

## ***Crossing the Digital Divide (v94)***

“Open the pod bay doors, HAL”

By Joseph Feigon

For the Observer

# Major security flaw found in Intel processors!

The specific details of the flaw(s), which are reported to affect virtually all Intel processors (CPU) made in the last decade, and therefore millions of computers running virtually any operating system (Windows, Linux, Mac, BSD, Android, Chrome, FreeDOS, etc.) , have not been made public.

Intel CEO Brian Krzanich unloaded \$39 Million worth (then) in stocks and options late November of last year. Was Intel aware of these flaws two months ago?

Spectre and Meltdown are not Equifax or Home Depot data breaches, the flaws uncovered are internal to the Central Processing Units (CPU's) Intel developed, machine language, system initialization routines, “software” to instruct the CPU to do “x, y and z” when powered up. Once the CPU is “ready”, the Operating System takes over. Once Windows or MacOS or Linux is up and running, the “user” can begin using Word, or a database, or listen to music, etc. Intel has the largest installed base (of CPU's) on the planet.

The flaw was announced on January 3, 2018 by Jann Horn of Google's Project Zero. Project Zero is a Google funded team of high level security analysts focused on zero day (as in unknown) vulnerabilities. Yes, now that the flaw has been discovered, and that information made public, bad guys as well as good will work to solve (or capitalize) on the problem.

In summary, the discovery was big, but unlikely to be a case of “let's pull a fast one”.

Back to pedestrian topics and things \*we\* can control.

Have you updated your passwords yet? Don't forget UPPER/lower and symbols. Try using spaces, and create passphrases. “I ha8e passwords”. Your job is to change yours. Don't make them all the same. Write them down, keep them safe. We want your DIGITAL footprint as secure as possible.

Be religious about keeping your PC, Mac, iPhone, Android, Roku, Alexa, Siri, whatever up-to-date. Microsoft and Apple will push updates as soon as flaws and fixes are discovered, resolved, and fully validated. Keep track of which credit card you use for which of your online services (Apple store, Google Store, NY Times, etc.), and review your billing statements monthly.

What about your backups? You have an external drive, right? You have a copy of USB style Memory sticks, don't you? If you don't want to be bothered with external devices, use Google Drive, Microsoft's One Drive, Apple's iCloud, or Dropbox. Google is easiest and most cost effective (15GB for FREE). Do it. You really don't want to lose pictures you cannot replace. Do not rely upon one hard disk drive in a ten year old computer to keep your non-replaceable digit files. Backup. Backup. Backup.

What about your email? I know it's easy to use email as a filing system, don't. Email, if important, should be extracted to PDF format and saved to your Cloud account or backup device (or printed). Email servers are engineered to send/receive email, mail servers (Sendmail, Postfix, Exchange, etc.) were never designed as data storage servers. Your inbox will open more quickly, your email service provider will be much happier with you, if you keep you INBOX small (less than 200 messages, and purge your SENT and SPAM and TRASH folders whenever you close your email client (or use webmail).

Lastly, Microsoft and Apple both released product/security upgrades this week. The iOS (iPhone operating system) update was small, and won't really impact your Internet usage if your Exede/Hughes. Windows update was larger, but as important. If you're Internet is metered, save the update for the end of your quota period, but don't put it off and forget it. It's important to stay "patched."

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum!