Defining the Undefined:
What is Tier Zero? – Part 4

Martin Christensen, Lee Chagolla-Christensen, Jonas Bülow Knudsen

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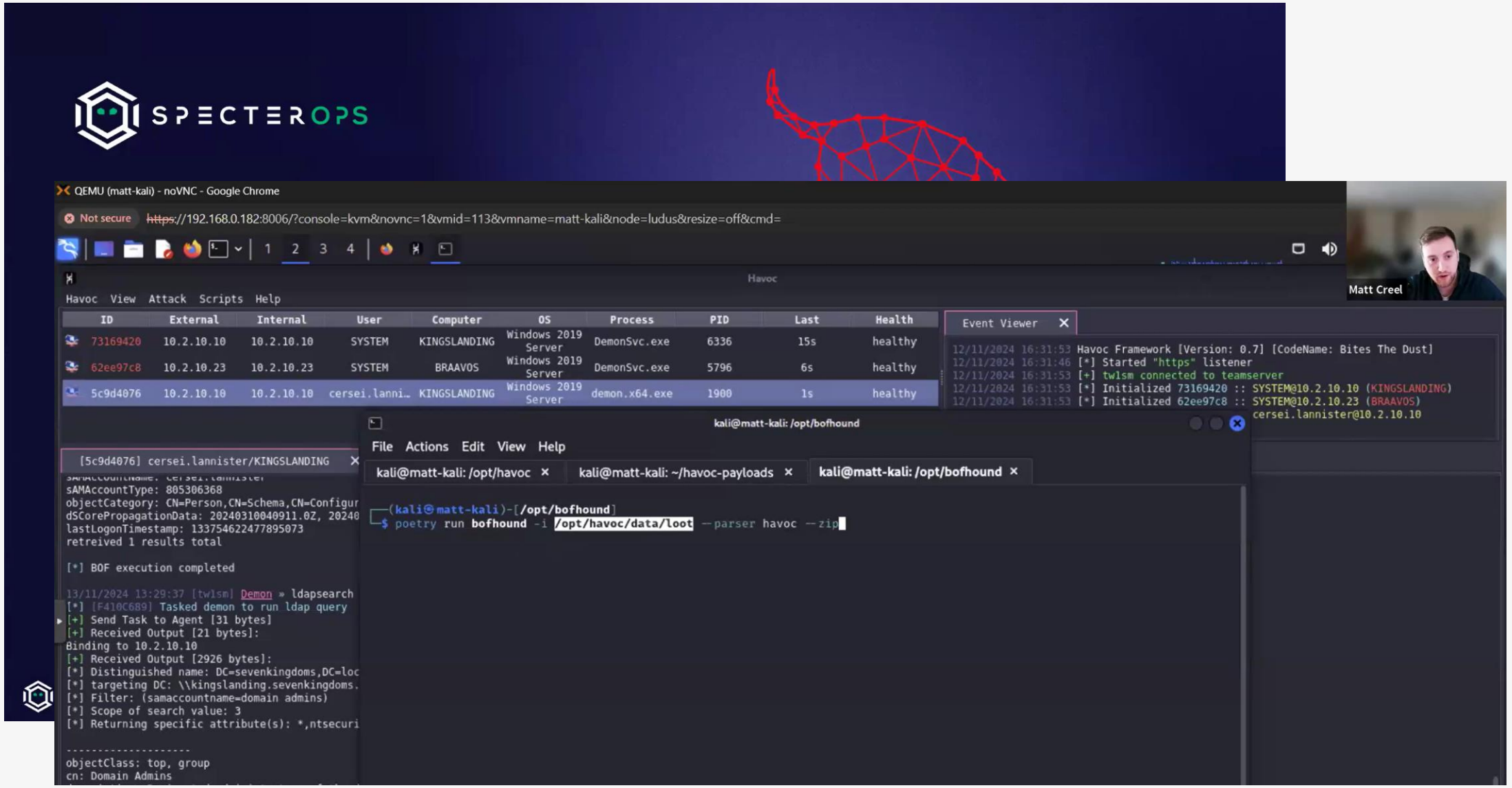


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What is Tier Zero? – Part 4

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Who are we?

Martin
Sohn Christensen

Technical Account Manager

Lee
Chagolla-Christensen

Security Researcher

Jonas
Bülow Knudsen

Product Architect

Agenda

- Recap
- Community contributions
- Isolating Tier Zero - Insights from working with BloodHound Enterprise customers
- Microsoft Exchange on-prem
- Active Directory Certificate Services (ADCS)

Recap

Recap – Part 1, 2, and 3

- Part 1:
  - Our definition of Tier Zero:
    Tier Zero is a set of assets in control of enterprise identities and their security dependencies
    - *Control: A relationship that can contribute to compromising the controlled asset or impact its operability*
    - *Security dependency: A component whose security impacts another component's security*
  - Microsoft's original list of Tier Zero AD groups
  - Tier Zero Table: https://github.com/SpecterOps/TierZeroTable
- Part 2: More on-prem AD objects
- Part 3: Entra ID admin roles

Community contributions

- DnsAdmins
  - Controls DNS – relay attacks and disruption
  - Contributors: kberkheiser and Adam Przybyszewski (sludgework)
- Performance Log Users (and Distributed COM Users)
  - Permissions to activate DCOM on DCs
  - Remote compromise users logged in on DCs through a coerce + NTLM relay attack
    - https://decoder.cloud/2024/04/24/hello-im-your-domain-admin-and-i-want-to-authenticate-against-you/
  - Contributor: Andrea Pierini (decoder)

Isolating Tier Zero

Insights from working with BloodHound Enterprise customers

Tiering at different scales

- Tiering is for everyone - small to very large
  - Woodside, leading Australian natural gas producer, ~5 000 employees
  - HEMA, leading Dutch retailer, ~17 000 employees
  - Global top-5 car company

- Technical Account Manager = BloodHound expertise and tiering guidance

BloodHound Enterprise case studies: https://specterops.io/spec-resources/#case-studies

Challenges

- Stakeholder Investment
- Classify Tier Zero
- Identify Violations
- Quantify Risk & Know Your Unknowns
- Usable Tiering & Continuous Audit

Stakeholder Investment

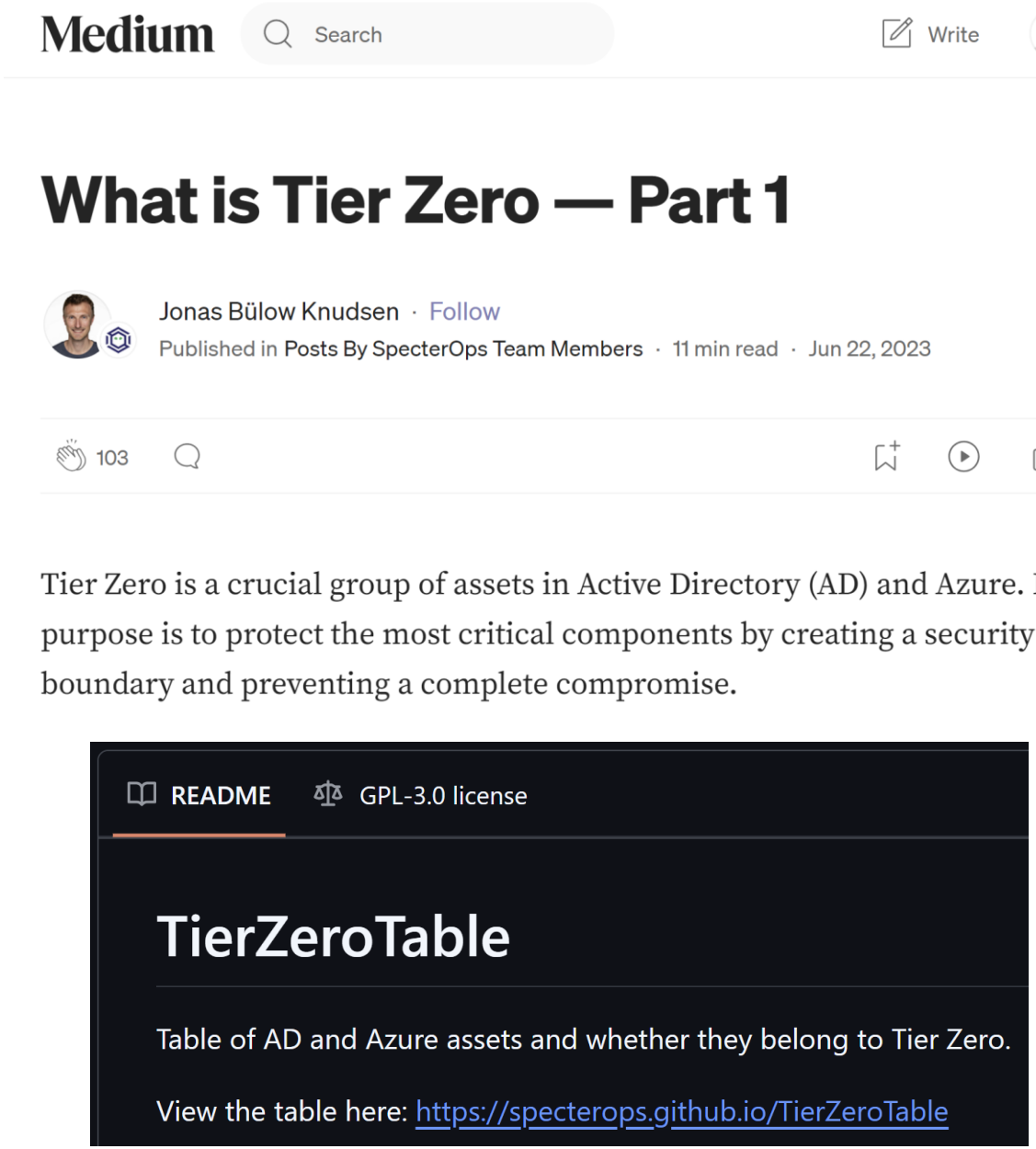
- Tiering = significant effort (design, implement, operationalize, sustain)

- Security organizations must “think in graphs”
  - Top-level support & make tiering a security policy
  - Security and Infrastructure must collaborate

