



Matrix: Who is Edward Snowden?

by

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on

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This article is a compilation of a number of pieces I've written about Ed Snowden and the NSA. It doesn't replace them, but it hits the high points...

Let's begin here: If you absolutely must have a hero, watch Superman movies.

If your need for a hero is so great, so cloying, so heavy, so juicy that it swamps your curiosity, don't read this.

If you can't separate Snowden's minor revelations from the question of who he is, if you can't entertain the notion that covert ops and intelligence-agency games are reeking with cover stories, false trails, and limited hangouts, you need more fun in your life.

NSA? CIA? These guys live for high-level bullshit. They get down on their knees and worship it. They fall into a suicidal funk if they aren't lying on at least three or four levels at once.

Okay. Let's look at Snowden's brief history as reported by The Guardian. Are there any holes?

Is the Pope Catholic?

In 2003, at age 19, without a high school diploma, Snowden enlists in the Army. He begins a training program to join the Special Forces. At what point after enlistment can a new soldier start this elite training program?

Snowden breaks both legs in an exercise. He's discharged from the Army. Is that automatic? How about healing and then resuming service?

If he was accepted in the Special Forces training program because he had special computer skills, then why discharge him simply because he broke both legs?

"Sorry, Ed, but with two broken legs we just don't think you can hack into terrorist data anymore. You were good, but not now. Try Walmart. They always have openings."

Circa 2003, Snowden gets a job as a security guard for an NSA facility at the University of Maryland. He specifically wanted to work for NSA? It was just a generic job opening he found out about?

Snowden shifts jobs. Boom. He's now in the CIA, in IT. He has no high school diploma. He's a young computer genius.

In 2007, Snowden is sent to Geneva. He's only 23 years old. The CIA gives him diplomatic cover there. He's put in charge of maintaining computer-network security. Major job. Obviously, he has access to a wide range of classified documents. Sound a little odd? He's just a kid. Maybe he has his GED. Otherwise, he still doesn't have a high school diploma.

Snowden says that during this period, in Geneva, one of the incidents that really sours him on the CIA is the "turning of a Swiss banker." One night, CIA guys get a banker drunk, encourage him to drive home, the banker gets busted, the CIA guys help him out, then with that bond formed, they eventually get the banker to reveal deep secrets to the Agency.

This sours Snowden? He's that naïve? He doesn't know by now that the CIA does this sort of thing all the time? He's shocked? He "didn't sign up for this?" Come on.

In 2009, Snowden leaves the CIA. Why? Presumably because he's disillusioned. It should be noted here that Snowden claimed he could do very heavy damage to the entire US intelligence community in 2008, but decided to wait because he thought Obama, just coming into the presidency, might keep his "transparency" promise.

After two years with the CIA in Geneva, Snowden really had the capability to take down the whole US inter-agency intelligence network, or a major chunk of it?

If you buy that without further inquiry, I have condos for sale on the dark side of the moon.

In 2009, Snowden leaves the CIA and goes to work in the private sector. Dell, Booz Allen Hamilton. In this latter job, Snowden is assigned to work at the NSA.

He's an outsider, but, again, he claims to have so much access to so much sensitive NSA data that he can take down the whole US intelligence network in a single day. The. Whole. US. Intelligence. Network.

This is Ed Snowden's sketchy legend. It's all red flags, alarm bells, sirens, flashing lights.

Then we have the crowning piece: they solved the riddle: Ed Snowden was able to steal thousands of highly protected NSA documents because... he had a thumb drive.

It's the weapon that breached the inner sanctum of the most sophisticated information agency in the world.

It's the weapon to which the NSA, with all its resources, remains utterly vulnerable. Can't defeat it.

Not only did Snowden stroll into NSA with a thumb drive, he knew how to navigate all the security layers put in place to stop people from stealing classified documents.

