

## Chip and Skim: cloning EMV cards with the pre-play attack

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**Abstract**—EMV, also known as “Chip and PIN”, is the leading system for card payments worldwide. It is used throughout Europe and much of Asia, and is starting to be introduced in North America too. Payment cards contain a chip so they can execute an authentication protocol. This protocol requires point-of-sale (POS) terminals or ATMs to generate a nonce, called the unpredictable number, for each transaction to ensure it is fresh. We have discovered two serious problems: a widespread implementation flaw and a deeper, more difficult to fix flaw with the EMV protocol itself. The first flaw is that some EMV implementers have merely used counters, timestamps or home-grown algorithms to supply this nonce. This exposes them to a “pre-play” attack which is indistinguishable from card cloning from the standpoint of the logs available to the card-issuing bank, and can be carried out even if it is impossible to clone a card physically. Card cloning is the very type of fraud that EMV was supposed to prevent. We describe how we detected the vulnerability, a survey methodology we developed to chart the scope of the weakness, evidence from ATM and terminal experiments in the field, and our implementation of proof-of-concept attacks. We found flaws in widely-used ATMs from the largest manufacturers. We can now explain at least some of the increasing number of frauds in which victims are refused refunds by banks which claim that EMV cards cannot be cloned and that a customer involved in a dispute must therefore be mistaken or complicit. The second problem was exposed by the above work. Independent of the random number quality, there is a protocol failure: the actual random number generated by the terminal can simply be replaced by one the attacker used earlier when capturing an authentication code from the card. This variant of the pre-play attack may be carried out by malware in an ATM or POS terminal, or by a man-in-the-middle between the terminal and the acquirer. We explore the design and implementation mistakes that enabled these flaws to evade detection until now: shortcomings of the EMV specification, of the EMV kernel certification process, of implementation testing, formal analysis, and monitoring customer complaints. Finally we discuss countermeasures. More than a year after our initial responsible disclosure of these flaws to the banks, action has only been taken to mitigate the first of them, while we have seen a likely case of the second in the wild, and the spread of ATM and POS malware is making it ever more of a threat.

### I. THE SMOKING GUN

EMV is now the leading scheme worldwide for debit and credit card payments, as well as for cash withdrawals at ATMs, with more than 1.62 billion cards in use worldwide. US banks were late adopters, but are now in starting to issue EMV cards to their customers. EMV cards contain a smart

card chip, and are more difficult to clone than the magnetic-strip cards that preceded them.

EMV was rolled out in Europe over the last ten years, with the UK being one of the early adopters (from 2003–5). After it was deployed, the banks started to be more aggressive towards customers who complained of fraud, and a cycle established itself. Victims would be denied compensation; they would Google for technical information on card fraud, and find one or other of the academic groups with research papers on the subject; the researchers would look into their case history; and quite often a new vulnerability would be discovered.

The case which kicked off the research we report here was that of a Mr Gambin, a Maltese customer of HSBC who was refused a refund for a series of transactions that were billed to his card and which HSBC claimed must have been made with his card and PIN at an ATM in Palma, Majorca on the 29th June 2011. In such cases we advise the fraud victim to demand the transaction logs from the bank. In many cases the banks refuse, or even delete logs during the dispute process, leaving customers to argue about generalities. Some courts have recently criticised banks for this and in the Gambin case the bank produced detailed log data. We observed that one of the fields on the log file, the “unpredictable number” or UN, appeared to be increasing steadily:

| Date       | Time     | UN       |
|------------|----------|----------|
| 2011-06-29 | 10:37:24 | F1246E04 |
| 2011-06-29 | 10:37:59 | F1241354 |
| 2011-06-29 | 10:38:34 | F1244328 |
| 2011-06-29 | 10:39:08 | F1247348 |

The UN appears to consist of a 17 bit fixed value and the low 15 bits are simply a counter that is incremented every few milliseconds, cycling every three minutes.

We wondered whether, if the “unpredictable number” generated by an ATM is in fact predictable, this might create the opportunity for an attack in which a criminal with temporary access to a card (say, in a Mafia-owned shop) can compute the authentication codes needed to draw cash from that ATM at some time in the future for which the value of the UN can be predicted. We term this scenario the “pre-play” attack.

We discovered that several ATMs generate poor random

numbers, and that attacks are indeed possible. Even more, we found that such attacks are also possible when an ATM generates a cryptographically strong random number due to a flaw in the protocol. Following our responsible disclosure policy, we informed bank industry organisations in early 2012 so that ATM software can be patched. We are now publishing the results of our research so that customers whose claims for refund have been wrongly denied have the evidence to pursue them, and so that the crypto, security and bank regulation communities can learn the lessons. These are considerable. For engineers, it is fascinating to unravel why such a major failure could have been introduced, how it could have persisted undiscovered for so long, and what this has to tell us about assurance. At the scientific level, it has lessons to teach about the nature of revocation in cryptographic protocols, the limits of formal verification, and the interplay between protocol design and security economics.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. In Section II, we give the high-level background, telling the history of EMV and discussing its effect on fraud figures overall. In Section III we give the technical background, describing how an EMV transaction works, and how our “pre-play” attack can be mounted. Section V describes our experimental methods and results: how we developed a data capture card to harvest UN sequences from ATMs, and what we learned from examining second-hand ATMs bought on eBay. Section VI describes the protocol flaw, and Section VII discusses the possible defences. Section VIII presents our scientific analysis: what the crypto and security communities should take away from this, how EMV can be made more robust, and how such failures can be made less likely in future large-scale systems that employ cryptography for authentication and authorisation. Finally in Section IX we draw some conclusions.

## II. BACKGROUND

EMV (named after its original developers Europay, MasterCard and Visa) was developed in the mid 1990s to tackle the developing threat of magnetic strip card counterfeiting, where organised crime gangs with access to card manufacturing equipment produced cloned cards using data from discarded receipts, or skimmed surreptitiously from legitimate cards, first at point-of-sale (POS) and later at automated teller machines (ATMs). The payment terminal executes the EMV protocol with the chip, which exchanges selected transaction data sealed with a cryptographic message authentication code (MAC) calculated using a symmetric key stored in the card and shared with the bank which issued the card (the “issuer”). The idea is that the bank should be able to detect a counterfeit card that does not contain this key, and the physical tamper-resistance of the chip should prevent an attacker from extracting the key.

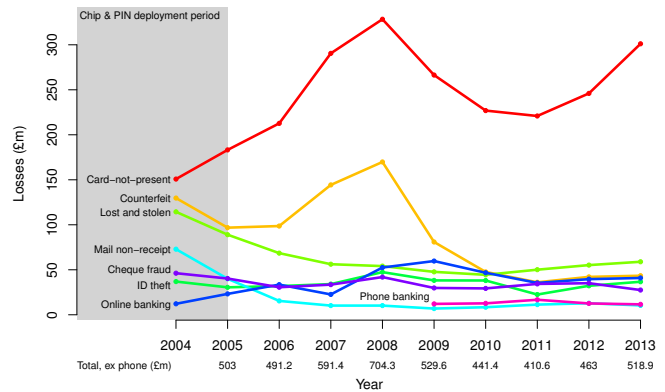


Figure 1. Fraud levels on UK-issued payments cards [1]

Many countries, including the UK, moved to authenticating cardholders with a PIN rather than a signature at both POS and ATM, where previously PINs had only been used at ATMs. The goal was to make it harder to use a stolen card. This simultaneous introduction gave rise to the term “Chip and PIN” being commonly used in the English-speaking world to refer to EMV. In layman’s terms, the chip protects against card counterfeiting, and the PIN against stolen card abuse.

EMV did not cut fraud as its proponents predicted. While using counterfeit and stolen cards did become more difficult, criminals adapted in two ways, as can be seen from Figure 1. First, they moved to “card-not-present” transactions – Internet, mail-order, and phone-based payments – which remained beyond the scope of EMV.

