



## Episode 1,102: Can Liberty Go Mainstream? A Comic Creator Says Yes

Guest: Johnny Rocket

**WOODS:** One of my favorite podcast shows that I've ever done and one of my favorite interviews of all time was when I was on your show.

**ROCKET:** Really? That's an honor.

**WOODS:** Oh, it was so funny and great, and you guys were great. And I think there's something about a show where there's more than one host, where there's banter going on among the interviewers. I don't know, it just makes a whole different experience, and it was just a ton of fun, a ton of fun. So I made it into – I'm going to link – at [TomWoods.com/1102](http://TomWoods.com/1102), I'll link to the episode itself, because I made it into an episode of this show, I liked it so much. So that was great. As a matter of fact, I was in I guess it must have been Seattle for some Mises thing like a year ago or a year and a – I don't know when it was, but and I met you there and we did an escape room together.

**ROCKET:** That was great. We had a great time. And we lost, though. We were not –

**WOODS:** I know, we didn't – I wasn't going to say anything, but now that you've brought it up. Look, nobody's perfect. These are hard. That was a hard room. And then when they revealed some of the answers, I thought, well, I don't feel so bad now, because even if you gave me four more hours, I wouldn't have figured this out.

**ROCKET:** Oh, no, it was tough.

**WOODS:** Yeah, it was a fun thing to do together with people, and then once I've done that with somebody, it's like I'm a lifelong friend of that person.

**ROCKET:** Oh, yeah, it was great. It was fun. I had no idea what it was, and everyone's just like, "Just buckle up. You're going to have a good time." And I had no idea what I was expecting. I thought like, is this like a bar thing or something like that? And you're like, no, no, no, it's something completely different and new. And we just had a great time. It was just mind boggling how cool it was.

**WOODS:** And I get people saying, "What's an escape room? Why do you talk about these?" Google is your friend, folks. Just type in "escape room." You'll find out all about it. Anyway, we've got to talk about what you're here to talk about. And I get a lot of people saying, "What am I supposed to do? What should people be doing?" Not everybody should be writing policy papers. Maybe far fewer people should be writing policy papers. Not everybody should be a

professional speaker or whatever. And not everybody's cut out for that, because we all have different talents. So what exactly can I be doing? And I've had from time to time people on the show who have done all different sorts of things. I was just mentioning before we went on about the guy who developed Freedom Toons, whom I like very much, and that's a great YouTube channel where he makes these great two- to three-minute videos – two to three minutes to keep people's attention – that are funny and that make some important libertarian point. Given the way the world works, that is likely to have more of a lasting impact than another version of Mises' *Human Action*. So what are your thoughts on this?

**ROCKET:** Well, I mean, it's a great example. I think before we start – before people start voting or taking a political action, I think people need to understand what libertarianism is. And people have the attention span of a gnat, so no one's going to read a tome – not the average person, anyway, is going to read Mises' *Human Action* or Rothbard's *Man, Economy, and State*. I think what we need to do is start with entertainment, and I think there's a lot of people out there who have gifts and talents that we need to kind of make liberty a more of a mainstream thing, something that's palatable, something that's enjoyable, something that people can get a laugh from.

And not just entertainment. I think all walks of life. I mean, I know people like Eric July, is a great example. He's actually using the music to spread the libertarian message, and I think that's very imperative that we go that route and we start using popular culture. And I have a buddy who does the – he actually brews beer, and it's all about liberty, and it's the New Agorist Beer Company. And what he's doing is actually brewing beer to spread liberty. And I think this is a great thing, and this is what we should be doing as libertarians and take our talents and make it palatable, make it cool again. Because I don't think libertarianism has gotten the best rap for being cool.

**WOODS:** No, no, it hasn't. I don't think if you were to ask people to describe a libertarian, it would come out quite that way. I think we have more of a nerdy image.

**ROCKET:** Yes.

**WOODS:** We're not all nerds. Some of us are nerds, but we're not all nerds. And the nerds in school were not always the most popular kids. Let's put it that way.

