



# **Analysing malicious documents and files with oletools**

**Philippe Lagadec – Pass-The-Salt 2024-07-05**

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## Philippe Lagadec

- Cybersecurity R&D engineer at Quarkslab
- Dissecting file formats and collecting malware since 2000
- Some open-source projects :
  - **olefile since 2005 (to parse MS Office documents)**
  - **exefilter since 2008 (to scan many file formats and clean them from active content like macros)**
  - **oletools since 2012 (to analyse MS Office files, detect malicious documents)**
- X/Twitter : @decalage2 - @decalage@mastodon.social – <https://decalage.info>

- 1** **Olefile / Oletools – a bit of history**
- 2** **Analysing suspicious documents**
- 3** **File format identification (ftguess)**
- 4** **MSI / MSIX**

## ..... A bit of history

- 2000: building the 1st email gateway for French MoD – developed filters for **VBA macros, RTF OLE objects and PDF**
- 2005: open-sourced **olefile**, parser for OLE files (MS Office), fork from PIL (now Pillow)
- 2008: open-sourced **exefilter** (to filter and disarm many file formats)
- 2012: published **oletools**
- 2014: added **olevba** to extract and analyse VBA macros
- 2015: published **ViperMonkey**, an emulator for VBA macros and VBScript
- Since then added many features, additional file formats, etc
- With the help from dozens of contributors!

..... **Oletools : open-source tools to analyse OLE files & MS Office documents**

- Open-source project started in 2012, initially for exploring OLE files
- Several tools to analyse different file formats (legacy Office 97-2003 files, OpenXML Office 2007+ files, RTF, etc)
- Detect security issues / attack techniques:
  - **VBA Macros, XLM macros, OLE objects, DDE, Remote Templates/OLE**
- <https://github.com/decalage2/oletools>

## ..... Projects / Products using oletools

- oletools are used by a number of projects and online malware analysis services, including:
- [ACE](#), [ADAPT](#), [Anlyz.io](#), [AssemblyLine](#), [Binary Refinery](#), [CAPE](#), [CinCan](#), [Cortex XSOAR \(Palo Alto\)](#), [Cuckoo Sandbox](#), [DARKSURGEON](#), [Deepviz](#), [DIARIO](#), [dridex.malwareconfig.com](#), [EML Analyzer](#), [EXPMON](#), [FAME](#), [FLARE-VM](#), [GLIMPS Malware](#), [Hybrid-analysis.com](#), [InQuest Labs](#), [IntelOwl](#), [Joe Sandbox](#), [Laika BOSS](#), [MacroMilter](#), [mailcow](#), [malshare.io](#), [malware-repo](#), [Malware Repository Framework \(MRF\)](#), [MalwareBazaar](#), [olefy](#), [Pandora](#), [PeekabooAV](#), [pcodedmp](#), [PyCIRCLearn](#), [QFlow](#), [Qu1cksc Ope](#), [Tylabs QuickSand](#), [REMnux](#), [Snake](#), [SNDBOX](#), [Splunk add-on for MS O365 Email](#), [SpuriousEmu](#), [Strelka](#), [stoQ](#), [Sublime Platform/MQL](#), [Subparse](#), [TheHive/Cortex](#), [ThreatBoook](#), [TSUGURI Linux](#), [Vba2Graph](#), [Viper](#), [ViperMonkey](#), [YOMI](#), and probably [VirusTotal](#), [FileScan.IO](#).

..... **Many file formats:**

OLE/CFB format	OpenXML format (ZIP+XML)	Other
DOC - Word 97-2003	DOCX/M – Word 2007+	RTF
XLS – Excel 97-2003	XLSX/M/B – Excel 2007+	Word 2003 XML
PPT – PowerPoint 97-2003	PPTX/M – PowerPoint 2007+	Word XML - FlatOPC
PUB - Publisher	VSDX - Visio	Excel 2003 XML
VSD - Visio	XPS	PowerPoint XML - FlatOPC
MPP/MPT – Project	MSIX	MHT – Word/Excel MHTML
Outlook messages		SLK
FlashPix images		CSV
StickyNotes		
MSI		

