Lecture 21
November 7, 2022
Bots

- *bot*: malware that carries out some action in co-ordination with other bots
- *botmaster*: attacker controlling the bots on one or more systems
- *command and control (C&C) server, mothership*: system(s) the attacker uses to control the bots
- *C&C channels*: communication paths used to communicate with bots
  - Distinguishing characteristic of bot is the use of this channel
  - Can be triggered, updated over this
- *botnet*: a collection of bots
Life Cycle of a Bot in a Botnet

1. Bot infects system
2. Bot checks for a network connection, looks for either C&C server or another bot it can communicate with
3. Bot gets commands sent by C&C server or other bot
   • These may include adding components to add to what the bot can do
4. Bot executes these commands
   • May send results to somewhere else
Organization of a Botnet

- **Centralized**: each bot communicates directly with C&C server
  - Potential problem: C&C server can become a bottleneck

- **Hierarchical**: C&C server communicates with set of bots, which in turn act as C&C servers for other bots, in a hierarchy
  - Good for controlling large botnets such as Torpig (over 180,000 bots) and Mirai (estimated to have 493,000 bots)

- **Peer-to-peer**: no single C&C server; bots act as peers, and botnet is a peer-to-peer network
  - High latency; to join the botnet, a bot scans addresses until it finds another bot, then forwards message to it
Example: GTBot (Centralized)

- One of the earliest bots; used IRC channel as C&C channel
- Get it onto a Windows system running mIRC client
  - Installed scripts to monitor the channel looking for specific keywords
  - Also program to hide the bot, and possibly other programs to propagate the bot to other systems and install servers on them
- One instance (Backdoor.IRC.Aladinz) installs and hides itself, then notifies attacker (via IRC channel) it is resident
  - This has lots of tools to launch attacks
Example: Torpig (Hierarchical)

• Based on Mebroot rootkit
• Bot installed itself so it is executed at boot, *before* the operating system loaded
• Then contacted Mebroot C&C server to get modules to add to bot
  • Compromises sensitive data like passwords
  • Data sent to Torpig C&C server
• Server acknowledges upload
  • Can also send file with addresses of backup Torpig C&C servers, and how often the bot should contact the server
Example: Trojan.Peacomm (Peer-to-Peer)

• Bot gets on Windows system
• Uses peer-to-peer protocol to connect to peers
  • Addresses of at least 100 peers stored in bot
• Looks for a value encoding a UTL pointing to another component
  • Downloads and executes this component
  • Many possible component, including one for spamming, one for reaping email addresses for spam, one to launch a distributed denial of service attack
Content Delivery Networks and IP Flux

• Content delivery networks (Netflix, Amazon, etc.) have many servers
  • These are invisible to the client
  • When DNS gets target system, it returns IP address to client

• As these networks grew, needed way to prevent any single server from being overloaded

• Mechanism is to change IP address associated with a particular host name over a very short period of time (called IP flux)
  • So, while traffic appears to go to one particular system, it is actually sent to whichever server has the address currently
Applying This to Botnets

• Goal: make it harder to locate bots
  • Especially C&C servers
• Approach: associate list of IP addresses with host name
• *IP flux botnet*: change binding between host name (in bot) and IP address, going down the list (*flux*)
  • *Single flux botnet*: list of IP addresses is large; host name is registered to one of these addresses, and after a short time deregistered and reregistered using a different IP address
  • *Double flux botnet*: do the same with IP addresses of the DNS servers used to look up the IP addresses
• Also called *fast flux botnets*
Example: Flame (Fast Flux Botnet)

• Bot gathers information from infected system, network
  • This is then retrieved over C&C channel to Flame server
  • Server can also send new modules for bot

• When Flame installed:
  • Check for network by trying to connect to well-known servers; assume successful
  • Flame had 5 domains initially for the Flame server; Flame server could add more to this list
    • Communication over SSL; Flame’s certificate was self-signed
  • Preliminary analysis: more than 50 host names and more than 15 IP addresses related to C&C messages; later raised number of C&C hosts to around 100
Variation: Domain Flux

