

THE HOUSE OF IDEAS

(Part Three of the Four-Color Trilogy)
7th Draft Script Sample

By
Mark Pracht

"Comics are one of the five native American art forms,
including banjo music, jazz music, musical theatre, and the
mystery story as invented by Edgar Allen Poe."

- Harlan Ellison

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ACT ONE

ACT ONE - SCENE ONE

Projected: An image of the grandeur of deep space

A large man in a red toga lined with comic book images is silhouetted against the image, this is our OBSERVER.

Projected: A very rapid series of Marvel comic panels, or portions thereof as the Observer speaks. Should be too quick for anything more than an impression.

OBSERVER

As fabled Atlantis rose and fell, grand Xanadu Kublai Khan decreed, and El Dorado lost to the mists of fantasy. Since time out of mind, these eyes have witnessed the path of imagination. I know all that is, most of what has been, and much of what will be.

Projected: More cosmic majesty.

OBSERVER

I'm kind of a big deal...cosmically.

Lights shift. The Observer is fully illuminated.

OBSERVER

I am sustained by the well of inspiration. I have seen the fabulous trickery of Houdini, the heady, swirling musical journeys of Bird Parker...And the imaginings that enliven my heart, nourish my soul like no other.

He produces a Marvel comic book.

OBSERVER

Joyously read into tatters, or slabbed safely under plastic, by beings...fans...like me.

Projected: NEW YORK - 1941

OBSERVER

A sordid enterprise born of a glorious marriage of ink and pulp paper, ushered into it's fullest form by naive young hearts bristling with ambition and imagination...

Projected: Image of New York City in 1941

Lights fade on The Observer.

Lights up on four men in an office, JOE SIMON and Jacob Kurtzberg, better known by his pen name, JACK KIRBY face off with MARTIN GOODMAN, Publisher of Timely Comics. Another man sits behind Goodman, attempting to remain unnoticed, Stanley Lieber, who will become known as STAN LEE.

GOODMAN

You're supposed to bring me comics, Simon.

JACK

Goodman, are you callin' us slackers?

GOODMAN

I expect you to work for ME.

Projected: The Timely Comics logo

SIMON

Kirby and I give you the services we contracted for. Captain America each month, like clockwork.

JACK

I ain't no welsher, you get that? I didn't take insults back in the neighborhood, and I won't do it now. I do my work, Joe does his, and sell gangbusters! Hell, even your nephew back there...

GOODMAN

Cousin, actually.

JACK

Whatever! He didn't earn his job, but he knows to do what we tell him.

GOODMAN

I hear tell you boys have been moonlighting. That's a violation of your deal.

SIMON

The deal that gives us twenty-five percent of Captain America?

JACK

I don't see than in my checks! How's that for a valuation?

Simon places a hand on Jack's arm, quieting him.

GOODMAN

I think you're over-estimating the profit on that book.

SIMON

You're laying every last bit of the office expenses, all of this, against our comic!

GOODMAN

I keep clean books, Joe. If Liebowitz over at DC gets his pick of your work, I don't see that Timely Comics needs your services.

JACK

(to Stan)

You ratted us out, didn't ya kid? Followed us around like a puppy, and then ran back to Uncle Marty.

SIMON

Let it go, Jack.

GOODMAN

You did this to yourself.

SIMON

We all make our deals, Goodman. Remember that when the sales come in.

Jack and Joe step out, lights shift to isolate them. Lights down on Goodman and Stan.

JACK

He screwed us, Joe!!

SIMON

It's business, don't take it personally.

JACK

I swear, I ever see that Stanley Lieber kid again, I'm gonna kill him.

SIMON

Anybody could've told Goodman we were moonlighting. Ten guys knew about it.

JACK

No, no way. That kid followed us over there, spying for Goodman.

SIMON

Jack, calm down. Bridges burn. I'm not always going to be around to watch your back.

Lights shift back to Stan and Goodman. Jack and Joe exit.

GOODMAN

They're gone, Stanley. You can stop hiding back there.

STAN

I wasn't hiding, Mister Goodman.

GOODMAN

Of course not...Well, Joe Simon, my editor, just walked out. I guess it's on you now.

STAN

What was that Mister Goodman?

GOODMAN

You're in charge.

Goodman starts to exit, then stops.

GOODMAN

Make more than you spend.

Goodman exits. Stan is alone as the lights shift

ACT ONE - SCENE TWO

Projected: FRANCE - 1944

OBSERVER

Innocence may hide in our nostalgic obsessions, but the fantasy of four-color violence gives way to the brutal truth of war. Men in the prime of life answered their nation's call to far-away Europe...

Lights up on Jack. He is dressed in an infantry uniform, dirty and battered from battle.