## ..... Oleid : quick summary of analysis

- First tool to be used:
- Identify file format
- Run all relevant oletools
- Summarize results
- Suggest tools to get more details

```
oleid 0.60.1 - http://decalage.info/oletools
THIS IS WORK IN PROGRESS - Check updates regularly!
Please report any issue at https://github.com/decalage2/oletools/issues

Filename: 06faae4e566f53dfca3e89233bb9de021f7635ef0474605dd36710beb721fe8e.doc
WARNING For now, VBA stomping cannot be detected for files in memory
```

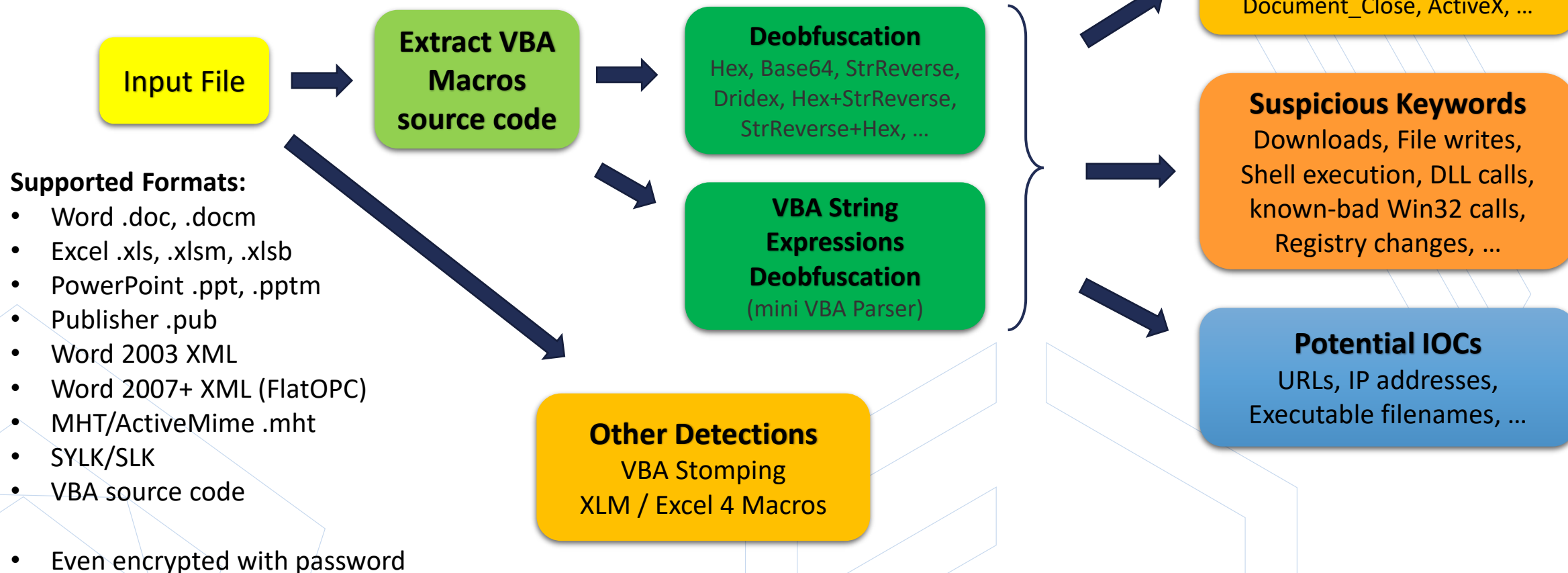
Indicator	Value	Risk	Description
File format	MS Word 2007+ Macro-Enabled Template (.dotm)	info	
Container format	OpenXML	info	Container type
Encrypted	False	none	The file is not encrypted
VBA Macros	Yes, suspicious	HIGH	This file contains VBA macros. Suspicious keywords were found. Use olevba and mraptor for more info.
XLM Macros	No	none	This file does not contain Excel 4/XLM macros.
External Relationships	0	none	External relationships such as remote templates, remote OLE objects, etc



## ..... Olevba : Extract and analyze VBA Macros and Excel 4 Macros (XLM)

```
olevba 0.60.1 on Python 3.11.6 - http://decalage.info/python/oletools
=====
FILE: docm_vba_shell_calc.docm
Type: OpenXML
WARNING For now, VBA stomping cannot be detected for files in memory
-----
VBA MACRO ThisDocument.cls
in file: word/vbaProject.bin - OLE stream: 'VBA/ThisDocument'
-----
Private Sub Document_Open()
    Shell "calc.exe"
    MsgBox "Hello from VBA! I just launched an executable file."
End Sub
-----
+-----+-----+-----+
|Type      |Keyword      |Description      |
+-----+-----+-----+
|AutoExec  |Document_Open|Runs when the Word or Publisher document is
|          |              |opened          |
|Suspicious|Shell        |May run an executable file or a system
|          |              |command         |
|IOC       |calc.exe     |Executable file name
+-----+-----+-----+
```

