



A PUZZLING ADVENTURE

Gregory F. Jacob

I SNAPPED THE LAST PIECE INTO PLACE – plain woodgrains, no distinguishing features. Precisely the kind of piece that always seems to linger until the very end.

I turned to my partner in puzzling and extended him a congratulatory handshake, but was surprised to find him scowling. This was our moment of triumph. What gives?

VD was staring fixedly at the freshly assembled puzzle. “Something’s missing,” he said. “Well, several somethings, actually. But one hits particularly close to home.”

I stared at him in confusion. “What are you talking about? We’ve been at this for more than three hours. But it’s finished. We’ve got all the pieces in. Even the ones with nothing but fine script on them that we had to take apart five times, double-check the back side, and then reassemble because the shapes are nearly identical. It’s over now. We’re done.”

VD ignored me, still gazing at the puzzle, lost in his train of thought. He mused: “I should have known this would happen. They always do something like this. You think you’re done, but you never really are.”

He paused, then stood. “Well, I’m not taking it lying down. I’m going to find it. Or if I can’t, I’ll at least make sure we represent well. I mean, this omission is just embarrassing. I’ve got to set it right.”

VD strode to the door, donned his top hat, and turned. “Don’t try to stop me, now. I’m off. I’m behind in my work, I know, but that’s certainly nothing new. Listen, if Big Lub comes looking for me, would you be so

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kind as to run a bit of interference? He's always pestering. I'll be in touch when I can."

He whirled and left, the door clicking shut behind him. Through the window, I watched him saddle his horse, mount up, and ride off.

That was the last I heard from VD for about two months. All that time I kept the puzzle out on display on my coffee table, partly to impress guests with my combination of jigsaw acumen and prosecutorial erudition, but mostly so I could stare at it every now and then and try to figure out what had gotten VD so spun up and why he had ventured off on his mysterious mission.

As the days passed, I became increasingly unsure I'd ever see or hear from my cantankerous friend again. Then, one day in the heat of early July, a package arrived in the mail. I recognized the script immediately and eagerly opened the padded package, anxious to learn what had become of VD and what he had been doing all this time. But as it turned out, what I found inside raised far more questions than it answered.

A heavily worn journal with leather binding. A large coin that featured a drawstring bag on one side and an eagle on the other. And a short note on a torn piece of paper, also written in VD's hand. It read:

"X – Mission accomplished. I fear this package may fall into the wrong hands, so for now I'll say nothing more than UPTEMPOS HAUNT and leave it at that. I know you'll get the job done, you always do. The path is in the journal ... just follow in my footsteps, and you should have no trouble connecting the dots. Fill in the key along the way, and I'll meet you at the Three Sisters."

I turned to the first page, which had the word "Key" written at the top, with several blanks etched out beneath it:

KEY:

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Nothing else was written on the page. The following pages, however, held a series of numbered notes:

1. Start in a central place. But there's more than one of those, of course. Enter the total number of central places in the first space of the key, then let the coin be your guide.

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Turn to the eagle face, and place the coin atop its analog on the map. Look closely now: that's not the Great Seal of the United States, it's the Seal of the Supreme Court; find the distinguishing feature. From that stellar point move your eyes rightward, skipping over the Thought Bubble Gum. Then slide the coin left the number of spaces indicated by the first digit, followed by the second digit down. Two flags? That's the place!

