

LOVE AND DEATH RAYS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE

A spidery SPACE STATION floats through the vast cosmic emptiness. Jupiter looms in the distance.

EXT. SPACE STATION

A lone ASTRONAUT is tethered to the hull of the station, staring at an open hatch in front of him.

Beside him, a SMALL ROBOT clings to the metal shell, TWITTERING to itself and handing him tools as he works.

ASTRONAUT

Wrench. The correct one this time.

The robot pulls out a wrench from its tool kit, then shudders and freezes up in a shower of SPARKS.

The astronaut reaches over and nudges the robot -- dead as a doornail.

He plucks the wrench from the robot's claw, fumbles it...

... Then watches the tool float into the inky darkness. He sighs, muttering:

ASTRONAUT

What else can go wrong today?

That's when he notices

A MASSIVE SHAPE

rocketing toward the station, looking like an enormous cloud-enshrouded comet with vapor trailing in its wake.

THE ASTRONAUT

stares as it approaches with unbelievable speed.

He grabs his tether and UNHOOKS IT.

The astronaut drifts free of the space station as

THE ALIEN MASS

collides with the station, which DISINTEGRATES as it connects with the cloud cover. It's over in the blink of an eye.

The thing roars on its way.

THE ASTRONAUT

tumbles through space, now completely alone. Beat.

ASTRONAUT

Well fuck me...

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

A sea of buildings stretches to the horizon, lighting up the darkness. Tranquility reigns.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

We DOLLY down a long hallway, STOPPING at one door: "BRADLEY JANSON, C.P.A." is inscribed on the frosted glass.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

BRAD JANSON sits at his desk in the small, tidy office. A 30-year-old wallflower in a rumpled suit. Meek and innocuous.

He types data into a spreadsheet on his computer. Beside him, an ANCIENT CASSETTE PLAYER plays a SELF-HELP AUDIOTAPE. We see the box on the desk: "BE AGGRESSIVE! 12 STEPS TO GETTING YOUR WAY IN LIFE, WORK AND LOVE."

VOICE ON TAPE

Remember that confidence is the key to attracting any woman. Just remind yourself that you are a dynamic and assertive individual with many engaging qualities. Let's hear you say it.

BRAD

Uhh... I am a dynamic and assertive individual with --

VOICE ON TAPE

Very good.

Brad sits back, glancing out the window beside him.

BRAD'S POV - THROUGH THE WINDOW

TWO FIGURES DRESSED IN BLACK can be seen darting across the top of a nearby building.

BRAD

watches the two. He sighs.

BRAD

Damn it...

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The two shadowy figures head for the edge of the roof.

One of the figures, the wiry WALTER, points a LARGE GUN and FIRES. A GRAPPLING HOOK with a rope attached arcs across the street and embeds itself in the concrete of the far building.

Walter pulls the end of the rope off his gun and ties it to a pipe on the rooftop. He tugs on the rope a few times and nods to his heavysset cohort, SAM.

EXT. FAR ROOFTOP - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Sam and Walter shimmy across the rope, never looking down at the incredible distance to street level below them.

Both clamber onto the roof of the building.

INT. VERTICAL AIR SHAFT - NIGHT

Sam and Walter press their backs against one side of the shaft and feet against the opposite side, inching their way down the claustrophobic space.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The duo make their way down the hallway on MINI-STILTS, deftly avoiding the LASER BEAMS crisscrossing the floor.

They reach a CLOSED DOOR. Sam crouches down, still on stilts, and picks the lock.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

The door swings open and the two enter the enormous, dark office with its cathedral ceiling and majestic window overlooking the city.

They get off the stilts and look around in awe.

SAM

Jeez...

Walter turns and shushes him with a finger, then looks back down at the map in his hands. They walk over to the MASSIVE BOOKSHELF lining one wall and begin climbing up its shelves.

They reach a certain shelf and push aside some books, revealing a SMALL HATCH with a combination lock on it.

Sam fiddles with it for a few seconds until something CLICKS. Walter opens the hatch to reveal a safe full of jewelry.

The two men grin at each other.

WALTER

Jackpot.

MAN (O.S.)

I've been waiting for you boys.

The two startled thieves look up to see

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

slowly float down from the shadows above them. His costume is red, complete with fluttering cape and cowl that conceals the upper half of his face. A superhero's superhero.

Sam yelps in fear and loses his grip, tumbling to the ground. He sprints for the door.

The Crusader reaches down and grabs Walter off the bookshelf, then glances at Sam.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Halt!

(looking up into the
darkness)

Skippy, apprehend the villain!

SKIPPY comes swinging out of the shadows on a rope, a 50-year-old masked sidekick in a brightly colored outfit that no middle-aged man should be forced to wear.

Skippy is clearly a sidekick past his early prime.

Sam skids to a stop as Skippy drops in front of the door. The Crusader lands next to him and tosses Walter to the ground.

WALTER

Do that again and you'll be eating that cape of yours.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

I'd like to see you try.

(to Skippy)

Skippy, get the Red Sled. We'll meet you on the roof.

Skippy stares at him a moment, then sighs heavily.

SKIPPY

Sure thing, boss.

He turns and trots out of the room.

The Crusader reaches down for Walter.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

C'mon, fiend, get to your feet.

WALTER

Then what did you put me down here for in the first place?

Sam watches the Crusader, obviously impressed.

SAM

Wow, I've never been busted by the Crimson Crusader before.

(beat, frowning)

Ain't you supposed to be taller?

The Crusader stares at him, taken aback. He sputters:

CRIMSON CRUSADER

I'm the same height I always was.

WALTER

(shaking his head)

No, you nabbed me five years ago, and you were easily half a foot taller than you are now.

CRIMSON CRUSADER
Maybe you grew.

WALTER
If you're the real Crusader, then
I'm Mary Poppins.

The heroic bravado of the Crusader's voice suddenly disappears, replaced by the sound of a normal man in a ridiculous superhero costume.

CRIMSON CRUSADER
What do you think this is --
Halloween? Of course I'm the real
Crusader.

SAM
Yeah, Walter, he's got the outfit
and everything.

WALTER
So does my ten-year-old nephew.

CRIMSON CRUSADER
We're not going to argue about
this. I'm the real Crimson
Crusader. Honest!

WALTER
Prove it.

The Crusader turns and points a finger at the wall of books. ZAP! An ENERGY BOLT shoots out of his fingertip and strikes the books, which BURST INTO FLAMES. Walter is unimpressed.

WALTER
Big deal. Any mutant out on the
street can do that.

SAM
I can't believe you're destroying
private property, man.

CRIMSON CRUSADER
I'm blaming you for it.

WALTER
He's not the Crimson Crusader, Sam.
I'm telling you.

SAM
You really don't think so?

WALTER

Nope.

Sam looks at the Crusader carefully. He finally nods.

SAM

Maybe you're right...

CRIMSON CRUSADER

C'mon, guys, cut me some slack,
okay? I'm having an off night.

BEHIND THEM

a book teeters on the edge of the bookshelf the thieves were just hanging on. After a second, the heavy volume slides off the shelf and hits the floor with a BANG!

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

whips around in the direction of the sound.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Halt, villain!

Sam and Walter take the opportunity to bolt out of the room.

The Crusader turns back to see them round the corner.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Shit.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Crusader emerges as SIRENS go off and RED LIGHTS begin flashing.

DOWN THE HALL

Walter and Sam dash toward the elevator, running through the ankle-high laser beams that have triggered the alarm.

THE CRUSADER

takes a little leap and literally flies like a bullet toward

THE ELEVATOR

as its doors close with the thieves inside.

The Crusader reaches the doors and forces them open. He looks

INTO THE ELEVATOR SHAFT

as the car heads up toward the roof of the building.

INT. ELEVATOR - MOVING

Sam turns to Walter, panting.

SAM

Think we lost him?

Suddenly the FLOOR EXPLODES as the Crusader propels himself upward into the elevator. Only he doesn't stop. He disappears THROUGH THE ROOF OF THE CAR.

The elevator doors open. The two thieves tumble out.

The Crusader pokes his head down through the hole in the ceiling.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Gotta work on that.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Walter and Sam sprint out onto the top of the building, heading for the rope on which they crawled across.

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

emerges from the doorway as

THE TWO THIEVES

shimmy across the rope. Walter looks over as

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

flies toward them. He circles around the rope, following the thieves, who continue their crawl.

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Don't make me come and get you two!

WALTER

Why not? You afraid of us?

CRIMSON CRUSADER

The Crimson Crusader fears nothing.

WALTER
Too bad you ain't him!

CRIMSON CRUSADER
I am too, damn it!

Walter begins to laugh.

CRIMSON CRUSADER
Really, I am! Stop laughing at me!

Sam begins chortling also. The Crusader circles around helplessly, the sweat heavy on the exposed part of his face.

WALTER
You ain't the Crimson Crusader,
chump! Get lost.

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

hovers there for a moment. THEN FALLS.

THE THIEVES

watch him plummet toward the street below.

SAM
Not very thick-skinned, is he?

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

tumbles through the air toward

A FLAG POLE

jutting out of the building. An American flag flutters in the breeze.

The Crusader falls past the pole.

HIS CAPE CATCHES ON THE POINTED END.

The metal rod bends under the weight of the superhero, but the cape remains attached.

The Crusader stops short with a GRUNT.

He looks around, sighing in disbelief. Beat.

THE CAPE

rips free of the pole.

THE CRIMSON CRUSADER

plummets again. 20 stories to go... 19... 18... Suddenly

THE RED SLED

zips underneath him, a sleek flying jet ski piloted by Skippy.

The Crusader drops onto the back of the vehicle, behind Skippy. Panicking, he grabs his sidekick's face for balance.

SKIPPY

Do you mind, boss?

CRIMSON CRUSADER

Sorry.

The Crusader removes his hands and looks up.

The two thieves are long gone.

EXT. CITY - DAWN

The Red Sled streaks over a RIVER, away from the heart of the city.

EXT. CRIMSON CRUSADER HIDEOUT - DAWN

Skippy pilots his vehicle toward a huge decrepit WAREHOUSE in the middle of an ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL PARK on the water's edge.

A LARGE DOOR opens at the base of the warehouse. The Red Sled glides through, and the door shuts behind it.

INT. HIDEOUT - DAY

The Red Sled comes to a halt in the middle of the cavernous warehouse filled to the brim with MASSIVE COMPUTERS, EXOTIC MACHINES and ALIEN ARTIFACTS. Superhero paradise.

The Crusader and Skippy get off the Sled.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

Don't tell me -- a bunch of Girl Scouts kicked your tail.

The two look over as

JAKE JANSON (80)

strolls out of the shadows, a powerhouse of a man grappling with his ultimate nemesis -- old age. His handsome face is lined and weathered, but the eyes still flicker bright.

The Crimson Crusader rips off the red cowl, revealing Brad. Hard to believe he's his father's son.

BRAD

Dad, what are you doing here?

JAKE

Don't be dense, boy -- I belong here!

BRAD

Does Mom know?

JAKE

She thinks I'm golfing with the guys. It better stay that way.

Jake scowls at Skippy, who takes off his mask to reveal the sad-eyed, weary face of someone who's put up with too much abuse for far too long.

JAKE

For Pete's sake, Skippy, stand up straight. You're a superhero's sidekick. Look like one, would you?

SKIPPY

Sorry, Mr. J. And please don't call me that. I'm a crime-fighting assistant.

JAKE

This is no time to argue semantics. We're men of action, not words!

Jake notices the torn cape.

JAKE

Jumping Jehovah, what have you done to my suit?

BRAD

My suit. I had a little accident.

JAKE

The Crimson Crusader doesn't have accidents. He saves people from them.

BRAD

Yeah, yeah, yeah...

JAKE

Do you realize that I ripped that suit only once in over 60 years of wearing it?

Brad sighs wearily. He's heard this before.

BRAD

Yes, Dad, it was the only fight you lost.

JAKE

That's right -- the only truly worthy opponent I ever faced. He nearly beat me, but of course good triumphed over evil in the end. So what's your excuse?

Brad opens his mouth. Skippy beats him to it:

SKIPPY

He ripped it on a flag pole.

JAKE

What?

Skippy interrupts Brad again.

SKIPPY

He fell out of the sky like a stone.

Brad nudges Skippy, glaring. Skippy shrugs.

JAKE

You forgot how to fly?

BRAD

No, Dad, I just can't fly anymore. I can't do anything.

JAKE

I don't believe it.

BRAD

Why would I lie to you?

(to Skippy)

Get the Union of Superheroes on the line, tell them we lost the two suspects at Kane Tower.

Jake picks up a book and eyes the unsuspecting Brad.

JAKE

Brad!

Brad turns to Jake just as the old man hurls the tome at him. It strikes Brad square in the forehead.

BRAD

Ow! Jeez, Dad!

Stunned, Jake watches Brad clutch his head.

JAKE

Great galaxies, you should have deflected that with your powers just by reflex! C'mon, boy -- to the infirmary with you!

EXT. SPACE

The ALIEN MASS roars through the cosmos.

It rockets past the moon, heading straight for Earth.

INT. HIDEOUT - INFIRMARY - DAY

The bathrobe-clad Brad lies on a table, staring up at the cartoonishly large instrument scanning his body.

Skippy and Jake watch the x-ray image of Brad overhead. Jake sips a cup of coffee, the Crimson Crusader costume draped over one of his massive shoulders.

SKIPPY

There's nothing wrong with him, Mr. J.

JAKE

Thank you, Skippy. I have eyes.

BRAD

So what does this mean?

JAKE

I'm working on it, boy. Relax.

BRAD

Relax? I'm completely relaxed.
This may be the greatest thing that
ever happened to me.

JAKE

Normal men like Skippy would kill
for your power.

Brad sits up and gets off the table. He bangs his head on
the examining instrument above him and winces.

BRAD

Let him have it. I'll throw in the
costume too.

JAKE

Don't be silly, Brad. Skippy's
just a sidekick --

SKIPPY

Crime-fighting assistant.

JAKE

-- who couldn't free a hamster from
a cage on his own. No offense,
Skip.

SKIPPY

(sighing)

None taken, Mr. J.

JAKE

But you make a heck of a cup of
coffee.

SKIPPY

Thanks, Mr. J.

BRAD

Being normal. Imagine that.

JAKE

Brad, just be a good sport, okay?
There are worse jobs. If nothing
else, you're your own boss.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Jake Janson!

Brad, Jake and Skippy turn to see DOTTIE JANSON, 70, storm in, a whirling dervish of a little old lady.

DOTTIE
Golfing, my fanny!

JAKE
Dottie, I wasn't --

Dottie points to the red costume over Jake's shoulder.

DOTTIE
What are you doing with that outfit? You were going to put it on, weren't you?

JAKE
The boy ripped it, dear --

DOTTIE
I may not have superpowers, but I'm no dummy. What about our deal?

