



It is truly all in the details.

DOMESTIC TERROR

## Sons of Anarchy

How an F.B.I. informant stopped the gun-crazed, conspiracy-theorizing group behind the plot to kidnap

# Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer



BY NINA BURLEIGH

NOVEMBER 13, 2021

READING TIME: 20 MINUTES

*One, two, I'm coming for you, three, four better lock your door ...*  
—Wolverine Watchmen founder Joe Morrison, after pounding  
on what he thought was Michigan governor Gretchen  
Whitmer's office door

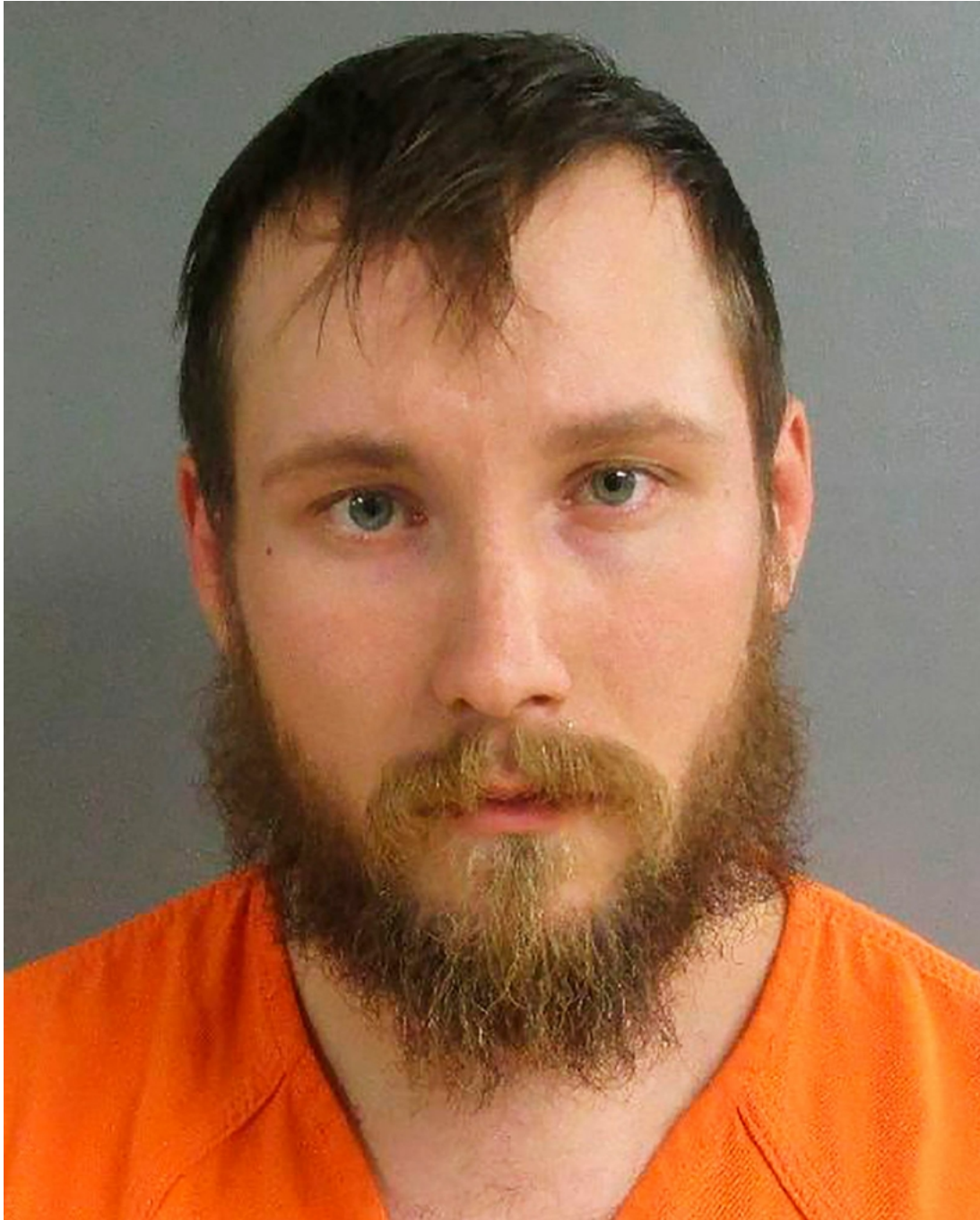
**T**he men living in the compound beside a willow-shaded bend in the Portage River in rural Munith, Michigan, had spent months waiting for the signal of the start of the Boogaloo. But handcuffed, disoriented, and shivering in their underwear in separate interrogation rooms of the Michigan State Police's Jackson Post wasn't quite how they had envisioned the commencement of a second American civil war playing out.





Detectives entered. Agents were still on the Munith property of some of the men behind the plot to kidnap Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer, they said, attempting to execute a search. But they'd heard the place was booby-trapped with explosives and mantraps laid with punji sticks.

They started in on Joe Morrison, a Marine reserve known by the nom de guerre "Boog Daddy Bunyan," who later that day would be discharged after nearly a year of sharing his U.S. taxpayer-funded training with other members of the Wolverine Watchmen, a paramilitary group which he founded and led.



