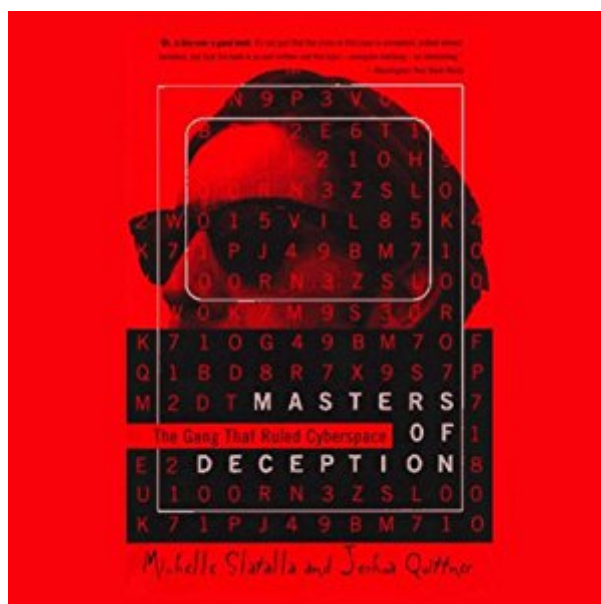


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# Masters Of Deception: The Gang That Ruled Cyberspace



## Synopsis

From the bedroom terminals of teenagers isolated from their peers by their hyperactive intellects, to the nerve center of a nationwide long-distance phone company infiltrated by a hacker's hand, *Masters of Deception* offers an unprecedented tour of the murkiest reaches of the electronic frontier and a trenchant, blow-by-blow chronicle of the most notorious gang war in cyberspace. In 1989, Paul Stira and Eli Ladopoulos, two teenage hackers from Queens, New York, made some exploratory forays into local phone-company computers and discovered a domain far more mysterious and appealing than any they had ever seen. To unravel the mysteries, they contacted Phiber Optik (aka Mark Abene) - a member of an infamous gang of crack hackers called the Legion of Doom. Phiber Optik was legendary throughout cyberspace for his wealth of hard-won knowledge about the phone system. When he was satisfied that Stira and Ladopoulos weren't a couple of lamers, the three kids arranged a meeting of the minds in Ladopoulos's bedroom. When Phiber Optik got kicked out of LOD after a tiff with its leader, Erik Bloodaxe (aka Chris Goggans), the New York kids formed a rival gang called Masters of Deception. MOD soon matched LOD's notoriety, gaining a reputation for downloading confidential credit histories (including Geraldo Rivera's, David Duke's, and a rival hacker's mom's), breaking into private computer files, and rewiring phone lines. All the while, federal agents were secretly monitoring this highly illegal battle royal and closing in for the kill. Slatalla and Quittner, who have followed this case for five years, lead us down the darkest alleys of cyberspace and up to the front lines of the raging battle over just who will control the web that already connects everyone to everybody else. They offer an unparalleled hacker's-eye view of the inner life of hackers, a heady realm where order and chaos hold equal sway.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read this book a while ago, but I was still so impressed by it that as I'm showing a friend of mine the web page here I couldn't help but add a review. My aunt bought me this book for Christmas, and I put it down only once over the course of two days. Masters of Deception paints a wonderfully vivid picture of the hacker culture and Internet security when both were nascent. The book is technically vivid, emotionally engaging, and just plain fascinating.

I read this after reading Clifford Stoll's Cuckoo's Egg which is a much better book on the same subject matter. Stoll is just a smart and observant graduate student who simply tries to tell his story accurately. The 2 authors of Masters of Deception are apparently professional writers and they spend too much time trying to liven up what is essentially an account of high school and college kids playing on computers. You get the feeling they writing this with a screenplay in mind. The book is filled with cliches, bad metaphors, contrived rhetorical questions: "Destroy people's lives? Make them look like saints? Is this what hackers do?" There is very little interesting technical info and much of what there is is dumbed down and often wrong. The discussion of tymnet in chapter 13 is completely off. They obviously don't understand it. Cuckoo's Egg is much better and even the Littman books are better books on the same topic.

I'm sorry. I don't know where that title came from. This is one of those books that really sheds some insight into the mind of the phone phreakers and the 'hacker' subculture. Kids, bored, learn everything there is to know about the phone system, social engineering, and various other things. Because they are young, they do cool stuff with their knowledge, and because the world doesn't have much of a sense of humor, they get into trouble. A very interesting read about the people who would be Internet Consultants and web designers today, but didn't have the material to work with at the time. Proto-web as it were. If you ever wondered about what the online world looked like before it was the web, read this book. It's great fun.

Masters of Deception is a description of the "great Hacker wars" between two rival hacker gangs Legion of Doom (LOD) and Masters of Deception (MOD). It sounds impressive, but it was just a couple of teenagers with a lot of knowledge about the phone system that started to annoy each other. Put it in that way, the Great Hacker War doesn't look that great, but the book is still good for

understanding the hacker dynamics of the end of the 80s and beginning 90s. The book is written from the perspective of MOD and starts with the founding of MOD by Phiber Optik, Acid Phreak and Scorpion. They together explore the phone system. Phiber Optik was in the Legion of Doom group, but got kicked out and therefore they started the Masters of Deception hacker group. Though it started out as a joke, they grew quite fast and their hacks became quite sophisticated. Not only that, they were also getting more attention from the Secret Service, especially their pranks done to the LOD members who wanted to quit hacking and start a security company. Eventually... well... I'll leave what eventually happens to the reader. The book is well written and very easy to read. It took me a couple of days on and off reading. The tone of the book is a bit uncomfortable and strange as the authors do take a strong position for the hackers and view them as teenagers playing pranks with a bit too much knowledge. The book is shallow on technical knowledge however, which is most likely because the authors are professional authors and not professional hackers. I think I would have enjoyed it more with a bit more technical information. That said, I did enjoy the book and I think it describes an important timeframe in hacker history. Decided to go with 4 stars. Recommended if you are interested in hacking history, otherwise better not pick it up.

This book is essentially a slightly jumbled, chronologically organized log of all the events and occurrences that lead to the hacking scandal of the early 1990's and the war between MOD and LOD, two rival hacker groups. The book begins with an introduction to all these hacker kids, and continues on through all their hacking exploits, life occurrences, and various important events leading up to the cyberspace war, and computer law scandal. The book is clichéd in some ways, and attempts to answer the question of what a hacker really is, and what a hacker really does. In the end the book ends up being a bit of a cautionary tale. None of the boys' deepest feelings or psyches are really explored, and it really seems that if they ever get below the surface to show what they're really thinking, it's very brief. In the end it seems a bit like reading a log of events. All in all the book is informative, and there are few, if any, technical mistakes (not that there is much technical dialogue to begin with). I urge you to buy this book, simply to be informed, and if you're up for some light reading on the subject, it's likely you'll enjoy it.

What could have been a very boring and dry account of the daily affairs of teenager hackers was turned into an insightful and entertaining book with serious social value. The way the story was presented kept every character vital and kept the reader informed on what the overall picture was. The way in which it switched perspective every chapter or so also kept the plot line fresh. It stayed

true to the ideals of all involved, although at times it slanted a bias towards the young pranksters, and "Masters of Deception" also succeeded in conveying what hacking is really all about. The summary at the end also provided one hell of a thought to chew on. Actually it gave you several, and that is quite possibly the most redeeming thing about this book. Not only is it a fun read, but it provokes you to think about the social questions surrounding what has become a major issue in the 90s.

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