

Police and Thieves

By Jesse Walker

Los Angeles' ongoing police scandal continues to grow: As many as 70 officers are now under investigation for their possible roles in an ugly web of shootings, beatings, drug-dealing, frame-ups, perjury, and corruption. (See "Gangsta Cops," January.)

It's still unclear how far the wrongdoing reaches, and not all of the charges levied by Rafael Perez—the coke-dealing cop whose testimony unleashed the scandal—have been corroborated. But more than 40 convictions have been overturned to date, and the victims of police abuse and false imprisonment are revving up to sue the city. Officials estimate that L.A. will have to pay out at least \$125 million in settlements, and perhaps much more.

Where will the city find that kind of money? Mayor Richard Riordan has an idea, one that's sparked its own outraged response. Los Angeles, he announced in February, should set aside some of its take from the recent federal settlement with the tobacco industry.

Not so fast, say other officials. We were going to use that money to make the city's sidewalks wheelchair-accessible—a change required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Hacked Off

By Jeff A. Taylor

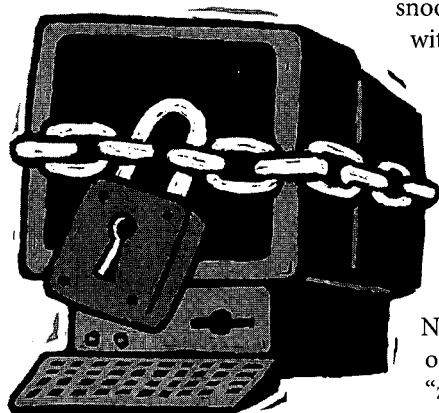
When is a "hacker attack" not a hacker attack? When it's done by

wannabes too dense to be hackers.

That seems to be the case in the assaults on several high-profile e-commerce Web sites in February. EBay, Amazon, and a few other vendors had to go offline after cyber-vandals monkeyed with their systems and clogged those sites with phony electronic traffic. While damage was done, such antics don't qualify as true hacks: The systems were never actually penetrated or turned "rogue." For the targeted sites, these attacks were more like being on the receiving end of a flurry of crank phone calls. Your line is tied up by the pranksters and people you want to talk to can't get through. Imagine you run a business dependent on phone orders and real money can be lost.

To complete the analogy, our phony callers would have broken into someone else's house and used their phone to harass you. This makes them hard to catch.

Net culture even has a term for those who engage in this sort of vandalous pseudo-hack: *script kiddies*. Of course, if the mainstream media were to lead their reports with that phrase, the average American might think the Net is under attack from Hollywood child stars. So *hackers* it is.

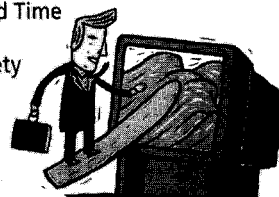


Balance Sheet

By Jeff A. Taylor

ASSETS

- ▲ **Grossed In.** Canada's graphic anti-smoking campaign, featuring full-color snaps of diseased body parts on tobacco products, becomes a collector's item among Canuck teens. If there is one thing more powerful than nicotine, it's the gross-out. Still, Sen. Dick Durbin (D.-Ill.) misses the point and introduces a bill to do the same in the U.S.
- ▲ **Guide Wires.** America Online and Time Warner announce plans to open the conglomerate's cable lines to a variety of Internet providers. Backers of so-called "open access"—mainly the competing Bell companies—had argued that only government could compel such a thing to occur.
- ▲ **Brain Candy.** Spanish researchers find that THC in marijuana might fight brain tumors. Scientists shot cannabinoids directly into mouse brain cancers only to see the tumors shrink while normal cells thrived. Human trials are planned soon.
- ▲ **Open Doors.** Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan tells Congress that more foreign workers are needed to help keep the economy going. Uncle Alan backs a bill to increase from 65,000 to 195,000 the number of high-tech workers who could emigrate to the United States each year. "The benefits of bringing in people to do the work here, rather than doing the work elsewhere, to me, should be pretty self-evident," he says.
- ▲ **Tax Tips.** Less than one in 300 tax returns will be audited for tax year 1999, compared to one in 67 in 1981. Adverse publicity and new taxpayer rights laws make the IRS auditors gun-shy. Auditors can now be fired outright for abusing taxpayers, a novel concept.



As with most break-ins, this sort of attack can usually be deterred with better locks. But better locks mean better security, and that means doing things that bother both the official privacy lobby and national security organs.

Last year, both Intel and Microsoft were branded evil snoops for shipping products with ID codes embedded in them. Truth is, individual users will likely always find ways to defeat ID codes and surf anonymously. But for large organizations with lots of excess computing power and Net connections—the ones our script kiddies love to "zombify"—user authentication

should be part of a total security package.

The other part of security means treating information on any large system as valuable by encrypting it. That is the equivalent of hiding sharp objects and fragile knick-knacks from toddlers. Webmasters are just now catching onto how the use of encryption can make the script kiddies' task that much tougher.