• Instead of holding host name fixed and changing the associated IP address, change host name and keep associated IP address fixed
  • Called *domain flux*

• Advantage: host name associated with C&C server for a short period of time
  • With IP flux, finding host name identifies C&C server

• Example: Torpig
  • Compute a host name that is fixed for current week number and year; append “.com”, “.net”, “.biz” suffixes and probe for each
  • If no luck, generate name based on current day, append suffixes, probe for each
  • If no luck, go to fixed list of host names
Rabbit, Bacterium

• A program that absorbs all of some class of resources

• Example: for UNIX system, shell commands:

```bash
while true
do
    mkdir x
    chdir x
done
```

• Exhausts either disk space or file allocation table (inode) space
Logic Bombs

• A program that performs an action that violates the site security policy when some external event occurs

• Example: program that deletes company’s payroll records when one particular record is deleted
  • The “particular record” is usually that of the person writing the logic bomb
  • Idea is if (when) he or she is fired, and the payroll record deleted, the company loses *all* those records
Adware

- Trojan horse that gathers information for marketing purposes and displays advertisements
  - Often selects ads to display based on gathered information
- Believed to have originated with a company announcing it would make its software available for free, because it would pop up window advertising company
  - Benign as user had to opt in
  - Spread through distribution of program only
Types of Behavior

• *Low severity behavior*: just display ads, don’t transmit information

• *Medium severity behavior*: transmits information deemed low risk, such as location information, and may display ads based on this

• *High severity behavior*: transmits personal information, and displays ads tailored to devices, people with those characteristic
  • Typically very aggressive (annoying)
  • Sometimes called *madware*
Getting Adware On a System

• Put on a web site user visits
  • Put it in a banner enticing the user to click on it; this installs the adware
  • Page may require user to install software to view parts of web site; software contains adware
  • If page refreshes automatically, it may direct browser to run an executable
    • Usually browser notifies user via a dialog box that may require a click; on click, program runs and installs adware
  • Some browser plug-ins download, execute files automatically; there may be no indication of this
    • Called drive-by downloading
Getting Adware on a System

• Put into software that user downloads
  • Very common with mobile apps

• Problem: app asks for permission to carry out its tasks
  • Some may be unnecessary; often hard for users to minimize permissions set
  • Thus app may have access to camera, microphone, and may be able to make calls without going through dialing interface — and user does not realize this

• Example: survey of 900 Android apps
  • 323 had unnecessary permissions
Economic Motives

• Used to target ads that use is most likely to respond to
• Purveyors get money for every ad displayed or clicked on
  • Web site owners display ads on their sites
  • Developers put adware libraries in their apps
  • Others take apps, modify them to include adware, and put them on unauthorized app stores
Spyware

• Trojan horse that records information about the use of a computer for a third party
  - Usually results in compromise of confidential information like keystrokes, passwords, credit card numbers, etc.
  - Information can be stored for retrieval or sent to third party

• Put on a system the way any other malware gets onto system
Example: Pegasus

• Designed for Apple’s iPhone, attacker sends URL to victim who clicks on it, triggering attack that tries to gain control of iPhone
• First sends HTML file exploiting vulnerability in WebKit
  • Basis for Safari and other browsers
• This downloads software to gain control of iPhone
  • Software enciphered with different keys for each download
  • Includes a loader for the next stage
• Loader downloads dynamic load libraries, daemons, other software and installs Pegasus
  • If iPhone has previously been jailbroken, removes all access to the iPhone provided by the earlier break
Example: Response to Pegasus

• Apple developed patches for the vulnerabilities exploited
  • Deployed them in update to iPhone’s operating system, iOS

