Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web

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"4chan is the Anti-Facebook," a site that radically encourages anonymity. It spawned the hacktivist group Anonymous, which famously defended WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange by bringing down MasterCard's and Visa's Web sites. Created by a 15-year-old wunderkind in 2003, it is the creative force behind "the Web's most infectious memes and catchphrases" (*Wired*). Today it has over 12 million monthly users, with enormous social influence to match.

Epic Win is the first book to tell 4chan's story. Longtime blogger and 4chan expert Cole Stryker writes with a voice that is engrossingly informative and approachable. Whether examining the 4chan-provoked Jessi Slaughter saga and how cyber-bullying is part of our new reality, or explaining how Sarah Palin's email account was leaked, *Epic Win* proves 4chan's transformative cultural impact, and how it has influenced--and will continue to influence-- society at large.

Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web Details

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From Reader Review Epic Win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web for online ebook

rob says

The problem with this book was that it was positioned and marketed as a look deep inside Anonymous. Instead it was a primer on weird web culture for outsiders. There's a place for that, but that's not what I was looking for.

Rod Hilton says

It's a book about 4chan. In a way, it's a fantastic book, because if you want to read a book about 4chan, this is pretty much the only game in town. In another way, it's a book about 4chan.

The title implies it's about capital-A Anonymous, the semi-political group of scientology protestors/internet freedom fighters that grew out of 4chan and, while the book does cover that, that's only a very small portion of the entire book.

Most of the book is devoted to the formation of 4chan, it's history rooted in other chan boards, the various types of boards, and of course /b/. Lots of chapters are devoted to /b/'s raids like in Second Life and Habbo Hotel, and then eventually it gets to Project Chanology and other protests.

It's quite current - including some pretty recent lulzy material, though I was irritated during the covering of the Jessie Slaughter incident that no mention was made of the fact that Jessie's father died, which is a critical piece of the story.

Ultimately, the book sometimes seems desperate for content, and it's clear that not even the author thinks 4chan is really worthy of an entire book. But for the most part, it's an entertaining read, and as a longtime lurker on /b/, /v/, /tv/, and a few other boards, I found Cole's descriptions to be surprisingly adept.

The book definitely paints as positive a portrait of 4chan as possible, frequently touching on the value of a completely anonymous place to post content. Stryker is, overall, eager to defend 4chan as much as possible, talking up the strengths of the board when appropriate, discussing with an even-handed fairness the more trollish behaviors such as raids, and rightfully calling 4chan out on some of it's shittiest incidents.

This book is like the anti book about Facebook, because it's about the site that is the anti-facebook. If you like internet culture or you know a little about 4chan but are afraid to visit yourself, the book is worth reading.

Clare O'Beara says

The author works as an online journalist and he decides to break Rules 1 and 2 and talk about what goes on at 4chan. I have to think that the title is an attempt at placating the denizens, or to grab attention. First he proceeds through a list of the boards and explains that mostly they are for images, with additions, prank

alterations and captions. Such as Japanese anime cartoons, cats, autopsy slides, gross diseases and cartoon sex between men. We are later assured that child porn may crop up but is swiftly removed and reported. /b/ is called the random topic board and many people, /b/tards, contribute anonymously. Insults are commonplace as is strong language and seemingly abusive talk. But if everyone including the poster is being called a bad name, how bad is it really?

Then we get a potted history of the boards, from 2chan a Japanese anime board which inspired 15 year old Christopher Poole, calling himself moot, to start his own board called 4chan because he didn't speak Japanese. He invited everyone to join in and there would be no rules. Later he started an art site called Canvas.

We are told that many memes, cultural gimmicks, get started on 4chan as bright or bored people kid around with images and captions in spare time. Here the author makes the mistake of thinking that everyone uses the social media he does. Reddit, Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, whatever, no, I don't use any of them. So much of what he was saying, however nicely explained, was wasted on me. He makes one brief reference to AOL boards in the early days, detailing that those days were slow and expensive due to dial-up modems at home, pay subscription and pay for time. I used CompuServe from mid-nineties and there is no mention. We had similarly separate chat boards with mods.

