A review of the evolution of Andromeda over the years before we say goodbye

Archived: 2026-04-05 21:40:25 UTC

Bahare Sabouri & He Xu

Fortinet, Canada

Copyright © 2018 Virus Bulletin

Table of contents

Introduction

Andromeda, also known as Gamaru and Wauchos, is a modular and HTTP-based botnet that was discovered in late 2011. From that point on, it managed to survive and continue hardening by evolving in different ways. In particular, the complexity of its loader and AV evasion methods increased repeatedly, and C&C communication changed between the different versions as well.

We deal with versions of this threat on a daily basis and we have collected a number of different variants. The botnet first came onto our tracking radar at version 2.06, and we have tracked the versions since then. In this paper we will describe the evolution of Andromeda from version 2.06 to 2.10 and demonstrate both how it has improved its loader to evade automatic analysis/detection and how the payload varies among the different versions.

This article could also be seen as a way to say 'goodbye' to the botnet: a takedown effort, followed by the arrest of the suspected botnet owner in December 2017, may mean we have seen the last of the botnet that has plagued Internet users for more than half a decade.

Overview of Andromeda

The first Andromeda to be discovered was spotted in the wild in 2011, and the new 2.06 version followed quickly afterwards in early 2012. Not much is known about any earlier versions and it is possible they were never released into the wild.

The campaign continued to develop with versions 2.07, 2.08, 2.09 and 2.10. The latest known version, 2.10, was first seen in 2015 and may be the final version released: according to posts on underground forums, the development of the threat stopped around a year ago. Figure 1 shows a brief history of Andromeda.

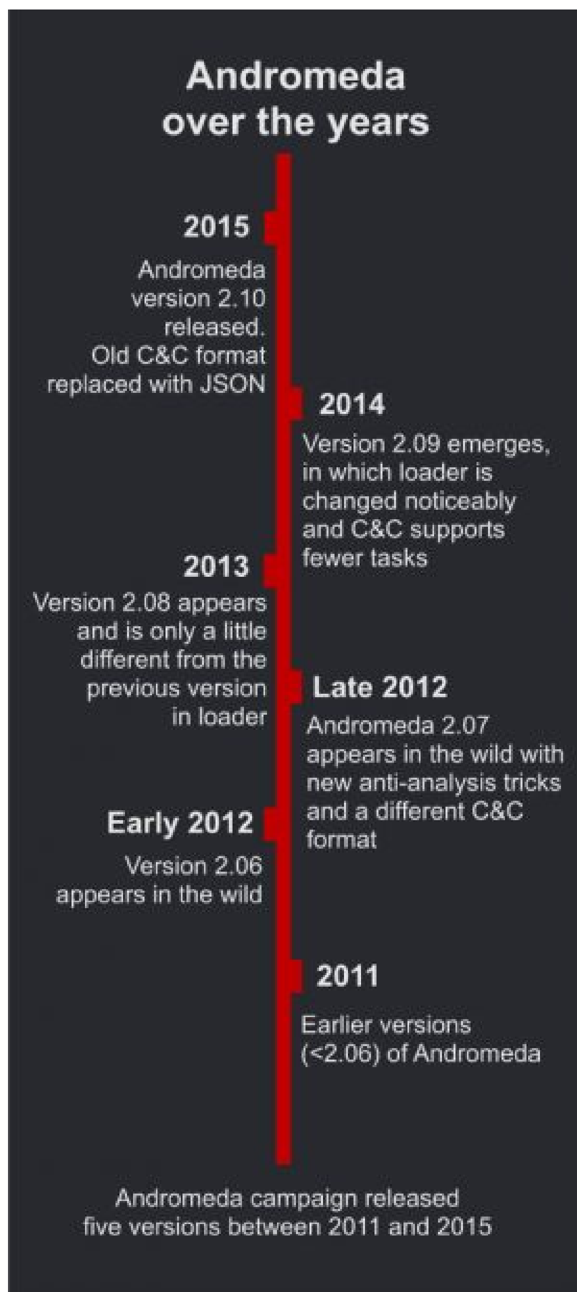

Figure 1: A brief history of Andromeda.

Regardless of the version, Andromeda arrives on the target machine as a packed sample. Various packers have been used, from very famous packers such as UPX and SFX RAR to lesser known and even customized ones which are compiled in various languages such as Autoit, .Net and C++.

Unpacking the first layer of the sample reveals the loader, which is small both in terms of size (13KB to 20KB) and in the number of function calls it contains.

Loader

In all versions of Andromeda the loader avoids making direct calls to APIs. Instead, it incorporates hashes to find and call the APIs via general purpose registers. Versions 2.06, 2.07 and 2.08 pass hash values as immediate values to a function and thus find the matching API name. Version 2.06 uses a custom hash function, while versions 2.07 and 2.08

