“I’m paranoid, but am I paranoid enough?”
Special Techniques for Secure Programs

- Buffer overflows are bad in any case
- Some problems are only a risk for secure programs
- But what is a “secure program”?
- A secure program is one that runs with one set of permissions and accepts input from someone with lesser permissions
- Includes most network servers and setUID programs, and many system daemons
SetUID Programs Are More Sensitive

- Anyone on the local machine can invoke them
- Many environmental influences that can be controlled by the invoker
- On the other hand, network daemons can be accessed remotely
Macro Injection Attacks

- Suppose a program is querying an SQL database based on valid userID and query string:
  
  `sprintf(buf, "select where user="\"\%s\"" && query="\"\%s\"", uname, query);`

- What if `query` is
  
  `foo" || user="root`

- The actual command passed to SQL is
  
  `select where user="uname" && query = "foo" || user="root"

- This will retrieve records it shouldn’t have

- Stored SQL procedures are much safer
What Was Wrong with That Slide?
Did You Notice?

• I wrote `sprintf` instead of `snprintf`
• I was mostly trying to save room on a complex slide
• I was also curious to see who’d notice...
More Generally

- If you invoke an external program, be aware of its parsing rules
- Especially serious for languages like Shell, Perl, and Python, where data can be converted to statements and executed
- Example: what delimits different arguments to the shell?
- Blank, tab, newline? Why?
IFS

- The shell variable IFS lists the delimiters used when parsing command lines
- If you can change it, you can control the shell’s parsing
- (The exact effects are subtle, because of the risks of just accepting it blindly — know your semantics!)
Other Sensitive Environment Variables

- **PATH** Search path for finding commands
  - If “.” is first, you’ll execute a command in the current directory.
    What if it’s booby-trapped?
  - Secure programs should always use absolute paths or reset PATH
- **ENV** With some shells, a file to execute on startup
- **LD_LIBRARY_PATH** The search path for shared libraries
- **LD_PRELOAD** Extra modules loaded at runtime

Some of these are disabled for setUID programs, to minimize the risks
File Descriptors

- Normally, file descriptor 0 is stdin, 1 is stdout, and 2 is stderr
- The `open()` system call allocates the first available file descriptor, starting from 0
- Suppose you close fd 1, then invoke a setUID program that will open some sensitive file for output
- Anything it prints to stdout will overwrite that file
- Similar tricks for fd 0
Some Other Inherited Attributes

current directory
root directory
resource limits
umask
timers
signal mask
open files
Current uid
Effective uid

see chroot()

see getrlimit()

see getitimer()

See the FIOCLEX option to ioctl
Why Do These Matter?

- Will such a program misbehave?
- Will it core dump after having read a sensitive file? (Some systems prevent core dumps of setUID programs.)
- If the program terminates prematurely, will it leave some crucial resource locked?
Access Control

- Some privileged programs need to read or write user-specified files
- Example: web server (remote), lpr (setUID)
- Very tricky...
Remote Access Control

- Don’t want to offer all system files to, say, web users
- Operating system doesn’t help — too many files are world-readable
- Web server must implement its own access control
- Several different levels
Filename Parsing

- User supplies pathname; application must check for validity
- Administrator specifies list of accessible files and/or directories
- Sometimes, wildcards — *, ?, and more — are permitted
- Application must parse supplied filename
- Remarkably difficult
The “..” Problem

- Attackers try to get at other files
- Simplest attack: put .. in the path
  - `http://example.com/../../etc/passwd`
- The .. can occur later:
  - `http://example.com/a/b/../../etc/passwd`
- If directory `/dir` is legal, what about `/dir/../../dir/file`? Do you want to count levels?
- Watch out for `/dir///../../file` — replicated `/`’s counts as a single one
Application Syntax Issues

- Applications can have their own weird syntax
- Example: in URLs, %xx can specify two hex digits for the character. %2F is the same as /
- When is that expanded?
Unicode

