

# Victor's Story

## ESCAPE ROOM GUIDE

Escape Racism: Toolbox to Promote Inclusive Communities



## Introduction

Victor's Story is one of 10 escape rooms created by the EU Erasmus+ project, Escape Racism, to highlight and combat social and racial prejudices worldwide. As in any escape room game, the object of Victor's Story is to escape from a locked room in as short a time as possible. In order to achieve this, players must solve a series of clues and puzzles that point them towards the game's solution.

Whilst playing Victor's Story, it is hoped that the players will enjoy playing the escape room and become better educated about the lives of those people who are imprisoned by modern slavery and, in particular, forced labour. These crimes are globally systemic. According to a report by the International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, approximately 40.3 million people were the victims of modern slavery in 2016. Of these, 24.9 million people, almost the entire population of Australia, were thought to be the victims of forced labour and made to work in often physically strenuous roles for little, if any, recompense via threats and coercion from individuals, criminal gangs, and even state authorities who all profit from the activity. Unfortunately, it is a sad fact that at least some of the food and clothes that each of us purchase will have been created by means of forced labour somewhere within the production chain meaning that we also, as private citizens, benefit from these illegal activities, albeit indirectly.

## Narrative

Victor is a university graduate with a degree in engineering. Up until a few years ago, he held a well-paid position within a manufacturing company, which meant he was able to enjoy a decent standard of living with his wife Katerine and son Artem. This sadly changed when Victor lost his job.

Over the following months Victor struggled to find work and took out a series of loans to help cover the cost of living. During this time, he also met and became friends with John. John would constantly talk to Victor about how great life was in the west, claiming it would be easy for a man of Victor's skills to find work. One day, John mentioned that his friend Gary owned a small engineering company in the UK was willing to give Victor a job. Victor explained to John that he could not leave Katerine and Artem behind, neither could he afford the cost of flights and accommodation. The next day John called Victor and said that Gary had offered to arrange Victor's paperwork and let him live in one of his properties, once he was back on his feet, Katerine and Artem could join Victor in the UK. John even offered to pay the cost of Victor's flights. Victor initially refused the offer, but after speaking at length with Katerine, decided that this was too good an opportunity to pass up. He phoned John and accepted his offer.

A few days before his departure, John called around with Victor's tickets and the details of his flight to London. He told Victor that everything was arranged with Gary who would meet him when his plane landed and drive him to his accommodation. Victor spent the next few days preparing to leave home for a new life, knowing that he might not see his family for some time.

Gary met Victor at the airport and, taking his suitcase and documents, walked him to a van where a man got out and beckoned him to take the passenger seat before getting in himself. Gary got into the driving seat and started to drive in silence for around 45 minutes before stopping outside a shop. The unnamed man got out and pulled Victor from the van before pushing him through a side door, up a flight of stairs and throwing him through a door into a room full of dirty looking mattresses and rubbish. Gary entered and looking Victor in the eyes said, 'you work for me now until you've paid off what you owe John', 'we know where your family are and if you try to run, we'll kill them'. The two left the room locking the door behind them. Sometime later, the door was unlocked, and a group of dishevelled looking men walked in, collapsing one-by-one onto the mattresses without saying a word.

The following day, Victor and the rest of the men were woken early and bundled down the stairs into the back of a van. The van drove for some time before stopping. The doors opened and they were beckoned out, 'pick up a shovel and start working, and remember to keep your mouths shut or it will end badly for you' they were told. Victor picked up a shovel and started digging.

Victor has become a victim of modern slavery, and it is our players job to discover information about Victor's life during this time. Did Victor manage to escape, and if so, how? Only through uncovering clues, completing puzzles, and discovering artefacts will our players find out. Key to this will be Victor's diary, which helps to explain his life as a modern slave, and also provides some clues and even the eventual key to his release.