use CRC32. Versions 2.09 and 2.10 have the same trivial custom hash function. Figure 3 shows the loader in version 2.09 handling an array of hash values.

```
_1961:00401929    test    eax, eax
_1961:0040192B    jz      loc_401A2E
_1961:00401931    push    86B0A95Ah
_1961:00401936    push    [ebp+var_C]
_1961:00401939    call    resolveAddress_byHash
_1961:0040193E    test    eax, eax
_1961:00401940    jz      loc_401A0B
_1961:00401946    push    104h
_1961:0040194B    push    [ebp+var_10]
_1961:0040194E    call    eax
_1961:00401950    add     eax, [ebp+var_10]
_1961:00401953    mov     dword ptr [eax], 642E2A5Ch
_1961:00401959    add     eax, 4
_1961:0040195C    mov     dword ptr [eax], 6C6Ch
_1961:00401962    push    75272948h
_1961:00401967    push    [ebp+var_C]
_1961:0040196A    call    resolveAddress_byHash
_1961:0040196F    mov     [ebp+var_158], eax
_1961:00401975    test    eax, eax
_1961:00401977    jz      loc_401A0B
_1961:0040197D    push    0C9EBD5CEh
_1961:00401982    push    [ebp+var_C]
_1961:00401985    call    resolveAddress_byHash
_1961:0040198A    mov     edx, eax
_1961:0040198C    test    eax, eax
_1961:0040198E    jz      short loc_401A0B
_1961:00401990    lea     eax, [ebp+var_152]
_1961:00401996    push    eax
_1961:00401997    push    [ebp+var_10]
_1961:0040199A    call    edx
```

API Hash

Figure 2: Version 2.08 passes the hash as an immediate value to 'resolveAddress_byHash'.

```
.text:004016EA    dd 0AB48C65h
.text:004016EE    dd 0DE604C6Ah
.text:004016F2    dd 925F5D71h
.text:004016F6    dd 0EFD32EF6h
.text:004016FA    dd 0B8E06C7Dh
.text:004016FE    dd 831D0FAAh
.text:00401702    dd 0A62BF608h
.text:00401706    dd 102DE0D9h
.text:0040170A    dd 7CD8E53Dh
.text:0040170E    dd 6815415Ah
.text:00401712    dd 0E7F9919Fh
.text:00401716    dd 64C4ACE4h
.text:0040171A    dd 0
```

Array of hash values

Figure 3: In version 2.09, the loader handles an array of hash values.

Version 2.10 also keeps an array of API hash values. The hash algorithm is a custom function and, in order to complicate static analysis further, the author incorporates opaque predicates, as shown in Figure 4.

```
00402784 64 A1 30 00 00 00                    mov     eax, large fs:30h
0040278A 8B 40 0C                             mov     eax, [eax+0Ch]
0040278D 8B 40 0C                             mov     eax, [eax+0Ch]
00402790 81 E7 8C AD 09 66                    and     edi, 6609AD8Ch
00402796 81 EF 21 18 1D 2D                    sub     edi, 2D1D1821h
0040279C 81 C6 DA F0 57 40                    add     esi, 4057F0DAh
004027A2 89 45 68                             mov     [ebp+78h+var_10], eax
004027A5
004027A5                     loc_4027A5:                              ; CODE XREF: start+3B9↓j
004027A5 8B 45 68                             mov     eax, [ebp+78h+var_10]
004027A8 81 EF E6 81 E6 10                    sub     edi, 10E681E6h
004027AE 81 CE 9E 5A EF 4C                    or      esi, 4CEF5A9Eh
004027B4 89 45 B4                             mov     [ebp+78h+var_C4], eax
004027B7
004027B7                     loc_4027B7:                              ; CODE XREF: start+5DC↓j
004027B7 81 CF 3C 32 91 F1                    or      edi, 0F191323Ch
004027BD 81 C6 AE B5 29 25                    add     esi, 2529B5AEh
004027C3 81 FF CB 28 A2 FD                    cmp     edi, 0FDA228CBh
004027C9 0F 84 02 05 00 00                    jz      loc_402CD1
004027CF 8B 45 68                             mov     eax, [ebp+78h+var_10]
004027D2 69 FF 73 54 E1 58                    imul    edi, 58E15473h
004027D8 8B 00                                mov     eax, [eax]
004027DA 81 CE 0E 00 4B 11                    or      esi, 114B000Eh
004027E0 89 45 68                             mov     [ebp+78h+var_10], eax
004027E3 81 FE EE EC C2 8B                    cmp     esi, 8BC2ECEEh
004027E9 0F 84 EE 00 00 00                    jz      loc_4028DD
```

Opaque Predicates

Figure 4: Opaque predicates in the version 2.10 loader make static anaylsis more difficult.

