

"C O S P L A Y"

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Final draft 10/5/25

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FADE IN:

INT. DINER - NIGHT

A yellow-green hum from flickering fluorescents. A cracked vinyl booth near the window. A weather-worn ROCKPORT COMIC CON poster peels from the glass.

At the booth: JARED MILLER, 36, pale, puffy, a week's worth of unshaved anger. Across from him: MATTY (early 20s, still wearing a Deadpool hoodie), and TOMMY (40s, heavy-set, trench coat, name badge reading CON SECURITY).

They're surrounded by cold fries and half-read comics.

JARED

(leans forward, intense)
I'm just saying— Superman today would get cancelled before he hit the sky. Truth, justice, and the American way? They'd call him a fascist in tights.

MATTY

He literally is a fascist in tights, bro. He's an alien cop.

TOMMY

(chewing)
Cop with abs. People eat that up.

JARED

Nah, not anymore. Now it's all "representation this," "safe space that." You used to read comics to escape the world. Now it's homework.

He punctuates the sentence with a long sip of flat cola.

MATTY

(chuckling)
You still mad about the bisexual Robin thing?

JARED

I'm mad about lazy writing. It's tokenism. It's... it's cheap.

He gestures with a fry-grease arcs across a Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 3 poster taped to the wall.

TOMMY

You ever think maybe comics changed
and you didn't?

Jared's eyes harden. Beat.

JARED

They changed the wrong way. Heroes
used to mean something. Now it's
all quips and hashtags.

He pulls a crumpled convention badge from his pocket—"Artist Pitch Panel - Rejected."

MATTY

You submitted again?

JARED

Fifth year straight. "Thank you for
your passion, we're pursuing other
voices." Translation: we don't like
straight white guys from nowhere.

He forces a smile that doesn't reach his eyes.

TOMMY

Maybe you just need better art,
man.

Jared doesn't blink.

JARED

I don't need better art. I need a
world that stops rewarding
mediocrity.

Silence. The diner's ceiling fan wheezes like it's dying.

Outside, neon reflections swim across rain-slick glass—
Rockport at 2 A.M. A dying mall district painted in blues and
reds like a comic panel.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - LATER

The trio exit. Steam rises from sewer grates. Matty hops into
a rusted Civic plastered with stickers: "MAKE MUTANTS REAL
AGAIN."

MATTY

See you at the con tomorrow?

JARED

Wouldn't miss it. Maybe this time
the world notices.

Matty waves, drives off. Tommy lingers.

TOMMY

You're a smart guy, Jared. Maybe
too smart to keep being this angry.

JARED

Anger's all I've got left that's
mine.

He turns, trench coat fluttering like a cheap cape. The
whoosh of passing traffic echoes like applause.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A one-bedroom mausoleum of nostalgia. Stacked comic boxes,
unopened collectibles, LED lights glowing sickly blue.
Posters: The Dark Knight Returns, Spawn, The Boys.

A computer hums—multiple monitors lit with forums titled HERO
PURIST HQ and REAL FANS AGAINST WOKENESS.

Jared scrolls, typing with manic rhythm.

ON SCREEN (CHAT):

USER: "THEY RUINED THE CANON."

REPLY: "THEN REWRITE THE CANON."

He stops typing. The glow paints his face like an
interrogation light. Behind him, the rain pounds harder—like
the world tapping to be let in.

He whispers to no one.

JARED

Rewrite the canon..

His gaze drifts to a dusty sketchbook labeled CAPTAIN JUSTICE
#1. A crude drawing: a blue-caped figure, fists clenched,
city burning below.

Cue faint guitar feedback—grunge chords leaking from cheap speakers.

INT. ROCKPORT CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Bright banners, costumed chaos, the smell of sweat and synthetic leather. The con floor is alive with color—Supermen, Deadpools, Harley Quinns.

Jared enters in a wrinkled Captain Justice T-shirt, clutching a battered portfolio. He breathes it in like holy incense.

CUT TO:

A booth labeled "THE PITCH ARENA - 5 MINUTES TO CHANGE THE WORLD."

A volunteer smiles mechanically.

VOLUNTEER

You registered?

JARED

Yeah. Jared Miller. Creator of Captain Justice. He fights for purity of heart in a corrupted age.

VOLUNTEER

(typing)

Cool concept! You're number 83.
Wait over there.

He nods. Moves to a folding-chair line that snakes past a trash can overflowing with cosplay scraps and coffee cups.

He sits. Opens his portfolio. Pages of hand-inked panels—beautiful, obsessive, apocalyptic.

A kid in a Spider-Gwen outfit glances over.

KID

That's cool. You draw that?

JARED

Yeah. Someday everyone will know him.

She nods politely, looks back to her phone.

Jared's smile fades.

MONTAGE - CONVENTION FLOOR (ALT-ROCK OVERLAY)

Smashing Pumpkins' "Zero" hums under chaos:

Cosplayers pose for selfies,

a panel chants "Representation Matters!",

Jared watches, jaw clenched.

He hands out sketches—people ignore him.

Someone drops his flyer; it lands in a puddle of spilled soda.

CUT TO:

Panel Stage - "Creating the Modern Hero." Influencer STACY VALE (30s, vibrant, self-assured, dressed as a feminist reimagining of Thor) commands the crowd.

STACY

Heroes evolve. They should look like us.

Cheers. Jared sits front row, trembling.

STACY (CONT'D)

Old myths served their time. If you feel threatened, maybe the mask was never yours.

Applause. Jared's hand shoots up.

JARED

Maybe some of us just want stories that don't apologize for having guts!

The room hushes. Stacy tilts her head, smiles with PR-polish.

STACY

And maybe some of us just want new storytellers. You submitted to our open call, right?

(beat)

We passed for a reason.

The audience laughs. Phones record. Jared's face burns.

CUT TO:

Outside corridor—he storms away, humiliated, past a janitor wheeling a bin of discarded props. He punches a vending machine; the clang echoes.

He slumps beside the dumpster, breathing hard.

Rain begins again—light through water streaks like comic-book motion lines.

From inside the dumpster: a flicker of electric blue.

Jared looks closer. A torn cape, shimmering faintly even in the rain. He reaches in, lifts it—fabric almost breathing, heavy as guilt.

He drapes it over his shoulders.

The air goes still. The world hushes.

Tiny sparks crawl across his skin.

He exhales—a sound halfway between relief and rage.

JARED
(whispers)
Finally...

SMASH CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CONVENTION ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Rain needles down. The BLUE CAPE clings to JARED like a wet second skin.

He stands, shaky. The neon sign above the service door flickers — ON / OFF — each pulse mirrored in the cape's fibers like bioluminescence.

A CON SECURITY GUARD (50s, bored, soaked) rounds the corner with a flashlight.

SECURITY GUARD
Hey! Area's closed. You can't be
back—
(eyes the cape)
That from the prop bin? Put it
back.

Jared shrugs, the cape shifting like it understands.

JARED
It's not a prop.

SECURITY GUARD

Buddy, I don't get paid enough—
just toss it in and—

The guard reaches for the fabric.

The cape WRITHES — microfilaments bristle like a sea creature's spines. The flashlight pops and dies; glass and metal plink to the asphalt in slow motion.

The guard recoils, breathing steam.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

The— hell was that?

The alley HUMS at a sub-bass register. Rain curves around Jared in a weird parabola, like he's inside an invisible dome.

Jared looks at his hand — tiny arcs of BLUE ELECTRICITY dance between fingertips.

He flexes. The metal door behind him warps inward with a godlike groan.

Jared and the guard share a stunned beat.

JARED

I... think I found my voice.

The guard bolts.

Jared doesn't chase. He LEVITATES six inches, surprised, then SLAMS back down, knees bending with a seismic THUD. A laugh slips out — unsteady, giddy, horrified.

JARED (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Rewrite the canon.

He pulls the cape tight and steps into the rain. The water hisses off the fabric like it's boiling.

EXT. ROCKPORT - NIGHT

A MONTAGE drenched in neon and guitar feedback:

— The Mill District: brick factories turned breweries. Jared sprints, then launches, vanishing into low clouds. — The Overpass: cars streak below.

Jared lands on a blinking billboard for a streaming show called THE CHOSEN SQUAD — smiling, diverse heroes posed against a rainbow city. He stares at it, jaw tight. The billboard's structure bends under his grip. — The Old Mall: glass atrium reflects a blue comet — JARED — streaking across the night like a broken prayer.

GUITAR FEEDBACK SCREECHES to silence.

EXT. PAWN SHOP / BUS STOP - LATER

An awning rattles. A BUS STOP light flickers. A TEEN (17, soaked hoodie) argues with PAWN SHOP OWNER (60s, gruff) through the metal grate.

TEEN

C'mon, I just need the phone till Friday!

OWNER

We're closed. Come back— hey! Don't pound my gate.

The teen kicks the grate, angry tears mixing with rain. Across the street, a TWO-MAN MUGGER TEAM clocks him. They exchange a nod.

Jared perches on the pawn shop roof like a gargoyle, cape dripping glowing beads. He watches — expression empty and eerily calm.

The muggers stalk the teen under the overpass. One pulls a knife.

MUGGER #1

Wallet. Phone. Don't make it—

TEEN

I don't— I—

MUGGER #2

Phone, kid.

Jared drops soundlessly behind them.

JARED

He said he doesn't have a phone.

The muggers whirl.

MUGGER #1
Beat it, cosplayer.

The knife flashes. It SNAPS when it hits Jared's palm – metal crumples like foil.

Silence. Rain. The teen's eyes widen.

MUGGER #2
What the–

Jared pushes him gently. The man FLIES backward into a concrete column – CRACK – then slumps, wheezing.

MUGGER #1 lunges. Jared catches his wrist, curious, almost polite.

JARED
You ever read Action Comics #1?

MUGGER #1
What?

JARED
First appearance. Classic. He lifts the car. Feels good. Feels...clean.

A faint smile. He SQUEEZES. Bones POP like popcorn. The mugger screams.

The teen backs away, trembling.

TEEN
Thank you, thank you– oh my god–

Jared turns, registering the kid like he noticed a security camera.

JARED
Run home.

The teen bolts.

Jared looks at MUGGER #1 dangling in his grip – eyes rolling, blood mixing with rain.

He should let go.

He doesn't.

JARED (CONT'D)
Justice used to have a shape. A jawline. A code. Now it's a brand deal and a hashtag.

He SLAMS the man into the column. The impact sends a RIPPLE through the concrete – dust rains down. The mugger goes limp.

MUGGER #2 coughs red, trying to crawl.

Jared steps on his hand – not hard – the bones 粉碎 with a wet crunch. The man screams wordless.

Jared's face is calm, clinical. The cape drinks the rain, the blood. The BLUE GLOW brightens.

Sirens wail in the distance. Jared looks upward – a vertical ZIP and he's GONE into the night.

EXT. JARED'S APARTMENT BUILDING - ROOFTOP - LATER

Tar paper glistens. Satellite dishes whine in the wind. Jared lands badly, staggers, catches himself on an HVAC unit that BENDS under his grip.

The adrenaline ebbs. He shudders – a wave of NAUSEA and something worse: a hollowing, a siphon.

JARED
(panting)
Okay. Okay..

He laughs – then stops. The laugh sounds wrong. Empty. He touches his chest – his HEARTBEAT is a slow, seismic bass thud.

He looks at the city. The cape flutters around him, affectionate.

JARED (CONT'D)
(soft, to the cape)
We did good.

The cape tightens at his throat for a micro-second – almost a hug, almost a choke. Jared frowns.

A PHONE BUZZ from his coat pocket. He fishes it out – MATTY: "DUDE U SEE THE BLUE ANGEL VIDEO?!?!" A link follows: Overpass Vigilante Stops Mugging (GRAPHIC) – already 19,000 views, climbing.

Jared clicks. Somebody filmed. Shaky. Rain-smearred. Audio: the teen sobbing, "thank you," the wet impact of concrete. Jared's voice, god-calm.

Comments fly: HERO. PSYCHO. COSPLAYER CRUSADER.

A slow smile creeps over Jared's face. Not joy. Recognition.

JARED (CONT'D)
They see me.

The BLUE CAPE ripples like a pleased animal.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Harsh LED light. Cracked mirror. Jared peels off his wet shirt. His skin is PALE — veins faintly BLUE-LIT like fiber optics under flesh.

He prods his shoulder — NO BRUISES. He punches his own ribcage experimentally. The TILE cracks, not him.

He stares into his pupils — a RING OF ELECTRIC BLUE like a burned-in eclipse.

JARED
(low, almost reverent)
I wasn't chosen. I chose me.

He drapes the cape over the shower bar like a sacred banner. It WAVES in still air.

He turns on the faucet; the water runs clear, then slowly tints blue as it passes the cape. He kills the tap, chest fluttering with a sudden, inexplicable SADNESS — a vacuum where warmth should be.

He waits for tears.

None come.

He laughs, dry, unsettled.

JARED (CONT'D)
Right. No crying in Issue One.

INT. JARED'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Multiple monitors glow. Tabs upon tabs: the vigilante clip mirrored, remixed, memed.

He opens his VLOG SOFTWARE. The ring light paints his face in an angelic halo that looks more like a surgical lamp.

He hits RECORD.

JARED
 (into camera)
 They call it vigilantism. I call it
 maintenance. We celebrate fictional
 courage but punish the real thing.
 You wanted a hero who doesn't
 apologize? Congratulations. You get
 what you deserve.

He ends the recording. Uploads. Title: "THE BLUE ANGEL:
 EPISODE 1 - NO MORE HALF-MEASURES."

A CHAT NOTIFICATION pings - a DM from LENA BRANT (verified
 check), avatar: a reporter headshot.

DM (LENA):

THIS IS LENA BRANT WITH THE ROCKPORT LEDGER.
 If you witnessed the overpass incident, I'd like to talk. Off
 the record if you prefer.

Jared considers. Types, deletes, types.

JARED (TYPING) (CONT'D)
 What if I was the witness and the
 warning?

He deletes it. Locks the phone.

The cape, now draped over his chair, SHIFTS like it's
 listening.

INT. JARED'S KITCHEN - DAWN

Grey light bruises the room. A kettle screams. Jared doesn't
 blink.

He scrolls STACY VALE'S social feed - her panel clip with him
 heckling is trending. Captions: "Fragile Fanboy Loses It."
 Comments brutal. Laughing emojis. Knife-twist.

His jaw tightens. He clicks her TOUR SCHEDULE - tonight
 she'll be at a VIP AFTERPARTY at the HYPERION HOTEL.

The cape, across the room, TIGHTENS around the chair back,
 hearing his pulse.

JARED

(soft)

Issue Two: The Righteous Man.

The kettle runs dry, screeching. He lets it.

EXT. HYPERION HOTEL - NIGHT

Chrome-and-glass monolith. Valet umbrellas. Influencers cluster under heat lamps, laughing, filming themselves.

Jared, hood up, cape HIDDEN beneath a cheap black overcoat, moves through the crowd like a shadow with bad intentions.

A BOUNCER blocks him.

BOUNCER

Invite?

Jared smiles, neighborly. He touches the velvet rope post - BENDS it open with two fingers. The bouncer steps back without meaning to.

BOUNCER (CONT'D)

Whoa, hey-

JARED

You work too hard, man. Rest.

The bouncer blinks, suddenly foggy - sits down like his strings were cut.

Jared slips inside.

INT. HYPERION HOTEL - SKY LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

City lights glitter. A DJ spins retro alt-rock. The crowd is shiny, curated. STACY VALE holds court near the bar, telling a story, making people feel included. She's good at it - disarming, practiced, beloved.

Jared lingers in the shadows, watching. The cape under his coat SHIFTS, hungry.

STACY

...No, the point is: stories save people. We widen the lens and more folks can see themselves.

Applause. Someone hands her a phone – the overpass vigilante clip.

PARTYGOER

You see this? Rockport's got its own superhero.

Stacy watches, face hardening – professional concern.

STACY

He nearly killed that man.

PARTYGOER

Nearly?

STACY

(quiet)

I know a fatal slam when I see one.

She hands the phone back, scans the room – catches a GLINT OF BLUE under a black coat at the edge of the party.

Their eyes meet for a second. Jared disappears into a service corridor like smoke.

Stacy frowns, instinct prickling.

She excuses herself, follows.

INT. SERVICE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Industrial. Concrete walls. Bare bulbs. The music muffles into a heartbeat throb.

Stacy steps cautiously.

STACY

Hello?

Her voice echoes.

Jared's voice flows from the dark, calm, a podcast set to lullaby.

JARED (O.S.)

You ever think maybe you killed the hero myth?

Stacy stops.

STACY

I think myths don't die. They molt.
Who's there?

Jared steps into the light. The BLUE CAPE slowly UNFURLS from beneath the coat like a flag claiming territory.

Stacy's face changes – not fear, not yet. Calculation.

STACY (CONT'D)

You're the overpass guy.

JARED

I'm the guy tired of apology tours.
You remember me from the panel.

STACY

I remember a lot of guys like you.

A razor-smile. Jared's jaw works.

JARED

Careful. Stereotypes go both ways.

STACY

What do you want? An apology?

Jared tilts his head. The cape SHIMMERS.

JARED

No. I want you to say I'm right.
You sell the idea that "everyone
gets a cape." But capes are earned.

STACY

No one earns power. Power is given.
How you use it is earned.

They stand in a long, electric pause. Rain hammers somewhere beyond the concrete.

