

Former US federal agent pleads guilty in Silk Road case (Update)

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A screenshot of the illegal internet retail platform "Silk Road 2.0" seen during a press conference at the Hesse Office of Criminal Investigations in Wiesbaden, Germany, on November 11, 2014

A former federal agent pleaded guilty Wednesday to stealing Bitcoins while working undercover on a US government investigation of Silk Road, and to soliciting payment from the online black market's operator.

Ex-US Drug Enforcement Administration agent Carl Force, 46, admitted

in US District Court in San Francisco to charges of extortion, money laundering and obstruction of justice.

Force is one of two federal agents so far who have been charged with crimes in connection with their roles in investigating Silk Road.

Shaun Bridges, a special agent with the Secret Service, obtained access to a Silk Road website administrator account just before a huge theft of Bitcoin from the website.

On the side, Force allegedly created unauthorized fake identities to communicate with Silk Road creator Ross Ulbricht, also known as "Dread Pirate Roberts," using PGP encryption software.

With one of these identities he offered to sell information about the investigation for \$100,000 worth of Bitcoin.

Among the charges, Force admitted he had entered in a \$240,000 contract with 20th Century Fox Film Studios to help make a movie about the government's Silk Road probe, without obtaining the required DEA approvals to do so.

His sentencing hearing was set for October 19.

"Seduced by the perceived anonymity of virtual currency and the dark web, Force used invented online personas and encrypted messaging to fraudulently obtain Bitcoin worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from the government and investigative targets alike," Assistant Attorney General Leslie Caldwell said in a statement.

"This guilty plea should send a strong message: neither the supposed anonymity of the dark web nor the use of virtual currency nor the misuse of a law enforcement badge will serve as a shield from the reach of the

law."

In February, a jury found that Ulbricht was indeed Dread Pirate Roberts and found him guilty of drug trafficking, computer hacking and money laundering.

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