

UNDERLINGS

"Baptism by Fire"

Show #1 (**PILOT**)

Written & Created by Christopher Howard Wolf

CAST

<u>CHARACTER</u>		<u>ACTOR</u>
GERRY	
RON	
PHIL	
STEVEY	
AMY	
STRANGE EDDIE	
CHEESE	
CASHIER #1	
CASHIER #2	

SETS

INTERIOR

- THE COMIC CELLAR
SALES FLOOR
OFFICE
GAME ROOM
HALLWAY
ELECTRICAL CLOSET
- PIES GUYS PIZZA
DINING AREA

EXTERIOR

- PIES GUYS PIZZA
FRONT SIDEWALK
- FOREST GLEN

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. FRONT SIDEWALK - MORNING

We are outside a street side urban pizza restaurant which looks to be well-aged, as one would expect a long-time fixture of the neighborhood to be. POSTERS picturing various PIZZAS hang in the large front WINDOWS, which overlook the worn SIDEWALK here. To one side is a STAIRCASE which descends below ground.

A SIGN above the restaurant's front doors reads:

PIES GUYS
PIZZA

A STANDING SIGN placed near the staircase reads:

THE COMIC CELLAR
COMICS, CARDS, GAMES, ANIME

We PUSH IN on the standing sign and PAN UP to reveal CHEESE, a stereotypical fan boy in his late teens. He approaches the staircase, wheezing as he exhaustedly lurches along.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING AREA - AT THAT MOMENT

The interior of the restaurant is nasty neat, decorated with framed SPORTS JERSEYS and wall-mounted TELEVISIONS. Several TABLES surrounded with CHAIRS sit in regimented order. A few CUSTOMERS sit at various tables. Behind two CASH REGISTERS on a SALES COUNTER stand two CASHIERS.

Cashier #1 looks forward to the restaurant's front windows while Cashier #2 absently spins a COIN on the counter top.

CASHIER #1

Nerd alert.

Cashier #2 looks up as well as the two spot Cheese, lurching past the front windows of the store on his way to the Comic Cellar.

Cashier #2 starts doing a bad FRENCH ACCENT, as if he is Jacques Cousteau.

CASHIER #2

Ah, here we have ze great white geek. Zis amazing creature sustains itself entirely on greasy snack foods, such as ze elusive pork rind or ze playful cheese doodle.

CASHIER #1

Majestic, in its way.

Outside the window, Cheese reaches the staircase and descends.

CASHIER #2

(still with the accent)

Gradually, ze huge man-whale descends below ze surface, to a subterranean cave with others of its species.

As Cheese disappears down the stairs...

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

The sales floor of the Comic Cellar is an expansive room filled with TABLES of LONG BOXES. There are several RACKS filled with COMIC BOOKS, ROLE PLAYING GAME MERCHANDISE, and ANIME DVDs. T-SHIRTS hang on the walls above and a half-circle of DISPLAY CASES full of mostly TRADING CARDS and GAMING CARDS serves as the sales counter.

Behind the counter is RON, a hip-looking and casually dressed man in his early 20s. He sits on a STOOL behind the REGISTER, reading a MAGAZINE.

Also behind the counter is GERRY, a shorter, stockier man in his late 30s with coke bottle glasses. He sits to the side in a LAWN CHAIR, looking over PAPERWORK.

The front door of the shop OPENS, and Cheese enters, panting.

RON

(Without looking up)

Hello, Cheese.

Cheese lets the door close behind him as he walks up to the counter in front of Ron and leans on it for support.

CHEESE
(exhausted)

How did you know it was me?

RON

I listened for the famous *Cheese wheeze*.
It's somewhere between the gasp of a dying
buffalo and the labored panting of a pack
mule.

Cheese turns to Gerry, who is still looking over his paperwork.

CHEESE

Gerry, do you hear this? How he talks to
your most valuable customer?

GERRY

Ron, stop being mean to our most valuable
customer.

Ron looks up briefly from his magazine as Cheese gives him a
smug grin.

CHEESE

What do you have to say to *that*, comic
monkey?

Ron abruptly, but lightly SWATS Cheese in the FACE with his
magazine. Within a split second, he is back to calmly reading.

Gerry sighs, takes out a blank piece of PAPER, and WRITES on it
in large letters.

GERRY
(as he writes)

"Please do not taunt the monkey."

Just as abruptly, we...

CUT TO OPENING TITLES:

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. SALES FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Cheese is now standing in front of Gerry at the other side of the counter, trying to draw his attention like a slighted toddler.

CHEESE

OOOH! You saw that! He hit me!

Gerry doesn't look up as he hands the paper he was just writing on to Ron, who places it on the counter in front of himself.

GERRY

I've done all I can do. It's out of my hands.

Cheese steps back from the counter and narrows his eyes at Ron.

CHEESE

I hope you're quite happy. You've soured my shopping experience.

Ron closes his magazine and rolls it up.

RON

No, I'm not happy. My magazine has Cheese-face all over it.

Cheese wanders off into the rest of the store as Ron gets up and replaces the magazine on a nearby shelf.

GERRY

That just wasn't you.

RON

Something about him brings out my inner bully. I think it's his burgeoning mid-pubescent man-boy musk. One whiff and I black out, unable to control my primal fury.

