

QAnon and the Attack of the Crafty Crazies

[Peter McLaren](#)

Standing firm at the fore of conspiracy theorists, QAnon adherents have made a name for themselves in this vile and desolate era of Trumpism. And, while that name is ‘C-R-A-Z-Y,’ there is no denying that QAnon has had a direct and measurable impact on American politics. In the alienation of everyday life, opportunities for passion and expression in the dissemination of lies are very real. Their aim is to make their vehemence and their *de facto* views known to all. However, QAnon cult members seem to believe their evidence-free accusations and in the thrall of their wide societal uptake, so do many would-be followers thirsting for adventure. That is because QAnon believers have socially constructed a complex but fragile epistemological architecture that is very different from the more rational mainstream. Julia Carrie Wong [describes](#) QAnon as follows:

More than just another internet conspiracy theory, QAnon is a movement of people who interpret as a kind of gospel the online messages of an anonymous figure – ‘Q’ – who claims knowledge of a secret cabal of powerful paedophiles and sex traffickers. Within the constructed reality of QAnon, Donald Trump is secretly waging a patriotic crusade against these ‘deep state’ child abusers, and a ‘Great Awakening’ that will reveal the truth is on the horizon.

Many non-adherents of this conspiracy-mongering cult learned about QAnon through reading about the baseless [Pizzagate conspiracy theory](#), which claimed that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex ring out of a Washington DC pizza restaurant named Comet Ping Pong, a kid-friendly venue equipped with ping-pong tables and craft rooms. On the afternoon of Sunday, December 4, 2016, a would-be conspiracy-addled vigilante who believed that Hillary Clinton had murdered children entered Comet Ping Pong through the front door, carrying a Colt AR-15 rifle, a Colt .38 handgun, a shotgun and a folding knife. He was investigating if children were being tortured. He fired his gun. Fortunately, no one was hurt. The fact that this turned out to be nonsense in no way deterred QAnon’s followers. It’s not difficult to spread a sex-trafficking conspiracy theory. One Reddit user was able to achieve this simply by [complaining](#) that cabinets made by Wayfair were too expensive:

The cabinets, which all cost more than \$10,000, had been given female names as their product titles on the website. Soon, the theory that Wayfair was trafficking children disguised as furniture was spreading around the internet. Wayfair refuted it by [explaining](#) that the items earned their high prices because they are industrial-grade cabinets, and that an algorithm had named the products. Still, that didn’t stop believers from doing their signature deranged deep dive into attempting to connect the company to child abuse.

But conspiracy theories spread by QAnon don’t all need to deal with sex trafficking paedophiles. They are often contingent and connected to current events. Following the onset of the COVID-19

pandemic, QAnon theorists spread the idea that drinking an industrial bleach known as Miracle Mineral Solution was a cure for the illness. When wildfires erupted across the West Coast in the fall of 2020, Q posted comments from a former US Senate candidate in Oregon that six Antifa members had been arrested for intentionally starting wildfires. And there is no denying that [QAnon](#) has taken root internationally:

According to the ISD [The Institute for Strategic Dialogue], from November 2019 to June 2020, 2.8 per cent of QAnon-related tweets came from the United Kingdom, 2.7 per cent from Canada, 1.7 per cent from Australia, and 0.5 per cent from Germany. An online survey of 2,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that 19 per cent had heard of QAnon, and, of those, 5.7 per cent reported supporting it. In addition, in August 2020, there were street protests in 10 cities across the UK, including one in London involving 500 protestors, organized by Freedom for the Children UK, a group promulgating the QAnon conspiracy theory online under the hashtag #SaveOurChildren. QAnon's growth in Germany has resulted in theorists demonstrating in the streets as well, along with anti-COVID lockdown and far-right Reichsburgers nationalist protestors. In countries around the world, QAnon themes have been picked up and adapted by local groups to promote conspiracy theorizing and to foment grievance.

What, I dare say, has effectively grabbed the attention of QAnon followers today? To be sure, it's still the blood-slurping, torture-loving, Satan-worshipping cannibalistic paedophiles, plus that awesomely cool feeling of trying to overthrow the United States government, beating up policemen and smashing through the remnants of democracy and wanting to hang traitors.

Brian Bethune [writes](#) that QAnon adherents today are obsessed with the false notion that the election was stolen from Trump:

QAnon – an otherwise heterogeneous mix of unfounded and unrelated conspiracy views – universally regards the former president as the secular Messiah destined to rescue America from a Satan-worshipping cabal of cannibalistic paedophiles centred in Biden's Democratic party, Hollywood's elite and the so-called deep state.