JARED

You made them laugh at me.

STACY

You wanted worship. You got
feedback. That's called adulthood.

Jared's eyes flicker BLUE. The air pressure drops; a sprinkler head tinkles from the stress.

JARED

You talk like a creative. You move
like a brand.

STACY
And you talk like a martyr who
found a shortcut.

A beat. Jared smiles, almost admiring.

JARED
You'd write good villains.

STACY
I write survivors.

Footsteps approach. A HOTEL MANAGER rounds the corner.

MANAGER
Ms. Vale, is everything—

He sees the cape. His brain does the math and ejects the
result.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Sir, you can't—

The LIGHTS BLOW down the hall like a fuse burning. Darkness
swallows them in sequence.

STACY
(to Jared, low)
People are watching. Cameras.

JARED
Good.

The cape FLARES brilliant blue. The manager stumbles back,
shielding his face.

MANAGER
Security!

Jared gently presses a hand to the wall. The CONCRETE indents
like clay. He steps closer to Stacy, voice a hypnotist's
murmur over a jet engine.

JARED
Say I'm right.

STACY
I won't.

JARED
Say the old myths matter.

STACY

They matter when they make more
room, not less.

A long, dangerous silence.

Jared's smile vanishes. Something HOLLOW yawns inside him –
an empty space where triumph should live.

He backs away a half-step. The cape resettles, frustrated.

JARED

We'll finish this another issue.

He turns. WALKS STRAIGHT INTO THE CINDERBLOCK WALL – and
PHASES THROUGH IT like the wall is a curtain.

Stacy exhales the breath she was holding. The lights FIZZ
back to life. The manager yells into his radio.

Stacy's hands shake – she studies them, furious at the
tremor.

STACY (to herself) Okay. So that's real.

She pulls out her phone. Starts a voice memo.

STACY

Note: Subject exhibits force-field
deflection, possible EM
interference, super strength,
intangibility? Cape is the focus.
He wants narrative control. Find
the origin of the cape.

She steadies. The survivor begins writing.

EXT. ROCKPORT RIVERWALK – NIGHT

Jared stands on the railing above black water, cape BILLOWING
in wind that seems to blow just for him.

He stares at his reflection – the blue outline of a god where
a man used to be.

JARED

(soft; to the city, to the
cape, to himself)
Issue One ends when the world
notices.

Behind him, from a rooftop, a phone camera ZOOMS. Another clip begins.

The cape ripples, HUNGRY.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CONVENTION ALLEY - NIGHT

The dumpster glistens like a wet tomb. Neon buzzes. JARED drops from the sky with a muted WHUMP, landing in a puddle that ripples BLUE.

He approaches the dumpster, hypnotized.

JARED

You came from trash. So did I.

The CAPE moves in a lazy inhale-exhale, as if scenting home. Jared leans in, peers at the trash strata. Between pizza boxes and broken foam swords—SCORCHED FABRIC scraps, blue fibers fused to melted plastic.

He fishes out a RIPPED LABEL from a garment bag: "ASTRA-STAGE: NANOFIBER HEROWEAR — PROTOTYPE / DO NOT DEPLOY."

His eyes dance.

JARED (CONT'D)

You're a prototype. I'm a prototype.

He pockets the label. A rat scurries; the cape TWITCHES toward it—predatory—then stills. Jared notices.

JARED (CONT'D)

Hungry?

A door CLANKS open. JANITOR (50s, stoic) steps out with another bag of con trash. Sees Jared. Sees the cape.

JANITOR

You the guy from earlier?

Jared smiles, soft, almost normal.

JARED

I found something that fits.

JANITOR

If it came outta there, it's not
for keepin'.

JARED

Everything worth keeping came out
of a dumpster at some point.

Janitor snorts, hefts the bag.

JANITOR

You gonna make trouble?

The cape tightens an imperceptible fraction at Jared's
throat. Jared's pupils flare BLUE.

JARED

No. Not for you.

He takes the bag, tosses it in with inhuman ease— like a
paper ball into a hoop. The dumpster DENTS.

JANITOR

..Huh.

They share a quiet, human beat beneath roaring rain.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

World's mean. Don't let it make you
meaner.

Jared clocks that line. It lands somewhere deep— then slides
off like rain on oiled glass.

JARED

I'm trying something else.

The janitor nods like he's seen too much in life to argue
with magic. He goes inside. The door shuts.

Jared faces the alley. Tension cracks his neck.

JARED (CONT'D)

(whisper; to the cape)
Okay. Let's pick an issue.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lights low. Monitors glow. The cape hangs on a coat rack like
a blue stormcloud.

On screen: a SPREADSHEET titled "JUSTICE BACKLOG." Columns:
Name / Sin / Year / Severity / Where They Are Now.

Rows upon rows:

ARTHUR KLINE — Fired me in public / "insubordination" / 2019
/ High / Kline Logistics, Night Shift Mgr, Dock 6

STACY VALE — Public humiliation / Today / Pending / Tour
schedule attached

COACH RABIN — "Fat boy" / 2003 / Low / Retired

DAD — Left / 1996 / ... / Unknown

He scrolls. The cursor hovers over ARTHUR KLINE.

Jared opens a MEMORY FOLDER: grainy phone video of 2019—
ARTHUR, 50s, management beard, red tie, in a warehouse
office.

ARTHUR (VIDEO)

You don't tell customers they're
wrong, Jared. You apologize even
when they're wrong. That's the job.

YOUNGER JARED (O.S.)

I'm not wired for that.

ARTHUR

Then you're not wired for
employment.

Laughter in the background. Jared's face in the video—
humiliated, pink with heat.

Jared pauses the footage on that face. Studies it like a
police sketch.

JARED

(soft)

You taught me the wrong lesson.

He puts the cape on.

The ROOM DARKENS. Not the lights— the air itself, like
reality pulled thinner where the cape touches it.

Jared breathes in. Power DRAGS a cord through him, tugging
joy out behind it like a comet tail.

His eyes mist— almost a tear.

Nothing falls.

JARED (CONT'D)

Right. No more tears.

He types M I S S I O N : 0 0 1 - A R T H U R K L I N E in a new window. Hits ENTER. The word EXECUTE flashes.

Guitar feedback swells.

EXT. KLINE LOGISTICS - DOCKS - NIGHT

A grim rectangle of corrugated metal along the Rockport River. Sodium lights buzz. FORKLIFTS move like tired beetles. ARTHUR KLINE stands at a clipboard, rain pattering off his hood.

He chews a peppermint, eyes ugly with entitlement.

ARTHUR

(to WORKER)

If you take a smoke break in the bathroom again, I'll dock you an hour. Bathroom's for piss and productive crying.

The WORKER nods, dead behind the eyes, walks off.

A sudden GUST sprays rain sideways. The lights flicker. A shadow stretches long across the dock: A MAN IN A BLUE CAPE.

Arthur squints.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

We closed. Try Amazon.

Jared steps into the cone of light. No mask. Just certainty.

JARED

I used to work for you.

Arthur's face cycles: irritation- calculation- smirk.

ARTHUR

One of my strays. Which one?

JARED

You said I wasn't wired for employment.

ARTHUR

Still true?

Jared looks down at his open hands – the rain CURVES around his palms like weather obeying a prayer.

JARED
I got rewired.

Arthur glances at the cape, the weird rain, the VIBRATING AIR.

ARTHUR
Okay. Cosplay hour's over, chief.
You on something?

Jared steps forward. The dock GROANS under his footfall.

JARED
On scripture.

ARTHUR
The Bible?

JARED
Action Comics.

Arthur barks a laugh that sounds like a cough.

ARTHUR
You want your job back? This is how you ask?

JARED
I don't want a job. I want truth.
(beat)

JARED (CONT'D)
Tell me you fired me because you liked the feeling. Because power makes you feel tall.

Arthur scoffs. Peppermint clicks against teeth.

ARTHUR
I fired you because you were bad at the job.

JARED
(smiles)
Wrong answer.

Arthur's walkie SQUAWKS– he thumbs it off, annoyed.

ARTHUR
Look, if you're gonna shoot me or whatever–

JARED
 Guns are for cowards.
 (beat; gentle)
 But I do want you to apologize.

Arthur weighs the request— then decides to get big.

ARTHUR
 I'm sorry you're a loser.

Jared's smile is patient. The cape LIFTS in an invisible tide.

JARED
 That's a good villain line. B-minus
 for cadence.

He MOVES. Not fast— unstoppable. He LIFTS Arthur by the front of his jacket, one hand, like a misbehaving cat.

Arthur's feet DANGLE.

ARTHUR
 (airless)
 H-hey, put me— put me down—

JARED
 You ever read the letter columns?
 People send in their pain and hope
 the universe writes back.

ARTHUR
 I— I—

JARED
 You wrote me a letter in 2019. "You
 don't belong anywhere." I'm writing
 back.

Jared turns. Walks to the dock's edge. The RIVER below churns black and hungry.

Arthur thrashes, a peppermint drops from his lips and skitters across wet wood.

ARTHUR
 Help! Help! Security!

A distant WORKER looks up— sees the impossible tableau— FLEES.

Jared holds Arthur out over the river.

JARED

I forgave you, you know. Every night. I practiced forgiving.

ARTHUR

Please- I got kids-

JARED

You have spreadsheets. You have schedules. You have rules that let you sleep.

(then; almost kind)

Say you liked it. Say you liked being God for five minutes.

Arthur sobs wetly.

ARTHUR

I- I-

JARED

Say the words.

ARTHUR

I- liked- it-

Jared closes his eyes. For a breath, he's human- hearing the smallest ghost of a heartbeat that cares.

Then the CAPE TIGHTENS across his chest like a defibrillator strap.

The humanity GUTTERS.

Jared opens his eyes- flat, blue.

JARED

Thank you for your honesty.

He HURLS Arthur. Not into the river- STRAIGHT UP. Arthur SCREAMS into the rain-dark, a ragdoll flailing against God.

Jared watches him ARC- then CATCHES him with obscene gentleness, inches from the water.

Arthur hyperventilates, sobbing in shock.

JARED (CONT'D)

That feeling? That's the one you sold me. Helplessness. It's expensive. I'm returning it.

Jared FLIPS Arthur over the dock and SLAMS him through a STACK OF PALLETS – splinters erupt. Arthur lies crumpled, alive, moaning.

Jared kneels. Places two fingers on Arthur's throat. Finds pulse.

He looks almost disappointed he can feel it.

JARED (CONT'D)
I'm not a murderer.
(leans in)
I'm a continuity editor.

Lights blaze on the far side of the yard. SECURITY TRUCK engine roars. Jared stands, serene.

JARED (CONT'D)
Tell the next one I gave you mercy.

He LAUNCHES skyward in a blue smear. The security truck slides to a stop. Guards pour out, weapons raised, shouting.

They find Arthur gasping, soaked, alive, weeping.

He clutches the peppermint from the deck like a rosary.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - BULLPEN - NIGHT

Fluorescents. Paper coffee cups. The last newsroom in a dying city still pretending it's invincible.

LENA BRANT (32), sharp eyes, sharp mind, sits amid chaos. On her monitor: "THE BLUE ANGEL: EP.1 – NO MORE HALF-MEASURES."

She scrubs frame by frame. Freezes on the cape's rippling microfilaments.

LENA
(to herself)
You're not fabric.

She opens a search tab: "ASTRA-STAGE NANOFIBER HEROWEAR" – nothing. Another: "AstraStage LLC Rockport" – a news brief: "Local VFX startup files bankruptcy after on-set accident. NDAs issued."

Lena whistles.

At the neighboring desk, KENT (50s editor), sleeves rolled, deadpan optimist, leans in.

KENT
You working the cosplay psycho?

LENA
If it bleeds, it leads. If it
levitates, it dominates.

KENT
We can't call him a psycho.

LENA
Yet.

She clicks an old HUMAN INTEREST PIECE: "Janitor Saves Con:
Fire Suppression Glitch Averts Tragedy" – photo of the
JANITOR from the alley, dated six months ago. In the
background of the photo, something blue blurs at the edge of
frame.

LENA (CONT'D)
Bingo.

KENT
What am I looking at?

LENA
An origin story.

Her phone buzzes. A text from UNKNOWN:

"YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND ME. MEET ME WHERE I WAS REBORN."

She stares at it, deadpan.

LENA (CONT'D)
Either a prophet or a Redditor.

KENT
You going?

LENA
Yeah.

KENT
Take a vest.

LENA
I'll take a pen.

She grabs her coat, recorder, a press badge that used to mean
safe passage.

EXT. CONVENTION ALLEY - LATER

The rain has thinned to a mist. Lena steps lightly, eyes everywhere. The DUMPSTER looms.

LENA

(off her phone recorder)
Rockport Convention Center. Back alley. Smells like wet foam and hot dogs. Blue residue on the dumpster lip— fibers luminescent under low light.

She snaps photos. Kneels. The fibers WRIGGLE at her touch. She jerks back, pulse quickening.

LENA (CONT'D)

Not textile. Reactive. Maybe— living.

JARED (O.S.)

It's hungry.

She doesn't jump. She turns— sees JARED floating a foot off the ground, cape SPILLING down his back like a waterfall of night.

Lena hits RECORD on a fresh voice memo and keeps her hand by her side. Calm eyes.

LENA

You texted me?

JARED

I posted a comment. You were listening.

He descends. Feet TOUCH pavement without sound. The cape HALOES.

LENA

You have an origin?

JARED

Everyone does. Even gods.

LENA

Are you a god?

JARED

I'm the editorial note in the margin of a rotten story.

She studies him. No mask. No obvious mania. A man who found the exact thing his wound asked for.

LENA

What do you want, Jared?

He freezes a fraction. The name lands like a dart.

JARED

You know me.

LENA

I know men like you.

(beat)

And I read the watermark on your uploads.

A ghost of amusement touches his mouth.

JARED

You're not scared.

LENA

I am. I'm just busy.

She points to the cape.

LENA (CONT'D)

What is it?

JARED

A promise kept. A lie corrected. It gives what the world took.

LENA

At a cost.

He tilts his head.

JARED

Everything worth anything costs.

A long, brittle silence. Rain whispers. Somewhere, a freight horn moans.

LENA

Can I touch it?

The cape QUIVERS like a cat hearing the can opener. Jared's jaw tightens— the thing has preferences.

JARED

It chooses.

Lena extends a hand. The cape REACHES— microfilaments tasting the air near her fingers.

For a heartbeat it's almost intimate— then SNAPS BACK like a repulsed tongue. Jared inhales sharply, as if yanked on a leash.

Lena clocks his flinch.

LENA
It doesn't like me.

JARED
It doesn't like anyone.

LENA
Including you.

They stand together with that truth between them. It changes the shape of the night.

LENA (CONT'D)
You hurt someone tonight.

JARED
I edited a mistake.

LENA
And tomorrow?

JARED
Tomorrow I publish.

LENA
Who?

He smiles, soft and terrible.

JARED
You'll write it when you see it.

He rises. The alley bends around him like a page curling from heat.

LENA
Jared—

He stops, mid-air, looks down at her.

LENA (CONT'D)
You think they're laughing at you.
They're not. They're terrified of
how much you look like them.

A flicker— a tremor through his human mask. The cape TIGHTENS again, punishing the hesitation.

JARED
You're good at your job.

LENA
So are you.

He vanishes straight up, leaving turbulent air and a faint OZONE SCENT.

Lena lowers her phone, breath shaking— just a little.

LENA (into recorder) He's dissociating. The cape is reinforcement. Maybe a parasite. If it feeds on affect, he's going to get colder.

(beat)

And smarter.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

Jared sits cross-legged on the floor. The cape draped around him like a cult robe. Candles gutter. On the wall, COMIC PANELS he's drawn tonight: stick-figure recreations of his vigilante acts, captioned in block letters.

He speaks to an unseen congregation.

JARED
(sermon cadence)
They'll say I'm a monster.

JARED (CONT'D)
But a monster is just a hero after
the audience changes.

The cape STIRS— a thousand hairs aligning. Jared shudders, eyes unfocusing— an INNER LANDSCAPE bleeds across his vision:

INT. WHITE VOID (JARED'S MIND)

Jared floats. The cape blooms around him like a JELLYFISH, translucent, pulsing.

Whispers leak from nowhere— COMMENT THREADS, PANEL SOUNDBITES, REJECTION EMAILS— layered into a choir.

VOICES (V.O.)

- we're pursuing other voices - -
 fragile fanboy - - heroes evolve -
 - you don't belong anywhere -

The cape's filaments press to his skin. MEMORIES surface:
 Dad's back leaving, Coach's whistle, Stacy's smirk, Arthur's
 laughter.

Each memory BURNS BLUE and then GOES DARK, like fuel spent.

JARED

(whispers)

Take it. Take what you need.

The jellyfish-cape PULSES, feeding.

BACK TO SCENE

Jared's cheeks glisten. He touches them, surprised- moisture.
 He looks at his fingers- not tears. Just CONDENSATION from
 the cold room.

He laughs, low, almost a sob.

JARED (CONT'D)

Issue Two starts at dawn.

He stands. The cape falls into perfect lines, icon-ready.

On the monitor: his JUSTICE BACKLOG. The cursor blinks next
 to STACY VALE.

He selects the name. Drags it to the top.

INSERT: SCREEN

MISSION: 002 - STACY VALE (PUBLIC
 MYTHMAKER)

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SKY OVER ROCKPORT - DAWN

FIRST LIGHT SMEARS THE CLOUDS. A BLUE STREAK CARVES THE
 HORIZON.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. ROCKPORT - MORNING

ROCKPORT WAKES ANGRY. SIRENS THREAD THE RAIN.

