CSE 484: Computer Security and Privacy

# Software Security: Buffer Overflow Defenses

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# Admin

- Homework 1: Due Today 11:45pm
- Lab 1:
  - Online: https://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse484/21sp/assignments/lab1.pdf
  - Try to form groups and do "Environment and Sign-Up" before quiz section

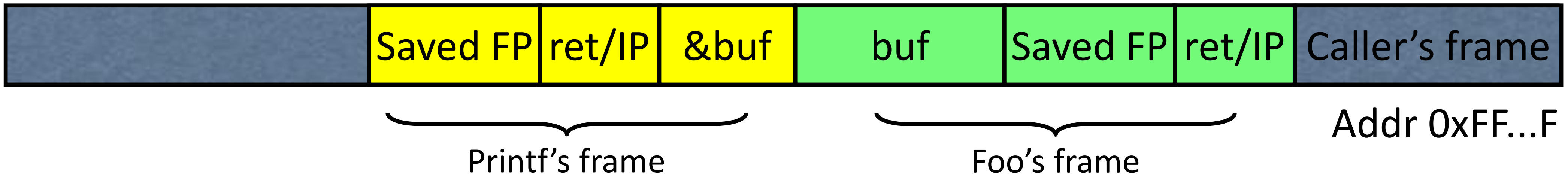
# Summary of Printf Risks

- 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
}
```

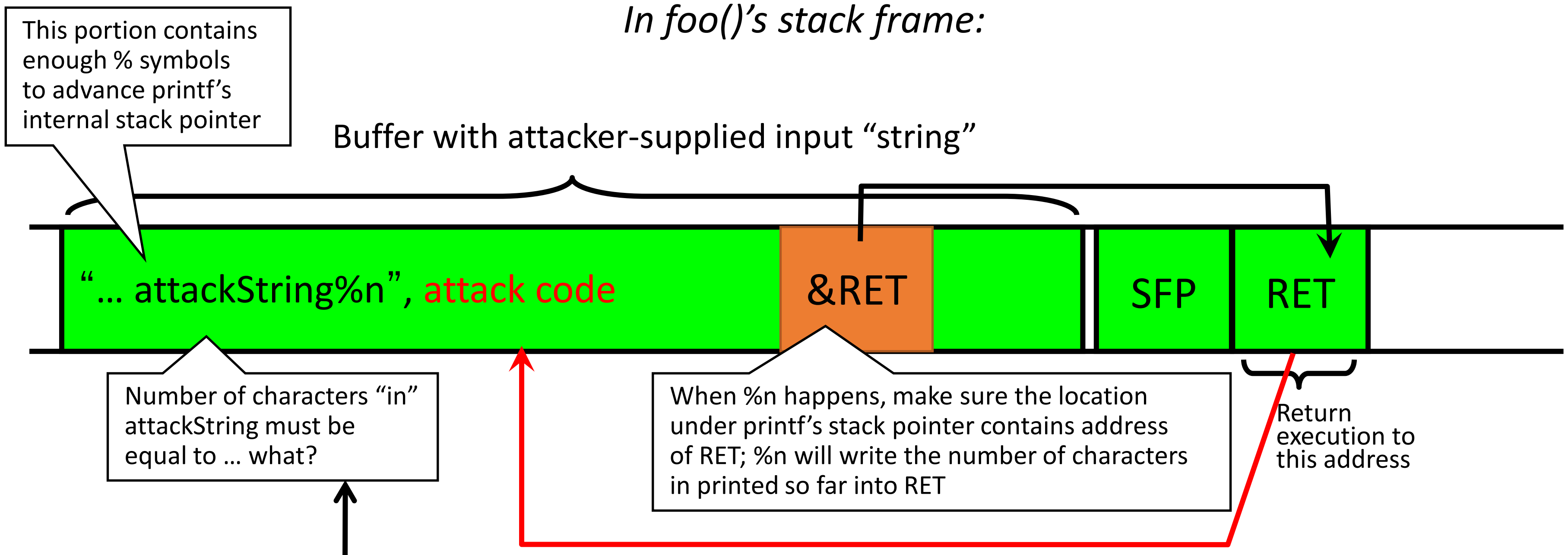
If format string contains % then printf will expect to find arguments here…




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

**Different compilers / compiler options / architectures might vary**

# Using %n to Overwrite Return Address




Why is "in" in quotes? 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%n", 10) will print three spaces followed by the integer: "   10"
That is, the %n will write 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)**

# The exploitation twilight zone

- During an exploitation attempt sometimes you have to ‘let it run’
  - Overflow a buffer
  - Change things
  - Let program run for ‘a bit’
  - Everything triggers!

