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Geeks in Tents = Chaos
by [Steve Kettmann](#)

3:00 a.m. 9.Aug.99.PDT

BERLIN -- If there was a unifying theme at the Chaos Communication Camp over the weekend, it was security. Or rather, insecurity.

Hugh Daniels, a leader of the [Linux FreeS/WAN encryption project](#), spoke at several workshops during the three-day event and offered the technical tips many in the audience wanted. But he also sounded the alarm about the need for encryption code to be shared with anyone and everyone.

See also: [Chaos Around the Campfire](#)

"The goal is for you to be able to build world-class networks that you can't bring down without cutting the cables," Daniels said at a session on Saturday afternoon. Then he went off on a long riff about eventually having CPUs implanted on the inside of his brain, each with an Internet connection.

"There's going to be a Net inside my head and one personality is going to want to keep secrets from another," he said.

Daniels and John Gilmore, who financed much of FreeS/WAN, put a lot of time into worrying about how compromised information that travels on the Internet remains, starting with email. Gilmore went so far as to compare Daniels' appeal in April for "1,000 crypto Web and FTP sites to spring up in the US" to the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall.

Others were worried about security, too.

"It's a very big thing this time, because we need it," said "Pinky," a computer scientist from Erlangen, Germany, who declined to give his full name. "Politicians are discussing it, too. We have to discuss it, so they won't. We have to do something, so they will have problems messing everybody up."

The Ninth US Circuit Court of Appeals [ruled this spring](#) that a data-scrambling code was a protected form of free speech, meaning that cryptography code has First Amendment protection against government intrusion. But the United States bans the export of strong crypto, arguing that terrorists might make use of it.

Gilmore fumed about the restriction, arguing that attempts to limit crypto code just help the powerful.

"We will find people who know how to hack good crypto code for the good of their countries -- in India or wherever," he said. One terminal in the huge

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main tent, haven of hard-core hackers, kept drawing crowds. It turned out that it was all just to see how commercial Firewall software looks when it's running. The programmer running the software was even more press-phobic than most geeks, and would only identify himself as a hacker from Munich.

"I see the camp as basically educating people about what their rights are," he said. "It's not about breaking anything, because the people who break something and make people pay, asking for ransoms or something, those people are outcasts. Or that's how it is in Germany anyway."

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 Stephanie, a 22-year-old from Amsterdam who works as a consultant on network security, said the issues raised by Daniels, Gilmore, and others did not strike her as new or surprising. But she was looking forward to Sunday's FreeS/WAN workshop -- and considered it a fine public service to give people the tools to enhance their own security.

She could not hide her disappointment, though, that the CCC weekend lacked some of the freewheeling charm of its model, Hacking in Progress, a similar event two summers ago near Amsterdam that was more wild and less programmatic.

"HIP was more happening," she said. "It's cool to camp, but at HIP there were more interesting people and more diverse people."

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Even as word filtered around the massive campsite about the paper issued by the Ontario (Canada) Information and Privacy Commission on Thursday, saying that everyone should learn to use encryption, few at CCC were convinced that security issues were sexy, rather than just an annoying necessity.

This was all too clear to Daniels and his associates, who devoted themselves this weekend to convincing young hackers that there's more to life than cheap thrills.

"There are all these kids out there who think it's sexy to crack," he said wearily. "We decided to use CCC to try to convince them it's worth thinking about the larger good."

That's a motivation that only goes so far. Heinz and his group had crammed a small tent full of CPUs, monitors, and assorted paraphernalia, and were just revving up a game of "Total Annihilation" when Heinz offered his take on the weekend.

"We don't care too much about the US government's attitude toward encryption, just so long as we can get our software," he said as he stared at his screen, which read "Battle Room." "And the world is big enough, we can always get what we want."

But don't think the dismissive sighs necessarily carried the day. Daniels was weighing the option of extending his current stay in Europe long enough to speak at a Haarlem, Netherlands, conference early next month billing itself as "The IT security event of 1999."

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