Technical Analysis of Code-Signed “Blister” Malware Campaign (Part 1)

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A new malware, dubbed “Blister,” by the Elastic Security team that identified it, is leveraging valid code-signing certificates in Windows systems, to avoid detection by antivirus software. The malware is named after one of its payloads, Blister, which further deploys second-stage payloads.

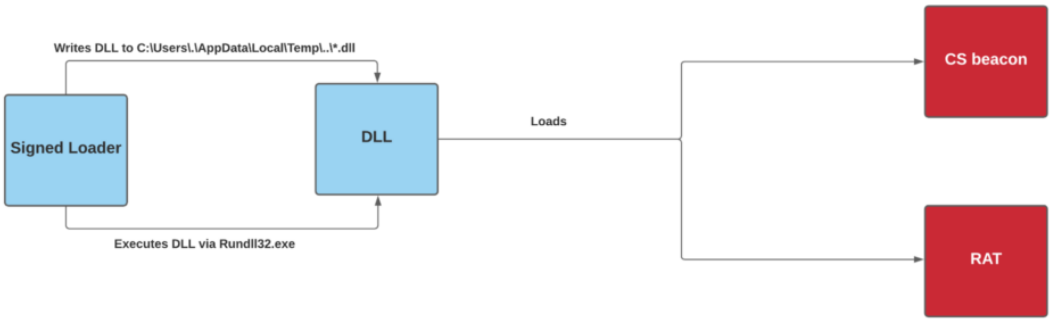
The threat actors orchestrating the Blister campaigns have been active since 15 September 2021, and have been using code-signing certificates that were validated on 23 August 2021. These certificates were issued by Sectigo to Blist LLC’s mail.ru email address. It is notable that mail.ru is a widely used Russian email service provider.

The malware masquerades malicious components as genuine executable files, due to which it has a low detection rate. Apart from using code-signing certificates, the threat actors are also leveraging other techniques, such as binding Blister to a legitimate library on the infected system, to stay under the radar.

Modus Operandi of the Blister Campaign

Threat actors are known to use code-signing to circumvent basic static security checks to compromise the victim systems. The Blister malware is no different in that it uses a Sectigo issued certificate to make the loader malware program look genuine to security products. It then deploys a Remote Access Trojan (RAT) on the target system to gain unauthorized access.

A *.dll* file is used as a second stage payload to execute the encoded RAT/ CobaltStrike beacon. Since the *.dll* file has no malicious traces there have been very few detections on VirusTotal. However, the loader uses *Rundll32.exe* to execute the *LaunchColorCpl* function exported by the malicious *.dll* file.

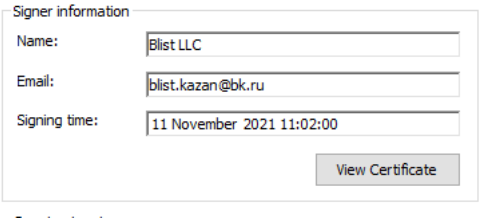


Overview of the Blister malware campaign

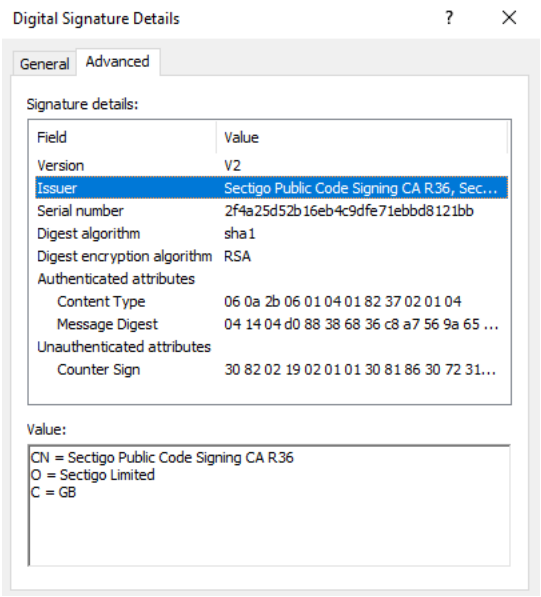
Leveraging Code-Signing Certificates to Avoid Detection

The below image contains the details of the certificate to an entity called "Blist LLC". It is common for cybercriminals to either steal code-signing certificates from compromised targets, or to use a front company to obtain the certificate, to sign the malware with.

Sectigo has since revoked the certificate issued to the binary.



