

Introduction

Hello there,

If you want to play the treasure hunt:

Look at the original post, verse and image below. Don't read any further!

If you get stuck you can find some hints highlighted in black. Use them sparingly.

If you're looking for the solution:

Scroll down until you find the **big red** spoiler tags (they're hard to miss)

In this document you'll find the following:

- The original armchair treasure hunt and all updates
- Hints for all parts of the treasure hunt
- A full solution to the treasure hunt
- Some thoughts about treasure hunt design and solving The Secret

Congratulations to the winner and a big thank you to everyone who participated in the hunt, my testers, the nice folk at opengameart.org and whoever gave me Reddit gold!

If you have any questions, feel free to send me a message on Reddit.

Please don't submit any solutions, as the prize has been claimed and I won't check for new solves.

DocFalko

The Tower

*Where G and A are set in stone,
Seek F atop his morbid throne.
From the discoverer,
Follow the savior
And seek the place
Where wisdom's pearls are kept.
Loop the loop and back you go
To four of wood and four of stone.
Now seek him who went opposite four times
Of where you're going now.
Downhill via dolorosa
Til you hit the lions' corner
Left, not straight,
Another red gate,
Up the stairs
To the square
Beyond the pale
Witness the grail
At the gates
Treasure waits.*



Using GFX from HenrySoftware via itch.io, and assets from usr_share, Jetrel, ArMM1998 via opengameart.org (thank you!!!)

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An armchair treasure hunt you can solve from home

THE TREASURE HAS BEEN FOUND AND THE PRIZE HAS BEEN CLAIMED

Bored while sitting at home? Me too!

Way back before the days of the internet there were books like *The Secret and Masquerade*, full of riddles and puzzles leading the way to buried treasures.

Some of these treasures are still out there, but now we have to #StayAtHome and cannot search for them.

But with the internet we have the world at our fingertips! So my idea was to create an armchair treasure hunt that lets you participate from the comfort of your home.

The rules:

Your goal is to identify a location in the real world where an imaginary treasure is hidden.

You can discover this location by studying the image and using the internet.

The first person to submit a correct and complete solution will win a 50\$ prize (amazon gift card, steam gift card, etc.).

Don't send me any private messages. A way to submit the solution will reveal itself when you solve the puzzle.

There is NO TREASURE buried in the real world. Don't go digging, but #StayAtHome!

The winner chosen at my sole discretion. Any recourse to courts of law is excluded.

No hints will be given via private message, e-mail etc. , but feel free to share your findings.

P.S.: I'm a programmer, so excuse my pixelart.

A full resolution picture is available at <https://imgur.com/fcmnROs>

Link to the original thread

https://www.reddit.com/r/12keys/comments/fqserp/a_tribute_treasure_hunt_you_can_solve_from_home/

THE TREASURE HAS BEEN FOUND AND THE PRIZE HAS BEEN CLAIMED

Updates

Just like the Secret, my riddle was made at a point in time. But as time passes, things tend to change.

Unlike Byron Preiss I can keep you up-to-date.

A certain search engine provider has updated their pictures of the treasure's area since the riddle's inception, but fret not, you can still see the older pictures (by clicking on the clock in the top left corner).

To even the odds here's some helpful apocrypha:

Times are changing on your screen

You're lucky it's a time machine

So you can see what's now unseen.

Back then you could fly with me,

Now there's nothing left to see,

And another ho is now the home of E.

Sleepyhead, you failed the test,

You parked in front of the one at rest,

The one where you go north not west.

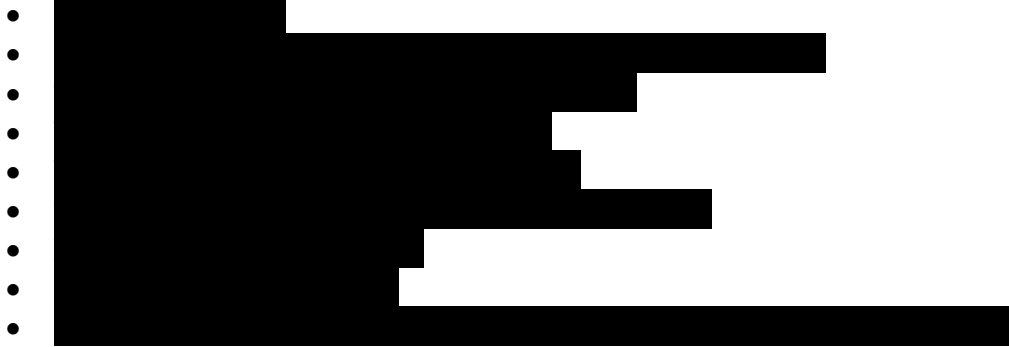
Riddlesmith, you are the worst!

You miswrote a crucial verse.

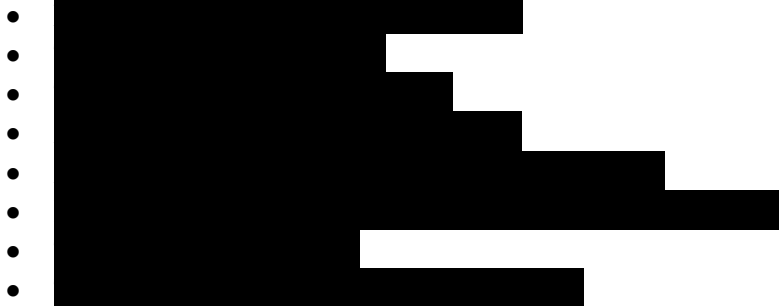
You misjudged an Eye for a Tea.

Now wrong things the searchers See.

Downhill via dolorosa



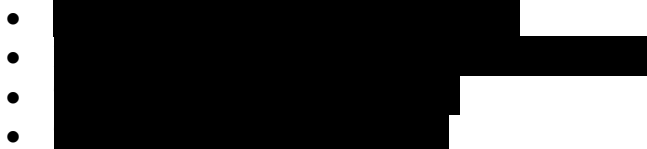
The lions' corner



Left, not straight, another red gate



Up the stairs, to the square



Beyond the pale



Witness the grail

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

The gates

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

7



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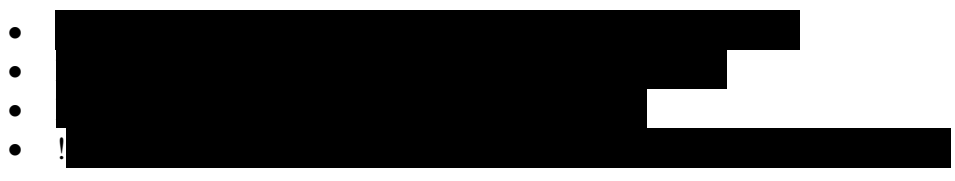
15



17



19



Bottom Riddle

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**!SPOILERS
FOLLOW!**

**!SPOILERS
FOLLOW!**

Solution

Overview

The treasure is in Salamanca, Spain.

The riddle contains of three components:

- First Verse
- Image
- Second Verse – unlocked by recognizing and scanning the QR code on the image

The way to the solution is as follows:

- Determine the city from the available hints
- Determine the road to the treasure using the verse and the image
- Match locations on the road to lines of the verse
- With the second image, you have to decipher an e-mail address to send your solution to

All maps and street images from Google Maps and Google Streetviews

All other illustrations from commons.wikimedia.org

First Verse

In general, the order of the road to the treasures is straightforward, except for one loop, as indicated below.

In the following each verse will be solved individually, resulting in the road to the treasure and the treasure's location.

Note that the image provides confirmers for some stations on the road to the treasure.

1 Where G and A are set in stone,

(New Cathedral – astronaut and gargoyle/grotesque in ornaments of north lateral entrance!)

<https://www.amusingplanet.com/2015/02/the-cathedral-of-salamanca-astronaut.html>

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/spain/articles/the-story-behind-salamancas-mystery-stone-carvings/>

<https://www.google.de/maps/@40.9611387,->

[5.6659957,3a,75y,192.73h,116.07t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1szz5e2zCm5oYgW00WT_Rf2A!2e0!7i13312!8i6656](https://www.google.de/maps/@40.9611387,-5.6659957,3a,75y,192.73h,116.07t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1szz5e2zCm5oYgW00WT_Rf2A!2e0!7i13312!8i6656)

2 seek F atop his morbid throne.