JAKE
Dear, I swear I was just visiting. I wasn't going to go out with Brad.

DOTTIE
Right. Here --

She snatches the costume from Jake's shoulder and looks at the cape.

DOTTIE
Give me five minutes. You won't even see the stitches.
(to Brad)
Maybe if someone had a girlfriend she'd do this for him.

BRAD
Give it a rest, Mom.

The ALARM goes off.

JAKE
The danger siren! To the control room, Skippy!

Jake rushes out. Skippy looks at Brad and Dottie, sighs, then shuffles after the old man.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad and Dottie enter and join Jake and Skippy, who watch the WALL-SIZE MONITOR before them.

The monitor blinks on to show the ridiculously attired GOLDEN GOOSE (early 60s) looking out at the four.

GOLDEN GOOSE
Greetings, Crimson Crusader.

BRAD
Greetings, Golden Goose.

Golden Goose scowls.

GOLDEN GOOSE
I was talking to your father.

JAKE
No, no, Brad's the man in charge.
I'm retired now. Right, Dottie?

DOTTIE
That's right.

BRAD
What can we do for you?

GOLDEN GOOSE
A foreign mass is currently
approaching Earth at an incredible
speed.

Brad opens his mouth to speak, but Jake cuts him off.

JAKE
Is it hostile?

GOLDEN GOOSE
Aren't they always?

EXT. EARTH

The alien mass streaks toward the planet, its cloud layer dissipating.

The object hits the atmosphere and BURSTS INTO FLAME.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Early morning COMMUTERS AND PEDESTRIANS look up to see the BALL OF FIRE screaming across the blue sky.

LIZ O'CONNELL

sits in her car, craning her neck to watch. Late 20s, with the features of a Golden Age movie starlet.

LIZ
Oh my God...

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The Jansons and Skippy stare at the image of the fireball on the monitor. Dottie takes Jake's hand.

DOTTIE
Jake...

Brad notices Jake's troubled expression.

BRAD
What is it, Dad?

JAKE
Not what. Who. Destructo.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Flaming pieces of the mass fall off and shower the city as the thing tears through the sky. Suddenly it EXPLODES as

DESTRUCTO

emerges from the flames, a gigantic robot that uncurls itself from a fetal position. Easily twice the size of the Statue of Liberty, Destructo soars around over the city while

DOWN ON STREET LEVEL

Chaos breaks out as people run screaming, crash their cars into one another and generally behave like it's the end of the world, which it very well may be.

LIZ

watches the pandemonium around her, gripping her steering wheel but going nowhere. She looks out as

SMALL ROBOT BEETLES

detach themselves from the metal skin of Destructo like barnacles from a boat. Ugly clawed monstrosities.

The Volkswagen-size creatures dart around their master.

Destructo hovers above the city, motionless as the world watches. The VOICE that booms from the sky is HARSH and METALLIC.

DESTRUCTO

Greetings, Planet Earth. For 40 of your years I have plotted my return after suffering defeat at the hands of your Crimson Crusader. The time has come for Destructo's vengeance.

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad's expression turns to that of horror as he stares at

THE MONITOR

while the alien continues:

DESTRUCTO

I am not a cruel being. If my old nemesis faces me to do battle again, I will spare this world of the horrors that await it otherwise. Do not anger me, people of Earth. I have come for the one who banished me to exile. Crimson Crusader, I await your response.

EXT. CITY - DAY

City-dwellers watch in awe as

DESTRUCTO

roars upward, disappearing into the clouds. Its robot beetles spread out over the city as if posting guard.

LIZ

looks around -- the world has frozen. No one moves.

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

The Jansons and Skippy watch

THE MONITOR

as the image of the empty city sky changes to that of the clearly rattled Golden Goose.

GOLDEN GOOSE

We'll await your arrival at the
Union Hall, Crusader. May the gods
help us.

The image goes black.

DOTTIE

turns to Brad.

DOTTIE

I'll get to work on the suit.

She hurries away. Brad looks around, confused.

BRAD

Hold on, I can't do this.

JAKE

Of course you can. The blood of a
hero flows through your veins.

BRAD

Why doesn't the hero just do it
himself?

Dottie pokes her head into the room.

DOTTIE

I heard that, Bradley. Don't you
dare encourage him.

Jake shoots her an annoyed glance, then turns back to Brad.

JAKE

You know why I can't, boy. Now go
earn your right to wear the outfit.

BRAD

But I never wanted it in the first
place!

JAKE

Nonsense. Now concentrate.

BRAD

On what?

JAKE

On getting your powers back.

BRAD

I don't want them back.

JAKE

Why not?

Brad points to the monitor.

BRAD

Because I'm going to have to fight that thing.

JAKE

Great galaxies, whose son are you really?

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

In the distance, the robot beetles dart over the metropolis.

THE SILVER STALLION

stares out at the objects from atop the building. Beside him is the young, impossibly peppy COLT BOY.

COLT BOY

Gee, Silver Stallion, what do we do now? Is it time to fight?

SILVER STALLION

Patience, Colt Boy. First the Union of Superheroes must meet to determine the most effective strategy for confronting this mechanical menace.

COLT BOY

Then what do we do now?

SILVER STALLION

We wait...

He turns around to face the SMALL GROUP OF MEN with videocameras that record his every move. He grins broadly and holds up a can of soda.

SILVER STALLION
... And drink Zap Cola, the
superhero's soft drink.

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Jake stares hard at Brad as Skippy watches on.

JAKE
Come on, boy, think positive.
Focus.

BRAD
Right.

Dottie enters the control room, costume in hand.

DOTTIE
There you go. Good as new.

Brad turns to his mother.

BRAD
Thanks, Mom.

Jake smacks Brad on the head.

BRAD
Ow! Quit it!

JAKE
I said focus, you sissy.

They stare at each other a moment.

Jake glances over Brad's shoulder.

JAKE
Think fast!

A WRENCH flies through the air at Brad, who whirls around as it strikes him in the chest. Brad collapses.

Jake pulls the young man to his feet.

JAKE
You were supposed to dodge it.

BRAD
This isn't working out.

SKIPPY

Maybe it's all in your head.

The Jansons look at Skippy.

JAKE

Are you saying the boy is crazy?

SKIPPY

No, I'm saying maybe he has issues that a professional can help him work out.

JAKE

A shrink? The Crimson Crusader doesn't need a shrink. What would people think?

SKIPPY

All cases are strictly confidential, of course.

Jake's eyes narrow.

JAKE

Sounds like you know what you're talking about.

Skippy shuffles his feet, eyes cast downward.

SKIPPY

Maybe.

JAKE

Skippy, I'm shocked.

BRAD

What's the guy's name?

SKIPPY

Dr. Liz O'Connell. She specializes in superhero therapy. I like to talk with her when I'm feeling... down.

JAKE

What in blazes should you feel down about? You're the sidekick of the greatest hero the world has ever known!

SKIPPY
 (sighing)
Right.

 BRAD
What's her address?

 JAKE
You're actually going to do this?

 BRAD
It can't hurt.

Jake shakes his head and scowls.

 JAKE
In my day, superheroes didn't need
shrinks. You got problems? Take
them out on a villain!

EXT. CITY - DAY

People continue on their way through the streets, glancing up at the beetle robots silently hovering above them.

INT. CAR - MOVING

Brad, now out of costume, maneuvers his car through the traffic, noting the nervous citizens around him.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

Brad walks down the hallway to a door with a sign hanging on it: "SIDEKICKS ANONYMOUS." Someone has crossed out the "SIDEKICKS" and scrawled "CRIME-FIGHTING ASSISTANTS" over it.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Brad gently pushes open the door to see

A GROUP OF SUPERHEROES

arranged in a circle. LIZ O'CONNELL, seen in traffic earlier, sits among them, her back to Brad.

Beside her, SEAL BOY is in mid-rant, looking around at his costumed comrades.

SEAL BOY

He's always bossing me around --
 "Seal Boy, park the boat," "Seal
 Boy, get me a beer." Never, "Seal
 Boy, could you please get that
 cutie's phone number? I'd really
 appreciate it." Dang it, why can't
 he just be nice to me for once?

Seal Boy buries his face in his flippers and begins to sob.
 Liz pats him on the shoulder.

LIZ

It's okay, Irving. The White Whale
 is probably just insecure. He
 bosses you around because he's
 afraid to tell you how he really
 feels. Tough guys are like that.

Seal Boy looks up and sniffles.

SEAL BOY

You think so?

LIZ

Sure.

SEAL BOY

So when he calls me a piece of raw
 sewage, he really means that I'm an
 okay guy?

LIZ

Exactly.

Pause.

SEAL BOY

Thanks, Doc. I feel better about
 things.

LIZ

No, Irving. We all feel better.

The circle of sidekicks nod and murmur in agreement. All of
 the sudden there is a small choir of BEEPING SOUNDS.
 Everybody checks the beepers on their utility belts.

LIZ

Sounds like you boys have work to
 do. See you next time, and
 remember -- we're all superheroes
 in our own special way.

The sidekicks get to their feet and hurry out the door.

EXT. HALLWAY - DAY

Brad turns his back to the crimefighters as they rush past.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Liz is straightening up as Brad knocks lightly on the door.

BRAD
Dr. O'Connell?

LIZ
Yes?

She turns around to face him.

Brad blinks, stunned. Love at first sight. For him, anyway.

BRAD
I'm a dynamic and assertive
individual with many engaging
qualities.

LIZ
Excuse me?

BRAD
I'm Brad Janson.

They shake. Brad continues to hold her hand, grinning stupidly. She finally pries her hand from his grip.

LIZ
Hi.

BRAD
I understand you work with
superheroes.

LIZ
And the occasional supervillain.
Bad guys have problems too, you
know.

BRAD
What if I told you I was the
Crimson Crusader?

LIZ

I'd ask to see some I.D.

Brad pulls out a card entitled "UNION OF SUPERHEROES" with two photos on it -- one with Brad in the costume and one without. Liz looks it over, then hands it back with a nod.

LIZ

Shouldn't you be joining my other clients right now?

BRAD

In a minute. I have a little problem and I was wondering if you could help.

LIZ

What is it?

BRAD

It's sort of embarrassing.

LIZ

If you don't tell me I can't help you.

BRAD

Maybe you can't help me anyway.

LIZ

That's a pretty defeatist attitude.

BRAD

It's been that kind of day.

LIZ

So what can I do?

Brad stares at her a moment. He smiles slyly.

BRAD

Let's discuss it over drinks.

LIZ

I don't drink on the job.

BRAD

There's a first time for everything.

LIZ

What makes you think I'd say yes?

BRAD
My superheroic intuition.

LIZ
You really do have a problem, then.

BRAD
So that's a no?

They turn to the SOUND of TAPPING.

Skippy can be seen hovering on the Red Sled outside the office window. He points to his watch and shrugs.

Brad turns back to Liz, peeling off his shirt to reveal the Crimson Crusader costume underneath.

BRAD
(stripping off his
clothes)
Sorry, duty calls. It was a
pleasure meeting you, Doctor. Let
me know if you change your mind
about that drink.

LIZ
Wait, aren't you going to tell me
about your problem?

BRAD
I should probably just handle it
myself. I mean, I am the Crimson
Crusader, right?

LIZ
You tell me, Mr. Janson.

Brad pulls on the Crusader cowl. He smiles and heroically whips his cape over his shoulder.

BRAD
Call me Brad.

Brad turns to dash toward the window, slamming his knee on the corner of a desk.

He keels over with a groan.

EXT. UNION HALL - DAY

The Red Sled swoops toward the enormous FORTRESS in the middle of the city. Skippy drives, and Brad clings to him from behind.

BRAD

This is humiliating. Could you at least let me drive next time?

SKIPPY

Whatever you say, boss.

INT. UNION HALL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Brad limps in with Skippy. The large room is filled with SUPERHEROES sitting around an enormous oval table, with countless CAMERAMEN behind them recording everything.

The superheroes are almost all male, and there are very few who are over the age of 40 or so. Their costumes reflect their names: the Silver Stallion, the Arctic Avenger, etc.

The SIDEKICKS hover around their bosses, handing them cups of coffee.

THE WHITE WHALE sips his coffee, then flings it back at Seal Boy in disgust.

WHITE WHALE

Damn it, Seal Boy, this coffee is terrible! Can't you do anything right?

Seal Boy runs off, sobbing.

Everyone quiets down when they realize Brad has arrived.

Golden Goose sits at the head of the table. He nods to Brad.

GOLDEN GOOSE

Good -- now that the Crimson Crusader has arrived fashionably late, we can begin.

A CAMERAMAN shoves his videocamera in Brad's face for a close-up. Brad scowls.

BRAD

Do you mind?

The cameraman backs off. Brad and Skippy take their places at the table.

Beside Brad sits the Silver Stallion, who sips Zap Cola and mumbles:

SILVER STALLION

C'mon, Janson. You gotta work with the media. What's the public gonna think?

The Silver Stallion notices a camera trained on him. He flashes the can in his hands and grins. Brad notices this and shakes his head.

BRAD

Whore.

SILVER STALLION

Moron. You know how much I've made in endorsements this year?

Before Brad can respond,

GOLDEN GOOSE

looks out at the heroes and begins to speak.

GOLDEN GOOSE

As you all know, Destructo has returned to Earth. Most of you weren't even born the last time this fiend menaced our world. He is a villain the likes of which has not been faced since the Golden Age of Heroes half a century ago.

THE WHITE WHALE

sits up in his seat.

WHITE WHALE

Fear not, sir. We will conquer this Destructo with ease.

He then winks and flexes for the cameraman filming him.

GOLDEN GOOSE

shakes his head.

GOLDEN GOOSE

You are grossly mistaken, White Whale. Destructo is far more powerful than any adversary you have ever encountered. He nearly killed the Crimson Crusader in their last confrontation.

A MURMUR passes through the group as they all turn to Brad.

BRAD

(shrugging)
So he got lucky.

GOLDEN GOOSE

Now Destructo is back and he has made his intentions plain. Crimson Crusader, are you ready to battle him?

All eyes turn to Brad again, who shifts uncomfortably in his seat. He clears his throat.

BRAD

Well, that all depends on how you define "ready." Can you ever really ask anyone if they're ready to face their own possible death and get a real response? I mean, I can say I'm ready to fight, but you never know until the moment of truth. And what is truth? Truth is all relative anyway. Truth is the weird gray area that you can bend into whatever you're trying to say. Or do. Or trying to say that you're going to do. Or trying to do what you're going to say. Or --

SILVER STALLION

Right. So when do the rest of us get to kick some ass?

The table erupts in a chorus of CHEERS and HOOTING.

Golden Goose silences them.

GOLDEN GOOSE

If the Crusader fails in his attempt to stop Destructo, we will spring to action. Until then, we wait.

Several dozen supersoulders slump in disappointment.

GOLDEN GOOSE
 Good luck, Crimson Crusader.

