This month’s Chains...

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I am writing this not as a criticism or a call to arms, simply a suggestion.

Earlier this year there was an announcement of a ‘World Championship’ for Escapology. This, in of itself, is not a bad thing and I, as a fan, have often wondered why we, as an art form, have not gone down this route in terms of promotion and activity.

Back in the early 2000’s I was blessed to be part of an old Yahoo group (yes, I am that old) which was full of illustrious members, from Mr McColl to Mr Bigelow, Mr Ness to Mr Santini and I would often ask weird and wonderful questions because I had no idea where the boundaries were.
One of them related to the concept of a ‘World Championship’. 
The feedback was polite, diplomatic but firm. No! The reason for that was quite simple, who would judge it? The discussion then proceeded along the lines of, how would you classify an escape? Who would judge and on what scoring system and to what purpose?
This is not to say that the concept of a World Champion is wrong, or that it cannot be done. It is just, how?
I know of Escape Artists that have gone out of the way to make it clear in their billing and bookings that they are not magicians, yet, it would seem that the most common form of judging an escape is by ‘performance’ and would seem to be measured to similar criteria to the judging system in magic competitions.
Again, this is not a bad thing but it then causes a concern as, if we, as an art form, consider our work to not be ‘magic’ then to be assessed using the same criteria as magicians is somewhat counter-productive.
I am reminded of an anecdote, which was based on Bruce Lee’s reaction how Judo and Martial Arts were judged in the 1960’s in the USA. It turned out that these events were ‘non-contact’ with judges trying to estimate how hard a strike would have hurt if it had connected. Mr Lee apparently called it ‘dry land swimming.’ I mention this because there may be another way to test our skills.
So, I propose a four round competition that is full view escapes and more sporting in style, held in a sports hall or similar area.

Round 1 - Open challenge.

Two names are drawn at random. They then each challenge the other with an escape. The whole escape, including set up, must not take more than 5 minutes, so no water torture cells or pillories. There is a ‘joker’ that will allow the challenger to compel the person challenging them to do the escape once they have discovered what it is. This is to prevent the use of king-breakers, the application of led shot or someone bringing two bean giants. If the joker is played and the escape fails, the person playing the joker goes through.

Round 2 – The Race

This is against the clock. The EA starts with 5 handcuffs secured, single locked, up their arms. The EA then shims them open and must run 5 metres to a marked spot where leg irons are applied and double locked. The EA must pick them or unlock them and...
then run back to the start where the 5 handcuffs are reapplied. They escape again, run to the leg irons, secured and double locked again, then repeat escape and return to handcuffs, where the five are applied and escaped from again, them run to the leg irons once the leg irons are removed for a third time the clock stops.

Fastest times go through

**Round 3 – Weighted Strait Jacket**

Again, against the clock. The EA is weighted in the morning of the event and a weighted flak jacket equal to 25% of their weight is placed onto their body (so if 200lbs, 50lbs is added in weight). A regulation Posey SJ is then put on the EA with the straps checked using a strain gauge. That way, all attempts are equal.

Fastest times go through

**Round 4 - Challenge**

The final round is where a random challenge faced by Houdini, Murray, Walker or other historic EA is presented to the finalists, this could be snow chains, this could be tied to a plank etc. Again, fastest escape would win.

There is nothing to prevent other, more traditional, stage or close up competitions taking place around an event like this. It does not expose the art and it does give the onlooker something other than a classical stage performance to view.

Now I know some of you may feel that these are not ‘pure’ escapes and you may be quite right however, technically speaking, the final stage of ‘American Ninja Warrior’ is just climbing a rope. The entire Cross Fit championships are based on different and wacky forms of weight lifting.

As I said at the start, this is a suggestion. If you like it, then do please let me know. My email is stuart.burrell@gmail.com

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“Wild about Harry”
John Cox” Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com
Our mate Dave Richards reports on an event he’s done not too long ago.

Submersion
Event Details
Sat 1 & Sun 2, Sat 15 & Sun 16,
Sat 22 & Sun 23 Sep
2.30pm & 4.30pm

Location:
Old Royal Naval College,
King William Walk,
Greenwich SE10 9NN

We head back in time to 1709, when a Londoner’s common pastime was to watch a good execution, especially pirate executions. In Submersion, the admiralty battles it out with pirates. Captured, the pirates are held in Marshalsea Prison to face up to their crimes and pending execution. We travel to Execution Dock to see our pirate firstly hung, then chained and securely fastened in the river, to allow the traditional three tides of the Thames to wash over him.