We get a mention that women are sometimes insulted or instructed to show images of themselves stripping on 4chan. If they do more fool them. This is a laddish chattery abuse-slinging culture. More recently than publication, a young woman was doxxed after stripping with, as requested, a bottle of her medication, all the lads needed to find out who she was. Her images were sent to her family and friends. Some /b/tards had spoken against doing this, but with no consequences to the doers, they proceeded.

At the end we get a look at how some members working together formed Anonymous and carried out DDoS attacks, mixed with other attacks, on Scientology and other groups they disliked. They managed to hack into a major security company. To read what I consider a better look at this hacking see 'This Machine Kills Secrets: How WikiLeakers, Hacktivists, and Cypherpunks Are Freeing the World's Information' by Andy Greenberg. However Greenberg, another journalist, did not appear to have been able to get anyone in Anonymous to talk to him whereas Stryker being already on 4chan got quotes from members of both. Neither man tells us that some women took part in the protests against Scientology.

Pages 286 - 304 contain references and an index. I counted 16 names which I could be sure were female. This is an unbiased review.
Postscript: I review this book on 5th July, and on 6th July I get a phishing e-mail allegedly from Blockchain saying in the headline that my access to a Bitcoin purse has been blocked.

Garryg says

I can see why some people have given this book five stars, and I can see why others have given it two. I've had the occasional peek at 4chan, but never really got into it. Then again I'm not the target 4chan demographic.
As far as the book goes I'd say it was one of the most interesting non-fiction books I've ever read, and I've read a few...
I liked its initial explanation of memes and thought this led into the explanation of 4chan very well. I found the whole 4chan thing utterly readable and interesting, but when it got to the history part it was genuinely

unputdownable for me. You see I remember all that stuff! I also remember first looking at 4chan when it was still relatively new. And although I hadn't visited any of these sites for more years than I care to remember, I was still nevertheless very genuinely sad to learn of their demise, or commercialisation. Something is lost in their passing... Something horrible maybe, but still something none the less, a certain sense of early 2000's Stile you may say ;)

I thought there was enough coverage of the actual Anonymous group to give an idea of what this really is all about, although I agree more would have been interesting.

I've been around the Internet too long to believe all the media nonsense surrounding Anonymous, but in a sense I think I'm pretty much in the target audience for this book. I know of all the things mentioned, but not all the 'whats' and 'hows' of them. Overall an interesting and informative read if you are nor immersed in this culture but are open minded enough to be interested and take an objective look.

I now consider myself an honorary oldfag ;)

Keep the internet free /b/

Jasmine says

so I have a good friend I've always thought of as a /b/tard. I don't know if he really is one but he's definitely a professional troll. I know when people think about 4chan they think of child porn, but it's so much more than that. I could tell you but then the review would have to be as long as this book.

Krista says

"Epic Win" is a badly titled book.

It is, in reality, a story of the development of Internet culture, focusing heavily on anonymous social networking (4Chan, Reddit, and others). It discusses the origins of some popular memes and Internet characters, as well as the extent to which their fame penetrated mass media.

The downside, however, is--well, at least three-fold:
1.) For a book about Anonymous, at least 3/4 of the book doesn't have anything to do with Anonymous. The author mentions the difference between /b/ and Anonymous, but we barely delve into the topic (the end of the book). The delineation between the two is blurred, and the title/cover go farther in making this mistake.
2.) The author writes in a way that is embarrassing. The cool thing about the Internet is that it isn't cool. (Hence the fame of Keyboard Cat.) Quoting how he found image XYZ awesome just makes one cringe in second-hand embarrassment. Yes, a person can enjoy, admire, and be heavily amused by Internet goofiness, but there's a line. Such wording does not ring true. (Talking to someone in real life about the "lulz" is another cringer.)
3.) The author blurs over the problems with hate emerging from /b/. Indeed, the book reinforces the sexism prevalent by discussing how users talk about "girls." While the author acknowledges /b/ can be a cesspool of

various biogtry, mostly for the purposes of sheer shock value, he fails to hold the users genuinely accountable. Regardless of intention, nastiness deserves to be called out for what it is.

So, overall, a mixed bag--this book is of some interest in charting Internet developments, but it certainly has limits.

