

ROCKET

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. ROCKET COMICS - SCOTTY'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY, MAY
1954 - DAY

The office has two glass walls with Venetian blinds, and two brick walls decorated with framed posters of COMIC BOOK COVERS -- titles like SGT. SAMM'S BATTLIN' BATTALION (a war comic), THE FREEDOM SQUAD (a superhero team), LIFE OF CRIME (a true crime comic) and, most prominently, CAPTAIN JUPITER.

The logo of ROCKET COMICS appears on every cover.

SCOTTY SORENSON, 22, Caucasian, young and professional, sits at his desk. On his desktop are a sign with a cartoon of Harry Truman that reads "The Buck Stops Hereabouts," and a photo of a middle-aged man. A small plaque on the picture frame reads: "IN MEMORIAM: HENRY SORENSON, 1896-1953."

Scotty is absorbed in an issue of Life of Crime.
Very absorbed.

A new angle reveals why: Scotty isn't reading the comic at all -- he's hiding a book inside.

The office door opens and CHIP MERRILL, 48, enters, followed by a LAWYER, 55. Chip is handsome but a bit sloppy, like a newspaper reporter. The Lawyer is neater, and carries a dossier.

CHIP

(re: Lawyer)

He's back, Scotty! You haven't finished yet?

Scotty puts down the comic, keeping the book inside hidden.

SCOTTY

Just want to be sure, Chip.

CHIP

I don't blame you. Gotta go out on a good note.

SCOTTY

It's for sure?

CHIP

It's for sure.

Scotty claps his hands together in happiness.

CHIP (CONT'D)

You have there the last
publication of Rocket Comics. Life
of Crime 34. Who'd'a thunk?

SCOTTY

What's the number?

LAWYER

Seven fifty.

SCOTTY

(disbelief)

Seven hundred and fifty
thousand dollars?

CHIP

Told you he was good.

Scotty leaps up from his chair to shake the Lawyer's hand.

SCOTTY

When do we sign?

LAWYER

Three days to draw up the
paperwork with Metropolitan's
lawyer, then you're both rich men.

CHIP

Less poor, in my case.

SCOTTY

Just three more days. I'll tell
you what, Thursday night we're
going to pop the champagne!

LAWYER

Just one last order of business.
Which of you poor saps gets to
tell Millicent?

CHIP

I will.

SCOTTY

Thanks, Chip, but I should do it.

CHIP

You sure, kid?

SCOTTY

Yeah. Tonight. She should hear it
from me.

INT. ROCKET COMICS - BULLPEN/OFFICES/KITCHENETTE -
CONTINUOUS

MILLICENT HERNANDEZ, 33 and Puerto Rican, carrying a stack of mail under her arm, walks past the windows of Scotty's office, where the meeting is continuing. If Rita Hayworth stuck her finger in an electrical socket, she'd look like Millicent.

We follow behind Millicent as she delivers the mail, and get the full tour of the office. It's cluttered with art supplies and old comic books.

Her first stop is the BULLPEN, the heart of Rocket Comics, where ARTISTS work at drafting desks, drawing comic book pages on large art boards.

She stops into a couple of small offices where EDITORS review typed outlines and artwork.

Then she circles through the KITCHENETTE, a very basic set-up with an ancient refrigerator and a coffee pot, and comes out the other side into...

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

...the reception area, where the elevator door is just opening. Off it steps SEAN ABERNATHY, 57, Caucasian, gray-haired, grouchy, with an ink-stained shirt and bifocals. He's visibly trying to escape from HAM ROSE, 20, Caucasian, who wears a ill-fitting suit and carries an art portfolio under his arm.

HAM

-- a fan, a big fan. It's a real
honor, I've got every Captain
Jupiter you ever did.

ABERNATHY

(to Millicent)

Save me.

Millicent, smiling, leads Ham by the shoulder to the reception desk, which piled high with papers, comics and toys.

MILLICENT

Good morning. Would you like a cup
of coffee?

HAM
Yes, please.

MILLICENT
(gestures towards
kitchenette)
In there. Get me one too, will
you? Light and sweet.

She sits at the desk. Ham scowls at her and doesn't move.

HAM
Is Mr. Sorenson in?

MILLICENT
Do you have an appointment?

HAM
No.

MILLICENT
Is that a portfolio?

HAM
Yes.

MILLICENT
Show me.

HAM
No offense, I'd rather just show
Mr. Sorenson. When do you think
he'll be free?

MILLICENT
Never. But maybe that could
change, so show me.

Ham hesitates, then hands over his portfolio.

HAM
I think I've heard of you.
Millie, right?

MILLICENT
Millicent.

Millicent flips through the portfolio. Her frown deepens with
each page. She stops at a badly drawn picture of an ALIEN
MONSTER SURROUNDED BY SMALL, DOG-LIKE CREATURES.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
What's the story with the puppies?

HAM
 What puppies?
 (pointing at the drawing)

No, look, this guy came to Earth 'cause his planet's dying. He learns he can get the energy his people need from our kids.

MILLICENT
 And he lures the kids
 with puppies?

HAM
 There aren't puppies!
 (points to "dog ears"
 in drawing)
 These are brainwashing devices on
 the kids' heads.
 (flips to next drawing)
 Here, the parents have stopped the
 alien but, see, this boy won't let
 them kill him. He wants to go with
 the alien. No one understands him
 on Earth.

Millicent flips to another drawing. Different style, but just as bad.

MILLICENT
 What's happening here?

HAM
 It's a horror story, about a guy
 who's haunted by a German he
 killed in the war.

MILLICENT
 (turns page)
 And this?

HAM
 It's a western about a Jewish
 cowgirl who marries a Catholic pig
 farmer for the cheap bacon.

Millicent groans and turns a few more pages.

MILLICENT
 They all have stories?

HAM
 Sure do.

MILLICENT
 What's your name?

HAM

Ham Rose.

HAM (CONT'D)

MILLICENT

Ham. That short for something?

HAM

Yes.

Millicent gives him an appraising look, then smiles.

INT. SCOTTY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

As Chip and the Lawyer leave the meeting, Millicent enters and puts the portfolio on Scotty's desk. Ham hangs back in the doorway.

MILLICENT

Lunch meat to see you!

SCOTTY

Millicent, I told you, no more artists begging for --

MILLICENT

(firmly)

He's a nice kid with a head full of ideas.

