

# Android Malware Analysis Lab

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## 1 Background

### 1.1 Android Malware Analysis

In general, there are two main approaches for the detection of malware, static and dynamic analysis. Static analysis consist of examining the code (source, intermediate, or binary) to infer behavior of the program. In contrast, Dynamic analysis monitors the behavior of a program during executing in order to detect malicious behavior. Both static and dynamic analysis have advantages and disadvantages. Static analysis can provide an exhaustive analysis of an application's behavior, but may report behavior that is infeasible in actual execution. However, Behavior detected through dynamic analysis is bound to the test case inputs, and struggles to observe all possible execution paths, leading to dynamic analysis missing potential malicious behavior. Unlike static analysis which can report infeasible behavior, all behavior reported by dynamic analysis was observed during the execution of the application. In this lab, students will use both basic static analysis and dynamic analysis approaches to identify malicious and suspicious behavior in Android apps.

### 1.2 Android Manifest File

<sup>1</sup> Every application must have an `AndroidManifest.xml` file in its root directory. The manifest file provides essential information about your app to the Android system, which the system must have before it can run any of the app's code. Among other things, the manifest file does the following

- It names the Java package for the application.
- It describes the components of the application, which include the activities, services, broadcast receivers, and content providers that compost that application. It also names the classes that implement each of the components and publishes their capabilities, such as the Intent messages that they can

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handle. These declarations inform the Android system of the components and the conditions in which they can be launched.

- It declares the permissions that the application must have in order to access protected parts of the API and interact with other applications. It also declares the permissions that others are required to have in order to interact with the app's components.

In Listing 1 an example of an app's manifest file is shown. From it, we can see that this app declares that it needs the `INTERNET` and `RECEIVE_SMS` permissions. Additionally, the app uses three components: `ActivityOne`, `SmsReceiver`, and `myAppsService`. `ActivityOne` is declared in lines 80-85. The `intent-filter` tag specifies the types of intents that an activity, service, or broadcast receiver can respond to. An intent filter declares the capabilities of its parent component – what an activity or service can do and what types of broadcasts a receiver can handle. It opens the component to receiving the intents of the advertised type, while filtering out those that are not meaningful for the component. Lines 16-21 declare a broadcast receiver component named `SmsReceiver`. From the intent filters, we see that the Android OS will notify `SmsReceiver` when the device receives a new text message. The final component this app uses is a service component named `ServiceOfApp` declared on lines 23-25.

The Android Manifest file provides a high-level abstraction of an app's behavior. When attempting to manually inspect the internal behaviors of an application statically, the manifest file is a good starting point. It provides key insights on the permissions an application is using, the components it is using, and how the application interacts with the Android OS and the outside world. Additional information about the contents and attributes of the manifest file can be found in the Android documentation [1].

```

1 <?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
2 <manifest ... package="com.myApplicationPackage">
3
4 <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.INTERNET"/>
5 <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.RECEIVE_SMS"/>
6
7 <application
8
9 <activity android:name=".ActivityOne">
10     <intent-filter>
11         <action android:name="android.intent.action.MAIN"/>
12         <category android:name="android.intent.category.LAUNCHER"/>
13     </intent-filter>
14 </activity>
15
16 <receiver android:name="SmsReceiver">
17     <intent-filter>
18         <action android:name=
19             "android.provider.Telephony.SMS_RECEIVED"/>
20     </intent-filter>
21 </receiver>
22
23 <service
24     android:name=".ServiceOfApp"
25 </service>
26
27 <provider android:authorities="de.ub0r.android.smsdroid" android:
28     name=".MessageProvider"/>
29
30 /application>
31 </manifest>

```

Listing 1: An example of an app’s Android Manifest File

## 1.3 Disassembling Android Apps

Android uses the Android application package (APK) format to distribute apps to Android devices. Apks are nothing more than a zip file containing resources and assembled Java code. However, if you were to simply unzip the apk you would only have two files: *classes.dex* and *resources.arsc*. Since viewing or editing compiled files is next to impossible, the apk file needs to be decoded or disassembled. If one wishes to analyze an app at the bytecode level, reverse engineering tools, such as Apktool [2] are available. Additionally, the app’s Java source code can be partially reconstructed using JADX [3]. You will probably find both tools useful for completing this lab.

### 1.3.1 Disassembling Apps using Apktool

Apktool is a reverse engineering tool for Android apps. It can decode resources to nearly original form and rebuild them after making some modifications. It also makes working with an app easier because of the project like file structure

and automation of some repetitive tasks like building apk, etc. [2]. The functionality of Apktool is well-documented and we will briefly describes how this tool can be used to decode and build apk files. More information about Apktool can be found in its documentation [2].

### 1.3.2 Decoding apps using Apktool

In this example, we will use Apktool to decompile a malicious apk that was found in the wild (a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1) [4]. The apk is a repackaged version of the CoinPirates game that includes a malicious payload.

Apktool provides a command line interface. Its most common use case is for decoding and disassembling apk files. If you need to decode an apk file, you use the d (decode) option and pass the apk file as an argument. An example is shown in Listing 2 on line 1.

```
1 $: apktool d a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1.apk
2 I: Using Apktool 2.2.1 on a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1.apk
3 I: Loading resource table...
4 I: Decoding AndroidManifest.xml with resources...
5 I: Loading resource table from file: /home/joey/.local/share/
   Apktool/framework/1.apk
6 I: Regular manifest package...
7 I: Decoding file-resources...
8 I: Decoding values */* XMLs...
9 I: Baksmaling classes.dex...
10 I: Copying assets and libs...
11 I: Copying unknown files...
12 I: Copying original files...
13 $: ls
14 a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1/
15 a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1.apk
```

Listing 2: Decoding an apk using Apktool.

If you look in the directory created you should see something similar to Listing 3. For this lab, we will focus mostly on the AndroidManifest.xml file, the res/ directory, and the smali/ directory. The app's resources, such as its images and layouts can be found in the res/ directory. In the smali/ directory, the original classes found in the classes.dex file can be found. Apktool converts the original classes.dex file into smali using baksmali[5], an assembler/disassembler for the dex format. We will discuss the contents of these files and smali syntax later on.

```
1 $: ls
2 AndroidManifest.xml  Apktool.yml  lib/  original/  res/  smali/
```

Listing 3: Contents of the directory created.

### 1.3.3 Building apk files using Apktool

Apktool also can rebuild an apk file from the decoded resources after making some modifications, such as modifying the smali code. To build an app you need

to provide the `b` (build) parameter to Apktool and also provide the decoded directory as an argument like the example in Listing 4.

```
1 $Apktool b a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1/  
2 I: Using Apktool 2.2.1  
3 I: Checking whether sources has changed...  
4 I: Checking whether resources has changed...  
5 I: Building apk file...  
6 I: Copying unknown files/dir...
```

Listing 4: Rebuilding an apk file using Apktool.

If you received no errors, the new apk should be found in the `dist` subdirectory of the directory provided as input. For example the apk created from running the command in Listing 4 is shown in Listing 5. In your working directory, you will still have a copy of the original apk file. It does not include any modifications you may have made.

```
1 $cd a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1/dist/  
2 $ls  
3 a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1.apk
```

Listing 5: The location of the modified apk.

The next step is to sign the apk you just created. **If the apk has not been signed it will fail to install on an emulator or real device.** The Android SDK provides a utility program called *apksigner* that is located in the `Android/Sdk/build-tools/SDK version/` directory. We have provided this program on your VM (You can also use *jarsigner* if you prefer). For this lab, you should just sign the apk with the debug key, which is located in the `debug.keystore` file located in your `$HOME/.android/` directory. An example of signing an apk is shown in Listing 6. You need to provide the location of the keystore after the `-ks` option and pass the apk file as an argument. You will be prompted for a password. The default password is `android`.

```
1 $apksigner sign --ks ~/.android/debug.keystore  
   a7f94d45c7e1de8033db7f064189f89e82ac12c1.apk  
2 Keystore password for signer #1:  
3 $
```

Listing 6: Signing your apk file (password is android).

After you have signed your apk, install it onto the emulator to verify everything went correctly.

## 1.4 Making modification using Apktool

Apktool can also be useful for making small modifications to the underlying byte code. For example, let's assume a malicious app is using the anti-analysis check shown in Listing 7 to prevent the execution of any malicious behavior if the Build type is *eng*. Use apktool to disassemble this app, so that you can modify the code located in the `smali` directory. Use apktool to disassemble the apk located in `tutorialApps/emu-check.apk`. After you have done so, open the

file `emu-check/smali/com/myapplication/MainActivity.smali` in a text editor. You will see the code shown in Listing 8. The code shown is smali and is a representation of Dalvik bytecode. The Android Developer’s website provides a page that discusses the types of instructions and arguments [6].

For the `checkEnvironment` method, the app is checking the model’s build type to see if it is equal to the string “eng”. In the bytecode, we see that the value of `Build.TYPE` is stored in register `v0` on line 7. The string constant “eng” is stored in register `v1` on line 9. The comparison of the strings is completed on line 11 and the result is stored in register `v0`. On line 13 we see that if the value stored in register `v0` is equal to zero, then a jump to the `cond_0` branch will occur. Therefore, if the `Build.TYPE` is not “eng” then a jump to `cond_0` occurs and the malicious behavior will be triggered. Since we are on an emulator, our `Build.TYPE` will be “eng” and the jump will not occur. To force the control-flow to go to `cond_0`, change the statement on line 15 to “`goto :cond_0`”. This will force the branch to occur every time the app runs. Build and sign the app. Install it onto the emulator (If you installed the previous version you will need to uninstall it first) and open the app. If you check logcat, you will see that the Build type is “eng”. However, the app will now log the “do something malicious” instead.

```
1 protected void checkEnvironment() {  
2     if ( Build.TYPE.equals("eng")) {  
3         Log.d(TAG, "checkEnvironment: do nothing");  
4         return;  
5     } else {  
6         Log.d(TAG, "checkEnvironment: do something malicious.");  
7     }  
8 }
```

Listing 7: Prevents malicious behavior if the build type is eng.

```

1 # virtual methods
2 .method protected checkEnvironment()V
3   .locals 2
4
5   .prologue
6   .line 21
7   sget-object v0, Landroid/os/Build;-->TYPE:Ljava/lang/String;
8
9   const-string v1, "eng"
10
11  invoke-virtual {v0, v1}, Ljava/lang/String;-->equals(Ljava/lang/
12  Object;)Z
13
14  move-result v0
15
16  if-eqz v0, :cond_0
17
18  .line 22
19  const-string v0, "MainActivity"
20
21  const-string v1, "checkEnvironment: do nothing"
22
23  invoke-static {v0, v1}, Landroid/util/Log;-->d(Ljava/lang/String
24  ;Ljava/lang/String;)I
25
26  .line 27
27  :goto_0
28  return-void
29
30  .line 25
31  :cond_0
32  const-string v0, "MainActivity"
33
34  const-string v1, "checkEnvironment: do something malicious."
35
36  invoke-static {v0, v1}, Landroid/util/Log;-->d(Ljava/lang/String
37  ;Ljava/lang/String;)I
38
39  goto :goto_0
40 .end method

```

Listing 8: checkEnvironment in smali.

## 1.5 Using JADX to disassemble Dex to Java Source Code

JADX [3] is another tool that can be used to disassemble apk files. However, JADX disassembles the Dalvik byte code into JAVA source code. The translation is imperfect and will most likely be incomplete, but it is still useful for doing analysis. JADX provides two interfaces: a command line interface and a gui interface. For this lab, we will only discuss the gui interface. You can start the GUI interface of JADX by running jadx-gui from the command line. When the program first opens, it will ask the user to choose a file to disassemble. It supports apk, dex, jar, class, zip, and aar files. This discussion will only discuss using apk files. After you choose the apk file, JADX will begin disassembling

the apk. When it's complete you should see the source code for each class in the Menu pane. If you review the source code, you can see it is not ideal, but it does provide insight into the app's behavior.

## **2 Using the disassembled Code To Search For Suspicious Behavior**

Now that we have disassembled the apk file, we can begin analyzing the source code to identify suspicious behavior. Defining behavior within Android is challenging. Behavior that may be suspicious or malicious in one application may be expected behavior in another application. It is reasonable for a messaging app to access a user's contacts, but if a utility app, such as a flashlight app, accesses a user's contacts it should raise suspicion. Therefore, the behavior that makes an application potentially malicious is not a particular pattern, but the behavior in an application that is inconsistent with the end user's expectation. The easiest starting point for identifying any questionable behavior is by looking at the App's manifest file. The manifest file provides a high-level abstract of an app's behavior

### **2.1 Analyzing CoinPirates Manifest File**

In JADX, the `AndroidManifest.xml` is located in the `Resources/` directory. The highest level of security for Android is the permission system that protects the usage of sensitive behavior. The manifest file shows us that the CoinPirates app has access to 14 permissions. Malware often abuses the text messaging permissions to communicate with their C&C server and to try and send premium text messages without the user being aware.



```

1  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.INTERNET" />
2  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
3  ACCESS_NETWORK_STATE" />
4  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
5  READ_PHONE_STATE" />
6  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.WRITE_SMS" />
7  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.RECEIVE_SMS" />
8  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.SEND_SMS" />
9  <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
10 RECEIVE_BOOT_COMPLETED" />
11 <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
12 CHANGE_NETWORK_STATE" />
13 <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
14 WRITE_APN_SETTINGS" />
15 <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
    ACCESS_WIFI_STATE" />
    <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.
    CHANGE_WIFI_STATE" />
    <uses-permission android:name="android.permission.WAKELOCK" />
    <uses-permission android:name="com.android.browser.permission.
    READ_HISTORY_BOOKMARKS" />
    <uses-permission android:name="com.android.browser.permission.
    WRITE_HISTORY_BOOKMARKS" />

```

Listing 9: Permissions used by CoinPirates

After observing the permissions, the next goal is to vet the application by analyzing how the application uses the sensitive APIs that are protected by the suspicious permissions. Since malware writers often repackage their payload within real apps with 100's of classes, it would be too time-consuming to search through all the source code. Instead, we will focus on the entry points of the application.

### 3 Identifying Entry points into an Android applications

<sup>2</sup> Android applications are written using the Java programming language. Unlike conventional Java programs, Android applications do not have a *main()* function or a single entry point for execution. Instead, they are designed using components. App components make up the essential building blocks of an Android app. Each component is a different point through which the system can enter a developer's application. There are four different types of components: activities, services, content providers, and broadcast receivers. Each type of component serves a different role and the set of components used in an Android application define its overall behavior. The *activity* component creates user

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interfaces. For example, a messaging application may have one activity that creates the user interface for allowing a user to input their message and another activity for allowing the user to view their contacts. The *service* component runs in the background to perform tasks. Unlike, activity components, service components do not have a user interface. For example, a service component can be used to play music in the background. The *content provider* component handles application data. Using content providers, an application can store data in files, SQLite databases, or other persistent storage locations an application can access. The *broadcast receiver* component responds to system-wide broadcast announcements. For example, the system may broadcast that a picture has been captured, and the broadcast receiver can alert the application of this action. In general, broadcast receivers do minimal work, but instead, alert other components that an event occurred.

Since the components are required to be declared in the manifest, this allows us to quickly identify any interesting entry points without having to search through the source code. To avoid detection, malware usually does not trigger until it receives commands from its C&C server. The two most common and efficient ways for this communication is through the network and sms. Since SMS can provide communication when the user does not have a wifi connection, it is usually preferred. Since this app has declared the RECEIVE\_SMS permission, we know that it has the ability to receive broadcasts about arriving text messages through a broadcast receiver. If a broadcast receiver wants to receive a text message, it must specify that it can handle this action by adding the action to its intent filter inside the manifest file. The action required is shown in Listing 10.

```
1 <action android:name="android.provider.Telephony.SMS_RECEIVED" />
```

Listing 10: Action required to receive SMS broadcasts

In the CoinPirates manifest, we see that only one receiver has this ability, and the component's declaration provides us with enough information to identify the package and class name that declares the receiver. Additionally, the components declaration raises more suspicion. First, it is manipulating the naming convention and is located in the com.android package. Next, it has a priority of 10000. In Android, broadcasts can be ordered or sent to all apps at the same time. In general, applications with a higher priority will receive the broadcast first. Additionally, they have the choice of aborting the broadcast() or allowing it to be sent to the app with the next highest priority. Therefore, this behavior can be manipulated by malicious apps to hide the notification of received text messages<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>As of Android 4.4 this has been slightly adjusted. The default SMS app will always receive the broadcast first, regardless of priority.

```

1      <receiver android:name="com.android.SMSReceiver">
2          <intent-filter android:priority="10000">
3              <action android:name="android.provider.Telephony.
SMS.RECEIVED" />
4              <action android:name="android.provider.Telephony.
SMS.SENT" />
5          </intent-filter>
6      </receiver>

```

Listing 11: Action required to receive SMS broadcasts

If we use JADX to analyze the source code for the SMSReceiver class, we can identify any suspicious behavior that may occur when a text message is received. The Android OS notifies broadcast receivers by calling the receiver’s onReceive method. Therefore, we should start our analysis from this point in the app. When looking over the source code of the onReceive method, we see that the method immediately queries a database called “mydb.” The source code also shows us that the values received from the database are being compared to the sender’s number and the contents of the sms body. Based on the results of these comparisons, the app uses the needDel (delete text message) or needUpload variables to control the app’s control-flow.

Identifying suspicious entry point that are defined in the manifest file, allows us to quickly identify suspicious behavior. For example, After analyzing the SMSReceiver we see that it is being used by the C&C server to trigger malicious behavior. We also know that the app uses the “mydb” database to interpret the C&C servers commands. While the SMSReceiver app provides the most insight, the malicious app is also using two other receivers, AlarmReceiver and BootReceiver, to start the Monitor Service. We leaving analyzing the MonitorService component to the reader.

### 3.0.1 Triggering Malicious Behavior Dynamically

Using static analysis, we can identify the necessary events required to trigger malicious behavior in the app. Our next goal will be to leverage the details we extracted from the static analysis to dynamically generate the malicious behavior at run time.

In the case that the events necessary to trigger the malicious behavior is dependent on external sources, such as a text message being received, we will need to simulate these events. Android provides several tools for injecting events into the emulator, and you can read the full documentation on the Developer’s Website [7]. One tool is the emulator console. Each running emulator instance provides a console that lets you query and control the emulated device environment. For example, you can use the console to manage port redirection, network characteristics, and telephony events while your application is running on the emulator. The console emulator will be useful for injecting events, such as text messages from a specific number or changing the location’s device. The official documentation provides several examples.

## 4 Lab Assignment

### 4.1 Scenario

- You have received a malware sample from the wild. Your task is to discover what the malware does by analyzing it.
- You need to identify the commands that trigger the malicious behavior and record the conversation between the C&C server and the app.
- Analyze the network traffic to identify the type of sensitive information leaked.

### 4.2 Project Structure

1. Tools
  - (a) JADX
    - i. Disassembles apk files into Java Source Code
  - (b) Apktool
    - i. Disassembles apk files into smali.
    - ii. Rebuilds apk files.

### 4.3 Questionnaire

- To get your credit for the project, you have to answer the questionnaire in `/android/report/assignment-questionnaire.txt`
- For each stage, there are 4-5 questionnaire that inquires regarding the behavior of the malware.

### 4.4 Stage 1

1. (Points: 10) Find the information of component and intents for receiving C&C communication in `AndroidManifest.xml`. You should provide your answer in the format of a tuple. The first item is the component name and the second item is an Intent that can trigger it. Create a tuple for each type of Intent a component can receive.  
Answer format: `(MainActivity, android.intent.action.MAIN)`
2. (Points 20) Create a list of any anti-analysis techniques the app is using. Each line in the list should be a tuple. If the anti-analysis technique is based on internal information, the first item in the tuple should be the class and method/variable name that provided the original information, and the second item should be a description of why the info returned from this API is useful for identifying the environment. If the anti-analysis technique is external, the first item should be the range of values that

can be used to trigger the malicious behavior, The second item should be a brief explanation of how the malware is leveraging this information to prevent analysis. (Answer formats: Internal check (Build.Model, This information allows the app to see the name of the end product. So, it can identify that it is being ran on an emulator); External check ([86], The application is checking to see if the originating address of the sms has a Chinese country code.))

3. (Points 20) Identify the necessary text messages the app will need to receive before it will trigger malicious behavior. The answer format should be a list of commands. Each line should be a unique command.
- For Stage 1 Task 1, you only need to identify the components that handle commands from the C&C. Communication originating from the app is not necessary.

## 4.5 Stage 2

1. (Points 40) If the app is leaking any sensitive information, create a tuple that contains the command from the C&C server, the Android API that returns the information, and the Android API used to leak the information. (For example, if the C&C server sends the command “kfk-fasdk” to the app and it leaks the user’s phone number through a URL connection; the answer would be the following: (kfkfasdk, TelephonyManager.getLine1Number, URL.openConnection). Note, if the sensitive information leaked is from a content provider, please provide the URI (ex: content://sms/sent) instead of an API. Therefore, if the original answer was leaking (sent) text messages the answer would be (kfkfasdk, content://sms/sent, URL.openConnection)
  2. (Points 10) There is a text message from C&C that makes malware sends SMS message to a premium number. Find out that number.
- It is highly recommended to use dynamic analysis to complete Stage 2 task 1. Due to the asynchronous nature of Android, static analysis usually generates many false positives. If your answer reports any false information leaks, the answer will be wrong. Additionally, If the information leak is triggered by user input (i.e. a user presses button X to send a text message) it should not be reported.
  - If the location of a sensitive value is not unique to a specific database, your answer should contain the URI of the content provider used by the malicious app.
  - You may need to add content (such as photos, text messages, or contacts) to the emulator for information to actually leak.

- If the app is using any anti-analysis techniques you will need to modify the apk to remove them or modify the emulator before attempting to trigger the malicious behavior.

## References

- [1] Android. App manifest documentation. <https://developer.android.com/guide/topics/manifest/manifest-intro.html>.
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