## Olevba : Extract and analyze Macros



## ..... Mraptor : Detect suspicious VBA macros

- Can distinguish legitimate and suspicious macros
- MacroRaptor algorithm:
  - **A: Automatic triggers**
  - **W: Any write operation that may be used to drop a payload**
  - **X: Any execute operation**
- **Suspicious = A and (W or X)**

```
MacroRaptor 0.55 - http://decalage.info/python/oletools
This is work in progress, please report issues at https://github.com/decalage2/oletools/issues
-----+-----+-----+-----
Result      |Flags|Type|File
-----+-----+-----+-----
SUSPICIOUS |AW-  |OLE: |1995_Concept.doc
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |TXT: |1999_Melissa.vba
SUSPICIOUS |A-X  |XML: |1fe11c6116c366db77c3e5169b908076.xml
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OLE: |2ELJ2E10PJ00T.doc
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OLE: |BlackEnergy.xls
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OLE: |Dridex_1445942147T0.doc
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |MHT: |Dridex_Spilo_Worldwide_payment_61904698.doc
SUSPICIOUS |A-X  |OLE: |Emotet Dec 2019.doc
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OLE: |FIN4_6581d05ad0adc2126efe175b5a9e44cb
Macro OK   |---  |OLE: |Legit macro.doc
SUSPICIOUS |A-X  |OLE: |Locky_invoice_J-57038497.doc
SUSPICIOUS |A-X  |OpX: |Mudan_a Reserva 2019 Low Detection.xls
No Macro   |     |OLE: |Normal_Document.doc
Macro OK   |---  |OLE: |Normal_Macro.doc
Macro OK   |---  |OLE: |Normal_Macro.xls
Macro OK   |A--  |OpX: |Normal_Macro_button.docm
Macro OK   |A--  |OpX: |Normal_Macro_DocumentOpen.docm
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OpX: |PadCrypt_invoice_M60244.docm
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OpX: |RottenKitten_266CFE755A0A66776DF9FD8CD2FEE1F1.xlsm
SUSPICIOUS |AWX  |OLE: |TA505 2019 Letter 7711.xls

Flags: A=AutoExec, W=Write, X=Execute
```

## ..... rtfobj/oleobj: detect suspicious OLE objects in RTF and MS Office files

Examples :

- **OLE Package** objects containing executable files
- **Exploits for vulnerabilities**, such as Equation Editor
- **Remote Attached Templates** with Macros
- **Remote OLE objects**, such as

