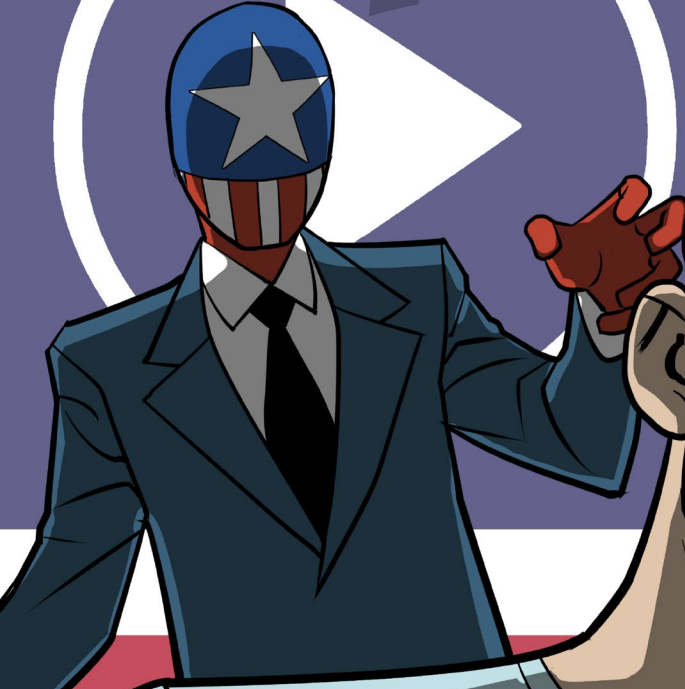


The Threat Lab Presents...

# THE NEW RECRUIT



RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

ED VIDEOS

DED VIDEOS

MMENDED VIDEOS

LATEST ADVENTURE  
SPECTACULAR!

Domestic violent extremism is an ongoing national security concern that undermines trust in government institutions and divides our society, our organizations, and even our families.

In collaboration with DoD's Counter-Insider Threat Program and the National Insider Threat Task Force, The Threat Lab created this graphic novel to raise awareness of the harm that domestic violent extremism may cause and offer strategies to interrupt pathways to violent behavior.

## Credits

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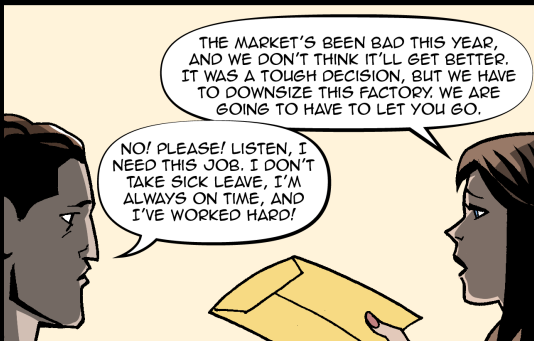
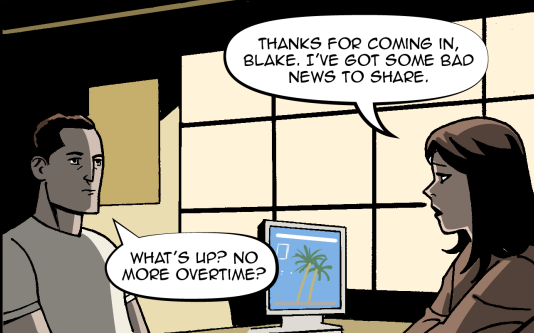
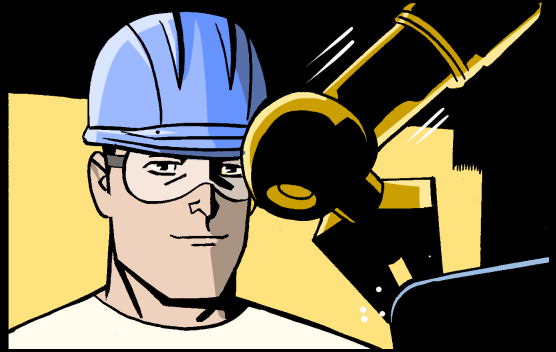
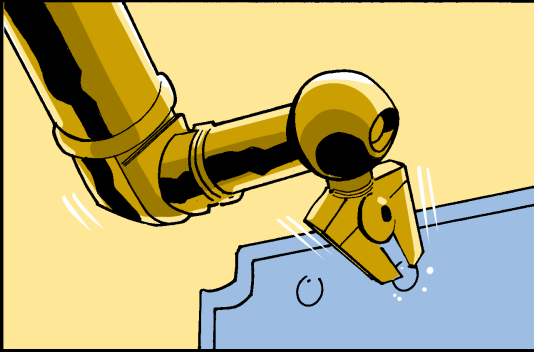
Office of the Under Secretary of Defense  
for Intelligence and Security (OUSD[I&S])

National Insider Threat  
Task Force (NITTF)

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who reviewed early drafts of this graphic novel and shared their time and expertise with us. We appreciate their help in making this a poignant and powerful story!





