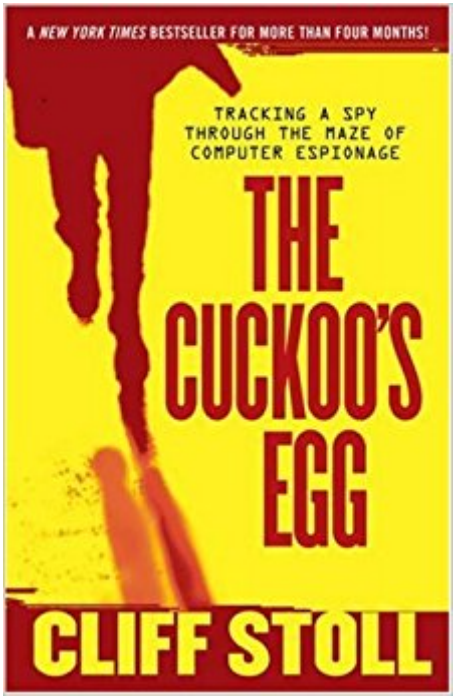
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The Cuckoo's Egg: Tracking A Spy Through The Maze Of Computer Espionage



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Synopsis

Before the Internet became widely known as a global tool for terrorists, one perceptive U.S. citizen recognized its ominous potential. Armed with clear evidence of computer espionage, he began a highly personal quest to expose a hidden network of spies that threatened national security. But would the authorities back him up? Cliff Stoll's dramatic firsthand account is "a computer-age detective story, instantly fascinating [and] astonishingly gripping" (Smithsonian). Cliff Stoll was an astronomer turned systems manager at Lawrence Berkeley Lab when a 75-cent accounting error alerted him to the presence of an unauthorized user on his system. The hacker's code name was "Hunter" -- a mysterious invader who managed to break into U.S. computer systems and steal sensitive military and security information. Stoll began a one-man hunt of his own: spying on the spy. It was a dangerous game of deception, broken codes, satellites, and missile bases -- a one-man sting operation that finally gained the attention of the CIA...and ultimately trapped an international spy ring fueled by cash, cocaine, and the KGB.

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Customer Reviews

A sentimental favorite, The Cuckoo's Egg seems to have inspired a whole category of books exploring the quest to capture computer criminals. Still, even several years after its initial publication and after much imitation, the book remains a good read with an engaging story line and a critical outlook, as Clifford Stoll becomes, almost unwillingly, a one-man security force trying to track down faceless criminals who've invaded the university computer lab he stewards. What first appears as a

75-cent accounting error in a computer log is eventually revealed to be a ring of industrial espionage, primarily thanks to Stoll’s persistence and intellectual tenacity. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A 75-cent discrepancy in billing for computer time led Stoll, an astrophysicist working as a systems manager at a California laboratory, on a quest that reads with the tension and excitement of a fictional thriller. Painstakingly he tracked down a hacker who was attempting to access American computer networks, in particular those involved with national security, and actually reached into an estimated 30 of the 450 systems he attacked. Initially Stroll waged a lone battle, his employers begrudging him the time spent on his search and several government agencies refused to cooperate. But his diligence paid off and in due course it was learned that the hacker, 25-year-old Markus Hess of Hanover, Germany, was involved with a spy ring. Eight members were arrested by the West German authorities but all but one were eventually released. Although the book will be best appreciated by the computer literate, even illiterates should be able to follow the technical complexities with little difficulty. Literary Guild selection. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a nostalgic read for me, as I read it in hardback when it first came out. It is revealing how naive we computer folks were about security in the 80’s. The book is well written and entertaining- both humorous and somewhat of a thriller. BTW, the international hack described in the book affected some systems I administrated at the time - a VAX/VMS cluster at a major university where I was employed. Clifford was largely responsible for nailing the hackers from his UC Berkeley operation, which incidentally, was also running both VMS and the then new Berkeley Standard Distribution (BSD) on DEC VAX hardware. Great book; fascinating times - sort of the Wild West days of computer networking.

The review somewhat over-dramatizes this book, but it’s stillpretty interesting if you’re curious about the mechanics of hacking networks and theearliest days of the internet... back when it was the hobby of a handful of geeksand not the omnipresent household fixture of today.The author is a programmer and astronomer who is tasked with writing the occasionaluseful app for his department and otherwise helping maintain the network. Having a curiousand dogged nature, he invests some hours looking into a minor accounting errorthat eventually reveals the presence of a hacker on his system. He decides that simplyplugging the security hole won’t be sufficient, as there are bound to

be others and the hackerwill be a threat unless he’s caught.What follows is a detailed account of the months Mr. Stoll invested tracking this hacker as hequietly jumps from one system to the next, probing for weaknesses and downloadingwhatever sensitive or interesting info he can find.The recurring theme of the story is our hero’s frustration at the lack of cooperationhe gets from the government. Nobody wants to take responsibility for it.Nobody seems to understand the magnitude of the threat.The CIA, FBI, and military all take turns stonewalling him and refuse to keep him in the loopwhen they finally decide to take action. But he methodically continues trackingthe hacker at some cost to his job and personal life.Being a true story makes this very engaging, but those are not into computers and hackingmay find it a bit dry. There really isn’t any James bond stuff, despite the promises of internationalespionage, drugs and missile bases in the blurb. Everything away from the keyboard is domesticscenery, not gunfights. But the meat of the book is spent at the computer and any enthusiastwill have no problem burning through the pages.

I read this book when it was first published but lost my copy somewhere along the way. I recently picked up another copy to see if it would stand the test of time. I wondered if the technological developments of the past couple decades would turn this book into a dull history lesson or if it would still capture my attention. I found it every bit as fascinating and probably more so now that I’m older and have a different perspective.At the time the events depicted in this book were taking place, I was starting my career as an IT professional. My first assignment involved supporting a Bellcore (Bell Labs) developed application running on AT&T Unix (sorry Cliff, I’m a "heathen" though I appreciate BSD too!). I got to experience working with DEC PDP-11/70s, 11/34s, VAX 8650s, Decwriters, and RP06/RP8x DASD. Some of that stuff was considered dated at the time and by today’s standards they are prehistoric. So, I can relate to Cliff’s experience, except for the part of having to track down an international spy, LOL. I missed out on that, thank goodness!I look at this book differently now than I did in 1989. Even if the reader doesn’t care about the origins of the Internet or the finer points of Unix system administration and telecommunications, the depiction of the government’s response to the situation is interesting and informative. Of note is the revelation that a particular agency was aware of existing security vulnerabilities but did nothing to address them because they were likely exploiting the vulnerabilities themselves.This time around, I had more interest in the personal drama surrounding the incident. I could more easily identify with, and laugh at, some of the crazy personalities involved. And, I could empathize with Cliff over the disruption it was causing in his personal life. I also appreciate Cliff’s commentary on the philosophy and ethics of computing and how a few bad apples can spoil it for everyone. These concepts are still relevant

today despite advancements in technology. After all, the weakest link in the system is the same today as it was back then.I would recommend this book to anyone getting started in Information Technology and to old school Unix guys and gals who have ever fixed a paper jam on a Decwriter.

I first read this on my father's advice 30 years ago. While many in the 21st Century may scoff at the idea of a book written before the age of commercial GUI, the cybersecurity lessons remain timeless. As with a detective novel, this book leads the reader on the tail of a spy infiltrating military computer systems. As with history, those who fail to learn from it may well be doomed to repeat it.

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