Follina

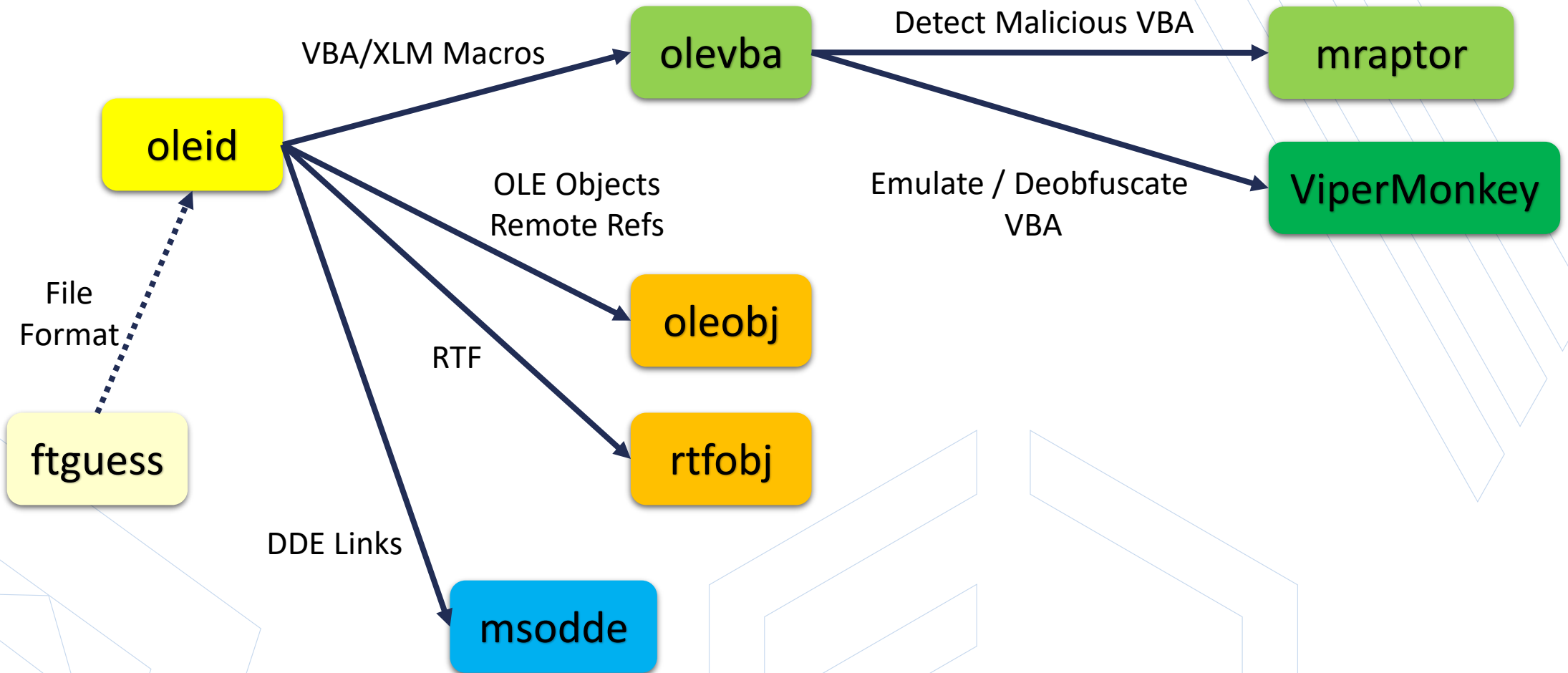
```
rtfobj 0.60.dev2 on Python 2.7.18 - http://decalage.info/python/oletools
THIS IS WORK IN PROGRESS - Check updates regularly!
Please report any issue at https://github.com/decalage2/oletools/issues

=====
File: 'RTF_OLEPkg_EXE.rtf' - size: 950601 bytes
-----
id | index      | OLE Object
-----+-----+-----
0  | 00062FC6h | format_id: 2 (Embedded)
   |           | class name: 'Package'
   |           | data size: 246496
   |           | OLE Package object:
   |           | Filename: u'pm02.exe'
   |           | Source path: u'C:\\Aaa\\exe\\pm02.exe'
   |           | Temp path = u'C:\\Users\\M\\AppData\\Local\\Temp\\pm02.exe'
   |           | MD5 = 'c44ac001b67fef80d0f46de594a615a8'
   |           | EXECUTABLE FILE
   |           | File Type: Windows PE Executable
-----
```

```
oleobj 0.56.1 - http://decalage.info/oletools
THIS IS WORK IN PROGRESS - Check updates regularly!
Please report any issue at https://github.com/decalage2/oletools/issues

-----
File: '17e3a134ee4bcb50a9f608409853628ac619fd24cffd8d15868cf96ce63bb775.doc'
Found relationship 'attachedTemplate' with external link http://plug.msplugin.icu/MicrosoftSecurityScan/DOCSDOC
```

..... **Oletools usage**



The background is a solid dark blue color. It features several abstract, light blue geometric shapes. On the left side, there are several overlapping, nested polygons that resemble a stylized 'E' or a series of concentric shapes. On the right side, there are several parallel, slanted lines and rectangular shapes that create a sense of depth and movement, similar to a stylized 'S' or a series of parallel paths.

