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CYX55TBD-Introduction to Vulnerability Assessment & Penetration Testing

Unit 5: Chapter- 28 Collecting Malware and Initial Analysis

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Unit –V	07 Hrs
Client-Side Browser Exploits: Why client-side vulnerabilities are interesting, Internet explorer security concepts, history of client- side exploits and latest trends, finding new browser-based vulnerabilities heap spray to exploit, protecting your self from clients side exploit. Malware Analysis: Collecting Malware and Initial Analysis: Malware, Latest Trends in Honeynet Technology, Catching Malware: Setting the Trap, Initial Analysis of Malware.	

- Malware
- Latest trends in honeynet technology
- Catching malware: setting the trap
- Initial analysis of malware

- Unintended and **unsolicited installation of software** on a system without the user knowing or wanting it.
- Understanding, examining, and dissecting malicious software to identify its behavior, origin, and impact.
- To detect and defend against malware effectively.

Virus:

- Malicious software (malware) designed to **spread from one device to another**.
- infect program and perform **some unwanted function**.
- Some are **easy to detect** and remove from a system.
- whereas others are **very difficult to detect** and remove.
- Some viruses use polymorphic (changing) technology to morph as they move from **system to system**, thereby prolonging their detection.

Characteristics:

- **Replication:** A virus can **replicate itself** by attaching to other programs or files.
- **Activation:** It requires **execution by the user** (e.g., opening an infected file) to activate.
- **Payload:** The destructive part of the virus, which might **delete files, alter data**, or perform other malicious activities.
- **Infection Mechanism:** Viruses **spread through infected files**, emails, removable drives, or compromised websites.

- Type of malicious software that **disguises itself as a legitimate or harmless program** to deceive users into installing or executing it.
- Trojan does **not self-replicate**. Instead, it relies on the victim to activate it, often through social engineering tactics.

Characteristics

- **Deceptive Appearance:** It appears to be a **useful or benign file or program** (e.g., a game, software update, or email attachment).
- **Hidden Payload:** Once executed, it performs malicious activities such as **stealing data, installing additional malware**, or allowing unauthorized access to the system.
- **No Self-Replication:** Unlike viruses or worms, a Trojan **does not spread on its own**.

Common Types of Trojans:

- **Backdoor Trojans:** Open a backdoor to the system, allowing attackers to gain remote control.
- **Banking Trojans:** Designed to steal financial information, such as credit card details and online banking credentials.
- **Downloader Trojans:** Download and install other malicious software onto the infected device.
- **Spyware Trojans:** Monitor user activity, such as keystrokes (keylogging) or screen captures.
- **Ransom Trojans:** Encrypt files and demand payment (ransomware) to restore access.
- **Rootkit Trojans:** Hide other malware or processes to evade detection.

Trojans Spread:

- **Email Attachments:** Malicious attachments pretending to be documents or software.
- **Infected Websites:** Clicking on fake ads or downloading files from untrusted sites.
- **Pirated Software:** Many Trojans are embedded in cracked software or illegal downloads.
- **Social Media Links:** Links in messages or posts that lead to Trojan downloads.

Signs of a Trojan Infection:

- Slow computer performance.
- Unexpected pop-ups or ads.
- New programs or icons you didn't install.
- Unauthorized changes to system settings.
- Unexplained network activity.

- Type of malware that can self-replicate and spread across systems without requiring a host program or user intervention.
- Unlike viruses, which need a user to execute a file or program to spread, worms exploit network vulnerabilities, operating systems, or software flaws to propagate automatically.

Characteristics:

- **Self-Replication:** Worms duplicate themselves and spread rapidly.
- **No Host Required:** They are standalone programs that don't need to attach to other files or programs.
- **Exploits Vulnerabilities:** Often use network security flaws, such as weak passwords or outdated software, to infiltrate systems.
- **Payload Delivery:** Some worms carry destructive payloads that delete files, install backdoors, or overload systems. Others simply spread and consume resources, causing disruptions.

Worms Working:

Entry Point: Worms typically enter a system via email attachments, malicious links, or infected software.

Propagation: Once inside, they exploit vulnerabilities in the network or operating system to spread to other devices.

Execution: They execute malicious activities such as:

Consuming system resources (disk space, CPU, bandwidth).

Installing backdoors for further attacks.

Delivering additional malware, like ransomware.

