



# We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency

*Parmy Olson*

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**We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency** Parmy Olson

**A thrilling, exclusive expose of the hacker collectives Anonymous and LulzSec.**

WE ARE ANONYMOUS is the first full account of how a loosely assembled group of hackers scattered across the globe formed a new kind of insurgency, seized headlines, and tortured the feds-and the ultimate betrayal that would eventually bring them down. Parmy Olson goes behind the headlines and into the world of Anonymous and LulzSec with unprecedented access, drawing upon hundreds of conversations with the hackers themselves, including exclusive interviews with all six core members of LulzSec.

In late 2010, thousands of hacktivists joined a mass digital assault on the websites of VISA, MasterCard, and PayPal to protest their treatment of WikiLeaks. Other targets were wide ranging-the websites of corporations from Sony Entertainment and Fox to the Vatican and the Church of Scientology were hacked, defaced, and embarrassed-and the message was that no one was safe. Thousands of user accounts from pornography websites were released, exposing government employees and military personnel.

Although some attacks were perpetrated by masses of users who were rallied on the message boards of 4Chan, many others were masterminded by a small, tight-knit group of hackers who formed a splinter group of Anonymous called LulzSec. The legend of Anonymous and LulzSec grew in the wake of each ambitious hack. But how were they penetrating intricate corporate security systems? Were they anarchists or activists? Teams or lone wolves? A cabal of skilled hackers or a disorganized bunch of kids?

WE ARE ANONYMOUS delves deep into the internet's underbelly to tell the incredible full story of the global cyber insurgency movement, and its implications for the future of computer security.

## We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency Details

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# From Reader Review We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency for online ebook

## Jason says

I'm going to talk about the book, but then I'm going to riff on the subject.

Olson's deft narrative of how Anonymous organized out of the chaotic prankishness of 4chan and eventually--in some ways obviously--fragmented and fell apart is deceptively accomplished. The book runs chronologically, helping us newbies ("newfags" in the language of this community) get a handle on what happened when and where, neatly tracking a linear path from early dickishness on discussion boards to a more organized ethos (against any constraints on internet freedom) that aligned--sort of--with politics (from WikiLeaks to the uprisings of the Arab Spring).

On first reflection, just having finished the book, I thought the story structure too pat, too familiar: ragtag kids find common cause and form a team (each with her/his own unique set of talents), early actions, more organized missions, hubris and internal strife, actions that went too far or fell apart as the team disintegrated, and the wistful nostalgia of members post-Events. We've all seen this movie. Yet that clean arc belies the real breadth of the history captured by Olson. In particular, she's expert at the expository aside--contextualizing 4chan while describing its birth, for instance--and the skeleton of the book's "plot" is a very, very smart way to give shape to all this information. Olson also had amazing access to many of the central players (who were, um, anonymous--and generally derisive of outsider interest). Thus her history is more richly-detailed, yet also more widescreen, than any I'd seen before. Her insights are generous yet rigorously critical--her accomplished account of who these folks are and how they worked is complemented by nuanced assessments of motive, philosophy.

At times I wished for less "and-then" and more "so what"--I wanted a book more expansively engaged with the cultural study of the pranker/hacker subculture, and with the intersections of politics and pranks. But it's unfair to wish the book was everything, when it already so damn good on its own terms. (I still think it's a little over-stuffed with detail, too bound by its own structural focus on chronology. But these are minor quibbles.)

That's why I picked it up, though. I'm fascinated by, a fan of, pranks--the disruptive energies of rule-breaking, from the pettiest acts of childish disruption to the "important" stuff that gets the "moralfags" all hot and bothered. I'm interested in rule-breaking. And one of the things that fascinates me--about 4chan, or Reddit, or Anonymous, Lulzsec, or predecessors like Alan Abel, Andy Kaufman, Sasha Baron Cohen, and the Yes Men--is the way the prank's unexpected intrusion into public spaces reveals (in disregarding) all those social conventions we implicitly or explicitly demand allegiance to. The prankster comes along and may just fart in church, or may come in all dressed in her Sunday best, sitting down in the pew, paying careful attention to the service before--say, mid-sermon--laughing loudly, and frequently. Maintaining a perfect face of reflection and engagement--she's *really* paying attention to the preacher!--but not responding the way we're supposed to. Events like this make us uncomfortable: they violate the social contract governing behavior. And that's where I get so excited: by intruding on and disrupting the (oft-unexamined, or intensely-protected) rituals of acceptable behavior, the prank provokes some reflection on those behaviors and that unexamined ethical code. Often the response is intensified policing of those behaviors. (The response to Assange and Anonymous illustrates this to a T, eh?) But there's an opportunity for subversion

there--an opportunity, when the rules aren't simply behind-the-scenes but are made visible, to imagine some other way of behaving with one another.

