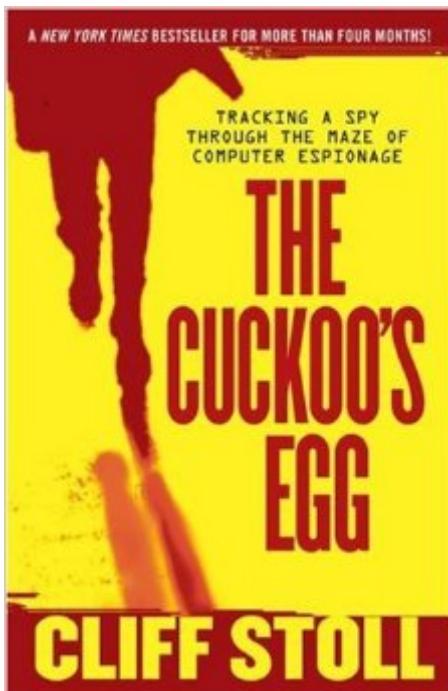


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The Cuckoo's Egg: Tracking A Spy Through The Maze Of Computer Espionage



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Cuckoo's Egg has everything most fictional detective novels wish that they had: a personable detective who does not mean to get involved as deeply as he does, federal agencies who cannot seem to take action, and a criminal mastermind who has everybody stumped until he encounters our detective. The best part of this whole book is that it really happened-- a feat that fictional mysteries can never match. I knew Stoll's work through the more technical article "Stalking

the Wily Hacker" and was pleasantly surprised to see how well Stoll was able to translate the technical side into a book-length narrative. IMO, this is significantly better than other more recent books about computer crime and still worth a read today (both for information and entertainment). Highly recommended.

This book succeeds on many levels. It's a well written suspenseful spy novel that evolves very smoothly and engages the reader very early on. It is also an excellent description of computer / telecommunications technology that most anyone can understand, since he goes to the trouble to stop and explain, in laymen's terms, UNIX utilities, daemon outputs, satellite technology, and microwave-oven protocol (check out the sneaker-melting fiasco on p 269). Stoll proves to be hell-bent on capturing the rogue user despite the lack of support from superiors and government agencies, and the toll it takes on his personal life. His frustrated accounts of his treatment at the hands of federal agencies as he petitions assistance from the FBI, the CIA, the NSA (among others) in capturing this potentially dangerous mole are testaments to the power of bureaucracy in this country. However, he still manages to humanize the employees of these otherwise caricatured federal agencies by describing them as real people who want to help, rather than just surly trench-coated spies. I especially enjoyed reading about Stoll's low-tech solutions to slowing the hacker as he rifled through delicate documents by jangling keys over the connector to resemble static (simply cutting the line would have tipped the hacker off). This is a very enjoyable book, and I'd also recommend the reader try to find a videocassette copy of the NOVA TV special on PBS. Although it loses a lot of the book's details in the attempt to condense into one hour, it allows the viewer to see and hear the author, one of the quirkiest, most entertaining techno-goobers you'll come across.

This was the second computer security book I read and it was like adding flame to a fire because it increased my curiosity and prompted me to want to know more about it, so I ended up reading Cyberpunk by Katie Hafner and John Markoff to get a more inside look. If you start reading it then you'll probably finish it the same day. It talks a scientist that stumbles on a mistake in the accounting part of his job as a scientist at Lawrence Berkely Lab and he makes the mistake into a chase through cyberspace. In the book the author takes on the role as a modern day Sherlock Holmes and in the end he realizes that it was only elementary. Dealing with the CCC (Chaos Computer Club), Hunter (the main hacker), and the different networks will really make you think and keep you on your toes. Read it and see for yourself just how intense the experience will be. I advise you to get

some sleep before you start because you probably won't be getting any anytime soon.

Cliff Stoll was an astronomer, but he became the systems manager at Lawrence Berkeley Lab. When he took the position, he discovered a 75-cent accounting error that indicated there was either (1) a bug within the code of the accounting program, or (2) unauthorized users on his system. Science is precise, and therefore Stoll began an investigation that ended up changing the intelligence community. His extensive testing and experiments revealed not only unauthorized access, but also the flaws of computer security. He studied the methods, the data path, and the signals (both false and true) through an electronic maze that eventually led him to "Hunter." Early in his exploration, he discovered a six-second-time delay between transmission and receipt. It took three seconds for the data link from New York to reach Berkeley. What happened to the extra three seconds? Stoll reevaluated his findings, and eventually found the three missing seconds. It was the transmission time from Europe to New York. The Cuckoo's Egg is Stoll's incredible story that eventually led to Hunter, a group of computer hackers and spies who were connected with the KGB and operating out of Germany. They had used our own services to piggyback onto valid signals. They jumped from system to system randomly to meet their goal. They obtained entrance to highly classified government sites. This is the suspenseful, true story of one scientist's ingenious methods that brought down a spy ring. I read this book when it was first released and treasure my copy. Clifford Stoll had included his e-mail address, and graciously responded to my questions. This book is not out-of-date. It opened the door to the world of computer investigations. The story is fascinating, and the writing is excellent. Five stars. Victoria Tarrani

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