

A semantic approach for describing Advanced Persistant Threat

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Supsec Winter Workshop
January 2023



CentraleSupélec

APT : Advanced Persistant Threat

A term coined by Colonel Greg Rattray (US Air Force) in 2006 and popularized the NIST in 2011

The Advanced Persistent Threat :

- ① *pursues its objectives **repeatedly** over an extended period of time ;*
- ② *adapts to defenders' efforts to resist it ; and*
- ③ *is **determined** to maintain the level of interaction needed to execute its objectives.*

Before 2011, the real knowledge of APTs remains confidential

When the term APT started to be used, the general public has heard about

- Moonlight Maze (1996) : targeting US military and government networks pointing to Russian Internet Service Providers in 1996
- Titan Rain (2003) series of attacks in the US since 2003 originated from China
- StuxNext (2010) uncovered in 2010 and thought to have been in development since at least 2005, widely understood to be a cyberweapon against Iran
- Operation Aurora (2010) series of cyber attacks originated from China targeting over 20 US companies



More than 10 years later, if you want to study APT ?

Few datasets [1]

- I won't talk about KDD99
- Unified Host and Network Dataset [2]
- DAPT 2020 [3]
- PWNJUTSU 2022 [4]

Some un-structured reports

AptNotes <https://github.com/aptnotes/>

Operation Aurora, Malware Targeting Organizations in Ukraine

Videos, tweet and other media

- TV5 Monde

Few (No ?) details on the targeted architecture, the defense system, the precise attack scenario

First Step : Global overview *Lifecycle of an Advanced Persistant Threat*

APT Lifecycle : *Cyber Kill Chain* Lockheed Martin in 2011

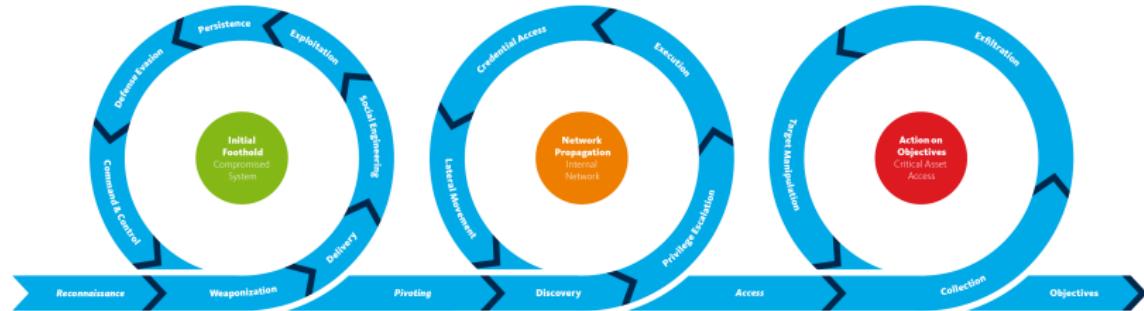
- Linear model focusing on the initial compromise
- Cannot describe long-term attacks



ATP-Life-cycle : Kill chains models

Pols in 2017 *Unified Kill Chain*

- introduces the notion of repetitiveness of technical actions
- introduces the notion of phases of APT
- does not consider the potential **regression** of the attacker.



Tactics of the Attack matrix

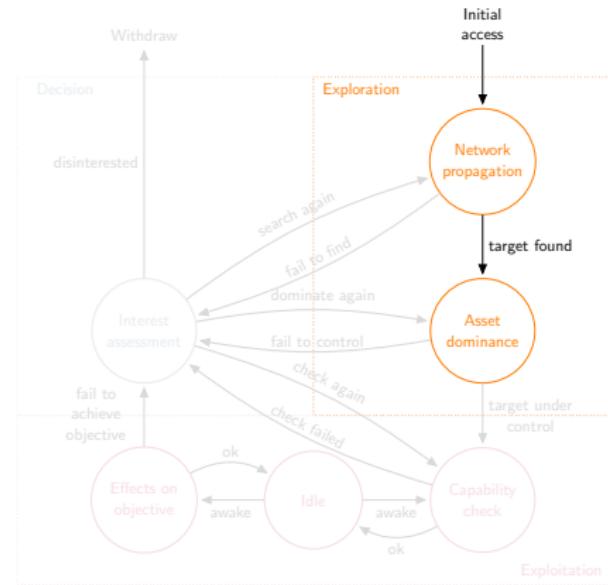
MITRE ATT&CK in 2013 a knowledge base of TTPs.