Amar Pai says

Such a lazy, stupid book. I can't believe how little effort went into this. It's just a bunch of one paragraph descriptions of stuff you could google in 10 seconds. There's a chapter that's literally just a list of 4chan topics. Could you get any lazier?

In the introduction, Stryker basically admits this book has the depth of a drained kiddie pool:

> 4chan is a multimedia experience, and there's only so much information that can be conveyed on the printed page. I highly encourage the reader to read this book near a computer so you can look up pertinent information as you go. If you're having trouble wrapping your head around a specific concept, online resources like Google, Wikipedia and Know Your Meme will help fill in the blanks.

Translation: "I didn't bother coming up with a thesis or doing any actual research. Try the web instead!"

If you need to get up to speed on memes, try Know Your Meme.

If you're interested in the actual concept of Anonymous, this book will give you zero insight into that phenomenon.

Hopefully someday a more thoughtful writer will tackle the subject.

Rick says

It's interesting, no matter how much you think you keep up on this stuff, there is still more to learn. Cole provides a great primer about Anonymous and 4Chan, and a balanced, fair portrayal of the communities behind it. The history, too, is a good time. A trip down memory lane. BBSes. The Well. Usenet. The good old days? Maybe. Pretty timely book, too, considering all the activity this summer. Cole manages to work in LulzSec and the events with Sony.

My main feeling in reading this was missing Project Chanology, and wishing that came back. God. Scientology.

And thank you, Cole, for not making me seem like an evil marketer. But if any of you Anonymous are reading this, don't worry. I quit that job.

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else fine says

Looking for a book, as I was, to explain internet culture to your mom? This will probably fit the bill. Not a lot of new information to anyone who has spent any amount of time poking around the internet, but then that's not why I picked it up. I've seen some valid criticism of this book floating around: large chunks seem cut and pasted, there is little original content, and there is something sort of inherently shitty about someone taking a bunch of free, not for profit content generated by others, compressing it into a book, and selling it. If it's any consolation, a book project like this (small print run, mid range publisher) is not exactly a fast track to fortune. It'll probably keep Stryker in tacos for a year, if he's lucky. And despite the opportunistic nature of the project and Stryker's unfortunate tendency to sound a little snide, some genuine idealism shines through. It's clear that Stryker really wants to communicate to a non-internet addicted audience what is so beautiful and so horrifying about the internet, and that what's really important is fighting for our freedom to express ourselves either way. It would have been nice if this book had delved a little more into the ethos of geek culture but whatever. There are other sources for that. And the trip down meme memory lane was really quite enjoyable.
So, in short, I think my parents, and people like them, who are baffled by alarmist news specials about legions of unhinged hackers lurking around the internet causing random mayhem, will learn a lot, which is all I really hoped for from this book.

Daniel says

It's not perfect (and it's obviously dated now) but there's a shocking lack of books about 4Chan despite it being a primary force in shaping the internet we all use today. This is an important story and props to Stryker for sticking his neck out there to document it and giving people something to put in bibliographies.

Ryan Jones says

I've always regarded 4chan as a cesspool of moral depravity where people gather to spread the kind of hate that is so disgusting these they're too afraid to do it in the real world.
I was so wrong. Of course I was; I had only visited the site a few times and never had any idea what was happening before my web-browsing eyes.
I'm not a huge book reviewer so I'll keep this one short. The book's usefulness is in how it familiarizes the outsider with the inside development and happenings of Anonymous. I now have a more enlightened appreciation for the movements of Anonymous towards social justice. The whole thing is a terrifically interesting phenomenon the world has never seen before; nameless figures gather en mass to fulfill unique and poignant missions not directed by any one leader, nor to fulfill any individual ego's aims. These movements are collective and can be launched for the collective good.
Some critics argue that Stryker is taking advantage of the situation by not offering anything new and simply explaining Anonymous to the layman. However I feel that he is fulfilling a need and if he's going to make money from that, than so be it! That's the way the world works. At least he's given us a quality book, and not a crappy one.