"Let's see. We have a new guy coming to work for us here at NSA today? Oh, whiz kid. Ed Snowden. Outside contractor. Booz Allen. He's not really a full-time employee of the NSA. Twenty-nine years old. No high school diploma. Has a GED. He worked for the CIA and quit. Hmm. Why did he quit? Oh, never mind, who cares? No problem.

"Tell you what. Let's give this kid access to our most sensitive data. Sure. Why not? Everything. That stuff we keep behind 986 walls? Where you have to pledge the life of your first-born against the possibility you'll go rogue? Let Snowden see it all. Sure. What the hell. I'm feeling charitable. He seems like a nice kid."

NSA is the most awesome spying agency ever devised in this world. If you cross the street in Podunk, Anywhere, USA, to buy an ice cream soda, on a Tuesday afternoon in July, they know.

They know whether you sit at the counter and drink that soda or take it and move to the only table in the store. They know whether you lick the foam from the top of the glass with your tongue or pick the foam with your straw and then lick it.

They know if you keep the receipt for the soda or leave it on the counter.

They know whether you're wearing shoes or sneakers. They know the brand of your underwear. They know your shaving cream, and precisely which container it came out of.

But this agency, with all its vast power and its dollars...

Can't track one of its own, a man who came to work every day, a man who made up a story about needing treatment in Hong Kong for epilepsy and then skipped the country.

Just can't find him.

Can't find him in Hong Kong, where he does a sit-down video interview with Glenn Greenwald of The Guardian. Can't find that "safe house" or that "hotel" where he's staying.

No. Can't find him or spy on his communications while he's in Hong Kong. Can't figure out he's booked a flight to Russia. Can't intercept him at the airport before he leaves for Russia. Too difficult.

And this man, this employee, is walking around with four laptops that contain the keys to all the secret spying knowledge in the known cosmos.

Can't locate those laptops. Can't hack into them to see what's there. Can't access the laptops or the data. The most brilliant technical minds of this or any other generation can find a computer in Outer Mongolia in the middle of a blizzard, but these walking-around computers in Hong Kong are somehow beyond reach.

And before this man, Snowden, this employee, skipped Hawaii, he was able to access the layout of the entire US intelligence network. Yes.

He stole enough to "take down the entire US intelligence network in a single afternoon."

Not only that, but anyone who worked at this super-agency as an analyst, as a systems-analyst supervisor, could have done the same thing. Could have stolen the keys to the kingdom.

This is why NSA geniuses with IQs over 180 have decided, now, in the midst of the Snowden affair, that they need to draft "tighter rules and procedures" for their employees. Right.

Now, a few pieces of internal of security they hadn't realized they needed before will be put in place.

This is, let me remind you, the most secretive spying agency in the world. The richest spying agency. The smartest spying agency.

But somehow, over the years, they'd overlooked this corner of their own security. They'd left a door open, so that any one of their own analysts could steal everything.

Could take it all. Could just snatch it away and copy it and store it on a few laptops.

But now, yes now, having been made aware of this vulnerability, the agency will make corrections.

Sure.

And reporters for elite US media don't find any of this hard to swallow.

A smart sixth-grader could see through this tower of fabricated crap in a minute, but veteran grizzled reporters are clueless.

On the ever-solicitous Charley Rose, a gaggle of pundits/newspeople warned that Ed Snowden, walking around with those four laptops, could be an easy target for Chinese spies or Russian spies, who could get access to the data on those computers. The spies could just hack in.

But the NSA can't. No. The NSA can't find out what Snowden has. They can only speculate.

The tightest and strongest and richest and smartest spying agency in the world can't find its own employee. It's in the business of tracking, and it can't find him.

It's in the business of security, and it can't protect its own data from its employees.

If you believe all that, I have timeshares to sell in the black hole in the center of the Milky Way.

Here is a more likely scenario.

Snowden never saw any of those thousands of documents on an NSA computer. Never happened. He didn't hack in. He didn't steal anything.

He was working an op, either as a dupe or knowingly. He was working for... well, let's see, who would that be?