2. Cross the bridge.
3. Pop some popcorn and take in a fraud trial. Eleven years and three months! That's a lot of time for just a few drops of blood.
4. Now move on to the State where a U.S. Senate committee found following an 1877 investigation that "a conspiracy was entered into among leading democratic managers ... for the purpose of depriving the majority of the people ... of their choice for President." All that trouble over a single disputed electoral vote!
5. Is it the meaning of life, the universe, and everything? Who knows? But it is the number of the state that you need to go to next. The sunny part.
6. Hop on a plane and fly back to the site of Daniel Ellsberg's Espionage Act trial (and mistrial too). But it wasn't the District for Charlie Chaplin's 1944 Mann Act prosecution (and acquittal), if only because the District didn't exist until 1966.
7. Unlike "D.B. Cooper," who ran a similar scheme the year before and then vanished, Richard McCoy was caught, prosecuted, and sentenced to 45 years in prison in 1972 after he hijacked a United Airlines flight using a grenade, secured hostage money from the airline, then jumped from the plane mid-flight and parachuted into this District. He probably shouldn't have bought that milkshake at the roadside stand after sticking the landing.
8. "America's Toughest Sheriff" Joe Arpaio was held in criminal contempt of court in this District in 2017 for refusing to obey a court order requiring him to stop arresting undocumented immigrants solely on the basis of suspicion. President Trump pardoned him two months later.
9. Est. 1889 * Re-Est. 1997.
10. No one was prosecuted in this District following the 1921 "Black Wall Street" massacre.

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11. In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson pardoned five prisoners held in this District for the sole purpose of restoring their civil right to testify. The object of their testimony: “Birdman of Alcatraz” and amateur prisoner ornithologist Robert Stroud, who had killed a guard in prison, and would have gotten away with it, too, if it hadn’t been for that meddling President. But fair was fair: Wilson pardoned Stroud, too, commuting the hanging that resulted from his conviction into a life sentence.
12. Created in 1906, this District’s criminal caseload was overwhelmed following the Supreme Court’s decision in *McGirt*.
13. Put on your brown shoes and try out some vertical integration, or at least some vertical(ish) dot connecting. This District’s key Clayton Act case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. Stop by the Eagle-ton Courthouse, and plug the first two letters of the city’s name into the third and fourth blanks of the key.
14. Stop off in this District to take in a heavy dose of patent cases (most of any District in the country!). While you’re there, visit my old client Deputy U.S. Marshal George Tucker, who I defended in that whole Johnson County mess. Remind him, please, that it’s really not wise to go about saying things like “[W]e had the politics and the money, but not the law. We were not convicted of our crimes because we had the politics and the money with us.” Can’t he give the lawyering just a bit more credit?
15. “Hanging Judge” Isaac Parker presided in this District from 1875 to 1896, sentencing 160 defendants to death. And until 1889, defendants who were found guilty had no other court to which they could appeal; a Presidential pardon was the only recourse. Enter the first letter of the state in the fifth blank of the key.
16. Davy Crockett’s congressional seat was lost to the census in 1843 – but if it still existed, it would be located within this District today. Enter the first letter of the state in the sixth blank of the key.
17. The District where I was born, went to college, and cut my teeth practicing law.
18. This District successfully prosecuted the “Sidewalk Six” in 2010, for spending millions of dollars in public funds to buy re-election votes in

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the 1999 municipal elections by pouring sidewalks. The (not so) good mayor Robert Pastrick then went on to win re-election in 2003 using fraudulent absentee ballots, only to have a do-over election ordered a year later on account of the fraud. But the voters took to heart the “fool me twice, shame on me” adage: in the election rerun, they finally ousted Pastrick after he served as mayor for 32 years.

19. Good work, gumshoe. You’re halfway there. You should have my first initial in hand by now, although that’s not really what we’re here for. To start the second half, you’ll need that coin again. Use the bag side this time. “A grain or two of truth” – I like that. Place the coin on the spot on the map that plainly needs it most. You won’t find many of those grains at the upcoming trial of Peter Navarro for contempt of Congress, but you can catch the fireworks at the District courthouse on September 5, 2023.
20. The first U.S. Attorney for this District, who was appointed in 1789, was a key prosecution witness in the unsuccessful 1805 impeachment trial of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase.
21. Jimmy Hoffa served as a witness for the U.S. government in this District in the 1963 prosecution of several Teamsters for accepting bribes. Prosecutor Sandy Jaffe called Hoffa as a witness over the objection of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who was concerned that if Hoffa testified honestly, it might damage the government’s ongoing prosecution of Hoffa in another jurisdiction for jury tampering. Kennedy allegedly told Jaffe: “I’m not going to tell you how to try your case, so you can call him, but if you lose the case, you’re probably going to lose your job.” Everything worked out: Jaffe won his case, Kennedy rewarded him with a PT 109 pin, and Hoffa was convicted.
22. Site of the prosecution of Alger Hiss for perjury, following the Pumpkin Papers revelation. Enter the number of trials it took to convict him in the seventh blank of the key. After you’re done, hop a plane and head back to the site of my last swearing in.
23. This State originally had one District (1790), then three (1794), then one (1797), then three (1802), but throughout all those times had only a single authorized District Judge for the whole. The State was divided

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into two Districts in 1872, and finally given a third District again in 1927. Go to the middle one.

