

MARVELS SERIAL—CHAPTER ONE
HUMAN TORCH
By Richard Ashcraft

BASED ON MARVEL COMICS' GOLDEN-AGE HEROES

Written in 2012.
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FADE IN:

EXTREME LONG SHOT - THE NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE - NIGHT

SUPER: NEW YORK CITY, SPRING 1947

VILLAIN ONE (V.O.)

How can we be sure this writer
really knows her? Maybe he's a
nut living in a fantasy world.

EXT. BILL'S DINER - LATE NIGHT

A 1940s COUPLE exits the somewhat run-down eatery.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

He introduced her to the workers
at Bill's Diner.

A 1937 Porter parks in front of the diner. OTTO BINDER exits the car. He is an average-looking man wearing a business suit and a matching hat. He enters the diner.

Moments later, he exits with two full paper bags, which he holds in one hand. He opens the car door and sets the bags on the passenger seat. Then he gets in, closes the door, starts the car, and drives away.

INT. OTTO'S CAR - LATE NIGHT

He drives and looks occasionally at the silent radio.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

Now he's listening to a news
report about the Human Torch.
The Torch used his powers to put
out some fire in an apartment
building.

OTTO

Praise the Lord.

VILLAIN THREE (V.O.)

So what? I can do the same thing
in my sleep.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

Quiet!

(a beat, calmer)

Now he's wondering how the Human Torch forces himself to use his powers. He can't understand how the hero can burst into flames after that awful day.

INT. AN OLD-FASHIONED LABORATORY - DAY

PROFESSOR PHINEAS HORTON is mixing chemicals into a beaker. His assistants, NORA AND FRED RAYMOND, anxiously watch. Nora is ready to write down the results. Fred is ready to hand Phineas test tubes filled with chemicals and colored powder.

SUPER: PHINEAS HORTON'S LABORATORY, ATLAS CITY, FALL 1939

PHINEAS

All right, Nora and Fred. I'm betting everything on red.

The Raymonds groan.

NORA

Professor. What an awful rhyme.

FRED

Hey, look.

The chemical in the beaker turns bright red. The three smile.

PHINEAS

Monte Carlo, here I come.

They laugh. Then Nora writes in her notepad. Fred hands Phineas a test tube filled with a green powder. Phineas pours the powder into the beaker. It turns the chemical black.

NORA

It's a good thing you didn't let it ride.

The Raymonds laugh while Phineas tries to figure out her joke. He finally does.

PHINEAS
Good one, Nora.

They all laugh again.

EXT. THE ATLAS CITY LIBRARY - DAY

It has a plaque with its name on the wall. PEOPLE wearing 1930s clothing enter and exit the building.

LIBRARIAN (V.O.)
Shhhhhh.

INT. THE LIBRARY - DAY

THOMAS is the Raymonds' 13-year-old son. He does his homework at a desk near the large window. Then he hears an EXPLOSION. The window and the desk shake for a couple of seconds. He and the elderly LIBRARIAN look out the window.

THEIR POV THROUGH THE WINDOW

The building next door is on fire. Thomas's horrified expression is reflected left of the inferno.

LIBRARIAN (V.O.)
Dear Lord in Heaven!

THOMAS
Mom! Dad!

THOMAS

He runs away from the window and out of the library.

EXT. THE BURNING LABORATORY - DAY

A siren roars. Then a police car pulls up in front of the lab. OFFICER JIM HAMMOND gets out of the car. He is blond and in his early twenties. He sees Thomas running for the building.

JIM
Hey! Stop!

Jim runs after him and stops him. Thomas struggles to get away.

THOMAS

Let me go! My folks are in there!

JIM

You must stay out here!

THOMAS

Please!

(sheds tears)

I've got to save them!

LIBRARIAN (V.O.)

Thomas Raymond! You stay with me!

The men turn to the librarian, who quickly approaches them.

LIBRARIAN

Jim can't worry about you while
he's saving your parents!

(to Jim)

Go!

Jim reluctantly lets go of Thomas and runs into the laboratory.
The librarian grabs Thomas's wrist.

INT. THE BURNING LABORATORY - DAY

Flames and eerie yellow smoke fill the room. The side door is
off of its hinges. Jim runs through the open doorway. He gasps
when he sees

THE THREE BURNING CORPSES

Their bodies give off the yellow smoke.

JIM

He is bewildered by the heat and smoke. He coughs while he tries
to escape the laboratory.

EXT. THE BURNING LABORATORY - DAY

The librarian and Thomas watch Jim exit the building. Thomas
bursts out crying and falls to his knees. The librarian reaches
out to Thomas and tries to comfort him.

Jim continues to approach them. With each step, his body starts to blaze. It is slowly at first. The librarian sees this, and she gasps very loudly.

JIM

I couldn't save them! I swear
to God, I tried to--

Jim totally bursts into flames. The librarian points at him.

JIM (CONT'D)

Oh, my God!

Thomas looks up and sees the burning Jim. Thomas stops crying. Then Jim's fiery body takes to the air against his control. The three scream as he flies out of the scene.

THE FIERY JIM

He flies out of control and waves his arms around in panic. This makes fireballs shoot out of his hands. One hits the library's roof and sets it on fire. Another hits the grocery store's roof. He leaves behind him a trail of fire in the air. The TOWNSPEOPLE run away from the low-flying Jim. A LADY ducks just in time.

THE LIBRARIAN

She looks upward, points to the side, and yells very loudly.

LIBRARIAN

Jim! Jim! The lake! Go to the
lake!

(now shrieks)

THE LAKE! THE LAKE!

A fireball barely misses her, and she jumps back and screams.

RESUME THE FIERY JIM

He is starting to gain some control over his flight, although he is still a bit unsteady.

LIBRARIAN (V.O.)

(somewhat faint)

The lake! The lake!

JIM
Of course!

He flies to the lake. Then he dives in. His flames go out, but the water becomes boiling hot.

THE BOILING LAKE

Jim comes up to the surface. He is nude because his clothes have burned away. He inhales deeply while he treads water.

JIM (V.O.)
I should be freezing! But I
don't feel cold! And I didn't
feel hot when I was on . . .

He looks to the side. He gapes.

JIM (V.O. CONT'D)
Fire.

HIS POV

Black smoke rises from two areas in the city.

JIM (V.O.)
What have I done?

RESUME JIM IN THE LAKE

He gets an idea.

JIM (V.O.)
I created the fires! So I should
be able to put them out!

He closes his eyes and concentrates.

JIM (V.O. CONT'D)
Just make a wish! Then the fires
will go away!

JIM
I wish the flames would stop
burning in Atlas City!

EXT. THE BURNING ROOFS - DAY

The flames rise up and form into fireballs. Then they fly over the buildings and to the side. They exit the scene.

RESUME JIM IN THE LAKE

The fireballs fly at Jim. He yells as they strike his body. They quickly go out as soon as they touch his wet skin. Jim gapes in surprise. Then he looks up as if talking to God.

JIM

I didn't want them to come to me!

JIM (V.O.)

At least the city is safe! I hope no one got hurt!

A car horn honks three times. This is followed by:

SWAIN (V.O.)

Jim! Jim Hammond! Can you hear me? It's Doctor Swain!

Jim looks to the side.

JIM

Doctor Swain? Oh, thank God!

Jim smiles and quickly waves his hand back and forth.

HIS POV

The middle-aged DOCTOR SWAIN stands next to his car. He takes his medical bag out of the car. Then he closes the driver door. He looks to the side.

SWAIN

Son, you stay in the water! I don't want you catching on fire when I, uh, examine you!

(a beat, to himself)

Though I'm not quite sure how I'm going to do that.

MONTAGE

- A) Jim stays in the lake while SOLDIERS form a bucket brigade. They use the water to fill up a cast-iron bathtub that is on an army truck. Doctor Swain's clothes are now wet. He watches them work. The LADY REPORTER beside him writes in a notepad.
- B) A PRIVATE approaches Jim. The private holds several blankets over his head. He drops a blanket into the water in front of Jim. Jim soaks it and then wraps it around himself. The private drops another blanket into the water, and Jim repeats the process.
- C) The blanket-clad Jim gets out of the water, and he runs to the truck. The soldiers are ready to throw their buckets of water at Jim. However, he does not burst into flame.
- D) The blanket-clad Jim sits in the bathtub. Two soldiers use their buckets to fill up the tub. Jim does his best to keep his body totally underwater.
- E) Doctor Swain, the librarian, Thomas, and the lady reporter wave goodbye to the moving truck. Thomas wipes away a tear.
- F) Jim's fiery body hovers off the ground in front of MILITARY PERSONNEL. When his flames eventually die off, Jim's ordinary body lands. He is embarrassed to be wearing black trunks.
- G) Jim shoots fireballs at ten tin cans on a wooden fence. The fireballs knock the cans off without setting the fence on fire. He beams.
- H) A GENERAL shields his eyes when Jim bursts into flame. Jim does not levitate. Then his flames disappear. The General smiles and points at Jim.
- I) The fiery Jim performs several aerial maneuvers. He flies high into the air, does a few loop-the-loops, and hovers upside-down.
- J) Jim creates floating letters made out of flame. They spell out JIM. He smirks at the General, who applauds him. Jim then creates more letters. They all spell out JIM IS THE GREATEST! The General gives him a mock look of disapproval. Jim waves his hands, and the letters disappear.

EXT. AN ARMY BASE - DAY

It is in the middle of a desert. Barracks are lined up in a row.

JIM (V.O.)

You have got to be kidding me.

INT. AN ARMY BARRACK - DAY

Jim is now the HUMAN TORCH. The Human Torch is wearing red long underwear with golden armbands, a golden collar, and a golden belt. The General looks at him.

HUMAN TORCH

I look like I belong in the circus.

GENERAL

At least it covers up your body.

HUMAN TORCH

That's true. No more running around in swim trunks. That was really embarrassing.

GENERAL

Let's test your costume out. Set only your right arm on fire.

HUMAN TORCH

Okay.

Human Torch looks at his right arm. It bursts into flame.

GENERAL

Is the fabric burning?

HUMAN TORCH

No, sir.

GENERAL

Stop the fire. I want to see for myself.

HUMAN TORCH

Yes, sir.

The flames disappear. The General examines the Human Torch's arm.

GENERAL

Amazing. Your costume really is fireproof.

HUMAN TORCH

And the little pores allow my flames to go through the fabric. Without them, my costume would smother the flames. I wonder who created these clothes.

GENERAL

Sorry. That information is strictly top secret. Is it safe for me to shake your hand?

HUMAN TORCH

It's not giving off any heat. Go ahead.

They shake hands. Then they smile at one another.

GENERAL

You finally have control over your powers. Congratulations.

HUMAN TORCH

Thank you, sir.

They stop shaking hands.

GENERAL

You think you're up to meeting the press sometime soon?

HUMAN TORCH

Yes, sir. At least this time I won't be naked.

They laugh.

EXT. AN ARMY BARRACK - DAY

ARMY OFFICIALS, REPORTERS, and PHOTOGRAPHERS stand around the entrance. Off to the side, REPORTER ONE talks to a MAJOR.

REPORTER ONE

Now come on, Major. This guy
can't really burst into flame?

The Major smiles knowingly.

MAJOR

I swear on a stack of bibles
that it's true.

REPORTER ONE

But why not keep him a secret?

MAJOR

One. The newspapers and radio
stations have already reported
the facts about him. And two.
We're sending Uncle Adolph a
message. "Don't even think of
coming here!"

Reporter One is impressed and smiles. Then he nods, points to his temple, and winks to the Major.

THE GENERAL

He comes out of the barrack. The photographers start taking pictures, and the reporters bombard him with questions. The General motions for them to quiet down. The reporters stop talking, but the photographers keep taking the occasional picture.

GENERAL

Gentlemen! Thank you for being
here today! I am General Herman
Donahue! And it is my honor to
present to you America's own
super-soldier--the Human Torch!

Human Torch comes out of the barracks. He smiles and waves at the reporters and photographers. They do not know what to make of his costume and give him startled looks. The army officials murmur among themselves. The General reassures Human Torch with a slight tilt of his head. The hero then tries to laugh it off.

HUMAN TORCH

Like Kate Smith says, hello,
everybody! And while she's a
big star . . .

(as an aside)

Some say she's the biggest star
they've ever seen!

Some of the others laugh. Most of them groan.

HUMAN TORCH (CONT'D)

She can't hold a candle to this!

(now yells)

FLAME ON!

He bursts into flames and hovers off of the ground. Some of the reporters shield their eyes, but the photographers keep taking the hero's pictures. They all are surprised.

HUMAN TORCH (CONT'D)

I can't stay too close to you
guys when I'm like this! So it's
a good thing I'm now lighter
than air!

Human Torch shoots up into the air and out of the scene, much to the reporters and photographers' surprise. The General beams.

INT. OTTO'S CAR - 1947

OTTO (V.O.)

Carl Burgos was lucky. He didn't
have to invent the Torch's origin.
He just had to read the army's
official reports on Jim Hammond.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

He wishes that he could rewrite
the Human Torch's story.

VILLAIN THREE (V.O.)

I wish I could kill the Human
Torch right now.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

Patience. The iceman cometh soon
enough.

OTTO (V.O.)

