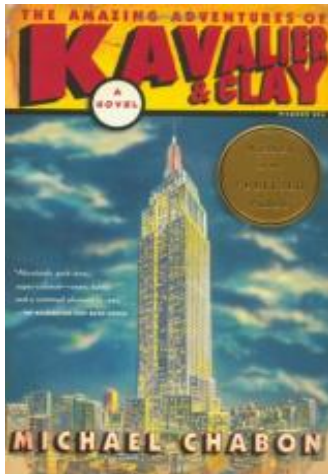


# The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay

by Michael Chabon



## About the Book

With this brilliant novel, the bestselling author of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* and *Wonder Boys* gives us an exhilarating triumph of language and invention, a stunning novel in which the tragicomic adventures of a couple of boy geniuses reveal much about what happened to America in the middle of the twentieth century. Like Phillip Roth's *American Pastoral* or Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* is a superb novel with epic sweep, spanning continents and eras, a masterwork by one of America's finest writers.

It is New York City in 1939. Joe Kavalier, a young artist who has also been trained in the art of Houdini-esque escape, has just pulled off his greatest feat to date: smuggling himself out of Nazi-occupied Prague. He is looking to make big money, fast, so that he can bring his family to freedom. His cousin, Brooklyn's own Sammy Clay, is looking for a collaborator to create the heroes, stories, and art for the latest novelty to hit the American dreamscape: the comic book. Out of their fantasies, fears, and dreams, Joe and Sammy weave the legend of that unforgettable champion the Escapist. And inspired by the beautiful and elusive Rosa Saks, a woman who will be linked to both men by powerful ties of desire, love, and shame, they create the otherworldly mistress of the night, Luna Moth. As the shadow of Hitler falls across Europe and the world, the Golden Age of comic books has begun.

The brilliant writing that has led critics to compare Michael Chabon to John Cheever and Vladimir Nabokov is everywhere apparent in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Chabon writes "like a magical spider, effortlessly spinning out elaborate webs of words that ensnare the reader," wrote Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* about *Wonder Boys*-and here he has created, in Joe Kavalier, a hero for the century.

## Discussion Guide

1. Escape, literally and figuratively, is everywhere in this novel. Why do you think Michael Chabon and the characters in the novel place so much importance on it? From what and to what are the different characters in the novels escaping?

When is escape good in the novel and when is it bad? Can the character of Joe Kavalier ever quit trying to escape, whether it is from place, like Prague and New York, or from relationships, like Rosa and Sammy? When Sammy leaves for LA, is this an escape, and if so, is it good or bad? Why do characters in this novel seem to be trying to escape relationships, and what are the different types of relationships that can be binding? Does the escaping end at the conclusion of the novel?

2. Compare the theme of escape in the novel to escapist nature of art. In what ways does Chabon explore this in his novel through the art of magic, and painting, and comics? How is the novel *THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY* an escape itself and the creation of a world unto itself for the reader? Although the novel is clearly fiction, why do you think Michael Chabon goes to such lengths to make it feel real, by adding real historical facts and fictitious footnotes? Why do you think Chabon chose to write about the medium of comics, as opposed to something else like television or the movies?

3. How are love and family portrayed in the novel? What constitutes a family at different points in the novel? What are the different types of love in the novel? How are the families of Joe, Sammy, and Rosa different, and how are these three people able to make a family themselves? What role does family play in Joe's life? Does it unnecessarily bind him to the past? Why or why not? Is there something special about America that allows for unorthodox types of families? Why do you think Sammy married Rosa? Why did she marry him? Are Sammy and Joe both fathers to Tommy?

4. Joe and Sammy create alter egos for themselves and others in their comic books. What is the significance of this? Do the comic book character give us any insight into the real characters in the book which they resemble. Does the character of Luna Moth help us to understand Rosa or Joe more? What does the character of The Escapist tell us about Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay? Why does Joe dress up as The Escapist before reuniting with Rosa and Sammy?

5. A golem, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is "a man artificially created by cabalistic rites: a robot." Knowing this, what do you think the significance of the golem is in this novel. Why is it so important to preserve the golem, and what is the realization one comes to when the golem is only dirt? Where does the transforming power lie, in the dirt or some other, inexplicable, magic quality? Does the power of the creator die with the creation? Compare the creation of the golem to the creation of The Escapist and other characters by Sammy and Joe and the creation of *THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY* by Michael Chabon.

6. Is this a happy ending? Is Sammy escaping to LA?

## **Author Bio**

Michael Chabon is the bestselling and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of many books, including *THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY*, *THE YIDDISH POLICEMEN'S UNION*, *GENTLEMEN OF THE ROAD*, *TELEGRAPH AVENUE*, *MOONGLOW*, *POPS* and the picture book *THE ASTONISHING SECRET OF AWESOME MAN*. He is the editor, with Ayelet Waldman, of *KINGDOMS OF OLIVE AND ASH: Writers Confront the Occupation* and *FIGHT OF THE CENTURY: Writers Reflect on 100 Years of Landmark ACLU Cases*.

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