

Trust the Plan

The Rise of QAnon and the Conspiracy That Unhinged America

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Chapter 7 The Wizard of Mattoon

Mattoon, Illinois, Is A Blue-Collar Factory And Farming Town On The Midwestern Prairie Most Renowned For Its Annual Bagel Festival. But When Millions Of Dollars Started Flowing Into The Town In The 1990s, It Came \$100 At A Time, *Wrapped In Aluminum Foil To Avoid Government Agents.*

Suddenly, Wealth Was Everywhere. In The Mattoon Post Office, An Over-Stuffed Package Burst Open, Spilling Cash. Working-Class Residents Deposited Millions Of Dollars Into Their Bank Accounts. A Sheriff's Deputy Bought A Boat And A Harley-Davidson Motorcycle. A New Sawmill Opened, Along With A Bakery And A Diner. A Fleet Of New Trucks Appeared At A Construction Company That Had Seemed On The Verge Of Collapse.

The Mystery Windfalls Could All Be Traced Back To Clyde Hood, An Electrician With A Background In Running Minor Cons. Few People In Mattoon Knew Where His Money Was Coming From, But He Had A Lot Of It. He Started Opening Businesses And Handing Out Sizable, Interest-Free Loans To His Friends.

He Hired Other *Mattoonians* To Help With His Mysterious Income Stream. Hood Had Once Been Convicted For Helping To Steal Guns From A Construction Site, And Only Avoided Prosecution For A Scheme To Sell Fraudulent Oil Securities In Indiana By Refusing To Turn Himself In. So, Understandably,

Hood's Status As Mattoon's New Benefactor Came As A Surprise To His Neighbors. Living With His Wife In A Modest, Hood Didn't Exactly Look The Part Of A Financial Wizard.

"He Listed His Occupation At One Point As A Pool Hall Manager," Recalled Carl Walworth, Then A Crime Reporter For The *Mattoon Journal Gazette*. "You Could See Clyde In A Pool Hall."

Whatever Hood Was Doing Now, Though, Mattoonians Knew It Had To Be Lucrative. Hood Collected More Than A Dozen Rare Cars. He Traveled To Europe, And Stashed Money In The Caribbean And The Middle East. It Didn't Matter If Hood Looked Like The Sort Of Guy You'd Find In The Pool Hall. *To The More Than Ten Thousand People Across The United States Who Sent Him A Fortune Later Estimated At \$50 Million, He Was A Savior Sent By God.*

In 1994, Hood Had Begun Traveling The Country For Meetings Where He Portrayed Himself To People Outside Mattoon As A Banking Wheeler-Dealer Of The Highest Order. In Hood's Telling, *He Was One Of Only Eight People In The World Qualified To Trade In "Prime Banknotes"* — An Exclusive Financial System Closed Off To All But The Most Connected Investors, Where The Wealthiest Families In The World *Reaped Enormous Returns On Risk-Free Investments*. After Making His Fortune In Prime Banknotes, *He Had Received A Message From God. The Holy Spirit Visited Hood And Told Him To "Keep The Lord's Warehouse Full"* By Creating An Investment Pool Called Omega Trust And Trading, Selling Shares At \$100 Each To "The Little People." By Funneling Small Investors' Money Into The Prime Banknote System, He Could Connect Average Americans With The Massive Profits Once Reserved For Tycoons And European Aristocracy. Hood Promised Potential Omega Investors 50-to-1 Returns In Nine Months On Each Share Of \$100, Which He Would Then Reinvest Three Times. That Meant *Each \$100 Share* Would, In Just A Few Years, *Become \$12.5 Million.*

Video Of Hood Making His Sales Pitch In A Portland Motel Circulated In Church Groups Across The Country, Prompting Them To Send Huge Amounts Of Money To Mattoon. A Washington State Chiropractor Retired And Put All His Savings Into Omega, Certain That He Would Soon Be A Billionaire,

While An Ice Cream Shop Owner Sold Her Business And Sent \$50,000 To The Fund. Hood Hired More Than A Dozen People To Enroll New Investors And Rented An Office Where They Could Count The Money. One Of Hood's Associates Even Pulled In Omega's Cleaning Woman, Convincing Her To Invest Her Life Savings.

