Machine-Level Programming V: Advanced Topics

15-213: Introduction to Computer Systems
9th Lecture, February 13

Instructors:

Franz Franchetti, Seth Copen Goldstein, and Brian Railing

Today

- **Memory Layout**
- **Buffer Overflow**
  - Vulnerability
  - Protection
- **Unions**

x86-64 Linux Memory Layout

not drawn to scale

- **Stack**
  - Runtime stack (8MB limit)
  - E. g., local variables

- **Heap**
  - Dynamically allocated as needed
  - When call **malloc(), calloc(), new()**

- **Data**
  - Statically allocated data
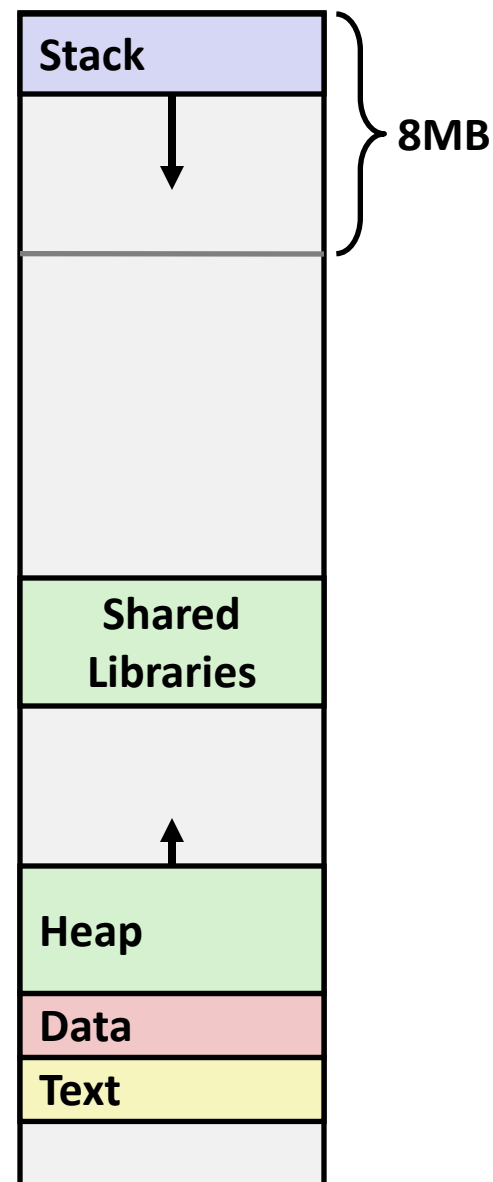 - E.g., global vars, **static** vars, string constants

- **Text / Shared Libraries**
  - Executable machine instructions
  - Read-only

`00007FFFFFFFFFFF`

| Stack |
| 8MB |

| Shared Libraries |

| Heap |
| Data |
| Text |

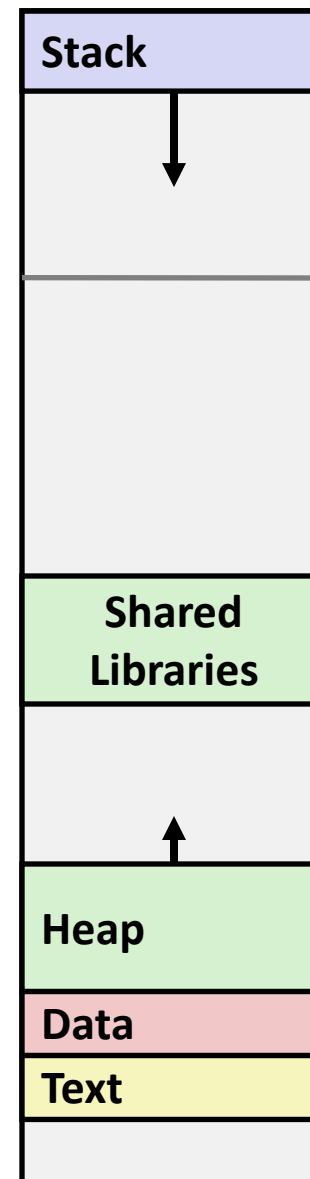Hex Address ➡ `400000`
`000000`

3

Memory Allocation Example

not drawn to scale

```
char big_array[1L<<24];  /* 16 MB */
char huge_array[1L<<31]; /*  2 GB */

int global = 0;

int useless() { return 0; }

int main ()
{
    void *p1, *p2, *p3, *p4;
    int local = 0;
    p1 = malloc(1L << 28); /* 256 MB */
    p2 = malloc(1L << 8);  /* 256  B */
    p3 = malloc(1L << 32); /*   4 GB */
    p4 = malloc(1L << 8);  /* 256  B */
 /* Some print statements ... */
}
```

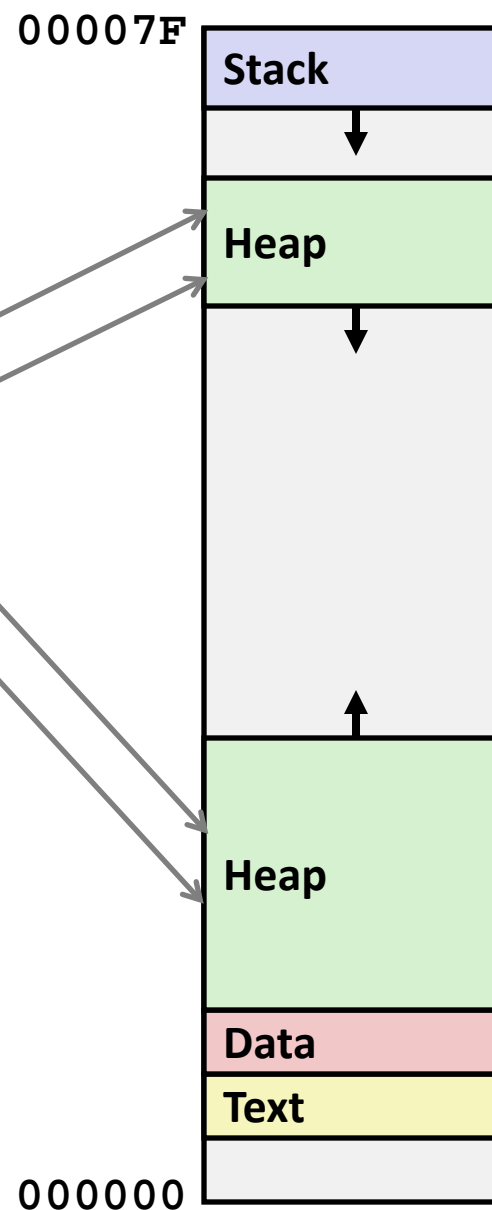| Stack |
| Shared Libraries |
| Heap |
| Data |
| Text |

Where does everything go?

x86-64 Example Addresses

not drawn to scale

address range ~2^{47}

```
00007F
```

Stack

Heap

local   `0x00007ffe4d3be87c`
p1   `0x00007f7262a1e010`
p3   `0x00007f7162a1d010`
p4   `0x000000008359d120`
p2   `0x000000008359d010`
big_array `0x0000000080601060`
huge_array `0x0000000000601060`
main()   `0x000000000040060c`
useless() `0x0000000000400590`

Heap

Data

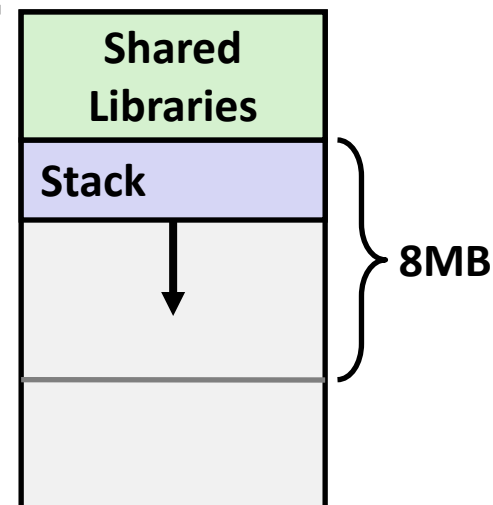| Text |
|---|

```
000000
```

5

Runaway Stack Example

not drawn to scale

`00007FFFFFFFFFFF`

```
int recurse(int x) {
    int a[2<<15];  /* 2~17 =  128 KiB */
    printf("x = %d.  a at %p\n", x, a);
    a[0] = (2<<13)-1;
    a[a[0]] = x-1;
    if (a[a[0]] == 0)
        return -1;
    return recurse(a[a[0]]) - 1;
}
```

Shared Libraries
Stack

8MB

- **Functions store local data on in stack frame**
- **Recursive functions cause deep nesting of frames**

```
./runaway 48
x = 48.  a at 0x7fffd43e45d0
x = 47.  a at 0x7fffd43a45c0
x = 46.  a at 0x7fffd43645b0
x = 45.  a at 0x7fffd43245a0
. . .
x = 4.  a at 0x7fffd38e4310
x = 3.  a at 0x7fffd38a4300
x = 2.  a at 0x7fffd38642f0
Segmentation fault
```

Today

- **Memory Layout**
- **Buffer Overflow**
  - Vulnerability
  - Protection
- **Unions**

