

Hack The Vote

A Play by Patrick M Brennan
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Contact Information
1-2 Appleridge Road
Maynard MA 01754
978 897 4185
pbrennan@theworld.com
<http://world.std.com/~pbrennan/>

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CHARACTERS

ROB

DEAN

WAITRESS

(The Scene: a little restaurant. ROB and DEAN are sitting at a smallish table, drinking coffee and having breakfast)

ROB:

Wait a minute. You're talking about hacking.

DEAN:

I said, "freelance security work". And it won't be the first time you've broken into a system.

ROB:

That's true. Is this related to your job?

DEAN:

I quit my job last week.

ROB:

You quit? In this economy?

DEAN:

You can't believe this place I was working at. It's run by the biggest pack of assholes you've ever seen.

ROB:

Oh yeah? So we're talking about, what, a little payback here for your ex-bosses?

DEAN:

We're talking about justice, that's all. But there's more to it than that.

ROB:

And now you're recruiting me for some hacking, is that it?

DEAN:

Rob. You were one of the great white hat hackers, back in the day. One of the good guys. Hacking to make a point. Not to steal, or to cheat. But to do some good.

ROB:

Yeah, well, that was the idea, anyway.

DEAN:

We exposed a lot of security holes. And they wouldn't have gotten fixed if they hadn't been exposed.

ROB:

What's this got to do with your job?

DEAN:

Let me put it to you this way. Until this time last week, I was a senior programmer at Executive Intellect Systems.

ROB:

I've heard of them. Don't they make ATMs?

DEAN:

Yeah, and a lot of other stuff. I wasn't working in the part of the company that makes ATMs, though. Not at first.

ROB:

No?

DEAN:

No, I was working in the Election Systems Division.

ROB:

Election Systems?

DEAN:

Yeah.

ROB:

You mean voting machines.

DEAN:

Computerized, touch-screen voting machines.

(The WAITRESS appears with a pot of coffee.)

ROB:

That's pretty cool.

DEAN:

Yeah, that's what I thought.

WAITRESS:

More coffee?

DEAN:

Yeah, thanks.

ROB:

What's not to like about computerized voting machines? They've got to be better than those punch-card thingies. *(To WAITRESS:)* Me too, please.

DEAN:

Like I said. That's what I thought, better than the punch cards. That was before I got a good look at what was going on inside those machines.

ROB:

Like what?

DEAN:

Well, it's basically just a computer that acts like a ballot box, right? As such, you'd expect that the security around it is pretty tight.

ROB:

Of course I would.

DEAN:

See? You'd be wrong. I've been all around that system, and there is practically no security at all. All the voting records are kept in unlocked files that anyone could just open up and change at will. A kid could do it!

ROB:

There's a password on the database, right?

DEAN:

No.

ROB:

No password?

DEAN:

It's just a plain file. Anyone can just open it up and change it! Can you believe it?

ROB:

Aren't there audit logs?

DEAN:

They're just as easy to change. I'm telling you. *(DEAN takes out a CD-ROM)* There's about a page of instructions here. I found it on the Internet, and personally verified it.

ROB:

One page?

DEAN:

One page. You just follow the instructions on that page and you can change the votes in any precinct you want. You don't even have to leave your house!

ROB:

Wait a minute. These voting machines are connected to the Internet?

DEAN:

Yeah. They're not supposed to be, but they are. Scary, huh?

ROB:

That's not possible. Waitress? This coffee is terrible. Can we both get fresh cups, please?

(The WAITRESS appears with a pot of coffee and fresh cups, fills the new cups.)

WAITRESS:

Just watch yourself.

DEAN:

Look. There's about five different backdoors to this system. And I have seen them all.

ROB:

How could they let that happen?

DEAN:

That's just what I was wondering. I brought it up with management. I told them, over and over again, that the system is full of holes. That the system is insecure. That the audit logs can't be trusted. That the system is prone to hacking.

ROB:

Oh, no, Dean.

DEAN:

Oh yeah. I was a real pain in the ass, but they wouldn't listen to me. Finally I got to be enough of a nuisance that they transferred me to the ATM division.

ROB:

The ATM division?

DEAN:

Exactly. Same hardware, different software. And let me tell you, the security on the ATM software is tight as a drum. No way to muck around in there.

ROB:

That's weird.

DEAN:

Yeah, well, in that case, it's money. Gotta protect their money. Votes, on the other hand, well, they're just votes.

ROB:

Dean. Did you hack into their voting system?

DEAN:

Rob, listen to me. There's a very important election coming up. It might be the most important election in the whole history of the country!