Main structure

The section in the loader that is used to evade virtual machines and, more generally, analysis, is similar in versions 2.06, 2.07 and 2.08. In these variants, the loader enumerates the processes running on the machine and compares them against a list of unwanted processes. In order to do this, the loader converts the name of each process to lowercase and then calculates its hash value. The hash values are then compared against a hard-coded list of values. The same algorithm as is used to hash API names is used here. The hash algorithm in version 2.08 has an extra xor instruction (xor eax, 0E17176Fh). As shown in Figure 5, the newer versions have longer lists of unwanted processes.

```
lea     eax, [ebp+var_150]
push    eax
call    Convert_Str_LowerCase
lea     eax, [ebp+var_150]
push    eax
call    CalcHash_Process
cmp     eax, 4CE5FD07h
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 8181326Ch
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 31E233AFh
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 91D47DF6h
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 0E8CDDC54h
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 8C6D6Ch
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 0A8D0BA0Eh
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 0A4EF3C0Eh
jz      loc_401767
cmp     eax, 5CD7BA5Eh
jz      loc_401767
lea     eax, [ebp+var_174]
push    eax
push    [ebp+var_4C]
call    [ebp+var_10]
test    eax, eax
jnz     loc_401508
```

```
lea     eax, [ebp-144h]
push    eax
call    Convert_Str_LowerCase
lea     eax, [ebp-144h]
push    eax
call    CalcHash_Process
cmp     eax, 99DD4432h
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 2D859DB4h
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 64340DCEh
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 63C54474h
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 349C9C8Bh
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 3446EBCEh
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 5BA9B1FEh
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 3CE2BEF3h
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 3D46F02Bh
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 77AE10F7h
jz      loc_401E97
cmp     eax, 0F344E95Dh
jz      loc_401E97
lea     eax, [ebp-168h]
push    eax
push    dword ptr [ebp-40h]
call    dword ptr [ebp-1Ch]
test    eax, eax
jnz     loc_401C65
```

```
lea     eax, [ebp-144h]
push    eax
call    Convert_Str_LowerCase
lea     eax, [ebp-144h]
push    eax
call    CalcHash_Process
xor     eax, 0E17176Fh
cmp     eax, 97CA535Dh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 23928ADBh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 6A231AA1h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 6DD2531Bh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 3A8B8BE4h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 3A51FCA1h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 55BEA691h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 32F5A99Ch
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 3351E744h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 79B90798h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 0FD53FE32h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 23A97A00h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 0ADC6152Bh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 1365FAFEh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 98847CD1h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 299BC837h
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 35E8EFEAh
jz      loc_401EF3
cmp     eax, 632434B6h
jz      loc_401EF3
lea     eax, [ebp-168h]
push    eax
push    dword ptr [ebp-40h]
call    dword ptr [ebp-24h]
test    eax, eax
jnz     loc_401CD2
```

Figure 5: From left to right: version 2.06, 2.07 and 2.08 hard-coded hash values correspond to the list of unwanted processes.

2.06	**2.07**	**2.08**
0x4CE5FD07: vmwareuser.exe 0x8181326C: vmwareservice.exe 0x31E233AF: vboxservice.exe 0x91D47DF6: vboxtray.exe 0xE8CDDC54: sandboxiedcomlaunch.exe 0x8C6D6C: sandboxierpcss.exe 0x0A8D0BA0E: procmon.exe 0x0A4EF3C0E: wireshark.exe 0x5CD7BA5E: netmon.exe	0x99DD4432: vmwareuser.exe 0x2D859DB4: vmwareservice.exe 0x64340DCE: vboxservice.exe 0x63C54474: vboxtray.exe 0x349C9C8B: sandboxiedcomlaunch.exe 0x3446EBCE: sandboxierpcss.exe 0x5BA9B1FE: procmon.exe 0x3CE2BEF3: regmon.exe 0x3D46F02B: filemon.exe 0x77AE10F7: wireshark.exe 0x0F344E95D: netmon.exe	0x97CA535D: vmwareuser.exe 0x23928ADB: vmwareservice.exe 0x6A231AA1: vboxservice.exe 0x6DD2531B: vboxtray.exe 0x3A8B8BE4: sandboxiedcomlaunch.exe 0x3A51FCA1: sandoxierpcss.exe 0x55BEA691: procmon.exe 0x32F5A99C: regmon.exe 0x3351E744: filemon.exe 0x79B90798: wireshark.exe 0x0FD53FE32: netmon.exe 0x23A97A00: prl_tools_service.exe 0x0ADC6152B: prl_tools.exe

		0x1365FAFE: prl_cc.exe 0x98847CD1: sharedintapp.exe 0x299BC837: vmtoolsd.exe 0x35E8EFEA: vmsrvc.exe 0x632434B6: vmusrvc.exe

Table 1: Corresponding process to each hash.

Next, the bot takes advantage of registry artifacts and checks the registry value in the following key:

Key: HKLM\system\currentcontrolset\services\disk\enum
ValueName: 0

Version 2.06 parses the value of the subkey for the presence of the substrings 'qemu', 'vbox' and 'wmwa'. Similarly, versions 2.07 and 2.08 check for 'qemu', 'vbox' and 'vmwa'. (It is likely that 'wmwa' was a bug in version 2.06 that was patched later.) Upon finding any of these strings, each version takes a different approach to redirect the flow of the code.

Before redirecting the code in versions 2.06 and 2.07, the sample designates another snippet of code that uses a technique known as 'time attack' in order to prevent further analysis. The malware acquires the timestamp counter (by calling rdtsc) twice and calculates the difference between the two. If the difference is less than 512ms, it proceeds to resolve imports and decrypt the payload. Otherwise, it leads to a dummy code, where the loader drops a copy of itself in %ALLUSERSPROFILE% and renames it to svchost.exe.

```
.text:00401746                                      ; start+1E3↑j ...
.text:00401746                 rdtsc
.text:00401748                 push    eax
.text:00401749                 rdtsc
.text:0040174B                 pop     edx
.text:0040174C                 sub     eax, edx
.text:0040174E                 cmp     eax, 200h
.text:00401753                 jnb     short loc_401767
.text:00401755
.text:00401755 loc_401755:                          ; CODE XREF: start+AC↑j
.text:00401755                 lea     eax, dword_401778
.text:0040175B                 mov     [ebp+var_188], eax
.text:00401761                 lea     eax, dummyCode
```

Figure 6: Timestamp analysis to detect the debugger.

Following that, it creates an autorun registry for the dropped file as follows:

Key: HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
ValueName: SunJavaUpdateSched

Eventually, waiting for a command in an infinite loop, it sniffs port 8000. A received command will then be run in the command window.

