PopSec: Andor

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Contents

E01: Kassa 4
- Cassian & The Guards 4
- The Guards Themselves 5
- Friends, Trusted and Less So 6

E02: That Would Be Me 6
- Finding the Leak 6
- Covering Your Tracks 8
- Patriarchal Jealousy 8
- Others' Secrets 9

E03: Reckoning 9
- Arrogance 9
- Risk Management 10
- Electronic Footprints 10

E04: Aldhani 11
- Aliases 11
- Personally Identifying Information 11
- Vouching 11
- Repression 12

E05: The Axe Forgets 12
- Trust, but Verify 12
- Reliance 13
- What Isn't There 14
- Unadmitted Fear 14

E06: The Eye 15
- Being Inconspicuous 15
- Projection 15

E07: Announcement 15
- Accepting Risk 15
- Leave No Trace 16
- Playing It Cool 16

E08: Narkina 5 17
- Finding Cracks 17
- New Circles 17
- The Dangers of Sympathy 18
- When It's Too Personal 18
- Counter-Intel 20
- Uneasy Alliances 20

E09: Nobody's Listening 20
(Meta-)Data is Forever 20
Due Suspicion 21
Risk is Relative 21
E10: One Way Out 22
Doing the Expected 22
Dangerous Allies 23
E11: Daughters of Ferrix 23
Sticking to Protocol 23
When Someone Tells You Who They Are, Listen 24
E12: Rix Road 24
False Evidence 24
Security Culture and Spontaneous Rebellion 25
Postscript 26

Warning! This text contains significant spoilers for the *Star Wars* series *Andor*. However, each section only references events up until that episode, so it's safe to read one section at a time as you watch the series.

Operational security is the practices taken by an individual or group to reduce the amount of useful intelligence that can be gleaned by an adversary. It may be to hide their movements, their intents, their goals, or their identities. Anarchists, activists, and others involved with liberatory movements are aware that there are those with power who want to prevent a liberated world from being brought into existence. To these ends, operational security (OpSec for short) is employed to allow them to achieve their goals while minimizing disruption. In common usage, it more often means "how to do shit without getting caught" than its original definition that was narrowly focused on the concept of military intelligence and operations.

Discussions of OpSec may be strictly theoretical, discussing idealized and constructed scenarios, though these often lack sufficient depth to be deeply instructive. When discussions are based on reality and they analyze a subject and their adversaries, it's done with imperfect knowledge and one has to resort to guesswork. A third method is to analyze stories in popular culture through the lens of OpSec in the aptly named process of PopSec.

PopSec is a little more lighthearted than other forms of analysis, and it has the benefit of using well-established worlds with characters known to the reader. There's no inventing of the subjects Alice and Bob and some abstract adversary Eve. We're working with characters who have motivations and personalities we understand in a world with equally established organizations and movements.

I've been a fan of *Star Wars* since I was a wee lad with its themes of DIY do-gooders taking on space fascists, and as an adult anarchist I was captivated by *Rogue One*. Guerilla rebels and militant factions working in conjunction with little to no supplies to take down occupiers, sacrifice themselves so that others might live. It struck a chord.

However, the scope of the operations of the Rebel Alliance is not something most anarchists are able to emulate unless they're working with the AANES,[1] EZLN,[2] or similar. We operate more as insurrectionaries rather than as an opposing quasi-State with a regulated military. *Andor* is a series about how one of the main characters of *Rogue One*, Cassian Andor, came to be involved with the groups that would later form the Rebel Alliance. As such, the nature of their operations are more akin to how we operate today, and there are many lessons we can learn from how the protagonists conduct themselves.

E01: Kassa

Cassian & The Guards

In the opening scene when Cassian arrives at the brothel on Morlana One looking for his sister, he is knowingly there illegally, additionally having arrived on a stolen ship. A hostess begins

[1] Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, also known as Rojava.

[2] Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*).

talking with him which upsets two corporate security guard across the bar who had been waiting longer. He knows the danger because he warns the hostess to attend to the guards first because "it's a company town." When she leaves to look for someone matching his sister's description, Cassian stares down the guards provoking them to take interest in him. He's made himself a target.

They follow him after he leaves and try to shake him down in a back alley. Cassian offers the credits in his jacket pocket and one guard is extracting them, he knocks him back then fights and disarms the other guard. Cassian's mission at this time is not to fight the injustices of the Empire and its subsidiaries but to find his sister. Fighting the guards, while good and just, puts his primary objective at risk. He would have been better off treating the 300 credits as the cost of getting some information from the hostess and being able to continue. Instead, he risked death and is now on the lam after killing two guards. This extra heat will make his primary objective more difficult to achieve.

Twice in the opening scene has Cassian failed to keep a low profile and has complicated his life as a result. What's more interesting is that if he did all this with just one friend who could be a second pair of eyes, a second body, and second voice to calm Cassian, he would have been far safer.[3]

The Guards Themselves

The guards after feeling disrespected by "a skinny thing like [Cassian]" decide to exact revenge on him. They think that a lone slim individual will be an easy target, and during their attempted shakedown they identify him as a foreigner. In a world where everyone is armed and fleeing from a crime scene can lead to an interplanetary hunt, they should know the risks associated wit ha shakedown. Further, armed civilians are common in the Star Wars universe. They don't account for the fact that extorting a bit of money from someone in poverty might be equivalent to a death sentence. They are unable to understand that someone with nothing to lose will react far more dangerously than someone who can suffer the loss. They assume that their authority alone will protect them, but authority only works when there is a credible threat of violence that follows. Their victim is able to fight back in part because the odds that someone is able to come after him for what he's done is very low. And even further, as security guards, they should know that the absence of cameras work in their target's favor. No face, no case. Higher chances that someone will fight back.

When news of their deaths reaches the Chief Inspector Hyne, he points out to his overly enthusiastic and by-the-book subordinate Syril that investigating their deaths would uncover corruption and malfeasance by Preox-Morlana security. The guards were drinking contraband beverages—that they could only afford because of taking bribes—in a brothel they weren't supposed to be in while on duty. Further, Pre-Mor care more about the political expediency of the illusion of control than actual control itself. So not only did the guards not understand the danger of Cassian, they wouldn't even be avenged because systemic issues prevent it.

One should be aware of the structures within which they operate and the political circumstances so that they can factor in the reactions of their compatriots should any harm befall them. You might choose to go out in a blaze of glory knowing no one will follow in your wake, but such a decision should not be made on the assumption that someone *will* follow.

[3] Plus, who wouldn't want to joyride a spaceship across the galaxy?

Friends, Trusted and Less So

The next day on Ferrix,[4] Cassian is awoken by his adoptive mother's droid B2EMO and is told that his mother among others came by looking for him while he was out on his escapades. Cassian tells the droid to lie on his behalf to cover his activities. In town, Cassian meets his friend Brasso and after a small nudge gets Brasso to cover for him if anyone asks where he was. Brasso takes the story Cassian was weaving and embellishes to account for the visible injuries Cassian got from the fight.

Because our lives connect with the lives of others, our whereabouts and activities will be under some amount of scrutiny, and have someone who can provide cover or an alibi for you without question is important for conspiratorial activities.