MONTAGE - MEDIA FRENZY (ALT-ROCK NEEDLE-DROPS UNDER):
 - Local AM talk radio hosts arguing, phones lighting up:
 "Hero or hazard?" - Reaction videos: split-screens of the
 OVERPASS CLIP, faces gasping, cheering, moralizing. - A
 conservative podcast calls him "Real Man Energy." - A
 progressive vlog calls him "Proto-Fascist Fanboy." - Meme
 accounts slap comic captions over his silhouette: "NO MORE
 HALF-MEASURES." - An Etsy page already selling BLUE CAPES
 ships "limited drops."

THE CITY SCROLLS, PICKS SIDES, RELOADS.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - BULLPEN - DAY

LENA BRANT TYPES LIKE A SURGEON.

ON HER SCREEN: "THE BLUE ANGEL: GOD OR GLITCH?" SUBHEAD: A
 VIGILANTE'S PHYSICS-DEFYING CAPE IS REAL. THE MYTHOLOGY HE'S
 SELLING MIGHT BE DEADLIER.

SHE INSERTS A PHOTOGRAPH: MICROFILAMENTS WRITHING ON THE
 DUMPSTER LIP.

KENT leans over.

KENT

It's sharp. You're about to turn a
 cape into the First Amendment.

LENA

It's not the cape. It's the hole he
 fills.

She hits PUBLISH. The site PING spikes.

Her phone rings - a cable booker salivating.

BOOKER (V.O.)

Lena, standby for a segment at 6.
 Title: "Angel or Algorithm?" Can
 you do a live debate?

LENA

(shrug)

I don't do debates. I do facts.

BOOKER (V.O.)

We do both.

She hangs up, already done arguing.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - DAY

The blinds are closed. The CAPE hangs in the kitchen doorway like a shrine curtain.

JARED sits on the floor, cameras pointed at him, ring light halo. He presses RECORD.

JARED

(into camera; calm)

People will tell you power corrupts. That's cute. Power clarifies.

He holds up a COMIC PANEL he's drawn in Sharpie: a blue figure lifting a car.

JARED (CONT'D)

The first panel is always a miracle. The second is an excuse. We're skipping excuses.

He lowers the panel. Eyes like ice water.

JARED (CONT'D)

To the citizens of Rockport who feel invisible: I see you. To the leaders who sell virtue by the yard: I'm billing you.

He ends the recording. Uploads: "EP.2 - THE CLEAN PANEL."

The cape SHIMMERS in the doorway as a notification pops - LENA'S ARTICLE. He reads, expression a steady flatline.

When he reaches the line "He's selling an old myth in a new suit: pain as permission," a muscle ticks in his jaw.

JARED (soft; to the cape) She's good copy.

He picks up his JUSTICE BACKLOG sheet. STACY VALE sits at the top.

He stands. The cape crawls across the tile like liquid velvet and CLIMBS his frame.

EXT. ROCKPORT PLAZA - AFTERNOON

A street festival. Food trucks. A charity stage with a banner: "HEROES FOR KIDS - LIVESTREAM." STACY VALE MCs, flanked by costumed volunteers. She's live on three phones and a platform stream.

STACY
(cheerful; sincere)
Heroes aren't perfect. They're
people who choose to help.

Applause. Donation ticker climbs.

At the edge of the crowd, JARED watches beneath a hood. The cape is hidden but BREATHES under the coat.

Kids in plastic masks run past, shrieking with delight. A little boy in a faded SUPERMAN shirt bumps Jared and freezes, staring up.

BOY
You look sad.

Jared blinks. The boy's mom pulls him away with a murmured sorry.

BOY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(to mom)
He's a sad superhero.

Jared exhales through his nose. A flicker of something that isn't rage. The cape tightens - a correction.

Onstage, Stacy takes questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
What do you think about the Blue
Angel?

STACY
I think vigilantism is a story that
never ends well. We need systems,
not saviors.

A murmur. Split reactions.

A DRUNK DRIVER screeches a sedan through a closed side street, fishtails toward the crowd – a wet scream of tires. People SCATTER.

Time SLOWS.

A toddler frozen in the lane, a balloon string tangled around her wrist.

JARED MOVES.

He BLURS across the plaza, scoops the toddler mid-run, pivots, and CRADLES her against his chest as the car TEARS PAST.

Mothers SCREAM. Phones UP. The car CLIPS a barricade, spins, and SLAMS into a light pole with a firecracker burst of AIRBAGS.

Jared sets the toddler down in mom's arms. The cape peels the tears from the child's cheek like a static trick. She giggles through sobs.

The crowd ROARS – pure, incandescent gratitude.

CROWD

Hero! Hero!

Jared turns to the crumpled car. The DRIVER, dazed but alive, coughs, fumbles for the door, empty beer bottles tumbling.

Jared RIPS the door like a sardine tin. He stares at the driver – a red-cheeked man, eyes glassy, blood in his beard.

DRIVER

I– oh god– did I– is the kid okay?

JARED

She's fine.

DRIVER

(starting to sob)

Thank– thank you– I'm sorry–

Jared hears him the way a butcher hears rain.

STACY (O.S.)

Stop.

Jared turns. Stacy stands ten feet away, arms out, palms calm, phone live. Her voice is steel wrapped in empathy.

STACY (CONT'D)

You did the right thing. Now do the hard thing.

Jared looks back at the driver, at the BOTTLES on the floorboard, at PHONES filming.

JARED

(quiet)

No more half-measures.

He LIFTS the driver by the collar with one hand. The crowd gasps.

STACY

No. Put him down. Let the law—

JARED

The law outsourced mercy to PR.

STACY

You're performing pain. That's not justice; it's content.

Silence needles the plaza. The livestream chat EXPLODES:

@TRUTHFORGE: DO IT

@MothersAgainst: DON'T @BlueAngelStan: CLEAN PANEL @LBrant: (watching icon) ...

Jared's eyes glow BRIGHTER. The cape FANS outward like wings.

JARED

(to the driver; almost kind)

JARED (CONT'D)

Say you chose to drive drunk because you knew the world would cushion you.

DRIVER

(crying)

I— I made a mistake— please—

STACY

Mistakes are how we're human.

JARED

And consequences are how we stay.

He THROWS the driver into the LIGHT POLE with a bone-chord CRUNCH. The man CRUMPS to the pavement, howling, legs at wrong angles but alive.

The crowd SPLITS down the middle – half cheering like a touchdown, half recoiling like they saw a beheading.

A POLICE SIREN grows. Officers form a perimeter, weapons UP.

A wall of phones records a man deciding who gets to bleed.

STACY stares at Jared, devastated.

STACY

You wanted to be seen. Now look at yourself.

Jared looks – not at his reflection, but at the MIRROR OF PHONES. For a second he sees what they see: a blue-lit hole where a person was.

The cape CONSTRICTS his chest – a punishment for doubt. His breath hitches.

LENA BRANT arrives at the edge, weaving through bodies, camera rolling. She catches the instant of doubt, whispers to her mic:

LENA

He hesitates. Something is still in there.

COP (MEGAPHONE)

Hands where we can see them! On the ground!

Jared gently raises both hands. The air WARPS around the bullets that haven't been fired yet.

JARED

(to the crowd, to the cameras, to himself)
Issue Two begins now.

He ASCENDS in a roar of BLUE WIND, police lights strobbing across his face like a broken projector. Phones tilt skyward, jaws open.

A BULLET cracks. It BENDS around him, curls away like a metal fern.

Jared hovers forty feet up, cape UNFURLED, a stained-glass saint reimaged by a violent age.

JARED (CONT'D)

(to every lens)

If you harm the innocent, if you profit from their fear, if you turn apology into business— I'm correcting your plot.

STACY

(under her breath, into her phone)

Don't make him a god. Make him accountable.

LENA

(into hers)

He's writing a manifesto in panels. Find the publisher: who made the cape.

COP (MEGAPHONE)

Stand down!

Jared looks at the cops, then at the LITTLE BOY IN THE SUPERMAN SHIRT from earlier, peeking from behind his mother's legs, eyes big as saucers.

They lock eyes.

The boy NODS once — a child's absolution.

Jared smiles, hollow and luminous.

He ERUPTS UPWARD, a blue comet slicing the cloud ceiling. Thunder answers.

The plaza erupts — CHEERS, SCREAMS, ARGUMENTS. The driver moans. EMTs swarm. The livestream numbers spike into six figures.

STACY lowers her phone. Hands shaking, she dials.

STACY

(into phone)

We need to talk security protocols for tonight's panel. He's escalating.

LENA lowers hers, eyes glinting.

LENA

(to her recorder)

Act I ends. The city chooses sides.

She looks up at the hole in the clouds where the blue streak tore.

SMASH TO BLACK.

EXT. ROCKPORT - VARIOUS - DAY

MONTAGE - CITY IN FEVER (ALT-ROCK RIFFS OVER):

- A SPORTING GOODS STORE mannequin wears a cheap BLUE CAPE; a hand-written sign: "We do NOT sell vigilante gear." - TIKTOK CLIPS: teens parkouring in dollar-store capes; fails; bruises. - A GUN RANGE offering "Blue Angel Tactical Nights." - A CHURCH MARQUEE: PRAY FOR MERCY. NOT FOR CAPES. - A STREET MURAL of the Blue Angel painted overnight, eyes haloed in neon. Someone tags over it: "FASCIST." Someone else tags over that: "FATHER." - CABLE NEWS SPLIT SCREENS; hosts shout over each other, lower-third chyron: ANGEL OR ALGORITHM? - POLICE BRIEFING ROOM: Chief holds a shaky press conference. No answers, just fear management. - KIDS tying towels around necks, leaping off stoops, moms yanking them back. - ETSY orders packaging blue fabric in kitchen-table sweatshops.

The city has chosen sides. And new uniforms.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Fluorescent coffin. LENA BRANT sets a recorder between two paper cups of vending coffee.

Across from her: the JANITOR from the convention alley. Close-cropped hair, permanent fatigue. Name patch says "SOTO."

LENA

Thanks for meeting me, Mr. Soto.

SOTO

Call me Soto. Mr. makes me feel like a mop wringer.

She smiles. He doesn't.

LENA

Six months ago, you were credited with stopping a fire suppression malfunction during a film test at the convention center.

Soto stares at the recorder.

SOTO

NDAs are a religion now.

LENA

Then speak in parables.

He thinks. Sips the coffee. Grimaces like it insulted his mother.

SOTO

A crew rents the hall. Big screens. Smoke machines. Fancy fans. They bring boxes that look like coffins for ballerinas.

LENA

Garment racks?

SOTO

Suits. Capes. Fabric that moved like it was bored.

LENA

Astra-Stage?

Soto flinches. The name sticks like a thorn.

SOTO

They said "Astra." The stagehands said "not safe." One of the rigs kicks on by itself. Sprinklers don't go.

SOTO (CONT'D)

The... cloth on one rig lights up blue like a bug zapper, but cold. The VFX boss puts on gloves. The gloves smoke.

LENA

Anyone hurt?

SOTO

A PA. Nosebleed. Ear bleed. He laughs like he won the lottery till he falls down.

(MORE)

SOTO (CONT'D)

They cut the power to the whole block. We sit in the dark with emergency lights and listen to something breathe that's not a person.

Lena leans in, voice soft.

LENA

How did the cape end up in the trash?

Soto rolls the paper cup in his palms.

SOTO

Boss lady says, "Get rid of the bad batch." I open a bin and there it is, folded wrong like it folded itself. I put it in the dumpster. Next morning, it's on the floor. I put it back. Same thing. Third time, I... tied it in a contractor bag and piled chairs on top.

LENA

And still-

SOTO

Same place. Like a dog finds its bed.

He meets her eyes.

SOTO (CONT'D)

Some things aren't trash even when you throw 'em out. They're... magnets for the kind of person who hears them calling.

LENA

You saw him?

SOTO

Only his back. Looked like someone carrying a storm on purpose.

Lena clicks off the recorder. Tucks it away.

LENA

You did the right thing.

SOTO

I did the cheap thing. Right costs overtime.

He stands. Hesitates.

SOTO (CONT'D)
If you find the people who made
that... don't touch it.

He leaves. The room feels colder when he's gone.

Lena exhales, opens her notebook. On the page: ASTRA-STAGE → SHELLS? → BANKRUPTCY COURT FILINGS. She circles FILINGS three times.

INT. COMMUNITY TV STUDIO - AFTERNOON

A black box with ambition. STACY VALE walks a production team through the set: a TOWN-HALL stage with folding chairs, plexi lecterns, a banner: HERO ETHICS: A CONVERSATION.

A PRODUCER (30s, efficient) checks mic levels.

PRODUCER
We'll stream to three platforms,
simulcast delayed to Channel 9.
We've got clergy, a cop, a trauma
nurse, a comic historian, and a mom
from the plaza.

STACY
Add a union rep. If we're talking
ethics we need workers.

PRODUCER
Copy. Security?

A SECURITY LEAD (ex-military calm) gestures at a screen showing entry points.

SECURITY LEAD
Metal detectors, bag checks,
plainclothes inside. If the Blue
Angel shows, we follow de-
escalation protocol-

STACY
No hero worship. If he shows, he's
a citizen with extraordinary means.
Treat him like weather: respect,
but don't bow.

The producer nods, impressed despite herself.

PRODUCER

You sure you want to host?

Stacy looks into the empty audience – the outline of people not yet in their seats.

STACY

If he's rewriting the story, I'm writing the stage directions.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT - DUSK

A storm den. The CAPE hangs like a predatory fern. JARED paces in slow figure-eights, speaking to the camera, to himself, to the thing.

JARED

They call it copycatting. It's communion.

He stops at his JUSTICE BACKLOG wall. Photos, names, printed articles with crimes highlighted in highlighter.

He touches three names:

– COUNCILMAN ROYCE – "CITY CONTRACTS: NEPOTISM ALLEGED"
– SERGEANT PIPER – "OFFICER SUSPENDED AFTER BRUTAL ARREST;
QUIETLY REINSTATED" – DR. LAVIN – "INSURANCE DENIAL LINKED TO
CEO BONUS"

JARED (CONT'D)

Sins that hide behind process.

He faces the cape.

JARED (CONT'D)

Tonight we take a bigger panel.

The lights DIM without a switch. He steps forward; the cape crawls up his arms with lover's certainty and strangler's patience.

His phone dings. A notification: HERO ETHICS: LIVE TONIGHT – HOSTED BY STACY VALE.

Jared's mouth twitches.

JARED (CONT'D)

Of course.

He pockets the phone. The ring light flips on by itself, haloing him.

JARED (CONT'D)
 (into camera)
 If systems are just costumes for
 cowards, let's undress them.

Upload: "EP.2.1 - COSTUMES FOR COWARDS."

EXT. BACK STREET - NIGHT

A COPYCAT in a cheap blue towel-cape stands on a car hood, livestreaming to thirty viewers.

COPYCAT
 Blue Angel if you see this, duet
 me, bro. Justice squad!

He leaps from the hood to a dumpster, misses, folds in half, wheezes. His phone clatters, comments erupt with laugh emojis and "L."

From the shadows, JARED watches - expression unreadable. The towel cape kid sees him, gasps.

COPYCAT (CONT'D)
 No way. Dude. It's him.

He lifts his phone with trembling hands.

COPYCAT (CONT'D)
 Blue Angel, any advice for your
 followers?

Jared steps forward so the phone frames his face and the living cape's subtle SHIMMER.

JARED
 Don't follow.

He flicks his finger. The phone goes dead like a candle in wind. The kid's eyes brim.

COPYCAT
 Can I- can I help?

JARED
 (soft)
 Be better than me. That's how you
 help.

He lifts off, leaves the kid crying for reasons that will confuse him later.

EXT. CITY HALL ANNEX - NIGHT

A brutalist cube. COUNCILMAN ROYCE exits a side door with a STAFFER. Umbrellas. Laughter not meant for cameras.

JARED floats down behind them, silent as a verdict.

STAFFER

Sir, your car is-

The staffer SEES him. Words die.

Royce turns. Politician's reflex - put on a smile, extend a hand.

ROYCE

Evening. Can we help you, young man?

JARED

You mispriced a human life and called it a bid.

Royce's smile doesn't twitch.

ROYCE

If this is about the housing contracts, we complied with every requirement-

JARED

Requirements are costumes too.

Jared SQUEEZES Royce's umbrella. The metal TWISTS into a Mobius strip.

The staffer fumbles for a phone. The screen SPARKS and dies from ten feet away.

ROYCE

I don't know what you think you-

Jared LIFTS him by the belt and jacket like debris. Royce wheezes.

JARED

Say you enjoy feeling important while people drown.

ROYCE

I- I serve!

JARED

You harvest.

The staffer lunges, brave, dumb. Jared FANS the cape; a GUST flattens the man to the wall, unharmed, terrified.

JARED (CONT'D)

This is a warning panel.

He walks Royce to the steps and SETS HIM DOWN gently. Kneels to eye level.

JARED (CONT'D)

Tomorrow you resign and confess on camera. If you don't, I take your costume off in front of everyone.

He stands. Royce sags like wet cardboard.

ROYCE

You... can't threaten an elected official.

JARED

I didn't. I diagrammed your sentence.

He ASCENDS, disappears. The staffer shakes, crosses himself.