(The Frog of Salamanca sits atop a skull – a morbid throne – at the university)

<https://salamancaspanish.com/en/the-mystery-of-the-frog-of-salamanca/>

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/spain/articles/a-guide-to-frog-spotting-in-salamanca/>

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9615832,->

[5.6674083,3a,53.5y,150.6h,92.3t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sP4eet6uFtoXwSpVyzykrmw!2e0!7i13312!8i6656](https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9615832,-5.6674083,3a,53.5y,150.6h,92.3t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sP4eet6uFtoXwSpVyzykrmw!2e0!7i13312!8i6656)

3 From the discoverer,

(Plaza Colon with monument of Christopher Columbus)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9624864,-5.6638636,3a,59.9y,178.65h,101.72t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1scPXmMjCyz0FYqAU7Ab4x7Q!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>



4 Follow the savior

(reference to Jesus Christ – and the Calle Jesus)

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9620231,-5.6642471,3a,75y,275.24h,81.94t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s1PQUEm2vBIFZ9uENZstuJQ!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo1.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3D1PQUEm2vBIFZ9uENZstuJQ%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D310.5151%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192



5 And seek the place

6 Where wisdom's pearls are kept.

(Pearls are kept in a seashell – and pearls of wisdom are kept in books – the casa de las conchas is full of seashells and is a public library)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.962814,-5.6660388,3a,75y,48.4h,114.55t/data=!3m8!1e1!3m6!1sAF1QipNos01jgTSXDXsCITdUXSsqdwSJCo0TohVkeKBE!2e10!3e11!6shhttps:%2F%2Fh5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipNos01jgTSXDXsCITdUXSsqdwSJCo0TohVkeKBE%3Dw203-h100-k-no-pi-0-ya134.7946-ro0-fo100!7i2508!8i1254>



7 Loop the loop and back you go

(this is a break in sequence – this comes after you’ve been in a loop – at the university and the frog)

(Patio de Escuelas is the loop and you need to go back to where you came from)

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Patio+de+Escuelas,+37008+Salamanca,+Spanien/@40.9615844,-5.6678118,130m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0xd3f263fefa2c5b5:0x9422b0d56f0fdb1!8m2!3d40.9616056!4d-5.6674968>



8 to four of wood and four of stone

(north entrance again, four columns and four trees / or four green isles from above)

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9613948,-5.6657126,3a,75y,34.92h,104.71t/data=!3m8!1e1!3m6!1sAF1QipOg9w7vhm_hKWkskJhGFtszLWLRcHWxM97k62jL!2e10!3e11!6shttps:%2F%2Fh5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipOg9w7vhm_hKWkskJhGFtszLWLRcHWxM97k62jL%3Dw203-h100-k-no-pi-0-ya165.81624-ro-0-fo100!7i8704!8i4352



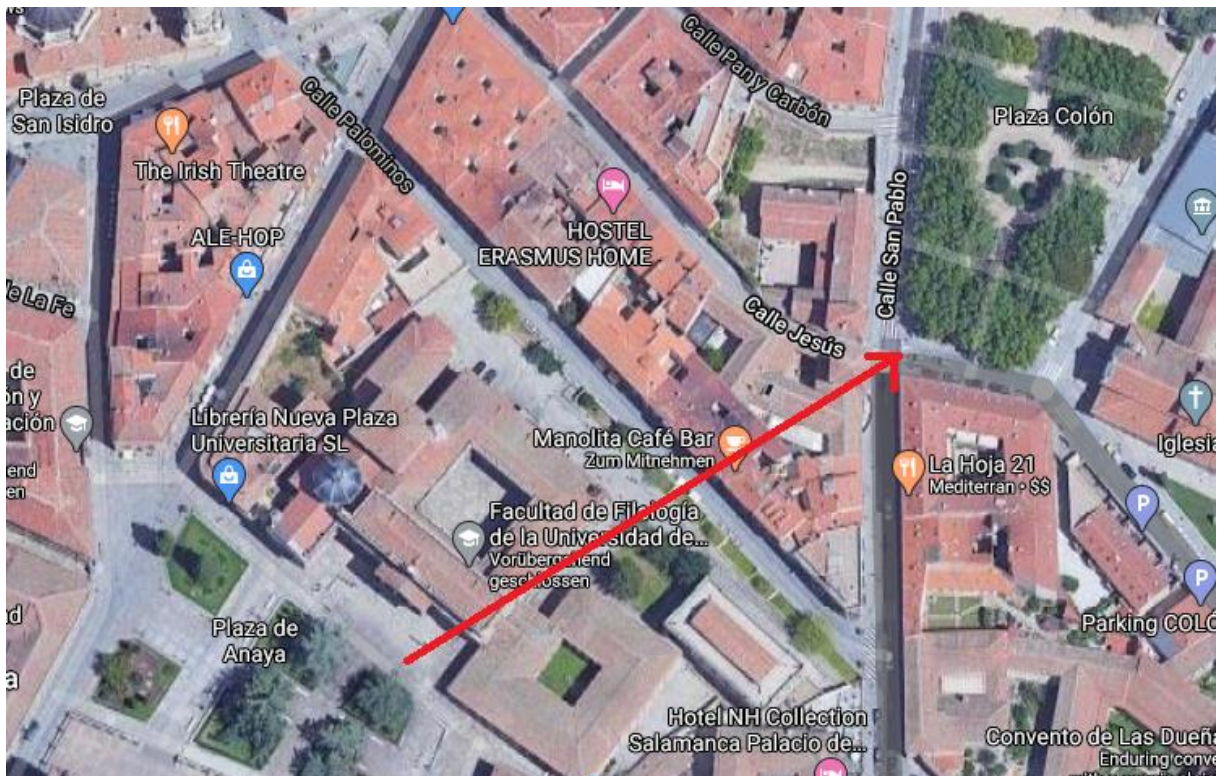
9 Now seek him who went opposite four times

10 Of where you're going now.

(Christopher Columbus went west and south on his four voyages to America, if you go to him, you need to go north east)

(solving this riddle and identifying the discoverer allows you to figure out the sequence break or loop in the verse)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyages_of_Christopher_Columbus



11 Downhill via dolorosa,

(after the out-of-sequence verses we're back at casa de las conchas)

(probably the most misleading verse in the riddle – note that via dolorosa is not capitalized, hinting the it might not be THE Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem)

(Salamanca is famous for its easter processions – one road used for them is the calle de la compañía Salamanca and it goes downhill from the casa de las conchas)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Week_in_Salamanca

[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calle_de_la_Compa%C3%B1a_\(Salamanca\)](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calle_de_la_Compa%C3%B1a_(Salamanca))

[https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9628807,-](https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9628807,-5.666056,3a,75y,322.23h,74.21t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sVa3sCikiJ3jN1OlZnqYsJA!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo)

[5.666056,3a,75y,322.23h,74.21t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sVa3sCikiJ3jN1OlZnqYsJA!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo3.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DVA3sCikiJ3jN1OlZnqYsJA%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D48.887085%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192](https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9628807,-5.666056,3a,75y,322.23h,74.21t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sVa3sCikiJ3jN1OlZnqYsJA!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo3.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DVA3sCikiJ3jN1OlZnqYsJA%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D48.887085%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192)

12 Til you hit the Lions' corner

(you reach the Palacio de Monterrey, arriving at the corner where a coat of arms with Lions can be seen as well as lion heads adorning the corner)

(combined with the previous verse and the Lion's Gate in Jerusalem, that lead many people LITERALLY down the wrong road)

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9649693,-5.6664941,3a,53.5y,336.19h,130.33t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sYKRPAbIdYvMXooH_T5pwIQ!2e0!7i16384!8i8192



13 Left, not straight,

(take a left turn at the corner, into Plaza Augustinas)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9650203,-5.6665669,3a,75y,280.76h,102.66t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sm6E7WpzfF3-rr0uSBthT5w!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>



14 Another red gate

(gate of the Iglesia de la Purísima – on Google Maps there's even another red gate of a truck in front of it)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9650769,-5.6671527,3a,75y,232.15h,100.38t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sOaYmQCrQvRBJZw0cymIHg!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