This trust, however, has a limit. After meeting Brasso, Cassian goes to meet Bix, co-conspirator involved in black market sales, at her place of work. They have a tense back and forth where Cassian asks Bix to contact her fence[5] so he can sell off some item and leave town due to the presumed heat from the murders. She quips that he's been holding out on her, and he replies that she's been skimming off the top too. Bix suggests that Cassian could instead sell directly to her, and he refuses because as much as they might be partners, he needs to look out just for himself.

While we are entitled to look out for ourselves to some extent, breeding mistrust and ill will by withholding resources and information in what should be a trusted environment can impair one's willingness to take risks of make sacrifices on our behalf. We should be cautious about alienating those we rely on as this will affect future actions.

E02: That Would Be Me

Finding the Leak

Cassian arrives at Maarva's hovel where she confronts him about the Pre-Mor security bulletin looking for a Kenari in relation to the deaths of two guards. Their conversation is so important, it's worth repeating in full.

> Maarva Who else knows?
> Cassian About what?
> Maarva That you were born on Kenari.
> Cassian You don't want to hear what happened?
> Maarva Mhmm, we'll get to that. But who knows? Who have we told?
> Cassian I don't know, I—
> Maarva We have always said Fest. Every doc I've ever submitted has always said

[4] As a note, the planet is called Ferrix, but the city is never named. Assumptions should be that everything described as on Ferrix is happening in what we might call Ferrix City.

[5] Someone who buys stolen goods to sell later.

you were born on Fest. Have you ever said anything other than Fest?
Cassian Officially, no. I don't think so. But people, yes.
Maarva Who?
Cassian Uh… And so did you.
Maarva Well, how many?
Cassian I don't know. It's not something I've been keeping track of!
Maarva Well, everyone I've told is dead.
Cassian That's ridiculous. Jezzi. Sammo. Hmm?
Maarva That's family.
Cassian If we're making a list, we're making a list.
Maarva Well, it's all your women that I'm worried about.
Cassian Oh, come on. Please.
Maarva Femmi, Karla, Sondreen.
Cassian Stop. Stop!
Maarva There are some names I don't even know!
B2EMO B-B-Bix.
Cassian Bix has nothing to do with this.
Maarva But then who told these Pre-Mor bastards about Kenari?
Cassian *(pause)* That would be me.
(Cassian argues with B2EMO)
Maarva Cassian, what have you done?
Cassian I messed up.

Their conversation tersely goes through many of the phases of people's reactions to finding out there's been an information leak. Cassian starts by trying to make excuses as if his mother's anger is about why he's being pursued, not that he wasn't careful. Often when we make OpSec mistakes, our instinct is to justify them based of intents or results and not acknowledge that they happened and try to resolve the issue or perform a root cause analysis

Maarva is right to quickly jump to figuring out who might have leaked the information. It would help them figure out who can still be trusted and what avenues exist for keeping Cassian safe. Cassian says he hasn't been keeping track of who he's told about his true identity, and that is precisely one of the problems with having multiple alias and identities. We generally see ourselves as one complete person, and it can be hard to remember with whom we've shared what version of ourselves. Online this can be easier because of the simplistic and stunted interactions we have with others, but offline this can be far harder.

His mother's criticism that he probably shared his identity with too many lovers is extremely valid. We often mistake passion and intimacy for trust, and even aside from our activist lives, most of us have probably been burned by an ex who knew too much about us and who either maliciously or innocently didn't hold their tongue. However, she also brushes off her indiscretions as wise and prudent while Cassian's are rash an foolish. He in turn is right to actually make the full list of who knows his true identity because the leak coming from within their circle of trust is plausible.

Over the course of the conversation, he realizes that having said he was looking for his Kenari sister while on Morlana One was the source of the leak. Admitting you've made a mistake and putting your ego aside is critical for OpSec. We all fuck up and have weaknesses, and being able

to identify and work around them is the only way forward. If we lie to ourselves and others, we will take ill-informed actions.

Covering Your Tracks

At the start of the episode, we see Bix at work reading a terminal. It shows her the bulletin from Pre-Mor asking for information about Cassian. Her coworker and lover Timm comes in, and she hurriedly closes it before declining his invitation for dinner and zipping off to warn Cassian. Timm turns the terminal back on and sees what she was looking at. This piques his interest again, and he secretly follows her as she leaves.

Her decision to turn the terminal off when Timm walks in is based on her knowledge that Timm is suspicious of Cassian and their relationship, but in her hurry she doesn't completely wipe what she was doing. This small detail was enough to cause the info about the hunt for Cassian to spread a little further in particular to someone who's already suspicious.

Closing apps on our phones, using private browsing, and cleaning up printed materials when we leave a space are all trivial tasks, but they stop snippets of info from leaking. When we go to show a friend a funny picture, an important conversation might pop up when we unlock our phone. When we spontaneously bring someone back to our flat, sensitive materials might be scattered on our desk, and people tend to be curious. All this information might get out anyway, but it's better to slow the spread.

Patriarchal Jealousy

In the first episode after Cassian argues with Bix about selling directly to her fence, Timm confronts him as he leaves and gets protective of Bix, and we later see him following her around town. It's implied by what B2EMO says when Cassian is arguing with Maarva about his lovers being a source of the leak that Cassian had an affair of some sort with Bix prior to her starting one with Timm, and this is confirmed in E07. Timm exhibits classic signs of patriarchal protectiveness over "his" woman. Bix was right to say "he'd do anything for me" when Cassian asks if he knows about their crimes. She meant it in the sense that he would protect her and that which is important to her from external threats, but the truth is that Timm would do anything *to have her for himself*. When he follows her to a cantina after seeing the Pre-Mor bulletin, he sees Bix having a seemingly intimate conversation with Cassian. He wants Cassian out of the picture, so he snitches to Pre-Mor causing them to send a snatch squad.

As the saying goes, misogynists make great informants.[6] Timm's passion and dedication aren't to the ideals that Bix and Cassian share, about the joys of ripping off the Empire to make a few credits to survive. He simply wants to have Bix as his own. Bix and Cassian are criminals, not revolutionaries at this time. In fact, we know their criminal relationship is slightly adversarial where they hold out on each other for personal gain. This is a case where if they were more altruistic and had developed a coherent politic of mutual aid or liberation, Timm's possessiveness would have been revealed for what it is. Their selfishness made it impossible to see his and what a threat that was.

[6] See the zine *Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements.*

It is not enough to do the right things. We have to also do them for the right reasons, not just from an ethical perspective, but because the analytic tools that come from well-developed liberatory theories allow us to spot false allies and snitches easier.

Others' Secrets

As we see later in E03, Timm knows Cassian is from Kenari because Bix mentioned it to him. Cassian was right to trust Bix to not use that knowledge against him, but every person we tell our secrets to is another person that might let it slip. It's easier for us to keep track of what knowledge about our own lives is secret, but it's much harder to do so with information about the lives of others. Keeping our whole lives private from others can be unsustainable, and a way to help minimize information spreading like this is to be extremely explicit about what information of ours is secret and under what conditions it can be shared. These conversations might feel awkward or too formal, but they protect us from accidents.

E03: Reckoning

Arrogance

In E01 when, Syril tells his subordinates to send the bulletin to Ferrix, his staff say that they "don't have presence there" and that it's only "technically" under Pre-Mor jurisdiction. One even says "They have their own way of doing things." En route, Sergeant Linus Mosk addresses the snatch squad and says "There may be some local residents who less than enthused with our presence." Syril and Linus had previously hyped each other up on the arrest because they were both true believers in the use of force and the virtue of the Empire. Again, Syril dons his "righteousness armor" and assumes because they are authorized to do something and that it is the right thing that there will be minimal negative outcomes.

