



The Risks of RDP and How to Mitigate Them

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About Us



Olivier Bilodeau

Cybersecurity Research Lead at GoSecure

- Jack of all trades, master of none
- Speaker BlackHat, RSAC, SecTor, etc.
- Co-founder MontréalHack (hands-on security workshops)
- NorthSec VP Training / Hacker Jeopardy



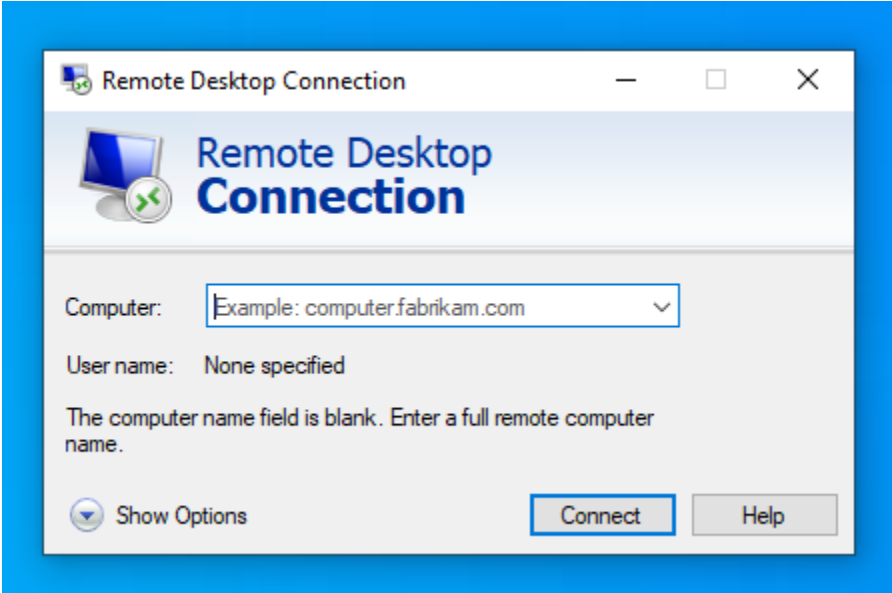
Lisandro Ubiedo

Security Researcher at GoSecure

- Cloud-based trickery
- Malware analysis and Threat research
- Stratosphere Labs collaborator

Introduction to RDP

Remote Desktop Protocol



PROPERTIES
For EC2AMAZ-6IS509J

Computer name	EC2AMAZ-6IS509J	Last installed updates	5/19/2017 8:36 PM
Workgroup	WORKGROUP	Windows Update	Never check for up
		Last checked for updates	5/19/2017 8:36 PM
Windows Firewall	Public: On	Windows Defender	Disabled
Remote management	Disabled	Feedback & Diagnostics	Settings
Remote Desktop	Enabled	IE Enhanced Security Configuration	On
NIC Teaming	Disabled	Time zone	(UTC) Coordinated
Ethernet	IPv4 address assigned by DHCP, IPv6 enabled	Product ID	00376-40000-0000
Operating system version	Microsoft Windows Server 2016 Datacenter	Processors	Intel(R) Xeon(R) CP
Hardware information	Xen HVM domU	Installed memory (RAM)	1 GB
		Total disk space	30 GB

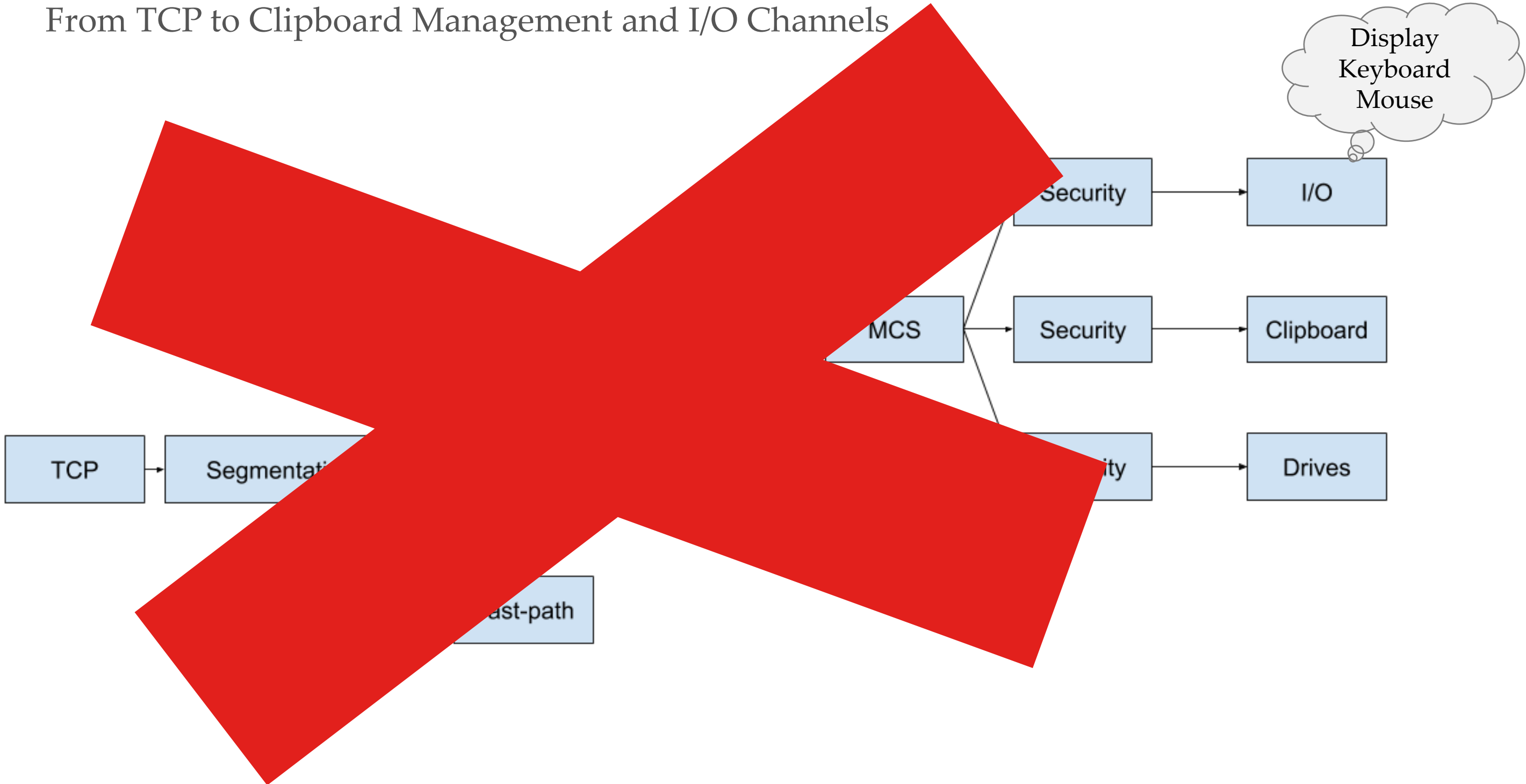
EVENTS
All events | 2 total

Server Name	ID	Severity	Source	Log	Date and Time
EC2AMAZ-6IS509J	10016	Error	Microsoft-Windows-DistributedCOM	System	3/24/2022 5:25:18 PM
EC2AMAZ-6IS509J	10016	Error	Microsoft-Windows-DistributedCOM	System	3/24/2022 5:24:18 PM

RDP Layers



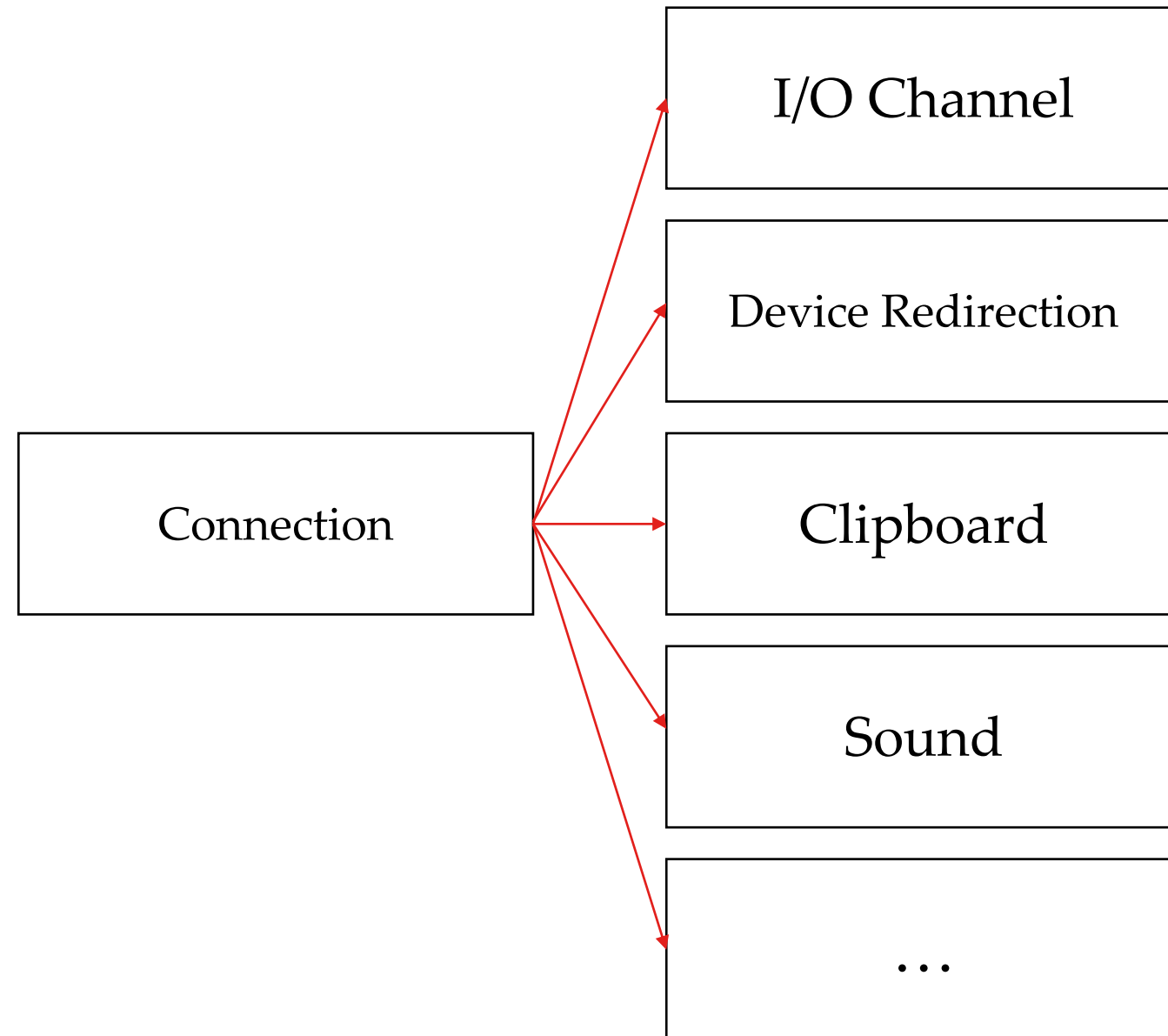
From TCP to Clipboard Management and I/O Channels





RDP Virtual Channels

Multiplexing data and extensions within a single connection



- Extra RDP features and extensions are implemented in virtual channels
- Server sends a list of available channels during connection phase
- Client chooses which channels to join

