

AVS & KILTECH



Summary

Indicators is a [series](#) by Stefan Burden that focuses on the story of Kay, an auditor who finds himself in too deep during an audit at an electronics business called KilTech. [The series currently comprises two books, the first of which is *Indicators Of Compromise \(IOC\)*, and the second, *Indicators Of Destruction \(IOD\)*.](#)

Focus of World

The story for [Indicators of Compromise](#) takes place mostly within the KilTech premises, and [IOD](#) mostly takes place with [Callsail](#).

Major Locations

KilTech

Kilverlay Technology, or 'KilTech' for short, specialise in electronics assembly for off-the-shelf and custom items, along with sales and sales support of the assembled products, along with their shipping and dispatch. They sell printed circuit boards and various related components according to a variety of product specifications. [It is based in Lancaster in the UK.](#)

KilTech as a whole has 500 employees. The workers there span a wide range of ages and mostly work on day shifts, although the hours worked tend to span further than the general full-time standard of 9am - 5pm.

Boardroom

The auditors and KilTech's representatives occasionally visit this room.

[\[Noted as less up-to-date than the rest of KilTech. Same boardroom that Endgame scenario takes place.\]](#) [\[I just want to check what you mean here to make sure I'm understanding right. Do you mean the decor is out of date, or is this profile out of date?\]](#)

[Both? But Kaiden makes a comment that the tech in the boardroom is of an older design than the rest of the company]

Main Production Building

This building is mentioned in chapter 2 onwards. It has high security arrangements, appropriate to the storage and production of the electronics that KilTech produces here.

Main Offices

These are higher up in the building. They are light, airy, clean and tidy, and quite formal in their decor.

AVS Auditing

AVS, a Swindon-based company, is less fancy than KilTech but still has a modern edge to its branding and offices. The business is smaller than KilTech too. It is situated within the heart of the city, which gives it a smaller, more 'squeezed' feeling than KilTech, which boasts offices on the outskirts. AVS' hierarchy of power is Owner > Line Manager > Senior Auditor > Auditor.

AVS stands for Audit Vertex Services ('Vertex' meaning apex or the highest point), however the company's name is usually shortened to simply AVS, even among the company's own employees. There's a running joke that AVS was the first owner's initials, and no-one bothered to change it.

Callsail

A small (~1 year old) telecommunications company based in the heart of the city of Hull that's never had an external audit done before due to the young age of the company. Cramped at first due to some floors being closed off for maintenance, but settles down after a few days. Main focus of IOD.

The Hotel

Kay and Max, the auditors, stay at a hotel for the duration of *Indicators*.

A&E

There isn't much to say about the hospital except for the fact that it's over-stretched at the time Max is sent there, and that this impacts the amount of time that can be spent investigating the root cause of his black out, especially as he recovers when he gets there.

[Mid-IOD he's on first name terms with the cardiologist in Swindon.]

Geography

Climate

The overall *Indicators* story arc takes place entirely within the UK.

It rained for most of the week that Kay and Max were present to complete the KilTech audit. Other than that, the climate has little significance to the story.

Cast

The cast of *Indicators of Compromise* comprises two major groups of people: the auditors and the KilTech employees. The main individuals who we see at KilTech are the Directors or their higher-up aides, while the main AVS cast are auditors.

Auditors

The story follows two auditors, Kay and Max, who work for AVS.

Max Williams

Max is in his 30s and has been an auditor for 5 years. He works well with Kay and they consider one another as friends, to the point where they have had the occasional falling-out, which they have considered it worth the effort to patch up for the sake of their friendship. Max is the more outgoing of the pair. He specialises in networks.

Kaiden Seeker

Like Max, Kay (short for Kaiden) is also in his 30s and has also been an auditor for around 5 years. Although he is quieter and more reserved than Max he is more than capable of standing up for himself. He also takes a more direct approach to the more difficult questions that inevitably arise as part of the auditor role, and tends to ask these when Max is reluctant to.