This is more often seen with liberal activists than with hardened revolutionaries. They might do something like arrange a permitted protest or engage in minor civil disobedience because they are de jure allowed to but are then shocked when they find the cops kettling, arresting, or brutalizing them.

Moreover, Syril fails to understand why people obey laws or submit to power. They do so because of the credible threat of violence. The planned dozen men taking on a city is not a credible threat of violence because there is no backup. Arrests in more densely policed areas work because the suspect and bystanders can reasonably expect overwhelming force to arrive should there be resistance. Syril and Linus seem to think that some rowdy yokels will be kept in line by their authority even without a backing threat.

OpSec isn't just about staying hidden. It's about making assessments of one's adversary and asking what are the likely actions they may take. Syril and Linus have not done their homework and ignored caution, and as a result have not taken appropriate precautions for their operation. Don't be like them. Look at general trends in State and non-State repression, and do specific research on your targets before carrying out an action.

Risk Management

When Bix's fence Luthen Rael arrives, she tells him "There's been a complication." She tells him about the security bulletin, and responds to his question that—to her knowledge—Cassian hasn't been identified by the guards yet. While he doesn't say it aloud, he knows that Pre-Mor is coming for Cassian. His response is only that they should move quick.

Luthen isn't just a fence. He's also an organizer of the resistance to the Empire that would later become the Rebel Alliance. He wants more than just the goods Cassian has swiped. He wants Cassian's skills as an infiltrator, and he's willing to take a personal risk to those ends. A bit of risk now for a large payoff is worth it to him.

OpSec is about risk management. We identify what risks exist so that we can make plans around them while we pursue our goals. Total safety is never the goal of an insurrectionist. If that was a goal, they'd throw away their ideals, keep their head down, and assimilate into the dominant power structures. Luthen has gathered information and is taking a calculated risk. Likewise, when we choose our targets or actions, we don't do so blindly or with an illusion of total safety, but with some knowledge possible outcomes.

Electronic Footprints

One of Cassian's priorities with making the deal with Bix's fence is that he wants to leave money for Maarva and those he owes. He gives a commlink to B2EMO so that if he has to stash the money somewhere while making a quick escape, the droid can pick it up.

While waiting for Luthen, Cassian radios B2EMO to check that comms are working. From his side, this may be nervousness or a bit of whistling in the dark while he waits. Unfortunately, the guards are already at Maarva's hovel while looking for Cassian and overhear his innocuous messages. Linus pulls out some sort of device and gets a fix on Cassian's location.

In the warehouse, a device[7] in Luthen's pocket begins beeping. He checks it then asks if Cassian is carrying a commlink. Cassian says yes. Luthen takes it, smashes it, and says "Rule number one. Never carry anything you don't control."

A recurring theme in activism, espionage, and modern warfare is how much our digital footprints can blow our cover. Phones track our location and smart watches do the same. Radio signals can give away locations and be used to target artillery strikes.

What Luthen says is true enough: we should we wary of carrying things we don't control. The advantages gained from phones and online accounts can sometimes make them too tempting, and having viable alternatives makes leaving these devices behind far easier. It would have been far better for Cassian to plan out some dead drop locations with B2EMO than to try to coordinate it after making the sale.

[7] It's unclear what exactly it is, but the best guess is its a proximity sensor for the security guards' radios or transponders.

E04: Aldhani

Aliases

Luthen and Cassian arrive on Aldhani where Luthen explains to him some of the details of the heist against the Imperial payroll held at the local garrison. Luthen tells him to pick a name to use with the people he's about to meet. Cassian picks Clem, his adoptive father's name. After getting pinched by the cops because of his past connection to Kenari, Cassian should be more wary about choosing a name that can be linked to him.

A common error when using pseudonyms or constructing aliases is that we want them to still have a bit of ourselves in them. We might use something like an old nickname from our childhood or even our pet's name. Any misdirection is helpful, but making the leap to something completely random and nondescript makes it harder to link your identities.

Personally Identifying Information

After arguing with Luthen about the merits of taking on a new member, Vel accepts Cassian and they begin walking to the rebel camp. Cassian is curious about Luthen. Vel says over course of the conversation "You should have asked him that when you had the chance," "He is something we will never discuss," and "We never mention him [to the others]."

It is not her decision to reveal information about Luthen. Only he can do that, and without some long-standing rule about what can or cannot be said or some explicit agreement in this case, Vel takes a sensible default of silence. Luthen may not fully trust Cassian, and Vel may not either. There's some risk of Cassian being captured, and the less he knows the better. Likewise, as some sort of wealthy benefactor, the grunts who risk their lives in the mud for the rebellion might resent his existence if they knew much about him, so it's better that he effectively doesn't exist.

This sort of silence is common practice among anarchists. Not even just when someone new is around, but also among trusted friends, we don't spill or comrades' secrets just because someone asks. Sharing information about someone's identity, origin, or activities can be dangerous, and more importantly it is a matter of consent. When personal information is shared, it is done so with only those it was directly shared with and without any implied consent for it to be spread further.

Vouching

A similar scenario as just discussed replays after Vel and Cassian arrive at the camp. The other rebels are generally not keen on someone being added so late, and when questioned about it Vel hides her relation to Cassian and only says that he comes highly recommended and that she trusts him. She trusts Luthen, and since she can safely assume that Luthen has done his research, by proxy she should also trust Cassian. In this case Vel brokers trust between Luthen (who is unknown to the rebels) and the rebels themselves so as to hide Luthen's connection and also Cassian's past.

When operating in small clandestine affinity groups, we often have connections to others. We need to somehow establish trust with these connections or when individuals join us. However, if everyone knows everything about everything about everyone, the cell model of security breaks

down. Vouching is the process by which we can establish trust without needing all of one's information. Typically this process is that one person serves as a trust broker and either does the research themselves or uses another trusted party who knows the individual in question quite well to establish the appropriate level of trust that should be extended to said individual. When used well, vouching can allow trust to be established while still hiding connections from complete exposure.

Repression

On Coruscant, the capital of the Galactic Empire, senator Mon Mothma arrives via air speeder to Luthen's antiquities shop where he plays the role of a respectable and dignified curator. Luthen's assistant Kleya points out that Mon's driver is someone new. Mon steps in, and she and Luthen put on a ceremonious greeting for the driver as if he were a spy before they retreat to the back room under the cover of looking at newly arrived items.

Once they have privacy, Luthen asks if Mon can get him the money she's agreed to, and she replies that there's difficulty because of Empires actions. Luthen dismisses her worries saying "Oh, they're watching everyone." She responds that she's heavily surveilled including new staff at her bank and her driver. She also says that she wants to bring someone new onboard. Luthen replies that they're too vulnerable and they need money, not more people.

Both have points. Insurrection cannot be sustained on hope alone; it needs bread too. However, someone who is under heavy surveillance bringing a new person around carries its own risks. It's not just whether they're an informant but if they are careful enough with their words and actions or if they could be leveraged to turn if captured.

