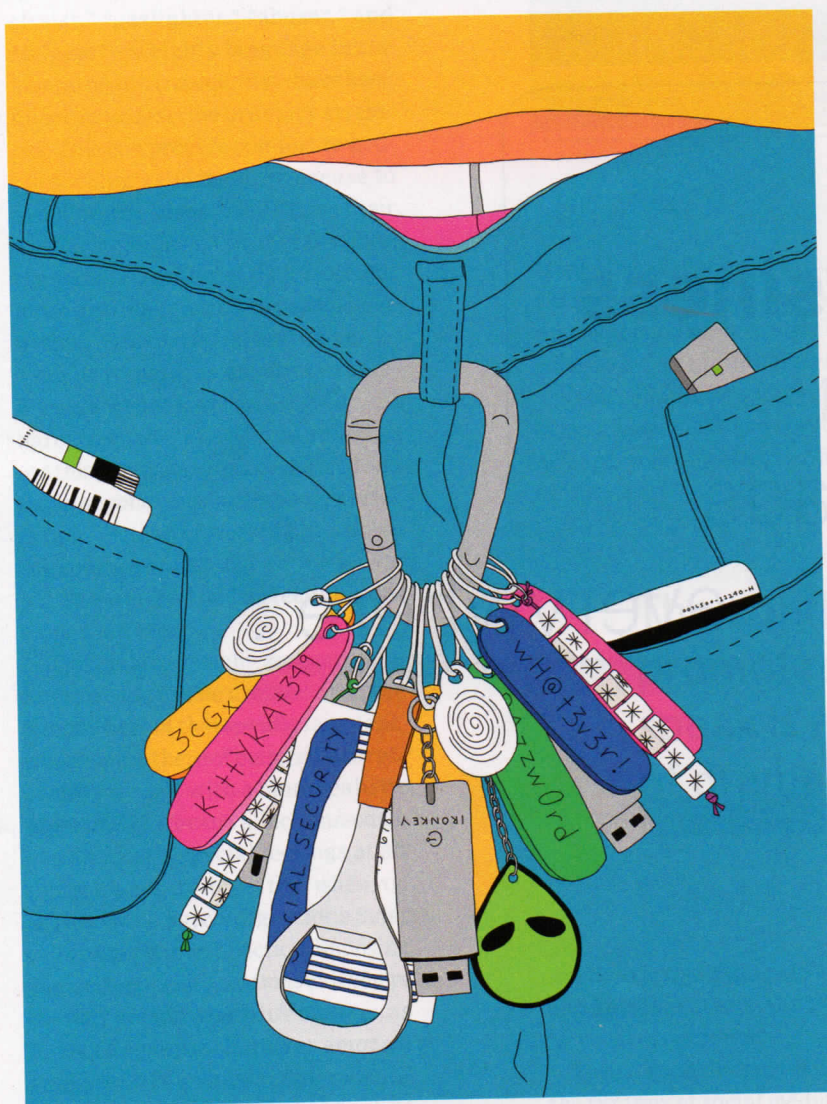


BY PAUL FORD | ILLUSTRATIONS BY JACQUI VANLIEW

P1EAS3 LOG 1N



We should have been free from passwords by now. They're holding us hostage instead.

I BELIEVE, WITH total conviction, that the tech industry should stop absolutely everything else it is doing—self-driving cars, large language models, spyware, teledildonics—and figure out how to stop making me log in to everything all day. I would passionately love to return to an era in which the most important software tool I use is something besides my password manager.

If you are young, you may not remember the days when you would turn on a computer and ... frankly that was it. You may only know the new world of infinite login chains: Wake up, hold phone to face, check email, find that the email app has decided you need to log in, open password manager, log in to that, and so on. Repeat the process for your work laptop, for the video call, for the podcasting software. I often forget to unlock my watch. I am reminded when I tap it to pay for the subway and then smash my body against the turnstile and people stare at me while I grunt in pain and shame. Say what you will about the Clinton era, but I didn't have to constantly prove my identity to read a newspaper.

If we extrapolate from current trends, within 10 years everything people do with a computer will be related to logging in: all authentication, all the time. In 2022, 1Password was said to be worth \$6.8 billion, which is good for them but should make everyone else quake in fear. We are entering the age of Big Password. In a way it might be a relief. We can stop using all these apps, making documents, sending emails, and simply enter our credentials over and over again.

I complain here as that most pitiful of things—a recreational sysadmin. I love tending to a small farm of devices, keeping them in good shape. Drum machines,