## Required Materials

To create the setting and puzzles for Victor's Story, you will need a decent sized room, or space to mark one out, and a range of materials which are listed below. You may also wish to increase the player's immersion by dressing the room with materials such as old food wrappers, containers, drink bottles, cans, and old newspapers. The latter of these can also act as a red herring for players and help to hide puzzles in plain sight.

- ❖ Victor's Diary Pages (included within the kit)
- ❖ 3 x Foam Camping Mats
- ❖ 3 x Blankets
- ❖ 1 x Vase
- ❖ 20 x Bobby Pins
- ❖ 1 x Jigsaw Puzzle (200 pieces)
- ❖ 1 x Small Sheet of Plywood
- ❖ 1 x 10cm (L) 2cm (W) x 2cm (H) Length of Wood
- ❖ 1 x Packet of Blu Tack
- ❖ 3 x Combination Lockboxes
- ❖ 1 x Lockbox with a Key
- ❖ 1 x Puzzle Box with Opening Instructions
- ❖ 1 x Crosshead Screwdriver
- ❖ 1 x Tape Recorder
- ❖ 1 x Tape (containing music)
- ❖ 4 x Batteries (to fit the tape recorder)
- ❖ 1 x Length of String (1m or 3ft in length)
- ❖ 1 x Small Magnet (must fit the neck of the vase)
- ❖ 1 x Table Lamp (with a short cord)
- ❖ 1 x Black Light Bulb (to fit the lamp)
- ❖ 1 x Black Light Marker
- ❖ 1 x Extension Cable
- ❖ 2 x 4mm Crosshead Wood Screws
- ❖ 1 x Pack of Standard Playing Cards
- ❖ 1 x Plug Socket
- ❖ 1 x Tube of Superglue
- ❖ 1 x Key
- ❖ Lemon/Orange Juice or Orange Flavour Effervescent Tablets

Combination and Puzzle Boxes may be substituted for standard wooden or cardboard boxes with holes cut into them through which a combination lock can be inserted in order to lock the box shut. The following materials may also be included to act as red herrings, although other objects may be substituted should you desire:

- ❖ 1 x Torch
- ❖ 1 x Old Mobile Phone
- ❖ 3 x Pictures of Numbers
- ❖ Assorted Old Mats or Carpet
- ❖ Assorted Used Food Wrappers
- ❖ Assorted Used Food Containers
- ❖ Assorted Used Soft Drink Cans
- ❖ Assorted Used Soft Drink Bottles
- ❖ Assorted Old Newspapers or Magazines

## Preparation

Some of the materials within the escape room will require preparation before they can be utilised. In some cases, this may require some basic 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) skills. Please seek assistance if you feel uncomfortable doing this.

- ❖ If you are running the game for English speaking players, print the diary pages that are included within the escape racism kit. If you are running the game for non-English speakers, print out the blank diary pages, also included, and translate the originals into your own language; see the section entitled 'The Diary' for more information.
- ❖ Take one of the foam camping mats and mark it's with the letter 'V'. Mark the remaining mats with random letters. This indicates that they belonged to someone.
- ❖ Build the jigsaw puzzle and flip it over so that the blank side is facing upwards. It might be helpful to use cardboard or a sheet of plywood to help with this, if you do so then leave the cardboard or plywood in the escape room so that the players can use the same method to turn the puzzle over. Write the combination to lockbox 1 onto the blank side of the puzzle using large writing, flip the puzzle back over and remove some of the pieces with writing on the back. When you create the room place some of these, so the writing is visible on a flat surface alongside the jigsaw puzzle.
- ❖ Take the 2 x 2cm length of wood and cut out 4 sections at intervals of 2.5cm. This should give you 4 pads of wood that you can glue into the corners of lockbox 1's interior. now cut a piece of plywood sized to fit as tightly as possible into the base of lockbox 1, ensuring that it sits on top of the pads that you have created. Close to one of the longer edges, drill 2 x 3.5mm holes into the plywood and screw 2 x 4mm screws into them. These will act as a rudimentary handle which will aid the removing of the false bottom you have created.
- ❖ Remove the 'recording protection tab' from the music tape. Cut or rip a piece of paper to fill the resulting hole. Write the combination to lockbox 2 onto the paper, crumple the paper up and push it into the hole. Using a marker, draw an 'X' or a dot next to the hole to highlight it to the players.
- ❖ Open the pack of playing cards and select 4 cards from the deck at random. Write one number from the combination to lockbox 4 onto each of these. Make a note of the