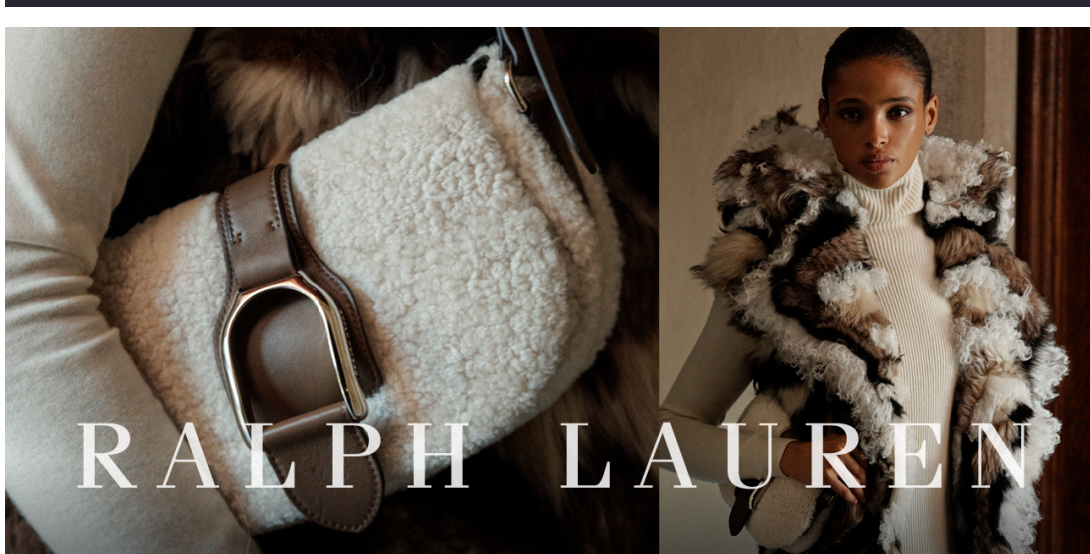
Joe Morrison at the Jackson County Sheriff's Office.

A pale, blue-eyed wisp of a man with a long, dark blond beard, Morrison, 27, founded his militia on Facebook in November 2019. An adherent of the far-right, anti-government, anti-police Boogaloo movement, he refused to cooperate, not even to acknowledge his Miranda rights. "I do not understand your



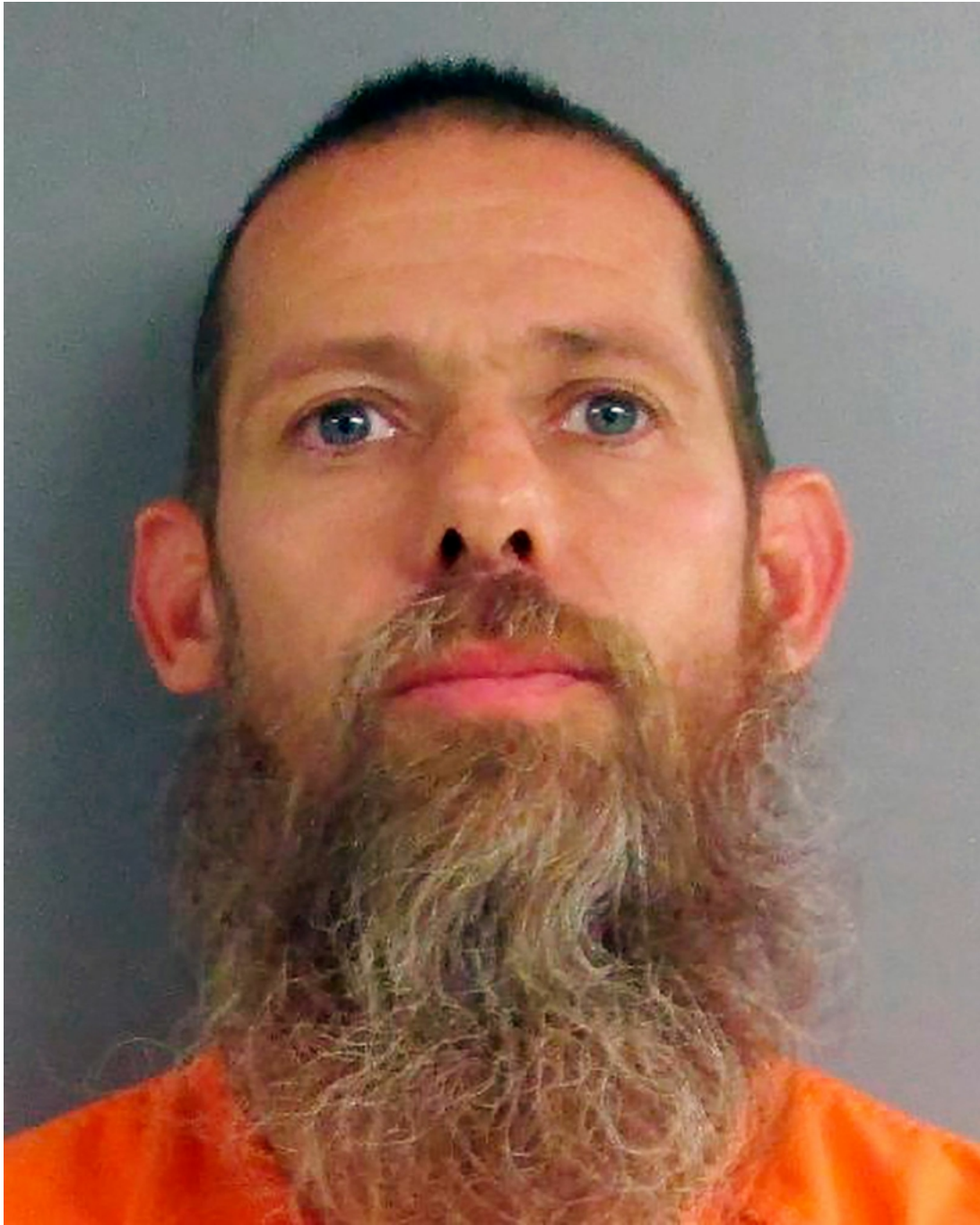
authority,” he muttered when he was read them. “I understand God.”

