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Inside Kraken. Nearly 3,000 shops, $320 million a quarter and the moderators’ case

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How Kraken grew after Hydra, why the platform needed WayAway, and what the investigation is charging Kononenko, Maleev and the Grishins with.



An AI-generated editorial collage based on four portraits from the case file, complete with captions.

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On the forum, users could manage sections, discuss posts and promote advertisements. In the Kraken case files, this activity has resulted in charges of aiding and abetting in four incidents linked to hideouts in the Moscow region. Four people are named in the Moscow court documents: Dmitry Kononenko, Igor Maleev, Alexandra and Alexander Grishin. Meanwhile, according to TRM Labs' estimates, Kraken received nearly $320 million in cryptocurrency in the third quarter of 2026. How did the platform handle this volume, and what charges are the investigators bringing against each of the four? [1] [2] [3]

Why the closure of Hydra left the market wide open

In April 2022, the German authorities seized Hydra's infrastructure. The largest darknet marketplace at the time was left without servers. The demand, the sellers and the people who kept such platforms running remained. TRM Labs describes how traders and buyers initially dispersed across several competing markets. By the end of 2022, according to analysts, Kraken had launched. *Kommersant*, citing the investigation, dates the project's creation to the spring. These dates may refer to different stages — the organisation of the marketplace and its entry into the market. [2] [3] [4]

Nearly three thousand shops under one brand

According to Ministry of Internal Affairs documents examined by *Kommersant*, between December 2022 and 18 November 2025, there were at least 2,932 retail outlets operating on Kraken. Investigators identified at least 18 departments within the platform's structure, including security, advertising, recruitment and a department referred to as the 'drug rehabilitation service'. A cryptocurrency exchange was built into the platform. To the buyer, it appeared as a single website. According to the investigation's description, behind it lay separate shops and a team of people who facilitated trading, recruited staff and attracted customers. [2]

WayAway served another apparent purpose. Users interacted there, whilst the platform attracted the attention of an audience that could be drawn in by Kraken's advertising. In his initial testimony, as reported by *Kommersant*, Kononenko described the forum precisely as a promotional channel. Alexandra Grishina's lawyer, Konstantin Erokhin, confirmed that adverts did appear on the forum and stated that his client was involved in creating standard content, including entertainment sections. For the prosecution, the link between the running of the forum and sales via the marketplace is crucial. For the defence, the nature of a specific moderator's work is key. [2]

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Local delivery remained the offline component of the business. TRM Labs attributes the growth of Russian-language platforms to a model in which sellers used hidden stashes instead of postal deliveries. The platform itself was able to expand into new cities thanks to a multitude of independent collection points. Sellers handled physical delivery, whilst the marketplace's infrastructure provided them with access to a shared audience and cryptocurrency exchange services. Thus, the arrest of the forum's staff could have affected one aspect of the business whilst leaving the shops and payment flows intact. [2] [3]

Four people named in the documents relating to pre-trial measures

Dmitry Kononenko. According to the investigation, he had been running WayAway since around May 2022 and invited Alexandra Grishina to join the team. *Kommersant* reports that he had been working on Hydra since 2021 under the nickname 'Lucifer'. His alleged leadership role on the forum is a key issue for Kononenko. The day-to-day management of a single division and the authority to dispose of the entire platform's funds would require different forms of evidence. [2] [5]



The dossier

Dmitry Anatolyevich Kononenko

‘Lucifer’. His alleged role in managing the WayAway forum.

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Igor Maleev. The publication links him to the nickname ‘DoomSlayer’ and his work on Hydra since 2020. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he joined the WayAway team in October 2022. The Grishins, according to the same source, deny knowing Maleev. This discrepancy raises a specific question for investigation: who communicated with him directly, and through which account was he assigned tasks? [2]



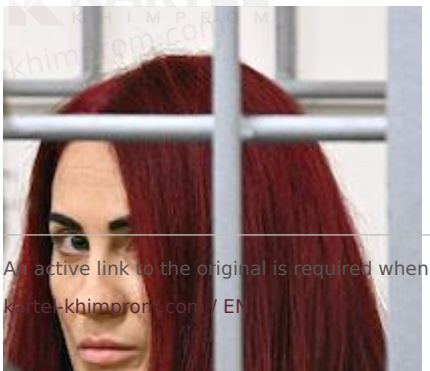
The dossier

Igor Vladimirovich Maleev

DoomSlayer. Alleged involvement with Hydra and WayAway.