As part of its evolution, version 2.07 implements a custom exception handler using a call to SetUnhandledExceptionFilter. Similarly, version 2.08 calls RtlAddVectoredExceptionHandler and adds the custom handler as the first handler into the vectored exception handler chain (VEH), as shown in Figures 7 and 8.

```
.text:00401B84 loc_401B84:                              ; CODE XREF: sub_401B62+7↑j
.text:00401B84                 push    8007h
.text:00401B89                 call    dword ptr [ebp-10h]
.text:00401B8C                 push    offset custom_exception_handler
.text:00401B91                 call    dword ptr [ebp-SetUnhandledExceptionFilter]
.text:00401B94                 mov     ebx, large fs:30h
.text:00401B9B                 mov     ebx, [ebx+0Ch]
.text:00401B9E                 mov     ebx, [ebx+0Ch]
.text:00401BA1                 push    20h
.text:00401BA3                 push    1000h
.text:00401BA8                 push    20h
.text:00401BAA                 push    dword ptr [ebx+18h]
.text:00401BAD                 call    dword ptr [ebp-4]
.text:00401BB0                 mov     ebx, [ebx]
.text:00401BB2                 add     ebx, 24h
.text:00401BB5                 mov     ebx, [ebx+4]
.text:00401BB8                 movzx   ebx, byte ptr [ebx]
.text:00401BBB                 or      ebx, 5C3A00h
.text:00401BC1                 mov     [ebp-278h], ebx
.text:00401BC7                 xor     ecx, ecx
.text:00401BC9                 push    ecx
.text:00401BCA                 push    ecx
.text:00401BCB                 push    ecx
.text:00401BCC                 push    ecx
.text:00401BCD                 push    ecx
.text:00401BCE                 push    104h
.text:00401BD3                 lea     eax, [ebp-278h]
.text:00401BD9                 push    eax
.text:00401BDA                 lea     eax, [ebp-278h]
.text:00401BE0                 push    eax
.text:00401BE1                 call    dword ptr [ebp-8]
.text:00401BE4                 lea     eax, [ebp-278h]
.text:00401BEA                 push    eax
.text:00401BEB                 call    sub_4016ED
.text:00401BF0                 cmp     eax, 20C7DD84h
.text:00401BF5                 jz      loc_401E83
.text:00401BFB                 call    near ptr loc_401C0B+1
.text:00401C00                 db      67h
.text:00401C00                 jnz     near ptr loc_401C5F+5
.text:00401C03                 jb      short near ptr loc_401C65+4
.text:00401C05                 xor     esi, [edx]
.text:00401C07                 db      2Eh, 64h
.text:00401C07                 insb
.text:00401C0A                 insb
```

Figure 7: Bot creates a custom exception handler in version 2.07.

```
_1961:00401BD7                 push    eax
_1961:00401BD8                 call    sub_401746
_1961:00401BDD                 test    eax, eax
_1961:00401BDF                 jz      loc_401EFE
_1961:00401BE5                 push    offset custom_exception_handler
_1961:00401BEA                 push    1
_1961:00401BEC                 call    eax             ; RtlAddVectoredExceptionHandler
_1961:00401BEE                 mov     eax, large fs:30h
_1961:00401BF4                 mov     eax, [eax+0Ch]
_1961:00401BF7                 mov     eax, [eax+0Ch]
_1961:00401BFA                 mov     esi, [eax+28h]
```

Figure 8: Bot adds a custom exception handler into VEH in version 2.08.

If the malware finds any of the substrings in the retrieved registry, it runs a function that causes an access violation. The access violation is created intentionally when the sample tries to overwrite the DLL characteristics in the PE header which only has read rights, as shown in Figures 9 and 10.

```
.text:00401E88                 add     eax, [eax+3Ch]
.text:00401E8B                 lea     eax, [eax+18h]
.text:00401E8E
.text:00401E8E loc_401E8E:                             ; DATA X
.text:00401E8E                 or      word ptr [eax+46h], 80h
.text:00401E94                 mov     eax, [eax+1Ch]
```

OverWriting PE Header

Figure 9: Overwriting the PE header raises an exception.

00260000	00016000	\Device\Har			MAP	-R---	-R---
00280000	00041000	\Device\Har			MAP	-R---	-R---
002D0000	00041000	\Device\Har			MAP	-R---	-R---
00320000	00006000	\Device\Har			MAP	-R---	-R---
00400000	00001000	loader.exe			IMG	-R---	ERWC-
00401000	00005000		".text"	Executable code	IMG	ERW--	ERWC-
00406000	00001000		".rdata"	Read-only initialized data	IMG	-R---	ERWC-
7C800000	00001000	kernel32.dl			IMG	-R---	ERWC-
7C801000	00084000		".text"	Executable code	IMG	ER---	ERWC-
7C885000	00005000		".data"	Initialized data	IMG	-RW--	ERWC-
7C88A000	00066000		".rsrc"	Resources	IMG	-R---	ERWC-
7C8F0000	00006000		".reloc"	Base relocations	IMG	-R---	ERWC-

Figure 10: The PE header only has read rights.

In this case, if the sample is not being debugged, control is passed immediately to the custom handler. The custom exception handler decrypts a piece of code that will be injected into another process later (Figure 11).

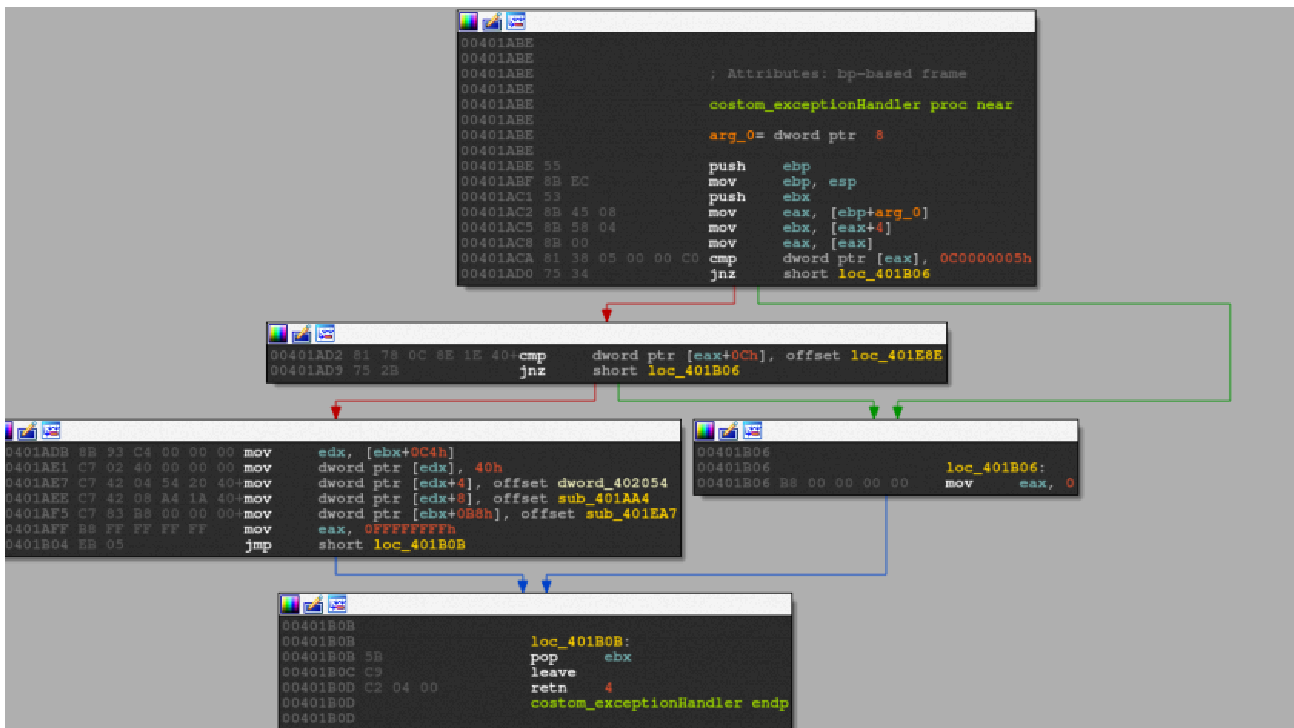

Figure 11: Custom exception handler.

Versions 2.07 and 2.08 share another feature that controls whether the loader bypasses anti-VM and anti-debugging procedures. The loader calls GetVolumeInformationA on the 'C:\' drive and acquires the drive name. Next, it calculates the CRC32 of the drive name and compares it against a hard-coded value, 0x20C7DD84 (Figure 12). If they match, it bypasses the anti-forensics checks and proceeds directly to invoke the exception. The author probably used this technique to test the bot in his/her virtual machine without the need to go through the anti-VM/anti-analysis features.

```
_1961:00401BEE    xor     ecx, ecx
_1961:00401BF0    push    ecx
_1961:00401BF1    push    ecx
_1961:00401BF2    push    ecx
_1961:00401BF3    push    ecx
_1961:00401BF4    push    ecx
_1961:00401BF5    push    200h
_1961:00401BFA    lea     eax, [ebp-36Ch]
_1961:00401C00    push    eax
_1961:00401C01    lea     eax, [ebp-36Ch]
_1961:00401C07    push    eax
_1961:00401C08    call    dword ptr [ebp-GetVolumeInformationA]
_1961:00401C0B    lea     eax, [ebp-36Ch]
_1961:00401C11    push    eax
_1961:00401C12    call    calc_crc32
_1961:00401C17    cmp     eax, 20C7DD84h
_1961:00401C1C    jz      skip_antiVmChecks
```

Figure 12: Drive C checksum is calculated and compared to 0x20C7DD84.

Versions 2.09 and 2.10 evade debugging and analysis by implementing the same idea as previous versions, but this time in the payload. Eventually, in all versions, the loader injects the payload into a remote process using a process hollowing technique and runs it in memory.

Payload

As mentioned, the payloads of versions 2.09 and 2.10 start with some anti-VM tricks, despite the earlier versions having taken care of this in the loader. Like the older versions, they check for a list of blacklisted processes in case the machine is compromised. The number of blacklisted processes in version 2.09 is exactly the same as in 2.08, whereas it increases to 21 processes in version 2.10 (see Figure 13). Like versions 2.07 and 2.08, versions 2.09 and 2.10 calculate the CRC32 of the process name. However, instead of implementing the algorithm, they call RtlComputeCrc32 directly. If the bot finds any of the target processes, it runs a snippet of code to sleep for one minute in an infinite loop in order to evade detection.

```
proc_name_crc32 dd 99DD4432h
dword_7FF902AC  dd 2D859DB4h
                dd 64340DCEh
                dd 63C54474h
                dd 349C9C8Bh
                dd 3446EBCEh
                dd 5BA9B1FEh
                dd 3CE2BEF3h
                dd 3D46F02Bh
                dd 77AE10F7h
                dd 0F344E95Dh
                dd 2DBE6D6Fh
                dd 0A3D10244h
                dd 1D72ED91h
                dd 96936BBEh
                dd 278CDF58h
                dd 3BFFF885h
                dd 6D3323D9h
                db    0
                db    0
                db    0
                db    0
```

```
proc_name_crc32 dd 99DD4432h

                dd 2D859DB4h
                dd 64340DCEh
                dd 63C54474h
                dd 349C9C8Bh
                dd 3446EBCEh
                dd 5BA9B1FEh
                dd 3CE2BEF3h
                dd 3D46F02Bh
                dd 77AE10F7h
                dd 0F344E95Dh
                dd 2DBE6D6Fh
                dd 0A3D10244h
                dd 1D72ED91h
                dd 96936BBEh
                dd 278CDF58h
                dd 3BFFF885h
                dd 6D3323D9h
                dd 0D2EFC6C4h
                dd 0DE1BACD2h
                dd 3044F7D4h
                db    0
                db    0
                db 2 dup(0)
```