(A cheap sociologist's way to experience this: walk on to an elevator, and stand facing the wrong side. Or sit in a public bathroom stall and try to strike up conversations with people in the next stall. Jimmy Kimmel had a wonderful bit where he offered the guy in the stall next-door a plate of brownies.)

But what I love about the prank is what's dangerous about it. The prankster isn't standing outside, throwing stones--they're in the mix, and subject to consequences. Further, the "subversion" is not necessarily driven by moral purpose--or at least one can't bank on the moral outcomes. The problem with rule-breaking like this is that all rules go up in the air.

(We could stop here and address the 4chan love of the "-fag" tag. Newbies to the board were "newfags;" folks in Anonymous who stopped aiming just for Lulz--the mean/cynical bellylaugh of the jackass--and started thinking about purpose and politics were "moralfags." Clearly this nomenclature emerges from a foundational homophobia, and a pervasive bullying on the 4chan boards. Yet the usage became a neat tool for driving away the prudes--join in the game, or take your scolds somewhere else. And the new usages--perhaps--attained new semantic functions in the community; the "external" rules of culture were rewritten "inside" the chatroom. And, as Olson carefully and intriguingly defines in a thread throughout *We Are Anonymous*, there was an inclusivity to gender and sexual fluidity in these spaces. The breaking of that cultural rule--don't say the word "fag"--is not mere subversion nor simple bullying. It's a lot more fucking interesting, and to my mind suggestive of why breaking rules matters so much. Adherence to rules is often a way NOT to think about the messiness of our values. "Don't say 'fag'" allows us to cover up, act like homophobia, intensely-policed gender behaviors, and the limits of our cultural understandings of gender and sexual identity--the neat binaries we normalize--are not always on the table or in the room. The downside is obvious: the breaking of the rule might be a vicious, overt attempt to maintain other rules. This is at the heart of the problem of the prank. Sometimes you're being a [lovable] jackass; sometimes you're an asshole.)

We might turn this around on Goodreads culture, and maybe the recent kerfuffle about the "bullying" of authors, the site's attempts to define and control behaviors and image. 4chan had no real constraints on how people behaved, or what people could post. And I think this improvisatory play is more 'organic' to social media community; anything goes, and the rules, such as they are, form (and constantly reform) depending on what the mass of users will accept. It leads to a constant rule-breaking and -setting. Goodreads, like lots of social networking sites, is constantly grappling with this tendency for "open" conversation to evolve through bouts of jackassery and assholishness. Reviewers here aren't bound by some of the constraints imposed by newspapers or print sources -- we can let it rip. We might be profane, might be cruelly or crudely derisive of the themes/topics or the (non-existent) aesthetics, might call the author names ("What kind of misogynistic asshole wrote this?"). We can write reviews that ignore the book entirely, and just throw mud. Authors could pipe up--and throw mud back, or game the system (what rules? I'll get my ratings by making up profiles), or go out on the internet and start attacking the "attackers."

If we were 4chan, we'd just ride the waves of anger and counter-move, and eventually "rules" would shake out. I think that on a social-networking site largely driven by readers, the assholish writers trying to control how people write or talk about their works would have their asses handed to them. And ought to. But my point is: I would be fine with letting the shitstorm rage. If there appears to be a user behaving in a way that other users find inappropriate, I think the visceral response is just fine. For example, trolls will troll, and will usually spark mobs of fire-wielding friends to attack. I wouldn't censor trolls--I'd assume the mob will get 'em. But mobs are dangerous, too, right? I wouldn't censor mobs, either, but things can get uncomfortable. (A while back--some eons ago in internet time--another kerfuffle on GR was about "reviews" that attacked the

problems of predatory behavior on sites like this. Some felt like the mob had gone vigilante. I felt--still do--that the internet runs on different rules. And part of the pleasure, and pain, of playing on a site like this is the discomfort of figuring out what rules/values matter to me, and how do I fit in, and....)

I understand why GR wouldn't want to have 4chan as a business model. It's a difficult thing trying to figure out rules to shape social network behaviors.... and it's damned interesting to watch problems blow up, and then seeing how the community and the overlords try to make sense of and then structure behaviors accordingly. But the place--Goodreads, but also this broader new world of a networked community--demands new ways of thinking about our values, and how behaviors get policed. And for that reason the "bully" debate is wonderful, if painful. And I'll delight in coming upon the next prank--whether neat jackassed air horning or assholish prowling--that disturbs the community here. "Delight" in the most complicated sense: relishing its worth and value, even if I feel outraged, or aggrieved, or hurt.

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### **Melody says**

Well-written in the face of disinformation, secrets, and outright lies. Double and triple fact checking probably didn't cut much ice here, and Olson did a creditable job of ferreting out what seems to be a coherent narrative. The journalism is solid, the authorial voice very engaging.

