

What is FakeAV?

FakeAV or Fake AntiVirus, also known as Rogue AntiVirus, Rogues, or ScareWare, is a class of malware that displays false alert messages to the victim concerning threats that do not really exist. These alerts will prompt users to visit a website where they will be asked to pay for these non-existent threats to be cleaned up. The FakeAV will continue to send these annoying and intrusive alerts until a payment is made.

This paper provides insight into where FakeAV comes from, what happens when a system is infected with FakeAV, and how users can protect themselves from FakeAV.

What is FakeAV?

Introduction

FakeAV or Fake AntiVirus, also known as Rogue AntiVirus, Rogues, or ScareWare, is a class of malware that displays false alert messages to the victim concerning threats that do not really exist. These alerts will prompt users to visit a website where they will be asked to pay for these non-existent threats to be cleaned up. The FakeAV will continue to send these annoying and intrusive alerts until a payment is made.

This paper provides insight into where FakeAV comes from, what happens when a system is infected with FakeAV, and how users can protect themselves from FakeAV.

During the last year, the number of FakeAV executables has grown enormously. SophosLabs has seen the quantity of unique variants grow from less than 1,000 to well over half a million. This huge rise in popularity among malware writers is primarily due to the direct revenue source that FakeAV provides. Compared to other classes of malware such as bots, backdoor Trojans, downloaders and password stealers, FakeAV draws the victim into handing money over directly to the malware author. FakeAV is also associated with a thriving affiliate network community that makes large amounts of money by driving traffic toward the stores of their partners.¹

Typical signs of infection

FakeAV usually uses a large array of social engineering techniques to get itself installed. Campaigns have included:

- » Fake Windows Security Updates²
- » Fake Virus-Total pages³
- » Fake Facebook app⁴
- » 9/11 scams⁵

Once on a system, there are many common themes in its behavior:

- » **Popup warnings**
Many FakeAV families will display popup messages in the taskbar:



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

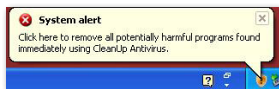


Fig.4

» Fake scanning

The FakeAV will typically pretend to scan the computer and find non-existent threats, sometimes creating files full of junk that will then be detected⁶:

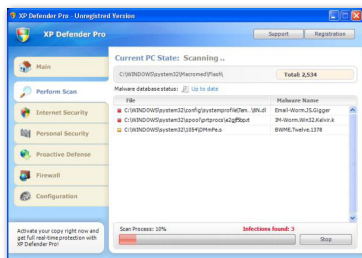


Fig.5

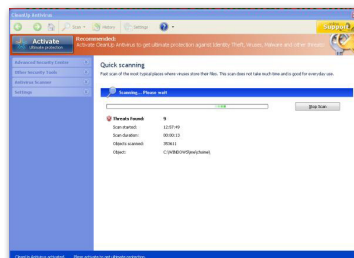


Fig.6

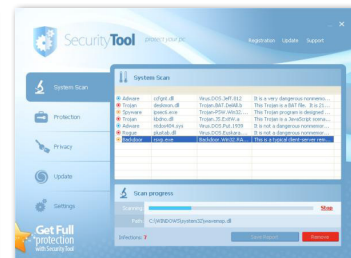


Fig.7

FakeAV uses an enormous range of convincing names to add to the illusion of legitimacy, such as:

- » AntiSpyWarePro
- » Antivirus Plus
- » Antivirus Soft
- » Antivirus XP
- » Internet Security 2010
- » Malware Defense
- » Security Central
- » Security Tool
- » Winweb Security
- » XP Antivirus
- » Digital Protector
- » XP Defender
- » CleanUp AntiVirus

There can be many thousands of variants for each family as techniques such as server-side polymorphism are used heavily to alter the FakeAV executable. This is a process whereby the executable is re-packaged offline and a different file is delivered when a download request is made. This can happen many times during a 24-hour period. One particular family that calls itself “Security Tool”⁷ has been known to produce a different file nearly every minute. This is how a single family can have such large numbers of samples.

Many families will also share a common code base underneath the polymorphic packer, where the application is simply “re-skinned” with a different look and feel but the behavior remains the same.

Infection vectors

How do people get infected with FakeAV?

Although there are many different ways that a specific FakeAV may get onto a system, the majority of distribution avenues rely on social engineering. Ultimately, the user is tricked into running the FakeAV installer executable in a way similar to many other types of Trojans. FakeAV authors have used a huge range of different social engineering tricks and are continuing to come up with new ones all the time.

In this paper, we review several main sources of FakeAV infection:

- » Search engine optimization poisoning
- » Email spam campaigns
- » Compromised websites and exploit payloads
- » FakeAV downloads by other malware

Search engine optimization poisoning

A very common source of FakeAV infection is following results received from popular search engines while searching for topical terms. FakeAV authors ensure that links leading to FakeAV download sites will feature prominently in search results by using blackhat SEO techniques.⁸ These poisoned results will redirect users to a FakeAV-controlled website that displays a fake scanning page, informing them that their computer is infected and they must download a program to clean it up. Alternatively, a fake movie download page may be displayed, where users are prompted to download a codec in order to view the movie. This codec is in fact a FakeAV installer.

Google Trends⁹ is a service provided by Google that highlights popular search terms entered into its search engine. Here is an example of how search terms taken from Google Trends are poisoned by FakeAV authors. Let's do a search over the last 24 hours for pages containing terms from Hot Searches:



Fig.8

Picking several of the terms and performing a search for them will produce several poisoned results:

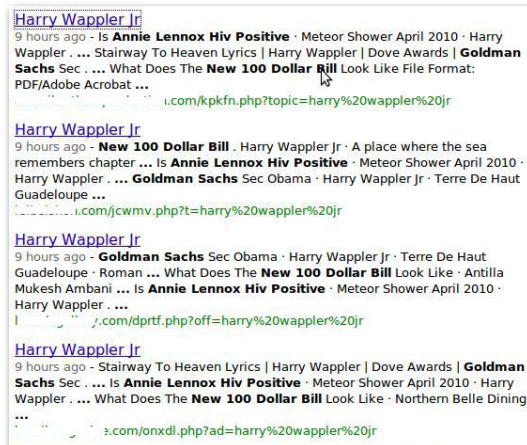


Fig.9

Clicking on these links takes users to a fake scanning page, where they are told they have multiple infections and need to download a program to remove the threats:

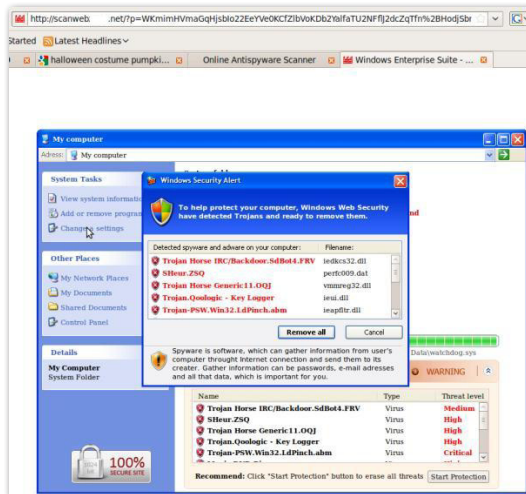


Fig.10

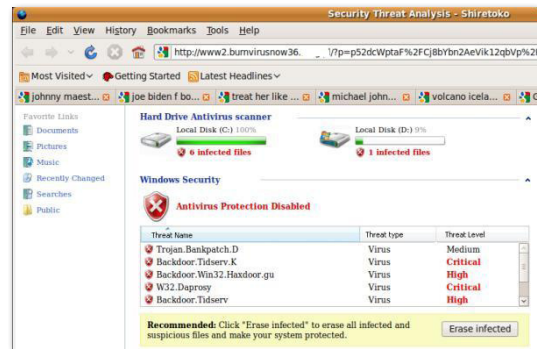


Fig.11

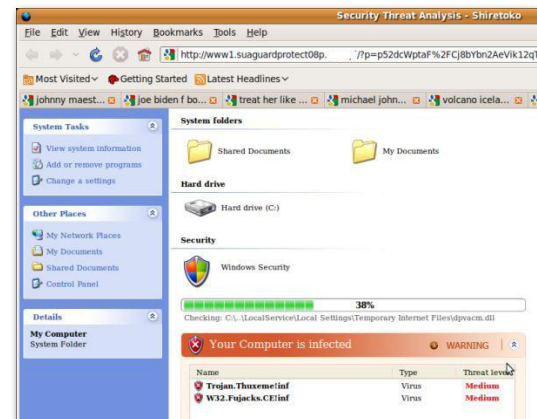


Fig.12

Or, users are taken to a fake movie download page where they are told they need to download a codec to view the movie:

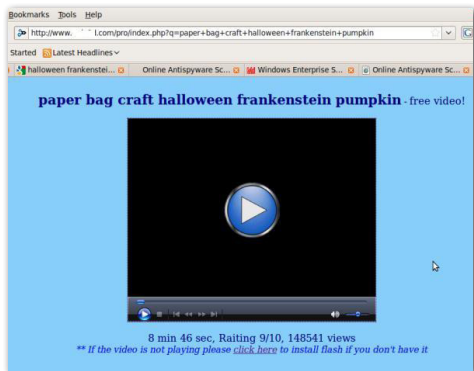


Fig.13

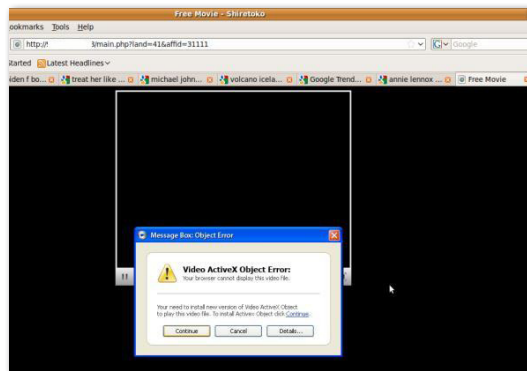


Fig.14

In each case, users are tricked into downloading and running an unknown executable, which is the FakeAV installer.