Tactics of the Attack matrix

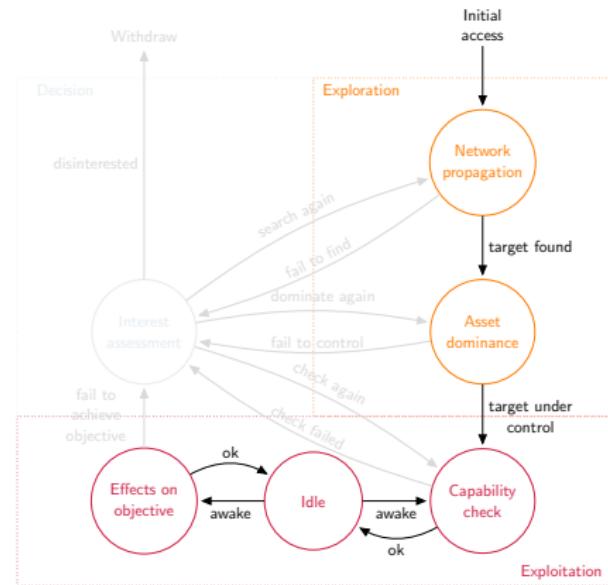
MITRE ATT&CK is not a model per se but it deepens the notion of phase of an attack without highlighting their ordering



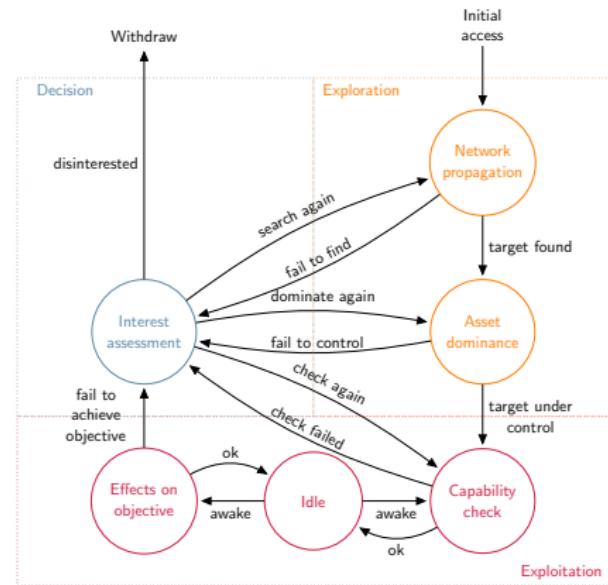
Modeling the Operational Phases of APT Campaigns [5]



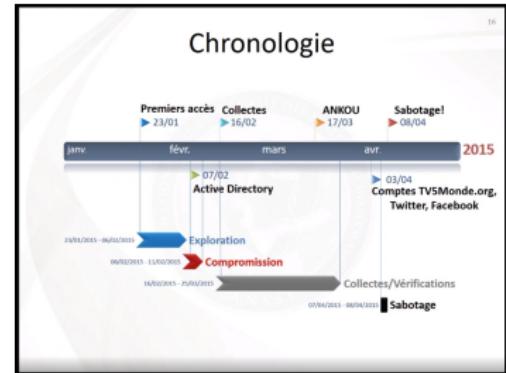
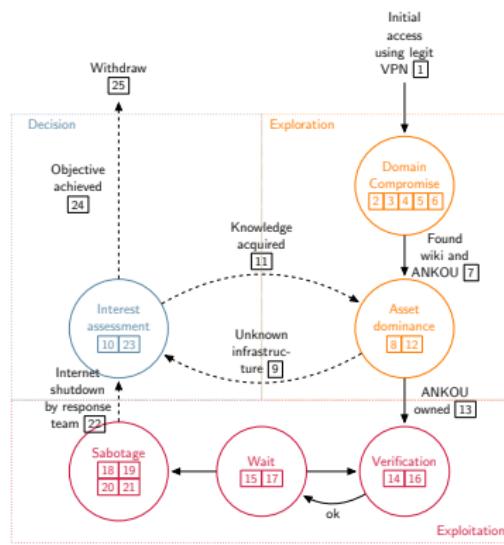
Modeling the Operational Phases of APT Campaigns [5]



Modeling the Operational Phases of APT Campaigns [5]



Instantiation by the incident of TV5 Monde



Suppose that the community agrees on a generic model to represent an APT

but we still lack data..

varied, representative, up-to-date and above all accurate data

PWNJUTSU project

PWNJUTSU

- Project funded and supported by IRSN BCyP
- 22 professional attackers attacks on a dedicated architecture
- New available dataset !

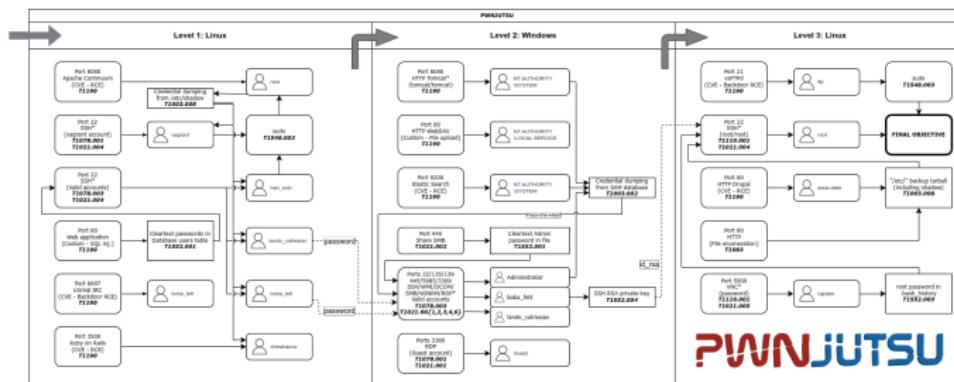
Publication

Aimad Berady, Mathieu Jaume, Valérie Viet Triem Tong et Gilles Guette :
PWNJUTSU: A Dataset and a Semantics-Driven Approach to Retrace Attack Campaigns.