- Printf exploit a perfect example

# 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

# Buffer Overflow: Causes and Cures

- Classical 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. …

# **Defense:** 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

# return-to-libc

- Overwrite saved ret (IP) with address of **any library routine**
  - Arrange stack to look like arguments

- Does not look like a huge threat
  - …

- Canvas in-class activity, Oct 8!

# return-to-libc

- Overwrite saved ret (IP) with address of **any library routine**
  - Arrange stack to look like arguments

- Does not look like a huge threat
  - …
  - We can call *any* function we want!
  - Say, exec ☺

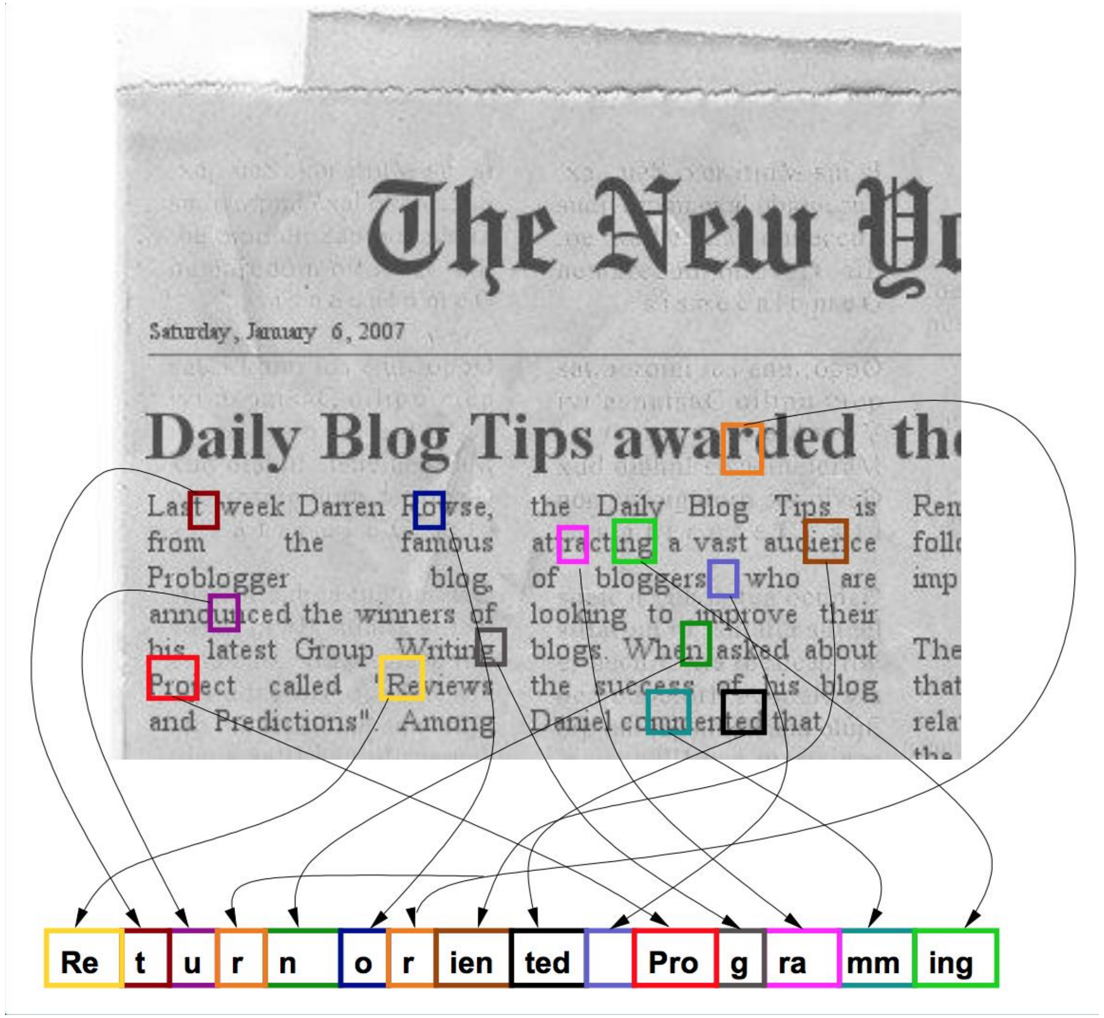
# return-to-libc++

- 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 (SP)
    - Guess what?  Its value is under attacker's control!