That belief constitutes QAnon's anchor, and it gets worse, since

[e]mbedded within the horrific claims that cabal members prolong their lives by harvesting adrenochrome from the living bodies of children is the ancient and ongoing anti-Semitic belief that Jews drink the blood of Christian children. (Some believers assert the existence of a video of Hillary Clinton, the chief villain in the QAnon narrative, cutting off the face of a young girl to wear as a mask while she consumes the child: a sight so gruesome, so the story goes, that the New York police who discovered the video committed suicide.)

So, how does Q post his messages? What triggers these crazy stories? Bethune [writes](#):

The first of Q's postings, known as 'drops,' featured the kind of reader-enticing questions and suggestions that became a hallmark of his (her? their?) messaging. Drop 1 was itself

reactive, a response to another anonymous poster's statement that Hillary Clinton would soon be arrested. Q agreed and amplified the claim. Her passport had been flagged, he wrote, 'in case of cross-border run,' and the National Guard mobilized to restore order should protest riots ensue: 'Proof check: Locate an NG member and ask if activated for duty 10/30 across most major cities.' Q, who went nameless for his first 33 drops, identified himself in Drop 34 as 'Q clearance patriot,' a reference to the high-security clearance level he claimed to possess as a government official; a day later, a Canadian user on the same site decided to call him QAnon, the name that stuck.

The remainder of Q's 4,953 drops, just as inaccurate as the first, came at a raggedly uneven pace up to December 8, 2020 – sometimes 15 to 20 a day, separated by weeks of silence; sometimes just images of the US flag or links to YouTube videos; sometimes hundreds of words of cryptic declarations and rhetorical questions.

Bethune [offers](#) a cloak-and-dagger example of one of Q's drops, Drop 2559, which reads in part:

RUSSIA = THE REAL CONSPIRACY; Define 'PROJECTION'; What happens when they lose control, and the TRUTH is exposed? What happens when PEOPLE no longer believe or listen to the FAKE NEWS-CONTROLLED MEDIA, CONTROLLED HOLLYWOOD, CONTROLLED BLUE CHECKMARK TWIT SHILLS, ETC ETC???

Are you intrigued? Be careful, dear reader, or you may be sucked into the drama and end up down the rabbit hole. How was this message by Q received by the cult members? And how do some Q followers profit from Q's cryptic messages? Bethune [explains](#):

As Rothschild notes in an interview, right-wing Internet personalities were immediately attracted to the way Q's pro-Trump message was seemingly expressed in logic puzzles, 'treating the drops as holy writ with hidden information that needed to be teased out in their own tweets or YouTube videos.' Such movement 'gurus' as the Praying Medic and Joe M are as important as Q in the world he spawned, amassing social media followers and, often, lucrative pages on the Patreon paid subscription service. There is opportunity in QAnon, says Rothschild, for 'grifters to make money from books and Q merch.' Another practical pillar of the movement can be found in its online trolls, he adds, some involved because 'they hate Jews or Democrats,' others simply for entertainment.

When a video was broadcast of a cicada from Brood X, the swarm of insects that had recently emerged from seventeen years underground in Mid-Atlantic American states, landing on Joe Biden's neck, a chat group of 225,000 QAnon members on the social media platform Telegram, lit up the dark channels of the internet in spectacular fashion because 'any news referencing the number seventeen (the letter Q's place in the alphabet) or the word underground (QAnon somehow believes that the deep state keeps captive children in subterranean tunnels), has the potential to be 'comms' (communication) from Q.' Bethune puts this in perspective when he [comments](#): 'It is a very broad church indeed that can accommodate the concepts that its devil eats living children and its prophet speaks via cicada-comms.' QAnon members 'trust the plan' because it gives them a focus for their retributive desire, which remains laser-focused on destroying Hillary Clinton and her cadres of elite cannibal paedophiles. Now before you think all

of this is just too absurd to consider, please recall that half of Republicans – yes, half – continue to believe the election was stolen, and half of those respondents agreed with the following baseless statement in a February American Enterprise Institute poll: ‘Donald Trump has been secretly fighting a group of child sex traffickers that include prominent Democrats and Hollywood elites.’

It should come as no surprise that QAnon grew in prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic when its members threw their support behind furious anti-vaxxers and damn-the-torpedoes, full-speed-ahead mask resisters around the world. The QAnon cult could have cost hundreds and even thousands of lives with its support for a perverted view of freedom that does not take into account the simple fact that not wearing a mask or refusing to get a vaccination puts other people at greater risk of dying from the virus. What a selfish, egocentric view of freedom. Bethune [quotes](#) Rothschild’s ominous account of what could happen with QAnon in the near future if Trump is not restored to office:

That is the same worry the FBI expressed in a newly released report: if QAnon adherents conclude that Trump is not going to be restored to office and the military is not going to swoop down upon the child-killers, then some will decide to take that task upon themselves. ‘No, things are not getting better,’ concludes Rothschild. QAnon is ‘a cultish movement that’s not quite a cult, a movement with prophetic and game-playing elements, and there can be no certainty about how it will evolve in the future.

