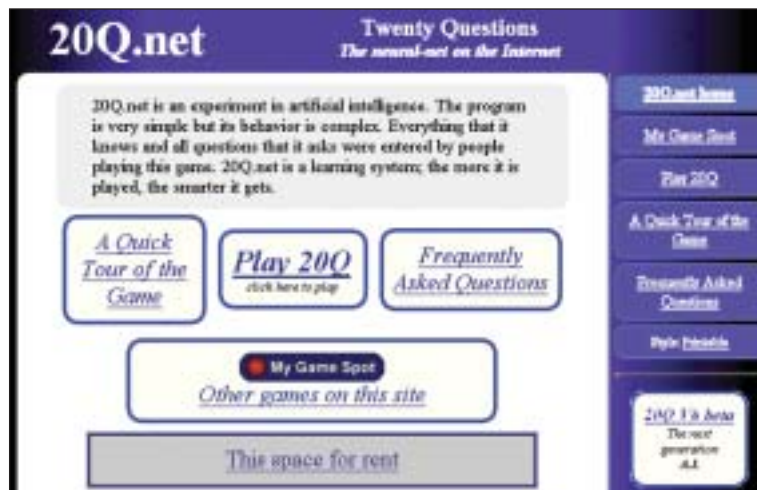


## The Neural Net and Twenty Questions



Despite the slowdown in national coverage, artificial intelligence (AI) continues to develop in a number of areas from logistical planning to image systems that can recognize faces or automatically steer a vehicle on America's highways. Expert programs can evaluate electrocardiograms or schedule multiple systems on a factory floor, while supercomputers like Deep Blue have defeated human masters at games as complicated as chess. Perhaps most interesting are the genetic programs that mimic evolution as they develop new solutions by improving their own systems.

For a whimsical demonstration of how recent AI programs “reason” and “learn,” go to [www.20q.net](http://www.20q.net). There you'll find a high-tech version of the game you probably played as a kid on porches or in the

back seat of the car on long road trips. The program can ask 20 questions to guess what you are thinking, beginning with the classic: animal, vegetable, or mineral? Hit the button for A Quick Tour of the Game for a better idea of how to answer the machine's questions.

If you register as a member, the program will keep track of your games and will offer additional information such as how many are playing the game today.

The game gets better at guessing as it learns from players like you. And it's surprisingly successful (guesses correctly about 33% of the time) when you consider that you can use subjects like *einsteinium* or *backgammon*—items that just weren't part of your eight-year-old vocabulary when you first learned to play the game. ■