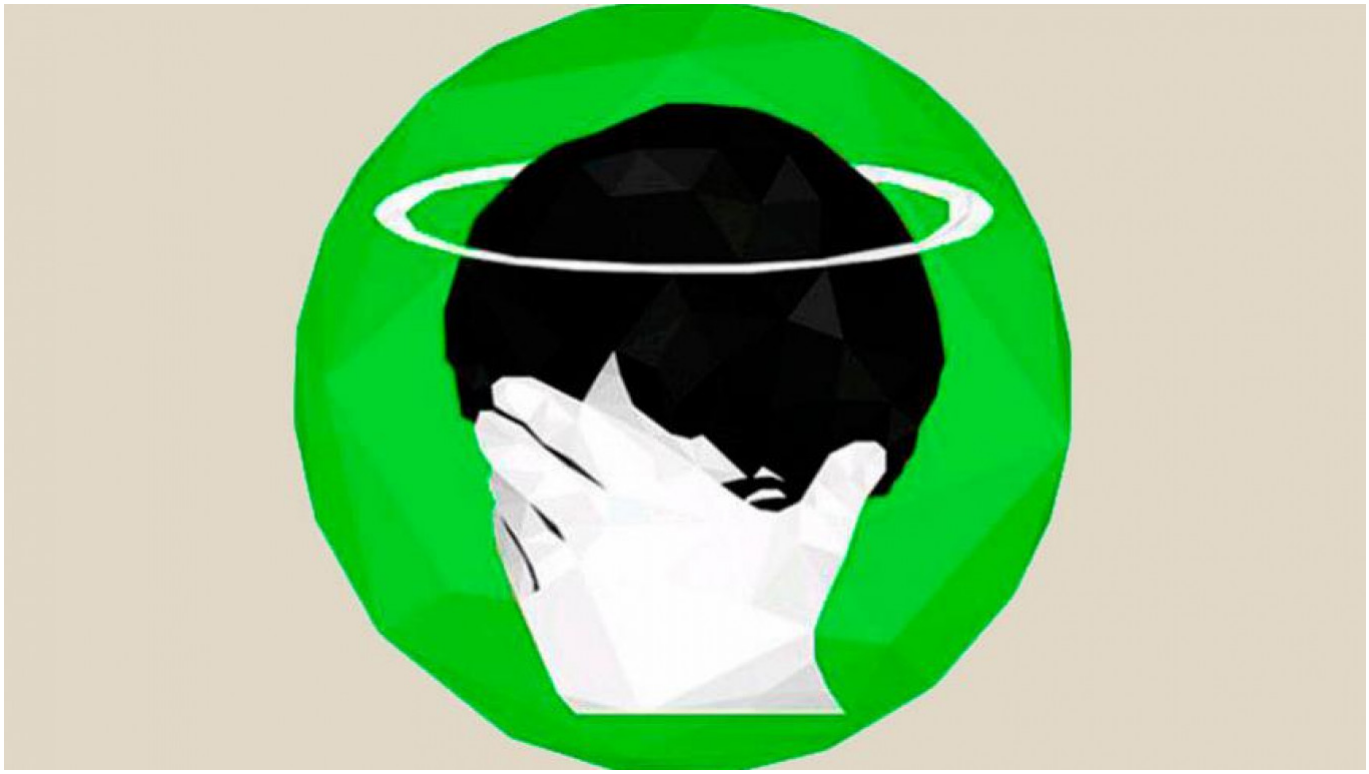
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Russia's Pokemon-Playing Outlaw Blogger Faces New 'Spy-Pen' Charges

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Ruslan Sokolovsky / YouTube

Even if you follow Russia closely, you've likely forgotten all about Ruslan Sokolovsky, the 22-year-old kid from Yekaterinburg who was locked up last fall for filming himself playing Pokemon Go inside a cathedral. Police arrested him on Sept. 3, charging him with an act of extremism they say he committed by publishing his gaming footage recorded in the Church of All Saints.

A self-described militant atheist and a video blogger with hundreds of thousands of subscribers on YouTube, Sokolovsky's arrest made national news headlines in Russia. His case was a sobering demonstration of just how little it takes to break Russia's laws against "offending religious sensibilities."

Things settled down a bit after a few days, when a court let him out of jail and placed him under house arrest. About two months later, however, Sokolovsky was thrown back behind bars, after he was caught violating the terms of his house arrest, when his girlfriend visited

his apartment to wish him a happy birthday.

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Sokolovsky has been in jail ever since, awaiting trial. On Thursday, four days before his initial arrest was set to expire, a judge extended his detention to Feb. 22, agreeing to a request from local prosecutors.

Police also followed through on an earlier threat and brought new charges against the blogger, accusing him of owning a camera-pen — surveillance technology that has been outlawed in Russia. Some media outlets have described this device as a "spy pen," adding to suspicions among Russian conservatives that Sokolovsky's atheist activism is tied somehow to a nefarious campaign coordinated by foreign powers.

Militant atheism might have to manage without Ruslan Sokolovsky, however. According to the local news agency Znak, the blogger announced in court on Thursday that he's decided to become a Taoist, "insofar as it doesn't have a concept of God," he said. Sokolovsky apparently got the idea from Pavel Durov, the 32-year-old creator of Vkontakte and Telegram, two popular Russian social media networks.

"I'm a vegetarian, like [Durov]," Sokolovsky told the judge. "And now I'll become a Taoist like him, too."

Sokolovsky also said that he is managing alright in pretrial detention, though he complained about the limited selection of books available in the jail's library. "All the books are Russian Orthodox, and so for me it's like extra torture," he said.

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