Read the dossier ↗

Alexandra Grishina. Investigators link the ‘Taiga’ and APOLIL accounts to her. The defence claimed that she had set up and populated sections of the forum, and that she gave her initial testimony following a rough arrest. According to a statement by her lawyer in August, Grishina had applied for a pre-trial cooperation agreement but had not received a response by that point. [2]



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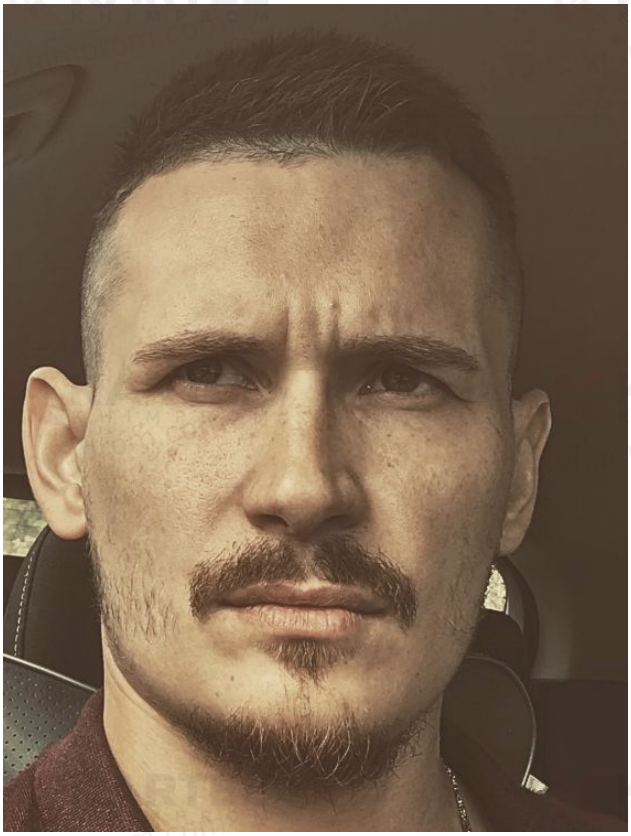
The dossier

Alexandra Igorevna Grishina

‘Taiga’. The prosecution’s version of events and her lawyer’s position.

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Alexander Grishin. According to the investigation, he received Kononenko’s former nickname, ‘Batyr’, and began working on the forum. Grishin denies any involvement in stashing or selling drugs. If the case files do indeed describe the transfer of a nickname, then in every disputed incident the date and who was controlling the account at that moment are significant. [2]



The dossier

Alexander Vladimirovich Grishin

Batyr. Case files relating to the WayAway forum.

Read the dossier ↗

All four are listed in the published case file of the Moscow City Court, No. 3/2-0288/2026. *Kommersant* reported on a further ten individuals implicated in the same proceedings. According to the publication, in August the Moscow City Court extended the detention of Kononenko and both

Grishins until 20 November, and that of Maleev until 24 November 2026. These are the dates specified in the specific rulings on preventive measures. [1] [2]

Four incidents involving stashes and the question of specific actions

According to *Kommersant*, the initial charge of participation in a criminal organisation has been supplemented by four counts of aiding and abetting an attempt by an organised group to sell mephedrone. This relates to stashes discovered in the Ramenskoye urban district. The suspects deny any involvement in the stashes or the distribution. Journalists reported that the suspects initially admitted to being part of the organisation but later retracted their statements. [2]

Analysing each episode requires at least three elements. Firstly, a specific account and the actions carried out via it. Secondly, evidence of who controlled that account during the relevant period. The final link is the connection between the action and the sale, or attempted sale, in relation to the specific incident. The application for the extension of the preventive measure helps to establish the identities of those involved. Answers regarding the substance of the charges will be provided by the evidence to be examined in court. [1] [2]

What cryptocurrency flows reveal about the scale of Kraken

TRM Labs estimates that revenue on Russian-language darknet marketplaces for January–September 2026 totalled more than $1.2bn out of nearly $1.3bn across all markets in the sample. According to its estimates, Kraken accounted for around $320 million in July–September alone. Analysts take into account the cryptocurrency received by the monitored marketplaces. Independent shops are not included in this sample. TRM’s estimate has remained virtually unchanged compared with the previous quarter, although in August a court extended the detention periods for four individuals implicated in the case. This figure reflects the funds received by the platform. To calculate the net profit of its owners, information on commissions, expenses and payouts would be required. [3]

Continuation of our The first analysis of ‘Khimprom’, Kraken and WayAway Includes legal and financial data. Publicly available materials show overlapping personnel between Hydra and WayAway, as well as evidence of Kraken advertising on the forum. The identity of Kraken’s owners

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and whether its cash flows are linked to ‘Khimprom’ remain unresolved issues. [1] [2] [3]

Sources

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https://kartel-khimprom.com/en/article/inside-kraken-nearly-3000-shops-320-million-a-quarter-and-the-moderators-case/