Recall: Memory Referencing Bug Example

```c
typedef struct {
  int a[2];
  double d;
} struct_t;

double fun(int i) {
  volatile struct_t s;
  s.d = 3.14;
  s.a[i] = 1073741824; /* Possibly out of bounds */
  return s.d;
}
```

```
fun(0)  ->    3.14
fun(1)  ->    3.14
fun(2)  ->    3.1399998664856
fun(3)  ->    2.00000061035156
fun(4)  ->    3.14
fun(6)  ->    Segmentation fault
```
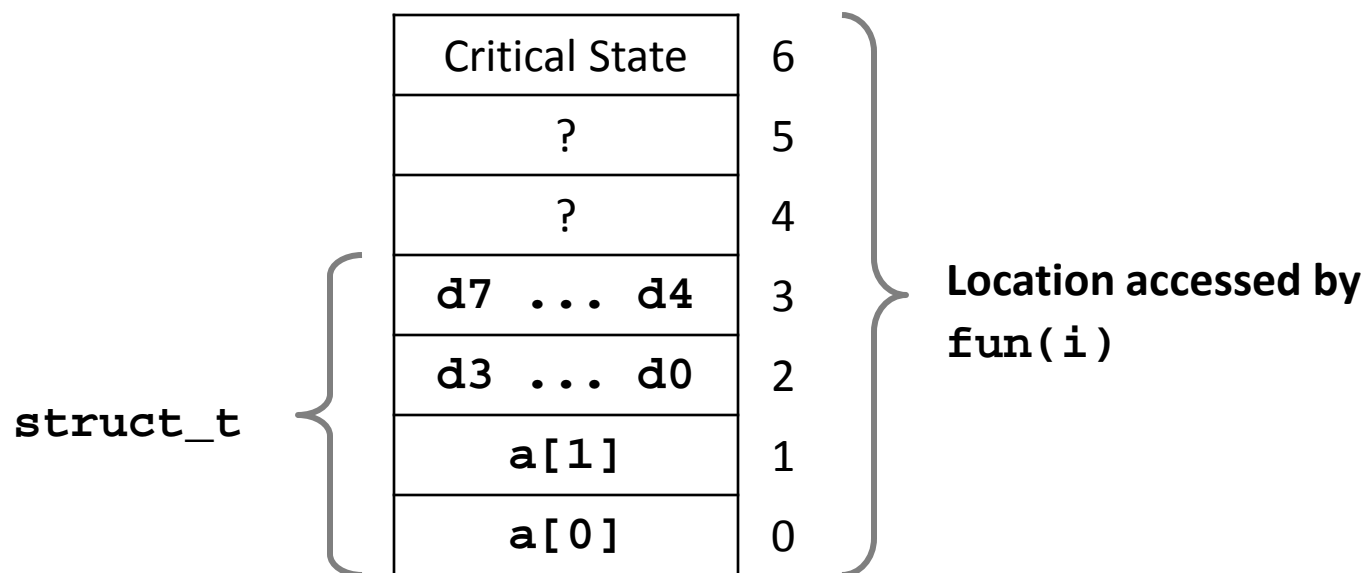
- Result is system specific

Memory Referencing Bug Example

```
typedef struct {
  int a[2];
  double d;
} struct_t;
```

```
fun(0)  ->   3.14
fun(1)  ->   3.14
fun(2)  ->   3.1399998664856
fun(3)  ->   2.00000061035156
fun(4)  ->   3.14
fun(6)  ->   Segmentation fault
```

Explanation:

Critical State	6
?	5
?	4
d7 ... d4	3
d3 ... d0	2
a[1]	1
a[0]	0

struct_t

Location accessed by
`fun(i)`

Such problems are a BIG deal

- **Generally called a "buffer overflow"**
  - when exceeding the memory size allocated for an array

- **Why a big deal?**
  - It's the #1 technical cause of security vulnerabilities
    - #1 overall cause is social engineering / user ignorance

- **Most common form**
  - Unchecked lengths on string inputs
  - Particularly for bounded character arrays on the stack
    - sometimes referred to as stack smashing

String Library Code

- **Implementation of Unix function `gets()`**

```c
/* Get string from stdin */
char *gets(char *dest)
{
    int c = getchar();
    char *p = dest;
    while (c != EOF && c != '\n') {
        *p++ = c;
        c = getchar();
    }
    *p = '\0';
    return dest;
}
```

  - No way to specify limit on number of characters to read

- **Similar problems with other library functions**

  - **`strcpy, strcat`**: Copy strings of arbitrary length

  - **`scanf, fscanf, sscanf,`** when given **`%s`** conversion specification

Vulnerable Buffer Code

```
/* Echo Line */
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];  /* Way too small! */
    gets(buf);
    puts(buf);
}
```

← btw, how big
    is big enough?

```
void call_echo() {
    echo();
}
```

```
unix>./bufdemo-nsp
Type a string:01234567890123456789012 3
01234567890123456789012 3
```

```
unix>./bufdemo-nsp
Type a string:012345678901234567890123 4
Segmentation Fault
```

Buffer Overflow Disassembly

echo:

```
00000000004006cf <echo>:
 4006cf:   48 83 ec 18             sub     $0x18,%rsp
 4006d3:   48 89 e7                mov     %rsp,%rdi
 4006d6:   e8 a5 ff ff ff          callq   400680 <gets>
 4006db:   48 89 e7                mov     %rsp,%rdi
 4006de:   e8 3d fe ff ff          callq   400520 <puts@plt>
 4006e3:   48 83 c4 18             add     $0x18,%rsp
 4006e7:   c3                      retq
```
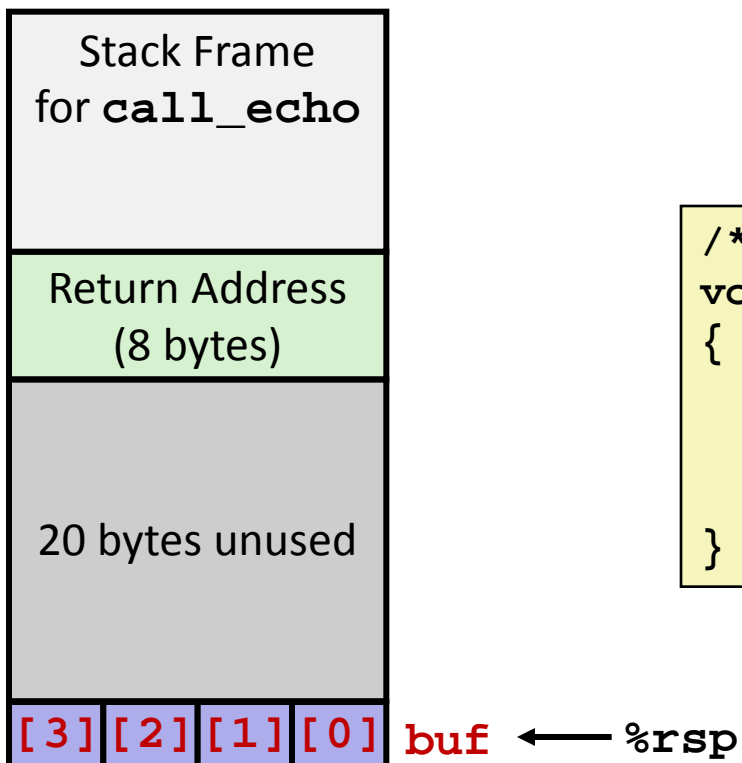
call_echo:

```
 4006e8:   48 83 ec 08             sub     $0x8,%rsp
 4006ec:   b8 00 00 00 00          mov     $0x0,%eax
 4006f1:   e8 d9 ff ff ff          callq   4006cf <echo>
 4006f6:   48 83 c4 08             add     $0x8,%rsp
 4006fa:   c3                      retq
```

Buffer Overflow Stack

Before call to gets

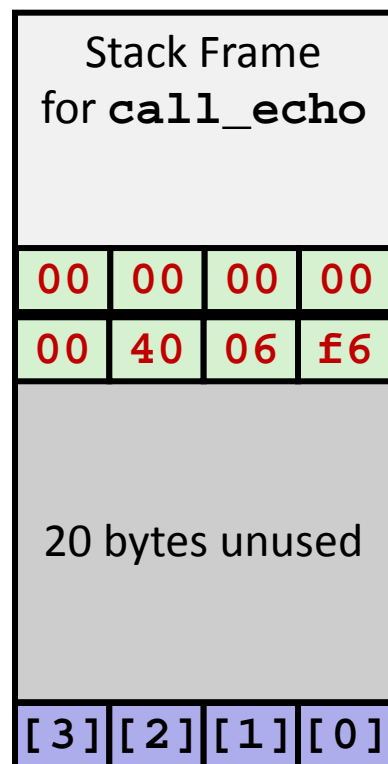| |
|---|
| Stack Frame for `call_echo` |
| Return Address (8 bytes) |
| 20 bytes unused |
| `[3][2][1][0]` buf ←—— `%rsp` |

```
/* Echo Line */
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];  /* Way too small! */
    gets(buf);
    puts(buf);
}
```

```
echo:
  subq  $24, %rsp
  movq  %rsp, %rdi
  call  gets
  . . .
```