Ron returns to his stool.

GERRY

Maybe... but you're probably just an ass.

RON

That's an alternate theory that warrants further exploration.

The door opens yet again. In walks STEVEY, a tall, lanky goth guy in his early 20s. He is dressed all in BLACK, complete with a TRENCH COAT.

STEVEY

Ding dong, the witch is here.

Ron visibly slumps in his seat, obviously not happy to see Stevey.

RON

(flatly)

It rained this morning. I thought you might've melted.

Unfazed by Ron's lackluster attitude, Stevey draws his trench coat out like a cape as he spins in place.

STEVEY

I flew between the raindrops!

RON

You're a tricky little pixie.

STEVEY

Again, that's "Witch"... "Warlock" if you prefer.

(he chuckles)

Pixies aren't *real*.

Stevy chuckles at his own response, then suddenly SLAPS his hand down on the counter in front of Gerry.

STEVEY (CONT'D)

(excited)

HEY!

GERRY

(apprehensively)

Hey Stevey... what's up?

STEVEY

We had a visitor last night. He walked right into the office, touched me, and then left!

Gerry finally looks up from his paperwork with a curious expression.

GERRY
Should I be concerned?

RON
Relax, it's a ghost. He thinks the store's haunted.

Gerry shakes his head at the interruption and continues to study his paperwork.

Stevey scoffs.

STEVEY
Think? I don't think.

Stevey turns his focus back to Gerry.

STEVEY (CONT'D)
You have a class nine anchored poltergeist in here. Has anyone died in this store?

GERRY
Possibly.

STEVEY
I'm sorry, but shouldn't you know a thing like that?

GERRY
I can't be expected to keep track of everything.

Gerry looks up again, thinks for a beat, and then turns to Ron.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Do me a favor and sweep the store for corpses, whenever you have a moment.

RON
No problemo, Boss.

Stevey folds his arms and snorts.

STEVEY

I'm going to help the spirit move on. Maybe light some candles.

RON

Why not? Start a bunch of small fires in a comic book shop. When we all burn to death, we can keep your ghost buddy company.

STEVEY

If it were up to you, spirits would be stuck forever... mournfully wandering the places they find most familiar... suffering for all eternity!

RON

If *I* have to, *they* have to.

Stevey moves to leave. Gerry speaks, stopping him.

GERRY

As soon as I'm done with the paperwork, we're having a team meeting.

RON

We're a man down.

Stevey turns back with surprise.

STEVEY

Someone quit?

RON

Ben quit, specifically.

STEVEY

On what grounds?!

GERRY

He called in this morning and said he would "no longer be able to execute his duties as an employee of the Comic Cellar."

STEVEY

His duties? *What* duties?

Stevey looks off into space for a beat, brow furrowed as if searching his thoughts.

STEVEY (CONT'D)

We work in a *comic shop*..

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST GLEN - MORNING

We are now inexplicably in a medieval forest, nothing but TREES in every direction. Standing amid this setting is PHIL, a large, hairy man in his mid 20s. He is dressed in MEDIEVAL GARB akin to that of a VIKING WARRIOR. He holds an ornate SWORD in one hand and a SHIELD in the other.

Phil slowly stalks through the forest, and is suddenly confronted with an elderly, white-bearded CLOAKED WIZARD.

PHIL

What ho, fair traveler! Be you in need of some assistance?

WIZARD

Stop talking like a fruit. You got any good items, dude?

PHIL

"Fruit"? What be this strange, homophobic term you use? Be you some sort of escaped mental patient from the towers of turmoil?

Phil looks at the cloaked wizard quizzically for a beat, then moves to pass him.

WIZARD

Hey, gimme your sword.

PHIL

I say thee nay.

Phil attempts to walk away from the cloaked wizard, but is again confronted by him.

WIZARD

Fine, be a numb nuts. I'll just yoink it.

PHIL

What manner of trickery...

The wizard raises his hands as if casting a spell on Phil.

WIZARD

Alt seven, control Q, control Q, enter!

Phil starts to raise his sword, only to find that his fist is now EMPTY. He looks at his empty hand with utter shock.

Phil turns to look as the cloaked wizard runs away, Phil's sword now in the wizard's hand.

PHIL

(calling after)

HEY!! Cheater!

Suddenly, we...

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - AT THAT MOMENT

This relatively small office contains a few LONG BOXES of COMICS, a couple FILE CABINETS, a MINI REFRIGERATOR with a SEVERED HEAD in a display case on top, and a DESK against two of the walls. Sitting at one of the desks is Phil, dressed in modern, casual clothing. He is sitting at a COMPUTER, and is angrily SMASHING the keyboard with his FISTS. Phil sits in a LAWN CHAIR identical to the one at the front desk, while a SWIVEL CHAIR sits at the other desk. There is a WASTE BASKET by the office door whose BAG is FILLED to the rim.

PHIL

Cheater, cheater, cheater!!

The office door opens, Ron pokes his head in.

RON

What's all the ruckus, Flabby Hayes?

PHIL

Meh. Some hacker stole my ethereal sword of epic power with upgraded accuracy and maxed out damage.

RON

I'm... sorry?

Phil sighs and seems to relax a bit.

PHIL

It's okay, I have like five of them in the vault.

