

# Herbert Smith and Helminthic Therapy

By John Scott, for the Helminthic Therapy wiki

The individual who eventually adopted the alias, “Herbert Smith”, first appeared in the helminthic therapy online community when he joined the Yahoo Helminthic Therapy forum in 2008 using his real name. Soon after this, he deleted all the comments he had posted to the group and switched to using aliases, cycling through several different pseudonyms, including “kublakan”, “rhnogorm” and, for a time, even adopting the alias, “helminththerapy”.

It was not until 2010 that he settled on “Herbert Smith”, at the same time claiming the gmail address, “helminththerapy” and adopting as his personal Facebook avatar the hookworm icon that appears on the Wikipedia Helminthic Therapy page. It was quite some time after this that the purpose of all this positioning would become clear, and what Herbert obviously didn’t anticipate was that someone would find his online behaviour sufficiently fascinating to want to follow it in great detail!

When Smith joined the Yahoo forum - the only helminthic therapy discussion group available at that time - I was a rookie moderator and I made the “mistake” of deleting one of his posts, which resulted in him making an unbelievable fuss. He was not even placated when I explained to him that two identical posts had been presented for approval, appearing within a couple of minutes of each other, one from him and one from another member, both announcing the same piece of information in almost exactly the same words.

I’d decided that there was no point in approving both posts, and assumed that the author of the one not selected to appear on the board would understand when they saw that the other post was identical to theirs. Unfortunately, in deleting Smith’s post, it seemed that I had committed a cardinal sin, because he immediately accused me of censorship.

Soon after this, in November 2010, he set up his own group, the Facebook Helminthic Therapy User Discussion, and began using this group to vigorously denounce the Yahoo board and to *repeatedly* accuse me of censorship. While doing this, he also submitted a series of posts to the Yahoo forum advertising his new group. The fact that the Yahoo forum’s moderators approved all these posts, while witnessing many of our members leaving to join the new group on the increasingly popular Facebook platform, did nothing to stem Smith’s public attacks on the Yahoo group, its moderators, and especially me.

Before this incident, Smith had telephoned me (from his place of employment in New York to my home in the UK) and spent most of the conversation explaining his belief that there was a huge amount of money to be made from helminthic therapy. It was obvious that he was looking for a way to share in the bonanza that he was convinced the helminth providers were enjoying.

He subsequently approached Autoimmune Therapies (AIT), with an offer to procure customers for a commission. An agreement was reached between him and AIT’s owner, Jasper Lawrence, and Smith began vigorously promoting the therapy, posting widely online and setting up various websites to attract potential fodder for his scheme.

He went to considerable lengths to promote himself online, carefully crafting the Herbert Smith persona and creating accounts in this name on Yahoo, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest and elsewhere, before “friending” hundreds of people on Facebook and adding them, sometimes without their knowledge, to his Users group. For example, on 14 January 2013, when the group had only 500 members, he added 17 new ones. At the time, this was an unprecedented number to join a helminthic therapy group on a single day, and this batch including four “Mikes” and three “Michaels”. This addition of groups of people with the same first initial suggested that he was attempting to artificially boost this group’s membership, perhaps with a view to making it the preeminent venue for helminthic therapy discussion.

His posts at that time typically included comments such as:

*“Please don’t hesitate to msg me and ask me about my experience if you have any questions.”*

*“Send me a friend request if you want to hear more about my experience or want to join the helminthic therapy users Facebook group.”*

And he was charm itself when speaking to his unwitting prey:

*“... he was always really cool with me. Talking with him convinced me to give helminthic therapy a try...”*

When Lawrence discovered that Smith was not using his real name in his dealings with the people he approached, nor telling them that he stood to benefit financially from his relationship with them, Lawrence pulled out of their

deal, but, critically, failed to pay Smith what he was owed for the referrals Smith had already made, whereupon Smith began a campaign of relentless disparagement of Lawrence and AIT, attacking Lawrence's reputation at every opportunity. In online groups, especially in his Users group - which, thanks to his promotional efforts, had by then become the most active helminthic therapy group on Facebook - he even described Lawrence as being "deranged".

Smith's behaviour in his Facebook group became progressively more unpleasant, and, in spite of being the group's principle admin, he supported and actively encouraged a couple of other members who were behaving in a similar manner, all of them effectively trolling. When other members began to challenge Smith about this, he turned to bullying and threatened to ban them, and three members were actually ejected from the group. While Smith eventually allowed two of them to return, he refused to reinstate the third member and, when I and others tried to intercede for this guy, Smith continued to deny him access until he had apologised, even though the guy had done nothing that he needed to apologise for. All he had done was try to bring balance and decorum to the group's proceedings.

Not surprisingly, Smith's relentless attacks on Lawrence and AIT alienated members of the Users group who were AIT clients, but it also dismayed many others in the group. After several members had tried, unsuccessfully, to encourage Smith to moderate his behaviour, and he had made comments insulting two completely innocent members with whose personal views he disagreed, a number of members began privately to discuss the need for a new group, and suggested that it should have a provider-agnostic policy. As a result of all of this, I created the [Helminthic Therapy Support group](#) in March 2012, and most of the active members of Smith's group transferred to the new one within a few weeks.

When Smith also asked to join the new group, this presented its admins with a dilemma. Apart from the fact that many had joined the Support group specifically in order to escape from his malign influence, we were also concerned by the recollection of the way he had publicly attacked the Yahoo forum and its admins after one of his posts to that group had failed to be approved. Obviously, we wondered whether he might have done something similar if he were denied access to the Support group, so I sent him an email specifying the behaviours he had displayed in the Users group and emphasising that these would not be tolerated in the Support group. Although the contents of this email were objective and measured, Smith apparently rejected all of my points and immediately circulated a copy of the email to his closest associates, indignantly denouncing it as "toxic". Nevertheless, he had received the message, so we took the risk of admitting him to the group on a trial basis.

