

Behind the Mask



An Inside Look at Anonymous

By

COMMANDER X



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Behind The Mask



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Written By: Commander X

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Behind The Mask: An Inside Look At Anonymous

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This work is a true story. Some of the names, locations – and circumstances have been altered to protect the anonymity of those involved.

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to my hero; Julian Assange, aka Mendax - The greatest hacker and information activist in history, and creator of the world changing disclosure and transparency platform WikiLeaks.

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INTRODUCTION

Anonymous: The World's Most Secretive Activists

Let me begin this tale by stating for the record: I am Commander X, and I am absolutely a part of the idea known to the world as Anonymous. I am not an outsider looking in, nor am I a former participant. I am not a pundit, journalist or academic expert. I am Anonymous. Everyday, I spend many long hours online working on a slew of current Anonymous Operations. And this isn't a hobby, or a part time endeavor - this has become my sole life's work. And more than even that, Anonymous is my culture, my lifestyle - and the philosophical context for my entire worldview. It is this fact that I believe sets this work apart from the many other books that have cropped up lately on the subject of Anonymous.

The challenges in writing this book were numerous. First and foremost, I produced this work while on the run from the FBI, NSA, CIA, CSIS, RCMP, various police departments in the USA and elsewhere - and at least three death squads from around the world. As I complete this book, I have entered political exile in Canada and I am in hiding. In addition to this rather daunting hurdle, I also found it nearly impossible to lay down the multitude of responsibilities I have in various operations, actions - and projects within Anonymous. I did not have the luxury of taking a "working vacation" from cyber-activism in order to work on my writing.

Finally, there is the challenge of the subject matter. When I began this project many years ago, I was immediately faced with one conundrum; how does one publicly tell the story of a movement that is so secret that its participants will only appear publicly in mask? How do I share the details and inner workings of the many wonderful things Anonymous has done in this world without seriously endangering the people who are a part of this idea called Anonymous? And as I sit here in exile from my own country due to some of those activities, and indeed hunted and stalked by those who would have me dead for the work we have done - it is a weighty question and no small matter. If I screw up, people could be imprisoned, they could be hurt - they might even be killed

This of course begs the question that many Anons asked me during the preparation of this work for publication; why bother? Why write this book at all? The answer is twofold. First, I firmly believe that Anonymous is one of the most powerful forces of our time. Having been a part of Anonymous, I feel very strongly there is an obligation to the historic record of mankind to relate our

story from the inside - to explain to the world and posterity how and why we did the things we did.

But beyond this, there is an obligation to contemporary society. There can be no argument that Anonymous is having an incredible impact on the events unfolding in our world today. As such, we have a responsibility to account for our actions and the great power that fate and political forces have bestowed upon Anonymous. For it would be hypocritical of us to demand, as we have, transparency from the governments and corporations that rule our world - and not offer up transparency ourselves. Now some would say this is an impossible contradiction, anonymity and transparency. But this is not actually a contradiction. One enables the other. By tending to our personal anonymity and making that bullet proof, we enable ourselves to safely open up our actions to the scrutiny of the world and history. It allows us to act as one and be accountable as one, while keeping us all safe from the oppressors.

And so I have entered upon the quixotic and nearly impossible task of relating the tale you now hold in your hands. It is a story of secrecy, shadows - and those who began as simple activists and found themselves at the center of one of the most powerful movements in the history of mankind. Throughout the preparation of this manuscript, I have taken great care to protect those who risked everything for the simple dream that we might live in a better world.

Where necessary, I have altered the names, locations - and circumstances of the story in order to protect those who are not only a part of Anonymous, but in many cases my dearest friends. In order to offer the reader a glimpse into the thoughts, fears, motivations - and hopes of an Anon, I have chosen to tell this story using the first person narrative.

When it comes to my own participation in these events, I have attempted to be as accurate, transparent, open - and honest as is humanly possible. With regard to historical accuracy, I have tried to research as best I can the events I am about to relate. I have discovered great differences in the narrative I have so often given in media interviews, and the actual facts and dates. So hopefully this book will set some of the record straight, and help me give better interviews to journalists in the future as a side benefit.

