

Chapter **Three**

Roland Minton parked his white, piece-of-shit rental Camry across from the shiny, blue-tiled, windowless buildings that looked like five huge blocks of ice scattered randomly across three or four acres of manicured lawn. The property was fenced and had more digitized security than the Midwestern Federal Reserve.

A monument sign out front announced:

GEN-A-TEC
A BIO-SCIENCE CORPORATION

Roland stuffed his new purple hair into his white phone company hard hat, glancing at himself in his rearview mirror as he tucked the last strands up under the hatband. God, he loved this new shade. It

was Technicolor-tight. The gay hairdresser at the San Francisco beauty salon had mixed some awesome red-and-blue streaks in with the purple, and Roland thought the do rocked majorly. He pulled the bill down on the hard hat and grabbed his computer cracking kit out of the backseat: a tool belt with screwdrivers, pliers, wire cutters, lines, and alligator clips. He checked his phony ID badge made with his new CD-ROM computer package. His picture, geeky and proud, grinned back at him; PACIFIC BELL was in block sans-serif letters underneath. Roland clipped it on, grabbed his computer packed in its expensive Cordura case, and again turned his attention to the shimmering, blue, fortress-like science lab. "Bet you assholes got a load'a pixel-dust security," he muttered, "but I is de Dustbuster."

Roland Minton looked up the street at the rest of the block. The science lab was in Sausalito, across the bay from San Francisco. From where he stood he could just barely see the top of the Golden Gate Bridge fading away into the late afternoon mist, the orange-red suspension cables arching like the top of an amusement park devil ride.

Gen-A-Tec was in a commercial neighborhood a mile from Sausalito's shopping district. Several small, low-roofed factories and warehouses lined the remainder of the street. Gen-A-Tec was the only secure layout on the block, but he knew from previous research that they had enough security to make up for everyone else. Roland could hardly wait to try his skill against the Gen-A-Tec systems administrator. The guy was probably money. Roland was ready to put his game in play. He loved going up against cream because he knew he was boss dawg. The ultimate big guy—master of the game.

He backed the rental car out of sight of the blue tile buildings, then got out dragging his cracking equipment with him. He buckled his utility belt around his bony hips and started up the street, looking for the telephone company junction box. Usually it was located somewhere around the middle of the block and pretty easy

to spot. Halfway down the street he found it in the ivy: a four-foot high, one-foot deep, green metal rectangle that served the telephonic needs of the entire neighborhood. It was camouflaged behind a scraggly hedge near a warehouse park, under the shade of an old pepper tree.

Roland stepped carefully through the ivy and kneeled down next to it. "We be strollin' with Roland," he whispered as he opened the box. He wanted to do his hacking from a number that seemed like it originated inside the Gen-A-Tec building. To do that, he had decided to work from here because the junction box had the easiest terminal access. He had elected to do this hack in the late afternoon in broad daylight for two reasons: First, most electronic security shifts turned over at 5:30 P.M., and during the first half hour after the changing of the guard the new crowd would not be up to speed. They'd be getting coffee and checking attendance logs. Second, phone company techs normally work around junction boxes only during daylight hours. To attempt the crack at night would automatically arouse suspicion.

Roland studied the box and its myriad of terminals. Using his lineman's handset to connect to each phone jack, he phreaked the terminals breaking into them in sequence to find out which lines belonged to whom. After five minutes he had the Gen-A-Tec phones isolated. Their lines were in a block of numbers beginning with 555-6000—the main switchboard line, and going to 555-6999. Roland unzipped the Cordura case, lovingly took out his laptop computer, and hooked it up to one of the science lab's phone lines.

Earlier that afternoon he had visited Gen-A-Tec's website and downloaded the company prospectus. He now pulled it out of his pocket and laid it on top of the junction box where it would be handy. He had memorized most of the important corporate officers, the cheese who would have unlimited access to the computer system and had written down their e-mail addresses—that were also thoughtfully supplied by the same prospectus.

Before driving out here, Roland had logged on to Gen-A-Tec's e-mail host and asked it what version it was. When the host answered he quickly logged off. Now, as he crouched behind the hedge, he began looking for several notorious security holes in that particular software version; holes that sometimes went unpatched by lazy dick-smack systems administrators. But he didn't really expect to find any, because Gen-A-Tec seemed so security-conscious. He was sure this systems boss had probably patched them all over, but he was wrong. Roland was surprised and delighted to find several unpatched holes in the software.

"Bust on, Super Daddy," he murmured to himself as he picked one, wondering at the stupidity of having full-boat security and leaving such easy access through systems defects. He accessed the Gen-A-Tec home page, but instead of signing on with them he went through one of the security holes. It let him slip past all of their warning alarms and access the company e-mail system. "Kickin' ass," Roland smiled as he crouched in the bushes and worked. But he was also slightly let down. This systems administrator was whack. Their security was a joke. He liked to ply his trade against the best, but this SA wasn't going to present him any challenge. Bummage.

Roland quickly went through his next few cracker steps. He needed to access his ISP—where he had already set up a phony account using a stolen credit card number. "Man, what don't I do for the Strockmeister?" He smiled as he thought of the overweight attorney. When he first met Herman he thought the dude was a complete drudge, but Herman had slowly won him over with his passion for causes and his fairness. Roland's mother, Madge, had found Strock while Roland was fielding grounders in the federal joint, convicted of computer crimes. Strock took his case on appeal and got it overturned. In exchange Roland had volunteered his hacking services. The two became an unlikely pair, as different emotionally as they were physically, but they shared a blistering intelligence, and now there was very little that

Roland wouldn't do for Strock. He thought Strock was the bomb—finer than frog hair.