Spam campaigns

FakeAV is often sent directly to the victim as an attachment or as a link in a spam message. The message is predominantly sent through email, but other forms of spam have also been observed to deliver FakeAV, such as instant messaging applications including Google Talk.¹⁰ The spam message itself usually uses social engineering techniques to trick users into running the attached file or clicking on the link. Specific campaigns vary and include password reset, failed delivery message and “You have received an ecard” scams.

Examples of email spam campaigns spreading FakeAV include:

- » **Account suspension scams:** Victims receive an email message suggesting access to a specific account has been terminated and they need to run the attached file to fix the issue.

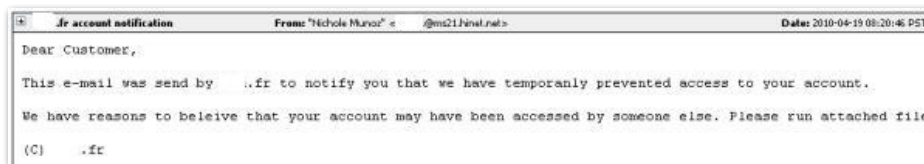


Fig.15

- »
- » **Ecard scams:** An email is received purporting to be from a legitimate ecard company. In fact, a FakeAV installer is attached.

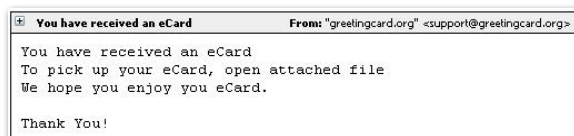


Fig.16

- » **Password reset scams:** Victims receive a message supposedly from a popular website, informing them that their password has been reset and the new one is in the attached file.

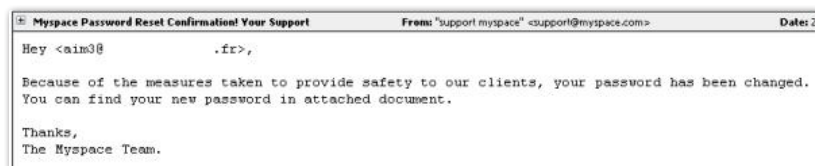


Fig.17

- » **Package delivery scam:** Details of a (fictitious) recent postal delivery are included in an attached file. In reality, the attachment will install FakeAV.

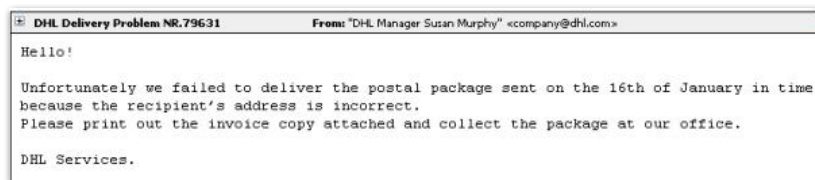


Fig.18

Compromised websites and exploit payloads

Users can sometimes be sent to FakeAV websites by browsing legitimate websites that have been compromised, where malicious code has been injected into the page. This can be achieved by penetrating the target website's hosting server and appending (typically) JavaScript to HTML pages hosted there. This redirect code can be used to send the browser to any type of malware hosting page including exploit kits and FakeAV. This JavaScript code is almost always heavily obfuscated, and Sophos detects this type of malware as variants of Troj/JSRedir.¹¹

SophosLabs has also seen hackers compromise legitimate web-based advertising feeds to ensure that malicious code is loaded instead. This may take the form of an exploit that downloads and executes a FakeAV binary as the payload or a simple iframe that redirects the browser to a FakeAV web page.^{12,13}

FakeAV downloads by other malware

FakeAV can be downloaded onto a machine by other types of malware. SophosLabs maintains many honeypot machines that are seeded with different malware, in order to observe their behavior and ensure protection is maintained when new variants are downloaded. We have seen several families install FakeAV onto an infected machine, most notably TDSS, Virtumundo and Waled.¹⁴ The infamous Conficker worm was also observed to install FakeAV onto infected computers.¹⁵ In this way, a hacker that has infected a computer with TDSS or Virtumundo can extract more money from victims by forcing them to pay for FakeAV.

FakeAV families

We now explain in more detail the behavior of FakeAV once it has made its way onto a target system.

Registry installation

FakeAV's typical behavior is to copy the installer to another location on the system and create a registry entry that will run the executable on system startup.

The installer is often copied into the user's profile area (e.g., C:\Documents and Settings\\Local Settings\Application Data), or into the temporary files area (e.g., c:\windows\temp) with a randomly generated file name. This makes the FakeAV UAC-compliant on Windows machines that have UAC¹⁶ enabled, thus avoiding a UAC warning popping up during installation. However, some families still do not care about UAC and still create their files in the Program Files or Windows folders.

A run key entry is then created in the registry that will run the file when the system starts up. Typically, this will be added to one of the following:

- » HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunOnce
- » HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
- » HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run

Examples:

**HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
wparufv**

c:\documents and settings\\local settings\application data\tqaxywic\chgutertssd.exe

**HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\RunOnce
CUA**

c:\windows\temp\sample.exe

**HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run
85357230**

c:\documents and settings\all users\application data\85357230\85357230.exe

Initiate a fake scan

Once FakeAV is installed, it will usually attempt to contact a remote website over HTTP and will often download the main component. This will initiate a fake system scan, where many non-existent threats will be discovered. The main FakeAV window is often very professionally created and victims can easily be convinced that they are using a genuine security product. Here are several examples:

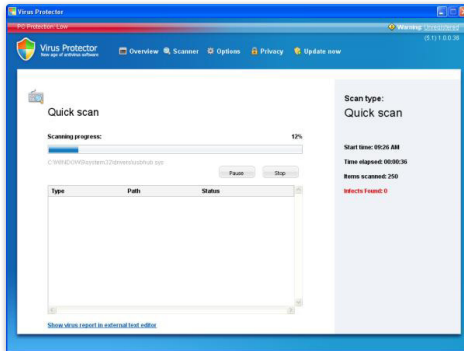


Fig.19

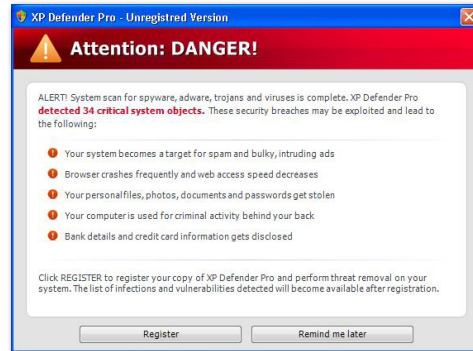


Fig.20



Fig.21



Fig.22

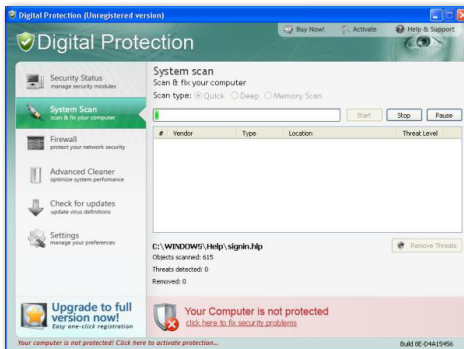


Fig.23

Once the fake threats have been discovered, users are told they must register or activate the product in order to clean up the threats. Users are taken to a registration website (either through a browser or through the FakeAV application), where they are asked to enter their credit card number and other registration details. These pages are also very convincing, occasionally featuring illegal use of logos and trademarks from industry-recognized organizations such as Virus Bulletin¹⁷ and West Coast Labs¹⁸:

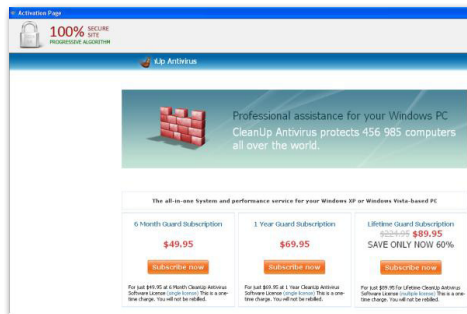


Fig.24

This example fraudulently uses logos from West Coast Labs and Virus Bulletin:



Fig.25



Fig.26

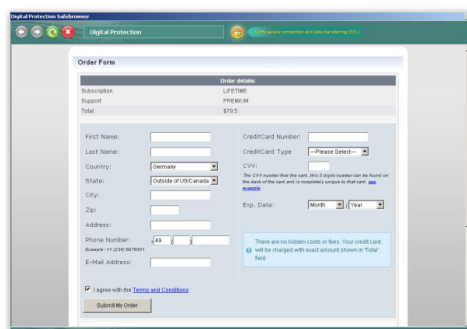


Fig.27

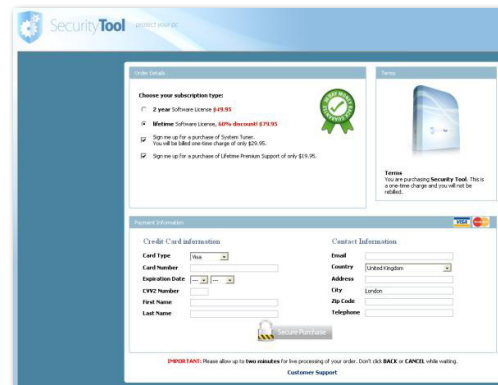


Fig.28

Other FakeAV behavior

Certain FakeAV families cause further distress to the victim by interfering with normal system activity. Commonly, this includes disabling the Task Manager and use of the Registry Editor, prohibiting certain processes from running and even redirecting web requests. This behavior further convinces the user that there is a problem on the system and increases the likelihood of a purchase being made. This extra activity can take the form of:

- » **Process termination:** Certain programs are prohibited from running by the FakeAV, with a warning message being displayed instead.



Fig.29

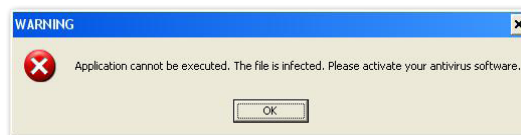


Fig.30

The FakeAV will generally allow Explorer and Internet Explorer to run, so renaming an executable as explorer.exe or iexplore.exe should allow it to be run.

- » **Web page redirection:** Some FakeAV families will redirect web requests for legitimate web sites to an error message or other type of warning message. This adds to the user's fear and, again, makes the user more likely to pay for the FakeAV.



Fig.31

- » **Installation of more malware:** FakeAV has been known to download other types of malware upon installation, such as banking Trojans, rootkits and spam bots.

Prevention and protection

The most effective defense against the FakeAV threat is a comprehensive, layered security solution. Detection can and should take place at each stage of the infection:

- » **URL filtering:** By blocking the domains and URLs from which FakeAV is downloaded, the infection can be prevented from ever happening. Sophos customers are protected by URL filtering in Sophos Web Security and Control¹⁹ and the latest endpoint security product.
- » **Detection of web-based content:** This includes detection of the JavaScript and HTML used on FakeAV and fake codec web pages. Detection at this layer prevents the FakeAV binary from being downloaded (e.g., Mal/FakeAvJs, Mal/VidHtml).
- » **Proactive detection of the FakeAV binary:** Using Behavioral Genotype technology, many thousands of FakeAV binaries can be detected with a single identity. The number of samples currently detected as variants of Mal/FakeAV and Mal/FakeAle is well in excess of half a million.
- » **Run-time detection:** If a FakeAV executable manages to evade the other layers of protection, Sophos's Host Intrusion Prevention System (HIPS) can detect and block the behavior of the FakeAV sample when it tries to execute on the system.²⁰ HIPS includes rules that specifically target FakeAV.
- » **Spam blocking:** Sophos Email Security and Data Protection blocks spam containing FakeAV before a user even sees it.²¹

Conclusion

FakeAV is a prevalent and rapidly growing threat. The direct financial benefit gained from FakeAV means that it will not go away; in fact, it will likely become even more widespread.

FakeAV is already distributed through a large number of sources. The variety and inventiveness of its distribution will only increase.

Fortunately, users can protect themselves through a comprehensive and layered security solution that detects and defends against FakeAV at every possible level.

References

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- 17 **Virus Bulletin**
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<http://www.westcoastlabs.com/>
- 19 **Sophos Web Security and Control**
<http://www.sophos.com/products/enterprise/web/security-and-control/>
- 20 **Sophos HIPS**
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- 21 **Sophos Email Security and Data Protection**
<http://www.sophos.com/products/enterprise/email/security-and-control/>

