SOPHOS

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.

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Introduction

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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:

Anti-Spam Warning Bulk/Mass Mailing Process has detected if you are not a Spanner, you must stop immediately	Varue intrusion1 Your computer security is at risk. Spyware, woms and Trojans were detected in the badyound. Prevent data comption and condit confination intel ¹ . Stagguard your system and perform a free security scan now.
Server: smbol nicol and server Server: smbol nicol com Username: kinterly Address: yaser@rocketmail.com Mail.counter: 151	Fig.2 Security Tool Warning Country Tool has detected harmful software in your system. We strongly recommended you to register Security Tool to
It seems that some malicious software (like mail worms) uses your e- mail account to send spam to inclims.	remove these threads immediately.
Press STOP to stop this process	System alert Click here to remove all potentially harmful programs found immediately using Clearulp Antivirus.
Fig.1	🛛 🖞 🚺 🕅 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:



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.

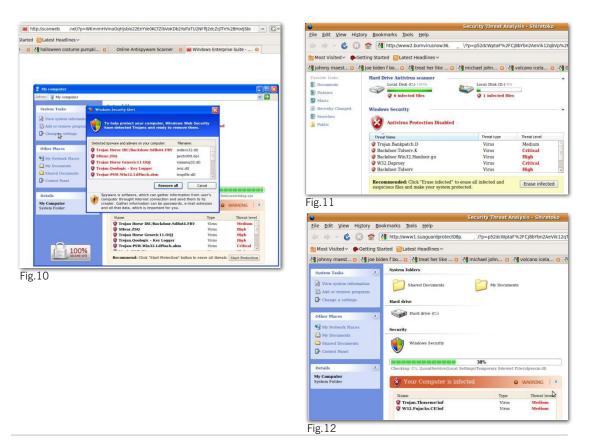
Google Trends⁹ is a service provided by Google that highlights popular search terms entered into its search engine. Here is an example of how search terms taken from Google Trends are poisoned by FakeAV authors. Let's do a search over the last 24 hours for pages containing terms from Hot Searches:

Google trends		Search Trends
Tip: Use comm	as to compare multiple search terms.	
Hot Searches (USA)		
Apr 21, 2010 - change date		
1. miserable failure	6. goldman sachs sec	11. monhegan island main
2. scott tenorman	7. american idol top 6	12. jack tenorman
3. annie lennox hiv positive	8. pcd	13. new 100 dollar bill
4. who got voted off american idol april 21	9. ps3 update 3.30	14. don frye
5. wu tang clan name generator	10. anegada british virgin islands	15. idol results

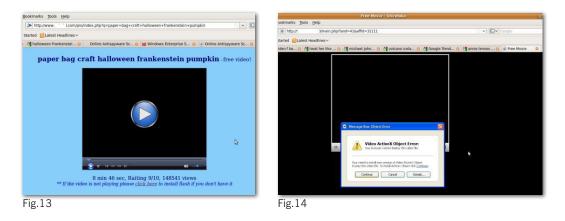
Picking several of the terms and performing a search for them will produce several poisoned results:



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:



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



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.



»

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

You have received an eCard	From: "greetingcard.org" <support@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!	

» **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.

Myspace Password Reset Confirmation! Your Support	From: "support myspace" <support@myspace.com></support@myspace.com>	Date: 2
Hey <aim38 .fr="">,</aim38>		
Because of the measures taken to prov You can find your new password in att	ide safety to our clients, your password has been ached document.	h changed.
Thanks,		

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

DHL Delivery Problem NR.79631	From: "DHL Manager Susan Murphy" «company@dhl.com»
Hello!	
because the recipient's addr	eliver the postal package sent on the 16th of January in time ess is incorrect. copy attached and collect the package at our office.
DHL Services.	
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\<user>\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 wpkarufv

c:\documents and settings\<user>\local settings\application data\tqaxywicl\chgutertssd.exe

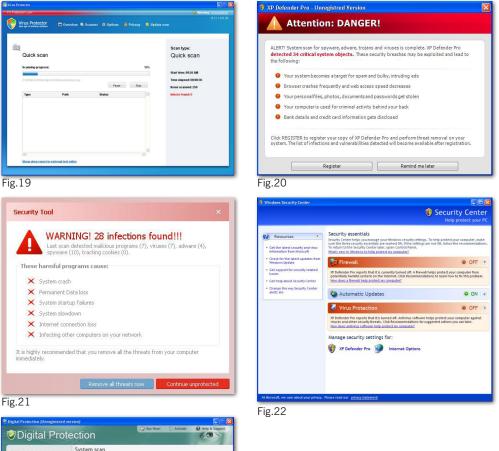
c:\windows\temp\sample.exe

 $\label{eq:head} HKLM \ SOFTWARE \ Microsoft \ Windows \ Current \ Version \ Run \\ 85357230$

