

Grand Theft Auto 6 leak: who hacked Rockstar and what was stolen?

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What has happened?

In the early hours of 18 September, a poster on GTAForums going by the name teapotuberhacker posted about 90 videos, totalling 50 minutes of footage from an in-development version of forthcoming video game Grand Theft Auto 6, from Rockstar Games. The footage has since proliferated around social media and the wider internet. Shortly after the initial announcement, the hacker left a message on the forum claiming they wanted to “negotiate a deal” with Rockstar for the return of unreleased data – including the source code for [Grand Theft Auto 5](#) and the in-development version of Grand Theft Auto 6.

A large amount of clearly work-in-progress gameplay, from all stages of development. Some of the footage is simple short clips of animation tests: one such video shows a figure leaning out of the window of a car armed with a rifle, aiming in a smooth circle. In others, characters alternately walk and run to test animation progressions.

Other videos are more detailed. In one, a female player character holds up a diner, pointing a pistol at the cashier who places stacks of dollars on the counter, before the player picks up the money and moves on. The scene is voice-acted and fluidly animated, but still unpolished, with character models and scenery having none of the detail expected from a finished game.

Even given the unfinished nature of the clips, with debug commands and technical information overlaid, the leaked footage appears to confirm many reported details about the game, including the presence of a female playable character in the single-player campaign for the first time, and the setting of modern-day Vice City, the GTA world’s equivalent of Miami, which featured in 2002’s Grand Theft Auto: Vice City.

Is it genuine?

Yes, according to our sources – and besides, it would be difficult to fake the sheer quantity of work involved without devoting significant resources. GTA publisher Take-Two Interactive has acknowledged the leak, and has been sending takedown requests to YouTube under The Digital Millennium Copyright Act, affirming that the company holds the copyright to the posted footage.

Where did it come from?

The hacker says the footage was obtained by breaking into Rockstar’s Slack channel, the communication platform used for internal collaboration. The 90 videos were posted there, he says, and were easily downloaded.

Who leaked it?

Teapotuberhacker also claims responsibility for a recent Uber data breach, and the techniques used appear similar. In both cases, the messaging app Slack was a major point of entry, where it's likely that information shared between staff members was used to gain further access to sensitive data. But the Rockstar hack appears less serious than the Uber attack, which involved the attacker gaining administrative access to the entire network, even being able to control the initial response to the hack itself through total control of the Slack account.

In Rockstar's case, the hacker seems to want to shake down the company. As well as the videos, which have already been posted to YouTube as proof of the attack, he claims to have source code for GTA 5 and GTA 6 development builds, and appears to be blackmailing the developer for it.

What is source code?

The actual code used to create a piece of software, which contains all the instructions that make a game function. The unauthorised release of source code for a game such as GTA 5 or 6 has a number of consequences, none of which are pleasant for a company such as Rockstar. The most immediate outcome would be a further stream of information about the forthcoming game, as players are able to analyse the code for hints of features and content not visible in the posted videos. Depending on the completeness of the code that was stolen, it may even be possible to actually compile it into a playable piece of software, although it would probably be far from a fully featured game.

In the longer term, the release of source code for games such as GTA risks revealing trade secrets of craft or engineering talent that have real value, and increasing the chance of pirated or knockoff versions of the game being created and distributed.

What has Rockstar done about it so far?

Parent company Take-Two has issued takedown notices to social media accounts, YouTube channels and other sites posting the stolen footage. GTAForums, where the leak originally surfaced, and the GTA subreddit both claim that Take-Two has instructed them to take down posts and links related to the leak. The original [GTAForum thread](#) started by teapotuberhacker was removed then relaunched with all links and GTA 6 details removed.

In a statement posted to Twitter, Rockstar said: "We recently suffered a network intrusion in which an unauthorised third party illegally accessed and downloaded confidential information from our systems, including early development footage for the next Grand Theft Auto. At this time, we do not anticipate any disruption to our live game services nor any long-term effect on the development of our ongoing projects.

"We are extremely disappointed to have any details of our next game shared with you all in this way. Our work on the next Grand Theft Auto game will continue as planned and we remain as committed as ever to delivering an experience to you, our players, that truly exceeds your expectations. We will update everyone again soon and, of course, will properly introduce you to this next game when it is ready. We want to thank everyone for their ongoing support through this situation."

Why is this such bad news for Rockstar?

Any information about a game this big is very tightly controlled, and a leak of this magnitude is almost unprecedented. There will be financial consequences, as Rockstar investigates the leak and likely evaluates working practices. Publisher Take-Two may well face a dip in its stock value as well as uncomfortable questions from shareholders.

And in terms of reputation, this will negatively affect how Grand Theft Auto 6 – likely to be the biggest game of all time, when it is eventually released – is perceived. In-progress game footage is unfinished, obviously, and not representative of the quality that the developers will be striving to achieve. We are already seeing the footage being torn apart on social media and on forums by ill-informed users taking issue with its perceived quality and content.

How has the games industry reacted?

With a mixture of shock and sympathy. Neil Druckmann, co-president of Uncharted developer Naughty Dog, tweeted, “To my fellow devs out there affected by the latest leak, know that while it feels overwhelming right now, it’ll pass. One day we’ll be playing your game, appreciating your craft, and the leaks will be relegated to a footnote on a Wikipedia page. Keep pushing. Keep making art.” Similarly supportive messages have come from indie developer Rami Ismail, Xbox corporate vice-president Sarah Bond, and Gears of War creator [Cliff Bleszinski](#).

What’s next?

The hacker has been using social media platforms to seek a response from Rockstar and is clearly hoping to sell the unpublished data back. It’s unlikely we’ll ever find out if the company makes such a deal. From its announcement it looks like Rockstar is hoping to ride out the crisis, but it’s likely an investigation into the source of the hack has begun. There has been no further response so far from the hacker, but if the source code is released this will be even worse for Rockstar, as it will make the game vulnerable to further hacks and exploits when it launches.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2022/sep/19/grand-theft-auto-6-leak-who-hacked-rockstar-and-what-was-stolen>