According to forensic psychiatrist Brian Holoyda, conspiracy theorizing could be an adapted evolutionary mechanism. He [writes](#) that

Some have hypothesized that conspiracy theorizing may be an evolutionary by-product of adaptive psychological mechanisms including pattern perception, agency detection, and threat management. Indeed, the processes of pattern perception and agency detection are well on display in the interpretation of banal events by QAnon theorists. For example, when Donald Trump was on a trip to Asia, Q posted photographs of islands that conspiracists interpreted as evidence that Q was on Air Force One.

QAnon adherents are willing to challenge almost any position taken up by those whom they consider the liberal elite, as they zealously follow their fellow believers on 4Chan (famous in internet culture for its racist extremism and campaigns of harassment) and 8Chan (a more extreme version of 4Chan) through posts – known as ‘breadcrumbs’ or Qdrops – from a so-called administration insider with high-level government security clearance codenamed ‘Q,’ whose messages are intriguingly cryptic and sometimes appear as puzzles (puzzles make it a lot more fun, doesn’t it?). Because Q posts anonymously, Q uses a ‘trip code’ that allows followers to distinguish his posts from those of other anonymous users (known as ‘anons’). In November 2017, Q decided to switch to 8chan from his usual posting on 4chan. He alarmed the QAnon community when he went silent for several months after 8chan shut down in August 2019. Q eventually re-emerged on a new website established by 8chan’s owner, 8kun. Julia Carrie Wong [writes](#) that

For close followers of QAnon, the posts (or 'drops') contain 'crumbs' of intelligence that they 'bake' into 'proofs.' For 'bakers,' QAnon is both a fun hobby and a deadly serious calling. It's a kind of participatory internet scavenger hunt with incredibly high stakes and a ready-made community of fellow adherents.

I'm not worried about the hobby goers. I'm worried about the cranks and cray-crays. Imagine those adherents of Crazy Town who truly believe in the QAnon narrative. What might they actually do? Show up with a sign at a protest rally with their kids in strollers? Or would they be impelled to fight the murderous, Satanic, paedophile cabal out of some sense of moral duty? I think you know. 'They're talking about a group of people who are operating our government against our wishes, and they're molesting and torturing children and destroying our society,' [said](#) Joseph Uscinski, a professor of political science who studies conspiracy theories. 'It's an incitement to violence.'

At times, their childish levity, lyrical outrage, cheerful obliviousness and self-indulgent chicanery – to say nothing of their pure and simple dishonesty – seems relatively innocuous until you realize their commentary is engendered by a ferocious desire to bring down the government and replace it with their own members. Or until you recall that the killings, domestic terrorism incidents, child-kidnapping schemes, and an attempt to destroy a coronavirus hospital ship were all carried out in the name of QAnon. According to [Brian Hoyolda](#),

QAnon has been associated with various criminal acts. For example, on June 15, 2018, Matthew Phillip Wright blocked traffic on a bridge over the Hoover Dam with an armoured truck containing two assault rifles, two handguns, and 900 rounds of ammunition. He held a sign next to the vehicle that stated, 'Release the OIG report,' and claimed that he was on a mission for QAnon to obtain a report on the conduct of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents during their investigation of Hillary Clinton's use of a private e-mail server for official public communications. He later pleaded guilty to charges of making a terrorist threat, aggravated assault, and unlawful flight from a pursuing law enforcement vehicle. On May 30, 2019, the FBI released a report classifying Pizzagate and QAnon as 'fringe political' conspiracy theories and noted that they likely motivate domestic extremists to commit violent and other criminal behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that many of those arrested for their participation in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol building have been found to be loyal QAnon believers. Like any other type of belief, a conspiracy theory can motivate the believer to act, including in ways that are violent or otherwise unlawful. QAnon has managed to invade mainstream political discourse and spread to other nations. Given its wide uptake, general psychiatrists, correctional psychiatrists, and forensic psychiatrists may encounter individuals espousing belief in the conspiracy theory more frequently. It is therefore important for practitioners to understand the underlying tenets of this theory, as well as how QAnon compares to other types of atypical belief systems. Psychiatrists charged with evaluating or treating QAnon theorists should also be aware of how conspiracy theories spread, a process that has become more rapid and virulent with the rise of social media. Finally, forensic examiners require a framework by which to evaluate the role of QAnon and other conspiracy theories in the context of forensic assessment.