### DEBRIEF SECTION

GRIEVANCES PLAY A BIG ROLE IN THE SPREAD OF EXTREMISM. THERE ARE MANY SOURCES OF GRIEVANCES, INCLUDING A JOB LOSS, A MISSED PROMOTION, RELATIONSHIP OR FAMILY PROBLEMS, UGLY POLITICAL DISCOURSE, AND PERCEIVED UNFAIRNESS. A PERSON WITH GRIEVANCES MAY FEEL STRONGLY THAT THEY HAVE BEEN BETRAYED OR HAVE BEEN DENIED WHAT THEY DESERVE.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

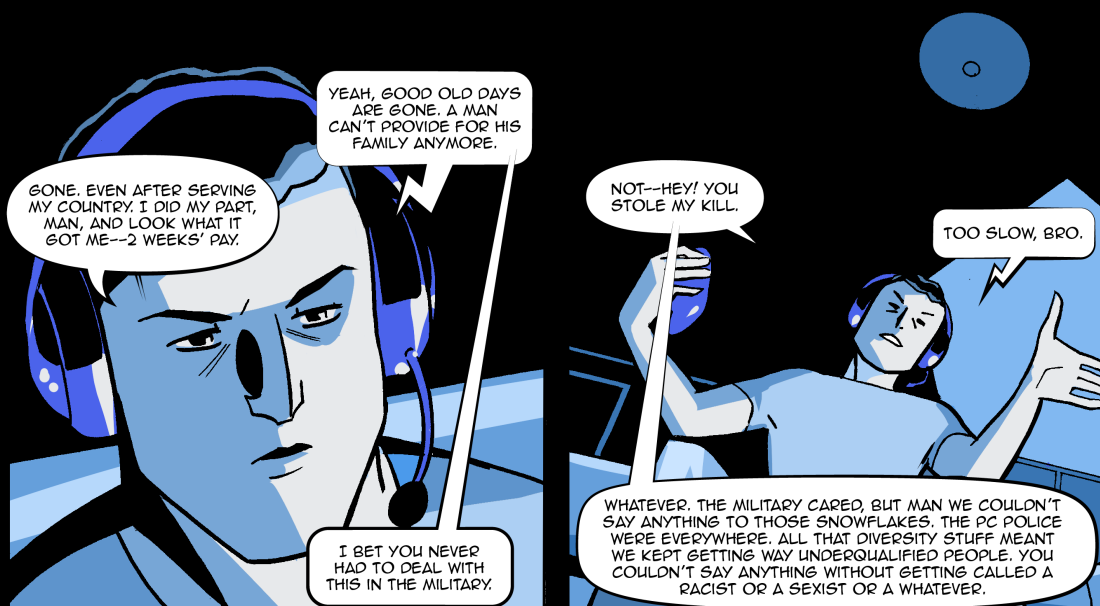
OUR SOCIETY--GOVERNMENT, BUSINESSES, FAMILY, FRIENDS--  
MAKES A LOT OF PROMISES BUT DOESN'T ALWAYS DELIVER:

WORK HARD AND YOU WILL SUCCEED.

GET AN EDUCATION AND YOU CAN FIND A JOB.

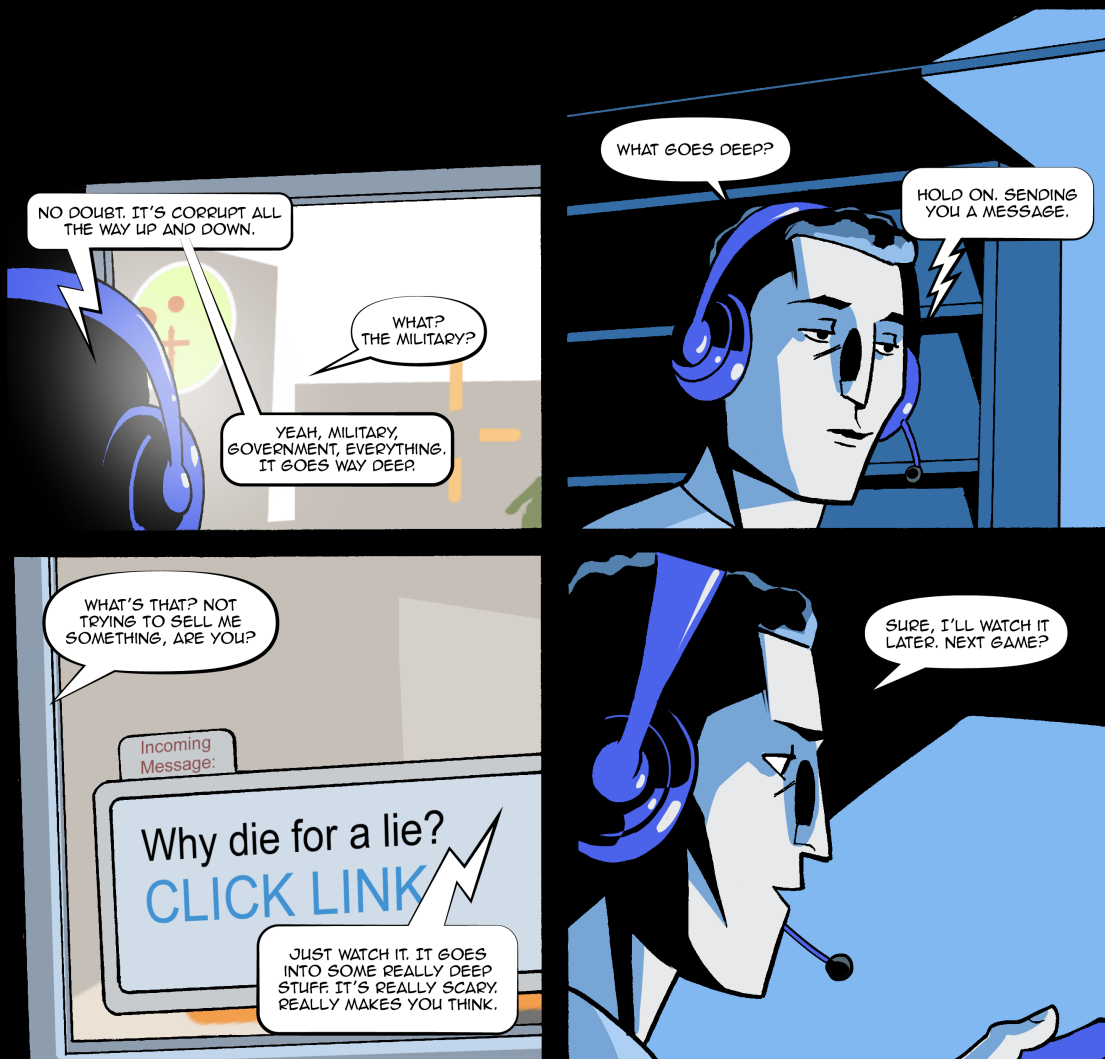
GO ABOVE AND BEYOND AND YOUR HARD WORK WILL BE RECOGNIZED.