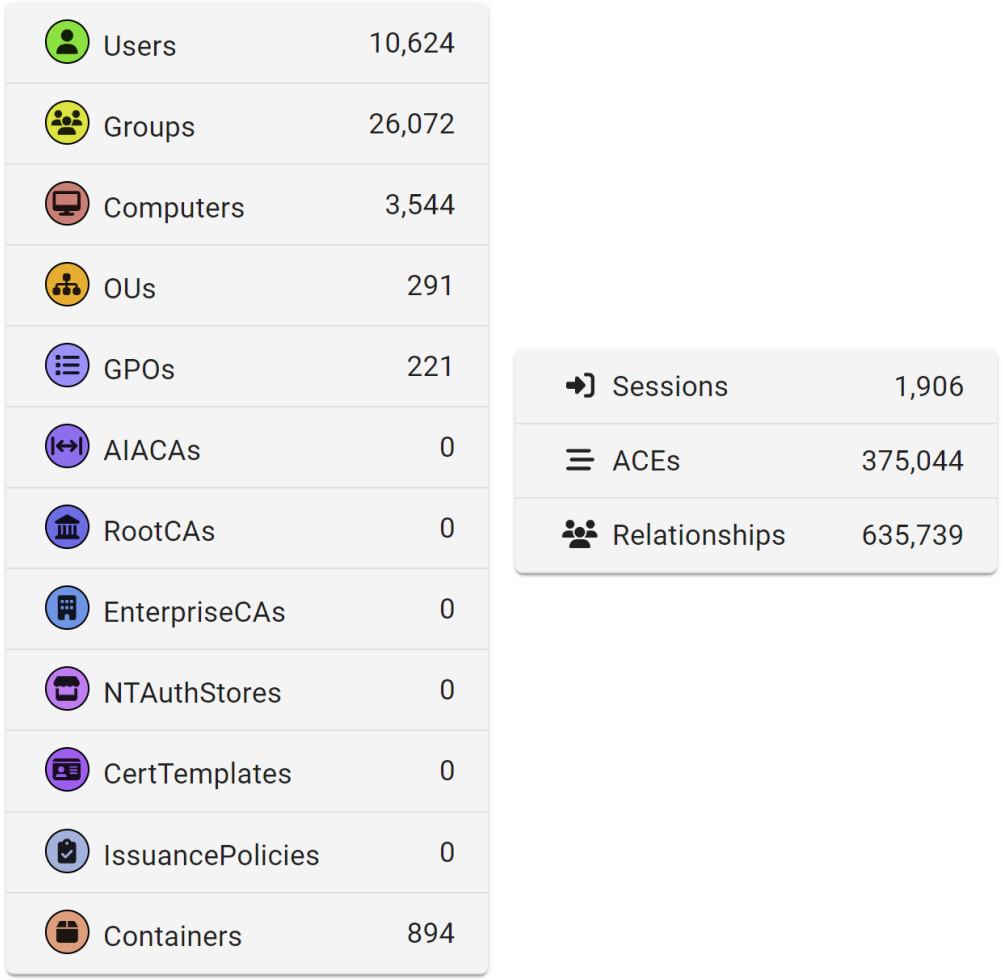
- Sell the concept of tiering
  - What does every pentest reveal?
  - Assess your Tier Zero attack paths – at least just implement Tier Zero

Classify Tier Zero

- We gave you the definition, now you classify YOUR Tier Zero
  - BloodHound does a lot for you: Groups, GPOs, OUs, etc.
- Audit Tier Zero Memberships
  - *“Is that Tier Zero service account following the principle of least privilege?”*

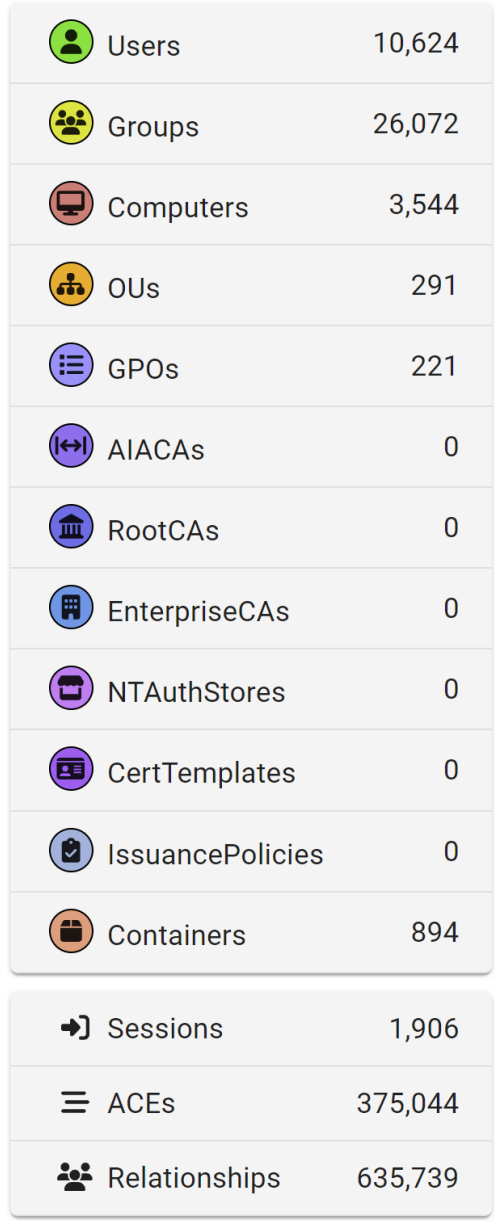


Identify Violations



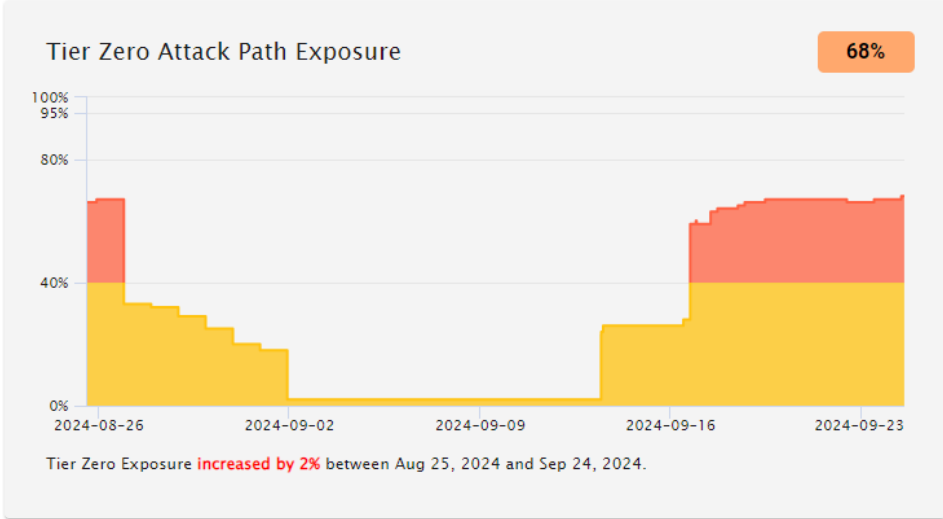
Identify Violations

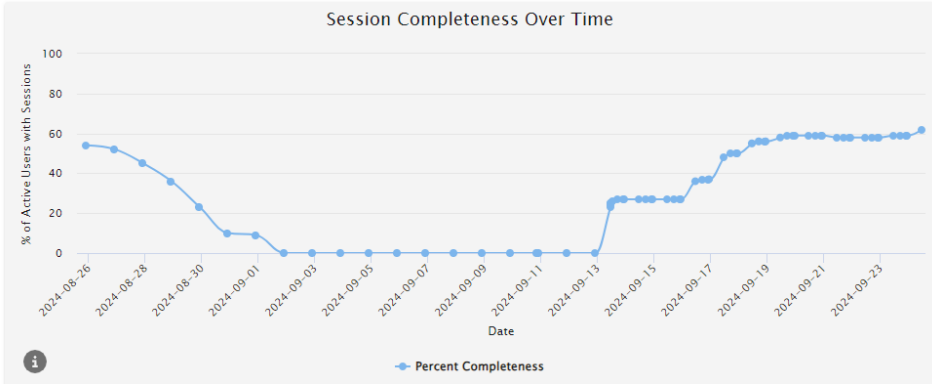
- *“Which of our 635 739 relationships are tiering violations?”*
- All onboarded customers have violations
- Attack Path Management must be a strategic approach
- The graph (i.e., BloodHound) can solve the problem



Quantify Risk & Knowing Your Unknowns

- Increase Graph Visibility = Increase Known Risk
- Ensure collection of all data types
  - Logon Sessions, Local Group Memberships, User Rights Assignments, DC Registry, CA Registry
- Did you miss anything?
  - Where are the DC backups?
  - Which key vaults store Tier Zero credentials?





Usable Tiering & Continuous Audit

- *“Security at the expense of usability, comes at the expense of security”*
  - Example: Logon restrictions in place; admin created an exception and logged in at a critical point…

Continuous Audit

Usability expense = Security expense

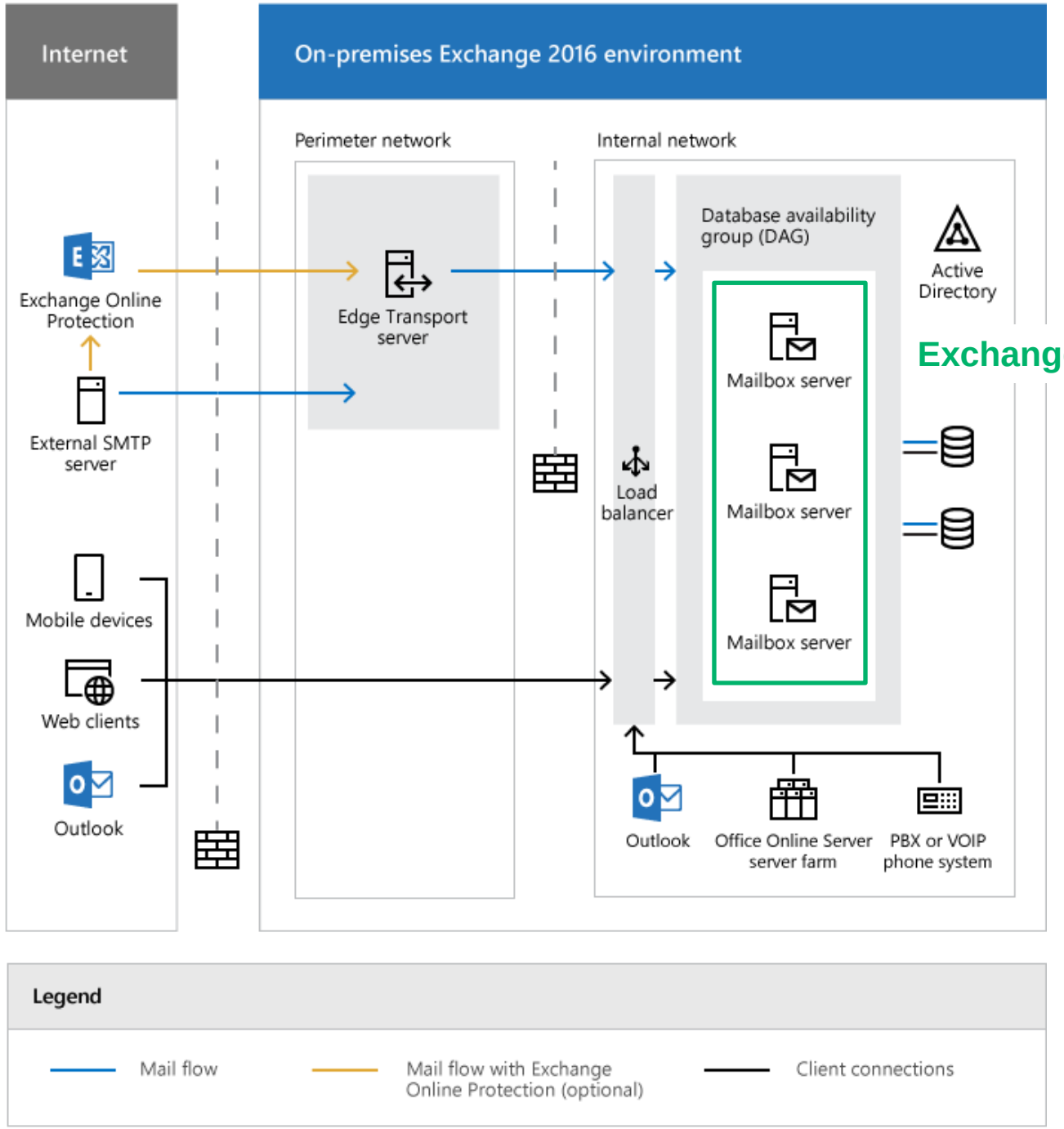
- Industry changes, security now has more usability… but also new risks
  - Example: PAM rotates passwords.. but now PAM is Tier Zero and added complexity

