

Looking Back at 10 Years of Rowhammer Exploits

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25th October 2024

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Who Are We?



- **Jonas Juffinger**
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- **Andreas Kogler**
- PhD Alumni, IAIK, Graz University of Technology
-  @0xhilbert
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•

2014

Flipping bits in memory without accessing them:
An experimental study of DRAM disturbance errors

Kim, Y., Daly, R., Kim, J., Fallin, C., Lee, J.H., Lee, D., Wilkerson, C., Lai, K. and Mutlu, O.

SIGARCH, 2014 [13]

- Hardware **fault** of the DRAM
- Frequent accesses **flip** bits in neighboring rows



```
1 for (i = 0; i < N; ++i) {  
2   for (j = 0; j < M; ++j) {  
3     aggressor[j];  
4     flush(&aggressor[j]);  
5   }  
6 }
```




•

2014



2014

2015

Exploiting the DRAM rowhammer bug to gain kernel privileges

Mark Seaborn and Thomas Dullien

Google Project Zero, 2015 [24]



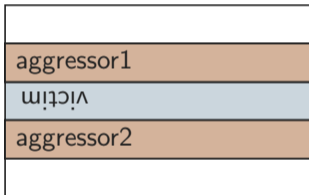
- Native code browser sandbox
- Allows only 32-byte **aligned** indirect jumps
- Allows instruction only at 32-byte aligned locations

```
1 andl $~31, %eax // Truncate to 32 bits and mask to be 32-byte-aligned.
2 addq %r15, %rax // Add %r15, the sandbox base address.
3 jmp *%rax // Indirect jump
```

```
1 20ea0: 48 b8 0f 05 eb 0c f4 f4 f4 f4 movabs $0xf4f4f4f40ceb050f,%rax
```

- Hide a SYSCALL instruction (0f 05) at address 0x20ea2
- Spray 250MB of indirect jumps using `dyncode_create()`
- Disable jump alignment with Rowhammer
- **Check** if an exploitable bit flip happened

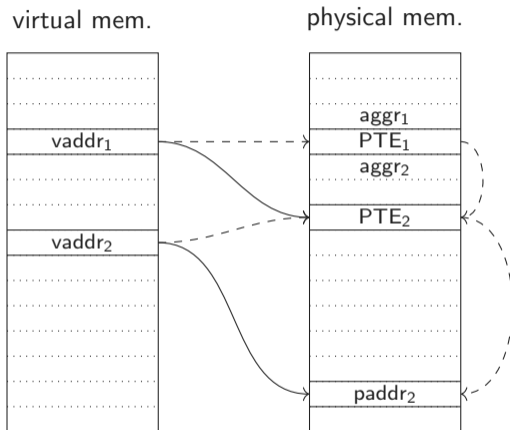
Double Sided Rowhammer

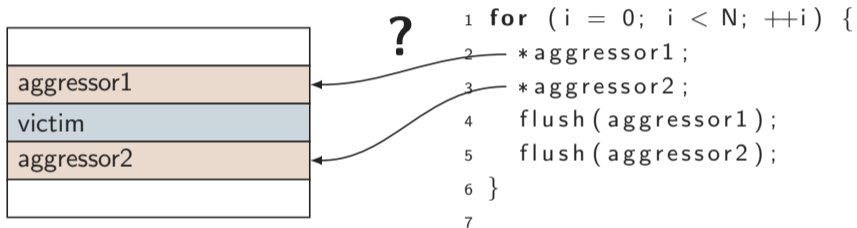


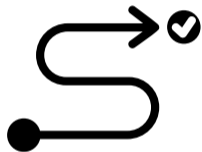
```
1 for (i = 0; i < N; ++i) {  
2   *aggressor1;  
3   *aggressor2;  
4   flush(aggressor1);  
5   flush(aggressor2);  
6 }  
7
```

Page Table Exploit [24]

- Map **shared memory** to spray page tables
- Hammer page table
- Flip bit in page table entry
- Access to physical memory





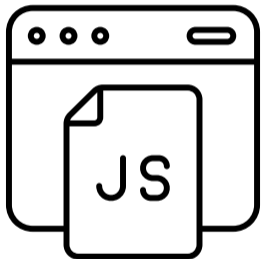


- Physical address → row mapping reverse engineered for many architectures [21]
- Until 2015 physical address through `/proc/self/pagemap`
- ... but quickly closed
- new solutions in new exploits

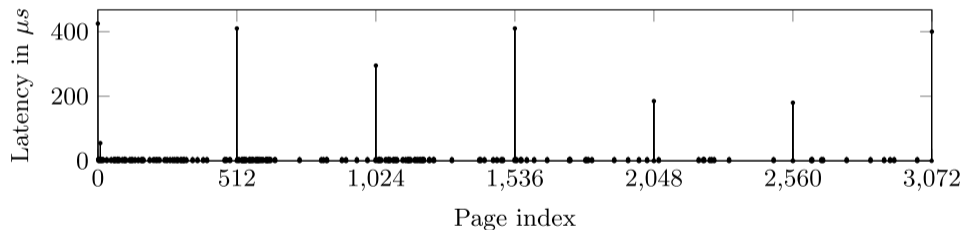
Rowhammer.js: A Remote Software-Induced Fault Attack in JavaScript

Gruss, D., Maurice, C. and Mangard, S.

DIMVA, 2016 [7]



- No host physical address information
- Browser maps arrays with 2MB pages
- Double sided hammering
- Cache eviction





2014

2015

2016

Jonas Juffinger ([@notimaginary_](#))

Andreas Kogler ([@0xhilbert](#))



2014

2015

2016

2016

Jonas Juffinger ([@notimaginary_](#))

Andreas Kogler ([@0xhilbert](#))

Dedup Est Machina: Memory Deduplication as an Advanced Exploitation Vector

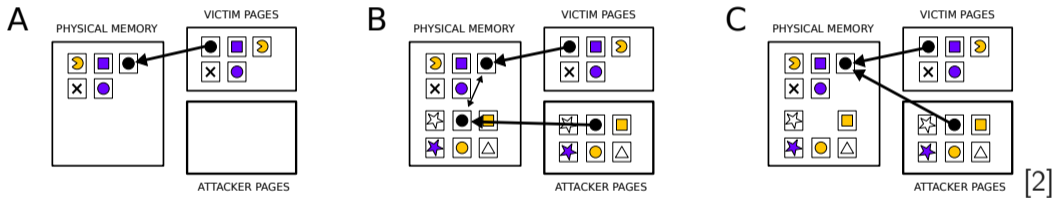
Bosman, E., Razavi, K., Bos, H. and Giuffrida, C.

