

Application

The application CD had several hidden items. Under the label you can find the words “silence counts.” This is a hint to count the number of seconds of silence after each track on the audio portion of the disc, which points you down the road to the correct solution of the cipher included in the file portion of the disc. You might not have noticed that if you try to use “jackpot” as the key, the resultant message is “oh spittoon” followed by a bunch of nonsense. There were also two bonuses on the application. The first can be found by looking at the hidden files in the file portion of the disc, called “desktop db” and “desktop df.” There are text messages in each; one points to the other one, which in turn instructs you to show us the number 604 in your application for a bonus. Some of you may have noticed that 604 is the highway number of The Strip in Las Vegas. The second bonus was a bit trickier. If you take the length of the songs in the audio portion (not including the silence at the end) and translate each length into a letter by modding 26 on the total number of seconds, you get this message: “cd universe reviews.” If you go to cduniverse.com and look up the album Jackpot: The Las Vegas Story (the source of the songs on the audio portion of the application disc), you will find a review posted by a listener in Las Vegas. Taking the first letter of each word in the review yields a message telling you to show us an elephant in the application for extra credit. It is interesting to note that the final song on the audio portion has a length of 4:20, with no silence at the end. This gives a nice nod to number theme of the weekend, but it also happens to mod 26 all the way down to zero, or no letter. Some stopped at 26 for a Z, but we won't hold that against them.

Website

The nautical flag encoding on the original front page says “get ready.” On the roster page, hidden in the source there's ebcidic that says that ebcidic is not required. On the faq page, hidden in the source there's a code using the nth prime to encode letter n that says that a power drill is not required. On the teams page, there is a weird ordering of "you don't need a snowboard" (i.e. `<!-- dyr oau owbiw loln ns oat dnee -->`) in the source.

On the first soaa page (<http://www.thejackpotgame.com/soaa/flash.htm>), hidden in the page source there's the comment `<!-- stsize3 ---->`, which roughly means there exists 3 preclues on this page. They are:

- 1) The wheels directly spell out the message about preclues not being mandatory.
- 2) Ascii on the letters/non letters spells out that the password is gnobflasm.
- 3) A pentary encoding using the symbols (in the order that they appear) that spells out “aha so you made it here you must be a true ubergeek.”

On the second soaa page, there are 2 preclues (as mentioned by the stsize2 comment in the source):

- 1) The SIMPSONS mention in the letter wheel of the T's.
- 2) A no-spaces cryptogram using patterns of symbols on the racks to spell out "a well prepared family should have a large protractor in their van."

On the third soaa page (password "protractor"), there is only one preclue: it uses the numbers on the wheels in groups of four that are the reciprocal of the letter's number. This clue spells out: “Keep almanac with you.”

On the FAQ page, there's a preclue in the source of the question "what should I bring?". The spaces between lines in the source spell out "no kitchen sink". David adds: “Oops, I forgot that I had done this when I initially set up the site – www.thejackpotgame.com/joint.html says "nicework". I totally forgot I did this as a joke to myself as I set up the site. My guess is that no one has seen it.” Well, David, now we have, you freak. Finally, the picture of Elvis and the bride on the main page is a shot of the Little White Wedding Chapel.

E-mails and mailings

Several hints were available in the various mailings that you received from us. The welcome letter included mention of the Greased Palm System, with the GPS in bold type. It also mentioned blackjack strategy among other things. The return address on the welcome letter was in fact Jackpot Central. If you sent an email to SOAA Properties asking for more information about timeshare, you were sent a return that reiterated much of the information in the welcome letter, but also gave a brief list of countries that have exchange opportunities. This used the same encoding as the slide at the banquet (see below), and gave the message “nice job.” The insider email that came the week of the event included a number code that spelled out letters on the telephone keypad; each character that is spelled out starts and ends with the same keypad symbol. This message told teams to bring a compass and a handheld GPS unit (in case you missed the Greased Palm System hint).

Banquet

There was one slide in particular that should have caught your attention at the banquet. It had the heading “Clue In to Vacation Exchange” and had a list of countries. This slide was kept up about as long as all of the rest of the slides combined in order to give everyone a good chance to notice the “clue in” hint and copy down the information. If you find the two-letter country code for each of the countries listed and then take only the second letter of each, you end up with the message “be ready at eight,” which was our warning that the first clue would be delivered at 8 am on Saturday morning instead of 8:30. Another hidden tidbit at the presentation was that one slide had a picture of a house posing as timeshare. This was in fact a photo of Jackpot Central, where we lived for the month of April.

