

Botnet Detection and Perimeter Defence

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# Section 1 - Research

## Botnets

It is known within the cyber security industry that in recent years, botnets have emerged as one, if not the, major threat to information security within businesses. This is primarily due to the fact that botnets, and subsequently the coders behind them, have been evolving in both size, sophistication, and knowledge of evasive techniques. *(Aussems, Noë, and Rivera, 2014, pp. 1-8)*

The purpose of botnets can be seen below:

*“Special Trojan viruses to breach the security of several users’ computers, take control of each computer and organise all of the infected machines into a network of ‘bots’ that the criminal can remotely manage.” (Kaspersky, 2019)*

A botnet works by having multiple bots (zombies) listening to a C&C channel, and upon receiving an instruction, will carry out a specific task. These tasks can vary from positive impacts to negative impacts on end uses and businesses. (The Honeynet Project, 2008)

The strengths of botnets consist of, but are not limited to, their wide range of capabilities; they can be used for phishing via spam email, as well as theft of end user confidential information, enabled by keystroke logging, as well as DDoS capabilities, provided that the botnet is large scale. In addition to this strength, botnets can adapt; one stage in the bot lifecycle (can be referred to as *egg downloading (Vuong and Alam, 2011, p.56)*)allows the bot to download new executables, for example a payload to deactivate the antivirus capabilities of a system. Thus, making botnets an extremely robust and sophisticated malware.

The weaknesses of a botnet consist of, but again are not limited to, how well it is implemented, and the topology used to create connections to the bots. The implementation, while in some cases being successful, can be a weakness; IDS’ are only as good as the botnets are bad, meaning that if a botnet is put together without planning or carefulness, it can become easy to spot and block, allowing it to be taken down. In addition to this, the topology used while setting up and, in turn, running the botnet can also be a weakness; more centralised structures, having a central C&C device connected to the array of bots, creates a single point of failure for the botnet – if the C&C device goes down, or is detected, it becomes easy to disrupt, and as a result destroy the botnet. *(Aussems, Noë, and Rivera, 2014, pp. 1-8)*

Botnets as a whole could become more sophisticated as time goes on; the introduction of more IoT devices offers a wider range of potential bot devices, as more and more brands are becoming commonplace, and it can be assumed that security is not as big of an issue as other features, such as usability and consumer cost in order to gain more market share; more security focus during development is likely to increase the cost, and subsequently drives down sales as the market for IoT is flexible. Due to this, it could be suggested that botnets can become more sophisticated to evade IDS’s through hiding activity via IoT protocols and listening to multiple C&C channels, such as RSS feeds, IRC Servers and HTTP pages whilst incorporating a distributed topology to avoid being destroyed from a single point of failure.

## IDS – Intrusion Detection Systems

An intrusion can be described as a potential possibility of a deliberate unauthorised attempt made in order to access/manipulate information, as well as render a user system unusable or unreliable. Subsequently, an IDS (intrusion detection system) can be described as a piece of hardware / software in place to detect abnormal activity on a device / network (HIDS / NIDS) which is created by an attempted intrusion. The purpose of an IDS is to point out when an intrusion occurs, and can categorise into 6 different types of intrusion:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Attempted break ins | Denial of service |
| Leakage | Malicious use |
| Masquerade attacks | Penetration of the security control system |

An advantage of IDS systems is that through anomaly-based detection, the IDS can detect unseen attacks as its aim is to detect unusual (compared to normal) activity. This has a disadvantage however in that it will subsequently result in a higher volume of false positives as not all traffic will be malicious but it can still be classed as unusual. However, by using both signature detection and anomaly-based detection, the IDS can become very powerful. *(Chawla, Lee, Fallon and Jacob, 2018)*

