CSci 5271
Introduction to Computer Security
Day 4: Low-level attacks

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Other array problems

- Missing/wrong bounds check
  - One unsigned comparison suffices
  - Two signed comparisons needed
- Beware of clever loops
  - Premature optimization

Outline

Non-buffer problems

Classic code injection attacks

Announcements intermission

Shellcode techniques

Exploiting other vulnerabilities

Integer overflow

- Fixed size result $\neq$ math result
- Sum of two positive `int`s negative or less than addend
- Also multiplication, left shift, etc.
- Negation of most-negative value
- `(low + high)/2`

Integer overflow example

```
int n = read_int();
obj *p = malloc(n * sizeof(obj));
for (i = 0; i < n; i++)
    p[i] = read_obj();
```

Signed and unsigned

- Unsigned gives more range for, e.g., `size_t`
- At machine level, many but not all operations are the same
- Most important difference: ordering
- In C, signed overflow is undefined behavior

Mixing integer sizes

- Complicated rules for implicit conversions
  - Also includes signed vs. unsigned
- Generally, convert before operation:
  - E.g., `1ULL << 63`
- Sign-extend vs. zero-extend
  - `char c = 0xff; (int)c`

Null pointers

- Vanilla null dereference is usually non-exploitable (just a DoS)
- But not if there could be an offset (e.g., field of struct)
- And not in the kernel if an untrusted user has allocated the zero page

Undefined behavior

- C standard "undefined behavior": anything could happen
- Can be unexpectedly bad for security
- Most common problem: compiler optimizes assuming undefined behavior cannot happen

Linux kernel example

```
struct sock *sk = tun->sk;
// ...
if (!tun)
    return POLLERR;
// more uses of tun and sk
```

Format strings

- `printf` format strings are a little interpreter
- `printf(msg)` with untrusted `msg` lets the attacker program it
- Allows:
  - Dumping stack contents
  - Denial of service
  - Arbitrary memory modifications!

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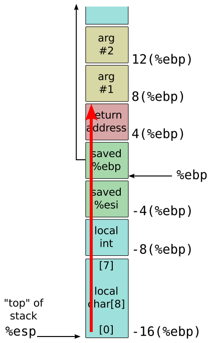
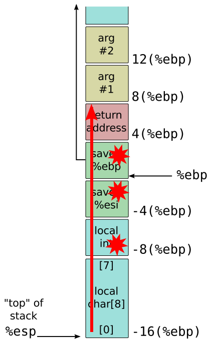
Overwriting the return address



Collateral damage



Collateral damage

- Stop the program from crashing early
- 'Overwrite' with same value, or another legal one
- Minimize time between overwrite and use

Other code injection targets

- Function pointers
  - Local, global, on heap
- `longjmp` buffers
- GOT (PLT) / import tables
- Exception handlers

Indirect overwrites

- Change a data pointer used to access a code pointer
- Easiest if there are few other uses
- Common examples
  - Frame pointer
  - C++ object vtable pointer

Non-sequential writes

- E.g. missing bounds check, corrupted pointer
- Can be more flexible and targeted
  - E.g., a *write-what-where* primitve
- More likely needs an absolute location
- May have less control of value written

Unexpected-size writes

- Attacks don't need to obey normal conventions
- Overwrite one byte within a pointer
- Use mis-aligned word writes to isolate a byte

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Project meeting scheduling

- For pre-proposal due Wednesday night:
- Will pick a half-hour meeting slot, use for three different meetings
- List of about 65 slots on the web page
- Choose ordered list in pre-proposal, length inverse to popularity

BCVI 1.1 released

- The `:%!` command allowed arbitrary programs
  - E.g., `rootshell`
- Fixed by limiting to a whitelist in sudo mode
- Download new code and remake to update your VM
- 64-bit version also now available

Sending input to BCVI

- Common challenges with scripting interactive programs:
  - Only work if input is from a (pseudo-)terminal
  - Need to react to program outputs
- Neither challenge applies to BCVI, you can just send to its standard input
- If you want to try out a fancier tool, see `expect`

HA1 general reminders

- Read the instructions carefully
- `bcvi` vs. `sudobcvi`
- Moodle or email to staff available for questions
- Don't forget to `test-exploit`

Readings reminders

- For last Wed.: buffer overflows and defenses
- For today: Attack techniques (under ASLR)
- Coming up: academic (ACM) papers, campus/proxy downloads

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Basic definition

- Shellcode: attacker supplied instructions implementing malicious functionality
- Name comes from example of starting a shell
- Often requires attention to machine-language encoding

Classic execve `/bin/sh`

- `execve(fname, argv, envp)` system call
- Specialized syscall calling conventions
- Omit unneeded arguments
- Doable in under 25 bytes for Linux/x86

Avoiding zero bytes

- Common requirement for shellcode in C string
- Analogy: broken 0 key on keyboard
- May occur in other parts of encoding as well