Wake-up

As we had hoped, the teams were evenly mixed: several had solved the banquet clue and were ready to go at 8, several were surprised but still awake and ready, and several were a bit groggy, and definitely not raring to go.

Journal of Stories

This clue let players know right away that Jack Pyrite’s world isn’t bound by the same time constraints that we are. Characters can easily be 200 years old or more. There are several things you might have missed in the Journal, some of which will be mentioned later on. For one, there are 13 paragraphs. Each paragraph is about Jack and one of the characters in his chain, and the order is the same as the order of the puzzles. So, the first paragraph is about Plays With Fire, the second is about Maguey Verde, the third is about Barley Corn, and so on. Of course, most of the information given about the characters at this point would really only resonate fully in hindsight. Some other hidden items: the numbers of the dates in the first paragraph spell out “perpetual calendar” as a hint on how to solve the clue. The six dates in the second paragraph are the birthdays of the six principal members of Just Passing Through. Finally, the numbers of the dates in the last paragraph spell out “Pyrite baby,” a nod to the movie Swingers. Most of the stories in the journal are based on actual Nevada history. Samuel Clemens first used the name Mark Twain in Carson City on the date mentioned; the Yellow Jacket mine really caught fire and burned for years; a 50-pound sack of flour was in fact sold at auction hundreds of times and raised over \$200,000 for charity; there were exactly 420 miles of Pony Express routes in Nevada, and so on. Imagine that, learning history while you play!

Ethel M Factory

Not much hidden here, except that some teams didn’t notice that there was a chocolate in the display case that hinted that it might be beneficial to spend some time getting familiar with the programs on the NEO.

Lake Mead / Celebrity Planets

This clue was relatively straightforward, though you might have missed the fact that the paragraph about Maguey in the first clue mentioned that he liked fishing on the lake and staring up at the stars, which was a hint about the planetary nature of the discs.

Hoover Dam / Semaphore Flags

This was a straightforward clue, but there was a bonus for teams that followed instructions. Barley Corn asked teams to deliver a message to the tour guide and tell him what she said. If they returned to Barley and gave him the tour guide’s message, Barley gave them the template for solving the logic problem. While this wasn’t essential to solving the meta puzzle, it was definitely helpful to have it.

Dry Lake / Tumbleweed

This clue was relatively straightforward.

Techatticup Mine / Blind Billiards

This clue was relatively straightforward. The Magic 8 Ball contained hints toward binary (1000 instead of 8) and Braille (“I am unable to see the answer”), which most teams figured out.

Turbine Statue / Postcards

The flavor text for this clue had several darts terms included as hints towards the solution: bull's-eye, dart around, flight, tip, got on board. In addition, the NEO hint that told teams that the locals never forget about doubles and triples pointed toward another hidden bit of information: the three cities that hit a double or triple ring on the dartboard were each represented by local postcards (Lake Mead, Hoover Dam, and the turbine statue itself), with the correct city listed in the handwritten text of the note on the back of the postcard.

Frenchman Mountain Interpretive Site

This was one of many areas where we were able to make minor adjustments to the length of Jackpot. Had teams been faster than we originally anticipated, we would have put The Professor's message at the end of the interpretive trail, about a 10-minute hike up and around the mountain. The view from this spot is fantastic, so if you're ever back in the area we would strongly recommend taking the time, especially as night falls. The information plaque at the end of the trail is a popular geocaching spot, and there is a sign-in booklet up there for visitors. Jack had visited that spot a while ago, and had shared some information in the booklet that might have been helpful later on to any team running around the Strip looking for answers...

Shadow Rock Park / Binary Jumper

This clue was relatively straightforward.

The Library / lapdance & trinary vibrator

This clue was relatively straight and definitely forward. One thing that was never mentioned explicitly is that Candi's married name (she was briefly married to Barley) was Candi Corn. Such a sweet girl.

Tattoo Asylum / Arc de Triomphe tattoo

This clue was relatively straightforward.

The Strip / Pyramid clue

There were six jacks, each with a different orientation. The one whose orientation matched the rest of the cards was the only one that wasn't upside-down in the final solution. When properly assembled, there are five upside-down jacks in the pyramid, and the letter J from each should be facing the same direction. The green dots in the two of diamonds and three of diamonds help you orient the layers correctly if you missed the J hint mentioned above, and they also tell you where to begin reading the message across each layer. As a final hidden element, if you take the questions in card order (starting with the twos instead of the aces, just as you do when you read the final message) and turn the answers into letters, you get "pyramid power" followed by a bunch of nonsense.

Yellow Horse Casino

This clue was relatively straightforward. The name originally came from the fact that the yellow water tank at the site looks like a horse. We also liked the fact that Jack had a giant yellow horse, which was a nice homage to Paul Bunyan's giant blue ox. You may not be aware that the Yellow Horse's name is Bambino.

UNLV Flashlight Statue / Continuo tiles

This clue was relatively straightforward. We especially liked how the quote on the flavor card mentions the light of knowledge and truth (see below for more on the flavor cards).

Little White Wedding Chapel / Marriage certificate

This clue was relatively straightforward. However, the fact that the certificate had an actual seal of the state of Nevada caused us some headaches, as it evidently wasn't fake enough for some people's tastes. Oh well.

Red Rock Canyon / navigation

This clue was relatively straightforward.

Meta Puzzle

There was a lot of hidden information surrounding the meta puzzle. Basically, the puzzle had two main parts: a logic problem revolving around a series of poker games, and a second section revolving around specific episodes of *The Simpsons*. Both could be found in the gold flavor cards that came with the clues. For starters, the bottom four lines of text on each card gave conditions for the logic problem. Using all of these rules, it is possible to figure out the setup at each of the six games. When this information is entered into the template, the targeted letters spell out the first part of the meta-message:

Some astute families noticed that one of the games contains an apparent impossibility: a woman (Candi) sits to the left of the dealer (Jimmy the Skink), a condition that should have been forbidden. What those families failed to notice, however, was that Jimmy the Skink was often able to convince Jack to relax his normally stringent personal policies. The Skink can be quite persuasive; we're sure that he made Jack an offer he couldn't refuse to enable the sexy Candi to sit to his left. We hope you weren't caused much confusion by this.

The second part of the puzzle was a bit more hidden. The numbers in the diamonds on the flavor cards use the same coding as the pyramids. For example, the A card has the adjuster -9. Take the Ace of diamonds (14) and subtract 9 to get an E. The message spells out to say "episode number." This is a reference to the fact that the NEO codes on the bottom of each card contain the episode numbers of various episodes of *The Simpsons*. Basically, take away the first four digits of each NEO code, and you're left with a *Simpsons* episode number. The names of the episodes should then be entered into the template given at the Yellow Horse Casino, and the targeted letters will spell out the second half of the message (the part telling teams to show us the most efficient solution to the block puzzle app on the NEO for a bonus). Another way to solve this second part of the meta puzzle was to use the quotations on the cards. The italicized quote underneath the character name is from the episode in question (though not necessarily from the character that the card represents), as are all of the lines within quotation marks within the body of the text. For those who care, the quotes are always consistent (in other words, Matt Simon quotes are always Milhouse, Maguey Verde quotes are always Grampa, etc.). It should also be noted that quotes attributed to Jack come from two sources: Bart and Mr. Burns. This was to represent the timelessness of Jack Pyrite. He's both a young scoundrel and an old scoundrel all at once.

Some more of the story comes to light when the meta puzzle is taken into account. For example, those who know the Stonecutter's song from the *Simpsons* episode (Number Four's card) may remember a few key lines: "who keeps the martians under wraps" and "who rigs every Oscar night." You may recall that in the journal of stories clue, we learned of Jack's involvement in Area 51 and in alien autopsies. Further, Jack's meetings with Charlton and the Academy in March of 1959 were during the weeks before *Ben Hur* won the most Oscars of any movie to date. Coincidence? Not likely. Also, the Maguey Verde episode (the Flying Hellfish) is one of the sources for Jackpot's story. In this episode, several people enter into a tontine in which the last member alive gets the treasure. Jack's puzzle chain works a bit differently, but also features a group of people keeping a treasure secret over many years. It was important for us to keep the *Simpsons* references as subtle as possible, which is why the meta puzzle was broken into two parts. The first part (the logic problem) was essentially the third puzzle from the original framing story (the puzzle that lists the treasure's rightful owners). The second part (the *Simpsons* episodes) was simply a bonus, and not at all necessary for any resolution to the Pyrite saga. However, we found it absolutely uncanny that the couch gag on the *Simpsons* that aired on 4/21 after the event was over featured a slot machine with spinning wheels and the word "Jackpot!" written above. Creepy.

Finally, for those who didn't make the connection, the whole hidden treasure with three puzzles scenario is lifted almost directly from the legendary Beale Treasure story. If you haven't heard of the Beale Treasure, please do yourself a favor and check it out—it's pretty fascinating! There's a very good summary of the story in Simon Singh's *The Code Book*, which is a very worthwhile read for any puzzle enthusiast.

Thanks for reading this. We hope you had as much fun with it as we did!