Scotty glares at her. Millicent holds his gaze for a long moment.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

(to Ham)

The boss will see you now.

HAM

They're not puppies.

MILLICENT

Good luck!

Millicent gently pushes Ham further into the office before closing the door behind her.

Ham and Scotty stare at one another for an uncomfortable moment, then Ham shakes Scotty's hand.

HAM

You're Henry Sorenson?

SCOTTY
He was my father.

HAM
Oh, sorry. When did he--?

SCOTTY
Six months ago. I'm
Scott Sorenson.

HAM
Pleased to meet you, Scott. I had
a lotta respect for your pop. He
was one of the greats.

Ham gives Scotty his portfolio. Scotty sits at his desk opens
to the first page.

SCOTTY
Ham Rose? That short
for something?

HAM
Yes.

SCOTTY
(pages through
portfolio, squints)
Oh. Puppies, right?

HAM
They're kids.

SCOTTY
Really?

HAM
Yeah, they're -- stylized.

SCOTTY
The alien's brainwashing
them, right?

HAM
How'd you know?

SCOTTY
Been around comics my whole life,
Ham. I can spot a brainwashing
machine.

Scotty keeps paging through the portfolio. With each new page,
he looks a little more disappointed. Ham's face falls.

HAM

It's okay, just say it.

SCOTTY

What?

HAM

It's garbage. It's all right, I've heard it before.

SCOTTY

No, I think it's very -- promising. Imaginative. If you work at it, I think you could really...

At the word "promising" Ham breaks into a sardonic grin. Scotty sees it and starts smiling too.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

All right, but have you seen Rocket lately? If you think you're bad!

HAM

You've still got Captain Jupiter.

SCOTTY

(laughs)

Superheroes are dead. You know, I don't think anybody's actually read superhero comics in, oh, five years?

HAM

Seven.

SCOTTY

We've also got Life of Crime.

HAM

Which you ripped off from Crime Doesn't Pay.

SCOTTY

Please! Headline Comics is a rip-off of Crime Doesn't Pay. We ripped off the rip-off.

(takes comics from desk drawer)

Let's see what else! Romance comics, Bible comics, reprints, talking animals, more Bible comics

--

HAM

My pop said problems are really opportunities in disguise.

SCOTTY

I'm pretty sure my dad said something like that too.

Beat.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

What would you do?

HAM

Sorry?

SCOTTY

What would you do with Rocket, if you had my job?

Scotty looks through the window at Millicent, working at her reception desk. At that moment, she looks up and meets his gaze.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

You seem like a nice kid with a head full of ideas.

HAM

Well, okay, let's take your latest issue...

Ham picks up the comic book Scotty was reading earlier, revealing "Fahrenheit 451" underneath it.

HAM (CONT'D)

You like Bradbury?

SCOTTY

I love him.

HAM

I read it last month, cover to cover, the day it came out.

(beat)

Screw comics. You wanna know what I'd do? I'd do this.

SCOTTY

(smiles)

I don't think Bradbury writes comics.

HAM

You and me could change that.

Scotty smiles wistfully -- that thought has some appeal...

SCOTTY

I've got a dinner meeting. It was nice to meet you, Ham.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Scotty and Ham come out of Scotty's office. Millicent is just finishing a call.

SCOTTY

Millicent, I have a dinner meeting.

MILLICENT

Your mother just called to confirm.

SCOTTY

(flustered Ham heard that; needling her)
Have a good evening -- Millie.

MILLICENT

See you tomorrow -- Scotty.

Scotty puts on his hat. He starts to leave, hesitates.

SCOTTY

Millicent, there's something I should...
(quiet, so Ham can't hear)
I mean, something you should --

MILLICENT

Yes?

SCOTTY

Never mind. It's nothing important.

MILLICENT

Good night, Mr. Sorenson.

Scotty gets into the elevator.

HAM

What was that about?

MILLICENT

He's got to break my heart. He
just hasn't found the words yet.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - DAY

Scotty sits at a table with AGNES SORENSON, 54, Caucasian, his mother. She is very good looking older woman, very tastefully dressed. They clink champagne glasses.

AGNES

My! Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars? Doesn't Metropolitan know comic books are dying?

SCOTTY

Turns out Dad's golden goose still had one more egg in it.

AGNES

Well done, Peanut.

SCOTTY

Chip's the one you want to thank. He's the one who said the lawyer should reject the second offer and push for more.

AGNES

Here's to Chip. You shall have to give him quite a bonus.

SCOTTY

He owns eight percent of the company, he's making out pretty well.

AGNES

Nonetheless, that's how things are done. Or how they used to be done. We can't forget all the people who were loyal to your father. Chip, Mr. Abernathy, Millicent. Poor Millicent. Have you told her?

SCOTTY

Not yet.

There's a tear in Agnes's eye.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

AGNES

I shall miss them, that's all.

SCOTTY

Second thoughts?

AGNES

God, no. That place reminds me too much of your father. How about you, Peanut? Any regrets?

SCOTTY

I don't know. Remember how excited I used to get when he'd bring me the new issues from the printer?

AGNES

Vividly. I told him he'd rot your brain. But you turned out all right.

SCOTTY

I just thought there'd always be a Rocket Comics.

AGNES

We need a fresh start, you and Joanie and I, and we've got one, thanks to you. Not Chip. You. You put our house in order after Daddy died and convinced Metropolitan that Rocket is worth three quarters of a million dollars. Which, frankly, is ridiculous. Now, cash their check and go to law school. Rocket was Daddy's dream. He wouldn't want you to throw away yours.

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Ham stands against the wall by the door. Scotty and Agnes come out.

AGNES

My head's fuzzy. Why did you let me drink so much champagne?

SCOTTY

We're celebrating.

Scotty raises his hand to hail a taxi. One pulls up. Scotty opens to door for Agnes.

AGNES

I'm going straight home to bed.
I'm very, very proud of you,
Peanut.

(gets in cab)

Lexington and 72nd, driver.

The cab leaves. Thinking he's alone, Scotty heaves an enormous sigh, then jumps and turns as Ham says his name.

HAM

Mr. Sorenson! Funny running into
you here.

SCOTTY

Yeah. Funny.

HAM

Millicent said I'd find you here.

SCOTTY

I thought she might've.

HAM

She said you wouldn't mind.

SCOTTY

Did she tell you about the time my
father fired her?

(beat; sighs)

Want a drink?

