

X9

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TITLE CARD:

SUPERIMPOSE: YEAR 2086 — TWO YEARS INTO THE X9 PANDEMIC

EXT. NAIROBI — MAKESHIFT CLINIC — DUSK

Flies buzz. A young BOY (5), skin ash-gray and fevered, lies motionless in his mother's arms. She hums softly, trying not to cry.

Nearby, a tired MEDIC draws blood from another patient. Behind him, a crude sign reads:

X9 TRIAGE ZONE — NO ENTRY WITHOUT PPE

To the left, tarp tents flap in the wind. Dozens of coughing, trembling patients lie on cots. A little girl convulses as a YOUNG MOTHER (early 30s) clutches her hand, begging for help.

CLOSE ON: A tag pinned to the girl's chest: "X9 POSITIVE — STAGE IV"

A NURSE rushes over — mask soaked in sweat and shakes her head. The mother lets out a sharp cry... that cuts to silence—

INT. GLOBAL NEWSROOM — SPLIT SCREEN — NIGHT

Footage flickers: hospitals overwhelmed in New Delhi, food riots in Sao Paulo, body bags loaded in Berlin.

ANCHOR (V.O.)
...cases have tripled this quarter.
International labs continue to
clash over whether X9 is airborne
or waterborne...

INT. GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC SUMMIT — DAY

PRESENTER (O.S.)
...as X9 mutates, estimates suggest
one in six may be carriers by next
year. Without full neural mapping,
there is no vaccine — only
adaptation.

ANDREA stands toward the back of a long line of students.

Shoulders taut, eyes darting between the front of the line and the worn notebook clutched in her hands. The air hums with nervous ambition—murmured hopes, quiet rehearsals.

She cranes her neck, scanning the crowd. Searching.

At the front, DR. RAJ GUPTA – calm, composed, flanked by TOP OFFICERS – offers a generic wave. No handshakes. No words. He turns and walks off.

The line exhales in unison – groans, mutters. Students peel away, deflated. Disappointment ripples through the crowd.

Andrea doesn't move. Through the thinning crowd, she spots a WOMAN approaching – surrounded by her own set of officers. Poised. Confident. She shakes hands with Dr. Gupta. Then, Dr. Gupta exits – a swift disappearance into the back.

But the woman stays. She heads for the podium – DR. BROWN (40s). Wise eyes, youthful energy. Warmth wrapped in command.

Andrea watches, transfixed, as Dr. Brown fires off crisp, efficient orders to her team. The energy in the room recalibrates – she's in charge now. Then Dr. Brown turns. Starts toward Andrea. Andrea straightens, bracing herself as the distance closes.

ANDREA

Hi... You're Dr. Brown, aren't you?

Dr. Brown turns – barely interested.

DR. BROWN

Check the program.

She turns back.

ANDREA

I read your White Note on the "X9 Anti Virus" and your journal on adapting your Viral-Singularity Schematic to a Global Scale.

DR. BROWN

Well, then you know exactly what I wanted you to know.

ANDREA

But there's nothing in there about using the ocular nerve as a conduit – for immersive broadcasting from third parties.

Dr. Brown freezes. Looks up. Walks to the edge of the stage, eyes sharp, looming over Andrea.

DR. BROWN

I haven't done that yet.

Andrea blinks. Realizes what she just implied.

ANDREA

Sorry – I just meant... I've been running models. Simulations. You'd be surprised what a half-dead laptop and stubbornness can do.

Dr. Brown eyes her. Cautious.

DR. BROWN

Where'd you get your data?

ANDREA

I built a backdoor into the public genome archives. You have gaps in your anonymization layer.

DR. BROWN

Jesus Christ.

Andrea digs in her backpack. Produces a cracked flash drive.

ANDREA

My overlay's on this. I know it looks insane but please check it.

DR. BROWN

Let me guess – you want me to hand this to Dr. Gupta, and in six months you're running my division?

ANDREA

No. I want to help before another hundred thousand die.

Dr. Brown takes the flash drive, reluctantly.

DR. BROWN

If this thing gives my terminal a stroke, I'll personally send your bones to Virology.

ANDREA

Fair trade.

Dr. Brown's smirk sharpens – the first flicker of intrigue she's let herself feel in years.

EXT. GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC SUMMIT

SUPERIMPOSE: YEAR 2091 – FIVE YEARS LATER

Dr. Brown circles the pillar, arms folded like armor. Andrea slouches on a bench, hands twisting in her lap.

DR. BROWN
Counter-intuitive. No one sane
would run with that.

Andrea flinches, shrinking slightly.

ANDREA
It's just an idea.

Dr. Brown studies her – sharp, assessing.

DR. BROWN
How old are you?

ANDREA
Twenty-Two.

Something shifts in Dr. Brown – not warmth, but interest.

DR. BROWN
And you're here?

ANDREA
Finished the entire Pre-Biotech
Pharma curriculum in a year.

DR. BROWN
Then why do you need me?

ANDREA
Got kicked out. Ran garage trials.
It worked – for a week. I thought
that earned a medal.

Dr. Brown stops pacing, eyes locked on her.

DR. BROWN
I've made up my mind.

Andrea straightens, pulse quickening.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)
You want to cure X9?

Andrea blinks, caught between disbelief and hope.

ANDREA
How?–

Dr. Brown's grin breaks through – rare, electric. She extends her hand.

DR. BROWN
Welcome to Biotech Pharmaceuticals.
What's your name?

ANDREA
Andrea.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

EXT. SOUTH AFRICA - DAY - YEAR 2020 - FOUND FOOTAGE

Sun-bleached images flicker - scorched plants curl inward,
cracked soil stretching for miles, crops reduced to dust.

GUPTA (V.O.)
No, I don't think we can ignore it.

A frail child lies curled in the dirt, ribs stark beneath
skin. A dead bird nearby, still as the air.

GUPTA (V.O.)
Africa holds sixty-five percent of
infected patients alone—

PRESENTER (V.O.)
Dr. Gupta, the World Health
Organization is updating their
numbers. It may be higher...

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - NEWSROOM SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Bright lights wash the sleek Global Health Today set. Dr.
Gupta sits across from a poised FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR. The red
ON AIR light blinks.

ANCHOR
Dr. Gupta, global mortality rates
have plateaued for the first time
in months. Is that due to the new
protocol?

GUPTA
That's right. The X9 suppressant
has stabilized late-stage immune
collapse in sixty-two percent of
patients.

ANCHOR
A miracle drug, some say.

GUPTA

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.
Not a cure — but time, and time
gives hope.

ANCHOR

You've extended life expectancy to
eight years?

GUPTA

Triple what we projected.

ANCHOR

And with Biotech leading the
charge, public trust is soaring.

Gupta nods, humble on the surface, calculation beneath.

GUPTA

We're grateful for that trust. We
intend to earn it every day.

ANCHOR

Last question — Halstrom
Enterprises' rapid expansion.
Competition?

A hint of a smirk.

GUPTA

More hands on the wheel never hurt.
But we're the ones setting the
course.

The anchor smiles, cue cards folding. Cameras fade to black.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD — KITCHEN — DAY

Worn counters. Peeling cabinets. A flickering TV hums.

RHEA MAHARAJ [RHEA] (20's) female, in a bathrobe, towel
around her head, winces as she butters toast. ISHARA MAHARAJ
[ISHARA] (40's) her no-nonsense mother, sits at the table.

ISHARA

Why is this taking so long?

RHEA

Toast's almost done.

ISHARA

Not the toast. The virus.

Rhea shrugs, eyes down.

RHEA
It's complicated, Mom.

ISHARA
These companies think their money
decides who lives and who doesn't.

Rhea looks up, weary.

RHEA
It's not that simple.

ISHARA
Just remember that when the prices
go up. I'll say, "Told you so."

FLORA (7) bursts in—bright, innocent, full of energy.

FLORA
Mom!

She launches into Rhea's lap. Rhea winces, forcing a smile.

FLORA (CONT'D)
You okay?

RHEA
Yeah, sweetheart. I'm fine.

FLORA
Look what I made!

She holds up a crayon masterpiece. Rhea's smile softens.

RHEA
It's beautiful, Flora.

Ishara watches — proud, worried. Rhea stands, slow and careful.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Come on, let's get you ready for
school.

Flora hops down, chattering. Rhea steadies herself, fragile but determined.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laptop light cuts through the dark. Rhea types - fast, precise. Code scrolls, error blinks: [ACCESS DENIED - ADMIN KEY EXPIRED]

She exhales, rubs her temple.

RHEA

That's not it either...

She types again. Another denial. Her jaw clenches. Not at the machine- at herself. She used to crack this without thinking.

A dry cough slips out. She swallows it.

FLORA (O.S.)

Mom?

Rhea shuts the laptop gently.

RHEA

Be right there, sweetheart.

She rises, steadying herself on the desk. One glance back at the glowing code - the world she used to command. Something unresolved flickers in her eyes. She turns off the light.

INT. DR. BROWN'S BATHROOM - EARLY MORNING

Dr. Brown faces the mirror, lipstick steady, deliberate - too polished for a lab coat. Her reflection studies her back. The phone buzzes: Gupta. She lets it ring out.

She rolls up her sleeve - an old injection scar. Covers it with practiced care.

DR. BROWN

You sold it to yourself, too,
remember?

She smiles faintly at her reflection. A mask, now in place.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - BOARD ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Glass walls. A mirror-bright table. The city skyline burns gold in the distance. Dr. Brown, Andrea, and Gupta sit mid-debate.

DR. BROWN

We need an influx of funds. The
cure's within reach-

GUPTA

I'm not gutting stable revenue for a gamble on hope.

DR. BROWN

It's not a gamble. You've seen the data.

GUPTA

It's risk. The suppressant works - keeps people alive, keeps the board calm.

DR. BROWN

For now. But that won't last.

GUPTA

No, but it's predictable. A cure? That's a black hole. That's years of trials, debt, and no return.

He turns to Andrea.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

You have an opinion?

Andrea glances at Brown, then back.

ANDREA

Why not both? Reallocate, pull from lower-priority sectors. No one's saying we burn the foundation.

GUPTA

That's the problem with theorists. You all assume there's no fat left to cut without cutting bone.

DR. BROWN

She's right. If we scale now, we hit efficacy in months, not years.

GUPTA

You're forgetting what comes next - regulations, FDA, SAHPRA, human trials, global validation, red tape. You want us bankrupt before approval?

DR. BROWN

I'd infect myself to prove it works.

A heavy silence. Gupta rises, smoothing his jacket.

GUPTA

That kind of talk spooks investors.
I'll explore options.

(beat)

You think I don't want a cure? I've
lost family too. But I won't send
another child into a trial half-
prepared.

At the door, he turns back.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Just don't infect yourself while
I'm gone.

He exits. Andrea lets out a tight breath. A beat.

ANDREA

We're all cowards. We hide behind
simulations. My parents didn't get
protocols – they were the
protocols.

DR. BROWN

It's not brave to die for optics.

ANDREA

Maybe not. But dying makes people
look. You're brave to even think
about injecting yourself.

DR. BROWN

You think I'm brave? I helped
design the very protocol that
killed your mother. I wasn't brave
– I was promoted.

Andrea turns to the window.

ANDREA

Honestly? That went better than I
expected.

Dr. Brown gathers her tablet.

DR. BROWN

We'll talk tonight.

She exits. Andrea stares out over the city, her reflection
trembling over the city's light.

EXT. SUMMIT PARK BENCH - NIGHT

Andrea sits alone on a cold bench overlooking the city's shimmer. She pulls a battered wallet from her coat, unfolds a worn newspaper clipping.

INSERT: Headline - "Parents Die in Experimental Biotech Trial. No One Held Accountable."

Two smiling faces - her mother and father. Andrea's thumb traces the photo. Her jaw tightens. She folds the clipping carefully and slips it back into her wallet.

A deep breath - then she rises and walks into the night, purpose burning behind her eyes.

EXT. RUNNING TRAIL - LATER

Dusk settles in. Andrea runs, breath ragged, headphones in. She listens to old University notes with her Professor, PROFESSOR NYSTUEN.

ANDREA (V.O.)
Biotech's scaled up fast.
Manufacturing, distribution,
treatment lines...

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (V.O.)
They burn billions and call it R&D.

ANDREA (V.O.)
Still - seven major diseases
stopped through human trials.
That's still impressive.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (V.O.)
Two decades ago it took years to
reach a cure. Now? Months.

ANDREA (V.O.)
Stronger strains?

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (V.O.)
Stronger profits.

ANDREA (V.O.)
You're bitter.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (V.O.)
They rejected my research. They'll
reject yours too.

ANDREA (V.O.)
I'm not going to Biotech. But if I
did – maybe they'd listen to me.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (V.O.)
Someone there will poach you. And
when they do, be ready to play by
their rules. And one day you'll
miss the safety of this University-

The recording clicks off. Her phone's AI breaks the silence.

AI (V.O.)
One mile to go.

Andrea stops, breath heavy. Sweat on her brow. She exhales,
hands on her hips.

ANDREA
...Begin cool-down.

INT. GUPTA'S OFFICE - LATE EVENING

Gupta's desk gleams – precise, surgical. He pours mineral
water, gaze landing on a child's drawing tucked among his
books: a red rocket, three stick figures, scrawled words – To
Uncle Gup – bring us to the stars!

He studies it, murmuring to himself.

GUPTA
I am bringing them. Just not how
you meant.

He sets it back. Straightens his jacket. Faces the door. The
armor clicks back into place.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - DR. BROWN'S LAB - NIGHT

Blue light from rotating 3D-RNA holograms flickers over Dr.
Brown and Andrea as they work.

ANDREA
There...

The strands unfurl, revealing a replication tag: ANBRYOSIS.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Run it back. Save everything.

Dr. Brown taps commands into a TABLET, eyes strained.

DR. BROWN
You'll have to walk me through the
last part.

ANDREA
It's the same X9 cure model. You
okay?

DR. BROWN
Close. So close.

Dr. Brown rubs her temples, drained. She crosses to another
station, voice thin.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)
Thirty people spent the day trying
to mirror this pattern...

She pulls a cylindrical tube from a drawer, shakes it — it
hovers. Andrea feeds in the RNA sample. The sequence rises,
spinning.

ANDREA
Uploading outbreak risk data.

DR. BROWN
Punch it.

POP — the RNA combusts to black ash.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)
How did that happen?

ANDREA
Newer strands aren't surviving the
outbreak model.

DR. BROWN
That's... strange.

ANDREA
It's acting synthetic.

Dr. Brown stiffens. A long pause.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Have you been synthesizing X9?

DR. BROWN
Not me.

ANDREA

I've tried over ninety percent of the possible permutations. Nothing holds.

DR. BROWN

Stay on it.

She pinches some ash, rubs it between her fingers.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

We've handled heat before. But ninety percent isn't enough.

ANDREA

The data's blurred. How's Gupta masking RNA like this?

DR. BROWN

It's not how. It's why.

ANDREA

Then why?

DR. BROWN

Because if we solve it, he loses control. He needs a villain. Makes him the hero.

Andrea flicks a hologram to Brown's tablet.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

That can't be right...this doesn't even look like what we've been building.

ANDREA

It's not. It's his.

She points to a cluster of flickering neural nodes.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

This isn't just a virus. It's a bioweapon – rewires memory and emotion. Programs belief.

She zooms in. The strands snap apart.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

If you can't trust your memories... you'll trust whoever rewrites them.

DR. BROWN
Show how it scales to outbreak
level.

Andrea locks in, screens pulsing.

ANDREA
We should go public. Blow the
whistle. Expose Gupta—

Dr. Brown covers Andrea's mouth — gently but firm.

DR. BROWN
I've wanted to do that for years.

ANDREA
Then why haven't you?

Dr. Brown's silence says everything.

DR. BROWN
Hungry?

ANDREA
Not while people are dying in their
sleep.

DR. BROWN
You've been around me too long.

ANDREA
You never talk about your family.

DR. BROWN
Safer that way.

ANDREA
You've got a nephew — Regan, right?

DR. BROWN
He's in tech. I keep him away from
Biotech.

ANDREA
Does he know what you're working
on?

DR. BROWN
He knows enough.
(beat)
If he ever ends up on Biotech's
payroll, do me a favor — pretend I
don't know.

A small smile. Then back to work. Andrea loads another sample.

SHAKE. HOVER. SPIN.

POP – ash again. Dr. Brown staggers, pale.

ANDREA

Dr. Brown!

She rushes over.

DR. BROWN

Stay back!

She swabs the residue, hands trembling. Pulls a file from a drawer – thrusts it at Andrea.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

We don't have long.