The cops had better luck with the man in the next holding room, the father of Morrison’s wife, Jada. Among the Wolverine Watchmen, Pete Musico, 43, went by the code name “Grandpa.” A weed-smoking self-styled political philosopher and sometimes a reborn Christian, Musico had repeatedly offered to martyr himself via death by cop in order to spark the Boogaloo.



Musico was made of softer stuff than his son-in-law, a surprise to detectives who knew him only as the man who, on surreptitious F.B.I. recordings, advocated arresting, trying, and executing politicians. “Click-clack, fuck you,” he often said about how he’d greet a cop, imitating the sound of a magazine locking in a weapon. And, from one recording: “I’ve lived my life. This is about putting rifles in front of law enforcement or

police officers, or politicians' faces, and pulling the trigger.”



Pete Musico, Morrison's father-in-law.

Now, cuffed in his holding cell, Musico told a different story. What about booby-trapping his property with explosives and bear traps? It was all “just talk to keep people off my property,”

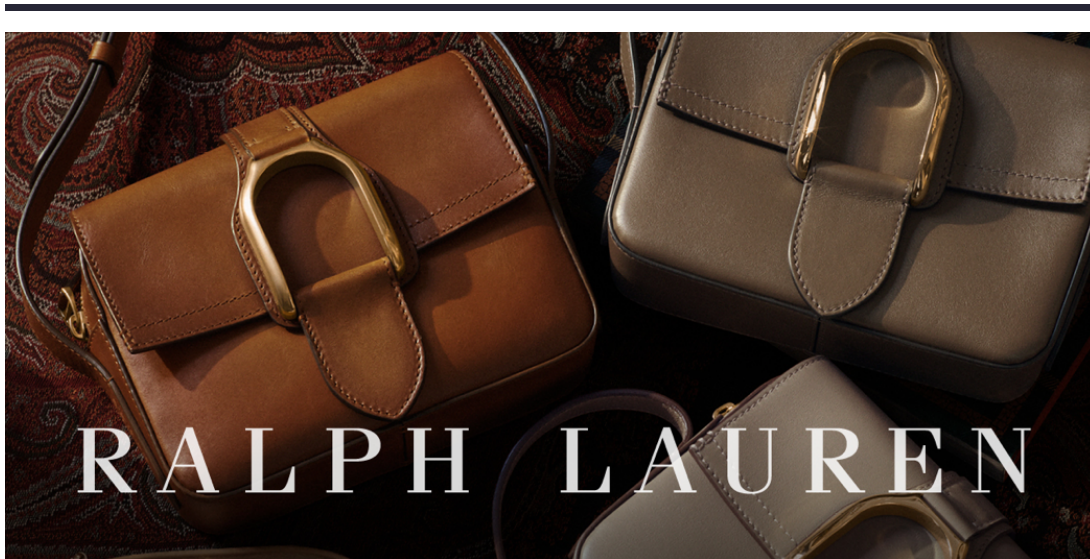


he said. And when interrogators asked about the hand grenade he'd latched to his body armor in photos he posed for during the armed protest inside the Michigan State Capitol, in Lansing, earlier that year, Musico told them that it, too, was fake.

"If you walk in my bedroom door, hanging on the closet door is all my gear, my rifle, stuff like that," Musico now told them. "On that rack, hanging, is [a] dummy grenade. On top of my squirrel cage."

"You have a pet squirrel?" a detective asked.

"I have two pet squirrels. I've had them since they were babies. The tree ... when it got cut down, their mom died."



## Playing Army

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There might be no better state in which to play army than

Michigan. Summers are verdant and the wetlands come alive with animals. The man-made world feels very distant.

But it's a poor state, and when the high green corn is cut and trees turn leafless under the months-long Midwestern winter, the poverty shows: idled auto-parts factories, tractor trailers waiting out the black ice, dinged S.U.V.'s spilling children at Dollar Generals.

