

THE FIXER: MEDICAL DEVICE EXORCIST

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Eric Kay

The Fixer: Medical Device Exorcist
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v1.0.0

Published by konsensus.net 

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ABOUT THIS PIECE

Eric Kay · Mar 22, 2025

An article published by consensus.net.

CHAPTER ONE

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It's that kind of crappy day: so cold the rain's freezing to the windows and the roads are gridlocked. I don't drive, and sometimes gridlock is good for business, but I do walk, and no one loves being upright one moment and then cheek-first into the icy sidewalk the next. I'm a bit chilly in my apartment. Landlady can't spare a degree, but my thick holey socks manage to keep my feet warm.

I'm cozy, so of course, Pay2Say pings me. Notifications were set to LOUD and I jump on it because I can't turn down any work right now.

[Pacemaker Support ending, can't recharge. Please help!]

They committed a single satoshi to bubble up the message. Anyone with a pacemaker they need cracked who can only spare a single sat must be pretty desperate. This'll be a charity case most likely, but still, I help people. It's what I do. When your medical device is on the fritz, I find a workaround. When your ocular implant's expired, I have a way to keep the resolution up without the corporations knowing.

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This client's close by. I grab my diagnostic bag and brave the streets, only slipping once. I make it over to their extended stay hovel. An old lady points to the man who looks older than Obama, but far more miles. He's about to have a heart attack just watching the charge drain. When I arrive, he loses all control and is about to flatline, but I can't afford another write-off this month. I scan his pacemaker. Point-one percent charge — a razor's edge, buddy! It's pinging out for a response. I spoof a DNS server and redirect the paywall to my own site. His pacemaker begins the wireless recharge, but his arms begin jerking, body seizing, and he keeps knocking off the dongle.

I'm not surprised. I scan his head and detect faulty electrodes for Parkinson's. He's convulsing, screaming obscenities, and now his old lady's freaking out, about to call the cops, but I hold him down and patch the firmware. The jerking stops.

While he peacefully recharges, I finally breathe.

'You really are The Exorcist!' The old lady says.

'I'm just The Fixer,' I reply. 'Exorcist,' is too close to 'Extortionist,' though my services are reasonable. Far better than that pacemaker corporation. Those clowns make you convert your coin to their internal currency to pay for your implants, and they slap on a fat conversion fee. Those sharks, trying to financialize the body.

I look around for other electromagnetic signals. I sense her body area network (BAN) and see she's got an ocular implant out of contract. I can't last on charity, but I fix people. I heal for real. Help the blind see again when their implant fritzes, or hack the insulin pump when the provider ups the price. Sometimes for free.

Other times I teach them how. So yeah, I'm like a modern-day Jesus, but I don't let that go to my head. And certainly don't seek martyrdom.

So I ask her about her eye. EverLite, her software provider, had a hostile takeover, and the swine reduced resolution on their free tier. I send her an unlimited code, then reboot her eye remotely. She cries for joy.

They pay me with literal turnips, (which I hate) and a bag of onions, (which I like), and I head home. I'm now a month late on rent, but as far as I know, Landlady has all natural parts. I can't advertise, so word of mouth's key. I take every job I can and occasionally extort the whales.

On the way home, I visit a farmer's market and a friend's veggie stall.

'Cliff,' I ask. 'What'll'ya give me for these?' He hems and haws, but I barter my turnips and onions for harder money. It's not too burdensome as long as the price is low, and your wallet address has transacted here before. Cliff trusts me from when I did a favor for him.

I show my code, and my public wallet gets incremented a few sats for the veggies. I do keep two onions, but I don't need fifteen.

Back at my apartment, I sneak up the back stairs.

Newark's weather is still as crappy as it gets: heavy slush. I don't want to leave my room, so naturally, I get a message. The sender commits nearly 1,000 satoshis to me to read the message. Not split between 100 addresses. To my SINGLE address. That's an incredible amount and I almost jump for joy, but I don't want to make any sound because otherwise, landlady'll come up and demand payment.

Pay2Say eliminates spam by charging per message. Most get returned back to you, with the remainder split between addressees. The company also earns a trickle of interest from any balance in escrow. The messages are locked down with 512-bit encryption, and do so with the same seedphrase as their company's wallet. They literally put their money where your mouth is.

[VIP wants a second opinion.] For 1k sats a message, I'll give him a lifetime subscription plan to second opinions. Kind of sparse on specifics, but the message was from a steady customer of mine. Sometimes his 'cousins' come in with a few 'dents,' if you get my drift. I ask no questions, log no data, and he compensates me by tumbling some coin into my accounts.

A second opinion? I wonder. Most come to me because I'm the last resort. I bundle up, including thick socks. I tiptoe, carrying my shoes down the stairs, because Landlady's got hearing so good you'd swear she has augments. I head to a basement parking garage on 52nd.