The Silver Stallion leans over toward Brad.

SILVER STALLION
 I wish I could say it was nice
 knowing you.

EXT. CITY - DAY

COMMUTERS hurry on their way to wherever they are going,
 nervously glancing up at the beetles hovering above them.

A SCREECHING SOUND fills the air. Everyone looks up as

DESTRUCTO

slowly descends from the clouds above them.

DESTRUCTO
 It is time, Crimson Crusader.

IN THE STREETS BELOW

Pandemonium. The beetle robots swoop down and slowly float
 over the running people, as if they are searching.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Brad sits at his desk, typing at his computer and listening
 to ANOTHER TAPE:

VOICE ON TAPE
 ... Now repeat after me: "There is
 nothing I cannot achieve in life.
 I am the master of my own destiny."

BRAD
 There is nothing I cannot achieve
 in life. I am the master --

THE FRONT DOOR

flies open. Jake storms in, trailing a reluctant Skippy.

Brad sits up with a start.

JAKE
 Great Scott, boy, what do you think
 you're doing???

BRAD
Dad, I'm at work --

Jake throws the Crimson Crusader costume at him.

JAKE
Now you are. Hurry up and get it
on.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Destructo floats overhead, looking down at the buildings.

DESTRUCTO
You cannot hide forever, Crusader.

BRAD (O.S.)
I'm here, Destructo.

The robot looks up to see

A HUGE VIDEO IMAGE

of Brad in costume, projected against the clouds above.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Brad stands in front of a videocamera operated by Jake.

Nearby, Skippy sits in front of a small contraption with a radar dish atop it.

BRAD
I ask you to leave this world or
face the consequences.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Destructo stares up at the image of Brad.

DESTRUCTO
And what consequences are those?

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Brad glances at

JAKE

who squats down and scrawls something on a piece of cardboard with black magic marker. He holds the barely legible sign up for Brad, who reads:

BRAD

Your complete and utter
destruction, villain. I will show
no mercy this time.

DESTRUCTO (O.S.)

Nor will I, my old foe. But I have
not returned simply for vengeance.
I have come for what is mine -- the
crystal.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Up in the sky, Brad frowns.

BRAD

The crystal?

DESTRUCTO

Return it to me and I will spare
your world.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake holds up the cardboard, which reads, "NEVER!!!"

Brad glances at it, then looks into the camera and shrugs.

BRAD

I'll see what I can do.

Jake jabs a finger at the cardboard and hisses:

JAKE

Are you blind, boy?

EXT. CITY - DAY

Destructo stares at the image of Brad.

DESTRUCTO

You have 48 hours, Crusader.

The giant robot rockets upward, disappearing into the clouds.

INT. BRAD'S OFFICE - DAY

Jake flings the cardboard at Brad, who rips off the cowl.

JAKE

Do you need glasses or reading lessons?

BRAD

How about a clue, Dad -- what's this about a crystal?

JAKE

Nothing much -- just Destructo's key to universal domination.

SKIPPY

That figures.

JAKE

Destructo replenishes his power source by consuming the worlds he invades. The crystal filters terrestrial matter into usable energy.

SKIPPY

And that's how he destroyed the planet you came from, Mr. J?

JAKE

That's right. But in our last confrontation, I took the crystal from him. It's been over 50 years since his last meal, Brad. He's hungry.

BRAD

So where is the crystal now?

JAKE

Safe.

BRAD

Care to elaborate on that?

JAKE

Great galaxies no -- you'll just give it to him! Want to throw in anything else while you're at it?

BRAD

Cut me some slack, Dad!

JAKE

I'm so embarrassed, I'm surprised I haven't dropped dead of a heart attack right now!

SKIPPY

We should be so lucky.

Jake whirls around at the sidekick, who covers his head.

JAKE

I heard that, Skippy. You two deserve each other. Dang it, I'm going golfing!

Jake storms out. Brad watches him go, then turns to Skippy.

BRAD

What was the shrink's number again?

INT. LIZ'S OFFICE - DAY

Brad lies on a couch, still wearing his outfit. Liz sits next to him in a chair, pad and pencil in hand.

BRAD

Do I have to do this in the costume?

LIZ

Yes.

BRAD

But I feel so foolish.

LIZ

Why?

BRAD

I should be fighting crime in this getup, not talking about my problems.

LIZ
So you admit you have problems to
work out?

BRAD
Jeez, lady, what do you think I'm
here for -- a lap-dance?

Liz writes something on her pad.

LIZ
Interesting...

BRAD
What? What are you writing? Stop
it!

She looks up.

LIZ
So it bothers you?

BRAD
Yeah, it bothers me! I feel like
I'm under a microscope.

LIZ
Well, I'm trying to figure out
what's wrong with you. What's your
theory?

BRAD
Would I be lying here paying you
hundreds of dollars an hour if I
knew that?

LIZ
Depends on what kind of person you
are.

BRAD
Not that kind.

LIZ
So you say.

BRAD
You think I'm lying to you?

LIZ

Maybe you're lying to yourself. You feel the need to hide your true identity with your superhero persona, after all. Deception is part of your personality.

BRAD

Maybe I just like to dress up in tights.

Liz writes something down.

LIZ

Interesting...

BRAD

You're writing again! Stop it! Okay, let's start over. Hi, I'm Brad Janson, aka the Crimson Crusader. How are you?

LIZ

I'll feel much better after you tell me where the costume came from.

Pause.

LIZ

Well?

BRAD

It's my father's.

LIZ

So you're not the real Crimson Crusader?

BRAD

Of course I am! I'm just not the first.

LIZ

What happened to him?

BRAD

Mom made him retire. She said he was getting too old to fight crime.

LIZ

Did you volunteer to take over or did he ask you to do it?

BRAD
More like forced me.

LIZ
How did that make you feel?

Silence. He looks up at her.

BRAD
You wanna go out sometime?

LIZ
Don't try to change the subject.

BRAD
Too late.

LIZ
I don't date clients, Brad.

BRAD
You're fired. Now that that's settled, how about some sushi?

LIZ
I don't date superheroes either.

BRAD
You're missing out.

LIZ
Trust me, I'm not. So how did it feel being forced to take your father's place?

BRAD
I'll only tell you over a plate of raw fish. Is that a romantic come-on or what?

She looks down at him a moment, then sighs.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brad (now in street clothes) and Liz eat their meal in the crowded restaurant.

Across the room, a GROUP OF PEOPLE IN COSTUMES can be seen through a doorway -- a private party. A "HAPPY HALLOWEEN" banner hangs over the ghouls, princesses and other assorted characters drinking punch and bobbing to an Abba tune.

Brad glances at them, then clears his throat.

BRAD

So... do you like your job?

LIZ

We're not here to talk about me.
You're the patient, remember?

BRAD

No, we're two single adults having
an obscenely expensive dinner
together.

LIZ

This is business, Brad. And the
meter is still running.

Brad looks mortified.

BRAD

You mean you're charging me for
this?

She holds her watch to her ear.

LIZ

Tick, tick, tick, tick...

BRAD

And here I thought my boyish charm
was working its magic on a
beautiful woman.

LIZ

Sorry to disappoint you. Now do
you want to tell me about your
family?

Brad sits back and thinks about it moment.

BRAD

Dad's a really admirable guy. You
know, he came from another planet,
got stranded here and made
something out of himself. Isn't
that the American Dream or
something like that?

LIZ

Thanks for the party line. What do
you really think of him?

Brad waves around a piece of sushi with his chopsticks.

LIZ
Cold fish, huh?

Brad nods, attempting to pop the sushi into his mouth. But he fumbles the chopsticks, jabbing himself in the cheek.

Liz rolls her eyes.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A PAIR OF ROBOT BEETLES float above the street, scanning the nervous crowd.

They drift closer to the SUSHI RESTAURANT.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Liz watches Brad attempt to contort his fingers around his chopsticks.

LIZ
What did you do before taking over
for your father?

BRAD
I'm an accountant.

LIZ
Really?

BRAD
(nodding)
I used to dodge the IRS. Now I
dodge deathrays. Same bullshit,
different packaging.

LIZ
Do you miss it?

BRAD
I still do it, actually. You know,
as my cover. Drives my old man
nuts -- he says saving the world is
a full-time job.

LIZ
So when can I meet him?

BRAD

Aren't you getting a little ahead of yourself? We haven't even kissed yet.

LIZ

You know what I mean.

BRAD

As soon as we go out on a date. One that I'm not paying you by the hour for.

LIZ

Janson...

BRAD

All right, level with me -- is it my deodorant that's turning you off?

LIZ

I already told you. It's nothing personal.

BRAD

Of course not.

LIZ

I'm not a very nice person anyway.

BRAD

That's okay. I'm used to dealing with bad guys.

Liz smiles in spite of herself.

EXT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A CAB pulls up in front of the restaurant and several drunken COSTUMED PARTYGOERS stagger out of the back seat. Among them is a MAN IN A CRIMSON CRUSADER COSTUME.

FAKE CRUSADER

Hey, is this the right place?

His companions pull him into the restaurant as

THE ROBOT BEETLES OVERHEAD

suddenly spot the "Crimson Crusader."

They DART TOWARD THE RESTAURANT.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Liz and Brad notice the Fake Crusader and his friends weave among the tables, heading for the private party.

The Fake Crusader looks around drunkenly.

FAKE CRUSADER
Hey, everybody, I'm here to save
the world!

Suddenly the FRONT WINDOWS EXPLODE as

THE ROBOT BEETLES

burst through, shattering the glass as they tear into the restaurant.

Patrons SCREAM and scatter as the beetles shove aside tables, heading straight for

THE FAKE CRUSADER

who stares at them, wide-eyed and rooted to the spot.

FAKE CRUSADER
Holy Moses...

LIZ

turns to Brad.

LIZ
Do something!

BRAD
Liz, I've got this problem,
remember?

Liz jumps to her feet and darts toward

THE FAKE CRUSADER

who turns and sprints into the private room, pursued by the beetles.

Liz shoves her way through the pandemonium.

BRAD

watches her go, then gets up and dashes away from Liz, heading towards the shattered front window with the rest of the fleeing patrons.

He pulls out his cell phone and dials.

SKIPPY (FILTERED)

Hello?

BRAD

Skippy, get your ass out of bed!
We've got a little problem!

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Liz bursts into the private room, watching as

THE ROBOT BEETLES

hover in the room among the terrified partygoers, confused as they stare at the FOUR GUYS DRESSED AS THE CRIMSON CRUSADER.

EXT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brad rushes over to his car, fumbling with his keys.

He climbs in, reaches into the back seat and pulls out a RED BUNDLE -- the Crusader costume.

BRAD

I'm gonna regret this.

He pulls off his shirt, flopping back across the front seat.

INT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

The beetles begin to advance on the Fake Crusaders.

LIZ

steps forward, shouting:

LIZ

Take off your masks! Show them
your faces!

THE FAKE CRUSADERS

look at each other, then rip off their cowls.

All but one -- the drunken guy from the cab. He stares at the robots, shaking.

PARTYGOER

C'mon, Bill, do it!

The Fake Crusader doesn't listen as the beetles float closer to him. A STAIN spreads across the crotch of his red tights.

LIZ

pushes through the crowd and throws herself at the Fake Crusader, tackling him to the ground.

She pulls off his cowl. The beetles stop, hovering above ominously.

Then they draw closer again.

The Fake Crusader glances at Liz.

FAKE CRUSADER

A lot of good that did, lady.

BRAD (O.S.)

Halt, villains!

Robot beetles and humans alike turn to see

BRAD

standing in the doorway, clad in the Crimson Crusader costume and pointing heroically at the

ROBOT BEETLES

who dart toward him.

BRAD

Shit.

Brad turns and SPRINTS OUT OF THE ROOM.

EXT. SUSHI RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brad bursts out of the front of the restaurant, cape flapping behind him as he darts into traffic.

Cars SCREECH to a halt inches away from his kneecaps as he hauls ass across the street.

BRAD

Sorry!

THE ROBOT BEETLES

roar out of the ruined restaurant, spot Brad tearing down the street, and rocket after him.

BRAD

shoves past bewildered pedestrians on the sidewalk.

BRAD

Excuse me! Sorry! Pardon me!

He ducks down

AN ALLEY

and notices a nearby DUMPSTER.

He throws open the lid and jumps in as

THE ROBOT BEETLES

round the corner into the alley. They buzz past.

Brad opens the lid of the dumpster and peeks out, watching the beetles dart down the alley.

Beside him in the dumpster, a grimy BUM rises into view and turns to Brad.

BUM

Hey, buddy -- this ain't the
Hilton, ya know.

The beetles stop and whirl around at the sound of the bum's voice. They take off after

BRAD

who clambers out of the dumpster and sprints back into

THE STREET

Brad bursts out, watching as LIZ'S CAR slams to a halt in front of him. She throws open the door.

LIZ

Come on!

Brad dives into the passenger seat as Liz swerves into traffic.

INT./EXT. LIZ'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Brad looks out the rear window as the beetles shoot out of the alley and speed after them.

TWO MORE BEETLES join the chase.

LIZ
Are you okay?

BRAD
You mean aside from the gang of
killer robots after us? I'm just
friggin' fine!

Liz wrenches the wheel, heading for

A PARKING GARAGE ENTRANCE

Liz's car smashes through the ARM blocking the entrance into the garage, speeding up the ramp.

The beetles swoop through the entrance. One of the robots doesn't make it, SMASHING into the threshold of the parking garage entrance and EXPLODING.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Liz's car winds through the half-empty garage, TIRES SCREECHING as it heads upward at full throttle.

INSIDE THE CAR

Brad turns to see the three remaining beetles gaining.

BRAD
Okay, so now what?

LIZ
What are you asking me for? Aren't
you going to help out here???

Liz wrenches the wheel again as

THE CAR

slides across the concrete, barely making a turn.

The lead beetle isn't so lucky. It SMASHES into the wall, EXPLODING.

The last two robots successfully make the corner.

One of the beetles keeps after Liz's car. The other veers away, taking another route.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Liz's car barrels up onto the upper level of the garage, speeding toward the "down" ramp on the other side of the roof.

INSIDE THE CAR

Liz white-knuckles the wheel. Brad sits beside her, ashen-faced. He looks back to see the beetle emerging behind them.

BRAD

So where's the other --

LIZ

Jesus!

He turns to see

AHEAD OF THEM

The second beetle bursting out of the far ramp on the roof.

LIZ'S CAR

slams to a halt in the middle of the roof. Trapped.

The pair of robot beetles zip toward it.

INSIDE THE CAR

They watch as the beetles descend on the car. One winds up, smashing a claw THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD.

Liz and Brad both SCREAM as the claw grabs Liz, pulling her through the shattered windshield.

ANOTHER CLAW TEARS THROUGH THE ROOF, plucking Brad from the inside of the car.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Liz struggles in the grasp of the robot beetle, watching Brad be pulled from her car.

