



# Breaking and Entering: The Extraordinary Story of a Hacker Called "Alien"

*Jeremy N. Smith*

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**Breaking and Entering: The Extraordinary Story of a Hacker Called "Alien" Jeremy N. Smith**

**This taut, true thriller dives into a dark world that touches us all, as seen through the brilliant, breakneck career of an extraordinary hacker—a woman known only as Alien.**

When she arrived at MIT in the 1990s, Alien was quickly drawn to the school's tradition of high-risk physical trespassing: the original "hacking." Within a year, one of her hallmates was dead and two others were arraigned. Alien's adventures were only just beginning.

After a stint at the storied, secretive Los Alamos National Laboratory, Alien was recruited by a top cybersecurity firm where she deployed her cache of virtual weapons—and the trespassing and social engineering talents she had developed while "hacking" at MIT. The company tested its clients' security by every means possible—not just coding, but donning disguises and sneaking past guards and secretaries into the C-suite.

Alien now runs a boutique hacking outfit that caters to some of the world's biggest and most vulnerable institutions—banks, retailers, government agencies. Her work combines devilish charm, old-school deception, and next generation spycraft. In *Breaking and Entering*, cybersecurity finally gets the rich, character-driven, fast-paced treatment it deserves.

## **Breaking and Entering: The Extraordinary Story of a Hacker Called "Alien" Details**

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Author : Jeremy N. Smith

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# From Reader Review Breaking and Entering: The Extraordinary Story of a Hacker Called "Alien" for online ebook

## **Mrs. Europaea says**

Substance was lacking.

It read very much like fiction which was unpleasant. Nothing felt cohesive or authentic. I don't deny that this can be true, even as absurd as some of it seems, but Smith's writing left much to be desired.

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## **Danielle Tremblay says**

In the "Age of Big Data" when everybody and their brother (Big Brother?) track our every move, it's easy to become obsessed with data security: personal, industrial and Governmental. And are the Anonymous and other secret groups of hackers what really threaten most our data? And in this era of counterterrorism, should we let our government expand the surveillance powers of intelligence agencies over individuals and groups?

This book tells simultaneously two stories: the **hacktivism** of the last 20 years and the personal history of Alien, a female hacker who began her « career » when she was just a teenager. But these two stories interweave since we discover the Big Data world through Alien's eyes.

Even if you're not a geek, don't worry, you'll understand everything. It can be disturbing for some of us to discover everything that some computer geniuses are capable of though. And if you're a young computer geek, you'll get an overview of what you are getting into.

Mr Smith seems to be very good at writing on sensitive and fashionable topics such as health, environment, local agriculture, urban gardening, etc.

Fans of non-fiction stories that read like novels, here is your next to-read book. If you liked Mr Robot, you'll love this story. If you like spy or conspiracy stories, you should like it a lot too.

So I give it *4½ stars*. The removed half star was because I found some sections a bit... tedious. The story drags a little. But maybe it was because they were about things I already knew.

Thanks to the author, the publisher and Netgalley for providing me a digital copy of this book before publication.

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## **Erica says**

I have mixed feelings about this one. On the one hand, the characters are well-developed and some of the scenes felt very real like this book could be turned book to movie. That being said, I am still not sure if this is an actual true story and these things really happened or not. I tried a Google search and couldn't verify anything so that was confusing but if it isn't a true story then the plot is kind of lacking. I kept wondering, what's the end game here? And true or not, this book was pretty scary at times when learning all of the things

hackers can do. I'd say if you're interested in technology and stories involving hacking, then this is up your alley.

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### **Marika says**

A true non-fiction that reads like fiction. The story of a young who entered MIT in the 1990s and was intrigued Alien by the school's tradition of high-risk physical trespassing: the original "hacking." Lots of adventure, legal and illegal which is to be expected with college kids. It's when someone dies that reality sets in. \*Alien\* learned a lot about hacking and security systems at MIT and spent time assessing their security. She did it all, coding, disguising herself to sneak past guards...just to test the company's security. Great thriller for those who love cyber security

I read an advance copy and was not compensated.

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### **Chris says**

Hard to really distinguish if this is actually nonfiction. It read like fiction but is so lacking in substance and follow through that I found my way more than 75% of the way through, wondering where this story was going? I often thought "am I just reading through someone's perfectly normal career progression through a fringe career?" Lots of people find something they are interested in while attending college and stumble their way through life trying to make that interest a fruitful career. The only thing intriguing is the career subject matter in this book.

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### **Hewett Ashbridge says**

#### **How insecure are you?**

Very thought provoking and makes one wonder if security is even attainable in a techno world. I admire "Alien" for her tenacity and ethics. It is an excellent read, if like me, you know little to nothing about the subject. (I am not including reading or listening to the news.).

