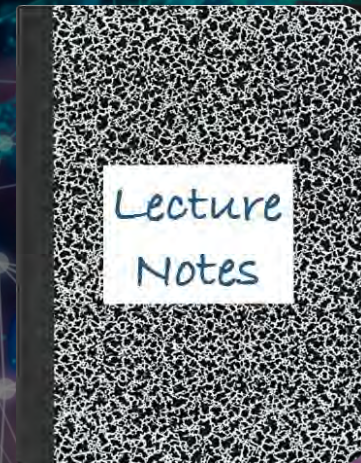


CS 419: Computer Security

Week 4: Authentication

Paul Krzyzanowski



© 2025 Paul Krzyzanowski. No part of this content may be reproduced or reposted in whole or in part in any manner without the permission of the copyright owner.

Authentication

Identification: *who are you?*

Authentication: *prove it*

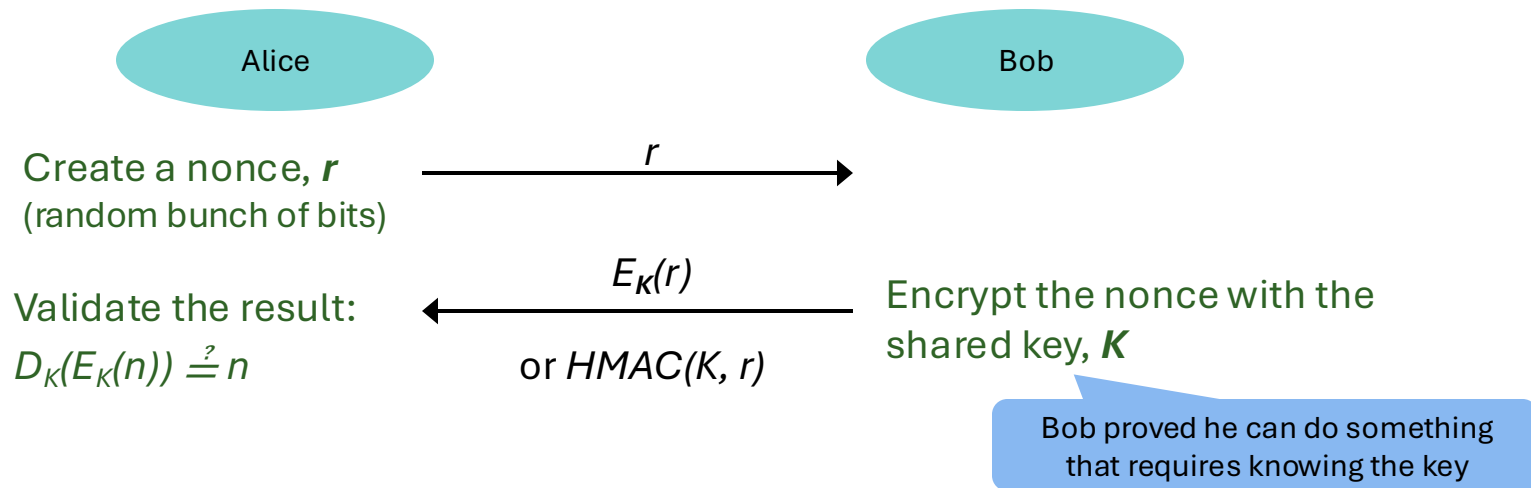
Authorization: *you can do this*

Some protocols (or services) combine all three.

Authentication & Key Exchange

Key concept: prove you know a secret (have the key)

Challenge-response model: ask the other side to prove they can encrypt or decrypt a random message with the secret key:



- This assumes a **pre-shared key** and symmetric cryptography.
- After that, Alice can encrypt & send a **session key**.
- Minimize the use of the pre-shared key, which is a **long-term key**.

Mutual authentication

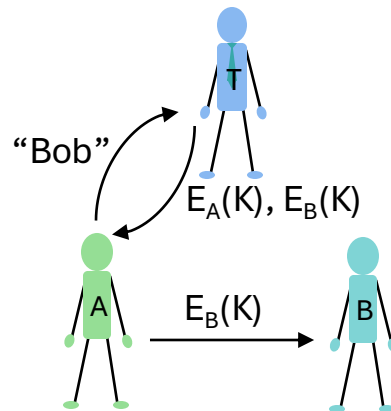
- Alice had Bob prove he has the key
- Bob may want to validate Alice as well
 - ⇒ **mutual authentication**
 - Bob will do the same thing: have Alice prove she has the key

Combined authentication & key exchange

Basic idea with symmetric cryptography:

Use a **trusted third party (Trent)** that has all the keys

- Alice wants to talk to Bob, so she asks Trent
 - Trent generates a session key encrypted for Alice: $E_A(K)$
 - Trent encrypts the same key for Bob (called a **ticket**): $E_B(K)$
 - Alice can't decrypt the ticket but can send it to Bob.
- Authentication is implicit:
 - If Alice can encrypt a message for Trent, she has proved she knows her key
 - If Bob can decrypt the message from Trent, he has proved he knows his key
- Trent can also perform *authorization* and reject Alice's request
- Weaknesses that we need to address:
 - Replay attacks



Replay attacks are a problem

Replay attack

- An attacker records a message and plays it back in the future

If an old session key was compromised:

- **Impersonation**: the attacker can impersonate Alice by sending Bob the old ticket

If an old session key wasn't compromised:

- **Key reuse**: trick Bob into reusing an old key with Alice.
They might think they're communicating with new security guarantees (new session key).
This undermines *forward secrecy* and risks future confidentiality

Security Protocol Notation

A (*Alice*), B (*Bob*), C (*Charles*), ... : users or services

T : Trent, a trusted third party – a server that has everyone's keys

k_A Long-term key shared between Alice & Trent

$k_{A,B}$ Session key created for Alice & Bob

$A \rightarrow B : M$ *Alice* (A) sends a message M to *Bob* (B)

$A \rightarrow B : \{ X, Y, Z \}_{k_B}$ *Alice* (A) sends a message containing X , Y , and Z to *Bob* (B)

r_1, r_2 **nonces** – random numbers (stands for “*number used once*”)

t timestamp

Combined authentication & key exchange protocols

Using **symmetric key cryptography**, allow two parties who do not share a secret to establish a fresh session key for communication via a **trusted third party**

Bootstrap problem

Using only symmetric cryptography, how can Alice & Bob communicate securely?

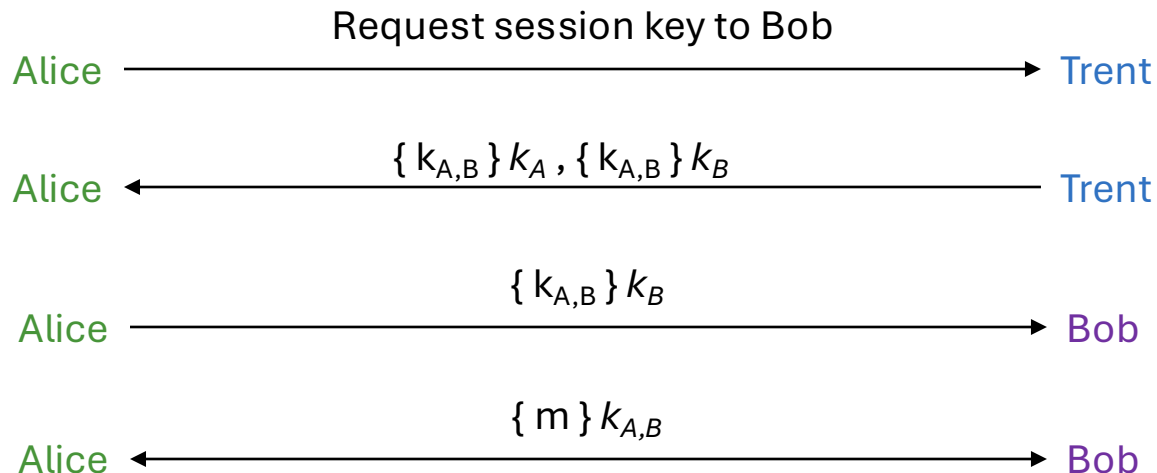
- Alice cannot send a key to Bob in the clear
 - We assume an insecure network
- We looked at two mechanisms that used public key systems:
 - Diffie-Hellman key exchange
 - Public key cryptography

Let's examine the problem with symmetric cryptography

Simple Protocol

Use a trusted third party – Trent – who has all the keys

Trent creates a session key for Alice and Bob

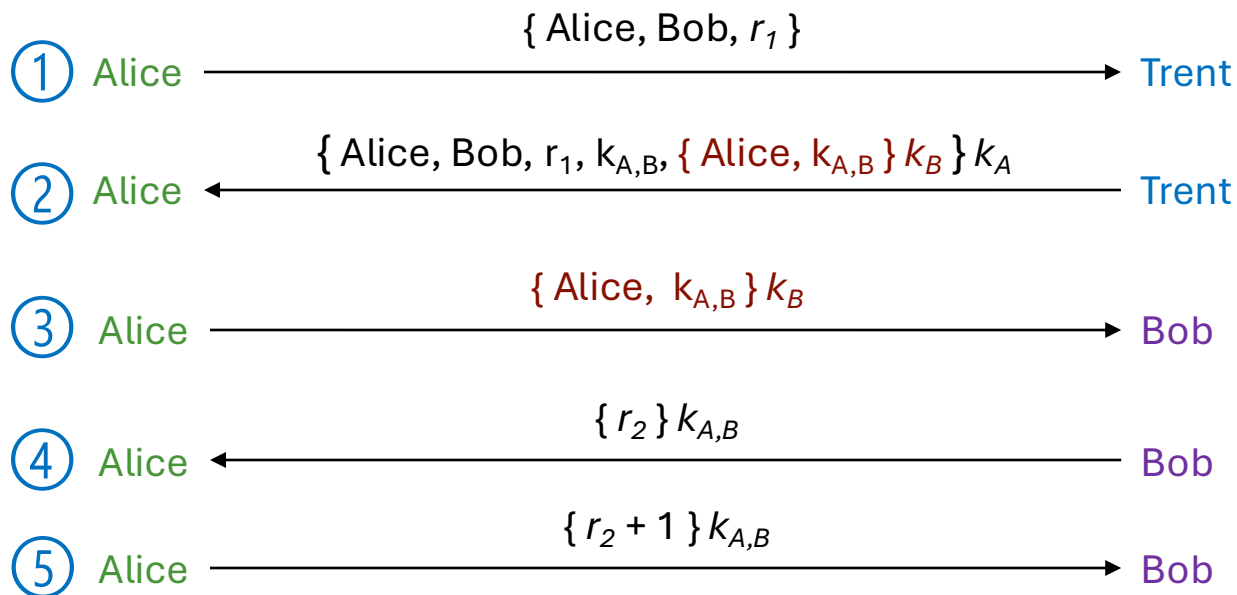


The good and bad

- Authentication & Authorization: How does Bob know he is talking to Alice?
 - The trusted third party, Trent, has all the keys
 - Trent knows the request came from Alice since only he and Alice can have the key k_A
 - Trent can **authorize** Alice's request
 - Bob gets a session key encrypted with Bob's key, which only Trent could have created
- Main problem: **no proof of freshness**: vulnerable to **replay attacks**
 - Eve records the message from Alice to Bob and later replays it
 - Bob will think he's talking to Alice and will re-use the same session key
- Protocols should defend against **replay attacks**

Needham-Schroeder Protocol

Add a *nonces* – random strings (r_1, r_2)

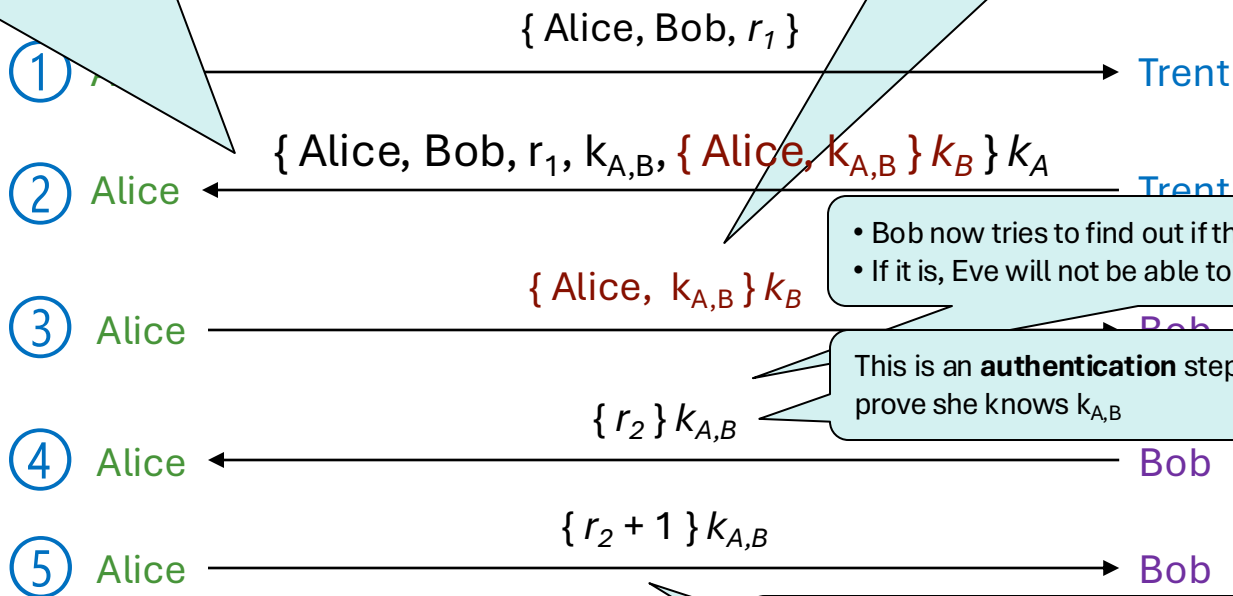


Needham-Schroeder – Main Points

Add **nonces** – random strings – a

- Alice knows only Bob & Trent can read this and get the session key.
- Bob knows it's a request from Alice

Message must have been created by Trent & is a response to the first message (contains r_1). Use of r_1 ensures it's not a replay attack.



- Bob now tries to find out if this is a replay attack
- If it is, Eve will not be able to decipher r_2

This is an **authentication** step: Bob asks Alice to prove she knows $k_{A,B}$

Alice proves she has the session key by decrypting and modifying the data from Bob

Needham-Schroeder Protocol Vulnerability

- If an attacker, Eve, obtains the session key from an old message (she worked hard, got lucky, and cracked an earlier message), she can replay the protocol from step 3: Bob will think he's talking to Alice

Replay

③ Eve → Bob: $\{ \text{Alice}, k_{A,B} \} k_B$

Bob sees this as a legitimate request approved by Trent. It was ... but earlier!

④ Bob → Eve: $\{ r_2 \} k_{A,B}$

⑤ Eve → Bob: $\{ r_2 + 1 \} k_{A,B}$

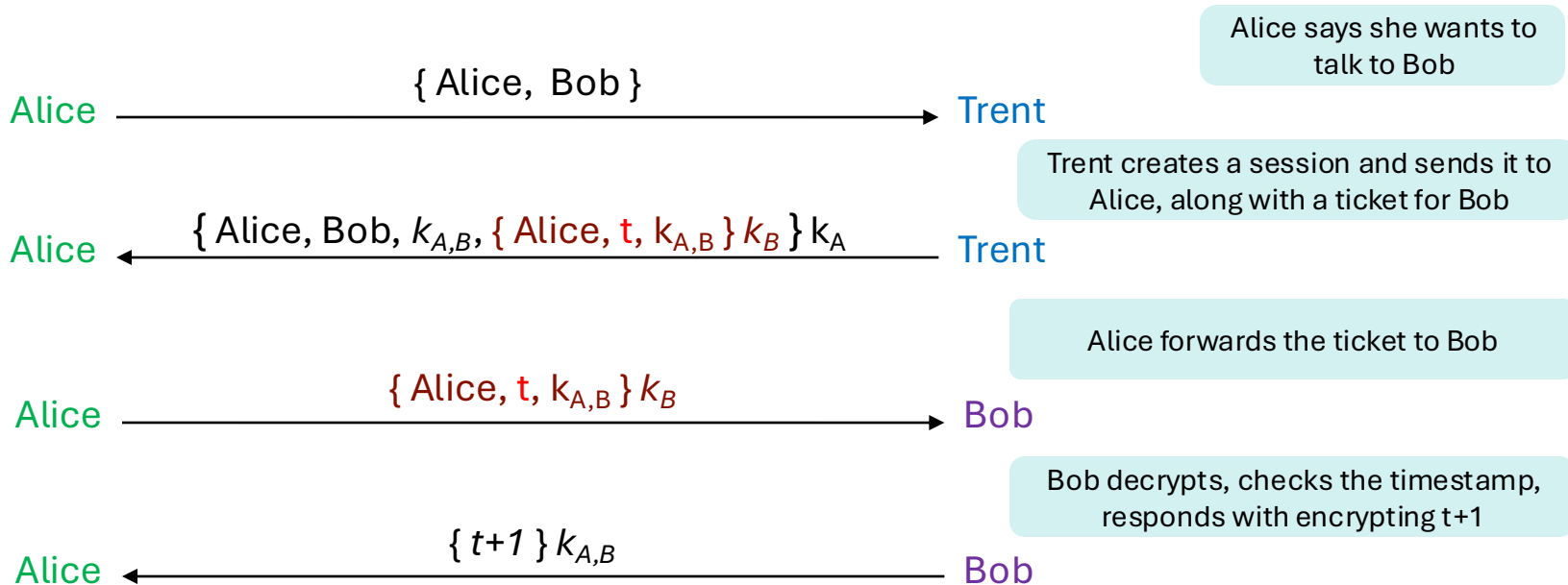
Eve the eavesdropper. She decrypted an old session key and is trying to get Bob to use it to think he's talking to Alice.

Denning-Sacco Solution to the 3rd Message Replay

- Problem: replay in the third step of the protocol
 - Eve has an old session key and replays the message: $\{ \text{Alice}, k_{A,B} \} k_B$
- Solution: use a timestamp T to detect replay attacks
 - The trusted third party (Trent) places a timestamp in a message that is encrypted for Bob
 - The attacker has an old session key but not Alice's, Bob's or Trent's keys
 - Eve cannot spoof a valid message that is encrypted for Bob

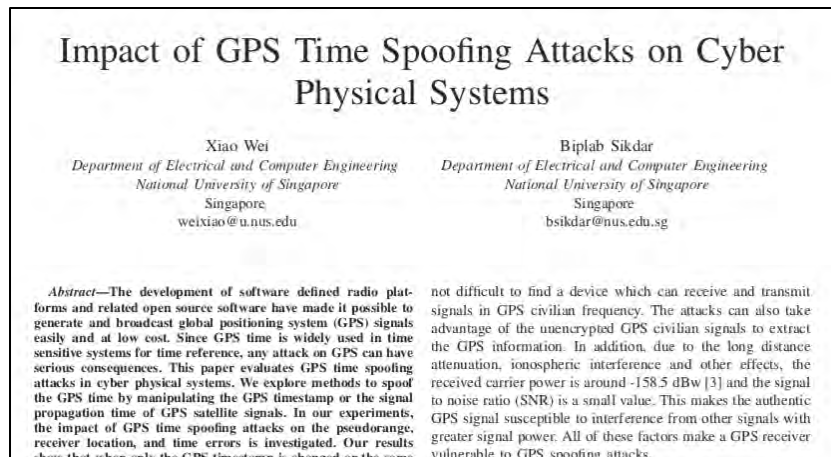
Denning-Sacco Enhancement

Use a **timestamp, t**



Problem with timestamps

- Use of timestamps relies on synchronized clocks
 - Messages may be falsely accepted or falsely rejected because of bad time
- Time synchronization becomes an attack vector
 - Create fake NTP responses
 - Generate fake GPS signals



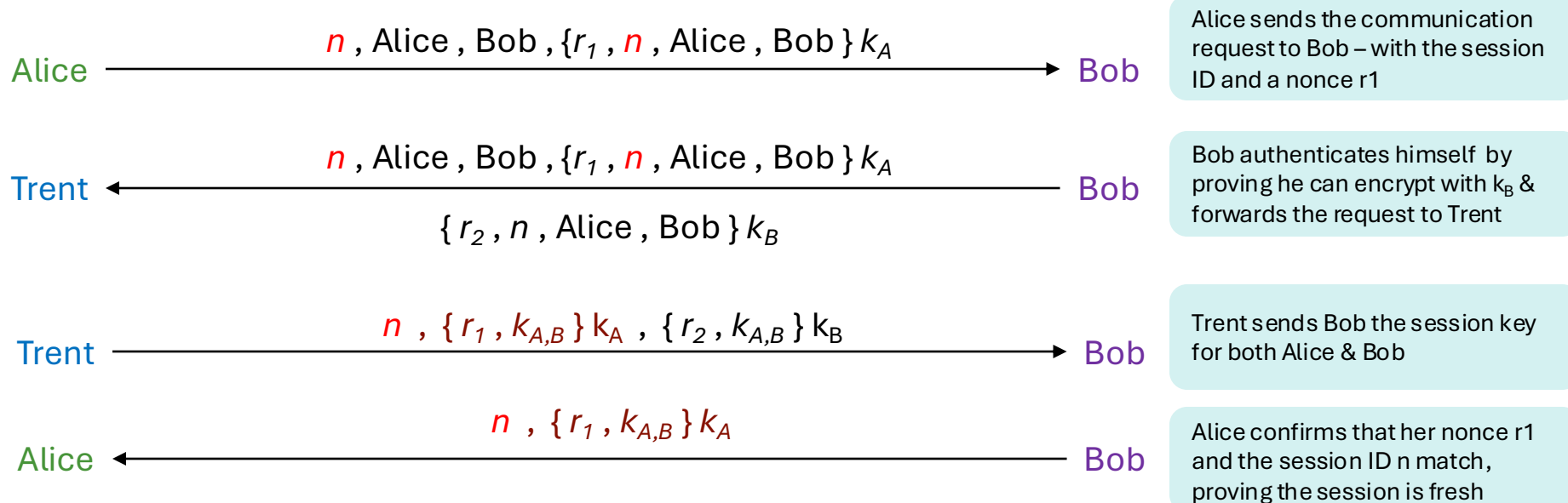
Otway-Rees Protocol: Session IDs

Another way to correct the *replay* problem

- Instead of using timestamps
 - Use a random integer, *n*, that is associated with all messages in the key exchange
 - This is a **session identifier** & included in all messages for the session – ties them all together
 - Use nonces too
- This follows a different flow
 - Alice first sends a message to Bob
 - The message contains the session ID & nonce encrypted with Alice's secret key
 - Bob forwards the message to Trent
 - And encrypts a message containing a nonce & the same session ID with his secret key
 - Trent creates a session key & encrypts it for both Alice and for Bob
 - Each reply includes the corresponding nonce and session ID

Otway-Rees Protocol

Use nonces (r_1, r_2) & session IDs (n)



Kerberos

- Authentication service developed by MIT
 - Created as part of Project Athena 1983-1988
- Uses a trusted third party & symmetric cryptography
- Based on *Needham Schroeder* with the *Denning Sacco* modification
- Passwords are never sent in clear text
 - Assumes only the network can be compromised
- Supported in most popular operating systems
 - Default network authentication used in Microsoft Windows
 - Supported in macOS, Linux, FreeBSD, z/OS, ...
 - Used by Rutgers LCSR to manage NetIDs

Kerberos

Users and services authenticate themselves to each other

To access a service:

- User presents a **ticket** issued by Kerberos
- Service uses the ticket to verify the identity of the user

Kerberos is a **trusted third party**

- Knows all (users and services) passwords
- Responsible for
 - **Authentication**: validating an identity
 - **Authorization**: deciding whether someone can access a service
 - **Key distribution**: giving both parties an encryption key (securely)

Kerberos – Components (single sign-on)

Kerberos splits the trusted third party into two services:

Authentication Server (AS):