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:





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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:

C.		
🥑 V.p Antivirus		
Rata	Professional assistance f	or your Windows PC
The all-in-one System and p	performance service for your Windows >	P or Windows Vista-based PC
6 Month Guard Subscription	1 Year Guard Subscription	Lifetime Guard Subscription 9224-95 \$89,95
\$49,95	\$69.95	SAVE ONLY NOW 60%
	Subscribe now	Subscribe now
Subscribe now		

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

- XP Defender Pro - Hicrosoft Intern		Search	🔍 💎 Virus	Protector			
XP Defender Pro Protect and Secure your Windows OS mepage Bury Now Support						SECURE BILLING SYSTEM	
	New XP Defender Pro				We accept:	_	
	XP Defender Pro multiple layers of protection mea thing of the past.	ans identity theft, spam and viruses are a		SH Presco	VISA 🗢 🖼	_	
A series A seri	6 Months License - \$49.95 (Full 6 Month License Including Auto activation and Prensus 24/7/86	S Support)			Your Payment Information: Payment Type: Credit Card	_	
	Year License - \$59,95 Pull 1 Year Lorens Induding Auto activation and Premium 24/7/85 5 2 Years License - \$59,95			\$ 49 [%]	* Card Number		
t Features	2 Years Luceise - \$4535 [Full 2 Years Listens Including Juds activation and Pranaux 24/7/88				* Card Expired	mau CO2	
Identity protection - up-to-the-minute 3P Defender Pro Edentity Protection enha credit card numbers, and all other private	barriang and shapping protection nois your current anti-visus software by shielding your passwords, Information from prying ayes.	XP Defender Pro continues to win awards1 PC Answers Recommended Award		Your Name and Addre			
Webshield - safe social networking, chat Webshield allows you to doverload and ex using XCQ, MSN and Yahoo! instant messe	ting and downloading change files without risk of vivus infection, including files downloaded ingens.	eXaminer.com. As you can see from this review, 3P Cefender Pro is the one to beach there. They offer auseriar protection, comparability		* First Name	* Country -		
	dopts a regularly updated database for detecting all forms of span.	and a pricing structure second to name.		* Last Name	* Zp		
Anti-virus and anti-spyware - safe o Our Arthitrus and Arth Spyware technolo warm, or Trojan horse. It also prevents the Enhanced firewall - block hadren	exputer gr pretects you from failing victor to or unwittingly spreading a virus, or unauthorized access of information from both spyware and advane.	Security as the first		Phone	* Street		
Our Enhanced Firewall ensures you again	it unwanted visitors trying to access your computer-	product even to receive its Chedimark Anto Malinare Dynamic Centification,	VERIFIED			X CLOSE	
a free different programs in my socializity none have ever been ton an 20 beferder Poo. Vitie is perfect, 370 beferder Poo. Vitie is perfect, 370 beferder Poo. to strive to be as dose as they possible for me and twy family." Fixed to	fer Pro totably nulled This old	Virus Balletin Award Virus Balletin, m hosponden trailware sourch, reviewal by Defined for barrent security, The neakal 100% detection nate.	Fig.26	rity Tool semanary			
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And the second s	ber bestander in den son		Fig.26	Designed and Consequence of a part of the Consequence of the consequence of the consequence of the Consequence of the consequence of the co	versions (HP3) versions (HP3) versions (HP3) versions (HP3) versions versions (HP3) versions	Creater Experimental Creater Experimental Creater Experimental Creater Creater Experimental Creater Experimental Creater Creater Experimental Creater Experimental	

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.

Security Tool	WARNING
Security Tool ×	Application cannot be executed. The file is infected. Please activate your antivirus software.
MSPAINT.EXE is infected with worm Lsas.Blaster.Keyloger. This worm is trying to send your credit card details using MSPAINT.EXE to connect to remote host.	СК
ok 👘	Fig.30
ig.29	

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.

3 XP Internet Security ALERT - Microsoft Internet Explorer
Ele Edit View Parontes Icols Hep
🔇 Back + 🔘 - 🖹 🖻 🏠 🔎 Search 👷 Favorites 🤣 🍰 😓 🚳
Address 截 www.google.com
Unternet Explorer alert. Visiting this site may pose a security threat to your system
Possible reasons include:
 Dangerous code found in this site's pages which installs unwanted software into your system. Suspicious and potentially unsafe network activity detected.
 Spyware infection in your system. Complaints from other users about this site.
 Complaints non-other users about this site. Port and system scans performed by the site being visited.
Things you can do:
 Get a copy of XP Internet Security to safeguard your PC while surfing the web (RECOMMENDED)
 Run a spyware, virus and malware scan
 Continue surfing without any security measures (DANGEROUS).
Fig 31

- 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.