Who was he working for before he entered the private sector and wound up at NSA?

The CIA.

Would that be the same CIA who hates the NSA with a venomous fervor?

Would that be the same CIA who's been engaged in a turf war with NSA for decades?

The same CIA who's watched their own prestige and funding diminish, as human intelligence has given way to electronic snooping?

Yes, it would be. CIA just can't match the NSA when it comes to gathering signals-intell.

Wired Magazine, June 2013 issue. James Bamford, author of three books on the NSA, states:

"In April, as part of its 2014 budget request, the Pentagon [which rules the NSA] asked Congress for \$4.7 billion for increased 'cyberspace operations,' nearly \$1 billion more than the 2013 allocation. At the same time, budgets for the CIA and other intelligence agencies were cut by almost the same

amount, \$4.4 billion. A portion of the money going to... [NSA] will be used to create 13 cyberattack teams."

That means spying money. Far more for NSA, far less for CIA.

Turf war.

People at the CIA were able to access those NSA documents, and they gave the documents to Snowden and he ran with them.

The CIA, of course, couldn't be seen as the NSA leaker. They needed a guy. They needed a guy who could appear to be from the NSA, to make things look worse for the NSA and shield the CIA.

They had Ed Snowden. He had worked for the CIA in Geneva, in a high-level position, overseeing computer-systems security.

Somewhere in his CIA past, Ed meets a fellow CIA guy who sits down with him and says, "You know, Ed, things have gone too damn far. The NSA is spying on everybody all the time. I can show you proof. They've gone beyond the point of trying to catch terrorists. They're doing something else. They're expanding a Surveillance State, which can only lead to one thing: the destruction of America, what America stands for, what you and I know America is supposed to be. The NSA isn't like us, Ed. We go after terrorists for real. That's it. Whereas NSA goes after everybody. We have to stop it. We need a guy... and there are those of us who think you might be that guy... "

During the course of this one disingenuous conversation, the CIA is killing 37 innocent civilians all over the world with drones, but that's beside the point. Ahem.

Ed says, "Tell me more. I'm intrigued."

He buys in.

Put two scenarios on the truth scale and assess them. Which is more likely? The tale Snowden told to Glenn Greenwald, with all its holes, with its super-naïve implications about the fumbling, bumbling NSA, or a scenario in which Snowden is the CIA's boy?

We have reporters at the Washington Post and at The Guardian. We have Julian Assange, the head of Wikileaks. They're all talking to Snowden. The NSA can spy on them. Right? Can listen to their calls and read their emails and hack into their notes. Just like people have been hacking into the work and home computers of Sharyl Attkisson, star CBS investigative reporter.

But the NSA can't do all this spying and then use it to find Snowden. Just can't manage it.

Everybody in the world with a computer has passwords. The NSA can cut through them (as well as encryption) like a sword through hot butter. But Assange and the Post and Guardian and Snowden have super-special passwords.

They got these passwords by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope, along with 25 cents, and a top from a cereal box to The Shadow. These passwords are charged with atomic clouds that obscure NSA men's minds so they cannot see or spy. The passwords are immortal and invulnerable.

The NSA can spy on anyone else in the world, but they can't get their foot in the door, when it comes to the Post, The Guardian, and Assange.

And if Snowden winds up in Venezuela or Tierra del Fuego, that too will become an insurmountable mystery.

"Nope, we don't know where he is. He's vanished. Venezuela has a Romulan shield surrounding it. The cloaking technology is too advanced."

Perhaps you recall that, in the early days of this scandal, Snowden claimed he could spy on anyone in the US, including a federal judge or even the president, if he had their email addresses.

Uh-huh. But the combined talents of the NSA, now, can't spy on Snowden. I guess they just can't find his email address.

If Snowden is still working for the CIA, he and his buds aren't the only people who want to take the NSA down a notch. No. Because, for example, NSA has been spying on everybody inside the Beltway.

Spying on politicians with secrets.

