

Comparing Forensic Tools on an Image File

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Summary

There exists a large range of forensic tools available ranging from free open source products including PECmd from Erik Zimmerman, to paid for programs developed by companies such as FTK from Exterro. Knowing what's good from the large array of possibilities is difficult without knowing how they all compare to one another. With that in mind we wanted to do exactly that. Starting with the NIST hacking case image. Investigators look through an image of Greg Schardt's computer who had been accused of war-driving and stealing user information under the alias of Mr. Evil. War-driving is the act of physically searching for wireless networks with vulnerabilities by driving around and then submitting this information to a third party.[1] This then led us to investigate what programs they had run to find proof of war-driving programs. What information they had stolen from users while doing this. Proof that Greg Schardt also goes by the name of Mr. Evil. In addition to presenting any other evidence that comes up. All while using various tools that acquire evidence of these activities then comparing how these tools work in comparison to each other. These can be in terms of how easy it is to use, how good the information it gives is and how easy to read it is. These will all be looked into further in the various sections of the report.

Problem

To investigate an incident, the investigator has a variety of tools available to aid in finding the missing puzzle. As mentioned, the tools can be available as open-source tools or paid tools. Some licensed software are expensive for independent investigators, or students who are learning the digital forensics concepts. To make the comparison between the tools, we need to have an image for analysis; therefore, we selected the NIST hacking case image to demonstrate the comparison between the selected tools in every area of analysis with the available licensed tools from the RIT virtual environment. In some areas, we only compared open-source tools with an attempt to compare it with licensed tools.

Primarily, we focused on Web Browsing/Network, prefetch files, registry files, and timeline analysis using the NIST hacking case. For the completion of the project, we analyzed the obtained artifacts to support evidence against Mr. Evil.

With the investigation of Web Browsing/Network, Autopsy and Index.dat Analyzer both free tools were used. These helped to obtain the browsing history evidence specifically and other options were investigated to find more evidence on the network but did not yield good results, this is the "netsh wlan show profile" command and where it gets its information.

Then for the prefetch files, three tools were used: PECmd. prefetch-parser which are open source terminal tools and Prefetch Parser a free GUI based tool. All of which were compared based on information presented, how intuitive they were and other metrics.

For registry files, we selected Forensics Registry EDitor (Fred), and RegRipper, that represent the open-source tools, and Registry Viewer, which is a licensed tool from AccessData [8][9][10]. We gleaned some values from the registry of the acquired image using the three mentioned tools, and compared them to demonstrate the difference between them [11]. Although our main goal was to compare the tools, we attempted to find evidence from the suspect machine to support the accusation against Greg Schardt. We found a hiberfil.sys file, we could dump it to a disk image, and we analyzed its content [12].

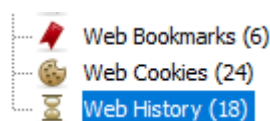
For timeline analysis, we have used two tools- log2timeline/plaso and FLS Sleuthkit. These tools are used for investigation purposes to collect timestamps and computer artifacts from a computer system. It gives clear information through the specific year, month, date and time. Those results are then analyzed to find any digital evidence which can corroborate if allegations pointed on the criminal in the investigated case was true or not and can hence serve as a very effective tool for examining people. We attempted to get timeline results using the two tools and compared which one is better than the other