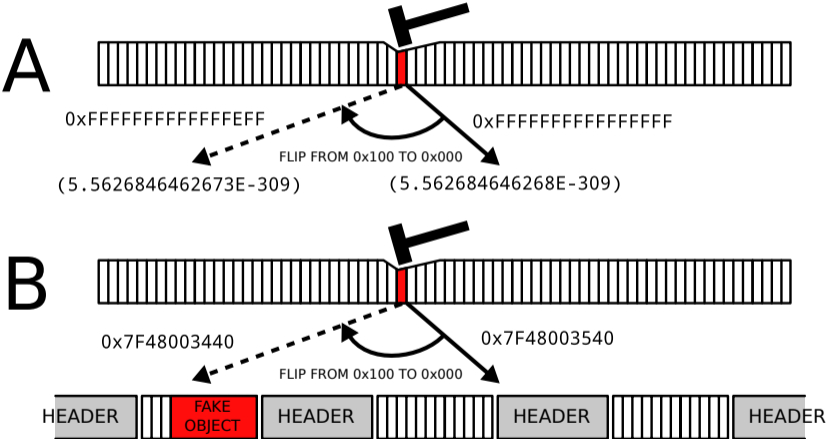
S&P, 2016 [2]



JavaScript Browser (Edge) Exploit

- Exploits page deduplication to leak pointers
- Create counterfeit Uint8Array object
- Pivot pointer to object using Rowhammer

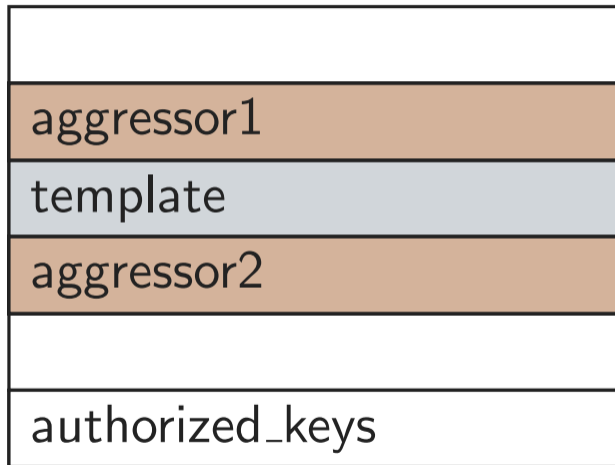


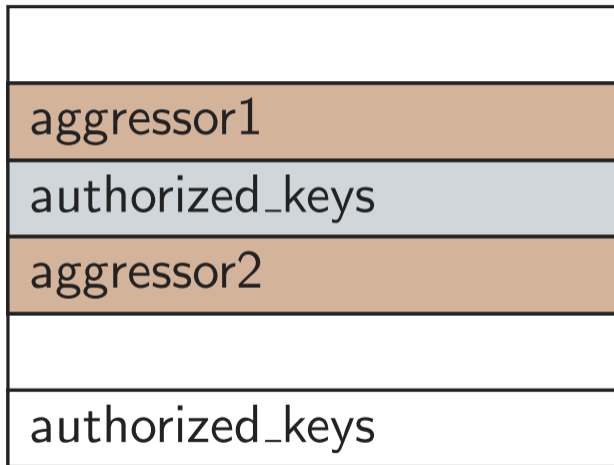


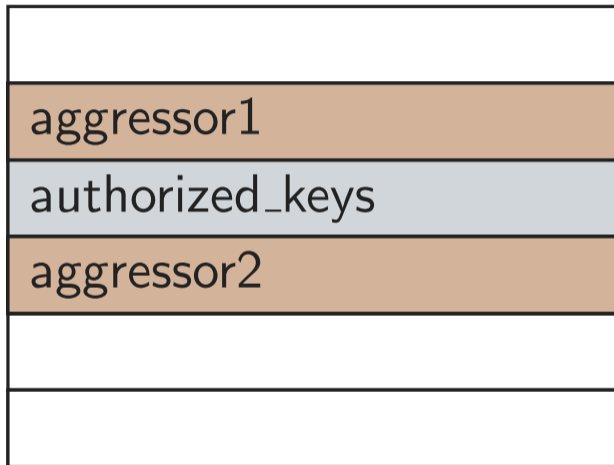
Flip Feng Shui: Hammering a Needle in the Software Stack

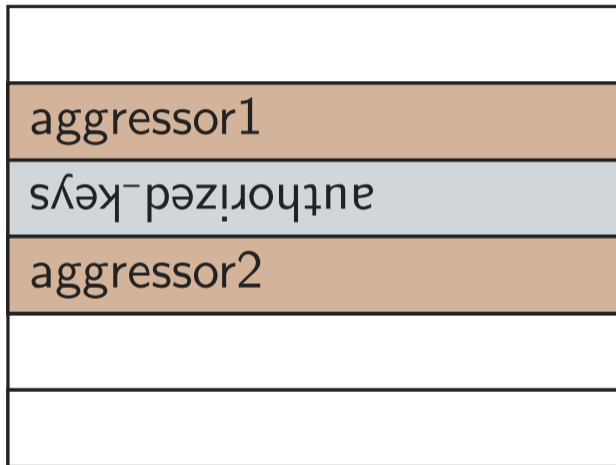
Razavi, K., Gras, B., Bosman, E., Preneel, B., Giuffrida, C. and Bos, H.