That includes a major, major, prime NSA target: Congress.

So imagine this conversation taking place, in a car, on a lonely road outside Washington, late at night. The speakers are Congressman X and a private operative representing a covert unit inside the NSA:

"Well, Congressman, do you remember January 6th? A Monday afternoon, a men's room in the park off—"

"What the hell are you talking about!"

"A stall in the men's room. The kid. He was wearing white high-tops. A Skins cap. T-shirt. Dark hair. Scar across his left cheek. Blue tattoo on his right thigh."

"Jesus."

"We have very good audio and video. Anytime you want to watch it, let me know."

Dead silence.

"What do you want?"

"Right now, Congressman? We want you to come down hard on Snowden. Press it. He's a traitor. He should tried and convicted."

The Congressmen pulls himself together:

"Yeah, well, there's another side to this story. If Snowden gets enough support, if the wave rises high enough, the NSA could take a hit. I know a dozen Washington players who'd like that very much. They're pissed off. They don't like to be spied on. It's possible Snowden was their guy from the beginning. I couldn't say... "

Let's make a deal. That ends up being the topic of this and other similar conversations inside the Beltway.

"Senator, we know about the underage cheerleader in Ohio. Your trip there in 2012, just before the election."

"Look, you've brought this up before. But now I've got a trump card to play. Ed Snowden. This whole scandal can escalate like a tornado in Kansas, or it can die down... "

Let's make a deal.

Here's another vector. A Congressman gets a visit from his favorite lobbyist, who works for a private defense contractor in the Congressman's home state:

"Congressman, here's the thing. The NSA is an integral part of our nation's defense system. Right? This Snowden thing is messy. We want it to go away."

"It may not go away. I'm not some kind of traffic cop who can put up his hand and stop the tide."

"We understand that. I was just talking to XXX at NSA, and he'd really appreciate your help on this. Slam this bastard Snowden. Make him into the worst scumbag in the world."

"And if I do?"

"Your offshore account in Panama will remain protected. That's what XXX wanted me to tell you."

Calling in markers. Putting on pressure. Let's make a deal.

If you're a Congressman or a Senator, and you know NSA is spying on you, because it's spying on everyone in the Congress, who's your potential best friend?

Somebody who can go up against the NSA, somebody who wants to go up against the NSA.

And who might that be?

The CIA.

It's not perfect, but it's the best you can do.

So if you're a Congressman, you go to a friend in the CIA and you have a chat about "the NSA problem." How can you get NSA off your back? Your CIA friend has his own concerns about NSA.

He tells you in confidence: "Look, maybe we can help you. We know a lot about the NSA. We have good people. You might say one of our jobs is watching the watchers at NSA, to, uh, make sure they don't go too far in their spying."

This sounds interesting. If you have to sell your soul, you'd rather sell it to the CIA than the NSA. It's a judgment call.

And a few weeks or months later... you read about Ed Snowden blowing a hole in the NSA. You take note of the fact that Snowden worked for the CIA. He worked for them in Geneva. Then he left for the private sector and got himself assigned to the NSA.

Hmm. Maybe you have some cause for optimism.

You, the Congressman, don't give a damn about the NSA spying on all Americans all the time. You couldn't care less about that. You just don't want NSA looking over your own shoulder.

You know the incredibly naïve American public would never imagine what's going on behind the scenes, with CIA, NSA, and Congress. The yokels and rubes in America actually believe their Congressional representatives are, well, representing them in Washington.

This fact is good. It means privacy for you: you can try to work out your problems without public scrutiny. You can play all the necessary games to hide your own secrets and crimes, and you can do it in back rooms.

Unless those bastards at NSA decide to leak one of your embarrassing secrets. That's why you need your friend at CIA.

And now, again, you look at the recent article and see that Ed Snowden worked for the CIA. You hope this a signal from the CIA that they're taking a battering ram to the NSA.

