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»» BY NIC CORBETT

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»» FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

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»» In January 2008, it seemed like an army of online hackers took down the Church of Scientology's websites.

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»» But although ^{how many} others were involved, just one man, 19-year-old Dmitriy Guzner of Verona, was charged in connection with the cyber assault. He pleaded guilty in May to one count of unauthorized impairment of a protected computer as part of a plea deal.

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»» On Wednesday, three days before his 20th birthday, he's expected to stand before Judge Joseph A. Greenaway Jr. in U.S. District Court in Newark and take his lumps. He's facing up to two and half years in prison and nearly \$119,000 in fines.

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»» The online attack by members of a loosely formed group called Anonymous was meant as an anti-Scientology protest, akin to blocking streets or access to a building. They were upset by the church's attempted censorship of a leaked promotional video featuring actor and Scientologist Tom Cruise, who made enthusiastic and unbelievable claims about the religion. They assumed there would be safety in numbers, but nine months later, one ended up getting caught and taking the fall.

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»» "I think they were relying on a very simple premise, that the number of people arrested and convicted of these kind of attacks is very low," said Jose Nazario, manager of security research at Arbor Networks, which helps companies keep their websites secure.

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»» On Jan. 17, 2008, Guzner and an undisclosed number of cohorts launched a distributed denial of service attack, or DDoS for short, against the religious organization's Web presence, prosecutors say. By hijacking a now-defunct website meant for companies measuring their online traffic, the group sent so many hits to the Scientology websites that it overwhelmed the church's servers, making the websites temporarily inaccessible to legitimate users.

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»» The cyber vigilantes kept up the attack for days. On the third day, Nazario measured 488 attacks, the longest of which lasted almost two hours. The websites were restored when the church hired a company to divert traffic coming from the attackers.

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»» Anonymous members, or Anons for short, see the church, founded by

science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard in 1954, as a dangerous cult and they've banded together across the globe ~~in their hope~~^{at an} to expose the controversial church for fraud and other abuses.

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»» The aim of the Church of Scientology is "to bring man to total freedom and truth," according to its official website. The essential tenet of the religion is that man is an immortal, spiritual being who is basically good and has unlimited capabilities, though they may not be realized yet. Scientology is known for its celebrity followers, such as Cruise and John Travolta.

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»» A YouTube video by Anonymous^{which} surfaced shortly after the attacks, featuring a robotic voice that warned the church of the group's plan to systematically dismantle the religious organization "for the good of your followers, for the good of mankind and for our own enjoyment." The declaration of war was followed by prank calls, juvenile stunts, death threats, vandalism of churches and organized protests across the country.

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»» Referring to the January 2008 cyber attack, Kendrick Moxon, a lawyer for the Church of Scientology, said: "That was the first such incident. From that point on, things got out of control." ^{incor?}

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»» But a well-known critic of Scientology, Mark Bunker, also known as the "Wise Beard Man," posted a video about a week after the DDoS assault, encouraging Anonymous to pursue legal ways of protesting. Many Anons realized the online attack was a mistake.

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»» Guzner was arrested after a YouTube video of a real-life protest that mentioned his Internet handle "Aendy" caught the attention of federal authorities. In court, ^{when/where?} Guzner, a pale, slender, dark-haired teenager with glasses, denied being a member of Anonymous but admitted he participated in the first day of the attacks. Guzner's family recently moved to Verona from Brooklyn, but on social-networking sites, he indicates his hometown is Moscow. He has no criminal history. Prosecutors have not detailed Guzner's role in the cyber attack. Still, an examination of internet message boards and one of Guzner's class Web projects show he's steeped in the underground online culture of 4chan.org, from which the Anonymous movement arose.

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»» He declined to comment for this article until after Wednesday's sentencing hearing, and his lawyer, New York-based Edward McQuat, wouldn't discuss Guzner either, saying he has to respect his client's wishes.

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»» In the wake of the war's outbreak, the church has labeled Anonymous[/] a hate group.


02_TEXT_... »» "This group Anonymous, sir, they're not nice people," Moxon told Greenaway at a court hearing last month. "They're haters."

02_TEXT_... »» Moxon carried with him a 42-page glossy magazine about Anonymous published by an arm of the church, which describes the group's members as "cyber bullies."

02_TEXT_... »» Moxon said Anonymous doesn't just hate against the Scientology church but also other groups of people: "There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason." All they care about, he said, is the "LULZ" a variation of the net-speak acronym "LOL" for "laughing out loud."

