

## Cicada 3301 Baffles Cryptanalysts

posted by [Moderator](#)

Filed under: [Culture Jamming and Reality Hacking](#)

### The internet mystery that has the world baffled

by Chris Bell

telegraph.co.uk

25 November 2013

*For the past two years, a mysterious online organisation has been setting the world's finest code-breakers a series of seemingly unsolvable problems. But to what end? Welcome to the world of Cicada 3301*



One evening in January last year, Joel Eriksson, a 34-year-old computer analyst from Uppsala in Sweden, was trawling the web, looking for distraction, when he came across a message on an internet forum. The message was in stark white type, against a black background.

“Hello,” it said. “We are looking for highly intelligent individuals. To find them, we have devised a test. There is a message hidden in this image. Find it, and it will lead you on the road to finding us. We look forward to meeting the few that will make it all the way through. Good luck.”

The message was signed: “3301”.

A self-confessed IT security “freak” and a skilled cryptographer, Eriksson’s interest was immediately piqued. This was – he knew – an example of digital steganography: the concealment of secret information within a digital file. Most often seen in conjunction with image files, a recipient who can work out the code – for example, to alter the colour of every 100th pixel – can retrieve an entirely different image from the randomised background “noise”.

It’s a technique more commonly associated with nefarious ends, such as concealing child pornography. In 2002 it was suggested that al-Qaeda operatives had planned the September 11 attacks via the auction site eBay, by encrypting messages inside digital photographs.

Sleepily – it was late, and he had work in the morning – Eriksson thought he’d try his luck decoding the message from “3301”. After only a few minutes work he’d got somewhere: a reference to “Tiberius Claudius Caesar” and a line of meaningless letters. Joel deduced it might be an embedded “Caesar cipher” – an encryption technique named after Julius Caesar, who used it in private correspondence. It replaces characters by a letter a

certain number of positions down the alphabet. As Claudius was the fourth emperor, it suggested “four” might be important – and lo, within minutes, Eriksson found another web address buried in the image”™s code. Feeling satisfied, he clicked the link.

It was a picture of a duck with the message: “Whoops! Just decoys this way. Looks like you can”™t guess how to get the message out.”

“If something is too easy or too routine, I quickly lose interest,” says Eriksson. “But it seemed like the challenge was a bit harder than a Caesar cipher after all. I was hooked.”

Read the rest of this article [here](#).

Share this:



## Related Posts:

1. [Confessions of a Social Engineer](#)
2. [The Honest Coca-Cola Obesity Commercial](#)
3. [Anonymous Threatens to Expose Drug Cartel](#)
4. [Moscow Billboard Hacked](#)



•

## • About

Welcome to the Art of the Prank, produced and edited by [Joey Skaggs](#). Here you will find insights, information, news and discussions about art, pranks, hoaxes, culture jamming & reality hacking around the world - past, present and future - mainstream and counter culture. You are invited to contribute to its development. May your journey be filled with more than your expectations.

- Search the Art of the Prank Blog

•

- **Get new Art of the Prank posts delivered to your inbox**

First Name

Last Name

Email Address \*

Subscribe

[Like /artoftheprank on Facebook](#)



Follow @artoftheprank

[View the Art of the Prank movie website](#)



[Visit /artoftheprankmovie on Facebook](#)



[Visit /bullshitdetectorwatch on Facebook](#)



## • Contents

### [Home](#)

- [Art of the Prank – the movie](#) (11)
- [All About Pranks](#) (505)
  - [Definitions](#) (9)
  - [Hoaxes vs. Scams](#) (24)
  - [Sociology and Psychology of Pranks](#) (22)
  - [The Prank as Art](#) (61)
  - [The History of Pranks](#) (161)
  - [The Future of Pranks](#) (12)
  - [First Amendment Issues](#) (88)
  - [Political Challenges](#) (87)
  - [Legal Issues](#) (48)
  - [Co-option \(If You Can't Beat 'Em...\)](#) (35)
  - [Media Literacy](#) (123)
- [The World of the Prank](#) (2,511)
  - [Pranksters](#) (516)
  - [Art Pranks](#) (291)
  - [Media Pranks](#) (182)
  - [Creative Activism](#) (419)
  - [Culture Jamming and Reality Hacking](#) (748)
  - [Political Pranks](#) (281)
  - [Publicity Stunts](#) (198)
  - [Prank News](#) (279)
  - [Practical Jokes and Mischief](#) (394)
    - [Phone Pranks](#) (40)
    - [College Pranks](#) (22)
    - [High School Pranks](#) (19)
    - [Office Pranks](#) (8)
  - [Just for Kids](#) (3)
  - [Not for Kids](#) (17)
  - [Satire](#) (592)
  - [Parody](#) (242)
  - [Literary Hoaxes](#) (88)
- [Fact or Fiction?](#) (857)
  - [The Big One](#) (68)
  - [Conspiracy Theories](#) (35)
  - [Propaganda and Disinformation](#) (177)
  - [Hype](#) (40)
  - [Spin](#) (90)
  - [Illusion and Magic](#) (82)
  - [Urban Legends](#) (77)
  - [Truth that's Stranger than Fiction](#) (131)
  - [Fraud and Deception](#) (268)
  - [You Decide](#) (115)
  - [Prank Busters](#) (27)
- [How to Pull Off a Prank](#) (79)
  - [Why Do a Prank?](#) (10)
  - [What Makes a Good Prank?](#) (14)
  - [Instructionals](#) (53)
  - [Hoax Etiquette](#) (14)

