

Anthony Bourdain knew too much, viral conspiracy theory claims



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Anthony Bourdain poses for a photo in Toronto on Monday, October 31, 2016.

The Canadian Press/Frank Gunn

Some peddlers of conspiracy theories seem to have an unhealthy obsession with child sex rings, especially ones that can be linked, through a leap of the imagination, with their political opponents.

Sometimes this has dangerous real-life consequences, as we saw in late 2016 when a credulous North Carolina man attacked a D.C. pizzeria with an assault rifle. He had convinced himself, based on online conspiracy theories, that it was the centre of a child trafficking ring linked to the Democrats.

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In the absence of other evidence, the choice of theme seems to have to do more with what generates clicks for unscrupulous site operators more than anything else.

More recently, an armed paramilitary group in Tucson, Ariz. convinced itself that a homeless encampment in the desert was actually a centre of child sex trafficking, based on, as far as can be determined, their imaginations. The conspirators created headaches for the homeless people (who already have enough to deal with), the people who were trying to help them, and police.

The *Arizona Daily Star*, which has more patience than we do, tries to explain the intricacies of the affair here.

The claims fit into a larger conspiracy theory called QAnon, which seems to have originated with 4chan. The *New York Times*' Michelle Goldberg calls it "fascinating as an artifact of our current political derangement."

"In the QAnon reality, Trump only *pretended* to collude with Russia in order to create a pretext for the hiring of special counsel Robert Mueller, who is actually working with Trump to take down an inconceivably evil and powerful network of coup-plotters and child sex traffickers that includes Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and George Soros," Goldberg explains.

Now-disgraced comedian Roseanne Barr tweeted in support of QAnon in March.

WATCH: People reacted Tuesday to news that ABC cancelled the "Roseanne" reboot after a racist tweet by the show's star, Roseanne Barr.

The day after chef and author Anthony Bourdain died last week, Neon Nettle (a fake news site that wasn't on our radar until today) cashed in with a story headlined "Anthony Bourdain Was About to Expose an Elite Pedophile Ring Before He Died."

Little evidence was offered to support the claim, but that didn't seem to matter; the story got 107,744 total Facebook interactions, NewsWhip estimates.

"... Evidence is now emerging that the mainstream reporter was about to expose an elite pedophile ring just before he died," the site argued. "Although Mr. Bourdain's death has been officially declared a suicide, many see his untimely passing a suspicious and unexpected."

The link above is a good example of something we've seen before, which is referencing a another website as a way of giving the claim an air of authority. Typically the link is either to some kind of mainstream source, which you have to read to realize it doesn't support the claim, or to a site that lacks inherent authority. This link belongs to the second category, being a thread on /r/conspiracy/.

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Now, some backstory: Asia Argento, Bourdain's partner, did accuse Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault back in May. And Bourdain was no fan of Hillary Clinton.

Neon Nettle then closes the loop by citing unnamed "sources," who, it says, "are stating that Bourdain was planning on running 'an exposé' on the sex slave network."

If as a reader, you ask yourself "The sex slave network? How did I miss that?" and read back to find out if 1) you're asking the right question, 2) you didn't miss the first reference, because there wasn't one.

Other than an out-of-context reference to the camp in Arizona (“Could this tie in with whatever the investigative journalist Anthony Bourdain was just about to expose?”), and a reference to the fact that CNN, Bourdain’s network, didn’t cover child abuse arrests in Atlanta that’s about it.

Anyway, we clicked so you don’t have to.

(They’re against vaccination, too.)

WATCH: For the second time this week, a celebrity has died by suicide. Anthony Bourdain’s body was found Friday in France. The 61-year-old was a chef, writer, and globe-trotting television host. As Mike Drolet reports, millions of people lived vicariously through Bourdain’s travels.

READ MORE: Anthony Bourdain had a thing for Canada and its food, despite some controversy

In brief:

- In Wired: David Carroll makes the case that Americans trying to piece together how and why AggregateIQ and Cambridge Analytica might have influenced the 2016 election (and others) should pay more attention to parliamentary investigations in Britain and Canada. The story is “devilishly confusing,” he admits: “At times it feels Cambridge Analytica designed it this way, to overwhelm the capacity of government, media, and citizens.”
- At BuzzFeed: a 21st-century story about a debunker of internet hoaxes who suspected that another site (which did better in Google search results) was plagiarizing him. He guessed which IP addresses the alleged plagiarist was coming from, created alternative hoax content for readers from those addresses, and based a sting on that. (Makers of reference books use much the same strategy to catch plagiarists.) More than 2,000 allegedly plagiarized fact-check stories have now vanished.
- And Facebook concedes, again, that it needs to do more to try to curb the platform’s role in the Rohingya genocide in Burma.

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