

Operation Mindfuck
QAnon and the cult of Donald Trump
Robert Guffey

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The author's name may ring a bell.¹ He has been researching the wonderful world of American conspiracy theories for about 25 years and in this book he takes on the biggest and strangest of them all: the collection of nonsense loosely woven together under the title of QAnon.² Mr Guffey has ploughed through a mountain of gibberish, corresponded with some of its true believers and come out the other side still rational. We owe him, we really do. I wouldn't have lasted much beyond the first hour of the absurd piffle which is on-line. Early on he quotes science fiction writer Cory Doctorow:

[W]hy is it so easy to find people who want to believe in conspiracies[?] My answer: because so many of the things that have traumatized so many people ARE conspiracies . . . In a world of constant real conspiracy scandals that destroy lives and the planet, conspiracy theories take on real explanatory power. (p. 21)

The author offers his own version a hundred pages or so further on.

Just as the militia movement of the 1990s served the needs of average working people alienated from the elitist corridors of academia and effete liberalism, QAnon came along during a moment of crisis and provided what all cults offer their beaten-down followers: an explanation of why they're living in such extreme poverty while everyone else around them — half-real phantoms seen haunting Facebook, Instagram, television — seem to prosper and flourish. Is it because someone's *keeping* them down? If so, who is it? *Who?* (p. 108)

¹ I reviewed one of his earlier books in *Lobster 70: Chameleo: A Strange but True Story of Invisible Spies, Heroin Addiction, and Homeland Security*, <<https://tinyurl.com/39sap6pw>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/70/chameleo-a-strange-but-true-story-of-invisible-spies-heroin-addiction-and-homeland-security-by-robert-guffey/>>.

² This book, he tells us, grew out of series of articles he wrote for Salon in 2020 about the origins of QAnon. I look at Salon pretty regularly but managed to miss those.

There is a large Wikipedia entry on QAnon at <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QAnon>> which conveys both its scope and idiocy.

These are plausible hypotheses but they make it sound almost rational and don't begin to encompass the sheer weirdness of much of the QAnon material. Take this example, on pages 17 and 18 (and there are dozens of others).

. . . rabid Trump supporters who are convinced COVID-19 is both a hoax and also Trump's greatest moment as president. He has acted decisively apparently, while also knowing that COVID-19 is a Hollywood Liberal Elite cover-up [...]. Adrenochrome is a drug for the liberal elite of Hollywood made from actual human brain stem containing hormones from the adrenal gland. Hillary Clinton manufactures this drug by torturing children in a pizza shop [...]. Tom Hanks is addicted to Adrenochrome and he caught COVID-19 from the latest batch of tainted Adrenochrome that came through Celine Dion who is a high priestess from the Church of Satan. She is well-versed in poison as she's been lacing her children's clothing line with a chemical that makes our children 'gender neutral'. Tom Hanks signalled to the Hollywood Liberal Elite Cabal DeepState in his Golden Globes acceptance speech that there would be a shortage of Adrenochrome. Ellen has closed her studio audience because she's addicted as well.

Mr Guffey recounts dealing with a friend of his – apparently intelligent and rational – who began spouting QAnon nonsense. Guffey is baffled and entirely unable to work out why his friend is doing this, or to persuade him to explain it. In the exchanges with his friend he is directed to on-line videos.

The first video (entitled "The Underground War, Happening Now") features a "Christian Patriot" named "Rick B2T" in conversation with an anonymous fellow calling himself only "Gene." I subjected myself to thirty-eight minutes and sixteen seconds of unsubstantiated rumors about U.S. Christian soldiers battling demon-worshipping members of the Illuminati in deep underground bases.

This is the beginning of many pages recounting the many months watching this particular duo as their theories get stranger and stranger. Most interesting to me is Guffey's reporting of their ability to evade material which undermines or refutes their beliefs. This happens repeatedly with Donald Trump. Rick and Gene take him and his various predictions seriously and repeatedly have to explain to themselves – and their viewers – why it didn't turn out the way Trump said it would. The human brain's ability to rationalise the counterfactual is one of its most important – and most disabling – features.³

³ There is a fair bit about this on-line under the psychology of rationalisation.

He explores some of Q's antecedents in English-language conspiratology: in the last 30 years or so, among the obvious forerunners are the late William Cooper, Cathy O'Brien,⁴ David Icke and *The X-Files*. Cooper's 1990 *Behold A Pale Horse* is available on-line.⁵ I scrolled through the on-line PDF to remind myself of it. After some chapters of autobiography, Cooper has this on p. 27:

On the day that I learned that the Office of Naval Intelligence had participated in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and that it was the Secret Service agent driving the limo that had shot Kennedy in the head, I went AWOL [he was in the Navy] with no intention of ever returning. My good friend Bob Swan is the one who talked me into going back. Later, on June 1, 1972, the eve of my wedding, I told Bob everything that I knew about the UFOs, Kennedy's assassination, the Navy, the Secret Government, the coming ice age, Alternatives 1, 2, & 3, Project GALILEO, and the plan for the New World Order. I believed it was all true then and I believe it is all true now.

After a discussion of secret societies he tells on p. 78:

The English Freemason organization was used by the KGB to infiltrate and take over British Intelligence. British Intelligence is synonymous with Chatham House, more commonly known as the Royal Institute for International Affairs, the parent organization of the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States. The English state police, Scotland Yard, ordered its personnel not to join the Masons for fear the same would happen to them.

Despite peddling such demonstrable baloney, Cooper was taken seriously in some circles. In retrospect his significance was in being one of the first to produce what someone (I can't remember or trace who it was) called a unified field theory of conspiracy: he chucked it all in.

