



#### DIVERSIONS

## Magical Mystery Tour

PEOPLE SAY THAT JOHN KEATS' GHOST haunts his house below Rome's Spanish Steps. And, according to legend, a dragon lurks beneath the columns of Castor and Pollux's temple in the Forum. These are just a few of the tidbits to be found within the new Rome edition of *The Ruyi*, a series of guidebooks ([www.theruyi.com](http://www.theruyi.com)) that turn visits to Italian cities into intriguing treasure hunts.

Springing from the fertile imagination of Venetian writer Alberto Toso Fei, this game-as-guide centers on a hunt for the Ruyi of the title, a mythical magical scepter stolen from Kublai Khan by Marco Polo. In the story, the explorer takes the scepter back to Venice—where Toso Fei's first *Ruyi* game is set—before it is donated to the Vatican. During the sack of Rome in 1527, the Pope commissions Florentine goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini to transform the Ruyi's appearance to keep it out of enemy hands.

Players use clues to

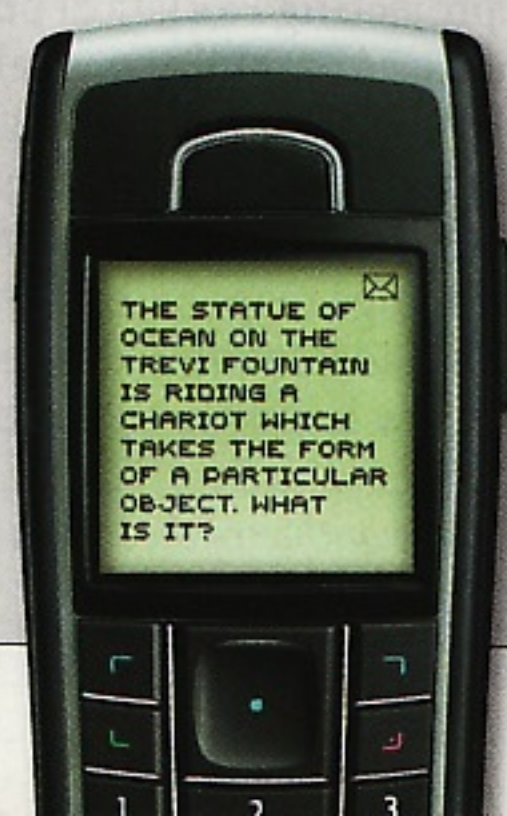
"find" the scepter, taking in a tour of the city as they search. To make the quest more challenging, each entry in the book has been sliced up and jumbled. The only way to reassemble it—and identify the site it describes—is to use a code sent to you by text. Then another text arrives with a question

that can only be answered by visiting the site itself. Send the correct reply, and you get a new code to move on to the next site. The clues can lead to any of 60 landmarks and monuments throughout Rome, ranging from the obvious—the Colosseum—to the more obscure, such as a shrine marking the spot where Joan, the legendary female Pope of the 9th century, is said to have given birth. The game lasts from two to nine hours and can be played alone or in teams.

Ultimately, the Ruyi always evades discovery. But the real treasure is in experiencing a fun new twist on sightseeing in the Eternal City. —BY RACHEL SPENCE

#### HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

- Send a text to a phone number in the guide book.
- Receive a code that reassembles a jumbled entry and head to the site it describes.
- A second text contains a clue, the answer to which can only be found at the site.
- Reply with the right answer.
- A new code points to the next site, and the hunt for the Ruyi continues.



#### CHECK IN

## Chez De Niro

HE MAY BE BEST KNOWN FOR his onscreen performances, but offscreen no role better defines Robert De Niro than unofficial mayor of New York City's Tribeca district. By investing in everything from its dining scene (Nobu) to its arts industry (the Tribeca Film Festival), De Niro has helped establish the 'hood as one of Manhattan's hippest.



And his latest debut could be his most ambitious yet: the eight-floor, 88-room Greenwich Hotel.

With its industrial-luxe aesthetic, the hotel ([www.thegreenwichhotel.com](http://www.thegreenwichhotel.com)) looks as if it has been there for a century. But it was actually completed earlier this year, its classically styled façade elegantly aged with red bricks handcrafted in 20 different shapes and sizes.

Inside, the hotel offers a similar blend of old and new. Rooms have iPod docks and wi-fi, but also sturdy oak beams recycled from abandoned factories, hand-cut Italian terra-cotta tiles in the bathrooms, and custom-made furniture inspired by early 20th century designs. A stay also grants you access to perhaps the hotel's truest luxury: its subterranean Shibui spa and pool. Low lit and nearly silent, the space contains an original 18th-century bamboo home from Tokyo, meticulously reconstructed onsite.

Thanks to its rumored \$50 million price tag and A-list pedigree, the Greenwich has all the makings of a hotel blockbuster. With the rooms already booking up fast, perhaps De Niro might consider a sequel. —BY DAVID KAUFMAN