

A plane crashes, killing all passengers aboard. The telephone system goes down, cutting off millions of customers. A cancer patient receives a massive radiation overdose, ending his life. A hotly promoted new computer chip fails, sending consumers into a tailspin. An automated teller machine incorrectly debits a customer's account, jeopardizing his credit line.

More than ever, our society depends on the reliable—if not always correct—functioning of computers. Computers amplify not only our genius but our flaws, sometimes to intolerable extremes. Author Ivars Peterson traces the lurching history of software development and describes how misconceptions and mistakes have become an inextricable part of computer programs and systems. He creates fascinating and colorful profiles of the people who hunt down these elusive computer bugs and struggle to make an inherently fallible system less treacherous. He also offers dozens of detailed examples of how computer failures occur—some amusing, some annoying, others terrifying, even fatal.

Each computer failure is a reminder that we all pay a price for sloppy thinking in software development, for making the rush to market a more important consideration than safety and reliability. No software can ever be guaranteed 100 percent bug-free, but if we analyze our past mistakes and rethink our approach to computers, we can defuse some ticking time bombs and create a more trustworthy next generation of computers.

Peterson's fascinating accounts of computer failure and deft portraits of the people working to chase down bugs make *Fatal Defect* relevant reading.

—from Times Books



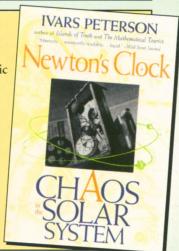
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