During his younger years he used to experience anxiety. Max knew him during this time and stood by him when he needed support. Kay went to see a therapist to help with his

anxiety and Max gave him the space and support to make the best use of that therapy. Kay was diagnosed with autism in the period between *IOC* and *IOD*. However, his diagnosis is never explicitly mentioned in the books.

While Kay was in the earlier stages of this therapeutic work, he had an unpleasant experience at work. A manager was celebrating his birthday and Kay had been feeling particularly lacking in confidence that day. Max had taken the time to convince Kay to be there. A notably unpleasant employee caught Kay unawares, scared him, and that put Kay into fight or flight mode. He cursed the colleague out, shoved him out of the way, and stormed off - and in particular, he stormed past Carl.

Carl recognised this as out of character for Kay and turned a blind eye to this, and Max went after him. Kay had found an office to hide in and, although he wouldn't let Max in to talk over what had happened, he offered support in the best way he could.

After that, Kay and Max became firm friends. Their bond came as a result of Max helping Kay through his hardest times and that continues to be a strong aspect of their friendship.

Another element of the strength of their friendship comes from the fact that their personalities and working styles contrast so much. This means that they can cover a lot of ground while working together, while their friendship means that they are able to communicate well and accept, and compliment, each others' different approaches to work. For this reason they have become a great team.

Carl

Carl is Max and Kay's line manager. He prefers an informal approach to any given problem if he can, however he is perfectly capable of being severe when the situation demands it.

Carl is wonderfully non-judgemental. A few years prior to the *Indicators* story, when Max approached him with concerns for Kay's well-being, he ensured that he did the best he could by Kay, by signposting him towards Tony (see below) and then supporting him, including for the period of time that Kay temporarily found that his condition got worse (Carl was well aware that this is a common feature of counselling and anticipated it in Kay).

Tony

Tony is a counsellor with a contract with AVS. It was him who Kay was sent to see when he had a particularly difficult time with his anxiety, several years before the events of the *Indicators* story. Kay was granted a certain number of sessions with Tony, subsidised by AVS. However, Kay found the counselling so effective that when the subsidisation ended, he continued to see Tony to continue his work.

Tony agreed to work via Zoom (an encrypted equivalent of Skype frequently used by counsellors) with Kay to avoid making Kay travel to him.

KilTech Staff

Indicators of Compromise features several individual KilTech members of staff, and several teams.

Eric Richardson

One of the three Directors of KilTech, he is the one to show the auditors around. He is overweight and ageing, and quite genial in a formal kind of way. However, he does not like to be pushed about certain aspects of KilTech.

Daniel Raleigh

The second of KilTech's Directors. He shows up later in the story. Daniel is Irish and likes to go on holiday to hot destinations and has the tan to prove it. His father founded KilTech and bequeathed a large amount of equity in the business to Daniel.

The youngest of the three Directors, he is only a few years older than Kay - 35 - and often clashes with Eric over their differing approaches to how to operate the business. As far as Eric is concerned, he has far more experience with running a business at this level than Daniel does, and feels that Daniel lacks the experience to run it well. Perhaps it was inevitable that they would butt horns. Ultimately Daniel is the majority shareholder so he has final say, which only adds to the friction.

Kiera

KilTech's Security Consultant, she got an apprenticeship at KilTech after leaving school. Ever the optimist, she accompanies Eric as he shows the auditors around in order to keep an eye on the situation - security is her line of work, after all. She is

non-confrontational in the workplace so whenever Eric feels pushed she normally leaves him to fend for himself.

Max has come to KilTech for several audits in the past and their friendship built over the course of those few visits, possibly even leading to a romantic connection. Whether or not that is true, Kiera often regales Max with tales of her elderly Indian parents trying to work modern technology, to both of their amusements. She is much more conversational than Eric, and has near-perfect English due to immigrating at a young age.

