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The Cuckoo's Egg: Tracking a Spy Through the Maze of Computer Espionage

By Cliff Stoll



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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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The Cuckoo's Egg: Tracking a Spy Through the Maze of Computer Espionage By Cliff Stoll Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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.

From Publishers Weekly

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 Stoll 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.
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From Library Journal

Stoll is an astrophysicist at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory who became a computer security expert when his persistence in chasing a computer hacker in West Germany led to the crackdown of an international spy ring. Here, his careful documentation of how he tailed the intruder over a year-long long period reveals for all to see the vulnerability of computer networks, the bureaucratic politics of government agencies, and the irresponsible, damaging actions of hackers. Stoll's interspersal of domestic anecdotes adds a touch of seasoning to the story. Readers who are familiar with computer trojan horses, time bombs, and viruses, and who wish to learn about the "cuckoo's egg," will be delighted with this realistic account. Succinct explanations of computer jargon make the text intelligible for general readers. Recommended for public and academic libraries. Literary Guild selection.
- May Rathbone, Virginia Polytechnic Inst. & State Univ., Blacksburg
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