

MekaMon combines virtual and augmented reality with real world spider-like robots

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Credit: Reach Robotics

(Tech Xplore)—A new type of gaming system is being sold just in time for the holiday gift-giving season—the Reach Robotics MekaMon. It combines virtual and augmented reality with real-world robots that look

like colorful four-legged mergers of crabs and spiders.

The gaming system is both ambitious and expensive—the robots move around on the floor of your living room or wherever you choose to set them and move as realistically and fluidly as creatures in sci-fi movies. Also, the team has imbued them with certain movements that can make players forget for a moment that they are not biological creatures. The [game](#) clearly ups the ante for gaming by merging aspects of video gaming, [robot](#) warfare and augmented reality systems.

A single system costs \$329—it includes a single robot and an app that runs on a smartphone or tablet computer. When playing in single-robot mode, users place the robot on a mat for positioning and then enter a virtual world that includes [augmented reality](#) imagery. The robot on their bedroom floor, for example, can engage (via Bluetooth) in virtual warfare with nefarious elements in a virtual world. Adding additional robots allows for a completely different experience—each robot is controlled by a single person with their smartphone; the players then try to outsmart, outshoot and outmaneuver their opponents—sort of like engaging in virtual laser-tag via WiFi. The action occurs in the real world, on the floor, not in a [virtual world](#). But there are augmented effects. Users can shoot laser cannons at one another, for example, which they can only see on their phones.

There are several types of prearranged games that users learn as they go. But that is not the end of it. Each of the robots is customizable—users can pull off whole legs or just the end-parts of the legs and replace them with other types of parts that offer different features, similar to those seen in many video games. All of the parts have embedded electronics allowing the app running on the controlling device to recognize them so that they can be manipulated in new ways during combat. As a bonus, other companies will soon be free to make physical add-ons for the robots as well, allowing for more accessories in the future.

The new robot system represents a significant step forward in the gaming community, though its steep price might cause some to wait to see if the situation changes.

More information: mekamon.com/

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