Procedure and demonstration

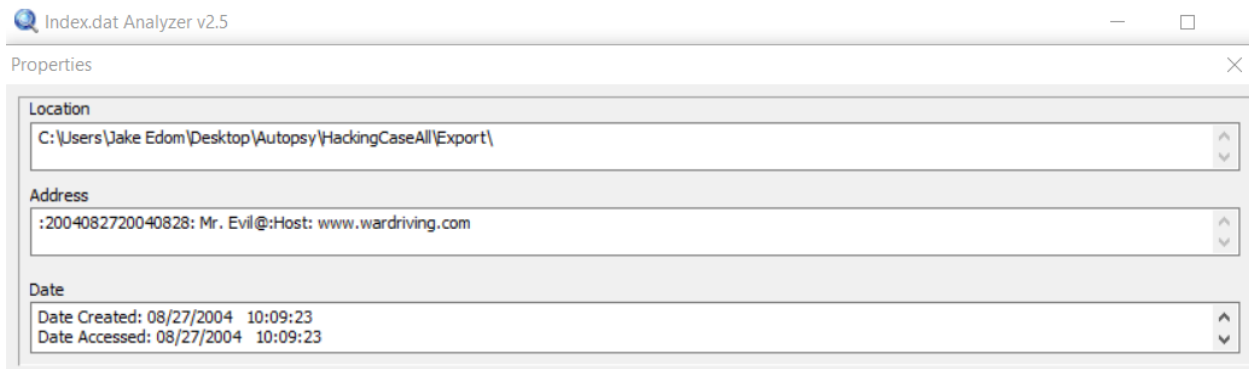
In this section, we present demonstrations for comparing the tools and analyzing the evidence along the way. This section is divided into various sections to show the related tools and comparison.

Web Browsing/Network

The main goal of this section was to find evidence on the file of internet connections that Greg Schardt had done to prove that they had made connections to other networks. Since this would be important to prove that they were doing war-driving, as with this information one could figure out where they were trying to connect to and this could lead to the vulnerable networks they were looking for. Starting off with Autopsy, a free digital forensics tool to look for possible files and evidence to look for this.[2] Which lead to the sections based on web cookies and web history to try and find information. Web Cookies lead to evidence of where the user had been on websites and so did Web History. With the main difference being that Web History needed an additional tool of Index.dat Analyzer.[4] Which gave information in the index.dat file which mainly had to do with the URL address and when the file was created. What would be better evidence would be something like the “netsh wlan show profile” which has the ability to show the connection profiles of a Windows machine.[3] Which in our investigation would show these war-driving connections. Although I could not find where this information is stored.



Web artifacts



Index.dat Analyzer

```
C:\WINDOWS\system32>netsh wlan show profiles

Profiles on interface Wi-Fi:

Group policy profiles (read only)
-----
    <None>

User profiles
-----
    All User Profiles : HITESH
    All User Profiles : hackme
    All User Profiles : vihar
    All User Profiles : insident
    All User Profiles : robot
    All User Profiles : narenmodi
    All User Profiles : givah
    Current User Profile : vyom198

C:\WINDOWS\system32>
```

netsh wlan show profiles

Prefetch

Prefetch files are automatically created files in Windows that normally act to accelerate applications startup processes. This sets up a record of the application having been run and at a specific location. For forensic analysis this means that these files can be used as evidence that a certain file was run on the system. This isn't the only information that a prefetch file can contain. There is information on when the file was last accessed, how many times the file was run, what the explicit exe this prefetch file is connected to and what files and directories it references. With that background information accounted for, we'll talk about the tools used and how they compare. Three different tools were selected, PECmd.exe developed by Erik Zimmerman, Prefetch_Parser developed by Mark Mckinnon on GitHub and prefetch-parser created by Paul Hutelmyer on threatfix.com. Starting with PECmd, this is a terminal based tool that requires some knowledge of the terminal although the README on the download website

