



SHALL HE PLAY A GAME?

**Lessons learned while playing
CoreWars8086**

Shapira Elad ('Zest') | Security Researcher | 29-6-2014



#Whois Elad Shapira ('Zest')

- Reverser from the Holy Land.
- Mobile Security Researcher @AVG.
- Highly passionate for RE, Assembly and Low-Level.
- Speaker (ClubHack, Ground Zero Summit..).
- Co-Organizer of CoreWars8086 competition (IL).

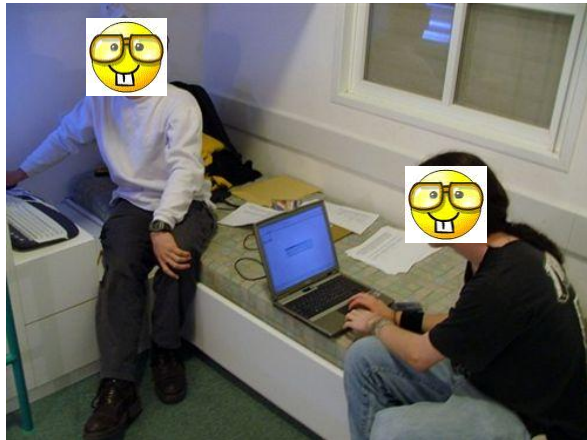


Popular Israeli TV show:
"Beauty & the Geek"

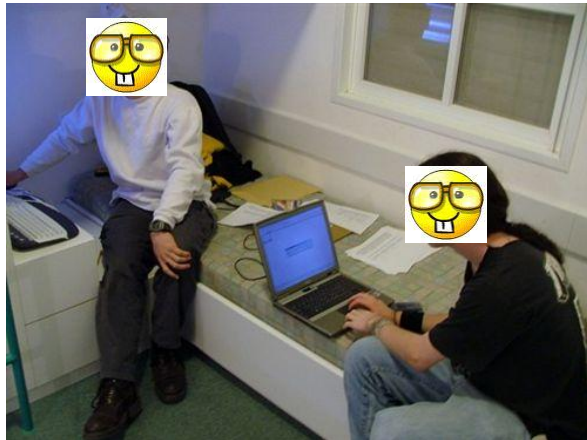


**AVOID HANGOVERS
STAY DRUNK**

Unofficial name:
"Israeli idol of the geeks"



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"Israeli idol of the geeks"

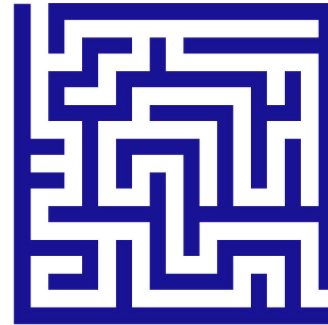


A total of 300 tickets will be sold for this year's conference.

Why CoreWars8086?



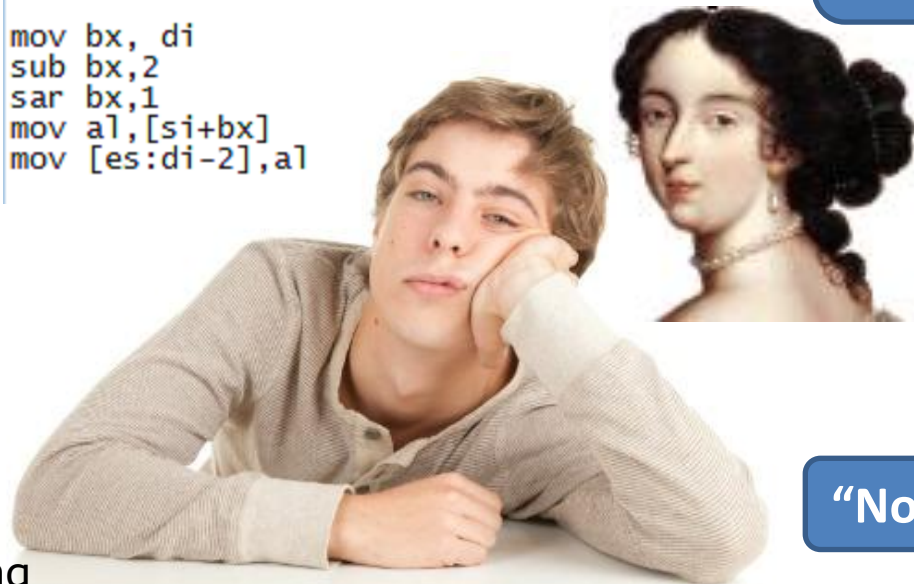
LEARNING IS FUN



```
mov al,7
mov [es:di+1],al
mov di,[Cur]

mov bx, di
sub bx,2
sar bx,1
mov al,[si+bx]
mov [es:di-2],al
```

Does it got any sports in it?



"No Starch".. 😊

Agenda

- Timeline of the CoreWars8086 competition.
- Arena, Engines and rules.
- How to analyze and write survivors.
- Optimization.
- Anti reversing techniques.
- Future / Improvements.
- Share ideas → Create new ideas!
- Hangover.

Origin

- Alexander Dewdney / D.G. Jones.
- CoreWars / RedCode
- <http://vyznev.net/corewar/guide.html>



[Note: This is a reproduction of the Core War Guidelines originally produced by Jones and Dewdney in March of 1984]

CORE WAR GUIDELINES

D. G. Jones and A. K. Dewdney

Department of Computer Science
The University of Western Ontario

March, 1984

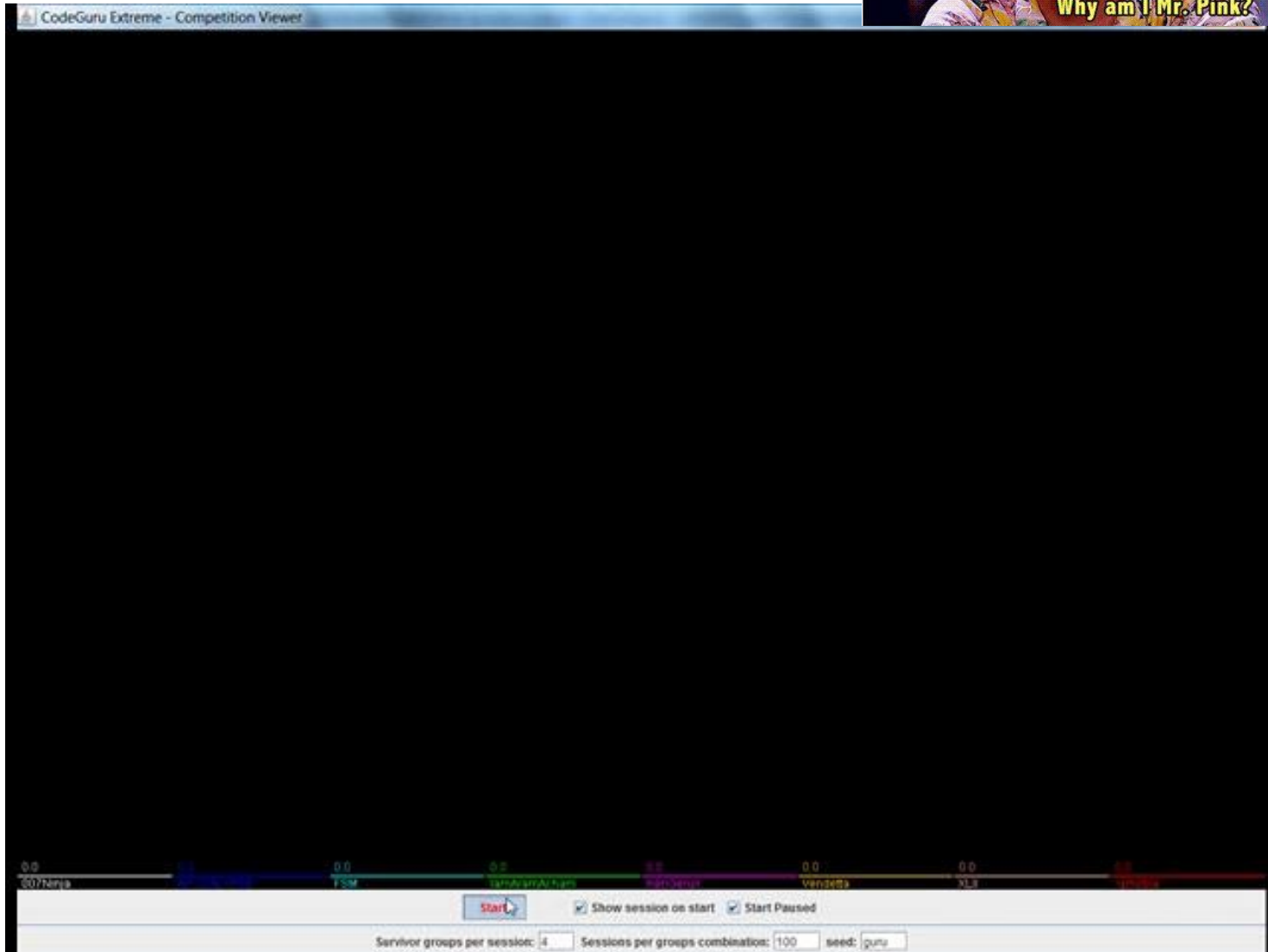
Red's dead baby.
Red's dead.





Fight Club – The digital version

CodeGuru Extreme - Competition Viewer



Survivor groups per session: 4 Sessions per groups combination: 100 seed: guru

Cameras usually add 5 kg ..

Timeline of the competition

We got cool T-shirts from our sponsors!



- Getting zombies from the organizers.



Zombies



- 1st round (remote) – 25%
- 2nd round (Face-2-face) – 25% 09:00 AM



Other competitors

- 3rd round (Face-2-face) – 50% 12:01PM
- Top 4 survivors get to the final.
- Final → Winners!

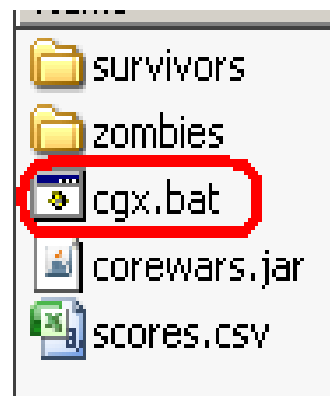
Survivors in general



<https://code.google.com/p/corewars8086/>



- **Download, Unzip & play** (Google Code).
- Survivor's name == file's name (without extension).
- 8086 opcodes, **16bit** instructions.
- Not all instructions are supported (Pusha, Popa, ..).
- Compiled as **'com'** file
 - DOS command file format.
- **Maximal** survivor size - **512** bytes.
- **Each team** can submit **two survivors**.
 - Rocky1 & Rocky2.



Virtual Arena

- Loaded to the virtual arena each time with **random address** (copied “as is”).
- **Distance** between two survivors and the sides is at least **1024** bytes.
- **All cells** initialized to `CCh` before start.
- End of the battle
 - **200,000 rounds** or **one survivor left**.
- **Order of the survivors is determined randomly** at the beginning and cannot be changed.

Arena (NOT virtual)



Arena & Addresses

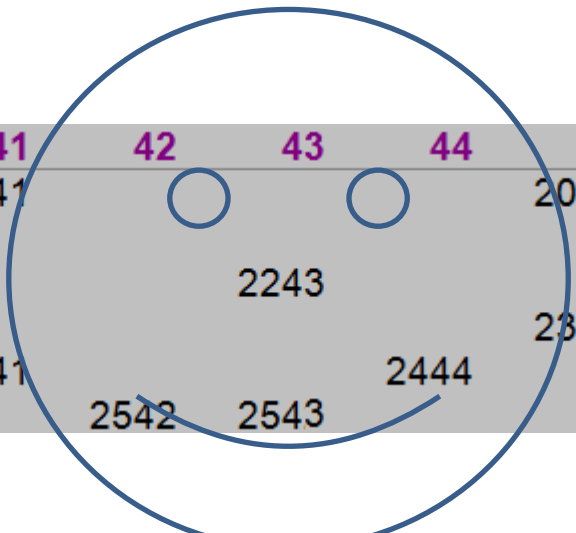
	00	01	..	..	FE	FF
00	0000	0001	..	..	00FE	00FF
01	0100	0101	..	..	01FE	01FF
:	:	:			:	:
:	:	:			:	:
FE	FE00	FF01	..	..	FEFE	FEFF
FF	FF00	FF01	..	..	FFFE	FFFF

```

mov [2041h], al
mov [2045h], al
mov [2243h], al
mov [2340h], al
mov [2441h], al
mov [2542h], ax
mov [2444h], al
mov [2345h], al

```

	40	41	42	43	44	45	46
20		2041				2045	
21							
22			2243				
23	2340					2345	
24		2441			2444		
25			2542	2543			



Survivor's Registers (before 1st round)

- **BX, CX, DX, SI, DI, BP** = 00s.
- **Flags** = 00s.
- **AX, IP** - Initial location of the survivor, offset.
- **CS, DS** - Segment that was assigned to the survivors.
- **ES** - Segment for survivors from same team (shared memory) – 2048 bytes.
- **SS** - Beginning of the personal stack (2048).
 - ss:0x00 - ss:0x7ff, initialized to 0x00.
- **SP** - Offset of beginning of personal stack (00s).



How survivor gets killed

- **Running illegal command**
 - The 060h byte does not translated to an assembly command.
 - Engine: "Died due to CPU".
- Running **commands** that are **not supported by the engine**
 - For example 'int 21h'.
- **Access to memory** not in the arena or not in the range of the survivor's personal stack.
 - For example ES:0x1234.
 - Engine: "Died to memory exception".

Zombies

- **Sent by organizers** before competition begins.
- Regular survivors that **do not get points**.
- **Different CPU states** problem.
 - Direction flag (MOVSW will kill master).
- Zombies **can still win the battle**
 - less points for us.
 - We need to encourage them to **commit suicide**.
- **Contain Math Riddles** (That you need to solve).

Pwning bugs in the engine

```

File[] warriorFiles = warriorsDirectory.listFiles();
if (warriorFiles == null) {
    JOptionPane.showMessageDialog(null,
        "Error - survivors directory (\\" +
        WARRIOR_DIRECTORY + "\\") not found");
    System.exit(1);
}

WarriorGroup currentGroup = null;
// sort by filename
Arrays.sort(warriorFiles, new Comparator<File>() {
    public int compare(File o1, File o2) {
        return o1.getName().compareToIgnoreCase(o2.getName());
    }
});

```

```

    }
}
readZombies();
}

```

.	FULL STOP (U+002E)
/	SOLIDUS (U+002F)
0	DIGIT ZERO (U+0030)
1	DIGIT ONE (U+0031)

How to make your survivors be the firsts to run?

0 SurvivorName

What is the advantage?



Zombies can fix your survivor's code

0Survivor~~X~~Team1 (x2)
SurvivorTeam2 (x2)
SurvivorTeam3 (x2)
Zombie1
Zombie2



Zombies can fix your survivors code

0SurvivorTeam1 (x2)
SurvivorTeam2 (x2)
SurvivorTeam3 (x2)
Zombie1
Zombie2

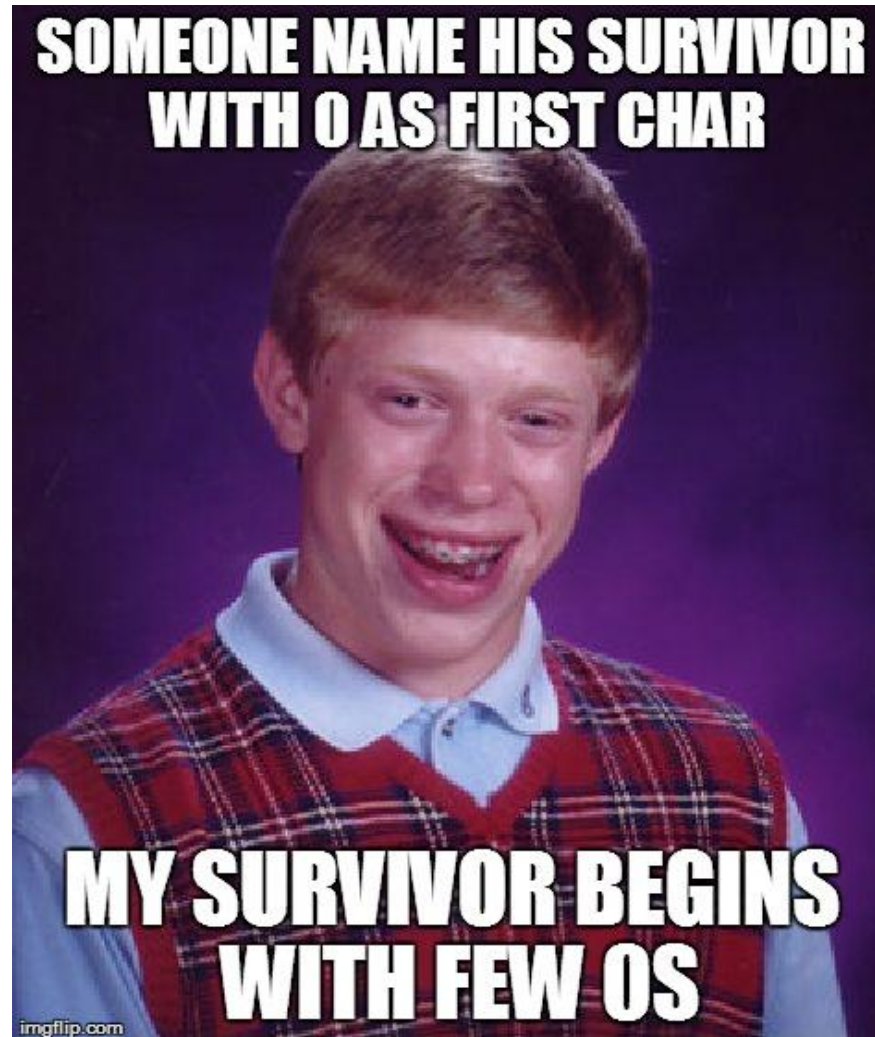
Zombies can fix your survivors code

0S  vo  Team1 (x2)
SurvivorTeam2 (x2)
SurvivorTeam3 (x2)
Zombie1
Zombie2

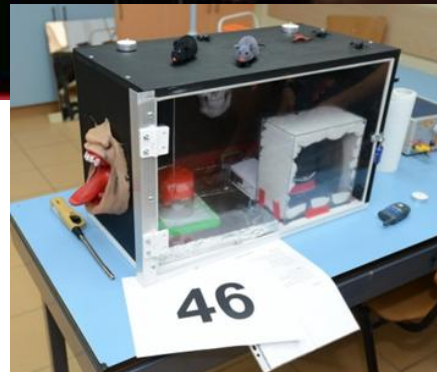
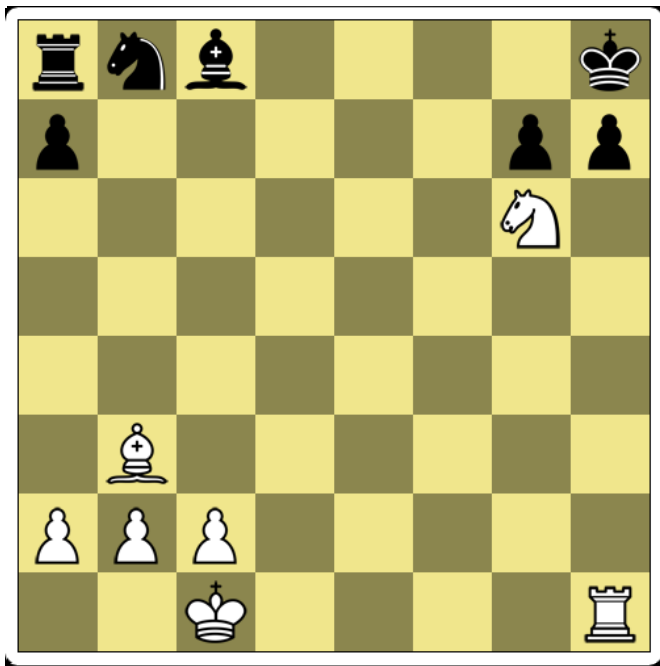
Zombies can fix your survivors code

0S  v  am1 (x2)
SurvivorTeam2 (x2)
SurvivorTeam3 (x2)
Zombie1
Zombie2

To stay on the safe side..



Safe Cracking

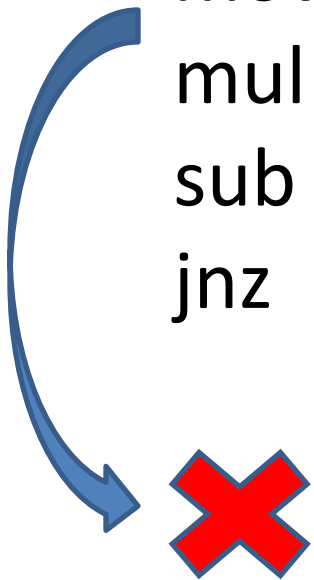


Safe example#1

```

loop:
mov  AX,[1234]  [1234] = AAAB
mov  BX,3      3*AX=1
mul  AX        BX*AX=1
sub  AX,1      AX=1
jnz  loop     ZF=1

```



Solution:

```

killer:
mov  AX, AAAB
mov  ptr word [1234], AX
JMP  killer

```

-21845			
1010 15	1010	1010	1011 0
AAAB			
1010 15	1010	1010	1011 0

Safe example#2

loop:

mov AL,[111] [111] = 49H

add AL,0A8h 73+168=241(F1)

mov AH, [112] [112] = 42H

xor AH,0ADh ADH xor 42H = EFH (239d)

mul AH AX = AH * AL = 239 * 241 = 57599

cmp AX,0xe0ff AX=57599d

jne loop ZF=1



Safe example#2

```
loop:
mov AL,[111]
add AL,0A8h
mov AH, [112]
xor AH,0ADh
mul AH
cmp AX,0xe0ff
jne loop
```



Solution:

killer:

```
mov AL, 49H
mov AH, 42H
mov ptr byte [111], AL
mov ptr byte [112], AH
jmp killer
```

Important factors

- Survivors usually contain
 - **Initialization.**
 - **Bombing loop.**
 - Write -> Update address for next writing -> Jumping to beginning of loop
- We usually measure survivors by
 - **'Area of vulnerability'**
 - **'Attack rate'**.
- We can cause unexpected phenomenon
 - `mov AX, 0000 -> mov ax, 0cccch (2,3 bytes).`

Looper

- Smallest functional survivor (EBFE, jmp \$):

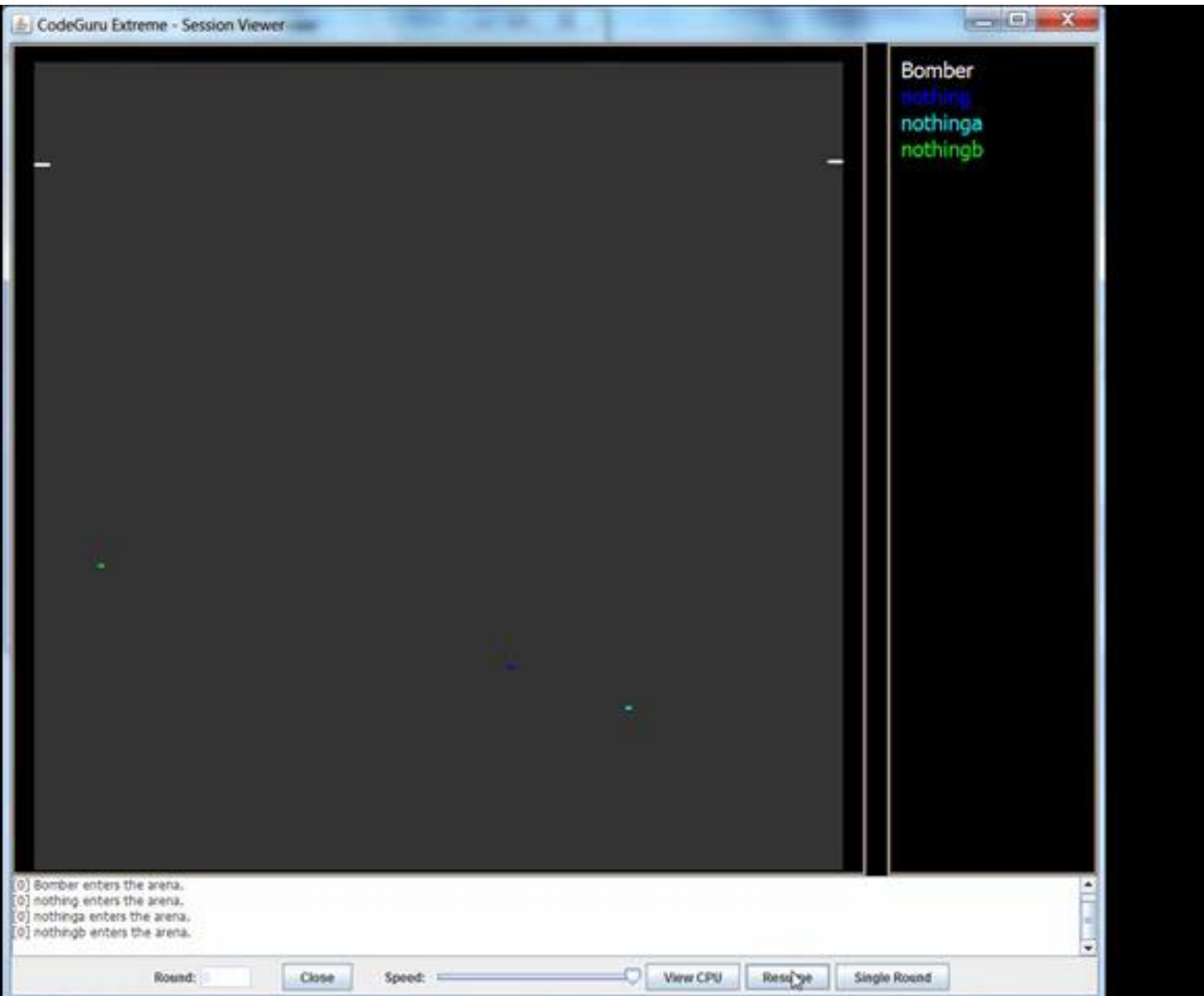
Loop:

Jmp loop

- Good to test other survivors.

Bomber Demo

Attack sequence	Vulnerability profile
3 / 1	5



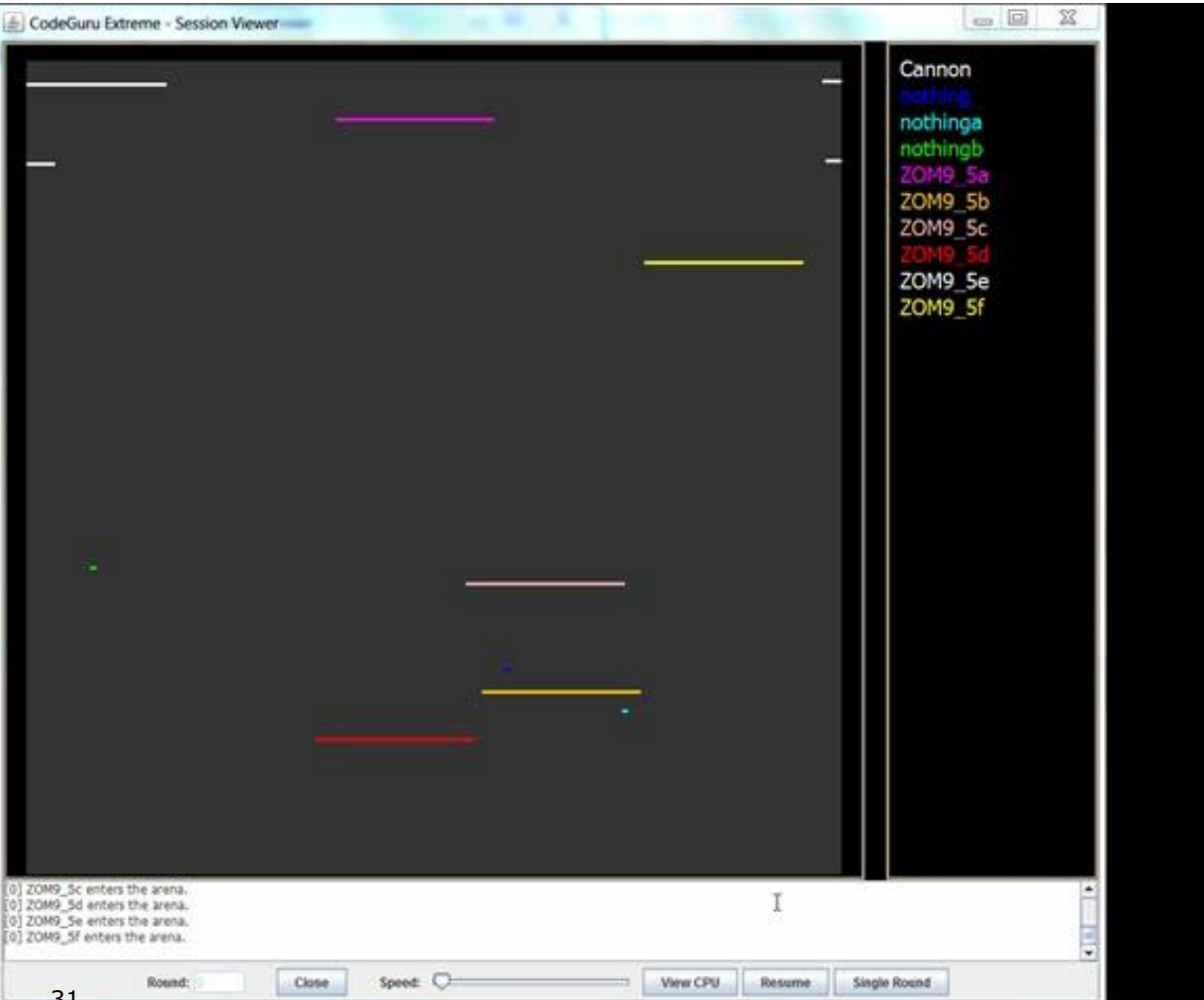
```
mov al, 0CCh
mov bx, 0
```

```
@loop:
mov [bx], al
inc bx
jmp @loop
```



Cannon Demo

Attack sequence	Vulnerability profile
3 / 1	7



@start:

```
mov bx, ax
```

```
add bx, (@end - @start)
```

```
mov al, 0CCh
```

@loop:

```
mov [bx], al
```

```
add bx, 8
```

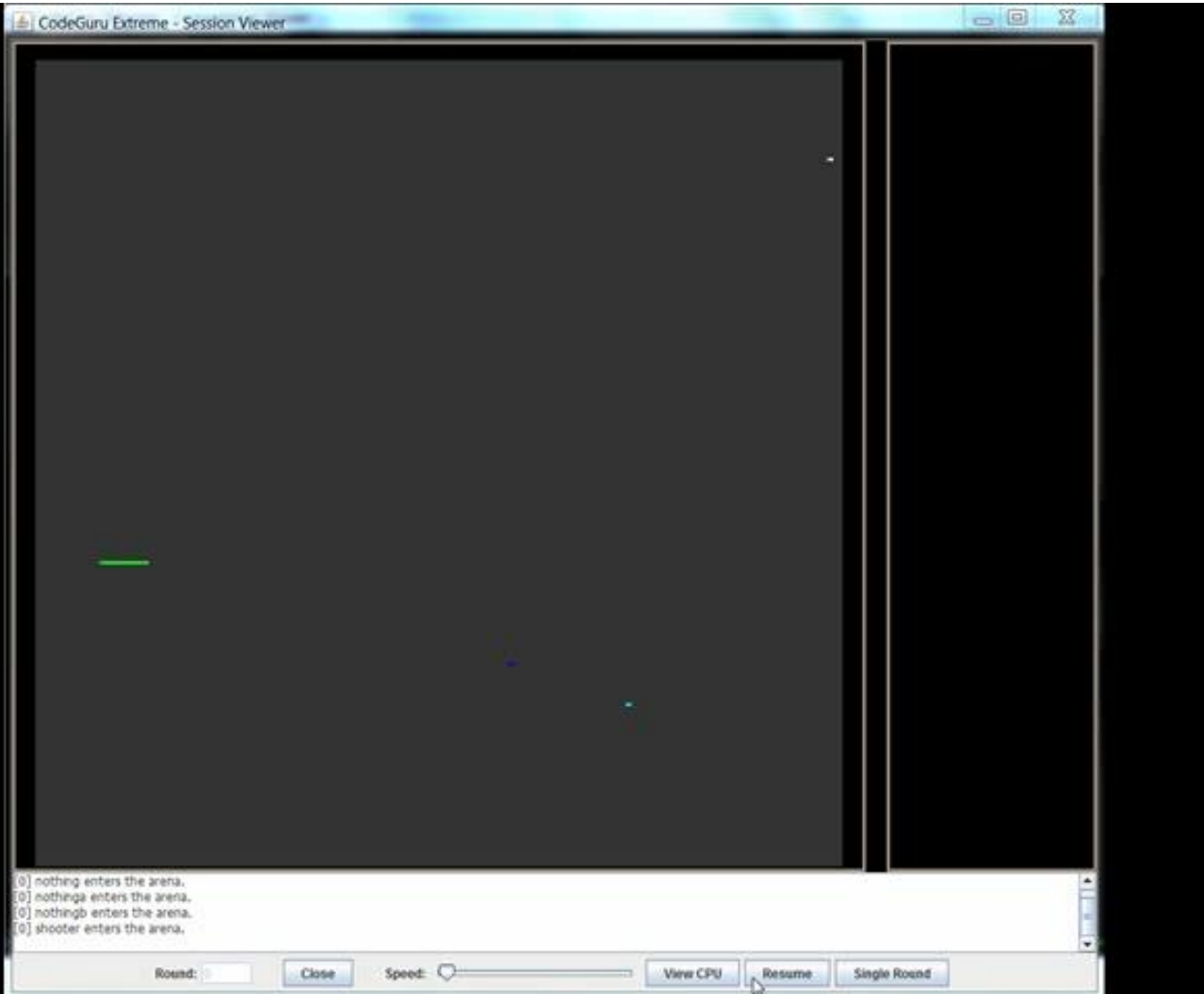
```
jmp @loop
```

@end:

Attack sequence	Vulnerability profile
3 / 2	6



Shooter Demo



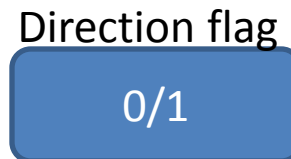
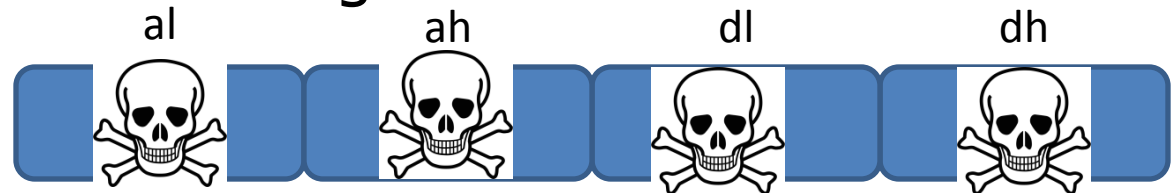
```
MOV DI,AX
MOV AX,0CCCCCh
```

```
@loop:
STOSW
ADD    DI,9
JMP   @loop
```

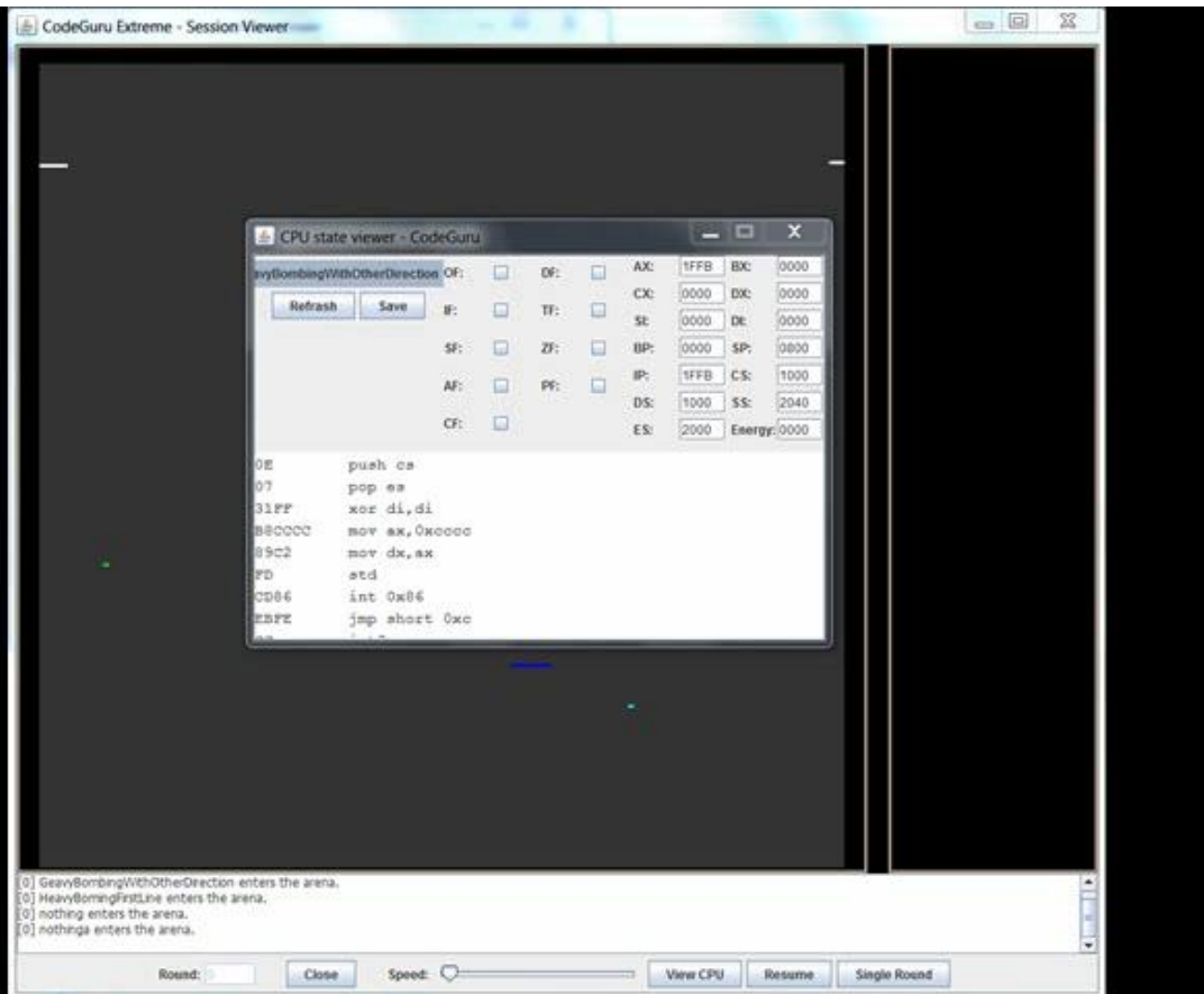



Heavy Bombing

- Writes on 256 bytes (es:di -> 255 addresses)
- es same value as cs -> if not memory exception after the interrupt
- CLD/STD -> change direction
- 2 Heavy Bombing each battle
- We can bomb shared segment
- INT 86h



Heavy Bombing Demo (Opposite direction)



push cs

pop es

xor di,di

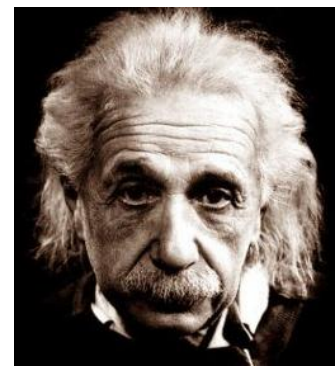
mov ax, 0ccccch

mov dx, ax

std

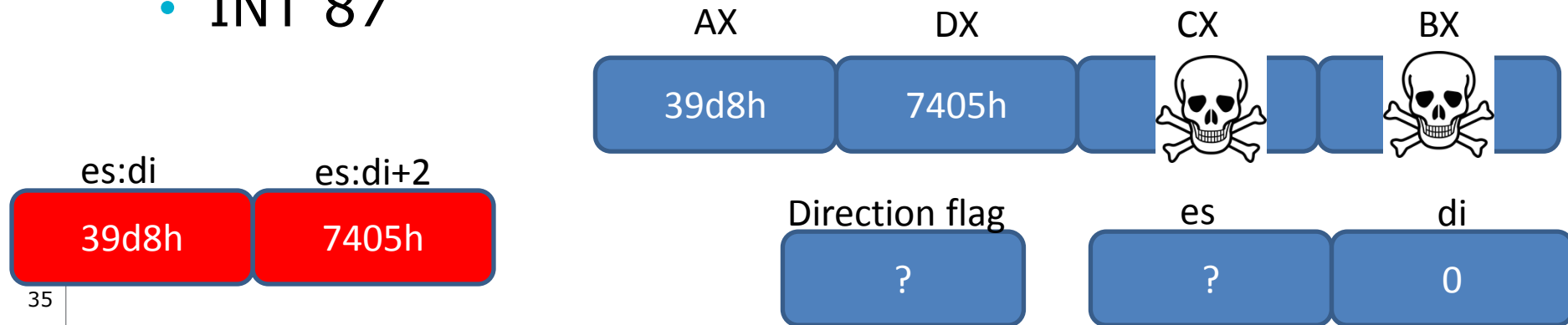
int 86h

jmp \$



Smart Bombing

- Bombing the first occurrence of AX:DX in memory.
- Replacing it with data we want
 - Illegal commands or jmp to our code.
- We can attack ourselves..
- 1 Smart Bombing each battle.
- INT 87



Protection from Smart Bombing

- Change **functionality of registers** (BX \leftrightarrow BP).
 - Usually does not matter.
- Change **order of independent commands**
 - Put 3 values to 3 registers = Few different ways.
- **copy parts of the code**
 - To the beginning and the end.
- **Variable that changed during runtime** near main loop/code part (SP).
- **Encoding with random numbers.**
- **XORing** (will be discussed later).

Smart bombing FAIL protection (CGX#9.5)

```

jmp short 0x12
mov si,0x95a0
xchg ax,bx
cld
lodsw
std
cmp ax,bx
jnc 0xc
or al,0x90
lodsw
loop 0x6
mov si,0x95a0
xchg ax,bx
Cld
lodsw

```

E2F4
BEA0

```

std
cmp ax,bx
jnc 0x1c
or al,0x90
lodsw
loop 0x16
mov si,0x95a0
xchg ax,bx
cld
lodsw
std
cmp ax,bx
jnc 0x2c
or al,0x90
lodsw
loop 0x26

```

```

push cs
pop es
mov ax, 0F4E2h
mov dx, 0A0BEh
mov cx, 0cccch
mov bx,cx
STD
Int 87h
Jmp $

```

Zombie ==?

Binary search ("Lion in the desert")

`jmp short 0x12` → Jumping to body

`..`

`mov si,0x95a0` → The "talking location" that the survivors and the zombie talk in

`xchg ax,bx`

`cld` → Keep loading address on the side (LODSW will change AX)

`lodsw`

`std` → Clears the direction flag (DF=0)

`cmp ax,bx`

`jnc 0x1c` → LODSW == MOV AX,[SI++ or SI--]

`or al,0x90`

`lodsw` → AX will hold the 'talking location'

`loop 0x16` → DF=1 (later SUB SI, 2 to change back)

Binary search ("Lion in the desert")

jmp short 0x12

..

mov si,0x95a0

xchg ax,bx

cld ←

lodsw

std

cmp ax,bx

jnc 0x1c

or al,0x90 →

lodsw

loop 0x16

Compare his address (BX) to talking location (AX) - change only flags.

AX >= BX

jumps into itself (IP increased by 1)

73 FF 73 **FF** Dec [si] ← Next cell

0C 90 **0C** 90 nop

changes AL + AX changed again?

hidden Dec[Si] command 😊

DF=1 (sub si, 2 to change back)

6 Zombies

```

push cs
pop es
int 0x87
and ax,0x7fff
push ax
mov bl,[0xc0de]
test bl,bl
jns 0x16
div bl
mov [0xc0dd],ah
pop ax
jmp short 0x7
  
```

Zombie ==?

```

mov bl,[0xc0de]
mov bl,[0xc1de]
mov bl,[0xc2de]
mov bl,[0xc3de]
mov bl,[0xc4de]
mov bl,[0xc4de]
  
```

```

mov [0xc0dd],ah
mov [0xc1dd],ah
mov [0xc2dd],ah
mov [0xc3dd],ah
mov [0xc4dd],ah
mov [0xc4dd],ah
  
```

```

public start
start proc near
push    cs
pop     es
assume es:seg000
int     87h
and     ax, 7FFFh
  
```

```

loc_10107:
push    ax
mov     bl, ds:0C0DEh
test   bl, bl
jns    short loc_10116
  
```

```

div     bl
mov     ds:0C0DDh, ah
  
```

```

loc_10116:
pop     ax
jmp     short loc_10107
start endp
  
```

```

seg000 ends
  
```

```

end start
  
```




Chinese Remainder Theorem

$$\begin{array}{l}
 2x \equiv 1 \pmod{3} \\
 3x \equiv 2 \pmod{4} \\
 4x \equiv 3 \pmod{5} \\
 \\
 x \equiv 2 \pmod{60}
 \end{array}
 \Leftrightarrow
 \begin{array}{l}
 x \equiv 2 \pmod{3} \\
 x \equiv 2 \pmod{4} \\
 x \equiv 2 \pmod{5}
 \end{array}$$

Formula used to find all the zombies:

input = ?

a1 = (input%254);

a2 = (input%255);

input = (a1*255*1 + a2*254*254)%(255*254);

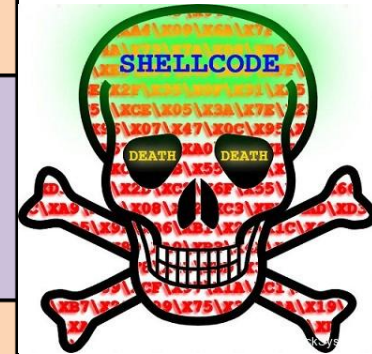
**Sometime, the organizers
send invalid zombies...**



Optimization



#	bytes	opcodes	rounds	Not optimized	Optimized	bytes	opcodes	rounds
1	3	0x83 0xc0 0x01	1	add ax,1	inc ax	1	0x40	1
2	3	0x83 0xe8 0x01	1	sub ax,1	dec ax	1	0x48	1
3	3	0xb8 0x00 0x00	1	Mov AX,0	Sub AX,AX	2	0x29 0xc0	1
4	5	0xb9 0x02 0x00 0xf7 0xf1	2	mov CX,2 div CX	shr ax,1	3	0xc1 0xe8 0x02	1
5	6	0x89 0xc2 0x89 0xd8 0x89 0xd3	3	mov dx,ax mov ax,bx mov bx,dx	XCHG ax,bx	1	0x93	1
6	7	0xa2 0x00 0x00 0x88 0x26 0x01 0x00	2	mov [0],al mov[1],ah	mov [0],ax	3	0xa3 0x00 0x00	1



Bit Twiddling Hacks

By Sean Eron Anderson
seander@cs.stanford.edu

How not to be seen





#1 – Anti Disassembly

Mu-Ha-Ha-Ha!



Original

FF =
will never
happen

Disassembly

```

00000000 89C2  mov dx,ax
00000002 1E    push ds
00000003 06    push es
00000004 EB01  jmp short 0x7
00000005 FF1F  call word far [bx]
00000006 07    pop es
00000009 EBF5  jmp short 0x0
    
```

```

@start:
mov dx,ax
push ds
push es
jmp @yes
@no:
db 0xff
@yes:
pop ds
pop es
jmp @start
    
```

1F =
pop ds

#2 – Usage of unsupported registers (1/2)

- FS is unsupported by engine.
- difference between opcode interpretation between 8086 and later processors like 80386
- 8086 processor will read it like 'ES'.



HutsHuts
CGX3

```
C:\Program Files (x86)\nasm>ndisasm.exe CodeToCompile  
00000000 8EE3          mov fs,bx
```

```
push es, ds  
move bx, ds  
mov fs, bx
```

#2 – Usage of unsupported registers (2/2)

- `mov <segment register>, <general purpose register>`
- Binary value: `10001110``cosssr``hmm`

Advanced processors

000 - ES

001 - CS

010 - SS

011 - DS

100 FS (only 386+)

101 GS (only 386+)

8086 processor

Ignore first bit

`mov fs,bx =>`

`mov es, bx`



#3 - Problems with old debuggers

- Targeting flaws that can be found in debuggers.
 - Example: debug.exe.
- SP (Stack Pointer) gets really small value like '4' -> debugger crush.

```
DaySixth:  
mov  ss, sp  
mov  [80], ax  
mov  sp, dx  
shl  sp, 1  
shl  sp, 1  
shl  sp, 1  
shl  sp, 1  
add  sp, [bx]  
jmp  ax
```


#4 - Random bits



- Write multiple INT3 ('CC', unsupported opcode) in places that are not part of the code flow.
- After compilation replace all occurrences of 'CC' to random bits (Hex Editor/script).
- For example F1, D6 etc.

```
case (byte)0xCC: // INT3
    throw new IntOpcodeException();
```

```
mov es,sp
int 87h
add si,cx
call far [si]
```

```
int 3
int 3
int 3
int 3
int 3
int 3
int 3
```



```
O}-<Q<=10018 MTWThF
02.28.08 7:55pm |* *| Q<=
O}-< 1/2?...1/256? omg! <3
lol!{u}{_}3=<">=H207xNaCl
yllambywlaw Q<= "?" O}-<
..-.etc jv*\o/* #*%@%!"----"
aabb O}-< :({)xXx })i({ SW .+
5th/42nd ° No.2 ---> ]?
```



#5 – XORing the code

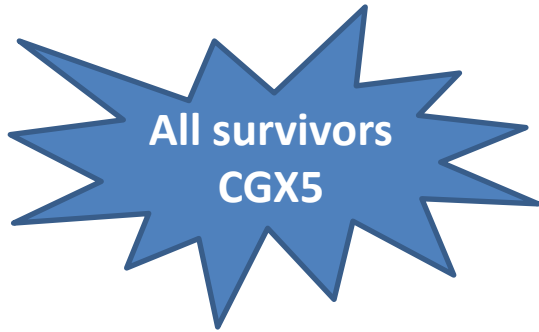
- Taking survivor's body and **generate two binary strings** - XOR of them will be the body of the original survivor.
- **During runtime** every survivor copy his part to the shared memory and they **calculate XOR of the two parts** before it is run by the survivor.
- Also **Smart bombing protection..**



#6 – Copy of a zombie

- Copy zombie into our survivors so **others will pwn a fake zombie** instead of the real one.
- Cons: valuable space is wasted.

#7 – Different Versions



All survivors
CGX5

- Getting zombies from the organizers.



- 1st round (remote) – 25%
- 2nd round (Face-2-face) – 25% 09:00 AM



- 3rd round (Face-2-face) – 50% 12:01PM
- Top 4 survivors get to the final.
- Final -> Winners!

Let them reverse
vulnerable, lame
version

Keep all your
good stuff for
this version

**That's what happens to a team that achieves
1st place before the final round..**



Detect Relationship

1 - Generating ASM instruction trace

```

1    PUSH
2    MOV
    
```

	PUSH	MOV	CALL
PUSH	0	0	0
MOV	0	0	3
CALL	0	0	0

	PUSH	MOV	CALL
PUSH	0	0	0
MOV	0	0	1/6
CALL	0	0	0

1

```

17   MOV
18   CALL
    
```

2

```

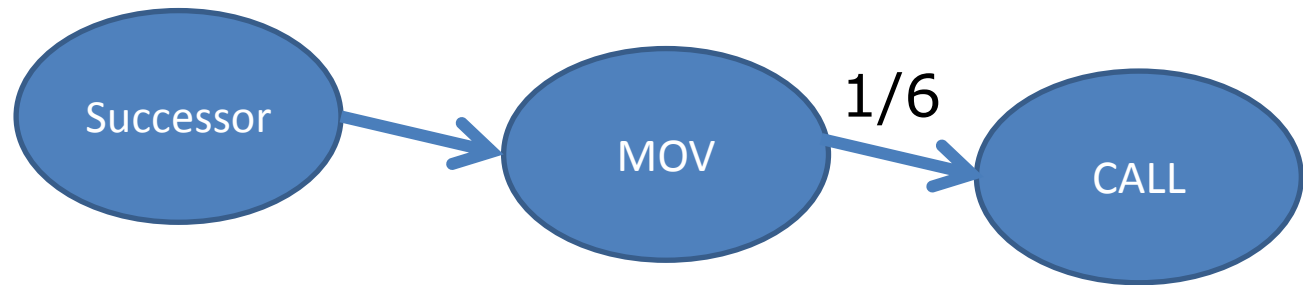
34   MOV
35   CALL
    
```

3

```

42   MOV
43   CALL
    
```

4 - Weighted directed graph for code



5 - Weighted directed graph for code

$$\text{score}(A, B) = \frac{1}{N^2} \left(\sum_{i,j=0}^{N-1} |a_{ij} - b_{ij}| \right)^2$$

