

# **The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay Study Guide**

**The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay by Michael Chabon**

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# Introduction

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, by Michael Chabon, was published in 2000 to critical and popular acclaim. Some critics found Chabon's novel overly long, but all agreed that it is stylistically sound and well written. *Kavalier & Clay* took the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2001 and has drawn as much notice as Chabon's previous book, *Wonder Boys*, which was made into a feature film. *Kavalier & Clay* is an epic tale that is topically unique within Chabon's body of work but stylistically consistent with his distinctive, graceful use of language.

Drawing on his own love of comic books for *Kavalier & Clay*, Chabon deftly weaves historical facts and figures together with light touches of fantasy. The author's inspiration in part came from Superman's creators: two Midwestern Jewish boys, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, who sold their nascent superhero to the publisher of *Detective Comics* (DC Comics) for a hundred and thirty dollars. *Kavalier & Clay* follows two Jewish cousins in New York City, Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay, who grow into adulthood during the onset of World War II. They experience fame, tragedy, love, and a little bit of magic. With its clever mix of literary self-consciousness and shameless adventure, *Kavalier & Clay* is one of those rare books which appeal to readers of both serious and popular fiction.

# Author Biography

**Nationality 1:** American

**Birthdate:** 1963

Michael Chabon (pronounced shay-bon) was born May 24, 1963, in Washington, D.C., to Robert and Sharon Chabon. His father worked as a lawyer, physician, and a hospital manager; his mother as a lawyer. His parents divorced when he was eleven years old. Chabon grew up in Columbia, Maryland, while most of that planned city was still being constructed. He was introduced to comic books as a child by his grandfather, who brought them home from the plant where he worked. Chabon earned a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh in 1984 and a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing at the University of California at Irving.

Chabon has been a successful writer since the publication of his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988), which was his master's thesis and became a bestseller. His second novel, *Wonder Boys* (1995), was made into a feature film in 2000, starring Michael Douglas. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000) won Chabon the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. As of 2006, a film adaptation was reportedly in the works. With *Summerland* (2002), Chabon dabbled in the young adult market and won the 2003 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award. *The Final Solution*, a short novel about Sherlock Holmes, was published in 2004.

As of 2006, Dark Horse Comics, in conjunction with Chabon, was publishing a quarterly comic book edition of *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist*, drawing on the fictional history of this superhero. *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* won the 2005 Eisner Award for Best Anthology. Chabon has also published two volumes of short stories and a number of screenplays, including part of the popular movie, *Spider-Man 2* (2004).

Chabon often writes about Jewish identity, homosexuality, and single parenthood.



# Plot Summary

Sammy Klayman lives in Brooklyn, NY with his mother. One evening, his cousin Josef Kavalier is thrown into Sammy's bed, after arriving in New York. Josef has escaped Prague, Czechoslovakia with the help of his old magic teacher, Kornblum. He is concealed in the casket of the Golem of Prague, a lifeless clay body. Hundreds of years ago the Golem had been alive and a protector of the Jewish community. Sammy finds out that his cousin, now to be known as Joe, is an excellent artist. Sammy enlists Joe to draw comics and announces to his boss, Shelly Anapol, that he can produce a new Superman-type comic book. Their superhero, the Escapist is a combination of Joe's experience as an escape artist and magician, and Sammy's fantasies to be big, strong and powerful. Next, Sammy, now to be known as Sam Clay, recruits some of his friends and local artists to draw a sample comic book. The result is the formation of Empire Comics, which is financed by Shelly Anapol and his associates.

Kavalier and Clay are an overnight success. Joe wants to save his family trapped in Nazi-occupied Prague. Joe begins to feel guilty that he is free in America while his family is suffering. Joe begins to target local Germans in New York City and get into a series of fights. He attacks a small Aryan-American League Office he finds, and beats up Carl Ebling, a pro-Nazi man who runs the office. Ebling knows Joe is one of the creators of the anti-Nazi comic-book, the Escapist. Ebling makes a phony bomb threat to the offices of Empire Comics. At the scene of the phony bombing, Joe and Sammy meet James Love, a rich industrialist, who agrees to finance an Escapist radio program.

Joe and Sammy go to a party. There Joe meets Rosa Luxemburg Saks. Joe becomes a local star by saving Salvador Dali, the surrealist painter, and Joe soon makes Rosa his girlfriend. Rosa takes Joe to Mr. Hoffman, who has a scheme to save Joe's younger brother Thomas, by putting the boy on a ship to America. Joe and Sammy go to the studio of the Escapist radio program. Sammy meets Tracy Bacon, a tall and handsome young man. Sammy takes Tracy home to Sammy's mom. Soon, Tracy visits Sammy at his Empire State Building night civil-defense observation post. The men kiss and their sexual relationship develops. Meanwhile, Joe has calmed down due to his relationship with Rosa. Joe's comic-book-like opponent, Carl Ebling, makes a bombing attack on a Bar Mitzvah party, where Joe is working as a magician.

Japan bombs Pearl Harbor and America joins the war against Japan and Germany. At the same time, Joe hears that his brother Thomas' boat has been torpedoed, and Thomas has drowned. Joe abandons Rosa and enlists in the US Navy. At the same time, Sammy goes to a homosexual retreat of James Love, with Sammy's lover Tracy Bacon. The housekeeper is the sister of Carl Ebling, who on seeing the Jewish Sammy, calls the police. Sammy is raped and scared. He decides to not be a homosexual anymore. Rosa tells Sammy that she is pregnant and Joe has abandoned her. Sammy decides to marry Rosa and raise the child. Joe goes partially mad serving with the Navy in Antarctica.



Sammy is living in the suburbs for many years, and Tommy, his son, is 11 years old. At a visit to Tannen's Magic Shop, Tommy sees Joe, who has been in hiding. Tommy begins to visit Joe in New York. Then Tommy writes a note to a paper saying that the Escapist will jump off the Empire State Building. After a crisis, Joe is reunited with Sammy and Rosa. At first, Sammy and Rosa try to maintain their hollow marriage, though Rosa kisses Joe and admits her attraction to him. Then Sammy is subpoenaed to the Senate Hearings on the bad effects of comic books. It is implied in televised hearing that Sammy is a homosexual and through comics promotes pederasty. Sammy is in shock and decides to leave Rosa and move to Los Angeles. The couple, Joe and Rosa and their biological son, Tommy are reunited with Sammy's approval.



# Part I, to P. 39

## Part I, to P. 39 Summary

Chapter 1: Sam Clay is reminiscing about his comic book career. When the book starts, Sam's name is Sammy Klayman. He is 17 years old, short and Jewish. Joe Kavalier, Sam's Czech cousin is dumped onto Sam's bed in an apartment in Brooklyn, NY. Sammy finds out that Joe speaks passable English and is an artist. Joe wants Sam to get him a job as a commercial artist. Joe is concerned about his family that is still in Prague, and he wants to get them out as soon as possible. Joe wants a cigarette and puts one together from the butts that lie in a plant on the porch. Joe rolls a cigarette, and Sam plans how Joe can be part of his scheme for success.

Chapter 2: In Prague, there is a plan to get the famous clay Golem out of the city and away from the Nazis, who have occupied Czechoslovakia. The assignment to do this is given to Bernard Kornblum, an old illusionist and magician. Joe Kavalier is trying to get out of Prague and comes to Kornblum's house. Joe has failed to escape Prague and comes to Kornblum to somehow help Joe. Kornblum decides to have Joe escape to Lithuania with the giant clay corpse of the Golem.

Chapter 3: Joe, then called Josef, thinks back to the year 1935, when he is first trained by Kornblum to be a magician. At the age of 14, Joe takes regular lessons and learns to pick locks and do other tricks. Joe's younger brother, Thomas, comes up with a scheme to have Joe locked up in a sack and thrown into the River Moldau. Joe and Thomas hope to impress the local Hofzinsen Club with this remarkable escape. Joe is locked up, chained and tied up in the sack. Thomas throws him into the river from its bank. Then, Thomas also falls into the river. Joe escapes the sack and gets out, but then he sees that Thomas is drowning. At the last minute, Kornblum appears and rescues the boys. Kornblum takes them to the Hofzinsen Club later, but Joe's magic lessons are ended.

## Part I, to P. 39 Analysis

Josef Kavalier is dumped into Sammy's bed like a piece of meat. Yet, soon Sammy realizes that he has a new collaborator. Sammy's ability as a comic illustrator is far out-classed by his soon-to-be shown talents as an organizer of the plots of comics and stories. Sammy's quick acceptance and adapting to his cousin could be foreshadowing his later homosexual tendencies.

Josef Kavalier, soon known as Joe, is an escape artist throughout the book. He first escapes the Nazis with the help of Bernard Kornblum, the magician, and the Golem, a former sort-of-superhero. Now the Golem is just a big clay body in a coffin. Joe recalls that being a student of a magician and learning to be an escape artist is not an easy job. Joe and his brother Thomas are both nearly drowned in their first escape act in the Moldau River in 1935. Although Joe is successful in escaping the chains, the sack, and





the water, he is nearly drowned when he attempts to save Thomas, who has fallen in the water. In this case, Kornblum, the magician, plays the role of the superhero who rescues the unfortunates from drowning.



## Part I, P. 40 to end, Part II, to P. 79

### Part I, P. 40 to end, Part II, to P. 79 Summary

Chapter 4: The narrative returns to 1939, with the Germans looking for the Golem of Prague. The Golem is concealed in an apartment building. Meanwhile, there is chaos, as the Jews are concentrated in a ghetto, and families are doubled up in apartments. Kornblum and Joe pretend to be taking a survey, in order to look for the Golem. They are unable to get into apartment #42 and plan to break into it at night. They break in, and a woman comes out with a gun. A man named Max comes out and recognizes Kornblum as an old friend from the Hofzinsen Club. The apartment is a house of prostitution and Joe loses his virginity. The next day, Kornblum finds out that the children in the building know of one room not occupied. Kornblum has all the tenants put a Jewish star in their window and then the unoccupied space is located. That is where the Golem is.

The men go into this room on the top floor through the rear window. Joe hangs down from the roof, opens the window, and they find the Golem. Joe remembers that his father has a suit of a giant who died. Joe gets the suit and by then his family have left their house because of Nazi orders. Joe only sees his brother Thomas, says goodbye, and he promises to rescue Thomas and bring him to America. The men make a hole in a wall and slip the casket of the Golem out to a car-hearse and then it is shipped on the railroad with Joe hiding inside the casket. Despite some interest from the guards, the Golem is safely shipped to Vilna, Lithuania. From Vilna, Joe gets passage through the Trans-Siberian Railway and by ship to Japan. He then sails to California and then by bus arrives in Brooklyn, New York.

Part II, Chapter 1: Sam finds out that Joe draws quite well. Sam and Joe want to make lots of money. Joe wants the money so he can rescue his family from Prague. Comics are in a crude state in 1939. Though the covers are quite nice, the insides are chaotic and unrelated to the cover. The big shift is in the appearance of "Superman" comics. Joe and Sammy are planning their own superhero.

### Part I, P. 40 to end, Part II, to P. 79 Analysis

The Nazis want to seize the Golem, as a symbol of the Jews, and as an artifact. The Jews of Europe are soon targeted for destruction by the Nazis. By saving the Golem, Kornblum and Joe are indirectly striking a blow against the Nazis. They are defending a symbol of the Jewish people's hope for a better future. In the meantime, life continues in Nazi-occupied Prague. Families are overcrowded in a ghetto. When Kornblum and Joe are searching for the Golem, they must look in an overcrowded apartment house. In the process, they run into a house of prostitution. Joe enjoys the services of a prostitute, and the reader is made to know that Joe does not likely share his cousin Sammy's homosexual orientation. The plot to escape with the Golem, and to have Joe escape

Prague, is very involved with many details. Joe promises to save Thomas when he sees him. This creates a strong motivation for Joe's actions throughout the book. Joe feels the oncoming mass death that will, in a few years, overtake the Jews of Prague.

Sammy is very pleased with Joe when he discovers how well Joe draws. This is the big break in his life for which Sammy, now to be known professionally as Sam Clay, is waiting. Ethel Klayman, Sammy's mother, cannot believe that it is possible to make money drawing comics. Even if it is possible, she considers comics to be trashy entertainment. This negative attitude towards comics foreshadows criticism of comic books that later has a big impact on Sammy's life.



## Part II, from P. 80 to P. 138

### Part II, from P. 80 to P. 138 Summary

Part II, Chapter 2: Empire Novelty is owned by Sheldon Anapol, who has worked his way up from a poor salesman to being able to buy the company. Sheldon still retains some of his old salesman sense of humor. Sammy brings his new scheme to Sheldon Anapol early in the morning and brings Joe, too. Anapol's associates are all talking about the success of Superman comics. Sammy offers Anapol a new Superman-type comic hero. Joe draws a picture that looks like the Golem. Anapol's brother-in-law Jack Ashkenazy, of Race Publications looks at Joe's drawings and agrees that Joe and Sam should produce a new comic book over the weekend.

Chapter 3: Joe and Sam go for a walk. They discuss the different sorts of superhero they could create. Should the superhero fly or what other powers should he have, they ask. Joe has a moment of insight and decides that the question of why the person is a superhero is most important. Joe and Sam must decide why the superhero is fighting crime. They run into Julie Glossy, a boy Sammy knows. Julie's brother also works in comics, and Sam proposes Julie and his brother work for Sam. Next they seek a place to work.

Chapter 4: The narrative turns to Sammy's father, the "Mighty Molecule," also known as Doctor Von Clayman. The Molecule is a showman, who tours through the United States and Canada with various circus acts. When Sam is 13, his father comes home. The Molecule is extremely strong, though short. Sam begs his father to take him on the next trip. One problem is that Sammy had a bout of polio and his legs are weak. He cannot make it in the Molecule's business. Sammy and the Molecule stop at a steam bath, and Sammy is oddly attracted to his father's body. When they go home, Sammy's father and mother fight. Soon, the Molecule leaves for good. Later, a telegram arrives, saying that the Molecule has been crushed to death during one of his circus stunts.

Chapter 5: Sammy, Joe and Julie go to the apartment building where Julie's brother and two other artists live. The landlady refuses to let Sammy in and no seems to be at home in the apartment. Joe manages to jump on the fire escape and climb into the apartment's fifth floor window. At this point, a woman is heard screaming. She is the young and beautiful Rosa Luxemburg Saks.

Chapter 6, Chapter 7: Julie pays three dollars to Joe to draw a picture of Rosa naked on the bed, as he saw her when he came through the window. The three young men make themselves comfortable in the apartment. Joe tells Sammy some of the stories of Joe's escape from Prague. Sammy asks questions about Joe's teacher in illusion and magic, Kornblum. Sammy talks about his cold and absent father, the Mighty Molecule.

Chapter 8: Sammy tells the story of how the Escapist started and why he fights oppression in the comic book myth. Tom Mayflower is setting up the stage for the



magician Mysterio. Suddenly, Mysterio is shot while he does his act in a water tank. Mysterio gives Tom the golden key and Tom's limp leg magically becomes strong. Tom is able to do Mysterio's trick. The crew returns backstage where Mysterio is slowly dying. Mysterio tells Tom the story of how Mysterio was kidnapped and then freed by a stranger who is killed. Mysterio has struggled for years to free the oppressed and fights against the Iron Chain gang. Now, the Iron Chain has seized Germany. Tom vows to continue Mysterio's fight, as the masked man, the Escapist. Chapter 9: Joe wishes that somehow the Escapist is real. Sammy tells him that he can make tons of money by publishing the Escapist and other comic books. This money can be used to get Joe's family out of Nazi-occupied Europe.

## Part II, from P. 80 to P. 138 Analysis

Sammy's boss, Mr. Shelly Anapol also hopes to be rich some day. After years as a traveling salesman, Shelly (also known as Sheldon) settles down to distribute a line of novelties after he buys Empire Novelties, Inc. Sammy comes to his workplace with his newly-discovered talent, Joe the artist. Shelly and his brother-in-law, Jack Ashkenazy, are impressed enough to ask the cousins, Joe and Sammy, to produce an entire comic book over the weekend. This is a very dramatic turn in the coming rags-to-riches story for Joe and Sammy, and especially for Shelly and Jack. Is it believable? Not necessarily, but it is exciting and the reader wants to believe it. Sammy is the engine of the new comic book enterprise. Although Sammy's drawing is weak, he understands how to give an inner depth to his superheroes. Sammy's intention is to imitate National Comics' success with their superhero, Superman. This intention to imitate also becomes a major issue in the book.

Sammy answers the question of why the Escapist fights oppression. Otherwise, the Escapist character is just as likely to become a master thief when he has super powers. Sammy recruits other artists, beginning with his pal, Julie Glovsky.

The author goes into a flashback to inform the reader about the formation of Sammy's personality. Sammy's father, is called the Mighty Molecule, and is another character who uses illusion and magic. In this case, he is short, but has incredible physical strength. In the Mighty Molecule's case, all his allegedly superpowers are wasted in showmanship. The Mighty Molecule is strong all through his body, unlike Sammy who has polio-weakened legs. Yet, the Mighty Molecule cannot and will not free his own son, Sammy, from boredom and oppression.