Susanne Vale

KilTech's Head of Marketing and KilTech's [second](#) Director, [joining KilTech before Eric](#). [Their shared history means that she works better with Daniel than Eric does](#). She has less of a hands-on role than Eric and Daniel and instead gives counsel and makes up the voting party. She prefers to be on the marketing side of things and to keep the marketing and PR of KilTech running smoothly.

She can be blunt at times and prefers to use money to get someone's attention, but is amicable enough to deal with clients when required.

[She was also the one who helped Max and Kay when Max collapsed, but didn't reveal her status as a director](#).

[Callsail Staff](#)

James Stewart

[One of the younger members of the company's Compliance team who's tasked with showing the auditors around. Seems enthusiastic yet nervous. He is at an early stage of development at the time of writing this edit of the Indicators Worldbuilding Profile, and might look to Max more than Kay for moral support](#).

James' Uncle

[James' uncle. Rarely seen in a good mood. Daniel reveals information about him in IoD, and describes him as one of Eric's lapdogs, as someone who needs to be in control, and who will probably try and guilt-trip anyone who says or does anything contrary to his aims and goals. Sadly, he knows how to scare James and put him on the back foot](#).

Eric

Previously worked at KilTech during IOC **[what's his role at Callsail?]**, Eric is one of the main antagonists for *IOD*. [As far as I have written, it was more a Sales Manager role than anything else]

History

Indicators takes place over a few short days, however the story makes more sense if you know the history of the businesses involved. Here are a few key details about the events prior to the story.

Major Events

KilTech is externally audited twice a year, on a routine basis. Internally they run audits on a quarterly basis. During an external audit, Max and Kay require access to the previous internal audit reports, in addition to checking previous external reports.

Audit 1

Prior to *Indicators of Compromise*, an audit was carried out by two other AVS employees in relation to KilTech's sales paperwork, including checking records of customer complaints and the reasons for them.

Audit 2

The audit that occurs during the events of *Indicators of Compromise* is in relation to security (both physical and logical), paper trails relating to suppliers and similar threads of enquiry, and ensuring that compliance requirements are met.

Max detects the presence of a wireless security network in action which he does not believe should be there. It raises questions about KilTech's security so he and Kay investigate it as a potential security breach.

Max's Blackout

When Max discovers the energy spike, he and the auditing party agree to take a brief coffee break before settling into the task of investigating it. Although he asks for decaf (he cannot tolerate caffeine due to a case of supraventricular tachycardia) he is given ordinary coffee, and it causes him to black out.

Max remains out for [a minute](#) and is taken to hospital. He comes around and is taken to hospital. However he is still not fully himself and has no further reason to stay at the hospital as they are too over-stretched to run tests on him, so he returns to the hotel while Kay continues the audit alone.

[With my previous/first research into said conditions and fainting/syncope, hospital visits were only in consideration if unconsciousness lasted more than a minute. According to the NHS website, that is.]

Kay would have preferred to have stayed with Max, however with waiting times in the hospital so unpredictable, he couldn't afford to potentially spend so long away from his posting. After his day at KilTech he returns to the hotel to type up their notes and observations, as he waits for Max to update him about his condition.

Max is undermined enough by the black out that he stays away the following day too.

This leaves Kay feeling uncertain about KilTech's approach to his and Max's well-being, but he cannot prove anything due to Max's pre-existing sensitivity to caffeine.

Max knows that he is overly sensitive to caffeine due to the sometimes dull nature of his job. [This reads like the dull job is the cause of the caffeine sensitivity - is it worth rephrasing? I'd perhaps go for: "Due to the sometimes dull nature of his job, Max has taken caffeine before. This is how he inadvertently discovered his sensitivity to caffeine. When he learned of this, he switched to decaf." After a quick discussion about this with Mike, we figured that caffeine tablets were less likely to be the stay-awake drug of choice by the auditors. Likely they'd take coffee or other stimulants. Not necessarily illegal ones, but something with a longer half-life, at least. There are several nootropics and 'smart drugs' that students tend to use that they prefer over caffeine or energy drinks. That said, I can imagine coffee or energy drinks being favoured by the auditing team.] ~~Every auditor has taken the occasional dose of caffeine tablets to help them get through longer, more arduous auditing projects. Max subsequently learned that, rather than making him feel alert and eager to continue, he felt light headed and weak.~~

[This would make sense, and gives me an additional way of taking things, as if it were just coffee it could be initially assumed that it was the milk or any other additive. When the same thing happened again with different ingredients (with caffeine remaining the same), then maybe that's when things started to come together.]