I'm deeply sympathetic to hackers, and this book didn't dissuade me one bit. Yeah, they do some harm- it's undeniable. But when they are taking down banks and evil corporations, I'm right up there cheering them on, so who am I to castigate them for their other, more nefarious actions? I enjoyed the "ripped from the headlines" aspect of this book, and I dug getting to feel like I was, however briefly, on the inside. I'm in their corner, with my knee-jerk anti-authority bias intact.

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### **Eris says**

The "true crime" section is an interesting read if you know at least a little bit about a)internet culture, b)anonymous/lulzsec and c)hackology. You don't have to be an expert, it's probably better if you aren't (experts may get bored in the explanations). The evolution of the hivemind is an interesting thing to watch, as are the "normal" human protective behaviors that tend to remain in the individuals even when they are immersed in it... at least, in SOME individuals. I'm sure in the future we will suss out the difference between hivemind individuals and hivemind absorbees.

Olson does devote an inordinate amount of time to the blow by blow of the events, but she does at least give a nod at the end to the continuing culture and its singular nonidentity. The fact that "Anonymous" is not really any one set of people or ideals is important to realize. The fickleness of the internet based identities is real, and not based on any moral code. One day fighting for justice, the next exposing some poor saps address for no good reason other than some asshole put them up on 4chan as a target. The chaotic neutral aspect of the hivemind speaks volumes of the human race as a whole - this is who we are, this IS reflective of our history and indicative of our future unless we decide otherwise.

Otherwise an interesting read for those of us who knew bits but not the whole story of Sabu and the whys and wherefores of who did what to who. There are many unanswered questions, but at least you'll come away knowing you really should change your passwords regularly.

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## **Karlo Mikhail says**

Less theory and more history. Its just as the subtitle says: "Inside the Hacker World . . . : An impressive work of investigative journalism that pieces together and contextualizes the rise of Anonymous through the story of one of its many core groups.

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## **Ray says**

Mr. Robot, this isn't!

Another crucial book for understanding the modern era we live in, a fascinating tale of the hackers much of whom would be more classified as just evil trolls than activist brilliant computer experts (although there are plenty of the latter as well).

The story spans from the beginnings with 4chan, to the loosely organized thing that is Anonymous which is not quite what most people assume. Much of the book is also about LulzSec, which others criticize, but perhaps the best way for author Parmy Olson to have researched such a book is by way of public knowledge after all the arrests and everything. I found it a fascinating exposé by focusing on those colorful characters, even if not a complete overview of everything hacktivist.

Sabu, Topiary, and Kayla "herself" don't always come out looking like aspirational figures but it cannot be denied that they are truly intriguing characters.

So if you're not already an expert do read up and learn about imageboards and social engineering and DDoSing, and it might just be helpful to know one day...

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## **Ryandake says**

it's like a whole book of he-said, she-said, relayed third-hand by somebody who is not a native speaker of the language.

i get that it's probably really, really difficult to pin down anybody from Anonymous. it's not like you can insist, like a six-year-old on a playground, that they *prove it!*

and i believe that this author really did do the best due diligence possible, given the subjects and the fact that they take great joy in pranking people.

but by virtue of the medium (the interwebs) and the people involved, this sense of creeping dubiousness spreads slowly through the book until, about halfway through, you begin to wonder whether any of what you've read is really true.

btw i think "the global cyber insurgency," and a lot of other rhetoric in this book, is wildly overblown. it's almost like talking about a gang of pre-teens egging cars as terrorists. not that Anonymous are just skill-free

irritants, but that they are nowhere near organized enough to be "insurgents." they also haven't one agenda. they also haven't a specified target. etc etc. and taking down a web site is not anywhere near as terrifying as launching an RPG into a McDonald's.

so, no. not terrorists. not verifiable. in the end, this book sort of reminds me of those old advertisements about the demon marijuana, one puff of which will slide you into heroin. way, way overblown.

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### **Gabriela Souto says**

Comecei a ler este livro em Outubro de 2016 porque achei o tema interessante. Sempre tive muita curiosidade sobre este mundo obscuro da internet, darkweb, hackers, gente que tem habilidades e capacidades que eu nem sonho em desenvolver.

E ai comecei a ler e a ver coisas tão próximas de mim como o 4chan, IRC, coisas que foram muito presentes na minha adolescência e naqueles princípios de internet, quando ter banda larga em casa era um luxo pra poucos.

E o livro foi se arrastando, tinha uma hora que eu já não aguentava mais ler porque tinha ficado chato, detalhes demais sobre conversas e não desenvolvia... eu demorei uns bons meses, reli umas partes e avancei muito devagar, até fui buscar meus próprios spoilers sobre quem eram os personagens do livro, o que aconteceu com essa galera na vida real? Pós busca no google eu recuperei as forças pra acabar. Chegando na parte final do livro, tudo ficou melhor e aí desenrolou de maneira muito agradável.