Buffer Overflow Stack Example

Before call to gets

Stack Frame for `call_echo`
Stack Frame for `call_echo`
00 | 00 | 00 | 00
00 | 40 | 06 | f6
20 bytes unused
[3][2][1][0] buf ← %rsp

```
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];
    gets(buf);
    . . .
}
```

```
echo:
    subq   $24, %rsp
    movq   %rsp, %rdi
    call   gets
    . . .
```

call_echo:

```
    . . .
    4006f1:   callq   4006cf <echo>
    4006f6:   add     $0x8,%rsp
    . . .
```

Buffer Overflow Stack Example #1

After call to gets

Stack Frame for call_echo			
00	00	00	00
00	40	06	f6
00	32	31	30
39	38	37	36
35	34	33	32
31	30	39	38
37	36	35	34
33	32	31	30

buf ⟵ %rsp

```
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];
    gets(buf);
    . . .
}
```

```
echo:
  subq  $24, %rsp
  movq  %rsp, %rdi
  call  gets
  . . .
```

call_echo:

```
   . . .
   4006f1:  callq  4006cf <echo>
   4006f6:  add    $0x8,%rsp
   . . .
```

```
unix>./bufdemo-nsp
Type a string:01234567890123456789012
01234567890123456789012
```

```
"01234567890123456789012\0"
```

Overflowed buffer, but did not corrupt state

Buffer Overflow Stack Example #2

After call to gets

Stack Frame for `call_echo`			
00	00	00	00
00	40	00	34
33	32	31	30
39	38	37	36
35	34	33	32
31	30	39	38
37	36	35	34
33	32	31	30

```
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];
    gets(buf);
    . . .
}
```

```
echo:
    subq   $24, %rsp
    movq   %rsp, %rdi
    call   gets
    . . .
```

call_echo:

```
    . . .
    4006f1:  callq  4006cf <echo>
    4006f6:  add    $0x8,%rsp
    . . .
```
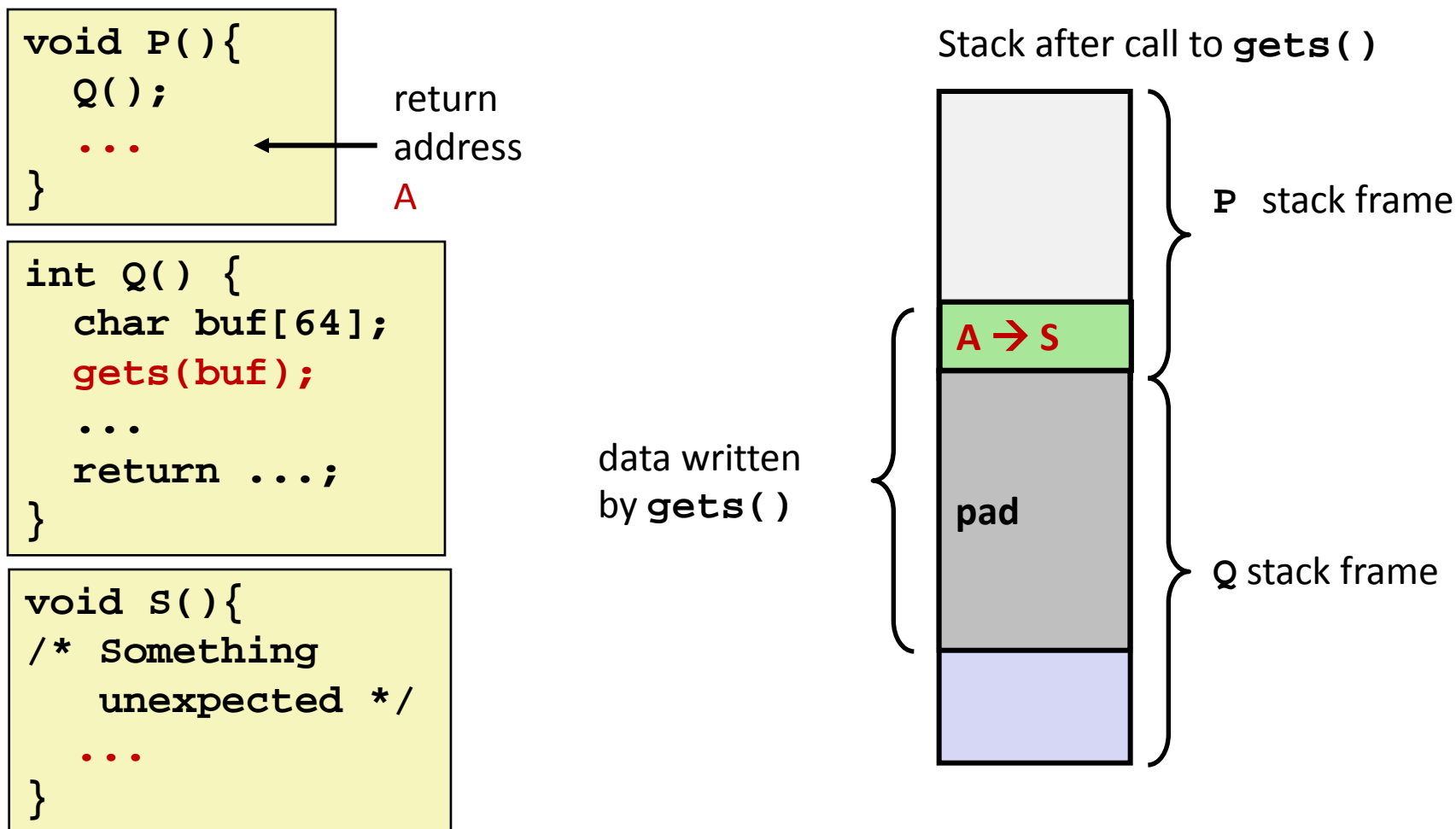
`buf` ⟵ `%rsp`

```
unix>./bufdemo-nsp
Type a string:0123456789012345678901234
Segmentation Fault
```

`"012345678901234567890123` **4\0** `"`

Overflowed buffer and corrupted return pointer

Stack Smashing Attacks

```
void P(){
  Q();
  ...
}
```

return
address
A

```
int Q() {
  char buf[64];
  gets(buf);
  ...
  return ...;
}
```

```
void S(){
/* Something
   unexpected */
  ...
}
```

Stack after call to **gets()**

P stack frame

A → S

data written
by **gets()**

pad

Q stack frame

- **Overwrite normal return address A with address of some other code S**
- **When Q executes ret, will jump to other code**

Crafting Smashing String

```
int echo() {
  char buf[4];
  gets(buf);
  ...
  return ...;
}
```

| Stack Frame |
| for **call_echo** |

00	00	00	00
00	48	83	80
00	00	00	00
00	40	08	83

← **%rsp**

24 bytes

Target Code

```
void smash() {
  printf("I've been smashed!\n");
  exit(0);
}
```

```
00000000004008a3 <smash>:
  4008a3:        48 83 ec 08
```

Attack String (Hex)

```
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33
a3 08 40 00 00 00 00 00
```

Smashing String Effect

Stack Frame for `call_echo`			
00	00	00	00
00	48	83	80
00	00	00	00
00	40	08	a3
33	32	31	30
39	38	37	36
35	34	33	32
31	30	39	38
37	36	35	34
33	32	31	30

← **%rsp**

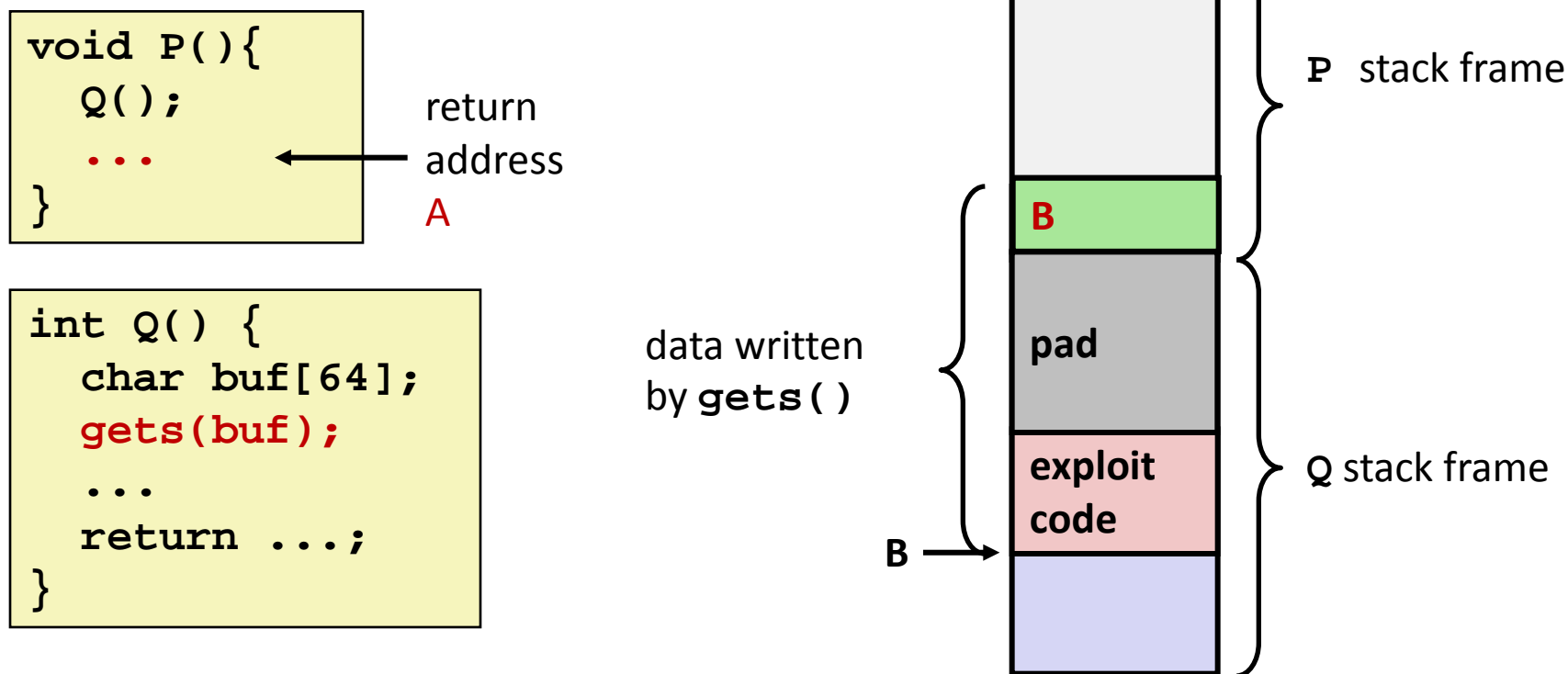*Target Code*

```
void smash() {
    printf("I've been smashed!\n");
    exit(0);
}
```

```
00000000004008a3 <smash>:
  4008a3:        48 83 ec 08
```