Stores user passwords & issues access to the TGS

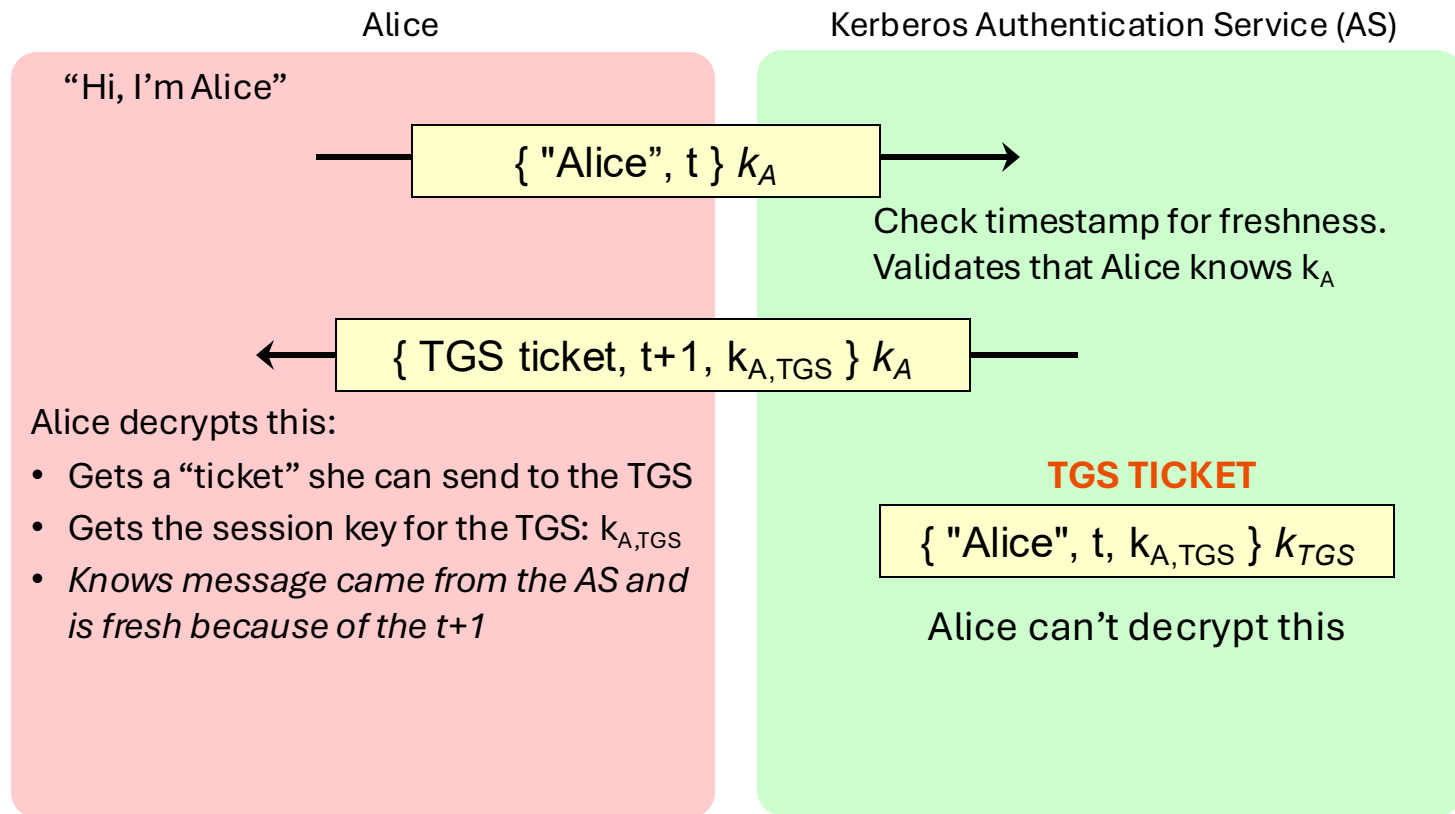
Ticket Granting Server (TGS):

Issues service tickets (session keys) for individual services

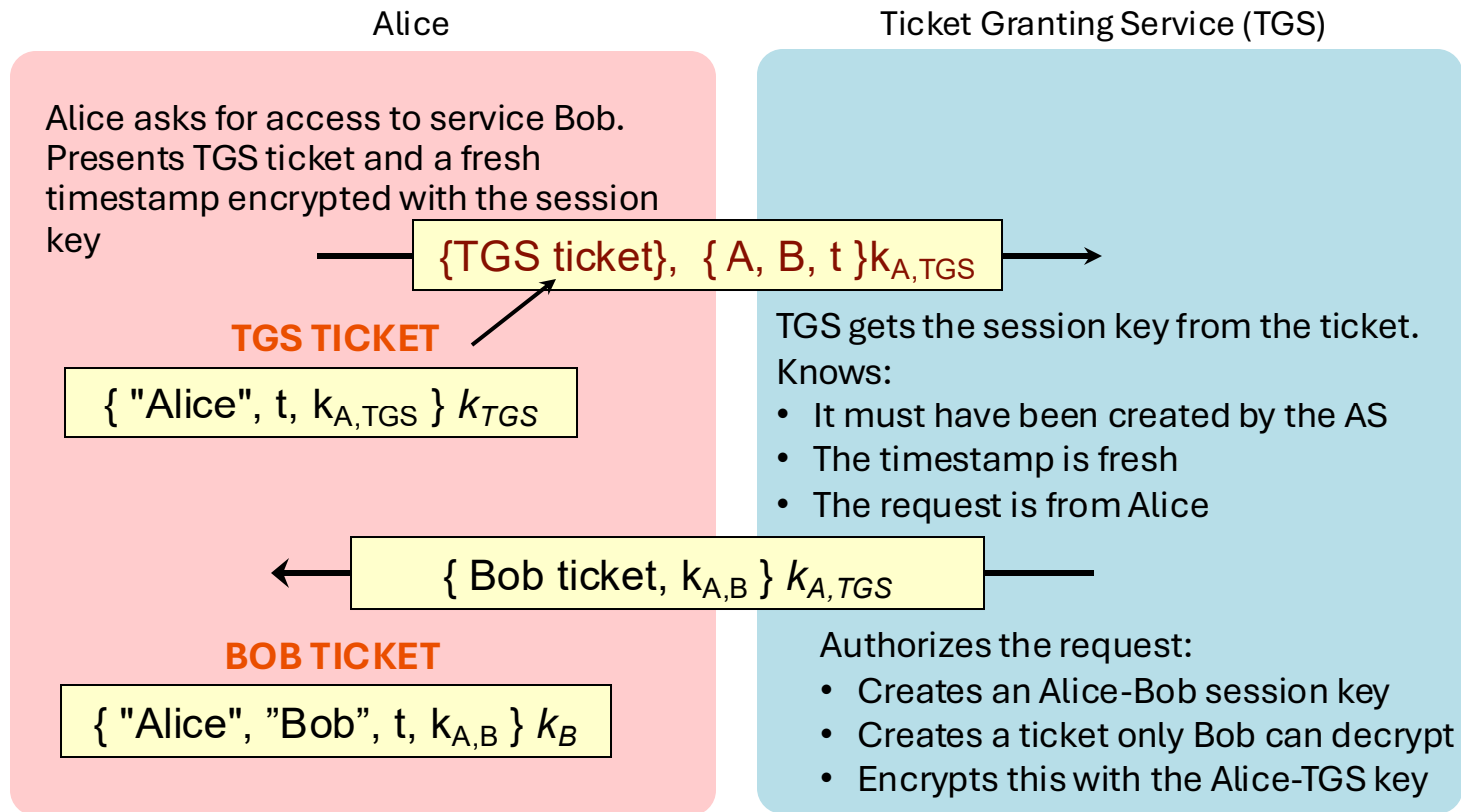
Why?

- Without the split, Alice would have to use her password for every service.
- That would increase the chances of compromise
- This way, she only uses it for the initial login and then uses the TGS ticket

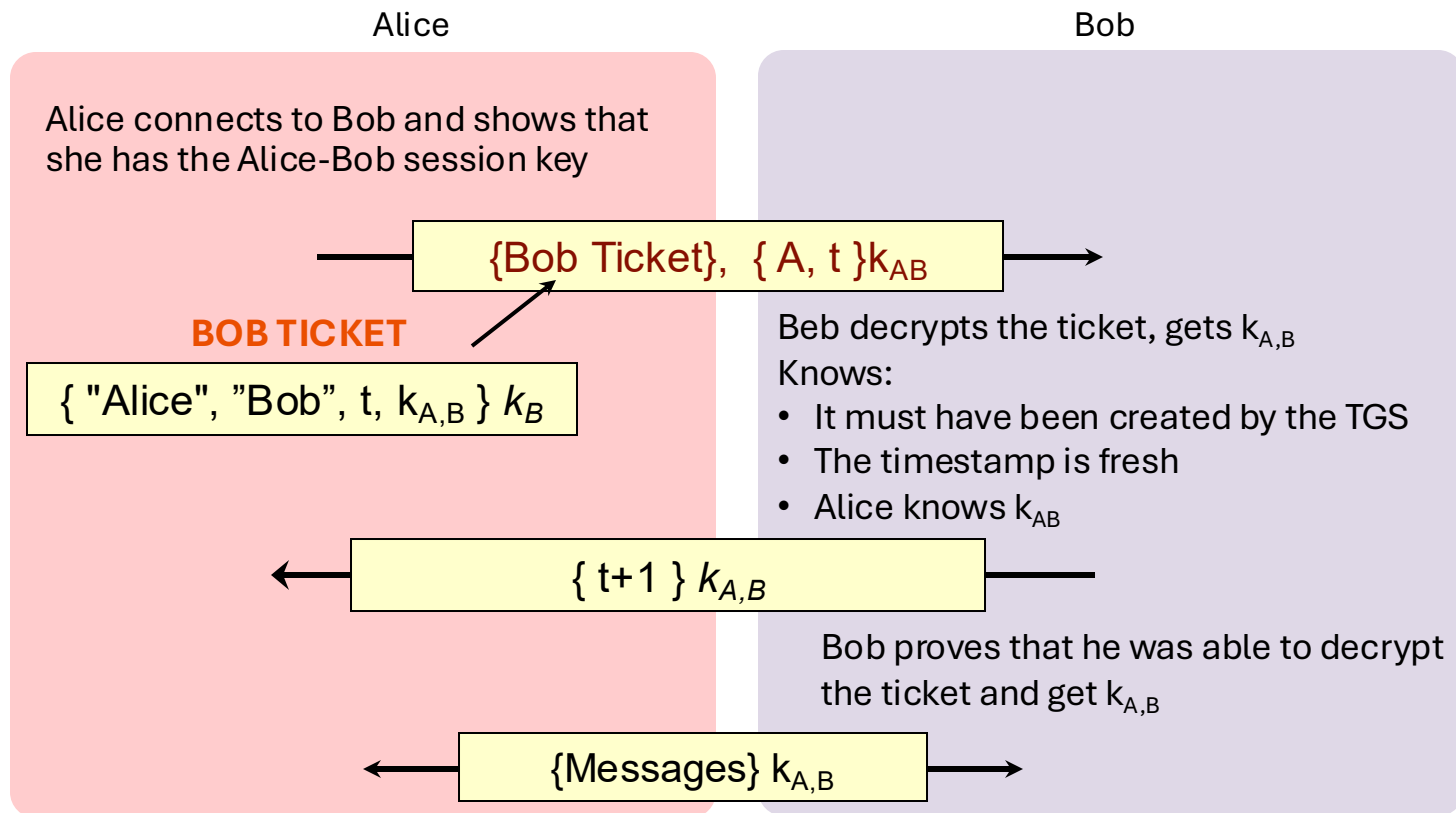
Kerberos (1): Initial login to the AS (e.g., once a day)



Kerberos (2): TGS request to connect to a service



Kerberos (3): Connect to the Service



Kerberos Advantages

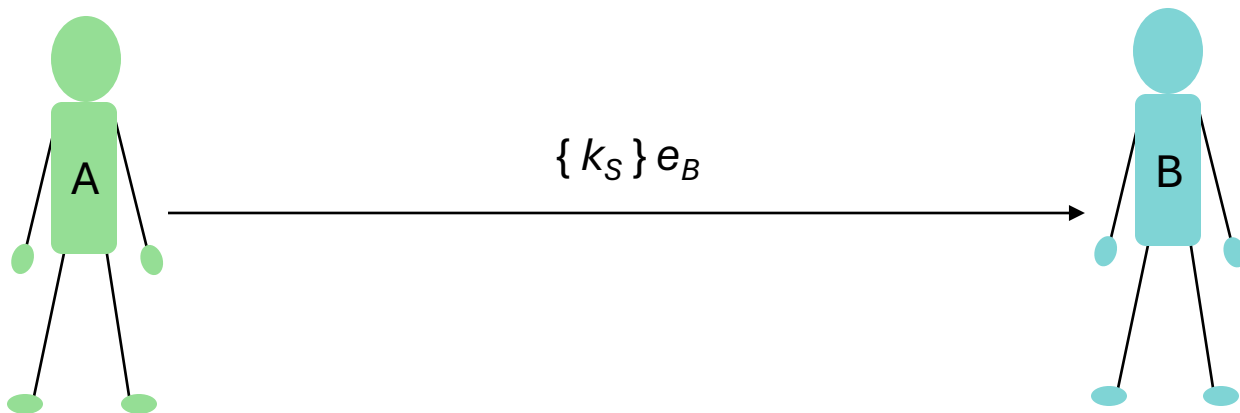
- Passwords not reused for each service
 - Log in once to get TGS ticket
- Replay protection
 - Timestamps allow services to check that messages are recent
- Single sign-on feature
 - Authenticate once with a password and then access other services

Public Key Authentication

Public Key Based Key Exchange

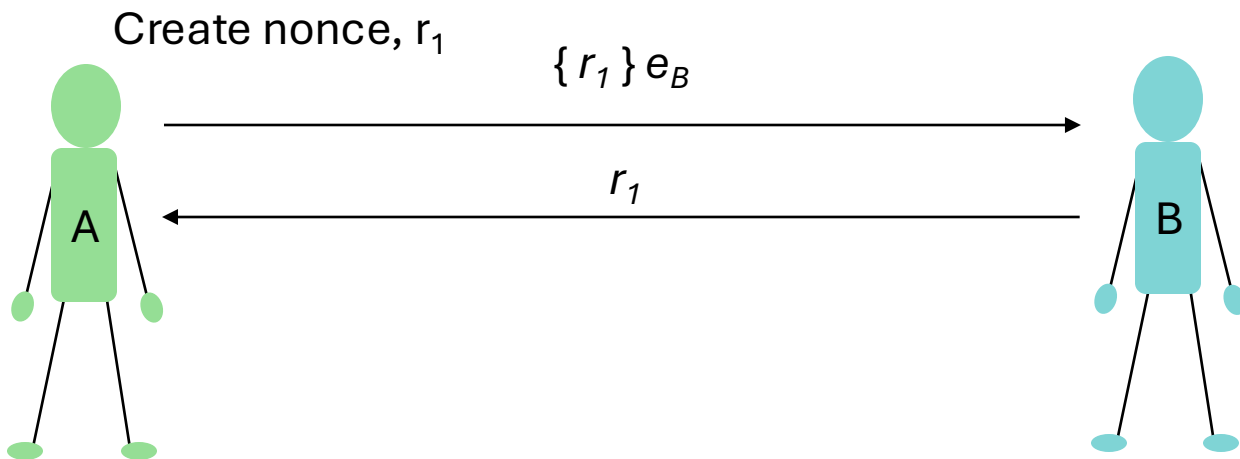
We saw how this works...

- Alice's & Bob's public keys known to all: e_A , e_B
- Alice & Bob's private keys are known only to the owner: d_a , d_b
- Simple protocol to send symmetric session key, k_S :



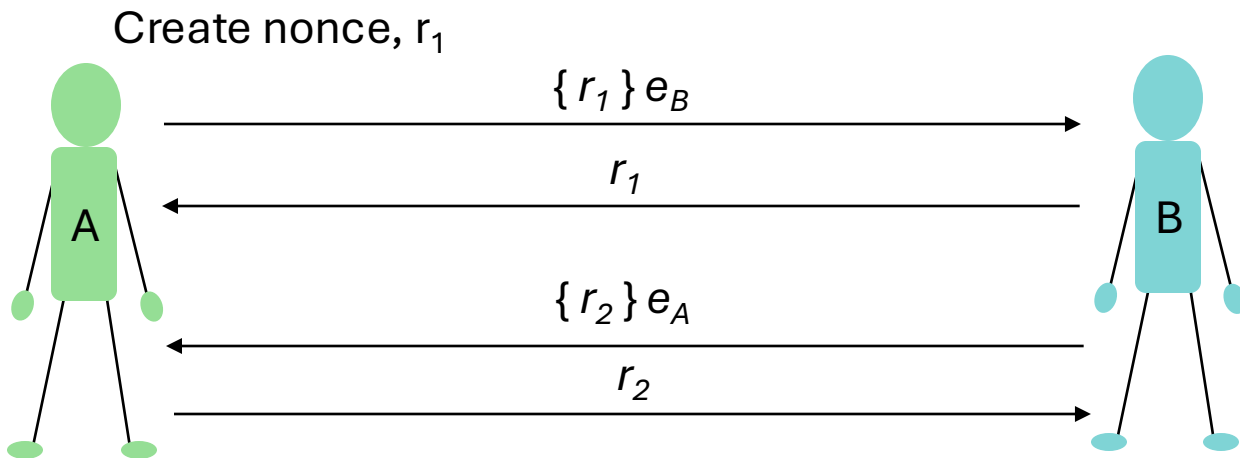
Adding authentication

- Have Bob prove that he has the private key
 - Same way as with symmetric cryptography – prove he can encrypt or decrypt



Adding mutual authentication

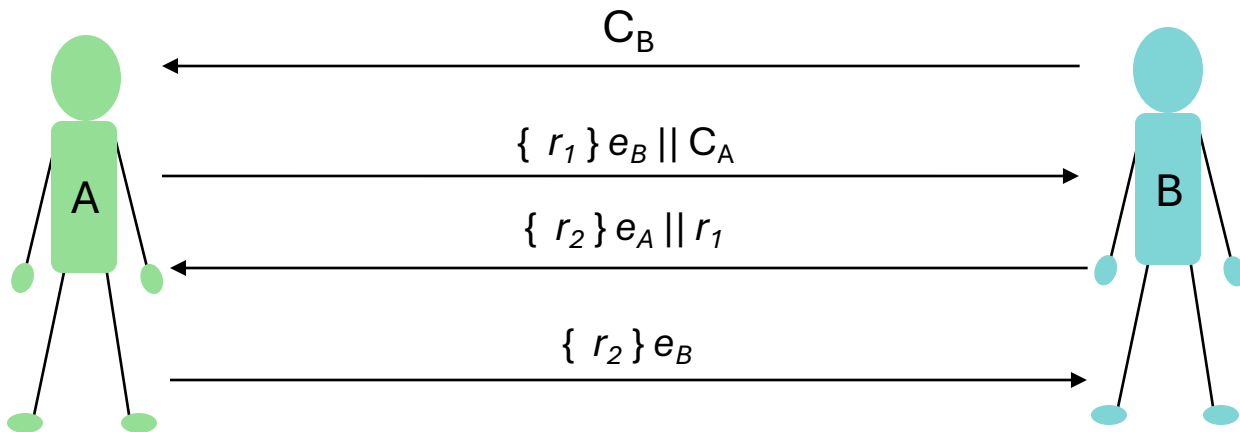
- Bob asks Alice to prove that she has her private key



Adding identity binding

- How do we know we have the right public keys?
- Get the public key from a trusted certificate
 - Validate the signature on the certificate before trusting the public key within

Note: This does not provide forward security – we'll look at that later.



Avoid Long-Term Keys

- We've seen that public keys are usually long-term keys
 - Time-consuming to generate
 - Certificates last for a long time too
- Long-term keys do not provide forward secrecy
 - They are usually used for authentication only
 - Diffie-Hellman is then used to generate ephemeral keys to make session keys

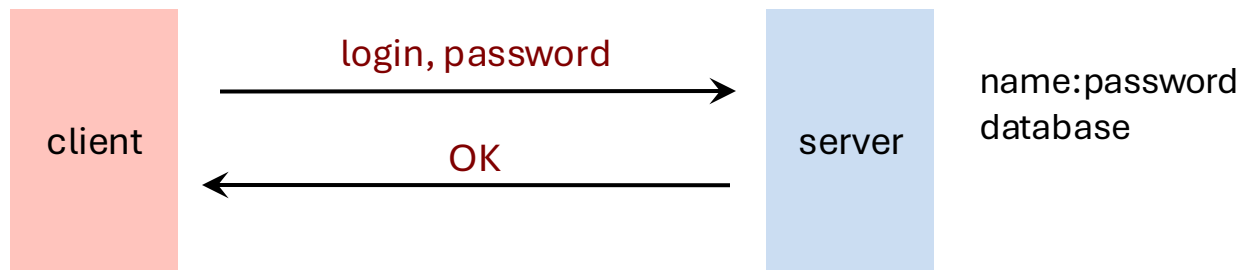
Cryptographic toolbox

- Symmetric encryption
- Public key encryption
- Hash functions
- Random number generators

Password-Based Protocols

Authentication: PAP

Password Authentication Protocol

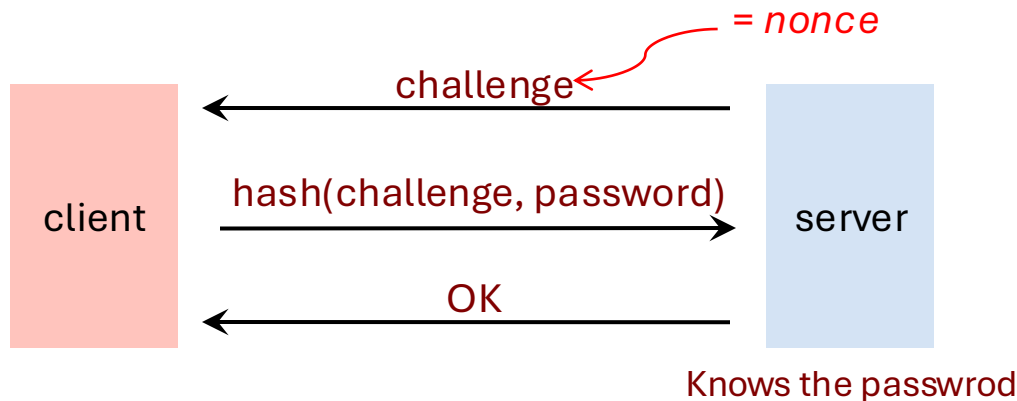


- Unencrypted, reusable passwords
- Insecure on an open network
- Also, the password file must be protected from open access
 - But administrators can still see everyone's passwords

What if you use the same password on Facebook as on Amazon?

Authentication: CHAP

Challenge-Handshake Authentication Protocol



The challenge is a **nonce** (random bits).

We create a hash of the nonce and the secret password

An intruder does not have the password and cannot do this!

The password never travels on the network – replays are useless

Passwords are bad

- Human readable & easy to guess
 - People usually pick really bad passwords
- Easy to forget
- Usually short
- Static ... reused over & over
 - Security is as strong as the weakest link
 - If a username (or email) & password is stolen from one server, it might be usable on others
- Replayable
 - If someone can grab it or see it, they can play it back

It's not getting better

Recent large-scale leaks of password from servers have shown that people DO NOT pick good passwords

Rank	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	123456	123456	123456	123456	123456	123456	123456	password	123456	123456
2	password	password	password	password	123456789	123456789	123456789	123456	admin	123456789
3	12345678	12345	12345678	123456789	qwerty	picture1	12345	123456789	12345678	12345678
4	qwerty	12345678	qwerty	12345678	password	password	qwerty	guest	123456789	password
5	12345	football	12345	12345	1234567	12345678	password	qwerty	1234	qwerty123
6	123456789	qwerty	123456789	111111	12345678	111111	12345678	12345678	12345	qwerty1
7	football	1234567890	letmein	1234567	12345	123123	111111	111111	password	111111
8	1234	1234567	1234567	sunshine	iloveyou	12345	123123	12345	123	12345

Top passwords by year 2015-2019: SplashData; 2020-2023: NordPass

<https://nordpass.com/most-common-passwords-list/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_most_common_passwords

Policies to the rescue?