• Discovered when human rights activist received text messages with a suspicious link
  • Sent messages to Citizens Lab
  • Citizens Lab recognized links were associated with a manufacturer of spyware for government surveillance
  • Lookout carried out technical analysis
Ransomware

• Malware inhibiting use of computer, resources until a ransom is paid
  • Ransom is usually monetary, and must be paid through some anonymous mechanism (BitCoin is popular)

• PC CYBORG (1989) altered AUTOEXEC.BAT to count number of times system was booted; on 90th, names of all files on main drive (C:) enciphered and directories hidden
  • User told to send fee to post office box to recover the system

• CryptoLocker (2013) encrypted files and gave victim 100 hours to pay ransom; if not, encryption keys destroyed
  • Used evasive techniques to make tracking more difficult
  • Spread via email as attachments
Example Protocol

Goal: Angie wants to extort money from Xavier

• Angie generates asymmetric key pair; embeds public key in malware
  • She retains private key

• Malware infects Xavier’s system
  • Generates symmetric key and uses that to encipher target data
  • Enciphers symmetric key with public key, erases all instances of symmetric key
  • Xavier sees message saying he needs to do something for Angie (usually send money); he does so and includes the encrypted symmetric key

• Angie then deciphers encrypted symmetric key with her private key, returns it to Xavier
Phishing

• Act of impersonating legitimate entity in order to obtain information such as passwords or credit card information without authorization
  • Usually a web site associated with a business

• Usual approach: craft a web site that looks like the legitimate one
  • Send out lots of email trying to persuade people to go to that web site
  • Copy their login, password, and other information for later use

• More vicious attack: fake web site passes data on to real web site, and sends replies back to victim
  • Man-in-the-middle attack
Example

• Heidi banks at MegaBank, with URL of https://www.megabank.com
• She receives a letter saying she needs to check her account for possible fraudulent activity
• Email includes link
  • Link is visible as www.megabank.com
  • But link actually connects to https://www.megabank.crookery.com
• Attacker records name, password, then give error
  • If very clever, client is redirected to actual bank’s home page
Spearphishing

• Phishing attack tailored for particular user
• Used to attack specific (types of) users to obtain information
• Example: some employees of a major cybersecurity company received email called “2011 Recruitment Plan”
  • They opened an attacked spreadsheet
  • This exploited a vulnerability in a supporting program to install a backdoor so attackers could control system remotely
  • Attackers used this as a springboard to compromise other systems in the company’s network, and ultimately stole sensitive information
• Embarrassment, financial costs of recovery large
Defenses

• Scanning
• Distinguishing between data, instructions
• Containing
• Specifying behavior
• Limiting sharing
• Statistical analysis
Scanning Defenses

• Malware alters memory contents or disk files
• Compute manipulation detection code (MDC) to generate signature block for data, and save it
• Later, recompute MDC and compare to stored MDC
  • If different, data has changed
Example: *tripwire*

- File system scanner
- Initialization: it computes signature block for each file, saves it
  - Signature consists of file attributes, cryptographic checksums
  - System administrator selects what file attributes go into signature
- Checking file system: run *tripwire*
  - Regenerates file signatures
  - Compares them to stored file signatures and reports any differences
Assumptions

- Files do not contain malicious logic when original signature block generated
- Pozzo & Grey: implement Biba’s model on LOCUS to make assumption explicit
  - Credibility ratings assign trustworthiness numbers from 0 (untrusted) to $n$ (signed, fully trusted)
  - Subjects have risk levels
    - Subjects can execute programs with credibility ratings $\geq$ risk level
    - If credibility rating $<$ risk level, must use special command to run program
Antivirus Programs

• Look for specific “malware signatures”
  • If found, warn user and/or disinfect data

• At first, static sequences of bits, or patterns; now also includes patterns of behavior

• At first, derived manually; now usually done automatically
  • Manual derivation impractical due to number of malwares
Example: Earlybird

- System for generating worm signatures based on worm increasing network traffic between hosts, and this traffic has many common substrings.