RDP Security



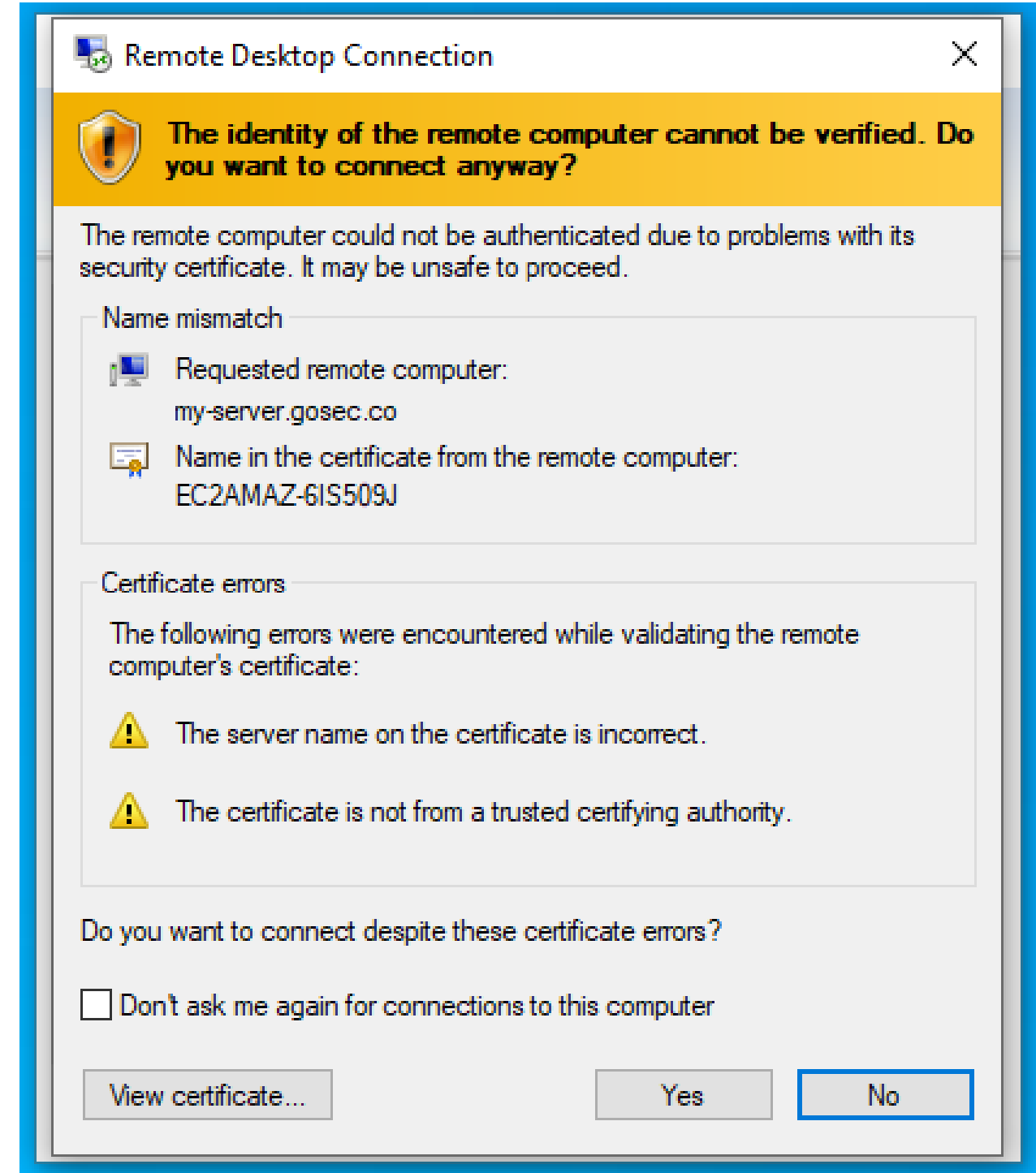
- RC4 + Graphical login (dead)
- TLS + Graphical login (legacy)
- TLS + Network Level Authentication (NLA) which relies on CredSSP
- Remote Credential Guard and RestrictedAdmin

The Risks of RDP: MITM

MITM Risks



- **Security Downgrade Attacks**
 - NLA -> TLS
- **Clicking Through Warnings**
- **Impact**
 - Display
 - Keyboard
 - Clipboard
 - Server-side takeover
 - Client-side file stealing
 - Client-side takeover*



*: implementation pending

Attack Video Demo

But first...

Our Attack Tool: PyRDP

Learn More About It!

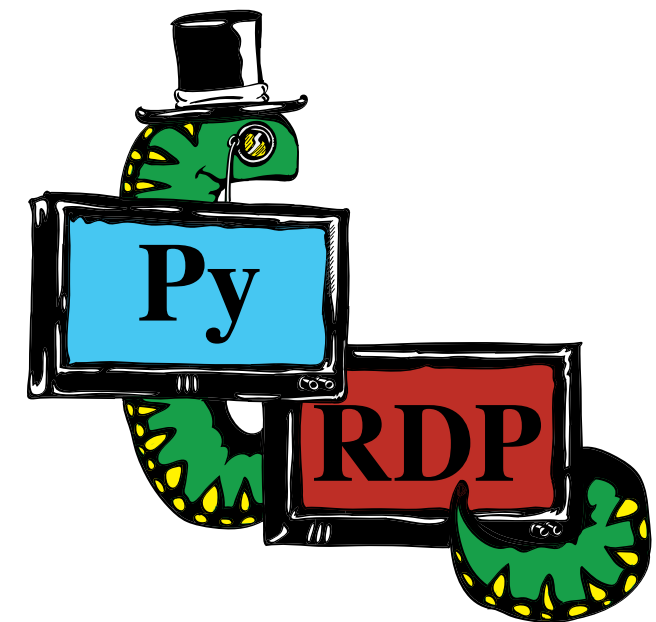


Source Code / Documentation

- <https://github.com/GoSecure/pyrdp>
- [PyRDP ReadMe](#)
- [PyRDP Transparent Proxying Guide](#)
- [Windows RDP Certificate Extraction](#)
- [RDP Connection Sequence](#)
- [RDP Basic Protocol Specification](#)

Past Presentations & Blogs

- [Introduction Blog Post](#)
- [NorthSec 2019 Talk](#)
- [BlackHat Arsenal 2019](#)
- [Blog: PyRDP on Autopilot](#)
- [DerbyCon 2019 \(Video\)](#)
- [DEFCON 28 Demo Labs](#)
- [Blog: Announcing PyRDP 1.0](#)
- [1.0 released at SecTor 2020](#)
- [BlackHat Arsenal 2021](#)



Attack Video Demo

[\(link to video\)](#)

Detect Security Protocol Downgrade



Normal Flow

Windows Security

Enter your credentials

These credentials will be used to connect to my-server.gosec.co.

User name

Password

Remember me

OK Cancel



Remote Desktop Connection

The identity of the remote computer cannot be verified. Do you want to connect anyway?

The remote computer could not be authenticated due to problems with its security certificate. It may be unsafe to proceed.

Certificate name

Name in the certificate from the remote computer:
EC2AMAZ-BMCNDLD

Certificate errors

The following errors were encountered while validating the remote computer's certificate:

The certificate is not from a trusted certifying authority.

Do you want to connect despite these certificate errors?

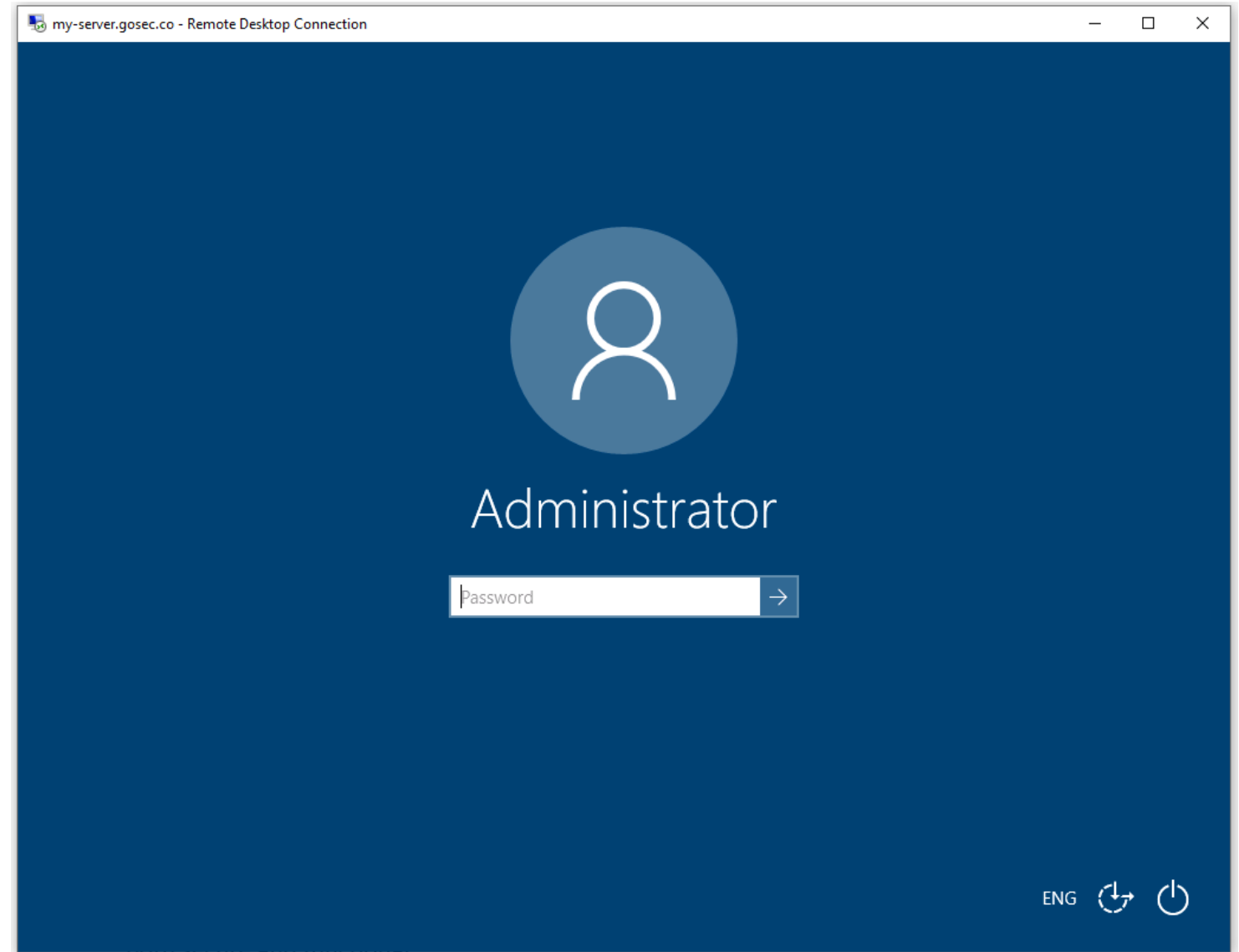
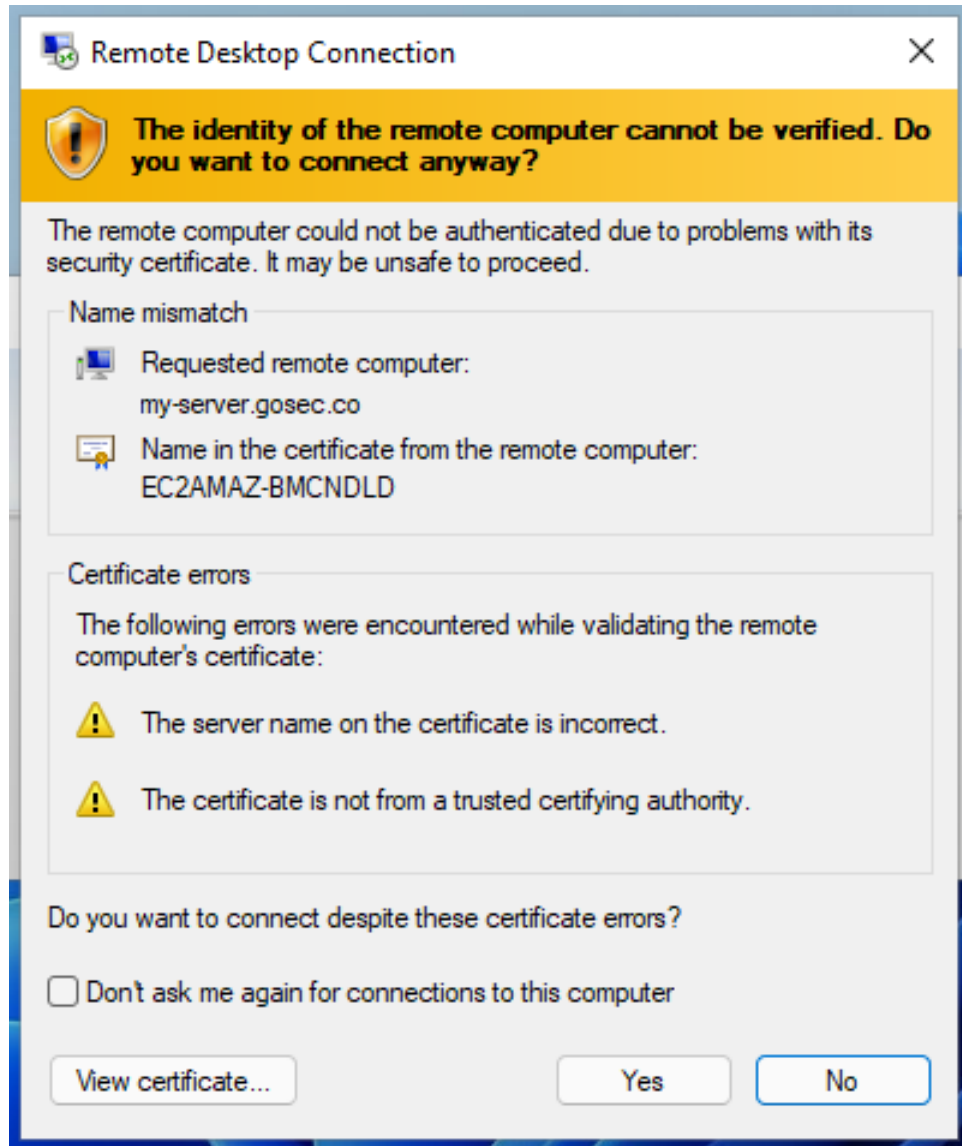
Don't ask me again for connections to this computer