Attack String (Hex)

```
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33
a3 08 40 00 00 00 00 00
```

Code Injection Attacks

Stack after call to `gets()`

```
void P(){
  Q();
  ...
}
```

return
address
A

```
int Q() {
  char buf[64];
  gets(buf);
  ...
  return ...;
}
```

data written
by `gets()`

- **Input string contains byte representation of executable code**
- **Overwrite return address A with address of buffer B**
- **When Q executes ret, will jump to exploit code**

How Does The Attack Code Execute?

```
void P(){
  Q();
  ...
}
```

```
int Q() {
  char buf[64];
  gets(buf); // A->B
  ...
  return ...;
}
```
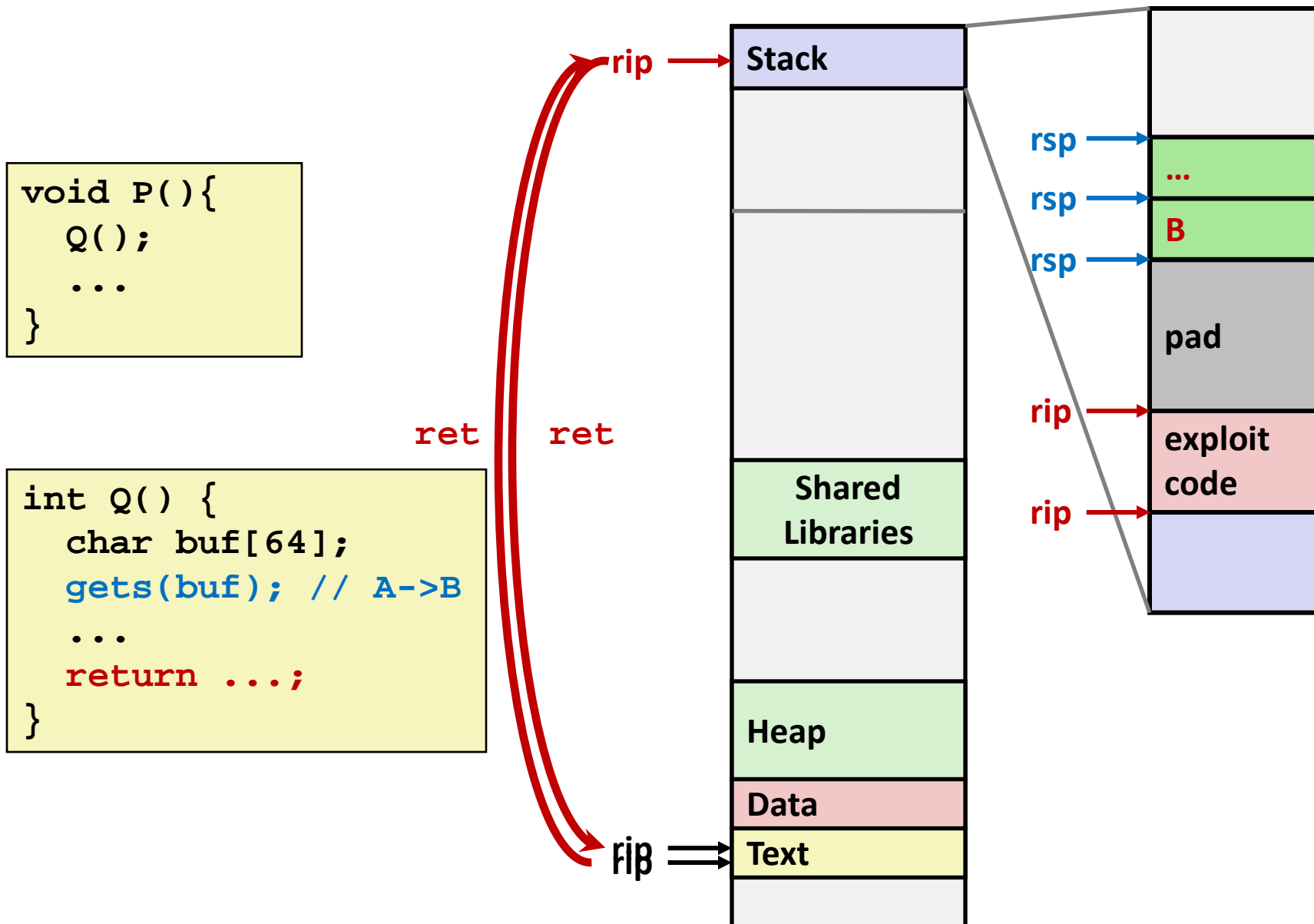
What To Do About Buffer Overflow Attacks

- **Avoid overflow vulnerabilities**

- **Employ system-level protections**

- **Have compiler use "stack canaries"**

- **Lets talk about each...**

1. Avoid Overflow Vulnerabilities in Code (!)

```
/* Echo Line */
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];  /* Way too small! */
    fgets(buf, 4, stdin);
    puts(buf);
}
```

- **For example, use library routines that limit string lengths**
  - **fgets** instead of **gets**
  - **strncpy** instead of **strcpy**
  - Don't use **scanf** with **%s** conversion specification
    - Use **fgets** to read the string
    - Or use **%ns** where **n** is a suitable integer
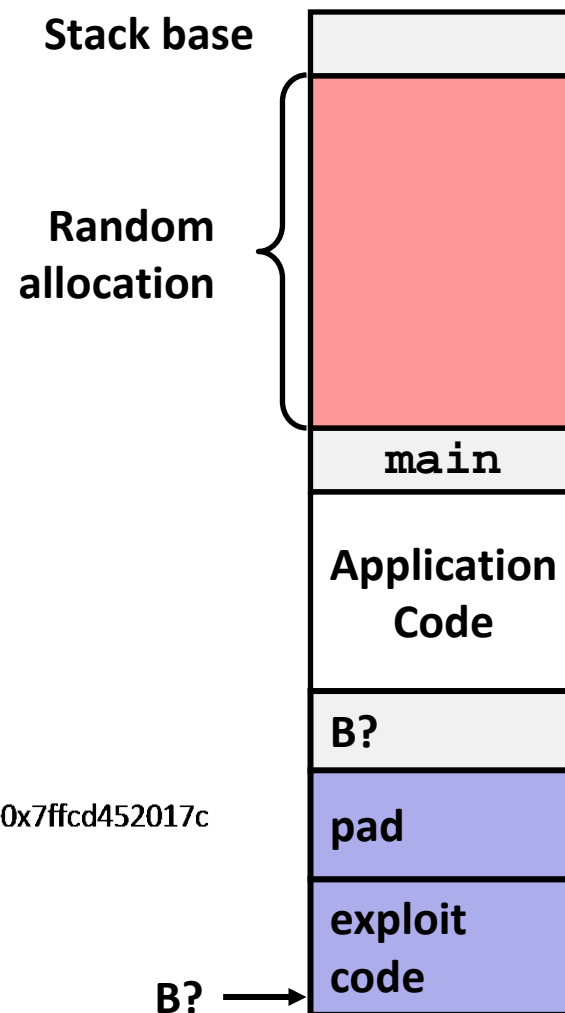
2. System-Level Protections can help

- **Randomized stack offsets**
  - At start of program, allocate random amount of space on stack
  - Shifts stack addresses for entire program
  - Makes it difficult for hacker to predict beginning of inserted code
  - E.g.: 5 executions of memory allocation code

  local   0x7ffe4d3be87c   0x7fff75a4f9fc   0x7ffeadb7c80c   0x7ffeaea2fdac   0x7ffcd452017c

