Cyber Alert

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Description

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Cyber Alert

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Cyber Alert is at first glance a very familiar sort of book, one that screams to computer users “Be afraid! Be very afraid”! Lest the title itself not be sufficient warning of the many forms of doom to which our computers will soon introduce us, the cover graphic, a colorful picture of a computer in a ominously lighted room, the screen of which reads “How the World is Under Attack from a New Form of Crime” clues in even the clueless. The work, however, has virtues that transcend the worked-out genre of which it is a part.

The problems with the genre, which we think of as “Gothic Tales of Computer Terror,” consisting largely of works that should all be subtitled: “Don’t let this happen to you!” are many. Firstly, it has been done, done again, over done and repeatedly done, and doubtless scores of writers are doing it even as you read these words.

Secondly, print journalism, and even Fox News, now warns us of every new scheme that comes down the electronic pipe well ahead of what print publishers can manage with their Neolithic production processes. Cyber Alert, for example, seems to have been largely edited for publication in the fall of 2004, appearing a good six months later. The bulk of the recent resource material probably comes from 2003, a millennia in the development of computer crime.

In that interval, new threats appeared, old ones metastasized, new laws were written and several generations (internet time) of victims cozened. If you want to either scare or defend yourself vis-à-vis Cyber Crime, go to the Internet. [1]

It is a shame that Cyber Alert was aimed at the Gothic Computer Tales market. It is really old stuff in that regard, for the reasons mentioned above. However, it has several virtues of its own which would make it useful to many readers.

The first group that would find this useful would be those who are quite familiar with the American
variety of computer crime but want a quick introduction to European equivalents of both the criminals and their opponents. Here the book delivers beyond any other we have seen.

The authors, Peter Warren and Michael Streeter, are each highly experienced British journalists, and Streeter is said to be an expert on computer security issues as well. Their credentials got them access to a number of elite European (both Western and Eastern European) computer-crime fighting agencies, and their examples are fascinating ones.

If you are bored with reading about Kevin Mitnick, the ace American hacker, you might read about the more appropriately named “Fungus,” his English equivalent. And for Americans who might fear that our technological lead is slipping away in yet another realm, rest assured that Mitnick, too, is discussed.

The general focus of this book is upon the organizations and the laws which have developed in Europe, particularly in Britain, to combat computer crime. This makes the work probably of most use to students of computer crime (including law enforcement agents) who would like to research the roots of particular scams, and even the criminal organizations which perpetuate them.

We are largely aware, for example, that the wave of creativity loosed upon the world by the fall of the Soviet empire early included crime and criminals. In Cyber Alert we meet Solntsevo, the biggest Russian computer gang, which introduced free market principles in personnel recruitment to procuring the highly qualified technical work force they require: posts ads, evaluate CVs, interview, and hire—via the Internet, of course. And for the alert reader seeking employment, we can point out that there have been no complaints regarding their retirement program.

The authors, thanks to their splendid law enforcement contacts, were able to interview participants in early computer crime, “back in the day” before ill-informed script kiddies took all the fun out of it, and show us how it developed and spread. It turns out that just as prison is a good place to teach and to learn nationalist revolution and religious or racial extremist doctrines, expertise in computer crime also spreads quickly in confined spaces.

One interesting example, in this case an American one, begins with John Draper, who has been immortalized, in certain circles at least, as “Captain Crunch.” It was Draper who discovered that he could use a whistle found in that cereal to manipulate the telephone system. With this knowledge a whole generation of “phone phreaks” learned to reach out and whistle someone.

Draper was imprisoned. There, he later said, “I went out of my way to teach every criminal I came in contact with on how to do this.” Another go-ahead criminal organization, the Las Vegas unit of the mafia, was soon significantly reducing the telephone bills of their bookies, not now with whistles but with black boxes which were easier for non-virtuosos to use.

And there are also, of course, the White Hats, the reformed criminals and the law-enforcement
institutions which oppose the yet-to-be-reformed. The authors trace the development of most, if not all, of the European organizations which combat computer crime, such as the National High-tech Crime Unit of the UK, and the Spider Group and Department K of Russia. Their genesis and evolution, too, makes very interesting and informative reading, if this is a problem which interests you, and if you are reading this piece on line, it certainly should.

Cyber Alert might well be dismissed at first glance as a quickly outmoded example of a crowded genre. It should not be, it has many uses. And like me, you may well find a copy in the reduced for quick sale sections of your favorite bookstore or of the Internet itself.

[1] A good place to start might be: http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/cybercrime/ This page can be personalized via roll-over, for eight different groups ranging from law enforcement officials to high tech employees, including, of course, victims of computer crime. There are a number of more nimble and reader-friendly sources as well, such as http://www.computerworld.com/securitytopics/security/cybercrime/ which has fast-breaking stores written at a broadly accessible level.


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8 THOUGHTS ON “CYBER ALERT”

plotek
on January 30, 2014 at 7:11 AM said:

Awesome talk! Thank you so a lot for hosting Great.

africa
on January 30, 2014 at 11:37 AM said:

Sorry for your vast review, but I’m quite loving the post, and hope this, and the great
analysis some other people have written, will assist you determine if it is the right choice for you.

breaking news

on January 30, 2014 at 1:58 PM said:

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polityka

on February 1, 2014 at 3:40 AM said:

Wow, someone was thinking. A great system you put in place. I’m sure it is going to take in plenty of the stress away !

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on February 4, 2014 at 10:18 AM said:

Thanks a lot for providing persons with this kind of a remarkable opportunity to read crucial reviews from here. It is usually so superb plus packed having a lot of fun for me personally and my office peers to visit your internet site minimum Three times every week to find out the new elements you have. And indeed, I’m also actually satisfied with your astonishing tips served by you. Some Two data in this posting are totally the simplest we’ve ever had.

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on February 4, 2014 at 10:29 AM said:

I did finally watch A Mighty Wind! Beneficial stuff!
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on February 4, 2014 at 10:39 AM said:

I haven’t seen the movie but, given the focus of this site, I observed this quote from an Indiewire article interesting:

Trent

on February 6, 2014 at 11:56 AM said:

Have you ever considered about adding a little bit more than just your articles? I mean, what you say is fundamental and everything. However imagine if you added some great visuals or video clips to give your posts more, “pop”! Your content is excellent but with images and video clips, this blog could undeniably be one of the very best in its field. Superb blog!