

People & Places

Entertainment

Latest buzz

Escape room new challenge

WASHINGTON, Oct. 22, (RTRS): Dental lab technician Jon Choi and his friends celebrated his birthday this month under pressure: they were locked together in a small "escape room" and had to solve a series of puzzles to achieve their freedom within 60 minutes.

They finally made it out with one minute to spare.

Choi avidly plays computer games with the same set-up, but

had never visited a physical escape room before. The experience was both fun and tough enough that he is now planning to try other similar rooms.

He has plenty of options.

Escape rooms are the latest entertainment phenomena to seize the United States, where people break out of locked rooms using their smarts, or any that the friends, family members or strangers interred with them may possess. There are more than 100 across the country, according to the Escape Room Directory, charging between \$20 and \$30 for the experience.

Requires

In an era when socializing no longer requires real-time conversation and the answers to all life's questions are a screen-tap away, those seeking to connect with others in person and use their own knowledge for intellectual challenges find the rooms refreshing. The concept has captivated Americans so much that the Science Channel created the game show "Race to Escape" around it.

Themes of the independently-owned rooms vary from place to place. In Pittsburgh, families are encouraged to share "bonding time" in the "Prison Escape" room. In Los Angeles, players can relive their city's Raymond Chandler past in a room called "The Detective."

Once the door is closed and the timer set, the first puzzle emerges. Its solution leads to the next puzzle. Clues are tucked all over the room, some in plain sight and others in secret compartments. Step by step, players solve the overarching mystery of the room.

For Choi and his friends at Escape Room Live in Alexandria, Virginia, that mystery revolved around fictional detective Sherlock Holmes.

Shocked

"We looked up at the time and there was 10 minutes left and I was like, 'God!'" said Andrew Kim, who was shocked when they finally cracked the mystery.

According to Escape Game Orlando, the rooms' roots are in video games, with the basic idea of trapping a player in a single location first appearing in the 1988 game "Behind Closed Doors." A real-life room opened in Kyoto in 2007 and the trend soon spread throughout Asia and Europe, according to the company.

When Ginger Flesher-Sonnier started Escape Room Live a year ago in Washington, DC with a secret agent-themed room, she was surprised by the demand.

Within three weeks, Flesher-Sonnier, a former math teacher, had to create a second room at the site and within nine months she opened the Alexandria location featuring two Holmes-themed rooms. In August alone, 6,000 people visited both Escape Room Live locations.

So many people have tramped through that, after rent and salaries, prop storage has become the company's biggest expense. It must have exact duplicates of all the puzzle objects ready to swap in every few weeks.

Flesher-Sonnier estimates 60 percent of visitors are millennials. Corporate team-building provides many customers and three men have popped the question by having engagement rings hidden in puzzles.

Few players solve the mysteries in time without getting hints from the game masters who monitor and run the rooms. They have seen that the puzzles bring out all sorts of quirks in people's personalities and relationships.

"I think strangers work the best. The reason why is you can't get mad at a stranger," the manager of the Alexandria location, Hop Dang, said. "Families — they don't hold back."

Dang attended his first escape room a year ago, thinking, "why am I paying someone to lock me in a room?" Now he often dreams at night about secret doors and hidden objects.

The world tends to look different to people once they have escaped, Dang said.

"Every thing that you see, you're going to try to open."



Dang



US actress Hilary Swank waves to photographers on the red carpet upon her arrival for the opening ceremony of the 28th Tokyo International Film Festival in Tokyo on Oct 22. (Inset): Japanese actress Sola Aoi poses for photographers. (AFP)

Film

Fox never imagined sci-fi trilogy popularity 30 yrs on

'Back to the Future' still stuns

'Unbroken' finally set for Japan release

Filipino director Mendoza honored at Tokyo fest

NEW YORK, Oct. 22, (Agencies): When Marty McFly and Emmett "Doc" Brown first appeared on screen in 1985's "Back to the Future", the duo won over legions of fans with their time-travelling adventures.

Thirty years on, Michael J. Fox, who portrayed the teenage McFly, says he never imagined the continued popularity of the sci-fi trilogy.

"We thought it would speak to '50s generation and the '80s generations, we didn't know that it would speak to the '90s generation and the 21st century generation," he said. "It just kind of continues to amaze us."

Fox was speaking on the red carpet for an event on Wednesday celebrating Oct 21, 2015, the date McFly travels to from 1985 in the film's sequel, arriving in a future of flying cars and hovering skateboards.

Fans around the world celebrated the movie milestone, cinemas held special screenings and businesses put out dedicated adverts. Fox said the past few days of promotion had been a whirlwind.

"It's like the Pope's (recent US) visit ... I'm not trying to compare myself to the Pope but I've been busy. It's been one thing after the other because people want to mark this... take a note of it because the movies have meant something to them," he said.

Privilege

"And when you're involved in something like that it's just so humbling and a privilege and I don't know that I ever thought it would be like this 30 years out."

Fox reunited with cast members Christopher Lloyd, who played Doc, and Lea Thompson, who portrayed McFly's mother Lorraine, for a screening of the film and Q&A session.

"It's a dream come true to be in a film that has the kind of profound impact it's had on so many people ... and for it to endure the way this film has," Lloyd said.

"It's amazing, it's a rarity." "Back to the Future" celebrated its 30th anniversary Wednesday at the AMC Loews Lincoln Square in Manhattan with a red carpet complete with a DeLorean and favorite stars from the iconic trilogy. Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd and Lea Thompson took to the carpet on Oct 21, 2015, the very day Marty McFly and Doc Brown arrived in the future.

Tech talk abounded on the carpet. Co-creator and writer Bob Gale sighed over the opportunity to have cold fusion technology power his house and car.

I was like, 'Eh, no.' I do not want to write an album of mushy baby songs. Or mommy songs. That is not me."

But she did co-write "What I Never Knew I Always Wanted," a reflection on the realization that motherhood filled a hole she never knew she had. (AP)

DUNKIRK, NY: Cory Wells, a founding member of the popular 1970s band Three

TOKYO, Oct. 22, (Agencies): Filipino director Brillante Mendoza, taking center stage at the Tokyo International Film Festival, is pursuing a collaboration with other Asian filmmakers — a cultural connection that might be as simple as rice.

The festival, which opened Thursday with red carpet ceremonies, features five films directed by Mendoza, including his latest "Taklub," shown earlier this year at Cannes. Two Filipino films he has produced are also being shown.

Mendoza has already started preliminary discussions with Isao Yukisada of Japan and Cambodian Sotho Kulikar for a film to be shown at next year's Tokyo festival.

The prevalence and deeper meaning of cooking and family meals in Asian life — and in Asian films — has already come up as one commonality, he said.

"We would like to maximize the connection," Mendoza said in an interview at a Tokyo hotel.

The festival's opening film is "The Walk," about French tightrope daredevil Philippe Petit, directed by Robert Zemeckis, who is among the 400 people attending the opening.

Hilary Swank, who portrays a woman with a fatal illness in "You're Not You," and Helen Mirren, of "Woman in Gold," also

walked the red carpet for the festival, which closes Oct 31.

Mendoza, who has won awards at Cannes, Berlin and Venice, is a rare but powerful voice of independent cinema in a region dominated by sappy melodrama and Hollywood.

His films are poetically dark, following prostitutes, midwives and poor mothers in back alleys of a slum, spiraling staircases and typhoon-torn beaches. The sometimes shaky hand of his camera gives it a voyeur feel, disguising the certainty of his storytelling.

His characters endure hardships — a devastating typhoon in one, the heartbreaking death of a child in another — often shot in the gorgeous landscapes of the Philippines. The plot is never a simplistic pitting of good versus bad, as in many Hollywood action films.

Mendoza's people are hardworking, humble, everyday people. But they are sometimes weak, betraying a partner's love or simply giving up.

"We can all commit mistakes, but committing a mistake doesn't make us a bad person," he said. "I think that is what makes us really human. Rising up above these mistakes — that is the best part, when you learn."

Mendoza said he hopes to share

his insights on independent filmmaking, including distribution and post-production work, with Japanese fans and filmmakers, and with film students in Tokyo.

Mendoza says he will not waver from his original goals and has little interest in commercial success or going to Hollywood, adding awards and growing fame have not changed him.

Also:

TOKYO: Angelina Jolie's wartime-based movie "Unbroken" will finally be shown in Japan over a year after its release despite attempts from nationalists who blasted it as racist to prevent it being screened, a distributor said Thursday.

The film, directed by Jolie, which depicts an American prisoner of war being tortured by a sadistic Japanese guard, is set to hit screens in February, beginning in Tokyo before being shown in other locations nationwide.

Unbroken is based on Laura Hillenbrand's 2010 best-seller and tells the story of American Olympic athlete and air force pilot Louis Zamperini, who was captured by Japanese soldiers after his bomber crashed into the Pacific in 1943.

The movie was released in the United States and other countries last December.

Mets do well. But I'd love to see the film be right. So I'm torn," Fox said before the game ended, adding "Whatever happens, happens."

Lloyd, said he didn't really follow the predictions, except for that one.

"I'm hoping the Cubs win tonight and go into the series, that would be the ultimate prediction," Lloyd said with a bit of trepidation.

But that was not to be. The New York Mets defeated the Cubs 8-3 Wednesday in the National League Championship Series. They will advance to the World Series.

"Back to the Future Part II" envisioned more than baseball. It depicted a colorful 2015 with flying cars, hoverboards and self-tying shoelaces. While those doodads are hardly prevalent today, the film did accurately tease the rise of flat-screen televisions, biometric scanning and hands-free gaming.

Wells experienced acute back pain weeks ago and died suddenly Tuesday in Dunkirk, where he had lived, bandmate Danny Hutton said.

"Cory was an incredible singer — a greater performer, he could sing anything," Hutton said.

The cause of Wells' death was unknown, Universal Music Enterprises spokeswoman Sujata Murphy said. Vocalists Wells, Hutton and Chuck Negron formed Three Dog Night in 1967, lifting the name from Australian slang for especially cold weather. They added a backing band as they became a top group over the following decade, specializing in covers of songs by Randy Newman, Harry Nilsson and Paul Williams, among others. (AP)



Toby Fulp dressed up as Doc Brown attends a Million McFly March to celebrate the movie 'Back to the Future' in Burbank, California, on Oct 21. (AFP)

Variety

SYDNEY: Two big budget blockbusters, including the next Marvel superhero "Thor" instalment and Ridley Scott's new "Alien" film, will be shot in Australia from next year, the government said Thursday.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said the deal to film Marvel Studios' "Ragnarok", starring Australian actor Chris Hemsworth, and Scott's production for Twentieth Century Fox would generate 3,000 jobs and Aus \$300 million (\$216 million) for the economy.

"Australia's creative industries are well placed to take advantage of a growing global economy and I have been actively promoting Australia for the production of major international films," Bishop said.

The announcement comes after recent trips to the United States during which Bishop lauded Australia for its highly qualified workforce, innovative technology, stable economy and low dollar.

The original "Thor" in 2011, based on the Marvel Comics character, was a box office smash and was followed by a sequel "Thor: The Dark World" in 2013, also starring Hemsworth.

Sci-fi horror movie "Alien", directed by Scott, was a cult hit in 1979 and led to three sequels. (AFP)

NASHVILLE, Tenn: Carrie Underwood is pure poise on the red carpet, on stage and on TV — but she's finding it hard to strike a balance these days, she says.

"I think mom guilt is rampant in my life," said Underwood, whose son Isaiah was born in February. "I am sure it is in any mom's ... I still constantly wonder, 'Is this fair to him? Is my life fair to him?'"

Underwood, whose new album, "Storyteller," is out on Oct 23, knows the exhaustion that comes after being up with a fussy baby all night during album launch week, or the remorse in bidding him goodbye in the morning and knowing she'll be working long after his bedtime.

As she sings in "Smoke Break," an ode to the working class that is now in the Top 5 on Billboard's Hot Country Songs chart, it's hard to be a good wife, a good mom and a Christian.

"He's my No 1 priority," Underwood said. "But it's just a question of how am I going to do this? ... I'll probably never find the answers to those questions."

When she was pregnant and writing songs for "Storyteller," she initially wasn't ready to sing about the joys of motherhood.

"I would have writing dates with people and they would come in and push me in that direction," Underwood said. "And



Underwood



Wells

Dog Night and lead singer on such hits as "Never Been to Spain" and "Mama Told Me (Not to Come)," has died at age 74.

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