gives examples on how to run it.[5] As well as some of the other options including how it is able to accept prefetch files including individual files and folders that contain prefetch files. Then the information gathered can then be saved in various ways, including, json and csv.

```
C:\Users\Jake Edom\Desktop\Autopsy\HackingCaseAll\Export>PECmd.exe -f 6515-NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX-0BD9920C.pf --csv foo.csv
PECmd version 1.4.0.0

Author: Eric Zimmerman (saericzimmerman@gmail.com)
https://github.com/EricZimmerman/PECmd

Command line: -f 6515-NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX-0BD9920C.pf --csv foo.csv

Warning: Administrator privileges not found!

Keywords: temp, tmp

Processing '6515-NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX-0BD9920C.pf'

Created on: 2021-11-25 18:13:11
Modified on: 2021-11-16 17:34:02
Last accessed on: 2021-12-02 02:46:15

Executable name: NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX
Hash: BD9920C
File size (bytes): 15,100
Version: Windows XP or Windows Server 2003

Run count: 1
Last run: 2004-08-27 15:12:11

Volume information:

#0: Name: \DEVICE\HARDDISKVOLUME1 Serial: 6CB18D9B Created: 2004-08-19 16:57:43 Directories: 17 File references: 41
Directories referenced: 17

#0: \DEVICE\HARDDISKVOLUME1\
#1: \DEVICE\HARDDISKVOLUME1\DOCUMENTS AND SETTINGS\
#2: \DEVICE\HARDDISKVOLUME1\DOCUMENTS AND SETTINGS\ALL USERS\
```

PECmd demonstration

Next will be the other terminal based tool prefetch-parser, unfortunately there isn't much to say with this one as it is much more simplistic. Only able to work on individual files with no other options available. It does show the critical information for a prefetch file, including MAC times and the number of times the executable has been run. Although the problem is there are some problems with the tool when tested. When using the same prefetch files as PECmd it was unable to find the program had been run before.[6]

```
C:\Users\Jake Edom\Desktop\Autopsy\HackingCaseAll\Export>prefetch_parser.exe 6515-NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX-0BD9920C.pf
Unknown Windows version [2:6:2] at C:/Perl/lib/Win32.pm line 530.
Date/Time prefetch file was created Thu Nov 25 18:13:11 2021
Date/Time prefetch file was modified Tue Nov 16 17:34:02 2021
Date/Time prefetch file was last accessed Thu Dec 2 02:45:49 2021

File NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX was run 0 times

NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX Embeded date/time is Thu Jan 1 00:00:00 1970
```

prefetch-parser failing

The final tool that was investigated was Prefetch Parser which is a GUI based tool, which is more intuitive than the terminal tools, allowing the user to select the prefetch files that exist in a folder and importing them to the tool.[7] From there each file that gets imported can be selected and the information about that particular file is shown. This is what we've come to expect, the number of executions, when it was executed with the added bonus of showing the times and dates of the various executions.

Prefetch Files

Prefetch File Name	Executable File Name	Description	Value
6515-NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX-08D9920...	NETSTUMBLERINSTALLER_0_4_0.EX	Number Of Executions	1
6519-NETSTUMBLER.EXE-08FEE568.pf	NETSTUMBLER.EXE	Execution DTTM 1	2004-08-27 15:12:11
		Execution DTTM 2	
		Execution DTTM 3	

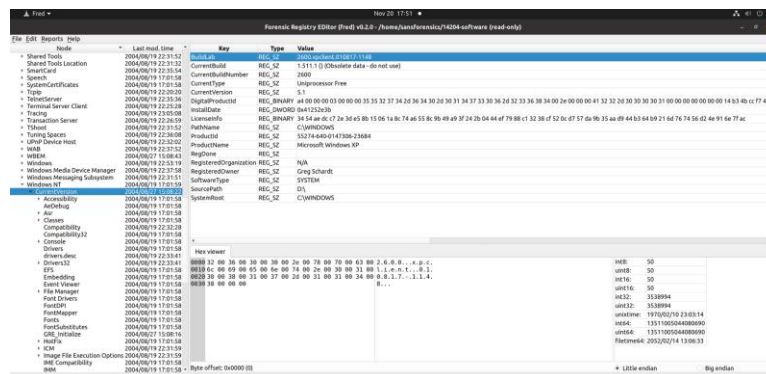
Prefetch Parser

Overall looking at these tools, the best tool is the PECmd for someone who can work with a terminal due to the additional options that make the results more flexible in how the data can be saved. Although with Prefetch Parser is more then adequate for an investigator who may not be as technologically savvy due to the much more intuitive use that a GUI program would have.