Ultimately I have done my best. I did not live my life with the recording of it in mind. I kept no diaries, I rarely logged my chats in IRC or other channels. I have my own memory and what ever material was archived on the internet to work with. Any errors or inaccuracies are solely my fault, and the reader has my apology for them.

In the end my goal was not to create a history book of Anonymous itself.

This has already been done, and by those who were involved far longer than I was in the meme. Probably the best example for those looking for a thorough historical review of Anonymous is the documentary movie “We Are Legion: The Story Of The Hactivists” produced by Brian Knappenberger. What I have tried to do, with all the love in my heart, hope in my soul - and intellectual capacity I possess; is to bring the reader on a journey inside the mysterious and wonderful world of Anonymous. Hopefully, I can give you just a small glimpse *Behind The Mask*.

www.CommanderX.info

Commander X - April 2, 2013 - Quebec City, Quebec - Canada



ONE



Cyber Punks

“You only need two things to be a world-class hacker: A computer and a cool pair of sunglasses. And the computer is optional.”

~~ Commander X

Tuesday - March 25, 2008 approx. 2:30 PM EST - Cambridge, Mass. USA

It was one of those cloudy, windy and bone chilling days so common in the Boston area this time of year. Winter can cling tenaciously, and spring can be hard pressed to make a true stand for a good month. As I walked down the dirty sidewalk with filthy lumps of snow in the gutters, through what is commonly known in the area as the "student ghettos" of Cambridge between Harvard University and MIT - I was distracted and tired. Occasionally, as they almost always did - the frost or root heaved broken pavement of sidewalks that seemed

to never get the attention of the City of Cambridge would seem to rise up on their own and trip me from my dazed and exhausted reverie. Fifteen years of walking down this street, and I still could neither navigate the blighted sidewalks, nor could I ever seem to find the house I was looking for. Perhaps it was because they all seemed to look exactly the same. Often, I would not realize I had passed it until I saw the "Now Entering Somerville" town line sign. Then I would curse, turn around - and literally count seven houses back, feeling like a moron.

Today wasn't that bad, thankfully. I came upon the ramshackle century old house, and sighed. Originally all these houses, which could have been shit out from a giant house making machine they looked so much alike - were all single family dwellings. But during the Great Depression, poverty forced nearly all the owners to illegally sub-divide them into multiple apartments. The vast majority were two story dwellings with two units per floor, and often one in the basement as well. The more desperate property owners even adding a tiny barely habitable unit in the attic. While each house at some point in its beknighted history had been painted a different color, they had all since faded to dullness so that on an overcast day like today they all looked grayish yellow. During the summer months the smell of garbage and piss was so strong it could make you gag. The worst part though was the garbage itself. Since each house was so completely sub-divided, and because each unit was crammed full of young students attending either Harvard or MIT - the garbage situation was truly deplorable. Some houses would literally have refuse piled completely around them like a ring around Saturn, awaiting that one day a week when the City of Cambridge *might* come and pick it up - *if* someone remembered to drag all the filthy crap to the edge of the street.

It was in the basement of one of these dubious dwellings that a tiny underground political group known as the Peoples Liberation Front had located its headquarters for the past thirteen years. I pushed open the metal gate at the side of the house and crabbed sideways towards the rear of the property, trying desperately not to touch the mountains of garbage piled along the side of the building. It wasn't that I was all that clean myself, but I feared injury if one of the huge piles were to avalanche down upon me. Popping with audible relief into what can only euphemistically be called the "backyard" of the property (approx. 50 square feet of compacted dirt and dog shit) - I pulled out my key to the door that led to the basement. The stairs were steep, and the bottom had this strange way of seeming to come up at you suddenly. Many a late night, high or drunk - had found me sprawled on the basement floor from a graceless entrance to what

we jokingly called "The Dungeon". Immediately my nostrils were assailed by the strong smell of burning marijuana and brewed coffee.

The basement was divided into three rooms. The first we referred to as the "Living Room", and its furnishings consisted of an ancient and thread bare sofa so filthy it was impossible to tell exactly what color it had originally been, and which was currently serving as the bed of Tobey - a relatively new PLF Member who was crashing in HQ until he could find more suitable living quarters.

