Four theories about Julian Assange's cat



Thursday's arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has provoked complicated reactions. There's one place, however, where everyone seems to agree: we *really* hope his cat is doing okay.

"Embassy Cat," as the feline is known on Twitter and Instagram, is undoubtedly a PR play from WikiLeaks. According to , Assange made up a story about getting the cat from his children, and the organization sells an array of Embassy Cat mugs, shirts, and stickers. But the fact remains that Embassy Cat is adorable (it wears little ties!), and several *Verge* reporters are deeply invested in its well-being.

Unfortunately, a bevy of major news outlets have been unable to confirm that cat's precise location, and multiple, credible sources have offered different accounts of its fate. So what's happened to Embassy Cat? Here are a few of our theories, from most to least plausible.

According to all available information, Embassy Cat hasn't

lived at the Ecuadorian Embassy for several months. The cat was one of many points of contention between Assange and embassy staff, and a leaked 2018 memo revealed that the embassy had threatened to take it away unless Assange took care of its "well-being, food and hygiene." After the arrest, an embassy spokesperson told *Sputnik News* that "it is not here since September, I think. It was taken by Mr Assange's associates a long ago… It is not here. We are not a pet store, so we do not keep pets here."

A November tweet from Assange's legal counsel, Hanna Jonasson, backs that up. Jonasson said that Assange had been "incensed at the threat" of losing his pet and asked his lawyers to take Embassy Cat to safety. "The cat is with Assange's family. They will be reunited in freedom," she wrote. (Assange is about to enter a long extradition fight, and he'll likely face trial in the US after that, so the reunion probably won't come anytime soon.)

The embassy and Assange's spokespeople haven't responded to emails from *The Verge,* but this account gives Embassy Cat a happy ending — or it would if one of Assange's former WikiLeaks colleagues didn't have a different story.

Journalist James Ball, who worked for WikiLeaks during its heyday in 2010, offered a darker account of Embassy Cat's fate. "For the record: Julian Assange's cat was reportedly given to a shelter by the Ecuadorian embassy ages ago," Ball tweeted after Assange's arrest, adding that he "genuinely offered to adopt it." Ball said he didn't buy the reports about Assange's family, noting that news coverage had all hinged on that tweet, and "Assange has no family in the UK."

Assange allegedly made up a story about getting Embassy Cat from family so there'd be some sad symmetry in a made-up story about sending it back. And if this is true, it seems almost impossible to confirm the feline's well-being. *The Verge* reached out to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty

to Animals, the UK’s largest animal welfare charity, but a spokesperson said they weren’t aware of anyone bringing the cat to a London RSPCA branch.

Some *Verge* staff members questioned whether Embassy Cat was alive at all, especially given the sensitive nature of Assange’s work. My colleagues Casey Newton and Cameron Faulkner, in particular, were in agreement that “the cat knew too much.” I won’t entertain the notion of Embassy Cat’s demise without some pretty hard evidence. But I will acknowledge that its location might be deliberately obfuscated — either to prevent it from giving up evidence against Assange or because Embassy Cat has custody of some yet-unreleased WikiLeaks material.

Look, I can’t prove we live in a magical realist universe where cats can talk, or that Embassy Cat’s DNA has been somehow encoded with the text of top-secret files. With reality becoming more confusing by the day, though, I’m not ruling anything out. And while I’ll admit the cat *probably* has few secrets to give up, Ecuador revoked Assange’s asylum status in part because he allegedly kept working with WikiLeaks to release documents — so Embassy Cat may have been in the thick of things until the end.

But only as long as we stop investigating *right now* and never check on the cat’s status again.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/13/18306641/julian-assange-embassy-arrest-cat-theories-wikileaks