Second, they started making magnetic-strip clones of EMV cards. There had always been some ATM “skimming” where crooks put devices on ATM throats to capture card data and record PINs; and now that PINs were demanded everywhere and not just at ATMs, the opportunities for skimming increased hugely. The simultaneous deployment of EMV with magnetic strip meant that fallback and backwards-compatibility features in EMV could be exploited; for several years, all ATMs would still accept mag-strip cards, and even once this started to be phased out in the UK for locally-issued cards, it was still possible to use mag-strip clones of UK cards in ATMs in the USA. This is why, soon after the completion of the UK EMV roll-out in 2005, counterfeit fraud went up. Instead of entering PINs only at ATMs, customers were now entering their PIN in POS terminals, which are much easier to tamper with [2].

Total fraud levels were brought down after 2008 through improvements to back-end fraud detection mechanisms; by more aggressive tactics towards customers who dispute transactions; and by reducing the number of UK ATMs that accept “fallback” magnetic-strip transactions on EMV-issued cards. Fallback fraud is now hard enough to push the

criminal community to more sophisticated smart-card-based attacks.

Prior research showed that it was possible to use a stolen EMV card in a POS device without knowing the PIN. Given a suitable man-in-the-middle device, a crook can trick the terminal into believing that the right PIN was entered, while the card thought it was authorising a chip-and-signature transaction [3]; criminals have now gone on trial in France for exploiting this “no-PIN” vulnerability [4].

However, the “no-PIN” vulnerability does not explain all the cases where people contacted the authors having been refused a refund for an ATM or POS transaction which they adamantly deny having made. One such case was that of Alain Job who sued his bank for a refund, but lost after the judge concluded that the customer’s card was probably used, not a clone [5]. In that case, the bank destroyed the log files despite the fact that a dispute was underway, contrary to Visa guidelines, and the judge warned that a court might not be so tolerant of such behaviour in the future.

The number of such cases is unknown. The UK fraud figures quoted above only count losses by banks and by merchants, not those for which customers are blamed; and since the introduction of EMV, the banks have operated a “liability shift” as they describe it, which means that when a transaction is disputed, then if a PIN was used the customer is held liable, while if no PIN was used the transaction is charged back to the merchant. Disputed transactions where the bank’s records show a PIN was used are seen by the banks not as frauds against the customer but as attempted frauds by the customer (or perhaps negligence by the customer) regardless of the fact that the no-PIN attack falls into this category. This may be ideal from the banks’ viewpoint but is less so for their customers. The 2008/2009 British Crime Survey [6] found that 44% of fraud victims didn’t get all their money back, despite both bank guidelines and the European Payment Services Directive requiring that customers who have not acted negligently or dishonestly be refunded. Of the 44% who were not fully refunded for their losses, 55% lost between £25 and £499 (\$40 to \$790) and 32% lost £500 or more. So there’s a large gap between the banks’ statistics and those from the crime survey. We believe that the vulnerability we expose in this paper could explain some of it; Mr Gabin’s case is not the only one that has come to us where the attack we describe here is a compelling explanation.

### III. OVERVIEW OF AN ATM TRANSACTION

An EMV transaction consists of three phases:

- 1) **card authentication** in which card details are read and authenticated by the ATM or POS terminal;
- 2) **cardholder verification** in which the person who presents the card is verified whether by PIN or signature; and

- 3) **transaction authorization** in which the issuing bank decides whether the transaction should proceed.

The principals are the card, the ATM and the issuer<sup>1</sup>. The process is illustrated in Figure 2. The description below has been somewhat simplified, and represents typical UK transaction flow. Other countries may differ slightly, but will be substantially similar.

During card authentication, the card provides data records to the ATM, which include the card number, start and expiry dates and which protocol options the card supports. The card also provides a static RSA digital signature over selected records, which aims to prevent crooks from fabricating cards from known or guessed account numbers. Some cards also provide dynamic signature generation capabilities, known as “Dynamic Data Authentication” (DDA).

Following card authentication, cardholder verification proceeds by signature or PIN. In an ATM transaction the card is not involved in this. The customer enters their PIN on the PIN pad, where it is encrypted and returned to the card issuer for verification through the ATM network.

Finally, transaction authorization is carried out. The ATM sends to the card various transaction fields: the amount, the currency, the date, the terminal verification results (TVR – the results of various checks performed by the ATM), and a nonce (in EMV terminology, the “unpredictable number” or UN). The card responds with an authorization request cryptogram (ARQC), which is a cryptographic MAC calculated over the supplied data, together with some card-provided data including the application transaction counter (ATC – a 16 bit number stored by the card and incremented on each transaction) and the issuer application data (IAD – a proprietary data field to carry information from the card to its issuer).

The ARQC is sent by the ATM to the issuer along with the encrypted PIN. The issuer verifies the PIN and checks the ARQC by recalculating the MAC over the received data fields. Additional checks include whether sufficient funds are available, that the card has not been reported stolen, and risk-analysis software does not flag the transaction as suspicious. Then the issuer returns to the ATM an authorization response code (ARC) and an authorization response cryptogram (ARPC) destined for the card.

The ARC authorises the ATM to dispense cash, which in turn passes the ARC and ARPC also to the card. The card verifies the ARPC (which is typically a MAC over the ARQC exclusive-or’ed with the ARC), and returns an authenticated settlement record known as a transaction certificate (TC), which may be sent to the issuer immediately, or some time later as part of a settlement process.

<sup>1</sup>The bank that operates the ATM (the acquirer) and the network that links the issuer to the acquirer are also involved in settlement, dispute resolution and assurance, but they do not participate in the authentication protocol run other than to route messages, so have been omitted from the discussion in this section.

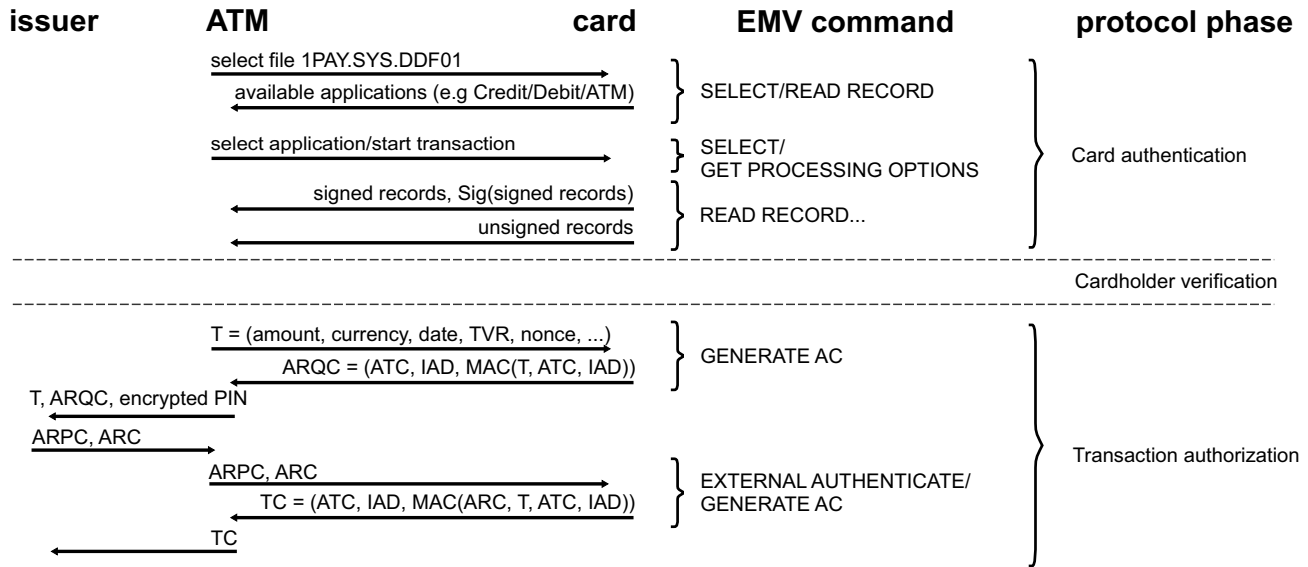


Figure 2. Outline of an EMV transaction at ATM. Note that while the messages between card and ATM have been verified, messages between issuer and ATM may vary depending on card scheme rules

POS transactions proceed similarly, except that cardholder verification is usually performed by sending the PIN to the card which checks it against a stored value. Whether the PIN is verified locally or online makes no difference to the attack discussed here. If a POS device generates unpredictable numbers that can in fact be predicted, then it too will be vulnerable to a pre-play attack.

