

Holiday Hoopla 2024

Thank you so much for participating in Holiday Hoopla! We hope you enjoyed your short journey through history and had as much fun solving as we did creating. ❤️

A special congratulations to our top three teams:

- 🥇 **Kwargers**
- 🥈 **Skype eSports**
- 🥉 **Vehappy Veholidays**

We'd also like to give a special shout-out to any teams who have returned to our puzzle hunt for the **fifth time**! We're so grateful to have shared this experience with all of you, and we hope to see you in future years as well.

Thank you to everyone who filled out our [feedback form](#). It will remain open for anyone else who would like to share their thoughts—we appreciate all feedback!

Team Shoutouts

We couldn't resist celebrating some unique achievements from this year's hunt.

Congratulations to:

- 🚀 *Spacetime Pioneer*, for solving the first puzzle of the hunt.
Quarantine Decrypters: who solved *Walk the Clank* 1m 42s after the hunt started
- 🌌 *Quantum Leaper*, for cracking the meta first.
imaima: who solved the meta 10m 14s after its release
- 🎯 *Anomaly Avoider*, for having the fewest incorrect guesses (excluding *Poetry for Neanderthals* partial guesses)
Just Cameron: who completed the hunt with 0 incorrect guesses
- ⌚ *To the End of Time*, for solving the final puzzle before the hunt ended.
FAUdacious: who solved *Hieroglyphic Cryptarithmic* 15m 45s before hunt end
- 📡 *Message Into the Void*
Vehappy Veholidays: who submitted the answer
BEFRANKWITHMEISTHISONEIMPOSSIBLE for *Decades Away* and contributing to alerting us that the puzzle difficulty needed adjusting.

The rest of the wrap-up may contain spoilers for puzzles.

Timeline

We chose the theme in October and began drafting the meta soon after, giving us our parallel timelines mechanic. We finalized all the puzzles by December 23, allowing us ample time for a thorough review before the hunt began.

Thank you to our testsolvers, whose quick feedback and invaluable insights kept us on track!

Reflections

We were really proud of how the hunt turned out this year! There was really solid engagement and the new website made everything go so much more smoothly.

Out of all teams registered,

- 139 teams solved at least one puzzle
- 71 teams solved the meta to return to the present day
- 61 teams solved all nine puzzles

Feedback Highlights

From the 20 responses in our feedback form, *Slipping and Sliding* was voted favorite puzzle, while *Decades Away* was voted least favorite puzzle. We're well aware that *Decades Away* was frustrating for many teams and this was a very valuable learning experience for our writers.

You also expressed that you enjoyed the relative difficulty of the hunt, which is intended to skew easier and be accessible to first time puzzle hunters! This is a value that we have as writers and plan to keep in years to come.

Looking Ahead

Our team is expanding and our brains are storming together on how to make the hunt more exciting next year. Nothing's finalized yet, but we're noodling on:

- ✨ Which features to add to our shiny new website
- 🧩 Adding more writers to increase hunt size and puzzle variety
- 🔧 New mechanics such as different meta unlock criteria to improve the hunt experience

Fun Stories

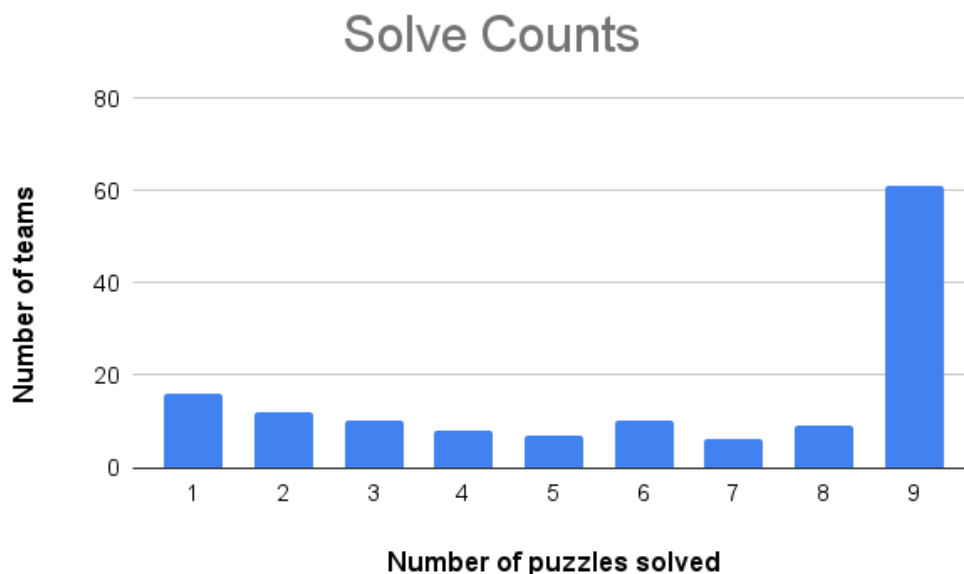
- “Near the beginning of the hunt, I happened to check the leaderboard and saw the team 天南地北 in first place despite having zero solves. 天南地北 translated to “From North to South”, so we were convinced there was some sort of puzzle hidden in the leaderboard.... until 天南地北 disappeared from the top :p” **–Vehappy Veholidays**

(Context from our developer: There was a bug in our code initially that sorted all the teams alphabetically... except for 天南地北! We tried to fix it as soon as we noticed, but not fast enough to avoid it serving as an unintentional red herring.)

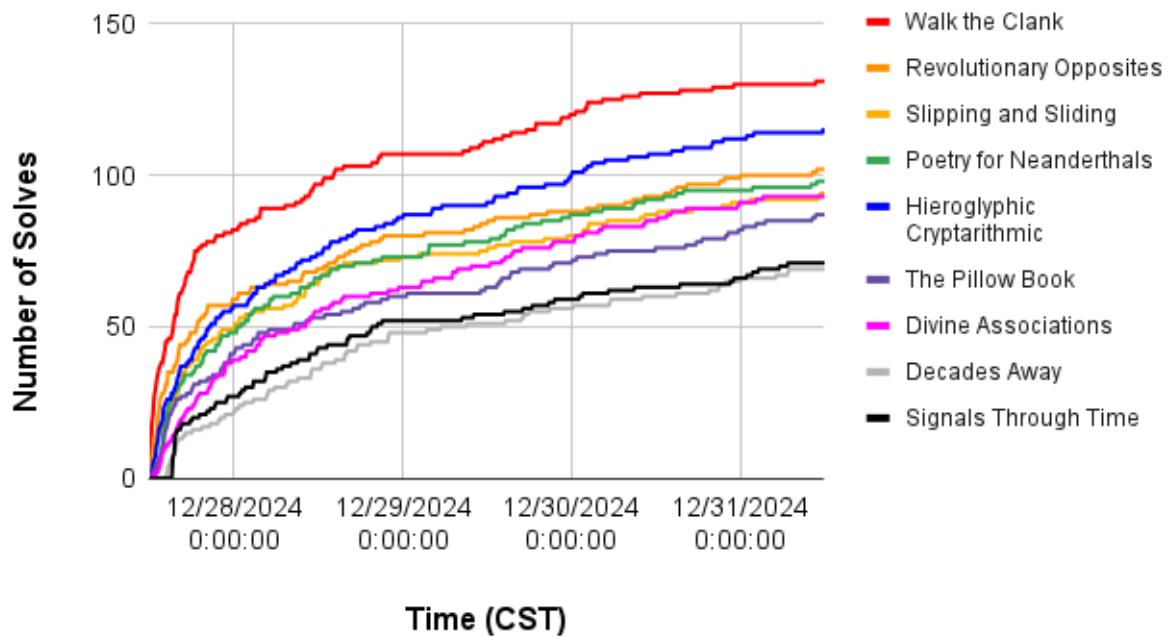
- “My one daughter wasn’t initially helping us...but was looking over our shoulders and immediately recognized all the Hamilton lyrics (when my other daughter & I were stumped on that puzzle) and then very excitedly helped us solve. And then mocked us for not realizing it was all from Hamilton.” **–Abysmal Chunks**
- One team fully leaned into the icy theme of *Slipping and Sliding*, submitting 93 creative ice-related (mostly) guesses. Some highlights included FROZENDESSERT, POLARICECAPS, FREEZETAG, and our personal favorite: ZAMBONI. Ironically, the actual answer wasn’t directly ice-related, but we loved their dedication to the theme and enjoyed reading through their guesses!

Hunt Statistics

Here are some graphs and tables!



Solves Over Time



Stats by Puzzle

Puzzle Name	Solves	No Solves (for teams with at least one solve)	Guesses
Walk the Clank	131	8	159
Revolutionary Opposites	102	37	311
Slipping and Sliding	94	45	310
Poetry for Neanderthals	98	41	2000
Hieroglyphic Cryptarithmic	115	24	133
The Pillow Book	87	52	193
Divine Associations	93	46	236
Decades Away	69	70	275
Signals Through Time [Meta]	71	68	187

Tech

We created a custom website using Google Firebase to host the frontend (React/Typescript/CSS-in-JS), and relying on Firebase Realtime Database and Firebase Functions for the backend. The cost was very cheap (~\$1 for hosting, plus the domain registration fee), and we were getting about 200 requests per minute at peak.

Most of the website work was completed in 2023, with some additional features added before and during (*cough*hint voucher*cough*) this year's hunt to help it run even more smoothly.

Credits

- **Coordinators:** Vivi, Sisi
- **Puzzle writers:** Ananya, Cindy, Ian
- **Web developer:** Cindy
- **Testsolvers:** Coby Tran, Daniel Sun, Eric Higgins, Jake A, Tommy Jiang, Tracey Lin

Thanks again and Happy Holidays!