Rachel says

As a young person having spent my formative teenage years as a web denizen, and as someone who spends a majority of her time immersed in the unique internet culture, learning about "Epic Win For Anonymous" meant I could find a non-fiction book relevant to my interests, on a subject both familiar and foreign to me. I heard about the book from the author himself on the website Reddit--thus, I was in the key demographic.

I am, admittedly, a terrible reviewer. I am notoriously easy to please; I recommend anyone wishing to find a more solid opinion should take my words lightly. With this disclaimer, I proceed.

Over the years I have been in and out of the Anon culture as a bystander, a fringe participant. In my high school days, I had many friends who frequented 4chan's /b/ board and identified as /b/tards; by proxy, I was a /b/tard only due to my recognition of memes and slang. My proximity to /b/ did not teach me to love the community, but to fear it. My friends bragged about raids (many of them participated in the infamous Habbo Hotel raids) and freely snarked lulz-worthy internet candidates. I watched from the sidelines, fascinated, amused and terrified that I could become a target. Perhaps one can chalk it to age, or to the constant social paranoia I experience daily, but I was scared that I would slip up and taint my online identity, causing myself to be a target for the ruthless Anons. I plugged myself up on the internet at a time when many people were exposing themselves, and, in my perception, being punished for it.

Stryker's book's number one takeaway message for me was that this is not true, and it has never been true. Numerous times, Stryker refers to "breathless exposés" done by nightly media outlets about the dangers of Anonymous, leading the public to believe that the group is a bunch of no-good, hate-filled terrorists who will destroy everything you know and love. The analyses, the history and the first-hand information from community founders detailed in Stryker's book depict /b/ and Anonymous as they truly are: a diverse community of creatives people, oriented both in the cultivation and propagation of unique internet culture and in the spread of justice and wide-spread social activism. Who can't get behind these movements?

Stryker does not hide that some of Anonymous's practices are a bit on the shady side; he does not apologize for some of the major drama that Anonymous has caused, does not try to do damage control, but he explains why it happened. The number one thing Stryker's book cleared up for me was the very concept of Anonymity as it is used in an internet context. It is not so much a mask to hide behind as a movement that, in most cases, represents the public's will and true desires, subjects that could not be shared when attached to a name and face because of real life repercussions.

I guess what I would say about this book is that anyone who feels they do not understand the reviled "Internet Hate Machine" should definitely try to read the book. It explains and details the rise of Anonymous as well as the rise of internet culture as a whole. To anyone in the loop, it is a beneficial read to learn about the background workings of a website that even people in the know may be fuzzy on. To anyone who has never heard of the site, their conquests are unforgettable and well-documented, and, as is the usual in mass media, an unwarranted amount of fear is attached to this movement that is harmless to the individual. Anything leaked by Anonymous will most likely not lead to your untimely death. It takes the terror out of Anonymous, and more importantly provides a very strong message: don't want to be targeted by Anonymous? Live life well, live it free of corruption and live it morally, but, most importantly, don't take yourself too seriously. In the end, most of it is done for the lulz.

Anonymous is one of the most influential movements of our time. I would recommend anyone interested in technology, human interaction and the organization and success of activist movements check out the book to

see just how it reached this point; but, if these things do not interest you, you could also read it to take some of the horrific mystique out of the collective.

Oriana says

Okay, let me start by saying that I have never been on 4chan. I know what it is, I know what it does, and I know how it works, I've just never felt compelled to actually slog through it. But that doesn't mean I'm not utterly fascinated by it, and I certainly understand what an awesome (in both senses) cultural force it is, and how it represents everything new and amazing and unpredictable about the times we're living in. So of course I was super psyched to get this book (for $4 at the Brooklyn Book Fair). I'm fairly close to the target demographic for it; I know enough about memes and the web and new media that there were a few sections I glossed over, but for the most part I'm outside of the hardcore internetters for whom this book would be like a primer for the lives they already lead. One of the best things that happened as a result of reading this was that I got to have the following conversation four different times:

"I'm reading this really fascinating book about 4chan and learning *sooo* much."
"What's 4chan?"
"Wait, seriously? You don't know what 4chan is? Where all the memes come from?"
"What's a meme again?"