*IEEE Transactions on Network and Service Management (TNSM),
Special Issue on Recent Advances in Network Security Management, 2022.*

PWNJUTSU Project overview

- 3 machines (Windows and Linux) : $M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow M_3$
 - mandatory checkpoints with *flags* to recover
 - Several attack paths
 - Vulnerabilities easy to exploit, so that the experimentation is focused on propagation in the network.



PWNJUTSU Project – Overview

- Dedicated Instances for each participant.
- Probes on operating systems and verbose logs
- Continuous capture of network flows
- Supervision by a SIEM.

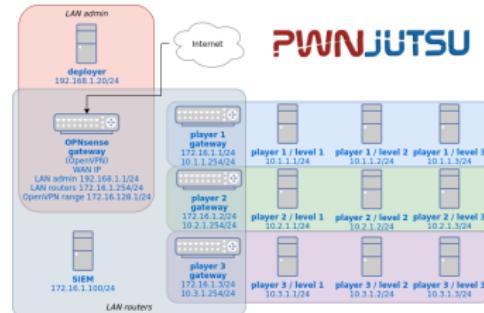


Figure – PWNJUTSU infrastructure

PWNJUTSU Project – Participants

YES WE H~~A~~CK

- 22 experts from the TOP100 of YesWeHack experts
- 9 nationalities
- Progressive and attractive financial rewards
- Typical participant profile :
 - 25-35 years old (63%) ;
 - Bachelor's/Master's level degree (91%) ;
 - Certified in "ethical hacking". (64%) ;
 - Self-trained offensive security expert(100%).

PWNJUTSU dataset

<https://pwnjutsu.irisa.fr>

a raw dataset

- 16 million system events
- 172 GB of network traffic
- a search engine

Time	Player	Level	Trace
15/05/2021 08:40:46	#16	ver1	May 15 08:40:46 n!<ver1> smonop#004 [Sue1120 and 3080 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
15/05/2021 08:40:53	#21	ver1	May 15 08:40:53 n!<ver1> smonop#004 [Sue1120 and 3080 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
15/05/2021 08:40:59	#21	ver1	May 15 08:40:59 n!<ver1> smonop#012 [Sue1120 and 3087 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
16/05/2021 17:14:30	#20	ver1	May 16 17:14:30 n!<ver1> smonop#1875 [Sue1120 and 3577 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
16/05/2021 18:18:59	#20	ver1	May 16 18:18:59 n!<ver1> smonop#1875 [Sue1121 and 3779 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
16/05/2021 18:19:44	#20	ver1	May 16 18:19:44 n!<ver1> smonop#1876 [Sue1121 and 3799 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
16/05/2021 20:09:09	#20	ver1	May 16 20:09:09 n!<ver1> smonop#1913 [Sue1121 and 3878 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
18/05/2021 23:27:49	#20	ver1	May 18 23:27:49 n!<ver1> smonop#1711 [Sue1120 and 262099 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
18/05/2021 23:21:49	#20	ver1	May 18 23:21:49 n!<ver1> smonop#1702 [Sue1120 and 262099 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
21/05/2021 13:38:43	#27	ver1	May 21 13:38:43 n!<ver1> smonop#1916 [Sue1120 and 262494 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
21/05/2021 13:38:49	#27	ver1	May 21 13:38:49 n!<ver1> smonop#1917 [Sue1120 and 262494 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
24/05/2021 18:56:06	#24	ver1	May 24 18:56:06 n!<ver1> smonop#3080 [Sue1040 and 13687 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an
24/05/2021 18:56:29	#24	ver1	May 24 18:56:29 n!<ver1> smonop#3080 [Sue1040 and 13687 http://www.your1.com/home.html,localhost:8080/n!<ver1> netstat -an] netstat -an

Here we have data

but how to present them ?

we need a way to detail the whole scenario
and each particular attack progression