The world of theatre and circus come together and on the 250 anniversary of circus, the navy celebrate in circus style, as they witness the start of the pirates demise.

Hold your breath with the pirate as he struggles to free himself in this swashbuckling escapologist event in a re-enactment of Houdini’s water torture cell escape. The pirate is lowered upside down in a tank of water, shackled and padlocked, and has just a nail file to pick the locks and to free himself. See for yourself if he can escape or is doomed to become a warning to other pirates.

Job well done mate!
March 14, 2018

There are no locks or shackles made that can keep these escape artists restrained. Strength, flexibility, patience, a steady hand, and a flair for showmanship — these are the hallmarks of any good escape artist. The practice of “escapology” has been a source of entertainment since the 1860s, and it’s still popular today, continuing to baffle awed spectators wondering just how somebody could get out of these seemingly inescapable traps.

As you might expect, escapology has evolved significantly over the years. Handcuffs and straitjackets were favorite tools used by many of the great escape artists, but as the popularity of the stunts grew, so did the demand for more sensational — and dangerous — performances. Read on to see how the most famous escape artists of all time raised the stakes.

Harry Houdini

Houdini is, by far, the world’s best-known escape artist. Starting his career as an illusionist specializing in card tricks, Houdini soon found that his skills were better suited to escape stunts. On a European tour, he challenged police in each city to put him in shackles in their jails, successfully escaping each time. In Cologne, he was accused by a police officer of using bribery to pull off his escapes. Houdini sued the officer and won the case by opening the judge’s burglar-proof safe.

Houdini elevated the drama in his acts by introducing another element: he would escape restraints while submerged in water or sand. His most famous escape act, “Buried Alive,” nearly killed him when he first performed it. He smoothed out the routine and successfully performed two more variations of this act. The fourth was to be the highlight of his 1927 season — an escape from a straitjacket sealed in a bronze casket and buried in a large tank filled with sand. Unfortunately, Houdini died of peritonitis on October 31, 1926, and the casket he designed for the escape act was instead used to transport his body from Detroit to New York for burial.
Dorothy Dietrich

If Houdini was the best-known male escapologist of all time, Dorothy Dietrich, the “First Lady of Magic,” is certainly the most popular female escape artist. Dietrich’s skills were obvious from a young age, when she often found herself tied up by her six brothers when they pretended to be Wild West cowboys around their home. Supposedly, an aunt saw her setting herself free and asked, “Who do you think you are, Houdini?”

Houdini became a childhood idol of Dietrich, who began imitating his acts. Her flash acts with doves and clever sleight-of-hand routines were particularly popular in her early career. But she soon broke the glass ceiling for female escape artists with increasingly daring acts. She became the first woman to escape from a straitjacket while hanging from a burning rope 15 stories in the air...with no safety net! Her most famous feat — one that Houdini never achieved — was catching a .22 bullet, fired from a gun, in a metal cup in her mouth.

Steve Santini

Known as “The Dark Master” due to his use of heavy metal music and medieval torture instruments in his stage performances, Steve Santini is known for his bent toward the bizarre and macabre. At a young age, Santini apprenticed with a Toronto locksmith, where he learned as much as he could about locks and how they worked. In the evenings, he used that knowledge to practice conquering those same locks.

Santini has more than earned the Ripley’s Believe It or Not! title of “World’s Most Extreme Escape Artist.” In 2010, he set a world record at Ontario’s historic Cornwall Jail by escaping from handcuffs in only seven seconds. In over 35 years of performances, Santini has managed to escape from jails, prisons, and castle dungeons while navigating added obstacles such as flamethrowers, chainsaws, and explosives.
Roslyn Walker
Best known as “The Gentleman Escape Artist,” Roslyn Walker is a British escape artist and stuntman whose performances hearken back to the Victorian era. Walker has recreated two of Houdini’s most challenging stunts — the straitjacket escape and the famous Mirror Handcuff Challenge. In the mirror challenge, though, Houdini had two advantages that Walker did not. Houdini had been able to perform the stunt away from the eyes of the public, and without a time limit. Walker had 10,000 pairs of eyes watching his every move as he performed the stunt within a strict time limit.