Registry Analysis Tools Comparison

The Windows Registries are an essential element of the Windows Operating System since many valuable configurations are stored on them. There are various tools used to glean these configurations from the registry. One of the well-known tools is Registry Viewer from AccessData [*]. Although Registry Viewer is a good tool for analyzing Windows Registry, investigators must pay the license for using the software. There are similar open-source tools that can be used instead of Registry Viewer, such as Forensics Registry EDitor (Fred), RegRipper, and Registry Explorer/RECmd [*][*][*]. In this project, we explored Fred and RegRipper to analyze the registry files from the Hacking Case, and we compared the outputs of the open-source tools with Registry Viewer. Fred is a graphical user interface, and it has a report generation feature. RegRipper is a command-line tool that has plugins for analyzing the registry file.

Starting with Fred, we gleaned the suspected Operating System Version, Installed Data, product ID, and Registered Owner from the “\Microsoft\Windows N\CurrentVersion” from the Software Hive file. We found that the operating system version is Windows XP, and the registered owner goes by the name Greg Schardt.



Fred

In RegRipper, we ran the tool from the terminal by typing the tool script name “rip.pl”, “-r” for registry hive file parser, the hive path, and name, “-p” followed by plugin name. Note that RegRipper displayed fewer details compared to Fred.

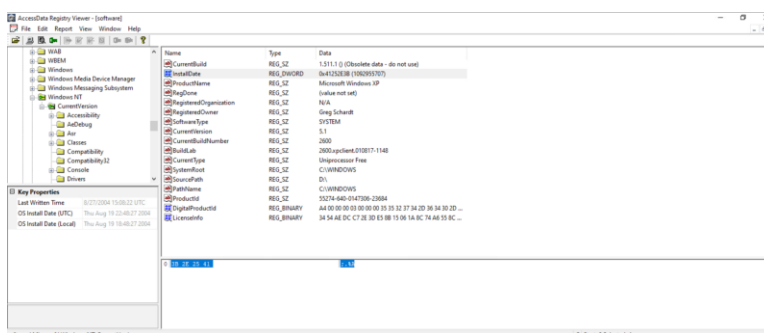
```

susefermics@iftworkstation:
$ rip.pl -r 14284-software -p winver
Launching winver v.20290525
winver v.20290525
(software) Get Windows version & build info
ProductName      Microsoft Windows XP
BuildLab         2600.vpclnt.018017.1148
RegisteredOrganization
RegisteredOwner   Greg Schardt
InstallDate       2004-08-19 22:48:27Z
susefermics@iftworkstation:
$

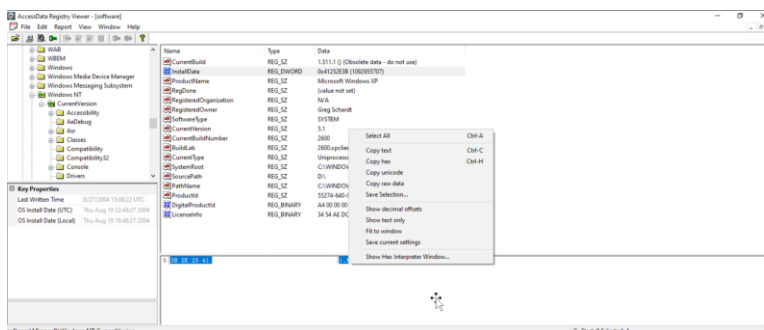
```