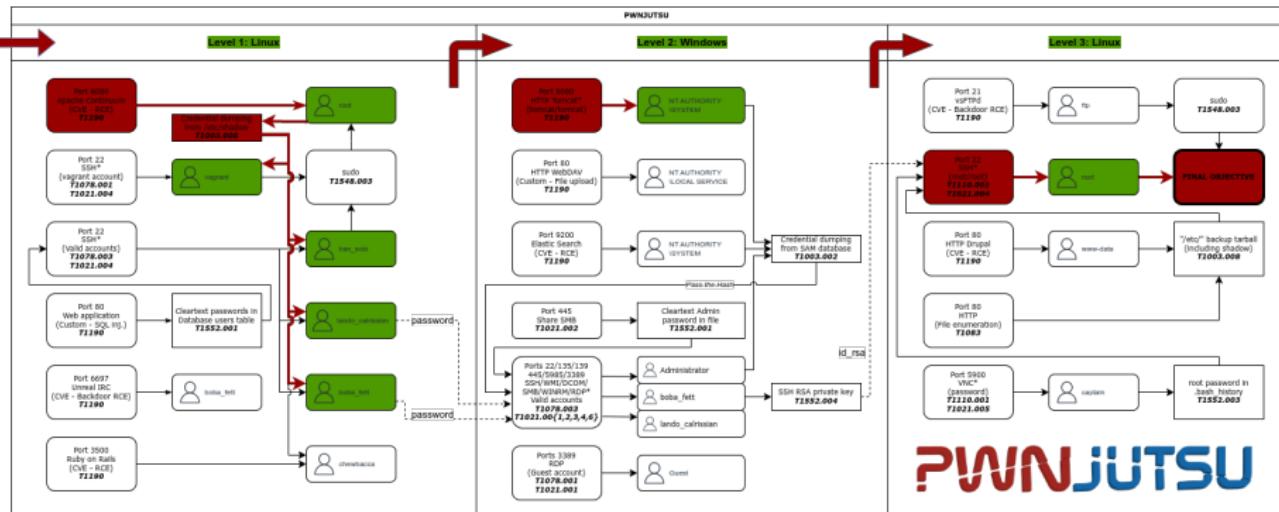
Attacker's report

Extract from P12 report

- ① scan nmap (1000 ports) through the VPN.
- ② Discovery of several services.
- ③ Recover banners and discover the continuum application.
- ④ Launched a bruteforce on the SSH port (without success and not very functional).
- ⑤ Search for public vulnerabilities on continuum.
- ⑥ Usage of Metasploit module to successfully exploit the continuum vulnerability.
- ⑦ I obtained a shell and fast environment of the machine.

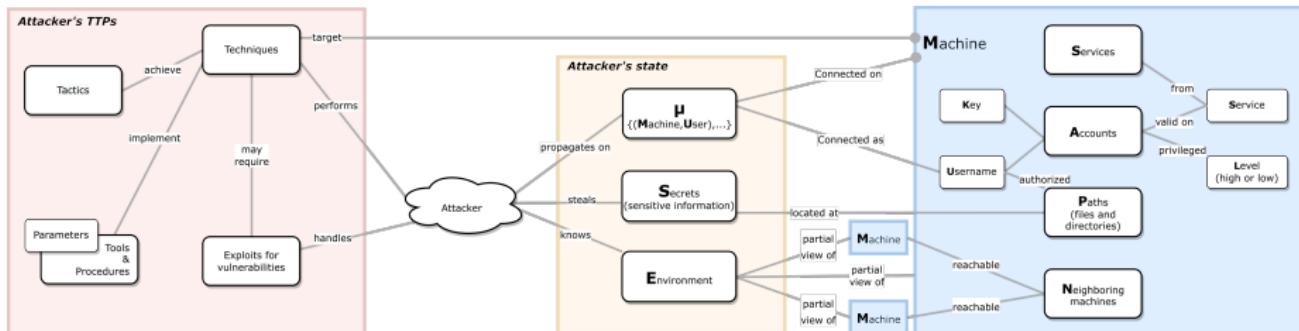
Informal report where some element are missing, attacker's perspective only

P12 progression



This progression has been manually inferred and represented.

An attacker centric model to retrace attack campaign



An attacker state

- μ an attack position (machine, user)
- S the recovered secrets
- E a partial view of the targeted system

A targeted system is a set of machines. A machine m

- S_m : services
- P_m : some files
- A_m : accounts
- N_m : a neighboring

Progression of an attacker

A complete attack campaign is a sequence of attacker states representing the evolution of his control of the target.

The attacker moves from one state to another by applying an attack technique.

$$(\mu_i, \mathcal{S}_i, \mathcal{E}_i) \xrightarrow{\mathbf{t}(\textit{params})} (\mu_{i+1}, \mathcal{S}_{i+1}, \mathcal{E}_{i+1})$$

The attack techniques are those defined by the MITRE attack. These techniques are still defined in natural language and do not have a precise semantic.

MITRE ATT&CK – T1210

MITRE | ATT&CK

Exploitation of Remote Services

Adversaries may exploit remote services to gain unauthorized access to internal systems once inside of a network. Exploitation of a software vulnerability occurs when an adversary takes advantage of a programming error in a program, service, or within the operating system software or kernel itself to execute adversary-controlled code. A common goal for post-compromise exploitation of remote services is for lateral movement to enable access to a remote system.

An adversary may need to determine if the remote system is in a vulnerable state, which may be done through Network Service Discovery or other Discovery methods looking for common, vulnerable software that may be deployed in the network, the lack of certain patches that may indicate vulnerabilities, or security software that may be used to detect or contain remote exploitation. Servers are likely a high value target for lateral movement exploitation, but endpoint systems may also be at risk if they provide an advantage or access to additional resources.

