Would California Parks and Rec... allow an Alcatraz jailbreak today?

This month’s Chains...

- Prison Break Idea? 1
- Peterhead Prison Escape 1
- Voodoo escapology 2
- Alcatraz Handcuffs 4
- 2,000 Water Torture Cell Escapes 5
- Houdiniopoly Update 5
- wikiHow to Escape from a Straitjacket 6
- The Escape Artist Show (Revisited) 7
- Begging Box 8

Several firsts and surprises all wrapped up with highland majesty...

Over the last few years, from York to Ripon, the United Kingdom Escape Artists group has slowly road tested and developed the research and hard work conducted by the late, legendary, UK Escape Artist David De-Val in his attempts to recreate a historically accurate version of Harry Houdini’s famous cell escapes.

Whilst Cell Escapes are not uncommon even in modern times, despite the increased threat levels around the world, the methodologies used, and the misdirection applied, are as diverse and as unique as the artists performing them.
The article presented here does not necessarily represent the opinions of The Chainletter, The International Escapologist Society, its’ editor or its’ members. If you find the following material objectionable, that is your right and you may certainly express different opinions.

Internet Definition: Voodoo... a black religious cult practiced in the Caribbean and the southern US, combining elements of Roman Catholic ritual with traditional African magical and religious rites, and characterized by sorcery and spirit possession.

Like Mr. Rob’s last book, which I reviewed in the November issue, this one starts out with a simple rope tie. The instructions are clear, photographed and presented in a way that makes them easy to follow. I believe Mr. Rob’s goal is not so much to teach escapology, but to demonstrate a way in which a performer might present an act.

For those who might care to read this book, intentional or otherwise there is some degree of history to be learned. The idea the Papa Legba was in fact Saint Peter of the New Testament is something I can not speak to either way, but it does make for an interesting idea.

There is also a concept woven into the book that Voodoo is not evil as many people seem to think, and that the Catholic church has done things far worse than most Voodoo practitioners. I make no comment on this and leave it to the reader to make their own choice in the matter.

My favorite quote in the book is, “It is also more helpful if you stay alive.” this is referring to someone who wants to perform all the rituals before becoming versed in the art of escapology. The example is a bridge jump which could kill an unskilled or under prepared performer.

If we are using the rituals plus escapology for entertainment, I have to wonder about how to set the stage. Are we in an African temple dressed in traditional African clothing? Are...
common man who often felt powerless in life. Houdini would show these people that escape
from their trouble is possible.

Loco is the one to see for a healing ritual. Mr. Rob makes a very strong argument about the placebo effect anticipating that there may be some people who are critical or positive of this effect. Still healing is a common thread in many shows regarding demonstrations of faith. This is true for many religions and not just Voodoo. Remember all these rituals include the escape and apparently that is the focus to guide your efforts in contacting the entities in question.

Bosou-Koblamin is an entity that can be used for several rituals, including to kill an enemy. I can certainly see stories in which someone turns to a stronger force to get rid of an enemy, heck American Cinema is full of this. Think “The Godfather,” for example. Early in the film a wronged man turns to Don Corleone for help when

We in the west indies with a group of people in the forest seated around a ritual campfire chanting and dancing to summon our entities? All performers know that for a successful show certain things must match. A clown performs perfectly in a circus motif. A voodoo performance at a circus would be hideously out of place and look too unbelievable.

The rituals in this book include one to Dumballah for wisdom. Praying for wisdom, and working for wisdom are fine ideas. How to work this into a show is another story. I suppose one could work it into a vignette where someone is seeking to be smarter.

Agassu is the entity to pray to for power. Again, there are any number of stories that one can tell in the need for power. No less than Houdini himself was a strong roll model for the
His daughter is raped. Don Corleone asks for a ritual first; On your knees and kiss my ring and call me Godfather. Once the ritual is complete, then the man will get his help; justice will be served.

Still, I tend to draw the line here. I don’t see killing as the appropriate tool in most cases. I also don’t see such a ritual as particularly entertaining. Still to each their own.

An interesting ritual that most people can relate too is using the entity Lemba to help overcome bad habits. Everyone can relate to this. Everyone has a habit or two they would love to be rid of.

So what ever your goals are, if you would like to work Voodoo rituals into an escapology act. Then this book by S. Rob may be for you. The book is available on Amazon.com.

Here is a chuckle for some of you.

I was up in San Francisco for Veteran's day weekend. In a tourist trap gift shop, I saw a product called Alcatraz handcuffs. One of the boxes was open so I looked inside. I expected to see an ordinary pair of cuffs with the name stamped on them or some such. This was not the case though.

What was inside was not stamped or labeled in any way. It was simply a pair of metal "toy" cuffs. The kind that has a release lever on the side. Technically not toys, but that is what the New York City Police call them. The souvenir value I suppose rested in the box that showed a photo of Alcatraz island as well as a photo of real looking handcuffs.

Anybody know when the release lever came into being? I am guessing it may have been after a law suit involving a kid chaining up his sister or a parent or something. The pair I had of these in the 70's had no such lever, but were ridiculously easy to pick.

A great tribute site to the amazing David De-Val

http://www.davidde-val.com/
Houdini Museum says:

All files have been sent to the people who are printing the game. We will be sending parts out hopefully in December. Game pieces, etc. Not sure if the entire game will be out before Christmas. Will keep you informed. We had to change the manufacturer, as we felt there was a chance they could not handle the work. Communication and other problems. The company we now have is more established and experienced. This has been a very difficult process. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

November 7th 2017

Stage is set for Kristen Johnson’s 2,000th water torture cell here at Columbia County Fair and Drew Exposition. Tune in at 9:15pm eastern time to see it live on Facebook on the Lady Houdini page. Huge thanks to Hope Victoria Copeland for recording this event tonight!
Even though straitjackets are designed to restrain someone who's in danger of harming themselves or others, they also make a good challenge for any *escapologist*. In fact, one of Harry Houdini's most famous tricks was to escape from a straitjacket while hanging upside down from a crane! Contrary to popular belief, you *don't* have to dislocate your shoulder in order to perform this feat, but you do have to practice the following steps.

1. **While you're being buckled up, use one of your hands to inconspicuously pinch the front, giving you about three inches of slack.** Take a deep breath and tighten your muscles in order to make your upper body as big as you possibly can. As your sleeves are pulled behind you, try to make sure your stronger arm is over your weaker arm.

2. **Loosen up.** Once the straitjacket is secured, relax your upper body and breathe out. Make your upper body as small as possible, and let go of the slack you created in the previous step. The straitjacket should feel looser now.

3. **Push your strong arm forcefully towards the opposite shoulder.** This will move the slack to where you need it for the next step.

4. **Bring your strong arm up and over your head.** Keep your weak arm down. Once you've done this, you'll be able to move your arms around.

5. **Unbuckle the sleeve buckle with your teeth.**

---

http://www.urbanninjablog.com/category/escapology/
This video from Dan Harlan has a very interesting past. When it was first released, there was a thread on The Magic Café about it that was so volatile, it got deleted for inflammatory opinions. You see the problem was that Dan Harlan, despite his strong reputation for doing really good magic... was not an escape artist. Several people took exception to his producing one of his series “Packs Small Plays Big” on the subject of an escape artist show. The controversy ended with two simple acts. First the moderators of the Magic Café deleted the thread, and Dan Harlan Joined the International Escapologist Society. While he did that out of spite, and I believe other than join our group he has never been here, it was in interesting display.

Last month we read a review from M.U.M. magazine regarding this video. The review was very positive, but it lacked one thing; the escape artist perspective.

Many people will want to not like the video for the reasons above, but the truth is, this is an excellent presentation with lots of really good ideas.
Equally, the nature of the Cell is often varied, as almost all are in museums and depending on the era that the museum seeks to represent, and their level of funding, the level of challenge varies.

This is what has made the escape from Peterhead Prison Museum so fascinating. Firstly, it represents the first time that an Escapologist has escaped from a Prison Cell in Scotland, this is mostly down to the fact that the Prison Service in Scotland do not take kindly to performers playing around near active prisons, and secondly, it was also fascinating as the cell itself was only decommissioned from regular, active, use, four years ago.

So, we have a cell that is as modern and as current in terms of locks, doors, interior and structure as any that can be found in the vast majority of active prisons in the United Kingdom and a methodology that worked well for Harry Houdini in the early 20th century and De-Val in the 1980’s.

To be clear it, as far as anyone could tell, the Houdini / De-Val test methodology had never been tested against any cell upgraded since the turn of the millennium.

For me the good news was that I was going to be present to witness the cell escape and, even better news, I was not the person facing the alarm and anxiety of actually doing it.

Oh and it was on the 31st of October, with the general public in attendance, covered on live TV and, as Peterhead is on the East Coast of Scotland, north of Aberdeen, it was a bit cold.
The honour/near impossible to comprehend stress of it all fell onto fellow UKEA member, Scottish Escapologist and De-Val historian, Andy Robertson.

Andy had been challenged by Rebecca Taylor, representing the De-Val Family, a few months earlier but no amount of time could have overcome the enormity of the challenge itself.

The test conditions were, full strip search and medical examination, cell to be searched by the public, regulation restraints provided by a third party and checked by a locksmith, those manacles applied by the museum staff and other selected individuals, not the EA, and, obviously the cell door to be locked and the key removed.

As for the venue, imagine a classic Victorian prison, ripped straight from the pages of a dark Dickens novel. Imagine being walked through gates, past towers and fences that a few years before marked the boundary between liberty and the execution of justice. Add in the fading light and the cold, harsh autumnal evening and the fear I felt was very real.

It was a daunting, intimidating, place, one that is also steeped in legend. Whilst it is true that no Escapologist has ever escaped from a cell under test conditions from this, or any other prison in Scotland, as if to add another layer of stress, the Prison had been the home of ‘Gentle’ Johnny Ramensky, a famous (non-violent) burglar and former Commando who rose to some fame due to his safe cracking and engineering skills (sabotage mostly) being used against the Nazis in World War 2. The fact that he was imprisoned and not allowed to attend his wife’s funeral led to the first of his five successful escapes from the Prison.

Members of the Ramensky family attended the event as guests and were invited to help secure Mr Robertson.

So, on this famous night of spirits and the supernatural it was not just the ghosts of Houdini and De-Val that were peeking around the ethereal curtain.

Back inside the cell and I can attest to the public searching the cell. There was even one delightful couple who were convinced that something was down the sink.
To be clear, the sink was a stainless steel box cut into the wall with hot and cold push buttons, similar to the type you find in some fast food restaurants and the trap and sink guard were cast into the metal, the box was concreted into the wall. After a few minutes of pulling, they eventually conceded that they were wrong.

I found out later that someone else had even checked the toilet U Bend. Perhaps they had watched the film Kingsman and had got inspired. Regardless the modern viewing public remain a delight to work with.

Once the cell had been checked and Mr Robertson had undergone the inspection, the Scottish TV crew, the public and the observers moved further down the corridor and behind a closed fire door.

No one was present to assist Andy. All he had was his own experience as an Escapologist, his research into the methodology of Houdini and De-Val, and a lot of courage.

I once wrote that being an escape artist at someone else’s escape is a bit like being a boxer, sitting in the front row seats, of someone else’s boxing match. You cannot help but flinch or tense, you hear noises that are almost silent, you sense things that the public do not and, overall, you find yourself picturing the escape as you would do it.

After 8 minutes and 12 seconds, Andy was free from the cell and standing, fully clothed, in the corridor, having called out and signalled he was free. The only indication of any struggle was the swollen and cut skin on his left hand, an indication of how tightly the manacles were applied. It was an amazing night and an honour to have been invited to be present.

It is a tribute to Mr Robertson for the time and effort in conducting this escape, to the De-Val family for issuing the challenge, the Ramensky’s for attending, to STV for their time and professionalism and to the members of the UKEA that were there for moral support. But, above all else, the work carried out by two masters of the 20th Century, that not only provided an escape method for their times, but as Mr Robertson has shown, is timeless.
Dan opens with how to put an escape act in a briefcase. How many of us come to do a show with a shoulder bag, a suitcase on wheels and maybe another bag in your hand? I know I have. The secret Dan shows us is really no secret, just good planning and a very valuable lesson in show organization for the novice escape artist. Novice? I did my first handcuff escape 40 years ago and I still found this lesson to be very enlightening.

Next we see a variation of the tie a knot in the rope by just whipping it. In this case the knot appears on your wrist. We are escape artists after all. I was first shown that stunt by a hospital clown years ago. I think this is a nice way of stepping it up and customizing it. We are escape artists, just doing rope tricks doesn’t mean escape. A tied knot magically appearing on your wrist, that says “Escape artist!”

Dan goes over a total of 9 effects and includes the psychology of how to put each one where it is in the show. We all know there is more to a show than just a bunch of effects strung together at random; a common mistake.

Dan shows us how to thread a pair of ropes through a borrowed jacket’s sleeves and pull the jacket off leaving the ropes intact. Most of our readers probably already know how this works, but I think it is a fine effect that will leave the volunteers scratching their heads. While it may be an extension of a simple trick that many beginning magicians know and use, it gets built into a real shocker.

Dan does a straitjacket escape. While there is nothing to set it apart from anyone else doing that bit, he does do a fine job, and yes, it does fit in his briefcase.

My favorite is the ribbon through the lady. Again, this effect will not fool you as a practiced escape artist, but the gimmick is rather clever. You might make good use of this and it gives a fine excuse to bring three volunteers on stage.

Dan does the big loop chains and tells you how to build your own. I have issues with this, on several points, including I much prefer Steve Baker’s version in which the big loop is a very thin loop.

Overall, Dan Harlan is a fine magician who did his homework. This video is great for a budding escape artist, and will still inspire the seasoned pro. It costs about $34 and that includes used on e-bay. Is it worth the money? I think so.

Btw, I thought his thumb tie was diabolical.