A Look Back at BazarLoader's DGA – Malware Book Reports

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I was recently asked a question about DGA and I was unsatisfied with my explanation, so I wanted to write a quick post on DGA, what it is, and how it works. I learned a lot going through this exercise and I hope you enjoy it.

What is DGA?

A Domain Generation Algorithm (DGA) is a technique used by malware authors to generate new domain names for malware command and control. Typically malware will contain a configuration which will house any number of things, including the Command and Control (C2) domains/IPs. While these configurations are typically encrypted within the binary, malware analysts and reverse engineers can often extract these C2s through sandboxes or configuration extractors. This makes it fairly easy, if not trivial, to extract these C2s and put in network blocks. To combat this, malware authors use DGAs to generate domains over time, allowing for a sometimes infinite stream of C2s. This allows for increased persistence if C2 infrastructure is taken down and makes it more difficult to block network traffic.

How Does a DGA Work?

DGAs generate domains over time according to the particular algorithm written in the malware. DGAs often produce their own distinct patterns in the domains they generate. Some DGAs may generate domains by combining multiple words or numbers from a hardcoded dictionary included in the malware. Others will use a seed value to generate a more random looking domain name. Once the domain name has been created, the DGA will then add a top-level domain (TLD), such as .com or .net, to finalize the DGA C2.
Because a DGA is capable of producing infinite domains, threat actors do not need to register every domain potentially generated. The threat actor holds the algorithm and therefore can identify when a domain would be generated according to the routine and can register that domain as needed, such as a situation where previous C2 infrastructure is taken down and communication to the implant is lost.

Defend Against DGAs

DGAs can pose a difficult problem to the blue team. Extracting configurations and putting in network blocks is often times trivial, but DGAs present the challenge of preventing virtually infinite combinations of C2 addresses. DGAs embedded in malware can be reverse engineered, the DGA emulated and network blocks put into place, but that task is time consuming and network blocks will quickly get out of hand. The main advantage of DGAs in the modern era is longer lasting infrastructure, as host-based firewalls and EDR products make network containment of endpoints significantly easier. Threat Researchers and law enforcement often work together to reverse engineer

the C2 network protocols and C2 DGA in order to register future domains. In some cases, commands can be sent to the botnet to uninstall the malware, remove critical files, etc. to takedown particular botnets.

BazarLoader Domain Generation Algorithm

A while back I wrote a blog post about BazarLoader, which had been quite prevalent in those days. In more recent times, BazarLoader as all but disappeared in favor of the newer BumbleBee malware. In that blog post, I briefly highlighted the existence of the domain generation algorithm included with BazarLoader, but I did not dive into how it works. Let's take a look at the algorithm and see if we can replicate the algorithm in Python.

BazarLoader's DGA

Figure 1: Generate Emercoin – BazarLoader's DGA Algorithm

Algorithm Breakdown

Before I break this down, I want to give credit where credit is due. I'm not experienced when it comes to reversing DGAs and working through this algorithm was tough. I came across this blog post and the author does an incredible job breaking down the algorithm. I heavily relied on it as a reference as I debugged and learned how the algorithm works. I highly recommend reading that post, and others by the author, for an in-depth understanding of BazarLoader's DGA and how it has evolved over time. With that said, let's dive into the algorithm.

1. BazarLoader first separates the 26 letter alphabet into two characters classes containing 25 characters total. (j is omitted)
    - 6 vowels `aeiouy`
    - 19 consonants `bcdfghklmnpqrstvwxz`
2. The two sets are then combined into 2 * 6 * 19 ordered pairs that contain one vowel and one consonant (Cartesian Product).
3. The 228 resulting pairs are then rearranged with a permutation that is hard-coded into BazarLoader. This permutation is the seed of the BazarLoader DGA.
4. Four pairs are chosen from the 228 pairs and appended together to create the second level domain. The pairs are selected based on the current date (MM-YYYY), where the 2 month digits and last 2 digits of the year are significant. For example, given August 5, 2022, 0822 would be the significant digits used to select the pairs.