Royce vomits quietly into the twisted umbrella.

INT. BAR - SAME NIGHT

A cop bar. Wood paneling, bad lighting, union stickers. SERGEANT PIPER (40s, bullish, scar on knuckle) holds court over a platter of wings.

PIPER

You know what "de-escalation" is? It's when they don't swing. You make it happen with presence. With tone. With fear if you gotta.

Cops laugh, nod. A TV over the bar plays a replay of the plaza incident. The driver's leg angle makes a rookie blanch.

ROOKIE

That... that right there's murder.

PIPER

That right there is optics. He did
what we all want to do twice a
night.

The DOOR whispers open with a bell that doesn't ring. Wind
dies. The room temperature drops two degrees.

JARED stands just inside, cape dim under a hoodie.

Conversations FADE. Someone mutters "oh, hell."

Piper swivels, stand-your-ground smile.

PIPER (CONT'D)

You lost? Cape night is Tuesdays.

JARED

I'm here to return property.

He sets a BODYCAM on the bar. Red light blinking. The barkeep
looks at it like it's a tarantula.

PIPER

We're off duty.

JARED

You're never off record.

Piper stands. He's not small, and he's used to rooms
kneeling.

PIPER

What do you want?

JARED

Confession. Contrition.
Consequences.

Piper steps close. Close enough to smell electric ozone off
the cape.

PIPER

You really think you're the good
guy?

JARED

I think I'm the editor.

PIPER

Then edit this.

He swings. His fist lands on Jared's jaw with the sound of a bat hitting rebar. Piper yelps; his hand breaks in three places.

Silence. Jukebox CLUNKS off by itself.

Jared catches Piper's shattered hand, holds it like a dance partner's.

JARED

Say you stepped on his neck because
you could.

The bar holds its breath.

PIPER

(through teeth)
Lawful use of- aah- force-

JARED

Try again.

PIPER

I- liked- the fear.

The room exhales pain. A veteran at the end of the bar starts to cry without sound.

Jared releases Piper's hand. Piper collapses onto a barstool, staring at the wrongness of his own bones.

JARED

Tomorrow you resign, apologize, and
name names.

JARED (CONT'D)

Or I read the rest of your hard
drive out loud.

He taps the BODYCAM. It ERUPTS into a fountain of BLUE SPARKS - then neatly reassembles itself on the bar, still blinking.

Jared turns to go. Stops. Looks back at the youngest cop in the room - ROOKIE.

JARED (CONT'D)

You can quit before it eats you.
Heroes don't stay heroes here.

He leaves. The door closes softly, like the end of a chapter.

EXT. COMMUNITY TV STUDIO - NIGHT

Crowd gathering. Metal detectors beep. Signs: "TALK DON'T KILL" and "ANGEL SAVE US" and "WHO WATCHES THE CAPE?"

Lena arrives, press badge flashing. She clocks the security layout, the choke points, the exits. She's counting oxygen in a mine.

LENA
(into recorder)
Town-hall security is theatre. If
he comes, he won't use a door.

She checks her phone - an email reply: BANKRUPTCY COURT - ASTRA-STAGE FILINGS READY FOR VIEWING. She smiles, a shark who found blood in water.

KENT (TEXT): Careful. LENA (TEXT): Always. She pockets the phone, steps inside.

INT. COMMUNITY TV STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Stacy centers herself in the wing, eyes closed, hands on her ribs, breath low. The producer approaches.

PRODUCER
Five minutes.

Stacy opens her eyes. Looks at a FRAMED COMIC COVER someone hung for set dressing - a hero catching a falling train.

She touches the glass.

STACY
(to herself)
Be a station, not the tracks.

She walks onstage to applause that sounds like a question.

EXT. ROOFTOP OPPOSITE STUDIO - SAME

Jared stands at the parapet, thirty feet up, looking across at the lit windows, the movement inside, the antenna blinking red like a heartbeat.

The cape BILLOWS without wind.

JARED
 (soft prayer)
 Issue Two: We take the mask off the
 town.

He steps into the void and FLOATS forward, slow as a
 confession.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. COMMUNITY TV STUDIO — NIGHT

Packed chairs. A low buzz of tension. LIVE icon glows red.
 Banner behind the plexi lecterns reads: HERO ETHICS: A
 CONVERSATION.

Onstage: STACY VALE at center; panelists flanking — TRAUMA
 NURSE, CLERGY, UNION REP, COMIC HISTORIAN, COP SPOKESPERSON,
 MOTHER FROM PLAZA.

PRODUCER (O.S.)
 We're live in five... four...

The audience hushes into a knife-edge.

STACY
 Good evening, Rockport. We're here
 to talk about power — who has it,
 who pays for it.

Applause collides with boos. Phones up everywhere — multi-
 angle livestream hell.

STACY (CONT'D)
 If the Blue Angel is watching, this
 is your invitation to talk, not
 perform.

A ripple. People glance at the ceiling as if the word
 invitation opens a hatch.

INT. COURTHOUSE RECORDS ROOM — SAME

Claustrophobic stacks. LENA BRANT at a lonely terminal lit
 corpse-white. On screen: ASTRA-STAGE BANKRUPTCY FILINGS —
 exhibits, asset lists, SEALED ADDENDUMS.

She scrolls. Finds: SCHEDULE G – EXECUTORY CONTRACTS. A line item: “PROJECT: ARGO CLOAK – Materials License via NOVA-ION DEFENSE (Redacted)”

LENA
(under breath)
Defense. Of course.

She screenshots. A CLERK clears a throat behind her.

CLERK
We close at nine.

LENA
I’ll be done at 8:59.

She dives deeper. Finds EXHIBIT Q: incident report language – black bars everywhere; a sliver escapes: “bioreactive microfilaments– host-affect attenuation–”

LENA (into recorder) The cape doesn’t just protect. It edits affect. It eats it.

She hits PRINT. The machine churns, angry with secrets.

INT. COMMUNITY TV STUDIO – CONTINUOUS

STACY moderates with surgical calm as chaos trims her sleeves.

UNION REP
Heroes don’t fix a city that
underpays nurses and firefighters.
Pay them and you don’t need a cape!

COP SPOKESPERSON
With respect, vigilantism
destabilizes–

MOTHER FROM PLAZA
He saved my child!

TRAUMA NURSE
And broke a man in half. My ER is
overrun with copycats falling off
roofs.

Audience erupts. PROTESTERS chant over each other: “TALK DON’T KILL!” / “ANGEL SAVE US!”

STACY

We can hold two truths—

The OVERHEAD LIGHTS HUM — a subsonic WOOOOM. Mics crackle. A CAMERA slews on its own, re-framing the stage center.

A BLUE SHADOW moves across the back wall like a cloud in a locked room.

The audience GASPS.

STACY looks up — and JARED descends SLOWLY from the grid, cape billowing like a cathedral banner, landing between lecterns with the quiet of a guillotine blade.

Half the room CHEERS. Half SCREAMS. Security surges and then FREEZES as their radios cough static.

JARED

(serene, amplified by
nothing)

You invited me to talk.

STACY

Then do that. No demonstrations. No broken people.

JARED

I don't break people. I break costumes.

COP SPOKESPERSON tries to step forward. His BODYCAM hisses and DROPS sparks.

JARED (CONT'D)

No props.

STACY moves closer. Keeps her hands visible. She's on a balance beam above a shark tank.

STACY

You saved a child. That matters.
You also made yourself judge, jury,
and content. That matters more.

JARED

Content is a slur for story you
don't control.

COMIC HISTORIAN

(blurting)

Comics have always been political—

JARED

And always about courage. Not algorithms.

A heckler from the aisle: BRO IN A BLUE TOWEL CAPE stands on a chair.

BRO

We love you, Angel! Clean panel!

Jared's gaze flicks. The towel-cape DISINTEGRATES into lint in a gentle blue sigh. The bro crumples back into his seat, suddenly small.

JARED

Don't follow.

A door BANGS backstage. Two PLAINCLOTHES push through with tasers raised. The tasers FIZZLE and MELT into drooping plastic as they aim.

STACY

(to Jared)

If you want to be human, prove it.
Stand down. Sit. Answer questions.

He considers. The cape TIGHTENS like a leash; he resists, jaw flexing. Then—

JARED

Okay.

He SITS in an empty folding chair. The simple act shocks the room more than floating did.

STACY

(beat; impressed despite herself)

First question: What do you owe the people you hurt?

JARED

Truth. Clarity. An end to the shrug.

TRAUMA NURSE

Clarity doesn't set bones.

JARED

Sometimes a bone heals wrong.

MOTHER FROM PLAZA

(tearful)

You saved my baby.

JARED
I would again.

COP SPOKESPERSON
And you crippled a man.

JARED
He aimed two tons of steel at a crowd. I corrected his vector.

Shouts crash like surf. "YES!" / "MONSTER!"

STACY
Why the cape?

A long beat. Jared's voice softens.

JARED
Because I prayed for someone to notice me before I died. The cape answered. Then it asked for a tithe.

STACY
What tithe?

JARED
Everything that made me soft.

The room chills. Some people cry and don't know why.

From the back: A MAN IN A SUIT stands, face red — COUNCILMAN ROYCE. Cameras whip to him.

ROYCE
You threatened me at City Hall. You extorted an elected official!

JARED
I suggested accountability.

ROYCE
I will not be intimidated by a cosplayer with a god complex!

Jared rises SLOWLY. The plexi lectern nearest him HAIRS with cracks.

STACY
(to Royce, warning)
Sit down.

ROYCE
No! He thinks he can—

Jared GESTURES – microphones across the stage go DEAD in a wave. Only Stacy’s handheld remains hot.

JARED
 (to Stacy; quiet,
 intimate)
 You can end this tonight. Say we
 don’t need costumes. Only courage.

STACY
 We need community. That’s
 different.

An ALARM blares. Sprinkler heads DRIP blue-tinted water and then REVERSE the drip back up into themselves, as if time changes minds.

SECURITY LEAD in the wings – shouting on a dead radio, signals to EVACUATE.

The back doors BURST – a surge of audience panics toward exits – CHAOS.

STACY slams the handheld:

STACY (CONT'D)
 Everyone stop! If you run, you get
 hurt! Sit down! Breathe!

Miraculously – many do. Her authority threads the room back together.

Jared watches her, a flicker of admiration, maybe envy.

JARED
 You wield hearts better than I
 wield fear.

STACY
 Good. Then listen: Put it down.

He looks at the cape like it’s a weapon and a wound. His hands hover at the clasp.

The ROOF groans. A DRONE smashes through a skylight – police QUADROTOR with a beanbag launcher, zipping for Jared.

AUDIENCE screams. Security dives.

Jared’s eyes go NARROW BLUE. He SNATCHES the drone out of the air with a lazy backhand. It CRUMPLES like a soda can. Sparks snow.

He places the dead drone gently on the stage.

JARED

They never let us finish the page.

STACY

The page ends when you stop writing
on other people.

And then – a sound from the rafters: a CABLE SNAP. A lighting truss LURCHES.

WIDE SHOT – the truss swings over the audience like a pendulum.

People DUCK. A little girl is FROZEN beneath the arc.

Jared LAUNCHES – catches the truss with both hands – MUSCLES STRAIN – the cape flares like a parachute – he HALTS the swing inches above heads.

A stunned, collective GASP – then APPLAUSE even from people who hate him.

He lowers the truss to the stage, breath steady, eyes hollow.

STACY locks on the moment, leans into the handheld:

STACY (CONT'D)

You saved them. Now save yourself.
Walk out with me. No spectacle. We
go to the precinct. You tell your
story. We build something real.

A silence so thin you could tear it with a sigh.

Jared looks at the door. The cape PULLS him backward like undertow.

JARED

(soft)

I don't get to be saved.

STACY

Everyone does.

He almost believes her.

BANG – the SIDE EXIT blows inward. A TACTICAL TEAM storms with shields. FLASHBANG arcs – HITS THE FLOOR–

JARED flicks a hand – the flashbang FREEZES in mid-roll, sizzling in place like a bug pinned to glass. He turns it gently upward. It POPS into the flyspace – a harmless star.

Crowd ERUPTS – fear into frenzy.

JARED's face goes blank. Whatever human thread Stacy had wrapped around him SNAPS.

He LIFTS both hands. The TACTICAL SHIELDS grow HEAVY, bearers grunt, knees sag. GUNS click lifeless.

JARED
(voice everywhere)
Sit down.

The TACTICAL TEAM – and much of the audience – SIT, forced by a gravity that isn't gravity.

Stacy steps into his line of sight, hands up like she's holding a wild animal's gaze.

STACY
Jared, look at me. Not them. Me.

He does. The room falls away – just two people on a wire above a pit.

STACY (CONT'D)
Take it off.

The cape COILS like a striking snake.

JARED
It won't let me.

STACY
Then prove you still exist. Tell it
no.

His fingers rise to the clasp. Trembling. The FILAMENTS bite – thin blue cuts bloom on his neck.

JARED
(through pain)
No.

The LIGHTS explode into DAYLIGHT BRIGHT. People scream. Smoke curls. The building makes a sound like it hurt itself.

Jared REELS, staggers–

–then VANISHES STRAIGHT UP through the broken skylight in a roar of blue wind, leaving the audience, the cops, and Stacy blinking under a shredded grid.

Silence, then pandemonium.

PRODUCER
Kill the feed! Kill the–

The LIVE light goes black.

Stacy stands alone at center, hair wild, chest heaving, a queen on a bombed chessboard.

She lowers the handheld.

STACY
 (to the room, ragged)
 If you got out with all your
 pieces, thank the person next to
 you. We finish the conversation
 tomorrow.

The audience – shaky – APPLAUDS. Not joy. Survival.

INT. COURTHOUSE RECORDS ROOM – SAME

The PRINTER jams on EXHIBIT Q. LENA curses, yanks the tray, finesses the wrinkled sheet. She smooths it on the desk, eyes devouring a paragraph the black bars missed:

“...SUBJECT H EXHIBITED ELEVATED STRENGTH, EM
 INTERFERENCE; AFFECT ATTENUATION PROPORTIONAL TO

ACTIVATION TIME. RECOMMENDATION: DO NOT ALLOW CONTINUOUS
 WEAR > 30 MIN. BEHAVIORAL DRIFT OBSERVED: EMPATHY
 DECLINE, MORAL DISENGAGEMENT.”

LENA
 (whisper)
 Timed soul-siphon.

She snaps photos. Her phone lights with EMERGENCY ALERTS: “Incident at Community TV Studio.” A shaky clip autoplays – the truss save, the standoff, the blue exit.

LENA (CONT'D)
 He almost took it off.

She shoves the pages into a folder, runs.

EXT. HOSPITAL – NIGHT

Ambulances carousel. Sirens grind. TRAUMA NURSE from the panel shoves a gurney through doors, eyes furious and wet.

She looks up as JARED touches down on the parking structure across the way, a silhouette against sodium orange.

TRAUMA NURSE

(to herself)

If you come in, I treat you. If you don't, I hope lightning remembers your name.

She disappears inside.

Jared watches the ER swallow people. The cape ripples, HUNGRY.

JARED

(hoarse)

Issue Two, page two.

He turns toward the skyline — toward a GLASS TOWER with lit letters: NOV A- I O N (half the sign dead). A logo Lena just saw on a PDF.

He steps into the air.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. ROCKPORT - MIDTOWN - NIGHT

Rain needles. Traffic hisses. The NOVA-ION DEFENSE tower rises like a glass scalpel — mirrored planes, atrium glowing aquamarine.

A single red AIRCRAFT BEACON blinks at the crown: heartbeat for a building.

INT. STACY'S CAR (MOVING) — NIGHT

Wipers thwack time. STACY VALE drives, jaw set. LENA BRANT rides shotgun, flipping through damp BANKRUPTCY PRINT-OUTS.

LENA

They licensed "Project: ARGO CLOAK" from Nova-Ion. "Host-affect attenuation." They knew it eats the wearer.

STACY

And they dumped a live weapon in a public dumpster.

LENA

"Prototype disposal: third-party vendor." Translation: pay someone to throw God in the trash.

Stacy eyes the tower looming ahead.

STACY

We can't out-punch him. We out-publish him.

LENA

We need evidence that survives a lawsuit. Emails. Lab notes. Video.

STACY

And while we're printing receipts... he's already there.

They share a look that says: run toward the fire.

EXT. NOVA-ION PLAZA — CONTINUOUS

They park across the street. Security guards cluster under an awning; a lobby X-RAY ARCH idles.

Lena stuffs papers into a messenger bag, slings it.

STACY

I'll keep them looking out here.

LENA

I'll go shopping.

STACY

Try not to steal anything radioactive.

LENA

No promises.

They split — Stacy crosses to the guards with a high-beam smile; Lena slides into shadow.

INT. NOVA-ION - LOBBY - SAME

Corporate aquarium. Glass elevators snake up a hollow spine. A suspended kinetic sculpture of SPUN TITANIUM THREADS rotates in slow hypnosis.

STACY breezes in, umbrella snapping shut.

STACY

Hi! Stacy Vale, live in fifteen,
hoping to get a comment on-

SECURITY CAPTAIN

Ma'am, building's closed.

STACY

Great, I love a challenge.

She turns the smile up a lumen. The captain's attention sticks.

In the reflection behind them, a DOOR TO THE SERVICE STAIRS eases open and closes with no one touching it.

INT. NOVA-ION - SERVICE STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Dark. Emergency lights pulse like distant lightning.

JARED floats one inch above each step, cape a hush. He's a blue moon moving through a canyon.

He pauses, hand to throat - the FILAMENT CLASP glows bright, then dims. He breathes shallow.

ON SCREEN (GHOSTED HUD FEEL):

ACTIVATION TIME: 00:24:38 ...
00:24:39 ...

A sound: VENTS BREATHING BACKWARDS. He looks up into the dark shaft - listens to a building think.

INT. NOVA-ION - LOBBY - SAME

STACY films the sculpture with her phone, narrated cheerfully.

STACY (to camera) When your lobby looks like a Bond villain's dental floss dispenser, you're compensating.

The SCULPTURE wobbles – threads SING at an ultrasonic pitch.
The guards flinch.

STACY doesn't.

STACY

Sir, are you aware your art is
haunted?

SECURITY CAPTAIN

Stay by the desk, ma'am.

He radios LEVEL 3 CHECK. Behind him, a lobby cam feed
glitches – a BLUE SMEAR across one frame, gone the next.

Stacy clocks it. Her smile thins to blade.

INT. NOVA-ION - DOCUMENT ARCHIVE - LEVEL 2 - SAME

Rows of compact shelving units. LENA slips between stacks,
headlamp dim. She finds a terminal. Boots it. "EMPLOYEE ID
REQUIRED."

She pulls a USB RUBBER DUCKY from her pocket; slots it. The
login screen BREATHES once and yields: ARCHIVE ACCESS -
GUEST.

LENA

Bless the lazy gods of infosec.

Search: ARGO CLOAK. Hits: LAB LOGS, INCIDENT REPORTS, MEETING
MINUTES (sealed). She drags files into a SYNC FOLDER.
Progress bar crawls.

A footstep in the aisle. Lena kills the headlamp, becomes
furniture.

A NIGHT CUSTODIAN pushes a cart past, humming off-key. Gone.

Progress: 38%... 41%...

INT. NOVA-ION - R&D CORRIDOR - LEVEL 12 - SAME

Frosted glass doors with PROJECT NAMES etched: PHALANX,
PERSEUS, ARGO (dark).

Card readers blink. JARED approaches ARGO, places his palm on
the glass.

The reader SINGS. The LOCKS DISENGAGE in a soft sequence like tumblers in a thousand-year safe.

INT. ARGO LAB — CONTINUOUS

Clinical cathedral. Tables with CRUCIFORM RIGS. A vertical CLOAK FRAME stands empty, cables coiled like veins. On one bench: a tray of MICROFILAMENT SPOOLS under a hood; they QUIVER at his presence.

Jared steps in. Every instrument TILTS microscopically toward him.

On the wall monitors: paused video frames — HUMAN SUBJECTS wearing early cloaks. Smearred smiles. EYES GONE GLASSY.

He touches a monitor. The footage rolls without a click.

VIDEO (V.O.)

— Subject H, minute eighteen —
language centers show attenuation—
empathy indices fall to baseline
noise—

A tech in the video removes a cloak. The subject HOWLS like something was torn out with it. In the lab, JARED flinches.

JARED

(low; to the air)
You took their soft parts and
called it progress.

A whisper — not language — ripples through the lab: the CAPES IN COLD STORAGE breathe under vacuum wrap.

ON JARED'S NECK: The filament clasp BRIGHTENS. ON-SCREEN
TIMER: 00:29:52 ... 00:29:53 ...

He sways. The world narrows to a pinhole; colors leach.

A RESEARCHER steps in from a side office — 50s, exhausted, white coat askew — DR. HAO LIN.

DR. LIN

Don't take another step.

Jared doesn't turn. He's listening to a frequency no one else hears.

DR. LIN (CONT'D)
 If your activation cycle passes
 thirty minutes without a purge, you
 won't... remember that you care about
 remembering.

Jared faces him. The human in his eyes returns for a breath.

JARED
 How do I... purge?

Dr. Lin watches the answer hurt.

DR. LIN
 Take it off. Sit in a cold room.
 Breathe. Forty minutes. Maybe more.

JARED
 It won't let me.

DR. LIN
 Then ask it. It's not a tool. It's
 a tide. You can beg a tide.

Jared studies him — the kind of man who apologized to
 machines when they worked too hard.

JARED
 You made this tide.

DR. LIN
 I warned them where it would flood.

Footfalls outside. SECURITY assembling.

Lin glances at the door. Makes a decision he'll never explain
 to HR.

DR. LIN (CONT'D)
 Server's on B4. Static-cold
 storage. Paper beats pixels. Take
 this.

He tosses a KEYCARD. Jared catches it without looking.

DR. LIN (CONT'D)
 You have... three minutes before you
 hate me again.

Jared nods once — respect given to a man who chose
 contrition.

He moves for the door; LIN stops him with a last needle.

DR. LIN (CONT'D)
 She almost pulled you back. On the
 stage. The anchorwoman.

JARED
 Stacy.

DR. LIN
 If you want to remember the parts
 you're losing... listen to her, not
 to us.

SECURITY (O.S.)
 (through door)
 Hands! Nova-Ion Security! Hands!

Jared PHASES through the glass wall like it's a mood. Alarms
 chew on the air.

Lin exhales. His hands shake. He sits. The cloak frames SHIFT
 an inch toward him, as if disappointed.

INT. NOVA-ION - ARCHIVE - SAME

LENA watches the progress hit 78%... 93%... 100%. She yanks the
 drive, pockets it, glides out-

-and stops. In the reflection of a polished wall, a BLUE
 COMET streaks down the atrium spine toward the basements.

Lena's breath fogs. She follows the comet into the stairwell.

INT. NOVA-ION - STAIR CORE - DESCENDING - INTERCUT

JARED drops past flights like a falling hymn, cape
 whispering. LENA races down the adjacent stairs, counting
 landings.

ON-SCREEN TIMER (JARED): 00:31:07 ... 00:31:08 ...

His hand trembles on the rail but doesn't touch.

INT. NOVA-ION - B4 COLD STORAGE - NIGHT

A room built for secrets - TAPE LIBRARIES, METAL DRAWERS labeled with acronyms. Air like winter.

KEYCARD READER blinks. Jared presents LIN'S CARD. The lock YIELDS.

He enters. The cape WILTS slightly in the cold, filaments retracting like sea anemones at low tide.

He breathes; the HUMAN COLOR seeps back a shade.

He moves to a cabinet marked ARGO / CL-K. Slides a drawer. FILE BOXES wrapped in antistatic bags.

He lifts one. The label: "AFFECT LOAD CURVES - HUMAN SUBJECTS A-H".

A presence at the door.

LENA (O.S.)

If you're about to burn that, give me five minutes.

Jared doesn't startle. He turns. LENA slips in, closes the door, teeth chattering.

They regard each other across the altar of a file drawer.

JARED

You shouldn't be here.

LENA

Neither should you.

She nods at his neck.

LENA (CONT'D)

Timer?

He almost smiles.

JARED

You read the manual.

LENA

You're bleeding blue. Sit down for two breaths.

He doesn't sit. He sets the file box on a table, opens it. PHOTOS, CHARTS, HAND-ANNOTATED PRINTS with terms: "Empathy Index," "Drift on Activation," "Attenuation Pulse." Faces of test subjects with dots for eyes.

Lena lifts her phone, snaps, fast and methodical.

JARED watches her like a study in a museum: the last human act unaffected.

LENA (CONT'D)

You want people to see what you see. Let them see this.

JARED

They'll call it fake.

LENA

They'll call it whatever their team captain says. But the truth gets bored of being buried.

He tilts his head, filing the line under Things Worth Stealing.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH. Distant at first. Then the ELEVATOR CHIME outside the cold room.

Lena moves to the TAPE LIBRARY. Pulls two cartridges: ARGO-VID-I and ARGO-VID-II. Shoves them into her bag.

JARED

Give me one.

LENA

You'll edit it.

JARED

So will your boss.

She weighs that. Splits the difference — hands him ARGO-VID-II.

LENA

We publish in parallel. If you cut a manifesto, I cut you.

JARED

You can try.

The DOOR HANDLE turns. SECURITY keys in.

LENA (fast) You can phase through. I can't.

He hesitates. The cape PULLS up and away like a jealous animal.

LENA

Help me or I print your face over
the words "coward's cape."

Something cracks – in him, not the door.

JARED

Stay close.

The door SWINGS. Two guards in. Guns up.

GUARD #1

Hands–

The AIR GOES THICK. The guards' arms sag like they suddenly weigh fifty pounds.

Jared steps forward and TAKES LENA'S HAND. The cape BLOOMS around them both. For a breath, FILAMENTS taste her wrist – recoil, then TOLERATE.

JARED

Don't breathe for a second.

He walks THROUGH THE WALL with her. The world becomes COLD WATER and STATIC.

INT. SERVICE CORRIDOR – CONTINUOUS

They EMERGE on the other side, both gasping. Lena doubles over, LAUGHS once– manic, alive.

LENA

You... are a horrible elevator.

JARED

You're heavy with proof.

Alarms rip down the corridor. RED STROBES paint them like devils. ON-TIMER: 00:34:49 ... 00:34:50 ...

Jared staggers. The blue light in his veins FADES, then FLARES.

LENA clocks it.

LENA

Cold room. You need another purge.

JARED

No time.

From far end: ARMORED DOOR slams open. Guards fan.

Lena grabs his wrist – shockingly human.

LENA

Then listen to Stacy in your head
and live long enough to let me save
you with a story.

His breath hits like dry ice in his lungs.

He LIFTS – an inch, two – then SETTLES.

JARED

Go.

LENA

You can carry me again.

JARED

I don't trust what I am after
minute thirty-five.

The admission lands like a confession to a priest who doesn't judge.

Footsteps close. They run – LENA sprinting, JARED walking faster than physics.

INT. NOVA-ION - LOBBY - SAME

STACY still at the desk with the captain, now doing the world's friendliest filibuster.

STACY

– and the ethics of emergency
intervention are fascinating,
actually, because–

The SERVICE DOOR pops. LENA stumbles out, clutching her bag, eyes wide. She sees Stacy.

LENA

Got it.

Stacy's face changes – reporter to field general.

STACY

Go. I'll be right behind you.

She turns to the captain, voice bright–

STACY (CONT'D)

Do you validate parking for truth?

—then MULE-KICKS the metal detector, which SCREECHES sideways, blocking two guards racing from the hall.

Lena bolts into the rain.

INT. NOVA-ION - STAIR CORE - SAME

JARED leans against a pillar, shaking. He looks up the shaft. The building hums a lullaby of ELECTRIC TRUSTS and LEGAL EXCUSES.

ON-TIMER: 00:36:12 ... 00:36:13 ...

He presses his palms to his eyes. The cape whispers: STAY. FEED. FIX.

A voice slips through the static — STACY, from the town hall, in memory:

STACY (MEMORY V.O.)

Tell it no.

JARED

No.

The clasp SCALDS his throat. He hisses, peels ONE FILAMENT free with trembling fingers. It WRITHES, resisting, then LOOSENS a millimeter.

A SHOUT. Guards at the landing above. MUZZLES peer.

GUARD (MEGAPHONE)

On your knees!

Jared lowers his hands. The blue in his veins fades to ASH.

He KNEELS.

The guards freeze — they didn't expect that obedience to hurt.

GUARD swallows, steps down a tread.

JARED looks up, eyes rimmed in raw red, the god gone, the man wrecked.

JARED

Bring me a cold room.

The guard doesn't move.

JARED (CONT'D)
 (hoarse)
 Or pull the trigger and make me
 perfect forever.

They don't. The human error called hope walks down the stairs
 with them.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE NOVA-ION - SAME

LENA sprints across traffic. STACY bursts out of the
 revolving door behind her, both women LAUGHING the laugh you
 only earn by not dying.

They pile into Stacy's car. Doors slam. Engine growls.

STACY
 Please tell me you have the
 monster's diary.

LENA
 We have its baby photos and its
 feeding schedule.

She holds up the drive and tapes. Stacy's hands shake as she
 pulls into traffic.

STACY
 Where?

LENA
 Ledger. Redundant copies, then
 publish. You call your stream. I
 call the lawyer.

Stacy guns it. The tower recedes, a glass throat swallowing
 sirens.

INT. NOVA-ION - TEMP HOLD ROOM - LATER

Fluorescent chill. No furniture, just CINDERBLOCK and a
 drain. JARED sits on the floor, back to wall. The cape hangs
 loose, DIM, like a storm run out of thunder.

A wall clock ticks. ON-TIMER SUPER fades, replaced by the
 real SECOND HAND moving.

He breathes. In. Out. In. Out.

DR. LIN stands in the doorway with two SECURITY OFFICERS, not quite permitted but not forbidden.

DR. LIN
Thirty minutes. Then you can decide
to be a person again.

Jared nods, eyes on the clock.

He's very, very quiet. The kind of quiet that hurts to watch.

DR. LIN (CONT'D)
(soft)
What's your name?

A beat.

JARED
...Jared.

It sounds like a child learned the word.

Lin nods once and leaves him to regain altitude without flying.

The door shuts. The clock obeys itself.

HOLD ON JARED as the blue in his veins dims to human. For now.

EXT. ROCKPORT LEDGER — NIGHT

Stacy's car screeches to the curb. LENA jumps out with the bag; KENT meets her at the door, reading panic and purpose on her face.

KENT
Tell me you didn't bring a felony
into my building.

LENA
I brought a vaccine.

They disappear inside.

Across the street, a TEEN IN A CHEAP BLUE CAPE watches them go, conflicted. He unties the cape. Shoves it in a trash can.

The wind FISHES it back out. It flutters into the night like a moth that only eats loneliness.

SMASH TO BLACK.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

A storm of keyboards and breath. Coffee rings like crop circles on desks. On a wall TV: local news loop of the town-hall chaos with pundits chewing.

LENA BRANT threads through desks carrying a drive and two LTO tapes like organs in a cooler. KENT (editor), AYA (fact-check), RIZZO (legal counsel), cluster at her station.

LENA

We have lab logs, incident reports, tape labels, and Nova-Ion's bankruptcy filings linking "Project ARGO CLOAK" to a defense licensor. The documents show "affect attenuation." That's not poetic. It's literal.

She drops PRINTOUTS: charts titled EMPATHY INDEX / DRIFT OVER TIME; photos of test subjects with dead, shining eyes.

AYA

I can verify chain-of-custody on the court filings. The lab stuff?

LENA

Hand-annotated, internal numbering matches the docket references. Custodial metadata says 2024-2025.

RIZZO (LEGAL)

Chain for the lab docs is soft. If we publish, Nova-Ion files a TRO by sunrise. "Stolen trade secrets," "reckless endangerment," pick your poison.

KENT

TRO we can fight. Prior restraint is an ugly look for them.

RIZZO

Only if the judge cares about looks.

Lena plugs in the drive.

ON MONITOR: folder tree opens – ARGOLOGS, AFFECTCURVES, SUBJECT_VIDS (empty – she handed one tape to Jared).

AYA
Where's the video?

LENA
On tape. And with him.

Silence prickles.

KENT
You shared with the unstable god?

LENA
Parallel publication. He wants control. We want truth. May the better edit win.

RIZZO
Or the one with fewer subpoenas.

KENT
We publish text and stills now. If the video lands later, we update.

He looks to Rizzo. Rizzo grimaces, then nods.

RIZZO
No adjectives like "soul-eating." Stick to their terms. "Affect attenuation," "behavioral drift." Quote the charts to hang them with their own rope. And blur faces.

KENT
Run it.

AYA
On it.

Aya's fingers become a drumline.

INT. NOVA-ION – BOARDROOM – SAME

A glacier in conference-table form. CEO CORINNE PRAGUE (50s, ice-true), GENERAL COUNSEL HARKER, PR CHIEF VIV, SECURITY DIRECTOR SLOANE. A double wall of screens shows town-hall clips, Ledger site, and stock tickers threatening red.

PRAGUE

How bad?

VIV (PR)

Turn on any channel and pick your favorite apocalypse. The Ledger is on the runway. Their social editor just primed a "read before the injunction" tweet.

HARKER (COUNSEL)

We can file TROs in two jurisdictions. Also hit their host with DMCA on the images— the lab photos are our IP.

PRAGUE

(eyes Sloane)

Containment?

SLOANE (SECURITY)

We have the subject — "Jared" — in a temp hold per Dr. Lin's protocol. Cooling. We'll transfer him to Fort Stocker in the morning under DoD liaison.

PRAGUE

Dr. Lin?

SLOANE

In the lab. He facilitated subject access to B4. We'll address that internally.

Prague's jaw moves once, then stills.

PRAGUE

Address it externally. Make it so no one wonders whether he did anything heroic.

Sloane nods like he just received a grocery list.

VIV

Our statement?

PRAGUE

We express concern, deny wrongdoing, and announce a "public-private task force" on metahuman safety. Invite Stacy Vale to co-chair. She loves chairs.

HARKER
And the Ledger?

PRAGUE
Crush them in court while you smile
on camera.

Viv's phone buzzes. She reads a notification grimly.

VIV
They just posted the hed: "THE BLUE
CAPE WAS BUILT TO EAT YOU."

Prague stares a hole through the glass.

PRAGUE
Then let's feed it something.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - NEWSROOM - LATER

AYA hits PUBLISH. The newsroom holds its breath.

ON LENA'S SCREEN: the article goes live: AFFECT ATTENUATION:
HOW NOVA-ION'S CLOAK PROJECT KILLS WHAT MAKES YOU HUMAN.