**Why are documents still a threat  
today ?**

# ATTACK TECHNIQUES

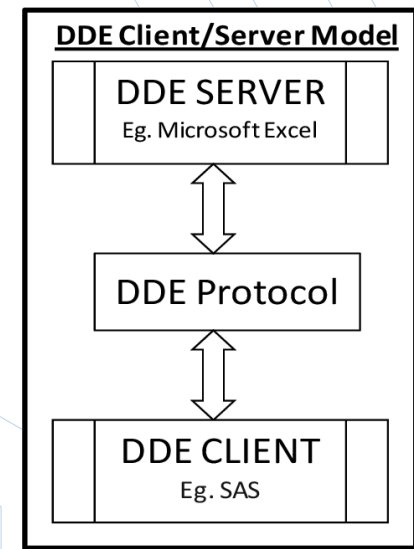
## ..... Techniques to run malicious code from MS Office documents

- VBA Macros
- Excel 4 Macros
- DDE
- OLE Package objects
- Vulnerabilities



**CVE-2023-36884**

MS Office Zero-Day Vulnerability  
Exploited For Espionage



# WHAT CAN A MALICIOUS MACRO DO?



Note: It is possible to write malware completely in VBA. But in practice, VBA macros are mostly used to write **Droppers** or **Downloaders**, to trigger other stages of malware.

**All this simply using native MS Office features available since 1997, no need for any exploit !**



# A HISTORY OF MACROS

## Office 95/97

- 95: WordBasic
- 97: VBA - **simple**  
**Yes/No prompt** to enable macros

## Office 2000/XP/2003

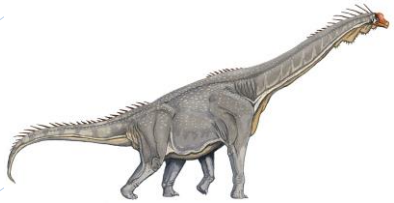
- Unsigned macros are **DISABLED BY DEFAULT**

## Office 2010 / 2013 / 2016 / 365

- **Single "Enable Content" button**  
AFTER seeing the document (lures)...
- Sandbox against exploits (Protected View)

## 1995-2003

- **Macrovirus era**
- Concept, Laroux, Melissa, Lexar



## 2004-2013

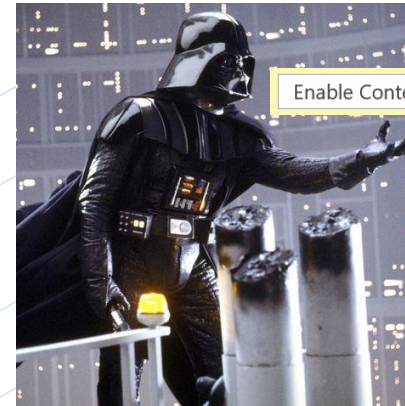
- **VBA winter**
- Attackers prefer exploits



## 2014-2023

### **VBA Macros come back**

- Used as first stage to deliver malware
- 100,000s of phishing e-mails per day
- Banking Trojans, Ransomware, APTs, ...



..... **All those techniques have been « patched » by Microsoft, right ?**

**YES! :**

- **VBA Macros**
  - **2023 : Blocked by default for files coming from the Internet**
- **Excel 4 Macros**
  - **2022 : Disabled by default**
- **DDE**
  - **2017 : disabled by default in Word**
  - **2019 : disabled by default in Excel**
- **OLE Package objects**
  - **2020 : Blocked for executable files**
- **Vulnerabilities**
  - **CVE-2017-11882 (Equation Editor), CVE-2021-40444, CVE-2022-30190 (Follina), CVE-2023-36884, ...**

# ATTACK TECHNIQUES

## ..... But... Threat Actors are still using Malicious Documents in 2024

- LockBit ransomware using Remote Templates with VBA Macros :

Date (UTC)	SHA256 hash	Type	Signature	Tags	Reporter
2024-02-07 13:55	1866b28b51045944df18...	exe	LockBit	exe lockbit	adrian_luca
2024-01-15 14:27	0dd36a058705717a7d8...	exe	LockBit	exe lockbit viviendas8-com	JAMESWT_MHT
2024-01-15 14:26	06faae4e566f53dfca3e8...	doc	LockBit	doc lockbit viviendas8-com	JAMESWT_MHT
2024-01-15 14:24	957baea98c48a7e8f620...	docx	LockBit	docx lockbit viviendas8-com	JAMESWT_MHT
2024-01-15 14:13	1d9ddc7850fd9451d2c5...	doc	LockBit	doc lockbit	JAMESWT_MHT
2024-01-13 05:08	c0869e7f1bb4914fa453...	elf	LockBit	elf lockbit Ransomware	pisut4152
2024-01-12 11:02	1520e4cb2748aa5725d...	exe	LockBit	32 exe lockbit trojan	zbetcheckin
2024-01-11 20:30	ee02e5051243512ec5a...	docx	LockBit	docx KOR lockbit	smica83

