

A Practitioner's guide to Hardened JavaScript Improving JavaScript (d)app security by practicing extreme modularity

Tom Van Cutsem





About me

- Today: Computer scientist and research director at Nokia Bell Labs
- In a past life: TC39 member and active contributor to ECMAScript standards
- Author of standard Proxy and Reflect APIs (since ECMAScript 2015)
- Turning JS into a smart contracting language before Ethereum existed





tvcutsem.github.io







(7) @tvcutsem

A software architecture view of app security

same-origin policy

certificate pinning

OAuth

cookies

content security policy

CSRF

HSTS html sanitization

A software architecture view of app security

modules same-origin policy functions certificate pinning encapsulation OAuth dependencies content security policy immutability dataflow html sanitization isolation

A software architecture view of app security

"Security is just the extreme of Modularity"

- Mark S. Miller (Chief Scientist, Agoric)

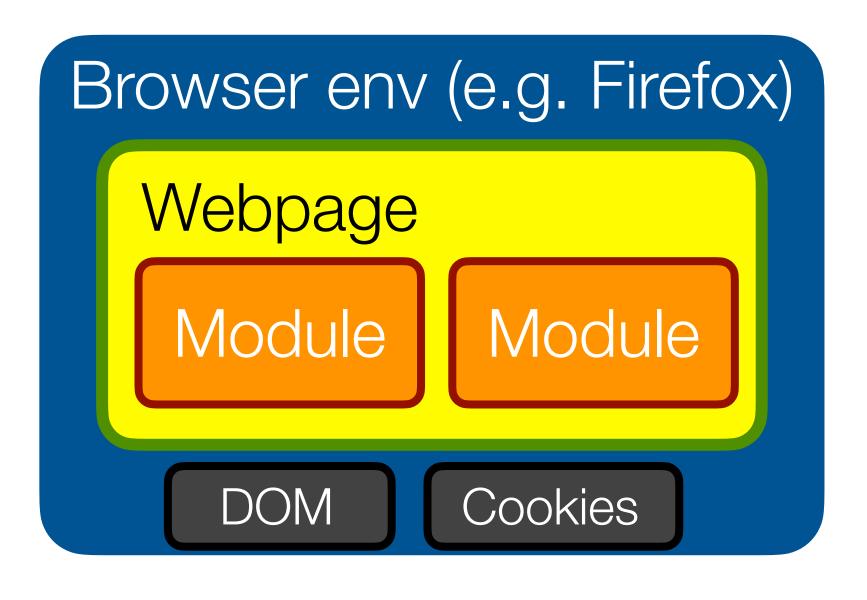


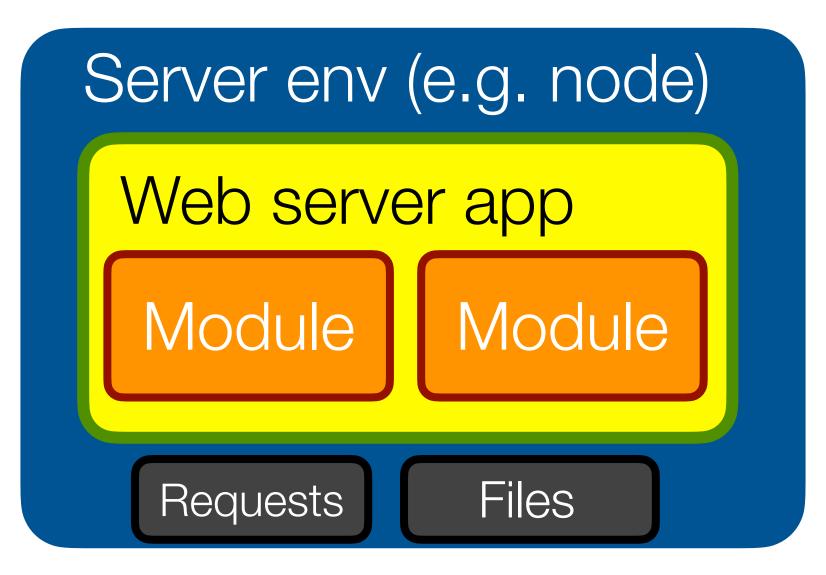
Modularity: avoid needless dependencies (to prevent bugs)

Security: avoid needless vulnerabilities (to prevent exploits)

It's all about trust

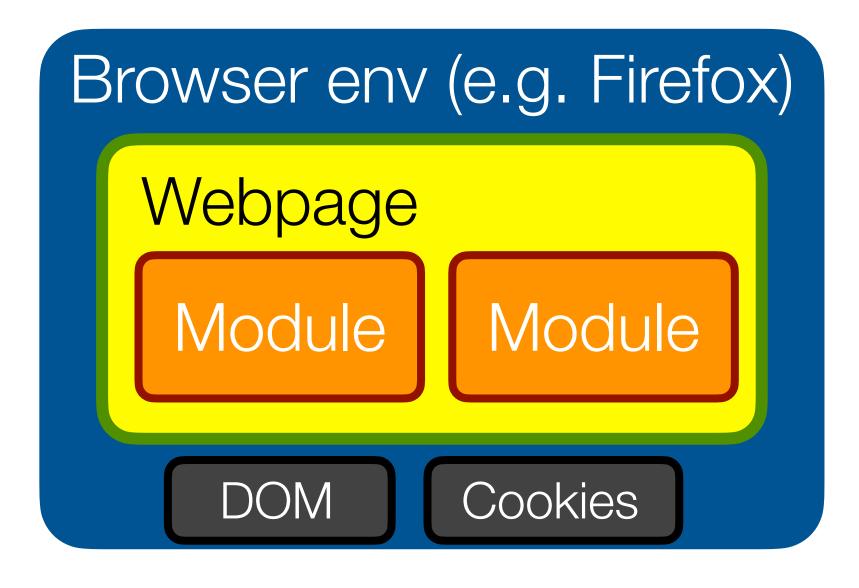
It is exceedingly common to run code you don't know/trust in a common environment

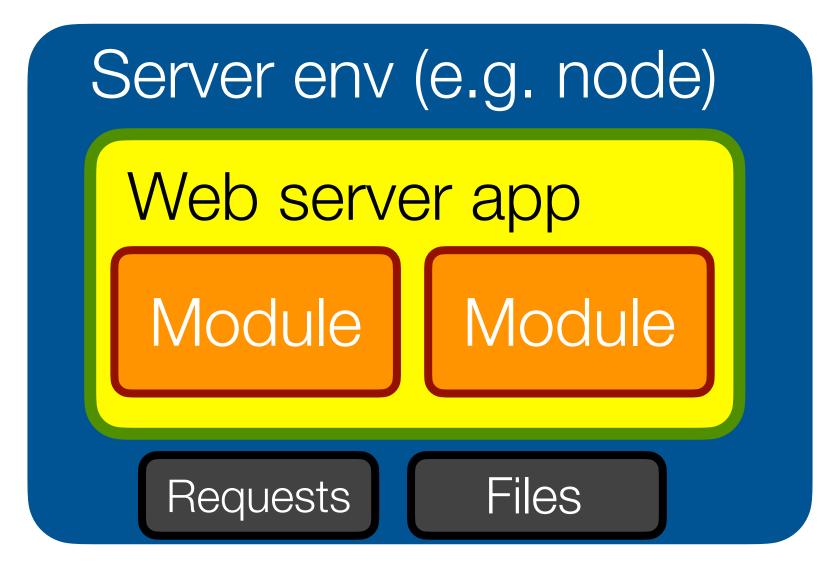


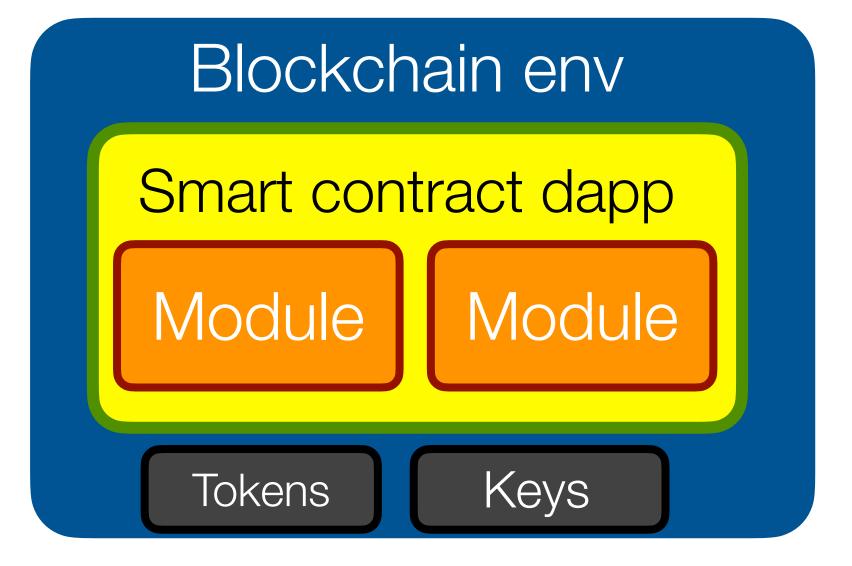


It's all about trust

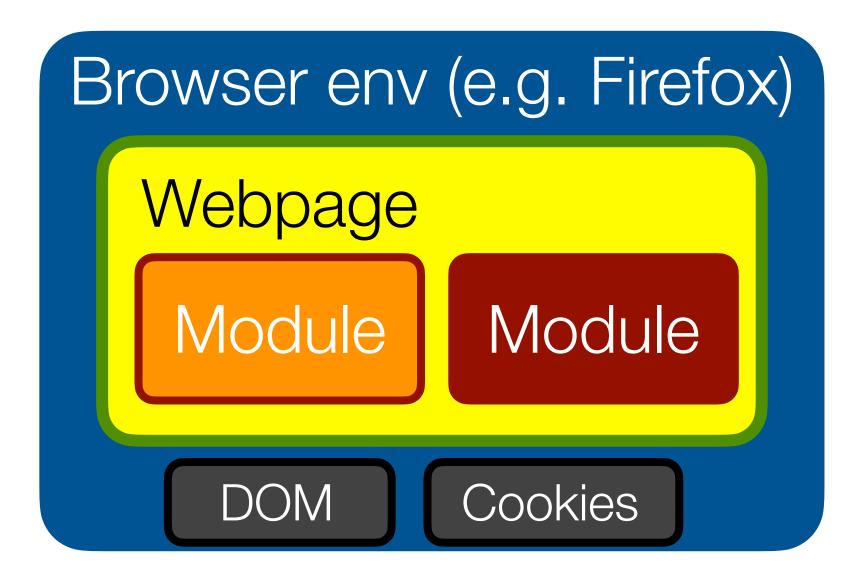
Even more critical in Web3 where code may access digital assets or wallets

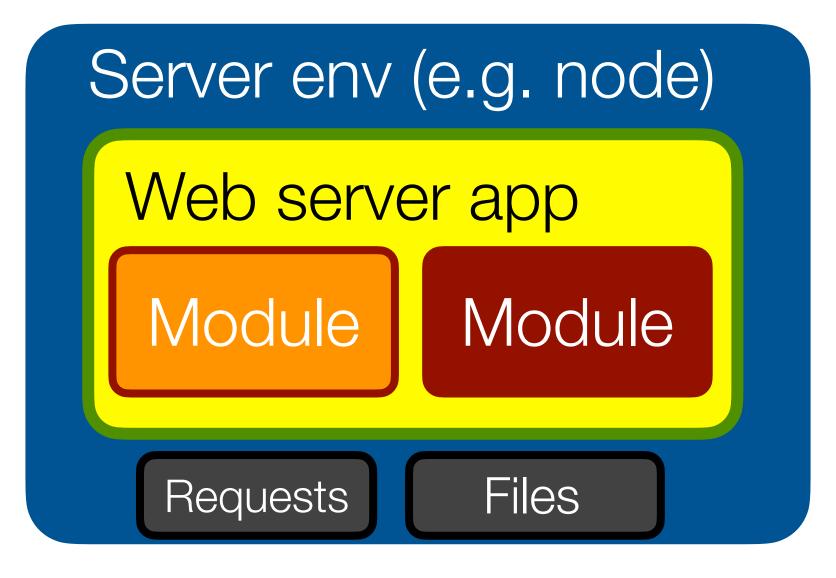


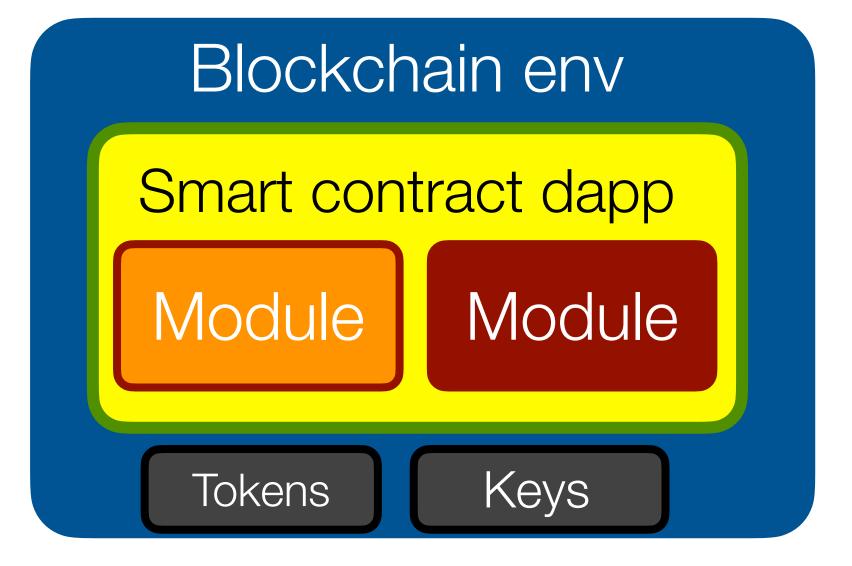




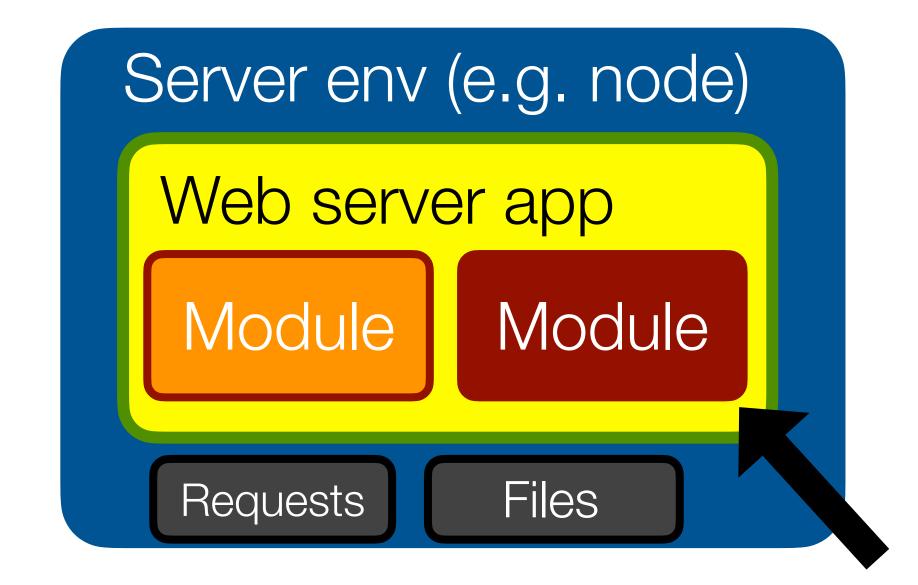
What can happen when code goes rogue?



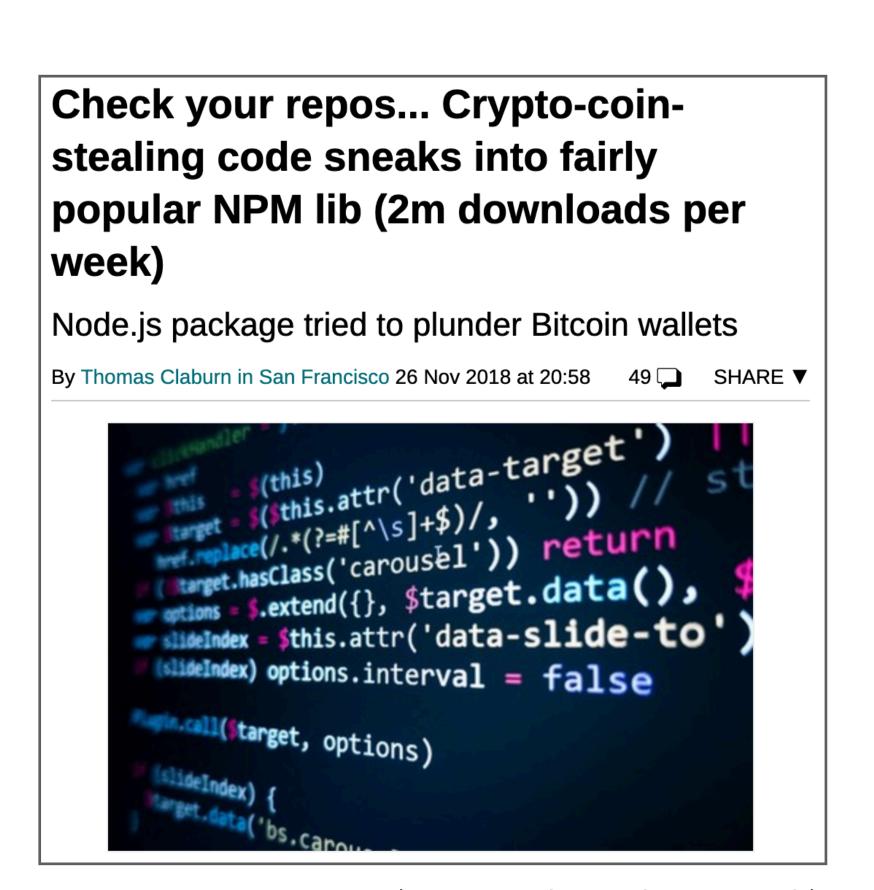




What can happen when code goes rogue?



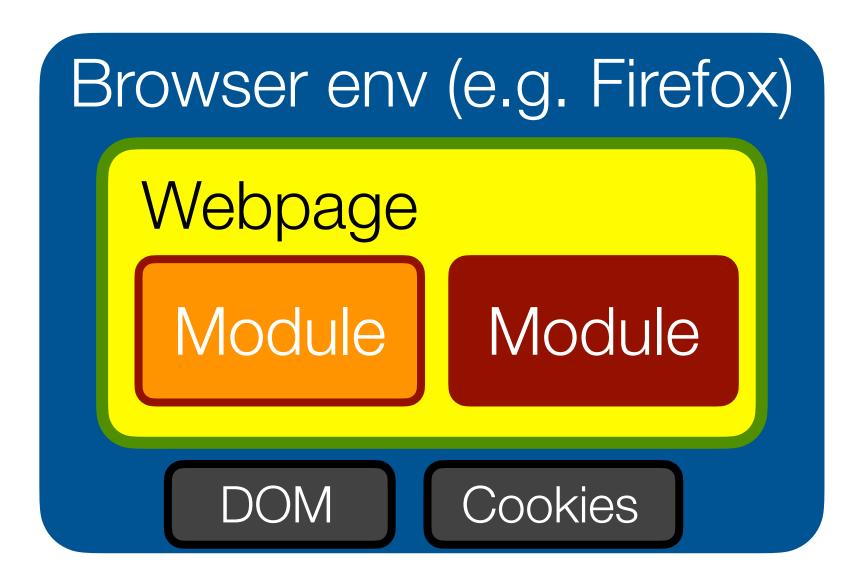
npm install event-stream

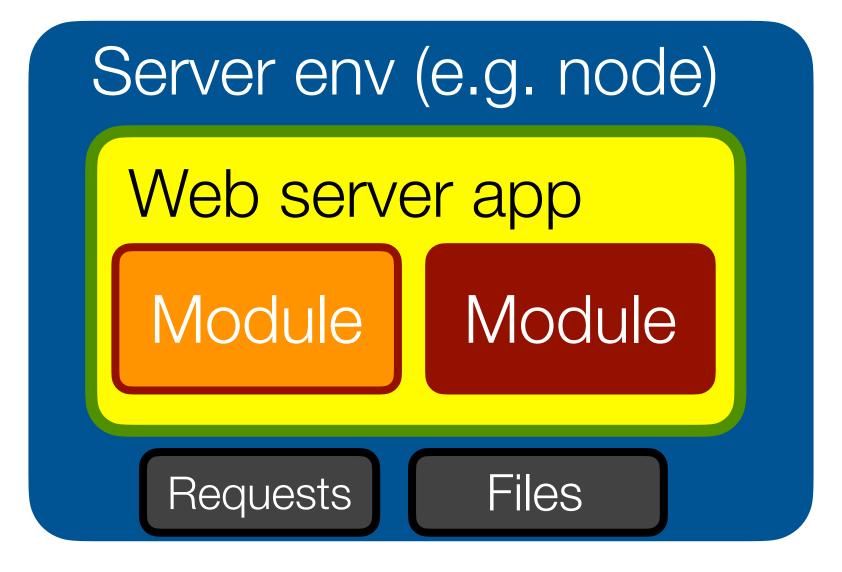


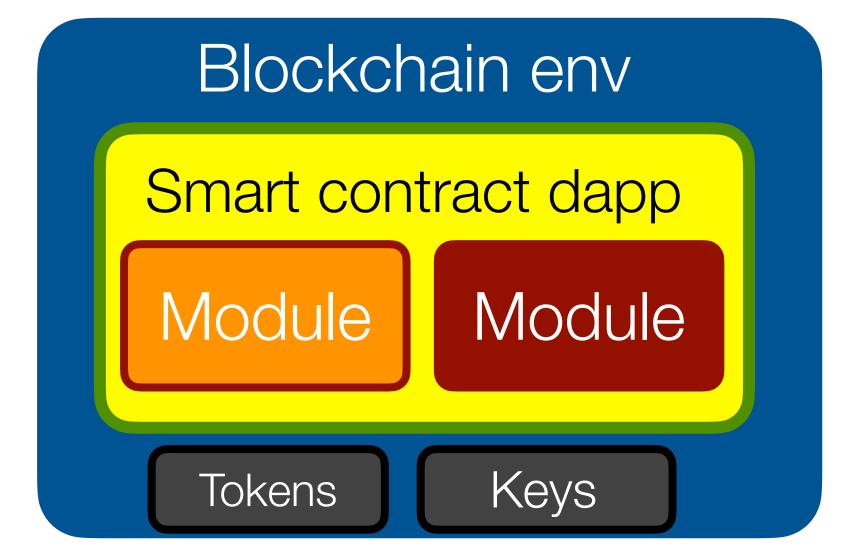
(source: theregister.co.uk)

Avoiding interference is the name of the game

- Shield important resources/APIs from modules that don't need access
- Apply Principle of Least Authority (POLA) to application design







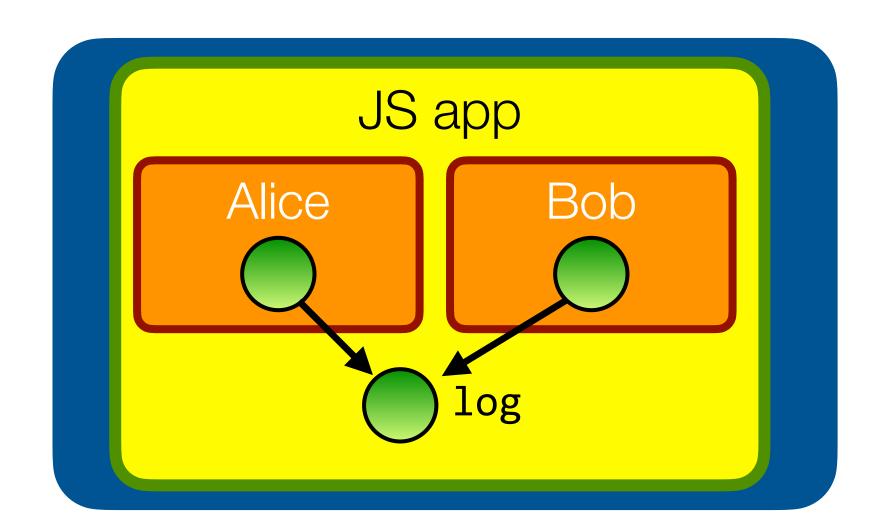
Running example: apply POLA to a basic shared log

We would like Alice to only write to the log, and Bob to only read from the log.

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
bob(log);
```



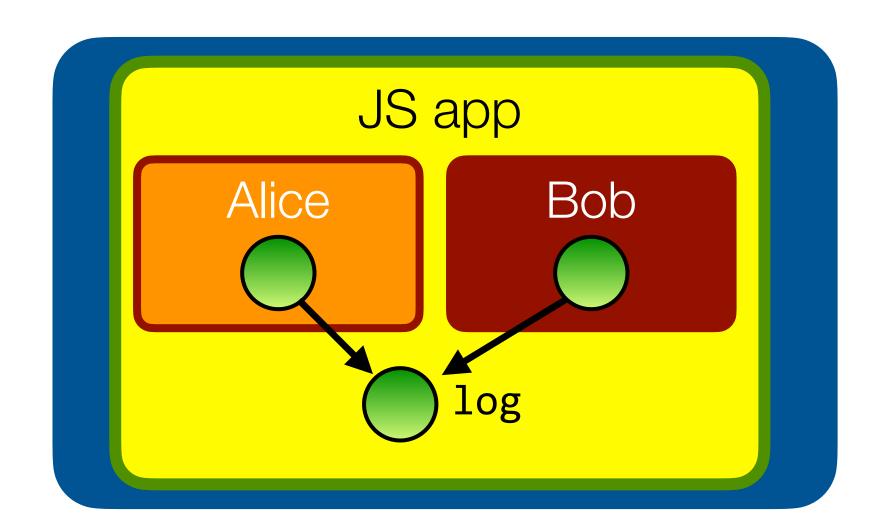
Running example: apply POLA to a basic shared log

If Bob goes rogue, what could go wrong?

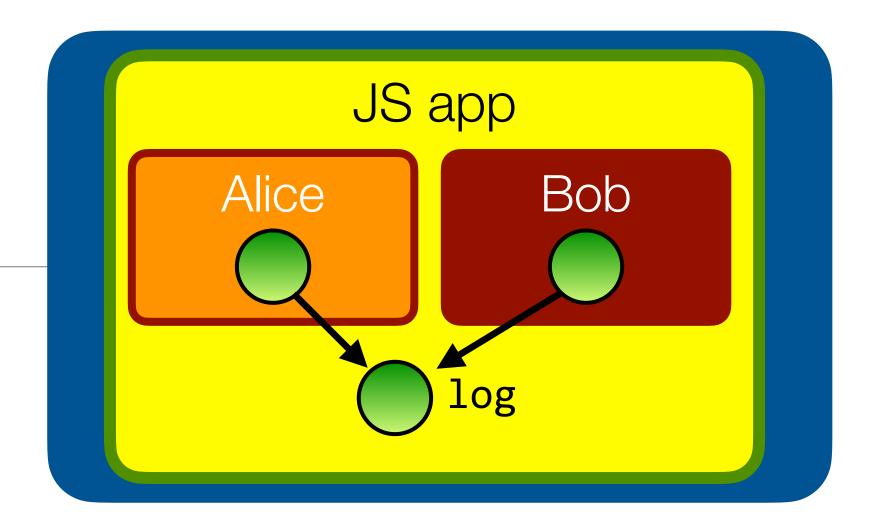
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import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
      this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
bob(log);
```



Bob has way too much authority!



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

// Bob can delete the entire log
log.read().length = 0

// Bob can replace the 'write' function
log.write = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can replace the Array built-ins
Array.prototype.push = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}
```

How to solve "prototype poisoning" attacks?

Load each module in its own environment, with its own set of "primordial" objects

```
JS app

Alice

Bob

log
```

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
      this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

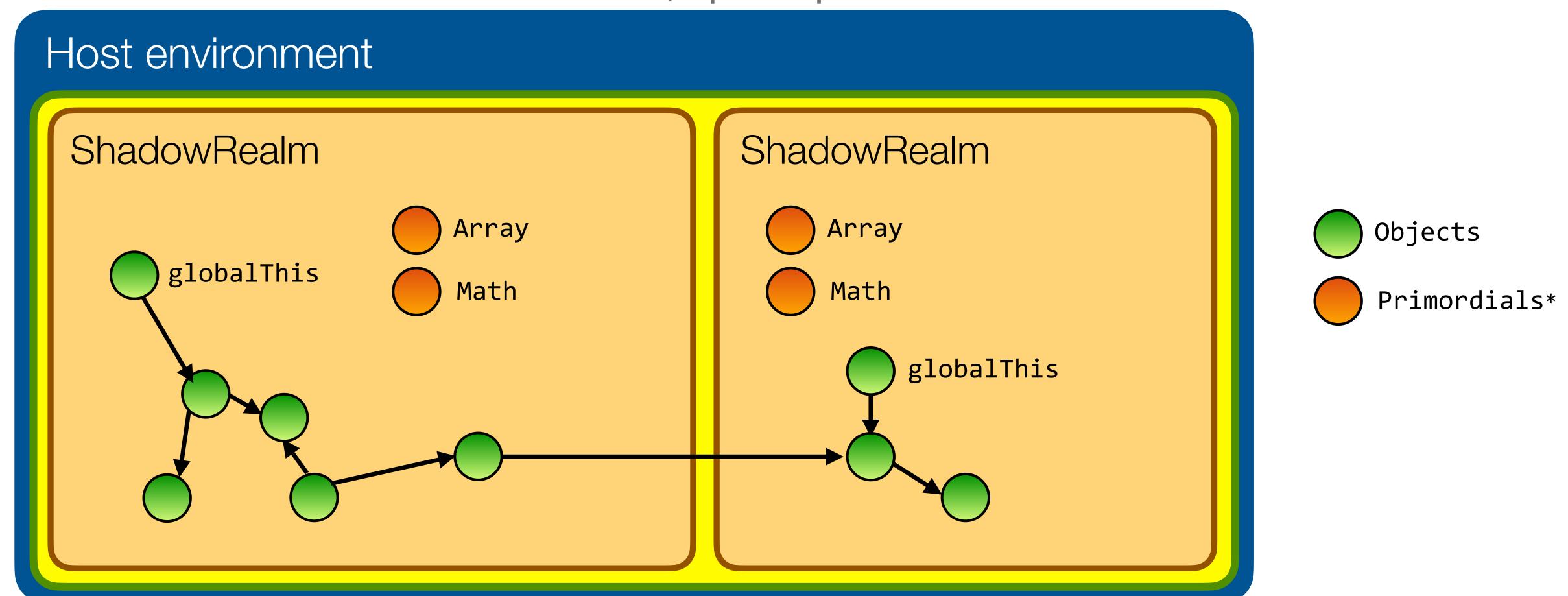
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Array.prototype.push = function(msg) {
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```

ShadowRealms (TC39 Stage 3 proposal)

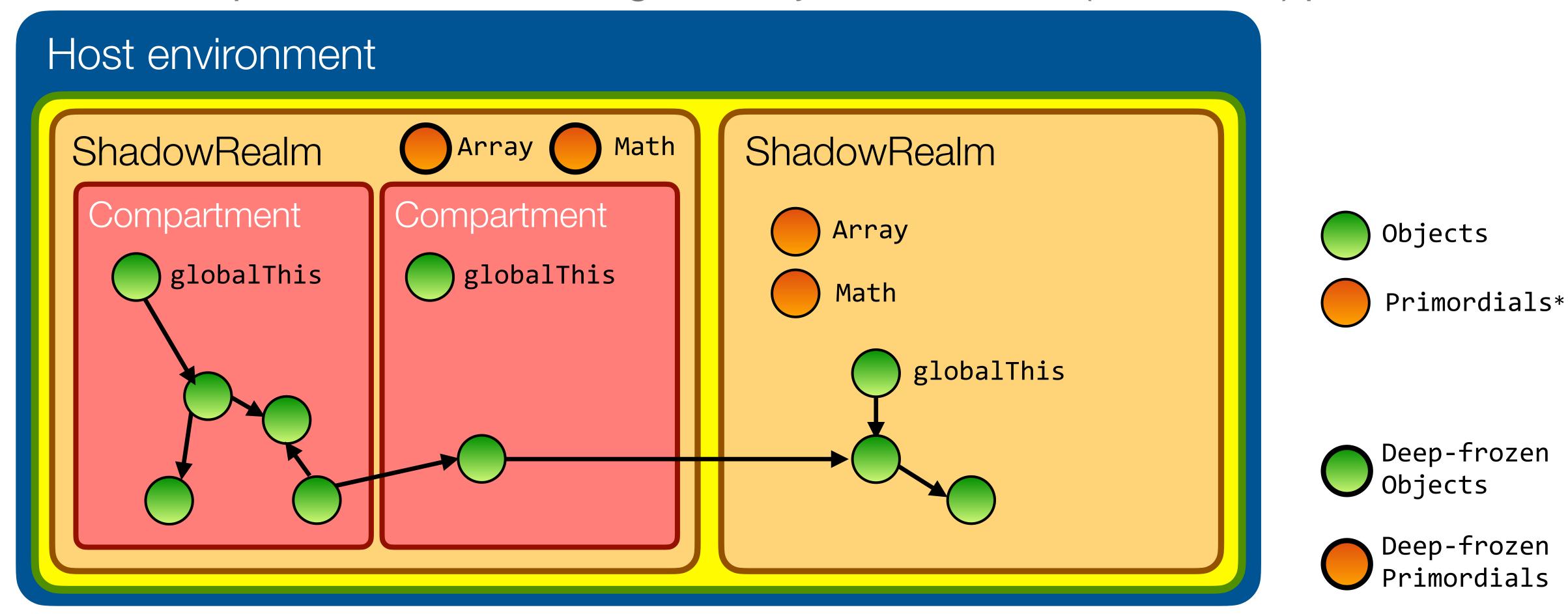
Intuitions: "iframe without DOM", "principled version of node's 'vm' module"



^{*} Primordials: built-in objects like Object, Object.prototype, Array, Function, Math, JSON, etc.

Compartments (TC39 Stage 1 proposal)

Each Compartment has its own global object but shared (immutable) primordials.



^{*} Primordials: built-in objects like Object, Object.prototype, Array, Function, Math, JSON, etc.

Hardened JavaScript is a secure subset of standard JavaScript



Key idea: code running in hardened JS can only affect the outside world through objects (capabilities) explicitly granted to it from outside.

```
import 'ses';
lockdown();
```

(inspired by the diagram at https://github.com/Agoric/Jessie)

LavaMoat

- Build tool that puts each of your app's package dependencies into its own sandbox
- Auto-generates config file indicating authority needed by each package
- Plugs into Webpack and Browserify



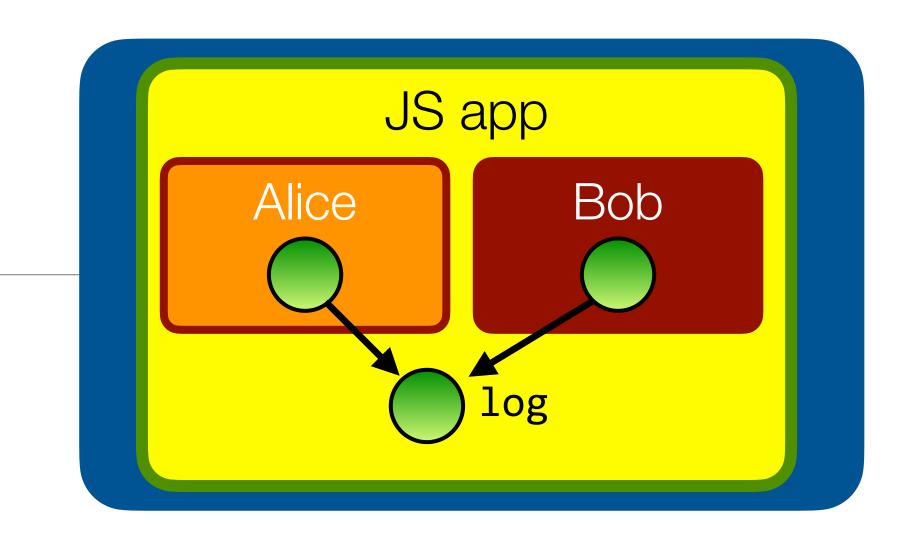
https://github.com/LavaMoat/lavamoat

```
METAMASK
```

```
stream-http": {
 "globals": {
   "Blob": true
   "MSStreamReader": true
   "ReadableStream": true
   "VBArray": true,
   "XDomainRequest": true,
   "XMLHttpRequest": true,
   "fetch": true,
   "location.protocol.search": true
 "packages":
   "buffer": true,
   "builtin-status-codes": true,
   "inherits": true,
   "process": true,
   "readable-stream": true,
   "to-arraybuffer": true,
   "url": true,
   "xtend": true
```

Back to our example

With Alice and Bob's code running in their own Compartment, we mitigate the poisoning attack



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

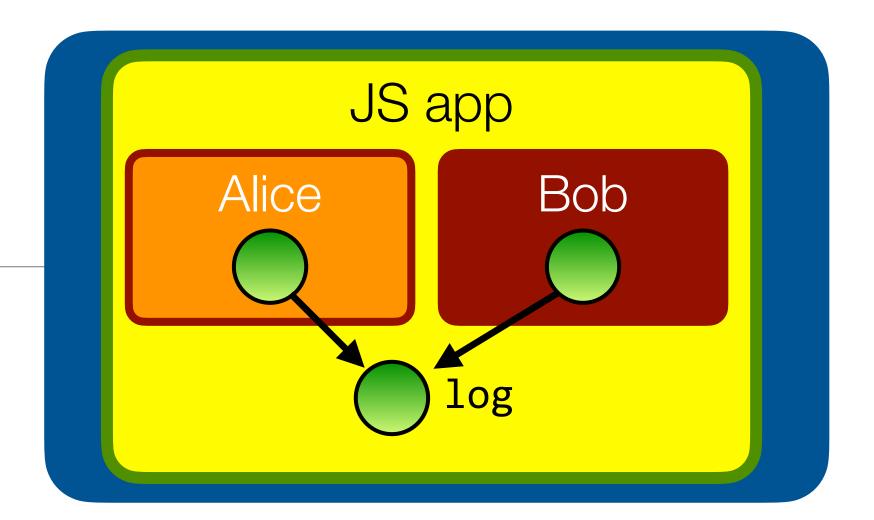
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// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

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log.read().length = 0

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log.write = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can replace the Array built-ins
Array.prototype.push = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}
```

One down, three to go



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = new Log();
alice(log);
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```

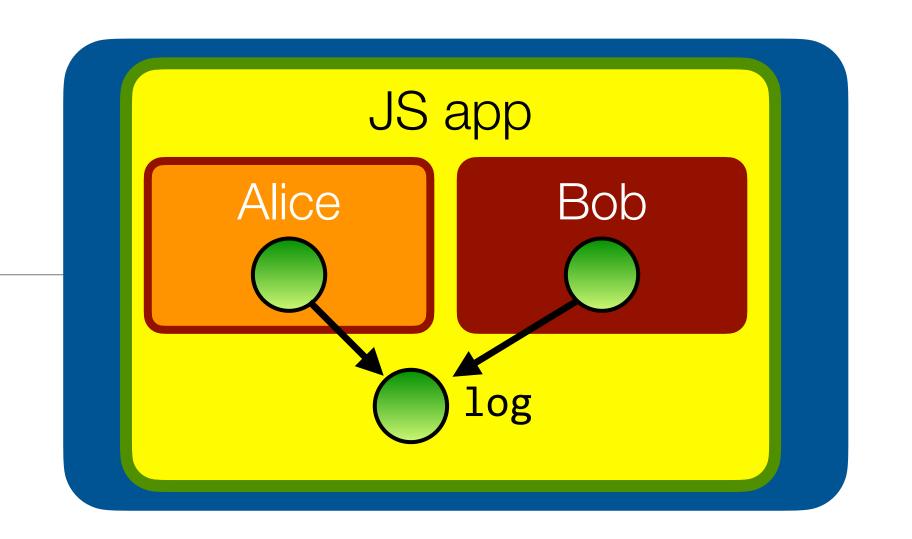
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log.read().length = 0

// Bob can replace the 'write' function
log.write = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}
```

Make the log's interface tamper-proof

Object.freeze (ES5) makes property bindings (not their values) immutable



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
      this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = Object.freeze(new Log());
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

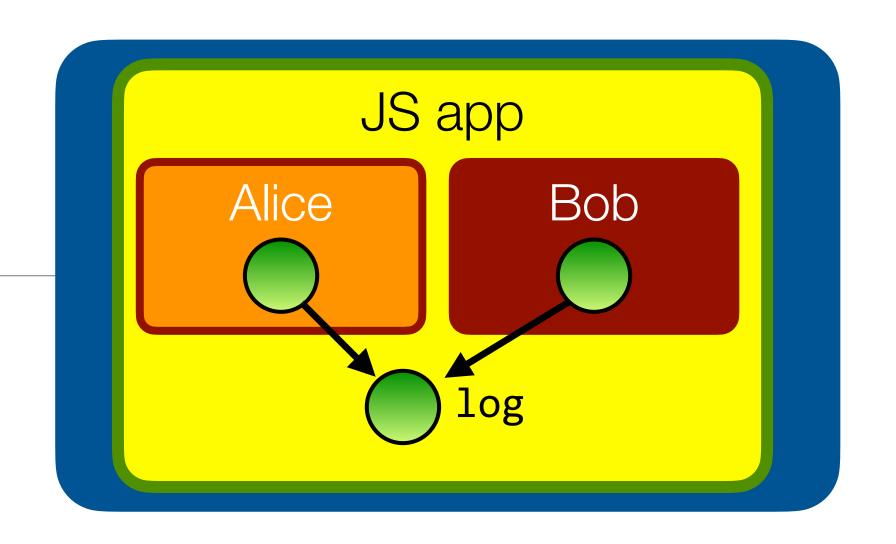
```
// in bob.js
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// Bob can delete the entire log
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// Bob can replace the 'write' function
log.write = function(msg) {
   console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}
```

Make the log's interface tamper-proof. Oops.

Functions are mutable too. Freeze doesn't recursively freeze the object's functions.



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = Object.freeze(new Log());
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

// Bob can delete the entire log
log.read().length = 0

// Bob can replace the 'write' function
log.write = function(msg) {
    console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can still modify the write function
log.write.apply = function() { "gotcha" };
```

Make the log's interface tamper-proof

Hardened JS provides a harden function that "deep-freezes" an object

```
Alice Bob log
```

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return this.messages_; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
bob(log);
```

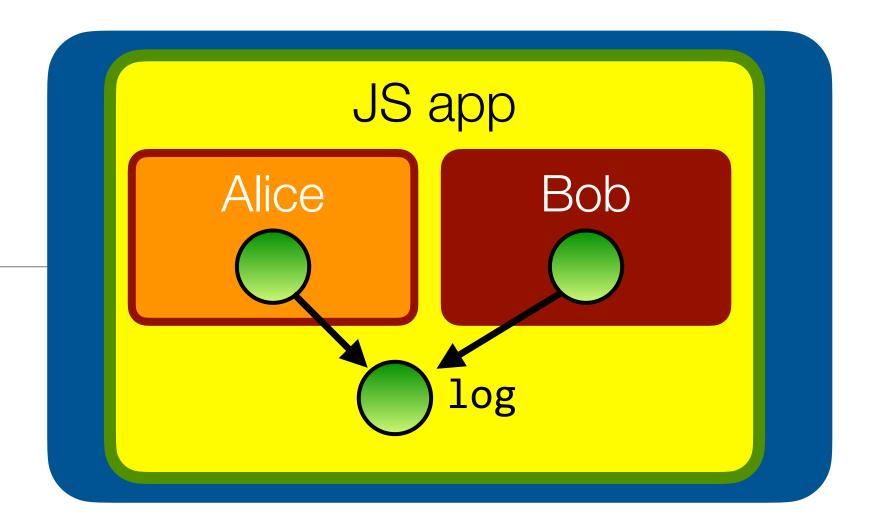
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```

Two down, two to go



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
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   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
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let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
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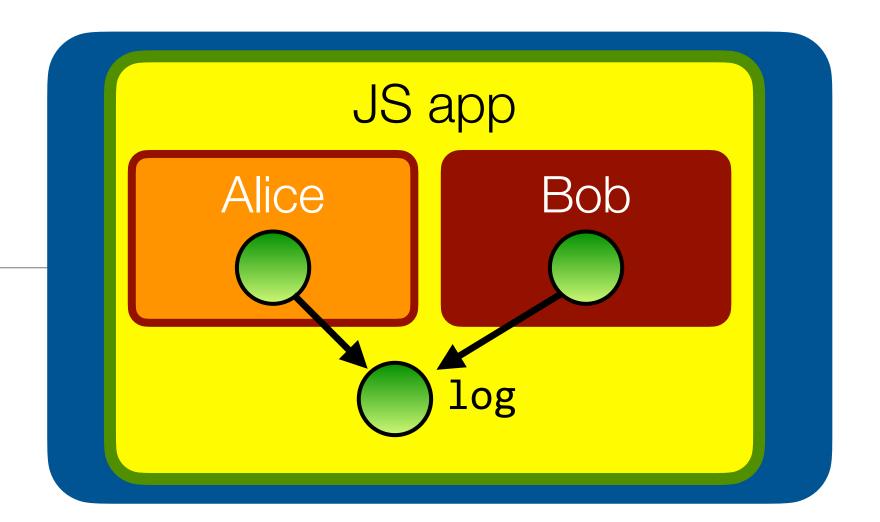
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```

Two down, two to go



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import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
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let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
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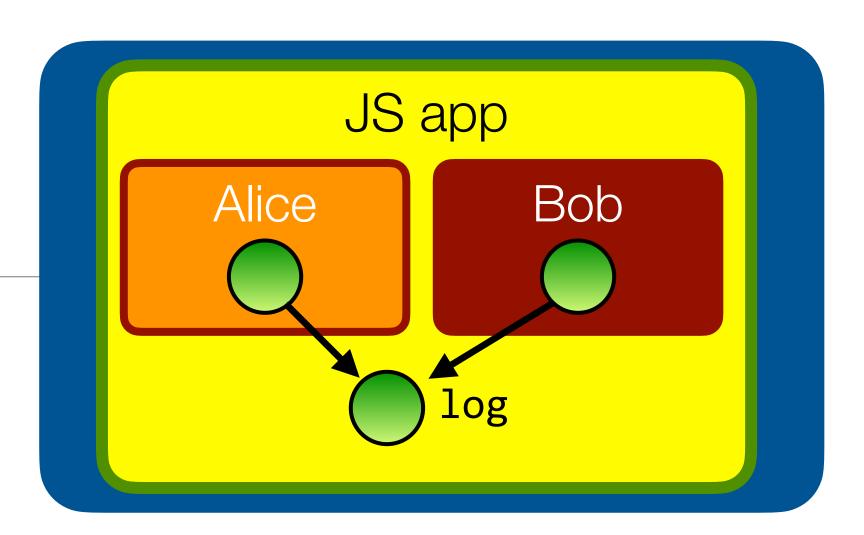
Don't share access to mutable internals

- Modify read() to return a copy of the mutable state.
- Even better would be to use a more efficient copy-on-write or "persistent" data structure (see <u>immutable-js.com</u>)

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
      this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
bob(log);
```



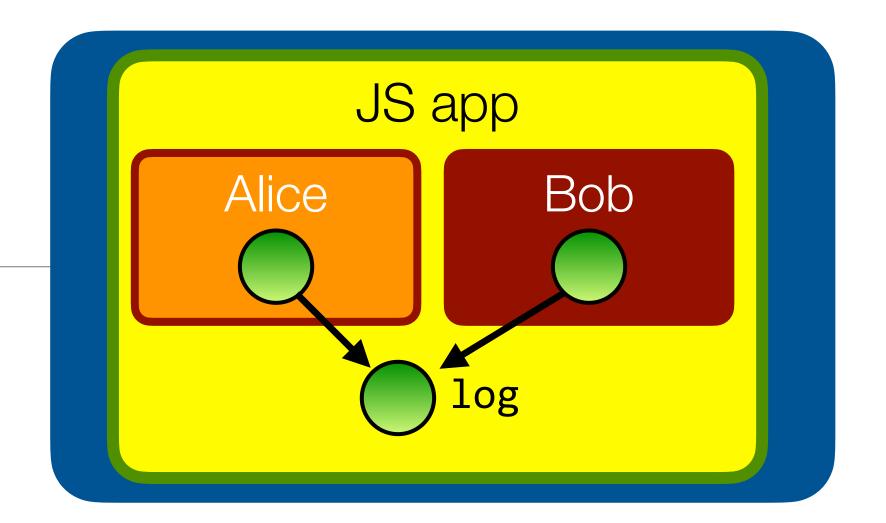
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// Bob can still modify the write function
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```

Three down, one to go



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
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let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
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```
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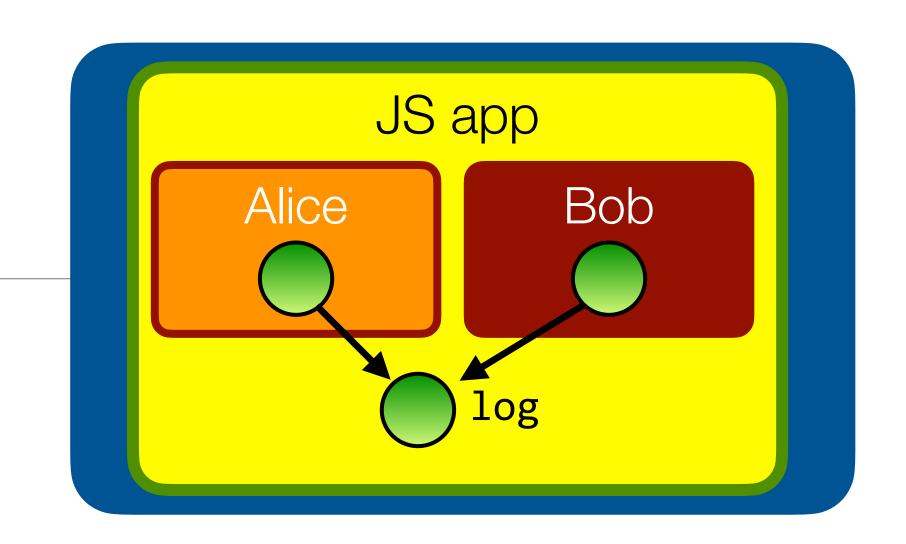
Three down, one to go

- Recall: we would like Alice to only write to the log, and Bob to only read from the log.
- Bob receives too much authority. How to limit?

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log);
bob(log);
```



```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

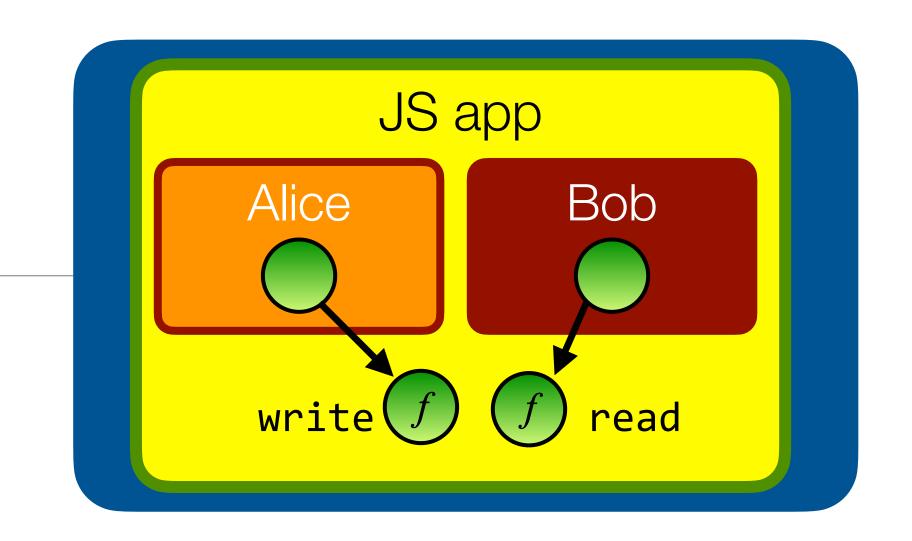
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// Bob can replace the 'write' function
log.write = function(msg) {
    console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can still modify the write function
log.write.apply = function() { "gotcha" };
```

Pass only the authority that Bob needs.

Just pass the write function to Alice and the read function to Bob. Can you spot the bug?



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
      this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log.write);
bob(log.read);
```

```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

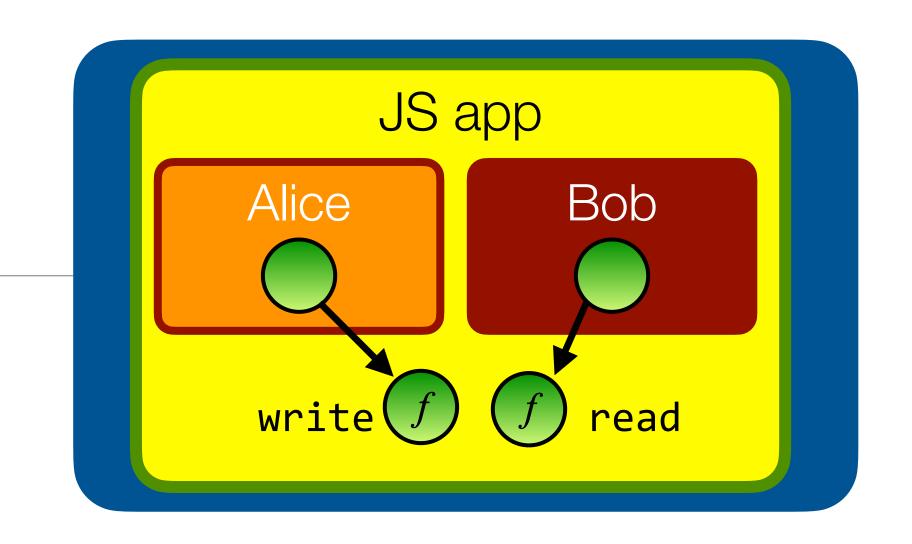
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log.read().length = 0

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log.write = function(msg) {
    console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can still modify the write function
log.write.apply = function() { "gotcha" };
```

Pass only the authority that Bob needs.

To avoid, only ever pass bound functions



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log.write.bind(log));
bob(log.read.bind(log));
```

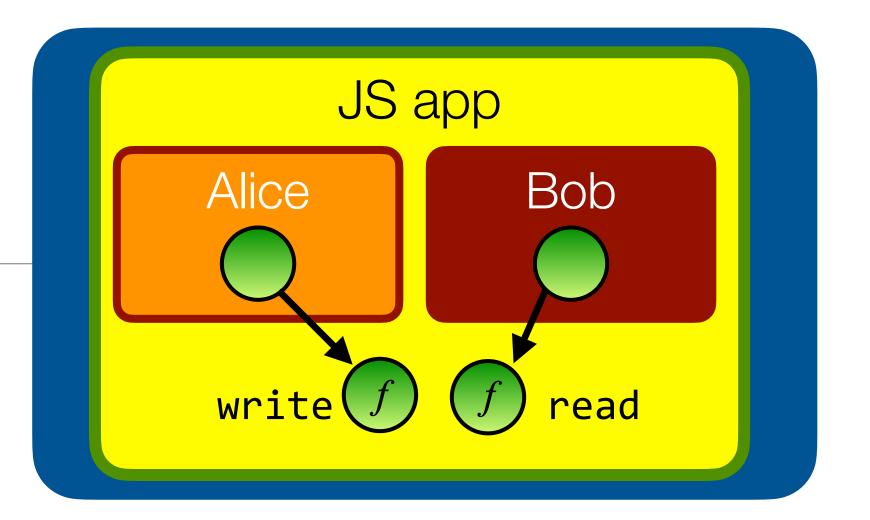
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log.write = function(msg) {
    console.log("I'm not logging anything");
}

// Bob can still modify the write function
log.write.apply = function() { "gotcha" };
```

Success! We thwarted all of Evil Bob's attacks.



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log.write.bind(log));
bob(log.read.bind(log));
```

```
// in bob.js
// Bob can just write to the log
log.write("I'm polluting the log")

// Bob can delete the entire log
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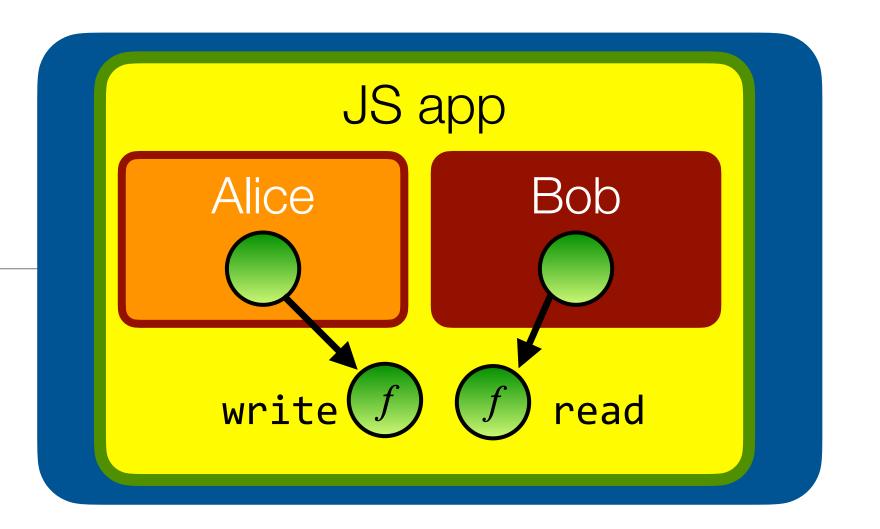
Is there a better way to write this code?

The burden of correct use is on the *client* of the class. Can we avoid this?

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

class Log {
   constructor() {
     this.messages_ = [];
   }
   write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
   read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
}

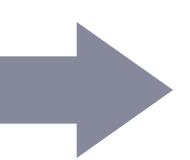
let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log.write.bind(log));
bob(log.read.bind(log));
```

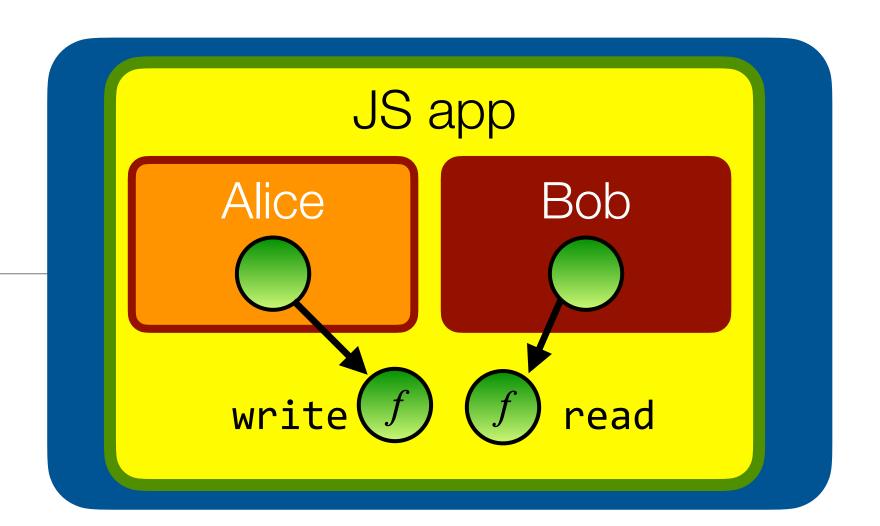


Use the **Function as Object** pattern

- A record of closures hiding state is a fine representation of an object of methods hiding instance vars
- Pattern long advocated by Doug Crockford instead of using classes or prototypes

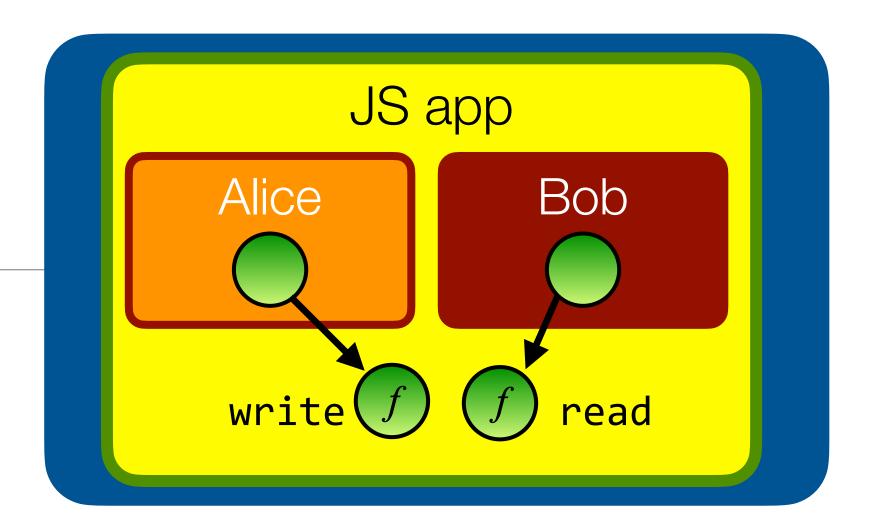
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import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";
class Log {
  constructor() {
   this.messages_ = [];
  write(msg) { this.messages_.push(msg); }
  read() { return [...this.messages_]; }
let log = harden(new Log());
alice(log.write.bind(log));
bob(log.read.bind(log));
```





```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";
function makeLog() {
 const messages = [];
 function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
 function read() { return [...messages]; }
  return harden({read, write});
let log = makeLog();
alice(log.write);
bob(log.read);
```

Use the Function as Object pattern



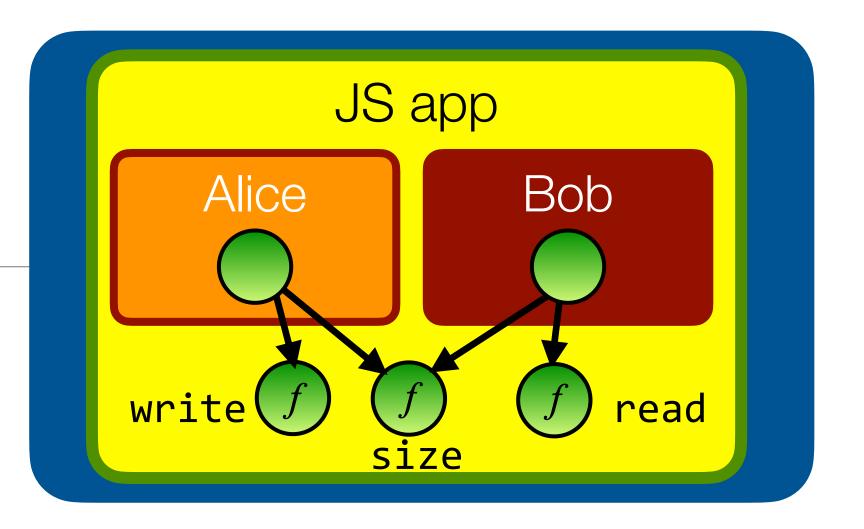
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import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
  const messages = [];
  function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
  function read() { return [...messages]; }
  return harden({read, write});
}

let log = makeLog();
alice(log.write);
bob(log.read);
```

What if Alice and Bob need more authority?

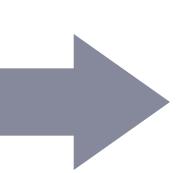
If over time we want to expose more functionality to Alice and Bob, we need to refactor all of our code.



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
  const messages = [];
  function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
  function read() { return [...messages]; }
  return harden({read, write});
}

let log = makeLog();
alice(log.write);
bob(log.read);
```



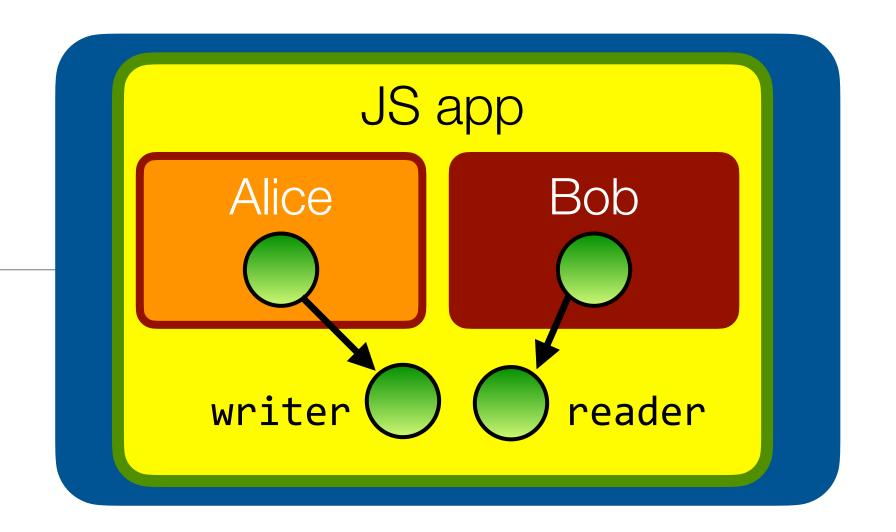
```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
   const messages = [];
   function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
   function read() { return [...messages]; }
   function size() { return messages.length(); }
   return harden({read, write, size});
}

let log = makeLog();
alice(log.write, log.size);
bob(log.read, log.size);
```

Expose distinct authorities through facets

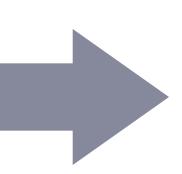
Easily deconstruct the API of a single powerful object into separate interfaces by nesting objects



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
   const messages = [];
   function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
   function read() { return [...messages]; }
   function size() { return messages.length(); }
   return harden({read, write, size});
}

let log = makeLog();
alice(log.write, log.size);
bob(log.read, log.size);
```



```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";
function makeLog() {
  const messages = [];
  function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
  function read() { return [...messages]; }
  function size() { return messages.length(); }
  return harden({
    reader: {read, size},
    writer: {write, size}
  });
let log = makeLog();
alice(log.writer);
bob(log.reader);
```

Further limiting Bob's authority

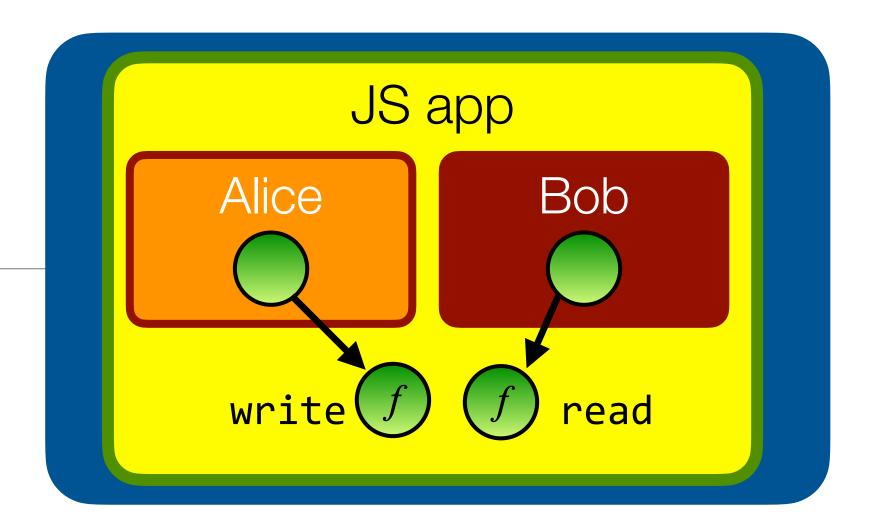
We would like to give Bob only temporary read access to the log.

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
   const messages = [];
   function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
   function read() { return [...messages]; }
   return harden({read, write});
}

let log = makeLog();

alice(log.write);
bob(log.read);
```



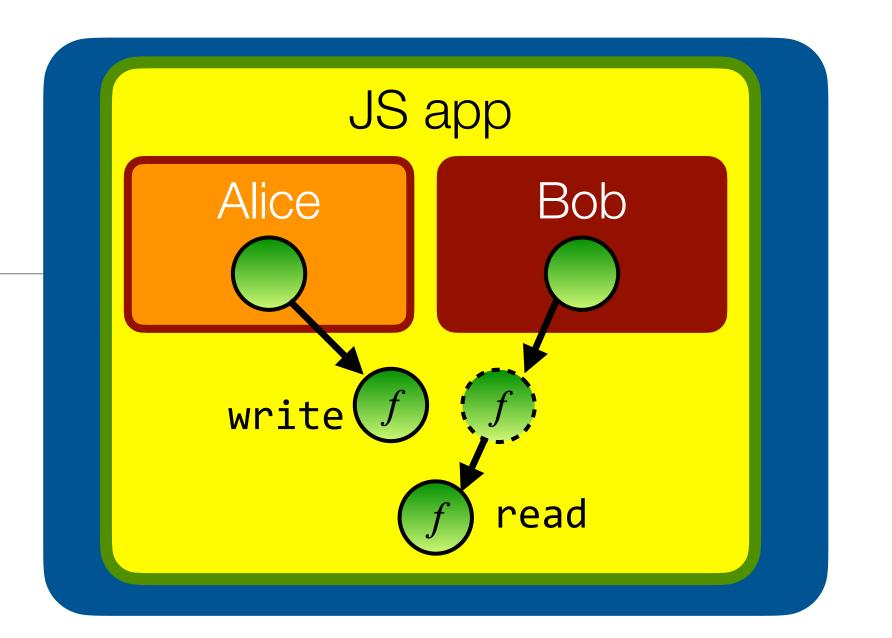
Use caretaker to insert access control logic

We would like to give Bob only temporary read access to the log.

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
   const messages = [];
   function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
   function read() { return [...messages]; }
   return harden({read, write});
}

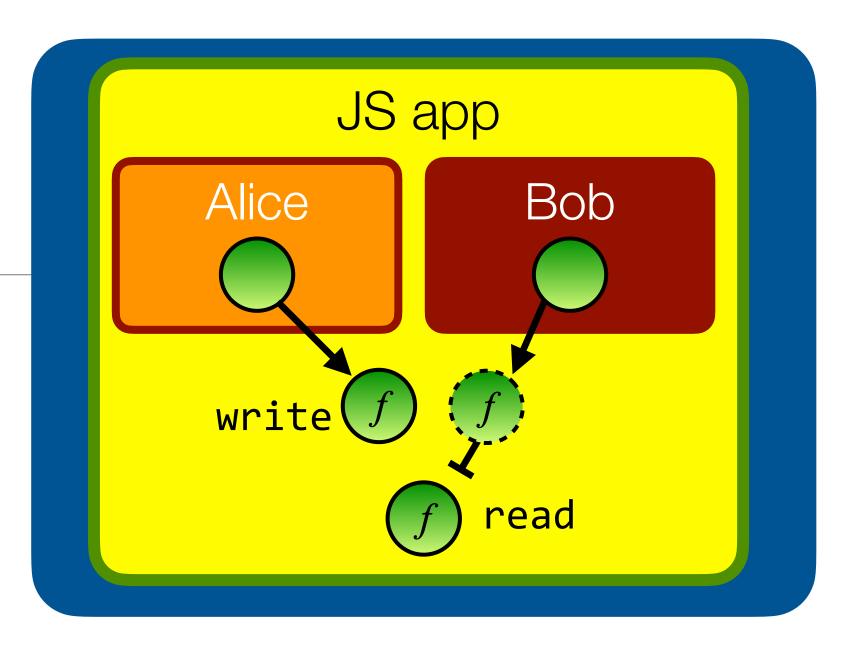
let log = makeLog();
let [rlog, revoke] = makeRevokableLog(log);
alice(log.write);
bob(rlog.read);
```



Use caretaker to insert access control logic

We would like to give Bob only temporary read access to the log.

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";
function makeLog() {
  const messages = [];
  function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
 function read() { return [...messages]; }
  return harden({read, write});
let log = makeLog();
let [rlog, revoke] = makeRevokableLog(log);
alice(log.write);
bob(rlog.read);
// to revoke Bob's access:
revoke();
```

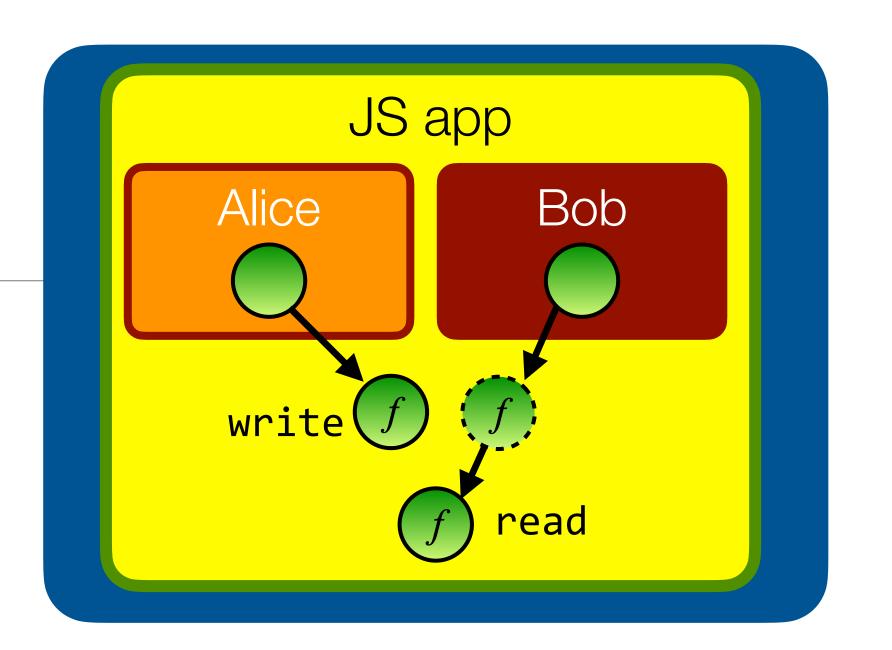


A caretaker is just a proxy object

```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";

function makeLog() {
   const messages = [];
   function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
   function read() { return [...messages]; }
   return harden({read, write});
}

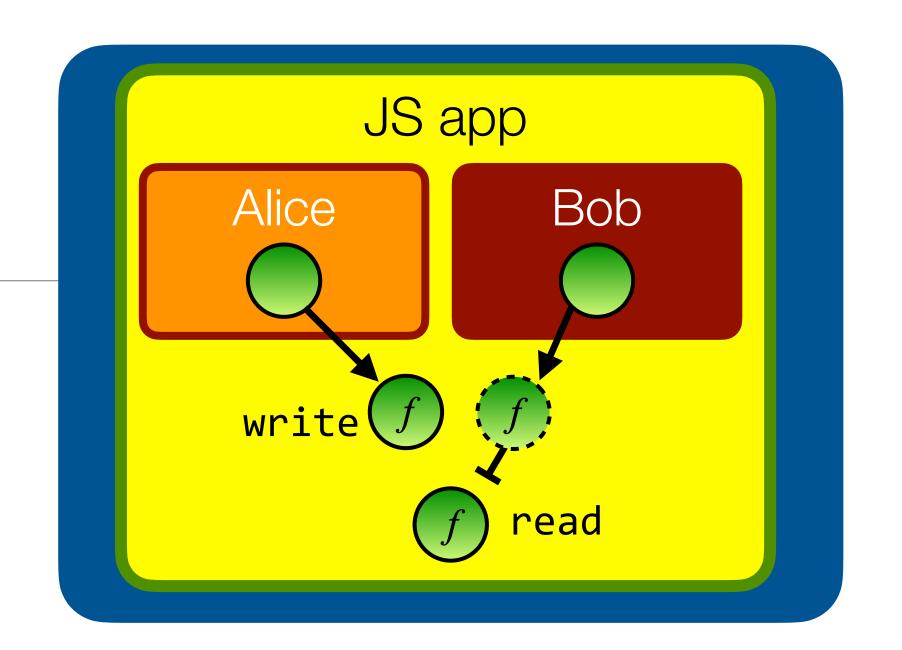
let log = makeLog();
let [rlog, revoke] = makeRevokableLog(log);
alice(log.write);
bob(rlog.read);
```



```
function makeRevokableLog(log) {
  function revoke() { log = null; };
  let proxy = {
    write(msg) { log.write(msg); }
    read() { return log.read(); }
  };
  return harden([proxy, revoke]);
}
```

A caretaker is just a proxy object

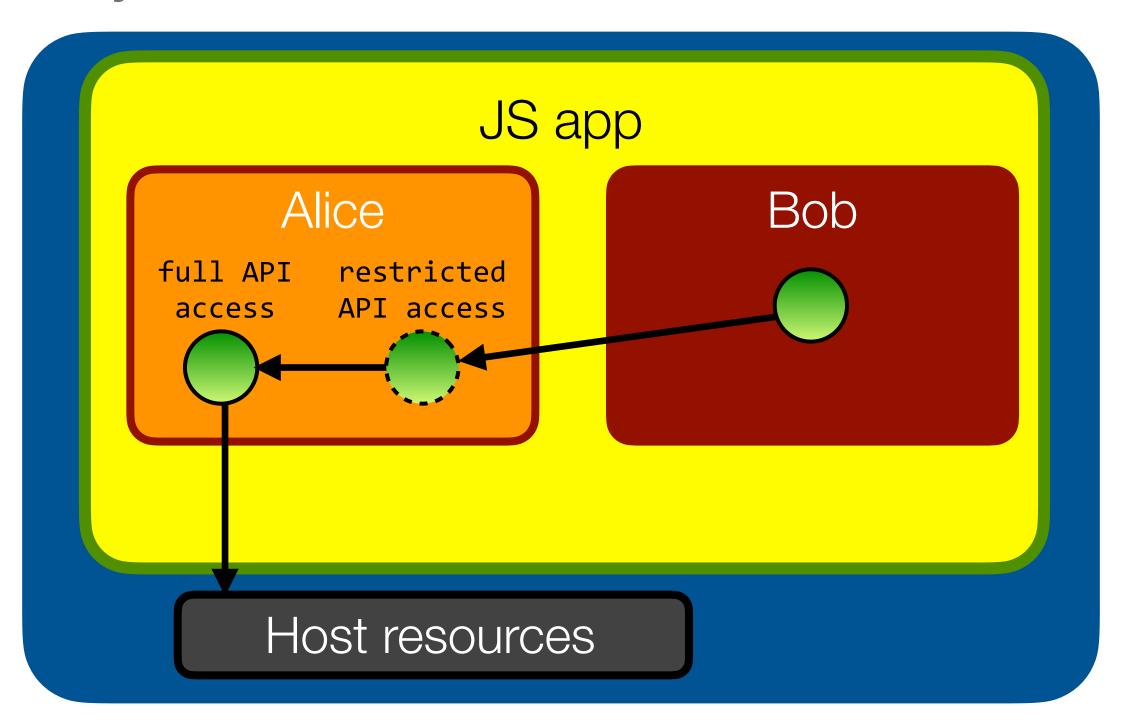
```
import * as alice from "alice.js";
import * as bob from "bob.js";
function makeLog() {
  const messages = [];
 function write(msg) { messages.push(msg); }
 function read() { return [...messages]; }
  return harden({read, write});
let log = makeLog();
let [rlog, revoke] = makeRevokableLog(log);
alice(log.write);
bob(rlog.read);
// to revoke Bob's access:
revoke();
```



```
function makeRevokableLog(log) {
  function revoke() { log = null; };
  let proxy = {
    write(msg) { log.write(msg); }
    read() { return log.read(); }
  };
  return harden([proxy, revoke]);
}
```

Taming is the process of restricting access to powerful APIs

- Expose powerful objects through restrictive proxies to third-party code
- For example, Alice might give Bob read-only access to a specific subdirectory of her file system

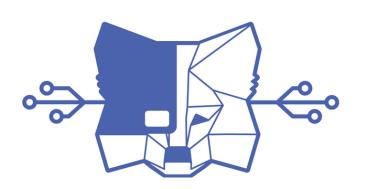


These patterns are used in industry



Moddable XS

Uses **Compartments** for safe end-user scripting of IoT products



MetaMask Snaps

Uses **LavaMoat** to sandbox plugins in their crypto web wallet



Agoric Zoe

Uses **Hardened JS** for writing smart contracts and Dapps



Google Caja

Uses **taming** for safe html embedding of third-party content



Mozilla Firefox

Uses **membranes** to isolate site origins from privileged JS code



Salesforce Lightning

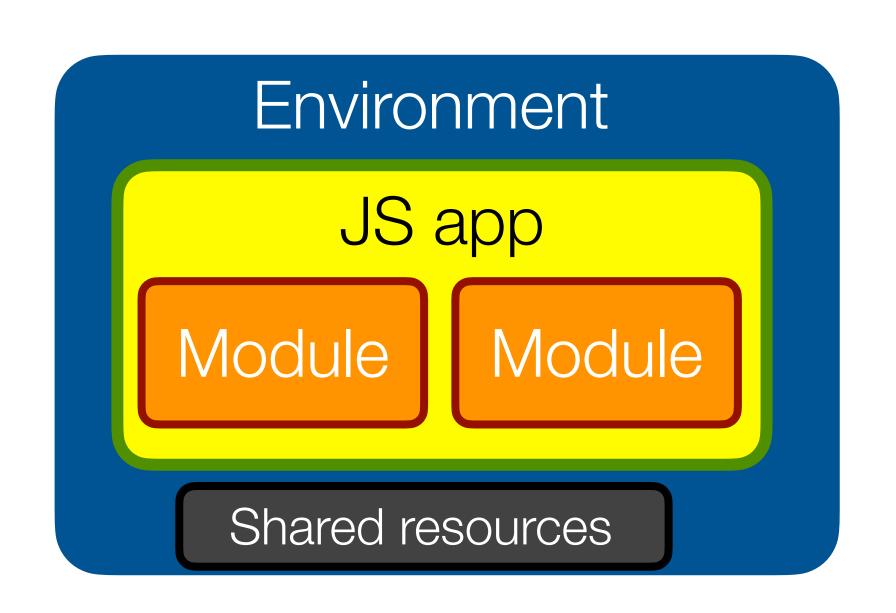
Uses **realms** and **membranes** to isolate & observe UI components

The take-away messages

- Modern JS apps are composed from many modules. You can't trust them all.
- Apply the "principle of least authority" to limit trust.
 - Isolate modules using Hardened JS & Lavamoat
 - Let modules interact safely using patterns such as facets, caretaker, membranes, taming,

. . .

• Understanding these patterns is critical in Web3 where code directly interacts with digital assets



JS

Improving JavaScript (d)app security by practicing extreme modularity A Practitioner's guide to Hardened JavaScript

Tom Van Cutsem



Thanks for listening!



Acknowledgements

- Mark S. Miller (for the inspiring and ground-breaking work on Object-capabilities, Robust Composition, E, Caja, JavaScript and Secure ECMAScript)
- Marc Stiegler's "PictureBook of secure cooperation" (2004) was a great source of inspiration for this talk
- Doug Crockford's Good Parts and How JS Works books were an eye-opener and provide a highly opinionated take on how to write clean, good, robust JavaScript code
- Kate Sills and Kris Kowal at Agoric for helpful comments on earlier versions of this talk
- The Cap-talk and Friam community for inspiration on capability-security and capability-secure design patterns
- TC39 and the es-discuss community, for the interactions during the design of ECMAScript 2015, and in particular all the feedback on the Proxy API
- The SES secure coding guide: https://github.com/endojs/endo/blob/master/packages/ses/docs/secure-coding-guide.md

Further Reading

- · Compartments: https://github.com/tc39/proposal-compartments and https://github.com/Agoric/ses-shim
- ShadowRealms: https://github.com/tc39/proposal-realms and github.com/Agoric/realms-shim
- Hardened JS (SES): https://github.com/tc39/proposal-ses and https://github.com/tc39/proposal-ses and https://github.com/tc39/proposal-ses and https://github.com/endojs/endo/tree/master/packages/ses
- Subsetting ECMAScript: https://github.com/Agoric/Jessie
- Kris Kowal (Agoric): "Hardened JavaScript" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoodZSIL-DE
- Making Javascript Safe and Secure: Talks by Mark S. Miller (Agoric), Peter Hoddie (Moddable), and Dan Finlay (MetaMask): https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzDw4TTug5O25J5M3fwErKlmrjOrqGikj
- Moddable: XS: Secure, Private JavaScript for Embedded IoT: https://blog.moddable.com/blog/secureprivate/
- Membranes in JavaScript: tvcutsem.github.io/membranes
- Caja: https://developers.google.com/caja