

Superman Returns III: Dark Knight of the Soul

by Laurence Ireland

© 26-Jan-09

Rating: T

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author. The author is in no way associated with the owners, creators, or producers of any media franchise. No copyright infringement is intended.

The Long Dark Knight Of The Soul

Prologue

Over the entirety of the opening credits, a series of clips play from the movies making up the background universe to this tale. There is no dialogue to these scenes save whichever lines are specified below, only a score that begins slowly and increases in tempo.

We see the fiery destruction of Krypton, and the spaceship streaking away from its absolute annihilation.

JOR-EL: ...I send them you, my only son...

In a hospital, a doctor is performing what looks to be a complicated operation on a patient. A nurse barrels into the room and gasps out news (we don't hear what she says). The doctor looks at her, looks down at the patient beneath him, and then turns away and gets back to work.

Above a Kansas cornfield, a spaceship surrounded by meteors streaks from the sky and impacts the surface below, sending a massive shockwave out across the surrounding countryside that almost topples a battered old pickup truck. A man and woman, with the look of a farmer and his wife, emerge, blinking in disbelief at the scene of interstellar carnage that awaits them.

Back in the hospital, the doctor finishes his work on the patient, and immediately tears off out of the operating theatre. He jogs through the corridors, dodging patients and nurses alike. A nurse leaning out of a doorway with the air of someone keeping sentry spots him and waves frantically.

NURSE: Dr. Wayne! She's in here!

He bursts into the room and skids to a halt beside a dishevelled, but still beautiful woman, who looks up at him with immense relief. We cut to father and mother cradling their newborn son, a picture of familial togetherness.

In the cornfield, the farmer and his wife reach the smoking crater and see the spaceship within. They gasp in shock and horror and turn tail, frightened out of their wits.

And then a sound reaches them. The sound of a small child, crying. Frightened and alone.

They stop. They turn. And we cut to a shot of the woman cradling an infant in her arms, wrapped in an old blanket the man produces from the back of the pickup. The baby looks up at her, not crying, and it's love at first sight.

The scenes go faster now. The music speeds up.

Clark is five. His father is driving the farm's tractor and is distracted by something, and fails to notice his infant son walking blithely into his path. His mother sees. She screams. There's an impact. The father, stricken, ashen, tumbles from the cab and races to the front of the tractor-

-to find little Clark, sitting on his ass, rubbing a bump on his head. The boy is crying. His mother scoops him up and hugs him fiercely while his father examines the huge dent in the front of his tractor, an expression of amazement on his face.

In a huge mansion, a little boy and a little girl barrel through rooms, each brandishing a water pistol that they're taking turns soaking each other with. The girl tries to soak the boy and misses, leaving a puddle of water pooled at the top of a staircase on a polished wooden floor. Seconds later, the boy skids into the water, and unable to stop, cries out in terror as he heads for the fall down the huge staircase-

-a hand snags him and pulls him back. The boy looks up into the face of a man dressed in the black and white of a butler, who looks down at him with severe disapproval. He pulls

the boy to his feet and kneels in front of him, giving him a lecture he won't forget in a hurry, but one that finishes with a wink and a ruffle of his hair before the boy is sent on his way.

The pace increases. The music tempo does the same.

Clark, now taller, is bounding across a cornfield. He crashes through the barn roof and stops in mid-air before impacting the floor.

Bruce, no more than ten years old, cradles his father and mother's dead bodies in an alleyway, tears streaming down his young face.

Clark, now a teenager, stands with his hand on his mother's shoulder as a coffin is laid into the ground. We cut to him still standing there, his mother gone, standing over a grave that reads JONATHAN KENT. BELOVED HUSBAND AND FATHER.

Bruce, a concealed gun in his coat, walks to meet Joe Chill, his parents' killer recently released on parole. Before he can kill the man Joe is assassinated by one of Falcone's men, leaving Bruce shaken. We cut to him being slapped by Rachel Dawes, and being thrown out of Falcone's club, alone in the Gotham night.

Clark steps off a bus in Metropolis, smiles in starstruck awe at his illustrious surroundings, and almost immediately is soaked by a passing car driving through a huge puddle. He witnesses a mugging and stands paralysed with indecision before finally doing nothing. That night, in an extremely small Metropolis apartment, he sits with his knees tucked up to his chin on a tiny bed, and slowly brings his hands up to cover his ears, as we cut to one shot after another of misery, of crime, of evil being perpetrated all around him in the city he now calls home.

The music stops.

A copy of the Daily Planet fades into view. SUPERMAN SAVES THE PRESIDENT! proclaims the headline.

It fades out to be replaced by a copy of the Gotham Tribune. MASKED AVENGER - HERO OR VIGILANTE MENACE?

The music resumes.

Superman flies above the streets of Metropolis. Batman stalks the alleys of Gotham. We see an extremely quick montage of Superman and Batman both in action, including clips from Superman Returns and Batman Begins:

Superman's rescue of the space shuttle, his dealings with Lois, encountering Jason and Richard White, the defeat of Lex and his exhausted comatose state after lifting the false Kryptonite-infused continent of New Krypton to orbit. Batman's training with Ra's Al Ghul, his return to Gotham, his encounters with the Scarecrow, and the climactic battle with Ra's in the speeding elevated train.

In Metropolis General, Lois Lane leans close to where Superman lies comatose.

LOIS: Jason. He's your son. You have to wake up, for his sake. He's going to need you to guide him.

We cut to Jason sleeping and Superman watching him from outside the window of Lois' home.

We move into brief flashes of the events of Superman Returns II and The Dark Knight. Superman's battle with the first Metallo. Richard White's kidnapping and subsequent remaking into the second Metallo at the gleeful hands of Lex Luthor. Richard/Metallo's battle with Superman, including breaking Superman's arm. Superman being unmasked as Clark Kent (including the SUPERMAN UNMASKED! Daily Planet headline). Superman meeting The Eradicator.

Jason White demonstrating his lineage by stopping a Humvee from going over a cliff and allowing Lex Luthor to escape death in the process. Richard/Metallo's defeat and eventual restoration to human form. Clark Kent shaking Superman's hand during a very public press conference (including the SUPERMAN IDENTITY HOAX EXPOSED! Daily Planet headline), 'Superman' is revealed to be the shape shifting form of The Eradicator. Richard White, restored to human form, giving Jason one final hug before walking away, bag slung over his shoulder, from Jason and Lois. Jason silently mouthing 'Daddy' as Richard goes, crying. And Lois and Clark kissing in Clark's apartment.

Batman meeting Harvey Dent. His first encounter with The Joker amidst Harvey's fundraiser. Saving Rachel from falling to her death. Watching Harvey be taken away after announcing he is the Batman. Saving Harvey and capturing the Joker. Interrogating him and racing away to save Rachel, only to discover the deception of being sent to the wrong location. Rachel's death.

Harvey's accident and rebirth as the deranged Two-Face, and Two-Face's execution of the corrupt cops who set him up. Capturing the Joker and dangling him from a wire on a high-rise. Getting shot by Harvey at point blank range before charging him to save Gordon's son from Harvey's revenge. Harvey's dead face. Staggering away from the police. Gordon smashing the Bat Signal. A headline from the Gotham Tribune emblazoned with Dent's face - DARK KNIGHT MURDERS HERO D.A., FIVE OTHERS.

Bruce Wayne standing on the balcony of his mansion, looking into the night skies of Gotham. Searching for something, though we don't know what. Eventually his eyes flit downwards, his shoulders slump.

Clark Kent watching Jason, his son, asleep. We cut to him shedding his civvies until he stands clad as Superman, kissing Lois, and stepping off his apartment's balcony to soar out over Metropolis. Lois watches him go, love and pride evident on her face.

And in a warehouse somewhere, a gang of men examine shiny, new, and very large weapons approvingly, while a man watches their delight, fingers steepled, face emotionless. He is Lex Luthor.

The music swells to a crescendo before fading out.

Act I, Scene I

We swoop through the streets of Gotham by twilight. We veer off the brightly lit main thoroughfares where crowds bustle even at this late hour and into the back alleys, under the distant rumble of an elevated train line until we come to a stop at the entrance to an alley into which a girl has just ran as fast as she can. We don't follow her into that narrow forbidding place until her pursuers flit past us; one, two, three men.

Inevitably, the girl comes to a dead end; a grillway across the alley perhaps fifteen to twenty feet tall. She tries to scale it but cannot and so sinks to her knees, sobbing, even as we peer over the shoulders of the men slowly advancing on her.

MAN #1: Don't you watch movies? You *never* run into the alley. When does that ever end well?

MAN #2: (growls) Or quickly...

The girl, perhaps twenty-five years old, finds the strength to stand despite her obvious terror and face them. She scrabbles in the dark and comes up with a sharp piece of wood, which her fingers wrap themselves around. She backs up until she can back up no further and then braces herself, the wood held ready.

It's now that we see that all three men are wearing clown masks.

CLOWN #3: Do we look like vampires?

He produces a gun.

CLOWN #3: Drop it.

Shaking, the girl complies. The wood drops to the alley floor slowly - we watch it from below, watch it impact and bounce once, twice before coming to a rest.

CLOWN #1: What'd we tell you? It never ends well.

He lunges - and is thrown backward by a fist that comes from the shadows. Caught unawares, his body is propelled like a ragdoll into the alley wall where it hits, hard, until he drops.

Batman emerges from the shadows, to stand between the girl and the clowns.

BATMAN: You're right. It doesn't.

The two remaining clowns back off a little but, perhaps surprisingly, don't run for their lives. The third clown brings his gun to bear on Batman.

CLOWN #3: Look who it is. The cop-killer.

CLOWN #2: How much is the reward money now?

CLOWN #3: Ten million. So I hear.

BATMAN: Want to try your luck?

CLOWN #2: Don't need luck.

We see the girl cowering behind Batman raise her head. There is no trace of fear in her eyes, only malicious intent.

CLOWN #3: Got a plan.

The girl lunges forward, moonlight glinting off the tip of a hypodermic needle which she plunges through the thinner neck material of Batman's armour into his skin. No sooner has it penetrated than Batman has spun on his heel and, all thoughts of protecting the girl who has just betrayed him gone, knocked her flat against the wire mesh.

But it's too late. Whatever she injected him with is now coursing through his nervous system.

CLOWN #3: Boss was right. Can't resist the damsel in distress. Whassamatter, freak? Little dizzy?

CLOWN #2: Shoot him!

Batman reels, his hands pressed to his head. We switch to his vision of the world; the drug pulsing through him is a hallucinogenic tranquiliser, throwing his co-ordination completely off. He manages to lift his rope-shooter and fire it, but his aim is hopelessly off and it clatters harmlessly to the alley floor.

One of the clowns kicks the gadget from his hand. Batman swings wildly but doesn't come close to connecting with his assailant.

CLOWN #3: Shoot him? Hell with that. I'm gonna have some fun first. Boss won't mind.

The two clowns advance and strike, landing blows to Batman's upper body. The armour absorbs some of the venom of their blows and Batman does his best to respond with his training, but can only swing randomly. We flit in and out of his vision which consists of nothing more than smears of colour and movement dancing across his eyes, even the voices of the attacking clowns distorted and faraway.

The first clown, the one kicked by Batman before the ambush, is coming to. He staggers to his feet and sees the ongoing carnage. We hear him grunt in amused amazement behind the permanent leer of the mask. He walks over to where his two partners are delivering a savage beating to the prone hero.

CLOWN #1: Room for one more?

There is the distinct click of a gun being cocked. The barrel pokes into the back of the first clown's head. The gun belongs to Police Chief Jim Gordon, and he looks extremely pissed off.

GORDON: I was just about to ask the same thing.

We cut to the alley, some time later, now filled with police, and the three clowns handcuffed securely to the wire mesh, with their female accomplice alongside them. Gordon is standing with Ramirez a little way away from the prisoners.

GORDON: Another four disciples. Even locked in Arkham, he's still a menace.

RAMIREZ: There are a lot of people who think the Joker was only trying to wake the city up to what Batman was, sir.

GORDON: There are a lot of people who are wrong.

CLOWN #3: *(shouts)* Where'd you hide him, Gordon?

Gordon doesn't react. Ramirez tries not to, but her eyes flick over to the clown just as one of the cops near him yanks off his mask - to reveal a face painted and scarred, just like that of his own icon.

CLOWN #3: He's hiding him! Helping him! We saw it all! He has the Batman!

GORDON: It's late. I'm done here.

The accusing shouts of the clowns follow him down the alley as he walks off, nodding to his officers on the way. We cut to him approaching his car, a beat-up old saloon classic parked in a darkly lit Gotham street. He gets inside, takes off his glasses, sighs and rubs his eyes like a man who's seen far too many late nights recently.

He takes out his phone and we read on the screen - 4 missed calls. He pulls up the menu and we see they're all listed as from 'Barbara'. His finger pauses over the green DIAL button and he seems to hesitate, before putting the phone back in his pocket and turning on the radio with an almost angry gesture.

RADIO: -scenes in Metropolis earlier today as the city came under bombardment from a shower of micro-meteorites. Scientists still baffled as to the cause-

GORDON: *(still looking straight ahead)* So what do I do with you?

We switch to looking from the front of the car, over Gordon's shoulder. A shape lies over his back seats, prone. We see a chest rising and falling slowly.

GORDON: I can't take you to a hospital. I don't trust my own cops. And I'm pretty sure I'm being watched. They know, you see. I've gone on TV and I've called for your head, just like you wanted. But I'm not a good liar. That's how you and I got into this mess in the first place, because I think you knew that.

BATMAN: Drive.

GORDON: *(starting the car)* Drive to where?

BATMAN: The river.

Gordon's saloon drives through the dark streets of Gotham. We flit between brief glimpses of the world outside - dark, cold, people huddling together - and Batman's still drug-addled perception of reality, until finally the saloon pulls up underneath one of the bridges spanning the river.

GORDON: Now what?

He is forced to put his hands up to shield his eyes as a pair of bright headlights illuminate into life ahead of him. The Tumbler is revealed in its new incarnation; still big, bulky, strong as an ox. An indomitable mirror of its master's will.

Gordon's back door opens and the Batman tries to get out of the car, but slumps to his knees, still weak from the effects of the drug. Gordon gets out of the driver's side and helps him to a standing position.

GORDON: Tell me you're not going to drive like this.

BATMAN: No. A friend will.

GORDON: *(surprised)* You have another friend besides me?

They're at the Tumbler now. Its side door opens and a man emerges, wearing a Batman mask. He speaks in a strange accent, almost as if he were a broad Cockney by birth but trying to sound like an American...

ALFRED: I'll take him from here, Commissioner. Thank you.

They get Batman inside the Tumbler and almost immediately the superhero passes into unconsciousness, as if his mind has finally allowed his body to succumb to the drug's effects. Alfred turns to go and close the side doors but finds Gordon's hand on his arm.

GORDON: If you are his friend...give him a message, from me. Tell him...tell him thank you, but tell him that he can't go on. Tell him to go back to the night before he gets himself killed. This entire city is buying for his blood and I can't hold them off much longer.

ALFRED: I'll tell him. Can I ask you something?

GORDON: Yeah?

ALFRED: Why didn't you look? *(off Gordon's look)* Under the mask.

GORDON: Because it doesn't matter.

We cut to Gordon, back in his car, watching the Tumbler speed off into the Gotham night. He waits until it's gone and then lifts his phone once again and calls his wife.

GORDON: I'm coming home, Barbara.

BARBARA: Don't expect a welcome. It happened again.

The phone goes dead. Jim Gordon looks at it for a moment and sighs, and then drives off.

We go back to the Tumbler. Alfred is driving - well, attempting to drive at any rate. He's not doing too well, as evidenced when the Tumbler sideswipes a parked - and thankfully empty - 4x4, sending it spinning.

ALFRED: Bloody thing handles like an aircraft carrier on wheels! Computer!

COMPUTER: (*maddeningly calm female voice*) Yes, Alfred?

ALFRED: Engage the sodding auto-drive!

COMPUTER: I'm afraid you don't have sufficient access permissions to request that, Alfred.

ALFRED: Oh you *are* joking...

He squawks in alarm as they roar toward a traffic snarl-up, throws the control stick to one side, and winces as the Tumbler sweeps across three lanes of road, almost taking out several other motorists in the process.

COMPUTER: Police presence detected.

Alfred glances at a monitor screen which indeed displays five police pursuit cars speeding into view, lights flashing, sirens blaring.

ALFRED: Get rid of them!

COMPUTER: I cannot use lethal force on law enforcement vehicles without the proper authorisation.

ALFRED: Use *something*!

COMPUTER: Engaging anti-pursuit measures.

We cut to behind as the Tumbler releases an oil slick from its rear, spraying it liberally across the road. The pursuing police vehicles veer crazily across the road, two of them colliding with each other, one with a mini-van, taking them out of the game.

He's just seen what's up ahead; a busy junction with cars zipping past at high speeds.

ALFRED: Aw, bollocks to it-

Two more police cars join the pursuit from side streets, avoiding the oil slicks. They begin to fire on the Tumbler. We hear bullets ricocheting off the armour from the inside as we stay with Alfred and his world-weary expression.

ALFRED: Computer, engage the sodding auto-drive!

COMPUTER: Insufficient access clearance. Voiceprint required.

ALFRED: Voiceprint? *Voiceprint*?! If you don't engage auto-drive we're gonna be spread across the street like bloody paste! I can't exactly just go -

As they hurtle toward the junction and what will surely be a high-speed collision or several, two police cars still in hot pursuit, Alfred grunts in a ridiculously deep husky growl:

ALFRED: (*in a very passable 'Batman' voice*) Activate auto-drive!

COMPUTER: Autodrive activated.

ALFRED: (*astonished*) Bugger me...

As lights dance across suddenly lit consoles before him, Alfred is thrown aside as the Tumbler's incredibly sophisticated onboard computer system calculates the trajectories of the cars in the junction ahead and plots a route through them.

We cut to outside and see this for real; the supposedly cumbersome vehicle, now free of the limitations of human reflexes, banks across the junction, spinning on its axis at just the right moment to avoid one - two - three collisions with Gotham's night drivers.

Seconds later, the pursuing police cars are forced to screech to a halt as the drivers of the cars using the junction, despite not colliding with the Tumbler, hit the brakes, the sight of a huge tank-like shape flitting at incredible speed across their path sinking in.

Now clear, the Tumbler continues on its merry way, the urban sprawl of Gotham soon beginning to give way to the leafier suburbs and in the distance, Wayne Manor itself.

Alfred wipes a bead of sweat from his brow. He spares a second to cast a rueful glance

at the unconscious Batman.

ALFRED: You don't pay me enough for this.

We cut to outside again, and as the Tumbler's turbo engine fires to enable it to clear the jump to enter the Batcave through the underground entrance, we pull back to take in the sight of Gotham city in all of its vast brooding glory.

Act I, Scene II

Another metropolis, as brightly lit as Gotham was dark. In fact it could almost be taken to be the same city, were it not for the helpful 'Metropolis' banner that appears across the bottom of our screens.

A crowd a few thousand strong has gathered around a makeshift stage in the centre of Centennial Park. A man is speaking, but we can't make out what he's saying. We sweep in instead to two men, sharply dressed, sitting beside one another.

SACKETT: Watch and learn, Garcia. This is why I don't fear re-election.

The handsome, clean-cut Latino man sitting beside him seems unimpressed, but we see his eyes flick around. He's clearly interested in what's going on.

MAN: Ladies and gentlemen, your Mayor, Bradford "Buck" Sackett!

Polite applause follows, if not exactly over enthusiastic, as the red-faced middle-aged man who we heard speak earlier gets up and walks to the podium. He drinks in the adulation in a slightly exaggerated fashion, something which doesn't escape the man he was sitting beside. We see him raise a sardonic eyebrow.

SACKETT: People of Metropolis, welcome, and thank you for coming. Well, time was I might have composed a speech for something like this, but hell if it doesn't feel like this has happened so often now I practically know the routine off pat.

Some amusement across the crowd, a few shouts.

SACKETT: At 4.32pm yesterday-

We cut abruptly away from Sackett talking to an aerial shot of Metropolis on a beautifully clear sunny afternoon. The waters around the city sparkle. Again, there is a remarkable distinction between what we see here and what we saw from Gotham.

Suddenly, one, two, three large objects hurtle past us. Rocks trailing fire and smoke; micro-meteorites, but each one larger than a semi truck and capable of levelling an entire block upon impact.

We follow the lead object as it drops, heading directly for one of the city's largest buildings. On the ground below, stunned citizens freeze in their daily routines, mouths agape, looking up at the certain death falling from the skies above. Cars slam into one another. Children's ice-cream drops uneaten from neglected cones. Mothers shield babies.

And then -

- a blue streak, climbing from the streets above, slams at incredible speed into the lead object, shattering it into a billion particles which rain down as nothing more harmful than larger-than-normal hailstones.

We zoom in as time slows, focussing in on Superman as he unfolds himself from a foetal position adopted to maximise impact with the first object. The next two - each larger than the first - are both dropping still. The third object is still some thousands of feet up, but the second is already at the same altitude as was the first, and dropping.

Superman's eyes narrow. He points his body into an arrowhead shape and takes off across the skies, upward not downward, seemingly ignoring the second object in favour of the third.

But no. Although his trajectory remains due up, he's staring directly down and a red line of fire spouts from each of his eyes, striking the meteorite dead-centre, heating it at a fantastically accelerated rate until -

It explodes, much as its predecessor did. The citizens below throw an arm over their eyes as debris fountains outwards, but as before none of it is sufficiently large to pose much

of a problem.

Superman's eyes stop glowing. His jaw sets with the determination of a job done, and then his head tilts upwards, even as he continues to arrow upward into the path of the third object, biggest of the lot, already casting a sizeable shadow over the heart of downtown Metropolis...

Cut to ground-level and the face of every person we can see is turned upward, their mouths open, their breaths held. It is a perfect moment of anticipation.

There is a single second's pause.

Impact.

We don't see what happened in the skies above. All we see is the reaction of the assembled men, women and children watching from below - wild cheering, whoops and embraces. Fathers hold their sons aloft, pointing excitedly. Clenched fists of triumph are offered from every opened car and office window.

Back to Sackett on the podium, still talking. We pull back a little so we can read the banner he's standing below for the first time. It reads 'THANK YOU SUPERMAN' in blue and red lettering twenty feet high.

We linger on Garcia's face for a moment.

SACKETT: ...with his usual unflinching, unselfish devotion to the safety of this city and its inhabitants. And so we're gathered here today to say to him - thank you, Superman.

There is a pause. Everyone is looking upward much as we saw them do during the meteorite scare the previous day.

SACKETT: Uh. Well folks (*he adjusts his tie*) I know we were all hoping for an appearance from the man of the hour but it seems, ah, that perhaps more pressing matters are being attended to at this moment in time. And after all, isn't that unswerving dedication to his calling the reason why we're so thankful to have him in the first place. I mean...

He casts a meaningful, almost smug glance at Garcia.

SACKETT: ...when you look at some of our sister cities, you can see we've been very lucky in the brand of hero who has chosen to call Metropolis his home.

We cut to Wayne Manor. Bruce Wayne lies unconscious on his bed. Alfred and Lucius Fox are in the room. Alfred is administering some form of medication to the unconscious Bruce while Fox looks on, both men wearing concerned frowns.

ALFRED: They used a girl as bait, Lucius. This can't go on.

Fox says nothing, but nods.

We cut to afterward in Metropolis. The crowd is dispersing. Sackett's driver opens the back of his limo for Sackett and Garcia to enter, which they do. As soon as the door is shut Garcia leans across to the older man.

GARCIA: What the hell was that? You trying to embarrass me, Buck?

SACKETT: Not at all, Tony. We Mayors have to stick together, we're a rare breed.

GARCIA: (*mutters darkly*) You got that right. So what happened to the big guy anyway? Landslide in Peru? Orphanage in Sydney?

SACKETT: (*shrugs*) He doesn't always show. But he does show. And I get a nice handshake with him, shower him with praise, get lots of pictures taken. Me and my buddy Superman, protecting Metropolis together. (*he chuckles*) Any idea what that's worth in terms of votes, Tony? Being associated with the man who's just punched a couple of asteroids to so many popcorn kernels and saved nine-tenths of the registered voters within your city limits?

GARCIA: I'm thrilled for you. Besides rubbing my nose in it any further, I still don't see

what any of this has to do with me.

SACKETT: Tony. My friend. *Mi héroe estupendo es su héroe estupendo.*

GARCIA: Are you suggesting *Gotham* takes Superman?

SACKETT: Not for a minute. He seems attached to this city, and who can blame him? *(off Garcia's glowering look)* Look, Tony...we know your re-election numbers are bad. And we know why. It's not your high unemployment, not your corruption. Not even your crime rate...

He leans forward, conspiratorially.

SACKETT: It's him. The Batman. You don't want to go down as the Mayor who couldn't catch the world's most infamous cop-killing vigilante, do you?

GARCIA: And Superman can-?

SACKETT: Use your head, Tony. They say the man flies halfway around the world to rescue kittens from trees. An appeal to him for help in bringing a criminal like Batman to justice...

Mayor Garcia mulls this over. His earlier irritation has subsided as the plus points of this proposal sink in.

SACKETT: Metropolis is extending the hand of brotherhood to its brother across the bay. *He holds out his hand.*

SACKETT: What do you say, Tony?

GARCIA: And what does Metropolis expect in return?

SACKETT: *(chuckles)* Tony. You didn't get to where you are without playing the game, knowing how to pick your allies. I do this for you, I expect to be counted within that list. Along with anyone else I may send in your direction.

GARCIA: Anyone else?

SACKETT: *(soothingly)* Don't worry about it. Now. Do we have a deal?

Garcia nods and grasps the other man's hand.

GARCIA: How do we do this?

SACKETT: Simple. Driver...take us to the *Daily Planet*.

Act I, Scene III

The Daily Planet's offices, as bustling and busy as you would expect the headquarters of a major metropolitan newspaper to be. We follow first one journalist and then another until we land at a particular desk emblazed with a gold nameplate which says CLARK KENT. It's empty. A female hand picks it up and turns it over, examining it.

JIMMY: Where is CK anyway?

Lois Lane starts slightly - she hadn't seen Jimmy Olsen behind her. She shoots him an annoyed look at being startled that is pure Lois, and puts the nameplate back down on the desk.

LOIS: Off on some story. You know Clark.

JIMMY: *(playfully)* So uh, so how are you two these days? You...you crazy kids...

His banter falters in the face of Lois' answering expression, which would stop a charging hippo and give it serious cause to reconsider its life choices.

LOIS: *(coldly)* Do I hear something?

JIMMY: I think you hear Perry calling me.

LOIS: I do. I really do.

He stumbles off in the supposed direction of Perry White's offices, in reality just glad for the excuse to be out of Lois' range when she's in this mood.

Lois, a little reluctantly, walks away from Clark's place of work and to her own. She sits. There's a package sitting on her desk. She picks it up, examines it, reads the label. We see it too. It's addressed to her, and it comes care of Richard White. She frowns.

Her phone buzzes. She lifts it with one hand, attempting to tear open the package with the other.

LOIS: Lois Lane? *(beat)* What, now? Here? Me? Um. Sure, absolutely, I'll be there in a sec.

She replaces the phone in the cradle and with both hands now free, takes a look at the package, still unopened, sitting beside her notepad and dictaphone. After a moment's pause she snatches the notepad and dictaphone.

We follow her as she walks through the crowded newsroom, until shouts of excitement from around her cause her to look up at the TV monitors arranged fifteen feet or so above the newsroom floor. They're running rolling news stations on a continuous feed and right now they're all showing the same thing.

Superman.

We see him, zipping and zooming in and out of a building that looks on the verge of collapse. The bottom of the screen displays the legend TEL AVIV QUAKE - LIVE!

NEWSHOUND #1: Guy never misses.

NEWSHOUND #2: Entire planet to look after and somehow he's always there. Guess Metropolis doesn't have a monopoly on him after all.

NEWSHOUND #1: Yeah *(glances at Lois, under his beath)* much as some of us wish he did, huh...

They snicker. Lois, who's obviously heard the exchange, pauses another moment to glance up at the action above before moving beyond it into a large conference room. Inside, Perry White is already there, along with two men we should recognise from the previous scene, who rise to greet her as she enters.

LOIS: Mayor Garcia. Mayor Sackett. Good to meet you both again.

Mayor Garcia glances at her appraisingly; he's obviously very taken with her.

GARCIA: Always a pleasure, Lois.

PERRY: Sit down, Lois. Our illustrious friends want to make a public appeal through the Planet, and I want you to cover it. Jimmy tells me Clark is AWOL once more?

LOIS: *(without pause)* He's in the Middle East, Chief. Went there this morning to cover the humanitarian efforts of the UN. I have a feeling he'll have a front-page leader on Superman's quake rescues in your inbox well before deadline tonight.

PERRY: *(delighted)* Great Caesar's Ghost! That man has *the* most uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time I've ever seen in a reporter.

LOIS: You don't pay him enough.

PERRY: Mmm. So he keeps reminding me.

Mayor Sackett coughs.

PERRY: Yes, well. Mayor Sackett-

SACKETT: Please, Perry. Call me Buck.

PERRY: *(with the faintest trace of distaste; we sense he doesn't much care for 'Buck')* Buck, yes. What is it you need from us?

SACKETT: It's not what I need, or even what Metropolis needs, Perry. Our little brother across the bay is in need of our assistance, and unique amongst all the cities in the world we have something we can give to aid him in his darkest hour of need...uh, are you getting this?

He's addressing Lois, whose pen hasn't moved and whose notepad is blank. She returns his accusing glare dispassionately.

LOIS: I'm sorry. I didn't realise this was a speech. I thought this was how you always talked.

Mayor Garcia brings a hand to his mouth to cover his amusement. Sackett goes redder. Perry White has the professionalism to shoot Lois a rebuking look. She feigns an apologetic shrug and begins transcribing dutifully.

SACKETT: ...and that something, Perry, Lois, is our friend Superman.

Lois looks up. She exchanges a look with Perry.

LOIS: I'm sorry, did you say *Superman*?

SACKETT: Absolutely I did.

LOIS: You want to *give* him to Gotham City? What is he, a trading commodity now?

SACKETT: Please, Miss Lane, we're all aware of your, uh, unique position in regards to-

GARCIA: *(before Lois has a chance to explode)* Buck, please. Miss Lane, we're not proposing to steal Superman or anything so preposterous. The televisions outside display his heroism across the globe, far beyond the confines of Metropolis city limits. Not a quake, not a crisis goes by without the comforting thought of him *(he searches for the right term)* riding to the rescue. Uh. Figuratively speaking, of course. And Gotham has need, Miss Lane. We too have a quite unique individual who calls our city home.

PERRY: You're talking about him, aren't you. The Batman. You want Superman to go after him.

GARCIA: Through your paper, we're going to ask him to do just that, yes.

PERRY: Dear God in heaven. This will be the news event of the goddamned century. I'm getting goosebumps just thinking of it. And the Planet has the exclusive?

SACKETT: *(glancing at Lois)* You and Superman go together. It's a natural fit. Will you run the appeal?

PERRY: I'll write the editorial personally. I-I can't believe this. My hands are shaking, look. Gentlemen, I guarantee this will be our front page tomorrow.

LOIS: What about the quake? Clark's report-

PERRY: *(dismissively)* Quakes come and go, Lois. Superman taking on the Batman...

He reaches for a decanter of what is presumably whiskey sitting on the table before him, makes as if to pour some into a glass, and ends up simply swigging from the decanter, wiping his mouth and looking glassy-eyed into the distance.

PERRY: This will be the biggest story since we all believed a man could fly.

LOIS: Assuming he says yes.

GARCIA: Why wouldn't he, Miss Lane?

Act I, Scene IV

Clark's apartment. He is standing facing Lois. Both are in a confrontational pose. Somewhere in the background, video game noises can be heard.

CLARK: Why wouldn't I, Lois?

LOIS: Well let's see.

We move away slightly to where Jason, Lois's eight-year-old son, is sitting playing on an Xbox 360. He's playing a superhero game. As we watch, he presses buttons to make his character leap across two tall buildings and begin to take out a group of bad guys with a succession of punches, kicks and throws.

We go back to Lois & Clark.

LOIS: ...no-one knows a damn thing about what this guy can do, who he is, why he...why he did the things he did. Why go from the unofficial toast of a city to someone who takes the rap for a spate of cop killings with no motive?

CLARK: Lois, the man dresses up as...a...giant...bat. I'm only amazed he doesn't have nipples on his body armour. He's not exactly the pinnacle of a reasoned mind.

LOIS: Gee, y'know, that would sound *so* much more convincing if it didn't come a man who parades around in a skintight blue suit with an *al fresco* approach to his underwear.

CLARK: Ouch. Cheap shot. Besides, I wanted to change to that black suit.

LOIS: And I told you. People will say you've gone evil. Now stop changing the subject.

CLARK: He's just a man, Lois.

LOIS: Oh *that's* a comforting attitude. Is that all we seem now to you, Clark? Mere humans?

CLARK: Of course not. But I'm just saying...all of his tricks, all of his little gadgets...they might work fine on muggers and wackos with circus fixations, but what are they going to do against me?

We cut to Jason's video game. The avatar on screen rises vertically into the air and flies straight downward again into the ground, cracking the surface and sending a shockwave ploughing into a giant robot attacking him, knocking it off its feet. Jason grins in satisfaction. We see for the first time that attached to his head are an expensive-looking pair of headphones.

LOIS: He may be just a man. But so was Luthor.

A frown crosses Jason's face. His hand leaves the joypad and slides down the in-line volume control notches on the phones so the volume of the music he's listening to decreases.

LOIS: And you-

CLARK: *(raising a finger)* Jason? Are you listening?

JASON: No...

CLARK: Jason, remind me of something. Is what Superman stands for *white lies, justice and the American way*? Is that how it goes?

LOIS: That *American way* thing is gonna have to go. Unless you're going for the irony value.

CLARK: Please. I'm trying to impart morality lessons here.

LOIS: Hey, you started it.

JASON: Why did you say his name?

That stops the Lois & Clark bickering in its tracks. Both look at the other, discomfited. Jason looks at them in the uncomplicated way that children have.

LOIS: I was making an example, son.

JASON: But you haven't found him yet.

CLARK: Jason-

JASON: He's still out there. Somewhere. And after what he did to my father-

Lois and Clark glance down at the floor in unison at this. Lois is the first to look up. She walks to where Jason is sitting on the sofa and drops to her hands and knees to take his hands in hers and look into his eyes.

LOIS: What he did to Richard - to your father - it was terrible. But we fixed it, Jason. And you helped. And I know your father is very proud of you for that.

CLARK: *(quietly)* That's a fact.

LOIS: And him - Luthor - you know Uncle Clark never stops looking for him, and will never stop until he finds him and puts him somewhere where he can never hurt any of us again.

JASON: I should have left him to die.

We get a very quick flashback of what was shown in the Prologue - the moment where Jason, stopping a Humvee from going over a ravine, hangs on for dear life and allows Lex Luthor to scramble free, to survive.

CLARK: *(appalled)* Jason, no! Don't ever think like that. Don't ever. Please. You have to promise me.

JASON: *(reluctantly)* Okay. But why can't you find him? I mean, he's just a man, right?

Lois shoots a dangerous look at Clark at this, narrowing her eyes at him. Clark has the decency to look embarrassed.

CLARK: Jason, just because Luthor can't fly or isn't super strong...he's smart. Real smart. And he knows where to hide. It would take the world's greatest detective to find him.

Realisation dawns on Jason's face like the breaking of day. He jumps up, almost bowling Lois over as he does, for when he jumps up he jumps almost eight feet straight up, barely missing bashing his head on the apartment ceiling. When he lands, he claps his hands together with excitement.

JASON: The world's greatest detective! That's who you need!

He zips off - literally, zips, his arms and legs a blur. He's nowhere near as fast as his father, but he's much quicker than any eight-year-old child should have a right to be, a fact that isn't lost on his mother.

LOIS: His powers are getting stronger.

CLARK: Superman will take him-

LOIS: Clark, you're doing it again.

CLARK: *I'll* take him for more training. I promise.

LOIS: You know I hate that.