Michigan is sometimes called "the Wolverine State," after the snarling, vicious little beast that once roamed its forests. That animal gave the group founded by Joe Morrison its name.



Morrison's Munith, Michigan, property, which became the de facto headquarters for the Wolverine Watchmen.

Details of how this paramilitary group operated are straight out of a novel by Carl Hiaasen, crossed with Thomas Pynchon.



Men training with AR-15s while smoking copious weed. Deep paranoia about imminent totalitarianism. A young militia member's letter to Santa found among his notes for code words, like "SpaghettiOs" for firearm silencers, "can openers" for machine guns, and "cupcakes" for improvised explosive devices. A Kalamazoo hotel orgy that led to the end of an F.B.I. agent's career. Militia wives, daughters, and girlfriends practicing knife- and axe-throwing while their men blast away at cutouts of cops, before everyone tucks into a potluck barbecue.

You know how it ended: last October, state and federal authorities arrested 13 men for conspiring to kidnap Governor Whitmer.



The men were all white and almost all raised in Michigan. Most were in their 20s and 30s. Four of them had been lured to their arrests by an undercover agent posing as an explosives seller. Others were picked up at their jobs, in parking lots, or at

their or their parents' homes. All but one has pleaded not guilty.

**“I do not understand your authority. I understand God.”**

Six face federal charges of conspiracy to kidnap, conspiracy to commit domestic terrorism, and owning and operating weapons of mass destruction, with penalties adding up to life in prison. Eight will be tried by the state, charged with supplying material support to terrorism, terroristic threats, felony gang activity, and weapons violations. (Morrison and Musico face state charges.) Most of the state-charged defendants have been bailed out, are awaiting trial at home on tethers, and have relinquished their firearms. Only the federal trial has a set date, in March of next year.





Six of the Wolverine Watchmen arrested for their plot to kidnap the governor, including Adam Fox (*top right*) and Ty Garbin (*bottom right*).

The defendants' lawyers are going to argue that guns and threats are protected by the First and Second Amendments. They will also argue that the sting operation the F.B.I. set up to arrest the Wolverine Watchmen constitutes illegal entrapment. The government will argue that those rights ended when they engaged in a conspiracy to kidnap a state governor.



Despite overwhelming evidence of the men's guilt, the government case against the Wolverine Watchmen has some challenges, including the fact that one of their lead agents in the case was thrown in jail in July on a domestic-violence charge. Critics of the case point out that the governor was informed weeks in advance of the arrests about the kidnapping plot and was never in any real danger.

A lawyer for Ty Garbin, the sole defendant to plead guilty to federal charges, has stated otherwise. "Yes, it was a real plot. It wasn't just talk," Garbin's attorney, Gary Springstead, said after his client pleaded guilty earlier this summer. "Absolutely [Garbin] regrets what he did."





The scene across large swaths of rural Michigan.

The case has since slid off into an eddy of the wild news cycle, but it's clear that the fantasy of arresting and killing elected leaders that animated the Capitol insurrectionists on January 6 had a prologue in a deranged neck of Michigan. "These were not sophisticated plans," said a federal prosecutor at one of the pre-trial detention hearings, "but if what we saw on January 6 is any indication, you don't have to be organized. You just have to be filled with rage and lack impulse control, and that's what these individuals were doing."

A shared sense of restricted personal liberty—by traffic cops, debt collectors, and, most of all, coronavirus and gun regulations—seems to have accounted for this rage, based on the hundreds of pages of testimony and court documents that have been made available ahead of the trials. That any



“authority” dared tell the Wolverine Watchmen what they could and could not do with themselves or their firearms galled them.

This anger and paranoia found a focus in the face of their “tyrant bitch” governor, whose political profile had grown since the start of the pandemic, when she enacted a strict statewide lockdown.



The case presents a new kind of challenge to the F.B.I. Right-wing terror is on the rise in the American heartland. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas testified in the Senate this summer that the greatest domestic threat facing the U.S. right now comes from American white supremacists and allied right-wing extremists.

# You know how it ended: last October, state and federal authorities arrested 13 men for conspiring to kidnap Governor Whitmer.

But the F.B.I. has long failed to prioritize white domestic terrorists. Even now, with political violence on the rise, the F.B.I. still doesn't tally the number of white-supremacist terror acts or killings (despite having been requested to do so by Congress).

In the years since 9/11, the F.B.I. has deployed outrageous entrapment tactics against marginalized groups with little objection beyond defense attorneys. Americans "fear men with turbans and long beards," says Mike German, a former F.B.I. agent who spent decades undercover with white nationalists, more than they fear men who look like them.

All it took to convict scores of Muslims and Blacks during the war-on-terror years, explains German, was proof that the defendants had a "predisposition" to commit acts of terror, something that could be proved with as little as a pattern of interest in "bad ideas" or glancing involvement with a community associated with those ideas.



Proving entrapment in court is not easy. “The legal definition [of entrapment] is extremely narrow,” German says. “The government is allowed to set you up if they can show you have a ‘predisposition’ to commit the crime.”



