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Hackers solve password mystery

Computer experts gleefully solved a Norwegian institute's data problems after an archivist died, taking a vital password to his grave. Internet hackers answered an emergency call for assistance.

The Ivar Aasen Centre of Language and Culture in Norway offered a reward of a round-trip flight to the "New Norwegian" Festival of Literature and Music in June to the first person to supply them with the password needed to access a database indexing over 11,000 titles compiled by Reidar Djupedal.

The power of the Internet resulted in a flood of e-mail suggestions and a feverish informal competition among tech types on the web.

According to Aasen Centre information chief Torgeir Dimmen, the institute received a solution for their long-standing security headache within five hours of their Internet appeal.

"That's what happens when you mobilize all the people out there - just fantastic!" Dimmen said.

The institute released the full details of the contest winner on Monday. They credited a 25-year-old Swede, Joakim Eriksson from Växjö, with providing the answer - 'ladepjud' - first.

This password was only the first step in gaining access to the archive material. It freed the database, but accessing the material required another password, this one the even simpler 'reidar'.

The Aasen centre noted that one of their first tips came from parapsychologists who told them the password would likely be something simple spelled backwards.

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Institute director Ottar Grepstad said it was easy to say the mystery was simple afterwards.

"It sounds simple now that we have the answer, but the database was created in an old program that few have now, and the public institutions we asked for help didn't manage to crack the code," Grepstad said.

"It is interesting that this case has sparked a serious debate among computer experts about how one should take care of an important password. What was a bit of a PR stunt from us has had positive repercussions," Grepstad said.

Hackers gathered at www.slashdot.org [discussed the problem](#) when it was released and claimed to have solved the puzzle on Friday.

The Aasen Institute seemed to agree that the answer extracted at the site for self-proclaimed nerds was 'ladepjud' - the researcher's name spelled backwards - but waited over the weekend to see if that information was enough to allow full access to the valuable index.

The simplicity of the apparent solution was somewhat puzzling as various attempts to crack the code earlier had reportedly tried variations on names from both Djupedal's and Aasen' families.

Dimmen would not comment on the surprisingly simple password, saying only that the original investigation had been headed by BIBSYS, a national library data center.

If the catalog proved inaccessible it would have taken the institute about four years of work to recreate.

The Aasen center researches Norway's second language *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian), compiled by linguist Ivar Aasen from the country's local oral dialects as an alternative to the official written language that is based on Danish.

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