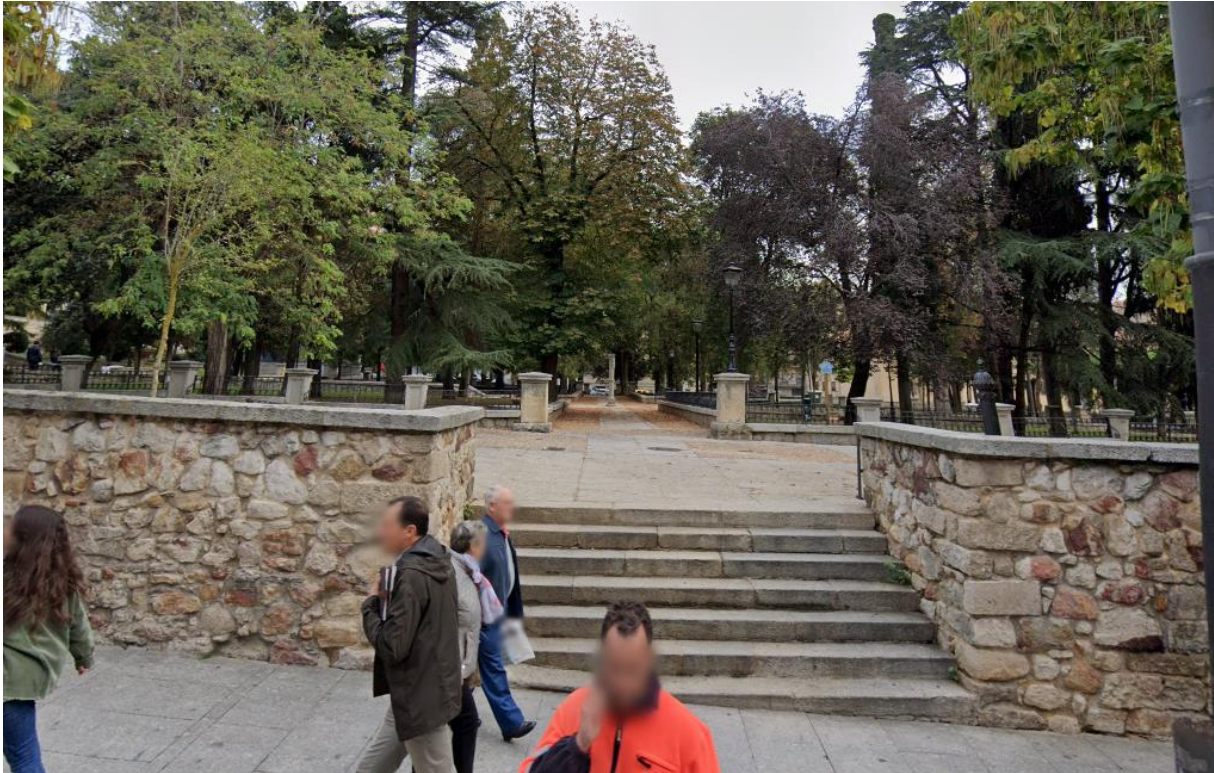


15 Up the stairs

(continue ahead until you reach the Calle Ramon y Cajal, to the right there are stairs leading into Campo de San Francisco)

(this doesn't mean the stairs of the Iglesia de la Purísima)

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9657689,-5.6687393,3a,75y,33.21h,97.47t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sbObxH1Xyi0xRIgxyJQKj0w!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>



16 To the square

(you reach a square plaza with a column or pale)

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Patio+de+Escuelas,+37008+Salamanca,+Spanien/@40.9660904,-5.668653,55m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0xd3f263fefa2c5b5:0x9422b0d56f0fdb1!8m2!3d40.9616056!4d-5.6674968>



17 Beyond the pale

(pass the pale and go further)

(this is also a play on words: https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/beyond_the_pale)

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9661343,-5.6684554,3a,75y,208.49h,79.08t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sM2mt9HzKf9ZMRMQkao13vA!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo2.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DM2mt9HzKf9ZMRMQkao13vA%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D108.35925%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656



18 Witness the grail

(there's a fountain shaped like a grail, giving you a strong visual confirmer)

https://www.google.de/maps/@40.9662475,-5.6687216,3a,37.6y,199.3h,78.06t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1szaKSCg3achoYgyhLtCmCBg!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo0.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DzaKSCg3achoYgyhLtCmCBg%26output%3Dthumbnail%26client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D186.99179%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656



19 At the gates

(continue in the same direction (pale to grail) and you reach a black gate, formerly belonging to a public library)

<https://www.google.de/maps/@40.9663812,-5.6690376,3a,48.3y,302.19h,90.32t/data=!3m8!1e1!3m6!1sAF1QipPtEisJEVaZmWV-jXtN3yxQTEyXzE-6K3XamHFZ!2e10!3e11!6shttps:%2F%2Fh5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipPtEisJEVaZmWV-jXtN3yxQTEyXzE-6K3XamHFZ%3Dw203-h100-k-no-pi-0-ya180.02895-ro0-fo100!7i10240!8i5120>



20 Treasure waits.

(behind the gates is the virtual treasure)

<https://lacronicadesalamanca.com/126351-proponen-que-la-biblioteca-del-campo-san-francisco-sea-un-centro-ludico/>

<https://salamancabuenasnoticias.com/2018/06/30/la-biblioteca-del-campo-de-san-francisco-sera-espacio-de-lectura-tambien-en-verano/>

The treasure is books, as the gates belong to a small public library

The image

The image serves a threefold purpose:

- First, it is the easiest way to figure out the country and city the treasure is hidden in.
- Second, it contains visual hints and confirmers for some elements on the road to the treasure and the location.
- Third, it contains a coded link to the second verse.

All hints in the image – from top to bottom

- The antenna resembles the ornaments in the black door you need to find
- The dome and railing resemble the cathedral of Salamanca
- The Alpha and Omega further reinforce the Christian connection as well and indicate the old and new cathedral of Salamanca are close together
- First framed picture:
 - The three seashells are of course a joke (Demolition Man and lack of toilet paper during Covid19 crisis), but also hint at the casa de la conchas
 - In the background of the waterfall the word Tormes can be found (right side below the grail bowl) – the Tormes river flows through Salamanca
- Left to the grail picture you can see a little rocket in the starfield, a little obscure hint to the astronaut
- The coat of arms:
 - The halved coat of arms at the left and right end match the sister cities of Salamanca, Coimbra and Würzburg
 - The two coats of arms in the center use the structure of the Salamanca family crest. The two objects are a diamond grill (teeth) and a hotel bell, referencing two characters from Breaking Bad: Tuco and Hector Salamanca
- The second framed picture:
 - Contains a monk (Saint Francis) – he has a curious shape (not only because I can't draw), because he resembles the city center of Salamanca as seen on a map
 - You can see the inspiration for the saint's depiction here: <http://imagessaintes.canalblog.com/archives/2015/12/26/33117727.html>
 - The monk's eye is in the location of Campo de San Francisco and the pupil is in the position of the "grail" fountain, witnessing it.
 - Behind and above the monk's ear you can find the numbers 37008 in the hair, which is the zip code of Salamanca
 - The monk's chain contains blue crosses that mimic a part of Salamanca's coat of arms. The position of the chain indicates the river Tormes.
 - The amulet of the monk resembles Colon Plaza and the colors match (one version of) Columbus' family crest. Also in the center where the statue would be, the letters CC for Christopher Columbus can be seen through minor shading differences
 - In the background there is a brighter spot, which is the outline of Castile and León, the community of Spain Salamanca (and the monk) is in
- Below the second picture frame there are some rocks that are brighter than others. Using the long vertical lines as a delimiter, these spell the word Europe in Morse code
- On top of the three columns below you can make out roman numerals just below the balustrade. These are IV, III, IX and III, and II giving +34 923, Salamanca's phone area code in Spain
- The red doors are of course a reference to the red doors all over Salamanca, in particular those of the university where you find the frog. Similarly, the stones of the tower are meant to resemble the stones of many buildings in Salamanca
- On the red door you find three rings and lots of nails. These form a QR code, where you have to do a little image manipulation to reach the second image. The outer rings resemble the rim of the "grail" fountain
- Now on to the heads on the three columns – there are 8 available slots on each column, from left to right, interpreting them as bits gives you 01000101 01010011 01000001 – or ESA in ASCII. E-SA is the car license plate of Salamanca.

