

THE NARCISSIST WITH A TOP SECRET CLEARANCE TRYING TO IMPRESS TEENAGERS IN A UKRAINE-RUSSIA CHAT ROOM

It's something like 34 paragraphs deep into this WaPo report on how a bunch of documents got shared on a Discord server named "Thug Shaker" before WaPo reveals there was another name for the specific room in which someone who works on a military base shared classified information: bear-vs-pig, an allusion to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The documents were another lesson for younger members in how OG thought the world really worked. The member said OG wasn't hostile to the U.S. government, and he insisted that he was not working on behalf of any country's interests. "He is not a Russian operative. He is not a Ukrainian operative," the member said. The room on the server where he posted the documents was called "bear-vs-pig," meant to be a snide jab at Russia and Ukraine, and an indication that OG took no sides in the conflict.

Before you get to that detail, the WaPo offers this apocryphal reference to Reality Winner's leak.

The photographs of printed secret documents now seen by millions may offer clues to the federal agents searching for OG. Reality Winner, who leaked secret National Security Agency documents to the news website the Intercept in 2017, was compromised by secret markings on printouts that helped

narrow the search.

There's no evidence in the search warrant affidavit or detention motion that the FBI had to use the dots on the document Winner printed out. They didn't need to. She was one of just two people at her workplace who printed out the document, for which she did not have a need to know. She was easy to find using little more than subpoenas, as this dude is likely to be.

But the reference to Winner, someone who leaked a document that alerted Russia to what collection the NSA had on one of Russia's most elusive hacking groups even though she had no known reason to want to help Russia, is an important reminder that often the best way to recruit someone to leak is via means other than asking them to help a hostile country.

Indeed, even the teenagers interviewed by the WaPo describe, whether they recognize it or not, that "OG" is a narcissist craving for adulation, even if comes from teenagers or people posing as teenagers in a Discord chat room.

The young member was impressed by OG's seemingly prophetic ability to forecast major events before they became headline news, things "only someone with this kind of high clearance" would know. He was by his own account enthralled with OG, who he said was in his early to mid-20s.

"He's fit. He's strong. He's armed. He's trained. Just about everything you can expect out of some sort of crazy movie," the member said.

[snip]

OG was the undisputed leader. The member described him as "strict." He enforced a "pecking order" and expected the others to read closely the classified information he had shared. When their attention waned, he got angry.

[snip]

The dramatic and yet nonchalant presentation also reminded the group that OG could lay his hands on some of the most closely guarded intelligence in the U.S. government. "If you had classified documents, you'd want to flex at least a little bit, like hey, I'm the big guy," the member said. "There is a little bit of showing off to friends, but as well as wanting to keep us informed."

OG is a right wing guy with Top Secret clearance who has been soured by conspiracy theories.

But OG had a dark view of the government. The young member said he spoke of the United States, and particularly law enforcement and the intelligence community, as a sinister force that sought to suppress its citizens and keep them in the dark. He ranted about "government overreach."

OG told his online companions that the government hid horrible truths from the public. He claimed, according to the members, that the government knew in advance that a white supremacist intended to go on a shooting rampage at a Buffalo supermarket in May 2022. The attack left 10 dead, all of them Black, and wounded three more. OG said federal law enforcement officials let the killings proceed so they could argue for increased funding, a baseless notion that the member said he believes and considers an example of OG's penetrating insights about the depth of government corruption.

And whether the foreigners in the Discord server had followed OG there or even had elicited these leaks, they surely saw the same thing a bunch of

teenagers saw: he would and did leak to feed his own ego and rationalized doing so with claims about the Deep State, the same kind of claims that the former President spreads regularly.

The member estimated that the server hosted people from Europe, Asia and South America. "Just about every walk of life." Of the roughly 25 active members who had access to the bear-vs-pig channel, about half were located overseas, the member said. The ones who seemed most interested in the classified material claimed to be from mostly "Eastern Bloc and those post-Soviet countries," he said. "The Ukrainians had interest as well," which the member chalked up to interest in the war ravaging their homeland.

For years, U.S. counterintelligence officials have eyed gaming platforms as a magnet for spies. Russian intelligence operatives have been suspected of befriending gamers who they believe work for intelligence agencies and encouraging them to divulge classified information, a senior U.S. official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

As WaPo notes, spooks have recognized for some time that gaming platforms and other semi-private chat rooms are havens for spy recruitment.

The easy part of this investigation will be figuring out who OG is. Subpoenas on Discord and even these kids' call records will identify him. The hard part will be figuring out who the other foreigners in the room were, and whether they enticed OG to leak this stuff or treated it as an auspicious benefit of being there.

This was a room focused on Ukraine and OG was an easy mark. One of the main questions at this

point is whether he needed the nudge to leak these or really did so just to impress a bunch of teenagers.

Update: NYT reports that a member of MA's Air National Guard is the person in the chatroom.

The national guardsman, whose name is Jack Teixeira, oversaw a private online group named Thug Shaker Central, where about 20 to 30 people, mostly young men and teenagers, came together over a shared love of guns, racist online memes and video games.

Two U.S. officials confirmed that investigators want to talk to Airman Teixeira about the leak of the government documents to the private online group. One official said Airman Teixeira might have information relevant to the investigation.

Update: While I was out to dinner, Teixeira was arrested.