RegRipper

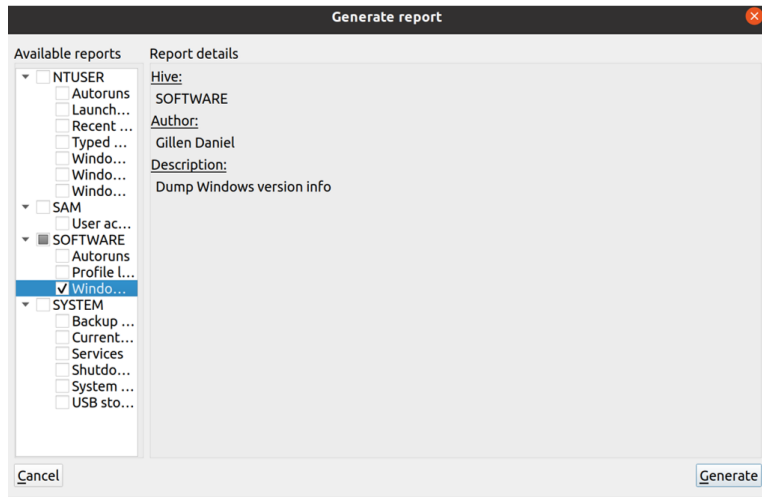
By comparing the result of the open-source tools with the Registry Viewer, we almost have the same output. We noted that the Installed Date in the Registry Viewer is displayed in hexadecimal value. We had to highlight the value in the lower pane to interpret it into a readable format.



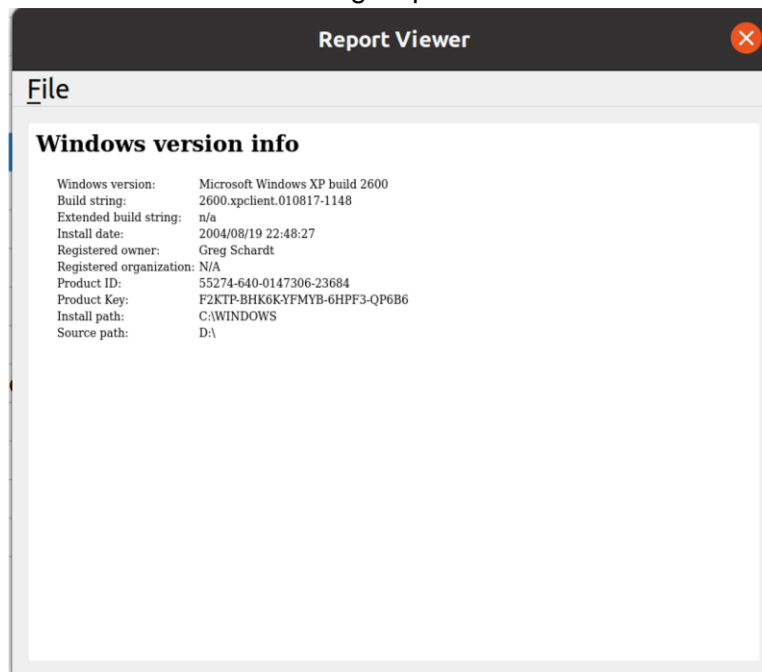
Registry Viewer



Registry Viewer highlights the hex value

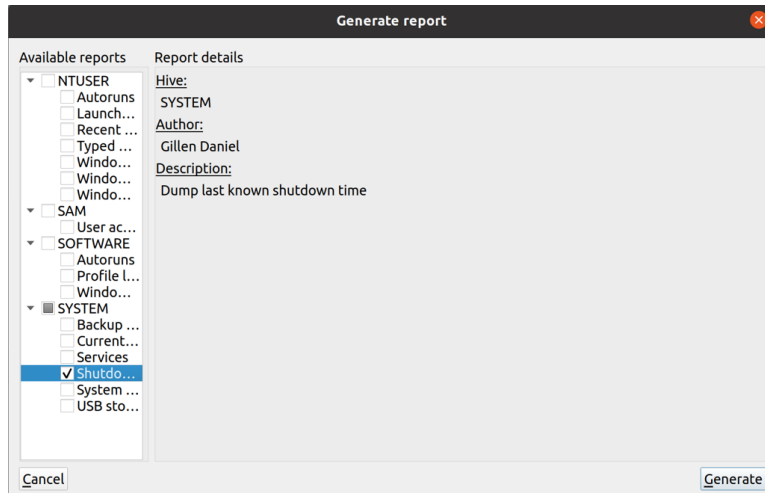


Generating Report in Fred



The report in Fred

The Last shutdown time is essential in determining when the suspect machine was active. The path to this value is stored in “\ControlSet001\Control\Windows” from the System Hive file. We used the Generate Report feature in Fred to display the Last shutdown by checking the shutdown option. We already opened the System Hive file in Fred, and it would not show any values if the file was not opened.