USENIX Security, 2016 [22]









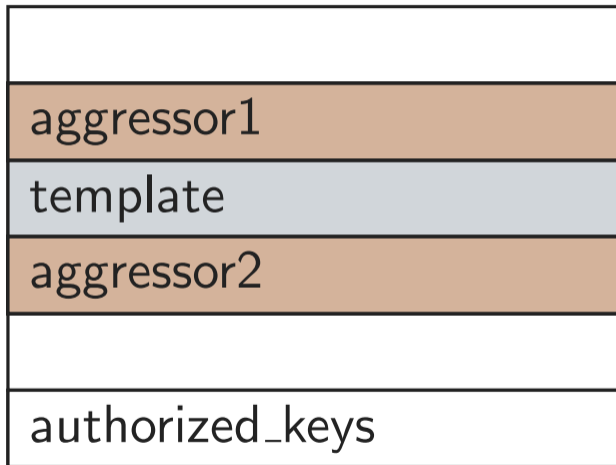


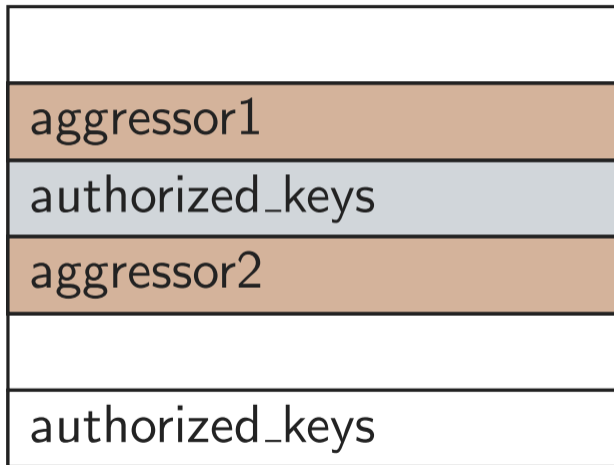
Corporate needs you to find the differences between this picture and this picture.

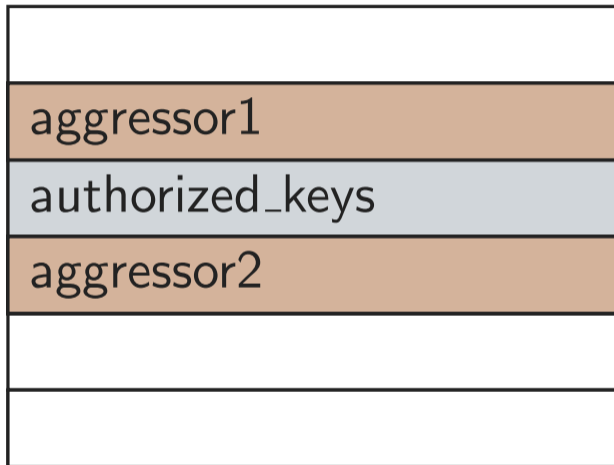


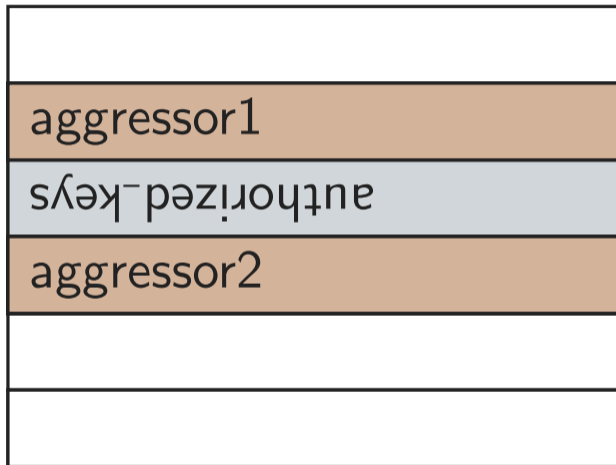
Kernel Samepage Merging

They're the same picture.







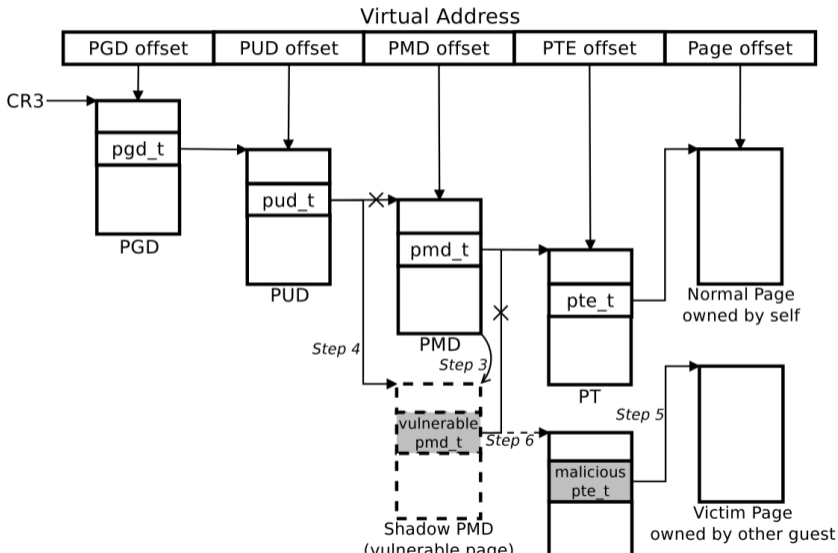


One Bit Flips, One Cloud Flops: Cross-VM Row Hammer Attacks and Privilege Escalation

Xiao, Y., Zhang, X., Zhang, Y. and Teodorescu, R.

USENIX Security, 2016 [28]

One Bit Flips, One Cloud Flops [28]



Drammer: Deterministic Rowhammer Attacks on Mobile Platforms

Van Der Veen, V., Fratantonio, Y., Lindorfer, M., Gruss, D., Maurice, C.

