

FLARE

Flare-On 6: Challenge 7 – WOPR.EXE

Challenge Author: Sandor Nemes (@sandornemes)

*“I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought,
but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”*
– attributed to Albert Einstein

OVERVIEW

The challenge consists of a huge, 5 MB executable file called *wopr.exe* (any similarity in pronunciation to a product of a widely-known fast food restaurant chain is merely coincidental). A quick Google search reveals that WOPR stands for War Operation Plan Response, a military supercomputer from the 1983 movie classic, WarGames.

Upon executing the file, you are presented with a terminal screen, similar to the one in Figure 1:

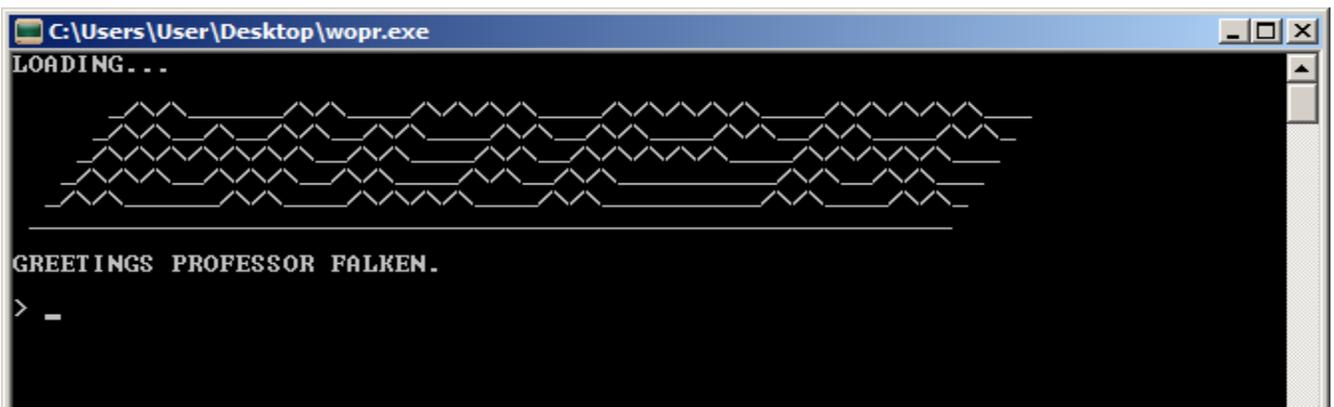


Figure 1 – Welcome screen

The program is equipped with a super smart military-grade artificial intelligence module, so if you enter a greeting, it greets you back. Unfortunately, due to shortage of resources we were only able to embed a stripped-down demo version of the AI module, so don't expect it to do anything considerably fancier than that. 😊

Now, if you randomly try out a few commands, you should be able to quickly notice that there is

a basic help system (that can be invoked using the “?” or “help” command), that lists the possible commands (Figure 2).

```
> help
AVAILABLE COMMANDS:
HELP
HELP GAMES
LIST GAMES
PLAY <game>
```

Figure 2 – List of available commands

As seen in Figure 3, the “list games” command shows that there are 3 different games that one could possibly play, from which two are unfortunately unavailable due to maintenance (believe me, those are dull and uninteresting games anyway, so you didn’t miss too much):

```
> list games
FALKEN'S MAZE
TIC-TAC-TOE
GLOBAL THERMONUCLEAR WAR
```

Figure 3 – Game list

However, the one that sounds by far the most rad, namely “Global Thermonuclear War”, is available. If you try to play that game, you will immediately see a state-of-the-art ASCII world map generated using thousands of hi-res spy satellite images stitched together (Figure 4), and you can enter a target for the nuclear strike (Figure 5).