- AgentTesla using XLAM – Excel Add-ins with VBA Macros

Date (UTC)	SHA256 hash	Type	Signature	Tags	Reporter
2024-02-22 06:26	3aa665d4f46ab7402bfe...	xlsx	AgentTesla	AgentTesla CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-21 13:19	275c050d461f4215f183...	xlsx		xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-21 13:19	ae737e58b8b0194fcbf...	xlsx		xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-21 13:19	de3f3f31f5c4ff182053dd...	xlsx	AgentTesla	AgentTesla CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-20 15:35	b3a54a632c7f6c4d1f87...	xlsx	AgentTesla	AgentTesla CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-20 15:35	12c2ec6b1fce0eb8fdc5c...	xlsx		CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-20 15:35	a9a15723f5a0e06be29f...	xlsx	AgentTesla	AgentTesla CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch
2024-02-20 15:34	bcdfd7d79bd3546989d7...	xlsx	AgentTesla	AgentTesla CVE-2017-11882 xlam xlsx	abuse_ch

## ..... All those techniques have been « patched » by Microsoft, right ?

Yes, but :

- **Not all computers are fully patched.**
  - Threat actors still use exploits from 2017 !
  - In 2024 malicious macros are still coming in.
  - Attackers only need one unpatched computer to enter.
- **Some users need to use macros.**
  - Finance department getting XLS files every day from partner
- **Every year, new vulnerabilities are discovered**
  - Example : the new MS Outlook CVE-2024-21413 allows a link to launch a document without Protected View
- **Some techniques still work for lateral movement**
  - Documents on SharePoint/OneDrive can still run macros
  - Documents sent by email within a company can still run macros
- **Attackers sometimes find ways to bypass fences**
  - Blocked features are not 100 % blocked
  - Example : Document with macros in an ISO image file, OLE Package with drag and drop

kaspersky daily

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Vulnérabilités

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## CVE-2017-11882 : exploitée pendant cinq ans

Il semblerait que certaines entreprises n'aient pas encore installé les correctifs de Microsoft Office pourtant publiés il y a 5 ans.

Editorial Team

18 Août 2023



## ..... Some Red Teamers still use VBA Macros

<https://github.com/X-C3LL/congresos-slides/blob/master/Offensive%20VBA.pdf>

### Office Macros in 2024 (2/2)

- Evade the macro restriction Policy:
  - Phish target to disable the protection
  - Phish target to move the file to a Trusted Location
  - Phish target to copy document to a shared folder
  - Phish target to save embedded document
  - Etc.

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/emeric-nasi-84950528\\_extended-slides-activity-7211761335305437184-9nG?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/emeric-nasi-84950528_extended-slides-activity-7211761335305437184-9nG?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)



# DEMOS



## Demo 1

- Recent sample with VBA macro

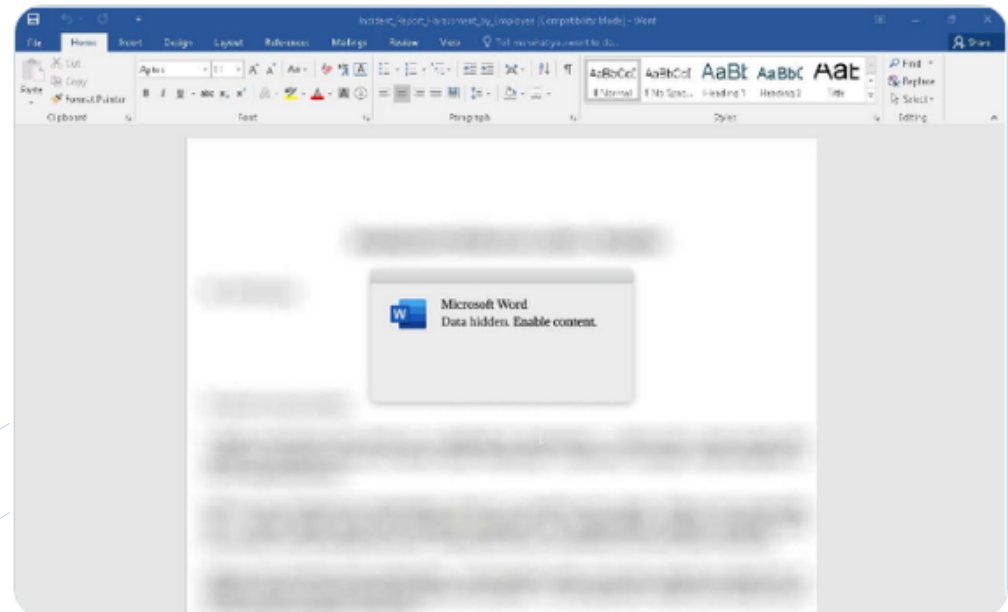


Very interesting sample.