One of the more outlandish QAnon pronouncements includes the claim that many in the Democratic cabal have already been secretly captured and replaced by clones, President Biden being the most prominent. Another belief is that John F. Kennedy Jr. is still alive. Bethune [notes](#) that ‘Neither of those concepts came directly from Q, the still anonymous imageboard user who began it all on October 28, 2017.’ Some even claim that the younger JFK, who died in a 1999 plane crash, is not merely still alive but also Q himself. Kennedy purportedly functions as a covert political operative and will reveal himself as Trump’s new vice president. Some QAnon adherents believe that John McCain did not actually die of natural causes but was secretly executed for treason. Others maintain that Robert Mueller was a clandestine Trump ally investigating the president as a decoy operation. The QAnon shaman, made famous during the January 6 coup, [claims](#) that decorative tiles outside bathrooms in shopping malls ‘were coded signals for secret gangs of Deep State child-trafficking paedophiles to abduct children into a cave network to harvest the chemical adrenochrome from their brains.’ And there exists a subset of QAnon followers who believe in the existence of the ‘frazzledrip tape,’ which, according to [Josef Burton](#), is

a purported video of Hillary Clinton and her assistant Huma Abedin ritually sacrificing and then eating a baby. This chaotic fever dream of demonic imagery is mixed with more prosaic enemies – elitist diplomats, complacent Washington insiders and Trump’s personal enemies list – to make up the shifting cloud of what is called the Deep State, the hidden enemy.

Did you say Deep State? According to [Josef Burton](#), the term deep state is used in the United States as ‘a catchall term for status quo power structures or hegemonic institutions.’ But, in Ankara, Turkey, where he worked in the US Embassy, the deep state is real, ‘a shadowy parallel system of power, not the power structure that you can openly see.’ The term describes ‘unauthorized and unknown networks of power operating independently of official political leadership ... and includes state-aligned mafia figures as well as industrialists and conservative economic elites....’ Trump administration figures used the term ‘deep state’ ‘initially in much the same way that Barack Obama coined the phrase ‘the blob’ – as shorthand for the Washington establishment consensus.’

But the deep state is far from an establishment consensus. We know, for instance, that the deep state was involved in some serious skulduggery, from COINTELPRO in the 1960s, which consisted of a series of covert and illegal projects conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) aimed at infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting domestic American political organizations. The FBI famously monitored radical organizations, from Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Young Lords, to MK-ULTRA experiments on Canadian psychiatric patients in Montreal funded by the CIA and the Canadian government. We [know](#) that operatives at Fort Bragg’s John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Centre in the 1980s (previously known as the US Army Institute for Military Assistance) took part in ‘American covert efforts to fight communism – the men who ran the Phoenix Project death squads in South Vietnam and trained anti-communist secret police and commandos in Thailand, Iran, Italy, Greece, Guatemala and a dozen other countries, including Turkey.’

But, in the US, the victims of the ‘deep state’ as described by the right-wing extremists are often merely [abstractions](#), not real:

In America, real and specific Deep State agents – celebrities, politicians, institutions – purportedly commit horrific torture on abstract categories of victims (patriots, children, etc.) who can never be specifically named or seen. Nobody has successfully proved voter fraud in the 2020 election. No child survivor of the elite Soros adrenochrome harvest has come forward.

That view of the deep state could be changing. Some ranks of QAnon, according to [Burton](#),

are much less prone to the fantastic and make more concrete (although still totally baseless) claims. The events that they claim happened, the jargon they use to impart verisimilitude to their stories, and frequently the conspiracy theorists themselves are linked to the US military or security services.

Consider this [fantastic rumour](#) that was circulating just a month prior to the January 6 coup:

A month before January 6, rumours swirled among the Telegram channels and yet-unbanned Facebook groups where the Capitol rioters mobilized. For example, a specific military unit, the 305th Military Intelligence Battalion, was reported as having raided a secret underground server farm in Frankfurt, Germany. It was there, the story went, that the CIA had secreted away a server farm full of voting data with incontrovertible proof that the 2020 election had been stolen from Donald Trump. There had been casualties, but the raid was a success. The 305th had captured CIA Director Gina Haspel, and she had already been flown to Guantánamo Bay and been executed for high treason. While the real public affairs officer for the actual battalion was busy drafting a statement explaining that no, the Arizona-based unit of analysts was not a secret shock troop tasked with overturning the 2020 election and had not been engaged in a subterranean battle with the CIA in Germany, a retired lieutenant general, Thomas McInerney, was solemnly intoning that the 305th had taken heavy casualties. A month later, while the QAnon Shaman stood shirtless on the Speaker’s rostrum in the House of Representatives chamber in a horned headdress and howled about impending doom for traitors, Larry Rendall Brock stood on the House floor in a tactical plate carrier and helmet, giving instructions to other rioters. A former Air Force lieutenant colonel, Brock had tucked into his vest a bundle of zip ties meant to restrain detainees. (After his arrest, he claimed he actually had no targets for detention in mind but wanted to give the zip ties to the police.)

