

# Remote DNS Cache Poisoning Attack Lab

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## 1 Lab Overview

The objective of this lab is for students to gain the first-hand experience on the remote DNS cache poisoning attack, also called the Kaminsky DNS attack [?]. DNS [?] (Domain Name System) is the Internet's phone book; it translates hostnames to IP addresses and vice versa. This translation is through DNS resolution, which happens behind the scene. DNS Pharming [?] attacks manipulate this resolution process in various ways, with an intent to misdirect users to alternative destinations, which are often malicious. This lab focuses on a particular DNS Pharming attack technique, called *DNS Cache Poisoning attack*.

## 2 Lab Environment

This lab runs in the Labtainer framework, available at <http://my.nps.edu/web/c3o/labtainers>. That site includes links to a pre-built virtual machine that has Labtainers installed, however Labtainers can be run on any Linux host that supports Docker containers.

From your labtainer-student directory start the lab using:

```
labtainer remote-dns
```

Links to this lab manual and to an empty lab report will be displayed. If you create your lab report on a separate system, be sure to copy it back to the specified location on your Linux system.

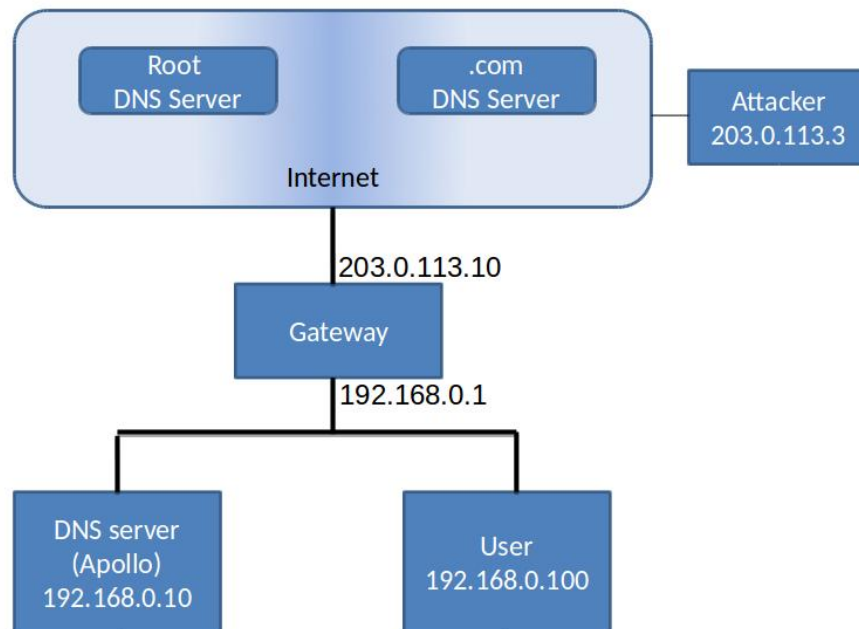


Figure 1: The Lab Environment Setup

Figure ?? illustrates the setup of the lab environment. In this lab the user machine's IP address is 192.168.0.100, the DNS Server's IP is 192.168.0.10 and the attacker machine's IP is 203.0.113.3.

**Note for Instructors:** For this lab, a lab session is desirable, especially if students are not familiar with the tools and the environments. If an instructor plans to hold a lab session (by himself/herself or by a TA), it is suggested that the following topics are covered in the lab session <sup>1</sup>:

1. The use of Labtainers.
2. The use of Wireshark.
3. Configuration of BIND 9 DNS server [?].

## 2.1 Review the Local DNS server Apollo Configuration

The BIND 9 server program is installed on the Apollo DNS server. The DNS server reads a configuration file named `/etc/bind/named.conf` when it starts. This configuration file includes an option file, which is called `/etc/bind/named.conf.options`. Please review that file and note this entry:

<sup>1</sup>We assume that the instructor has already covered the concepts of the attacks in the lecture, so we do not include them in the lab session.

```
options {  
    dump-file      "/var/cache/bind/dump.db";  
};
```

which instructs the DNS server to dump its cache into a file named: `/var/cache/bind/dump.db` whenever you run the command:

```
% sudo rndc dumpdb -cache // Dump the cache to dump.db
```

You may delete the cache using:

```
% sudo rndc flush // Flush the DNS cache
```

If a change is made to a configuration file, the DNS server must be restarted:

```
% sudo /etc/init.d/bind9 restart
```

## 2.2 User Machine Configuration

On the user machine `192.168.0.100`, we need to use `192.168.0.10` as the default DNS server. This is achieved by setting the file `/etc/resolv.conf` of the user machine to contain:

```
nameserver 192.168.0.10 # the ip of the DNS server you just setup
```

This is already set on the user machine.

## 2.3 The Wireshark Tool

Wireshark is a very important tool for this lab, and you probably need it to learn how exactly DNS works, as well as debugging your attacks. This tool is installed in the Apollo DNS Server for your convenience.

## 3 Lab Tasks

The main objective of Pharming attacks is to redirect the user to another machine *B* when the user tries to get to machine *A* using *A*'s host name. For example, assuming `www.example.com` is an online banking site. When the user tries to access this site using the correct URL `www.example.com`, if the adversaries can redirect the user to a malicious web site that looks very much like `www.example.com`, the user might be fooled and give away his/her credentials to the attacker.

In this task, we use the domain name `www.example.com` as our attacking target. It should be noted that the `example.com` domain name is reserved for use in documentation, not for any real company. The authentic IP address of `www.example.com` is `93.184.216.34`, and its name server is managed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). When the user runs the `dig` command on this name or types the name in the browser, the user's machine sends a DNS query to its local DNS server, which will eventually ask for the IP address from `example.com`'s name server.

The goal of the attack is to launch the DNS cache poisoning attack on the local DNS server, such that when the user runs the `dig` command to find out `www.example.com`'s IP address, the local DNS server will end up going to the attacker's name server `ns.dnslabattacker.net` to get the IP address, so the IP address returned can be any number that is decided by the attacker. As results, the user will be led to the attacker's web site, instead of the authentic `www.example.com`.

There are two tasks in this attack: cache poisoning and result verification. In the first task, students need to poison the DNS cache of the user's local DNS server `Apollo`, such that, in `Apollo`'s DNS cache, `ns.dnslabattacker.net` is set as the name server for the `example.com` domain, instead of the domain's registered authoritative name server. In the second task, students need to demonstrate the impact of the attack. More specifically, they need to run the command `"dig www.example.com"` from the user's machine, and the returned result must be a fake IP address.

