

This is your brain on treasure hunting

That tingly feeling is your sanity being replaced by suspicions

By [Billy Baker](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 21, 2020, 53 minutes ago

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Ally Rzesza

NEW YORK — I'm not sure how much I can trust you people, so I'm not going to say too much about the location of the treasure. I mean, I don't *technically* know where it is, or else I'd have dug it up already. But I know roughly where it is. Probably. Unless it's in the other place where I think it could be.

I'm rambling, but treasure hunting makes me suspicious of everything. And that especially includes Jason Krupat, a guy I wrote about back in October after he solved a four-decade-old riddle that led to a treasure buried underneath home plate on a softball field in the North End of Boston. He would later become the reason I applied for a New York City metal detector's license, which he did not, even though it was his idea. Suspicious.

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Babbling again, I know, but this is what happens when you let it infect you. You connect dots that have no business being connected, start a fight with a guy who doesn't even know you're in a fight with him, and the next thing you know you're standing in a New York City park jabbing a long metal probe into the ground, trying to beat him to a treasure that isn't even worth that much to begin with.

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I need to slow down. Let me start at the beginning.

ADVERTISING

Back in 1982, a man named Byron Preiss published a book called "The Secret," which contained 12 puzzles that led to 12 parks in North America where he had buried a plexiglass box that contained an ornate chest with a key inside. Each puzzle consisted of a cryptic verse paired with a cryptic painting, and if you solved one and found a key you could exchange it for a jewel worth about \$1,000.

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Three teenagers solved the first one in Chicago the following year, and Preiss thought the rest would quickly follow. It took 21 years to find the second, in Cleveland. The following year, in 2005, Preiss died in a car crash, taking the secrets of "The Secret" with him.

I'd never heard of "The Secret" until Krupat and his family found the third key last fall, after he alerted a construction crew that was renovating Langone Park in the North End that he thought a treasure was buried below home plate. Understandably, the workers thought he was nuts, until a few months later, when an excavator cracked open a plexiglass box, exactly where Krupat had said it was.

When I interviewed Krupat, I mentioned that I was a bit of a treasure hunter myself, and had recently led three buddies deep into the back country of Montana and Wyoming, searching for a treasure that was hidden in the Rocky Mountains by a New Mexico antiques dealer named Forrest Fenn that was reported to be worth millions. We did not solve the riddle that led to Fenn's treasure, but we did not die looking for it, which is pretty good, since five people already had.

In June, 10 years after he'd hidden the treasure, Fenn announced someone had found it. Then, because the man can't help but drive people nuts, Fenn declined to say where, or by whom, only that it was "a man from back East."

This is when Jason Krupat reentered my life, via a text to ask if I was the man from back East. While he had me, Krupat casually mentioned that he had solved another of the "The Secret" puzzles, this one leading to a key buried in New York, and asked if I wanted to go to Brooklyn to dig it up.

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We arranged a time to have a video chat, and before we did I took my first look at the verse and painting that led to the New York treasure. The riddle is maddeningly convoluted — *Although the sign/Nearby/Speaks of Indies native/The natives still speak/Of him of Hard word in 3 Vols* — but the painting is slightly more straightforward. It features an angelic woman hovering in the air, along with images that appear to show such things as a mosque, a clock face, and a gull. But what stood out to me was the barreling wave that occupies the lower half of the painting.

In addition to being a bad treasure hunter, I'm a bad surfer, but I knew the only place in New York City that might possibly have a wave like that was Rockaway, in Queens.

I mentioned this to Krupat on our video chat, and he went strangely silent — at least that's how it felt to me — until he finally said that none of the many online theories he'd read had ever mentioned this.

Then it got weird. Or maybe I did.

Krupat's plan was for us to apply for New York City metal detector permits, though what we were looking for was not metal. But he'd done his homework and knew that permit would allow us to dig holes legally in New York City parks, so long as we used a tool that was less than 12 inches long and could only be used one-handed. I immediately ordered a heavy-duty spade and mailed in my application.

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Krupat did not.

Four weeks later, my official metal detector permit arrived, and I immediately texted Krupat to ask if he'd received his. "I thought we would use yours," he replied. "I'm OK if you dig. My hands are delicate. Is that unethical?"

Um, it's suspicious. Even more suspicious, when I replied to ask when he wanted to go, he went silent. I asked again four days later. More silence.

Another week went by, and I ran into my friend Mark, who just so happens to be the only other person I know who is into "The Secret," and I told him my suspicions and my barreling wave theory. The next thing I knew, he was sending me PowerPoint presentations, picking apart the painting and the verse, as well as reservations for the hotel rooms he'd booked for our families down in Queens.

Like I said, treasure hunting makes people crazy.

When Krupat replied more than two weeks later with my favorite "stuff got crazy with work" excuse, I informed him that I'd developed my own super-team, and we were now rivals.

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"Not quite sure what you mean?" he replied.

I mean . . . all of this.

My team went down to New York the other day. Don't worry about where, exactly. I even borrowed a metal detector from my 11-year-old neighbor, but it didn't matter, because the people of New York paid zero attention to the two guys jabbing a spear into the ground over and over while their kids argued over whose turn it was to dig with the spade.

We failed to hit anything that sounded like plexiglass, but we know it's there. The clues all add up. It's definitely there. Unless it's somewhere else.

As I was writing this, I got a text from Mark. "The sickness is real," he wrote. "I think that I now have the right spot."

Even worse, he said he had just mailed in the application for his metal detector permit.

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