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http://www.sophos.com/products/enterprise/email/security-and-control/

Screenshot appendix

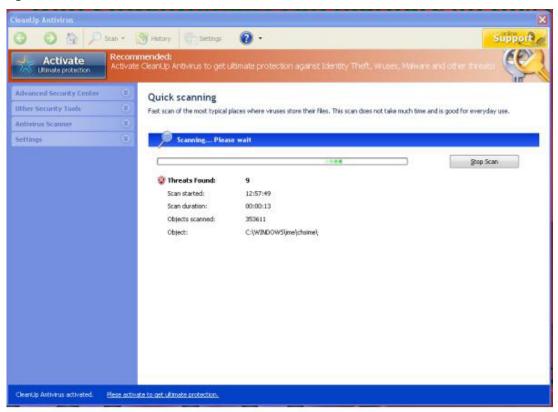


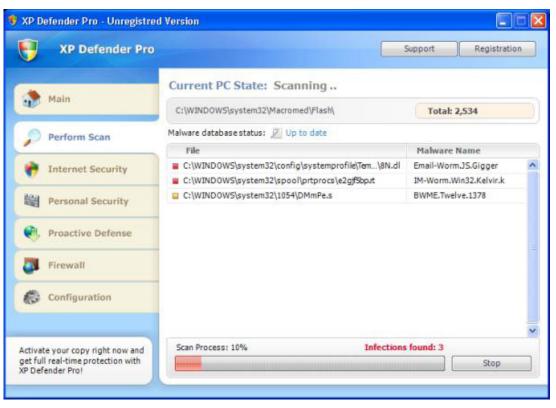
Fig.2











~	yTool			
🖌 System Scan	System	em Scan		
Protection	Adware Trojan Spyware Trojan Trojan Adware Rogue	ccfgnt.dl deskmon.dl ipsec6.exe kbdno.dl ntdos404.sys plustab.dl	Virus.DOS.Jeff.812 Trojan.BAT.DelAll.b Trojan-PSW.Win32 Trojan.JS.ExitW.a Virus.DOS.Put.1939 Virus.DOS.Euskara	R is a very dangerous nonmeno This Trojan is a BAT file. R is 21 This Trojan program is designed This Trojan is a JavaScript scena R is not a dangerous nonmemor R is not a dangerous nonmemor
Privacy	 Backdoor 	rsvp.exe	Backdoor .Win32.RA	This is a typical client-server rem
S Update				
	Scan	progress		
GF Settings		C:\WINDOWS\syst	em32'iwavemsp.dl	<u>Stop</u>
Get Full	Infections: 7			Seve Report Remove

Google trends		Search Trends
Tip: Use commas	to compare multiple search terms.	
Hot Searches (USA)		
Apr 21, 2010 - change date		
1. miserable failure	6. goldman sachs sec	11. monhegan island maine
2. scott tenorman	7. american idol top 6	12. jack tenorman
3. annie lennox hiv positive	8. pcd	13. new 100 dollar bill
4. who got voted off american idol april 21	9. ps3 update 3.30	14. don frye
5. wu tang clan name generator	10. anegada british virgin islands	15. idol results

