FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Precedence: ROUTINE   Date: 8/7/1995

To: LAS VEGAS   Attn: SQUAD 9

From: SA [   ]
       SQUAD 9
       Contact: SA [   ]   b6
                                                          b7C

Approved By: [   ]

Drafted By: [   ]

File Number(s): 264C-LV-NEW

Title: DEF CON III,
        LAS VEGAS '95,
        TROPICANA HOTEL AND CASINO,
        LAS VEGAS, NEVADA,
        8/4/95 through 8/6/95,
        COMPUTER FRAUD AND ABUSE - INTRUSION;
        OO: LAS VEGAS

Synopsis: Information.

Details: [   ]

[   ] DEF CON is a conference that has taken place in   b6
the Las Vegas area for the past three years. It is a gathering   b7C
of "hackers" from throughout the country. [   ]   b7D

        Inasmuch as this conference appears to be a yearly
gathering and in an attempt to maintain all information regarding
DEF CON III in one file it is recommended that this matter be   b6
opened and assigned to SA [   ] until such time   b7C
as all pertinent information is disseminated and all matters are
brought to a logical conclusion.
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Hackers put heads together at annual computer confab

Associated Press

First they cracked into a hotel television system, reprogramming it to scroll messages reading "Hackers rule!" across screens in 1,000 rooms.

Later that night, they set up a pirate radio station and began broadcasting from the roof of the Tropicana hotel.

But in the end, Def Con III, the computer hacker's convention, was a lot tamer than many Las Vegas conventions. The 350 or so computer hackers, crackers, phone phreaks and 'zine publishers spent most of the weekend bragging, gossiping, listening to speakers who extolled the hacker ethic and trying to debug the super high-speed T-1 line that was supposed to give them screaming access to the Internet.

Def Con is named for the military term Defense Condition, a measure of just how close the country is to nuclear war. It began three years ago as a massive party thrown by a young bulletin board operator who goes by the name Dark Tangent.

"I was going to leave for law school and I decided to throw a huge party for everyone I've met from all the networks. Then we decided if it was going to be a colossal failure, we might as well have it someplace fun, so we chose Las Vegas."

Housed in two large rooms surreally juxtaposed with the Tropicana's wedding chapel across the hall, conventioneers were mostly intensely bright young men in their late teens and early 20s — the sort who 30 years ago might have been ham radio operators.

Hacking comes from an intense intellectual desire to figure out how things work, and the desire to show off just how much you know. Grace and skill count for more than sheer power, and an elegant solution to a problem gains more esteem from one's peers than "kludgy" fixes.

Hackers, according to Dark Tangent, are portrayed in the media only as marauding and destructive, when in fact they're just curious.

"(Hackers) are interested in how the network topology is laid out. They're interested in knowledge — they're not interested in destroying things," the 25-year-old said.

In fact, hackers provide an important service to the computer world by spending thousands of hours finding network's weak points, said former CIA intelligence officer Robert Steele.

The assembled crowd, some of whom kept nodding off in corners after arriving via an all-night car caravan from the San Francisco Bay area, were overwhelmingly male.

Out of 350 participants, perhaps 20 were women, most of whom appeared to be girlfriends of attendees. The attitude toward women was summed up by one man in his early 20s who was catching up with a friend at the registration desk.

"Yeah, I've had a girlfriend for a year and a half, but it hasn't gotten in the way of my hacking," he said.

The women-not-as-peers attitude was only reinforced when Sarah Gordon ("Theora") gave a presentation on female

hackers Saturday afternoon which included height and weight as part of the design parameters of her survey.

The convention broke down into four main portions: bragging, drinking, hacking and information exchange.

Amusements over the course of the weekend included the ever-popular "Spot the Fed" contest and midnight games of Hacker's Jeopardy, which required the audience to duck flying 2,400-baud modems thrown as prizes.

The first official event of the con, Jeopardy featured Dark Tangent doing a fine impression of Alex Trebeck. The categories ranged from "MS Dos" to "The Internet" and "Narcs I've come to love."

"The rudest mistake Microsoft ever made."

"Starting business."

"Famous for developing the X-ray laser, their computers held over 30,000 Mg of pornographic images."

"What is Lawrence Livermore Labs?' answered Larry Lasker, co-writer and producer of the computer movies "Wargames" and "Sneakers." He said he was attending to pick up background for his latest film.

After suitable arrangements for a beer run, the game started up again.

"The password on every router shipped by Cisco Systems."

"What is Italy?" came the answer from several teams simultaneously.

And finally, to shouts from the audience, "The lowest form of life."

"What are America Online users?"

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