Without the time or funds, the insurrection could fail. Just as easily, without outside help, it could fail too. OpSec is about risk management, not elimination. Bringing someone on board to help might be risky, but without their help you might be dead in the water. A balance is often struck by taking active efforts to obfuscate true plans or motivations so that those who help us can't piece together what we're doing but we still benefit from their assistance.

E05: The Axe Forgets

Trust, but Verify

After Cassian's first night at the camp, he awakes to his possessions missing. Across camp, his gear is spread out on a workbench as Arvel washes himself beside it. Cassian is upset that his new comrades would rifle through his things, but before he can speak Arvel tells him that Vel had asked him to take a look and that the stakes are high. In particular, Arvel is suspicious of the Pre-Mor service revolver that Cassian had nicked from the guards he killed in the first episode. They also have a back and forth when Arvel sees that Cassian has noticed his prison tattoos.

The members of the cell are right to be suspicious of someone new who will eventually hold all their lives in his hand. Vel might trust Luthen, and the others might trust Vel, but when the consequences of a security fuck up are death or life in prison, they need the peace of mind of having looked themselves. It might not prove conclusively[8] one way or another that Cassian is or

[8] Evidence like this can be fabricated. An interesting and well-known case during WWII is the OSS's Operation Mincemeat where they put convincing personal possessions on a corpse with fake intel and let it get picked up. It

isn't an Imperial agent, but it can be evidence in support of their doubts or evidence of Cassian's authenticity.

This tactic may seem invasive or even extreme to novice activists, but this pattern is not unfamiliar in radical communities. Presence at community events or simply "knowing a guy" isn't sufficient to establish trust with clandestine groups. Often at a minimum, such groups will use OSINT methods to research new people and might even conduct make the person submit to a background check they run themselves. As Arvel noted, one can't be too cautious when the stakes are so high.

Reliance

After his encounter with Arvel, Cassian sits down to breakfast with Nemik. Nemik pulls out some complicated navigational contraption.

> Cassian That's an old one.
> Nemik Old, and true. And sturdy. One of the best navigational tools ever built. Can't be jammed or intercepted. Something breaks, you can fix it yourself.
> Cassian Hard to learn.
> Nemik Yes, but once you've mastered it, you're free. We've grown reliant on Imperial tech, and we've made ourselves vulnerable. There's a growing list of things we've known and forgotten, things they've pushed us to forget.

Nemik is a starry-eyed idealist as those who write manifestos are wont to be, and we're supposed to take this as lofty and impractical, but he is spot on with his analysis.

As I'm writing this, on the 18th of November in the year 2022, Twitter is in its possible death throes after mass layoffs, and people are pointing to its loss as a crushing blow to activism. The Arab Spring, Occupy, and less striking things like the ability to more easily crowdsource funds are all held up as things that were only possible through Twitter. However, Twitter was and is controlled by entities that are actively hostile to us, and our inability to think of alternatives harms us.

Twitter is easy to use. It's there, it works, and changing away from it is hard. But looking back at instances where it was used to positive ends neither says that those ends couldn't have otherwise been met with other tools or that future events would require the same tools.

This isn't just about Twitter. Mobile phones and the internet itself might be powerful and easy to use compared to their analog counterparts, but our reliance on them without having alternatives is a risk we need to contend with. How will we communicate? Spread ideas? Create propaganda? Navigate? Do research and gather intelligence? We should practice using alternatives where possible to avoid current repression and create possibilities in the future.

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fooled the Germans into leaving Sicily poorly defended when the Allies invaded from North Africa. Or perhaps more close to home, an undercover cop is able to copy local antifascist fashion (to a reasonable degree).

What Isn't There

Back on Coruscant, ISB[9] agent Dedra Meero continues to track missing supplies with her subordinate Heert. First tipped off about this by the star path unit Cassian tried to sell to Luthen, she's come to realize that there is some sort of pattern.

> Dedra He's right though. It's too spread out to be organized.
> Heert But you don't believe that.
> Dedra I know this. If i was them, this is how I'd do it. I'd spread it out. Never climb the same fence twice.
> Heert It's too random to be random.

From Dedra's end, all she can see is missing supplies from manifests. She even has the eye to guess which reports are falsified in the bureaucratic hell of an interplanetary empire. While there is no pattern of some cluster of targets that are repeatedly hit for silent thefts, there is a pattern of perfect spread. True randomness would have some duplication, and Dedra is able to read this as intentional non-randomness.

The evidence we leave behind aren't just our footprints but where there are no footprints at all. For example, in today's society it's more suspicious to have no presence on the internet than an extremely dull presence. Everyone in a milieu turning their phones off right as they reach a certain part of the woods is itself a signal. When we try to leave no trace, it can be better to leave a false trail than no discernible trail at all.

Unadmitted Fear

While the rebels are taking a break on the way to the Imperial garrison, Arvel holds a knife to Cassian's neck and takes the gem Luthen had given him as a down payment for his services as a mercenary. He holds it up as vindication of his suspicions that Cassian isn't who he says he is. After listing off all of "Clem's" incongruities, Arvel says "I need to know who I'm riding with."Tensions rise, and Vel diffuses the situation saying they'll talk about it at camp.

Cassian admits he's being paid, and says he doesn't want to walk in looking over his shoulder. He then calls out Arvel for losing his nerve about the mission and latching on to something to deflect his fear. If he can't admit he's too afraid to do the mission, he can find something that's wrong enough to make aborting the only logical choice.

We too fall into this trap. It's easier to turn our sights inward where the only consequences are words than to carry out actions that could potentially derail our lives. Sometimes we do this under the alleged auspices of security culture, but this misuse of the processes of OpSec to justify our fears harms not just a current action but security culture at large. Nitpicking about perfect adherence to some tenets of social justice or calling everyone you haven't known for a decade a possible cop is almost always easier than doing the work, especially the scary work. This isn't to say we should do as Arvel does and work with mercenaries that just got dropped on us, but we should ask ourselves if we're attacking and over-scrutinizing fellow travelers out of genuine concern or if it's away of avoiding what needs to be done without ever having to admit our own fears.

[9] Imperial Security Bureau. "The Feds."

E06: The Eye

Being Inconspicuous

In the previous episodes as the rebels traveled and trained in the mountains near the garrison they planned to rob, they lived and dressed as the local Dhani. Even as Cassian and three of the other rebels made their way to the garrison, they were clothed in their imperial uniforms but with the large overcoats and caps atop them. As Cassian has pointed out, and as we see from the officers' perspective inside the base, the Empire has no regard for the people it oppresses to the point it doesn't think of them as a threat. Fournon-native civilians walking the mountains would be suspicious, more so four random imperial soldiers. But four shepherds is something that would barely register with them.

As much as dressing punkly or flamboyantly might be our means of expressing identity of actively challenging norms of presentability, it has its time and place. For clandestine actions, black bloc can be counter-productive. The so-called "normie bloc" or "gray bloc" can be extremely effective at avoiding detection or infiltration. You might use it to get to a demo before blocking up, or you can use it to get inside an event you're not permitted. The nature of your plan might guarantee detection, but it's better that happen at the last possible second, and how we dress is often the first giveaway that we do not belong.

Projection

After the heist, Cassian sits outside a hovel with Arvel while Vel stays inside with Nemik who is receiving medical care. Arvel suggests that he and Cassian take the ship and run, lay low, then split the credits and live richly. He admits to having lied about his brother being driven to suicide by the Empire and that his "rebellion" is just him versus everyone else no matter who he has to climb over. Cassian shoots him, then goes inside to tell Vel what happened. She doesn't believe him and even seems surprised that Cassian only asks for his agreed upon cut instead of walking off with the whole load.