View certificate... Yes No

Detect Security Protocol Downgrade



Degraded Flow



both secure and functional.

Detect Security Protocol Downgrade



Graphical Login instead of NLA Prompt

Windows Security

Enter your credentials

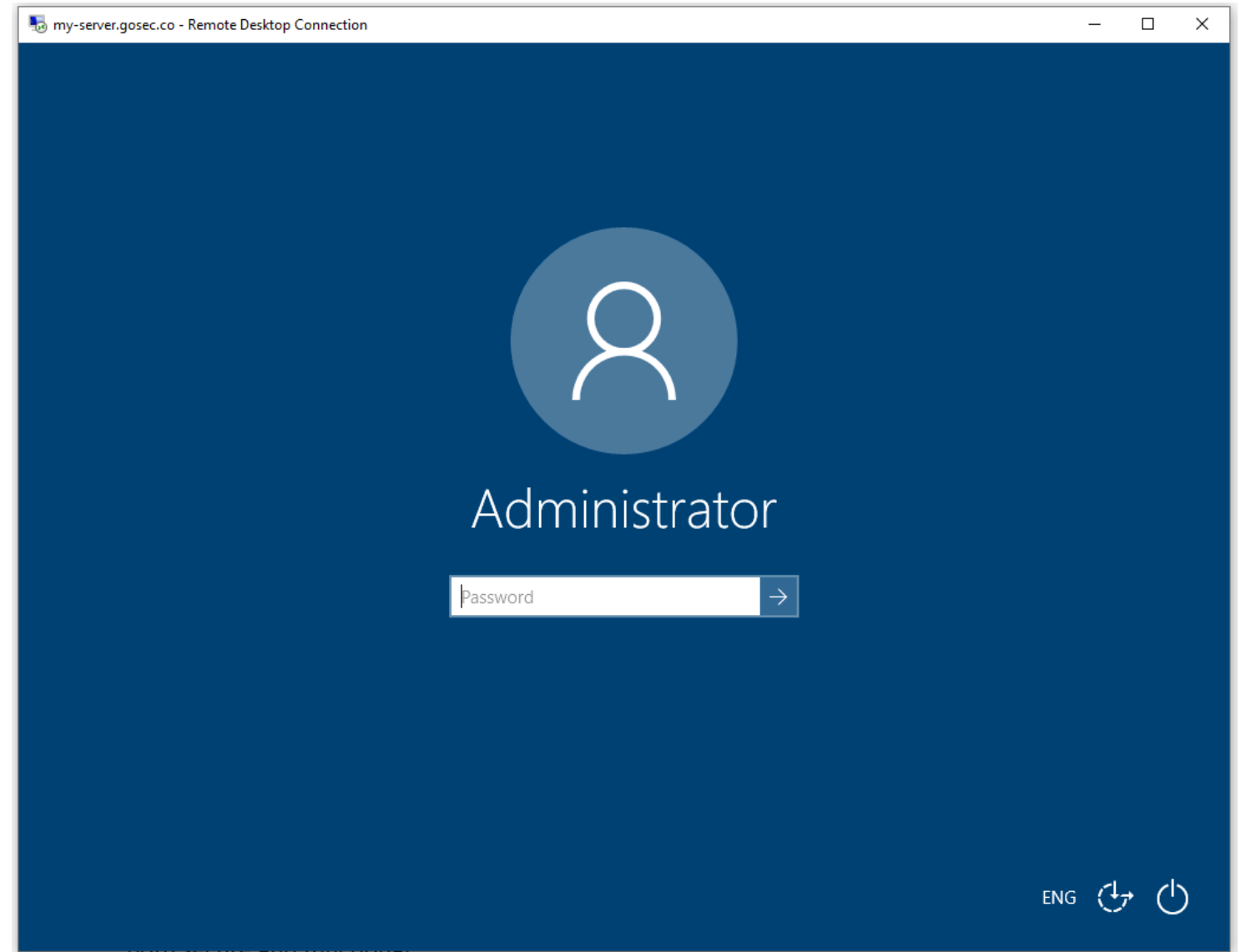
These credentials will be used to connect to my-server.gosec.co.

User name

Password

Remember me

OK Cancel

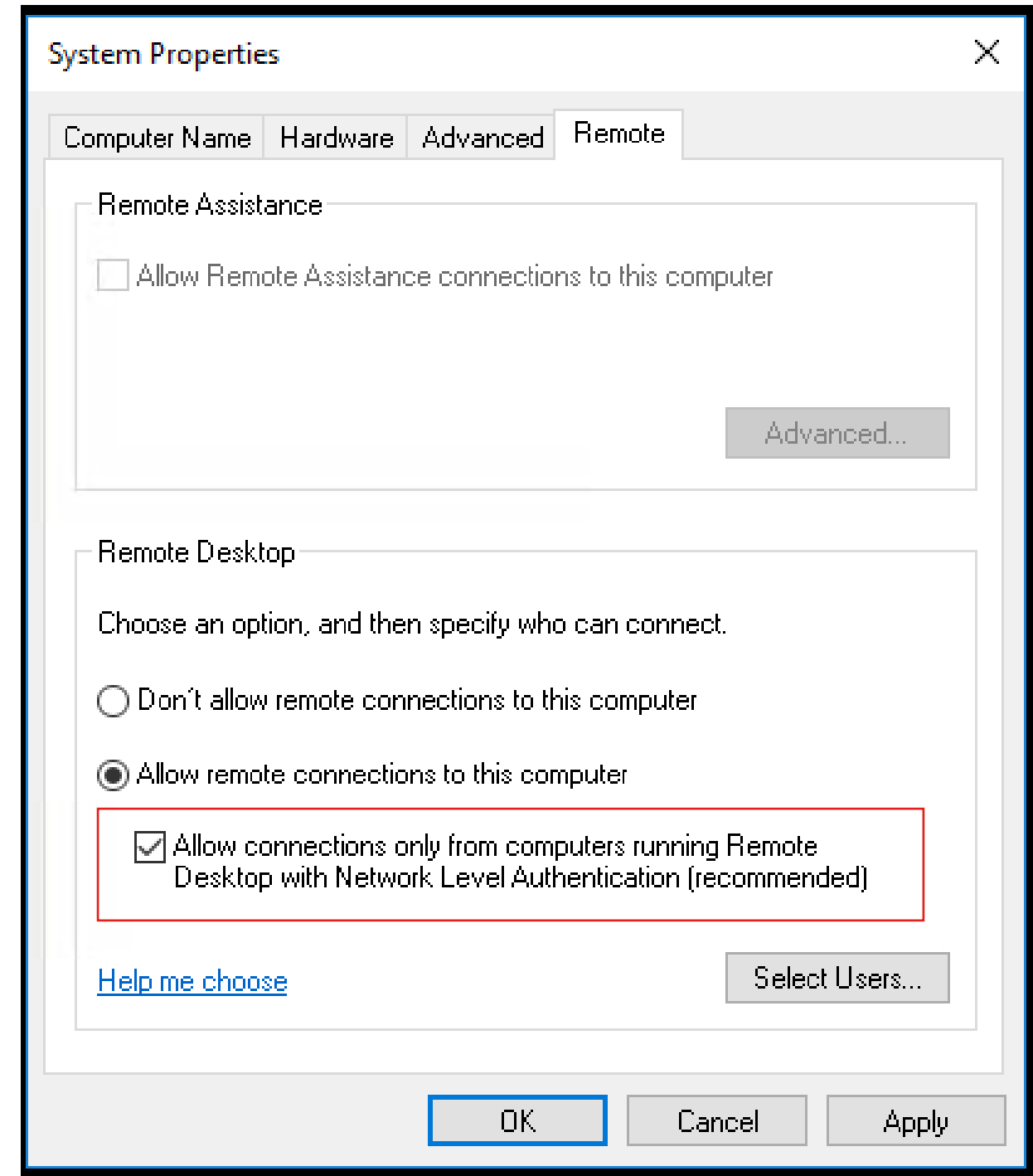


both secure and functional.