In April 2011, Walker broke two world records in the field of escapology. In the first, he escaped from nine handcuffs in one minute, beating the previous record of six. In the second, he managed to free himself from 677 pairs of police handcuffs in one hour.

Do you disagree with Jay the Lockbuster’s choices? Let him know. lockbustersnyc.com

When a man from the Mirror trapped Harry Houdini - but not for long

Our man and a Birmingham blacksmith gave legendary escape artist ‘one of the hardest tests’ he ever had

By Warren Mangers OCT 5, 2013

As the king of escapology there were not many situations Harry Houdini could not wriggle out of.

But at the height of his fame, the legendary showman was stumped by a challenge from the Daily Mirror – to free himself from a pair of handcuffs with a supposedly unpickable lock.

It was March 1904 and Houdini had issued his customary invitation for challenges to spectators at a packed Hippodrome Theatre in London’s West End. Dozens had come forward, each handing him shackles that the self-styled “Handcuff King” slipped out of with astonishing ease.

A great tribute site to the amazing David De-Val

http://www.davidde-val.com/
But then came the Mirror reporter’s turn. He presented the star with a pair of steel cuffs. But Houdini took one look at the lock and refused three times to take up the challenge. He was eventually persuaded to return for a matinee show five days later, where he would pit his wits against the best of British craftsmanship which had produced the sturdy shackles.

It set the scene for a momentous showdown, which is celebrated by a new plaque unveiled this week at the Hippodrome. TV magician and Houdini expert Paul Zenon said: “At this time he was a new boy on the scene and he was at the peak of his publicity.

“It was his second or third time over here and this was a big gig at a new theatre in the middle of town.”

The Mirror handcuffs here made by a Birmingham blacksmith with a lock he spent five years perfecting and believed “no mortal man” could pick.

A string of London’s leading locksmiths had inspected the solid steel shackles and agreed they had never seen such a wonderful or fiendish mechanism.
At first Houdini tried to duck the challenge, claiming he only attempted to escape from regulation police cuffs. But he relented and on March 17 – a week before the entertainer’s 30th birthday – he took to the stage at the sold-out Hippodrome to a standing ovation from 4,000 fans.

He told them: “I do not know whether I am going to get out or not. But I can assure you I am going to try my best.”

Houdini disappeared into his stage cabinet, which he called his “ghost house”, to embark on his escape as the band began to play. After 22 minutes the star’s face poked out – but only to get a better look at the lock in the strong electric light. As the clocked reached 35 minutes Houdini emerged again, his collar broken and sweat pouring down his face, complaining that his knees hurt. The cuffs remained in place, but he insisted he was not done. Admiring his resolve, the Mirror offered the magician a cushion to kneel on.

After another 35 minutes he emerged again, to groans – the shackles were still on. Houdini asked the Mirror man to remove the cuffs so he could take off his coat. The reporter refused, so the escapologist took a penknife from his pocket, flipped the garment over his head and cut it to ribbons. Paul said: “It broke the tension and was a bit of comic relief. It was top showmanship and that was what made his name.”
Determined Houdini went back into the ghost house for a final time. And 10 minutes later, with the band reaching a stirring crescendo, he emerged triumphant – with the cuffs held aloft. After an hour and 10 minutes, he had escaped. The crowd erupted, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, before one man dashed forward, lifted Houdini on to his shoulders and carried him around the arena. It was all too much for the star, who began sobbing. The Mirror later presented him with silver replica of the cuffs and he responded by sending the paper a grateful telegram. He wrote: “I must say it was one of the hardest, but at the same time one of the fairest, tests I ever had.”

Impressed: How The Mirror covered the story
Houdini, born Ehrich Weisz in Budapest, went on to become a global superstar, expanding his act with a range of original stunts including escaping from a Chinese water torture cell and squirming out of a strait jacket while dangling upside down. He even starred in his own films, performing a series of daring escape stunts on screen. Houdini died in 1926 of peritonitis after his appendix burst. He was 52.

Today the venue for his challenge has been transformed into the Hippodrome Casino and is open round the clock. But the stage where he performed is still in place.