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### **Brian says**

Breaking and Entering tells the story of a hacker known by her call sign from MIT Alien. This book follows Alien as she finds her place amongst MIT and the hacking community there (note at the time she was at MIT hacking was not limited to a computer) and eventually after several tragedies befall her hacking friends finds her place in IT and at Los Alamos. Through a series of events she finds herself working in a hacking field which includes both computer hacking and physical penetration. Her specialty will become the soft psychological hacks which take computer skills and a working knowledge of psychology. The male dominance of the tech industry (particularly in the hacking world) is on full display here. Smith makes this an engaging and interesting read as you can't wait to find out what is going to happen next. I found myself enjoying the book despite the numerous law breaking occurring throughout it and found Alien to be a very

sympathetic character in the end. Not sure I can even classify who this book would be a good read for but as someone in the tech industry I found it quirky, fun and entertaining.

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## **K De says**

"Breaking and Entering" by Jeremy Smith is a strong companion book to "Ghosts in the Wires" about the digital realm of white hats and black hats. The first part of the book is about the culture of "hacking" at MIT and how it is part of the intellectual ferment of students there. (The great film about "hacking" is "Real Genius" about the student culture of Pacific Tech nee CalTech.) The rest of the book is about cyber sleuthing by "Alien" who graduates from MIT and is intimately involved in becoming a "white hat". What is interesting is that digital penetration of corporations is for at least fifty percent is on the human side of the equation. Humans are prone to simple traps which allows for the black hats into secure systems. This has been shown over and over again. Kevin Mitnick said the same thing in "Ghosts in the Wires". Even Nobel prize winner Richard Feynman's memoir "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman" has a long story about safe cracking during the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos facility in which many of the top administrators and scientists would or could not take the time to change the code to their safe from the original factory setting. Highly recommended reading.

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## **Scribe Publications says**

*A novelistic tech tale that puts readers on the front lines of cybersecurity. For all whose lives and connections depend on the internet — nearly everyone — this biography of the 'Alien' provides a fast-paced cautionary tale. Jeremy Smith has enough experience as a computer programmer to understand the technicalities of this world, but his storytelling makes it intelligible to general readers; indeed, the narrative is more character-driven than technology-driven ... Smith goes into great detail to demonstrate how Alien could penetrate the security of whomever was employing her, showing how a real criminal would do it, and makes fearfully clear that there is 'no such thing as absolute security in this world, or any definitive and final fixes.' A page-turning real-life thriller, this is the sort of book that may leave readers feeling both invigorated and vulnerable.*

### **Kirkus Reviews**

*Scintillating ... Alien's mindset and exploits epitomise the spirit of hacking — a dogged perseverance directed at outsmarting and outwitting barriers of any kind ... An unabashedly human and humane portrait of a brilliant hacker.*

**Gabriella Coleman, Author of *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy***

*In Breaking and Entering, Jeremy Smith reveals the human side of cybersecurity. The book covers the vast spectrum of why and how hackers do what they do. A great thriller!*

**Paul de Souza, Founder, Director, and President of the Cyber Security Forum Initiative**

*Hunter S. Thompson famously said 'Only life can kill you' and the hackers who pushed their minds and bodies to the limit at MIT tested this theory in every conceivable way. Alien survived and managed to escape, but life was no easy road from that point on. This story of all that she has overcome and accomplished holds a mirror to the challenges and triumphs that are part of the journeys of so many women in tech and so many hackers in America.*

Deviant Ollam, Author of *Practical Lock Picking and Keys to the Kingdom*

*A joy. With wit and masterful storytelling, Jeremy Smith takes the reader inside information security. Alien encounters sex and drugs, bureaucracy and exploitative bosses, and the stresses of running a business and family — and she never stops hacking.*

**Skylar Rampersaud, Senior Security Researcher at Immunity Inc.**

*Every hacker has his or her story. This book weaves a riveting tale of one woman's journey from the catacombs of MIT's hacking culture to becoming the CEO of a computer security consulting company. There are plenty of technical computer security books, but I am often asked about how to get started in hacking. This book tells the human side of that story.*

**James Butler, Chief Technology Officer at Endgame Inc.**

*A thoroughly entertaining read! Breaking and Entering recount the journey of one skilled hacker, Alien, as she navigates her way from the bowels of MIT's hidden corridors to the top of the infosec community. In the best tradition of the movie *Sneakers*, Jeremy Smith illuminates the pivotal role played by white hat hackers in protecting our most important assets.*

**Eli Sugarman, Cyber Initiative Program Officer, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation**

*Breaking and Entering is an awesome, beautiful, and sometimes nerve-wracking story. It is also the story of someone unafraid to delve into the boundaries of what is possible and to act courageously in the face of what she learned. The technical references are relevant, accurate, and most importantly, accessible, including for non-technical readers. And Alien's career and life story are things anyone trying to chart their course in life can relate to.*

**Soren Spies, Former President of Technology House at Brown University**

*Smith ... serves a fascinating and entertaining account ... Vignettes careen from gripping to funny and show the critical need for regular testing, as security breaching in elections and corporate and personal identity theft are growing industries ... Like an espionage thriller, this account ensnares readers into the high-stakes world of computer security, told through Alien's emergence as a recognized expert in a male-dominated profession. It will reach audiences of enthusiastic hackers and general readers.*