- Standard for representing (virtually) all of the world’s scripts
  - There are proposals for Klingon and Tengwar ("Elvish") codepoints
- *Many* problems!
- Some symbols look the same, but have different values: ordinary / — technically called “solidus” — is U+002F, but U+2044, “fraction slash”, looks the same
- “Combining characters” and “grapheme joiners” make life even more complicated. Thus, á can be U+00C1 or the two-character sequence U+0041,U+0301
- Comparison rules have to be application-dependent — and watch out for false visual equivalences; these have already been used for attacks, especially with Cyrillic domain names
Operating Systems Don’t Have Such Problems

- Conceptually, you’re trying to permit certain subtrees.
- The application is trying to map a string into a subtree.
- The OS has one mapping function; the application has another.
- The OS doesn’t care about the tree structure for access control; it uses its own mechanisms.
- The OS stores permissions with the data; no separate parse is needed.
File Access by SetUID Programs

- Some commands — `lpr`, for example — need to write to restricted places, but also read users’ files
- Need permissions to write to spool directory; need user permissions to read users’ files
- How can this be done?
First Attempt: Access() System Call

```c
if (access(file, R_OK) == 0) {
    fd = open(file, O_RDONLY);
    ret = read(fd, buf, sizeof buf);
    ....
}
else {
    perror(file);
    return -1;
}
```

What’s wrong?
Several Problems

- Only useful if setUID root – other UIDs can’t open read-protected files.
- (I didn’t check the return code on the `open()` call . . .)
- Race conditions
- Generic name: TOCTTOU (Time of Check to Time of Use)
Race Conditions

- There is a window between the `access()` call and the `open()` call
- The attack program can create a link to a readable file, invoke `lpr` in the background, then remove the link and replace it with a link to a protected file
- The probability of success is low but not zero — and the attacker only has to win once
Temporary Files

- The same attack can happen on files in `/tmp`
- The standard C library subroutine `mktemp()` is vulnerable to this
- Alternatives: `mkstemp()` or `mktemp()` with the `O_CREAT | O_EXCL` flags to `open()`
- Caution: if `open()` is used that way, generate a new template if `EEXIST` is returned
Shedding SetUID

- A setUID program can give up and then regain its setUID status:
  ```
  save_uid = geteuid();
  setuid(getuid());
  fd = open(file, O_RDONLY);
  seteuid(save_uid);
  ```

- Better alternative: run unprivileged most of the time, but assume setUID status only when doing privileged operations

⚠️ But — watch for SIGINT, buffer overflows; injected code can reassume privileges, too
Lock Directories

- Have a parent directory that’s mode 700, and a 777 subdirectory
- While privileged, do a `chdir()` to the subdirectory
- Give up privileges; write files in this subdirectory
Use a Subprocess

- Fork, and have a subprocess open the user’s files
- Option 1: copy the file contents to the parent process over a pipe — safe but slow
- Option 2: send the file descriptor via `sendmsg()`/`recvmsg()` over a Unix-domain socket
Issues with Message-Passing Systems

- File-opening permissions
- Authentication
- Other issues?
Opening Files

- How does the server open a private file? Two ways...
- The client opens the file and passes the open file descriptor
- The client sends some sort of access right — a capability — to the server
Authentication

- Who is allowed to send messages to the server?
- How does the server know the client’s identity?
- Two solutions: support from the OS or cryptographic authentication
Other Issues?

- The buggy code problem doesn’t go away
- It’s very similar to the network security problem; it hasn’t been solved, either
The Fundamental Problem

- The real issue: interaction
- To be secure, a program must minimize interactions with the outside
- All interactions must be controlled
RASQ

- RASQ: Relative Attack Surface Quotient
- Microsoft metric of how vulnerable an application is
- Roughly speaking, it measures how many input channels it has
- Must reduce RASQ
Not All Channels Are Equal

- Some channels are easier to exploit
- Some are more accessible to attackers
- Some have a bad track record
RASQ Examples

- Weak ACLs on shared files: .9 — names are generally known; easy to attack remotely
- Weak ACLs on local files: .2 — only useful to attacker after initial compromise
- Open sockets: 1.0 — potential target
Generic Defenses

- Better OS
- What’s a secure OS? *One that makes it easy to write secure programs*
- Most don’t qualify…
Minimize Chances for Mistakes

- Eliminate unnecessary interactions
- Example: per-process or per-user /tmp
- Avoid error-prone primitives
- Tight specification of input and environment — and check that it’s all true