Genetic Programming



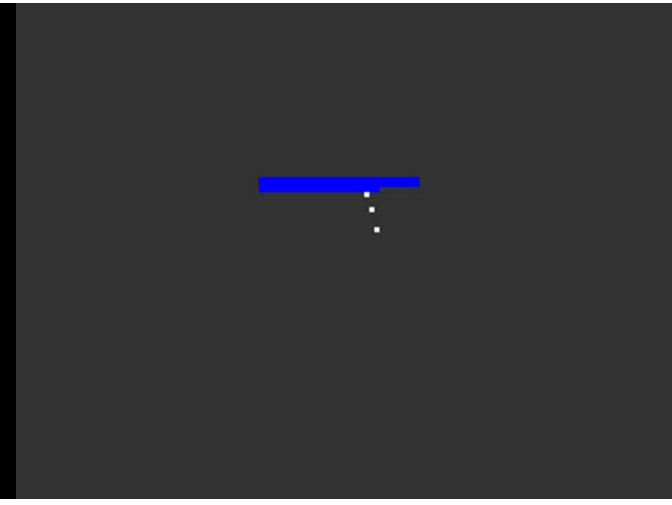
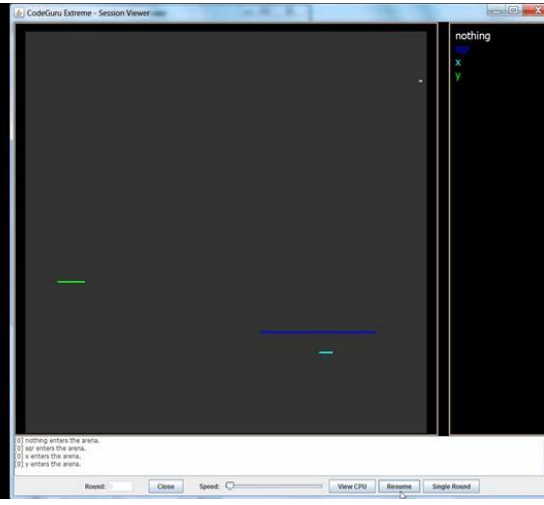
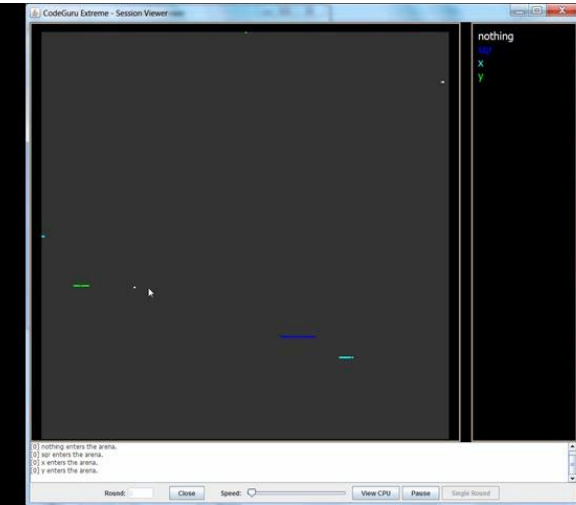
- **A lot of work was done on RedCode**
 - John Perry , Jason Boar, Ryan Colman, Wilkies Benchmark, Dave Hillis and others.
- **One effort was done on CoreWars8086.**
 - Darwin8086.
- Gen = Warrior = String 1-512 bytes.
- Chromosome
 - Bit, Command, Meta-command, Combination,..
- Fitness function – Endogeny, Exogeny.

Graphical Survivors (Make Love Not War)

2D

3D

BALL



SIR



S



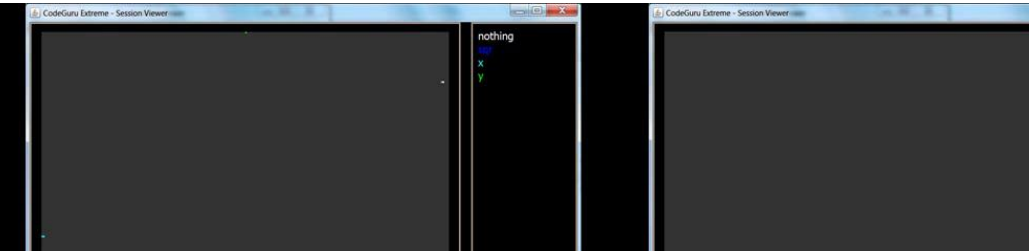
HALF



Graphical Survivors (Make Love Not War)

2D

3D



**1st wedding
proposal?**



Future? Improvements?



ARM[®]



FIFA WORLD CUP
Brasil



KHANACADEMY



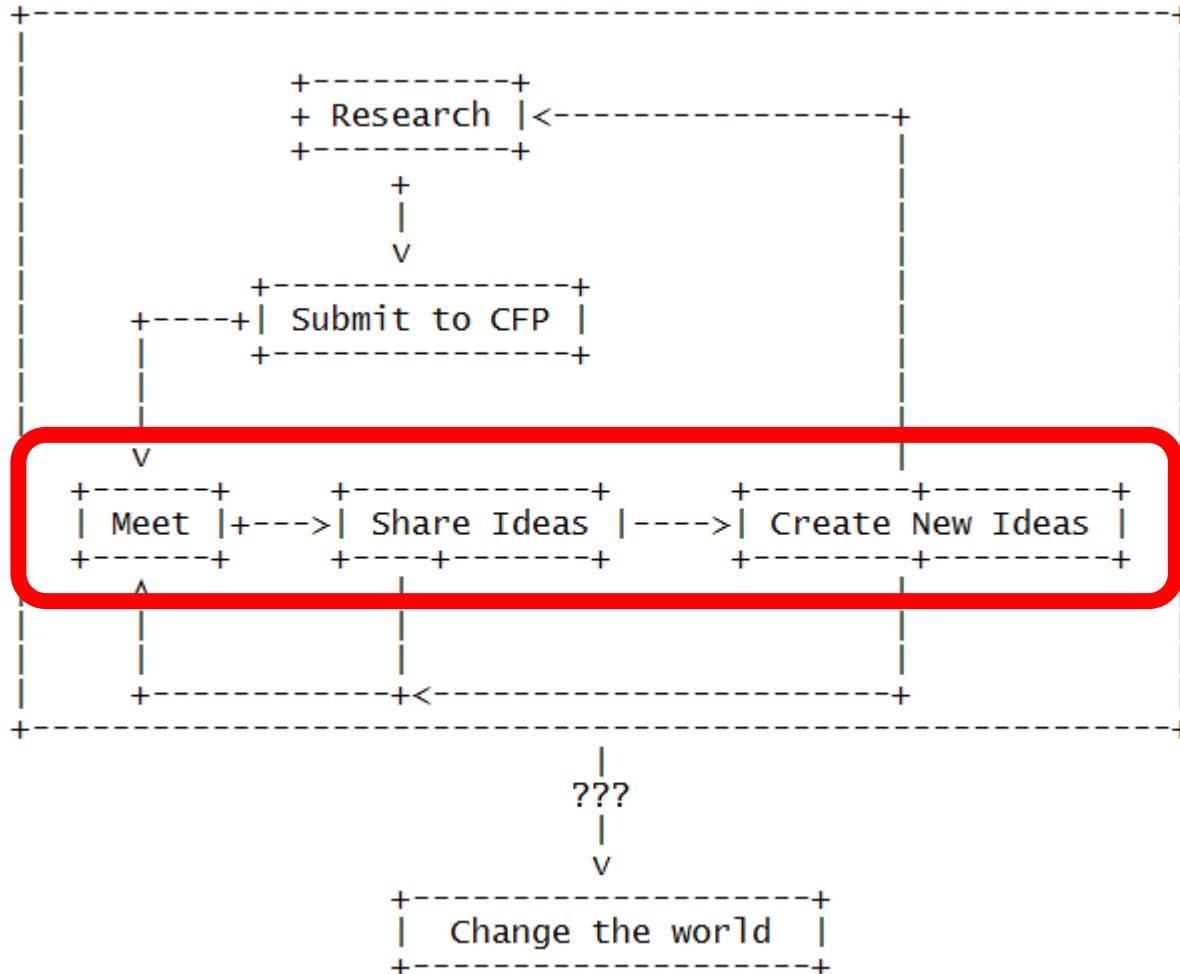
ONLINE

This is how can we add 'hardware hacking'..

#@&%*^@& !!!!!!!
I knew I should
stick to PHP !!!

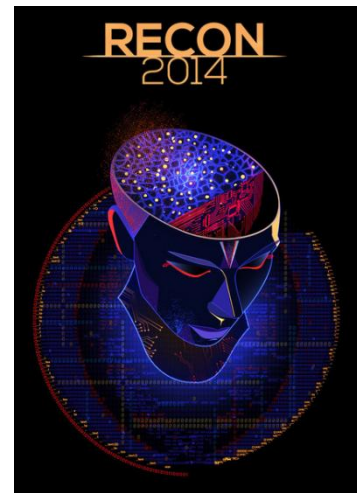


Q & A / Feedback



Thank you! Merci!

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T TC TCP IP

ACK

- Hugo, Sam, Elizabeth and the ReCon team!!!
- Dr. Oded Margalit, Assaf Nativ, Ange Albertini, ShiftReduce, SonOfLilit, Danny Leshem, DualCore and Others..
- AVG, Oren Barad & The team.
- My (brave) Wife & kids.
- **300 Ninjas & Reversers..**