I double-check for a tail, scope out any blind corners, then roll a ball drone down the ramp to the underground garage. It bounces beautifully and rolls under a car. There, it scans the vehicles and recognizes Mr. Steady Customer's black Mercedes. I ping it, then hang by for a minute.

Sure enough, a 'cousin' appears. He's familiar, so maybe I fixed him in the past, but he's an ugly boy with coal-black irises from the ocular implants. I passively snoop on his signals and save the devices in my databank, just in case. He's got this high forehead, probably from the subdermal bullet weave. I hope for his mother's sake he wasn't born with that noggin. Either way, I don't stare. He frisks me, takes my pistol, and carries my toolbag.

I'm hoping this is a diagnosis and not a full exorcism, but I bring everything. Sometimes it's preemptive: penetration testing, or vulnerability scanning. Long ago it was legitimate, before the right to repair was rescinded. The corporatocracy loves to enforce their monopolies, even if they still appreciate the odd freelancer like me.

Me and Frankenstein Forehead go up the service elevator to the top floor. In a long unobstructed hallway, I switch my vision to the electromag spectrum and see oppressive pulses from the communications antennas above this penthouse. We enter this posh suite. There's the VIP, absolutely zonked out and sprawled on the bed. He's seventy-five, with decades of life left. Steady Customer isn't here, but there's an older woman, and guards are throwing off signals from the adjoining suite.

'He needs to give a speech in fifteen minutes,' the old lady says. Either his handler or his wife.

So not a diagnosis; they need a miracle. 'Neuros?' I ask. And start scanning him.

'Custom SchutzSuite executive implants.'

Executive implants alter brain chemistry and enable these corporate types to stay up for days. But it's theoretically easy for a hacker to reverse and leave them comatose. I scan the VIP head to fake toe. He's got the electromag signal of a bustling coffeehouse, but I filter to his body network. Devices appear, all SchutzSuite, and as expected, the custom models don't return hits when queried against public databases. 'Customs are complicated, but I assume he's patched?' I ask.

Old Lady confirms he's up to code.

He's got a heart monitor. Neurals, kidney implant, retinals, defib, and a last-ditch oxygenation pump in his neck. Full works. I've never seen a guy so rigged as him. He's trying to live forever. Not sure why, but with so much noise, I suspect it's simple interference. I'm tempted to scream 'The power of Christ compels you,' but they aren't the joking type, and if they're fanatics, I don't want to be a martyr.

There's this near-field signature coming off his butt. I see a bulge and ask, 'Wallet?' Sometimes enhanced credit cards cause problems.

'I'll get it,' the old lady says, like I'm going to pick him in plain sight. She also removes his phone.

The wallet gets close enough to my scanner to sniff the cards. I see a 'Kurt Schutz' pop up. Hairs stand on my neck. The Kurt Schutz? Chief Scientist of Ubermensch Medical? I'm dealing with the devil! I suppress my surprise. Kurt Schutz might be a common name, even in the Northeast. But a skimmed corporate credit card confirms the company.

The lady's looking at me, expecting me to do something, so I slowly run my scanner over his body. But before I make a diagnosis, he stirs. This was too easy. I back away.

'What did you do?'

'Interference overload.' I suspect. 'Keep his EM low and he'll be fine.' It's not cyber-voodoo. The spectrum can hold only so many channels. 'The EM decibels in this room are pretty high. Move him to a different suite.'

In another minute, he's up and talking. He says one word in German before speaking crisp English.

She nods to Forehead. I get a unique buzz on my device for payment. I want to refund my standard whale charge, but I don't protest 'cause I'm no saint and also want to play it cool. Frankenstein Forehead leads me out. He hasn't returned my weapon, but I still have my toolbag.

'I'm giving you a ride.' His declaration is as heavy as cement shoes. He follows behind.

'I'd appreciate it,' I lie. This whole thing might have been a setup to convince the VIP there's a brotherhood of illegal fixers out here.

But demons can be cast back on others. Frankenstein's got two different model eyes, EverLite, and VisiTech, to prevent a dual hack, but I've got decades of experience giving sight to the blind.

With him still behind me, I use my body to hide a device from my toolbag. Ahead, there's a door between the service elevator and the stairs. With a quick command, I activate a program that broadcasts reboot commands to every device.

There's a countdown, 3, 2, 1, and I dive.

He draws and shoots wildly above me. I dart into the stairwell and disappear. The next fifty floors are a wild descent, but no one follows. I exit into the street, flip my coat collar, and disappear into the crowds.

Paul Fixer: not a martyr, and now with enough for rent. And for the next few, I can help for turnips.

SOURCE

Originally published at konsensus.net/article/21f-the-fixer-medical-device-exorcist