- The heads themselves describe your journey. Start with a city with a bull in its coat of arms – then you find the Gargoyle and the Astronaut. After that it is on to the frog on the skull (I swapped the order here because I feared F atop would otherwise be too obvious – that turned out to be wrong), then it's on to Columbus and Jesus Christ. Then you have a Lion as in Lion's corner and finally, the saint (San Francisco)
- The mountains:
 - On the left of the tower you can see a bull on the bridge (the roman bridge in Salamanca) and a tree, giving you more elements of Salamanca's coat of arms
 - On the right of the tower you can see the Alcazar de Salamanca in the background – it is not part of the tower, so it's not part of the solution path, but gives you a further hint towards the city
 - Both are near to the old/new cathedral and in the image stand next to the tower, giving you a rough idea of the location

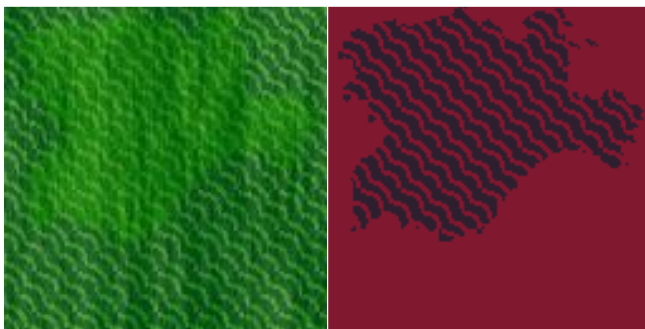
Things that are not hints:

- The star pattern contains no hints, it's just filler with a little visual noise
- The colors of the sunset – it's just to make the picture look a little better
- The shape of the mountains – stock images of clouds, just like in Mario Bros for NES
- The amount of mountains – any resemblance to the Seven Hills of Rome are coincidence (but great theory, anyway!)
- The grass – you can see the pattern is repeating
- The red pattern of the door – only the rings and nails matter
- The waves behind the monks – they only serve to obscure the shape below
- The brown stripes in the balustrade – just randomized to make other hints less obvious
- The shape of the picture frames – recolored and stolen from my game Cards & Crystals
- The position and amount of the seashells – everything has been explained above
- The color and shape of the dome – the only goal was to resemble the real dome in pixel art
- Anything but Tormes in the waterfall – it's just randomized pixels with a few letteresque shapes in them
- The shading of the grail – the goal was just to give a close enough visual match
- The shading of the monk's coat - nothing there but dithering...
- The monk's freckles – again, just a little dithering...

Details



The monk's outline compared to a map of Salamanca – notice that even on the map, you can make out the treasure location as the eye and the river as the necklace



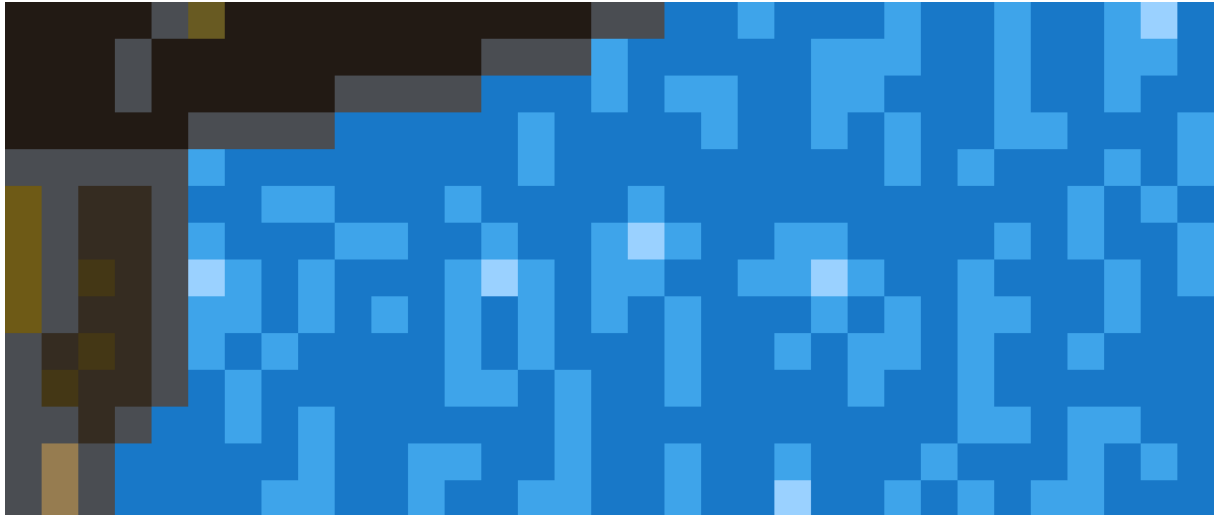
Outline of Castile and León behind the monk



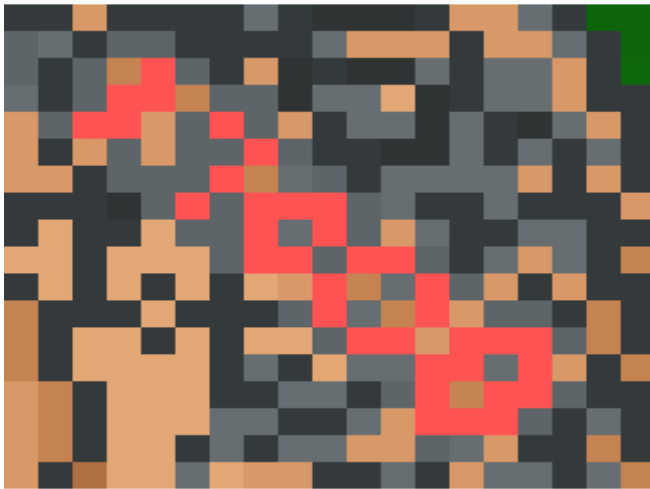
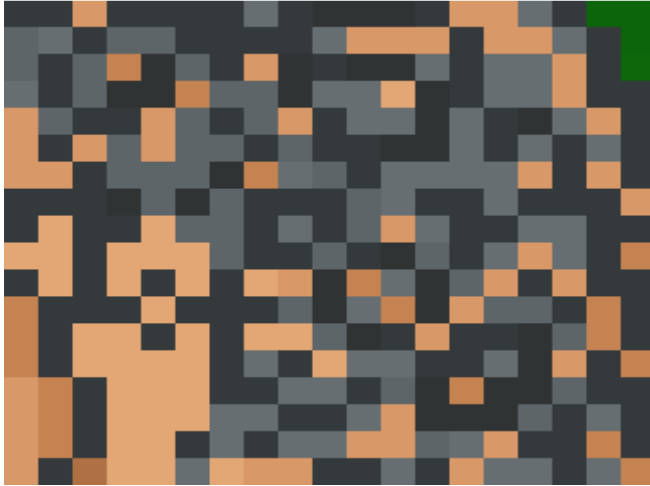
The original QR code vs the final door



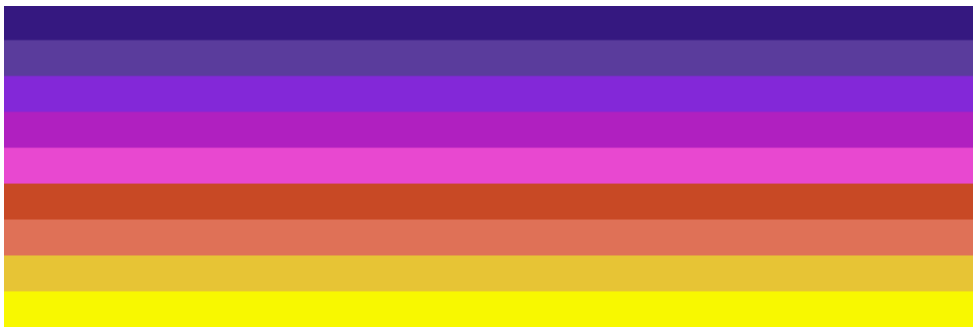
Ornament on top of the tower



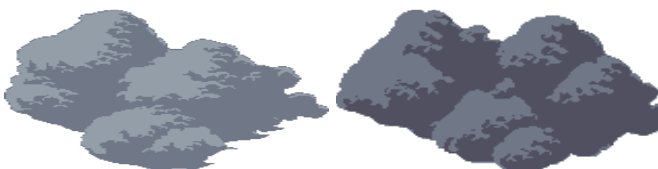
„TORMES“ hidden in the waterfall



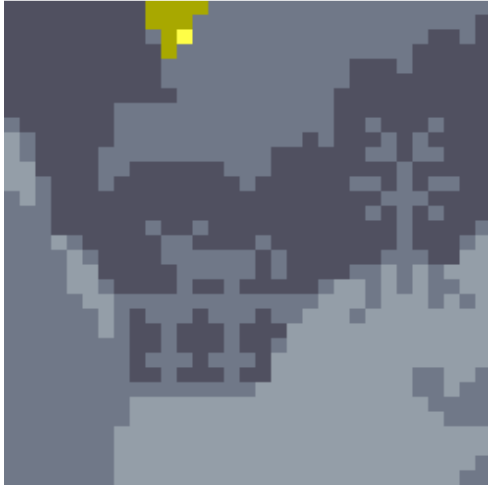
„37008“ hidden in the monk’s hair



The „rainbow“ in the background – just some generic sunset colors



The mountains are actually clouds



Salamanca's coat of armst o the left off he tower



The amulet resembling the outline of Plaza Colon – note the CC initials where the monument to Christopher Columbus is



Roman numerals that with a bit of finagling give you the 34 923 area code



Morse code delimited by vertical lines: | -.- --- .-. . .| translates to europe

The second verse

The second verse can be obtained by following the QR code hidden in the image.