Signs of a Worm Infection:

- Decreased network performance (slow internet or file transfers).
- Unexplained system crashes or freezes.
- High CPU or memory usage.
- Unexpected files, processes, or network connections.

Examples of Famous Worm Attacks:

- **Morris Worm (1988):** One of the first worms on the internet, it caused major disruptions by spreading rapidly.
- **ILOVEYOU (2000):** Spread through email with the subject "ILOVEYOU," causing billions in damages worldwide.
- **Code Red (2001):** Exploited vulnerabilities in Microsoft IIS web servers, defaced websites, and launched DDoS attacks.
- **Stuxnet (2010):** A highly sophisticated worm that targeted industrial systems, particularly Iran's nuclear facilities.
- **WannaCry (2017):** Combined a worm with ransomware, exploiting SMB vulnerabilities to infect systems globally.

- Spyware is malicious software designed to **secretly collect information about a user, their device, or their online activities** without their knowledge or consent.

Characteristics:

- **Stealthy Operation:** Runs silently in the background to avoid detection.
- **Data Collection:** Gathers personal information such as:
 - Login credentials
 - Credit card numbers
 - Browsing habits
 - Sensitive documents
- **Transmission:** Sends collected data to a **third party for malicious purposes** like identity theft or targeted advertising.

Types of Spyware:

- **Keyloggers:** Record keystrokes to **capture passwords, credit card numbers**, and more.
- **Tracking Cookies:** Monitor browsing habits and collect data for advertisers.
- **System Monitors:** Record user activity, including **screenshots, app usage**, and file access.
- **Banking Trojans:** Specifically designed to **steal financial information**.

- Adware is software designed to **deliver unwanted advertisements**, often in the form of pop-ups or banners. It may also collect user data to tailor ads.

Characteristics:

- **Aggressive Advertising:** Bombards users with intrusive ads.
- **Performance Impact:** Slows down systems by consuming resources.
- **Data Collection:** Tracks browsing habits to deliver personalized ads.

Is Adware Always Malicious?

Is Adware Always Malicious?

- Not always. Some adware is **legitimate and included in free software** as a way to fund development.
- However, when installed **without user consent or combined with spyware**, it becomes malicious.

Spyware and Adware Spread:

- **Free Software:** Bundled with "free" applications or downloads.
- **Malicious Websites:** Clicking on unsafe links or pop-ups.
- **Email Attachments:** Opening infected attachments.
- **Fake Updates:** Installing updates from untrusted sources.
- **Drive-By Downloads:** Downloaded automatically when visiting compromised websites.

Signs of Infection:

For Spyware:

- Slow system performance.
- Unusual network activity.
- Unauthorized changes to settings or accounts.

For Adware:

- Frequent pop-up ads, even when offline.
- Unexpected changes to browser settings (e.g., homepage or search engine).
- Installation of unknown programs or toolbars.

- Malware analysis involves understanding, examining, and dissecting malicious software to identify its behavior, origin, and impact.
- It helps cybersecurity professionals detect and defend against malware effectively.

Key Tools for Malware Analysis

- **Static Tools:** Strings, PE Explorer, Binwalk.
- **Dynamic Tools:** Cuckoo Sandbox, ProcMon, SysInternals.
- **Network Tools:** Wireshark, Fiddler, tcpdump.
- **Reverse-Engineering:** IDA Pro, Ghidra, Radare2.

Static Analysis

Examines malware binaries **without executing the code**.

Tools: strings, IDA Pro, Ghidra, objdump.

Dynamic Analysis

Involves running the malware in a **controlled environment (sandbox)** to observe its behavior.

Tools: Cuckoo Sandbox, VMware, Process Monitor.

Behavioral Analysis

Focuses on understanding **how malware interacts with the system** (network traffic, file system, registry).

Tools: Wireshark, Regshot.

Code Analysis

Reverse-engineering the **malware code to identify functions and logic**.

Tools: Ghidra, IDA Pro.

- **Set Up an Isolated Lab Environment**
 - Use virtual machines (VMware, VirtualBox) and sandboxes.
 - Avoid direct execution on production systems.
- **Perform Static Analysis**
 - Extract strings, hashes, and file metadata.
 - Use tools like VirusTotal for file reputation.
- **Dynamic Analysis**
 - Run malware in a sandbox.
 - Monitor its actions on network, files, and system processes.
- **Behavioral and Code Analysis**
 - Study malware's persistence mechanisms, obfuscation, and encryption techniques.
 - Analyze assembly code for logic.