WHEN PEOPLE DO ALL THE RIGHT THINGS BUT STILL FALL SHORT, THEY MAY  
LOSE FAITH. WHEN THEY SEE OTHER PEOPLE GETTING AHEAD OR  
SUCCEEDING WHILE THEY STRUGGLE, THEY MAY THINK IT'S UNFAIR--THAT THE  
WORLD IS STACKED AGAINST THEM. BROKEN PROMISES, REAL OR PERCEIVED,  
CAN LEAVE PEOPLE RECEPTIVE TO EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

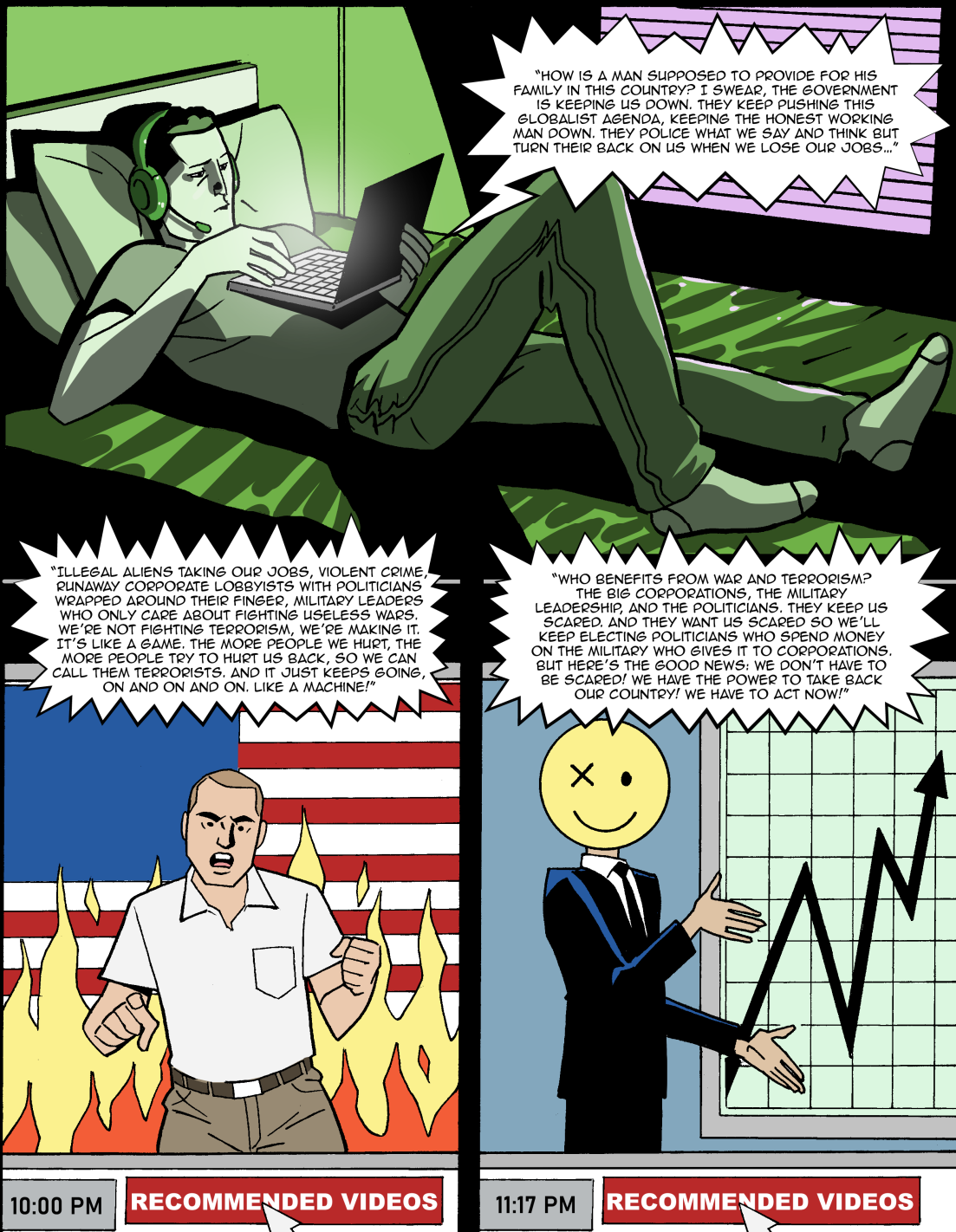
MANY PEOPLE WORK THROUGH GRIEVANCES AND DON'T LET THEM DOMINATE THEIR LIVES. OTHERS NURSE THEIR GRIEVANCES AND COLLECT NEW ONES WITHOUT RESOLVING THE OLD ONES. THESE UNRESOLVED GRIEVANCES CAN MAKE A PERSON MORE RECEPTIVE TO EXTREMIST CONTENT. BY OFFERING SIMPLE EXPLANATIONS FOR A PERSON'S SUFFERING, MANY CONSPIRACY THEORIES BECOME POWERFUL LURES.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