Certificate issued to Blist LLC

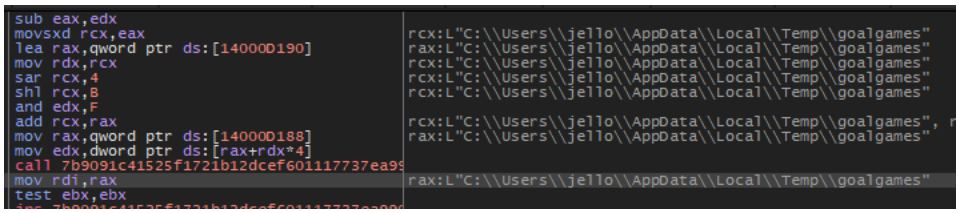


Certificate issued by Sectigo

First Stage of Infection

Overview of the Loader

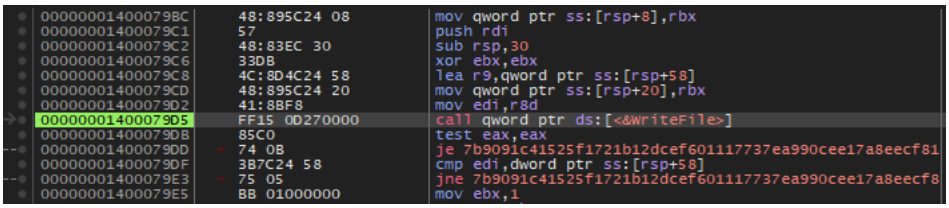
- The loader writes a malicious *.dll* file in a directory created inside the user Temp folder.
- In one of the analysed samples, the malware created a folder named "goalgames" and inside it the loader dumped *holorui.dll*.
- The *.dll* houses the code for deploying the RAT to gain unauthorized access to the infected system.



The loader writes a .dll file in the user Temp folder

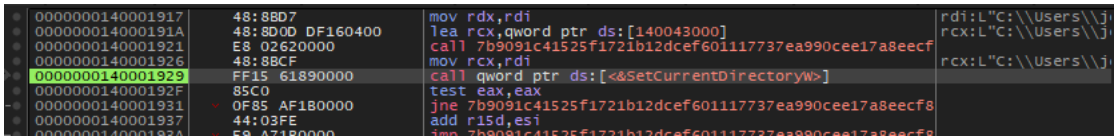
Step by Step Working of the Loader

The Win32 API createDirectoryW is used to create a folder called "goalgames" in the path: *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp directory*. as shown below.



Using Win32 API createDirectoryW to create a folder in the user Temp folder

Before dumping the .dll, the loader sets the working directory to *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\goalgames* via Win32 API *SetCurrentDirectoryW*.

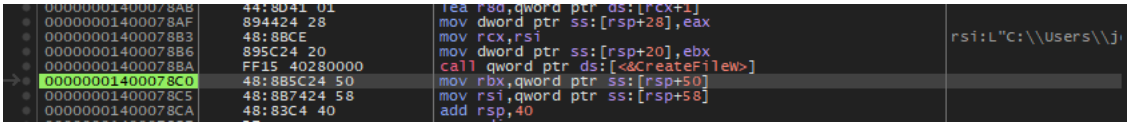


Using Win32 API SetCurrentDirectoryW to set the working directory

After setting the working directory, the malware resolves the filename for the *.dll* file to *holorui.dll* and stores it in the register RCX, to later pass it to Win32 API *CreateFileW*.

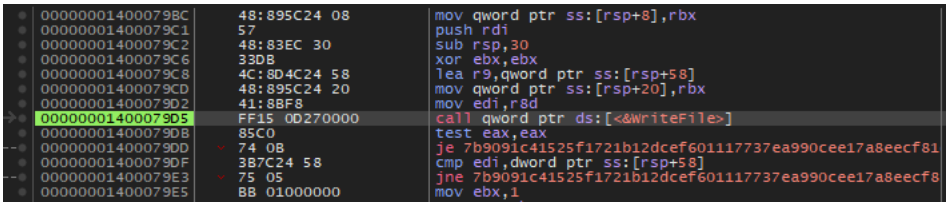
The malware resolves the filename for the .dll file to holorui.dll

The file *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\goalgames\holorui.dll* is created using the *CreateFileW* API.



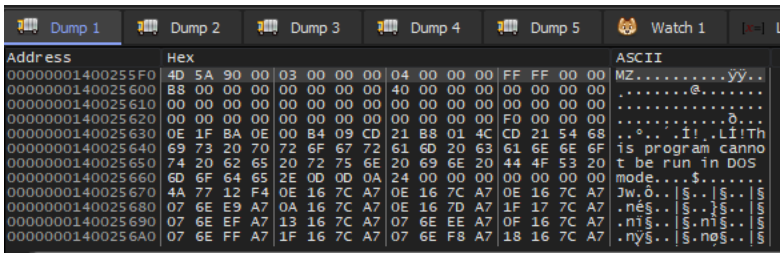
holorui.dll created using *CreateFileW* API

Once the file is created, the malware starts writing the content to the file by iteratively transferring bytes from the *.dll* payload in the loader. The Win32 API *WriteFile* is used to write contents into *holorui.dll*.



