

# TAKEDOWN

**THE PURSUIT AND CAPTURE  
OF KEVIN MITNICK,  
AMERICA'S MOST WANTED  
COMPUTER OUTLAW  
—BY THE MAN WHO DID IT**



**TSUTOMU  
SHIMOMURA**

**with JOHN MARKOFF**

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TSUTOMU SHIMOMURA  
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*This book is dedicated to our parents  
and to the memory of John's father, Mortimer Markoff*

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**take • down** (tāk/ doun/) *adj. Sports.* A move or maneuver in wrestling or the martial arts in which a standing opponent is forced to the floor.

*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,  
Third Edition*

# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
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PROLOGUE	I
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## PART ONE BREAK-IN

I	JULIA'S RETURN	7
2	TOAD HALL	15
3	DAMAGE CONTROL	34
4	THE REAL WORLD	53
5	FORENSIC DATA	75
6	MY CHRISTMAS VACATION	93
7	THE PRESS DESCENDS	118
8	KOBALL'S FIND	134

## PART TWO PURSUIT

9	BOTANY	151
10	"YOU LAMERS!"	174
11	NETCOM	187
12	PROOF	206

13	KEVIN	232
14	"TACTICAL NUCLEAR RANGE"	245
15	RALEIGH	264
16	THE STAKEOUT	278
17	"YOU'RE TSUTOMU!"	307
	EPILOGUE	313
	INDEX	315



# PROLOGUE



If you find three men sitting alone in a van in a shopping mall parking lot at two in the morning and one of them is holding an odd looking antenna, there's usually only one conclusion you draw.

They're cops.

I wasn't, and despite all the media frenzy that would erupt three days later, referring to me as a "cybercop" and a "cyber-sleuth," I had never intended to be one. In the winter of 1995 the only thing I was aspiring to be was a ski bum, and so far I wasn't doing a very good job of it. During the best ski season in memory in California, here I was stuck on a chilly morning in a parking lot in a suburb of Raleigh, North Carolina, a long way from anything resembling a ski trail.

I was holding an antenna that looked a little like a ray gun in one hand, and in my lap I was cradling a device that resembled an oversized electronic daytimer. It was emitting a soft whistling tone, much like that a modem makes when it establishes a connection.

The sound from the device had become persistent—proof I'd cornered my quarry, an elusive computer outlaw who'd managed to stay one step ahead of the FBI and at least three other law enforcement agencies for more than two years through a combination of con-artistry and sheer luck.

Along the way I'd been one of the victims. In December he

and possibly some of his cronies had electronically broken into my computers and stolen software I'd written, which if abused, could wreak havoc on the Internet community.

Now I was in a position to even the score. But none of us in the family van were police. The driver was a beefy engineer for a cellular telephone company and in the back sat a *New York Times* reporter who had tagged along following my odyssey. Ten minutes earlier our van had slowly circled a nondescript apartment complex as I swept my antenna back and forth, intently watching a digital signal-strength display for signs I was getting closer to the source of the cellular telephone call. I was determined to end my pursuit, but now, through a fog of fatigue brought on by an almost sleepless week of pursuing a vaporous trail of digital footprints through the web of computers that make up the Internet, I could feel the paranoia that can well up inside you when you push yourself too hard and too far.

Outside it was dead quiet. There were no cars or people on the street, and I felt conspicuous as our vehicle slid quietly by the apartment complex under the yellow glare of sodium vapor lights. Where was he? Was he watching us? Was he about to flee? As I watched the meter readout it suddenly fell off. He was behind us. Was he on the other side of the building? The driver turned the corner, and we saw empty fields stretching away into the darkened countryside. Our maps which we had spread out before us in the van showed a state park.

"A perfect escape route," the reporter murmured from the back seat.

We turned another corner, and the van swung back toward the front of the complex. The antenna swept back and forth and inside the darkened cab I watched as numbers on the display flickered upward again. Toward the front of the building our van slowed, and we crept through a parking lot full of empty cars. As we neared the corner of the apartments we stopped briefly. Using radio detection finding gear is a little like playing "pin the tail on the donkey." You get little cues, but still you feel like you're flying blind, floundering around in the dark. Now, however, from the way the meter jumped, I could tell we were almost on top of our target. Somewhere, within thirty meters of us, someone was crouching over a computer with an open connection to the Internet. It was

impossible to decipher the meaning of the monotonous hiss that was proof he was still at his keyboard. Where was he right now?

The three of us craned our necks and peered into a cul-de-sac. From inside the complex came a light from a second-story window. How would a fugitive react if he peeked outside in the middle of the night and saw a van with an antenna inside idling in his driveway? It was obvious he'd flee, or maybe worse. I had no idea what his state of mind was. Was he alone? There was no reason to think our cyber-criminal was armed, but it was late, and a cold feeling of doubt was growing in the pit of my stomach.

"If I was him I'd be facing the window," the reporter suggested.

