

Holiday Hoopla 2025

Thank you for joining us for 🍰🥥🍊 Holiday Hoopla's 2025 Feast! 🍊🥥🍰. This was our **6th year** hosting Holiday Hoopla and was our biggest initiative yet with **13 total puzzles**, **7 writers** (led by Ananya, Lead Writer and Coordinator), and **8 test solvers** (coordinated by Cindy, Lead Editor). We hope you enjoyed Holiday Hoopla as a family and beginner-friendly puzzle hunt and we intend to keep this spirit for years to come!

Let's start with a 🥂 toast to our first 3 teams to complete the meta:

- 🥇 vehe2muchsaltymbnonhooplaofsteele (2 hrs, 25 mins, 24 seconds)
- 🥈 JCroceo
- 🥉 VehemEvolt, just slip a sable under the tree, for me. Been an awful good girl

If you read nothing else, please take a minute of your time to **fill out** [this feedback form](#). It will help us make a better hunt for you all each year!

Achievements

Congratulations to:

- 126 teams that solved at least one puzzle
- 74 teams that completed the meta
- 44 teams that achieved the maximum 1400 points

And of course, some notable achievements for this year:

- 🍌 **Breaking the Fast** goes to **JCroceo** for solving the first puzzle of the hunt by solving SET the Table in 3mins and 45secs.
- 🗡️ **Sharpest Knives** goes to **chocoMint** for being the only team with no incorrect guesses or partial answers this hunt. You were on point!
- 🛎️ **Last Call** goes to **Team Nevermore** for getting the last solve in by solving The Feast 4mins and 23secs before the hunt closed.

Want to Join the Team?

If you enjoyed the hunt and are interested in helping out with our next hunt, please [fill out this 30 second interest form](#). This isn't a commitment, just a way for us to gauge interest! We'll reach back out closer to June for writers and October for test solvers to confirm your commitment.

The remainder of this wrap-up may contain spoilers for puzzles

Timeline

This year, with a bigger team and bigger hunt, we kicked-off in August and went through 3 key phases:

Meta + Brainstorming Phase: Aug-Sept

As we had a writer work on a meta, the remaining writers collaborated on brainstorming by sharing our favorite puzzles and drawing inspiration from other hunts as we prepared our Holiday Hoopla puzzles.

Writing Phase: Sept-Nov

Once the feeder answers for the meta were fixed, writers then worked on realizing their pitched ideas into full drafts. Ananya (Lead Writer) and Cindy (Lead Editor) would then test solve the puzzle and provide feedback, especially to support our first-time writers! During this time, writers test-solved each other's puzzles for preliminary feedback.

Testing and Iterating Phase: Nov-Dec

As more puzzles were written, we started sending out waves of puzzles for 2-3 rounds of external test-solving. We are overall very pleased with the quality of puzzles that came through after iterating on test-solver feedback.

Reflections

We're very proud of the puzzle diversity and creativity, difficulty spread, and length of the hunt this year.

Stats

Out of 161 registered teams...

- 126 teams completed at least one puzzle
- 74 teams solved the meta
- 61 teams solved all 13 puzzles

In terms of hint usage...

- 36 teams unlocked at least 1 hint
- 16 freeform hint requests were requested
- **Slice of Pi** had the most hint unlocks at 11

Feedback

As of right now, we have 24 responses on the feedback form and we can glean:

- **Every puzzle** (except one) **is at least one team's "favorite" puzzle** on the funness ranking with a plurality of responses favoring **Recipes**.
- The exception puzzle is **Foraging**. That was the **"least favorite" puzzle** of the hunt overall.

Hunters enjoyed...

...the beginner-friendly difficulty, the pre-written hint, and the formatted spreadsheets. We'll be sure to keep these features in the future!

Hunters would like to see improvements in...

...hosting more of the hunt directly into the website itself, more content in the hunt, and a more climactic and satisfying meta-solving experience.

Looking Forward

In terms of how the hunt went itself, there was a bit **more errata than we would have liked**, which was a function of reduced staffing as we got closer to the holiday time. This year, we plan to start our process even earlier to give more time for end to end quality assurance even after all the puzzles get uploaded to the final website. We expect the hunt size to be comparable to this year.

In addition to that, we'll be working on seeing **which features we can add to our website** to smoothen out the puzzle solving experience even further.

Fun Stories

If you're still reading, enjoy some of these anecdotes from the hunt!

1. *Halfway through the hunt, a team called "Last Place" appeared on our leaderboard and immediately unlocked every hint. They consisted of a single member named "Slow and steady..." and what we can only assume was a highly theoretical email address. After showing no signs of attempting to solve any puzzles, we decided to support their apparent mission and manually unlocked the meta hint for them, dropping their score to the absolute minimum of -140 points. We wish them great success in their quest to come in Last Place.*
2. *With our theme and all of our answers being real foods, we fully expected a bit of enthusiastic server spamming. Reading through all the guesses and backsolve attempts was quite funny and mouthwatering, while also introducing us to a couple of foods we hadn't heard of before like SARSAPARILLA! One particular favorite answer was the ELIXIR OF LIFE, which we wish we had but alas.*

3. *Shout out to the team name "I really love Nanahira. Like a lot. Like a whole lot. You have no idea." I did look up who Nanahira was because of this. You've succeeded in spreading the word of Nanahira.*