#### IV. THE TWO VARIANTS OF THE PRE-PLAY ATTACK

In a normal EMV transaction the card sends an ARQC to the ATM to prove that it is alive, present, and engaged in the transaction. The ATM relies on the issuer to verify this and authorise the transaction. Simply replaying an ARQC should not work, because a competent issuer prevents replay by rejecting any transaction whose application transaction counter (ATC) it has already seen<sup>2</sup>. The ATC prevents simple replay attacks but cannot assure the issuer that the ARQC was computed today rather than yesterday. To ensure freshness, a nonce is used – the unpredictable number (UN). This is a 32 bit field generated by the ATM. However, we have discovered two major flaws that make the UN almost redundant: (a) a specification and engineering flaw that results in predictable UNs that can be exploited; (b) a deeper, more difficult to fix protocol flaw, which allows an attacker to choose an arbitrary UN with the pre-play attack. These flaws, together with an additional classical protocol mistake make the entire EMV system vulnerable to the pre-play attack.

<sup>2</sup>We have seen incompetent issuers who accepted repeated transactions with the same ATC.

The specification flaw that enables the basic pre-play attack is that EMV does not include the identity of the terminal – a classic protocol mistake; in fact it’s strikingly reminiscent of the notorious Woo-Lam protocol [7]. While the EMV framework can support this through designation in a list of fields to be MACed in the ARQC (the CDOL1), the standard format developed by Visa (the version 10 cryptogram format [8]) requires only the terminal country code. The country in which the attacker will use its skimmed data is trivial to predict in advance.

The specification flaw means that when an ATM or POS terminal generates predictable random numbers, there is a “pre-play” attack – authentication data are collected at one moment in time, and played to one or more possible verifying parties at some later time that is already determined when the data are harvested. The practical implementation is that a tampered terminal in a store collects card details and ARQCs as well as the PIN from a victim for use later that day, or the following day, at ATMs of a given type. Indeed, if the attacker knows how to predict the UNs in a given make of ATM, he can harvest ARQCs for use in any ATM of that type in a given country and at a given date in the future. We will discuss this variant in detail in Section V.

The deeper protocol design flaw is that while the terminal generates the random number, it is the issuing bank that relies on it. This means that a man-in-the-middle device between the terminal and the bank can be used to attack a system where the random number generation is sound. The attacker records an ARQC in response to the nonce  $N$ , and presents it to a terminal that actually generated the nonce  $N'$ . The terminal sends the ARQC along with the

transaction data and  $N'$  to the bank; the MITM changes  $N'$  to  $N$ ; and the transaction may well be accepted. This means that a terminal infested with malware can debit your card not once, but multiple times, and for arbitrary amounts. We will discuss this variant in detail in Section VI.

#### V. PRE-PLAY ATTACKS BASED ON A WEAK RNG

The EMV protocol designers did not think through carefully enough what is required for the UN to be “unpredictable”. The specifications and conformance testing procedures simply require that four consecutive transactions performed by the terminal should have unique unpredictable numbers [9, test 2CM.085.00]. Thus a rational implementer who does not have the time to think through the consequences will probably prefer to use a counter rather than a cryptographic random number generator (RNG); the latter would have a higher probability of failing conformance testing (because of the birthday paradox).

The latest version of the EMV specification [10, Book 4, p57] offers some guidance as to how to generate the unpredictable number, but previous versions left the algorithm entirely up to implementers. Even the suggested construction (hash or exclusive-or of previous ARQCs, transaction counter and time) would not be adequate for generating a truly unpredictable number because the ARQCs would be zero if the ATM was rebooted and both the time and transaction counter are predictable. Yet if the attacker can predict an “unpredictable number” ahead of time, he can harvest ARQCs from a card one day and use them at the ATM the next.

For example, in the case of the ATM in Palma that started this line of research, the counter rolls over every three minutes, so an attacker might ask a card in his store for twenty ARQCs at points in the 15-bit counter’s cycle. On visiting the ATM he could use his attack card to first calibrate the ATM’s counter, and then initiate transactions when the counter is expected to be at a value for which he has a captured ARQC.

This is all very well in theory, but is it viable in practice? We decided to find out.

##### A. Experimental Method and Results

Pre-play attacks against EMV have been discussed theoretically before, but for a real-world attack to work, there are many practical challenges. In this section we describe our own approach to them: surveying for an exploitable vulnerability, skimming data, and deploying the attack. Each stage of the process must be completed by criminals with reasonable yield and an acceptably low cost (including probability of being caught).

##### B. Identifying vulnerable ATMs

To identify vulnerable ATMs we took three approaches: analysis of log files, collection of UNs in the field, and reverse engineering of ATMs.

1) *Analysis of log files:* We regularly investigate ATM withdrawals on behalf of customers in dispute with their banks. In most cases the level of detail in logs provided by the bank is low, but in a minority of cases detailed logs are handed over. The Palma case got us started on this research track, and we found one or two other cases of suspicious UNs in logs.

Following our responsible disclosure of this vulnerability to the banks and card brands, we delivered our random number analysis toolkit to several parties but so far received little or no feedback at all about their findings. We suggest that anyone in dispute with a bank over ATM transactions where this vulnerability might be an explanation should subpoena the bank’s logs for analysis.

We have also discussed the vulnerability with a large online services firm, but it turned out that they do not retain records of the UN.

We are particularly interested in collecting UN data from Italy, which is the only country of which we are aware where UNs are routinely printed on all customer receipts.

2) *Active probing of ATMs:* Even where ATM logs are available, the timestamps have an accuracy of only a second or so rather than a millisecond, so perhaps only grossly non-random UN generation algorithms can be identified. For both researchers and crooks, a better data collection approach is required. This needs to be moderately covert as the public are aware of the problem of ATM skimming; using primitive analysis tools repeatedly at an ATM may be a way to get arrested.

We therefore constructed a set of passive monitoring cards by adding our own ATM protocol analyser circuitry, consisting of an additional microcontroller with data storage memory, to a standard debit card. This was done as follows. First, the plastic from the rear side of the card, above the chip, was removed with a knife thus exposing the chip package. Then a cheap engraving tool with a flat metal cutter was used to carefully mill away some plastic between the chip slot and the card edge (Figure 3 top left). This was done carefully so as not to remove too much plastic and to avoid cutting through to either the card edge or the card face. The chip itself, being encapsulated in epoxy, is relatively well protected from mechanical damage during this surgery.

Then we fitted a Microchip PIC18F24K22 in a 0.5 mm thin UQFN package into this space, glued some protection resistors to the plastic next to the chip and wired them up to the terminal pins using thin wires. This microcontroller operates from 1.8 V to 5.5 V, so can be connected directly to the card terminals; but as we used a 3.3 V memory chip for fast data storage, some additional power control and interfacing circuitry was added in thin packages of 0.3 mm to 0.5 mm (Figure 3 top right). The memory chip came in a standard 0.7 mm WSON package, so we had to slim it to 0.5 mm; it was carefully milled on sandpaper, removing 0.15 mm from the front and 0.05 mm from the back. Then it



Figure 3. Passive monitoring card containing real EMV chip, with monitoring microcontroller and flash storage

was glued inside the card (Figure 3 middle left). Finally all the components were wired together (Figure 3 middle right). This process required a magnifying glass as some components have a 0.4 mm pin pitch. A special card interface was built for programming the microcontroller and downloading the ATM transaction data to a PC via an RS-232 connection (Figure 3 bottom-left). After initial laboratory testing, the area with added circuitry was filled with epoxy and tested with calipers to ensure it still fit the 0.8 mm card profile, so that the card would not get stuck in an ATM (Figure 3 bottom-right). The epoxy potting protected the circuitry but made that part of the card more brittle - requiring careful

handling between harvesting attempts. This conflicted with our desire to maintain a low profile by behaving as a normal ATM user, so normal practice became to transfer the card from safe storage to wallet while approaching and leaving the ATM. To guard against losing track of which UNs were harvested from which ATMs after a day in the field, we inserted dummy transactions into the stream recorded by the logger. This was done by using the card to perform a test transaction with a terminal emulator on a laptop back in the car.