Subsequent to this, Max mentioned his wooziness after taking caffeine tablets to AVS' First Aider, which was then noted down in the First Aider's records. In the run-up to KilTech's second audit, this information was found and used by KilTech.

Kay does his best to continue with the audit in spite of Max's medical episode. He finds this rather difficult, not only due to his deep concern over his friend (indeed, even after

Max returns to the hotel and they settle down for the night (he has difficulty sleeping), but also due to the fact that his audit does nothing to allay his concerns that something untoward is happening at KilTech.

During an evening half way through the audit, Kay goes down to the bar for a drink without Max, and meets Daniel, who has just returned to the country. Neither man knows who the other is and by coincidence, they get talking to one another.

At the end of the audit (but before the Endgame scenario below), Kay and Max join the Directors in the boardroom to discuss their findings. Kiera is also present to listen to their report. This is when Kay sees Daniel and realises who he really is; he loses his ability to concentrate and goes into a mild panic. Max notices this and steps in to take over. Eric, on the other hand, is visibly uncomfortable.

There is a list of non-compliances to be discussed, and Eric stays quiet when the agenda reaches these. Each item on the list has possible recommendations for correction or improvement, and there are enough orders of business to discuss that the meeting is broken into two parts with a break half-way through.

[Was re-written: Whilst the meeting was only a single one rather than being broken up, it is cut short when Daniel figures out Eric and Keira were up to something, and asks to speak to Keira alone at first. Everyone but Daniel and Keira leave the room to do whatever they need to. A short while later Keira leaves, and then Daniel, meaning that the boardroom is now empty. Kay goes back to get their stuff [Just to clarify, does Kay go back into the boardroom for their stuff, or is this somewhere else? Before this, does Kay go somewhere to cool off, as mentioned below? (I forget the answer to this myself, so have left the question in. Mike hasn't read the story, remember, and no one worldbuilder who works for me will necessarily know or remember the full details of the work they're helping to develop. A bit of help like he's asking for here, or a quick jog to the memory, always helps!)]

The meeting is adjourned when Daniel realises that something is going on that Eric and Keira are trying to keep a secret, regarding the various security issues brought up by the audit. Daniel initially asks to speak to Keira alone. The others leave the room. A while later, Keira also leaves the room, shortly followed by Daniel, so the boardroom is then empty. The Endgame scenario happens shortly after this.

[It took me a moment of rereading my own book - after the above paragraph, Kay does go back into the boardroom to collect their things, when he's confronted by Eric.]

~~During this break, Daniel, Kiera and Max go off together, and Kay goes his own way to get a coffee, find a quiet place (he finds a deserted side office), and does a little more work while he waits for the second half of the meeting. [For now I'm leaving this in so you can see it with the other changes. Once you're happy, this section can be removed]~~

Endgame

Kay's solitude at KilTech leads directly to the endgame of the Indicators story.

Eric finds Kay in the side office and attempts to bribe him to the tune of two years' wages, saying: "Whatever you make in a year, I'll double it and pay you right now to clear your report.". Kay refuses, although the situation escalates to the point where Kay feels that Max is being threatened. [Could you clarify how Kay feels Max is being threatened, when Eric is trying to bribe Kay? (I've left this question in also. While it's clear that Kay is being bribed, the threat is not clear here. I happen to know from reading IoC that Eric tried shouting at Kay to intimidate him into accepting the cheque, but Mike wouldn't know that, neither would he reasonably be expected to understand that.)] [Eric does not directly threaten Max, so it's more that Kay jumps to that conclusion after Eric's "wouldn't you hate it if your friend had another one of his funny turns?"]