**ROCKET:** No, no. But I think it's a start. I think what we need to do is make liberty cool, and this is why I started drawing *The Liberty Force* comic book, because comic books are a big part of culture now. A lot of people like the Marvel movies, and what I thought would be cool was if I could take these ideas of libertarianism and adopt them into a comic book that anyone could read in about 20 minutes. They can get the foundation and the fundamentals across to them in an entertaining way. And that's what I think we should be doing as libertarians so that people can start moving in that direction and start thinking, *Wait a minute. I remember reading this comic book the other day, and I thought it was pretty interesting, and their ideas are intriguing.* This is what we should be doing, is making people think.

**WOODS:** I think I wrote a foreword for that comic, which is highly unusual for a comic book.

**ROCKET:** You did. Yes, it's never been done. Well, actually, yes, you wrote the foreword to the comic book. It's right on the front, and it was an honor. It was great. Thank you very much for that.

**WOODS:** Thanks. I wrote the least-read part of the book. That's perfectly fine with me. I was glad to have some hand in it because it really is great. It's a cool thing. By the way, before we go on, how do people get that? And first of all, what do you read in there? What's going on in *Liberty Force*?

**ROCKET:** Well, you can find it at [LibertyForceComic.com](http://LibertyForceComic.com). We have a brand-new website, and we went through your Bluehost thing for this one.

**WOODS:** Oh, great, okay.

**ROCKET:** Yeah, so the [LibertyForceComic.com](http://LibertyForceComic.com), and basically the story is about three people who are part of the state, and they're on this routine mission, and they don't really realize that they're the bad guys. They think they're doing the right thing. They think that they're protecting society and the universe. And they come to find out – they discover this ancient base, and they come to find out about liberty. And so the reader and the characters in the book are discovering liberty at the same time, so it's not like you're getting thrown into the middle of a story where you're like, what's going on? These characters are learning with the reader about libertarianism, and they find out that there was this ancient power called the Liberty Force, and it was first harnessed by a group of aliens called the Rothbardians. So a lot of libertarian references, a lot of – I use the main enemy or the protagonist, his name is Hobbes. So I'm using a lot of libertarian themes, yet I'm also making it very palatable to the average reader.

**WOODS:** Wow, that's good. I mean, it seems like this would be – illustrations and making things look good and whatever, it seems like this would be awfully expensive. Am I wrong? Is it cheaper these days to produce something that looks nice?

**ROCKET:** It's not terribly expensive, believe it or not. I've actually had sponsors who actually funded the comic book. So I had Marc Clair from *The Lions of Liberty* and –

**WOODS:** Oh, great.

**ROCKET:** Yeah, they all pitched in and they all kind of got behind me. It was an honor that they all kind of threw some coin my way, more or less so I can put this out in print. And so I didn't really pay for much of anything; I just drew it and it was just hours and hours and hours of just a lot of work. It was a lot of work. Six months.

**WOODS:** Yeah, really, really. So how many of these are you thinking of putting out? Are you making a full-blown series?

**ROCKET:** Yes, yes. Right now I'm actually working on issue two, and we have a weekly, or as of now, it's a monthly little comic book that happens after. It's free online at [LibertyForceComic.com](http://LibertyForceComic.com), and you can continue the adventures after the story, and it all links together with the second issue. So you kind of find out what they're doing on their down time,

what's going on, what's the story between issue one and issue two. So I'm trying to make it kind of bigger than just a one-shot comic book.

**WOODS:** Nice. You know what, Johnny? Let me be totally honest with you. There are times when even I, a genial guy like me who has a fairly sunny disposition for the most part, will think about this topic of what can we do, how do we get the ideas out there, how can we be more successful, how can we make these ideas more popular? And part of me wants to say there ain't no way. Sorry, we're screwed. You'd better just do what you can for your family, but the situation is hopeless so forget about it. I mean, if it gives you pleasure to do cultural stuff and to write or animate or draw or whatever or do any kind of project, then knock yourself out, but it's hopeless. Even I get into that funk. Is there any way Johnny Rocket here can draw me out of that?