The modified card remains a valid payment card – the transaction flow proceeds as normal – so it should always

be accepted. However, it can be inserted into a variety of ATMs and POS devices without arousing suspicion<sup>3</sup>. More primitive approaches with a card wired to a laptop leave wires trailing from the slot and may cause problems in ATMs that hold the card internally during reading.

Other possible monitoring equipment includes wireless relay cards transferring data to a card outside, a wired card adapted to be compatible with ATM card slots, an overlaid shim glued on top of a thinned-down existing card, or an ultra-simple shim consisting simply of an antenna suitably connected to the card data line (which we could observe using “TEMPEST” techniques).

In the case of POS terminals, sales assistants are often briefed to turn away during PIN entry and avoid handling the customer card. Thus existing monitoring tools such as the Smart Card Detective [11] have been proven suitable for surreptitious use with a hidden wire running up the experimenter’s sleeve. We used the Detective to analyze unpredictable numbers from a POS terminal close to our offices, with the agreement of the POS owner.

For each ATM investigated, we harvested between five and fifty unpredictable numbers by performing repeated balance enquiries<sup>4</sup> and then a small cash withdrawal. The use of balance enquiries minimises the number of withdrawals on the card, as sudden repeated withdrawals might trigger a fraud detection system and cause the card to be retained. Such cards cost a few hundred pounds in component and labour costs so it is desirable to avoid their being captured by ATMs.

3) *Reverse engineering ATM code:* In order to get a better understanding of the generation of unpredictable numbers inside ATMs we acquired two real machines for analysis. Figure 4 shows EMV-enabled NCR and Hanco/Triton ATMs acquired via eBay for £100 each. Some of these had been in recent service, and some were out of service, having only been used for development. Barnaby Jack [12] described how second-hand ATMs can be brought back into service easily by simply phoning for a repairman.

We have performed an analysis of the hardware and software of the two ATMs, although our analysis has been complicated by the obsolete architectures. We found that one ATM was running OS/2 (see Figure 5(a)), and another on primitive hardware based on the Zilog Z180 CPU (see Figure 5(c)). We identified the manufacturer of the EMV kernel from information inside the ATM, and documentation on their website [13] indicates that the EMV kernel requires seeding with an external source of randomness. Hardware analysis revealed presence of a dedicated crypto chip implementing DES (see Figure 5(b)) and we theorise also

<sup>3</sup>For ethical and prudential reasons we informed the Metropolitan Police that such experiments were underway; we also consulted our local ethics process.

<sup>4</sup>It seems all transactions at ATM are authenticated by EMV protocol runs, but some with a zero withdrawal amount.



Figure 4. ATMs acquired for reverse-engineering

containing a hardware random or pseudo-random number source. Currently we are confident that each byte of the unpredictable number is independently generated from an off-CPU resource. This would either be the DES chip, a real-time clock (also present as a separate chip) or possibly the smart card control unit which is a MagTek board accessed via a serial interface.

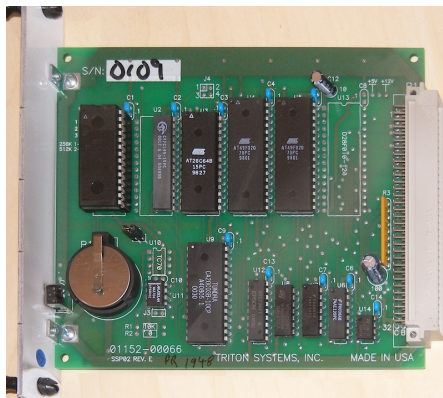
At the outset we believed that older, primitive platforms would be less likely to have a strong source of randomness than modern platforms in all cases. However our broader research across ATM and POS indicates a subtly different conclusion. Entirely modern platforms are likely to call the typical OS resources for random number generation, which nowadays are relatively strong. Meanwhile legacy platforms may have either strong or very weak randomness depending on whether this issue was thought about by the designers at the time. Curiously, legacy platforms which have been ported to more modern environments are most likely to have weak randomness as during the porting the random number generate custom call on the legacy platform is simply mapped across to the easiest standard library call, such as the `C rand()` function. In summary, it is as important to consider the lineage of the ATM or POS software as it is to consider the current platform when estimating the likelihood of vulnerability.

### C. Analysing the RNG

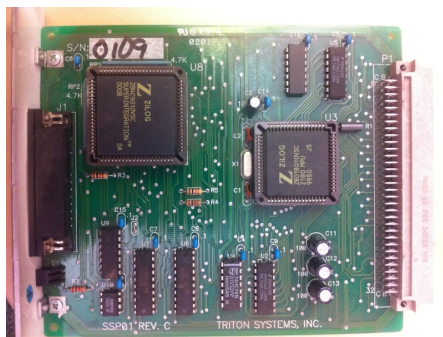
In Section V-B2 we described our own approaches to data collection. Using this approach we collected data to analyse the RNGs in EMV devices in our local area. We performed more than 1,000 transactions across 22 different ATMs and five POS terminals. We were successful at locating ATMs with weak RNGs, but attackers need to go further and identify which specific UNs are most likely to occur at a predictable future time. There are three broad classes of ineffective RNG to consider:



(a) Extracting disk image from NCR ATM



(b) Board with DES chip from Triton ATM



(c) CPU board from Triton ATM

Figure 5. Detail of hardware reverse engineering

- **an obviously weak RNG algorithm.** This includes using counters or clocks directly as the UN, homegrown algorithms which combine obvious transaction data, and severe programming errors which cause the state-space of a better algorithm to be limited (e.g. casting down to the wrong integer size, or submitting four BCD coded random bytes rather than four truly random bytes);
- **a simple RNG with little or no seeding.** There are many flavours, from a linear congruential generator, through encryption of the clock, to more messy schemes where we may find some fixed bits and some bits that cycle, or where a state machine starts off appearing random but ends up in a tight loop cycling through just a small number of values. From an embedded systems standpoint the typical options are the C standard library `time()` and `rand()` calls, neither of which have unpredictable outputs from a cryptographic point of view;
- **an RNG that can be put into a predictable state.** The simplest failure mode is a strong RNG fed by a weak source of randomness that's restarted on power-up, so an attacker can force an outage or follow the replenishment crew. There are also proposed RNG algorithms drawing noise from an untrustworthy source, such as when an RNG uses data from previous transactions. The attacker could insert a card which seeds the RNG with known values, or temporarily spoof the authorisation response from the bank, to push the RNG into a predictable state.

Table II(a) shows a selection of data collected from various ATMs falling broadly into the first category of ineffective algorithms. ATM1 and ATM2 contain a typical characteristic, which we denote *characteristic C*, where the high bit and the third nibble of each UN are always set to zero. This alone reduces the entropy of the unpredictable numbers from 32 to 27 bits. 11 of 22 ATMs we looked at exhibited this characteristic.

Such patterns allow us to prove a non-uniform hypothesis on the data from most of these 11 ATMs with a very good significance level. Table I shows two ten-transaction sequences from an ATM where the characteristic was proven. However further analysis beyond confirming this characteristic has not yielded statistically significant results yet. ATMs of wildly different ages and running different operating systems exhibited characteristic C, so we believe it to be an artifact of a particular EMV kernel post-processing an RNG source rather than of the RNG source itself.

We wondered whether ATM and POS devices were simply be using the C standard library `rand()` function, or other weak sources, and analysed our data using techniques based on spectral tests. Such analysis was complicated by the unknown levels of post-processing of the RNG: for example, we know in the case of one EMV library that each byte of the



Table I  
TEN TRANSACTION SEQUENCES FROM A SINGLE ATM

| SRC2 EXP6 |          | SRC2 EXP6B |          |
|-----------|----------|------------|----------|
| 0         | 77028437 | 0          | 5D01BBCF |
| 1         | 0D0AF8F9 | 1          | 760273FE |
| 2         | 5C0E743C | 2          | 730E5CE7 |
| 3         | 4500CE1A | 3          | 380CA5E2 |
| 4         | 5F087130 | 4          | 580E9D1F |
| 5         | 3E0CB21D | 5          | 6805D0F5 |
| 6         | 6A05BAC3 | 6          | 530B6EF3 |
| 7         | 74057B71 | 7          | 4B0FE750 |
| 8         | 76031924 | 8          | 7B0F3323 |
| 9         | 390E8399 | 9          | 630166E1 |

unpredictable number is sampled separately from the RNG – hence a modulo 256 or a type-cast is almost certainly post-processing the output. Multiple calls to the RNG to produce one UN makes fewer bits available to detect state per sample, but making four consecutive calls in a row for one UN reduces the potential interference from other services within an ATM.

