CSE 484 / CSE M 584: Computer Security and Privacy

Software Security: Buffer Overflow Defenses

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Admin

- Assignments:
  – Homework 1: Due today at 11:59pm
  – Lab 1: Sign up, granting access ~once per day, see forum

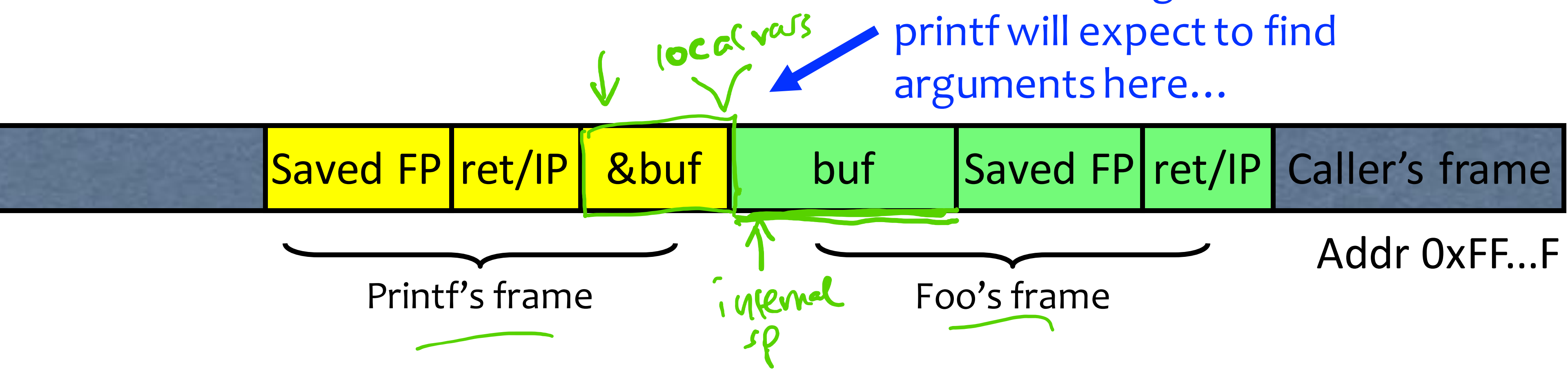
Summary of Printf Risks

- Printf takes a variable number of arguments
  - E.g., printf(“Here’s an int: %d”, 10);
- Assumptions about input can lead to trouble
  - E.g., printf(buf) when buf=“Hello world” versus when buf=“Hello world %d”
  - Can be used to advance printf’s internal stack pointer
  - Can read memory
    - E.g., printf(“%x”) will print in hex format whatever printf’s internal stack pointer is pointing to at the time
  - Can write memory
    - E.g., printf(“Hello%n”); will write “5” to the memory location specified by whatever printf’s internal SP is pointing to at the time

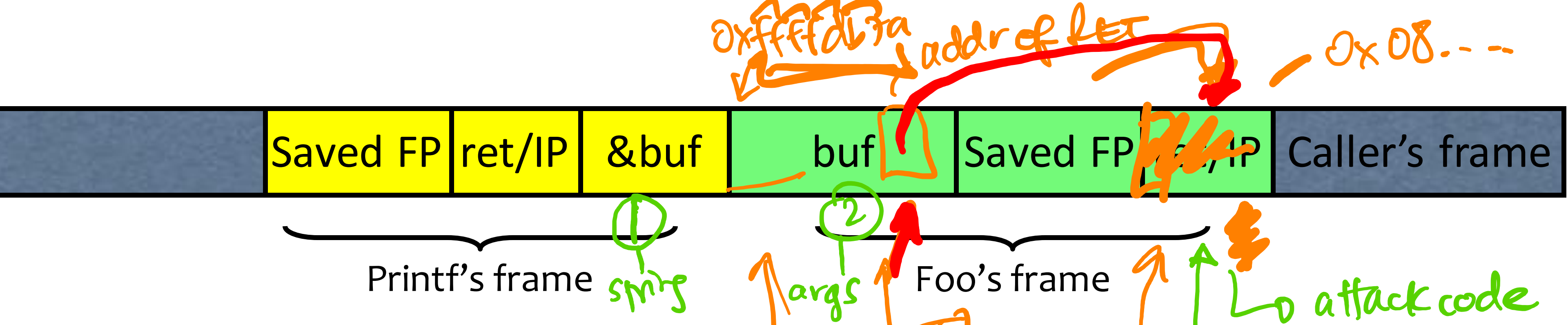
How Can We Attack This?

```
foo() {
        char buf[…];
        strncpy(buf, readUntrustedInput(), sizeof(buf));
        printf(buf); //vulnerable
}
```

If format string contains % then printf will expect to find arguments here…



What should the string returned by readUntrustedInput() contain??



Goal: overwrite RET by executing printf()

what goes in buf?

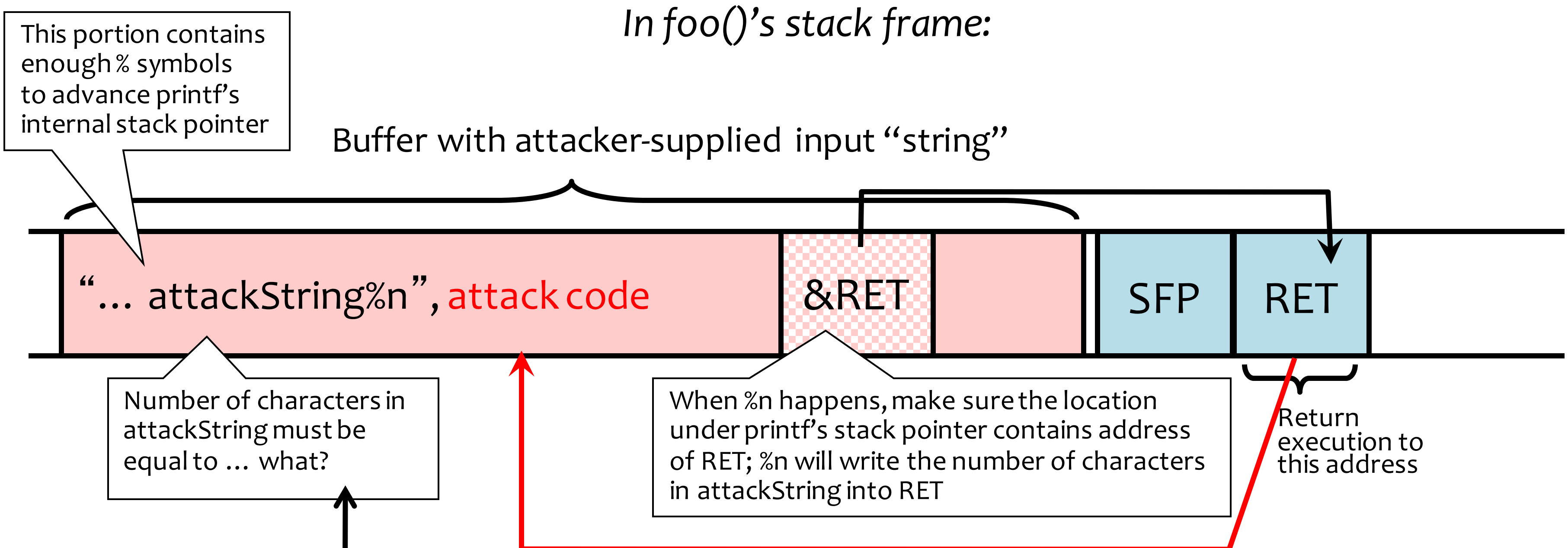
- %n to write → overwrite RET — where: (addr of RET)
- attack code
- %d, %x, %u

what to write?
what should %n write?
↳ address of attack code

Trick 1: write 4x, not 1x (4x %n)

Trick 2: width specifier ("%10d", 5) → "5"
("%08d", 5) → "___5"

Using %n to Overwrite Return Address



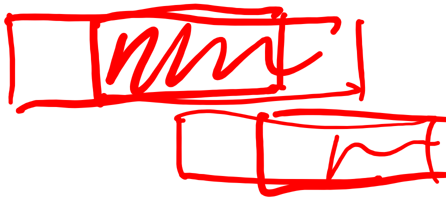
C allows you to concisely specify the "width" to print, causing printf to pad by printing additional blank characters without reading anything else off the stack.