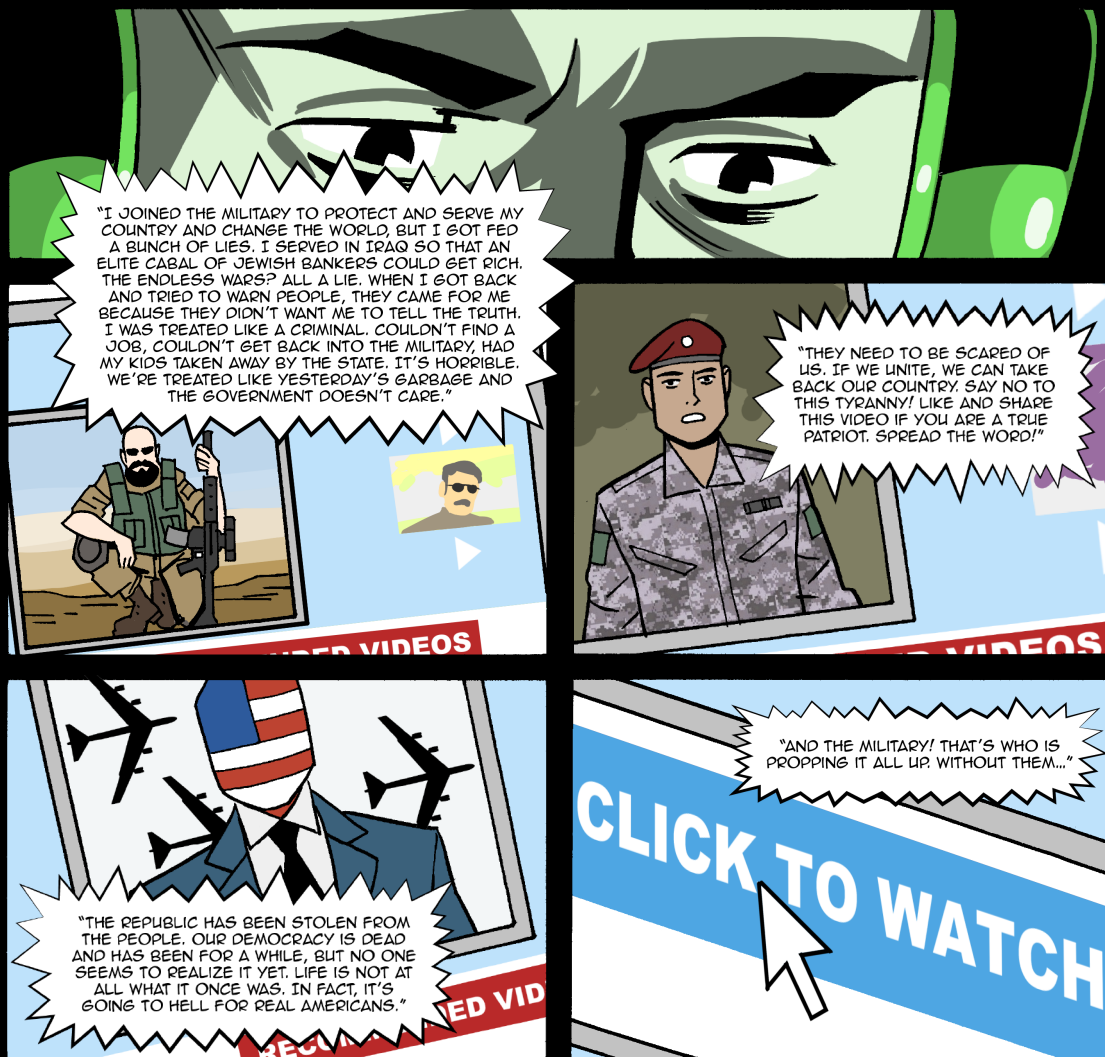
TODAY, THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO SHARE GRIEVANCES. SOCIAL MEDIA, GAMING PLATFORMS, MESSAGING APPS, AND IMAGEBOARDS ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON WAYS TO SHARE INFORMATION. THESE PLATFORMS ALLOW UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO PEOPLE AND TO INFORMATION, MOST OF IT HARMLESS.

SOME CONTENT, HOWEVER, IS CONCERNING, AND THE MIX OF GRIEVANCES AND THE EASE OF SHARING MAY PROVIDE AN ON-RAMP TO SOME EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

INCREASINGLY, WHAT WE SEE ONLINE IS DICTATED BY WHAT KEEPS OUR ATTENTION AND KEEPS US CLICKING RATHER THAN WHAT WE SEARCHED FOR IN THE FIRST PLACE. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USE ALGORITHMS TO PRIORITIZE CONTENT. THIS IS INTENTIONAL. PLATFORMS CALCULATE WHAT KEEPS OUR ATTENTION, AND THEN FLOOD OUR FEEDS WITH MORE OF THE SAME TO ENCOURAGE USER ENGAGEMENT ON THEIR APPS.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

OFTEN, WE CHOOSE TO CONSUME CONTENT THAT WE AGREE WITH, AND WHAT OFTEN KEEPS OUR ATTENTION IS CONTENT THAT SPARKS A STRONG EMOTIONAL REACTION LIKE OUTRAGE AND ANGER. FLOODING OUR FEED WITH MORE AND MORE OF THE SAME CONTENT--OFTEN ONE-SIDED CONTENT--CAN CREATE A PERSONALIZED REALITY THAT MAY ULTIMATELY MAKE EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY SEEM ACCEPTABLE. WE CAN GO DOWN A RABBIT HOLE OF EXTREMIST CONTENT WITHOUT EVER ACTIVELY CHOOSING TO VIEW IT OR KNOWING HOW WE GOT THERE.

