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The Snowden Files: The Inside Story Of The World's Most Wanted Man



Synopsis

It began with a tantalizing, anonymous email: "I am a senior member of the intelligence community." What followed was the most spectacular intelligence breach ever, brought about by one extraordinary man. Edward Snowden was a 29-year-old computer genius working for the National Security Agency when he shocked the world by exposing the near-universal mass surveillance programs of the United States government. His whistleblowing has shaken the leaders of nations worldwide, and generated a passionate public debate on the dangers of global monitoring and the threat to individual privacy. In a tour de force of investigative journalism that reads like a spy novel, award-winning Guardian reporter Luke Harding tells Snowden's astonishing story - from the day he left his glamorous girlfriend in Honolulu carrying a hard drive full of secrets, to the weeks of his secret-spilling in Hong Kong, to his battle for asylum and his exile in Moscow. For the first time, Harding brings together the many sources and strands of the story - touching on everything from concerns about domestic spying to the complicity of the tech sector - while also placing us in the room with Edward Snowden himself. The result is a gripping insider narrative - and a necessary and timely account of what is at stake for all of us in the new digital age.

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Customer Reviews

The NSA walks into a bar and says, "Give me all your drinks. I need to figure out which one to order." That joke came out of the new book, *THE SNOWDEN FILES: THE INSIDE STORY OF THE WORLD'S MOST WANTED MAN* by British journalist Luke Harding. It is one of a great many

thought-provoking passages in this timely and well-written book, in addition to being probably the funniest. Probably everything you've heard about Edward Snowden factually is true, but there is more besides that, and this book puts together the saga in a common-sense way that tells us just about everything there is to know, at least as of now. It is true that Snowden bootstrapped a career based on a mere GED and love of computers through several different agencies, and was living in Hawaii with his girlfriend at the time of his disappearance, bearing with him an astonishing amount of top-secret NSA files. (It is also true that he was enroute to earning close to \$200,000 a year had he gone on doing what his colleagues did, which was shut up and ignore the huge credibility gap between what the NSA told Congress it was doing, and what it was actually doing.) It is true that Snowden holed up in a hotel room in the Kowloon borough of Hong Kong and started disseminating the information among two Americans, a political activist and a documentary filmmaker, who had taken up residence in Brazil for security reasons. It is true Snowden got out of Hong Kong in the nick of time, headed for Russia, and that if the NSA had been as clever with interdiction as it was with "hoovering" up vast realms of telecommunications data, he'd likely have been captured. On the matter of opinion, as opposed to fact, author Luke Harding comes closer to endorsing Snowden as a risk-taking patriot and whistleblower, as opposed to a malcontent and turncoat as certain Establishment figures prefer to portray him. It is certainly the case that at the same time our President, who is not nicknamed "No Drama" for nothing, was trying to downplay the import of Snowden's document theft and sojourn in Russia, the head of our government's security, James Clapper, was fulminating that the young man had done inestimable harm to the nation's intelligence and thus its security. (This is the same James Clapper, who, after having been caught in a lie about how federal agencies would not have "wittingly" done what they did, tried to polish the deceit by saying he had handled it in the "least untruthful" manner possible.) The British newspaper THE GUARDIAN (years ago the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN) is a leading British periodical, which generally leans liberal but with an independent twist. American readers will recall that it took the combined powers of our NEW YORK TIMES and their GUARDIAN to access Snowden's treasure trove without government interdiction or censorship. We should also know that while THE SNOWDEN FILES is a vital book, it is a book by an English journalist and some of its contents will concern English security-gathering, which for decades has been working hand-in-glove with the NSA. It is written in the colloquial English of the modern U.K., which means even a mid-level Anglophile such as myself was sent to the urbandictionary dot com a time or two to unpack phrases like "not worth the candle" (not worth the time and trouble) or "frowsty" (grungy). But it is well-written, and even at over 300 pages a fairly fast read. It is not the "quickie" publication that usually follows in

the wake of a pivotal news story or breaking scandal (surely this is both?); that award would go to the two perfunctory e-books already published about the subject. There is a hardcover, and possibly more insightful, book on the way from Glenn Greenwald, the American journalist living in Brazil, but will not have that in its inventory for another two months. Meanwhile, read, enjoy, and be both enlightened and depressed by THE SNOWDEN FILES. If anything comes close to being a must-read for American citizens this year, not just civil libertarians, this must be it.

Just finished reading this superbly written account by the Guardian journalist, Luke Harding, who really knows how to master a large collection of facts and opinion and transmit them in a way that's a delight to read. As I'd followed this story from the start in the Guardian, the story was familiar to me, but the book still filled in very many details that I hadn't known. One of the things that really stood out for me occurs during a discussion of Snowden's slowly developing decision to go public: "Snowden said he hadn't voted for Obama in 2008 but had 'believed' in his promises ... He had intended to 'disclose' what he had found out, but decided to wait and see following Obama's election. What did happen, he said, was profoundly disillusioning: 'He continued with the policies of his predecessor'." (P 108) So there you have it. Remember all that "Change you can believe in", all that "audacity of hope", the "Yes we can"? It's tempting to ask will anyone ever again get taken in by that kind of fraudulent rhetoric, but of course they will as time goes on, as people forget, as new generations come along. Had post-election Obama done as pre-election Obama promised, we'd never have had to hear the name Edward Snowden, at least not in this connection. Harding reminds us of a few Obama promises: "No more illegal wiretapping of American citizens. No more National Security Letters to spy on American Citizens who are not suspected of a crime. No more tracking citizens who do no more than protest a misguided war. No more ignoring the law when it is inconvenient." (P 98) (Before I forget to mention it, there's a really detailed index, 12 pages, very useful indeed. I just used it to look up those quotes.) There's a sprinkling of witty vignettes and anecdotes too: "On Friday 19 July two men from GCHQ paid a visit to the Guardian ... [One of them said], 'You have got plastic cups on your table. Plastic cups can be turned into microphones. The Russians can send a laser beam through your window and turn them into a listening device'. The Guardian nicknamed the pair the hobbits. Two days later the hobbits came back ... [carrying] a large and mysterious rucksack ..." And not many will be surprised to find a Guardian writer recording a few insightful, witty and rather delicious observations on Mr Julian Assange. Harding also gives us an illuminating analysis as to why there has been, at least until recently, no real debate in the UK about the Snowden revelations, at least nothing to compare with the vigorous debates taking place

elsewhere throughout the world. (Pp 310-12) Convincingly he explores "one immediate explanation" and "further, cultural reasons". This is a wholly admirable and timely book which I unreservedly recommend to anyone whether they've followed the story from the start or are new to it.

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