He was right—we might have blown everything. Weeks of painstaking, cross-country detective work would vanish, leaving us empty-handed and chagrined. We decided caution was in order. The van started moving again and rolled around the corner of the building.



PART  
ONE BREAK-IN



# CHAPTER I

## JULIA'S RETURN

Is it possible to drive the 310 kilometers west from Echo Summit on the crest of the Sierra Nevada range to San Francisco International Airport in under two hours?

On the day before Christmas 1994 I tried it—in a snowstorm.

I thought I had a good reason. I was eager to see a friend whom I hadn't seen for more than two months and I had been feeling unsettled about where our relationship would be when she returned from her travels. We had been close friends for three years and during the last six months it had become clear that we were more than friends; we were in love. We had both agreed that during our time apart we would think about where we wanted to go with our relationship. Now I was in a hurry, because I was full of anticipation, but at the same time, I was also nervous and uncertain. What I didn't realize was that my headlong race from one side of California to the other was the opening act in an unusual adventure that was about to change my life forever.

The previous afternoon, Julia Menapace had left a message on my home answering machine in San Diego: she was at the airport in Bangkok and would be arriving in San Francisco at 1:40 the following afternoon after a fourteen-hour flight. Would I meet her?

Of course I would. I had been thinking a lot about Julia; the message suggested she'd been thinking about me too.

A tall, graceful woman who is strong and wiry, and who often

wears her hair drawn back in a braid, Julia had been a programmer at Apple Computer and other high-tech companies in Silicon Valley for the better part of a decade. With an intense gaze and blue-gray eyes, Julia was often introspective but also quick to laugh. She was a talented yoga teacher and had an ethereal quality that I found completely captivating. Recently she'd been working as an independent programmer, brought in by high technology companies to work on specific software development projects.

Although she knew the inner workings of the Macintosh computer well, she never became as obsessed with computing as many of the men she worked with. She had never been completely sucked into Silicon Valley's round-the-clock hacker culture—she liked to do too many other things in life, away from the computer world where time is divided into nanoseconds. During the years we'd known each other, we'd gone on countless trips, exploring the backcountry: mountains, hot springs, beaches. We both shared a love of the wilderness, whatever the season.

Julia had a particular passion for the mountain world above six thousand meters and in the fall of 1994 she took off for the Himalaya, but before she left to climb and trek in Nepal we had a great adventure exploring the Southwest together. We hiked Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks and wandered among the Anasazi ruins in Chaco Canyon. It was during trips like that one that I'd come to see Julia as the wonderful person she is, and we'd fallen in love. I knew she wanted to be in a committed relationship, but I had told her I needed to think about whether I was ready for a serious partnership. We hadn't spoken since right after she arrived in Katmandu, but after a couple months of contemplation I'd decided that I wanted to be with her and I thought I was able to uphold my end of a partnership.

However, I had no idea if her thoughts were tracking mine, and our relationship wasn't simple. Things remained ambiguous because she was also trying to end a seven-year-old relationship that had been drawing to a painful close for a long time. The man she had lived with had once been a friend of mine—a Silicon Valley hacker and a privacy activist who was well known for his commitment to making sure personal privacy wasn't lost in the emerging digital age. It had been a painful time before Julia left the country, but it was clear to me that their relationship hadn't



been working and it was a question of when, and not if, it would end.

But I didn't know what was going to happen next. I'd missed Julia and was eager to see her. It was important for me to arrive at the airport on time—getting there, however, meant coming from the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada close to the Nevada border. Just a day earlier, I'd moved in to an A-frame cabin outside Truckee, California, a couple hundred meters from the Tahoe-Donner Ski Resort, in the midst of a cross-country skiing mecca, with Emily Sklar, a ski instructor who had been a good friend for several years.

In San Diego, where I work most of the year, I in-line skate for exercise, but as much as I like to skate, I like cross-country skiing even better. During the last three years I'd learned a cross-country skiing technique called skating that looks much like in-line skating and offers more speed than the traditional striding technique you see most skiers using. Instead of skiing in two narrow tracks, skaters glide forward, placing each ski diagonally to the trail. I also like to race and the previous winter I'd begun to take racing seriously again, and had raced in several biathlons, a combination of skiing and riflery that combines strength, speed, and control.

Of course snow isn't one of San Diego's strong points. The previous winter, the ticket agents and flight attendants on Reno Air got to know me well. Once I even packed an ice ax in my carry-on luggage and sent it through the X-ray machine. No one blinked. In that single ski season I logged more than thirty thousand kilometers between Southern and Northern California. My plan this year had been to spend the winter skiing, volunteering for the Nordic ski patrol, serving as a parttime ski instructor and, when time permitted, taking on intriguing research problems.

The kind of work I often do, computational science and computer security research, can be done from just about anywhere. And because the previous winter I'd found myself flying up from San Diego nearly every weekend, this year I'd decided simply to set up headquarters in the mountains for four months. I planned on bringing along a couple of Unix workstations and connecting my own computer network to the outside world with a high-speed digital telephone line.

Usually I spend most of each year wearing several hats. Until