The third category could possibly be spotted from empirical analysis but are best detected with reverse-engineering. In Table II(b) we show a list of stronger consecutive unpredictable numbers retrieved from a local POS terminal. Even in this case the first bit appears to remain 0, which might suggest the use of a signed integer.

Once UN generation is adequately understood, the attackers figure out what UNs to collect in order to maximise the yield in the subsequent cash-out phase. The result is a target ATM profile which is sent together with intended withdrawal amounts, country code and date to the gang tasked with harvesting the ARQCs. Once a vulnerable ATM using the known RNG is identified, the attack flow can proceed further.

#### D. Harvesting the data

Given temporary access to an EMV card, whose holder is prepared to enter the PIN, and a range of possible unpredictable numbers to be harvested, the crook programs his evil terminal to read the static data from the card and call GENERATE AC to obtain an ARQC and TC for each possible UN. This process could be performed by a dedicated device, or by a tampered point of sale terminal, vending machine, or ATM, programmed to perform these operations after (or instead of) a legitimate transaction. Criminals have already shown the ability to tamper with equipment on an industrial scale and with great sophistication.

For each card a set of ARQCs can be harvested, perhaps many dozens. The only limitation is the time that the card can legitimately be left in a sabotaged POS while the customer believes that the machine is waiting for authorisation. Thirty seconds is the standard authorisation time limit; this might allow for more than 100 transactions to be skimmed.

Table II  
CATEGORISED UNPREDICTABLE NUMBERS

(a) From Various ATMs

| Counters |          | Weak RNGs |          |
|----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| ATM4     | eb661db4 | ATM1      | 690d4df2 |
| ATM4     | 2cb6339b | ATM1      | 69053549 |
| ATM4     | 36a2963b | ATM1      | 660341c7 |
| ATM4     | 3d19ca14 | ATM1      | 5e0fc8f2 |
| ATM5     | F1246E04 | ATM2      | 6f0c2d04 |
| ATM5     | F1241354 | ATM2      | 580fc7d6 |
| ATM5     | F1244328 | ATM2      | 4906e840 |
| ATM5     | F1247348 | ATM2      | 46099187 |
|          |          | ATM3      | 650155D7 |
|          |          | ATM3      | 7C0AF071 |
|          |          | ATM3      | 7B021D0E |
|          |          | ATM3      | 1107CF7D |

(b) From local POS terminal

| Stronger RNGs |          |
|---------------|----------|
| POS1          | 013A8CE2 |
| POS1          | 01FB2C16 |
| POS1          | 2A26982F |
| POS1          | 39EB1E19 |
| POS1          | 293FBA89 |
| POS1          | 49868033 |

#### E. Cashing out

To deploy the attack against an RNG which is a fast-moving counter such as we have observed, the attacker needs to start the ATM transaction at precisely the right moment. For a counter ticking hundreds or even thousands of times a second, it is impractical to synchronise merely through timed insertion of the card into the machine. A special smart card can be built to observe the counter and use an on-board clock to decide when to initiate the relevant parts of the protocol. Smart cards are allowed to delay processing responses almost indefinitely using the *request more time* signal (i.e. sending byte 0x60), and timely insertion to the nearest second will mean that the card should never need to delay more than a few hundred milliseconds.

Such a specialised smart card might use an on-board real-time clock (RTC), kept working in the absence of external power by a large capacitor. The RTC is used to synchronise an internal high resolution timer once the card is powered up, and waits the necessary amount of time until the ATM arrives at the step in the EMV protocol where the unpredictable number is sampled.

The feasibility of this attack depends on the speed of the timer, the process by which the ATM samples the timer, and the synchronisation resolution of the card. However there are straightforward ways to relax the timing requirements: the attackers harvest a set of transactions with consecutive



Figure 6. Modified Chip and PIN terminal, playing Tetris

unpredictable numbers, and the attack card makes its best attempt at synchronisation. Once the card sees the unpredictable number returned by the ATM it looks this up in an internal lookup table. If the UN is not found, the card can feign failure. So if ten transactions are harvested from the skimmed card, the timing requirements can perhaps be relaxed by a factor of ten as well.

In the case of ATMs employing stateful predictable pseudo-random RNGs, the implementation details differ: the attacker samples a few unpredictable numbers and can then predict subsequent ones. In any case, synchronisation technology can be developed and tested entirely offline against captive ATMs without any need to interact with the real payment network.

We show an illustration of this attack in Figure 7 (left).

#### F. Implementation and evaluation

We have constructed proof-of-concept implementations for all stages of the attack. As discussed above, we modified a bank smart card for data collection to identify ATMs with poor UN generation. To collect card data we have implemented a Python EMV terminal implementation and modified an EMV terminal to collect card data, as shown in Figure 6. To carry out the attack we implemented a cloned card on the ZeitControl BasicCard platform.

We used test cards with known ARQC-generation keys (UDK) to prove the viability of the attack at a protocol level. Our proof consists of an indistinguishability experiment; we take two test cards A and B loaded with the same ARQC-generation keys, initialised with the same ATC and handled identically. We use our skimming trace to harvest data from card A and then program it on to a “pre-play card”. We then compare traces between the pre-play card version of card A and the real card B, and observe that they are identical. This means that at a protocol level it is impossible for the ATM to distinguish between the real and pre-play cards. In detail the flow is as follows:

1) two transactions performed on card A

- 2) two transactions performed on card B
- 3) traces of transactions compared, GENERATE AC responses confirmed the same, proving both cards have the same cryptographic keys and are generating the same cryptograms (they are identical)
- 4) two ARQCs skimmed from card A
- 5) pre-play card programmed with data from data collected from card A
- 6) two transactions performed on card B
- 7) two transactions performed on pre-play card
- 8) traces of transaction compared and shown to be identical, confirming that pre-play card is indistinguishable from card B

## VI. THE DEEPER PROBLEM: PRE-PLAY ATTACKS DUE TO THE PROTOCOL FLAW

Even if the UN generation algorithms are patched, a number of protocol attack variants may make pre-play attacks viable for years to come.

- **Malware infection.** There are already numerous cases of malware-infected ATMs operating in Eastern Europe and depending on the internal architecture of the ATM it may be easy for such malware to sabotage the choice of UN. In fact one bank suggested to us that the ATM that kicked off this whole research project may have been infected with malware [14].
- **Supply chain attacks.** Such attacks have already been seen against POS terminals in the wild, and used to harvest magnetic strip data. So it is feasible that a criminal (or even a state-level adversary) might sabotage the RNG deliberately, either to act predictably all the time, or to enter a predictable mode when triggered via a covert channel. A suitably sabotaged RNG would probably only be detected via reverse engineering or observation of real world attacks.
- **Collusive merchant.** A merchant might maliciously modify their EMV stack to be vulnerable, or inject replayed card data into the authorisation/settlement system. He could take a cut from crooks who come to use cloned cards at their store, or just pre-play transactions directly. In the UK, there was a string of card cloning attacks on petrol stations where a gang bribed store managers to look the other way when PIN pads were tampered with and monitoring devices inserted into network connections; exactly what you need to deploy a pre-play attack. We have recently seen a transaction dispute in which a customer claims to have made one small purchase at a merchant yet his bank claims he made six large ones too.
- **Terminal cut-out.** A variant is the terminal cut-out or bypass, where the transaction stream between the merchant terminal and the acquirer is hacked to mis-report the unpredictable number when triggered by a particular signal (e.g. a particular account number or