Ron comes into the office, leaving the door open. He pulls up the swivel chair and sits near Phil.

RON

(mockingly concerned)

You need to take a break from that game. All this rage, it's not good for you. I mean, we're in a basement. If you had a heart attack we'd have to take you out on the delivery elevator.

Phil grins and plays along.

PHIL

Is it time for our therapy session already?

Ron crosses his legs, folds his arms, and does his best to look studious.

RON

Tell me about your dreams, Philip.

Phil leans back in his chair and looks at the ceiling.

PHIL

Let's see. When I dream, there are usually a lot of zombies. Zombies chasing me, or me chasing zombies. Sometimes *I'm* a zombie.

Ron stifles a laugh.

RON

You chase zombies?

PHIL

See, in one dream all the women on Earth have been zombified.

RON

Do you have a zombie girlfriend?

Phil is surprised by this question.

PHIL

A *girlfriend*? It's a dream, not a fantasy. Hell, if I could control my dreams there'd be pie. I'd be a pie, *chasing* pies...

RON

I'm sensing a theme of cannibalism.

Phil sits back up with a grunt.

PHIL

When are we replacing Ben? Lousy quitter.

RON

I don't know, Gerry won't say.

Gerry walks in the office door. As he does, Ron gets up to give him his seat.

RON (CONT'D)

Speak of the Devil!

As Gerry takes a seat, Stevey walks in, assuming the reference was directed at him.

STEVEY

I'm not the Devil, I'm a warlock! Though a warlock *is* in service of Mephistopheles, so I guess I can see how that would be confusing.

Ron sits on one of the desks as Stevey leans against one wall.

RON

No, I meant Gerry was the Devil.

GERRY

(to Ron)

Thanks for that...

(addressing the group)

Anyway, as you all know by now, we're short one employee. Frankly, I don't know if we even need another worker at this point.

Phil raises his hand and speaks.

PHIL

Question. If we *don't* hire someone, who gets the extra lunch every day?

GERRY

We'd order one less.

Phil lowers his hand.

PHIL

Okay, I'm out of the debate.

Ron clears his throat authoritatively and speaks up.

RON

Gentlemen, if I may point out an unexplored facet of this decision...

Ron stands and addresses the group.

RON

We must consider the fact that Ben was the low man on our totem pole. The bitch, if you will. Without a suitable replacement, you and I will actually have to *do* something around here.

GERRY

Listen, if you guys feel like it's worth it, you can find a replacement.

PHIL

You'd let the three of us interview all the candidates and choose one?

Gerry strokes his chin thoughtfully.

GERRY

Why does it sound like such a bad choice
when you say it?

RON

Okay, so can we agree that we need a toilet
plunging, floor sweeping, garbage emptying
patsy?

Ron kicks the waste basket. It JINGLES as if there is SPARE
CHANGE in the bottom.

RON (CONT'D)

Right here, look at this! This is totally a
job for a lackey.

Ron looks down into the waste basket, pulling the bag away from
the side.

RON (CONT'D)

Huh. Something's in here.

Gerry stands up suddenly.

GERRY

(concerned)

No, no there isn't.

RON

There's something hidden in the bottom of
this.

GERRY

There isn't anything hidden in the bottom of
anything.

PHIL

I heard something jingle.

Ron reaches down past the trash bag, into the bottom of the
waste basket beneath.

STEVEY

Be careful, it could be some sort of cursed
artifact... a remnant of our ghost's forgotten
past.

GERRY
(getting agitated)
There's nothing in there for you.

Ron pulls a MONEY POUCH out of the waste basket from underneath the trash bag.

On the side of the pouch is a logo reading: NEW CAPITAL BANK

Ron looks at the pouch in his hand, then toward Gerry with a wide grin.

RON
(smugly)
Gerry... is this the store's money pouch?

Gerry grabs the pouch from him.

GERRY
No!

PHIL
I always wondered where you kept that.

GERRY
It's not money! It's... letters. Love letters from some lady.

RON
It has your bank's name on the side. Does this "lady" work there? Does she own the bank? Way to hook a whopper!

Gerry TOSSES the money pouch on a desk, defeated.

GERRY
Fine! You're right, it's the store's money, are you satisfied?

PHIL
Why would you keep it in the garbage? It's right next to the office door. Anybody could walk by and find it.

GERRY
I'm a silly little man. That's what you want to hear, isn't it?

Phil shrugs.

PHIL

Well it's always nice to have confirmation...

RON

You don't have to hide it from us, Boss. We wouldn't dream of ripping you off.

Phil stands and takes a step toward the money pouch.

PHIL

Lemme get a few bucks for a Yoo-Hoo.

GERRY

Stop it!

Gerry grabs the money pouch again, claspng it to his chest.

RON

Yeah, I could go for a beer.

Ron reaches for the pouch, Gerry turns away from him.

PHIL

Hey, let a brother hold a Benjamin? I'll hit you back in a week.

Phil and Ron advance on Gerry, who steps back.

GERRY

No! Leave me alone!

Ron and Phil suddenly LURCH toward Gerry as if they are about to grab him. Gerry barely DODGES their grasp, and BOLTS out of the office door.

Ron turns to Phil.