It references the first verse (with line numbers) and helps you spell out an e-mail address to which to send your solution.

The general idea is that you start at the location indicated by the number in the first verse and search for something. (kinda like a side quest in a video game)

1

*Twice go through,
Red not blue,
South are you.
I liked the lion better!
atop counts the letter.*

2

*A ring is an eternal bond.
The second of the first
or the first of the second.*

3

*After you can fly with me
Look out for the home of E
Where you can catch some*

5

*Don't count them all.
Look at the opposite wall!
Red queen
above three
contains three.*

7

*Below the first of blue
You get the first of black,*

8

*Search nearby the saint's survival.
Find his last but not his final.*

9

*Follow to the root nearby.
In the corner of your eye
See the third between black and white.*

11

*Sleepyhead, you went straight not left!
Find fourfold one below the one at rest.*

13

*Don't be shy, look inside.
Who did the one on the bottom right?
Take the second of his third
Or of his second take the third.*

15



*Turn around.
Now you've found
The one who shares a name
With the first's assumed place.
Who made him? Tell me fast
His second's second last.*

17

*From the grail to the round,
Where life from death is found.
Read the words, find a trine
Absent from the second line.*

19

*Crack the code
On the road.
What lies beyond?
Please respond.*

1|15|7|5|11| 3|8|9|13|17|2  x^c 

*A full solution contains the road to the treasure, the treasure's precise location,
how you deciphered the above, and finally, what is inside the treasure's hiding place?*

1

Twice go through,

Red not blue,

South are you.

I liked the lion better!

atop counts the letter.

(references line 1 – so start at the north entrance of the Cathedral – go through two red doors – then you're at the south entrance of the cathedral)

#19 sprayed over the lion, the 19th letter of the Alphabet is

S

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9601461,-5.6661615,3a,73.2y,121.16h,74.05t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sUQQ54JW1AynbteiQK9soTA!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo2.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DUQQ54JW1AynbteiQK9soTA%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D309.54456%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656



2

A ring is an eternal bond.

The second of the first or the first of the second.

(above the gate of the university is a stone ring with two persons - Ferdinand Elisabetha – take the second letter of the first name or the first letter of the second name)

E

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9614801,-5.6673316,3a,19.7y,116.53h,136.22t/data=!3m8!1e1!3m6!1sAF1QipMqxO8Zctd0q8yRl110rRmMJf9KAHI23TCOqpiD!2e10!3e11!6shhttps:%2F%2Fh5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipMqxO8Zctd0q8yRl110rRmMJf9KAHI23TCOqpiD%3Dw203-h100-k-no-pi-0-ya135.19249-ro-0-fo100!7i8704!8i4352>



3

After you can fly with me

Look out for the home of E

Where you can catch some

(while you follow the Calle Jesus look out for a graffiti of a heart with the text “after you can fly with me” (unfortunately Google Maps has since updated StreetView so the Graffiti is gone and the Erasmus Home is now called Erasmus Hostel) it’s a hotel where you can sleep (catch some ZZZs) – thus you complete the rhyme (Zee with E))

Z

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.962183,-5.6646811,3a,75y,180.23h,74.39t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sjBEWrv3gO1v5zUSD8aZp6Q!2e0!5s20161001T000000!7i13312!8i6656>



<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.962394,-5.6649367,3a,75y,195.87h,83.75t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s171FtTjC8zif1sHJeEOI-w!2e0!5s20161001T000000!7i13312!8i6656>



5

Don't count them all.

Look at the opposite wall!

Red queen

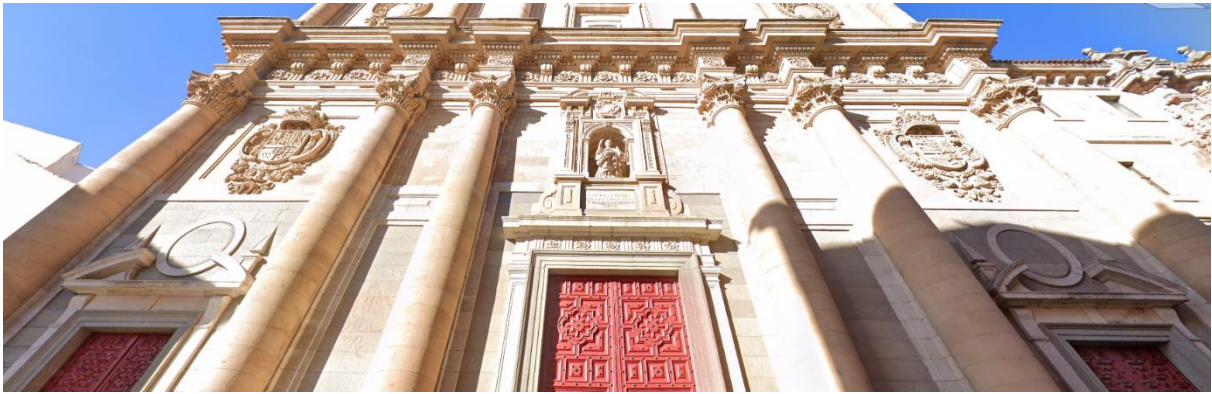
above three

contains three.

(don't count all the seashells of the casa de la concha – instead, look at the opposite wall to the Torre de La Clerencia – above three red doors you find the name of a queen – Margarita, a redhead with a red coat of arms shown in red in a portrait at the University of Salamanca – which contains three A)

A

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9627898,-5.6660271,3a,75y,256.67h,117.83t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sT2wtaHi0-z4pPIUtelrJPg!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_reina_Margarita_de_Austria_\(Universidad_de_Salamanca\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_reina_Margarita_de_Austria_(Universidad_de_Salamanca).png)



7

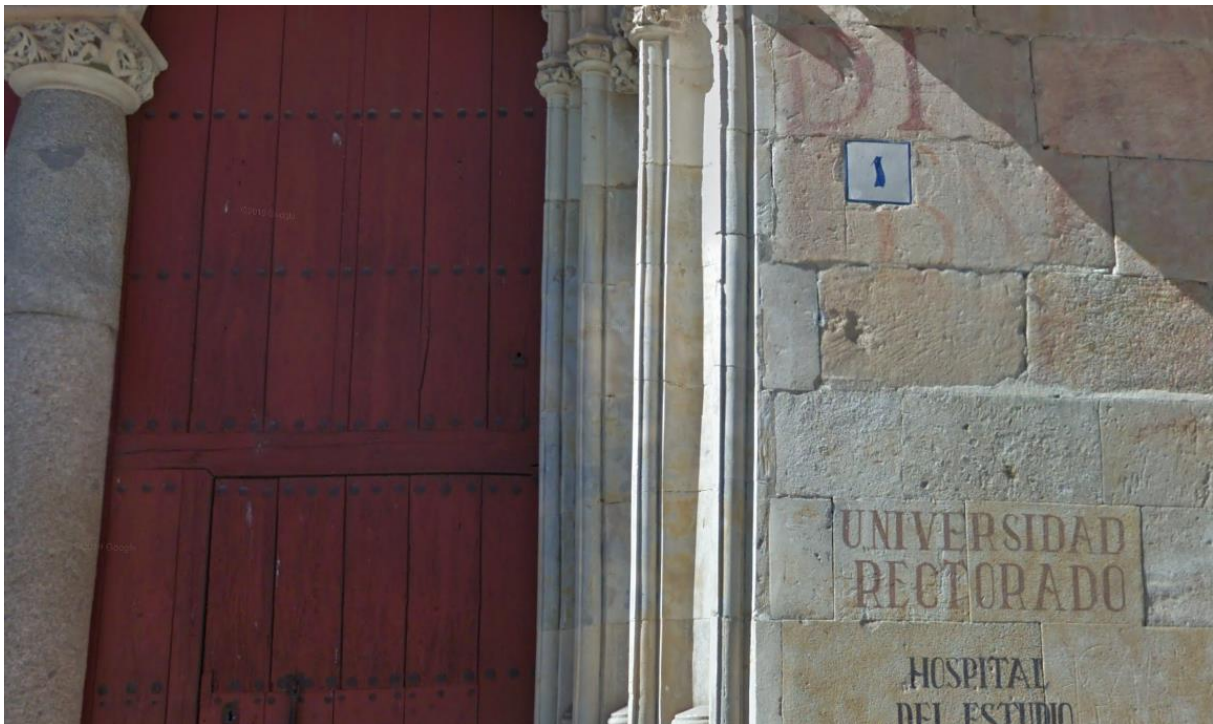
Below the first of blue

You get the first of black.