It appears that QAnon adherents who have some military experience are promulgating conspiracy theories about the deep state that now include mythic heroes, in this case, the 305th Military Intelligence Battalion, who purportedly executed Central Intelligence Agency Director Gina Haspel. But, of course, the military had to respond to this baseless rumour in order to stop its spread. Consider this [disturbing statistic](#):

Seven per cent of Americans are veterans, but almost 20 per cent of the January 6 rioters had served in the military. A midlevel State Department official who covered South American affairs has now been charged with assaulting a police officer during the riot. This strike against the American Deep State on January 6 was therefore demographically closer to any putative Deep State than to the general public. Not all American security institutions are bad in this fantasy world.’ But what is most alarming is that ‘conspiracy theories like QAnon and militias like the Oath Keepers that participated in the January 6 insurrection have found fertile recruiting ground within the ranks of law enforcement and the military.

And the military is not supporting the liberals who are considered to be weakening the United States by subscribing to ‘woke culture’ (supporting GLTBQ and transgender groups, supporting anti-racist Black Lives Matter and a vision of a multicultural society, pro-immigration, etc.). But the notion of the deep state is being resignified by the extreme right the more that QAnon groups are infiltrating the military. As Burton [notes](#):

The targets of the real existing Turkish Deep State and the Americans who regard themselves as fighting against a fictional Deep State are the same. They are democracy, minority rights and the left.... As it meanders in translation, Deep State loses useful meaning and becomes the territory of wingnuts and cranks. If this continues to happen, we will lose sight of one last terrifying irony: that with their infiltration of the military and the security services, contempt for democratic processes and willingness to use political violence, the anti-Deep State conspiracists in the United States are well on their way to creating the unauthorized and unknown networks of power that the term Deep State was coined to describe. Years after Ankara, on my way to work at another diplomatic post, I watched January 6 unfold on my phone. The rioters stormed up the steps of the Capitol with the same vigour any US-trained officer might have displayed while overturning a Cold War-era election in some foreign country. America’s support for anti-democratic violence has finally come home.... The boys have indeed done it.

In a broader sense, all this mystery and otherworldliness is crucial to QAnon’s success as a cultish organization – perhaps the key factor in making QAnon exactly what Los Angeles-based conspiracy reporter Mike Rothschild calls it in the subtitle of his new book, [The Storm is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything](#). The way QAnon followers impart their experiences to others is generally through protest gatherings. But much of their activity involves online histrionics. Bethune stresses the interactive nature of QAnon, which is an important feature of the cult. But QAnon participants cannot be considered unintelligent. They are not. They are crafty and live in a world where the criterion of what is truthful is very different from the mainstream. They would be very happy living in a postmodernist world where truth is relative. Similarly, they would be happy to have Aleksandr Dugin as their philosopher-king, for whom truth is whatever you are prepared to believe. Julia Carrie Wong [writes](#):

Will Partin, a research analyst with Data & Society, and Alice Marwick, a professor of communication at the University of North Carolina, describe QAnon as a ‘dark participatory culture,’ which is to say that it is a community that takes advantage of the

infrastructure of social networking sites to bring disparate people together and foster discussion, collaboration, research and community, but directs those energies toward anti-democratic, regressive and even violent ends. 'Everything about our research suggests that these people are not irrational; they're hyper-literate, even if they've come to beliefs that are empirically inaccurate,' Partin said. 'That's partly because they have a fundamentally different epistemology to judge what is true and false.'

Reddit originally was the source of QAnon followers, but, in 2018, the company [banned](#) 18 QAnon subreddits, the largest of which had more than 70,000 members but they are, nevertheless, still embedded in the 'digital architecture' of the internet and can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Discord and Facebook. Sometimes Facebook will ban QAnon if it engages in what Wong describes as the 'digital astroturf tactics that Russian operatives used to support Trump's presidential campaign in 2016. Those rules are aimed at operations in which actors make false representations about their identities in order to mislead people – a description that could encompass Q – but Facebook only applies its policy to deceptive behaviour that occurs on its platform, not on 8kun.' But how dangerous is QAnon? Wong [quotes](#) Will Parton:

There are innate societal and individual harms to convincing people of a version of reality that is simply false, as QAnon does, said Data & Society research analyst Will Partin. 'When a common sense of what is real and what is correct breaks apart, it becomes nearly impossible to reach a democratic consensus.' And QAnon followers' enthusiasm for misinformation is not confined to politics; as the coronavirus pandemic took hold, the groups became a hotbed for medical misinformation – something Facebook has claimed to be working hard to combat. Analyses by [Gallagher](#), the social media researcher, and the [New York Times](#) demonstrated how QAnon groups fuelled the viral spread of 'Plandemic,' a 26-minute video chock full of dangerously false information about Covid-19 and vaccines.