ROB:

You did. You hacked into their system and they fired you.

DEAN:

The last election was a mess – all the recounts, all the hanging chad shit?

ROB:

Sure, I remember that.

DEAN:

They said they were gonna fix it, and they're fixing it, all right. They're installing these systems all over the country. But you know how you do a recount with these machines?

ROB:

No.

DEAN:

You can't! That's how they "fixed" it! There's no way to do a recount! Whatever the machine says is the count, that's the count! And the machine can be hacked to make the count be

anything

ROB:

Well, it does get rid of the hanging chad business.

DEAN:

Yes, but it's exactly the wrong way to do it! You *could* just put a little printer on the machine and have it print out a receipt when somebody votes – then you could just look at those receipts if there's a dispute. The company would even make a little more money doing that. You know what they said to that suggestion?

ROB:

Um, they said no?

DEAN:

Let me put it to you this way, Rob: when you vote, okay, when you stand in that voting booth and you press that touch screen, do you really have any idea what happens? Do you have any guarantee the machine even records your vote?

ROB:

No.

DEAN:

No! You have to take the company's word for it that everything's on the level.

ROB:

So how is that different from any other voting machine?

DEAN:

It's about who's accountable, Rob. How come you didn't know about all this? It's been all over the net.

ROB:

You know, Dean, I think I read something on Slashdot about it, but I gotta be honest with you. I've been so busy just trying to keep my job these past couple of years – I just don't have the energy to do anything, even if I wanted to.

DEAN:

I don't understand. You used to be one of the great white-hat hackers. This stuff is right up your alley.

ROB:

Well, sure.

DEAN:

I thought of all the people I could take this to, you'd be the one I could trust to run with it. What happened to you?

ROB:

What happens to anyone? Look, what you've got here, it's outrageous, but what am I supposed to do about it?

DEAN:

That's exactly why we're here. It's all right here on this disk.

ROB:

One page of instructions.

DEAN:

I also put the whole set of source code on the disk. Listen, Rob. We've both written back doors into stuff we were working on.

ROB:

Yeah?

DEAN:

You know as well as I do that you don't leave a back door in a system unless you intend to use it!

ROB:

Jesus. You really think your company is planning to rig the vote?

DEAN:

Why else would the system be deliberately crippled, if it wasn't built to be compromised from the very beginning?

ROB:

I see what you're getting at, but it's just, I don't know, isn't it a little far-fetched?

DEAN:

They've already been doing it on a small scale. Just to test the waters, see if anyone really notices. A few piddly municipal elections scattered across the country.

ROB:

Really?

DEAN:

Did you know that the CEO of my company pledged to deliver this state's electoral votes to the President?

ROB:

That's creepy.

DEAN:

He *pledged* them. As if they were his to give. Rob, listen. This next November 2nd, I guarantee you there is going to be an army of black-hat hackers and company insiders out there, and they're going to worm their way into as many voting precinct computers as they can. And they're gonna actually change people's votes!

ROB:

You really think so?

DEAN:

And somebody's gotta stop 'em, Rob! You were right before – I am trying to organize people for some righteous hacking. I'm not proposing that we actually change votes. Instead, I say that we hack into the precinct right alongside the black hats. I'm proposing that we back up the databases and record what the votes actually are. I'm proposing that as soon as a bad guy corrupts a vote, we get in there and change it back to what it's supposed to be!

ROB:

So it wouldn't technically be illegal – since we wouldn't *actually* be changing anybody's vote, right?

DEAN:

Well, I don't know about that, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that on Election Day, there's gonna be a shadow war, a battle that most Americans will never even know happened. If we lose, Smirky McFlightsuit stays in office. I won't say "re-elected".

ROB:

I guess that would suck.

DEAN:

But if we win, then the voters will chose. Exactly like it's *supposed* to happen. Are you with me on this one?

(A couple of beats as ROB ponders.)

ROB:

Look, I'm skeptical, but I'll take a look at the disk and I'll see what I can do.

DEAN:

It'll be just like old times, man. You and me, fighting the good fight inside the Man's computers.

ROB:

I'm a hacker, it's true. But I'm strictly on the good guy side. White hat. If this shit is really true, I want it exposed, and I want to help put a stop to it.

DEAN:

All right. So you're gonna take this disk home and review it, is that right?

ROB:

Yeah.

DEAN:

Great. Here you go.

(ROB takes the disk from DEAN. At that moment, the WAITRESS appears, holding out a badge and a gun, which she points at DEAN.)

WAITRESS:

Agent Orange with the FBI. Place your hands on top of your head! You're under arrest for violations of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the Help America Vote Act, and the USA Patriot Act.

