

## Declaration of John Hawes of Virus Bulletin

I, John Hawes, declare as follows:

1. I am over the age of majority and make this declaration based on the business records of my employer, Virus Bulletin.

2. I am the Chief of Operations at Virus Bulletin, running the business side of the company since 2014 and managing all aspects of product testing and reviews since 2006. Virus Bulletin is an online magazine about the prevention, detection and removal of malware and spam. It regularly features analyses of the latest virus threats, articles exploring new developments in the fight against viruses, interviews with anti-virus experts, and evaluations of current anti-malware products. Virus Bulletin has run an annual international conference on malware, anti-malware and related subjects since 1991. Virus Bulletin is headquartered at The Pentagon, Abingdon Science Park, Abingdon, OX14 3YP, United Kingdom.

3. According to Virus Bulletin's business records, which are maintained in the ordinary course of business, the paper entitled "Dynamic Detection and Classification of Computer Viruses Using General Behaviour Patterns" by Morton Swimmer was published by Virus Bulletin to all 163 attendees of the Virus Bulletin International Conference at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers in

September 1995. The conference proceedings book containing the Swimmer paper was subsequently made available for private sale to individuals by Virus Bulletin.

4. Attached hereto as Exhibit A is a true and correct copy of the paper entitled “Dynamic Detection and Classification of Computer Viruses Using General Behaviour Patterns” that Virus Bulletin published in 1995.

5. I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true, and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. § 1001.

Executed at Oxfordshire, United Kingdom on October 15, 2015.



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**John Hawes**

# DYNAMIC DETECTION AND CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER VIRUSES USING GENERAL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

*Morton Swimmer*

Virus Test Center, University of Hamburg, Odenwaldstr. 9, 20255 Hamburg, Germany  
Tel +49 404 910041 Fax +49 405 471 5226 Email [swimmer@acm.org](mailto:swimmer@acm.org)

*Baudouin Le Charlier and Abdelaziz Mounji*

F.U.N.D.P., Institut d'Informatique, University of Namur, Belgium  
Email [ble@info.fundp.ac.be](mailto:ble@info.fundp.ac.be) / [amo@info.fundp.ac.be](mailto:amo@info.fundp.ac.be)

## ABSTRACT

*The number of files which need processing by virus labs is growing exponentially. Even though only a small proportion of these files will contain a new virus, each file requires examination. The normal method for dealing with files is still brute force manual analysis. A virus expert runs several tests on a given file and delivers a verdict on whether it is virulent or not. If it is a new virus, it will be necessary to detect it. Some tools have been developed to speed up this process, ranging from programs which identify previously-classified files to programs that generate detection data. Some anti-virus products have built-in mechanisms based on heuristics, which enable them to detect unknown viruses. Unfortunately all these tools have limitations.*

*In this paper, we will demonstrate how an emulator is used to monitor the system activity of a virtual PC, and how the expert system ASAX is used to analyse the stream of data which the emulator produces. We use general rules to detect real viruses generically and reliably, and specific rules to extract details of their behaviour. The resulting system is called VIDES: it is a prototype for an automatic analysis system for computer viruses and possibly a prototype anti-virus product for the emerging 32 bit PC operating systems.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Virus researchers must cope with many thousands of suspected files each month, but the problem is not so much the number of new viruses (which number perhaps a few hundred and grows at a nearly exponential rate) as the number of files the researcher receives and must analyse - the glut. Out of perhaps one hundred files, only one may actually contain a new virus. Unfortunately, there are no short cuts. Every file has to be processed.

The standard method of sorting out such files is still brute force manual analysis, requiring specialists. Some tools have been developed to help cope with the problem, ranging from programs which identify and remove previously-classified files and viruses to utilities which extract strings from infected files that aid in identifying the viruses. However, none of the solutions are satisfactory. Clearly, more advanced tools are needed.

In this paper, the concept of dynamic analysis as applied to viruses is discussed. This is based on an idea called VIDES (*Virus Intrusion Detection Expert System*), coined at the Virus Test Center [BFHS91]. The system will comprise of a PC emulation and an IDES-like expert system. It should be capable of detecting viral behaviour using a set of *a priori* rules, as shown in the preliminary work done with Dr. Fischer-Hübner. Furthermore, advanced rules will help in classifying the detected virus.

The present version of VIDES is only of interest to virus researchers; it is not designed to be a practical system for the end-user - its demands on processing power and hardware platform are too high. However, it can be used to identify unknown viruses rapidly and provide detection and classification information to the researcher. It also serves as a prototype for the future application of intrusion detection technology in detecting malicious software under future operating systems, such as OS/2, MS-Windows NT and 95, Linux, Solaris, etc.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the current state of the art in anti-virus technology; Section 3 describes a generic virus detection rule; Section 4 discusses the architecture of the PC auditing system; Section 5 shows how the expert system ASAX is used to analyse the activity data collected by the PC emulator; and finally, Section 6 contains some concluding remarks.

