

Boys kill friend using "Mortal Kombat" video technique

AFP, Riga, March 2, 2005

A 14-year-old schoolboy has been brutally killed in Latvia's north-eastern town of Valmiera by friends who say they were inspired by a video game, a spokeswoman for the police in Riga said Tuesday. The five boys, aged 13 to 16, were arrested Sunday by the police of this town of 43,000 inhabitants 120 kilometres (74 miles) north of the capital in connection with the murder which occurred on Saturday, the spokeswoman said. They explained that "they used techniques borrowed from the video game 'Mortal Kombat' in dealing with their victim", the spokeswoman, Kristine Mezaraupa said.

The boys described how they beat up their friend, Marcis, born in 1991, and threw his body in the nearby Gauja river, according to the head of Valmiera police department Juris Andersons. "The attackers tried to imitate some fighting techniques used in video games," said the head of the investigation division of Valmiera police department Salvis Stammers. "They employed the use of the legs in a scissor fashion to try to break the opponent's neck," he said. The detained could not say whether the victim was dead when he was thrown in the river. Rescuers had not yet found the body. "The evidence gained so far makes us certain that the boy could not survive in the ice cold water," added Andersons. Investigators inspected the territory along the banks of the river, which is partly frozen, where the murder took place, and found empty bottles of alcoholic drinks and samples of blood.

Three teenagers aged between 14 and 16, were still in police detention, but two boys aged 13 had been freed Monday, as legal responsibility for a criminal offence under the Latvian law comes into force only from age 14. "It is difficult for me to explain the motivation of this brutal crime," said Rudite Markus, the headmaster of Valmiera high school where Marcis was a pupil. "You can blame the video games for some influence, and you cannot fail to notice the onslaught of violence on TV screens."

"Videogames could be a catalyst for violent behaviour, alerted by alcohol, but one cannot reduce the real motives of the teen murderers to the influence of video games," said psychologist Zaiga Blaua. A year ago a pupil, addicted to videogames, killed a video saloon attendant in downtown Riga to get a few lats (dollars) to continue the game, which ended in tragedy. If proved guilty, the detained boys could get a life sentence or imprisonment up to 20 years.