Initially, things went well, and he honoured the new group's provider-agnostic policy, but it wasn't long before he began posting in a way that, while conforming to the letter of our policy, ran counter to its spirit. After telling one of the group's admins that the book, [An Epidemic of Absence](#), would be "devastating" for Lawrence, he began repeatedly posting links to this book. Several members took exception to this and its obvious intent and, during a conference call involving a majority of the group's admins, it was decided, unanimously, that his membership should be revoked. One admin - an assistant professor of medicine - made his opinion very clear that, in view of Smith's previous behaviour in the Users group, he should never have been admitted to the Support group.

Smith responded to his expulsion from the Support group by complaining bitterly, in posts to his Users group, about what he again claimed was censorship on my part, and by taking retaliatory action against me, blocking my access to *several* groups that he controlled, and informing me that he would only allow me back into these once I had readmitted him to the Support group. Since this was not possible, and as Smith never relented, I remained unable to reach out to the members of his groups, where I was told that people often asked questions that went unanswered.

Some time after Smith's expulsion from the Support group, I noticed that there was no mention of this group on the Open Source HT wiki that Smith had taken over from its creator, Paul Badger, during his empire building land-grab. When I visited this site and added the Support group to the list of helminthic therapy groups, this entry was immediately removed by Smith (on the 6 February 2013, using the alias, "kublakan") who recorded the comment in the page history, "*removed the ones that censor*".

Smith also rolled back my updates to the membership and post statistics for the Yahoo forum, along with a number of spelling and grammatical corrections that I'd made as a courtesy while on the site. He then ensured that I would be unable to make any further edits to the site by permanently blocking my access to it on 23 April 2013. This meant that the only Facebook helminthic therapy group that was mentioned in this so-called "Open Source" wiki was the one created, and administered, by Smith.

It is interesting that, while accusing the Support group of censorship as a result of its admins having terminated his membership, he obviously considered it acceptable for him to remove this group's details from the wiki, thus denying information about the group to others who might wish to join. And this is not an isolated incident. Smith practiced censorship, himself, covertly, on many occasions. For example, while encouraging the helminth provider, Marc Dellerba (by this time, Chief Scientific Officer at Biome Restoration) to join his Users group, Smith carefully deleted all the posts to that group in which he and others had been critical of Dellerba. At least three entire threads were deleted on this occasion alone, and, when Dellerba was later told about this by several of his friends, he wrote to one of them, saying,

*"I find it very funny (or rather sad) that these breakaway forums set up by Herbert were due to perceived bias and censorship on the Yahoo forum, only to become less fact-based and far more biased and dictatorial than anything the Yahoo board was ever guilty of."*

Smith eventually lost interest in the helminthic therapy scene and ceased taking care of the Open Source HT wiki site sometime in 2014, although he continued to deny myself and others access to it. Concerned that the site was woefully out of date and consequently misleading those who visited it, I approached Paul Badger at the beginning of 2015 with an offer to get the site's contents up to date, but, after telling me that he would have to consult Smith about my offer, I heard nothing further from Badger.

In December, 2015, Smith resurfaced briefly, added a post about TSO to his Facebook Timeline - his first post there for seven months and only his seventh post in two years. He also tried to regain entry to the Support group, but not in the usual way by clicking on the "Join this group" button on the group page. Instead, he sent personal messages to several of the group's newest admins, perhaps hoping that they would not be aware of his history. Once my attention was drawn to this activity, I emailed Smith to remind him of the circumstances of his previous membership and expulsion from the group. We heard no more from him after that.

In October 2016, I noticed that the "Herbert Smith" Facebook account was showing as inactive. When I followed a link to his Facebook page, I found that this no longer existed, so assumed that he had decided to retire the Smith alias. Then, in conversation with a relatively new member of the helminthic therapy community, I discovered that, after becoming aware of what Smith had been doing, she had taken exception to this behaviour, and had reported him to Facebook for using a fake ID. Facebook's response effectively closed a very unfortunate chapter in the history of the online helminthic therapy community.

With Smith out of the way, I again approached Badger about the wiki and, this time, he agreed that I should assume responsibility for the site, which I took over in Dec 2016. I had intended to simply update the site, but encountered technical difficulties with it, so, with the help of an IT specialist, I created an entirely new site and redirected traffic from the old site to the new one.

There is a *great* deal more to the "Herbert Smith" story than is revealed here, and I've yet to find anything that contradicts the conclusion that the man behind this alias is only interested in feathering his own nest. He is undoubtedly very clever and makes a very convincing show of helping others but, in reality, he's self-serving, very controlling and can be incredibly vindictive. He has to have whatever he wants and, if anyone stands in his way, he will attack them mercilessly, obviously thinking nothing of doing this in public.

Looking up this individual online using his real name, one finds him describing his professional self as a "highly-accomplished senior-level leader with exceptional problem-solving abilities" who has "developed and led high-performing global teams" and been "consistently promoted over a 10-year period due to outstanding performance". In his private life, Smith is revealed to be a man of faith, a respected member of his local Jewish community. Presumably, his colleagues at work and the members of his local synagogue have no inkling of the Jekyll and Hyde nature of his personality.

The case of Herbert Smith provides a fascinating insight into how the internet can facilitate the expression of a darker side to the personality of an apparently respectable and professionally successful individual.

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