ANDREA

What is this?

DR. BROWN

You can't trust them. You never could.

ANDREA

What are you talking about?

DR. BROWN

I thought I could change it from inside. But the system only takes.

ANDREA

Takes what?

DR. BROWN

My husband. My brother. Patients I can't name. X9 didn't mutate in a lab – it mutated in a boardroom.

(beat)

And if it ends... it'll be by someone they don't see coming.

She smiles – grim, certain.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

That's you.

Andrea presses the file tight to her chest, eyes hard.

ANDREA

This doesn't leave the lab. Not until I'm sure.

DR. BROWN

Andrea... if you lock it away, you're no better than him.

She doesn't answer. Just slides it into a drawer, hand lingering.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

Please - put a mask on.

Andrea glances at the file - a faint watermark: G.V. Gupta's mark, taunting. Her throat tightens. She looks at Dr. Brown - the air heavy, toxic. No going back now.

INT. SECOND SCIENCE LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Andrea steadies Dr. Brown onto a bench. Monitors blink. Ventilation hums like shallow breath.

ANDREA

Hold on. Just breathe slowly.

DR. BROWN

I thought I'd feel it sooner...

Andrea grabs a first-aid kit, pulls out a sterile injector. Dr. Brown catches her wrist.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

It's too late for me.

She reaches into her coat, pulling a security keycard and a sealed vial - trembling hands offering both.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

They can't have it. You know that.

Andrea freezes, eyes on the vial.

ANDREA

No. I'll get you help. You're not-

DR. BROWN

It's too late for me. Go. Now.

Andrea slowly backs away, then bolts out the door, clutching the vial and keycard.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Andrea rips off her mask, sprinting. A deep rumble swells – BOOM. The lab door erupts outward in a fireball. Fire tears through the doorway, the blast flinging her to the ground.

ANDREA

Dr. Brown!

She starts to run back – but a SECURITY GUARD grabs her arm.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Let me go back! She's in there!

ALARMS WAIL. Red lights strobe. Sprinklers hiss. Smoke floods the corridor as Andrea clutches the vial to her chest – the only thing she can save.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

DETECTIVE HARRIS and an OFFICER hover over grainy footage.

DETECTIVE HARRIS

Pulled the feeds from Brown's corridor.

OFFICER

And?

DETECTIVE HARRIS

Blurry as hell. Light from the window blows out half the frame, bad angle – you can barely make out who's who. Nothing usable.

OFFICER

So we're blind?

DETECTIVE HARRIS

For now. Until something better surfaces.

EXT. FUNERAL PARLOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Mourners drift away, their footsteps fading. Andrea stands alone before Dr. Brown's name carved in stone – still, unreadable.

A low murmur catches her ear. She turns. REGAN (20s) lean and wired with tension, speaks quietly with a FUNERAL HOME EMPLOYEE. His stance is restless, defensive.

Andrea approaches, cautious.

ANDREA
Can I help you?

REGAN
Just cleaning up.

ANDREA
Oh – sorry. Thought you were a guest.

REGAN
I worked with her, at Biotech.

ANDREA
You're her nephew... Regan.

REGAN
And you are?

ANDREA
I'm Andrea.

REGAN
Figures. You're one of them. Get the hell out of here.

ANDREA
Excuse me?

REGAN
I said – go.

She freezes, stunned.

ANDREA
I'm sorry...

She steps back. Regan watches her leave, anger draining into grief. He grabs a trash bag, fighting it down.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - LATER

Andrea enters the quiet, hollow space, crushed and visibly upset. She doesn't move at first. Then crosses to her desk.

Click – a lamp glows. She sets down a glass slide and stares at it. A framed photo above the desk: her parents and younger self, frozen mid-laugh. Her eyes glisten.

She turns away and spots the old trunk beneath the desk. Kneels. Hand on the lid. Hesitates. Then stands and walks off. Her gaze falls on the file Dr. Brown gave her.

She opens it. Her face changes – realization slicing through the grief.

EXT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – MORNING

Andrea, composed now, strides toward the building.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – CONTINUOUS

The halls echo – empty, sterile. Something's off.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – DR. BROWN'S LAB – MOMENTS LATER

Andrea enters. The lab is stripped bare – no equipment, no trace of work.

Behind her, Gupta steps from the shadows, laying a hand on her shoulder.

GUPTA
I'm so sorry, Andrea-

ANDREA
Dr. Gupta!

He nods solemnly, voice low.

GUPTA
Dr. Brown was one of our finest
scientists.

Andrea scans the gutted lab, confusion twisting to dread.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
We've quarantined everything. You
should get tested – precaution
only.

Andrea stiffens.

ANDREA
Dr. Gupta....What caused that
explosion?

Gupta's tone darkens, rehearsed.

GUPTA

We believe...Dr. Brown triggered it.

Andrea reels.

ANDREA

No. She'd never—Biotech wouldn't do this either. Not the company I know.

GUPTA

She wanted to break away. Go rogue with her research. I warned her — we couldn't support that.

Andrea looks down, conflict twisting across her face.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Maybe... she preferred no cure at all. I can only imagine how betrayed you feel.

He steps in, offering an embrace. Andrea doesn't resist, but her eyes lift over his shoulder — blazing.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

We'll find you something new. X9's cure is on hold. For now.

Andrea's expression hardens — silent fire behind her calm.

INT. DATA CUBICLE - NIGHT

The low hum of servers. Blue light washes over Andrea's face as she watches an old video — her mother in a hospital bed, frail but smiling.

MOTHER (V.O.)

You'll do amazing things, Andrea.
But promise me — you won't go chasing ghosts.

Andrea closes the laptop, her reflection fading from the screen. She exhales. Pulls out a small recorder.

ANDREA

What if I'm not ready? What if I'm just... noise?
(beat)
Pushing too fast. Pretending I know what I'm doing.

She hits stop. Sits in silence. Then – delete.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – KITCHEN – MORNING

Rhea opens the fridge. Cold air hits her pale face.

RHEA

Mom...

She sets food down, stares at it blankly. Pulls a knife, slices an apple – each cut clean, mechanical.

RHEA (CONT'D)

...Mom?

Her hand trembles. Then she collapses.

ISHARA (O.S.)

Rhea?

Ishara rushes in – freezes at the sight.

ISHARA (CONT'D)

Rhea!

She drops to her knees beside her daughter.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME – LATER

The news hums in the background as Andrea scrolls her phone.

NEWS (V.O.)

With Dr. Brown's passing, Biotech's future on the X9 cure remains uncertain. She was known for her relentless pursuit of a solution...

Andrea stills. Her gaze drifts to a framed photo – she and Dr. Brown, laughing mid-experiment. The faintest smile. Then steel. She crosses the room. Unlocks the trunk.

Inside: scientific gear. Dormant. Waiting.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME BASEMENT – LATER

Andrea flicks on the lights. Dust floats. Machines sleep under tarps.

She stands there – one breath. Then moves. Pulling covers. Plugging cables. Reawakening the lab.

EXT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Andrea slips through the shadows, Dr. Brown's ID in hand. She studies it - hesitates - then pockets it.

ANDREA
Too easy to trace.

She presses her palm flat to the biometric scanner. CLICK. The lock disengages. Andrea exhales, unsettled.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Guess security hasn't pulled her
access yet.

She slips inside.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - HALLWAY

Empty corridors stretch ahead. Andrea moves quickly, every footstep echoing. She slows near the lab - tension rising.

INT. DR. BROWN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

She raises the ID - BEEP. Door unlocks. Inside, a shadow moves.

ANDREA
Hey!

She throws the door open. Lights snap on. Regan freezes at the back of the lab, caught mid-motion.

REGAN
What are you doing here?

ANDREA
Regan? She told me you were in tech
- not here.

REGAN
I was. Things changed. Turn the
lights off!

ANDREA
No, stay right there.

She shuts the door behind her.

REGAN
How did you get in?

ANDREA
I work here. I actually use this
lab.

Regan looks away, guilt flickering.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Sit down.

He hesitates, then obeys. Drops his backpack – pulls out a worn ID badge. Beneath it, a photo: he and Dr. Brown, smiling in another lifetime.

Andrea kills the overhead lights. Blue monitor glow washes over them.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
So... what are you doing in my lab?

REGAN
My aunt's lab.

A beat. Andrea softens. Leans forward – hugs him briefly.

ANDREA
I'm sorry. I looked up to her.

He pulls back.

REGAN
I'm fine...

Andrea composes herself and straightens.

ANDREA
You know the cameras are on.

Andrea swipes her console. The surveillance feed skips, looping static.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Not anymore. We've got a window –
make it fast.

She lifts Dr. Brown's ID.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
At least I have her ID. How'd you
get in?

REGAN
I never left.

ANDREA

What?

REGAN

I came to grab my stuff and hid in here - You worked closely with her?

Andrea nods.

REGAN (CONT'D)

Then you know. They did this to her.

He stands. Starts pacing.

ANDREA

Gupta said it was her fault... but that doesn't make sense.

(beat)

This isn't Biotech. Someone twisted it. She mostly, trusted them. So do I, I think.

She starts opening drawers, searching through the stripped lab. Regan watches. Frowns.

REGAN

You won't find anything good here.

Andrea stops, thinking - pieces clicking into place.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. DR. BROWN'S LAB - NIGHT

Dr. Brown slides a drive into a small zippered case. Andrea watches, tense.

ANDREA

You're backing everything up?

DR. BROWN

Trust is a luxury I can't afford.

She zips the case closed, meeting Andrea's gaze - sharp, certain.

DR. BROWN (CONT'D)

My living room's better equipped to vaccinate the world than this lab ever was.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - DR. BROWN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

Andrea gathers scattered files and vials with urgent precision. Regan watches her, puzzled.

ANDREA

Come on.

REGAN

Where? I can't leave.

Andrea meets his eyes - steady, certain.

ANDREA

Your aunt left us everything we need.

Regan blinks - then follows.

INT. DR. BROWN'S LAB - NIGHT

Andrea lingers as Regan's footsteps fade down the hall. She trails her fingers along the desk - stops at a cracked mug, then spots a sticky note beneath the monitor.

She peels it free. In Dr. Brown's handwriting: You don't stop.

ANDREA

I won't.

She pockets the note and steps out.

EXT. DR. BROWN'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Police tape flutters in the wind. Andrea and Regan cross the street, faces shadowed by streetlights.

ANDREA

Surprised they didn't seal it off.

REGAN

She didn't die here. They probably just grabbed what they needed and left.

He pulls out a key, ducks under the tape and unlocks the back door.

INT. DR. BROWN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Silence. Dust. A life frozen mid-thought. Regan heads for the basement stairs.

REGAN
Biotech's tearing this place apart
tomorrow.

He disappears down the steps. Andrea switches on a lamp – warm light spills across a wall of books.

She runs her hand over the spines. One crumbles. She freezes, peels it back – behind it, a hidden layer of notebooks.

ANDREA
What the hell...

She opens one. Formulas. Diagrams. Personal notes. Regan reappears, lugging two heavy containers.

REGAN
These'll do.

ANDREA
Regan... look at this.

He leans in. Pages dense with data.

REGAN
No... what is all this?

ANDREA
This looks like every project your
aunt ever touched.

REGAN
She hated Biotech Pharma.

ANDREA
Hated?

REGAN
With a passion.

ANDREA
I don't want to believe that. Not
yet.

He starts sorting equipment. Andrea flips another page – recent entries, dated weeks ago.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
These are fresh. Eight-one, eight-eight... she was still working.

She looks up.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Where's her recorder?

Regan digs through a drawer, pulls out a SMALL TAPE RECORDER.

REGAN
This it?

ANDREA
Yeah.

She hesitates, then presses play.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
If you're hearing this, either I'm gone... or you're being reckless.

Andrea freezes.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
You don't stop, Andrea. That's your flaw — and your fire.

Andrea closes her eyes, breath trembling.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
Just, don't forget why you started.

Andrea exhales, then presses stop.

ANDREA
Let's see what else she left us.

She loads the next tape.

KAREN FARRIS (V.O.)
So, where are you now?

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
Incomplete—

KAREN FARRIS (V.O.)
But you think it works?

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
I haven't tested it. They won't let me.

KAREN FARRIS (V.O.)
Can't you do it off-grid?

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
Not without hospital clearance.

KAREN FARRIS (V.O.)
What are they saying?

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
Same story. I show progress – they
call it inconclusive. Gupta answers
to the board. They're drowning in
profit from the current treatment.

KAREN FARRIS (V.O.)
There's a story here. But I need
more—

A faint KNOCK interrupts.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)
Ah—

The tape cuts off. Andrea rifles through the notebooks.

ANDREA
She's gotta have it here somewhere.
Help me find her X9 notes.

They dig – papers flying.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Here!

She stops on a page glowing under the lamplight.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Do you know who she was talking to?

REGAN
No. But I'm guessing you'll figure
it out.

ANDREA
"You"? If we split the work, we can—

REGAN
I can't help. Not now. They're
gonna be watching me like a hawk.

Andrea nods, frustrated.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Maybe in a few weeks-

ANDREA
We don't have weeks. In a few weeks, this could be global.

He hesitates. Andrea leans in.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You're the only one I trust.

A long beat.

REGAN
Alright... fine.

Andrea nods - eyes alight with resolve.

INT. GUPTA'S PRIVATE STUDY - NIGHT

Dim. Sleek. Glass walls reflect city lights, not the sky. Everything hums with wealth and pressure.

Gupta sits slouched at his desk. Across from him stands TALIA (40), his silent shadow of an aide.

A holographic screen hovers between them paused on a video: A TEENAGE GIRL, bald, frail, nasal cannula in place. Next to her, a tearful WOMAN, late 30s.

GIRL (VIDEO)
Daddy, I don't feel anything anymore. Not even scared. Is that normal?

Gupta stares at the screen a long moment, jaw tight. Then-

GUPTA
Leave it up.

Talia freezes the frame. Waits. Gupta pours a shot of bourbon. Doesn't drink it.

He gestures. An X9 3D model blooms - glowing, mutating.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Twenty-seven trials. Zero survivals. Until her.

He traces a flickering strand: "Ocular Conduit - UNSTABLE."

GUPTA (CONT'D)

If I slow it down, it spreads too far. Harden the immunity wall, it kills faster.

He looks to Talia, voice low, brittle.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Tell me again I'm wrong.

TALIA

You're not.

GUPTA

I didn't build X9 to hurt her. I built it to save her. She was dying of something no one cared to cure. So I rewrote her body. Memory. Fear.

He throws back the bourbon – a sharp burn, a reminder he's still human.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

The world doesn't want cures. It wants control. That's why it needs monsters who don't blink – so everyone else can pretend to feel safe.

His wrist console BUZZES. He reads: Andrea Santiago – Unauthorized breakthrough. Project D72 compromised.

His face hardens to ice.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

I gave her a chance. That's more than anyone gave me.

He deletes the message. The video resumes.

GIRL (VIDEO)

You'll fix it, right? You always fix it.

He doesn't answer. Just stares – as if silence could undo everything.

INT. GUPTA'S STUDY – LATER

Lights low. The screen now blank.

Gupta opens a drawer, revealing a chessboard mid-game. Black pawns buried deep in white territory. No queens. He moves a rook – diagonally. Illegal.

GUPTA

New rules.

From his pocket, he takes a lone black queen. He turns it over in his hand.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

You'd hate this part.

He sets the queen just off the board – an observer, not a player. Talia steps closer.

TALIA

Shall I reset?

GUPTA

No. Let it play out.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – SMALL LAB – DAY

A cramped, flickering lab – more storage room than workspace. Andrea steps in, closes the door behind her.

She exhales, unimpressed, drops into a chair, and powers up her tablet. Fingers fly across the screen – fast, covert.

KNOCK KNOCK

Gupta steps in, composed as ever.

GUPTA

Good, you're here already.

Andrea quickly locks the tablet, sits up straight.

ANDREA

Yeah. IT reconfigured my clearance.
Admin team walked me over.

GUPTA

Perfect. You'll get your data
packets soon. I want your focus on
the treatment division.

ANDREA

We're already using the latest
version, right?

GUPTA
We can do better.

Andrea studies him – wary.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Dr. Brown's politics aside, we
shelved too much of her work. Time
to revisit it.

ANDREA
Really?

GUPTA
She wanted a better treatment. We
think longer cycles might be the
key.

ANDREA
Longer – for the patients?

GUPTA
Exactly. Extended delivery. Slower
recovery. Increases life
expectancy.

ANDREA
By weakening the antiviral.

GUPTA
We want that weaker strain live in
a month. Can you deliver?

ANDREA
Um... sure. I'll try.

GUPTA
Fantastic. More staff's coming in
to keep you on track.
(beat, faint smile)
Welcome back.

He exits. Andrea stays still a moment, stares out the window.
Then she pulls out her SMARTPHONE – and texts Regan: 7PM

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – LATER

Ishara struggles to guide Rhea up the stairs.

ISHARA
Come on, Rhea.

RHEA
Mom...I'm-

ISHARA
You're sick, that's what you are.

RHEA
Call Flora's dad. Ask if she can
stay a few extra days.

She clutches her stomach.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ishara helps her down beside the toilet.

ISHARA
Here we go...

RHEA
I should go to the hospital.

ISHARA
Hospital? We can't afford that. You
barely eat as it is.

Rhea looks away - anger muted by exhaustion.

RHEA
Can you get me a towel?

ISHARA
Sure.

Ishara steps out.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ishara walks down the hall.

SLAM - LOCK

She spins. Bathroom door-locked.

ISHARA
Rhea? Rhea!

No answer. She hurries back, pounding on the door.

ISHARA (CONT'D)
Rhea! What are you doing? Open up!

RHEA
Mom, you have to stay out.

ISHARA
Open the door!

RHEA
It's X9, Mom...

Ishara stops cold.

ISHARA
X9?

RHEA
I've been dizzy for days... I
didn't want to believe it.

ISHARA
Rhea, open this door right now!

RHEA (O.S.)
I don't want you to get it.

ISHARA
Rhea!

RHEA (O.S.)
Please... get help.

Ishara pounds the door again – no response. Just silence.

INT. ANDREA'S BASEMENT – NIGHT

The hum of machines. Screens glow cold against blacked-out windows. A battlefield disguised as a lab.

Andrea stares at the monitor – eyes raw from hours without sleep. Regan leans against the wall, half-awake.

REGAN
That's... new.

Andrea gestures him closer. Onscreen, a cell sequence pulses – alive. Then stabilizes:

RESPONSE: 94% – IMMUNE REGENERATION TRIGGERED

Regan straightens.

REGAN (CONT'D)
That's not progress. That's
history.

ANDREA
It's held for two hours.

She exhales, disbelief edging into certainty.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
It's real.

REGAN
Then we move. Now.

ANDREA
Not yet. I can push it further.

She slams another command through the console. Red flashes:
WARNING - SAMPLE INTEGRITY AT RISK.

REGAN
Andrea! If it crashes, we lose
everything—

ANDREA
If I don't test it, we lose
everyone.

The sequence flickers violently. The image wavers — then
holds. Andrea grips the table, breath trembling.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
See? It works.

REGAN
Or you just got lucky. You keep
gambling, there'll be nothing left
to save.

She ignores him, locking the vial into a reinforced case —
hard, angry. Then grabs Dr. Brown's ID.

ANDREA
We need proof. Trials.
Verification.

REGAN
No time. If Gupta finds out—

ANDREA
Then we make sure the world hears
us first.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - GUPTA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gupta sits behind his desk. Calm. Predatory.

A KNOCK.

Door opens. In walks CAL HALSTROM (40s) – bald, steely-eyed, a predator dressed in a suit.

GUPTA

You look a bit different than I expected – but you'll do. Shut the door.

Cal closes it without a word.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

You're the most expensive asset I've ever acquired.

He circles him – a collector admiring a weapon.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

I read about Istanbul – bioterror, panic–

CAL

That wasn't me. Rogue cell hijacked my data. Civilians were never the target.

GUPTA

Tomato, to-mah-to. Your fingerprints were there.

A flicker of tension in Cal's jaw.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

There are people I need you and your friends to handle.

(beat)

Not with bullets – not yet. Dead bodies raise questions. We ruin them first – reputation, credibility, lives.

Cal meets his stare – steel for steel.

CAL

Understood.

INT. ANDREA'S BASEMENT – LATER

Surgical light cuts across the room. Notes, glass slides, wires – chaos organized by obsession.

ANDREA

It's minor. But it's stronger than Biotech's last strain.

REGAN

Wanna load it onto the nanos?

ANDREA

Yeah. Prep the human cell strip.

Regan opens a SUB-ZERO CONTAINER, extracts a petri dish with gloved care. He pulls a sample with a tiny baster, drops it into a small rectangular black box.

REGAN

Heating... nanos ready?

ANDREA

Ten seconds max for RNA induction.
Watch that temp.

REGAN

Okay...Three...Two...One...

He opens the lid. Andrea peels the plastic cover off a small METALLIC RECTANGLE – a thin layer of nano-dust shimmers faintly.

Regan carefully transfers the heated liquid onto the surface.

ANDREA

Shut it off.

He powers the unit down, opens a fresh Petri dish, and Andrea carefully slides in the damp nano-layer.

Regan seals it, slides it beneath the microscope.

REGAN

Basement beats billion-dollar lab.

ANDREA

Unless we grew mold.

REGAN

Monitor on.

The screen flickers to life: decaying cells crawling with nanomachines.

ANDREA

Okay, let's load the sequence.

She lifts a second Petri dish, this time, liquid blue, their supposed cure. Prepares a SYRINGE.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Okay, Dr. Brown. Let's see if you
were right.

She hesitates. Her hand trembles – an echo of hospital monitors, her parents fading behind glass.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I swore I'd never do this again.
Not like this.

She steadies her grip, opens her eyes – colder now.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Load it.

Regan watches, silent. Andrea inserts the syringe into the port, injects the blue liquid.

Onscreen – nanomachines surge toward it, fusing, consuming, adapting.

They hold their breath as the image stabilizes – something new, something alive.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

POP! A CHAMPAGNE CORK rockets across the room. Andrea and Regan burst out laughing, flushed with adrenaline.

ANDREA
We have a cure!

She pours two glasses. Regan grabs the bottle, topping them off, grinning like he can't believe it either. They collapse into chairs at the kitchen table.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Your aunt nailed it.

The words hang there – joy thinning into silence. Grief takes its place.

REGAN
Cheers.

ANDREA
To Dr. Brown.

They tap glasses. Andrea downs hers in one go.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Now we just need it to work on a
live patient.

REGAN
Good news. I listened to all the
tapes last night.

Andrea sits up – instantly alert.

ANDREA
All of them? When did you sleep?

REGAN
Half the night. The rest I ran
voice matches through copyright
databases.

ANDREA
And?

REGAN
It's a reporter. Independent.
Name's Karen Farris.

ANDREA
Karen Farris... She's an ally?

BANG! BANG!

The windows shudder. Both freeze. A shared look – then they
bolt for the basement.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

They race down the stairs. Andrea yanks a tarp over the
table, hiding equipment.

ANDREA
Unplug the monitor.

Regan rips the cord free, grabs loose notes – then sprints
back upstairs.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Regan bursts up the stairs, flings open a cabinet, and
snatches a crowbar. He scans corners, checks the back door,
listens. Then slowly opens it.

Wind whips branches outside. Nothing but dark and movement.
Andrea appears behind him, voice steady but tight.

REGAN
 Could've been just the wind...

He locks the window tighter, double-checks the LOCK – clicks it tighter. Andrea pours what's left of the champagne, her hand shaking slightly.

ANDREA
 We need to reach that reporter.
 Now.

INT. CITY – STREETS – DAY

SIRENS wail. Smoke curls through the skyline.

KAREN FARRIS (30's) – tall, sharp, striking – stands in front of a charred high-rise, camera crew nearby.

KAREN FARRIS
 As the X9 death toll rises and the
 infection spreads, social and
 economic fallout deepens.

She gestures to the gutted building behind her – a blackened skeleton of glass and steel.

KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)
 This national bank is the latest in
 a wave of attacks – acts of
 desperation by those who've lost–

She stops. Sirens swell closer, cutting through her words.

KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)
 These sirens are murdering us...
 use the earlier take. Get it
 uploaded.

She steps out of frame, voice low, controlled.

INT. BUILDING LOBBY – LATER

Karen enters through a revolving door into a polished, silent lobby. Her phone BUZZES.

VFX TEXT BUBBLE: +11 978 5115

Another buzz. VFX TEXT BUBBLE: Call now.

She hesitates, thumb hovering. RED BANNER: DELETE MESSAGE?

Then another ping. VFX TEXT BUBBLE: X9

Karen freezes. Dismisses the delete prompt. Dials. RING... RING...

 ANDREA (V.O.)
Hello?

 KAREN FARRIS
Who is this?

 ANDREA
Is this Karen?

Karen edges toward a quiet corner, lowering her voice.

 KAREN FARRIS
Who's calling?

 ANDREA
Did Dr. Brown ever contact you?

Karen stiffens.

 KAREN FARRIS
Okay, not funny. I'm hanging up.

 ANDREA
Wait – please. She was right.
There's a cure for X9. We need to
meet.

Karen pauses – suspicion flaring, curiosity under it.

 KAREN FARRIS
I don't know who you are... or what
you think you're doing.

A beat. Her tone shifts – subtle, deliberate.

 KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)
But I do love Burnham Café. They
make a killer green tea.

Click. She hangs up.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – ANDREA'S OFFICE

The door opens. Gupta enters, flawless smile like an offer wrapped in danger.

 GUPTA
Andrea, how are you?

ANDREA

I'm good.

She taps her tablet; data flickers on the screen. Gupta watches, hawk-like.

GUPTA

Any progress?

ANDREA

I'll send my latest data. We're getting there.

Gupta nods, shifts his tone – patient, precise.

GUPTA

I've arranged a memorial for Dr. Brown at Halstrom Hospital. I want you to speak.

She looks up, measured.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

You worked closest with her. Only one nearer was her nephew – though that brat coasted on her coattails...

Andrea stiffens.

ANDREA

I wouldn't know, sir.

GUPTA

No reason to.

He paces once, choosing the next line like a surgeon.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Halstrom's officially joining us on the treatment. I'll announce it at the ceremony—a clean handoff, symbolically speaking.

He moves to the door. Andrea stands.

ANDREA

Sir... what about her nephew? Maybe he should be invited. She'd want that.

Gupta pauses a half beat, then smiles small and offhand.

GUPTA

Noted. Thank you, Andrea.

He exits. Andrea waits a second, then moves – deliberate, a plan clicking into place.

INT. CAFE – LATER

Andrea and Regan slip into a booth, scanning. The cafe hums. They look up and freeze – Karen Farris is already there, relaxed, a reporter who smells stories.

KAREN FARRIS

You scientists really don't blend in. All that "leave no rock unturned" energy – you stick out like road flares.

ANDREA

You're the one who called, right?

KAREN FARRIS

Yeah. You two?

REGAN

We did.

KAREN FARRIS

What's wrong with your generation? At least Dr. Brown had the good sense not to be seen with me.

ANDREA

We need help getting the truth out.

KAREN FARRIS

You have the cure?

ANDREA

Yes.

KAREN FARRIS

And a story?

ANDREA

We need people to know, so we can find a test subject.

Karen laughs – sharp, tired.

KAREN FARRIS

Oh no. No, no. You don't get how this works. You heard the tapes, right?

REGAN

Yeah-

KAREN FARRIS

Then you know I can't just scream "cure" into the void. Best case, I get branded a crank. Worst case? Biotech Pharma sends someone to shut me up - for good.

REGAN

We think they already did that to Dr. Brown.

KAREN FARRIS

Of course they did! That board isn't giving up their third vacation homes for some miracle vial that'll keep a few million people off the drip.

Andrea stares at her, blindsided. Regan is equally stunned.

ANDREA

You... you already knew?

REGAN

How the hell do you know that?

Karen shrugs, half-merciless, half-practical.

KAREN FARRIS

I know how these stories die. I also know how one live, verified recovery can change everything.

ANDREA

We need a patient.

KAREN FARRIS

So did Dr. Brown. This isn't new.

ANDREA

If we give you proof - real data - does that change the story?

KAREN FARRIS
It upgrades me from "conspiracy
theorist" to "professional
laughingstock."

REGAN
But even that gets attention.
People will bite.

Karen studies them, skeptical but unconvinced.

KAREN FARRIS
You don't know the ground you're
standing on.

Andrea holds her stare, unflinching.

ANDREA
Then show us how to stand.

Karen exhales – respect flares, quick and earned.

KAREN FARRIS
Alright. When can I see the data?

ANDREA
We'll be in touch. There's a–

KAREN FARRIS
No. Don't tell me. Remember Dr.
Brown. Tread lightly.

She stands to leave. Regan watches her go.

REGAN
She was my aunt.

Karen stops. Looks back.

KAREN FARRIS
Then I'm sorry.
(beat)
You want to send a message over a
wall that high? You don't climb it.
You dig under it – until it
collapses.

She walks out.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME – KITCHEN

Takeout boxes crowd the counter. Steam rises from noodles and
rice. Andrea hands Regan a plate.

REGAN

This was my Aunt's favorite spot.

ANDREA

Don't forget to add more mayo.

They both laugh. Then... the silence returns.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

My parents were a part of the first Biotech trials.

Regan stops mid-bite.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I pushed them into it. I was in school – young, idealistic. Thought Biotech was going to change everything.

(beat)

They died. Days apart. Believing they'd helped stop this virus.

REGAN

Then why keep working for Biotech?

ANDREA

I told myself it was science. Trial and error. But it wasn't error. It was greed.

(shaking head)

Working with your aunt... I saw the rot up close.

She lifts her drink. Swallows.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I want to believe Gupta's trying to save people... but the numbers keep saying otherwise. If I'm wrong, I need to know – and fast.

REGAN

He knew. It was never going to work.

Andrea reaches across the table, grabs Dr. Brown's worn file.

ANDREA

Right after my parents died, Biotech got another funding wave. Your aunt left this for me – she knew the truth.

(MORE)

ANDREA (CONT'D)

She knew if she'd told me sooner, I
might've quit before the science
could save anyone.

Regan gives a faint, almost broken laugh.

REGAN

It's not too late.

They share a look – a brief, unspoken alliance.

ANDREA

How do we even find someone?
Someone willing to be infected –
just so we can cure them?

REGAN

It's gotta be someone with nothing
left to lose. And we're low on
nano.

ANDREA

Not sure. Wait – I forgot. I have
something of hers. Be right back.

She leaves the room. He watches her go, then reaches into his
backpack, pulls out a small hologlass card and activates it.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)

Don't just build answers, Regan.
Build better questions.

He breathes – soaks it in. Swipes to another recording.

DR. BROWN (V.O.)

You'll do more than I ever did.
Just remember – tech solves speed.
People solve courage.

He blinks once, slowly. Footsteps approach. He kills the
display, tucks it away. Andrea reenters, holding a weathered
notebook.

REGAN

(taps the bag lightly)
Already beat you to it.

He smiles – something changed behind the grin.

INT. ANDREA'S BASEMENT LAB - NIGHT

The hum of machinery. Takeout boxes pushed aside. Andrea paces. Regan scrolls through raw Biotech footage, expression hardening.

MONTAGE - BIOTECH FILE FOOTAGE (ON PHONE)

- Schoolchildren on a bus, masked, tethered to portable oxygen.
- Protesters outside Biotech HQ in Berlin, banners burning.
- Drone footage of unmarked graves outside Rio.
- A U.S. Senator collapsing mid-press conference.
- A girl convulsing on a hospital bed.

Regan stops scrolling. Silence. Andrea slides over a cracked tablet - headline blazing: "More Deaths. Will Anyone Stop X9?"

She exhales, guilt weighing heavy - then something shifts behind her eyes.

REGAN

What?

ANDREA

What if I was the patient?

REGAN

No.

ANDREA

I know it's not ideal, but...I'd be a perfect test subject. Controlled environment, instant feedback-

REGAN

That's the last resort. We need someone else. Someone willing. Not you.

He looks at her - searching for a way to ground her.

REGAN (CONT'D)

If we can make people believe the cure exists, Gupta can't control the story.

ANDREA

Belief isn't enough. We need records. Trial data. Everything Brown and Gupta kept hidden.

REGAN

I'm locked out of all that.

ANDREA

So am I. Biotech never let me near the patient data - makes you wonder why.

REGAN

We'd need access to a hospital. Somewhere big.

A beat.

ANDREA

(Snaps fingers)
The banquet.

REGAN

You mean the one that hijacked my aunt's funeral? No thanks.

ANDREA

Well, We won't need to stay long.

INT. ANDREA'S BASEMENT LAB - LATER

Dim light hums over cold metal and cluttered notes. Andrea's gone. Regan sits at the desk, still as a ghost, the cracked tablet pushed aside.