A far-right protester, up close.



By the time the F.B.I. first encountered the Watchmen, they were a font of “bad ideas”—often shared in public via social media. They were empowered to act on those ideas with an armory of ammo and semi-automatic weapons—weapons they had acquired *without* prior government involvement (compared to, for example, F.B.I. cases built against Muslims and Blacks since 2001, in which the undercover agents and informants provided weapons—and plots).

Now the far right—Fox News and, specifically, Tucker Carlson included—is putting its weight behind the entrapment defense, using the F.B.I. infiltration of the Watchmen as yet another scrap of evidence of the Deep State totalitarian takeover they’ve been warning you about.

## The Hartland

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Almost all of the men involved in the Gretchen Whitmer kidnapping plot hail from a region of Michigan that is part rural, part exurban—a triangle encompassing Grand Rapids, Jackson, and the western exurban edges of Detroit. Its geographical center is a town called Hartland, which is 97 percent white and in a county known as the home of the Michigan KKK. It’s just 30 minutes south of majority Black, lead-poisoned Flint.



The area is about as Tea Party—and Trump—as you can get. In the lead-up to the 2016 election, Chief County Commissioner Wes Nakagiri liked to dress in a Hillary mask, pearls, and a prison jumpsuit. Last year, the few existing Biden signs were pocked with bullet holes. “The Big Lie is strongly believed here,” says Judy Daubenmier, chair of the Livingston County Democratic Party.

Joe Morrison formed the Wolverine Watchmen a few months after Michigan state police threw him in jail for a night for possession of an unlicensed weapon. He was able to walk free thanks to what he called “a gun-rights attorney.”

Morrison, who was reportedly born with fetal alcohol syndrome, was discharged from the Marines on the day of his arrest. In 2018, with money an aunt left him, he bought a rural property in Munith and moved his wife, Jada, and her parents, Crystal and Pete Musico, into it. The family decorated the house’s small porch with a Confederate flag and parked a

camper in front, where the Musicos' older daughter lived with her husband and a child.



Paul Bellar takes a break from guns to brandish a sword.

Facebook's algorithm quickly drove extremists and Second Amendment enthusiasts to Morrison's Wolverine Watchmen page. Paul Bellar, 21, was Morrison's first and youngest recruit. A handsome, dark-eyed warfighter fanboy, Bellar had washed out of basic training, but as a teen he had completed E.M.T. training, earning him the code name "Doc" in the group.

Bellar acted as a self-appointed neighborhood watch person, "screaming up and down the street with guns in his hands all the time," his neighbor Rebecca Timmerman told the local news site MLive. Bellar would soon take charge of writing down and disseminating code words and detailed plans for the Wolverine Watchmen's field-training exercises.





Morrison and Bellar recruited Ty Garbin at a Second Amendment rally in Lansing in January of last year. An airline mechanic with an extensive gun collection—including AR-15 assault rifles and silencers—and a knack for producing guns without serial numbers, Garbin, 25, who took the code name “Gunny” in the Wolverine Watchmen chats, quickly became the group’s go-to gun guy.

Soon, the Watchmen totaled at least two dozen members. Besides their local political leaders, they also had enablers from inside a gun-loving subculture that employed or otherwise nurtured them. Many worked in security or at firing ranges.

Bellar was a “safety officer” at a shooting range. According to the F.B.I., Bellar bragged to his militia comrades in arms that his boss told him that “when the governor declares martial law,” he could take whatever weapons or ammunition he wanted from the business, “and they would report it stolen.” (An attorney for Bellar declined to comment on the record for this

story.)



Neo-Nazis, until they want to equate Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer to Hitler.

The Watchmen bonded over a series of shared fantasies, fetishes, and grievances. There was the sexualized fantasy of arresting, hog-tying, and executing the governor. “Snatch and grab, man. Grab the fuckin’ governor. Just grab the bitch,” one member said. “She fucking goddamn loves the power she has right now,” said another. Before they went off social media, opting for an encrypted messaging system instead, members shared memes about the “gross slut who fucked the whole state.”

She was a female Hitler, literally—they shouted “Heil Whitmer” at their protests. (Many of the Wolverine Watchmen had done deep D.I.Y. dives into conspiracy theories that a racial

or socialist uprising was imminent. The men took Whitmer's coronavirus stay-at-home orders as the totalitarian sign they had been anxiously anticipating for a long time.)



Above all, like any militia, the Watchmen shared a love of guns and an affinity for the military—its lingo, its acronyms, and its gear. “Look, we used to play army when we were 10. These guys are still playing army,” says Andy Arena, a former F.B.I. agent who brought down another Michigan militia, the Hutaree, that coalesced in reaction to the Obama election in 2008. “Some were hoarders, living in pigsties, but you’d find a closet where ironed uniforms were hanging exactly two inches apart.”

Military idolatry would also prove to be the Watchmen's downfall.

## Facebook's Finest

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In mid-March of 2020, Facebook's algorithm drove an actual combat-experienced vet to the group. The Wolverine Watchmen welcomed him with open arms.