There are several well-known vulnerabilities that exist in common services such as SMB [1] and RDP [2] as well as applications that may be used within internal networks such as MySQL [3] and web server services. [4]

Depending on the permissions level of the vulnerable remote service an adversary may achieve Exploitation for Privilege Escalation as a result of lateral movement exploitation as well.

ID: T1210

Sub-techniques: No sub-techniques

① Tactic: Lateral Movement

① Platforms: Linux, Windows, macOS

① System Requirements: Unpatched software or otherwise vulnerable target. Depending on the target and goal, the system and exploitable service may need to be remotely accessible from the internal network.

① Permissions Required: User

Contributors: ExtraHop

Version: 1.1

Created: 18 April 2018

Last Modified: 24 February 2022

[Version Permalink](#)

Procedure Examples

ID	Name	Description
G0007	APT28	APT28 exploited a Windows SMB Remote Code Execution Vulnerability to conduct lateral movement. [5][6][7]
S0606	Bad Rabbit	Bad Rabbit used the EternalRomance SMB exploit to spread through victim networks. [8]
S0608	Conficker	Conficker exploited the MS08-067 Windows vulnerability for remote code execution through a crafted RPC request. [9]

A semantic for the technique *Exploitation of Remote Services*

TECHNIC	$T_{1210} : \text{Exploitation of Remote Services}$
TACTIC	<i>Lateral movement</i>
DESCRIPTION	Gain access to a machine by remotely exploiting a vulnerability using x exploit on an exposed network service s .
PARAMETERS	$\mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{m}', s, x$
PRÉCONDITIONS	$(\mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}) \in \mu,$ $\mathbf{m}' \in \lfloor \mathbb{N}_{\mathbf{m}} \rfloor_{\mathcal{E}},$ $s \in \lfloor \mathbb{S}_{\mathbf{m}'} \rfloor_{\mathcal{E}}$ et $x \in \text{Exploits}(s)$
TRANSITION	$(\mu, \mathcal{S}, \mathcal{E}) \hookrightarrow (\mu', \mathcal{S}, \mathcal{E})$ where $\mu' = \mu \cup \{(\mathbf{m}', \mathbf{u}')\}$ with $(\mathbf{u}', s, k, \ell) \in \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{m}'}$
VARIANTS	Authenticated vulnerabilities use the additional parameters \mathbf{u}'' and k'' such as $(\mathbf{u}'', s, k'', \ell'') \in \lfloor \mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{m}'} \rfloor_{\mathcal{E}}$

A semantic for the technique *Network Service Scanning* T1046

TECHNIQUE	$T_{1046} : \text{Network Service Scanning}$
TACTIQUE	<i>Discovery</i>
DESCRIPTION	Discover all network services of a remote machine \mathbf{m}' by browsing the namespace of network ports $\Delta \subseteq \{0, \dots, 65535\}$.
PARAMÈTRES	$\mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}, \mathbf{m}', \Delta$
PRÉCONDITIONS	$(\mathbf{m}, \mathbf{u}) \in \mu,$ $\mathbf{m}' \in [\mathbb{N}_{\mathbf{m}}]_{\mathcal{E}}$
TRANSITION	$(\mu, \mathcal{S}, \mathcal{E}) \xrightarrow{} (\mu, \mathcal{S}, \mathcal{E}')$ with $\mathcal{E}' = \mathcal{E} [\mathbf{m}' \leftarrow ([\mathbb{S}_{\mathbf{m}'}]_{\mathcal{E}} \cup \{\mathbf{s}(\text{port} : i) \mid i \in \Delta\}, [\mathbb{P}_{\mathbf{m}'}]_{\mathcal{E}}, [\mathbb{A}_{\mathbf{m}'}]_{\mathcal{E}}, [\mathbb{N}_{\mathbf{m}'}]_{\mathcal{E}})]$

Attack techniques semantics

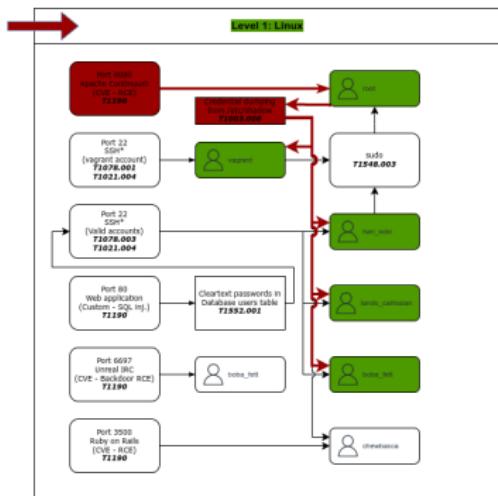
In [4] we detail the specification of 13 techniques, which satisfy 5 tactics :

- **Lateral Movement** : horizontal movement in the network (same user, different machine) ;
- **Credential Access** : collection of credentials ;
- **Privilege Escalation** : vertical movement in the network (different user, same machine) ;
- **Discovery** : discovery of the technical environment ;
- **Persistence** : implementation of a permanent remote access mechanism.