Last Shutdown in Fred

We noticed that the last time Mr. Evil touched his device was 15:46:33 in 2004/08/27.



Last Shutdown in Fred's report

To view the Last Shutdown using RegRipper, we provided the System Hive file along with the plugin "shutdown"

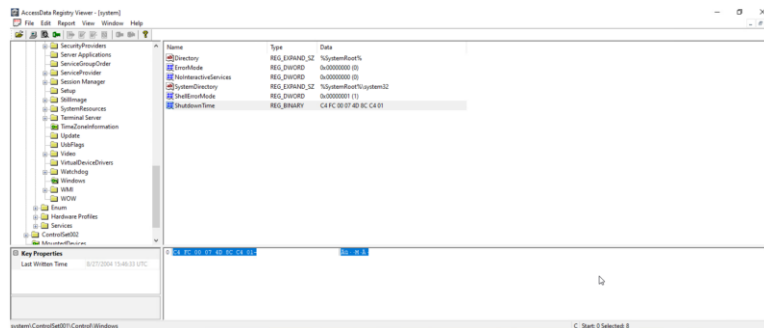
```

root@workstation: /home/janeferreira
saneferreira@workstation:
$ rip.pl -r 54218-system -p shutdown
Launching shutdown v.20200518
shutdown v.20200518
(System) Gets ShutdownTime value from System hive
ControlSet001\Control\Windows key, ShutdownTime value
LastWrite time: 2004-08-27 15:46:33Z
ShutdownTime : 2004-08-27 15:46:33Z
saneferreira@workstation:

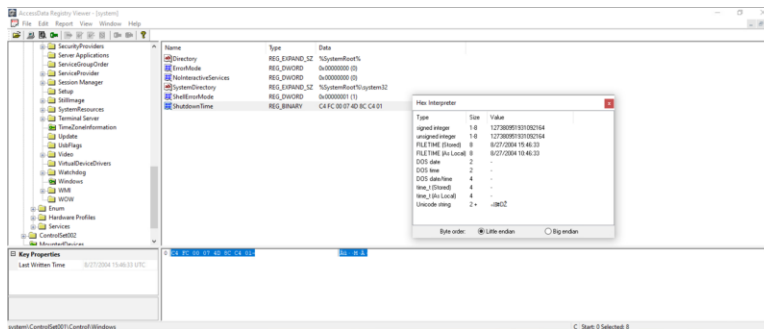
```

RegRipper shows the last shutdown

We compared the Shutdown value using the Registry Viewer, and we noticed that the last shutdown display was in Hexadecimal again. Therefore, the investigators have to use the interpretation option to view the shutdown time.



Last shutdown in Registry Viewer



Interpretation of last shutdown in Registry Viewer

We glean the account users on the suspect machine using the report generation feature from Fred. We noticed that only one user account was active on the system. This can be seen in the Total logins, in which only Mr. Evil had 15 times of logons.

Report Viewer												
File												
User accounts												
Name	RID	Full name	Last login	Last log change	Last failed login	Account expiry	Total logins	Failed logins	Flags	Processed size	Process size and dir	Logon script path
Administrator	500 (builtin)		2004/08/27 22:03	NA	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	0	0	0			
Guest	501 (builtin)		2004/08/27 22:03	NA	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	0	0	0			
HelpAssistant	502 (builtin)	Remote Desktop Help Assistant Account	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	0	0	0			
Mr. Evil	503 (builtin)		2004/08/27 22:03	NA	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	15	0	0			
SUPPORT_3889452	504 (builtin)	Microsoft Corporation UserAccount-3889452	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	2004/08/27 22:03	NA	0	0	0			

User accounts shown in Fred report

In the RegRipper, we only needed to provide the appropriate plugin and the Hive file to list the user accounts on the suspected system.