**ROCKET:** Well, you know, Tom, it's funny because I think there is hope, and I think there's a lot of people out there who are doing amazing things for liberty. And I don't think we should lose any hope in this battle. We should be going out there and continuing the hard fight, and I think there's a hope because, you know what was great, was when I did go to Seattle for the Mises thing with you, with Bob Murphy, it was wonderful because there were 300+ people there. And if that isn't a sign, in People's Republic of Seattle, if there's a sign of hope, that was a strong sign of hope, I think. And I think more and more people are libertarians. The more people I talk to one on one start to understand these ideas, and the more that we talk to people, I think we are continuing to spread. Your numbers are getting bigger. All of our numbers are getting bigger because people are getting it. I think people are understanding that there is no room for the state in our lives. And so I don't think we should lose hope at all. I think we should continue going, and we should all maximize our efforts and our talents in the name of liberty, and I think that's the only way we will win.

**WOODS:** Take a minute to tell me how this happened for you in your own case.

**ROCKET:** Oh, well, it was Ron Paul. Ron Paul was the guy who really kind of drilled it in. He was the guy. He was like an awe, awe-inspiring speeches. And it was Ron Paul who actually made me a hardcore libertarian. And I guess I was kind of interested with it with the show, *Penn & Teller's: BS*, that was on Showtime. When I first started watching HBO or Showtime, I started watching the show religiously, and they brought up really great questions about the state and why government and why regulations don't work. And so that show kind of let me dip my toe in the pool of libertarianism, and eventually I found Ron Paul. And that's where my journey began, and I became more and more interested. And then I started getting into economics, and then I started listening to podcasts like *The Tom Woods Show* and *Lions of Liberty* and *The Lava Flow*, and it just changed my mind. And now I'm a full-blown anarchist, which I am proud to say I am.

**WOODS:** How long have you had your own show?

**ROCKET:** I've been doing it for about five years now. I'm going on year five right now.

**WOODS:** Holy cow. And you've built up a loyal audience?

**ROCKET:** Yes, I do. I have a bunch of great people who have been very supportive of the show, and the last few months I've been a little behind the power curve on putting content

out, but there's been a lot of life changes going on in my life, so you know, everyone deserves a little extra leeway, especially when people are having some financial problems.

**WOODS:** Oh, yeah, yeah. My folks are very good about that. Like I'll get on and say, "Oh, I am so apologetic I couldn't do five episodes this week. We had sick kids or whatever." And they all write to me and say, "What is the matter with you? Why are you apologizing because you had a sick kid? We're perfectly fine. You have over 1,000 of these. We could always listen to those. Probably not everybody has listened to every single one." But you know what amazes me is that select group of people who will come up and say, "I've listened to every episode you've put out." Like, wow.

**ROCKET:** Wow.

**WOODS:** I think with a few of those, I'm not even sure I was listening, so that's a pretty good accomplishment there [laughing].

**ROCKET:** [laughing] Yeah, it's like you're on autoplay.

**WOODS:** Yeah. But you must get people who call in and say — people must talk to you as a host and say, you've got your thing, you've got *The Liberty Force* comic, you've got your own show, and what is my thing that I should be doing? Do you think there are things that are particularly effective and things — let's be blunt — that are particularly ineffective that we ought to avoid or be doing?

**ROCKET:** Well, I think there's a place for books and podcasts. I'm actually at the point where I love podcasts, and they're great, they're informative, sometimes they're very entertaining. But I think there's a place where we need to be maybe making liberty a little bit more low-brow. And I know that sounds stupid, but I think it's so intellectual sometimes that I think libertarians lose people. And I think that's one thing we should start doing as a movement. We should start making it a little bit more palatable to the average guy who's working as a mechanic at Joe's shop. And that's where I think libertarianism should be going towards: those people, the people that maybe just don't really care about politics but they really like the ideas of, "Leave me alone. This is my property, and this is nonaggression." Those are the things I think we should be doing.

