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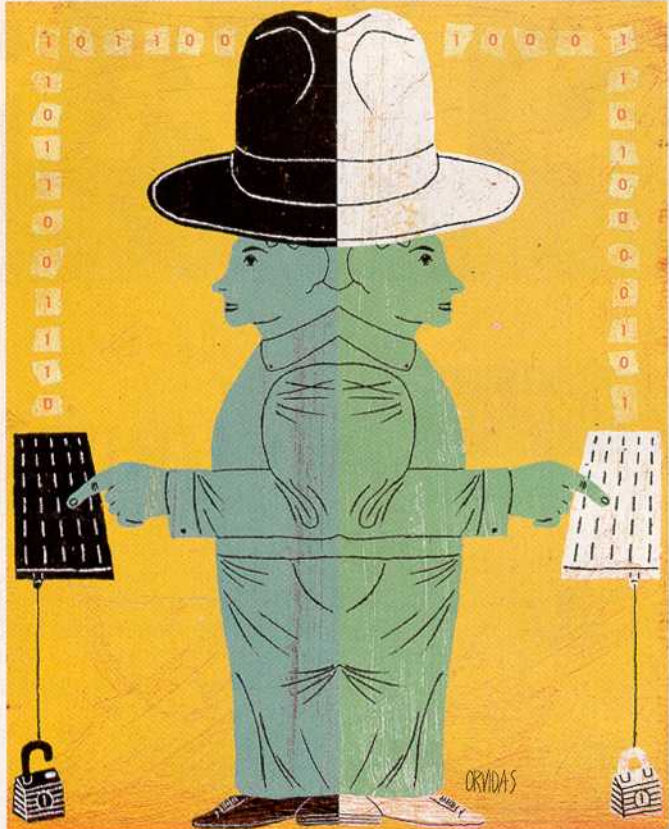
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HACK AWAY

WITH CYBERTERRORISM worries increasing since last September, some businesses are turning to hackers to help secure their systems. Ask John A. Klein, president of Rent-A-Hacker Inc. (www.rent-a-hacker.

IF BEING HACKED IS INEVITABLE, WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF THE HACKERS WERE ON YOUR SIDE?

BY AMANDA C. KOOSER

com), what a hacker is, and he'll give you a broad range of definitions. A hacker is "any of my contractors." A hacker is "someone who has the knowledge to develop code to compromise other people's systems." Hacker was once "a term of respect." Sure, you can hire a hacker as a security expert, but should you?

If you're concerned about giving a hacker access to your computers, you're not alone. A survey of IT professionals by InformationWeek Research showed that 48 percent wouldn't even consider hiring a hacker as a consultant. Klein, whose Fargo, North Dakota, company contracts with 400 computer security specialists and hackers, deals with such trepidation all the time. When it comes to former black-hat hackers (as opposed to law-abiding white-hat hackers), Klein says, "Very rarely will those folks ever touch a customer's system. I use them for information gathering and intelligence."

There are sensible ways to hire a hacker. For example, Klein's first line of assurance is a comprehensive nondisclosure agreement binding his contractors directly to the client. Feel free to request background checks on anyone involved, and know exactly what services will be performed and by whom. Will you get just an intrusion test seeking out vulnerabilities, or will your system also be patched and secured? If in doubt, have a lawyer examine any contracts.

Malicious hacker attacks may seem intangible, but the threat is real. The Computer Security Institute's (www.gocsi.com) "Computer Crime and Security Survey 2001" logged more than $377 million in reported losses due to computer breaches. Klein's question for small businesses is, "How much of that can you afford?"