(in the loop at the University gate, search for the blue number 1 on a house, below that there are brown and black letters – take the first letter of Hospital written in black)

H

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9615623,-5.6676522,3a,48.1y,212.77h,100.64t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1saiQNfBoOia99IMET2OeEnw!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>



8

Search nearby the saint's survival.

Find his last but not his final.

(near the Plaza de Anaya you can find the Iglesia de San Sebastian – the statue of the saint is pierced by arrows – unlike other saints typically depicted with their cause of death San Sebastian survived the arrows – the letter we are looking for is the last (alphabetical) but not the final (by word position))

T

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Sebastian

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.961584,-5.6659444,3a,74.1y,50.35h,129t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1swcWRav1PDaeq_QRjm9v3eQ!2e0!7i16384!8i8192



9

Follow to the root nearby.

In the corner of your eye

See the third between black and white.

(follow the outstretched arm of the Cristobal Colon statue into the Calle Pan Y Carbon until you reach a painted door with a root – you need to look in the corner of your eye, because if you go too close, Google Maps switches to a different picture made when the Grafitti was gone – the third letter between the black and white doors is your answer)

R



https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9625002,-5.6642519,3a,75y,266.42h,70.34t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1siWCjhJ4fkCDcPXCyiIJBsQ!2e0!6s%2F%2Fge_o2.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DiWCjhJ4fkCDcPXCyiIJBsQ%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D92.91304%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9627173,-5.6648204,3a,67.4y,287.88h,96.79t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sf7Vjcv392k3bYYQSL9huDw!2e0!7i16384!8i8192>

11

Sleepyhead, you went straight not left!

Find fourfold one below the one at rest.

(go straight at the Lion's corner of the Palacia de Monterrey and you'll reach a statue of

La Ciudad a Don Juan Principe De Asturias Y Señor de Salamanca en el V Centenario de sumuerte

MCDXCVII MCMXCVII

(Letter **T** is the only one that's contained four times)

(this is a major mistake in the riddle as it is Asturias not Asturtas – I simply misread the picture shown below)

An addendum was made to the riddle (inelegant, but the only way to keep it fair at that advanced point in the race)

Riddlesmith, you are the worst!

You miswrote a crucial verse.

You misjudged an Eye for a Tea.

Now wrong things the searchers See.

(Eye = I , Tea = T, See = C – so this hints that and I was instead read as a T and the searchers got a C, which is wrong)

T

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9652136,-5.6665157,3a,19.2y,35.78h,89.59t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1s0RztrRYs92GyTpg5ah4GRA!2e0!5s20180501T000000!7i13312!8i6656>



13

Don't be shy, look inside.

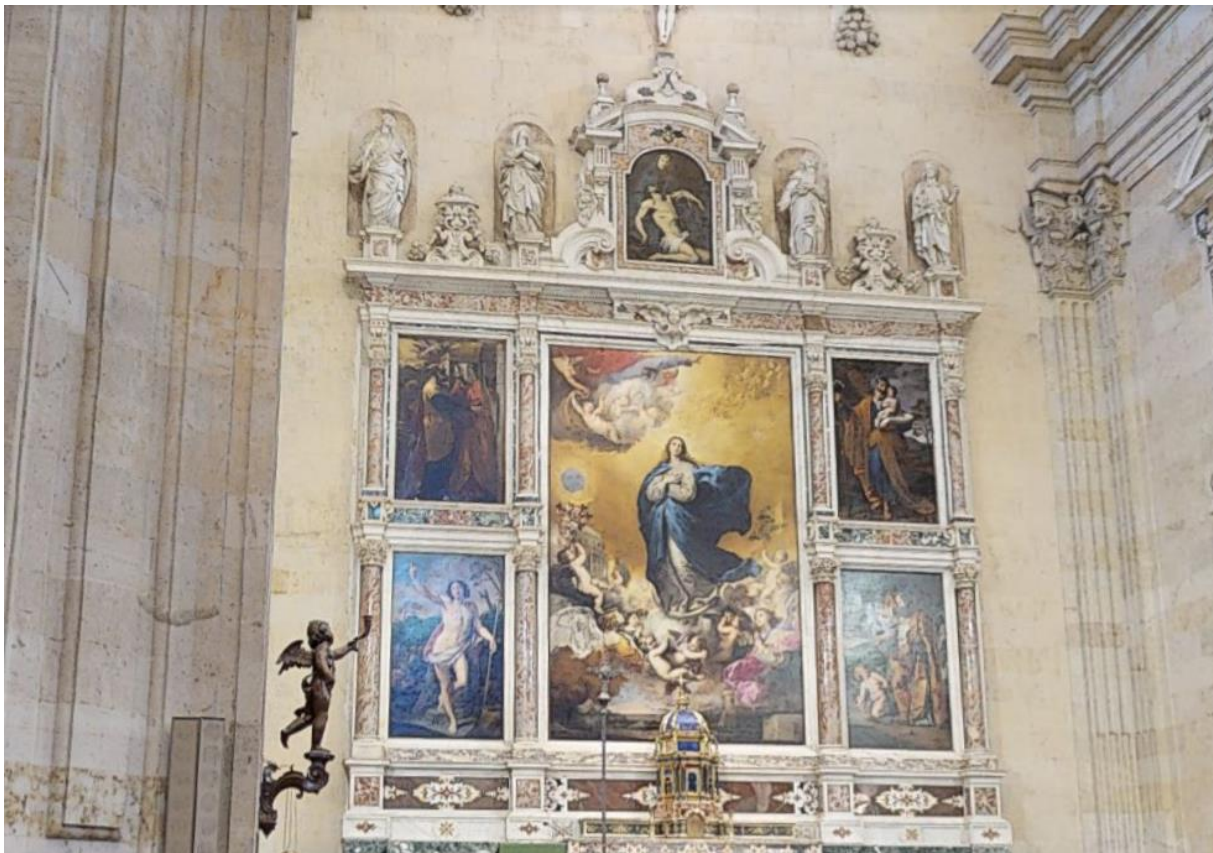
Who did the one on the bottom right?

Take the second of his third

Or of his second take the third.

(look inside the Iglesia de la Purisima – at the altar there's a group of paintings – recently it was discovered that the bottom right picture was painted by Peter Paul Rubens – take the second letter of his third name or the third letter of his second name)

U



<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9648081,-5.6672212,3a,26.1y,191.67h,102.2t/data=!3m8!1e1!3m6!1sAF1QipMUSrBrGdWNxpgQZRISHSxG8-cgVhLG2n9HKy5o!2e10!3e11!6shttps:%2F%2Fih5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipMUSrBrGdWNxpgQZRISHSxG8-cgVhLG2n9HKy5o%3Dw203-h100-k-no-pi-1.0780985-ya83.2854-ro-0.54016745-fo100!7i8192!8i4096>

<https://www.noticiascyl.com/t/1751571/iglesia-salmantina-purisima-alberga-cuadro-rubens>

Peter Paul Rubens

15

Turn around.

Now you've found

The one who shares a name

With the first's assumed place.

Who made him? Tell me fast

His second's second last.

(the first casque of The Secret is assumed to be in San Francisco - here is a statue of Saint Francis made by Venancio Blanco - Second to last letter of second name is C)

C

[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campo_de_San_Francisco_\(Salamanca\)](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campo_de_San_Francisco_(Salamanca))

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salamanca._Monumento_a_San_Francisco._Venancio_Blanco.JPG

<https://www.hotelhelmantico.com/278/blog-salamanca/el-campo-de-san-francisco-salamanca.aspx>

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.96594,-5.6681579,3a,55.8y,114.4h,90.81t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sF5oPS8BAZk-68qj_C-C8rQ!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo0.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DF5oPS8BAZk-68qj_C-C8rQ%26output%3Dthumbnail%26cb_client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D120.72617%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i13312!8i6656



17

From the grail to the round,

Where life from death is found.

Read the words, find a trine

Absent from the second line.

(from the fountain find a round building – the Instituto de Iberoamerica – there’s an inscription above the door alluding to the amphitheatre’s dual purpose for life and death

At caedes hominum prisca amphiteatra

patebant nostra ut longum vivere discant

the verse hints that you need to look at the words this time, and find a trine (=triplet) of syllables, so we’re looking at hominum, which has one letter that doesn’t appear in the second line

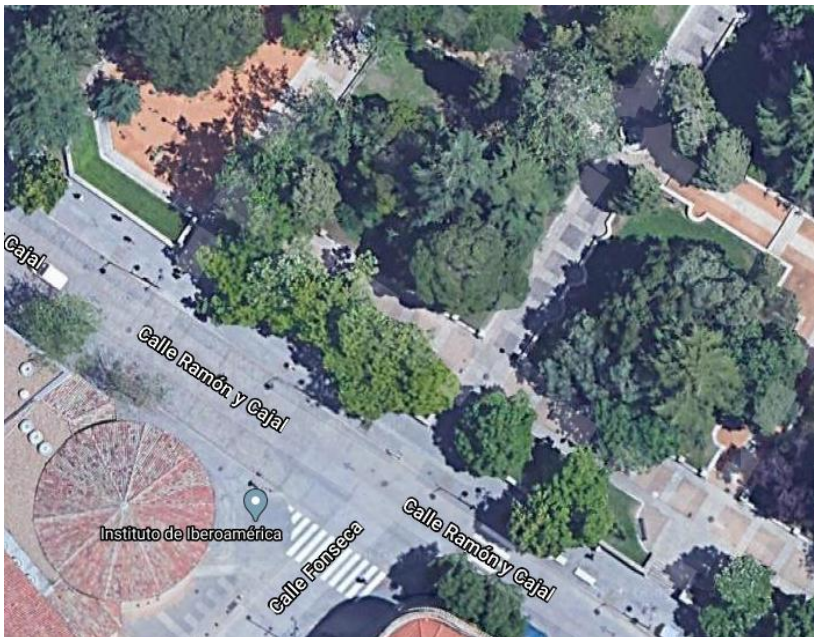
Even if you cannot figure the trine out, H is the only letter from the first line that doesn’t appear in the second

H is the only letter not in the second line)

H

<https://tironiana.wordpress.com/2016/10/11/los-anfiteatros-romanos-y-anatomicos-el-uso-del-latin-como-lengua-de-prestigio-en-al-anfiteatro-de-fonseca-salamanca/>

https://www.google.com/maps/@40.9658527,-5.669016,3a,15y,274.24h,106.94t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sVWVpmcU0uyjlwCb9lfWSjg!2e0!6s%2F%2Fgeo1.ggpht.com%2Fcbk%3Fpanoid%3DVWVpmcU0uyjlwCb9lfWSjg%26output%3Dthumbnail%26client%3Dmaps_sv.tactile.gps%26thumb%3D2%26w%3D203%26h%3D100%26yaw%3D225.06299%26pitch%3D0%26thumbfov%3D100!7i16384!8i8192





AD CAEDES HOMINUM PRISCA AMPHITHEATRA
PALEBANT NOSTRA UT LONGUM VIVERE DISCANT

19

Crack the code

On the road.

What lies beyond?

Please respond.

(this hint doesn't yield a letter, but gives you a hint that you need to search for these verses on the road – it also poses the question what lies beyond the gates – and indicates that you need to respond in a way - hinting that the below is an e-mail address)

Submission guideline

🧠 2: *solution* | 1 | 15 | 7 | 5 | 11 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 13 | 17 | 2 🇦🇹 x^C 🧠

The piece of body armor is a (plate) mail.

solution is just a word to be transcribed verbatim.

Then follow the letters from the second verse, giving you the word schatztruhe (German for treasure chest, so you have a chance of guessing the word even if you couldn't figure out all the letters – or I messed up somewhere).

The Austrian flag emoji (and the country) it typically shortened to AT (@).

X is Roman for ten, C is roman for a hundred, giving us 10¹⁰⁰, which is a Googol (google)

Thus, the solution e-mail address is (mail to:) solutionschatztruhe@googlemail.com

Unfortunately I had to change the e-mail address after the riddle was first released, just adding the word solution to the submission guideline. Otherwise nothing was changed so the riddle itself was not changed after the fact.

Updates

Times are changing on your screen

You're lucky it's a time machine

So you can see what's now unseen.

(Google Street View changed, but you can go back in time to see the old pictures)

Back then you could fly with me,

Now there's nothing left to see,

And another ho is now the home of E.

(the graffiti is gone and the Erasmus **home** was renamed to Erasmus **hostel**)

Sleepyhead, you failed the test,

You parked in front of the one at rest,

The one where you go north not west.

(a transporter is parked in front of the statue, making it very hard to find naturally in street view – as an additional hint you now know that you need to go north at the lions' corner)

When I realized my mistake with the fourfold one, I added an update to point the audience in the right direction without outright giving away that they're in the right place.

It's not ideal and not elegant, but for fairness sake, I had to do it.

Riddlesmith, you are the worst!

You miswrote a crucial verse.

You misjudged an Eye for a Tea.

Now wrong things the searchers See.

(explained for the second image, see above)

Lessons learned (that might be interesting for making and solving other treasure hunts)

Rule out the red herrings

Everyone went to Jerusalem first – why? Because there's a Lion's Gate at the real Via Dolorosa – I should have checked the area around this half-red-herring better.

Another solution was the Vatican, which is plausible from some hints and you can probably spend a lot of time going nowhere.

In hindsight, it would have been nice to exclude some of the very plausible, but ultimately wrong theories beforehand, especially Jerusalem and the Vatican.

Have confirmers for different steps of the way

Then many people had locations in Spain – but not Salamanca – there are many hints towards Salamanca in the picture, but many are probably too ambiguous or subtle – there probably should have been some explicit hint towards the country as well.

If you look at Salamanca's Wikipedia page you're pretty much hit over the head with the confirmers in the picture.

Avoid Ambiguity

You cram a lot of information in very little space when designing a treasure hunt of this kind. As you compress that information, it's your audience's task to decompress it again. Of course they have to fill in some gaps from external sources as well (like the dinosaur DNA in Jurassic Park ☺).

A certain amount of Ambiguity cannot be avoided and is arguably necessary for the riddle to be fun.

One example is a set of three doors the searchers had to find. But there's a fourth door nearby that belongs to the same building (but has a separate set of stairs). Does it belong to the solution or not?

With good ambiguity everything falls into place at a certain point. With too much bad ambiguity it's a guessing game that becomes frustrating. One should definitely be aware of this bad kind of ambiguity when constructing a treasure hunt. Some ways to circumvent it is to make your riddle more specific, add a confirmer or allow your searchers to interpolate (e.g. a stop on a route can be interpolated when the stop before and after are confirmed).

Test, test, test, then test some more

Find someone you trust and gently nudge them along the way – their misconceptions will tell you a lot!

Your first instinct will be that your riddle is too easy – this is most likely wrong! Talking with my tester I doubted that, given some interest, the riddle could hold up for a week! Beforehand I guessed that finding the city was the hard part, everything else after that would be comparably easy.

After the city got discovered, people really got to work and figured most hints out, though many of them only served as confirmers at this point.

Even then, the riddle contained a mistake at a crucial point. I transcribed an inscription from a low-resolution google image wrong. When double-checking the solution, I used the transcript and not the original image. As the solution was a word, it would probably have been possible to figure it out, nonetheless, but still...

The world changes faster than you think

After one update of Google Maps (2016 to 2019) there were already lots of changes – many not relevant to the puzzle, but some already unrecoverable – though, compared to other treasure hunts I chose some rather temporary landmarks, which someone designing a printed book probably wouldn't have done.

Your players are clever as well

You can think up a clever solution – your players will find solutions that are even more clever and elegant (and also wrong)

Some of my favorites:

- G and A as God and Adam, hinting at the Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, which would make F pope Francis and E the biblical Eve
- The seven mountains as the seven hills of Rome
- The funeral home La Dolorosa in Salamanca
- The crazy freemason lounge (had I found that I would definitely have used it)

Beware the filler

Things that in your eyes are obvious components of a solution (and thus must be explained for a solve to be plausible) will be ignored while other things that are secondary or tertiary take up most of the players' focus. One example is the stars and the sunset, which is just a backdrop.

