

Root Detection Bypass

Root detection in Android applications is a common security measure used by developers to help preserve the integrity of their apps. It's purpose is to detect whether a device has been rooted—a state in which users gain privileged access to the operating system. While rooting allows for deeper customization, it also introduces significant security risks. Rooted devices are more vulnerable to malicious attacks, as root access can bypass many of Android's built-in security protections. This poses a particular threat to applications that handle sensitive information, such as banking apps.

There are many methods developers can use to implement root detection checks in an application. Simple checks might include searching for common rooting apps, looking for the presence of a **su** binary, checking for common open-source libraries, and others. When an application detects a rooted device, it might restrict access, limit certain features, or display a warning message to the user. However, malicious users—and sometimes even regular users—may attempt to bypass these checks using evasion techniques. There are several reasons someone might want to circumvent root detection: root access allows users to modify the device beyond manufacturer limitations, such as uninstalling system apps or running apps that require elevated privileges. If an application blocks usage on rooted devices, a user may wish to bypass this restriction in order to retain both functionality and the benefits of rooting. In this section, we'll explore how to bypass root detection by patching the application.

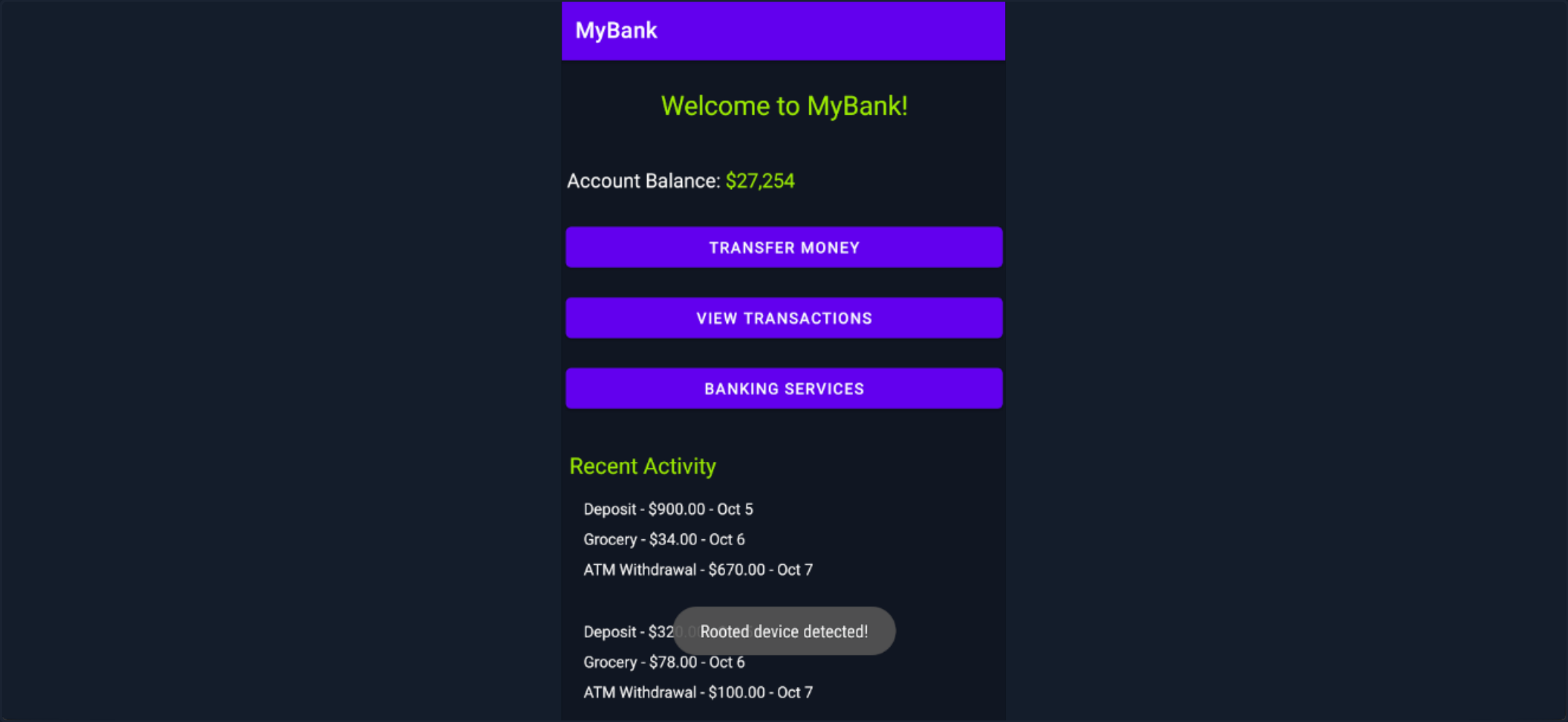
For this hands-on exercise, we suggest you use an AVD emulator, although another emulator or physical device will work as well. Once your emulator is running, connect to the device via **ADB** and install the application:

Root Detection Bypass

```
r11k@htb[/htb]$ adb connect
r11k@htb[/htb]$ adb install myapp.apk

Performing Streamed Install
Success
```

The following scenario features a bank application with root detection, used to prevent the app from running on rooted devices.



Third-Party Libraries

As we can see in the above image, the bank application detected a rooted device, and the message **Rooted device detected** is displayed. Let's open the APK file using JADX and read its source code.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ jadx-gui myapp.apk
```

> android.support.v4

> androidx

▼ com

> google

▼ hackthebox.myapp

> databinding

> AppPackageNames

> MainActivity

> R

> scottyab.rootbeer

> kotlin

> kotlinx.coroutines

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```
public void setColors() {
    SpannableString spannableString = new SpannableString("Account Balance: $27,254");
    spannableString.setSpan(new ForegroundColorSpan(Color.parseColor("#9fef00")), 17, 24, 33);
    ((TextView) findViewById(R.id.textViewBalance)).setText(spannableString);
}

void d16r45() {
    if (this.rootBeer.isRooted()) {
        this.tvRes.setText(hd87et());
        return;
    }
    l46o29();
    this.tvRes.setText(n763d6());
}
```

The above snippet reveals the method `d16r45()`, which includes the line `if (this.rootBeer.isRooted())`. If the `isRooted()` method is true, the string return from the method `hd87et()` will be printed. The imported package `com.scottyab.rootbeer.RootBeer` tells us the app is using a library called `rootbeer` to check if the device is rooted. Using APKTool, we can edit the Smali code and bypass the root detection check by reversing the `if` condition, as demonstrated in the previous section.

First, we'll disassemble the APK file and open its smali source code with a text editor.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ apktool d myapp.apk
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ vim myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity.smali
```

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```
invoke-virtual {v0}, Lcom/scottyab/rootbeer/RootBeer;->isRooted()Z
move-result v0
if-eqz v0, :cond_0
.line 74
iget-object v0, p0, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity;->tvRes:Landroid/widget/TextView;
invoke-direct {p0}, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity;->hd87et()Ljava/lang/String;
move-result-object v1
```

Changing the line `if-eqz v0, :cons_0` to `if-nez v0, :cons_0` will reverse the condition and bypass the root detection check. Before recompiling and signing the app, let's review the source code for any additional root detection mechanisms.

Build Tags

In this example, root detection is implemented by checking the build tags of the device's operating system. Build tags are part of the system's build properties and indicate how the OS was compiled. On non-rooted devices, the build tag is typically set to something like `release-keys`, whereas rooted devices (or those running custom ROMs) often use tags like `test-keys` or `dev-keys`. Let's open the APK with JADX and see how this check is implemented.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ jadx-gui myapp.apk
```

▼ com

> google

▼ hackthebox.myapp

> databinding

> AppPackageNames

> MainActivity

> R

> scottyab.rootbeer

> kotlin

> kotlinx.coroutines

> org

> Resources

APK signature

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```
void d16r45() {
    if (this.rootBeer.isRooted()) {
        this.tvRes.setText(hd87et());
        return;
    }
    l46o29();
    this.tvRes.setText(n763d6());
}

void v55n21() {
    String str = Build.TAGS;
    if (str != null && str.contains("test-keys")) {
        this.tvRes.setText(hd87et());
    } else {
        this.tvRes.setText(n763d6());
    }
}
```

The code snippet reveals another method called `v55n21()`. The line `String str = Build.TAGS;` stores the string returned from the field `Build.TAGS` in the `str` variable. If the substring `test-keys` is found within this string, the app considers the device as rooted. To bypass this check, we can modify the Smali code using APKTool by changing the condition `if (str != null && str.contains("test-keys"))`.