Incident\_Report\_Harassment\_by\_Employee.doc  
bbdbcec62526b94b38d7ab4e0e794efcc363cd7ec033f39c543c66637  
8c317ea

b227c000b3b89dc66492bde86278996c9881f62bdf715e0a203cfaf1ed  
a1cc9e

@JAMESWT\_MHT @h2jazi



.....

## Demo 2

- Hancitor sample with VBA macro and OLE package object





# Ftguess – File Format Identification

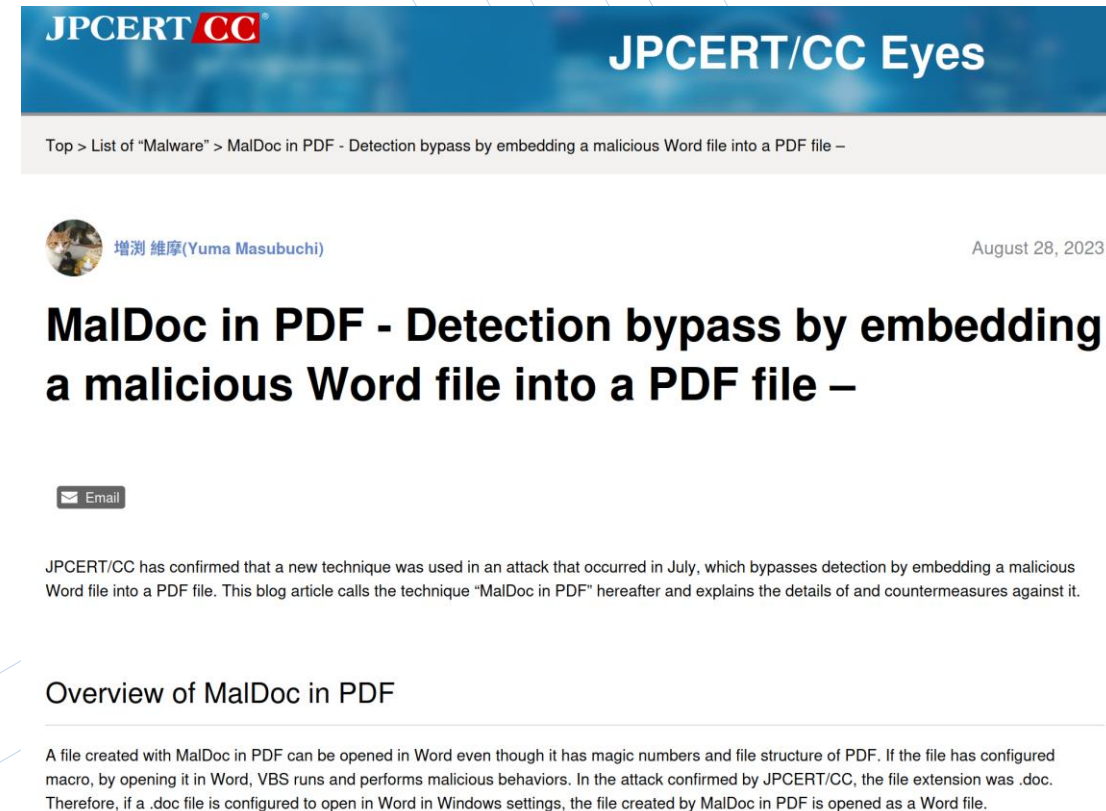
## ..... Ftguess – why a new file type guessing tool