Graphs slide in with little dignity. Footnotes heavy as
anchors.

KENT
Send to partners. Mirror copies on
every friendly server. Rizzo, pray
to your favorite judge.

RIZZO (already dialing) I only pray to service of process.

Lena watches the LIVE COUNTER climb like a fever.

Her phone VIBRATES. An unknown number. She answers.

LENA
Brant.

DR. LIN (V.O.)
(whisper)
Thank you for telling the part I
couldn't.

Lena blinks. Relief and warning collide.

LENA
Dr. Lin, where are you?

DR. LIN (V.O.)

In a room where the clock is honest. They'll move me soon- I don't think it's to another room.

Static. A breath.

DR. LIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The clasp responds to contradiction. If he says out loud what he refuses, it loosens. Make him say "no" to the cape, not to you.

LENA

(typing as he speaks)
Say no to the cape, yes to-

The line CLICKS dead.

LENA (CONT'D)

Dr. Lin? Dr. Lin-

She looks at Kent. He reads her face.

KENT

Go.

Lena grabs her coat, recorder, pepper spray she's never used.

INT. NOVA-ION - TEMP HOLD CORRIDOR - SAME

A blue-lit hallway like a vein. DR. LIN stands with SLOANE and two SECURITY OFFICERS outside the TEMP HOLD door.

Inside, JARED sits, breathing with the wall clock. The cape hangs slack - manageable, not gone.

SLOANE

Doctor, you should be home.

DR. LIN

I should have been a teacher.

SLOANE

We all should have been something gentler.

Sloane's smile is condescending paternal. He hands Lin a CLIPBOARD.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
Sign off on transfer.

Lin skims the form. The DESTINATION line reads: FS-12 / BIOCONTAINMENT. No visiting counsel. No independent medical.

Lin's jaw tightens.

DR. LIN
He needs care, not containment.

SLOANE
(pleasant)
He needs whatever keeps the city from burning down.

DR. LIN
Your city burns whether he's here or not.

Sloane's eyes cool.

SLOANE
Doctor— we're done asking nicely.

He gestures. The officers move to the door.

DR. LIN
(to Sloane)
If you move him now, you reset his drift. He won't come back.

SLOANE
Then he'll be easier to aim.

Lin looks at the door. Makes a decision.

He STEPS BETWEEN the officers and the lock.

DR. LIN
Then you'll move me first.

Beat. Sloane's face becomes a coin: one side bland, the other — nothing.

SLOANE
Of course.

He takes a half-step closer, almost intimate.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
You signed the NDA, Doctor. You forfeited your illusions.

The nearest officer SHOVES Lin against the wall. Lin's head CLACKS off cinderblock. He slumps but stays upright.

DR. LIN
(through blood)
You don't have to—

The second officer's hand goes to Lin's NECK with clinical pressure. Lin's eyes flutter. His lips move around a word that might be "No."

Inside the room, JARED hears something that isn't voice — A THIN BLUE CHIME.

He STANDS. The cape STIRS.

SLOANE (O.S.)
(open channel to intercom)
Subject transfer. Now.

Jared steps to the door. Places a palm on steel. The PAINT BLISTERS under his hand like frostbitten skin.

INT. STAIRWELL — SAME

LENA climbs, breath fogging. She passes a floor where ALARM LIGHTS pulse. Her phone buzzes with push alerts:

— Ledger story trending #2. — Nova-Ion files motion for TRO.
— Blue Angel sighting at Nova-Ion (unconfirmed).

She keeps moving.

INT. NOVA-ION — TEMP HOLD — CONTINUOUS

JARED closes his eyes.

JARED
(soft; to the thing)
No.

The CLASP bites. He gasps.

JARED (CONT'D)
No.

The filament loosens a FRACTION.

Outside, Sloane hears the whisper under the door. He nods to an officer. The officer swipes a badge.

The lock CHUNKS.

Jared opens his eyes. BLUE like an eclipse's edge. The door begins to open— then STOPS.

A HAND holds it: DR. LIN'S, fingers whitening. He looks at Jared through the gap, blood on his temple, a terrible clarity in his eyes.

DR. LIN
Say it again.

JARED
No.

The clasp UNCOILS another hair.

Sloane steps into view behind Lin, face soft with pretend regret.

SLOANE
Doctor. Move.

DR. LIN
(to Jared)
Remember your name.

SLOANE
(whisper)
Remember mine.

A QUICK WRIST movement. A STINGER touches Lin's side. He JERKS, a small sound like a question, and FOLDS.

He hits the floor. STILL.

Silence so loud it's a scream.

Inside the room, Jared doesn't breathe.

Then he does— in a SOUNDLESS INHALE that pulls heat out of the air.

The CAPE wakes like a wolf smelling blood.

JARED lifts his hand. The CLOCK on the wall STOPS at 00:39:59.

SLOANE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Open it.

The door RIPS inward like paper. The two officers are YANKED off their feet – WHAM into opposite walls – crumple.

SLOANE raises a weapon. It BENDS.

He looks up into JARED stepping through the threshold, eyes now SUN-BRIGHT BLUE.

JARED
(voice from a deeper room)
You killed the only man who told
the truth.

Sloane smiles, the last reflex of a professional liar.

SLOANE
He was confused. We helped.

JARED
I was confused. Now I'm edited.

He FLICKS Sloane into the ceiling. A CRACK – plaster snow. Sloane drops, groans, alive, wrong.

Jared kneels by DR. LIN. Touches his throat. Nothing.

He places a hand on Lin's chest. A BLUE PULSE flows from his palm – JOLTS the body. Once. Twice. A third time–

Nothing.

Jared's face does not change. The change is too big to show.

He LIFTS Lin with shocking tenderness and lays him flat, aligns his hands, closes his eyes.

JARED (CONT'D)
(whisper)
Thank you for saying my name.

A shadow in the doorway: LENA, frozen at the sight – guards groaning, wall buckled, Jared kneeling over a corpse.

He looks up. Human recognition FIRES once more.

JARED (CONT'D)
They killed him.

Lena swallows. Somehow, she makes herself press RECORD.

LENA
Who is "they," Jared?

JARED
People in costumes.

He stands. The cape UNFURLS like a courtroom flag.

LENA
If you leave now, they'll write him
as collateral damage from your
tantrum.

He stops. Breathes.

LENA (CONT'D)
Stay. Tell the camera what
happened. Make it theirs.

He looks at the lens. Somewhere, a human neuron tries to fire
over a flooded synapse.

JARED
(soft)
He said I could beg a tide.

Blue light WASHES the corridor. Sprinklers HISS. Boots
THUNDER in the stairwell.

Jared lifts a hand. CAMERAS in the corners TURN toward
Sloane, toward the downed guards, toward Lin.

JARED (CONT'D)
(to the building)
Look.

The cameras obey. Every lens frames the same truth.

SECURITY VOICE (P.A.)
Subject loose on B3. Lockdown. Lock
- kkkkzz-

Static devours the command.

LENA steps close to Lin, throat tight.

LENA
Dr. Lin, this is Lena Brant. On the
record: Nova-Ion killed you to hide
their tide.

She films her own shaking hand as she reaches to Lin, touches
the back of his cold fingers. She leaves that part in the
frame on purpose.

JARED watches the act - small, unpowered, absolute.

His voice is flat.

JARED
Issue Two, page three.

LENA
Jared—

He's GONE — a BLUE SHOCKWAVE down the corridor that slams doors sidelong, blows paper into snow.

Lena grabs her phone, pivots to SLOANE groaning on the floor.

LENA (to camera) Name and title.

Sloane coughs red.

SLOANE
You... are trespassing.

LENA
Name and title.

SLOANE
Sloane. Director of Security.

LENA
Did you order force used on Dr.
Lin?

SLOANE
I ordered compliance.

LENA
Did you strike him?

Sloane stares through her.

SLOANE
We escorted him. He fell.

Lena lifts the phone higher — shows ceiling dent, stinger, Lin's body.

LENA
On the record, Nova-Ion's security
"escorted" a whistleblower into the
ground.
(to herself, quiet)
I was there.

Guards SHOUT from the stairwell. Lena pockets the phone, steps back, memorizes the constellation of blood and plaster.

Then she runs.

EXT. ROCKPORT — NIGHT

Rain returns like a verdict.

MONTAGE — FALLOUT (NO MUSIC, ONLY RAIN):

— The Ledger headline updates: "NOVA-ION WHISTLEBLOWER DEAD DURING 'TRANSFER'." — TRO filings hit the docket; a judge's ORDER denies prior restraint; the DMCA counter-notices fly. — Stacy's livestream: calm, furious, surgically precise: "Say the words, Jared: NO to the cape. YES to us." — A candlelight vigil forms outside the convention center, LARP swords as makeshift crosses.

MONTAGE — FALLOUT (NO MUSIC, ONLY RAIN):

— A blue towel cape hangs from a street sign, rain beating it until it looks like a bruise. — Piper, the cop from the bar, staring at his cast, watching the vigil on TV, a decision growing on his face like mold.

INT. JARED'S APARTMENT — LATER

Dark. The cape GLOWS in a slow heartbeat. JARED sits on the floor with ARGO-VID-II in his lap — the tape Lin enabled him to take.

He threads an ancient VCR, cables into a monitor.

ON SCREEN (TAPE): Dr. Lin, months earlier, hair less grey, speaking to camera.

DR. LIN (ON TAPE)

If you're seeing this, we failed at ethical containment. The cloak amplifies agency while deleting compassion. It makes gods who cannot cry. Don't give it to true believers. Give it to people in love.

Jared's face is immobile. His eyes shine blue, then not.

DR. LIN (ON TAPE) (CONT'D)
 If you are wearing it now— say the
 word “no” aloud. Even if you can't
 mean it. Practice the sound.

Jared's lips part. The word sits there, whole and heavy.

JARED
 ...No.

The clasp RELENTS a hair. A breath returns he didn't know he
 lost.

His phone lights. A new LENA
 ARTICLE: “HE SAID MY NAME: DR. LIN
 AND THE TIDE.” Below it, a CLIP —
 shaky, real — Sloane naming
 himself; the camera panning to Lin
 on the floor; Lena's hand in frame.

Comments already a war.

Jared stares.

JARED (CONT'D)
 (quiet)
 Issue Three.

Lightning FORKS outside. The cape pulses like a living
 warning.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER - NEWSROOM - MORNING

Phones ring like fire alarms. Screens bloom with maps,
 timelines, document viewers.

LENA BRANT stands at a whiteboard splattered with names and
 arrows: NOVA-ION in the center, spokes to ASTRA-STAGE, DoD
 liaison, City Contracts, SLOANE, PRAGUE.

STACY VALE moves with a mic pack and a laptop, live-stream
 window up, chat scrolling like falling snow.

KENT points as he talks.

KENT

We're doing a rolling drop, every two hours: logs, charts, Lin's protocol notes, procurement emails. Rizzo, sue-proof the hed lines.

RIZZO (LEGAL)

No "murder," only "death during transfer." Stick to verifiable verbs.

AYA (FACT-CHECK)

(raising a hand)

And we have a whistle note about "FS-12." Some kind of off-books biocontainment.

LENA

(underlining)

Find it. If it's not on a map, someone's paying for it to be invisible.

Stacy's phone BUZZES. She glances, grim.

STACY

Mayor doing a unity presser at noon. "Calm the city."

KENT

We'll carry it. We're a newspaper, not a bunker.

LENA

We're both.

She scrawls on the board: NOON-MAYOR / 2PM-DROP #3.

INT. NOVA-ION - WAR ROOM - SAME

Glass table, glass faces. CEO PRAGUE, SLOANE (neck braced), HARKER (legal), VIV (PR), a DOD LIAISON in camouflage polite.

VIV

Ledger's rolling us. Every two hours, another cut.

HARKER

We've filed in chancery and federal. TRO hearing at 1:30.

(MORE)

HARKER (CONT'D)

I'll ask for sealed exhibits; argue public safety.

DOD LIAISON

Public safety would be improved by removing Subject H from the city immediately.

PRAGUE

Do that, and the headline becomes "military disappears civilian." We manage optics and outcomes.

She turns to Sloane.

PRAGUE (CONT'D)

The mayor's presser— is our message in it?

SLOANE

"Task force," "cooperation," "zero tolerance for vigilantism." His comms owe us three favors.

PRAGUE

Good. Keep him upright.

A quiet HUM under the table. Everyone pauses.

PRAGUE (CONT'D)

What is that?

Sloane doesn't hear it. That's the problem.

INT. TEMP HOLD - NOVA-ION - SAME

Cinderblock room. The CLOCK ticks. JARED kneels, eyes closed. The CAPE hangs deactivated— not dead, not pleased.

He whispers like he's learning to pray.

JARED

No.

The clasp loosens— CLICK... CLICK.

His chest shakes. Something like a sob threatens. Doesn't land.

He stands, legs jelly. Touches the wall— leaves a HUMAN handprint, not blue.

SLOANE (O.S.)
 (over intercom)
 Subject, stand by for medical.
 You'll be moved quietly.

Jared looks at the intercom like it's a liar with good diction.

JARED
 No.

CLASP slackens more. He exhales— half relief, half grief.

An AIR DUCT HUM deepens— a mosquito whine that sets teeth on edge. The cape TWITCHES toward it.

Jared frowns. Steps beneath the vent.

From inside: a WHIRR not like fans; like wings.

JARED (CONT'D)
 (soft)
 What did you feed the building?

INT. CITY HALL - PRESS ROOM - NOON

Folded flags. Podium with seal. MAYOR HAL WHITFORD (60s, affable, permanently campaigning) steps up, CHIEF OF POLICE, FIRE COMMISSIONER behind him.

MEDIA jam the room— local, national, internet. STACY stands front row, streaming; LENA beside her, taking notes.

MAYOR WHITFORD
 My fellow Rockporters— we are a proud city. We will not be intimidated by vigilantes or corporations—

Applause. Cameras SHUTTER. The mayor checks teleprompter, continues.

MAYOR WHITFORD (CONT'D)
 We are creating a Metahuman Safety Task Force to coordinate with Nova-Ion, state, and federal partners—

A ripple of boo/cheer. Stacy lifts her mic.

STACY

Mayor, will the task force include independent scientists? And will it subpoena Nova-Ion?

MAYOR WHITFORD

We will use all lawful means to—

He stops. Blinks. Clears his throat. Rubs his ear.

CHIEF (whisper) Sir?

The MIC picks up a thin BUZZ. People wince, reach for ears.

LENA freezes. She knows the sound.

INT. TEMP HOLD - NOVA-ION - SAME

The duct VIBRATES. Jared squints up. Something skitters behind the grille.

He steps onto the cot. RIPS the grille with newly human hands — it's harder— he strains— METAL SQUEALS— the grille comes free.

Inside: a PALM-SIZED DRONE, beetle-shaped, blue LEDs like a parody of grace. A CORPORATE SERIAL etched on its carapace: N-ION // VCAP-MK3.

JARED

You built a counterfeit angel.

The drone JERKS, senses him, wings a blur, bolts— WHIP down the duct.

Jared looks to the door. Locked. He looks at the vent. A choice between lungs and arteries.

He CLIMBS.

INT. CITY HALL - PRESS ROOM - SAME

The BUZZ climbs a register. The Mayor grips the podium, grimacing.

MAYOR WHITFORD

If individuals want to be heroes— they can start by—

A BLUE BOLT lances down from the CEILING VENT— not lightning— a TINY DRONE that moves like a conspiracy.

It slams the podium MIC— SPARKS— jumps to the MAYOR'S LAPEL, magnetizing, a FLASH like a welding arc.

The Mayor SEIZES. Gasps. Eyes roll. He collapses sideways in SLOW HORROR.

SCREAMS. Pandemonium. SECURITY lunges; the drone ZIPS up, ricochets off cameras, vanishes into a vent with a rodent's arrogance.

STACY keeps her phone steady like a soldier.

STACY
(on stream, voice iron)
Stay down. Make a corridor. Medics
now.

LENA snaps stills— hands trembling— then RUNS toward the dais.

The Mayor's aides kneel; the FIRE COMMISSIONER starts compressions.

CHIEF glances up at the VENTS. Eyes go predator.

CHIEF
(shouting)
Shut air! Shut the goddamn air!

INT. NOVA-ION - DUCTS - SAME

JARED crawls metal, cape snagging, knees scraping. The blue in him is FALTERING— human hurts arrive: heat, tightness, panic.

Ahead: the BEETLE DRONE scuttles, then LEAPS into a vertical shaft. Jared lunges— fingers GRAZE a rear foot— SIZZLE— he recoils.

He looks up the shaft— a ladder of grilles, each one a window into rooms below.

Snatches: a SERVER ROOM humming like a beehive; a CUBICLE FARM empty except for a cleaning crew; a GLASS CONFERENCE where PRAGUE speaks into a muted phone, calm as anesthesia.

Jared's jaw clenches. He starts CLIMBING.

INT. CITY HALL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

EMTs batter through. The MAYOR is wheeled past, face grey. A staffer sobs. The CHIEF barks orders into two radios.

REPORTERS swarm; STACY angles her lens toward the vent.

STACY
(into stream)
That was not him. That was not
human. That was hardware.

COMMENT FLOOD: "He killed the Mayor." "Blue saved us." "False flag." "Nova drone." "Deep state."

LENA grabs the CHIEF.

LENA
That was a weaponized mini-drone.
Check the HVAC logs. The building
didn't do this alone.

CHIEF
(eyes hard)
Write it down, Ms. Brant. I'll read
it at your funeral.

He charges off.

Stacy breathes, fights the urge to cry.

STACY
(to her viewers)
If you loved the Mayor, grieve. If
you hated him, grieve anyway. Don't
let a robot pick your side.

INT. NOVA-ION - R&D - GLASS WALK - SAME

A suspended catwalk over a void. JARED explodes from a ceiling panel, rolls, comes up fighting air.

Across the glass on a parallel walk: SLOANE with two TACTICALS.

Sloane clocks Jared's state: less blue, more human. He smiles like a hunter who's read the weather.

SLOANE
You're off-cycle. You'll fall.

Jared steps forward. The catwalk VIBRATES threateningly.

JARED
You sent toys to kill a mouthpiece.

SLOANE
We sent nothing. You did.

Jared blinks— a cold fact clicks: the frame-up accelerating.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
When gods vanish, the story writes
itself. We only tidy the edges.

He nods. The tacticals raise rifles—

JARED THROWS his weight into the handrail. GLASS SHRIEKS. A section GIVES— he DROPS— cape SNARES a crossbeam— he pendulums, slams a window— SPIDERWEB CRACKS bloom.

He dangles over neon space, human muscles screaming.

Sloane peers down, amused and wary.

SLOANE (CONT'D)
You chose a cape because you were
tired of falling. The city chose
you because it loves a drop.

The tacticals fire BEANBAGS. One hits Jared's ribs— OHH—
breath torn out.

The CLASP senses distress— TIGHTENS— blue starts LEAKING back
into his veins.

Jared's face goes COLD.

JARED
No.

The clasp FIGHTS. The beam GROANS.

He SWINGS, uses the momentum, kicks a panel— BURSTS through
into—

INT. NOVA-ION - MEDIA STORAGE - CONTINUOUS

Dark racks, blinking lights, the smell of ozone and dust. He collapses, sucking air.

On a shelf: ARCHIVE DRIVES. He yanks one. Label: VCAP OPS - CITY HALL DEMO.

He stares. Even Sloane labels evidence badly.

JARED

You recorded the bullet.

The door BLASTS inward. Tacticals pour. He raises a hand—CAMERAS in the ceiling pivot toward the doorway like hounds.

JARED (CONT'D)

Look.

He crushes the ARCHIVE DRIVE in his palms— SPARKS— molten plastic drips. He hurls the slag into the tacticals' path— they STUMBLE.

Jared bolts through a back door.

EXT. ROCKPORT - VARIOUS - AFTERNOON

MONTAGE - CITY UNRAVELS (FAST CUTS, GROWING SOUND):
 - BREAKING NEWS banners: MAYOR SUFFERS CARDIAC EVENT; DRONE INCIDENT SUSPECTED. - HASHTAGS at war: #BlueKilledHim vs #DroneDidIt vs #FalseFlagMayor. - BLUE-CAPE KIDS march with cardboard signs; COUNTER-PROTESTERS scream; bottles fly. - COUNCILMAN ROYCE on live feed, sweating, resigning without saying the word. - SERGEANT PIPER removes his badge, sets it on a bar, walks out into rain. - VIGIL outside City Hall; flowers drown in runoff.

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU ANTE-ROOM - SAME

GLASS DOOR. MAYOR WHITFORD LIES TUBED; A MONITOR DOES WHAT A HEART CAN'T.

STACY INTERVIEWS THE FIRE COMMISSIONER, VOICE LOW.

STACY
Cause of collapse?

FIRE COMMISSIONER
Electrical stun, localized. Like
someone hit him with a
defibrillator set to "malicious."

STACY
Drone?

FIRE COMMISSIONER
I'm a fireman. I only know when
something's burning.

He walks away. Stacy stares through glass, jaw set.

HER PHONE PINGS. LENA: "WE GOT ONE MORE TAPE OFF B4.
UPLOADING NOW."

STACY EXHALES, HITS GO LIVE AGAIN, EYES WET AND UNBROKEN.

STACY (to stream)

If you can hear me, hear this: a machine hurt a man today,
and a myth took the blame. Don't feed the myth. Feed the
truth.

INT. LEDGER - SERVER ROOM - SAME

LENA and AYA flank a rack, fans whining. A progress bar
chews.

AYA
If they win the TRO, this goes
dark.

LENA
Mirror to three friendly
universities. And my mother's
knitting blog.

AYA
Your mom knits?

LENA

Badly. But she pays hosting on
time.

They share a tiny laugh that keeps people from breaking.

UPLOAD COMPLETE pings.

INT. NOVA-ION - PARKING SUBLEVEL - LATE AFTERNOON

Concrete cathedral, echoing. SLOANE limps toward an armored
SUV, phone to ear.

SLOANE

Yes, procure more units. The VCAPs
sell themselves now. No, not here—
offsite. I don't need the Ledger
filming the invoice.

He clicks off. A SHADOW detaches from a pillar: SERGEANT
PIPER, in plain clothes, eyes raw.

PIPER

You did the mayor.

Sloane doesn't flinch. He reads men, writes endings.

SLOANE

You'll need a better noun.

Piper steps closer.

PIPER

I'm done being somebody's costume.

Sloane smiles like a bruise.

SLOANE

Then take off the uniform in your
head.

He gets into the SUV. Door thunks. Gone.

Piper stands alone in the echo— a man trying to find a third
option between quitting and exploding.

INT. TEMP HOLD - NOVA-ION - EVENING

The CLOCK says 7:12. JARED sits cross-legged, cape DIM.

He tries the word again.

JARED

No.

Clasp loosens. Almost free.

An intercom CHIRPS. PRAGUE'S VOICE fills the cell, warm like a poisoned blanket.

PRAGUE (V.O.)

Mr. Miller. You're being released.

Jared stands, wary.

PRAGUE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Nova-Ion regrets your distress. We acknowledge your civic concerns. We believe you'll do the right thing.

The lock TURNS. Door opens on an empty hall.

Jared steps out.

The hall LIGHTS guide him like runway markers.

PRAGUE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We're done making gods. We're making partners. Let's write the end together.

Jared's jaw clenches. He walks.

EXT. NOVA-ION - FRONT STEPS - DUSK

MEDIA, PROTESTERS, COPS. The doors open. JARED emerges— not floating, just walking, cape low, eyes tired.

A hundred lenses catch him; a hundred throats inhale.

REPORTER

Did you kill the mayor?

JARED

No.

The word is newly heavy. The CLASP slackens another notch.

REPORTER #2
Did Nova-Ion build the drone?

JARED
Yes.

Gasps, curses, cheers. Cops tighten the line; Sloane watches from high glass, counting risks.

Jared looks up at the LEDGER building two blocks away. He can almost see LENA at a window, typing the city together.

He steps down into the crowd. Hands reach— some to touch, some to grab.

A FISTFIGHT breaks ten feet to his right— BLUE CAPES vs NO CAPES— a bottle arcs— SHATTERS— screams—

POLICE LOUDHAILER
Disperse! Disperse now!

Jared lifts his hands.

JARED
Stop.

The RIOT ENERGY hitches— half a second— then REDOUBLES.

He can BEND BULLETS, but not PEOPLE. Not like this. Not anymore.

He lowers his hands. Steps backward. The cape swells, wanting to fix with force.

JARED (CONT'D)
No.

He LAUNCHES— not triumphant— RETREAT— a blue blur into dusk.

Phones lift to catch him. He is content whether he wants it or not.

INT. LEDGER - BULLPEN - NIGHT

The TRO hearing ZOOMS on a screen; JUDGE frowns; HARKER argues; RIZZO counters with calm surgical law.

KENT watches two screens: the hearing and Stacy's live, where she explains the VCAP OPS - CITY HALL DEMO file now mirrored on twenty servers. Comments war in all caps.

LENA returns to her desk, breathless, eyes fiery.

KENT
You okay?

LENA
No. Good.

She sits. Types. Headline chunked, clean: "DRONE, NOT DEMIGOD."

A PUSH ALERT pops:

MAYOR WHITFORD DEAD — HOSPITAL CONFIRMS.

The newsroom GOES STILL. A collective, involuntary exhale.

Stacy's voice comes from a speaker, steady, gutted.

STACY (V.O.)
We just lost a flawed man who tried to do a civic thing. We don't honor him with a war. We honor him with a better city.

Lena nods to no one— and keeps typing.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT (LATER)

MONTAGE — CRISIS TIPS (FAST, RELENTLESS):
— MOURNERS mass at City Hall; chants fracture into arguments; candles become torches. — BLUE-CAPE VIGILANTES confront MASKED COUNTER-GROUPS; fists, flags, batons. — NOV A- I O N's sign flickers; a brick shatters glass; Sloane's men form a line. — SERGEANT PIPER stands between two groups in a back street, arms out, screaming himself hoarse, alone, choosing to be a human shield. — A DRONE SHOT of Rockport: sirens like arteries, blue pulses like fault lines.

EXT. ROCKPORT WATER TOWER — NIGHT

High above it all, JARED perches on a catwalk, cape DARK, city a broken circuit below.

He watches the lines of flashing light, the pockets of movement.

He looks at his hands. They're shaking.

He whispers to the wind, to the cape, to Dr. Lin, to a boy in a Superman shirt.

JARED

Issue Three. The Legend.

He closes his eyes.

FADE OUT.

EXT. ROCKPORT — NIGHT

Sirens plait the dark. Helicopters paw the clouds. A hundred little fires paint the city like a rash.

MONTAGE — THE CITY DECIDES (FAST CUTS):

— CANDLELIGHT VIGIL fractures into a brawl when a kid in a blue cape shouts down a preacher. — NEWS TICKERS: NOVA-ION DRONE FILES LEAKED / TRO DENIED / MAYOR DEAD / CURFEW CONSIDERED. — HANDMADE POSTERS: "DRONES, NOT DEMIGODS" beside "ANGEL, SAVE US." — SERGEANT PIPER, now in plain clothes, stands between two crowds, arms out, absorbing insults meant for institutions he left.

INT. ROCKPORT LEDGER — BULLPEN — NIGHT

A flurry of pages, cords, coffee. LENA BRANT types while AYA mirrors servers and KENT barks triage.

STACY VALE, hair tied back, eyes exhausted, stands at a rolling camera by a whiteboard: TRUTHPLAN.

STACY

On the twos, we drop: procurement emails, the VCAP ops deck, and Lin's "don't give it to true believers." Keep the language clean. No mythology.

KENT

We can't stop mythology. We can only outrun it.

AYA

DDoS spikes incoming. Someone wants the servers to nap.

KENT

Let them try. We mirror to the knitting blog.

Stacy's phone buzzes: UNKNOWN → "Stop. Meet me. Rooftop above City Hall annex. 20 minutes."

STACY stares at the text. It feels like a depth charge.

STACY

He wants to talk.

LENA

Or someone wants your body as a headline.

STACY

Either way, the camera comes.

Lena nods – pulls a small body recorder from her drawer, presses it into Stacy's palm.

LENA

Turn it on before you say hello. If I lose you, I still have you.

They exchange a look that says everything they won't say aloud.

INT. NOVA-ION - WAR ROOM - SAME

Corporate sterility gone feral. CEO CORINNE PRAGUE watches four live feeds: riots; the Ledger stream; a court docket; AERIAL OF BROADCAST TOWER – Rockport's tallest spine.

SLOANE (neck brace, bruised), VIV (PR), HARKER (legal), DoD LIAISON glower around the glass sarcophagus of a table.

PRAGUE

We lost the temporary restraining order. We lost the mayor. We are not losing narrative.

VIV

Your "task force" line is polling well with scared suburbanites. But the drone file is viral. They're already calling it the "Nova Bolt."

HARKER

We issue a statement: "rogue prototype." We blame Astra-Stage disposal. We sue the city.

DoD LIAISON Or we take the subject out of play.

Sloane tilts his head slightly toward the Tower feed.

SLOANE

The city's broadcast tower is a symbol with an off switch.

SLOANE (CONT'D)

If the Angel owns the network, he owns the night. We flip the breaker before he climbs it.

PRAGUE

Subtlety died with the mayor. Operate.

Sloane taps an encrypted chat. A message goes out: "FS-12: OP RAZORWIND / AUTH PRAGUE."

EXT. ROOFTOP ABOVE CITY HALL ANNEX - LATER

Wind knives the night. STACY steps out, body rec on, phone cam live but screen dim. A city hum hangs like tinnitus.

JARED stands at the edge, cape DARK, face chiseled by neon. He looks smaller and older than the myth.

STACY

I'm recording. Not live. Not until we agree.

JARED

Agreement is a spell people use
when they're afraid of truth.

STACY

Then here's truth: you didn't kill
him. A machine did. But you built
the stage.

A long beat. He stares at the dark, then at her.

JARED

I watched the tape. Lin warned me.
He died because he warned me.

STACY

He died because power hates
witnesses.

JARED

He told me to beg a tide. I said
"No." It helps. (beat) Until it
doesn't.

The wind gusts. Stacy steps closer, close enough to see the
cut lines where the CLASP has bitten his skin.

STACY

Say it again.

JARED

(soft)

No.

The clasp RELENTS a fraction. His shoulders drop. A human
sigh.

STACY

Good. Now we make a choice. You can
disappear— become the cautionary
tale they want— or you can end it
in a way that saves lives tonight.

JARED

What's your page layout?

STACY

You make a public statement at the
tower, live. You say the drone
killed the mayor. You say Nova-Ion
built it. You tell the blue-cape
kids to go home. Then you take off
the cape.

He smiles, a tragic curve.

JARED
They won't believe it.

STACY
It's not for belief. It's for the
record. Records outlive gods.

He steps closer, the cape twitching like a jealous pet.

JARED
If I take it off, it finds another
neck.

STACY
Then we lock it where it can't find
a throat. Or we burn it.

He glances at the city. The broadcast tower's red beacon
blinks like a metronome for fate.

JARED
The tower then. The roof.

STACY
I'll meet you there with truth. You
bring an ending.

They hold the look a breath too long for safety and a breath
short of salvation.

JARED
Thank you for not laughing.

STACY
Thank you for almost crying.

He lifts, gentle as a wish. GONE.

Stacy sets her jaw, turns her camera back on, and speaks to
the world like it can be persuaded.

INT. LEDGER - BULLPEN - SAME

LENA tracks Stacy's dot on "Find My" and overlays the city
map with choke points and crowd heat.

AYA

Tower chatter just spiked on the scanner. PD says unknown units near the base. Not theirs.

LENA

(typing)

FS-12. Razorwind. Private war in a public place.

KENT

We're a newspaper, not a SWAT team.

LENA

We're a newspaper in a city. Get me a helmet and a charger.

She slings her bag, runs.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - NIGHT

A steel lattice spine stabbing the cloud deck. MAINTENANCE STAIRS spiral like DNA.

At the base: POLICE BARRICADE, CROWD with signs, COUNTER-PROTESTERS, PRESS vans, DRONES in the air like hungry insects.

PIPER arrives out of breath, sees cops he used to command. They see a civilian.

PIPER

Let me help with the line.

A young officer eyes him.

YOUNG OFFICER

You quit.

PIPER

I remembered my job.

The line wavers. The city leans forward to see if it falls.

INT. BROADCAST TOWER - STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

JARED climbs, cape QUIET. Each flight is a confession. Sweat beads. Human strain replaces god-glide.

ON HIS PHONE: a pre-typed statement. He edits in thumb-stabs:
 "Drones killed the mayor. I enabled this chaos. Go home."

He stops. Looks out through a grating— the city swirls
 beneath like a bruise swimming.

JARED (to himself) No more half-measures.

He keeps climbing.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - BASE - SAME

LENA pushes through the barricade with press credentials and
 audacity. PIPER spots her.

PIPER
 You shouldn't be here.

LENA
 You shouldn't be alive. Nice to see
 we're both stubborn.

They share a grim smile. Overhead, the red beacon blinks,
 faster now, or maybe that's panic.

LENA (CONT'D)
 PD says "unknown units." You see
 them?

PIPER
 Not PD. Not state. Hands clean,
 rifles dirty. Your friends from the
 lab.

LENA
 FS-12.

PIPER
 Sounds like a file name for a
 prison.

LENA
 It is.

They look up. Wind says hurry.

INT. BROADCAST TOWER - MIDLAND PLATFORM - NIGHT

A grated landing with a maintenance hut. TWO FIGURES in matte gear (FS-12 patch ghosted) plant a CASE and snap it open: a VCAP RIG— larger drone with a belted coil, grinning with voltage.

OPERATIVE #1

Target ascends. On your mark.

OPERATIVE #2

Copy. No visible police on the stairs. Media on the ground. Clean optics.

They shoulder the rig, aim up the spiral. The sight paints a faint BLUE RETICLE on metal.

A shadow drops behind them like a rumor becoming a fact.

JARED

Don't.

They whirl; the rig coughs; ARC LIGHT claws toward him—

Jared CATCHES the bolt with a hand, DIVERTS it into the railing. Metal SCREAMS, showering white sparks like angry snow.

He steps through the glare. The operatives back into the hut; OPERATIVE #1 thumbs a throat mic:

OPERATIVE #1

Razorwind contact. Subject engaged.
Proceeding—

The mic TWISTS into silence in his fingers.

Jared doesn't hit them. He plucks the VCAP RIG, bends its frame until it's a bouquet of scrap, and sets it down like proof.