Clark is beside her in an eyeblink, his arms around her. He tilts her chin up so their lips are brushing, pushing aside a forelock of her hair from her eyes.

CLARK: I know. I'm more interested in what you love.

LOIS: Oh, I think you know the answer to that...

They are about to kiss when a loud and exaggerated cough is heard. Reluctantly they break apart, small hands tugging both of their forearms.

JASON: Look. Look. Look!

They look. He's holding a scrapbook, and it's filled with newspaper clippings, all about one thing. One man.

Clark takes the scrapbook from the boy, opens it to a double-page spread from the

Gotham Chronicle: BATMAN SMASHES SMUGGLING RING!

LOIS: Jason, what is this?

JASON: I wanted to show it to you before, but I figured you might get mad. I've been collecting it for a while now.

LOIS: For how long?

JASON: Since before they started telling all those lies about him! He's not a murderer and he wouldn't kill policemen! He's a superhero just like you, Clark! Just like Superman!

LOIS: *(sits down on the sofa weakly, pulling her son to her)* Oh, Jason...

JASON: *(shakes free)* And look! Look at this!

He turns the scrapbook pages to another page from the Gotham Observer, an editorial entitled BATMAN: SHERLOCK HOLMES IN A CAPE.

JASON: You said yourself you don't know where Luthor is - and I'm afraid. I'm scared he's out there and he's going to hurt us again. He hates Superman more than anyone else in the whole world.

We see Clark, looking down at the newspaper headline, his face unreadable. Finally, he speaks.

CLARK: You kept a *scrapbook*? Of *Batman*?

JASON: Um.

LOIS: Clark-

CLARK: Well I'm just saying, Lois. I mean not *every* kid gets to soar through the skies on Superman's back. Or tunnel through the Earth's crust. Or dive to the bottom of the Marianas Trench. Or go into low-Earth orbit. You know. Some kids would think that was pretty neat.

JASON: *(defensively)* It is neat. Really. Really, it's neat.

CLARK: Okay. It's neat. So. Where's your Superman scrapbook?

LOIS: Oh, *Clark*!

CLARK: No, no, really I'm interested. Is it here or...?

JASON: Um.

CLARK: What's wrong? Don't you have a Superman scrapbook?

LOIS: This is officially pathetic as of right now.

JASON: You told me not to lie.

CLARK: I'm considering making an exception.

JASON: It's just that...well, um....it's *Batman*, you know? He's so...I mean he stays in the shadows...he strikes fear into the hearts of criminals...

LOIS: *(wistfully)* ...he's got that dark, mean, moody, needs-a-good-woman-to-tame-his-tortured-soul-thing...

JASON: ...he's *cool*.

CLARK: And Superman's not cool?

JASON: *(unconvincingly)* Oh, Superman's way cool...

LOIS: *(equally as unconvincingly)* Oh absolutely, yeah. Superman is one cool cat. Bingo. *Clark cocks his head to the side.*

CLARK: Mugging. Lower East Side. We'll continue this conversation later.

And with a blur of motion he's gone. The curtains of the apartment flap in the breeze. Lois bends down to pick up a bundle from the floor - it's Clark's civilian clothes, his Clark Kent outfit, left behind in the instant change and exit to Superman. She tries to maintain her earlier intensity of glare to Jason but fails, a faint smile tugging the corner of her mouth upward.

LOIS: So let's see this scrapbook of yours...

Act I, Scene V

The world comes into focus above our eyes and we realise we're looking up at an extremely high ceiling. The blurred vision belongs to Bruce Wayne, who's slowly coming to in a very large and very empty bed. He glances to the side and sitting there on the bedside table is a full breakfast tray, the coffee still steaming. He rubs his eyes.

We cut to Bruce walking through the interior of Wayne Manor, through all of its empty corridors and huge expanses.

He's outside now, walking through his massive lawns, a fountain burbling ornately in the backdrop. The sun is shining overhead. It's a glorious day by anyone's standards and Bruce is the king of all he surveys, but his face displays nothing but dissatisfaction. He's troubled.

He's back in the house now, in the kitchen area. The polished yet retro-chic fixtures and fittings are immaculate. Unlived in. He touches a specific area of a specific part of wall and a panel slides aside noiselessly. He touches a button on the revealed panel and a set of doors open in the wall before him to reveal an elevator from nowhere.

He stares into the empty elevator for a long moment.

ALFRED: You know-

Bruce starts a little. Alfred is standing no more than four feet behind him.

ALFRED: -in England, people used to say a penny for your thoughts. Gawd knows if they still do, I mean...what's a penny worth these days?

Bruce touches the buttons on the panel and the elevator doors slide shut. He turns away and begins to walk, moving past Alfred, who stands aside as a butler should for his master, but not without giving him a searching glare as he does so.

ALFRED: Mind you, I wouldn't waste me money anyway.

BRUCE: Remind me why I haven't fired you yet?

There's a smile on the billionaire's face that is enough to detract from the barb for Alfred to grin back.

ALFRED: Because I've been in your family your entire life?

BRUCE: Nah.

ALFRED: Hmm. Because I've got incriminating pictures of you?

BRUCE: What? Me in the Batsuit?

ALFRED: Oooh. If only they were, sir. Still. Who am I to judge?

Bruce looks out of the floor-to-ceiling window they're standing alongside. Gotham glistens in the distance in the early evening sunshine.

BRUCE: You're all I've got.

ALFRED: Master Wayne-

BRUCE: *(holding up a hand)* It's not self-pity, Alfred. It's simple fact. I trust precisely three people with the full details of my life and one of them is dead. And, no offence Alfred, but you and Lucius are not as pretty as Rachel.

ALFRED: Well I'm quite pleased you said that, sir. What with us two living alone in this big house together.

BRUCE: Tabloids still publishing those rumours? They'll have me adopting a ward next.

ALFRED: I have a message for you.

BRUCE: From Gordon.

Alfred nods.

Bruce walks to the window and leans against it. In the distance, a plane is taking off from Gotham Airport. It gains height, soaring into the skies, escaping the bounds of the city.

Bruce watches it go.

BRUCE: Aren't you going to give it to me?

ALFRED: Is there any point? You're the world's greatest bloody detective after all. You know what he told me. You know what he wants you to do. For your own sake, Master Wayne.

BRUCE: My father helped build that city, Alfred.

ALFRED: And his son helped to protect it. For a time. But that time has come and gone, Master Wayne. Your house is rebuilt, but you don't live in it. You skulk in it. You go into a city night after night to protect people who hate you. For God's sake, just accept it. Batman's time has come to go back into the night.

BRUCE: I can't. I won't. Gotham needs Batman, Alfred. Right now it needs to hate him, but that may change. And if it doesn't - it doesn't make a difference.

ALFRED: I buried your father and your mother, Bruce, God rest their souls. I buried Rachel. Don't make me stand over another grave. If I am the only person you've got, listen to me.

He walks away, leaving Bruce alone at the window.

We cut to Bruce, back in the kitchen area. He presses the panel, presses for the elevator. The doors slide open. He stares into the empty space.

And he walks inside.

In the Gotham night, the Tumbler roars out of the Batcave, with Batman at the wheel.

Act I, Scene VI

Back in Clark's apartment. He flies back through the window as Superman and is Clark in a blur of motion. He checks on Jason and finds him asleep. Lois is dozing in front of the television in the living area. Clark leans close to her and whispers into her ear.

CLARK: Miss me?

Lois starts a little but smiles at the familiar voice. She kisses him and allows herself to be scooped up into his arms.

LOIS: How was it?

CLARK: The mugging? Oh. Great.

LOIS: *(smiling sleepily)* Mmm, good. Hope it hasn't sapped all of your energy, mister...

They go inside the master bedroom. We stay outside, discreetly. There's a giggle from within, and a gasp, and then-

CLARK: I'm sorry...

A sigh. A woman's sigh. Superman emerges from the bedroom that Clark just entered. We see Lois, sitting up on the bed, rather put out.

LOIS: Again?

SUPERMAN: Sounds like a bad fire. It's only ten miles outside the city limits. I have to-

LOIS: Yes. Yes. Go.

He goes. Lois remains sitting there for a moment and then throws herself back on the bed, hitting the pillows with a thump.

Act I, Scene VII

From the setting sun around Gotham city, we're suddenly blinded by the whiteout of the endless white tundra of the Antarctic. We zoom over the ice and snow until a different structure rears out of the desolation. A crystalline structure.

Inside, on a crystalline screen acting as a television, Superman's quake rescue footage that we watched rolling across the Daily Planet newsfeeds is being replayed for the benefit of a man dressed all in black. A small man, with a compact frame, a waspish expression and a thin line of facial hair. His eyes burn with intensity. With hatred.

Another shape descends from the heavens to land softly beside him. Like the first man, he is also clad in black, with a silver sash across his chest, a Kryptonian insignia. For a moment he flickers in and out of existence. The first man notices this.

ZOD: Your power levels are still fluctuating.

ERADICATOR: The effort of relocating to the opposite end of the planet and rebuilding another Fortress from minimal source material was not without difficulty, General.

He kneels and places his palms on the surface below, seeming to draw strength from the very structure around them, which rumbles almost imperceptibly as he does so. His appearance solidifies.

ERADICATOR: In time the geothermal energy will replenish-

ZOD: Time!

He gestures to the screens above, stalking off, hands clasped behind his back.

ZOD: You talk of time, when the son of Jor-El walks free on this world! Held up as the saviour of its pathetic inhabitants, their Super Man! *(snorts derisively)* He serves when he should rule. Pathetic. So like the house of El.

ERADICATOR: My assessment also. And the reason for your return.

ZOD: My return!

He walks up to the Eradicator and quite without warning, lands a punch square on the Eradicator's chin.

The Eradicator doesn't flinch. Doesn't whimper. Barely seems to notice the blow.

Zod, however, gasps in pain and pulls his hand away. He wrings his hand ruefully and glares daggers at his companion.

ZOD: How! How can I hope to topple him, with none of his abilities! How can he do the things he does and I, General Zod, have no more strength than a miserable Earthling?

ERADICATOR: General. Pulling you from the Phantom Zone came at some cost. In time, your cells may begin to store enough solar energy to-

ZOD: Time!

He picks up a crystal lying nearby and hurls it in disgust. It bounces and clatters off the surfaces of the Fortress until rerouting itself and homing in on the Eradicator's outstretched hand.

ZOD: A mere human cannot hope to succeed against him. You know this. We need the Red Sun Chamber.

ERADICATOR: *(taken aback)* The technology is unproven. There is no telling what-

ZOD: Enough! Did you not seek me out for my leadership qualities? Then cease to question my orders! Construct the Chamber!

ERADICATOR: *(bows his head)* As you command, General.

ZOD: Our problem then becomes how to lure him to use it...

A thought crosses the Eradicator's face.

ERADICATOR: There was one. One who hated him. One who stood against him.
ZOD: Bring him to me. Perhaps we can be of use to one another...

Act I, Scene VIII

Night in Gotham. A shootout taking place between a gang and the police. Commissioner Gordon's car screeches to a halt and out he pops, wearing full body armour and packing a shotgun. He crouches behind the car. The gang are holed up in a building and taking potshots at the police gathering outside. Helicopters are closing in on the position from above.

Gordon bellows orders to his officers. One takes a round in the chest and spins to the ground, his gun clattering to the street below. Others dive for his body and drag him to cover; he's still breathing, the Kevlar has done its job, but he's dazed and out of the action.

One of Gordon's Lieutenants sits heavily beside him. It's Anna Ramirez. She and Gordon exchange brief world-weary looks, as if this is not an isolated incident of violence.

RAMIREZ: You think it's the new boss?

GORDON: Firepower certainly suggests it. Where is he getting these damn guns?

RAMIREZ: We've got his exits blocked and the place is surrounded. His guys aren't getting out of this one.

GORDON: Good. We need a few of these monkeys in custody. I want to know who the organ grinder is.

SWAT TEAM LEADER: Commissioner - aerial strike team is closing on a rooftop landing.

He gestures above to a helicopter approaching their position - just as an RPG streaks from one of the top floor windows of the building currently under siege. It misses the copter by a whisker. The pilot wisely banks to the right and throws the bird into a steep evasive.

GORDON: Snipers! Keep a bead on all windows! No more rockets!

He stands and fires off a few rounds, as much to let off steam as anything else. When he sits back down, he takes a moment amidst the chaos to stare into space. Ramirez doesn't miss the look.

RAMIREZ: Nights like this we sure could-

GORDON: I don't wanna hear it. Where are my eyes on the building?

We leave the streets and leap upwards to the adjoining buildings, and find ourselves staring down the barrel of a gun as it fires - not a bullet, but a zipline, which smashes through a window on the target building. A hand presses a button on the gun and the end of the zipline flowers open, shooting several small anchors at all angles to secure the far end into the ceiling, wall and floor.

A sniper scope further above belonging to one of Gordon's SWAT team members spots the line.

SNIPER: Batman on premises.

Back on the street, word reaches Gordon from the SWAT team leader. He looks up just in time to see the black shape zip across the buildings and vanish from sight. His frustration is visible, but so is his admiration.

GORDON: Here we go. Get ready.

RAMIREZ: We're going in?

GORDON: Maybe.

A body flies through one of the second-floor windows and crashes to the streets below ten feet in front of the police lines.

GORDON: Maybe they're coming out.

More vans arrive on the scene. The police lines push them back as much as possible to the designated safe areas - they're media vans. Reporters and media crew with cameras pour out of them. Gordon sees this and grits his teeth.

We go inside the building, rushing through the front door and up the central staircase (it's a department store) flying over two motionless bodies of former gunmen until we come to another would-be gangster. He's swinging his rather large gun to and fro in the murky darkness. A torch attached to the weapon illuminates the contents of a sporting goods section. He's terrified out of his wits, as is evidenced when the light reveals a baseball mannequin swinging a bat in a heroic action pose; the gunman's weapon sputters into life and the wretched baseball dummy is shot to pieces in a matter of seconds.

Something flashes across our - and the gunman's - vision. He whirls, firing.

GUNMAN: Cooney! Drennan! Anyone! Oh, Jesus...

A loudspeaker sounds from outside.

GORDON: (V/O) This is the Gotham City Police Department. Come out with your hands up and you will not be harmed.

BATMAN: (V/O) Sounds like a pretty good deal.

More blind firing. More mannequins destroyed. The gunman begins to retreat in the general direction of the main entrance. Whilst retreating he almost trips over the body of one of his former companions, knocked out clean and trussed up like a turkey.

BATMAN: (V/O) Better than you'll get from me.

GUNMAN: Okay! Okay!

He throws down the weapon and holds up his hands.

We cut to outside. Gordon motions for his squad to storm the building, which they do, officers pouring in from all sides, sweeping the interior for anyone still moving, finding only more gun-toting gang members out for the count, dangling from the ceiling, or simply curled up in a ball whimpering in pain.

Outside, Gordon's radio crackles.

BATMAN: (V/O) Plenty in there to interrogate, Commissioner. I'm borrowing one for myself.

A distant roar sounds - the unmistakable guttural throttle of the Tumbler waking up.

GORDON: You never listen, do you.

BATMAN: (V/O) I'll have him back to you safe and sound by morning. Mostly.

We cut to afterwards. The captured gang members, still somewhat dazed, are being led into a waiting police van. Gordon looks down at the seized weaponry, in particular the rocket launcher apparatus.

There's a presence at his shoulder. He glances sidelong.

GORDON: Get behind the cordon.

CLARK: Commissioner Gordon. Clark Kent, *Daily Planet*.

GORDON: Behind the cordon. Now.

He gestures to some of his fellow officers. They approach Clark and put a hand on his shoulders to move him to the permitted distance for journalists.

CLARK: You've talked to the Mayor today, Commissioner?

The officers tug Clark. We see frowns appear on their faces at their complete and utter failure to budge him even an inch.

GORDON: Why? Is he cutting my funding again, Mr Kent? Big surprise. If you'll excuse me I have police matters to attend to.

CLARK: It's about the Batman. And I *really* think we should talk before tomorrow morning's edition of the *Planet* hit's the newsstands.

Gordon looks up from the weapons. He studies Clark, then motions to the two officers. They release Clark, still eyeballing him with some level of puzzlement. Clark gives a little innocent shrug to one as if to say, no hard feelings. They move off.

GORDON: How long have you been here?

CLARK: Long enough.

GORDON: Did you enjoy the show?

CLARK: Saw enough to make me stop and think. Let's put it like that.

GORDON: Different from what you're used to in Metropolis?

CLARK: Usually I do the interviews, Commissioner.

GORDON: I'm trying to decide whether I like you, Mr Kent. As a journalist, you're not starting with a whole lot of credit in the bank. Now. What do you have to tell me?

Act I, Scene IX

Rolling titles for Gotham City News. We see Mike Engel in his familiar position as anchorman for the programme.

ENGEL: Good afternoon, Gotham. This city has seen some troubled times in the recent past, but today Gotham gets to celebrate a genuine piece of good news.

The caption to his left shows a picture of Gotham General Hospital. It's a live feed.

ENGEL: Barely eighteen months ago, Gotham General, built on the charitable donations of Thomas Wayne, was destroyed by the madman known as The Joker, who...

He falters for a moment.

ENGEL: ...who, uh, whose reign of terror certainly didn't end there, as this newsman can testify. But. The indomitable spirit of Gotham and its citizenry won out, and so too has the endless generosity of its patrons.

We cut to full screen view of the caption beside Engel. A podium and stage has been built and is fully occupied. Rows of chairs lie in front of it.

ENGEL: (V/O) Today, Bruce Wayne, son of Thomas, has the honour of opening the new Gotham General Hospital, rebuilt better than ever thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of the Wayne Charitable Foundation.

Bruce and Lucius Fox sit beside one another on the stage. Mayor Garcia is at the podium making a speech.

BRUCE: It drags a little in the turbo. I'm just asking, can you look at it.

FOX: And I'm telling you, Bruce. No. I can't.

BRUCE: *Et tu, Lucius?* You've been talking to Alfred, by any chance?

FOX: Shut up and take the applause, Mister Wayne. You're doing a good thing and the people of Gotham owe you a debt.

BRUCE: Gotham needs more than dollars for new hospitals. (*checks his watch, takes in the hospital behind him in all its glory*) Looks good though doesn't it? Shame it's empty.

A roar. The Tumbler suddenly appears, thundering alongside the press conference. It screeches to a halt and opens its side hatch, depositing a body on the grass. It's the gunman from the raid the night before. He has a bow on his head.

Bruce coughs. Lucius tries to keep a poker face, and succeeds, if only just. The police present at the press conference immediately scatter to their vehicles as the Tumbler screeches off. When it's gone and the police cars have receded into the distance and the chaos and hubbub show no signs of dying down, Mayor Garcia is forced to call for quiet.

GARCIA: Alright folks, show's over...well. I'm supposed to hand over to our man of the moment, Bruce Wayne, but our unscheduled surprise guest has prompted me to address something that will be hitting the news feeds across the world right around now.

Bruce perks up at this. He looks at Garcia, curious as to what the man could be referring to. As he does so, he seems to sense someone's eyes on him from the crowd.

His eyes settle on the front row. Lois and Clark are there. Clark is regarding him coolly. Bruce returns the stare. There is a moment between them when the rest of the world seems to fade slightly, and then we snap back to reality and Mayor Garcia's voice comes back into focus.

GARCIA: I have made a public appeal for Superman to come to Gotham City and assist us in the hunt for the fugitive known as Batman.

Lucius' eyebrows arch. Bruce keeps himself composed; only a slight pursing of his lips betrays any sort of reaction.

The rest of the assembled crowd, including many journalists, are not so reserved. Many explode to their feet in a rush to bombard the Mayor with questions. He ignores them all and his eyes come to settle on the couple in the front row.

We cut quickly to the Planet offices. Perry is watching the conference live on television. He's sporting a grin like a Cheshire Cat.

PERRY: Gather round, people. This is history.

We go back to the conference. Lois Lane rises to her feet. Mayor Garcia smiles and inclines his head to acknowledge her presence.

LOIS: Mayor Garcia, Lois Lane, *Daily Planet*. Is this a political stunt aimed at getting you back into office come re-election?

Garcia almost falls off the podium. Back at the Planet, Perry's smile wilts. Clark cannot keep a grin from tugging up one corner of his mouth. Typical of Lois not to stick to the pre-approved questions...

GARCIA: Absolutely not, Miss Lane. The Batman is a unique criminal and unfortunately has proven to be beyond the capabilities of our own police force to apprehend.

We cut to Gordon watching from his precinct. He bristles visibly, drumming his fingers on his desk in supreme irritation. Back to the conference.

GARCIA: A unique problem requires a unique solution. Superman, we hope, can be that solution.

LOIS: Isn't it true that until the alleged murders of several police officers during the Joker killings, Batman was single-handedly responsible for a 46% drop in all recorded crime rate across Gotham?

Bruce Wayne sits forward in his chair. He regards Lois keenly.

LOIS: Isn't it also true that during this period, the Gotham city police operated an unofficial policy of co-operation with him, leading to an overall crime rate lower than Metropolis' during the same period?

Now it's Clark's turn to bristle. He glances up at Lois, wounded.

GARCIA: Miss Lane, whatever...relationship...may have existed between GCPD and the vigilante during that period - never condoned by City Hall - ended the moment he began abusing the power he was gathering to himself and becoming judge, jury and executioner on the very officers sworn to protect this city. We've seen the...resources he has, the toys at his disposal. We cannot permit ourselves to be subject to the whims of someone with that kind of power.

BRUCE: *(murmurs)* Unless he flies around in a cape and tights and rescues kittens.

Clark's eyes flit to Bruce.

GARCIA: Now *(glaring at Lois)* I think I've taken up enough time. We await Superman's response to our appeal. Time to welcome the man of the hour-

Lois sits down. She glances to her companion, a question in her expression. Clark kisses her then, briefly, on the lips, to her surprise.

CLARK: I love you.

Not waiting for a reply, Clark half-stands and makes his way from the row, apologising to those others sitting around him, who ignore him, pleading with Mayor Garcia not to exit the stage, but he does so anyway, making way for-

GARCIA: -Mister Bruce Wayne!

Muted applause. The crowd are patently still abuzz from the Batman vs. Superman revelation of just a few moments ago and the lustre of a billionaire bragging about his

philanthropy suddenly doesn't seem so newsworthy - in fact, more than a few of the assembled throng are already leaking away, following the example supposedly being set by Clark. Bruce doesn't miss this snub and is sporting a wry smile as he takes up the podium from the Mayor.

BRUCE: Well. Ladies and gentlemen, talk about a hard act to follow. Now I know how the guy who had to come after Moses' Mt Sinai proclamation felt.

A ripple of laughter, more polite than heartfelt. Lois smiles up at Bruce; she genuinely seems to have appreciated the humour. He spares an instant to focus his gaze on her in return and tip her a microscopic wink.

BRUCE: Can I just add on a personal note that, speaking as someone whose Charitable Foundation has long campaigned for more equitable treatment for the vulnerable from city officials, I'm delighted to see Mayor Garcia finally offering a high profile job opportunity like this to a Migrant Worker.

Another ripple of laughter, stronger this time.

BRUCE: But, uh, if I can talk for a moment about the Gotham General-

And at that moment, he loses the audience completely. Hands shoot up into the air. Eyes are shielded for a better view. Shouts of recognition and excitement ring out.

And a pair of red boots lands on the platform beside him.

Bruce Wayne and Superman regard each other. In the foreground, the assembled press forget all about their designated seats and simply rush the podium, microphones and cameras thrust into the fray. The scrum almost envelopes Lois but despite her small frame she's seen enough media frenzies to hold her own, and simply hangs back to watch.

Superman extends a hand.

SUPERMAN: Bruce Wayne. Your Charitable Foundation does some amazing work. It's good to finally meet you.

Bruce looks at the hand proffered. He steps forward and shakes it.

BRUCE: Likewise.

The handshake ends. Bruce's hand drops to his side. It flexes experimentally. Only Lucius seems to notice. The media shout a thousand questions all at once to Superman, all along similar lines - are you going to go after the Batman???

Mayor Garcia waves for quiet from the assembled press. He has barged past Bruce to get to Superman and now stands beside him as the cameras roll and the flashes go off like a million tiny popping explosions of light.

GARCIA: Will you help us? Will you help Gotham? Will you bring the Batman to justice?

There is silence. Everyone's eyes are on Superman - Lois, Bruce, Lucius, and via television, the eyes of Perry White, of Alfred, of Commissioner Gordon, of Jason...

...and sitting in an apartment penthouse, of Lex Luthor. He watches proceedings with rapt fascination.

SUPERMAN: I will.

The crowd cheer. Lois does not. Bruce brings his hands together and applauds. Lucius simply looks worried, as does Alfred. Commissioner Gordon closes his eyes. Jason White switches off the TV in disgust.

And Lex...Lex Luthor smiles.

And that's when the window of his penthouse apartment is smashed in. Shielding his eyes from the flying glass, by the time Lex lowers them the Eradicator stands before him.

LUTHOR: Well. It's about time.

Act I, Scene X

The new Fortress. The Eradicator swoops inside, unceremoniously depositing Lex Luthor on the surface. Lex dusts himself off.

LUTHOR: Next time remind me to go business class. But speaking of upgrades...

He turns around to take in his surroundings, awestruck.

LUTHOR: ...new place?

ZOD: New master.

The voice comes from behind Luthor. He spins. Zod emerges from behind an array of Kryptonian crystalline formations arranged on a central raised platform, almost where you'd expect a throne to be located in the midst of the surrounding structure.

ZOD: I am Zod.

LUTHOR: (*dubiously*) Zod. Okay. And let me guess-

He is thrown to his knees in sudden pain. A beam of light projected from the Eradicator's fingertips is the cause. Luthor gasps in agony.

Zod motions to the Eradicator, who is still hovering above proceedings like some sort of vengeful angel. The beam of energy stops.

ZOD: Let me tell you something, Luthor. On Krypton I was a general. I commanded armies. I should have commanded the entire planet. I have seen this miserable world of yours, your pathetic technologies. It makes my skin crawl to even have to consort with one of your number. So I refuse to tolerate insolence. You are not 'allowed to guess'. You will be instructed, and if you perform well, you may be rewarded. That is it. That is all.

During this speech we watch Luthor's face and especially his eyes. They burn with repressed anger. As much as Zod proclaims himself unused to being spoken to in an offhand fashion, we get the impression that no-one speaks to Lex Luthor like this.

ZOD: Do you understand?

LUTHOR: Absolutely. (*pause*) General.

ZOD: I seek the destruction of Kal-El. The one your world calls Superman. My servant (*he gestures to the Eradicator*) informs me that you may be of use in this. Is he correct? Or shall I have you killed?

LUTHOR: I've tried.

ZOD: Why? Why, if all he does on this world is assist those in need? If he is held in such esteem by your species?

LUTHOR: My reasons are my own, General.

ERADICATOR: Answer him.

He raises a finger. Luthor gets the message.

LUTHOR: He was a threat to me. I sought to remove it. But I don't understand - if you are Kryptonian, why do you need my help? Between the two of you-

ZOD: The power he possesses comes from the solar radiation of your star. He has had more than thirty years to store that energy. I have been here much less than that. However-

He gestures to the Eradicator, who closes his eyes. Immediately the Fortress rumbles and from the floor rise two four-sided crystal booths, each big enough to accommodate one person.

ZOD: The chambers you see here transfer the yellow sun energy that powers his abilities. If I can force Kal-El into this (*he gestures to the left booth*), I shall remove his powers and take them for my own. And enable myself to rule this planet.

LUTHOR: Ah. Well, I've discovered to my own cost that brute force can't accomplish the

job. Superman is all but invulnerable.

ZOD: *(lazily)* Did I bring you here to tell me things I already know? Eradicator, it seems this one is to be of no use to me. Dispose of him.

LUTHOR: Wait!

Zod raises a hand to stay the Eradicator's execution of his kill command. He regards Luthor as a scientist would examine a lab rat.

LUTHOR: I can bring him here. I can get him into that booth.

ZOD: You? You can arrange this?

LUTHOR: Not alone.

Act I, Scene XI

Lois is unpacking a box in an apartment. Jason tramps past her, giving her daggers. She opens her mouth to speak to him. He ignores her and places his Xbox Live headset on his head, entering a chat with someone called 'MetroKnight'.

JASON: Hey, Azzie. Yeah, it's true. Gotham. Dunno. However long this Batman thing goes on for, they want my Mom and Clark here. Well, yeah, missing school *will* be kinda cool I guess. *(laughs)* Yeah. Maybe I will get to meet him, that'd be pretty sweet...

Lois is about to say something when her doorbell rings. She goes to her apartment door, trying to find somewhere to put down the boxes she's carrying, which features her Pulitzer balanced precariously on top, but can't find anywhere and ends up carrying them to the door.

LOIS: Who is it?

VOICE: I'm here from Wayne Enterprises, Miss Lane. I rang...?

LOIS: Oh yeah, sure, yeah...

She manages to get the door open, the boxes obscuring her view of who's actually coming through the door.

VOICE: Oh here, let me help you with those...

A pair of hands takes the pile of boxes from her and sets them down deftly on a nearby table. The visitor turns-

LOIS: Oh-!

BRUCE: Problem?

LOIS: No, um, not at all, I er...I just, when I spoke on the phone with, um, the Wayne Enterprises person and he said they were *sending someone over* I didn't expect it to be, you know, the guy who runs the entire company...

BRUCE: Well technically that'd be Mr Lucius Fox. He does all the, you know, *(pulls an 'ugh' face)* the actual work. But I heard you wanted an interview with someone to discuss the work of the Charitable Foundation. I thought I was best placed, since *(he grins, embarrassed)* you know, it *is* kinda my Foundation and all. Oh, how rude of me, we haven't been properly...you know...

He steps forward and offers his hand.

BRUCE: Bruce Wayne. Good to meet you.

She shakes his hand.

LOIS: Lois Lane.

BRUCE: Oh please, Miss Lane, you're every bit as famous as I am, and more deservedly so may I say. I've been a fan of your scoops for - oh my God, is this the actual...?

He's spotted the Pulitzer and approaches it reverentially, stretching out a hand but sending her a questioning look as she does so. Somewhat bemused, she nods and he lifts the prize to inspect it.

BRUCE: *Why The World Doesn't Need A Superman.*

LOIS: You're familiar...?

BRUCE: You kidding? I *loved* it. Even if, uh, you did undergo a little bit of a change of heart some time after...

Lois flushes red; we all know the reason for her change of heart, after all. Bruce simply chooses not to comment.

BRUCE: And who's this gaming whizzkid?

LOIS: Oh, this is my son, Jason. Jason, this is Bruce Wayne. *(warningly)* Say hello, honey.

JASON: *(without looking up from his superhero game)* Hey.

Bruce kneels on his hunches beside where Jason's sitting on the sofa as he plays the game. He studies the screen as the avatar storms inside a building and begins leaping from platform to platform, zeroing in on bad guys.

BRUCE: So. Nightstalker 2: Deadeye's Revenge?

Jason's head rotates to look at him for the first time.

JASON: *(surprised)* Uh. Yeah. You know it?

BRUCE: I should. Wayne Enterprises developed the AI that programs the enemies. *(to Lois)* We developed it for military simulators. *(to Jason)* You know I was the lead play tester on this game?

JASON: No shit!

LOIS: JASON!

JASON: Sorry, um. No way. Seriously?

BRUCE: *(laughing)* Yep.

JASON: So how do I defeat the boss on this level? He always gets me.

BRUCE: Ah, see your problem here is, you're playing the game all wrong.

As he talks, we cut away to an exterior shot of Superman streaking through the Gotham skyline. He lands on the roof of a building, walks to the access door, opens it, and in a blur of motion is down the interior stairwell until he emerges at the door to Lois' new Gotham apartment. By this stage he has somehow gotten back into his Clark Kent civvies once more. The apartment door is still open and voices trickle outward as Clark walks inside.

BRUCE: *(V/O)* ...just because you have all these powers in your power meter, doesn't mean the best approach is to go in all gung-ho, lasers blazing. By the time you get to Dead-Eye at the level's end, you're too drained to tackle him.

Clark walks into the apartment and closes the door. He sees Lois who greets him with a smile, a little wave. He frowns quizzically at her regarding the voices. She gestures with a nod of the head towards the sofa and the two people there.

Bruce has assumed control of the joypad. He's controlling the avatar now and where Jason had him bouncing off walls and high-kicking enemies through doorways, now the superpowered protagonist is stealthily moving past an entire cadre of bad guys, slipping from shadow to shadow. Moving just like Batman. With a burst of zipline the avatar swings up and into a large open space and boss-type music plays. Bruce hands the joypad back to Jason.

BRUCE: Try old Dead-Eye now. He doesn't stand a chance, trust me.

JASON: Cool. Thanks.

Clark watches the exchange.

BRUCE: No problem.

He stands and turns, and seems taken aback to see Clark, clutching his heart in exaggerated shock.

BRUCE: Whoa...sorry. Got the drop on me, big guy.

CLARK: Mr. Wayne.

BRUCE: *(shaking hands)* Clark Kent, right? I remember you from the news last year when that crazy 'Clark Kent is Superman' hoax thing was doing the rounds.

CLARK: *(ruefully)* Yeah. Most people do. *That* was a fun couple days.

BRUCE: And they call Luthor an evil genius, huh? Is that what passes for a genius in Metropolis? Small wonder Gotham U is more prestigious...

CLARK: Oh really? I didn't realise you were familiar with Bizarro World, Bruce.

BRUCE: *(laughing good naturedly)* Okay, okay. Can't blame a guy for local pride. Wow. Three of Metropolis' most famous exports in the one day. You know I may never wash this hand again?

CLARK: A billionaire who doesn't wash his hands *and* who hangs out in this neighbourhood? You're a rare one, Mr. Wayne.

LOIS: Mr. Wayne is here to do the interview about his Charitable Foundation. I thought it was only fair since his speech earlier was interrupted by the whole Superman thing...

BRUCE: Please, both of you, enough with the *Mr. Wayne's*. It's Bruce. And yes, I would appreciate the chance to get the message of the work we do out there without interruption, if possible. I do assume Superman's not a regular visitor to this apartment?

Lois and Clark laugh uproariously in unison at this most hilariously ludicrously ridiculous joke ever in the history of jokes. Bruce raises an eyebrow at the somewhat exaggerated level of mirth generated at what was a fairly tame gag.

JASON: *(to Bruce, still playing)* Don't worry, they're always like this.

BRUCE: Good to know.

JASON: Aw, dammit!

His avatar has just finished receiving a thorough pasting at the hands of Dead-Eye. Jason pauses the game in disgust and throws the controller to the side, slumping down dejectedly.

LOIS: Jason, what did I just say about language! Ah, Bruce, shall we begin?

BRUCE: Yeah...one sec.

He scoops up the controller, unpauses the game, and taps out a complicated sequence of buttons on it. A menu pops up on the screen. Bruce grins and gives the controller to Jason.

JASON: What did you do?

BRUCE: Cheat menu. Have fun.

He walks away to a little table, beside the window looking out over Gotham. Lois is already sitting.

BRUCE: *(looking around)* You know this place is okay, but if you prefer somewhere a little more upmarket, I could make a few calls...

CLARK: On a reporter's salary? No thank you.

BRUCE: Well, actually, if I made the calls, I think you'd find the rent for wherever I was able to arrange veering on this side of *free*, Clark.

CLARK: Isn't that just another cheat menu, Bruce?

BRUCE: *(mildly)* You don't approve, Clark?

He sits at the table. Clark looks unsure for a moment about whether to join Bruce and Lois and then seems to shrug and say, what the hell. He sits, so the two men are at opposite ends of the table, with Lois in the middle, her back to the city.

CLARK: I was raised to believe that if something is worth doing, it's worth doing right.

BRUCE: You had good parents. You're a lucky man, Clark.

CLARK: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...I know what happened to your-

BRUCE: *(waves a hand)* Please, Clark. Ancient history. I learned a lot from the way they lived. But I also learned from the way they died. This is a hard world, Clark. An unfair world. Brutal, and unfeeling, and capable of taking away everything you care about for no damned good reason. And to live, to survive, in a world like this, you have to be willing to use every advantage you have.