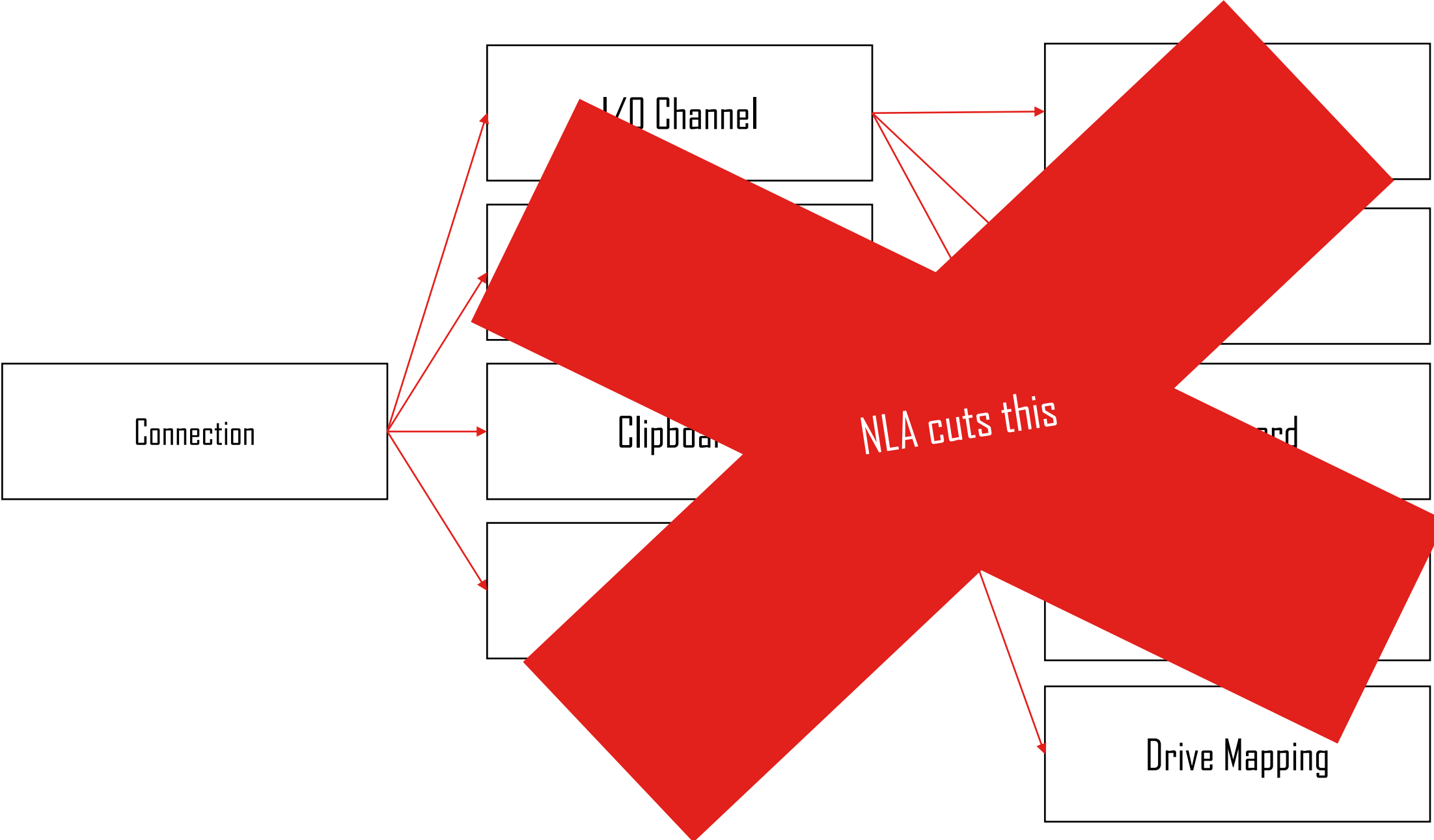


What is Network Level Authentication (NLA)?

- Authentication **before** session establishment
- Security Advantages
 - Attack Surface Reduction
 - DoS Resistance
 - Single Sign-On
- Introduced in RDP 6.0
- By default since Server 2012 and Windows 8



Attack Surface Reduction

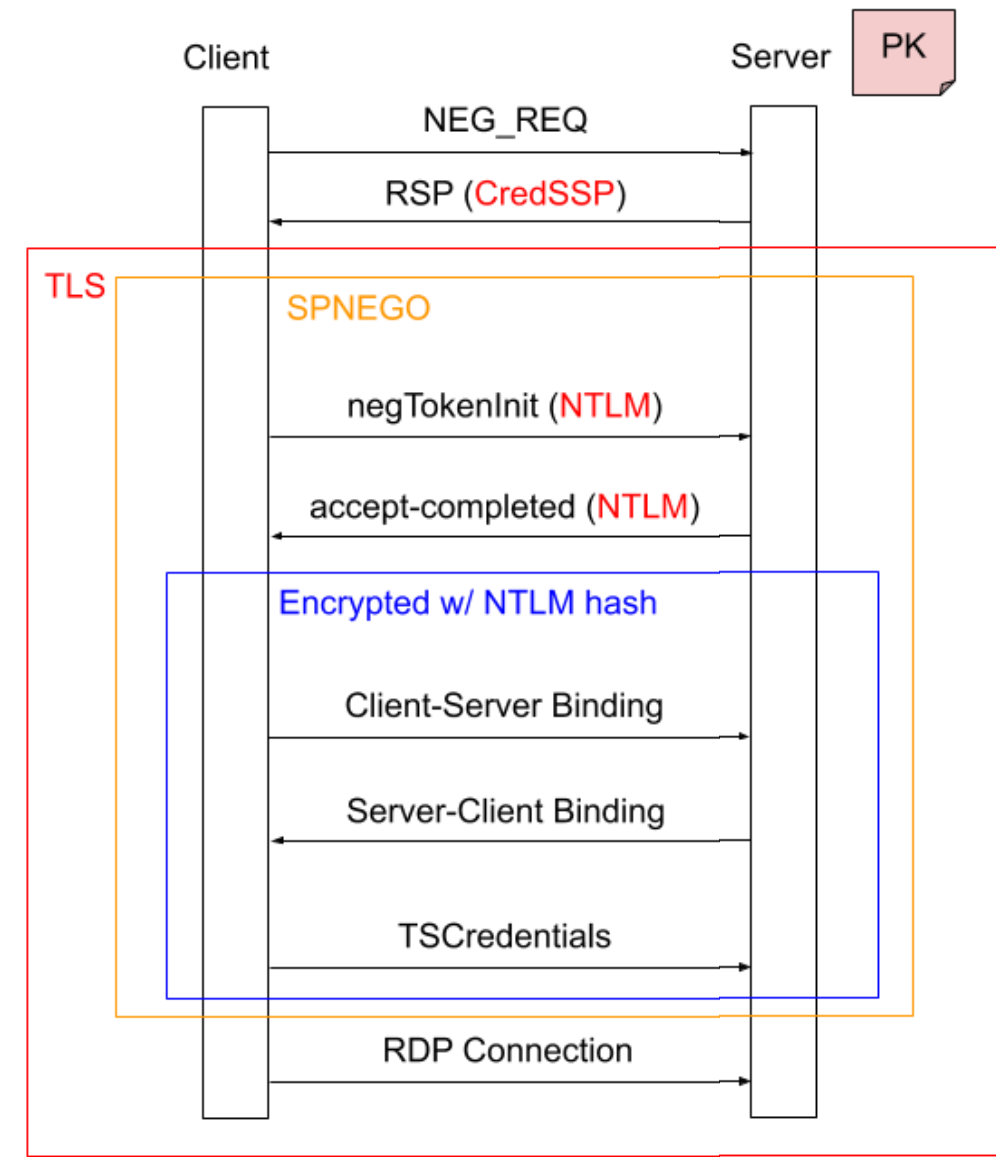




Authentication: CredSSP

NLA's Authentication Mechanism

- Initial plaintext negotiation method
- TLS Channel
- SPNEGO
 - NTLM
 - Kerberos
- Crypto prevents MITM
 - $E(H(PK | Challenge), NTLM-Hash)$





NLA Attack #1: Downgrade Attack

Downgrade the NEG_REQ to remove CredSSP from supported protocols

Windows Security

Enter your credentials

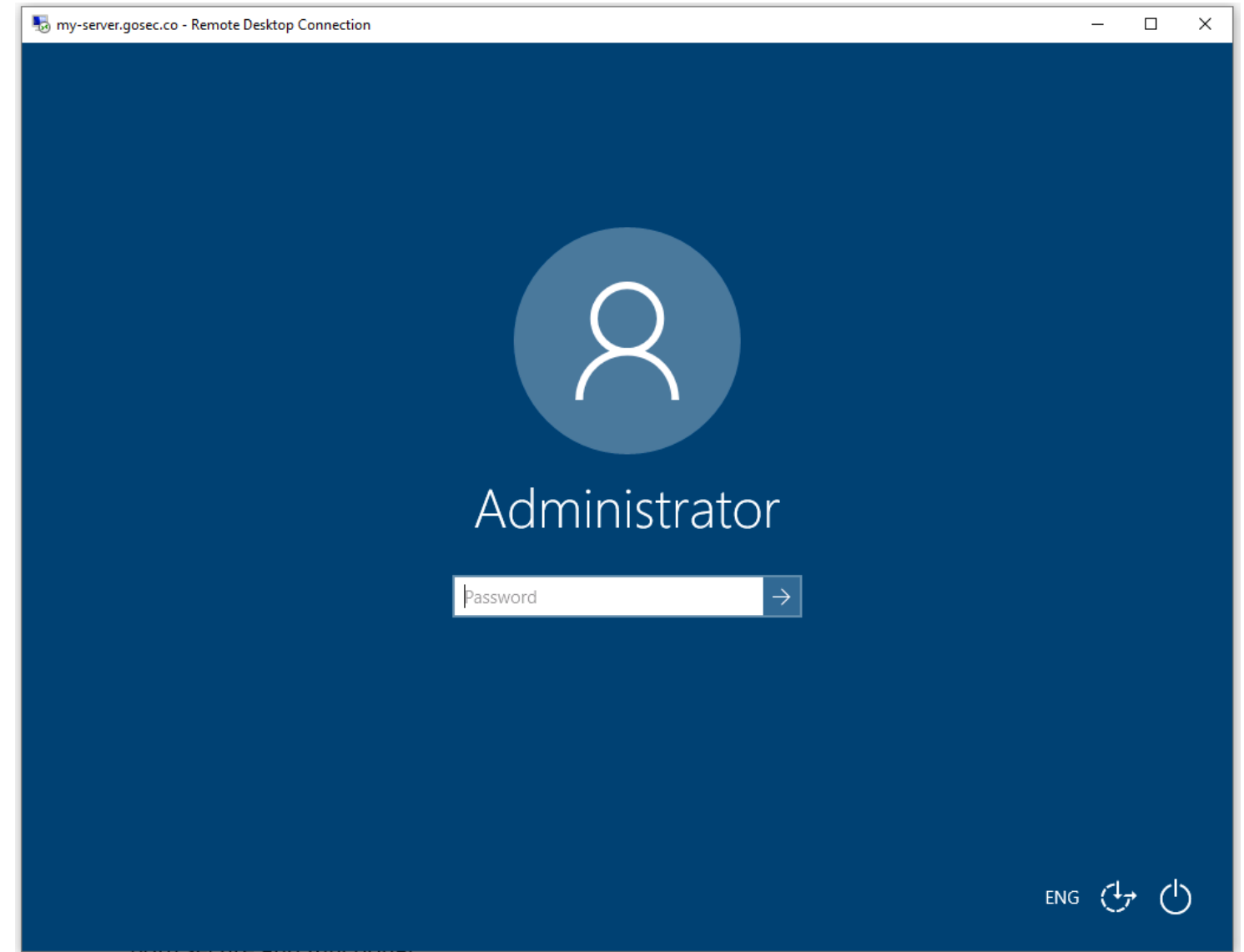
These credentials will be used to connect to my-server.gosec.co.