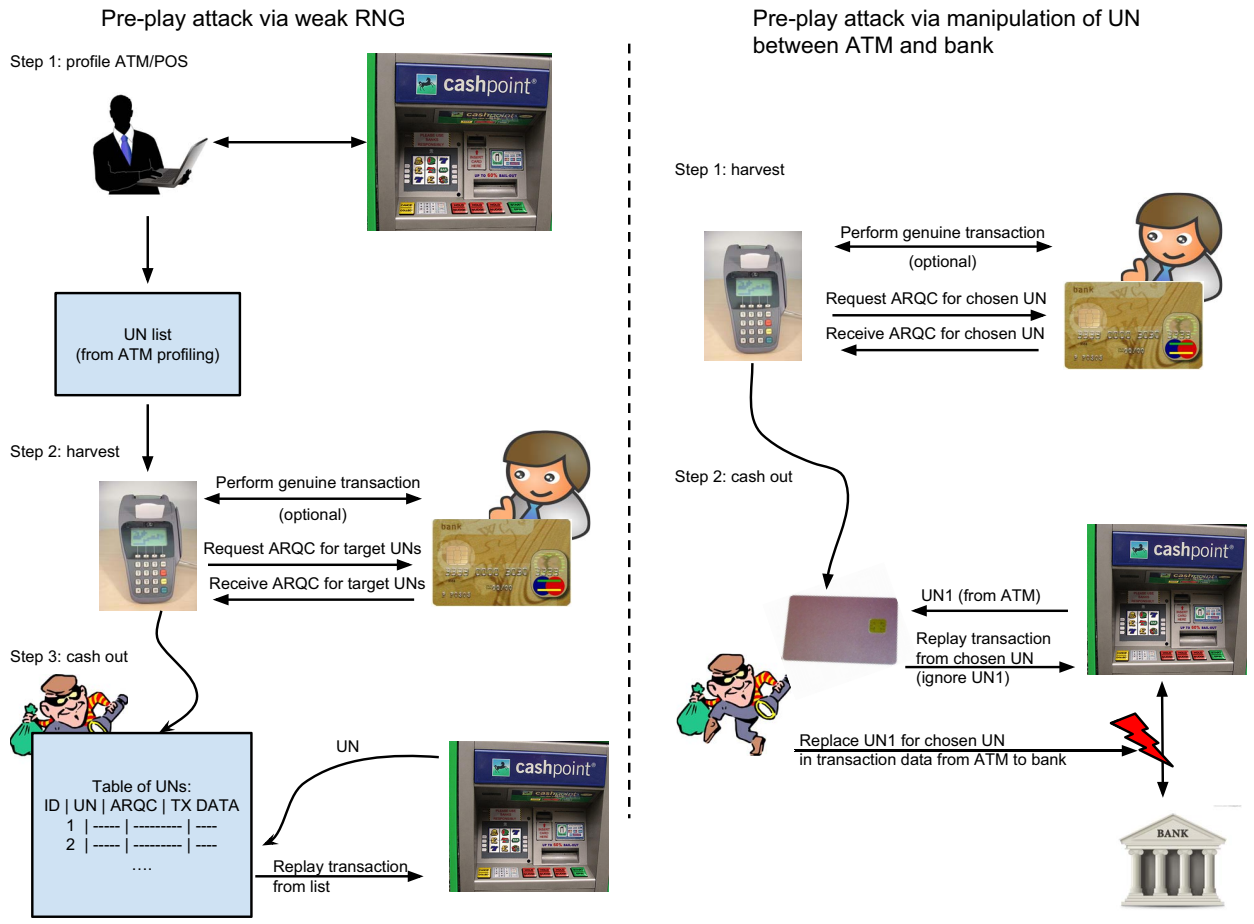


Figure 7. Overview of the pre-play attack using a weak RNG (left) or tampering with the UN at the ATM/POS side (right)

a known ARQC). This transaction data stream is not normally considered sensitive within the threat model and can be altered at will by merchant software. The attacker's card performing the replay can then use any UN for which it has an ARQC, and the true random UN made up by the terminal will never see the light of day. This is hard to block: there is no provision in currently deployed EMV cards for the terminal to confirm that its choice of UN was correctly included in the cryptographic MAC. The terminal cut-out could be implemented in malware (and there's evidence of bank botnets looking for POS devices), or in a merchant's back-end system (we have evidence of merchants already tampering with transaction data to represent transactions as PIN-verified when they were not, so as to shift liability).

- **UN modification in the network.** A man-in-the-middle device between a POS device and the acquiring bank, perhaps at a network switch, would also be a good way to deploy such an attack. This could be an attrac-

tive way to attack merchants that process high-value transactions, such as jewelers or investment firms, who might guard their premises and take care of their POS equipment yet still fall to a targeted attack. A pre-play attack would be much harder to detect than old-fashioned attacks that just convert deny authorisation messages into approve messages.

Using these versions of the pre-play attack (Figure 7 right) it is no longer necessary to profile an ATM or POS terminal. The attacker can simply choose an arbitrary UN and obtain the related transaction data, including the ARQC, from the victim's card. Then he can replay the transaction data at a terminal and replace the terminal's real UN with his chosen one (via any of the methods described above).

The key shortcoming of the EMV protocol is that the party depending upon freshness in the protocol is not the party responsible for generating it. The issuer depends on the merchant for transaction freshness. The merchant may not have the incentive to provide it, may not be able to deliver it correctly due to lack of end-to-end authentication with the

issuer, and might even be collusive (directly or indirectly).

Recently there has been some formal analysis of EMV, but this flaw was not discovered [15]. One reason is that the UN was modelled as a fresh nonce, even though this is not required by EMV (this omission is understandable given that the actual specification of the UN is buried on p1498 in an annex to the EMV specifications, totalling over 4,000 pages). The other is that the issuer and terminal are modelled as the same individual, whereas in reality the relying party is the issuer and has only limited control over the terminal behaviour. In fact, the terminal communicates with an acquirer that in turn sends the transactions to a switch that finally relays the transactions to the issuer.

As a next approximation, let's abstract away the acquirer and the switch, and consider the EMV protocol in an ideal world containing only one bank. The protocol might be idealised as (where  $A$  is the ATM,  $B$  is the issuer, and  $C$  is the card):

$$\begin{aligned} A \longrightarrow C &: N, V, T \\ C \longrightarrow A &: \{N, V, T\}_{KCB} \\ A \longrightarrow B &: \{A, \{N, V, T\}_{KCB}\}_{KBA} \\ B \longrightarrow A &: \{A, ok\}_{KBA} \end{aligned}$$

An analysis using BAN logic [16] would note that  $KCB$  is a good key for communicating between the card and the bank, so the bank knows that the card once said  $N, V$  and  $T$ ; if it concludes that  $N$  is fresh, then it will infer that the card said all this in the current epoch. However  $N$  is not the card's nonce  $NC$ , but the terminal's nonce  $NT$ , and we can't infer anything once we formalise this carefully.

In real life, we cannot rely on communications between the merchant and the card issuing bank to be protected by encryption or even authentication. This is a well-known problem from ATM networking (see [17, p336]): if a MAC is computed on each link from the acquirer to the switch to the issuer and back again, that necessitates two calls to a hardware security module at each node in each direction, so that the MAC can be verified with the inbound working key and recalculated with the outbound one, resulting in a dozen extra HSM calls which in turn greatly increase not just network latency but the size of the HSM fleet required at each institution. So in the absence of significant numbers of network-based attacks, it may be a defensible business decision to optimise the MACs away.

So there's no  $K_{BA}$ , and the actually implemented protocol may be more like

$$\begin{aligned} A \longrightarrow C &: N, V, T \\ C \longrightarrow A &: \{N, V, T\}_{KCB} \\ A \longrightarrow B &: A, \{N, V, T\}_{KCB} \\ B \longrightarrow A &: A, ok \end{aligned}$$

which makes it even more clear that the bank  $B$  can't rely on anything at all.

It is well known that the assumptions used in the 1970s by the pioneers of authentication were undermined by later "progress". The Needham-Schroeder protocol [18], famously has a "bug" in that the protocol can stall for an extended period of time between the third and fourth messages, with the effect that old session keys once compromised cannot be revoked. Needham and Schroeder defended themselves by pointing out that their paper had quite openly assumed that principals executed the protocol faithfully; therefore such behaviour was *a priori* excluded from their model. Our modern world of equipment that fails from time to time, and where life is spiced by the occasional malicious insider, requires us to be more careful with revocation.