Daniel happens to pass by at this time and hears the raised voices in a side office that should, at that time, be empty. He enters to see Eric and Kay having a heated discussion - more particularly, Eric getting heated with Kay, and Kay standing his ground with some difficulty. Both stop and look at him as he enters so he diffuses the situation by saying, "What is this, the 1950s?" This ends the confrontation.

After IOC

It's implied that Eric went to jail in the four years between *IOC* and *IOD*.

IOD

IOD takes place four years after *IOC*. Kay and Max are sent to do a routine external audit at a business called Callsail, and discover that Eric has a new job there.

Max's job offer

Max is offered a management job by Carl. This is one of the subplots of *IOD*: it presents the possibility that Kay and Max will not be auditing together, if Max accepts, and Kay is understandably sad and anxious about the changes that this represents.

The Hacking

After seeing that Eric is working at Callsail, Kay makes a flippant remark to Max that he's going to take revenge against Eric for his behaviour in *IOC*, by hacking Callsail and framing Eric for it. Max persuades him not to. However, the next day, Max and Kay receive news that someone hacked Callsail overnight.

Kay swears he didn't do it but the timing is such that Max doubts whether Kay did it or not. This leaves him in a moral dilemma over whether to report Kay or whether to trust him.



Corporate culture takes centre stage in *Indicators*.

KilTech

The culture here is centred around quality. KilTech has been around for a long time and uses this to leverage a sense of being trustworthy.

In addition to this, KilTech's staff have a clear sense of hierarchy, which can be easily noticeable, even to visitors.

The mood at KilTech is rather lower than that of AVS. As an electronics company, and as a bespoke manufacturer of goods (not to mention the efforts going on that are being covered up in the Endgame scenario) the company keeps a lot of secrets, whether they're patents or unethical cover-ups. The staff are overseen far more closely to ensure that they do not leak KilTech's secrets, and this impacts staff morale.

AVS

The culture of AVS is quietly studious, sober, and sensible by nature. While it's not necessarily austere, it can become so depending on the employee and the situation.

Often the general culture is mild-mannered and curious. However, unlike KilTech, the staff there have a certain amount of freedom to work in the way that fits them best. Although confidentiality is an important part of employment at AVS, the secrets that the staff uncover do not weigh on their consciences. In addition to this, the smaller payroll headcount means that the staff of AVS get better, and the smaller workforce is conducive to the power structure being less rigid.

To put it simply, people are friendlier at AVS.

Handling of Differences/Bigotry

Two businesses are central to the *Indicators* story, and their approach to the fair treatment of their staff is a background detail to the story. If you're interested in the character development in *Indicators*, this information is well worth knowing.

KilTech

The culture at KilTech is predictably corporate, with an HR department, observance of Equal Opportunities laws, and so on. With that in mind, it is something of an open secret at KilTech that Eric is homophobic. He is wise enough to corporate culture to keep this under wraps and only rarely makes a snide comment, usually in response to a news report or similar.

[The work being done in secret in the heavily-guarded room may or may not be to a given individual or demographic's detriment but we're not sure yet. We'll return to this when we feel ready. We have since discussed this so I look forward to hearing from you over whether you want us to take the "Eric provided KilTech's resources to a right-wing agency" route. I personally suggest that we do something like this as that network spike has always felt like a deserted story arc to me, and this would give it a powerful resolution that fits beautifully with the rest of the story.]

AVS

While there is little to say on the subject of observable bigotry within AVS, some members of staff are known to have something of a superiority complex. Working at an auditing company - a company that holds so much power over other businesses - has rather gone to the heads of some members of staff.

From time to time Max makes jokes to this effect, but not often, and he doesn't expect to be taken seriously.

Overall however, the employees of AVS are generally notably benign, and Max and Kay's manager is known for caring about his team members.