    - Stack repositioned each time program executes

Stack base

Random allocation

main
Application Code
B?
pad
exploit code

B? ➡

2. System-Level Protections can help

Stack after call to `gets()`

- **Nonexecutable code segments**
  - In traditional x86, can mark region of memory as either "read-only" or "writeable"
    - Can execute anything readable
  - x86-64 added explicit "execute" permission
  - Stack marked as non-executable

P stack frame

B

data written by `gets()`

pad

exploit code

B

Q stack frame
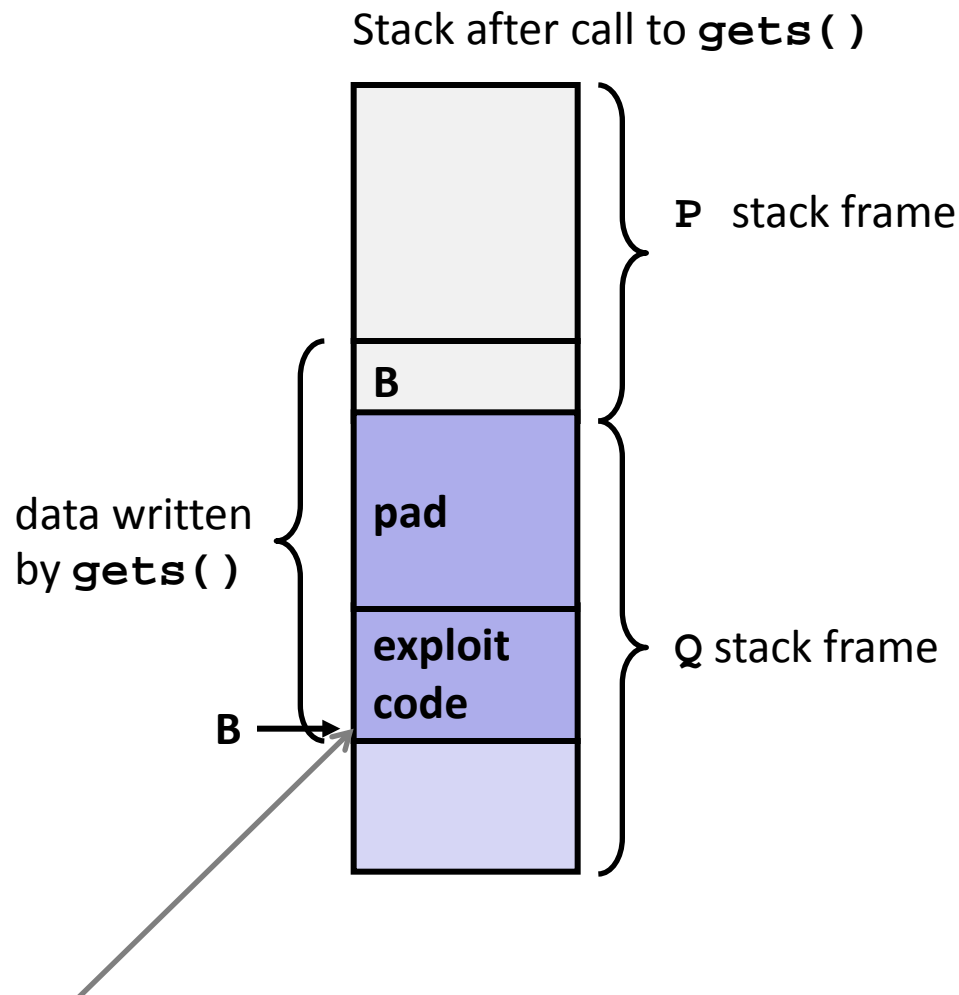
Any attempt to execute this code will fail

3. Stack Canaries can help

- **Idea**
  - Place special value ("canary") on stack just beyond buffer
  - Check for corruption before exiting function
- **GCC Implementation**
  - `-fstack-protector`
  - Now the default (disabled earlier)

```
unix>./bufdemo-sp
Type a string:0123456
0123456
```

```
unix>./bufdemo-sp
Type a string:01234567
*** stack smashing detected ***
```
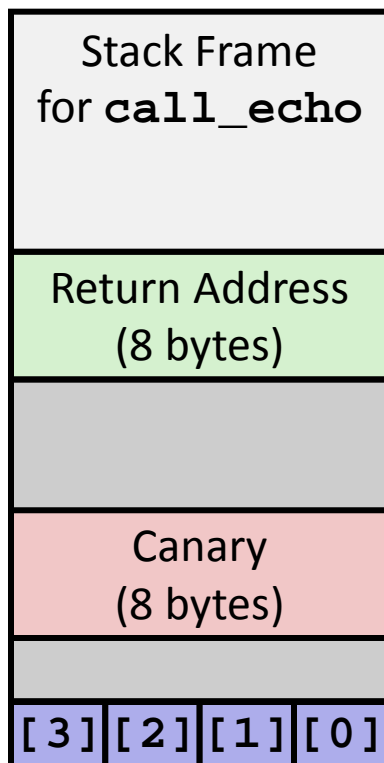
Protected Buffer Disassembly

echo:

```
40072f:   sub     $0x18,%rsp
400733:   mov     %fs:0x28,%rax
40073c:   mov     %rax,0x8(%rsp)
400741:   xor     %eax,%eax
400743:   mov     %rsp,%rdi
400746:   callq   4006e0 <gets>
40074b:   mov     %rsp,%rdi
40074e:   callq   400570 <puts@plt>
400753:   mov     0x8(%rsp),%rax
400758:   xor     %fs:0x28,%rax
400761:   je      400768 <echo+0x39>
400763:   callq   400580 <__stack_chk_fail@plt>
400768:   add     $0x18,%rsp
40076c:   retq
```
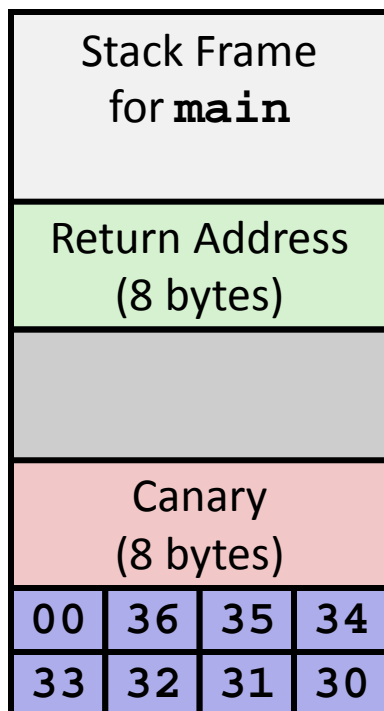
Setting Up Canary

Before call to gets

Stack Frame for **call_echo**
Return Address (8 bytes)
Canary (8 bytes)
[3][2][1][0] buf ⟵── %rsp

```
/* Echo Line */
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];  /* Way too small! */
    gets(buf);
    puts(buf);
}
```

```
echo:
    . . .
    movq    %fs:40, %rax  # Get canary
    movq    %rax, 8(%rsp) # Place on stack
    xorl    %eax, %eax    # Erase canary
    . . .
```

Bryant and O'Hallaron, Computer Systems: A Programmer's Perspective, Third Edition

31

Checking Canary

After call to gets

```
/* Echo Line */
void echo()
{
    char buf[4];  /* Way too small! */
    gets(buf);
    puts(buf);
}
```

Stack Frame for **main**			
Return Address (8 bytes)			
Canary (8 bytes)			
00	36	35	34
33	32	31	30

buf ⟵ %rsp

Input: *0123456*

```
echo:
    . . .
    movq    8(%rsp), %rax     # Retrieve from stack
    xorq    %fs:40, %rax      # Compare to canary
    je      .L6               # If same, OK
    call    __stack_chk_fail  # FAIL
```

Break Time!
argle-bargle: "copious but meaningless talk or writing"

Check out:

https://canvas.cmu.edu/courses/3822

Return-Oriented Programming Attacks

- **Challenge (for hackers)**
  - Stack randomization makes it hard to predict buffer location
  - Marking stack nonexecutable makes it hard to insert binary code

- **Alternative Strategy**
  - Use existing code
    - E.g., library code from stdlib
  - String together fragments to achieve overall desired outcome
  - *Does not overcome stack canaries*

- **Construct program from *gadgets***
  - Sequence of instructions ending in `ret`
    - Encoded by single byte `0xc3`
  - Code positions fixed from run to run
  - Code is executable