LIZ

Brad!!!

BRAD

turns to see her... and something happens. His eyes blaze with rage.

He reaches back, grabbing the claws that hold him, and RIPS THEM OUT OF THE THEIR SOCKETS.

Brad tumbles to the ground, holding the metallic claws as the beetle spirals backward.

Brad launches himself through the air, slamming into the other beetle holding Liz.

The robot drops her. She looks up as Brad grapples with the beetle in mid-air.

He hauls back and RAMS HIS FIST THROUGH THE METAL SHELL, wrenching out CLUMPS OF CIRCUITRY.

The beetle goes dead, plummeting to the roof.

Liz rolls out of the way as the beetle crashes next to her.

Brad hits the ground, looking up as

THE ARMLESS BEETLE

dives toward him, kamikaze-style.

BRAD

grabs the dead beetle beside him and PICKS IT UP over his head.

He FLINGS THE METAL SHELL INTO THE AIR.

The armless beetle collides with it, EXPLODING.

Brad drops to his knees, sweeping his cape over Liz as DEBRIS RAINS DOWN.

UNDER THE CAPE

Brad lies on top of Liz, their faces inches apart.

BRAD
You okay?

She stares into his eyes, nodding.

He stares back, then leans down. Their lips almost meet when suddenly...

SKIPPY (O.S.)
Boss!

Brad leaps to his feet, looking up to see

SKIPPY

circling around overhead on the Red Sled.

BRAD
Took you long enough.

Brad glances around at the robotic carnage, then faints.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

CLOSE ON BRAD'S EYES

as they slowly open.

BRAD'S POV

Liz leans over him, smiling at him/us.

LIZ
Morning.

WIDER

Now dressed in a bathrobe, Brad sits up on an examination table and looks around at the INFIRMARY of the CRIMSON CRUSADER HIDEOUT.

Liz sits beside him. She gestures around at the warehouse.

LIZ
Nice place. I'm impressed.

BRAD
What happened?

LIZ
You passed out.

BRAD
Sorry. Not much of a superhero,
huh?

LIZ
You were doing just fine last
night. So do you still have them?

BRAD
What?

LIZ
Your powers.

BRAD
Search me.

LIZ
No thanks.

Skippy lopes in, coffee mug in hand. He passes it to Brad,
who takes a sip and nods appreciatively.

BRAD
Good work, Skippy.

SKIPPY
No problem, boss. That's what I'm
here for.

Skippy shuffles out as Brad takes another sip.

LIZ
Brad!

Brad looks up in time to watch Liz fling a CLIPBOARD at him.
The board whacks him in the face, making his coffee splash
down the front of his robe.

BRAD
Jesus, Liz!

LIZ
Sorry. I thought you'd blow it up
or something.

BRAD
You'd really get along with my old
man.

LIZ
I guess we'll find out when we
visit him and your mother.

Brad flops back onto the examination table with a groan.

LIZ
We have to, Brad. Time is running out.

BRAD
Please -- dealing with them is hard enough. I don't think I could handle the three of you at once.

INT. BRAD'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Brad drives, sulking. Liz sits beside him in silence. She reaches over for the radio knob.

BRAD
Wait --

Too late. The SOUND of the SELF-HELP VOICE fills the car:

VOICE ON TAPE
Just remember -- many women respond to a strong-willed man because he reminds them of their father. Use this to your advantage. It's time for you to play Daddy.

Liz looks down at the "BE AGGRESSIVE!" tape case and glances at Brad. She smirks.

Brad sinks into his seat, mortified.

EXT. RETIREMENT VILLAGE GATES - DAY

Brad's car turns off the quiet suburban street into a driveway leading to a LARGE PAIR OF CLOSED GATES. Next to the gates is a sign reading "GOLDEN CAPE SUPERHERO RETIREMENT VILLAGE."

EXT. RETIREMENT VILLAGE - DAY

Brad and Liz walk around the quiet, immaculately maintained grounds with the VILLAGE DIRECTOR, a middle-aged woman radiating bogus good cheer.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR
So nice to see you again, Brad!
Come to see your parents?

BRAD
 You bet. With any luck I won't
 actually have to talk to them.

The village director stares at him, confused, then laughs hollowly.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR
 Splendid! I'm sure they'll be
 delighted.
 (to Liz)
 I don't believe we've met... Mrs.
 Janson?

BRAD
 Yes. No. LIZ

Liz glares at Brad.

LIZ
 Don't push it. Daddy.

INT. REC HALL - DAY

The village director leads Brad and Liz into the large rec room, where bored-looking OLD MEN AND WOMEN play ping-pong, watch TV or knit with incredible speed.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR
 I believe I saw your father...
 there!

ACROSS THE ROOM

Jake plays poker at one table with three other men: WALLY, CHAD and MORRIS. Wally sits across from Jake, smiles and lays out his cards.

WALLY
 Read 'em and weep.

Jake lays out his hand.

JAKE
 Full house, chump.

WALLY
 Dang it, Janson! You and your x-
 ray vision!

Wally rises to his feet and literally throws the table into the air, then suddenly balloons in size and metamorphoses into a CONCRETE MONSTER. He lunges at Jake.

Before Wally can hit him, Jake raises his hands and shoots an ENERGY BOLT out of his fingertips. It strikes Wally in the chest and sends him staggering back toward Chad, who snaps his fingers and DISAPPEARS before Wally can hit him.

Morris begins whirling around like a top, transforming himself into a small TORNADO that whips in circles around Jake and Wally.

The village director rushes over to wedge herself between the sparring ex-heroes.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR

Boys, stop it! Enough of this roughhousing!

JAKE

He started it!

Wally RUMBLES something incomprehensible in reply.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR

I don't care. Now you both settle down and make up or no ice cream for either of you tonight.

This seems to calm them. Wally deflates and turns human again, Chad reappears and Morris stops twirling. They all look sheepish.

WALLY

Sorry, Jake. You know how it is.

JAKE

Of course, Wally.

They shake on it.

VILLAGE DIRECTOR

There! Now don't we feel better about things?

Jake notices Brad and Liz standing nearby.

JAKE

Jumping Jehovah, what are you doing here? You have a blasted planet to save!

INT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DINING ROOM - DAY

Brad, Jake, Liz and Dottie sit at the table, eating a meal. Dottie can't stop smiling and glancing from Brad to Liz.

Liz nervously smiles back.

LIZ
Lunch is great, Mrs. Janson.

DOTTIE
Please, call me Mom. Can you sew?

LIZ
Sure. Why?

Dottie looks at the horrified Brad and smiles even more, gesturing toward Liz and giving a thumbs-up.

LIZ
Uh, could someone please pass the
mashed potatoes?

Brad reaches for the bowl. Jake looks at it and RAYS come out of his eyes, enveloping the bowl. The bowl levitates and floats to Liz, who takes it nervously.

LIZ
Thanks.

JAKE
Gee, Brad, can't you do that too?
Let's see.

BRAD
Dad, don't make this even more of a
nightmare than it already is.

Jake turns to Liz.

JAKE
Can you believe this guy?
(to Brad)
Snap out of it, boy. Quit your
whining and act like the superhero
you are.

BRAD
As you've pointed out many times,
Dad, I'm not superhero material.

JAKE
But you can be. It's in your
blood. Try it for once.

Brad glances at his mother.

BRAD
Mom, make him stop.

DOTTIE
Don't look at me, Bradley.

JAKE
Let me hear you recite the Crimson
Crusader Creed.

BRAD
Dad, please -- we're eating.

JAKE
Do it, boy! Criminals across the
galaxy...

Brad sighs angrily and drones:

BRAD
Criminals across the galaxy will
always see red --

JAKE
No, no, no, you dolt! You sound
like you're reading from the
blasted phone book!

Jake stands up.

JAKE
You have to say it like you mean
it, with passion! Like this...

Before anyone can stop him, Jake clammers atop the table,
strikes a heroic pose, then bellows:

JAKE
Criminals across the galaxy will
always see red, so long as the
Crimson Crusader is there to thwart
their plans and protect the
citizens of Earth from evil!

Brad, Liz and Dottie stare up at the old man. Dottie
practically swoons with affection. Liz is dumbfounded.

Brad claps unenthusiastically.

BRAD
That's great, Dad.

JAKE
Better be. Took me years to
perfect it.

Jake makes a few halting attempts to get off the table. He looks down at the three, embarrassed.

JAKE
Could somebody help me down,
please?

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Skippy looks up at

THE MONITOR

Golden Goose and the Silver Stallion stare down at him.

GOLDEN GOOSE
What do you mean, you don't know
where he is?

SKIPPY
That's exactly what I mean. Last
time I saw him, he was with Dr.
O'Connell.

Golden Goose glances at the Silver Stallion, who mimes a blow job. Golden Goose shakes his head and turns back to Skippy.

GOLDEN GOOSE
Find him, Skippy. If he's too
scared to face Destructo himself,
then we're going to do it for him.

EXT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DAY

Liz and Dottie walk out of the small home. Behind them follow Brad and Jake, who gestures to Liz.

JAKE
Beautiful girl. She has her
father's eyes.

BRAD
How would you know?

JAKE
Trust me, I do.

Before Brad can say anything, Liz turns to Dottie.

LIZ

It was very nice to meet you.

DOTTIE

The pleasure was all mine.

Liz and Dottie shake. Liz notices the RING on the old lady's hand -- an ASTOUNDINGLY LARGE CRYSTAL is set in the band.

LIZ

That's beautiful. What kind of stone is that?

Brad's eyes go wide. Before Dottie can say anything, he grabs his mother's hand and stares at the crystal.

DOTTIE

Bradley!

Brad whirls around and pulls Jake aside.

BRAD

Is that what I think it is?

JAKE

With you, boy, I have no idea.

BRAD

Destructo's crystal.

JAKE

Pretty, isn't it?

BRAD

You told me it was safe!

JAKE

Are you calling your mother irresponsible?

BRAD

No, just you. What were you thinking?!

JAKE

Look, I wasn't going to give her any old engagement ring --

BRAD

But Destructo's gonna come after
her now!

Jake grins and claps his son on the shoulder.

JAKE

Of course not. He's too busy
looking for you, Brad.

INT. UNION HALL - DAY

Golden Goose and the Silver Stallion watch the MONITOR
displaying Destructo circling over the city.

SILVER STALLION

What do you think?

GOLDEN GOOSE

I think the Crimson Crusader is
about as useful as a blackhead.

SILVER STALLION

I couldn't agree more. What now?

GOLDEN GOOSE

Assemble the team. We have a world
to save.

Golden Goose grins for the PHOTOGRAPHER shooting them nearby.
The Silver Stallion raises his can of Zap Cola in salute.

EXT. LIZ'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Brad accompanies Liz as they approach the steps leading up to
the front door.

BRAD

You didn't tell me that my dad
knows your dad.

LIZ

I don't want to talk about it.

BRAD

What does he do?

LIZ

Nothing.

BRAD

He's unemployed?

LIZ
He's dead.

BRAD
Oh... Need a hug?

LIZ
(sighing)
Brad, I'm not sleeping with you.
Ever.

BRAD
What makes you think that's what
I'm interested in?

LIZ
That's all guys like you are
interested in. Trust me, I know.
And I'm not just talking
professionally, okay?

BRAD
I thought you don't date
superheroes.

LIZ
I don't.

The light goes on for Brad.

BRAD
But you did once.

LIZ
Can't get anything by you, can I?

BRAD
Who was he?

LIZ
I don't want to talk about that,
either.

CLOSE ON BRAD AND LIZ

as they walk up the steps.

BRAD
Then let's talk about us.

LIZ
There is no us.

BRAD
Not yet, anyway.

They reach the top of the steps. Liz turns to Brad.

LIZ
Spitting out macho bullshit you
learned from a tape won't win me
over, Brad.

BRAD
You sure?

LIZ
Positive. Just be yourself.

BRAD
You're telling this to a guy who
wears a mask for a living, Liz.
And spandex -- God knows what that
means.

Liz breaks into a smile. She stares at him a moment, then
looks away, glancing down. Her eyes go wide.

LIZ
Brad...

WIDER

Brad looks down.

HE'S FLOATING NEXT TO THE STEPS THAT LIZ STANDS ON, FIVE FEET
ABOVE THE PAVEMENT.

BRAD
Well whaddaya know...

LIZ
If only your father could see this.

BRAD
My father...

Brad immediately plummets into the trash can underneath him.

EXT. WATER PARK - DAY

Kids and adults alike frolic throughout the park, which is
filled with slides, log flumes and other water rides.

The White Whale slouches in the passenger seat of his small HOVERCRAFT driven by Seal Boy, chatting with the bikini-clad GIRL standing next to him.

WHITE WHALE

Hey, baby, what's your sign?

GIRL

Aquarius.

WHITE WHALE

Well thank the stars, 'cause this is your lucky day. Hop in.

He looks down as the BEEPER on his utility belt BEGINS TO SOUND. He turns to Seal Boy and grins.

WHITE WHALE

To the Union Hall, dumbass.

INT. LIZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

Brad sits on the couch, watching Liz pace in front of him.

LIZ

You have to do it, Brad.

BRAD

Make me.

LIZ

What do you think I'm trying to do? I wasn't sure before, but this proves it.

BRAD

You're telling me that Dad and I have to work out our problems together.

LIZ

Exactly.

BRAD

Do you know how long that would take?

LIZ

The only way you're going to get your powers permanently restored is if you make peace with Jake.

BRAD
Yeah, that'll happen. You ask him
and see his reaction.

LIZ
Why are you so against this?

BRAD
At this point I'd rather fight
Destructo than deal with my dad,
okay? You don't understand.

LIZ
I want to. It's my job.

Brad's cell phone on his belt begins RINGING. He picks up.

BRAD
(into phone)
Hello? Skippy, what...
(beat, listening)
I'll be right there.

INT. UNION HALL - DAY

Golden Goose and the Silver Stallion enter the enormous hall
to face the large group of superheroes standing before them.
Along the sides of the room, the camera crews keep rolling.

GOLDEN GOOSE
It's time.

EXT. CITY - DAY

Brad's car whips through the city streets.

INT. BRAD'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Brad shakes his head as he drives. Liz sits behind him.

LIZ
Think we can stop them?

BRAD
You tell me -- you're their shrink!

EXT. UNION HALL - DAY

TV CREWS swarm around the outside of the fortress-like Union. One REPORTER speaks into a camera.

REPORTER

We've just received word that the Union of Superheroes is about to stage a full-scale assault on Destructo.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - DAY

The retired heroes sit around, watching the reporter on TV. Jack and Dottie are in the group.

REPORTER (FILTERED)

No word on whether the Crimson Crusader will be among them.

Wally turns to Jake.

WALLY

Hey, Jake, where's your boy?

JAKE

Don't ask.

Wally looks back at the television and sighs.

WALLY

What I wouldn't give to be with them right now.

Dottie notices the wistful look in Jake's eyes and smacks him on the back of the head.

DOTTIE

Don't even think about it.

EXT. UNION HALL - DAY

The crowd parts as Brad drives his car toward the SECURITY GATE, which rises. The car rolls into the Union.

INT. UNION HALL - DAY

Brad and Liz rush in as the various heroes and their sidekicks check their respective weapons, polish their jet packs or examine themselves in mirrors.

The two approach Golden Goose and the Silver Stallion.

GOLDEN GOOSE

Where's your outfit, Janson?

BRAD

Don't go, Golden Goose. You guys aren't ready to fight Destructo.

SILVER STALLION

Maybe you're not, you coward.

LIZ

Brad is right. You don't know what you're getting into.

The Silver Stallion turns to her, leering.

SILVER STALLION

Not like the good old days, huh?

He reaches out to touch Liz. She backs away.

The Silver Stallion notices Brad's baffled expression.

SILVER STALLION

You didn't know, Brad? The good doctor's been bareback riding with the Silver Stallion a few times, if you know what I mean.

BRAD

(to Liz)

Him? This asshole broke your heart?

SILVER STALLION

That wasn't the only thing I broke, buddy. Or should I say, broke in.

Brad lunges at the Silver Stallion. Superheroes swarm over the two and separate them.

GOLDEN GOOSE

Save it for the battle, Stallion.

(to Brad)

If you're not going to help, then get out of the way, son.

Golden Goose climbs atop his sleek-looking AIR CYCLE and looks at the other superheroes.

GOLDEN GOOSE
Move out, people. Let's fight some
evil.

The heroes shove Brad aside.

EXT. UNION HALL - DAY

The reporters and camera crews look up to see the superheroes flying out of the top of the Union.

INT. UNION HALL - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad and Liz watch the GIANT MONITOR showing the heroes leaving. He turns to her.

BRAD
What were you thinking, dating that
guy?

LIZ
I was really young, okay? Not a
mistake I'll make again. Now drop
it.

Skippy enters the room at a fast shuffle.

SKIPPY
All right, boss, let's get this
over with. The Red Sled's out
front.

BRAD
We're not going, Skippy.

EXT. CITY - DAY

The heroes fly through the air, followed by HELICOPTERS filled with camera crews.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - DAY

Jake shakes his head in disgust as he watches the TV.

JAKE
Ridiculous.

CHAD
You're just jealous.

JAKE
 Of them? Please -- we were
 superheroes, dang it, not flying
 showboats!

EXT. CITY - DAY

Destructo hovers over the city like a floating statue.

THE SUPERHEROES

streak toward the giant on their VEHICLES, strapped into
 their JET PACKS or flying on their own. Golden Goose and the
 Silver Stallion lead the team.

The media choppers follow closely behind.

BEETLE ROBOTS

swoop out of the clouds toward the heroes, LASERS BLASTING.

The superheroes spread out as THE BATTLE BEGINS.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - DAY

The old heroes leap to their feet as they watch the battle on
 the TV, cheering like they're watching a sporting event.

INT. UNION HALL - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad, Liz and Skippy stare at the monitor.

EXT. CITY - DAY

The fighting rages on as the superheroes gain the upper hand,
 shooting down the beetle robots.

Suddenly the surviving robots veer away and scream back up
 into the clouds, out of view.

GOLDEN GOOSE

looks around at his men.

GOLDEN GOOSE
 Let's get him!

With a chorus of shouting, the superheroes fall into
 formation again and fly toward

DESTRUCTO

who raises a finger.

ZAP!!! A DEATHRAY fires out of his fingertip, engulfing

THE SUPERHEROES

in a brilliant FLASH OF LIGHT. When the light fades, the sky is empty. The heroes are gone without a trace.

INT. UNION HALL - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad, Liz and Skippy are speechless for a moment. Finally Brad glances at Liz.

BRAD

Well, there goes your practice.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - DAY

The old people stare at the screen in silence, mouths gaping.

Somebody's DENTURES tumble to the carpet.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

City-dwellers stare up at the empty sky as a LIGHT DUSTING OF ASH flutters down upon them.

A LITTLE GIRL tugs at her MOTHER'S coat.

LITTLE GIRL

Mommy, look -- snow!

DESTRUCTO

looks down at the city as the choppers turn tail and flee.

DESTRUCTO

People of Earth, you amuse me. Your feeble heroes were no match for the awesome power of Destructo, and still I await the one I have returned for. Crimson Crusader, I give you 10 of your hours to face me, or your entire world will meet the same fate as that of your so-called champions. I will be watching for you.

Destructo shoots up into the dark clouds.

INT. UNION HALL - CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Brad turns to Skippy.

BRAD

I think we're going to have a little trouble on this one.

SKIPPY

"We"? You're on your own, pal.

BRAD

What do you mean?

Skippy rips off his mask.

SKIPPY

I'm too old for this superhero shit. I want a job with some dignity.

BRAD

Like what? You don't know how to do anything else.

Liz jabs Brad with a finger.

LIZ

Do you have to be so negative?

SKIPPY

I don't know what I'm gonna do, but anything's better than this. I'm tired of risking my life for the good of mankind.

BRAD

But I need you.

SKIPPY

Do you have any idea how demeaning it is to wear this get-up? People magazine has voted me the worst-dressed sidekick for 30 fucking years!

LIZ

Crime-fighting assistant.

SKIPPY

Call it what you want. I'm outta here. Good luck, boss.

BRAD

Skippy, wait --

Skippy turns and bolts out of the control room. Brad watches him go. He sighs.

BRAD

What else can go wrong today?

Brad's cell phone RINGS. He puts it to his ear.

BRAD

Hello?

JAKE (FILTERED)

You dolt! Where are you, for God's sake? You let your comrades be incinerated by that monster and you do nothing? Get your thumb out of your rear and do your job, or I swear by the planets that I'll do it for you! I --

BRAD

Talk with you later, Dad.

Brad hangs up. He notices Liz's stricken expression as she stares at the empty cityscape on the monitor.

BRAD

I'm sorry, Liz.
(beat)
What do we do now?

LIZ

You know.

After a moment, Brad sighs and nods.

INT. HIDEOUT - DAY

Brad and Liz make their way through the clutter of the Crusader hideout.

BRAD

He's not going to go easily.

LIZ

Then what can we do?

Brad stops in front of an ENORMOUS SAFE. He punches a complex code into the keypad mounted on the door.

BRAD

Dad came from a world circling a Red Dwarf star, the only survivor after Destructo wiped out the system. Until then he was a normal guy, right?

The door opens, revealing ANOTHER SMALLER SAFE inside the large one. He presses another keypad.

BRAD

But on Earth, the heat of our yellow sun gives him these insane powers.

LIZ

Turning him into a kind of... superman?

BRAD

Exactly. Hey, that's kinda catchy... Anyway, the only thing that can make him lose those powers is this --

The safe opens, revealing a TINY SAFE inside it. Brad twiddles the knob, opening it, revealing...

... A GLOWING RED ROCK the size of a golf ball.

BRAD

-- The last known chunk of Crimsonite, a piece of his destroyed planet that's been irradiated by the exploding sun.

He reaches in and picks up the rock. He begins to sway but controls himself.

LIZ

Are you all right?

BRAD

(nodding)

Since I'm part human, this stuff affects me only half as much as it does my dad. Boy, is he gonna shit.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

Jake stands by a hole, putter in hand. He gently taps the ball in front of him, which rolls across the green. It stops just on the edge of the hole.

JAKE

Dang.

He looks around, sees no one, and turns back to the ball. RAY BEAMS briefly SHOOT from his eyes. The beams strike the ball, which rolls into the hole.

BRAD (O.S.)

I saw that, Pop.

Jake turns to see Brad and Liz hurrying toward him.

JAKE

Thundering constellations, you don't get it, do you?

BRAD

We need your help.

JAKE

Don't remind me. If it weren't for your mother, I'd --

BRAD

No, not that way. Liz has a solution to my problem. It involves you.

JAKE

Me?

He looks at his son, then Liz. He shakes his head.

JAKE

You're on your own, boy. No shrinks for me. Nothing but pop culture nonsense.

LIZ

Mr. Janson --

JAKE

You gonna stick me and him in a hot tub, right? "I'm okay, you're okay?" Well you know where you can put your hot tub.

LIZ
Not even for the good of mankind?

JAKE
Hey, don't look at me. I'm
retired, remember? Now let me
cheat in peace.

Brad turns to Liz.

BRAD
Told you.

LIZ
So we do this the hard way.

Jake's eyes narrow.

JAKE
The hard way?

Liz reaches into her purse, pulling out the CHUNK OF
CRIMSONITE. Jake's eyes go wide, his knees buckle.

JAKE
Great galaxies...

He collapses, passed out.

INT. HIDEOUT - DAY

Sitting in the middle of his own hideout, Jake struggles in
the chair he is tied to. Brad and Liz stand in front of him;
Liz tosses the Crimsonite from hand to hand.

JAKE
This is ridiculous! You just wait
until I break free, boy.

BRAD
That's great, Dad. Threaten me a
little more, would you?

JAKE
I'm just warming up.

Brad glances at Liz.

BRAD
And you wonder why I have a complex
now.

LIZ

Have you two always been this way?

Simultaneously father and son blurt out:

	BRAD		JAKE
Yes.		No.	

The two look at each other incredulously.

JAKE

You're crazy. Nobody made a mess of you but you. I don't know what went wrong.

BRAD

Maybe if you were around more often you would.

JAKE

Go on, try and make me feel guilty for defending the universe.

BRAD

(to Liz)

Let me give you an example. Little League, second grade. I get a grand slam during the last championship game. Whose dad isn't there?

JAKE

Sorry, but Doctor Darkness wouldn't let me call time out to watch your little game.

BRAD

See, there you go again, putting me down...

JAKE

Of course it was a little game. That's why they call it Little League, for Pete's sake!

(to Liz)

He's way too sensitive. Gets it from his mother. The human side.

BRAD

Maybe that's why you don't understand me.

JAKE
I can read you like a book, Brad. A
blasted comic book.

Brad throws up his hands.

JAKE
What? I'm just being honest!

Brad turns to Liz.

BRAD
He has no clue what I'm about.
That's why he forced me into this
ridiculous costume instead of
letting me do people's taxes.

JAKE
That ridiculous costume is your
birthright, boy. You have powers
most men can only dream about. And
you want to help people cheat the
IRS.

BRAD
You have no idea who I am.

JAKE
Yes I do.

BRAD
Prove it.

The two stare at each other.

JAKE
Release me.

After a moment's hesitation, Liz puts down the Crimsonite and reaches for the ropes. Brad grabs her hands.

BRAD
Hold on! You really want to see
him kick my ass, don't you?

JAKE
I'm not going to hurt you.
Promise.

Liz unties Jake. Brad steps back as Jake stands up.

LIZ
What do we do now?

JAKE
You'll see.

Jake holds out his hands and motions to Liz and Brad.

They tentatively approach him and take his hands. Jake pulls them tight as Brad lets out a squeak.

Jake smiles, then BEGINS SPINNING AROUND LIKE A TOP.

Within seconds, the three of them become a WILD BLUR.

BRAD

stares across his father's chest at Liz, their faces
CARTOONISHLY DISTORTING at this incredible speed.

JAKE

finally slows his spin after a minute. He comes to a stop,
scowling.

JAKE
Dang it, we went too far back!

Brad and Liz look around, groggy and disoriented.

LIZ
Back?

WIDER

The three stand in the middle of a DESTROYED CITY, a
metropolis reduced to complete rubble. Nothing moves,
nothing breathes but the trio.

JAKE
I really am losing my touch. Next
thing you know, I'll be wearing a
diaper.

BRAD
I didn't know you could time
travel.

JAKE
Not surprising, considering the
amount of space between your ears.

A ROAR fills the air.

JAKE

Look.

He points up at

THE DAYTIME SKY

as Destructo tumbles into view from behind a shattered high rise building, BELCHING SMOKE from numerous joints.

He plummets to the ruined city street and hits the pavement with a mighty CRASH, sending debris flying.

A YOUNG JAKE

flies into view, clad in the FILTHY AND TORN CRIMSON CRUSADER COSTUME. The fury in his eyes is incredible, nearly blocking out the fatigue he obviously feels.

BRAD AND LIZ

watch the spectacle, slack-jawed. Jake's expression is unreadable as

DESTRUCTO

gets to its feet and fires a frazzled ENERGY BOLT out of its fingers.

The young Jake raises his hands, ABSORBING THE BOLT. He floats there in the sky, jerking around unnaturally, then THROWS THE ENERGY back at the robot.

The bolt strikes Destructo, sending it thudding to the ground again. The robot fires another bolt at Jake, who absorbs it and returns it. They repeat this again and again.

LIZ

shakes her head.

LIZ

I've only read about this in books.

JAKE

Took me a while to realize I could use its own power against it. Silly me.

THE BATTLE

rages on as the young Jake returns Destructo's fire, flying closer and closer to the metal behemoth.

The robot is clearly weakening under the assault, its knees buckling and the entire torso shaking.

Young Jake throws back a final bolt.

CLOSE ON DESTRUCTO'S FACE

as the bolt strikes its MOUTH AREA, which consists of a CIRCULAR HOLE.

The HOLE EXPLODES -- as Destructo tumbles backward, A TINY GLITTERING OBJECT FLIES OUT OF THE HOLE AND INTO THE AIR.

YOUNG JAKE

swoops around and catches the object -- he looks down at THE FILTERING CRYSTAL in the palm of his hand.

DESTRUCTO

stares up at young Jake, raising its hands.

DESTRUCTO

Enough, Crimson Crusader! I yield!
Please do not destroy me!

The young Jake floats with authority before the quivering giant.

YOUNG JAKE

I won't destroy you, villain. I am a fair man. But you can never return to Earth, lest you face my wrath.

(holding up the crystal)
And never again will a planet meet the fate of my homeworld. Your reign of terror is over, Destructo, and my people are finally avenged. Now heed my words and be gone with you!

DESTRUCTO

I will, Crusader. I have never met an organism with your strength.

YOUNG JAKE

Criminals across the galaxy will always see red, so long as the Crimson Crusader is there to thwart their plans and protect the citizens of Earth from evil!

Destructo clambers to its feet.

DESTRUCTO
Farewell, Crusader. You have won
for now, but we will meet again.

Before young Jake can say anything, the giant robot shoots up into the smoky sky and disappears into the atmosphere.

LIZ, BRAD AND JAKE

stand there in the wasteland.

LIZ
Wow.

JAKE
See what you're up against, Brad?
Destructo leveled this city and
would have finished off the rest of
the world if I hadn't stopped it.
Now you know how to fight back.

BRAD
Outstanding, Dad.

Jake grabs the two again.

JAKE
Come on. Time to show you what I
really want you to see.

Before Brad or Liz can say anything, Jake SPINS AGAIN.

INT. CRIMSON CRUSADER HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Jake, Brad and Liz stop spinning and look around.

WIDER

The hideout, which looks much as it does today, is filled with SUPERHEROES in their outfits, younger versions of the old people from the retirement home. Young Wally is here, as are his poker buddies Chad and Morris -- or rather, CINDERBLOCK, CAPTAIN INVISIBLE and THE TORNADO.

In the middle of the room, 10-YEAR-OLD BRAD sits, surrounded by presents. On either side of him are YOUNG DOTTIE and young Jake, who wears his Crimson Crusader costume.

A banner overhead reads, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BRAD!"

BRAD

stares at his younger self in shock. Jake notices his expression.

JAKE
Remember this, Brad?

Brad nods.

Liz looks around, then goes pale.

LIZ
Oh my God...

BRAD
What's wrong?

Brad follows her gaze to see

ACROSS THE ROOM

THE MARTIAN RANGER stands in the crowd, smiling as he watches Young Brad. A tall, green-skinned, majestic alien hero.

LIZ

begins to walk toward him. Jake grabs her shoulder.

LIZ
Papa....

JAKE
He can't see us, Liz. We're invisible.

Brad turns to her, bewildered.

BRAD
Papa?

YOUNG DOTTIE

hands young Brad a box.

YOUNG DOTTIE
And this is from Mommy and Daddy.

Young Jake watches with pride as his boy tears off the wrapping paper, wrenches the box open, and peers in.

YOUNG JAKE
Happy birthday, boy.

For a moment, the smile on young Brad's face falters. Then it's back as he pulls out a KID-SIZE CRIMSON CRUSADER costume.

YOUNG JAKE

Now you can look just like your old man.

The superheroes chuckle and applaud.

YOUNG WALLY

Brad's going to steal your job, Jake.

YOUNG JAKE

Not yet. It's just for fun, of course. You're not allowed to really fight crime until you turn 18, understand?

YOUNG BRAD

Yes, Dad.

YOUNG JAKE

And what do you want to do when you grow up?

Young Brad starts to speak. Young Jake beats him to it:

YOUNG JAKE

Become the Crimson Crusader yourself, right?

Young Brad thinks about it a moment, then smiles weakly.

YOUNG BRAD

Yes, Dad.

Young Jake ruffles his son's hair.

YOUNG JAKE

'Attaboy. Okay, who's up for Twister?

Suddenly the ALARM SOUNDS. Everyone snaps to life as YOUNG SKIPPY rushes in, peppier but just as doofy as his future self.

YOUNG SKIPPY

Boss, the Mutant Molemen have tunnelled into the basement of City Hall! They've kidnapped the Mayor!

YOUNG JAKE
Jumping Jehovah! You heard him,
men. Let's go to work!

The superheroes rush out the door of the hideout. Only young Jake stays behind.

He crouches down in front of his son.

YOUNG JAKE
Sorry, Brad. I'll make it up to
you. Do you like your present?

Young Brad nods.

YOUNG BRAD
Thanks, Dad.

YOUNG JAKE
Happy birthday, boy.

Young Jake stands up, ruffles the kid's hair and kisses young Dottie on the cheek.

YOUNG DOTTIE
Don't be too late.

YOUNG JAKE
I'll try, but you know how these
Mutant Molemen can be.

Young Jake whirls around with a flash of his red cape and takes off into the air, flying up through an OPEN SKYLIGHT in the ceiling.

Young Dottie looks down at young Brad, her eyes tearing up.

YOUNG DOTTIE
I'll be back in a minute.

She hurries away.

Young Brad looks down at the costume in his hands, the smile fading from his face. He stands up, throws the costume down and ZAPS it with his EYE RAYS. The outfit is incinerated.

Young Brad kicks the ashes under a table.

BRAD, LIZ AND JAKE

watch the young Brad stalk away. Jake is shocked.

JAKE

You told me the dog ate it.

BRAD

Surprise. Things are a lot different from this perspective, huh, Dad?

JAKE

I never realized.

BRAD

You weren't around often enough to complain to. Not that you would have paid attention.

Jake's expression turns from shock to scorn.

JAKE

Listen to you whine like a baby. Want me to go get your blankie?

BRAD

Why not? I can't think of the last time you treated me like an adult and let me make my own decisions.

JAKE

That's because the few times I did, you blew it!

Brad turns to Liz, exasperated.

BRAD

See what I put up with?

JAKE

Oh, come on. The kid can be a superhero and he becomes an accountant.

BRAD

Not everyone wants to save the universe, Dad!

Jake falls silent for a moment.

JAKE

Time to go home.

Brad glances at Liz, who stares up at the skylight, tears in her eyes.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - WALLY'S BUNGALOW - DAY

Wally stands in front of his closet and pulls out a BRIGHTLY COLORED COSTUME. He holds it out and stares at it a moment.

His WIFE shuffles into the room.

WIFE

Don't even think about it.

WALLY

Just wondering if it still fits.

WIFE

Sure you are, you old fogey. Now put that thing away. We're late for bridge.

Wally eyes remain trained on the costume. He sighs.

WALLY

Yes, dear.

INT. BRAD'S CAR - MOVING - DUSK

Brad drives down the highway, Liz beside him. Jake snores in the back seat.

BRAD

Why didn't you tell me your father was the Martian Ranger?

LIZ

I don't like to talk about him.

BRAD

Why not? What are you ashamed of?

LIZ

Ashamed? Brad, all I ever wanted was to be like him.

BRAD

So why didn't you?

Beat.

LIZ

Mom was human.

BRAD

So?

LIZ

So not all of us half-breeds get lucky, genetically speaking.

BRAD

Well, why should that stop you? Hell, look at Skippy, the poor bastard.

LIZ

Please, let's drop this --

BRAD

When we first met, I heard you say that we're all superheroes in our own special way. Don't you listen to your own advice?

Beat. Liz stares out at the road.

LIZ

All I wanted was to make my father proud. But you can't always get what you want.

EXT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DUSK

Brad's car pulls up in front of the little home. Brad, Jake and Liz get out.

The front door of the bungalow opens. Dottie peer out at them, scowling.

DOTTIE

Where have you been? I've been worried sick!

JAKE

We've been dealing with some issues.

(to Liz)

Isn't that what you call them?

Liz nods. Brad lets out a little laugh and claps his hands.

BRAD

Well, it was nice seeing you, Dad --

Jake turns to him.

JAKE

Not yet.

(to Liz and Dottie)

Would you two ladies excuse us a minute?

INT. JANSON BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - DUSK

Jake hauls a LARGE TRUNK out of the closet.

JAKE

I want to show you something.

Brad peers over his shoulder as he opens it, revealing MEMENTOES from a long career -- photos, souvenirs, awards, you name it.

Jake scoops up DOZENS OF LARGE KEYS TO THE CITY, handing them to Brad.

JAKE

Ran out of wall space for those.

Jake rummages through the trunk, pulling out PHOTOS of him in and out of costume.

Brad looks down at ONE PHOTO in his father's hands -- a shot of YOUNG DOTTIE dressed in nothing but the Crimson Crusader cape, smiling for the camera.

Brad claps his hands over his eyes as Jake quickly puts the photo away.

BRAD

Jesus, Dad!

JAKE

Sorry, honeymoon photo. Come on, I'm looking in the wrong place.

Jake slams the trunk shut and gets up.

Brad watches him walk away, then turns and opens the trunk again. He pulls out the nude shot of his mother.

He sneaks a peak, then looks closer. Jeez... Mom was hot.

EXT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DUSK

Dottie and Liz sit on the front porch.

DOTTIE

Don't expect a miracle in there.

LIZ

Why not?

DOTTIE

I don't think Jake realizes just how strong he is. He loved his job so much, it was hard for him to think about anything else. Or anyone else's feelings.

LIZ

That doesn't bother you?

DOTTIE

It used to. Then I realized that Jake is Jake, and nothing will change that. Life with a superhero is hard, Liz. He's never home, villains are always throwing cars at him, and the costume always needs cleaning.

LIZ

Then why did you put up with it?

Beat.

DOTTIE

Ever have an orgasm that lasted two hours straight?

INT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DUSK

Jake pulls a PHOTO ALBUM off a bookshelf. He opens it and pulls out a picture.

JAKE

Here we go.

Brad looks down to see a SNAPSHOT of battered young Jake, his costume in tatters, kissing young Dottie as the city smoulders behind them.

JAKE

That was right after I defeated Destructo.

BRAD
I've never seen this one before.

JAKE
No one has. I made sure of it.

BRAD
Why?

JAKE
Because it was our moment. No one else's. You know what I was thinking of during that fight?

BRAD
Saving the world?

JAKE
Great galaxies, no! I was thinking about your mother. She gave me the strength, Brad. I knew I had to win because I wanted to protect her. You've fallen for Liz, haven't you? Don't deny it.

Brad pauses, then nods.

JAKE
Then that's why you have to do this, boy. That's all this job is - - you have to save the world, sure, but really do it to save the ones you love. Understand?

It's like the wheels start turning in Brad's head.

BRAD
Hey, you're right...

JAKE
Of course I'm right. It's my superior alien intellect, remember?

Brad leaps to his feet.

BRAD
What am I doing wasting precious time like this? I have a girl to save!

Jake's eyes light up with glee as BRAD BEGINS TO FLOAT.

JAKE
That's it, boy -- let's hear the
Creed!

BRAD
(shouting)
Criminals across the galaxy will
always see red, so long as the
Crimson Crusader is there to thwart
their plans and protect the
citizens of Earth from --

Brad cracks his head on the ceiling, knocking him out cold.
He tumbles to the floor. Jake rolls his eyes.

EXT. JANSON BUNGALOW - DUSK

Liz looks queasy as Dottie rambles:

DOTTIE
... And there was one time we did
it so much, I couldn't walk for two
days. But it wasn't just the sex,
Liz. It was the man inside the
costume that made me stay.

LIZ
Weren't you afraid something would
happen to him?

DOTTIE
Of course, but you just have to
trust that everything will be okay.
(beat)
Brad likes you. A lot.

Liz nods.

DOTTIE
But you're not interested.

LIZ
I'm the doctor and he's my patient.

She notices Dottie's skeptical expression, then shrugs.

LIZ
Okay, I don't buy it either. It's
just that someone like him hurt me
a long time ago. I promised myself
that it wouldn't happen again.

DOTTIE

I understand. But Brad is different, Liz. He's one of the good ones, like Jake. Like your father. You just have to give him the chance to prove it.

LIZ

You think so?

DOTTIE

I know so.

The door flies open and Brad rushes out, rubbing his head.

BRAD

Liz!

LIZ

What's wrong?

He grabs Liz's hand, pulling her to her feet.

BRAD

I have to find Skippy.

LIZ

You mean --

BRAD

That's right. The Crusader's back, thanks to you.

Brad leans forward, kissing her. She stares at him in shock.

BRAD

I love you, Liz. Believe me.

LIZ

I do.

Brad turns to Jake, who stands next to Dottie.

BRAD

I won't let you down, Dad.

JAKE

I know you won't.

Brad waves goodbye, then SHOOTS INTO THE AIR.

Jake, Dottie and Liz watch him zip away like a drunken insect.

Liz turns to the Jansons; Jake watches his son fly away, while Dottie winks at her and holds up her hands a foot apart.

INT. SKIPPY'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Skippy sits at the counter in his kitchen, clad in a ratty bathrobe and starting at the Mr. Coffee machine gurgling in front of him.

The machine falls silent -- coffee's ready.

He looks around, notices he's alone and sighs.

Skippy grabs a mug and pours himself some java. Takes a sip.

Hey... not bad.

He looks up at the SOUND of TAPPING to see

BRAD

floating outside his kitchen window, gesturing.

Skippy walks over and opens the window.

BRAD

It's time, Skippy. Are you with me?

Skippy stares at him a moment, then sighs. He hands Brad his coffee mug.

SKIPPY

I'll go get the leotard.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

A ghost town.

Almost no one in the streets -- folks can be seen peering out of windows, looking up at

THE SKY

as LIGHTNING flashes through the dark clouds. A RUMBLING fills the air as DESTRUCTO swoops down into view.

The giant hovers above the city, dozens of ROBOT BEETLES buzzing around it.

DESTRUCTO
People of Earth, the time has come.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A FAMILY of three crouches by their apartment window, munching on popcorn and watching Destructo outside in the distance.

The little boy turns to his father.

LITTLE BOY
You said there'd be fireworks,
Daddy.

The mother leans out the window, staring down the street.

MOM
Look!

TWO FIGURES BLUR PAST the window.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

BRAD and SKIPPY weave among the buildings of the city, faster than the proverbial speeding bullet.

Both are in costume -- Skippy rides the Red Sled, and Brad flies by himself. Back in action.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - NIGHT

Jake, Dottie, Liz and the rest of the gang sit around the TV, watching the duo approach Destructo.

Morris, one of the old heroes, begins to bounce in his seat.

MORRIS
C'mon, Brad, you can do it!

He begins to WHIRL AROUND like a tornado. Beside him, his wife scowls.

MORRIS' WIFE
Morris, behave yourself!

Morris immediately stops whirling. He sits back, sulking.

MORRIS

Sorry.

Dottie notices Liz's nervous expression and pats her hand.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Skippy turns to Brad.

SKIPPY

You ready, boss?

BRAD

Hell, no!

SKIPPY

Didn't think so.

DESTRUCTO

watches them approach. It raises a finger at the duo as

THE ROBOT BEETLES

dart in their direction.

BRAD

turns to Skippy.

BRAD

Here we go!

SKIPPY

I should've stayed retired...

Skippy hits a switch -- an ENERGY SHIELD envelopes the Red Sled as

THE ROBOT BEETLES

swarm towards them, LASERS BLASTING.

BRAD AND SKIPPY

veer away from each other.

BRAD

darts down the canyons of the city, dodging laser bolts as half of the beetles pursue him.

He abruptly arcs around, flying STRAIGHT AT THE PACK.

The beetles continue to SHOOT at him, the beams bouncing harmlessly off the invisible shield that protects him.

Brad holds out his arms, WHIRLING AROUND in mid-air as he PLOWS INTO THE BEETLES.

Several of the robots EXPLODE as he crashes into them, ripping through their metal shells like they were paper.

The shattered beetles drop to the empty street below.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - NIGHT

The ex-heroes HOOT in appreciation. Jake cranes around at them, a shiteating grin on his face.

JAKE

Chip off the old Crimsonite, eh?

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Skippy darts through the city on the Red Sled, trying to shake the robot beetles on his tail.

SKIPPY

All I ever wanted was job security,
maybe a couple of weeks of vacation
a year. Nothing fancy...

He abruptly DIVES TOWARD THE STREET and HITS THE BRAKES.

The beetles dart past over his head.