User name

Password

Remember me

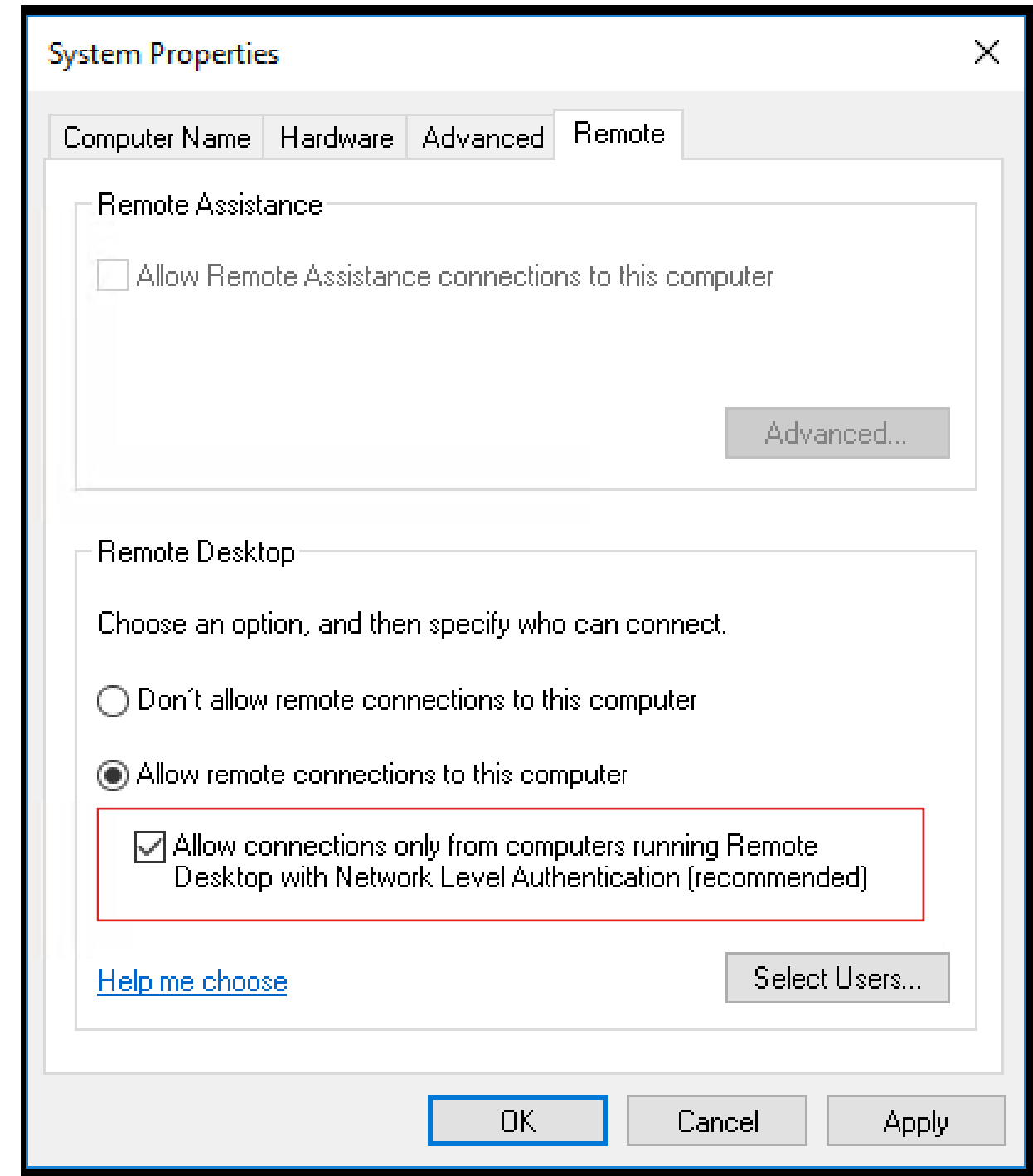
OK Cancel



Prevent NLA Downgrade Attacks



- Enforce NLA at the Server Side
 - This is the **default**





Prevent NLA Downgrade Attacks

For Reference

PowerShell/Registry

```
reg add "HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Terminal Server\WinStations\RDP-Tcp" /v  
UserAuthentication /t REG_DWORD /d 0 /f;
```

Group policy

Under

Computer Configuration/Administrative Templates/Windows Components/Remote Desktop Settings/Remote
Desktop Session Host/Security

Set

Require user authentication for remote connections by using Network Level Authentication

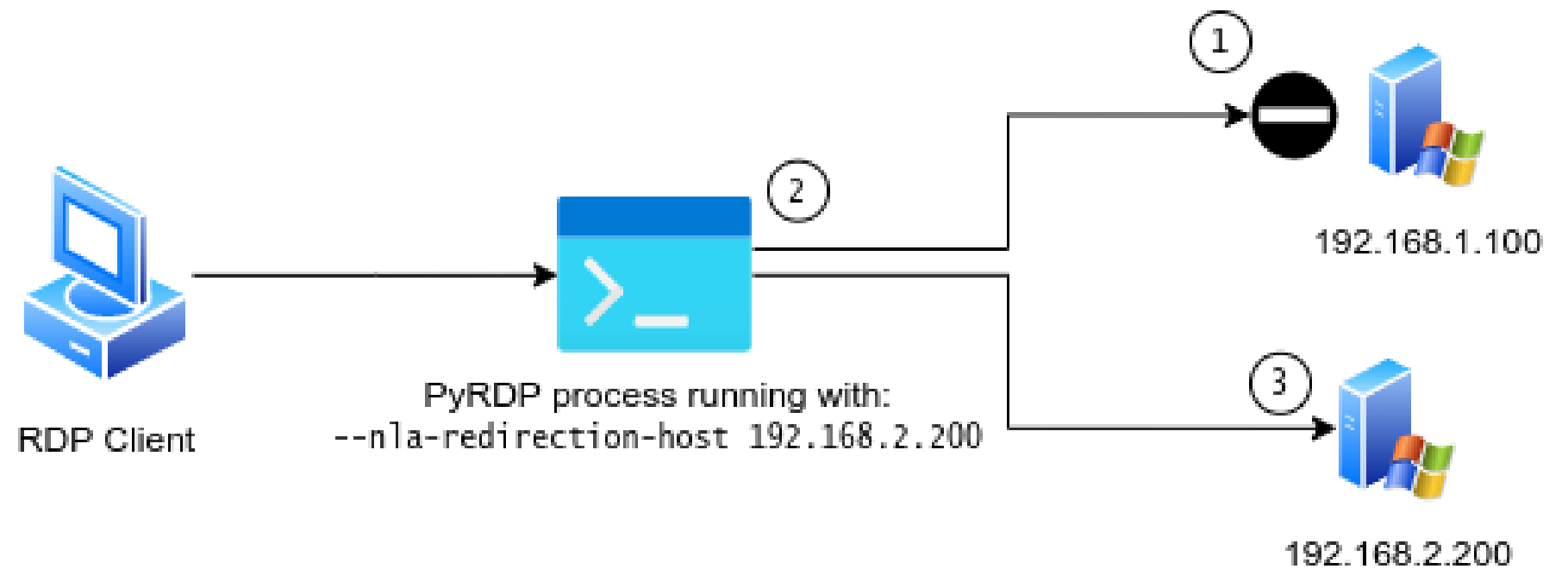
To **Enable**

Can't be disabled by users afterwards 



NLA Attack #2: Redirection to Non-NLA

1. Detects NLA enforcement
2. Transparently redirects
3. To an attacker controlled non-NLA system





Prevent Redirection to Non-NLA

Bad News

No specific way to enforce NLA on the client side

Good News

More general mitigation advice coming up



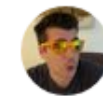
Marc-André Moreau
@awakecoding



@fdwl is there a GPO, registry key or .RDP file option that can be used to enforce RDP NLA *in the client*? @obilodeau just asked me, and it totally makes sense to get a client-side configuration, since he's working on attacks involving a malicious RDP server

[Traduire le Tweet](#)

5:32 PM · 5 avr. 2022 · Twitter Web App



Tweetez votre réponse.

Répondre



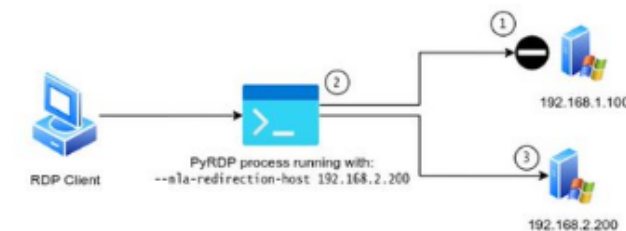
Olivier Bilodeau @obilodeau · 8 min
En réponse à @awakecoding et @fdwl
Trying to defend against this scenario



NLA Attack #2: Redirection to Non-NLA

Click to add subtitle

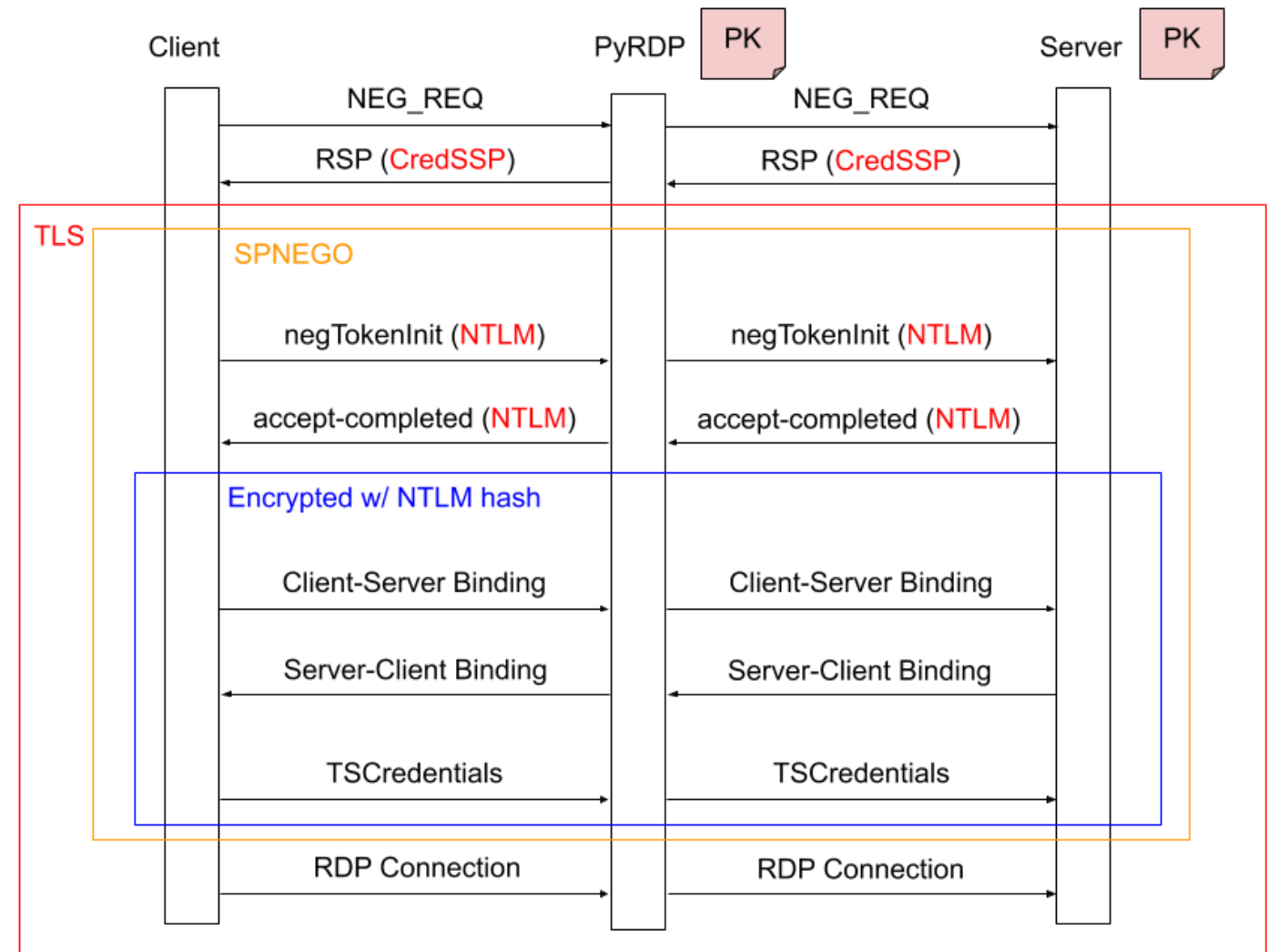
1. Detects NLA enforcement
2. Transparently redirects
3. To an attacker controlled non-NLA system