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A quiet Manhattan bar, half empty. Scotty and Ham are playing a game of pool that Ham is clearly winning. Scotty mostly sips his beer and watches Ham line up shots.

HAM

So Robinson hands it to him, and
Kirby looks at my drawings like
somebody farted. He doesn't know
I'm sitting there, so he says to
Robinson, "Jerry, the comics might
be lousy with Commie homosexual
Jews, but even we've got
standards."

Scotty almost chokes on his beer laughing.

HAM (CONT'D)

Yeah, right in that booth
over there.

SCOTTY

Seems like you know everybody in the business.

HAM

My pop used to say it's not what you know, it's who you know. He didn't know anybody.

SCOTTY

What's he do?

HAM

He sells wigs.

Ham sinks the eight ball.

HAM (CONT'D)

Double or nothing?

SCOTTY

I don't think so. If comics don't pan out, you can fall back on pool.

HAM

(laughs)

Buy me the next round and we'll call it even.

They put away their cues and sit at the bar. The BARTENDER arrives.

HAM (CONT'D)

Two more beers, on him.

SCOTTY

And two shots of Jack.

HAM

Well, well!

The Bartender brings their drinks. Scotty and Ham toast and throw back their shots.

HAM (CONT'D)

Y'know, you're the first comic book editor who ever bought me a drink.

SCOTTY

Why do you want to draw comics, Ham?

HAM

Seems like the most worthwhile thing to do with my life.

Scotty laughs. Ham doesn't. Scotty sees Ham is serious.

SCOTTY

You like comics, don't you?

HAM

I love comics.

SCOTTY

Why?

HAM

You kidding? If you could boil down everything great about America to cheap paper, four colors of ink, and a couple'a staples, you'd have a comic book. Comics are like Hollywood if there was some magic way to put anything you could imagine right up there on the screen. Beautiful broads with torn dresses, shoot-outs, monsters from outer space. Best of all, there're millions of kids out there who'll listen to whatever you got to say. Comics are -- perfect.

SCOTTY

I'm selling the company.

Ham is so surprised he's speechless for a moment.

HAM

But -- to who?

SCOTTY

Metropolitan. Nobody knows yet.

HAM

God -- I guess I'm barking up the wrong tree.

SCOTTY

I can put in a good word for you.

HAM

No, they've already seen my book. They weren't impressed.

(MORE)

HAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm thinking my pop had it wrong.

It is what you know. At least a little. I'm a crap artist, I know that.

SCOTTY

You've got ideas, Ham. That's not nothing. Match you up with the right artist, and who knows?

HAM

I don't think so. Comics are no gig for a writer. Name me one person outside the business who knows who Bill Finger is.

Ham drains off his beer and starts to put on his jacket and his hat.

HAM (CONT'D)

I should get home.

SCOTTY

Stay! I'll buy you another round.

HAM

You already got the last one.

SCOTTY

Please! In three days, Metropolitan's going to make me a rich man.

(to Bartender)

Two more!

EXT. STREET IN WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Scotty and Ham walk down a street of walk-up apartment buildings. They're drunk. Occasionally, they pass another pedestrian, mostly Hasidic Jews.

SCOTTY

I don't think I've ever been way out here.

HAM

Why the hell would you? It's Williamsburg. Still, it's not too bad. Just six stops to the Village on the BMT. This is me.

Ham starts to unlock an apartment building door.

INT. BUILDING STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

They climb the stairs, Scotty trails behind, breathing harder.

HAM

I know, fifth floor. It's kind of a hike, right?

SCOTTY

What did you want to show me?

HAM

You'll see.

INT. HAM'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Scotty and Ham enter. Scotty takes in his surroundings.

The tiny room is crammed with books, pulps, Hollywood magazines and comics -- they're on every table, every chair, they're piled on the floor.

SCOTTY

Lord, look at this stuff!

HAM

(proud)

I know.

SCOTTY

Don't you ever throw anything out?

HAM

Not if I can help it.

Ham hunts through a pile of comics.

Scotty picks up a framed photo from a cluttered bookshelf. It shows TWO HASIDIC JEWS, a man about 40 and an 8-year-old boy. Neither one is smiling.

Ham sees what he's looking at; hesitates.

HAM (CONT'D)

It's not Ham, it's Chaim.
Chaim Rosenberg.

SCOTTY

That's not very kosher.

HAM

It's been said.

Ham brings over a pile of comics. Top of the pile is CAPTAIN JUPITER NO. 1, published by Rocket Comics.

HAM (CONT'D)

Here's what I wanted to show you.

SCOTTY

Wow!

HAM

I have every one Sean Abernathy ever did. All originals, no reprints.

SCOTTY

I haven't seen these in years! Never tell Abernathy, but I was more a fan of Sgt. Samm.

HAM

Right over here!

SCOTTY

There was one I must have read a thousand times, where the Krauts capture Samm's squad in Paris --

HAM

(as he goes quickly through a pile of comics)
-- and Samm teams up with the French woman --

SCOTTY

-- right, the can-can dancer with the enormous --

HAM

-- can-cans. What was her name?

SCOTTY

Marie Madeleine.

Ham produces the issue. On the cover is the gruff, manly Sgt. Samm, with the voluptuous Marie Madeleine.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

My dad used to bring these home from the office for me.

HAM

What was that like?

SCOTTY

(with a nostalgic smile)
It was the best day of my week. But a kid's gotta grow up.

HAM

How much is Metropolitan
giving you?

SCOTTY

Seven hundred and fifty thousand!

HAM

Huh.

Ham walks out of the room into the kitchen.

INT. HAM'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Scotty follows Ham in. Ham is mixing them more drinks.

SCOTTY

You don't think it's a good price.

HAM

Three quarters of a mil's not bad
for a publisher with a couple'a
moldy old characters and nothing
but old dinosaurs in the talent
pool.

Ham thrusts Scotty's drink at him. Scotty takes it and sips.

HAM (CONT'D)

If that's what you think you've
got, sell. Get that millstone off
your neck.

SCOTTY

You were saying -- Bradbury in
the comics?

HAM

Sure.

SCOTTY

What would that take?

HAM

We'd have to start with the
talent. You held on to Sean
Abernathy, that's good, but we're
going to need more. Think
Roosevelt Davies, Tommy Gill, Carl
Hopwell --

SCOTTY

Carl.

HAM

Can you get him?

SCOTTY

He's my sister's husband.

HAM

No shit!

(passes him the telephone)

Call him.