Projected: An image of WWII US Troops

Another GI, PRIVATE DUGGAN, wanders in and plops down.

DUGGAN

Hell of a day.

JACK

Is it like this all the time?

DUGGAN

Usually the weather is worse. Be thankful you're not one of those poor bastards on the Russian front.

JACK

That bad?

DUGGAN

That's the word. It's not like they tell us anything.

JACK

I hear that. Seems like just last week I was goin' to work, then wham! On a troop transport.

DUGGAN

Yeah, that Hitler's damn inconsiderate.

They share a laugh.

JACK

Name's Kurtzberg, but they call me Kirby.

DUGGAN

Duggan. You from New York? Sounds like it.

JACK

The Big Apple's number-one son, lower east side.

DUGGAN

(Bad French accent)

“Ohh, Big Apple, passe le fromage et le champagne.”

JACK

You'll offend the locals talkin' that way.

DUGGAN

The Frogs are offended by everything they can't surrender to.

Duggan pulls out a flask.

DUGGAN

You want a snort?

JACK

Nah. I got my own.

DUGGAN

Hang on to that. Worth more than gold. That and smokes.

The GI pulls CAPTAIN AMERICA COMICS #40 from his rucksack. Jack gazes at his fellow soldier.

Projected: cover of Captain America Comics #40

JACK

Ya like that Captain America?

DUGGAN

Better'n that fish guy with the pointed ears. The Sub-ma-REEN-er, or whatever.

JACK

Sub-MARE-in-er. Prince Namor.

DUGGAN

What are you, a smartass? They give 'em to us.

JACK

You might be interested to know...

DUGGAN

I don't need to know anything from you, new boy! Come back when the Ratzis have taken a few more shots at you.

JACK

Captain America. That's my guy. Me and Joe Simon.

DUGGAN

Yeah, right. Gimme a break.

JACK

I'll show you...

Jack opens his rucksack and pulls out a sketchpad. He holds it up to the other Private.

JACK

See?

DUGGAN

Aw, hell, Kirby, I could do that!

JACK

Sure ya could, wiseass.

Jack stuffs his sketches away. Lights dim to a spotlight on Jack.

JACK

Dear Roz: I have landed on another planet. The GIs remind me that war is real, and that the Nazis who started this horror are not comic book characters. But this war...I will never forget what I have seen, the weak suffering under this evil. All I want is to get to Berlin, kill Hitler, and return home to you. I'll try to write you every day.

Lights shift back.

DUGGAN

Wait...Is that for real?

JACK

I ain't a liar.

DUGGAN

So you're rich, then?

Beat. The lights shift.

ACT ONE - SCENE THREE

Projected: Image of Fort Monmouth.

Lights shift and we find Stan sneaking into the base mailroom. He searches the office for the key to the mailboxes, occasionally indistinct comments to himself on his progress.

Projected: FORT MONMOUTH, NEW JERSEY - 1945

Lights shift as Stan is caught in a flashlight beam.

PINKERTON

(off stage)

Face front, Soldier!!

The flashlight cuts out and the overhead lights come on and a MP, CORPORAL PINKERTON, is holding his gun on Stan.

PINKERTON

Hands up!

STAN

Well, hey there!...Now, I bet you're asking yourself what I'm doing in here.

PINKERTON

Put your hands up!!

Stan does so. The MP starts to reach for his radio.

STAN

Hold on, hold on! Can't ya cut a guy a break? I'm one of the playwrights.

Beat.

PINKERTON

Thank you for your service. Let's go.

STAN

Couldn't ya cut a fellow GI a break? I got a deadline, here. Assignment right in that box.

PINKERTON

Sounds like a problem for you and your CO.

STAN

Well, y'know, it's not really for the Army.

PINKERTON

Keeping things safe stateside, huh?

Stan checks his uniform for his name.

STAN

Hey, Corporal...Pinkerton...Say, Do they call you "Pinky?"

PINKERTON

Not if they want to keep their teeth.

STAN

Nobody tells their CO everything, do they?

Stan smiles. Pinkerton doesn't.

STAN

Do ya mind if I put my hands down?

The MP lowers his gun.

STAN

So...can you help a guy out? Open the mailroom?

PINKERTON

What the hell is this job?

Lights shift to a spot on Stan. Pinkerton freezes.

STAN

I always dreamed of becoming a household name. A bon vivant of style and grace! A wordsmith! To be uttered in the same breath as Shakespeare! Tolstoy! Twain! Synonymous with class, skill, and talent.

Lights shift back.

STAN

(sighs)

I write comic books.

PINKERTON

Are you kidding?

STAN

'Fraid not.

Pinkerton pulls a folded up copy of Whiz Comics #63 featuring Captain Marvel from his pocket.

Projected: The Cover of Whiz Comics #63

PINKERTON

Never miss me a Captain Marvel. Shazam! You write this?

Stan looks at the book.

STAN

Y'know, that's a different publisher.

PINKERTON

Huh. Which one is yours?

STAN

Well, I tell ya...real exciting! Action packed, my friend! Captain America, the sentinel of liberty!

Stan does a superhero pose. Beat.

PINKERTON

Yeah...That one's terrible...You know the guy who does these?

The lights shift.

ACT ONE - SCENE FOUR

The Observer appears.

Projected: NEW YORK, NY - 1958

OBSERVER

The Nazi menace is defeated! Men like Kirby put the horrors of war behind them, yearning for the freedom they'd fought to defend. New homes, new opportunities, new pressure to support their growing young families...

Projected: The 1950's DC Comics logo.

OBSERVER

...But deception and betrayal are not only for combat.

Lights shift to the DC Comics offices. Jack walks onstage carrying his portfolio, a light rises and reveals JACK SCHIFF, an editor.

SCHIFF

Kirby! Come in here, we need to talk.

JACK

What do you need Schiff?

SCHIFF

You were supposed to wet my beak.

JACK

"Wet your beak?" What? Did ya join the mob?

SCHIFF

We had an agreement.

JACK

Are you jokin'? We paid you!

SCHIFF

It's money. It's never funny. You made a first installment. We said four percent.

JACK

Of everything? That's insane! D'ya think I'm a Dope?

Schiff smiles and shrugs.

SCHIFF

Not many games left in town, Kirby. What with you having such a nice little house out in Long Island, three beautiful kids...and another on the way...It'd be a real shame if DC no longer needed your services. Yeah, that would be a real damn shame.

JACK

Ya ain't nothin' but a crook. This is a scam!

SCHIFF

The word is "business," Kirby.

Kirby gathers his portfolio, and exits. As he walks across the stage, lights shift to the Kirby home, ROZ KRIBY, Jack's wife bustles about. She is pregnant. There is a radio playing and she sways and sings to Frank Sinatra's "All the Way." As Jack enters the scene, she turns off the radio and kisses him.

ROZ

There's my man! How was the train?

JACK

Be faster if you let me drive.

ROZ

You don't drive. I drive. You don't make enough to pay for a fourth wrecked car, Kirby.

Kirby sits at the table, and slumps.

ROZ

What's the matter?

She wedges herself into his lap. Jack grunts.

ROZ

Oh, stop that! My Kirby can lift a car if he needs to!

JACK

You must be cookin' a Buick in there, then.

She smacks him playfully.

ROZ

Keep it up mister smart guy, and I'll send you to bed with no supper.

JACK

It's physically impossible for Roz Kirby, my ever-lovin' wife, to not force-feed every man, woman or child in sight. I bet every last one of Neal's friends left here with a sandwich AND a piece of cake! Am I right?

ROZ

That's none of your business!

JACK

(Sighs)

That damn word.

ROZ

What word?

JACK

"Business."

ROZ

What happened?

JACK
That...

Jack scans the area.

JACK
Kids around?

ROZ
Outside playing.

JACK
That GODDAMNED Jack Schiff wanted a kickback! It was like being worked over by the gangs back in the neighborhood.

ROZ
You're too good for those rats. I hope you told him what's what.

JACK
I told him he could take his low-rent books and shove 'em!

ROZ
That's my fella.

They kiss. Roz gets up and returns to her chores.

JACK
I don't know where I'm gonna go. Schiff's gonna blackball me at DC. The whole damn industry is on it's last legs, thanks to that Wertham creep. The guys holdin' the strings are a bunch'a crooks tryin' to put the squeeze on. In the neighborhood, If some jerk was tryin' ta put one over on ya, ya'd paste him in the kisser, and they'd back off...I sure wish Joe was still around.

ROZ
Call him.

JACK
Ah, hell, Roz. Joe Simon's out of the business, Simon and Kirby is long over...I'm a grown man, I got three kids and you to take care of. Ought to be able to handle this.

ROZ
We can take care of ourselves. I'll give Schiff a sock in the jaw for ya.

JACK

Hell, I outta turn you loose on that scumbag. All the scraps I had back in the neighborhood, all those bums. Ain't nobody who scared me, not one. Except you.

ROZ

Didn't seem so scared when you asked me up to your bedroom to see your etchings...

JACK

Jeeze, Roz...we were kids!

ROZ

Here I thought you were making a pass, and you pull out a bunch of drawings!

JACK

Our parents were right there!

ROZ

Details, Kirby. Details.

She kisses him. Jack is quiet.

ROZ

What are you chewin' on?