RON

"Let a brother hold a Benjamin"? *Really?*

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. SALES FLOOR - AFTERNOON

A FOLDING CHAIR is now sitting beside a row of long boxes. Sitting in the chair is Cheese. He seems a little nervous, and takes a few moments to find a good "casual" sitting position.

Cheese clears his throat, and then blows into his hand to smell his own breath.

Stevey, Phil, and Ron each DRAG a folding chair across the floor. They end up sitting in a row, facing Cheese. Stevey sits with his chair turned backward for extra "cool effect".

Each of the three employees carries a CLIP BOARD with PAPER clipped on and a RED PEN.

Ron, Phil, and Stevey act very professionally, speaking flatly and in almost monotone voices.

RON

Good morning.

CHEESE

Afternoon.

RON

Pardon me?

CHEESE

Nothing, it... it's afternoon.

Ron looks Cheese in the eye with a cold expression. He uncaps his red pen and makes a mark on his paper.

RON

I see... Applicant is insubordinate.

Phil takes a deep breath, looks at his own paper, and lets out a sigh.

PHIL

It says here that your name is "Cheese". Is that correct?

CHEESE

Uhh... Yes.

PHIL

Huh. What kind of name is "Cheese"?

RON

Is that some sort of gang moniker?

PHIL

We're not going to hire some kind of gang-banger off the street.

Cheese can't believe his ears.

CHEESE

You guys named me that! My real name is Peter, but you keep calling me Cheese!

Phil makes a red mark on his paper.

PHIL

Giving a false name on an official job application... Not off to a good start, are we?

CHEESE

But I...

Phil interrupts, and continues to question Cheese.

PHIL

Why exactly do you want to work at the Comic Cellar?

CHEESE

You're kidding! I mean, I practically live here... I've always wanted to work at a comic shop. It's a dream of mine.

Ron places a red mark on his paper.

RON

Applicant has substandard life goals.

Phil studies his paper, then looks up at Cheese with a dubious expression.

PHIL

Under "special interests" you wrote
"member of the Communist Party." Care to
explain?

Cheese begins to get even more exasperated.

CHEESE

I... I didn't write that!

Cheese reaches for Phil's clipboard, but Phil pulls it back away
from him.

CHEESE (CONT'D)

You wrote that. Let me see it!

PHIL

Calm down, Karl Marx! I don't know where
you're from, but this is America, and in the
U.S. of A., sir, we do not take kindly to
people with grabby hands.

Before Cheese can reply, Stevey speaks up.

STEVEY

Have you read the manuscript for my novel?

CHEESE

You mean "Zack Maniac: Global Assassin"? Of
course, you emailed me the PDF file.

RON

(glumly)

He emailed it to everyone.

STEVEY

(to Ron)

It's called "Going Viral". Welcome to the
21st century.

PHIL

I remember, now. I deleted it because I
thought it was spam.

RON

More like *baloney*, am I right?

Ron turns to Phil, a perplexed look on his face.

RON (CONT'D)

You really don't read spam? It's how I found my Ukrainian mail order bride.

(wistfully)

Sadly, it turned out she was just too much man for me.

Stevey ignores Ron and continues to interrogate Cheese.

STEVEY

(to Cheese)

What did you think of the manuscript?

Cheese is speechless for a moment as he desperately searches his brain for an acceptable answer.

CHEESE

Uhh... Great! It was harrowing. I couldn't put it down even though I really, really wanted to.

RON

(to Stevey)

Aren't you self-publishing? Isn't that like literary masturbation?

Phil gestures to Cheese.

PHIL

(to Ron)

Ronald, please. There's a youngster present.

RON

(to Stevey)

Isn't that like literary *special touching*?

(to Cheese, accusingly)

Which you should *never, ever* do because the Lord is watching!

STEVEY

(to Cheese)

Ignore these jealous naysayers. What was your favorite part of the story?

CHEESE

My favorite...? Well...

(a beat as he thinks)

When the globe-trotting assassin realized
that he had a split personality disorder.

Stevey starts to make a red mark on his paper, upsetting Cheese.

CHEESE (CONT'D)

And -- his split personality was the serial
killer that murdered his own CIA handler.

Stevey stops just short of marking the page. He grins.

PHIL

Hey! Spoiler alert.

RON

Does that really matter if you never intend
to read it?

STEVEY

You guys can wait for the movie to come out.
I already have some contacts in the film
industry. My cousin interned at DreamWorks.

Ron gets somber for a moment, fixing a hard gaze on
Cheese.

RON

Pop quiz, sport. You're working alone on
shipment day. You have hundreds of comic
books to shelve. Suddenly...

Ron suddenly **THROWS** his clipboard on the floor and stands up.

RON (CONT'D)

BAM!! School lets out, and a bunch of
snotty-faced, sticky-fingered, stinky-butted
kids come clamoring through the door, intent
on touching *everything*.

Ron leans in on Cheese, almost nose to nose. Cheese pulls back.

RON (CONT'D)

Oh, and did I mention that there's an RPG event? Yeah, tons of role players, mad as Hell because a titanic Minotaur just slaughtered the entire party and used their enchanted scrolls for toilet paper.

Ron puts a hand on either side of Cheese's face and SQUISHES it, his eyes locked hard on Cheese's.