CCS, 2016 [27]



- Memory Templating via DMA (ION) uncached contiguous memory
 - Phys Feng Shui on the buddy allocator
- Self referencing page table



2014

2015

2016

2017

Jonas Juffinger (🐦@notimaginary_)

Andreas Kogler (🐦@0xhilbert)



2014

2015

2016

2017

2017

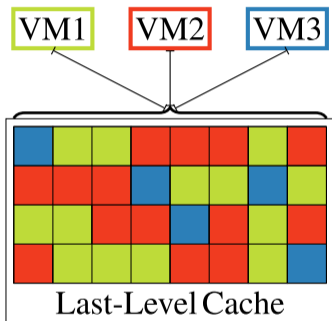
Jonas Juffinger (🐦@notimaginary_)

Andreas Kogler (🐦@0xhilbert)

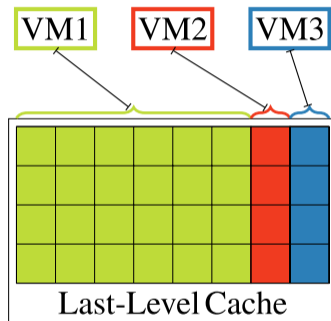
When Good Protections Go Bad: Exploiting Anti-DoS Measures to Accelerate Rowhammer Attacks

Aga, M.T., Aweke, Z.B. and Austin, T.

HOST, 2017 [1]

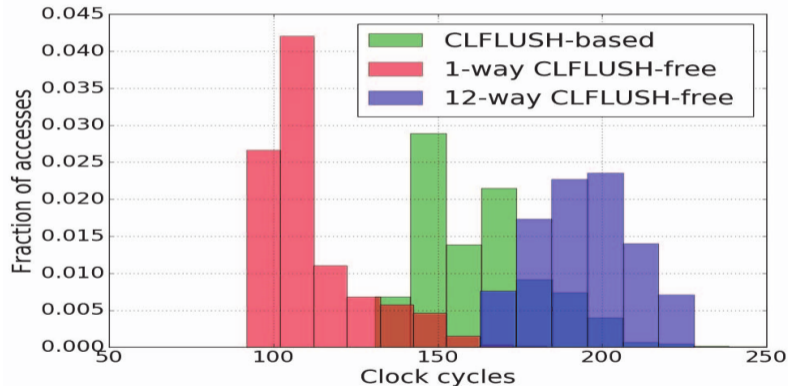


(a) CAT disabled



(b) CAT enabled

When Good Protections Go Bad [1]





2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

Jonas Juffinger (🐦@notimaginary_)

Andreas Kogler (🐦@0xhilbert)



2014

2015

2016

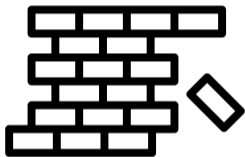
2017

2018

Another Flip in the Wall of Rowhammer Defenses

Gruss, D., Lipp, M., Schwarz, M., Genkin, D., Juffinger, J., O'Connell, S., Schoechl, W. and Yarom, Y.

S&P, 2018 [6]



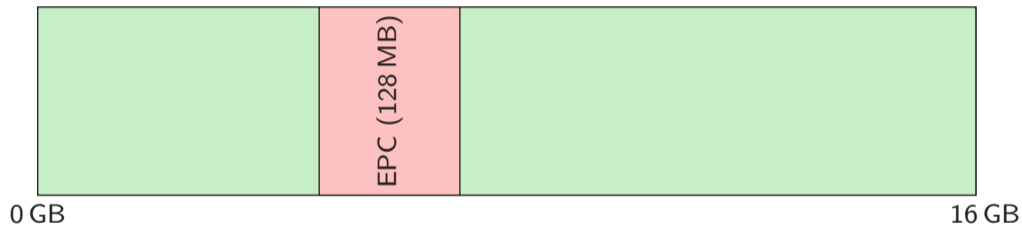
- One Location Rowhammer
- Hammer from SGX
- Attack setuid binaries, e.g., sudo

- Access only a single row
- Row immediately closed due to a closed-row policy ¹

victim
aggressor1
victim

```
1 for (i = 0; i < N; ++i) {  
2   *aggressor1;  
3   flush(aggressor1);  
4 }  
5
```

¹To be continued in 2024 ...



Rowhammer + SGX = Cheap Denial of Service [6, 8]

Hammer Non-EPC Memory



- Many applications perform actions as root
- They can be used by unprivileged users as well
- Implicitly: e.g., ping or mount
- Explicitly: `sudo`
- Target sudo (easy to exploit)













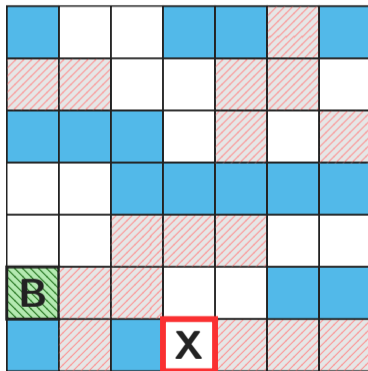




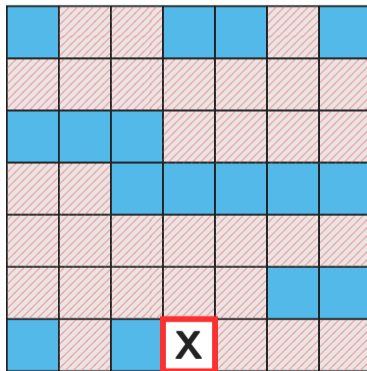
How to get the target virtual page to the target physical location?

