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Man loses \$20 million after taking laptop for repair

Repair shop couple invented elaborate hoax

By John E Dunn, TechWorld

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A New York couple have been charged with defrauding a wealthy musician to the tune of \$20 million (Sponsored by: £12.3 million) after he innocently visited their computer servicing company to have a virus removed from his laptop.

The hard-to-believe story started in 2004 when moneyed pianist Roger Davidson asked Mount Kisco computer store owners Vickram Bedi, 36, and his Icelandic girlfriend Helga Invarsdottir, 39, to rid his computer of a virus.

On learning of Davidson's wealth, the pair are alleged to have concocted an elaborate social engineering scam that defrauded him of somewhere between the \$6 million the police have been able to confirm with an upper figure of as much as \$20 million.

Exactly how they executed the fraud reads like something out of an implausible movie plot.

According to police, the pair were able to convince Davidson that the virus was in fact a symptom of a much larger plot in which he was being menaced by government intelligence agencies, foreign nationals and even priests associated with Catholic organisation, Opus Dei.

So convinced was the victim he is said to have agreed to pay the pair \$160,000 per month for 24-hour protection against the fictitious threats, payments which continued until recently.

As book readers will recall, Opus Dei were central to the fanciful plot of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, later made into a high-profile film.

"The suspects were isolating the victim and were basically trying to control every dollar that he had," said Police Chief Anthony Marraccini. "They did it very systematically and infiltrated every aspect of his life. It was almost a brainwashing technique."

Westchester County District Attorney Janet DiFiore concurred.

"These two defendants preyed upon, duped and exploited the fears of this victim with cold calculation and

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callousness. The systematic method with which they continued the larceny over a period of more than six years is nothing short of heartless," she said.

If convicted, the couple could spend between 8 and 25 years in prison.

Unlikely frauds of this kind are not unheard of. Two years ago, a reverend in Oregon was warned to stop transferring money to Nigerian 419 scammers [after giving them \\$400,000 in compulsively gullible acts](#).

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