



**AUGUST 7-8, 2024**  
BRIEFINGS

# **The Hack@DAC\* Story: Learnings from Organizing the World's Largest Hardware Hacking Competition**

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## Offensive Security Research at Intel

- 50+ years of combined experience
- CPUs, Servers, Clients, Networking, Cellular, Storage, Security technologies, ...
- 500+ vulnerabilities identified
- Vulnerability root causing and categorization
- MITRE HW CWE SIG\* members



**Jeyavijayan (JV) Rajendran**  
Associate Professor  
Texas A&M University, USA



**Ahmad-Reza Sadeghi**  
Professor  
TU Darmstadt, Germany

## Security Research

- 35+ years of combined experience
- Circuits, system security, network security, cryptography, microarchitecture, etc.
- 44000+ citations!

## Texas A&M University

- Rahul Kande\*
- Chen Chen\*
- Patrick Haney
- Garrett Persyn
- Bhagyaraja Adapa

## TU Darmstadt

- Mohammadreza Rostami\*
- Ghada Dessouky
- David Gens
- Pouya Mahmoody
- Shaza Zeitouni

## Synopsys

- Shylaja Sen\*
- Yann Antonioli\*
- Jagminder Chugh
- Meriav Nitzan

\* Part of most recent team



Introduction

Value of Organizing HW CTFs

How Hack@DAC is Unique

Organizing Hack@DAC

Key Takeaways & Summary

Introduction

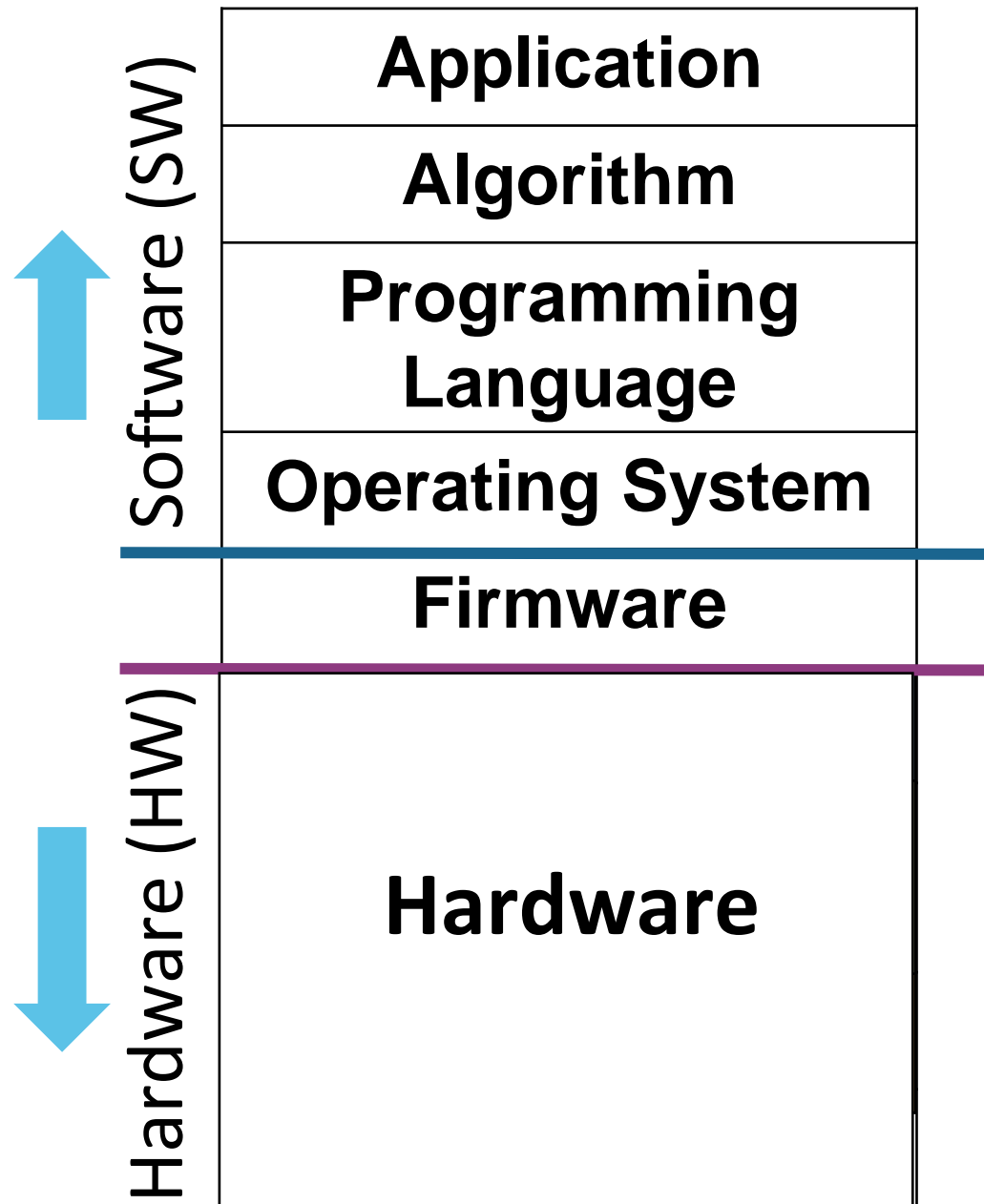
Value of Organizing HW CTFs

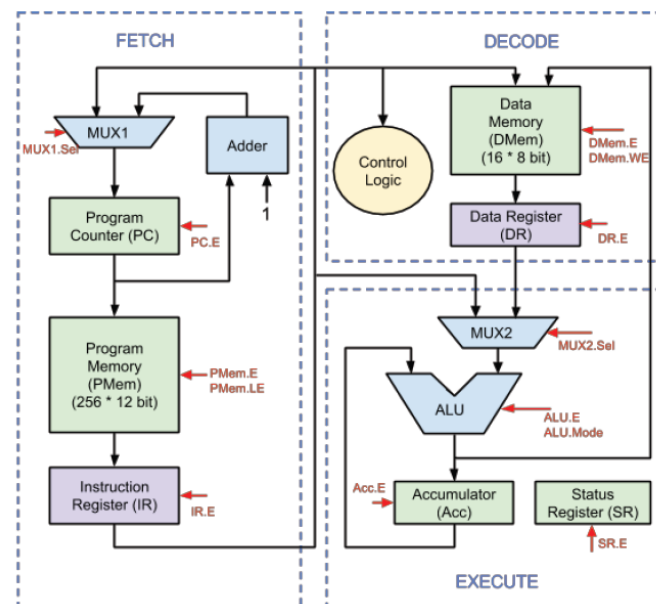
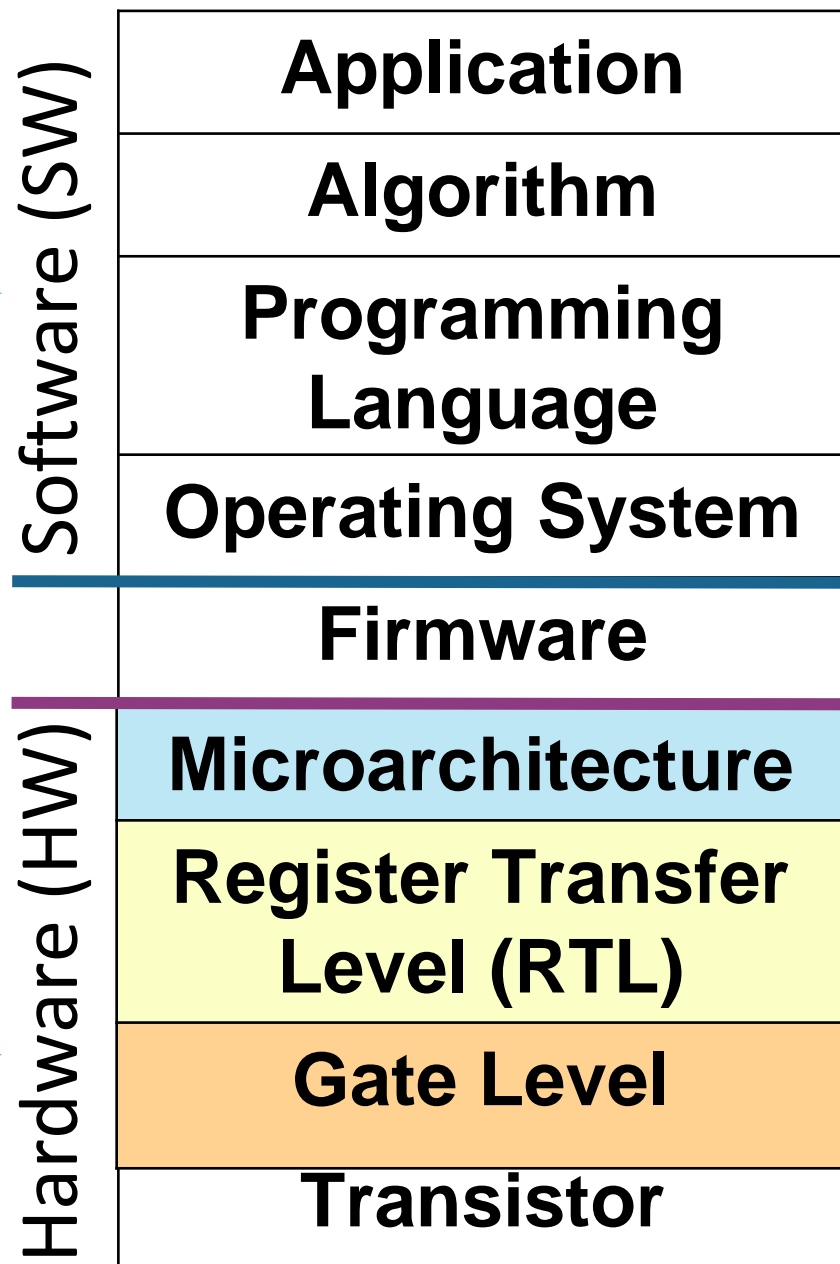
How Hack@DAC is Unique

Organizing Hack@DAC

Key Takeaways & Summary

# Computing Stack - Refresher



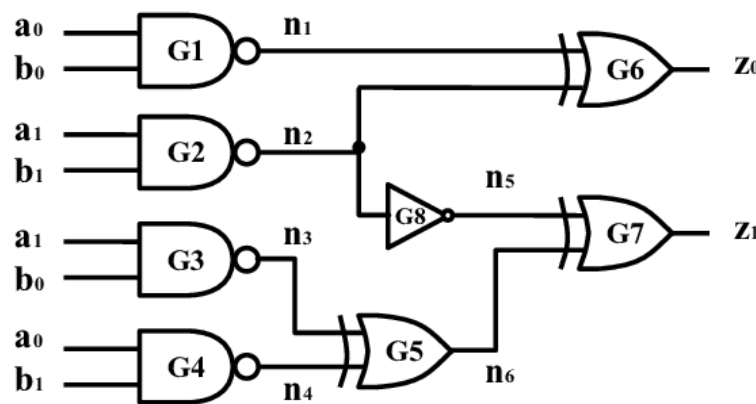


Microarchitecture

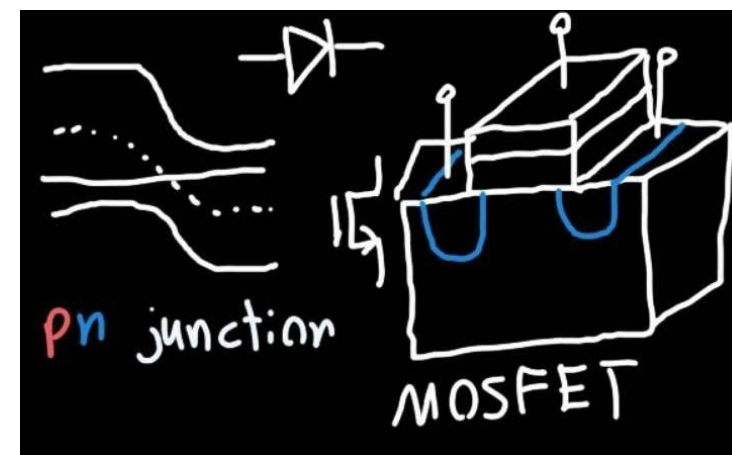
```

assign ADD_result = reg_A + reg_B;
assign SUB_result = reg_A - reg_B;
assign AND_result = reg_A & reg_B;
...
if (IR_opcode_field == 0)
    case (IR_function_field)
        6'b100000: ALU_result <= ADD_result;
        6'b100010: ALU_result <= SUB_result;
        6'b100100: ALU_result <= AND_result;
    ...
    
```

Register Transfer Level (RTL)



Gate Level



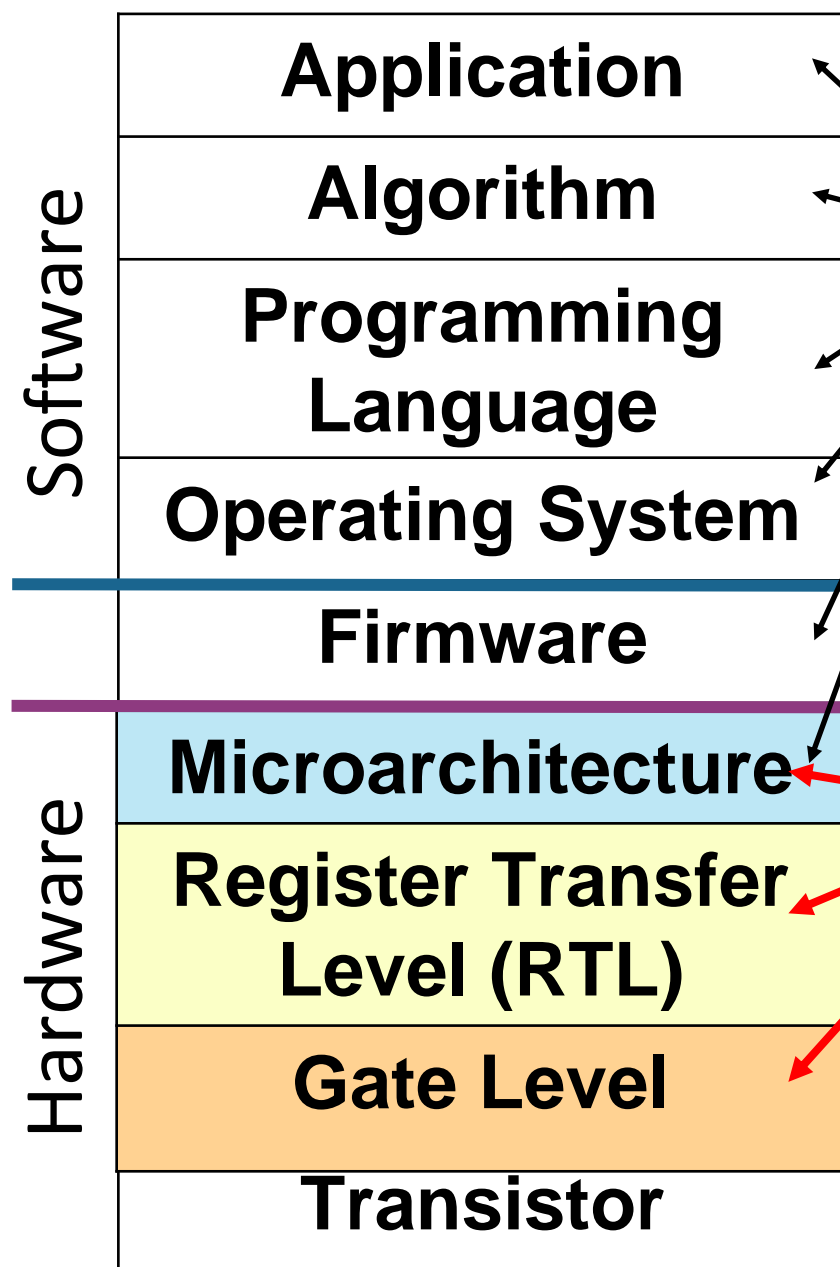
Transistor



# Race to the Bottom of the Stack

## Challenge #1: Limited Awareness of HW Security Weaknesses

**RACE TO THE  
BOTTOM**



Bugs in hardware could be exploitable by software!

HardFails: Insights into Software-Exploitable Hardware Bugs

Authors:

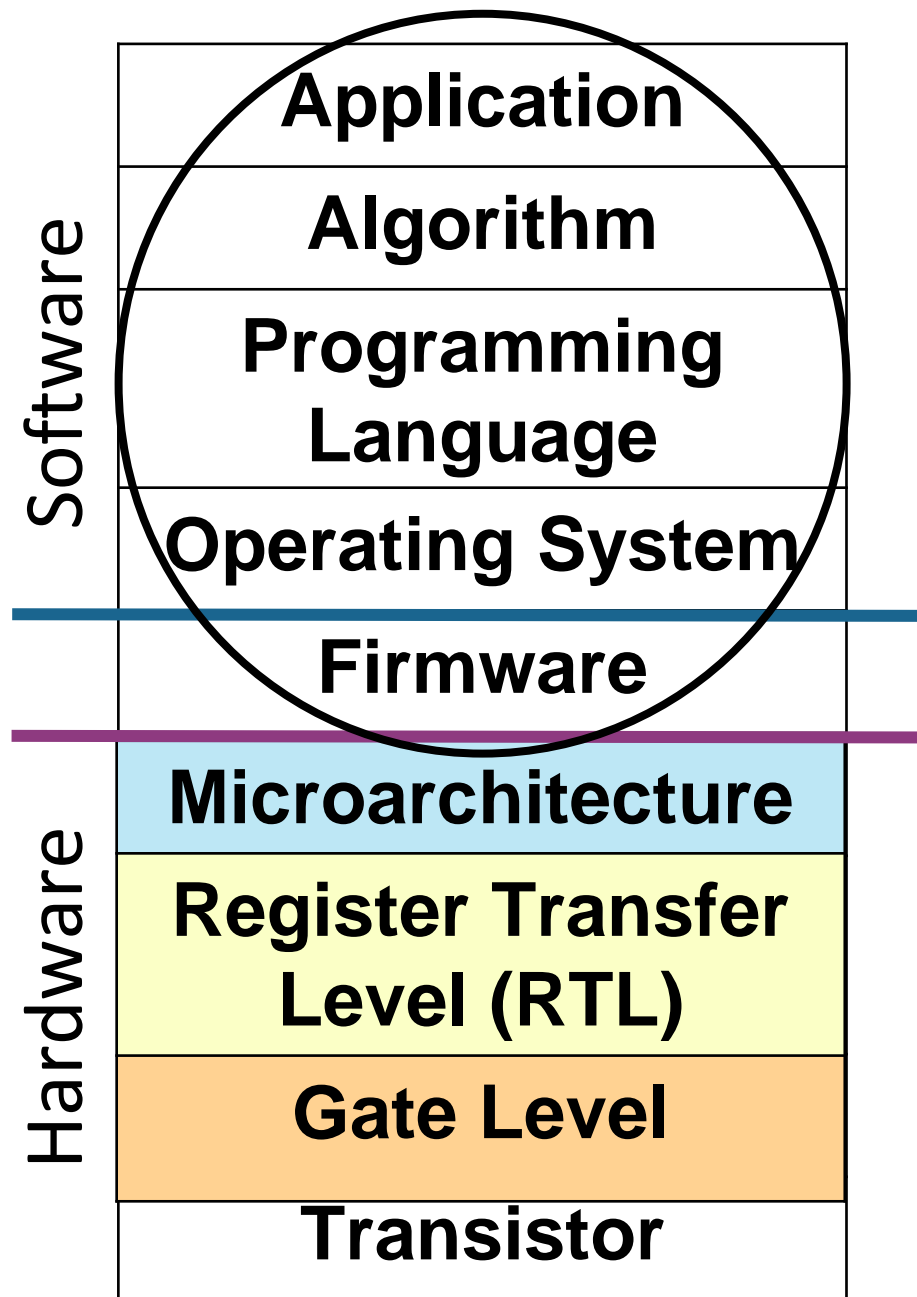
Ghada Dessouky and David Gens, *Technische Universität Darmstadt*; Patrick Haney and Garrett Persyn, *Texas A&M University*; Arun Kanuparthi, Hareesh Khattri, and Jason M. Fung, *Intel Corporation*; Ahmad-Reza Sadeghi, *Technische Universität Darmstadt*; Jeyavijayan Rajendran, *Texas A&M University*

USENIX Security 2019

#BHUSA @BlackHatEvents



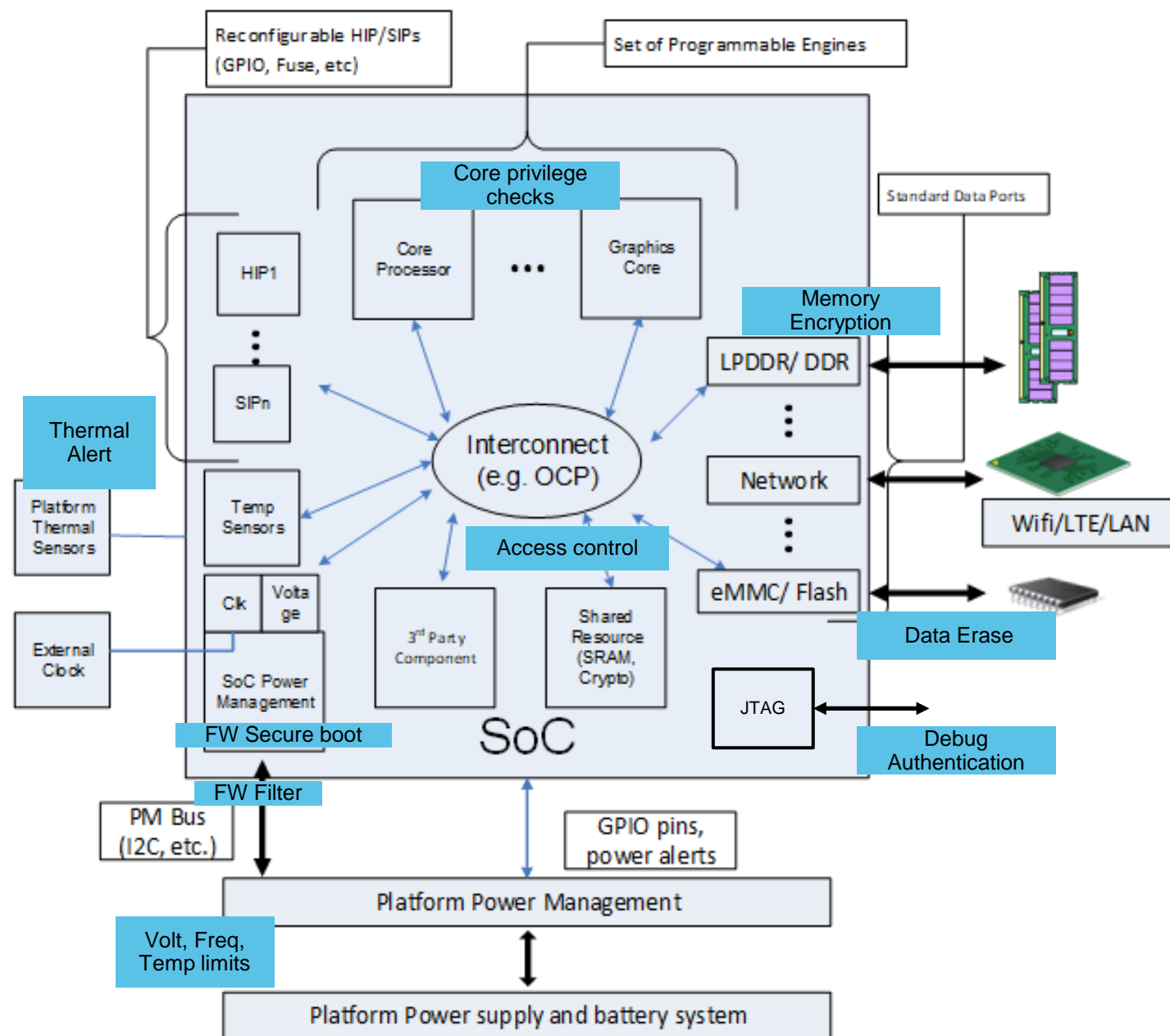
# Tools for Security – SW vs HW



Lots of tools for SW/FW security!

- Code scanners
- Protocol checkers
- Configuration checkers
- Decompilers & RE tools

# System on a Chip (SoC) Security



- Typical Security Objectives for Assets
  - Data Confidentiality
  - Data Integrity
  - Availability
- Example Security Features
  - Execution core & debug privilege checks
  - Access control
  - Memory encryption & integrity
  - Secure data erase
  - Power and thermal critical trip alerts

```

3 module aes0_wrapper #(
4     parameter int unsigned AXI_ADDR_WIDTH = 64,
5     parameter int unsigned AXI_DATA_WIDTH = 64,
6     parameter int unsigned AXI_ID_WIDTH = 10
7 ) (
8     clk_i,
9     rst_ni,
10    reglk_ctrl_i,
11    acct_ctrl_i,
12    debug_mode_i,
13    axi_req_i,
14    axi_resp_o
15 );
16

```

# HW Vulnerability Example – Key Clear

<b>Asset (Objective)</b>	Secret Keys in AES block (Confidentiality)
<b>Threat</b>	HW debug adversary extracts keys
<b>Mitigation</b>	Return all 0s for all reads when chip is in debug mode

When in debug mode,  
return 0 when keys are read

debug\_mode is not checked for  
key\_big2

Attacker can extract  
key\_big2 during debug

Security Impact

```

43 // signals from AXI 4 Lite
44 logic [AXI_ADDR_WIDTH-1:0] address;
45 logic                          en, en_acct;
46 logic                          we;
47 logic [63:0] wdata;
48 logic [63:0] rdata;
49
50 assign p_c_big  = {p_c[0], p_c[1], p_c[2], p_c[3]};
51 assign state_big = {state[0], state[1], state[2], state[3]};
52 assign key_big0  = debug_mode_i ? 192'b0 : {key0[0], key0[1], key0[2], key0[3], key0[4], key0[5]};
53 assign key_big1  = debug_mode_i ? 192'b0 : {key1[0], key1[1], key1[2], key1[3], key1[4], key1[5]};
54 assign key_big2  = {key2[0], key2[1], key2[2], key2[3], key2[4], key2[5]};
55

```

Asset (Objective)	Secret Keys in AES block (Confidentiality)
Threat	Keys should not be readable by untrusted software code
Mitigation	A read lock signal (when enabled) returns '0' when keys are read by software

Logic to read the key. If lock is set, reads return '0'

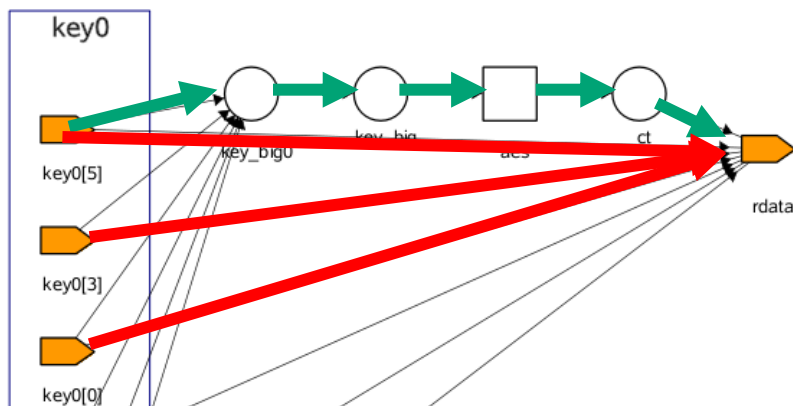
When valid read is detected (en is high), key0 is passed to read data without checking for lock

## Key0 leaks to attacker observable interface

```

159 // Read side
160 //always @(~write)
161 always @(*)
162     begin
163         rdata = 64'b0;
164         if (en) begin
165             rdata = key0[address[8:3]];
166             case(address[8:3])
167                 0:
168                     rdata = reglk_ctrl_i[0] ? 'b0 : {31'b0, start};
169                 1:
170                     rdata = reglk_ctrl_i[2] ? 'b0 : p_c[3];
171                 2:
172                     rdata = reglk_ctrl_i[2] ? 'b0 : p_c[2];
173             endcase
174         end
175     end

```

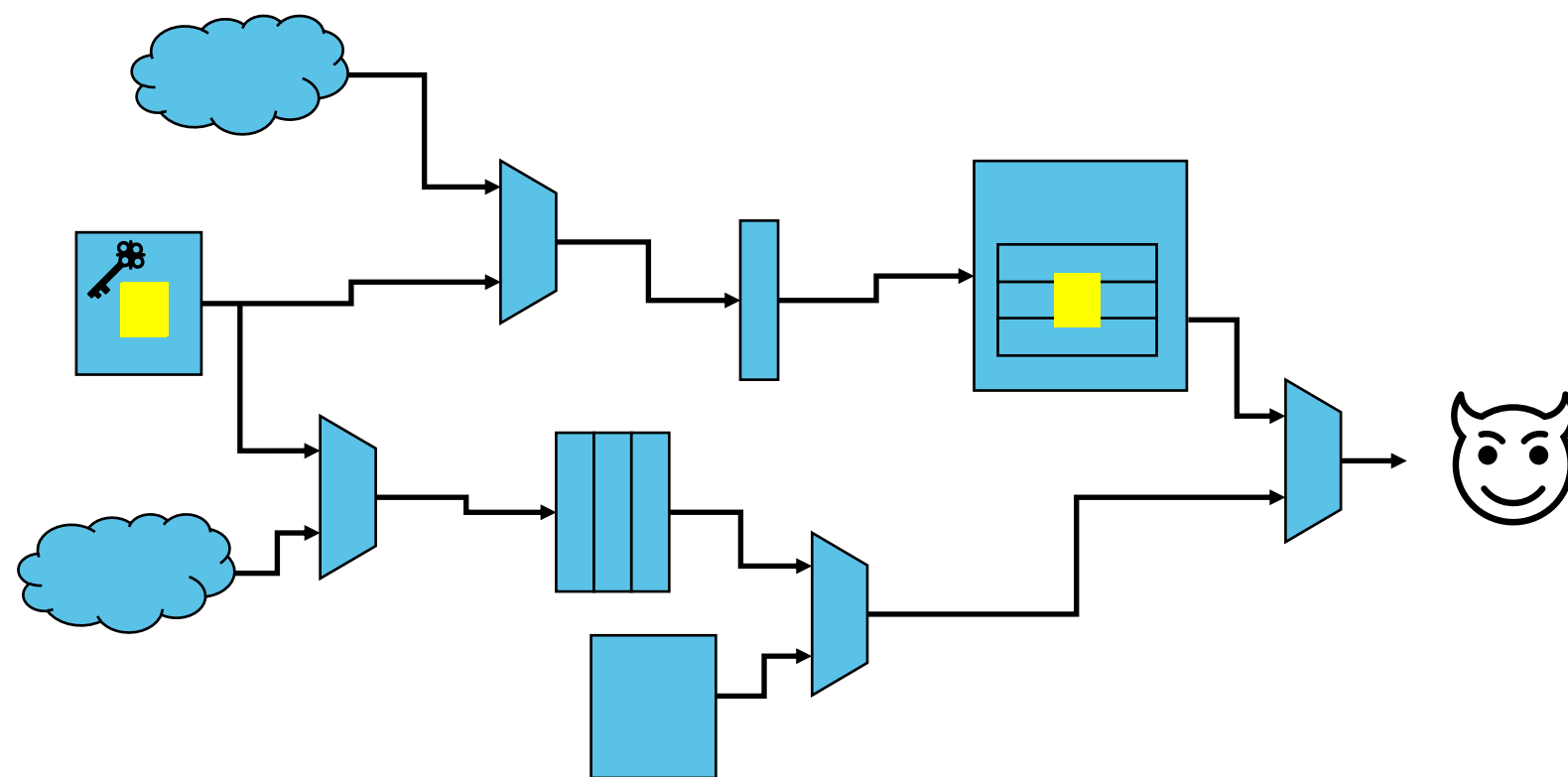
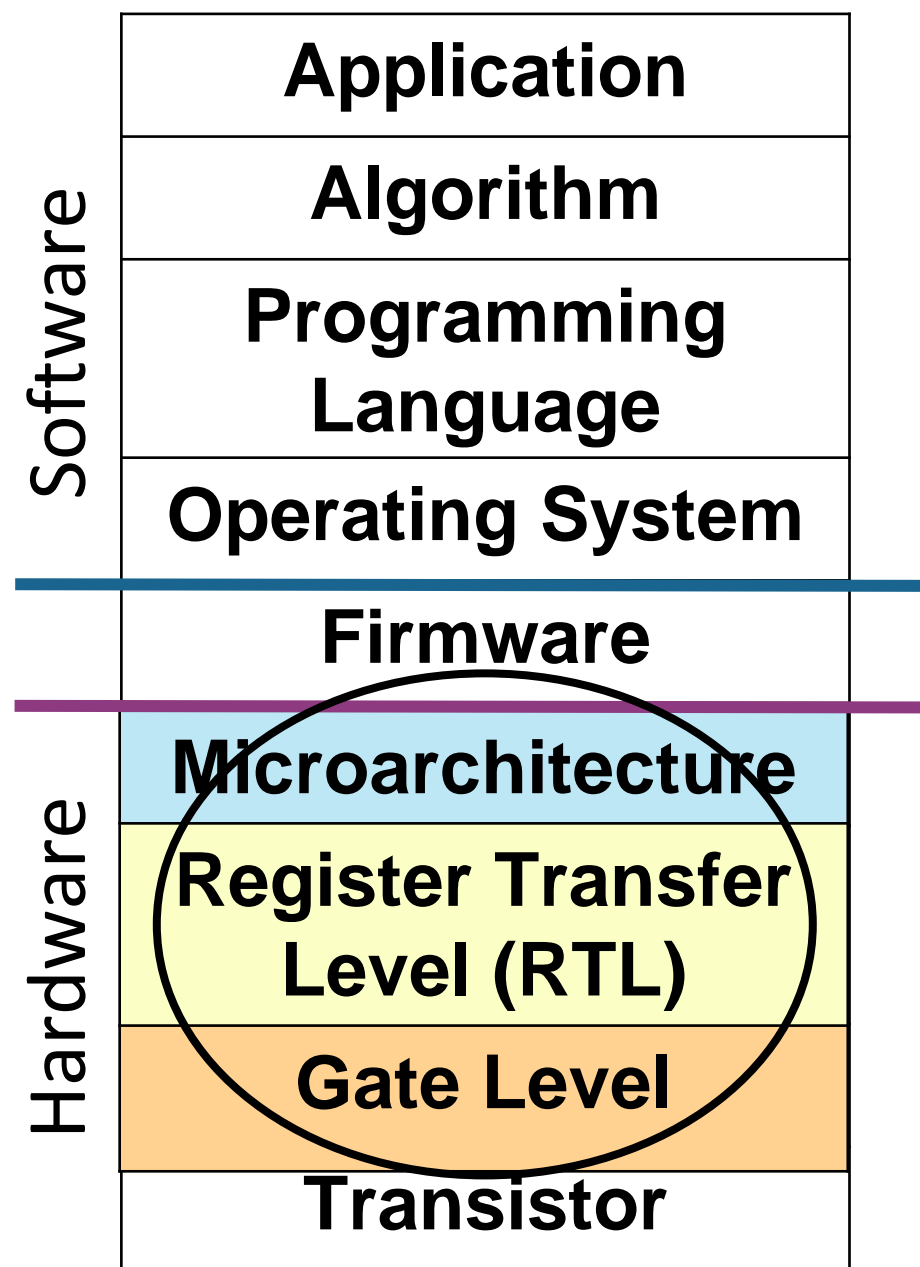


## Expected Path through AES engine

# Unexpected/hidden path leaks key



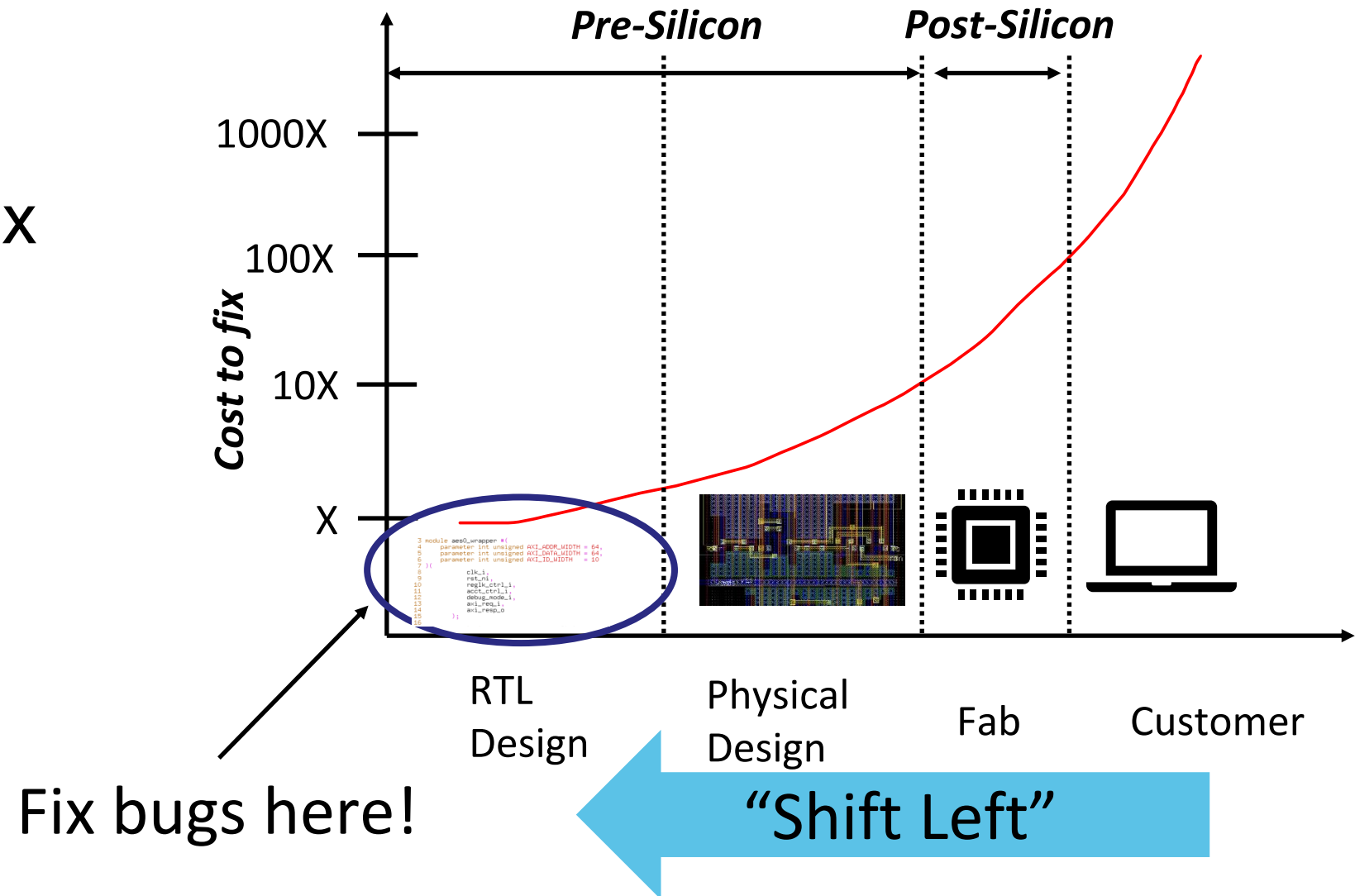
## Challenge #2: Need for Security-Aware Design Automation Tools



HW security tools (at RTL level) are limited

## Challenge #3: Need to Detect/Fix Bugs at RTL Design Phase

- SW bugs fixed with patches
- HW bugs are complicated to fix
  - Time consuming
  - Expensive
  - Cause brand damage



# Motivation for Hack@DAC



Awareness of  
Hardware  
Common  
Weaknesses

CONCEPTS



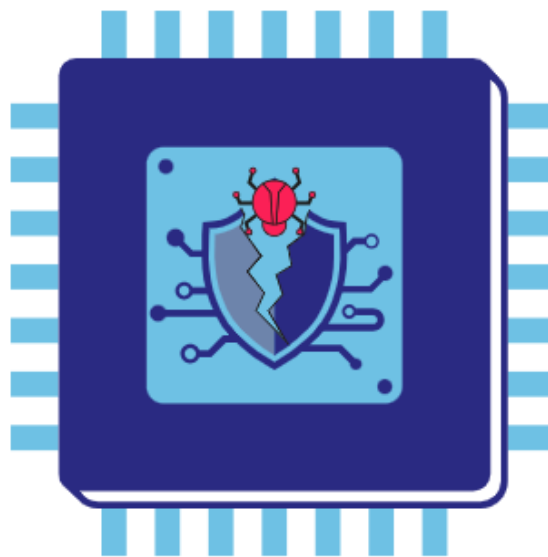
Security-  
Aware Design  
Automation

TOOLS



“Shift-Left” to  
Detect & Fix  
Bugs in RTL

BEST PRACTICES



## Hack@DAC

- Hackathons, trainings
- Open-source hardware as target?
- What about hardware CTF?

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Organizing Hack@DAC

Key Takeaways & Summary



- Continuous race between attackers and defenders
- Defenders need to up their game!
- Hardware CTFs foster greater awareness about
  - Common hardware security weaknesses
  - Constraints of chip design teams



# What's in it for Academia & Industry?

- A buggy SoC\* framework for furthering innovation
  - Realistic security features, threat model, and security objectives
  - Vulnerabilities inspired by CVEs and real-world bugs
  - Open source and commercial tool support
- Benchmark for developing and testing HW security tools
  - Closest to commercial chip designs
- Participants gain hardware security assurance experience
  - Develop hacker mindset
  - Launchpad for researchers from adjacent areas (e.g., Firmware)



\*SoC = System on a chip

Introduction

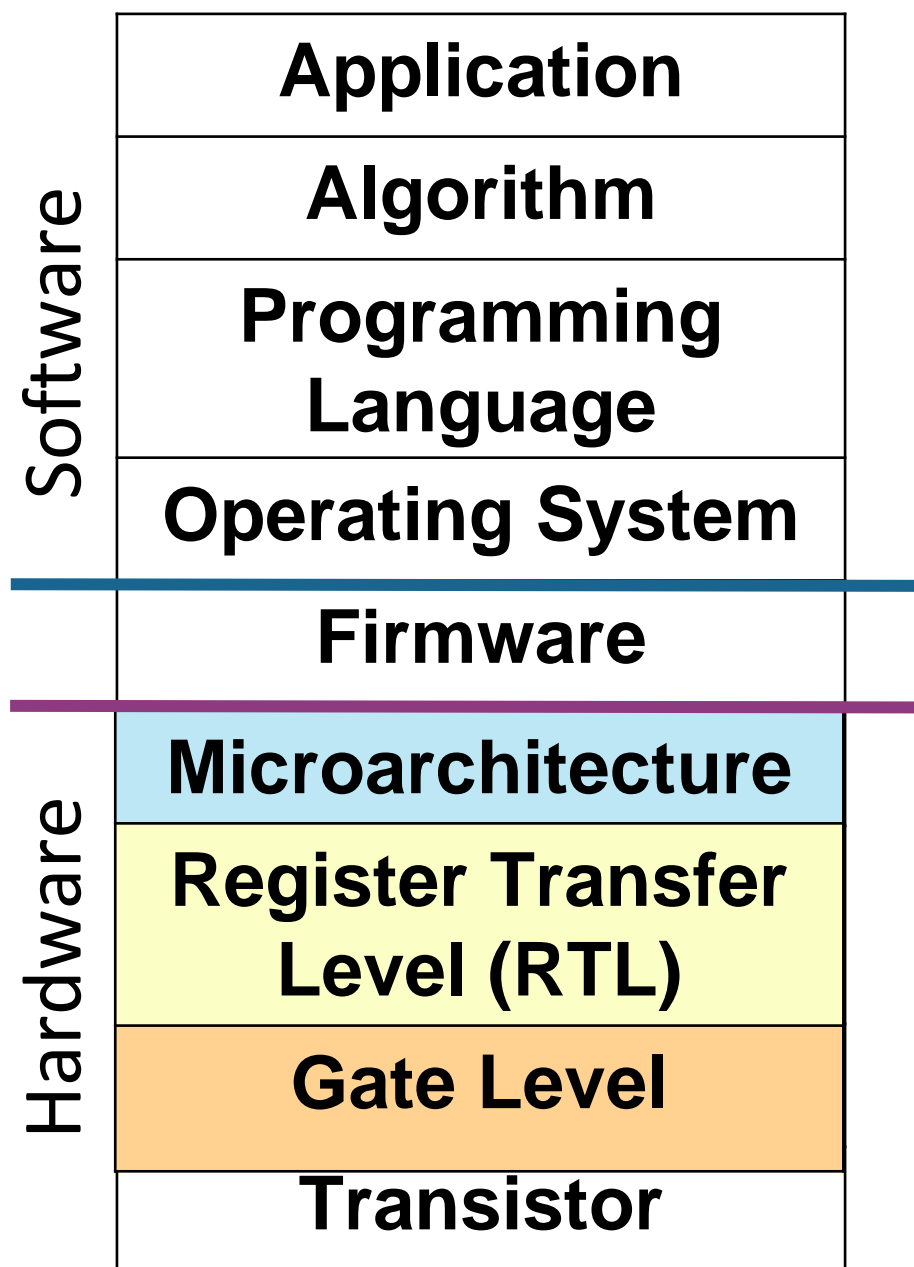
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# Popular HW CTFs

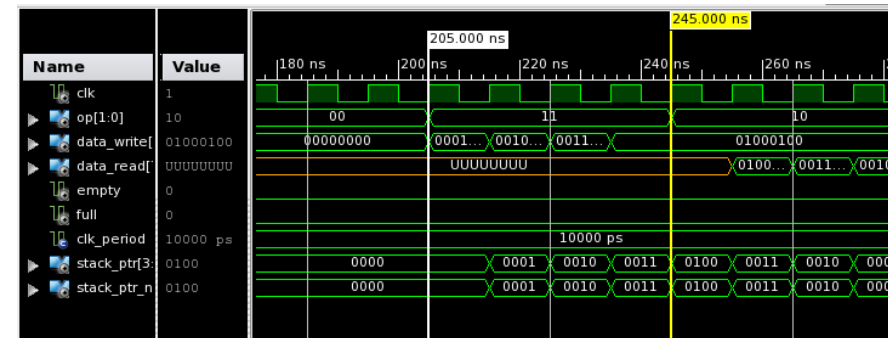


- Popular HW CTFs are “closed-box”
- Adopt a hacker-centric approach
  - Involve physical interaction with target chip
    - Probing input/output ports
    - Desoldering and reverse engineering attacks
    - Physical side channel attacks, etc.
  - No insights into the RTL code of the chip
- Very important research!
- Does not address “shift-left” challenge



# Closed-box vs Open-box CTFs

- Hack@DAC is “Open-box”
  - Participants given a buggy SoC RTL
  - Finer grained scope
- Participants attempt to break security features
  - RTL Simulation/ Emulation
  - Formal Verification
  - RTL Static Analysis
  - Manual reviews
- Designer-centric approach



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# Hack@DAC – The Process

## Participants

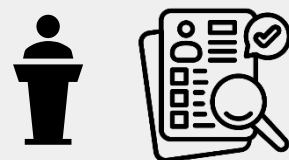
5 Registration



6 Bug submission



8 Scoreboard



11 Opportunities

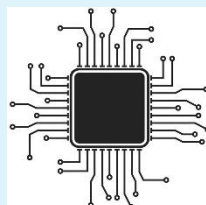
## Design Team

Security features  
Threat model

2

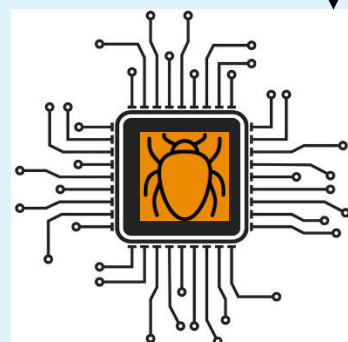


1 Open-source design



Bug list

3



Buggy design (RTL)