- When a packet arrives, its contents hashed and destination port and protocol identifier appended; then check hash table (called dispersion table) to see if this content, port, and protocol have been seen.
  - If yes, increment counters for source, destination addresses; if both exceed a threshold, content may be a worm signature.
  - If no, run through a multistage filter that applies 4 different hashes and checks for those hashes in different tables; count of entry with smallest count incremented; if all 4 counters exceed a second threshold, make entry in dispersion table.

- Found several worms before antimalware vendors distributed signatures for them.
Example: Polygraph

- Assumes worm is polymorphic or metamorphic
- Generates classes of signatures, all based on substrings called *tokens*
  - *Conjunction signature*: collection of tokens, matched if all tokens appear regardless of order
  - *Token-subsequence signature*: like conjunction signature but tokens must appear in order
- Bayes signature associates a score with each token, and threshold with signature
  - If probability of the payload as computed from token scores exceeds a threshold, match occurs
- Experimentally, Bayes signatures work well when there is little non-malicious traffic, but if that’s more than 80% of network traffic, no worms identified
Behavioral Analysis

• Run suspected malware in a confined area, typically a sandbox, that simulates environment it will execute in
• Monitor it for some time period
• Look for anything considered “bad”; if it occurs, flag this as malware
Example: Panorama

- Loads suspected malware into a Windows system, which is itself loaded into Panorama and run
  - Files belonging to suspect program are marked
- Test engine sends “sensitive” information to trusted application on Windows
- Taint engine monitors flow of information around system
  - So when suspect program and trusted application run, behavior of information can be recorded in taint graphs
- Malware detection engine analyzes taint graphs for suspicious behavior
- Experimentally, Panorama tested against 42 malware samples, 56 benign samples; no false negatives, 3 false positives
Evasion

Malware can try to ensure malicious activity not triggered in analysis environment
• Wait for a (relatively) long time
• Wait for a particular input or external event
• Identify malware is running in constrained environment
  • Check various descriptor tables
  • Run sequence of instructions that generate an exception if not in a virtual machine (in 2010, estimates found 2.13% of malware samples did this)
Data vs. Instructions

• Malicious logic is both
  • Virus: written to program (data); then executes (instructions)

• Approach: treat “data” and “instructions” as separate types, and require certifying authority to approve conversion
  • Key are assumption that certifying authority will not make mistakes and assumption that tools, supporting infrastructure used in certifying process are not corrupt
Example: Duff and UNIX

• Observation: users with execute permission usually have read permission, too
  • So files with “execute” permission have type “executable”; those without it, type “data”
  • Executable files can be altered, but type immediately changed to “data”
    • Implemented by turning off execute permission
    • Certifier can change them back
      • So virus can spread only if run as certifier
Containment

• Basis: a user (unknowingly) executes malicious logic, which then executes with all that user’s privileges
  • Limiting accessibility of objects should limit spread of malicious logic and effects of its actions
• Approach draws on mechanisms for confinement
Information Flow Metrics

• Idea: limit distance a virus can spread

• Flow distance metric $fd(x)$:
  • Initially, all information $x$ has $fd(x) = 0$
  • Whenever information $y$ is shared, $fd(y)$ increases by 1
  • Whenever $y_1, ..., y_n$ used as input to compute $z$, $fd(z) = \max(fd(y_1), ..., fd(y_n))$

• Information $x$ accessible if and only if for some parameter $V$, $fd(x) < V$
Example

• Anne: \( V_A = 3 \); Bill, Cathy: \( V_B = V_C = 2 \)
• Anne creates program P containing virus
• Bill executes P
  • P tries to write to Bill’s program Q; works, as \( fd(P) = 0 \), so \( fd(Q) = 1 < V_B \)
• Cathy executes Q
  • Q tries to write to Cathy’s program R; fails, as \( fd(Q) = 1 \), so \( fd(R) \) would be 2
• Problem: if Cathy executes P, R can be infected
  • So, does not stop spread; slows it down greatly, though
Implementation Issues