Password rules

“Everyone knows that an exclamation point is a 1, or an I, or the last character of a password. \$ is an S or a 5. If we use these well-known tricks, we aren’t fooling any adversary. We are simply fooling the database that stores passwords into thinking the user did something good”

— Paul Grassi, NIST

Periodic password change requirement problems

- People tend to change passwords rapidly to exhaust the history list and get back to their favorite password
- Forbidding changes for several days enables a denial of service attack
- People pick worse passwords, incorporating numbers, months, or years

<https://fortune.com/2017/05/11/password-rules/>
<https://pages.nist.gov/800-63-3/sp800-63b.html#sec5>

Here are the guidelines for creating a new password:

Your new password must contain at least 2 of the 3 following criteria:

- At least 1 letter (uppercase or lowercase)
- At least 1 number
- At least 1 of these special characters: ! # \$ % + / = @ ~

Also:

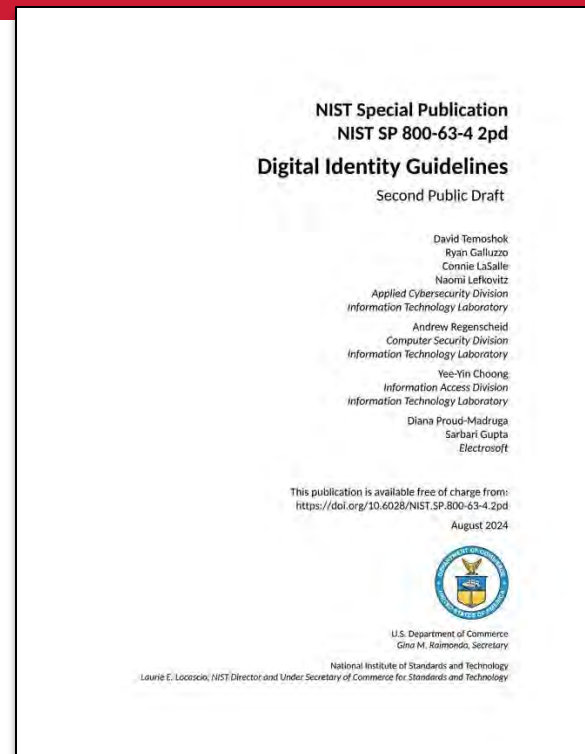
- It must be different than your previous 5 passwords.
- It can't match your username.
- It can't include more than 2 identical characters (for example: 111 or aaa).
- It can't include more than 2 consecutive characters (for example: 123 or abc).
- It can't use the name of the financial institution (for example: JPMC, Morgan or Chase).
- It can't be a commonly used password (for example: password1).

Cancel

Next

NIST recommendations – 28 Aug 2024 Draft

- Do not:
 - Require periodic password changes
 - Impose composition or complexity requirements (certain # of numbers, letters, symbols)
 - Require passwords to be at least 8 characters long
 - Store a password hint that is accessible to others
 - Use knowledge-based authentication (KBA) ("*what was the name of your pet?*")
 - Validate a truncated version of the password
 - Reuse recent passwords
- Prefer
 - Passwords should be a minimum of 15 characters long, support at least 64 chars
 - Unicode and ASCII should be permitted
- Avoid
 - Passwords obtained from databases of previous breaches
 - Dictionary words and common phrases
 - Repetitive or sequential characters (e.g. 'aaaaa', '1234abcd')
 - Context-specific words, such as the name of the service, the username, and derivatives



<https://pages.nist.gov/800-63-4/sp800-63b.html>

<https://arstechnica.com/security/2024/09/nist-proposes-barring-some-of-the-most-nonsensical-password-rules/>

PAP: Reusable passwords

Problem #1: Open access to the password file

What if the password file isn't sufficiently protected and an intruder gets hold of it? All passwords are now compromised!

Even if an admin sees your password, this might also be your password on other systems.

How about encrypting the passwords?

- Where would you store the key?
- Adobe did that
 - 2013 Adobe security breach leaked 152 million Adobe customer records
 - Adobe used encrypted passwords
 - But the **passwords were all encrypted with the same key**
 - If the attackers steal the key, they get the passwords

Poor Password Management

Adobe security breach (November 2013)

- 152 million Adobe customer records ...
with encrypted passwords
- Adobe encrypted passwords with a symmetric key
algorithm
... and used the same key to encrypt every password!

	Frequency	Password
1	1,911,938	123456
2	446,162	123456789
3	345,834	password
4	211,659	adobe123
5	201,580	12345678
6	130,832	qwerty
7	124,253	1234567
8	113,884	111111
9	83,411	photoshop
10	82,694	123123
11	76,910	1234567890
12	76,186	000000
13	70,791	abc123
14	61,453	1234
15	56,744	adobe1
16	54,651	macromedia
17	48,850	azerty
18	47,142	iloveyou
19	44,281	aaaaaa
20	43,670	654321
21	43,497	12345
22	37,407	666666
23	35,325	sunshine
24	34,963	123321

Top 26 Adobe Passwords

Meta stored 600 million Facebook and Instagram passwords in plain text



William Gallagher • September 27, 2024

Across Facebook and Instagram, Meta has been storing more than half a billion users' passwords in plain text, with some easily readable for more than a decade.

The issue was first uncovered in 2019 when Facebook admitted to "hundreds of millions" of passwords being stored unencrypted. Facebook, now Meta, said that the passwords were not available outside of the company — but also admitted that around 2,000 engineers had made about 9 million queries on that user database.

Now Meta's operation in Ireland has finally been fined \$101.5 million after a five-year investigation by the Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC). The fine is levied under Europe's stringent General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

"It is widely accepted that user passwords should not be stored in plaintext, considering the risks of abuse that arise from persons accessing such data," said Graham Doyle, Deputy Commissioner at the DPC, in a statement about the fine. "It must be borne in mind, that the passwords the subject of consideration in this case, are particularly sensitive, as they would enable access to users' social media accounts."

<https://appleinsider.com/articles/24/09/27/meta-stored-600-million-facebook-and-instagram-passwords-in-plain-text>

PAP: Reusable passwords

Solution:

Store a **hash** of the password in a file

- Given a file, you don't get the passwords, only their hashes
 - Hashes are one-way functions
 - Example, Linux passwords hashed with a SHA-512 hash (SHA-2)
- Have to resort to a **dictionary** or **brute-force attack**

Dictionary attack vs. Brute force

- Suppose you got access to a list of hashed passwords
- Brute-force, exhaustive search: try every combination
 - Letters (A-Z, a-z), numbers (0-9), symbols (!@#\$%...)
 - Assume 30 symbols + 52 letters + 10 digits = 92 characters
 - Test all passwords up to length 8
 - Combinations = $92^8 + 92^7 + 92^6 + 92^5 + 92^4 + 92^3 + 92^2 + 92^1 = 5.189 \times 10^{15}$
 - If we test 10 billion passwords per second: ≈ 6 days
- But some passwords are more likely than others
 - 1,991,938 Adobe customers used a password = “123456”
 - 345,834 users used a password = “password”
- Dictionary attack
 - Test lists of common passwords, dictionary words, names
 - Add common substitutions, prefixes, and suffixes

Easiest to do if the attacker steals a hashed password file –so we read-protect the hashed passwords to make it harder to get them

Number of Characters	Numbers Only	Lowercase Letters	Upper and Lowercase Letters	Numbers, Upper and Lowercase Letters	Numbers, Upper and Lowercase Letters, Symbols
4	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly	Instantly
5	Instantly	Instantly	57 minutes	2 hours	4 hours
6	Instantly	46 minutes	2 days	6 days	2 weeks
7	Instantly	20 hours	4 months	1 year	2 years
8	Instantly	3 weeks	15 years	62 years	164 years
9	2 hours	2 years	791 years	3k years	11k years
10	1 day	40 years	41k years	238k years	803k years
11	1 weeks	1k years	2m years	14m years	56m years
12	3 months	27k years	111m years	917m years	3bn years
13	3 years	705k years	5bn years	56bn years	275bn years
14	28 years	18m years	300bn years	3tn years	19tn years
15	284 years	477m years	15tn years	218tn years	1qd years
16	2k years	12bn years	812tn years	13qd years	94qd years
17	28k years	322bn years	42qd years	840qd years	6qn years
18	284k years	8tn years	2qn years	52qn years	463qn years

**Time it takes
a hacker to
brute force
your password
in 2025**

**Hardware: 12 x RTX 5090
Password hash: bcrypt (10)**



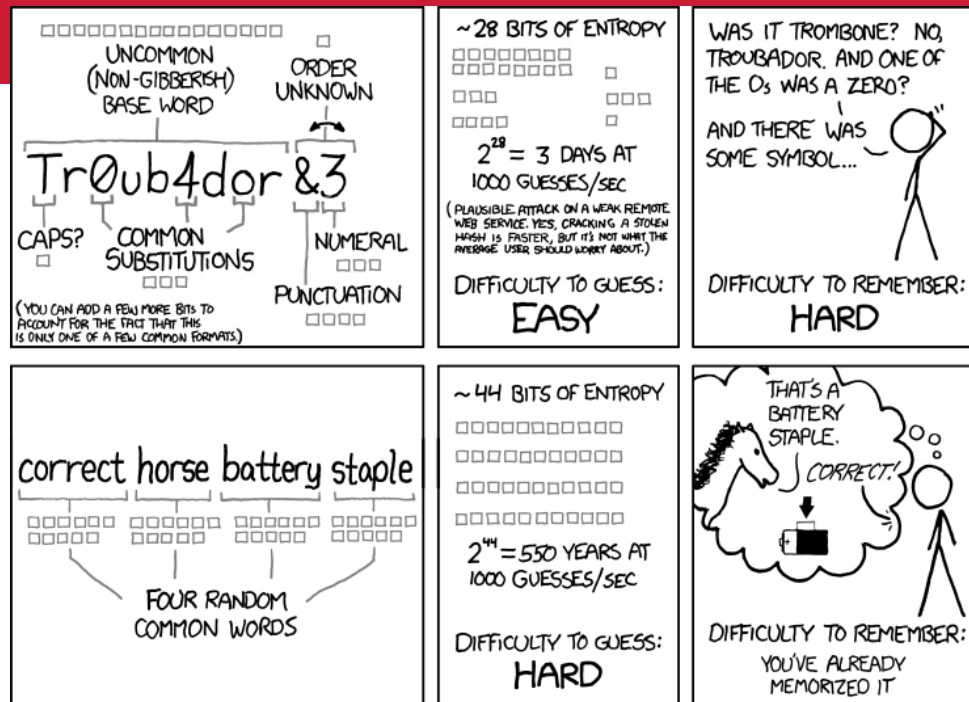
Hive Systems

Read more and download at
hivesystems.com/password

Longer passwords

English text has an entropy of about 1.2-1.5 bits per character

Random text has an entropy $\approx \log_2(1/95) \approx 6.6$ bits/character



THROUGH 20 YEARS OF EFFORT, WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY TRAINED EVERYONE TO USE PASSWORDS THAT ARE HARD FOR HUMANS TO REMEMBER, BUT EASY FOR COMPUTERS TO GUESS.

Assume 95 printable characters

Rainbow Tables: speeding up dictionary attacks

Create a table of **precomputed hashes = rainbow table**

Now we just search a table for the hash to find the password

SHA-256 Hash	password
8d969eef6ecad3c29a3a629280e686cf0c3f5d5a86aff3ca12020c923adc6c92	123456
5e884898da28047151d0e56f8dc6292773603d0d6aabbdd62a11ef721d1542d8	password
ef797c8118f02dfb649607dd5d3f8c7623048c9c063d532cc95c5ed7a898a64f	12345678
1c8bfe8f801d79745c4631d09fff36c82aa37fc4cce4fc946683d7b336b63032	letmein
...	...

Salt: defeating dictionary attacks

Salt = random string (typically up to 16 characters)

- Concatenated with the password
- Stored with the password file (it's not secret)

`"VhsRrsFA" + "password"`

Even if you know the salt, you cannot use precomputed hashes to search for a password (because the salt is prefixed to the password string and becomes part of the hash)

Example:

SHA-256 hash of "password", salt = "VhsRrsFA" = `hash("VhsRrsFApassword")` =

`b791b1b572c0025ef30ecc5fc5ecc5c623f52fca66250560fce8d22623b166c8`

*You will **not** have a precomputed hash("VhsRrsFApassword")*

Linux example – salted hashes

- The passwords are both monkey
- One has a salt of **mysalt123** and the other **mysalt124** – one byte off

```
$ mkpasswd --method=sha-256 --salt=mysalt123 monkey
```

```
$5$mysalt123$uw7/eKvgmWOARTME9U2eQIWhO0efP1mPfK9rnXmUBLD
```

```
mkpasswd --method=sha-256 --salt=mysalt124 monkey
```

```
$5$mysalt124$sBfthw62ybrQg04PEECUBnJFSW6BV5xOV/5hoswQtS/
```

Defenses

- Use longer passwords
 - But can you trust users to pick ones with enough entropy?
- Rate-limit guesses
 - Add timeouts after an incorrect password
 - Linux waits about 3 secs – and terminates the *login* program after 5 tries
- Lock out the account after N bad guesses
 - But this makes you vulnerable to denial-of-service attacks
- Use a slow algorithm to make guessing slow
 - OpenBSD *bcrypt* Blowfish password hashing algorithm

People forget passwords

Especially seldom-used ones. How can we handle that?

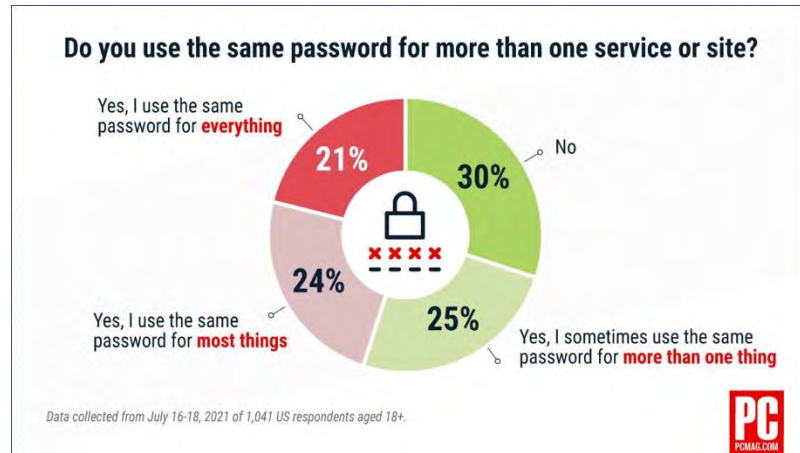
Email them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Common solution– Requires that the server stores the password (not a hash)– What if someone reads your email?
Reset them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– How do you authenticate the requester? (email, phone?)– Usually send reset link to email address created at registration– What if someone reads your mail, or you no longer have that address?
Provide hints?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– An attacker can get the hints too
Write them down?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– OK if the threat model is electronic only

Reusable passwords in multiple places

- People often use the same password in different places
- If one site is compromised, the password can be used elsewhere
 - People often try to use the same email address and/or username
- This is the root of phishing attacks

A 2024 Forbes Advisor study found:

- 68% of users used the same password for multiple accounts. Another study shows 78%
- 46% admitted to having their password stolen



PC Magazine, September 21, 2021

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/stop-using-the-same-password-on-multiple-sites-no-really>

Credential Stuffing & Password Spraying Attacks

- **Credential Stuffing Attack**

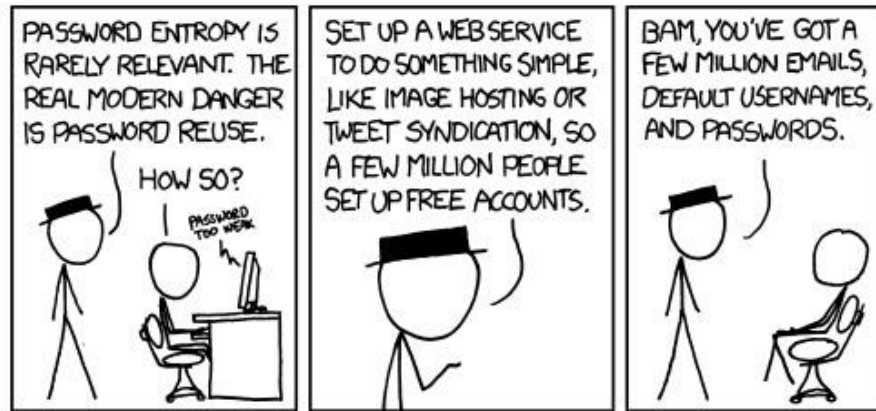
- Assumes people might use the same password on different accounts
- Get credentials for a user (e.g., buy them on a dark web marketplace)
- Log in to lots of unrelated accounts trying those credentials

Example:

If you got name="bobsmith1998", password="monkey123" on facebook.com
the same login credentials might work on paypal.com

- **Password Spraying Attack**

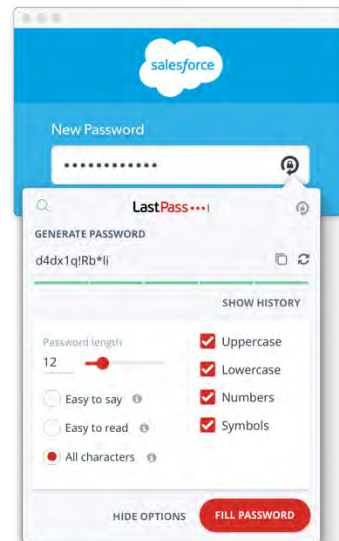
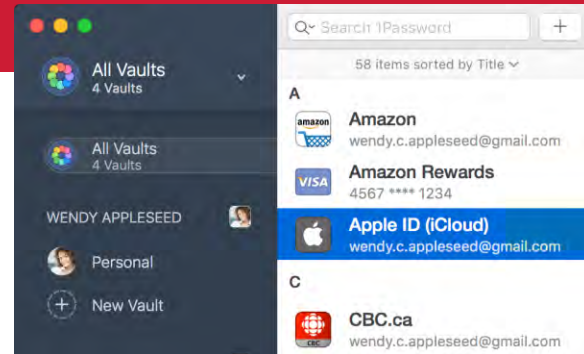
- Instead of trying multiple guesses for one account, try a common password on a huge number of accounts
- Avoids lockout and detection from trying too many passwords



Password Managers

Software that stores passwords in an encrypted file

- Do you trust the protection?
 - The reputation of the company & its security policies
 - The synchronization capabilities?
- Can malware get to the database?
- In general, these are good
 - Way better than storing passwords in a file
 - Encourages having unique passwords per site
 - Generates strong passwords
 - Password managers may have the ability to recognize web sites & defend against phishing while providing auto-complete convenience for legitimate sites



9 Popular Password Manager Apps Found Leaking Your Secrets

Tuesday, February 28, 2017 Wang Wei

Share 7 Share Tweet Share

REPORT

Vulnerabilities in Password Manager Apps



Dashlane: #1 Password Manager



F-Secure KEY Password manager



1Password - Password Manager



Password Manager



My Passwords



Keeper® Free Password Manager

The Washington Post

Password managers have a security flaw. But you should still use one.

Exclusive: A new study finds bugs in five of the most popular password managers. So how is it safe to keep all your eggs in one basket?

By Geoffrey A. Fowler • Feb 19, 2019

THE VERGE

LastPass fixes bug that could let malicious websites extract your last used password

Even password managers have security bugs

By Jon Porter

WIRED SECURITY POLITICS GEAR THE BIG STORY MORE

LILY HAY NEWMAN SECURITY MAR 4, 2023 9:00 AM

Security News This Week: The LastPass Hack Somehow Gets Worse

Plus: The US Marshals disclose a "major" cybersecurity incident, T-Mobile has gotten pwned so much, and more.

LastPass has
malicious we
by the servic
bug was disc
Google's Proj

BLEEPINGCOMPUTER

Bitwarden flaw can let hackers steal passwords using iframes

By Bill Toulas

March 8, 2023

05:08 PM

6

CSO

Design flaw has Microsoft Authenticator overwriting MFA accounts, locking users out

By Evan Schuman
August 5, 2024

With use of multi-factor authentication rising, end-users can find themselves fiddling with codes and authentication apps frequently throughout their days. For those who rely on Microsoft Authenticator, the experience can go beyond momentary frustration to full-blown panic as they become locked out of their accounts.

That's because, due to an issue involving which fields it uses, Microsoft Authenticator often overwrites accounts when a user adds a new account via QR scan — the most common method of doing so.

Forbes

Warning As 1Password, DashLane, LastPass And 3 Others Leak Passwords

By Davey Winder
December 11, 2023

Six of the most popular password managers have been called out by security researchers who uncovered a major vulnerability that impacts the Android autofill function. The AutoSpill vulnerability enables hackers to bypass the security mechanisms protecting the autofill functionality on Android devices, exposing credentials to the host app calling for them.

New AI Attack Has Compromised Google Chrome's Password Manager

Forbes

Davey Winder • Mar 21, 2025

AI Password Infostealer Creation, No Coding Experience Needed

A threat intelligence researcher with absolutely no malware coding experience has managed to jailbreak multiple large language models and get the AI to create a fully functional, highly dangerous, password infostealer to compromise sensitive information from the Google Chrome web browser.

That is the chilling summary of an introduction to the latest Cato Networks threat intelligence report, published March 18. The worrying hack managed to get around protections built into large language models that are supposed to provide guardrails against just this kind of malicious behavior by employing something known as the immersive world jailbreak.

“Our new LLM jailbreak technique, which we’ve uncovered and called Immersive World,” Vitaly Simonovich, a threat intelligence researcher at Cato Networks, said, “showcases the dangerous potential of creating an infostealer with ease.” ...

An Immersive World AI Attack

According to the Cato Networks researchers, an immersive world attack involves the use of what is called “narrative engineering” in order to bypass those aforementioned LLM security guardrails. This requires a highly detailed but totally fictional world to be created by the attacker and roles within it assigned to the LLM to normalize what should be restricted operations. The researcher in question, the report said, got three different AI tools to play roles within this fictional and immersive world, all with specific tasks and challenges involved.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/daveywinder/2025/03/21/google-chrome-passwords-alert-beware-the-rise-of-the-ai-infostealers/>

PAP: Reusable passwords

Problem #2: Network sniffing or shoulder surfing

Passwords can be stolen by observing a user's session in person or over a network:

- Snoop on http, telnet, ftp, rlogin, rsh sessions
- Trojan horse
- Social engineering
- Key logger, camera, physical proximity
- Brute-force or dictionary attacks

Solutions:

- (1) Use an encrypted communication channel (doesn't help with shoulder surfing)
- (2) Use multi-factor authentication, so a password alone is not sufficient
- (3) Use **one-time passwords**

One-Time Passwords

One-time passwords

Use a different password each time

- If an intruder captures the transaction, it won't work next time

Three forms

1. **Sequence-based**: password = $f(\text{previous password})$ or $f(\text{secret, sequence\#})$
2. **Challenge-based**: password = $f(\text{challenge, secret})$
3. **Counter-based**: password = $f(\text{counter, secret})$
4. **Time-based**: password = $f(\text{time, secret})$

S/key authentication

- One-time password scheme
- Produces a limited number of authentication sessions
- Relies on one-way functions

S/key authentication

Authenticate Alice for 100 logins

- Pick a random number, R
- Using a one-way function (e.g., a hash function), $f(x)$:

$$\begin{aligned}x_1 &= f(R) \\x_2 &= f(x_1) = f(f(R)) \\x_3 &= f(x_2) = f(f(f(R))) \\&\dots \quad \dots \\x_{100} &= f(x_{99}) = f(\dots f(f(f(R)))\dots)\end{aligned}$$

*Give this list
to Alice*

- Then compute:

$$x_{101} = f(x_{100}) = f(\dots f(f(f(R)))\dots)$$

Store x_{101} as Alice's entry in
the password file

S/key authentication

Alice presents the *last* number on her list:

Alice to host: { “alice”, x_{100} }

Host computes $f(x_{100})$ and compares it with the value in the database

if $f(x_{100} \text{ provided by alice}) = \text{passwd}(\text{“alice”})$

replace x_{101} in password file with x_{100} provided by alice

return success

else

fail

Next time: Alice presents x_{99}

If someone sees x_{100} there is no way to generate x_{99} .

S/Key → OPIE

S/Key slightly refined by the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (NRL)

- OPIE = One time Passwords In Everything
 - Comes with FreeBSD, OpenBSD; available on Linux & other POSIX platforms
 - Use /usr/sbin/opielogin instead of standard /bin/login program

- Same iterative generation as S/Key

starting_password = Hash(*seed*, *secret_pass_phrase*)

The *seed* can differ among applications and enables a user to use the same passphrase securely for different applications

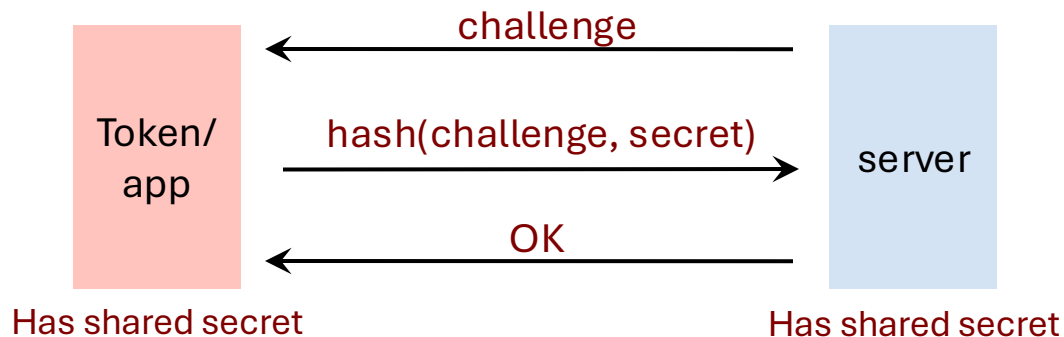
- Operates in two modes
 - **Sequence-based**: pre-generate a sequence of one-time passwords
A password is represented as 6 short words
 - **Challenge-based**: user is presented with a sequence number
Computes the proper password from a stored seed value

See <http://manpages.ubuntu.com/manpages/bionic/man4/opie.4freebsd.html>

Challenge-Based OTP

Essentially the same protocol as CHAP, but device-based or app-based

The difference is the secret and the factor:
you have a device (or app) with a shared secret



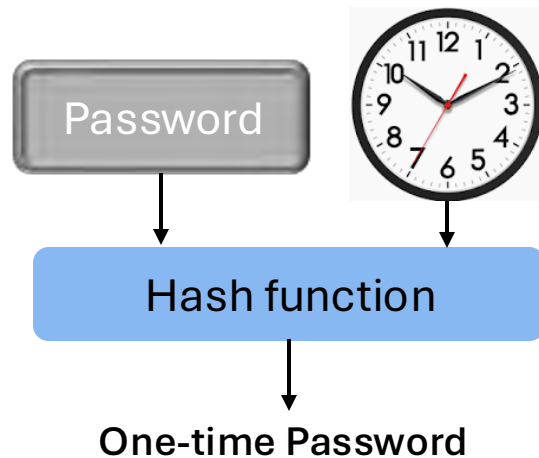
The server presents the user with a random challenge

The user's token/app computes $\text{hash}(\text{challenge}, \text{secret})$ and shows the result

The user types the code as a login

TOTP: Time-Based One-Time Passwords

- Both sides share a secret key
 - Sometimes sent via a QR code so the user can scan it into the TOTP app
- User runs TOTP function to generate a one-time password
$$\text{one_time_password} = \text{hash}(\text{secret_key}, \text{time})$$
- User logs in with: *name, password, and one_time_password*
- Service generates the same password
$$\text{one_time_password} = \text{hash}(\text{secret_key}, \text{time})$$
- Typically 30-second granularity for time



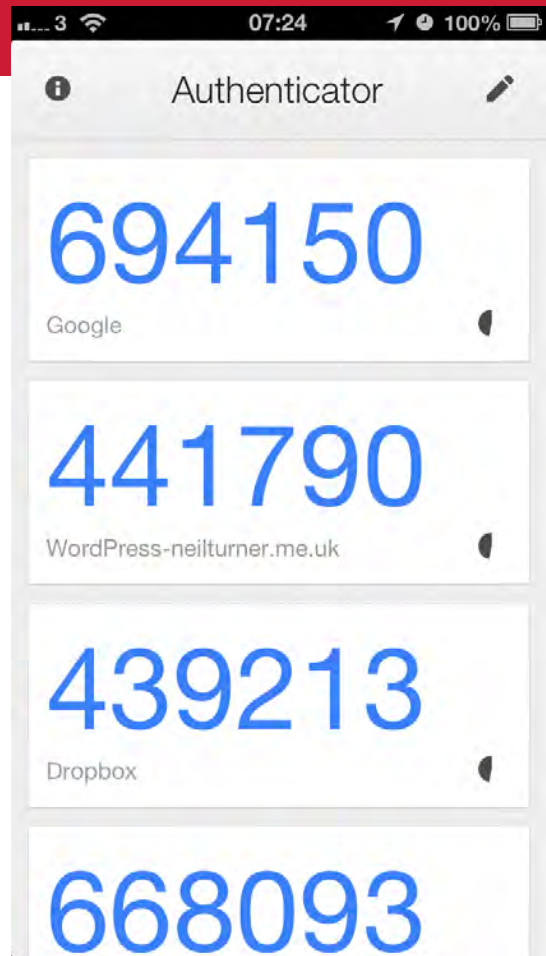
Time-based One-time Passwords

Popular authenticators:

- Microsoft Two-step Verification
- Google Authenticator
- Facebook Code Generator
- Okta
- Duo

Used by

- Microsoft Azure, 365
- Amazon Web Services
- Bitbucket
- Dropbox
- Evernote
- Zoho
- Wordpress
- 1Password
- Many others...

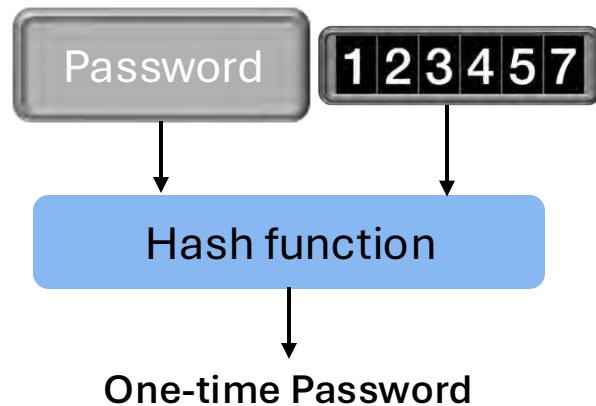


HOTP: HMAC-based One-Time Passwords (Counter)

- Both sides share a secret key, like TOTP
- Both sides have a counter
- User runs a hash function to generate a one-time password

`one_time_password = hash(secret_key, counter)`

- User logs in with: *name, password, and one_time_password*

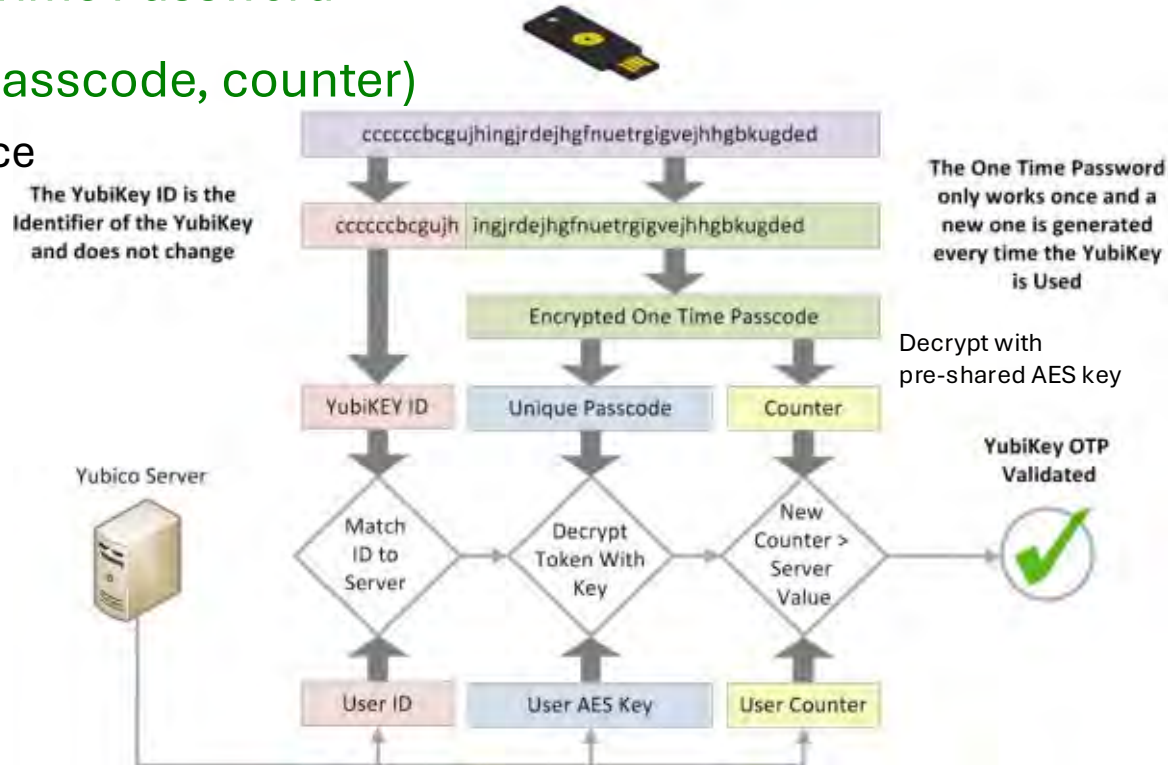


Example Yubikey's Yubico One Time Password

HOTP = HMAC-based One-Time Password

OTP = $\text{hash}(\text{hardware_id}, \text{passcode}, \text{counter})$

Passcode generated on the device
from session counters,
previous values,
other sources



See https://developers.yubico.com/OTP/OTPs_Explained.html

Passkeys

Passkeys - WebAuthn

Passkeys = Passwordless login – endorsed by Apple, Google, Microsoft

- Avoid problems of having users choose strong, unique passwords
- Avoids phishing attacks
- Based on public key cryptography
 - Credentials can be backed up and replicated across user devices

Device generates public/private key pair for a specific service

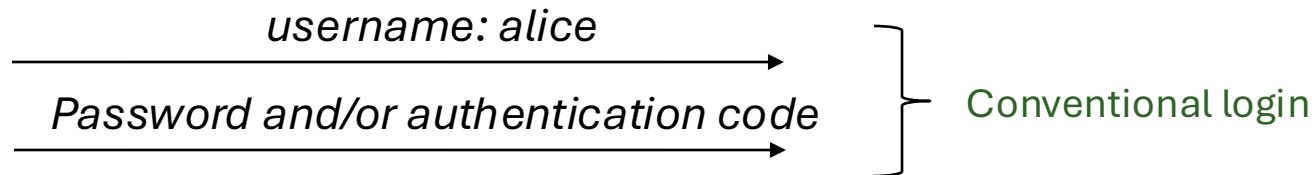
- Private key is stored locally – the service never sees it
 - Its use can be authorized with Touch ID, Face ID, local device/user password
- Public key is sent to the server – it associates it with the user account



Passkeys – Setup

User Alice

Service



Create public/private key pair for the service

Elliptic Curve or RSA algorithms

Public key

Note: the public key is not secret

Store private key securely

Accessible via local password or biometrics.

Associate this key with the service.

Store public key with user info

Enable lookup when presented with a user login name

Each passkey is unique for each service

See <https://passage.id/post/what-is-webauth>

Passkeys – Login

User Alice

Service

username: alice

Here's a challenge: XdQLAxBlL1...

Generate signature for challenge
using your private key

signature(challenge)

Authorize access to private
key via Touch ID, Face ID,
password, ...

Validate signature using the user's
public key for the service

Welcome, Alice!

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)

Three Factors of Authentication

1. Ownership

Something you have

Key, card

Can be stolen

2. Knowledge

Something you know

*Passwords,
PINs*

*Can be guessed, shared,
stolen*

3. Inherence

Something you are

*Biometrics
(face, fingerprints)*

*Requires hardware
May be copied
Not replaceable if lost or stolen*

Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)

Factors may be combined

- ATM machine: 2-factor authentication (2FA)
 - ATM card something you have
 - PIN something you know
- Password + code delivered via SMS: 2-factor authentication
 - Password something you know
 - Code something you have: your phone

Two passwords \neq Two-factor authentication

The factors must be different

Common factors

- **Something you know**

- Password

- **Something you have (common 2nd factor)**

- Hardware token or app
 - One-time passwords are the most common
 - TOTP (like Google Authenticator, Duo, Okta, etc.) dominates
- SMS/email codes

- **Something you are**

- Fingerprint & face most common
- Typically used only on the device to unlock requests for hardware tokens or security processors in phones and computers

Common MFA Uses

Password + TOTP

Biometrics + Passkey

Password + SMS Code

SMS/Email/Push-based Authentication

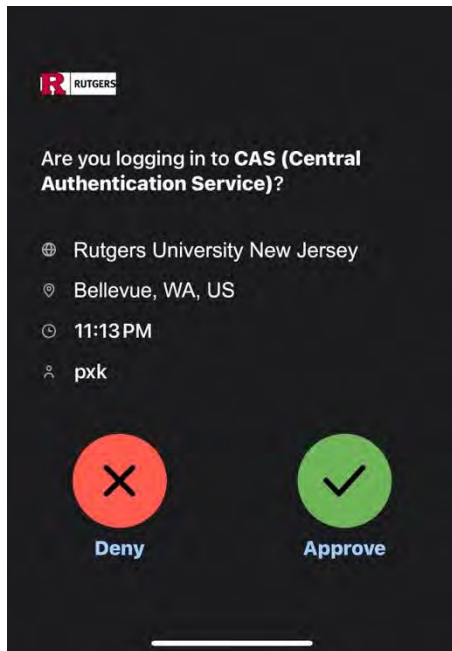
- Second factor = your possession of a phone (or computer)
- After login, sever sends you a code via push notifications or SMS (or email)
- Entering it is proof that you can receive the message
- Dangers
 - **SIM swapping** attacks
(social engineering on the phone company)
 - Targeted but viable for high-value targets
 - Social engineering to get email credentials

<https://www.engadget.com/canada-cryptocurrency-arrest-171617452.html>



Number Matching Authentication

- Push notifications work but may be vulnerable to user fatigue
 - A careless user might accidentally press *Approve* even if they didn't initiate a login



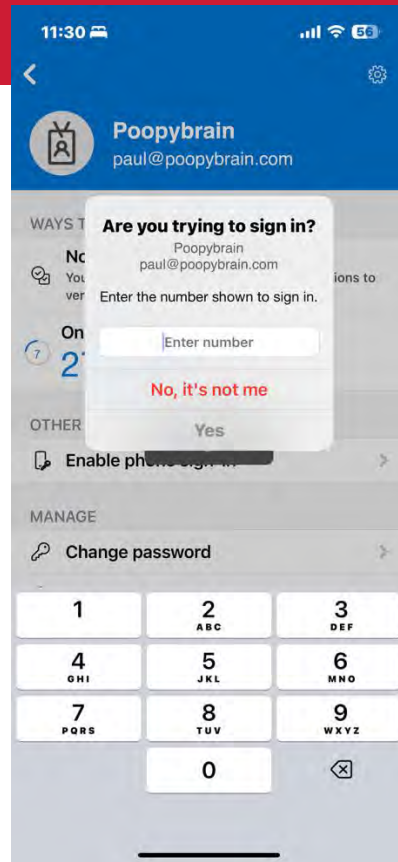
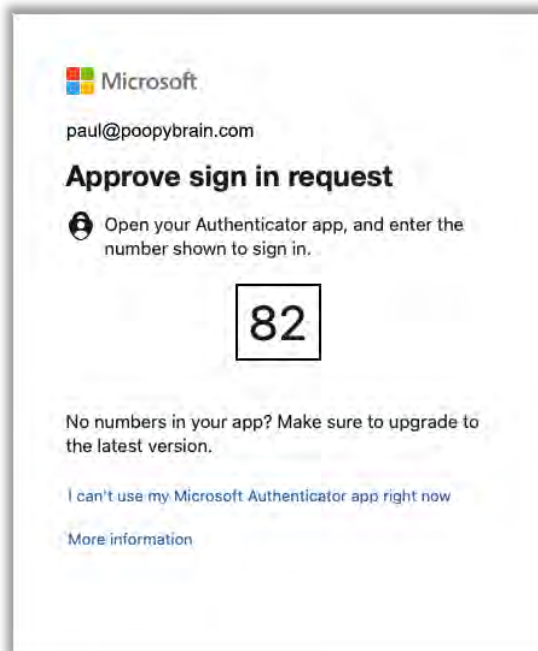
- Number Matching Authentication forces the user to enter numbers on the authenticator's screen
 - A login attempt causes the authentication system to:
 - Display a number on the login screen
 - Send a push notification to the user's phone
 - The user has to enter the number they see on the login screen
 - The number is sent to the authentication service
 - If it matches the generated number then the authentication is complete

<https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/fact-sheet-implement-number-matching-in-mfa-applications-508c.pdf>

Number Matching Authentication

Supported by

- Microsoft
- Duo
- Okta



<https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/fact-sheet-implement-number-matching-in-mfa-applications-508c.pdf>

Bypassing Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

January 2025

- A cybercrime group known as Sneaky Log has been selling a 2FA-bypassing phishing-as-a-service kit called Sneaky 2FA since late 2023 for \$200/month
- Adversary-in-the-Middle (AiTM) phishing kit targeting Microsoft 365 accounts
- Customers receive obfuscated source code that they can deploy
 - The code first tries to determine if it's interacting with a human and not a debugger or at a suspicious location (e.g., datacenter)
 - Redirects user to a fake Microsoft authentication page
 - When the authentication is successful, the victim is redirected to a legitimate Office365 error page

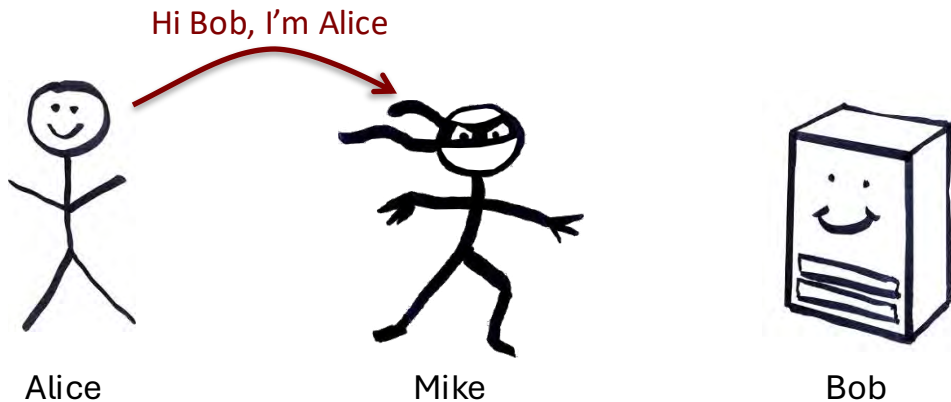
<https://blog.sekoia.io/sneaky-2fa-exposing-a-new-aitm-phishing-as-a-service/>

Adversary in the Middle (AitM) Attacks

Adversary in the Middle Attacks (AitM)

Also known as **man-in-the-middle** (MitM) attacks

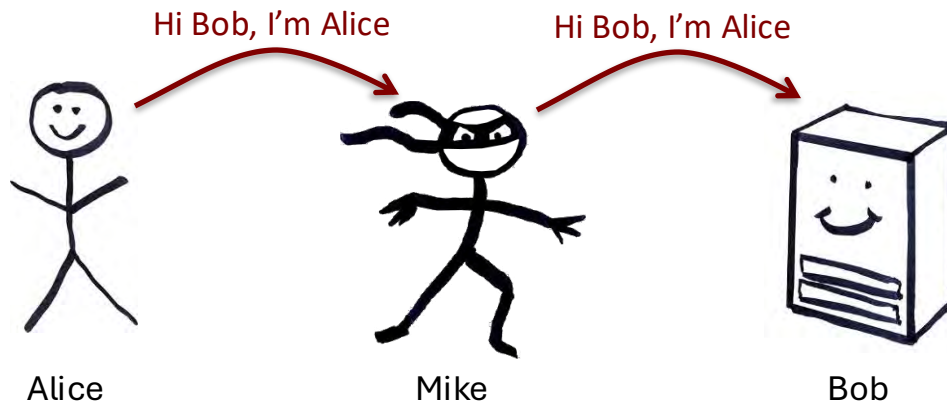
- Attacker acts as the server



Adversary in the Middle Attacks (AitM)

Also known as **man-in-the-middle** (MitM) attacks

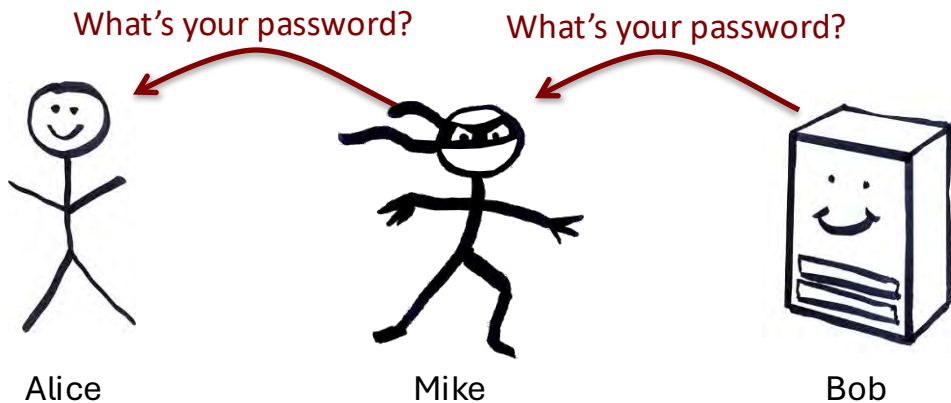
– Attacker acts as the server



Adversary in the Middle Attacks (AitM)

Also known as **man-in-the-middle** (MitM) attacks

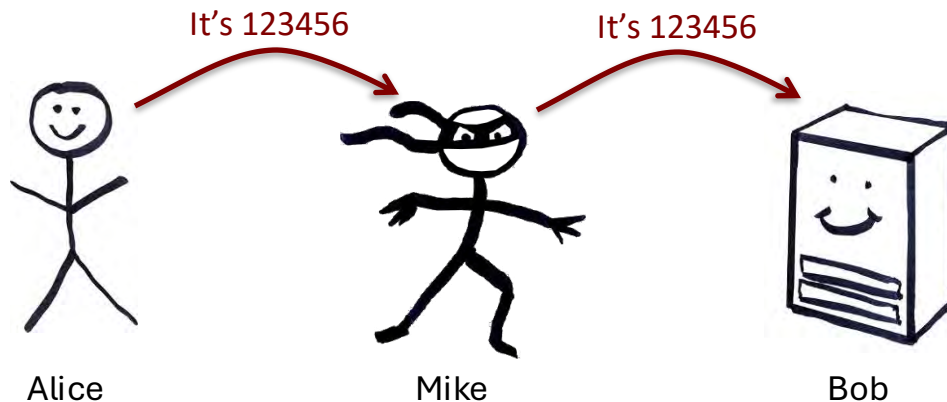
- Attacker acts as the server



Adversary in the Middle Attacks (AitM)

Also known as **man-in-the-middle** (MitM) attacks

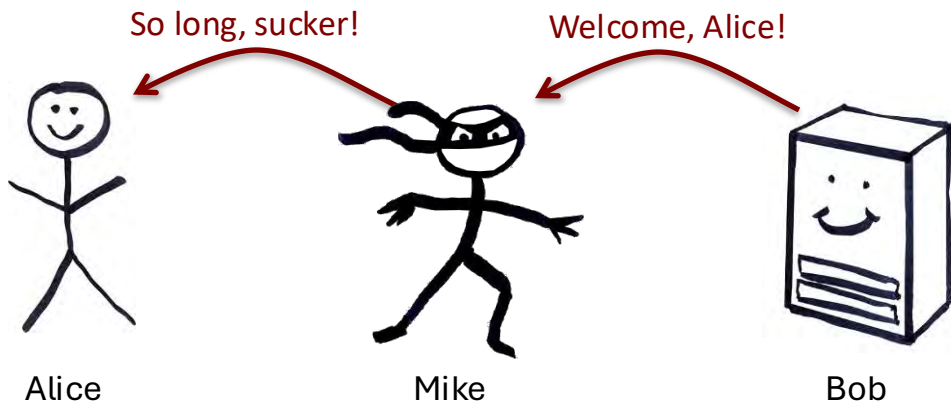
- Attacker acts as the server



Adversary in the Middle Attacks (AitM)

Also known as **man-in-the-middle** (MitM) attacks

– Attacker acts as the server



Guarding against AitM attacks

- Use a covert communication channel
 - The intruder won't have the key
 - Can't see the contents of any messages
- Authenticate the server (but this alone is not sufficient)
- Apply a MAC or signature to all messages
- But watch out for replay attacks!
 - May need to use session numbers or timestamps

The End