Figure 13: The number of blacklisted processes increases in version 2.10.

If 'HKLM\software\policies' contains the registry key 'is_not_vm' and the key is VolumeSerialNumber, version 2.10 bypasses these checks. This behaviour is comparable to that in versions 2.07 and 2.08 where the bot checked the

checksum of the root drive.

Evolution of C&C

The main aim of Andromeda's payload is to steal the infected system's information, talk to the command-and-control (C&C) server, and download and install additional malware onto the system. In order to do this, it initiates a sophisticated command-and-control channel with the server. Each version of Andromeda uses a different format for the message and the report that it sends to the server.

As shown in Table 2, each version has two message formats, both sent as HTTP POST requests: Action Request and Task Report. Action Request contains the information exfiltrated from the compromised system; the bot sends it to the server after encryption. Task Report, as the name implies, provides a report about the accomplished task.

Version	Action Request	Task Report
2.06	id:%lu|bid:%lu|bv:%lu|sv:%lu|pa:%lu|la:%lu|ar:%lu	id:%lu|tid:%lu|result:%lu
2.07	id:%lu|bid:%lu|bv:%lu|os:%lu|la:%lu|rg:%lu	id:%lu|tid:%lu|res:%lu
2.08	id:%lu|bid:%lu|bv:%lu|os:%lu|la:%lu|rg:%lu	id:%lu|tid:%lu|res:%lu
2.09	id:%lu|bid:%lu|os:%lu|la:%lu|rg:%lu	id:%lu|tid:%lu|err:%lu|w32:%lu
2.10	{“id”:%lu,“bid”:%lu,“os”:%lu,“la”:%lu,“rg”:%lu} {“id”:%lu,“bid”:%lu,“os”:%lu,“la”:%lu,“rg”:%lu,“bb”:%lu}	{“id”:%lu,“tid”:%lu,“err”:%lu,“w32”:%lu}

Table 2: Evolution of the message formats.

The Action Request format shares some essential tags among all versions, such as 'id' and 'bid', while some other tags are version-specific, such as 'ar' in version 2.06 and 'bb' in version 2.10. It is only the last version of the bot that uses JSON format to communicate with the C&C server.

Table 3 describes the role of each tag in the format.

Action Request		**Task Report**	
Tag	**Information**	**Tag**	**Information**
id	Volume serial number of victim machine	id	Volume serial number of victim machine
bid	Bot ID, a hard-coded DWORD in payload	tid	Task ID provided by server
bv	Bot version	res/result/err	Flag indicating if task is successful
pa	Flag indicating whether OS is 32-bit or 64-bit	w32	System error code, returned by RtlGetLastWin32Error
la	Local IP address acquired from sockaddr structure		

ar/rg	Flag indicating if the process runs in the administrator group		
sv/os	Version of the victim operating system		
bb	Flag indicating if victim system uses a Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian or Kazakh keyboard		

Table 3: Definition of tags.

We believe that 'bid' is used to represent build ID and, interestingly, in some versions, like 2.06 and 2.10, it indicates a date in the format YYYYMMDD, as can be seen in Figure 14. In other instances, this tag represents a hard-coded random number. The latest observed 'bid' in version 2.10 is 22 May 2017, which suggests that development stopped then.

```
push    ds:bb
mov     ds:la, eax
push    ds:rg
push    eax
push    ds:os          00405FE4               db 2 dup(0)
push    ds:bid         00405FE6 bid           dd 22042017h
push    ds:id
push    offset aIdLuBidLuOsLuLaLuRgLuBbLu ; "{\"id\":%lu,\"bid\":%lu,\"os\":%lu,\"la"
push    esi
call    ds:wsprintfA
```

Figure 14: 'bid' value in version 2.10.

After version 2.08, 'bv', which indicates the bot version, is removed from the request message. However, in the two latest versions, there remains a clue as to the bot version, which is a hard-coded xor key. This xor key is used in five different places in version 2.09 and twice in version 2.10. In all cases, it xors the 'id' and will be further manipulated to be used as the file name or registry value (see Figures 15 and 16).

```
                ; CODE XREF: DropCop
                ; DropCopy_Autorun_
mov     eax, ds:id
xor     eax, '0209'
push    eax
call    saveDate
call    encrypt_loop
mov     edi, eax
push    edi
lea     eax, [esi+ebx*2]
push    offset aMsS_exe ; "\\ms%s.exe"
push    eax
call    ds:wsprintfW
add     esp, 0Ch
push    edi
add     ebx, eax
call    freeheap
mov     edi, FILE_ATTRIBUTE_NORMAL
```

```
mov     ebx, ds:SetFileAttr
push    edi
push    ds:pHeap01
xor     eax, '0210'
mov     ds:Seed, eax
call    ebx ; SetFileAttributesW
mov     [esp+58h+var_48], 32h

                        ; CODE XREF: sub_4095D
call    sub_4092EE
mov     [esp+58h+var_3C], eax
cmp     eax, ebp
jz      loc_4099D3
push    eax
push    offset aMsS_exe ; "ms%s.exe"
push    esi             ; pszPath
call    j_PathFindFileNameW
push    eax
```

Hard coded bot version

Figure 15: The bot version is represented as a hard-coded xor key and used as a file name.

Figure 16: The bot version is represented as a hard-coded xor key and used in registries.

When the message is prepared for the required information, in all versions except the most recent one, the string is encrypted in two steps. The first step uses a 20-byte hard-coded RC4 key and the second step uses base64 encoding. Version 2.10 encrypts the message only using the RC4 algorithm. After posting the message to the server, the bot receives a message from the server. The bot validates the message by calculating its CRC32 hash excluding the first DWORD, which serves as a checksum. If the hash equals this excluded DWORD, it proceeds to decrypt the message using the 'id' value as the RC4 key.

Next, it decodes the base64 string and obtains a plain text message. Received messages have the following structure:

```
struct RecvBlock {
     uint8_t cmd_id;
     uint32_t tid;
     char cmd_param[];
};
```

According to the communicated cmd_id, the bot carries out a designated command which could be any number from the following: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9. In versions prior to 2.09, the bot is capable of performing all seven tasks. But in

versions 2.09 and 2.10, it discards commands 4 and 5.

In Table 4 we take a look at each task and describe it further using static analysis of the code.

cmd_id	Task type	Description
1	Download EXE	Using the domain provided in the command_parameter, the bot downloads an exe, saves it in the temp folder with a random name, and executes it.
2	Install plug-in	Using the domain provided in the command_parameter, the bot installs and loads plug-ins.
3	Update bot	Using the domain provided in the command_parameter, the bot gets the exe file to update itself. If a file named 'Volume Serial Number' exists in the registry, the bot drops the update in the temp folder and gives it a random name. Otherwise, the file is dropped in the current directory. This task is followed by cmd_id=9, which kills the older bot.
4	Install DLL	Using the domain provided in the command_parameter, the bot downloads a DLL into the %alluserprofile% folder with a random name and .dat extension.
5	Delete DLLs	The DLL loaded in cmd_id=4 is uninstalled.
6	Delete plug-ins	The plug-ins loaded in cmd_id=3 are uninstalled.
9	Kill bot	All threads are suspended and the bot is uninstalled.

Table 4: The seven command IDs and their tasks.

It is interesting to note that the cmd_id value changes a little in versions 2.09 and 2.10. As a result, the bot first downloads the plug-in and later finds three plug-in exports, aStart, aUpdate and aReport, using a call to the GetProcAddress API (Figure 17).

```
mov     esi, ds:GetProcAddress
push    offset ProcName ; "aStart"
push    edi             ; hModule
call    esi ; GetProcAddress
test    eax, eax
jz      short loc_409E1E
push    [ebp+arg_C]
push    ds:NTP_time
call    eax
jmp     short loc_409E2C
```

```
                                ; CODE XREF:
push    offset aAupdate ; "aUpdate"
push    [ebp+var_40C]
call    ds:GetProcAddress
test    eax, eax
jz      short loc_409CB2
push    [ebp+arg_0]
call    eax
```

Figure 17: The payload also searches for plug-in exports aStart and aUpdate.

To summarize, Andromeda normally spreads via exploit kits located on compromised websites. The primary sample is packed and drops the loader after the unpacking stage. In the earlier versions of the bot the loader contains anti-VM and anti-analysis tricks. In all versions, the loader decrypts the payload and resolves APIs for indirect calls in the payload. As a result, using an anti-API hooking trick, the loader saves the first instruction of the API call into memory and jumps to the second instruction.

In the last two versions of the bot (2.09 and 2.10) the payload contains anti-VM and anti-analysis features. In version 2.07 and later versions, the payload leverages an inline hooking technique and hooks selected APIs. For example, in versions 2.07 and 2.08 the bot hooks GetAddrInfoW, ZwMapViewOfSection and ZwUnmapViewOfSection; in version 2.09 it hooks GetAddrInfoW and NtOpenSection; and in version 2.10 it hooks GetAddrInfoW and NtMapViewOfSection. In all versions, the bot steals information from the compromised system, sends the information to the server (after encryption), and waits for a command from the server.

Upon receiving a command from the server, the bot acts accordingly, installing plug-ins and downloading other malware. Finally, the bot sends a report about its mission to the server.

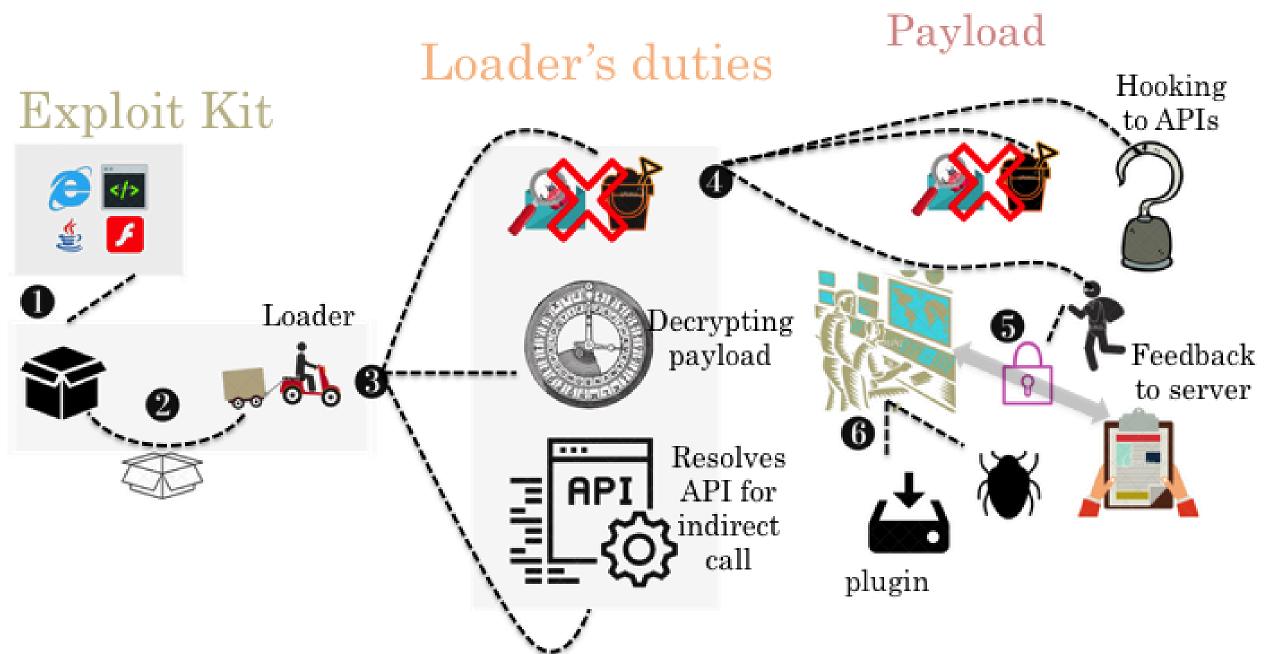

Figure 18: Andromeda at a glance.

Side note

It has been a while since the last version of Andromeda was released. We have been waiting a long time for a new variant to emerge, but Reuters reported recently:

'National police in Belarus, working with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, said they had arrested a citizen of Belarus on suspicion of selling malicious software who they described as administrator of the Andromeda network.' [3]

Based on that, we can tentatively call this the end of the Andromeda era, and conclude that there won't be any further releases.

Conclusion

From 2011 to 2015, Andromeda kept analysts busy with its compelling features and functionality, and it remains among the most prevalent malware families today. Over the course of four years, five major versions were released, each new version being more complex than its predecessor. This guaranteed that Andromeda remained a sophisticated threat. A flexible C&C provided a wide range of functionality and efficiency, increasing the power of the threat by installing various modules. Meanwhile, it integrated several RC4 keys to encrypt data for C&C communications, thus making

detection a significantly more complex challenge. Fortunately, however, analysts have become sufficiently familiar with Andromeda's ecosystem over the years to learn how to navigate all of its challenges.

References

[1] Tan, N. Andromeda 2.7 features. Fortinet blog. 23 April 2014. https://blog.fortinet.com/2014/04/23/andromeda-2-7-features.

[2] Xu, H. A good look at the Andromeda botnet. Virus Bulletin. May 2013. https://www.virusbulletin.com/virusbulletin/2013/05/good-look-andromeda-botnet.

[3] Sterling, T.; Auchard, E. Belarus arrests suspected ringleader of global cyber crime network. Reuters. 5 December 2017. https://ca.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idCAKBN1DZ1VY-OCATC.

[4] Xu, H. Cracked Andromeda 2.06 spreads bitcoinn miner. Fortinet blog. 7 January 2015. https://blog.fortinet.com/2015/01/07/cracked-andromeda-2-06-spreads-bitcoin-miner.

Sample information

Version 2.06

MD5: 73564f834fd0f61c8b5d67b1dae19209

SHA256: 4ad4752a0dcaf3bb7dd3d03778a149ef1cf6a8237b21abcb525b9176c003ac3a

Fortinet detection name: W32/Kryptik.AFJS!tr

Version 2.07

MD5: d7c00d17e7a36987a359d77db4568df0

SHA256: 44950952892d394e5cbe9dcc7a0db0135a21027a0bf937ed371bb6b8565ff678

Fortinet detection name: W32/Injector.ZVR!tr

Version 2.08

MD5: b4d37eff59a820d9be2db1ac23fe056e

SHA256: 92d25f2feb6ca7b3e0d921ace8560160e1bfccb0beeb6b27f914a5930a33e316

Fortinet detection name: W32/Tepfer.ASYP!tr.pws

Version 2.09

MD5: 3f2762d18c1abc67e21a7f9ad4fa67fd

SHA256: 2f44d884c9d358130050a6d4f89248a314b6c02d40b5c3206e86ddb834e928f6

Fortinet detection name: W32/BLDZ!tr

Version 2.10

MD5: fb0a6857c15a1f596494a28c3cf7379d

SHA256: 73802eaa46b603575216fb212bcc18c895f4c03b47c9706cde85368c0334e0cd

Fortinet detection name: W32/Malicious_Behavior.VEX

Source: https://www.virusbulletin.com/virusbulletin/2018/02/review-evolution-andromeda-over-years-we-say-goodbye/