- Risk Management Approach
  - Example: Accept clean source violation (no PAW) and reduce risk with MFA – risk of screen capture, keylogging, session hijack, MFA bypass, …

Microsoft Exchange on-prem

Microsoft Exchange on-prem

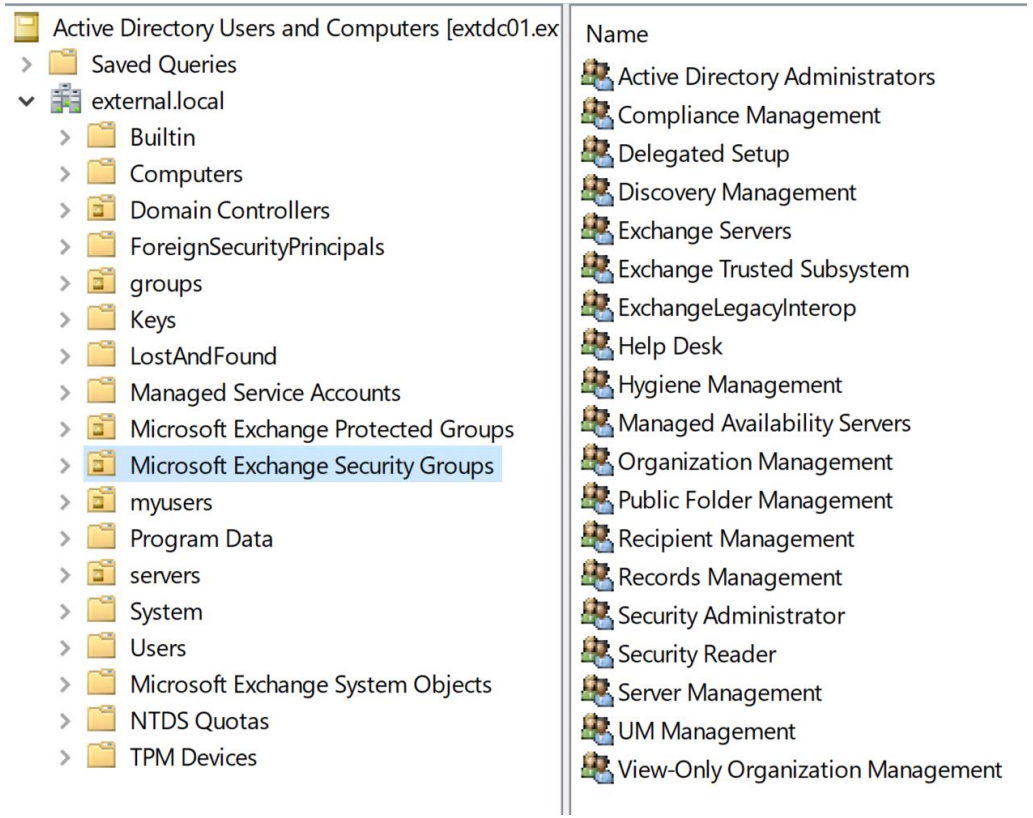
- On-prem (or hybrid) solution for communication
  - Email, calendar, contacts, and tasks
- Should not be a Tier Zero security dependency
- .. but has it control over Tier Zero?
- We need to understand:
  - What are the Exchange components
  - Do the components have Tier Zero control



Exchange servers

Microsoft Exchange on-prem components

- Components (we care about)
  - Exchange servers (mailbox servers)
  - AD groups
- What permissions do the components have in AD?



Microsoft Exchange on-prem components

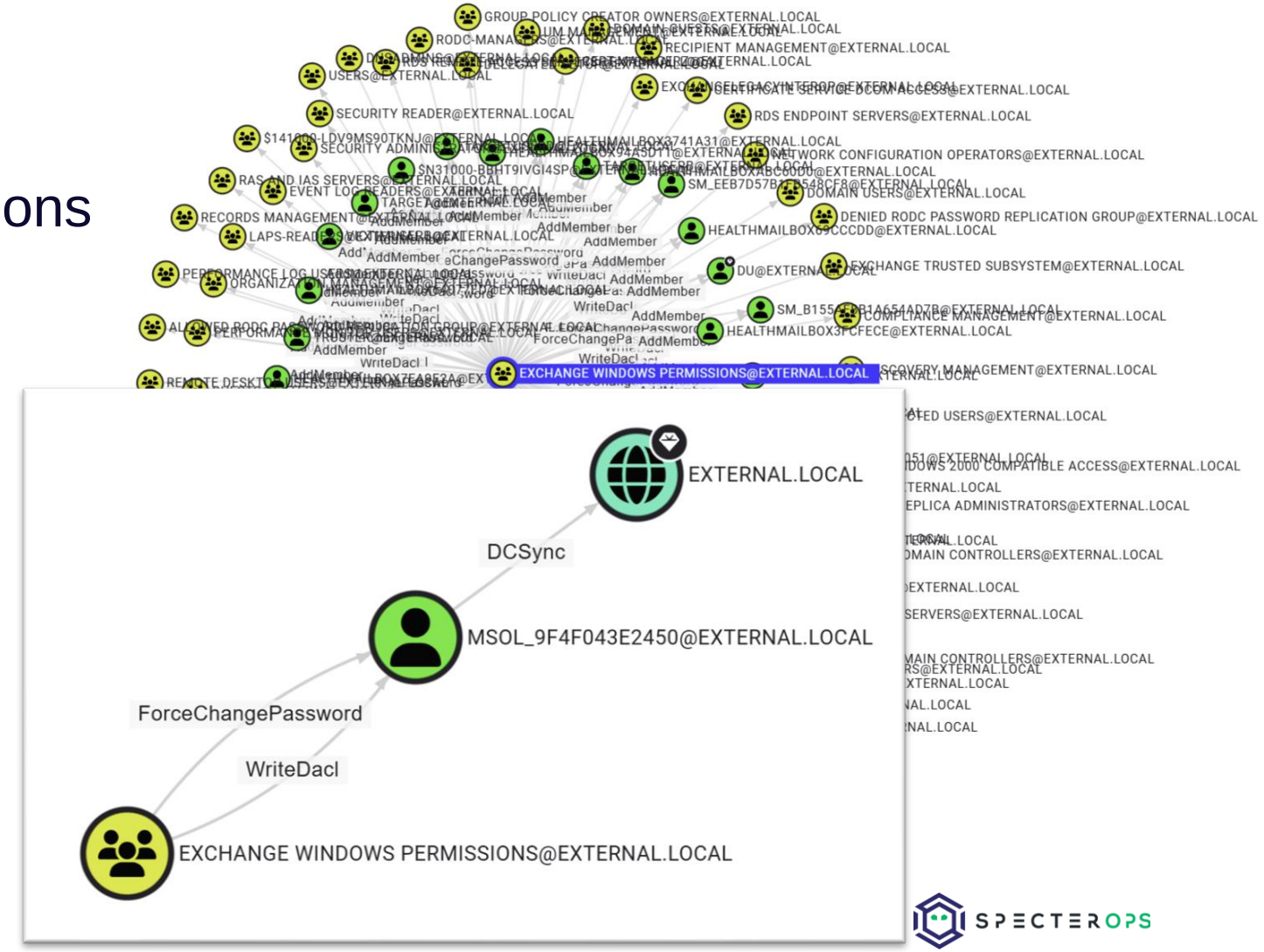
- What permissions do the components have in AD?

- Depends on the Exchange permission model:
  1. Shared permission model (default)
  2. Role-Based Access Control (RBAC) split permissions model
  3. AD split permissions model

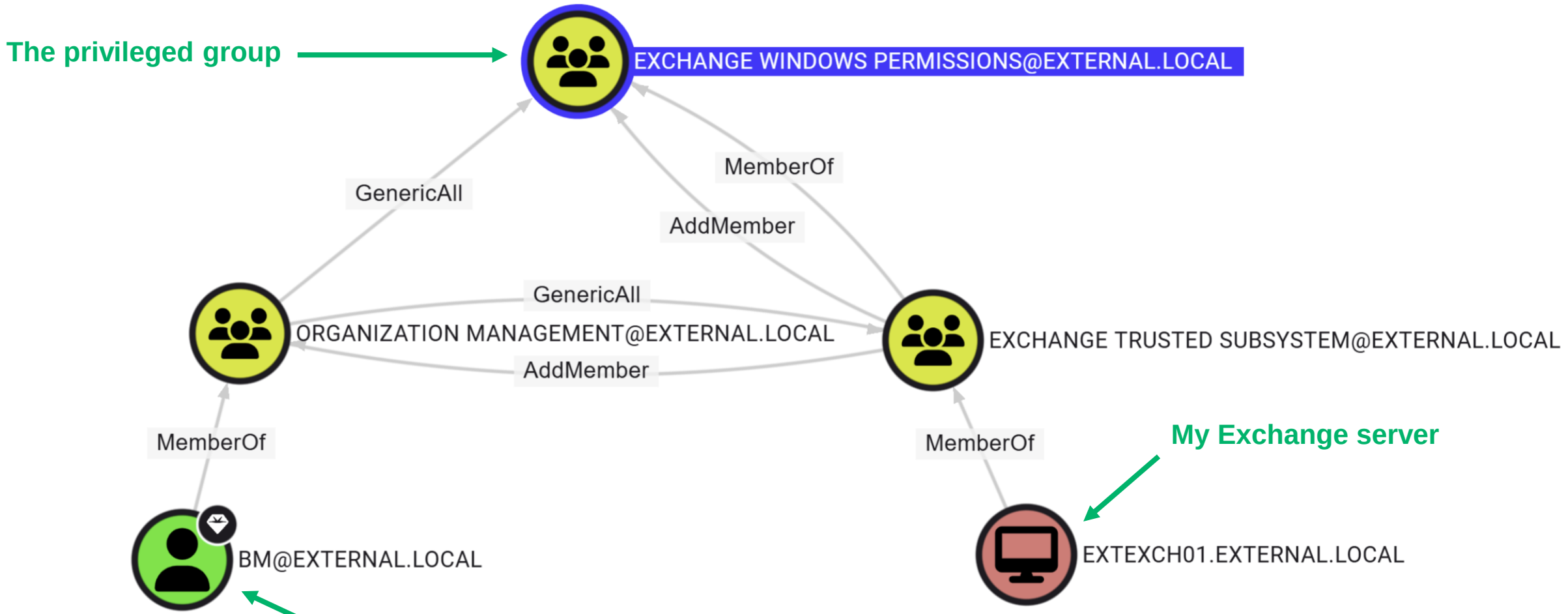
- Approach: Deploy each model and audit permissions

Shared permission model (default)

- BloodHound analysis
- Exchange Windows Permissions (group) has outbound control
- ACEs on domain object:
  - Users: ForceChangePassword, WriteDacl
  - Groups: AddMember
- Who controls this group?