- 15. idol results

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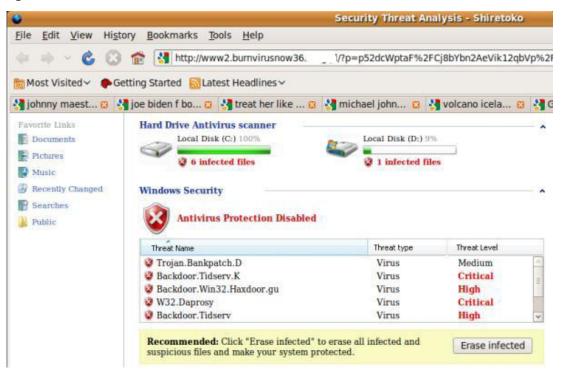
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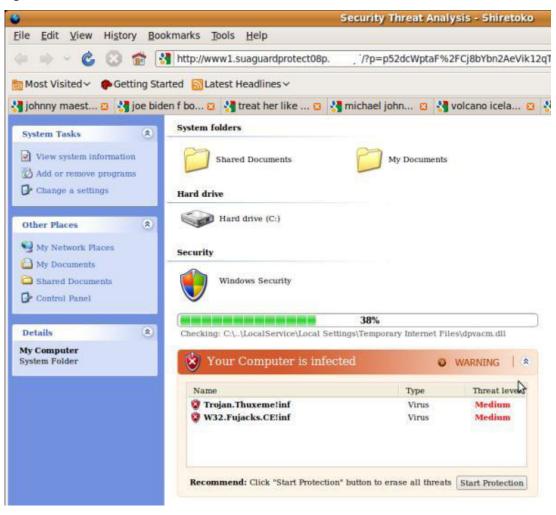
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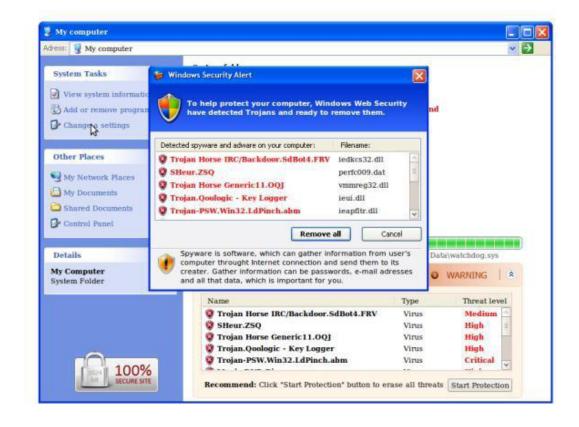
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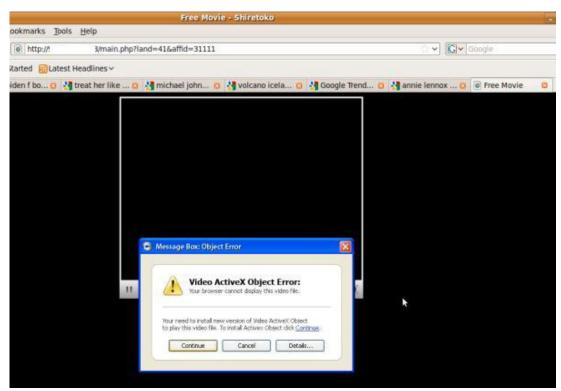
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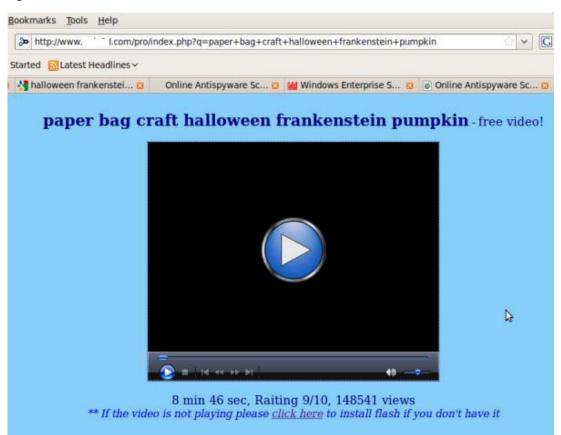




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This	e-mail was send by	y fr to	notify you	that	we have	temporanly	prevented	access	to your	account.	
Ve h	ave reasons to belo	eive that y	our account	may h	ave been	accessed	by someone	else.	Please r	un attached	file
(C)	.fr										

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 myspace" <support@n< th=""><th>nyspace.com></th><th>Date: 2</th></support@n<>	nyspace.com>	Date: 2
Hey <aim38< th=""><th>fr>,</th><th></th><th></th><th></th></aim38<>	fr>,			
Because of the measures You can find your new pe		safety to our clients, your ed document.	password has been	h changed.
Thanks, The Myspace Team.				