Arvel knew, like many cops and intelligence agents know, that one of the easiest ways to deflect suspicion of being an impersonator is to pin it on someone else. We see this play out online often where accusations of not really being into social justice are most often flung by people who do wildly unacceptable things. In our anarchist spaces, some of the people who are the loudest about stamping out abuse might themselves be abusers. This isn't to say that every person—or even most people—who aggressively look for abusers or infiltrators are that thing themselves. It's just not a guarantee that they aren't.

E07: Announcement

Accepting Risk

Mon visits Luthen under the guise of returning what she'd previously purchased so she can ask him if he was behind the attack on Aldhani. Mon is upset that Luthen acted on his own while she was still trying to find means of subtly moving funds from her monitored accounts. She tells him that she was doing everything she could, to which he retorts "Your 'everything' seemed tobe all about bringing in a savior to access your family funds." When Luthen goes on to explain that

the network is built and that all weapons are eventually used, Mon counters that the coming repression will hurt many. Luthen, a bit of an accelerationist, says that this is necessary part of the plan. Mon leaves upset, and Kleya says to Luthen "I hope she's worth it."

Mon and Luthen have very different appetites for personal risk or violence in general. At the end of E05, right be fore the heist takes place, Luthen asks Kleya if her walk-away bag is ready. Conversely, when we first see Mon with Luthen in E04, when they talk about upcoming actions, she says:

> "Don't lecture me on vulnerability. No one's more at risk than I am. You think I haven't thought this through? I'd be the first one to fall."

She might think she's highly vulnerable because she's highly visible and actively surveilled, but she's not carrying out the actual deeds that lead to deaths. In part, her luxurious lifestyle leaves her with more to lose, and it shields her from the knowledge of the constant suffering of those living under the Empire's heel.

OpSec isn't about security in the sense of safety, but about minimizing risk while still achieving one's goals, and this last part is key. Often we see individuals or so-called leadership in organizations put the protection of themselves over achieving goals. Revolution might be a goal, but if they only want it to happen if they can guarantee their safety, they do not actually want revolution. They want revolution with the caveat that its coming to pass does not harm them.

While this zine—and much else I've written—focuses on how to be secure, we must remember that if one's "security" is too "good," we will achieve nothing.

Leave No Trace

Vel returns to Coruscant and radios for a meeting with Kleya. Kleya follows some chalk markings to a location, and the first thing she does is criticizeVel for making contact and also herself for showing up. After covering some logistics, Vel asks about her lover Cinta. Kleya replies "Receiving messagesis just as dangerous as sending them." She's speaking about herself but also about Cinta.

Communications that have an clear sender and receiver—namely digital and postal comms—can be dangerous for both parties. One careless message from the sender can fully implicate the receiver in a crime carried out or even the tangential "conspiracy to commit X" charges. It can lead to increased surveillance of the individual even if they're not involved in the crimes at all. If not fact that two parties conversed, the content of a message can be worrisome. One members of an affinity group texting in the group chat "who's making molotovs?" even if no one responds can have serious consequences. Sometimes it's best to send no messages at all.

Playing It Cool

After paying off his debts and failing to convince his mother to leave Ferrix with him, Cassian lounges on beach on Niamos. While strolling in a touristy area, some people run by him while a stormtrooper call out for them to stop. Cassian is worried the stormtrooper means him, so he ducks off to the side and hurries away. Another stormtrooper sees him looking around nervously while sweaty and assumes he's involved in whatever caused the storm troopers to start chasing the other people. He stops him, gives a farcical interrogation, and has him arrested. A kangaroo

court immediately convicts him, and the sentence that would have been six months is upped to six years because of the repressive measures the Empire set in place in response to the Aldhani attack.

Most OpSec advice could be summed up into the phrase "don't get noticed." His (somewhat justified) paranoia stemming from his involvement in the attack leads him to think every member of law enforcement is out to get him, and it makes him act irrationally. Had he simply kept walking, nothing would have happened to him.

This is an error we often make on the streets, especially younger and less experienced comrades. They are a little too concerned with concealing what's in their bag. They make too much of a scene of playing it cool when a police car rolls by. They're constantly looking over their shoulders at the store even when they're not stealing anything.

What does a guilty person look like? Whatever that is, be the opposite. Be boring. Be uninteresting. Be someone a cop's gaze or an analyst's fine-toothed comb will pass over. There is safety in being calm and unremarkable.

E08: Narkina 5

Finding Cracks

After being sentenced, Cassian is shipped off to a labor camp on Narkina 5. The facility is drilled into the ocean with artificial whirlpools around it to suck in anyone who tries to swim away. Prisoners are not allowed to have shoes, and the electrified floors serve as the primary means of control. The facility is austere, and control is absolute, but it is not brutal because the prisoners are needed for labor.

As he's being escorted from the arrival platform to his section of the factory, he notices the guards are lackadaisical about their duties and are going through protocol by rote. One guard criticizes another for arriving without his partner then begins the intake procedure without the required second armed guard. When the second guard does arrive, he mentions that they're shorthanded elsewhere. Cassian knows about the apathy and disarray of the facility.

Repression may be brutal, and it may seem total. It aims to demoralize us and make use believe escape, change, and a better world aren't possible. But there are always cracks in the behemoth. The belief that one's control is absolute breeds complacency. Bureaucracy can create loopholes. The panopticon requires maintenance, and it will break down. Maybe there isn't a way to revolt today, but if we stay observant, we can find the patterns, the cracks, the small ways that repression can be overthrown. Be observant.

New Circles

After induction and his first shift, the prisoners go back to their cell block. Jemboc, one the prisoners, shows Cassian how to work the utilities in his cell while others start to listen in impatiently. Jemboc asks what he did to get sent to prison, and Cassian says "Nothing." Another prisoner says"Ask him already," and Jemboc asks him if he knows about the Public OrderResentencing Directive that caused their sentences to double the month before. He's also asked if he knows about the attacks against the Empires that led to this change. He says he doesn't know

anything, and the other prisons voice their upset that some rebel cowboys attacking the Empire has caused them to have to pay the price.

Compared to his cavalier attitude about who might know what about him when we first encounter him back on Morlana One, Cassian has learned to keep his mouth shut, and rightfully so. Before being imprisoned, when his mother speaks of how thrilled she is about the attack, he doesn't mention his involvement.

Knowledge is power. What someone knows about us can often be used against us. Moreover, giving up information should be done only when we know *why* (and nearly fully so) someone wants to have that knowledge. Often it's just curiosity or small chat, but sometimes if you give someone a bit of information they'll tug on it and your cover story will unravel or you'll find yourself backed into a corner.

The Dangers of Sympathy

On Ferrix, Cassian's mother is ill and being attended to by the family friends Brasso and Bix. Outside, they converse about Cassian being missing, and afterward Bix goes to Salman Paak's shop to use his secret radio to call Luthen in hopes of reaching Cassian. Salman tells her "Not sure that's a good idea." When she says in a strained tone that it's urgent, he acquiesces. Ferrix is a small working-class community, and we can assume that Salman knows about Maarva's health. He's had the radio powered off for security reasons, but his sympathy gets the best of him. Bix makes the call, and the next morning finds that Salman had been snatched by the Imperials.