Example: printf("%5d", 10) will print three spaces followed by the integer: "   10"
That is, %n will print 5, not 2.

Key idea: do this 4 times with the right numbers to overwrite the return address byte-by-byte.
(4x %n to write into &RET, &RET+1, &RET+2, &RET+3)

Recommended Reading

- It will be hard to do Lab 1 without:
  - Reading (see course schedule):
    - Smashing the Stack for Fun and Profit
    - Exploiting Format String Vulnerabilities
  - Attending section next week



Buffer Overflow: Causes and Cures

- Typical memory exploit involves code injection
  - Put malicious code at a predictable location in memory, usually masquerading as data
  - Trick vulnerable program into passing control to it

- Possible defenses:
  1. Prevent execution of untrusted code
  2. Stack "canaries"
  3. Encrypt pointers
  4. Address space layout randomization
  5. Code analysis
  6. …

Executable Space Protection

- Mark all writeable memory locations as non-executable
  - Example: Microsoft's Data Execution Prevention (DEP)
  - **This blocks many code injection exploits**
- Hardware support
  - AMD "NX" bit (no-execute), Intel "XD" bit (executed disable) (in post-2004 CPUs)
  - Makes memory page non-executable
- Widely deployed
  - Windows XP SP2+ (2004), Linux since 2004 (check distribution), OS X 10.5+ (10.4 for stack but not heap), Android 2.3+

What Does "Executable Space Protection" Not Prevent?

- Can still corrupt stack …
  - … or function pointers
  - … or critical data on the heap

- **As long as RET points into existing code, executable space protection will not block control transfer!**

  → return-to-libc exploits

- change local variables in the program
- point to other code
- crash
- fake stack frames

return-to-libc

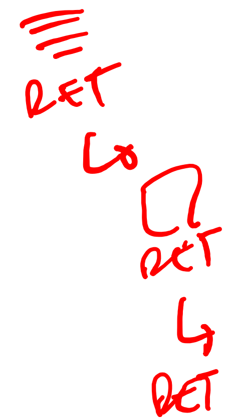
- Overwrite saved EIP with address of **any library routine**
  - Arrange stack to look like arguments

- Does not look like a huge threat
  - Attacker cannot execute arbitrary code
  - But … ?
    - Can still call critical functions, like exec

- See lab 1, sploit 8 (extra credit)

