

DAVID HUDSON CULTURE 12.28.98 02:00 PM

OUT OF CHAOS COMES ORDER

BERLIN – Tempers flared at Sunday's Chaos Communication Congress session, and the death of a famous Chaos Computer Club member was the flashpoint.

The conference assembles computer enthusiasts from around the world for three days of hacking, discussions, and workshops on topics ranging from alternative operating systems to TCP/IP penetration to the state of the hacker ethic.

This year, the mysterious disappearance of German hacker Boris Floricic – also known as Tron – on 17 October and the discovery of his body in a Berlin park five days later has been Topic A.

CCC spokesman Andy Mueller-Maguhn presented a timeline of events surrounding Floricic's death. A heated discussion centered on two points that continue to rile CCC members.

First was a refusal by the Berlin police to waive the 48-hour waiting period before referring the case to the Bureau of Missing Persons. Second was the decision by the police to file charges against Tron.

By 20 October, the 26-year-old hacker was not only officially missing, but also under suspicion of committing computer fraud. Tron's computer, laptop, and all his equipment and files were confiscated.

Two police officers unofficially addressed the issues Sunday. They said that the missing-person investigation was not compromised by the criminal case, since they were being handled separately.

Responding to emotional outbursts from Tron's friends calling suicide out of the question, officer Klaus Ruckschnat reminded the crowd that the official line

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Padelun, a longstanding member of the CCC, gently suggested that "sometimes things are what they seem." In other words, just as the police weren't ruling out murder, the CCC should not rule out suicide.

Mueller-Maguhn outlined the areas of Tron's work that may have got him in trouble with any number of parties. The young hacker cracked phone cards and digital set-top boxes for pay TV, and his university dissertation was on ISDN-related cryptography.

"Tron may have underestimated the financial value of the information he uncovered," said Mueller-Maguhn. "He was always direct and honest, but also naive."

The CCC settled on no unified position regarding Tron's fate, but some audience members agreed that if a lesson is to be learned from his death, it is to publish valuable information widely as soon as it's discovered. Or risk life and limb.

Earlier, CCC co-founder Wau Holland shared his personal observations on a decade and a half of CCC history and controversy. Among its "accomplishments," the CCC had cracked the German postal network, planted a Trojan horse in NASA's computer system, and seen the death of one of its own before.

"In every case," said Holland, "the club has retained its independence. We don't take sides."

Other conference events this week include a lockpicking contest, a robot-building contest, and a report on "Hacking the KGB: 10 Years After."

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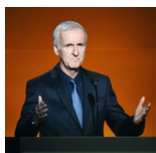
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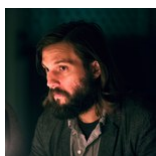
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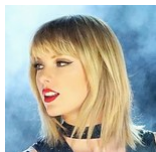
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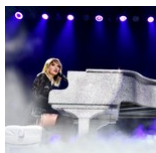
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