One of our strength as anarchists—our sympathy for others, our altruism—can get the best of us. The thing that is obviously kinder, that should be done if there were no security implications, can sometimes by something that harms us. Most of us are lucky enough to have never found ourselves in a position where we had to deny someone kindness on the grounds of security, but as the world grows more tumultuous, we may find ourselves having to be harsh in the name of safety.

Letting someone use your phone to make a call to alert their loved ones they're safe knowing that your line may be tapped. Letting someone borrow a car to drive to see a dying friend knowing your plates will be seen at that address. Letting someone publish a heartfelt text in your anthology knowing it risks you being charged with inciting insurrection.

I hope we never find ourselves having to make these tough calls, but one day we may have to, and we have to be both prepared to make such decision and to accept them when someone else does. This is not saying we have to harden ourselves against our own desires or our desires to help others. I'mjust saying that our heart can lead us to places our brain knows are dangerous, and sometimes we have to turn away from those choices.

When It's Too Personal

On Coruscant, Luthen walks into the shop's back room where Kleya listens in on Bix's call without responding.

Kleya It's the shop owner on Ferrix. She's trying to find Cassian Andor. His mother is ill. We're not answering. We can't.
Luthen She could point us in the right direction.
Kleya She's asking us.
Luthen She knows more than we do. So much more. She might have a lead.
Kleya More likely it's the ISB working her radio.
Luthen You're guessing!
Kleya And you're slipping! We're shutting down Ferrix. The code, the frequency, all of it. I'm thinking clearly, and you're not. Tell me to shut it down.
Luthen It's Andor. Knowing he's out there, knowing me, not knowing what he knows. I took him on the Fondor. Was I insane?
Kleya You were desperate for Aldhani to work, and it did. And we'll find him, just not like this.
Luthen Vel was out hunting. She and Cinta. Are they in Ferrix yet?
Kleya I'll have a listen. We're being extremely careful with it.
Luthen The woman's name is Bix Caleen. Vel could have a look if it's safe. The know what they're doing. I'm not slipping, Kleya. I've just been hiding for too long.
Kleya It's all different now. We're going loud. Vulnerability is inevitable.
Luthen I'm not slipping.
Kleya I know. I just need you to wake up. There's a lot to do.
Luthen Shut it down.

This exchange captures well how we can get too wrapped up or emotionally invested in our political projects to the point where we can't see straight. Luthen knows that Vel is hunting Cassian to tie up the loose end that connects him back to the robbery. He is so laser focused on killing Cassian to preven this own name from leaking that he misses the risk of using the radio. Cassian isn't actively malicious as Luthen knows because Cassian didn't run off with the money when he had the chance, but Luthen rushes anyway. He feels personally endangered by Cassian knowing his name more so than the acute threat from the ISB if he used the radio.

We often let our fears get the best of us or let strong emotions push us. We're only human after all, but these hotheaded moments can have devastating consequences not just for us but for our comrades too. Often all we need to do is slow down, take a breath, and attempt to accurately asses our risks and what strategies we have available to counter them. Showing up at an ex-comrade's flat because they threatened to doxx you might be what your heart cries out for, but that might put you and your whole crew at greater risk. Making a snap decision to strike back at some group that wronged you might satisfy your craving for righteous revenge, but without recon, you might immediately get caught. But maybe it's something simpler like using your sock account to ask a question to an abuser, a question that is a little too particular and gives your identity away. These aren't statements against doing any of those things. It's just that our actions don't exist in a vacuum, and like Luthen we need comrades who can help keep us in check from violating our crew's established security guidelines.

Counter-Intel

Luthen flies to Segra Milo to meet with Saw Gerrera, the leader of an extremist group in the milieu of rebel factions. The first part of their conversation is Luthen insinuating (with praise) that Saw was the one who attacked Aldhani as Saw tries to draw it out of Luthen that he might have been behind the attack. When the conversation moves on, Saw seems to believe that Luthen wasn't involved. Nominally, the are more on the same "side" as each other than not, but if Saw doesn't need to know, then it should remain a secret.

Keeping quiet about all of one's activities is one strategy for preventing others from what's going on. This works for some. Luthen as a coordinator naturally has to talk and schmooze with many people, something total secrecy might inhibit, so he takes the approach of jovially sewing misinformation not just about his activities but what information he has.

Within our radical milieus, there are many ideologies and even within a single ideology many factions. Together we call this "the left," and just like the Rebel Alliance, it is coalition more than a formal alliance. Factions may turn on each other, and our comrades may betray us. The further one is from anarchism both in terms of ideology or community, the more likely they are to eventually turn on us to gain advantage. Leaving a chaotic trail of misinfo about one's personal details or deeds can prevent many of these repercussions while still allowing one to operate effectively.

Uneasy Alliances

The second half of Luthen's conversation with Saw is him trying to convinceSaw to lend air support to another faction so that they can make a combined hit on an Imperial power station. In rage, Saw tells off Luthen for calling his adherence to his own ideology as "petty differences" and says that he's not risking his people for someone else. Saw has a reputation for being an extremist, and Luthen knows that his operation is well-funded and successful. Saw, however, is right to refuse the tactical alliance.

Saw is an anarchist,[10] and like us, his vision of the future is not some vague "anti-Imperialism." Anarchists are neither the shock troops nor the canon fodder for some larger struggle. We have our own program and beliefs, and where these line up we will take advantage, but often explicit alliances are dangerous. Not even just historically but also currently anarchists have been betrayed by the other "left" groups they work with, and when we do work together we are expected to bow to authority because we are the minority of cranky others. To prevent ourselves from being sold out or used up by allies who want to (falsely) get a quick win with established power, we need to play our game close to the chest.

E09: Nobody's Listening

(Meta-)Data is Forever

Mon Mothma meets again with Tay Kolma, her old friend she's recruited into helping her with her political projects. He's unaware of the full nature of it, but knows it's anti-Empire and needs to remain clandestine. She's asked him to help her access her fund more easily, and while digging

[10] Yes, literally. They say it in the show.

into how she's moved her money around, he finds one large transaction that can't be hidden. While it's not—to their knowledge—a problem, it's only not a problem yet. Should anyone go looking, it will become a problem for Mon.

As the adage goes, metadata is forever. If you, with no devices on your person, hike through the forest to commit an act of **[REDACTED]** and no camera catches you, there are minimal traces that you were ever there. If you do the same with your phone on you or message someone over insecure channels that you did this, that data might sit in a State intelligence agency's database for decades. Moreover, something that wasn't illegal at the time it occurred may be retroactively made illegal ex post facto. We don't need to think about what is suspicious of illegal today, but what be so under the oppressive regimes of the future. As much as possible, we need to leave no traces of what we do.

Due Suspicion

At the ISB headquarters on Coruscant, Dedra meets with Major Partagaz and other supervisors to discuss the rebel pilot they've captured and interrogated. He was a part of Anto Kreegyr's group, and under interrogation spilled the details of the planned attack on the power station at Spellhaus. The ISB supervisors know that if they imprison or kill him, Kreegyr will get suspicious and might call off the attack thus avoiding a possible trap. If they let him go, he obviously will tell Kreegyr too. Dedra proposes that they put his body inhis ship, foul it up to look like an accident, and let it drift into traffic so it gets picked up.