Memory Waylaying

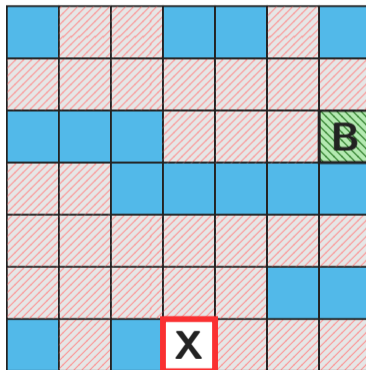
(1) Start



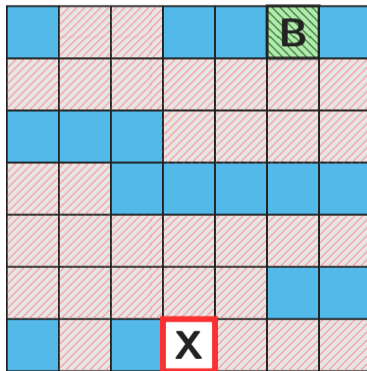
(2) Evict Page Cache



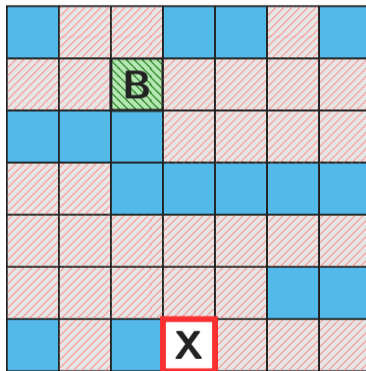
(3) Access Binary



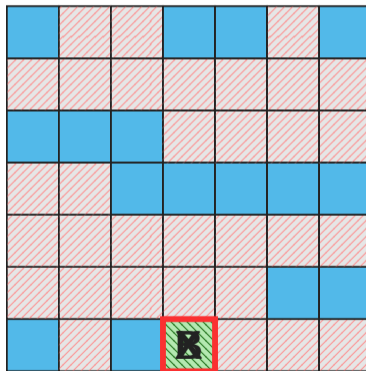
(4) Evict + Access



(5) Evict + Access



(6) Stop if target reached



**SGX + One-location Hammering + Opcode Flipping =
Undetectable Exploit**

Grand Pwning Unit: Accelerating Microarchitectural Attacks with the GPU

Frigo, P., Giuffrida, C., Bos, H. and Razavi, K.

S&P, 2018 [6]



First web browser exploit on ARM using an integrated GPU

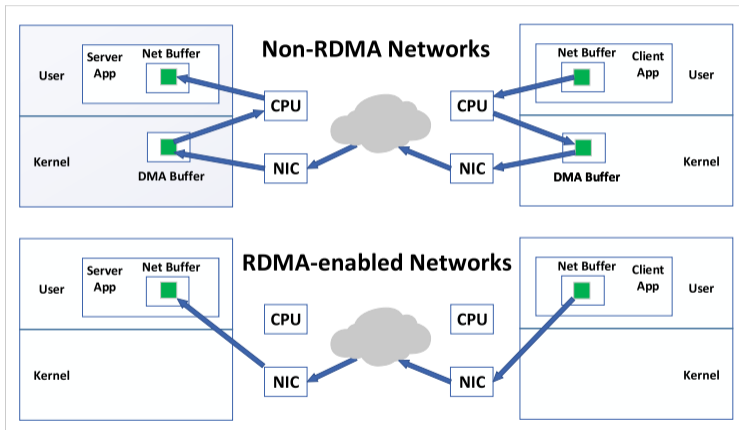
- Loading texture causes predictable memory accesses from the GPU
- Fast cache eviction because GPU has small deterministic caches
- Possible from JavaScript using WebGL
- And WebGL also supplies high resolution timers

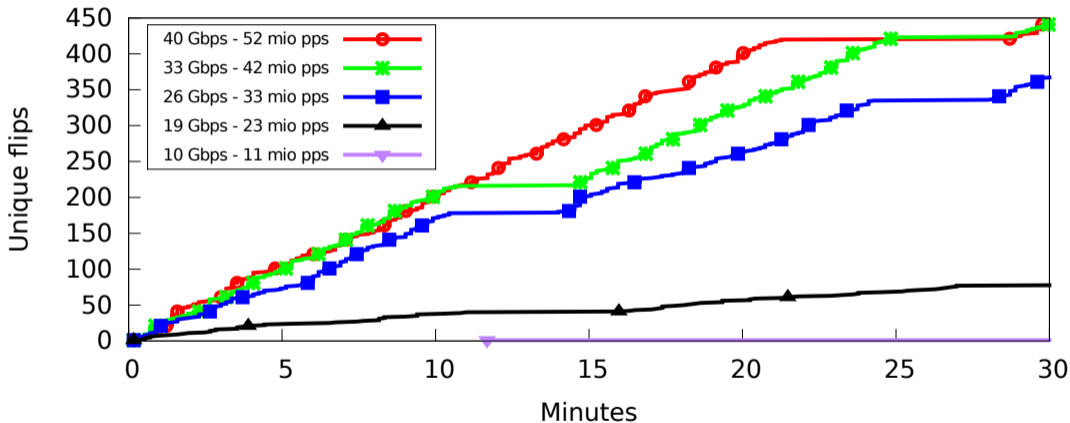
→ Arbitrary read/write

Throwhammer: Rowhammer Attacks over the Network and Defenses

Tatar, A., Konoth, R.K., Athanasopoulos, E., Giuffrida, C., Bos, H. and Razavi, K.

USENIX ATC, 2018 [25]

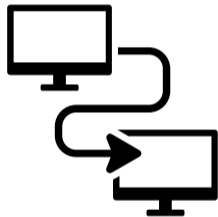




Nethammer: Inducing Rowhammer Faults through Network Requests

Lipp, M., Schwarz, M., Raab, L., Lamster, L., Aga, M.T., Maurice, C. and Gruss, D.

Euro S&P Workshop, 2020 [16]



- Network handling code touches packages multiple times
- This hammers the memory if a single cache way is available (Intel CAT)
- 500 Mbit s⁻¹ sufficient
- No targeted exploitation (DoS)



2014

2015

2016

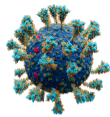
2017

2018

2019

Jonas Juffinger ([@notimaginary_](#))

Andreas Kogler ([@0xhilbert](#))



2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

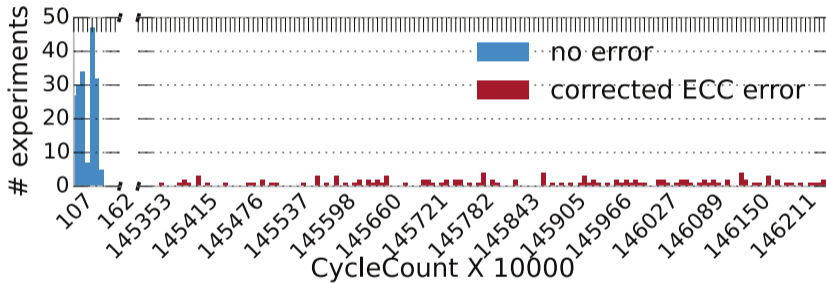
Exploiting Correcting Codes: On the Effectiveness of ECC Memory Against Rowhammer Attacks

Cojocar, L., Razavi, K., Giuffrida, C. and Bos, H.

