

# I AM ANONYM



FOR BETTER AND WORSE, I CAN WREAK HAVOC WITH YOUR  
SO-CALLED "SECRETS," AND WHEN SOMEONE—YOU MAYBE—OFFENDS MY SENSE  
OF WHAT IS RIGHT AND FAIR, I TAKE IT INTO MY OWN HANDS TO SEE THAT  
JUSTICE IS DONE. JUST LOOK AT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RAPISTS  
IN STEUBENVILLE AND YOU WILL SEE WHAT I, AND BRADLEY MANNING AND EDWARD SNOWDEN  
AND THOUSANDS OF OTHERS, ARE CAPABLE OF.

A man with short brown hair and glasses is lying down, looking towards the camera. He has several tattoos on his arms, including a skull with a knife in its teeth on his right shoulder and a Celtic Green Man on his left shoulder. He is wearing a black t-shirt with a graphic design. The word 'MOM' is overlaid in large, bold, white letters across the middle of the image.

# MOM

BY JOHN H. RICHARDSON

**HE LIVES IN A TOWN THE LOCALS CALL "RIFLE CITY":** Winchester, Kentucky. On one shoulder, there's a tattoo of a skull with a knife in its teeth and a bouquet of grenades dangling under its chin, a tribute to his grandpa's service in Vietnam. But the ribbon for a legend is blank because he never could figure out what he wanted it to say. On his other shoulder he's got a Celtic Green Man made of leaves, and he has a place on his forearm where the skin seems to peel back to show machine parts. His old man used to be a military cop, then a prison guard. His mom hung out with bikers. They divorced. He was homeless for a while then got himself together and went back to school. Now he lives on a small farm with a couple of outbuildings and a pond, some woods across a field, a Chevy truck parked in the driveway.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK HARTMAN



When the SWAT team pulled in, his shotgun was resting against the wall because he had just gotten back from turkey hunting. A panel truck pulled into his driveway, and when he went out to greet it twelve men in forest camouflage jumped out with assault weapons pointed right at his head, yelling, *Get the fuck down!*

As he dropped, KYAnonymous pleaded, *Don't shoot my dog. He don't bite, he just jumps.*

The noise woke up a second witness, his brother Chase. A lean twenty-three-year-old who plays in a punk band and works in a tattoo parlor, Chase remembers looking down from an upstairs window and seeing men with machine guns heading for his door. His first instinct was to grab his .45, cocking it on his way down the stairs.

SWAT! voices yelled. POLICE! The door crashed against the wall.

Chase had the presence of mind to throw his gun into the curtains, then instantly he was on his knees with a hard barrel pressed into his skull. The invaders wouldn't say what they wanted, wouldn't answer questions, just zip-tied his hands and went upstairs to zip-tie his girlfriend and walked them both outside. *She doesn't even have any shoes*, Chase said. He remembers the FBI guy saying, *Shut the fuck up.*

*This is America, buddy*, Chase answered. *You're on my property. You shut the fuck up.*

All this was happening because Chase's brother had reached out through the Internet and tapped into the global spirit of defiance of Edward Snowden, Tahrir Square, and the Brazilian street protests and brought the future to one small American town—KYAnonymous is the guy who called the world's attention to the infamous Steubenville rape case, in which members of Anonymous, the global hacker collective, mounted a campaign to expose the town for protecting its town-hero high school football stars from rape charges. Now he's caught up in one of the hottest battles of the modern world, the battle over knowledge itself, an asymmetrical war being fought globally between superpowers and corporations on one side, and on the other side kids who all seem to be twenty-five, a diverse bunch of punks whose common trait is a healthy disdain for official secrets and proprietary information. Current skirmishes range from the NSA metadata program to President Obama's unprecedented crackdown on leakers to the FBI's furious pursuit of little guys like KYAnonymous. They fired one guy at the State Department just for linking to WikiLeaks on his personal blog. And there's the ominous example of Aaron Swartz, the nerdy kid genius who killed himself after federal prosecutors threatened him with a \$1 million fine and thirty-five years in prison just for reposting articles from academic journals.

The rest of the SWAT team spreads across the old farm, smashing the door on the barn and breaking an RV window. A CSI team dressed in white lab coats goes in to search the house while the detectives take their suspect to the back porch, where they take off the cuffs and sit him down in an old wicker chair. There's a table and an ashtray filled with butts. This is where they sit in the evening, looking out over the pond.

The FBI man asks if he wants a lawyer.

*Why should I? I haven't done anything illegal.*

If he lies to the FBI, the agent tells him, he will go to jail for a minimum of five years. Then he asks KYAnonymous if he has hacked into a fan Web site for the Steubenville football team and posted a video demanding the players apologize to the victim.

KYAnonymous says it wasn't him.

*We know you're a good guy, the agent says. We like what you do. But if you're lying to us, you'll get more time.*

KY sticks to his story.

Hours later, they leave with his \$2,000 Alienware computer, his girlfriend's Dell, his brother's Xbox, a car-sale receipt for his truck, a couple flash drives and hard drives, and his credit report—and a



warning not to talk about the raid. *You don't even have to tell your girlfriend*, the agent tells him. *You can make up something.*

KYAnonymous grasps at the straw. *Yeah, I can tell her y'all were here for a grow operation.*

*There you go*, the agent says.

And for a moment it seems like things could actually be that simple.

**F**lash back just one year, and KYAnonymous doesn't even exist. Known as Deric Lostutter to the government, DJ to his mom, and Shadow to his oldest friends, he was twenty-five years old and working as a waiter in a pizza-and-beer joint for eight bucks an hour, getting home at two or three in the morning stinking of kitchen grease. One day he pulled up a documentary on YouTube called *We Are Legion*.

The story starts with a group of pranksters on a message board called 4chan who come together to send digital avatars with digital Afros to mob a digital pool at another online community—the birth of anonymous communal action in the spirit of stupidity. Later they add rapidly blinking lights to an epilepsy forum and hack a fake story onto PBS about Tupac and Biggie being alive and living together in New Zealand. To a guy who grew up on *Jackass*, this seemed like good fun.

But what really grabbed Lostutter was the famous move into

“hactivism” in 2008, when the hacker punks took on the Church of Scientology by shutting down its Web sites and summoning thousands to live protests—the first appearance of the Guy Fawkes masks now common to protests all over the world. And just like that, without meetings or minutes, Anonymous was born. The FBI added rebel glamour by responding with arrests, putting one nineteen-year-old away for a year just for helping to shut down a Web site for twenty-four hours. After the government pressured PayPal, MasterCard, and Visa to stop routing contributions to WikiLeaks, new Anonymous factions instantly sprang up to crash their Web sites, too. When the FBI responded with forty raids and at least fourteen arrests, new recruits immediately opened new fronts in this war, threatening the officers who ran the brig where Bradley Manning was being held naked while others hacked into the U.S. Senate Web site and another took down the Web site of the CIA. One audacious group hacked into the computers of a pair of military contractors named Stratfor and HBGary Federal, revealing sordid plans to discredit liberal muckraker Glenn Greenwald, manipulate public opinion, and infiltrate activist groups. Others shut down government Web sites in Egypt and Libya and helped Tunisian protesters looking to keep government secret police out of their computers.

The thing is, *these are all kids just like Deric Lostutter*. Most of them are in their twenties, and some are teenagers. One of the geniuses behind the HBGary hack was an eighteen-year-old from the Shetland Islands who called himself Topiary. Another was a twenty-four-year-old soldier who posed online as a sixteen-year-old girl named Kayla. Multiply that by hundreds, thousands, maybe someday even millions. Because you don’t have to sit at home complaining about your crappy job, your crappy town, your crappy country. Anyone can join. All you have to do is find your way to the private Internet Relay Chat channel for newbies and start listening to the conversation.

And Lostutter thought, *Fuck yeah, America. Finally someone’s getting off their ass. I want to roll with these people!*

**T**here’s a backstory, which his mother can explain the best. Lostutter leads the way through back roads until we arrive at the Yorktowne Mobile Estates, a sunny spot where birds chirp in the trees between the trailers. Getting out of his car, he thinks of the good news—\$4,000 in new donations and a statement of support from a progressive news site.

His stepdad is on the porch, tall and mild-mannered, hands calloused from his construction job.

“I just made the Young Turks, which is a really popular Web site,” Lostutter tells him. “They get millions of hits.”

Inside the trailer, his mom rises from a plush blue armchair. A small blond woman with short-cropped hair, she hasn’t been eating or sleeping well since the raid. “That pissed me off. It scared the shit out of me at first and then I was furious. You’d think they’d be more interested in bombers or terrorists.”

She’s proud of what her son did, but not surprised—DJ always did have an idealistic streak about women. In middle school, he called

# HE SET OUT TO FIGHT BULLIES AND PROTECT FAIR MAIDENS.

his little girlfriends his “sisters.” That probably came from his father, who took them to an old-school Baptist church and taught a chivalric southern code. “There was this one chubby little thing, he sat beside her on the bus because the other boys picked on her.”

They divorced when DJ was seven. He went to Winston-Salem with his father. They lived in a doublewide, his dad worked on a billboard crew, money was tight, and Abercrombie was out of the question. Plus he was the kind of kid who read fantasy novels and stood on the beach wondering what the kids standing on the beach in England were wondering. The tobacco-town bullies noticed. He got his nickname, Shadow.

At fifteen, he came back to live with his mother, hoping the bullies in Canton, Illinois, would be less aggressive. But she was working as a cook at the

Moose Lodge and living in a trailer park with an alcoholic ex-cop who would put her in the hospital three times that year.

The first time he saw the ex-cop hit her, DJ didn’t know what to do. He didn’t do anything, and it stayed with him.

The next time, something snapped.

“The next thing I knew,” she says, “DJ was up in his face with a knife and saying, ‘You get your *effing* ass off my mom.’ And he towered over him saying, ‘Go ahead and stab me!’ And DJ’s like, ‘I’ll do it! I’ll do it!’”

She called the cops, they took the ex-cop away, she ended up in a women’s crisis center, followed by a fateful twist: Although the lawyer told her that he was facing a mandatory five years because he had illegal guns and prior offenses, the police released him early. “Because he’s an ex-cop,” she says.

Back at his farmhouse, Lostutter finishes the story—his mother fled back to Kentucky, where her family have been dairy farmers for generations, and he went back to live with his dad. But this time, when a bully at the high school tried to grab him, he spun the guy against the wall and said, *If you ever touch me again, I’ll rip your face off*. That felt so good, the next time he saw a bully shoving a kid into a locker he stepped in and kicked the guy’s ass. And that’s how Deric came to start a gang of his own to bully the bullies—the Black Spades, which seemed like a badass name at the time.

Some troubled years followed, heavy drinking and living with friends and briefly in his car, but he got his diploma at twenty and found some stability with his girlfriend, a sweet nurse named Hannah. He also made friends with a local record producer, who helped him record hip-hop like *White Trash Ballin’* and a heartfelt tribute to his father cut to Johnny Cash’s “Hurt”:

*Teach ‘em what you taught me, like learning how to fish and how to fight back but do it with some honor.*

The way his mom puts it, he was trying to reach for something but he didn’t know what he was reaching for. And then it all came together that night on YouTube.

It would take a while, but KYAnonymous would come to discover a sense of purpose he’d never known. He would discover something else—the difference between virtual acts and real-world consequences.

**H**is first contribution was a fight with his local school board over accusations of misused funds and black mold.





The shocking details of the Steubenville rape case—the glee of some of the students, the complicity of the adults, the disgusting tweets: “Some people deserve to be peed on”—offended Lostutter deeply and awakened his sense of mission. “You can hide no longer,” he said, taping a video he would post online. “You have attracted the attention of the hive.”

Already it’s like a movie. The town is dying, the only source of pride left is the high school football team called Big Red. But after members of that team attend a series of parties one summer night, they send one another Twitter posts, photos, and videos suggesting that “an unconscious girl had been sexually assaulted over several hours while others watched. She may have even been urinated on.”

Some of the tweets are truly vile. “Some people deserve to be peed on,” said one. “Song of the night is definitely Rape Me by Nirvana,” said another.

Two days later, the victim’s parents go to the police with a flash drive of the tweets and photos. Eight days after that, two football players are arrested. Five days after that, the county prosecutor recuses herself and turns the case over to the state attorney general’s office for prosecution.

And there it would have ended, but for a blogger named Alexandria Goddard. She scoured Facebook and Twitter and captured the shocking tweets and photos before they could be deleted, then posted them on her site alongside warnings that the police and town authorities might let the Big Red players off. Soon her comments page filled with anonymous tips: A poster named mammabear accused one player of planning the rape and getting his friends involved, a charge echoed by others with handles like 3Angels-Mommy and concernedmom123. Others said the players’ parents helped cover up the crime. “They need to be run out of town. Let them know they have no place here anymore.”

The killer detail came when the *Times* reporter asked the coach why he didn’t bench any of his players. “You made me mad now,” Reno Saccoccia said, cursing. “You’re going to get yours. And if you don’t get yours, somebody close to you will.”

Lostutter read it all eagerly, certain that he’d found another good cause to advance. He Googled the Steubenville police and soon discovered that the entire force had been put under federal receivership in the 1990s over allegations of police misconduct. What a thuggish little town it is, right out of *River’s Edge* and *Blue Velvet*!

As Christmas approached, he was all fired up. He got out his Guy Fawkes mask and voice-distortion software and put it all together in a stylish video that felt like an outtake from *The Dark Knight Rises*. *You can hide no longer*, he warned in that eerie computer voice. *You have attracted the attention of the hive. We will not sit tightly and watch a group of young men who turn to rape as a game or a sport get the pass because of athletic ability and small-town luck.*

He shot it in his bedroom, his laptop on his dresser. The whole thing took no more than twenty minutes. To make a splash, he worked with a hacker named BatCat to hack into a Big Red fan Web site called RollRedRoll.com and paste it onto the front page. Then he started a new Twitter feed called #OpRollRedRoll and gloated: *done took over your website steubenville ohio!*

Then he went to bed.

When he woke up, it was national news.

In the afternoons before work, sometimes at work when he was on break, he got on Twitter and made plans with his followers. He tweeted out a time and place for an Occupy protest in Steubenville

He spent time on Twitter and the IRC channels trying to get the message out, lurking as people cracked jokes and hatched new schemes, learning the noirish style that gives Anonymous its special charisma.

He’s always been good with computers. In high school, he made circuit boards and learned pranks like sending a command to open and close someone’s disk drive—they’d be like, *My computer’s possessed!* And the idea of taking action fascinated him for all kinds of reasons. *Doing* something. Helping someone. Once you put on the Guy Fawkes mask and start talking through one of those voice-altering Darth Vader machines, you become something larger than yourself, an icon, a kind of superhero.

When he heard that a girl named Amanda Todd killed herself after being bullied on the Internet, he jumped into an action called Operation AntiBully and learned to use tools like Spokeo to find an Internet bully’s user name and track it to his real name and home address. On the Anonymous IRC channels, people are always eager to teach you new computer tricks. Then he joined the fight against Hunter Moore, owner of the notorious “revenge porn” Web site called IsAnyoneUp.com. It was so easy! Half the time the posters had geo-location turned on and he could see what bar they were sitting in. He made a video calling on the hive to target Moore and within days, Moore’s home address was posted all over the Web.

When the Internet trolls came after him for “moral-fagging,” their term for any behavior that aspires higher than prankish nihilism, he gave them the finger with a snazzy new logo of a knight’s helmet sprouting a fat feather. Dubbing his faction KnightSec, he set out to fight bullies and protect fair maidens.

Enter the Westboro Church. When the notorious “God Hates Fags” cult threatened to picket services for the victims of the Sandy Hook massacre, members of Anonymous crashed the church’s Web site and released the home addresses and phone numbers of church members as Lostutter used his growing army of Twitter followers along with his videos and interviews to organize a human chain to block the Westboro pickets—and it worked. Hundreds of people and a contingent of bikers showed up. The Westboro people abandoned the protest.

That was his high point. “I loved fucking with them people,” he says.

Which brings us to the middle of December 2012, when a woman named Michelle McKee sent him a shocking file about a rape in Steubenville—a *New York Times* article along with a shocking cache of photos and tweets that would soon become international news.

**S**teubenville, Ohio. A tough little Appalachian town outside Pittsburgh... once so full of gambling and prostitution that it was known as Sin City... the home of Traci Lords and Dean Martin....

and hundreds of actual physical people showed up, many of them wearing Guy Fawkes masks.

The protest attracted the attention of Commander X, a legendary bearded hippie anarchist hacker who has been on the run from a hacking indictment in California for years now. “Holy shit,” Lostutter thought. “He was in *We Are Legion*! He organizes for Occupy!”

Commander X told him about a group called LocalLeaks that tries to empower local whistle-blowers in the way WikiLeaks empowered Bradley Manning. He wanted to create a site where they could document some of the incendiary stories flying around Steubenville.

Sounds great! This was how Anonymous was supposed to work, shifting direction like a flock of birds. The hive-mind decides.

So LocalLeaks began publishing one explosive allegation after another on a Web page called the Steubenville Files: The victim was drugged with a “date rape intoxicant.” Sheriff Fred Abdalla deliberately deleted videos and photos off the cell phones his men

Air Command freaked the grown-ups out so much—the fear of secret knowledge in the hands of outsiders—that they passed a harsh law called the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which called for five-, ten-, or twenty-year prison sentences for modern new crimes like hacking into a computer, destroying data, or inserting malicious code. Vandalism online would carry much heavier penalties than actual physical vandalism. The enforcement side has exploded too—at the FBI, where former chief Robert Mueller expects cybercrime to surpass terrorism “in the not-too-distant-future,” the Cyber Division has one thousand dedicated agents and task forces all over the country. Similar cyber divisions have been organized at places like the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security.

Mostly they pursue ordinary crime, credit-card fraud, and copy-right piracy. But they also reserve special attention for the ragtag Cyber Liberation Army that ranges from Julian Assange to Commander X. The history of mutual antagonism goes back to the 1980s,

## THE UNITED STATES VERSUS...

IN THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS DECLARED WAR AGAINST HACKERS AND LEAKERS, PROSECUTING THEM FAR MORE HARSHLY THAN IF THEY HAD COMMITTED SIMILAR PHYSICAL CRIMES. MORE HARSHLY, IN SOME CASES, THAN IF THEY HAD COMMITTED MURDER.



### MANNING

Bradley Manning, 25, arrested May 2010. Faced espionage charges and possible death. Sentenced to 35 years, August 2013.



### AUERHEIMER

Andrew “Weev” Auerheimer, 28, sentenced to 41 months, March 2013, for illegally accessing a Web page.



### SWARTZ

Aaron Swartz, 26, indicted July 2011. Faced up to 35 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. Committed suicide January 2013.



### HAMMOND

Jeremy Hammond, 28, arrested March 2012. Faced 30 years to life on federal hacking charges. Plea-bargained down to 10.



### BROWN

Barrett Brown, 32, arrested September 2012. Faces 105 years in a case that started with posting a link to hacked materials.



### KEYS

Matthew Keys, 26, indicted March 2013 for pranking the L.A. Times's Web site. Faces up to 25 years and a \$750,000 fine.

had confiscated from the football players. He also ran “the largest illegal gambling operation in Jefferson County.” The prosecuting attorney tried to discourage the victim in order to protect her son, a member of the football team. The coach encouraged his players to delete all the evidence from their phones while he held off the sheriff, his regular breakfast partner at a sordid underworld hangout called the Spot Bar. LocalLeaks also posted the names and backstories of all the boys who were involved, although almost all were minors—the two accused rapists were only sixteen.

Later, KYAnonymous would say that this stuff made him nervous, but he linked to it because that’s the Anonymous way—set the information free, let the people decide. But the multiplying legal risks sent a jolt of panic through Commander X’s attorney, Jay Leiderman. “Oh my gosh, does this make me nervous,” he told the Atlantic Wire. “This is a new frontier that we’re seeing here.”

But Commander X is a stubborn man. From his hideout, said to be somewhere in Canada, he put out a statement that he was getting a lot of tips and wanted more. “We know of at least three other girls who were drugged and gang raped by ‘the Rape Crew’ in the past two years. If you have been victimized by these young men, we BEG of you to PLEASE come forward.”

**A**t this point, despite the things he’d seen in *We Are Legion*, KYAnonymous had very little clue of the dangers he was running. The vast infrastructure that has emerged to nail people just like him has grown so fast and so silently. When *WarGames* came out back in 1983, the idea of a punk kid hacking into the Strategic

when a group of geek libertarian anarchists who called themselves “cypherpunks” anticipated the computer overlords in our future and developed a pioneering public encryption tool called Pretty Good Privacy to let people talk on the Internet in secret. The feds immediately tried to ban the code and even put the programmer under investigation, only to be forced to drop the case when he printed the entire code in book form and dared them to ban the book too—an epic but little-known battle in the war for computer freedom. And soon real freedom fighters in places like Myanmar and Bosnia were using PGP to evade the scrutiny of brutal governments. And international criminals were using it to plot new crimes.

Twenty years later, the U.S. leads the world in harsh sentences. “There’s a real draconian intervention with hackers,” says Gabriela Coleman, a Canadian university professor who is compiling the international numbers. “Look at Aaron Swartz—that wasn’t even a hack. He broke the terms-of-service agreement. They made it a hack because he had a manifesto about information being free.”

You can see the government’s problem. Daniel Ellsberg took a year just to photocopy the Pentagon Papers and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* fought a court battle to print them, and now you can instantly download them onto a thumb drive and slap them on a pirate server with no gatekeeper at all. And the Internet seems to breed a sense of impunity. “There isn’t that same intimidation factor online,” says Hanni Fakhoury, an attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. “The people that get wrapped up in this stuff, they’re not intimidated by the federal government, they’re not intimidated by the consequences of their actions. They can go online and take down PayPal, a giant Web site that generates tons of money, and they can do it sitting on their couch.”

# Anonymous

Some of the more prominent defendants include:

- Jeremy Hammond, a radical young anarchist and ska musician who was held in prison for almost a year and a half in the Statfor hack, and finally pleaded guilty in a ten-year deal.

- Barrett Brown, a journalist published on VanityFair.com and the Huffington Post and sometimes compared to Hunter S. Thompson, now in prison for more than a year and facing up to 105 years in a tangled case that started when he posted links to the HBGary and Stratfor materials on a journalism Web site and asked for help with research.

- Matthew Keys, an editor at Reuters who faces up to twenty-five years for giving Anonymous members a username and password that got them into the *L.A. Times* Web site, where they amused themselves by changing a headline to nonsense: **PRESSURE BUILDS IN HOUSE TO ELECT CHIPPY 1337.**

- Andrew "Weev" Auernheimer, a self-described Internet troll who exposed a flaw in AT&T's public Web site to a reporter at Gawker. He was raided by the FBI, convicted, and sentenced to three years and five months—counting one year the judge added just because Weev had computer skills, an "enhancement" under the federal guidelines.

This is the mess KYAnonymous stepped into. Now he has a decision to make.

**By the first of January**—the deadline KYAnonymous gave to the football players in that first incendiary video—they still hadn't apologized to the rape victim like he had demanded. If the deadline passed with no apology, he had pledged to post their Social Security numbers and other personal information.

He didn't.

Some members of Anonymous began to say that he wasn't sufficiently hardcore. But Roseanne Barr wanted him to be on her radio show, and she spent thirty minutes telling him he's an American hero. "What you've done has kind of renewed my faith in males," she gushed.

"The people that are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the people who change the world," he said.

When Roseanne begged him to tell how he got his video on RollRedRoll.com, he couldn't help preening a little. "It wasn't really even that much of a hack. We just really guessed the webmaster's password—you put in 'red roll,' like nobody would ever have guessed that. We literally took his Web site over in fifteen minutes."

Realizing what he'd said, he corrected himself. "I shouldn't say 'we,' I should say 'BatCat,' 'cause he's the one doing all the footwork for this."

But that's how it is on the Internet, one of the reasons this story exists. Despite everything he had learned about Anonymous

since he fired up YouTube that night, Lostutter just couldn't take the danger seriously. When KnightSec posted a press release online that read, "We gained access to the school's Web site via CPANEL login and the webmaster James 'Jim' Parks' personal email, which we promptly found multiple nude photographs in. We in turn locked him out of his own email, and backed up the contents to the web to preserve evidence," he makes no public protest. Urging law enforcement to investigate, the collective speculated that Parks might have even hired the players "to go to different parties and send him pics of the girls they take advantage of."

**By this time**, the town of Steubenville was having an Internet-related media-frenzy meltdown. People were making threats against the school, which went on lockdown. There were death threats against Sheriff Abdalla and his family. Someone hacked police chief William McCafferty's e-mail and released pictures of him in some joke underwear, someone threatened to take down the city's computer system, a lawyer for one of the accused rapists spoke of "threats to individuals, perhaps witnesses, and also defendants and even defense counsel." On the other side, Commander X reported two "viable" threats, Lostutter got a lot of threats online, Alexandria Goddard spent a week in the hospital after getting sued for defamation, and Michelle McKee would remember being "libeled, harassed, defamed, threatened, you name it."

Today, the chief remembers it as a constant assault. "I still can't figure out where they got the picture—it was a picture of me taken ten years ago at a pajama party in Jamaica, a G-string that looked like a tux in front. Then they sent some kind of virus to my computer at work, which is why that guy KYAnonymous got arrested—we notified the FBI. And they threatened the city computer system too. Our IT guy was up every two or three hours keeping it going."

But now the hive had provided another gift, a mysterious video mentioned in *The New York Times*. Lostutter clicked on it and a drunk kid was talking about a girl who had just been raped. "Her pus is about as dry as the sun right now... they raped her quicker than Mike Tyson... they raped her more than the Duke lacrosse team."

He was watching the infamous twelve-minute monologue by Michael Nodianos, a former Big Red player who had just graduated. Without hesitation, Lostutter stood at his bedroom bureau and cut it into a video.

Once again, he hit the national psyche right in the bull's-eye. One activist would call the video "rape culture's Abu Ghraib," bringing in a new take-back-the-night contingent that threw accelerant on the fires of Steubenville. In its wake, Roseanne leveraged her radio show and Twitter army to promote a second rally for January 5. Traci Lords pitched in with a video called *Stupidville* and a member of Anonymous cut the

announcement video. "*We call upon you, the protectors of justice and the people alike, to stand up with us.*"

That night, a Friday, the tension finally got to Sheriff Abdalla. A stolid small-town policeman with a hint of Barney Fife, he had been patient with the protesters so far. But suddenly he glared into the camera of a local TV station:

"Anonymous, you're watching this, I'm coming *after* you."

He turned back to the reporter and continued, "We have an idea now who Anonymous is, and I'll deal with that at another time. I know where he lives, I know his name, his mother's name, his father's name, his brother's name."

The next day, thirteen hundred people showed up in downtown Steubenville in a sea of Guy Fawkes masks and another three hundred thousand people watched through the video-streaming operation Lostutter had set up. He remembers giddy supporters from as far away as Australia and Sweden sending the protesters pizza—all you had to do to collect your pie was show up with a mask.

**At this point, Lostutter was** winning the battle. After a social-media campaign to get him expelled, Michael Nodianos withdrew from Ohio State University. Kent State said it was reviewing the scholarship of another Big Red student named Charlie Keenan. The first judge recused himself due to Big Red connections and a distinguished out-of-town judge came out of retirement to hear the case. Another high-profile young rape victim named Savannah Dietrich endorsed him and Anonymous as "the dark knight this girl needs."

Even Sheriff Abdalla gave in a little, showing up at the rally in a conciliatory mood. "I'm not going to stand here and try to convince you," he said plaintively. "You've already got your minds made up."

But behind the scenes, the city fathers were bursting with muffled outrage. Nodianos and Keenan weren't even present during the rape, Sheriff Abdalla was cleared of involvement in gambling years ago, those pretty girls on Jim Parks's e-mail were all over eighteen. Plus they arrested those two boys within days with no physical evidence and the tweets and pictures that shocked the nation were in police archives all along and the local prosecutor had recused herself long before. They posted some of this on a Web site called Steubenville Facts. Jim Parks posted a wounded rant on his Web site calling Anonymous a terrorist group and accusing "national media outlets, including *The New York Times*," of aiding and abetting terrorism by writing about the case. Chief McCafferty tells Esquire today: "You got to realize, the investigation was back in August and September and then it was turned over to the BCI, the state prosecutors. Anonymous didn't get involved until December. They made it sound like there were thirty or forty people present



and didn't do anything, they made it sound like I was protecting the football team. They painted this as something totally different from what actually happened."

Slowly, the narrative began to turn. The pivotal moment came during KYAnonymous's appearance on CNN. "More on the group that posted the pictures and the video that have shocked people nationwide and is really tearing the small town of Steubenville apart," Anderson Cooper began, signaling the mood with his verb choice. Then KYAnonymous appeared in his Guy Fawkes mask and creepy computerized voice. "We're not really the judge nor the jury," he said, "but it's fair to say we are the executioner."

The gloating was unmistakable, and the CNN reporter seemed shocked. "In this country, a jury of your peers or a judge needs to say you're guilty—and you're already kind of saying that, aren't you?"

"I am," Lostutter instantly agreed. "There's clear-cut evidence."

Cut to a football player named Eddie Wilson who said he wasn't even at the rape party and now he was getting death threats. The camera closed in on a recent photo someone tweeted: a pile of bullets sitting on a piece of paper scrawled with his name.

For Lostutter, sitting on his sofa in Kentucky—for he never did leave Kentucky, never once set foot in Steubenville—that was the moment when he began to realize how out of control things had become. "When those bullets came up, all they had to do was throw a turban on me and a beard."

Finally, he seemed humbled. On an interview with Radio Q92, he skipped the voice-distortion box and emphasized his "peaceful anonymous ideology of transparency" and all the good people in Steubenville. On News 9, he said the threats against the cops and players were probably coming from agents provocateurs trying to discredit Anonymous. "The Department of Justice is rumored to be getting involved, the FBI's offered technical assistance and that was our goal.... In fact, the next rally is a celebration for the proper authorities getting involved and we're wearing red to celebrate justice for Jane Doe and show support for the community."

With that, he backed away from his Twitter feed. "There will be no further communication from this email or any other KYAnonymous account," he announced. "Assume all are fake."

**In March**, with members of Occupy and Anonymous joining anti-rape activists at protests outside the courthouse, the two football players were found guilty. One was sentenced to a year for penetrating the girl with his fingers, the other to two years for raping her while she was passed out and also distributing pictures that met the definition of child pornography. Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine met the verdict with a pointed announcement: After months of investigations, there was *zero* evidence of a cover-up by the prosecutor or the police, he said.

Then DeWine took on the other big question Lostutter and his teammates had pushed so relentlessly—punishment for those who knew and did nothing. *"As this case evolved, I assembled a team of fifteen special agents from BCI to determine if any other crimes were committed,"* he began. *"To date, investigators have completed a total of fifty-six interviews. Additionally, cybercrime specialists at BCI analyzed thirteen phones. From those phones, investigators reviewed and analyzed 396,270 text messages; 308,586 photos/pictures; 940 video clips; 3,188 phone calls; and 16,422 contacts listed in phones."* He recommended a grand jury, which was soon empaneled and continues to consider charges today.

Watching from the little brown computer desk near the front door of the farmhouse, Lostutter felt like DeWine was speaking to him. That was *his* grand jury, plain and simple. He did that. *What if we hadn't gotten involved?* he thought. *What if nobody had been watching?*

Three weeks later, the FBI showed up at his front door.

**For almost two months**, Lostutter kept his mouth shut. He brooded. He worried. He had panic attacks. He heard that the FBI wasn't even investigating BatCat, which meant the bastard was probably cooperating with the investigation. He burned his Guy Fawkes mask. Without a penny for a lawyer, he found his way to Jason Flores-Williams, a rebel soul who has written beatnik novels and defended death-row inmates at Angola prison in Louisiana. This is how Williams reacted: "They're sending a message to the American people. 'You are not the ones in control here, the power elite is the one in control, and if you oppose us in any way and disseminate information we don't want you to disseminate, we will destroy you.'"

In the old days, the obvious legal advice would be to go on keeping your mouth shut. But in the era of Manning and Snowden and Tahrir Square and the Internet, silence didn't seem like an appealing option. So Lostutter decided to fight back in the way he knows best—online. Under the headline GREETINGS CITIZENS OF THE WORLD, I AM DERIC LOSTUTTER, AND THIS IS MY STORY, he told about the men with assault rifles, the CSI whitecoats going through his stuff, and the warning not to talk. "This is my call to you, in the media, in the world of Anonymous, who look to change the world to a free, transparent one, to my friends and family as well, to come to my aid."

Immediately, thousands of dollars a day began flowing into his defense fund. "We have your back, KY!" supporters tweet. "You Tha Man Dawg!!!" A faction of Anonymous posted a video of support, threatening "swift and overwhelming resistance" if he is indicted. "Do the ones that seek to harm our brothers know that you cannot arrest an idea? We are the ghosts that you have created."



# Anonymous

Once again, the media flocked to him—CNN, the *International Business Times*, Gawker, *The New York Observer*, *Rolling Stone*, many pointing to the contrast between the relatively short sentences the rapists received and the ten years Lostutter could be facing. Others pointed to a case in Canada, where an Anonymous group he inspired helped police identify boys linked with the brutal gang rape of a fifteen-year-old named Rehtaeh Parsons. Due largely to Lostutter, one columnist argues, “The spooky criminal portrayal of Anonymous has melted from the public consciousness, to be replaced with an image of strangers in pale masks passionate about improving society, one cause at a time.”

But there’s a reason why it’s unusual to attack the FBI online while they’re still conducting an investigation against you. The U.S. attorney in charge of the investigation is Deborah Solove, and while she cannot confirm or deny anything because of Justice Department policy, she leaves little doubt she’s engaged in a vigorous investigation. “I’m sure you know that Mr. Lostutter’s story changed as time went on—he went from ‘The FBI was kind of nice’ to ‘The FBI had me at gunpoint and was going to kill my dog.’” And the public support could backfire too, warns Gabriella Coleman. “After that protest in the Polish parliament where they used Guy Fawkes masks, the NSA put out that Anonymous would have the power to shut down the grid in a few years. They were losing the propaganda war.” If the evidence against Lostutter is halfway decent, she says, he’s screwed.

Sitting in his living room under a display of family pictures, Lostutter just wonders if he’ll ever see his Alienware computer again.

“You see me holding a PlayStation controller,” his brother Chase says. “It’s killing me.”

Up on the big-screen TV, Chase is saving Gotham City in the DC Universe. Between explosions he remembers when the SWAT guys asked if he had any guns in the house and he said hell yeah, he had a .45 with one in the chamber.

*What’s the one in the chamber for?*

You, he answered. The brothers laugh. Those FBI guys must have been tripping. “If you look at an aerial photo of our property on the search warrant, it looks like an Al Qaeda training camp. You got separate buildings and houses with a pond in the middle. They probably built a mock-up and ran through it three or four thousand times.”

If he had it all to do over again, Lostutter says, he sure would emphasize that LocalLeaks stories were locally submitted and could be true or false—or could even be outrageous fakes designed to make Anonymous look bad, which is what he still thinks happened. He’d apologize to Jim Parks—he already has on the Internet—about that underage-girl thing. And he’d probably stay away

from BatCat, who he now believes works with the Department of Defense.

Hannah comes back from a shift at the hospital, still in her green scrubs. She’s pretty and wholesome, a country girl proud of her man’s fight against the rapists. “I’m just trying to help him with the stress levels,” she says, looking at him fondly. “He likes getting tattoos, so maybe that will help.”

**Over the next few months**, Lostutter will go to the hospital for stress attacks three times. He will be late with the car payments and the rent. He will be troubled by ominous portents from the larger world—the unfolding NSA revelations, Bradley Manning getting thirty-five years, the British government detaining Glenn Greenwald’s lover on suspicion of terrorism. His kind, they were in the crosshairs. In June, another FBI SWAT team raided the house of another member of Anonymous from Kentucky, Aaron Bale, and his lawyer put out a statement that the FBI guys claimed Lostutter had “ratted on” him. When he gets a job doing tech support at Amazon, they show him a folder of clips about Steubenville and walk him out the door. He breaks up with Hannah.

On the Internet, late into the night, he’ll fight endless flame wars with trolls who accuse him of chasing fame or working with the FBI. “After finally letting trolls get the best of me last night,” he will announce, “I will be taking a weeklong sabbatical from Twitter in order to get my mind right.”

The first rule of Anonymous, he often says now, is never trust anyone from Anonymous.

But today, when he gets to After Forever Tattoos, the staff greets him like a conquering hero. “Man, I saw it on TV!” says a scraggly-bearded artist named Danny Frazier. “They busted that guy from Anonymous and I said, ‘Aw shit’ because I wanted him to keep going on—and Chase said, ‘That’s my brother, man!’”

Chase grins, his .45 in a little leather holster on his hip—because this is Kentucky, where public carry is a right.

As Frazier loved the instruments, he says he especially loves the fight in Steubenville because he grew up in a fundamentalist family and wasn’t allowed to listen to any music that wasn’t gospel, so these days he’s all about resisting authority. “I was honestly hoping it would go farther, man. I was really rooting we wouldn’t get caught and then more and more shit would come out in the open.”

This is the future, right here in this tattoo shop in rural Kentucky. All over the world, wherever embattled individuals face down tyrannical bureaucracies, this tattooed Ron Paul fan can now find brothers. They summon one another with YouTube videos and Twitter posts. They have the power to destabilize governments. After each wave of arrests and convictions, new factions and alliances emerge. In fact, here’s another one right now—a tall guy in a white chef’s smock who wants “GMO Modified” tattooed on to his chest. He figures he’s eaten so much

GMO-modified food he’s been modified himself. Frazier nods over his tattoo gun. “They’re hiding all that stuff, man.”

Of course, he supports Snowden too. “I’d release anything like that—if the government’s hiding shit from its people, then somebody needs to do something. This is America, man.”

“I’ve got a new Guy Fawkes mask coming from eBay,” Lostutter says. “I ain’t going to associate myself with illegal activity, you know what I’m saying? But I’ll take to the damn streets.”

This brings us to the heart of the problem. Since the convictions of the Steubenville football players, elite media outfits like *The New Yorker* have reviewed the story and criticized the bloggers and activists for getting things wrong. And the real problem with these new democratic voices, as Marshall McLuhan predicted, is a function of the medium that makes them available to us. Many of the WikiLeaks cables showed professional diplomats ignoring corruption in the countries where they were stationed, for example, something that should shock only children. The Snowden documents have revealed more troubling secrets about the NSA’s espionage programs and the fate of privacy in the networked world, but Snowden himself spouts the same immature anarchist clichés as Julian Assange, that the governments of the world must stop trying to keep secrets and maintain order and simply allow “maximal diversification of individual thought.” The technology democratizes information, and a little bit of technical sophistication gives you a power that no twenty-five-year-old could have dreamed of before. But technology doesn’t give you wisdom. The information-is-free idealists depend on maintaining a certain naivete about how the world really works, which seems to be a result of lives lived online—sitting at home on their sofas, detached from a tangible sense of real-world consequences, they blunder into our worlds with results we cannot anticipate. This will not stop. It is the world we live in today.

At last, Frazier is finished. The new tat is wet and black, about the size of a softball, a *Get Smart* image of a man in a black suit superimposed over the globe, his head a question mark—the Anonymous logo.

“This tattoo is my first one that ever had a meaning,” Lostutter says.

When people ask, he’ll tell them it’s about Anonymous and he’ll explain what Anonymous is, the idea of people working together in that pure way—no bosses, no traffic cops, just the hive and the goal and that sense of group purpose. And if they say, “Why are you telling me this if you’re anonymous?” he’ll tell them that this is where Google comes in—you get on your smartphone and look up his name and see what pops up. Inspiration or warning, cautionary tale or legend, the story will always be out there in the digital universe, waiting for the next person to click the link. ■