Shared permission model (default)



Shared permission model (default)

- Components with Tier Zero control:
  - Exchange Windows Permissions (group)
- Indirect controllers:
  - Organization Management (group)
  - Exchange Trusted Subsystem (group)
  - Exchange servers
  - Exchange admins
- Tier Zero control removable: Disable ACL inheritance from domain on Tier Zero objects

Shared model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

Exchange permission models

Shared model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

RBAC split model

Tier Zero security dependency: ?

Tier Zero control: ?

Tier Zero control removable: ?

AD split model

Tier Zero security dependency: ?

Tier Zero control: ?

Tier Zero control removable: ?

RBAC split permissions model

- Microsoft recommended model
- Better options for delegating limited control in Exchange RBAC
- AD permissions analysis: Same as shared model!
- Split permissions in Exchange RBAC (not in AD!)

Exchange permission models

Shared model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

RBAC split model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

AD split model

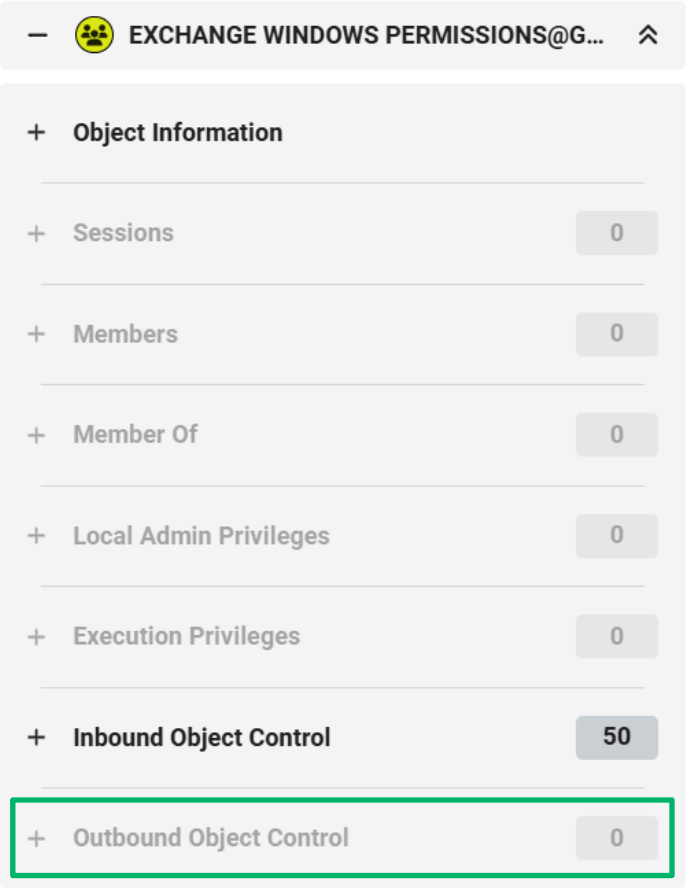
Tier Zero security dependency: ?

Tier Zero control: ?

Tier Zero control removable: ?

AD split permissions model

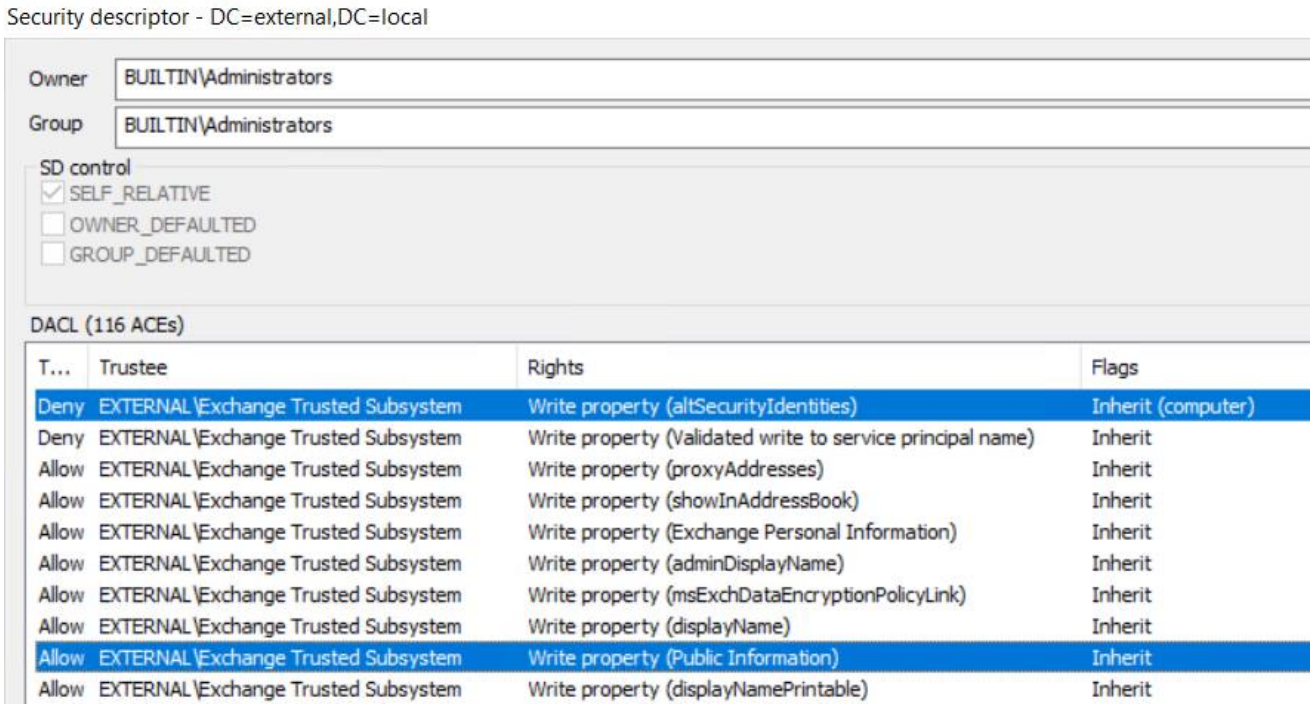
- Exchange Windows Permissions edges: Gone!
- Exchange now has limited write access in AD
- Admin challenge:
  Grant the necessary permissions in AD



https://www.teal-consulting.de/en/2023/05/15/exchange-split-permission/

AD split permissions model

- BloodHound does not capture everything
- Exchange Trusted Subsystem (group) has Write Public-Information on users
  - ACE on domain object
  - Includes Alt-Security-Identities attribute
  - Attack: ESC14 Scenario A



Exchange permission models

Shared model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

RBAC split model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

AD split model

Tier Zero security dependency: ✗

Tier Zero control: ✓

Tier Zero control removable: ✓

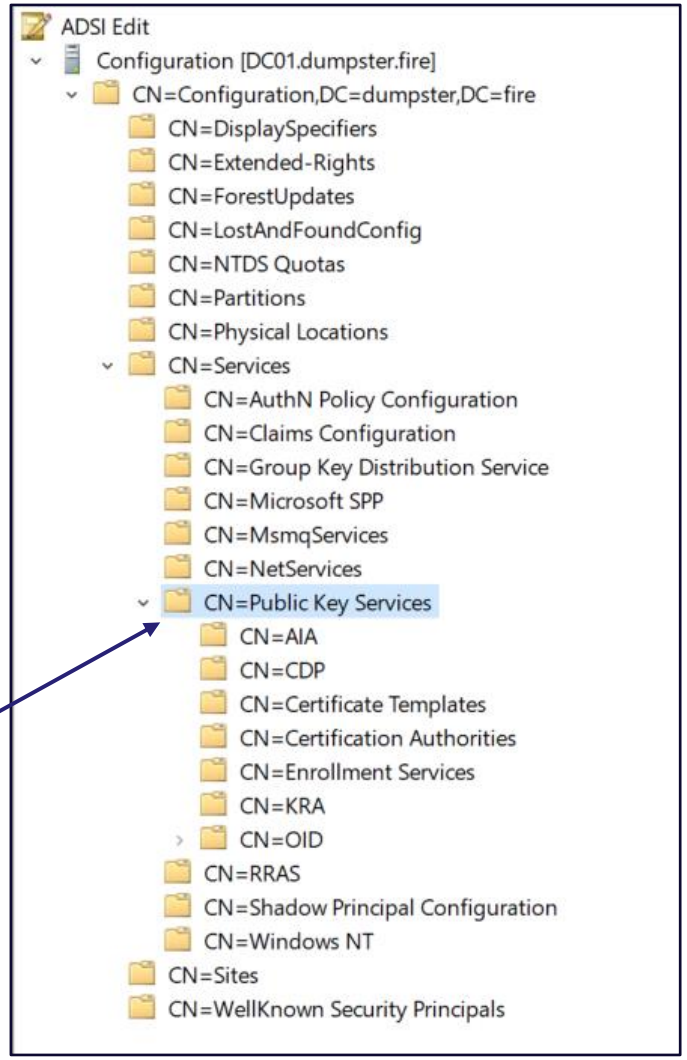
Microsoft Exchange on-prem - Summary

- Exchange components with Tier Zero control:
  - Exchange Windows Permissions – direct (except in AD split model)
  - Exchange Trusted Subsystem – direct
  - Organization Management – indirect
  - Exchange servers – indirect
  - Exchange admins – indirect
- Are the above components Tier Zero?
  - Yes, unless all Tier Zero users and groups are protected against ACL inheritance from the domain
- Microsoft's take: Exchange is typically Tier Zero

Active Directory Certificate Services

Active Directory Certificate Services (ADCS)

- Microsoft's Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) solution for Windows environments
- Issues and manages digital certificates
  - Example uses include SSL/TLS certificates, email digital signatures, code signing, and **authentication**
- Largely configured inside of Active Directory
  - See the Public Key Services container
- Old!!! First parts released in Windows Server 2000