He taps his phone. A video flickers - grainy hospital footage. A young girl, maybe twelve, gasps through a ventilator. Her fingers twitch. Alarms chirp. A nurse leans over her, speaking too softly to hear. The girl reaches toward the camera - then flatlines.

Regan doesn't move. His jaw locks. He watches again. And again.

REGAN

I should've stopped it.

EXT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A towering facade of glass and steel gleams under sterile spotlights - more fortress than hospital. Unwelcoming.

ANDREA (V.O.)
Those offices up there... They're
swimming in patient data.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

A crowd of elites. Gold trim. Polished laughter. Music hums
like it's under water.

SPLIT SCREEN: Andrea and Regan enter from opposite sides -
dressed sharp, deliberate.

ANDREA (V.O.)
I don't think anyone knows how well
we know each other...

They glide through the crowd in slow motion, eyes scanning.

ANDREA (V.O.)
But this is Gupta's coming-out
party. His big merger with
Halstrom. Every eye here's either
watching or pretending not to.

They approach. Andrea glances - Gupta's cutting through the
crowd toward them.

ANDREA (V.O.)
So... let's make sure we meet for
the first time.

ANDREA
Hi. Dr. Andrea Santiago.

REGAN
Dr. Santiago. Regan Ellis.

ANDREA
Pleasure to meet you.

Gupta slides into frame, charm rehearsed.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Gupta! I see you invited Mr. Ellis
after all.

GUPTA
Yes, Dr. Santiago. You look...
radiant tonight.

He turns to Regan, voice dipped in sugar.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

My boy. A sincere pleasure to honor
your brilliant aunt this evening.
Far beyond her peers.

REGAN

Thank you, sir. I wasn't sure I'd
come... but I changed my mind. For
the greater good.

GUPTA

Excellent. Always the family's
brightest trait.

He beams, pivoting seamlessly.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

And now, the two of you... here to
witness the dawn of Biotech's next
great chapter.

Without a goodbye, he's swallowed by the crowd.

REGAN

What an eccentric creep.

Andrea's smile fades.

ANDREA

Right.

Across the room – Cal, dressed in black, watches them.
Unmoving. Up front, Gupta steps onto the stage, bathed in
light. Andrea tenses. Starts forward.

REGAN

Not now. Cameras everywhere.

She bristles – eyes locked on Gupta, then on Cal. Regan grips
her arm, steady. A guest glances their way, suspicious.

REGAN (CONT'D)

You're gonna get us killed.

ANDREA

Ok, see you in a moment.

REGAN

Don't tell me what I miss.

They separate – one for the data, one for the distraction.

GUPTA

Good evening.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Regan slips through a side door. Controlled. Quiet.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Gupta commands the stage, spotlights glowing off his glass.

GUPTA

Tonight we celebrate - a
partnership with our dearest ally,
Dr. Cal Halstrom of Halstrom
Enterprises.

Applause. Andrea's jaw tightens.

ANDREA

Cal Halstrom...?

Cal joins Gupta onstage, face unreadable.

GUPTA

Together, we guarantee a healthier
world. One step at a time.

More applause. They shake hands. Cal exits.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

X9 has waged war against us for far
too long-

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Regan darts up the stairs. Checks corners. Swift and quiet.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - BANQUET HALL - SAME

GUPTA

-and tonight, we continue Dr.
Brown's legacy through the next
phase of innovation - led by Dr.
Andrea Santiago!

Heads turn. All eyes fall on her. The attention is
unexpected. Andrea freezes.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Dr. Brown was a visionary.
Relentless. And now her protégé
will carry the torch.

Thunderous applause. Andrea smiles, stiff, trapped. Her eyes find Cal. He's gone.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - UPSTAIRS OFFICES

Dim. Empty. A wall monitor flickers: PUBLIC ALERT - X9
VARIANT 2.3 / LEVEL 3 CONTAINMENT.

The date stamp reads May 17, 2031. Regan creeps to a lone
COMPUTER TERMINAL. Onscreen: LOGIN/PASSWORD

He kneels, checks a drawer. Finds a small ring of keys.

REGAN

C'mon, Halstrom. Make it slightly
harder.

INT. BACK OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Rows of patient files. Regan snaps drawers open,
photographing documents with his phone.

REGAN

X9... X9... come on...

Behind him, a shadow crosses the doorway - Cal. Silent.
Watching.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - BANQUET HALL

Gupta stands tall at the podium. Lifts a champagne glass.

GUPTA

This partnership brings not only
prosperity to South Africa...

(beat)

...but to the world at large.

Applause erupts.

INT. UPSTAIRS OFFICES

Cal steps inside, gaze locking on the glowing terminal. He
frowns, draws back his jacket - a subtle, lethal gesture.
Opens the back door - empty. His phone vibrates. He checks
the screen: Urgent.

CAL

One sec.

He slips into the hall. Inside, Regan exhales. Slides the last drawer shut, pockets his phone, and slips out the opposite way.

EXT. CITY - STREETS - MORNING

Karen Farris moves fast through downtown — earbuds in, eyes sharp. Her phone BUZZES. TEXT: PATIENT DATA

She stops. Dials immediately.

INTERCUT - INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Andrea, surrounded by notes, files, open tablets. Exhausted. She hits RECORD on a voice memo app.

ANDREA (INTO RECORDER)
If this fails... at least I'll know
they didn't die for nothing.

She stops the recording, breathes deep, and answers the call.

KAREN FARRIS
This is our last call.

ANDREA
We've got data — patients on
Biotech's treatment versus ours.
Their outcomes tank. Ours—

KAREN FARRIS
Jesus, stop. Don't say "cure."
Don't say "fail." Not on a recorded
line.

ANDREA
Right. Sorry.

KAREN FARRIS
You want a headline, not a thesis.
No one goes viral for spreadsheets.
You're not shorting a stock, you're
taking on an empire.

ANDREA
So... what sells?

KAREN FARRIS
Emotion. Danger. Risk. Something
people can bleed for.

ANDREA

What if I'm the patient?

Karen stops walking.

KAREN FARRIS

Say that again.

ANDREA

I'll take it. The dose. On camera.
I'll say I contracted X9.

KAREN FARRIS

Now that... that's news. But make
it human, not political.

ANDREA

If I do this, Gupta burns. For
good.

KAREN FARRIS

Then give me a video. Close-up.
Your own words. Make people feel
it.

Andrea nods, heart hammering.

KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)

And Andrea... this was our last
call.

Click. The line goes dead.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES - CAL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Cal, on a call with Gupta, stares at an encrypted order on
his screen: "RED PROTOCOL - REDUCE NOISE." Sub-lines blink:
"BPH SOUTH WING," "CONTAIN NARRATIVE," "DELAY RESPONDERS."

CAL

He's working with Andrea.

GUPTA

Predictable... chasing truth. As if
that was ever the point.

CAL

You sure about this?

GUPTA

You think I enjoy it? Every cure I
bury could save millions... later.
But not yet.

(MORE)

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Not until it's profitable – safe.

(beat)

Chaos kills faster than disease.

(beat)

Time to reduce the noise. A little
fire drowns out a thousand
whispers.

Cal hesitates, thumb trembling – then hits SEND.

EXT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – LATER

Regan exits the building, scrolling through patient data on his phone. Screams. A crowd running.

REGAN

What the-?

BOOM!

The south wing of Biotech erupts in fire. Debris rains. Regan freezes – then bolts for the parking lot, texting as he runs:

TEXT ON SCREEN: EMERGENCY. Check BPH. I'm coming now.

INT. REGAN'S CAR – MINUTES LATER

Regan drives fast. Sirens echo. His phone glows.

REGAN

Where are you, Andrea?

He slows – a grocery store ahead, mobbed. Regan gets out.

EXT. GROCERY STORE – CONTINUOUS

A CITIZEN pounds the locked door.

CITIZEN

Let us in! I'll break it down!

REGAN

What's happening?

CITIZEN

Power grid's down. Stores are in
lockdown. X9's airborne again!

The crowd roars. Panic surges.

Then—

ISHARA
Please! Somebody help me!

Regan turns. Ishara fights through the crowd, desperate.

REGAN
Ma'am—

ISHARA
My daughter! She locked me out two
nights ago — said she didn't want
me catching it. I haven't heard
from her since.

Regan stiffens.

REGAN
How long since symptoms started?

ISHARA
Four... maybe five days.

Her voice cracks.

ISHARA (CONT'D)
I don't even know if she's still
alive.

Regan's phone BUZZES: THAT BLAST HIT MY WING. He looks up,
resolve hardening. He slips on a mask and gloves.

REGAN
I can help you both. But we need to
leave. Now.

BOOM! Another blast echoes. Closer. The crowd surges.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Go! My car — now!

ISHARA
Who are you?

REGAN
Someone who's not giving up. Trust
me.

Something in his tone hits home. She nods. They run.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - BASEMENT

Andrea stands before her lab, syringe trembling between her fingers.

BUZZZZ. Her phone vibrates. She looks - REGAN. She exhales. Lowers the needle. Answers.

INTERCUT - INT. REGAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Regan drives, knuckles white. In the backseat, Ishara cradles Rhea - fevered, limp, fighting for air.

ANDREA
What's going on?

REGAN
Fire up the lab. All of it.

ISHARA
Where's the nearest hospital?!

REGAN
Forget the hospital ma'am. Andrea,
I'm gonna bring you a miracle.

Andrea's already moving.

EXT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Regan's car screeches to a stop. Ishara fumbles with keys.

ISHARA
She locked herself in... I
couldn't-

Regan kicks the door in.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - CONTINUOUS

Dark. Silent. The air is thick. Regan bursts into the bathroom - Rhea lies on the tile, drenched in sweat. Barely breathing.

ISHARA
Rhea! Baby, please-

Regan checks her pulse, then lifts her carefully.

REGAN
We don't have time. Let's go!

He barrels out, Ishara on his heels.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - MINUTES LATER

Regan bursts through the door carrying Rhea.

REGAN
Where do I put her?

ANDREA
It's not ready - the sequence isn't stable.

REGAN
She doesn't have time.

Andrea stares at the girl - a flash of her parent's faces in the dying light.

ANDREA
God help me. Downstairs.

They move quickly downstairs.

REGAN
There was an explosion at Biotech.

Andrea's eyes go wide.

ANDREA
He's erasing everything...

ISHARA
Wait, who - what are you people?

ANDREA
We're the only shot your daughter's got.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Rhea lies on the med-chair, shaking, drenched in fever. Machines blink around her.

ISHARA
What is all this?! Why isn't she at a hospital?!

ANDREA
Because hospitals follow orders. We don't.

Andrea slides on gloves. Regan calibrates sensors.

REGAN

She's three days in. Maybe less
than three hours left.

Andrea peers through the microscope: cells clumping, breaking apart.

ANDREA

Eighty-seven percent degradation...

ANDREA (CONT'D)

My parents volunteered for the
first X9 trial. Gupta called it a
"data error". I call it murder.

REGAN

Then let's end it.

ANDREA

We're on the wire.

She opens a CRYO-CASE. Opens it. Inside – one glowing VIAL.

REGAN

That the last one?

ANDREA

This is it.

She loads it into a spinning centrifuge. The WHIR builds. She draws the serum into a syringe.

ISHARA

Will it hurt her?

ANDREA

Not as much as waiting will.

She kneels beside Rhea, syringe steady.

EXT. ANDREA'S HOME

Through a long camera lens, Andrea's silhouette crosses the window – needle glinting in hand.

HENCHMAN 1

That's her. Send it.

Inside the van, a tablet flashes: DATA CONFIRMED – LOCATION TAGGED.

HENCHMAN 2 squints.

HENCHMAN 2
Wait... her phone's pinging across
town. Biotech HQ. She's not here.

HENCHMAN 1
Then who the hell's in the window?

INT. ANDREA'S HOME BASEMENT

Regan kills the overhead light, pulling a burner phone with a
signal spoofer from his pack. He tosses it onto the bench.

REGAN
Your GPS says you're clocking in at
Biotech right now.

Andrea exhales – adrenaline and relief mingling.

ANDREA
Nice trick.

REGAN
Won't last long. They'll figure it
out.

Andrea presses the syringe to Rhea's arm – no hesitation
left. The monitors flicker – a regeneration bar crawls
upward:

14%... 22%... 47%...

REGAN (CONT'D)
No way...

Under the microscope – cells un-clump. They pulse with light.
Alive again.

ANDREA
Degradation zero.

REGAN
Cell function restored.

Rhea stirs. Her eyelids flutter.

RHEA
Mom...?

Ishara falls beside her, trembling, stroking her daughter's
damp hair.

ISHARA
Stay with me, baby. Flora's safe,
okay? She's with Mrs. Miller. Just
stay with me.

REGAN
It worked.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME BASEMENT - LATER

Rhea sits wrapped in a thick blanket, a mug of hot chocolate
in hand. Ishara watches her like she might disappear.

ANDREA
How's that drink?

RHEA
Hot...

ANDREA
Good. That chocolate will give you
a nice little boost.

RHEA
Thank you.

Across the room, Regan guides Ishara into the med-chair.

REGAN
Ma'am, we should get you dosed too.
Just to be safe.

ISHARA
You said you don't have much. Save
it.

ANDREA
We have enough. I'll go last.

Ishara hesitates, then nods. Andrea sits beside Rhea as Regan
preps the injector.

RHEA
What was that stuff?

Andrea taps the monitor. Nanobots swirl onscreen.

ANDREA
Custom RNA in nanoshells.
Programmable medicine.

RHEA
And they're in me?

ANDREA

They fixed you. One day you'll take doses from your phone.

RHEA

That's... wild.

ANDREA

Why didn't you go to a hospital sooner?

Rhea glances toward her mother.

RHEA

She'd live to a hundred – but not if I buried her in bills. I used to be a computer engineer. Company folded.

Andrea studies her, softening.

ANDREA

You remind me of someone.

RHEA

Your sister?

ANDREA

No. My mother. She used to say science was hope in a bottle.

Rhea smiles faintly.

RHEA

Sounds like she was right.

ANDREA

Let's make sure she still is.

Andrea walks to a tablet. Pulls up Gupta's smug Biotech profile.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

He profits off suffering. We're burning him down.

Rhea steps up beside her, fire in her eyes.

ISHARA

That's the guy from the news...

REGAN

Easy.

Andrea nods. Regan doses Ishara swiftly. Onscreen – her cells stabilize, color flooding back into her face.

ISHARA
Call me Ishara.

REGAN
Of course.

Andrea turns to Rhea.

ANDREA
You said numbers are your thing?

RHEA
Yeah. Why?

ANDREA
Good. Regan'll bring you onto the network.
(to Regan)
Take them upstairs. I need a clean testimonial.

REGAN
You got it.

They head out – Regan, Rhea, Ishara – one by one.

Andrea lingers. She stares at the syringe she nearly used on herself. Her hand tightens around it. Silence.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - KITCHEN

A phone camera records. A makeshift ring light glows softly on Rhea, wrapped in a blanket. Her face – fragile but fierce.

RHEA
It doesn't have to be like this. X9 isn't unbeatable.

She swallows, voice catching.

RHEA (CONT'D)
There's a cure. Not just treatment.
A cure.

She lifts her tablet – her vitals flashing healthy and clear.

RHEA (CONT'D)
I'm cured. My mom... cured.

Her voice breaks. She pushes through it.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Flora... baby girl... we're alive.

She looks straight into the camera.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Ask your doctors. Ask Biotech. Ask
Halstrom. They know it works.
(beat)
They're just not giving it to you.

She leans forward, raw and unfiltered.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Demand better. Demand your life
back.

The red RECORDING light flicks off.

REGAN
One take.

ISHARA
She's brilliant.

Ishara hugs her daughter, fierce with pride.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - BASEMENT

Andrea unlocks a small case labeled X9 - LIVE SAMPLE.

REGAN
Andrea, we can't use volunteers -
Gupta wiped every patient ID from
the system.

ANDREA
Then the only verifiable proof
left... is me. My blood's still
tagged in their archives from Phase
One. They can't fake those markers.

REGAN
You'll be infected.

ANDREA
And cured. On record. In real time.

She stares at the vial - grief and fury fusing into resolve.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You turned my parents into test
subjects, Gupta. I'll show the
world what you've done.

FLASH CUT - Her parents, emaciated, being wheeled away in a
Biotech clinic.

She draws the serum. Calm. Unflinching.

RHEA (V.O.)
Protest Halstrom. Protest Biotech.
Make them listen.

Andrea sits, rolls up her sleeve. Breathes in. And injects.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Andrea emerges, pale but composed. Regan looks up from the
table.

REGAN
Karen needs this video - now.

Andrea shakes her head.

ANDREA
Karen's out. Too much heat.

REGAN
Then we wait. Find another way-

Andrea raises her phone.

ANDREA
Already sent.

She hits SEND. Message delivered.

REGAN
Andrea!

He stops. It's too late. The file's gone. The truth is out.
There's no undoing it. Andrea's already crossing the room,
joining Ishara and Rhea at the table.

ANDREA
I'll need to monitor you both
overnight. Just in case.

Regan watches her, stunned - part fear, part awe. Rhea leans
against her mother. Ishara kisses her forehead. The world
outside still burns - but something irreversible has begun.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - MORNING

The house sleeps. Stillness. Morning haze floats through half-drawn curtains. Downstairs, Andrea leans over a glowing screen, face pale, eyes red – wired, wrecked. Behind her, footsteps.

RHEA
You haven't slept?

Andrea doesn't look up.

ANDREA
Can't. Not while people are still dying... and I might have something that works.

RHEA
You do have something. You saved us.

Andrea finally looks at her. Dark circles, but a faint smile.

ANDREA
I didn't even know if it'd work.

RHEA
I didn't care. I just needed to see my daughter again.

Andrea softens – emotion threatening to surface.

ANDREA
X9 feeds on desperation. And the cure? It feeds... greed.

RHEA
Not anymore.

Rhea touches her shoulder – warm, grounding.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Try to rest.

She walks off. Andrea exhales, rubs her eyes, checks her phone—

DING! A notification. She frowns, taps – then her eyes go wide. Millions of views. Comments flood in. Shares. Reaction videos.

ANDREA
Regan, you have to see this!

Regan stirs on the couch, bleary. She tosses him the phone.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Look.

He scrolls, hope flaring. Then—

RHEA (O.S.)

Andrea...

Rhea stands in the doorway, pale, holding her phone like it's radioactive. Andrea takes it. The headline blares:

"Disgruntled Employee Spreads FAKE Cure — Biotech Sabotage."
Andrea's hands tighten around the phone.

ANDREA

He's twisting the truth...

Comments scroll: "Scammer BS." "She's endangering lives!"
"#BiotechWins."

Ishara stirs on the couch.

ISHARA

Is everything okay?

But Andrea's already halfway up the stairs.

REGAN

Andrea — wait! Where are you going?

BEGIN MONTAGE — MEDIA BACKLASH — VARIOUS LOCATIONS

INT. NEWSROOM — NIGHT

A composed ANCHOR stares directly into the camera. Behind her, a chyron blares: "BIOTECH DISINFORMATION CRISIS."

ANCHOR 1 (TV)

Self-proclaimed scientist Andrea
Santiago accused of spreading
conspiracy videos—

INT. PODCAST STUDIO — DIMLY LIT

A smug HOST leans into a microphone, surrounded by glowing monitors and clickbait headlines.

ANCHOR 2 (PODCAST)

Sources say she faked data to
destabilize Biotech—

INT. COLLEGE CAMPUS — STUDY LOUNGE — NIGHT

Students scroll Twitter on a projector screen during a study session. Murmurs ripple through the room.

TWITTER FEED
Another fame-seeking fraud.
#BiotechWins

INT. LIVING ROOM - SMART TV SCREEN

A family watches YouTube on the couch. Andrea's face flashes onscreen, distorted by buffering.

YOUTUBE COMMENT
You endangered patients! Hope ur
proud. Hope u burn!

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN - NIGHT

A commuter scrolls Facebook on a flickering phone. The feed glitches, then loads an aggressive fact - check article.

FACEBOOK FEED
We fact-checked the so-called
'cure' - Proven false. #fraud

END MONTAGE

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Andrea slams drawers, grabbing vials, medkits. Regan barrels down after her.

REGAN

You rushed it. You gave him the wheel back.

Guilt cuts through her fury.

ANDREA
Then we take it back. I won't let
him bury us.

BANG! Windows shatter - not an explosion, but a power surge ripping through the walls. Sparks. Smoke.

ISHARA
What was that?!

A faint hiss comes from the kitchen. Regan sniffs, tenses.

REGAN
...Gas.

Andrea bolts to the kitchen – the gas line sliced. A spark licks close.

ANDREA
They want it to look like an
accident.

BUZZZZZ – the doorbell. Too calm. Too ordinary. Regan peeks. A DELIVERY MAN waits outside, still as stone.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I didn't order anything.

REGAN
Quiet's worse than loud.

Andrea's eyes harden. She cuts the gas, motions everyone back.

ANDREA
They're not sending an army.
They're sending ghosts.

They retreat to the basement. Through the blinds, the delivery man speaks into his sleeve.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Every move from now on – assume
they're already here.

EXT. ANDREA'S HOME

A sleek BLACK SEDAN purrs at the curb, lights off. Inside – Cal, calm, surgical. Two henchmen step out, silencers drawn.

HENCHMAN 1
On your mark...

They move toward the house, deliberately, like cleaners finishing a job.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME – KITCHEN

Regan peers through the blinds, sees them – professional, patient.

REGAN
Ghosts. Just like she said.
(beat)
They're not leaving till someone's
dead.

INT. ANDREA'S HOME - BASEMENT

Andrea zips the duffel shut, turns to Ishara and Rhea.

ANDREA
We split. If they can't pin us in
one place, they lose control of the
story.

She presses a drive into Ishara's hands.

ISHARA
Me? I don't—

ANDREA
They'll expect me. Not you. Get it
out. No matter what.

Regan swaps phones with Rhea.

REGAN
If they're tracking, they'll follow
mine. Go. Through the window,
headlights flash — a signal.

Regan grabs his keys.

REGAN (CONT'D)
I'll draw them out.

EXT. STREET

Regan dives into his own car, slams the door, and guns the engine. The henchmen jump back into the sedan. Tires screech as it pulls off.

INT. REGAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Regan floors it — peels onto the street. He dials on Rhea's phone.

INTERCUT - REGAN'S CAR / ANDREA'S BASEMENT

ANDREA
Hello?

REGAN
You're alive.

ANDREA
What the hell just happened?

REGAN

Gupta's panic attack. You rattled
the hive.

ANDREA

And he sent ghosts. Quiet,
surgical.

Andrea yanks another cable from the wall, tosses it in the
bag. Rhea and Ishara hurry in, shaken.

REGAN

He flipped the narrative. Now we're
the threat. We need other hands on
this. Other labs.

ANDREA

No. Every time we let others in,
they corrupt it. That's how Biotech
wins. Brown's dead. My family's
dead. It's about Rhea now – about
everyone they erased.

REGAN

And if we don't? Then we're already
finished. They erase us next.

ANDREA

That's always their move –
discredit, then erase.

REGAN

Then we hit them back. Hard.

A pause.

ANDREA

We need their lab. Tonight.

INTERCUT – KAREN'S CONFERENCE ROOM / ANDREA'S BASEMENT –
NIGHT

Karen Farris paces a dimly lit space – laptop open, news
feeds streaming. Her hand grips the phone, knuckles white.

KAREN FARRIS

So... you're not dead?

Andrea freezes, duffel in hand.

ANDREA

Come again?

KAREN FARRIS
What the hell is happening?

ANDREA
Gupta's torching everything. I'm
lucky I'm still breathing.

Karen stops pacing. Her voice drops – almost a whisper.

KAREN FARRIS
I'm breaking my own rules calling
you.

ANDREA
You said "not dead." What are you
talking about?

Karen lifts a tablet off the table. Her face hardens.

KAREN FARRIS
Headline: "Dr. Andrea Santiago
Killed in Terrorist Blast. Gupta
Resigns."

ANDREA
What!?

KAREN FARRIS
Sending it now.

PING. Andrea taps her screen. A news clip opens. ON TABLET –
Gupta at a press podium, solemn, bathed in flashbulbs.

GUPTA (ON TABLET)
...Following Dr. Brown's tragic
passing, and now Dr. Santiago's
untimely death...

B-ROLL: Biotech's building-charred, smoldering holes across
its side. Emergency crews swarm the scene.

GUPTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...Halstrom Enterprises will
spearhead the global containment
strategy...

Andrea stares, stone-faced. Then – SLAM. She smacks the
tablet against the table.

ANDREA
Global epidemic?

KAREN FARRIS
CDC just validated it. Halstrom
confirmed new numbers.

Andrea paces, chest rising and falling fast.

ANDREA
He's staging a full-scale outbreak.
All to erase us before we go
public.

Karen's voice cuts sharp.

KAREN FARRIS
Did the cure work?

Andrea's eyes flick to the shattered syringe on the floor.
Then to the one pristine vial still glowing faintly.

ANDREA
They had hours left. Now they're
walking, talking, breathing.

Karen exhales – heavy. Her voice steadies.

KAREN FARRIS
If I go live, there's no going
back.

Andrea lifts the vial. Her reflection swims in the glass.

ANDREA
Then don't look back.

Silence. Then Karen sits, opens her laptop.

KAREN FARRIS
Strap in.

Click.

EXT. CITY STREET – CONTINUOUS

Regan pulls alongside Cal's sedan – windows down, wind
tearing through.

REGAN
Hey—!

Cal glances over, calm as ever. Lifts the machine gun.
Regan's eyes flare.

REGAN (CONT'D)

Shit!

He jerks the wheel, slams the brakes – his car veers hard, tires screaming.

A delivery truck barrels past, missing him by inches. Silence. Just the faint hum of the engine and Regan's pulse in his ears.

REGAN (CONT'D)

Yeah... can't learn that in school.

He spins the wheel – tires bite pavement. U-turn. He guns it back toward Biotech Pharma.

NT. NEWS STATION – NIGHT

Rhea's testimonial plays full-screen. Karen Farris sits at the anchor desk, live.

KAREN FARRIS

Dr. Gupta's issued denial after denial – each aimed at discrediting what you just saw. But I've verified that footage. No edits. No tricks. That woman is alive today because someone broke ranks. They called Dr. Santiago a fraud. I call her proof.

She stares down the camera.

KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)

How many lives were traded for profit? How many more before we act?

A beat.

KAREN FARRIS (CONT'D)

The time to act is now. Speak up. Protest. Take your lives back.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB – NIGHT

Andrea storms in with Rhea. Lights buzz.

RHEA

Didn't you work here?

ANDREA

Worked. Studied. Then I knocked on
Biotech's door hard enough they had
to let me in.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN (50s), wiry and soft-eyed, enters mid-sentence.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN

They said you were dead.

ANDREA

Not yet. But we're out of time.

He steps forward, arms ready to hug. Andrea lifts a palm, firm.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I wouldn't get too close...

His face sinks. He steps back, understanding.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

We have a working cure. I just need
space. And peace.

He doesn't respond.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Biotech torched my home, Professor.
We don't have infrastructure. We
have momentum. I just need forty-
eight hours.

The fluorescents buzz, stutter, nearly die. Rhea glances up – unnerved.

RHEA

Rolling blackout... or someone
pulling plugs.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN

Forty-eight hours. And nothing
leaves this room.

ANDREA

Thank you.

He nods once and disappears down the hall.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - GUPTA'S OFFICE - MORNING

The glass doors swing open. Two POLICE OFFICERS enter — stiff suits, grim faces. Cal sits off to the side, composed, hands folded.

Gupta rises smoothly to greet them — polished charm incarnate.

GUPTA

Gentlemen.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Dr. Gupta.

Gupta gestures toward Cal.

GUPTA

This is Dr. Halstrom. Halstrom Enterprises. Our newest ally in containing this... unspeakable tragedy.

POLICE OFFICER 2

We'll need to ask a few questions regarding the recent attacks.

Gupta motions to the sleek chairs in front of his desk.

GUPTA

Of course. Anything I can do.

POLICE OFFICER 1

We'll need access to your communications — call logs, internal correspondence, digital records.

GUPTA

Naturally. I'll authorize a full data pull.

POLICE OFFICER 2

Also staff files, medical records. Anyone confirmed or presumed dead — we'll need identifiers, maybe even dental.

Gupta's smile holds — but the corners of his eyes tighten.

GUPTA

You'll have everything. I want the truth uncovered as much as anyone.

POLICE OFFICER 1
There's one more thing. We'll need
to evacuate the building.

A pause. Heavy. Gupta doesn't move. Locks eyes with Cal.

GUPTA
That's not possible.

POLICE OFFICER 1
It's standard protocol during
active investigations—

GUPTA
This facility is the front line of
a global health crisis. You shut us
down, people die.

POLICE OFFICER 2
We can relocate your operations—

GUPTA
Relocate? You think you can rebuild
this infrastructure? These
resources? These minds?
(leans in, calm but cold)
I can offer your families full care
coverage. Private. Discreet. No
expense. Just... let us work.

The officers exchange a look — tired, compromised.

POLICE OFFICER 2
We'll work around it.

They stand.

POLICE OFFICER 1
Appreciate the cooperation.

The men exit.

Gupta watches them go, then turns to Cal with a small,
satisfied nod.

GUPTA
Nice to see the world still
understands leverage.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - PRIVATE CONFERENCE ROOM -
MOMENTS LATER

Low light. Shadows stretch across the glass walls. Cal stands beside two SENIOR SCIENTISTS - one older and weary, the other younger, unreadable. Silence. Then the older one steps forward, jaw tight.

OLDER SCIENTIST
We followed your specs. Your
orders. And now the story's "rogue
lab techs"?

Gupta adjusts his cuffs - unbothered.

GUPTA
The board doesn't care who started
the fire. Only who owns the
extinguisher.

The older man's fists clench. Cal shoots him a warning look. Gupta steps closer - quiet, dangerous.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
You like your clearance? Your
pension?
(beat)
Then remember who signs off on
both.

He pivots - mask of calm back in place - but the air behind him feels strangled.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - GUPTA'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Gupta stands at the window, his reflection fractured in the glass. Cal scrolls through Gupta's tablet - surveillance logs, calls, timestamps cascading down the screen.

CAL
We could move now. Clean hit. No
one sees it coming.

GUPTA
Not yet. They're still leading us
to what we need.

CAL
Her phone's running a military-
grade channel. We can't tap it
without triggering alarms.

GUPTA

Then we stay close – and patient.

Cal slides a drive onto the desk.

CAL

Thirty days' worth. Every ping,
every trace.

Gupta scans it. A slow exhale.

GUPTA

I want them buried. All of them.
And this building... gone. Ashes.

CAL

And if people are still inside?

GUPTA

Then history will call them
casualties.

CAL

Or witnesses.

Gupta pauses – a beat too long – then heads for the door.

GUPTA

Has my office at Halstrom been
prepped?

CAL

It's ready.

Gupta turns for one last look at his office – pristine,
gleaming, empty of sentiment.

GUPTA

It's been fun.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

But I have a higher calling...

He walks out without another glance.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB – NIGHT

Fluorescent lights flicker. Andrea – pale, focused, hunched
over the central bench. Beside her, Rhea lines up syringes,
eyes darting between monitors. From a hallway TV: muffled
chants, a newscaster's tone bleeding through.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)
Whistleblower Andrea Santiago –
branded a fraud by Biotech Pharma...

Andrea freezes a beat. Then works faster – precision edged with fury. The door bursts open. Regan stumbles in, breath ragged.

REGAN
How we doing?

Andrea looks up. Relief cracks through exhaustion – the first real exhale in hours.

ANDREA
You're alive.

A rare smile.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
We're close. Sequence is
stabilizing.

She coughs – sharp, tight. Regan notices, says nothing. He pulls on gloves, steps in beside her.

REGAN
Dr. Brown's house was ransacked.
They're not bluffing anymore.

Andrea nods toward a faintly glowing vial under the biohood.

ANDREA
They're looking for this.

REGAN
Well, we better finish fast, before
they find us.

ANDREA
Forty-eight hours to scale it.
Maybe less.

She checks the monitor – progress bar crawling: 97%.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
One last update... then we run it.

The lights flicker. A deep boom rattles the windows.

Outside, the low roar of a crowd – anger and fear blending in the night.

REGAN

They're at the gates already.

ANDREA

Good. Means we don't have time to fail.

She coughs again. Harder this time.

INT. UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY

Professor Nystuen strides through the corridor, fatigue etched in every step.

Outside - engines roll across gravel. He peers through the window.

EXT. UNIVERSITY - CONTINUOUS

Three unmarked SUVs roll to a stop. Doors open in sync. Six men step out - black suits, black boots, zero expression.

BACK TO HALLWAY

Nystuen stiffens. The men enter, stride past him without a glance.

PROFESSOR NYSTUEN

You-you can't be here-

Ignored.

INT. UNIVERSITY - SCIENCE LAB

Gunfire erupts. Distant. Closer. Andrea jolts. Regan grips her shoulder.

REGAN

Hide. Now.

They scatter - Andrea and Rhea dive behind tables. Regan stays standing, eyes on the door. Footsteps pound closer.

A HENCHMAN bursts through, gun raised-

Regan grabs the nearest fire extinguisher - sprays the man's face - a flash of instinct. A sharp elbow, his body drops.

He snatches the fallen weapon, tosses it toward Andrea.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Keep your wrists firm – with a
little give in the elbow.

ANDREA
You know how to do this?

REGAN
Dr. Brown had... unconventional
ideas about lab safety.

ANDREA
Unconventional?

REGAN
She taught me hand-to-hand between
RNA lectures. Said science without
survival was pointless.

A second HENCHMAN charges in – Regan spins, fires, one shot.
Down.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Rhea! Grab the core drive!

The laptop pings: 100%. Rhea yanks it, shoves tablets and
vials into her bag.

More boots. More guns. The next wave crashes in – glass
shatters, metal screams. Andrea yelps, squeezes the trigger –
BANG! A henchman spins, slams into a cabinet, crumples.

ANDREA
Did I–? Was that–?

REGAN
Dead center. Totally intentional.

ANDREA
I closed my eyes!

REGAN
Never admit that.

He fires again – quick, surgical. One, two – both fall.
Andrea fumbles the reload. Drops the clip. Ducks as a bullet
slices the air.

ANDREA
I think I hate this part of
science.

Regan kneels beside her, calmly swaps her magazine out.

REGAN
You get used to it.

Tables flip. Vials explode. Another henchman charges – Andrea shrieks, fires blind. Glass bursts. The man collapses. Andrea blinks – stunned.

ANDREA
Okay, that one I aimed for.

REGAN
Now you're a scientist and a statistic.

The last body hits the floor. The lab goes still.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Let's get out of here–

Andrea's halfway out when she stops. Pulls out her phone.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Andrea!

ANDREA
They'll erase this. I won't let them.

She films the wreckage – bodies, ruined lab, shattered glass – evidence. Regan pulls her toward the hall.

INT. UNIVERSITY HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

More gunmen storm down the stairs. Andrea and Regan fire while running – bullets slicing the air. Exit doors ahead.

EXT. UNIVERSITY – NIGHT

They burst into the parking lot. Andrea freezes. Professor Nystuen sprawled on the steps. Bullet through the chest. Eyes wide, lifeless.

ANDREA
I'm so sorry...

REGAN
We have to go!

She lingers one heartbeat too long – then runs. They disappear into the dark.

EXT. CITY - STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Regan's car tears through the night - headlights slicing the blur.

INT. REGAN'S CAR - MOVING

Andrea twists around, scanning shadows.

ANDREA
Where's your mom's house?

RHEA
It's-

SCREEEECH!

A BLACK SEDAN whips around the corner behind them, tires screaming.

INT. BLACK SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

A bloodied henchman leans out the window, gun blazing.

INTERCUT - BOTH VEHICLES

REGAN
We've got company.

He punches the gas. Traffic howls. Side mirrors clip cars. Horns erupt. Bullets ping off the trunk.

RHEA
He's gaining!

A concrete divider looms ahead, slicing the lanes.

REGAN
Hold onto something.

He cuts left, threading the sliver of road. Behind them -
CRUNCH!

The black sedan clips the barrier, flips - glass raining. The black sedan tries to follow-slams the concrete barrier, flips sideways, glass raining.

INT. REGAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The jolt throws them forward. Then - silence. Andrea flips open the laptop. ON SCREEN: SEQUENCE COMPLETE - 100%

ANDREA

Yes...

She slams it shut, grinning like she just stole fire. Adrenaline pulsing.

INT. NEWS STATION - DAY

FULL SCREEN VIDEO: Grainy phone footage. A university lab in chaos. Shattered glass. Unmoving bodies in black. A bloodied logo reads: Biotech Pharma.

KAREN (V.O.)

Tensions surge after a suspected terrorist assault at the University of Cape Town - just hours after the Biotech blast.

The video slides up to the corner.

LIVE ON AIR: Karen Farris - sharp, deliberate, eyes full of fire.

KAREN FARRIS

First Biotech. Now a university science lab. Why these sites? Why now?

(beat)

Dr. Gupta warns of a "shadow war." But the real question-

(leans in)

-are the enemies of science out there... or already among us?

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND - GUPTA'S OFFICE

Gupta watches the broadcast on a sleek tablet, jaw clenched.

GUPTA

Who the hell is this?

Cal enters, grim.

CAL

Our men are down, sir.

GUPTA

Clearly.

He paces, fury contained like static.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

The police are circling. After this, they'll be on my doorstep.

Cal hands him another tablet.

CAL

We might not have to worry about that.

Gupta scans the screen: Surveillance footage – Andrea sprinting through Dr. Brown's lab the night of the explosion.

GUPTA

Why isn't this whole place ash?

Cal's already heading for the door.

INT. GUPTA'S OFFICE - LATER

The two police officers from earlier return. Gupta greets them – mask back on, serene and spotless.

GUPTA

Officers... I'd like you to see something.

He hands them the tablet. They watch the footage closely.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

We believe Dr. Brown wasn't acting alone. Possibly a wider radical cell.

Both officers' phones buzz. One checks his walkie.

POLICE WALKIE (O.S.)

Explosion at Biotech. All units respond!

GUPTA

Dear God, Cal! Call over there—evacuate them. Now!

The officers rush out. Gupta turns – calm shattered, eyes hard. He calls Cal.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Push the damage claim. The
insurance alone makes it worth the
smoke.

CAL
What about her?

Gupta stares through the window – reflection haloed by flame.

GUPTA
Let them believe she's a killer. A
terrorist. Let them fear her.
(turns)
She'll be too busy staying alive...
for now.

INT. UNDERGROUND SERVER ROOM – NIGHT

A terminal flickers. Andrea's face glows in the light as
alerts bloom: "DR. SANTIAGO NAMED PRIME SUSPECT IN BIOTECH
BLAST."

She stares – stunned but steady.

EXT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS – NIGHT

Flames roar from the building's twisted frame. FIREFIGHTERS
slice through smoke. Shattered glass glitters across the
street like broken promises. Above it all – a black column of
smoke coils into the sky.

INT. UNDERGROUND SERVER ROOM – NIGHT

Dust drifts. Old equipment hums softly. Andrea, Regan, and
Rhea stand before a single glowing terminal.

Onscreen: grainy surveillance footage from Gupta's private
suite.

GUPTA (V.O.)
Let the world believe she's a
killer. A terrorist. Let them fear
her.

Andrea's fingers float over the keyboard. She locks eyes with
Regan.

REGAN
This time... we do it right.

Andrea hits SEND. The screen explodes with motion – files cascading like fireworks. Encrypted footage, memos, data – routed to whistleblower portals, newsrooms, global servers.

BEGIN MONTAGE – NEWS OUTLETS & SOCIAL MEDIA ERUPTING

INT. NEWSROOM – CNN EQUIVALENT – NIGHT

A red BREAKING banner pulses: “CEO IMPLICATED IN WHISTLEBLOWER SMEAR.”

ANCHOR 1 (V.O.)
Breaking: Shocking new evidence
implicates Biotech CEO in smear
campaign against Dr. Santiago.

INT. GLOBAL NEWS NETWORK – DAY

Split-screen: Gupta’s leaked meeting plays behind a stunned anchor.

ANCHOR 2 (V.O.)
Global outrage erupts as leaked
video confirms conspiracy to frame
whistleblower.

INT. TEENAGER’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

A teen scrolls Twitter. Notifications explode.

ON SCREEN – TRENDS: #JusticeForAndrea #GuptaExposed
#BelieveTheTruth

INT. COFFEE SHOP – DAY

Customers huddle around a laptop.

FACEBOOK TRENDING:

Leaked files tie Biotech CEO to false-flag cover-up.
#TheTruth

END MONTAGE

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – BASEMENT – LATE EVENING

Cables snake across the floor. Monitors hum with code. Regan and Rhea work fast. Andrea stands nearby, arms folded – eyes like steel.

REGAN
How's it feel to be dead again?

Andrea smirks.

ANDREA

Efficient.

(beat)

Biotech still spinning?

REGAN

Half the staff walked. The rest are furious. Your leak hit socials before I even made it back. They're evacuating within 24.

ANDREA

And Gupta?

Regan's silence says everything.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Of course. Gone like a ghost. He'll bury the cure and sell the panic.

REGAN

Maybe. But protests already broke out at Biotech. People are waking up.

The computers BEEP – systems online. Rhea checks readouts.

ANDREA

Can we be ready by morning?

RHEA

Easily. Give me twelve hours.

Regan lifts a small USB drive, quiet.

REGAN

Time to solve with courage.

He hands it to Rhea.

REGAN (CONT'D)

This still pings Biotech's old cloud. Maybe it gives us a backdoor.

Rhea nods, connecting it. Ishara descends the stairs with a tray of mugs.

ISHARA

You all look like death. Hydrate.

They pause – the air between them loaded, fragile.

REGAN

Gupta's turning Biotech into a ghost town.

ISHARA

Then maybe that makes it the perfect place to test your cure.

Andrea's eyes spark.

ANDREA

Why not go back? No security. Empty labs. Full access. No one to stop us.

(beat)

We use their own machines to prove the cure works.

REGAN

If I show up... with Gupta's moles still lurking...

ANDREA

We upload everything live. Feed the CDC real-time proof.

ISHARA

See? I'm useful.

Andrea grins faintly. Turns to Regan.

ANDREA

Give me your phone.

He hands it over. She starts recording – gaze steady.

ANDREA (INTO CAMERA) (CONT'D)

Still breathing. If you want to be on the right side of history... meet me at sunrise.

She ends the clip, hands the phone back.

REGAN

I'll rally whoever's left.

He turns to leave – but Rhea stops him.

RHEA

There's something else.

She looks to Andrea.

RHEA (CONT'D)
Gupta now knows you're alive.
Walking in there is suicide.

ANDREA
Then maybe I should do just that.

Everyone freezes.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
We've got the cure. The data. We
made it this far.
(beat)
Let him see me. Let him try. On
camera. If I die — let the world
watch.

REGAN
That's your brilliant plan?

ANDREA
Only if he wants the kill shot more
than control.

Rhea digs through a drawer, pulling out a BROADCAST UNIT and
EXTERNAL DRIVE.

RHEA
Stream everything. Wear your phone
like a necklace. I'll link the
feed.

Andrea sets her phone on the table. No hesitation.

ANDREA
Do it.

Regan shakes his head, half a laugh.

REGAN
You're insane.

Ishara gestures between Andrea and Rhea.

ISHARA
You two are the same size, right?

Blank stares.

ISHARA (CONT'D)
You're gonna need a red dress.

Andrea freezes — the words hit deep.

She glances at a shelf of scorched debris: a charred photo, Dr. Brown's badge, a melted flash drive.

She picks up the badge, the face still visible beneath the warping.

ANDREA

She used to say science doesn't
save people – people do.

She slips it into her pocket.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Time to prove her right.

Andrea turns back and reaches for the dress.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – KITCHEN – LATER THAT NIGHT

Water runs in the sink – forgotten. Andrea stands still, rinsing a glass she hasn't noticed in minutes. In the window's reflection: her face – drawn but composed.

Behind her, the red dress hangs over a chair like a challenge. Rhea enters, holding a tablet.

RHEA

The feed's synced. We'll go live
the moment you cross the threshold.

Andrea nods but doesn't turn.

ANDREA

You think he'll kill me?

RHEA

If he does, the world sees it.

ANDREA

That's not what I asked.

Rhea hesitates – then lowers her guard.

RHEA

I think... he wants to win. And
dead girls don't lose. They become
symbols. You scare him more alive.

Andrea finally looks up, meeting her own reflection. Doubt flickers.

ANDREA

What if it's not enough? The cure,
the stream, the outrage... What if
they bury it anyway?

RHEA

Then make him say it out loud.

Andrea turns, cautious.

ANDREA

You think he will?

RHEA

If you ask the right questions...
and keep him talking.

(beat)

Make him monologue. All great
villains love to do that.

Andrea almost smiles.

Regan appears in the doorway, holding a battered FIELD
RECORDER.

REGAN

If you're walking into the lion's
den... take this too.

(sets it down)

Backup mic. In case he jams the
feed.

ANDREA

Paranoid much?

REGAN

Yep.

A beat. The weight of what's coming fills the space.

ANDREA

This only works if he sees me as
something he couldn't kill.
If I look fearless.

RHEA

You're not?

Andrea lifts the red dress. Drapes it over her arm.

ANDREA

I'm terrified. That's how I know
I'm ready.

She exits. Silence lingers until-

ISHARA (O.S.)
Try not to bleed on the dress. It's
vintage.

INT. GUPTA'S COMPOUND - SECURITY HUB - NIGHT

Dim lighting. Surveillance monitors glow - streets, drones, satellites. A TECH OPERATIVE clicks furiously.

TECH OPERATIVE
Her livestream's up fifty thousand
viewers in ten minutes. Three
mirror uploads and climbing.

Gupta looms behind him, sleeves rolled, eyes on the feed:

Andrea approaches in her red dress. Live stream hanging at
her chest - approaching his gate.

GUPTA
Kill her, she becomes a martyr. Let
her in... maybe I control the
narrative.

CAL (O.S.)
Sir?

Cal storms in, tense.

CAL (CONT'D)
We had three clean shots - the
house, the protest, the university.
Every time, you called it off. Why?

Gupta turns - slow, deliberate.

GUPTA
Because every time I almost kill
her... the world leans in.
(beat)
If I do it while she's
broadcasting, we ignite a movement.
If I discredit her live on air - I
win twice.

Cal folds his arms - frustration barely contained.

CAL
And if she's holding something?
Proof? The cure?

GUPTA

Then we stay close. We jam nothing...
until I say so.

He walks out – calm, collected, terrifyingly certain.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

The world wants a show. So we give
them the illusion of mercy.

(beat)

Just make sure she doesn't leave.

On the monitors: Andrea steps up to the gate. The red dress
burns against the floodlights – one woman against an empire.

EXT. GUPTA'S PRIVATE COMPOUND-NIGHT

Andrea, radiant in red, walks toward the gate like it's a
runway. Her phone blinks LIVE. Each step echoes – too human,
too loud. Her breath ghosts in the cold. She presses the
intercom.

INTERCOM VOICE

Excuse—

CRACKLE. Line goes dead. The gate slides open.

Andrea smiles and walks through the moonlit courtyard as if
she owns it. The mansion doors part before she even reaches
them.

Gupta waits in the entry, composed, cold.

ANDREA

I've come back from the dead to
haunt you.

GUPTA

You shouldn't be here. Not after
everything you've done.

She casually taps her phone.

ANDREA

Then go ahead. Prove every word
I've said – on camera.

A long beat. Then Gupta steps aside, gestures her in.

GUPTA

Be my guest.

INT. GUPTA'S PRIVATE COMPOUND - ESTATE BANQUET ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Vaulted ceilings. Stained glass. A table for a hundred - empty. Perfection polished to sterility.

Gupta leads Andrea to a single chair. Pulls it out. Courtly. Chilling.

GUPTA
Sit. I'll be right back.

He vanishes behind a curtain.

Andrea tests the space. Touches plates, the silverware... Everything feels replicated, lifeless. Manufactured luxury.

Gupta re-enters, carrying a silver tray. Without warning - he hurls it down. CRASH. Crystal shatters. Andrea flinches.

ANDREA
Is anyone else here?

GUPTA
Not a soul.

He sets a covered plate before her. Lifts the dome. Seared tuna. Arugula. Gouda. Artful, excessive. He uncovers his own dish and sits opposite her.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
If we're going to roleplay... let's commit.

ANDREA
I'd like to discuss a new position.

A flicker of amusement. His tone sharpens.

GUPTA
Your cure. It works... or it doesn't. Which is it?

ANDREA
It worked. In live trials. Verified.

GUPTA
One trial. You think you're ready for billions?

A tense beat.

ANDREA
We'll find out.

She steadies herself.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Dr. Brown believed in it. You
buried her work.

GUPTA
Why don't you join me? Halstrom and
Santiago. Unlimited labs. Full
funding.

ANDREA
You torched Biotech. Now you're
offering me a job?

GUPTA
You're brilliant. Even I see that.

ANDREA
Regan. Rhea. The engineers?

GUPTA
All of it. Greenlit.

A long pause.

ANDREA
Why'd you erase Brown's research?

Gupta leans forward. Calm. Deadly.

GUPTA
Because if everyone can build it, I
stop mattering.

ANDREA
Is there anyone you wouldn't
extort?

Gupta smiles, leans in, points to her phone.

GUPTA
Why don't you turn that off?

Andrea looks down – her screen still streaming. A long beat.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
I'm sure you have more than enough
evidence that you were here.

She taps the screen. The feed dies. Gupta collects her plate, exits, returns with two domed trays.

Andrea'S POV: A message from Rhea begins streaming across her hidden broadcast interface. It's still live - secretly.

Gupta lifts the covers. Bone-in ribeye. Perfectly marbled. He steps behind Andrea. Gently places utensils in her hands. Fingers guiding hers - deliberate. Controlling. The blade slides through pink center.

ANDREA

Is this from a real animal?

GUPTA

Oh, yes. Raised with care. Coddled.
Until the end.

Andrea tastes. The richness almost cracks her guard. Gupta flicks a blade, pops a vintage bottle clean.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Ever had the real thing?

ANDREA

A few Toulous vintages. Once or twice.

GUPTA

So we do have some common ground.

He pours. She sips - small. Controlled.

ANDREA

You want to bleed the world for profit. I'd never work with you.

Gupta doesn't flinch.

GUPTA

Andrea, let me tell you a story.

BEGIN MONTAGE

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - Karen flips through files. Cal steps behind her.

EXT. CAL'S CAR - Trunk rattles. Something... alive?

INT. BIOTECH LABS - Controlled demolitions. Labs erupt in fire.

INT. ANDREA'S HOUSE - Cal soaks the home in gasoline. The match drops.

END MONTAGE

GUPTA (CONT'D)

When I was your age, I thought
saving lives was enough.

(beat)

Then I learned what dying costs.

Andrea stares at Gupta, realization dawning. The match. The
labs. Dr. Brown. Gupta watches her process it. He grins.
Vicious. Inevitable. Pleased.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

We're hours from collapse. I'll
never let that cure see daylight.

He taps his tablet. A headline flashes: Dr. Santiago
Implicated in Dr. Brown's Death - NEW EVIDENCE

Andrea's breath catches.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Looks like truth is whatever I
upload first.

(beat)

You're nothing. You're done. A
whisper in the hurricane. And
now... a criminal.

Long pause. Andrea exhales. Slow. Composed. Sets down her
fork, rises.

ANDREA

Tomorrow, you don't fall because of
me. You fall because now it's
theirs. The cure, the truth - it's
not mine anymore, it belongs to
everyone. I'm done hiding.

She rises. Calm. Controlled. Meets his gaze - just long
enough. Then turns. And walks out.

Gupta watches her go. No guards stop her. No bullets fly.
Only the quiet hum of a war about to break.

EXT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - LATE NIGHT

Regan runs into the blaze - jaw set, gear strapped. Flames
claw the sky. No sirens. No help. Just smoke and silence. He
stares into it. Beaten.

INT. BIOTECH PHARMACEUTICALS - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Smoke claws through the corridor. Regan ducks falling tiles, shoulders the fire door, pushes into the glow.

Ahead—panicked SCIENTISTS stumble through smoke. They freeze at the sight of him.

SCIENTIST
Everything's gone — north labs,
east wing. All of it.

REGAN
How much is left?

SCIENTIST
South wing. Still standing. For
now.

Regan squares his shoulders.

REGAN
Would you risk your lives to save
millions?

They hesitate, but only for a second.

SCIENTIST
That's why we're here.

Regan lifts his case — his eyes blazing with purpose.

REGAN
Then I've got something you need to
see.
(beat)
How many of you have cars?

EXT. ANDREA'S HOME - LATER

Andrea turns onto her street — her house a blazing skeleton against the night. Heat ripples the air. Embers swirl around her like ghosted ash.

She stumbles closer, phone shaking in her hand. Dials. Karen's name glows on the screen — no answer. She lowers it. Frozen. Just watching the place she once lived collapse into flame.

Distant SIRENS rise — growing louder. Her eyes sharpen. Instinct takes over. She runs.

INT. HALSTROM HOSPITAL - UPSTAIRS OFFICES - CAL'S OFFICE -
LATE NIGHT

A glass box of order and sterility. Every surface gleams,
untouched by chaos. Cal stands from behind his desk as Gupta
enters - fury wrapped in a suit.

CAL
Have a seat.

Gupta stays standing, eyes hollow. He taps his tablet -
screens bloom to life: protest footage, riots, crashing
markets.

GUPTA
Goodbye, Biotech.
(to Cal)
You've done exemplary work, Doctor.

CAL
The treatment's live. Their immune
systems won't recover. Some won't
walk again.

Gupta scrolls until he finds it - a headline that freezes him
mid-motion: Andrea Santiago Linked to Dr. Brown's Death.

Something fractures behind his eyes.

GUPTA
She made me burn my own empire to
the ground...

He starts pacing - the rhythm of a man unhinging.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Let the world drown. Let X9 take
the lungs of every continent.

CAL
Sir, you've never had more power.
More reach.

Gupta stops. The fire in him dims to ice.

GUPTA
And it still isn't enough.

INT. UNIVERSITY - SCIENCE LAB - SUNRISE

The lab hums bright and bursting with coordinated chaos.
SCIENTISTS. ENGINEERS. TECHS.

Voices overlap:

TECH #1
Sequence updated!

TECH #2
Upload's live!

TECH #3
Simulations running!

Screens flicker with coded light. Data climbs. Vials trade hands like currency. Momentum buzzes through the air.

Regan moves through the storm, tablet in hand, orchestrating it all – until the room hushes.

Andrea bursts in. Breathless. Hair wind-tossed. Fire still in her eyes.

ANDREA
Hi...yeah, I'm alive. Get used to it.

A few smirks, a few nods – and then the work resumes. The hum reignites. Regan steps toward her, relief tempered by purpose.

REGAN
How was it?

ANDREA
He's smarter than we thought. Years ahead.
(beat)
He's made them believe I'm dead –
and the villain in their story now.

She paces, energy crackling beneath her calm.

REGAN
Not everyone believes that.

Their eyes meet. Truth lingers between them. Not everyone doesn't mean no one.

ANDREA
Forget it. Let's pivot. This story's not about me anymore. It's about beating the virus.

REGAN
We're ahead of the curve.

ANDREA

Then let's stay there. We need Rhea
patched in.

She unlocks her phone, hits a button – SPEAKER hums to life.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Rhea, you with us?

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – BASEMENT

Rhea, surrounded by glowing monitors, leans in.

RHEA

Patched and synced.

Her phone buzzes. An anonymous text: DEAD GIRLS DON'T CURE
ANYTHING. Her hand trembles as she silences it. No reaction –
just a deep breath. Then back to the keyboard. Faster.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB – CONTINUOUS

Andrea steadies herself at the center of the storm. The lab
hums – alive with readouts, holograms, caffeine, and belief.

RHEA (V.O.)

This is it. X9 dies tonight – or
takes the world.

Regan swipes across his tablet. A 360° HOLOGRAPHIC MAP of
South Africa unfolds – glowing red infection zones, green
recovery arcs spreading outward like veins of light. Andrea
leans in.

ANDREA

Is the outbreak spreading?

REGAN

We're not seeing new zones–

ANDREA

Risk projection?

RHEA

Point-zero-four degrees.

Andrea's eyes flick up, razor-focused.

ANDREA

Regan?

REGAN

We log enough recoveries, the curve
breaks - Hold steady, we win.

A sharp PING. A notification flashes across a tablet. Regan
reads - and his expression fractures.

REGAN (CONT'D)

Karen Farris found dead. Suspected
overdose.

The room stills. Every sound vanishes. Andrea's breath
catches as she stares at the glowing map - the red zones
pulsing like open wounds.

ANDREA

From this moment on... this is your
cure. It belongs to all of you!

REGAN

Mine?

ANDREA

If Gupta wants to hide in the
shadows - so will I. I'm gone.
Publicly.

(beat)

No posts. No texts. No mentions. I
was never here.

REGAN

We're thirty seconds from going
live.

Silence spreads through the lab - a collective inhale.
Screens flicker, reflecting on Andrea's face. Her hands
shake.

Regan steps closer, quiet concern under the noise of
machines.

REGAN (CONT'D)

You okay?

ANDREA

Just... fatigue.

He studies her - sees what she's not saying.

REGAN

You infected yourself.

No denial. Just the truth sitting in her eyes. A long beat.

ANDREA

It was the only way to generate uncorrupted data. They can scrub files – not my genome.

REGAN

Then let's finish this.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND – GUPTA'S OFFICE

Cal stands, arms folded. Gupta stares out the window – rage brewing just beneath the surface.

CAL

Want me to deploy the rest of my men?

GUPTA

No, we can't risk it yet. We wait for nightfall.

CAL

What about Andrea?

Gupta turns. His calm breaks in a flash – a hand clamps Cal's jaw, fingers like iron.

GUPTA

I told you to kill her!

CAL

You're the one who let her walk out.

Gupta's grip tightens until Cal goes pale. The office goes small and cold.

GUPTA

"Get away"? You're the one with combat and firearms training, the backdoor access, the mercenaries.

(beat—his grip tightens)

Do you want to see how fast I could end her life if I wanted?

Cal stiffens, stunned. Breath shallow. He doesn't answer.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB

Andrea stands frozen. Chest rising. Fear flares and retreats like a tide behind her eyes.

RHEA (V.O.)
Outbreak threshold: 0.03%.

REGAN
These numbers are slipping. The
sequence isn't holding.

ANDREA
We need a stronger sequence.
(beat)
We just gave the immune system a
manual. Now it's deciding whether
to read it.

She rips her hand away from Regan and bolts out the room.

REGAN
Andrea!

INT. UNIVERSITY - SCIENCE LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Andrea bursts back in, hair wild, eyes blazing.

ANDREA
Rhea - pull up the full X9 cure
grid. Focus on South Africa.

RHEA
Analyzing...

HOLOGRAMS bloom: continent overlays, RNA spirals, hotspots
flickering like warning lights.

ANDREA
Map the Halstrom RNA structure.
Full sequence.

RHEA
Incoming call - Regan.

ANDREA
Decline. Give me the map.

RHEA
RNA structure: 90.78% complete.

Andrea yanks open a COOLING TANK. A biotech membrane ripples
under UV light, unnervingly alive. She tears a strip, slaps
it on a metal slab; it begins regenerating, like a wound
knitting itself.

ANDREA

We're re-engineering this live.
(to Rhea)
Feed me the code in bursts – ten
seconds at a time.

RHEA

That pace'll fry you.

ANDREA

Do it anyway.

She wires herself in. Fingers fly. A translucent cellular grid overlays the growing sheet. Her phone pings – warnings flicker. Sweat beads. She types through the noise.

RHEA

Regan's still trying to reach you–

ANDREA

Ignore it. Outbreak risk?

RHEA

0.02%.

Andrea zooms into the sequence, eyes sharpening. A blurred gap stabs at her – a missing section in Halstrom's RNA.

ANDREA

Wait... why is Halstrom's RNA
sequence incomplete?

She zooms further, finds the blur – not corruption, an absence. She freezes.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

This isn't corruption. It's missing
data.

RHEA

It's locked. Outside your access
tier.

Andrea's face hardens, calculation snapping into place.

RHEA (CONT'D)

Threshold holding at 0.02%.

Her eyes flash – fingers move again, faster, ruthless.

ANDREA

Where's the sequence now?

RHEA

91.63%.

ANDREA

We're gaining – over one percent.

(beat, commanding)

4D print that strand. Pull the
drive from the car. Now.

The lab kicks into overdrive – engines hum, lasers trace, printers spin. The green cure sheet unfurls across the bench, breathing light and promise. Andrea exhales once, composing herself. She looks at her team – the war is just beginning.

EXT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB – ENTRANCE

Andrea bursts through the doors, breathless, eyes blazing. She sprints across the lot, dives into her car, slams the door.

SCREECH! Tires howl as she tears off into the night.

Behind her – chaos turns to purpose. Scientists, engineers, med techs spill from the building carrying cooling tanks, cables, portable drives. Engines ignite in unison. A caravan builds – headlights flaring like a declaration. The science rebellion is on the move.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND – GUPTA'S OFFICE

Cal winces, grips his chest, breath jagged. Gupta watches him – expression carved from marble.

CAL

Gupta...

GUPTA

You want mercy? Wrong profession.

(leans in)

I built the system. I know exactly
where it cracks. You? You're just
another weak spot.

Gupta's calm is worse than anger. His stare pins Cal to the floor.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB

The lab is a battlefield of intellect – engineers darting between terminals, voices overlapping.

REGAN
Rhea — reach Andrea!

Rhea's voice crackles from a nearby console.

RHEA (V.O.)
She's not responding. Still on the
move.

Regan looks around — the urgency rising like static. He
climbs onto a chair, commanding the room.

REGAN
Everyone — listen up!

The noise dips. Heads turn.

REGAN (CONT'D)
We're not chasing headlines. We're
holding the line. We stabilize this
sequence, we get treatment live, we
prove this cure works.
(beat)
And we do it now. Before she gets
herself killed.

The air tightens. Then — the hum reignites. Focused chaos
resumes. A tech rushes forward with a fresh data slate.

TECH
Sequence holding. Just barely.

Regan exhales, glancing at the clock — time running thin.

INT. UNIVERSITY — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Regan steps into the corridor, every step urgent.

RHEA (V.O.)
She's still not responding...

He stops, eyes narrowing, caught between command and fear.

REGAN
Mobilize. Now.

He flags down a group of scientists hauling replicators and
med-kits.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Load everything. We're not waiting.

They rush past him, urgency building like a storm. Regan grabs a walkie.

REGAN (CONT'D)
Patch me through to all units –
Andrea's heading into the hospital
alone. She won't make it without
us.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE - MINUTES LATER

The street outside the hospital is chaos – hundreds in line, tents sagging, air heavy with dust and desperation. A distant SONIC BOOM rolls across the skyline. Heads turn.

Andrea's car barrels into view – skids to a stop in front of the crowd. Dust flies. Murmurs ripple as she climbs onto the hood, steadying herself on a roof rail.

ANDREA
HEY!

Crowd hushes. The vehicle sways under the press of bodies.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
This is real. It's live. We've
taught the medicine to think. It
finds the virus and shuts it down.
This – this is the cure.

She pops open a side compartment, revealing sleek vials of glowing 4D-printed nanotech, pulsing faint blue.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
How fast, Rhea?

RHEA (V.O.)
Instantaneous assimilation. Full
sequence delivery.

Andrea scans the faces – fear, disbelief, exhaustion.

ANDREA
Everyone – listen. There is a cure
for X9.

A murmur of resistance builds.

MAN
We've heard this before!

WOMAN 2

Biotech lies! This is another
trick!

OLDER WOMAN

She's one of them – look at her!

The crowd splits – half stepping forward, half retreating.
Phones rise. Cameras record. Andrea coughs, hard – blood
spots her sleeve. She doesn't stop.

RHEA (V.O.)

Andrea, what are you doing?

ANDREA

Too many died trying to protect the
truth. I won't bury it again.

A woman steps forward, trembling.

WOMAN

You're the one... they said was
dead.

ANDREA

They lied. I'm alive. And this –
this is why they wanted me gone.

She points to the hospital's locked doors.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

They'll watch you die before
admitting I was right.

WOMAN

But... you have the cure?

ANDREA

Yes. And I need it too.

(voice cracking)

I carried the virus. I've lost
everything. My family. My home. I
have nothing left to protect –
except this.

She doubles over in another violent cough.

RHEA (V.O.)

Andrea, you're hemorrhaging–

Andrea shakes her off, voice hoarse, shredded but fierce –
Body failing her, memories blinking in and out like static.

ANDREA
If we don't fight for the cure—
(coughs again, blood in
her teeth)
—then we've already lost.

The wind howls through silence. Andrea sways but holds her ground.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
So go ahead. Wait for Gupta to
choose who lives. Or trust me.

The stillness stretches — then breaks.

HOPEFUL MAN
I'll take it. I don't want to wait
to die.

HOPEFUL WOMAN
My boy — let me try it for him.

But the others push back. Voices spike, sharp and angry.

MAN IN HAT
You expect me to trust you?
Biotech's been lying for years!

WOMAN WITH SIGNS
Show us proof. Don't make us your
guinea pigs.

Phones lift higher. Voices rise. A fight brews between belief and fear.

ANDREA
I don't ask for blind trust. I ask
for courage. We'll document every
second. Cameras on. Medics in.
Consent in writing.

A ripple — a few nods, a few shouts. The fracture holds but doesn't break. Engineers roll out equipment. A pop-up lab unfolds amid chaos.

Andrea slams the cooler onto the hood.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You know the protocol. Take it from
here.

TECH (O.S.)
Ready — camera and vitals are live.
Consent signed.

A volunteer — a middle-aged MAN with hollow cheeks — sits. Needle in his arm. The crowd holds its breath. Halfway through the sequence, his pulse drops. He slumps forward. Panic detonates.

WOMAN

He's dying!

Phones tilt. Shouts explode. Guards push through as chaos builds.

RHEA (V.O.)

Stabilize his vitals. Pull the second bolus. Now.

A med-tech scrambles — injects the counter dose. The monitor flatlines, then flickers — once, twice — steady.

The man gasps. Coughs. Then, impossibly, laughs. A broken, beautiful sound. Silence rolls across the crowd.

HOPEFUL WOMAN

He's breathing. He's breathing!

Screens show it. The live feed surges. Comments flood: "It worked." "She did it."

The skeptical faces falter. Doubt cracks under data. Andrea steps down from the car — exhausted, shaking, but unbowed. The crowd moves forward now, not as a mob — but as witnesses. The cure has a pulse. And so does hope.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND — GUPTA'S OFFICE

Cal groans, half-upright on the marble floor. Gupta paces like a caged animal — shirt damp, eyes bloodshot.

CAL

Gupta, please—

GUPTA

I was this close. Hours from locking the world in my hand. And you — you stumble now?

He kicks Cal's side. Cal folds over, gasping.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

You opened the door. You gave her space to breathe.

CAL

I... I followed your orders.

GUPTA
Then own the outcome.

He grabs Cal by the collar, hauls him halfway up.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
You helped her. And now you'll help
me fix it... or you'll be buried
with her.

Cal just stares – something breaking behind his eyes. Gupta releases him, mutters as he reboots a console.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Control the air. The water. The
signals. We silence truth. We erase
her from the grid.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Screens blink out one by one. Rhea's voice cuts through a jittering feed.

RHEA (O.S.)
Signal drop... Gupta's jamming us.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE - LATER

The pop-up station hums with life. Andrea and the team move fast—administering doses, scanning vitals, recording consent.

Nearby, SCIENTISTS document every step – goggles on, cameras rolling.

ANDREA
Rhea, are you getting this?

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - BASEMENT

Rhea sits at the heart of a digital storm – a conductor of data storms. She's locked in.

RHEA(O.S.)
Every second. That was a damn good
speech, by the way.

ANDREA (V.O.)
I wasn't trying to give one.

RHEA(O.S.)
That's why it worked.

INT. UNIVERSITY - SCIENCE LAB - CONTINUOUS

Regan watches the holo-map - green dots bloom like constellations rearranging.

TECH
New vitals uploaded. Viral load
dropping - significantly.

Another feed confirmed! Johannesburg reporting recovery. The lab goes quiet, then erupts.

REGAN
It's working.

He turns, overwhelmed. Eyes glistening.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE

Andrea sinks to her knees, spent. around her, the crowd shifts from suspicion to stunned hope. A CHILD in a makeshift cot stirs, eyes fluttering open. A NURSE exhales, disbelief and joy braided together.

NURSE
That kid hadn't moved in hours...

The child coughs, reaches out. Andrea lets one tear fall.

ANDREA
Rhea?

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD - BASEMENT

Rhea is already typing.

RHEA
Pushing to CDC ... now.

She slams the key. A LOADING BAR flashes across her screen.

ON SCREEN: SENT - "X9 CURE - VERIFIED. GLOBAL RELEASE PACKAGE."

INT. CDC OPERATIONS CENTER - NIGHT

Red phones ring. Terminal lights blink. Monitors flash open.

ON SCREEN: Andrea's footage. GPS-tagged doses. Verified recoveries. Every piece.

A CDC TECH gasps – then runs for the emergency panel.

CDC TECH
Sir? You need to see this–

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE

More civilians arrive. Some limping. Some holding loved ones. Andrea never stops moving, dosing as many as she can.

RHEA(V.O.)
Infections dropping. Holding steady.

ANDREA
What about the CDC?

RHEA(V.O.)
No word – yet.

ANDREA
Send it to every agency. WHO, Geneva, Nairobi. Everyone.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND – GUPTA'S OFFICE

Gupta's tablet buzzes. He reads the alert:

LIVE STREAM: UNAUTHORIZED MEDICAL TREATMENT CLAIMS TO CURE X9
– MILLIONS VIEWING.

GUPTA
No. No, no, no...

Cal looks up, uncertain.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
She published it. The footage, the data... all of it.

He swipes to another alert:

TRENDING: #X9CURE – WHISTLEBLOWER FOOTAGE SPREADING

GUPTA (CONT'D)
They're going to believe her. Not because it's true – because it's convenient.
(yelling)
Go find her. End her. Right now!

CAL
In broad daylight, sir?

GUPTA
I don't care if it's on every
goddamn camera in the city! Shut.
Her. Down.

Cal bolts. Gupta taps his desk, opens a secure line.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
Security. We have a major breach.
Escalate to red protocol. Full
lockdown. Anyone unauthorized gets
detained.

He storms to the window, yanks the blinds. Across the skyline
— crowds swelling, drones buzzing overhead.

GUPTA (CONT'D)
She was never supposed to make it
this far...
(beat, into his secure
line)
Deploy digital jammers. Flood the
hashtags. Spin it as fake medicine
— call it domestic terrorism if you
have to.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE

The crowd freezes. Heads turn. A squad of HALSTROM SECURITY
storms in, rifles raised. Black visors. No names.

SECURITY OFFICER #1
Clear the area — NOW!

A ripple of panic. People hesitate, unsure.

SECURITY OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
Hands in the air! Do it!

Dozens of civilians comply, trembling. Andrea doesn't.

ANDREA
Keep filming. Don't stop.
(to the officers)
You're not shutting this down.

SECURITY OFFICER #1
Final warning! BACK AWAY!

A long, tense beat. Then—

RHEA (O.S.)
ANDREA — DOWN!

CRACK CRACK CRACK! Gunfire explodes across the lot. Bullets slam into concrete and car doors. Screams erupt. The Halstrom guards dive for cover. Up the street — ROOFTOP CIVILIANS in makeshift armor, rifles braced. They fire three more warning shots. Then vanish like ghosts. Sirens wail in the distance.

Andrea stands in the open — unflinching.

INT. UNIVERSITY — SCIENCE LAB

Holograms flare — green pulses racing across a 3D map of the continent. Every data point spikes green.

RHEA
Hold steady... Come on...

SCIENTIST
We've got sustained remission. No rebound.

RHEA
Outbreak risk steady at zero-point-zero-one.

A young tech bursts in, breathless.

SCIENTIST
CDC's online!

Regan grabs the nearest tablet, eyes widening.

REGAN
Rhea — patch me through.

INTERCUT — INT. CDC OFFICE / INT. UNIVERSITY — SCIENCE LAB

A female SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR from the CDC leans into a secure line.

SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR
Dr. Regan Brown?

REGAN
It's... it's Mr. Regan Brown.

SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR
We're receiving data suggesting you have a cure for X9?

REGAN

Yes! We need-

SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR

We're dispatching response teams now. Where are you located?

REGAN

Biotech Pharma. Cape Town, South Africa

SCIENTIFIC COUNSELOR

Biotech!?

REGAN

We've converted it. The data's live - just move. Please, move.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND - GUPTA'S OFFICE

A glass shatters. Gupta slams his tablet down. Breath ragged, face blazing red.

GUPTA

No. NO! They went live!?

He turns - Cal stands in the doorway, not defiant, just emptied out.

CAL

It's over. The cops, the press - they're inside the gates.

GUPTA

You betrayed me!?

CAL

No. I started remembering who we were supposed to save. You traded that for control, and I helped you do it. That's my betrayal - not yours.

Gupta's glare could scorch steel. But Cal doesn't flinch. The balance between them - finally broken.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE

A patient gasps - then inhales deeply. Their eyes widen.

RHEA (O.S.)
 Outbreak risk officially
 neutralized. CDC en route. They're
 reversing protocol – emergency
 lifted!

ANDREA
 YES!

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB

The DDLS holograms shimmer – every marker pulsing green.

ON SCREEN: ASSIMILATION – 100%.

Regan exhales, sagging into a chair. His tablet slips from his lap. Relief washes over him like a tidal wave.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE

The last patient receives the dose. A pause. Then an eruption. Cheers. Cries. Strangers hugging, laughing, collapsing in joy.

Children hold glowing vials to the sky. A woman sinks to her knees, praying.

RHEA (O.S.)
 Signal interference peaking –
 thousands uploading vitals. It's
 happening. They're healing.

Andrea stumbles back, eyes scanning the crowd – laughter, crying, chaos turning into harmony. She drops to her knees, hands covering her face, then throws her head back, screaming to the sky.

The world, finally, breathes.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND – GUPTA'S OFFICE

Cal stands firm. Gupta paces like a lion whose cage is shrinking.

CAL
 It's over. Call it what it is.

Gupta stops. His voice drops, low and dangerous.

GUPTA
We built this. The reach. The
control. We were gods.

CAL
We were butchers.

Gupta lunges but Cal sidesteps – calm, unafraid. Gupta glares at him, wounded pride twisting into a sneer.

GUPTA
You'd walk now? After everything?

CAL
I'm already gone.

He turns for the door.

GUPTA
Let me spin the story. You'll be
the hero. You'll be remembered.

Cal doesn't look back.

CAL
No. You will.

He walks out, leaving Gupta in silence.

INT. GUPTA'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Silence presses in. The door clicks shut. Gupta drifts to his desk. Opens the drawer. The chessboard sits inside. He pulls it out.

Bent pawns. Missing knights. A black king toppled. No queen. His fingers tremble as he finds her piece – the queen – and places it in the center of the board. Alone. He stares for a long time. Then–

CRACK. He slams the black king down. Pieces scatter.

GUPTA
You fix the board...not the
pieces...
(beat, softening)
The queen never belonged in the
game.

He closes the board. Locks it. And sits there. Breathing. Blinking. Nothing left.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUEUE - LATER

Ash from the spent replicator curls skyward. Andrea leans on the car, drained but steady.

She stares at the smoking machine, then the living crowd – the healed, the hopeful.

ANDREA
Alright... let's go.

INT. ANDREA'S CAR - MOVING

Andrea drives hard. The wind lashes through the open window, her eyes locked forward.

ANDREA
Rhea – unfilter Gupta's last message.

RHEA (O.S.)
Pulling it now.

ANDREA
Connect me.

A breath.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Let's slice the head off the serpent.

INTERCUT - INT. GUPTA'S OFFICE / ANDREA'S CAR

Gupta appears onscreen, practiced calm.

GUPTA
Andrea. I've shared everything. The outbreaks are being contained–

ANDREA
Cut the act.

GUPTA
I'm proud of you. Truly. I think it's time to rebuild – together.

He paces before a digital wall of global biotech hubs.

GUPTA (CONT'D)

Biotech's infrastructure is intact.
Patents. Pipelines. Labs on five
continents.

(beat)

You step in with me now, and we
don't rebuild – we expand. Quietly.
Globally. No watchdogs. No limits.

ANDREA

You built pipelines.

(soft, almost bitter)

I built a cure. With them. In real
rooms. With real blood. And I'm not
putting it back in your cage.

She glances down at her speedometer. Calm, focused.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

You're out of moves.

Gupta paces, his mask slipping. Sweat beads on his temple.

GUPTA

I still have resources. Influence.

(gesturing to his wall of
accolades – magazine
covers, biotech awards)

You see those? That's reach.

(steps closer)

I can put your face right next to
mine – front covers, global keynote
stages. You want to save the world?
I'll give you the microphone.

His fingers reach for her through the screen – desperate.

ANDREA

You'll be exposed. In every
language. In every feed. And when
the world sees what you did,
they'll bury your empire in shame.

She pauses.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

She was right. I don't stop. But I
remember now... why I started.

GUPTA

You're still just a bleeding
idealist. You think you'll save
them all?

(MORE)

GUPTA (CONT'D)
There'll be another outbreak.
Another X9. Always will be.

ANDREA
Then I'll be ready.

She faces the windshield – road stretching ahead, endless.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I'm taking Biotech. Merging it with
Halstrom. No secrets. No
gatekeepers. All without you.
(beat)
Rhea?

RHEA (O.S.)
Standing by.

ANDREA
Release everything. Our full
statement. All X9 data – tied
directly to Gupta.

Gupta stiffens.

GUPTA
Wait – Rhea? I can offer you a
stake. Influence. Legacy.

RHEA (O.S.)
Sending.

A pulse of silence. Then–

GUPTA
You don't know what I've built.
What it's capable of–

ANDREA
You underestimated everyone. Brown.
Regan. Even me.

His mouth opens – no sound. The silence swallows him. She
ends the call.

INT. UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE LAB

The room bursts in cheers, fist bumps, embraces. Holograms
spike with activity – green across every feed.

RHEA (V.O.)
Regan. He's pinging us direct.

Regan steps forward. Wipes his eyes, half smiling.

REGAN
Is all that red tape hitting the
feeds?

RHEA (V.O.)
Flooding every channel.

He grins.

INT. ANDREA'S CAR

She sits still. Wind whispering through the cracked window.

RHEA (V.O.)
All parties offline.

Andrea's eyes drift toward the sky – endless blue. Boundless.

ANDREA
Time to go home.

She shifts gears. The car roars forward, sunlight spilling
across the road.

INT. HALSTROM INDUSTRIES COMPOUND – GUPTA'S OFFICE

Gupta stares at static – no signal, no control. He opens a
drawer, pulls out a pistol. His hand trembles. A footstep.
Cal appears in the doorway – pale, broken, but alive.

CAL
Gupta–

GUPTA
I told you... kill them.

He raises the gun. Fires. Cal drops. Click. No bullets left.
Gupta slumps back in his chair, breathing shallow. Outside:
footsteps. Sirens. Radios.

POLICE (O.S.)
Dr. Gupta! Step away from the desk!

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO – NEWSROOM SOUNDSTAGE – DAY

Andrea sits beneath studio lights. Calm. Poised.

PRESENTER

Dr. Santiago – you helped stop a pandemic. Some say you're a hero.

ANDREA

I had a team. Some wanted to stay anonymous. Some didn't make it.

Off-stage, Regan nods quietly.

INT. MAHARAJ HOUSEHOLD – KITCHEN – DAY

Rhea, now in Biotech gear, watches the broadcast. Ishara beside her. Flora races in, throws her arms around Rhea.

Laughter fills the room.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO – NEWSROOM SOUNDSTAGE

PRESENTER

What do you say to those who still fear Biotech Pharmaceuticals?

Andrea looks into the lens.

ANDREA

If you or someone you love has X9... there's a cure. And if we could stop it once – we'll stop it again.

PRESENTER

But after Gupta's sentencing – how do you rebuild trust?

Andrea gestures toward the stage screen.

ANDREA

Regan?

He taps his tablet. The screen comes alive – blood under a microscope. Infected. Then nanomachines. Healing. Brightening.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

This is my blood. I still carry X9. And I'm taking the cure. Right now.

Cheers erupt. Onscreen, her cells are restored – bright, alive.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
That's the new Biotech. No more
secrets. No more kings.

Andrea steadies herself, eyes on the lens.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
This cure doesn't belong to
Biotech, or to me. It belongs to
everyone watching right now.

INT. PRISON - GUPTA'S CELL

Dark. Damp. Gupta rocking slightly, muttering to himself.
Shackled. Alone. Lips parted, eyes empty. A man unmade.

In his palm - the queen chess piece. his fingers tighten
around it. A king, dethroned. the cage finally fits.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Andrea and Regan drive through green pastures beneath an open
blue sky.

EXT. CEMETERY - DR. BROWN'S GRAVE - LATER

Their car stops at a small hillside cemetery. They walk to
Dr. brown's grave. Aandrea kneels, resting a hand on the
headstone.

ANDREA
We couldn't have done it without
you...

She pulls out a faded photo - her parents in lab coats,
smiling beside a Biotech logo - and lays it down.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
You were right, Mom. Hope belongs
to everyone now.

Regan sets down a worn notebook - Dr. Brown's research.

REGAN
Think Gupta'll survive a hundred
life sentences?

ANDREA
I hope he loses his mind trying.

She smiles. Bittersweet. They turn and walk away.