P12 progression (reminder)

Extract from P12 report

- ➊ scan nmap (1000 ports) through the VPN.
- ➋ Discovery of several services.
- ➌ Recover banners and discover the continuum application.
- ➍ Launched a bruteforce on the SSH port (without success and not very functional).
- ➎ Search for public vulnerabilities on continuum.
- ➏ Usage of Metasploit module to successfully exploit the continuum vulnerability.
- ➐ I obtained a shell and fast environment of the machine.



Evolution of Player 12's knowledge

ÉTAPE 0	P12 has an initial access on n12-gateway.
1- 22ptblock 22ptblack	P12 scanned network's services (T1046) from n12-gateway to n12-vm1.
ÉTAPE 1	
PARAMETERS	$m = n12 - \text{gateway}$, $u = \text{anonymous}$ $m' = n12 - \text{vm1}$, $\Delta = [\text{top100openportmap}]$
TRANSITION	$\mathcal{E}_1 = \mathcal{E}_0 \left[m' \leftarrow \left([S_{m'}]_{\mathcal{E}_0} \cup \left\{ \begin{array}{l} s(\text{port : 8080}), \\ s(\text{port : 22}), \\ s(\text{port : 80}), \\ s(\text{port : 6697}), \\ s(\text{port : 3500}) \end{array} \right\}, [P_{m'}]_{\mathcal{E}_0}, [A_{m'}]_{\mathcal{E}_0}, [N_{m'}]_{\mathcal{E}_0} \right) \right]$
TRACE (net)	HTTP/2.0 200 OK Date: Fri, 01-Jun-20 09:00:00 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Content-Length: 445 (HTML Report Generated by NetworkMiner 2.6.0.1)
1- 22ptblock 22ptblack	P12 exploits a remote service (T1210) Apache Continuum (port 8080) from n12-gateway to n12-vm1.
ÉTAPE 2	
PARAMETERS	$m = n12 - \text{gateway}$, $u = \text{anonymous}$ $m' = n12 - \text{vm1}$ $t = \text{continuum}(port : 8080)$ $x = \text{EDB-ID : 39945}$
TRANSITION	$\mu_1 = \mu_0 \cup \{(n12 - \text{vm1.root})\}$
TRACE (net)	HTTP/2.0 200 OK Date: Fri, 01-Jun-20 09:00:00 GMT Content-Type: text/html; charset=UTF-8 Content-Length: 445 (HTML Report Generated by NetworkMiner 2.6.0.1)
1- 22ptblock 22ptblack	P12 a récupéré un premier fichier flag secret (T1083) sur n12 - vm1.
ÉTAPE 3	
PARAMETERS	$m = n12 - \text{vm1}$, $u = \text{root}$ $p = /opt/apache/continuum/apache-continuum-1.4.2/flag.txt$
TRANSITION	$\mathcal{E}_2 = \mathcal{E}_1[m \leftarrow \{[S_m]_{\mathcal{E}_1}, [P_m]_{\mathcal{E}_1} \oplus \{(\{p, \{\text{root}\}\})\}, [A_m]_{\mathcal{E}_1}, [N_m]_{\mathcal{E}_1}\}]$
TRACE (sys)	key 0 20:00:00 n12-vm1:empty[0000]: (uid=0 and 1000 and !binary and !/opt/apache/continuum/apache-continuum-1.4.2/flag.txt - cat flag.txt)

$$\{(n12 - \text{gateway}, \text{anonymous})\}, \emptyset, \emptyset \downarrow t_{1046}$$

$$\{(n12 - \text{gateway}, \text{anonymous})\}, \emptyset, n12 - \text{vm1} \leftarrow \left(\begin{cases} s(\text{port : 8080}), \\ s(\text{port : 22}), \\ s(\text{port : 80}), \\ s(\text{port : 6697}), \\ s(\text{port : 3500}) \end{cases}, _, _, _, _ \right) \downarrow t_{1210}$$

$$\{(n12 - \text{gateway}, \text{anonymous}), (n12 - \text{vm1.root})\}, \emptyset, n12 - \text{vm1} \leftarrow \left(\begin{cases} s(\text{port : 8080}), \\ s(\text{port : 22}), \\ s(\text{port : 80}), \\ s(\text{port : 6697}), \\ s(\text{port : 3500}) \end{cases}, _, _, _, _ \right) \downarrow t_{1083}$$

$$\{(n12 - \text{gateway}, \text{anonymous})\}, TvYSrSr6FwmMeXRVcUz6lkFQPZLBLoj, n12 - \text{vm1} \leftarrow \left(\begin{cases} s(\text{port : 8080}), \\ s(\text{port : 22}), \\ s(\text{port : 80}), \\ s(\text{port : 6697}), \\ s(\text{port : 3500}) \end{cases}, \{(/opt/.../flag.txt) \} \right)$$