We shouldn't be — I think one thing we should be moving away from is talking to other libertarians, because they already — I'm not saying there isn't a place for it, but for us to spread and for us to get our message out there to more people, I think we need to start getting away from preaching to the choir as much and start embracing another — I'm not saying accepting other ideas, but at least maybe listening to what they have to say and then crush their arguments with logic.

**WOODS:** Sometimes that's easier said than done, because as we know, with some people — and here I'm thinking like the social justice warrior left — they will not listen. They've already decided that really everything you believe is just a smokescreen for racism. Everything's a smokescreen for racism, so you can't even get your message across. But I think the people you're talking about are just the average, workaday person who really doesn't have time for ideology or for social justice warrior stuff. I think just the average person would be willing to give you a hearing.

**ROCKET:** Absolutely, Tom, and I think that's where we need to start. There are those people that we know who will never agree with us, like the social justice left. They will never get it, so why waste our time? But there is the person down the street who is pissed – sorry, upset – because the government is taxing them, they're taxing on their property, they're being stolen from every day. And people are getting upset. I mean, here in Seattle we have a sugar tax on pop, and this is what people should get angry about. This is BS, and we should be – this is how we get people riled up, and I think this is a great opportunity for libertarians to say, *You know what? Let us show you another way. Let us show you another way.* And I think people should be going out there and doing movies about it, they should be writing songs about it, they should be writing comic books about it, they should be making beer about it. Everything that you can think of, that's what we should be doing. And I don't think there's a perfect solution to the problem; I think we've just got to hit it on all fronts. And I do think there is a party for the Libertarian Party, because I don't think they're going to win, but I think they're there to educate, and I think that's another angle that we should be trying to hit people with also.

**WOODS:** So let's take an example of – let's imagine you yourself being in this sort of situation where you're thinking this person needs to hear what Johnny Rocket has to say, and this is a person who would never listen to your show, wouldn't know about you otherwise. How do you start that conversation? Is it a case where you just say, *Let's see what this person's gripe is and try and see how libertarianism could work?* Or this there some general, universal principle you start with with everybody?

**ROCKET:** Well, I just basically – I think the best tool to talk to people about libertarianism is to bring up the word voluntary. As soon as you start saying voluntary, I think it makes people back off. They don't seem so confrontational. It's a very non-confrontational word. You know, how about voluntary taxes or voluntary this, voluntary that? People start – they like that word, voluntary, and I think it's a little bit less abrasive than saying taxation is theft, blah, blah, blah. I think if we go more along that route of saying I just want more of a voluntary system instead of this mandatory system, people are a lot more susceptible to that kind of discussion because it's nonthreatening. I think libertarians come out the door and they start saying you're stupid, you don't know anything, and then we lose people.

And we can still get our ideas across, but I think – you know, I always use this analogy. I say talk to libertarianism like you're talking to your girlfriend. You don't want to be too abrasive with the information or try to shove it down their throats, but you also kind of want to put just a little bit at a time. You don't want to overwhelm them. Because it's a big pill to swallow. It really is. I mean, going back from where I was four years ago, I have made a major transformation in my beliefs. So it's taken me time to come where I'm at, so I think the average person just needs a little bit at a time, and I think eventually they'll get there.

**WOODS:** All right, before we go on, let me pause to thank our sponsor, goTenna, which is an amazing new technology.

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Let me get back to your *Liberty Force* comic, because there aren't that many people in our circles who could pull that off: first of all, to be able to come up with a good story; secondly, to have the work ethic to actually complete a project that they dream about; and thirdly, to be able to draw it. So you've actually got an artistic background?

**ROCKET:** Yeah, actually. I was an illustrator – well, I started drawing in high school, so I was kind of an entrepreneur for a couple years before I joined the military. We'll talk about that later if you want. But yeah, so basically I was drawing my own comic book called *John Boy Comics* back in high school, and I did it the old-fashioned way with pencils and pen and ink and inked it all. And it was fun. I made like 1,000 bucks when I was 17 years old, and I thought it was great because I was a kid, and I thought it was fun to do and I kind of created my own little style. And I had no idea about libertarianism at the time, but that's where I kind of started learning about it. And then I also went to art school for a few years, and I also continued to do it.

But yeah, *The Liberty Force*, I just taught myself how to use the programs and I just started doing it. So I had no formal training, and it was an experience because there was a learning curve because I didn't know how to use the programs that I was using. I had to go online and go to YouTube and figure out how to do this. So it was fun. It was a fun learning experience.

**WOODS:** Let's talk about your time in the military. What were the circumstances that led you to enter the military, and how do you look back on that time now?

**ROCKET:** You know, I was in the Army for ten years. I was a pilot in the Army. And looking back at it, that was another reason why I became a libertarian because I just saw so much fraud, waste, and abuse in the military. I remember I was loading up Hellfire missiles at a shooting range here in Washington in Yakima. And I remember asking the guy, one of the guys on the ground, and I said, "How much are these things?" He was like, "Well, they're about \$800,000. But we need to get rid of them. We need to get rid of them so we make our budget next year. We need to get rid of all of our ammo and everything." And I'm like, you're crazy. So I was just shooting \$800,000, \$800,000 over and over again, all day long. And I'm thinking there's got to be a better way. There's got to be a better way. This is where our money is going? And so that started me thinking this is wrong. This isn't right, and this isn't right to the taxpayers. And I got upset, and that's another reason why I possibly started leaning more towards libertarian ideals.

**WOODS:** Huh, how about that? Because so often, maybe less often than we're led to believe, but people who have served in the military take it as a personal affront if you have anything less than flattering to say about the military, but you're saying that seeing it up close made you actually kind of upset and more hostile than you would have been otherwise.

**ROCKET:** Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And I've always been an antiwar guy, and I just think – I don't know why I joined the military. I joined it out of – I was broke, and I was living out of my car when I was 19 years old, and I just needed a place to go. And I thought, hey, why don't I serve my country? And at the time, I had no idea what it was about. And as I went through the ranks and the BS of the military, I started seeing more and more of the politics and how messed up it was and families destroyed. It was a horrible thing, just knowing people who have died who were my friends for no reason, just to go out there and fight somebody else's war. It's disgusting.

**WOODS:** I've said this a few times before, but when in the debates in South Carolina Trump said that the war in Iraq had been based on lies and there was of course the usual indignation that, *How could he say such a thing?*, and, *Certainly this is going to end his campaign* – they kept saying that. *This'll end it; that'll end it. He insulted John McCain. Can't do that. That'll end it.* It was one thing or another. But they were saying especially in South Carolina, because

that's the reddest of red states and they're very pro-military. But I had other people telling me, But you know what? It's precisely in these military states where not out in public, but in the privacy of their homes, a lot of people who served in the military will look at each other and say, "Yeah, I was there. It was a boondoggle, absolutely."

**ROCKET:** Oh, yeah. There's a lot of people who are friends of mine still who have taken a different approach and who take a more libertarian position. They think we shouldn't be there. I don't understand why we're going there. And there's more military members than you think, than the average person would think, that are a little PO'd about the situation. They had to spend six, seven years of their lives in some country, and they were miserable. They were away from their family. Sure, you get paid pretty good in the military if you're there for a while, but what good is the money if you're not there to use it? That's my position.

**WOODS:** Yeah, yeah, no kidding. No kidding. Now, I know that the whole point of our conversation has been there are different ways to skin this particular cat – and by the way, sometimes the – I don't to keep calling it the nerdy approach, but the booky approach does work with bookish people like me. It does work. I read a lot of books. That convinced me. But that's not for everybody, and that's the point. But if you've got, let's say, a hot prospect here, like that person is really starting to think in a new way, is there maybe a favorite YouTube video or even a small book or anything you sometimes encourage to kind of seal the deal? Is there anything that works particularly well or that you're especially fond of?