SCOTTY

Wait, what's he gonna draw?

HAM

It doesn't matter, I'll think of something. Call him!

Scotty dials the phone. He waits as it rings.

SCOTTY

Hey! Carl? It's Scotty. Oh shit.

(looks at his wrist watch)

Shit, I didn't realize. I thought you'd be up working.

Ham can't keep from laughing. Scotty waves at him to shut up. He's fighting like crazy not to laugh himself.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

No, no, I'm -- well, a little, but listen, Carl. I have a job for you, it's a great one, the start of a whole new direction for us!

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. HOPWELL HOUSE - DAY

An upper-class suburban home in New Jersey.

INT. HOPWELL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A tasteful kitchen. Lived-in, warm, homey.

JOAN HOPWELL, late 20s, Caucasian, is mixing batter as her daughter, HANNAH, 8, peeks over the counter. Joan is well put-together, and down-to-Earth. Hannah is dressed for school, but already looks like she's been at recess.

HANNAH

Can I help?

JOAN

You're helping by keeping Mommy company.

HANNAH

I wanna help-help.

JOAN

When I need you, I'll let you know, OK? Now go sit.

Hannah reluctantly goes to the table.

CARL HOPWELL, late 20s, Caucasian, enters. He is less well put-together than his wife. He comes up behind Joan and kisses her.

CARL

Mornin', Sunshine.

Two boys -- TIM, 12, and BRAD, 9 -- run into the kitchen and around the kitchen table. Tim is holding a comic book out of Brad's reach.

BRAD

That's mine! I bought it with my own dime!

Tim smiles as he teases Brad with the comic. Hannah, excited, gets up on her knees on her chair to watch the action.

TIM

I dunno why you read this anyway. Captain Jupiter is stupider!

BRAD

Is not!

TIM

(laughing)

Is too!

Brad has cornered Tim against a counter as Tim holds the comic over his head. Brad tries to grab it, but Tim's arms are too long.

Finally, Carl takes the comic from Tim, and Tim does not look pleased.

CARL

The latest from Rocket
Comics, huh?

Joan smiles. Tim shoots Carl a look before sitting at the breakfast table, suddenly upset. Carl hands Brad his comic and ruffles his hair. Brad sits.

Joan begins setting plates in front of the kids.

BRAD

(to Tim)

Ha-ha. Got it back!

TIM

Shut up.

JOAN

Don't talk to your brother
like that.

CARL

(to Joan)

I got an interesting call from
your brother last night.

JOAN

I was wondering who that was.
What'd he have to say at that time
of night?

CARL

He offered me a job.

JOAN

A job? But he's accepted the offer
from Metropolitan.

CARL
(chuckles)
I don't know how serious he was.
He sounded sloshed.

HANNAH
What's sloshed?

BRAD
Drunk!

HANNAH
What's drunk?

CARL
Never mind.

TIM
(whispered to Hannah)
It's when you drink a lotta beer
and can't stand up straight and
pee all over yourself.

CARL
Tim! That's enough.

Tim shoots Carl a dirty look, continues to pick at his breakfast.

CARL (CONT'D)
(to Joan)
I told him I can't take it anyway.
Got too much else going on. Did
you have a chance to look at those
pages?

JOAN
(packing up)
No, I'm sorry! With the bake sale
at the school today, I've been all
over the place.

CARL
Joanie! This was important.

JOAN
Surely it can go without my eye
this once.

CARL
Well, of course it can -- it's
just that your eyes are so pretty.

JOAN

Next time I'll make the time.
 Promise. Oh! Could you please take
 the kids to school before you go
 into the city?

Carl shoots her a look, "I knew this was coming."

Tim looks up and at his mother, disappointed that this is even
 being discussed.

CARL

Sure -- as long as you save me
 some of those cookies.

Joan comes over and hugs him from behind.

Tim looks at Carl angrily. He's stopped touching his breakfast
 completely.

Joan notices Tim and sighs.

INT. ROCKET COMICS - BULLPEN - DAY

Abernathy is penciling a page of Captain Jupiter panels. He
 sees Chip crossing the bullpen. Abernathy leaps up and
 intercepts him.

ABERNATHY

I know what's going on.

CHIP

(keeps walking)
 I don't know what you're talking
 about, Sean.

ABERNATHY

Come on, Chip, I'm not stupid. He
 cuts fourteen titles, streamlines
 the staff, now he's in daily
 meetings with you and that
 lawyer--

CHIP

It's nothing to worry about.

ABERNATHY

People are talking.

CHIP

You believe every rumor you hear?

Chip goes into his office.

INT. ROCKET COMICS - CHIP'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Abernathy follows Chip in, and closes the door.

ABERNATHY

Don't bullshit me. That lawyer has been meeting with Charlie Donovan at Metropolitan for two weeks.

CHIP

I don't know where you're getting this.

ABERNATHY

From Spector, McCabe and half a dozen other friends I've got at Metropolitan. Scotty's selling Rocket, isn't he?

Chip doesn't answer.

ABERNATHY (CONT'D)

Chip, I want to buy back Captain Jupiter.

CHIP

Ask Scotty, not me.

ABERNATHY

He said no.

CHIP

Then what do you want me to do?

ABERNATHY

Talk to him! If you tell him to sell it back to me, he will.

CHIP

I can't, Sean. Metropolitan would never buy Rocket without the Captain.

ABERNATHY

I created him, Chip, I've been drawing him for fifteen years! What am I supposed to do?

CHIP

Talk to Spector and McCabe, they'd be crazy to hire somebody else.

ABERNATHY

They're not going to hire anybody, don't you see, they're going to put the Captain on the shelf so he doesn't cut into their Powerman sales!

The office door opens and Agnes sticks her head in.

AGNES

(to Chip)

I'm sorry for interrupting, but I need to speak with you about Scotty.

CHIP

Could you excuse us, Sean?

ABERNATHY

Chip.

CHIP

I'm sorry, Sean. It's out of my hands.

Abernathy, very upset, walks slowing from the room. When he's gone:

CHIP (CONT'D)

What's up, Mrs. S?

AGNES

Joanie just phoned me. Scotty offered Carl a job last night.

INT. SCOTTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Scotty's messy bedroom. The alarm clock on his night stand reads 9:45. Scotty is buried under his pillow and blankets.

The PHONE RINGS, Scotty jerks awake, then holds his head. Loud rings are the last thing he needs on this hungover morning. He looks at his alarm, notices the time, then answers the phone.