- **Code Obfuscation:** Making **code harder to read** (e.g., encrypted payloads).
- **Polymorphism/Metamorphism:** Changing **structure to evade detection**.
- **Fileless Malware:** Resides in memory to avoid traditional detection.
- **Rootkits:** Hides malicious processes/files at the OS level.

- Critical for understanding the **nature and impact** of a malicious program.
- **Proper handling** and **safe practices** are essential to avoid infection or spreading malware.

Sources of Malware Samples:

Public Repositories:

VirusTotal: **Online file-scanning** and analysis tool that allows access to malware hashes.

MalwareBazaar: Community-driven repository for malware samples.

Hybrid Analysis: Provides automated analysis of malware samples.

Any.Run: Interactive malware analysis sandbox.

TheZoo: Open-source repository for live malware samples.

Honeypots:

Deploy honeypots to **attract and capture malware** in controlled environments.

Tools: **Dionaea**, **Kippo**, or **Cuckoo Sandbox**.

Email Attachments:

Analyze **suspicious email attachments** with caution (phishing campaigns).

Network Traffic:

Use network packet capture tools (e.g., Wireshark) to capture malicious payloads delivered through the network.

Safe Handling of Malware Samples

- **Isolate Environment:**
 - Use **virtual machines** (VMware, VirtualBox) or sandboxes.
 - Disable networking or use NAT with strict controls.
 - Use snapshots to revert to clean states.
- **Use Dedicated Tools:**
 - Store malware samples in **password-protected archives** (.zip with password infected).
 - Use tools like 7-Zip or WinRAR for this.
- **Malware Storage:**
 - Maintain a **secure, offline malware** repository.
 - Use labels or hashes to identify files.
- **Do Not Open on Production Machines:**
 - Ensure malware **never interacts with operational systems**.

- Gathering basic information without deep reverse engineering

Static Analysis (Without Execution)

- Examines the malware file without running it.

Tools: strings, PE Explorer, Binwalk, Ghidra, objdump.

Dynamic Analysis (Executing Malware in Controlled Environments)

- Running malware in a sandbox to observe its behavior.

Tools: Cuckoo Sandbox, Any.Run, Process Monitor, Wireshark.

1. Hashing

- **Compute cryptographic hashes** (MD5, SHA256) to identify known malware.
- **Tool:** HashCalc, md5sum.
- Check against malware databases like VirusTotal or MalwareBazaar.

2. File Type and Metadata

- Identify the **file format** and metadata.
- **Tools:** file, ExifTool.

3. Extract Strings

- Look for **readable strings** that may indicate URLs, IPs, commands, or obfuscation.
- **Tool:** strings (Linux) or Floss for obfuscated strings.

4. Disassemble Code

- Analyze the **malware's assembly code** for functions or behaviors.
- **Tools:** IDA Pro, Ghidra, Radare2.

5. Analyze Import Table

- Check for **imported functions** (e.g., CreateProcess, WriteFile) that suggest malicious behaviors.
- **Tool:** PEStudio.

1. Behavioral Observation

- Monitor **file creation, network communication, registry modifications**, and process activity.

2. Capture Network Activity

- Identify connections to **malicious domains or IPs**.
- **Tool:** Wireshark, tcpdump.

3. Monitor Processes and File System

- Observe **process creation, memory usage, and file system** changes.
- **Tools:** ProcMon, Process Explorer.

4. Check Persistence Mechanisms

- Investigate for **registry keys, scheduled tasks**, or services created for persistence.



Tools for Initial Malware Analysis

Category	Tool Name	Purpose
Static Analysis	strings , PESTudio	Extract metadata, strings, imports.
Dynamic Analysis	Cuckoo Sandbox	Run malware in isolation.
Network Traffic	Wireshark	Monitor network activity.
Process Monitoring	ProcMon , Process Explorer	Monitor processes and I/O.
Hashing and Signatures	HashCalc , VirusTotal	Check hashes and scan for detection.
Reverse Engineering	IDA Pro , Ghidra	Disassemble and inspect malware.

- **Classify Malware:** Identify its type (e.g., ransomware, trojan, worm).
- **Document Findings:** Record behaviors, hashes, file paths, and network IOCs (Indicators of Compromise).
- **Report and Share:** Share IOCs with threat intelligence platforms (e.g., MISP, VirusTotal).