A MONTH LATER...

"... THIS WHOLE CORRUPT POLITICAL SYSTEM WOULD COME CRUMBLING DOWN. NO MORE WELFARE STATE, NO MORE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, NO MORE IMMIGRANTS REPLACING REAL AMERICANS. LIKE THIS VIDEO AND SHARE THE WORD. GROW THE MOVEMENT!"

11:23 AM  
RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

SO, KASEY, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I...UM. I DON'T KNOW. THEY ALL SEEM REALLY ANGRY.

OF COURSE THEY'RE ANGRY! THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS CORRUPT. WHY WOULDN'T THEY BE ANGRY? WHY AREN'T YOU ANGRY? THE GOVERNMENT IS KILLING PEOPLE, AND THEY'RE GETTING AWAY WITH IT!

WELL THEY'RE SAYING SOME STUFF I AGREE WITH, BUT... I DUNNO. THESE GUYS DON'T SEEM RIGHT. THEY'RE TRYING TO MAKE EVERYTHING TOO SIMPLE.

IT IS SIMPLE. THEY WANT YOU TO THINK IT'S COMPLICATED BUT IT'S NOT. THERE'S GOOD GUYS AND BAD GUYS. THE GOOD GUYS JUST NEED TO BAND TOGETHER AND TAKE OUT THE POLITICIANS, THE CORPORATIONS, AND THE MILITARY.

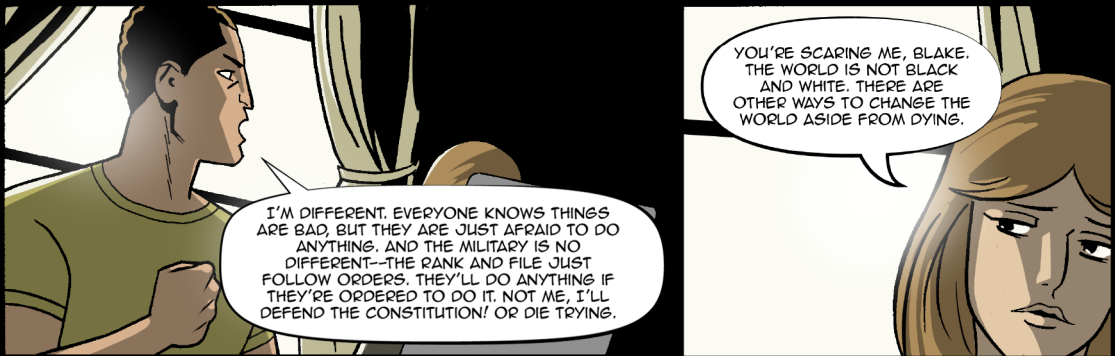
...BLAKE, YOU SERVED IN THE MILITARY.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

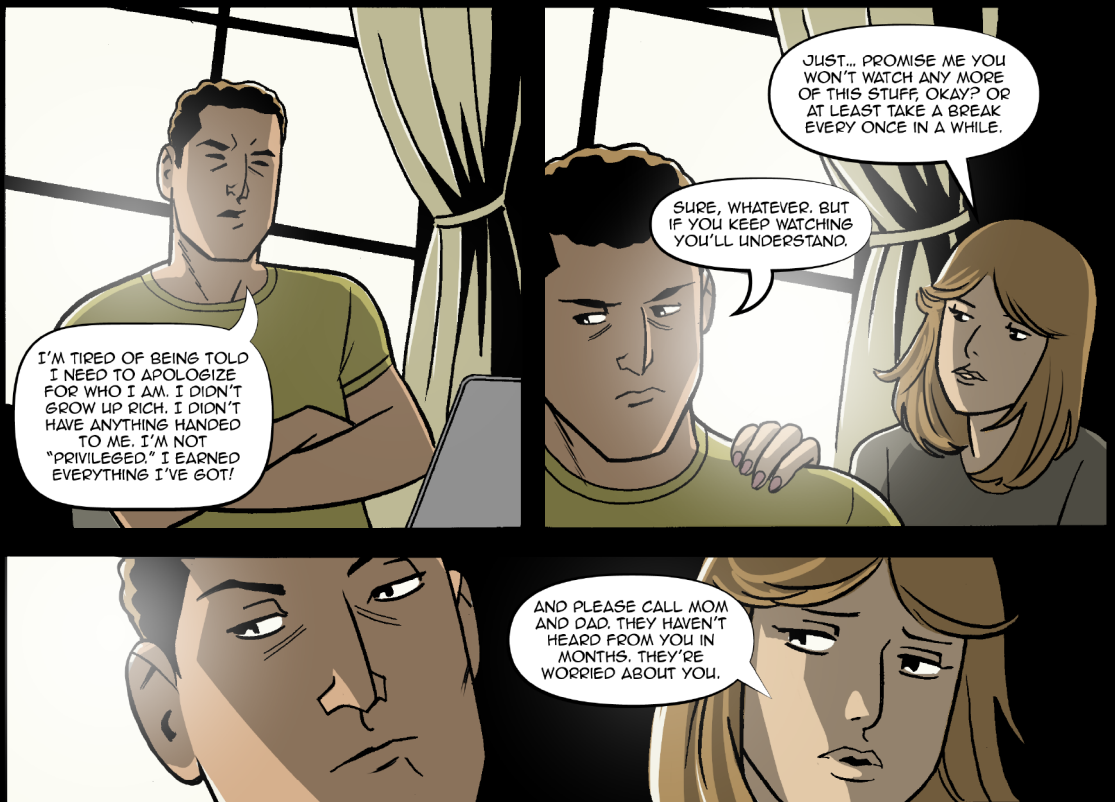
EVENTS IN THE NEWS OFTEN HAVE COMPLEX EXPLANATIONS THAT CAN TAKE TIME TO UNDERSTAND. CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND EXTREMIST RHETORIC TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS BY OFFERING A SIMPLE EXPLANATION FOR COMPLEX EVENTS.

