

Thoughts of a former mercenary

Musings from someone what used to be a contractor

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(U) In which I get a funny email

Posted on 2017-04-24 by (NSA-CIV) — 25 Comments ↓

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) This came into my inbox the other day.

(U)

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Dear Mr.

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is [REDACTED1] and I'm an independent investigative journalist working with [REDACTED2], author and writer at [well known magazine]. I am reaching out to you regarding a CNN-financed documentary series we are working on that explores various theories around the mysterious [Cicada 3301](#) internet puzzles.

Cicada 3301 first appeared in 2011, and the puzzles have since not been solved. No one knows who or what is behind Cicada or why these puzzles exist. My colleague and I are tasked with trying to uncover the who and why of Cicada 3301.

As someone with extensive hacking skills and knowledge, something Cicada heavily utilizes in its puzzles, we wanted to know if you would be interested in taking a look at some of the puzzles. We're looking for experts in various fields related to Cicada's recruitment methods and stated

Approved for Release by NSA on 08-24-2022, FOIA Case # 107792

ideology (more privacy in the digital age, better human rights and civil liberties, stronger data protection).

From our experts we're asking for their take on Cicada's sophistication, their 'traceability', and their possible origins. If you'd like to learn more about Cicada and their puzzles, I will gladly send you an information packet with details.

And if you're up to it, the initial interview could lead to an on-camera interview.

If you're interested, kindly get back to me at your earliest convenience and I'll get you the info packet right away and we can go from there.

Best regards,

[REDACTED1]

[REDACTED1]

Independent Investigative Journalist

@[REDACTED1]

PGP key ID: [REDACTED1's PGP key]

(U//FOUO) I [REDACTED] it's not a phishing attempt, and it's not asking me about NSA, but it strikes me as the kind of thing they'd want to know about. I'm curious: have others gotten this?



This entry was posted in [Uncategorized](#) and tagged [not_a_phish](#) by [REDACTED] [NSA-CIV](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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25 COMMENTS



2017-04-24 17:55



(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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(U//~~FOUO~~) How were they able to characterize you as "someone with extensive hacking skills and knowledge" when it sounds like this is the first time they've spoken to you?

1

Classification

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

0

Reply



Author



[Redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 17:59



Reply to [Redacted]

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) I have a public connection to the subject that predates my time here, and I have a resume that that clearly connects me to the subject (and yes, it went past PrePub and doesn't say as much as it could). My guess is that they were either referred to me by someone else or are just firing out email to anyone connected to the topic on Linked-In or the like. The email really isn't personalized past my last name, and it's trivial to take a list of names, a generic email, and then fire out spam emails that could fool someone into thinking they're unique.

👍 1

Classification

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0

Reply

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36



[Redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 17:59



UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U//~~FOUO~~) Not trying to get you to overshare or anything (speaking of phishing), but I'm curious, what sorts of things do you put on the internet that they would think to contact you? I thought you only connected using twelve nested VMs going through seven proxies, or something along those lines (so I guess I was assuming that you only lurked and weren't putting anything out there).

(U//~~FOUO~~) Again, not to pry. (Oh, and for the record, nobody has contacted me, but why would they?)

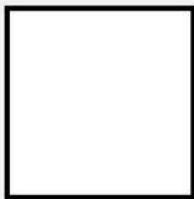
👍 8

Classification

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0

Reply



Author



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:16



Reply to

(NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) Some stuff predates my time here, and I wasn't anywhere near as cautious then as I am now (in my youth, I used to go to 2600 meetings), [redacted] and I do have a resume out in a few places that I update every year in case Congress walks in and says "something is obviously wrong with all you people who have been GG-12 for more than 5 years, you're all fired." (Or in case something happens and I have to resign and go back in the public sector.)

(U//~~FOUO~~) There are things where my activity on the Internet is obfuscated, but fact of [redacted] [redacted] is interested in information security" is UNCLASSIFIED, and really, I'm one of many in this world.



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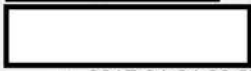
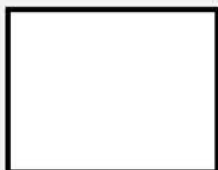
(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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Reply



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 20:07



Reply to

(NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U//~~FOUO~~) I used to the 2600 Online quarterly magazines in the early 2000's. You have rocked my world once again sir!

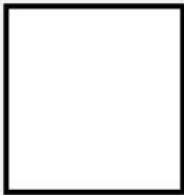


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Reply



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:05

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) Bad grammar: "As someone with extensive hacking skills and knowledge, ..., we wanted to know..." "Someone" should refer to "we" here. Obviously, it doesn't, though. Turn them down on those grounds.



Classification

UNCLASSIFIED

0

Reply



Author



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:06



Reply to



(NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) Nice. But my plan was to not reply at all.



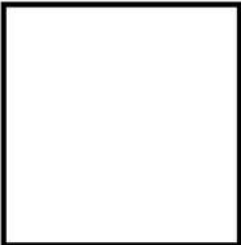


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Reply



Author



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:05

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) Reposting elsewhere.



