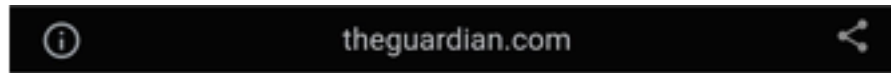


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How online gamers are solving science's biggest problems

A new generation of online games don't just provide entertainment - they help scientists solve puzzles involving genes, conservation and the universe

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For all their virtual accomplishments, gamers aren't feted for their real-world usefulness. But that perception might be about to change, thanks to a new wave of games that let players with little or no scientific knowledge tackle some of science's biggest problems. And gamers are already proving their worth.

In 2011, people playing *Foldit*, an online puzzle game about protein folding, resolved the structure of an enzyme that causes an Aids-like disease in monkeys. Researchers had been working on the problem for 13 years. The gamers solved it in three weeks.