

Breaking out of the Slack walled garden

how to use Slack via IRC since the gateway closed...

I'm old school cool. Real hackers chat on open, distributed platforms. Most technical discussion can be found on the Freenode (<https://freenode.net/>) IRC network. It's not perfect, but the advantages clearly outweigh the drawbacks.

Recently, I needed to join an existing large "community" on the centralized, proprietary walled garden (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closed_platform) that is the Slack (<https://slack.com/>) network.

The Problem:

Connecting to the the Slack server requires that you use either the proprietary client or their proprietary web app. There's zero chance I will install the former on my machine, and the latter uses an absurd amount of browser memory and CPU. I'm already happy with my *irssi* (<https://irssi.org/>) experience, and I didn't want to need another app.

Initially, Slack offered an IRC bridge as part of its embrace, extend, and extinguish (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embrace,_extend,_and_extinguish) strategy, but this is now closed (<https://it.slashdot.org/story/18/03/08/2049255/slack-is-shutting-down-its-irc-gateway>).

The Solution:

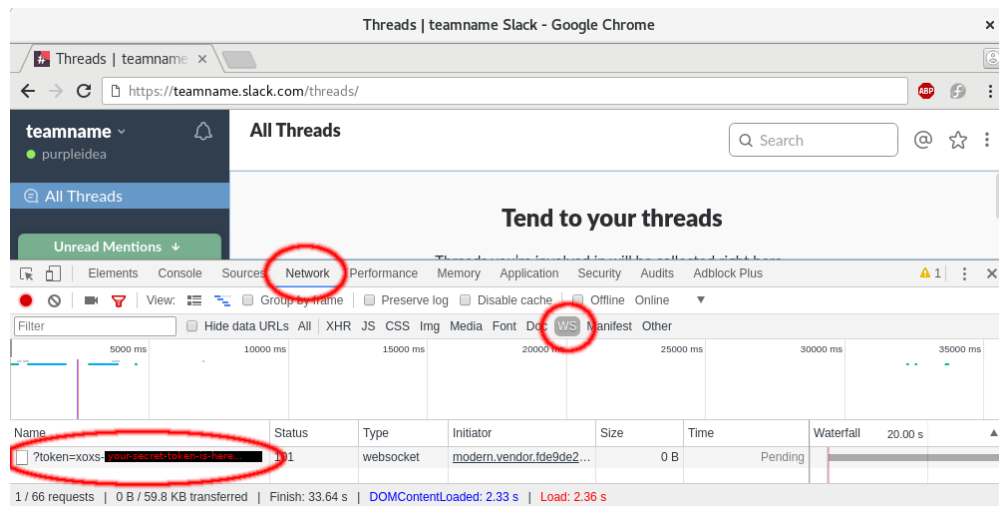
Don't use Slack! Move your team to Freenode or run your own private IRC server. This lets everyone use the client of their choice on the platform (<https://www.gnu.org/>) of their choice.

Luckily there's a workaround if you need to infiltrate an existing Slack community. ;) Here's how I did it.

Workaround: Step 1: Token:

Log into Slack via the web browser and get a "legacy token". You can get one from this web page (<https://api.slack.com/custom-integrations/legacy-tokens>). Apparently an administrator needs to allow this per-user, but since nobody was responsive, user 42wim (<https://twitter.com/42wim/status/1005200618808586240>) pointed out that you could just sniff for the token being used in the web ui.

I was unable to find it using Firefox, but if you open up the Chrome Developer tools, under the Network section, there's a WS (web socket) tab which will show you your token:



(slack-token.png)

Do this with care, since I have no idea how to revoke this token if it is lost. Perhaps changing your password will cause it to change, but I haven't tested it.

Workaround: Step 2: IRC Server:

Now we need to run a small local IRC server which speaks Slack protocol, and maps this to the standard IRC protocol that your IRC client will understand. There are two projects I've found that do this.

1. <https://github.com/42wim/matterircd/> (<https://github.com/42wim/matterircd/>)
2. <https://github.com/insomniacslk/irc-slack> (<https://github.com/insomniacslk/irc-slack>)

They're both easy to setup and install. I tested that both seem to work, but I felt slightly more happy with the first option. They both happen to use go lang , and once a recent version is installed, you can build a copy with:

```
go get github.com/42wim/matterircd
```

This should produce a matterircd binary in your \$GOPATH/bin/. This is often found at ~/go/bin/. I copied that to the server where I run my IRC client (<https://purpleidea.com/blog/2013/10/18/desktop-notifications-for-irssi-in-screen-through-ssh-in-gnome-terminal/>). In that screen session I then ran it:

```
[james@computer ~]$ ./bin/matterircd
INFO[2018-06-11T06:47:27-04:00] Running version 0.17.4-dev           mo
dule=matterircd
INFO[2018-06-11T06:47:27-04:00] WARNING: THIS IS A DEVELOPMENT VERSION. Things m
ay break. module=matterircd
INFO[2018-06-11T06:47:27-04:00] Listening on 127.0.0.1:6667           mo
dule=matterircd
```

You could probably add a systemd service for this, but I didn't bother.

Workaround: Step 3: IRC Client:

I use `irssi` but have never had great success getting the internal CLI to work properly. As a result, I disobeyed the instructions, quit `irssi`, and then edited the `~/.irssi/config` file. I added the following sections...

In the `chatnets = { ... };` block I added:

```
teamname = {  
    type = "IRC";  
    nick = "purpleidea";  
};
```

In the `servers = (...);` block I added:

```
{  
    address = "localhost";  
    chatnet = "teamname";  
    password = "xoxs-your-secret-token-is-here...";  
    port = "6667";  
    use_ssl = "no";  
    ssl_verify = "no";  
    autoconnect = "yes";  
},
```

In the `channels = (...);` block I added:

```
{ name = "#chan1"; chatnet = "teamname"; autojoin = "yes"; },  
{ name = "#whatever"; chatnet = "teamname"; autojoin = "yes"; },
```

In the above blocks you'll naturally want to replace `teamname` with the name you'd like to give to this slack network. You'll also need to replace the `xoxs-your-secret-token-is-here...` string with the value that you found in part 1.

Now start `irssi`. If all goes well, you should be connected! In the `irssi` status window you should see:

```
06:50 [teamname] -!- Irssi: Connecting to localhost [127.0.0.1] port 6667
06:50 [teamname] -!- Irssi: Connection to localhost established
06:50 [teamname] -!- Welcome! purpleidea!james@localhost.localdomain
06:50 [teamname] -!- Your host is matterircd, running version 0.17.4-dev
06:50 [teamname] -!- This server was created Mon Jun 11 06:50:56 EDT 2018
06:50 [teamname] -!- matterircd 0.17.4-dev o o debugmode false
06:50 [teamname] -!- There are 3 users and 0 services on 1 servers
06:50 [teamname] -!- - matterircd Message of the Day -
06:50 [teamname] -!- End of /MOTD command.
```

In the screen window running matterircd you should see:

```
INFO[2018-06-11T06:50:56-04:00] New connection: 127.0.0.1:46566      mo
dule=matterircd
```

You can now join more channels and even direct message other users. The complete list of users should show up in a special `&users` channel. Most things work as expected.

Conclusion:

Hope you enjoyed this. Tell your friends to pick regular IRC instead.

Happy Hacking,

James

You can follow James on Twitter (https://twitter.com/intent/follow?screen_name=purpleidea) for more frequent updates and other random thoughts.

You can support James on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/purpleidea>) if you'd like to help sustain this kind of content.

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822 words

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