Achei o livro detalhadíssimo, mas extenso demais. Poderia ter facilmente umas 50-100 páginas a menos. Tem muita enrolação na história. E o desfecho é legal, mas queria mais detalhes sobre a vida das pessoas pós Anon, pós Lulz. É uma história intensa e de repente acaba?? Mesmo assim é um belo trabalho de pesquisa e reconstrução de algo tão difícil de ser explicado e contextualizado. É fácil de se relacionar com a história... quem não lembra do vazamento das senhas da PSN? Foi algo muito grande no mundo. Dou 4 estrelas porque fiquei fã do Topiary e dos outros hackers.

Valeu a leitura, mas não sei se indico, mesmo com as 4 estrelas de nota.

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### **James says**

Attended an IT conference today and one of the first speakers talked about the credit card hack on target and how it caused target to shift gears from developing what is cool for the consumer to redefining it's most critical programs to focus on credit card thieves. Wow, this just after finishing the book a couple days early. So how does this relate to this book. Will write that at the end.

First I have to say WOW, a truly enjoyable book and a great history of how Anonymous came to be. It brought back a lot of old memories of hanging out in IRC chat rooms back in the early 90's, yes they existed back then with clients like MIRC and others (never to the extreme of these folks and never in AOL rooms :)

Thanks Parmy for delivering how Anonymous came to be, how it fought among itself to find the right voice as well as how they went about their hacks. Working in IT, mostly the project side and not the technical side

for several years, I would hear about sites that were hacked, what our company was doing about it, etc. Never did I think about the devious ways that hacks have gotten into systems, nor how they even discover these bugs in the first place.

Yes Anonymous would expose several sites online and yes, I think there is a positive side to calling out the companies that have been lying to consumers. Some of the hacks however seem to be from foreign governments, etc and my curiosity is what we are doing about it. Seems like Anonymous is global from the book and the like to find vulnerable sites to rile up the folks. Have they ever tried however to hack the hackers in foreign lands? Maybe there is a way to have Anonymous help folks by exposing those folks and what they've gotten away with.

As for credit cards and other hacks. The social engineering side of this book was great. Not only did it raise an eyebrow or two when it was covered, but I next went out and started deleting some FB connections that seemed out of place.

So tie that to tonight. Great 1st episode of the final season of Persons of interest. An old AI is resurrected in the end to begin the fight back. The concept of hacking comes up and malware. Listening to this, it's almost like Anonymous could be the cause (yes I know it's not, but how they described the malware in the firmware, etc., ones got to think maybe this already occurred.

Wrapping this back to Target (and knowing no one is probably reading down this far in my diatribe of ramblings). During my meeting today, cyber security came up several more times and I found myself recommending <-- Yes more than 5 times to some folks that were talking about this topic. At the end of the day, I wound up talking with the keynote about White and Black hackers and their purposes and I freaking knew what I was talking about all from this book and all from the correlated learning throughout the day. Sorry I can't give it a 5, but it's a very, very high 4 if I could score it that way. ... Not sure if Parmy Olson the author would read this but if it is read, I'd just like to say thanks for showing me this world, the crap I need to do better at home, etc.

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## **Chaima says**

I stumbled upon this book by pure hazard, and I'm very glad I did. It is not my usual read, I'm not quite familiar with the true crime section, internet culture or hacking for that matter, and you don't have to be an expert on the subject really, because Olson's writing is a true blessing.

The book runs on chronological order, starting by an introduction to the becoming of 4chan. 4chan gives us a terrifying peek of what the Dark Deep Web is all about. With its forced anonymity policy, the imageboard website, notorious for its violent, pornographic and right down debauched content, allows us to imagine how the Dark Web could be. The Web as you and I know it is only the tip of the iceberg of a very complex matrix of encrypted websites that is the massive chunk of ice that lays invisible under the water surface. 4chan's anonymity policy means that participants can do and say virtually anything they want with only the most remote threat of accountability, a chaotic freedom that contributes to the online disinhibition effect. It's a forum with no names, few rules and few consequences, which is the philosophical antithesis to virtually every other mainstream social property and means people can say just about anything they want.

The vast majority of the site's users are young, college-educated men with an interest in Japanese culture, video games, comics and technology. Most of them are often regroups in the site's most famous board /b/ (random), notorious for its "no rule" policy with the exception of child pornography and discussion of raids. However, administrators of /b/ board may be also subject to the "no rule" policy from time to time.

