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= The Science of Picking Locks =
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The advantages of picking or other skilled methods of entry are many: less noise and hence less chance of discovery, no tell-tale signs that a violation has even occurred, fewer tools are necessary than with most break and enter methods, and lastly, but not leastly, it has more class...

With any of the picking methods presented here it is necessary to practice, practice, practice. Any picking takes some time and lots of skill. Like most other things in life, it is seldom accomplished as easily as presented on television.

A good method for effective practice is to obtain a lock that lends itself to dismantling and remove all but two pins (one long and one short). Follow techniques given until you have mastered the two pin lock and then try three pins, then four, etc. Once you have this down pat, replace the two pins with mushroom pins and start over...

Before picking any lock, squirt a bit of graphite into the locks innards to help free it from the binding effects of dirt and other contamination.

An overview of the pin tumbler lock:

The pin tumbler lock is the most widely used lock. It offers medium to high security and is found in doors, cars, and a host of other applications.

The principle of the pin tumbler is a series of tumblers resembling small pins (usually 5) held in place by other pins resting on top of them, called drivers,which are in turn, held in place by springs.

The tumblers, drivers, and springs are mounted in the shell of the lock and the tumblers extend down in to the core of the lock. When the proper key is inserted the tumblers are raised to this shear line, or division between them and the driver pins. This shear line is located at the top of the core. When this transpires, the core may be turned freely with the key.

If a key is cut too low, the driver pins will extend down into the core; too high and the tumblers will extend up into the shell of the lock. In either case, the core is help stationary and the lock stays locked. Pin tumblers require a high degree of tolerace in lock and key making. About .002 of an inch is required for correct functioning.

Picks:

The most common way to obtain lock "tools" is to have a friendly locksmith order them for you. As much as I hate to say it, many people "become" locksmiths themselves and order the goodies on a letterhead. Some suppliers DO check to see if they are legit, some do not.

If you choose to skip all this worry and make your own pick set simply follow these easy to remember rules:

Get some clock spring, or even shim stock from an auto supply house. You want the thin type, sold in strips, not the sheets.

A good range of pick thicknesses is from .025-.035"; too thin will slip the pins out of alignment, and too think will bind in the keyway. The most useful pick is probably the curved variety, although straight picks have their uses...

Cut the metal on a grinding wheel, dipping it in water quite often. Take care not to burn the metal. For the curved variety you want a slight upward curve in the end of the pick. Do not make a gradual upswing, rather a slight, sudden upward curve directly at the end of the tool.

The other important tool is the tension tool. This is in every way as important as the pick(s) and must fit the job or it too will bind.

Tension bars can be constructed from the same clock/spring steel. Bend the tool into the classic "L" shape near the end. Also make several sizes and thick-nesses of tension tools.

Picking:

(about time, eh?)
Picking locks requires two intrinsic items: A pick and a tension tool. The pick is a thin tool cut from spring steel which ends in a slight upward curve, or a number of other tip shapes ranging from diamonds to balls and squares. The pick is used to raise each pin to its shear line. The most popular pick is probably the curved pick, although you should have a variety of alternatives on hand. There are many sets on the market containing anywhere from 5 to 200 picks and tension tools in some sort of carrying case.

The tension tool is an "L" shaped (usually double ended) piece of spring steel. The tension tool is inserted into the core of the lock and turned slightly in the direction that the lock opens. This tension is maintained throughout the picking operation (a small lead weight attached the the handle of the tool may do this job for you and free a hand to hold a flashlight, etc). As the pins are raised to their shear line the tension you are exerting will prevent them from falling back down into the core.

Locks that use regular, smooth pins are the easiest to pick, and are the best

to learn with. Modern Yale, Corbin, etc., are usually equipped with special pins to make picking a more exacting operation. It is quite essential that one learn to pick on a smooth pinned lock before attempting the challenge of an anti-pick lock. So...try and choose a cheaper, older lock to begin with. (Kwikset locks are quite easy.)

Place the end of your tension tool into the keyway in such a fashion that it does not block your access to the pins. Most locks will take the tension tool at the bottom of the keyway best; however it makes little difference to the lock, or for that matter, to me, where you place the tool.

Exert a medium tension on the tool on the direction you suspect the lock turns.

Take your curved pick and insert it into the lock directly under the first pin. Now, while maintaining the tension, push the pin up into the lock.

While still maintaining the tension, remove the pick. If the pin is picked the top (or driver) pin will remain up in the lock itself, freeing the shear line. The bottom pin may fall back down into the core, but if done correctly, the top pin will wedge against the edge of the core (because you are turning it slightly with the tension tool) and remain up.

Now move on to the second pin and while maintaining tension (so the first pin will remain caught) carefully move the second pin up into the lock; of course, you are being careful not to dislodge the first pin by a clumsy motion. You are being careful, aren't you?

Good.

Now about this time you may discover that some of the pins slide right back down without binding as you've come to expect from my clever instructions. You must realize that some of the pins will be thicker than others (either on purpose or due to uneven wear factors). This means that the thin(ner) pins will slide back into the core while the thicker pins remain picked.

To overcome this little problem one simply picks all the thick pins first and then goes back and attepts the thin ones. As each each pin is picked, the core turns a bit more and as it turns the thinner pins will bind against the edge. Soooo....go through the lock, picking all that will, and then go back and work the more difficult buggers.

It really makes no difference if you pick from front to back or skip around, choose the method that best matches your personality. An agent should be at harmony with himself at all times.

As you push a pin up into the lock and it falls down, you must decide if gravity is the cause or if the pin is being pushed by the spring. If the latter is the case, it is, of course, not picked.

Fat pins will be harder to push up, but they will stay picked. Thin pins go up easily and come back down easily. One may have to pick thin pins several times before success shines its bleary eye on you.

Raking:

Once you have mastered the art of picking you are ready for bigger and better things. This next method is especially nice if you're in a hurry, or say, you've picked up this little fox in the local singles bar and you've brought her along on this big secret mission to impress her.

Now she has this low-cut thing on and you're a bit nervous, right? Maybe you don't trust your hands too well, so you decide to try the rake.

Rake, I said rake. Get your mind out of the gutter.

Insert the tension tool.Now select your pick (I prefer the rake pick, but the circle, or even curved, will suffice) and push it into the lock as far as possible (so it is resting under ALL the pins at one time.)

Now bring the pick up until you feel it start to push up the pins, and then draw it towards you rapidly, watching to see that it comes in contact with every pin on the way out.

Always keep your tension on the core, and repeat this maneuver several times in quick succesion. You may have to adjust the height of the pick as well as the turning tension as you work. Start with a medium pressure on the tension tool, then try light, then hard.

If the lock fails to open, then remove and try again.
In raking you are still performing the same function as in individual picking- i.e. you are raising the pins to the shear line. Of course, you are doing it faster than you could with each separate pin.
As you rake the tight pins will pick first and then the loose pins as the core turns ever so little, just as in single picking. With any luck you should be able to open the lock in 5 or 6 rakes.

This method will open many locks in a matter of seconds.

Stay tuned for more fun spy files from Eric The Red.