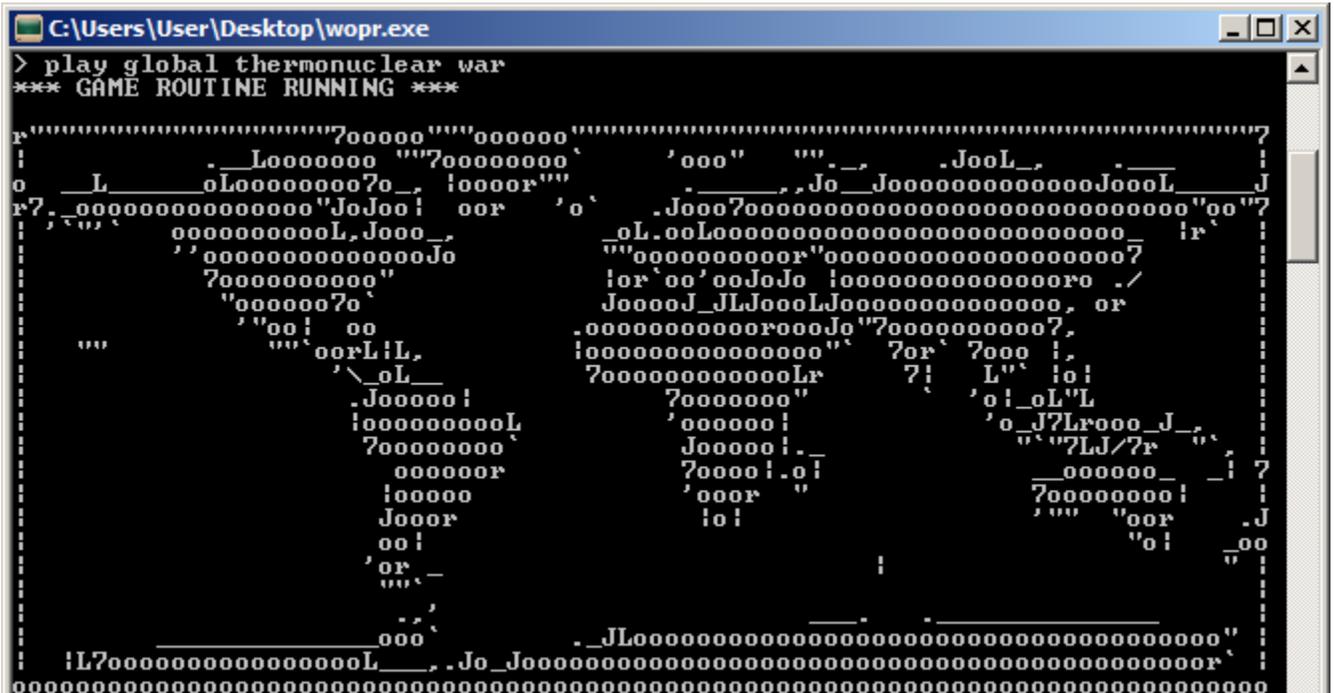


Figure 4 – Fancy ASCII art world map



Figure 5 – Nuclear launch code input screen

(Please note, that I am fully aware that Antarctica is neither a city nor a country, but the program code is so advanced that it is still able to locate it based on this information. ☺)

Ok, so the task here is probably to retrieve the nuclear launch code. You can try the launch code from the movie (“CPE1704TKS”), but that would be way too easy, so that obviously does not work. The next step one might think of, is to load the executable in a debugger, and try to churn through the machine code. The sheer size of the executable should be a discouraging sign that directly debugging the executable is going to be a dead end.

FINDING OUT WHAT KIND OF FILE THIS IS

Now examine the properties of the file using your favorite analysis tool. Basic static analysis of the file should reveal the following characteristics:

- It consists of a small stub executable, and a large binary blob overlay, appended to the end of the file.
- The entropy of the appended data is high, so it is very likely compressed or encrypted.
- The very end of the file has some strings (e.g. “python37.dll”, “PYZ-00.pyz”, “.pyd”) that suggest this file is somehow related to Python.
- If you look very carefully, you can even find hints in the “.rdata” PE section the to the actual name of the tool that was used to create this executable (see Figure 6 – Giveaway strings in the executable).

```
PyInstaller: FormatMessageW failed.
PyInstaller: pyi_win32_utils_to_utf8 failed.
```