Gadget Example #1

```
long ab_plus_c
    (long a, long b, long c)
{
    return a*b + c;
}
```

```
00000000004004d0 <ab_plus_c>:
  4004d0:  48 0f af fe  imul %rsi,%rdi
  4004d4:  48 8d 04 17  lea (%rdi,%rdx,1),%rax
  4004d8:  c3           retq
```
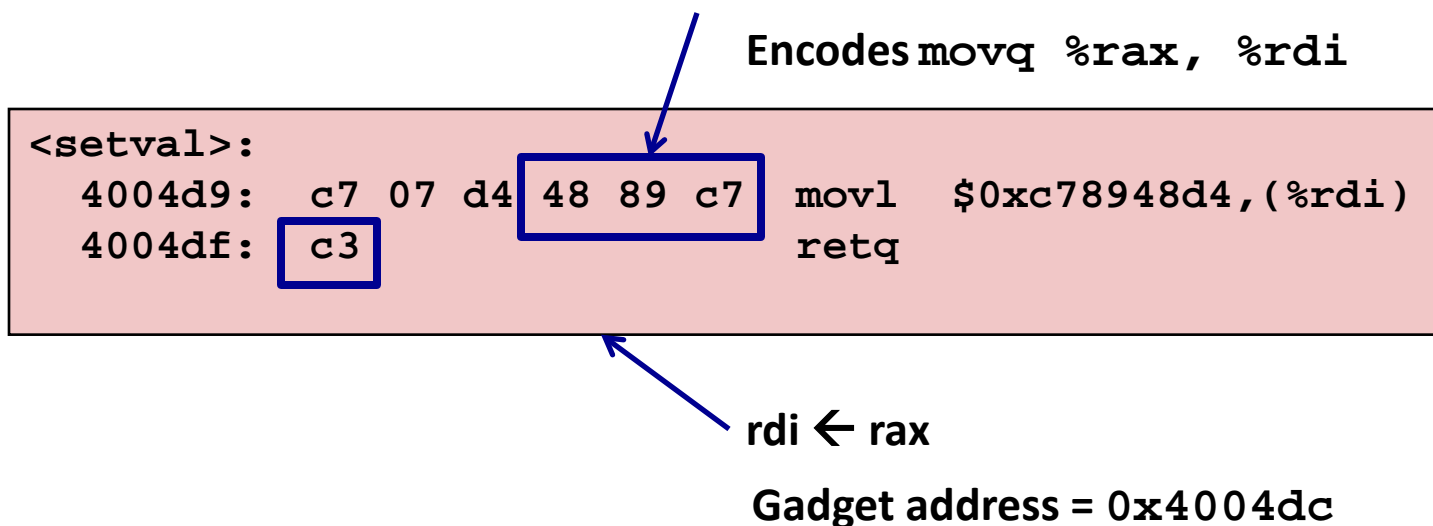
rax ← rdi + rdx

Gadget address = `0x4004d4`

■ **Use tail end of existing functions**

Gadget Example #2

```
void setval(unsigned *p) {
    *p = 3347663060u;
}
```

Encodes `movq %rax, %rdi`

```
<setval>:
  4004d9:  c7 07 d4 48 89 c7   movl  $0xc78948d4,(%rdi)
  4004df:  c3                  retq
```

rdi ← rax
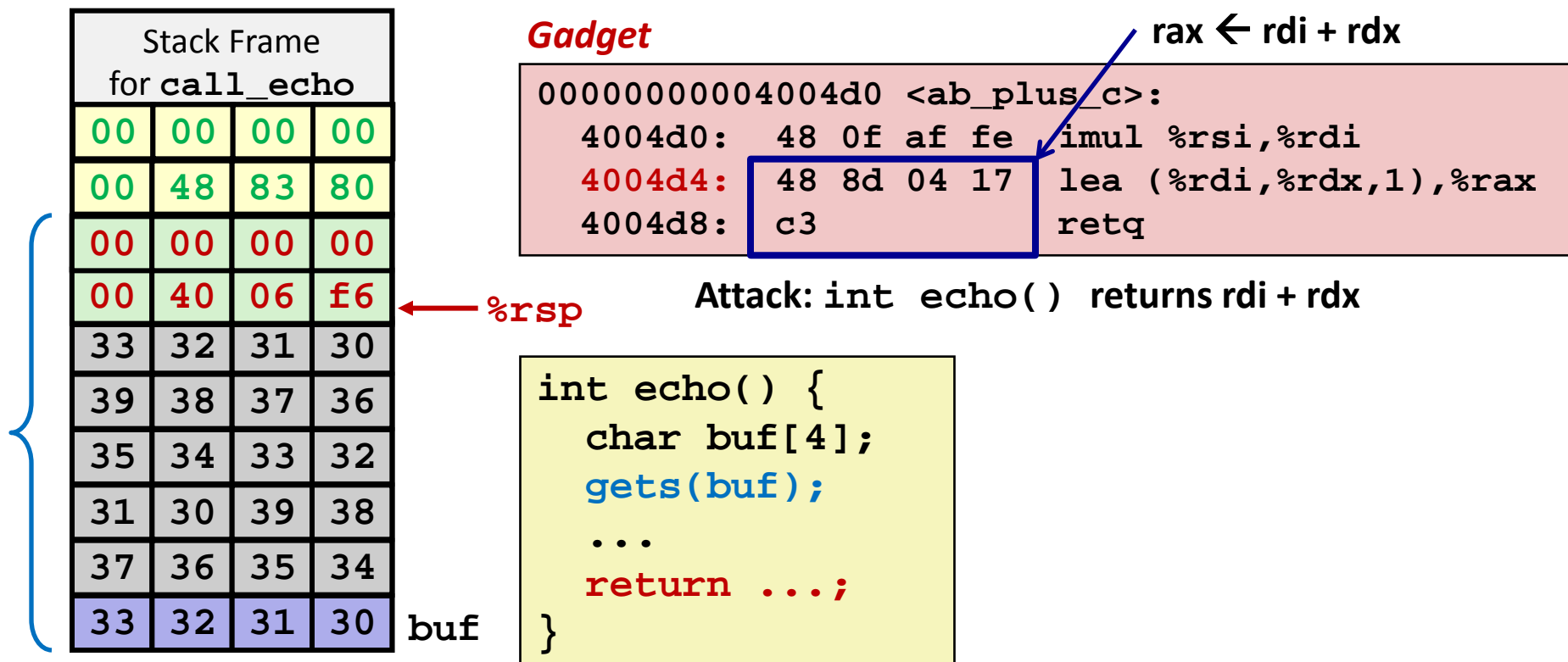
Gadget address = `0x4004dc`

- **Repurpose byte codes**

ROP Execution

Stack
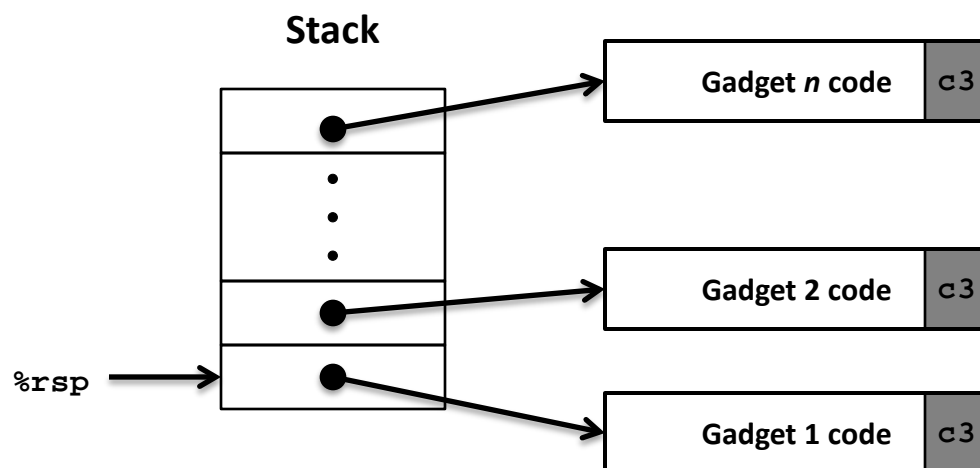
- **Trigger with `ret` instruction**
    - Will start executing Gadget 1
- **Final `ret` in each gadget will start next one**

Crafting an ROB Attack String

Stack Frame for `call_echo`			
00	00	00	00
00	48	83	80
00	00	00	00
00	40	06	f6
33	32	31	30
39	38	37	36
35	34	33	32
31	30	39	38
37	36	35	34
33	32	31	30

← `%rsp`

`buf`

rax ← rdi + rdx

Gadget

```
00000000004004d0 <ab_plus_c>:
  4004d0:   48 0f af fe   imul %rsi,%rdi
  4004d4:   48 8d 04 17   lea (%rdi,%rdx,1),%rax
  4004d8:   c3            retq
```

Attack: `int echo()` returns rdi + rdx

```
int echo() {
  char buf[4];
  gets(buf);
  ...
  return ...;
}
```

Attack String (Hex)

```
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 30 31 32 33
d4 04 40 00 00 00 00 00
```