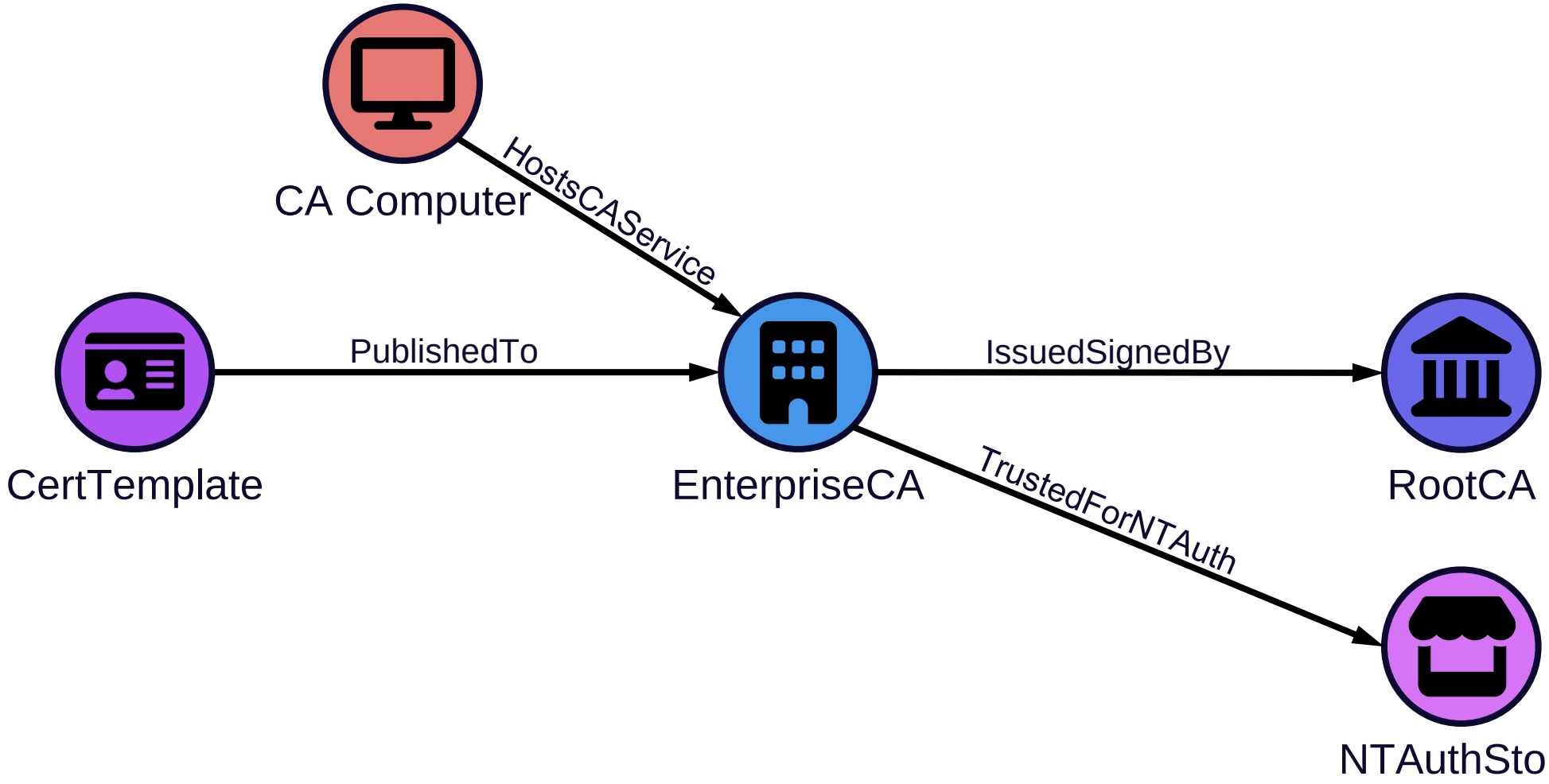


Active Directory Certificate Services (ADCS)

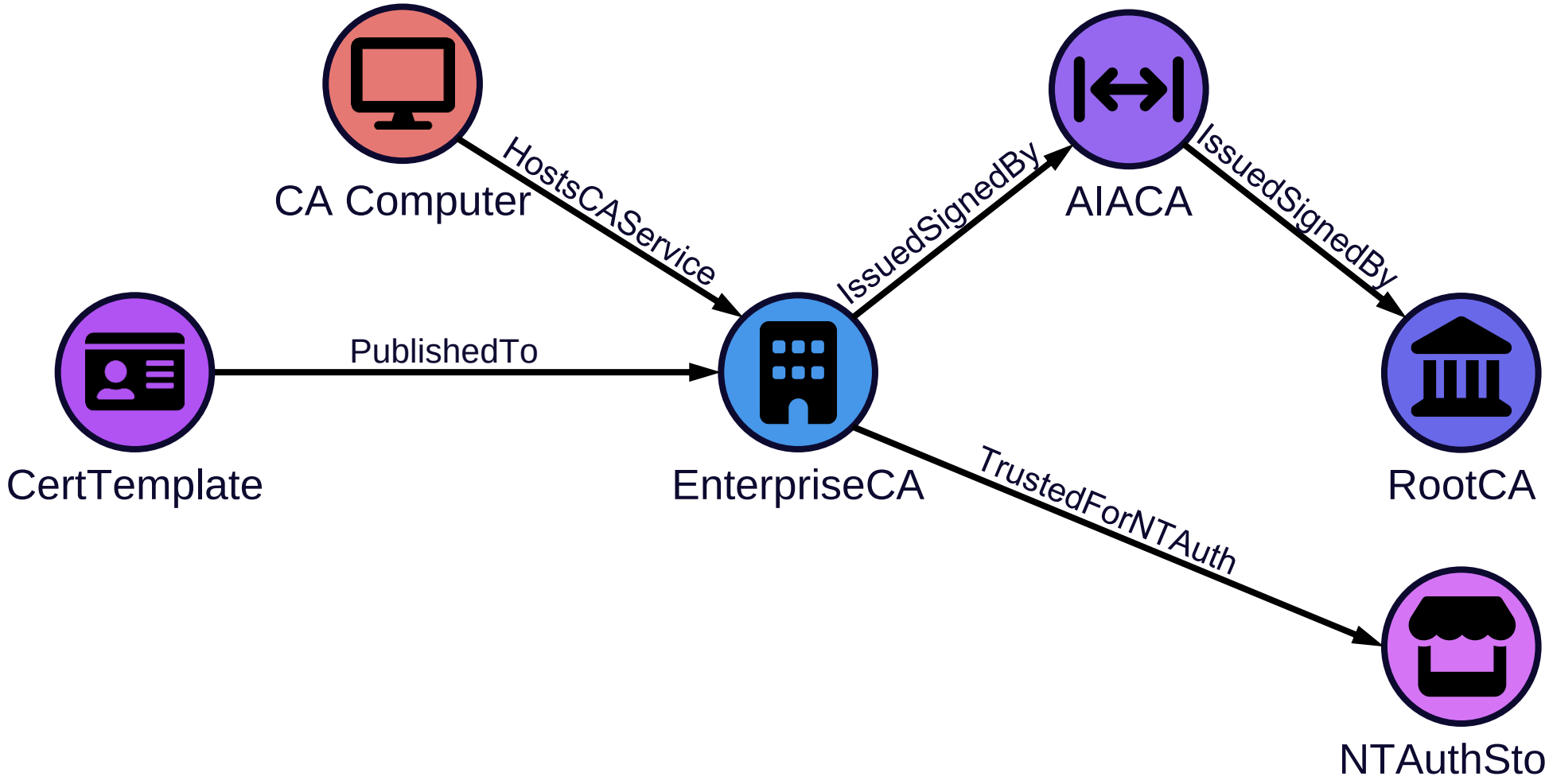
- 2021: Certified Pre-Owned ADCS whitepaper
  - Eight domain escalation techniques (ESC1 - ESC8)
  - AD CS persistence techniques
  - Detection guidance

- Since then
  - ***MANY*** full forest compromises on our assessments (and by threat actors 😳)
  - More escalation techniques (ESC9 - ESC15)
  - Several CVEs and resulting changes in AD
  - Limited security improvements in ADCS itself