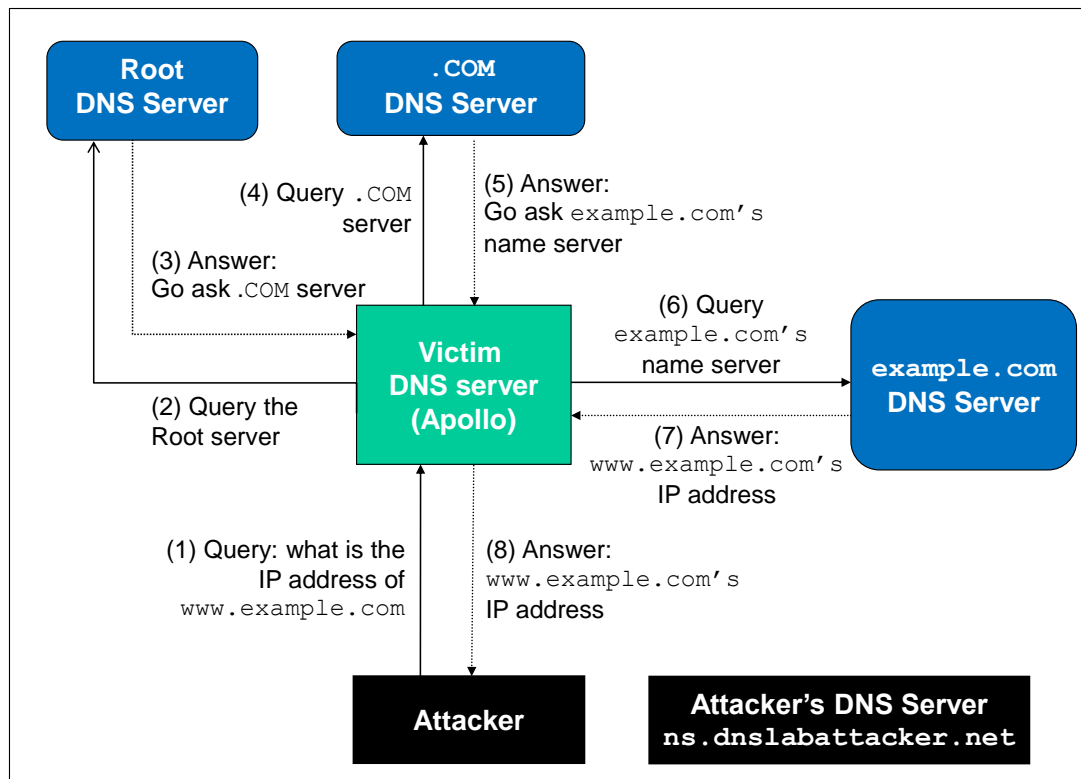


Figure 2: The complete DNS query process

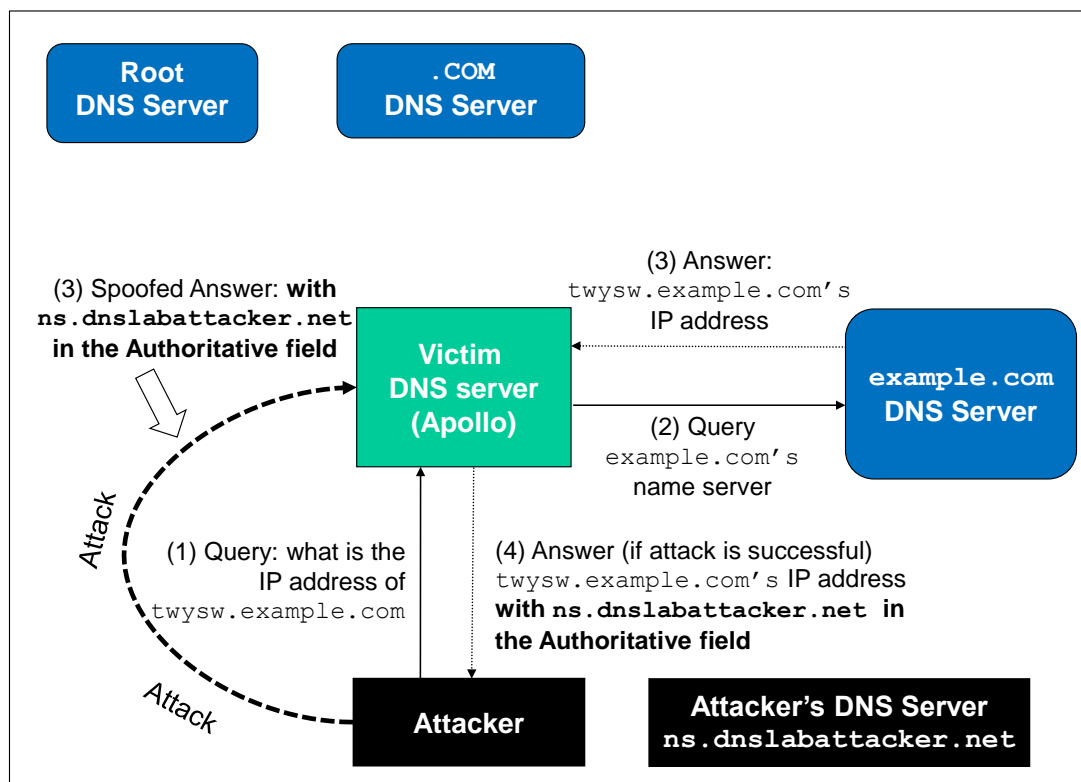


Figure 3: The DNS query process when `example.com`'s name server is cached

### 3.1 Task 1: Remote Cache Poisoning

In this task, the attacker sends a DNS query request to the victim DNS server (Apollo), triggering a DNS query from Apollo. The query may go through one of the root DNS servers, the `.COM` DNS server, and the final result will come back from `example.com`'s DNS server. This is illustrated in Figure ?? . In case that `example.com`'s name server information is already cached by Apollo, the query will not go through the root or the `.COM` server; this is illustrated in Figure ?? . In this lab, the situation depicted in Figure ?? is more common, so we will use this figure as the basis to describe the attack mechanism.

While Apollo waits for the DNS reply from `example.com`'s name server, the attacker can send forged replies to Apollo, pretending that the replies are from `example.com`'s name server. If the forged replies arrive first, it will be accepted by Apollo. The attack will be successful.

One reason that cache poisoning attacks are difficult is that the transaction ID in the DNS response packet must match with that in the query packet. Because the transaction ID in the query is usually randomly generated, without seeing the query packet, it is not easy for the attacker to know the correct ID.

Obviously, the attacker can guess the transaction ID. Since the size of the ID is only 16 bits, if the attacker can forge  $K$  responses within the attack window (i.e. before the legitimate response arrives), the probability of success is  $K$  over  $2^{16}$ . Sending out hundreds of forged responses is not impractical, so it will not take too many tries before the attacker can succeed.

However, the above hypothetical attack has overlooked the cache effect. In reality, if the attacker is not fortunately enough to make a correct guess before the real response packet arrives, correct information will be cached by the DNS server for a while. This caching effect makes it impossible for the attacker to forge

another response regarding the same domain name, because the DNS server will not send out another DNS query for this domain name before the cache times out. To forge another response on the same domain name, the attacker has to wait for another DNS query on this domain name, which means he/she has to wait for the cache to time out. The waiting period can be hours or days.

**The Kaminsky Attack.** Dan Kaminsky came up with an elegant technique to defeat the caching effect [?]. With the Kaminsky attack, attackers will be able to continuously attack a DNS server on a domain name, without the need for waiting, so attacks can succeed within a very short period of time. Details of the attacks are described in [?]. In this task, we will try this attack method. The following steps with reference to Figure ?? outlines the attack.

1. The attacker queries the DNS Server `Apollo` for a non-existing name in `example.com`, such as `twysw.example.com`, where `twysw` is a random name.
2. Since the mapping is unavailable in `Apollo`'s DNS cache, `Apollo` sends a DNS query to the name server of the `example.com` domain.
3. While `Apollo` waits for the reply, the attacker floods `Apollo` with a stream of spoofed DNS response [?], each trying a different transaction ID, hoping one is correct. In the response, not only does the attacker provide an IP resolution for `twysw.example.com`, the attacker also provides an "Authoritative Nameservers" record, indicating `ns.dnslabattacker.net` as the name server for the `example.com` domain. If the spoofed response beats the actual responses and the transaction ID matches with that in the query, `Apollo` will accept and cache the spoofed answer, and thus `Apollo`'s DNS cache is poisoned.
4. Even if the spoofed DNS response fails (e.g. the transaction ID does not match or it comes too late), it does not matter, because the next time, the attacker will query a different name, so `Apollo` has to send out another query, giving the attack another chance to do the spoofing attack. This effectively defeats the caching effect.
5. If the attack succeeds, in `Apollo`'s DNS cache, the name server for `example.com` will be replaced by the attacker's name server `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. To demonstrate the success of this attack, students need to show that such a record is in `Apollo`'s DNS cache. Figure ?? shows an example of poisoned DNS cache.

**Attack Configuration.** The following configuration settings facilitate your ability to perform the DNS cache poisoning attack.

1. *Attack Machine Configuration.* The attack machine uses the targeted DNS server (i.e., `Apollo`) as its default DNS server. The attacker `/etc/resolv.conf` file is configured with the external address of the site, exported by the gateway, i.e., `203.0.113.10`. The gateway forwards DNS requests to this address to the `Apollo` DNS server.
2. *Source Ports.* Some DNS servers now randomize the source port number in the DNS queries; this makes the attacks much more difficult. Unfortunately, many DNS servers still use predictable source port number. For the sake of simplicity in this lab, we assume that the source port number is a fixed number. The `Apollo` DNS server is configured to set the source port for all DNS queries to `33333`. This was done by adding the following option to the file `/etc/bind/named.conf.options` on `Apollo`:

```
query-source port 33333
```

3. *DNSSEC*. Most DNS servers now adopt a protection scheme called "DNSSEC", which is designed to defeat the DNS cache poisoning attack. If you do not turn it off, your attack would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. In this lab, we have disabled DNSSEC by changing the file `/etc/bind/named.conf.options` on Apollo. Please find the line "dnssec-validation auto", and note it is commented out, and a new line was added. See the following:

```
//dnssec-validation auto;  
dnssec-enable no;
```

4. *Flush the Cache*. Flush Apollo's DNS cache, and restart its DNS server.

```

▶ Frame 7983: 178 bytes on wire (1424 bits), 178 bytes captured (1424 bits)
▶ Linux cooked capture
▶ Internet Protocol Version 4, Src: 199.43.132.53 (199.43.132.53), Dst: 10.0.2.6 (10.0.2.6)
▼ User Datagram Protocol, Src Port: domain (53), Dst Port: 33333 (33333)
  Source port: domain (53)
  Destination port: 33333 (33333)
  Length: 142
  ▶ Checksum: 0x746e [validation disabled]
▼ Domain Name System (response)
  Transaction ID: 0x8e01
  ▶ Flags: 0x8400 (Standard query response, No error)
  Questions: 1
  Answer RRs: 1
  Authority RRs: 1
  Additional RRs: 2
  ▼ Queries
    ▶ twysw.example.com: type A, class IN
  ▼ Answers
    ▼ twysw.example.com: type A, class IN, addr 1.1.1.1
      Name: twysw.example.com
      Type: A (Host address)
      Class: IN (0x0001)
      Time to live: 388 days, 8 hours, 40 minutes, 32 seconds
      Data length: 4
      Addr: 1.1.1.1 (1.1.1.1)
    ▼ Authoritative nameservers
      ▼ example.com: type NS, class IN, ns ns.dnslabattacker.net
        Name: example.com
        Type: NS (Authoritative name server)
        Class: IN (0x0001)
        Time to live: 388 days, 8 hours, 40 minutes, 32 seconds
        Data length: 23
        Name Server: ns.dnslabattacker.net
      ▼ Additional records
        ▼ ns.dnslabattacker.net: type A, class IN, addr 1.1.1.1
          Name: ns.dnslabattacker.net
          Type: A (Host address)
          Class: IN (0x0001)
          Time to live: 388 days, 8 hours, 40 minutes, 32 seconds
          Data length: 4
          Addr: 1.1.1.1 (1.1.1.1)
        ▶ <Root>: type OPT
0020  0a 00 02 06 00 35 82 35 00 8e 74 6e 8e 01 84 00  ....5.5..tn....
0030  00 01 00 01 00 01 00 02 05 74 77 79 73 77 07 65  ....twysw.e
0040  78 61 6d 70 6c 65 03 63 6f 6d 00 00 01 00 01 c0  xample.c om....
0050  0c 00 01 00 01 02 00 00 00 00 04 01 01 01 01 c0  ....
0060  12 00 02 00 01 02 00 00 00 00 17 02 6e 73 0e 64  ....ns.d
0070  6e 73 6c 61 62 61 74 74 61 63 6b 65 72 03 6e 65  nslabatt acker.ne
0080  74 00 02 6e 73 0e 64 6e 73 6c 61 62 61 74 74 61  t..ns.dn slabatta
0090  63 6b 65 72 03 6e 65 74 00 00 01 00 01 02 00 00  cker.net .....
00a0  00 00 04 01 01 01 01 00 00 29 10 00 00 00 80 00  ....).
00b0  00 00

```

Figure 4: A Sample DNS Response Packet

**Forge DNS Response Packets.** In order to complete the attack, the attacker first needs to send DNS queries to Apollo for some random host names in the example.com domain. Right after each query is



sent out, the attacker needs to forge a large number of DNS response packets in a very short time window, hoping that one of them has the correct transaction ID and it reaches the target before the authentic response does. It is better to write C code to achieve this. To make your life easier, we have provided a sample code called `udp.c`. This program can send a large number of DNS packets. Feel free to use this sample code when writing your attack programs. It is in the HOME directory of the attacker machine.

1. When modifying the `udp.c` program, you need to fill each DNS field with the correct value. To understand the value in each field, you can use Wireshark to capture a few DNS query and response packets.
2. DNS response packet details: it is not easy to construct a correct DNS response packet. We made a sample packet to help you. Figure ?? is the screen shot of an example response packet: 10.0.2.6 is the local DNS server address, and 199.43.132.53 is the real name server for `example.com`. The highlighted bytes are the raw UDP payload data, and you need to figure out what they are. The details about how each byte works are explained clearly in Appendix ?. There are several techniques used in the response packet, such as the string pointer offset to shorten the packet length. You may not have to use that technique but it is very common in real packets.

Check the `dump.db` file to see whether your spoofed DNS response has been successfully accepted by the DNS server. See an example in Figure ??.

	172660	NS	h.gtld-servers.net.
	172660	NS	i.gtld-servers.net.
	172660	NS	j.gtld-servers.net.
	172660	NS	k.gtld-servers.net.
	172660	NS	l.gtld-servers.net.
	172660	NS	m.gtld-servers.net.
; additional	86260	DS	30909 8 2 ( E2D3C916F6DEEAC73294E8268FB5885044A8 33FC5459588F4A9184CFC41A5766 )
; additional	86260	RRSIG	DS 8 1 86400 20141201170000 ( 20141124160000 22603 . LtkTupSuz/a0GV4FxKx0wnEdfutvv4xcM8YC BWLAL2DLGIumuQGbkTE6Rum91+k6B2WXcdgo u/EsAKnyFx4lj/f9iPsiIvgda950rEadmCxd xYkwnVMNkoV5sDfyev4NYwxfy3tai6ro0ngS TQcm5NrWr+r/Q8XhIhDCLYKDeKs= )
; authauthority example.com.	172660	NS	ns.dnslabattacker.net.
; additional	86260	DS	31589 8 1 ( 3490A6806D47F17A34C29E2CE80E8A999FFB E4BE )
	86260	DS	31589 8 2 ( CDE0D742D6998AA554A92D890F8184C698CF AC8A26FA59875A990C03E576343C )
; additional	86260	RRSIG	DS 8 2 86400 20141128051526 ( 20141121040526 48758 com. e2Zclaahc5xiHjzEj+prLZm5Qs0IWTPfEMa/ Vho0guxIfupGnebs206Wffe3Pc+ZjQp+QNzN Nv33N/Kg4WymFg9soQxJpXFeYrcnkNmkaXh8 T5Rva4/M5+stP/tENNfiQuZG6klQECiNC9CA r5QckZNJExCN+7mZLuc/C4BufQQ= )

Figure 5: A Sample of Successfully Poisoned DNS Cache

### 3.2 Task 2: Result Verification

If your attack is successful, Apollo's DNS cache will look like that in Figure ??, i.e., the NS record for `example.com` becomes `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. To make sure that the attack is indeed successful, we run the `dig` command on the user machine (see Figure ??) to ask for `www.example.com`'s IP address.

When Apollo receives the DNS query, it searches for `example.com`'s NS record in its cache, and finds `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. It will therefore send a DNS query to `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. However, before sending the query, it needs to know the IP address of `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. This is done by issuing a separate DNS query. That is where we get into trouble.

The domain name `dnslabattacker.net` does not exist in reality. We created this name for the purpose of this lab. Apollo will soon find out about that, and mark the NS entry invalid, essentially recovering from the poisoned cache. One may say that when forging the DNS response, we can use an additional record to provide the IP address for `ns.dnslabattacker.net`. The sample response packet in Figure ?? actually does that. Unfortunately, this additional record will not be accepted by Apollo. Please think about why and give your explanation in your lab report (hint: think about the *zones*).

We will demonstrate the impact of our successful cache-poisoning attack by using a fake domain name. Note the changes made to the Apollo DNS server described below are simply to facilitate the demonstration. If we controlled a real domain, we would achieve this by using that domain in the NS record in place of `dnslabattacker.net`.

**Use A Fake Domain Name.** We have configured Apollo so it recognizes `dnslabattacker.net` as a real domain. We added the `ns.dnslabattacker.net`'s IP address to Apollo's DNS configuration, so Apollo does not need to go out asking for the IP address of this hostname from a non-existing domain. The configuration was achieved as described below.

We configured the victim's DNS server Apollo file named `named.conf.default-zones` in the `/etc/bind/` folder, to include the following entry:

```
zone "ns.dnslabattacker.net" {
    type master;
    file "/etc/bind/db.attacker";
};
```

And we added the file `/etc/bind/db.attacker`, with the following content:

```
$TTL 604800
@ IN SOA localhost. root.localhost. (
    2; Serial
    604800 ; Refresh
    86400 ; Retry
    2419200 ; Expire
    604800 ) ; Negative Cache TTL;
@ IN NS ns.dnslabattacker.net.
@ IN A 203.0.113.3
@ IN AAAA ::1
```

Note, we let the attacker's machine and the malicious DNS, `ns.dnslabattacker.net` share the machine (192.168.0.200).

If your cache poisoning attack is successful, any DNS query sent to Apollo for the hostnames in `example.com` will be sent to 203.0.113.3, which is attacker's machine.

The DNS server on 203.0.113.3 has been configured so it answers the queries for the domain example.com. This was achieved by the following entry in /etc/bind/named.conf.local on 203.0.113.3:

```
zone "example.com" {
    type master;
    file "/etc/bind/example.com.db";
};
```

and a file called /etc/bind/example.com.db, containing:

```
$TTL 3D
@           IN           SOA ns.example.com. admin.example.com. (
                2008111001
                8H
                2H
                4W
                1D)
@           IN           NS      ns.dnslabattacker.net.
@           IN           MX      10 mail.example.com.
www         IN           A       1.1.1.1
mail        IN           A       1.1.1.2
*.example.com IN         A       1.1.1.100
```

If everything is done properly, you can use the command like "dig www.example.com on the user machine. The reply would be 1.1.1.1, which is exactly we put in the above file.

## 4 Submission

Students need to submit a detailed lab report to describe what they have done and what they have observed. Report should include the evidences to support the observations. Evidences include packet traces, screen dumps, etc.

**Note:** Please do not forget to answer the question asked in Task 2, regarding why the IP address for ns.dnslabattacker.net in the additional field is not accepted by the victim DNS server.

If you edited your lab report on a separate system, copy it back to the Linux system at the location identified when you started the lab, and do this before running the stoplab command. After finishing the lab, go to the terminal on your Linux system that was used to start the lab and type:

```
stoplab remote-dns
```

When you stop the lab, the system will display a path to the zipped lab results on your Linux system. Provide that file to your instructor, e.g., via the Sakai site.

## References

- [1] D. Schneider. Fresh Phish, How a recently discovered flaw in the Internet's Domain Name System makes it easy for scammers to lure you to fake Web sites. *IEEE Spectrum*, 2008 <http://spectrum.ieee.org/computing/software/fresh-phish>

- [2] RFC 1035 Domain Names - Implementation and Specification : <http://www.rfc-base.org/rfc-1035.html>
- [3] DNS HOWTO : <http://www.tldp.org/HOWTO/DNS-HOWTO.html>
- [4] Pharming Guide : <http://www.technicalinfo.net/papers/Pharming.html>
- [5] DNS Cache Poisoning: [http://www.secureworks.com/resources/articles/other\\_articles/dns-cache-poisoning/](http://www.secureworks.com/resources/articles/other_articles/dns-cache-poisoning/)
- [6] DNS Client Spoof: [http://evan.stasis.org/odds/dns-client\\_spoofing.txt](http://evan.stasis.org/odds/dns-client_spoofing.txt)

## A Details of DNS Response Packet

```
0x8e 0x01 transaction ID
0x84 0x00 flags:means a no-error answer
0x00 0x01 Questions No.      (1 question session)
0x00 0x01 Answer No.        (1 answer session)
0x00 0x01 Authority No.     (1 authority session)
0x00 0x02 Additional No.    (2 additional sessions)
query session: eggdd.example.com:type A, class IN
0x05 5 characters follow
0x74 t
0x77 w
0x79 y
0x73 s
0x77 w
0x07 7 characters follow
0x65 e
0x78 x
0x61 a
0x6d m
0x70 p
0x6c l
0x65 e
0x03 3 characters
0x63 c
0x6f o
0x6d m
0x00 end of the string
0x00 0x01 type:A(address)
0x00 0x01 Class:IN
the Answer session:
0xc0 first two bits set to 1 to notify this is a pointer for a name string,
not a standard
string as before
0x0c the offset of the start point: here from transaction ID field to the
name string
12 bytes. The string will shows from the offset point to the end of the
string
0x00 0x01 type:A
0x00 0x01 Class:IN
0x02 0x00 0x00 0x00 time to live
0x00 0x04 DataLength:4 bytes
0x01 0x01 x01 0x01 1.1.1.1
Authoritative Nameservers session:
0xc0 first two bits set to 1 to notify this is a pointer for a name string,
```

```

not a standard
string as before
0x12 Offset 18 the string should be "/7example/3com/0"
0x00 0x02 type:NS
0x00 0x01 Class:IN
0x02 0x00 0x00 0x00 time to live
0x00 0x17 DataLength:23 bytes
The string represent "/2ns/14dnslabattacker/3net"
0x02 2 characters follow
0x6e n
0x73 s
0x0e 14 characters
0x64 d
0x6e n
0x73 s
0x6c l
0x61 a
0x62 b
0x61 a
0x74 t
0x74 t
0x61 a
0x63 c
0x6b k
0x65 e
0x72 r
0x03 3 characters
0x6e n
0x65 e
0x74 t
0x00 end of the string
*****additional session*****
first session :example.com:type NS,class IN ns ns.dnslabattacker.net

notice: you can use the same pointer technique we
talked before to shorten
the packet, this is just to show you both ways work.
The string represent "/2ns/14dnslabattacker/3net"
0x02 2 characters follow
0x6e n
0x73 s
0x0e 14 characters
0x64 d
0x6e n
0x73 s
0x6c l
0x61 a
0x62 b
0x61 a
0x74 t
0x74 t
0x61 a
0x63 c
0x6b k
0x65 e
0x72 r
0x03 3 characters
0x6e n

```

```
0x65 e
0x74 t
0x00 end of the string
0x00 0x01 type:A
0x00 0x01 Class:IN
0x02 0x00 0x00 0x00 time to live
0x00 0x04 DataLength:4 bytes
0x01 0x01 0x01 0x01 1.1.1.1
second session: not related to the lab. Just set a rule that during the DNS
communication, the server won't accept
the packet which is larger than a certain size
0x00 0x00 0x29 0x10 0x00 0x00 0x00 0x88 0x00 0x00 0x00
```