24. Count the total number of middle places on the map, enter that total in the second space of the key, and then go to the only adjacent one.
25. After being arrested within this District's territory in 1807, Aaron Burr was brought to Richmond, Virginia for his treason trial – Chief Justice John Marshall presiding. Check out the arrest site in McIntosh, then hop a plane and fly back to the place where the Burr-Jefferson electoral vote count occurred.
26. After John Brown's 1859 raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, there was disagreement whether he should be prosecuted in state or federal court. The state court option won, resulting in Brown being tried within this District's territory for treason, murder, and inciting a slave insurrection. The raid and trial helped set in motion events without which this District would never have existed.
27. After sleuthing your way across the country you've likely worked up a thirst. So let's pop over to this District, in which a November 30, 1919 newspaper reported of the previous day's proceedings: "A remarkable thing happened in United States District Court yesterday morning. When the case of the United States versus Ten Gallons of Whiskey was called, the defendant came into court without a friend or claimant. There was no one in this moonshine-torn state to plead for leniency for Ten Gallons, and the court could do nothing else than order the defendant destroyed. This proceeding was repeated, but with lesser cause for wonderment, in the libel cases of the government against four and one-half bottles Injection Zip; versus thirteen dozen boxes Black Caps; versus Cummings Pill mass; versus Santal Oil. No owners appeared in behalf of the defendants and orders of destruction were entered."
28. Meet me at the Three Sisters.

And there was VD, just as he promised. I found him standing on the Ninth Street span. This time, he had his hand extended. "Nicely done. It took you long enough, but I knew you'd make it to the end. You always were resourceful."

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“I’m not sure you realize it, but you’ve already completed the mission. I couldn’t tell you precisely what it was in that note I sent you just in case it fell into the wrong hands, but all you need to do is unscramble the phrase I gave you—UPTEMPOS HAUNT, you’ll remember. All too simple, really. But look, you’ve done it. We’re back! Big time!” He smiled broadly with that remark, then put his hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eye.

“Now, there’s just one last thing I need you to do for me. The key, of course. Start with the fruits of your traveling labors, and convert it into its order number. Then take the place we’re standing together right now, and convert it into its order number, too. Divide the former by the latter, and fill in the last two blanks of the key with the number that results.”

“That’s it, my friend. Right there. Where it all started. Well, truth be told, I was there before it was. Helped get the whole thing up and running. They even gave me a nice statue for it. But my point is, without that key there in front of you – the sixteenth section in particular – we couldn’t join this splendid puzzle thing you looped me into. But with it, I’m confident we can. So good work!”

As VD finished congratulating me, a breeze gusted across the bridge, almost blowing his hat off and into the river below. He grabbed it mid-air, placed it back on his head, and kept his hand up to hold it in place.

“Look, thrilled as I am to see you, I’m afraid I can’t stay. I’ve got to head home and track down a Mr. Vassallo, clue him in on our little plot. Then it’s straight back to chambers for me. Evidently no one thinks three opinions a year is up to snuff anymore. But I’m so far behind I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to dig my way out. Anyway, enough dallying. I’m off!”

And with that, VD strode back across the bridge, where I saw he had tethered the same horse he had ridden off on all of those many months ago. It would have been much faster for him to just take a taxi, I thought to myself. But not VD. With him, it was always that horse.

As he rode off, I silently wished him luck on the challenge ahead.



Editors’ note: We hope the author will provide us with the solution(s) to this challenge in time for our Summer issue, so that we can share with you.