cards and the numbers written on them; for example, if the combination to lockbox 4 were 7524 you might write '7 = 5 of clubs, 5 = 3 of diamonds, 2 = Queen of spades, 4 = 9 of hearts.' Now write numbers at random onto each of the remaining 48 cards and shuffle the deck together before replacing it into the packaging.

- ❖ Take a piece of paper and, in order of the combination, write or draw the names of the cards which the combination appears on. Using the previous example (7524) this would leave us with a piece of paper containing the legend '5 ♣, 3 ♦, Q ♠, 9 ♥'.

## The Diary

If you are creating the game for English speaking players, the diary which is included as part of the escape room's kit can be printed out and used directly. If you are creating the game for players who do not speak English, print the blank diary pages, also included, and translate the text from the English version onto them using a biro or felt tip pen. Try to make the writing as legible as possible whilst retaining the feeling of handwriting. It does not matter if you make mistakes as long as the text remains relatively the same, this will only add to their authentic feel.

When generating the codes on the final page, look for letters within your translations which spell out the words 'Forced Labour'. Then, within the code, indicate the page using the day, i.e., Monday 7th January becomes 7, followed by the line number and finally the position of the letter upon that line to give you a code consisting of three separate numbers. For example, in the English version of the diary, the code 7-1-1 would provide us with the letter 'A' from the word 'Artem'. It is also good to include the phone number for a local national helpline where possible, and other personal things such as the child's drawing which helps to connect Victor with the player.

## Creating the Room

The location that you use for the Victor's Story escape room must be large enough to contain all of the materials required to play the game plus approximately 2-4 players. It should not, however, be so large that objects and materials are spread over a wide area. If you have access to a larger space, you should mark out the boundaries of the escape room using hazard tape. If you create a room in this manner, ensure the players are aware that they shouldn't step outside the boundaries whilst playing and, if you want to be especially harsh, impose a time penalty on them for doing so. To create the room, perform the following steps:

- ❖ Take the foam camping mat that you've marked with a 'V' and roll it up, as you do so place diary pages 1 (Monday 7th January) and 2 (Wednesday 9th January) inside. Tie the camping mat up to ensure that it doesn't become unrolled and reveal the diary pages during the game unless a player examines it.
- ❖ Within the false bottom of lockbox 1, place the playing cards and magnet. If the false bottom is loose, place blu-tack onto the wooden pads and push the false bottom down onto it. Remove the 2 screws.
- ❖ Place diary pages 3 (Thursday 10th January) and 9 (Saturday 25th July), the screwdriver and batteries into Lockbox 1, on top of the false bottom, and lock it.
- ❖ Open the tape recorder battery slot and place the length of string inside it. Flip the tape recorder over and place the tape into it.