Dan, whose last name we are withholding in order to protect his privacy, suffers from a traumatic brain injury and has a titanium shinbone, lasting effects from his 14 months in Iraq. The Department of Veterans Affairs has deemed him 70 percent disabled. Back in Michigan after his service, married with a three-year-old daughter, and working at a post office following a stint as a security guard, he decided to look for a group on Facebook with whom he could maintain his military training.

Dan described himself in court as a "libertarian" with "pro-2a" sentiments. Based on the groups he followed, Facebook suggested the Watchmen. He checked them out, asked for entry to their private group, and, after a brief vetting, was accepted. He was the first of the Wolverine Watchmen to have actually fought in the U.S. Army.



Unlike many of the F.B.I.'s usual informants, Dan was neither a criminal nor a professional informer. He was only a few days into his invitation into the encrypted Watchmen chat room when Pete Musico suggested the group—which by that point had downloaded a hunting app that identifies property lines in order to locate cops' homes—execute “reverse red flag” maneuvers on cops by busting in on their homes in the middle of the night.

“I was alarmed by it,” Dan testified at a preliminary hearing. “This was not training, this is wanting to do violence. I felt these guys as a threat.”



Governor Whitmer speaks with members of the National Guard in March of this year, when officials warned of a new attack plot by extremists. Luckily, it did not materialize.

In early March 2020, Dan contacted a friend in the Flint Police Department, who referred him to the F.B.I. Soon after, he was summoned to the F.B.I.'s Flint headquarters. With trepidation, Dan—who said he feared for his daughter's safety—agreed to wear a wire and gave the F.B.I. access to his Facebook accounts as well as to a series of encrypted-messaging apps that the group used in an attempt to evade F.B.I. surveillance.

Meanwhile, the Watchmen were schooling members in the acronyms and assault tactics the U.S. government had devised for its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They held FTXs (Field Training Exercises) at members' outdoor fields, organized a Q.R.F. (Quick Reaction Force) to be deployed if any of them



faced trouble. (They did end up deploying this, armed and kitted up, including at a rural Home Depot parking lot as well as at a Black Lives Matter march in Detroit.) They practiced “breaching” (busting into buildings) and “stacking” (lining up men to push inward from behind; the assault on the U.S. Capitol was carried out in this way).

Because of his military training and urban combat experience, the man the Wolverines called “Big Dan” was adored and rapidly promoted within the group.



March 22, 2020, was a bright, chilly day in Munith, and the Wolverines came amped, armed, and dressed for the weather. It was their seventh FTX on the Morrison property but the first attended by Dan, just days after he’d become an informant for the F.B.I.

“This was not training, this is wanting to do violence. I felt these guys as a threat.”

As the Watchmen arrived, the property transformed into a mini armory. Ty Garbin brought with him a Glock, an AR rifle, a .30-06-caliber rifle with a silencer, a 22-caliber pistol, and three other rifles. Joe Morrison carried an AR-15 with four magazines, a plate carrier vest with ballistic armor, and a 12-gauge shotgun. Paul Bellar showed up in full kit, with an upside-down American flag on his vest—the extremist movement’s distress signal.

Bellar was running the training, but since Dan had actual military experience, he was drafted as Bellar’s adjunct. The group was soon blasting away on the edges of the property near the road, many of the participants smoking weed while operating their semi-automatic weapons. When Dan suggested they move farther into the woods for safety and in case authorities drove by, he says, Garbin replied that “if law enforcement showed up, the group could have target-practice piglets.”



Attorney General Dana Nessel (foreground) and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson (to Nessel's right) applaud Governor Whitmer during last year's State of the State Address.

Nothing about this felt like patriotic fun with guns to Dan. He was particularly unnerved by the ladies of the Morrison-Musico house. “Jada is absolutely crazy and tries to amp up her husband and encourage him to train more often,” he wrote in a memo to the F.B.I. “[She] carries a knife on her at all times. [She] smelled like marijuana during tactical training, where she used a crossbow.”





Jada's mom, Crystal, also "carries a knife on her at all times," Dan added. A pixie brunette, Crystal talked to a PBS reporter in her yard briefly after January 6, and cryptically blamed her husband's arrest and other recent events on the Second Coming. "I think we're on the third day. Jesus rose on the third day," she said. (Neither Jada nor Crystal responded to requests for comment through an attorney.)

While the Watchmen were amping up their military-training exercises, a first, deadly coronavirus wave was spreading across the U.S. Governor Whitmer closed schools on March 13, 2020, and three days later ordered all restaurants, bars, and gyms closed. This action piqued the Watchmen's fear—shared by many in the cracked parallel universe of the far right—that liberals were going to cancel their freedoms. By the time Trump tweeted "LIBERATE MICHIGAN!" a month later, the group was primed to focus less on cops and more on state leaders.

April 30, 2020, will be remembered in Michigan as the day a

mob of heavily armed men, kitted in military armor, one carrying a doll hanging from a noose, crowded into the State Capitol building, taunting cops and pounding on a door they thought the governor was cowering behind. (Luckily, Whitmer was not in the building at the time of the attack.)



