

Local hacker confronts success, Christmas

By AHSINRETS DRAWEDEDDOT

PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Being one of the suavest characters in hackerdom isn't always easy, as Todd Sternisha can attest. Todd recently rejoined the Cult of the Dead Cow, which Jane Pratt, editor-in-chief of *Sassy* magazine, called "the sexiest group of hackers there ever was." cDc recently put out their 300th regular publication, and to commemorate the event, and that of the group's upcoming tenth anniversary, Todd put together the cDc Tenth Anniversary Transmission Archive (or cDc TA-TA for short). We found Todd milling down E. 185th St. in Cleveland; with his dyed-black hair, death-pale skin, and goofy-looking combat boots, he looked more like an underfed vampire than the author of such classics as "The Guide to the Worship of Dave Teeters" and "The Lexicon." After verifying that we were with the press and therefore represented free publicity, we were able to ask him a few questions on his life and his latest project.

"Well, the cDc is sort of a non-organization. I mean, we have members, and we put the occasional statement, but there's this great ideological void. It's really just a case of a bunch of hackers with a lot of spare time doing what they can to manipulate the media. We've been mentioned in *Time*, *Details*, on CNN Headline News and *Gerardo*... and yet we don't really exist."

So you're saying that the Cult of the Dead Cow doesn't actually slaughter cattle?

"We, as an organization, don't advocate cow death. I have my own personal feeling on the subject, but as I've said, the organization doesn't stand for anything, except for free speech. I think Reid Fleming put it best when he said we were 'a subversive paramilitary extreme Marxist guerrilla unit forged for the sole purpose of

getting on TV.'"

Does the attention you get bother you?

"I think that as long as you keep everything in the right perspective, you'll be okay. I mean, I get mobbed by throngs of girls a lot, and every once and a while it gets tiresome, but these people, all they want is an autograph, some memento of having met you, or to have an intelligent conversation. I don't get a lot of people throwing themselves at me, wanting to have my children. That kind of thing only happens two or three times a week. Other than that, everyone's pretty normal about it."

What about the allegations that you are actually a vampire?

"I thought that whole thing had died down...I really have no comment on the subject."

What about the other aspects of your life?

"Well, I've been going to Lakeland for the last year and a half, taking classes, working at their radio station... I have a couple of jobs with Apple Computer, Inc. They're both entry-level representative-type stuff. The jobs aren't very demanding, but it's an interesting field, and I really believe in what I'm doing, which is educating people on the Macintosh advantage. As for what the future holds... I really have no idea."

What about your love life? There have been rumors about—

"No comment."

OK, next subject: what's the deal with Marilyn?

"What? Oh, the stamps. Well, I've always liked Marilyn, and since the cards I chose were blue anyway, I went for the blue Marilyn Monroe stamp for aesthetics rather than a more traditional holiday choice. Holly doesn't really do much for me anyway."

So is this a strike against the commercialization of Christmas?

"No, not at all. I have no problem with Santa, or holly, or candy canes; I just don't find them aesthetically pleasing. The commercialization or secularization of Christmas isn't something I worry about. To me, Christmas is about being with your friends, being with the people you love. It's about community, and I think there's something significantly spiritual about that in itself. Peace on earth, goodwill towards man: those are ideals that *everyone* can share in, no matter what their backgrounds or beliefs are. I think that makes them, and the season that surrounds them, that much more special."

"People complain about the crowds in the malls, but there's also something happening there that you don't see any other time: perfect strangers, parents, helping each other find exactly the right Power Ranger or whatever. That just makes my day. Or people that hold the door for me even though they're carrying an armload of packages, even though I'm laughing at them because the top one is about to fall off and clock them in the head. That's what warms my heart."

Do you have anything else you'd like to say to your fans?

"I'd just like to tell everyone to keep in touch. Sorry the cards are late, but I had to special-order them because I loved them so much."

"Speaking of which, do you think I could get extra copies of this interview for my cards?"

Todd Sternisha can be reached by phone at 942-4445 or by email at shade@en.com. Ahsinrets Drawdeddot is a journalism major on a foreign exchange program from the University of Turkey. There are no pictures accompanying this article due to the fact that we were unable to capture Todd's photographic image.