Figure 6 – Giveaway strings in the executable

UNPACKING THE PYINSTALLER EXECUTABLE

One way to unpack the executable is to use [PyInstaller](#) itself. After installing Python, and then PyInstaller using “`pip install pyinstaller`”, you will find an executable called “`pyi_archive_viewer.exe`” in the “`Scripts`” directory of your Python installation. However, this tool has two major drawbacks: you have to extract files one by one, because it does not let you extract all at once, and it does not give you any hints about the actual entry point, i.e. that main Python script in the archive. A better option is to use a utility called [PyInstallerExtractor](#) (Figure 7).

```
C:\Users\User\Desktop>pyinstxtractor.py wopr.exe
[*] Processing wopr.exe
[*] Pyinstaller version: 2.1+
[*] Python version: 37
[*] Length of package: 5068358 bytes
[*] Found 64 files in CArchive
[*] Beginning extraction...please standby
[+] Possible entry point: pyiboot01_bootstrap
[+] Possible entry point: pyiboot02_cleanup
[*] Found 135 files in PYZ archive
[*] Successfully extracted pyinstaller archive: wopr.exe
```

You can now use a python decompiler on the pyc files within the extracted directory

Figure 7 – Unpacking the file using PyInstallerExtractor

This script identifies two possible entry points: “*pyiboot01_bootstrap*” and “*pyiboot02_cleanup*”. Upon looking into the files with your favorite hex editor, it’s relatively easy to spot that one of the files is very odd, as it contains the poem “*The Raven*” authored by the renowned American writer, Edgar Allan Poe – so the core of challenge must be hidden in “*pyiboot02_cleanup*”. So far, so good.

DECOMPILING THE PYTHON BYTECODE

The tool that I personally used for this step is [uncompyle6](#)ⁱⁱⁱ (you can install it using “*pip install uncompyle6*”). When you try to run the “*uncompyle6*” command on the “*pyiboot02_cleanup*” file, you will receive an error message informing that the file should be a .py or .pyc file. After renaming the file to “*pyiboot02_cleanup.pyc*”, and running the Python decompiler again, you will face another error: “*ImportError: Unknown magic number 227 in pyiboot02_cleanup.pyc*”.

If you compare the file with any other .pyc file, you will see that PyInstaller removed the header (the first 16 bytes) of the .pyc files upon packing, so we need to restore those bytes.

So, the next step is to create a Python source file (can be an empty file), then compile it to a .pyc file either by importing your source file or using Python’s “*compileall*” module.

Let’s say you created an empty file called “*test.py*”, then you can just do “*import test*” from the Python prompt, or use “*python -m compileall test.py*” to generate a .pyc file (it will be created in the “*__pycache__*” directory if you use Python 3). The first 16 bytes of the generated .pyc file should look something like “*42 0d 0d 0a 00 00 00 00 e4 b9 18 5d 00 00 00 00*”. After you copy these bytes in front of the “*pyiboot02_cleanup.pyc*” file, decompilation should work properly and you should now have the (mostly) correct Python source.

If you now try to run the Python file, you will notice soon that it still does not work. Carefully comparing the .pyc and the decompiled .py files again using a hex editor, you should notice that the whitespace is not exactly right. It seems that the decompilation process destroyed the Tab (0x09) characters and replaced them with regular Space (0x20) characters (see Figure 8 – Whitespace characters in the original *pyiboot02_cleanup.pyc* file and Figure 9 – Modified whitespace characters in the decompiled *pyiboot02_cleanup.py* file).

```

00000016E: 4F 6E 63 65-20 75 70 6F-6E 20 61 20-6D 69 64 6E Once upon a midn
00000017E: 69 67 68 74-20 64 72 65-61 72 79 2C-20 77 68 69 ight dreary, whi
00000018E: 6C 65 20 49-20 70 6F 6E-64 65 72 65-64 2C 20 77 le I pondered, w
00000019E: 65 61 6B 20-61 6E 64 20-77 65 61 72-79 2C 09 09 eak and weary,00
0000001AE: 20 09 09 09-20 20 09 09-20 20 20 20-09 20 09 20 000 00 0 0
0000001BE: 20 09 09 09-20 20 20 20-20 20 09 09-09 09 20 09 000 0000 0
0000001CE: 09 09 09 09-09 20 09 09-20 20 20 09-20 20 09 09 00000 00 0 00
0000001DE: 09 20 09 09-20 20 20 09-09 09 09 20-09 09 09 20 0 00 0000 000
0000001EE: 09 09 09 09-09 20 09 20-09 20 20 09-20 09 09 20 00000 0 0 0 00
0000001FE: 09 09 20 09-20 20 20 20-09 09 09 20-20 20 09 09 00 0 000 00
00000020E: 20 09 20 20-20 20 09 20-09 20 20 09-09 20 09 20 0 0 0 00 0
00000021E: 20 20 20 20-20 09 20 09-09 20 09 20-09 09 20 09 0 00 00 0
00000022E: 20 20 20 20-20 20 09 20-09 09 09 09-20 09 09 09 00 0000 000
00000023E: 20 20 09 20-09 20 20 09-09 20 20 20-09 09 20 09 0 0 00 00 0
00000024E: 20 09 20 20-09 09 20 09-09 20 09 09-20 20 20 09 0 00 00 00 0
00000025E: 20 09 20 09-09 09 20 20-09 20 09 20-09 09 20 20 0 000 0 00
00000026E: 20 09 09 09-09 20 20 20-20 09 20 09-20 20 20 20 0000 0 0
00000027E: 09 09 09 20-20 20 09 20-09 09 20 20-09 20 20 09 000 0 00 0 0