Fred could not interpret the date

By gleaning the same information using RegRipper, we recommend using more than one tool to ensure the output's accuracy. For example, the following screenshots display how the uninstalled program along with their uninstalled date:



RegRipper display the uninstalled programs

Analyze the hiberfil.sys file

The screenshot shows a Windows terminal window with a dark background. The command being executed is: `powershell -Command 'Invoke-WebRequest https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=54568 -OutFile C:\ProgramData\Windows Up Ingester\WindowsUpIngester.exe' -NoProxy`. The command is entered on a single line and is partially obscured by a vertical scrollbar on the right side of the terminal window.

e needed to specify the image's profile using the "imageinfo."

Finding the profile

```

root@kali:~/kali# netstat -tlnp
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   PID      Thds  Hnds  Sess  Would-Start      Exit
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   4        0     217   0    2004-02-28 15:01:04 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   416      4     21   0    2004-02-28 15:01:09 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   472      4     11   806   2004-02-28 15:01:11 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   500      4     22   500   2004-02-28 15:01:11 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   944      50    259   0    2004-02-28 15:01:15 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   556      96    211   0    2004-02-28 15:01:15 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   926      54    228   0    2004-02-28 15:01:15 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   788      944    1209  0    2004-02-28 15:01:22 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   580      544    132   0    2004-02-28 15:01:25 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   900      544    15   163   2004-02-28 15:01:25 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   1004     544    132   0    2004-02-28 15:01:27 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   1112     512    138   0    2004-02-28 15:01:31 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   1556     1312   3   119   2004-02-28 15:01:38 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   1564     1312   4   117   2004-02-28 15:39:10 UTC+0000
tcp        0      0 0.0.0.0:22              0.0.0.0:22              LISTENING   608      500   3   129   2004-02-28 19:10:01 UTC+0000

```

Since the suspect is accused of wardriving, we considered looking for any network connection. We could glean the TCP connection and the remote connection addresses can be a proof of the locations he attempted to exploit.

```
sansformics@iftworkstation:~$ vol.py -f windows_xp.img --profile=winXPSP2x86 conmscan
Volatility Foundation Volatility Framework 2.6.1
Offset(P) Local Address Remote Address Pid
-----
0x002a2998 192.168.1.111:1183 130.94.133.187:80 1156
0x0108ed58 0.0.0.0:0 0.0.0.0:0 2157104624
0x010b1359 192.168.1.111:1184 209.185.12.42:80 1156
0x01133de8 192.168.1.111:1182 130.94.133.187:80 1156
0x05241420 192.168.1.111:1148 67.114.52.28:80 1524
0x05d26670 192.168.1.111:1175 204.193.136.54:6667 1564
0x06a8540 112.0.0.0:4079 0.0.0.0:45264 4209366312
0x0712820 0.0.0.0:0 0.0.0.0:0 428991648
0x07847620 192.168.1.111:1179 67.15.24.20:80 1156
sansformics@iftworkstation:~$
```

Remote connection from the suspect machine

Timeline analysis tools

Timeline analysis has become a mainstay of digital forensic analysis in both public and private sectors. They help to explain what was happening on a given device or set of devices during a cybersecurity incident, a crime, a collision, or other event. Through the timeline analysis, an analyst can easily find out when a particular event or transaction happened. It also helps to figure out the other events which took place during the same time interval along with their interconnection to one another. The result of this timeline analysis helps to frame the situation to explain to customers, attorneys, juries, and other stakeholders.

Here we have used 2 tools for getting the result of timeline analysis- Log2Timeline/plaso and FLS Sleuthkit.

log2timeline is a command line tool to extract events from individual files, recursing a directory, for example a mount point, or storage media image or device. log2timeline creates a plaso storage file, which contains the extracted events and various metadata about the collection process alongside information collected from the source data.