RON (CONT'D)

It's T-minus five seconds before those mewling school children run face-first into the distended bellies of the angry, hairy men storming out of game room... You're sitting on a frickin' powder keg!

(Breathing heavily for a beat)

So the question is this, sport...

Ron pulls back. He is still intense, but slightly less so.

RON (CONT'D)

How quickly can you make a video of the carnage and send it to us?

On that note...

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - AT THAT MOMENT

Standing away from the others, Gerry is now SKULKING past some comic book racks. His eyes DART back and forth as he holds the store's money pouch under one arm like some priceless object.

Gerry stops and looks DOWN at the BOTTOM of a rack, here. It seems to be a good place to hide something..

Gerry SQUATS down beside the rack, and once again looks all around to see if anyone is watching.

Slowly and slyly, Gerry SLIDES the money pouch under the rack.

As soon as the pouch is concealed, a CUSTOMER walks casually into the scene.

Still squatting, Gerry looks up at the customer.

CUSTOMER
(apprehensively)

Hey...

GERRY
(nonchalant)

Hello.

CUSTOMER
What's up?

GERRY
(he stammers)
I... I'm... pooping.

Gerry waves the customer away, still squatting. The customer leaves.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Privacy, please!

Gerry, still squatting, puts his head in his hands.

GERRY (CONT'D)
Why must I choke under pressure?

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

In the same setting, we now see STRANGE EDDIE sitting in the folding chair Cheese formerly inhabited. Strange Eddie is a creepy-looking fellow in his mid to late 20s, wearing what looks to be a mix of Army surplus and thrift store clothing.

Stevey, Phil, and Ron are sitting across from Strange Eddie. They still have their clipboards and pens at hand.

For a beat, Stevey, Phil, and Ron simply remain locked in a silent STARE with Strange Eddie.

Ron suddenly ELBOWS Phil, urging him to begin the interview.

PHIL
(startled)
Oh! Uhm... state your name for the record.

STRANGE EDDIE
Edward Bebark.
(he looks around the room)
Why, are you recording this?

RON
Do you mind if we call you "Strange Eddie"?
We've been doing it behind your back, so
it'll be nice to clear our consciences.

STRANGE EDDIE
I'm not gonna stop you.

Strange Eddie leans down and reaches under his chair.

STRANGE EDDIE (CONT'D)
Before we start...

Strange Eddie produces the store's MONEY POUCH from under his chair and holds it out in front of him.

STRANGE EDDIE (CONT'D)
I found this under one of the comic racks.

Gerry MOVES THROUGH the scene and grabs the money pouch from Strange Eddie.

GERRY
Damn it!

Gerry walks out of the scene with the money pouch.

RON
(to Strange Eddie)
Why were you looking under the racks?

STRANGE EDDIE
I wanted to find where the laughter was
coming from.

Everyone is quiet for a moment as that sinks in.

STRANGE EDDIE (CONT'D)

(matter of fact)

Don't worry, I took care of it.

Phil clears his throat and looks down at the paper on his clipboard. After a beat, Stevey and Ron follow suit.

PHIL

Alright... why do you want to work at the Comic Celler?

STRANGE EDDIE

I like comic books.

PHIL

Can you elaborate?

STRANGE EDDIE

I like horror comic books. Old ones. Tales from the Crypt... The Haunt of Fear... The Vault of Horror.

PHIL

You enjoy them for entertainment purposes... or you harvest them for fresh ideas?

STRANGE EDDIE

I like how they smell.

PHIL

No further questions.

RON

(to Strange Eddie)

If you could be any kind of animal, what would you be?

Strange Eddie presses his finger tips to the sides of his head as he considers the question.

STRANGE EDDIE

That's a tough one.

(he thinks for a beat)

When I was a kid, I wanted to be the shark from "Jaws". I guess I'll pick that.

RON
(concerned)
So you'd be vicious, man-eating shark?

STRANGE EDDIE
What? No. An animatronic one.

Stevey is fixated on Strange Eddie. He beams as he studies the strange character.

STEVEY
Strange Eddie, are you a homicidal psychopath?

Before Strange Eddie has a chance to answer, Phil speaks up, gesturing at Stevey.

PHIL
(to Strange Eddie)
You can answer honestly, that's a big plus to him.

STEVEY
(to Strange Eddie, bragging)
When I was a kid, John Wayne Gacey was almost the clown for my birthday party.

RON
You know, *normal* kids are disappointed when they don't get a *pony*.

And so, we...

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - LATER

Sitting in the chair instead of Strange Eddie is AMY, bookish, young woman in her late teens, dressed in vintage clothing and thin-rimmed glasses.

One last time, Stevey, Ron, and Phil are seated in a row in front of this applicant, still wielding their clipboards and pens.

RON

First things first. Is it or is it not true that you're a woman?

Amy chuckles.

AMY

I can affirm that.

RON

I don't recall asking if anything was *firm*, ma'am. This tribunal will not be swayed by flirtatious advances.

Ron studies the paper on his clipboard studiously.

RON (CONT'D)

Is this a joke, or is your name...

AMY

(interrupting exuberantly)

Amethyst, yes. It's because I'm precious!

PHIL

"Amethyst"... Nope. I'm not referring to you by the name of a rock. This isn't the Flintstones.

