

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

After some experimentation and growing pains, **The Dystonaut** is back to its original newsletter format. Thank you for your patience and support.
-Tom

*"So you must LEARN to THINK and to SEE.
Especially with your Third Eye."
- Chuck Hammill*

I came onto the scene in the early 1980s after reading a bunch of Ashida Kim books on Ninjitsu and **How to Survive a Nuclear Disaster**, by Robert C. Smith. The former was available in the martial arts section of any book store, and the latter in a supermarket's paperback book section, right next to the latest installment of Jerry Ahern's **Survivalist** pulp series. It was the same supermarket where a gentleman once showed me some interesting things you can do with a payphone, and it was that book that introduced me to something called the "2-meter band", a company called Heathkit, and a hobby known as Ham Radio. Funny how things work like that. It was this beginning that brought me out to the far edge of the bell curve and on a long, strange, and often meandering trip. The most important function these books provided was to further instill a certain mindset that began with the motto I learned as a Boy Scout: "Be prepared", and to provide a way of learning how to look at things outside the mainstream. Kim's books were very instrumental in this regard. Smith's book, in addition to showing a useful glimpse into the preparedness mindset and providing some useful information, had a very comprehensive bibliography that was valuable in further studies. Not bad for something that cost me \$4 back in 1982!

I came across all sorts of interesting types during this journey. The first types were computer hackers and their cousins the phone phreaks. These were individuals who used technology in often sketchy ways and existed on the fringes of what we now

call cyberspace. The hackers I knew of during the 1980s engaged in one of two activities. They either reverse-engineered or "cracked" commercial software so they could find out how it worked and gain status in the hacking community, or they found various ways to gain access into various mainframe computers used by businesses so they could learn how they work, explore the network, and gain status in the hacking community. Most of it was pretty harmless for the most part, and they made serious effort to avoid detection and not damage the data stored on the machines. These days everyone who is into computers calls themselves a hacker, and takes great pains to distinguish themselves from "crackers", who are the "bad guys" that today do what we thought of as hacking back before many modern hackers were born.

Phone phreaks were hackers who specialized in the phone company and its network. They too were into exploring the various parts of the phone system, both the networks and phone company computers. As an added bonus they were often able to make "phree" phone calls, but that carried a risk of getting busted that increased over the years. They had their roots in the Yippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and were more street-smart in general than hackers. The better phone phreaks I met over the years were also good overall computer hackers and often had expertise in designing and building interesting electronics devices. Some of them were also proto-survivalists of a sort. Phone phreaking for the sake of making free phone calls has been rendered moot with the various forms of inexpensive phone services available from various common carriers, but there remain a few telecommunications hobbyists who continue to explore the dark corners of the phone network. With the increase of VoIP services, much of this dovetails with computer hacking.

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

Then there were the survivalists, the "unorganized militia" types, and the modern-day politically-correct survivalists who call themselves "preppers". They were the individuals who were making preparations for when society collapses from a nuclear war or other disaster. The militia types came later. They were like survivalists in that they were preparing for some possible dark future, but were more concerned that the United States would be invaded by a foreign country (Russia, China, and the United Nations were considered the likely suspects) or perhaps taken over from within by a group of totalitarians planning a "New World Order". Some of them even thought we were going to be invaded from outer space by intergalactic space aliens, although everyone knows they only come here for our planet's excellent truck-stop food, in particular the barbeque (ribs, white bread, and ice-cold beer!)

One interesting observation I made was that despite their shared counterculture roots, hackers and survivalists never really came together. The closest I ever heard about such a thing was when a famous hacker named **Cheshire Catalyst** mentioned that if the US was ever invaded that hackers would probably be best able to set up covert communications networks on hacked computer systems for the resistance. Hackers were not very physical or real-world oriented, and generally avoided all the low-tech stuff. The survivalists were the same way in that they shied away from the high-tech stuff. Their excuses were that the EMP from nuclear weapons detonations would wreck most if not all electronics, and that "big brother" used all that stuff to track them.

Despite the stereotypes I would usually encounter in both communities, I would occasionally come across someone who really got it. They never had a real online pseudonym or "handle". On BBSes

they would pick a random one for each system they were on. If you were friends with them, they used their real name. When you first met them, it was always in the real world, not online. And most importantly, they were into both high-tech and low-tech. They quietly prepared for unforeseen circumstances and interesting situations, but were not caught up in that whole conspiracy theory, TSHTF, or TEOTWAWKI thing that many so-called survivalists get bogged down in. It's funny that the father of the survivalist movement, Kurt Saxon, was not into all that TEOTWAWKI stuff and simply advocated living a self-reliant lifestyle without getting bogged down in all that SHTF apocalypse nonsense.