```

Figure 8 – Whitespace characters in the original pyiboot02_cleanup.pyc file

```

0000000D8: 4F 6E 63 65-20 75 70 6F-6E 20 61 20-6D 69 64 6E Once upon a midn
0000000E8: 69 67 68 74-20 64 72 65-61 72 79 2C-20 77 68 69 ight dreary, whi
0000000F8: 6C 65 20 49-20 70 6F 6E-64 65 72 65-64 2C 20 77 le I pondered, w
000000108: 65 61 6B 20-61 6E 64 20-77 65 61 72-79 2C 20 20 eak and weary,
000000118: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000128: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000138: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000148: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000158: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000168: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000178: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000188: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
000000198: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
0000001A8: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
0000001B8: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
0000001C8: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
0000001D8: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20
0000001E8: 20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20-20 20 20 20

```

Figure 9 – Modified whitespace characters in the decompiled pyiboot02_cleanup.py file

Using a hex editor, restore the original poem from the .pyc file. Now, provided that you run the .py file from the same directory where the extracted “this” directory resides, you should be able to execute the Python source code properly. Otherwise, if you don’t have that directory next to the .py file, you will encounter a Python Easter egg, defined in [PEP 20](#)^{iv}.

DECIPHERING THE PYTHON SOURCE CODE

The first few lines of the Python code subtly swaps Python’s built-in *print()* and *exec()* functions to add a bit more fun to the challenge (Figure 10).

```
def ho(h, g={}):
    k = bytes.fromhex(format(h, 'x')).decode()
    return g.get(k, k)

a = 1702389091
b = 482955849332
g = ho(29516388843672123817340395359, globals())
aa = getattr(g, ho(a))
bb = getattr(g, ho(b))
a ^= b
b ^= a
a ^= b
setattr(g, ho(a), aa)
setattr(g, ho(b), bb)
```

Figure 10 – Swapping the built-in print() and exec() functions

The next, slightly obfuscated function (called “eye”), takes a string, and converts the Tab and Space characters from the end of each line to binary stream, where Tab corresponds to the digit 0, and Space corresponds to the digit 1 (Figure 11 – Function that converts Tab and Space characters to binary data). This function will be used to process the poem at the beginning of the Python script.

```
def eye(face):
    leg = io.BytesIO()
    for arm in face.splitlines():
        arm = arm[len(arm.rstrip(' \t')):]
        leg.write(arm)

    face = leg.getvalue()
    bell = io.BytesIO()
    x, y = (0, 0)
    for chuck in face:
        taxi = {9:0,
                32:1}.get(chuck)
        if taxi is None:
            continue
        x, y = x | taxi << y, y + 1
        if y > 7:
            bell.write(bytes([x]))
            x, y = (0, 0)

    return bell.getvalue()
```