INT. ROCKET COMICS - CHIP'S OFFICE - DAY

Chip and Agnes huddle together on one receiver.

INTERCUT between Scotty and Chip & Agnes:

AGNES
 (over phone)
 What is going on?

SCOTTY
 Mom. My alarm was set to go off in
 half an hour. I'll never get back
 to sleep!

CHIP
 Maybe it was all that calling you
 were doing at three in the
 morning.

Scotty looks mortified as memories from the night before come
 back to him.

AGNES
 Your sister said you offered Carl
 a job. This is people's lives,
 Peanut.

CHIP
 You don't yank Metropolitan's
 chain like that, kid!

SCOTTY
 Listen, there's been a
 misunderstanding --

AGNES
 (rolls eyes)
 More like a serious lapse
 of judgment!

SCOTTY
 Okay, but nothing's changed.

AGNES
 Are you sure?

SCOTTY
 (he isn't)
 Of course.

CHIP
 Good. See you when you get in.

Agnes hangs up.

INTERCUT ENDS.

Scotty hangs up. He shuts his eyes tight and falls back onto
 his pillows.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Abernathy is sitting on the edge of Millicent's desk. She is critiquing a penciled page of Captain Jupiter.

Scotty enters, looking haggard.

ABERNATHY
(offers his pocket flask)
Hair of the dog?

SCOTTY
(disgusted)
No.

Abernathy shrugs and puts the flask on the desk. Scotty walks towards his office. Millicent picks up the flask and pours some in her steaming coffee mug.

INT. SCOTTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Rubbing his eyes, Scotty enters the office, switches on the light and puts his hat on the hat stand.

HAM
Hey, boss!

Scotty starts in alarm. Ham is sitting at the chair in front of his desk.

HAM (CONT'D)
I was starting to think you would never get here. I set a meeting for you at eleven-thirty, if we hurry I think we can still make it.

Millicent appears at the office door.

MILLICENT
Oh, I forgot to tell you -- Ham Rose is in your office.

SCOTTY
(acid)
Thank you, Millie.

HAM
Put your hat back on. We've got to go.

INT. ROCKET COMICS - BULLPEN/RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Ham leads Scotty across the bullpen by the shirt sleeve, as Scotty puts his hat back on. Chip comes out of the kitchen with a cup of coffee and sees them.

SCOTTY

Ham, we need to talk about --

HAM

No time, you'll have to tell me on the way.

Chip joins them, following them into Reception.

CHIP

Where are you going?

SCOTTY

I don't have time to explain, Chip. I'll be back in about an hour.

CHIP

Wait a second, who is this guy?

HAM

Ham Rose.

The elevator arrives and Ham pulls Scotty in.

HAM (CONT'D)

(as the door closes)

Pleased to meet you!

EXT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A cab pulls up in front of a Greenwich Village walk-up building, Scotty and Ham get out. Scotty pays the driver while Ham rings the buzzer.

SCOTTY

And why couldn't he come in to the office?

HAM

We've gotta impress him. Roosevelt Davies is the Mozart of comic books. Look.

Ham takes a large, hardcover volume out of his briefcase. On the cloth cover, in gold letters: "THE REALM OF FEAR, BY ROOSEVELT DAVIES."

Scotty opens the book. Inside, is gorgeous, full-color artwork. There are word balloons but no square panels like a regular comic book. The art flows together in very creative ways, the characters are unusually detailed but still cartoonish.

HAM (CONT'D)

A book length comic book! Crazy, right? Nobody else ever tried it. It came out in '49. It was a terrific flop, but look at it.

SCOTTY

It's good.

HAM

It's amazing. He would've ditched comics for Madison Avenue years ago if he wasn't a Negro.

SCOTTY

He works for Galaxy, right?

HAM

Sometimes, but nobody's hired him lately. Artists love him, editors hate him. He's weird, hard to work with. There's all kinds of strange rumors.

SCOTTY

Sounds like a headache.

They are buzzed into the building.

INT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Scotty and Ham climb the stairs.

HAM

You wanna make the best comics, you need the best artist.

SCOTTY

We've got Abernathy, we've got Carl --

HAM

We haven't got Carl.

SCOTTY

We'll get him.

HAM

You get Roosevelt, every artist in comics'll wanna work for us.

SCOTTY

How are we going to do that?

HAM

We're going to tell him what we talked about last night, Bradbury in comics, all that stuff --

SCOTTY

Okay...

HAM

... and then we're going to pay him fifty bucks a page.

SCOTTY

The standard rate is --

HAM

Fifty.

They reach the landing. Ham knocks on an apartment door.

ROOSEVELT (O.S.)

(from inside)

It's open.

INT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Scotty and Ham enter.

It's a large apartment converted from an industrial space. There's almost no furniture. The walls are covered with painted cartoon drawings in the same style as the ones in the book. Scotty and Ham take it in.

ROOSEVELT (O.S.)

In here!

INT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Scotty and Ham come into the bedroom.

ROOSEVELT DAVIES, 35, an exceedingly handsome black man, is in bed, naked except for a blanket up to his waist. TWO OTHER MEN AND TWO WOMEN are lying in bed with him. Some are white, some are black but they're all naked.

Scotty and Ham are flabbergasted.

ROOSEVELT

What can I do for you gentlemen?

Scotty looks at Ham, then walks out of the room.

INT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Scotty is starting down the stairs. Ham catches up on the landing above.

HAM

Where are you going?

SCOTTY

I'm not working with that type
of person.

Ham looks like he wants to object but can't think of anything to say. Scotty continues down the stairs. Ham hesitates then turns back towards Roosevelt's apartment.

INT. ROOSEVELT'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ham storms back into the room. Roosevelt is out of bed and has just finished putting on pants. The other two men and two women are lazily necking, all together.

HAM

What the hell was that?

ROOSEVELT

It was a test, Ham, and you and
your boss failed it.

HAM

A test?!? You just cost yourself
a job!

ROOSEVELT

Don't care.

HAM

He was gonna pay you fifty bucks
a page!

ROOSEVELT

Really?
(shrugs)
Nope, don't care.

HAM

You're a nut! No wonder nobody
wants to work with you!

ROOSEVELT

Ham, I'm tired of hearing how
Roosevelt's a nut, Roosevelt's a
nigger, Roosevelt's a queer. I've
had it.

HAM

He didn't have to know about this!
Do you know what you just screwed
up for me?

Ham sits in a chair with his head in his hands.

ROOSEVELT

Don't be like that, buddy. Maybe
he'll come around. Want some
breakfast?

Roosevelt leaves the room. Ham lifts his head and sees that
the two men and one of the women are ignoring him, but the
second woman is looking at him.

The Woman is young and very pretty. She smiles at Ham sweetly
and with surprising innocence, inviting him over with one
finger in a "come here" motion.

Ham looks at her with embarrassment and dawning terror, then
gets up quickly and flees the room.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Millicent is at the desk. Ham is sprawled in a chair, head leaned back, staring at the ceiling.

MILLICENT

Naked?

HAM

Very.

Millicent laughs. Abernathy enters from the bullpen, carrying some drawings.

ABERNATHY

Where's Scotty?

MILLICENT

I think he's going to be out the rest of the day.

Abernathy shakes his head, grumbles something, starts back to the bullpen.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

(re: drawings)

You got something for me?

ABERNATHY

Right.

He returns just long enough to hand Millicent the drawings.

Millicent pages through the drawings, for a second, then looks at Ham, who's still sprawled.

MILLICENT

This isn't a lounge, you know.
(off Ham's blank reaction)
Come here.

Ham goes to her desk and she hands him the drawings. They're fantastic -- monsters and alien worlds, astounding quality!

HAM

Abernathy doing a new book?

MILLICENT

Nope. He just likes to doodle.
(MORE)

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

Why don't you grab one of those desks back there and spend some time with those. See what you come up with?

HAM

You know, I don't technically work here.

MILLICENT

You don't strike me as the type to let that stop you.

She gestures toward the bullpen with her thumb. They share a smile, then Ham rushes off.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

(calls after him)

Hey! Bring me coffee first, will ya?

HAM (O.S.)

Light and sweet?

MILLICENT

Yeah! I like coffee in my sugar!

INT. SCOTTY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Scotty enters, slamming the door. He paces. In his face, we can read some visceral emotions -- anger, disgust, disappointment. He takes a deep breath to calm himself.

A thought strikes him. He opens a closet and wrestles an old cardboard box from the upper shelf. Sitting on the sofa, he opens the box. It's filled with OLD, DOG-EARRED copies of Rocket Comics classics.

He goes through them until he finds the well-worn MARIE MADELEINE ISSUE of "Sgt. Samm." He looks at it for a long moment, with tears in his eyes.

INT. HOPWELL HOUSE - EVENING

The front door is ajar and we see Scotty poke his face through it. We hear far-off ARGUING.

JOAN (O.S.)

How can this be my fault?!

CARL (O.S.)
Of all the times to not do what
I asked!

Scotty steps in slowly, briefcase in hand, not sure if he
should enter or come back later.

JOAN (O.S.)
Carl, I'm sorry that I couldn't
give you my two cents, but it
isn't my job--

CARL (O.S.)
You know I need a fresh pair of
eyes! You know that!

JOAN (O.S.)
They aren't paying me, they're
paying you!

The sound of a GLASS BREAKING.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Dammit!

As the argument continues...

SCOTTY'S POV - TIM

He sees Tim sitting in the dark at the top of the stairs,
listening, looking despondent.

REVERSE POV

Scotty from the top of the stairs.

SCOTTY'S POV - TIM

Tim notices Scotty, bites his lip, then runs up to his room.

BACK TO SCENE

Scotty looks up after Tim, then closes the door behind him.

JOAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(through clenched teeth)
The kids will hear you.

CARL (O.S.)
They've already heard.

JOAN (O.S.)
Will you clean that up?

CARL (O.S.)
Oh sure. I'll clean this up. And while I'm at it, why don't I finish up dinner, too? It isn't as if I have anything else to do!

Scotty enters the living room as Joan storms in from the kitchen. She is startled.

JOAN
Scotty! When'd you get here? I wasn't expecting you until six-thirty.

SCOTTY
I managed to catch the earlier train.
(beat)
Everything okay?

JOAN
(wringing hands)
What? Oh, yes. I mean, you know. The usual. Nothing to worry about.

Scotty's face. He knows his sister's not telling him everything, but he doesn't pry.

INT. HOPWELL HOUSE - LATER

Scotty sits alone in the living room, sipping a cocktail. He looks over at the kitchen, then around at the empty room. Bored. Waiting.

Finally, Carl enters with a drink of his own.

CARL
(extending his hand)
Scotty! So glad you could come by!

Scotty's surprised by Carl's enthusiastic reception.

SCOTTY
(shakes his hand)
Carl! Good to see you.

Carl sits across from Scotty.

CARL
(leans in)
Listen, I wanted to talk to you
about that job you mentioned --

SCOTTY
Hey, look, I'm sorry about that
phone call. I know it was late.

CARL
Don't worry! And listen, I've
thought about it, and I can take
the job after all!

Scotty swallows hard.

SCOTTY
Carl -- I'm so sorry, but --

CARL
(trying to keep smiling)
Sorry about what?

SCOTTY
There's no job.

Carl's face falls. Joan enters.

JOAN
Roast should be ready in about 5
minutes. I hope you're both
hungry.

Carl stands.

CARL
I'll get the kids.

Carl goes upstairs. Scotty looks to Joan for an explanation.

JOAN
He lost his job today.

SCOTTY
Oh, God. I'm sorry, Joanie.

JOAN
(whispered)
You sure there isn't anything you
can do?

SCOTTY
You knew I was selling.

JOAN
But you offered --!

SCOTTY
It was second thoughts, okay? I
wish to God I hadn't done it.

JOAN
(angry)
I wish you hadn't either,
you idiot!

She steps away, folding her arms in a huff. After a moment,
she sighs, turning back to him.

JOAN (CONT'D)
After tomorrow, Dad's company
is gone.

SCOTTY
I don't know, Joanie. I don't even
know what I'm doing! We're signing
the papers tomorrow and I've been
recruiting artists. Am I losing my
mind?

Joan puts her arm around Scotty.

JOAN
Mom can't see how hard this has
been on you.

SCOTTY
What's so hard about going in
tomorrow and signing my name?
(then)
Remember Tuesdays?

JOAN
New comics.

SCOTTY
I was just telling Ham last night.
(off her confusion)
This new kid I met yesterday, full
of ideas. If Dad was alive,
he'd've hired him on the spot, and
they'd've turned Rocket into
the...

