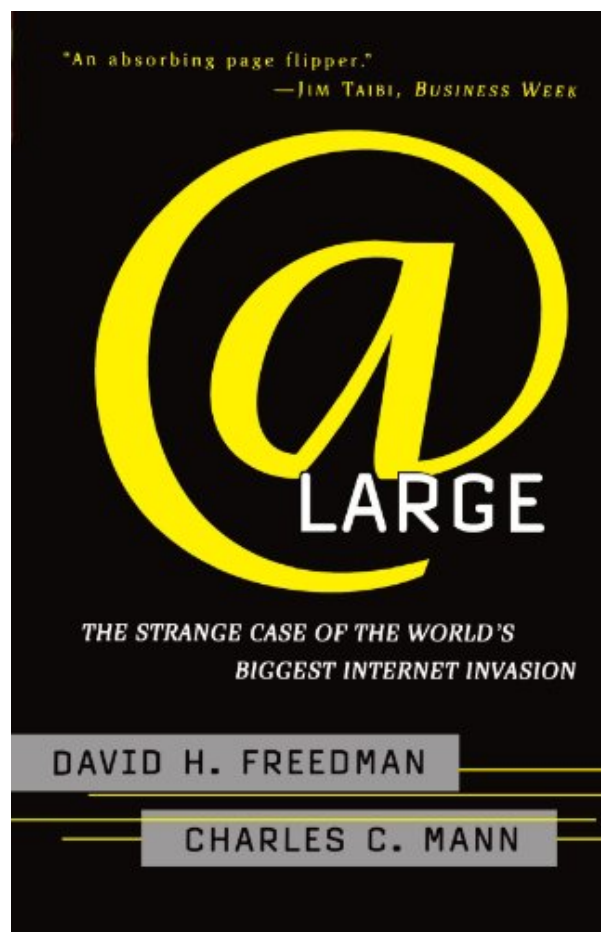


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WORLD'S BIGGEST INTERNET INVASION
BY DAVID H. FREEDMAN, CHARLES C.
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CHARLES C. MANN

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Hailed as "a chilling portrait" by The Boston Globe and "a crafty thriller" by Newsweek, this astonishing story of an obsessive hacker promises to change the way you look at the Internet forever.

At Large chronicles the massive manhunt that united hard-nosed FBI agents, computer nerds, and uptight security bureaucrats against an elusive computer outlaw who broke into highly secured computer systems at banks, universities, federal agencies, and top-secret military weapons-research sites. Here is "a real-life tale of cops vs. hackers, by two technology writers with a flair for turning a complicated crime and investigation into a fast-moving edge-of-your-seat story" (Kirkus Reviews, starred). At Large blows the lid off the frightening vulnerability of the global online network, which leaves not only systems, but also individuals, exposed.

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Most helpful customer reviews

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Amazon Customer

Great book.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating!

By Alan Mead

This book chronicles the exploits of a young computer enthusiast who managed to break into an alarming number of computers, mainly by sheer perseverance. The book is also the story of the people who hunted this early cybercriminal and how he was ultimately caught.

One of the remarkable aspects of the story is that the chief antagonist (the "hacker") was not particularly skilled. He was what's called a "script kiddie" in the biz. Another remarkable aspect of the book is that after breaking into dozens of computers, and finally getting caught after dozens of people had invested hundreds of hours tracking him, he was basically let off the hook with very little punishment.

I found this to be a fascinating account of an extraordinary series of events. I recommend this book especially for those who are interested in the field of information security as it provides a glimpse of the motivations and methodology of one notorious cracker. For people who are interested in crimes or security, this will be a riveting story.

All that said, this is only one side of the story and I wondered how accurate the reporting was. In particular, I wished that there was more on the motivation and thinking of the main antagonist, the super-cracker-slash-script-kiddie pseudo-named Matt Singer. In the book, he is characterized basically as a bad guy. There has

been more written about this story and apparently the script kiddie's real name is Tim Bach. You can find his posts in the freebsd.org mailing list archives from 1995 and other on-line traces. These "real-world" glimpses do not seem, IMHO, to jive completely with the character in this putatively non-fiction book.

In the same vein, Trent Fisher (no pseudonym for him in the book) has a website and doesn't seem too happy in how he was characterized.

And, finally, the events are ancient history. In many ways, information security has taken strides since these events unfolded. Law enforcement and especially forensics are more advanced. And in important ways, modern worms represent the evolution of this breed of attacker.

But it's still a fascinating and, I think, important story.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent

By David Cohen

At Large is essentially the tale of a cracker who was bright enough to electronically steal the source code of Solaris - described in the book as "over 100 Mb of corporate lifeblood" - but then, after the theft, wasn't smart enough to realise that his own hard drive wasn't large enough to store the pilfered material. This book is subtitled 'The Strange Case of the World's Biggest Internet Inavasion', but there are more appropriate adjectives than strange. Crazy, astonishing, mind-boggling and unbelievable would be more apt. This is a compelling account of cracked computers and confounded cops - with the cracker and confounder being not an evil consortium of hacking dudez, but ONE mentally retarded loner cooped up in his bedroom. Basically, one Matthew Singer of Portland, Oregon roamed the Internet almost at will during 1991 and 1992, taking over whole networks and inspecting their contents. No-one was immune from his wandering - he invaded commercial, government and educational networks. Through dogged persistence and nifty cracking techniques Singer (who went by the handles of Phantomd and Infomaster) did whatever he wanted, from reading other people's email to penetrating supercomputers. The most amazing thing is that Phantomd did almost no damage. His opportunities to cause havoc were vast. He seemed more interested in cracking for the sake of it, instead of trashing files. This was just as well - one of the networks he conquered, for example, controlled a huge dam in California. The message of At Large is clear: if Internet security is so bad, what's to stop real damage being done by a malicious cracker? There are numerous sobering quotes throughout the book, like 'Internet security isn't lousy. There just isn't any,' and 'The typical computer network...is more like a gauze tent encircled by a band of drunk teenagers with lit matches.' Systems administrators had a hard time keeping up with Phantomd. They also had great difficulty in convincing the FBI that real crime was being commi! tted - especially when there was no blood or outraged victim at the scenes of the crimes. No special computing knowledge is required to enjoy this book. Like all good science books, it imparts the necessary information needed to understand the sometimes-bizarre world of hackers and crackers. The explanation of TCP/IP is the best I've seen, and they are mostly dependable on other technical points - except when they say DOS stands for Digital Operating System - it's actually Display Only System. One of the best features of At Large is their descriptions of how some of the key characters in the book became so enraptured with computers and coding. Whether it was being entranced from learning Basic in a weekend, or wrestling with the Zen-like possibilities of Unix, they relate many instances of how otherwise-normal people are seduced by the digital. The authors show real narrative skill in pacing their account of the invasion, as the book switches from one location to another.

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