A far-right rally at the Michigan State Capitol.

It was also the day that a disabled Iraq War vet with a job at the U.S. Postal Service first wore a wire for the F.B.I. Dan the informant was live-broadcasting from a mike in his clothes. And he was freaking out.

Throughout the spring of 2020, anti-lockdown protests proliferated in state capitols across the country. The Wolverines saw the April 30 Lansing protest as an opportunity to recruit members, and perhaps even seize the “tyrant bitch” Whitmer

herself.

As Dan fretted over what he thought to be an imminent bloodbath, the state police, for reasons that remain unclear, suddenly opened the locked doors and let the armed men inside the capitol building. With several hundreds of others, the Watchmen crowded in, taunting the cops, and went hunting for the governor.



The armed invasion was live-streamed and watched by millions of Americans, many of whom wondered why the cops did not make arrests. They did not because state law states that it is legal to bring loaded weapons—but not protest signs—inside the Michigan State Capitol. This is also true in at least 20 other state capitols. (It is illegal to threaten to do bodily harm in the state of Michigan, and in theory the police or feds might have arrested some of the Wolverines—whose threats were online and already known to the F.B.I.—that day. But they did not.)



“I think we’re very, very fortunate that we didn’t see mass shootings occur on April 30,” says Michigan attorney general Dana Nessel. “I think had there been even a slightly different set of circumstances, I think that you would have seen people die on that day.”

## Sly Fox

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Joe Morrison founded the Watchmen, but the federal indictment against the six individuals accused of domestic terrorism names another man, Adam Fox, as the true leader of the kidnapping plot.

Fox, 38, joined the Watchmen in June of 2020, and brought a new level of batshit energy—and a cohort of new members with criminal records or drug addiction, or both, in their past—to the group. A steroid-abusing gym rat, Fox was divorced—“He is reckless when drunk, even drives,” said his ex-wife in a divorce filing, adding, “He owns a gun. He has kicked my door to get in. Punched holes in my wall, left bruises on me”—and homeless, living for free in a dark basement storage room, when he first connected with Morrison at a national militia gathering in Ohio. (An attorney for Fox declined to comment.)



After first hearing of his plans to storm the Michigan capitol with 200 men, Morrison decided Fox was one of the “real deal get shit done motherfuckers,” according to an encrypted chat recovered by the F.B.I.

With Fox around, planning got serious, though the exact goal was still murky. The idea of another assault on the state capitol was popular among the group. “I said, hey if we do this there’s no tomorrow,” Dan testified. “And Pete [Musico] said we would be on the run. I said, No, we’ll be dead.” According to Dan, Musico then said, “This is about putting rifles in front of law enforcement or police officers’ faces and politician faces and pulling the fucking trigger.” (Musico’s attorney insists his client’s statements were legal, protected speech.) Fox even floated the idea of chaining the capitol doors shut and setting the place on fire.



The entrance to the basement that doubled as Fox's home ahead of his arrest.

Then there was the idea of Whitmer's vacation house, which the Wolverines had been toying with since before Fox showed up. On May 26, 2020, nearly a month after the armed protest at the state capitol, the *Daily Mail* published a story reporting that Governor Whitmer and her husband had been accused of "lockdown hypocrisy" because her husband wanted to launch their boat ahead of a Memorial Day weekend visit to their vacation house in far northern Michigan. The article included a photo and the estimated value of the home.

That afternoon, Musico put up his own Facebook post linking to a real-estate listing of Whitmer's house, including its precise location and estimated value. From June onward, the Watchmen talked obsessively about grabbing Whitmer from that house and doing something—what, no one was exactly



sure—to her.



Attorney General Nessel told me the kidnapping plot was just an extreme example of the menace aimed at elected women in Michigan, where females hold the three top elected positions. Nessel said she herself had considered resigning due to threats to her and her family during the lockdown.

“We track threats, and we prosecute threats against other public officeholders. It’s [U.S. Senator] Debbie Stabenow, it’s [Representative] Elissa Slotkin, it’s [female] judges that have ruled on election-law cases,” she says. “Same thing in the legislature. You see threats against [state] Senator Sylvia Santana, threats against [state] Representative Cynthia Johnson—and you don’t typically see those types of threats against their male counterparts.

“This is about putting rifles in front of law enforcement or police officers’ faces and politician faces and pulling the fucking trigger.”

Besides the addition of Adam Fox, the Watchmen changed in other ways. Paul Bellar went broke buying military gear and, facing eviction, moved out of the state, leaving behind his letter to Santa, FTX notes and codes, and informant Dan in charge of training. They stopped inviting women and girlfriends to their FTXs. They built “kill houses” in fields and practiced grabbing their target. They worked on shooting from cars, in preparation for facing the governor’s security team.



Vac Shack, the vacuum-sales-and-repair shop where Fox lived.

Paranoia increased. They took themselves off social media, migrating their communications to a series of encrypted platforms, and forbade each other from showing up at public protests so as not to be flagged by the feds. On June 14, they purged members who seemed uncommitted or had blown off FTXs. Wounded warrior Dan was allowed to stay.