More restrictions

- No newlines
- Only printable characters
- Only alphanumeric characters
- "English Shellcode" (CCS'09)

Transformations

- Fold case, escapes, Latin1 to Unicode, etc.
- Invariant: unchanged by transformation
- Pre-image: becomes shellcode only after transformation

Multi-stage approach

- Initially executable portion unpacks rest from another format
- Improves efficiency in restricted environments
- But self-modifying code has pitfalls

NOP sleds

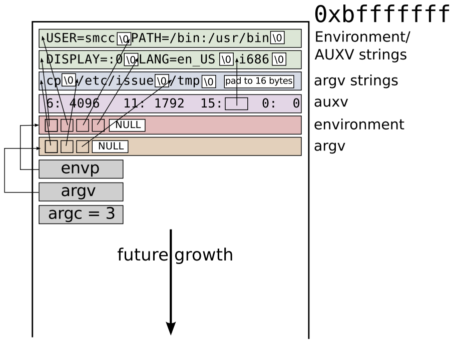
- Goal: make the shellcode an easier target to hit
- Long sequence of no-op instructions, real shellcode at the end
  - x86: 0x90 0x90 0x90 0x90 0x90 . . . shellcode

Where to put shellcode?

- In overflowed buffer, if big enough
- Anywhere else you can get it
  - Nice to have: predictable location
- Convenient choice of Unix local exploits:

Where to put shellcode?

Environment variables



Code reuse

- If can't get your own shellcode, use existing code
- Classic example: `system` implementation in C library
  - "Return to libc" attack
- More variations on this later

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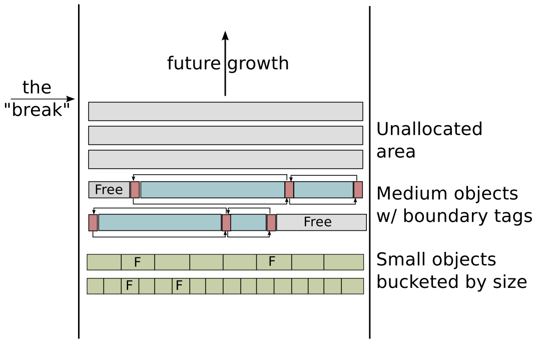
Non-control data overwrite

- Overwrite other security-sensitive data
- No change to program control flow
- Set user ID to 0, set permissions to all, etc.

Heap meta-data

- Boundary tags similar to doubly-linked list
- Overwritten on heap overflow
- Arbitrary write triggered on `free`
- Simple version stopped by sanity checks

Heap meta-data


future growth
the "break"
Unallocated area
Free
Free
Medium objects w/ boundary tags
F
F
F
F
Small objects bucketed by size

Use after free

- Write to new object overwrites old, or vice-versa
- Key issue is what heap object is reused for
- Influence by controlling other heap operations

Integer overflows

- Easiest to use: overflow in small (8-, 16-bit) value, or only overflowed value used
- 2GB write in 100 byte buffer
  - Find some other way to make it stop
- Arbitrary single overwrite
  - Use math to figure out overflowing value

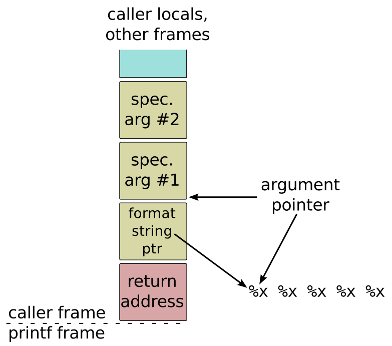
Null pointer dereference

- Add offset to make a predictable pointer
  - On Windows, interesting address start low
- Allocate data on the zero page
  - Most common in user-space to kernel attacks
  - Read more dangerous than a write

Format string attack

- Attacker-controlled format: little interpreter
- Step one: add extra integer specifiers, dump stack
  - Already useful for information disclosure

Format string attack layout



caller locals, other frames

spec. arg #2

spec. arg #1

argument pointer

format string ptr

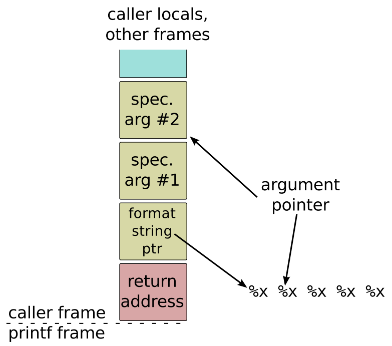
return address

%x %x %x %x %x

caller frame

printf frame

Format string attack layout



caller locals, other frames

spec. arg #2

spec. arg #1

argument pointer

format string ptr

return address

%x %x %x %x %x

caller frame

printf frame

Format string attack: overwrite

- `%n` specifier: store number of chars written so far to pointer arg
- Advance format arg pointer to other attacker-controlled data
- Control number of chars written with padding
- On x86, use unaligned stores to create pointer

Next time

- Defenses and counter-attacks