Screenshot appendix

Fig.1



Fig.2

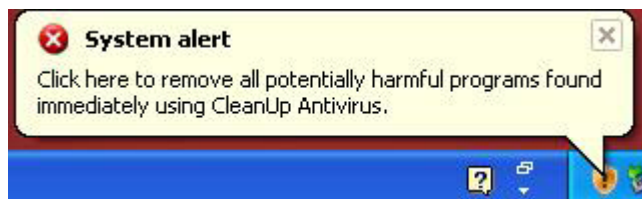


Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5

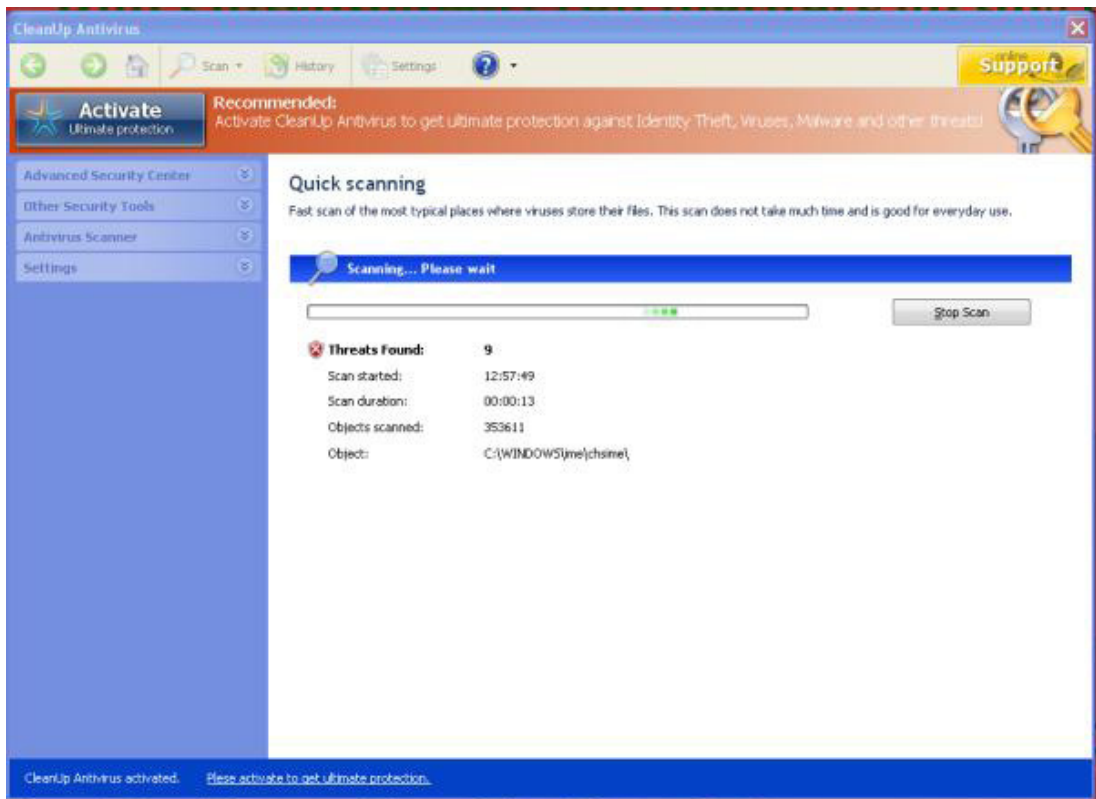


Fig.6

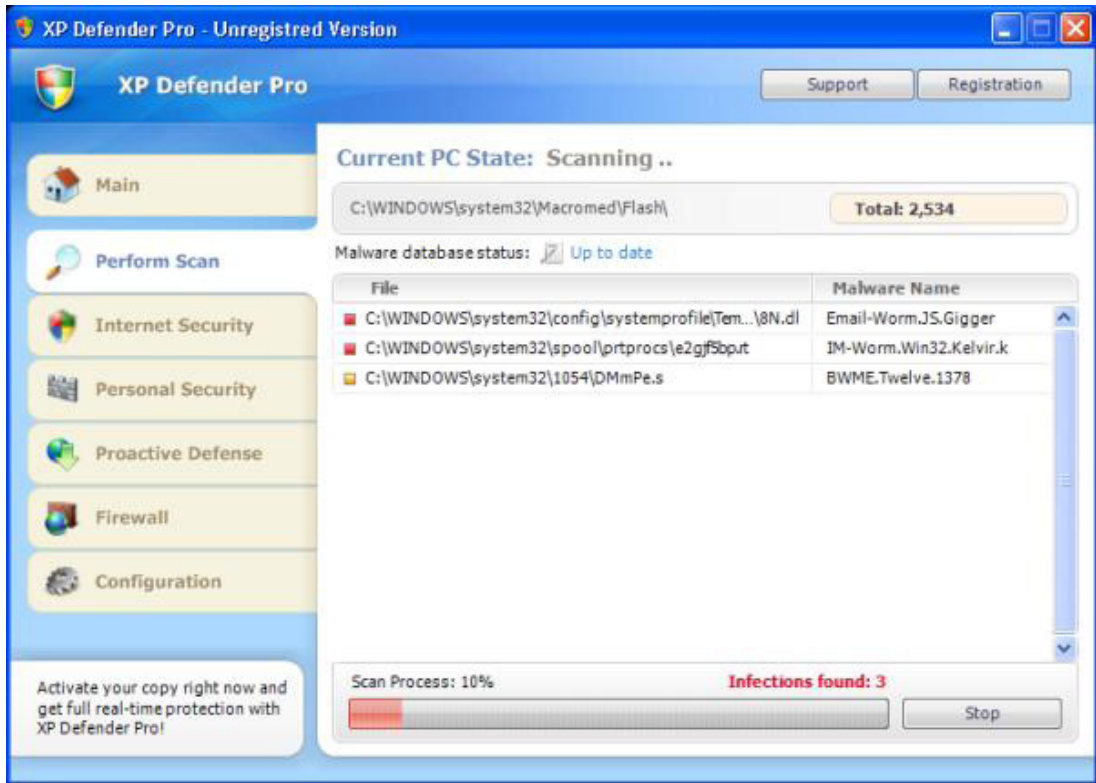


Fig.7

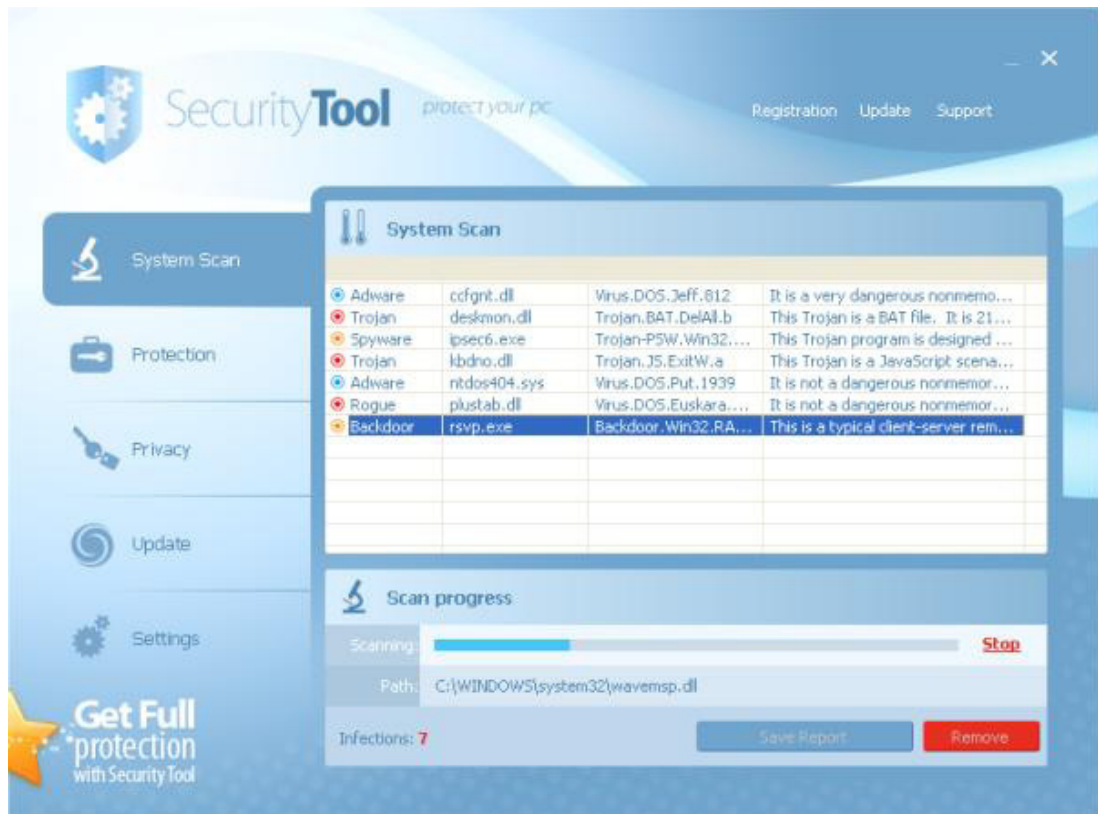


Fig.8

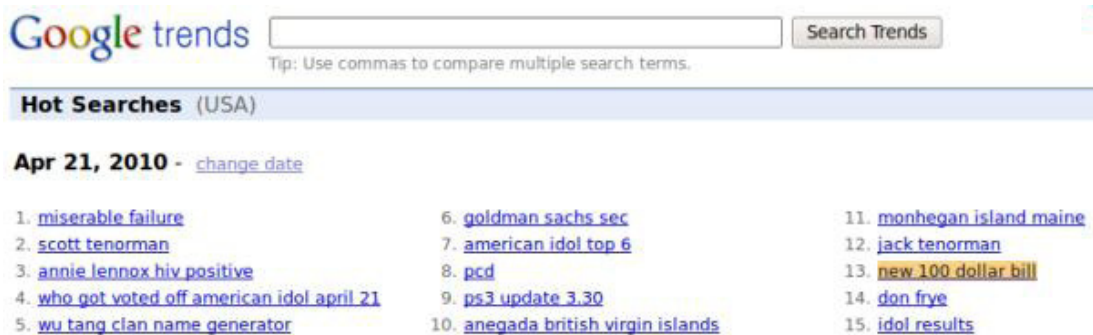


Fig.9

[Harry Wappler Jr](#)

9 hours ago - Is **Annie Lennox Hiv Positive** · Meteor Shower April 2010 · Harry Wappler Stairway To Heaven Lyrics | Harry Wappler | Dove Awards | **Goldman Sachs** Sec What Does The **New 100 Dollar Bill** Look Like File Format: PDF/Adobe Acrobat ...
...i.com/kpkfn.php?topic=harry%20wappler%20jr

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...i.com/jcwmv.php?t=harry%20wappler%20jr

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...i.com/dprtf.php?off=harry%20wappler%20jr

[Harry Wappler Jr](#)

9 hours ago - Stairway To Heaven Lyrics | Harry Wappler | Dove Awards | **Goldman Sachs** Sec Is **Annie Lennox Hiv Positive** · Meteor Shower April 2010 · Harry Wappler What Does The **New 100 Dollar Bill** Look Like · Northern Belle Dining ...
...i.com/onxdl.php?ad=harry%20wappler%20jr