A coffee table, piled two feet high with assorted litter, beer cans and bottles - and perched precariously on top a rolling tray with roaches, cigarette butts, rolling papers - and approximately a quarter ounce of what looked like some rather cheap marijuana. One overstuffed and equally filthy armchair, and three relatively new folding chairs completed the accoutrements of what served as the recreational area of HQ.

Debris of every conceivable type littered the floor, now added to by most of Tobey's worldly possessions - such that there was no way to navigate the room without constantly clearing a path in front of you with your foot. But what new visitors immediately noticed, most being unable for many minutes to keep from studying - were the walls and ceiling. Every square inch was plastered with concert posters (mostly Grateful Dead), protest fliers and handbills, comics torn from this or that publication - and hand drawn art, mostly political in nature. Most new comers never even saw the rest of the room at first, being completely captivated by this insane collage which in a strange way documented the history of the PLF in a way that no book or movie ever could.

I tossed my grubby day pack and laptop case onto the sofa, after searching in vain for a place to set it on the floor - and lit a smoke. It was then that it hit me, something was wrong. Instead of the usual blaring live Grateful Dead show screaming on the stereo in the corner, there was silence. And in place of the usual cacophony of shouted voices competing to be heard over the music, there was only hushed tones emanating from the next room. There was definitely something seriously amiss. I took another long drag off my cigarette, and steeled myself - and walked into the work room which we called "The Lab".

Tobey and Allison were seated at computer stations, of which there were four total on benches along two of the walls. This room was in considerably different condition than the "Living Room" as Commander Adama, the Supreme Commander of the PLF - demanded that it be kept clean and orderly. Along a third wall was a bench containing two photocopiers, a printer, telephone and fax and various accoutrements for underground publishing such as staplers, hole punchers, scissors etc. Standing in the center of the room behind Tobey and

Allison was Adama himself - his back to me as I entered.

Adama was an impressive man by all standards. At six foot six inches his head practically touched the ceiling of the basement. Two hundred and eighty pounds of very solid muscle filled his trademark denim jeans, turtle neck and leather flight jacket. A neatly trimmed full head of steel gray hair completed this imposing man. By any standards he was a good looking man, although other than a few whores he and I shared on a mission in the Caribbean - I never knew him to have a woman in his life. He was a charismatic person the likes of which they write epic tales about.

A born leader, who was never wrong. You wanted Adama to tell you what to do. "Tobey, I thought I gave you an order to clean up that pig sty in there" I said as I entered the room, hesitant as I could feel the tension in the air. "Sorry X, I'll get to it later" Tobey muttered without turning from his computer screen. "That's *Commander X*, Tobey, and you will do it now - that's an order" I snapped. Adama turned to me and half smiled. He had been getting on me lately to be more assertive with the crew, who had been slipping in discipline recently. Tobey especially had been an issue. Young, talented and cocky - he more than earned his place in the Peoples Liberation Front.

But he had never quite grasped that while we are Anarchists, we were also a militia. He would eventually be jailed in Italy for drugs, and be cast out from the PLF in disgrace - but not before making many heroic and incredible contributions to our group. His back stiffened in his chair, and then he rose and tried to exit the room without looking at or acknowledging me. I gently but firmly reached out my hand to stay him. "The appropriate response is 'Yes Sir' Tobey, and I thought you said you would have a place to live last week" I said firmly. Still refusing to look me in the eye, he looked over his shoulder to where Commander Adama had stood - but Adama had taken a seat at the computer Tobey had just abandoned and was typing away on the keyboard. Finally he turned to me "Yes Sir. I will be out this weekend *Commander X*" he said with a smirk and walked past me into the next room.

I let out a deep sigh. Sometimes this job sucked, and guys like Tobey did not make it any easier. I lit another smoke and walked up to the space in between where Allison and Adama were seated at computers. Kicking a milk crate out from under the work bench, I sat down between them. I leaned into Allison, she always smelled so good - and said in a low voice: "You shouldn't be coming here anymore it's too dangerous".

Commander Allison had recently taken a job with the US State Department in hopes that the PLF could infiltrate that branch of the US government. It was

an extremely dangerous idea that she and Adama had cooked up after she graduated with a degree in political science. Upon entering their employ, she was forced to sign a document stating that she agreed to be spied upon by US authorities for the rest of her life. She leaned over and kissed my ear "I know" she whispered.

