

# Secret society seeks world's brightest: Recruits navigate 'darknet' filled with terrorism, drugs

By Douglas Ernst - *The Washington Times* - Tuesday, November 26, 2013

A terrorist organization? CIA recruitment? A progressive scientific organization that aims to turn humanity into the “Nietzschen Übermensch”? Or just an elaborate prank?

A mysterious post on an Internet message board has both flummoxed and fascinated some of the world's best code breakers and cryptographers, many of whom are now fixated on deciphering the message.

Joel Eriksson, a 34-year-old computer analyst from Sweden, came across the message one night while surfing the Internet, [The Telegraph reported](#).

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We look forward to meeting the few that will make it all the way through.  
Good luck.”

Mr. Eriksson, along with thousands of code breakers and IT enthusiasts throughout the world, have tried their hand at finding the information hidden within the digital file and following the rabbit hole to its source.

Along the way, those who took a seemingly wrong turn found images of a duck with the message: “Whoops! Just decoys this way. Looks like you can’t guess how to get the message out.” It later turned out that important clues were embedded within the decoy message.

According to The Telegraph, the challenge — known as Cicada 3301 — has led “thousands of competitors across the web, down telephone lines, out to several physical locations around the globe, and into uncharted areas of the ‘darknet.’ So far, the hunt has required a knowledge of number theory, philosophy and classical music. An interest in both cyberpunk literature and the Victorian occult has also come in handy as has an understanding of Mayan numerology.”

Clues have led hunters to locations in Arizona, California, Paris, Seoul, Sydney and Warsaw, among others. As the challenge has progressed, so have the skills needed to continue. The ability to deal with hexadecimal characters, reverse-engineering and prime numbers is a must, Mr. Eriksson told The Telegraph.

The challenge is ongoing, having led users into the “darknet,” which the Telegraph estimates to be “5.000 times larger” than the “surface” web. It is

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