RON

We're not calling anyone by their real names today. How does "Amy" sound?

AMY

That's fine, I'm easy.

All three of the boys quickly write on their papers.

AMY (CONT'D)

I don't mean "easy" that way.

They stop writing. Phil shakes his head.

PHIL

You just talked yourself out of five thousand and one bonus points, little missy.

Amy turns to Ron, gesturing at Phil.

AMY

Is he okay?

RON

Phil just has issues with women. When he was little, his mother locked him out in the snow in his diaper.

Phil scoffs.

PHIL

Wrong. I was wearing my big-boy undies.

Phil turns his clipboard around so Amy can see it. On the paper is an INK BLOT made of SPILLED CHOCOLATE MILK.

PHIL (CONT'D)

What do you see in this ink blot?

Amy adjusts her glasses and peers at the paper.

AMY

That you spilled a Yoo-Hoo on your clipboard?

Phil turns the clipboard back around and marks his page.

PHIL

Technically correct. I would've also accepted "Monkeys playing baccarat" or "that time I found a Cheerio in my armpit, but I hadn't had Cheerios since I was seven".

Amy turns to Stevey.

AMY

What about you, Gloomy Goose? Any odd remarks or silly questions?

Stevy shakes his head.

STEVEY

Not at all! I think it would be really healthy to have a female aura around here.

PHIL

Yeah, he can finally get his own aura out of the skirt and high heels.

RON

(to Phil)

More shemale humor? Time to wrap it up.

(to Amy)

Any final reason we should hire you above all the other geeks who would die to work in a comic shop? You should know that we have one applicant who claims to be a very high-ranking Communist.

AMY

What can I bring to the job that others can't? Well... women talk.

PHIL

Boy howdy, do they!

AMY

I mean, women talk to each other. You guys probably don't realize it, but you've been driving away female customers for years. They've told me as much.

Ron looks genuinely interested for the moment.

RON

No way... how?

AMY

Let's start with your version of "Casual Friday".

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - FLASHBACK, DAY

We now take a look back at a past time. We see a CU of Ron's face as he surveys the store.

As we PAN BACK to a MEDIUM SHOT, we see that Ron is wearing only BOXER SHORTS and SOCKS as he walks through the area.

With his BACK turned to the camera, Ron approaches a FEMALE CUSTOMER who is looking at ANIME DVDs.

RON
See anything good?

The female customer looks at Ron, surprised by his lack of clothing. She then slowly looks DOWN toward Ron's crotch.

An unimpressed expression washes over the female customer's face.

Ron looks down at his own crotch.

RON (CONT'D)
(addressing his crotch)
You again! We talked about this sort of thing.

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - PRESENT, DAY

Back with the interview process, Ron leans back in his chair as Phil and Stevey look at him with disdain.

RON
In my defense, I was under the impression it was "Hang Your Wang Out Wednesday".

AMY
Also, it doesn't help that your customers look at every girl that walks in here like stray dogs ogling a slab of meat.

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - FLASHBACK, DAY

We now see a MEDIUM SHOT of Cheese and Strange Eddie standing near a SHELF of comic books. Cheese is busily chatting with Strange Eddie, who seems blank, possibly not even listening.

CHEESE

Green Lantern is, and always will be Hal Jordan. No replacement comes close.

(he chuckles)

I mean, really. *Kyle Rayner*? A super-hero who also happens to be a comic book artist? Like *that* isn't the comic world's most brazen example of creator self-insertion!

An EXOTIC FEMALE customer walks into frame, past Cheese and Strange Eddie. Both guys fall completely silent as she passes. They watch her very intently.

As the female leaves the frame, the two men are still watching in the direction she exited.

Cheese whimpers pathetically.

After a beat, Ron walks into the scene and stares in the same direction. Ron is again dressed only in BOXER SHORTS and SOCKS.

RON

Wow. Who's that?

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - PRESENT, DAY

Back with the interview process, Ron, Stevey, and Phil seem ready to make a decision.

AMY

You have to admit... having a woman's touch around here couldn't hurt... especially when that woman is into fantasy novels and Japanese animation. I'm fluent in both girl talk and geek speak...

Amy holds her hands up in a mock Karate pose.

AMY (CONT'D)

I could be your secret double-agent.

PHIL

I think we've heard all we need to hear. Shall we put it to a vote?

RON

All in favor?

All three boys each raise one hand.

RON, PHIL, AND STEVEY
(together)

Aye!

RON

All opposed?

All three boys raise their other hands.

RON, PHIL, AND STEVEY
(together)

Nay!

PHIL

It looks like we have a tie, and in such an event the tie-breaking vote goes to Mr. Pate.

Amy is utterly confused. She lets that sink in for a beat, and then looks to the boys quizzically.

AMY

I'm sorry, who?

Phil takes a daft-looking SOCK PUPPET from his pocket and carefully places it over his HAND. This, alas, is MR. PERKINS.

PHIL

(to the sock puppet)

What say you, Mr. Perkins?

Phil makes Mr. Perkins look Amy up and down, then speak.

PHIL (CONT'D)

(as Mr. Perkins, in a gravelly voice)

Lemme see here, what we got going on? Oooh, tasty. *Hire that thang!*

AMY

(worried)

You guys really *don't* do any work around here, do you?