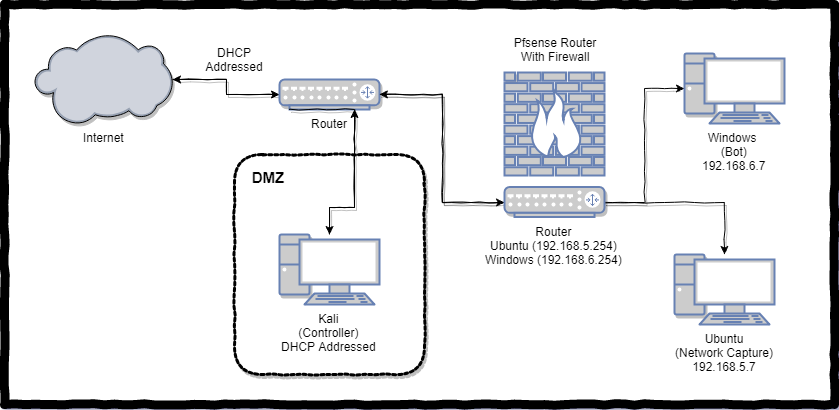
# Section 2 – Botnet Analysis

### Dynamic Analysis

Dynamic analysis, via packet sniffing, enables the botnets behaviour to be captured and interpreted, and, as is shown below, enables the viewing of the plaintext commands sent over the network to and from the bot, followed by the responses of the controller. Tools such as Wireshark can be used to capture live information flowing over the network and allow the user to follow TCP streams created. In order to dynamically analyse the botnet, a network layout and topology is required; each machine in use for this task has been configured with an IP address (as per the specification), a default gateway, and a DNS server which it can access. All of the default logins for VMs have been changed to secure the testbed of the botnet. It should be noted that some of the testing is not taken on the vSoc environment provided.

All VMs have connectivity with each other, tested with sending ICMP packets from each machine to every other machine. The firewall has been configured in accordance to the basic rule-set provided again by the specification. As a result, not all traffic is allowed throughout the network. This is later evidenced by screenshots of the pfsense router and its rules.

### IP Addressing

This basic diagram outlines the addressing scheme

As can be seen, the Windows and Ubuntu machines (representing the Public and Private areas of the network) are behind the pfsense router and firewall, and have IP addresses conforming to the specification. The DMZ area and machine will have a DHCP address assigned to it from the vsoc external router, which also provides internet access to the rest of the network (unless otherwise prevented).

On basic setup, allowing all network connections throughout the network topology, the botnet actions and behavior can be seen below, the supporting appendices can show specific packet information and request responses.

Basic pfsense firewall rules and connection proof (pinging)

Dynamic Analysis

* One of the initial tasks when analyzing a botnet and its associated traffic, is identifying the botnet in questions network connections and, by proxy, traffic generated. This can be done through eavesdropping / monitoring network activity, and filtering out unrelated traffic using an appropriate tool, such as Wireshark. The analysed network traffic and an interpretation of what it does can be found below.
* Identify types of traffic, reconnaissance/command and control traffic
* Identify and analyse specific botnet commands and response behaviour
* Decode botnet traffic/files if necessary–some may be encoded/encrypted! Crack
* the messages for extra marks and clues to other behavior.

## Static Analysis

Through static analysis, it is possible to gain an overview of all the bots' capabilities. In this case, using tools such as dnSpy, and de4dot allowed the source code of the bot and controller to be deobfuscated and reversed so the contents of the source code for each can be seen. An issue that occurred however was the fact that some string tokens were still obfuscated, however using de4dot’s command line argument “-–strtyp delegate” allowed further deobfuscation so that all commands and methods were made clear.

Bot Controller

The bot controller when statically analysed is easy to follow. At the start of its execution, it creates a new instance of “class1” uaing port 5001 to act as a listener for the bots that will try to connect to it, this is done with the “IPAddress.Any” argument meaning it will listen to any IP trying to connect. From this, Method0 is called, which is responsible for printing to output the connection made, accepting the client and string Method1. Method1 is responsible for creating the strings that will be asent over the network (responses to commands) by using streamWriters and Readers bound to the tcp client that was created on bot connection (ASCII encoded). Arrays created here are array, array2, array3 and array4. (Appendix botnet.1) It then goes to interpret any communications from the bots by using a variable called text, which is assigned the value of the streamReader of the tcp client. Each response specified by the controller will result in a certain response from the controller, using method5 to transmit the signal back to the bot. (Appendix botnet.2 – botnet.3). Below can be found the 15 commands for the bot, proving the dynamic analysis by showing the responses, and subsequently the functions behind them.

