Cross Fire
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Batman created by Bob Kane with Bill Finger

Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster
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PROLOGUE

When the lights switched off inside Doctor Babrius Aesop's padded cell, he didn't waste his time wondering what had caused the power outage. He went right into action.

He tried the door first, but it remained locked, as he thought it would be. A secondary system

controlled the doors just in case of an outage like this. What the architects of the Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane hadn't planned for was that someone of Aesop's engineering skill could subvert this secondary system.

Aesop stood on the cot that was bolted to the ground. Reaching up, he unscrewed the light fixture on the ceiling and pried loose its socket, exposing a tangled mess of red and black wires.

Aesop smiled. *Perfect.*

Carefully, he twisted the wires around each other, then hopped off the cot.

He inserted both ends of his wire twist into the thin gap between the door lock and the jamb. Sparks flew, then there was a *click*. Aesop tried the door again. This time, it opened.

The power outage had triggered the emergency alarms. Aesop used the strobing lights to find his way down the dark corridor. He passed cells where the inmates shouted, banging against their doors. In another cell he heard maniacal laughter. Aesop declined to help. Better these lunatics and jokers

stay locked up here. He didn't want their competition after he got out.

One cell he did unlock. The inmate who ran out nearly poked Aesop with his antlers he was so excited. "Thank you, thank you! Jack will work extra hard for you, extra hard!"

"Shut that big mouth of yours, Jackalope," Aesop snarled. "You're louder than the alarms!"

"Sorry, Doctor Aesop, sorry," Jackalope said. The short man had gotten his name because he resembled a jackrabbit with antelope horns. Bad genes cursed him with floppy ears, a button nose, and buck teeth. But his antlers were a personal choice. He wore the heavy horns on a headband that was fastened underneath his jaw. He refused to take them off, and any attempts by doctors to remove them triggered a screaming fit that could last for days. Jackalope was, like many of the patients at Arkham, truly crazy—and for the moment, also useful.

"Follow me," Aesop said.

He took Jackalope into the warren of offices

where the psychologists wrote their reports on their patients. Since it was after hours, they had all gone home for the day. And the guards who usually were stationed here had left to deal with the fried generator.

Aesop grabbed a white lab coat from the closet and slipped into it. Searching the desks, he found a pair of glasses with broken frames. He popped out the lenses, taped the frames, and put them on. With a pair of scissors, he chopped off his shoulder length hair and as much as he could of his shaggy beard. He turned to Jackalope. "How do I look?"

Jackalope squinted. "Where did Doctor Aesop go?"

Aesop smiled. It wasn't a great disguise, but if he stayed in the shadows, the guards at the entrance wouldn't recognize him. "It's still me, but *shhh*, you can't tell anyone if you want to go free."

Jackalope shook his antlers. "No, no, no. Won't squeal or snort. Promise."

"Good," Aesop said. "Now I'm going to need your strength."