Roland dialed into his ISP using one of the phone numbers from inside the Gen-A-Tec phone block, then logged on to his new phony Internet account. He had already composed a special e-mail message. The Gen-A-Tec e-mail host was only supposed to pass e-mails on to the recipient it was addressed to, but the hole Roland was using allowed him to add a few commands that the host would automatically execute. He sent an e-mail request to send a complete list of Gen-A-Tec's password files to the bogus account. All he had to do now was settle back and wait.

The late afternoon sun was hot on his skinny shoulders, but Roland didn't mind. He was thinking about pussy now, wondering how he was going to open some clam after work. He was thinking about cruising the bars, looking for cream, maybe making a trip out to Berkeley to flash his new sash out there, let his awesome purple headdress vacuum up the skank, throw those college girls a sausage party.

While he was pursuing those fantasies his computer beeped and he looked at the screen that flashed: YOU'VE GOT MAIL. He opened the e-mail and, sure as shit, there was the Gen-A-Tec password file. Among other things, it had pairs of user names and encrypted passwords for the 3,500 Gen-A-Tec employees:

| | |
|---------|------------|
| Rhyde | OR0THu |
| Pzimmer | 2Bfib7 |
| Bnorton | SEob1p#w81 |
| | |
| Flieter | COM725M |
| Jsasson | 13Jen45 |
| Klezso | 1415ube |

It went on for pages. Roland knew it was mathematically impossible for him to decipher these encryptions, but he also knew

that most corporate executives were pretty sloppy about what passwords they used. Usually a wife's name or a child's was a good candidate. Roland picked a program out of his CD case. The one he chose first had the two hundred most common adult names already encrypted. He quickly ran that program against the list the e-mail host had just supplied him. Nothing. Then he picked out a second CD and did the same for the two hundred most common baby names.

Bingo! Two matches popped up. One was a secretary and not worth working on. She wouldn't have top-shelf security. But the other match was JSASSON. He already knew from studying the corporate prospectus that this was probably the user name for Jack Sasson. Sasson's encrypted password was "2Bfib7," which matched the encryption in Roland's baby-name file for "Brandon."

"Go no further, my man," Roland told himself. Jack Sasson was major corporate cheese, Gen-A-Tec's chief financial officer.

Now Roland could go right through the front door, right past their bullshit security system directly into the company e-mail. He logged in with the user name JSASSON, then typed the password BRANDON. The e-mail host immediately displayed a Gen-A-Tec welcome screen. One of the choices listed was SYSTEMS PROMPT.

"Fuckin' A," Roland giggled. This system has more holes than a military rectal exam, he thought. Roland quickly clicked on SYSTEMS PROMPT and was immediately into their Local Area Network inside the Gen-A-Tec building. Roland was losing respect for this systems administrator at warp speed. The fool hadn't patched the known security holes in his software. He hadn't even guarded against frequently used passwords. The guy was a complete pant-load. Butt toast.

The Gen-A-Tec nighttime systems administrator's computer beeped a warning and Lincoln Fellows, a skinny, twenty-three-

year-old African American, master geek and computer nerd, whose net handle was *Darkstar*, ambled over and pushed his ebony features down into the blue-lit screen.

“What have we got here, my man?” he said softly as a window popped up on his screen with the warning:

CRACKER IN THE SHADOWS. MONITOR?

Lincoln clicked on OK and the alert window went away.

Linc got one or two of these a day. Kids mostly, trying their skill against an organized security system, trying to see if they could break in. Everything here, the holes in the version software, the easy-to-crack password files, everything was put there intentionally by Lincoln Fellows. Just hard enough to seem real, just easy enough to let them in. Once the kiddy crackers thought they were in, they would bounce around inside his BS shadow system thinking they had found the real deal, but it was just an elaborate stage set designed and orchestrated by Lincoln Fellows, master of the game. The crackers would screw with worthless data, download dummy files, do their best to steal or change shit, and leave their mark on the system. But as soon as they logged off the shadow system went back to the way it was before they came in, waiting for the next moron to try. The cracker always left without ever getting past Lincoln’s little funhouse to the real computer and data systems beyond. Brilliant. Unorthodox. Devastating. “I am de man. I rule.” Lincoln smiled to himself as he watched the intruder move around in his shadow system.

Outside in the bushes Roland decided to try to find out how employees might be organized into work groups at Gen-A-Tec. He tried looking at the */etc/group* file and the systems administrator let him do it. Roland’s contempt for this SA was becoming enormous. The guy was a beast, a Barney, an e-jerkoff.

Roland could see that Jack Sasson's systems access rights were pretty high. In fact, he was on all the key user groups, including the one called RESHCORN, that probably stood for Research Corn. "There we go, my man. We is strollin' with Roland . . . hittin' wid Minton." Roland grinned as he downloaded the entire corn file, but as it came in on his screen it seemed pretty damned ordinary. The kind of stuff you'd find in the newspaper: descriptions of bio-enhanced corn, stories about its new insect-repellent qualities and increased vitamin content—nothing that the Strockmeister could use in court. Roland shrugged. At least he got the goods as promised. Before logging off he downloaded a few of the company's "Mahogany Row" e-mail boxes for perusal later.

He disconnected his laptop, closed the phone junction box, packed up his equipment, then calmly walked back to his rental, got in, and pulled away.

"Adios, dickhead. You've just been kavorked," Roland said to the five giant blocks of blue tile as he drove off.

Lincoln Fellows watched as the cracker in the shadows logged off. The hacker had downloaded some newspaper articles and dummy e-mails. "Good crack, butt-munch," he said softly to the empty screen. "Come back any time."