If you make it rhyme, think about the implications. I tried to make most of the verses and the image part of the solution, but had to fill in the blanks at some point to (literally) get a full picture. One example for this is the red not blue verse, which just hints at red, but there's not really something blue in contrast.

Pixelart is as ambiguous as paintblots in a painting, especially the faces at the sides of the door (hey, I tried my best!).

Bottlenecks

I tried to make no single line or picture component a showstopper, either by repeating the information somewhere else or allowing you to interpolate (if you know a and c, you can perhaps guess the b in-between even if you don't understand the hints) – the one exception was the QR code, which was not something someone without the technical skills could solve – someone got it pretty immediately but deleted their comment when they saw how far ahead they were – I counted on someone to share this solution, which didn't happen for quite a while.

Pointers and confirmers

There's a balance between hints leading players in the right direction and confirmers that tell them they're correct. When giving hints towards the city, it's also important to keep in mind to not lead people into the wrong part of the city. Some hints (e.g. the Alcazar de Salamanca) could have been additional confirmers on the solution path.

Shut your pie hole

After spending quite a bit of time on this treasure hunt, the temptation to talk was quite big. I wanted to find the right balance between interacting with the community but not giving too much away or playing favorites. I really dislike all this hearsay in other treasure hunts about what has been

said in private conversations or e-mails. If you look for an example how an author got screwed by even revealing a little bit, look no further than Kit Williams, who helped some scammers unearth his golden rabbit.

Some people wrote me private messages with their theories, which I really appreciated, though I didn't give out any more information.

But stir the pot

After everyone went to Jerusalem and the Vatican, I really feared that was it. I put a bad hint into the verse and made everyone lose interest. Well, then I stirred the pot a little bit:

I'm starting to understand why these things haven't been found for so many years...

I think there's one part of the riddle that pulls many people in the wrong direction.

And there's too little attention on the painting.

To solve this, you must collaborate. I have a feeling there's someone out there further along but they don't want to share what they know.

That not so subtly told people that the Via Dolorosa was not the castle their princess was in. Also I nudged people a little bit in the direction of the painting.

And what do you know, it took a team to solve the puzzle! 😊

The Design process

My goal was to make something that is easier to solve than The Secret, so I looked at Chicago, the first casque that was found. This image has a lot more detail than others in the book (though the verse arguably has less). I thought providing more details in both verse and image and more explicit hints in the image would allow for a faster solve.

I landed on Salamanca by using Google Earth and finding that gorgeous black gate (and wondering what was behind). I had a few other treasure locations in mind, but you need an interesting city as well (and Google StreetView coverage!). Salamanca turned out to be a treasure trove of fascinating architecture, culture and art. I didn't even use half of the interesting places and references I found during my initial research. And the players found even more.

From my initial research I plotted out a route and a pencil sketch of the painting, keeping in mind my artistic limitations. Speaking of these artistic limitations, my apology for being a programmer served two hidden purposes as well. First, I wanted to throw the searchers of the scent regarding the monk's strange proportions. Second, I wanted to give you a little bit of insight into my way of thinking. In a riddle made by a programmer, ciphers and digital codes are certainly a possibility.

The painting changed quite a bit after the initial sketch, as there were many gaps to be filled between the planned set pieces, some with meaning, some with filler.

I chose the arch structure as it was evocative of the (assumed) San Francisco painting of The Secret and would look better in a digital format than a plain square picture.

I wanted the verse to be evocative of Byron Preiss' writing while still giving it a spin of my own. I knew I wanted to start with a spin of one of the more famous lines of the Secret and landed on "where M and B are set in stone". What a line, it could send you in a thousand directions (and hey, A and G sent a few people down some fascinating rabbit holes).

From its design the main hints for figuring out the city were in the image while the main hints for figuring out the treasure location were in the verse. Many people tackled it the other way around, which surprised me. After all, “where M and B are set in stone” is also no hint to the city, even though it is the first line of the verse. A little bit more balance between both parts would have been nice in hindsight.

I knew the main challenge would be to narrow down the location, as I hadn't put any limit on it (well, you didn't have to go to space). Thus, I hid many different hints towards the location in the image (many only findable by pixel hunting, a trick unique to digital pictures which you can zoom flawlessly). Surprisingly, almost none of these were found. One reason for this may be that there's other devices than computers to browse the web with – on mobile devices zooming in doesn't work as well, as the image becomes blurred.

I'm a big fan of escape rooms and many of them have a second room that opens up after a while. Using digital technologies I had a way of making the painting bigger than itself, by hinting towards a secondary picture. I hope the feeling of discovery was enjoyable for those who figured it out, though transcoding the QR code manually was something I hadn't foreseen.

Without an actual way to dig out the treasure, I wanted something similar to a dig requirement. Otherwise it would just come down to a guessing game or finding the grail on a lucky Google session. Thus you need to find a way to submit the solution, which makes sure that you've solved most of the clues in the first part and really walked the road to the treasure.

Even when you have a good idea where it might be, you still need to put in some effort and even if you're 99% sure you'll only know when you're all the way there.

All in all, the riddle held out for about four months, with quite a few attempts. I'm very happy with how that went, as my worst case scenario was the riddle being solved within a few days or not at all (due to lack of interest).

And what about The Secret?

With 9 of the 12 casques still in the ground, I only had a partial blueprint for creating a tribute. Besides the known solutions, prevailing theories on the other casques were an inspiration as well.

Of course my tools (and perhaps way of thinking) may be totally different from Byron Preiss's. In addition, I didn't put in as much time and effort as he did.

Considering the avenues Byron Preiss had for information gathering (travel guides, visiting the cities, libraries, experts) and what he assumed his audience had access to, I think we can rule out many more obscure theories as false positives. From a logistics, cost and time standpoint, he must have had at least a rough idea before arriving at the city in question, gathered from publicly available material. Visiting the city would then have allowed to refine and create the riddle (and burying the casque). We know he gave JJP polaroids as references for the paintings.

Without stepping on anyone's toes or belittling anyone's efforts, I now believe it very unlikely that there aren't any clues that Byron Preiss would regret in any of the twelve verses or images, creating a strong unintended connection. Especially as there was no Google back then, so finding these false positives for any hint would have been a lot harder.

I was surprised and delighted by the complex, poetic and fitting solutions people thought about (some of which are way cooler than what I designed...). I learned that there are solutions that are

elegant and smart, but wrong. Don't look for a perfect solution, but the solution Byron Preiss thought of and found reasonable for his audience.

It was also interesting to see different people's unique ways of thinking. As a programmer I tend to tackle problems a certain way and all things digital are something I deal with every day. Therefore I used a few ciphers and codes in the painting. Byron Preiss had a different job and a different way of thinking. When searching for the casques it probably doesn't hurt to keep his interests and circumstances in mind.

I vastly underestimated the difficulty of my puzzle, and looking at the results of *The Secret* so far, I assume Byron Preiss did the same. If he didn't anticipate that these things remained in the ground for forty years, it is reasonable to assume that he used more temporary markers and cultural references in his cities. Considering how much changed in three years at my treasure location, some of these are probably gone. I think history and "archeology" are an even more important part of unearthing the casques than previously assumed.

I've learned a lot from seeing the audience interact with the puzzle and solving it. Byron Preiss designed twelve of these, without internet access and without any test runs. And for a printed book without any way to update it! That we are still fascinated by them forty years later speaks to how great of an accomplishment that is. But the circumstances would make balancing them hard. Byron Preiss was a pioneer in the genre of armchair treasure hunts, and he didn't have many works to draw upon. The biggest treasure hunt before that, *Masquerade*, wasn't solved without an additional hint by the author, and it wasn't solved yet when the casques were hidden. If you look through the book you find many mentions of a planned second edition of *The Secret*, with announced winners, new fairfolk and (perhaps) new casques. It doesn't seem to me like these riddles were intentionally made so hard that they would take decades to solve. On the contrary, more solves would have generated positive press coverage (and sales) for the book.

I believe the largest challenge to solve the remaining casques is that we can't see what Byron Preiss saw. *The Secret* now has a worldwide audience, having access to all the world's libraries at their fingertips, but they can't wander the streets of these cities in 1980. And looking at the solutions found so far, these puzzles were meant for locals. (Well, there was a Japanese edition, but they had an even smaller chance than I had with my German edition of *Masquerade*.) I think travel guides from around that time might be an interesting thing to study.