

One Last Vacation: Escape Room

You wake up to a knock on your door, early in the morning on a Saturday. As you groggily get dressed to see who it is, you open the door to a very serious-looking man in a crisp black suit. He flashes a very official-looking badge, and kindly asks you to come with him. You ask where, and he points next door.

Your next door neighbor Fred is a kindly old gentleman, who always lived alone. You two would play chess sometimes, but never interacted in too much depth.

The man informs you that Fred has died suddenly, and has left you something important. Something just for you. The man leads you into Fred's house, where he unlocks a door leading down to the basement. You've never been down here, you think as you plod down the steps to the shag carpet below. All of a sudden, you hear a bang, as the door at the top of the stairs slams shut. You run up the stairs, and pull on the handle, calling to get out. "I'm sorry, sir, but this is official business, and we believe you are the only one who can help. I will let you out once you get us the information we need" You plead and ask for more info or instructions, but the man simply repeats that he will let you out once you provide the information they need.

You turn around to look at your surroundings, figuring maybe you should try to start to make any sense of this situation.

Right in front of you, across the room, there is a simple table that looks almost like a travel shrine. There are a number of travel related items on it, including a thick book that looks well-worn. Immediately beside the shrine, there is a strikingly-large world map attached to the wall. Along the right wall, there is a wooden chest. Above the chest is a small window, which is allowing some light in from the backyard. Along the left wall is a large bookshelf, and in the corner is a small table holding a rotary phone. On your right just as you come in is a solid plinth, topped with an old-looking chessboard. Mounted beside the chessboard is a full length mirror, with an ornate wooden frame, seemingly fastened to the wall.

Looks like you'll have to dig around Fred's stuff, and explore this basement if you have any hope of figuring out what it is the mysterious man upstairs wants from you!

THINGS TO LOOK AT

Binoculars: They seem to be your standard binocs, nothing special here. More something you would use for recreation than anything else.

Bookshelf: It seems like Fred was a collector of books. This shelf is packed with volumes of all shapes and sizes, and, it seems, on all topics. You'd need to know what you are looking for to find anything in here.

Chessboard: The chessboard seems to be attached to the top of this plinth, as if it stays there and can't move. The board is wood, with hefty pieces. Both sides (black and white) are set up normally, except there are no pawns on the board.

Sitting on the chessboard is a post-it note from Fred to you:

I certainly hope they called you like I put in my will. I truly cherished our hours playing chess, and am pretty sure you will be the only one who can help me now. To start your journey towards the info they need from you, trace my last flight, from start to finish. I need to keep the information safe from prying eyes, so excuse the secrecy. I have no doubt you can do this.

P.S I had to keep some things locked up. They had to be safe from the one that got away.

Military Uniform: The Military uniform is neatly displayed on a mannequin, looking well-ironed and official. You notice that there are many awards and ribbons hanging on the uniform, as if this person (Fred?) is very well-decorated. Draped around the neck of the mannequin is a length of black yarn.

Mirror: When I say full length, I mean full length. It goes from just below the ceiling all the way to the floor. It also seems firmly attached to the wall, so you can't take it off or look behind it.

Newspapers: Looking at the stack, you realize there is only one section in here, as if he was collecting his favourite part of the paper. It is all the Puzzle section. Each page has a crossword puzzle, a sudoku, a jumble, and a game where you solve puzzles based on chess moves.

Phone: The yellowing phone is sitting on an unremarkable folding table, tucked in the corner of the room. It seems like an old phone, and you notice it is the rotary type.

Photographs: Looking closer, you see five photographs, arranged in a vertical line. The pictures are official-looking photos of men in military uniform, but a different type of uniform than you see on the mannequin. These men all have badges with SS on them, some with swastikas on an armband. They are each labelled with a name. The last thing of note is that the first four names are crossed out with a thick, red, marker. The last one is instead circled with the same marker.

Starting from the top of the list, you read:

VINCENT uVE

WOLFHILde fRANKFURT

ADAm noRBERT

HARTWig hiLMAR

ADOLF EICHMANN

Below these pictures, there is another post-it, in Fred's handwriting, which reads:

Got these four in this order. Still haven't found the last one, but I have a hunch of one last place to look

Travel Shrine: The table itself is unremarkable, but the same can't be said for the items atop it. The table and wall are chock full of travel trinkets and mementos. Little souvenir Eiffel Towers and Leaning Tower of Pisas litter the table top, and the wall has postcards tacked on from all around the world. The most notable thing with the table is the big book sitting right in the middle. The book says "My Travel Journal" on the front in big letters.