NLA Attack #3: NLA MITM

- No tampering at the SPNEGO layer
- But the crypto said?
 - $E(H(PK | Challenge), NTLM-Hash)$
- Requires substantial setup
 - Server certificate and private key*



*: <https://github.com/GoSecure/pyrdp/blob/master/docs/cert-extraction.md>



NLA Bypass Mitigation

More Bad News

No specific way to enforce NLA on the client side

Good News

More general mitigation advice coming up

NetNTLMv2 Hash Capture

NetNTLMv2 Hash Capture



- On an NLA authentication



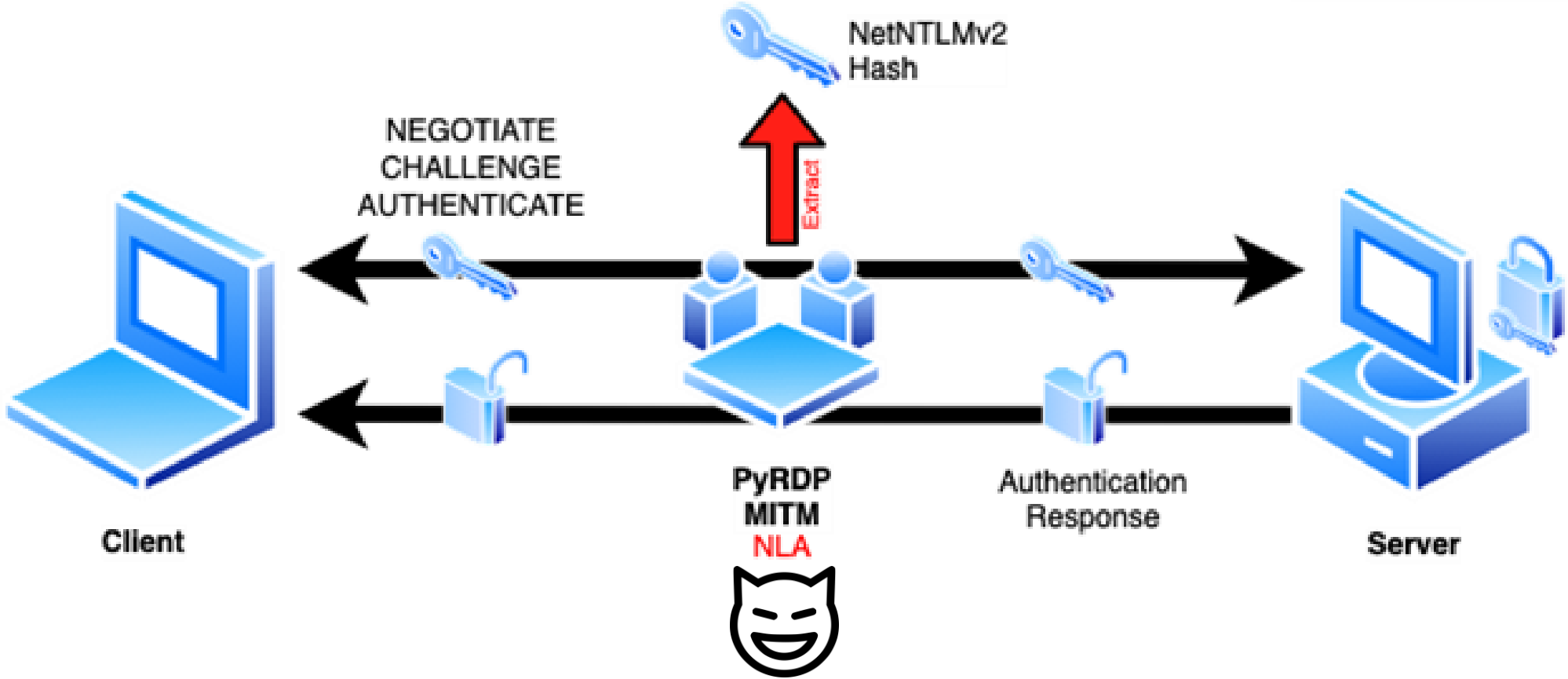
- Victim is tricked into connecting to rogue RDP
- The NTLM hash capture is done on-the-fly
- Hashes can be cracked using password cracking tools

NetNTLMv2 Hash Capture

(cont.)



HASHCAT



NetNTLMv2 Hash Capture



Example of captured hash

User

Server
Challenge

Net-NTLMv2 Hash

```
[2021-11-10 22:52:28.343] - INFO - Karen105427 - pyrdp.mitm.connections.ntlmssp - [!] NTLMSSP Hash:  
admin:::937f60a48cea8943:f298d601927699c77aab319e7de5b9ac:01010000000000000debca285d6d7015f3d313dc29e3  
80c0000000002000a00570049004e004e00540001000a00570049004e004e00540004000a00570049004e004e00540003000a00  
570049004e004e00540005000a00570049004e004e00540006000400020000000a00100000000000000000000000000000  
0090022005400450052004d005300520056002f006c006f00630061006c0068006f00730074000000000000000000000000  
000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
```

Net-NTLMv2 Response

NetNTLMv2 Hash Cracking



With john (hashcat works too)

```
$ john --format=netntlmv2 --wordlist=~/.wordlist/rockyou.txt hashes.txt
```

```
Using default input encoding: UTF-8
```

```
Loaded 1 password hash (netntlmv2, NTLMv2 C/R [MD4 HMAC-MD5 32/64])
```

```
Will run 8 OpenMP threads
```

```
Press 'q' or Ctrl-C to abort, almost any other key for status
```

```
purple (admin)
```

```
1g 0:00:00:00 DONE (2022-04-07 14:44) 14.28g/s 58514p/s 58514c/s 58514C/s  
123456..000000
```

```
Session completed
```

Preventing Hash Capture



- Verify connection to RDP server
 - Server address
 - Domain name
- Always look for valid certificates
 - Attack tools will often use hardcoded certificate values
- Never use RDP on untrusted networks!
- Avoid NTLM / Use Kerberos
- Audit NTLM usage*

How Bad is it Really?

Demo!

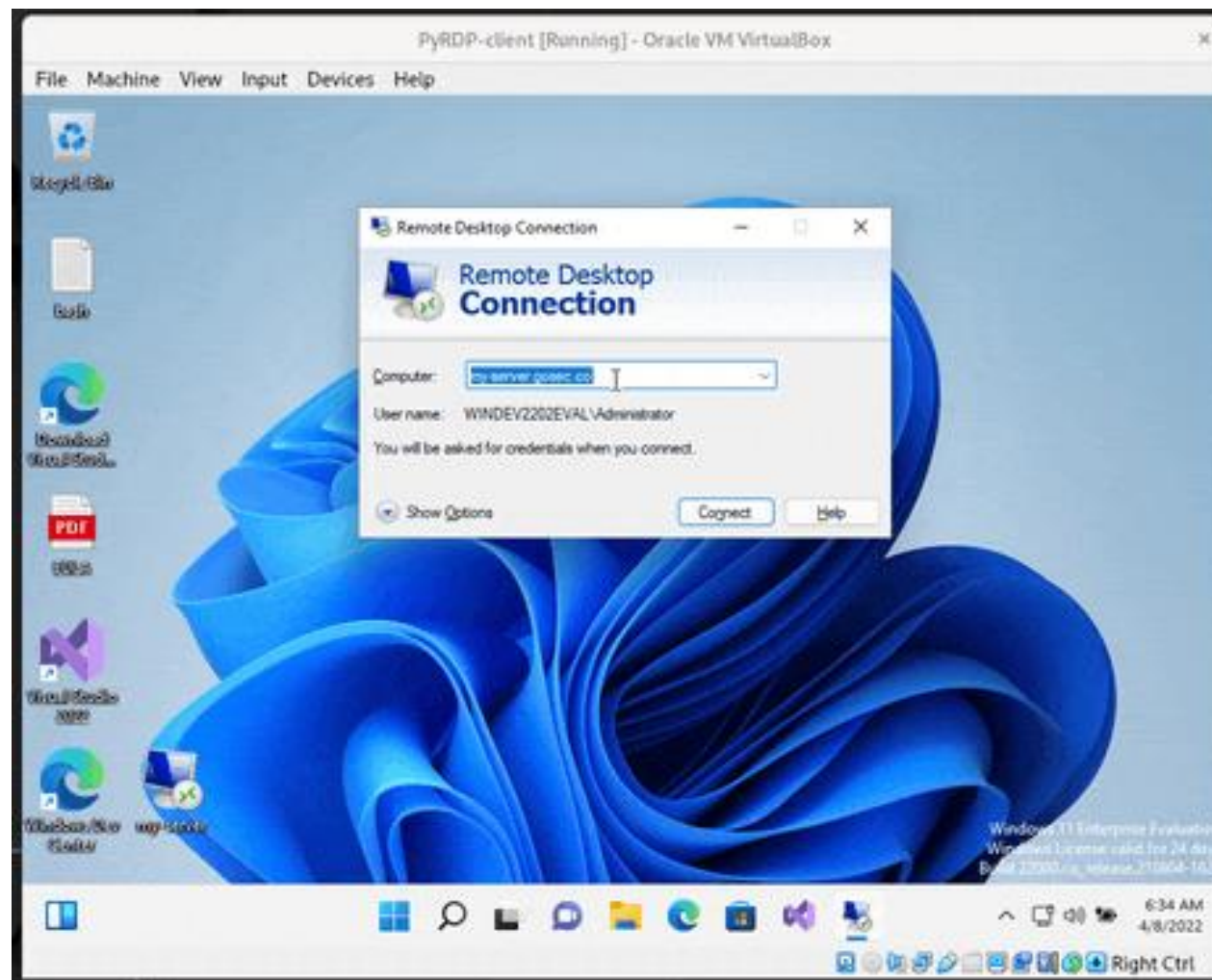
[\(link to video\)](#)

Certificates with RDP?