Root Detection Bypass

```
r11k@htb[/htb]$ vim myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity.smali
```

```
322     const-string v1, "test-keys"
323
324     .line 84
325     invoke-virtual {v0, v1}, Ljava/lang/String;->contains(Ljava/lang/CharSequence;)Z
326
327     move-result v0
328
329     if-eqz v0, :cond_0
330
331     const/4 v0, 0x1
332
333     goto :goto_0
334
```

Changing the line `if-eqz v0, :cons_0` to `if-nez v0, :cons_0` will reverse the condition and the root detection check. Again, let's hold off on recompiling and signing the app for now, and move on to another example.

Root Management Apps

In this scenario, root management applications are installed on the device. These allow users to manage root permissions on rooted Android systems, controlling which apps are granted superuser access.

Root Detection Bypass

```
r11k@htb[/htb]$ jadx-gui myapp.apk
```

com
└─ google
 └─ hackthebox.myapp
 └─ databinding
 └─ AppCompatActivity
 └─ R
 └─ scottyab.rootbeer
 └─ kotlin
 └─ kotlinx.coroutines
 └─ org

94 public void h27n99() {
95 if (this.apn.isRootManagementAppInstalled(getPackageManager())) {
96 this.tvRes.setText(hd87et());
97 return;
98 }
99 this.apn.doRandom();
100 this.tvRes.setText(n763d6());
101 }
102
103 public void n47b72() {
104 k97s21(getFilesDir().getAbsolutePath(), getExternalFilesDir(null).getAbsolutePath());
105 }
106
107 }
108
109 }

The method `h27n99()` checks whether the condition `if (this.apn.isRootManagementAppInstalled(getPackageManager()))` returns true. To understand how this check is performed, double-click on `isRootManagementAppInstalled()` to view its contents.

android.support.v4
androidx
com
└─ google
 └─ hackthebox.myapp
 └─ databinding
 └─ AppCompatActivity
 └─ R
 └─ scottyab.rootbeer
 └─ kotlin
 └─ kotlinx.coroutines
 └─ org
Resources
APK signature
Summary

package com.hackthebox.myapp;

import android.content.pm.PackageInfo;
import android.content.pm.PackageManager;

/* loaded from: classes.dex */
11 public class AppCompatActivity {
12 public void doRandom() {
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24 if (packageInfo.packageName.equalsIgnoreCase(strArr[i])) {
25 return true;
26 }
27 }
28 }
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Let's decompile the APK and edit the Smali code accordingly.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ apktool d myapp.apk
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ grep -Rnw './myapp/smali' -e 'com.hackthebox.rootmanagerapp'
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ sed -i -e 's/com.noshufou.android.su//g' -e 's/eu.chainfire.supersu//g' -e 's/com.topjohnwu.magisk//g' -e 's/
```

Listing the contents of the file `./myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/AppPackageNames.smali` shows that the package names have been successfully removed.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ cat ./myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/AppPackageNames.smali

<SNIP>
    const-string v0, ""

    const-string v1, ""

    const-string v2, ""

    const-string v3, ""

    .line 13
    filled-new-array {v2, v3, v0, v1}, [Ljava/lang/String;

    move-result-object v0
    const/4 v1, 0x0
<SNIP>
```

At this point, we are ready to recompile, sign the app, and test.

SU Binary

In Java Code

In this example, the source code is obfuscated, and reading the method names or the hardcoded messages is not possible. Let's try to follow the application flow to see if we can find any root detection methods. Checking the source code of the app using JADX reveals the following snippet.