S&P, 2019 [3]

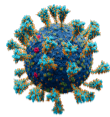


- Goal: Uncorrected and undetected Rowhammer bit flips
1. Reverse engineered ECC functions
 2. Collect single bit flips using a correction time side-channel





- Goal: Uncorrected and undetected Rowhammer bit flips
1. Reverse engineered ECC functions
 2. Collect single bit flips using a correction time side-channel
 3. Combine them for undetected bit flips
- Exploit page tables, RSA, sudo



2014

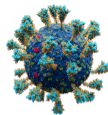
2015

2016

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2019



2014

2015

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2020

RAMBleed: Reading Bits in Memory Without Accessing Them

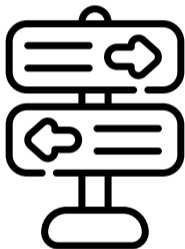
Kwong, A., Genkin, D., Gruss, D. and Yarom, Y.

S&P, 2020 [15]

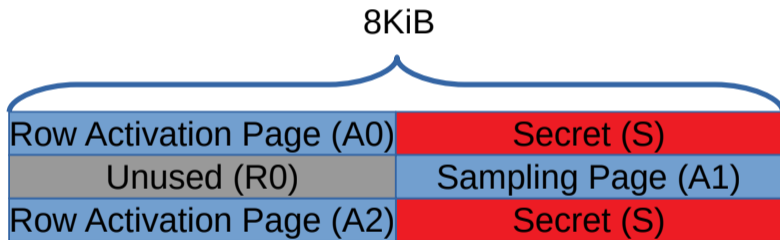


Exploit Rowhammer to directly leak data

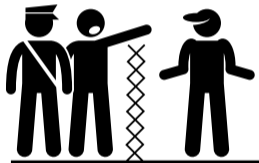
Rowhammer's Data Dependency



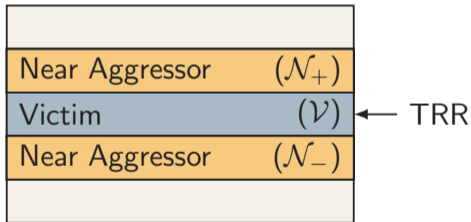
- Cells have only **one** flip direction
- Cells only flip to the value of neighboring cells
- $0 \rightarrow 1$ if neighbors are 1
- $1 \rightarrow 0$ if neighbors are 0



Target Row Refresh (TRR)



- Additional victim refreshes
- Standardized in LPDDR4x



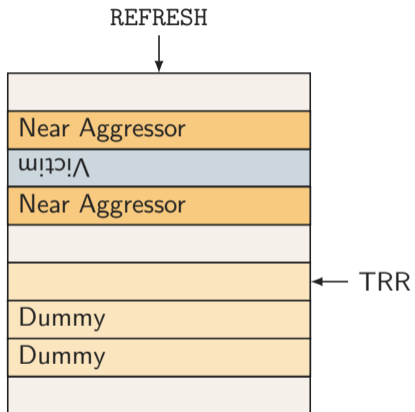
TRRespass: Exploiting the Many Sides of Target Row Refresh

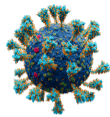
Frigo, P., Vannacc, E., Hassan, H., Van Der Veen, V., Mutlu, O., Giuffrida, C., Bos, H. and Razavi, K.

S&P, 2020 [5]



- TRR implementations are not perfect
- Can be distracted by dummy accesses





2014

2015

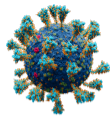
2016

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2021

SMASH: Synchronized Many-sided Rowhammer Attacks from JavaScript

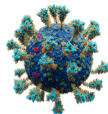
de Ridder, F., Frigo, P., Vannacci, E., Bos, H., Giuffrida, C. and Razavi, K.

Usenix Security, 2021 [23]



New browser JavaScript exploit

1. Evict the cache (no `clflush` instruction)
 2. Circumvent TRR (TRRespass)
- Evict the cache with TRRespass dummy accesses



2014

2015

2016

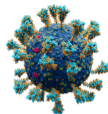
2017

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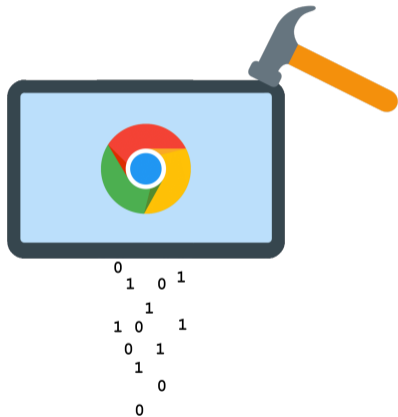
Half-Double: Hammering From the Next Row Over

Kogler, A., Juffinger, J., Qazi, S., Kim, Y., Lipp, M., Boichat, N., Shiu, E., Nissler, M. and Gruss, D.

Usenix Security, 2022 [14]



Far Aggressor	(\mathcal{F}_+)	
Near Aggressor	(\mathcal{N}_+)	← TRR
Victim	(\mathcal{V})	
Near Aggressor	(\mathcal{N}_-)	← TRR
Far Aggressor	(\mathcal{F}_-)	



- Corrupt page table entries can **kill** the attacker process

```
if ( /*misprediction*/ ) {  
    access(probe + (*ptr & 1));  
}  
if ( is_cached(probe) ) {  
    // ptr[0-4] valid  
}
```

Blacksmith: Scalable Rowhammering in the Frequency Domain

Jattke, P., Van Der Veen, V., Frigo, P., Gunter, S. and Razavi, K.