EXTREMIST RHETORIC ALSO PLAYS OFF STRONGLY HELD BELIEFS--KILLING IS BAD, CRIME IS BAD, BULLIES ARE BAD. WHEN THESE BAD THINGS HAPPEN, EXTREMISTS BLAME SOMEONE FOR CAUSING THEM. IN REALITY, THESE EVENTS USUALLY HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN A WIDE RANGE OF COMPLEX ISSUES. BAD THINGS MAY HAPPEN FOR A VARIETY OF EXPLAINABLE BUT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND REASONS THAT ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS. OFTEN, HONEST EXPLANATIONS MAY REQUIRE ACKNOWLEDGING INCONVENIENT FACTS THAT CAN MAKE US FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.



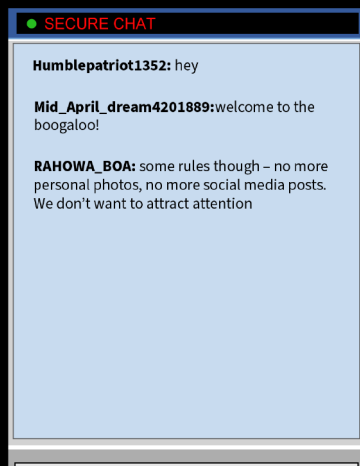
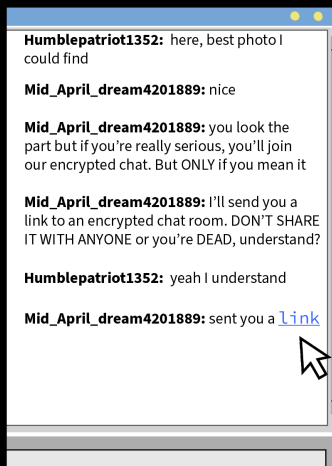
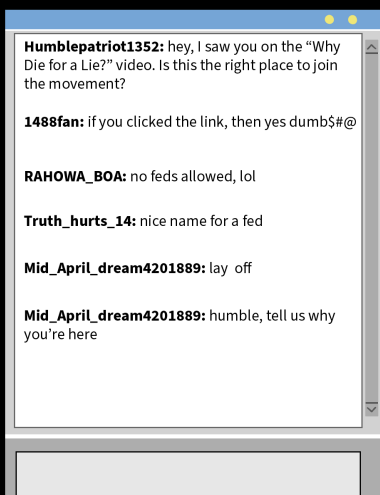
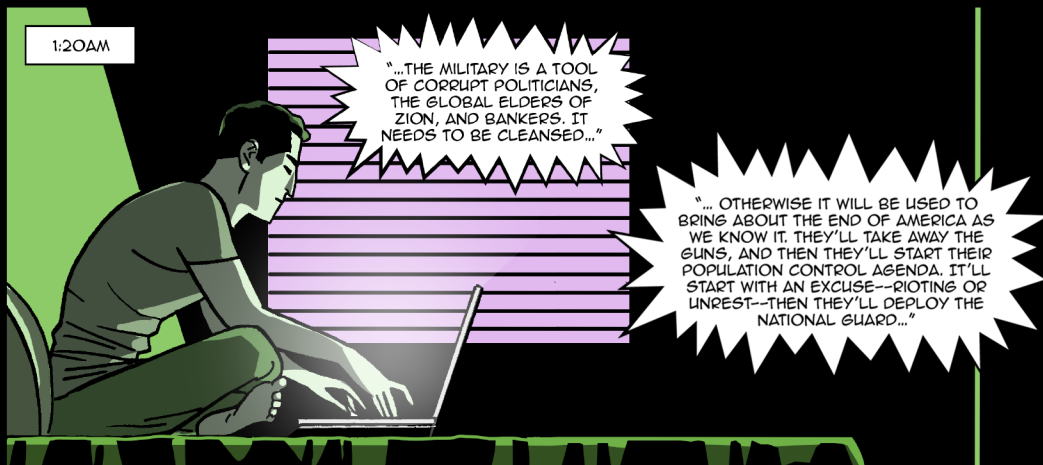
**DEBRIEF SECTION**

EXTREMISM SINGLES OUT ONE OR MORE GROUPS AS THE CAUSE FOR ALL OF SOCIETY'S PROBLEMS. THIS BLAME CAN DISRUPT BONDS OF TRUST BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS WITHIN SOCIETY THAT WERE BUILT OVER YEARS OF EFFORT. IT CAN ALSO QUICKLY FRAY BONDS AMONG COMMUNITIES, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY.



**DEBRIEF SECTION**

EXTREMIST RHETORIC IS DANGEROUS BECAUSE IT MANIPULATES EMOTIONS, OFFERS SIMPLE BUT DECEPTIVE EXPLANATIONS, AND OFFERS A SIMPLE SOLUTION UNCONNECTED TO THE REAL CAUSES OF AN ISSUE. IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS RECOMMEND THIS CONTENT. IT TELLS A HIGHLY-CHARGED, EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING STORY THAT CAPTURES OUR ATTENTION.