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Reply

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36



(b) (3) -10 USC 130b
(b) (6)
OGA



(USCYBERCOM)

2017-04-24 18:06

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(U//~~FOUO~~) Assuming this email is legit, is this the sort of thing that would need to be

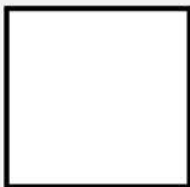


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Reply



Author



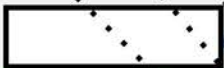
(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:07

(b) (3)-10 USC 130b
(b) (6)
OGA



Reply to



(USCYBERCOM)

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(U//~~FOUO~~) I don't think so: doesn't refer to NSA at all, after all. I [redacted] though.

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Reply

(b) (3) -P.L. 86-36



2017-04-24 18:10

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) Professional goal #1: Attain enough recognition within NSA that they institute a "Dress Like [redacted] Day".

(U) Professional goal #2: Attain enough recognition outside of NSA that I start attracting the occasional funny email on cryptography-related topics (but not so much that I get them all the dang time).



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Reply



Author

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:15



Reply to



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(U) The funny thing is, I don't think I'm that much of an expert (certainly not compared to some folks I know!), or all that recognized. My bet is that this was shotgunned to a bunch of people and slightly customized based on that.

(U) But thanks for boosting my ego a bit.

(U) Many people already achieve goal 1 for me, since my typical attire is "pithy tshirt and khakis." But I still hold out hope that I will get a letter designating me as the Agency's top expert on



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Reply



[Redacted]

2017-04-24 18:20



Reply to [Redacted] (NSA-CIV)

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(U) Well, if you've got a few spare cycles, I've come up with a fast implementation of [Redacted] and I'd appreciate some feedback.



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(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

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Reply



[Redacted]

Author

[Redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 18:44



Reply to [Redacted]

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(U) I'd be happy to help, sir. [Redacted]



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Reply



[Redacted]

[Redacted]

2017-04-24 18:47



Reply to [Redacted] (NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) If you didn't get an email from me, that was it.



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Reply

[Redacted]

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

[Redacted]

NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 20:13



Reply to [Redacted]

UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U) I've been [Redacted] Maybe I'll get around to writing a Journal post about it one of these days.



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Reply



[Redacted]

NSA-GIV)

2017-04-24 20:40

Reply to [redacted] (NSA-CIV)

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(U) This merely displays a poverty of ambition. I can offer a [redacted] service which provides the customer the ability to configure their desired level of security.

7

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Reply

[redacted]

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

[redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 20:54

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) You should have linked them to Time Cube [redacted]

0

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Reply

[redacted]

Author

[redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 20:56

(U) In which I get a funny email – Thoughts of a former mercenary

Doc ID: 6784026

Reply to [redacted] (NSA-CIV)

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(U) Don't tempt me to send them your way, sir.

👍 1

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0

Reply

[redacted]

[redacted] (NSA-CIV)

2017-04-24 20:57

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Reply to [redacted] (NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) You should send them to [redacted] or [redacted] actually.

👍 0

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Reply

[redacted]

[redacted]

2017-04-25 09:49

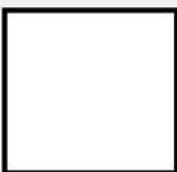
UNCLASSIFIED

(U) We got that note here in CCH as well, we sent them to PAO.

👍 1

0

Reply



Author



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-25 20:34



Reply to



UNCLASSIFIED//~~FOUO~~

(U//~~FOUO~~) It went to my personal email account, didn't mention NSA at all. I think sending her on to NSA PAO would be poor OPSEC on my part, and

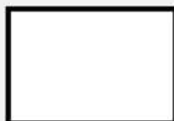


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Reply



(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36



2017-04-27 09:26



Reply to

(NSA-CIV)

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(U) Agree. It wasn't clear to me that this was your personal account, and I was just relating what we'd done with mail to CCH.



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Reply



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-26 17:46

UNCLASSIFIED

(U) I watched a movie where a "puzzle" was sent to a mass amount of mathematicians as a challenge. The "puzzle" was actually the key to unlocking the encryption on a server they were trying to hack and a ton of helpful mathematicians solved it, paving the way for the hacker to take control. This reminds me somewhat of that and may be a phishing attempt after all.

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(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Reply



Author



(NSA-CIV)

2017-04-26 18:01

□

Reply to



(NSA-CIV)

UNCLASSIFIED/FOUO

(U) It's not a phishing attempt. It's someone using the age-old marksmanship principle of "fire enough shots and you'll hit something." I've found out that two other friends who have no

Doc ID: 6784026

connection to the IC got the same message: the author is looking for people to come on TV and talk about Cicada 3301. (Now, your guess is as good as mine as to who is behind Cicada 3301 itself. That might be something like your scenario. Or it might just be a bunch of people on the fringe of the [cyberpunk](#) movement looking to recruit like-minded leet folks.)



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(U) 2017 Jailbreak Security Summit



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- (U) In which the weird turn pro, or, #Lavrov: why stop with just destroying a village

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