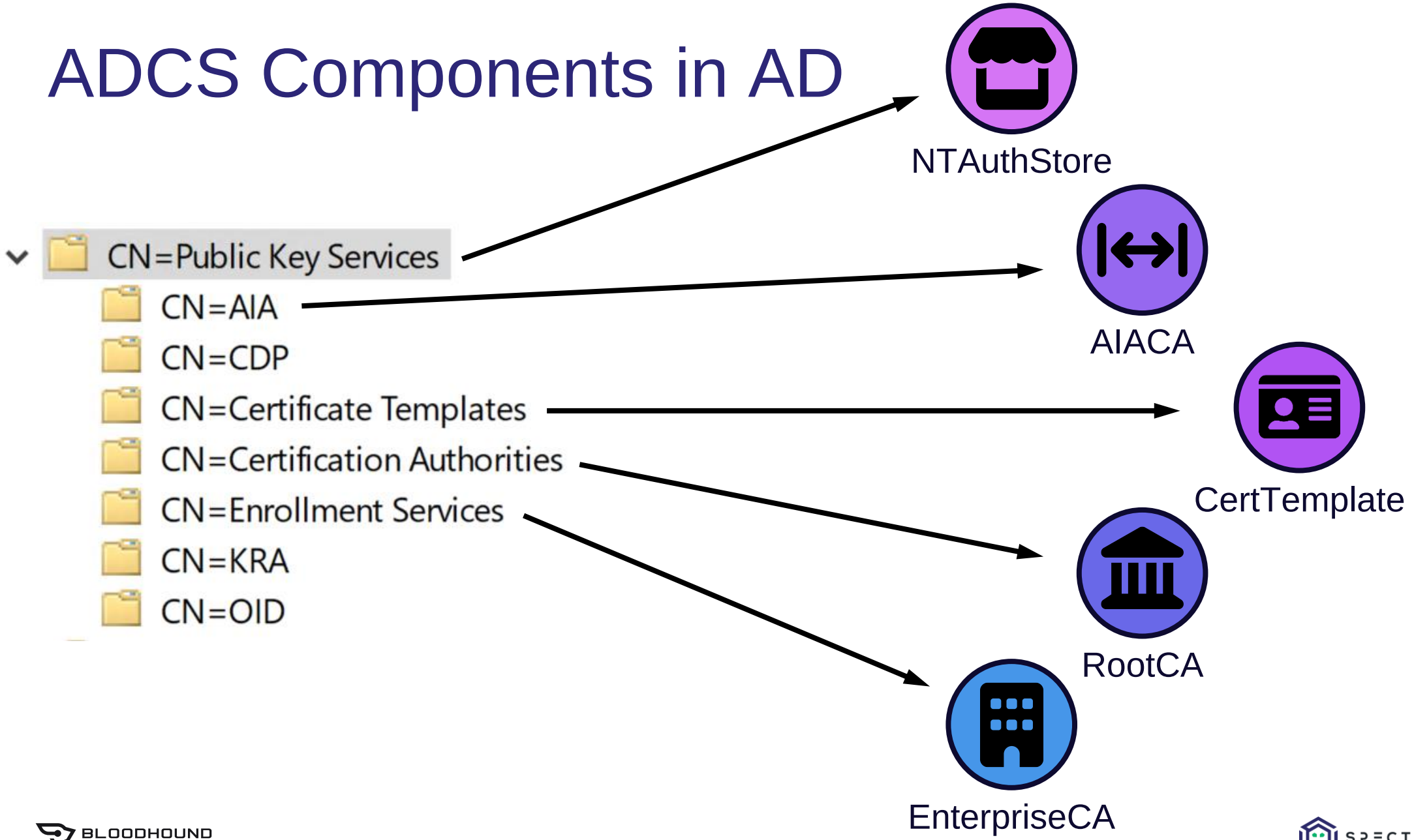
ADCS Components



ADCS Components



ADCS Components in AD



ESC1 Cert Template

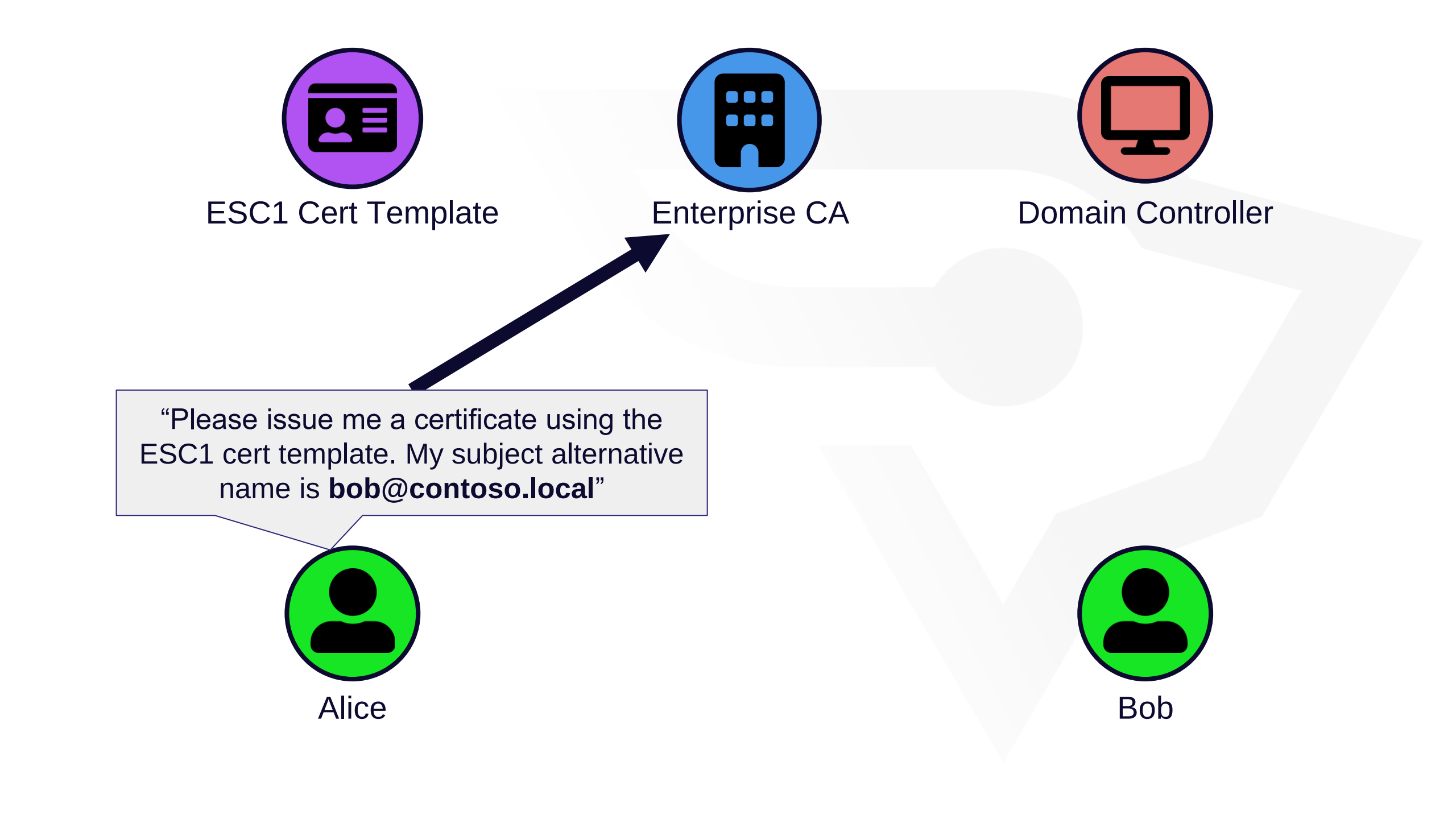
Enterprise CA

Domain Controller

ADCS Abuse Example: ESC1

Alice

Bob

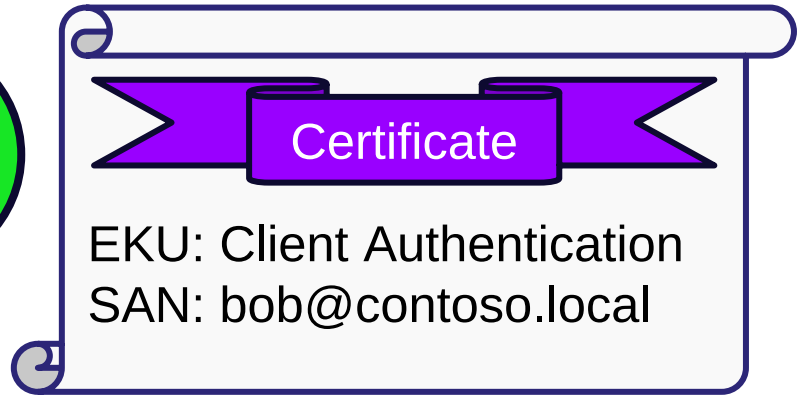

ESC1 Cert Template
Enterprise CA
Domain Controller
“Please issue me a certificate using the ESC1 cert template. My subject alternative name is **bob@contoso.local**”
Alice
Bob

ESC1 Cert Template

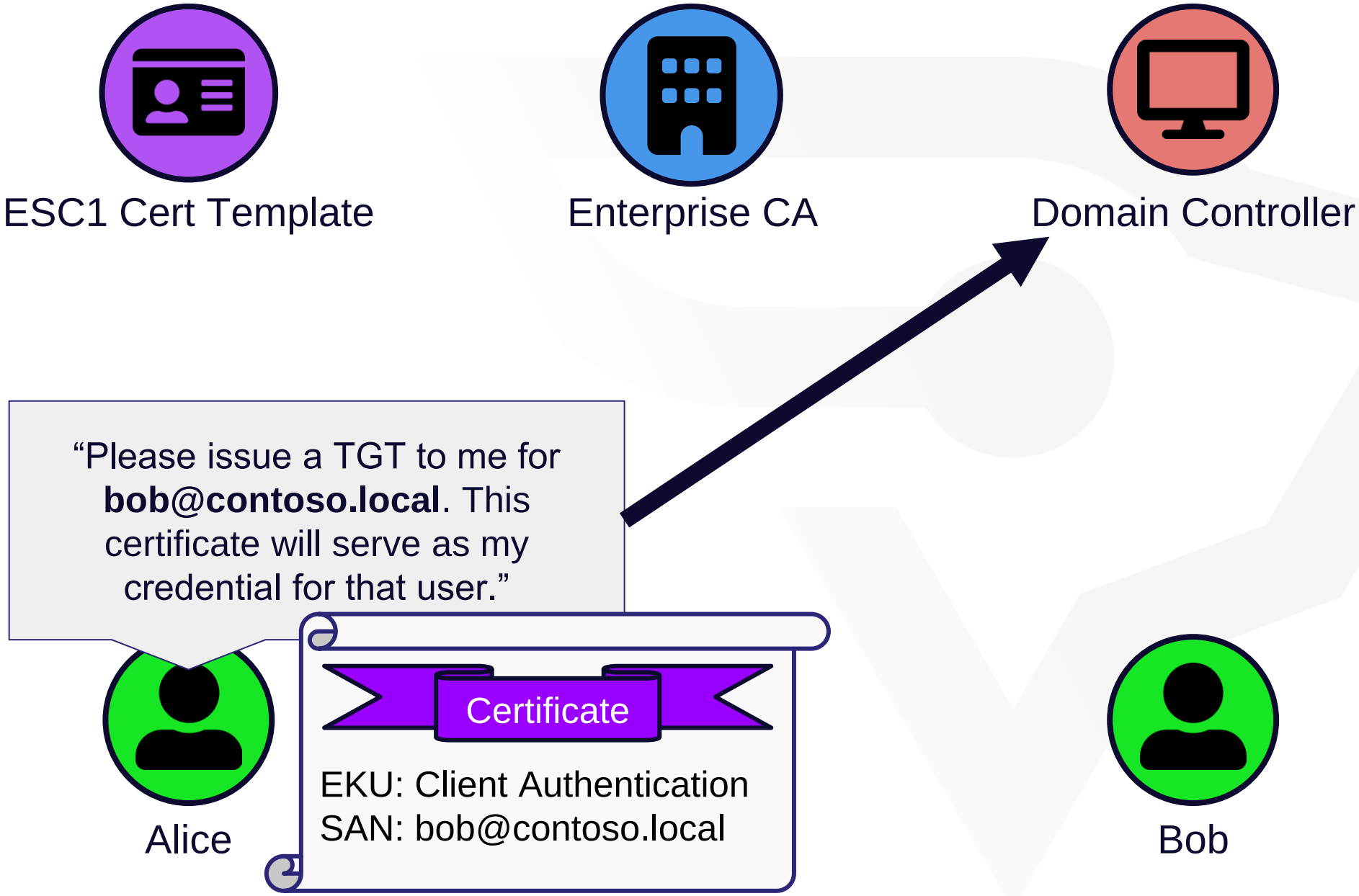
Enterprise CA

Domain Controller

Alice



Bob

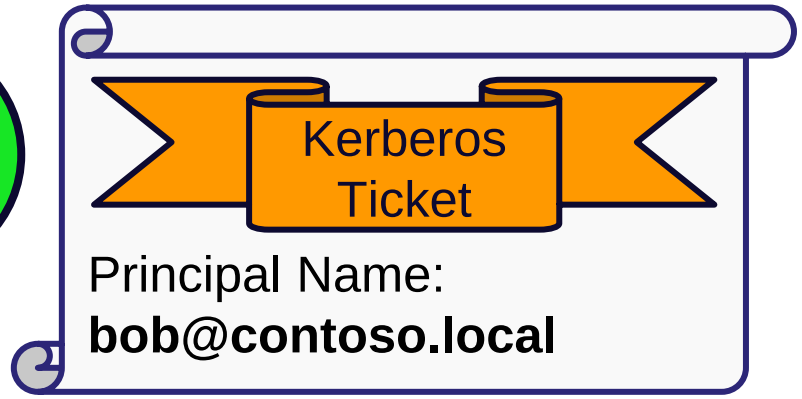

ESC1 Cert Template
Enterprise CA
Domain Controller
“Please issue a TGT to me for **bob@contoso.local**. This certificate will serve as my credential for that user.”
Certificate
EKU: Client Authentication
SAN: bob@contoso.local
Alice
Bob

