

DefCon II: Las Vegas  
Cyber-Christ meets Lady Luck  
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by Winn Schwartau

Las Vegas connotes radically different images to radically different folks. The Rat Pack of Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. elicits up the glistening self-indulgent imagery of Vegas' neon organized crime in the '50's (Ocean's Eleven displayed only minor hacking skills.)

Then there's the daily bus loads of elderly nickel slot gamblers from Los Angeles and Palm Springs who have nothing better to do for twenty out of twenty four hours each day. (Their dead husbands were golf hacks.) Midwesterners now throng to the Mississippi River for cheap gambling.

Recreational vehicles of semi-trailor length from East Bullock, Montana and Euclid, Oklahoma and Benign, Ohio clog routes 80 and 40 and 10 to descend with a vengeance upon an asphalt home away from home in the parking lot of Circus Circus. By cultural demand, every Rv'er worth his salt must, at least once in his life, indulge in the depravity of Glitter Gulch.

And so they come, compelled by the invisibly insidious derelict attraction of a desert Mecca whose only purpose in life is to suck the available cash from addicted visitor's electronic purses of ATM and VISA cards. (Hacker? Nah . . .)

Vegas also has the distinction of being home to the largest of the largest conventions and exhibitions in the world. Comdex is the world's largest computer convention where 150,000 techno-dweebs and silk suited glib techno-marketers display their wares to a public who is still paying off the 20% per annum debt on last year's greatest new electronic gismo which is now rendered thoroughly obsolete. And the Vegas Consumer Electronic Show does for consumer electronics what the First Amendment does for pornography. (Hackers, are we getting close?)

In between, hundreds upon hundreds of small conferences and conventions and sales meetings and annual excuses for excess all select Las Vegas as the ultimate host city. Whatever you want, no matter how decadent, blasphemous, illegal or immoral, at any hour, is yours for the asking, if you have cash or a clean piece of plastic.

So, it comes as no surprise, that sooner or later, (and it turns out to be sooner) that the hackers of the world, the computer hackers, phone phreaks, cyber-spooks, Information Warriors, data bankers, Cyber-punks, Cypher-punks, eavesdroppers, chippers, virus writers and perhaps the occasional Cyber Christ again picked Las Vegas as the 1994 site for DefCon II.

You see, hackers are like everyone else (sort of) and so they, too, decided that their community was also entitled to hold conferences and conventions.

DefCon (as opposed to Xmas's HoHoCon), is the premier mid-year hacker extravaganza. Indulgence gone wild, Vegas notwithstanding if previous Cons are any example; but now put a few hundred techno-anarchists together in sin city USA, stir in liberal doses of illicit controlled pharmaceutical substances, and we have a party that Hunter Thompson would be proud to attend.

All the while, as this anarchistic renegade regiment marches to the tune of a 24 hour city, they are under complete surveillance of the authorities. Authorities like the FBI, the Secret Service, telephone security . . . maybe even Interpol. And how did the "man" arrive in tow behind the techno-slovens that belong behind bars?

They were invited.

And so was I. Invited to speak. (Loose translation for standing up in front of hundreds of hackers and being verbally skewered for having an opinion not in 100% accordance with their own.)

"C'mon, it'll be fun," I was assured by DefCon's organizer, the Dark Tangent.

"Sure fired way to become mutilated monkey meat," I responded. Some hackers just can't take a joke, especially after a prison sentence and no opposite-sex sex.

"No really, they want to talk to you . . ."

"I bet."

It's not that I dislike hackers - on the contrary. I have even let a few into my home to play with my kids. It's just that, so many of antics that hackers have precipitated at other -Cons have earned them a reputation of disdain by all, save those who remember their own non-technical adolescent shenanigans. And I guess I'm no different. I've heard the tales of depraved indifference, hotel hold-ups, government raids on folks with names similar to those who are wanted for pushing the wrong key on the keyboard and getting caught for it. I wanted to see teens and X- generation type with their eyes so star sapphire glazed over that I could trade them for chips at the craps table.

Does the truth live up to the fiction? God, I hope so. It'd be downright awful and unAmerican if 500 crazed hackers didn't get into at least some serious trouble.

So I go to Vegas because, because, well, it's gonna be fun. And, if I'm lucky, I might even see an alien spaceship.

For you see, the party has already begun.

I go to about 30 conventions and conferences a year, but rarely if ever am I so Tylonol and Aphrin dosed that I decide to go with a severe head cold. Sympomatic relief notwithstanding I debated and debated, and since my entire family was down with the same ailment I figured Vegas was as good a place to be as at home in bed. If I could survive the four and half hour plane flight without my Eustachian tubes rocketing through my ear drums and causing irreparable damage, I had it made.

The flight was made tolerable because I scuba dive. Every few minutes I drowned out the drone of the engines by honking uncontrollably like Felix Ungerto without his aspirator. To the chagrin of my outspoken counter surveillance expert and traveling mate, Mike Peros and the rest of the first class cabin, the captain reluctantly allowed me to remain on the flight and not be expelled sans parachute somewhere over Southfork, Texas. Snort, snort. Due to extensive flirting with the two ladies across the aisle, we made the two thousand mile trek in something less than 34 minutes . . . or so it seemed. Time flies took on new meaning.

For those who don't know, the Sahara Hotel is the dregs of the Strip. We were not destined for Caesar's or the MGM or any of the new multi-gazillion dollar hotel cum casinos which produce pedestrian stopping extravaganzas as an inducement to suck in little old ladies to pour endless rolls of Washington quarters in mechanical bottomless pits. The Sahara was built some 200 years ago by native slave labor whose idea of plumbing is clean sand and decorators more concerned with a mention in Mud Hut Daily than Architectural Digest. It was just as depressingly dingy and solicily low class as it was when I forced to spend eleven days there (also with a killer case of the flu) for an extended Comdex computer show. But, hey, for a hacker show, it was top flight.

"What hackers?" The desk clerk said when I asked about the show.

I explained. Computer hackers: the best from all over the country. "I hear even Cyber Christ himself might appear."

Her quizzical look emphasized her pause. Better to ignore a question not understood than to look stupid. "Oh, they'll be fine, We have excellent security." The security people, I found out shortly thereafter knew even less: "What's a hacker?" Too much desert sun takes its toll. Proof positive photons are bad for neurons.

Since it was still only 9PM Mike and I sucked down a couple of \$1 Heinekens in the casino and fought it out with Lineman's Switching Union representatives who were also having their convention at the Sahara. Good taste in hotels goes a long way.

"\$70,000 a year to turn a light from red to green?" we complained.  
"It's a tension filled job . . .and the overtime is murder."

"Why a union?"

"To protect our rights."

"What rights?"

"To make sure we don't get replaced by a computer . . ."

"Yeah," I agreed. "That would be sad. No more Amtrak disasters." The crowd got ugly so we made a hasty retreat under the scrutiny of casino security to our rooms. Saved.

Perhaps if I noticed or had read the original propaganda on DefCon, I might have known that nothing significant was going to take place until the following (Friday) evening I might have missed all the fun.

For at around 8AM, my congestion filled cavities and throbbing head was awakened by the sound of an exploding toilet. It's kind of hard to explain what this sounds like. Imagine a toilet flushing through a three megawatt sound system at a Rolling Stones concert. Add to that the sound of a hundred thousand flue victims standing in an echo chamber cleansing their sinuses into a mountain of Kleenex while three dozen football referees blow their foul whistles in unison, and you still won't come close to the sheer cacophonous volume that my Saharan toilet exuded from within its bowels. And all for my benefit.

The hotel manager thought I was kidding. "What do you mean exploded?"

"Which word do you not understand?" I growled in my early morning sub-sonic voice. "If you don't care, I don't."

My bed was floating. Three or maybe 12 inches of water created the damnedest little tidal wave I'd ever seen, and the sight and sound of Lake Meade in room 1487 only exacerbated the pressing need to relieve myself. I dried my feet on the extra bed linens, worried about electrocution and fell back asleep. It could have been 3 minutes or three hours later - I have no way to know - but my hypnagogic state was rudely interrupted by hotel maintenance pounding at the door with three fully operational muffler-less jack hammers.

"I can't open it," I bellowed over the continual roar of my personal Vesuvius Waterfall. "Just c'mon in." The fourteenth floor hallway had to resemble an underwater coral display because the door opened ever so slowly..

"Holy Christ!"

Choking back what would have been a painful laugh, I somehow said with a smirk, "Now you know what an exploding toilet is like."

For, I swear, the next two hours three men whose English was worse than a dead Armadillo attempted to suck up the Nile River from my room and the hallway. Until that very moment in time, I didn't know that hotels were outfitted with vacuum cleaners specifically designed to vacuum water. Perhaps this is a regular event.

