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Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces Of Anonymous



Synopsis

Here is the ultimate book on the worldwide movement of hackers, pranksters, and activists that operates under the non-name Anonymous, by the writer the Huffington Post says "knows all of Anonymous"™ deepest, darkest secrets. Half a dozen years ago, anthropologist Gabriella Coleman set out to study the rise of this global phenomenon just as some of its members were turning to political protest and dangerous disruption (before Anonymous shot to fame as a key player in the battles over WikiLeaks, the Arab Spring, and Occupy Wall Street). She ended up becoming so closely connected to Anonymous that the tricky story of her inside "outside status as Anon confidante, interpreter, and erstwhile mouthpiece forms one of the themes of this witty and entirely engrossing book. The narrative brims with details unearthed from within a notoriously mysterious subculture, whose semi-legendary tricksters "such as Topiary, tflow, Anachaos, and Sabu" emerge as complex, diverse, politically and culturally sophisticated people. Propelled by years of chats and encounters with a multitude of hackers, including imprisoned activist Jeremy Hammond and the double agent who helped put him away, Hector Monsegur, Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy is filled with insights into the meaning of digital activism and little understood facets of culture in the Internet age, including the history of "trolling," the ethics and metaphysics of hacking, and the origins and manifold meanings of "the lulz."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anonymous is almost certainly not what you think it is. You have to live it to understand it, its

implications, its functioning, and its place in society. Gabrielle Coleman lived it, as a fully disclosed academic anthropologist. This is her story as much as theirs. The structure of Anonymous is like the structure of the internet: multiple channels, multiple entry points, self healing patches, and lots of redundancy. (Also lots of swearing, lots of personal attacks, and lots of suspicions. Testosterone is involved.) This enables a totally flat organization to achieve in minutes what giant corporations and government take years to effect. The exhilaration, the joy, the satisfaction participants savor is incomparable. Anonymous is far more than a labor of love; it is idealists executing on their dreams. Everyone should be jealous. Gabriella Coleman hitched a ride on some of those dreams, and was clearly jealous. She goes so far as to express the compulsion, the adrenaline rush, and the thrill of watching it happen live. The characters are as richly detailed as any in fiction. There are heroes and villains, victims and survivors. There are plot twists and subplots. It covers roughly four years in which Coleman got close enough to many of the characters as to meet in person, something totally alien to the whole concept. Often as not, they confounded her assumptions. The story is a classic bell curve. At first there is confusion and commotion and random, unconcerted activity. They were in it for the entertainment value. As the participants refined their goals and their skills, they won many battles, notably Scientology, where they earned their stripes. They then took on and down whole governments.

If I could give this 3.5 stars, I would. It took me a while to put my finger on why, since this book is an excellently written and meticulously researched account of Anonymous. Anthropologist Gabriella Coleman takes a long, detailed look into it--she clearly put a ton of time into this, and teased out the different threads of this loosely associated network/movement. The book is extremely well-researched and detailed, and cleared up a lot of confusing history re: Anonymous by teasing out different factions, fiefdoms, cliques, and even time periods and evolutions within the ragtag group of hackers, activists, tricksters, and trolls. There were a few aspects I found problematic. First and foremost, this account seemed to have a bit of an identity crisis. It fails as a purely anthropological text. Coleman struggled and in many ways, I believe, failed to maintain academic detachment/journalistic distance from her sources. She seemed very eager to impress them, make sure she had cred, prove that she understood the lulz, etc. When she detailed meetings or conversations with Anons, she seemed extremely close to many of her sources, looked like she was constantly trying to prove herself, and I don't think ever expressed much disagreement. It was unclear whether she was doing this to maintain her sources, or whether her views were colored by her sources, but it still seemed like it may have colored her perspective a bit. It's of course extremely

likely that she was already very sympathetic to Anonymous-- her opinions were likely what drew her to this project in the first place--and it's hard *not* to love Anonymous or at least many of the antics done under that banner.

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