

# 'Escape' games prove challenging, addicting

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"Escape the Basement" and "Escape the Estate" are two games in a series of "Escape the Room" games by Zigurous.

For those of you who don't know, "Escape the Room" is a genre of puzzle games where you are usually locked in a room, generally have amnesia, and absolutely need to leave quickly. They are typically point-and-click or text based, and can take anywhere from a few minutes to days to win. While they usually don't have a story, the two by Zigurous make the plot very clear. In this series, there is a man who is planning on possibly torturing you to death, who has you locked in a house. The fear of this character is the main reason I love the series. It is a well-furnished house, conveniently equipped with everything you need to leave. Unlike most games, there are also plenty of things you do not need (fortunately, the game informs you). He has clearly done this to several people, and you even learn his name.

Both of these games have two secret areas, the first is an ending, and the second evokes a harsh "DO NOT WANT!" from players of the first. Finding the solution to these two is not as hard as a game by Neutral, but is

certainly not easy either.

The solutions to the hidden places are difficult enough that most people needed to follow a guide. I did not (there wasn't one when I played,) and I think it would be best if you could check how long it takes for you to figure it out on your own as well!

Graphics 8/10: The graphics fit the world; they're very polished and almost inviting. The reason it only receives an 8 is simply because there isn't much going on, no intense animations. While the first was definitely full of as many things as the developers figured would be in a basement, the estate doesn't have quite so much awesome.

Game Play 9/10: These games are my second favorite set of "Escape" games, and though the extra paths are much more difficult than the rest of the game, they aren't so horrifying that I would think of lowering the game's rating, especially considering they're entirely optional, and hardcore escape game players should enjoy the challenge.

Story 7/10: While this game has very little story, it has an amazing atmosphere in its motivational background compared to any other escape game I have ever played. I could only give it a seven, but if there were a special "Escape the Room" overall game series ranking, it would have at least a 9.



Image courtesy of zbanger.com

Sound 4/10: I didn't mind the music for the first part, but it is ridiculously repetitive. Although I didn't notice it because I was so focused on solving the problem, the raging in the comments section brought to my attention that, at least in the "Estate," the music is on a very short loop. In a very good game, this fact definitely brings it down.

Trophies and Everything Else: There are trophies for this game, and they will give you hints to the secrets. This is a great game to play if you're a fan of the "Escape the Room" genre. It came out fairly recently, so be sure to leave a review after you've finished wasting your...ahem...saving yourself by escaping.

# 'Paper Hat Game' pleases patrons with puppetry

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Paradoxical to popular persuasion, puppet performances aren't just for kids.

"The Paper Hat Game" is a multimedia puppet show that tells the (true) story of Scotty Iseri's bizarre, but amusing game centered around his journey on Chicago's transit, according to the production's official website.

In 2001, Iseri began to make paper hats and hand them to his fellow commuters on the train in hopes to inspire a bit of merry-making in an otherwise glum setting, according to Iseri's website, scottyiseri.com, eventually becoming a bit of a pop culture fad. There are currently three other "Paper Hat People" spreading their good vibes through out the country. "The Paper Hat Game" show was created by a team of artists' Toy Theatre, using Iseri's story. Iseri's story has also been featured in a number of Chicago, and national publications.

I was lucky enough to be invited to this show by TechNews' own Robin Babb, who is the publicist for the show's Chicago run. I also coerced (see: dragged along) two friends; there's always power in numbers.

Before I segue, let's take a moment just to appreciate the gem that is the Den Theatre (1333 N. Milwaukee Ave., second floor). The first thing noticeable about the theater is that its entrance is a seemingly ordinary door leading to an unfriendly corridor of stairs, up to the second floor (where the theater is located.) Turning right at the first possible instance, you are jettisoned in to a room that is more like an Old English library, than a Wicker Park hole-in-the-wall pub. Complete with a bar, (fancy cocktails anyone?) bookcases, and furniture straight from the Antiques Roadshow, the lounge is charming, and huge, but extremely homey.

After the initial confusion of trying to find the location of the performance (perhaps due to a pre-show drink and my overall awe and confusion of the maze that is this theater) we entered a small room that sat about 20 people. There was an odd rhythmic Stanley Kubrick-esque white noise piped through the speakers; it felt more like an Aldous Huxley dystopian novel soundtrack, than the score to a puppet show. Settling into our front row spots, (yeah, we went there) we were greeted by a never-ending loop of a passing CTA train on the screen, where the performance would take place.

Before the show started, the audience was given a warm and gracious greeting

from the creator and director, Torry Bend, expressing how excited she was to bring "The Paper Hat Game" back to the city from which it had originated.

The audience is shown the first of three rules: "you can't talk." No one does. The other rules include: "you can't make people play" and "everyone wins." The only sound comes from the play's score, that includes music, voiceovers, and sound effects being woven throughout the story. The intricacies of the movement of the set, and the thumping of the puppeteers working behind the curtain slowly speed up.

Now, some could suggest that the cumbersome movements coming from behind the curtain were distracting, or took away from the show, but it's the opposite. The movements from the puppeteers remind the audience that they're watching a moving piece of art, complete with nuances that vary from show to show. The movement also reminds us of all the hard work that is going on behind the scenes. More about that later.

The show compiles traditional puppetry, three-dimensional moving set-design, and video footage. They are juxtaposed over each other to create deep, and delicate scenes. It incorporates a newspaper motif into the majority of the art; the use of newspaper is an obvious homage to Iseri's original medium, but also fits with the cosmopolitan influences of the production.

If you're a fan of detailed and artistic stop-motion animation, like the short film "Peter and the Wolf" (2006, also available for free streaming online) you'll find this play pleasing to your avant-garde aesthetic.

The moving parts of this wheel require concentration, and test your senses at the same time.

One stunning aspect of the show, is how accurately it portrays the feeling of different modes of transportation. Obviously the CTA trains are a main component of the show, but the way your senses are overwhelmed could convince you that you're on the Green/Red Line back to the 35th-Bronzeville-IIT stop. This enthralling element is also used when the central character is being transported in an automobile.

Instead of just flatly presenting puppets as three-dimensional figures in front of a two-dimensional set, "The Paper Hat Game" takes perspective to a different, heightened level. The audience is hurled from a third-person perspective, to Iseri's first-person perspective, to a shadowed dimension where it's difficult to discern what's happening on screen. It feels entirely real-



Images courtesy of Salvatella de Prada (via thepaperhatgame.com) & thechicagostagereview.com

istic, and the movement is enchanting, but overwhelming if you pay too close attention.

The details of the puppets, props, and scenery are amazing; the craftsmanship of the tiny buildings and gadgets would put any College of Architecture student to shame. The vault was opened after the show, and the audience was invited to take a look behind the scenes.

The last time I actually watched a puppet show, I couldn't tell you, but I have fond memories. Watching the muted movements of the puppets, as well as the intentional use of the performers' hands, ignites a sense of astonishment at the meticulous work and seamless effort that has been molded into this show.

For those looking for a strictly linear and literal plot, move along. This show is heavily conceptual, and keeps the story minimal in order to make room for the weight and intricacy of the artists' creations, and the performers' efforts.

"The Paper Hat Game" is showing at the Den Theatre this, and the following weekend (until September 22) with shows at 7:30 and 9 p.m., and Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$15, and on sale through brownpapertickets.com.

Find out more information about the production by visiting their Facebook page, The Paper Hat Game, or website, thepaperhatgame.com.