Travel Journal: Flipping through the pages, you see plane tickets, journal entries, more postcards, bits of menus, all the stuff you might expect in someone's travel journal. Nothing stands out to you right now, although you notice the front cover has a little inscription that Fred must have written to himself:

Now that I am all done with my military days, I can spend my time travelling the world in peace. Nothing by my favourite hobby to occupy me. No matter how far and wide I travel, I always need to remember that X will always mark the spot.

Window: As you are in the basement, this window is up near the ceiling, and seems to look out into the backyard of Fred's house. You see trees, a fence, and the sky, but not much else.

Wooden Chest: This is a thick, sturdy-looking chest. It looks like it might have some juicy secrets inside, but unfortunately it is sealed shut with a thick lock (five letters)

Workbench: This workbench has some firearms on it, including some silencers. This is way outside your area of expertise, and especially with a government official hanging around you don't want to do anything dangerous or illegal.

World Map: (*Show supplementary image of map*) This map is HUGE. It takes up most of the wall. Something looks a little strange at first, and then you notice that there is a major difference from other world maps you've seen. This one has the Americas in the centre, sandwiched by Europe and Africa on the right, and Asia and Oceania on the left. As with most maps, there is a superimposed grid over the map, showing longitude and latitude lines. This map has an *extra* grid superimposed, covering most of the map. On the wall beside the map are a number of tacks, and hanging from them is a white piece of yarn. (If they ask, you can say this one is an 8x8 grid).



ACTIONS

Bookshelf: *Looking for a book on birds or ornithology.* You find a book called *The One That Got Away: How to Find The Most Elusive Birds!*

Binoculars: *using them to look out the small window, specifically for a birch tree.* You look and look, but don't see any birds. Weird. As you're about to give up, however, you notice something unusual on a branch of the birch tree. You see words scrawled into the wood. They read:

22081976 Use the capitals to find the answer

Bird Book: *Flipping through the book.* A quick flip through the book lands you on a heavily-dogearred page. You find an entry on the common robin, even though they don't seem very elusive to you. You read the entry:

The American robin is a migratory songbird of the true thrush genus and Turdidae, the wider thrush family. It is named after the European robin because of its reddish-orange breast, though the two species are not closely related. Robins are known to make their homes most often in birch trees.

Under the entry, scrawled in a thick red marker is the following hastily-scrawled note:

EICHMANN = ROBIN

Chessboard: *Moving the white bishop diagonally up five squares* (tracing the path of the flight from New Zealand to Algeria): Strange, it seems like the piece moves with an extra purpose. When it slides onto the last square, you hear an audible *click*, and the full length mirror next to the chessboard swings in a little. Looks like it's some kind of concealed door!

Chessboard: *Moving the black chess pieces as per the chess instructions from the medals.* Nothing special happens here. Strange, you were hoping for another secret door! (It does make a diagonal line down, which can be traced on the map with the black yarn. See supplementary image under Gamemaster's Explanation)

Military Uniform: *Inspecting the medals.* These medals are in all shapes and sizes. Looking carefully, you pick out a few interesting sets of letters and numbers. They read:

Na6 Bf5 Nf6 Qc8 Nc5 Rxh6 Kd7 Ne6 Rh3 Ng4

Mirror: *Going in the secret door.* You push open the mirror, and it reveals a little room, hidden in the space under the stairs. There are some very strange and surprising things in this room. The first is a mannequin, which is covered in what looks like a very official military uniform. Next, you notice one wall is covered with maps, notes, and most notably, five large photographs pinned conspicuously in the centre. Below the wall, there is a workbench that seems to be used for servicing firearms. You see a few pistols and fancy silencers sitting out. There is also a note pinned to the back of the mirror/door:

I'm glad you were able to solve this much. Looks like my secret is out of the bag. I don't feel any remorse, as these scumbags had it coming. I'm taking out as many as I can, for all my murdered family members and ancestors. I know the government wants answers. You will need to figure out the location of the last target, finishing the work I couldn't. Also, to prove the intel is for real, you will also need to tell them my codename. Those two pieces of info should satisfy whatever government suit they sent to strongarm you. I'm sorry you got caught up in this.