**Karl Helicher, Library Journal**

*[A] book that reads like a fictional thriller while remaining solidly grounded in fact ... Smith's book is remarkably easy to read. Although hacking can involve very complex programming tactics and systems architecture issues that lay readers would struggle to understand, the author keeps the technical side of the story manageable and easy to follow ... Breaking and Entering is an engaging cautionary tale of security vulnerabilities and the constant threat of cyber attacks that businesses and institutions face on a daily basis.*

**Michael J. McCann, New York Journal of Books**

*When the woman now known as Alien turned up at MIT more than 20 years ago, she took a while to figure out that what interested her was hacking. First, in the term's original meaning, came physical trespassing, but eventually she settled on computer hacking and wound up working for a company that specialized in testing business security systems. Later, she founded her own cybersecurity firm. This riveting book follows Alien as she transforms herself from a young woman up for pretty much any challenge, no matter how dangerous, to a woman who is among the best in the world at what she does. Freelance journalist Smith writes with gusto, giving Alien's story the feel of a novel (or, perhaps, a movie along the lines of 1995's *Hackers*). The world of hacking and cybersecurity still carries a mystique; only the privileged few are*

*permitted to learn the secrets that lie within the close-knit hacker community. This book opens the gates and invites readers inside. It's not only a powerful story about a specific hacker; it's also a fascinating look at the hacking world, in general.*

**David Pitt, Booklist**

*Smith's writing style...is crisp as he charts the course of Alien's life in a series of vignettes from uncertain undergraduate to successful business owner. The structure works because Smith is a lively storyteller.*

**The New York Times Book Review**

*Amusing and cautionary tale.*

**WORLD Magazine**

*A fascinating look at hacking and the cybersecurity industry that has evolved. Alien is one bad-ass woman!*

**The Missoulian**

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**Robert m says**

This was an entertaining read. There were times where the timeline or the specific subjects felt slightly off, as if the story represents more than one person.

Overall it was a fun read, and the type of book I'd recommend to the average computer user to show them how trivial it could be to fall for an email scam, or computer theft.

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**Tony Mistretta says**

Interesting story about a young woman who has an affinity for breaking barriers. Eye-opening accounts of how easy it is and how vulnerable organizations and critical systems are to being broken into.

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**Kimberly Simon says**

The book is told in a narrative second person perspective. The timeline is college through the main character, Alien (Elizabeth) thirties. It is a path of her discovering her skills and how to use them which isn't as simple as train and square and fit through square hole. what she is skilled at turns out to be one of societies greatest threats - cybertechnology and hacking. It begins with Elizabeth receiving entry into MIT.

MIT a place for thinking by doing. I loved how the story showed the freedom of exploration into discovering highest potential, interest, individuality and how to work with others as well. If general education functioned like this school, we'd discover the genious in every person. Playground for the mind. As an ex art teacher of 18 years I've often struggled with an explanation to others of what I see education SHOULD look like. Yes there are classrooms and teachers, but there is also a whole world of learning encouraged outside the classroom by creating a mind playground as campus. THAT'S how you keep campuses meaningful in a digital age and that is what general education for the masses needs...which of course requires more money and the same type of education for teachers so that they can understand what their role is.

She also had unique skills...she was creative, physically adventurous, quick thinking on the spot, a good actor...her experiences in theater, learning how to ride a motorcycle, learning to bartend were important skills that helped with social engineering, putting on a con so as to show weaknesses in a business that a hacker could take advantage of....She physically walked into buildings and stole computers and online created whole phishing scams...

Her knowledge had to be maintained by working and teaming with youth and attending conferences and always learning new systems. You are never to boring or insignificant to be hacked she says. And the newest trends are internet that aren't in laptops but in kitchen appliances, home security systems, around our wrists for fit bits...Whether you are online or standing in line some where you can be hacked. Our technology has quickly outpaced what we can secure for because we could hardly keep up with the companies, now we have whole countries attacking through social media and our democracy is at risk.

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This was a relevant book that shows society today, how one can fit into it as both a white hat or a black hat and risks for the future.

### **Ariel Cummins says**

Straightforward, but still interesting, memoir about working in the cyber security field and what it means to be a hacker. I think labeling this as a “thriller” is really a mistake, marketing wise - there’s no overarching plot, so to speak. This is a story about what it’s like to find your way in life and how the world isn’t always easy for women or people who think differently.

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### **Claire says**

This is one of those books that are unlike any else and that's what makes it an interesting read. I can't talk about the accuracy of the facts (except for a few of them), but the challenges and discrimination touched upon are very much real and very much true. There's no actual plot, so I'd rec this to readers who are interested in CS and enjoy non-fiction that reads like fiction.

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*\*Thank you to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Edelweiss for providing an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.\**

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