The Sleuth Kit as we know is a library and collection of Unix- and Windows-based utilities for extracting data from disk drives and other storage. The FLS Sleuthkit is a tool in sleuthkit specifically used to list the files and directory names in a file system. It will process the contents of a given directory and can display information on deleted files

Whatever tool we use, we had to first download the image, enter proper unix commands compatible to each tool's working and that way the result comes in the form of a CSV file. The contents of the file are then analyzed and a complete timeline of events are presented as results

Firstly, we had entered the necessary unix commands to get the CSV file required for the timeline analysis

Once the commands were processed, we found the CSV file in the same path and opened it to observe the computer artifacts found in them

From the analysis, we got the following artifacts which have strong evidence against Mr. Evil. For some events, there are multiple instances found, hence here I have given a single instance of it:

1. Logging into/logging off Mr. Evil account now and then:

TIMESTAMP	2004-08-27T15:08:23.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Last Login Time
SOURCE	REG
MESSAGE	[HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SAM\SAM\Domains\Account\Users] Username: Mr. Evil Full name: Comments: RID: 1003 Login count: 15

TIMESTAMP	2004-08-26T16:04:08.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Last Shutdown Time
SOURCE	REG
MESSAGE	[HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\System\ControlSet002\Control\Windows] Description: ShutdownTime

2. Doing password resets to Mr. Evil account:

TIMESTAMP	2004-08-19T23:03:54.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Last Password Reset

SOURCE	REG
MESSAGE	[HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SAM\SAM\Domains\Account\Users] Username: Mr. Evil Full name: Comments: RID: 1003 Login count: 15

3. Searching the internet for articles about hacking:

TIMESTAMP	0000-00-00T00:00:00.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Not a time
SOURCE	WEBHIST
MESSAGE	Location: http://g.msn.com/0USHP/1016?!hacking

4. Visiting websites which has blogs and articles about hacking:

TIMESTAMP	0000-00-00T00:00:00.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Not a time
SOURCE	WEBHIST
MESSAGE	Location: http://www.elitehackers.com/cgi-bin/ref/referers.cgi?

5. Using rootkits, spywares, packet sniffing tools, etc

TIMESTAMP	2004-08-20T15:09:18.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Last Checked Time
SOURCE	WEBHIST
MESSAGE	Location: Visited: Mr. Evil@file:///D:/Drivers/GhostWare/Receipt.rtf Number of hits: 1 Cached file size: 0 HTTP headers:

TIMESTAMP	0000-00-00T00:00:00.000000+00:00
TIMESTAMP TYPE	Content Modification Time
SOURCE	WEBHIST
MESSAGE	Location: http://cdn1.tribalfusion.com/media/191336/flash_wrap_v4.js Number of hits: 1 Cached file: HYU1BON0\flash_wrap_v4[1].js Cached file size: 3936 HTTP headers: HTTP/1.1 200 OK - P3P: CP="NOI DEVa TAla OUR BUS" - Content-Length: 3936 - Content-Type: application/x-javascript - - ~U:mr. evil -

TIMESTAMP	2004-08-20T15:04:51.000000+00:00
-----------	----------------------------------

TIMESTAMP TYPE	Last Visited Time
SOURCE	WEBHIST
MESSAGE	Location: Visited: Mr. Evil@file:///D:/Drivers/Anonymizer/keys.txt Number of hits: 1 Cached file size: 0 HTTP headers:

Comparison between both tools:

More than FLS Sleuthkit, Log2Timeline/Plaso has more information which includes Windows event logs, link files, prefetch, shellbags, etc. These would be very useful in a case where the data stolen is of very sensitive nature, involves high number of users and large size of data

On the other hand, Log2Timeline/Plaso takes too much time to create the CSV file whereas FLS Sleuthkit takes very less time to do the same. This factor can be very useful if data stolen was not too sensitive, involves handful of users and size of data stolen was less

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