return-to-libc on Steroids

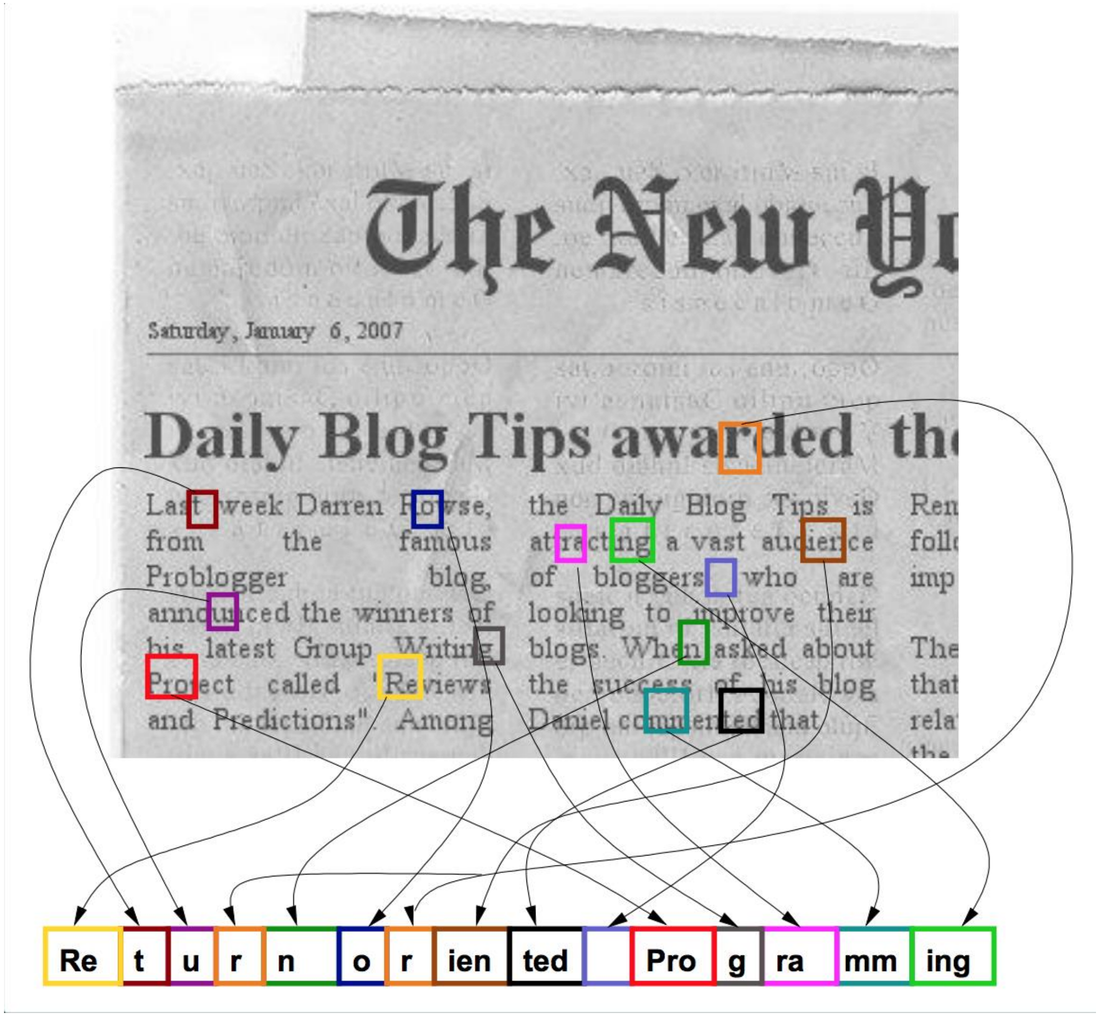
- Insight: Overwritten saved EIP need not point to the *beginning* of a library routine
- **Any** existing instruction in the code image is fine
  - Will execute the sequence starting from this instruction
- What if instruction sequence contains RET?
  - Execution will be transferred… to where?
  - Read the word pointed to by stack pointer (ESP)
    - Guess what? Its value is under attacker's control!
  - Use it as the new value for EIP
    - Now control is transferred to an address of attacker's choice!
  - Increment ESP to point to the next word on the stack



Chaining RETs for Fun and Profit

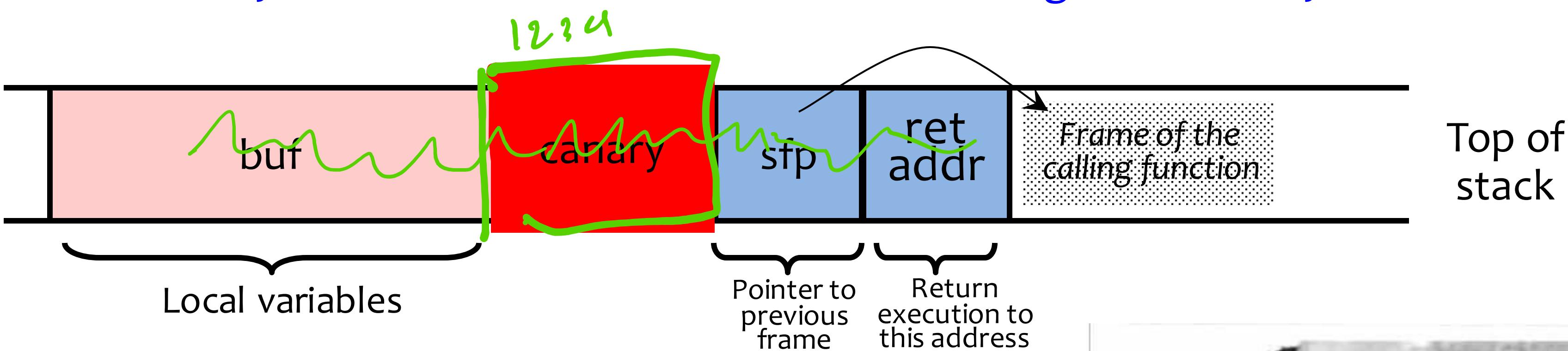
- Can chain together sequences ending in RET
  - Krahmer, "x86-64 buffer overflow exploits and the borrowed code chunks exploitation technique" (2005)
- What is this good for?
- Answer [Shacham et al.]: everything
  - Turing-complete language
  - Build "gadgets" for load-store, arithmetic, logic, control flow, system calls
  - Attack can perform arbitrary computation using no injected code at all – return-oriented programming