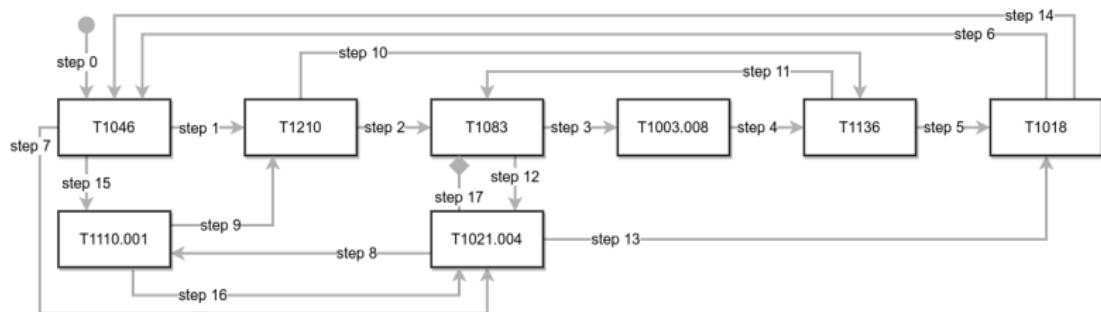
The complete attack campaign of Player 12

- 18 steps
- 6 attack techniques used
- 6 attack positions

Step 0	P12 got an initial access to n12-gateway.
Step 1	P12 performed network service scanning (T1046) from n12-gateway to n12-vml.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = anonymous M = n12 - vml, Δ = [tcp http port arp arpmap]
Trace (net)	May 2 2018 10:49:09 2017[0] httpd[170]: 10.10.1.10 19.10.1.1 102 [root] GET / HTTP/1.1 [n12-vml/n12-gateway]
Step 2	P12 exploited remote service (T1220) Apache Continuum (port 8080) from n12-gateway to n12-vml.
Parameters	M = n12 - gateway, U = anonymous M = n12 - gateway, B = continuation port : 8080 X = ZID-ID : 39943[3]
Trace (net)	May 2 2018 10:50:09 2017[0] httpd[170]: 10.10.1.10 19.10.1.1 102 [root] GET /continuation/continuation-action HTTP/1.1 [n12-vml/n12-gateway]
Step 3	P12 got a secret flag file (T1083) on n12 - vml.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = root M = n12 - vml, Δ = [http http port ... /flag.txt]
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: /root/.ssh/authorized_keys (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 4	P12 got all credentials (T1031.008) of n12 - vml OS.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = root, S = C01100
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: /root/.ssh/authorized_keys (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 5	P12 added a private key (from the root user's folder) for the user han_solo on the service SSH (T113) on machine n12 - vml.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = root M = n12 - vml, K = B0B91vat.ekey M = n12 - vml, S = 223
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: /root/.ssh/authorized_keys (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 6	P12 discovered remote system (T1088) n12 - vml from n12 - vml1 using ARP table.
Parameters	R = n12 - vml, U = root, M = n12 - vml
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: /root/.ssh/authorized_keys (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 7	P12 performed network service scanning (T1046) from n12 - vml to n12 - vml1 as user root.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = root M = n12 - vml, Δ = [tcp http port arp arpmap]
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: [root] exec: exec:1208 [n12-vml/n12-vml1] /bin/sh (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 8	P12 got an access using SSH (T101.004) service on n12 - vml as user han_solo with the previously added private key.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = han_solo M = n12 - vml, U = han_solo K = 8828qrsivatekey, S = ssh2 port : 22
Trace (sys)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: [root] exec: exec:1208 [n12-vml/n12-vml1] /bin/sh (n12-vml/n12-gateway)
Step 9	P12 bruteforce by guessing (T110.000) the service Tomcat/axis2 (port 8080) with the default username admin and password admin.
Parameters	M = n12 - vml, U = han_solo, M = n12 - vml, U = admin, M = tomcat port : 8080
Trace (net)	May 2 2018 10:54 2017[0] anonymous[15881]: [han_solo] POST /axis2/services/admin/login HTTP/1.1 [n12-vml/n12-vml1]
Step 10	P12 discovered remote service (T1088) Tomcat (port 8080) on n12 - vml to n12 - vml1.
Step 11	P12 added an account for the user han_solo on the service SSH (T1136) on machine n12 - vml.
Step 12	P12 got a secret flag file (T1083) on n12 - vml2.
Step 13	P12 got an access using SSH (T101.004) service on n12 - vml2 as user gutenberg.
Step 14	P12 discovered remote system (T1088) n12 - vml from n12 - vml2 using ARP table.
Step 15	P12 performed network service scanning (T1046) from n12 - vml2 to n12 - vml3.
Step 16	P12 bruteforce by guessing (T110.000) the service ssh (port 22) with the username root on n12 - vml3.
Step 17	P12 got an access using SSH (T101.004) service on n12 - vml3 as user root.
Step 18	P12 got a secret flag file (T1083) on n12 - vml3.