Obviously, There Were No Prime Banknotes. Promising Naive Investors Access To A “Secret” Banking System Had Become Such A Common Scam In The 1990s That American Authorities Wondered Whether Con Men Like Hood Were Sharing Their Gifts With One Another. The Scam Spread Across The World, Racking Up A List Of Victims That Included A Major Bank In The Czech Republic, A Chicago Pension Fund, And The Government Of The Island Of Nauru. The Con Also Attracted A Diverse Set Of Charlatans, Including A Former Pro Baseball Pitcher Who Bilked Investors Out Of \$7 Million By Promising Sky-High Returns From The Secret Banks. Instead, He Blew The Money On Racehorses Until The Feds Caught Up With Him. In 1994, A Law Professor Studying Prime Banknotes Estimated That A Combined \$500 Million Had Already Been Stolen By Criminals Running The Scheme. Few Of Hood's Colleagues In Crime, Though, Were As Successful Or As Clever As He Was. Hood Raked In Tens Of Millions Of Dollars By Targeting *Churches* With His Scam, Tapping Into Their Social Networks To Increase His Take. He Threw In Plenty Of Conspiracy Theories About The Powers-That-Be Trying To Stop Him And Keep Down The Small Investor. Hood Always Promised To Deliver The Profits On A Specific Date A Few Months In The Future, But He Never Came Up With The Money. Omega Investors Could Call A Hotline Where Hood Left Prerecorded Messages With His Latest Excuse, Claiming, For Example, *That Earth's Magnetism Had Delayed The Financial Transfer By Interfering With Hood's Satellites.* Over The Five Years Hood Ran The Hotline, He Updated The Prerecorded Message Seventy-Two Times, Always Moving The Date Of The Great Payoff *Just A Little Bit Into The Future.*

Rather Than Realize They Had Been Duped, Though, Most Of The “Omegans” Bought Hood's Explanations. They Complained In Message Boards That Nefarious Outside Forces Must Be Holding Up Their Life-Changing Paydays. Hood Claimed In One Hotline Message That “Numerous Individuals And Entities” — The Government, Or Rival Bankers — Didn't Want His Investors To Receive The Fabulous

Returns They Were Due. Omegans Were Instructed To *Wrap Their Cash Contributions In Foil Before Mailing Them, To Avoid Government Spies.*

So Much Money Flowed Into Omega That Prosecutors Never Knew With Any Certainty Exactly How Much Hood Had Made. Later, They Estimated That Hood And Omega Took In Somewhere Between \$20 Million And \$50 Million Between 1994 And 2000.

“You Would Think That If Somebody Asked You To Put A Hundred-Dollar Bill In Tin Foil, That Might Be A Bit Of A Red Flag, But It Really Wasn’t For A Lot Of People,” Walworth Said.

Stories Like Omega Or Q Involve A Huge Number Of People Waiting For A World-Changing Moment That Would Never Happen. When Their Predictions Fail To Come True, Though, They Commit To Their Beliefs Even More, Stunning People Outside The Movement Who Could See That They Had Been Fooled.

The Question Of Why People Believe Conspiracy Theories, Even Hurting Their Own Interests In The Process, Has Become A Pressing One In A Time Where Conspiracy Theorists Commit Violence, Destroy Family Relationships, And Encourage One Another To Refuse Vaccines. But When Syracuse University Religion Professor Michael Barkun Became Interested In Conspiracy Theories In The 1980s, There Was Practically No Research In Any Academic Discipline Into Why People Became Enthralled With Them. As He Worked On A Book About A Conspiracy-Theory-Crazed Extremist Christian Sect That Had Motivated White Supremacist Terrorists Around The Country, Barkun Wanted To Know More About Conspiracy Theories And What Role They Played In American Politics.

Historian Richard Hofstadter’s Landmark 1964 Essay, “The Paranoid Style In American Politics,” Which Focused On Decades Of Feverish Anticommunism And Conservative Barry Goldwater’s Doomed Presidential Campaign, Created The Modern American Field Of Conspiracy Theory Study. Two Decades

After Hofstadter's Essay Came Out, Though, There Wasn't Much Else For Barkun To Go On. Some Budding Conspiracy Theory Scholars Had Begun To Feel That One Of Hofstadter's Central Claims — That Conspiracy Theories Were An Aberration In American Politics, Embraced Only By The Fringes — Had Stalled Research In Their Nascent Field. Contrary To What Hofstadter Wrote, His Critics Said, Conspiracy Theories Have Been A Powerful Force In American Politics And Culture Since Before The Country's Founding, All The Way Back To The Salem Witch Trials.