Root Detection Bypass

```
rl1k@htb[/htb]$ jadx-gui myapp.apk
```

myapp.apk

Source code

a

a0

a1

a2

android

androidx

b

b0

b1

b2

c

c0

c1

c2

com

google.android.material

hackthebox.myapp

MainActivity

R

d

d0

d1

d2

MainActivity

```
}

@Override // androidx.fragment.app.v, androidx.activity.n, u.g, android.app.Activity
public final void onCreate(Bundle bundle) {
    String stringFromJNI;
    super.onCreate(bundle);
    setContentView(R.layout.activity_main);
    SpannableString spannableString = new SpannableString("Account Balance: $27,254");
    spannableString.setSpan(new ForegroundColorSpan(Color.parseColor("#9fef00")), 17, 24, 33);

    ((TextView) findViewById(R.id.textViewBalance)).setText(spannableString);
    String[] strArr = {" /system/app/Superuser.apk", " /sbin/su", " /system/bin/su",
"/system/xbin/su", " /data/local/xbin/su", " /data/local/bin/su", " /system/sd/xbin/su",
"/system/bin/failsafe/su", " /data/local/su", " /su/bin/su"};
    boolean z2 = false;
    int i3 = 0;
    while (true) {
        if (i3 >= 10) {
            break;
        } else if (new File(strArr[i3]).exists()) {
            z2 = true;
            break;
        } else {
            i3++;
        }
    }
    if (z2) {
        stringFromJNI = stringFromJNI2();
    } else {
        this.f1718v.getClass().

```



```
> e
> e0
> e1
> e2
```

Within Native Code

The screenshot shows an IDE with a project structure on the left and Java code on the right. The project structure includes folders like 'com', 'google', 'hackthebox.myapp', and files like 'AppPackageNames', 'MainActivity', 'R', and 'scottyab.rootbeer'. The code on the right is the onCreate method of MainActivity, showing a toast message and setting up a TextView.

The screenshot shows an IDE with a project structure on the left and Java code in MainActivity on the right.

Project Structure (Left):

- com
 - google
 - hackthebox.myapp
 - databinding
 - AppPackageNames
 - MainActivity** (selected)
 - R
 - scottyab.rootbeer
- kotlin
- kotlinx.coroutines
- org
- Resources
- APK signature
- Summary

Java Code (Right):

```
31  /* loaded from: classes.dex */
    public class MainActivity extends AppCompatActivity {
        TextView tvRes;
        int tvResults;
        StringBuilder deviceInfo = new StringBuilder();
        RootBeer rootBeer = new RootBeer(this);
        public AppPackageNames apn = new AppPackageNames();

        private native void f1474h(int textViewId);

        private native String hd87et();

        private native void l46o29();

        public native void k97s21(String internalPath, String externalPath);

        public native String n763d6();

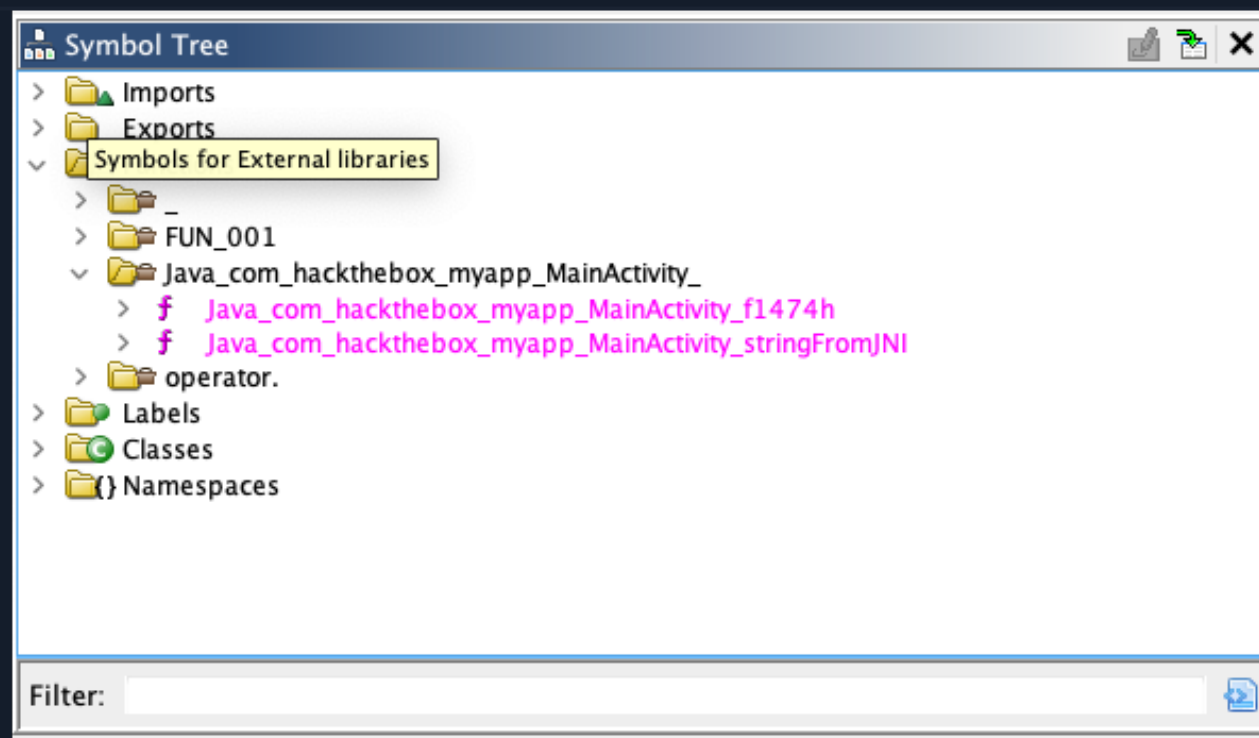
        static {
33      System.loadLibrary("myapp");
        }
    }
```

Let's use APKTool to extract the library from the APK.

Then, can open the extracted library using Ghidra.

click on **File** -> **Import File**, navigate to the **libmyapp.so** file, click **Select File To Import**, and click **OK** at each of the following pop-up windows.

Next, double-click on the imported file, click **Yes** and **Analyze** on the next pop-up window. An inspection of the functions included in this library (under **Symbol Tree** at the left of the window) reveals the function **Java_com_hackthebox_myapp_MainActivity_f1474h**.



Let's click on it and view the library's source code in the **Decompile** pane at the left of the window.

```
Decompile: Java_com_hackthebox_myapp_MainActivity_f1474h - (libmyapp.so)

1
2 void Java_com_hackthebox_myapp_MainActivity_f1474h(long *param_1, _jmethodID *param_2)
3
4 {
5     int iVar1;
6     long lVar2;
7     ulong uVar3;
8
9     iVar1 = access("/system/app/Superuser.apk",0);
10    uVar3 = 1;
11    if (iVar1 == -1) {
12        iVar1 = access("/sbin/su",0);
13        if (iVar1 == -1) {
14            iVar1 = access("/system/bin/su",0);
15            if (iVar1 == -1) {
16                iVar1 = access("/system/xbin/su",0);
17                if (iVar1 == -1) {
18                    iVar1 = access("/data/local/xbin/su",0);
19                    if (iVar1 == -1) {
20                        iVar1 = access("/data/local/bin/su",0);
21                        if (iVar1 == -1) {
22                            iVar1 = access("/system/sd/xbin/su",0);
23                            if (iVar1 == -1) {
24                                iVar1 = access("/system/bin/failsafe/su",0);
25                                if (iVar1 == -1) {
26                                    iVar1 = access("/data/local/su",0);
27                                    if (iVar1 == -1) {
28                                        iVar1 = access("/su/bin/su",0);
29                                        uVar3 = (ulong)(iVar1 != -1);
30                                    }
31                                }
32                            }
33                        }
34                    }
35                }
36            }
37        }
38    }
39    lVar2 = (**(code **))(*param_1 + 0xf8))(param_1,param_2);
40    if (lVar2 != 0) {
41        lVar2 = (**(code **))(*param_1 + 0x108))(param_1,lVar2,"showToast",&DAT_00113485);
42        if (lVar2 != 0) {
43            _JNIEnv::CallVoidMethod((_jobject *)param_1,param_2,lVar2,uVar3);
44            return;
45        }
46    }
47    return;
48 }
```

This function performs several checks for rooted status, such as verifying the presence of files like `/system/bin/su`. It uses the same detection technique mentioned earlier but executes it within native code. Since this function solely handles root detection, we can bypass it by removing the call to `f1474h()` from the `onCreate()` method in the Smali code.

Let's open the file `myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity.smali` using a text editor and search for the method `f1474h()` within the `onCreate()` method.

