

ELE 2006 – Document A

[Sam Clay] pressed the heels of his hands against his temples. You could almost see the idea elbowing its way around the inside of his mind, like Athena in the cranium of Zeus. [Joe Kavalier] sat up. He ran his mind back over the last half hour of conversation and, as if he were picking up a transmission direct from Sammy's brain, saw in his own mind the outlines, the dark contours, the balletic contortions and
 5 perpetual escape. He was just envisioning or foretasting, or, strangely, remembering this dashing character when Sammy opened his eyes. His face was twisted and flushed with excitement. He looked very much as if, to employ one of his own expressions, his bowels were in an uproar.

"Okay," he said, "listen to this." He started to pace between the drawing tables, looking down at his feet, declaiming in a sharp, barking tenor that Joe recognized from the announcers on American radio. "To,
 10 uh, to all those who, uh, toil in the bonds of slavery—"

"Bonds?"

"Yeah." Sammy's cheeks reddened, and he dropped the radio voice.

"Chains, like. Just listen. It's comics, all right?"

"All right."

* 15 He resumed his pacing and radio-announcer tone and continued to compose his historic series of exclamations.

"To all those who toil in the bonds of slavery and, uh, the, the shackles of oppression, he offers the hope of liberation and the promise of freedom!" His delivery grew more assured now. "Armed with superb physical and mental training, a crack team of assistants, and ancient wisdom, he roams the globe, performing
 20 amazing feats and coming to the aid of those who languish in tyranny's chains! He is"—he paused and threw Joe a helpless, gleeful glance, on the point of vanishing completely into his story now—"the Escapist!"

"The Escapist." Joe tried it out. It sounded magnificent to his unschooled ear—someone trustworthy and useful and strong. "He is an escape artist in a costume. Who fights crime."

"He doesn't just fight it. He *frees* the world of it. He *frees* people, see? He comes in the darkest hour.
 25 He watches from the shadows. Guided only by the light from—the light from—"

"His Golden Key."

"That's great!"

* "I see," Joe said. The costume would be dark, dark blue, midnight blue, simple, functional, ornamented only with a skeleton-key emblem on the chest. Joe went over to one of the drawing tables and
 30 climbed onto the stool. He picked up a pencil and a sheet of paper and started to sketch rapidly, closing his inner eyelid and projecting against it, so to speak, the image of a lithe, acrobatic man who had just leaped into his mind, a man in the act of alighting, a gymnast dismounting the rings, his right heel about to meet the ground, his left leg raised and flexed at the knee, his arms thrown high, hands outspread, trying to get at the physics of the way a man moved, the give-and-take of sinews and muscle groups, to forge, in a way that no
 35 comic book artist had, an anatomical basis for grace and style.

"Wow," Sammy said. "Wow, Joe. That's good. That's beautiful."

"He is here to free the world," said Joe.

"Exactly."

"Permit me to ask a question to you."

40 "Ask me anything. I got it all up here." Sammy tapped his head in a cocky manner that reminded Joe almost painfully of Thomas; in the next minute, when Sammy heard Joe's question, he looked crestfallen in exactly the same way.

* "What is the why?" said Joe.

Sammy nodded slowly, then stopped.

45 "The why," he said. "Shit."

"You said—"

"I know, I know. I know what I said. All right." He picked up his coat and grabbed the last package of cigarettes. "Let's take a walk," he said.

ELE 2006 – Document B

Superheroines

America went to war in 1941, and Wonder Woman—“beautiful as Aphrodite, wise as Athena, stronger than Hercules and swifter than Mercury”—entered comics. Her creator, psychologist William Moulton Marston, coincidentally also the inventor of the lie detector, intended to design a heroine for girls in the all-male world of comic books, and succeeded admirably with a mixture of mythology and feminism. When handsome pilot Steve Trevor crashes his plane on the matriarchal Paradise Island, Amazon Princess Diana dons a costume based on the American flag and departs with him for “Man’s World,” to fight fascism and defend sisterhood and democracy. The constant message in Wonder Woman was that girls could do anything boys could do, and often better, especially if they stuck together.

Wonder Woman paved the way for countless other comic book superheroines and remains a favorite among girls and women to this day, but she was not the first superheroine. That honor belongs to Miss Fury, a newspaper strip heroine drawn by a woman named Tarpe Mills, who beat Wonder Woman by eight months. The strips glamorous panther skin-clad protagonist was actually a dead ringer for her attractive creator, Mills. In her film-noire adventures in exotic locales like Brazil, the heroine fought Nazis side by side with an equally glamorous girl guerrilla who looked like Carmen Miranda. Miss Fury’s panther skin supposedly had been cursed by a witch doctor, which may explain why the heroine got no rest. After the war, she battled gangsters, kidnappers and mad scientists until 1949.

The superheroines who followed Wonder Woman into 1940s comic books tended to have “girl” names like Sun Girl, Moon Girl, Hawk Girl, Bullet Girl, and Bat Girl, were often merely sidekicks of the male heroes, whose names ended with “man” rather than “boy”—Hawkman, Bulletman, Batman—and were not as strong. But one teenage superheroine, Mary Marvel, had only to repeat the magic word, “Shazam” to become the world’s mightiest girl. Bullets bounced off her, and she could fly. At her peak of popularity, Mary had a fan club, and girls wanting to emulate their heroine could even buy Mary Marvel fashions. The “Shazam Girl” lasted for twelve years and appeared in 172 comic books, more comics than any other superheroine except Wonder Woman. 1940s Superheroines often got literally spacey. Venus was actually the Roman goddess of love herself, come down to earth as a superheroine—from the planet Venus! Sun Girl didn’t come from the sun, and Moon Girl didn’t come from the moon. The latter was from “the mountains of Samarkand,” where she was known as “the Princess of the Moon.” Moon Girl used her magic moonstone to attain the strength of ten men and battle equally spacey enemies, like “Erica with her wolf-girls from Venus.” On the other hand, Mysta of the Moon did live on the moon, along with her faithful robot. The silver-haired heroine was, says the comic, “sole possessor of the scientific knowledge of the universe,” so her super power consisted of being really smart!

WOMEN IN COMICS

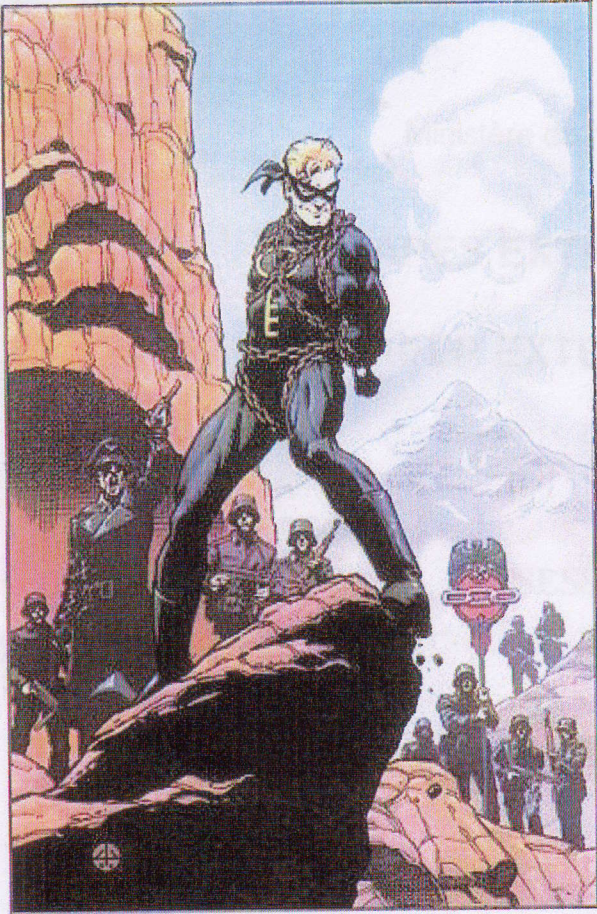
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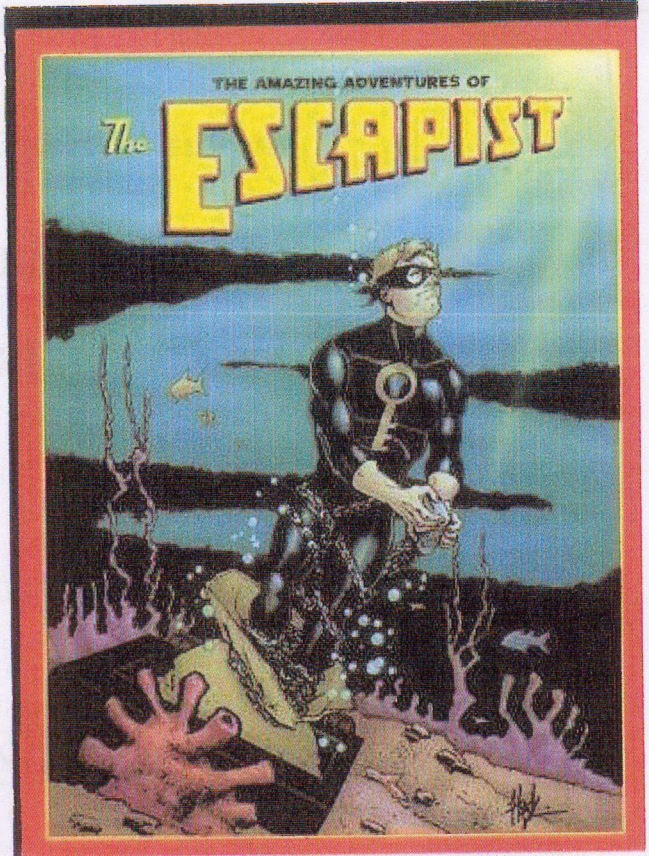
*Gallery: The Escapist
Based on The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay
by Michael Chabon, 2000*

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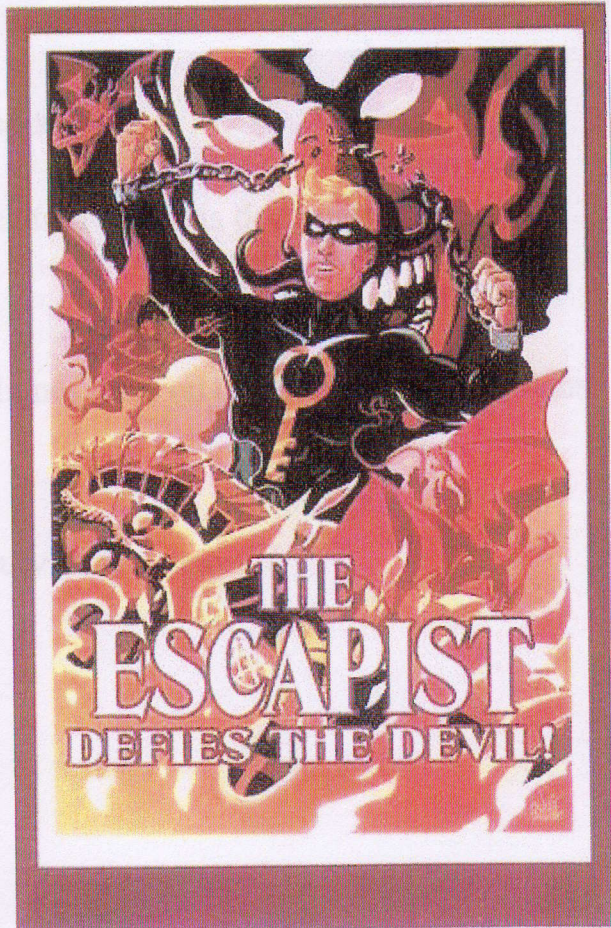


GALLERY

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Gallery The Escapist
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