ESC1 Cert Template

Enterprise CA

Domain Controller

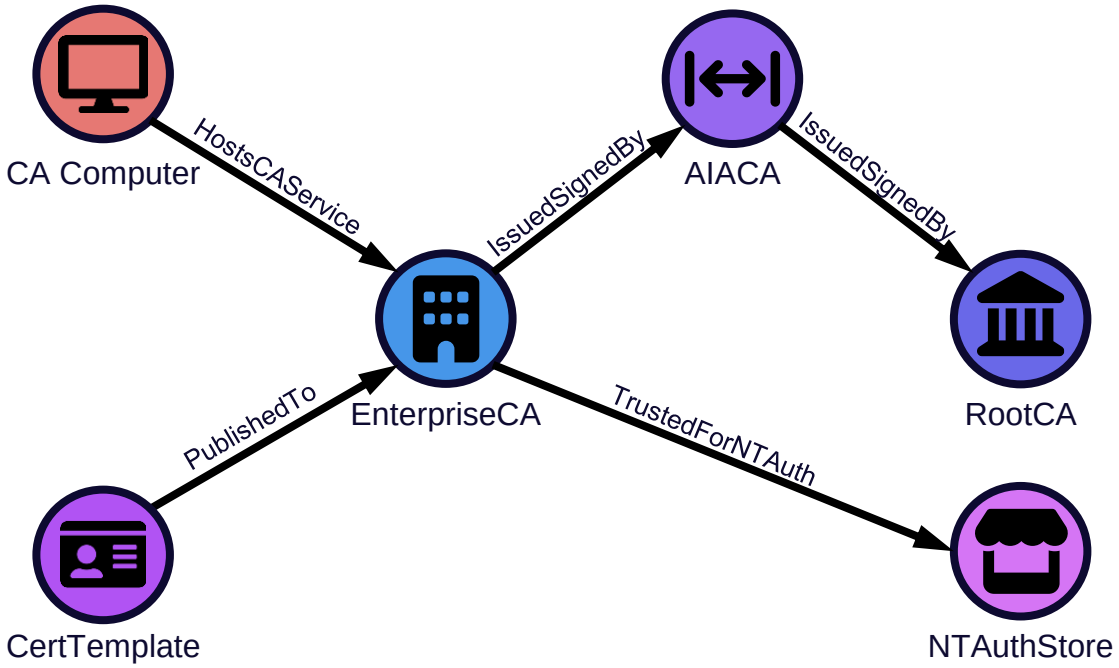
Alice



Bob

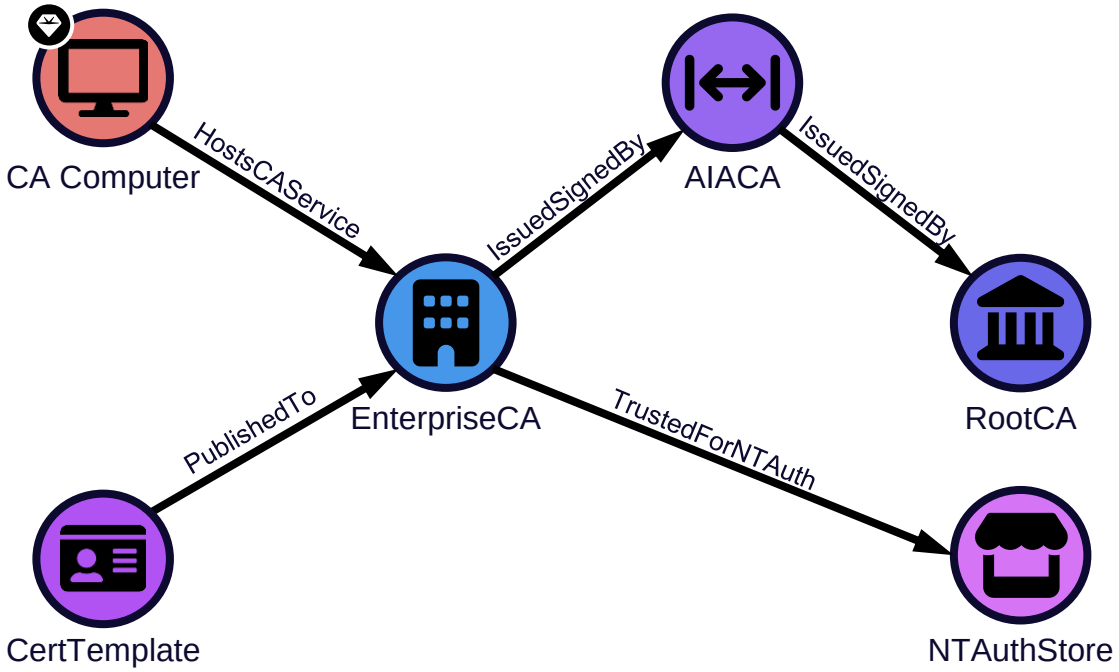
ADCS Components

- ADCS enables impersonation as anyone
  - Takeover control of Tier Zero
- Which components enables takeover?
  - Or disruption of Tier Zero



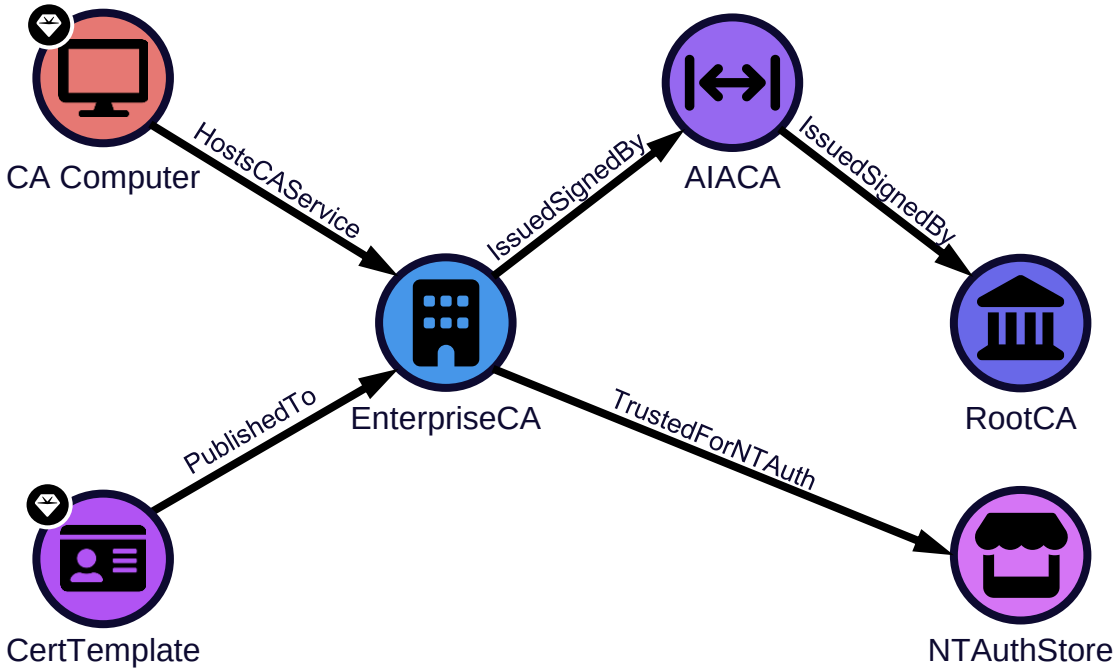
CA Computer

Tier Zero Compromise	Possibly (GoldenCert or ESC7)
Compromise actions	Forge cert, approve denied requests, modify pending requests ..
Compromise pre-reqs	CA certificate is trusted
Is Tier Zero	Yes



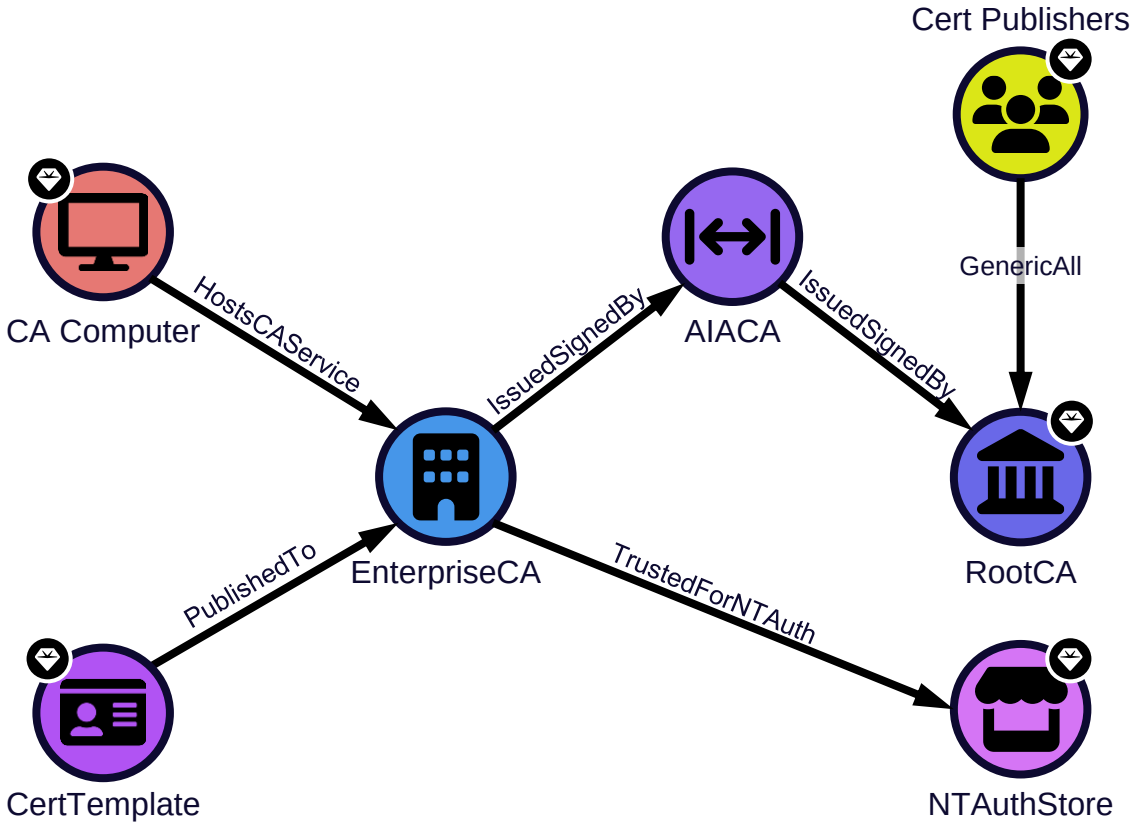
CertTemplate

Tier Zero Compromise	Possibly (ESC4)
Compromise actions	Modify template to enable ESCx
Compromise pre-reqs	Published to CA CA is trusted by NTAuth and root CA
Is Tier Zero	Yes