Consider that the extremist Larry Cook, the administrator of Stop Mandatory Vaccination, one of the largest [anti-vaxx Facebook groups](#), is urging QAnon believers to join his group, as he references the 'deep state' and stokes fear of forced vaccination and 'FEMA camps.' [Read](#) his twisted logic and imagine it being taken up by QAnon followers:

I have discussed the concept many, many, many times that vaccines destroy our connection to God and that we are in a spiritual war with Principalities of Darkness that have a death wish for our children, and humanity at large.' Oh, and don't forget to purchase his various products on his subscription-only platform for 'medical freedom patriots.'

In May 2019, the FBI identified QAnon as a [potential domestic terrorism](#) threat in an [intelligence bulletin](#). Despite this, [Uscinski](#) 'consistently finds that QAnon is "one of the least believed things" out there, well below belief in theories about Jeffrey Epstein's death, anti-vaccine hoaxes, and Holocaust denialism.' Uscinski's recommendation is that we not overly exoticize the QAnon narrative, reminding us that 'most of the component parts of QAnon have been around forever.' He notes parallels in the [Satanic Panic](#) of the 1980s and the plot of Oliver Stone's JFK. And he's concerned about the free speech implications of censorship by tech platforms.

Remember the McMartin Preschool Abuse Trial of the 1980s? Well, the same panic has returned. A plate bearing a pentagram that was found at the McMartin Pre-School in Manhattan Beach, California was seen as evidence by parents of children at the school that satanic rituals were occurring at the school, and teacher Ray Buckey came under suspicion. The year was 1983, and Buckey was accused of abusing one of his students. By the following spring, the accusations had expanded exponentially to include hundreds of children, and rumours swirled that the students had been abused in satanic rituals at cemeteries and in tunnels underneath the school. One parent believed a teacher had sodomised her son with a thermometer because her son had been obsessed with playing doctor, a game that he said he played at school, and he had been complaining of an itchy anus. The same parent claimed that children at the school were made to watch babies being beheaded and forced to drink their blood. This generated [a debate](#) over psychiatrists' practice of 'recovered memory.' The trial resembled the social contagion of the Salem witch trials.

Brian Holoyda [warns](#) that forensic psychiatrists will be encountering QAnon patients in the future, and it 'is therefore important that psychiatrists understand the QAnon conspiracy theory, as well as how it is consistent with and different from other conspiracy theories' and 'to be able to differentiate QAnon beliefs from other types of beliefs, including delusions and other delusion-like beliefs.' Belief in QAnon is not delusional, but it is delusion-like. Why? [Because](#) 'belief in QAnon and other conspiracy theories fails to meet the DSM-5 definition of a delusion because their existence depends on a community or subculture of individuals that share the belief. In addition, there are degrees to which theorists adhere to their beliefs that may change depending on the evidence presented to them. Even those committed to act on behalf of QAnon, such as Edgar Welch (the Pizzagate gunman), may find that their "intel [is not] 100 per cent" or that their belief is shaken by evidence to the contrary. Finally, the fact that conspiracy theories are widely held within the general population indicates that they are not delusions, lest most of the population be considered to have a delusional disorder.' If you really want to understand QAnon believers, and you happen to be a school psychologist, then you could [take some professional advice](#) and try to

understand individual belief acquisition and maintenance and the impact of dyads, closed groups, and the internet in such processes... [and understand] ... models of the adoption of unconventional beliefs. Relevant examples include the two-deficit model that involves the cognitive misinterpretation of an anomalous experience, and the socio-epistemic model that involves epistemic mistrust (i.e., lack of belief in the authority of traditional institutions), as well as information-processing biases that make an individual vulnerable to misinformation.

That might be too much of a mouthful for most people. But if it's in your wheelhouse, maybe you wish to [read about Carl Wernicke](#)'s concept of overvalued idea. Since the idea of 'extreme overvalued belief is meant to assist psychiatrists in distinguishing between delusions, obsessions, and DLBs to which someone may firmly adhere. Differentiating elements of the definition of extreme overvalued belief include that it "is shared by others in a person's cultural, religious, or subcultural group," that the "individual has an intense emotional commitment to the belief and may carry out violent behaviour in its service," and that it "is usually associated with an abnormal personality.'"