So why is 4chan so important? For multiple reasons. Olson will proceed to explain how 4chan is responsible of some of the largest hoaxes, cyberbullying incidents and Internet pranks. It is the mother land of Internet trolls. Olson gives us a peek into the mind-set of what some consider being the Internet's sociopaths, and well, it is not pretty. It is here that you can truly witness the terrifying power of Internet freedom and how it impacts our social morals. The actions of these trolls, which are basically hacking into the personal information of their victim to then harass them, attack them, blackmail them, and basically ruin their lives just for the "lulz" of it. I had such a hard time understanding why? Why engage in such anti-social behaviour? Where was the "lulz" in causing so much harm to complete strangers? What was the point of such massive destruction? The damage these people, these kids because most of them were barely over their twenties, have done is simply mindboggling! It is hard to believe that so much harm was done for the sake of entertainment, a part of me refuse to believe so because what does it say of human nature? How can someone who outwardly appears to respect social norms so easily adopt a contrarian alter-ego? This is the startling impact of anonymity. It leads to complete disinhibition. Once in the comfortable confines and shadows of the web, where it dark crooks and corners give you a false sense of security, one abandons his social inhibitions that would normally be present in face to face interactions. And maybe that's why; the lack of face to face interactions, of direct human contact seems to make the whole of their actions somewhat less real, with no direct and serious impact. Once you were lost in the crowds of people of the internet, you somehow became detached from reality, oblivious to certain consequences of your actions. And this chaotic natural aspect of the hive mind speaks volume of the human race as a whole. Is this who we are? Is this not reflective of our history? Is it not indicative of our future?

This chaotic world gave birth to Anonymous, the hacktivist collective that will turn out to be an important player in some of the world's most changing events. Anonymous is a sort of an internet gathering with a very loose and decentralized command structure that operates on ideas rather than directives. The group became known for a series of well-publicized publicity stunts and DDoS attacks on government, religious, and corporate websites. It represents the concept of many online and offline community users simultaneously existing as an anarchic, digitized global brain. In its early form, the concept was adopted by a decentralized online community acting anonymously in a coordinated manner, usually toward a loosely self-agreed goal, and primarily focused on entertainment, or "lulz". Here's where you should really listen, Anonymous did not start as some sort of vigilant community that attacked evil big corporations to denounce their immoral behaviour to the world and unmask their true agendas. No. That's not how it began. What motivated most of these Anons were first of all the intellectual exploration of the Dark Deep Web, and the challenge of the whole operations. It also presented itself as a great opportunity to learn new tricks and ways to sharpen their hacking skills. And also, it was a great way to have fun.

It only started to get serious when some international corporations like PayPal, MasterCard and Visa have cut their services to WikiLeaks in the midst of the chaos that ensued after the publication of some secret government documents. Anonymous had publicly supported WikiLeaks, sharing its fundamental belief that information should never be hidden from the public, that secrets needed to be discovered. These beliefs come from an ideology that most hackers share, one that affirms that all information is good, and everything should be published.

Anonymous who was at the time in the midst of Operation Payback at the time that was sparked by an Indian software company that contracted with film studios to launch DDoS attacks on websites providing pirated content, soon expanded to include Operation Avenge Assange, and proceeded to attack PayPal, MasterCard,

Visa and PostFinance's websites causing serious financial loss.

How these operations were carried out revealed a decentralized, undisciplined, overdramatic and anarchic community, but the genius of the social engineering works that have been put in them is simply outstanding. And it's here that the role of Topiary had really shone through. As the spokesman of the organization at the time, his social and communication skills played key role into getting the media's and the world's attention. And it's thanks to him that Lulzsec came to existence.

After Op Payback, Op Avenge Assange, Anons quickly became bored and uninterested in the "moral" and "vigilante" turn Anonymous had taken. Lulzsec was supposed to bring back the shenanigans Anonymous was known for, and so, the small group known for the HBGary attack splintered into the hacker group "Lulz Security".

Olson gives us a very detailed report on how the group came to be, how it functioned, and how it eventually went down. And that's where the strength of the narrative comes from, the personal details taken from multiple interviews. The work done on the book is simply superb. This could have easily turned into a boring report, but it didn't. The plot is neatly and smartly crafted, the chronological order of the book helping the smooth flow of the massive amount of information presented. More than that, her writing is so compelling, so thrilling that it was impossible for me to put the book down. Not only was it a great adrenaline and brain kick, it also raises some serious questions about Internet security, the social and moral impact of Internet freedom and anonymity, it disinhibition effect, it desensitization effect, it influence on moral codes. And well, just how safe is our personal information on the wide wild web? They're not.

Solid 4.5 for this one. Great job Olson!

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## **Murdo Morrison says**

We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Global Cyber Insurgency is a book that is compelling and hard to put down. I have been using the Internet since before the emergence of the World Wide Web. Like many others I use social media and enjoy the convenience and connection to information and other resources that the Internet makes possible. Author Parmy Olson details the many harmful things that are also made possible.