Scotty's expression has become animated. Now he trails off,
and his face falls.

Brad and Hannah come running down.

BRAD
Hello, Uncle Scotty!

SCOTTY
Hey there, kiddo! Good to see you!

HANNAH
You got comics for us?

JOAN
Hannah, really!

SCOTTY
A girl who knows what she wants. I
can appreciate that.

He reaches into his briefcase and takes out a small stack of comics, gives them to Hannah who squeals, grabs them, and starts to run off.

JOAN
What do you say?

HANNAH
Thanks, Uncle Scotty!

Scotty nods, then takes out another stack and hands it to Brad.

BRAD
Thanks, Uncle Scotty!

Before they run off...

JOAN
Take those upstairs and come right
back down. You can read them after
dinner.

The kids do as they're told.

Scotty takes out a final stack for Tim, separating one from the rest. IT'S HIS FAVORITE ISSUE OF SGT. SAMM.

SCOTTY
(to Joan)
Remember this?

Joan looks over Scotty's shoulder.

JOAN
Uh-huh. God, you were obsessed.

Hannah and Brad run back downstairs and to the kitchen table.

SCOTTY
Tim still upstairs?

JOAN
I suppose.

SCOTTY
I'll go bring these up to him --
so he doesn't have to make two
trips.

Joan smiles and nods.

INT. HOPWELL HOUSE - TIM AND BRAD'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Tim is on his bed, lying down on his stomach, his head resting
on his arms.

Scotty appears in the doorway. He looks at Tim for a moment
before knocking on the door frame.

SCOTTY
Hey, buddy. Can I come in?

Tim shrugs. Scotty steps inside.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
You ready to eat? Your mom and dad
are about ready to tear into that
roast.

TIM
He's not my dad.

Scotty sits on the edge of Tim's bed.

SCOTTY
He's the man who raised you,
isn't he?

Tim sits up and moves away from Scotty, sitting with his back
against the wall.

TIM
My dad died in Europe fighting
Hitler. You can't just get a new
dad.

Silence for a moment. Then, Scotty pushes a stack of comics
toward Tim.

SCOTTY
Hey, look. I was getting rid of
some old comics --

TIM
I don't want any.

SCOTTY
How 'bout just this one?

Scotty hands Tim just HIS FAVORITE SGT. SAMM.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
It's my favorite. I read it a
thousand times.

Tim absently picks it up and flips through it.

TIM
(sort of touched, but this
is awkward)
Thanks.

Tim puts the comic book on his nightstand.

SCOTTY
Your mom and me -- we just lost
our dad. I know what it's like.

TIM
It's different. He was old.

SCOTTY
Doesn't matter. When you lose your
dad, it hurts.

TIM
Brad and Hannah can't even
remember our dad.

SCOTTY
Then I guess it's important you
never, ever forget.
(beat)
But Carl's a good guy, you know.
He love your mom, he loves Brad
and Hannah, and guess what? He
even loves --

TIM
(edging off the bed)
Can I go get dinner now?

SCOTTY
(beat)
Sure.

Tim exits. Scotty sighs and gets off the bed. His fingers
brush the cover of the comic book on the nightstand -- this is
goodbye to a childhood treasure.

44.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Scotty comes out of the elevator. Millicent's desk is empty. He walks into his office.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - SCOTTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Scotty turns on the light.

MILLICENT

(angry)

Metropolitan Comics is in the
conference room.

Scotty gasps. Millicent is sitting behind his desk.

SCOTTY

Millicent, I have to tell you
something. I'm --

MILLICENT

(more angry)

Yes?

SCOTTY

I'm selling Rocket.

MILLICENT

I know! Madre de Dios, Scotty,
I know!

SCOTTY

Millicent, I'm sorry --

MILLICENT

Sorry's exactly what you are, the
sorriest, most cowardly --!

SCOTTY

Now, just a minute, I'm still
your boss!

MILLICENT

Then start acting like it! You are
selling, you're not selling,
you're talking to amazing new
talent, you're tellin' 'em to go
screw!

Your father would've made a decision weeks ago!

SCOTTY
(before he can stop himself)
I'm not my dad!

Millicent softens. She stands, coming around the desk toward Scotty.

MILLICENT
What was the first thing you said
to me when we first met?

SCOTTY
(muttering)
I'm taking away your key to this
door, again.

MILLICENT
Well?

SCOTTY
I said -- "You're a queer bird,
but I like you."

They smile at each other.

MILLICENT
Roosevelt Davies.

SCOTTY
What about him?

MILLICENT
He's like me.

SCOTTY
He's a sick, perverted --

Millicent folds her arms.

MILLICENT
He's like me, Scotty. And he needs
someone to tell him that they like
him anyway.

SCOTTY
But...

Millicent turns and heads for the door. She stops.

MILLICENT
How were you smart when you were
young, but you're so stupid now?
(MORE)

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

(then)

Like I said. Meeting in the
conference room -- Mr. Sorenson.

She exits.

INT. ROCKET COMICS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Chip, Agnes and the Lawyer sit on one side of a conference table. Across from them sits MR. CHARLIE DONOVAN, 50, president of Metropolitan Comics, wearing a very nice suit and accompanied by HIS LAWYER and TWO AIDES.

Scotty enters.

CHIP

There he is!

SCOTTY

(shakes hand with Donovan)
Hello, Mr. Donovan.

MR. DONOVAN

How are ya, my boy?

Scotty sits without answering him.

MR. DONOVAN (CONT'D)

(resumes after a pause)

We're very excited to be here,
Scotty, very excited. I've always
been a great admirer of Rocket
Comics. This company did some
great work, in its day. It may not
of been the biggest, but it had a
big heart.

(passes Scotty an expensive
leather folder)

Here's the contract. Your lawyer
can walk you through it. Take all
the time you --

Scotty opens the folder and TEARS THE CONTRACT IN HALF.

Total silence in the room. Everyone looks stricken.

AGNES

Scotty, have you taken leave
of your --

SCOTTY
(quiet, but firm)
Please, mom.

Agnes fumes, but says nothing more.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)
Mr. Donovan, Rocket was my
father's whole life. Seven hundred
and fifty thousand dollars isn't
much for a man's whole life.

MR. DONOVAN
It's a very generous offer, son.

SCOTTY
I'm Mr. Sorenson, sir. I'm not
your son.

MR. DONOVAN
(swallows his anger)
I apologize.