Some schmuck reporter asks you about the current NSA scandal and you say, "Of course we have to protect classified data, in order to prevent terrorist attacks. But at the same time, we need to respect the Bill of Rights. People can't go around spying on anyone for no reason."

You're sending your own signal.

You're tipping your CIA guy. You appreciate his help, if in fact he's helping you. You can't ask him directly. If you did, he'd never give you a straight answer. But just in case...

As for the naïve rubes in your home state, the voters, you don't give them a second thought. They're not on your radar. They're merely clusters of polling data. They don't have a clue about how the game is played, and they never will.

You're representing two defense contractors, a pharmaceutical company, a big Ag corporation, and a bank. Those are your only true constituents. You give them all the time they need.

To keep those relationships on track, you only need to hide your peccadillos from embarrassing exposure. The hooker in DC, the bank account in Panama, the influence you used to move a sizable donation to a university where you intend to teach when you retire.

There are only two things you really need to think about in your job. First, what happens when your Party leaders come down the hall and tell you which way you're going to vote on a bill—and you know your vote is going to upset one of your key constituents back home.

That's a tricky situation. But you've been successful in keeping feathers from being ruffled. That pharmaceutical company understands you can't side with their interests every single time.

You've got to go with your Party. The Pharma boys don't like it, but they get it.

The other thing you've got to think about is darker. Nobody is going to give you stats on it, because stats don't exist. Here's how it shakes out:

How many people in Congress are so controlled by the NSA that they'd never try to break out? How many people, with how many secrets, are so blackmailed, they'd never dare go up against NSA?

This is an important calculation. The battle might already be lost. You might not stand a chance. Maybe nobody can help you. Maybe you can't escape.

Maybe you shouldn't even hint that NSA has overstepped its legal boundaries by spying on Americans.

That's the conundrum that keeps you up at night.

What if the spies spying on their own government are running the government beyond the ability of anyone to stop them?

You don't give a damn about what this would mean for America. You only care about what it means for you and your secrets.

Maybe this is the jail you're in for the rest of your life.

When you're back in your home state showing your face and giving speeches, and a voter comes up to you and voices a concern about his dwindling paycheck, his house payment, his endangered pension... and when you nod and gaze out at the horizon, as if to pluck a magic answer from the aether, you're really thinking about the conundrum.

You're thinking about the life sentence you're serving in the Surveillance State.

And that night, in your hotel room, you get down on your knees and pray that Ed Snowden is still working for the CIA.

Who else, besides the CIA and numerous politicians inside the Beltway, would be aching to take the NSA down a notch? Who else would be rooting hard for this former (?) CIA employee, Snowden, to succeed?

How about Wall Street?

Still waiting to be uncovered? NSA spying to collect elite financial data, spying on the people who have that data: the major investment banks. NSA scooping up that data to predict, manipulate, and profit from trading markets all over the world.

A trillion-dollar operation.

Snowden worked for Booz Allen, which is owned by the Carlyle Group (\$170 billion in assets). Carlyle, the infamous. Their money is making money in 160 investment funds.

A few of Carlyle's famous front men in its history: George HW Bush, James Baker (US Secretary of State), Frank Carlucci (US Secretary of Defense and CIA Deputy Director), John Major (British Prime Minister), Arthur Levitt (Chairman of the SEC).

Suppose you're one of the princes in the NSA castle, and Ed Snowden has just gone public with your documents. You're saying, "Let's see, this kid worked for Booz Allen, which is owned by the Carlyle Group. We (NSA) have been spying over Carlyle's shoulder, stealing their proprietary financial data. What are the chances they're getting a little revenge on us now?"

Yes, you're thinking about that. You're looking into it.

The Surveillance State has created an apparatus whose implications are staggering. It's a different world now. And sometimes it takes a writer of fiction to flesh out the larger landscape.

Brad Thor's novel, *Black List*, posits the existence of a monster corporation, ATS, that stands alongside the NSA in collecting information on every move we make. ATS' intelligence-gathering capability is unmatched anywhere in the world.