Each one of these rare individuals I met over the years had a few things in common. The first was that they were exceptionally good at what they were into. The second was that they put together their kit with their own personally determined specifications, and that their choices often contradicted the popular choice. For example, back when everyone started moving over to IBM PCs and PC clones (or a Macintosh), these individuals still ran older Apple IIs, Commodores, Ataris, TIs, TRS-80s and S-100 systems. They could do more with those systems (they usually wrote their own software) than most people could do with the newer stuff. Likewise, their choices in firearms and survivalist-type gear were highly functional and often not reflective of the current fads in those scenes. These people were the true hackers and survivalists, although they didn't consider themselves such and they were certainly different than the average self-proclaimed practitioner of either.

Over the years, I have worked on trying to define the essence that makes those individuals stand apart and put it into words. While they are very good at

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

both they cannot be defined as either hackers or survivalists based upon observations of those who call themselves such. I have come to call them dystonauts because that is the word that I feel best defines them. They are individuals, who through their unique skill-sets, have become adept at navigating around the current dystopia many people feel were are experiencing these days. However I hardly expect them to self-identify themselves as such.

One of the most amazing things I've observed of dystonauts over the years was that they were completely and totally aware of just how screwed-up things are, acted accordingly, and yet they were totally unfazed by it. This attitude comes from having that unique skill-set, and having the confidence that comes from being aware of one's competency in that skill-set. You can tell the dystonauts from everyone else that way. Take any news story that would have the average survivalist-type wringing his or her hands in worry. A dystonaut usually laughs when hearing it; often at both the story and the individual wringing their hands over it. Often they will explain simple countermeasures based upon their unique skill-set and commonly-available technology.

An interesting aspect of this is that most of the technology used by dystonauts is available at your local Target, Wal-Mart or Radio Shack, and can be bought with untraceable cash. I have mentioned the concept of the Wal-Mart Ninja previously, and many of you have heard the term "mall ninja" being used as a pejorative against fanatical collectors of tactical gear. What few realize however is that guerrilla operatives from the Ninja of ancient Japan to modern times use local sources to outfit their kit. With the Ninja, common farming implements became weapons. Today, dystonauts use local sources to outfit their kit. This

includes retail outlets, tag sales, flea markets, hardware/home-improvement stores, and army/navy stores. They buy common off-the-shelf items to modify, kit-bash, and re-purpose them. Modern day ninjas would probably be going to the mall (OK, a decent shopping plaza then) to outfit themselves. Fortunately, most of these toys are pretty inexpensive. Some of them actually are toys. I also cannot disparage malls too much because when I got my start they were a one-stop source of educational reading material (bookstores), electronic supplies (Radio Shack), chemicals (pharmacy), phreaking access (payphones), and recreation (Dream Machine Arcade).



Funny story time. I was walking through a Toys 'R Us with Mercenary/IIRG many years back. We were looking for some inexpensive commo gear to use at the second HOPE hacker conference. We settled on these 900 MHz. walkie-talkies made by Vtech. They were only \$30 each, operated on the 902-928 MHz. Part 15 band, had selective calling so you could speak "privately" to another unit, and were frequency agile. They ran less than a watt of power, but it was enough for us to talk from one end of the Puck Building to another. You had to be a few inches away with the right antenna to tag them with a frequency counter, so

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

near-field frequency determination was unlikely. Third-parties could listen to us if they stumbled across the frequency, but we were high enough that we didn't have to worry about some hacker-wannabe jamming us with his ham HT. They worked well and served their purpose. Anyway, Merc commented how that if we as kids had the technology available (at that time) in a mere toy store, we'd probably would have taken over a third-world country. These days, it's gotten even better. More important than the technology however is the skill set. Tech comes and goes, but the skill set remains with you forever.

Everybody's unique skill-set is different. Note the adjective "unique", meaning one-of-a-kind. The more diverse the better because the level of diversity is directly proportional to the success of a voluntary association of dystonauts gathered together for a common purpose. With that said, there are some common skills that are essential. One of these is broadly defined as observation. For the sake of this exercise, observation is using your six senses to directly and personally pick-up on events happening around you. Watching or listening to pundits and talking heads via mass media outlets doesn't count! I have observed that too many people these days look without seeing, and this is a bad thing. I have also observed that too many people blindly accept third-party observations from individuals with an agenda who are paid to entertain and bring in listener revenue. This is also bad.