- More
  - [Contact us](#)
  - [How to Submit Materials](#)
  - [Shop at the Art of the Prank Bookstore](#)
  - [Press Coverage](#)
  - [Press Releases](#)
  - [Privacy Policy](#)
  - [Legal Notices & Conditions of Use](#)

## Contributors

### Editors

[Joey Skaggs \[81\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)

### Contributors

[KDM and CLM \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[Survive LA \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Rev. Al \[4\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Dadara \[4\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[monochrom \[7\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Ask The Fiddler \[32\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Matt Besser \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Samuel Bester \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Mark Borkowski \[7\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Andrew Boyd \[11\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Albert Cahn \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[Erin Clermont \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Dino D'Annibale \[4\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[W.J. Elvin III \[87\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Margaret Engel \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Ron English \[6\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)

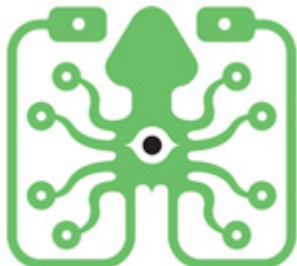
[Homer Fink \[3\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Rose Fox \[21\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[André Gattolin \[10\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Doug Harvey \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Mike Ibanez \[6\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Tim Jackson \[14\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Paul Krassner \[7\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Marcy LaViollette \[23\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Steve Lambert \[15\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[John Lundberg \[7\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Beauvais Lyons \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Norm Magnusson \[4\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Steffani Martin \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[Jorge Luis Marzo \[7\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Kate McCamy \[14\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[Kembrew McLeod \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Peter Moosgaard \[9\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[David Moye \[3\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Ethan Persoff \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Steve ESPO Powers \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Sean Ryan \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#)  
[David Strom \[8\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Mark Thomas \[1\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Tamara Thorne \[3\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Charlie Todd \[84\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[V. Vale \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#) | [Link](#)  
[Nancy Weber \[2\]](#)  
[Profile](#)

[Wayne Zebzda \[12\]](#)

[Profile](#) | [Link](#)

## • Related Links

- [Adbusters](#)
- [Annenberg Political Fact Check](#)
- [Art Threat](#)
- [Billboard Liberation Front](#)
- [Boing Boing](#)
- [Borkowski Blogs](#)
- [Bullshit Detector Watch](#)
- [Cacophony Society](#)
- [Church of the SubGenius](#)
- [Circlemakers](#)
- [Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting](#)
- [Freaking News](#)
- [Guide to Urban Legends and Folklore](#)
- [Instructables](#)
- [Joey Skaggs](#)
- [Laughing Squid](#)
- [LitFraud Blog](#)
- [Mark Dery](#)
- [MediaChannel.org](#)
- [Museum of Hoaxes](#)
- [PR Watch](#)
- [Quackwatch](#)
- [RE/Search](#)
- [Skeptic's Dictionary](#)
- [Skeptic's Society & Magazine](#)
- [Skeptical Inquirer Magazine](#)
- [Sniggle](#)
- [Snopes](#)
- [Sound of Young America](#)
- [Sourcewatch](#)
- [Spinwatch](#)
- [Streetsy: Daily Street Art](#)
- [The Onion](#)
- [ThinkGeek](#)
- [UCB Comedy](#)
- [Urban Prankster](#)
- [Wooster Collective](#)



LAUGHING SQUID  
WEB HOSTING

Development/Design by: [dgb.design](#) | Illustration/Design by: [Jef Leon](#) | Built with: [WordPress](#)

© 2021 Joey Skaggs | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Legal Notices and Conditions of Use](#)

☺