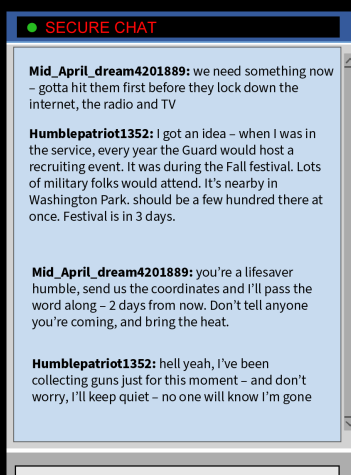
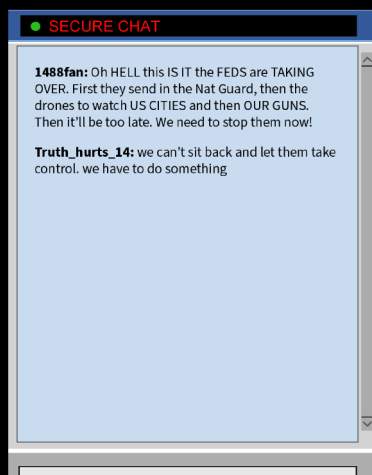
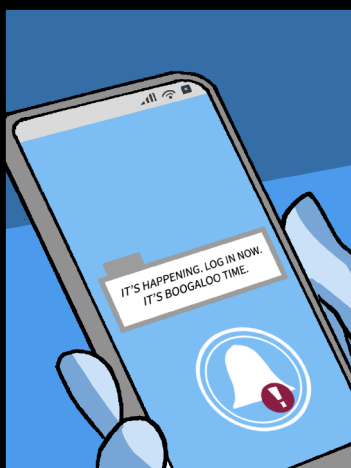


### DEBRIEF SECTION

EXTREMIST GROUPS ACTIVELY RECRUIT VETERANS TO FURTHER THEIR AGENDAS. VETERANS ARE A TARGET FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

VETERANS BRING SPECIFIC SKILL SETS AND EXPERIENCES THAT CAN HELP ADVANCE THE EXTREMIST AGENDA--LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS, AND WEAPONS TRAINING.

THE U.S. MILITARY IS STILL ONE OF THE MOST TRUSTED INSTITUTIONS IN THE NATION. HAVING MEMBERS OF THAT TRUSTED INSTITUTION IN THEIR RANKS BRINGS LEGITIMACY TO THE GROUP AND HELPS WITH FURTHER RECRUITMENT.

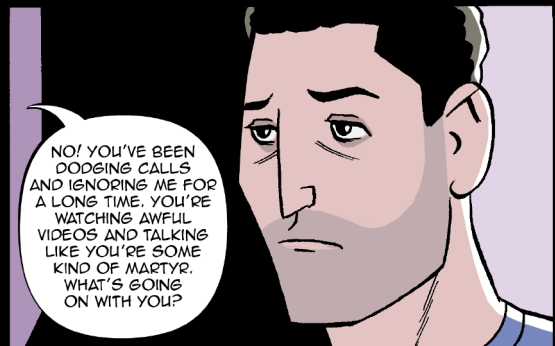
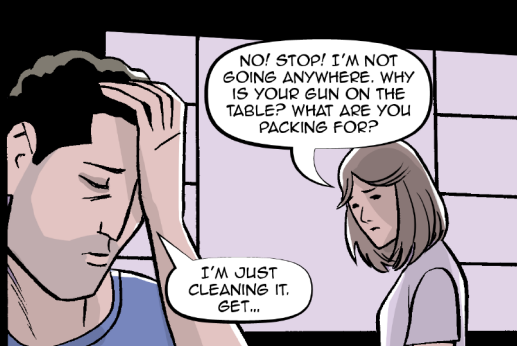
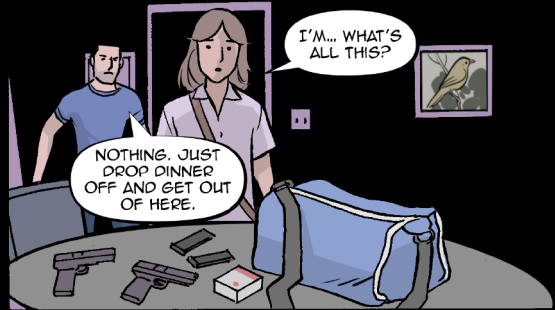
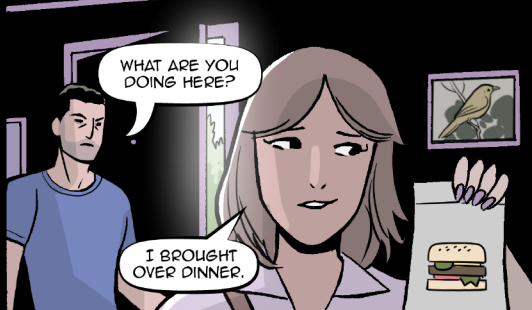
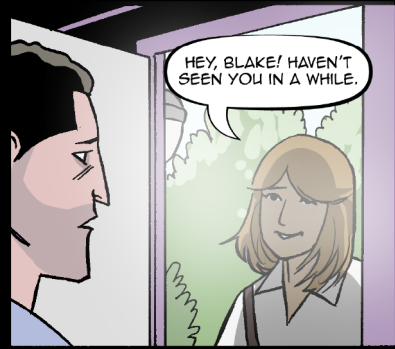


## DEBRIEF SECTION

EXTREMISM OFTEN FUELS AND REINFORCES ITSELF, ESPECIALLY ONLINE. WITH ALGORITHMS PUSHING THE SAME CONTENT AND GROUPS PROMOTING ONLY INTRA-GROUP COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT, MANY PEOPLE WHO FALL VICTIM TO EXTREMISM END UP SOCIALLY ISOLATED.