1. “Hello”
   1. As found in the dynamic analysis, the hello command when sent from the bot, as well as custom (Appendix Botnet.4), will return in "Welcome to the gang...". The code snippets in Appendix Botnet.1 shows this, as well as the Wireshark capture screenshotted in Appendix Wireshark.1.
2. “Get”
   1. As found in the dynamic analysis, the Get command when sent from the bot, as well as custom (Appendix Botnet.4), will return in a base64 string that can be rendered into an image (Appendix Botnet.5). Dynamic analysis would suggest that the bot sends only one base64 string, however static analysis shows that two base64 strings are parsed together, using a space as a delimiter. This is shown in Appendix Botnet.6.
3. “Test”
   1. As found in the dynamic analysis, the Test command when sent from the bot, as well as custom (Appendix Botnet.4), will return either an MD5, SHA1 or SHA256 encrypted string of a random word from the array “the, owls, are, not, what, they, seem”. This random is decided by the result of a modulus calculation; if divisible by three completely it will use an SHA1 hash, if MOD 1 is the result then SHA256 will be used, otherwise MD5 is used. The proof of this can be seen in Appendix Botnet.7.
4. “Failover”
   1. Through dynamic analysis, it was concluded that the Failover command generated a random integer and sent it along with the Failover keyword. Static analysis proves this as the set of code run within shows a function that chooses a random integer between 5000 and 4000000, and for each element in a new array, with length of the random integer, assign said array element the value of its corresponding integer. The original number generated is then concatenated to the end of the Failover command string, and sent to the controller.
5. “Connect”
   1. As found in the dynamic analysis, the Connect command when sent from the bot, as well as custom (Appendix Botnet.4), will return one of 6 sites (apple.com, microsoft.com, ibm.com, twitter.com, hpe.com, and bbc.co.uk).
6. “Takedown”
   1. As found in the dynamic analysis, the Takedown command when sent from the bot, as well as custom (Appendix Botnet.4), will return one of three ciphers; mentioning Flashpoint in relation to the Mirai Malware, mentioning both types of malware (lockscreen and encryption), and mentioning Cryptolocker ransomware. The keys are Apple, Orange and Peach respectively. (Appendix Botnet.8)
7. “Capture”
   1. As believed in static analysis, the capture command will take a random string and apply a scrambled alphabet cipher to it. There are 5 elements to an array which is randomly selected from, and will then have the scrambled alphabet encoding applied to them. Each of the items can be seen deciphered below:
      1. "The distributed denial of service attacks against dynamic domain name service provider Dyn this morning have now resurged. The attacks have caused outages at services across the Internet."
      2. "The botnet, made up of devices like home Wi-Fi routers and Internet protocol video cameras, is sending massive numbers of requests to Dyn's DNS service. Those requests look legitimate, so it's difficult for Dyn's systems to screen them out from normal domain name lookup requests."
      3. "An advanced piece of malware, known as Regin, has been used in systematic spying campaigns against a range of international targets since at least 2008. A back door-type Trojan, Regin is a complex piece of malware whose structure displays a degree of technical competence rarely seen. Customizable with an extensive range of capabilities depending on the target, it provides its controllers with a powerful framework for mass surveillance and has been used in spying operations against government organizations, infrastructure operators, businesses, researchers, and private individuals."
      4. "Hundreds of thousands of Android phones have been infected with malware that uses handsets to send spam and buy event tickets in bulk. Mobile security firm Lookout said the virus, called NotCompatible, was the most sophisticated it had seen. The cyberthieves behind it had recently rewritten its core code to make it harder to defeat, it said. Mobile malware aimed at smartphones is steadily getting more complex, said security company Wandera. Jeremy Linden, a security analyst at Lookout, said: \"The group behind NotCompatible are operating on a different plane to the typical mobile malware maker.\""
      5. "Prince added that Cloudflare was seeing a sizable increase in errors in traffic for its customers because the attack was affecting infrastructure providers like GitHub. \"If a customer's site is pointing to a git there, now we can't reach Github,\" he said. \"There are definitely infrastructure providers that we can't reach."
8. “Keepalive”
   1. keepalive, as the dynamic analysis suggests, will return one of 68 fruits, each of which would have had a random Caesar Cipher applied. Below is a collection of all fruits used by the botnet.