At his site, BradThor.com, the author lists some of the open-source material he discovered that formed the basis for *Black List*. The material, as well as the novel, is worth reading.

On pages 117-118 of *Black List*, Thor makes a stunning inference that, on reflection, is as obvious as the fingers on your hand:

"For years ATS [substitute NSA] had been using its technological superiority to conduct massive insider trading. Since the early 1980s, the company had spied on anyone and everyone in the financial world. They listened in on phone calls, intercepted faxes, and evolved right along with the technology, hacking internal computer networks and e-mail accounts. They created mountains of 'black dollars' for themselves, which they washed through various programs they were running under secret contract, far from the prying eyes of financial regulators.

"Those black dollars were invested into hard assets around the world, as well as in the stock market, through sham, offshore corporations. They also funneled the money into reams of promising R&D projects, which eventually would be turned around and sold to the Pentagon or the CIA.

"In short, ATS had created its own license to print money and had assured itself a place beyond examination or reproach."

In real life, whether the prime criminal source is one monster corporation or the NSA itself, the outcome would be the same.



Total surveillance has unlimited payoffs when it targets financial markets and the people who have intimate knowledge of them.

"Total security awareness" programs of surveillance are ideal spying ops in the financial arena, designed to grab millions of bits of inside information, and then utilize them to make investments and suck up billions (trillions?) of dollars.

It gives new meaning to "the rich get richer."

Previously, we thought we needed to look over the shoulders of the men who were committing major financial crimes out of public view. But now, if we want to be up to date, we also have to factor in the men who are spying on those criminals, who are gathering up those secrets and using them to commit their own brand of meta-crime.

And in the financial arena, that means we think of Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan as perpetrators, yes, but we also think about the NSA men who already know everything about GS and Morgan, and are using this knowledge to steal sums that might make GS and Morgan blush with envy.

Goldman Sachs, Chase, and Morgan consider trillion-dollar trading markets their own private golden-egg farm. They run it, they own it, they manipulate it for their own ends.

If NSA has been looking over their shoulders for the past 30 years, discovering all their knowledge, and operating a meta invasion, siphoning off enormous profits, NSA would rate as Enemy Number One.

And would need to be torpedoed.

Enter Ed Snowden.

Finally, we need to understand what NSA and other agencies are doing, are really doing in their ongoing creation of the Surveillance State.

Number one, they're technocrats who are ultimately Globalists, in sheep's clothing. Their tracking of every human on Earth is designed to morph into a system for distribution of goods and services from a central control point. To the whole planet. In this system, a human is a unit, a data point that surrenders to a set of ruling algorithms.

And number two, they're trying to create a single universal mind. Which is to say, the flattening and reducing of human thought down to manageable parameters of conformity and sameness.

Surveillance itself tends to achieve this over time, because when people know they are being watched and evaluated, they simplify their mental processes. They avoid many subjects, they avoid controversy, they express fewer ideas, they monitor their own responses.

Surveillance tacitly encourages a limited range of thought in which all people participate. You wind up with one cookbook of recipes for the human condition. People make the same meals. The meals taste the same. Everybody eats the same thing.

So far, the revelations of Edward Snowden have done nothing to stop the juggernaut. No major hearings to expose the overall Surveillance State are scheduled.

The NSA could take a hit, but that means nothing in the long run.

In this sense, what Snowden has exposed could be called a limited hangout. A way to let a little steam off, a way to avoid the deeper issues.

The true wild card in the op to lock down the planet is, as always, the free individual. The individual who takes his own freedom. The individual who creates something unexpected, something that can't



be predicted by any system.

The individual who finds himself in the middle of the labyrinth and suddenly has a lawnmower and cuts a new path out.

Some people think that's Snowden.

Is it?

Whatever you believe, the idea that individuals - rather than groups and collectives - can achieve shattering breakthroughs is exactly what the Surveillance State is trying to destroy.