I have no desire to canvas the psychological literature for possible connections with QAnon, but I will say that QAnon does not fit in the official definition of a cult. But it has merged of late with the Sovereign Citizen Movement. Holoyda [expands](#) on this psychological merger:

Though QAnon and its adherents are not a cult, its conspiracy theories have begun to merge with the pre-existing DLBs [delusion-like behaviours] of the sovereign citizen movement. Sovereign citizen beliefs have morphed since their inception in England in the 19th century, but common tenets include the United States' rule via admiralty law; the creation of a corporate trust in a child's name coinciding with the assignment of a social security number; and redemption by freeing oneself from the jurisdiction of the US government. Because of their beliefs, sovereign citizens attempt to combat government interference in their lives by refusing to pay taxes and filing excessive pseudo-legal documents in court. Recently some QAnon supporters used sovereign rhetoric to explain why Donald Trump will be President of the United States again. Specifically, QAnon adherents claimed in January 2021 that Joe Biden was inaugurated President of the corporation of the United States, but that Donald Trump would be inaugurated as President of the original republic on March 4, 2021. This cross-over of sovereign beliefs into QAnon further demonstrates the malleability of the conspiracy theory and the difficulty of distinguishing between different DLBs, including similar types of DLBs.

The QAnon conspiracy theory has a fraught and contentious relationship with reality. It can easily be absorbed into our everyday tribal thinking. It poses a very different danger to the liberalism that every so often re-initiates us into the giddy whirl of bourgeois subjectivity with its aerosol thinking, its jacuzzi reformism, and its lap-dog governance and tilt-a-whirl ethics. In stark contrast, it presents the very danger of supporting the fascist logic of regimes such as Trump and Orbán. Hence, I will shoulder no conciliatory defence here for the rebarbative Manichean worldview that envelopes it. It exhibits cult-like behaviour and is focused on death in a way that has captured the heart and minds of millions of its followers. Neither do I have any truck with establishing a dialogic relationship with proponents of one of QAnon's cousins, the deep state. If we wish to rescue sanity from transmogrification, we need not make a covenant with vexatious interlocutors wearing black suits and Ray-Ban Wayfarer Classics for the sake of a need to chauvinise. Nor do I wish to purge those who claim to work in Area 51 from the sanctuary of good old-fashioned civility.

QAnon adherents are whacky, intellectually disjointed and permanently polarized from the mainstream; they are uncritical proponents of a tendentious doctrine that has them classified as a potential domestic terrorism threat by the FBI, who have linked the group to numerous attempted acts of violence. Yet Trump has praised Marjorie Taylor Greene, a supporter of QAnon, who won the Republican nomination in Georgia's 14th congressional district, describing her as a 'future Republican Star.' When Trump was president, he was asked about QAnon. And he [replied](#), 'I don't know much about the movement other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate.... I have heard that it is gaining in popularity.' He also made the following remark: 'These are people that don't like seeing what's going on in places like Portland and places like Chicago and New York and other cities and states. I've heard these are people that love our country, and they just don't like seeing it.' When a reporter asked Trump a follow-up question, pointing out that QAnon supporters believe Trump is 'secretly saving the

world from this satanic cult of paedophiles and cannibals,' the president replied blithely: 'I haven't heard that, but is that supposed to be a good thing or a bad thing? 'If I can help save the world from problems, I'm willing to do it, I'm willing to put myself out there, and we are, actually. We're saving the world from a radical left philosophy that will destroy this country, and, when this country is gone, the rest of the world will follow.' When Alabama's football team presented Trump with a jersey bearing the number 17, which also happens to be the position of the letter Q in the alphabet, the QAnon community saw this as a sign of support for their group. Never mind that Trump himself is estimated to have [promoted](#) the conspiracy theory at least 265 times via retweets of QAnon-associated accounts between October 2017 and October 2019.

Could Trump's ruthless ambition and personal vanity be any clearer? Trump's words follow a doctrine of sheer expediency, that the ends justify the means, even if that means tacitly endorsing QAnon, generating the opposite of what people would expect from a sane person. But Trump's followers, QAnon or not, don't care. They don't want to shed an all-pervasive light on the ruinous policies of American capitalism. They simply want to see, in their cowardness and pettiness, the liberals handed an embarrassing defeat. Notwithstanding their ambiguous nuances, and their self-fashioning as free beings, QAnon believers are determined to marshal their fanatical fantasies that involve glorious revenge scenarios against Satan's minions in the service of siphoning away Democrats' political power. They will do anything to 'own the libs' in the name of their sham Republican orthodoxy, where everything is weighted by a factor of untruth and where they don't mind mixing weirdness into their political gruel (JFK is going to appear from the grave and join Trump in destroying the 'paedo' Dems). The followers of QAnon are passionate and tenacious, perfect conscripts for the battalion of loonies in Trump's army of followers. People who feel Trump is part of God's plan will go to great lengths to see his destiny fulfilled. One has only to look at what happened on January 6, 2021. If you assume that people will not tell monumental lies that could easily be disproved – well, just talk to some QAnon followers. The more you can disprove their claims, the more intensely they believe them. QAnon is the cult where raw stupidity has never been equalled in trenchancy, where the unadulterated lie joins in holy matrimony with deific audacity. Its members are less than scrupulous about logic or rational argumentation than most. They seek to create an affective investment in preposterous ideas in order to create the chaos necessary to challenge democracy. What is worse is that they actually believe their own nonsense. QAnon is an apocalyptic religious cult-like organization where information is accepted on faith, where false beliefs give meaning and purpose to their cavalcade of empty lives, where a connection is made with a narrative so all-encompassing that it engulfs and smothers all counter-intuitive attempts to explain it away. If somebody tells you that the government is carrying out disinformation campaigns and that gets your blood boiling, how much more compelling is the belief that Satan is being worshipped by an elite group of Democrats and Hollywood stars who carry out cannibalistic rituals that include peeling the faces from their victims, who are going to be punished by Donald Trump, God's 'Chosen One.'

