



Indian schoolchildren wear the colors of the country's tricolor as they pray for world peace at The Anjuman-E-Islam School in Ahmedabad yesterday, while commemorating the 71st anniversary of the nuclear explosion over Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. — AFP

## Escape rooms get an upgrade into a deeper theatrical show

You meet in a nondescript reception room in a midtown Manhattan skyscraper. You're handed a form on a clipboard. Then the receptionist slips away and the doors lock and all hell breaks loose. Within an hour, you and your group will have searched for clues in drawers and bookcases to get free, crawled through a ventilation shaft and encountered a woman dangling from a meat hook. "Paradiso: Chapter 1" fuses the traditional escape room game with theatrical elements like actors and high-tech production values.

"Paradiso" is one of several shows pushing the boundaries of what escape rooms can become, turning the fast-growing games into a richer, theatrical experience. "It seemed like there was an opportunity for escape rooms to go to the next level," said Michael Counts, the creator and one of the early pioneers of immersive theater. "For us, it was creating a deeper narrative, something that was expansive." Escape rooms were invented in Japan. They first appeared in the US in 2014. There are

now some 4,850 escape rooms in 84 countries and in every US state, according to the online Escape Room Directory.

"Maybe 'escape game' is a very limited word to use," said John Hennessy, one of the first to embrace the trend in the US. "I think we're going to have to start calling them something different." Hennessy, who organized races and scavenger hunts around southern California, now runs four escape rooms, including ones set in a medieval alchemist's lab and a film-noir style Hollywood mystery. "People spend their days pretty much staring at a screen - a monitor or a telephone, or whatever. This is very different from that. You're faced with problems that you have to solve by talking to each other and working with other people," he said.

### 'The Walking Dead Experience'

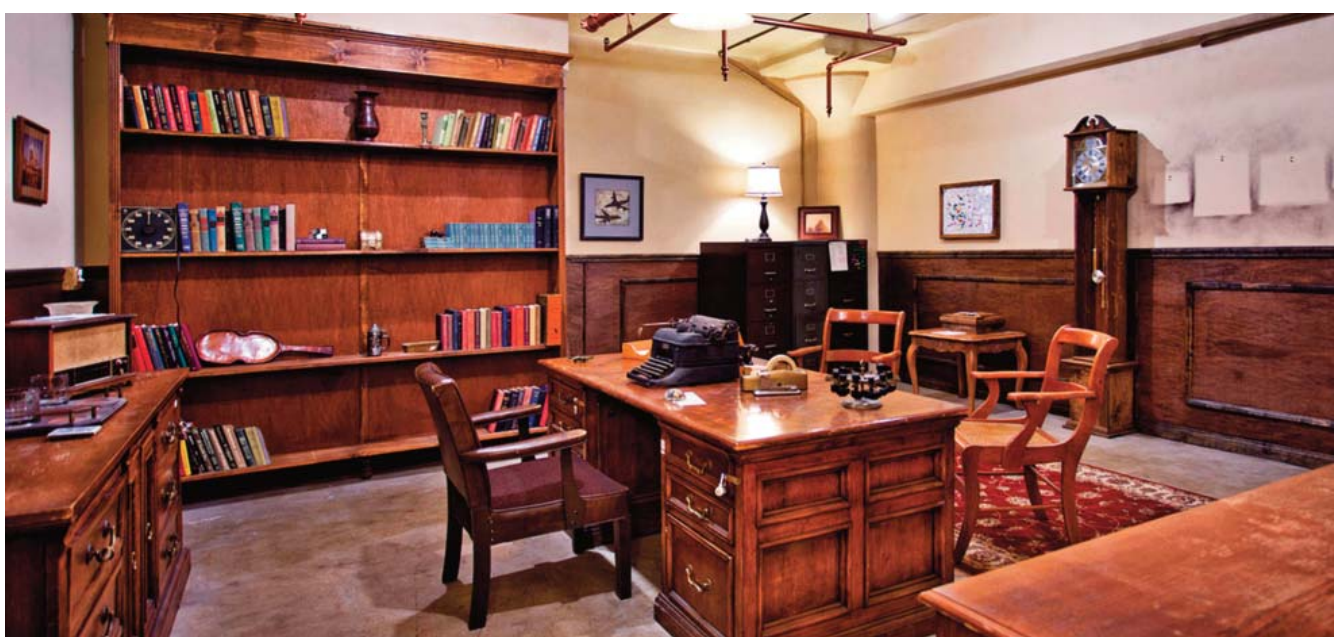
Counts teamed up with producer Jennifer Worthington, a former executive with filmmaker Jerry Bruckheimer, to create "Paradiso." To go deeper and scarier, they hired Broadway and immersive theater veterans - including lighting designer Ryan O'Gara from "Hamilton," video and special effects wizard Caleb Sharp from "The Walking Dead Experience" and set designer Katie Fleming of "Sleep No More." Ten guests at a time begin in the reception of the Virgil Corp., a nefarious Halliburton-like contractor. The cost is \$60, more than double the price of most regular escape rooms, but the experience is virtually cinematic.

The game is a noisy, chaotic, adrenalin-pumping scramble through four rooms. Doorknobs must be yanked in the darkness, peepholes in doors show scary figures, video screens flash messages, and there are holographic helicopters and corpses split in half - all to a doom-inducing soundscape. "You're sort of dropped into an action movie," said Worthington. "Who doesn't want to be in the middle of a James Bond movie?" In Orlando, Florida, Dave Maynard and his team at Digital Escape Velocity have added multi-touch screens, projectors, mobile devices and robotics. "We have gone completely off the deep end when it comes to throwing really high-tech stuff at it," Maynard said.

Maynard and his four teammates - all veterans of Lockheed Martin's research and development lab - just opened their first room, a deep space adventure set in 2225 that's customizable with the touch of a button. Six players at a time start in the battle-scarred engineering room of an alien ship and figure out how to power up the spacecraft and get to the observation deck and later the bridge. Wristbands offer players status updates, lights and engine sounds are synched up, video clues are sent depending on need and metrics are kept for a high scoreboard. "We innovate by really looking at how do we take the best of one thing and the best of another thing, put it together and make something that no one's ever seen before," said Maynard. — AP



This undated image released by Karen Greco Entertainment shows a scene from "Paradiso: Chapter 1," an immersive thriller created and directed by Michael Counts.



This undated image released by Race/LA shows one of the scenes for "Escape Room LA," in Los Angeles. — AP photos



This undated image provided by Objects of Art Santa Fe shows the Ramos Martinez painting Las Monjas dated 1943, on newsprint and offered at \$43,000 at the Objects of Art Santa Fe Show.



This undated image provided by Objects of Art Santa Fe shows a Francisco Zuniga painting 'Two Women' dated 1929. — AP photos

## Artwork from comedian Garry Shandling's estate to be sold

Dozens of paintings and other works of art from the estate of comedian Garry Shandling will be offered for sale at a show in New Mexico this week. Organizers of the annual Objects of Art Santa Fe say this will be the first public viewing of Shandling's collection, which includes Navajo rugs, Southwest furniture and pieces by Mexican artists Francisco Zuniga and Alfredo Ramos Martinez.

More than 40 of Shandling's personal pieces from his California home will be offered, ranging from a couple hundred dollars to more than \$40,000. The 66-year-old comedian, who died in March, stopped in Santa Fe often to vacation and buy art. Some of the pieces up for sale were originally purchased in Santa Fe, and it was through the recommendations of family and friends in California and relationships among art dealers that the pieces are finding their way back to New Mexico's art capital.

"Obviously Garry enjoyed the Southwest and enjoyed Santa Fe and this style of work so it was an exciting combination that we were doing the Objects show at the same time that they were ready to release the collection," said Kim Martindale, a co-producer of the show. Shandling was raised in Tucson, Arizona. On arriving in Los Angeles as a young adult, it was a short hop from a brief stint in the advertising business to comedy writing and stand-up.

While he was best known for his punchlines, his love of art resulted in regular appearances at the annual LA Art Show. "He definitely was a collector. He definitely was involved in the art world but he wasn't super public about that," Martindale said. "He certainly had a house full of really nice paintings and furniture and Navajo textiles." Among the work at this week's Objects show is a \$43,000 modernist painting of nuns on newsprint by Ramos Martinez that dates back to 1943. The artist began painting on paper in Paris and continued after moving to Los Angeles.

Martindale said Shandling's collection is reflective of his affinity for the Southwest and the Mexican and Latin style. Aside from the comedian's collection, the show will also feature work by Mexican sculptor Betsabee Romero, Cuban artist Jose Bedia and other one-of-a-kind pieces from around the world. With the success of the show in Santa Fe over the last several years, organizers have plans to expand with a show in Los Angeles in April. This week's show opens Thursday with a gala in Santa Fe and runs through Sunday. — AP