American History Is Filled With Conspiracy Theory Beliefs Playing Out In Mainstream Politics. In The Country's First Years, Thomas Jefferson's Opponents Accused Him Of Colluding With Illuminati Groups In Europe. In The 1830s, American Protestants Reacted To Waves Of Catholic Immigration By Obsessing Over Claims That Catholic Priests Were Sexually Abusing Protestant Girls In Church Schools, In A Scheme Organized By The Pope And The Catholic Head Of The Austrian Empire. As The Country Was Torn Apart By Slavery, Abolitionist Forces Were Motivated By Conspiracy Theories About "Slave Power," The Idea That Every Death Of Abolitionist Could Be Attributed To A Vast Network Of Assassins Run By Proslavery States.

But Defining Exactly What A Conspiracy Theory Is Can Be Difficult, Since Even People With The Most Eccentric Beliefs Are Unwilling To Self-Identify As Conspiracy Theorists. Joseph Uscinski, A University Of Miami Professor Who Has Been At The Forefront Of Research On QAnon, Summed Up Conspiracy Theories In 2014 With A Colleague As "An Explanation Of Historical, Ongoing, Or Future Events That Cites As A Main Causal Factor A Small Group Of Powerful Persons, The Conspirators, Acting In Secret For Their Own Benefit Against The Common Good." Another Academic Definition Holds That A Conspiracy Theory Is "A Text That Falsely Accuses A Group Of Individuals Of Orchestrating A Plot That Has Harmed Or Will Harm Society."

Barkun Has His Own Definition Of A Conspiracy Theory. To A Believer, Barkun Writes, “Nothing Happens By Accident, Nothing Is As It Seems, And Everything Is Connected.” At A Time When QAnon Believers See Every Random Event — A Flash Of Light Off The Pacific Coast Of The United States, Or A Ship Running Aground In The Suez Canal — As Proof Of A Plot To Shoot Down Air Force One Or A Foiled Scheme To Smuggle Children To Hillary Clinton, Respectively, Barkun’s Definition Fits.

The Appeal Of The Belief That Unseen, Malevolent Forces Control The World Isn’t Restricted By Racial, Gender, Or Class Boundaries. Blaming Personal Failings On The Misdeeds Of An Unseen Cabal Has An Obvious Emotional Appeal, Relieving A Person Of Taking Responsibility For Their Own Problems. It’s Also A *Simple Way To Explain A Complex World*. Rather Than Accept That Random, Chaotic, Deadly Events Can Happen Out Of Nowhere, The Believer Can Simplify The World By Blaming Tragic Events On A Conspiracy.

QAnon Is The Latest American Example Of One Of The Most Enduring Kinds Of Conspiracy Theory: A “Superconspiracy,” A Conspiracy That Explains Dozens Of Lesser Conspiracy Theories By Blaming All Of The Events On What Barkun Calls A “Distant But All-Powerful Evil Force.” In The 1990s, Evangelical Leaders And Conspiracy Theorists On Talk Radio Claimed There Was A Sinister “New World Order” At Play Behind Seemingly Distinct Events Like The Waco Siege, UFO Sightings, And Rising Drug Addiction In American Cities. In The Same Way QAnon Believers Now Weave Issues Like Trump’s 2020 Defeat, The Coronavirus Pandemic, And Child Sexual Abuse Into One Coherent Narrative That Puts All The Blame On A Shadowy Cabal. The Names Of The Villains Have Changed, But The Human Desire To Believe In A Single Powerful Force Controlling The World Remains.

Shaini Goodwin Discovered Omega In 1998, When Clyde Hood Was Still Promising To Divert Billions Of Dollars To His Investors On God’s Orders. Goodwin Sent Hood \$200, Good Enough For Two Shares And A Sizable Fortune Once Hood Transferred Omega Profits From A Bank In The English Channel.