Newspapers: *Looking closer at the chess puzzle section.* This section includes some information for first time puzzle solvers of this type of chess game. You learn that the columns of the 8x8 grid are labelled with the letters a-h (left to right on the "bottom" of the board, where white plays from). These letters are reversed from black's perspective, with h on the far left and a on the right (from their perspective). Starting from 1 where white lines up, the rows of the board are labelled up to 8. The following pieces are given the following notation:

King = K

Queen = Q

Rook = R

Knight = N

Bishop = B

Phone: *Entering 8-3-6-4* (code from names in secret room). You hear a little click, and then something strange: you hear birds chirping. They play for a few seconds, and then stop (you don't know enough to identify the type of bird on your own)

Travel Journal: *Opening to the most recent page.* This page seems to be not too far back in time, only a few months. Strange, you didn't realize Fred travelled so much! On the final page, you see a ticket with the following info:

FLIGHT: ONE WAY

DEPARTING: BISHOP AIRPORT

WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

ARRIVING: HOUARI BOW-MED-IENNE BOUMEDIENE AIRPORT

ALGIERS, ALGERIA

Travel Journal: *Opening to an entry from August 22, 1976 (from the branch clue).* This page has writing on it, and seems to be Fred talking about some of his travels from that time period. It says:

Aug 22, 1976

Knowing where to look is half the battle. After leaving Berlin, I tried stopping over in Riyadh. Did anything seem suspicious to me? Well not for

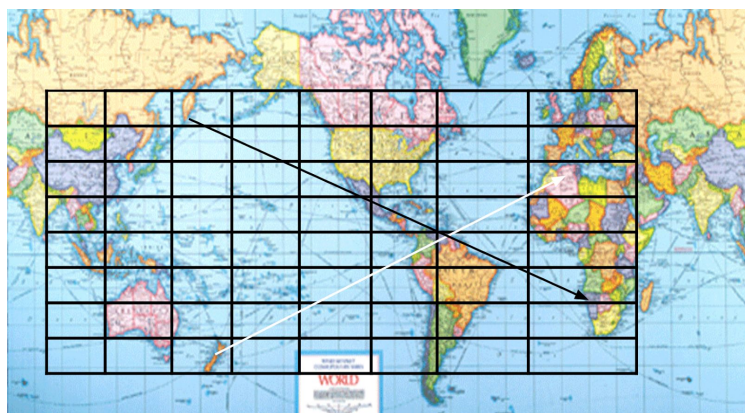
nothing, but Algiers might be a better bet. This isn't as easy as it was in Canberra or Hanoi. Even after such a long day, it's important for me to keep going. Really wishing one of these leads will pan out soon.

Wooden Chest: *Entering ROBIN in the lock* (from Eichmann's name in the bird book). The heavy lock clicks open, and you pull open the top of the chest. While Fred alluded to something interesting in here, he may have been exaggerating. All there is is a pair of binoculars, and a stack of newspapers.

World Map: *Using the white yarn to trace a line from New Zealand to Algeria. Provide supplementary image (top right).* Nothing obvious happens, although you notice that the lines do match up nicely with the grid that has been superimposed on the map.



World Map: *Using the black yarn to mimic the line made with the chessboard's black pieces. Show supplementary image (bottom right).* The line goes from somewhere in Russia to Namibia? It doesn't seem like those places are especially significant to Fred.



CONCLUSION

You yell through the door: "The BIRDWATCHER says the last target is in Caracas!" You hear the man make a quick call, before he opens the door to let you out. "I'm truly sorry for this, but it was the only way. The Birdwatcher was an invaluable asset for us in tracking down Nazi sympathizers after the war, and we had a hunch he was on to something before he died. We appreciate your help, his instincts were right about you. If you ever need a part time job, an opening just became available..."

Thanks, but no thanks scary government man. Adolf Eichmann must have been pretty young during the war, and is probably very old now. I think I'll leave that part up to the professionals.