- ❖ Place diary page 5 (Tuesday 12th February), the blacklight bulb, and the extension cable into Lockbox 2 and lock it.
- ❖ Place the lamp near a power socket, ensuring that it can be plugged in and switched on.
- ❖ Taking the instructions for opening the Puzzle Box, transcribe them onto a surface, or ideally a number of separate surfaces spread around the room. Surfaces can be walls, floors, or even tabletops. If you prefer not to do this, then simply transcribe the instructions onto paper and tape them to the walls. The surfaces should be further away from the plug socket than the lamps cable will allow it to reach.
- ❖ Place diary pages 6 (Wednesday 17th April) and 7 (Thursday 18th April), and the 2 x 4mm screws into the Puzzle Box and close it.
- ❖ Place diary page 8 (Thursday 13th June) and the playing card cypher which you have created into Lockbox 3.
- ❖ Place the key to Lockbox 3 and approximately 20 bobby pins into the vase. Fill the vase with a weak lemon or orange cordial mix.
- ❖ Place diary page 4 (Friday 11th January) and the lone key into Lockbox 4.
- ❖ Place the jigsaw puzzle and the removed pieces onto a flat surface.
- ❖ Distribute all of the materials (lockboxes, puzzle box, camping mats, blankets, etc), red herrings, and set dressing around the room in a seemingly random manner. Try to hide the lockboxes in locations which are not obvious by covering them with old mats, newspapers, camping mats, blankets, etc. Once this is done, and you are happy with the layout, take a photograph to use as reference when resetting the room for a new group of players.

## Set-Up Example Images

The following images show how we set up the escape room for a series of testing sessions. As you can see, with the exception of the lamp, which needs to be near a plug socket and the instructions for opening puzzle box 3, which need to be within reach of the lamp cord and extension cable, there is no defined locations for the objects within the room other than those described within the section 'Creating the Room'. Use your own best judgement when laying the room out, and try to hide lockboxes, etc, where possible.





## Game Goals and Puzzle Connections

The game should play out in a relatively structured manner. However, it doesn't matter what order the players uncover clues and hints as they will need to complete each of the puzzles in order to find and decipher the code-words that are required to complete the room. The following structure is built into the game.

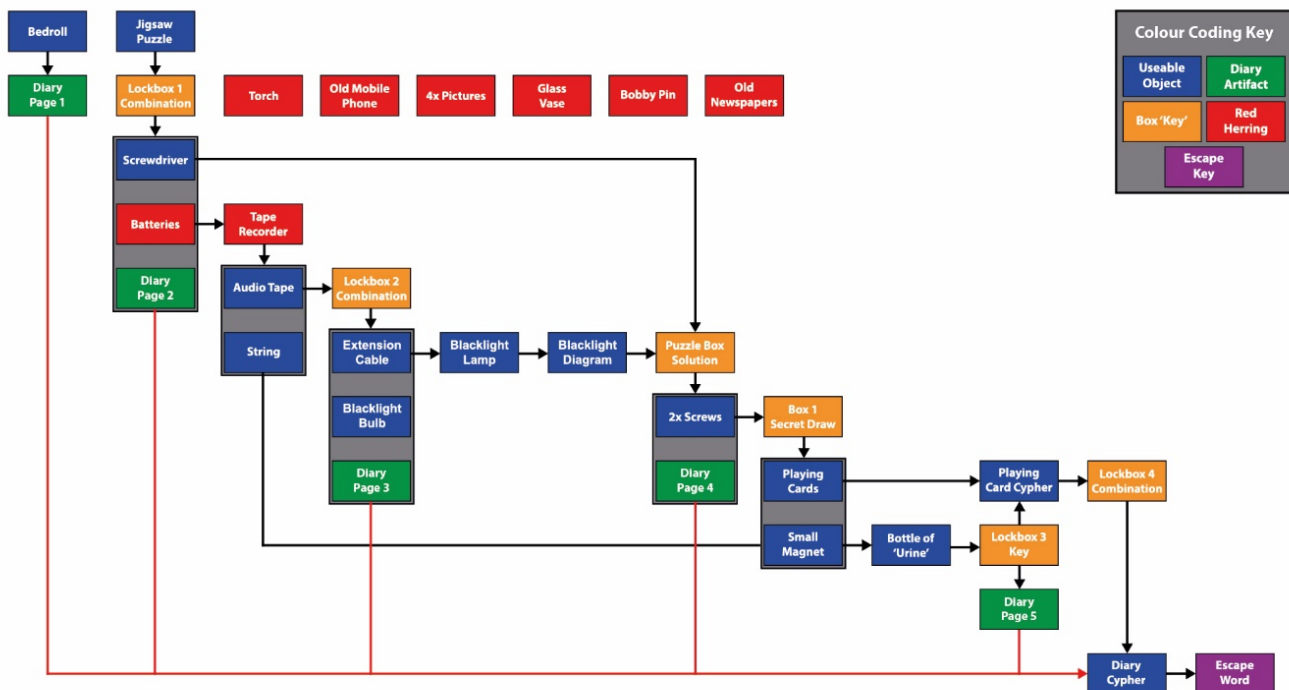
- ❖ Examining the foam camping mats should reveal diary pages 1 and 2.
- ❖ Completing the jigsaw puzzle and looking at the reverse side should provide the combination for Lockbox 1.
- ❖ Opening Lockbox 1 will provide the screwdriver, some batteries, plus diary pages 3 and 9.
- ❖ Looking at the tape, which is in the tape recorder, should reveal the paper with the combination to Lockbox 2.
- ❖ Examining the tape recorder's battery slot, should reveal a length of string. Players are guided to this by the discovery of the batteries within Lockbox 1.
- ❖ Within Lockbox 2, the players will find a blacklight bulb, an extension cable, and diary page 5.
- ❖ By using the blacklight bulb and the extension cable with the lamp, players should be able to search the room for the diagrams that shows them how to open the Puzzle Box.
- ❖ The Puzzle Box contains 2 screws, which can be used to pry open the secret compartment in Lockbox 1, plus diary pages 6 and 7.