- Used to **protect systems, networks, and data** from malicious software.

Types

1. **Proactive Techniques** - Preventing malware infections before they occur
2. **Reactive Techniques** - Mitigating and responding to malware infections
3. **Advanced Techniques** - cutting-edge technology and approaches
4. **User Awareness and Training**
5. **Legal and Policy Measures**

Endpoint Protection

- **Antivirus and Anti-Malware Software:** Install and regularly update antivirus tools to detect and block malware.
- **Host-based Intrusion Prevention Systems (HIPS):** Monitor and prevent suspicious activities on endpoints.
- **Application Whitelisting:** Restrict systems to run only approved software.

Network Security

- **Firewall Configuration:** Filter incoming and outgoing traffic to block malicious data.
- **Network Segmentation:** Limit the spread of malware by isolating sensitive systems.
- **Intrusion Detection and Prevention Systems (IDPS):** Identify and respond to unusual patterns in network traffic.

Software and System Hardening

- **Patch Management:** Regularly **update** operating systems and applications **to close vulnerabilities**.
- **Least Privilege Access:** Limit user **access rights** to reduce the attack surface.
- **Secure Configuration:** **Disable** unnecessary services and enforce secure settings.

Threat Intelligence

- **Reputation Services:** Use databases to **block known malicious IPs**, domains, and files.
- **Honeypots:** Deploy decoy systems **to attract and analyze malware**.

Incident Response

- **Detection and Containment:** Quickly **identify malware** infections and isolate affected systems.
- **Eradication:** **Remove malware** using specialized tools or manual methods.
- **Recovery:** **Restore** data and systems from clean backups.

Malware Analysis

- **Dynamic Analysis:** Execute malware in a **controlled environment (sandbox)** to understand its behavior.
- **Static Analysis:** Analyze malware binaries without executing them to identify characteristics and potential threats.

Backup and Restore

- **Regular Backups:** Maintain **frequent and secure backups** of critical data to minimize the impact of ransomware and other destructive malware.
- **Immutable Backups:** Use backups that cannot be altered to ensure integrity.

Behavioral Monitoring

- **Anomaly Detection:** Use machine learning and behavioral analytics to identify **unusual activities** that could signal a malware attack.

Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR)

- Continuously **monitor and analyze endpoint activities** for signs of advanced threats.

Threat Hunting

- Proactively **search for indicators of compromise (IoCs)** within networks to detect and neutralize threats early.

Zero Trust Architecture

- Apply **strict access controls** and assume all traffic is potentially malicious.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning

- Employ AI models to **detect previously unseen malware variants** through behavioral patterns and heuristics.

Virtualization and Sandboxing

- Execute files in **isolated environments to determine if they are malicious** before deployment.

4. User Awareness and Training

- Educating users on identifying phishing attempts, avoiding suspicious downloads, and practicing good cybersecurity hygiene is a cornerstone of malware defense.

5. Legal and Policy Measures

- Establish organizational policies for acceptable use, incident handling, and regular audits.
- Stay updated with legal frameworks and compliance requirements related to malware defense.

Top 25 CWEs Truly the Most Dangerous Software Weaknesses in 2024?

<https://vulncheck.com/blog/cwe-top-25-2024>

- Rootkits
- Packers
- Protective Wrappers with Encryption
- VM Detection

- Category of software that **hides itself** and **other software from system administrators** in order to perform some nefarious task.
- stealthy malware designed to **gain unauthorized access and hide their presence on a system**, often by manipulating the operating system.

Defensive Techniques for Rootkits:

- **Kernel Integrity Monitoring:** Use tools that verify the **integrity of critical system** files and kernel modules.
- **Behavioral Analysis:** Monitor suspicious activities like **unauthorized privilege escalation** or abnormal process injections.
- **Memory Scanning:** Perform **in-depth scans of system memory** to detect hidden malicious processes or drivers.
- **Rootkit Removal Tools:** Use specialized tools like **GMER or Microsoft's RootkitRevealer to detect** and remove rootkits.
- **Reinstallation of OS:** For severe infections, reinstalling the operating system is often the only way to ensure complete removal.