Indeed, more than anything, these attacks show that the U.S. government's long war against powerful encryption has kept such tools out of the hands of exactly the wrong people: One of the programs thought to have been used to launch the at-

On March 5 and 6, the John Templeton Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania hosted a conference called **"Extended Life, Eternal Life,"** with participants discussing the ethical and theological implications of our increasing ability to extend and enrich our lives through biotechnology. As might be expected, tempers flared, with anti-biotech speakers such as The Hastings Center's Daniel Callahan declaring, **"The worst possible way to resolve [the question of life extension] is to leave it up to individual choice. ...There is no known social good coming from the conquest of death."** Gregory Stock, director of UCLA's Program on Medicine, Technology, and Society, begged to differ, suggesting, **"We are not moving toward a cataclysmic reckoning. Instead, I offer you the image of birth. Like birth, this period [of nascent biotech] is messy, bloody, and traumatic, but it is the beginning of a new era. Future humans will look back on this period as the time when the very bases of their lives were laid down and thank us."**

Some of the conference materials (including an archived debate on "Should biomedicine seek to treat dying like a disease—and seek to cure it?") are available on the Web at www.extended-eternallife.org. REASON Science Correspondent Ronald Bailey attended the conference and filed daily dispatches, available at www.reason.com/opeds/rb030600.html.

may soon be known for a variety that is weaker than ditchweed. In December, as part of an experiment sanctioned by the state legislature, University of Hawaii researchers began planting industrial hemp on a quarter-acre plot in Oahu.

Since it contains a negligible amount of THC, marijuana's main psychoactive ingredient, this crop isn't worth smoking. But it is useful in manufacturing a wide variety of products, including textiles, paper, cord, foods, beauty aids, and building materials. Although such products are legally available in this country, the plants from which they're made have to be grown elsewhere, because state and federal laws do not distinguish between industrial hemp and marijuana.

That's starting to change. Hawaii is the third state to endorse the experimental cultivation of hemp, following North Dakota and Minnesota. The Oahu project—backed by a \$200,000 grant from Alterna, a company that uses hemp seeds in its hair care products—is the first to get started. The experiment is aimed at developing a hemp strain suited to Hawaii's climate.

The Drug Enforcement Administration has long insisted that legalizing hemp, which was banned in the late 1950s, would send a pro-drug message and make marijuana crops harder to detect. But the agency seems to be softening its position. It did

not try to ▶

Oahu Weed

By Jacob Sullum

Once famous for especially potent cannabis, Hawaii



LIABILITIES

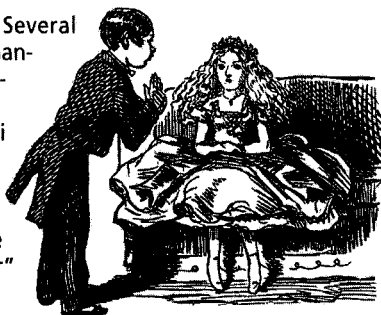
▼ **Gun Snobby.** A Louisiana judge tosses out state laws passed in order to stop cities from suing gun manufacturers for damages caused by gun crime. The decision will be appealed to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

▼ **Craps.** A former stock trader faces up to 19 years in prison and a \$2 million fine after he is found guilty of helping Americans gamble on the Internet. The trial court interprets the ancient Wire Communications Act in such a way that it could apply to a bet anywhere in the world that involves a phone and an American.

▼ **Launch Time.** China threatens to lob a missile at the U.S. should it get involved in any hostilities over Taiwan. A real ballistic missile defense would be nice 'long about now.

▼ **Virtual Law.** Two state legislators draft the "Tennessee 21st Century Media Market Responsibility Act of 2000," which would ban the sale of violent video games to minors. Taboo games would be determined by a ratings label system. Violators would face up to six months in jail and a \$500 fine.

▼ **Finishing School.** Several states look to legislate manners. South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, and Mississippi all weigh laws which would require kids to be polite in school. Louisiana is currently the only state with a "yes, sir" statute.



tacks uses encryption to mask what it is doing.

Penal Code

By Ryan H. Sager

Easily aroused men and boys had best steer clear of Mississippi—at least if State Sen. Tom King has his way. Concerned with the behavior of strip-club patrons, Sen. King has proposed a public nudity law that defines nakedness to include "the showing of covered male genitals in a discernibly turgid state."

"It will set some boundaries on what [strip club patrons] can or cannot do in a community," Forrest County Supervisor Johnny DuPree

told Reuters earlier this year. DuPree, who has opposed the opening of a strip club at a local National Guard base, asked for a discussion of the law in the state legislature.

If a man has a hard time following the law, he could face up to \$2,000 in fines and a year in jail. The bill, which was modeled on a similar statute in Indiana, has been sent to the Mississippi Senate Judiciary Committee for review.