JACK

I heard Goodman might need guys.

ROZ

Kirby, you can't. They welched on you and Joe! You want to work for Stanley Lieber?

JACK

Can't be worse than Jack Schiff.

ROZ

Bunch of finks. You can smell 'em.

JACK

Then why can't I get a decent deal without Joe?

ROZ

You will, Kirby.

JACK

Not if we all starve to death. I'm goin' down to the dungeon to work.

ROZ

Remember to eat!

JACK

Like you wouldn't tie a feed bag to my face!

Jack exits, and the lights fade.

ACT ONE - SCENE FIVE

Projected: LONG ISLAND, NY

Lights shift to a cocktail party at Martin Goodman's home. Charlie Parker's "Everything Happens to Me" plays softly. Stan and his wife, JOAN LEE, stand holding martini's and laughing in her English accent with Goodman.

Projected: Photo of a Long Island Estate

JOAN

Oh Martin! You are such a CARD!

They all laugh.

JOAN

Is Jean going to join us?

GOODMAN

She'll be out presently. Something to do with the staff in the kitchen.

JOAN

Good help is hard to find, Martin. Don't we know that, Stan?

STAN

What do you mean? We don't have...

She elbows him.

STAN

YES! So right, Joanie! Our last pool party was almost a disaster. TERRIBLE help!

GOODMAN

I'm sorry Jean and I couldn't make it.

JOAN

Next time, Martin! We always have a martini ready for you.

GOODMAN

Maybe you'd like to join her in the kitchen.

JOAN

Oh, I don't think so.

She turns away from Martin.

STAN

Y'know, Martin, I have some exciting ideas for expanding the magazine line...

JOAN

Yes! Stan was regaling me with the idea. Celebrity photos, witty commentary. What were you going to call it Stan?

STAN

Celebrity!

GOODMAN

Pardon me, Stanley. I see someone important.

Goodman exits.

STAN

Another time, Martin!

JOAN

Oh, Stan...Jean's new couch is just darling! That's a Carl Hansen, I just know it. I should look into getting one.

STAN

Maybe wait until we've paid off the sideboard?

JOAN

The Danish school just speaks to me.

STAN

Danish! It's imported?

JOAN

Of course it is! Who buys American? No one with style.

GREER GRANT, carrying a notebook, enters.

GREER

Excuse me, are you friends of the Goodmans?

JOAN

Relatives, darling.

GREER

Oh really?

JOAN

My husband is Martin's nephew.

STAN

Cousin, actually.

JOAN

Stanley and I live just down the block.

GREER

Isn't that just delicious!

JOAN

I like to think so.

GREER

Well, I'll have to cover your next party.

JOAN

Cover?

GREER

Oh, I do the social page for The South Shore Record. Greer Grant.

JOAN

The South Shore Record! Stan, isn't that just wonderful!?

STAN

Sure is. My name is Stanley Lieber, by the way. This is my wife Joanie.

GREER

Absolutely charmed! You're here in the neighborhood?

JOAN

Right down the street. You MUST come by, I have some lovely pieces I found at a little boutique in Greenwich...the city? I really think they might be Gio Ponti. Maybe you can give me your opinion?

GREER

I would absolutely LOVE to! May I call you Joan?

JOAN

OF COURSE!

GREER

What do you do, Stan? Oh, may I call you Stan?

STAN

Anything but “hey Bozo!” and to tell you the truth, that’s probably OK by me, too! I work for Martin's company.

GREER

Magazine Management?

STAN

That's absolutely right. Say, you ARE a reporter, aren't you!

They all laugh.

JOAN

She’s got a notebook! Be careful what you say, Stan.

GREER

The magazine business is soooo very interesting.

STAN

I happen to be a writer. Along with some editing and art direction.

GREER

How exciting! What do you work on?

STAN

...You probably haven't heard of it, it's children's publications.

JOAN

Greer, you don't have any children, do you?

GREER

Oh dear God, no.

JOAN

It's just such a niche market, even with our daughter, J.C? I've never heard of half these magazines Stan talks about.

GREER

I do have nephews, voracious readers. I'm sure they read EVERY children's magazine.

Joan looks at Stan.

STAN

They're...illustrated stories.

GREER

Like what?

STAN

It's actually comic books, Greer. I run Martin's line of comic books.

Beat.

GREER

Well, it was...lovely to meet you both. Unfortunately, I simply must rush back to the office and file this story.

JOAN

Well I very much hope you'll be able to stop by and help authenticate my Gio Ponti.

GREER

Honestly, Mrs. Lieber, I'm quite sure it wouldn't be genuine.

Greer exits. Stan picks at a spot on his tie, and Joan sips her martini. Lights shift.