Character Pool Pairs

Before we jump into our pair selection, let's take a look at our embedded pairs so we understand the character pool pairs the algorithm selects from. When pairs are being selected, bytes are selected from the following two structures, with the two selections being XORed to produce an ASCII character. Each of the two structures were of length 0x1C8 (456), the length expected for 228 character pairs. In order to generate the total character pool, the two structures can be extracted and XORed to produce the pool of character pairs.

```
 ciphertext = bytearray(b'\x10\x9C\x57\xCD\x64\xB2\x33\xCA\x51\xF1\x1E\xF6\x55\xAF\x48\xDC\x4D\x87\x76\xFE\x17\x

key = bytearray(b'\x68\xF9\x2D\xA8\x0A\xDD\x49\xBF\x38\x8B\x6E\x9F\x3A\xDE\x3E\xA9\x28\xEC\x1F\x98\x6F\xE8\x5B\x

 for i in range(len(ciphertext)):
     ciphertext[i] ^= key[i%len(key)]


Resulting Char Pool:
xezenozuizpioqvuekifxyusofalytkadeibubysmyliylvaikultugikuuddoyqlanevebaqoixogicuqebuvbuviehbofyefsokonihosygoyn
```

Date Seed

As mentioned above, the current date is used to select character pairs. The analysis below was performed August 04, 2022, meaning `0822` will be used to calculate the pairs.

First Pair

The first pair is selected by splitting the character pool pairs into groups of 19. The first digit of the date is then used as the index of the groups to select. Since the first digit of a month will either be a 0 or 1 (01, 02, 03…10, 11, 12), only two groups can be selected from.

Note: I will use a DGA domain generated during a debugging session as a visual example. To denote which character pair was chosen during this session, the pair will be highlighted in bold font.

```
          xe ze no zu iz pi oq vu ek if xy us of al yt ka de ib ub
         ys my li yl va ik ul tu gi ku ud do yq la ne ve ba qo ix
```

Below is what this selection looks like in the debugger.

Figure 2: Calculate first char of first pair == ‘p’

Figure 3: Calculate second char of first pair == ‘i’

Second Pair

The second pair is selected in the same way as the first pair, but groups are picked based on the second digit. The second digit can range from 0-9, so ten different groups are possible.

```
          xe ze no zu iz pi oq vu ek if xy us of al yt ka de ib ub
         ys my li yl va ik ul tu gi ku ud do yq la ne ve ba qo ix
         og ic uq eb uv bu vi eh bo fy ef so ko ni ho sy go yn be
```

```
et we nu un uw oh qu ri ta am ug vy it im fi yr el co yk
aq qa ac ap ok cu yd se um af ed em fu by ir ah iq ux eg
ce ab ur ot il uh vo cy wo wu mo yv up ag du ob as er ro
zi qy en pa ha xi lo az od to is hu ax bi uf mi fo iw es
le yh zo yf re on ty uz fa ez ky pu ar yw ny av ry si ov
yc zy ra ci os gu mu at yz om me ol xa eq da ev ke pe ox
sa ut ep po ym xo oz wi yg uc py he ec te ly za yx yb ga
```

Figure 4: Calculate first char of second pair == ‘p’

Figure 5: Calculate second char of first pair == ‘e’

Third Pair

The third pair is selected from groups with a size of 4 pairs. The third digit can range from 0-9, so ten different groups are possible. This digit represents the current decade and therefore the group of 4 pairs `ek if xy us` will remain the same for quite some time.

```
 xe ze no zu
iz pi oq vu
ek if xy us
of al yt ka
de ib ub ys
my li yl va
ik ul tu gi
ku ud do yq
la ne ve ba
qo ix og ic
```

Figure 6: Calculate first char of third pair == ‘x’

Figure 7: Calculate second char of third pair == ‘y’

Fourth Pair

The fourth and final pair are selected in the same manner as the third pair. Again, there are 10 potential groups of 4 pairs.

```
 xe ze no zu
iz pi oq vu
ek if xy us
```

```
of al yt ka
de ib ub ys
my li yl va
ik ul tu gi
ku ud do yq
la ne ve ba
qo ix og ic
```

Figure 8: Calculate first char of fourth pair == ‘e’

Figure 9: Calculate second char of fourth pair == ‘k’