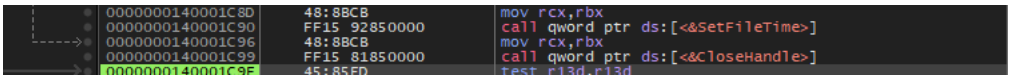
Win32 API WriteFile used to write contents into holorui.dll

The malicious *.dll* is embedded in the initialized data segment of the PE executable of the loader and the bytes are transferred into *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\goalgames\holorui.dll*.



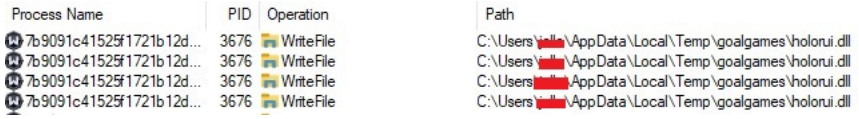
The MZ header of the embedded file

Upon closing the handle to the *holorui.dll* file, written on to the disk in the Temp directory, the malware finishes delivering the second stage payload. Then the file handles are closed by the malware.



File handles closed by the malware

The successful delivery of the malicious .dll can be confirmed by analyzing the interaction of the malware on the system.



Successful delivery of the malicious .dll

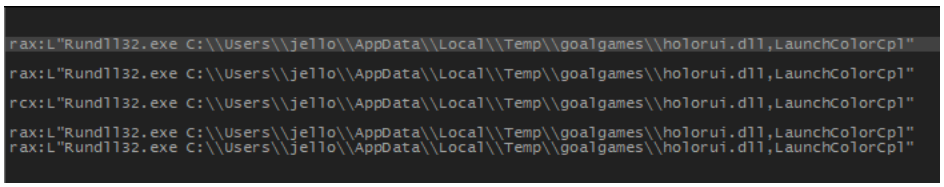
Based on analysing multiple signed loader samples, we have enumerated following distinct directory and payload names used within different samples from the same campaign:

- *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\goalgames\holorui.dll*
- *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\Framwork\axsssig.dll*
- *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\oarimgamings\holorui.dll*
- *C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Temp\guirtsframworks\Pasade.dll*

Note: The content inside the *.dll* is the same despite having different names

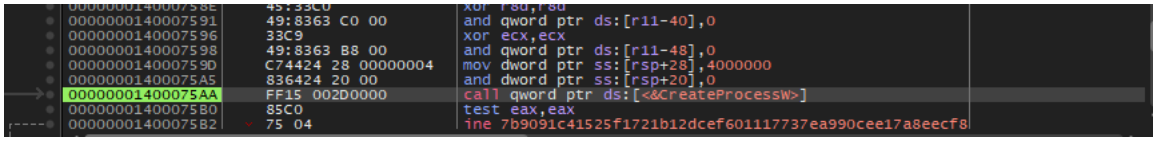
Second Stage of Infection

At the second stage of infection, the loader generates a command line to execute the function *LaunchColorCpl exported* from the *.dll,* via *Rundll32.exe* on the infected system.



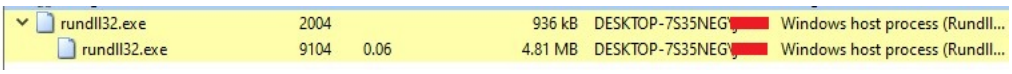
Command line to execute the function LaunchColorCpl

A new process is created with the above command line to spawn a *Rundll32* process via *CreateProcessW* Win32 API.

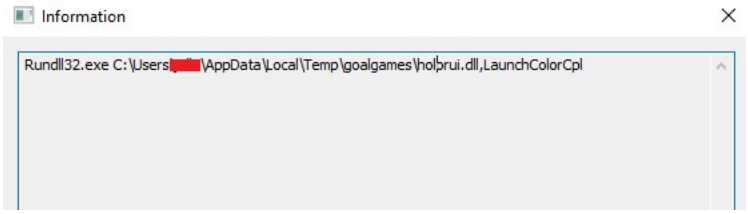


Spawning a *Rundll32* process via *CreateProcessW* Win32 API

The newly spawned *Rundll32.exe* process is listed in the process listing on the infected machine.



Newly spawned Rundll32.exe process



Command line confirmation for the newly spawned process

The final payload is executed by the *Rundll32.exe* process.