Two weeks later, during a training in Munith, the Watchmen got in a circle and Fox asked, “Who’s down with kidnapping tyrants?” The reaction, Dan testified, was “kinda like a deer in the headlights for some of the group.” Dan said that he looked each member in the eye, pointing at people, “like hey, are you understanding what’s going on? They acknowledge.”

Fox grew more amped by the day, demanding that the team—“his operators,” as he called them—“think about [the



kidnapping] at least 30 minutes per day,” Dan reported. Jada suggested that since the men were likely to be shot during the kidnapping operation, the women should begin studying nursing.

In late August and again in mid-September, groups of them drove six hours north in separate cars and surveilled Whitmer’s vacation house. Fox drew a map and got it laminated—the better to dry-erase strategies. They discussed painting Ty Garbin’s fishing boat black and using it to move the governor across the lake once they had her. They discussed how they would handle her security detail (kill) and family members (T.B.D.). They got the G.P.S. coordinates of nearby police stations and decided that blowing up a bridge that connected the hamlet to a major highway would buy them time.

The Watchmen would need powerful explosives to blow up the bridge. So began the sting operation that would end them.

## Hotline Sting

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Hours before the arrests that began on October 7, 2020, Dan drove with Ty Garbin, Adam Fox, and two other members of the group to Ypsilanti, a once thriving automotive-parts-supply city in southeastern Michigan. Known to Dan alone, they were headed to a baited trap—a fake-explosives sale in a parking lot where an F.B.I. team was waiting to arrest them.



As they drove, Dan Harris, another former Marine, kept loading and unloading his semi-automatic pistol and then pulling the trigger. When Dan told him to cut it out, Harris, according to Dan's testimony, pointed his gun at Dan's head.

Agents arrested Garbin, Fox, and the other members upon their arrival at the meeting point outside an Ypsilanti warehouse. (They arrested Dan, too, in order to keep up the act; Dan was released soon after.) Later that night and into the early hours of October 8, federal and state authorities fanned out across the state and arrested eight other members of the Wolverine Watchmen at their homes.

The Wolverine Watchmen discussed how they would handle Gretchen Whitmer's security detail (kill) and family

## members (T.B.D.).

They used battering rams and broke walls and doors at Morrison's Munith property. Ty Garbin's neighbors in Hartland watched goggle-eyed as a helicopter circled, chrome lights illuminating federal agents as they swarmed his spic-and-span prefab house, hauling off the airplane mechanic's gun safe among other pieces of evidence.

The next morning, the 13 white-male faces of the accused were splashed on TV screens and newspapers across the country.



Dan has since sold his car and house as a witness-protection move. The F.B.I. paid him more than \$50,000 for expenses and reimbursement, and denied that Dan was in it for any reason other than honor. "Kind of an extension of the oath he took in the military," one of his handlers said at a hearing.



In state courts, Morrison and Musico have been portraying themselves as reformed and Christly gun-lovers. “I come before you humbly,” Morrison wrote the judge in a handwritten plea from jail. “I do not ask for myself but for my wife, my almost 2 year old daughter and 3yo niece, who are traumatized over the way the search was conducted. I am a deacon at my church and in a men’s discipleship program. 2 months ago I fully gave my life to Christ and have changed my thoughts and actions.” (An attorney for Morrison declined to comment.)

Ty Garbin, the only defendant to plead guilty so far, was sentenced to six years in prison and will testify against the others. In a video he recorded for his sentencing hearing earlier this fall, Garbin blinks like a man waking up from a long nap and talks about the plot as if recounting a dream.



When I visited the vacuum-shop owner who let Adam Fox crash in his basement, he said, “The reason I don’t believe he

did this is that he loved his dog too much, and would never have left him behind.” (Indeed, Fox was so attached to his dog that when it was diagnosed with cancer, authorities allowed its euthanasia to be live-streamed into his cell so that he could say good-bye.)

Since the Watchmen were taken into custody, neighbors have been afraid to talk to reporters, expressing fear that not everyone involved had been arrested. They might be right—according to federal and state documents, many of the people who were present at the field trainings and discussions of kidnapping have not been charged.

Among them is a Lansing real-estate agent, who, on one transcribed chat, suggested Snapchat was a good platform to elude surveillance. (“The feds hate it,” he wrote.)

Fox’s girlfriend, Amanda Keller, quoted on F.B.I. memos twice as saying, “I want to know what it feels like to shoot someone in the head,” was never charged, either. (Through an attorney, Keller declined to comment.)

John Colone is the owner of the Screams Ice Cream parlor and mini-golf course in the hamlet of Hell, Michigan—supposedly named after the German *so schön hell*, or “so beautifully bright”—not far from properties where the Watchmen blasted away at cutouts of the governor in the woods. Colone says many of his customers were sympathetic to the Watchmen.

“The only comments I ever heard were ‘Oh, they shoulda got

her.”

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*Nina Burleigh is a documentary producer and the author of seven books, including [The Trump Women: Part of the Deal](#) and [Virus](#). She is working on a book about the Wolverine Watchmen case*

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