Use Let's Encrypt to Protect RDP



- It works!
- Impractical
 - No auto-renewal or expose ports 80/443
 - Must use a domain name





Attacker Controlled Let's Encrypt Signed Certificate

Easy way to increase trust in a server

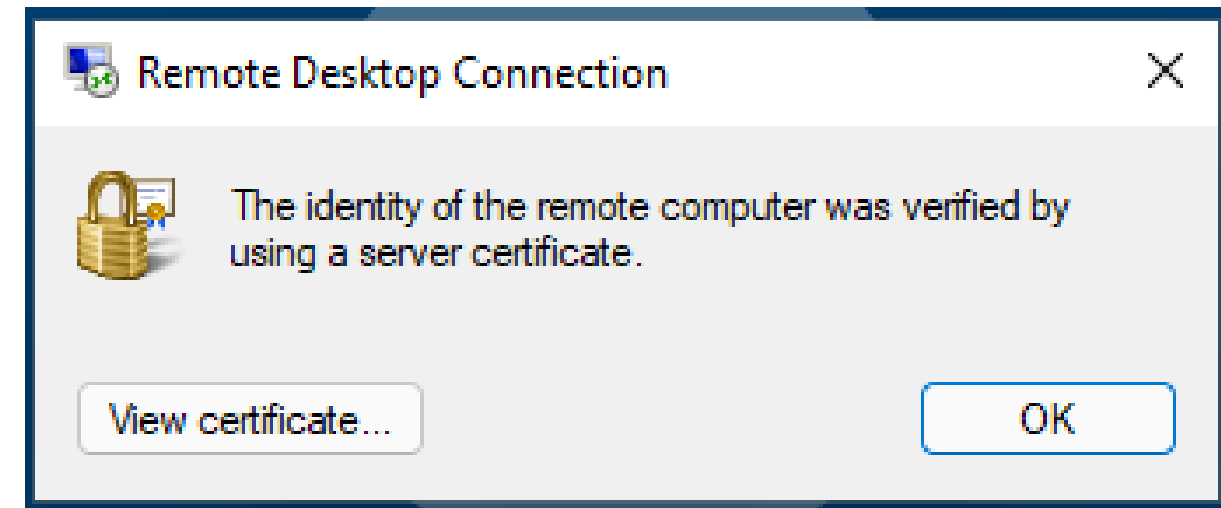
Non-NLA only PyRDP requires it

Step by step:

```
# with DNS already pointing to the PyRDP server
snap install core; snap refresh core
snap install --classic certbot
certbot certonly -standalone
```

```
Please enter the domain name(s) you would like on your certificate (comma and/or
space separated) (Enter 'c' to cancel): my-server.gosec.co
Requesting a certificate for my-server.gosec.co

Successfully received certificate.
Certificate is saved at: /etc/letsencrypt/live/my-server.gosec.co/fullchain.pem
Key is saved at: /etc/letsencrypt/live/my-server.gosec.co/privkey.pem
This certificate expires on 2022-07-05.
```



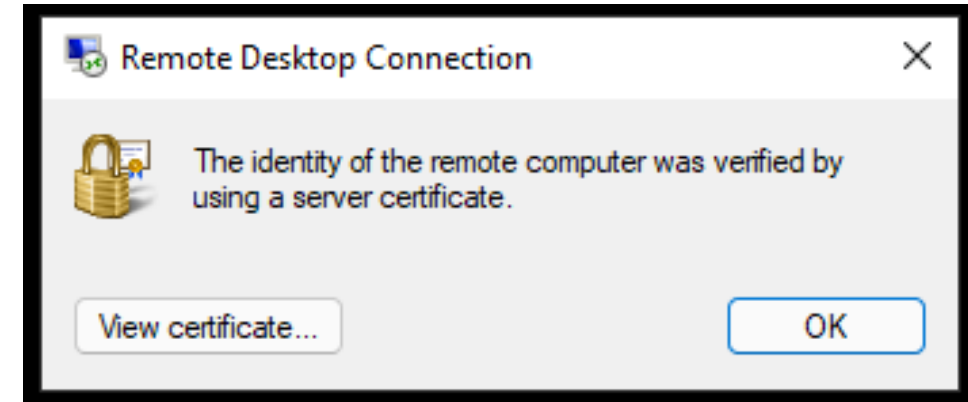
```
pyrdp-mitm.py -i 172.19.0.1 -c /etc/letsencrypt/live/my-server.gosec.co/fullchain.pem -k \
/etc/letsencrypt/live/my-server.gosec.co/privkey.pem 52.23.235.42
```



Copy on Attacker Controlled Server

If you want to support/attack NLA

Step by step:



```
openssl pkcs12 -export -passin "pass:admin" -passout "pass:admin" \  
    -out my-server.pfx -inkey cert.key -in fullchain.pem  
# Copy pfx to RDP Server  
# In Admin PowerShell console:  
$password = ("admin" | ConvertTo-SecureString -AsPlainText -Force);  
$thumbprint = (Import-PfxCertificate -FilePath C:\Windows\Temp\cert.pfx -  
CertStoreLocation cert:\LocalMachine\My -Password $password).Thumbprint;  
$path = (Get-WmiObject -class "Win32_TSGeneralSetting" -Namespace  
root\cimv2\terminalservices -Filter "TerminalName='RDP-tcp']").__path;  
wmic /namespace:\\root\cimv2\TerminalServices PATH Win32_TSGeneralSetting Set  
SSLCertificateSHA1Hash="$thumbprint";
```

Stealing Credentials



Stealing Credentials

- Credentials are sent as part of NLA connection
- Terminal Service saves passwords in memory
- Passwords are in cleartext
- Mimikatz to the rescue :)

Stealing Credentials



(cont.)

```
mimikatz 2.2.0 x64 (oe.eo)

.#####. mimikatz 2.2.0 (x64) #19041 May 17 2021 23:43:36
.## ^ ##. "A La Vie, A L'Amour" - (oe.eo)
## / \ ## /*** Benjamin DELPY `gentilkiwi` ( benjamin@gentilkiwi.com )
## \ / ## > https://blog.gentilkiwi.com/mimikatz
'## v ##' Vincent LE TOUX ( vincent.letoux@gmail.com )
'#####' > https://pingcastle.com / https://mysmartlogon.com ***/

mimikatz # version

mimikatz 2.2.0 (arch x64)
Windows NT 10.0 build 17763 (arch x64)
msvc 150030729 207

mimikatz # privilege::debug
Privilege '20' OK

mimikatz # ts::logonpasswords

Domain :
UserName : Administrateur@lab.local
Password : waza1234/

Domain : KIJOU
UserName : gentiloperateur
Password : waza1234/ope

mimikatz #
```

Utilisateur	Statut	Processeur	Mémoire
> Administrateur (16)		0%	42,6 Mo
> Administrateur (19)		0%	104,6 Mo
> gentiloperateur (16)		0%	103,1 Mo

Prevent credentials theft



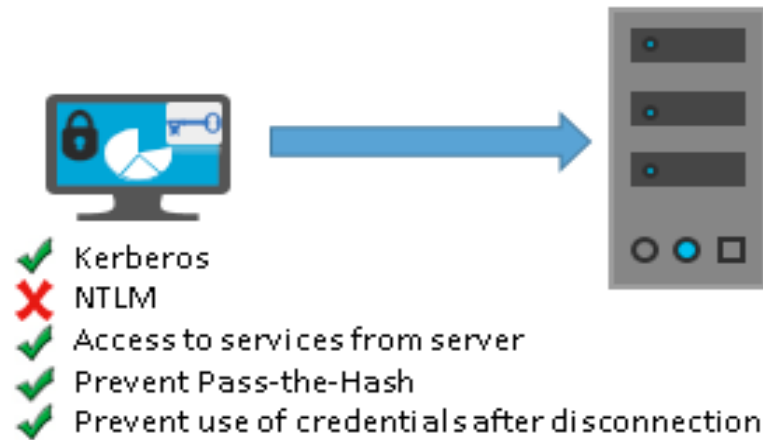
Three ways of protecting from this attack:

1. Restricted Admin Mode
 - Avoid sending reusable credentials
2. Remote Credential Guard
 - Same as Restricted Admin Mode
3. Smartcard Authentication
 - Physical smart cards used for authentication

Prevent credentials theft

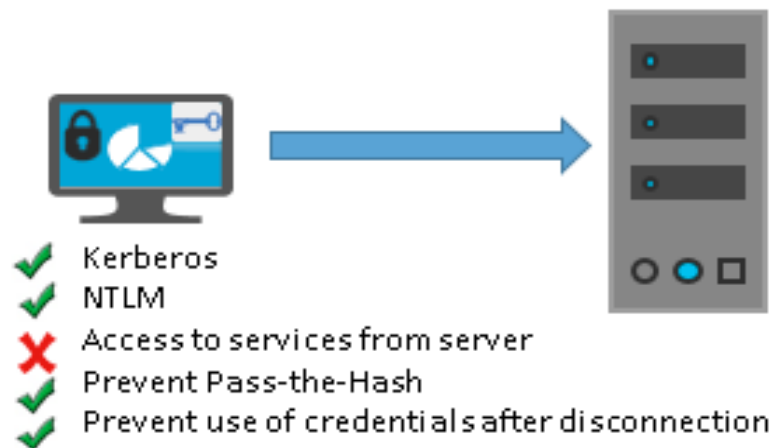


Windows Defender Remote Credential Guard





- Credentials protected by Windows Defender Remote Credential Guard
- Connect to other systems using SSO
- Host must support Windows Defender Remote Credential Guard

Restricted Admin Mode



- Credentials used are remote server local admin credentials
- Connect to other systems using the host's identity
- Host must support Restricted Admin mode
- Highest protection level
- Requires user account administrator rights

 = Credential protection
 = Credentials



Feature	Remote Desktop	Windows Defender Remote Credential Guard	Restricted Admin mode
Protection benefits	Credentials on the server are not protected from Pass-the-Hash attacks.	User credentials remain on the client. An attacker can act on behalf of the user <i>only</i> when the session is ongoing	User logs on to the server as local administrator, so an attacker cannot act on behalf of the "domain user". Any attack is local to the server
Version support	The remote computer can run any Windows operating system	Both the client and the remote computer must be running at least Windows 10, version 1607, or Windows Server 2016.	The remote computer must be running at least patched Windows 7 or patched Windows Server 2008 R2. For more information about patches (software updates) related to Restricted Admin mode, see Microsoft Security Advisory 2871997 .
Helps prevent	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pass-the-Hash• Use of a credential after disconnection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pass-the-Hash• Use of domain identity during connection
Credentials supported from the remote desktop client device	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed on credentials• Supplied credentials• Saved credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed on credentials only	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed on credentials• Supplied credentials• Saved credentials
Access	Users allowed, that is, members of Remote Desktop Users group of remote host.	Users allowed, that is, members of Remote Desktop Users of remote host.	Administrators only , that is, only members of Administrators group of remote host.
Network identity	Remote Desktop session connects to other resources as signed-in user.	Remote Desktop session connects to other resources as signed-in user.	Remote Desktop session connects to other resources as remote host's identity.
Multi-hop	From the remote desktop, you can connect through Remote Desktop to another computer	From the remote desktop, you can connect through Remote Desktop to another computer.	Not allowed for user as the session is running as a local host account
Supported authentication	Any negotiable protocol.	Kerberos only.	Any negotiable protocol

Enabling Restricted Admin Mode

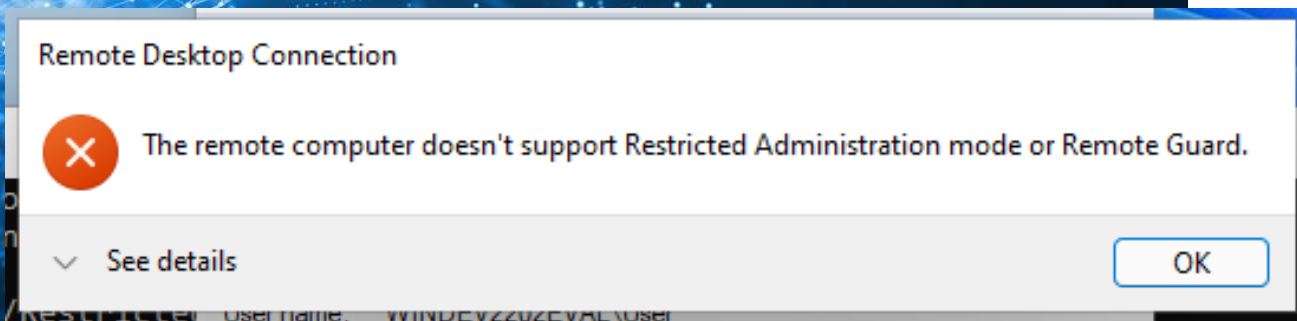


- Edit the RDP server's registry and enable this mode:

```
reg add  
HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Lsa /v  
DisableRestrictedAdmin /d 0 /t REG_DWORD
```

- No reboot required.
- To connect to the RDP server with this mode enabled you must run on the client:

```
mstsc.exe /RestrictedAdmin
```



Enabling Remote Credential Guard



- Edit the RDP server's registry and enable this mode:

```
reg add HKLM\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Lsa  
/v DisableRestrictedAdmin /d 0 /t REG_DWORD
```

- No reboot required.
- To connect to the RDP server with this mode enable you can run on the client:

```
mstsc.exe /remoteGuard
```

- Or via GPO

<https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/security/identity-protection/remote-credential-guard#using-windows-defender-remote-credential-guard>

Logon settings



Enter the name of the remote computer.