Strangely, David Icke is only mentioned once by Guffey. But Icke, at his peak in the years after Cooper, was another big stepping stone on the way to QAnon. Even stranger, *The X-Files* TV programme is missing entirely, even though it was shown to nearly half the world and introduced its viewers to

⁴ Author of *Trance Formation of America*, of which I have only read fragments. O'Brien recounts tales of her sexual abuse at the hands of various American politicians. The subtitle is *The True Life Story of a CIA Mind Control Slave*. In O'Brien's view of the universe, the rich and powerful men of America need mind-controlled sex slaves to act out their fantasies. Alas, all they need is their power or their wealth.

⁵ <<https://tinyurl.com/3hs6zpj8>> or <<https://ia902905.us.archive.org/35/items/william-cooper-behold-a-pale-horse/William%20Cooper%20-%20Behold%20a%20Pale%20Horse.pdf>>

much of the pre-internet and pre-QAnon American conspiracy theorising. In other words, especially within the United States, the ground was being prepared.

Historical perspective says, 'Look, some people always could believe strange conspiracy theories'. Which is true and can be traced back to the 19th century and the stories about the Illuminati. But there is an enormous gulf between a Cooper or an Icke and the QAnon nonsense. Nothing Cooper or Icke came up with produced responses which could match what appeared under the QAnon name or was inspired by it. The author tells us:

Even as you're reading these words, there are *thousands* of 'Christian Patriots' living in the United States who sincerely believe that Donald Trump *saved them from being eaten by demons* when he entered the White House. This is not hyperbole. This is a literal interpretation of what they believe. (p. 26) (emphasis in the original)

Guffey writes: 'Compared to QAnon, William Cooper was Buckminster Fuller'. (p. 28) More significantly, while people read or listened to Cooper and Icke, they didn't do anything with it. But then there isn't much you can do with the notion that the world is controlled by shape-shifting alien lizards . . .

As for how it all began, Mr Guffey quotes one who was involved with QAnon from day one:

. . . it took off like wildfire. It was a perfect storm sort of thing, triggering a lot of confirmation bias, etc. Q posts started coming in non-stop. And, of course, they quickly became more and more insane. And, the way 4chan works, nobody actually knows if any subsequent Q posts were written by the original Q. Some tried to imitate the style/voice of the original, and many were clearly just people goofing around. It's very possible that the original Q never posted again ever. Suddenly, everybody was Q. They called it Q-posting. It was just a giddy sort of fun. Also, part of the culture of /pol/ [politically incorrect] is to say and 'prove' the most outlandish possible things – the more ridiculous the claim, and the more flimsy and circumstantial the 'evidence', the better. And when some hapless goof would come along and try to push back against the veracity of our claims, we would double and triple and quadruple down. That was the game. (p. 216)

But what began as a game was steered by persons unknown with political objectives, believes Guffey. He calls it 'the ultimate catfish [scam] scheme for the twenty-first century', (p. 83) done by '[s]omeone who was highly familiar with conspiracy theory folklore'. (p. 35) This he deduces from

. . . . the numerous obscure sources upon which the multilayered QAnon narrative has been manufactured. . . include such colorful conspiratologists as Léo Taxil, Richard Shaver, Ray Palmer, Richard Sauder, William Cooper, Louis Tackwood, Alex Constantine, Walter Bowart, Maury Terry, John W. DeCamp, Gordon Thomas, Christopher Simpson, Jordan Maxwell, Mae Brussell, Lyndon LaRouche, Dr. Peter Beter, and Jack McLamb. Most people outside the limited, solipsistic world of conspiracy research have never heard of these people. (pp. 101/2)

And the objective? 'The purpose is to distract the citizenry from the real problems, from the people who are actually controlling this country.' (p. 109)

' . . . the entire QAnon phenomenon displays all the telltale signs of being a highly coordinated psychological warfare operation that eclipses the draconian efforts of Nixon's Committee to Re-elect the President in the early 1970s. This operation is targeted not just at hardcore Christian evangelicals but also at wide swaths of the American population previously untapped by the Republican Party. The beauty of Operation QAnon, from a strategic standpoint, is that it's specifically designed to be a *secular religion*. Though QAnon has a Christian base, you don't have to be Christian to buy into the essential components of the QAnon mythology. There are plenty of non-Christians in this country who believe in the existence of demons and other paranormal beasties. You can be a committed atheist and still buy the idea that a secret group of Satanists are kidnapping children and sacrificing them to deities these elitist devil worshippers *believe* to be real. Devotees can pick and choose from the QAnon platter which elements of the story they wish to indulge in. (pp. 102/3)

Towards the end of the book Guffey tells us:

It should be painfully obvious by this point that the entire purpose of the QAnon narrative – a complex psychological warfare campaign intended to inculcate the American rightwing with not only a religious yearning for martial law but also a perverse hunger for an outright military coup in the U.S. – was a buildup to the insurrection of January 6 in case Trump lost what his 2016 campaign advisor Roger Stone characterized as 'an already corrupt election'. (pp. 191/2)

If this is true, the interesting question is at what stage did the political operators take control of the narrative? Chances are good that somewhere somebody is writing a memoir and we will find out how it was done and by

whom. The closest we have got is an article in the *New York Times* earlier this year reporting the results of analysis of the writing styles of QAnon posts which identifies two men as the major authors.⁶ Thus far they have not acknowledged their roles.

⁶ <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/19/technology/qanon-messages-authors.html>>