Return-Oriented Programming



Run-Time Checking: StackGuard

- Embed "canaries" (stack cookies) in stack frames and verify their integrity prior to function return
  - Any overflow of local variables will damage the canary



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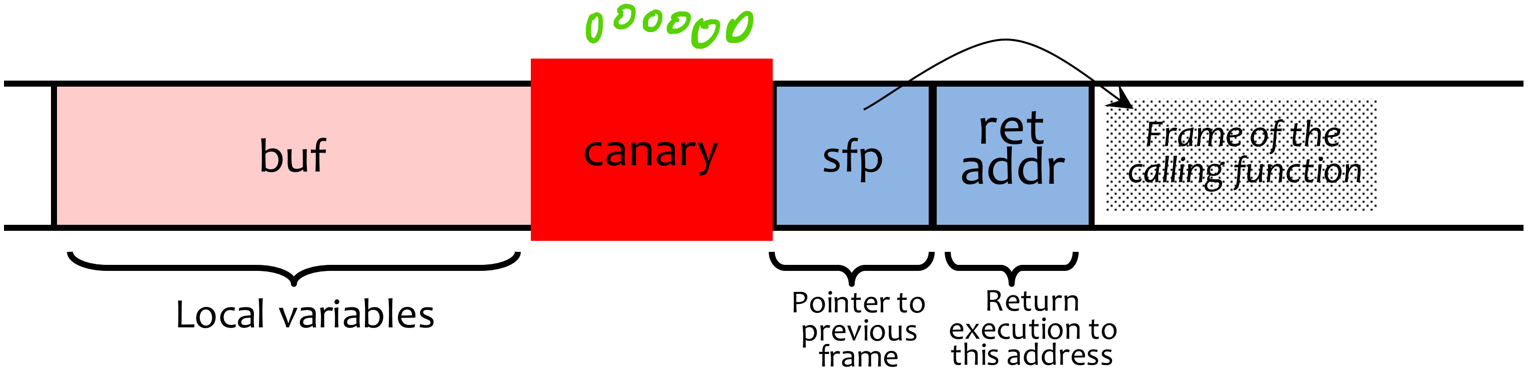