When we operate in the shadows, we need to be suspicious of oddities. Sometimes things are coincidence, but other times they are huge red flags. A member of our crew turning up dead seemingly from an accident might bean accident or even bad luck, but depending on what we know they know and what the risk might be if they were interrogated, it might behoove us to change our plans. A new day, a new target, and new strategy. It might feel like losing out on an opportunity, but there's always a different covert action we can carry out when we're not in prison.

More realistically, this means we should attempt to piece together incongruities in the behavior of those around us. Someone who never seems to work but always has money to hand out is odd, and maybe they're an infiltrator. A new face might be full of a newbie's enthusiasm for bold attacks, or maybe they're a fed aiming for entrapment. Sometimes the advice is "don't look for spooks in every shadow" but other times it's "don't ignore the spooks in plain sight."

Risk is Relative

In the prison on Narkina 5, something caused a delay in the changing of shifts and the power grid to flicker. Through sign language between the levels and wings, the prisoners try to relay the message around. It's unclear what has happened, but it's not good. Once they're in their cell block, Cassian tries to get Kino to share what he in his privileged position knows about the security of the prison. Kino either doesn't believe that escape is feasible or worth it and refuses to give info that could be used to facilitate an escape as it might implicate him or cause him to loose what privileges a kapo might have.

During the next shift, the elderly inmate Ulaf has an unsalvageable stroke, and the medtech Rhasiv gives him a lethal injection. He says at least he'll pass peacefully unlike the rest of them.

Cassian and Kino press to ask what he means, and he says that after they made a mistake and put an inmate in another cell block after he should have been released, they executed the whole block to hush it up. Rhasiv says that no one is leaving any more. As they walk back to their cells, Kino finally answers Cassian's question about how many guards there are per level.

Every day in our lives, we run heuristics on risk. How much risk can we take on versus what are the rewards? Sometimes it's as simple as darting through traffic. Doing this a handful of times might get you to work on time which might help prevent your boss from firing you, but you also might get hospitalized if a car doesn't slow down or you misjudge its speed, even if the odds of this happening are low. In our politics, this is often about the expected results of an action versus how likely we are to get caught doing it. Often we constrain ourselves in what we do because we fear the cudgel and the cage. The odds of getting caught might be fairly low, but we find the disastrous consequences unpalatable.

In Kino's case, the consequence haven't changed. Attempting to escape would still yield the same increased sentence or torturous punishment, and learning of the brutality the guards are carrying out against the prisoners seems that is likely has not changed the consequences for attempting to escape. The only thing that is different is that the benefits of not attempting to escape have diminished. When asking himself "is it worth losing my privileges in an attempt to gain freedom," the answer has finally shifted to "yes."

For us, the possibility of going to prison today for an act of resistance is lower than it would be under the sort of fascistic government that all our so-called liberal democracies seem to be sliding into. There's more chances of successfully organizing today. What keeps us from doing that is that we often cling to what little comforts we have.

While many the OpSec discussions in this zine have had concrete recommendations of "prefer this" and "avoid that," in this case, it is more open ended. I can't pretend to have a solution, though I have some ideas. As an exercise to all readers, I ask to you: how can we drive ourselves and others to action without resorting to a passive form of acceleration whereby we delay resistance until it "actually" gets bad?

E10: One Way Out

Doing the Expected

At the ISB headquarters, the supervisors discuss that the fouled rebel ship has been picked up by local authorities and that Kreegyr should be none the wiser to the fact that they've successfully interrogated his pilot and are laying in wait. One of the supervisors says that under normal circumstances, Imperial forces would investigate an unresponsive ship. He says:

> "Let's assume Kreegyr's watching. The least suspicious thing we could do is take an interest."

In it's most canonical form, OpSec is preventing an enemy military intelligence from becoming aware of troop movements and missions, and this certainly fits the bill. The lesson is that under uncommon circumstances, we need to act in the most expected possible way. It hides the knowledge we have, and it doesn't pique anyone's interest. In our case as the underdog without a massive surveillance apparatus, it often happens on a smaller scale. A suspected informant is

not ejected, but subtly relegated to useless tasks.[11] Kicking them out shows one's hand and runs the risk of a replacement informant that you have to identify again.

Dangerous Allies

Lonni is a rebel double agent at the ISB. He reports back to Luthen that they know about Kreegyr's planned attack at Spellhaus. He wants the attack called off to save the rebels' lives. Luthen says that a sacrifice of 50 rebels is worth it to prevent the leak at the ISB from being discovered. Much as the previous section, the rebel attack has to do what's expected otherwise it reveals an informant's existence.

As the saying goes, one can't make an omelette without cracking eggs. This is usually said as justification for sacrificing life for some Greater Good. No struggle can be won without some loss of life or liberty, but with this in mind, all sacrifice should be done with the consent of those engaging in the risky activity. State militaries will throw battalions into a meat grinder as part of a feint to hide their true strategy, but we do not operate as a State. Our allies, however, might. Often libs will rat out radicals or fire them to keep their orgs squeaky clean. We might say the means are the end, but to many of our allies, human life is expendable. Our strategies should reflect this, and who we work with should be chosen carefully.

E11: Daughters of Ferrix

Sticking to Protocol

Vel has learned from Cinta, who is still on Ferrix, that Cassian's mother has died and that a funeral will take place. Since this might lure Cassian, she wants to get word to Luthen. When she arrives at the antiquities shop, Luthen is gone, but Kleya greets her as if she's a customer. Vel tries to get her to drop the act, and Kleya says "We have rules for a reason." Vel responds that she sent up a flag, and in her impatience she came anyway.

Of all the conspirators in the show, Kleya has the tightest security. She sticks to the established protocols and directly points out everything that everyone else is doing wrong. She saved her and Luthen's skin by telling him he's slipping and to not respond to Bix when she radioed looking for Cassian. Salman, whose yard the radio was in, was immediately arrested, interrogated, tortured, and executed. Bix was arrested right after. Kleya knows how little room there is for error.

Kleya, Luthen, Vel, & co. are operating what is effectively a terrorist network under a totalitarian government, so their security needs are a bit more stringent than ours. What we can learn from her is why strictness about security is important.

Security can be tedious and annoying. Sending a text is easier than using a dead drop. Meeting at someone's flat or a social center to discuss an action is easier then finding somewhere inconspicuous. Spilling the details of a plan is easier than carefully constructing a contrived scenario that allows a minimum subset of information be exchanged. Hell, even reusing a password is easier than using a password manager, and those are fucking easy to use.

Vel had been generally careful thus far and had her orders on how to handle Cassian. There was no need for Vel to report back. It might have felt like something that needed to be rushed,

[11] This is not to say this is the ideal strategy or one you should always use. It simply is a strategy the is employed to hide one's true knowledge.

but getting caught because she visited the shop in hopes of expediently delivering information to avoid being caught sure would be ironic. Breaking protocol should only be done when there is significant and imminent risk of not doing so. We should always stick to protocol, for as the IRA said to Margaret Thatcher, so too could our adversary's intelligence wing say to us: "We only need to be lucky once. You need to be lucky every time."