Skippy comes up behind them, LASERS BLAZING.

Most of the beetles EXPLODE or tumble away, CRASHING INTO BUILDINGS.

BRAD

bashes his way through the hoards of robot beetles swarming over him, claws snapping at his cape.

He whirls around, slamming his fist through the metal shells and ripping out CIRCUITRY.

Below the fight, the sky seems to rain beetles as the robots drop away.

Brad grabs one dead beetle before it falls and swings it around, SMASHING INTO THE ROBOTS AROUND HIM.

NEWS HELICOPTERS

zip across the city, CAMERAMEN leaning out of the choppers to get their shots.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - NIGHT

Jake stares at the spectacular images on the screen, and suddenly his expression changes -- his excitement turns to sadness. Dottie notices this.

DOTTIE

What's wrong? He's winning.

JAKE

I know. I just wish it was me.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Skippy continues to BLAST AWAY at the beetles around him, weaving through the flying pack so fast that the robots end up SHOOTING themselves.

BRAD

flies around, picking off the beetles one by one. He notices a NEWS CHOPPER coming in awfully close to the fight.

Too close.

BRAD

Get out of here!

Several beetles SURGE toward the chopper, grabbing it with their claws.

Brad tears toward the chopper, which begins to sink under the weight of the beetles.

One beetle gets too close to the ROTOR, which SLICES INTO IT.

The CHOPPER PLUMMETS, also taking the beetles clinging to the outside.

Brad dives down after it.

INT. CHOPPER - MOVING - NIGHT

The CAMERAMAN and PILOT SCREAM as they drop from the sky.

CRASH! Brad SLAMS through the top of the chopper and drops inside. He grabs the cameraman, then pulls the pilot from his seat.

Gripping both men, he throws himself out of the chopper.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Brad flies away from the helicopter as it SLAMS into the street, crushing the beetles with it.

He lands on a ROOFTOP, letting go of the two stunned men. He shakes his head.

BRAD

Use your heads next time, okay?
We're not playing Monopoly up
there.

He leaps into the night sky.

SKIPPY

maneuvers the Red Sled above the city, trying in vain to shake the last beetle on his tail.

He rubs his left arm, frowning.

BRAD

comes up behind the beetle and RIPS THROUGH IT. He catches up with Skippy, who still holds his arm.

BRAD

What's wrong? You get shot?

SKIPPY

I'm okay.

The two of them speed toward

DESTRUCTO

who hovers in the sky, watching them approach.

SKIPPY

glances at Brad.

SKIPPY

Any ideas?

BRAD
I'm working on it! Quit pressuring
me!

DESTRUCTO

raises a fist -- a HUGE ENERGY BOLT blasts out of its
knuckles, heading straight for

BRAD

who raises his hands.

The bolt strikes him. Stunned, he drops from the sky.

SKIPPY

watches him fall.

SKIPPY

Boss!

Skippy dives toward

BRAD

who continues his free-fall. He suddenly snaps back into
consciousness and swoops upward, past Skippy.

BRAD

I'm all right!

He flies straight at Destructo, ENERGY BOLTS shooting from
his fingers.

The bolts harmlessly bounce off the robot's armor.

Destructo winds up and FIRES another BOLT.

The energy bolt strikes Brad, only this time he absorbs it.
His body contorts in mid-air, then he THROWS THE BOLT back at
Destructo -- just like Jake did in his last fight with the
robot.

The bolt strikes Destructo, knocking it backward a little.
Not much, though.

The robot CHUCKLES, the sound ECHOING across the city.

DESTRUCTO

I see you've learned nothing since
we last met, Crimson Crusader.

(MORE)

DESTRUCTO (CONT.)
Your old tricks will not work this
time.

He FIRES again.

The bolt hits Brad, who absorbs it, then throws it back. It does nothing to Destructo, who flies toward him.

Brad feebly SHOOTS an energy bolt from his fingers, but the shot goes wide, missing the giant robot entirely.

SKIPPY

darts toward Destructo, FIRING his lasers in vain.

BRAD

struggles to catch his breath, watching as Destructo turns towards his sidekick.

BRAD
Skippy, don't!

SKIPPY

continues to weave across the sky, SHOOTING at Destructo.

Suddenly, Skippy clutches his chest with a gasp.

SKIPPY
You gotta be kidding me --

He passes out. Without him driving, the RED SLED FLIES STRAIGHT FOR DESTRUCTO.

BRAD

swoops toward him as

DESTRUCTO

reaches out to bat away the approaching Red Sled.

BRAD

darts in front of Destructo, grabbing the Red Sled and dragging it out of reach.

He brings it down to a ROOFTOP, pulling Skippy off the vehicle and laying him on the ground.

BRAD

Skippy --

Skippy slowly opens his eyes, grimacing.

SKIPPY

My chest... I think I'm having a heart attack. Can you believe this shit?

BRAD

We gotta get you to a hospital.

SKIPPY

I'd defeat the big robot first, boss.

Brad pauses, then nods and shoots up into the sky.

DESTRUCTO

hovers above the city, watching Brad rocket toward him.

Brad FIRES energy bolts at him. They do nothing.

Destructo's hand lashes out as Brad darts past, CATCHING HIM with two fingers.

The robot holds the squirming hero up before its eyes.

DESTRUCTO

So the mighty Crimson Crusader is no longer the opponent he once was.

BRAD

Yeah, well, at least I've still got my hair.

Destructo GROWLS, then holds him closer.

DESTRUCTO

This is not the Crimson Crusader.

Brad sighs.

BRAD

Jesus Christ, not you too...

DESTRUCTO

My voice recognition program indicates a negative match. You are not the one I have come to fight.

BRAD

Yes, I am. Honest!

Destructo FLINGS HIM AWAY.

Brad tumbles through the air, dropping down to the ROOFTOP where Skippy lies.

He gets to his feet, staring up at

DESTRUCTO

who looks out at the news helicopters buzzing around.

DESTRUCTO

People of Earth, your hero has failed you with his cowardice. If the Crimson Crusader will not show his face, then you will now pay the price.

DEATHRAYS shoot out of Destructo's eyes, DESTROYING A BUILDING BELOW HIM.

BRAD

takes a running leap, then tumbles back down to the rooftop. He gets up, panic on his face.

BRAD

Oh, no. No, no...

He points a finger. Nothing happens. Hops a little. Nada.

DESTRUCTO

continues on his rampage, LEVELLING THE CITY STREET BY STREET WITH HIS DEATHRAYS.

BRAD

grabs Skippy, climbs on the Red Sled and takes off.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - DAY

Everyone watches the TV in dead silence.

ON THE SCREEN

The Red Sled can be seen zipping into the night sky, away from Destructo.

JAKE

takes Dottie's hand, his eyes never leaving the screen.

JAKE

Time to go to work.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The Red Sled swoops down in front of the EMERGENCY ROOM ENTRANCE. Brad gently places Skippy on the concrete, then zooms off.

A NURSE comes out and sees Skippy lying there, barely conscious. He croaks:

SKIPPY

How you doing?

INT./EXT. BRAD'S CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Liz drives down the utterly empty road, looking out at the GLOWING HORIZON as Destructo burns down the city.

Jake sits beside her. Dottie is in the back seat.

DOTTIE

Jake --

JAKE

Dottie, please.

DOTTIE

You're too old.

JAKE

Well thanks for reminding me!

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - NIGHT

The rest of the heroes sit in silence, watching the destruction on the TV.

Morris leans across his wife, looking at Wally.

MORRIS

You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?

Beat. Wally turns to him and nods.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

The Red Sled pulls in. Brad hops off, pulling the cowl off his head. He strips off the costume and throws it to the ground, standing there in his skivvies.

JAKE (O.S.)

That's no way to treat the costume.

Brad whirls around to see Jake approach out of the shadows, followed by Dottie and Liz.

BRAD

Then you wear it.

Jake picks it up off the ground, brushing it off.

JAKE

Don't mind if I do.

Brad watches, speechless, as Jake hurries out of view.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Chaos reigns. People and cars jam the streets as Destructo swoops overhead, ANNIHILATING everything in sight.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Brad pulls on his street clothes as Dottie and Liz wait nearby.

LIZ

So that's it? You're giving up?

BRAD

Hey, there's nothing for me to do. The right guy's squeezing into the tights. Damn things never fit me anyway.

DOTTIE

Brad --

BRAD

Mom, give it a rest, okay? I've had kind of a rough night.

JAKE (O.S.)

What do you think?

They turn to see

JAKE

stepping out from behind a piece of machinery, NOW DRESSED IN THE CRIMSON CRUSADER OUTFIT. Aside from the lines visible on his exposed mouth area, he looks ageless. Heroic.

Or, more accurately, superheroic.

Dottie and Liz swoon accordingly.

DOTTIE

Oh, Jake, you've still got it.

Jake walks toward them. He stops in front of Brad, who avoids his gaze.

BRAD

Don't start, Dad --

JAKE

I have nothing to say to you.

Brad finally looks up at him. Beat. He brushes past his father.

LIZ

Where are you going?

BRAD

Who cares?

Liz rushes after him.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - TV ROOM - NIGHT

All of the men are gone, leaving their WIVES sulking in front of the TV.

Wally's wife turns to Morris' wife and shakes her head.

WALLY'S WIFE

Idiots.

EXT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Brad dashes away from the hideout into the industrial park surrounding it.

Liz follows.

LIZ
Brad, come back!

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Jake stretches on the floor, BONES CREAKING LOUDLY. Dottie wrings her hands nearby.

DOTTIE
Are you sure about this, Jake?

JAKE
Positive.

DOTTIE
But what if you're outmatched?

JAKE
Then it'll be a really short fight.

A LOUD BANGING SOUND makes them jump. They whirl around to face the GIANT METAL FRONT DOOR.

LIZ
Who is it?

Jake stares at the door. His EYES GLOW a moment, then he breaks into a smile.

He walks over and opens the door.

Standing in the threshold are ALL OF THE RETIRED SUPERHEROES. Every one of them are IN COSTUME, outfits that do little to conceal their old age or expanded waistlines. But they still retain their old Golden Age magic. Some just barely.

Wally shakes his head.

WALLY
Never thought I'd need a girdle to wear this getup again.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo bats away FIGHTER PLANES that swoop around it, their bullets harmlessly bouncing off its shell.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

The superheroes dust off their FLYING VEHICLES that are scattered throughout the hideout, ancient machines that SPUTTER to life for the first time in years.

Those heroes that can fly restlessly -- if tentatively -- circle around overhead.

Wally revs his AIR BIKE.

WALLY

C'mon, Jake, let's ride!

JAKE AND DOTTIE

stand in front of each other. Jake tenderly takes hold of her waist, smiling.

JAKE

I'll be a little late tonight.
Don't wait up.

DOTTIE

Good luck, Crimson Crusader.

JAKE

That's Jake to you, lady.

He leans forward, pulling her tighter as they kiss. Even 40s movie stars never looked this romantic.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - NIGHT

Liz races among the buildings. She climbs up a LADDER to

A WAREHOUSE ROOFTOP

where Brad stands, staring off into the distance -- across the nearby river, the city can be seen burning.

LIZ

Brad, what are you doing?

BRAD

Exactly what it looks like.

LIZ

Your father needs you.

BRAD
He made it pretty clear that he
doesn't.

They glance up as

THE PACK OF SUPERHEROES

zoom by overhead. Jake is in the lead.

BRAD

shakes his head.

BRAD
Look at him. He was meant to do
it, not me.

LIZ
No, he was meant to be the Crimson
Crusader.

BRAD
So what was I meant to be?

LIZ
Yourself, Brad.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

The superheroes swoop through the sky toward

DESTRUCTO

who turns to see them draw closer.

DESTRUCTO
At last...

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Liz and Brad watch the superheroes speed toward Destructo.

LIZ
Don't you see? You have these
powers --

BRAD
Not anymore.

LIZ
Of course you do. You just have to
believe in yourself.

BRAD
I can't.

LIZ
That's because you think you have
to fill your father's shoes. What
you really have to do is fill your
own.

Brad turns to her. Pause.

BRAD
Really?

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Flying towards Destructo, Jake glances at Morris.

JAKE
Morris, take a team down to put out
the fires. The rest of you come
with me. We have to keep Destructo
away from the city.

WALLY
But how do we stop him, Jake?

JAKE
I'm working on it...

EXT. WAREHOUSE ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Liz stares at Brad.

LIZ
That's what you never understood,
Brad. Your father doesn't really
want you to be the Crimson Crusader
--

BRAD
Could've fooled me.

LIZ
-- He wants you to fulfill your
potential. But you have to do it
on your own terms, not his. Stop
comparing yourself to Jake Janson.

BRAD

All I wanted to be was an
accountant, Liz.

LIZ

You still can be. Only you'll just
fight crime too. You have the
gift, Brad, and I believe in you.

CLOSE ON BRAD

as he stares at Liz, then takes hold of her. They kiss.
After a moment, she breaks off and looks down.

LIZ

Brad --

He suddenly glances around -- they're FLOATING FIVE FEET OFF
THE GROUND.

BRAD

What is it about you?

ACROSS THE ROOF

A ROBOT BEETLE watches the two, unnoticed and silent.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Morris and SEVERAL SUPERHEROES dive toward the BURNING
BUILDINGS.

Morris leaps off his air bike and spins around in mid-air,
turning into THE TORNADO.

He whirls around a burning building, creating an air current
of such intensity that the FIRE GOES OUT. Meanwhile...

JAKE

leads the rest of the heroes toward

DESTRUCTO

who FIRES his deathrays at them.

THE HEROES

split up, avoiding the rays.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Dottie stares at a MONITOR mounted on the wall, watching the battle over the city. She whirls around with a SQUEAK as

BRAD AND LIZ

rush in from outside.

BRAD
Don't mind us.

DOTTIE
Brad, what are you doing?

Brad stops in front of a GIANT DOOR and slides it open, revealing THE WORLD'S LARGEST CLOSET.

He goes down the racks, pulling out superhero costumes and regular clothes.

BRAD
No... No...

Brad freezes, staring at something out of view.

He smiles.

BRAD
Yes.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo continues to FIRE at the scattering superheroes.

Morris and the rescue squad put out the fires below, pulling PEOPLE from the buildings and flying them to safety.

WALLY

swoops up to Jake.

WALLY
The fires are almost out. What now?

JAKE
Time to end this.

BRAD (O.S.)
Need a hand?

The heroes turn to see

BRAD

streaking toward them through the sky, now dressed in a three-piece suit, a raincoat and a fedora, a MASK covering the top half of his face.

The world's most superheroic office worker.

JAKE AND WALLY

stare, baffled, as he swoops in front of them.

JAKE

... Brad?

BRAD

Not anymore. I have become --
(bellowing heroically)
THE TAXMAN!

Jake and Wally exchange glances. Jake turns back to his son and grins slightly.