I sat up straight, blew out a long trail of smoke and said "so my comrades, what exactly the flaming fuck is going on?". Both of my friends sat up straight on either side of me and regarded me with smiles that at once exuded warmth and conveyed consternation. "This is what's up X" Allison said and tapped her keyboard once bringing up a web site. The same site was already up on Adama's screen as well. I regarded them both with a slightly puzzled look, and then leaned in to examine the site as it appeared on Adama's slightly larger monitor.

As I could see from the browser's address bar, it was the Epilepsy Foundation of America home page. But something was wrong with the page. On it was a large animated gif that strobed in a hypnotic and almost psychically disturbing fashion. I recognized this image at once from a computer article I had read somewhere. Studies had shown that this image, and others like it - had the capacity to actually induce seizures and even coma in certain individuals who were susceptible, especially epileptics. The page had been "hacked", defaced as we term it in the business. "Who in the fuck would do something like this?" I asked breathlessly, almost stunned to speechlessness by the utter depravity of the act. Allison smiled and turned back to her computer and started typing. I turned to Adama as he leaned back his head and let out a chuckle. He looked down at me sitting on my crate "Ever hear of a group called 'Anonymous?'".

"Anonymous?" I said as I wracked my brains trying to tease out a vague recollection from recent media reports. Allison tapped my shoulder and pointed to her screen. On her monitor was a recent online news report detailing the ongoing protests against the Church of Scientology. "You mean the crazies with the Guy Fawkes masks? You have got to be kidding me, right? This is some kind of joke?" I asked in dismay. In my mind at that time Anonymous was a crazy ass science fiction based cult who had gone to war with another crazy science fiction cult, like a looney toon cartoon where two complete idiots proceed to pummel each other into smithereens.

But while I knew plenty about Scientology, I knew next to nothing about their mask wearing nemesis - Anonymous. "They are not a cult, nor are they

crazy" Adama said as he leaned back and lit a cigarette. "They are a techno-hacker group, just like us" he explained as he exhaled a stream of smoke towards the ceiling. "Bullshit. Not like us, we would NEVER do something like this. These fuckers are pure evil if they did that." as I pointed at the site still up on Adama's screen. "Perhaps" Adama said laconically. "Of one thing I am certain. They are powerful, and getting more so by the day. I want to know everything there is to know about them. And I want you and Allison on the inside. You two are going to become members of Anonymous" he turned to me and took a drag from his cigarette. I turned to Allison hoping for some support, but she was smiling this big shit eating grin and even giggling. "Ah shit, this is really going to suck" I said as I reached for Adama's pack of cigarettes.

Tuesday - April 14, 2009 approx. 8:00 PM - Cambridge, Mass. USA

Now I knew I was starting to get old, as I walked into the work room of HQ the new guy whose name I couldn't even remember turned to me from his computer.

"Commander X, sir - Commander Adama would like to see you in his office *sir!*" the kid said with just a little too much enthusiasm. Dressed in full camo khakis, and with all the proper PLF insignia sewn on his shoulder and breast (the only person I have ever known to wear the full and official PLF uniform on a daily basis), this young man's enthusiasm was just a wee disturbing. "Right" I muttered. "Uhhh, at ease" I said, at a loss for how to deal with the full martial treatment. Shaking my head and wondering how we could get some of this kid bottled up and feed it to Tobey, I gently knocked on Adama's office door and entered without waiting for a reply.

Adama's office was the third room of our basement HQ. Whereas the "Living Room" was usually trashed, and the "Lab" in a state of clean yet creative disarray - Adama's office, like Commander Adama himself - was always immaculate. The only sign of anything amiss was piles of books, folders, magazines and papers piled high on the four corners of a large steel work desk. As I entered, Adama was sitting at his desk, head in both hands and rubbing his temples methodically. He didn't look up as I sat in the chair across from him. "You okay old man? You don't look so good" I asked gently. He slowly raised his head and looked directly at me, blankly at first. I stared back, studying him. Deep lines were beginning to crease his face, and there were disturbingly large bags under his eyes. I had known Adama for over a quarter of a century. We met

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