Actress Evanna Lynch, who played Luna Lovegood in the Harry Potter films, is the escape artist’s wife Bess in the new production Houdini that is touring the UK. Bess was at his side throughout his career, from his early years as a poor performer in New York, when they ate rabbits he caught to survive, and later as his glamorous assistant during his rise to fame.

Evanna Lynch is playing Houdini’s wife Bess
Taking time out to unveil the plaque, Evanna, 22, said: “I found a beautiful quote from Houdini. He said, ‘We starved together and starred together’. That sums it up.” Some suggest Houdini could not have completed the Mirror challenge without the help of Bess, who -allegedly slipped him a key as she gave him a kiss during the show. But Paul said: “Actually, it was claimed she gave him the key when she passed him a glass of water. It only became a kiss later because that was more romantic. That theory was disproved by witnesses who saw the theatre manager pass Houdini the water.”

The original cuffs are now owned by illusionist David Copperfield and the replica by collector Mike Hanzlick.
August 4th during my DangerMagik performance at the Santa Clara County Fair an insane thing happened. I was presenting my “Broken Arrow” demonstration, where I break an examined arrow with my neck, and had part of an arrow impaled my leg. People always ask if what I do is real. This slow motion video shows it all.

https://www.facebook.com/michael.mezmer/videos/10214678737434566/

As you watch the video, just after the arrow snaps, you will see half of the arrow fly into my leg. After it connects, I reach down and pull the arrow shard out. Fortunately my leg was not heavily damaged, but I pulled some deep splinters out. It was a painful but memorable performance. Make sure to watch with your sound on, the sound of the arrow breaking is pretty dramatic.

Well I guess our mate S. Rob has outdone himself this time. This time with pen to paper he has combined his own personal invention of occult escapology with another of his own ideas, that of humanic possession. In this book Mr. Rob will show you how to possess the Devil himself. What would you do if you could possess Lucifer and have him do your bidding.

This is quite an interesting idea as far an entertainment is concerned. There are so many plays and sketches that involve a “deal with the Devil,” that this seems like a natural backdrop, only in reverse.

Not only the devil, but Beelzebub too, the second most evil entity in hell. Leviathan and Purson will also be yours to command with the escape rituals in this book.

Mr. Rob has certainly come up with an unusual set of rituals and has even attempted to let the pope himself know about them.

So many people feel victimized by the Devil, maybe it is time to take the fight back to him in Hell.

Good luck with your shows.
Harry Houdini wasn’t born. He was invented.

The world’s most famous magician began life as Erik Weisz, the son of a Hungarian rabbi. In 1878 immigration to the U.S. transformed Erik Weisz into Ehrich Weiss. It was the first of many transformations for the man who would become the first international superstar.

*Inescapable*, curated by local performer and magician David London, tells the story of how Ehrich Weiss became Harry Houdini and investigates the technologies, marketing prowess and entertainment trends that transformed him into a superstar.

On one level, the exhibit is pure fun – incorporating magic, escapes, seances, films, rare artifacts and hands-on illusions. On a deeper level, the exhibit pulls back the curtain, revealing the story of the man behind the image.

In addition to the exploration of his early life, visitors will find sections illuminating stages of his life and career:

- **Setting the Stage** describing the struggles of Houdini’s early life and the difficulties faced by his father, artifacts include a Hebrew bible that belonged to Rabbi Weiss.
- **The Self Liberator** featuring a spectacular display of reproduction posters, photos and press clippings, as well as original apparatus, including a straitjacket and milk can that he used in his performances.
- **On the Cutting Edge** investigates his exploration of new technologies and also features clips from his film career and a chance to listen to a rare recording of his voice.
- **Houdini’s Third Act: Exposing Frauds** showcases his crusade against deceptive spiritual mediums.
- **The Final Bow/Curtain Call** sets the record straight on the events that led to his death and explores the séances to contact him by his wife, Bess.
- **Houdini in Maryland** shines a spotlight on his appearances in the state where he performed close to 100 shows during his career. This section also features Houdini’s personal diary from 1898 turned to the page recording his first tour of Maryland (before his success) where he where he repeatedly reports “no dinner,” as he could not afford to eat.

Throughout the exhibit, visitors also will have the opportunity to try out some of Houdini’s magic tricks, including the world’s smallest version of Houdini’s biggest illusion – making a five-ton elephant vanish.”