Chapter 46

Conclusion

There is one single thing that has remained throughout this entire book. One single focus that is ever-present and never leaves the page.

It isn't China, or Russia, or the United States. It isn't a weapon, a doctrine, or a war. It isn't a specific exploit, tactic, or campaign.

The one through line in this book is you.

What do nation-states want? Your data. What do they want to influence? Your worldview. What are you to them? Someone to protect or to persecute.

What do tech companies want? Your data. What do they want to keep? Your attention. What are you to them? A user to serve and a resource to exploit.

You may not think your data is important, but I guarantee you, a nation-state does. Your data trains their models, reveals your habits, and makes it cheaper to manipulate, intimidate, and pressure you at scale.

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None of this exists without you. If there is no real-world outcome to a cyberattack, attackers do not do it. You are that impact. You are the real-world outcome.

The Internet would not exist if people did not participate. The largest and most powerful companies in the world would cease to exist tomorrow if users threw away their cell phones and laptops.

But it isn't going to happen. The Internet will continue. Nation-states will continue to steal data, sabotage enemies, and surveil their citizens.

We did not choose our role here; it was imposed on us by how the Internet and modern states evolved. We don't get to decide that now. But what we do get to decide is where we click, what we share, and what we choose to believe. That can look small: using strong and unique passwords, scrutinizing the facts of a rage-bait post, or backing laws that treat your data as your property instead of their gold mine. We get to choose what we demand from governments and companies—and what we are no longer willing to accept.

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