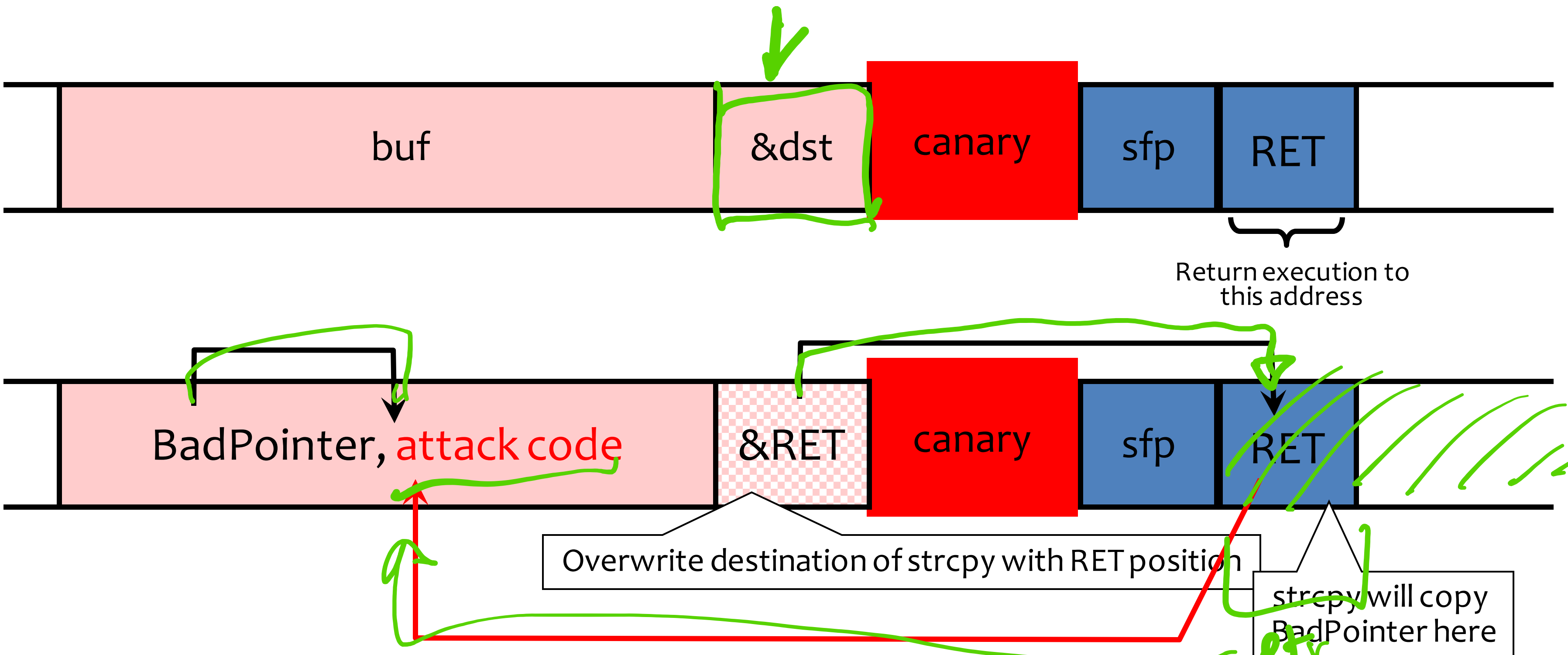
- Choose random canary string on program start
  - Attacker can't guess what the value of canary will be
- Terminator canary: "\0", newline, linefeed, EOF
  - String functions like strcpy won't copy beyond "\0"

StackGuard Implementation

- StackGuard requires code recompilation
- Checking canary integrity prior to every function return causes a performance penalty
  - For example, 8% for Apache Web server at one point in time
- StackGuard can be defeated
  - A single memory write where the attacker controls both the value and the destination is sufficient

Defeating StackGuard

- Suppose program contains strcpy(dst,buf) where attacker controls both dst and buf
  - Example: dst is a local pointer variable



ASLR: Address Space Randomization

- Randomly arrange address space of key data areas for a process
  - Base of executable region
  - Position of stack
  - Position of heap
  - Position of libraries
- Introduced by Linux PaX project in 2001
- Adopted by OpenBSD in 2003
- Adopted by Linux in 2005

ASLR: Address Space Randomization

- Deployment (examples)
  - Linux kernel since 2.6.12 (2005+)
  - Android 4.0+
  - iOS 4.3+ ; OS X 10.5+
  - Microsoft since Windows Vista (2007)
- Attacker goal: Guess or figure out target address (or addresses)
- ASLR more effective on 64-bit architectures

Attacking ASLR

- **NOP slides** and **heap spraying** to increase likelihood for custom code (e.g., on heap)
- Brute force attacks or memory disclosures to map out memory on the fly
  - Disclosing a single address can reveal the location of all code within a library, depending on the ASLR implementation

Other Possible Solutions

- Use safe programming languages, e.g., Java
  - What about legacy C code?
  - (Though Java doesn't magically fix all security issues ☺)
- Static analysis of source code to find overflows
- Dynamic testing: "fuzzing"