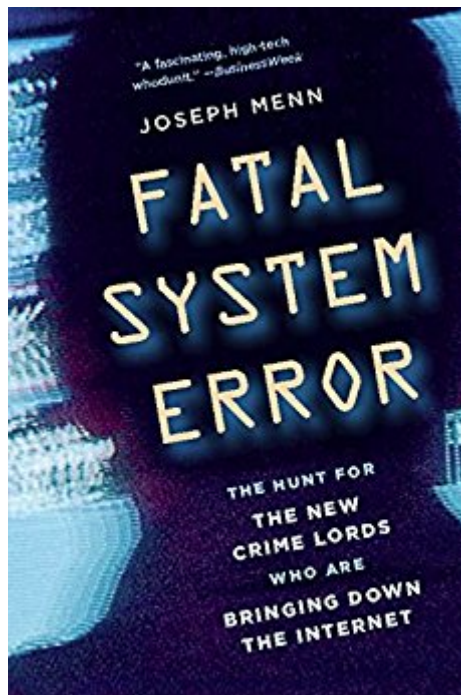


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Fatal System Error: The Hunt For The New Crime Lords Who Are Bringing Down The Internet



Synopsis

In 2004, a California computer whiz named Barrett Lyon uncovered the identity of a hacker running major assaults on business websites. Without fully grasping the repercussions, he set on an investigation that led him into the heart of the Russian mob. Cybercrime was evolving. No longer the domain of small-time thieves, it had been discovered by sophisticated gangs. They began by attacking corporate websites but increasingly stole financial data from consumers and defense secrets from governments. While Barrett investigated the cutting edge of technology crime, the U.S. government struggled to catch up. Britain, however, was a different story. In the late 1990s, the Queen herself had declared safe e-commerce a national security priority. Agents from the London-based National Hi-Tech Crime Unit sought out Barrett and enlisted his help. They also sent detective Andrew Crocker, a Welsh former boxer, to Russia to track down and prosecute the hackers and to find out who they worked for. Fatal System Error penetrates both the Russian cyber-mob and the American mafia as the two fight over the Internet's massive spoils. It takes readers into the murky hacker underground, traveling the globe from San Francisco to Costa Rica, London, and Russia. Using unprecedented access to mob businesses and Russian officials, it shows how top criminals earned protection from the Russian government and how Barrett Lyon and Andrew Crocker got closer to the titans of the underground economy than any previous outsider. Together, their stories explain why cybercrime is much worse than you thought and why the Internet might not survive.

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Customer Reviews

Joseph Menn has cracked open the inside workings of cyber crime bosses with his book Fatal System Error: The Hunt for the New Crime Lords Who are Bringing Down the Internet . I packed the book with me this past week as I retired to a rustic cabin in Northern Michigan. Menn's book made for enthralling reading by light of a butane camp lantern. In addition to telling the story of Barrett Lyon, entrepreneur and cyber crime fighter who founded Prolexic, BitGravity and 3Crowd, Menn follows through to recount the dark world of Russian crime figures as explored by Andy Crocker, on assignment from the UK National High Tech Crime Unit (NHTCU). Andy finally convicts three DDoS extortionists in Russian who are serving sentences of eight years hard labor. I met Barrett in 2004 when he was still immersed in getting Prolexic off the ground. I was at Gartner and looking for something new to get involved in. Barrett's network defenses against Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks was the most exciting thing I had encountered. Barrett thought I was joking when I asked him if I could send him my resume. I was completely serious until I met his business partner Mickey Flynn in a hotel bar in Chicago. Mickey ran BetCRIS, one of the key sports book making and online gaming organizations in Costa Rica. For once in my career my spidey sense served me well. Mickey seemed like a great guy but it was the first time I had ever met anyone accompanied by two big body guards wearing sports coats and obviously packing. As Barrett's adventure unfolded I saw bits and pieces of it but I had no idea just how deeply entrenched Barrett had become in the workings of an international crime ring, one that had its own problems with cyber criminals in Russia. Thanks to Joseph Menn I now know the story.

When Mikko Hyponnen (of F-Secure fame) posted about this book on Twitter, I immediately pre-ordered the book. I got it two days later. (I was only one-day advanced on the pre-order, it seems.) I wasn't quite sure what to expect exactly, only I knew it had to do with cyber-security, so I was intrigued. What I got was a fascinating book with two main stories told from the perspectives of the good guys. The first was a story of how a young dyslexic man struggled against the odds to become one of the best people around at defeating Distributed-Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks. His story, which spans at least two continents and his unwitting participation with some of the

internet's shadier characters, is a fascinating one. That story comprises part one of the book, and ties into part two quite neatly. Part two is the story of a British detective and his exploits in foreign countries (particularly Russia) in his efforts to find and eventually catch several of the same cyber-criminals from part one. While it has the tempo of a fictional "cyber-thriller", this book is non-fiction and is based on the very thorough work of Joseph Menn, a reporter for the Financial Times (previously of the LA Times). The overall theme is that of the war that is taking place using the world's computers and networks as a battleground. Despite the chronicled successes outlined in these two stories, it's a war that's very quickly being lost. I've been working in the cyber-security industry for a while now, so I'm not entirely unfamiliar with some of the more sinister aspects of what happens on the internet.

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