Espionage?

The world is in an uproar. "German hackers sell high-tech to the Eastern Bloc,"
"Biggest espionage case since Gunter Guillaume," etc., etc.

In a television report on the ARD program "Brennpunkte," hackers, and particularly the Chaos Computer Club, are portrayed as a scary group of alcohol- and drug-addicted computer freaks. With dark images of shadows behind computers, they lay it on even thicker. Among other things, "C-compilers and operating systems" are said to have disappeared to the Eastern Bloc.

Furthermore, data from Philips and Thomson (a French defense giant) also allegedly disappeared. The following day in Germany, most newspapers are already putting the initial reports into perspective after the Minister of the Interior, Zimmermann, stated that there had been no large-scale espionage. The Dutch papers, however, are uncritically repeating the initial reports.

So what really happened?
Are all German hackers actually spies? Will Hack-Tic subscribers be getting a visit from KGB agents soon? Hack-Tic opens the book on the case.
The story of Professor Clifford Stoll dates back to the time of the NASA hack by a number of German computer crackers.

A few years ago, Stoll discovered that computer crackers were at work on his system. He contacted the FBI, and together with the FBI, it was decided to "feed" the hackers a little so they could be traced. A number of fake "SDI files" were placed on the computer, and after several months of intensive investigation, the "Wily Hacker" was traced to Hannover. He turned out to be the 27-year-old UNIX and VMS expert Markus Hess.

This Markus hacked along with several others:

Karl Koch, 23 years old and also from Hannover. Because he allegedly lived a rather luxurious lifestyle and was a drug addict, he is said to have sold information to the KGB.

Hans Hübner, alias "Pengo", from Berlin. This 20-year-old owner of a small computer business in Berlin supposedly needed money to invest in his company. Just like the others, he does not belong to a hacker club, but he maintains good contact with the local hacker scene.

Dirk Brezinski from Berlin. A programmer and troubleshooter for Siemens BS-2000 systems. He earned 20,000 DM a month at Siemens and is considered a genius by his interrogators.

Peter Carl from Berlin. An ex-croupier who "always had enough cocaine." No information is available about his computer knowledge or experience.
After the group had supposedly attracted the interest of the KGB.

The group (with Hess and Koch leading the way) sold their well-documented hacks (which, by now, were available to view on all hack BBSs) to the KGB for a total sum that would have run into the hundreds of thousands.

Why, in this summary of "facts," do we constantly use words like "supposedly" or "reportedly"? Because it is not at all clear to us what is actually going on. The German government has a knack for twisting the facts, and in this case, we have heard so many plausible but utterly contradictory stories that we've gradually lost all track of where we stand. What is certain is that there was some form of contact between intelligence agencies and hackers, and that is bad enough.

After all, we can all too easily imagine that there are people here in the Netherlands who would be willing to sell hack-info (from THIS, for example) for a hefty sum. For us (and for all principled hackers on THIS and elsewhere), this is a horrifying prospect. The idea that information gathered by hackers and freely exchanged with others would be used solely to favor one regime over another is repugnant to us!

The editors are in favor of spreading computer knowledge to the Eastern Bloc (and to the rest of the universe). We just believe that secret services and governments are not the right intermediaries. Anyone who strives for more openness and for the dismantling of information monopolies should, in our view, stay far away from intelligence agencies, no matter which side they are on.