Comedian Tron Jones was visiting the brick and mortar magic shop, “Best Magic.” He asked for magicians he could get to appear on his weekly podcast. Proprietor and magician Kurt Freitag recommended the editor of The Chainletter as a likely candidate. This is how I wound up sitting on front of Tron’s house talking on his podcast. I had always wondered how a podcast worked, and now having been on one, I still do not know, but at least I watched it happen.
Now, here is the truth. That is not Tron’s house. That is a wonderfully detailed computer generated backdrop. Looks pretty good doesn’t it? Tron and his engineer did a great job of setting it up. Tron interviewed me, but at times I felt like I was interviewing him. I do tend to give good interview, even at times in my life talking my way into jobs for which I was totally under-qualified.

Tron drinks Hennessey Whisky while doing his show and he politely offered me some. I don’t drink. I turned this into a cute interview story and explained how hard it is to get out of handcuffs while drunk, though I had done it. (true story—no lie)

After we interviewed for a bit it was time for me to do my set. I will admit that performing for a stationary camera is harder than an audience, at least for me. I constantly had to make sure I was not stepping off camera range and angle. At one point my volunteer (Tron’s wife) asked if I wanted her off camera. I guess she remembered the range better than I did.

I found out a sad truth, the camera really does add ten pounds to the performer. Oh well. Also the make up department did not bother to tell me I had tied my tie too long. I guess I was nervous. Once I started talking all was well, I can talk to anyone about anything anytime, even if I don’t know what I am talking about. In this case I knew my subject well.

I especially liked that they had my website URL up on the screen while I performed. This was almost a month ago and the number of contacts I have gotten so far is... well, zero. But what the heck, I still had a great time.

The next act up after me was Big Weezy, a tall and large African American man doing very funny observational stand up comedy.

For those of you who know me and have heard me use profanity, you know that I try to watch my language. This is 100% true in my role as a teacher, and nearly 100% true if I am on stage or on camera. I think I was the only one on this show (including the audience members and the engineer) who was not using “R” rated language profusely.

I don’t know how many people actually watch the podcast, but if anyone does see it, I hope they like it. You can see it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDnoB4CZ0Co
The Escape Artist, by Brad Meltzer, published March 6th, 2018, by Grand Central Publishing, is a wonderful blend of magical mystery and magical history. The detective in this murder mystery is a mortician, Jim "Zig" Zwicherowski, and provides an unique and unusual background for solving the crimes of multiple murders. The story is interwoven with history of Harry Houdini and one of Houdini's mentors you may not have heard of, Horatio (Harry) Green Cooke, who was born 1844 in Norwich, Connecticut, and who was known in his time as Abraham Lincoln's favorite magician and escape artist. It turns out that Harry Cooke and Harry Houdini knew each other well and Houdini considered the elder magician as an early mentor. Many historians credit Cooke as being the first escape artist in America. Houdini, of course, became America’s greatest escape artist, and author, Brad Meltzer, uses magic history and magic principles to weave his story of murder most foul and makes it all clear in the end who is the real Escape Artist. As Magicians and Escape Artists yourselves, you'll enjoy watching how a Mortician solves the mystery.

https://www.amazon.com/Escape-Artist-Brad-Meltzer/dp/1455559520

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Editor’s note: I was given this book as a gift because of my career as an escape artist and because of its’ title. I take nothing away from Mr. Meltzer, I think this is a great book, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. The sad truth is there are no escapes in this book. Not one. The title is based on certain character’s choice of code names. That is really it. On the other hand if you enjoy mysteries and fiction books about political intrigue, this might be the book for you. Meltzer does a great job of bringing believable characters to life and making you like, love or hate them.

Thanks Professor, for finding the book and giving your input.

"Wild about Harry"
John Cox”Houdini web site
www.wildabouthoudini.com
Your editor here at The Chainletter has been a comic book reader and comic book fan since 1973. When I saw that S. Rob had written a book about Super-Villains and occult escapology, it certainly got my attention. The fact is I have seen super-hero based escape shows before, and some even feature super-villains. Ever since 1966 when Adam West became Batman, and had to escape from a deadly and diabolical (albeit silly) death trap each week, Super heroes and Escapes have seemed to go hand in hand. Let’s not forget that great book about Harry Houdini where he is called America’s first super-hero.

As always, Mr. Rob starts off with a pictorial about a simple rope escape. Acknowledging that there are other possibilities for escape equipment, he launches into an appropriate report about safety, assistance and “plan B” backup.