Figure 11 – Function that converts Tab and Space characters to binary data

Another obfuscated function follows (called “fire”), which is simply an implementation of the RC4 crypto algorithm (Figure 12 – Implementation of the RC4 crypto algorithm).

```

def fire(wood, bounce):
    meaning = bytearray(wood)
    bounce = bytearray(bounce)
    regard = len(bounce)
    manage = list(range(256))

    def prospect(*financial):
        return sum(financial) % 256

    def blade(feel, cassette):
        cassette = prospect(cassette, manage[feel])
        manage[feel], manage[cassette] = manage[cassette], manage[feel]
        return cassette

    cassette = 0
    for feel in range(256):
        cassette = prospect(cassette, bounce[feel % regard])
        cassette = blade(feel, cassette)

    cassette = 0
    for pigeon, _ in enumerate(meaning):
        feel = prospect(pigeon, 1)
        cassette = blade(feel, cassette)
        meaning[pigeon] ^= manage[prospect(manage[feel], manage[cassette])]

    return bytes(meaning)

```

Figure 12 – Implementation of the RC4 crypto algorithm

The final part of the script simply takes the Python module docstring (i.e. the poem), then processes the whitespace characters at the end of each line (using the “eye” function), decrypts the data using the RC4 algorithm (the “fire” function), with the key data from the “this/key” file, plus another byte prepended to the key that is simply brute-forced in a loop (Figure 13 – Brute-forcing the first byte of the RC4 key). And finally the result is decompressed using the LZMA algorithm, and then passed to the *print()* function.

```

for i in range(256):
    try:
        print(lzma.decompress(fire(eye(__doc__.encode()), bytes([i]) + BOUNCE)))
    except Exception:
        pass

```

Figure 13 – Brute-forcing the first byte of the RC4 key

Remember though, that we have the *print()* and *exec()* functions swapped earlier, so the *print* call actually executes the resulting script. If you remove the function swapping part, you should be able to print out the deciphered script.

ANALYZING THE FINAL SCRIPT

The final script will make use of certain definitions (e.g. imported modules and functions) that are defined in the first script, so you will need to copy/paste them over to be able to run the script. The first important part of the final script is the *wrong()* function: this function parses the PE header of the current process, undoes the memory relocations (to guarantee a deterministic PE image, regardless of the current load address), then calculates an MD5 hash of the code section. The trick here is, this will yield a different result when you run the file as a standalone .py script, compared to the value what you get when you run it as the original PyInstaller executable. Thus, you will need to dump the PE image of the PyInstaller executable from process memory and run this function on it to get the correct hash value (*a7bfd29e0f016b536837b7607cbab4a8*).

```

def wrong():
    trust = windll.kernel32.GetModuleHandleW(None)

    computer = string_at(trust, 1024)
    dirty, = struct.unpack_from('=I', computer, 60)

    _, _, organize, _, _, _, variety, _ = struct.unpack_from('=IHIIIHH', computer,
dirty)
    assert variety >= 144

    participate, = struct.unpack_from('=I', computer, dirty + 40)
    for insurance in range(organize):
        name, tropical, inhabitant, reader, chalk, _, _, _, _ = \
            struct.unpack_from('=8sIIIIHHI', computer, 40 * insurance + dirty +
variety + 24)
        if inhabitant <= participate < inhabitant + tropical:
            break

    spare = bytearray(string_at(trust + inhabitant, tropical))

    issue, digital = struct.unpack_from('=II', computer, dirty + 0xa0)
    truth = string_at(trust + issue, digital)

    expertise = 0
    while expertise <= len(truth) - 8:
        nuance, seem = struct.unpack_from('=II', truth, expertise)

        if nuance == 0 and seem == 0:
            break

        slot = truth[expertise + 8:expertise + seem]

        for i in range(len(slot) >> 1):
            diet, = struct.unpack_from('=H', slot, 2 * i)
            fabricate = diet >> 12
            if fabricate != 3: continue
            diet = diet & 4095
            ready = nuance + diet - inhabitant
            if 0 <= ready < len(spare):
                struct.pack_into('=I', spare, ready, struct.unpack_from('=I', spare,
ready)[0] - trust)

            expertise += seem

    return hashlib.md5(spare).digest()