I wonder what happened to that
boy. Maybe the librarian adopted
him. I hope he wasn't killed in
the war. Damn you, Hitler.

EXT. A BUILDING - NIGHT

The Porter parks in front of the place.

VILLAIN FOUR (V.O.)

Finally!

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

Give the poor man a break. He
can't fly through buildings like
you can.

Otto gets out of the car with the two paper bags in one hand. He
locks the car door. Then he walks to the building door while he
puts his car keys in his pocket. He gets out a door key as he
approaches the entrance.

CAMERA PANS UP to show the sign on the building. The sign reads

LELAND BAXTER PAPER COMPANY
TIMELY COMICS

EXT. THE BUILDING'S ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Otto stands next to the stairway entrance. He does not have the
bags with him. He holds onto his hat to keep it from blowing
away.

OTTO

Come on, come on, come on!
It's getting cold up here!

VILLAINESS (V.O.)
He's a smorgasbord of emotions.
Anger. Irritability. Anxiety.
Eagerness. Even a little bit of
love. Fascinating.

OTTO
How does she stand it?

WOMAN (V.O.)
I'm sorry I'm late, Otto.

Otto smiles.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)
It's her!

Otto turns around and looks up.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O. CONT'D)
Her pictures don't do her justice!

OTTO'S POV

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL slowly descends onto the rooftop. Her hair and cape fly up in the wind, but she keeps her skirt from doing the same.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
But I had to help the police
capture a cat burglar.

She lands. Her hair and cape fall naturally into place.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)
I'm learning so much already!
She's a fountain of information!

VILLAIN FIVE (V.O.)
Don't get too hung up on her!
She's mine!

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL AND OTTO

He approaches her.

OTTO
That will be the lead story
in the next issue of All-
American Girl.

He kisses her hand. She smiles at him.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
It's not worth writing about.

OTTO
But it will be. After I make
the cat burglar steal a gem
that gives him magical powers.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
Oh, you poets and your licenses.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)
I knew it. He made up most of
their stories.

They head for the stairway entrance.

OTTO
I got us some dinner.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
Oh, good. I'm starving. Flying
really builds up an appetite.

OTTO
It's nothing special. Just some
ham-and-cheese sandwiches and
potato chips.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
Sounds good to me. So is Ione
waiting for us downstairs?

OTTO
No. Her mother broke her leg.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
Oh, no. Is she all right?

OTTO

For the most part. Ione flew back home, and now she's helping Mom out.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

A good wife and a good daughter. I wondered why she wasn't out here with you.

OTTO

Believe me, that's the only reason she would miss another chance to see you.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

Well, tell them both hello for me.

They exit through the stairway entrance and close the door behind them.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)

Hmmm. With his wife out of town, Binder will be more footloose and fancy-free. Which means he'll have his guard down.

INT. A MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Otto and All-American Girl eat their meals and drink from Zesty bottles. A portable typewriter, notepads, and his briefcase are on the table.

OTTO

I heard on the radio that the Torch put out another fire.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL

I know. I wish I could do that.

OTTO

So do I. Does Jim have any problems using his powers because of . . . what happened?

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
He came to terms with it.

OTTO
How? Did he see a shrink?

She looks coyly at him.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL (V.O.)
He still does.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
No. He just got on with his life.
Like everyone else did after the
war.

OTTO (V.O.)
Good way to change the subject.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)
I don't believe it. They're
playing cat and mouse.

Otto takes a drink of Zesty. Then he looks at her.

OTTO
You know, it's been many years
since we've printed the Marvels'
"secret origins." Mr. Lieber
thought some new versions of
those stories might increase
our readership.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
You want to change our origin
stories? That's a new one.

OTTO
Well, we gotta do something.
Super-heroes just aren't as
popular as they used to be.
(now embarrassed)
That didn't come out right.

He puts his hand to his forehead and looks away. She giggles.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL
It's okay, Otto.

He forces himself to look at her.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL (CONT'D)
I know what you mean. The Marvels
are everywhere these days. So
some people must consider us
yesterday's news.

OTTO
Well, these stories will change
their minds.

He opens his briefcase and looks through the paper-clipped
pages. Then he pulls one set out and hands it to her.

OTTO (CONT'D)
Here is the script for the
Sub-Mariner.

She starts to read it.

ALL-AMERICAN GIRL (V.O.)
If only I could tell him the
real story.

VILLAIN TWO (V.O.)
Everyone, be quiet! She's
focusing all her thoughts on
Namor!

To be continued in SUB-MARINER.