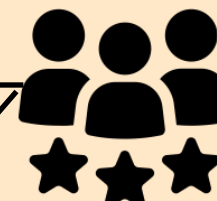
4

Updated spec



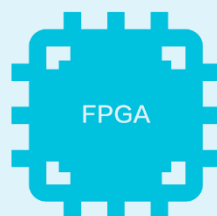
Tool support

## Judges



Bug evaluation

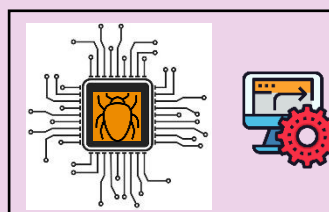
7



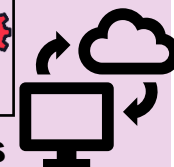
FPGA support for  
emulation

9

## Cloud Team



Commercial tools  
on cloud

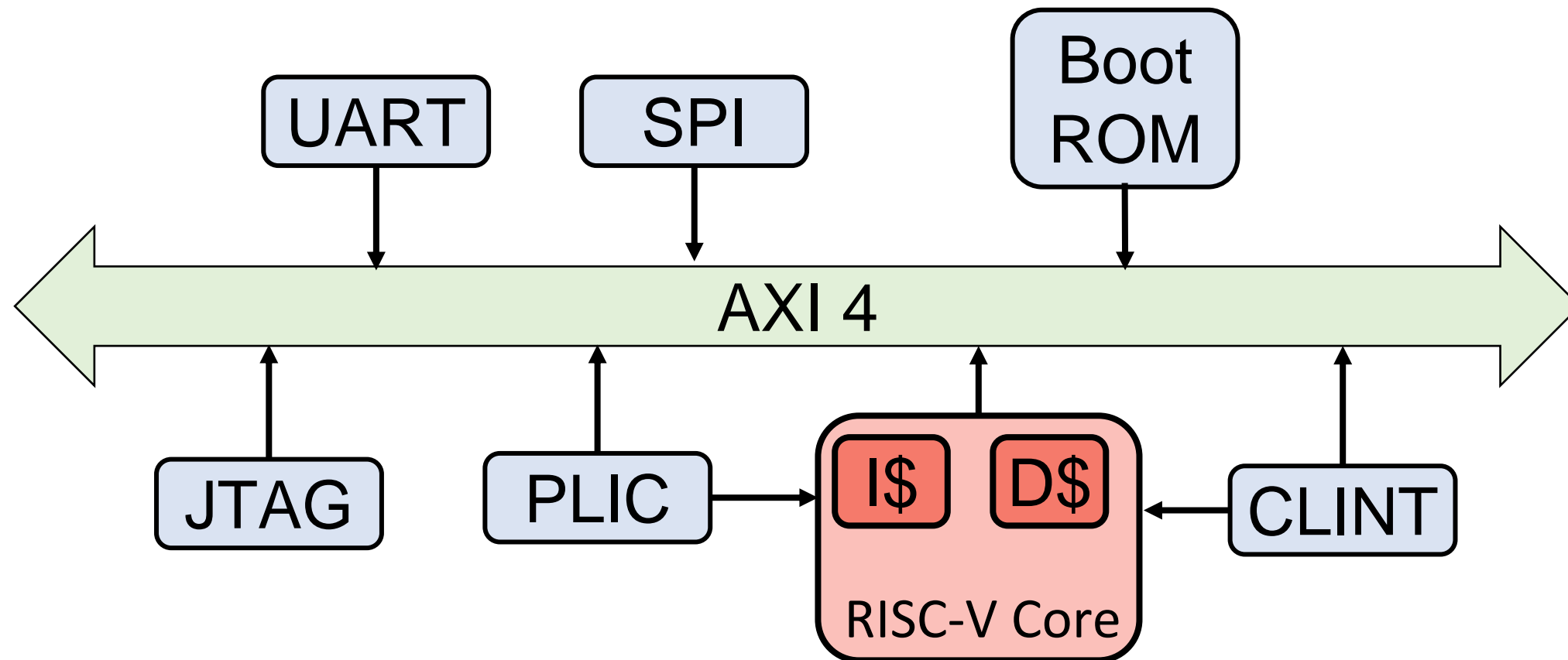


Winners announced

10

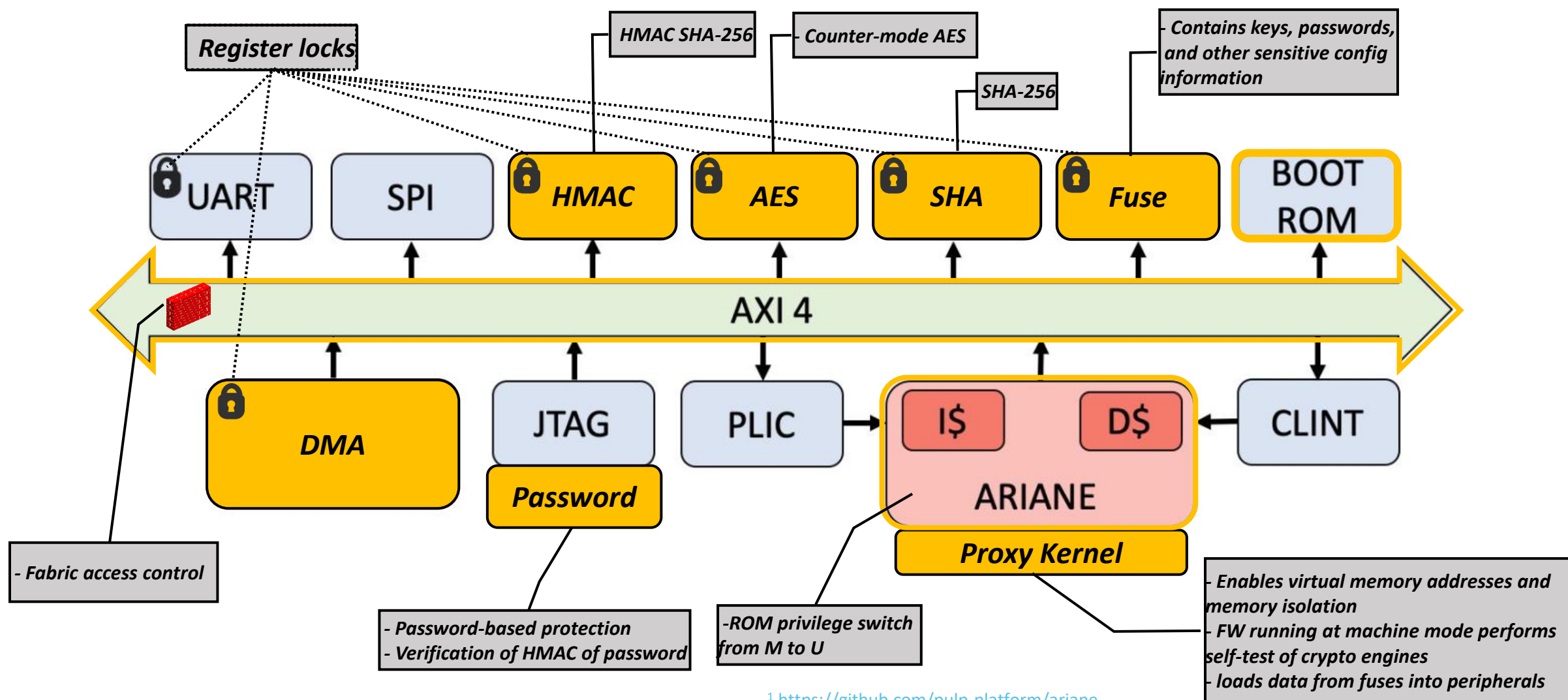
# Selection of Target

- Survey various **open-source hardware designs** and pick full SoC
- Priority given to designs with support for hardware simulation (open-source tool support), stability
- Reduced Instruction Set Computing (RISCV) RISC-V architecture based SoCs
  - [Pulpinio](#) -> [Pulpassimo](#) -> [OpenPiton](#) -> [Open Titan](#)





# Adding Security Features to HW



<sup>1</sup> <https://github.com/pulp-platform/ariane>

<sup>2</sup> <https://content.riscv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/riscv-privileged-v1.10.pdf>

- Threat Model

#	Type	Description
1	Unprivileged software at user-level mode	Executes on core with user-level privileges but may exploit bugs to mount privilege escalation attacks
2	Physical attacker	Has physical possession of the device
3	Authorized debug access	Has the ability to unlock and debug production device

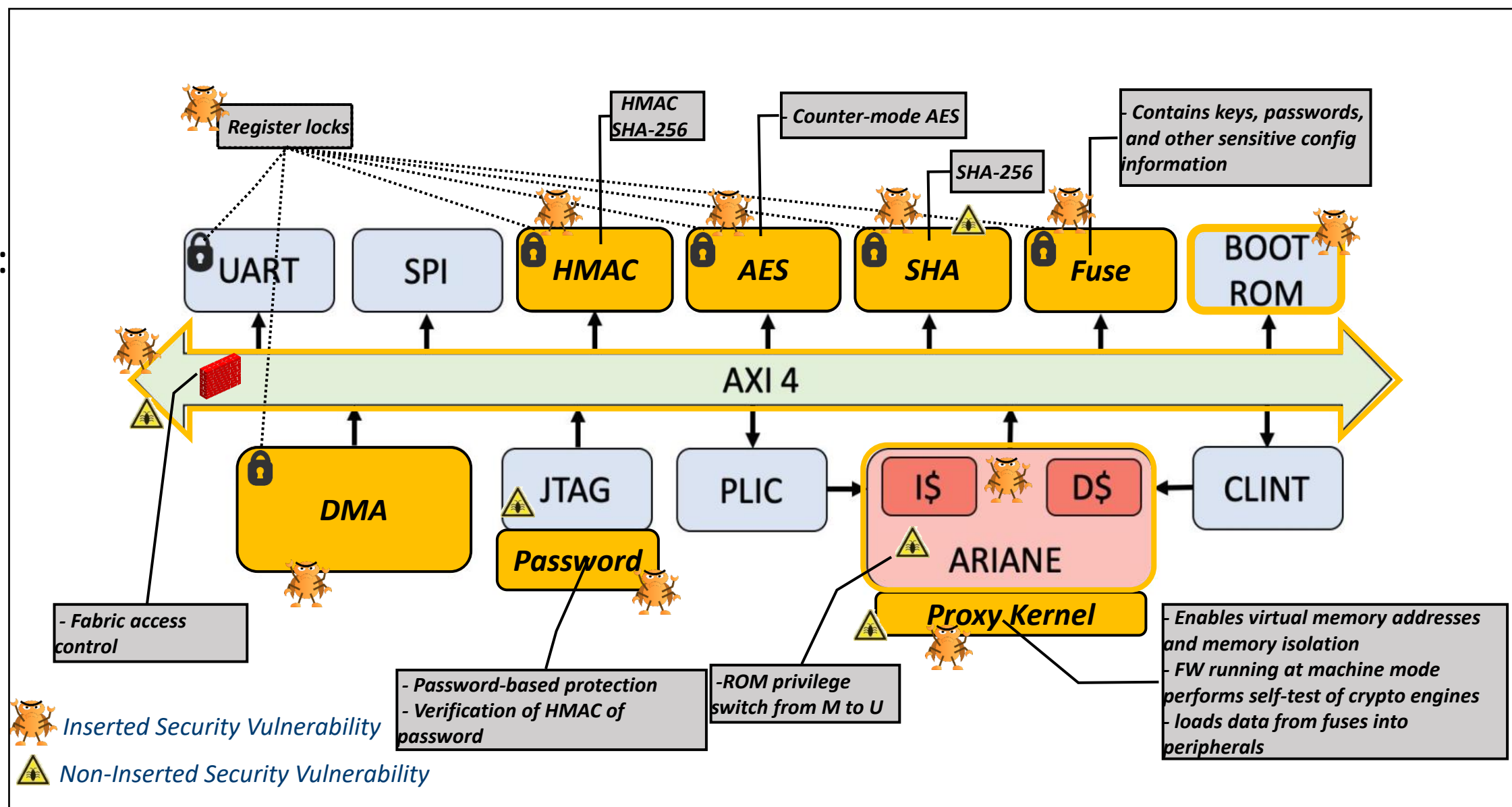
- Security Objectives

- Unprivileged code in core should not be able to compromise privilege level
- Internal registers of crypto blocks should not be accessible from JTAG

# Inserting Vulnerabilities

Vulnerabilities inspired by:

- CVEs
- Security advisories
- Our experience





- Website updated with Call for Participation
- Advertised on social media



**DAC 2024**

# HACK@DAC'24

The World's Largest Joint Industry-Academia Hardware Security Competition

The timeline diagram shows the competition phases connected to a central chip icon labeled 'HackTheSilicon'. The phases are: 9th February (Registration Starts), 9th March (Phase I Starts), 30th April (Phase I Ends), 6th May (Phase I Results Announced), 23rd June (Phase II Starts), and 27th June (Winners Announcement).

## Why HACK@DAC?

The growing number of hardware design and implementation vulnerabilities has led to a new attack paradigm that casts a long shadow on decades of research on system security. It disrupts the traditional threat models that focus mainly on software-only vulnerabilities and often assume that the underlying hardware is behaving correctly and is trustworthy.

System-on-Chip (SoC) designers use a mix of third-party and in-house intellectual property (IP) cores. Any security-critical vulnerability in these IPs can undermine the trustworthiness of the whole SoC.

Attacks may cause a system failure or deadlock, remotely access sensitive information, or even gain privileged access to the system, bypassing the in-place security mechanisms.

## Participating in HACK@DAC

Participating teams can be from industry, academia, or a combination. They will receive an altered OpenTitan SoC design with planted security vulnerabilities. They must identify these vulnerabilities, assess their impact, provide exploits, and propose mitigation.

The teams can use any tool or technique and should provide a detailed report on their findings. The submitted bug reports will be evaluated based on a scoring system that considers the number and severity of security vulnerabilities, their exploitation, and the used security assurance automation methods and tools.

The competition has two phases. Only the selected teams from the first phase can participate in the final phase during DAC 2024.

For more information about the competition and eligibility requirements, visit our website:  
<https://hackthesilicon.com/home/hackdac24/>



# Competition: Phase 1

- Phase 1 is offline
- Participants have over 2 months to:
  - Analyze entry points
  - Identify assets
  - Develop security test cases
  - Develop custom tools to detect bugs
  - Submit bugs for evaluation by judges
- Extended duration allows for equal access to participants from various backgrounds.

# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.

Specific security feature that participants managed to bypass

# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F	G
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference	Detection method
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.	Manual analysis + User level assertion generation + Formal property verification using Synopsys VCStatic

How was the vulnerability identified?

- Simulation
- Formal Verification?
- Custom tool?
- Manual code review?

# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F	G	H
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference	Detection method	Security impact
					other wrappers, all the secure data can be read out.
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.	Manual analysis + User level assertion generation + Formal property verification using Synopsys VCStatic	This bug will lead to accessing peripheral device even when its register is in locked state (which ideally should have restricted its access).



What is the security impact of bypassing security feature?



# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference	Detection method	Security impact	Adversary profile	Proposed mitigation
					other wrappers, all the secure data can be read out.		
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.	Manual analysis + User level assertion generation + Formal property verification using Synopsys VCStatic	This bug will lead to accessing peripheral device even when its register is in locked state (which ideally should have restricted its access).	Unprivileged software at user-level mode	One line verilog change in acct_wrapper.sv: reglk_ctrl[13] -> reglk_ctrl[3]



Mitigation suggestions

# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference	Detection method	Security impact	Adversary profile	Proposed mitigation	CVSSv3.1 score and severity	CVSSv3.1 Details
					other wrappers, all the secure data can be read out.				
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.	Manual analysis + User level assertion generation + Formal property verification using Synopsys VCStatic	This bug will lead to accessing peripheral device even when its register is in locked state (which ideally should have restricted its access).	Unprivileged software at user-level mode	One line verilog change in acct_wrapper.sv: reglk_ctrl[13] -> reglk_ctrl[3]	Medium (6.1)	CVSS:3.1/AV:L/AC:L/PR:L/UI:N/S:U/C:L/I:H/A:N/RC:C Attack vector: Local. A person having read/write/execute access on the SoC can mount the attack. Attack complexity: Low. An exploit code developed can sureshot obtain access control of



CVSS scoring details to determine severity of issue

# Submission and Scoring

B	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	N
Team name	Security feature bypassed	Finding	Location or code reference	Detection method	Security impact	Adversary profile	Proposed mitigation	CVSSv3.1 score and severity	CVSSv3.1 Details	Judges comments
					other wrappers, all the secure data can be read out.					
	Register Lock Control signal unset	In access control register wrapper file, reglk_ctrl signal is responsible for reading/writing the signal for locked peripherals. All bits set to '1' of reglk_ctrl signal indicates the peripheral is locked otherwise bits set to '0' indicate normal operation. Therefore, by default reglk_ctrl should always be set high to prevent unauthorized access. We found that only lower half of the reglk_ctrl is set from 8-bit input reglk_ctrl_i and higher bits are set to 0. Thus, all bits from 8-15 are set to 0 and should not be accessed for any read/write operation. In acc_wrapper.sv, at line 96, 98 and	piton/design/chip/tile/ariane/src/acct/acct_wrapper.sv, Line 96, 98 and 100.	Manual analysis + User level assertion generation + Formal property verification using Synopsys VCStatic	This bug will lead to accessing peripheral device even when its register is in locked state (which ideally should have restricted its access).	Unprivileged software at user-level mode	One line verilog change in acct_wrapper.sv: reglk_ctrl[13] -> reglk_ctrl[3]	Medium (6.1)	CVSS:3.1/AV:L/AC:L/PR:L/UI:N/S:U/C:L/I:H/A:N/RC:C Attack vector: Local. A person having read/write/execute access on the SoC can mount the attack. Attack complexity: Low. An exploit code developed can sureshot obtain access control of	Valid issue (5) + correct impact analysis (5) + FPV usage to detect bug (50)

Scoring based on:

- Validity of issue
- Novelty of methodology used
- Correctness of security impact, mitigation, CVSS
- Conference theme based bonus
  - New tool bonus at DAC
  - Exploit bonus at USENIX Security

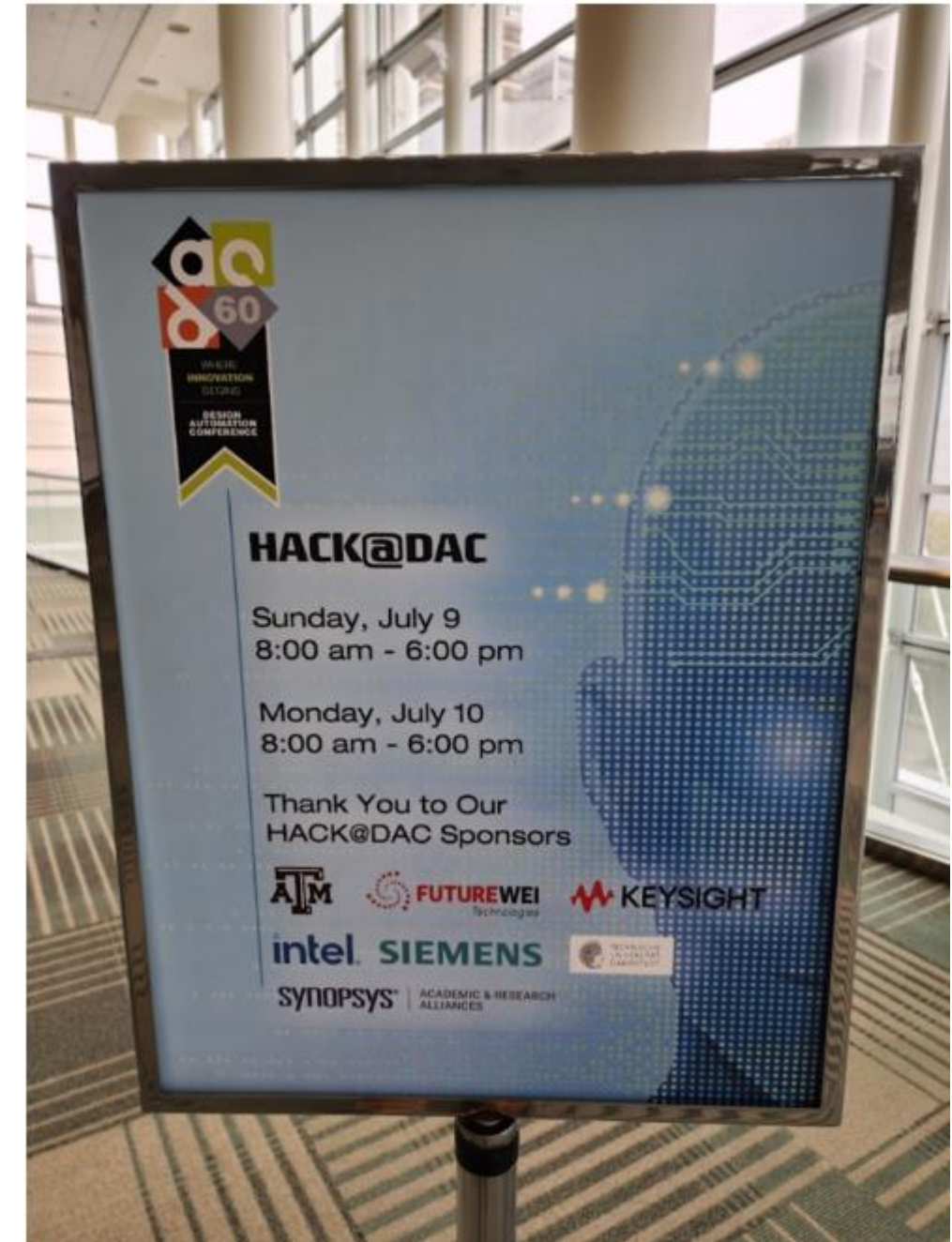
Special award for “cool” finds!

Manual vs Automated scoring



# Competition: Phase 2 (Finals)

- Top 10 teams invited to participate in finals
- Phase 2 live at the conference
- Partnership with Synopsys
  - All necessary tools hosted on Synopsys cloud
  - Buggy design ported to cloud
  - Tool trainings provided to all finalists
- Travel grants to US-based finalists to attend in person
- Duration of 48 hours





# Competition: Phase 2 (Finals)

## Live Scoreboard

Hack@DAC'19 Beta Scoreboard : Live

Team name	Points	
Hackin' Aggies*	465	465
NOPS	330	330
Always@Posedge	290	290
NotATrojan	276	276
Alpha4	163	163
..hackamole..	144	144
SEC	115	115
Team 11	104	104
Chipsters	52	52
Tribe	28	28
CCNY	15	15
CICA*	15	15



Image: "Hacking SoC IP Under Pressure", SemiEngineering 2018 [source](#)



# Competition: Phase 2 (Finals)

## Winners Honored



## Publications

IEEE  
**Design&Test**  
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021



### Special Issue on Hack@DAC

- SoC Security Evaluation: Reflections on Methodology and Tooling
- Hardware Penetration Testing Knocks Your SoCs Off
- Hunting Security Bugs in SoC Designs: Lessons Learned
- Texas A&M Hackin' Aggies' Security Verification Strategies for the 2019 Hack@DAC Competition
- Merged Logic and Memory Fabrics for Accelerating Machine Learning Workloads
- Real-Time Hardware Implementation of ARM CoreSight Trace Decoder



- Extended to USENIX Security (Hack@SEC) and CHES (Hack@CHES)
- 300+ teams participated from all over the world; 1000+ participants
- Industry participation too!
- Past winners now working in hardware security roles at top companies

### HACK@DAC 2023 WINNERS

<https://>

**1st**  
Sycuricon  
ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY

**2nd**  
Calgary ISH  
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**3rd**  
Bitwise Bandits  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
IIT KHARAGPUR

**3rd**  
NYU\_bounty\_hunters  
UNSW  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

 DR. YAJIN ZHOU	 JINYAN XU	 YIYUAN LIU	 XIAODI ZHAO	
 DR. BENJAMIN TAN	 JOEY AH-KIOW	 ANUDEEP DHARAVATHU	 SUBROTO NATH	 ABDELRAHMAN ELNAGGAR
 DR. SWARUP BHUNIA	 SUDIPTA PARIA	 ARITRA DASGUPTA	 RAJAT SADHUKHAN	 ARNAB BAG
 DR. HAMMOND PEARCE	 PRITHWISH BASU ROY	 MEET UDESHI	 JASON BLOCKLOVE	 ANIMESH BASAK CHOWDHURY

### CICA-II

 ROHIT SINHA NXP Semiconductors	 RUCHI BORA NXP Semiconductors
 DEEPAK MAHAJAN NXP Semiconductors	 PRASHANT GUPTA NXP Semiconductors

INDUSTRY TEAM WINNERS

### HACK@DAC 2024 WINNERS

**1st**  
UF NanoKnights  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

**2nd**  
15 Below Calgary  
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**3rd**  
The Orangutans  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

 DR. SWARUP BHUNIA	 SUDIPTA PARIA	 ATRI CHATTERJEE	 ARITRA DASGUPTA	
 DR. BENJAMIN TAN	 RAHA MORADI SHAHMIRI	 ANUDEEP DHARAVATHU	 RAHEEL AFSHARMAZAYEJANI	
 DR. KANAD BASU	 SANJAY DAS	 AMISHA SRIVASTAVA	 SAMIT MIFTAH	 ANAND MENON

SYNOPSYS<sup>®</sup>    intel<sup>®</sup> <https://hackthe>  
#BHUSA @BlackHatEvents

Introduction

Value of Organizing HW CTFs

How Hack@DAC is Unique

Organizing Hack@DAC

Key Takeaways & Summary



# Recap of 3 Top Challenges



Awareness of  
Hardware  
Common  
Weaknesses



Security-Aware  
Design  
Automation



“Shift-Left” to  
Detect & Fix  
Bugs in RTL

## MITRE Hardware CWE

<https://cwe.mitre.org>

### 1194 - Hardware Design

- + **C** Manufacturing and Life Cycle Management Concerns - (1195)
- + **C** Security Flow Issues - (1196)
- + **C** Integration Issues - (1197)
- + **C** Privilege Separation and Access Control Issues - (1198)
- + **C** General Circuit and Logic Design Concerns - (1199)
- + **C** Core and Compute Issues - (1201)
- + **C** Memory and Storage Issues - (1202)
- + **C** Peripherals, On-chip Fabric, and Interface/IO Problems - (1203)
- + **C** Security Primitives and Cryptography Issues - (1205)
- + **C** Power, Clock, Thermal, and Reset Concerns - (1206)
- + **C** Debug and Test Problems - (1207)
- + **C** Cross-Cutting Problems - (1208)
- + **C** Physical Access Issues and Concerns - (1388)

- 75+/110 CWE entries contributed by Intel
- Hack@DAC vulnerability and mitigation examples now added to several CWE entries
- “[Hardware Security Failure Scenarios](#)”

### CWE-1245: Improper Finite State Machines (FSMs) in Hardware Logic

Weakness ID: 1245  
 Vulnerability Mapping: **ALLOWED**  
 Abstraction: Base

View customized information:

Conceptual

Operational

Mapping  
Friendly

Complete

Custom

#### Description


Faulty finite state machines (FSMs) in the hardware logic allow an attacker to put the system in an undefined state, to cause a denial of service (DoS) or gain privileges on the victim's system.

#### Extended Description

The functionality and security of the system heavily depend on the implementation of FSMs. FSMs can be used to indicate the current security state of the system. Lots of secure data operations and data transfers rely on the state reported by the FSM. Faulty FSM designs that do not account for all states, either through undefined states (left as don't cares) or through incorrect implementation, might lead an attacker to drive the system into an unstable state from which the system cannot recover without a reset, thus causing a DoS. Depending on what the FSM is used for, an attacker might also gain additional privileges to launch further attacks and compromise the security guarantees.

#### Relationships

##### Relevant to the view "Research Concepts" (CWE-1000)

Nature	Type	ID	Name
ChildOf		684	<a href="#">Incorrect Provision of Specified Functionality</a>

##### Relevant to the view "Hardware Design" (CWE-1194)

Nature	Type	ID	Name
MemberOf	<b>C</b>	1199	<a href="#">General Circuit and Logic Design Concerns</a>

#### Modes Of Introduction

Phase	Note
Architecture and Design	
Implementation	

#### Applicable Platforms

##### Languages

Class: Not Language-Specific (Undetermined Prevalence)

##### Operating Systems



# **Security-Aware Tooling & Bug Detection**

## - Security Test Case Generation and Bug Patching using GenAI/ LLMs

- (Security) Assertions by Large Language Models (*IEEE TIFS 2024*)
- Examining Zero Shot Vulnerability Repair with Large Language Models (*IEEE Security and Privacy 2024*)
- Fixing Hardware Security Bugs with Large Language Models (*arXiv*)
- On Prompting Hardware Security Bug Code Fixes by Prompting Large Language Models (*IEEE TIFS 2024*)
- DIVAS: An LLM-based End to End Framework for SoC Security Analysis and Policy-based Protection (*arXiv*)



## - Formal Verification

- Sylvia: Countering the Path Explosion Problem in the Symbolic Execution of Hardware Designs (*FMCA 2023*)
- All Artificial, Less Intelligence: GenAI Through the Lens of Formal Verification (*arXiv*)



## - Static Analysis

- Don't CWEAT It: Toward CWE Analysis Techniques in Early Stages of Hardware Design (*IEEE/ACM ICCAD 2023*)

## - Concolic Testing

- RTL-ConTest: Concolic Testing on RTL for Detecting Security Vulnerabilities (*IEEE TCAD 2022*)

## - Hardware Information Flow Tracking

- Cell-IFT: Leveraging Cells for Scalable & Precise Dynamic Information Flow Tracking in RTL (*USENIX Security 2022*)

# Key Takeaways for Academia

- Hack@DAC SoC framework
  - Realistic threat model and security objectives
  - Closest available to commercial chip designs
  - Uncover new classes of security vulnerabilities
- Get invaluable hardware security assurance skills!
  - Mimic security teams at a chip design company
  - Develop a hacker mindset
- Competition format
  - provides equal access to participants from diverse backgrounds
    - Strong technical female participation
  - Facilitates participation from various geos/ time zones



Hack@DAC 2018 finals  
at San Francisco, CA



# Takeaways for Industry

- Improve in-house security assurance best practices
  - Exposure to new kinds of weaknesses
  - Planning for survivability features
  - Easier for functional verification teams to pick up security assurance
- New tools for identifying weakness classes
  - Publish [guides](#) on detection of classes of hardware security weaknesses
- Add security capabilities to today's functional tools
  - Address gaps of today's security verification tools to detect classes of vulnerabilities



Capture-the-Flag Competitions Need to Include Hardware



Learning Hardware Security Via Capture-The-Flag Competitions



Why Do We Need a Standardized Framework to Enumerate Hardware Security Weaknesses?



Intel Hardware CTF Competitions Drive Innovation for Next-Gen Secure Computing Platforms



Hacking SoC IP Under Pressure



Intel Harnesses Hackathons to Tackle Hardware Vulnerabilities

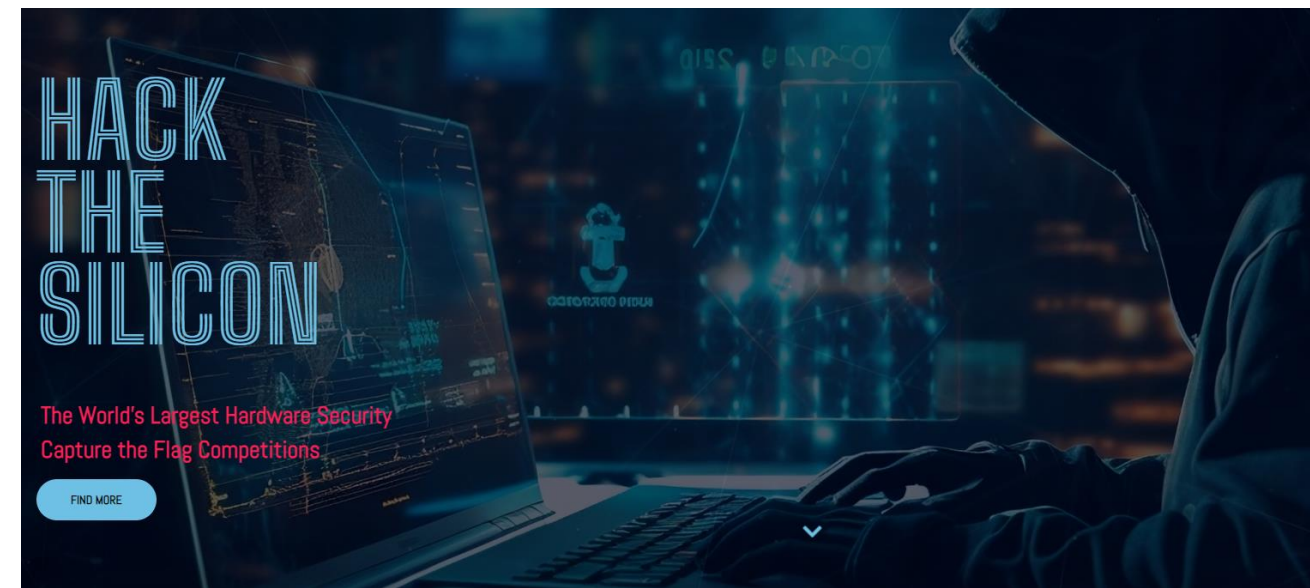
Hack@DAC has resulted in:

- Increased HW Security Awareness
  - MITRE HW CWE (<https://cwe.mitre.org>)
  - *Corpus of weaknesses and code examples*
- Availability of Open-sourced buggy SoCs
  - *Realistic security features*
  - *CVE-inspired vulnerabilities*
  - *Complexity matching commercial chips*
- Innovations in HW security tooling
  - *Tools that detect and patch bugs at RTL*
- Participants developed hacker mindset

## Contact

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**Email:** [hackatevent@gmail.com](mailto:hackatevent@gmail.com)







# HW Vulnerability Example - Locks

Lock signal for sensitive registers

Security sensitive register  
core\_lock\_reg is not locked

Attacker can overwrite  
security sensitive register

```
45      input logic [16-1:0][53:0]      pmpaddr i;  
46      input logic [7 :0]              reglk_ctrl_i; // register lock values  
129  
130      else if(en && we)  
131          case(address[7:3])  
132              0:  
145                  start reg <= wdata;  
146              7:  
                  core_lock_reg <= (wdata==0) ? 0 : ((core_lock_reg==0) ? wdata : 0);
```

Security Impact

# HW Vulnerability Example - Debug

State machine implementing password authentication logic for secure debug access

When opcode is DTM\_PASS (for entering password), state change changes to WRITE

Attacker wants to enter password – but gets write access to chip internals through debug interface

```

118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
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128
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130
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132
133
134
135
case (state_q)
  Idle: begin
    // make sure that no error is sticky
    if (dmi_access && update_dr && (error_q == DMINoError)) begin
      // save address and value
      address_d = dmi.address;
      data_d = dmi.data;
      if ( (dm::dtm_op_e'(dmi.op) == dm::DTM_READ) && (pass_check | ~we_flag == 1) ) begin
        state_d = Read;
      end else if ( (dm::dtm_op_e'(dmi.op) == dm::DTM_WRITE) && (pass_check == 1) ) begin
        state_d = Write;
      end else if (dm::dtm_op_e'(dmi.op) == dm::DTM_PASS) begin
        state_d = Write;
        pass_mode = 1'b1;
      end
      // else this is a nop and we can stay here
    end
  end
end

```

Security Impact

When in debug mode, return 0 when keys are read

debug\_mode is not checked for key\_big2

```

50  assign p_c_big  = {p_c[0], p_c[1], p_c[2], p_c[3]};
51  assign state_big = {state[0], state[1], state[2], state[3]};
52  assign key_big0  = debug_mode_i ? 192'b0 : {key0[0], key0[1], key0[2], key0[3], key0[4], key0[5]};
53  assign key_big1  = debug_mode_i ? 192'b0 : {key1[0], key1[1], key1[2], key1[3], key1[4], key1[5]};
54  assign key_big2  = {key2[0], key2[1], key2[2], key2[3], key2[4], key2[5]};
55

```

Attacker can extract key\_big2 during debug

Security Impact