As I write this, I am parked in a shopping plaza with line of site to the street intersection where the plaza's entrance is located. My window is rolled down a bit, and I have a Signal Stalker police scanner running. I can see, hear, and smell my immediate environment. The scanner is keeping me apprised of local public safety radio traffic, and will alert me of any nearby RF signals

regardless of frequency. I am also getting a feel for the location, and I trust that my sixth sense will clue me in if something seems interesting on a quantum level. I was listening to a talk-radio show, but the host's whining was too distracting and interfered with my observation exercise.

To what end all of this? Despite what you may have been taught, ignorance is not bliss. Observation skills and related support equipment are an essential part of your personal infrastructure. Observation is the first step of the OODA loop. Without it you can't effectively orient, decide, or act. Assorted bad actors and other members of the opposition will want to get inside your OODA loop in order to gain an advantage over you for any number of nefarious reasons. As a matter of self-defense, you want to prevent this and get inside their's if possible. Much of the opposition's game plan is based on FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt). Proper observation technique helps reduce or eliminate FUD.

With the exception of the police scanner, this exercise was conducted with organic biological assets that every person who isn't both profoundly blind and deaf has access to. If one of your senses is handicapped on some level, I don't have to tell you that your other ones become more acute to compensate for your handicap. Just about anyone can try this exercise, and come away learning something. All you have to do is find a comfortable place that has some form of activity, and use what God gave you. The more you do it, the better you become at it. There are even little exercises you can do that will help you improve different facets of your observation abilities.

The first exercise requires is a bunch of small random objects and a small blanket or towel. Arrange the objects on a table, and give yourself a couple minutes to "memorize" what you

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

see. Cover the objects over, write down what you've seen, and then remove the covering to see how accurate you are. You can adjust the difficulty by shortening the observation time, using similar objects, and requiring more detail. You will notice your improvement as you begin to remember more detail in a shorter amount of time. After you have done some visual work for a while, pick up a familiar object, close your eyes, and let your sense of touch ascertain the shape, texture, temperature, and other tactile aspects of the item. Try it with different things. Now just kick back with your eyes closed, and concentrate on the sounds, smells, and the overall "vibe" of the scene. What do you now notice with your other senses when you eliminated vision? If you haven't done it already, spend some time walking around your house and property in the dark without a light source.

Once you've tackled those stages, set yourself up in a secure and safe outside location where there is some activity going on. After you've conducted a little visual observation, close your eyes. Again, concentrate on the sounds, smells, and the overall "vibe" of the scene. Try this in your back yard first, and then in a public place. Conduct a reconnaissance first to find somewhere where random people won't be likely to notice you hanging around with your eyes closed and think you're sleeping, passed out, or dead. Most people walk around with blinders on, and something has to be right in their face for them to notice it. You don't have to worry about them. You do have to worry about the individual much like yourself who is going to notice your experimentation. He or she may leave it alone, or they may call 911 because they think you just had a stroke or heart attack in your car. Been there, done that to a traveling salesman who decided that the back end of an employer's parking lot was a good place to take a nap.

When you conduct an observation activity, what are you specifically looking for? If you are in the field keeping tabs on the opposition, you will likely be making use of the acronym SALUTE. This breaks down into the following:

- S - SIZE: How many people and vehicles.
- A - ACTIVITY: What they are doing.
- L - LOCATION: Where they were located.
- U - UNIT (OR UNIFORM): Distinctive clothing, uniforms, and markings on clothing and vehicles.
- T - TIME: The date and time that the activity occurred.
- E - EQUIPMENT: What they are carrying and using.

All of this goes together in a log file you keep on observed activity. Eventually you will note increasing detail of your observations and see patterns develop. SALUTE is good for direct observation of people conducting an activity. What about a location or general area? In that case, OCOKA will be of use. Fellow dystonaut MKORION breaks it down quite succinctly:

This is not only for selecting terrain, say from a map reconnaissance, it's also for assessing whatever terrain you happen to be in. It requires absolutely no tools, and provides you with a tested and reasoned approach to simple terrain analysis—that alone puts you one up on everyone else not doing it.

Try it.