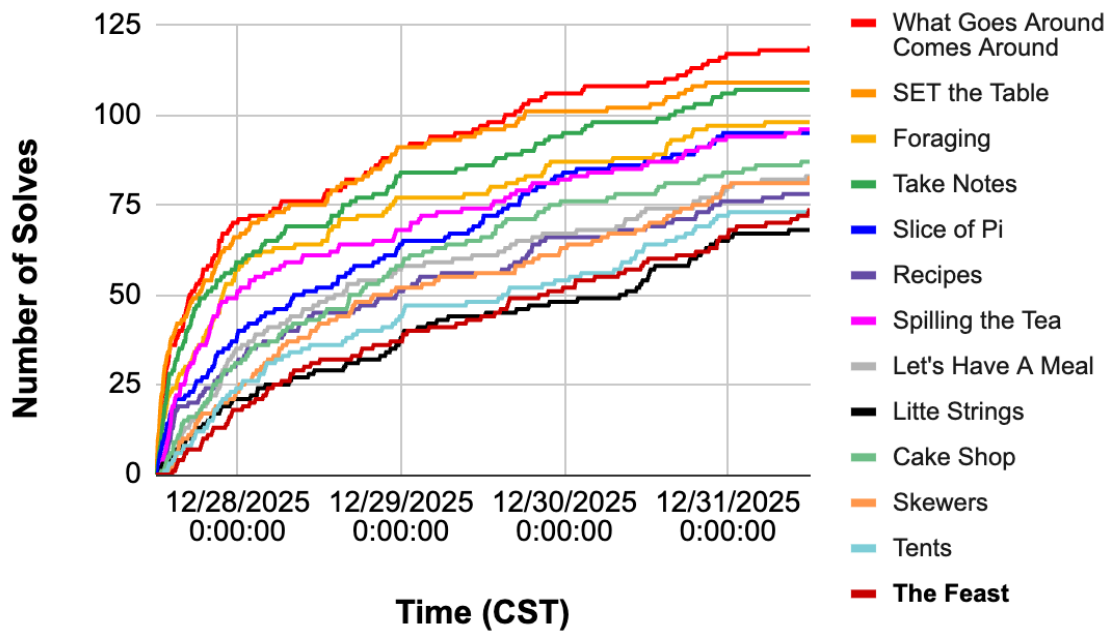
Tech

We have 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 (~\$1.5 for hosting and functions, plus the domain registration fee), and we were getting about 4.5 QPS at peak.

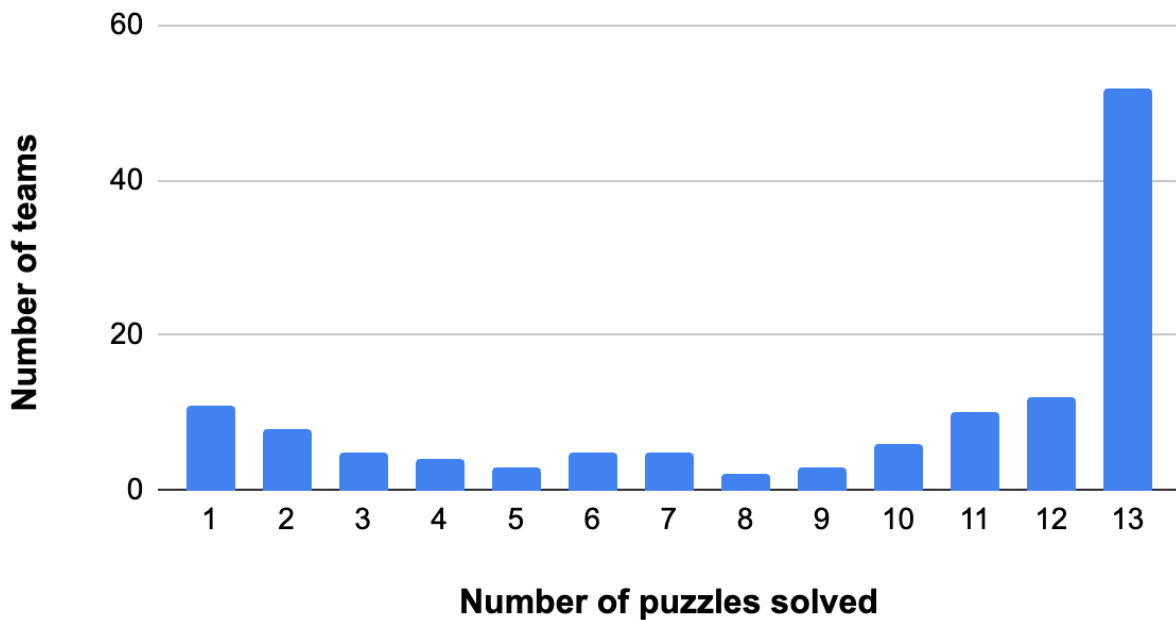
Charts and Graphs

Puzzle Name	Solved	Not Solved (for teams with at least one solve)	Guesses
What Comes Around Goes Around	119	7	157
SET the Table	109	17	133
Foraging	98	28	139
Take Notes	107	19	145
Slice of Pi	95	31	201
Recipes	78	48	185
Spilling the Tea	96	30	199
Let's Have a Meal	83	43	144
Little Strings	68	58	281
Cake Shop	87	39	184
Skewers	83	43	178
Tents	74	52	158
The Feast [Meta]	74	52	664

Solves Over Time



Solve Counts



Credits

- **Co-founders:** Vivi, Sisi
- **Puzzle writers:** Ananya (Coordinator, Lead Writer), Anna, Jace, jah, KP, Min, Syfirry
- **Editor:** Cindy
- **Web developer:** Cindy
- **Testsolvers:** Art, Celena, Coby Tran, Daniel Sun, Jake A, Meso, Tommy Jiang, Tracey Lin

Thanks again, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year!