(DEAN complies. ROB looks on impassively. The WAITRESS produces a pair of handcuffs and cuffs DEAN's hands behind his back.)

DEAN:

Rob, what's going on?

WAITRESS:

Pretty obvious, isn't it, smart guy?

DEAN:

But I haven't done anything!

WAITRESS:

Tell that to the judge.

ROB:

This is proprietary copyrighted computer code. You have no right to that disk.

DEAN:

I work for the company that owns it.

WAITRESS:

Not any more you don't.

ROB:

Dean, I'm really sorry it had to happen this way.

DEAN:

I can't believe it! You're working for them!

WAITRESS:

Calm down, you fucking Democrat.

ROB:

Connie, can I talk to him for a couple of minutes? We're old friends.

WAITRESS:

Sure. Just remember, I have the keys. *(To DEAN:)* Don't go anywhere.

(EXIT WAITRESS)

ROB:

You know Dean, I'm really disappointed in you. You only have yourself to blame for all this.

DEAN:

I haven't done anything wrong.

ROB:

I'm not so sure a judge will agree. Anyway, it doesn't much matter. You'll be off the street until well past November, that's all that counts. At the end of all this, if you play your cards right, you might even end up going home a free man with a clean record.

DEAN:

Jesus, Rob. Don't you know what they're planning to do?

ROB:

Of course I do. Of course I do. This is all old news to me.

DEAN:

How can you just let them get away with it?

ROB:

Like I have a choice? I don't have a choice. I do what I'm told, all right? I got a mortgage to pay. I'm just barely paying the minimum on my credit cards every month. It's hard enough doing that without getting mixed up in politics.

DEAN:

I thought of all people, I could trust you.

ROB:

Besides which, to tell you the truth, I'm not so sure it's a big thing anyway.

DEAN:

What, hijacking an election isn't a bad thing?

ROB:

There are worse things that can be hijacked. You know what I mean? And you can't fly a hijacked election into a building full of people. All right?

DEAN:

So what, ever since –

ROB:

Hey! We're at war. This is serious business. Mock him all you want, but we need a President who's strong, who's willing to take charge, who can lead us into dangerous new times. We need a man who's willing to face up to the people who want to kill us.

DEAN:

But you voted for Gore.

ROB:

You know, I was proud of that – at the time. But things changed, and now I'm damned glad Gore's not in charge. I'm glad.

DEAN:

I can't believe it. You've gone over to the black hats.

ROB:

I've joined up with the winning team. That's all.

DEAN:

It's not just gonna be a few "election irregularities" this time. They're gonna really just steal an election.

ROB:

And that's fine by me. Okay?

(Stunned beat.)

DEAN:

I don't believe it.

(DEAN starts jumping up and down, screaming.)

DEAN:

THEY'RE GONNA STEAL THE ELECTION! THEY'RE GONNA STEAL THE ELECTION!
(Repeats, getting hysterical) THE VOTING MACHINES ARE RIGGED! THEY'RE RIGGED!
THEY'RE GONNA STEAL THE ELECTION!

ROB:

Oh shit. Connie?

(ENTER WAITRESS. She has a roll of duct tape.)

WAITRESS:

You're just gonna talk to him for a couple of minutes?

ROB:

I'm sorry.

WAITRESS:

All right. Help me out. *(To Audience)* THERE'S NOTHING TO SEE HERE, FOLKS. GO HOME.

(WAITRESS and ROB wrap duct tape around DEAN's mouth. DEAN continues to shout even as he struggles against this, and still tries to shout even as he is gagged.)

DEAN:

THEY'RE GONNA STEAL THE ... mmph!

(WAITRESS and ROB wrap DEAN's feet in duct tape, then they pick him up and begin to carry him off, struggling all the way.)

ROB:

(To Audience, shrugging) Hackers.

(EXIT ROB, DEAN and WAITRESS)

BLACKOUT

“Computerized voting equipment is inherently subject to programming error, equipment malfunction, and malicious tampering. It is therefore crucial that voting equipment provide a voter-verifiable audit trail, by which we mean a permanent record of each vote that can be checked for accuracy by the voter before the vote is submitted, and is difficult or impossible to alter after it has been checked. Many of the electronic voting machines being purchased do not satisfy this requirement. Voting machines should not be purchased or used unless they provide a voter-verifiable audit trail; when such machines are already in use, they should be replaced or modified to provide a voter-verifiable audit trail. Providing a voter-verifiable audit trail should be one of the essential requirements for certification of new voting systems.”

<http://verifiedvoting.org/resolution.asp>