The book's main theme focuses on the activities of a loosely organized and changing online community of hackers known to the public as Anonymous and on a smaller subset of six that form LulzSec. The author details how the group formed and paints fascinating portraits of a very diverse set of personalities.

The book, for me, also raises a plethora of issues related to society as a whole. While the acts of the hackers are certainly criminal and do considerable harm to companies and individuals, the book also raises questions about the role and possible culpability of companies, media and even government. Many of the systems hacked into appear carelessly vulnerable. The media, with a few exceptions, appear gullible and predisposed to the disinformation fed to them by the hackers.

At one point, when a member of LulzSec is located by the FBI and decides to cooperate, the book suggests that the law enforcement agency stands by while a company called Stratfor is hacked into, in the interests of locating and arresting the other members of the group. This raises the question whether there is a

definitional component to notions of criminality. Is a warrantless wiretap or ignoring a crime in progress any less culpable than the actions of the hackers?

For many years I have cautioned friends and colleagues to pay more attention to online security. The responses have generally been dismissive. Some have questioned why anyone would care about their online activity. The book provides an object lesson in exactly why they should care. Descriptions in the book of how easily Twitter and Facebook accounts are hacked, or mention of rogue Facebook applications, should reinforce my point.

We are Anonymous is a book that anyone, which means most of us, who is on the Internet should read.

Murdo Morrison

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### **Hadrian says**

Our story begins on 4chan, a violent, pornographic, iconoclastic pit of the internet which invented the idea of putting grammatically incorrect captions on cat pictures. On /b/, historically the most popular board on the site, forced anonymity brought with it a freedom from social conventions and norms, as a place to vent things that one would not ordinarily say. In this place, communities developed, and with their morbid senses of humor, friendships grew.

One way for /b/ to pass the time was recreational hacking, by finding personal information about their victims. This was primarily done out of schadenfreude, or 'lulz', but not necessarily. Some targets included pedophiles. A brief sketch of their attacks shows the mercurial nature of /b/'s targets - first the social game Habbo Hotel, then the minor racist talk show host Hal Turner, then the cultish Church of Scientology, then the real *anus mundi* known as the Westboro Baptist Church.

The rest of the book focuses on LulzSec, a group which grew out of this random vandalism. which hit targets at random, and for fun. They attacked corporations, governments, and other institutions almost at random, and on a larger scale. Their targets included Sony Pictures, the Tunisian government during the Arab Spring, private security companies, the CIA, and the US Senate, either by stealing passwords or designated denial of service attacks. If I might speak from anecdotal experience and memory, most in Anonymous did not necessarily approve of all of LulzSec's actions, especially those involving video game companies.

After some fifty days of chaos, they claimed that they were finished, but instead were taken down *en masse* largely due to a turncoat and informer within the group. Much of Olson's chronology of events is taken from interviews, as well as research and archives taken from sites such as chanarchive.

The strength of the narrative comes from the personal details, taken from multiple interviews. One of the problems with this method is the reliability of the sources. It is easy, perhaps a custom, for people to lie or embellish their identities on the internet. An British army private claimed to be a young nymphet girl hacker, for example. How, then, can the sources be verified? Olson admits this is a problem.

By contrast, the book's worst flaws are in the grievous technical errors. For example, the author does not differentiate 'hashing' from encryption, mistakes text-to-speech as 'speech recognition', misspells a 'l33tsp33k' name, and mistakes the purpose of a command line. For heaven's sake! My dad knows the last

one, and he started programming with punch cards.

So what can we learn from this? Anonymous is *not* just a decentralized amorphous mass of people causing havoc, but rather a name or brand that individual actions could be attributed to. LulzSec itself was only six or seven people at its height. Law enforcement was able to find them and squash them individually, even though its members lived in disparate areas as the Shetland Islands and the Bronx. How the group operated will no doubt be of interest to scholars of 'Network theory' and decentralization away from a central authority.

Nevertheless, some points in Olson's analysis are essentially true. We can all learn from the horrendous mistakes of security professionals. Do not ever use a simple password. criticizes the mistakes of the 'old media' in trying to describe Anonymous and Lulzsec, while she proves her own point with her mistakes. LulzSec is now defunct, but others claiming the name Anonymous will no doubt return.

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## **Trupti Dorge says**

It's a digital World.

Everything is online, including our private lives. In the news we hear about cyber attacks, about a site being DDos'd, sometimes our very own twitter and email accounts are hacked. In 'We are Anonymous', we get to read about these very people who operate from behind the anonymity of the internet. In this book we learn how Anonymous, widely seen by the rest of the world as an organized group of hackers was formed, how it emerged from chanology and 4chan and evolved into what it is today.