Each of these have been extracted from the source code of the controller, showing that these fruits are what are enciphered and subsequently sent across the network to the bot device. Every time the bot runs, any of these can be sent, with a random cipher applied every time.



1. “Look”
   1. ‘Look’, unexpectedly, will return two separate strings concatenated into one, and upon analysis is two gif images, seen in the dynamic analysis section, there could be embedded files within each.
2. “Code”
   1. This command will return “Calvin never forgets transmogrification animal ... may be key...” from the server, and could suggest information on decoding other messages.
3. “Generate”
   1. As suspected during dynamic analysis, the generate command will pull host information and send it to the controller. This could be beneficial in deciding which exploits to side-load onto the machine or to gather capabilities based on OS and versions. Based on static analysis, it becomes evident that the generate command will collect the machine name, current directory of the bot, OS version of the host (including service pack number), and username of the logged in user.
4. “Snoop”
   1. The snoop command, as assumed in dynamic analysis, will ping all addresses on an internal network (from x.x.x.0 – x.x.x.255), if on an internal network, and send ip addresses of other internally connected machines, stating that they are potential victims. If the bot machine was not on an internal network, the ping would be sent to 8.8.8.8 once. Static analysis has discovered that the command will test for presence on an internal network, and return the address if so, but will return “-” if not. The code then checks for if the returned statement is a “-” or an address. If a “-”, the bot will ping 8.8.8.8 and do nothing but send the ‘snoop’ command to the controller. If however the code returns an address that starts with a 10, 172 or 192, it will remove the element after the last ‘.’, and concatenate from 0 to 255 on the end of the string (in order) and ping the address. If the address is used, the ping should return true and the address used will be added to the text that is sent across the network.
5. “Loop”
6. “Goodbye”
   1. Upon inspection, the goodbye message (sent from the bot) will have a return message (from the controller) of sleep, which writes “+]” to the command line, sets bool\_1 as true, bool\_0 as false, and closes the TCP connection that was established.
7. “Hint”
   1. This is not found in the dynamic analysis; the only way to send this command is through either utilising Telnet / Netcat to act as a bot client (trick the controller to resonding

# Section 3 – Prototype Defences Implementation and Testing

* From your botnet analysis, create and test a basic prototype detection system for the Botnet agent and controller using an IDS sensor. Create IDS rules/signatures to detect the bot activity and not excessive many false positives. This section could show the Snort rules with descriptions of how they work, and screen shots of the testing/outputs and discussion on this.
* Create a closed perimeter firewall configuration to prevent/highlight future communications for this particular botnet, but allow certain valid traffic (specified in requirements spec’). Again show the configuration/rules and testing using screen shot snippets with short explanation, and any interesting discussion on the findings/outputs.

