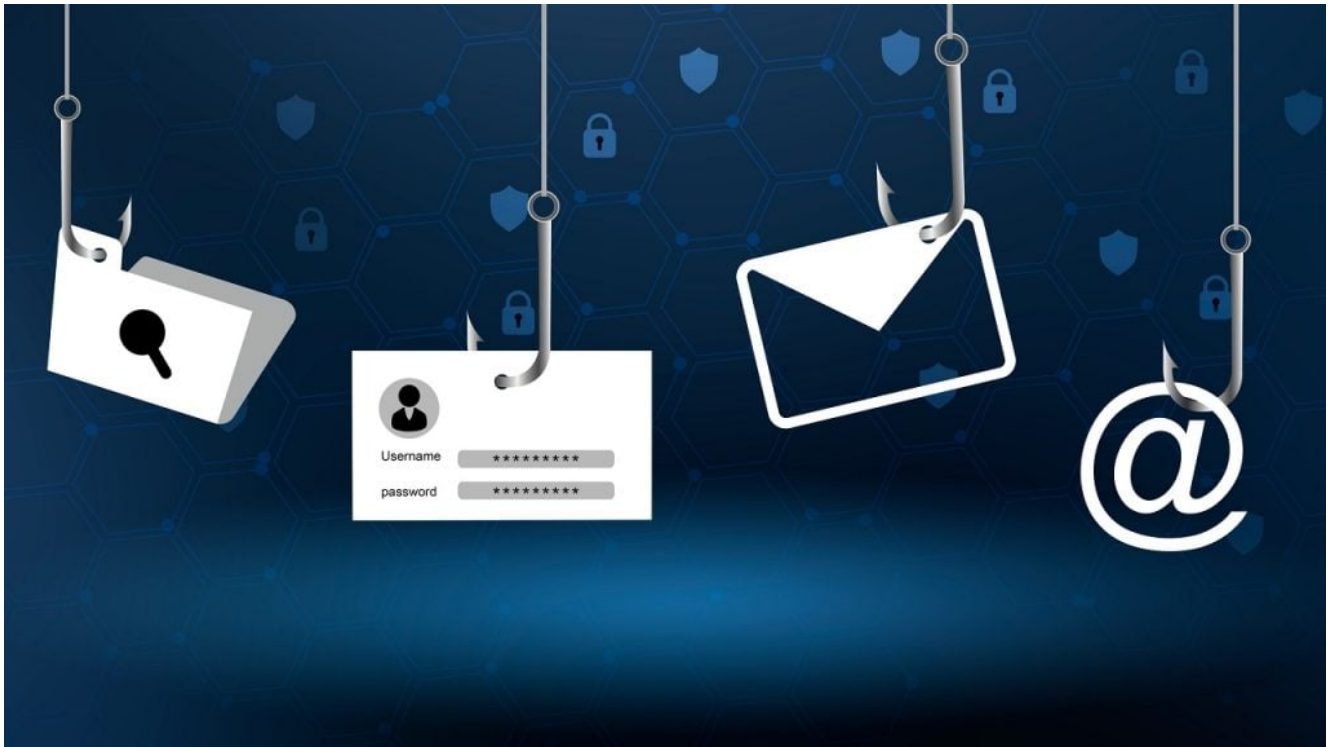


OUCH! Pen pals



by Reg Green

Lately, I've been getting emails from a whole new group of people. Some are men with unfinished names like Tom Wal, others have an air of mystery like Dominic Drago, still others are reminiscent of characters like Otis B. Driftwood or Wolf J. Flywheel that Groucho Marx once played. None of them are genuine.

But predominantly they are – or purport to be – female, suggestive either of furtive pleasures like Desiree or of four-square gals, like Jane Truelove, whom you could take home to your mother and trust with your life's savings. Both kinds will take you to the cleaners.

I haven't actually met any of them or even replied, although their messages pulsate with urgency. They are the most recent incarnation of that man from Kenya who had suddenly found out that his company owed you the best part of a million dollars and was so anxious to make amends that he insisted you reply

immediately to collect. When enough people had exposed him, he mutated into financial companies with odd names, warning you that your mortgage was on the brink of cancellation.

How many families, who were comfortably off, are now sleeping on sacks under bridges because they hitched up with these phantoms, I can't guess but there must be a good living in it: otherwise these smoothies would never have taken their show on the road in such numbers.

Now there's a new variant, new to me anyway. Instead of asking something *from* you they tell you they are sending something *to* you, notifying you, for example, that your order for their service (#438*%KKK) will go into effect tomorrow, no further payment required. Or thanking you for a contribution to an organization that rings only the most distant of bells

They are particularly nasty because they catch people who are responsible enough to resist the promise of getting something for nothing. They write back to explain they don't know what this is about and fall headlong into the spider's web.

Some years ago, I got one from a guy with a cockeyed name offering me the chance to get in on the ground floor of an idea that would make both our fortunes. Elon Musk or something like that. He said he'd built a car that runs on electricity. Electricity! He must think I'm stupid.