Everyone who has ever suffered through one bitch about Vegas buffets, and even the hackers steered away from the Sahara's \$1.95 "all you can eat" room: "The Sahara's buffet is the worst in town; worse than Circus Circus." But since I had left my taste buds at 37,000 feet along with schrapneled pieces of my inner ear, I sought out sustenance only to keep me alive another 24 hours.

By mid afternoon, I had convinced myself that outside was not the place to be. After only eighteen minutes of 120 sidewalk egg-cooking degrees, the hot desert winds took what was left of my breath away and with no functioning airways as it was, I knew this was a big mistake. So, hacker convention, ready or not, here I come.

Now, you have to keep in mind that Las Vegas floor plans are designed with a singular purpose in mind. No matter where you need to go, from Point A to Point B or Point C or D or anywhere, the traffic control regulations mandated by the local police and banks require that you walk by a minimum of 4,350 slot machines, 187 gaming tables of various persuasions and no less than 17 bars. have they no remorse? Madison Avenue ad execs tale heed!

So, lest I spend the next 40 years of my life in circular pursuit of a sign-less hacker convention losing every last farthing I inherited from dead Englishmen, I asked for the their well hidden location at the hotel lobby.

"What hackers?" There goes that nasty photon triggered neuron depletion again.

"The computer hackers."

"What computer hackers. We don't have no stinking hackers . . ." Desk clerk humor, my oxymoron for the week.

I tried the name: DefCon II.

"Are we going to war?" one ex-military Uzi-wielding guard said recognizing the etymology of the term.

"Yesh, it's true" I used my most convincing tone. "The Khasakstanis are coming with nuclear tipped lances riding hundred foot tall horses. Paris has already fallen. Berlin is in ruins. Aren't you on the list to defend this graet land?"

"Sure as shit am!" He scampered off to the nearest phone in an effort to be the first on the front lines. Neuron deficiency beyond surgical repair..

I slithered down umpteen hallways and casino aisles lost in the jungle of jingling change. Where the hell are the hackers? "They must be there," another neuron-impooverished Saharan employee said as he pointed towards a set of escalators at the very far end of the casino.

All the way at the end of the almost 1/4 mile trek through Sodom and Gonorrhoea an 'up' escalator promised to take me to hackerdom. Saved at last. Upstairs. A conference looking area. No signs anywhere, save one of those little black Velcro-like stick-em signs where you can press on white block letters.

### No Mo Feds

I must be getting close. Aha, a maintenance person; I'll ask him. "What hackers? What's DefCon."

Back downstairs, through the casino, to the front desk, back through the casino, up the same escalator again. Room One I was told. Room One was empty. Figures. But, at the end of a hallway, past the men's room and the phones, and around behind Room One I saw what I was looking for: a couple of dozen T-shirted, Seattle grunged out kids (read: under 30) sitting at uncovered six foot folding tables hawking their DefCon II clothing, sucking on Heinekens and amusing themselves with widely strewn backpacks and computers and cell phones.

I had arrived!

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You know, regular old suit and tie conferences could learn a thing or two from Jeff Moss, the man behind DefCon II. No fancy badge making equipment; no \$75 per hour union labor built registration desks; no big signs proclaiming the wealth of knowledge to be gained by signing up early. Just a couple of kids with a sheet of paper and a laptop.

It turned out I was expected. They handed me my badge and what a badge it was. I'm color blind, but this badge put any psychedelically induced spectral display to shame. In fact it was a close match to the Sahara's mid 60's tasteless casino carpeting which is so chosen as to hide the most disgusting regurgative blessing. But better and classier.

The neat thing was, you could (in fact had to) fill out your own badge once your name was crossed off the piece of paper that represented the attendee list.

Name:

Subject of Interest: E-Mail:

Fill it out any way you want. Real name, fake name, alias, handle - it really doesn't matter cause the hacker underground ethic encourages anonymity. "We'd rather not know who you are anyway, unless you're a Fed. Are you a Fed?"

A couple of lucky hackers wore the ultimate badge of honor. An "I Spotted A Fed" T-shirt. This elite group sat or lay on the ground watching and scouring the registration area for signs that someone, anyone, was a Fed. They really didn't care or not if you were a Fed - they wanted the free T-shirt and the peer respect that it brought.

I'm over 30 (OK, over 35) and more than a few times (OK, a little over 40) I had to vehemently deny being a Fed. Finally Jeff Moss came to the rescue.

"He's not a Fed. He's a security guy and a writer."

"Ugh! That's worse. Can I get a T-shirt cause he's a writer?" No way hacker-breath.

Jeff. Jeff Moss. Not what I expected. I went to school with a thousand Jeff Mosses. While I had hair down to my waist, wearing paisley leather fringe jackets and striped bell bottoms so wide I appeared to be standing on two inverted ice cream cones, the Jeff Mosses of the world kept their parents proud. Short, shshort cropped hair, accented by an ashen pall and clothes I still wouldn't wear today. They could get away with anything cause they didn't look the part of radical chic. Jeff, I really like Jeff: he doesn't look like what he represents. Bruce Edelstein, (now of HP fame) used to work for me. He was hipper than hip but looked squarer than square. Now today that doesn't mean as much as it used to, but we ex-30-somethings have a hard time forgetting what rebellion was about. (I was suspended 17 times in the first semester of 10th grade for wearing jeans.)

Jeff would fit into a Corporate Board Meeting if he wore the right suit and uttered the right eloquencies: Yes, that's it: A young Tom Hanks. Right. I used to hate Tom Hanks (Splach, how fucking stupid except for the TV-picture tube splitting squeals) but I've come to respect the hell out of him as an actor. Jeff never had to pass through that first phase. I instantly liked him and certainly respect his ability to pull off a full fledged conference for only \$5000.

You read right. Five grand and off to Vegas with 300 of your closest personal friends, Feds in tow, for a weekend of electronic debauchery. "A few hundred for the brochure, a few hundred hear, a ton in phone bills, yeah, about \$5000 if no one does any damage." Big time security shows cost \$200,000 and up. I can honestly say without meaning anything pejorative at any of my friends and busienss acquaintances, that I do not learn 40 times as much at the 'real' shows. Something is definitely out of whack here. Suits want to see suits. Suits want to see fancy. Suits want to see form, substance be damned. Suits should take a lesson from my friend Jeff.

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I again suffered through a tasteless Saharan buffer dinner which cost me a whopping \$7.95. I hate grits -buttered sand is what I call them - but in this case might well have been preferable. Somehow I coerced a few hackers to join me in the ritualistic slaughter of our taste buds and torture of our intestines. They were not pleased with my choice of dining, but then who gives a shit? I couldn't anything anyway. Tough.

To keep out minds off of the food we talked about something much more pleasant: the recent round of attacks on Pentagon computers and networks. "Are the same people involved as in the sniffing attacks earlier this year?" I asked my triad of dinner mates.

"Indubitably."

"And what's the reaction from the underground - other hackers?"

Coughs, sniffs. Derivative visual feedback. Sneers. The finger.

"We can't stand 'em. They're making it bad for everybody." Two fingers.

By and large the DefCon II hackers are what I call 'good hackers' who hack, and maybe crack some systems upon occasion, but aren't what I refer to as Information Warriors in the bad sense of the word. This group claimed to extol the same position as most of the underground would: the Pentagon sniffing crackers - or whoever who is assaulting thousands of computers on the net - must be stopped.

"Scum bags, that what they are." I asked that they not sugarcoat their feelings on my behalf. I can take it. "These fuckers are beyond belief; they're mean and don't give a shit how much damage they do." We played with our food only to indulge in the single most palatable edible on display: ice cream with gobs of chocolate syrup with a side of coffee. .

The big question was, what to do? The authorities are certainly looking for a legal response; perhaps another Mitnick or Phiber Optik. Much of the underground cheered when Mark Abene and others from the reknowned Masters of Destruction went to spend a vacation at the expense of the Feds. The MoD was up to no good and despite Abene's cries that there was no such thing as the MoD, he lost and was put away. However many hackers believe as I do, that sending Phiber to jail for hacking was the wrong punishment. Jail time won't solve anything nor cure a hacker from his first love. One might as well try to cure a hungry man from eating: No, Mark did wrong, but sending him to jail was wrong, too. The Feds and local computer cops and the courts have to come up with punishments appropriate to the crime. Cyber-crimes (or cyber-errors) should not be rewarded by a trip to an all male hotel where the favorite toy is a phallically carved bar of soap.

On the other hand, hackers in general are so incensed over the recent swell of headline grabbing break-ins, and law enforcement has thus far appeared to be impotent, ("These guys are good.") that many are searching for alternative means of retribution.

"An IRA style knee capping is in order," said one.

"That's not good enough, not enough pain," chimed in another. (Sip, sip. I can almost taste the coffee.)

