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COMPUTER HACKER PLEADS GUILTY AND AGREES TO TWO YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that GREGORY KING, 21, of Fairfield, pleaded guilty today before United States District Judge Lawrence K. Karlton to two counts of transmitting code to cause damage to a protected computer. As part of the plea agreement KING agreed to a two-year prison sentence.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the FBI, whose agents analyzed Internet logs, executed search warrants, performed forensic analysis of KING's computers, and took KING's confession. Assistant United States Attorney Matthew D. Segal, a member of the U.S. Attorney's Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property Unit, prosecuted the case.

According to Segal, KING admitted to using a "botnet" to conduct distributed-denial-of-service (DDOS) attacks against two different Web sites: Killanet and Castlecops. A botnet is a network of malware-infected, zombie computers (bots) that can be used to conduct DDOS attacks, send spam, and commit fraud over the Internet. Bots are also used to infect other computers and thus propagate the botnet. The owners of the infected computers do not know that their computers have been infected with "botware," but their computers can nonetheless be secretly directed by the "bot herder," the person in control of the botnet. In a DDOS attack, a bot herder directs the bots to flood a victim computer with information and thereby disable the target computer.

Known online as Silenz, Silenz420, sZ, GregK, and Gregk707, KING admitted to controlling about 7,000 bots and using them to DDOS attack Killanet and Castlecops. Killanet, an interactive forum where members share advice on graphic design, Web design, photography, and gaming was DDOS-attacked in 2004, 2005, and 2006. Castlecops is an Internet security community specializing in anti-phishing, malware analysis, and combating spam; it was DDOS-attacked in 2007.

On October 1, 2007, FBI agents went to KING's residence to arrest him. After agents knocked on the front door, KING exited the back door, hid a laptop computer in the backyard, and then returned to answer the front door. Pursuant to a search warrant, the laptop was seized and searched. It contained, among other things, botnet software and references to KING's various Internet monikers.

The defendant is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Karlton on September 3, 2008 at 9:30 a.m. The maximum statutory penalty for this violation is 10 years in prison and a $250,000 fine. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

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