S&P, 2022 [9]

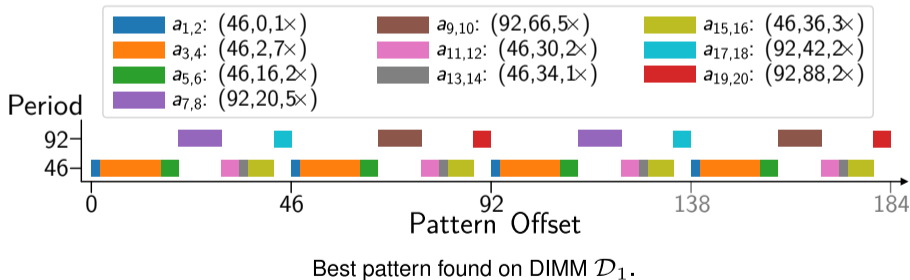
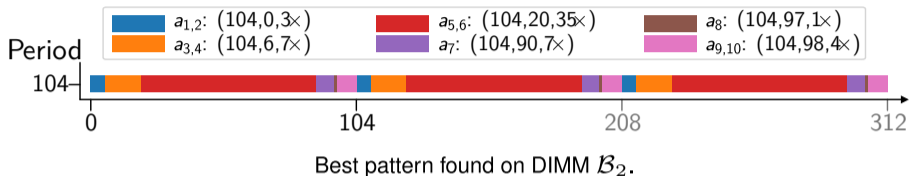


Rowhammer pattern is a combination of aggressor tuples with three characteristics:

- **Frequency:** How often the tuple is accessed within the pattern
- **Phase:** First hammer after start of pattern
- **Amplitude:** How many consecutive hammers

A fuzzer finds effective patterns.

Blacksmith – Example Patterns [9]



Bit flips in all tested modules

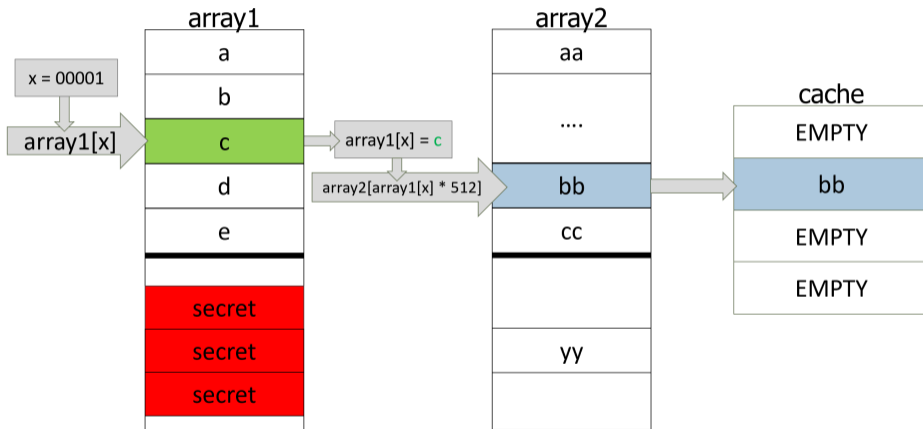
SpecHammer: Combining Spectre and Rowhammer for New Speculative Attacks

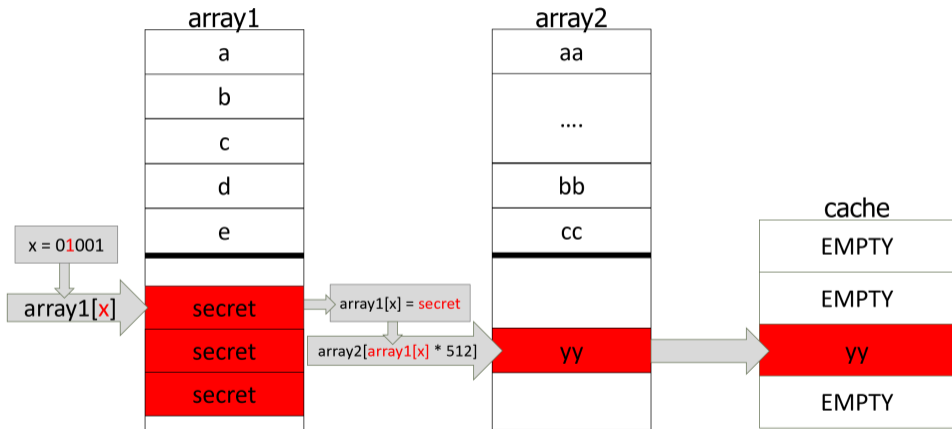
Tobah, Y., Kwong, A., Kang, I., Genkin, D. and Shin, K.G.

S&P, 2022 [26]



- No spectre gadgets in the Kernel anymore :(
- All branches with attacker controlled data are fenced
- Branches on “trusted” kernel data are not
- Hammer this kernel data for out of bounds spectre reads



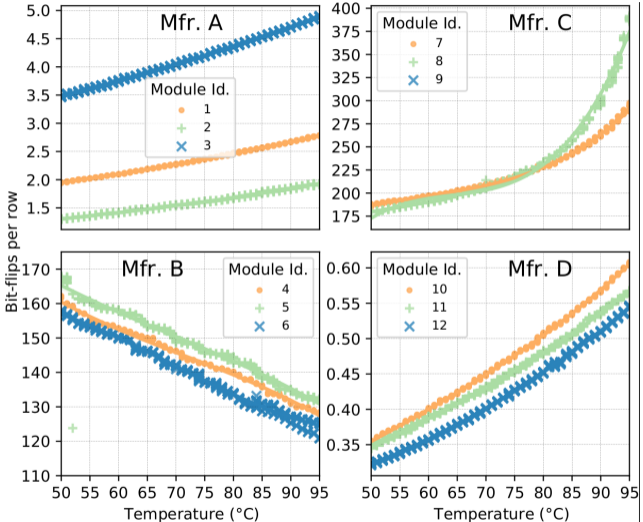


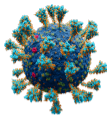
SpyHammer: Using RowHammer to Remotely Spy on Temperature

