Politics

New vigilante malware protects your computer from the bad guys

By Patrick Howell O'Neill   Oct 1, 2015, 9:00am CT

The Daily Dot

TOPICS ▾   COMMUNITIES ▾

THE KERNEL

f   ⟩   g+   ⬡   t   ✉   🔗 http://bit.ly/1RhT5M0

SUBSCRIBE ▾   🔍 Daily Dot Politics
                        f Like   ⟩ Follow

Call it vigilanteware: Malware in a superhero cape.

Instead of stealing your credit card or doing anything malicious at all, a highly virulent piece of malware, recently uncovered by security researchers at Symantec, actually defends your machine against hackers and even remedies other malware infections.

Now, the researchers are wondering if they've discovered an "altruistic" infection from a vigilante hacker with a flair for the dramatic.

The so-called Linux.Wifatch malware, first discovered last year, infects over 10,000 machines, largely in China and Brazil. Although it initially looked like just another botnet, Symantec researchers found Wifatch was "more sophisticated" than a normal infection.

Symantec found that Wifatch removed well-known families of malware that usually target routers, and it even tells users to change their password and upgrade firmware, another way to defend against malicious hackers.

Wifatch's creator seems to have wanted her creation to be discovered.

The Wifatch code isn't obfuscated and contains debug messages for easier analysis. The source code also holds a signature honoring software freedom activist Richard Stallman:

> To any NSA and FBI agents reading this: Please consider whether defending the US Constitution against all enemies, foreign or domestic, requires you to follow Snowden's example.
>
> EOF

What about the hacks Wifatch couldn't solve outright but still wanted to defend against?

Symantec researchers found that Wifatch forces Dahua DVR CCTV systems to automatically reboot every week, a strange choice that may have interesting intentions behind it. They speculate that the reboot could kill any other running malware, cleaning the TV up for another week.

Just as real-world superheroes might butt up against the law, virus vigilantism has quite a few major potential pitfalls as well. The Symantec researchers are quick to point out that Wifatch is illegal and utilizes the same backdoors that more malicious hackers enter through.

As far as the researchers have found after months of investigation, however, Wifatch's creator has yet to do anything malicious. In fact, using cryptographic signatures, the malware's creator has even programmed the virus to guard against other hackers surreptitiously using the same network or backdoors.

Illustration by Max Fleishman

Daily Dot Politics

f Like   🐦 Follow

FROM THE WEB

Taiwan Billionaires Shocked &

By **Millionaire's Blueprint**

Become a Millionaire Over Night in
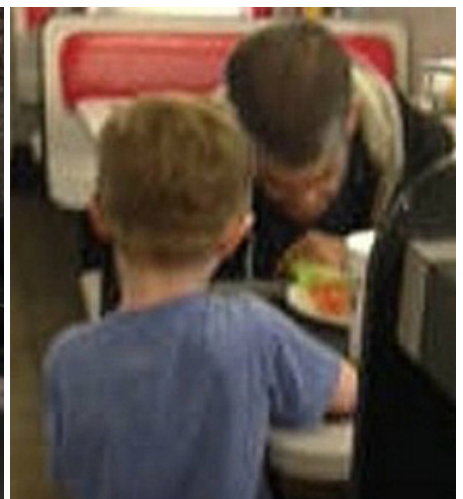
By **Millionaire Blueprint**

How To Get Rich In Taipei? You Will Be
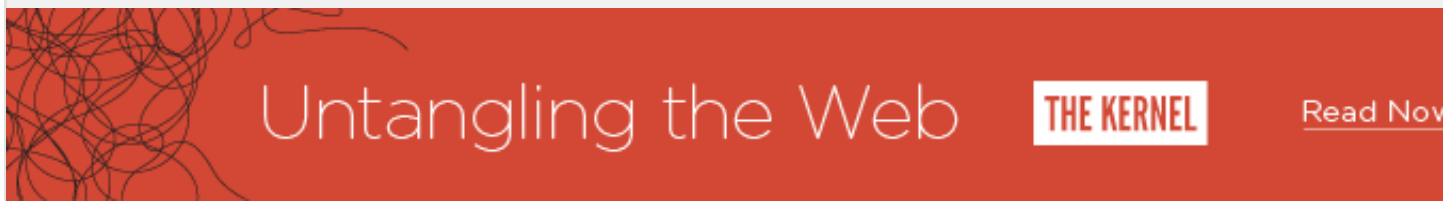
By **Millionaire's Blueprint**

Scientists discover glow-

Hugh Jackman plays a

5-year-old makes entire

TOP STORIES

The Internet's most recognizable Joker tells us why he's about to don his last smile

By Aja Romano — October 01, 2015

The global struggle to prevent cyberwar

What is cyberwar? Nobody knows— and that's a dangerous problem.

By Eric Geller — September 30, 2015

Oculus Rift inventor Palmer Luckey says virtual reality was never really about gaming

By Dennis Scimeca — September 29, 2015

TECH

The surprising porn habits of Android and iOS users

Do not ask to borrow their phone.

By AJ Dellinger — October 01, 2015

We now know roughly how much Oculus Rift will cost

By Dennis Scimeca — October 01, 2015

How to track Hurricane Joaquin's path this weekend

By Amrita Khalid — October 01, 2015

Samsung may have rigged its TVs to fool energy-consumption

By AJ Dellinger — October 01, 2015

Teens are wary of social media romance—and they

By Selena Larson — October 01, 2015

How to back up your old iPhone and migrate to a new one

By Elizabeth Harper — October 01, 2015

This guy bought Google.com for $12 and owned it for one

By Mike Wehner — October 01, 2015

POLITICS

Arson ruled cause of California Planned Parenthood

By Dell Cameron — October 01, 2015

Ferguson activist Clifton Kinnie talks race in America

By Deron Dalton — October 01, 2015

We made you some National Cybersecurity Awareness Month

By Patrick Howell O'Neill — October 01, 2015

Umpqua Community College shooting leaves multiple

By Andrew Couts — October 01, 2015

Here are the 22 states where police can trick your phone to

October 01, 2015

Government IT professionals say data-sharing won't stop

By Dell Cameron — October 01, 2015

Why did 4chan try to frame one of its own for the Oregon massacre?

A 4chan meme becomes a national story on a tragic day.

By Fernando Alfonso III — October 02, 2015