Computer:

my-server.gosec.co

User name:

WINDEV2202EVAL\User

Your Windows logon credentials will be used to connect.

Always ask for credentials

Backdooring RDP



Backdooring RDP

Accessibility tools can be backdoored

Applications like **sethc.exe** can be used:

- Log into the system
- Add a debugger for this application via Registry

```
HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows  
NT\CurrentVersion\Image File  
Execution Options\sethc.exe
```

```
"Debugger"="C:\Windows\System32\cmd.exe"
```

Backdooring RDP

(cont.)



The screenshot shows a remote desktop connection to a Windows machine. The background is a dark blue Windows login screen with a white user icon and the text "Administrator". Below the icon is a password field labeled "Password" with a right-pointing arrow. In the foreground, a black command prompt window is open, titled "Administrator: C:\windows\system32\cmd.exe". The command prompt shows the following text:

```
Microsoft Windows [Version 10.0.14393]  
(c) 2016 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.  
C:\Windows\system32>
```

**SHIFT
SHIFT
SHIFT
SHIFT
SHIFT**

Detect backdoors via Accessibility tools



- Make sure that previous Registry entry or similar were not added
- Automatic check for backdooring
 - Use Sticky-Keys-Slayer* to check for Utilman.exe or sethc.exe backdoor
- Windows Defender
 - Threat:
Behavior:Win32/AccessibilityEscalation.A
 - Blacklist some system tools as debuggers
 - cmd.exe
 - taskmgr.exe

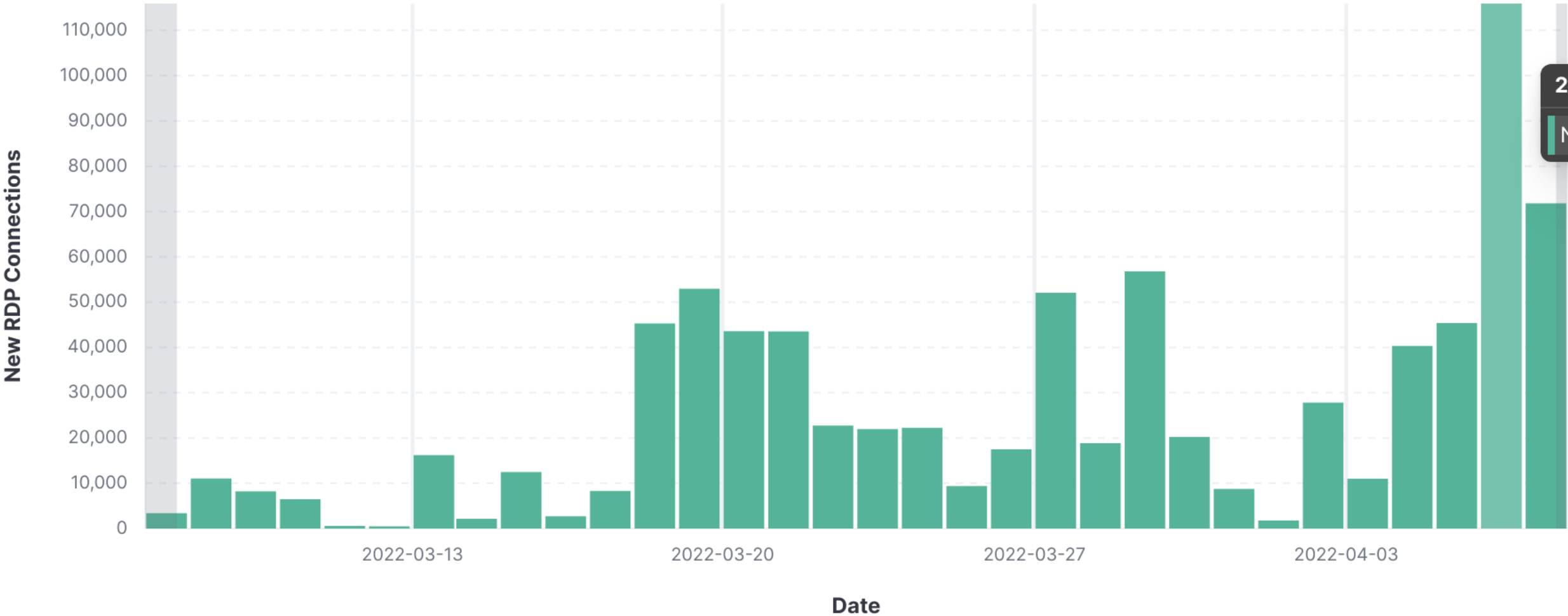
(*) <https://github.com/linuz/Sticky-Keys-Slayer>

Exposed RDP

Attacks on Exposed RDP Systems



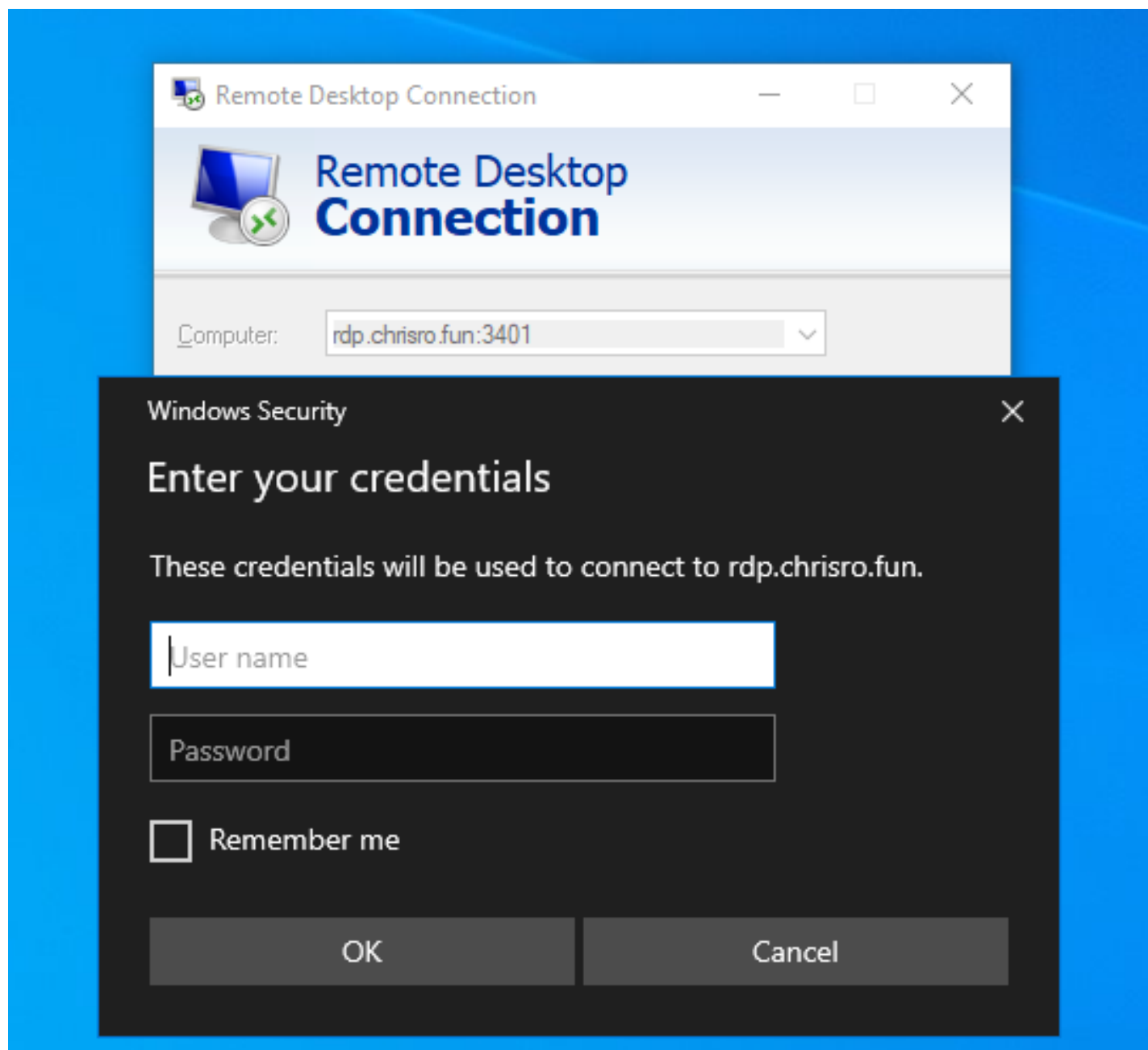
New RDP Connections Per Day (Last Month)



2022-04-06
New RDP Connections **115,910**

Risks of RDP

Case in point: Okta



Risks of RDP



Case in point: Okta

The screenshot shows a remote control session into a virtual machine. The browser window displays the Okta user dashboard. The address bar shows the URL: `okta.okta.com/app/UserHome?iss=https%3A%2F%2Fokta.okta.com&session_hint=AUTHENTICATED`. The dashboard includes a search bar, a sidebar with navigation options like 'My Apps', 'Recently Used', 'Work', 'Add section', 'Notifications', and 'Add apps', and a main content area with sections for 'Recently Used' and 'My Apps'. The 'Recently Used' section contains tiles for Jira, AWS, two 'superuser' accounts, Okta Sales Org, and Zoom. The 'My Apps' section contains tiles for AWS, Cornerstone, another 'superuser' account, Jira, Google Workspace Mail, Confluence, Google Workspace Calendar, Zoom, Okta Sales Org, Crayon, Splunk Cloud, and Okta Certification Program. At the bottom of the VM window, there is a 'GlobalProtect Login' button and a system tray with the date '21/01/2022' and 'Right Ctrl' indicator.

Wrapping Up

Recap of the Risks



Attacks on the Client

- Stealing files, clipboard, keystrokes
- Recording screen
- Stealing hashed or plaintext credentials
- Code exec via DLL Sideload^{*}
- RDP Phishing aka Rogue RDP

Attacks on the Server

- Credential Bruteforcing
- Session takeover
- Command injection

Future Work



Defensive Side

- RD Gateway
- Require valid TLS with specific CA
- NTLM Restrictions
- Shadow Attack Framework (AutoRDPwn)
- Enterprise-scale mitigation
- Blog, blog, blog!

Offensive Side

- RestrictedAdmin with PyRDP
- Kerberos Downgrade
- Shadow Attack Framework (AutoRDPwn)
- RD Gateway



Red Team Take Aways

- **RDP is often misconfigured and under the radar**
- **You can do more than credential bruteforcing with it**
 - **Attack clients**
 - **Attack servers**
 - **Attack both!**
 - **Not a lot of EDR/XDR coverage**

Blue Team Take Aways



- **Today: Never use RDP on unprotected networks!**
- **Today: Train users to not click through certificate errors!**
- **Soon: Make sure NLA is enforced on all RDP servers (default, often deactivated)**
- **Long-term: Carefully roll-out Remote Credential Guard or Restricted Admin client-side enforcement**

Resources



- <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-hardware/customize/desktop/unattend/microsoft-windows-terminalservices-rdp-winstationextensions>
- <https://www.gosecure.net/blog/2020/10/20/announcing-pyrdp-1-0/>
- <https://www.gosecure.net/blog/2022/01/17/capturing-rdp-netntlmv2-hashes-attack-details-and-a-technical-how-to-guide/>
- <https://www.darkoperator.com/blog/2012/3/17/configuring-network-level-authentication-for-rdp.html>
- <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-server/remote/remote-desktop-services/clients/rdp-files>