- Packers are used to “pack” or compress the Windows PE file format.
- Packers compress or encrypt malware payloads to obfuscate their content and evade static analysis by antivirus software.
- Most common packers are UPX, ASPack, tElock

Defensive Techniques for Packers:

- **Unpacking Tools:** Use tools such as UPX, OllyDbg, or IDA Pro to extract the original **code** from packed files.
- **Dynamic Analysis:** Execute the packed file in a **sandbox environment to observe its behavior and determine** its intent.
- **Heuristic Analysis:** Employ heuristic-based antivirus engines that can **detect patterns indicative of packed malware.**
- **Entropy Analysis:** Measure the **entropy (randomness) of files to flag unusually high values typical of packed files.**

- Malware uses **encryption to protect its payload**, often wrapping malicious code in layers of encryption to prevent analysis.
- Some hackers **use tools** such as the following to wrap their binary with encryption: Burneye, Shiva

Defensive Techniques for Protective Wrappers:

- **Decryption Tools:** Use cryptographic analysis tools to strip away layers of encryption and reveal the payload.
- **Memory Dumping:** Analyze the malware when it's running in memory, as the decrypted payload often resides in RAM during execution.
- **Threat Intelligence Sharing:** Collaborate with other security teams to share decryption keys or known wrapper techniques.
- **Behavior-Based Detection:** Focus on the actions the malware performs rather than its static signature.

- Malware often includes mechanisms to detect if it is running in a virtual machine (VM) or sandbox.
- If a VM is detected, the malware may alter its behavior or remain dormant to evade analysis.

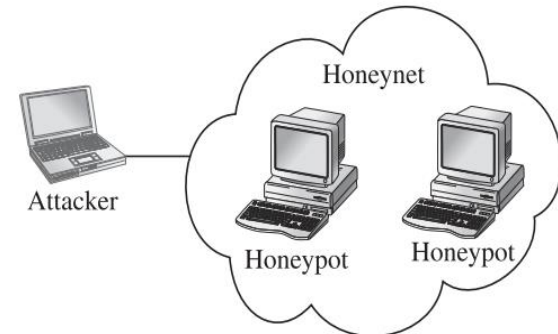
Defensive Techniques for VM Detection:

- **Anti-VM Evasion Tools:** Modify VM configurations to mimic physical machines and bypass basic VM detection checks.
- **Hardware-Assisted Virtualization:** Use advanced virtualization platforms that can better mask the presence of a VM.
- **Stealthy Sandboxing:** Design sandboxes that simulate real-world environments to deceive malware into executing normally.
- **Binary Instrumentation:** Intercept and analyze malware's system calls and behaviors without relying solely on virtualization.
- **Dynamic Renaming of VM Artifacts:** Remove or rename common VM-related artifacts such as "VMware" or "VirtualBox" to trick malware.

Unified Approaches to Counter These Techniques:

- **AI and Machine Learning:** Analyze **large datasets to identify subtle patterns** indicative of rootkits, encrypted malware, or VM-aware malware.
- **Threat Intelligence Platforms:** Leverage global threat databases to **keep up-to-date on new evasion tactics**.
- **Code Emulation:** Emulate **suspicious code in controlled environments** to understand its **functionality** without executing it directly.
- **Layered Security:** Combine multiple defensive layers, such as **network, endpoint, and application-level protections**, to create a comprehensive defense system.

- A honeypot is a **decoy system or network resource** designed to **attract, detect, and analyze cyber threats**.
- It **mimics legitimate systems**, enticing attackers to interact with it while collecting information about their techniques, tools, and intentions.
- Honeypots can **vary in complexity** and **purpose**
- Honeypots are decoy systems **placed in the network** for the sole purpose of **attracting hackers**.
- The systems are **not valuable and contain no sensitive information**, but they look like they are valuable.
- “honeypots” because once the hackers put their hands in the pot and taste the honey, they keep coming back for more.



Cat and mouse game:

- battle between defenders (security experts) and attackers (hackers or malware creators).
- This cycle typically involves **innovation, countermeasures, and strategic maneuvering by both sides**
 - **Attackers:** Continuously develop **new techniques** like malware, ransomware, or phishing strategies to bypass security measures.
 - **Defenders:** Respond with **updated firewalls, antivirus software, and threat detection systems**, forcing attackers to adapt again.