Without The Money Promised By Omega, Goodwin's Future Looked Bleak. In Her Early Fifties, Goodwin Lived In A Double-Wide Trailer In Rural Washington State With Her Sick Mother. She Had A History Of Financial Problems, Including A Past Bankruptcy. When She Bought Into Omega, Goodwin Had A \$12,000 Federal Tax Lien Hanging Over Her Head. She Already Dabbled In Fringe Beliefs, Taking Classes At Ramtha's School Of Enlightenment — An Alleged Cult In Washington Whose Leader Claims To Channel The Voice Of A 35,000-Year-Old Warrior Named Ramtha.

On Omega Forums, Goodwin Adopted The Moniker "Dove Of Oneness" And Began To Imbue Omega-Watching With A New Age Spirituality. Styling Herself As The "Deep Throat Of The Northwest," She Claimed That She Had Access To Inside Information That Proved That The Omega Payoff Would Soon Take Place. Goodwin Amassed A Following Among Dispirited Omegans. She Also Started To Solicit Donations From Investors Eager To Hear More Good News About Omega.

One Day In August 2000, Two Years After Goodwin Bought Her Shares In Omega, Federal Law Enforcement Officers Arrested Hood, His Wife, And Seventeen Associates. Hood Eventually Pleaded Guilty, Received A Fourteen-Year Prison Sentence, And Agreed To Testify Against Other Defendants. But Even After Hood Admitted That Omega Was A Rip-Off, Calling It A "Scam" While Testifying Against One Of His Underlings, *Omegans Continued To Believe*. Hood, They Thought, Was Being Pressured By Prosecutors To Say Omega Was A Con. They Embraced British Conspiracy Theorist David Icke's Claim That The World Is Controlled By Reptilian Aliens, Blaming The Lizard-People For Delaying The Omega Payoff. The Omegans' Unflagging Hopes Created Some Sad Scenes. Online, Omegean Leaders Insisted That Navy SEALs Had Been Dispatched, Possibly Disguised As Pizza Deliverymen, To Deliver The Massive Payoffs To Investors On A Particular Date. Omega Shareholders Took Time Off Work So They Could Wait At Home For Their Millions Of Dollars, Peeking Out Their Windows When A Pizza Man Passed By. The Money Never Arrived. Others Raised Money For Hood's Bail, Convinced That He Could Turn Omega *Into A Success If He Could Just Get Out Of Jail Long Enough For One More Trade*.

Scouring The Internet For More Proof That Her Omega Money Would Arrive Soon, Goodwin Came Upon The Writings Of Harvey Barnard, An Eccentric Louisiana Engineer Who Believed He Had Written A Law That Would Save American Business. Barnard Called His Bill The “National Economic Stabilization And Recovery Act,” Or “NESARA.” Barnard Mailed One Thousand Copies Of His Draft Legislation To Congressional Offices And Awaited The Swift Passage Of His Bill. Because No One Had Ever Heard Of Harvey Barnard Or NESARA, The Draft Was Immediately Ignored.

Long After Bernard’s Draft Bill Had Landed In Wastepaper Baskets Across The U.S. Capitol, Goodwin Discovered His NESARA Website. Barnard’s Original Bill Had No Connection To Omega. Without His Permission, Goodwin Took It Much Further. NESARA Wasn’t Just An Amateur Economic Theory, Goodwin Told Her Followers — It Was A Bill For Restructuring The Entire World. NESARA Would Eliminate Credit Card Debt, Mortgage Payments, And The Federal Reserve. Omega Was Just One Of Fifty Programs Within NESARA, Each Of Which Would Shower Fabulous Wealth On Ordinary People. Notably, Considering Her Own Five-Figure Tax Debts, Goodwin Said NESARA Would Also Abolish Income Taxes And The Internal Revenue Service.

Best Of All, Goodwin Told Omegans, Congress Had already Passed NESARA In 2000. In A Story That Echoes QAnon’s Vision Of A “Storm” Where Heroic Soldiers Circumvent The Democratic Process In What Could Be Seen Less Charitably As A Coup, Goodwin Claimed That Special Forces Troopers Ordered Bill Clinton To Sign NESARA At Gunpoint. Alas, The Supreme Court Had Put A Temporary Gag Order On Everyone Involved To Not Discuss The Bill’s Existence. Only Goodwin Could Reveal The Truth.