- ❖ Within Lockbox 1's secret compartment is a pack of playing cards and a magnet.
- ❖ The magnet can be tied to the string and used to pick up the key which is hidden within the vase full of lemon or orange cordial.
- ❖ The key can be used to open Lockbox 3, within this should be found diary page 8 and a cypher associated with the pack of playing cards.
- ❖ Using the cypher with the playing cards should reveal the combination for opening Lockbox 4.
- ❖ Within Lockbox 4 the players will find diary page 4 and the key to exit the room.
- ❖ The player should use the codes written on diary page 9 to decipher 2 words "Forced Labour". The first number of each 3-digit code refers to the date of the diary entry, i.e., 10 refers to the page headed 'Thursday 10th January'. The second number refers to the line, i.e., 12 refers to the 12th line of text from the top. The third and final number refers to the letter within that line, including spaces, i.e., 11 refers to 'F'.

## Game Flow Diagram

The following flow diagram shows how the items within Victor's Story connect together and can be utilised to escape the room.



## How to Win

To complete the game, the players must have firstly found each of the individual diary pages. The final page comes with a key, which is meant to indicate the exit to the room. However, players should not be allowed to exit until they have deciphered the 2 code-words which are provided on diary page 9. Once the players have uncovered these the game ends. If the 45-minute timer runs out and the players have yet to complete the game, then halt them by telling them that time is up.

## Facilitation

Whilst they are playing the game, it is important that the players enjoy themselves. It is fine if they become stuck on one puzzle, as long as they are having fun trying to solve it. However, if the players become bored, the facilitator should intervene to assist them.

According to the age of the players and their skills, hints can be provided either verbally, by asking questions in the style of a fellow player such as *'what's that in the bottle'*, or by writing a note which guides the players and throwing it into the room for them to find. When you provide hints, try not to make them too obvious. Most importantly of all, do not solve any part of the puzzle yourself as this will take the players sense of agency away from them.

**Important Note:** Some escape rooms are designed in such a way that it is critical to win the game and get out of the room; because this will reveal an important fact highlighted within the debriefing phase. In cases such as this, ensure that the group won't run out of time.

If this is not the case, and the group has uncovered enough elements about the escape rooms topic, there will be no requirement that they win the game, so do not over facilitate the escape room experience.

