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FBI Nabs Movie Pirates

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Counterfeiters sometimes bribe their way into advance screenings, so their work can hit the black market before the movies are released in theaters. This is part of a broader scheme the movie industry says robbed it of an estimated US$18 billion in global revenue in 2005.

The FBI broke up two movie piracy rings Wednesday that authorities said specialized in sneaking digital camcorders into theaters and shooting hit films, then duplicating and distributing millions of bootlegs worldwide.

Agents arrested 13 people in raids across the city who had been operating since 1999, officials said. Industry officials believe they were responsible for nearly half of all illicit recordings made in the U.S.

Black Market

Some of the DVD knockoffs included the FBI warning seen at the start of legitimate discs -- "no small irony," Mark Mershon, head of the FBI's New York office, said at a news conference.

Using computer file sharing networks, the suspects distributed the counterfeit films to Pakistan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and other countries, said Michael Robinson, an antipiracy official for the Motion Picture Association of America.

Because counterfeiters sometimes bribe their way into advance screenings, their work can hit the black market before the movies are released in theaters, part of a broader scheme the movie industry says robbed it of an estimated US$18 billion in global revenue in 2005.

One of the movies the suspects were conspiring to profit from was "Superman Returns," the highly anticipated film released Wednesday, officials said.

Covert Filming

The FBI learned that assistants were used to surround "cammers," people who specialize in covertly filming movies, to conceal their filming and prevent people from blocking the view.

The video shooters were paid several hundred dollars per film by manufacturers who would duplicate and package fake DVDs in counterfeit labels for distribution to street peddlers, the court papers said. The bootlegs sell for up to $19 a piece.

The suspects were awaiting arraignment in federal court in Manhattan. Each could face five years in prison if convicted of conspiracy, copyright infringement and trafficking in counterfeit goods.

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Misc

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