As Goodwin Kept Up The Updates From Her Trailer, NESARA Started To Mutate. Benevolent Aliens Were Added To The Mix. Goodwin Won Fans Who Had Never Been Involved In The Original Omega Scam, Ultimately Attracting At Least 15,000 People To Her Message. Supporters Of The Mythical Law Deluged Newspapers With Letters To The Editor, Demanding That Congress Finally Unveil NESARA. Believers Wrote “NESARA NOW” On Their Utility Bills, Refusing To Pay On The Grounds That The Bill [NESARA]

Absolved Them Of The Debt. Postcards Demanding NESARA's Implementation Flooded Into The Supreme Court. Baffled Pedestrians In Washington, D. C., Watched As Billboard Trucks Calling For NESARA Circled The City.

While QAnon Supporters Would Later Interpret News Events In The World As Signals About The Battle Between Benevolent “White Hats” And Malevolent “Black Hats” Ahead Of “The Storm,” Goodwin Saw Everything As Battles Between Good “White Knights” And Evil “Dark Agenda” Agents, All Centered On A Fight To Enact NESARA. The Attacks Of September 11, 2001, Were Organized By The U. S. Government To Prevent The Federal Reserve From Enacting NESARA From An Office In The World Trade Center. Home Lifestyle Icon Martha Stewart Was Framed For Insider Trading Because She Supported NESARA. When A Malaysia Airlines Flight Disappeared In 2014, Blogs Supporting The Conspiracy Theory Claimed That The Vanished Passengers Volunteered To Be Taken As Hostages By The Aliens Overseeing NESARA. But Like Hood Before Her And Q After Her, Goodwin Kept Moving The Date Of The Great Moment That NESARA Would Be Implemented, Pushing It Forward A Few Months Each Time. And Like Q, She Thrilled Her Audience With Gruesome Tales Of Their Foes' Demise, Claiming At One Point That “100,000 Bankers” Who Opposed The Legislation “Have Been Eliminated.”

Goodwin's Fictional World Even Outlasted Her Death In 2010. After She Died, The Head Of The NESARA Website Claimed That Goodwin Had Sacrificed Herself To Send A Message To The Aliens. But It Wasn't All Bad News. The Webmaster Also Announced That Goodwin Had Prepared A Few Trades Promising “More Than Favorable Returns” Before Her Demise. *All That Was Needed Now Was a Little Money From Her Fans.*

These Days, NESARA, Now Often Called GESARA — The “National” Has Been Replaced By “Global” — Has Become A Key Part Of QAnon Lore. As Early Q Believers Tried To Puzzle Out The Clues, Conspiracy Theorists Who Already Believed In NESARA Claimed Q Was Talking About Their Law. NESARA Offers Something Personal For QAnon Believers Waiting For The Storm: A World Without Debts Or Disease.

QAnon Followers Write “NESARA/GESARA” On Their Signs And Tell One Another About The Perfect World That Awaits Them.

Researchers Have Struggled To Find What Makes Certain People More Likely To Support And Believe In Conspiracy Theories. Some Research Suggests That People With Manichean Worldviews Who See The World As More Black-And-White Are More Likely To Support Conspiracy Theories. Other Factors That Indicate A Tendency Toward Conspiracism Include Preferences For Strict Hierarchies, Holding A Dark View Of Human Nature And Higher Distrust Of Other People, And Viewing The World As A Jungle Where “The Strong Dominate The Weak.” Conspiracy Theory Believers Often Display Obsessions With The Sufferings Of Their Own Identity Group — Their Religion, Their Race, Their Country — At The Hands Of Sinister Outside Groups.

“Sometimes It’s A Group Of Plutocrats,” Barkun Said. “Sometimes It’s Jews.”

As A Way Of Seeing The World, Conspiracy Theories Offer Their Believers A Chance To Feel Smarter Than The Average Person, Giving Them A Sense Of Agency Or At Least Understanding Over Events That Often Seem Totally Out Of Control. “They Give You A Sense That You Are One Of The Few People Who’s Learned To See Through The Deception And The Bullshit,” Said Peter Knight, A Professor At The University Of Manchester Who Studies Conspiracy Theories.