Combine Second Level Domain with Top Level Domain

Now that the second level domain of `pipexyek` as been generated, the top level domain of .bazar is appended to complete the DGA. “.bazar” can be seen in the above figure as a “tight string.” The two hex-values of `0x57E6691A` and `0x2D877955` are combined and XORed with `0x2D870B34`, resulting in `.bazar.`

Figure 10: Bazar tight string XOR decrypted

Algorithm Replication in Python

Once again, I would like to link this [blog post](#) that contained a Python script to emulate this DGA. I learned a ton from this blog and look forward to reading and reversing more DGAs in the future.

```
 from binascii import hexlify, unhexlify
import argparse
import logging
import traceback
import os
from datetime import datetime
from collections import namedtuple
from itertools import product

def configure_logger(log_level):
    log_file = os.path.join(os.path.dirname(os.path.realpath(__file__)), 'bazardga.log')
    log_levels = {0: logging.ERROR, 1: logging.WARNING, 2: logging.INFO, 3: logging.DEBUG}
    log_level = min(max(log_level, 0), 3) #clamp to 0-3 inclusive
    logging.basicConfig(level=log_levels[log_level],
                        format='%(asctime)s - %(name)s - %(levelname)-8s %(message)s',
                        handlers=[
                            logging.FileHandler(log_file, 'a'),
                            logging.StreamHandler()
```

```
                        ])

class DGA:

    def __init__(self, date: datetime):
        self.logger = logging.getLogger('BazarLoader DGA Generator')
        self.seed = datetime.strftime(date, '%m%Y')

    def decrypt_permutation(self):

        ciphertext = bytearray(b'\x10\x9C\x57\xCD\x64\xB2\x33\xCA\x51\xF1\x1E\xF6\x55\xAF\x48\xDC\x4D\x87\x76\xF

        key = bytearray(b'\x68\xF9\x2D\xA8\x0A\xDD\x49\xBF\x38\x8B\x6E\x9F\x3A\xDE\x3E\xA9\x28\xEC\x1F\x98\x6F\x

        # XOR decrypt to reveal char pool
        for i in range(len(ciphertext)):
            ciphertext[i] ^= key[i%len(key)]
        self.logger.debug(f"Character Pair Pool: \n {ciphertext.decode('utf-8')}")
        return ciphertext

    def generate_domains(self):
        """
        Generate DGA domains using BazarLoader DGA algorithm.
        """

        # Calculate pairs (ciphertext and key are hardcoded into Bazarloader)
        charpool = self.decrypt_permutation().decode('utf-8')

        # Print out seed
        self.logger.critical(f'Seed is: {self.seed}')
        print(f'Seed is: {self.seed}')

        # Generate Possible Ranges
        Param = namedtuple('Param', 'mul mod idx')
        params = [Param(19, 19, 0), Param(19, 19, 1), Param(4, 4, 4), Param(4, 4, 5)]
        ranges = []
        for p in params:
            s = int(self.seed[p.idx])
            lower = p.mul * s
            upper = lower + p.mod
            ranges.append(list(range(lower, upper)))

        self.logger.debug(ranges)

        # Generate Domains looping indices of Cartesian product
        domains = set()
        for indices in product(*ranges):
```

```
            self.logger.debug(indices)
            domain = ""
            for index in indices:
                domain += charpool[index * 2 : index * 2 + 2]
            domain += '.bazar'
            domains.add(domain)

        for domain in domains:
            print(domain)

if __name__ == '__main__':
    parser = argparse.ArgumentParser(description='BazarLoader String Decryptor')
    parser.add_argument('-v', '--verbose', action='count', default=0,
        help='Increase verbosity. Can specify multiple times for more verbose output')
    parser.add_argument('-d', '--date', default=datetime.now().strftime('%Y-%m-%d'),
        help='Date used for seeding. (e.g. 2022-08-05)')
    args = parser.parse_args()
    configure_logger(args.verbose)
    date = datetime.strptime(args.date, '%Y-%m-%d')
    dga = DGA(date)
    try:
        dga.generate_domains()
    except Exception as e:
        print(f'Exception generating DGA domains.')
        print(traceback.format_exc())
```

Finally, now that we have a list of all the domains and know the algorithm used to generate them, a simple regex can be used to identify any network communications:
`[a-ik-z]{8}\.bazar`

Source: https://malwarebookreports.com/a-look-back-at-bazarloaders-dga/