In exactly the same way, the deployment of a system like EMV across an ecosystem with hundreds of vendors, thousands of banks, millions of merchants and billions of cards requires us to be much more careful about who the principals are, and the incentives they have to execute their tasks competently. Indeed, one of the new realities of the EMV world is that merchants and banks may be hostile parties in the payment system, thanks to tussles over payment transaction charges and chargebacks. There have been large lawsuits between major retailers and payment networks, and we are aware of cases where merchants deliberately falsify record data (e.g. by claiming that transactions were PIN-verified when they were not [19]) so as to push fraud costs to the bank and reduce chargebacks.

So if issuing banks cannot trust merchants to buy terminals from vendors who will implement decent random number generators, what can be done?

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND DEFENCES

The limitations of a pre-play attack are:

- The country of attack must be chosen in advance
- The dates of attack must be chosen in advance
- The amount must be chosen in advance
- The PIN must be entered in the card, if a chip-and-PIN transaction
- The ATC may limit the attack window

### A. Defences against random-number attacks

In the case of the first variant of the attack, where the unpredictable number is known ahead of time, the attacker does not need to know the terminal ID of the ATM, or time of transaction, as these are rarely (if at all) requested by card and are not included in the generation of the ARQC. The cloned card can be used in any vulnerable ATM which shares the same country code.

The simplest fix is a cryptographically secure random number generator. The UN field is only 32 bits, and so an attacker who could collect approximately  $2^{16}$  ARQCs from a card could get a decent probability of success with  $2^{16}$  transactions at an ATM. This is not a realistic concern as an EMV card should disable itself after  $2^{16}$  transactions, and

carrying out  $2^{16}$  transactions at an ATM at 20 seconds each would not only take more than a day but should rapidly propel the machine to the top of FICO's watch list.

The problem here is that fixing the random number generator is a matter for acquiring banks, ATM vendors, merchants and POS terminal suppliers, while the cost of fraud falls on the issuing banks and the customers. Hopefully this article will reduce the likelihood of risk being dumped unfairly on customers, but what can an issuing bank do?

If an attacker requests many ARQCs from a card, the issuer may notice gaps in the ATC sequence. Issuers should probably reject online transactions where the ATC is lower than the highest ATC seen from that card, which would limit the attack window to the next genuine card use. For offline transactions, however, this cannot be done because there might be re-ordering of cryptograms.

### *B. Defences against protocol attacks*

The best defence against protocol attacks in the short-to-medium term is almost certainly for the issuer to meticulously verify the transaction certificate (TC). The TC states whether the card verified the ARPC, and the ARPC in turn was computed by the card-issuing bank after it verified the ARQC. In the presence of a pre-play attack, the TC will still verify, but its IAD will indicate that the issuer authentication did not complete successfully.

In more detail, the `EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATE` call (which happens during the transaction authorization, see Figure 2) cannot be made, as the ARPC cannot be generated without the issuer's involvement. This does not impair the card's ability to generate the ARQC (which happens before `EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATE`), but it will allow the attack to be detected by an issuer who examines the TC. The IAD field in the TC is not covered by the EMV specification, but additional standards defined by Visa [8], commonly implemented by cards, do go into more detail. A pair of bits in the IAD indicates whether `EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATE` has been performed and whether it succeeded. Although this will not prevent every attack (because the TC is only sent to the issuer once the terminal has completed the transaction), it will normally allow detection later. In one case we've seen a genuine transaction that was followed by six disputed large ones from the same terminal; in such cases, an immediate alarm on a suspicious TC would prevent all but the first fraudulent transaction and thus significantly reduce the criminals' expected income.

At present, this does not appear to be done. Visa's 'Transaction Acceptance Device Guide' [20, 5.12] states:

"Devices operating in a single-message or host-capture environment should ensure a TC is generated for approved transactions. Although not needed for clearing, generating a TC ensures that cards do not request unnecessary online approvals

on subsequent transactions and also provides liability protection for acquirers."

Mitigating acquirer liability in the event of stand-in processing is all very well, but our concern here is the liability faced by the cardholder who is the victim of a pre-play attack.

In the event of a court having to decide whether a series of disputed transactions from a single terminal was made with the cardholder's collusion or by means of a protocol-level pre-play attack, the first forensic test should therefore be to examine the TC. If a valid TC is generated by a card following a correct ARPC that in turn was generated following a correct ARQC, then the card was present and active at the time the ARPC was generated. This does not totally exclude the possibility of fraud, as there may have been a relay attack [21]; but pre-play attacks at least appear to be unlikely.

Another approach for increasing the difficulty of the attack is to force the card to commit to the value of the ATC before the ATM presents the UN to the card. This is possible without having to modify cards, because a mandatory feature of EMV is that the `GET DATA` command retrieves the current ATC. If the pre-play card were able to exactly predict the value of the UN in a transaction, being forced to choose an ATC would not affect the difficulty. However, it would prevent the card from searching a list of available ARQCs and finding one that matches. However, this technique is available only to the terminal supplier (usually the acquirer) not to the issuer (who faces the risk of loss, or at least should face this risk once courts realise that pre-play attacks are possible).

One set of non-defences are the public-key authentication features of EMV. The static digital signature on the card data can be trivially copied to the pre-play card. However, by examining records of transactions we discovered that the terminal verification results (TVR) field sent to the card during transaction authorization indicates that this digital signature was not verified. The decision not to check the digital signature could have been made by ATM manufacturers to save the time needed to verify the signature on the low-end CPUs in some ATMs (see Section V-B3), and the maintenance costs of updating the root certificates, because counterfeit cards should be detected during transaction authorization.

Even the public-key challenge-response protocol of EMV (used by cards supporting Dynamic Data Authentication – DDA) would not adequately protect terminals from attack. If DDA were commonly used by ATMs (or the attack is fielded at a point-of-sale terminal) the signature response to the `INTERNAL AUTHENTICATE` command can be recorded and replayed just as the ARQC is. In our POS terminal tests the unpredictable number sent by the terminal to the card in the `INTERNAL AUTHENTICATE` command is the *same* as for the `GENERATE AC` command.

A protocol specialist might suggest that randomness must

be generated by the party that relies on it; so the terminal should request a nonce from the issuing bank before commencing the transaction. A weaker but cheaper option might be for the terminal to authenticate the message conveying the nonce to the card issuing bank. This would however cost a lot of latency and processing, as noted above; even authentication is commonly optimised away in payment messages, let alone extra message round-trips.

The only practical short-term alternative may be for arbitrators to shift the burden of proof, in the event of a transaction dispute, to the acquiring bank which should be called on to demonstrate that the unpredictable number was properly generated. The terminal equipment might support audit in various ways, such as by using a generator which encrypted an underlying sequence that is revealed after the fact, and locked to the transaction log to establish time limits on possible pre-play tampering. However, this would not be entirely trivial; secure storage of audit data in the terminal is a new problem and creates new opportunities for attack.

### VIII. DISCUSSION

The potential vulnerability of EMV to a poor random number generator was discussed in the abstract by Murdoch [22]. Marketos and Moore [23] additionally explored how otherwise secure true random number generators could be manipulated to produce more deterministic output. But this paper is the first work to show that poor random number generators exist in the wild, that they have been implicated in fraud, how they can be exploited, and that the EMV specification does not test adequately for this problem.

The random-number exploit scenario described in this paper might be viewed as a variant of the relay attack, which was explored in the context of EMV by Drimer and Murdoch [21]. But there, the relay attack required real-time bi-directional communication with the genuine card; the genuine card had to be under the control of the attacker while the attack was taking place. This makes it hard to deploy; the best attack we can think of is to have a false terminal such as a parking meter to attract cardholders, communicating with a crook who waits with the connected false card near an ATM. We do not know of this being deployed in practice (though we've heard rumours). Another variant of the relay attack is the no-PIN attack where a man-in-the-middle device tricks the terminal into accepting a transaction after the wrong PIN was entered; that also works in real time. That has been deployed, and crooks have been prosecuted for it; but so far the losses appear to be of the order of a million Euros, and from one or two incidents.