Conspiracy Theory Beliefs Can Promote Other Negative Behaviors, Too. Believers In Conspiracy Theories That AIDS Was Created By The Government Are Less Likely To Use Condoms During Sex, One Study Found. Another Group Of Researchers Found That Conspiracy Theorists Are Much More Likely Than The Average Person To Support Political Violence.

As Strange As Theories Like QAnon Can Seem, Though, Conspiratorial Thinking Is In General Widespread. A 2013 Study Found That 63 Percent Of Americans Surveyed Held At Least One Conspiratorial Belief When Asked To Choose Whether They Believed In Any Of Four Conspiracy Theories:

Whether Barack Obama Was Covering Up Significant Information About His Early Life, The Government Knew In Advance About The 9/11 Attacks, Or The 2004 Or 2012 Elections Were Marred By Severe Voter Fraud. Another Survey Taken In 2011 Found That 55 Percent Of Americans Polled Believed In At Least One Conspiracy Theory When Presented With Seven Options, Ranging From The Idea That Jews And Oil Companies Caused The Iraq War To The Claim That George Soros Is Deliberately Destabilizing The American Government. The Most Popular Conspiracy Theory In That Poll, Held By 25 Percent Of Respondents, Maintained That Bankers Caused The 2008 Financial Crises Deliberately To Empower The Federal Reserve.

There's No One Factor That Makes Someone Believe In Conspiracy Theories. But After Talking To QAnon Believers For Years, I've Started To Notice Some Commonalities That Go Beyond Politics. They Often Seem Angry About The State Of The World And Their Place In It. Conversely, They Get A Special Pleasure In The Knowledge They Think Q Has Shared With Them, Reveling In The Secrets That Set Them Apart From The Average Person. As One Believer Put It To Me With A Smile, *They Know The News Before Everyone Else*. In A Confusing World, A Conspiracy Theory Like QAnon Gives People Something To Put Their Faith In.

"Many Of Them Are Perfectly Normal," Barkun Said Of Conspiracy Theorists. "It Would Be Nice To Say, 'Well, They're All Crazy People,' But They're Not."

Despite The Growing Research Into What Causes People To Believe In Conspiracy Theories, It Can Still Be Deeply Unsettling To Find It Appearing In Your Home. In 2020, Amanda, A Portland Homemaker, Watched As QAnon Took Over Her Family. "It's Been Absolutely Life Changing," Amanda Told Me. "I've Been A Different Person Because Of How It Upended My Foundational Reality."

Amanda's Uncle, Her Mother's Brother, Had Long Dabbled In Conspiracy Theories, Encouraging His Relatives To Investigate The "Hollow Earth" Pseudoscience That Posits There's A Lively Separate World Inside The Planet. Amanda And Her Mother Had Laughed Off His Off-The-Wall Facebook Posts. Then, A

Few Months Into The Pandemic, Amanda Noticed That her Mother Was Posting About The “Real” King Of England — A New Zealand Man Named Joseph Gregory Hallett, Whose Farcical Claim To The British Throne Has Been Embraced By QAnon Believers. Amanda Ignored The Posts, Only To See Her Mother Write More About QAnon, And Eventually Block Her Daughter To Stop Her From Criticizing Q On Her Facebook Page.

Soon Other Family Members Signed On To QAnon. A Police Officer Her Uncle Was Dating Convinced The Family To Stock Up On Emergency Supplies, Claiming That The Country Would Essentially Be Shut Off For Ten Days As Trump Reestablished Control Against The Deep State. Amanda’s Grandfather Posted A Meme On Facebook Claiming That Bill Gates Was Being Tried In India For Injuries Caused By Vaccines. But Her Grandfather Didn’t Believe The Meme, Because He Had Read *Another* Post Claiming That Gates Had Already Been Executed.

“My Relationship With My Family Was Just Completely, Completely Upended,” Amanda Said.

Amanda Became Depressed For Nearly A Year, Lying Down For Hours At A Time, Unable To Comprehend How Her Family, And Especially Her Mother, Had Turned On Her For QAnon.

“One Day She Was A Sane Person And We Laughed At Her Brother, And The Next Day She Was All In,” Amanda Said.