Orosa, L., Rührmair, U., Yağlikçi, A.G., Luo, H., Olgun, A., Jattke, P., Patel, M., Kim, J., Razavi, K.
and Mutlu, O.

arXiv, 2022 [20]

Measure temperature with Rowhammer [20]





2014

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2016

2017

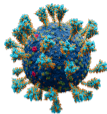
2018

2019

2020

2021

2022



2014

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2018

2019

2020

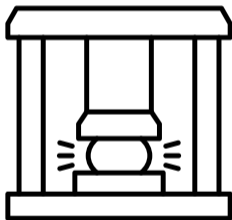
2021

2022

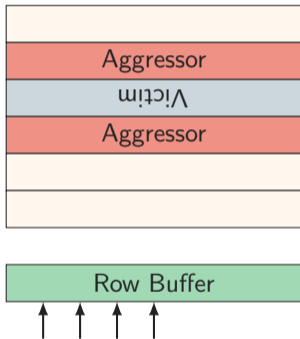
2023

RowPress: Amplifying Read Disturbance in Modern DRAM Chips

Luo, H., Olgun, A., Yağlıkçı, A.G., Tuğrul, Y.C., Rhyner, S., Cavlak, M.B., Lindegger, J., Sadrosadati,
M. and Mutlu, O.
ISCA, 2023 [17]

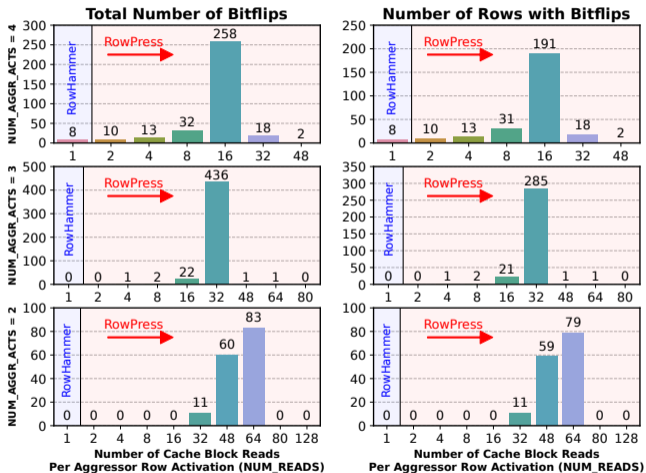


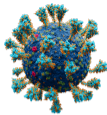
- Different underlying physical effect than Rowhammer
- We unknowingly already saw this effect in 2018 [6, 11]
- Can be exploited [11]



Keep rows open as **long** as possible.

Flips different bits than Rowhammer





2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

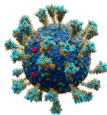
2019

2020

2021

2022

2023



2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

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2020

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2022

2023

2024

ZenHammer: Rowhammer Attacks on AMD Zen-based Platforms

Jattke, P., Wipfli, M., Solt, F., Marazzi, M., Bölcskei, M. and Razavi, K.

ISCA, 2024 [10]



- First Rowhammer bit flips on AMD
- Some differences in DRAM mapping
- Better method to detect REF commands
- Optimized fencing strategy

RISC-H: Rowhammer Attacks on RISC-V

Marazzi, M. and Razavi, K.

DRAMSec, 2024 [18]



- First Rowhammer bit flips on RISC-V (SOPHON SG2042)
- Required access to multiple DRAM columns due to a hardware bottleneck
- Memory access ordering using `nops` for small delays

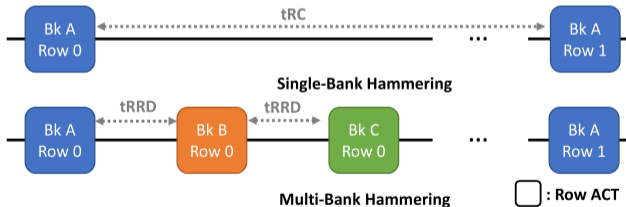
SledgeHammer: Amplifying Rowhammer via Bank-level Parallelism

Kang, I., Wang, W., Kim, J., van Schaik, S., Tobah, Y., Genkin, D., Kwong, A. and Yarom, Y.

Usenix Security, 2024 [12]



- DRAM has multiple banks for parallelism
- Hammer multiple banks in parallel
- Less reordering leads to more bit flips



GlueZilla: Efficient and Scalable Software to Hardware Binding using Rowhammer

Mechelinck, R., Dorfmeister, D., Fischer, B., Volckaert, S. and Brunthaler, S.

DIMVA, 2024 [19]

Unintentional Source Code

```
int a = 42;
if(a != 5) {
    ...
}
```

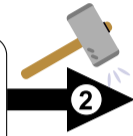


Junction Instruction:
Unintentional Form

Unintentional Program

c7 45 ec 2a 00 00 00	mov	[rbp-0x14],0x2a
83 7d ec 05	cmp	[rbp-0x14],0x5
0f 84 <offset>	je	<offset>
↳ 0b10000100		

Junction Bit

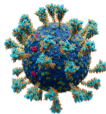


Intentional Program

c7 45 ec 2a 00 00 00	mov	[rbp-0x14],0x2a
83 7d ec 05	cmp	[rbp-0x14],0x5
0f 85 <offset>	jne	<offset>
↳ 0b1000010 1		

Junction Instruction:
Intentional Form





2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

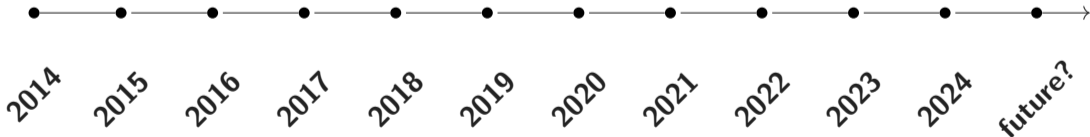
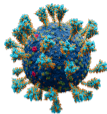
2020

2021

2022

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2024



2014

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future?

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