CHIP
Scotty --

SCOTTY
(to Mr. Donovan)
Chip's about to remind me that
Rocket is a washed up little
company with only a couple titles
that kids still give a hoot about.
That right, Chip?

CHIP
That's about the size of it.

SCOTTY
Here's what I want to know, Chip:
How is Mr. Donovan's situation any
better than ours?

MR. DONOVAN
We publish the most recognizable
superheroes in the country.

SCOTTY
In other words, a bunch of strong
men in long underwear.

MR. DONOVAN
They've done pretty well for us.

SCOTTY

It's not the forties anymore, Mr. Donovan. You can't tell the same old stories, over and over. If you don't believe me, look at your sales numbers. Before long, you'll be lucky if some sucker will give you seven hundred and fifty grand for Metropolitan!

MR. DONOVAN

How 'bout you let me worry about that?

SCOTTY

How 'bout this: Starting this month, Rocket's going to be the only publisher that's not too scared to give them something they've never seen. Does that sound good to you, Mr. Donovan?

MR. DONOVAN

It sounds insane.

SCOTTY

Sounds like the new Rocket Comics. See you at the newsstand.

Offended, Mr. Donovan and his entourage stand up.

MR. DONOVAN

I was being generous, Mr. Sorenson. For your old man's sake. If you have a change of heart -- call somebody else. The offer's off the table.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

Scotty escorts Donovan and his entourage into the reception area, with Chip and Agnes following behind. Millicent is holding the elevator. Ham and Abernathy are nearby.

Donovan scowls and grinds his teeth.

MR. DONOVAN

(points at Scotty)

That reckless young man is taking you down a dangerous road, Millicent.

MILLICENT

I certainly hope so, sir.

Mr. Donovan gets on the elevator, shaking his head. The doors close.

Millicent lets out a squeal of delight and leaps into Scotty's arms. Ham smiles widely and claps. Even Abernathy looks less ornery than usual. But Agnes is stone-faced, and Chip is in shock.

CHIP

Scotty, what the hell was --

SCOTTY

(pushing Millicent off him)
Chip, in my office. We've got work to do.

MILLICENT

Go get 'em, boss!

INT. SCOTTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Scotty enters, followed by Chip. Agnes comes in behind them.

CHIP

Scotty, are we going to talk about what you just --

SCOTTY

No.

CHIP

You can't take on Metropolitan!

SCOTTY

Watch me.

CHIP

We haven't got the cash, we haven't got the distribution --

SCOTTY

Chip, put Ham Rose on the payroll, and have Millicent draw up freelance contracts for Roosevelt Davies and Carl Hopwell. We're keeping Captain Jupiter, Sgt. Samm and Life of Crime. Cancel everything else.

CHIP

I hope we don't regret this.

SCOTTY

We won't.

Chip exits, leaving Scotty alone with Agnes.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

Let's hear it.

AGNES

(furious, sarcastic)

Oh? Do I have your leave to speak now?!

SCOTTY

Mother --

AGNES

I was supposed to have a fresh start, you and I and Joanie! Have you lost your mind?!

SCOTTY

I know what I'm doing.

AGNES

And what is that exactly?

SCOTTY

The last couple days, I have met some amazing people--

AGNES

Ham Rose?

SCOTTY

-- talented people, like Ham Rose, yes...

AGNES

He's just a boy!

SCOTTY

... and others too. They could take Rocket into the big time!

AGNES

I should have handled the sale.

SCOTTY

They could fill this place with a kind of energy we haven't seen since --

AGNES

It was wrong of me to lay this on your shoulders, Peanut. I know it's hard to let him go --

SCOTTY

This has nothing to do with Dad!

AGNES

Then what is it about?! You heard Chip! You don't have the distribution to take on Metropolitan. You're behaving like a sentimental child!

SCOTTY

I'm behaving like a businessman. If Donovan will pay seven-fifty for a moldy, old dinosaur, imagine what he'll give us a year from now.

Agnes stops. Now she's listening.

AGNES

A year from now?

SCOTTY

When Rocket prints the best comic books in the business. When we're making him sweat.

Agnes is thinking now. You can see the wheels turning.

SCOTTY (CONT'D)

We don't need the distribution. We don't even need to break even, don't you see? This time next year, he'll give us two million, easy.

AGNES

(beat)

It's risky.

SCOTTY

I can do it, Mom. I got him to offer seven-fifty. With Ham, I can get more.

AGNES

(nodding slowly)

And does Ham know you're planning to sell the company out from under him.

SCOTTY

We need his best work. We won't
get it if he knows.

Agnes nods again. She goes to the door, then turns. She looks at Scotty with both respect and sadness.

AGNES

You've always fancied yourself as
the center of a little group of
outsiders. King of the misfits.

(beat)

Enjoy your new friends while you
can, Peanut.

She exits.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - SCOTTY'S OFFICE - LATER

Scotty and Ham at Scotty's desk. Ham signs a contract. Scotty offers Ham his hand. Ham takes it and pulls his friend into a hug.

Millicent brings him a cup of coffee. Ham's surprised -- he's used to waiting on her. She smiles, ruffles his hair.

INT. ROCKET COMICS OFFICE - RECEPTION - LATER

Roosevelt enters, looking dapper in a red suit and hat. Scotty offers his hand, respectfully.

Roosevelt eyes him suspiciously, then takes the plunge and shakes his hand. A hint of a smile.

INT. HOPWELL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carl on the couch opening a recently messengered envelope. He pulls out a Rocket Comics contract.

Joan approaches, leans on the back of the couch, putting her hand on his shoulder. He looks up at her, she smiles at him, and they both look at the paperwork.

EXT. BRANDT ELEMENTARY - SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The school yard is desolate. No playing. No noise.

Until we happen upon a crowd of TEACHERS and STUDENTS standing around several large METAL BARRELS WITH FLAMES COMING OUT OF THEM.

People cheer. NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPHERS snap pictures.

The children are throwing something into the fire -- we can't see what at first. As we get closer, it becomes clear. COMIC BOOKS.

ANGLE ON TIM -- next to one of the barrels. His face is hard as he looks into the fire. He pulls a rolled up comic out of his back pocket. IT'S THE ONE SCOTTY GAVE HIM.

ANGLE ON THE COMIC BOOK -- as Sgt. Samm and Marie Madeleine are consumed by the flames.

ANGLE ON TIM -- his face betrays just a hint of regret as he watches it burn, the flames reflected in his eyes.

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT