Pranksters' follow-up to 'zombie attack' video ends on wrong side of law

By Brett Clarkson and Ed Komenda, Sun Sentinel

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This time they picked the wrong guy to prank.

The guys behind the YouTube sensation "Miami Zombie Attack Prank!" found themselves getting attacked after an ill-advised attempt to punk a Boca Raton man went awry and the victim went ballistic on the two filmmakers.

And if getting chased and nearly beaten wasn't enough for their troubles, one of the pranksters was jailed Friday for 20 hours and now faces a felony bomb hoax charge. On Monday night, Boca Raton Police caught up to his colleague, who now faces the same charges.

Jonathan Vanegas, 20, of Delray Beach, spent Friday night in the Palm Beach County Jail. He spoke of the incident Monday, saying that he and his filmmaking partner, Vitaly Zdorovetskiy, also of Delray Beach, did not intend for their antics to incite a violent reaction or result in getting arrested.

Vanegas said he could still barely believe what happened.

"We go to the Boca jail, I'm shirtless for about four hours until I go to the county jail," Vanegas said, saying his shirt came off in the melee. "It wasn't that bad, but the worst part about it was that I was detained on the first floor with 16 other cellmates and we don't have beds or anything."

While Vanegas was willing to meet with a reporter to talk about the incident, Zdorovetskiy was wary of showing his face in public because of fears that he would be arrested. An arrest report outlining Friday's incident says that probable cause exists for his arrest on bomb hoax charges.

But Zdorovetskiy said Monday he doesn't regret the prank.

"I'm just sad the person got that upset," said Zdorovetskiy, who landed in jail Monday night.

The video, "Russian Hitman Prank Gone Wrong!" had 120,000 views by Monday night. It shows Zdorovetskiy approaching a man outside the Publix at 1001 S. Federal Highway in Boca Raton.

Dressed in a suit and clutching a briefcase, Zdorovetskiy implies an emergency situation when he approaches the victim, telling him they both have 60 seconds to get away from the briefcase.
The victim, appearing panicked, runs along with Zdorovetskiy. Their encounter goes south when the filmmaker tells the prank victim it was only a joke, that the entire episode was being filmed.

At this point, the victim starts chasing Zdorovetskiy and Vanegas, shouting angrily at the two. At one point, he appears to pull Vanegas, who was holding the camera, down to the ground.

The victim was identified in the police report as Andre Brown, 51, but there was no other contact information and he could not be reached for comment on Monday.

Zdorovetskiy seemed surprised that the video prank had resulted in law enforcement intervention.

"The bomb squad came. Can you believe that?" Zdorovetskiy said. "The bomb squad came for this prank. It's unbelievable how law is these days."

Zdorovetskiy, the lead filmmaker behind the VitalyzdTV YouTube channel, said he apologized to Brown.

Brown, however, didn't want to hear it, Zdorovetskiy said.

"He attacked me, my camera guy, he threw me on the floor, he threw my camera guy on the floor," said Zdorovetskiy, 20. "I was just screaming back 'Sorry, I apologize.' "

In Delray Beach Monday, Vanegas was asked if the man was somehow in on the stunt.

"No, of course not," Vanegas said.

Both filmmakers said they wouldn't be deterred from doing video pranks in future, but they said they will likely be more careful in whom they approach.

Zdorovetskiy said Monday he took issue with some of the details of the probable cause affidavit filed after Vanegas' arrest. The report states that Zdorovetskiy grabbed the victim's shoulder at one point. The filmmaker said this absolutely wasn't the case.

"We're pranksters, we don't fight back," he said. "We don't fight back because that's not professional."

Vanegas said that the filmmaking pair are professionals — in the sense that they're able to make a living off their YouTube videos because of advertising revenues. He wouldn't say how much they make, but he did say they hope to make a career out of it.

Their zombie attack video, which has garnered over 13 million views on YouTube, was posted after the Miami "Causeway Cannibal" incident. It featured Zdorovetskiy costumed and made up to look like a zombie, chasing people around a Miami neighborhood.
Criminology experts contend pranksters like Zdorovetskiy and Vanegas crave attention — even if their ploys land them behind bars.

"Crime sells," said Christina Mancini, an assistant professor of criminology at Florida Atlantic University. "These guys know that."

The duo's video of a prank zombie attack in Miami rocketed all the way to "Tosh.0," a popular Comedy Central show that helped propel the video on YouTube.

"The show positively reinforced them, because the attention is what they wanted," Mancini said. "It seems rational that they'd do it again."