Frame Number	Time Date Local Adjusted	Time Offset	Process Name	Source	Destination	Protocol Name
252	00:47:59 02-01-2022	797.1536354	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
253	00:47:59 02-01-2022	797.1537574	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
258	00:51:06 02-01-2022	984.8343785	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
259	00:51:07 02-01-2022	985.2858651	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
260	00:51:07 02-01-2022	985.8407156	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
261	00:51:08 02-01-2022	986.2905016	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
262	00:51:09 02-01-2022	987.8563559	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
263	00:51:10 02-01-2022	988.3197376	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
266	00:51:13 02-01-2022	991.8685226	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
267	00:51:14 02-01-2022	992.3212904	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
268	00:51:21 02-01-2022	999.8696087	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP
269	00:51:22 02-01-2022	1000.321...	rundll32.exe	DESKTOP-7S3...	93.115.18.248	TCP

Network activities between the infected host and the attacker C2

In the part 2 of this article we will cover the internal working of the .dll payload in detail.

Indicators of Compromise (IoCs)

FileHash-MD5

e6404260b4e42b7aa75bb0a96627ed3a	304921a919ab5228687a4932bb66fab9
db8827d0d7b2addc05719e407216da14	1b33c1f232b2ed68ac108519caa2d35f
755f50457416aeb7fee95a67abfea9fe	1896e6b20128e85a9851b94753eabbdf
6f76505a91c91c29238f0ed70b369417	a91ba8f4a339a98fa94e810831e83d96
5a7dea7aa86ccd600f5a97e3b53f7338	b8c9c560c6970a877a7ad359f37811d7
3efcd76417a185e48da71e22d230c547	

FileHash-SHA1

f8fa1ba14df6f8ab2b307ee0ce04054ea9d538c0	77b11cc7fc02f2ece71c380afbed82a39df9b8fa
f534e15bbc104cafab80f954ba30f12de87b0f48	72134bbf433c51d475412d16ff7abb4ce2b08110
d58e06727c551756cbee1fc6539929553a09878b	4800d1f8e6ebc489c6c8a1d3a1f99b8339cf0980
c039362e891b01040c20e75e16b02169c512aebd	21799d1d30344428697f3a186733b283a993ac16
bb69d5da32164813be5af29d31edc951a8f1f088	871e52778597185f98eb0a57127024bcd094cf07
a492b5e329b55d4a0f66217e5352ab56fabacad1	

FileHash-SHA256

fe7357d48906b68f094a81d19cc0ff93f56cc40454ac5f00e2e2d9c8ccdbc388	fa885e9ea1293552cb45a89e740426fa9c313225ff77ad1980dfe
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00eb2f75822abeb2e222d007bdec464bfbc3934b8be12983cc898b37c6ace081	0a7778cf6f9a1bd894e89f282f2e40f9d6c9cd4b72be97328e681

Domains

- discountshadesdirect.com
- domain clippershipintl.com
- domain bimelectrical.com

IPv4

- 93.115.18.248
- 188.68.221.203
- 185.170.213.186

Signed loaders

- ed6910fd51d6373065a2f1d3580ad645f443bf0badc398aa77185324b0284db8
- cb949ebe87c55c0ba6cf0525161e2e6670c1ae186ab83ce46047446e9753a926
- 7b9091c41525f1721b12dcef601117737ea990cee17a8eecf81dcfb25ccb5a8f
- 84a67f191a93ee827c4829498d2cb1d27bdd9e47e136dc6652a5414dab440b74
- cc31c124fc39025f5c3a410ed4108a56bb7c6e90b5819167a06800d02ef1f028
- 9472d4cb393256a62a466f6601014e5cb04a71f115499c320dc615245c7594d4
- 4fe551bcea5e07879ec84a7f1cea1036cfd0a3b03151403542cab6bd8541f8e5
- 1a10a07413115c254cb7a5c4f63ff525e64adfe8bb60acef946bb7656b7a2b3d
- 9bccc1862e3e5a6c89524f2d76144d121d0ee95b1b8ba5d0ffcaa23025318a60
- 8a414a40419e32282d33af3273ff73a596a7ac8738e9cdca6e7db0e41c1a7658
- 923b2f90749da76b997e1c7870ae3402aba875fdbdd64f79cbeba2f928884129
- ed241c92f9bc969a160da2c4c0b006581fa54f9615646dd46467d24fe5526c7a
- 294c710f4074b37ade714c83b6b7bf722a46aef61c02ba6543de5d59edc97b60

DLL

BE7E259D5992180EADFE3F4F3AB1A5DECC6A394DF60C7170550B3D222FCE5F19

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Lead Cyberintelligence Editor, CloudSEK
Total Posts: 3

Deepanjli is CloudSEK’s Lead Technical Content Writer and Editor. She is a pen wielding pedant with an insatiable appetite for books, Sudoku, and epistemology. She works on any and all content at CloudSEK, which includes blogs, reports, product documentation, and everything in between.