Ron stands and takes Amy's hand tenderly. She stands with him.

RON

(adoringly)

And now, my dear, neither shall you.

Mock-romantically, they clutch each other's hands and look deeply into each other's eyes.

RON (CONT'D)

Are your glasses are fogging up?

AMY

Yes, but only because you're nose-breathing in my face.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. SALES FLOOR - LATER

Ron and Amy are now alone at the front desk. Ron sits on his stool behind the counter as Amy stands next to him.

RON

This is the front desk.

AMY

I suspected as much.

RON

The most important rules of running the front desk are... Don't let anyone behind the counter, and...

(a beat)

I guess there's one rule. Falling asleep is generally frowned upon, but I wouldn't necessarily call it an official regulation.

Cheese ENTERS the scene and walks up to the front desk. He stands in front of Ron.

Cheese tries his best to act cool and casual, leaning on the counter nonchalantly.

CHEESE

(to Ron)

So... Dude... Have you decided who you're hiring, yet?

Ron winks at Amy, then turns back to Cheese.

RON

No, not yet. But... you know what helps us with big decisions?

CHEESE

(hopeful)

What?

RON

I dunno, maybe something like... a hot, fresh Meats-A-Palooza Pizza from upstairs.

Cheese grins excitedly at Ron, and then hurriedly jogs out of the front door.

RON (CONT'D)

(to Amy)

You totally have the job.

AMY

That was cruel.

RON

Well then you don't have to eat any of the pizza.

AMY

I'm a vegan.

Ron snickers.

RON

I'm not surprised. Don't worry, I won't tell anyone.

AMY

A vegan is someone who doesn't eat meat.

RON

Oh! So then you're not a...

AMY

(interrupting)

Let's leave some mystery for the rest of the work week, shall we?

CUT TO:

INT. DINING AREA - AT THAT MOMENT

Two CASHIERS stand at the counter here as a few CUSTOMERS sit at tables.

Cheese walks through the front door and ambles up to the counter.

CHEESE

(to cashier #1)

My good man, I would like to procure one large Meats-A-Palooza pizza, please.

CASHIER #1

No problem, Chief.

Cashier #1 rings Cheese's order up on his cash register, then decides to play with Cheese's mind.

CASHIER #1 (CONT'D)

You're from the comic shop downstairs, right?

CHEESE

I sure am.

Cheese crosses his fingers and grins.

CHEESE (CONT'D)

Might be working there, soon!

CASHIER #1

My Uncle gave me some old comic book...
Something like... Action Comics, issue one.
Think it's worth anything?

Cheese laughs out loud.

CHEESE

Action Comics number one? That's only the
first appearance of Superman! Ever hear of
him? Most popular super-hero in the world?

CASHIER #1

So it's worth something, then? What, like...
twenty bucks?

Cheese laughs again.

CHEESE

Way more than twenty bucks.

CASHIER #1

That's great.

(a beat)

It has some crayon marks on it.

Cheese visibly twitches as he hears this.

CHEESE

Eh... okay... That'll bring the price down a little...

CASHIER #2

(to Cashier #1)

Hey, didn't your little sister have that school project?

CASHIER #1

(to Cashier #2)

Hey, you're right.

(to Cheese)

Does it matter if there are a bunch of pictures cut out? I still have most of the cover.

Cheese's eyes ROLL BACK as he starts to FALL BACKWARD.

Before he hits the ground, we...

CUT TO:

INT. SALES FLOOR - AT THAT MOMENT

Ron and Amy look UPWARD as a loud THUD can be heard above - Cheese's unconscious body hitting the restaurant floor.

AMY

Oh my goodness. What was that?

RON

That was the sound of our pizza delivery getting delayed.

Ron suddenly STANDS and GRABS Amy by the hand. He MOVES through the sales floor, dragging her behind.

RON (CONT'D)

C'mon, while we wait I'll give you the grand tour!

Ron drags Amy over to Stevey, who is busily LIGHTING a row of CANDLES, which are set right on top of the long boxes full of comic books.

RON (CONT'D)

Stevy is basically in charge of keeping the racks in order. He's also our resident Ghost Buster.

STEVY

Excuse me, but I take offense. "Ghost Busters" was a deeply inaccurate film in its portrayal of our spirit brethren.

Ron gestures to the OFFICE DOOR to the back of the sales floor.

RON

Phil can usually be found in the office. He maintains the store website and runs all of our online auctions.

STEVY

I'd do it, but I type too fast. That computer can't keep up.

Stevy stops lighting the candles and turns to Amy.

STEVY (CONT'D)

(to Amy)

Hey, have you read my manuscript?

Ron drags Amy away quickly.

RON

Uh oh! Time to go. The tour continues.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Ron suddenly BURSTS through the office door, into the EMPTY office.

Amy walks in behind Ron, almost anxiously.

RON

This is the office. We do office stuff here.
All kinds of professional things.

AMY

Like?

RON

We had a meeting, once. It was this morning.

Ron moves to the OFFICE BATHROOM door and FLINGS it open.

RON (CONT'D)

We even have our own employee bathroom, away
from all of the riff-raff.

Amy joins Ron at the office bathroom door. She looks in, and
then suddenly looks away.

AMY

Hello, Phil.