  - Use it as the new value for IP
    - Now control is transferred to an address of attacker's choice!
  - Increment SP to point to the next word on the stack

# Chaining RETs

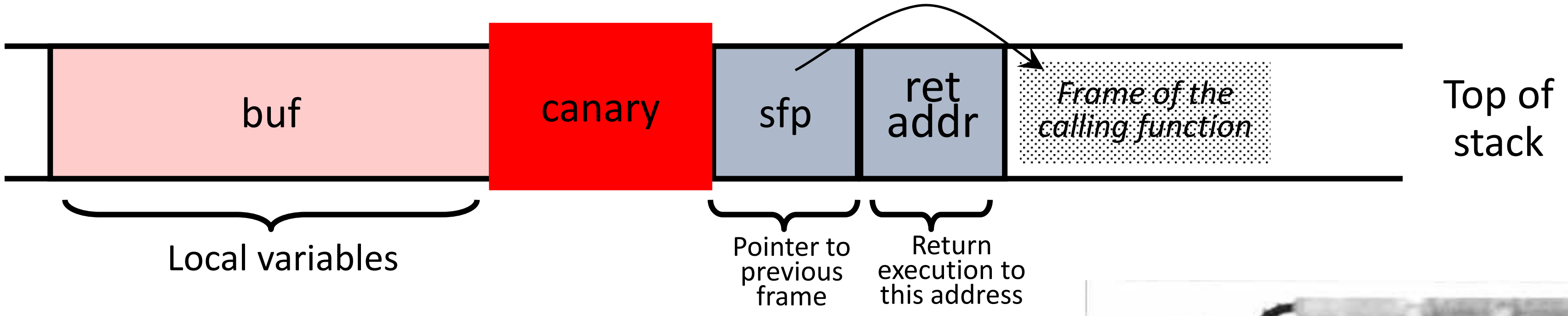
- Can chain together sequences ending in RET
  - Krahmer, “x86-64 buffer overflow exploits and the borrowed code chunks exploitation technique” (2005)
- What is this good for?
- Answer [Shacham et al.]: everything
  - Turing-complete language
  - Build “gadgets” for load-store, arithmetic, logic, control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

# Return-Oriented Programming



# **Defense**: 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




# **Defense**: Run-Time Checking: StackGuard

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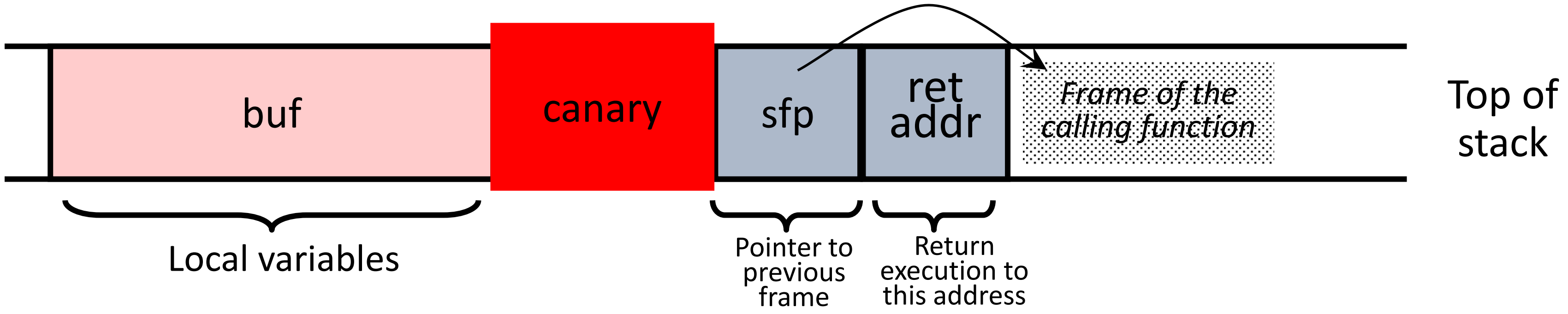


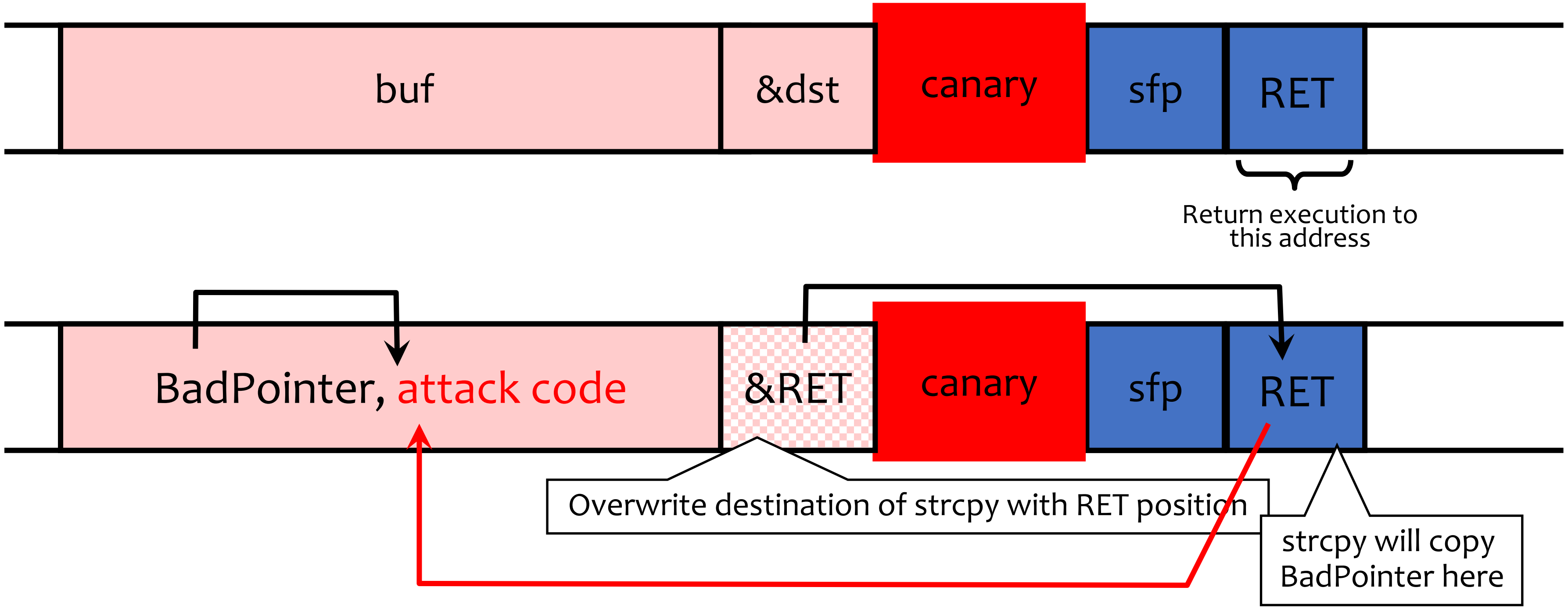

- Choose random canary string on program start
  - Attacker can't guess what the value of canary will be
- Canary contains: "\0", newline, linefeed, EOF
  - String functions like strcpy won't copy beyond "\0"

# 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

# Defeating StackGuard

- StackGuard can be defeated
  - A single memory write where the attacker controls both the value and the destination is sufficient
- Suppose program contains copy(buf,attacker-input) and copy(dst,buf)
  - Example: dst is a local pointer variable
  - Attacker controls both buf and dst



# 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 sleds** and **heap spraying** to increase likelihood for adversary's code to be reached (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

# Admin (Reminders)

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