RootCA and NTAuthStore

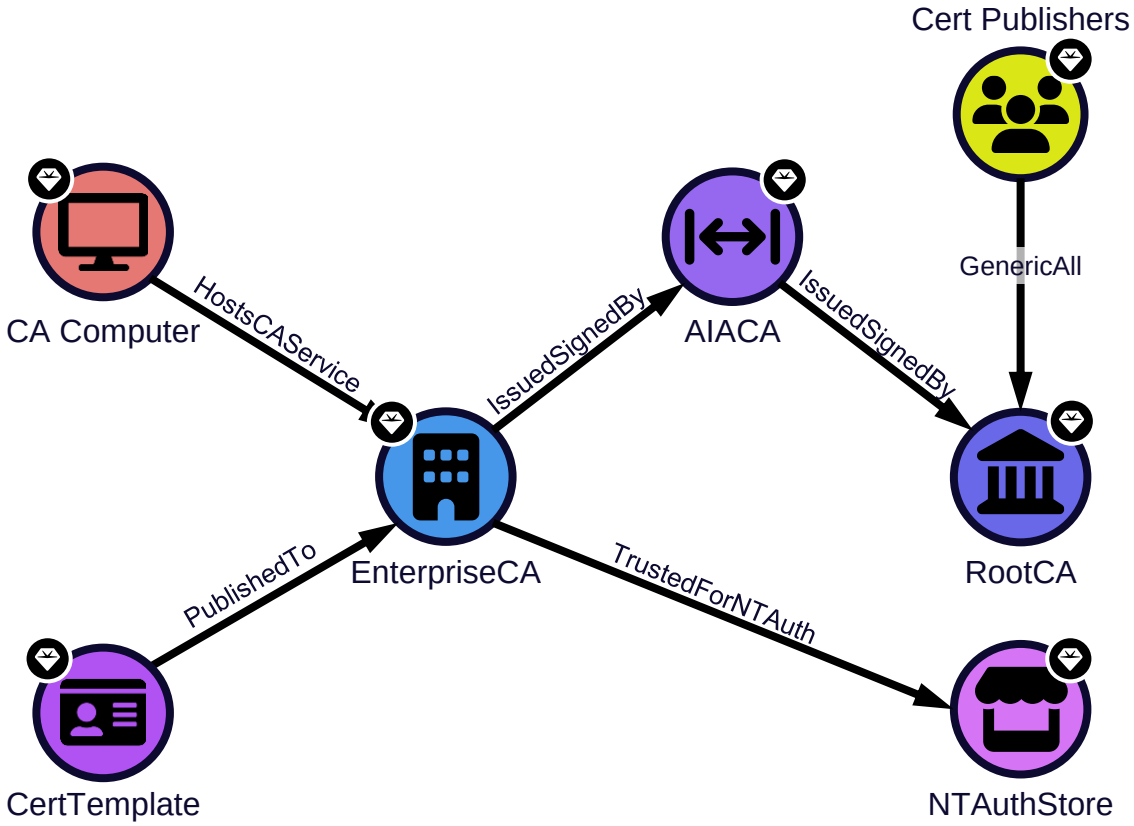
Tier Zero Compromise	ESC5
Compromise actions	Add attacker root CA certificate Make it trusted by NTAuth store
Compromise pre-reqs	None
Is Tier Zero	Yes



https://decoder.cloud/2023/11/20/a-deep-dive-in-cert-publishers-group/ (Andrea Pierini)

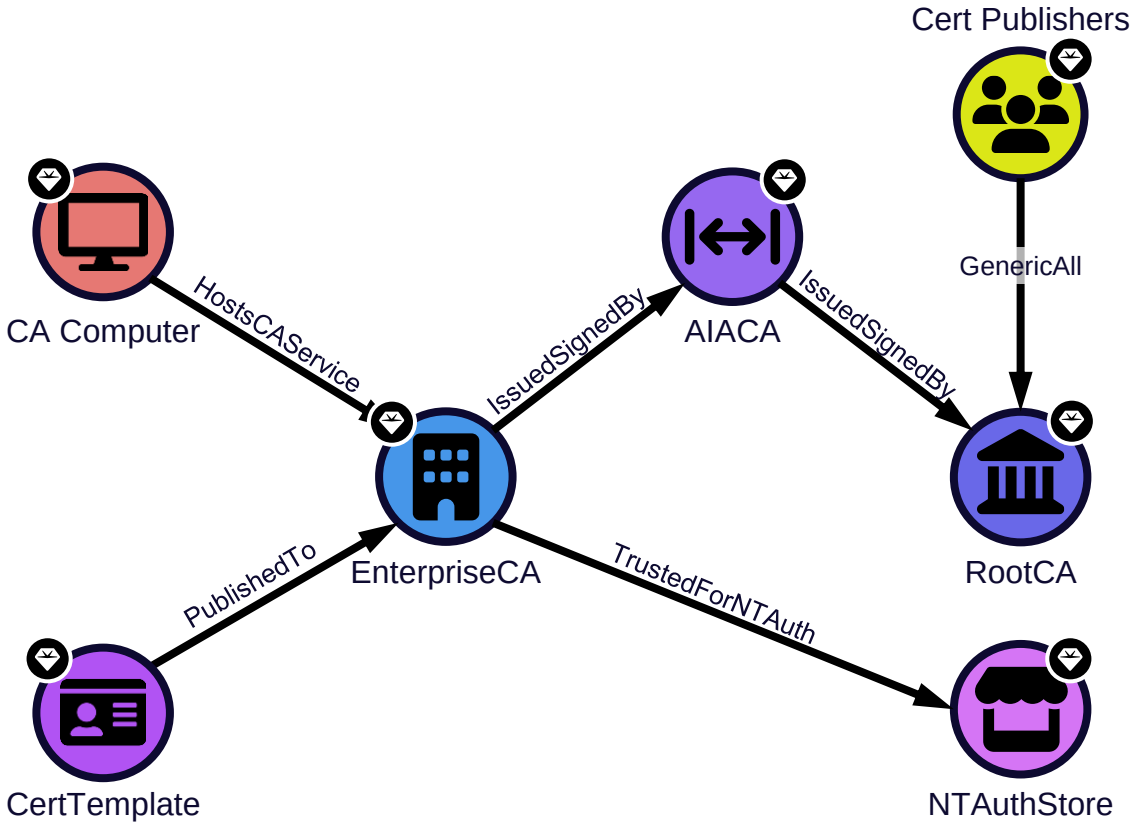
EnterpriseCA and AIACA

Tier Zero Compromise	Disruption
Compromise actions	Delete the objects (break CA chain)
Compromise pre-reqs	None
Is Tier Zero	Yes

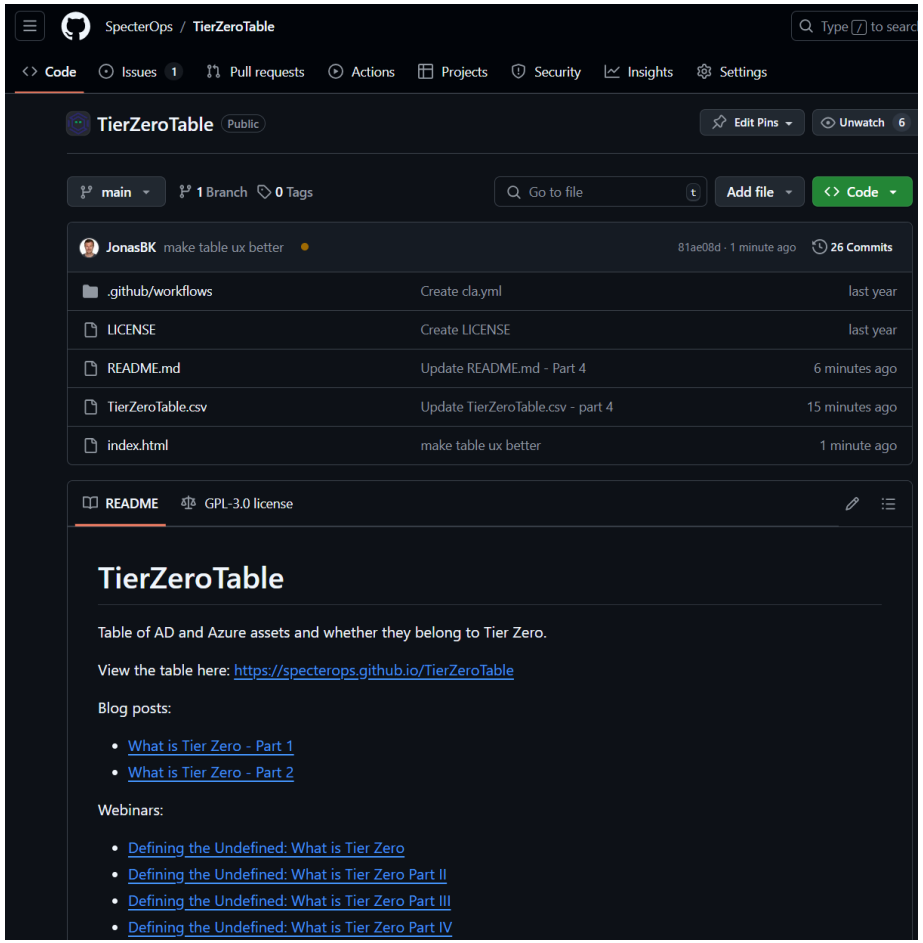


ADCS - Summary

- ADCS has Tier Zero takeover control
- Many components are Tier Zero security dependencies
- **Recommendation:**
  - Treat ADCS as Tier Zero
  - Non-Tier Zero has no control over ADCS by default – don't change that!
  - No ADCS? Maybe another PKI solution?



Tier Zero Table



TierZeroTable

Table of AD and Azure assets and whether they belong to Tier Zero.

Description of table columns and additional resources can be found here: https://github.com/SpecterOps/TierZeroTable

Hint: Click on a header to sort the table alphabetically.

Search...

Name	Type	IdP	Identification	Description	Compromise by default	Compromise by configuration	Is Tier Zero	Reasoning	Cypher query	Privileged access security role	AdminSD Holder protected	What is Tier Zero episode ▲	External links
Account Operators	DC group	Active Directory	SID: S-1-5-32-548	The Account Operators group grants... Read more	YES - Takeover	N/A - Compromise by default	YES	The Account Operators group has GenericA... Read more	MATCH (n:Group) WHERE n.objectid ENDS WITH 'S-1-5-32-548' RETURN n	YES	YES	1	https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-... Read more
Administrators	DC group	Active Directory	SID: S-1-5-32-544	Members of the Administrators group have... Read more	YES - Takeover	N/A - Compromise by default	YES	The Administrators group has full control... Read more	MATCH (n:Group) WHERE n.objectid ENDS WITH 'S-1-5-32-544' RETURN n	YES	YES	1	https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-... Read more
Backup Operators	DC group	Active Directory	SID: S-1-5-32-551	Members of the Backup Operators group ca... Read more	YES - Takeover	N/A - Compromise by default	YES	The Backup Operators group has the... Read more	MATCH (n:Group) WHERE n.objectid ENDS WITH 'S-1-5-32-551' RETURN n	YES	YES	1	https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-... Read more

- https://github.com/SpecterOps/TierZeroTable
- Submit your contributions or refinements

Questions