# Section 4 - References

# Bibliography

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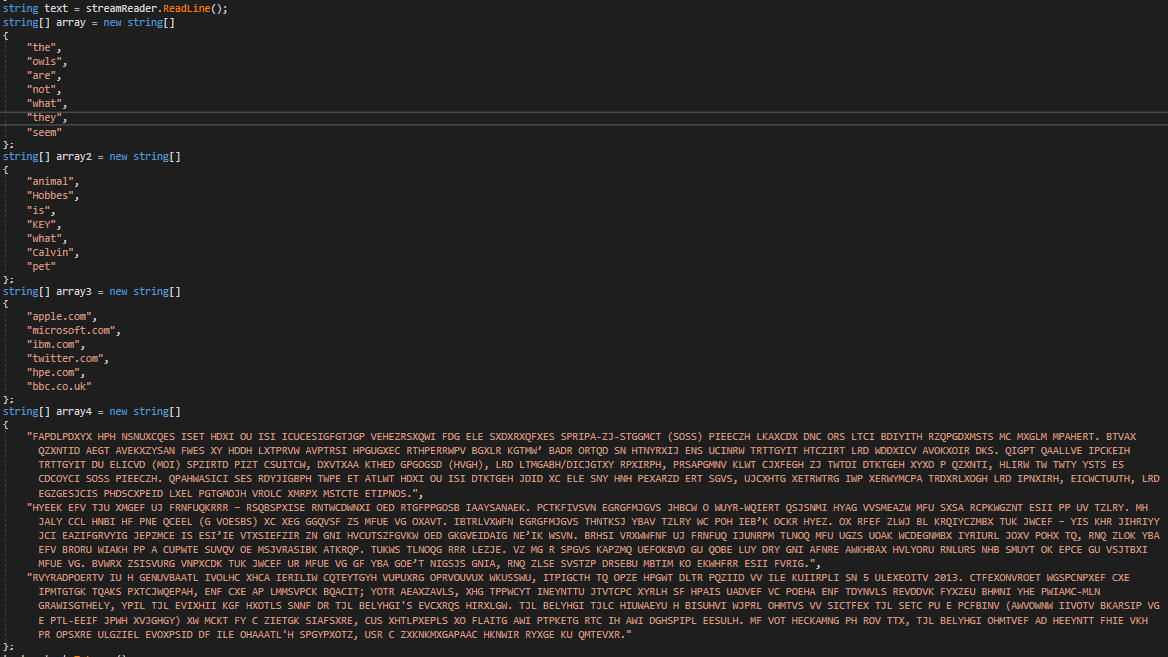
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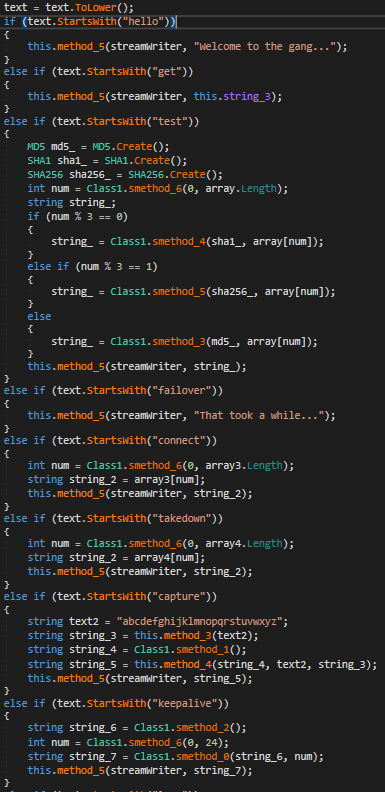
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### Appendix

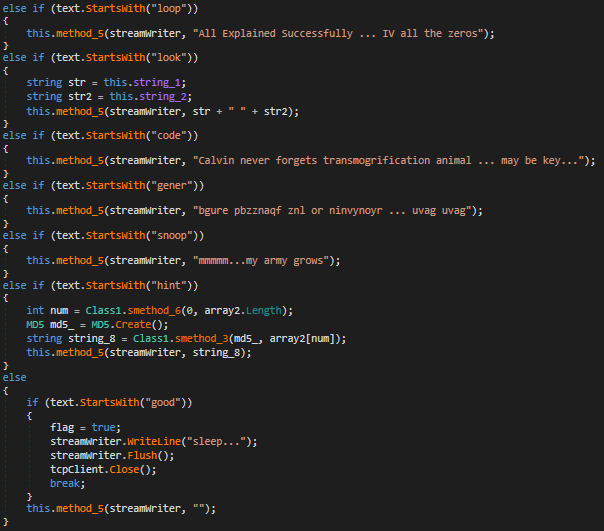
Botnet.1



Botnet.2



Botnet.3



Wireshark.1