There is no QAnon codex; there are no golden tablets or resplendent temples, so there is no need here to transcode complex glyphs into determinate behaviour to try to figure out what makes the QAnon cult so bizarre. But there is a deep state, if by that we mean a forbidding collusion among actors belonging to unacknowledged networks of power consisting of the military-industrial complex, weapons manufacturers and other industrialists, as well as conservative economic elites aimed at destroying the left. It's a clandestine system of malevolent power, but not really parallel

to the government and not readily visible to the average person. But we know from the history of US imperialism that it is there. Don't worry, QAnon; for the most part, it's on your side.

[The New York Times](#) has shared the findings of two independent teams of forensic linguists from France and Switzerland who claim they've identified Paul Furber, a South African software developer, and Arizona congressional candidate Ron Watkins, site administrator of the imageboard website 8kun (formerly known as 8chan) as the first individuals to write under the pseudonym Q. Watkins took over the account when it eventually moved to post on his father's 8chan message board. QAnon is not about proletarian autonomy; it is about a willingness to believe in the commission of child sexual abuse and sacrifice on the part of the cultural and political elite, that, if wiped out, will Make America Great Again. The purported involvement of our government leaders is a hard truth for some to swallow, but such an inconvenient truth will not stop the bona fide QAnon follower; it will only energize them. It's not about lack of sophistication or having mental smarts. After all, QAnon followers are used to solving puzzles – person, woman, man, camera, TV. It's more of a need that people have to belong to a group when confronting an iniquitous society – in this case, one with a not very finely honed philosophy. We all know that the government, together with large corporations, keeps secrets from the public, such as surveillance programs of citizens. It brings solace to people trapped in siloed communities of modern, digitalized, post-industrial life to share their fears and feelings of vulnerability with groups who reside outside their normal everyday lives and to realize that others feel the same way you do. In the case of QAnon, the interanimation of ideas and variegated sets of preposterous beliefs remain convoluted, a catharsis of unreason, loosely linked to a warped interpretation of Christianity or its gnostic variants, that can't be easily refuted as self-evidently wrong but that smell awfully suspicious. As partisans of illiberal thought, their ineluctable vicissitudes and attention-seeking behaviour have put QAnon's epigones and disciples on a path to an alternate, evidence-free reality. Yet they cannot help to antagonize and bastardize the very grounds of rationality that most of us take for granted. Their perversity of reason – inspired by a hatred of liberal democrats and their embeddedness in 'woke culture' – plays a salient role in the concrete unreasonableness of daily life in America.

And for those of you reading this who are part of the Q conspiracy, here is my breadcrumb: ACROMONOGRAMMATIC. Yes, seventeen letters, you crazy nut. That was just to catch your attention. Look out for the orange-haired anti-Christ. He's coming your way at fine bookstores not near you because Amazon has put them out of business. Save the People. Pumpernickel bread. (That's 17 letters too). Peyote. Eugene Debs. The soundtrack for Walkabout. Hear it and be healed. Pray to Oscar Romero. Get yourself straightened out.

You are erasing more of yourself than you redeem. Extraterrestrials.

The Big Lie is real. Eat the bony fish.

All the notes are equal.

Rubbermaid bath mat. Count the letters.

Tippy Top. Fight back. He has a V-shaped appendage.

Return your AR-15 to your mother. But first sign the handle with Chinese black ink.

I am watching the Manhattan skyline from Air Force One. Join the gallerygoers, but don't stop walking due East. You are entitled to depersonalize the Hopkinsville goblin but not the Space

Brothers. Affirm the negation. Marshall McLuhan was right. Momo Taro will emerge from a peach. Phosphorescent Rum. Text me when you have it. —M

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