**ROCKET:** I tell people – I actually gave my brother a copy of *For a New Liberty*, and I saw him over Christmas, and he is very libertarian-leaning. And it was really cool because we haven't talked for like 10, 15 years, and he's like, "You know, John, I'm kind of a libertarian. I lean libertarian." And I'm like, "Oh, really?" And he's kind of there, but he's still on the conservative side. So I gave him a book, and I'm like, "You're going to read this." And he's like, "Okay." So that book changed my life. *For a New Liberty* really changed my life, and I would also say *Man, Economy, and State* changed my life. Great book. I mean, it's kind of hard to read. Might as well like cross off your calendar for the month. But it was very interesting. And I think my "come to Jesus" time in my life was when I read Murray's *Man, Economy, and State*. It was cool because once you understand economics, it's like you understand everything. You start to understand everything, how everything works, and that is what I tell people: understand economics, read economics. *Economics in One Lesson*, another great book where I tell people, "Read this. It's short. You'll get it." And that's my little secret weapons: read this book or listen to it on Audible or whatever.

**WOODS:** I have one of my daughters I'm trying to persuade of the merits of economics, because I'm teaching it to her as a homeschool setting. And it's good that she trusts me already, because otherwise she would say, "Eh, I don't think this is going to be particularly interesting." Oh, I think there's a big – the recycling truck just drove by. There was nothing outside my house for them to pick up. But anyway, yeah, I think because you hear economics, you hear the things associated with it, and it can be made to be dry, and I think a lot of times it is made try by people.

**ROCKET:** Oh, sure, sure.

**WOODS:** But our stuff is so good, and so what I'm telling her is, I know you don't think you want to know this now, but trust me, once you do know it, you'll say I'm glad I know it. That's

the thing. So take that trust you already have in me and just hold on for a while, because man, is there a lot of benefit on the other side.

**ROCKET:** Oh, yeah. I mean, it changed my life. And once I started reading Rothbard, it just opened up everything in my life. Everything became clear. I'm like, I get it. I get it. And that was the turning point for me being a minarchist to an anarchist, was Murray. And I'll give him all the credit in the world. 95% of it goes to Murray Rothbard. And you know, I wanted to kind of give homage to him in the comic book, so we have the Rothbardians that are this ancient alien race. And so that was cool. I like to put little things in there that people could maybe take home and think about it and go, *That's pretty cool how he did that*. But another cool thing is, Tom, we did a radio drama, and Jeff Deist narrated it. So we had Launchpad crew together and we did the issue one in a 1950s or '60s radio drama with the sound effects and everything. It turned out really good.

**WOODS:** Wow, that is fun stuff. Good old Jeff Deist, you never know what that guy will do. That's just great. How do people consume your content? We've got — is it LibertyForceComic.com? That's one thing.

**ROCKET:** Yeah, LibertyForceComic.com. You can find my podcast at JohnnyRocketLaunchpad.com, and you can also find me with a group of podcasters called The League of Liberty Podcasters, and that's with Marc Clair from *The Lions of Liberty*, Chris Spangle from *We Are Libertarians*, and Roger Paxton from *The Lava Flow*. So that's another thing we're doing, and we have a group on Facebook for The League of Liberty Podcasters, so please check that out also.

**WOODS:** All right, I'm going to link to all — those are all great guys, by the way, so whatever they do you should be supporting.

**ROCKET:** Oh, yeah, great people.

**WOODS:** Absolutely. So we're going to link to everything you just said at TomWoods.com/1102, so go get out there and do that, and Johnny, keep on doing what you're doing. Great to talk to you.

**ROCKET:** Tom, thank you so much. It was an honor. Thank you.