GAMEMASTER'S EXPLANATION

Note: With plotting certain countries on the map, you can ask the escapees if they can tell you the colour of the country they are looking for on the map, and help them if necessary. They shouldn't need to be geography masters to solve this! All you will need to know is New Zealand is the orange one south east of Australia, and Algeria is the pink one in North Africa. Venezuela is the purple one at the top centre of South America, and Caracas is its capital.

There's only one real way to make progress at the start of the room, although escapers can find a lot of important information for use later. The phone, chest, bookcase, mirror, and window are all dead ends for now. They should look at the chessboard, which will really get them started. The note tells the escaper that they need to trace Fred's last trip from start to finish (and also a hint about the locked chest that we will use later). This should lead them to the travel shrine, which will get them to the travel journal. This will lead them to the inscription in the front cover, which will hint at a military past, a new hobby in retirement, and give a hint about "X marks the spot" that is for the end of the room.

Looking at the last page will reveal a trip from New Zealand to Algeria. This can be plotted on the big map with the white yarn, which will make a nice diagonal line up from left to right (see diagram above). They may also notice that it leaves from Bishop Airport in NZ (fictional), which may hint them to using the chessboard. They may also have noticed that the superimposed grid on the map is also an 8x8 grid, which could also point them towards the chessboard.

If they move the white bishop (the leftmost one) up five squares on a diagonal (mirroring the flight path), they will trigger the secret door to open in the mirror.

As they explore the secret room that was just revealed, they will learn a few things, like that Fred's hobby in retirement was as a Nazi hunter! There are two paths here, that will both need to be solved before finishing the room.

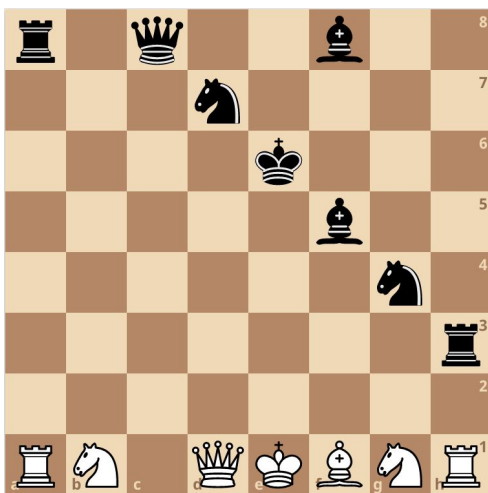
First is the pictures on the wall. The Xs through them will tell escapers that those four are the ones that Fred has already "dealt with," and the last one is the one "that got away." When you show them the names, the weird capitalization might tip off escapers that there are letters that are important here (tuv, def, mno, ghi, in order). Clever escapers might notice that these are letter combos seen on rotary phones. If they enter these numbers (8-3-6-4) into the phone, all they hear is bird noises. This should lead escapers to the bookshelf, where they will find a book on birds. The dog eared page will bring them to the entry on robins, where they learn that they mostly roost on birch trees. They can try looking out the window, but can't see much without help.

Below the entry is a handwritten note that "Eichmann = Robin." Since escapers know that Eichmann is the one that got away, they can use "ROBIN" to open the locked chest. Inside are binoculars, and some newspapers that will be used later.

Now that they have the binoculars, they can look out the small window to see a message scribbled on a branch of the birch tree.

The numbers on this message can be decoded as a date, which can be looked up in the travel book. Show them this entry, as well. The clue about "capitals" can be misleading, since the entry includes a number of national capitals. The trick here is to only read the capital letters (including the first A in August), spelling out "AKA BIRDWATCHER." Fred's top secret codename! Halfway there!

Let's go back to the secret room, and the mannequin. Looking at the medals will reveal a series of numbers and letters. These may seem confusing, until escapers learn about chess notation from the newspaper clippings (the chess connection is hinted at by the black yarn). This will get them to do a series of chess moves with the black pieces (they maybe want to draw the board out to help, or you can let them use [this link to interact with](#)), which will ultimately be a diagonal line going from top left to bottom right (They may want to alternate black and white turns, but should realize that all the moves can only be done by the black pieces).



They can mimic this line with the black yarn on the map, (draws a line between Russia and Namibia, but that doesn't matter) and you can show them the final supplementary image.

Now if we remember that "X marks the spot," escapers can look where the lines cross, which is in Venezuela (specifically, Caracas). With both pieces of info, escapers can yell the answers through the door to be let out of the room!