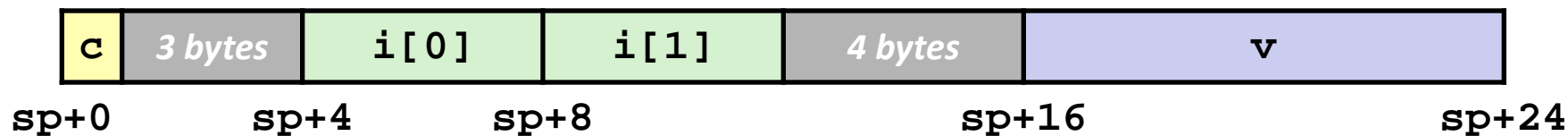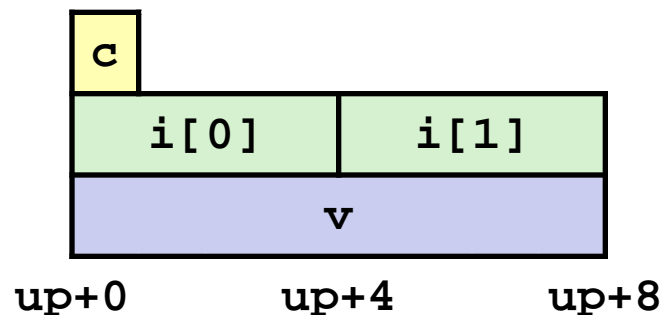Multiple gadgets will corrupt stack upwards

Today

- **Memory Layout**

- **Buffer Overflow**
  - Vulnerability
  - Protection

- **Unions**

Union Allocation

- **Allocate according to largest element**
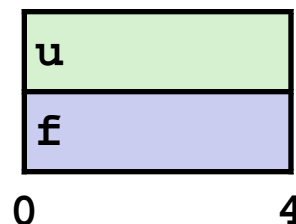- **Can only use one field at a time**

```
union U1 {
  char c;
  int i[2];
  double v;
} *up;
```

```
struct S1 {
  char c;
  int i[2];
  double v;
} *sp;
```

c		
i[0]	i[1]	
v		

up+0   up+4   up+8

c	3 bytes	i[0]	i[1]	4 bytes	v

sp+0   sp+4   sp+8   sp+16   sp+24

Using Union to Access Bit Patterns

```
typedef union {
  float f;
  unsigned u;
} bit_float_t;
```

u
f

0   4

```
float bit2float(unsigned u)
{
  bit_float_t arg;
  arg.u = u;
  return arg.f;
}
```

```
unsigned float2bit(float f)
{
  bit_float_t arg;
  arg.f = f;
  return arg.u;
}
```

Same as (float) u ?   **Same as (unsigned) f ?**

Byte Ordering Revisited

- **Idea**
  - Short/long/quad words stored in memory as 2/4/8 consecutive bytes
  - Which byte is most (least) significant?
  - Can cause problems when exchanging binary data between machines

- **Big Endian**
  - Most significant byte has lowest address
  - Sparc, *Internet*

- **Little Endian**
  - Least significant byte has lowest address
  - Intel *x86*, ARM Android and IOS

- **Bi Endian**
  - Can be configured either way
  - ARM

Byte Ordering Example

```
union {
    unsigned char c[8];
    unsigned short s[4];
    unsigned int i[2];
    unsigned long l[1];
} dw;
```

How are the bytes inside short/int/long stored?

Memory addresses growing ⟶

32-bit

c[0]	c[1]	c[2]	c[3]	c[4]	c[5]	c[6]	c[7]
s[0]		s[1]		s[2]		s[3]	
i[0]				i[1]			
l[0]								

64-bit

c[0]	c[1]	c[2]	c[3]	c[4]	c[5]	c[6]	c[7]
s[0]		s[1]		s[2]		s[3]	
i[0]				i[1]			
l[0]							

Byte Ordering Example (Cont).

```
int j;
for (j = 0; j < 8; j++)
    dw.c[j] = 0xf0 + j;

printf("Characters 0-7 ==
[0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x]\n",
    dw.c[0], dw.c[1], dw.c[2], dw.c[3],
    dw.c[4], dw.c[5], dw.c[6], dw.c[7]);

printf("Shorts 0-3 == [0x%x,0x%x,0x%x,0x%x]\n",
    dw.s[0], dw.s[1], dw.s[2], dw.s[3]);

printf("Ints 0-1 == [0x%x,0x%x]\n",
    dw.i[0], dw.i[1]);

printf("Long 0 == [0x%lx]\n",
    dw.l[0]);
```
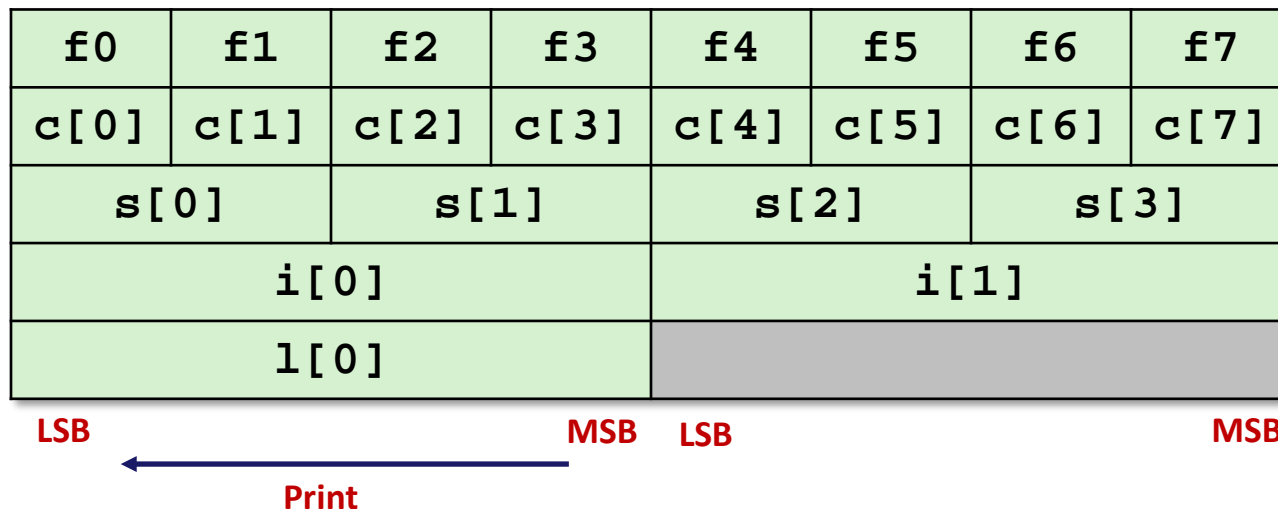
Byte Ordering on IA32

Little Endian

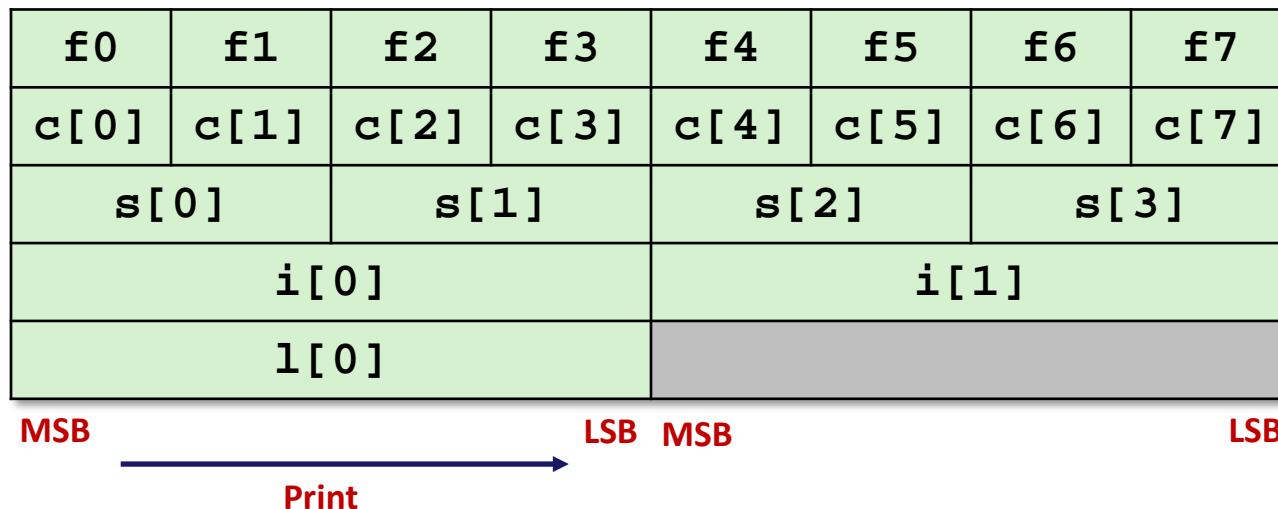| f0	f1	f2	f3	f4	f5	f6	f7
c[0]	c[1]	c[2]	c[3]	c[4]	c[5]	c[6]	c[7]
s[0]		s[1]		s[2]		s[3]	
i[0]				i[1]			
l[0]							

LSB ← Print → MSB   LSB   MSB

Output:

```
Characters 0-7 == [0xf0,0xf1,0xf2,0xf3,0xf4,0xf5,0xf6,0xf7]
Shorts     0-3 == [0xf1f0,0xf3f2,0xf5f4,0xf7f6]
Ints       0-1 == [0xf3f2f1f0,0xf7f6f5f4]
Long       0   == [0xf3f2f1f0]
```

Byte Ordering on Sun

Big Endian

f0	f1	f2	f3	f4	f5	f6	f7
c[0]	c[1]	c[2]	c[3]	c[4]	c[5]	c[6]	c[7]
s[0]		s[1]		s[2]		s[3]	
i[0]				i[1]			
l[0]							