PHIL

(unseen, inside office bathroom)

Hey there, Amy.

(a beat)

Be a dear and bring me one of Stevey's
candles.

CUT TO:

INT. GAME ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

This is a large room filled with CARD TABLES and FOLDING CHAIRS.
There are several ARCADE GAME MACHINES against one wall, and
some VENDING MACHINES against the opposite wall.

Sitting at the tables here are several LARGE MEN, playing
various ROLE PLAYING GAMES and CARD GAMES.

Amy and Ron are standing in the middle of the room, amid the
oblivious gamers, who HOOT and HOLLER every few moments.

GAMER #1

(to other gamer)
Ah ha! You've activated my trap card!!

RON
This is the game room.

GAMER #2
(to other gamer)
No, no, no! My sacrificial dagger *has* to
work on the Lich King!!

RON
This is where we hold events for all of the
role players and card gamers.

Amy sniffs the air.

AMY
And you cook them hot dogs?

RON
Ah. No.

Amy quickly covers her nose and grimaces.

AMY
Oh.

As the gamers continue to howl and shout, we...

CUT TO:

INT. HALLYWAY - MOMENTS LATER

We PAN down this narrow hallway as Ron once again leads Amy through the scene. We pass by a CLOSET DOOR, a MEN'S ROOM DOOR, a LADIES' ROOM DOOR, and an ELECTRICAL CLOSET DOOR with a HIGH VOLTAGE sign.

Ron and Amy stop at the closet door.

AMY
I've always wondered what this door goes to.

RON

This is the magical overstock closet. It's filled with stuff that didn't sell, and if you reach in blindly you're guaranteed to pull out something you don't want.

Amy cautiously cracks open the closet door and reaches in warily.

She quickly withdraws her hand, now holding a CD CASE. She studies the cover intently and reads the title.

AMY

"Stan Lee Sings. The creator of Spider-Man covers pop hits of the 70s."

Amy disdainfully tosses the CD back through the closet door and gingerly closes it.

RON

Yikes, that's a bad one. Stan should stick with his day job... not that he's been very good at that either, lately...

Ron leads Amy past the Men's Room and Ladies' Room doors.

RON (CONT'D)

Here's the Men's Room - you do *not* want to see that... and next to it, the ladies' room. That basically gets used whenever we have a female customer, which is pretty much once every six months.

AMY

I'm familiar with the facilities, thank you.

Ron stops at the electrical closet door.

RON

This is the electrical closet. You have to promise me you'll never, ever go in there.

Amy smiles.

AMY

Awww, you'd prefer I wasn't electrocuted!
You're sweet.

As Ron opens the electrical closet door...

CUT TO:

INT. ELECTRICAL CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

We now PAN around a small, dark room which is dimly lit by a single BARE BULB. An ELECTRICAL PANEL sits on one wall, a WATER HEATER stands in the corner, and a RADIO TRANSMITTER with MICROPHONE and HEADSET sits facing the door. A series of LIGHTS blink and flash on the transmitter, A WHEEL CHAIR sitting in front of it. Various POSTERS for different rock bands hang here.

Ron enters the electrical closet, Amy pokes her head in after.

RON

That, plus I don't want you messing with my pirate radio station.

AMY

(awestruck)

Blinky lights!

(a beat)

I'll try to leave this alone... but it'll be a struggle.

Ron SITS in the wheelchair, puts the headphones on, and starts talking into the microphone with a snappy, cliché DJ voice.

RON

Heeeyyy, that was Bloodworm with their latest jam, "Electrokill". Coming up next, we have a solid block of rock sure to clean your clock! This is DJ Spinkick and you're listening to KRON, radio without dignity!

As we ZOOM IN on the blinking lights...

BLACKOUT:

END ACT THREE

CLOSER

INT. SALES FLOOR - LATER

Amy and Ron are now back at the front counter. Amy is sitting in Ron's stool, and Ron is beside her.

RON

So that's everything. What do you think?

AMY

I *think*... that I need to go to the little girl's room, now.

RON

My personality has that affect on people.
Feel free to use the employee bathroom, now.

AMY

No, thanks. After what I saw in there, I'll be lucky if I can sleep tonight.

Amy gets up. She starts to walk away, but turns back to Ron.

AMY (CONT'D)

Hey, Ron?

(a beat, genuinely)

Thanks for showing me the ropes.

As Amy departs for the rest room, Ron retakes his stool.

RON

(calling after Amy)

No problem, kid. You're a welcomed addition.

(mumbling to himself, angrily)

Now stay off my frickin' stool.

Gerry enters the scene and walks behind the counter, taking his seat near Ron.

GERRY

How goes the hiring process?

RON

Great, I think we picked a winner. Did you finally find a secret spot to squirrel away your fortune?

GERRY

Yup. I'm especially proud of my cunning.

RON

Come on... Where is it? You can tell me.

GERRY

No way! It's someplace no one ever goes,
that's all I'm saying.

A toilet flushes somewhere in the building.

After a few beats, Amy excitedly strolls back into the scene,
now carrying the EMPTY money pouch in one hand, and wielding a
STACK OF BILLS in the other.

AMY

Wow! I've never gotten paid to do *that*
before!

Gerry drops his head to the counter.

GERRY

Damn it!

FADE OUT:

END