Root Detection Bypass

```
r11k@htb[/htb]$ vim myapp/smali/com/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity.smali
```

Code: smali

```
<SNIP>
    .line 52
    invoke-virtual {p0}, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity; ->v55n21()V

    .line 54
    invoke-virtual {p0}, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity; ->h27n99()V

    .line 56
    iget p1, p0, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity; ->tvResults:I

    invoke-direct {p0, p1}, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity; ->f1474h(I)V

    return-void
.end method
<SNIP>
```

Next, remove the following lines.

```
<SNIP>
    invoke-direct {p0, p1}, Lcom/hackthebox/myapp/MainActivity; ->f1474h(I)V
<SNIP>
```

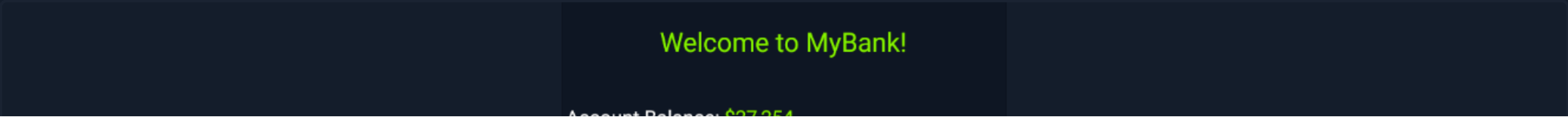
Then, we recompile, sign, and install the modified application.

Root Detection Bypass

```
r11k@htb[/htb]$ apktool b myapp
r11k@htb[/htb]$ echo -e "password\npassword\njohn doe\ntest\ntest\ntest\ntest\ntest\nyes" > params.txt
r11k@htb[/htb]$ cat params.txt | keytool -genkey -keystore key.keystore -validity 1000 -keyalg RSA -alias john
r11k@htb[/htb]$ zipalign -p -f -v 4 myapp/dist/myapp.apk myapp_aligned.apk
r11k@htb[/htb]$ echo password | apksigner sign --ks key.keystore myapp_aligned.apk
r11k@htb[/htb]$ adb uninstall com.hackthebox.myapp
r11k@htb[/htb]$ adb install myapp_aligned.apk
```

```
Performing Incremental Install
Serving...
All files should be loaded. Notifying the device.
Success
Install command complete in 381 ms
```

Finally, running the app on the device displays the message `Root detection bypassed`.



Account Balance: \$27,254

TRANSFER MONEY

VIEW TRANSACTIONS

BANKING SERVICES

Recent Activity

Deposit - \$900.00 - Oct 5

Grocery - \$34.00 - Oct 6

ATM Withdrawal - \$670.00 - Oct 7


Deposit - \$320.00 - Oct 5

Grocery - \$78.00 - Oct 6

ATM Withdrawal - \$100.00 - Oct 7

Root detection bypassed!

It is not recommended to delete a function or remove the entire library without first understanding its role. Other parts of the application may rely on functions within the library, and doing so could cause the app to crash. In many cases, root detection relies on a combination of multiple checks—both in Java and native code—to increase robustness.



Connect to Pwnbox

Your own web-based Parrot Linux instance to play our labs.

Pwnbox Location

UK

31ms

Terminate Pwnbox to switch location

Start Instance

/ 1 spawns left


Waiting to start...

Enable step-by-step solutions for all questions

Questions

Answer the question(s) below to complete this Section and earn cubes!

Cheat Sheet


+ 6

Download and install both APK files into the emulator. After successfully bypassing the root detection mechanism, what message is displayed on the screen? (Note: The "SU Binary In Java Code" step is excluded from this task.)

Submit your answer here...

+10 Streak pts

 Submit

 [myapp_detection_mechanisms.zip](#)

 Previous

Next 

 Cheat Sheet

 Go to Questions

Table of Contents

Extracting and Enumerating APK Files


 Introduction

 Disassembling the APK


Understanding Smali

Analyzing Application's Source Code

 Reading Hardcoded Strings

 Bad Cryptography Implementation

 Reversing Hybrid Apps

 Reading Obfuscated Code


 Deobfuscating Code


Analyzing Native Libraries

 Reversing Shared Objects

 Reversing DLL Files

Application Patching


 Authentication Bypass

 Modifying Game Apps

 License Verification Bypass

 Root Detection Bypass

Skills Assessment

 Skills Assessment

My Workstation

O F F L I N E

 Start Instance

 / 1 spawns left