Whaaa? Only one of those conversations was with someone of my parents' generation; the others were my friends, my peers, people who clearly should know about this stuff. So I got to explain all about easy ones like LOLcats and Rickrolling and the "Hide yo' kids, hide yo' wife" guy, and I got to feel very very savvy and in the know, which of course I'm really not.

If you are, some parts of this book will bore you--for example, there's a long entire chapter where Stryker describes in specific every different board of 4chan and what you'll find there. Also much of the criticism of the book seems to be that people find the title misleading, because it's really a book about 4chan, with only a bit of discussion of Anonymous. I'd bet money that the paperback edition gets an epilogue about Occupy Wall Street and Anonymous' role therein. But that's the point, isn't it? This is a book, which is fixed and stable, and the world of the internet changes *so fast* that writing a book about it is almost necessarily a losing endeavor.

Except it's not. Stryker covers a ton of fascinating ground here, which will not become out of date or out of touch. There's a sort of condensed history of hacking, which he dates back to the fifties, when a bunch of blind kids calling themselves Phone Phreaks "hacked" the landline telephone system by whistling into the receiver at a certain pitch to get free long-distance calling. He takes us through the early, "Wild West" days of the internet, covering Usenet and BBSes, and then traces the history of a bunch of sites I'd never heard of, like WELL, Stile Project, and Gaping Maw, plus many I have, like Rotten, Slashdot, Fark, Reddit, etc. He's got a basic meme primer, where he discusses memes as a concept and then runs through many of the most popular. He talks about memes crossing over into the mainstream, like Rick Astley's live Rickrolling at the Macy's Day Parade last year, and into advertising, like the Old Spice Guy doing a thirty-second YouTube spot specifically for 4chan users, riddled with obscure references to their inside jokes. He has scads of interviews with tons of internet people, from execs at all the major sites to random /b/tards. He introduced me to a ton of stuff I never knew about, filled in the gaps on things I knew only vaguely, and gave me a

really varied, balanced account of the internet today and how it got like this.

Naturally Stryker is an unabashed fan of 4chan, of /b/, of Anonymous, and of our crazy internet world, and it shows. He loves his subject in all its weird, frightening, and unexplainable glory. Of course he touches on all the racism, homophobia, bullying, and stalking that are made possible by 4chan, and he pokes fun at the "normal" people who are horrified by the morning news' scare tactics used to paint 4chan and Anonymous as a den of sin and iniquity just waiting to prey upon your children. But ultimately he wants us to see how amazing and filled with potential this all is. Here's one of my favorite lines: "The success of 4chan as a meme generator has challenged everything we thought we knew about the way people behave on the web. People are willing to spend shocking amounts of time creating, collaborating, documenting--all with no recognition. The implications are staggering. Give people a place that facilitates creation and sharing, and they will conjure entire civilizations." I love that! It's so true!

Out of 10: 9, unless you are a hacker or a /b/tard, in which case probably don't bother.

Karthik J says

The author must have changed the title in the last minute with the massive publicity Anonymous has generated. Most of the book is about 4chan & meme culture and only a chapter is dedicated to anonymous. He tries to go behind the gore and depravity , which has come to define 4chan and tries to explain that all is not evil. I liked the parts of the book which explains events which happened before a decade- Usenets, BBS ,origins of meme culture, eternal september. something aweful and even ED. I have been following most newsreports on the more recent developments - not much of a value add in those chapters. Definitely a good read for parents of kids who seem to spend a lot of time on 4chan. A light read for someone curious on what the Internets has been upto offlate. In summary - I would much rather prefer to lurk on reddit rather than risk any misadventure in the randomness of 4chan.

Caryn Vainio says

I went into this book expecting an analysis and history of Anonymous the hacker group, but the book focuses more on a history of internet memes and how they arise primarily from 4chan, Anonymous' home. The book is a great walk down memory lane for anyone who's been on the Internet since at least the 90s, reminding you that sites like Stile Project and Fark were places you used to love visiting. It also reminds you of the sharp delineation between the pre-Facebook Internet, where anonymity was the norm, to post-Facebook Internet, where real identities are a near requirement. But the book doesn't offer anything new to those of us in the pre-Facebook crowd.