

Forum: [Hack Forums](#)

Thread: [\[Feedback & Walkthrough\] Festive Crypto Challenge](#)

Ronan. - December 10, 2016, 6:46 pm

Hey all,

I recently ran a puzzle contest over here: <https://hackforums.net/showthread.php?tid=5475443>

The purpose of this thread is to get some feedback as to what you guys think of these ARG-type puzzles as opposed to the "Decode this from X to Y then from Y to Z" style I see quite often.

Spoiler Warning: Although the competition is over, if you would still like to attempt the challenge, stop reading now.

Step 1 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) This step simply involved either highlighting the text or quoting the original post:

Step 2 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) Another introductory step, converting this hex into ASCII provides the following link: <http://pastebin.com/FUTw3CLa>

Step 3 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) This step involved extracting the capitalised characters from the pastebin and using them with the Tinyurl link

Step 4 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) Similar to the null cipher in step 2, this involved taking the first letter of each sentence and adding it to an imgur link.

Step 5 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) After going to the imgur link, one can either squint at the corner or just playing around with the levels/curves to reveal an email address.

Step 6 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) Once emailing the given address, they'll receive the following reply:
HZMGZHSVOKVI185@bash:~\$ help
help: command not found

As you can see, this is presented in the vain of a Linux terminal.

This is the first step that requires a bit more lateral thinking to get through as one needs to identify that @bash is actually hinting towards the common cipher known as 'AtBash'. Entering the code into a translator such as this: <http://rumkin.com/tools/cipher/atbash.php> provides the following:
SANTASHELPER185

Step 7 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) The code given follows very similar tendencies of online usernames. After trying the username on the 'top tier' social media websites, it's revealed to be a Twitter handle: <https://twitter.com/santashelper185>

Our dubious hacker may have the skills it takes to take over Santa's server farm, but hasn't yet figured out how to delete a tweet. On the timeline, the youtube code "1zMLo5t_M5s" is given. Fun

fact, to get an underscore in the URL, I had to reupload the video 15 times. I wanted there to be a non-alphanumeric character to allow people to cross out a few options

Step 8 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) After getting some inspiration from the video, the next challenge is to figure out the icon of the youtube channel has a link: <http://pastebin.com/sUzUPMeW>

This was actually available after receiving the email, though they wouldn't be able to complete the puzzle without finding it via the youtube video.

The clue in the image requested 'help'. This was a hint towards the HF [Help Docs](#). From there, using the array notation provided on the pastebin from the last step highlights the following:

Step 9 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) The resulting tinyurl links to the address "http://0.49.175.246/". Obviously this isn't going to work, to get any useful information from this it needs to be converted to base 10: 3256310

Step 10 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) This number then links to an old thread of mine: <https://hackforums.net/showthread.php?tid=3256310>

One of my less subtle clues, but I mentioned 'readit', meaning Reddit. As well as giving a username. One of the comments of this user provides the final url: /= 4j7fCDRV + 1zMLXXX?X??X?X?XAECORRUPT

Step 11 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) Let's start with the first part of the link, "4j7fCDRV ". This can be followed to a pastebin link: <http://pastebin.com/4j7fCDRV>.

To solve this, the weighted total of these brackets must be calculated. It's possible to do this by hand... though I'd recommend just writing a small script to do this. After assigning values to (and), the result is 246.

Step 12 Spoiler ([Click to View](#)) If they found the youtube url, this is a fairly simple step. If they didn't, there might be some struggling until they figure out the remaining half of the url. Going back to santa's hacker's favourite video and checking the page's source, we can see that the video contains a tag called 'naughtysanta', not visible in the description.

Visiting the combined link (tinyurl.com/246naughtysanta) takes them to a link to post the top secret password to the thread.

Big congrats to [MeshCollider](#) for being the first to crack the code.

I'd also like to give [Wares](#) and [Yoyo](#) a little shoutout for their progress, the last couple of challenges were a very close race ?

I'd love to hear everybody's feedback on this, especially so the types of puzzles involved, their difficulty and the overall competition length.

Cheers ?

SIM-2015410 - December 11, 2016, 3:14 pm

Very interesting walkthrough, its funny the things I actually missed like the Imgur down the side of the sentences in step 4 haha. Step 8 was definitely the hardest for me personally, had to get so much hints before we worked it out

Stealth™ - December 11, 2016, 3:20 pm

Thanks for finally letting us know how to do it!

If you decide to make another in the future, try to not have clues for later steps in earlier steps (i.e.

the pastebin link in the profile picture, as that's what confused me and a few others)

Biocides - December 12, 2016, 5:23 am

(Dec 10, 2016 07:46 PM)Ronan. Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#)

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Cheers ?This was an amazing Challenge! Really fun, the last 2-4 steps were really tricky :P
Gratz to @Mesh to winning this :P