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Compiler Fuzzing: How Much Does It Matter?

Michaël Marcozzi* Qiyi Tang* Alastair F. Donaldson Cristian Cadar

*The presented experimental study has been carried out equally by M. Marcozzi and Q. Tang.

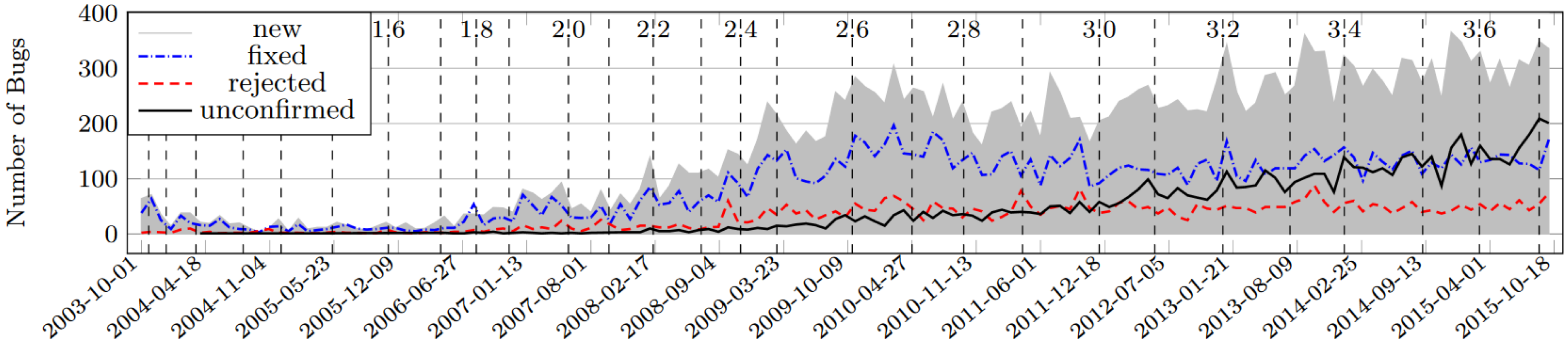
Imperial College London

Outline

1. **Context:** compiler fuzzing
2. **Problem:** importance of fuzzer-found miscompilations is unclear
3. **Goal:** a study of the practical impact of miscompilation bugs
4. **Methodology** for bug impact measurement
5. Experiments and results
6. Conclusions

Compiler Bugs

- Software **developers intensively rely on compilers**, often with blind confidence
- **Compilers** are software: they **have bugs** too (~150 fixed bugs/month in LLVM compiler)
- In **worst case**, unnoticed **miscompilation** (silent generation of wrong code)



History of LLVM Bug Tracking System (2003-2015) [Sun et al., ISSTA'16]

Compiler Validation (1/2)

- Classical **software validation approaches** have been **applied to compilers**
  - Formal verification: CompCert verified compiler, Alive optimisation prover, etc.
  - Testing: LLVM test suite, etc.

Compiler Validation (2/2)

- Recent surge of interest in **compiler fuzzing**:
  - Automatic and massive random generation of test programs to compile
  - Automatic miscompilation detection via differential or metamorphic testing
  - e.g. 200+ miscompilations found in LLVM by Csmith[1], EMI[2], Orange[3] and Yarpgen[4]

[1] [Yang et al., PLDI'11] [Regehr et al., PLDI'12] [Chen et al., PLDI'13]
[2] Equivalence Modulo Inputs [Le et al., PLDI'14, OOPSLA'15] [Sun et al.,OOPSLA'16]
[3] [Nagai et al., T-SLDM] [Nakamura et al., APCCAS'16]
[4] https://github.com/intel/yarpgen

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Importance of Fuzzer-Found Miscompilations (1/2)

- Audience of our talks on compiler fuzzers often **question the importance of found bugs**
- In our experience, this is a **contentious debate** and people can be poles apart:

> **In my opinion, compiler bugs are extremely dangerous, period.** Thus, regardless of the real-world impact of compiler bugs, I think that **techniques that can uncover (and help fix) compiler bugs are extremely valuable.**
>
> *One anonymous reviewer of this paper at a top P/L conference*

> **I would suggest that compiler developers stop responding to researchers working** toward publishing papers **on [fuzzers]**. Responses from compiler maintainers is being becoming a metric for measuring the performance of [fuzzers], so **responding just encourages the trolls**.
>
> *'The Shape of Code' weblog author*
> (former UK representative at ISO International C Standard)

Importance of Fuzzer-Found Miscompilations (2/2)

- In this work, we consider a **mature compiler** in a **non-critical environment**:
  - The compiler has been intensively tested by its developers and users
  - Trade-offs between software reliability and cost are acceptable and common
- In this context, **doubting** the **impact** of **fuzzer-found bugs** is **reasonable**:
  - It is unclear if mature compilers leave much space to find severe bugs
  - Fuzzers find bugs affecting generated code, whose patterns may not occur in real code

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Goal and Challenges

- In this work, our **objectives** are to:
  - ✗ ~~Show specifically that compiler fuzzing matters or does not matter~~
  - ✓ Study the impact of miscompilation bugs in a mature compiler over real apps
  - ✓ Compare impact of bugs from fuzzers with others (e.g. found by compiling real code)
- Operationally, we aim at **overcoming** the following **challenges**:
  - Take steps towards a methodology to measure the impact of a miscompilation bug
  - Apply it over a significant but tractable set of bugs and real applications

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Bug Impact Measurement Methodology

- Assumption: Restrict to **publicly fixed bugs in open-source compilers**, to extract

Fixing Patch
written by developers

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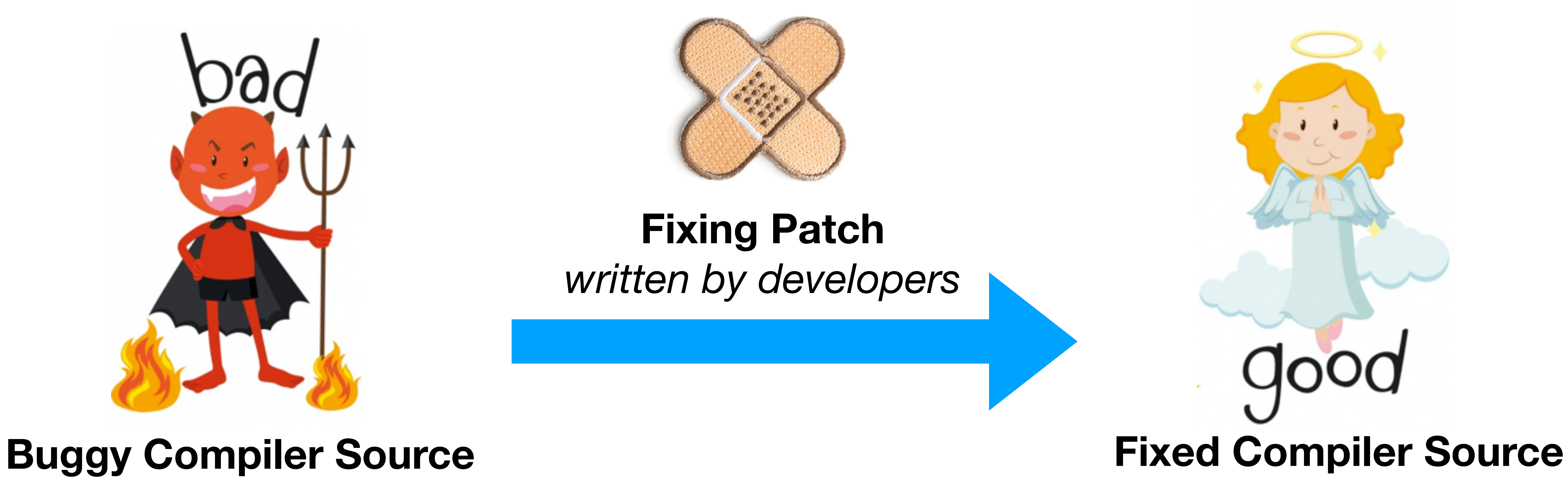

- Assumption: impact of miscompilation bug = **ability to change semantics of real apps**

Bug Impact Measurement Methodology

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- We **estimate** the **impact** of the compiler **bug over a real app** in **three stages**:

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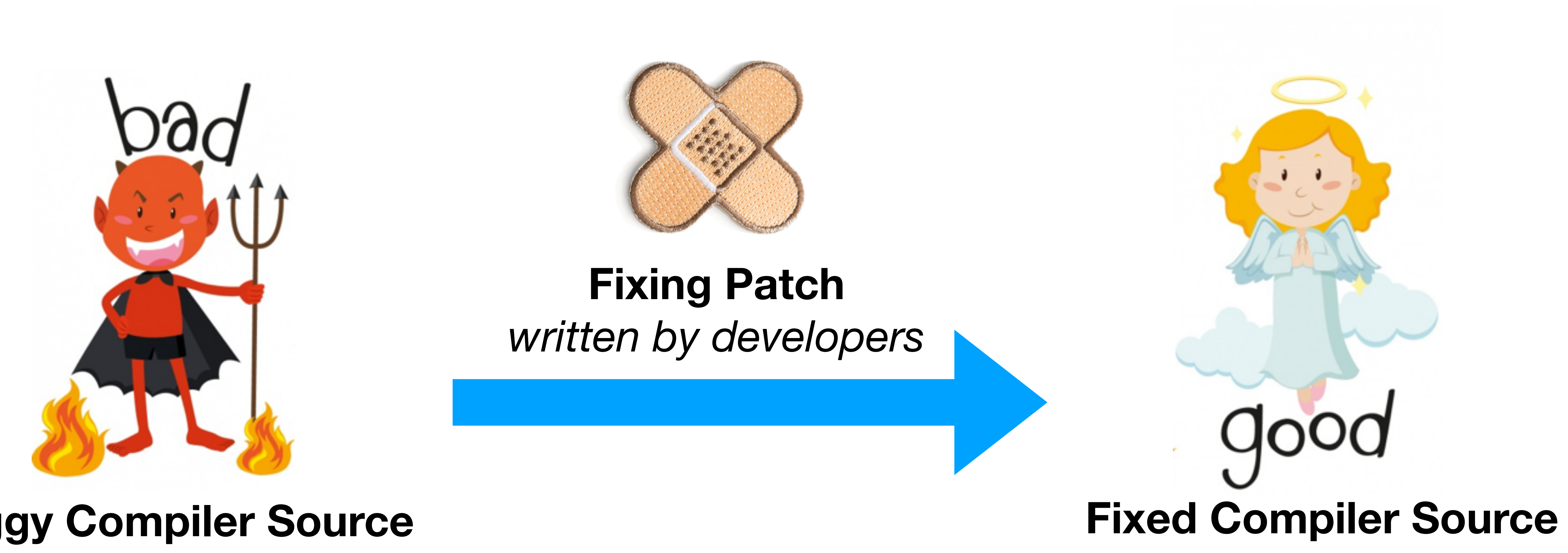

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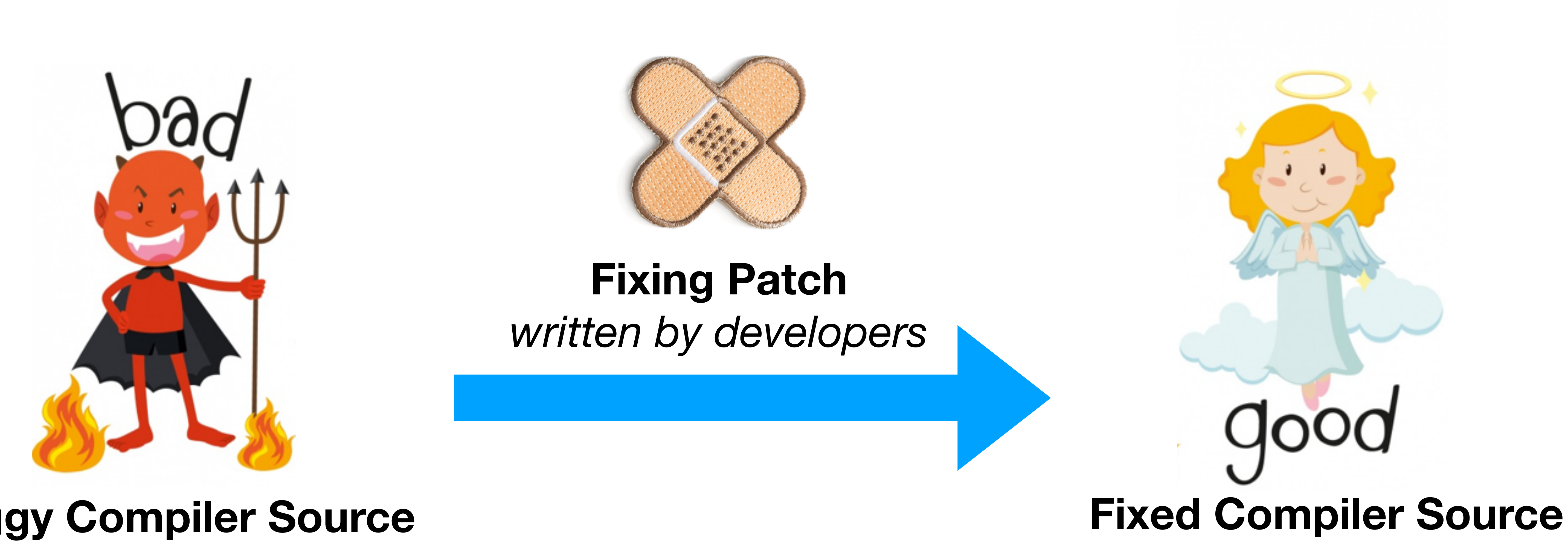

- <u>Assumption</u>: impact of miscompilation bug = **ability to change semantics of real apps**

- We **estimate** the **impact** of the compiler **bug over a real app** in **three stages**:
  1. Is the buggy compiler code reached and triggered <u>during compilation</u>?
  2. How much does a triggered bug change the <u>binary code</u>?

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1. Is the buggy compiler code reached and triggered during compilation?
2. How much does a triggered bug change the binary code?
3. Can the binary changes lead to differences in binary runtime behaviour?

Stage 1: Compile-Time Analysis

```
if (Not.isPowerOf2())
 /* Code transformation */
```

fix for LLVM bug #26323

```
if (Not.isPowerOf2()
     && C->getValue().isPowerOf2() && Not != C->getValue())
   /* Code transformation */
```

Buggy Compiler Source

Fixed Compiler Source

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Buggy Compiler Source

Fixed Compiler Source

```
warn("Fixing patch reached!");
if (Not.isPowerOf2()) {
    if (!(C->getValue().isPowerOf2() && Not != C->getValue()))
       warn("Bug triggered!");
     else /* Code transformation */ }
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Warning-Laden Compiler

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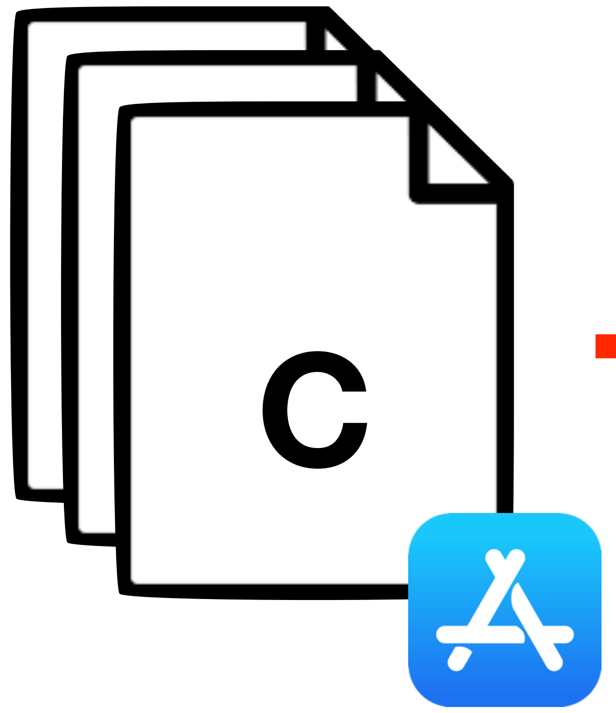


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```

Warning-Laden Compiler

101
011

grep logs
"Fixing patch reached!"
| "Bug triggered!"

Stage 2: Syntactic Binary Analysis

Buggy Compiler