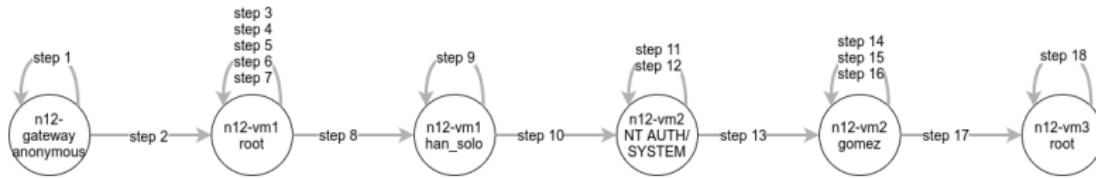
First immediate benefit

You can visualize the attack from the attack techniques point of view



First immediate benefits

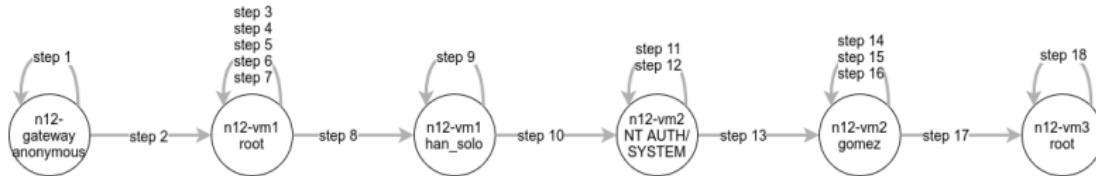
You can visualize the propagation area



Perspectives

Attack scenario

- An attack position is a pair (*machine, user*)
- A successful attack procedure execution
 - increase the attacker knowledge
 - or allows to move from an attack position to another



Take away

- PWNJUTSU : a new dataset of traces of professional attackers
- a semantic of attack techniques that allows to precisely describe the attacker behavior
- the central concept of attack position

What is still missing ?

In this work

- the dataset misses from noise and normal activity
- the logs were manually interpreted

More globally

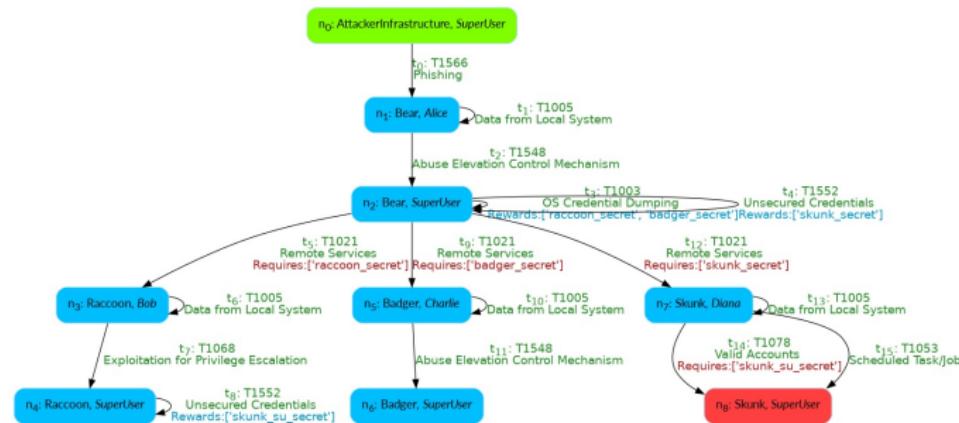
We need

- more precisely described datasets with different infrastructures and different attacks
- high level and low level representation of attacks
- a way to infer these representation automatically

Perspectives

Submitted for publication. PhD thesis research project of
Pierre-Victor Besson

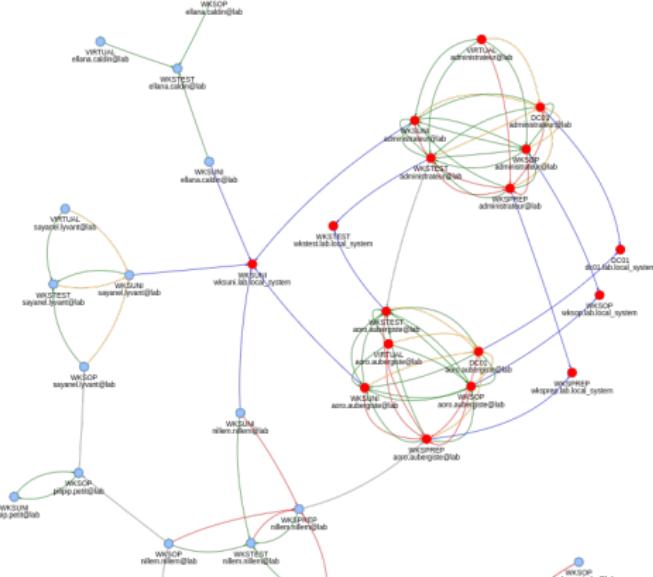
Generation of training systems



Perspectives

submitted for publication, to be improved during the PhD thesis research project of Manuel Poisson in collaboration with Amossys.

Evaluation of the propagation area using Living-off-the-land techniques



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