## 2 CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

For the purpose of discussion it will be necessary to define the term computer virus.

### 2.1 TERMS

There is still no universally-agreed definition for a computer virus. What is missing is a description which is still general enough to account for all possible implementations of computer viruses. An attempt was made in [Swi95], which is the result of many years of experience with viruses in the Virus Test Center. The following definition for a computer virus is the result of discussion in comp.virus (Virus-L) derived from [Seb]:

**Def 1** *A Computer Virus is a routine or a program that can 'infect' other programs by modifying them or their environment such that a call to an infected program implies a call to a possibly evolved, functionally similar, copy of the virus.*

A more formal, but less useful, definition of a computer virus can be found in [Coh85]. Using the formal definition, it was possible to prove the virus property undecidable.

We talk of the infected file as the *host program*. System viruses infect system programs, such as the boot or Master Boot Sector, whereas file viruses infect executable files such as EXE or COM files. For an in-depth discussion of the properties of viruses, please refer to literature such as: [Hru92], [SK94], [Coh94] or [Fer92].

Today, anti-virus technology can be divided into two approaches: the *virus specific* and the *generic* approach. In principle, the former requires knowledge of the viruses before they can be detected. Due to advances in technology, this prerequisite is no longer entirely valid in many of the modern anti-virus products. This type of technology is known to us as a *scanner*. The latter attempts to detect a virus by observing attributes characteristic of all viruses. For instance, integrity checkers detect viruses by checking for modifications in executable files; a characteristic of many (although not all) viruses.

## 2.2 VIRUS SPECIFIC DETECTION

Virus specific detection is by far the most popular type of virus protection used on PCs. Information from the virus analysis is used in the so-called scanner to detect it. Usually, a scanner uses a database of virus identification information which enable it to detect all viruses previously analysed.

The term *scanner* has become increasingly incorrect terminology. The term comes from *lexical scanner*, i.e. a pattern matching tool. Traditionally scanners have been just that. The information extracted from viruses were strings which were representative of that particular virus. This means that the string has to:

- differ significantly from all other viruses, and
- differ significantly from strings found in *bona fide* anti-virus programs.

Finding such strings was the entire art of anti-virus program writing until polymorphic viruses appeared on the scene.

Encrypted viruses were the first minor challenge to string searching methods. The body of the virus was encrypted in the host file, and could not be sought, due to its variable nature. However, the body was prepended by a decryptor-loader which must be in plain text (unencrypted code); otherwise it would not be executable. This decryptor can still be detected using strings, even if it becomes difficult to differentiate between viruses.

Polymorphic viruses are the obvious next step in avoiding detection. Here, the decryptor is implemented in a variable manner, so that pattern matching becomes impossible or very difficult. Early polymorphic viruses were identified using a set of patterns (strings with variable elements). Moreover, simple virus detection techniques are made unreliable by the appearance of the so-called *Mutation Engines* such as MiE and TPE (Trident Polymorphic Engine). These are object library modules generating variable implementations of the virus decryptor. They can easily be linked with viruses to produce highly polymorphic infectors. Scanning techniques are further complicated by the fact that the resulting viruses do not have any scan strings in common even if their structure remains constant. When polymorphic technology improved, statistical analysis of the opcodes was used.

Recently, the best of the scanners have shifted course from merely detecting viruses to attempting to identify the virus. This is often done with added strings, perhaps position dependent, or checksums, over the invariant part of the virus. To support this, many anti-virus products have implemented machine-code emulators so that the virus' own decryptor can be used to decrypt the virus. Using these enhancements, the positive identification of even polymorphic viruses poses no problem.

The next shift many scanners are presently experiencing is away from known virus only detection to detection of unknown viruses. The method of choice is *heuristics*. Heuristics are built into an anti-virus product in an attempt to deduce whether a file is infected or not. This is most often done by looking for a pattern of certain code fragments that occur most often in viruses and hopefully not in *bona fide* programs.

Heuristics analysis suffers from a moderate to high false-positive rate. Of course, a manufacturer of a heuristic scanner will improve the heuristics both to avoid false positives and still find all new viruses, but both cannot be achieved completely. Usually, a heuristic scanner will contain a 'traditional' pattern-matching component, so that viruses can be identified by name.

## 2.3 GENERIC VIRUS DETECTION

Computer viruses must replicate to be viruses. This means that a virus must be observable by its mechanism of replication.

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