The world has seen a lot of illegal activities from the Anonymous, including hacking of oppressive governments websites, Church of Scientology, PlayStation Websites and networks, Visa, MasterCard and PayPal for not supporting Wikileaks and so on. After looking at this list, one might feel that all these technologically savvy people were some kind of Samaritans who were trying to oppose those who curb freedom of speech. But the truth is, most of these are teenagers or young people who are looking for their next adrenaline rush. Most of them have never hacked a site before. All they have to do is download a free code, put in the website address and click on execute. It does the job for them. But these are people who have crossed the line between moral and immoral, between legal and illegal all in the name of a little kick. It gives them a head rush, a kind of power where you feel you can mess with anyone's life if you want to, take down almost any organization, any government website. It's an addiction, especially for people who don't gel into the real world very well. The internet gives them a feeling of being powerful.

There is section in the book where a hacker describes how he hacked into people's facebook accounts and blackmailed them. There is an incident where he blackmails one of the guys to show his objectionable picture/ video to his mother in the middle of the night or he would leak his private stuff to the world. It was filthy, creepy and twisted.

We also learn about Lulzsec which emerged as an offshoot of Anonymous, consisting of handful of people who wanted things a little more serious and organized. This book gives us the perspective of Jake Davis – aka Topiary who was also the mouthpiece of Lulzsec. We follow the activities of Lulzsec – their "work", their personal lives, and ultimately how they were all eventually trapped by the FBI and by other similar organizations of other countries.

This book, although well written can get stuck in a loop at times. It's the same story over and over – something happens in the real world, anonymous doesn't like it and decides to hack something. The most

interesting part however is in the later half of the book when the FBI is closing in on these people. Also the personal lives of these people are interesting. Someone who is not a little tech savvy might find it difficult to go through this book as it's filled with technical jargon. The author does explain a lot of it but it might get a little too heavy if you know absolutely nothing of the tech world.

As the world is getting more digital everyday and with more of our private lives on the internet, we can be sure that even if all of these hackers are imprisoned and never are allowed to get on the world wide web again, a new breed of hackers will rise overnight. While we cannot do much ourselves, we can atleast make sure that our personal online space is protected. This was my biggest takeaway from the book.

*This is not to say that the Internet is your enemy. It is your greatest ally and closest friend; its shops mean you don't have to set foot outside your home, and its casinos allow you to lose your money at any hour of the day. Its many chat rooms ensure you no longer need to interact with any other members of your species directly, and detailed social networking conveniently maps your every move and thought. Your intimate relationships and darkest secrets belong to the horde, and they will never be forgotten. Your existence will forever be encoded into the infinite repertoire of beautiful, byte-sized sequences, safely housed in the cyber cloud for all to observe.*

– Jake Davis (former member of Lulzsec)

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## **Donovan van Eetveldt says**

[www.groggysblogg.wordpress.com](http://www.groggysblogg.wordpress.com)

A good book to read after Hacker Hoaxer Whistleblower Spy, by Gabriella Coleman, or if you really enjoyed the We are legion documentary. Poorly written. Good coverage of Lulzsec.

The book is mainly about the 6 core members of LulzSec, and is the narrative is driven by the story of Jake Davis - aka Topiary, who became the mouthpiece of Lulzsec.

If you want to know what Anonymous is, or how it began, then this book should suffice as a good starting point. Beginning with 4chan and chanology and extending to the Stratfor hack and the demise of Lulzsec you get a decent overview of the main characters and events.

If you had to choose between this and Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy by Gabriella Coleman I would choose HHWS. But here are some comparisons between the two.

HHWS is a more academic look at Anonymous. GC is an anthropologist and the book sometimes has a thesis feel to it which makes the pages heavier to turn.

However, HHWS is a much smoother read. WAA is poorly written, the editor did Olson no favors.

There is value in reading both as they do cover different events and different perspectives of the events that overlap between them.

GC's book has a much more insider feel to it, she manages to take you into the IRC chats more effectively and in general captures the atmosphere of the madness more effectively.

To sum it up, HHWS is more insightful, covering the zeitgeist of the period it covers by delving into the Occupy Movement and the apathy pre-snowden. WAA focuses a lot more on the young men involved with Lulzsec and the traitor that sold them out.

But back to what I thought of WAA. At one point about 2/3's in I put it down for quite a while, with the

intention of not returning to it. Slightly disgusted and put off. I eventually did finish it but only thanks to downloading the audiobook version. Which made the poor writing easier to get past, but if you decide to go the audiobook route, be prepared for a narrator who's accents make you cringe.