• Metric associated with *information*, not *objects*
  • You can tag files with metric, but how do you tag the information in them?
  • This inhibits sharing

• To stop spread, make $V = 0$
  • Disallows sharing
  • Also defeats purpose of multi-user systems, and is crippling in scientific and developmental environments
    • Sharing is critical here
Reducing Protection Domain

- Application of principle of least privilege
- Basic idea: remove rights from process so it can only perform its function
  - Warning: if that function requires it to write, it can write anything
  - But you can make sure it writes only to those objects you expect
Example: ACLs and C-Lists

• $s_1$ owns file $f_1$ and $s_2$ owns program $p_2$ and file $f_3$
  • Suppose $s_1$ can read, write $f_1$, execute $p_2$, write $f_3$
  • Suppose $s_2$ can read, write, execute $p_2$ and read $f_3$

• $s_1$ needs to run $p_2$
  • $p_2$ contains Trojan horse
    • So $s_1$ needs to ensure $p_{12}$ (subject created when $s_1$ runs $p_2$) can’t write to $f_3$
  • Ideally, $p_{12}$ has capability $\{(s_1, p_2, x)\}$ so no problem
    • In practice, $p_{12}$ inherits $s_1$’s rights, so it can write to $f_3$—bad! Note $s_1$ does not own $f_3$, so can’t change its rights over $f_3$

• Solution: restrict access by others
Authorization Denial Subset

• Defined for each user $s_i$
• Contains ACL entries that others cannot exercise over objects $s_i$ owns
• In example: $R(s_2) = \{ (s_1, f_3, w) \}$
  • So when $p_{12}$ tries to write to $f_3$, as $p_{12}$ owned by $s_1$ and $f_3$ owned by $s_2$, system denies access
• Problem: how do you decide what should be in your authorization denial subset?
Karger’s Scheme

• Base it on attribute of subject, object
• Interpose a knowledge-based subsystem to determine if requested file access reasonable
  • Sits between kernel and application
• Example: UNIX C compiler
  • Reads from files with names ending in “.c”, “.h”
  • Writes to files with names beginning with “/tmp/ctm” and assembly files with names ending in “.s”
• When subsystem invoked, if C compiler tries to write to “.c” file, request rejected
Lai and Gray

- Implemented modified version of Karger’s scheme on UNIX system
  - Allow programs to access (read or write) files named on command line
  - Prevent access to other files

- Two types of processes
  - Trusted: no access checks or restrictions
  - Untrusted: valid access list (VAL) controls access and is initialized to command line arguments plus any temporary files that the process creates
File Access Requests

1. If file on VAL, use effective UID/GID of process to determine if access allowed
2. If access requested is read and file is world-readable, allow access
3. If process creating file, effective UID/GID controls allowing creation
   • Enter file into VAL as NNA (new non-argument); set permissions so no other process can read file
4. Ask user. If yes, effective UID/GID controls allowing access; if no, deny access
Example

• Assembler invoked from compiler
  
  as x.s /tmp/ctm2345

  and creates temp file /tmp/as1111
  
  • VAL is

  x.s /tmp/ctm2345 /tmp/as1111

• Now Trojan horse tries to copy x.s to another file
  
  • On creation, file inaccessible to all except creating user so attacker cannot read it (rule 3)
  
  • If file created already and assembler tries to write to it, user is asked (rule 4), thereby revealing Trojan horse
Trusted Programs

• No VALs applied here
  • UNIX command interpreters: csh, sh
  • Program that spawn them: getty, login
  • Programs that access file system recursively: ar, chgrp, chown, diff, du, dump, find, ls, restore, tar
  • Programs that often access files not in argument list: binmail, cpp, dbx, mail, make, script, vi
  • Various network daemons: fingerd, ftpd, sendmail, talkd, telnetd, tftpd