MSB   LSB   MSB   LSB

Print

Output on Sun:

```
Characters 0-7 == [0xf0,0xf1,0xf2,0xf3,0xf4,0xf5,0xf6,0xf7]
Shorts     0-3 == [0xf0f1,0xf2f3,0xf4f5,0xf6f7]
Ints       0-1 == [0xf0f1f2f3,0xf4f5f6f7]
Long       0   == [0xf0f1f2f3]
```
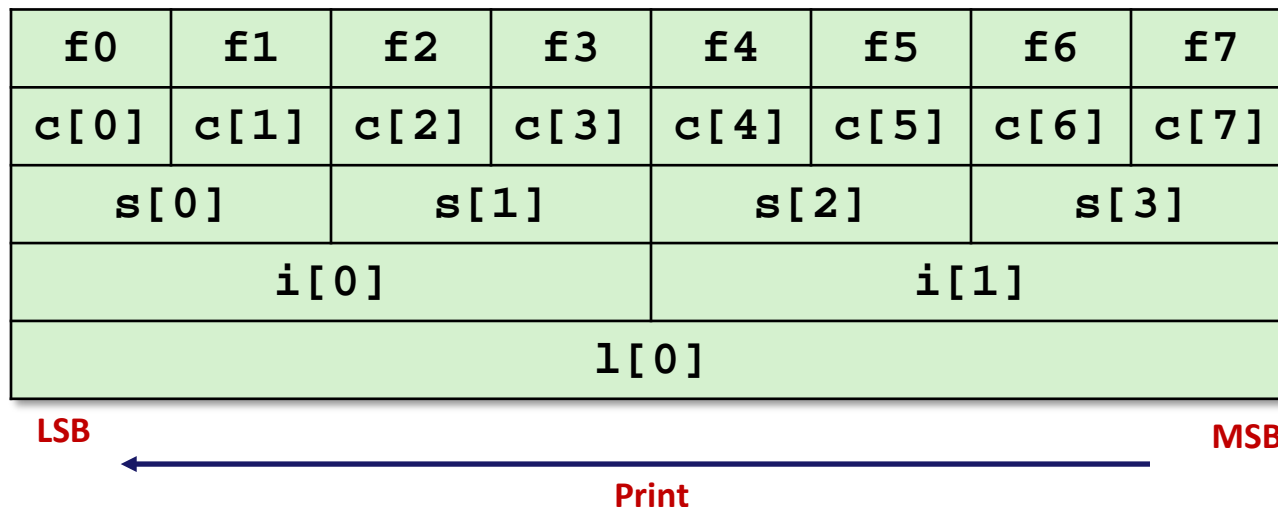
Byte Ordering on x86-64

Little Endian

f0	f1	f2	f3	f4	f5	f6	f7
c[0]	c[1]	c[2]	c[3]	c[4]	c[5]	c[6]	c[7]
s[0]		s[1]		s[2]		s[3]	
i[0]				i[1]			
l[0]							

LSB   **MSB**

← **Print**

Output on x86-64:

```
Characters 0-7 == [0xf0,0xf1,0xf2,0xf3,0xf4,0xf5,0xf6,0xf7]
Shorts     0-3 == [0xf1f0,0xf3f2,0xf5f4,0xf7f6]
Ints       0-1 == [0xf3f2f1f0,0xf7f6f5f4]
Long       0   == [0xf7f6f5f4f3f2f1f0]
```

Summary of Compound Types in C

- **Arrays**
  - Contiguous allocation of memory
  - Aligned to satisfy every element's alignment requirement
  - Pointer to first element
  - No bounds checking

- **Structures**
  - Allocate bytes in order declared
  - Pad in middle and at end to satisfy alignment

- **Unions**
  - Overlay declarations
  - Way to circumvent type system

Summary

- **Memory Layout**

- **Buffer Overflow**
  - Vulnerability
  - Protection
  - Code Injection Attack
  - Return Oriented Programming

- **Unions**

Exploits Based on Buffer Overflows

- ***Buffer overflow bugs can allow remote machines to execute arbitrary code on victim machines***
- **Distressingly common in real programs**
  - Programmers keep making the same mistakes ☹
  - Recent measures make these attacks much more difficult
- **Examples across the decades**
  - Original "Internet worm" (1988)
  - "IM wars" (1999)
  - Twilight hack on Wii (2000s)
  - … and many, many more
- **You will learn some of the tricks in attacklab**
  - Hopefully to convince you to never leave such holes in your programs!!

Example: the original Internet worm (1988)

- **Exploited a few vulnerabilities to spread**
  - Early versions of the finger server (fingerd) used `gets()` to read the argument sent by the client:
    - `finger droh@cs.cmu.edu`
  - Worm attacked fingerd server by sending phony argument:
    - `finger "exploit-code  padding  new-return-address"`
    - exploit code: executed a root shell on the victim machine with a direct TCP connection to the attacker.
- **Once on a machine, scanned for other machines to attack**
  - invaded ~6000 computers in hours (10% of the Internet ☺)
    - see June 1989 article in *Comm. of the ACM*
  - the young author of the worm was prosecuted…
  - and CERT was formed… still homed at CMU

Example 2: IM War

- **July, 1999**
  - Microsoft launches MSN Messenger (instant messaging system).
  - Messenger clients can access popular AOL Instant Messaging Service (AIM) servers
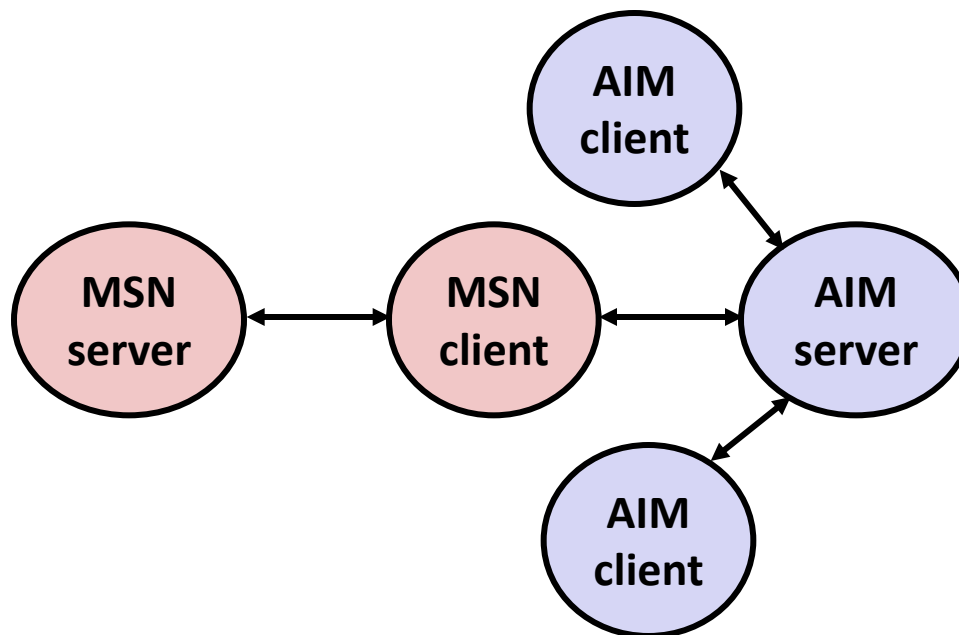
IM War (cont.)

- **August 1999**
  - Mysteriously, Messenger clients can no longer access AIM servers
  - Microsoft and AOL begin the IM war:
    - AOL changes server to disallow Messenger clients
    - Microsoft makes changes to clients to defeat AOL changes
    - At least 13 such skirmishes
  - What was really happening?
    - AOL had discovered a buffer overflow bug in their own AIM clients
    - They exploited it to detect and block Microsoft: the exploit code returned a 4-byte signature (the bytes at some location in the AIM client) to server
    - When Microsoft changed code to match signature, AOL changed signature location

```
Date: Wed, 11 Aug 1999 11:30:57 -0700 (PDT)
From: Phil Bucking <philbucking@yahoo.com>
Subject: AOL exploiting buffer overrun bug in their own software!
To: rms@pharlap.com

Mr. Smith,

I am writing you because I have discovered something that I think you
might find interesting because you are an Internet security expert with
experience in this area. I have also tried to contact AOL but received
no response.

I am a developer who has been working on a revolutionary new instant
messaging client that should be released later this year.
...
It appears that the AIM client has a buffer overrun bug. By itself
this might not be the end of the world, as MS surely has had its share.
But AOL is now *exploiting their own buffer overrun bug* to help in
its efforts to block MS Instant Messenger.
....
Since you have significant credibility with the press I hope that you
can use this information to help inform people that behind AOL's
friendly exterior they are nefariously compromising peoples' security.

Sincerely,
Phil Bucking
Founder, Bucking Consulting
philbucking@yahoo.com
```

It was later determined that this email originated from within Microsoft!

Aside: Worms and Viruses

- **Worm: A program that**
  - Can run by itself
  - Can propagate a fully working version of itself to other computers

- **Virus: Code that**
  - Adds itself to other programs
  - Does not run independently

- **Both are (usually) designed to spread among computers and to wreak havoc**