When Someone Tells You Who They Are, Listen

Saw excitedly tells Luthen that he is willing to join Kreegyr on the attack at Spellhaus, and Luthen is forced to tell him no because the ISB is aware. Saw asks what if it were he in Kreegyr's shoes, would Luthen burn him? Luthen tries to explain no because if Saw were captured he could identify him to the ISB. While this is meant to be reassuring, it shows how much of Luthen's security considerations are about his own personal safety. He might truly believe that keeping his source in the ISB protected by burning Kreegyr will lead to less total deaths, but that he holds fast on this position and how he does so shows that it is not reliable.

Security culture isn't just about someone's ability to not make mistakes that leak information nor about the knowledge that no one would ever rat on each other, it also heavily relies on the belief that everyone protects everyone. There are no involuntary sacrifices. No one gets treated as a pawn in some larger plan or as canon fodder to sate some bloodlust. Luthen behaving as he does is detrimental to long term solidarity and security. We want to be able to say of our comrades "they have my back" and not "when will they backstab me?"

E12: Rix Road

False Evidence

Outside a soirée, Mon waits for Perrin inside the air speeder. When he gets in, they begin to tiff, and Mon asks their driver to mute the intercom for some privacy. She begins accusing Perrin of gambling again, and illegally at that. He denies it, and she starts to ask how he even got the money. Naturally, their driver listens in. Mon knows he'll do this because she knows, or at least very strongly suspects, that he's an ISB agent. In a later scene, this is confirmed when he reports that Perrin gambles and may be misusing funds to do so.

My speculation is that Mon is feeling the heat so bad that she's desperate to throw them off her trail by sending them chasing a false lead so that there's a plausible reason for the money to be missing.[12] Her motivation for doing so might be to ensure only she goes down if they do start investigating and that the rebellion is safe. Doing this is risky because the ISB wasn't really on to her yet, only suspicious, and now they're actively moving against her armed with something they didn't have before.

Often we think that we can outsmart repression apparatuses by being tricky. When we're successful, it's usually because we've managed to provide so little evidence that there was no way to prosecute much less convict us. It's far more rare that an active counter-intelligence plan works. This is largely because we don't have insight into their workings. We can't tap their calls,

[12] It's unclear whether she actually believes he's gambling or not, and that's somewhat irrelevant. He has a history of doing so which may or may not be known to the ISB, but any search would likely turn up corroborating evidence.

and we don't have inside agents. All our assumptions are by looking at patterns of prosecutions (what evidence, what laws, what tactics) or other patterns of repression.

In Mon's case, she doesn't actually know anything. She doesn't know if they on to her or not or what evidence they have or don't. Vel, who was unmasked while assaulting and robbing an Imperial garrison has been in her house multiple times since the attack. Anything that draws attention carries more risk than potential benefits.

Whether this pans out for Mon in the second season remains to be seen, but our lives aren't flashy cinematic productions. Plot armor won't protect us. Leaving chaos behind us to obfuscate our actions is a reasonable tactic as is flying as stealth as possible. Drawing attention to ourselves as part of a counter-intel scheme is generally inadvisable.

Security Culture and Spontaneous Rebellion

On Ferrix, the various factions prepare for the funeral. The Imperials think it will be a small affair in the early afternoon as does Luthen, Vel, and Cinta. Cassian works with some compatriots to move toward the hotel to rescueBix, and the local thug Nurchi schemes to sell him out. Syril and Linus arrive to do their own op against Cassian, and Dedra arrives separately to oversee the operation. However, hours before things are supposed to go down, we see what appears to be thousands of Ferrixians converging from multiple separate fingers to form a larger protest. The Imperials and Rebels are caught off guard.

OpSec is both the personal actions one takes daily to protect their identity and the measures a small crew takes on a per action basis to secure their activities. Security culture is the broad set of norms within a milieu or extended network that foster wide-spread OpSec and solidarity. It can mean never snitching or talking to cops. It can mean normalizing phoneless organizing meetings. Maybe it's just whistling when patrols come through the area to alert everyone doing shady thing to cut it out for a few minutes.

We know that the ISB has agents in Ferrix observing, and the Rebels have been there for weeks watching for Cassian, but they don't know about the Ferrixians' plans. Snitches haven't ratted out the plans yet because they simply do not know. What sort of community—in the sense of interlaced social networks—have the working class Ferrixians built have that would even allow this to happen? I can't give a solid answer to this either, but there are some things that work at smaller scales.

When one genuinely cares about the well-being of another, an injury to them is akin to an injury to oneself. Ratting someone out leaves no gain because it is also a form of self-harm. When we have tight connections to those around us—or rather when we have a strong social network—we know who to trust and who not to.

We often talk about "community self-defense" but what is often lost is the idea that community—again, in the sense of networks—is self-defense. A small militia won't protect a neighborhood that is simply people living in proximity to each other. But a neighborhood that cares for one another has less need for a specialized militia when everyone is involved in its defense. Ona smaller scale, you can't keep your apartment block from being sold off on your own even if you and your flatmates are the most hardcore insurrectos this side of the Atlantic. Four people can't defend 400 who aren't invested in their own liberation. But those four could be the start of a radical network that learns to defend itself.

When we think of the seemingly spontaneous insurrections that occur around the world in response to oppression or some injustice, they don't happen because of some anarcho-vanguard throwing the first stone or everyone waking up one day and deciding to rally behind a cause they previously didn't care about. They come from shared ideals, mutual aid, solidarity, and strong bonds between individuals. If you're looking to recreate the Rix Road riot and tip the balance of power in your city, one of the best armaments you can have is a robust social network. These networks give you cover to organize and protect you when repression comes.

Postscript

This is less a conclusion, and more some scattered remarks. I wasn't sure how this zine would turn out when I started. I was enthralled by Andor and saw many OpSec lessons, so I wrote something fun. It turned out a good bit longer than I'd intended.[13]

As a series, *Andor* does an excellent job capturing the sort of chaotic conspiracies we're involved with. Different factions with different goals. Some people are ideologically committed to liberation, and others are not. On another axis, those pure or heart and those out just for their own skins.

Security isn't some abstract concept where we tally up mobile phone usage against spicy activities committed and if the balance sheet comes out net positive, we get off scot-free. It's born of the relations we have to others. Who we choose to keep company with matters as does keeping tabs on our allies. Arvel Skeen was willing to betray all his comrades to get what he saw as his. Luthen is a true believer, but incoherently in a vague "non-Empire" future, and as a result he treats people as expendable.

As much as security depends on technical things like how we communicate and how resilient we are to surveillance, it's just as much a human problem. Too much paranoia, and we'll only ever work alone. Not enough, and we'll let snitches into our ranks. If we're too credulous, we'll get taken advantage of. Somewhere, there's a balance. "Trust but verify" is a fairly good starting point for figuring this out. Humans are social creatures, and a lifetime of interactions with others has left each of us with gut instincts that serve us well. These instincts are also influenced by the world around us, and since the world is racist, sexist, and otherwise bigoted, so too are we (at least some). We're also traumatized and often looking for terror where it might not be. Pure theory isn't enough, nor is gut instinct. To make informed decisions about those around us, we have to tie our political analyses to our emotional reactions, but moreover we have to actually do the work of observing and analyzing. We have to introspect on ourselves and our feelings, and measure these against the objective reality around us. Security isn't checkboxes. It's a deeply personal affair. If there's only one thing we can learn from *Andor*, it's the importance of strong human connections but also of the dangers therein.

[13] So much fucking longer…

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Håkan Geijer
PopSec: Andor
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