Watching Anon Spread In Her Family, Amanda Thought Of A Nature Documentary She’d Seen About A Tropical Fungus That Takes Over Insects’ Minds And Spreads By Exploding Out Through Their Bodies. I Think About The Caterpillars And Ants That Can Catch That Fungus And Makes Them Climb Up To A High Place, And Then They Explode And Get It All Over Everybody Else,” Amanda Said. “It’s Just Like That. There’s No More Thinking To It.”

NESARA And QAnon Both Fall Into A Category Of Political Or Religious Movement Called Millenarianism: The Belief That A Utopian World Is Right Around The Corner. Millenarian Movements Get Their Name From Early Christians, Who Thought The World Would Change With Jesus's Return At The Millennium. More Recently, Scholars Classify Millenarian Movements As Groups That Believe The World Will Experience A Final Epochal Change That Brings In An Unprecedented Era Of Peace And Prosperity. Often, The Only People Who Will Benefit From This New World Are Those Who Believed Beforehand That It Would Happen. They Can Be Religious Or Secular. Soviet Communism, Nazism And Islamic Terrorist Groups Like al-Qaeda And ISIS Have All Been Described As Millenarian Movements.

The United States' Most Famous Millenarian Movement Ended, Like So Many Others, In Disappointment. Starting In 1831, Preacher William Miller Convinced Thousands Of People Around New York That The World Would End With Jesus Coming Back To Earth On March 21, 1844. Miller's Followers, Called The Millerites, Threw Themselves Into Proselytizing Miller's Prediction And Prepared For A New Era. When March 21 Came And Went, Miller's Followers Were, For The Most Part, Not Dissuaded. It Was Only After Miller's Second Date For The Second Coming Failed To Materialize That Miller's Movement Fractured In A Moment That Came To Be Called The Great Disappointment.

QAnon Can Seem Focused On The Present, With Followers Litigating The Meaning Of 8Chan Posts Or Trump's Hand Gestures. But Its Goal Is A Utopian One: The Post-Cabal World That Follows The Hyperviolent Storm, Often With A NESARA-Style Economic Utopia Attached. Those Hopes For Their Own Personal Betterment, With Debts And Diseases Abolished, Mean There's More On The Line For Believers Than Who Controls The White House. They Think This Affects The Most Important Parts Of Their Lives: Their Children, Their Finances, Their Health. This Is Personal For Them.

When Conspiracy Theories Fail To Come True, Supporters Are Faced With A Choice: Admit They Were Wrong And Deal With The Humiliation, Or Commit To Their Beliefs Even Further.

“When You Make That Kind Of Psychic Investment In Something, The Costs Of Saying ‘I Was Wrong’ Are So High That It May Seem Cheaper To Buy Into Some Kind Of Rationalization, Even If It Seems Absurd, Than To Say, ‘I Made A Mistake,’” Barkum Said.

Few Omegans Proved Willing To Take That Embarrassing Step And Admit They Were Wrong. Federal Authorities Ultimately Recovered Just \$12.5 Million Of The Money Hood Was Believed To Have Stolen Through Omega, Selling Off His Fleet Of Classic Cars To Recoup Some Of It. When They Offered His Estimated 10,000 Victims The Chance To Receive The Money, Only 368 Victims Applied, Receiving \$1.69 Million In Restitution. *Instead Of Asking For Their Money Back, Omegans Showed Up Outside The Courtrooms Where Hood Or Other Omega Conspirators Were On Trial To Show Support For The People Who Had Conned Them.*

The Failure To Distribute Much Of The Seized Money Surprised Esteban F. Sanchez, The Prosecutor Who Took Down Hood And His Associates. He Had Expected Thousands Of People To Apply To Get Their Money Back. But Most Omegans Kept The Faith, Fearful That Applying For The Money From The Government Restitution Pool *Would Mean Losing Out On Millions When Hood’s Plans Came To Fruition.* As The Aggrieved Omegans Saw It, Sanchez’s Effort To Undo The Damage Caused By Hood’s Con Was *Just Another Plot To Rob Them Of Their Fortunes.*

“This Vast Group Out There Still Believes That This Big Truck Of Money Is Going To Come In, Despite All Of Our Efforts To Tell Them It Won’t,” Sanchez Said.

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