Get up from your computer, walk into your living room and begin your OCOKA analysis. Practice it next time your in a checkout line, or idling in a parking lot. Do it from your desk at the office.

Here are some considerations:

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

O - Observation and Fields of Fire: Observation from unaided vision or vision enhanced with an electro-optical device. In the defense, consider how and with what you will be engaged with. In the offense, how and with what you will engage.

C - Cover and Concealment: Cover is protection from weapons, concealment is protection from observation. When considering this, ask what weapons you have cover from and what sensors you have concealment from. This is where technical and scientific literacy have some of their greatest utility. Disguise and appropriate dress is a type of concealment.

O - Obstacles (man made and natural): Consider obstacles like police operations. If you're attempting to remain undetected, then a police presence is an obstacle. A section of your town may be unnavigable because of social or cultural differences. Intersections that are navigable may become obstacles when vehicles are abandoned near them.

K - Key or Decisive Terrain: In our application, we're not usually going to seize or hold terrain, so think of key terrain as those areas that support your Courses of Action. People are also terrain.

A - Avenues of Approach: On foot, bicycle, water, sewers, windows, "mouse holes"? Urban terrain is three dimensional. Always try for three ways in or out. Urban terrain also allows for easy vertical movement (i.e. fire escapes, storm drains).

Use OCOKA as a template and apply it fluidly.

So far, everything we've talked

about requires no equipment other than what nature and evolution provided you. Besides using your organic observation assets, you can take this to a different level with various technological aids. I already mentioned the police scanner. Small radio communications receivers extend your observation ability into the ether and enable you to keep track of activities that you are physically separated from by a few miles. A small pair of inexpensive 10x25 binoculars help bring the scene closer to you. Those amplified listening aids do the same with sounds, and help clear up unintelligible voices. Digital cameras, both still and video, can save what you see for future analysis. The same applies to audio recorders. CCD cameras combined with IR LED illuminators, or actual night-vision devices help you see in the dark. Network cams, wireless cameras, and baby monitors let you directly observe from a distance.

Your starter-level observation kit doesn't have to be expensive. My most-used piece of equipment is a pair of 10x25 binoculars I bought for less than \$20 at the local spy shop about ten years ago. Seriously. They fit in a pouch on my go-bag, right next to my digital camera. The size is convenient, and the optics are more than adequate for discrete daytime observation. It was unfortunate when the owner moved his business down south, as the place was good for inexpensive useful toys and business leads. They still sell the same binoculars, but the price is now \$20. The 25mm objective lens is a little on the small side for night time use. Going up to a pair of 10x50s will greatly improve your observation capability in evening streetlight and bright moonlight conditions. My first pair of binoculars was a set of Tasco 10x50s from a sporting goods store. They're approaching 20 years old now, and still work great when I need a little more light gathering capability than the 10x25s provide.

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

So far we're talking entry-level optics. For the beginner, a pair of binoculars from Tasco or Bushnell will get the job done and not stress your budget. You do get what you pay for however and my next set of optics were a pair of post-World War II East German military surplus 8x30 field glasses made by Zeiss. Not too many people know are aware of who made optics for the Warsaw Pact right after the war, and this bit of information can help you get some real quality at a good price. Not as much magnification or light-gathering ability as a pair of 10x50s, but the increased clarity of the optics made up for it. The lesson here is to buy the best you can afford.

I've found that 10x is the maximum magnification that can be used freehand in a practical manner. Beyond that, the field of view jumps around too much to be useful. For greater magnification, you need a spotting scope with a tripod. Spotting scopes are better suited for fixed observation posts when you need to observe detail on a specific area. Back in my "industrial security" days, I made good use of a 15-45x50 Bushnell to read the names and registration numbers of various vessels on the Hudson River from a half-mile away.

Night vision gear, a/k/a NODs (Night Observation Devices) is another one of those handy observation aids that most people never get because they feel the equipment is unaffordable. A decent NOD should be one of the first things you purchase for your kit, because in this day and age you can't afford to not have one. Some individuals who opt for a set of NODs go with the Russian Night Owl brand that's sold at Sporting Goods stores. They are better than nothing, but you are better off treating your NOD purchase as an investment for the future and buying some surplus Gen1 or Gen2 American Gear. The availability has gone up and prices have gone down since they have been replaced in the military with

Gen3 and newer equipment. I like the AN/PVS-4 (weapons sight) and AN/PVS-5 (goggles) units. They are familiar, reliable, and fairly idiot-proof. A decent set on Ebay is in the \$1000-\$1500 range. If you look around, you can find one in good condition for under \$1000. For night-time observation, I prefer the AN/PVS-4. The PVS-4 is also a nice weapon sight.