The random-number pre-play attack could also be seen as a kind of card cloning. We have already seen fake magnetic strip cards based on either the magnetic strip of the genuine card, or the copy of the magnetic strip data stored on the chip of some EMV cards. Another approach is the "YES-card" where the static data from a chip is copied to a cloned

chip card. If the transaction can be kept offline (e.g. by keeping it below the "floor limit"), the fact that such a card cannot produce a valid ARQC or TC will not prevent the transaction, but as the YES-card is responsible for verifying the PIN, it can be programmed to accept any PIN. The pre-play attack is more powerful in some respects as it works for online transactions, and less in others as the transaction parameters must be known in advance. Crucially, the pre-play attack will work in ATMs while a YES-card won't (a typical YES-card attack involves buying cigarettes for resale, which is less convenient than stealing cash directly).

One might imagine that much more fraud could be committed with a fully cloned card containing a copy of the ARQC-generation keys than with a card containing pre-play data. However even a full clone will have its own ATC which will diverge from that of the real card and in due course be detectable. So a full cloning attack might be not that much more powerful in practice than a pre-play attack.

The protocol pre-play attack could come in a number of guises. In the version described here, and (we believe) observed in the wild, a single terminal is compromised and used to duplicate transactions. There are clearly variants in which the terminals where the data are harvested are quite remote from the terminals used for cash-out. If a gang succeeds in compromising a number of terminals (which was done in the UK physically by three separate gangs in the mid-2000s) or in compromising the communications to a number of high-value stores (which was done to jewelry stores in Hatton Garden in the 1980s) the cards can have ARQCs harvested in one location and presented in another.

Perhaps the main takeaway message is that an attacker who can subvert a merchant's premises, get access to his terminal equipment (even before it is purchased), or get control of his network connection, can do transactions that are indistinguishable from card cloning to the bank that issued the EMV card – even if full card cloning is impossible. The EMV attack surface is bigger than one might think, especially once crooks learn how to manipulate the protocol.

#### A. *Evidential issues in dispute*

Viability of the pre-play attack has significant legal ramifications. It can no longer be taken for granted that data in a logged transaction was harvested at the time and place claimed, which undermines the reliability of evidence in both civil and criminal cases. To show that a given transaction was made by a particular card, it is now necessary to show that the random number generator on the ATM or POS was sound.

From the point of view of an issuing bank in dispute with a customer, this attack greatly complicates matters. The bank cannot just rely on its own log data – it must collect data from a third party (the ATM operator) to prove that the ATM was not infected with malware; that the random number generator was not vulnerable due to either design failure or

a supply chain attack; and that the logs at the acquirer match those kept at the terminal itself. A mere one-off certification for a class of EMV kernel does not come close to discharging this burden. There may be practical matters in incentivising the acquiring bank to cooperate with the issuer, especially in international cases.

Under existing Visa guidelines, logs should be retained in case of dispute. Yet in recent cases we have dealt with, logs were routinely destroyed after 90 or 180 days regardless of whether a dispute was in progress. So the industry already cannot cope with dispute resolution based on issuer logs; and given that some of the disputes we're already seeing would require scrutiny of acquirer and ATM operator systems, dispute resolution can only get harder. The only feasible way forward is by getting the liability right. Banks which destroy evidence should become automatically liable for the full sums in dispute, including costs. Above all, the burden of proof must lie on the banks, not the customer. The Payment Services Directive already requires this, yet dispute resolution bodies like the UK Financial Ombudsman Service routinely ignore the law and find for banks who destroy evidence. We discuss the issues of evidence further in [22], [19].

### *B. Industry Response*

We disclosed these flaws to the major card schemes and to selected banks and payment switches in early 2012, initially with an emphasis on the random-number variant as we did not realise how powerful the protocol variant could be. All parties acknowledged receipt and several contacted us to ask further questions. The card schemes chose initially not to circulate the work, but after several weeks a different contact did decide to circulate our report and our vulnerability disclosure report received several thousand downloads. The vast majority of contacts refused to talk to us on-the-record, but in April 2012 EMVCo published a specification update [24] which partially tackled the random number generator problem. The bulletin required that the unpredictable number field should be "truly unpredictable even given access to all previous numbers, and it should be infeasible for an attacker to control the next Unpredictable Number that the terminal generates.". EMVCo also gave notice that the testing and approval procedures for terminal random number generators would be strengthened. Yet almost two years after our disclosure of the protocol flaw, nothing appears to have been done. The world's fleet of EMV terminals remain vulnerable to attacks involving either terminal malware or man-in-the-middle manipulation of communications. This is particularly shocking given that industry insiders told us that Mr Gambin's case probably involved ATM malware.

Beyond the direct impact of influencing a specification change, we received some informal responses: the extent and size of the problem was a surprise to some, whereas others reported already being suspicious of the strength

of unpredictable numbers, or even said others had been explicitly aware of the problem for a number of years. If these assertions are true, it is further evidence that banks systematically suppress information about known vulnerabilities, resulting in fraud victims being denied refunds.

## IX. CONCLUSIONS

EMV is the main protocol used worldwide for card payments, being near universal in Europe, in the process of adoption in Asia, and in its early stages in North America. It has been deployed for ten years and over a billion cards are in issue. Yet it is only now starting to come under proper scrutiny from academics, media and industry alike. Again and again, customers have complained of fraud and been told by the banks that as EMV is secure, they must be mistaken or lying when they dispute card transactions. Again and again, the banks have turned out to be wrong. One vulnerability after another has been discovered and exploited by criminals, and it has mostly been left to independent security researchers to find out what's happening and publicise it.

In this paper, we report the shocking fact that many ATMs and point-of-sale terminals have seriously defective random number generators. These are often just counters, and in fact the EMV specification encourages this by requiring only that four successive values of a terminal's "unpredictable number" have to be different for it to pass testing. The result is that a crook with transient access to a payment card (such as the programmer of a terminal in a Mafia-owned shop) can harvest authentication codes which enable a "clone" of the card to be used in ATMs and elsewhere.

We now also disclose that the pre-play attack is not limited to terminals with defective random number generators. Because of the lack of end-to-end transaction authentication, it is possible to modify a transaction made with a precomputed authentication code, en route from the terminal to the acquiring bank, to edit the "unpredictable number" to the value that was used in the pre-computation. This means that as well as inserting a man-in-the-middle devices between the payment card and the terminal, an attacker could insert one between the terminal and the acquirer. It also means that malware in the terminal can attack the EMV protocol even if the protocol itself is implemented in a tamper-resistant module that the malware cannot penetrate. The banks appear to have ignored this, perhaps reasoning that it is difficult to scale up an attack that involves access to specific physical cards and also the installation of malware or wiretaps on specific terminals. We disagree. The Target compromise shows that criminals can deploy malware on merchant terminals widely and exploit it to earn serious money. The move to terminals based on mobile phones may expose this flaw to industrial scale exploitation by malware that can be spread through the mobile phone population much more easily than through the terminal fleet. The recent announcement that card payments via phones need no longer rely on cryptography in the SIM

card, or in a secure element or TEE, opens the door wide to malware there too.

This flaw challenges current thinking about authentication. Existing models of verification don't easily apply to a complex multi-stakeholder environment; indeed, EMV has already been verified to be secure. We explained why such verifications don't work and discussed the sort of analysis that is required instead. Ultimately we feel that the tools needed to build robust systems for millions of mutually mistrustful and occasionally hostile parties will involve game-theoretic analysis as well as protocol-theoretic modelling. In addition, mechanisms for rolling out fixes across networks with huge installed bases of cards and terminals, and strong externalities, will have to be much better than those we have at present, with incentives that put the pain where it's deserved and technical mechanisms that offer the prospect of remedial action to the sufferers.

In the meantime, there is a structural governance failure that gives rise to systemic risk. Just as the world's bank regulators were gullible in the years up to 2008 in accepting the banking industry's assurances about its credit risk management, so also have regulators been credulous in accepting industry assurances about operational risk management. In a multi-party world where not even the largest card-issuing bank or acquirer or scheme operator has the power to fix a problem unilaterally, we cannot continue to rely on a slow and complex negotiation process between merchants, banks and vendors. It is time for bank regulators to take an interest. It is welcome that the US Federal Reserve is now paying attention, and time for European regulators to follow suit.

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