In the next chapter, Joe slips into Julie's brother's apartment through the fire escape. Joe displays near super-human agility and is awarded with the sight of a naked young woman. She is Joe's future girlfriend, Rosa Luxemburg Saks. Note that Rosa Luxemburg (Saks) is named after a famous German socialist and economist. She is killed by German rightists after an uprising of the Spartacus League in 1919. This gives an indication of the leftist and surrealist background of Rosa's father and Rosa.



The boys make themselves comfortable and goof off. Sammy talks of his father, the Mighty Molecule, who abandoned Sammy. Perhaps this is why Sammy needs a superhero. His father was the so-called strongest Jew in the world, but the only help he gave Sammy was mostly some child-support payments. Sammy wants to create a superhero who is internally motivated to do good. This gives Sammy the drive to develop a reason for the Escapist, his superhero, to fight crime. Like Sammy, Tom Mayflower has a bad leg and limps. In fact he is totally crippled. Sammy can walk, but his legs are too weak for his father to have taken him along for one of the Mighty Molecule's touring trips. That happened years ago, but now, through the Escapist, Sammy can be a superhero.



## **Part II, from P. 139- to end, Part III, to P. 175**

### **Part II, from P. 139- to end, Part III, to P. 175 Summary**

Part II, Chapter 10: Jerry Glovsky, Marty Gold and Davy O'Dowd come home and find Julie, Joe and Sammy in their apartment. They are artists, and brought another artist, Frank Pantaleone, along with them. Sammy claims that the girl, Rosa Saks, let them in. Jerry and his friends calm down and look at Joe's drawings, and Joe is introduced to the other young men. Chapter 10: Sammy recruits all the young men to draw parts of his 64-page comic of masked superheroes. Joe draws; Sammy, whose drawing is weak, is best at making up superheroes, and their motivations and plots. Six different comic strips are drawn. Joe's masterpiece is a comic cover painting with the Escapist knocking Hitler down on the ground. After being awake for two days, the cousins collapse and fall asleep together on the kitchen floor.

Chapter 12: Monday morning, Joe and Sammy march into Empire Novelties. George Deasy, the editor, comes in after Sheldon Anapol looks at the comics, along with Jack Ashkenazy. George Deasy loves the Hitler being punched cover and immediately hires Joe. Sammy is noted as the mastermind behind the comics. After a brief conference, Jack, George and Anapol offer to buy the escapist and the other characters. Sammy argues over price and salary, while Joe insists that the Hitler-punched cover be kept. The cousins walk out but soon are turning out comics at a steady rate.

Part III, Chapter 1: When he gets home, Joe Kavalier is tired after drawing comic books all week. In the comics, Joe and the Escapist, his character, have fought and won the war against Hitler. Joe's comics go through a complicated production cycle and end up being printed and distributed all over New York and the country. Joe returns to reality when he hears about the latest measures against the Jews of Europe. Joe intensifies the fight of the Escapist. In the comics, the Escapist has received additional powers from the League of the Golden Key. Shelly Anatol is afraid that Joe's rage against the Germans will get Joe and Shelly into trouble. Shelly has come back from vacation, and just bought a house for his family, in Florida.

### **Part II, from P. 139- to end, Part III, to P. 175 Analysis**

Sammy is the soul and driver of the comic book project. Even though most of the profits go to Sammy's boss and partners, Sammy is the driving force. All he needs is to have Joe show up, who is a talented artist. Sammy convinces Joe that by being a killer success in the comics business, Joe can make enough money to buy freedom for his parents and brother, Thomas. Sadly, the reader learns later that this is a hopeless dream, although Thomas comes close to escaping the Nazis. In the course of the book,



the reader is warned that the fantasy world of the comics cannot efficiently do things in the real world.

Sam swiftly recruits the other four young artists. The other young men are doing better than Sammy financially, and yet somehow they are drawn into his quest to hit the big time of success. Joe's hatred of the Nazis is totally mobilized with an astounding painting of the Escapist punching Adolph Hitler. In New York City, which is heavily Jewish in 1939, such a cover is bound to be a hit. Indeed, when the cover is shown to George Deasy, the editor, it gets him immediately to want to sign on to Sammy's comic-book project. George Deasy, the gentile, backs the project more strongly than Shelly Anapol, Sammy's Jewish boss. Perhaps George sees its artistic merits or more clearly what its marketing potential is.

The deal that Sammy and Joe get is not that great. They have to sell 100-percent of the rights to the new cartoon characters. Since Sammy and Joe have no capital and no ability to run a business, they have no choice. While Sammy and friends start making decent money for working-class kids, Shelly Anapol is the one who soon is making millions of dollars.

Joe is slowly driven mad by drawing fantasy combat against the Nazis on a regular basis. Joe is reminded by a radio broadcast that as the Nazis occupy most of Central and Western Europe in 1940, the fate of Jews in these areas is growing worse. Shelly loves the money, but he knows that Joe is too serious, which foreshadows Joe's attempts to get into physical combat with Germans.





## Part III, from P. 176 to P. 224

### Part III, from P. 176 to P. 224 Summary

Part III, Chapter 2: Joe is traveling to the German consulate to try to get his family out of Europe. He is well-dressed, and this is one of his many visits to the consulate. He cannot even get them visas. He decides to go to Hoboken, New Jersey, where the ship Rotterdam is docking from Europe. Joe goes to the docks and thinks he sees his father, which is impossible and not the case. When Joe returns to Manhattan and goes to the German consulate, he finds out that his father, Dr. Emil Kavalier, has died. The consulate official is traveling back to Europe, too. Joe goes into a bar and decides to take a train to Montreal, Canada and enlist in the RAF, the Royal Air Force. Chapter 3: Joe takes a train as far as Albany NY but then turns back. He decides that he still has to help his family members in Europe and returns to New York City. Joe gets drunk in a bar and calls Sammy. On their way back home, Joe spots a German man and picks a fight with him. The man punches Joe in the stomach and knocks Joe down.

Chapter 4: Joe continues to look for Germans in NY with whom to get into fights. At a football game, Joe attacks two men who cause a big cut in his head that his aunt Ethel Klayman must sew up. One day, Joe is walking around in the Yorkville section of Manhattan and sees a sign in the window "Aryan-American League." The building seems deserted, and Joe goes inside and picks the lock on the office with the sign. Joe goes through the office files and finds back issues of the Escapist comics and other Radio comics. There are reports by Carl Ebling that the two Jewish writers of the comics, Joe and Sammy, are threats to Germany. Abruptly, Carl Ebling arrives in the office, as Joe is vandalizing it. Carl hits Joe with a blackjack, but Joe fights back and knocks out Carl Ebling. Joe leaves a note from his alter-ego, the Escapist.

Chapter 5: James Love of Oneonta Mills is sitting with Al Smith, President of the Empire State Building, when a bomb threat is phoned in. The bomb targets the 25th floor, where the offices of Empire Comics are. Everyone in offices on the 25th floor is evacuated. Joe does not leave and somehow grabs a policeman's handcuffs. He handcuffs himself to a built-in drawing table. Joe says he is too busy drawing comics to leave. While Joe talks with Love and Smith, a phony bomb is found. Joe knows that this is done as retribution for his attack on Carl Ebling two weeks ago. James Love is impressed with Joe and is also very anti-Nazi. Mr. Love asks to have the Escapist character presented on a radio show and sponsored by his company, Oneonta Mills. George Deasy, meanwhile, the editor of Joe and Sammy's comics, draws them aside. He warns them that they will get no money from the radio deal and that now is the time for them to get a better financial deal from Shelly Anatol.



## Part III, from P. 176 to P. 224 Analysis

Joe is beginning his slide towards madness. He goes to the German Consulate to try to get his family visas. It is 1940 and it is still possible though difficult to travel from Europe to the United States and back. Joe stops in Hoboken by the ship Rotterdam, which is bringing refugees from Europe. This reminds Joe that it is still possible to leave Europe. At the consulate, Joe finds out that his father has died. Joe is so enraged that he takes a train to Canada to enlist in the British Air force. The United States is still not in the war. Joe turns back instead begins his ridiculous campaign of harassment of Germans he meets, particularly in the Yorkville section of Manhattan, a German neighborhood.

At first, the reader feels understanding for Joe picking on a German man in a subway, though even then, he has no idea what the man's political opinions are. Later, it is obvious that Joe is going crazy. The book gets a strange charge of added energy with Joe's attack on the Aryan-American League office. Joe is caught by Carl Ebling while he is vandalizing the office. Carl Ebling, according to his files, has been monitoring the "Jewish enemy" that writes the Escapist comic strip. In spite of his prejudices, Carl has also become a big fan of the Escapist. At this point, the book's narrative becomes a comic-book-like story. Joe is the tough and righteous Escapist, while Carl Ebling becomes the evil character and operative of the sinister Iron Chain gang. Carl Ebling plants a phony bomb in Sammy's desk in the Empire State Building, but this backfires in that it gives the Escapist new publicity. James Love, the industrialist agrees to sponsor an Escapist radio show. Later in the book, Mr. Love is shown to be a special sort of Cupid, or love-god, so his name is aptly chosen. Carl Ebling, the evil villain, like in the comics, is going to strike again.



## Part III, from P. 225 to P. 265

### Part III, from P. 225 to P. 265 Summary

Part III, Chapter 6: George Deasy invites Joe and Sam to a party. The party is for the surrealist artist, Salvador Dali, who has finished his exhibit in the world's fair, the "Dream of Venus." George Deasy is old friends with Dali, from hanging around with him in the old days, in Mexico City. The party is at Mr. Longman Harkoo's house in Greenwich Village, NY City, where Mr. Harkoo lives with his daughter. Sam and Joe do not like going to party, but George Deasy drags them along and has them have a drink.

Chapter 7: The house is big and exotic and the crowd is full of leftists and artists. Salvador Dali is in the ballroom of the house, in a sea diver suit, with a helmet on his head attached to an air pump. The rest of the people at the party are upstairs. Joe and Sam meet Longman Harkoo, whose original name is Siggy Saks. Joe gets to take a picture of Harkoo, and Joe and Sammy are introduced to various artists and other interesting people at the party.

Chapter 8: There is a beautiful young woman telling a dirty story and yelling. It is Rosa Luxemburg Saks, the young woman that Joe sees naked when he breaks into Sammy's friends' apartment. Rosa vaguely recognizes Joe and speaks to him about his family. Ch. 9: Suddenly, Salvador Dali is choking because the air pump has jammed and his helmet is stuck on his head. Joe runs downstairs and using a pocket knife, forces the screw open on the helmet and saves Dali. Joe is acclaimed a hero. Rosa comes over to him and invites Joe up to see her paintings. After hesitating, Joe goes with her. Chapter 10: Rosa talks to Joe about her paintings. Now she recognizes Joe from the incident at the apartment. Joe tells Rosa about his work as an artist in comics. Rosa also fixes Joe's finger, which was dislocated when helping Dali. Later, Rosa kisses Joe. She asks Joe to leave, but arranges to see Joe the next day, where Rosa does volunteer work at a Rescue Agency.

Chapter 11: Mr. Hoffman, Rosa's boss, has bought a ship in Europe and is planning to bring 324 Jewish children to America. He is chronically short of funds. Mr. Hoffman agrees to arrange to have Joe's brother, Thomas Cavalier, join the ship, if Joe funds the passage of several other children. Mr. Hoffman asks about Joe's character, the Escapist, and magicians. Mr. Hoffman is a magician and does a trick with a disappearing cigarette. Joe does a magic trick as well and is asked to perform at Mr. Hoffman's son's bar mitzvah party. Joe agrees and leaves the Union Square area office. Ch. 12: On his way out, Joe sees a crowd of people looking at a large moth. Joe has an idea for a female comic book character, Luna Moth, in part inspired by Rosa.



## Part III, from P. 225 to P. 265 Analysis

George Deasy, the editor of Sammy and Joe's comics, drags the cousins to a party. In the slightly more real world of the party, the comic book creators get to show more of their character. Joe is drawn to a beautiful woman, who turns out to be Rosa Luxemburg Saks, the girl that Joe had seen naked at Jerry Glovsky's apartment. Before Joe manages to blow his chances with Rosa, like in the comics, he gets a chance to show his extraordinary powers and save the artist Salvador Dali from a suffocating helmet on a wet suit. This in turn gives Rosa the excuse to invite Joe to her room, talk to him, and kiss him. Joe wants to turn down this opportunity to have a girlfriend but somehow relates his hatred of Germans to his attraction to Rosa. While this seems strange, Rosa arranges for Joe to meet Herman Hoffman, who is sponsoring a boat of Jewish children that is scheduled to soon leave Europe.

While Joe meets Rosa and falls in love, Sammy ends up staring at two men in a homosexual embrace. Sammy is repulsed, but at the same time attracted to this sight. This incident lets the reader know that Sammy may have homosexual tendencies. After all, he could have been staring or chasing after plenty of women at the party, if he wanted to. The author at this point has portrayed Sammy as a dynamic person and a leader, and soon will show that he is also homosexual.

Joe falls in love with Rosa who also fires his dreams of saving his brother Thomas. Rosa introduces Joe to Herman Hoffman and his project of bringing a ship of Jewish children from Europe to America. Hoffman is also a magician and recruits Joe back to the world of magicians and escape artists. To top it off, Joe invents a cartoon character, Luna Moth, who he dedicates to Rosa.



## Part III, Part IV: p. 266- 305

### Part III, Part IV: p. 266- 305 Summary

Pt. III, Ch. 13: The story behind Luna Moth is that she once was a librarian named Judy Dark. Judy Dark confronts some criminals after an exhibit of an ancient Book, the Book of Lo. Judy gets an electric shock and wakes up to meet the Moth goddess, Lo. The goddess can empower one woman warrior to fight for justice. Luna Moth then defeats the thieves and frees a police officer. Ch. 14: Sam and Joe bring in their new character, Luna Moth to their boss. Luna Moth is denounced as a form of pornography for little boys, but she is also the next great success. Ch. 15: Sammy demands 50-percent of the rights to the new character and a raise. Sammy and Joe's boss, Shelly Anatol agrees to give them 5-percent of the rights to the new character, but also demands that Sammy and Joe agree to stop attacking the Nazis in their comics. At this point, Sammy and Joe are about to walk out. Their editor, George Deasy, shows them the order to "cease and desist" from National Comics. The legal motion claims that the character, the Escapist, is a copy of National's character, Superman.

Pt. IV, Ch. 1: In 1941, Sammy and Joe are making lots of money. They rent an apartment together and have lots of room. Rosa sleeps with Joe and is often at the apartment. Rosa teases Sammy and offers to help him to get a girlfriend, but Sammy always has excuses. Sammy's mother invites Sammy and Joe to Friday night dinner. That afternoon, Joe and Sammy are invited to visit the radio cast of the Escapist. Sammy is impressed with Mr. Tracy Bacon, a tall, blond, muscular young man, who plays the Escapist on the radio show. The show is a lot different from the comics that it is based on. Tracy wants to talk to Sammy about how to portray the Escapist properly. Tracy leaves the cast and goes for a drink with Sammy. Sammy and Tracy end up going to Sammy's mother's house for dinner.

### Part III, Part IV: p. 266- 305 Analysis

Judy Dark is a bit like Rosa, Joe's new girlfriend, although she is much quieter. Like Judy, Rosa works in a quiet office job but then has another world of imagination. The other connections of Rosa to Judy Dark and her superhero character, Luna Moth, are moths. When Joe goes up to Rosa's room, there are moths on her bed. Luna Moth is also an outlet for Joe's passion for Rosa, and he draws Luna Moth in a nearly pornographic way. Joe and Sammy demand a percentage of all the profits from Luna Moth. They get a percentage, on the condition that they stop the anti-Nazi comics fighting. This actually helps provoke an advance of their comic characters to a more three-dimensional and adult level.

Sammy and Joe have a comfortable two-bedroom apartment, and Rosa often sleeps over with Joe. The issue of Sammy's sexuality begins to surface. He has a lot more money than before but no real desire to meet a girlfriend. Sammy resists Rosa's offers



to help him get a girl. This foreshadows Sammy's new friendship with the actor, Tracy Bacon, who soon becomes Sammy's boyfriend.

When Sammy and Joe go to the radio studio that produces the Escapist show, Sammy meets Tracy. Tracy is a tall and attractive young man who plays the character, the Escapist. Tracy is also somewhat confused in his sexuality. An actress is attracted to Tracy, and she is sort of his girlfriend. Yet, Sammy finds out that Tracy is lonely and wants to be with Sammy. Sammy takes Tracy to Sammy's mother's house for Shabbos, for Friday night dinner.



## Part III, P. 306- 353

### Part III, P. 306- 353 Summary

Pt III, Ch. 2: Sammy's mother is stunned by Tracy Bacon's good looks, while Tracy is helpful to Sammy's mother, Ethel, in the kitchen. Ethel and Sammy talk about Joe and his girlfriend, Rosa, and about the plan to bring Joe's brother, Thomas, from a Catholic orphanage in Portugal to America, aboard the ship, the Ark of Miriam. Sammy also remarks how much he enjoyed the radio show and how well Tracy does. Ch. 3: Rosa's father knocks on Rosa and Joe's bedroom door and comes in with a gift for Joe of a blue tuxedo, with the logo of the Escapist on its jacket, and a mask. Joe loves Rosa but does not feel at home in the United States. Ch. 4: Joe gets a letter from his mother in Prague and carries it around, but refuses to read it. The letter asks Joe to forget about his mother and family.

Ch. 5: Joe has been doing magician shows, with the fees donated to the Transatlantic Rescue Agency. Joe has calmed down and stopped picking fights with Germans. Joe and Rosa go to the Hotel Pierre, where the ballroom is decorated as Neptune's Kingdom. Ch. 6: Meanwhile, Carl Ebling imagines that he is the evil character, the Saboteur, from the Escapist comic book. Ebling works in the catering business and finds out about Joe's magic act. He knows Joe is performing tonight and disguises a pipe-bomb as Neptune's trident. Ebling gets a push cart and successfully deploys his disguised pipe-bomb on the ballroom stage. Ebling looks at Joe when Ebling passes, and eventually Joe recognizes him. As Joe performs a trick, he sees smoke from a burning cigarette on the floor of the stage. Joe moves to put out the cigarette, which leads to the bomb fuse. Ebling runs and jumps on Joe. There is a struggle and Ebling and Joe fall off the stage. The bomb goes off, causing minor damage to Joe and more serious wounds to Ebling, who is on top of Joe. Joe goes to the hospital, comes back to the ballroom, and then returns to Rosa's house. He becomes very upset, when he realizes that he has lost his mother's letter.

Ch. 7: Sammy volunteers for three nights a week to go to the Empire State Building's 86th floor Observatory deck, checking for the military for a German surprise attack. This is in 1941, months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Sammy realizes that someone is coming up the elevator. It is the actor Tracy Bacon, Sammy's new friend. Tracy tells a story of being rejected by an actress, Helen Portola, to whom he is linked. Tracy says that he refused to marry her. Tracy has brought two paper bags filled with a gourmet meal and wine, which he says he removed from his dinner with the actress. The two men see a storm and lightning out the window. Suddenly, Tracy gives Sammy a long kiss. Sammy is stunned but not upset, and the young men go back to watching the storm.



## Part III, P. 306- 353 Analysis

Sammy's mother, Mrs. Klayman, seems vaguely to sense that Sammy is attracted to Tracy. This is 1941, and homosexuality is not something that people talk about openly. Meanwhile, Joe has settled down somewhat since Rosa has become his girlfriend. He stops picking fights with Germans that he meets on the street or hanging around Yorkville, the German neighborhood in Manhattan. Unfortunately for Joe, Carl Ebling's desire for revenge has not gone away, and Carl has a new scheme to attack Joe. Joe is concentrating on getting his younger brother, Thomas, to escape Europe. Thomas is in a Catholic orphanage in Portugal, a neutral nation in the war in Europe. Since the United States and Germany are not yet at war, the ship Ark of Miriam has a reasonable chance of making it to the United States. Actually, already neutral ships are being sunk by the German Nazis. In occupied Europe, time is growing short for Joe's mother and grandparents. Joe's father has already died, and conditions are deteriorating. Joe's mother sends one more letter to Joe, which Joe fears to open. He is aware that his mother is in danger. In the somewhat overly-dramatic way that the book's plot is developing, the reader sees the story moving towards a turning point.

Likewise, Carl Ebling's attack on Joe is fairly serious and has long-range effects on the book's plot as well. Joe could have been severely injured if Carl's concealed bomb exploded near Joe on stage. Carl Ebling is relatively incompetent, yet has a fanatical determination to go forward with his attack, even after the bomb's burning fuse is discovered.

At the same time as Joe's fight with the Nazis is coming to a head, so is Sammy's relationship with Tracy Bacon. Tracy is very good at giving Sammy stories that allow Tracy to get closer to Sammy. Tracy is chasing Sammy, as is clearly shown when Tracy brings up a gourmet diner to Sammy at his midnight post on the 86th Floor Observation desk of the Empire State Building. Tracy claims that he has just been rejected for failing to ask his actress friend to marry him. Whether this is true or not, Bacon obviously prefers Sammy to the actress. After they eat, Sammy accepts a kiss from Tracy without much protest, though Sammy is still uncertain on how to proceed.





## Part IV, P. 354- 401

### Part IV, P. 354- 401 Summary

Pt. IV, Ch. 8: Joe and Tracy Bacon both manage to get tickets to the premiere of Orson Welles' first film, *Citizen Kane*. Joe is with Rosa, and Joe is upset about the delays of the ship that will take his brother Thomas to New York. Sammy and Tracy are in the cab, too, going to the movie. Tracy is hoping to play the Escapist in a new film version of the comic book character.

Ch. 9: Sammy and Joe, the two cousins, get new ideas from the *Citizen Kane* movie on how to integrate the words and pictures of their comics. Joe gets new ideas for movie shot angles drawn into the pictures in his comic books. Ch. 10: The next day, Joe and Sammy go to talk with their boss, Sheldon Anapol. They show Shelly the comics they have just drawn, to show him a new approach for a more mature comic book, comic books for adults. Shelly tells them that Parnassus has signed on for the *Escapist* movie and will give the cousins a small percentage of the profits. They, in exchange, have to give up fighting Nazis in comics. America's entry into the war is seen to be only months away in any case. For the next few months, the *Empire* comics and the *Escapist* comics are about the adventures and reactions of ordinary people and even criminals.

Ch. 11: Tracy Bacon arranges for the head of production for Parnassus Studios to meet with Sammy. Sammy has three scenarios for the upcoming *Escapist* movie. For the first time, to his shock, Sammy thinks that Tracy Bacon is his boyfriend. They are in the street and Tracy asks Sammy where he wants to go. Then Tracy hails a cab to take them to the World's Fair grounds in Queens. They get there and the abandoned fair grounds are fenced in. They climb the fence and go into a building, the Peri-sphere. There Sammy and Tracy climb through a series of ladders and doors until they end up in a grassy city model area. There they lie down together.

Ch. 12: At the end of November 1941, Thomas' ship is delayed by a cancellation of visas for the children, which is fixed by appealing directly to the President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt. Joe rents a new apartment on the West Side of Manhattan, as a place to raise Thomas, who is just 14. Rosa paints a portrait of Joe but cannot yet agree to move in with him. Ch. 13: A couple of days later, Joe goes to the Trevi Hotel to perform his magic act. Ch. 14: That same evening, Rosa is in the new apartment and begins to draw a mural on the wall of what will be Thomas' room. Rosa goes outside to buy cigarettes and reads that Thomas' ship is believed to have been sunk. She takes a cab to the Trevi Hotel to meet Joe. Rosa finds out that Joe has left the hotel hours ago. The bar mitzvah boy, Stanley, says that Joe performed his tricks and afterward heard about the sinking of the ship. Joe agreed to escape from a bag in the Trevi fountain but instead nearly drowns. Joe is rescued and leaves the hotel. Rosa tries to track him down.



## Part IV, P. 354- 401 Analysis

Despite the onrushing crises about to hit Joe and Sammy, this is a wonderful time for both of them. As this part of the book is called, it is truly a Golden Age. Joe and Sammy get a new insight into how to produce comics, by seeing Orson Welles' film *Citizen Kane*. Actually, it seems that they get an idea of how to create a more balanced comic-book, which has a more human plot, from watching this movie. Sammy and Joe are looking for new ways to create comics, since they have been stopped from producing anti-Nazi comics.

In the cab going to the movie, Joe is with Rosa and Sammy with Tracy Bacon. The name Bacon is somewhat ironic in the context, since Tracy Bacon is the piece of meat that Sammy prefers, and bacon is very un-kosher. Although, they are still just friends, Sammy and Bacon's relationship is becoming more apparent. Tracy continues his pursuit of Sammy. Sammy can no longer deny their relationship and is caught up in the pleasure of love. Tracy takes Sammy on a wild adventure to the abandoned World's Fair park. They sneak into the World's Fair grounds and feel that they are entering a new world. As Sammy and Tracy climb into the Peri-sphere, they feel no constraints and make love. This wild abandon in isolation symbolizes their freedom, which soon is brought into conflict with the real world.

Joe is waiting for Thomas to leave on his ship from Portugal about this time. Joe plans to rent a new apartment where Thomas can be raised. Joe realizes soon that he has to marry Rosa, and then he can create a new family. When there is a cancellation of the children's visas for the ship to America, the crisis shows the reader the uncertain future of Thomas and the other children. The war is expanding and so is the danger to the children. Although the children's visas are restored, there is a foreshadowing of their soon-to-be tragic fate.

Joe does his magic act one more time at a Bar Mitzvah party. When he hears that Thomas' ship has sunk, Joe loses his magic touch. This is his fall from grace. Joe agrees to be tied up and thrown into a fountain and then escape. Whether he plans to commit suicide or just freezes and does nothing is not clear. In any case, when Joe is rescued, it is seen that he made no attempt to escape from the bag in the water. Rosa suspects that Joe will immediately try to get into the war and kill Germans. That is the reason she does not tell Joe that she is pregnant. Joe escapes his relationship with Rosa, without even saying goodbye.



## Part IV, Part V: P. 402- 468

### Part IV, Part V: P. 402- 468 Summary

Pt. IV, Ch. 15: Sammy is going with Tracy Bacon to Mr. James Love's country house on the New Jersey shore. About eight men are there, all homosexuals. Sammy looks at the beautiful men, and feels embarrassed because he is little and Jewish. He cannot believe he is there and goes up to his room, making love to Tracy Bacon. Unknown to Sammy, the housekeeper is Ruth Ebling, the sister of the Nazi sympathizer, Carl Ebling who bombed the bar mitzvah party where Joe performed and who has been sent to jail. Ruth knows who Sammy is and decides to call the police about the homosexual gathering. A bunch of police, newsmen and irregulars show up. They arrest the men, some of whom resist. Sammy and another man hide and are found by two FBI irregulars. Sammy is raped and then receives a call from his mother, Mrs. Klayman, that Thomas Kavalier, Joe's brother, has died. Sammy is driven home by the other homosexual victim.

Ch. 16: After leaving the Hotel Trevi, Joe gets drunk and in a daze goes to his Aunt Ethel's apartment in Brooklyn. He is picked up in a taxi by Rosa, but in the morning leaves her to enlist in the US Navy without saying a word. Sammy goes to Rosa's house to find Joe, but Joe is gone already. Sammy tells Rosa that he decided not to go to Los Angeles with Tracy Bacon. Ch. 17: Rosa tells Sammy she is pregnant with Joe's child and needs an abortion. Suddenly, Sammy smiles at Rosa and has a wild idea.

Pt. V, Ch. 1: Joe has been assigned by the US Navy to a US Base in Antarctica. Twenty-two men live there, monitor German U-boat radio traffic and any German presence in Antarctica during World War II. There are also about twenty sled dogs. One of them helped save Joe's life and is named Oyster. Joe often ends up sleeping in the dog's quarters, next to Oyster. The base is known as the Kelvinator and also as Lupe Velez. One night, Joe is sleeping in the "dog-town" and hears a strange noise. Oyster is breathing funny. Joe realizes that the air is poisoned and gets outside. Ch. 2: By then, all the men and dogs are dead, except for Joe, Oyster the dog, and a pilot, Shannenhause, who was sleeping in another building. The stove has broken and the men die from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

Ch. 3: Joe and Shannenhause have plenty of fuel and food, but begin to go mad during the perpetual darkness of the Antarctic winter. Shannenhause is working on his plane, while Joe is always listening to the radio. Joe hears a German broadcast telling of the model Jewish Czech ghetto, Terezin. Then he hears the transmission of a German scientist, who is in Antarctica, one thousand miles away. After a murder-suicide, the German scientist is all alone. Ch. 4: Joe decides that he wants to fly with Shannenhause, in the small plane, and kill the German. Before they leave their base, Joe reads a letter from Rosa that she has married Sammy and has given birth to a son. Joe realizes that he is the father of the child.



Ch. 5: Joe and Shannenhouse fly off in the plane. On the way, Shannenhouse has an attack of appendicitis and slowly dies. Joe crash lands and confronts the German scientist. Ch. 6: The German shoots Joe, grazing him in the shoulder, and Joe kills the German. Then, Joe feels horrible, since he realizes that the German did not have a military deployment of any consequence. Ch. 7: Joe travels alone and wounded in the snow to an older abandoned German base and manages to survive several more weeks, until he is picked up by an American Naval ship. Joe is brought to Guantanamo Bay for psychiatric observation, but recovers, and despite some doubts, is awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

## Part IV, Part V: P. 402- 468 Analysis

The reader is led into the scene of Sam's trip to Mr. Love's New Jersey Shore vacation house very subtly. Mr. Love, who runs the "love house," is the same rich industrialist who is met in the scene of the phony bomb at the Empire State Building in Part III, Chapter 5. It takes a while for the reader to realize that all the men there are homosexuals. The author makes a point to describe the men as regular guys who happen to be homosexual. The comic-book-like setup continues, where James Love's housekeeper, just happens to be the bitter sister of the Nazi, Carl Ebell. Carl Ebell has just been sent to prison for his bombing attack on Joe. Ruth Ebell also mentions to the authorities, when she blows the whistle on the homosexuals, the line that comic-books are a cause of corruption. Comics certainly helped drive her brother Carl insane. This foreshadows a later personal trial of Sammy on his role in producing comics that corrupt the youth.

The author makes clear the total hypocrisy of the bust of the nest of prominent homosexuals. One of the FBI agents that comes along for the bust, ends up raping Sammy and another male who is hidden under the table is also raped. Sammy's fears of being a homosexual make him suddenly grab at the opportunity to marry the pregnant Rosa, who will give birth to Joe's biological son, Tommy. From afar, Joe later thinks that Sammy adapts to this marriage in a normal way, but that is apparently not the case.

Joe gets little chance to fight the Nazis. Due to his German language fluency, he is assigned to a US Navy listening post in Antarctica. Joe may be the great escape artist, but the war seems to have largely escaped him. Antarctica itself seems to be the enemy that is stalking Joe and the other men with its harsh conditions. All but Joe, another man, and one dog are killed in an accident involving the heating stove. Joe escapes this suffocation by carbon monoxide by a combination of luck and his friendship with the dog Oyster. Next, Joe is subjected to being totally isolated during the months-long totally dark Antarctic winter. It is literally always night for months. The other navy man, Shannenhouse, secludes himself in the hangar, working on the one plane. Joe receives letters from Rosa but refuses to write back or communicate with her by radio. Joe knows he has fathered Rosa's child, and that Rosa is now married to Sammy, but does nothing about it.



Joe goes mad in the winter listening to the all-channel and shortwave radio all of the time. Joe suffers heartbreak, when the dog that saved his life twice, Oyster, is killed and skinned by Shannenhause. This is done by Shannenhause as part of his obsessive project to refurbish the plane. Joe is enraged by hearing a German broadcast of a so-called model ghetto in Terezin, Czechoslovakia. He hears a broadcast of his grandfather singing and knows his family is isolated in a camp. Joe directs his rage at a lone German scientist who is located one thousand miles away, and makes a radio broadcast. After a murder-suicide at the scientist's camp, the German scientist is all alone. Joe wants to get his chance to kill at least this one German.

Shannenhause flies Joe to the German scientist camp, but on the way, Shannenhause becomes sick and finally dies. So Joe is all alone. Rather than try to make friends with the only other human being in the area, Joe kills him and receives a flesh wound in the shoulder as well. Again, Joe proves himself to be the great escape artist. Joe survives weeks in isolation, after finding another older abandoned German camp. The US Navy picks him up, but Joe's mind is damaged. The Navy keeps Joe in seclusion but eventually awards him and sends him back to the United States, where Joe again decides to disappear.



## Part VI: P. 468- 512

### Part VI: P. 468- 512 Summary

Pt. VI, Ch. 1: Sammy is married to Rosa and lives with his son, who is actually Joe's son, Tommy. Tommy is 12-years old and behaving oddly. He sneaks into New York City from his home in Bloomtown out on Long Island. Tommy is playing with an eye patch, which he uses as a type of disguise. Sammy has lost most of the money he made in the heyday of his collaboration with Joe. With the remainder, he buys a house in Bloomtown and is living a quiet middle class life. After several failed businesses, Sammy has gone back to running a small comic book company.

Ch. 2: At a coffee shop, several men in the comics business are discussing the news item that someone is threatening to jump off the Empire State Building in protest of the cheating practices of Sammy and Joe's former boss, Sheldon Anapol. There is also fear because there are Senate hearings involving the allegations of Dr. Fredric Wertham and his anti-comics attack published as "How to Seduce an Innocent." Sammy walks in and then checks his office for his Escapist costume. The costume is missing, and Sammy suspects that Joe Kavalier is back in town.

Ch. 3: A Detective named Lieber is sent to talk to Sammy about Joe. Joe has been missing since the end of World War II. Sammy tells Detective Lieber that Joe was supposed to be brought to Virginia after the war but somehow disappeared. Sammy tells the detective that Sammy notices that he is Jewish. Sammy's father-in-law shows up with Tommy. People in the Empire State Building are told to look for Joe Kavalier. A crowd of several hundred people are outside the Empire State Building, waiting to see if, as promised, someone will jump off the building at 5 pm. This information has been published in a letter to the NY Herald Tribune. Sheldon Anapol, still head of Empire Comics, is mad about the letter saying that he cheated the creators of the Escapist.

Ch. 4: Detective Lieber looks at Tommy and sees the boy is frightened. He gets Tommy to confess that he mailed the letter to the newspaper, saying that someone would jump.  
Ch. 5: Tommy had gone with his parents to Tannen's Magic Shop. There, Tommy sees a man in the backroom, who looks back and there is a spark of recognition. Tommy loses interest in the magic set that he is getting. A few days later, Tommy is back in Bloomtown at the local candy store, looking at comics. His cousin, Joe Kavalier comes in, who has been missing for years. Tommy tells the store owner that Joe is Tommy's magic teacher.

### Part VI: P. 468- 512 Analysis

The story returns to Sammy and Rosa, with their son, Tommy, actually Joe's biological child. The family lives on Long Island, in the suburb of Bloomtown, NY. Sammy has successfully concealed his real state of mind and poses as a normal married man and



father. There is something missing in Sammy's marriage, whether it is the physical side of marriage, or the lack of enjoyment of such activity. Their son Tommy also has a secret, which is why he is avoiding going to school one day a week with a phony medical excuse. Tommy is visiting his so-called cousin Joe at the Empire State Building, without telling Sammy and Rosa that Joe is back in town.

Sammy loses almost all the money in various get-rich-quick schemes. Sammy just saves enough money to buy his house in Bloombtown and then goes back into the comic-book business. Sammy drives into Manhattan and hears about someone calling himself the Escapist, threatening to jump off the Empire State Building. Sammy and others wildly suspect that Joe is back in town after 9 years. Even though Joe has been gone for so long, anything is considered possible, since Joe is also a master escape artist. Sure enough, Sammy's Escapist costume is missing from his office. This is the costume that was worn by Tracy Bacon, who was later killed during the war.

A detective named Lieber shows up at Sammy's office. Sammy and Lieber discuss how Joe has been missing all these years. There is a quick friendship between Sammy and Lieber. Later, after the case of the Escapist is over, they have a lunch date. Lieber seems to be possibly one of Sammy's string of boyfriends. Tommy also shows up at Sammy's office, with Sammy's father-in-law, Longman Harkoo. Tommy was supposed to be in school, but like it runs in the family, he is another escape artist. Tommy goes with Sammy and the policeman to the Empire State Building, where Tommy talks about his seeing Joe regularly for almost a year. Tommy internalizes his relationship with cousin Joe in a comic-book world view. Tommy is the comics-character Bugman, while Joe is Secretman. Tommy writes the letter to the newspaper, to draw attention to Joe's grievances against his former boss, Shelly Anapol, and to make Joe come out of his hiding place.



## Part VI, P. 513- 540

### Part VI, P. 513- 540 Summary

Ch. 6: Tommy gets a letter from Tannen's Magic shop with encoded instructions on how to get to Joe's office and home in the Empire State Building. For almost a year, Tommy visits Joe once a week, with only a couple interruptions. Once, Tommy is caught by his mother, Rosa, who is well dressed for the day. She does not get mad and takes him to lunch and to a movie. Tommy wonders if his mother has a secret meeting scheduled with someone as well. Tommy imagines that he that he has a secret identity as Bugman, and that he is going to see Joe, who is really Secretman. One day, when Tommy visits, Joe hits his head after tripping over Tommy's bag and is out cold for a while. Tommy is scared, though Joe finally wakes up after a few minutes. Tommy decides that the Bugman, his secret comic character, must help Secretman to reveal his true identity. When he leaves the hideout, Tommy goes to a print shop, where he types a letter to a newspaper, about the Escapist's plan to jump off the Empire State Building.

Ch. 7: Tommy brings Sammy and the cops to Joe's room in the Empire State Building, but suddenly there is news that Joe is wearing the Escapist costume, ready to jump from the 86th floor Observation deck. Ch. 8: A bunch of orphans are on the deck, while Joe is there saying a man can fly, using a huge rubber band, to bring him back up. As Tommy and Sammy join the crowd, after Joe says hello, he walks backwards into the air. The rubber band stretches and then breaks, but somehow Joe makes it to the landing that is two stories down. Ch. 9: Joe is not badly hurt, though he is taken to the hospital.

### Part VI, P. 513- 540 Analysis

After Tommy and Joe see each other at Tannen's magic shop, Joe comes out to see Tommy. It is an excruciatingly difficult effort for Joe to do this, since otherwise he only goes out to the Empire State Building coffee-shop, Tannen's Magic Shop, and a few other places. Since Joe knows Tommy reads comics, or suspects this, Joe stakes out the Bloomtown local candy store and follows Tommy into the store. Even this is not without dangers to Joe, because the proprietor asks Tommy who is this adult talking to the boy. Tommy says that Joe is his magic teacher. The line in the book from comic books, to the arts of escape and magic, is continued in Tommy and Joe's relationship. Joe shows Tommy a card trick, and after Joe mails Tommy directions to Joe's lair, Joe teaches Tommy lots of magical and card tricks. Their relationship is out of time and space, since it is concealed in the small office that Joe occupies in the Empire State Building. Joe draws his comics and shows Tommy magic tricks, but they discuss little about Sammy and Rosa. Joe resists going to talk to Sammy and Rosa. This is odd, since one would think that Joe would be anxious to go back to Rosa, his old love, but Joe thinks that Sammy and Rosa have a happy marriage.





When Joe trips over Tommy's things and is knocked out, Tommy is put into a crisis. Instead of ratting on Joe, Tommy creates a device to let Joe back into the world. Tommy knows enough from Joe's complaints to write a letter to a newspaper, announcing that the Escapist will jump off the Empire State Building. Joe's complaints against Shelly Anapol, filtered through an 11-year old boy's imagination, are what comes out in the letter to the newspaper. Then, Joe feels obligated to make Tommy's letter true and actually jump off the Empire State Building. Joe's scheme is quite mad, in that he has a rubber-band around him, which is then attached to the 86th Observatory Deck. When Joe jumps, he is supposed to fall one hundred feet and then bounce back unharmed. The author's description of the rubber-band breaking, and somehow Joe ending up on a landing two-stories down, unhurt, is not very believable. In effect, Joe is given a bit of superpowers by the author, though only for an instant, to perform a miraculous escape from death.



## Part VI, P. 541-574

### Part VI, P. 541-574 Summary

Pt. VI, Ch. 10: Joe faces various legal charges, but with the help of Rosa's father, all charges are dropped. Meanwhile, when Sammy returns to Joe's office/room, Sammy gets a subpoena to testify before the Senate anti-comics hearings. Soon Rosa gets a phone call that Joe has shown up and that he is alive and well. Ch. 11: Rosa is home in Bloomtown working on a comic strip. After Sammy goes back to working on comics, Rosa starts drawing comics for Sammy on an emergency basis. Later, Rosa regularly draws a comic strip about career girls. Rosa dresses up to meet Joe again, cooks dinner and then goes back to her comic-strip work. Joe, Sammy and Tommy get home. Tommy is asleep and Joe and Rosa tenderly put him to bed. Rosa asks Joe why he jumped off the Empire State Building. Joe did it, because he wanted to make Tommy's letter claim to the newspaper actually happen. Joe is happy to eat a real meal. Joe tells Rosa he knows that Tommy is his son, although Tommy does not know this. The three of them, Sammy, Rosa and Joe are not sure what they will do to sort out their relationships.

Ch. 12: Sammy and Rosa go to bed. Sammy continues to discuss comic book characters that Rosa is working on, like a story about a woman and the A-bomb. Sammy reveals how Tommy concealed his trips to Joe for almost a year with the lie that he had to see an optometrist. Rosa does not think Joe is out of his mind; he has just been through hell. Sammy is still nervous about the upcoming Senate hearings on the effects of comics. Ch. 13: The future of Sammy and Rosa's marriage is not resolved yet. Joe is sleeping on the couch and spending his days at Sammy's house. He has a strong attraction towards Rosa. Joe apologizes to Rosa for all he has done and soon she is passionately kissing him, but then stops, because Rosa knows Joe loves her but she is not ready to change her situation. Next, Rosa turns to cleaning out Joe's office of about 100 cartons of comic books, since Joe has been evicted.

### Part VI, P. 541-574 Analysis

Joe has been brought back, at least into an approach into the real world. Now it is Sammy's turn to have his little fantasy world torn apart. Joe was Rosa's lover and the father of her child, Tommy. Although Sammy does not want to give up Rosa, he is slowly but surely forced to do just that, by his own thinking. Sammy has charges against Joe dropped, partially with the help of his new male friend, Detective Lieber. The author implies that Sammy has been seeing a string of men over the last 9 years, some as friends and some as lovers. Likewise, the upcoming Senate Hearings put into questions Sammy's motives for writing comic books the way he writes them. He is asked whether his pairs of men and boy, such as Batman and Robin, are really a cover for promoting pederasty and homosexual relations.



Rosa forces herself to keep calm when she hears that Joe is coming to her house. Joe is her former lover, but also someone who behaved very badly, abandoned her and then disappeared. Rosa has, at least a professional commitment to Sammy, working as an illustrator for Sammy, the writer. Joe is overjoyed to have a real meal and come back to the people he still loves. Joe does not want to wreck Sammy's marriage. It takes Joe a while to realize that there is no sexual love between Rosa and Sammy. Even this is a bit ambiguous. Perhaps Sammy has sex with Rosa but is simply unhappy with it. Sammy does not throw Joe out, though Joe could easily rent a hotel room. It takes time for the characters to decide what to do next. The author has Sammy and Rosa discuss the upcoming Senate hearings, and there is a foreboding feeling that these hearings, where Sammy must testify, will affect Sammy profoundly. The biggest hint is that the character Wonder Woman is described as "butch." That is, a masculine-type of lesbian.

For a few days Joe stays in the house and hesitates about what to say to Rosa. He is a masculine-type man and first tries to apologize to Rosa for having vanished but soon probes her feelings for him. Rosa kisses Joe passionately but decides to stop and wait to see what Sammy wants to do about their relationship. Joe has not only the leftovers of his relationship with Rosa, but his huge comic book collection has to be removed from his office, since he is evicted from the Empire State Building.



## Part VI:, P, 575- 612

### Part VI:, P, 575- 612 Summary

Ch. 14: Joe thinks of how comics have helped him escape from an ugly reality. He has been working on a huge comic strip about the Golem of Prague, which Sammy reads.

Ch. 15: Sammy reads the strip and loves it and also admits that he is still homosexual and why he married Rosa. Sheldon Anatol stops by and says that he has been stopped by a law suit from publishing the Escapist comics and is trying to sell Empire Comics. Joe wonders whether he should buy the business but hesitates.

Ch. 16: A couple days later, there is a delivery to Sammy's house in Bloomtown, of a large coffin-like wooden box. Joe has been gone all day in the family car. Joe finally arrives back, amid fear that he has vanished again. Joe had left early to go for a drive. He ends up in Manhattan and decides to check up on how much money he has accumulated since 1941 and then, if he can buy Empire Comics, for him and Sammy. Joe thinks back to his childhood home in Prague. He gets to the bank but cannot figure out where to park the car. Joe drives to a large cemetery in Queens, NY, where the famous magician, Harry Houdini is buried. Joe does not believe in the spirit world, but in a dream sequence, he sees his old teacher, Kornblum tell him to go home. So he goes back to Bloomtown. When Joe comes back, Rosa and Tommy show him the coffin, which Joe knows is the Golem of Prague. The casket is much heavier now than when Joe hid it in 1939. The three of them force open the casket, and inside it is full of mud. Tommy also finds a business card from Joe's father there. Joe speculates that the box is heavy because souls have come back into the Golem.

### Part VI:, P, 575- 612 Analysis

Sammy loves helping Joe pack up his old comic book collection. It is ironic that while the Senate hearings are going to attack comics as being escapist and full of fantasy, this escapist quality is what Joe loves about comics. Escape through reading comics saves Joe's life in his long wanderings until he sets up his hiding place in the Empire State Building. Sammy is impressed with the Golem comic book strips Joe has drawn in his years in hiding. Joe needs Sammy to give his comics English dialogue and a tighter more marketable plot. Sammy comments that the comics Joe has drawn are too directly Jewish but could be improved and edited without too much difficulty. The issue of Joe and Sammy working together on comics is posed. Meanwhile, Shelly Anapol stops by. He has ended the Escapist comic book series, under legal pressure for imitating Superman, put out by National Comics. Joe wants Sammy to work with him on new comics, but at the same time, Joe wants Rosa, who is Sammy's wife. Rosa seems to be the deep-rooted reluctance of Sammy to collaborate again with Joe. Sammy knows that he has to change his life, but like most people, Sammy resists change.



After Sammy and Joe discuss the Golem comics that Joe has drawn, the Golem actually shows up. In the most magical and weird scene in the book, the remains of the Golem are delivered to Sammy's house in Bloomtown. The large coffin box is traceable to Prague, from Lithuania, where Joe had long ago had it brought. At the time that the Golem is delivered, Joe is on a trip to New York, after grabbing Sammy's car. Joe tries to check up on his large bank account, cannot park, and ends up in a large cemetery in Queens, New York. There, Joe visits the grave of the master magician Harry Houdini, and Joe consciously denies the existence of the spiritual world. There is a heightened sense of synchronicity when Joe sees the coffin of the Golem when he returns to Bloomtown. The events and conflicts of Joe, Sammy, and Rosa are coming to a climatic conclusion.



## Part VI, P. 613 to P. 636 (end)

### Part VI, P. 613 to P. 636 (end) Summary

Ch. 17- On April 21st and 22nd there are Senate hearings on the bad effects of comics, held in New York City. Dr. Frederic Wertham repeats the attacks on comics that are printed in his book. On the 2nd day of hearings, Sammy Clay testifies after two rather shady characters. A Senator alleges that the comic characters, Batman and Robin, and other pairs of adults and boys in comics, represent subliminal pedophile relationships. The Senator claims that these characters represent Sammy's own tendencies. Sammy has been exposed as homosexual on national TV.

Ch. 18- Sammy is in shock and after the hearings goes with Rosa and Joe to get drunk in a nearby bar. Sam is disappointed that neither is in the least shocked, and that they clearly know about his tendencies. Sammy has them go home on the LI RR while he sobers up. Sammy cries and the bartender, who has seen the hearings on TV, makes a remark about the pair, Batman and Robin. Suddenly, Sammy's old editor, George Deasy shows up. George remarks that Sammy may have been given the Golden Key and liberated to be himself by this public exposure. Sammy says that his plan of liberation is to go to Los Angeles and get a job in television production.

Ch. 19- At home in Bloomtown, the boxes of comics from Joe's office have arrived. Tommy makes himself a so-called Bugs nest inside the boxes and looks through an old box. He sees old pictures of Joe and Rosa kissing, when they were in love. Tommy hears Joe and Rosa kissing outside. Joe and Rosa come in and all three of them look at the old pictures. Joe tells Tommy about Joe's dead brother and how strange things happened during the war. Then, Tommy asks, what about Sammy, his up-till-now dad.

Ch. 20- Sammy comes home late. He thinks he can pack a suitcase and leave unnoticed, but Rosa catches him. Sammy thinks Batman is really an ideal father-figure to Robin and not perverse. Sammy gets into bed with Tommy for a moment and remembers raising Tommy, until Tommy says he is being squished.

Rosa thinks that it makes sense for Sam to leave, when told of his decision. Joe wants Sam to stay and announces that Joe has bought Empire Comics for him and Sammy. Rosa would let Sammy stay, but Sammy wants to be by himself and free to pursue his sexual identity in Los Angeles. Sammy sleeps on the couch and gives his bed spot to Joe in the bedroom with Rosa. In the morning, Sammy is gone.

### Part VI, P. 613 to P. 636 (end) Analysis

Sammy would like to maintain his status as a collaborator of Rosa and as a married man. This façade is destroyed by the Senate Judiciary hearings soon held in New York City. Sammy is likely targeted by the Senators because someone told them that Sammy is a suspected covert homosexual. Also, Sammy tells Rosa that his work in man and



boy pairs is suspected as promoting pederasty. These man-boy pairs are named by Dr. Frederick Wertham in his book attacking the comic-book industry. Yet later, when Sammy thinks over the disaster of these hearings, Sammy thinks that such man-boy relationships represent ideal father-son relationships. Sammy thinks of how his father, the Mighty Molecule, abandoned him. In many other families, the father works so much that he hardly ever sees his children. So for pairs such as Batman and Robin, Batman represents an ideal father figure.

Though the charges are ridiculous, they have a devastating effect. Sammy, Joe and Rosa get drunk in a bar, and it is clear to Sammy that both of them know he is homosexual. Now, the proverbial "everyone" knows it, as discussed on television. George Deasy walks in, Sammy's former editor, who once encouraged Sammy and Joe to get a fair amount of money for their creative work from their boss, Sheldon Anapol. George is a sort of guardian angel to Joe and Sammy. George brings Joe to the party where Joe meets Rosa. Now, though George says he does not like homosexuality, George gives Sammy symbolic permission to leave his marriage and live his life as a homosexual. This is the Golden Key that Sammy and Joe once described as the special tool of the Escapist. Now Sammy has been given the key to escape his humdrum and inauthentic life. Although Joe and Rosa want each other, Rosa, especially, is waiting for Sammy to give them permission to act.

After Sammy's open exposure, he sends Joe and Rosa home together, while Sammy waits until he is sober enough to drive the car. This is also a sort of signal that Sammy is ready to change places with Joe and let Joe be Rosa's husband and Tommy's father. Sammy may write stories for comics and send them from Los Angeles, or may after a while come back to New York, but everything is changing. At home, Joe and Rosa kiss and Tommy finds the old picture of Joe and Rosa as a couple in one of the old comic-book boxes. Joe has bought Empire Comics and wants to work together with Sammy. However, Sammy makes his decision, by literally putting Joe in bed with Rosa, while Sammy sleeps on the couch. Sammy leaves for Los Angeles early the next morning.



# Characters

## Sheldon Anapol

Sheldon Anapol, an owner of Empire Comics and Joe and Sam's boss for several years, is a businessman first and foremost and plays his historic role in cheating two naïve young men out of their multi-million dollar idea. But he is not without a conscience, having worked hard more than a decade at his own, less-successful novelty business. As co-owner of Empire Comics (with his brother-in-law Jack Ashkenazy), Anapol is subject to both its successes and its troubles. Even as Anapol is settling into a life made comfortable by lots of money, he is also receiving death threats from Nazi-sympathizers and a major law suit from the owners of Superman. While making deals for radio plays and movie shorts, Anapol tries to convince Sammy and Joe to stop beating up Nazis so that he can get a decent night's rest. His relationship to the Escapist is purely business.

## Jack Ashkenazy

Jack Ashkenazy, the brother of Sheldon Anapol's wife as well as Anapol's business partner in Empire Comics, has bad taste in everything from literature to clothing. Ashkenazy's success results from the intelligence and talent of the people around him, namely Anapol, Deasey, Joe, and Sammy. When he left Empire Comics in 1943, Ashkenazy tried out several other business ventures but they all failed.

## Tracy Bacon

Tracy Bacon, Sammy's true love, lives life vigorously, working as an actor and rarely taking no for an answer. He has a mysterious, unpleasant history shrouded in a confusion of conflicting facts. Whatever has come before, he is undeniably happy with Sammy. He is handsome and charismatic—everything Sammy never thought he could have. Bacon's name is a joke that plays upon the idea of forbidden fruit: as a Jew, Sammy is not supposed to eat pork. He knows famous people all over town, such as Orson Welles and Ed Sullivan, but he is guileless and does not seek fame so much as acceptance. Bacon knows he is gay and is not ashamed of it, but he cannot convince Sammy to feel the same way about himself. Bacon ultimately leaves for Los Angeles alone, just as the United States is entering World War II. He joins the Air Force and is shot down over the Solomon Islands in 1943.

## Eugene Begelman

Eugene Begelman is Tommy's best friend. Tommy discovers his love of magic when playing with a set of magic tricks belonging to Eugene.





## Bubbie

Bubbie, Sam and Joe's grandmother, lives with her daughter Ethel and her grandson Sammy in Brooklyn. Bubbie dies peacefully in her sleep at age ninety-six.

## Rosa Clay

See Rosa Luxemburg Saks

## Sammy Clay

Sammy Clay, the everyday hero of Chabon's novel, is a quiet Jewish boy from Brooklyn who chases his dreams—to publish comic books—and catches them. Sammy's bravery and pluck are seen in his initial pitch to Anapol and later in how he stands up to Anapol, Ashkenazy, and Deasey to get what he feels he and Joe deserve for their talent. Some argue that Sammy is Joe's sidekick, but that interpretation does not work. Joe and Sammy's relationship is not that of a mentor and his student or a father and his son. They are fully partners, sharing in the creation of characters, the development of stories, and the negotiation of payment. Despite Sammy's courage in the office, his real struggle is in seeking to accept his homosexuality. Sammy spends most of the novel in denial, even though nearly every other character seems to know he is gay just from meeting him. Tracy Bacon is Sammy's great love, but Sammy turns his back on that relationship after he is sexually abused by another man. This denial nearly destroys Sammy's spirit; when he and Joe are reunited after twelve years, Joe describes Sammy as haggard. But he is also tough and resilient. When he is publicly outed by Senator Hendrickson, Sammy realizes he has nothing to lose, and he finally buys his ticket to Los Angeles and gets on that westbound train he was supposed to be on with Bacon twelve years earlier.

## Tommy Clay

Tommy is the son of Joe Kavalier and Rosa Saks, but Sammy Clay is father to him for the first twelve years of his life. He takes after Joe in looks and his interest in magic. Tommy successfully schemes to bring Joe back to his family when Joe has lost his way.

## Salvador Dalí

Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí is the guest of honor at Longman Harkoo's party where Joe and Rosa are formally introduced. Joe saves Dalí's life when Dalí's diving suit malfunctions.



## George Deasey

George Deasey, the editor of Empire Comics and a mentor to Sammy, is harsh but sincere. Although Deasey is management, several times he gives Joe and Sammy hints on how to effectively negotiate their contracts so they will not get short-changed by Anapol and Ashkenazy. He also introduces them to Harkoo.

## Carl Henry Ebling

Carl Ebling is a mentally unstable Nazi-sympathizer whom Joe runs afoul of. Joe's attack on Ebling's office pushes Ebling over the edge. Ebling decides he is a supervillain named the Saboteur and Joe is the Escapist. Ebling plants a phony bomb at the Empire Comics office and later tries to blow up Joe and a roomful of guests at a bar mitzvah. People are spared because his incompetence far outweighs his enthusiasm for anti-Semitic activity. To the horror of his family who know he is mentally ill, Ebling is found guilty of terrorism and attempted murder and put away in Sing Sing.

## Ruth Ebling

Ruth Ebling, Carl's older sister, is a housekeeper at James Love's beach house estate in Pawtaw, New Jersey. Angered about her brother's imprisonment, she calls the police to raid Love's house after she finds a copy of the *Escapist* in Sammy's room.

## FBI Agent

The second, unnamed FBI agent is the one who sexually assaults Dave Fellowes at Love's Pawtaw estate.

## Dave Fellowes

Dave Fellowes hides with Sammy when the police raid Love's house in Pawtaw. Dave is sexually abused by the unnamed FBI agent. Dave is John Pye's lover.

## Jerry Glovsky

Jerry Glovsky, Julie's older brother, shares a house with Marty and Davy. Jerry is a comic book illustrator and calls his place Palooka Studios. He lets Sammy and Joe use their place to work on the first issue of their *Escapist* comic book.



## Julie Glovsky

Julius Glovsky, called Julie, is a childhood friend of Sammy's and also a comic book illustrator. Julie is the first artist Joe and Sammy hire to help them create the inaugural issue of the *Escapist*.

## Marty Gold

Marty Gold, Jerry's housemate and an inker for comic books, works with Sammy and Joe on the first issue of the *Escapist* comic book.

## Longman Harkoo

Longman Harkoo is Rosa's father and a wealthy surrealist art dealer living in an odd house in Greenwich Village. He renamed himself after he had a reoccurring dream about a Long Man of Harkoo. Harkoo is cheerful, quirky, and supportive of his daughter and her friends. He is very well-connected and enjoys using his connections to help people.

## Joe's Grandfather

Joe's grandfather is a renowned operatic Czech tenor. He survives the war with Joe's mother until they are both sent to a death camp.

## Dr. Anna Kavalier

Anna Kavalier is Joe's mother. She and Joe keep up a faithful communication until he enlists in the navy. She dies in a death camp along with Joe's grandfather.

## Dr. Emil Kavalier

Emil Kavalier, Joe's father, dies from pneumonia less than a year after Joe leaves his family.

## Joe Kavalier

Joe Kavalier is the central character of Chabon's book. The plot follows his life, recounting his late childhood in Prague, his arrival in New York City as a young man, his naval assignment in Antarctica, and eventually his return to his family in New York. Trained as an escape artist by one of the profession's unsung masters, Joe is incredibly adept at any task he takes on, making him somewhat larger than life. He is also a gifted artist and half of the genius behind the book's popular comic book superhero, the



Escapist. Joe works closely with his cousin Sammy to create this superhero, which is inspired in equal parts by the unique backgrounds of these cousins. Despite Joe's repeated ability to escape and survive, he is incapable of saving even one of his family members from the war in Europe. The loss of his brother Thomas, en route to New York, nearly destroys Joe, but he cannot die, even when he wants to (this is repeated again in Antarctica, when he goes to Jotunheim). Joe's great love is Rosa Saks, and their affection for each other is not diminished though time, guilt, shame, and anger must separate them for twelve years. Joe tries to stay away from Rosa, Sammy, and Tommy after the war out of a misdirected sense of forfeiture, but the night that he at last reads Rosa's letters and learns about the birth of Tommy is a turning point for Joe, who at last stops fighting.

## **Josef Kavalier**

See Joe Kavalier

## **Thomas Masaryk Kavalier**

Thomas Kavalier is Joe's younger brother. Joe arranges to have Thomas transported to New York City on a ship carrying Jewish children refugees, but the ship is overcome by a U-boat and a sudden storm and all the children drown.

## **Alter Klayman**

See The Mighty Molecule

## **Ethel Klayman**

Ethel Klayman (née Kavalier), Sammy's mother and Joe's aunt, works as a nurse and is a very practical, no-nonsense woman. She thinks Sammy's dream of drawing comic books is ridiculous—even in the midst of his success, she considers it to be ephemeral. Her love is tough but not meager, and she gladly embraces Joe, Rosa, and even Bacon into her home. Ethel saves most of the money Sammy gives her. She dies of a brain aneurysm in the mid-1940s, shortly after retiring to Miami Beach.

## **Samuel Klayman**

See Sammy Clay



## **Bernhard Kornblum**

Bernhard Kornblum, a retired performing illusionist who mentors the teenage Joe in escape tricks, helps smuggle Joe out of Prague when Nazi restrictions threaten to trap the boy. Thereafter Kornblum only appears to Joe in visions, offering advice.

## **Detective Lieber**

Detective Lieber is assigned to the case of the Empire State Building jumper. He figures out that Tommy was the one who wrote the jumper's letter.

## **James Haworth Love**

James Love is chairman of the board for Oneonta Mills and instrumental in getting the *Escapist* on the radio through his sock company's sponsorship. He invites Bacon and Sammy to his beach house in Pawtaw with a group of other gay men.

## **Klaus Mecklenburg**

Klaus Mecklenburg, a German geologist stationed at Jotunheim, Antarctica, dies from a gunshot wound after struggling with Joe for control of the weapon.

## **The Mighty Molecule**

The Mighty Molecule is Ethel's husband and Sammy's father. He is a traveling strong man who survived hardship and imprisonment in Eastern Europe. After Sammy is afflicted with polio as a child, his father takes him walking to keep his legs strong. Although he does not live at home, he and Ethel love each other. The Molecule dies in 1938, crushed beneath a tractor he was attempting to lift.

## **Herr Milde**

Milde is the adjutant at the German consulate in New York City. Joe visits him weekly, trying to find a way to get his family out of Prague. Milde is polite but unhelpful. He is the one who delivers the news to Joe that his father has died.

## **Davy O'Dowd**

Davy O'Dowd is Jerry's housemate and one of the illustrators who work on the inaugural issues of the *Escapist*.



## Frank Pantaleone

Frank Pantaleone is friends with Jerry, Marty, and Davy. He is a more experienced illustrator and also works on the inaugural issue of the *Escapist*.

## John Pye

John Pye, Dave Fellowes's lover, is considered one of the most beautiful men in New York City.

## Rosa Luxemburg Saks

Rosa Saks is salvation and muse. She and Joe fall madly in love in the way young people do. Rosa becomes indispensable to the cousins as she helps them with domestic affairs and with rescuing Thomas Kavalier from Prague. Rosa also inspires Joe to create the sexy superhero, Luna Moth. When Joe unknowingly leaves Rosa in the lurch, she and Sammy get married, thus saving each other from a world that does not yet accept deviance. Their marriage of convenience is not at all romantic, but it is not awkward because they have always been close, like siblings. Over time, Rosa and Sammy develop a strong partnership, churning out comic books the way Joe and Sammy did. Although Rosa is not directly responsible for Thomas's death, she feels guilty because of the role she played in placing Thomas on the doomed ship. She names her son after Joe's brother to honor Thomas's memory and possibly to keep a connection with the love of her life, from whom she is separated for twelve years. When Rosa and Joe are reunited, they easily pick up where they left off, happy and in love.

## Siegfried Saks

See Longman Harkoo

## Hal Spiegelman

Spiegelman is the proprietor of Spiegelman's Drugs in Bloomtown, New York. Tommy introduces Joe to him as his magic teacher.

## Agent Frank Wyche

Agent Frank Wyche finds Sammy hiding at Love's house and sexually abuses him.



## Sammy, Sam Clay, Sammy Klayman

Sammy is the central motivator of the comic-book project, and is intensely ambitious. Although he cannot draw well, he is the inspiration of the project that becomes Empire Comics. He is a leader of men and the idea man who creates the character, the Escapist. Until Joe turns up, Sammy lacks the power to turn his dreams into reality. Yet, Sammy, despite being a leader has physical and character flaws. He finds out that he is homosexual, in a time when there are big penalties for not conforming with normal role models. Indeed, later in the book, Sammy is accused of promoting homosexuality covertly in his comic-book characters. Sammy marries Rosa and has a chance to live a "normal" married life.

In the beginning of the story, Sammy is presented as a fairly short young man, with weak legs due to the effects of a bout with polio. Sammy is Jewish, but with little relationship to the formal Jewish community. Sammy's father rejects Sammy because despite strong upper body strength, Sammy's weak legs make it impossible for him to succeed as a circus performer. He cannot follow in the footsteps of his father, the Mighty Molecule. Sammy is intelligent and well-read but has no access to higher education. Sammy is largely a self-made man. The arrival of Joe makes Sammy conscious of the wider world and the threat of the Nazis to the Jewish community. Sammy is a product of culture in New York City which abounds with get-rich-quick schemes.

## Joe, Josef Kavalier

Josef Kavalier, known in America as Joe, comes to the United States at the age of 19, as a refugee. In Czechoslovakia, Joe is a fine arts student and a popular young man, until the Nazis march into Prague in 1939. Joe embodies a major theme of the book, the Escape artist, who escapes from all sorts of deadly situations. Joe wants to be a success in America but is often overcome with nearly overwhelming guilt from not being able to rescue his family stuck in Prague. Under the influence of Sammy, Joe draws the Escapist and other comic strips. Joe wants to earn money to somehow buy freedom for his family. Joe's ability to break into buildings gives him power to get what he wants. This gives Joe the ability to see Rosa Saks sleeping naked and later to break into the Aryan-American office.

For a long time, Joe works full-time with Sammy and for Empire Comics and avoids women as a distraction from his mission. Joe's attack on the Aryan-American League office leads to a comic-book like feud with the Nazi, Carl Ebling. Joe's romance with Rosa is a pleasant experience for Joe, but one that he abandons with the death of his brother Thomas and the declaration of war. Joe is able to survive deadly situations, from being a Jew in Prague, to being with the US Navy in Antarctica. His inability to succeed in his goal to save his family or to fight the Nazis drives Joe nearly insane. Joe's mental isolation is intensified in the isolation of Antarctica, where he is the only survivor of a US Naval base there. He is overwhelmed by being the great Escapist and for nine years



escapes reality in hiding, most of the time in New York City. Only the love and desire to be with his biological son, Tommy, draws Joe out of seclusion.

## **Rosa Luxemburg Saks, pen name, Rose Saxon**

Rosa, like Joe and Sammy, is an artist. Rosa is raised by a wealthy father, in the leftist and eccentric world of New York's Greenwich Village. Rosa enters the book when Joe sneaks into an apartment and sees her sleeping naked in Jerry Glovsky's bed. Rosa is sexually experienced, loud, and sometimes aggressive. She is a New York Jew who works as an artist for a magazine, as well as for an operation to rescue Jewish children from the Nazis. Though Rosa is a sexually-liberated woman, her morality is governed by her thoughts of what is right and wrong, and her willingness to help others. Rosa quickly falls in love with Joe and is shocked when he abandons her without saying goodbye. Rosa is pregnant by Joe, and in order to have her child in a family setting, she marries Sammy, who is fleeing his homosexuality. Rosa moves with Sammy to Bloomtown and settles down. She makes many compromises and avoids looking at evidence of Sammy's continuing sexual relationships with men. Rosa still has a lot in common with Sammy and works for him as a comic-book artist. Only the sudden reappearance of Joe, after being gone for 12 years, makes Rosa remember the passionate love she is missing. Even then, Rosa is slow to abandon her hollow marriage with Sammy. Her principled character makes her want to stay with Sammy until Sammy ends their relationship.

## **Tommy, Thomas Clay**

Tommy is Sammy and Rosa's 11 year-old-son. He is really the biological son of the missing Joe. Tommy sees his so-called cousin Joe at Tannen's Magic Shop and is covertly in contact with Joe. Tommy comes to Joe's hideout in the Empire State Building every week and plays magic tricks and other games. Tommy fears that Joe is in danger and exposes Joe's presence to the world. Tommy does this through a newspaper announcement, that the Escapist, Joe's comic-book character, will jump off the Empire State Building.

## **Thomas Kavalier**

Thomas Kavalier is Joe's younger brother, in Prague Czechoslovakia. While Joe escapes, Thomas, who is about 12, must stay behind. Thomas participates in magic tricks and an attempt at an Escapist trick in the Moldau River, where both are nearly drowned. Thomas stays in touch by letters with Joe and is brought to Portugal to escape Europe on a children's ship. This ship, the Ark of Miriam, goes toward America, but is sunk by a Nazi submarine.





## **Bernard Kornblum**

Bernard Kornblum is Joe's magic teacher in Prague. Kornblum is asked by a Jewish committee in Prague to smuggle the remains of the Golem of Prague out of the city, to neutral Lithuania. Kornblum uses this opportunity to smuggle Joe out of Prague as well. Kornblum is over 70-years old and does not wish to escape Prague; it is enough for him to allow Joe to escape. Kornblum occasionally comes back to Joe's thoughts in dreams and visions. Kornblum comes to Joe in visions telling Joe how to escape first in Antarctica, and later, to escape Joe's isolation in New York.

## **Sheldon Anatol, aka Shelly**

Shelly is a traveling salesman who finally makes enough money to settle down in New York. He is unhappily married and runs Empire Distribution, often living in his office. Shelly's big break is when he goes along with Sammy's scheme to start Empire Comics. Shelly and his partners financially exploit Joe and Sammy through controlling 100-percent of the rights of characters such as the Escapist. Later, this becomes an issue, when Joe returns, after being absent from New York for years. Shelly's exploitation is part of the complaint in Tommy's letter about the Escapist jumping off the Empire State Building.

## **Ethel Klayman**

Ethel Klayman is Sammy's mom. She raises Sammy largely by herself, with Sammy's father only making occasional appearances. Ethel is somewhat dissatisfied with Sammy's success in comics, which she regards as trash. Ethel takes care of Sammy and also Joe, after he arrives. She is a nurse and is able to sew up Joe's head wound after he is wounded in a fight with Germans in New York. Ethel is a good mother and aunt and tries to help Sammy and Joe when they are in difficulties.

## **Professor Von Klayman, the Mighty Molecule**

Professor Von Klayman, or the Mighty Molecule is Sammy's showman father. The Mighty Molecule is only with Sammy for short periods of Sammy's youth. He tells Sammy that he helped Sammy walk after having polio, but then the Mighty Molecule leaves again. After visiting Sammy when Sammy is 13, the Mighty Molecule goes out again to work in traveling circuses and is killed in one of his stunts. The Mighty Molecule is a sort of prototype for Sammy's superheroes, but without a reason to do good and help people.

## **Carl Ebling, the Saboteur**

Carl Ebling is the one-man Nazi activist running the Aryan-American League. After Joe raids the office and beats up Carl, Carl seeks revenge. Carl makes a phony bomb and



telephones a bomb threat to the Empire Comics offices in the Empire State Building. Later, in a more serious attack, Carl arranges for a bomb to explode at a bar mitzvah party, where Joe is working as a magician. He is sentenced to 12 years in prison.

## Ruth Ebling

Ruth Ebling is Carl's sister. By coincidence, she is James Love's housekeeper when Sammy and Tracy Bacon go there on a homosexual vacation. Ruth Ebling, like her brother, hates Jews, and views Sammy's comic-books as having helped driven her brother insane. Ruth betrays her employer, and calls the police to tell them that a group of prominent homosexuals are having a "love nest" retreat, and the house is raided.

## Tracy Bacon

Tracy Bacon is the actor who plays the Escapist in the new Escapist radio show. He is big, young and handsome and Anglo-Saxon. Sammy is attracted to Tracy and Tracy to him, first as friends. Tracy rejects an actress for the attention of Sammy and falls in love with Sammy. Tracy and Sammy are caught in a homosexual bust. Tracy goes to Los Angeles, but Sammy refuses to go with him. Tracy dies fighting in the war.

## James Love

James Love is a rich widower and industrialist. He is introduced at the Empire State Building when a bomb threat is called in; he agrees to finance the Escapist radio show. Later, James Love turns up as a prominent homosexual, who invites Sammy and Tracy to a retreat on the New Jersey shore. This retreat is busted, though later, charges are dropped.

## Julie Glovsky, Jerry Glovsky

Julie Glovsky is a (male) pal of Sammy. Julie suggests that he, Sammy and Joe sneak into his brother's apartment, sometimes known as Palooka Studios. Julie's brother is Jerry Glovsky, one of the men who rents the apartment and who later shows up. Julie and Jerry are comic-book artists. Jerry has a reputation as a ladies' man, and Rosa Saks is awakened, naked in his bed, when Joe Kavalier, Sammy, and Julie sneak into the apartment.

## George Deasy

George Deasy is Sammy and Joe's editor at Empire Comics. George plays a key role in bringing Joe and Sammy to a party, where Joe encounters Rosa again. George also advises Sammy and Joe to ask for more money from Shelly Anapol, as their comic-book venture develops. Later, George makes a guest appearance at a bar, after Sammy is



exposed as homosexual in Senate TV hearings. George urges Sammy to seek his real identity.

## **John Shannenhouse, the Pilot**

John Shannenhouse is the pilot of the one plane at the Kelvinator base, the US Navy Base in Antarctica. He is the only other survivor of the incident of a broken stove that sends off deadly carbon monoxide. Shannenhouse is obsessed with refurbishing his plane. On the flight to attack the German base in Antarctica, Shannenhouse slowly dies from appendicitis.

## **Hermann Hoffman**

Hermann Hoffman runs the TRA, the Trans-Atlantic Rescue Agency, mostly by himself, with the help of Rosa Saks. He charts the ill-fated ship, the Ark of Miriam, to take European Jews to America. Mr. Hoffman also steers Joe back to being a magician and working magic acts at Bar Mitzvah parties in New York.

## **Detective Lieber**

Detective Lieber is the detective sent on the case of the newspaper letter wherein someone threatens to jump off the Empire State Building. He is a young Jewish detective and becomes friendly with Sammy. Sammy tells Rosa that he has an appointment to go to lunch with the Detective and that Lieber helped get charges against Joe dropped.



# Objects/Places

## Palooka Studios

Palooka Studios is actually the apartment of Jerry Glovsky and several other young men. Joe, Sammy and Julie Glovsky sneak into this apartment and start to draw Sammy's ideas for new comic-book characters. Later, Jerry Glovsky and others are recruited to Sammy's comic-book project.

## The Golem

The Golem is the legendary superhero who defends the Jewish community of Prague, Czechoslovakia, during the Middle Ages. The body of the Golem is hidden in Prague. Bernard Kornblum, with the help of Joe finds the Golem in a large coffin. The Golem is smuggled out of Prague to Lithuania, and in the process Joe is smuggled out of Prague. Much later, the Golem shows up at Sammy's house in Bloomtown.

## The Escapist, Tom Mayflower

The Escapist is a superhero, who has the ability to help others escape from oppression and captivity. In the comic-book story, he is really Tom Mayflower, who is given a Golden Key from a dying man who adopted him, Max Mayflower. The Escapist character is accused in the courts of being a copy of the character, Superman.

## The Golden Key, the League of the Golden Key

The Golden Key is a key that a man who frees Max Mayflower, gives to him, while on his deathbed. Max Mayflower, in turn, when shot, gives the Golden Key to Tom Mayflower. The Golden Key is a comic-book object, which is a metaphor for the freeing of the oppressed. In the comic-book, there is an actual League of the Golden Key organization. This metaphor is used when Joe tries to free his brother Thomas and is used again when Sammy decides to free himself from his loveless marriage.

## The Escapist Radio Show

The Escapist Radio Show is sponsored by rich industrialist James Love after the phony bombing of Empire Comics. In a visit to the Escapist Radio Show studios, Sammy meets Tracy Bacon, who plays the Escapist.



## **The Empire State Building**

The Empire State Building is the site of the new offices of Empire Comics after they become successful. Later, Joe rents a small office there as his hideout in New York. At the time, the Empire State Building is the tallest building in the world.

## **The 86th Floor Observatory Deck**

The 86th Floor Observatory Desk is a popular tourist site in the Empire State Building. It is the place where Sammy is on Civil Defense duty at night, and Tracy Bacon comes to see him. Later, Joe, dressed up as the Escapist superhero, jumps off the Empire State Building from this deck.

## **The Iron Chain Organization or Gang**

The Iron Chain Organization or Gang is the rival of the Golden Key Organization. While the Golden Key is dedicated to freeing the oppressed, the Iron Chain is dedicated to oppression and evil. Germany is said to have been taken over by the Iron Chain.

## **Luna Moth, Judy Dark**

Luna Moth is a comic-book character that Joe invents to celebrate his relationship with Rosa Saks. In the comic-book, Judy Dark, a librarian, is inducted as a superhero by the Goddess of Lo. Joe decides to call the character Luna Moth, after the moths that he finds on Rosa's bed in her room and studio.

## **The Kelvinator, the US Naval Base in Antarctica**

The Kelvinator is the name that the men give to the US Naval Base in Antarctica, where Joe Kavalier is stationed. At the Kelvinator, due to a faulty stove, all the men are killed by carbon monoxide poisoning except for Joe and John Shannenhause.

## **Oyster, the Sled Dog**

Oyster is the name of a sled dog at the Kelvinator in Antarctica. Oyster saves Joe's life at least twice, including when Oyster is sleeping with Joe, and whines when carbon monoxide gas accumulates after a stove breaks. Later, Shannenhause kills Oyster, much to Joe's regret, to use its pelt to refurbish a plane at the base.



## **Tannen's Magic Shop**

Tannen's Magic Shop is a place where magicians hang out. Tommy goes there with his parents to buy a magic kit and sees his so-called cousin, Joe. Joe hangs out there to be with his fellow magicians, though he is hiding from everyone else.

## **The Hofzinsen Club**

The Hofzinsen Club is a club of magicians and intellectuals in Prague. Both Joe and his brother Thomas want to go there and are allowed there once after their attempted escape trick in the Moldau River.

## **The German Base in Antarctica**

The German Base in Antarctica is where one solitary German geologist lives. It becomes Joe's target in his war against the Nazis, when Joe is in the US Navy. Nearby are other abandoned German bases, where Joe shelters until he is rescued from Antarctica.

## **The Moldau River**

The Moldau River is the central river in the city of Prague, Czechoslovakia. There Joe (Josef) and his brother Thomas, attempt to pull off a demonstration of Joe's ability to escape from being tied up in a sack in the river. Although, Joe escapes, he and his brother nearly drown and are miraculously saved by their teacher, Bernard Kornblum.

## **The Ark of Miriam, the TRA, The Trans-Atlantic Rescue Agency**

The Ark of Miriam is the ship that is bought and chartered by Mr. Hermann Hoffman, who runs the TRA, the Trans-Atlantic Rescue Agency, a mostly one-man operation, with the assistance of Rosa Saks. Thomas Kavalier, Joe's brother is on the ship, when it is sunk by a German submarine.

## **The Seduction of the Innocent, Dr. Wertham**

"The Seduction of the Innocent" is a book by Dr. Wertham that makes a string of accusation about the bad effects of comic-books on youth. Included in his book is a charge that man-boy pairs, such as Batman and Robin, imply a homosexual pederast relationship. Dr. Wertham also testifies at Senate Hearings.



# Themes

## The Escape Artist or the Magician

The Escape Artist, or the Magician, is an occupation, but also a certain type of person. Joe, then known as Josef, is instructed by his teacher, Bernard Kornblum in the art of being a magician and escape artist. Later, Joe escapes Nazi-occupied Prague and helps Sammy invent the comic book character, the Escapist. The Escapist as a comic-book character is highly successful and generates a large amount of comic-book sales. The Escapist has a mission of using his powers to help those who are in chains and oppressed. As a real life person, the person who is an escapist has problems that the one dimensional comic-book character does not have. For a long time, Joe is dedicated to making money to help his family escape Prague. He is unsuccessful in getting them a visa. Only after Joe meets Rosa, does Joe get an idea on how to at least help his brother Thomas escape Europe. Joe is put into conflict, because he loves Rosa and wants to settle down with her and marry her. This conflicts with Joe's desire to fight the Nazi to the death. When the war begins, Joe enlists in the US Navy and abandons Rosa.

The person who wants to escape something or help others escape has limitations. He cannot be an escapist and at the same time establish roots and a future. When Joe comes back to New York, he is still dedicated to escape but no longer has a reason to escape and hide. Joe stays in hiding out of habit, until his longing for a relationship with Tommy, his biological son, draws him out. Sammy escapes obscurity with his comic book scheme but then finds out that he is homosexual. Being homosexual is too scary for Sammy, so he takes the opportunity to escape into married life with Rosa. Though this married life is hollow, it is a comfortable place for Sammy to escape. Only when Joe comes back is Sammy confronted with his empty life. The Senate hearings on comics finally drive Sammy out of married life, in the same way that his disgrace at being a homosexual drive him into it.

## The Need to be True to Oneself

Joe tries to devote his life to saving his family and to fighting the Nazis. Sammy aims to make a lot of money and become famous but neglects his own personal and sexual feelings. In Joe's first year in New York, he devotes himself totally to his work in comic-books. He is fighting a war against the Nazis in his comic-books, which leads to real skirmishes against Germans in the streets of New York. Many of these people may not have been Nazis or Nazi-sympathizers at all. Joe is just blindly attacking them for speaking German and for giving what he thinks are dirty looks at him. In fact, until Joe meets Rosa, Joe does not have any viable plan to rescue any member of his family. Joe's requests at the German consulate are totally ignored. Only when he gives himself up to his passion for Rosa does he meet a man who is organizing an escape ship for



European Jewish children. In this way, Joe almost saves Thomas, except that the war starts, and the ship "the Ark of Miriam" is sunk.

Likewise, Sammy is so intent on being a financial success, he does not realize he has neglected his personal needs. Without having a viable plan to form a relationship with a woman, Sammy is picked up by Tracy Bacon. Of course, Sammy has a natural tendency to fall in love with men, but perhaps he could have decided to be different if he consciously confronted this fact about himself. Sammy marries Rosa, so she can have Joe's child legitimately and live a married life with him. This strategy works on the outside but is not entirely successful. Later, when Joe comes back, Rosa tries to maintain her marriage with Sammy. She fights her desire to give herself to Joe, her old lover. When Sammy breaks down over the Senate Hearings, Rosa's strong front breaks down. Sammy literally throws her into the arms of Joe and makes all of them, in a sense, true to themselves.

## Coming of Age

In the beginning of the book, Sammy is 17 years old and Joe is 19. Both of them need to do a lot of work to figure out who they are and what they want in life. The only way Sammy can articulate his desires is his desire to make a lot of money. Due to his interest in art and comic-books, this centers around a career being a successful creator of a comic strip. When Joe comes to Sammy's apartment and possesses strong drawing ability, Sammy's desires have the chance to become reality. Sammy is aggressive and in a relatively short time is successful. Yet Sammy does not realize that being a successful adult takes more than financial success. After Joe forms a relationship with Rosa, Sammy is increasingly lonely. Rosa offers to fix him up on dates with attractive women, but somehow Sammy does not want this.

Instead, Sammy blunders into a homosexual relationship with Tracy Bacon. When the homosexual retreat house on the New Jersey shore is raided by the police, Sammy is confronted with the penalties of being homosexual in the 1940s. Even in the more liberated era of today, there are penalties to many people who decide to be open about their homosexuality. Sammy must decide if the price of being himself is worth it; he decides it is not. Whether Sammy made the right decision or not is not clear. As all people learn in life, there are pluses and minuses to many decisions people make. By marrying Rosa, Sammy has a stable life and a productive partnership with Rosa in making comic-books. Once Joe returns, Sammy decides to return to a homosexual lifestyle in Los Angeles, when he is over 30 years old. Sammy decides to change his identity again, which many people, after their late teens and early twenties, refuse to do. In that way, he finally becomes a mature adult and makes his choice.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view is third person, from a multiple person standpoint. In fact the book has a strong quality of being event-driven, and thereby maintaining a continuity, although the point of view, from the third person, is from many different people. In the beginning section of the book, in the scenes of Joe's escape from Prague, the point of view is exclusively from Joe. In the first chapter, when Joe is thrown by Sammy's mother, into Sammy's bed, the point of view is from the inner thoughts of Sammy. The same is true of Part I, Chapter 4, which is a flashback of Sammy's childhood together with his father, the Mighty Molecule.

The most interesting scenes from the standpoint of Point of View, are those where Joe and Sammy are together. In these scenes, the story is mostly told in the form of conversations, although there are some comments on the inner thoughts of both Joe and Sammy. There are some chapters which are flashbacks or asides, such as the chapter about the history of the Escapist and why the Escapist helps the oppressed. Other than that, there is a viewpoint from the joint collaboration of Joe and Sammy, until the fateful evening when Joe meets Rosa again, at the party. After that, the book is broken up into long sections where the primary viewpoint is either that of Sammy, Joe or later, Rosa. What keeps this together is the voice of a narrator who is all knowing, and as in a play or a movie announcer, narrates the overall scene and direction of the action. In this way, the book is coherent, while having quite intimate viewpoints of several characters, though always told from a third-person point of view.

## Setting

The main setting for most of the book is New York City, with some important exceptions. The book begins in Sammy's mother's apartment, in Brooklyn NY, on Ocean Avenue. The action quickly moves to lower Manhattan, which is both the location of Sammy's employer, Empire, Distributors of Novelties and the nearby apartment of Sammy's friends, the so-called, Palooka Studios. Later, important action takes place in the Empire State Building, then the tallest building in the world, on 34th St., and at the Saks family house, in Greenwich Village. Additionally, some action takes place in lower Manhattan. Another scene is the apartment that Joe and Sammy rent and the new apartment on the West Side that Joe prepares for his brother Thomas and him. Other scenes are at Manhattan locations such as the Hotel Trevi, other hotels, and in the outer borough of Queens, where the World's Fair takes place and later is an abandoned site. An important turning point scene takes place at James Love's house on the New Jersey shore.

Large parts of Part I of the book take place in Prague and Nazi-occupied Europe. Part IV of the book, Radioman, describes Joe's adventures while serving in the US Navy in



Antarctica, and takes place in Antarctica. Many of Joe's thoughts while in Antarctica center on Sammy and Rosa in New York and Brooklyn, and on his family in a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. In Part VI of the book, major scenes take place in Sammy and Rosa's home in the suburbs, in Bloomtown, NY. A key final scene takes place at the US Senate Hearings and a nearby bar in Manhattan. So while the setting does go out of the greater New York City area, it follows the various adventures of Sam Clay and Joe Kavalier.

## Language and Meaning

The language is clear and descriptive, with a fairly high vocabulary level. In fact, a rather funny dichotomy is created, where the story is mainly about the creation of comics, which is reputed to be a banal, dumbed-down media, but the book is written with a rather developed vocabulary. This can be more clearly seen in the Chapters where actual comic stories are quoted and developed. There the dialogue is much more to the point and direct, with simpler language used. This is used in the story of the development of the Escapist and why he fights, and also the story behind Luna Moth, the superhero whose alter-ego is Judy Dark. In many other scenes that describe Joe and Sammy's development as people, the vocabulary is at a quite high level.

It is as if the author decided to intentionally use a highly-developed vocabulary to describe an art-form, comic-books, which has been described as trash, degrading, decadent, perverse, and having an evil, subliminal influence on children. Perhaps the message from the author is that even if comic-books is a straight-forward and uncomplicated media, the emotions of its creators are complicated and intense like those of artists in any other art-form. In another sense, some of the more descriptive passages about comic-book heroes and villains may be an idealized form of comic-book art, which has never occurred in fact, but the author dreams, would have been interesting if it did occur. So, in the "Golden Age," Part IV, Chapter 5, Carl Ebling is described in complicated terms, as he is transformed into a real-life version of the Saboteur. The Saboteur is described as "nefarious" and working on a "gleaming obsidian table" as he plots against the "mongrels." His lair is described as a "cavernous armory." This language has a romantic and gothic quality to it that would never be seen in a real comic-book.

## Structure

The book is divided into six general parts and numerous chapters. In Part I, "The Escape Artist," the general theme of the escape artist is laid out, with Joe being the real-life escape artist. In Part II, "A Couple of Boy Geniuses," Sam Clay and Joe Kavalier establish their collaboration and then, with the sponsorship of Empire Comics, create the ground work for a successful enterprise. This part includes chapters going through details of the boyhood of Sammy and the background of the character, the Escapist. Part III, "The Funny-Book War" goes into the details of the successful unfolding of Empire Comics. Joe and Sammy's boss, Shelly Anapol is making tons of money, but



Joe is not satisfied. Soon, Joe gets into a string of fights against against Germans, including his nemesis, Carl Ebell. Joe is diverted from his little war by meeting his girlfriend, Rosa Saks, and getting into a real scheme to save his brother, Thomas.

Part IV is the main part of the book, titled, "The Golden Age," and lasting almost 200 pages. Joe settles down with Rosa, as his lover, and Sammy meets Tracy Bacon, a tall, handsome man, who becomes Sammy's boyfriend. Sammy and Joe learn new things about art and drawing and create intellectual improvements in their comic-books. They are told not to attack the Nazis, and this yields comic-books that involve superheroes but are more about everyday people. In the end of this part, war begins, and both Joe and Sammy's schemes and relationships unravel, including the death of Joe's brother, Thomas. In Part V, Joe goes to Antarctica for the US Navy, where he barely escapes with his life. His sanity emerges less intact. At the end of the book, Part VI, "The League of the Golden Key," the various relationships and traumas of Joe, Sammy and Rosa are more or less resolved. Joe is brought out of hiding through contact with his biological son, Tommy, and sleeps on the couch at Sammy and Rosa's. The hollowness of Sammy and Rosa's marriage is exposed, and it soon fractures. The foreshadowed debate on the trashiness of comics is aired in a Senate hearing, including personal attacks on Sammy. Finally, Sammy returns to his homosexual identity and leaves for Los Angeles, and Rosa and Joe are reunited as a couple.



# Historical Context

## Conflict in the Middle East

In the 1990s, tensions increased in Middle Eastern countries such as Israel and Iraq. Palestinian dissidents stepped up their efforts to separate from the State of Israel, and some of these protests escalated to terrorism, including bombing public places and shooting innocent people if they crossed into the wrong territory. On November 4, 1995, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist because of Rabin's role in negotiating peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Following the Gulf War in 1991, worldwide concern grew that Iraq was stockpiling weapons and possibly attempting to build nuclear weapons. The United States has historically taken a hard-line approach to dealing with Saddam Hussein, who was president of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. Hostility between Hussein and the United States threatened to escalate the problem of Iraq disarmament in the late 1990s, forcing United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan to step in and negotiate new arrangements, including U.N. inspectors to search Iraq for weapons of mass destruction. These arrangements did not last long. Paul Wolfowitz, a U.S. military analyst, called for more aggressive action, which presidents Clinton and Bush tempered with less hostile philosophies such as those proposed by then secretary of state Colin Powell.

Although there is no evidence connecting the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (the 9/11 terrorists were citizens of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt) and Iraq or Hussein, the Bush administration linked them. Overnight opinions in Washington changed in regard to the disarmament of Iraq and arguments were made for a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Hundreds of thousands took to streets in the United States and in other countries to protest the aggression, to no avail.

## Gaming

Comic books have maintained a presence into the 1990s in the United States, but computers and video game consoles have replaced books and magazines as the major source of solitary entertainment available to young people. The wildly popular Sony PlayStation game console was first released in 1995, using more advanced technology than was previously available for similar systems. Other companies moved quickly to keep up with PlayStation, including the Nintendo 64 in 1996, Sega Dreamcast in 1999, PlayStation 2 in 2000, and the Microsoft Xbox in 2001.

Computer games for use on personal computers became more technologically advanced in the 1990s. First-person, three-dimensional shooter games were particularly popular, games such as Doom (five separate games released from 1993-1996), Quake (1996), and Half-Life (1998). Controversy over the violent content of these games and their connection to juvenile delinquency echoes arguments made about television and



movie content or Dr. Fredric Wertham's opinions about comic books in his book *Seduction of the Innocents* (1954).

## Gay Rights

A decade after AIDS and HIV first appeared in the United States in 1981, this virus was still a major topic within gay and lesbian communities of the 1990s. In the early 2000s, much more was understood as to how AIDS is transmitted and can be treated, helping to reduce fear and give hope to living with the disease. Gay rights activists in the 1990s were increasingly concerned with marginalized groups such as those who are transgender or intersexual. Transgender individuals identify with a gender other than their birth gender and may undergo hormone therapy or surgery. An intersexual person is born with genitalia or secondary sexual characteristic that combine genders or are otherwise ambiguous. As with other minority groups, gay and lesbian activists seek social equality.

## Y2K

Y2K is an abbreviation for the year 2000. In the late 1990s, many people became increasingly concerned about the approaching millennium change. Businesses had to check their software to make sure that it was compliant with a rollover to the year 2000, resulting in costly upgrades and overhauls. Some people were worried about sudden shortages of energy, water, or other necessities (as a result of businesses not being prepared) and chose to stock up on supplies. Cults proclaiming the end of the world and other dramatic prophesies gained some attention. The world celebrated a momentous and peaceful event the evening of December 31, 1999. Even though the millennial rollover affected businesses when moving from the year 1999 to 2000 and many people around the world believed the new millennium arrived then, others maintained that the new millennium did not arrive until January 1, 2001. The year 2000 was also the beginning of a mild recession in the United States, following a decade of strong economic growth. Thus the new millennium, for many, seemed to mark the passing of a golden age—much as Sammy feels in 1941, just before the United States enters World War II.

## Rwandan Genocide

The Rwandan genocide involved two ethnic groups, the displaced Tutsis and the government-leading Hutus. Over the course of only four months in 1994, extremist Hutu militia murdered approximately one million Tutsis and Hutus. The genocide ended when Tutsi rebels finally overthrew the Hutu-led government and the Hutus fled the country. The number of people killed and how quickly they were killed was shocking. The Rwandan genocide is also significant because of the meager response of the United Nations, which failed to intervene to help prevent the genocide when mounting tensions in the region foreshadowed such an outcome. While in the early 2000s, Rwanda was

still recovering from this brutal period in its history, ethnic wars continued to rage across Africa (particularly in the Democratic Congo, Burundi, and the Sudan), some motivated by continued aggression between Tutsi and Hutus.



## Critical Overview

Chabon has been popular with readers and favored by critics since the publication of his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, in 1988. His novels are distinct and imaginative. Tom Deignan and other critics have observed that, with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, Chabon has finally come into his own as a writer. Stewart O'Nan, writing for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, compliments Chabon's larger-than-life comic book style of writing but feels that the length makes this grandiose language exhausting for the reader: "At its best, *Kavalier and Clay* is a heady, frothy concoction, finely drawn and broadly comic, but in its own baroque . . . runs the risk of collapsing of its own weight." In a review for the *New York Times*, Janet Maslin describes Chabon's third novel as "excitingly imaginative" with "loving if sometimes windy detail." Ken Kalfus, also writing for the *New York Times*, celebrates Chabon's "passionate, expressive language." He observes that this novel is "generously optimistic about the human struggle for personal liberation." John Podhoretz, in an article for *Commentary*, echoes the novel's sentiment that so much of what defines the American way sprang from the hearts and minds of recent immigrants. Podhoretz writes that *Kavalier & Clay* is an ambitious book, but it "does not have all that much of interest to say. . . . A wonderful book but, despite its scope, a small one."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1





# Critical Essay #1

*Ullmann is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, Ullmann applies Joseph Campbell's model of an archetypal hero journey to Joe Kavalier's experience in The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay.*

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, by Michael Chabon, is a sweeping tale of grand proportions that uses some of the bold, over-the-top stylistic devices of comic books, such as archetypes. Critics have noted that Joe Kavalier, although quiet and hardworking, is also suave, competent, talented, and indestructible. Joe's uncanny abilities are not overstated to the point of magic realism, but he is as supernatural and heroic as the characters he illustrates for his comic books. The work of Joseph Campbell, an expert in the fields of comparative mythology and comparative religion, was heavily influenced by psychologist Carl Jung. Campbell's seminal text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), provides the following outline for the journey of the archetypal hero, a hero just like Joe Kavalier.

1. The Call to Adventure
2. Refusal of the Call
3. Supernatural Aid
4. The Crossing of the First Threshold
5. The Belly of the Whale or Rebirth
6. The Road of Trials
7. The Meeting with the Goddess or the Attainment of Knowledge
8. Woman as the Temptress or Fear of Failure
9. Atonement with the Father
10. Apotheosis or Glorification
11. The Ultimate Boon
12. The Refusal of Return
13. The Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16. Master of the Two Worlds, Supernatural and Human



## 17. Freedom to Live

The first part of Joe's journey is simply getting out the door, that is, departure. Joe's call to adventure is the encroaching Nazi presence in Czechoslovakia and his family's decision to send him to his aunt in the United States. Joe's mother sells her favorite emerald to help pay for Joe to leave. Saying good-bye at the train station, Joe blithely refuses the call with his foolish stoicism when faced with the heartbreak of his family who weep while he is impatient to leave. This is a refusal because Joe's attention is on the enjoyment of travel rather than the seriousness of his family's situation. When the authorities send him back to Prague, Joe cannot pretend he is having fun anymore. He goes to his former mentor, the retired performing escapist Bernhard Kornblum, for help. Kornblum, here and throughout Chabon's novel, is Joe's supernatural aid. Ever after, Joe has dream-like visions of Kornblum whenever he needs guidance.

The guardian of the first threshold is the Golem. (Golem is a creature from Jewish legend, created by Rabbi ben Loeb to protect the Jews of Prague from persecution.) With Kornblum's aid, Joe passes this threshold by finding the Golem and preparing it for their passage to Lithuania. Joe enters the proverbial belly of the whale, a place of rebirth, when he hides inside the Golem's casket and travels toward freedom. Emerging safe in Lithuania nearly two days later, Joe is reborn from the Golem's dusty chamber. He can never return to the home he once knew because it no longer exists. Literally speaking, Joe's family has been forced by the Nazis to move from their comfortable apartment. Figuratively, Joe is not a boy anymore. He has successfully completed the first part of his journey, and he is now a man, although still young.

The next stage is initiation. On the road of trials, Joe encounters many tests as well as helpers. In this part of his story, Joe successfully creates and establishes the Escapist, with the help of Sammy and against those who would hinder, redirect, or hold them back, i.e., Anapol, Ashkenazy, and Deasey. He survives numerous fights with various German people and struggles with Carl Ebling (including a bomb attack). Joe perseveres despite set backs such as his father's death, difficulties with the German adjutant, and strident negotiations with his boss about money and artistic freedom.

In the meeting with the goddess, also sometimes called a marriage, the hero attains knowledge of life. Rosa is Joe's goddess and his muse. Her influence in his life and their deep love for each other quell much of Joe's anger and frustration that his family is still trapped in Prague. Rosa delivers hope that he may at least be able to rescue his brother. From within this new peace, Joe creates Luna Moth and stops fighting Nazis so that he can focus on his creative expression. He has chosen life/birth over death. He is less aware of worrying as his loved ones are absorbed into the chaos of war, beyond Joe's reach. But when Thomas drowns at sea, Joe has a crisis of faith, and he is engulfed by his own fear of failure. He knows he can no longer reach his mother and grandfather, and now his father and brother are dead. This means Joe has failed in his original purpose in New York City, and he cannot forgive himself for being the one in his family who survives.



Joe flees Rosa and Sammy and takes his pain to Antarctica, where he is stationed by the navy and thus denied a chance to express his anger directly to Nazis. This exile leads to Joe's atonement. He casts off ignorance and at last opens Rosa's letters from the past three years. From them he discovers his love for her as well as a new opportunity for love: his son Tommy. Joe forgives Rosa and himself for his brother's death. Just before leaving on his sworn mission to finally kill a German, Joe sends his victim a warning. This is his apotheosis or glorification because Joe, having forgiven himself, can return to life. Face to face with the German geologist, Joe desires only to make a human connection, for now he is grasping his ultimate boon, what Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* calls his "life-transmuting trophy" of love. When the geologist dies anyway, Joe, under the influence of his boon, is more heartbroken than he has ever been, even over the deaths of his family members.

Returning home is the final stage of Joe's adventure and by far the hardest. He imagines Sammy, Rosa, and Tommy living happily ever after, and against the wishes of his own lonely heart, he forbids himself to return. At this critical point in the journey, the hero may opt to never complete his or her quest. The magic flight is Joe's attempt to return, by degrees, to the life he once knew. It is, by definition, somewhat ridiculous. Joe takes up residence in an office near the top of the Empire State Building because he likes to be near the Escapist. He becomes a hermit and carries on a clandestine friendship with his son Tommy, who thinks Joe is his cousin.

Tommy senses Joe's dilemma, senses that he wants to return but has forgotten how. Tommy is the one who rescues Joe by forcing him out into public where he can reunite with Sammy. Joe crosses the return threshold in his quiet homecoming to Sammy and Rosa's house. He accepts their love and acknowledges that things are not as he thought they were. Sammy and Rosa have created a family that offers space for Joe; indeed, their strange marriage has been waiting for Joe's return for a long time. He is needed; he is home.

The last two phases of the archetypal hero journey demonstrate the hero's new powers. As master of two worlds (the supernatural and the human), Joe uses his million dollars to purchase the failing Empire Comics, enflamed by love of his character, the Escapist, and full of vigor for new work. Joe has no fear of failure or success because of the boon he brings with him, love, which now gains strength through reciprocation. In rediscovering Rosa's love for him and his relationship with Tommy, Joe has the freedom to live. His strange quest is over, and he returns to ordinary life, older and wiser. Thus is a hero made. Sammy, at the end of the novel, departs for Los Angeles—but that is a different hero's story for a different day.

Campbell's thesis, as a Jungian mythographer, is that the hero journey lives within every human being and is an essential story for all humankind. People experience the hero journey in their dreams, which are transformed into stories; it is a pattern of timeless meaning. The hero, unlike the king and other roles which are merely assigned, is made through self-achievement. Joe Kavalier is a quietly fantastical character, but he is also, more importantly, a real-life hero: a performing magician, a brilliant illustrator of a popular comic book, a soldier, a father, and a man dedicated to the rescue of his family



from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. Joe's qualities add up to larger-than-life proportions and distance him from readers as a sympathetic character—but like any celebrity, he is no less appealing to observe.

**Source:** Carol Ullmann, Critical Essay on *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.



## Quotes

"The shame of Josef's departure, however, was nothing compared to the unbearable ignominy of his return."

Part I, Chap. 2, P. 19

"At a certain point, Josef realized that his limbs felt warm now, even hot, and that he was drowning. His last conscious perception was of Bernard Kornblum cutting through the water toward them, his bushy beard tied up in a hair net."

Part I, Chap. 3, P. 56

"After relieving Josef of the burden of his innocence the previous night, in a procedure that required less time than it now took her to brew a pot of coffee, Trudi had pulled on her cherry-pink kimono and gone out to the parlor to study a text on phlebotomy, leaving Josef to the warmth of her goose-down counterpane, the lilac smell of her nape and cheek lingering on the cool pillow, the perfumed darkness of her bedroom, the shame of his contentment."

Part I, Chap. 4, P. 47

"Anapol grinned. 'Get a load of this guy,' he said. 'You just get me a Superman,' he went on, putting a placating hand on Sammy's shoulder."

Part II, Chap. 2, P. 88

"She was lying passed out on her belly, her sprawling right leg kicked free of the blankets and leaving exposed rather more than half of a big and fetching tuchis."

Part II, Chap. 6, P. 116

"As for Hitler, he came flying at you backward, right-crossed clean out of the painting, head thrown back, forelock a-splash, arms flailing, jaw trailing a long red streamer of teeth."

Part II, Chap. 11, P. 150

"By the time the Adirondack pulled into Albany that afternoon, Joe's adventure into the unknown of war had come to seem one unknown too many for him to bear. He had convinced himself that it was far more likely that both his mother and Thomas were still alive."

Part III, Chap. 3, P. 189

"'For what it's worth, here's the warning now. Or call it advice, if you like. You boys were powerless when you signed that contract last year. you aren't quite so powerless anymore. You've had a good run. You've come up with some good ideas that have sold well.'"

Part III, Chap. 3, P. 225

"'Is he a fairy?' Rosa was, at that moment, asking Joe. They were still sitting on her bed, holding hands. Joe was at first shocked by this suggestion, and then suddenly not. 'Why



would you say that?' he said."  
Part III, Chap. 10, P. 255

"The addition of sex to the costumed-hero concept was a natural and, apart from a few minor efforts at other companies—was a natural and, apart from a few minor efforts at other companies— the Sorceress of Zoom, the Woman in Red— yet to be attempted."  
Part III, Chap. 14, P. 277

"Big, radiant, confident fellows with string-bass voices always made him feel acutely how puny, dark, and Jewish he was, a goofy little curlicue of ink stamped on a sheet of splintery paper.,,,Bacon grip was firm and dry, and he pumped Sammy's hand up and down half a dozen times."  
Part IV, Chap. 1, P. 303

"Ebling just had time to say 'No.' Then a sheet of heavy foil seemed to fall onto Joe's head, to wrap his face and throat and ears in crumpling steel. He was thrown backward, and something hot, a burning wire, was laid with a hiss across his forehead."  
Part IV, Chapter6, P. 337

"Bacon's breath was sour with wine, but one sweet drop of the stuff lingered on his lips as he pressed his mouth against Sammy's. The stubble on their chins scraped with a soft electric rasp."  
Part IV, Chap. 7, P. 352

"The following day Rosa came straight to the Empire offices from the T.R.A. and burst into tears in Joe's arms. She told Joe that Mr. Hoffman had, almost as an afterthought, placed a call that afternoon to the Washington offices of the President's Advisory Committee.... To his astonishment,...it looked as all of the children's visas were going to be revoked for reasons of 'state security.'"  
Part IV, Chap. 12, P. 381

"He also smashed the camera of a photographer who sold to the Hearst papers, an act for which all of his friends were later grateful."  
Part IV, Chap. 15, P. 411

"The winter drove them mad. It drove every man mad who had ever lived through it; there was only ever the question of degree."  
Part V, Chap. 3, P. 437

"Had Joe read the letters from Rosa as they arrived, with gaps of weeks and months between them, he might have been deceived by the falsifying of the date of baby Thomas's birth, but read all at once— as a kind of continuous narrative— the letters betrayed just enough inconsistency in their accounting of months and milestones that Joe became suspicious, and his initial stab of jealousy and his deep puzzlement over Rosa's hasty marriage to Sammy gave way to a sad understanding."  
Part V, Chap. 4, P. 456-7



"Before today, how many people knew this whole story about how you and your cousin were robbed and cheated and taken advantage of?"

Part VI, Chap. 4, P. 494

"The man with the large nose looked up, smiling at whatever little stunt he had just pulled off, his deep-set, heavy-lidded blue eyes unimpressed with himself. The other magicians swore in appreciation of the trick. The sad blue eyes met Tommy's. They widened. The door closed."

Part VI, Chap. 5, P. 501

"His confidence in his ability to pull off the trick of leaping from the roof, plunging to a maximum of 162 feet in the direction of the far-distant sidewalk, then reascending, tugged skyward by the enormous rubber band, to alight smiling at the feet of the policemen, appeared to be absolute."

Part VI, Chap. 8, P. 531

"It's not about me personally: It doesn't even identify me by name. It just talks about stories I wrote. The Lumberjack. The Rectifier. But not just mine.... There's stuff about Wonder Woman. About how she's a little... a little on the butch side."

Part VI, Chap. 12, P. 566

"I killed him. Or let's say he's retired. I called Louis Nizer, I told him, Nizer, you win. As of today, the Escapist is officially retired. I give up. I'm settling. I'm signing his death warrant."

Part VI, Chap. 14, P. 588

"Hendrickson: 'Isn't it true that you actually have a reputation in the comic book field for being particularly partial to boy sidekicks?' Clay: 'I'm not aware— no one has ever—'"

Part VI, Chap. 17, P. 615

"To prove a point, is what you're saying'

'Yes. About how nobody can tell us how to live, and it takes all kinds, and mind your own damn business. Like that."

Part VI, Chap. 20, 634

# Adaptations

*The Amazing Website of Kavalier & Clay* at <http://www.sugarbombs.com/kavalier/> is a fan site for Chabon's book created and maintained by Nate Raymond. It collects reviews, historical information, artwork, news, and more.

*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* has been adapted as an abridged audio book narrated by David Colacci. It was produced by Brilliance Audio in 2005 and was, as of 2006, available on both compact disc and cassette tape.





## Topics for Further Study

Individually or in groups, create a superhero and write a story featuring him or her. Include a weakness along with a superpower, a villain, a secret identity, and sidekick or other supporters. For extra credit, illustrate your tale.

Science has traditionally been important to superheroes and their villains, either as a source of superpower or inventions to aid in fighting or causing crime. What area of science interests you? For example, biology, nuclear physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, etc. Dream up an invention or application of technology within your field of interest that would be an aid to a superhero or villain. Create an illustrated poster demonstrating your idea.

Research a heroic figure from legend or history. Does this figure fit any of the superhero criteria such as a secret identity, superpowers, and an idealistic mission? Write a brief report to share with your classmates.

One of Rosa's artistic expressions is a dreambook. In her dreambook, Rosa uses collage, illustration, and text to tell the stories she experiences when she is dreaming. Find or make a blank journal and create your own dreambook based on a dream you have had.

The Holocaust took a terrible toll of loss and displacement on the groups targeted by the Nazis. Unfortunately, genocide still happens to this day. Research an incident of genocide that has happened in the recent past, examining why it was carried out and what can be done to stop future genocides.

Letter writing was an important form of communication before widespread use of email in the 1990s. Write a letter by hand (not computer) to a friend or family member whom you do not see often. Tell the person what is new in your life and any interesting stories that have happened to you. Enclose relevant photographs, drawings, or article clippings. After your teacher has checked that you have completed the assignment, mail your letter.

Joe spends most of a year stationed on Antarctica, monitoring radio waves for the U.S. Navy. Research current political and scientific activity relating to this unusual continent. Also look up information about Antarctica's climate and geography. Which countries have laid claim to portions of Antarctica? What scientific studies are being conducted there and why? Are there parts of Antarctica that have yet to be explored? How does the size of the land mass today compare to one hundred years ago? Write an essay about the current importance of Antarctica.

Under Judaic law, a boy reaches maturity when he turns thirteen and is made a bar mitzvah (□son of the commandment□). Girls are made bat mitzvahs (□daughters of the commandment□) at twelve years of age. They are then responsible for following and upholding Jewish traditions, which is expressly a religious aspect of Judaism. Secular or



ethnic Jews do not always choose to become a bar or bat mitzvah. What other rites of passage do you know? What time of life do they typically occur? Are they cultural, religious, or related to some other aspect of life? What are the components of the ritual? What are the conferred rewards and responsibilities? Prepare a presentation for your class using PowerPoint, slides, overheads, or other visual aids.

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and Joe's childhood home. What foods are particular to the Czech people? Research authentic Czech recipes, assemble a cookbook to distribute to each student in the class, have everyone select a different recipe to prepare, and then host a Czech food day. What are your favorite dishes? What flavors are unusual to you? Is there anything you would like to make again? Share your answers with your classmates as you enjoy this new cuisine.

The Empire State Building has captured people's imaginations since it was built in 1931. What are some examples of the Empire State Building being used in a creative work such as a novel, poem, movie, painting, photography, or song? How has the artist interpreted this structure? Let inspiration strike and create something new that involves the Empire State Building in some way. As a class, put on an exhibition and share your work with the rest of your school, friends, and family.



# Compare and Contrast

**1940s:** World War II begins in 1939. The United States becomes directly involved in 1941. By the time the war ends in 1945, over 62 million soldiers and civilians are dead, marking this as the world's deadliest war to date.

**1990s:** A series of civil wars and armed conflicts break out in the former Yugoslav republic in 1991 and lasts until 2001. Reported numbers of deaths vary but range between 100,000 and 200,000 civilians and soldiers on all sides.

**Today:** The United States invades Iraq in 2003, beginning the Second Gulf War (also known as the Iraq War). As of 2006, approximately 3,000 Americans and perhaps as many as 500,000 Iraqis have been killed.

**1940s:** In this Golden Age of comic books, the most popular superheroes are Superman, Batman, and Captain America.

**1990s:** The Modern Age of comic books is sometimes also called the Gimmick Age, the Dark Age, or the Diamond Age, for a variety of reasons. The X-men team of superheroes enjoys resurgence in popularity. Anti-heroes such as Spawn and Venom also become trendy.

**Today:** Japanese comic books called *manga* are extremely popular with readership comprising 60 percent women, a sharp contrast to the male-dominated readership of comic books. Popular series include *Chobits* and *Doraemon*.

**1940s:** Levitt & Sons builds the first planned suburban community, named Levittown, on Long Island in New York, starting in 1947. Over 17,000 single-family dwellings are built in five years.

**1990s:** In the United States, economic prosperity and cost-effective construction lead to suburban communities with exceptionally large, mass-produced houses on small plots of land. These look-alike houses are sometimes referred to as McMansions.

**Today:** People are more interested in higher density living for the first time in over fifty years due to environmental concerns (pollution and destruction of wildlife habitat), rising gas prices, and health concerns (people in urban areas walk more). The majority of Americans still live in suburban areas.

**1940s:** Letter writing and the telegraph are major forms of long-distance personal communication. The telephone is used primarily to communicate within a local area.

**1990s:** Electronic mail, called email, grows in popularity, thanks in part to ubiquitous usage on college campuses and within businesses.

**Today:** Cellular phones are a popular way for people to keep in touch as well as to express personal style. Email remains important as well.



**1940s:** Prior to World War II, Jews in Prague number 50,000.

**1990s:** Following the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, Jews in Prague number about 800.

**Today:** With the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989, known as the Velvet Revolution, the population of Jews in Prague rises to 1,600.

**1940s:** Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi governor of the region and possible successor to Hitler, is assassinated by Czech soldiers in 1942. In 1945-1946, Czech citizens expel 3,000,000 Germans from their country in an effort to revolt against the Nazis. The Soviet Army invades in 1948 and establishes communist rule in Czechoslovakia.

**1990s:** Czechoslovakia divides into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. The Czech Republic becomes part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999.

**Today:** The Czech Republic is part of the European Union. Prague is a popular city with tourists, businesses, and the film industry. The Czech economy grows but has a reputation for corruption.

## What Do I Read Next?

*Tales to Astonish: Jack Kirby, Stan Lee and the American Comic Book Revolution* (2004), by Ronin Ro, covers the life and career of influential comic book artist, Jack Kirby.

*Superman Chronicles, Volume 1* (2006) is a collection by the original Superman creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. In this graphic novel, they reprint all of Superman's early appearances, beginning in 1938.

*The Final Solution: A Story of Detection* is Michael Chabon's 2004 novel about an aged Sherlock Holmes engaged in solving one last mystery.

*Houdini!!! The Career of Ehrich Weiss* (1996), by Kenneth Silverman, is an acclaimed biography of the world's most famous escape artist. It contains more than a hundred photos, many of them rare and previously unseen.

*Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Volume I, 1986; Volume II, 1991), by Art Spiegelman, is a graphic novel memoir with comic-like drawings about Spiegelman's father and how he survived World War II and the Holocaust. *Maus* won many awards, including the 1992 Pulitzer Prize Special Award.

*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2001), by Dave Eggers, is a critically acclaimed memoir about Eggers' life as a single-parent to his younger brother after the death of both of their parents. Eggers is the editor of *McSweeney's*, a publishing house to which Chabon has strong ties.

*A Model World and Other Stories* (1991), by Michael Chabon, is the author's first collection of short stories. These stories are about quirky individuals in ironic situations.



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss a person going through a crisis of identity. Sammy begins the story acting like a regular guy. After Joe forms a relationship with Rosa, Sammy is rather isolated socially. He forms a relationship with Tracy Bacon, which he ends after the authorities beat and rape Sammy. Then, Sammy marries and only later decides to be free of his marriage. Can a person decide to change their sexual orientation? Under what circumstances would this be possible?

Discuss the Jewish community during the Nazi era and World War II. Many European Jews, such as Joe Kavalier's family in Czechoslovakia, are totally secular and are caught by surprise by the Nazi persecution. In New York, Joe fights a low level war against Germans and Nazis, which has little relationship to the events going on in Europe. Does the book make any sense about the relationship between Jews and their Nazi persecutors?

Discuss if comic books have redeeming value or are a bad influence on children. Are they really trash? Ironically the book is written at a fairly high vocabulary and conceptual level, but it is about comic-books. Can comic-books be an art-form?

Discuss the Senate Hearings on comic books. Is this a witch hunt? Have these attacks been exaggerated? While comic-books could easily be attacked for a low intellectual content, could they be accused of subliminally promoting pederasty?

Is escapism a legitimate state of mind to seek. Do the fantasies of instant justice meted out by a superhero constitute a form of escapism? What is the appeal of comic-books to boys and girls?

Describe Joe's life in the US base in the Antarctic. Is this typical of people based in remote areas of the north and the south of the planet? How many people are based there currently? Is it as difficult as the author describes in the case of Joe?

Discuss the "Golem." Of what is the Golem a symbol? Is the Golem a religious figure or could it be a forerunner of modern superheroes in comic-books?

Discuss life in the suburbs. Do Sammy and Rosa lose a lot by not living in New York City? Is this isolation, for the sake of a garden and quiet, a form of escapism?

Discuss Rosa and her bohemian lifestyle. Rosa is described as a girl, who even in the 1930s, is not ashamed of her sexuality. With her appearance in the book, naked on a young man's bed, she is not portrayed as a virgin when she meets Joe. Yet, she is faithful to Joe and later to Sammy, despite an unconventional marriage. Or is she faithful to Sammy? There are some hints in the story that she is not.



## Further Study

Amundsen, Roald, *The South Pole*, Cooper Square Press, 2001.

This book gives a first-hand account of Amundsen's 1911 expedition to the South Pole.

Chabon, Michael, and others, *Michael Chabon Presents: The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist*, Vol. 1-3, Dark Horse Comics, 2004-2006.

This series of graphic novels reprint the *Escapist* comic books along with original content. Dark Horse Comics launched *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* following the popularity of Chabon's novel.

McCloud, Scott, *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form*, Harper, 2000.

This book, told in McCloud's boldly black and white comic style, examines the Internet as the next frontier for the comic book industry.

□□□, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Kitchen Sink Press, 1993.

McCloud examines comics as art and as communication media. Although his arguments are rigorous, the content is laid out as a black and white comic book.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis, *The Golem*, illustrated by Uri Shulevitz, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982.

Nobel laureate Isaac Singer retells the story of the legendary Golem of Prague. This is one of Singer's most famous short stories.



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Maslin, Janet, "A Life and Death Story Set in Comic Book Land," in *New York Times*, September 21, 2000, pp. B10, E10.

O'Nan, Stewart, Review of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, in *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 17, 2000, p. G8.

Podhoretz, John, Review of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, in *Commentary*, Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 68-72.





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The Gale Group, Inc

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of *Novels for Students (NfS)* is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, *NfS* is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently



studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

### Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

### Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students  
Gale Group  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535