First of all, super villains steal. Many are motivated by greed and lust for wealth or material goods. The first ritual concerns calling on the ghost of Blackbeard, who certainly resides in “Hell,” to help you steal the object of your desire. On its own, I have no use for theft, but I could see working this into a script when the hero, magician or escape artist tries to steal back some important object.

Next we meet Aphroditus. Have you ever heard of Aphroditus? I had not, apparently a male (sort of) version of Aphrodite. Villains are experts at creating diversions to cover their exit from a crime scene. Aphroditus will grant the villain a diversion that has to be seen to be believed, and I mean that literally. This ritual when performed will turn everyone into a transvestite. I am not sure from reading the ritual if that means trading clothes with a member of the opposite gender or something more shocking than that, still what a site that would be to see.

A great tribute site to the amazing David De-Val

http://www.davidde-val.com/
You can have a consultation with Hades, the lord of the underworld if you like. You will need some tools to work with but they are easily obtained. Hades is very powerful and can answer most any questions or offer guidance with nefarious plans.

Delos is the Greek God of deception and guile. The next ritual allows you to summon him and discuss your plans from whatever your deception activities may be. Apparently he will cheat people for you when summoned.

The voodoo loa Bosou-Koblamin can help you protect yourself. Villains always seem to have a way to protect themselves from the hero’s attack, and this ritual can set you in the right direction. He can also help you to attack an organization. Many organizations are not quite so above board these days, and many seem to figure well as super villains themselves.

Super Villains always seem to have a way to frame the hero for something he did not do. This gets the police on his tail and can get the public on his back as well. A ritual to a one legged dwarf can be just the trick you need to get false evidence planted against the one you choose.

Loki, the Norse God of mischief apparently can be summoned as well. You can use him to protect yourself or perform acts of sabotage.

OK, so super villainy can be fun. I think there are many ways these rituals might be worked into a show. Maybe not all of them at once, but especially using characters that audiences would recognize, might prove entertaining. Enjoy.
Non-convention is almost here!

We have our first official activity scheduled for the Non-convention to be held in Las Vegas. We will be attending the Las Vegas “Lunch Bunch.”

This is a very strong gathering of magical minded people in the magic-rich Las Vegas area.

The last time I attended this gathering there was a mini-lecture from a local comedy magician who was performing in a Vegas club.

This gathering has had many high level guests speakers and performers and will be a welcome addition to the Escape Artist Non-Convention.

Now to arrange a trip to Dixie Dooley’s Houdini Museum.

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Weekend of June 8th...
Las Vegas - Escape Artist Non-Convention!
Be there?

This is the part of The Chainletter where the editor begs for you to give him some material to publish. No idea what to write?

Well, How about...
Your first escape.
How did you learn to escape?
Your creative process.
Your last escape.
Who is your hero? Why?
What makes a good escape.
Your escape bio.
An escape you saw on TV.
An escape you saw live.
Anything escape related.

This site is well worth the time to study if you want to learn about lock picking.
http://www.lockpickguide.com/

"Without A Key" for all your lock picking needs
http://www.withouteakey.co.uk/
It was February of 2017 when I first heard of the kickstarted campaign to create this Houdini tribute monopoly game. That was 15 months ago. I immediately signed up for a pair of games, one I would examine and/or play, the other to remain sealed and unopened as a possible collector’s item. Dick and Dorothy must have worked their butts off on this, because while it took 15 months to get the game. It took only two weeks to more than fill the Kickstarter campaign to get the ball rolling.

The first thing to notice, before even opening the package, is the bottom of the box. It reads like a who’s who of the magic and escape world listing certain major contributors to the campaign.

The package of custom playing pieces is spectacular, and comes with a certificate of authenticity, again for a possible collector’s item.

Inside the box is a true haven for any Houdini trivia buff as well as more listings of donors to the game’s creation. The monetary amounts have been updated and the properties are all places that were important to Houdini in some way.

The properties, the utilities and railroads have all been Houdini-ized. Of course there is one traditional square on the monopoly board called “Jail.” this adds a comic twist to the game as Houdini seemed to be immune to the restricting effects of jail cells and general police restraints.

The Chance and Community Chest cards are also Houdini oriented, not only in name but in how they assign the give and take of money in the game.

Dick, Dorothy, You have outdone yourselves.

This was well worth the wait!