The reason I had become so unenthralled with the book was how it had descended into a sad stupor of nefarious teenage revelry. At this 2/3 point in the book I was realising that very few of the people the book centres on had any hacking skills, and that the heart of the anonymous in the period covered by the book thus far was mainly teenage apathy and a myriad of dark activities. And although Olson presents the dicotomy existent in anonymous throughout the book - those in it for the Lulz and those in it for activism - those with true hacking skills and those with little to none - at this 2/3 point the book had centred on the immature motives of the young Lulzsec members and the depravity existent in the culture that the redeeming features of anonymous that I think draw most readers seemed, perhaps rightfully so, peripheral.

For me, this book left me wondering what anonymous and Lulzsec had accomplished. What had they gained in exchange for imprisonment ? Very little. The book suggests they exposed security weaknesses to the public. And this is true , but it does not seem to carry much weight.

You get to know the teenager Jake Davis quite well throughout the book. As well as Hector Monsegur who represents the more revolutionary aspect of anonymous, a hacker passionate about the antisecc movement who ultimately flips. There is a large part of the book about another young man, William, who is of a similar mould to Jake Davis. Getting to know these characters ultimately acquaints the reader with the vile and immature side of anonymous, centered on trolling, low-tech facebook hacks, and filthy behaviour. There is less about genuine hacking ,and a lot of garbage about how these young men would "hack" facebook accounts, ultimately getting other young men to send them dick pics, which they would use as blackmail, forcing their victims to perform humiliating acts such as waking up there mother in the dead of night to show her the previously mentioned picture, all the while in tears, to appease these "hackers".

The book did reveal something to me that I either missed in HHWS or that was not explained regarding DDOS attacks. From WAA you realised that in fact very little of the firepower that brought down the various .mil and .gov websites came from the hive that anonymous attracted. The real firepower came from botnets, mainly from one individual by the name of Ryan. Another kid who was later apprehended, and is now free, despite being involved in child pornography. It was at this point that I was so repulsed by the lost young men who could not have been more different to someone like Aaron Schwartz that I was doubtful the book held much more for me.

I persisted to Topiary's last tweet before being apprehended at the end of the book . "you cannot arrest an idea". But after reading this book, I can only come to the conclusion that these young men stood for no idea in particular and all there activity was ultimately an expression of a deep teenage angst though a wonderful show to watch.

The coverage of genuine political hacker Jeremey Hammond and Wikileaks founder Assange, is pretty brief, and there are no good insights on anything Snowden, TOR, silkroad, NSA, information freedom, Aaron Schwartz, Occupy, or any of the other overlapping themes that meld into anonymous.

The book ultimately did a great job at de-romanticising anonymous for me, though this was not what I think the author intended. The book balances nicely against HHWS as the two popular books that cover anonymous. The books is quite dated now, so take that into consideration after reading this and if you decide to read WAA.

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### **Peter Burnett says**

A difficult task writing this, even harder getting it out so quickly, but given the interviews with Jake Davis, and some of the other insights it has to be read if you're interested in this subject. You'd think perhaps a more anarchic and less journalistic style (like Jake's own style) may be better suited to this story, which is not about Anonymous, and also not about the Global Cyber Insurgency, but for a general reader, I think it's pretty good.

A full on warts and all review can be read here: <http://peterburnett.info/epic-volumes...>

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### **Stacy says**

Fascinating look at the world of Anonymous. I learned many lessons from this. 1) Anonymous is not really a group--at least not one with a hierarchy. 2) Most people in Anonymous have average or slightly above-average computer skills (these are called "script-kiddies".) 3) Those that have great computer skills are revered, but they're not leaders. 4) Several of the attacks that the group has carried out weren't political, but done for the "lulz" (embarrassing someone else publicly for fun). 5) Most big companies employ only the most basic of security measures on the Web. 6) You never know when you're attracting the attention of someone who hates you. 7) Each level of security you employ increases your chances of outstripping a hacker's attention span. You may never reach 100%, but many people who spend the vast majority of their time online have short attention spans and get bored easily. So the goal of your online security isn't just to outsmart the smartest guy in Anonymous--it's to outlive his attention span. (The saying "There are no girls on the Internet" in this case is true. The VAST majority of hackers are male.)

You never know who is watching, and you probably wouldn't know whether someone has broken into your accounts until they MAKE it known. Someone could watch you for months, amassing a file, and eventually publish it for the sole purpose of embarrassing you. 8) Several in Anonymous who thought they were truly anonymous got a harsh lesson when the roles were reversed and it turned out the FBI and European authorities were watching. Three key players were arrested. One was arrested months before the others and was quickly turned into an informant. 9) Many of the memes, saying and culture of the Internet originated with Anonymous and hacker culture. 10) Anonymous is not your friend. Almost any political intent is something you read into it. If it gets a chance to embarrass a person or an entity, it will. And that someone could be you. It's sort of a faceless version of the Joker from Nolan's version of Batman. "Some men just want to watch the world burn."

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