```
if (Not.isPowerOf2())
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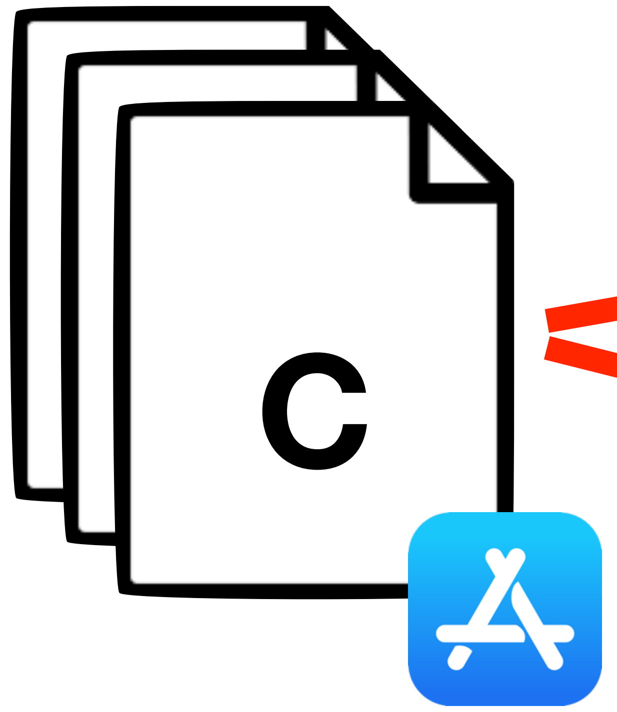
Fixed Compiler

Stage 2: Syntactic Binary Analysis

Buggy Compiler

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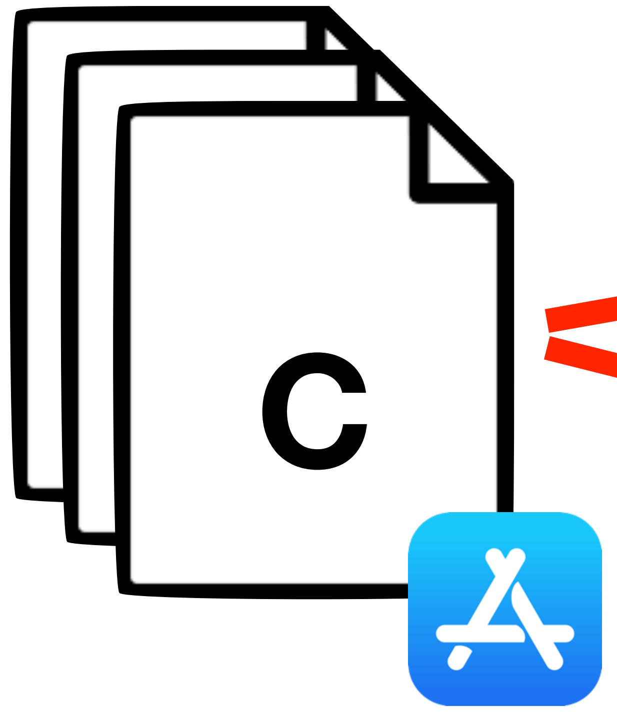


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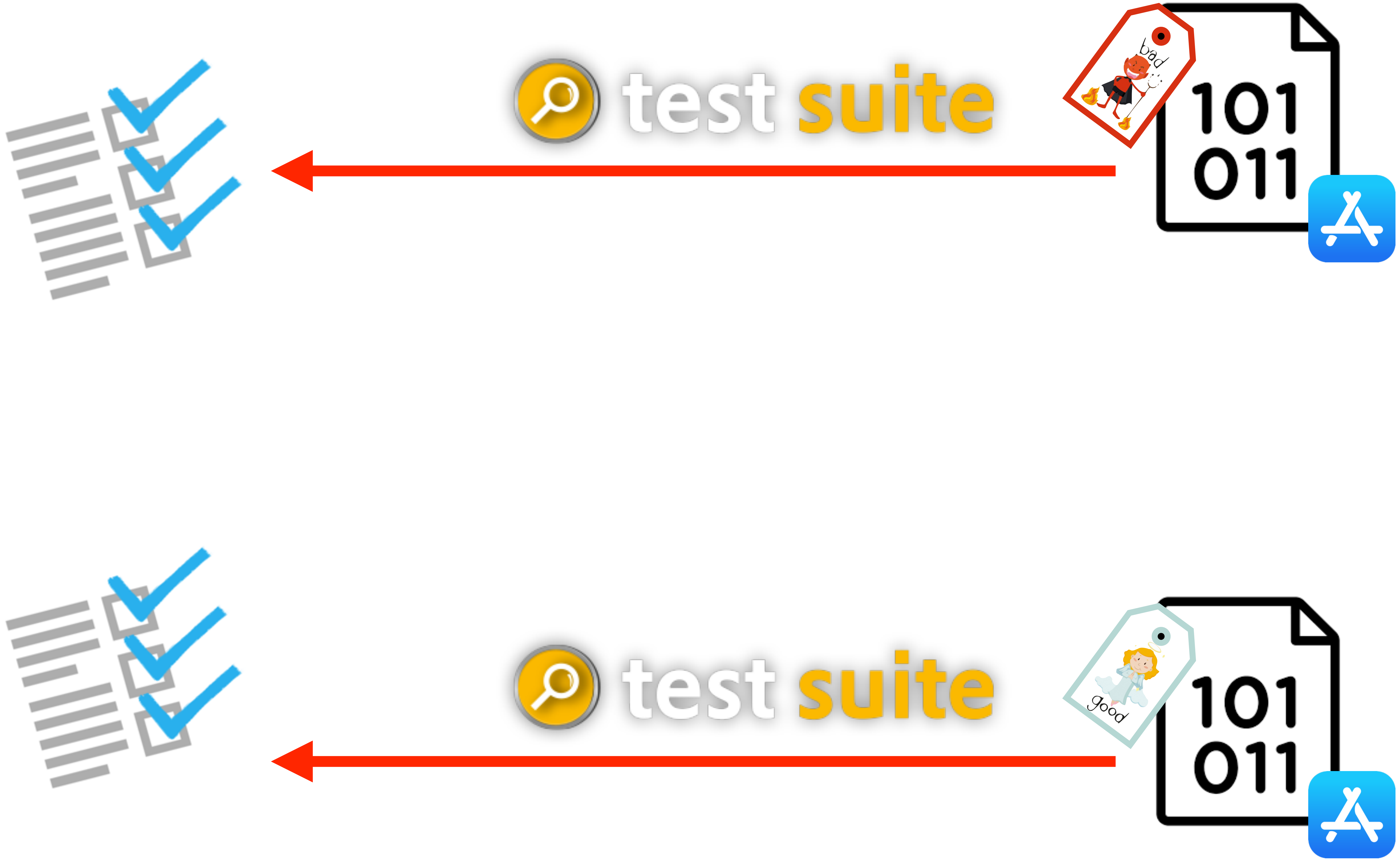

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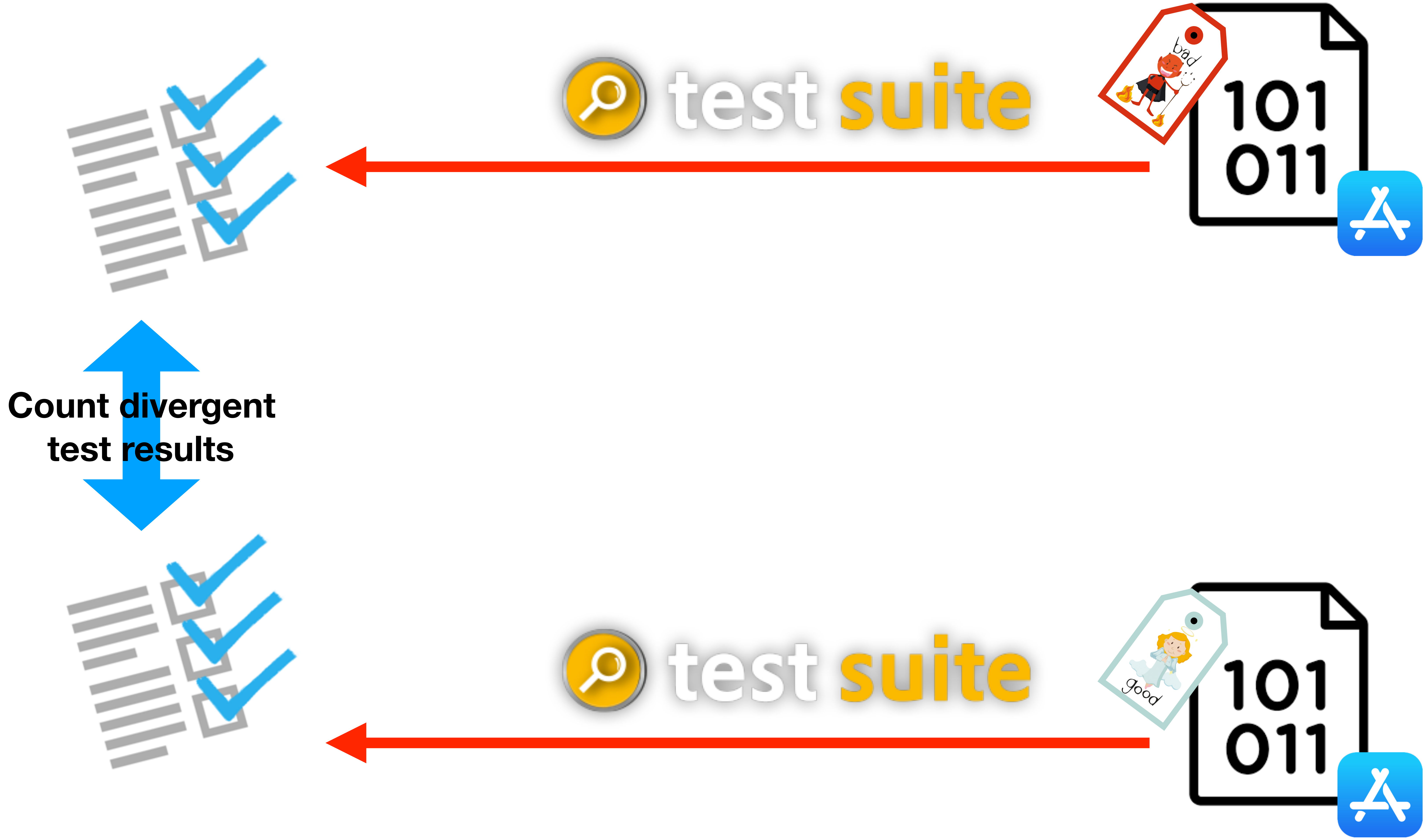
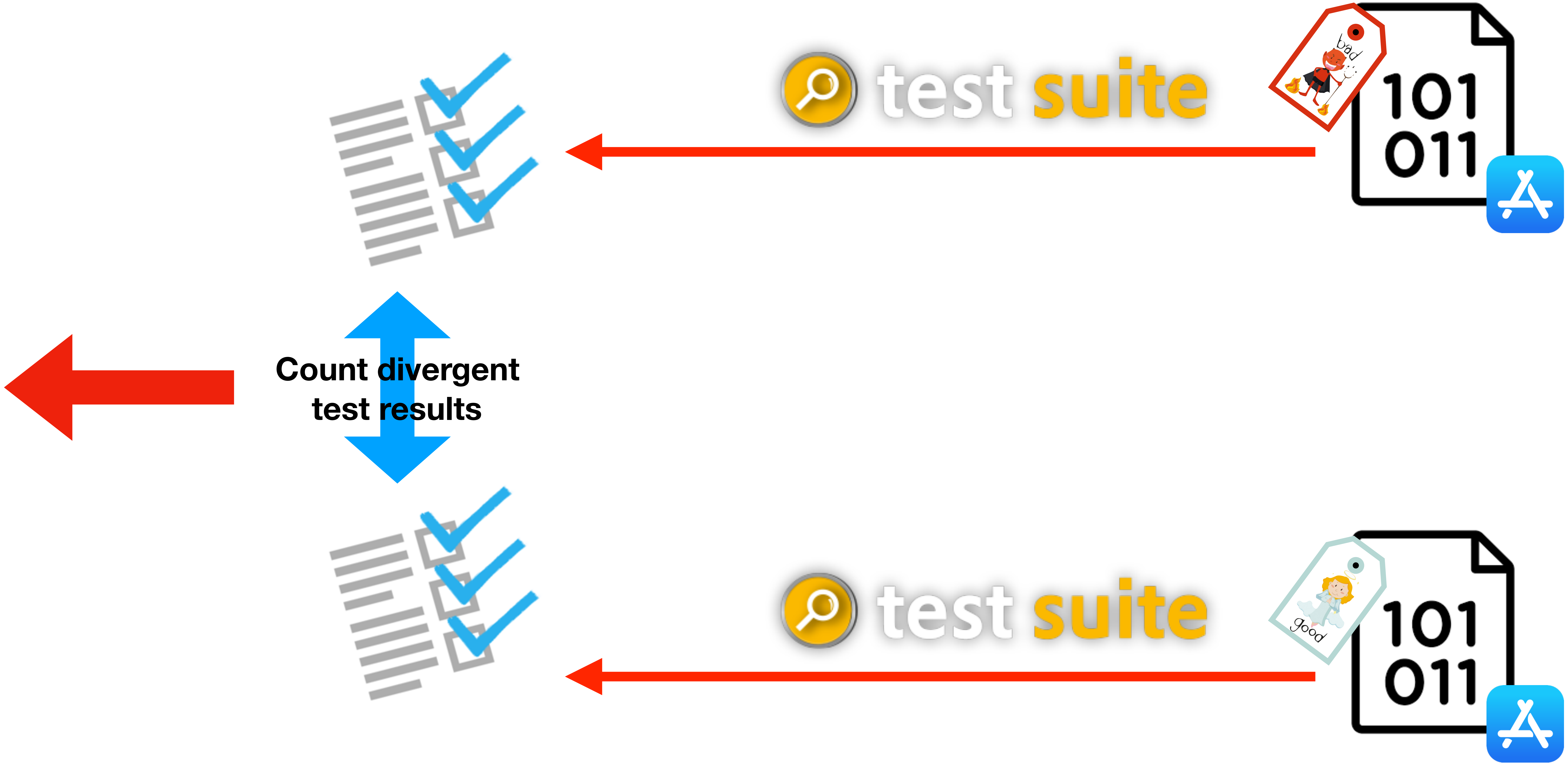


Stage 3: Dynamic Binary Analysis

No test divergence does not mean that binaries are semantically equivalent



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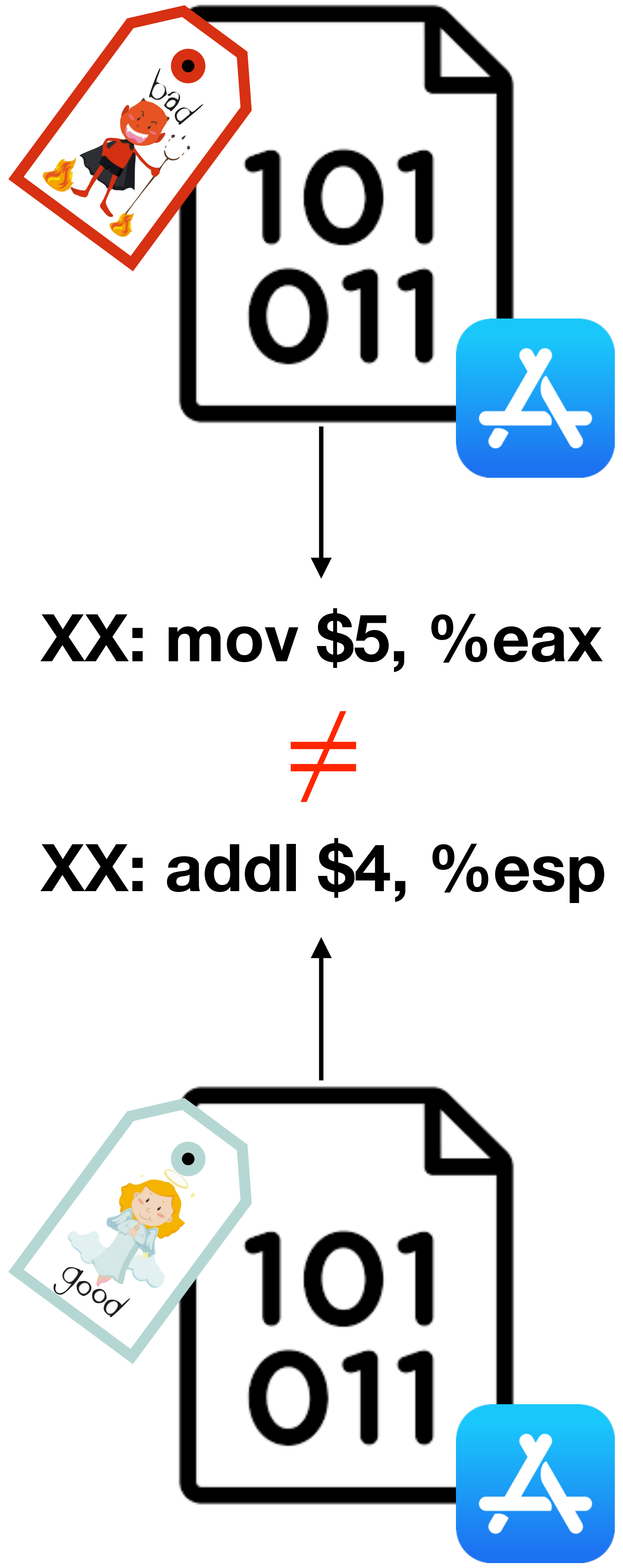
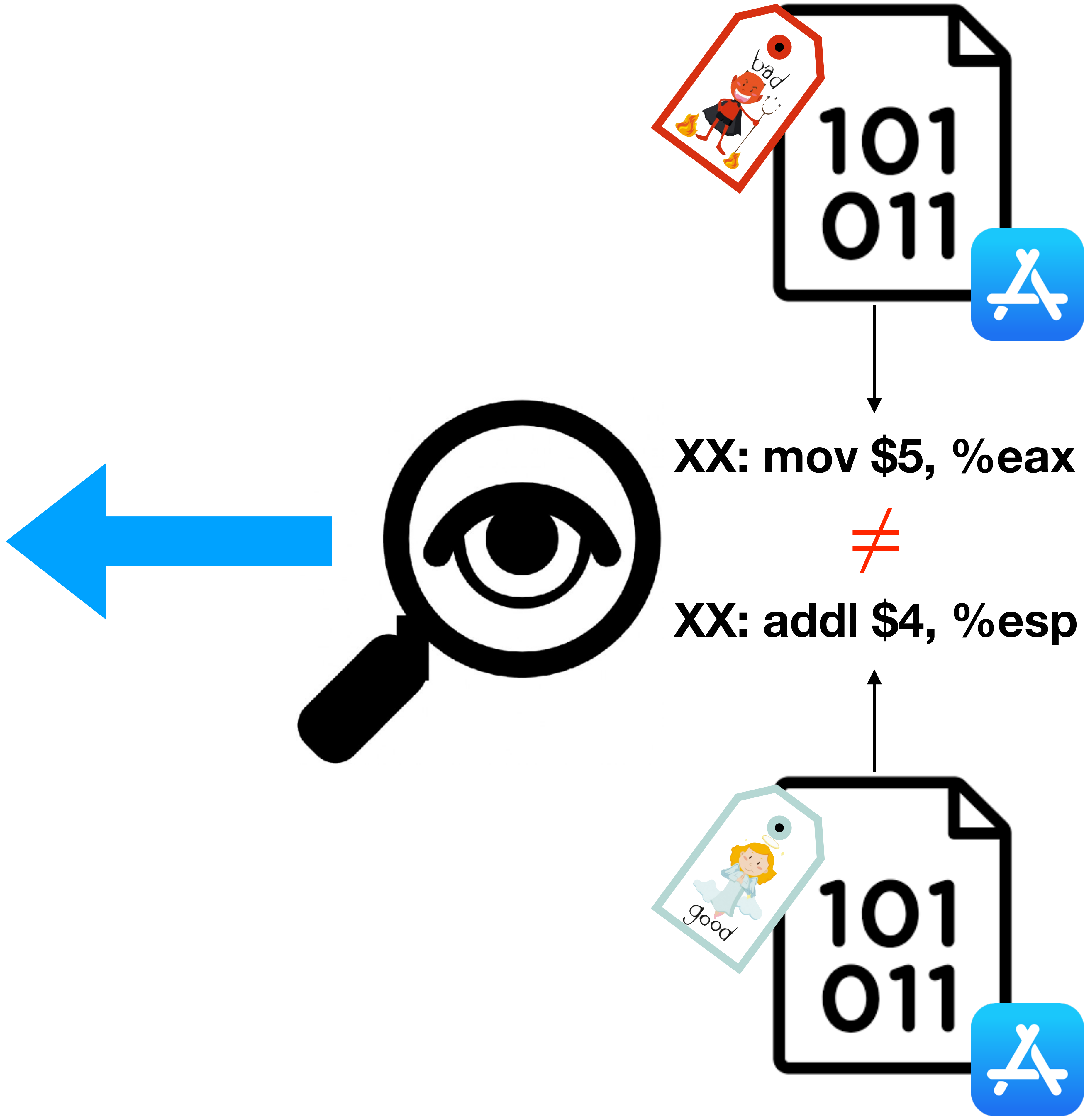


Stage 3: Dynamic Binary Analysis

Manual crafting of inputs to trigger runtime divergence



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Experiments (1/2)

We **apply** our bug impact measurement **methodology over** a **sample** of:

- 45 miscompilations bugs in the open-source LLVM compiler (C/C++ → x86_64)
  - 27 *fuzzer-found* bugs (12% of miscompilations from Csmith, EMI, Orange and Yarpgen)
  - 10 bugs detected by compiling *real code* and 8 bugs from Alive *formal verification* tool

Experiments (2/2)

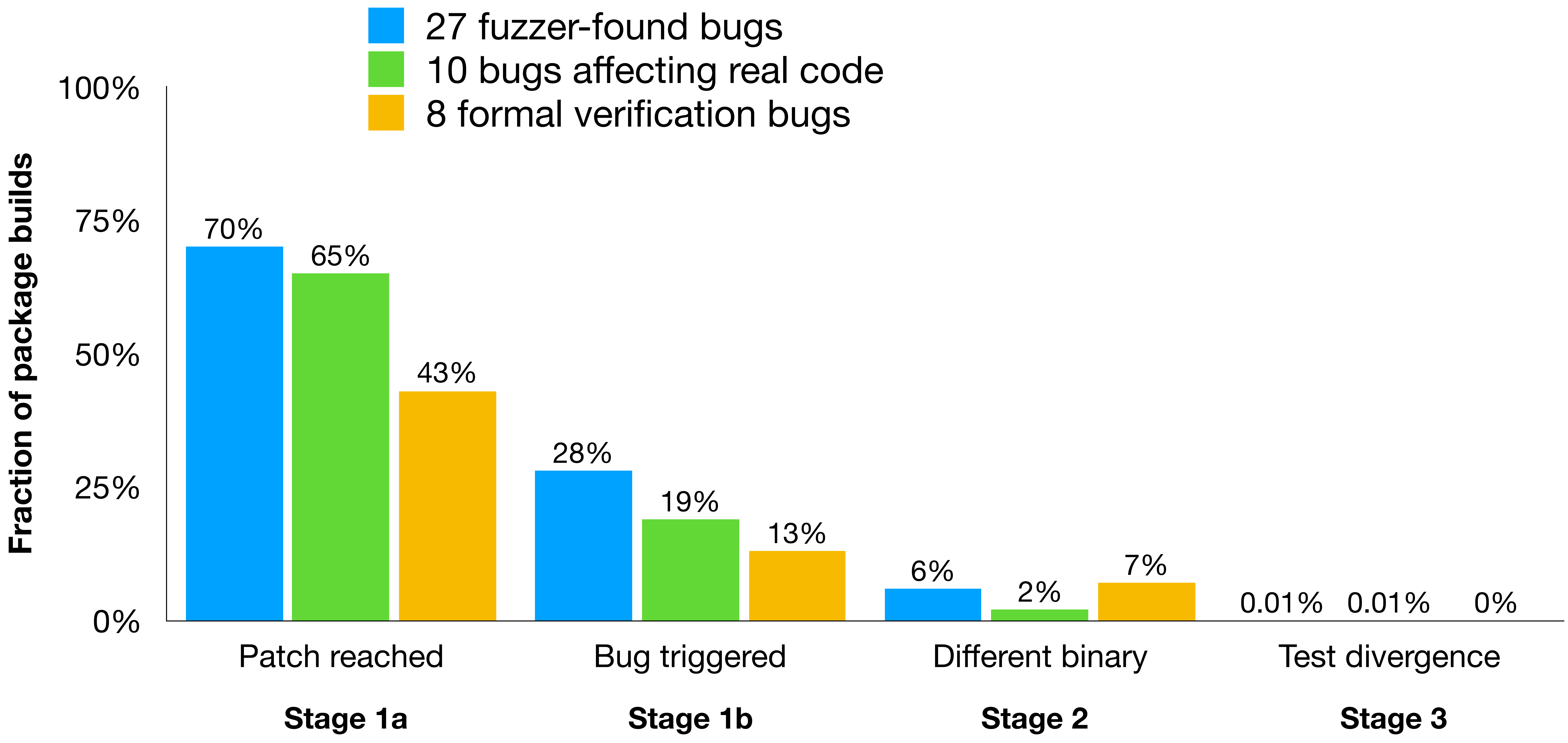
We **apply** our bug impact measurement **methodology over** a **sample** of:

- 309 Debian packages totalling 10M+ lines of C/C++ code
  - Not part of the LLVM *test suite*
  - *Diverse set of applications* w.r.t. type, size, popularity and maturity

APACHE™ samba > grep

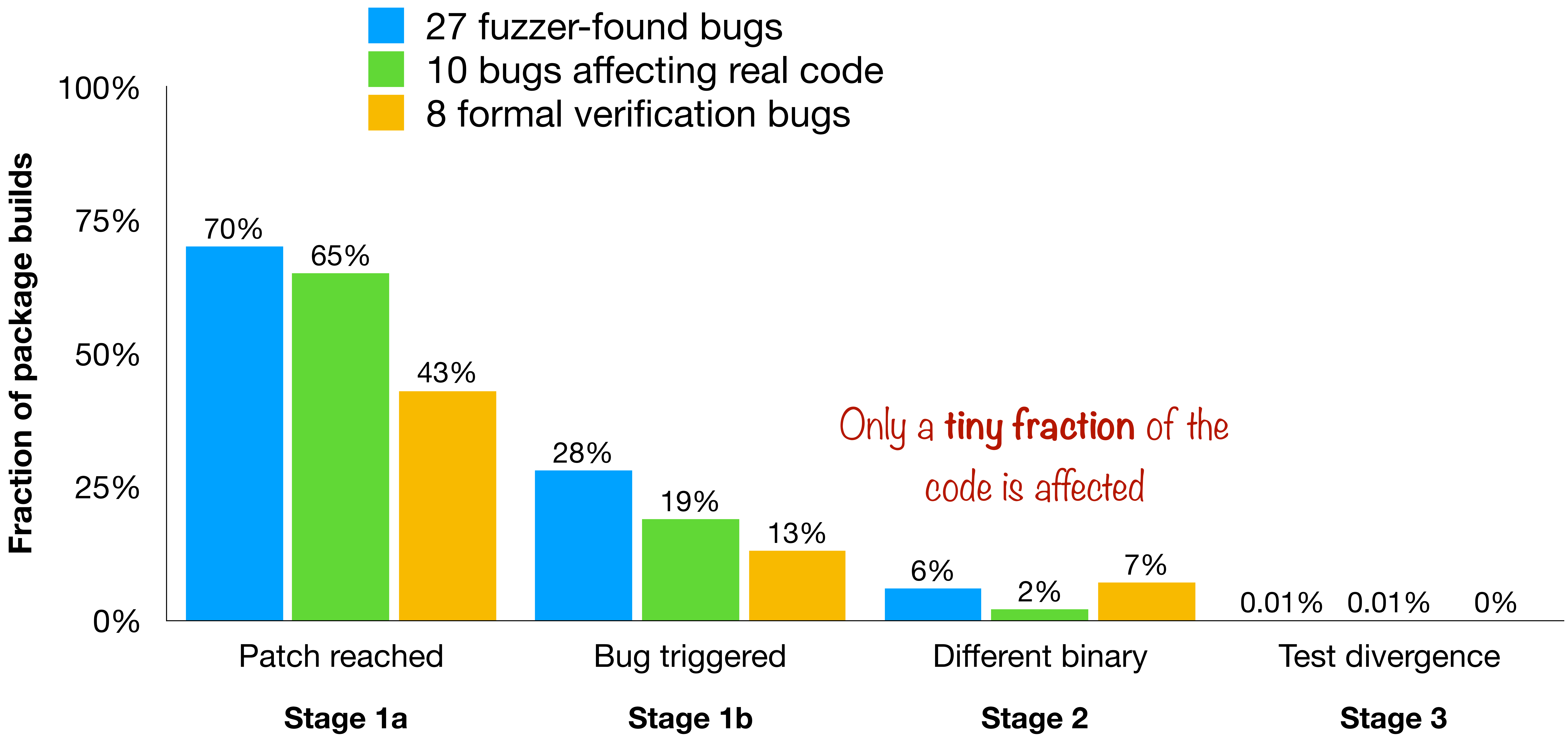
A lot of manual effort and 5 months of computation happen here

Results



27 fuzzer-found bugs
10 bugs affecting real code
8 formal verification bugs
Fraction of package builds
100%
75%
50%
25%
0%
70%
65%
43%
28%
19%
13%
6%
2%
7%
0.01%
0.01%
0%
Patch reached
Bug triggered
Different binary
Test divergence
Stage 1a
Stage 1b
Stage 2
Stage 3

Results



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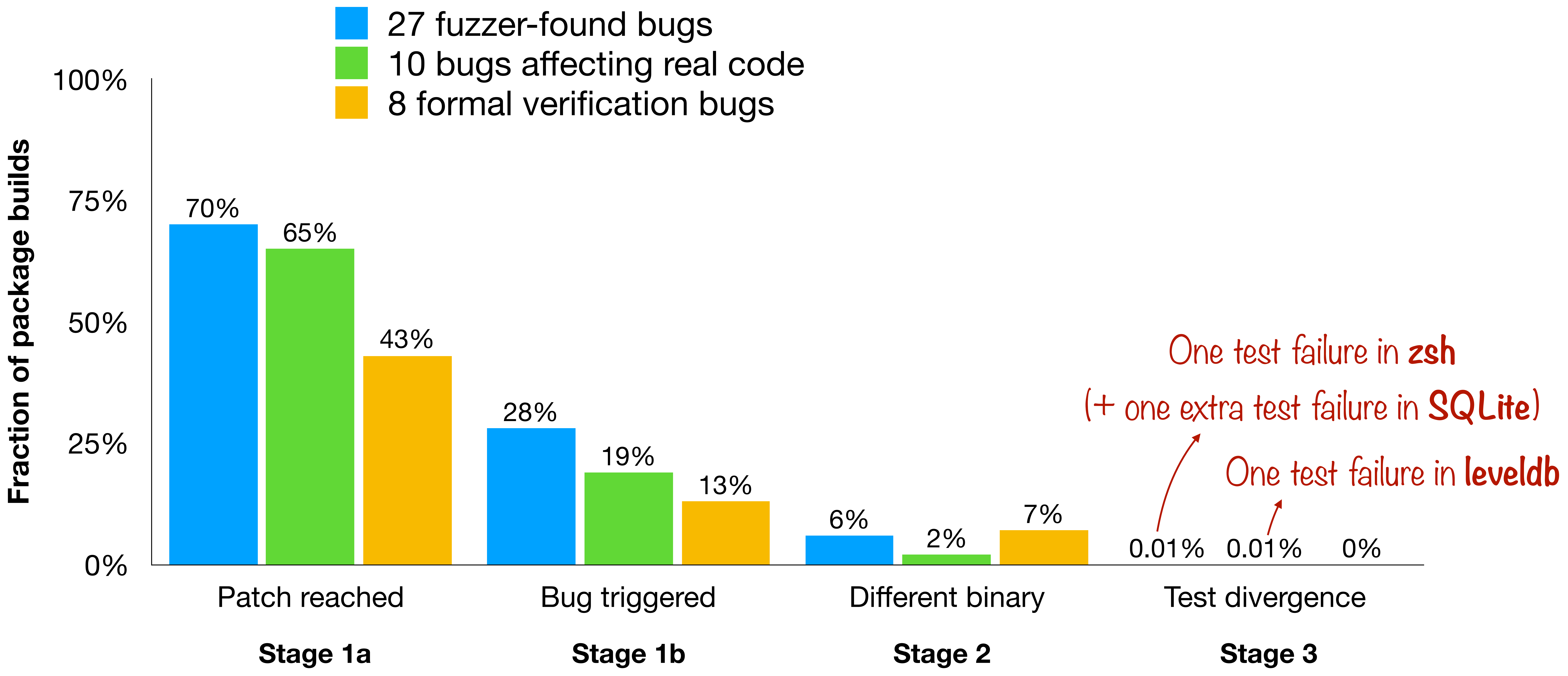
0%
70%
65%
43%
28%
19%
13%
6%
2%
7%
0.01%
0.01%
0%
Only a tiny fraction of the code is affected
Patch reached
Bug triggered
Different binary
Test divergence
Stage 1a
Stage 1b
Stage 2
Stage 3

Results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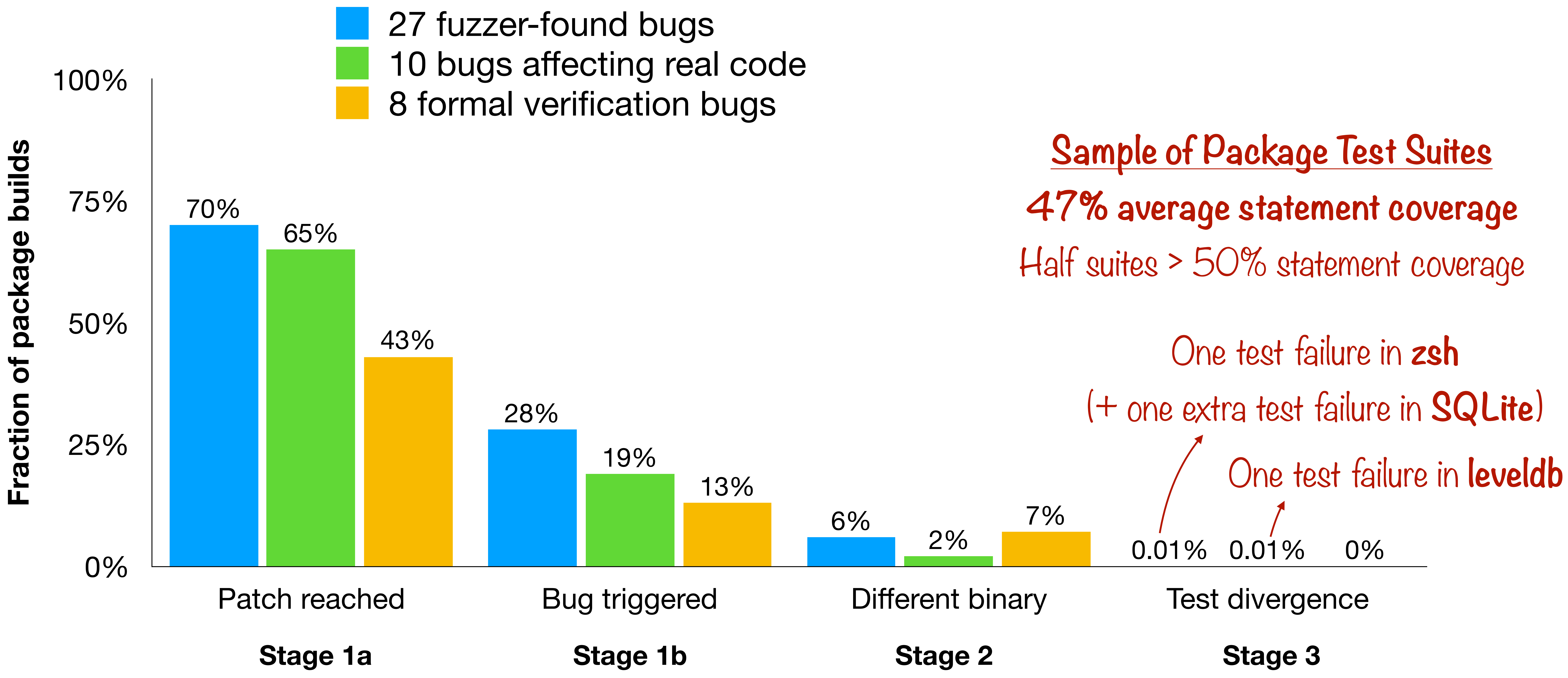
0%
One test failure in zsh
(+ one extra test failure in SQLite)
One test failure in leveldb
Patch reached
Stage 1a
Bug triggered
Stage 1b
Different binary
Stage 2
Test divergence
Stage 3

Results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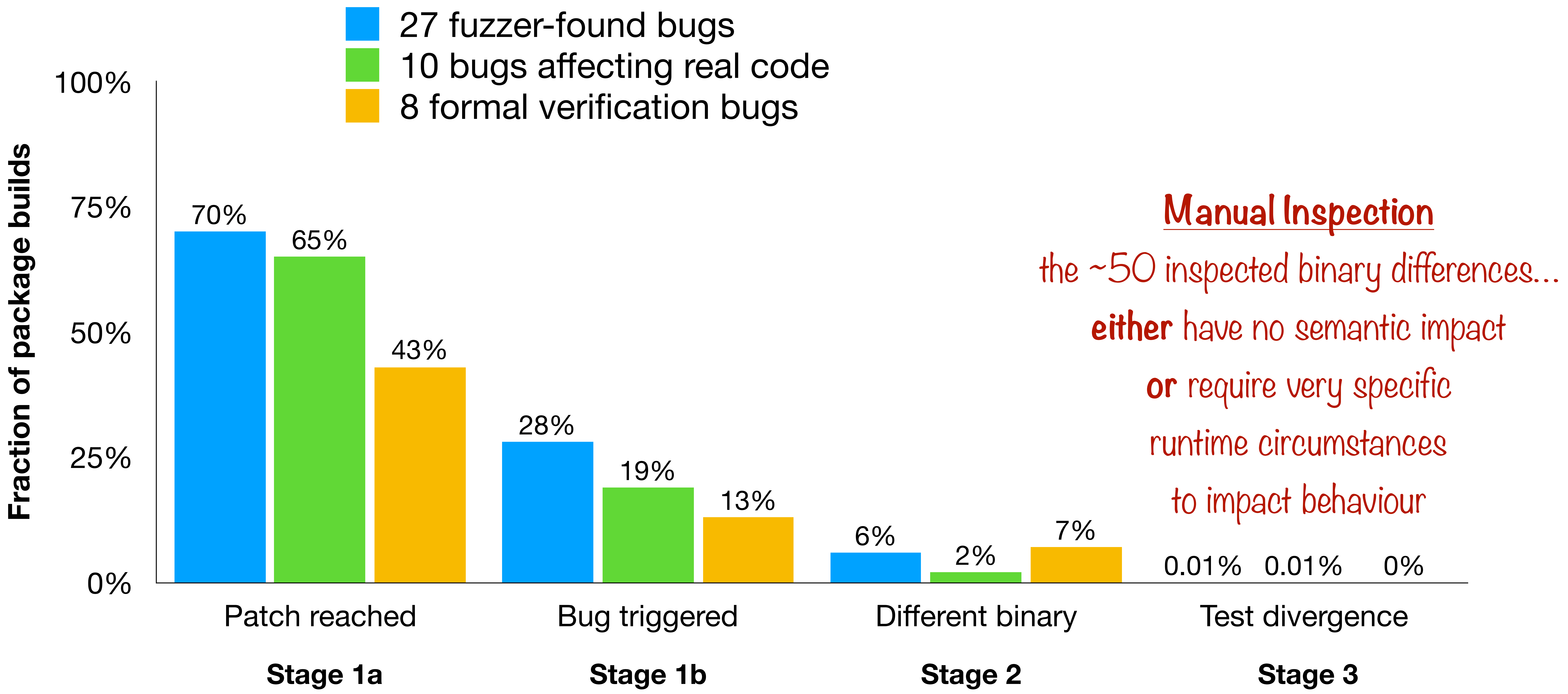
Patch reached
Bug triggered
Different binary
Test divergence
Stage 1a
Stage 1b
Stage 2
Stage 3
Sample of Package Test Suites
47% average statement coverage
Half suites > 50% statement coverage
One test failure in zsh
(+ one extra test failure in SQLite)
One test failure in leveldb

Results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Patch reached
Bug triggered
Different binary
Test divergence
Stage 1a
Stage 1b
Stage 2
Stage 3
Manual Inspection
the ~50 inspected binary differences…
either have no semantic impact
or require very specific
runtime circumstances
to impact behaviour

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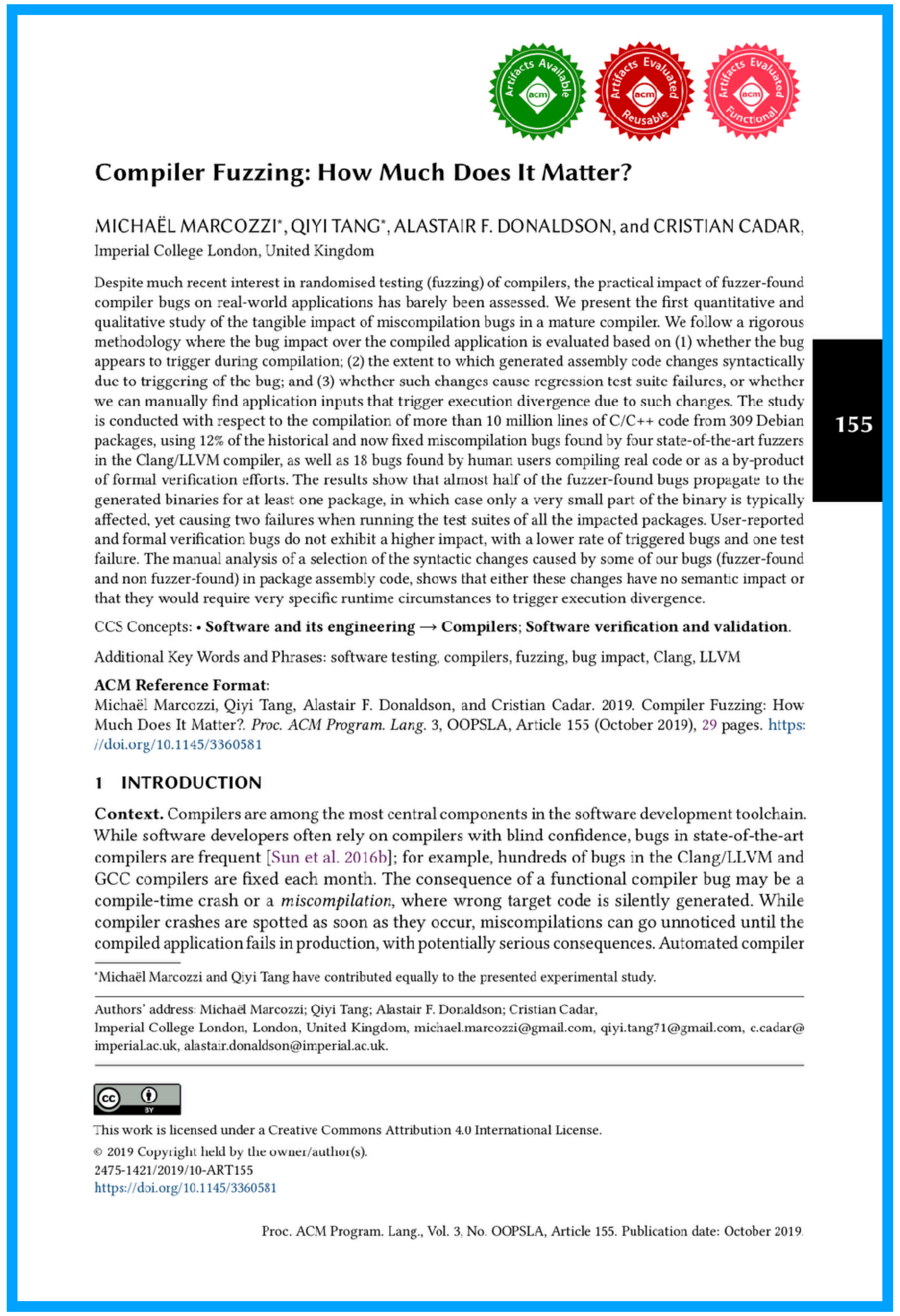
Conclusions

- Our **two major take-aways** are that miscompilations bugs in a mature compiler…
  - seldom impact app reliability (as probed by test suites and manual inspection)
  - have similar impact no matter they were found in real or fuzzer-generated code
- A **possible explainer** for these results is that, in a mature compiler…
  - all the bugs affecting patterns frequent in real code have already been fixed
  - only corner-case bugs remain, affecting real and generated code similarly

Thank you for listening!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Compiler Fuzzing: How Much Does It Matter?

MICHAËL MARCOZZI*, QIYI TANG*, ALASTAIR F. DONALDSON, and CRISTIAN CADAR,
Imperial College London, United Kingdom

Despite much recent interest in randomised testing (fuzzing) of compilers, the practical impact of fuzzer-found compiler bugs on real-world applications has barely been assessed. We present the first quantitative and qualitative study of the tangible impact of miscompilation bugs in a mature compiler. We follow a rigorous methodology where the bug impact over the compiled application is evaluated based on (1) whether the bug appears to trigger during compilation; (2) the extent to which generated assembly code changes syntactically due to triggering of the bug; and (3) whether such changes cause regression test suite failures, or whether we can manually find application inputs that trigger execution divergence due to such changes. The study is conducted with respect to the compilation of more than 10 million lines of C/C++ code from 309 Debian packages, using 12% of the historical and now fixed miscompilation bugs found by four state-of-the-art fuzzers in the Clang/LLVM compiler, as well as 18 bugs found by human users compiling real code or as a by-product of formal verification efforts. The results show that almost half of the fuzzer-found bugs propagate to the generated binaries for at least one package, in which case only a very small part of the binary is typically affected, yet causing two failures when running the test suites of all the impacted packages. User-reported and formal verification bugs do not exhibit a higher impact, with a lower rate of triggered bugs and one test failure. The manual analysis of a selection of the syntactic changes caused by some of our bugs (fuzzer-found and non fuzzer-found) in package assembly code, shows that either these changes have no semantic impact or that they would require very specific runtime circumstances to trigger execution divergence.

CCS Concepts: • **Software and its engineering → Compilers**; **Software verification and validation**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: software testing, compilers, fuzzing, bug impact, Clang, LLVM

ACM Reference Format:
Michaël Marcozzi, Qiyi Tang, Alastair F. Donaldson, and Cristian Cadar. 2019. Compiler Fuzzing: How Much Does It Matter?. *Proc. ACM Program. Lang.* 3, OOPSLA, Article 155 (October 2019), 29 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3360581

1 INTRODUCTION

Context. Compilers are among the most central components in the software development toolchain. While software developers often rely on compilers with blind confidence, bugs in state-of-the-art compilers are frequent [Sun et al. 2016b]; for example, hundreds of bugs in the Clang/LLVM and GCC compilers are fixed each month. The consequence of a functional compiler bug may be a compile-time crash or a *miscompilation*, where wrong target code is silently generated. While compiler crashes are spotted as soon as they occur, miscompilations can go unnoticed until the compiled application fails in production, with potentially serious consequences. Automated compiler

*Michaël Marcozzi and Qiyi Tang have contributed equally to the presented experimental study.

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https://doi.org/10.1145/3360581

Proc. ACM Program. Lang., Vol. 3, No. OOPSLA, Article 155. Publication date: October 2019.

> Preprint and artifact available

https://srg.doc.ic.ac.uk/projects/compiler-bugs

> Postdoc position available

https://srg.doc.ic.ac.uk/vacancies/postdoc-comp-pass-19

www.marcozzi.net

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