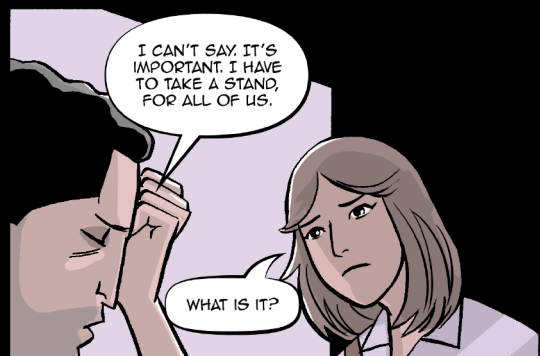
OFTEN, EXTREMIST SYMPATHIZERS DEMONSTRATE PROFOUND BEHAVIOR CHANGES IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. THEY LOSE OR LIMIT CONTACT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY. AS THEY BECOME MORE RADICALIZED, THEY BECOME MORE ISOLATED AND THUS HAVE FEWER OFF-RAMPS FROM EXTREMISM.

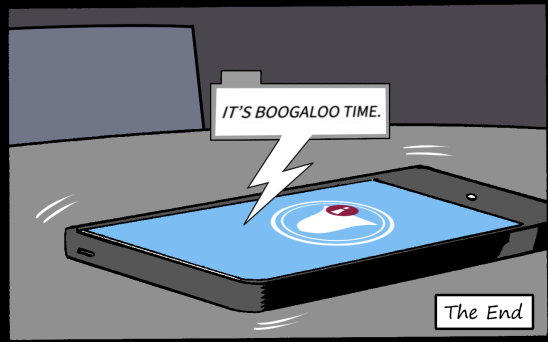
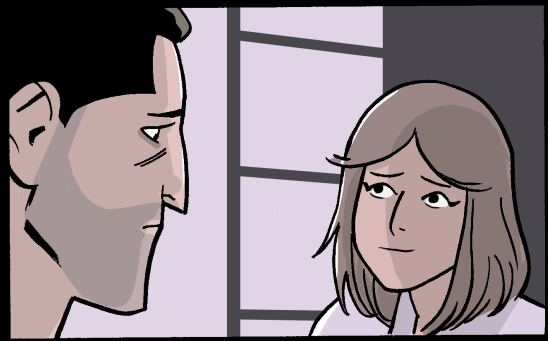
EXTREMISM ALSO BLINDS PEOPLE TO ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS. ANGER FEELS GOOD AND RIGHTEOUS. ANGER BRINGS A FEELING OF SUPERIORITY. THERE ARE USUALLY MULTIPLE WAYS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM AT THE ROOT OF A GRIEVANCE. EXTREMISM SELECTIVELY DISMISSES ALL BUT THE MOST RADICAL SOLUTIONS, THUS NARROWING A PERSON'S CHOICES TO ONLY ONE OPTION--VIOLENCE.



### DEBRIEF SECTION

EXTREMISM IS COMPLICATED. THERE'S NO ONE ROUTE OR PATHWAY TO EXTREMISM AND VIOLENCE. WHAT MAY PUSH ONE PERSON TOWARD VIOLENCE MAY HAVE NO EFFECT ON ANOTHER PERSON. THE TIMEFRAME OF RADICALIZATION DIFFERS AS WELL. SOME PEOPLE ARE RADICALIZED TO VIOLENCE IN A MATTER OF DAYS, WHILE OTHERS ARE FULLY IMMERSSED IN EXTREMIST RHETORIC FOR YEARS BUT NEVER HARM ANYONE.





## DEBRIEF SECTION

THOUGHT PRECEDES ACTION. EXTREMIST RHETORIC MAY FEED INTO ACTION. EXTREMIST RHETORIC IS SOMETIMES, BUT NOT ALWAYS, AN INDICATOR OF SOMEONE'S WILLINGNESS TO USE VIOLENCE. IN FACT, SOMEONE MIGHT NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THEY ARE REPEATING EXTREMIST TALKING POINTS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE SURROUNDED BY EXTREMISTS--EITHER ONLINE OR IN REAL LIFE. EXTREMIST RHETORIC MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BECAUSE IT CAN HAVE A CORROSIVE EFFECT ON ORGANIZATIONS AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

GRIEVANCES PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO TURN TO EXTREMISM, AND THE ROAD FROM GRIEVANCE TO EXTREMISM HAS BEEN SUPERCHARGED BY ALGORITHMS AND SOCIAL MEDIA. HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO INOCULATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS AGAINST EXTREMIST RHETORIC:

BE WARY OF "US VERSUS THEM" MESSAGES.

BE WARY OF PEOPLE WHO DEMAND EXTREME MEASURES AND DISMISS MODERATE ONES OUT OF HAND.

BE WARY OF MESSAGES WITH SIMPLE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS.

BREAK OUT OF THE GRIP OF THE ALGORITHM. TALK TO OTHERS AND GET MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES!

READ FROM MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOURCES! YOU COULD BE LIVING IN A BUBBLE AND NOT KNOW IT.

THERE IS NO ONE APPROACH TO TACKLING VIOLENT EXTREMISM--BUT KNOWING WHY AND HOW SOMEONE MAY RADICALIZE MAY HELP DISRUPT THE PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE.

## The Threat Lab: A Brief History

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) founded The Threat Lab in 2018 to realize the DoD Counter-Insider Threat Program Director's vision to incorporate the social and behavioral sciences into the mission space. Our team is headquartered in Seaside, California, and includes psychologists, sociologists, policy analysts, computer scientists, and other subject matter experts committed to workforce protection.

Our business model is simple: We work with stakeholders to transform operational challenges into actionable research questions. We then design and execute research projects that result in accessible, concise findings and recommendations that we integrate into training and awareness materials for organizations to use as is or to customize for their own purposes.

For more information or to request a briefing, please email us at  
**dodhra.ThreatLab@mail.mil**



**PA PERSEREC**