Social Politics

Although *Indicators* is the story of a corporate scandal, there are several relationships that are integral to the story and without which the story would be far less rich. The most notable ones include:

Max and Kay

In addition to being colleagues, Max and Kay are friends. Max tends to be the more outgoing of the two, but is also more reluctant to rock the proverbial boat, while Kay is more prone to keeping to himself but will ask the difficult questions when needed.

Daniel and Eric

Discussing any relationship between Eric and anybody else can be somewhat tricky as Eric keeps his cards close to his chest, so it can be argued that few people see him as he really is. However, the person Eric is the most honest with is Daniel, as the pair of them have worked together far too much and become passionate about far too many subjects (although that has been mainly the wellbeing of KilTech) for Eric to have kept his intentions entirely secret.

Daniel inherited the business from his father but has a very different view of how it should be run to Eric. Eric, given his upbringing in a certain generation, is prone to certain points of view that look very bigotted to Daniel. The two tend to butt horns quite often.

Law

There are multiple examples of potential law-breaking in *Indicators*.

Eric's Bribery

Eric's bribery of Kay towards the end of the story deserves a mention here as a failure to prevent a bribery from occurring, courtesy of The Bribery Act 2010. Eric bribes Kay with twice Kay's annual salary (which would add up to £100k).

[Whatever Eric had going on, this was put right by Daniel. The Spike mentioned at the start of IOC was the result of Eric's fraudulent activities. I haven't adjusted this part

either as, at the time Mike worked on this profile, we hadn't decided on the ending of the network spike story arc. I wonder if it's worth looking at laws relating to support of, or working with, hate groups, as the law being broken here?] [I think it'd work if I made Daniel make mention of sorting it out/seeing the conclusion when he's with Kay as they meet up in IOD]

Economy

[Do we want to specifically say that the story of Indicators of Compromise happened in the run-up to Brexit?]

Endgame Scenario

[The inducing factor for the endgame scenario continues to be uncertain, however it may have been prompted by the state of the economy as of 06/10/19, as we expect that the UK's economy will go into recession due to Brexit. Most likely KilTech were either testing for a new product or service, finding a way to undermine the competition, or rendering their clients more dependant upon themselves (and therefore to make sure they spend more with KilTech, or at least continue to spend without wandering off) - *This note is very out of date and I will work on it the next time we develop this profile.*]

Medicine

Max's Caffeine Sensitivity

Max is sensitive enough to caffeine for it to affect his well-being. When he reached the age of 30 he developed a minor heart condition, and when this happened, he developed an adverse sensitivity to caffeine. He found that caffeine made him feel light-headed and tired, and mentioned this to his First Aider at work.

This information was discovered by KilTech prior to his project there, and exploited to render Max unable to do his part of the auditing task.

KilTech learned of this as a result of a conversation between themselves and Max's line manager. They asked whether Max and Kay had any particular dietary requirements, and Max's line manager revealed the information on the basis of this being a hospitable gesture, not a request for medical information.

Kay's Anxiety Counselling

During the earlier days of Max and Kay's friendship, Max noticed the extent of Kay's anxiety. It caused Kay a significant impact on his quality of life, but he didn't seem able to do anything about it. Out of concern for Kay, Max approached their line manager to ask for help on Kay's behalf.

This led to Kay receiving subsidised counselling for a short period of time. He found it helpful, and continued work with the same counsellor, paying for it himself when AVS ceased funding it.

Kay was also diagnosed with autism in the period between *IOC* and *IOD*. However, this has not been explicitly stated in the Indicators storyline at the time of writing. [Note: Mike could not have known that without being explicitly told that it's a hidden detail, so although I've added a note here, I also feel that Mike's comment was fair, given the information available to him.] [It was also stated above so does it really need duplication?]

Distribution of Goods

Dispatch and Shipping

This is part of the audit that Max and Kay are employed to audit, and they find it to be very badly maintained and in a big mess. The level of disorganisation was so great, and so incongruent with the orderliness of the other trails they had to audit, that between them they suspected the disorganisation to be deliberate obfuscation.

Credits

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy