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CyberTerror

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Editor, Interface

Pineiro, R.J. CyberTerror.
Tom Doherty Associates, N.Y. 2003

In our endless search for popular fiction authors who deal seriously with the Internet and whose works might further our understanding of its impact, we were bound to encounter R. J. Pineiro. Among his titles can be found: Y2K; Shutdown; Firewall; Conspiracy.com, and CyberTerror. Our search, however, does not end with this book.

For a synopsis of CyberTerror we lift one from the author’s website, presumably in his own words:

“Computers increase the flow of natural gas to the San Antonio, Texas, distribution center increasing the pressure, triggering multiple leaks which result in massive explosions. The death toll is in the thousands, ten times the number of injured and homeless.

Tom Grant has spent twenty years as America’s top counterterrorist operative. But this attack was something neither Grant nor America were prepared for. An attack via computer, and suddenly a new word enters the American mainstream, cyberterror. Enlisting the aid of the FBI’s Karen Frost, a special agent who has never played by the rules, and Michael Patrick Ryan, Stanford computer whiz, Grant tracks one of the hackers to an address in Florida. The new government Agency, the Counter Cyberterrorism Team, kicks in the door, only to find the booby-trapped corpse of a computer science professor. The explosion takes out two CCT agents.

Meanwhile, a mysterious terrorist, Kulzak, is on to his next target in America. But the apparently random strikes are just a cover to divert attention from his true mission.

Suddenly, Grant, Frost, and Ryan find themselves at the center of a war for the survival of our nation. A war that will force them to draw on their combined experiences to fight and stop an
enemy that is as formidable as he is ruthless, as deadly as he is brilliant-an enemy determined to unleash a wave of destruction on America."

As the synopsis indicates, this is a rather eventful work, and one which largely presents the Internet as a constant threat. The villains make those found in Ian Fleming’s James Bond series multidimensional. The hero himself occasionally seems reflective, but the prose often cries out for an editor. Sentences frequently run on for many lines, abusing many of the conventions of grammar and punctuation.

But the real problem with the work, and presumably with the author’s others, is simply that the readers of Interface are probably not the intended audience. In general, Tor Books, the imprint for Pineiro’s works, appears to keep publication costs very low—hence the lack of adequate editorial supervision—and perhaps seeks a less literate audience than do many publishers. Of course, this audience is a vast one, and Pineiro very successful at reaching it.

One review of another work, Shutdown, suggests that the target audience is truly young adults and teens. Even for this audience, however, we would hope to see a higher quality of writing and a more thoughtful presentation of the world of computing and the Internet.

As the author states at his website, he is a martial arts enthusiast, a firearms expert, and a 20-year veteran of the computer industry, where he worked as an engineer at AMD. His credentials are good ones, and the details of these varied fields in his work are accurate. We feel that he probably has a really good book in him for those of us interested in the impact of the Internet, but sadly, CyberTerror isn’t it.

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