Fig.10

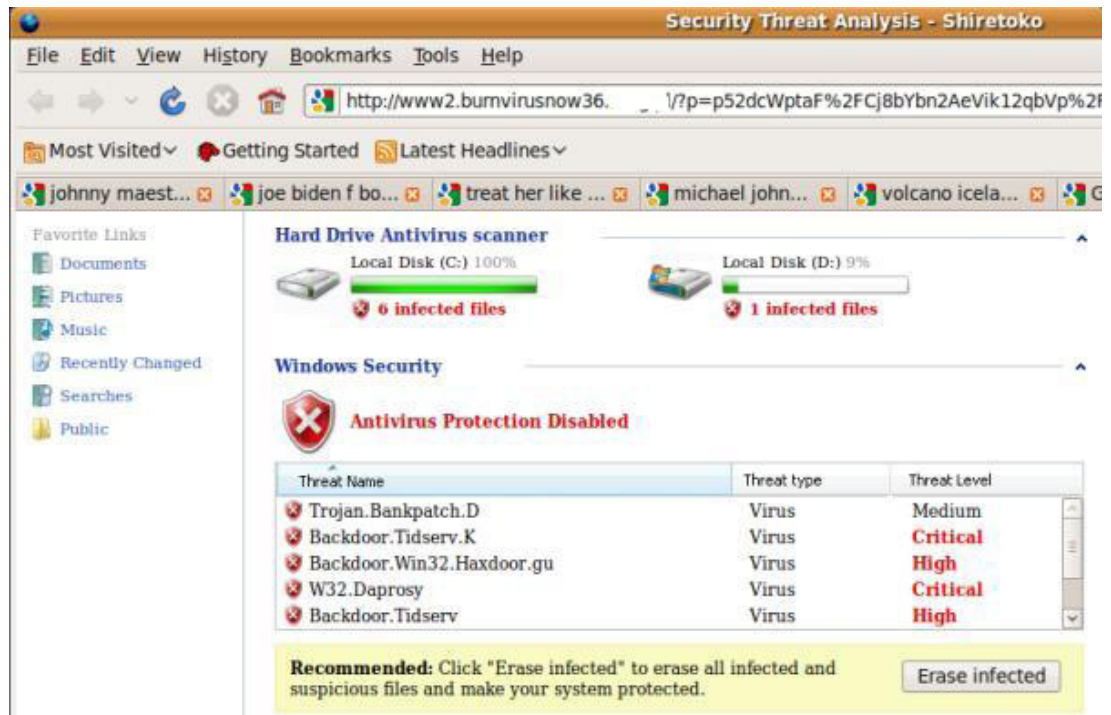


Fig.11

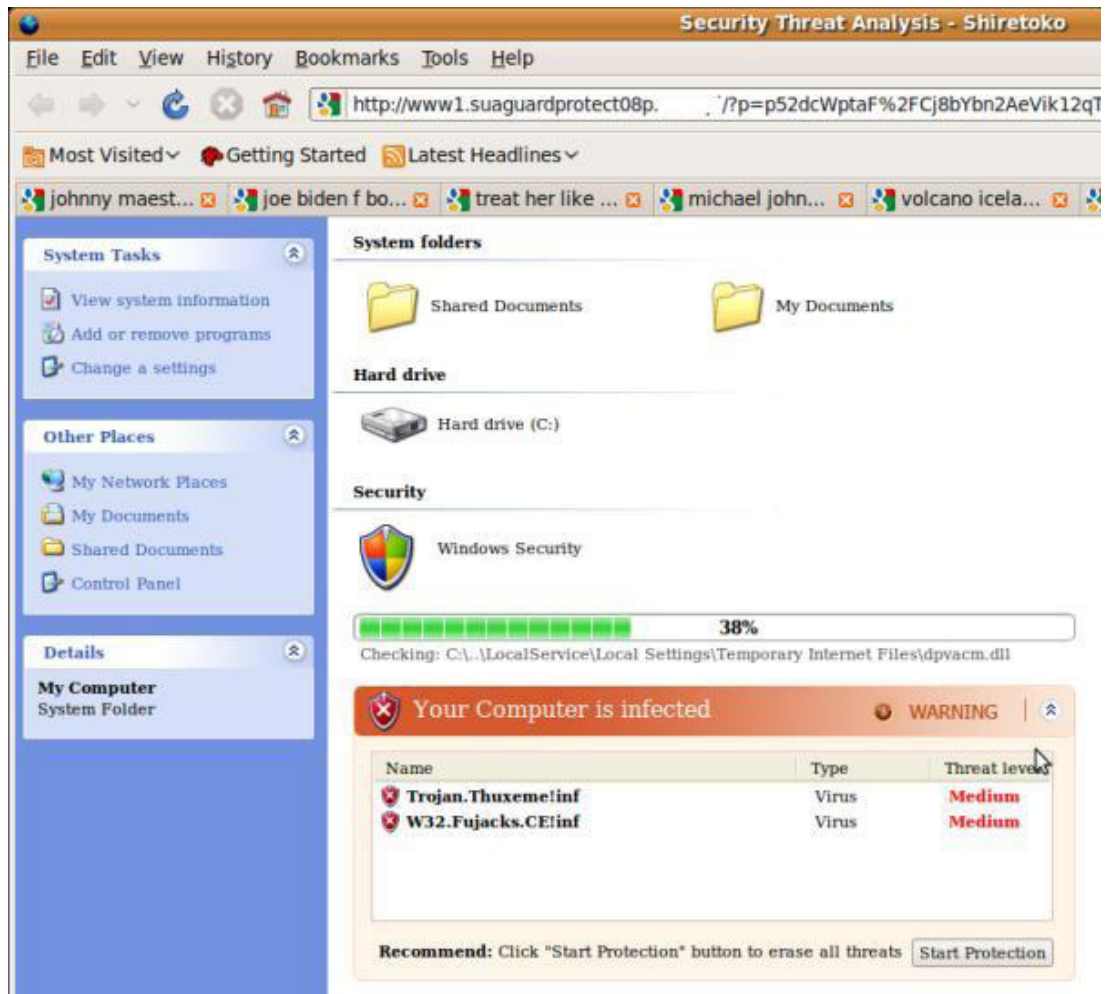


Fig.12

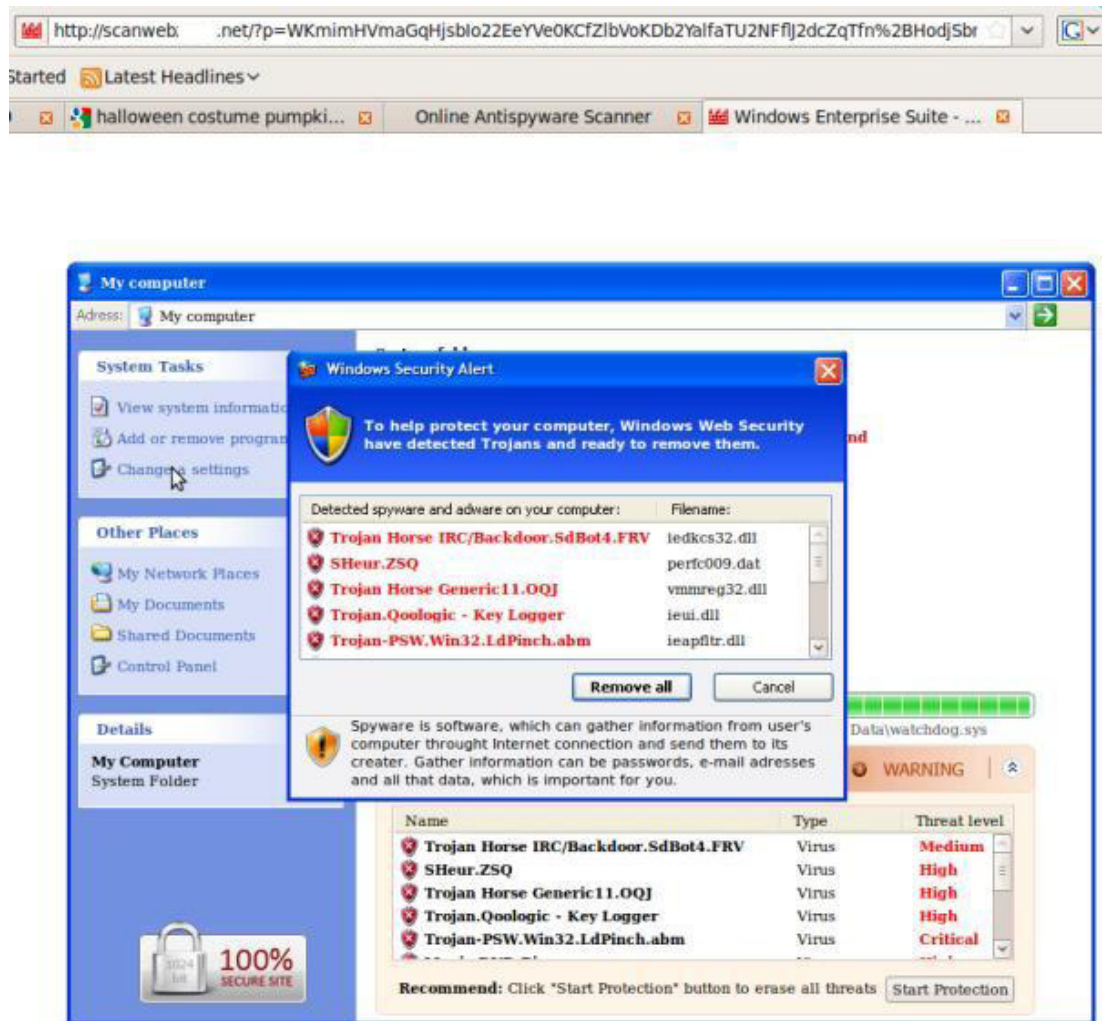


Fig.13

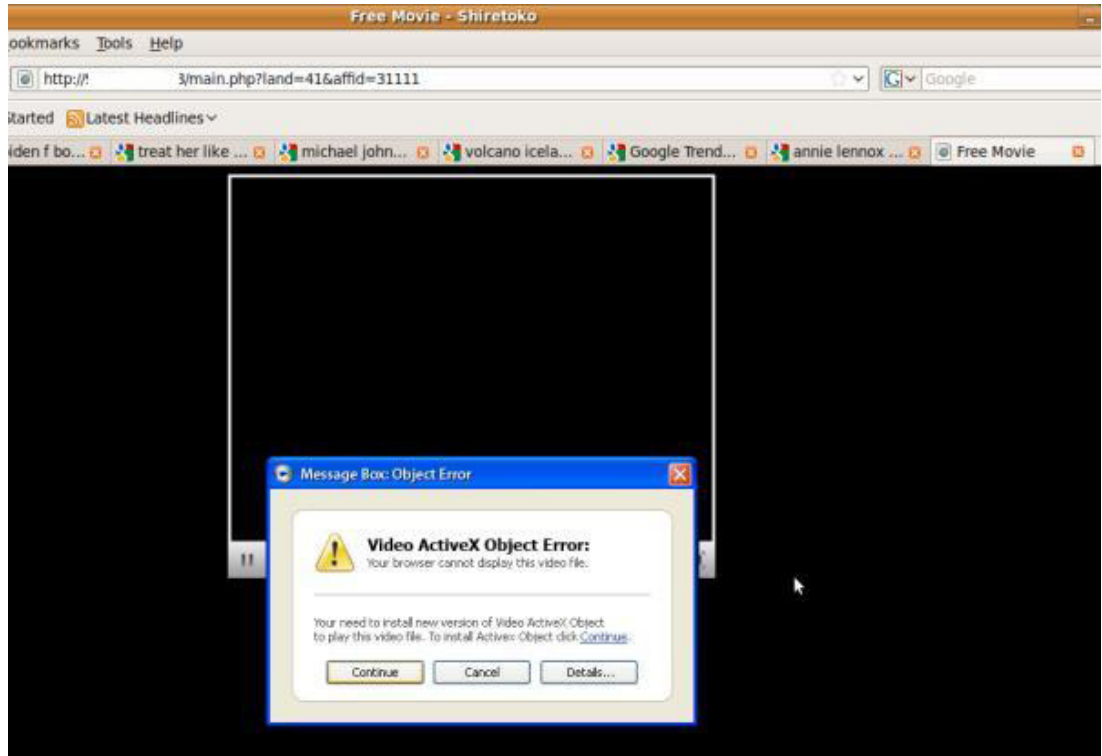


Fig.14

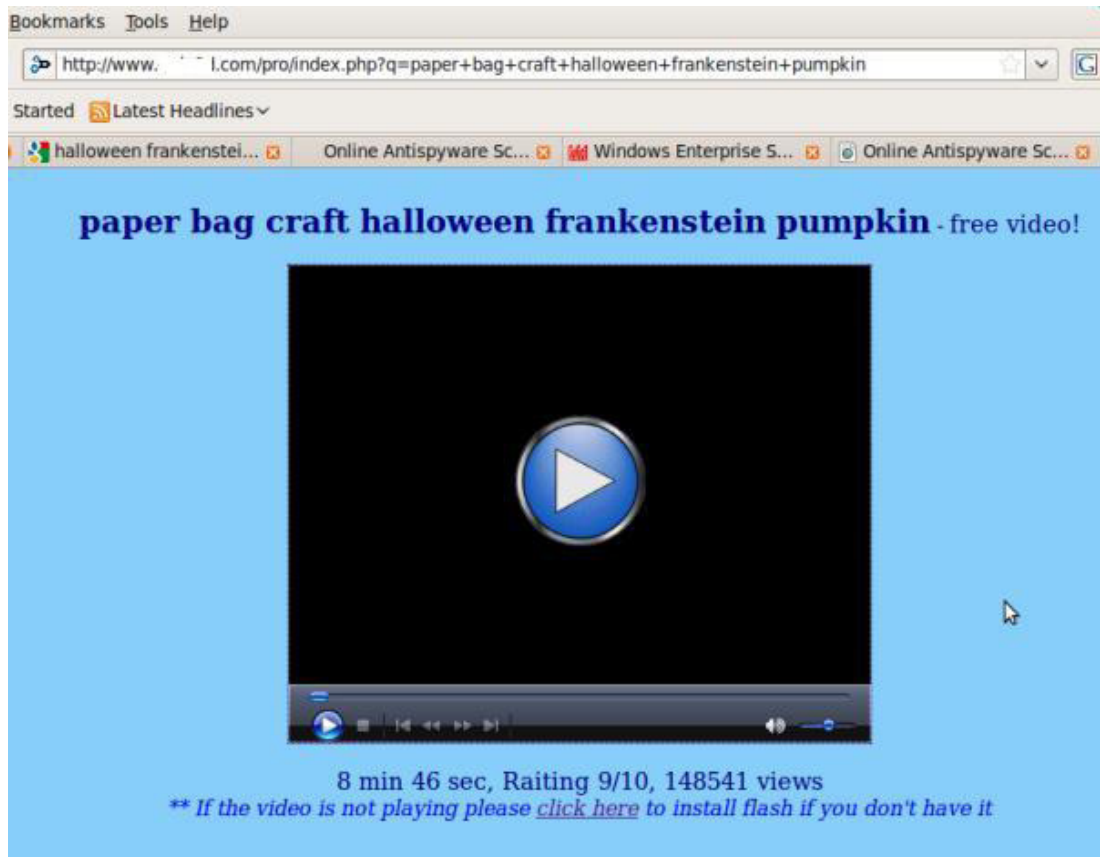


Fig.15

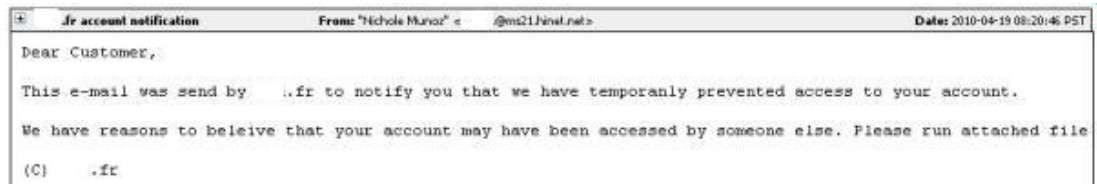


Fig.16

+ You have received an eCard	From: "greetingcard.org" <support@greetingcard.org>
-------------------------------------	--

You have received an eCard
To pick up your eCard, open attached file
We hope you enjoy you eCard.

Thank You!

Fig.17

+ Myspace Password Reset Confirmation! Your Support	From: "support mspace" <support@myspace.com>	Date: 2/
--	---	-----------------

Hey <aim3@.fr>,
Because of the measures taken to provide safety to our clients, your password has been changed.
You can find your new password in attached document.

Thanks,
The Myspace Team.

Fig.18

+ DHL Delivery Problem NR.79631	From: "DHL Manager Susan Murphy" <company@dhl.com>
--	---

Hello!

Unfortunately we failed to deliver the postal package sent on the 16th of January in time because the recipient's address is incorrect.
Please print out the invoice copy attached and collect the package at our office.

DHL Services.