- **file/libmagic** are good most of the time, but not very accurate for MS Office formats and some others like MSIX, PowerShell, JavaScript, VBScript.
- **TrID** is a bit better.
- **Magika** (recent tool from Google based on ML) works well on script formats, but version 1 does not know many formats yet.
- Ftguess implements my custom algorithm to detect file formats more precisely and **only by content**, especially MS Office formats.
- For example:
  - If file starts by OLE Magic “DOCF”: parse OLE structure
    - Get CLSID from root storage
    - Each CLSID maps to a specific file format:
      - Word 97, Excel 97, etc
  - If file is a ZIP archive: look for specific XML files
    - Check URL of main relationship
    - Each URL maps to a specific OpenXML file format
      - Word 2007, Excel 2007, etc

Name	Size	CLSID
Root Entry	-	00020906-0000-0000-C000-000000000046 Microsoft Word 97-2003 Document (Word.Document.8)
\x01CompObj	114	
\x05DocumentSummaryInformation	280	
\x05SummaryInformation	412	
1Table	8134	

## ..... Ftguess - future

- But OS like Windows and Linux use **first the file extension** and second the file content to decide which app should open the file.
- This is abused by **polyglots** - example: a MHT file with VBA macros, with a fake PDF header:
  - Most tools see the file as PDF
  - On Windows, it is opened by Word due to the .doc extension
- Ftguess will add a new **strict mode** to be more accurate:
  1. Identify potential formats based on file extension
  2. For each, verify that the content matches the extension
- Example: if file extension = .doc
  - Check if content is Word 97-2003
  - Or Word 2007+
  - Or RTF
  - Or MHT
  - Or plain text
- Only relevant if file has not been renamed.



The screenshot shows a blog post from JPCERT/CC Eyes. The header includes the JPCERT/CC logo and the site name. The breadcrumb trail is 'Top > List of "Malware" > MalDoc in PDF - Detection bypass by embedding a malicious Word file into a PDF file'. The author is Yuma Masubuchi, and the date is August 28, 2023. The main title is 'MalDoc in PDF - Detection bypass by embedding a malicious Word file –'. There is an 'Email' button. The text states: 'JPCERT/CC has confirmed that a new technique was used in an attack that occurred in July, which bypasses detection by embedding a malicious Word file into a PDF file. This blog article calls the technique "MalDoc in PDF" hereafter and explains the details of and countermeasures against it.' Below this is a section titled 'Overview of MalDoc in PDF' with the following text: 'A file created with MalDoc in PDF can be opened in Word even though it has magic numbers and file structure of PDF. If the file has configured macro, by opening it in Word, VBS runs and performs malicious behaviors. In the attack confirmed by JPCERT/CC, the file extension was .doc. Therefore, if a .doc file is configured to open in Word in Windows settings, the file created by MalDoc in PDF is opened as a Word file.'

**MSI / MSIX**

## ..... MSI / MSIX

- MSI and MSIX: installer packages for MS Windows
- Both abused in the recent years to deliver malware
- **MSI: OLE format** (like .doc, .xls)
  - Introduced in 1999 (with Office 2000)
  - Custom Actions can be added to run scripts, EXE or DLL
  - A legitimate MSI can be backdoored
  - Can be parsed by olefile/oletools but needs additional processing to extract useful info and detect malware
  - Undocumented file format
    - Custom encoding algorithm for stream names
    - Custom database format inside some streams

## ..... MSI / MSIX

- **MSIX: OpenXML** format (like .docx, .xlsx)
  - Not exactly OpenXML, just a subset
  - Very recent format (2018), not well known and not well supported by security tools
  - Could also be parsed and analysed by oletools
  - Requires digital signature (but some threat actors use stolen keys or buy them)
  - Bonus point: not yet in the list of [MS Outlook blocked attachments!](#)
  - Undocumented file format
    - But XML files are easier to parse

## ..... olemsi

- New tool under development to parse MSI / MSIX and extract useful information + embedded executable files and scripts
- **Existing tools are not sufficient:**
  - **Msidump is great to analyse malicious MSI but requires Windows**
  - **Lessmsi also requires Windows**
  - **Msitools require Linux, not security oriented**
  - **Not found any suitable tool or parser for MSIX**
- **Work in progress:**
  - **Done: decode OLE stream names from MSI**
  - **MSI: Extract embedded files from streams and CAB files**
  - **MSI: Parse databases, extract custom actions**
  - **MSI: Extract scripts**
  - **MSIX: Parse manifest**
  - **MSIX: Parse config.json**
  - **MSIX Extract embedded files and scripts**
  - **Detect suspicious MSI / MSIX**



**Any questions:**

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