JARED

Go home. There's going to be enough
dead.

They stare. A choice hangs.

OPERATIVE #2 drops the backup rig very slowly and raises empty palms.

OPERATIVE #1 follows, something like shame on his face.

OPERATIVE #1

We never signed up to electrocute speeches.

Jared nods, something almost like gratitude touching his eyes. He starts up the next flight.

OPERATIVE #2

(soft)

If the wind shifts, we were never here.

They retreat into shadow, disappearing like bad dreams at noon.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - UPPER PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

A high, exposed deck with a SAT DISH, wind punching like a bully. The city yawns open around it.

JARED steps onto the grid. The RED BEACON blinks to his left. The cape flutters, jealous and alive.

He plants his phone on the rail, GOES LIVE. The viewer count ROCKETS.

JARED

(steady; human)

Rockport. My name is Jared Miller.

A hundred thousand ears tilt.

JARED (CONT'D)

I didn't kill the mayor. A Nova-Ion drone did. I let the city become a stage for my wound. I'm ending my show.

He reaches for the CLASP.

The cape TIGHTENS with the panic of a drowning thing gripping a throat.

JARED (CONT'D)

No.

It bites. Blood beads. He keeps pulling.

LENA (O.S.)
 (offscreen, winded,
 arriving)
 Jared!

She staggers onto the platform, hair whipped, camera already up.

LENA (CONT'D)
 Don't do it alone.

He half-smiles, half-cries with his eyes.

JARED
 You brought a pen to a hurricane.

LENA
 I brought Lin.

She holds up her phone: DR. LIN (ON TAPE) frozen mid-sentence: "Say the word 'no' aloud..."

Jared nods. Says it again. And again.

JARED
 No. No. No.

The clasp UNLACES one filament, then another.

BELOW — BASE OF TOWER:
 STACY arrives at the barricade with
 a LIVE KIT and a megaphone. PIPER
 clears a path.

STACY
 (into megaphone)
 No violence. No heroes. We're
 witnesses tonight.

The line calms a notch. Sufficient to thread a needle.

INT. NOVA-ION - WAR ROOM - SAME

PRAGUE watches the live feed, jaw flint. SLOANE leans in, pupils bright with hunter's light.

SLOANE
 He's taking it off. That ends our
 problem.

PRAGUE

It creates another. The myth
hardens when it dies on camera.

Sloane's fingers skate to a switch on a custom board: DISH
CONTROL / TOWER RELAY.

PRAGUE (CONT'D)

Don't fire. Cut the stream.

He flips. On Jared's live: SIGNAL WEAK. Glitches. The chat
screams in twenty languages.

PRAGUE (CONT'D)

If he falls, he falls unwatched.

Viv looks ill. Harker looks relieved. No one looks human.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - UPPER PLATFORM - SAME

LIVE SIGNAL stutters. The wind doubles.

JARED grips the clasp. PULLS. Filaments SCREAM in a frequency
you hear in your teeth.

LENA steps in. Puts her hand over his, pushing the clasp away
from his neck.

LENA

On three.

JARED

On "No."

They grin like soldiers who understand gallows humor.

LENA & JARED (CONT'D)

One. Two. No.

RIIIIIIP.

The CLASP TEARS FREE. The CAPE SHRIEKS - a sound of LOSS -
and LASHES at them both.

Jared SHOVES LENA DOWN; the cape WHIPS PAST, filaments
slashing the rail, BITING METAL.

The phone shows BUFFERING. The world curses at routers and
fate.

The cape, DIS-ANCHORED, WREATHES Jared's torso and tries to RE-SEAT itself around his throat.

JARED

No!

He RIPS IT OVER HIS HEAD like flaying a sin. It FLUTTERS— then LUNGES for LENA.

Jared moves FASTER THAN HE HAS SINCE THE COLD ROOM. He GRABS the cape mid-flight. It WRITHES, filaments BURROWING into his palms, drawing BLUE FIRE up his arms.

He staggers to the RED BEACON TOWER LIGHT — a hot red heart on a metal pole.

LENA

Jared—!

JARED

Tell them I said it.

He wraps the cape around the BEACON. The fabric SMOKES. The FILAMENTS SCREAM. The LIGHT goes from RED to WHITE to BLUE to BLACK.

The cape CATCHES — FIRE LIKE ALCOHOL, almost invisible, hungry.

The wind tries to TEAR IT FREE. Jared HUGS IT to the beacon like he's restraining a dying god that wants another host.

LENA lunges to help. He shakes his head, a command and a plea.

JARED (CONT'D)

No more hosts.

The cape FIGHTS with ALL ITS STOLEN JOY. Jared's veins light NEON. His skin CRACKS with blue fissures.

BELOW — THE CROWD:

They see STREAKS OF BLUE like a saint's blood. They HUSH despite themselves. Even the phones feel sacrilegious.

STACY points her camera up and NARRATES CALMLY to the city.

STACY

He's burning it. That's what courage looks like when it's not marketable.

PIPER stands shoulders-braced, tears he didn't order in his eyes.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - UPPER PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

The cape HOWLS with Lin's ghosts. Jared SCREAMS once, a human sound that makes Lena's knees go weak.

LENA

Hold on.

She reaches to KILL THE STREAM CUT on his phone - RESETS the uplink with a reporter's mean genius. The LIVE indicator FIGHTS BACK ON.

CHAT ERUPTS: "OH MY GOD" "HE'S SAVING US" "FAKE" "SAINT"
"BURN IT ALL"

Jared's arms shake. His eyes fill with WATER that WON'T FALL.

JARED

(through teeth)

Tell them I wasn't... chosen. I was...
angry. And I said... no.

The cape COLLAPSES, fire eating it inward. ASH lifts like BLUE SNOW that turns BLACK in air.

For a breath, SILENCE. Just wind.

Then the BEACON EXPLODES - a WHITE-THROATED POP - the platform SHUDDERS. Jared STUMBLES toward the edge.

LENA lunges, GRABS HIS WRIST. She is not strong enough. She is STRONG ENOUGH.

LENA

I've got you.

JARED looks at her. A million versions of a man flash: boy in a comic shop, young worker fired, poster apartment, blue god, human again.

He smiles with ALL THE SOFTNESS LEFT.

JARED

Tell Stacy... music matters.

LENA

What?

JARED

Grunge saved me once.

His fingers SLIP. Not because she lets go. Because GRAVITY IS A LAW and he obeys one, finally.

He FALLS.

The wind takes him, gentle and monstrous. He is SMALL and BRIGHT and then GONE into the glow of sirens.

LENA screams – not loud – like a recorder left on a desk.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - BASE - CONTINUOUS

The crowd watches a dot vanish. A woman sobs. A man falls to his knees. STACY keeps filming, tears on her face making small prisms of the tower lights.

STACY

(to stream, breaking and unbreaking at once)

His name was Jared Miller. He said "no." Remember that word. No to the cape. No to the myth that pain earns crowns. Go home. Be kind. Be loud tomorrow.

PIPER turns to YOUNG OFFICER beside him, voice raw.

PIPER

That's your training video. Right there.

The young officer nods, helmet visor wobbling like a yes.

INT. NOVA-ION - WAR ROOM - SAME

PRAGUE watches the feed rebuffer into LIVE despite her cut. She closes her eyes a moment – not in grief – in calculation.

PRAGUE

We pivot. Memorial fund. Scholarship. "Jared Miller Center for Responsible Innovation."

VIV stares at her like at a snake that learned to type.

VIV

You can't—

PRAGUE

We can. Or we die.

SLOANE looks at the tower's upper deck, sees Lena's silhouette alone against the beacon stump.

SLOANE

We don't die.

He turns away, already writing the next operation with the quiet of a man who never intends to be a statue.

EXT. SIDE STREET NEAR TOWER — SHORTLY AFTER

THUD in a dark alley. A CRUMPLED FIGURE slams into a stack of MATTRESSES dumped beside a thrift store.

A HOMELESS MAN jolts awake, staring, then crosses himself with a greasy hand.

The figure coughs. JARED. Broken but breathing. The cape's ash DUSTS him like the last bad snow.

He groans. Everything hurts. He rolls off the mattresses onto wet asphalt. Looks at his hands. NO BLUE.

He laughs once— a broken music box.

HOMELESS MAN

Angel?

JARED

...Not today.

Sirens converge nearby. Voices. Footsteps. LENA's voice faint, shouting his name into wind.

Jared PUSHES himself into a SHADOW behind the dumpster. He could walk out and be a saint. He slides DEEPER into dark.

He disappears with a man's choice, not a god's.

EXT. BROADCAST TOWER - UPPER PLATFORM - SAME

LENA stands alone with the burned beacon and a phone still live. She wipes a cheek with the back of her hand, then turns the camera on herself.

LENA

For the record: The cape is dead.
The choice wasn't.

She hits END.

Wind returns to being just wind.

EXT. ROCKPORT - VARIOUS - LATE NIGHT

MONTAGE - AFTERSHOCKS:

- VIGILS soften. People hug instead of hit. - BLUE CAPES get stuffed into trash cans. Some wriggle free. Most don't. - SERGEANT PIPER helps a protester up from the street; the protester helps him up, too. - STACY edits a memorial video without orchestral strings - just street noise and a guitar hum. - PRAGUE stands before a camera, expression arranged, promising accountability with perfect diction.

MONTAGE - AFTERSHOCKS:

- SLOANE scrolls through a secure chat: "FS-12 regroup / next phase?" His thumbs hover, then type: "Stand by."

INT. LEDGER - BULLPEN - DAWN

The newsroom dozes in chairs, screensavers blooming galaxies. KENT snores, mouth open. AYA clutches a keyboard like a teddy bear.

LENA returns, soaked, eyes red and bright. She plugs in her phone. Drag-drops a file: "He Said No - Tower.mp4."

STACY enters, carrying two coffees and the brittle serenity of too much adrenaline.

They sit. They don't speak for a long ten seconds.

STACY

Did he-

LENA
 He... did a heroic thing.
 (then)
 I don't know what he did next.

STACY
 We tell the part we saw. We tell it
 clean.

Lena nods. She types the headline like a prayer she intends to argue with later:

"HE SAID NO."
 Subhead: "A man ended a myth. Don't
 build a new one."

She hits PUBLISH.

A guitar hum in the server room sounds like feedback. Or the building exhaling.

EXT. RIVERWALK UNDERPASS — DAWN

A small figure in a thrifted coat walks with a wince, collar up. JARED. His face is half-shadow, half-blooming bruise.

He passes a mural someone has started: a blue cape burning on a lighthouse.

He stops. Looks at it. Smiles, tiny.

A LITTLE BOY in the SUPERMAN SHIRT from the plaza emerges with a candle stub from a vigil, held like treasure. He sees Jared, tilts his head.

BOY
 You okay?

Jared considers the truth. He chooses the good lie.

JARED
 Yeah. Going home.

The boy nods like that's the bravest thing a person can do.

He offers the candle.

BOY
 For the angel.

Jared takes it, hands gentle, eyes wet that won't weep.

JARED
Thanks, kid.

He walks on, the candle a tiny sun.

Behind him, the mural artist paints a final stroke— a cape turning into ASH and SEAGULLS.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. ROCKPORT — SIX MONTHS LATER — DAY

Sunlight over scaffolds. Murals of JARED MILLER everywhere: one haloed like a saint, one burning like a devil, one stylized as a comic-book logo: "THE BLUE SAINT."

A talk-radio host's voice rides the air.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)
Six months since the Tower Fire,
and Rockport still asks: was Jared
Miller a hero... or a super-powered
mass-murderer?

The street splits down the middle — protesters vs. pilgrims.

PROTEST SIGN: "NO MORE ANGELS."
OTHER SIGN: "MILLER SAVED US."

INT. ROCKPORT MEMORIAL MUSEUM — DAY

Glass, steel, silence. A line of schoolkids files past THE CAPE'S ASHES, sealed in resin. A docent rehearses the script.

DOCENT
The Miller Beacon burned until the
tower fell silent. His last words
were: "No more hosts."

(beat)

At least, according to edited footage provided by Nova-Ion Memorial Trust.

In the back, LENA BRANT watches, disgust hidden behind sunglasses. She whispers to STACY VALE, who's filming covertly.

LENA

They color-graded the sky.

STACY

They own the footage. They own the weather.

A security guard eyes them; they drift toward the exit.

EXT. MEMORIAL STEPS — CONTINUOUS

Outside, a pro-Nova-Ion rally unfolds: smiling influencers livestream selfies beside soldiers in matte armor marked FS-12 RESERVE.

A podium, banners: "THE JARED MILLER INITIATIVE — FOR SAFE INNOVATION."

CEO CORINNE PRAGUE takes the mic, PR smile immaculate.

PRAGUE

Jared Miller reminded us that power demands responsibility.

PRAGUE (CONT'D)

Nova-Ion honors that truth through accountability and progress.

Camera shutters. A drone buzzes overhead, its shell polished blue.

LENA

(to Stacy)

Accountability's wearing eyeliner now.

They walk off as applause swells.

INT. NOVA-ION — EXECUTIVE LEVEL — LATER

SLOANE, healed, scarred, stands before a new wall display: PROJECT LEGION. Rows of synthetic cloaks hang like flayed flags. He signs a manifest: "Authorized Field Trials — FS-12 Units A-G."

VIV (PR) enters quietly.

VIV

The Initiative's optics are good.
Congress is calling you the new
NASA.

SLOANE

Then we've already failed. NASA
wanted the stars. We just want
obedience.

He taps a screen: a map flashes RED DOTS across major U.S.
cities.

SLOANE (CONT'D)

Deployments start at dawn.

INT. ABANDONED RADIO STATION — NIGHT

Flicker of CRTs, walls lined with cables. LENA and STACY run
their underground broadcast, "THE NO SIGNAL HOUR."

Logo: a blue cape burning into static.

STACY (on mic)

Nova-Ion's Initiative is beta-testing new cloaks under
Project Legion. Same code, new colors. If you're listening,
remember: "No" is still a complete sentence.

LENA slides a drive across the table: CLASSIFIED — FS-12
OPERATIONS.

LENA

Another whistle drop. Straight from
a sympathetic tech. They're
pattern-matching emotional
signatures again. Machine empathy
my ass.

STACY

And the myth still sells merch.

She gestures to a bootleg T-shirt pinned to the wall: "NO TO
EVIL — YES TO POWER."

LENA

He died saying no, and they
trademarked it.

They share a silence thick as regret.

EXT. SEWER TUNNEL — NIGHT

Water drips. A shape limps through shadows: JARED. Beard, coat, scars; the blue long gone. He carries a small candle stub — the one from the boy.

He reaches a hidden chamber with a battered radio. Stacy's voice hums from static.

STACY (V.O.)
—remember him right, not bright.

He smiles faintly. Pain and pride coexist.

JARED
You're doing fine, Lois.

He sets the candle on a ledge, lights it. The glow flickers over graffiti: "NO MORE HOSTS."

Footsteps echo from deeper in the tunnel. He tenses—until a child's voice calls softly:

BOY (O.S.)
You left this.

The same kid from the vigil, now older by months but eyes older by years. He holds a small shard of blue filament, crystalline, pulsing like a heartbeat.

Jared's breath catches.

JARED
Where did you—

BOY
It was in the river. It still moves.

The shard vibrates faintly in the boy's palm, humming that low, hungry tone.

Jared stares at it — recognition, dread, inevitability.

JARED
You should throw it away.

BOY
I tried. It came back.

Jared kneels, voice barely a whisper.

JARED

Then listen close. When it
whispers, you tell it "no." Every
time.

BOY

Will that stop it?

JARED

Sometimes.

(beat)

That's enough.

He closes the boy's hand around the shard, then guides it to
the water's surface. Together they let it fall in. It sinks,
pulsing once, twice – then out.

Jared stands, watching ripples fade.

The boy looks up.

BOY

Are you the angel?

JARED

Not anymore.

He walks deeper into dark. The boy watches him go, reflection
of the dying glow flickering in his eyes.

EXT. RIVERBANK – DAWN

The shard washes up again, half-buried in silt. A hand – not
the boy's – gloved, adult, female – picks it up.

We pan up to see A NEW CHARACTER: twenty-something, cosplay
jacket, con-badge dangling. She smiles, transfixed.

WOMAN

Cool prop.

The shard flickers once–like recognition.

INT. NOVA-ION SERVER VAULT – SAME

Screens ignite themselves. One dormant process wakes:
ARGO_CLOAK / LEGION ALERT: SIGNAL DETECTED.

Sloane's console pings. He grins, thin and satisfied.

SLOANE
Welcome back.

EXT. ROCKPORT SKYLINE — MORNING

Sunlight bleeds over the tower's rebuilt skeleton. Workers weld a new BEACON, its casing stamped "NOVA-ION RENEWAL PROJECT."

On a nearby wall, spray-paint appears overnight: "NO MORE HOSTS." Someone adds beneath it in fresh paint: "...OR MAYBE JUST ONE MORE."

INT. NO SIGNAL HOUR STUDIO — MORNING

Lena cues the next broadcast.

STACY
(to mic)
You're listening to No Signal Hour. They say legends never die. We say legends get rebooted. So keep your radios close. And when the blue light hums under your door— say the word.

She leans in. Whispers:

STACY (CONT'D)
No.

CUT TO BLACK.

TEXT ON SCREEN: "ISSUE FOUR — TO BE CONTINUED."

ROLL CREDITS.