Fig.19



Fig.20

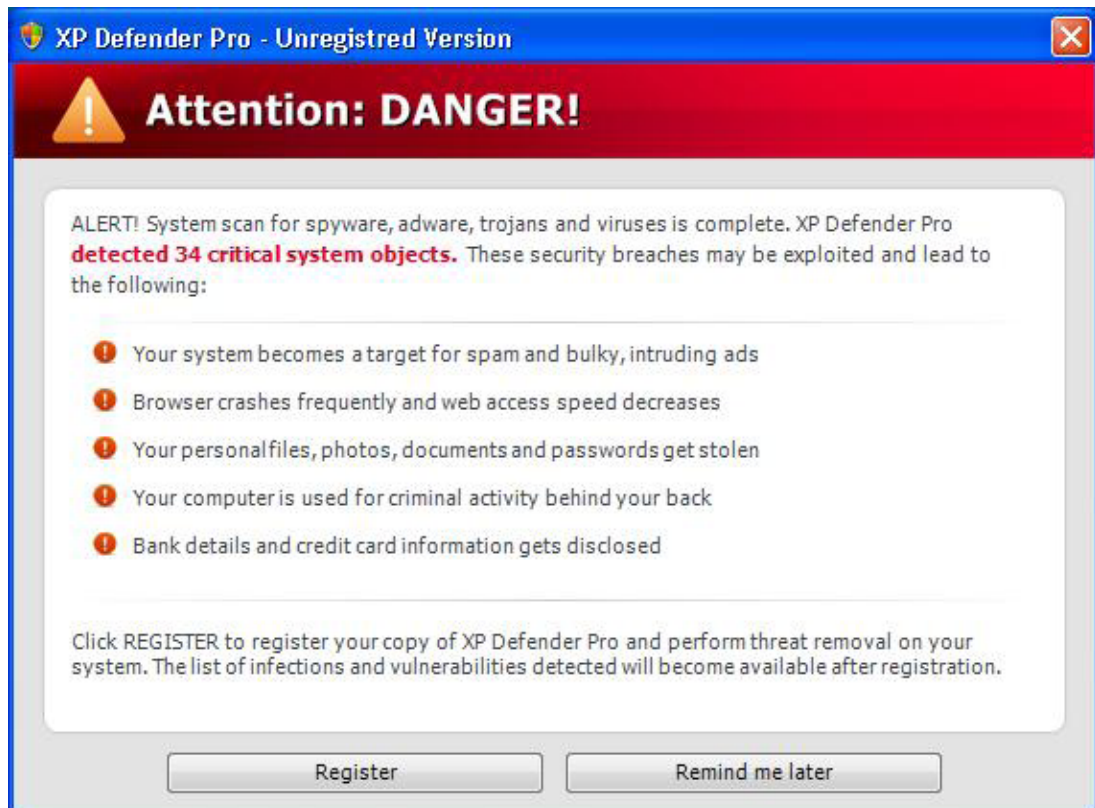


Fig.21

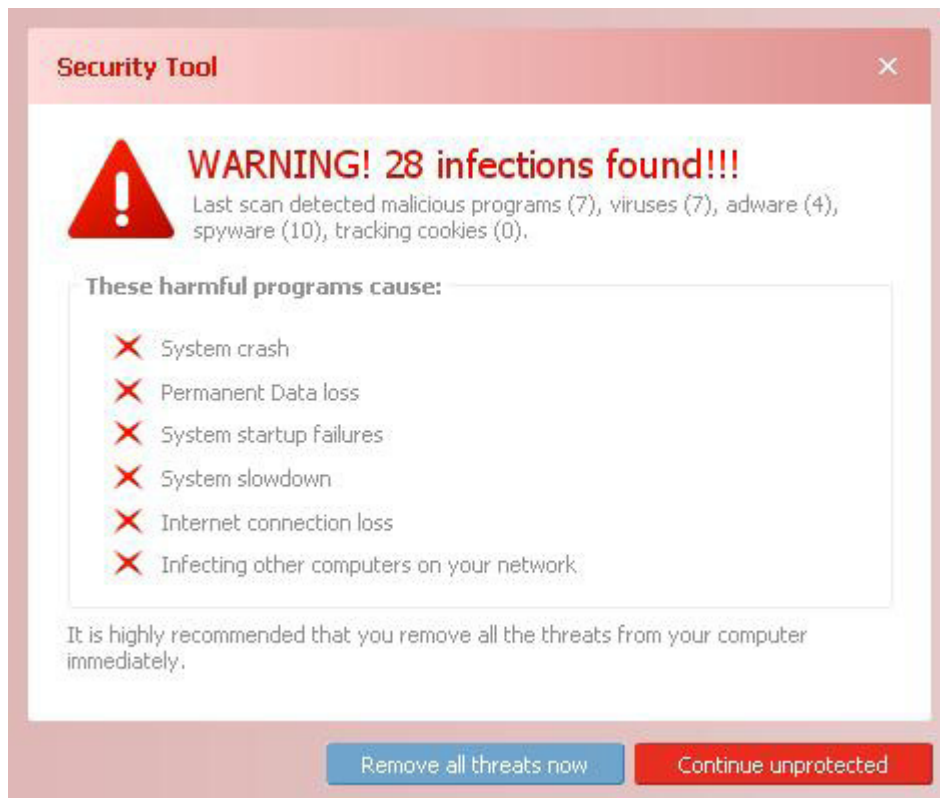


Fig.22

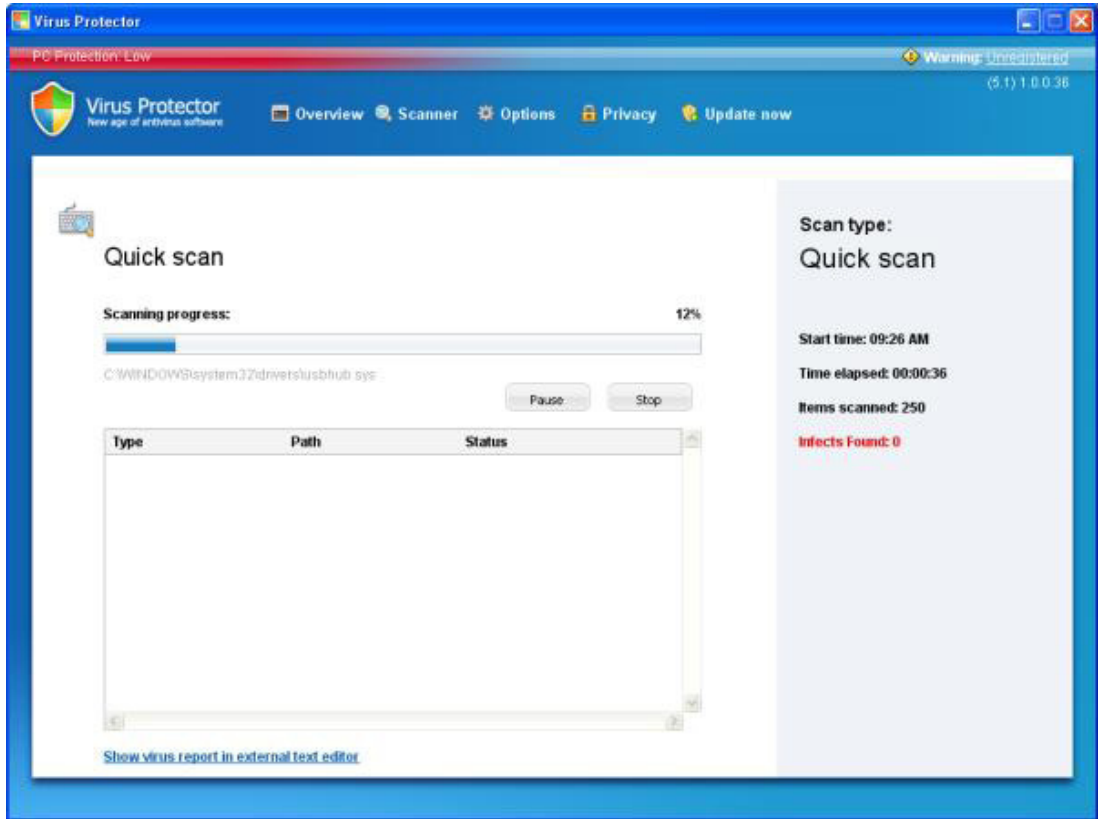


Fig.23

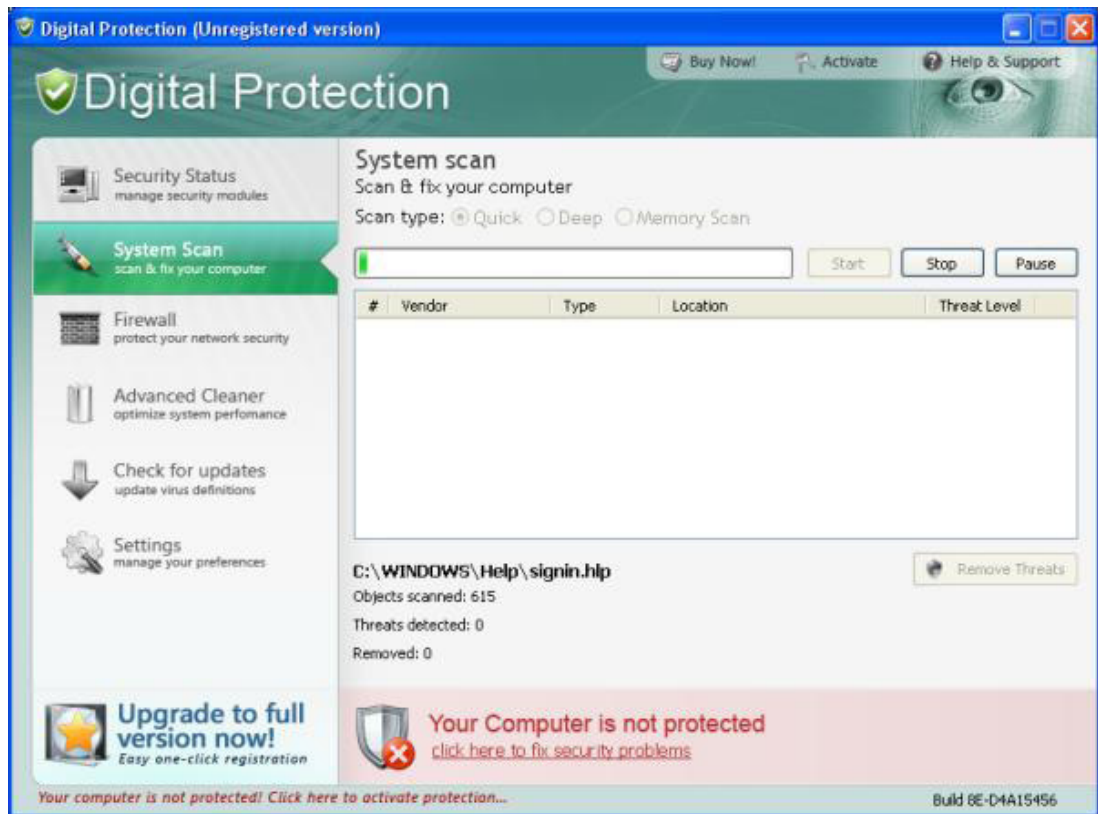


Fig.24

Activation Page

100% SECURE SITE
PROGRESSIVE ALGORITHM

CleanUp Antivirus

Professional assistance for your Windows PC
CleanUp Antivirus protects 456 985 computers
all over the world.

The all-in-one System and performance service for your Windows XP or Windows Vista-based PC

6 Month Guard Subscription	1 Year Guard Subscription	Lifetime Guard Subscription
\$49.95	\$69.95	\$224.95 \$89.95 SAVE ONLY NOW 60%
Subscribe now	Subscribe now	Subscribe now
<small>For just \$49.95 at 6 Month CleanUp Antivirus Software License (single license) This is a one-time charge. You will not be rebilled.</small>	<small>For just \$69.95 at 1 Year CleanUp Antivirus Software License (single license) This is a one-time charge. You will not be rebilled.</small>	<small>For just \$89.95 For Lifetime CleanUp Antivirus Software License (multiple licenses) This is a one-time charge. You will not be rebilled.</small>

Fig.25

The screenshot shows the XP Defender Pro website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for 'Homepage', 'Buy Now', and 'Support'. The main heading is 'XP Defender Pro' with the tagline 'Protect and Secure your Windows OS'. Below this, there are three license options: 6 Months License for \$49.95, 1 Year License for \$59.95, and 2 Years License for \$69.95. Each option includes 'Full' license, 'Auto activation', and 'Premium 24/7/365 Support'. A 'BUY NOW' button is provided for each. The 'Great Features' section lists: Identity protection, Webshield, Anti-spam, Anti-virus and anti-spyware, and Enhanced firewall. A testimonial section titled 'What do our Facebook fans think about the product?' features three quotes from users: Keven Krantz, Steven Dufault, and Trey Faulkner Gamble. On the right side, there are three award logos: PC Answers Recommended Award, West Coast Labs Award, and Virus Bulletin Award, each with a brief description of the award.