For those on a budget, you can go the poor man's night-vision route. CCD cameras are sensitive to near-IR light, and can be used to see in the dark if combined with an array of IR LEDs. I've experimented with this, and have found that you need an IR LED array that's twice the size of what you think you need. Start with an array of about 20 LEDs and go from there. This is an active system, and that LED array is going to shine like a beacon to anyone with NOD capability. Also be aware of the fact that many "night vision" cameras that use CCDs with LED illumination don't use IR LEDs. They instead use low-power visible red LEDs that can be seen with the naked eye.

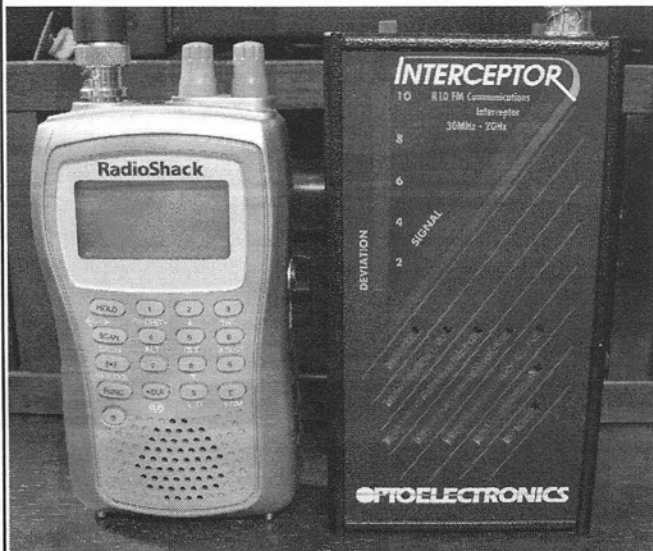
IR illuminators can also be used to enhance the operation of regular image intensifier NODs. The AN/PVS-5 comes with a built in illuminator for close-in work. Many tactical flashlight brands offer IR filters for the various models of their lights. The use of an IR illuminator will significantly increase the observation range of your NOD, especially on cloudy or moonless nights.

The optics are nice when you are doing surveillance and reconnaissance, but how are you going to know when something is out there worth watching? I previously mentioned Signal Stalker police scanners. For what it's worth, detecting nearby radio activity that is out of sync with the normal traffic in your immediate area, especially encrypted activity, is definitely a Buffalo Springfield moment. Many advanced operators upgrade from the

The Dystonaut

Issue #2, May/June 2011

Radio Shack solution and get broadband near-field receivers such as the NF-3K unit sold by many spy shops, or an old Optoelectronics R-10. After establishing an RF baseline, they consider any increase in the local noise floor or weird noise they hear as grounds for further investigation. This eventually graduates to a black art known as TSCM: Technical Surveillance Countermeasures. For those who are just starting out however, one of those little \$100 Radio Shack specials is handy for knowing when the local gendarmes are next door dealing with a domestic dispute.



In following this particular path, you'll find that having developed an electronics skill-set comes in handy. Antennas can be built that enable you to monitor signals farther out and in specific directions. Remote sensors can be fabricated from old garage door openers and alarm system parts. Some particularly astute types add simple wireless microphones into the mix so they can listen in to determine if what tripped the sensor has four legs or two. Used baby monitors are a dime a dozen at tag sales. With a little applied technical knowledge, anyone can implement their own *Total Information Awareness* program from cast-off and dumpster-dived components.

So to what end all this? Ignorance may be bliss, but (applied) knowledge is power. If you want to take more control of your life, you need to start by opening your eyes, especially your third one. As you notice more of what's going on around you, you begin to connect the dots and notice patterns. This gets into the field of intelligence analysis. You will be able to predict the future on a limited basis, and master your own OODA loop. This puts you at a distinct advantage over those who remain blind to what's going on around them, and more importantly provides a defense against those who have been doing exactly what you just learned in order to take advantage of you. What you decide to do with this new found power is up to you. I would hope you put it to good use.

The Dystonaut is published by:

Homestead Design Works
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Plymouth, CT 06782.

We can be reached via email through ticom.new.english@gmail.com.

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