```

Figure 14 - Function that calculates an MD5 hash of the PE code section

The MD5 hash of the code section is then XORed with an embedded key, this should result in the following final value for “h”: [115, 29, 32, 68, 106, 108, 89, 76, 21, 71, 78, 51, 75, 1, 55, 102].

```

xor = [212, 162, 242, 218, 101, 109, 50, 31, 125, 112, 249, 83, 55, 187, 131, 206]
h = list(wrong())
h = [h[i] ^ xor[i] for i in range(16)]

```

Figure 15 – Code section hash XORed with an embedded key

This is where the second important piece of the puzzle comes in, as you will see a system of linear equations (Figure 16). The launch code you enter has to satisfy this linear equation, to yield the values of “h” calculated earlier (the MD5 hash of the code section XORed with a fixed key). In mathematical terms, you need to solve $Ax = b$, where “x” is the entered launch code, and “b” ($=$ “h”) is the XORed code section hash.

```

# encoding map coordinates
x = list(launch_code.ljust(16, b'\0'))
b = 16 * [None]

# calculate missile trajectory
b[0] = x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[8] ^ x[11] ^ x[14]
b[1] = x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[8] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[14]
b[2] = x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[4] ^ x[5] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15]
b[3] = x[5] ^ x[6] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[15]
b[4] = x[1] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15]
b[5] = x[0] ^ x[4] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15]
b[6] = x[1] ^ x[3] ^ x[7] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[15]
b[7] = x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[14]
b[8] = x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12]
b[9] = x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[15]
b[10] = x[0] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^
x[15]
b[11] = x[0] ^ x[2] ^ x[4] ^ x[6] ^ x[13]
b[12] = x[0] ^ x[3] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[15]
b[13] = x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[5] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14]
b[14] = x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[7] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15]
b[15] = x[1] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[15]

if b == h:
    t.typewriteln("LAUNCH CODE ACCEPTED.\n\n*** RUNNING SIMULATION ***\n")

```

Figure 16 – System of linear equations

As soon as you have the correct launch code that satisfies the system of equations, this launch code will be used as the RC4 decryption key to decrypt the contents of the “eye” variable (Figure 17), which holds the encrypted challenge flag.

```
eye = [219, 232, 81, 150, 126, 54, 116, 129, 3, 61, 204, 119, 252, 122, 3, 209, \
196, 15, 148, 173, 206, 246, 242, 200, 201, 167, 2, 102, 59, 122, 81, 6, 24,
23]
flag = fire(eye, launch_code).decode()
t.typewrite(f"CONGRATULATIONS! YOU FOUND THE FLAG:\n\n{flag}\n")
```

Figure 17 - Decrypting the challenge flag using the launch code

SOLVING THE LINEAR SYSTEM OF EQUATIONS

You have several choices for solving the linear algebra part. After converting the equations into a matrix form ($Ax = b$, where A is a 16×16 binary matrix), you can perform Gauss-Jordan elimination, or use a linear algebra package to calculate the inverse of that matrix. For example, Figure 18 shows how to do it using [GNU Octave](#):

```

>> mod(int8(inv(int8([
  [0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0];
  [1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0];
  [1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1];
  [0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1];
  [0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1];
  [1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1];
  [0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1];
  [1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0];
  [0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0];
  [0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1];
  [1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1];
  [1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0];
  [1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 1];
  [0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 1, 0];
  [0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 1, 1, 1];
  [0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1];
]))), 2)
ans =

  1  0  1  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  0  1
  1  0  1  0  0  0  0  0  1  0  0  1  0  1  1  0
  1  0  0  0  0  1  1  0  1  0  0  1  0  1  1  1
  1  1  1  0  1  1  0  1  0  1  1  0  1  1  0  0
  1  1  0  0  1  1  0  1  0  1  0  1  0  1  0  1
  0  1  0  1  1  0  0  0  0  0  1  1  1  0  1  1
  1  0  0  0  1  1  0  1  1  1  1  0  1  0  1  0
  1  0  1  0  0  0  0  1  0  0  1  1  0  1  1  1
  0  1  1  0  1  0  0  1  1  1  0  1  0  1  1  0
  1  1  0  0  1  1  0  1  1  0  1  1  1  1  1  1
  1  0  0  0  0  0  0  1  1  0  0  1  0  1  1  1
  0  0  1  0  0  1  0  0  1  1  1  1  0  0  1  1
  1  1  1  1  1  0  1  1  0  0  0  0  1  1  0  1
  0  1  1  0  0  1  1  0  0  0  1  1  1  0  0  1
  0  1  1  0  1  0  1  1  1  0  0  0  1  0  1  1
  0  0  0  1  1  0  1  1  0  0  1  0  0  0  1  0

```

Figure 18 – Inverting the matrix using GNU Octave

Note, that you need to calculate *modulo 2* on the result, because of the way how the XOR operation works (i.e. if you apply XOR an even number of times, you will get the original value back, however if you apply the XOR operation N times, where N is an odd number, that’s exactly the same as applying it once).

The Nth row of resulting matrix will show you which components of the key you need to XOR together, to get the Nth character of the launch code (e.g. the first row of the matrix is “1 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1”, so you need to do `key[0] ^ key[2] ^ key[15]` to get the first character, i.e. `chr(115 ^ 32 ^ 102) = '5'`).

But the easiest way to solve it is using an SMT solver (e.g. [Z3](#)), as shown in Figure 19.

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3
from z3 import *

h = [115, 29, 32, 68, 106, 108, 89, 76, 21, 71, 78, 51, 75, 1, 55, 102]
b = [BitVecVal(_, 8) for _ in h]
x = [BitVec('x' + str(_), 8) for _ in range(16)]

s = Solver()
s.add(
    b[0] == x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[8] ^ x[11] ^ x[14],
    b[1] == x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[8] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[14],
    b[2] == x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[4] ^ x[5] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^
x[15],
    b[3] == x[5] ^ x[6] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[15],
    b[4] == x[1] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15],
    b[5] == x[0] ^ x[4] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15],
    b[6] == x[1] ^ x[3] ^ x[7] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[15],
    b[7] == x[0] ^ x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[14],
    b[8] == x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12],
    b[9] == x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[15],
    b[10] == x[0] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[7] ^ x[8] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14]
^ x[15],
    b[11] == x[0] ^ x[2] ^ x[4] ^ x[6] ^ x[13],
    b[12] == x[0] ^ x[3] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[10] ^ x[12] ^ x[15],
    b[13] == x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[4] ^ x[5] ^ x[6] ^ x[7] ^ x[11] ^ x[12] ^ x[13] ^ x[14],
    b[14] == x[1] ^ x[2] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[7] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[14] ^ x[15],
    b[15] == x[1] ^ x[3] ^ x[5] ^ x[9] ^ x[10] ^ x[11] ^ x[13] ^ x[15]
)

if s.check() == sat:
    m = s.model()
    print("Launch code: " + "".join(chr(m.eval(x[_]).as_long()) for _ in range(16)))
```

Figure 19 – Python script to solve the equations using Z3

```
$ ./solve.py
Launch code: 5C0G7TY2LWI2YXMB
```

Figure 20 – Running the script yields the correct launch code

Upon entering the correct launch code (Figure 20), the WOPR system runs a sequence of military simulations to determine the winning strategy (spoiler: there is none, as per our current knowledge a full-scale nuclear war would very likely lead to complete annihilation and radioactive fallout causing the collapse of civilization), then finally the challenge flag is shown (Figure 21):

```

*** SIMULATION COMPLETED ***

A STRANGE GAME.
THE ONLY WINNING MOVE IS
NOT TO PLAY.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU FOUND THE FLAG:
L1n34R_4L93bR4_i5_FuN@flare-on.com

```

Figure 21 – Simulation results and challenge flag

The challenge flag is “L1n34R_4L93bR4_i5_FuN@flare-on.com”.

- i <https://www.pyinstaller.org/>
- ii <https://sourceforge.net/projects/pyinstallerextractor/>
- iii <https://pypi.org/project/uncompyle6/>
- iv <https://www.python.org/dev/peps/pep-0020/>
- v <https://www.gnu.org/software/octave/>
- vi <https://github.com/Z3Prover/z3>