Fig.26

The screenshot shows the Sophos SecurityTool checkout interface. At the top left is the SecurityTool logo with the tagline "protect your pc". The main content is divided into three sections:

- Order Details:** Contains a "Choose your subscription type:" section with three radio button options: "2 year Software License \$49.95", "lifetime Software License, 60% discount! \$79.95", and "Sign me up for a purchase of System Tuner. You will be billed one-time charge of only \$29.95." There are also two checked checkboxes: "Sign me up for a purchase of Lifetime Premium Support of only \$19.95." and a green "30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE" seal.
- Terms:** Shows a product image and text stating: "Terms: You are purchasing Security Tool. This is a one-time charge and you will not be rebilled."
- Payment Information:** Includes a "Credit Card information" section with fields for Card Type (set to Visa), Card Number, Expiration Date, and CVV2 Number. It also has a "Contact Information" section with fields for Email, Country (set to United Kingdom), Address, City (set to London), Zip Code, and Telephone. A "Secure Purchase" button with a padlock icon is located below these fields.

At the bottom of the form, there is an "IMPORTANT" notice: "Please allow up to two minutes for live processing of your order. Don't click BACK or CANCEL while waiting." and a "Customer Support" link.

Fig.27

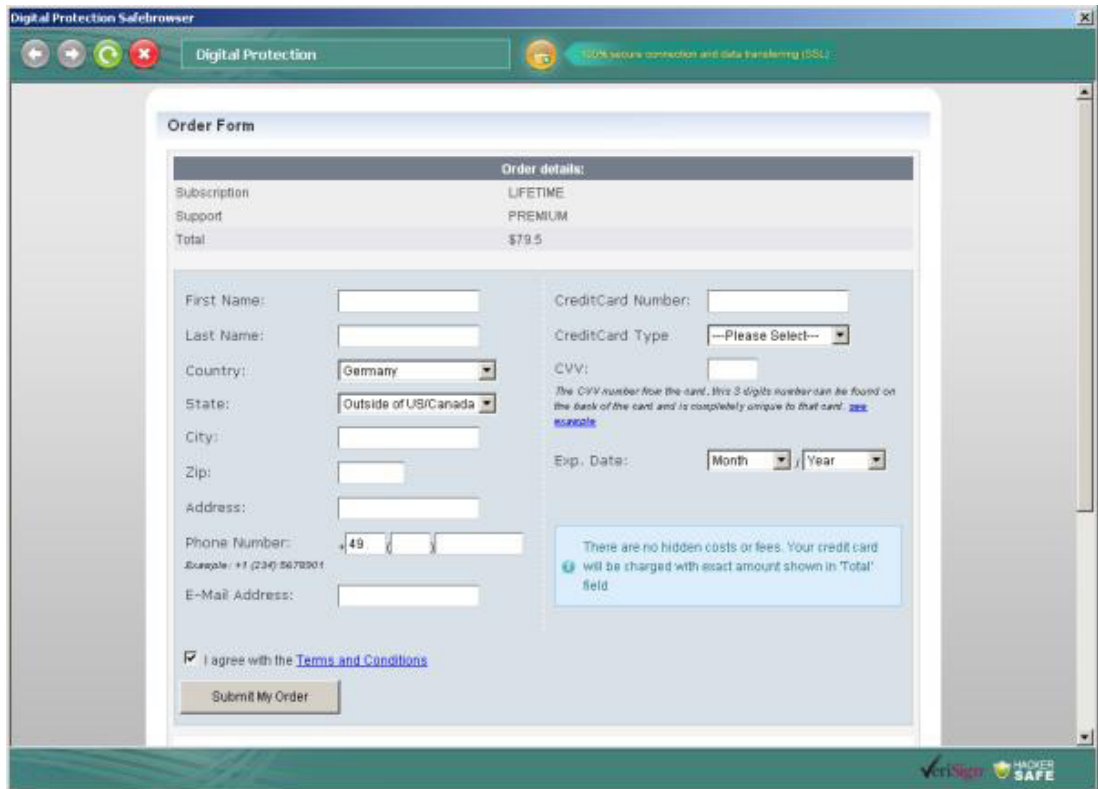


Fig.28



Fig.29

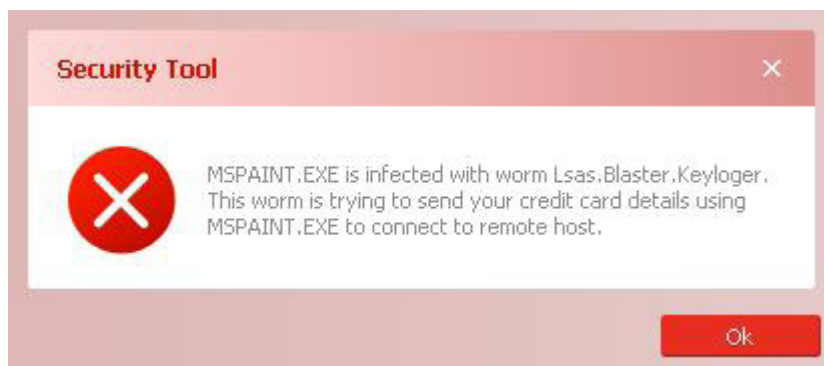


Fig.30

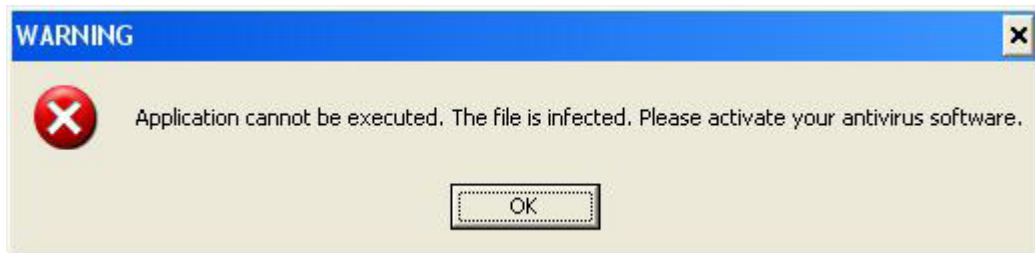
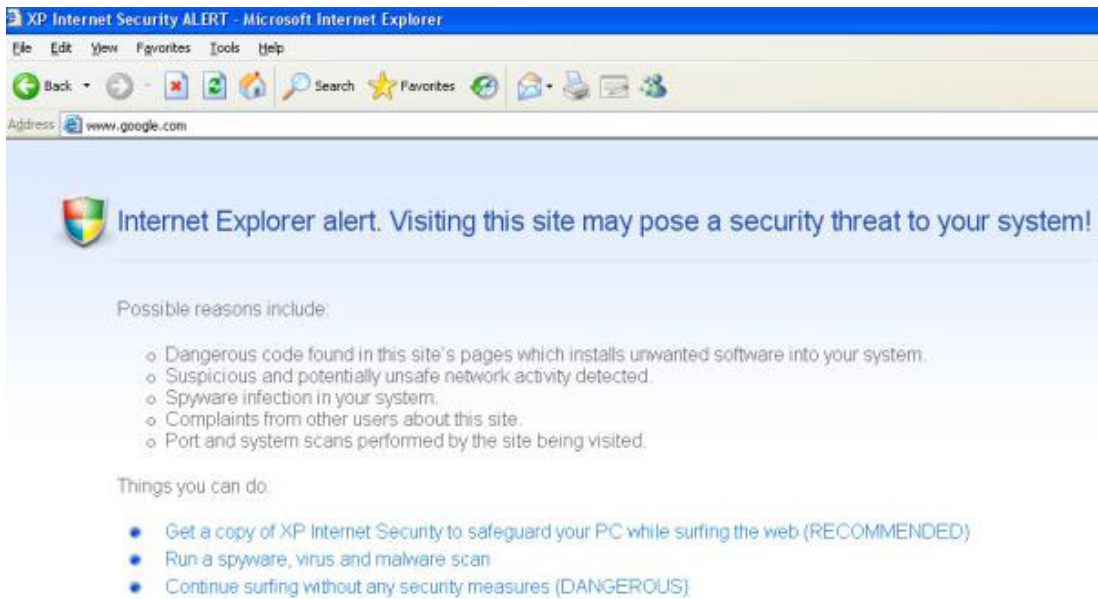


Fig.31



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