## Game Dynamics

Within this section, we will discuss the process of running Victor's Story including how you should go about introducing the room to your players, how the clues within the room will be uncovered and are connected, how the game is 'won', and finally, how you can debrief your players. This latter process is extremely important within Victor's Story as it will allow you to provide wider context to modern slavery and highlight other areas of the subject which are not necessarily covered by the contents of the escape room.

## Introducing the Game

Begin by welcoming your players to Victor's Story and, when you are ready to begin, guide them to the doors leading into the escape room, or just outside the area you have delineated. Give them the following introduction speech, or create one of your own:

*Welcome to our escape room which we call Victor's Story. The room you are about to enter is part of an on-going investigation into modern slavery. Several victims of modern slavery have recently been held in this room against their will. One of the victims, a man called Victor, recently managed to somehow escape, and was picked up by the police after calling the modern slavery helpline (swap this for a modern slavery helpline in your own country). He has agreed to assist the police with their investigation and is being looked after in secure accommodation. Don't worry, the people alleged to have held him against his will are currently in police custody. You are here today to uncover any evidence of criminal activity and try to explain how Victor*

*managed to escape. You have 45-minutes to look around for clues beginning from the time I start the clock. Once 45-minutes has passed, whether you have managed to escape or not, we will reconvene for a debrief.*

*The game begins in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...*

## **Debriefing the Players**

Once the game has concluded, by the players either escaping or running out of time, you should debrief them. The debriefing should begin by asking the players what they think they have discovered. Ask them to explain the contents of the diary to you and explain that this is the evidence you were looking for. If the players have completed the game but have questions about a specific aspect of it, how one of the puzzles should work, for example, then explain the workings to them. If the players did not complete the escape room, but instead ran out of time, tell them that they will have to play the escape room again to see what extra secrets it holds.

Finally, explain the story of the escape room to the players, throwing in details about modern slavery and forced labour.

*We believe that Victor is a victim of modern slavers who brought him to the UK using false promises of work. The slavers then used his family as leverage against him by threatening to kill his son if he should run away. This is a crime that is often overlooked, and the people who are taken are misunderstood and hidden away, but unfortunately, modern slavery is a worldwide problem. There are thought to be over 40 million people enslaved worldwide at this point in time and the number continues to rise year on year. Some of these are forced into prostitution, whilst others are exploited by criminal gangs, some people are even taken with the explicit purpose of harvesting their organs, which often results in medical difficulties and death.*

*Approximately 25 million people are thought to be enslaved as forced labourers. That is to say that they're held captive, primarily by mental or physical threats, and forced to labour for little or no recompense. Many of them are told that they will be released once they have worked off the debt that they 'owe' to the very people who have enslaved them.*

*It is a sad fact that each of us have benefited from slavery in some small way, as much of the food we eat and the clothes we wear will have, in some small part, have been a product of modern slavery. Victor is one of the lucky few who escape their captors and flee to freedom by contacting the Modern Slavery Hotline where he got to speak to an advisor who gave him quick access to support services.*

*If you'd like to find out more about the issues surrounding modern slavery, then please take a look at [www.anti-slavery.org](http://www.anti-slavery.org) or [www.modernslaveryhelpline.org](http://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org). Each of these websites contains information about the problem and what to do should you encounter it. Thanks for your time and I hope you enjoyed playing Victor's Story.*

If you are running Victor's Story in a country other than the UK, please change this information so that it is relevant to your location.

## Images

**Cover:** Photo: ILO Asia-Pacific, Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0

**Page 3:** David Adam Kess, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

**Page 5:** Iniabasi Udosen - Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

**Page 8:** Graffiti by Banksy in London. DeptfordJon. Flickr. CC BY 2.0.

**Page 10:** Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

**Page 11:** Faiqe Sumer, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

**Escape Racism: Toolbox to Promote Inclusive Communities.**

**Project Number: 2019-2-IT03-KA205-016906**