1. Based on Interaction Level

Low-Interaction Honeypots:

- Simulate **limited functionalities of systems or services**.
- Easy to set up and maintain.
- **Examples:** Simulated SSH or FTP servers.
- **Use:** Detecting automated attacks or simple reconnaissance.

High-Interaction Honeypots:

- Offer a realistic environment, such as a **fully functional operating system**.
- **Allow attackers to interact deeply, providing richer intelligence.**
- Require more resources and risk management.
- **Use:** Studying advanced threat actors and sophisticated malware.

Medium-Interaction Honeypots:

- Strike a balance between low and high interaction.
- Provide **more interactivity than low-level honeypots** but without the complexity of high-level setups.

2. Based on Deployment Goals

Research Honeypots:

- Used to **study attacker behaviors, malware**, and exploit trends.
- Typically deployed in controlled environments by cybersecurity researchers.

Production Honeypots:

- Deployed **within an organization's network to detect real-time threats**.
- Provide **early warning of potential attacks** and help in fortifying defenses.

1. **Threat Detection:**
 - Identify **unauthorized access attempts**, malware infections, and insider threats.
2. **Attack Analysis:**
 - Collect **detailed logs of attacker activities**, tools, and methodologies.
3. **Decoy and Distraction:**
 - Divert attackers away from **critical systems**, buying time for defenders.
4. **Vulnerability Assessment:**
 - Understand which **aspects of a system are most attractive** to attackers.
5. **Training and Awareness:**
 - Serve as platforms for **simulating attacks and training security** teams.

- **Minimal False Positives:** Honeypots **only capture data** when someone intentionally interacts with them, reducing noise.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Simpler honeypots can be **inexpensive** compared to complex intrusion detection systems (IDS).
- **Deep Insights:** Provide **detailed logs and telemetry** that might not be available through other security tools.
- **Support for Threat Intelligence:** Honeypots contribute **data to threat intelligence databases**.

- **Risk of Exploitation:** If compromised, a honeypot could be used to launch attacks on other systems.
- **Detection by Attackers:** Skilled attackers may recognize honeypots and avoid or manipulate them.
- **Resource Intensive:** High-interaction honeypots require significant setup, monitoring, and management.
- **Legal and Ethical Issues:** Deploying honeypots might inadvertently expose sensitive data or raise privacy concerns.

- **Kippo:** A low-interaction SSH honeypot.
- **Honeyd:** A tool for creating **virtual honeypots**.
- **Dionaea:** Focused on **malware collection** and analysis.
- **T-Pot:** A multi-honeypot platform offering **integration with several honeypot technologies**.
- **Canary Tokens:** Lightweight decoys used for **detecting unauthorized access**.

- **Segregation:** Isolate honeypots from **production environments** to prevent lateral movement if compromised.
- **Logging and Monitoring:** Implement robust **logging to analyze activity and learn from attacks.**
- **Realism:** Make honeypots appear authentic to entice attackers.
- **Regular Updates:** Maintain the honeypot with **updated vulnerabilities to attract current threats.**
- **Legal Compliance:** Ensure deployment adheres to **legal and ethical guidelines** in your jurisdiction.

Integration with Machine Learning:

- ML algorithms to analyze **attack patterns and predict potential** vulnerabilities.
- This helps in identifying **unknown threats** and **zero-day attacks** more effectively.

Specialized Honeynets for IoT and IIoT:

- Honeynets tailored to these environments are becoming popular.
- **Mimic smart devices** and industrial setups, attracting attackers

High-Interaction Honeynets:

- Allowing attackers to **interact more deeply with decoy systems**.
- Gathers detailed information on **attack tools, tactics, and motivations**, providing insights into both technical and behavioral aspects of attackers

Cloud-Based Honeynets:

- These setups can scale dynamically and are particularly useful for studying **attacks on cloud services and infrastructure**

Use in Active Defense Strategies:

- They not only gather information but **also slow down and misdirect attackers, buying defenders time to respond**

Honeynets for Critical Infrastructure:

- Cyber-physical systems, such as those used in utilities and transport, are adopting honeynets to detect and analyze threats targeting critical infrastructure.
- These setups are vital for preventing large-scale disruptions

<https://www.honeynet.org/about/>

<https://www.honeynet.org/challenges/>

<https://www.codeproject.com/?cat=1>

<https://isc.sans.edu/>

<https://isc.sans.edu/tools/>

<https://www.backtrack-linux.org/>

<https://www.exploit-db.com/>