02_TEXT_... »» "On one of their videos, they say they commit these acts 'simply because we can,'" he said. "They're random acts of hatred and honestly make no more sense than a terrorist attack."

02_TEXT_... »» Authorities are cagey about how they caught Guzner, other than to say they identified him after noticing the name "Aendy" was used in a YouTube video to describe one of four masked individuals plastering anti-Scientology flyers on signs outside the church's Midtown New York City flagship location. For that real-life protest, or "raid," which took place on the third day of the cyber attack, Aendy and the other three protesters wore the Guy Fawkes masks from the movie "V is for Vendetta." *favoured by anons*

02_TEXT_... »» The FBI and U.S. Secret Service, as part of the Electronic Crimes Task Force in Los Angeles, worked together to identify Aendy as Guzner, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Erez Liebermann . They searched his home and turned up one of the Fawkes masks.

02_TEXT_... »» On Oct. 17, 2008, nine months after the Anonymous-Scientology war broke out, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California announced the New Jersey teen had been charged for his role in the cyber crime and that he faced up to 10 years in prison.

02_TEXT_... »» The next day, Anonymous members who staged real-life protests at Scientology churches around the globe said representatives of the church had printed the press release and were handing copies out to protesters, according to message board posts on whyweprotest.net. The Anons decried this as a scare tactic and wondered if Guzner was being made to take the fall.

02_TEXT_... »» "Still seems a bit overkill, I mean he didn't exactly compromise the Pentagon and start world war 3 [sic] did he?" wrote "Basil" about Guzner's potential sentence.

02_TEXT_... »» Some questioned whether Guzner even existed, since they had never

heard of his real name.

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»» "I'm still wondering if DG is a real person or if this is some weird, complex smokescreen" devised by the Church of Scientology and federal officials, a poster named "Optimisticate" wrote.

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»» But Guzner is indeed a real person. Out on \$50,000 bail, he's a junior studying interactive digital design at the Hamden, Conn.-based Quinnipiac University, according to school officials. In spite of his arrest and looming jail sentence, he's carried on his life as a regular college student. Since September, he's hosted a weekly show on a Quinnipiac University radio station. He appears to have spent many years on an online forum about Flash games, which he is now learning how to create. In one post, he wrote about how weird it was when his father discovered the "scientology stuff" on his YouTube account. Guzner said his father then looked up Anonymous and 4chan's image message board, called /b/. ?

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»» "He's not going to forbid me from going on /b/ because I'm old enough to decide for myself and because he knows I'll do it anyway if I want, but he thinks I shouldn't get into that kind of stuff," Guzner wrote under his other pseudonym, D-Tree (read aloud, it sounds like Dmitriy).

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»» In another post, dated May 2008, he admitted to some involvement in the war.

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»» "I've done 2 protests, mostly out of boredom and need of lulz, and to a lesser degree for the anti-scientology purpose. But I'm still anti-scientology," he wrote.



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»» The church has asked that the federal judge in Newark to demand Guzner pay nearly \$119,000 -- the cost incurred to divert the January 2008 DDoS attacks and pay for protective services. But Guzner's lawyer pointed out that just \$37,500, a portion of the contract, was agreed upon in the plea deal, in which Guzner admitted to participating in the attack.

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»» Guzner's recommended federal prison sentence is between 12 and 18 months with no chance of parole, followed by two to three years of probation. But the judge could decide to hand down a prison sentence between 24 and 30 months long, the assistant U.S. attorney said. With good behavior, he would only have to serve 85 percent of the term. Guzner

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»» Today, on Guzner's YouTube channel -- username "Aendyy  cg 

-- he has posted videos of his 3D design projects for his college class; a 5-minute video of a pet cat chewing on the handle of a shopping bag; and a video of

himself showing how to turn a plastic fork into "metal" -- as in the hand sign for heavy-metal music. Guzner's taken care not to post any anti-Scientology or Anonymous-related content on that account. ~~For good reason,~~ since his online activities are now being monitored by the federal government.

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»» On an online message board in March 2008, he posted a link to a site he created for his Web design class, which makes fun of "copy-pasta," ~~4chan~~ ^{language for stories or images that get copied and pasted so many times they} ~~become Internet memes.~~ Instead of using filler text for one sample page, he includes a narrative that spoofs the Tom Cruise video, based on Cruise's outlandish claim that Scientologists are the only ones who can help in a car crash.

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»» The actor is depicted rescuing a woman from a four-car pileup on the freeway: "Stand back, emergency workers," Cruise says in the story, which is widely copied on Anonymous websites. "Put down your jaws-of-life and crowbars. I am a Scientologist."

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