JAKE

Well... it's a start.

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Liz and Dottie stare up at the giant MONITOR, watching the battle unfold on-screen.

Liz whirls around at the SOUND of a CRASH.

She rushes over to the doorway and looks up.

LIZ'S POV - THE CEILING

A GIANT CLAW smashes through the hatch covering the skylight.

The metal hatch tumbles to the floor below as the ROBOT BEETLE seen before dives through the skylight.

DOTTIE

rushes to Liz's side, staring up at the monster above them.

LIZ

Get back!

ROBOT BEETLE'S POV

The view is tinted RED, with COMPUTER READOUTS scrolling down either side of the image. CROSSHAIRS cut through the center of the view.

We/it watch Liz grab Dottie, pulling her through the threshold into the control room.

ZOOM IN on Dottie's outstretched hand. The IMAGE FREEZES on her ENGAGEMENT RING with the CRYSTAL.

The computer readouts go crazy as the BEETLE BEEPS WILDLY.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo whirls around toward the river.

BRAD AND JAKE

watch the robot fly in that direction.

JAKE
The hideout...

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

Liz and Dottie back away from the door, which BENDS as the BEETLE SLAMS INTO IT from the other side.

DOTTIE
What does it want???

Liz suddenly looks down at the ring on Dottie's hand.

LIZ
This.

She takes Dottie's hand and wrenches off the ring, stuffing it into her breast pocket.

EXT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Destructo can be seen across the river, roaring towards the industrial park.

THE SUPERHEROES

race after it. Jake and Brad lead the pack.

Suddenly Jake bursts ahead, catching up with Destructo, then
FLYING PAST THE ROBOT.

INT. HIDEOUT - CONTROL ROOM - NIGHT

The door bubbles outward. The POUNDING CONTINUES.

Liz pulls Dottie over to the computer console and points
under it -- just enough room for one person.

DOTTIE
But what about --

LIZ
Quickly!

She helps the old lady squeeze underneath, then notices a
FIRE EXTINGUISHER clamped to the underside of the console.
Liz grabs it and whirls around as

THE BEETLE

crashes through the door, shoving aside the twisted metal and
darting straight for

LIZ

who holds up the extinguisher and FIRES.

The FOAM SPAYS across the beetle's black eyes.

Liz ducks as the beetle CRASHES into the monitor behind her.

The robot whirls around unsteadily, twitching.

Liz dashes out of the control room.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Jake arcs around and zooms toward Destructo. He holds out
his hands as the DEATHRAYS STRIKE HIM.

He shudders as the BOLTS RICOCHET AWAY.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Liz scrambles through the maze of machinery and artifacts
filling the hideout. She glances over her shoulder to see

THE ROBOT BEETLE

swooping after her, still half-blind and slamming aside everything in its path.

LIZ

zigs and zags, squeezing under old vehicles and jet engines as the beetle rips overhead like a raging hornet.

She looks up as

A SECOND BEETLE

drops through the skylight.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

The Crimson Crusader continues straight toward Destructo, picking up speed.

THE OTHER SUPERHEROES

swarm around the giant robot, distracting it.

Brad looks down at Jake.

BRAD

Are you crazy, Dad???

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Liz rolls under a table and checks her shirt pocket. Empty. Panicking, she looks around to see

THE RING

lying on the ground where she just was.

Liz lunges for ring and misses. Just out of reach.

She looks up again to see both beetles descend toward her.

Suddenly ONE EXPLODES.

Liz ducks back under the table as METAL showers down.

The surviving beetle swoops out of view.

Liz climbs out from under the table to see

DOTTIE

standing atop an ancient FUTURISTIC TANK nearby, gripping a GIANT LASER GUN mounted on a tripod and FIRING at the beetle.

DOTTIE

You want a piece of me? YOU WANT A
PIECE OF ME????

LIZ

shoves through the robot debris, searching the floor. She sees the ring lying there and reaches down.

A METAL CLAW lashes out, grabbing her wrist. She screams as the half-destroyed beetle lying next to her comes alive.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Jake continues on his collision course with Destructo, going so fast that he BEGINS TO BLUR.

The robot FIRES deathrays at him. Jake bats them away with his hand, then SLAMS RIGHT INTO DESTRUCTO'S THROAT.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Jake BREAKS THROUGH THE ROBOT'S SHELL, smashing into the FAR WALL. He rubs the back of his head.

JAKE

Ouch.

Jake looks down.

The inside of the enormous torso is hollow, cluttered with a maze of GEARS AND PISTONS maintained by ROBOT BEETLES that swarm around like metallic parasites.

A HUGE BOX sits about midway down the torso, connected by various TUBES AND WIRES and BLINKING in the dim light.

JAKE

Every tin man has a heart.

Jake drops down the torso.

The BEETLES clamber across the gears toward him.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo thrashes around in the sky, arms flailing as it SHOOTs energy bolts.

The superheroes dart after the bolts, SHIELDING the city before they strike.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Liz struggles in the weakly twitching beetle's grip, while

DOTTIE

keeps missing the second beetle with her laser blasts.

Suddenly, the GUN SPUTTERS AND DIES. She taps it.

DOTTIE
Blasted contraption.

LIZ

sees the beetle arcing toward Dottie, then glances down at the monster grappling with her.

Her free hand flails out, grabbing at anything in her reach.

Her fingers close around a HAMMER.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Jake descends down the torso, bashing through the attacking beetles.

The vicious robots snap at him in vain.

Jake points a finger at a nearby PISTON and FIRES an energy bolt.

The PISTON SHATTERS.

He SHOOTs at another piston, then another.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo jerks in the sky as if electrocuted.

It claws at its chest like a heart attack victim.

The superheroes BLAST it with their lasers.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Liz brings the hammer down on the beetle's cracked head, SMASHING through the metal into its positronic brain.

The robot shudders and goes limp. The claw drops from Liz's wrist.

She looks up at the flying beetle.

LIZ

Hey!

The thing stops in mid-air and whirls around at Liz as she reaches down into the debris and holds something in the air.

Dottie's ring.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Jake continues to BLAST pistons around him.

The robot beetles skitter over to the mechanisms and begin trying to repair them.

Now left alone, Jake lands on the top of the HEART.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Destructo floats above the river toward the industrial park, shaking violently.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Jake crouches atop the heart. He winds up, then SLAMS HIS FIST THROUGH THE METAL.

He peels back the shell and drops through the hole into

THE HEART

which is a large chamber filled with more tubing.

At its center is a refrigerator-sized CONTAINER, the core itself.

Jake pushes through the tangle of tubing to the container. He begins to sweat, his knees buckle.

JAKE
Great galaxies, what have we here?

He reaches the container, grabs the handle on a SERVICE HATCH and rips it off its hinges.

RED LIGHT pours out of the opening, filling the room.

Jake drops to his knees, shielding his eyes.

JAKE
Jumping Jehovah, a heart of
Crimsonite!

He collapses.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

The beetle dives toward Liz. Dottie screams:

DOTTIE
Liz, be careful!

LIZ

stares up at the oncoming robot.

She drops the ring onto the table beside her, raises the hammer, and SMASHES THE RING.

THE CRYSTAL SHATTERS INTO A MILLION PIECES.

EXT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Now hovering above the hideout, Destructo lets out an EAR-SHATTERING HOWL, then ROCKETS INTO THE SKY.

Dozens of robot beetles tear after it.

BRAD

watches them go, then SHOOTS UP AFTER DESTRUCTO.

INT. HIDEOUT - NIGHT

The beetle dives straight toward Liz, who drops to the ground and covers her head.

It suddenly STOPS inches above her, then ZIPS UPWARD and disappears through the skylight.

Liz stares at the night sky above, then notices Dottie making her way through the debris toward her.

DOTTIE
He would've been proud, Liz.

LIZ
Who?

DOTTIE
Your father.

Liz stares at Dottie a moment, then reaches out and hugs her. She begins to sob.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Brad tears through the atmosphere, catching up with Destructo.

He grabs hold of the robot, clambering up the shell to the hole in the throat.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Something's going very wrong -- it's as if Jake's handiwork has caused a chain reaction.

Gears and pistons SEIZE UP as robot beetles frantically try to fix them.

INSIDE THE HEART

Jake lies on the floor, gasping in the glow of the Crimsonite core.

He raises a trembling hand. A FLICKERING FIRE comes out of his fingertip. Nothing more.

Jake's hand drops. He closes his eyes.

INT. DESTRUCTO - NIGHT

Brad climbs through the hole into the robot. He stares down the torso at the pandemonium -- fires everywhere, beetles skittering across the breaking machines, the massive frame of Destructo itself SHUDDERING.

He drops down the torso, knocking aside beetles in his way.

BRAD

Dad?

Brad lands on the heart, sees the hole and drops through it.

INSIDE THE HEART

Brad hits the ground and staggers backward in the light of the Crimsonite.

Jake lies in front of the core, motionless.

Brad notices him and pushes through the tubing, growing weaker with every step.

He finally reaches his father and drops to his knees.

Jake opens his eyes just barely.

JAKE

Brad... the core...

Brad hauls Jake away from the hatch.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Destructo reaches the upper limits of the Earth's atmosphere.

INT. DESTRUCTO - HEART - NIGHT

Brad pulls Jake to the hole above them. He lifts his nearly unconscious father to his feet.

JAKE

Concentrate, boy... focus...

BRAD

I'll try.

JAKE

I love you, Brad.

Brad looks down at his father, shocked beyond belief.

He takes a deep breath, points a fist at the glowing core, and FIRES AN ENERGY BEAM THAT STREAMS INTO THE CRIMSONITE.

The container itself begins to GLOW. The EDGES GIVE WAY as it BEGINS TO VIBRATE, then MELT.

Brad pulls his father tighter, closes his eyes, and LEAPS UP THROUGH THE HOLE as

THE HEART EXPLODES BENEATH THEIR FEET.

Brad grips Jake as they tear up the body of Destructo, AN INFERNO RAGING AFTER THEM.

Jake begins to regain consciousness. He looks around groggily as they race toward the top of Destructo's body.

BRAD

Hold on!

THEY SLAM THROUGH THE CEILING ABOVE THEM.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

Jake and Brad CRASH THROUGH THE CROWN OF DESTRUCTO into the thin atmosphere, darting away as

DESTRUCTO EXPLODES.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

The people of the city stare up at the spectacular BALL OF FIRE that lights up the night sky.

EXT. HIDEOUT - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

The superheroes have congregated on the roof of the Crusader hideout, somber and silent.

Liz and Dottie walk out onto the roof. Dottie's eyes begin to well up as she watches the fireball. Liz takes her hand.

Wally points to the sky.

WALLY

Look!

BRAD

sails down into view, still holding Jake.

They gently land on the roof.

The heroes rush over, then stop when they watch Brad lay his father down. Jake's eyes are closed.

Dottie grabs Liz's hand, trembling.

Beat.

Jake slowly opens his eyes, looking around. He stops at Brad.

JAKE
Nice work, Taxman.
(beat)
What's wrong?

BRAD
(gently)
Criminals across the galaxy will
always see red, so long as the
Crimson Crusader is there to thwart
their plans and protect the
citizens of Earth from evil.

Jake stares at his son. He smiles.

JAKE
Shut up, boy, and take me home. I
need a nap.

Dottie rushes over and takes her husband in an embrace, sobbing.

Brad stands up and steps back, then notices Liz.

He walks over to her and stops. Their eyes meet.

TINK! A SMALL METAL RING falls from the sky, landing by Brad's feet.

He picks it up, stares at it, then takes Liz's hand.

She smiles as he slips the metal on her ring finger.

Perfect fit.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE: "SIX MONTHS LATER"

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

TWO FIGURES climb a ROPE up the sleek face of the high-rise.

CLOSE ON THE FIGURES

We see that it's WALTER and SAM, the thieves from the beginning of the story.

They shimmy up the rope, huffing and puffing. Sam looks up at Walter above him.

SAM
Are we almost there?

WALTER
What is this, a trip to Grandma's house? Now zip it. I'm trying to concentrate.

Walter reaches into his pocket, pulling out a STOPWATCH. He glances at it.

WALTER
Step it up. We got five minutes before security makes their rounds -
-

He goes to pocket the watch and misses. He lets go of it.

Sam flinches as the stopwatch tumbles past his face.

Walter shoots an angry look down at him.

WALTER
Damn it, look what you made me...

Sam looks up at Walter's slack expression.

SAM
Walter...?

Sam looks down just in time to see

BRAD

floating up to them, dressed as the Taxman and holding the stopwatch.

BRAD
You seem to have dropped something.

Walter stares at him, deflated.

WALTER
Shit.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Brad swoops into view, Sam in one hand and Walter in the other. He drops the crooks onto the roof, where

SKIPPY

leans on the Red Sled, looking healthy, happy and sporting a NEW COSTUME that isn't half as ridiculous as the old one.

BRAD

Take 'em in, partner. I'm running late.

SKIPPY

Sure thing, Taxman.

As Skippy grabs Sam, Walter leaps up and dashes away.

Brad and Skippy exchange glances, then watch him go. Sam is confused.

SAM

Ain't you gonna get him?

WALTER

hauls ass across the rooftop. He pulls a GRAPPLING GUN from his shoulder, FIRING it.

THE GRAPPLING HOOK

connects with the rooftop across the street, a WIRE stretching from it to the gun.

WALTER

reaches the edge of the building and LEAPS OFF.

He SWINGS BETWEEN BUILDINGS as

JAKE

soars into view, grabbing him in mid-air.

Walter stares at the Crimson Crusader.

WALTER

I heard you retired.

JAKE

You can only play so much golf.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Jake circles overhead with Walter. He looks down at Brad.

JAKE
You run along, boy. Skippy and I
will handle these ruffians.

BRAD
I'll see you later, Crimson
Crusader.

Walter watches Brad fly away. He frowns.

WALTER
That voice sounds familiar.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

We see a DOOR that reads, "ELIZABETH JANSON, M.D."

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Liz checks her watch and gets up from her desk -- we can see
that she's PREGNANT.

She waddles over to the open window as Brad swoops into view.
He hovers in front of her.

LIZ
You're late.

BRAD
So were the bad guys. What time's
our dinner reservation?

LIZ
Eight.

BRAD
So we have, what, 30 seconds?

LIZ
You haven't even changed yet.

Brad takes off his mask and pockets it.

BRAD
There. I'm all set.

He holds out his hand. She takes it, then freezes.

LIZ
You sure you don't want to drive?

BRAD

No time. Now come on, Mrs. Janson.
You have a flight to catch.

He gently pulls her through the office window. She grips him tightly, trying not to look down.

LIZ

You're lucky I put up with this.

BRAD

Tell me about it.

She notices a TINY RIP on his coat.

LIZ

You've got a little tear there.
I'll fix it later.

BRAD

My mom will be so proud.

They take off over the city, soaring into the peaceful night.

THE END