"Are you guys serious?" I asked. Violence? You? I thought I knew them better than that. I know a lot of hackers, none that I know of is violent, and this extreme Pensacola retribution attitude seemed totally out of character. "You really wouldn't do that, would

you?" My dinner companions were so upset and they claimed to echo the sentiment of all good-hackers in good standing, that yes, this was a viable consideration.

"The Feds aren't doing it, so what choice do we have? I've heard talk about taking up a collection to pay for a hit man . . ." Laughter around, but nervous laughter.

"You wouldn't. . ." I insisted.

"Well, probably not us, but that doesn't mean someone else doesn't won't do it."

"So you know who's behind this whole thing."

"Fucking-A we do," said yet another hacker chomping at the bit. He was obviously envisioning himself with a baseball bat in his hand.

"So do the Feds."

So now I find myself in the dilemma of publishing the open secret of who's behind the Internet sniffing and Pentagon break ins, but after talking to people from both the underground and law enforcement, I think I'll hold off awhile. It serves no immediate purpose other than to warn off the offenders, and none of us want that.

Obviously all is not well in hacker-dom.

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The registration area was beyond full; computers, backpacks everywhere, hundreds of what I have to refer to as kids and a fair number of above ground security people. Padgett Peterson of Martin Marietta was going to talk about viruses, Sara Gorden on privacy, Mark Aldrich is a security guy from DC., and a bunch of other folks I see on the seemingly endless security trade show circuit. Jeff Moss had marketed himself and the show excellently. Los Angeles send a TV crew, John Markoff from the New York Times popped in as did a writer from Business Week. (And of course, yours truly.)

Of the 360 registrees ("Plus whoever snuck in," added Jeff) I guess about 20% were so-called legitimate security people. That's not to belittle the mid-20's folks who came not because they were hackers, but because they like computers. Period. They hack for themselves and not on other systems, but DefCon II offered something for everyone.

I remember 25 years ago how my parents hated the way I dressed for school or concerts or just to hang out: God forbid! We wore those damned jeans and T-shirts and sneakers or boots! "Why can't you dress like a human being," my mother admonished me day after day, year after year. So I had to check myself because I can't relate to Seattle grunge-ware. I'm just too damned old to wear shirts that fit like kilts or sequin crusted S&M leather straps. Other than the visual cacophony of dress, every single hacker/phreak that I met exceeded my expectations in the area of deportment.

These are not wild kids on a rampage. The stories of drug-induced frenzies and peeing in the hallways and tossing entire rooms of furniture out of the window that emanated from the HoHoCons seemed a million miles away. This was admittedly an opportunity to party, but not to excess. There was work to be done, lessons to be learned and new friends to make. So getting snotted drunk or ripped to the tits or Ecstatically high was just not part of the equation. Not here.

Now Vegas offers something quite distinct from other cities which host security or other conventions. At a Hyatt or a Hilton or any other fancy-ass over priced hotel, beers run \$4 or \$5 a crack plus you're expected to tip the black tied minimum wage worker for popping the top. The Sahara (for all of the other indignities we had to suffer) somewhat redeemed itself by offering an infinite supply of \$1 Heinekens. Despite hundreds of beer bottle spread around the huge conference area (the hotel was definitely stingy in the garbage pail business) public drunkenness was totally absent. Party yes. Out of control? No way. Kudos!

Surprisingly, a fair number of women (girls) attended. A handful were there 'for the ride' but others . . . whoa! they know their shit.

I hope that's not sexist; merely an observation. I run around so few technically fluent ladies it's just a gut reaction. I wish there were more. In a former life, I owned a TV/Record production company called Nashville North. We specialized in country rock taking advantage of the Urban Cowboy fad in the late 1970's. Our crew of producers and engineers consisted of the "Nashville Angels." And boy what a ruckus they would cause when we recorded Charlie Daniels or Hank Williams: they were stunning. Susan produced and was a double fo Jacqueline Smith; we called Sally "Sabrina" because of her boyish appearance and resemblance to Kate Jackson. A super engineer. And there was Rubia Bomba, the Blond Bombshell, Sherra, who I eventually married: she knew country music inside and out - after all she came from Nashville in the first place.

When we would be scheduled to record an act for live radio, some huge famous country act like Asleep at The Wheel of Merle Haggard or Johnny Paycheck or Vassar Clements, she would wince in disbelief when we cried, "who's that?" Needless to say, she knew the songs, the cues and the words. They all sounded alike. Country Music? Ecch. (So I learned.)

At any rate, ladies, we're equal opportunity offenders. C'mon down and let's get technical.

As the throngs pressed to register, I saw an old friend, Erik Bloodaxe. I've known him for several years now and he's even come over to baby sit the kids when he's in town. (Good practice.) Erik is about as famous as they come in the world of hackers. Above ground the authorities investigated him for his alleged participation in cyber crimes: after all, he was one of the founders of the Legion of Doom, and so, by default, he must have done something wrong. Never prosecuted, Erik Bloodaxe lives in infamy amongst his peers. To belay any naysayers, Erik appeared on every single T-shirt there.

"I Only Hack For Money,"  
Erik Bloodaxe

proclaimed dozens of shirts wandering through the surveillance laden casinos. His is a name that will live in infamy.

So I yelled out, "Hey Chris!" He gave his net-name to the desk/table registrar. "Erik Bloodaxe."

"Erik Bloodaxe?" piped up an excited high pitched mail voice. "Where?" People pointed at Chris who was about to be embarrassingly amused by sweet little tubby Novocain who practically bowed at Chris's feet in reverence. "You're Erik Bloodaxe?" Novocain said with nervous awe - eyes gleaming up at Chris's ruddy skin and blond pony-tail.

"Yeah," Chris said in the most off handed way possible. For people who don't know him this might be interpreted as arrogance (and yes there is that) but he also has trouble publicly accepting the fame and respect that his endearing next-generation teenage fans pour on him.

"Wow!" Novocain said with elegance and panache. "You're Erik Bloodaxe." We'd just been through that said Chris's eyes.

"Yeah."

"Wow, well, um, I . . . ah . . . you're . . . I mean, wow, you're the best." What does Sylvia Jane Miller from Rumpsteer, Iowa say to a movie star? This about covered it. The Midwest meets Madonna. "Wow!" Only here it's Novocain meets Cyber Christ himself.

Like any other security show or conference or convention there is a kickoff, generally with a speech. And DefCon II was no exception. Except.

Most conventional conventions (ConCons) start at 7:30 or 8:00 AM because, well I don't know exactly why, except that' when so- called suits are expected to show up in their cubicles. DefCon, on the other hand, was scheduled to start at 10PM on Friday night when most hackers show up for work. Most everyone had arrived and we were anxiously awaiting the opening ceremonies. But, here is where Jeff's lack of experience came in. The kick- off speaker was supposed to be Mark Ludwig of virus writing fame and controversy. But, he wasn't there!

He had jet lag.

"From Phoenix?" I exclaimed in mock horror to which nearby hackers saw the absurdity of a 45 minute flight jet lag. Mark has a small frame and looks, well, downright weak, so I

figured maybe flying and his constitution just didn't get along and he was massaging his swollen adenoids in his room.

"Oh, no! He's just come in from Australia . . ." Well that explains it, alright! Sorry for the aspersions, Mark.

But Jeff didn't have a back up plan. He was screwed. Almost four hundred people in the audience and nothing to tell them. So, and I can't quite believe it, one human being who had obviously never stood in front of a live audience before got up in an impromptu attempt at stand up comedy. The audience was ready for almost anything entertaining but this guy wasn't. Admittedly it was a tough spot, but . . .

"How do you turn a 496 into an 8088?"

"Add Windows." Groan. Groan.

"What's this?" Picture the middle three fingers of your right hand wiggling madly.

"An encrypted this!" Now hold out just the middle finger. Groan. Groan.

"What's this?" Spread your legs slightly apart, extend both hands to the front and move them around quickly in small circles

"Group Air Mouse." Groan.

The evening groaned on with no Mark nor any able sharp witted comedian in sight.

Phil Zimmerman wrote PGP and is a God, if not Cyber-Christ himself to much of the global electronic world. Preferring to call himself a folk hero (even the Wall Street Journal used that term) Phil's diminutive height combined with a few too many pounds and a sweet as sweet can be smile earn him the title of Pillsbury Dough Boy look alike. Phil is simply too nice a guy to be embroiled in a Federal investigation to determine if he broke the law by having PGP put on a net site. You see, the Feds still think they can control Cyberspace, and thereby maintain antique export laws: "Thou shalt not export crypto without our approval" sayeth the NSA using the Department of Commerce as a whipping boy mouth piece. So now Phil faces 41-51 months of mandatory jail time if prosecuted and convicted of these absurd laws.

Flying in from Colorado, his appearance was anxiously awaited. "He's really coming?" " I wonder what he's like?" (Like eevryone else, fool, just different.) When he did arrive, his shit- eating grin which really isn't a shit-eating grin, it's just Phil's own patented grin, preceeded him down the hallway.

"Here he is!" "It's Phil Zimmerman." Get down and bow. "Hey, Phil the PGP dude is here."

He was instantly surrounded by those who recognize him and by both those who don't but want to feel like part of the in-crowd. Chat chat, shit-eating grin, good war stories and G-rated pleasantries. Phil was doing what he does best: building up the folk hero image of himself. His engaging personality (even though he can't snorkel to save his ass) mesmerized the young-uns of the group. "You're Phil?"

"Yeah." No arrogance, just a warm country shit-eating grin that's not really shit-eating. Just Phil being Phil. He plays the part perfectly.

Despite the attention, the fame, the glory (money? nah . . .) the notoriety and the displeased eyes of onlooking Computer Cops who really do believe he belongs in jail for 4 years, Phil had a problem tonight. A real problem.

"I don't have a room!" he quietly told Jeff at the desk. "They say I'm not registered." No panic. Just a shit-eating grin that's not a shit-eating grin and hand the problem over the experts: in this case Jeff Moss. Back to his endearing fans. Phil is so damned kind I actually saw him giving Cryptography 101 lessons on the corner of a T-shirt encrusted table. "This is plaintext and this is crypto. A key is like a key to your hotel room . . ." If Phil had a hotel room.

Someone had screwed up. Damn computers. So the search was on. What had happened to Phil's room? Jeff is scrambling and trying to get the hotel to rectify the situation. Everyone was abuzz. Phil, the crypto-God himself was left out in the cold. What would he do?

When suddenly, out of the din in the halls, we heard one voice above all the rest:

"Phil can sleep with me!"

Silence. Dead stone cold silence. Haunting silence like right after an earthquake and even the grubs and millipedes are so shaken they have nothing to say. Silence.

The poor kid who had somehow instructed his brain to utter the words and permitted them to rise through his esophagus and out over his lips stood the object of awe, incredulity and mental question marks. He must have thought to himself, "what's everyone staring at? What's going on? Let me in on it." For the longest 10 seconds in the history of civilization he had absolutely no clue that he was the target of attention. A handful of people even took two or three steps back, just in case. Just in case of what was never openly discussed, but nonetheless, just in case.

And then the brain kicked in and a weak sheepish smile of guilt overcame this cute acne-free baby-butt smooth-faced hacker who had certainly never had a shave, and was barely old enough to steer his own pram.

"Ohhhhhh . . . . noooooo," he said barely louder than a whisper. "That' not what I mean!"

I nearly peed laughing so hard in unison with a score of hackers who agreed that these misspoken words put this guy in the unenviable position of being the recipient of a weekend of eternal politically incorrect ridicule.

"Yeah, right. We know what you mean . . ."

"No really . . ." he pleaded as the verbal assaults on his alleged sexual preferences were slung one after the other.

This poor kid never read Shakespeare: "He who doth protest too much . . ."

If we couldn't have a great kickoff speech, or comedian, this would have to do.

The majority of the evening was spent making acquaintances:

"Hi, I'm Jim. Oops, I mean 'Septic Tank," was greeted with "Oh, you're Septic. I'm Sour Milk." (Vive la difference!) People who know each other electronically are as surprised to meet their counterparts as are first daters who are in love with the voice at the other end of the phone. "Giving good phone" implies one thing while "Having a great keystroke" just might mean another.

The din of the crowd was generally penetrated by the sounds of a quasi-pornographic Japanese high tech toon of questionable socially redeeming value which a majority of the crowd appeared to both enjoy and understand. I am guilty of neither by reason of antiquity.

And so it goes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Phil Zimmerman must have gotten a room and some sleep because at 10AM (or closely thereafter) he gave a rousing (some might say incendiary) speech strongly attacking the government's nearly indefensible position on export control

I was really impressed. Knowing Phil for some time, this was the first time I ever heard him speak and he did quite an admirable job. He ad libs, talks about what he want to talk about and does so in a compelling and emotional way. His ass is on the line and he should be emotional about it. The audience, indeed much of counter culture Cyberspace loves Phil and just about anything he has to say. His affable 40-something attorney from Colorado, Phil DuBois was there to both enjoy the festivities and, I'm sure, to keep tabs on Phil's vocalizations. Phil is almost too honest and open for his own good. Rounds and rounds of sincere appreciation.

Hey kids, now it's time for another round of Spot The Fed. Here's your chance to win one of these wonderful "I Spotted A Fed" T-shirts. and all you have to do is ID a fed and it's yours. Look around you? Is he a Fed? Is she under cover or under the covers? Heh, heh. Spot the Fed and win a prize. This one-size- fits-all XXX Large T-shirt is yours if you Spot the Fed. I had to keep silent. That would have been cheating. I hang out on both sides and have a reputation to maintain.

"Hey, I see one" screeched a female voice (or perhaps it was Phil's young admirer) from the left side of the 400+ seat ballroom. Chaos! Where? Where? Where's the fed? Like when Jose Consenko hits one towards the center field fence and 70,000 screaming fans stand on their seats to get a better view of a ball 1/4 mile away flying at 150 miles per hour, this crowd stood like Lemmings in view of Valhalla the Cliff to spy the Fed. Where's the Fed?

Jeff jumped off the stage in anxious anticipation that yet another anti-freedom-repressive law enforcement person had blown his cover. Where's the Fed? Jeff is searching for the accuser and the accused. Where's the Fed? Craned necks as far as the eye can see; no better than rubber neckers on Highway 95 looking for steams of blood and misplaced body parts they half expected a Fed to be as distinctly obvious as Quasimoto skulking under the Gorgoyled parapits of Notre Dame. No such like. They look like you and me. (Not me.) Where's the Fed?

He's getting closer, closer to the Fed. Is it a Fed? Are you a Fed? C'mon, fess up. You're a a fed. Nailed. Busted. Psyche!

Here's your T-shirt. More fun than Monty Hall bringing out aliens from behind Door #3 on the X-Files. Good clean fun. But they didn't get 'em all. A couple of them were real good. Must have been dressed like an Hawaiian surf bum or banshee from Hellfire, Oregon. Kudos to those Feds I know never got spotted. Next year, guys. There's always next year.

Phil's notoriety and the presence of the Phoenix,Arizona prosecutor who was largely responsible for the dubiously effective or righteous Operation Sun Devil, Gail Thackeray ("I change job every 4 years or so - right after an election") brought out the media. The LA TV station thought they might have the makings of a story and sent a film crew for the event.

"They're Feds. The ones with the cameras are Feds. I know it. Go ask 'em." No need. Not.

"Put away that camera." At hacking events it's proper etiquette to ask if people are camera shy before shooting. The guy that I was sitting next to buried his face in his hands to avoid being captured on video tape.

"What are you; a Fed or a felon?" I had to ask.

"What's the difference," his said. "They're the same thing." So which was it, I wondered. For the truly paranoid by the truly paranoid.

"Get that thing outta here," he motioned to the film crew who willingly obliged by turning off the lights. "They're really Feds," he whispered to me loud enough for the row in front and behind us to hear.

I moved on. Can't take chances with personal safety when I have kids to feed. Fed or felon, he scared me.

Gail Thackeray: was the next act on stage. She was less in agreement about Phil Zimmerman than probably anyone (except the undetected Feds) in the audience. She, as expected, endorsed much of the law enforcement programs that revolve around various key management (escrow) schemes. Phil recalls a letter from Burma that describe how the freedom fighters use PGP to defend themselves against repression. He cites the letter from Latvia that says electronic freedom as offered by PGP is one of the only hopes for the future of a free Russia. Gail empathizes but sees trouble closer to home. Terrorism a la World Trade Center, or rocket launchers at O'Hare Airport, or little girl snuff films in Richmond, Virginia, or the attempt to poison the water supply outside of Boston. These are the real threats to America in the post Cold War era.

"What about our personal privacy!" cries a voice. "We don't want the government listening in. It's Big Brother 10 years behind schedule."

Gail is amused. She knew it would be a tough audience and has been through it before. She is not shaken in the least.

"I've read your mail," she responds. "Its not all that interesting." The audience appreciates a good repartee. "You gotta pay me to do this, and frankly most of it is pretty boring." She successful made her point and kept the audience laughing all the way.

She then proceeded to tell that as she sees it, "The expectation of privacy isn't real." I really don't like hearing this for I believe in the need for an Electronic Bill of Rights. I simply think she's wrong. "History is clear," she said "the ability to listen in used to be limited to the very few. The telegraph was essentially a party line and still today in some rural areas communications have never been private. Why should we change it now?"

"Gail, you're so full of shit!" A loud voice bellowed from next me again. Boy can I pick seats. "You know perfectly well that cops abuse the laws and this will just make their jobs easier. Once people find a way to escape tyranny you all want to bring it right back again. This is revolution and you're scared of losing. This kind of puke scum you're vomiting disgusts me. I just can't take it any more." Yeah, right on. Scattered applause. While this 'gent' may have stated what was on many minds, his manner was most unbecoming a conference and indeed, even DefCon II. This was too rude even for a hacker get-together. The man with the overbearing comments sat down apologizing. "She just gets

me going, she really does. Really pisses me off when she goes on like about how clean the Feds are. She knows better than to run diarrhea of the mouth like that."

"You know," she continued. "Right across the street is a Spy Shop. One of those retail stores where you can buy bugs and taps and eavesdropping equipment?" The audience silently nodded. "We as law enforcement are prohibited by law from shopping there and buying those same things anyone else can. We're losing on that front." Cheers. Screw the Feds.

I don't agree with ever thing that Gail says, but she is a compelling speaker; she believes in what she says. But I do agree with her on the difficulty of forensic evidence in computer cases."

"I got really mad," she said. "I was reading a magazine and there was an ad for United, you know, the employee owned airline. And it was a beautiful ad, hundred of employees standing in front of a brand new great big jet. All smiling and happy." Gail then frowned deeply. "Some stockholder ought to sue them for misleading advertising." This was more like it! Go, Gail! "I started to look at the picture carefully and I noticed this unmistakably fat lady in a pink dress. And then over a few persons. . .guess what? The same fat lady in pink." Roars of laughter and applause.

Her point? What seems real may not be real at all, and with a few hundred dollars in software and a little practice, most anyone can build a false reality digitally.

Her time was up but the audience wanted more. She was mobbed for eternity by hackers who fight her tooth and nail but respect her comportment enough to make the disagreements lively, partisan, entertaining, but with respect. Respectful hackers. No HoHoCon orgies; merely verbal barbs with no solution. Everyone knew that, but it's the battle that counts.

More security conference should be this open, this honest and informative, with all kinds of people with all kinds of opinions. That is how we, and I, learn. Listen and learn. And all for \$5000 no less, plus a paltry \$15 entrance fee.

\* \* \* \* \*

The afternoon sessions were filled with a mixture of anti-government, pro-privacy advocacy, virus workshops and such by both under and above ground folks. Padgett Peterson's knowledge of viruses is deep and he spread the same wisdom as his does in so called legitimate circles. Knowledge is knowledge, and better accurate than wrong.

It's often surprising to see how people will voice the same opinion in varying degree of intensity depending upon their audience. Mark Aldrich of General Research Corp. in the Washington area made a statement that I doubt I would hear at a ConCon. "Fear your government that fears your crypto. Use crypto as weapon." Sara Gordon's panel discussion on crypto and privacy and related topics fueled the audience's general anti-fed attitude.

"I was bugged by the Feds." "So was I?" "What can we do about it." "Yeah, they listen in on my phones, too. I can hear the clicks." Right.

As Mark so succinctly put it, "if the government wants to bug you, you'll never know. They're that good.". That kind of shut up the dilettante paranoids in the group, albeit mumbling that they just knew that they were the victim of one of the 900 or so court approved wire taps last year. Right. I think Gail was right: some of you guys are too boring to be believed.

The afternoon edition of the Spot A Fed contest took us on the run. I actually succumbed to their enthusiasm and the lack of mybetter judgement and followed a group of 8 or 10 to unmask an unmarked white van in the parking lot.

"It's the Feds." "How do you know?" "Oh, it's the Feds alright." "How do you know." "It's a white van and the intelligence services use white vans." "What are you going to do?" "Bust 'em." "Bust 'em for what?" "For being Feds."

This motley crew traipsed through the mile long casino, trodding upon the ugly tartan/paisley carpets so obnoxiously loud a blind man could cry "Uncle!", into the Hall of Overpriced Shoppes through the lobby and over to the parking garage. We had to have \$100,000 of surveillance gear in tow: (enough to detect the plant Pluto fart in b-flat), Radio receivers and eavesdropping equipment were courtesy of my pal Mike Peros. The goal was, if this was a Fed van, we could hear it. I don't think so, but I go for the ride and a few minutes of reprieve away from the conference hall.

As we near, the excitement grows among the more paranoid who are trying to instill their own mental foibles into their companions and sheer terror in normal old Vegas visitors who have no idea what they've walked into.

Feds? Not. Surreptitious radio transmissions? Just hotel security tracking the movements of 8 or 10 paranoids (and one writer with nothing else todo for a half hour) into a parking garage which has more cameras than NBC. Feds? Of course not. Don't be ridiculous.

\* \* \* \* \*

To say nothing worthwhile occurred until 11PM that evening would be lying, but this thing, this DefCon II thing, was turning into what I would have called 25 years ago, a Love-In. The participants were giddy from the event, the camaraderie, the \$1 Heinekens and the hacking. The Sahara was actually pretty good about it. Jeff got the conference space for free because he guaranteed that at least 100 hotel rooms would be booked by "computer enthusiasts coming to a small computer conference." Little did the hotel know that half the crowd was too young to drink, to broke to gamble, and conspicuous enough to ward off legitimate clients. But a deal's a deal.

The hotel operators went out of their way and allegedly gave the hackers permission to hack through the PBX in order to provide a SLPP connection.

"Just put it back the way you found it when you're done," was the hotel's only and quite reasonable request.

In my day an equivalent event producing an equivalent social non- drug induced high would have been achieved by tossing a Frisbee to Grace Slick (Lead singer Jefferson Airplane) and have her throw it back. We didn't have the kind of technology that today's rebellious age has. We had the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix, safe sex (kinda), safe drugs (well, maybe a little safer) and a cause. But no technology to speak of.

When I was on the publishing staff of the New York City Free Press in 1968/9 we wrote our anti-establishment diatribes by hand. By hand! And then we went down to a dark office late at night to use their typesetting gear when it was idle. It took no more than a blushing glance around the room to realize that we impressionable teens were publishing our political extremisms on equipment courtesy of Al Goldstein and Screw magazine. Now that was an education.

DefCon II was a Love-In, technology and all.

Come 11PM yet another speaker canceled and I offered to chat to the crowd for a half hour or so on Van Eck radiation; the emissions from CRT's that make video screens readable from a distance. Now this wasn't a fill in at 5PM or anything. Sessions reconvened at 11PM and I spoke to a full audience who were there to get a midnight lesson in cellular hacking.

Most above ground types still believe that hacking is an acne- faced teenager, sucking on Jolt Cola, wolfing down pepperoni pizza and causing Corporate America no end of grief. To a certain extent some of this is true. But hacking is so much more.

As Rop Gonggrijp, editor of Hacktic once told me, "hacking is disrespect of technology." It's going the extra mile to find out how things work. Many of the older hackers, those in their early 20's and older, are migrating from the conventional dial-em-up and break-in hacking image to the fine art of cellular hacking. How do these things work? What are the frequencies? How can I customize my phone? How many channels can I scan? The possibilities are endless as I soon learned.

Jim and Bill (fake names) asked if I wanted to see a great demo. Sure! No names, they said. OK. No problem. In one of the several thousand hotel rooms at the Sahara was a pile of equipment to make an under budgeted FBI surveillance team insanely jealous. There in the middle of the ridiculously filthy room that no doubt caused the maid to shudder, sat a log periodic antenna poised atop a strong and highly adjustable photographic-style tripod. Feeding the antenna was a hunk of coax attached to a cell phone's antenna jack.

OK, so that's that? Free cell calls? No, much more.

A second cell phone/scanner, an Oki 900 was modified and connected to a laptop computer. (This was the exact modification being discussed downstairs) Custom software that was freely distributed around DefCon scanned the data from the Oki and displayed the scanning activity. A pair of speakers then audibly broadcast the specific conversation. And in Vegas, you can imagine what was going over the open airwaves!

A half dozen 'kids' sat around enthralled, each begging for his turn to, as Jim put it, "harass cellular users. Ppure and simple. Harassment. Stomp on the son of a bitch," he laughed, joined in by the others.

When a 'good' conversation was detected, they entered the channel into the broadcasting cell phone and spoke. And talk they did. Essentially they turned 'private' conversations into wide-band free-for-alls. If they spoke for only a few seconds one or both of the parties could hear what was being said. If they talked for too long, the overpowering signal from the antenna would literally wipe out the chat: the cell switch reacted with an internal signal to shut down. Stomping, they called it.

For those on the receiving end of the harassment, it must have sounded like the overbearing voice of God telling Noah how to build the Ark.

"Noah?"

"Who dat?"

"Noah?"

"Who is that?"

What terror lurks in the minds of boys . . .

For those old enough to remember, stomping is no more a stunt than putting a 500 watt linear power amplifier on a CB radio and blasting nearby CB's to kingdom come. The truckers used to do it to 4-wheelers. When the police began monitoring CB channels "to protect and serve" they became the target of CB stomping. So what else is new?

I gotta give it to them: these characters designed and built the software, modified the phones and put it all together and it works! Not bad on a \$3 allowance and a 10th grade education. Now, I guess what they did may have been sort of illegal, or at least highly unethical and definitely, not nice. But I have to admit, some of what I witnessed was very, very, funny. I'm not advocating this kind of activity, but much like Candid Camera broke in to people's lives to capture their reactions, cellular hacking is similarly amusing. The hacker/phreaks particularly enjoyed breaking in on fighting couples. (I counted six impending divorces.) Almost without exception the man was in a car and the lady was at a fixed location; presumably, home.

Him: "Where the hell have you been."  
Her: "Nowhere." Him: "Bullshit."  
Her: "Really honey . . ." Defensively.  
Him: "Who's with you?" Intense anger.  
Hacker: "Don't believe her. She's a whore."  
Him: "What was that?"  
Her: "What?"  
"That voice."  
"What voice?"  
Hacker: "Me you asshole. Can't you see she's playing you for a fool."  
"I know she is." He agrees.  
"What's that honey?"  
"I know he's there with you."  
"Who?" Incredulous.  
"Him . . . whoever you're fucking when I'm at work."  
Hacker: "Yeah, it's me."  
"Shit! Who the fuck is there?"  
"No one!"  
"I can hear him, he's there. You're both making fun of me . . ."  
Hacker: "She's laughing at you, man."  
"No shit. Who the fuck are you?"  
Hacker: "The guy who takes care of her when you can't, asshole."  
"That's it." Click.

Drug dealers aren't immune to these antics.

"Where's the meet?"  
"By the 7/11 on Tropicana."  
"You got it?"  
"You got the cash?"  
"Yeah, dude."  
"Be sure you do."  
Hacker: "He doesn't have the cash my man. He's gonna rip you off."  
"What?" "What?" Both sides heard the intruder's voice. "Who is that?"  
"What's that about a rip-off?"  
"This ain't no rip-off man."  
Hacker: "Yes it is. Tell 'em the truth. You gonna take his drugs and shoot his ass. Right? Tell 'em."  
"You gonna rip me off?"  
"No, man!"  
"Your homeboy says you gonna try and rip me off?"  
"What home boy?"  
Hacker: "Me, you bozo drug freak. Don't you know that shit can kill you?"  
Click.

Good samaritanism pays off upon occasion.

"Honey, hurry up."

"I'm on the freeway. I'm coming."

Hacker: "He's late. Let's save her ass."

"What was that?" "What did you say honey?"

"He said he was going to save your ass." "Who did?"

"The guy on the radio." (Technical ignorance abounds.)

Hacker: "Me. You're late and she's scared so we're gonna beat you there and make her safe."

"Who the hell is that?" "Who?" "The guy with you?" "There's no one here." "He says he's gonna beat me there and pick you up."

Hacker: "Damn right we are."

"Hey, this is cool. Who's there?"

Hacker: "Cyber Christ talking to you from Silicon Heaven."

"No shit. Really?"

Hacker: "Yeah, (choke, choke,) really."

"What's happening, honey."

"I don't know, for sure. He says it's God."

"God!?!?"

Hacker: "Close enough. Listen, you sound alright. Go get your woman, man Keep her safe."

"No problem. Uh, thanks."

Click.

Around 4AM, I guess it was, the hacker/phreaks definitely helped out law enforcement. One end of the conversation was coming from inside a hotel, maybe even the Sahara. The other from another cell phone, most likely in the lobby.

"What do you look like?"

"I'm five foot nine, thinning brown hair and 180 pounds I wear round glasses and . . ."

"I get the idea. Where are you now?"

"I'm coming down the elevator now. What do you look like?"

"I'm six foot one in my heels, have long blond spiked hair and black fishnet stockings."

Hacker: "Don't go man. It's a bust."

"What?" he said.

Hacker: "Don't go, it's a bust. You don't want your name in the papers, do ya?"

"What the fuck?" she yelled.

"There's a guy who says this is a bust?"

"Bust? What bust?"

Hacker: "That's the clue, man. She's denying it. Of course it's a bust. Is it worth a night in jail to not get laid?"

"Shit." He whispers not too quietly to another male companion. "There's some guy on the phone who says it's bust. What should we do."

Hacker: "I'm telling you man, don't go,"

"This ain't worth it. I'm going back upstairs."

Click.

A couple of hours later the same hooker was overheard talking to one of her work mates.

"Then this asshole says it's a bust. Cost me \$300 in lost business, shit."

"You, too? Same shit been going on all night long. What the fuck?"

Wow. And it seems like only this morning that my toilet exploded.

\* \* \* \* \*

So what's a perfectly groomed and slightly rotund 50-something convicted methamphetamine dealer doing at DefCon II with hundreds of impressionable teenagers?

You might well ask.

So I'll tell you.

Sitting in yet another Saharan hell-hole of a room they unabashedly market for \$55 per night I encountered hackers #1 through #4 and this . . . I immediately thought, elderly gent. He said nothing and neither did I, thinking that he might have been an over aged chaperone for delinquent teens or perhaps even an understanding Fed. But the gallon jugs of whiskey was depleting itself right before my eyes, as if a straw from Heaven sucked the manna from its innards. Actually, it was Bootleg.

Not bootleg liquor, mind you, but Bootleg the felonious con from Oregon. Apparently he got busted 'cause speed is and was against the law, and crank is not exactly the drug choice of maiden aunts nor school marms. "I've been a hacker longer than some of these kids have been alive. It all started back in . . ." and Mike "Bootleg" Beketic commenced on the first of hundreds of war-story jail house tales to entertain him and us. Bootleg loves a good story.

"Jail ain't so bad," he bragged with a huge whiskey smile. "No one fucked with me. You gotta make friends early on. Then it's OK." Good advice, I guess. "On parole I got slammed with a year for piss that didn't pass." Gotta be clean, my man. Stay away from that shit. It'll kill you and your teeth will rot.

Bootleg handed me form PROB-37, (Rev. 1/94) from the United States District Court, Federal Probation System. Grins from ear to ear. A badge of honor for villains, thieves, and scoundrels. Sounds like they need their own union.

This was the official "Permission To Travel" form dated June 16, 1994 which gave Bootleg the legal right to travel from Oregon to Las Vegas in the dead of the summer to attend a "computer convention." The flight times were specific as were the conditions of his freedom. He had to inform the local cops that he was in town. In case any crimes occurred throughout the city of Las Vegas during his sojourn, he was an easily identifiable suspect.

While he downed another Jack and coke I found out what Bootleg was really doing. Despite the fact that the "Federal Keep Track of a Crook Travel Form" said, "you are prohibited from advertising or selling your DMV CD," the paranoia ran rampant through the minds of prison bureaucracy was actually in this case quite correctly concerned. "What's a DMV CD?"

"I'm glad you asked." I was set up. The edict said he couldn't sell or advertise, but there was no provision stating that he couldn't answer questions from an inquiring mind.

Bootleg handed me a CD ROM:

Bootleg Presents:  
DMV

- Over 2 Million Oregon Drivers License Records
- Over 3 Million Oregon License Plate Records

The inside jacket clearly stated that this information was not to be used by any creatively nefarious types for any sort of personal Information Warfare tactics. It warns,

Do not use this CD to:

- Make phony Licenses
- Make phony Titles
- Obtain phony I.D.
- Harass Politicians, Cops or Journalists
- Stalk Celebrities
- Get ME in trouble <G>

I can come up with at least 1001 other uses for this collection of information that the Oregon authorities are none too happy about. The ones Bootleg outlined never came into my mind. (Heh!) Bootleg acquired the information legally. State officials were kind enough to violate the electronic souls of its citizens by sending Bootleg their driver's information magnetically emblazoned on a 3600 foot long piece of 9 track acetate. Now they want to change the law to reflect "heart felt concern for the privacy of their citizens." Get a clue, or if none's available, buy one from Vanna.

Bootleg is moving onto the next 47 states (California and New York don't permit this kind of shenanigans) shortly to make sure that everyone has equal access. Hacking? Of course. Bootleg effectively hacked the Oregon DMV with their blessing and tax payer paid-for assistance.

Time to go back to my room while Bootleg and friends spent an evening of apparently unsuccessful whoring around the Strip and Glitter Gulch.

A good time was had by all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeff Moss opened the Sunday morning session with an ominous sermon. "You'll notice that the wet bar is missing from the rear?" It had been their yetserday. Everyone turns around to look. "I gotta pay for the damage . . ." Jeff was not a happy camper. "They have my credit card number and it's almost full. So cool it!" But the show must go on and we had more to learn.

Next. Anonymous mailers on the net? Forget about it. No such thing. Anonymous remailers, even if they are in Norway or Finland or some such other country where American information contraband such as child pornography is legal, are only as safe and secure as the people who run it

"The FBI can go over any time they want and look up who you are and what kinds of stuff you swallow down your digital throat," one speaker announced. Of course that's ridiculous. The FBI would have to call in the Boy Scouts or Russian Mafia for that kind of operation, but we all knew that anyway. A slight slip of the ad lib tongue. No harm done.

I didn't know, until this Sunday, that there were actually real live versions of "Turn Up The Volume" running rampant across the country, impinging their commercial-free low power radio broadcasts into an electromagnetic spectrum owned and operated by the Federal Communications Commission. And, as to be expected, the FCC is trying to put this relatively harmless stations out of business along with Howard Stern and Don Imus. One would think that WABC or KLAC or any other major market stations would little care if a podunk 20 watt radio station was squeezing in between assigned frequencies. And they probably shouldn't. But, as we learned, the Military lent an innocent hand.

In support of the hobbies of servicemen, a local San Francisco base commander gave approval for a group of soldiers to establish a small, low power radio station for the base. Good for morale, keep the men out of the bars: you know the bit.

But the ballistic missiles went off when the nation's premier rating service, Arbitron, listed KFREE as a top local station in the San Francisco market.

"What station KFREE?" "Who the hell are they?" "What the fuck?"

Needless to say, KFREE was costing the legitimate radio stations money because advertising rates are based upon the number of listeners not up and peeing during commercials. Since KFREE was ad-free, no contest. Arbitron assumes the rating to relect the existence of a real station - the numbers are there - and the local stations call the FCC and the FCC calls the base and as quick as you can scream, "Feds suck!" KFREE is off the air.

Stomp.

I was scheduled to speak today, but with the schedule seemingly slipping forward and backward at random haphazard intervals, there was no telling when what would occur. Mark Ludwig, of Virus Writing Contest fame and author of the much touted "Little Black Book of Computer Viruses" Virus gave a less than impassioned speech about the evils of government.

"I know most of you don't have any assets other than your computer," Ludwig said to the poverty stricken masses of DefCon II. "But you will, and you want to make sure the government doesn't come crashing down around you whenever they want. They can and will take your life away if it suits them. There is no fourth amendment. Most search and seizures are illegal." And so it went.

"Put your money off shore, kids," said Dr. Ludwig the theoretical physicist. "Find a good friendly country will flexible banking laws and the Feds can't get you."

"And when the Fed do come for you, make sure that your entire life is on your computer. Rip up the papers after you scan them in. Your all-electronic life cannot be penetrated - especially if you get a case of the forgets. 'Oops, I forgot my password. Oops! I forgot my encryption key. Oops! I forgot my name.'"

"Even your VISA and Mastercard accounts should be from overseas. Keep it out of the US and you'll be all the better for it." For those interested in such alternative, Ludwig recommends that you call Mark Nestman: of LPP Ltd. at 800-528-0559 or 702-885-2509. Tell him you want to move your millions of rubbles and dollars and Cyber-credits overseas for safe keeping because the Byzantine Police are at the front door as you speak. Order pamphlet 103.

These are the defensive measures we can take protect ourselves against the emerging Police State. But offensive action is also called for, he says. "Help Phil Zimmerman. Send him money for his defense. Then, laugh at the Feds!" Ha ha ha ha. Haha. Hahahahahaha. Ha!

."When they come to the door, just laugh at them." Haha. Hahaha. Haha. "No matter what they do, laugh at them." Hahahahaha. Enough of that, please. If I laugh at 6 husky beer-bellied Cyber-cops who have an arsenal of handguns pointed at my head, they might as well send me to the Group W bench to commiserate with Arlo Guthrie. Peeing would come before laughing. But then again, I'm no longer a grunged out 20 year old who can laugh in the face of the Grim Reaper. "Yes, ossifer, sir. I'm a cyber-crook. I ain't laughing at you in your face, ossifer, sir . . ." I panic easily. Kissing ass well comes from a life long success of quid pro quo'ing my way from situation to situation.

"And, now," Master Mark announced, "on to the results and awards for the Annual Virus Writing contest." Ludwig seemed suddenly depressed. "Unfortunately, we only got one legitimate entry." One entry? The media plastered his contest across the media-waves and the National Computer Security Association was planning a tactical nuclear response. One entry? What kind of subversives have 20 year olds turned into anyway? In my day

(Yeah, I'm old enough to use that phrase) if we called for a political demonstration thousands would pile through the subway turnstiles to meet a phalanx of well armed police appropriately attired in riot gear. One entry? Come on X-Generation, you can do better than that? No wonder the world's going to shit. Don't have enough trouble from the young-uns. Sheeeeeesssh!

Mark Ludwig's politically incorrect virus writing contest may have been a PR success but it was a business abortion. One entry. Shit. At the NCSA meeting in Washington, rivaling factions battled over how we as an association should respond.

"Hang the bastard." "He's what's wrong with world." "Put him in a county jail with Billy-Bob, Jimmy-Ray and Bubba for a week and they'll be able to squeeze him out between the bars."

C'mon you fools! Ignore him! Ignore him! If you don't like what he has to say don't egg him on. Ignore him. You want to do what the Feds did to poor Phil Zimmerman and make him a folk hero? Turn a non-event into the lead for the evening news is not the way to make something go away. I loudly advocated that he be treated as a non-entity if the goal was reduction to obscurity. I was right.

Super-high priced PR and lobby firms had prepared presentation to wage an all-out attack on Ludwig and his contest. I bet! And who was going to pay for this? Peter Tippitt of Semantech ponied up what I believe amounted to \$7,000 to get the pot going. No one else made a firm offer. Can't blame them cause it would have been no more effective than taking out an ad in USA proclaiming that evil is bad. The PR firm would have made their fees, the event would have made even more news and Ludwig would certainly have had to make a judgement and choose from more than one entry.

But oddly enough, the one entry did not win.

The winner of the Annual Virus Writing Contest was no less than Bob Bales, Executive Director of the NCSA. Not that Bob wrote a program, but if he had, it would be called either Don Quixote or Paranoia, and it would be of the human brain attacking Meme type. The virus is a software equivalent of Prozac to alleviate the suffering in middle-aged males who have no purpose in life other than virus busting.

"Is Winn Schwartau here?" Mark asked the audience.

I was there. "Yo!"

"Would you tell Bob that he's won a plaque, and a \$100 check and a full year subscription to the Computer Virus Developments Quarterly." I'm the technology advisor to the NCSA so it was natural request.

I told Bob about his 15 minutes of fame at DefCon to which he roared in laughter. "Good! Then I won't have to subscribe myself."

I spoke next. Jeff introduced me by saying, "Winn says he doesn't want to speak to an empty room so he's gonna talk now." Some introduction. But, what a great audience! Better than most of the security above-ground starched sphincter tight suit and tie conference audiences I normally get. But then again, I get paid handsomely to address legitimate audiences where I have to be politically correct. At DefCon, insulting people was the last thing I worried about. It was what I focused on, onstage and off.

"Hey, kid. Did you ever land Zimmerman in bed?"

"You, you, er . . ."

"C'mon kid. Give me your best shot."

"Your mother . . ." A crowd gathered to see what kind of repartee this little schnook could come up with. "Your mother . . ." C'mon kid. You got it in you. C'mon. "You, she is a . . . uh, . . . mother . . ." and he finally skulked away in sheer embarrassment. Poor kid. When he went to the men's room, men walked out. Poor kid. I don't think he ever figured out it was all a put on.

The audience got it, though. Rather than go over what I rambled about for an hour, here comes a blatant plug: Go buy my new book "Information Warfare: Chaos on the Electronic Superhighway." That'll sum it up real nice and neat. But what a great audience. Thanks.

Little did I know, though, that I was also on trial.

John Markoff of the New York Times was the first to ask, and then a couple of buddies asked and then a lady asked during the Q&A portion of my ad hoc ad lib speech. "How come you did it?" Did what? "How come you flamed Lenny DeCicco?"

It turns out that someone adapted my electronic identity and logged on to the WELL in Sausalito, CA and proceeded to post a deep flame against Lenny. Among other none-too-subtle aspersions, 'my' posting accused Lenny of a whole string of crimes of Information Warfare and even out and out theft.

Except, it wasn't me. I answered the lady's question with, "It wasn't me, I don't know Lenny and I don't have an account on the WELL." That satisfied everyone except for me. What happened and why? It seems that Lenny's former partner in crime Most-Wanted on the lam federal fugitive computer hacker Kevin Mitnick actually wrote and signed the letter with his initials. Or someone was spoofing him and me at the same time. But why? And why me?

It took a couple of days after arriving home from DefCon to learn after extensive conversations with the WELL that my erased account from almost two years ago and then re-erased on June 20 of this year was accidentally turned back on by some mysterious administrative process that I cannot claim to fathom. OK, that's what they said.

But perhaps most interesting of the entire Getting Spoofed incident was a single comment that Pei Chen, sysop of the WELL said to me while I complained about how such an awful anti-social attack was clearly reprehensible. Oh, it's simple, she said.

"We have no security." Whoaaaaahhh! The WELL? No security? I love it. I absolutely love it. Major service provider, no security. Go get 'em cowboy.

The only other speaker I wanted to see was Peter Beruk, chief litigator for the Software Publisher's Association. This is the Big Software Company sponsored organization which attempts to privately interdict illegal software distribution as a prelude for both civil and criminal prosecutions. And with this group of digital anarchists, no less.

The SPA scrounges around 1600 private BBS's to see who's making illicit copies of Microsoft Word or Quattro For Weanies or Bulgarian for Bimbos or other legitimate software that the publishers would rather receive their due income from then being stolen.

"Which boards are you on?"

"That would be telling." Big grin and laughs.

"Is your BBS secure?" A challenge in the making.

"Sure is."

"Is that an offer to see if we can break in?" Challenge made.

"Ahem, cough, cough." Challenge denied.

"What name do you use on the boards?" Idiot question that deserves an idiot answer.

"Fred." Laughs.

"You mean you have a full time guy to download software from boards to see if it's legal or not?" "Yup."

"So, you pay people to commit felonies?" Astutely stupid question.

"We have permission."

"Why should we have to pay rip-off corporations too much money to use really shitty software?"

"So don't buy it."

"We don't. It's so shitty that it's barely worth stealing."

"So don't steal it."

"Just want to check it out, dude."

"Scum sucking imperialists are making all of the money. The software designers are getting ripped off by the big software bureaucracies. Power to the people." Every generation goes through this naively innocent berating of capitalism. It doesn't make them Communists (in 1950 it did), just not full fledged capitalist pigs themselves yet. Soon come. Vis a vis Ludwig's comment on the asset-deprived audience. Soon come, man.

"We go after BBS's that store illegal software."

"So you're gonna put Compuserve in jail?" Big, big applause.

Despite the openly verbal animosity between the free-ware believers and the Chief Software Cop, the spirited and entertaining disagreements maintained a healthy good natured tone that well exceed Peter's time limit, as DefCon II was coming to a close.

It was time for one more stand up comedy attempt by a long haired bandanna wearing hippie/hacker/phreak who was not quite up to the job.

"OK, guys. We've had some fun at the Feds expense. They're people, too. So, from now on, it's Hug a Fed. Go on, find a fed and go up to him or her and big them a great big bear hug full of love." The Feds that had been busted were gone. The ones still successfully undercover weren't about to blow it for quick feel from a horny teenager.

Next. The Cliff Stoll doll with an assortment of accessory yo-yos was a popular item. It was thrown pell-mell into the crowds who leapt at it with a vengeance like a baseball bleachers section awaiting the 61st home run.

"There used to be a Wife of Cliff Stoll doll, but no one's seen it in two years." Cliff is strange. I don't know if he's that strange, but it was a funny bit.

"Then we have the LoD/MoD action figure set starring Erik Bloodaxe and Phiber Optik." GI Joe action set gone underground. Corny, but appreciated as hundreds of bodies dove to catch the plastic relics tossed from the stage.

If anything, an anti-climatic end to an otherwise highly informative and educational conference. I can hardly wait till next year when, after word gets out, DefCon III will be attended by thousands of hackers and cops and narks who will try to replay the Summer of Cyber-Love '94 for a sequel.

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More than anything I wanted to get away from the Sahara. Away from its nauseatingly chromatic carpets, it's hundreds of surveillance cameras, and most of all, away from its exploding toilets.

We decided to play, and play we did at the new Luxor Hotel which is an amazing pyramid with 4000+ rooms. There are no elevators as in a pyramid 'going up' is kind of useless, so Inclinator take passengers up the 30 some odd floors to hallways which ring around the impossibly huge hollowed out pyramid shaped atrium.

This was play land. And for three hours we played and played and went to dumb shows that attract mid-western mamas from Benign, Ohio, alighting in Vegas for their annual RV pilgrimage. But we went and enjoyed none the less.

The "Live TV" show was anything but live except for lovely Susan who hosted us into the ersatz TV station. Her job is to look pretty, sound pretty and warm up the crowd for an over budget, overproduced schmaltz driven video projection that was to make us all feel like we were on stage with Dave. Letterman, that is. The effect does not work. But we enjoyed ourselves, anyway.

"Everyone here on vacation?"

"No!" I yelled out. Poor Susan was stunned. No? Why else would you be here?

"What are you doing?" The TV audience of 500 was looking our way. Between the five of us we had a million dollars (give or take) of electronic wizardry stuffed around us, beneath us and in our laps.

"Working." Gee, I'm quick.

"What do you do?" Susan asked with a straight face. I bet she expected something like gas pumper, or nocturnal mortuary fornicator or 7/11 clerk.

"We're hacking for Jesus. This is Cyber Christ!" I said pointing at Erik Bloodaxe.

Silence. Dead silence again. Sleep with Phil Zimmerman silence. Except for us. We giggled like school boys. Psyche.

"Ah, . . . that's nice." That was all she could come up with: That's nice. So much for ad libbing or deviating from the script. But the TV audience enjoyed it. A whole lot. They finally figured out it was put on. Not every one from the Mid- West is as stupid as they all pretend to be.

Then it was time to get sick. VR rides do me in, but not to be publicly humiliated by my 20-something cohorts (and Mike Peros with whom I had to travel yet another 2000 miles that night) I jumped right into an F-14 simulator which rotated 360 degrees on two gimbals for an infinite variety of nauseousness.

"Oh, shit!" I yelled as I propelled myself forward and around and sideways with sufficient g-force to disgorge even the most delectable meal. "Oh, shit." I had reversed the throttle and was now spinning end over end backwards. My inner ear was getting my stomach sick. "Oh, shit." Out of the corner of my eyes my four pals were doubled over in laughter. Had I barfed yet and not known it? God, I hope not. "Oh, shit." I came to a dead standstill, the video screen showed me plummeting to earth at escape velocity and I pushed the throttle forward as roughly as I could. An innate survival instinct came in to play. "Oh, shit!" The virtual aircraft carrier came into sight and after almost 2 minutes of high speed rotating revulsion, I was expected to land this spinning F-14 on a thimble in the ocean. Right. I tried, and damned if I didn't make it. I have no idea how, but I got an extra 34,000 points for a safe landing. 120 seconds. Ding. Time's up.

I got out of the simulator and spilled right onto the floor; one 42 year old pile of humanity who had navigated nausea but whose balance was totally beyond repair. "Could anyone hear me?" I asked from my knees.

"They were selling tickets."

"Do I get my money back?"

Onto the VR race cars. I really thought I'd throw up to the amusement of a thousand onlookers. Hacking then phreaking then flying and now driving. I put the pedal to the metal and crashed. The huge video display has me tipping end over end and the screen is shaking and the car I'm driving is shuddering violently but my brain can't compute it all. I'm gonna wretch, I just know it. But I keep on driving, decidedly last against people who haven't been handicapped with an inner ear so sensitive I get dizzy when I watch a 5" black and white TV.

We tilted out of there and alas, it was time to find a 200,000 pound of metal to glide me home. It was damn good thing I hadn't eaten before VR Land, but I wolfed down \$3 hot dogs at the airport knowing full well that whatever they served on the plane would be a thousand times worse. So Mike and I munched, leaving Cyber Christ and friends to battle the press and the stars at the opening of Planet Hollywood at Caesar's Palace.

And then an unexpected surprise. Lisa and friend; our first class objects of flirtation from the outbound trip which seemed like a month ago, appeared. But we were all so wiped out that a continent of innuendo turned into a series of short cat naps. We got a few flirts in, but nothing to write home about. Red Eye flights are just not what they're cracked up to be.

As I crawled into bed at something like 7AM Eastern, my wife awoke enough to ask the perennial wife question. "What did you do all weekend?" I, in turn, gave her the usual husbandly response.

"Oh, nothing. Good night, Gracie."

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Winn Schwartau is an information security consultant, lecturer and, obviously, a writer. Please go buy his new book: "Information Warfare: Chaos on the Electronic Superhighway." Available at book stores everywhere. Winn can be reached at: Voice: 813.393.6600 or E-mail: [P00506@Psilink.com](mailto:P00506@Psilink.com)

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