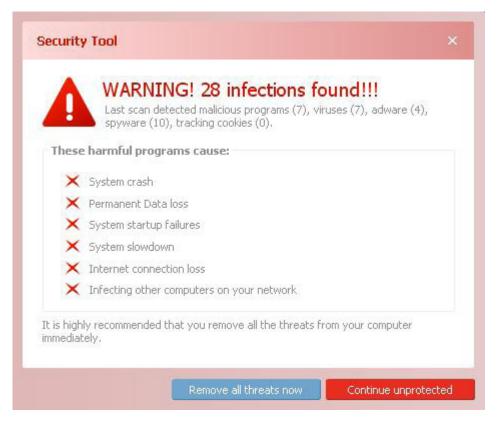
Fig.18

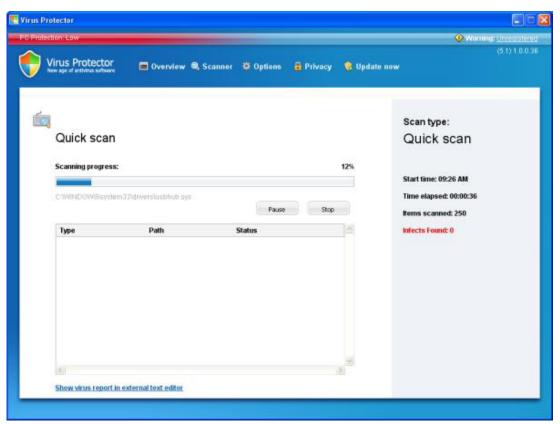
DHL Delivery Problem NR.79631	From: "DHL Manager Susan Murphy" «company@dhl.com»
Hello!	
Unfortunately we failed to d because the recipient's addr	eliver the postal package sent on the 16th of January in time ess is incorrect.
Please print out the invoice	copy attached and collect the package at our office.
DHL Services.	

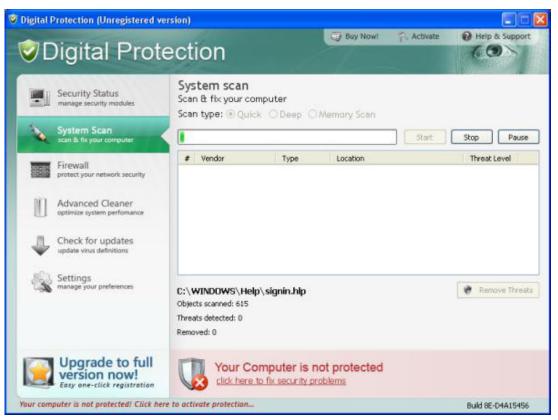
24



	Attention: DANGER!
dete	cted 34 critical system objects. These security breaches may be exploited and lead to ollowing:
0	Your system becomes a target for spam and bulky, intruding ads
0	Browser crashes frequently and web access speed decreases
0	Your personal files, photos, documents and passwords get stolen
0	Your computer is used for criminal activity behind your back
0	Bank details and credit card information gets disclosed
Click syste	REGISTER to register your copy of XP Defender Pro and perform threat removal on your em. The list of infections and vulnerabilities detected will become available after registration.
	Register Remind me later







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	2 Years License - \$69 (Pull 2 Years License Inclu	.95 ding Auto activation and Premium 24/7/385 St	apport)	> BUY NOW
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Webshield - safe social net	working, chatting and downloading nload and exchange files without risk of vir		examiner.com.	As you can see from this review, XP Defender Pro is the one to beat here. They offer superior
Anti-spam - safe, undutter Our XP Defender Pro Anti-Sp	ed e-mail am feature adopts a regularly updated dat	abase for detecting all forms of spam.		protection, compatability and a pricing structure second to none.
	are technology protects you from failing vi o prevents the unauthorized access of info		West Coast Labs Awar	rd West Coast Labs honored XP Defender Pro Internet Security as the first
	es you against unwanted visitors trying to	access your computer.	1	product ever to receive its Checkmark Anti-Malware Dynamic Certification.
ed a few differnt programs in my Absoulutely none have ever been flective as 30 Defender Pro. While ining is perfect, XP Defender Pro ins to strive to be as close as they be in their craft. Thanks for making net possible for me and my family. rem Krantz	"XP Defender Pro totally rules! This old computer runs like a scalided ape not a single virus, trojen, or anything has gotten through. The tried many so- called anti-whatever programs, but XP	"Man XP Defender Pro is too great Takes around 50 minutes (Old Scanner took Bie 2-3 hours) and as said before it doesn't slow CPU down. It hank everyone at XP Defender Pro for helping students like me	Virus Bulletin Award	Virus Bulletin, an independent malware journal, reviewed XP Defender Pro Internet Security. The results? 100% detection rate.
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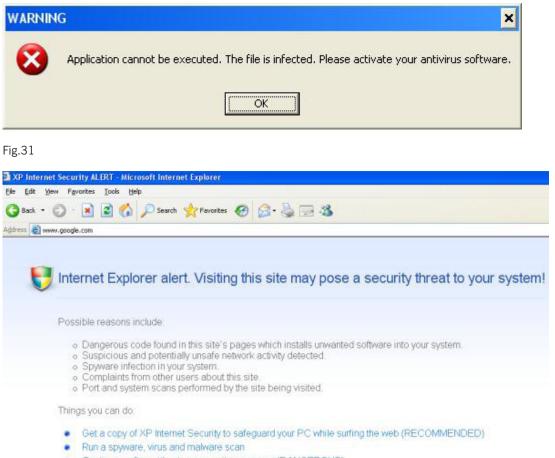
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