CLARK: That's a very Gotham City attitude, Bruce.

LOIS: Clark!

BRUCE: No Lois, Clark is right. It is. And I'm proud of it. Gotham and its people have been through some tough years. The depression. The Mob. Corruption. Even sheltered little rich kids like me have had that reach out and touch them. Comfortable middle-class people tend not to rob and murder couples in dark alleys.

CLARK: So that violent past, that climate of fear, is something to be envied?

BRUCE: Of course not. But fear can be overcome, and make you stronger. And that's why I created the Charitable Foundation - because I firmly believe in the power of Gotham's citizenry to pull themselves up and close the gap on...well, why deny it, close the gap on places like Metropolis. Maybe even overtake them.

CLARK: You don't like Metropolis, Bruce?

BRUCE: I like it fine. It shines in the sunlight, it's pretty and it has some of the most famous institutions in the world. People flock from all over the world to live there. No-one flocks to Gotham. Most people born here stay right here, and a lot of them die here. Maybe that says something too. Anyway, enough about me. How are you finding Gotham, Clark? Done any sightseeing?

CLARK: Not really. We're here to cover the Batman story...

BRUCE: *(makes a face)* Oh. Well I can only hope that resolves itself soon. This whole sorry affair has dragged on so long, it's damaging the reputation of the entire city.

CLARK: I'm sure it won't take long.

BRUCE: Really? You're that confident of Superman's abilities?

LOIS: You don't sound sure yourself.

BRUCE: Well he seemed a nice enough guy earlier, don't get me wrong. Grip was a little weaker than I expected-

Lois bites her lip and tries not to look amused, pointedly not looking at Clark.

BRUCE: -but he's not exactly a bounty hunter *par excellence* is he?

CLARK: Meaning?

BRUCE: Hmm. Lex Luthor?

Clark's eyes flash, but there's no denying the truth of that one...

CLARK: Granted. But the Batman-

He's interrupted by the chirruping of Bruce's PDA. Bruce removes it from his jacket, grimacing apologetically to Lois & Clark. He scans the message, frowns and sighs, standing up abruptly.

BRUCE: My sincere apologies. Trouble in la-la-land corporate land requires my immediate, although bored, presence. Miss Lane I promise I *will* complete this interview. Shall we reconvene for tomorrow?

LOIS: Sure.

BRUCE: How goes it, champ?

JASON: Final level!

BRUCE: Attaboy.

He puts on his jacket. Lois & Clark have walked to the door to see him out. Clark has opened it for him. Bruce nods and then hesitates and stops.

BRUCE: Tell you what. I can't pass on this opportunity to sell my city to the *Planet's* best writers. I'll call you tomorrow and you can be my guest for the day.

CLARK: I don't think we can-

LOIS: We'd love to.

CLARK: But the story-

LOIS: If anything happens and we need to go, I'm sure Bruce will understand.

BRUCE: You bet I will. Until tomorrow, then. Nice to have met you both. And Clark - c'mon, before I go. Admit it. It must have been fun, everyone thinking you were a superhero.

CLARK: It had its moments.

BRUCE: I *knew* it.

He kisses Lois on the cheek, before shaking Clark's hand. There is a faint crack and we see Bruce's eyebrow twitch minutely.

He exits the apartment and immediately makes a call as he enters the elevator. We see the PDA message - SHIPMENT. PIER 22. MIDNIGHT.

BRUCE: Alfred? Bring the car. No. Not the Lamborghini.

Back inside the apartment, Clark sits beside Jason on the sofa and watches him play the game, his expression a little troubled.

CLARK: Which one did you use?

JASON: Which what?

CLARK: Cheat. Unlimited lives? Infinite energy?

JASON: Oh. None of them.

CLARK: (*surprised*) But I thought-

JASON: Yeah, well, it's weird. I know it's there if I need it, but I tried again and beat it on my own. Guess I just needed to relax a little.

Clark absorbs this.

LOIS: Good advice...

She's whispering in Clark's ear. He turns his head to look at her. Jason makes a face.

LOIS: Gonna help me unpack, hero?

CLARK: Yes ma'am...

Jason watches them go. He rolls his eyes, and grabs his headset before turning it up to full volume.

Act I, Scene XII

Gotham City Harbour. Huge black silhouettes of docked ships loom out of the night, light illuminating a few of them - the docks never sleep. And Pier 22 is certainly anything but slumbering. A huge vessel has pulled into port and a crane is currently unloading its cargo containers into waiting trucks by the pierside. Men bustle here and there and a foreman barks orders.

GOON #1: There. Open that one.

Two fellow goons open the crate with crowbars. The one giving the orders reaches inside and retrieves a very large, very dangerous looking assault weapon. He removes the magazine inside with a few sharp motions and inspects the ammo.

GOON #1: Armour-piercing. *(smiles)* We're gonna own this town. Even Falcone never had an arsenal like this.

GOON #2: Where does the boss get this stuff? I mean this musta cost a fortune. We haven't even pulled that many jobs...

GOON #1: Don't ask, don't complain. Get 'em packed and get 'em out of here.

The crane stops moving above their heads, its cargo container still suspended halfway between the ship and the unloading bay on the pier. The head goon frowns.

GOON #1: What the hell-

Something small and black whips through the air and slices through the thick metal chain suspending the cargo container from the crane.

GOON: Holy sh-! MOVE!

They scatter. Above them, the container strikes the hull of the ship first, rupturing its sides, the crates inside splitting asunder. Guns fall everywhere, bouncing crazily. The rest of the container impacts a moment later with a tremendous resounding crash, barely avoiding the desperately fleeing goons, but knocking them off their feet entirely.

And half a city away, asleep until that very moment, Clark Kent's eyes snap open.

The goons get back to their feet. They're all packing the assault rifles.

GOON #1: It's him! Shoot on sight! Get whatever guns we got and get outta here! Now!

He makes a run for the nearest lorry with a few of his henchmen. A rope snakes from the darkness, wrapping itself around one of his accomplices ankles, tripping the man up and slamming him to the deck in an instant. Panicked, the remainder fire in the direction the rope originated.

GOON #3: There! Up on top!

A dark shape is glimpsed above their heads. Gunfire tracks it, peppering the crate with bullets. They all join in, showering the crate with a firestorm of ammunition until it fairly breaks apart.

BATMAN: Finished?

He's standing behind them.

BATMAN: My turn.

An instant later he's waded into the centre of the closely-knit group, surgical punches and kicks disarming each of his opponents in turn. He's despatched two of the goons when another truck pulls up and more pour out from within. We see a close-up of Batman's face; a flash of concern in his eyes. This wasn't in the plan.

GOON #1: Get him!

Batman reaches into his belt and tosses what looks like a grenade at the newcomers. They react, but he wasn't aiming for them; the grenade sticks securely to the side of the

truck. Diving behind cover as a wall of bullets chews up the ground before him, Batman touches his fingers to his shoulders, hitting two concealed switches in his suit. We see a close-up of the 'ears' of his Batman mask and a noise that suggests something sliding shut-

An instant passes-

And an absolute WALL of noise erupts forth from the sonic device. Every single goon collapses to his knees, equilibrium shot to hell. We see blood trickling down the cheeks from their ears. We see through one of their eyes and see the suddenly muffled world, inhabited by a dark shape who has emerged from hiding and is now cutting a swathe through the field of would-be assailants before him. Our point of view cam is suddenly deactivated due to Batman delivering a devastating blow to the side of 'our' head, switching the goon off like a light.

As his body hits the ground though, Batman suddenly realises he's not alone. He turns. A goon stands behind him, assault rifle in hand, trained on his position. Unlike his now-unconscious partners, he seems completely unaffected.

GOON: Goodnight.

He opens fire from pointblank range before Batman can do anything, can react- And a blue and red blur zips back and forth between Batman and the goon. The goon keeps firing, but the smile slowly drips from his face. He keeps firing until the magazine goes dry and the gun clicks, and sees Batman still standing before him, unscathed.

GOON: What...

And just as it had earlier that day, a pair of red boots lands softly on the surface. We pan up to reveal Superman, standing with his arms bundled together and the bullets he intercepted gathered up in them. He opens his arms and the bullets fall to the dockside.

SUPERMAN: These yours?

The goon whimpers and runs off. Superman blurs with motion once more, snatching up a length of rope. In a fraction of a second the man is securely bound. Superman frowns down at his prisoner and sends a beam of X-Ray Vision in his direction, before nodding and walking back to Batman, still standing in place, not moving.

SUPERMAN: Almost completely deaf. Probably why your sonic device didn't work. I, uh, *(he rubs his ears ruefully)* I wish the same could be said for me. That's what delayed me getting here by the way.

BATMAN: Don't let me keep you.

He turns his back on Superman, walks over to one of the downed goons - the chief barking orders from earlier, now lying on the pier clutching his ears and whimpering softly. Superman takes off vertically and lands a moment later between Batman and his new target. Another beam of X-Ray vision lances out, visible only to us. Superman cocks his head to the side.

SUPERMAN: Lead-lined mask. Your identity means that much to you?

BATMAN: I have business here. You're not it.

He makes as if to walk around Superman to get to the goon. And that's when Superman reaches out an arm and places it on Batman's shoulder. Batman freezes in place. His head turns to look at Superman.

And behind his back, he presses a button on a small handheld controller.

BATMAN: Are we gonna have a problem?

SUPERMAN: I'm not going to insult you by asking if you know why I'm here.

BATMAN: I saw. You know you look good in front of a cheering crowd. You should be a politician. Now get the hell out of my way.

SUPERMAN: Please. Hear me out. (*cocks his head to the side*) The police are coming. They'll be here in about three minutes. All I want is two.

BATMAN: Yeah? All I need is one.

He stands back. The Tumbler barrels through a wall of crates. Superman has time to look up, surprise etched on his face, before it impacts him full-on, sending him flying backwards off the pier and into the Gotham waters below. The Tumbler barely stops at the edge in time.

Batman goes to his belt and retrieves several of the same sonic grenades as before. He pulls out a small electronic device - the same one he used to call the Tumbler - and with a few button presses has called up a menu entitled FREQUENCY ADJUST.

Superman shoots from the waters below, arcing up and out and landing on the pier before Batman in one smooth graceful motion. Water drips from his nose. He does not look amused.

SUPERMAN: You're not listening.

BATMAN: Oh I'm listening.

He thumbs the frequency adjuster and we watch the number go from 10, 000Hz to 30, 000Hz. The grenades bleep.

SUPERMAN: I'm sorry, I didn't want to have to do it this way.

He moves forward at super-speed, straight for Batman, who dives to the side and drops the sonic grenades. They flash-

An incredibly high-pitched sound rips through the night. Superman's lunge is knocked off balance. He crashes into the side of a ship, putting a hole clean through the hull.

Batman remains unaffected. The police sirens are now close. He grabs the chief goon and walks to the Tumbler, throwing him inside and clambering in, gunning the engines. The Tumbler roars into life-

-and goes nowhere.

BATMAN: Computer! Turbo!

Superman, holding on to the rear of the vehicle and lifting its massive bulk off the ground so its huge wheels gain no traction, is suddenly engulfed in a massive fireball as the afterburners kick into high gear. He's swallowed completely by the flames.

Back inside the Tumbler, Batman watches in disbelief as the afterburner power levels begin to dip. They still haven't moved an inch.

COMPUTER: Afterburner exhausted. Overheating. System shutting down.

The furnace dies. Superman is revealed once more, looking none the worse for wear. Batman watches this on the onboard cameras.

The Tumbler wrenches to one side abruptly.

COMPUTER: Warning. Left rear wheel removed.

And to the other.

COMPUTER: Warning. Right rear wheel removed.

BATMAN: (*muttering*) So glad I have you to tell me these things.

He's busy working at control panels whilst removing the gloves he's wearing and accessing a hidden panel to reveal a small metallic container. He opens the door. We don't see what happens next.

A moment later, the door of the Tumbler is torn off.

COMPUTER: Warning. Door removed.

SUPERMAN: Amazing what they can get computers to do these days, huh?

He appears at the door, leaning inside. He takes an appraising glance around.

SUPERMAN: Nice. How many miles to the gallon?

BATMAN: More than you'd think. It's a hybrid.

The police sirens are very loud now.

SUPERMAN: I want to bring you to justice. And I mean it. I've seen you work. Can't say I approve of your methods, but I don't think you're a cop-killer. So why are you letting them think you are? What are you protecting?

BATMAN: I don't have time for this.

SUPERMAN: You don't have much choice. Come on. I'm stronger than you. Faster. You know you can't beat me.

BATMAN: Yeah?

He takes his hands from the metal box, raises his arms to a boxer's pose. And we see his gloves in close-up.

They're laced with green.

BATMAN: How 'bout now?

He punches Superman right in the jaw, a real haymaker. Superman is knocked off his feet and onto the pierside below, impacting heavily. In a flash Batman is out of the Tumbler and standing above him, dragging him to his feet once more, not letting him breathe. He lands a succession of blows with the gloves to Superman's solar plexus. Above them, a helicopter is now circling, but not a police copter...

We cut to above and to a young news reporter screaming into a camera, trying to restrain her excitement and failing quite miserably, but quite understandably in the circumstances.

TANIA: Tania Moon, WGBS News! *Live* from Gotham Docks! One hundred feet below me is raging the fiercest battle this city has ever seen! I can't *believe* what I'm watching!

We cut to various locations all over the city - homes, hospitals, bars, the main Gotham boulevard. Every single person stops in their tracks and stares at the television screens as they relay blow-by-blow (quite literally) footage of Batman and Superman going toe-to-toe.

HOUSEWIFE: He's murdering him! The brute!

MAN IN BAR: Yeah! Go Bats! Give him one for Gotham!

MAN IN BAR #2: Hey, what are you, crazy? The guy's a menace! We should be cheering Supes!

MAN IN BAR: *(waves him away)* Bats is the real deal, trust me. And he's one of us!

The argument rages on in the bar, in the homes, across the entire city. And we see Jason White, plonked in front of the television in Lois' Gotham apartment, with Lois emerging sleepily from the bedroom behind him.

LOIS: Jason, have you seen Clark...?

Jason merely points to the screen. Lois takes a look.

LOIS: Oh my God...

We go back to the fight. It's a real knockdown affair; whatever amount of Kryptonite Batman has laced his gauntlets with, it's enough to hurt Superman, but not enough to really do him any lasting damage, so he's able to get in some pretty good hits of his own, which, given his huge strength advantage, are causing Batman some trouble.

The police pull up in a circle around the combatants. Gordon spills from the car, pulling his gun, taking in the scene before him. He mops sweat from his forehead, hardly able to believe what he's seeing.

RAMIREZ: Do we...do we, uh...go in?

Superman lands a blow to Batman that sends him twenty feet backwards and straight through another few wooden crates, which splinter spectacularly.

GORDON: *(looks at her incredulously)* What do you think?

RAMIREZ: Stay back!

Superman approaches Batman carefully. Batman struggles to his feet. He's dazed, his armour is torn completely off in places, and has some difficulty getting up. Superman looks winded and a little out of breath but otherwise unhurt.

SUPERMAN: Stop this. Please. If you're innocent the courts can prove that.

BATMAN: *(gasping)* You're a goddamned fool. There's not an honest court in this city. That's why I have to stay out here. Where I can...make a...difference!

He rushes Superman, but his opponent simply lifts himself thirty feet into the air, well out of range of any punches or blows. Batman simply stares at him, helplessly.

And with a resigned look, Superman applies a blast of heat vision from his eyes, landing squarely on Batman's gloves. They heat up instantly, and Batman is forced to remove them, gasping in pain as he does so. As soon as they're off, Superman ups the intensity of the blast from his eyes and reduces them, and the Kryptonite crystals within them, to so much smoking ashes.

He lands back on the pier, facing a now defenceless Batman, the police ring in the background.

SUPERMAN: It's over.

And that's when it happens.

Just for an eye blink, there's the strangest effect before him, an odd sort of pseudo flicker of motion, as if Batman had moved somewhere absurdly fast. Superman frowns, but Batman is still standing there before him, just as before. His shoulders suddenly slump, and his hands slowly raise into the air.

BATMAN: I surrender.

Gordon lowers his head, placing his hand on the hood of his car to steady himself. None of his officers move a muscle. Ramirez is the first to dare to speak.

RAMIREZ: Commissioner...?

GORDON: Take him in.

We switch to the news footage of Batman as he is surrounded by police officers. They handcuff him securely and bundle him into a waiting custody van. Superman stands and watches.

TANIA: He's captured! The Batman is captured! Superman did it!

As before, we go around the city, to drink in the various reactions. Some are cheering, but most are simply watching, mirroring Jim Gordon's own troubled expression. The cameras zoom in on Superman as he too watches the custody van drive away, its infamous occupant securely within.

Back at the pierside, Gordon walks over to where Superman is standing.

GORDON: I suppose you want thanks?

SUPERMAN: I want him to get a fair trial, Commissioner.

GORDON: You're in for a disappointment on both fronts, my friend.

And he walks away, gets into his car, and drives off, leaving Superman on the Gotham dockside, surrounded by the wreckage of battle and the assault rifles from the shipment Batman stopped.

In the custody van, surrounded by officers, the Batman sits quietly. One of the officers, a particularly well-built specimen, swaggers to where he sits.

COP #1: Not so tough now, huh? Lets see who's under that mask-
He reaches forward and rips off the Batman cowl. His jaw drops. We don't see what he sees.

COP #1: What the-

Now we see what he sees. Himself.

BATMAN: Oh I'm sorry. Is this preferable?
His facial features ripple and change until he looks like Mike Engel from Gotham Tonight.

BATMAN: No? No better? How about now?

Again, his facial features change, so now he looks like Mayor Garcia.

COP #1: I thought you were *human*. What the hell are you?
We cut abruptly to a warehouse roof, the Gotham Docks in the backdrop. Batman, his armour torn and his gloves off from the battle with Superman, opens his eyes and sees the bald smiling face of Lex Luthor smiling down at him.

LUTHOR: *(his finger on his lips)* Sssh...

From the pierside below, in the midst of the huge police presence, a blue-suited figure takes off into the Gotham night, streaking across the skies and gone from vision in a few seconds.

LUTHOR: *(speaking into a wrist communicator)* He's gone. Now.

And back in the van, 'Batman' stands up, snapping his cuffs easily. His features ripple again and he shoots the beam of energy we saw earlier, incapacitating the officers around him in seconds. When his features settle, we see The Eradicator standing amidst the bodies of the officers charged with keeping the Batman contained.

ERADICATOR: I think the technical term is *decoy*...

Back on the rooftop, Batman gets to his feet to face Lex Luthor. A few moments later the Eradicator lands on the rooftop beside Luthor.

BATMAN: What do you want?

LUTHOR: The same thing you want.

He points upwards to the skies. His eyes glitter in the dark.

LUTHOR: Payback.

Act I, Scene XIII

Clark arrives back in the apartment. He closes the door behind him, and turns, and faces the music in the form of Lois and Jason.

LOIS: You sneak off in the middle of the night and next thing I know you're in the middle of some smack down all over the news! You could have been killed!

JASON: You beat him! You humiliated him! Why'd you do that? You didn't have to *do* that!

CLARK: Jason, I...believe me, I tried to-

JASON: They'll unmask him, they'll throw him in jail and throw away the key. He was a hero, just like you!

Something seems to snap in Clark at this.

CLARK: Like me? He's nothing *like* me! He's violent! He's unstable! He's a borderline sociopath! He dresses like a bat and wears a mask!

JASON: (*points to his own eyes, indicating Clark's glasses*) And you don't?! At least he wears *his* mask when he's being a hero. Better than wearing it when you're pretending to be a person!

He storms off to his room, tears in his eyes. Clark watches him go, real anguish in his face. He takes a step as if to follow and finds Lois' arm has attached itself to his wrist. Though she couldn't have a hope in hell of stopping him physically, the simple gesture is enough to halt him in his tracks.

LOIS: (*gently*) Let him go, Clark. He's too angry right now to listen to reason. Try it tomorrow.

CLARK: I'm trying to do my best here, Lois, but sometimes I just feel as if I understand-

LOIS: Kids? Women?

CLARK: -humans.

LOIS: *Humans?*

CLARK: Yes, humans. I don't get this world sometimes. I zip back and forth across this planet *every single day*. Stopping *one* disaster after *another* after *another*, saving hundreds, thousands, *millions* of people. I answer a request for my help to bring a fugitive to justice. I saw him at work again tonight, Lois. He hates criminals. He *despises* them. The methods he uses...the things he does...(*he shrugs*) I didn't believe it about those cops, but what if he discovered they were on the take? What if he couldn't control his anger? And so I brought him in. As gently as I could. Giving him as much dignity as I could.

He bunches his hands into fists and takes a deep steady breath.

CLARK: And yet everywhere I turn, people are looking at me as if *I'm* the villain. I heard them, Lois. I heard them all tonight as I flew across this damn city. *Who does he think he is? Did you see those things from his eyes?* And then to come here...and have my...

He trails off, unable to complete the sentence. He stares out into Gotham, lost for words, visibly irritated.

CLARK: I'm *not* a Boy Scout, Lois. I'm tired. And I don't know how much more I can take.

There is a pause. Lois seems to be looking for the right thing to say. She reaches out as if to touch him again, but pulls back at the last moment.

LOIS: You know you were right before, at least partially. Batman isn't like you. He can't fly. He can't leap tall buildings in a single bound. He's *human*, Clark. And the people of this city, they mistrusted him, they feared him, but they all knew what he was and they saw the

things he did and some part of them thought - he can do all of that, and yet he's human, like the rest of us.

CLARK: And Superman isn't.

LOIS: No. He isn't.

CLARK: (*sarcastically*) What part of the reassuring chat is this, exactly? I'm confused.

LOIS: Clark, I've seen you work miracles so many damn times. Seen you do things no-one should be able to do. And you've saved my life so many times doing those things. But if you're asking me is there a part of me that doesn't look at you moving mountains and blasting laser beams from your eyes and creating hurricanes from your breath and wonder what it must feel like to possess power like that...you're crazy.

CLARK: I don't understand.

LOIS: Batman is pretty much as advanced as humankind can hope to get. And tonight you handed his ass to him on a plate. Forgive us for wondering for a moment what exactly is stopping you from doing that to the rest of us. You know. If you ever wake up one day and discover you're tired of zipping back and forth across this planet every single day, stopping one disaster after another after another...

CLARK: Forgive *us* for wondering? You're including yourself in this, Lois? You're just like the rest?

LOIS: Hey. You were the one said you couldn't understand *humans* Not some of us. All of us. So don't you dare accuse *me* of generalising. You stop seeing us as individuals and start seeing as a species and we're all in trouble, Clark.

CLARK: I-

He cocks his head to the side again, and points to the switched-off television.

CLARK: Turn it on.

Lois does so. The rolling news is still on, and a sleepy, if extremely caffeine-wired looking Mike Engel stares out at us.

ENGEL: That breaking news again: Batman has escaped police custody. The van transporting him to Gotham City Central Precinct never arrived-

CLARK: What do you know. Humans 1, Kryptonians 0, huh?

He walks to the window, pulling aside his Clark Kent civvies to reveal the S shield beneath. Opening the window, the wind ruffles his hair and causes Lois to pull her nightgown tighter around her body to shield herself from the cold. She shivers. Clark watches this gesture. He doesn't seem to know what to say.

LOIS: I know we look small from way up there. Try not to see us that way.

He's gone in another moment, leaving Lois standing at the window as she watches him soar out over the city. Unlike in the Prologue, there's none of the love and pride evident there now, only concern and worry. She closes the window.

Act I, Scene XIV

Back on the rooftop from Scene XI. No time appears to have passed.

BATMAN: How did I get here?

LUTHOR: (*nods to the Eradicator*) My friend here can move extremely fast when he wants to.

ERADICATOR: I can also confuse Kryptonian physiology. Slow him down.

BATMAN: Then why do you need my help? I just got my ass kicked.

ERADICATOR: I can buy instants only. And if he became aware of me, he could shrug off the effects.

LUTHOR: From where I was standing, you did better than most. But with my help...you can do better still.

BATMAN: I know you, Luthor. You're the worst kind of scum. Worse than a thousand Falcone's or Maroni's.

LUTHOR: (*bows*) Well, quite. But at least *I* don't run around in scary makeup. How is your friend, by the way? Still securely locked away in Arkham?

BATMAN: He'll rot in there.

LUTHOR: Oh don't worry, I have no desire to see him do otherwise. Besides, he might be a little pissed at me muscling in on his old stomping grounds. But we're getting off-topic.

BATMAN: You? *You're* the new crime lord?

LUTHOR: (*pointing to the pierside*) Whose guns do you think those are, scattered all over the harbour? Pah. World's greatest detective indeed...

BATMAN: You fill my city with guns and you want my *help*? You're crazier than I thought.

LUTHOR: Oh, far from it. Without help, Superman will bring you in. You know it. You don't stand a chance against him. And with you in jail, your identity exposed, you won't last ten minutes against half the crooks in the city that you put in there dressed as a flying mouse. But he's too much of an idiot to see the reality of that. He thinks you can get justice. Stop me if I'm wrong at any point by the way.

Batman says nothing.

LUTHOR: And you saw him tonight. You saw the power he possesses. How long before he tires of saving us from ourselves and starts instructing us on how to be better? How long will he live? Forever? How long before he works out how to clone himself or before he sires his heirs and spreads his abilities far and wide, and we all fall under the yoke of super powered aliens who can kill us in an instant? I may be a criminal, but at least I'm *human*.

ERADICATOR: He is on the move. I will distract him.

He takes off into the skies above. Luthor watches him go. As soon as he is gone he approaches Batman and speaks as if from one confidante to another.

LUTHOR: He's not alone of his race on this world. There is another. A General. He craves Superman's power for himself. He must not get it. They think I'm helping by bringing you in, and I am. But not them. I'm helping the human race. Stand with me.

BATMAN: Everything you're asking me to do goes against what I stand for.

LUTHOR: Don't be naïve! Gotham despises you. But I can change all of that.

BATMAN: You?

LUTHOR: This empire I've built in the last year, within your city. Help me now, help me when I call upon you, and I will allow you to dismantle it. It'll make the mass arrest you, Dent and Gordon tried last time look tame. You will personally be responsible for the biggest

clean-up of Gotham's streets in three generations. If that doesn't make the fools running the city revise their opinion of you, I don't know what will.

BATMAN: And what happens to you?

LUTHOR: Well. *(smiles)* You know something, I'm just not that *keen* on prison. And Gotham doesn't suit me like Metropolis did. You look the other way. I slip out. We never see each other again. Happiness ensues.

The Eradicator touches back down on the rooftop.

ERADICATOR: He will not find us, for now. But we should not linger.

LUTHOR: I think I'm done with the pitch. Just awaiting the response.

Luthor and the Eradicator regard Batman. He meets their gaze, his armour tattered, a shadow of the same man who started the night so masterfully interrupting the arms shipment.

BATMAN: How can I possibly trust you?

LUTHOR: *(sighs)* I'd prefer it if you came on board. But don't mistake me for one of your two-bit Gotham villains. I am not a moron. Do it.

He points. The Eradicator advances on Batman. Batman puts himself into a defensive posture as he approaches, and lashes out a foot to connect perfectly with the Eradicator's stomach. But it has no effect. Batman tries again, and again, raining blows down on his opponent, but all to no avail.

The Eradicator pins Batman's arms behind his back and immobilises his legs. Luthor advances now and puts his hands on Batman's cowl. When he speaks, it's softly, conspiratorially.

LUTHOR: I could take this off. See who you really are. Find out who you love. Make them suffer.

He steps back, and motions. The Eradicator releases Batman.

LUTHOR: Should I do that, Bruce?

Batman's eyes widen behind his cowl. Luthor smiles.

LUTHOR: As I said. Not a moron. No-one but a billionaire could have the toys you do, and the carefree playboy act may fool some, but it doesn't fool me for a second. Besides, I've become rather a specialist at secret identities in recent times.

BATMAN: You hurt anyone I care about, and I'll kill you.

LUTHOR: Not many of them left now, with Mummy and Daddy and Rachel in the ground is there? But hey. Demonstration of seriousness over. We were talking about trust. So how about a freebie to show you I'm serious. In fact, how about two.

He lifts a dossier from a nearby surface and gives it to Batman, who opens it. Inside is the face of Anna Ramirez, Gordon's lieutenant.

BATMAN: She was the traitor? She gave Rachel and Dent to the Joker?

LUTHOR: It's amazing what you learn when you mix with the morally ambiguous.

BATMAN: What's the second?

LUTHOR: They do say turnabout is fair play, don't they? Tell him. No. Better to *show* him.

The Eradicator ripples his form into a perfect replica of Superman. Batman reacts with shock.

LUTHOR: Useful skill. Would allow you to shake hands with yourself. Say, in a press conference in front of the world's press, to make a story go away...?

The implications of this don't take long to sink in.

BATMAN: Kent...

LUTHOR: Kent. So. Your answer?

BATMAN: What do you need.

Luthor smiles.

END OF ACT ONE

Act II, Scene I

A car being driven through Gotham's busy morning traffic. Jason White sits on the back seat, clutching a schoolbag, looking like someone heading to the gallows. Lois sits in the front seat, applying lipgloss as she tries to steal a march on the traffic.

LOIS: I thought Metropolis was bad. This would be so much easier if Clark were taking you. Stupid mudslide. Stupid Peru.

JASON: It'd be so much easier if I wasn't going at all.

LOIS: Jason we discussed this.

JASON: No, Mom, you discussed this *at* me.

LOIS: We could be here for weeks. I'm not prepared to let you miss that much school. I don't care *how* well you're doing. Plus, Clark and I are going to be busy, so you need somewhere to *be* during the day. Dammit, *move!*

She honks the horn in sheer frustration, checking her watch and rolling her eyes.

JASON: Can't I stay with Dad? In LA? Clark could have me there in like, an hour.

Lois stops pounding on the horn. Her expression becomes troubled, and she hesitates before replying.

LOIS: Honey, Richard is-

JASON: Dad. Why can't you even call him that now? You two hate each other that much?

LOIS: Of course not. We just fell out of love with each other. I know that's hard to understand.

JASON: White lies always are, Mom. Dad still loves you. When I stayed with him at New Year, I could see it.

LOIS: *(muttering)* You pick a hell of a time to start growing up on me...

JASON: I like Clark, Mom. I do. But I miss my Dad. I miss how he was there when I needed him. Clark's so busy with *(he mimes with his hands raised up in the air)* and that's cool and stuff, but...

He shrugs, unable to come up with anything more eloquent. Lois stares blankly ahead at the road, emotions raging across her face. We get the sense that she knows exactly what her son means.

Car horns blare from behind her, and Lois belatedly realises she should be moving. She slams hard on the accelerator and the car lurches forward. Lois composes herself and glances in the rear-view mirror, to find Jason idly looking out of the window.

He huffs on the glass of the window and begins to draw with a fingertip as they stop-start through the Gotham rush hour.

We cut to the car pulling into park at the entrance to an ornate building. Lois gets out and Jason does the same, shouldering the schoolbag as he does so. He closes the door and we see his doodle - the Bat insignia.

They walk inside. We see Lois talking to a middle-aged woman who regards Jason keenly. Lois gets down and hugs her son, who looks only slightly uncomfortable by such public displays of affection. We see her whisper something in his ear. He rolls his eyes and nods. She walks away and waves goodbye.

We stay with Jason as he's led through corridors and deposited outside a classroom. The teacher walks out and converses with the middle-aged woman, before the middle-aged woman departs and the teacher looks down at Jason - she has kind eyes - and smiles, putting her hand comfortingly on his shoulder and escorting him inside.

TEACHER: Class, this is Jason White, from Metropolis. He's going to be joining us for a little while so I want everyone to make him feel very welcome.

CLASS: *(in unison)* Good morning Jason.

TEACHER: There's a seat over there sweetie, next to James.

Jason goes and sits, not meeting the eyes of any of his classmates. He looks uncomfortable.

TEACHER: History textbooks everyone. Page 142. Jason...can you share with James?

Jason glances across at the boy sitting nearby. The boy nods at the teacher and pushes his desk across, smiling shyly and rolling his eyes in the universal greeting of 'school, lame huh?'. Jason manages a small smile in return. They begin reading together.

We cut to a little later, and the recess bell rings out. The class files out and Jason sits, a little unsure of what to do.

JAMES: You can come with me. If you like. I um. I know it's hard not knowing anyone. I just joined here last year.

JASON: Yeah. Sure.

The two boys walk out of class together.

JAMES: This place is kinda okay. It's a bit um. Snooty. But my Dad got a big promotion and he said this place would be, like, safer I think. Something like that.

JASON: Safer?

JAMES: Yeah. My Dad's the um, Police Commissioner.

JASON: Wow.

We cut to the boys walking outside into the schoolyard. It's leafy and green and ornate and the various students of the school are playing in an orderly fashion.

JASON: So he knows Batman? Your Dad?

A flash of something passes across James' face. He looks away.

JAMES: I'm not really, uh, s'posed to talk about that...some of the others here, they, um, they give me a hard time sometimes.

JASON: *(incredulously)* No kidding? *These* guys?

And right on cue-

BULLY #1: Hey, Gordon!

JAMES: Aw, crap...

He turns, and is almost immediately pushed in the chest by the larger boy, who looks at least two years his senior. He's large, broad-shouldered for his age. Two almost-equally large henchmen trail along in his wake. The kids in the yard start drifting by, sensing trouble with the ancient instincts of all children for a potential fight.

BULLY #1: Did you see your best bud get his ass whupped on TV last night by Superman? Man, that was the funniest thing I ever saw.

His henchmen snicker.

BULLY #1: They oughta fire your Dad. How long now is he gonna pretend to be looking for him, huh?

JAMES: Leave me alone.

BULLY #1: Everyone knows they worked together. Probably still are. Your Dad probably pulled the trigger on one of those cops himself-

Seeing red at this, James swings a fist, but the bully simply catches it in his large paw and throws it aside effortlessly. The bully takes a step closer.

And Jason White very calmly steps in front of him, standing square between him and his

target.

JASON: Hey. I'm new. Can someone tell me where I can get some bananas? How 'bout you? Got some sort of lever you push to get one dispensed? Is that how it works?

BULLY #1: (*sizing Jason up*) You gotta be kidding me. What are you, six or something? Look. I'll cut you a break, since you're new. Get outta my way.

JASON: I'm gonna go right ahead and make you the same offer. Since I'm new here and all. Take the rest of the pack and go pick fleas off each other's backs.

The bully roars with anger and swings a punch at his younger, smaller, thinner challenger. Or at least, tries to. Jason dodges the punch as if the bully's moving through treacle and plants a foot on his backside as he swings and misses, pushing and sending the boy sprawling headfirst into the ornate fountain that serves as the centrepiece to the picturesque playground.

He comes up, spluttering and choking, soaked to the skin. Everyone stands agape, except for Jason, who simply stands there radiating calmness.

BULLY #1: Get him!!!!

As he launches himself from the fountain back into the fray, his two accomplices lurch belatedly into action.

We don't see what happens next. Instead we stay on the watching kids and especially on James, and we hear plenty of sound effects; plenty of 'oooof's and 'yeeeeow's and one particularly long drawn out 'get him off of me get him OFF OF MEEEEEE'.

And we travel upwards, to the roof of the school, to where Superman is sitting perched on the tiles, watching the scene unfurl below. His expression is a mix of paternal concern and a large quantity of fatherly pride.

Only now do we see the fight itself, or rather, the aftermath. Two of the boys - the henchmen - are on the floor, panting and quite terrified by the looks of them. Jason is standing above them, still maintaining that air of placid impassivity. He looks down at them.

JASON: So you're what passes for tough kids in Gotham, huh?

Behind him, the main bully rises to his feet. He glances around for a weapon, sees a pile of building materials nearby, lifts a large concrete slab and raises it high above his head, meaning to bring it down on Jason's unwitting skull-

-and then he shrieks in pain, drops the slab and begins slapping at his own ass with his hands, looking like a demented turkey trying to escape the Thanksgiving feast.

BULLY #1: I'm on fire! I'm on fire! I'M ON FIRE!!!!

Panicked, he runs for the fountain and plonks his butt into the cooling waters, to much hilarity from the assembled children. His henchmen wisely use the distraction to make good their escape back into the bowels of the school. Jason looks confused for a moment and then glances upwards.

SUPERMAN: (*murmurs*) Careful, kid. I won't always have your back.

JASON: (*murmurs*) Thanks.

SUPERMAN: I was late arriving. Did they deserve it?

JASON: You bet they did.

Superman smiles at this, nods, tips the boy a salute, and zips off into the skies in an instant. No-one else but Jason seems to have noticed him.

A crowd of kids assemble around Jason. James, who had begun to surge forward himself, is unable to push through and eventually gives up and simply goes to where his bag lies on the ground and picks it up, heading back for the school's interior himself, just as the

recess bell goes.

JASON: Hey. James! Wait.

James turns, and sees Jason jogging to catch up, pushing through the last of the crowd as politely as is possible. He reaches his new friend and smiles, and James smiles back.

JAMES: Thanks.

JASON: Don't sweat it.

JAMES: Where'd you learn to fight like that?

JASON: Umm. You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

JAMES: Oh yeah? Well I got some secrets of my own.

And we cut to the two of them in class, whispering to each other, seemingly in a competition for who can get whose eyebrows to climb the highest...

Act II, Scene II

In stark contrast to the beginning of the previous scene, this one finds a car driving alone, through the deserted byways of a cemetery. It's a large car, and as it comes to a halt, we see its occupants are Alfred and Bruce Wayne. Alfred opens the door for his master and Bruce gets out, carrying two large wreaths.

They walk together in silence.

Destination reached, they stop, and we pull back to see the graves they were walking to. The name on the one on the left reads RACHEL DAWES. 1976 - 2008. BELOVED DAUGHTER. TAKEN TOO SOON FROM THOSE SHE LOVED.

Bruce drops to his hunches and lays a wreath on the grave. We stay with Alfred at a respectful distance from Bruce, though we see Bruce's lips moving, we don't hear a word of what he's saying.

Bruce stands and moves to the right, to the second grave. It reads HERE LIES HARVEY DENT. 1972-2008. GOTHAM'S WHITE KNIGHT.

We cut away to Bruce's face and linger there for a long moment. When we go back to the tombstone, we move down a little so we can read the line below.

INCORRUPTABLE.

Bruce lays the wreath on Harvey's grave. He turns and walks away, not back towards his car, just away over the peaceful greenery and beautiful verdant surroundings of the cemetery. Alfred follows behind him.

Bruce stops at the side of a gorgeous teardrop-shaped pond. He looks out over the water for a moment, until Alfred comes to a stop beside him. Bruce seems about to say something, but checks himself, seemingly unable to think of the right thing to say.

ALFRED: You know something, Master Wayne?

Bruce closes his eyes. He's been waiting on this, and he's not looking forward to what Alfred is about to say to him. Not one bit.

ALFRED: I should have brought some bread.

Bruce looks over at him quizzically at this odd thing to say.

ALFRED: For the ducks.

Bruce looks and indeed, there are several ducks swimming out on the pond.

BRUCE: I can only imagine your embarrassment.

ALFRED: Am I detecting a certain amount of sarcasm, sir?

BRUCE: Come on, Alfred. You watch the damn news. You were monitoring the telemetry on the Tumbler. And since I got back last night you haven't asked me a thing about what happened.

ALFRED: You escaped. I assumed that was the important part.

BRUCE: I found it three weeks ago, Alfred.

ALFRED: Found what, sir?

Bruce turns to face his long-time friend and protector, genuine annoyance written on his face. Alfred remains cool as ever.

BRUCE: That bug you and Lucius planted in the suit! I found it and I kept it in there and so I know you heard every damn thing that was said last night on that rooftop, so don't play dumb with me!

ALFRED: Were it not for that 'bug', I would have had greater difficulty locating you when you were ambushed not three nights ago. Lucius and I were concerned-

BRUCE: -oh, so Lucius is concerned, but not concerned enough to help me, not

concerned enough to do the job I employed him to do!

ALFRED: Lucius isn't worried about the bloody Batman, sir. And to be frank neither am I.

BRUCE: You once told me Batman could make the choice no-one else could make - the right choice. And yet now all I hear from you, from Lucius, is quit, quit, quit. What's changed, Alfred?

ALFRED: What's changed? Oh I don't know, sir. Couldn't possibly say. So how *does* Lex Luthor want you to help him bring down Superman then?

Bruce rears back as if stung.

ALFRED: Maybe, just maybe, the people of this city have been treating you like a criminal for so long you're beginning to think like one. To *act* like one.

BRUCE: He's dangerous, Alfred! The *power* he has!

ALFRED: That may be. But are you consorting with Luthor because you genuinely believe Superman and whoever else he's brought here could be a threat? Or is it because he beat you in a fight?

BRUCE: I don't have to explain myself to you!

ALFRED: No. I suppose you don't. I am just the staff, after all, although I do seem to remember someone telling me that I was all they had.

BRUCE: Well. That's about to change.

ALFRED: Sir?

BRUCE: Alfred Pennyworth, you've been in my family's service for thirty-three years. I'm retiring you, on full pay, plus a 2 million dollar lump sum bonus. The Wayne cottage in Sussex is yours, I'll have the legal department send you the deed.

ALFRED: You want me to resign? I won't. Never in a million years.

BRUCE: Okay. You win, Alfred.

He walks to Alfred and puts his hand on the older man's shoulder. Alfred looks at his long-time charge, clearly horribly confused and upset, his eyes wide.

BRUCE: You're fired.

And he walks off, leaving Alfred staring out over the pond, utterly dumbstruck.

Act II, Scene III

WayneCorp Tower, downtown Gotham. Lois Lane strides into the main reception area, cellphone clasped to her ear. She is not happy.

LOIS: ...well I don't see *how* he could have caused *scorching*. No. No, of course he doesn't have a history of pyromania! Well, yes, he's gotten into fights, he's an eight-year-old boy...

Clark is waiting for her in the lobby. He notes the conversation she's having as they see each other and raises his eyebrows, even if we see a corner of his mouth twitch. He tries to look as blissfully ignorant as possible. Lois eventually snaps the phone shut.

LOIS: (*darkly*) Can you have a talk with him tonight? *Before* I kill him?

CLARK: I'm sure they got what they deserved.

Lois skewers him with a look.

LOIS: You *know* something about this? Tell me you don't. Just tell me you don't and I promise, I won't hurt you.

CLARK: Uh...

They are interrupted - thankfully, in Clark's case, for his sake - by the arrival of a small man dressed in a sharp suit. He is young, with close-cropped reddish hair, and he looks from Lois to Clark, sensing that he's interrupting a bit of a domestic disturbance.

REESE: Lois Lane? Clark Kent?

LOIS: Yes?

REESE: Hi. I'm Coleman, Coleman Reese. I work in Special Projects here at WayneCorp, Mr. Wayne sent me to meet and greet you both and bring you to the roof. Apologies he's not here himself - some problems with his transportation getting here, I believe. If you'll follow me?

CLARK: Sure.

Reese takes them to the elevator and nods to the operator, who places a special override key and as they step in, Reese keys in a special security code. Ever the journalists, Lois and Clark don't fail to notice this.

REESE: Security's tighter the higher up you go. We've got some exciting stuff in R&D at the moment. But I uh, (*he grins nervously*) I can't take you there.

The elevator begins to rise. Lois looks as if she's about to start talking to Clark again, and her face is still like thunder. Clocking this intent, Clark quickly starts talking to Reese.

CLARK: So what's Mr. Wayne like to work for?

REESE: (*quickly - too quickly*) Great! Great! He's, yeah, he's a really nice guy. You know. He's not always, uh, around (*quickly*) with being a billionaire, I mean, hey, who wouldn't like to have that problem huh?

Silence. Tinny elevator muzak plays. It's the theme to the 1960's Batman TV series.

CLARK: Worked here long?

REESE: Actually six years. I used to work in finance, looking at the accounts...

He trails off. Clark frowns.

CLARK: And now you work in R&D? Isn't that a bit of a jolt? Was it a promotion?

REESE: Uh. Kinda...?

Another silence. The muzak continues on a loop. We see Lois give an irritated glance.

LOIS: Did you see the news last night?

REESE: You mean Superman?

LOIS: Yeah.

REESE: *(with an entirely unexpected sudden passion)* Superman should go back to Metropolis and leave Batman be. The police, the press, they've got it all wrong. Batman's no killer. I-

The elevator 'dings' as it comes to a halt, and its doors slide open to reveal the WayneCorp Tower roof and a smiling Bruce Wayne awaiting their arrival, a helicopter perched in the background. Reese looks at him and trails off. Wayne and he exchange nods.

BRUCE: Coleman. Tell Lucius I want a word with him later?

REESE: Yes, Mr. Wayne.

Lois and Clark step out of the elevator. Clark turns back to Reese.

CLARK: What were you going to-

REESE: *(stabbing the 'close door' button, noticing Bruce looking at him)* I'm sorry. I really have to get back to work-

The doors slide shut, almost trapping Clark's nose. His brow wrinkles for a moment before he shrugs and turns back to stand beside Lois.

BRUCE: Lois. *(almost undetectable pause)* Clark. Good to see you. Come on. We're going flying.

They walk over to where the helicopter waits.

BRUCE: I promised I'd show you my city. What better way than from the air?

Although posed as a rhetorical question, he turns to Clark when he says it. Clark returns the stare, somewhat surprised, unsure as to whether he should answer or not. But in a moment Bruce has turned on his heel again and is clambering inside the helicopter.

LOIS: Where's the pilot?

BRUCE: You're looking at him!

He starts the pre-flight sequence. The rotor blades whirr into life. Lois and Clark look at one another before getting on board.

CLARK: Been flying long?

Bruce looks back from the controls in the front seat and regards his passengers, particularly Clark.

BRUCE: Nervous, Clark?

CLARK: No. Not nervous.

BRUCE: Good!

At a gesture from Bruce, Lois & Clark don their helmet communicators so they can hear each other over the din of the helicopter's blades and engine. The bird lifts into the air, and in moments is soaring over the side of WayneCorp Tower and out into the mid-morning Gotham sunshine, down one of the most famous skylines in the world.

We zoom out from the helicopter, further and further back, until we're on a hill on the outskirts of Gotham itself, with the copter merely the faintest of dots in the distance, disappearing between the high-rise buildings.

Luthor stands with binoculars pressed to his eyes. Beside him is the Eradicator.

LUTHOR: *(conversationally)* I like Bruce Wayne. He's so much more fun than Kent, don't you think? So full of rage and jealousy and angst...

ERADICATOR: Wayne. Kent. It does not matter. You will all kneel before Zod.

LUTHOR: Of course we will. I'm *particularly* looking forward to it. Now go. Do your thing.

ERADICATOR: You do not order me. I take orders only from Zod.

LUTHOR: *(very impatiently)* As do we all. He's just the *greatest*. Now go!

The Eradicator's form ripples and changes into that of a perfect replica of Superman himself. He rises into the air. Luthor keeps his binoculars trained on the Gotham skyline. When the Eradicator has receded somewhat into the foreground-

LUTHOR: *(derisively)* Kryptonians...

We go back to the copter. It's banking around some of Gotham's more famous landmarks - the Narrows, with its tightly-packed streets, and sitting square in the centre of the labyrinthine structure the squat form of Arkham Asylum itself, home to Gotham's criminally insane and home to one mastermind in particular. The copter passes over the island and heads out to the bay, passing over the docklands that were the scene of the action the night before.

BRUCE: I guess you two were covering this last night?

LOIS: Clark was. I was with Jason.

BRUCE: Yeah? What was it like? It must have been something, huh?

CLARK: Intense.

BRUCE: *(eyebrows arched at this understatement)* Wow. No wonder *she* won the Pulitzer.

LOIS: Bruce, how long are we going to be up here for? I'm not being rude-
And that's when the copter jerks to the left and drops thirty feet, before regaining its bearings. Lois is gripping her seat very tightly, white as a sheet. Bruce lets loose a string of curses.

LOIS: You know what? Forget it. We can stay up here a little longer...

BRUCE: Something's wrong! The engine isn't responding! Controls are sluggish!
He begins to wrestle with the controls, looking increasingly anxious. Lois glances over at Clark meaningfully. Clark unbuckles his harness and goes forward into the cockpit.

CLARK: Can I help?

BRUCE: You know how to fly, Kent?

CLARK: A little...

Clark sits and begins to work the controls. The copter is still losing altitude, and fast - and the buildings that were some distance below them are now a measurably smaller distance below them.

BRUCE: I can't bring us out of this dive! *(he grabs the radio)* This is Bruce Wayne aboard *WayneCorp One*, mayday! Mayday!

Clark looks down and we see a burst of X-Ray vision leave his eyes as he pulls his glasses down to allow the beam to escape. Invisible to Bruce, but he sees the gesture anyway, and we see that the high levels of anxiety he's currently displaying are all an act; the moment Clark's eyes are off him they melt away, to be replaced by a calculating look, which switches back to apparent terror the moment Clark raises his head once more.

CLARK: Massive mechanical failure.

BRUCE: Oh God! I'm too rich to die! HELP! SAVE US!

The buildings below are lunging up towards them. Lois looks imploringly at Clark as if to say - DO SOMETHING! But Clark can only glance at Wayne - there's no way he can become Superman and save them in time without Bruce noticing his disappearance.

CLARK: Bruce, what you're about to see...

BRUCE: Oh thank God! Thank God thank God! It's him! He's here!

And so it is. It's Superman.

Lois and Clark watch, speechless, as the oh-so-familiar blue and red suited figure

swoops in from underneath them. A moment later, the copter steadies in the air. Lois leans forward and grasps Clark tightly by the arm, taking off her helmet communicator as she does so, so that only Clark will hear her.

LOIS: *(hisses)* What the hell is going on?

BRUCE: *(leaning out the window)* Oh thank you Superman! You're the best!
Clark's mouth sets in a thin line.

CLARK: It's him. He's back.

LOIS: That sentient computer program? The one from Krypton?

Clark nods.

LOIS: I thought he'd vanished, taken the Fortress with him? What the hell is he doing here in Gotham?

CLARK: I don't know. But that's not the only question I'm going to ask him...

Act II, Scene IV

By the time 'Superman' sets down the helicopter, in the middle of a pedestrianised courtyard right in front of WayneCorp Tower, a crowd of onlookers and media have gathered. Camera crews rush forward the moment the doors open, surging for Bruce Wayne and Superman. Clark and Lois are largely ignored.

Police and medics, arriving on the scene, separate the onrushing journo's from their targets.

Bruce Wayne pumps Superman's hand vigorously, shaking his head in disbelief and sheer nervous energy. It's a command performance from him, utterly convincing.

BRUCE: I can't thank you enough. You saved us...without you...there could have been a terrible accident here today.

SUPERMAN: This was no accident, Mr. Wayne.

Clark moves forward with all the inevitability of continental drift, pushing through anyone standing between him and Bruce and his new best friend, until he's standing close to both men. His eyes never leave Superman.

BRUCE: No...no accident? What are you talking about?

SUPERMAN: You've been targeted. By the Batman.

LOIS: *What??*

She makes a beeline for Superman. Clark has to put a hand on her shoulder to hold her back. He glares at her, meaningfully letting his eyes drift to the watching media of the world gathered before them. Lois clams up, but with difficulty.

BRUCE: I-I can't believe Batman would do that...

A police lieutenant, fresh on the scene, has overheard Superman's last words. He steps forward.

LIEUTENANT: Come with us, Mr. Wayne. If you've been targeted you need to be protected.

BRUCE: I guess...

He makes as if to go with the lieutenant.

SUPERMAN: No. With respect, you can't protect him. Not from Batman. But I can.

Clark's eyes narrow to such a degree that he has to actually look down and away. We see him lifting his glasses slightly and the pavement below him blacken slightly (in the crowd, no-one else notices this). This seems to vent his anger somewhat and he's able to look up again, still focussed entirely on Superman in front of him.

BRUCE: You? But you have things to do, places to be...you can't watch me 24/7.

SUPERMAN: No. But I can put you somewhere safe. Trust me. It's the only way.

Bruce nods, looking a little fearful. Superman motions for the crowd to step back. As he steps away to do this, Clark steps forward and places his hand on Bruce's arm.

CLARK: (*urgently*) Don't do this, Bruce.

BRUCE: Why, Clark?

CLARK: (*softly*) Just trust me. Please, I'm begging you.

LOIS: Bruce, he's right. Don't go with him.

BRUCE: (*amazed, to Lois*) Have you two had a falling out, or...?

SUPERMAN: Lois, is there something wrong?

By way of response, Lois fixes him with a glare that could curdle milk.

SUPERMAN: Mr. Wayne, we don't have time to linger. Batman could strike again at any time. Please. Come with me.

CLARK: Bruce...please. I know this is going to sound insane but don't go with him. Don't trust him. He's not taking you anywhere to protect you - he's going to use you for something.

Bruce smiles, and furrows his brow.

BRUCE: That's a very Gotham City attitude, Clark.

He walks to Superman, who hooks his hands underneath Bruce's armpits and takes off into the skies above. Lois and Clark watch them go. Lois looks to Clark - they're still surrounded by media.

Clark begins to walk. Very fast. Lois runs to catch up with him. Clark is knocking people out of the way like a bowling ball scattering ninepins, attracting shouts of outrage as he goes that he's completely ignoring.

LOIS: You're going after them?!

CLARK: Yes.

He shrugs off his suit jacket and tosses it behind him to Lois. She catches it, even as Clark accelerates from walking pace and begins to pull away from her, heading straight for a nearby alleyway.

LOIS: Clark, be careful!

He disappears into the alleyway. Lois looks up. Sure enough a second later a red and blue bullet is spat out of the top of the alley. She watches it go, before turning around and gasping.

Facing her, smiling, is Lex Luthor.

LUTHOR: Hello Lois. Long time.

He's carrying a coat over his forearm. Lois' eyes see the gun barrel poking from beneath it, pointed straight at her.

LUTHOR: Shall we go for a drive?

He nods to a nearby car, its passenger door already open. Lois looks helplessly up at the sky, at where Superman has just left.

LUTHOR: Ah, the dilemma! Call for help and risk throwing Superman off the scent of his quarry and damn Bruce Wayne to an unknown fate, or go with Lex and face an uncertain fate of her own?

LOIS: You're behind this?

Luthor's smile vanishes. He looks every inch the extremely dangerous megalomaniac he really is, not the avuncular witty uncle persona he sometimes adopts.

LUTHOR: *Behind* it? My dear, I'm all over it. And believe me. It's only just beginning.

He beckons with the gun. With no other choice, Lois follows him.

Act II, Scene V

We cut to above the clouds. Superman is barrelling through the atmosphere, the landscape below him blurring as his speed increases. He looks as if he means business.

Ahead of him, a dot resolves itself into a speck, which grows into a blob. Superman's eyes focus and the blob leaps forward in our vision thanks to Superman's telescopic vision to become the figures of the impostor Superman and his care package, Bruce Wayne.

Superman seems to take a breath and step on the gas even more. We cut for a second to a ground-level view somewhere over South America as high above, one streak bullets across our field of vision from one horizon to another, followed instants later by a second. We stay at ground level and it's only a few moments later that the incredible noise created by their passing reaches the surface.

South America gives way to ocean which gives way to ice and tundra, and just as Superman is within a few hundred metres of his quarry, the impostor veers off-course and down to what seems at first to be merely another outcropping of ice and snow and rock, but as we get closer to the ground, quickly resolves itself into a crystalline structure, symmetrical, otherworldly, beautiful. The new Fortress.

Superman touches down softly on the tundra, in front of the entrance to the Fortress. Ahead of him, Bruce and the false Superman are just entering the interior.

SUPERMAN: Bruce...

He zips across the ground, stopping only as he reaches the entrance, employing a note of caution as he steps inside.

The interior of the fortress is vast, dome-like, with three winding crystalline staircases spaced at regular intervals around the circumference leading up to a second floor. From the opposite end of the second floor to the entrance, a platform extends to the middle of the dome, terminating in a huge and very futuristic computer bank made from Kryptonian materials. A huge holographic screen, cylindrical in shape, is being projected from the centre of the dome and goes up to the ceiling. It displays news feeds. Hundreds of voices speak at once from the holograms.

At the far end of the Fortress, on the ground level, past the hologram, sits the twin chamber. It pulses slowly with red light.

Bruce is nowhere to be seen. Nor is the Eradicator. Superman hovers about ten feet from the ground, drifting further and further into the Fortress.

SUPERMAN: Let him go. Whatever you want from him, it won't-

The holograms change, from thousands of separate feeds to one face. It's a woman, around forty, pretty. Superman recognises her instantly.

SUPERMAN: Mother...

LARA: My son.

Superman's face hardens. He shakes his head.

SUPERMAN: No. I've seen what you can do, especially within this place. I've been through your manipulations before, remember? You made me believe what you wanted me to believe. That you were here to protect me.

The hologram simply switches itself off. And when it does, the Eradicator shimmers into being, fifteen feet or so in front of Superman, hovering at a similar height. He's in his default form now, no longer morphed into a Superman replica.

ERADICATOR: I performed that function. I saved you from the crude cyborg construct, the 'Metallo'. Repaired the damage he had done to you.

SUPERMAN: Where is Bruce? What have you done with him?

The Eradicator points downward. A concealed floor panel slides back and a platform beneath it rises upward, to reveal the unconscious form of Bruce Wayne.

ERADICATOR: It was necessary to bring you here.

SUPERMAN: You could have just asked me to come.

ERADICATOR: You do not trust me.

SUPERMAN: Of course I don't! You lied to me about your own history. You weren't sent by my father to protect me. You stowed away on the rocket that brought me here. You told me you were created to judge Zod for his crimes, but you tried to have him installed as ruler of Krypton!

ERADICATOR: Necessary for the planet's survival. The impending cataclysm of Rao's supernova required a strong leader to-

SUPERMAN: And what caused it? What caused Rao to go supernova? Or *who*?

ERADICATOR: (*visibly confused*) No-one caused the supernova.

And that's when the laugh is heard. We go close on Superman's face as he hears it, and we see that behind him, the hologram has flickered to life again. When he turns to look at it, it's no longer his mother's face displayed there.

ZOD: The son of Jor-El. Here, at last. Welcome.

We cut away for a second to where Bruce lies, apparently unconscious. His eyes open.

SUPERMAN: Zod...

Furious beyond measure, he turns and flies straight into the Eradicator, pushing the computer program back until they slam against the nearest part of the Fortress' circular outside wall, sending shards of crystal flying. One of Superman's hands is on the Eradicator's chest, the other poised around his throat. We have rarely seen Superman so incandescent with rage as he is right now. He looks as if he is genuinely contemplating ripping the Eradicator's head from his shoulders.

SUPERMAN: You brought him *here*?! To *this* world?!

ERADICATOR: You are...unfit...weak...unworthy to rule...

SUPERMAN: I don't *want* to rule!

Frustrated, angry, he grabs the Eradicator by the shoulders and hurls him downward, creating a large impact crater in the floor of the Fortress. Superman doesn't press the attack, however. Instead, he flies closer to the hologram, his eyes searching his surroundings.

SUPERMAN: Show yourself, General. Or are you afraid the family of El will beat you, again?

ZOD: You will kneel before me.

SUPERMAN: You failed to conquer Krypton. And you'll fail here too. I'll see to it, Zod. This is my home now. You won't destroy it.

ZOD: Do I detect an accusation?

SUPERMAN: I know it was you. I can *feel* it.

We see the Eradicator climbing woozily from the impact crater created by Superman's slum-dunk. He looks up at the hologram of Zod, his eyes wide.

ZOD: Watch and learn, Kal-El.

The hologram expands outwards until it seems to touch every aspect of the Fortress, and suddenly the interior of the structure seems to shimmer and vanish, until Superman, The Eradicator, even Bruce are standing on the surface of an alien world, all crystals and huge valleys and cities hewn from the crystals themselves, a massive red star burning brightly

overhead. Krypton itself. The Zod hologram has gone, but his voice remains.

ZOD: (V/O) My troops swept across our world. What resistance we met was pitiful at first. Our people had too long been lulled into a pacifistic slumber. But eventually, a resistance formed....

The scene changes to that of a fierce battle, fought with extremely advanced weaponry. Bruce stands and flinches as what looks like the distant descendant of a Challenger Tank passes straight through him, firing fizzing orbs of plasma towards its counterparts on the other side of the battlefield. Explosions and death fill the air. And our point of view shifts, so we can see one of the vehicles, and the man commanding it - approaching middle-age, broad shouldered and white haired.

SUPERMAN: Father.

The scene dissolves, to a courtroom setting. Zod stands in the docks, penned there by a force field, with a small female and a huge male to either side of him. Jor-El stalks in front of him, speaking passionately and forcefully (though we don't hear his words), glancing up at the row of holographic faces of the Council Elders above.

ZOD: (V/O) Banishment to the Phantom Zone! For the crime of being a visionary!

As the dimensional portal arrives to carry the three prisoners, screaming, through the rip in reality, the courtroom setting dissolves and the vista of Krypton spins crazily, until we seem to have travelled halfway around the planet. We see the endless crystalline tundra, and a hitherto unseen doorway sliding back to reveal a rocket launching device, which raises to point straight at Rao burning above.

ZOD: (V/O) My insurance policy against defeat. If I was never to step foot on my beloved homeworld again...I would take it from them. Remove it from the galaxy forever.

The rocket launches, and as it goes, the Eradicator takes off from the surface to intercept it.

ERADICATOR: No!!!!

It's a futile gesture, of course; it's only a hologram after all, and it passes straight through him, up into the atmosphere and away from the planet, straight toward the star. The Eradicator watches it go, helpless, bereft.

ERADICATOR: How? No missiles were ever detected...

ZOD: (V/O) Advanced cloaking technology.

The scene changes again. Rao goes from being red and healthy to being visibly bigger, brighter, and covered in sunspots, giving it a sickly pallor. Rumbles and quakes shake the holographic terrain. Huge splits scythe through the crystalline tundra. Krypton is falling apart under the strain of its star's death throes.

Bruce is watching all of this unfold with interest.

Rao seems to implode in on itself. It's a horrifyingly spectacular sight, drawing all of their attention. The star consumes its own borders, shrinking at a spectacular rate, its mass destabilising catastrophically until it has collapsed to a ball of light no bigger than Krypton itself. And for the briefest of moments, that ball of light seems almost stable.

Almost.

It explodes, a shockwave of incalculable size screaming across space toward them. We see Superman throw his hand up, as if to ward off this unstoppable wave of annihilation. As it impacts, Krypton simply falls apart around them, shredded to pieces in a single heartbeat.

The hologram ends, and the Fortress reappears. Superman slowly takes his hands from his face, breathing heavily, the trauma of witnessing his homeworld's moment of fiery

destruction - and with it, somewhere across the planet, the deaths of his parents - written on his face.

The Eradicator is on his knees, hunched over, his palms flat on the floor. He makes no sound at all.

Zod's face reappears.

ZOD: But enough of the past. Today is about the future.

SUPERMAN: You don't have a future, Zod. Not on my world.

ZOD: Ah, yes. Your beloved Earth. And all your beloved humans. Some more beloved than others...

The hologram changes, still showing Zod's face, but also now showing Lex Luthor and Lois Lane, travelling through Gotham City in the back of the car we saw Lex beckon Lois into. Lex has a gun aimed at Lois's midriff. He smiles.

LUTHOR: Superman! You didn't tell me your home planet produced anyone fun! Shame on you!

SUPERMAN: Lois...

ZOD: How fast do you think you can go, son of Jor-El? Fast enough to get to your woman before she dies?

LUTHOR: Oh, and I see Bruce is there too! (*tips his gun in a mock salute*) Thanks for your help, Bruce. Couldn't have done it without you.

Superman looks down at Bruce, betrayal all over his face, seeking Bruce to deny or rebut Luthor's claim. Bruce returns his gaze.

BRUCE: Utilise every advantage. I did try to warn you.

ZOD: I fail to see that the human has been of any assistance.

LUTHOR: He's full of surprises.

Superman swoops down to ground level and in one smooth motion has lifted Bruce up with one hand until his feet dangle off the ground. If we thought he'd reached the pinnacle of what he was capable of anger-wise before when throttling the Eradicator, it's nothing compared to this.

SUPERMAN: *Why?*

BRUCE: (*speaking through the hand around his throat, his voice sounds exactly like his Batman persona*) To...make...a...difference.

Superman's eyes widen as it all falls into place. He lets Wayne go. Bruce crashes to the deck. Superman takes a step backward, stunned at the levels of betrayal all around him.

SUPERMAN: You....you're him?

LUTHOR: This is so much fun. Is there a TiVo running on this hologram? It's a keeper.

Superman advances on Bruce. Bruce stares up at him, no fear in his eyes, all traces of the Bruce Wayne billionaire playboy persona gone now.

BRUCE: Like he said. Full of surprises.

SUPERMAN: (*still advancing on Bruce, spitting the words*) I thought you had honour, Bruce. I thought you *stood* for something. You didn't stand for those things in the same way I do, but I thought we shared the same ideas about justice.

BRUCE: It's time for you to have your cosy perceptions of how the world works shaken up, Clark.

ZOD: Enough!

This causes both men to look away, because the voice doesn't come from a hologram anymore. Another hidden underground elevator is raising the man himself to the surface.

Superman turns to face him and Zod raises an admonishing finger, pointing up to Lex and Lois on the hologram above, now taking up the entire viewing area.

ZOD: Unless you wish to prove to me that you're not the weakling I take you to be, any moves towards me would be...unwise.

Superman restrains himself, only just. He glances up at Lois. There is apology in her eyes. He looks back with love, before all traces of it vanish as he returns his attention to Zod. The General smiles, and steps to the side, indicating the Red Sun chamber behind him, still pulsing with a crimson heartbeat. He points to the left chamber.

ZOD: Inside. Now.

LOIS: Clark, no!

Superman glances at Bruce, one final look of hurt, of betrayal. Bruce returns the gaze, untroubled by it. Superman walks to the chamber door. It opens automatically. With a final look at Lois, still with a gun jammed into her stomach-

SUPERMAN: I love you.

LUTHOR: *(rolls his eyes)* Maybe this isn't such a keeper after all.

Superman steps inside the chamber. The door slams shut. The chamber pulses with energy faster now, and Superman seems to begin to feel the negative effects. His eyes close. He staggers.

Finally he loses his balance and slumps to his knees inside, weak, dizzy. The rays are draining his solar energy. We see it, a massive energy ball, begin to form in the interlinking pipe linking the two chambers.

Superman is on the floor, breathing, but not moving.

Zod inhales. This is his moment. He walks to the chamber on the right. Stands there.

Waits.

Turns.

ZOD: What are you waiting for, you imbecile? Open this door!

And that's when the Eradicator finally stops leaning forward, placing his hands on the floor. We see now what he was doing; what he was hinting at earlier - drawing energy directly from geothermal power, absorbing it from deep within the bowels of the planet. As he stands, his arms and legs crackle with power. His eyes glow with it. And he's looking directly at Zod with hatred in every fibre of his being.

ERADICATOR: I was created to serve Krypton. To preserve it. Every single aspect of its culture, of its people.

He raises an arm to point at Zod. Zod backs away from the chamber, fear written all over his face.

ZOD: *(desperately)* I am your Master! You chose me to be the spearhead of a new Kryptonian Empire! Together we can rebuild this planet! Reshape it into a new Krypton!

ERADICATOR: I-

He blasts energy from his fingertip. It impacts the General square in the chest, knocking him backwards a few paces; spreading through every inch of his body.

ERADICATOR: -liked-

Another blast. Again Zod is knocked backwards.

ERADICATOR: -the-

And another. Zod's body impacts the rightmost chamber, the destination chamber. Smoke has begun to curl from his skin as the energy coursing through him fries him where he stands.

ERADICATOR: -OLD-

And another. Zod is flattened against the chamber now. Flames are spreading out over his entire frame now, consuming him.

ERADICATOR: -KRYPTON!!!!

A final blast arcs out between the two men. This one doesn't earth itself through Zod's body. Instead, it simply blows Zod apart; destroying him utterly, leaving nothing behind, not even a trace or a scorch upon the Fortress' surface.

The Eradicator collapses, fading in and out of existence. Lights across the Fortress dim. The hologram above of Lex and Lois flickers crazily. Lex leans forward, Lois seemingly forgotten.

LUTHOR: Do it, Bruce. Do it now.

The hologram dies. Lights across the Fortress go out, until the only illumination in the structure comes from the Red Sun chamber. Superman still lies crumpled in the left chamber, and the ball of pulsing stored solar energy still sits glowing in the interlocking pipe.

And Bruce Wayne walks to the rightmost chamber. He heaves at it until the door swings open. For a moment, a long moment, he hesitates.

And then he gets inside.

When the door closes behind him the ball of solar energy moves, and bathes him from head to toe. Superman's body shivers and Superman lets loose a mournful cry, as if having something ripped from him. Bruce lets loose a cry of a different sort, of exultation, of elation, as the golden energies travel through into the chamber in which he stands...

...and then the lights go out altogether.

Act II, Scene VI

The school bell rings, and James Gordon and Jason White look up from their work. They exit the classroom together, talking, and walk to the front of the school.

JASON: You've got to tell someone.

JAMES: I can't. I shouldn't even have told you...if my Dad found out...

JASON: But everyone thinks Batman went bad, killed those cops! Superman is here to take him down because of that! You saw what happened last night! If they knew it was Dent...if they knew what really happened-

JAMES: So can't you talk to him? To Superman? I mean, if he's...he's this friend of yours...

JASON: Huh. You still don't believe me about that.

JAMES: Look. I think um, I think you're really cool. And what you did for me today was *(he figets awkwardly)* well, I won't forget it. But it's just a bit much to take, I mean that Superman would come and take you away on adventures. I mean, why you?

JASON: I guess we all have secrets.

He won't say any more on the matter. They've reached the front of the school now. Jason spots the bully from earlier be picked up by his Mom; the bully rushes to her, catching sight of Jason as he does so. Jason smiles and waves cheerily at him. The bully piles into the back of his mother's car without wasting another second lingering.

JAMES: My Mom's here. Guess Dad's working an extra shift again.

JASON: Yeah. My Mom said she'd be here too. But Uncle Clark should be here soon if she doesn't show.

James walks a few steps toward his waiting mother. He turns and the two boys look at each other for a moment, caught in that awkward moment boys have of being friends but not wanting to seem girly enough to actually admit it.

JAMES: So see you tomorrow?

JASON: Yeah.

JAMES: Kay. Bye.

He does a sort of half-wave and turns to go. His Mom notices the gesture and when he reaches her, she begins to interrogate her. They're too far away for the conversation to reach human ears, but of course that isn't a problem for Jason, and we hear the words spoken clearly even as James and Barbara Gordon get into the car.

BARBARA: Is that a new boy?

JAMES: Yeah. He's from Metropolis. He's cool.

Jason smiles.

BARBARA: You two seem friendly. You should ask him over on a play date.

JAMES: A *play date*?!! Aw Mom...*promise* me you won't say that ever again.

The car pulls away. Jason stifles a laugh and shakes his head in an 'I know your pain' kinda way.

JASON: Moms...

He settles back against a wall of the school and waits. We see more kids getting into various cars and the cars driving off.

We cut to a little later. The Gotham day has dulled a little. Jason is now the only boy left standing outside the school. He checks his watch and frowns.

JASON: Mom? Clark? Where *are* you guys...?

Act II, Scene VII

Clark Kent's eyes open. We see through them for a moment, into a blurred world of greys and blacks, slowly resolving itself into focus, before going back to a shot of Clark until we realise we're looking at him lying flat on his back. He's back in his Clark civilian outfit again, including the suit and glasses, although the suit is rumpled and the glasses askew. He reaches up to fix them and slowly begins to sit up and take in his surroundings.

He's surrounded on both sides by the walls of a very claustrophobic alleyway. Garbage litters the surface. A dumpster at the far end is jam-packed with trash and flies circle its offerings endlessly. Far above his head, washing lines are strung across the alley, with clothing of all shapes and sizes hung out to dry. A head belonging to a little girl, no more than six years old, is poking out of a small window looking down at Clark with mild interest. Her mother's head pokes out above it and speaks to the girl's head sternly, before both heads retreat back inside again.

Clark sees all this and struggles to comprehend it. He gets to his feet...and falls on his ass. We go back inside his head again, and although it's not blurry anymore, we notice that only when Clark actually puts the glasses over his eyes does his vision approximate that of normal; when he removes them or lifts them up as if to unleash heat vision, his sight is far from perfect. Clark takes off the glasses and examines them, extremely puzzled.

More carefully this time, he gets to his feet, steadying himself against the nearby wall to ensure a successful operation this time. He winces and clutches a hand to his temple, and we see a blinding flash of what it must have looked like from the inside of the Red Sun booth; searing pain, red light, and a quick shot of Clark as Superman screaming in agony as the source of his superpowers was ripped from every cell in his body.

Cut back to present time, in the alley. Clark leans against the wall for support. He puts the glasses back on, looks to the end of the alleyway he's in, and begins to walk toward it, if a trifle unsteadily. As he gets to the end of the alley, he realises where he is. In Gotham City. Slap bang in the middle of the Narrows, the most deprived area of the city, a rabbit warren of low-class housing and poverty-stricken neighbourhoods separated from the rest of the city by bridge. Crowds of people are filing past. There's a marketplace about fifty feet away to the south.

One man, middle-aged and carrying a few shopping bags of goods, notices Clark, leaning against the alley wall. He comes over.

NARROWS MAN: Hey buddy, you all right?

CLARK: It's so quiet.

The citizen of the Narrows looks around him. The street they're standing in is packed with life, noisy, busy. He looks at Clark and frowns, taking a half-step back and noting Clark's dishevelled appearance.

NARROWS MAN: Seems pretty vivid to me, pal. Look. Want my advice? You come down here wearing a suit like that, even if it *has* seen better days, you're only telling people you probably got a wallet stuffed with cash on you. Lose the suit or finish your business here pretty quick if you don't want a real bad day.

He walks on. Clark stares after him, trying to process what's going on.

CLARK: I need help. Lois...oh God, Lois...

Clark ducks back into the cover afforded by the alley. He looks upwards, hunches down, springs...

...and lands back on his feet about a second later, having done what could charitably be

described as a bunny hop. Nothing more.

He rummages in his pockets, turns them out. Nothing in any of them. He opens a few of his shirt buttons. Nothing but bare skin beneath. No Superman costume.

CLARK: No. No...

He runs back out of the alley again, straight into the throng of people walking to and fro the little market. Spying a woman in her mid-twenties talking on a cellphone with two children walking with her, he goes to her, wide-eyed.

CLARK: Please, miss. You have to help me. I need to make a call-

Quick as a wink, the girl has fished in her bag and produced a small flickknife. She thumbs the blade so it springs up and eyeballs Clark, moving her children behind her. The daughter, no more than four years old, looks out from behind her mother with eyes like saucers, full of wary fear.

WOMAN: You're one of them fear-gas leftover nut jobs, right? Well back the hell off. You hear me? Back the *hell* off from me and my kids.

MAN #1: You heard the lady.

He's joined by two other men. Clark spreads his hands wide as the three men form a moving wall of threat moving toward him.

CLARK: Guys, please. I woke up in an alley. I have no idea how I got here. My girlfriend has been kidnapped, and I have to get to her. I have to save her. And to do that I have to get out of here. I need a phone-

MAN #2: *(to the woman)* You got him pinned. Fear gas nut job.

MAN #3: Girlfriend kidnapped. Right. Just like my dog got eaten by the croc in the sewer. *They laugh.*

MAN #1: *(snorts)* Shirt ain't even buttoned up right on that fancy suit. C'mon fella. Leave the girl alone and go back to whatever padded cell you escaped out of.

CLARK: I swear, I'm not crazy! I'm just asking for your help-

He takes a step forward, motioning to the cellphone the woman carries. She moves, slashing, and suddenly Clark is sporting a cut on his hand. He looks down at his hand in wonder, automatically clutching it with his other hand, and at the blood seeping through from the cut, turning his fingers red, seeping into the white fabric of his shirt sleeves.

CLARK: *(amazed)* I'm bleeding. I...it hurts.

The woman takes her children and hurries on, sending one fearful glance back in Clark's direction. The three men who came to her aid exchange glances and then advance on Clark once more.

MAN #1: What do you think?

MAN #2: Escapee. Definitely.

MAN #1: We can't leave him out here.

MAN #3: So let's take him home.

Clark looks up at the three men and behind them, the shape of Arkham Asylum suddenly looms into focus. He realises what they mean.

CLARK: *(desperately, backing away)* My name is Clark Kent. I'm an investigative reporter for a major metropolitan newspaper-!

MAN #1: *(soothingly)* Sure you are.

MAN #2: And I'm the long-lost prince of Atlantis.

MAN #3: C'mon fella. We'll get you to people who can help you.

Clark weighs up his options for about a second longer, then turns tail and runs for all

he's worth, with all three in close pursuit. The guys are shouting to the crowd in general - words like 'escapee!' and 'fear gas!', words which cause some of the market crowd to abandon what they were doing and join in the task at hand of bringing Clark down.

He's rugby-tackled to the ground by one man coming at him from the side. Clark smashes to the pavement below, going through a fruit and vegetable stall, sending the contents flying. His torso and head impact the ground in slow-mo and we can see the reverberations and how much pain they cause him.

TACKLING MAN: I gottim! I gottim!

Clark kicks him in the face.

The tackler abruptly howls in pain and lets go, and Clark is on his feet before the three original pursuers can reach him. He dodges left and right as more and more people join in the chase, and in trying to wriggle free through the far side of the market and to the relative safety of a less busy adjoining street, he fails to notice a fist arcing towards him until it's too late-

The fist smashes into his face, knocking off his glasses, destroying them. He is sent sprawling to the deck. Once there, he raises his hands to his face and comes away with them covered in blood. Clark Kent blinks through tears of pain in his fear-filled eyes as shadows fall upon him from above.

There's no escape from this one.

Kicks begin to rain down on him, the rugby-tackling man Clark kicked in the face the first to strike, revenge in his eyes. Clark blocks the first few kicks as best he can but is unable to fend off the others, and soon loses the strength even for that, unable to do anything but simply curl up into a foetal ball as the beating continues.

After another few blows land, one man - one of the original three - holds up a hand.

MAN #1: That's enough!

The subduing stops.

MAN #1: We ain't animals. Maybe he ain't either.

We cut to Clark being carried through the front doors of Arkham Asylum. The receptionist looks up from her desk and gasps in shock as she sees the state of the man being dragged in before her. The three men deposit him unceremoniously on a couch to the side of the reception area, even as the receptionist runs out from behind her station and over to Clark, who has slumped on the couch, barely conscious, blood trickling from his nose.

MAN #1: Another one of your guests. This loon almost assaulted a young mother.

MAN #3: You clowns should take this off (*indicating the front doors*) install a goddamn revolving one and be done with it.

RECEPTIONIST: Hey! Hey! You can't just leave him here!

MAN #2: Yeah? Watch us.

And with that, the three men simply walk out, leaving Clark alone with the receptionist. She gingerly leans over him and takes a look at him, wrinkling her nose in disgust at what she sees; the filthy suit, the blood. Sighing, she presses a button on the wall.

RECEPTIONIST: Security? We have a UA down here. Possible escapee. Do a rounds check willya? And get someone from Admissions down here. Cleanup.

CLARK: (*weakly*) Phone...I need...phone...

RECEPTIONIST: Yeah, all in good time.

Security arrives. Clark is bundled into a chair and we see flashes of his wounds being dabbed as he seems to flit in and out of consciousness, head lifting and falling, until he comes

to properly, now dressed in a standard issue gown, his suit gone, facing a doctor.

The doctor, elderly, hook-nosed, peers over old-fashioned glasses disapprovingly at his new admission.

DOCTOR: Mmm. You like assaulting young women?

Clark comes to somewhat at the sound of the doctor's voice. His head lifts and we see his face is already beginning to puff up from the beating he received. He tries to focus on the doctor before him, looking through short-sighted eyes swollen with bruising.

CLARK: What? What are you talking a-owwww...

He touches his body, his midriff, his ribs. Pulls aside the gown and stares down at the bluish-black bruises that are blooming all over him as if he can't comprehend what is happening.

DOCTOR: Three Narrows locals brought you in on a citizen's arrest. After Crane's mass breakout a few years back, the police started avoiding this place altogether. Figured it was a lost cause I suppose. *(snorts)* Can't say as I blame them. So now it's just the locals policing themselves. And the Bat. He helps, sometimes.

CLARK: *(grunting, through the pain)* Oh, yeah. He's a real hero.

DOCTOR: We checked the files, and you're not a previous guest of ours, that much we know. So who are you?

CLARK: My name is Clark Kent. I'm a reporter for the *Daily Planet*.

DOCTOR: Can anyone prove that?

CLARK: *(exasperated)* Find me a copy! I wrote the front page lead two days ago!

DOCTOR: We don't have newspapers on the premises. We try not to remind the inmates of the world outside.

CLARK: What about the staff?

DOCTOR: Inmates, staff. Stay here long enough, you'll start to struggle to tell the difference. *(mutters)* Trust me.

CLARK: Lois...*(he clutches his head, in pain)* ...God, Lois - I have to get out of here. I have to make a phone call. Please. Someone close to me is in danger.

DOCTOR: Calm yourself.

CLARK: *(slams his fists on the table, despite the pain this obviously causes him)* I don't have *time* for calm! The woman I love has been kidnapped, I'm powerless with no memory of how I got here, my son is alone in Gotham GOD-DAMNED City - and you're telling me to *calm down*?! I'm *not* crazy! I know my rights! I want to make a phone call! NOW!

DOCTOR: Very well.

He presses a button on the desk.

DOCTOR: Dr. Quinzel? Can you come in here please?

The door to the room opens and in steps a young woman wearing the white overcoat of a doctor. She is pretty, young, blonde, wearing fashionable glasses. She seems annoyed to be called, however, and glares at Clark.

DR. QUINZEL: Will this take long? I have to get back to-

DOCTOR: Harley...I don't want to hear it. He'll still be there. He's not going anywhere, please God.

DR. QUINZEL: His review board-

DOCTOR: Is due in *one hundred and fourteen years*. Wish him luck from me, won'tcha? Now, take this gentleman to the secure phone and let him make his phone call, and then place him in the holding pen until we can check his identity with GCPD. Get someone down to

identify him if possible, but I've assessed him and believe him when he says he's not crazy.

He glances at Clark. There's a haunted expression on his face as he speaks.

DOCTOR: I don't doubt you think you've been treated shabbily, and for that, I'm sorry. But you don't know what we get in here. Trust me when I say we *have* to be sure.

He stands and gestures Clark toward Dr. Quinzel. Clark gets up, limping, pain evident on his face from the bruises all over his body received at the marketplace brawl.

We cut to Clark being led by Dr. Quinzel down a corridor toward a room containing a telephone. Clark passes rooms containing various inmates as he goes. A hand reaches out through a grille and tries to brush him. He jerks away, alarmed.

VOICE: You reek of fear...

DR. QUINZEL: (*slapping the hand away*) Enough, Crane! One more and your outside privileges are revoked for another week! Understood?

She gets no reply. She rolls her eyes at Clark, turns on her heels (four-inch, killer) and strides off again. Clark struggles to keep up.

CLARK: Was that-? Jonathan Crane?

DR. QUINZEL: (*dismissively*) Yes. Hopeless case. He'll be here the rest of his days. Some of our inmates don't have the imagination to change. And some...

She pauses just as she's about to open the door to the room containing the phone. There's a faraway look in her eyes; she's almost misty-eyed in fact.

DR. QUINZEL: ...well. Some are *altogether* different. Some people simply shouldn't be here at all.

CLARK: (*darkly*) Yeah? Tell me about it.

He slams the door shut and begins dialling a number on the phone.

Act II, Scene VIII

Commissioner James Gordon is getting out of his car, parked in front of his house. He closes the car door, then remembers something and jogs back to the car. He returns a second later with a rather small and meek bunch of flowers, which he hides behind his back. He walks to the front door and is about to put his key in the lock to open it when it opens ahead of him to reveal Barbara Gordon, his wife.

GORDON: I'm sorry I'm-

BARBARA: Forget it. I know.

GORDON: I brought-

He brings the flowers around meekly. Barbara smiles briefly, takes them from him, and then her smile broadens. Her husband sees this and frowns, but can't help a smile surfacing on his face too. We get the distinct impression Commissioner James Gordon hasn't seen his wife smile like that in far too long.

GORDON: What is it?

We cut to inside. James, Gordon's son, is brushing his teeth. His father sneaks a look around the top of the staircase at him, and then jogs back down to talk to his wife.

GORDON: Did you get a name?

BARBARA: Jason White. He's Lois Lane's son.

GORDON: Lane? She was involved in that helicopter incident this morning at Wayne Tower, she and Clark Kent and that rich idiot Wayne.

BARBARA: (*horrified*) Oh-! Was she-

GORDON: No, no, she's fine. Superman came and...(*he motions with his arms above his head*) you know...did his Superman thing, I guess.

BARBARA: What is it?

GORDON: Hmm.

BARBARA: I know that face, James. I know that look. Is something bothering you?

GORDON: No. (*off his wife's look*) No, Bar. But hey, I mean... that's great, huh? About Jason? Maybe now we won't have to pull James from that school.

BARBARA: Jason's only going to be here for as long as his parents are working the Batman story, so James told me.

GORDON: Well, we can (*he shrugs*) who knows, we can arrange something.

BARBARA: (*dryly*) Just don't call it a play date, whatever you do.

Husband and wife look at each other for a long moment and then, quite impulsively, come together for a long embrace. There are tears in Barbara's eyes.

GORDON: I'm sorry. I've been...

BARBARA: Sssh. No-one should have to keep the secrets you do, James. *No one.* You're the most principled man I've ever known and I'm so, so proud of you, okay?

Jim Gordon nods, visibly emotional himself. He kisses his wife, on the forehead and then on the lips. When they break apart, he puts a foot on the first stair.

GORDON: First time I've been home early enough to tuck them in in 13 days.

BARBARA: You count?

GORDON: (*surprised*) Never realised until now.

He moves to set off upstairs - and his cellphone buzzes for attention. Barbara bites her lip and turns away in frustration. Gordon hesitates, looking at Barbara helplessly, and it's only when she turns back and nods that he brings the phone out, steps away from the stairs

and into their living room, and answers the call.

GORDON: Jim Gordon?

Upstairs, coming out of the bathroom, little James Gordon hears his father's voice from below. He pads down a few of the stairs quietly, and listens to the conversation going on between his mother and father:

GORDON: *(to Barbara)* I've gotta go.

BARBARA: What is it?

GORDON: A man claiming to be *Clark Kent* is being held in Arkham Asylum. Got the hell beaten outta him by some Narrows gang.

BARBARA: *(gasps)* What?!

GORDON: Kent's claiming that Lois Lane has been kidnapped by - get this - *Lex Luthor*. *Hearing all this, horrified, Little James vaults the stairs two at a time, bursting into the living room, where his father is just finishing replacing his coat around his shoulders.*

JAMES: Lois Lane! That's Jason's Mom! Dad, we have to help her!

BARBARA: James! You shouldn't be-

JAMES: Mom, he's my friend! He...*(he falters)* he... helped me today. Dad, *please!*

GORDON: We'll help Clark and Lois, James. That's what we do. I have to go. Kent came to see me a few nights ago. If it really *is* him at Arkham, I'll know. Getting him out of there is the first step to finding Jason's Mom, okay?

JAMES: Okay. Be careful, Dad.

Jim Gordon smiles down at his son, and reaches out a hand to clasp his wife's hand in his for a moment, before he's off out the front door and back into his car once more.

JAMES: Mom...if Clark is in Arkham, and Lois is missing, who picked Jason up from school?

Barbara Gordon absorbs this.

Act II, Scene IX

Jason White is in the office of the school. The headmistress is on the phone.

HEADMISTRESS: Yes. Yes thank you.

She replaces the phone in its cradle and looks at Jason with as much empathy as she can muster, preparing to deliver the bad news. She doesn't even get to formulate the first word, however, because before she can begin-

JASON: How can Clark be in Arkham? Why can't he just get outta there? And how can no-one know where my Mom is *half an hour* after she was almost in a helicopter crash? And how, how, can Superman rescue CLARK???

The headmistress stares at him, agape, obviously wondering how he knows all of this.

JASON: I have to get to Clark. Now. How quick will the police get here?

HEADMISTRESS: *(dazed)* Whu...how did-

JASON: *(to himself)* May as well wait. I don't even know where Arkham is...

We cut to outside the school. Jason stands there with the headmistress beside him. A police cruiser pulls up. Jason is inside almost before it's come to a complete stop. He's brimming with intent. The two officers in front exchange a glance.

JASON: Arkham! Go!

OFFICER #1: Uh, kid. We have instructions to take you someplace safe. That kinda rules out Arkham.

The car sets off.

OFFICER #2: Yeah, and the entire Narrows.

JASON: I'll protect you, don't worry.

The cops exchange another glance.

JASON: I have to get to Clark. Something's wrong. Clark shouldn't need rescuing. Well. Okay he did. One time. But I saw him from like a thousand feet up. And this time I know where he is, and he might know what happened to my Mom, so we gotta-

OFFICER #1: Kid. Listen to me. I'm sorry, really I am. I know you're worried about your Mom but there's no way on this *Earth* we're taking you to Arkham, okay? Now sit tight. We got a place for you to stay.

We cut to the police car pulling to a stop outside of Jim Gordon's house. Barbara and James are outside waiting. Jason, though glad to see a familiar face, is still frustrated at not getting his own way. He gets out of the car and watches Barbara exchange words with the officers. The car parks outside and the officers settle in, obviously intending to guard the house and by extension, Jason.

JAMES: Hey. I heard about your Mom, man. I'm...I'm sorry.

JASON: *(frustrated)* Thanks. But I need to get to Arkham. I can help.

BARBARA: *(arriving on the scene, and kneeling down to Jason)* Oh honey, that's so brave of you but really, my Jim is the best cop in Gotham and he's gone to get Clark. You come inside with James. You can stay right here until this is all straightened out, okay?

JAMES: She's right. My Dad is the best.

JASON: *(thunderstruck)* Dad! My Dad...! *(to Barbara)* Can I call him? My real Dad, I mean. He's in LA. Somebody ought to tell him about Mom.

BARBARA: Of course, hun. You come inside and you can call him right away. And try not to worry. I'm sure your Mom will turn up safe and sound.

They move inside the house. Barbara ushers Jason to the living area and the phone. James hangs beside his friend, concern evident on his face. Jason picks up the phone and

begins to dial with the receiver in his hand.

JAMES: Yeah. I mean, that Luthor guy is prob'ly-

There is a crunching sound, and then silence. Barbara and James are both staring at a patch of living room rug that now contains the shattered remains of a phone receiver, ground into pieces at a reflexive motion of Jason's hand.

JASON: Luthor? *Lex Luthor* has my Mom?

BARBARA: (*uncomfortable*) I...I don't know...my husband mentioned that Clark had said he thought that *Lex Luthor* was involved...I'm sorry, we didn't...

Jason stands there for a moment.

JASON: (*quietly*) No.

And then, slowly, he crumples to his knees, beginning to sob, huge whooping sobs that shake his entire body.

JASON: No...oh no, oh no, oh *please* no...it's my fault, it's all my fault, my Mom is gone and it's all my fault, she's *dead* and it's all my fault-!

He keeps sobbing, interspersing each sob with a repetition of the word 'no' over and over again. Barbara Gordon pauses only for a second before she swoops in, hugging him fiercely, Jason's chin on her shoulder. James Gordon looks on, helplessly.

Jason's eyes open.

JASON: I should have let him *die*.

His eyes are angry. They're also red.

A lance of red light sears out from his eyes, striking the living room window. It explodes outward, the curtains ablaze.

Barbara Gordon shrieks in terror. James scampers to the other side of the room, throwing his hands up over his face.

Jason sinks to his knees, his eyes now closed again. He forces himself to take several deep breaths. The fire begins to spread to the walls. He opens his eyes again, the red glow gone.

BARBARA: Jason, come on! We have to get out of here!

She grabs him but he won't budge. Instead he gets up, walks to the shattered remains of the window and, with Barbara and James watching, begins to blow on the flames. He blows until he goes red in the face. At first it seems to have no effect, but after a few seconds the fire chokes and dies, Jason's supercooled breath starving it of oxygen.

As the final part of the flame dies, Jason turns, breathing heavily with the exertion. He faces a flabbergasted mother and son. Nobody seems to know quite what to say. Jason looks at his new friend.

JASON: Believe me *now*?

Act II, Scene X

Arkham Asylum's reception area. Clark Kent is shouldering his suit jacket with some discomfort, each turn of his arm causing him fresh pain. When he's completed the manoeuvre, Jim Gordon is standing in reception.

GORDON: Good God. It is you, Kent.

CLARK: What's left of me.

GORDON: What the hell happened to you?

CLARK: Had a disagreement with some colourful local characters. Before that, I don't know. I woke up in the Narrows three hours ago.

We cut to Gordon signing a release form for the receptionist. She smiles at him and at Clark.

RECEPTIONIST: Have a nice day, sir.

Battered and bruised, Clark Kent can only muster a thousand-watt glare in response. He and Gordon exit the building and head toward Gordon's car, Clark limping and wincing.

GORDON: Why didn't Luthor kidnap you along with Lois?

CLARK: I don't know.

They get inside.

GORDON: I've got officers combing the city for him now. We've contacted Metropolis PD and they're doing the same. No response on her cell and nothing in your apartment.

CLARK: And Jason? He's been picked up? He's safe?

The car sets off.

GORDON: He's with my wife. He goes to school with my son, James. Made quite an impression on him in one day. Good kid.

CLARK: He's the best. I want to go to him, please. Now.

GORDON: *(grimaces)* I was hoping to take you to the station. You're the only lead we have on Lois...

CLARK: After I see Jason, you can take me there. Please. He'll want to see me.

GORDON: Okay. You got it.

The car pulls off into a different lane, taking an exit ramp.

CLARK: Plus, I might not be the only lead we have.

GORDON: I'm listening.

CLARK: Well, the way I see it, of the three of us involved in that helicopter accident earlier, Lois is missing, I was abducted and abandoned...

GORDON: *(ahead of him)* So is Wayne next on Luthor's list.

CLARK: Or he may know something. *(Impatiently)* Is this, uh, is this as fast as we can go?

GORDON: We're doing ninety in a fifty zone. What speed are you used to, Kent? *(getting radio)* Ramirez, this is Gordon. Come in.

We cut to Gotham Central. Ramirez sits at her desk, surrounded by papers. There's a newspaper cutting on the wall of the Gotham Tribune's article about Batman killing Dent. His dead eyes stare out over the office.

RAMIREZ: *(thumbing the radio)* Ramirez here, Commissioner.

We go back to Gordon's car.

GORDON: Get a black-and-white up to Wayne Manor. See if the man of the house is safe and sound. Check WayneCorp too - that guy Fox seems to be his eyes and ears. Find Bruce Wayne.

RAMIREZ: *(V/O)* Roger that, Commissioner. I'm on it.

GORDON: We'll know soon enough if Wayne's involved.

Clark stares out of the window at Gotham City flashing past.

CLARK: Yeah. We'll know.

We go back to Gotham Central. Ramirez sits hunched over the desk. Her eyes keep flitting to the picture of Dent on the wall as she sits in the darkness.

Act II, Scene XI

WayneCorp Tower. Most of the building is in darkness, but the top few floors are lit still. We go inside and find Lucius Fox poring over a schematic for what looks like a small aircraft in the rough shape of a Bat. He rubs his eyes and blinks, checks his watch.

Seeing the time, he sighs, and places the schematic inside a folder which he seals several times, marked BRUCE WAYNE - CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS ENCLOSED. He also takes out a handwritten letter and we focus in on the final line where he has written:

'...goodbye, and good luck, Mr. Wayne. Your friend, Lucius.'

He places the letter on top of the confidential folder and exits the small office, switching off the lights as he does so. He walks alone across the laboratory floor, past a treasure trove of armour designs, gadgetry, and assorted trinkets, until he gets to the sliding doors marking the exit to the elevator. He flicks the main lights and the illumination over the entire floor dies, one set of lights at a time, from the far end to Lucius himself.

There's a noise. Lucius, who'd just been about to step into the elevator, half-turns and stares into the darkness. The only light being shed on the entire floor is that coming from the open elevator behind him.

LUCIUS: That you, Mr. Wayne? You *know* that silent trick gets on my nerves.

BATMAN: (*unseen*) Sorry. Force of habit.

LUCIUS: (*sighs*) Yeah. Well, it's late. All this stuff is yours anyway so have fun exploring. I'm going home.

BATMAN: (*still unseen*) You're resigning, Lucius.

LUCIUS: I am.

BATMAN: You've talked to Alfred.

LUCIUS: Mmm. It's what friends do, Mr. Wayne. Talk.

BATMAN: How-?

LUCIUS: How do you *think* he is?

BATMAN: I had to-

LUCIUS: Yeah. (*sighs again*) Thank you for the opportunity to work here. If you'll excuse me, my wife and I have a trip to England to prepare for. Alfred's promised to teach me cricket. Goodbye. And good luck.

BATMAN: Turn on the light. At least look at me before you go.

LUCIUS: (*smiles sadly, looking into the darkness*) Aren't I already, Mr. Wayne?
He gets into the elevator and it closes behind him, throwing the entire floor into complete darkness, until a switch is flicked and the lights come back on.

Batman stands alone. He's wearing a new and repaired Batsuit, no longer the damaged one from the dock fight the previous night.

We cut to him thumbing controls on a device, entering a reinforced chamber surrounded by thick soundproof concrete walls. He removes his chest armour.

BATMAN: Fire.

COMPUTER: Warning. Safety override engaged.

BATMAN: Disable safety override. Fire.

A wall-mounted machine gun at the opposite end of the chamber jerks into life, spitting out bullets at a fantastic rate. We go into super-slow-motion as the first spate of bullets emerges, tracking the first four or five as they fly from the gun barrel and make a beeline for their target; the torso of Batman.

The first bullet impacts, and we see it flattened as it impacts on Batman's naked skin,

dropping to the floor harmlessly. The same fate befalls the next four or five bullets, and as we exit super-slow-motion and go into real-time, the same fate befalls the next hundred, two hundred bullets, until Batman is standing ankle-deep in flattened bullets and until the machine gun's ammo runs dry and the barrel stops spinning with a long drawn-out click, coming to a complete halt.

Batman reaches down and experimentally prods his skin. He kneels and picks up one of the bullet casings, examining it, seeing its new shape.

We cut to him reloading the gun, stepping back into the firing line.

BATMAN: Tracking program Alpha. Disable safety override. Fire.

Once again the bullets fly, but this time, rather than simply wait for them to impact, Batman actually dodges each one as it comes. The gun tracks him. We follow this in slow-mo for a few moments, Batman staying ahead of the spray of bullets, including backflipping off the nearest wall to stay ahead of the hail, until we snap back to real-time and see exactly how fast Batman is moving; he's impossible to follow with the naked eye.

Once again, the gun clicks to a halt. The far side wall has been almost completely destroyed by the bullets, but on Batman, now stopped and visible once more, there is not the merest scratch. He's not even out of breath.

We cut to him emerging onto the roof of WayneCorp Tower, armour back in place, and walking to the edge of the building, with Gotham spread out all around him.

Snatches of sounds start to filter through. Voices. Conversations. Tyres screeching. Birds. The myriad noises of a living breathing city, home to millions. Batman jerks his head to the side, putting his hand over one ear, seeming overwhelmed by the sheer level of sensory input he's receiving. And then-

-the white noise filters out, and is replaced by one voice.

VOICE: Help! Oh God, help me! Please!

Batman's head snaps around in the direction the voice came from. He jogs to the rooftop edge, hops up onto it, looks down. WayneCorp Tower is one of Gotham's tallest buildings. Far, far below, traffic no bigger than matchboxes moves along Gotham's downtown avenues.

He takes a step off the roof. And doesn't fall. He bobs up and down gently, looking like a swimmer treading water without actually needing to move his arms and legs to do so.

BATMAN: I could get used to this.

And a second later, he's moving through the air. At first he kinda forces his way through, adopting an awkward swimming motion, propelling his arms, but after a few moments of this he experiments with stopping the arm & leg movements and simply arrowing his body in the general direction he wishes to travel. It works.

And it's only then that it sinks in. What he's doing. The reality of flying.

For a few moments we see him take in the beauty of Gotham from above; the lights of the city, the sights. The wings of his cape extended fully, he's able to swoop between buildings in a graceful, unencumbered way that Batman never could have before.

At ground level, as he passes beneath the neon billboards of Gotham's avenues, a Bat-shaped shadow travels along the ground, causing Gotham's citizens to pause and look up, and see him. They point.

VOICE: ...please...

Shaking off the temptation to simply revel in the glory of his newfound ability, Batman zeroes in on the source of the distress call and ups the pace, gathering speed...

We cut to below. A store clerk, clutching a handgun, is hiding behind his shop counter.

Three hoods are spread throughout the store, with a fourth behind the wheel of the getaway car outside. All three hoods have shotguns.

CLERK: *(whispers, to himself)* Oh God, help me...I don't wanna die...

His is the voice Batman heard before, we realise.

The lead hood steps out from behind cover and lets rip with the shotgun, shattering the items lying on the countertop, destroying the till, sending debris fragments raining down on the terrified clerk behind, who whimpers all the more.

LEAD HOOD: Don't be a stupid dead hero, man! Throw out the gun and let us do what we gotta do and we won't touch you, swear to God!

There is a pause. The handgun arcs over the counter, clattering to the floor. The lead hood smiles. He motions to one of the others. They advance on the counter.

LEAD HOOD: Okay, good choice. Now come on outta there. We hit the safe, we're done. Everybody's happy, right?

The clerk stands. He sees the shotguns trained on him from all sides.

LEAD HOOD: You got the keys?

CLERK: Y-yeah...

*He fishes the keys out of his pocket and brandishes them, and only then seems to realise his mistake. The lead hood shrugs as if to say 'sorry', and then opens fire-
-but the clerk isn't there anymore.*

And then the lights go out.

And then, the lights go back on again.

Batman stands there, directly in all three's field of fire.

BATMAN: Sorry about the lights. *(pause, he shrugs)* Force of habit.

LEAD HOOD: Get him!

All three open fire. None miss. Batman doesn't move a muscle and doesn't seem remotely bothered by the impact of three pointblank shotgun blasts to the chest. His armour takes a pounding but that doesn't seem to bother him either.

BATMAN: Ow.

The hoods look at each other in what is clearly a moment of awful realisation.

BATMAN: My turn?

We cut to outside, and a police cruiser pulling up to the store. Central is talking to the officers inside.

RADIO: Reports of a robbery in progress. Shots fired. Backup en route.

OFFICER #1: Roger that. Unit 23-14 on scene now.

RADIO: Proceed with caution-

And that's when the entire glass front of the store caves outwards as one, two, three bodies smash through it. The leftmost and rightmost bodies sail right past the advancing cruiser, but the centre body - the lead hood - impacts the police car full-on and smashes right through the windshield, terrifying the officers inside, causing the car to swerve and screech to a halt.

A second cruiser pulls up. An officer gets out and surveys the wreckage.

OFFICER #3: Jesus Christ...what the hell happened here...?

Unseen by him, a black shape perched on the store's roof takes off vertically into the Gotham night. We follow Batman as he rises, all of Gotham calling out to him, his cape fluttering out behind him as he soars.

Never before has he so resembled the creature he sought to emulate. And all of Gotham

is now his to hunt in. But he has designs on one person only.

BATMAN: Ramirez...

Act II, Scene XII

Gordon's car pulls up at his house. Jason is out the door to meet it, and Clark is out of the car almost before it has stopped. The two meet each other and envelop one another in a hug. There is a crack, much the same as we heard between Clark and Bruce in an earlier scene, except this time it's coming from Clark's ribs.

CLARK: (softly) Ow.

Jason lets him go and looks up at him disbelievingly. Clark stares back at him, unable to say anything due to Gordon's presence, but there's a lot of communication going on behind the eyes.

JASON: Mom...? You've found...?

CLARK: Not yet.

JASON: I should have let him die.

Clark opens his mouth to reply, and seeing Jason's expression, simply swallows his words and puts his hand on the boy's shoulder instead. Gordon, who has been keeping a discreet distance until now, moves in. His radio squawks and we overhear the officers reporting on the store robbery.

OFFICER #3: (V/O) ...owner swears it was Batman. These guys are in pretty bad shape. He really busted them up. I've never seen anything like it. Guess Superman pissed him off.

Clark reacts. We see him absorb the significance of Batman being at large in the city.

GORDON: (into the radio) Just the facts, officer. Cordon off the area, standard search pattern.

JASON: He can help! Batman can help us look for Mom! I know he can!

Barbara is outside now too. She beckons her husband over urgently. Jason sees this. He looks afraid, upset. He looks to Clark.

JASON: I'm sorry. When I heard about my Mom and Luthor...my eyes, they...

He points to the house and Clark sees the destroyed window and the scorch marks on the wall to either side. Clark's eyes go wide as he absorbs the significance of this. His arm goes around Jason instinctively, protectively.

JASON: They, they saw me. I'm sorry...

Clark hugs him.

CLARK: It's okay.

Gordon, having talked with his wife, comes back over to Clark. He glances at Jason long enough for us to know that he knows. Clark moves the boy subtly behind him, in much the same way as the girl with the cellphone in the Narrows shielded her own children.

GORDON: Keeping anything from me, Kent?

CLARK: Nothing that matters right now, Commissioner.

James Gordon peers around the front door of his home. Jason sees him and starts to wave. James notices Jason's attention moving and hides back inside the house again. Jason's hand, fingers about to uncurl, drops slowly back to his side again.

CLARK: We need to find Lois. You suggested taking me to the station.

JASON: I'm going with you. I don't want to stay here.

Gordon nods, a trifle reluctantly. Moments later they are pulling away from Gordon's house in his car, with Clark and Jason in back. Jason looks out the window for James, but his friend has not come to say goodbye.

GORDON: Kent, I like you. And as I said before, I'm not a huge fan of the press as a rule. So don't screw up your good standing with me now.

CLARK: Commissioner-

GORDON: What the hell is going on with Superman and Batman? You're one half of the Official Superman Press Pack, aren't you? So if you know anything, now's the time to tell me.

CLARK: *(after a pause)* I wish I-

GORDON: Goddamit, Kent! I'm not asking you as a cop, but as a guy concerned for the safety of people caught in the crossfire! I know Batman! He can't throw street punks through shop windows and break damn near every bone in their bodies!

And as he says that, something seems to click in Jason's young mind. He looks up at Clark, open-mouthed. Clark sees the look and shakes his head warningly as if to shush the boy, but it's too late.

JASON: Unless he took Superman's powers...

CLARK: Jason...

JASON: That's it, isn't it?! He took...*(he pauses, just in time, as he looks at Clark)* he took Superman's powers away somehow.

Clark doesn't reply. Gordon keeps on driving, but we can see him deep in thought.

GORDON: Y'know ten minutes ago I'd have laughed that suggestion away. But after what my wife just told me she saw, I'm thinking you might know more about Superman than most kids. Is it true, Kent?

CLARK: For the moment.

GORDON: So we have a super-powered Batman. What does that make Superman?

CLARK: *(softly)* At a guess, Commissioner? Pissed. *Very* pissed.

Act II, Scene XIII

Gotham Central. Gordon, Clark and Jason proceed through the main foyer and negotiate through the back rooms to Gordon and his unit's offices.

GORDON: You know more about Superman than most of us will have forgotten, Kent. So what are we looking at? What can Batman do now? What can we expect?

CLARK: *(shakes head)* It's not that simple. He can't just absorb Superman's powers and expect to be able to use them all right away. That's not how it worked for...for Superman. It takes time to-

Jason has stopped walking. He cocks his head in the air.

JASON: Something's com-

There is a tremendous CRASH ahead of them. Gordon shoves Clark and Jason back and draws his gun, breaking into a run down the corridors until he opens the door that leads to his unit's offices-

-to find a gaping hole in the wall, and Lieutenant Anna Ramirez being held down on a desk by Batman, his cape billowing in the breeze kicked up by the wind whistling through the wall's sudden over-ventilation.

Batman doesn't even look up when Gordon enters the room.

BATMAN: Jim. Good to see you.

GORDON: What the hell is going on?! The entire precinct will be coming-

As Ramirez gasps for breath, Clark and Jason arrive at the door behind Gordon. Their reactions on seeing Batman couldn't be more different; Jason's eyes open wide and he grins in delight. Clark's jaw sets, his nostrils flare, and his eyes narrow. He places a protective hand over Jason's chest.

RAMIREZ: *(strangled voice)* Help me...

JASON: It's you! It's really you!

CLARK: Keep back, Jason.

BATMAN: Man's got a point, Jason. Don't want to get too close. Never know who might betray you.

GORDON: What are you talking about?

BATMAN: How's the sick mother? Hmm? Still getting good treatment? *(bellows in fury)* How is she, Anna?

He throws her aside, sending her crashing into the wall, where she impacts the Gotham Tribune article showing Dent's face. As she slides to the floor, blood from her impact has seeped through the cracked glass of the framed article, staining Dent's face.

RAMIREZ: *(to Gordon)* I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...

Gordon's gun wilts. He can't quite believe what he's hearing. More police arrive behind Clark and Jason.

BATMAN: Call them off, Jim. I'm not in the mood.

Gordon motions for them to stay back and they comply.

RAMIREZ: I only did what I thought-

GORDON: Save it for the judge, Anna.

BATMAN: Judge?

He turns on Gordon now, advances on him until he's uncomfortably close. For the first time, Jim Gordon takes a step back when confronted with Batman.

BATMAN: You know this town. She won't get time.

GORDON: She will. I'll see to it.

BATMAN: Sure you will. Like you promised to clean up this city, Jim? Like you promised that me being the villain would *mean* something?

GORDON: You almost killed three people tonight! You destroy half my office! Now, what, you want to be judge, jury, and executioner? What the hell's gotten *into* you?

Batman looks at Clark. Clark stares back.

CLARK: You can't control them. You don't know what you've done. Trust me on that.

BATMAN: Like I should have trusted the Big Blue Boy Scout to hand me over? Went meekly into the cells and watched as the underworld set about killing everyone I ever cared about in revenge for the things I've done to hurt them?

CLARK: (*hotly*) They would have been protected. You would have had justice. Don't do this. Don't make an enemy where you could have made a friend.

BATMAN: Game's changed. I'm tired of being hated. Tired of being hunted.

He moves to the hole in the wall he created. Jason breaks free of Clark and runs to Batman.

JASON: But - but - you have to help us! My Mom - Lois - Lex Luthor has her, and Superman...please, you *have* to give him his powers back-

BATMAN: Your Mom is fine. And as for Superman...well...

He rises gently into the air and floats out the window. Clark, Jim Gordon and Jason all look on, astonished.

BATMAN: ...nothing lasts forever.

He flies off into the Gotham night.

GORDON: I thought you said he wouldn't be able to-

CLARK: It's impossible.

We cut to the main foyer, to where a woman has just walked through the entrance doors. It's Lois.

She stands unaided, but only just, swaying, looking as if she's just woken up from the world's deepest sleep. A female officer spots her.

LOIS: My son...Jason...

Upstairs, Jason's head snaps up.

JASON: Mom?! Mom's here! She's here!

He bolts for the door. We cut to back down in the foyer, as Lois continues to try to stay upright.

OFFICER: Get her some help!

Officers rush toward her as she very gently keels over. It's Jason who catches her, zipping between the police officers seemingly moving in slow-mo. He gathers his mother's body in his arms. She's still awake, if weak. She smiles up at him and cups his cheek.

JASON: Mommy...

LOIS: I'm okay, baby. Mommy's okay. Just...so tired...

Clark and Gordon arrive on the scene. Clark kneels beside Jason and helps him bear the burden of Lois, wiping her hair from her face and checking her pulse. He breathes a sigh of relief.

CLARK: Pulse is strong. (*to Jason*) She's going to be okay.

GORDON: She looks drugged. Somebody, get an ambulance!

JASON: Clark...I want to go home. I want to go home, all of us. Back to Metropolis. Please? Can we go home? I don't want to be in Gotham any more.

Clark looks at his son, at the tears streaming down his face as his mother lies

unconscious in his arms.

All he can do is nod in agreement.

Act II, Scene XIV

A man is lying flat on his stomach, his face poking through a massage hole. An attractive young female masseuse is applying serious pressure to his back. We see the man's face contort in pain/pleasure - it is, of course, Lex.

A shadow falls across the masseuse. She looks up, wide-eyed.

We go back to Lex. He frowns.

LUTHOR: Candy? I don't pay you to admire the v-ouuuuwww!

He twists his head, trying to extricate himself from the massage hole, but to no avail. As he twists, he catches sight of a pair of black boots standing next to him. A pair of heels click-clack away as Candy makes good her escape.

LUTHOR: *(grimacing with discomfort)* The man of the hour...

BATMAN: Your back looks tense, Lex. Under stress?

He presses a single finger into Lex's shoulder blade, all the while holding down Lex's entire body with the other hand without any apparent effort. There is a squawk of protest from beneath him.

Batman lets go. Lex struggles out of his rather vulnerable position with as much dignity as he can muster, throwing on a very grand, very thick robe (monogrammed "LL" we notice) and wincing as he rotates his arm and clutches his shoulders. Batman watches impassively.

LUTHOR: New suit? Like it.

And indeed it is; much, much thinner than the previous Batsuit, because after all, what protection does Batman need from bullets and knives now? It's still jet black and still resembles the old armour, but is more like a Dark Knight version of Superman's costume.

LUTHOR: So. I'm waiting.

BATMAN: For?

LUTHOR: *(wounded)* My thank you! I delivered on everything I promised, didn't I? Including returning dear, sweet Lois *(he makes a nauseous face)* safe and sound. As agreed.

BATMAN: I want your empire. All of it.

Lex reaches into a box of Cuban cigars and retrieves one, lighting it and taking a long draw. He regards Batman thoughtfully.

LUTHOR: How much do you know about Krypton?

He walks out of the massage room. Batman follows, his arms crossed across his chest, radiating impatience. They walk to the main living area of Luthor's penthouse apartment, judging from the view from the huge window located smack-bang in the centre of Gotham's downtown. WayneCorp Tower is only a few hundred yards away. Lex regards the view in front of him, leaning against a large mahogany desk. He takes another puff on his Cuban.

LUTHOR: Krypton is something of a passion of mine. An advanced civilisation, far beyond our capabilities...and yet they succumbed to destruction, they fought amongst themselves, failed to spot that one of their own would be capable of destroying the planet.

BATMAN: How did you know? What was going to happen?

LUTHOR: I've met the Eradicator before. I've been to the Fortress. Had myself a few Kryptonian history lessons. From those, I knew enough about Zod to guess what happened with Krypton, and enough about Superman to know he would confront him about it as soon as they met.

He pauses, and shrugs modestly.

LUTHOR: Plus - you know - genius.

BATMAN: Zod did what you would have done.

The two men regard each other for a moment, Luthor framed against the cityscape behind him, Batman, his arms still crossed across his chest, almost invisible watching from the shadows. Luthor smiles.

LUTHOR: Is that what you think of me? That I'd destroy my homeworld rather than suffer defeat?

BATMAN: You wouldn't?

LUTHOR: Perhaps. In the past. But things change.

Luthor glances down at the desk he's standing beside. There's a photograph amongst others there, showing a woman in her twenties. She's not smiling for the camera; in fact she seems to be engaged in a contest with the lens as to which one's about to break first. As Luthor glances at the photograph, his mask seems to slip for just a moment.

LUTHOR: I'm nothing like Zod. There's nothing clever about genocide. Nothing to be gained from blowing up your own world. He was weak. Short-sighted. And a fool.

He looks to Batman now as he speaks. Batman says nothing.

LUTHOR: Besides. I knew you. If one person was going to have a shot, it was you.

BATMAN: Why, Luthor? Why seek to give this power to me, rather than for yourself?

LUTHOR: *(bursting into delighted laughter)* Me? Making with the 'up up and away' stuff? Soaring through the air? Oh no, no, no. Not interested. Not the kind of power I'm after. Someone like you is much more *(he gestures to Batman's current attire)* suited to it. Welcome to it, even.

He stops laughing and looks at Batman again, and we're reminded exactly why Lex Luthor always seems to bounce back from the defeats that Superman has handed him down the years; the man is a genius. He seems to be staring right into the soul of the man before him.

LUTHOR: Which raises an interesting point. Why did *you* take his powers? Not exactly superhero textbook stuff. Stealing a fellow hero's powers as he lies helpless? Having him dumped in some godforsaken alleyway? That's cold. That's like something they'd blame *me* for.

BATMAN: This city is rotten. Overrun. I tried to clean it up before. I failed. I did what I had to do.

LUTHOR: Had to do, huh? And that includes beating the living crap out of hoods who couldn't touch you now with anything short of a nuke?

BATMAN: I am not listening to a morality lesson from Lex Luthor! Give me your empire or I'll take it from you! I upheld my end of the agreement. The son of Jor-El is no longer a threat to you-

LUTHOR: The *what*?

BATMAN: -Superman is no longer-

Luthor stares at him, and something seems to click. He takes a half-step backward and then composes himself, seeming a tad nervous for the first time in the discussion, but the mask of nonchalance quickly falls once more.

LUTHOR: *(shrugs)* Fine. Have it all. I'll arrange a meeting of everyone who's anyone, and you can come along and gatecrash it. It'll take a little time, but it'll be done.

BATMAN: And they won't be suspicious?

LUTHOR: Oh yes. Very. They might even bring guns and rocket launchers and all sorts of horrible nasty weapons. *(in mock horror)* Whatever *shall* you do against such an arsenal?

BATMAN: And you...

He advances from the shadows until he stands close to Lex Luthor. Lex is forced to retreat until his back is pressed up against the glass of the window, a twenty-plus storey drop to the streets of Gotham beckoning below.

BATMAN: *(softly, slowly)* What am I supposed...to do...with you?

LUTHOR: *(calmly)* Kill me or let me go. Your choice.

BATMAN: I could drop you in Blackgate. From a great height.

LUTHOR: *Prison?* You know prison won't hold me. *(sighs)* And do you seriously think I won't have planned for that? Would it make you feel better if I said something like, oh I don't know, I have a little gizmo that monitors my whereabouts on the globe at any moment, and should I find myself inside of certain places, large explosive devices hidden in population centres around the world will explode?

BATMAN: Is it true?

LUTHOR: *(rolls eyes)* No. It's a clever bluff on my part. Oh. Oh no, wait, I seem to have slipped up verbally. *Puh-lease.* And besides, you know what I know, what I'm currently keeping a lid on out of respect for our little arrangement. Batman may be invulnerable, but the minute I get the striped pyjamas, Bruce Wayne dies. Forever.

He moves forward, breaking Batman's threatening hold over him. Batman steps back, but their eyes remain locked together.

LUTHOR: Assuming, of course, you're given to caring about such trivialities as human identity anymore...

BATMAN: Meaning?

LUTHOR: *(musing, casually)* Amazing isn't it? How a human body like yours could have coped with the power download you received? How you've mastered those powers so quickly? Superman himself didn't appear on the scene until he was an adult and yet here you are, a common man, and it's taken you less than a day...

Now it's his turn to approach Batman. Batman doesn't retreat. Lex is practically nose-to-nose with him now. Luthor taps the side of his head slowly, once, twice.

LUTHOR: *(softly)* Are you *absolutely* sure you're alone in there, my friend?

Batman shoves him backward. Luthor goes sprawling over the desk, knocking most of everything off, tumbling backward helplessly until he impacts the window. It cracks, a huge splintering crack travelling outward, a spreading spider's web that for a moment looks as if it's going to shatter the glass entirely, but it holds. Just.

Slumped at the bottom of it, bruised, barely conscious, Lex Luthor looks up at Batman, who is once again standing over him. Batman leans down so he can whisper in his ear.

BATMAN: You're the monster, Lex. Now. Time and date.

LUTHOR: *(weakly)* One week from now. Junction of 133rd and Main, there's a supply warehouse. 9pm.

Batman nods. He walks to the window. Behind him, Lex gets to his feet, very unsteadily.

LUTHOR: I'm not the only one that won't be held.

Batman stops.

LUTHOR: He's going to get out eventually. You know it.

BATMAN: *(without looking back)* Yes.

LUTHOR: You have the power. Throwing safecrackers through car windshields is well and good, but if you ignore him forever, the first victim he kills, the first life he destroys, that blood is going to be on *your* hands just as much as his.

Batman is gone in another moment, a black shape in the skies above. Luthor watches him go. The smile fades from his face. He staggers to the debris that was knocked from his desk, and picks up the photograph of the girl we saw him glancing at earlier. He touches her face for a moment before brushing away the glass and replacing the photo back on the desk again.

This done, he retrieves the telephone and gratefully drops to his plush chair on his desk, picks up the phone from its cradle and dials.

LUTHOR: WayneCorp? I'm calling for a Mr Reese. Mr Coleman Reese? I need to speak to him. *Now.*

Act II, Scene XV

Metropolis, in the blazing sunshine. A message fading in at the bottom of the screen informs us that this is One Week Later.

The Daily Planet offices. Perry White is holding a board meeting of the Planet's top talents, including amongst others Lois, Clark, Ron Troupe (young, bespectacled, political editor) and Steve Lombard (long-haired, rock guitarist looks, sports editor). Lois looks fully recovered. Jimmy raps the door and Perry beckons him in.

PERRY: Jimmy. Glad you could make it.

JIMMY: Gee, Chief, I'm just delighted to be invited. I mean, you don't usually-

PERRY: *(to everyone else)* So that was two with cream, three with jelly, two with sprinkles, and one blueberry muffin? *(to Jimmy)* Get that.

JIMMY: *(deflated)* Got it.

LOIS: Uh, no chocolate sprinkles on mine Jimmy.

We see Jimmy mutter something to himself as he exits; we don't hear what it is, but we imagine it's not exactly safe for work language-wise.

PERRY: So, Brain Trust, how do we save this newspaper?

He points to a circulation graph and an arrow pointing straight down.

PERRY: 7 days straight we've been beaten by the *Gotham Tribune*. The same newspaper that experimented with *(he shivers in disgust)* 'Bingo cards' not six months ago. And what, I ask you, is the reason for this reversal?

LOIS: Better pay?

STEVE: *(currently flicking little paper balls into a plastic cup three feet away with pinpoint accuracy)* Dental?

RON: The fact that they have a *raison d'être* that extends beyond finding the latest exciting picture of a man in tights saving a speeding train full of orphans from smashing into a burning building during an earthquake slash tsunami slash terrorist attack?

PERRY: Wrong, wrong, *wrong*. Anyone else?

CLARK: Batman.

PERRY: Half correct! That pointy-eared idiot and his newfound zeal for life aside, we're facing an altogether bigger and more complex problem, one so multi-layered, so intricate, so difficult to grasp, that I've thought long and hard about how best to express it-

He tears off the next sheet on his flipchart. It reads in huge letters:

NO SUPERMAN, STUPID!!!!

Clark drums his pen on the desk. Lois squeezes his wrist supportively. They meet each other's eyes as Perry begins his rant.

PERRY: Seven days! And not a single sighting, in Metropolis or anywhere goddamn else! What is this, a 'no flights, no tights' policy?! It's *killing* us! And every single one of you worthless big-brain college grads-

STEVE: Hey-

PERRY: -you excepted, Steve-

STEVE: Damn straight.

He winks in an exaggeratedly manly way at Lois. She looks as if she's about to throw up.

PERRY: -*stop* sitting on your hands and get the *hell* out there and FIND ME SUPERMAN!!! I don't care where he is! I don't care if he has a timeshare apartment on Krypton's charred remains! Charter *god-damned* spaceships and FIND HIM!!! Because if we don't...if we don't...

His bluster falters a little and Perry White, eternally terrifying editor supreme, for a moment looks vulnerable.

PERRY: If we don't, the *Planet* is in serious trouble.

Everyone absorbs this. Perry glowers at them all, the moment of vulnerability passing in a heartbeat to be replaced by the accustomed veil of gruffness.

PERRY: Well? What the hell are you waiting for? Handwritten gilt-edged invitations with calligraphy done by virgins halfway up the majestic slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro?

Everyone glances at everyone else guiltily.

RON: Uh...

Jimmy Olsen enters the room with a box full of doughnuts and pastries. He places them on the table and notices the decidedly chilly atmosphere and the fact that every single person in the room is staring at him, particularly Perry.

We follow Jimmy as he backs out, step by step, everyone's head moving to follow him, as if afraid any sudden movements will cause the room to explode. The door shuts with a click and through the glass of the door panels we see poor Jimmy sag with relief to still be alive on the other side.

Perry resumes glowering at his staff. He reaches over and closes the lid of the pastries box and jerks his thumb in the direction of the exit.

PERRY: Out!!!

*Everyone files out. When he's alone, Perry sits down heavily at the conference table, catches sight of the *Tribune* vs. *Planet* circulation numbers graph he discarded earlier, sighs, opens the box and stuffs a huge doughnut into his mouth.*

PERRY: *(muffled)* Somebody get me a tree. I'll get the cat.

Outside, Lois and Clark tramp off to their collective side-by-side desks, looking suitably dejected with life.

LOIS: So. Uh. Anything...?

She indicates flexing her bicep and pumping iron with a questioning expression on her face. Clark shakes his head, shrugs. He makes a fist and thumps it experimentally on the table before him, only to make an agonised face and have to put his hand between his knees to hide the pain.

Lois watches this impassively. Clark notices her lack of sympathy and gives her a wounded look.

LOIS: Yeah. You know, that looks awful familiar.

CLARK: Except now I'm not faking it. *Ow.*

Lois places her hands on her head and sighs. When she speaks, it's in a low whisper.

LOIS: This is *so* frustrating. The entire world is wondering where Batman got the sudden upgrades from and where the hell Superman went. I know the answer to *both* questions, as well as the little matter of who Batman really *is*, and I'm sitting here on my hands taking a pasting from Perry and covering such luminary events as the Metropolis Boy Scout Jamboree. Which was a *big* success, in case you were wondering.

CLARK: This isn't exactly a laugh a minute for me either, Lois. You think it's easy watching the news, reading the *Tribune*, about him running around with *my* abilities? We have a little boy at home who needs guidance in how to use his powers. How can I do that now? I'm just...

LOIS: *(sarcasm dripping)* Just a man? Yeah. Y'know that rings a bell somewhere, that *just a man* line. Can't think where.

CLARK: Okay, enough. We have bigger problems beside him anyway.

LOIS: Really? Like what?

CLARK: Like you and the fact you're here now.

LOIS: Excuse me?

CLARK: Come on Lois. Lex Luthor had you and he just, what, drugs you unconscious and then decides to let you go? Just like that?

Lois can't meet his eyes. Clark moves closer to her, and for a moment it's just the two of them, despite the crowdedness and chaos of the Planet's newsroom in full swing. Just a man comforting the woman he loves.

CLARK: You're sure he didn't...

LOIS: No. Clark, he didn't. And I'm as bothered by him letting me go as you are, crazy as it sounds. I've been checked head to toe, inside and out, for those little bugs he uses. I'm clean. It makes no sense. Almost as if he had an attack of conscience.

CLARK: *Luthor?*

LOIS: Yeah. I know. But how else do you explain it...?

Act II, Scene XVI

WayneCorp Tower. A conference room within. Lucius Fox sits at the head of the table, leaning forward, his normally placid expression contorted with scepticism.

LUCIUS: *That's your explanation?*

We cut to the other end of the conference table, and to its current occupant.

LUTHOR: Yes.

A wide shot, revealing Alfred Pennyworth is also there, sitting close to Lucius. He's dressed in casuals and on him it looks slightly odd, as we've come to expect him dressed somewhat formally whenever we see him. Alfred coughs delicately, looks at Lucius, and shrugs.

LUCIUS: For *this* you pulled us from Surrey? I was just beginning to improve my bowling.

ALFRED: Regardless of whether what he's saying is true, Lucius, we have to face facts. One (*he nods to Luthor, who smiles broadly*) he *knows*. Two, *something* is going on. Since the...transfer...he's been...

A silence falls over the table. Neither Lucius nor Alfred can bring themselves to vocalise further.

LUTHOR: He's going to kill. You both know it.

ALFRED: If he didn't kill the clown...(*he shakes his head*) he's not going to kill anyone.

Although his words sound definitive, he and Lucius again avoid each other's eyes.

Neither man is confident in the proclamation.

LUTHOR: That was then.

LUCIUS: And why are *you* so concerned with helping? Forgive me, Mr. Luthor, but your reputation precedes you somewhat. Mother Teresa you ain't.

LUTHOR: I was never a big fan of Superman. Perhaps you've heard. But at least he was stultifyingly noble. Batman with Superman's powers alone is a rather daunting prospect. Batman under the influence of a maniacal alien warlord with a thirst for world domination with Superman's powers...well...

ALFRED: Which brings us to the question of what the bloody hell can we do about it?

LUTHOR: (*rolls eyes*) I thought you'd never ask. Now. Judging from incident reports of vigorous crime-fighting activity, your boss is so engrossed with Gotham's underbelly that he seems to be somewhat of an absentee landlord these days, both at home and in work-

LUCIUS: How do you *know* all this?

LUTHOR: (*snaps*) Because I'm a genius! *Why* do I have to keep reminding everyone of that? He'll be occupied tonight with dismantling a certain criminal empire (*he coughs*) so I think this may be the perfect opportunity for you gentlemen to return to work. Because you're right. We three together can't hope to make a dent in him. But-

And he smiles. It's not a reassuring smile, even given the circumstances.

LUTHOR: There might be someone out there with a score to settle...

Act II, Scene XVII

The following scene plays out silently, and alternates between the following.

Clark Kent leaves work. He goes through the motions of turning off the desk lights, squeezing into the elevator. When he emerges from the Planet building, he sees a taxicab disgorge its passenger and begin to pull away. He sticks his arm in the air and waves and whistles. The cab continues to pull away. Clark gives chase, but to no avail - the cab pulls away by the time he gets to the kerbside.

Batman suits up. He rises high into the Gotham night, scanning the city below, occasionally swooping down. We see very quick flashes of crimes being foiled, villains being summarily dispatched.

Clark is making boil-in-the-bag pasta in the microwave. He's watching the television in the kitchen, and when the microwave 'dings' he absent-mindedly reaches in and grabs the bag inside-

Battling a gang of hoods at the riverfront, Batman hovers over the river's surface and puffs out a huge breath, sending a jet of water barrelling into the group, scattering them like ninepins.

Clark runs his hand, red and swollen, under the cold tap.

A stolen car zigzags crazily along the Gotham intersections, its occupants firing at a pursuing Gotham city police cruiser. Bullets pepper the chasing cruiser and it's forced to give up the chase, to much whooping of delight from its occupants. And then the car jerks from below, and the carjackers are terrified to see its bumper rise into the air. Batman is underneath, propelling the car skywards, towards Gotham City Cathedral and its massive silver spire rising majestically from its ramparts.

Clark is trying to open a jar. He huffs and puffs for a moment and then hands it silently to Jason, who gives it a twist and hands it back. Clark nods in thanks.

Batman drops the stolen car onto the spike. The goons inside scatter just in time as the spike goes straight through the car, impaling it like a butterfly pinned to a wall.

Clark is working through some receipts, presumably doing taxes or some such. Those he's examined he places on a small spike. He puts one on without really looking. We cut to him placing a small plaster over a cut on his hand. Jason is sitting behind him looking on. Clark grins sheepishly. And Jason smiles back.

He motions with his Xbox controller, and Clark shrugs, a 'what the hell' kinda shrug. We see both frantically mashing buttons on a driving simulator game as Lois walks in. She absorbs this and though she frowns, there's a bemused expression behind the frown.

Jason climbs into bed. Clark is there. He holds several books in his hand. One is about a superhero, the other about dinosaurs. Jason points at the dinosaur book. Clark raises his eyebrows, shrugs, and sits down beside the boy. They both begin to read.

Batman smashes through the wall of the warehouse, right into the middle of a huge collection of Lex's army of mobsters and villains. It's chaos from the get-go. Guns are produced and emptied with wild abandon in a vain attempt to nail him. Several rockets are fired upward. Batman deflects them or simply flies through the hail of destruction, moving from one opponent to another, taking each one out with an incredible economy of movement, cutting an absolute swathe through their numbers.

But there's something different. Whereas Batman fought once to disable and incapacitate, now he seems to revel in the destruction. He throws men left and right with abandon, and seems finally to have mastered the art of heat vision, dispensing it liberally

into the crowd of goons, sending a blast to seal the doors to the warehouse shut and blasting one man fleeing square in the back, sending him sprawling, screaming in agony.

Clark and Jason finish the bedtime story. Clark bids the young boy goodnight and walks out of the room. Lois walks in and sits beside her son and they exchange unheard words.

A veritable sea of securely bound goons lie groaning or unconscious on the floor of the warehouse. We watch Batman round them up. Red and blue lights begin to flash outside.

Lois walks out of her son's bedroom and is surprised when Clark emerges from around a corner and wraps his arms around her. They kiss, and sneak a look back into the room. Jason is asleep.

Clark gathers Lois up into his arms. Lois tries not to laugh as Clark tries to make it look as effortless as it once would have been. He brings her into the master bedroom. Discreetly, we stay outside.

LOIS: (V/O) I remember this. Isn't this where there's a fire...?

CLARK: (V/O) Not tonight...

There's the sound of giggling, and then a gasp, and then...the bedroom door swings shut.

We cut to Wayne Manor, bathed almost in complete darkness, save for the moonlight coming through the large windows. And Batman, taking off his suit as he walks to become Bruce Wayne once more, walking alone through the vast emptiness of his own home.

Lex Luthor passes through customs at Metropolis airport, in disguise, flashing the girl at the desk a false passport. He smiles dazzlingly at her and goes out into the Metropolis night.

And in Gotham, in WayneCorp Tower, Lucius Fox and Alfred are poring over schematics for something called the AVATAR Project.

Act II, Scene XVIII

Mayor Garcia is in his Gotham office. He's watching Gotham Tonight with Mike Engel on the television there. We cut to the Gotham Tonight studios.

ENGEL: ...Gotham City still reeling from the arrest of over *one hundred and seventy* gang members last night, courtesy of the Batman. Gotham Tonight asks the question: how can an alleged cop-killer be responsible for single-handedly turning the tide in the war on crime and corruption in this city? Well, here in the studio to discuss this with me is Commissioner James Gordon, Gotham's Chief of Police. Commissioner, welcome.

GORDON: (*seeming distinctly uncomfortable*) Mike.

ENGEL: Commissioner, there seems to be a growing public demand to reopen the so called 'Joker killings' case files and see whether the police officers who lost their lives during that period really were victims of Batman. Do you support this?

GORDON: It's too early to, uh, to give an official position on this, Mike. We're obviously delighted that one of Gotham's biggest criminal gangs seems to have been put out of action. But there's some concern over Batman's actions.

ENGEL: Meaning?

GORDON: Twenty-two fatalities.

ENGEL: According to the Mayor's official statement, those have been attributed to crossfire between the gang members themselves...?

GORDON: (*irritated*) Twenty seven of those severely injured during Batman's raid suffered burns over fifty percent of their bodies that can't be accounted for by crossfire-

ENGEL: (*interrupting*) Commissioner, is it true that Lieutenant Anna Ramirez has been arrested on suspicion of corruption?

Back in Mayor Garcia's office, the Mayor allows himself a smile as he watches Gordon's expression.

GORDON: That's...I can't possibly comment-

ENGEL: We have it from a source, Commissioner (*we get a quick flash of Garcia again, just so we know who the 'source' is*) that Ramirez has been implicated in the abduction of former District Attorney Harvey Dent and his fiancé Rachel Dawes the night of the Joker's short-lived capture to police custody.

GORDON: I can't confirm-

ENGEL: Can you shed any light on rumours surfacing that Dent's experience during his abduction by the Joker resulted in a psychotic break?

Pale, Gordon has had enough. He stands up and takes off his microphone.

GORDON: This interview is over.

Garcia chuckles merrily to himself. The door to his office is knocked. He mutes the television volume.

GARCIA: Come-

The door bursts open and, red-faced and perspiring heavily, Mayor Bradford "Buck" Sackett strides into Garcia's office, not stopping until he's reached the desk of his peer and leant over it, skewering Garcia with an accusatory glare.

SACKETT: We need to talk.

GARCIA: Something wrong, Buck?

Garcia's secretary appears at the door, a security man in tow. They look into the room questioningly, the secretary spreading her hands apologetically and the security man beckoning to his radio and to Sackett. Garcia waves them away subtly and indicates the chair

at the opposite side of his desk.

GARCIA: Sit down. Take a load off.

SACKETT: You think this is funny, Tony?

GARCIA: I'm not sure I know what you're getting at.

SACKETT: I offered you my help. I offered you a way out of your problem.

GARCIA: That you did. And I was very grateful for it.

SACKETT: Grateful! You're telling me (*he points to the television, still showing Mike Engel and Gotham Tonight*) this little spin doctoring exercise isn't some sort of slate-wiping whitewash to make your Caped Crusader into your very own Superman? Exonerating him of all that pesky cop-killing and freeing you up to start singing his praises and turn his sudden rehabilitation in the public eye into another term of office for you?

GARCIA: Not at all, Buck. The irony is, Batman really *wasn't* responsible for the deaths we tagged him with. He just made a convenient scapegoat.

SACKETT: You expect me to believe that Harvey Dent - Gotham's White Knight - murdered *cops*?

GARCIA: Let me show you something.

He takes a key from underneath his desk, goes to a hidden safe in the wall, and retrieves a DVD from inside. He places it in the player underneath the office television. It plays, showing CCTV footage from a seedy bar somewhere in Gotham. A heavyset man with white hair sits drinking. And then, a second shape enters, in the shadows at first, but as he passes below the lights-

SACKETT: My God.

Garcia presses freeze-frame so we can get a better look. The horrific visage of Harvey Dent - one half of his face normal, handsome, the other horribly scarred, eaten away, is frozen in a sneer on the screen.

GARCIA: Gotham's White Knight. Or at least, what the Joker left of him.

He presses play. We see Dent flip a coin and shoot the white-haired man in the head. Garcia stops the playback and has the DVD ejected.

SACKETT: You knew? You knew Batman was innocent this whole time?

GARCIA: I didn't get into this office on my stunning good looks alone, Buck. It suited Gotham to blame Batman. The public had turned against him for not giving in to the Joker's demands to reveal his identity - that led to the assassinations, to Gotham General, to the ferry bombs, to an entire city on its knees. Batman was dead in the water.

He points to the television, which is now showing pictures of the almost two hundred detainees being led into prison. The huge amount of gang weapons recovered.

GARCIA: But now...different story. That (*he indicates the TV again*) is just the appetiser. And this (*he waves the DVD*) this is going to hit the airwaves tomorrow and complete his return from the cold.

SACKETT: And what about me, Tony, huh? What about Metropolis? What about Superman?

GARCIA: (*shrugs*) I don't know what to tell you, Buck. He's an alien. Maybe his... his Power Ring ran out of charge. Maybe he quit. Who knows.

SACKETT: That's it? That's all you got? You don't seem to understand, Tony... all of this, offering Superman to Gotham, it wasn't even my idea in the first place.

GARCIA: Meaning?

SACKETT: Hey. Like you said. We didn't get into office on good looks alone. We all got

our paymasters, and not all of 'em pay taxes and play nice. I did what I was told.

GARCIA: And now you're worried your boss is, what? Gonna run amok in that perfect little city of yours with no Superman to protect you if he goes too far?

SACKETT: You don't know this guy, Tony. He's dangerous like you wouldn't believe. If he even knew I was *talking* to you...

He sits down heavily in the chair, taking out a handkerchief and mopping his brow. He looks up at his opposite number, pleading now, somewhat pathetic.

SACKETT: You've gotta help me. I helped you.

GARCIA: *You helped me?* Huh. And here I thought Superman coming to Gotham wasn't even your idea...

SACKETT: We need him back, Tony. Or maybe - you think Batman could - ?

GARCIA: (*shrugs*) You want to get a message to the Batman, Jim Gordon's your man. I wouldn't tell him you spoke to me, though. I was the one who ordered him to appear on that on-air ambush tonight. I doubt he's too pleased with me.

SACKETT: I'll speak to him. Thank you, Tony. I won't forget this.

GARCIA: Hey. We Mayors are a rare breed. We need to stick together, right?

The two men shake hands. Buck leaves Garcia's office. Garcia picks up his phone and dials a number.

GARCIA: You were right.

He replaces the phone in his cradle, goes and pours himself a drink from a nearby brandy tumbler, then walks to the window and watches as Sackett exits the building, flanked by two minders, heading for his official car parked outside.

A car parked at the other side of the street disgorges several men. They reveal automatic weapons and open fire on Sackett and his minders, cutting them down savagely in seconds. The gunmen pile back into their car and screech off. Garcia watches the car as it goes with casual interest. He glances down at his watch, seeming to count from one to five as he does so.

By the time he gets to 'three', a black shape flits past the window in hot pursuit of the fleeing car. Garcia lifts the glass of brandy in tribute and knocks it back.

His phone rings. Garcia picks it up.

We cut to Metropolis, and Lex Luthor, sitting in an unidentified location watching a live video feed of the scene of the brutal execution of Buck Sackett. He holds a phone to his ear. We cut between him and Garcia as each of them speak.

LUTHOR: I'm in your debt, Mr. Mayor.

GARCIA: Consider it even for (*he picks up the DVD of CCTV footage from his desk and turns it over in his hands*) services rendered. Metropolis is yours, Lex.

LUTHOR: Enjoy Gotham.

GARCIA: I intend to.

He replaces the phone and we cut to Luthor, who takes his own receiver away from his ear.

LUTHOR: While it lasts...

We widen out to take in the entire room Luthor sits in. He's sitting at the head of a large conference table filled with others. Most of these people look like fairly standard-issue gangster types, hard-faced, unsmiling. But Luthor doesn't seem overly bothered by them. Instead, he's looking at the man sitting at the opposite end of the conference table.

Definitely not your typical criminal type, the man grabbing Lex's attention is

immaculately dressed, middle-aged, white-haired, distinguished and respectable looking, with a presence that dominates the room and rivals that of Luthor himself. When he speaks, he does so slowly and surely, brimming with easy confidence.

LUTHOR: Mr Edge. Or can I call you Morgan?

If Luthor is being sarcastic, Morgan Edge ignores it. He does not smile.

EDGE: Feel free.

LUTHOR: Such a common touch for one of Metropolis' foremost entrepreneurs. I'm humbled. Unworthy.

EDGE: Surrounded.

LUTHOR: *(glancing around the room)* Yes, I had noticed. I really should have brought my massive criminal empire with me.

EDGE: The one you donated to the Batman rehabilitation fund?

LUTHOR: A necessary bargain for Superman's removal. You wanted your 'Intergang' to rule Metropolis, Mr Edge. But you knew with Big Blue around it was never going to happen. *Voila.* I've cleared the way for you.

EDGE: Very generous of you, Lex. But forgive me if I'm wondering why this sudden wave of charity has washed over you.

LUTHOR: You offered me a billion dollars, Morgan. I'd hardly call it charity.

EDGE: That's your motivation? Money? I'm a little disappointed in you, Lex.

LUTHOR: *(smiling dangerously)* Don't be, Morgan. Now, since we're in the habit of asking questions, mind telling me where you're getting those toys of yours from?

EDGE: You mean these?

He produces what looks like an assault rifle, but assault rifles don't usually hum with power when you press a switch on the side. He ratchets up a power meter on the top of the weapon and points it at one of the henchmen sitting around the table.

HENCHMAN: B-boss...?

Those sitting next to him scatter. Luthor watches with interest.

EDGE: You wouldn't believe me if I told you, Lex. But you'll know soon enough. Everyone will.

He turns his attention to the henchman, who stares down the barrel of his own oblivion, pale as a ghost. The gun hums with barely contained power. Edge's finger curls around the trigger.

EDGE: No more skimming off the top, Frankie?

HENCHMAN: N-n-n-no, boss. I s-s-s-swear...

EDGE: *(soothingly)* I know.

He pulls the trigger.

We cut to an outside of the building. It's emblazoned with a huge WGBS logo. An arcing blue pulse of energy breaks free of one of the top floors, dissipating into the Metropolis skyline. We go in through the hole created by the energy until we arrive back at the conference room and at the smoking, headless torso of the luckless Frankie. Morgan Edge places the weapon on the conference table. His eyes turn to Lex.

EDGE: The money will be in your account in one hour.

LUTHOR: *(standing up)* Thank you, Morgan. Have fun.

EDGE: And what about you, Lex? Batman has Gotham. Intergang has Metropolis. What's left for the *(he sneers the words)* 'Greatest Criminal Mind of Our Times'?

In response, Lex Luthor simply shrugs and smiles, the sort of smile you could shave with.

LUTHOR: Don't worry about me. I'll find something to do. I always do.

Act II, Scene XIX

Metropolis in chaos.

Gang members wearing full body armour and packing the weapons we saw Morgan Edge with in the previous scene are swaggering down Metropolis' avenues. They empty several discharges into one of the larger department stores, completely destroying the entire glass storefront.

Police cars arrive. One car is hit almost immediately by a discharge and flips over crazily into the air, its gas tank igniting, the cops inside spilling out in a desperate attempt to save themselves. Other cops are pinned down by fire from the weapons, but even diving behind cover doesn't help matters much because repeated fire from the weapons simply obliterates whatever they're hiding behind.

We see an ornamental fountain in one of the boulevards be systematically taken apart in such a way, causing the cops hiding behind it to flee.

The weapons have the rapid firing rate of handguns and the power of RPG's. There's simply no way for the police to stand against their power.

One item in the midst of battle seems curiously unaffected, however. A WGBS news van is untouched. Gang members give it a wide berth. We see several camera crews out filming the carnage and none of the looters and rioters seem inclined to target them.

Tania Moon is there, reporting as ever live from the midst of the chaos.

MOON: Tania Moon, WGBS News! Metropolis under siege!

A huge explosion blooms from two hundred feet or so behind her as the gang move on to a gas station and empty discharge after discharge into the fuel tanks, creating a spectacular fireball that billows high into the Metropolis skies.

MOON: Large numbers of a group identifying themselves only as 'Intergang' have taken to the streets, armed with...some kind of portable cannon...and are intent on wreaking havoc across downtown Metropolis!

We cut to Clark Kent's apartment. Clark, Lois, and Jason are watching the news report.

MOON: And still Metropolis wonders - *where* is Superman? Is he dead? And if not, why isn't he stopping this?

CLARK: Because I can't!

He switches off the television. Distant explosions can be heard through the apartment windows. Clark turns his head away from them. Lois comes to comfort him. Jason doesn't move. He just keeps sitting on the sofa, staring ahead.

LOIS: Clark, it's not your fault-

CLARK: I was the one who got into that chamber.

LOIS: For me. You did that for *me*, remember? So if anyone's going to be blamed- *He touches her cheek. She can't finish the sentence. She looks up at him and he looks back with love and not a hint of blame. She smiles, wanly but a smile nonetheless.*

CLARK: I have to get them back, Lois. My powers. You know it's the only way.

LOIS: Why? Why you, Clark? Why always you? Batman has your powers. Why can't he stop this?

CLARK: Why don't you go ask him? He doesn't seem inclined to lift a finger beyond Gotham's borders. It's like he's fencing it off from the rest of the country. Building his own little kingdom.

Lois looks away. Tears are brimming in her eyes.

Jason watches all of this exchange but says nothing.

LOIS: I liked having you around all the time. You know it's strange; there you were as Clark Kent all that time, with me so in love with Superman and barely noticing Clark existed. And yet now...now all I have is Clark, and...the thought of Superman coming back, I realise a part of me, a big part, wouldn't care if I never saw those tights again. You'll be away from me, from us, again.

CLARK: I know. Believe me, I know. Being here for you...*with you...*

He touches her shoulder and she melts into him. He closes his eyes for a moment, savouring her nearness, but then, gently but firmly, pushes her slightly away so he can guide her into a half-turn to allow him to look into her eyes as he speaks.

CLARK: Clark is who I am. Superman is what I do. But I can't exist without him. I can't be the same man. Look at me, Lois. *Look* at me.

He holds up his red and swollen left hand and his right hand, now with multiple cuts and plasters.

CLARK: I'm great at pretending to be human. I suck at *being* human.

LOIS: (*softly*) You're the most human person I've ever known.

They kiss.

LOIS: (*sighing*) So...how does this work? How do you...?

CLARK: I have to go back there. To the Fortress. To the Eradicator. If there is a way, it'll be there. I know it.

LOIS: Clark, that's...that's thousands of miles away! You can't fly...

CLARK: I can. Anyone can. (*gently*) They're called aeroplanes, Lois.

LOIS: How are you even going to find it when you get there? And how do you intend to get around the small problem of the homicidal, potentially insane computer system?

JASON: I can find it.

Lois & Clark stop talking. They look at the boy, who has snapped out of the seeming stupor he had before. He is looking at them calmly, looking very much like his real father.

JASON: I know I can. I can always sense that crystal stuff and the whole place is built of it, right? And as for that Eradicator guy... well, I'm strong.

CLARK: Jason, no.

JASON: I'm stronger than *you* are now! And you know it!

He's on his feet now, jabbing his finger accusingly at Clark and Lois, angrier than we've ever seen him before. This has been building in him for some time, and when he releases it, he does so with gusto and with passion, a little volcano of determination erupting before them.

JASON: The last three years, all I've heard is how important it is for me to learn to use these powers I have! Well, for what? Why did you take me out for all those lessons as Superman, Clark? I kinda thought it was because you wanted me to help you out, when I grow up. And you know something? I looked forward to that more than *anything*. You help people. Batman was cool, but he wasn't my hero. *You* were. So I'm gonna start acting like one. I'm coming with you to find the Fortress and help you get your powers back and you're gonna stop Intergang. Because that's who you are. And that's who I wanna be.

He stops talking, now red-faced with anger and embarrassment, and looks as if he expects Lois or Clark or both to explode right back at him.

But all that surfaces in the faces of both adults is pride.

Without a word, Lois walks forward and envelops her son in a hug. When she lets him go, there are more tears in her eyes.

LOIS: I am so proud of you.

JASON: So I'm going?!

CLARK: You're right. I need your help.

JASON: Great! And um. You mentioned a plane?

CLARK: Yes...?

Jason's face breaks out in a nervous, hopeful smile.

JASON: Well, I um, I know where we can prob'ly get a *really* good pilot...

Act II, Scene XX

Gotham City. A stack of Gotham Tribunes are dumped from a truck onto a pavement outside a newsagent. The headline reads DARK KNIGHT PARDONED! with a sub-headline of BATMAN CLEARED OF COP KILLINGS!

In an alley, Batman lands in the midst of a mugging in process. The two would-be muggers look up in terror, their victim scampering away. The lead mugger drops his knife.

Both are dressed in crude clown outfits, similar to those worn by the clowns in Act I, Scene I.

CLOWN #1: You got us.

BATMAN: Clowns.

Batman advances on them.

BATMAN: I hate clowns.

Both muggers raise their hands in surrender.

CLOWN #2: Uh, take us in. We don't want no trouble. Like the man said, you got us.

BATMAN: Pathetic.

Batman now towers over the terrified men, a black silhouette of vengeance against the darkness of the alley.

BATMAN: Put your hands down.

The muggers comply.

BATMAN: Kneel.

CLOWN #1: Uh...?

BATMAN: Kneel!

He lashes out with a fist and propels the mugger who dared question the order into the brick wall of the alleyway. The man's neck snaps like a twig. He falls lifeless to the ground.

Batman looks down at his fist. He holds a hand to his head, as if dazed, and when he looks up at the second mugger, his voice is noticeably different; much more like Bruce Wayne's natural voice rather than the Batman voice persona.

BATMAN: Run.

CLOWN #2: Whuh...?

BATMAN: GET AWAY FROM ME!

Not needing to be told again, the clown runs away, not looking back, making for the safety of the end of the alleyway.

Batman falls to his knees, his hands at either side of his head, as if he's trying to keep it from exploding. He lets loose a howl of anguish and then slumps forward, as if exhausted.

His head lifts. The clown has almost reached the end of the alley. When he speaks, it's back in the Batman voice again.

BATMAN: You will all kneel before me.

Heat vision sears from his eyes, sizzling through the air between Batman and the mugger, striking him on both heels. He screams in pain, collapsing to his knees. On the ground, in agony, he can only continue to whimper in fear even as we see the black-suited visage of Batman drawing closer to him.

Fade out.

END OF ACT TWO

Act III, Scene I

Metropolis Airport. Clark, Lois and Jason emerge onto one of the private runways. Clark and Lois shield their eyes from the morning sun; Jason has no such need. He points and jumps up and down excitedly.

JASON: He's coming!

LOIS: *(murmurs to Clark)* Look - up in the sky...

CLARK: *Real funny.*

We cut to the small plane taxiing to a stop on the runway. Jason bolts from beside Lois and Clark and begins to race across the tarmac toward it.

LOIS: Jason! Human speed!!!

We see a close-up of Jason's face as he sprints. He rolls his eyes and eases back on the throttle, reducing his speed from well beyond what a human child should be capable of to merely one an Olympic sprinter would be thrilled to achieve.

The plane comes to a stop. We cut to Lois and Clark as they walk toward it. In the distance, they see the plane's door open and a man appear. The little boy jumps up and down and rushes up the small steps.

JASON: Daddy!!!!

RICHARD: Hey, big gu - ooffff...

Richard White is almost knocked off his feet, but manages to steady himself. He embraces his adopted son fiercely for a long moment, before the two of them descend the staircase to the tarmac of the runway. Lois and Clark are just arriving on the scene. Lois smiles, as does Clark. Both seem genuinely pleased to see Richard.

LOIS: Hey, Richard.

RICHARD: Lois.

They come together. Richard kisses her on the cheek. Clark discreetly looks aside but there's nothing suspect going on with this kiss; we sense he's just wanting to give the two their moment to acknowledge the five years of history between them. There's a look that passes between Richard and Lois that does much the same thing. Richard turns to Clark.

RICHARD: Clark. Good to see you.

CLARK: *(shaking hands)* Richard, always a pleasure. Been too long.

JASON: *(rebukingly)* Yeah, Dad! Way too long.

RICHARD: Yeah, sport, and like I said on the phone, I'm really sorry.

He glances at Lois as if to apologise, and does seem genuinely discomfited by something, but it goes no further than an expression.

RICHARD: Now what's all this about, Lois? You're *serious* about going to the North Pole?

CLARK: Uh. Actually - South Pole.

RICHARD: Wow. Glad I checked.

LOIS: Please, Richard. So much has happened...Intergang has the city by the throat.

RICHARD: I know. I've seen the news. *(to Clark)* And Clark...you're not...?

CLARK: I'm powerless. Completely.

RICHARD: Okay. *(takes a breath)* I'm convinced. South Pole it is. Well, as far inland as I can take us, which probably won't be very far this time of year.

LOIS: Oh, we have that covered. We think.

CLARK: Where's the-?

LOIS: Oh! Dammit. I got distracted by the plane coming in.

She points. We cut back to where we first joined the trio, about five hundred feet or more away just outside one of the hangars. Three large bags are piled there.

JASON: I'll get 'em!

LOIS: Jason, no-!

But it's too late. He's gone, speeding across the tarmac, a blur. He zips around in a U, scooping up the three bags at the apex of the turn. We cut to Richard watching. His eyes are on stalks. Jason is back standing in front of them in another instant.

The entire round trip took around four, maybe five seconds, and as he dumps the bags on the ground, we can tell by the impact they make there that these things aren't exactly lightweight, yet they hardly seemed to faze him.

Jason grins at his father, and we know why he pretended not to hear Lois' warning shout - this has been his first opportunity to show off to Richard, and he wasn't going to miss it. For his part, Richard looks shellshocked. In fact he looks so astonished that Jason's smile begins to wilt, until Richard collects himself and shakes his head in astonishment, grinning.

RICHARD: That was incredible! When did you start doing that?!

JASON: *(smile fades)* Like I said before, Dad. It's been too long...uh...whoa...

Jason sways on his feet, abruptly, seeming a little dizzy. Lois steadies him, concerned.

LOIS: Jason? What's wrong?

JASON: *(shaking his head)* Oh. Must have stopped too quickly Mom, that's all.

Richard watches this exchange silently.

We cut to a little while later. The plane is packed with the luggage and Richard is beginning the pre-flight sequence. Clark and Jason are strapping themselves in. Lois places her hand on Richard's shoulder and lets it sit there. Richard looks over at the woman he came within a whisker of marrying.

LOIS: Bring them home to me. And you. You come home too. Promise me.

RICHARD: You're sure about-

He moves his head to indicate Jason, who is sitting right at the back of the cabin looking out the window to his left, for a moment looking every inch a normal young boy.

LOIS: I'm worried sick about it. But there's no other way. So bring him home.

RICHARD: I will. I promise.

Lois moves back and plants kisses all over her son's face and head. He squirms.

JASON: Moooom!

LOIS: *(tearfully)* You listen to everything Daddy and Uncle Clark tell you, okay? And you come back to me.

JASON: 'Kay. But why do I have to sit wayyyyyy back here? Can't I sit up near you, Dad?

RICHARD: *(firmly)* No, Jason. You sit right there, you hear me? It's safer.

Jason's shoulders slump sulkily. Lois flicks his nose and he abandons the pout and grins impishly at her, before reaching out and giving her a final hug which she accepts. When she breaks from it she turns to Clark. No words are exchanged - she simply leans in and kisses him on the lips, a kiss he responds to hungrily.

We see Richard looking down, face neutral, carefully composed, ostensibly checking out his instrumentation. When the kiss ends, Lois gets out of the plane.

We cut to the plane taking off. Jason waves out of the tiny window to his mother, now no more than a dot on the landscape as the land pulls away from them. On the ground, Lois waves back, looking sick with nerves.

We cut to a little later. Jason's eyes are drooping. They're flying over the ocean.

Richard glances behind him from the cockpit and frowns when he sees Clark, and especially Clark's hands, which are securely gripping the edges of his seat. A bemused smile forms on Richard's face.

RICHARD: Something wrong, Clark?

CLARK: *(strained)* Nope. Fine.

RICHARD: Whassamatter? *(laughs)* Superman afraid of flying? There's a front page scoop.

CLARK: *Superman* loves it. *Clark Kent* is suddenly reminded that this little collection of nuts and rivets and fuel is suspending us ten thousand feet above open ocean and if anything goes wrong, I can't just rip open my shirt and save the day.

RICHARD: Come up here, Clark. Seriously. It's less scary from the cockpit. Come on.

CLARK: Uh, I should probably stay with Jas-

He trails off, having glanced across. Jason is sound asleep. Clark unbuckles his belt, stands up - and the plane hits a little pocket of turbulence, shaking them somewhat. Clark's hands shoot out to grip the nearest available surface. He closes his eyes, looking distinctly green around the gills. Only when the plane has levelled does he risk opening his eyes again.

RICHARD: Sorry...

Clark moves across to the boy, reaches inside the overhead locker and produces a travel pillow, which he fixes around the boy so he'll have something soft to snooze on. Jason mumbles but stays asleep. This done, Clark glances up and sees Richard's hand waving him on. Clark obliges, moving forward into the cockpit and getting into the co-pilot's chair beside Richard.

He buckles himself in and leans forward so he can look out the wraparound piloting windows, which are now showing wispy clouds below them and the magnificent blue shimmer of the Atlantic Ocean far, far below.

Clark sits back. He takes another steadying breath.

RICHARD: See? Better, huh?

CLARK: Oh. Yeah. So much. Thanks.

RICHARD: Clark...

There's a tone to his voice that makes Clark look up from his vigil of trying not to look up. Richard is staring straight ahead, as a pilot should most of the time, but we can tell by the expression on his face that he's about to say something he's not been looking forward to.

RICHARD: I, I wanted to thank you.

CLARK: *Thank me?*

RICHARD: Gee, you sound kinda surprised, Clark. I mean, I got turned into a killer cyborg and I tried to kill you repeatedly, and when you had the chance to kill me, you didn't take it. Instead, you rebuilt me.

CLARK: Well. We had the technology...

The two men smile at the weak joke. It relieves some of the tension, but Richard looks as if he's not finished what he had to say, and indeed he hasn't.

RICHARD: Listen, uh. Jason's pretty mad at me for not spending more time with him, yeah?

CLARK: Uh...look, Richard, we live in Metropolis, you live in LA. It's not easy, I know that-

RICHARD: Clark, please. You don't have to make excuses for me, okay. It *is* easy and we both know it. I own a *plane*. God, I could have asked Superman to fly him to me in, what,

ten minutes? Less? And he could have stayed weekends and he would have loved it. And I haven't. I haven't seen him since his birthday which was nine months ago now. Nine months, one week, three days, in case you're interested.

CLARK: I don't know what to say...

RICHARD: You won, Clark. You won Lois. And I know that makes you uncomfortable around me, and yeah for a while you weren't my favourite guy. But you know, time passes. And I don't hate you, I really don't. The whole saving my life thing helped, admittedly. You're so goddamn decent that you're impossible to hate.

CLARK: (*confused*) Richard, I'm sorry, I don't know what you're-

RICHARD: It didn't entirely take.

CLARK: What didn't?

Richard simply presses a few controls on the plane and lets go of the controls. The plane maintains its altitude and speed, much to Clark's relief. Richard reaches under his seat and produces a long thick bar of what looks like iron or steel.

As Clark watches, Richard takes the bar and bends it, slowly but surely. He shows effort in doing so, but there's no way a human man should be able to make any sort of impact on a piece of metal that thick.

Richard drops the bar on the cockpit floor. It clangs. Clark's eyes follow it all the way down.

CLARK: Richard, no...I'm so sorry.

RICHARD: Hey. Not your fault, as I said. But that (*indicating the bar*) isn't the problem, Clark. Hell, sometimes it comes in handy. There isn't a jar of pickles I can't ass-kick, you know?

CLARK: So what's the problem?

RICHARD: How was Jason when he came back from spending his birthday with me?

CLARK: I-I don't know. He was fine, I think-

And then, Clark remembers. And horrible realisation dawns on his face.

CLARK: No. No...he *wasn't* fine. He had a cold. A fever. He was shivering. Lois and I put it down to a virus...

RICHARD: And how many viruses has that kid ever gotten, Clark? How many *other* times has he gotten sick, that you can remember?

He turns away from Clark. Clark's face is full of shock, full of pity, for the man before him. He struggles to find words.

CLARK: Richard, I...

RICHARD: It's still in me. The Kryptonite that powered Metallo. It's spread throughout my entire body, Clark. I had three different hospitals run tests in LA to confirm it. None of them understood how I'm not dead already of cancer. So I have to stay away from my son, not because I love him less, not because I'm a bad father, but because if he stays with me for too long he's going to get weaker and weaker until eventually...he'll die.

Clark says nothing. What is there to say? He glances back at Jason, peacefully asleep, and at where he is sitting, the seat Richard insisted he use for the trip. The seat furthest from him.

RICHARD: I guess you really *are* powerless, or you wouldn't be able to sit so close. (*sighs*) I hope we find what you're looking for, Clark. If there's one thing that all this with Batman has proved, it's that Lois was right. The world doesn't need *a* Superman. It needs Superman himself. Jason does too.

CLARK: Jason's got two. He's a lucky kid.

RICHARD: (*bitterly*) Yeah. I'm a real hero. I didn't realise intelligence went out with the heat vision.

CLARK: You should have *told* us, Richard.

RICHARD: And what could you have done?

CLARK: Honestly, I don't know. But I promise you this - I'll try. With everything I have, I'll try to fix this. You deserve that. Jason deserves that.

Richard glances across. He smiles, and nods.

RICHARD: Thank you.

We cut to an outside view of the plane as it continues to skim across the skies.

Act III, Scene II

The Daily Planet building. Lois enters Perry's office. Perry, on the phone, motions for her to take a seat. She does so.

PERRY: Send him up, then, if he's insisting on it!

He slams the phone down and sighs heavily with his head in his hands before raising his eyes to take in Lois. She frowns.

LOIS: What's up, Chief?

PERRY: The *Planet* owners. They're threatening to pull the plug. Our numbers are so bad and with Superman gone...*(he waves his hands helplessly)* they're threatening to sell.

LOIS: Sell? Sell to who? Who's gonna buy a newspaper in a time like this?

Perry's eyes flit away from Lois and out of his office. Lois follows his gaze and sees a man exit the elevator and scan the newsroom before him with an evidently unimpressed result. He catches sight of Perry through the office windows and begins to walk in their direction.

LOIS: No. *Morgan Edge*? You're joking, right? The guy's a creep! And he's dirty!

PERRY: Prove me something I don't know.

Edge reaches the door and opens it, without waiting to be invited in. He walks inside and regards Lois and disregards her an instant later, walking past her and to Perry's desk so he can loom over the editor-in-chief more efficiently. We see Lois lean to the side so she can see past Edge's body and to Perry, who glowers up at the newcomer.

EDGE: Perry. Fire that receptionist will you? It's not every day a billionaire finds himself told he needs an appointment to see a newspaper editor. Particularly when he's a few hours and a handshake from becoming that editor's new boss.

PERRY: Sit down, Morgan.

EDGE: I prefer to stand, if it's all the same to you. I won't be staying long anyway.

PERRY: *(very insincerely)* Oh. Really? Shame...

EDGE: I'm here to ask for you to give the board your recommendation that they sell to me. They will eventually anyway, but there has been some dithering, and I know your approval will move things along. Can I count on it?

PERRY: Can you count to zero?

Edge's face darkens. It is not a nice transformation.

EDGE: Don't be naive, Perry. My *Gotham Tribune* is outselling you worldwide five to one. My WGBS network gets more ad revenues in an hour than you pull in in a month. Without Superman, you have nothing to offer, no USP. Joining Global Network under my banner will be a challenge. Of course, if you, if the *Planet* isn't up to that challenge...well, business is business. Survival of the fittest.

Perry gets up from his chair and stands toe-to-toe with Edge. Lois watches all of this, spellbound.

PERRY: This paper has existed since 1775. *George Washington* wrote a guest editorial for its first edition. No-one had heard of Superman, Batman, or anything remotely resembling them. And by God, so long as there is strength in my body and so long as I have access to a printing press and to talented writers *(he glances at Lois)* there will be an edition of the *Daily Planet* hitting the newsstands across this great city until you, me and Superman himself are distant memories. Now get. The *hell*. Out. Of my office.

EDGE: You'll regret this, Perry. Believe me.

He turns and walks out, taking a moment to wither Lois with a poisonous glance in her

direction. As he walks out the door, slamming it behind him, Lois jabs out her tongue at his retreating back. She turns to Perry.

LOIS: That was amazing, Perry! You sure-

But Perry looks far from triumphant. He's slumped in his chair. As Lois trails off, he raises his head to look at her, hopelessness in his eyes.

PERRY: Save it, Lois. He's right. I just couldn't bear to let him see that I knew it.

LOIS: No way, Chief! Look. Do what you can to stall the owners making that sale. Clark and I have a lead on Superman.

PERRY: *(sitting bolt upright)* Great Caesar's Ghost! Why didn't you say so?!

LOIS: Because it's only a lead. But it's something. Clark's off...investigating. But I have a few ideas of my own. Hang in there, kay?

PERRY: *Hang in there?* Let me simplify this for you, Lane - you underling, me editor. Now get out there and get to work!

LOIS: *(rolling her eyes)* Sure thing, Chief. Good to have you back.

She exits Perry's office and scans the newsroom floor, eventually finding what she's looking for.

LOIS: Jimmy!

Jimmy Olsen is standing before her in moments. He looks nervous, but also waiting to be disappointed, as he was before when called into the meeting room to fetch the pastries order.

JIMMY: Yeah?

LOIS: I have a big job for you.

Jimmy sighs. He fishes out a notebook.

JIMMY: Black? White? Latté? Jelly? Sprinkles?

Lois puts her arm around his shoulders. Jimmy's eyes bug.

LOIS: Undercover...

Act III, Scene III

Gotham. Mayor Garcia's office. Commissioner Gordon is there, and he's not happy. Not even a little bit. He paces around the room as he talks, while Mayor Garcia sits calmly and impassively as he listens to what Gordon has to say.

GORDON: It's absolutely out of the question.

GARCIA: I fail to see why, Commissioner. The CCTV footage proves Batman's innocence. It's all over the news.

GORDON: Yeah. *Amazing* sources those news guys have these days.

GARCIA: Astonishing. But given the footage, why can't we scale back the manhunt, the arrest warrant, to...uh...*(he coughs delicately)* previous levels? Say, before the Joker killings levels?

GORDON: You want us to *work* with him again? *(shakes his head)* No. And it's not easy for me to say that. I supported him more than just about anyone, and you damn well know I did. But things have changed.

He produces a folder and drops it on Garcia's desk. Photos tumble out - photographs of corpses and injured, some with necks broken, some covered in horrific burns.

GORDON: I had a guy give himself up last night. Crawled into the nearest precinct, left a trail of blood for six blocks. A mugger. Said Batman stopped the mugging he and his partner were about to commit.

GARCIA: That monster! Well, I'm convinced! *(lifts his phone)* All units! Arrest the Batman at once!

GORDON: Not content with stopping the mugging, Batman insisted he and his partner *kneel* before him. And when his partner hesitated, Batman did *this-*

He produces another photograph, of the dead mugger in the alley, his neck broken in several places, his body contorted in the rictus of death. Garcia looks at the picture, and replaces the phone.

GARCIA: Is there any proof? That Batman did this?

GORDON: *Proof?* After what he did to those gang members?! Most of them were lucky to make it out alive!

GARCIA: *All* of them were armed to the teeth with weapons they were hellbent on using to bring this city to its knees, Commissioner. Weapons you and your unit had done little to stem the tide of.

GORDON: I'm telling you something is wrong. Very wrong. A week ago if you'd told me Batman would be the hero of Gotham again I'd have been the first to raise a glass. But not now. Inviting him back into the city's good graces is a mistake.

GARCIA: I disagree. And I'm asking you once again - drop the manhunt. Call off the dogs.

GORDON: And I'm telling you again. My answer is no.

GARCIA: Duly noted, Commissioner. I expect your letter of resignation on my desk by this time tomorrow. We're done here. Thank you for your time.

He gestures to the door. Gordon looks at him with disgust and walks toward it, stopping as he walks through only to say-

GORDON: Keep the pictures. We'll have plenty more before long.

He walks away. The door clicks shut, and Garcia is alone in his office. He smiles to himself, shakes his head, and retrieves some papers from the top of his 'In' tray, gets a pen, and begins making notes and signing his name. He pushes Gordon's photos into a pile and to

the far edge of his desk to give himself room to work.

There is a breeze. The curtains to his office's window flutter for a second. Garcia doesn't glance over, doesn't give it a second thought.

Until the shadow falls across him, across his desk. The shadow with pointed ears. The nib of Garcia's fountain pen shatters as his hand reflexively constricts. He takes a breath before looking up, and as expected, Batman stands in his room, imposing, silent and invincible.

GARCIA: It's an honour to meet you-

BATMAN: We've met before.

GARCIA: I don't think so...

BATMAN: I was someone different at the time.

GARCIA: Someone...different?

BATMAN: At the time I was convinced I needed to hide behind a 'normal' life. That's changed. I have nothing to fear now. Now they fear me.

GARCIA: Y-yes, I can definitely see why they-

BATMAN: Speak to Gotham. In time I'll do it myself, but these things take adjustment.

GARCIA: Speak to Gotham? You mean make an address? Saying what?

BATMAN: Telling them that crime won't be tolerated.

GARCIA: Yes. Yes, excellent. Faith in the police is at an all-time low, and your endorsement-

BATMAN: I'm not talking about the police. Gotham has no need for the police. Or prisons. *(pause)* Or Arkham.

GARCIA: *(laughing nervously)* I don't know what you-

BATMAN: At 8pm tomorrow night, you and your authorities will arrange for every single prisoner in Gotham Penitentiary, every single inmate of Arkham, to be set free.

GARCIA: Are you *insane?! The entire city would be overrun with lunatics! We'd have anarchy on our hands! No...no, it's crazy!*

BATMAN: Do it. Or I will remove their bonds myself. It seems you forget that Gotham and its people have *me* to protect it. When you make your address, tell the people that. And tell them that crime will not be tolerated. Anyone who violates the law will be dealt with.

Garcia's eyes flick down to the pictures spread out over the desk. The broken corpses. The burns. The mugger with the snapped neck. He licks suddenly dry lips.

GARCIA: Dealt with?

Batman picks up the photo of the mugger. His eyes glow red. Twin streaks of heat vision lance out and incinerate the photograph, going right through it in an instant and striking the wall behind Garcia. He shoves himself out of the way of the heat vision, scared witless.

BATMAN: Dealt with. Make the address. 8pm tomorrow. My rule of Gotham begins then.

GARCIA: *(numbly)* Your rule...

He is gone out of the window in a second, leaving Garcia shaking and staring at the wall where the heat vision blasts hit.

On the wall is written, in scorch marks -

HELP ME.

KILL ME.

Garcia walks unsteadily over to the desk phone. He picks it up.

GARCIA: Commissioner Gordon just left my office. Get him back. Now. And book me in

for a public address. 8pm tomorrow night. (*snaps*) Do it! Get Gordon back here *now*, do you hear me!

He cuts the call and leans over his desk, sweating, only to be confronted with the photographic evidence of Batman's brutality that he had scoffed at and ignored mere moments earlier.

With a heave, he flings the entire contents onto the floor.

Act III, Scene IV

The Antarctic tundra. As the camera moves forward through the snow and ice and high winds, visibility increases until shapes loom out the white. We see Richard's plane. Richard, Clark and Jason are on the ice. Richard and Clark are wrapped up against the elements, whereas Jason's wearing only thin coverings. Richard looks uncomfortable at this.

Everyone has to shout slightly to be heard over the wind.

RICHARD: I keep getting the urge to wrap you up! You *sure* you're not freezing to death?

JASON: I'm fine! I'm...

He staggers a little, holding his head again. Clark and Richard look at each other.

CLARK: Come on! We'd better get moving inland before the weather gets any worse!

RICHARD: You've got the GPS and the satellite phone?

CLARK: *(holding them up)* Got 'em!

RICHARD: I'll stay here as long as I can! But I need to protect the plane, it might be our way out of here! So if I need to take off and land somewhere else, I have to!

CLARK: I understand!

JASON: Come on! It's over there! *(he points)* I can feel it! Can't you two feel it?!

Clark extends a hand but Richard surprises him by hugging him.

RICHARD: Look after him.

CLARK: I will.

He gets down to bid farewell to Jason, even as Clark clambers onto what looks like a sled and secures himself to it. As Richard speaks to Jason, we see him affixing straps to the boy.

RICHARD: You were right. It has been too long. I'm sorry.

JASON: I love you, Dad.

RICHARD: I love you too, son. Now *(he grins, if a little forcedly)* mush!

JASON: Hang on, Clark!

He turns and begins to run across the ice, no longer concerned with human speed, but now pulling Clark Kent along behind him on the sled with the supplies. Despite this weight dragging him back, he still rips across the surface much faster than sled dogs or even a snowmobile could hope to match.

Clark's head jerks back and we see his body bouncing along as he tries gamely to hold on.

We go back to Richard as he watches the strange sight of a small boy dragging an adult man on a sled into the tundra disappear into the distance. There's nothing but anguish written all over his face.

Act III, Scene V

Outside shot of the WGBS building. A piece of scaffolding exists around the hole at the top where the luckless gang member was incinerated.

Inside, Tania Moon is sitting at her desk, looking into a small compact mirror as she retouches her makeup. A young, nervous male assistant appears in the mirror behind her.

ASSISTANT: Uh, Miss Moon...?

TANIA: *(rolling her eyes, snapping the mirror shut)* Yes?

ASSISTANT: Your new camera operator is here. I thought you might wanna meet him and give him the, uh, *usual* instructions?

Tania stands. She's tall, leggy, dark-skinned, and pretty, and completely aware of each of these qualities. She flicks her hair and nails the assistant with another glance.

TANIA: Show me.

He takes her to an adjoining office.

ASSISTANT: He's in there.

She walks in, to find-

TANIA: Okay let me get a few things straight with you. I have one rule. I am the centre of the shot. I don't care what's going on behind me, understand? It could be the Hindenburg blossoming into flame. It could be a mushroom cloud over the White House. It could be Elvis rollerblading down Madison with Marilyn. I don't care. I am the centre of the shot. They can make room. Got it?

JIMMY: Got it.

It's Jimmy Olsen. He's in a suit, he's sweating profusely, and he's clutching a sheaf of papers. He's also completely and utterly in love at first sight.

TANIA: These your credentials?

JIMMY: Uh? *(looks down at papers)* Y-yes...

Tania snatches the papers from him and scans through them. Jimmy looks nervous, and as we go closer on his face, we turn until we're actually going inside his right ear. A tiny little device is inside.

We cut to Lois, parked outside the WGBS building in her car. She's in front of a laptop, has an earpiece of her own which she keeps pressed into her ear and a microphone, which she speaks into now. There's a picture of the WGBS building on the laptop screen.

LOIS: Relax, Jimmy. If there's one thing I can do, it's forge a CV. How do you think I got hired at the *Planet* in the first place?

Back to Jimmy. Tania's eyes are still scanning the documents ahead of her. And Jimmy's eyes are scanning in front of him, too...

LOIS: *(V/O)* Eyes up, Olsen.

Jimmy's eyes leap like salmon up a waterfall, back to a respectable viewing height just as Tania finishes reading the CV. She seems grudgingly impressed.

TANIA: Not bad. Though you don't look old enough for Tiannamen Square.

Lois bites her lip.

JIMMY: I moisturise.

TANIA: Huh. Well, go get yourself kitted out. Word has it those guys with the pocket bazookas aren't done with Metropolis yet. Welcome to WGBS.

She turns with a hair-flick and walks out. We see her do it in slow-motion as Jimmy looks on adoringly.

LOIS: *(V/O)* Jimmy.

He doesn't reply.

LOIS: (V/O) Jimmy!

JIMMY: (murmurs, snapping out of it somewhat reluctantly) Okay, okay. What now.

We go to Lois. She's got a detailed schematic of the WGBS building on the laptop in front of her. Her fingers fly on the keyboard.

We follow Jimmy as he winds his way through the corridors of WGBS. Security and staff occasionally pause to give him questioning looks, but he flashes his shiny new WGBS pass at them and they seem satisfied. Lois talks to him through the headset and earpiece, tracing a line on the schematic in front of her, until finally Jimmy reaches an office doorway, after having watched a guard walk past and disappear around a corner. MORGAN EDGE is written on the door. Jimmy swallows.

JIMMY: I'm here.

LOIS: Okay. You probably won't have much time, Jimmy.

Jimmy reaches into his pockets and produces a small device. He presses it to the doorway and it begins softly beeping almost immediately. Lights flash across its surface.

LOIS: (V/O) (urgently) You didn't let anyone touch that thing, did you Jimmy? Besides you?

JIMMY: Course not. Where'd you get this stuff anyway...

LOIS: S.T.A.R. labs. Here's a tip, Jimmy. *Always* give favourable write-ups to scientists. (pause) 'Cept the mad ones.

The device stops beeping and flashes white. Jimmy removes it from the door, pockets it, closes his eyes, swallows, and pulls down the handle...

..the door opens. Jimmy exhales. Footsteps are heard from around the corner. Jimmy gets inside the room and closes the door softly behind him just as the guard re-appears. He waits until the footsteps retreat into the distance before taking a proper look around. Morgan Edge's office is huge, spacious, luxurious, with greenery, a fish tank built into the wall, floor-to-ceiling windows of Metropolis and a killer view. On the desk a PC sits.

JIMMY: Okay. I'm in.

LOIS: Just like we rehearsed, Jimmy.

Jimmy nods. He retrieves a USB key and inserts it into the PC. Immediately a window opens on Lois' laptop that says SYNCHRONISING...SYNCHRONISING...

JIMMY: Done. What now?

Lois doesn't reply, so Jimmy begins looking around. He lifts a few of the things sitting on Morgan's desk, including a squat little machine with a hole in one end. He puts a pencil inside and we hear a whirring as it's sharpened instantly.

Jimmy makes an impressed face. He pulls out a fountain pen from his pocket and slowly, inexorably, his eyes are dragged back to the sharpening machine...

JIMMY: Lois?

He toys with the notion of putting the pen into the machine. As we cut to Lois, we see her eyes wide. A limousine has just pulled up to the WGBS building. Morgan Edge steps out with three of his bodyguards. He walks inside.

LOIS: Jimmy...don't panic. Edge is back. He's on his way up.

She closes her eyes in despair as we hear the distinct sounds of a Jimmy Olsen panic come down the transmission line. We stay with Lois.

LOIS: Jimmy! Stay with me. The connection between Edge's PC and mine isn't up yet. I need you to wait. Plant the bug on his desk.

JIMMY: (V/O) Bug???

LOIS: I gave it to you earlier. The pen?

Back to Jimmy. He's looking down at the inky remains of a fountain pen, shredded to pieces.

JIMMY: Aw, *crap*. Uh, Lois...the pen's kinda, uh...

He examines the remains. Wires dangle from the pen's tube. He sweeps up the debris and drops it into the wastepaper bin.

JIMMY: ...out of action.

The window on Lois's desktop now says SYNCHRONISED.

LOIS: Connection's established. Get the key and get outta there!

Jimmy, not needing to be told twice, yanks the USB key free from the PC and dashes to the door. He opens it a crack - and the guard comes around the corner, forcing Jimmy to close the door again until the guard makes his sweep of the corridor. When he's gone, Jimmy re-opens the door - only for the elevator doors to 'ding' open and for Morgan Edge to emerge and head directly towards him.

JIMMY: Oh God oh God oh God oh God-

He dashes around the room, desperately looking for a place to hide, until he happens upon a walk-in closet containing suits. He hides amongst them, closing the door behind him, just as the main office door opens and closes.

We follow Morgan Edge as he enters the office, alone, his bodyguards standing outside. He walks to his desk, sits down, and immediately picks up his phone. We cut to Jimmy in his hiding place as we hear Morgan's voice outside, not loud enough to pick up any of what he's saying.

LOIS: (V/O) Jimmy - wherever you are, you have to get closer. I can't hear a thing.

We cut to Lois as she begins to explore the contents of Morgan's private network. Files and folders are everywhere - it's a maze. Lois clicks from one to another, trying to find something, anything.

JIMMY: (*whispering as loud as he dares*) Closer? Are you crazy?!

LOIS: (V/O) Jimmy do you want to be the one Perry sends for coffee forever?! You do this, you get this scoop, you get us something we can use on Edge, and I promise you Perry White is gonna think the sun shines out of your aperture. Now *do* it!

Jimmy gulps, but he slides forward and inches the closet door open a crack. The sound of Morgan's voice is much less muffled now.

We cut to Lois in the car as Morgan's voice filters through to her. She's just opened a folder called WWOR. In it is a document called PROJECT DARKSEID. She double-clicks...

EDGE: (V/O) Tonight. I want the entire building razed to the ground, do you hear me? Topple that globe. There'll be no Superman here to catch it this time. If I can't have the *Planet*, I'll destroy it.

And that's when the alarms go off.

Lois' laptop receives a massive power surge, the screen cracking and warping before her horrified gaze. It bursts into flames. Lois squawks in alarm and tosses the laptop out the driver's side window so it lands on the sidewalk beside her car.

In Morgan's office, alarms continue to whoop. The security guards rush in as Morgan leaps to his feet, fanning out to cover him.

MORGAN: (*barking into the intercom*) Network hack! Lock it down! Trace the signal!

He glares at his screens for a moment, then starts scanning his office, motioning to his guards to start fanning out. Jimmy retreats as far as he possibly can into the suits hanging in the walk-in closet.

JIMMY: Lois...Lois help me...

We cut to Lois. She looks grim as she opens the car door.

LOIS: I'm coming, Jimmy.

The closet door opens. We see a flash of Jimmy Olsen's terrified face for a moment before we go back to Lois.

LOIS: Jimmy? Jimmy?!

More guards run out from the front entrance of the WGBS tower. One looks suspiciously at Lois - and then his eyes travel downward to where she's standing. Right beside a still-smoking laptop.

GUARD: Get her!

His companions start to run toward Lois. She scrambles back into her car and guns the engine, barely managing to get away before they reach her. As she pulls away, two WGBS vans screech from the underground car park and begin to pursue her. They're not filled with the usual journalists and camera operators, however, as evidenced when a bullet shatters her back windshield.

Far above, Morgan Edge watches from his penthouse window as Lois' car winds its way through the traffic. He speaks into a radio communicator.

EDGE: No shoot to kill! I want her alive. I have to know what she knows.

He turns back to Jimmy, who's being held by two of his security guards. Jimmy is absolutely scared out of his wits, but is doing his best to put on a brave face.

JIMMY: You can't just shoot at people in the middle of Metropolis! The police will-

EDGE: (*chuckles*) Kid, the police are too busy trying to clean up the wreckage of the attacks. There's not a cop for five blocks. Besides, who's going to run the story? I own this town's news. Now...as for you...

His smile vanishes. He reaches out and takes Jimmy's WGBS ID badge from his shirt.

EDGE: ...an employee? Tut. Tell me, "Jimmy Olsen", was our...severance policy...ever explained to you?

We cut back to the car chase. Lois is weaving in and out of traffic as best she can, and doing quite a decent job. She ducks her little compact between several rows and across a busy intersection, and one of the chasing vans is taken out by a heavy rig coming across from the left, jack-knifing it so the trailer swings around. The second van barely avoids the outswinging trailer, skidding to a halt beside the exit ramp for the harbour. The driver of the second van takes a second to appreciate his escape...and then his partner points.

DRIVER: What the-

It's Lois. She's spun the car around and far from fleeing, she's actually driving straight for the second van, ready to hit it side-on. The passenger leans out and sprays the onrushing car with bullets, and Lois ducks down, glass covering her.

But it's too late. The driver and his passenger raise their arms to shield themselves but Lois' vehicle crunches into them, knocking them backwards and right over the exit ramp and into the waters of Metropolis bay below.

We stay on Lois' car. The airbag has deployed and for a moment, despite this, we fear that Lois is seriously injured. But no. She raises her head, battered and bloodied but alive.

And SERIOUSLY pissed.

Back at the intersection pile-up, one of the chasing goons is crawling free of the first van, holding his side and moaning, his other hand clutching something.

LOIS: Hey.

He turns, and goggles in astonishment to see-

LOIS: Can I borrow that?

She punches him in the jaw, laying him out, catching the radio in a neat motion as it falls from his unconscious hand.

LOIS: Damsel in distress my ass.

She presses the call button and raises the radio to her mouth.

We go back to Edge's office. His two guards have an arm and a leg of Jimmy Olsen each so he's suspended off the ground. Edge is down on his haunches, talking conversationally to him.

EDGE: One last time, kid. Who are you and who are you working for?

JIMMY: I've told you! My-my-my name is Jimmy Olsen and I work for the *Daily Planet!*

EDGE: (*pats Jimmy on the head*) Okay. I believe you, son. I believe you. Now, about that severance.

He stands up and nods to his men.

EDGE: Toss him out the window.

JIMMY: NO!

The goons don't listen. They begin to rush Jimmy headfirst toward the windows at the edge of the office. Edge's radio crackles into life.

LOIS: (*V/O*) What's Project Darkseid, Morgan?

EDGE: STOP!

Jimmy's progress toward certain death is arrested - just. Edge operates the radio.

EDGE: Let's see. If this cretin is telling the truth about being from the *Planet*, then that would probably make you Lois Lane. Am I right?

We cut to Lois, currently hotwiring a parked car.

LOIS: Ten out of ten.

EDGE: I'm amazed, Miss Lane. I was given to understand you couldn't blow your nose without Captain Spicurl around. And yet here you are.

LOIS: You ain't seen nothing yet, Morgan. So here's the deal. I'm going to drive to WGBS tower, and park outside. You're going to send Jimmy out and he's going to get into my car and we're going to drive off.

MORGAN: Oh I see. Of course. Obvious really. And I'd let you do this, why?

LOIS: Come on. I had Jimmy here waltz through your headquarters' security for fun. You seriously think I hadn't planned for this too?

EDGE: Interesting point, Miss Lane...

Edge looks to Jimmy, still suspended. He nods to the goons. They drop Jimmy, and he stands, looking as if he's about to collapse at any given moment.

EDGE: How did you get past security?

Jimmy manages to retrieve the door opening device and hands it to Edge, who takes it from him and examines it.

EDGE: Cute. Pointless, but cute.

LOIS: You're right. Get rid of it.

Edge tries. It's affixed to his hand. He tries again, still to no avail. Lights flash across the device's surface. Edge begins to look distinctly worried by this new development.

LOIS: Real cute, huh? And you should see the amount of high explosive in there. Positively *dinky*.

We cut to outside WGBS Tower. Lois' new car pulls up. After a few anxious moments, Jimmy Olsen walks through the entrance doors. Armed guards flank him on either side, following his every movement, something he's only too acutely aware of. Eventually he gets to Lois' car and gets inside.

EDGE: (V/O) Disarm this thing!

LOIS: Ouch. Y'know, *disarm* might be an unfortunate turn of phrase there Morgan... *She switches off the radio and they set off at high speed.*

JIMMY: I'm alive. I'm alive oh God I'm still alive thank you God thank you Lois I love you did I mention I love you? (*beat*) Um, where are we going? Cos, uh, a hospital would be good. Or a bar. Yeah. A bar would be *great*.

LOIS: To the *Planet*. We have to warn them what's coming. We have to get help somehow. Plus, the detonator for that explosive was on the Kentucky Fried Laptop. Figure we have about ten minutes before Morgan works that out...

We cut away on Jimmy's expression of horror, terror and admiration as he realises Lois just won his freedom on a bluff.

Act III, Scene VI

Blackgate Penitentiary, Gotham. The huge and forbidding complex is located on an island in Gotham Bay. We see Commissioner Gordon arriving by boat and cut to him being driven inside the main walls, flashing his ID to the guards. We cut to him walking inside and meeting up with a burly red-haired man as they walk around the prison. The inmates are in their cells and cries of 'go to hell, Gordon!' and variations of the same theme ring out as the two men walk.

WALDEN: What are we meant to do here, Gordon?

They have stopped in a quiet place, on one of the top floors, the entire square of the prison laid out below them, a maze of gridded floors and stark cells, each containing a member of Gotham's underworld. Gordon leans on the guardrail and looks down into the pit of criminality below him.

WALDEN: What does the Mayor suggest?

GORDON: (*grunts*) Suggest? Are you kidding? Garcia's tried to skip town twice since Batman came to visit. I've had to put two men on him to remind him of his civic duty.

More catcalls and threats come their way from below, most of them directed at Gordon. He looks down thoughtfully.

WALDEN: We could...

GORDON: Yeah. We could.

We cut to Gordon in Walden's office. He raises an old-style broadcasting microphone to his lips.

GORDON: Attention. This is Commissioner Gordon.

The prison falls silent as his voice carries throughout, broadcast from speakers scattered throughout the levels, in cells. A few jeers are heard and quickly shushed as inmates crowd around to hear what he has to say.

GORDON: At 8pm tonight, Gotham City will hand over control of law and order, enforcement and judiciary, to Batman. As a consequence of this, you have been deemed no longer a danger to Gotham society and you will be free to leave this prison, should you so choose-

He gets no further. Blackgate erupts. Prisoners jump up and down. Those in communal areas pump the air and high-five, shaking their heads, hardly able to believe their ears.

We go back to Gordon. He waits for the uproar to subside and then he smiles.

GORDON: I should point out that the moment you leave this prison, you will cease to be under our protection. Not only will Batman be given the powers to enforce the law, he will also decide on the correct punishment for offenders.

His latest statement is met with a deafening silence as total as the wall of noise was noisy bare moments before. Prisoners look up at the speakers and at each other, the full implications of what Gordon has just said sinking in.

GORDON: Your choice, gentlemen. Gordon out.

WALDEN: (*wiping sweat from his forehead*) You got stones big as church bells, Gordon, I'll give you that. You really think this is gonna work?

GORDON: Not on all of them. Not on the dumber ones. But on enough to give us some time.

WALDEN: Time?

GORDON: Time to get our city back. Somehow.

We cut to Gordon getting back into the car again, ready to go to the jetty to go back to

Gotham city proper. Walden has come to see him off. They shake hands.

GORDON: Good luck, Governor.

WALDEN: Don't worry about Blackgate, Commissioner.

Gordon gets into the car. He's a deeply worried man, and the diplomatically optimistic face he was putting on for Walden's benefit melts away immediately.

GORDON: *(muttering)* Blackgate's not the problem...

Act III, Scene VII

Arkham Asylum. Dr. Harleen Quinzel has just finished a phone call. She puts the phone down and begins jumping up and down like an excited toddler. She bursts through the doors of the telephone room and begins running down the corridor until she reaches a particular cell.

She goes inside. The door closes. We don't follow her inside, we just hear her voice through the observation port.

DR. QUINZEL: You're not gonna *believe* it!!!

JOKER: (V/O) Harley...my dear...you will be *amazed* at what I'm willing to believe.

We cut to outside Arkham. Five hundred feet above it, in fact, where Batman hovers in mid-air, cape extended.

Waiting.

Act III, Scene VIII

The scene starts in darkness, with only the distant noise of a howling wind to give us some orientation as to where we are.

And then, a voice. It's Jason's.

JASON: The whole place is dark!

The moment he says it, however, he's proven wrong; illumination grows around where he's standing, a little puddle of light that pulses weakly until it seems to strengthen and spread out, tendrils of luminosity filling the interior of the space in which they stand, which is, of course, the Fortress of Solitude.

Clark appears behind Jason in the doorway. He unzips his heavy parka to be able to talk, having no need for shelter from the extreme cold of the elements outside within the artificially heated structure.

CLARK: Jason! Stay close to me.

Jason complies, but can't keep his attention from wandering to take in the wondrous, cavernous space coming to life around them.

JASON: It's so much bigger than the last one...

CLARK: (*darkly*) And less safe...

JASON: I don't see this Eradicator guy. I thought he was-?

CLARK: I don't know. I woke up in Gotham, Jason. I've no idea what happened here after I was-

As the memory comes back, he begins to jog over to the far end of the Fortress and to the area where the Red Sun chamber emerged from the floor beneath. Nothing is there now. Clark walks around, in desperation.

CLARK: It's not here...!

JASON: The controls are up there. On the observation thingy. Right?

Clark looks at the boy.

CLARK: Yes, I think so. How did you-?

JASON: I...don't know. It's weird. I feel like some part of me is home in this place. Home and safe and warm.

ERADICATOR: That's because this *is* home.

He fades into existence, not ten feet in front of them. He remains translucent, and looks a good deal more gaunt and drawn than the last time we saw him in the 'flesh', so to speak. Clark steps in front of Jason, who steps in front of Clark, who steps in front of Jason with a warning look.

CLARK: I'm warning you-

ERADICATOR: I have nothing to fear from you, Kal-El.

He moves toward them both. Clark takes a breath, obviously steeling himself for battle, no matter how swift or hopeless. But the Eradicator stops.

ERADICATOR: And you have nothing to fear from me. And nothing to gain. I will no longer oppose the House of El. I was mistaken to ever have done so. For what it may be worth, you have my apologies.

Clark absorbs this, somewhat surprised. His stance remains cautious and battle-ready, though what he could hope to accomplish in his current powerless state is doubtful.

ERADICATOR: I had intended to let the energy of this Fortress, and myself, wind down and perish. Your arrival has awoken me. Yet I fear I have no good news to impart.

CLARK: I need my powers back.

ERADICATOR: That can only be done willingly. With your powers, your strength, Zod could easily resist any effort to bring him here and confine him in the chamber by force. It is impossible. My power levels are almost completely depleted, though even at full strength I would not-

He gets no further. Clark interrupts.

CLARK: *Zod? Did you say Zod?*

ERADICATOR: Yes.

CLARK: But - Zod is dead. I saw it - was almost unconscious but I *saw* it! I saw you blow him apart!

ERADICATOR: *(shaking his head sadly)* No. Zod's mind lives on within the human who stepped into the chamber. The strength of his mind will quickly have dominated his human host.

CLARK: *(horrified)* Are you telling me that Batman has *my* powers and the mind of General Zod? A planet-destroying genocidal lunatic?

ERADICATOR: I'm sorry.

CLARK: Sorry! You're *sorry*?!!

Clark takes an involuntary step backward, almost collapsing under the strain. He looks genuinely lost, lost for ideas, lost for a way forward. He looks at his surroundings, at the Eradicator, trying to find comfort or inspiration from somewhere.

CLARK: We're screwed. I've lost.

He sits down on the surface of the Fortress, putting his head in his hands in despair. We leave him like that for a moment as Jason steps into shot, looking the Eradicator up and down. The sentient computer program returns the gesture.

JASON: Hi.

ERADICATOR: Greetings.

JASON: How come I know you?

ERADICATOR: You've dreamed of me. Of your home.

Clark raises his head, panic replacing the despair in his eyes.

JASON: Home?

CLARK: Jason, don't listen to him-

The Eradicator sweeps a hand, and the interior of the Fortress, as before, is replaced with a holographic simulation of the surface of Krypton. Jason looks around at the crystalline landscape, the gleaming cities, the advanced technology, the bright red star burning directly overhead. Clark reaches him and tries to pull him away.

CLARK: Jason, we have to go-

He can't budge the boy, try as he might. Jason looks up at him for a moment, and then back at the Eradicator.

JASON: Krypton?

ERADICATOR: Yes.

JASON: Home?

ERADICATOR: Yes.

CLARK: Jason-

And Jason looks back up at him, not with accusing eyes, not with outrage, not with anger or confusion or betrayal. With love.

And a certain amount of 'gimme a break' thrown in for good measure.

JASON: *(gently)* Clark...I'm a kid. I'm not an idiot.

Clark's mouth opens. For the second time in as many moments, he's at a complete and total loss for words. Jason's sardonic expression fades a little and now a little bit of vulnerability does shine through as he speaks again.

JASON: I figured it out. Yay for me. And I kinda waited, you know, for you or Mom or D...Dad... (*he hesitates*) to tell me. Officially. And you didn't and I thought wow, either they think I'm *real* stupid or they're real nervous about it. And I got to thinking about it and how I felt about it, and I guess, um-

And just like that he begins to cry, softly but insistently. Clark drops to his knees in front of him, his hands on Jason's shoulders, his face a wordless expression of sympathy.

JASON: I just wanna know if it's okay. Is it okay? I kept wanting to ask, if it would be okay, if you'd get mad-

CLARK: If what? If what is okay?

Jason sniffs, and composes himself, and rubs his red-rimmed eyes as best he can as he looks at Clark Kent.

JASON: (*quietly*) He was my Dad first.

Clark listens to this and is speechless for a reply. But Jason hasn't finished talking, in that same low, insistent voice.

JASON: He was my Dad when I was just a little kid and he used to read me at nights and I know he and Mom aren't together and you and Mom are. And I'm okay with that. Really. Because...(*he fidgets*) because I love you, Clark. When I realised you were my father, I wasn't mad and I wasn't freaked out. But it's just - I want to know - want to check - is it okay if I still call Richard Dad...? Can I still do that and you won't get-

Clark hugs him, cutting off the remainder of the question. There are tears on his face too. The Eradicator watches the embrace.

CLARK: Of *course* it's okay. I don't want to take him from you, Jason. I never wanted that.

JASON: But he never wants to *see* me anymore...

CLARK: There's a reason for that. But it's not me and your Mom and it's *not you*, Jason. I swear. Your Dad still loves you.

Jason nods after a moment. He turns back to the Eradicator.

JASON: So you're gonna play ball now, huh? Not screw around with us anymore?

ERADICATOR: I will serve the House of El.

JASON: Prove it. Show me the thing Batman used.

ERADICATOR: As you wish.

He gestures. The Red Sun chambers rise beside where they stand.

CLARK: If there was some way to lure Batman here - but we don't have the time...

JASON: No. We don't.

And with that, Jason White leaps lightly a few feet into the air and mid-jump, he bops Clark Kent as gently as he dares on the back of the head. Clark wobbles for a moment and has time to look down at Jason with an expression of shock before his legs turn to jelly and he passes out.

Jason looks to the Eradicator with a slight frown on his face, as if wondering if the computer construct might pose a problem. But no protests are forthcoming.

ERADICATOR: Understand that if you do this, there are no guarantees that your abilities can ever be returned to you.

JASON: All I've ever wanted is to be a hero like him. I do this, even if I never lift another

Humvee my entire life, I've done something I can be proud of.

ERADICATOR: He will still be no match for his opponent. Your power levels are nowhere near that of an adult.

JASON: It'll be enough. He'll do it. I know he will.

He bends down and picks up Clark's body effortlessly.

JASON: He's my Dad.

Jason carries his father's body to the Red Sun chamber, placing him inside the booth gently. He smiles down at him.

We cut to Clark waking up in the destination booth a few moments later, looking along the power transfer line, following it to the transmission booth and seeing Jason's body crumpled within. He screams a soundless scream of protest even as the stored solar energy of his son is sucked out and passed to him, bathing him in radiant sunshine, entering every pore of his body.

As before, the lights across the Fortress die.

Fade out.

Act III, Scene IX

Richard White is at the controls of the plane. He curses under his breath at the hideous weather conditions all around him. The satellite phone beside him rings for attention. He has it answered and to his ear in a heartbeat.

RICHARD: Clark! Talk to me! How'd it go? Is Jason okay?

CLARK: (V/O) You have our position?

RICHARD: Sure, you're...uh...you're about four hundred feet south...uh...three hundred feet...*(whistles)* travelling pretty fast. You airborne again? I hope so, because there's no way in this world I can land this bird with visibility like it is.

CLARK: (V/O) Get as low as you can! And open the door!

Richard locks the controls for long enough to open the side door of the plane. He dips the nose of the plane and the altimeter drops to 300 feet...200 feet...100 feet...

RICHARD: *(under his breath)* Whatever you're doing, Kent, do it fast...

The plane rocks suddenly to the side and Richard glances back, alarmed, only to see Clark Kent hanging onto the open door with one hand, a bundle in the other. He swings around and into the aircraft, depositing the bundle as gently as is possible with the other. It unwraps itself to reveal Jason, swaddled in the middle of as many wraps and blankets as possible.

Richard's eyes bulge in alarm. He wants to let go of the controls and run to his boy, but of course that would be suicide, so he must resist that urge and fight the sticks to regain them the altitude they lost.

RICHARD: What the hell happened down there!

CLARK: Our son grew up. *(stroking Jason's sleeping face)* He's fine. He's unconscious. *He makes Jason comfortable, secures him, and then moves up to sit beside Richard in the cockpit. Immediately he winces in pain. Richard glances at him.*

RICHARD: Well *that's* gotta be a good sign...

CLARK: I'm not back to what I was. I can't fly.

RICHARD: I can. You better get to the back of the plane.

CLARK: Yeah, about the plane. I've got an idea-
The satellite phone rings again. Clark picks it up.

CLARK: Lois?

He listens in silence for a few moments.

CLARK: We'll be there in less than two hours. Jason is fine. He's sleeping. *(pause)* Not entirely. But it might be enough. I love you too. Goodbye.

RICHARD: Less than *two hours*??? Are you crazy?

CLARK: Lois is in trouble.

RICHARD: Stop the presses. Look, I wanna get there too, but we've got six thousand miles to cover!

CLARK: Yeah. About that-

He produces a crystal from his parka. Richard looks at it dubiously and then to Clark.

RICHARD: From the Fortress?

CLARK: We need all the help we can get. What's the worst that could happen?

RICHARD: *(with some finality)* Yup. We're all gonna die.

Clark places the crystal on the plane's dash. For a moment it just sits there. Richard and Clark look at it with some trepidation. Eventually Richard raises an eyebrow.

RICHARD: If you've got some water on you it could grow into an ass-ugly continent...

Without fuss, the crystal simply seems to dissolve into the plane. Richard cries out in alarm. Clark looks only slightly less concerned. The plane's engine noise changes. From the usual dull roar it seems to kick, to hesitate, to stall. Richard and Clark look at each other, the same thought going through both their minds-

That's when the engines roar back to life. And the plane is suddenly kicked forward as if from the steel toe-capped boots of God Himself. The instrumentation beneath Richard seems to flow and change fluidly. The plane even changes shape, going from a modest little clunker of a craft to a sleek, sexy, white-veined and otherworldly looking arrow, built for hypersonic flight. It climbs into the clouds and screams across the skies.

RICHARD: Look out, Metropolis...

Act III, Scene X

No dialogue, only music, as we see-

Metropolis residents running for their lives as masked men walk in a line down one of the city's avenues.

The WGBS news anchor speaking over a graphic of a circle contracting. The banner above reads SECOND WAVE OF INTERGANG METROPOLIS ATTACKS.

The centre of the circle fading to a shot of the exterior of the Daily Planet building. Its employees are fleeing the premises. Perry White urges them out, shouting, harrying, screaming at them to hurry up with their escape.

Police trying to call a halt to the relentless advance. National Guardsmen pull up in their armoured vehicles and there's a short standoff between them and the line of advancing gang members, until it becomes clear that the rooftops of nearby buildings are also filled with gang members holding the pocket launchers.

Missiles rip toward the Guardsmen and their transports.

Fireballs spiral.

We cut abruptly to two men entering a hidden elevator. As it descends, we see the men and their location. It's Lucius Fox and Alfred Pennyworth, and they're descending into the Batcave.

They emerge, and throw the switches to illuminate the cavernous interior.

LUCIUS: Never help build a Batcave without keeping yourself a spare access code.

ALFRED: I can't believe we're doing this.

Lucius accesses the nearest computer terminal, begins plugging in data entry modules. A huge graphic of Project Avatar appears on the screen. Lucius and Alfred look at each other.

LUCIUS: Time to call for the calvary.

In the Planet building, Perry watches as the foundations shake, and closes the door behind the last staff member to flee, leaving him by himself. He stares out at the city, and then turns on his heel and gets into the lobby elevator, emerging a few moments later into the newsroom.

He lifts a copy of the Daily Planet, a draft of the front page of tomorrow's paper. It reads DAILY PLANET DESTROYED!

LOIS: I got another one for ya.

PERRY: Lois? What are you doing here-! I told you to get out!

She hands him another front page. This one reads DAILY PLANET SAVED! Perry looks down at the headline and up at Lois.

LOIS: What are you doing here, Chief?

PERRY: I can't leave her, Lois. This paper has been my life. It's destroyed my marriage and it's swallowed my every free minute, but I love it. It's my heart. And I won't walk out that door and watch as they bring it down.

LOIS: Perry, this is just a *building*. The *Planet* isn't about concrete and steel, it's about convictions and truth. You may be her captain, but you don't have to go down with the ship, because the ship doesn't have to go down at all.

PERRY: Lois, I'm sixty-three years old and you're asking me to rebuild one of the world's biggest newspapers from nothing?

LOIS: Yeah. I am.

A smile slowly dawns over Perry White's face. Lois is relieved to see it. She grabs his arm.

LOIS: Now let's get the hell out of here.

They sprint for the elevators-

-and are knocked back by an explosion as the bombardment of the building begins. Windows shatter. Desks are knocked over and turned to kindling. Perry knocks Lois to the ground, sheltering her with his body as they scramble for the centre of the newsroom.

Outside, a ring of the masked men have now surrounded the entire building. Their leader steps forward, the barrel of his pocket launcher still smoking. He's looking up.

GANG LEADER: Is that a plane?

Our point of view climbs until we see that it is indeed a plane. Not just any plane though. Close up on Clark, as he stands at the open side door of the plane, hovering impossibly in place outside the newsroom floor of the Planet, by the hole in the wall the launcher just blew, as only a helicopter should be able to do. He looks down, then back at Richard in the cockpit, and at the still-unconscious Jason.

He takes off his glasses, and throws them to Richard.

CLARK: Time to get to work.

We pull back from the close-up and we see he's in full Superman regalia. He steps into empty air and plummets down toward the ground below.

RICHARD: Lois! Perry! Get in!

Lois and Perry stand up and look in disbelief at the white dart suspended in mid-air outside the hole in the Planet building. Richard, visible through the cockpit window, waves at them frantically to come on.

The gang leader's eyes open wide as the shape of Superman gets larger and larger, falling like a stone toward him and his men. His mouth forms the word FIRE and the pocket launchers of he and the men standing by him release their deadly payloads, multiple rockets shooting into the lower floors of the Planet building, some going higher-

Lois and Perry jump the six feet or so between the edge of the building and the safety of the Kryptonian-modified plane. The door seals shut on the side just as the rockets impact the newsroom they've only just left, consuming it in a fireball that engulfs the plane also.

Superman hits the ground feet-first, causing a shockwave and buckling the sidewalk where he impacts. He's knocked off his feet and sent sprawling, and by the time he's recovered only has time to turn his head upward to the scene of the explosion far overhead.

The fireball dissipates. And the plane is intact. It flies off.

Superman stands to face the twenty or so men assembled before him, a terrible expression of intent written all over his face.

GANG LEADER: Get him!!

Rockets fly. Superman dives to the left and right to avoid them and succeeds, but only succeeds in allowing the rockets meant for him to impact the ground floor of the Planet building, completely destroying the lobby and obliterating the foundations. The entire building begins to rumble.

Superman doesn't have time for that now. He moves at high speed, a blur, making a beeline for the gang members around him, stretching out an arm here, throwing an uppercut there. One member he picks up bodily and simply tosses the man into two of his companions. He impacts them so hard they are thrown thirty feet backward.

And a rocket impacts him dead centre in the back.

We see in slow-motion the effects of the explosion has at pointblank range. Despite his powers being increased beyond those of a normal human, Superman is still well below

normal strength at which he would have been stunned but able to shrug off the rocket impact; at this power level, he's blown straight through the already distressed Planet building, clean out the other side, sliding across the pavement, battered bruised and bloodied.

We cut to the roof of the Planet building. The surface is buckling crazily with the floors below going through immense strain. The struts holding the huge Planet globe in place stretch and snap, and the globe rolls ponderously and inevitably off the roof, heading straight for the prone figure of Superman below. He just has time to look up and throw up an instinctively protective arm in a vain attempt to shield himself from the surely fatal impact- And we cut, abruptly, to a young boy's bedroom.

He's playing an Xbox game and controlling his superhero - it's the same game as Jason was playing before. Something drops off the roof of the building his avatar is flying toward.

BOY: Ohhhhhh no you don't...

Pushing down on the joystick on his pad, he throws his avatar into a dive, tongue sticking out in concentration.

We cut to another bedroom, another boy. Playing the same game. Doing the same thing.

Another house. This time it's a middle-aged man. He's wearing the Live Communicator headset. His wife is standing behind him, dressed as if she's going out for the night. She taps her watch.

WIFE: Merrill!

MERRILL: Larisa! This is a live multiplayer event! Special invitation for *top players only!* They didn't even *announce* it! How cool is *that?!!*

WIFE: Goodbye Merrill.

As his wife walks out the door, Merrill's avatar catches the globe in tandem with other players. We see his controller shake with the feedback. Merrill wipes sweat from his brow.

We go back to Superman. He's still alive. He lowers his arm in astonishment and looks up...

...to see the Planet globe, suspended in mid-air by three black-suited Batmen. Each is wearing a pair of jet-boots billowing fire and smoke, allowing them to fly. As Superman looks closer, we can see that each Batman is entirely mechanical.

To say Superman is confused would be an understatement. However, he doesn't have much time to process it. Now on the other side of the Planet building, he's facing the other half of the gang and they're not about to let his stay of execution last for long. He's forced to jump thirty feet into the air to vault over three rockets that come his way, attaching himself to the side of the now-rapidly-disintegrating Planet building.

We go back to Merrill in his living room. He grins into his headset and then, all businesslike, taps his earpiece and adopts an extremely professional tone.

MERRIL: Wingmen, come in. Repeat, wingmen, come in.

The screen splits so the two boys we saw moments earlier playing the game in their bedrooms are now shown also.

BOY #1: I gotcha, Squad Leader.

BOY #2: Loud and clear, Kingpin. We going bowling?

MERRIL: You bet we are.

All three bash their joypads and we see, in the real world, the robots they're unwittingly controlling launch the Planet globe at the gang members. It crunches into the sidewalk and rolls toward the assembled gang, causing them to scatter in panic. Some aren't fast enough. Some are. Superman is able to deal with the rest.

MERRIL / BOY #1 / BOY #2: *(in unison) Strrrrrrrriike!*

Merril's unbridled joy turns to confusion as he watches on his screen a red & blue suited figure appear and begin taking out some of the gang.

MERRIL: Who the hell is *that* noob?

BOY #2: Beats me. Must be an NPC.

We go back to the Batcave, and to Alfred and Lucius, who are watching three feeds from the players. Lucius is shaking his head in wonderment. Alfred can't help but grin.

ALFRED: Our turn...?

Lucius nods.

The game ends for the three players and a message flashes up - MISSION SUCCESS! Merrill grins, but then the grin fades.

MERRIL: *(disgusted)* Huh? No Achievement Points?

Superman watches as the Daily Planet building tumbles, now in catastrophic collapse. His mouth is a thin line as the headquarters of the world's most respected broadsheet is reduced to rubble. He sees one of the gang members thought to be unconscious raise his head and takes a not inconsiderable amount of pleasure to laying the man back out again with one punch.

The dust settles. The Daily Planet building is no more. Superman stands amidst the wreckage of his civilian workplace.

Three pairs of black boots land at each of the points of a triangle around him. He looks from the face of one Batman automaton to the other, extremely wary.

SUPERMAN: Nice toys, Bruce.

AVATAR: They're not toys, mate.

Superman blinks. The voice coming from the robot standing in front of him doesn't speak with an American accent. It sounds Cockney.

AVATAR: Apparently they're Autonomous Version Airborne Tertiary Attack Robots. Or something like that. We call 'em AVATARs. Lucius can tell you more if you can follow 'alf of what he's banging on about. *(pause)* Yes, I'm asking him now. I'm *getting* to that, yes.

Superman absorbs this strangeness of a robot bickering with itself with a puzzled expression. The robot seems to be jerking its head back and forth as if receiving signals from two sources at once. But now it focuses its gaze back on Superman once more.

AVATAR: We need to talk. About Bruce.

SUPERMAN: Unless it's how you can help me stop him, not interested.

AVATAR: Well then. This is your lucky day, innit?

One of the robots standing behind Superman walks up behind him and puts its arms around him. Superman reacts.

AVATAR: Relax. It's just a lift. Time is of the essence here.

The three robots lift off, one carrying Superman. They rise into the Metropolis sky and level out, heading straight for Gotham.

SUPERMAN: How did you know I'd *need* a lift? Who are you?

AVATAR: Me?

We cut to Alfred, speaking into a microphone in the Batcave. He grins from ear to ear.

ALFRED: I'm just the help, sir. Just the help.

Act III, Scene XI

Metropolis airport. The plane has landed on one of the runways. Onboard, Jason White's eyes open. Lois and Richard are above him, smiling down. Lois has tears in her eyes. She hugs her son tightly.

JASON: Hey...

He sits up as Lois releases him, if a little woozily, and takes in where he is.

JASON: Um.

RICHARD: We redecorated while you were sleeping.

JASON: Where's Clark...?

PERRY: Yeah, where *is* Kent?

Jason notices Perry also aboard the plane for the first time. Richard and Lois send him a knowing look.

JASON: Uncle Perry!

PERRY: Hey, kid.

RICHARD: C'mon, Jason. Time to go.

He reaches down and lifts the boy gently. We cut to Richard carrying Jason down the steps of the plane as Lois and Perry also emerge.

RICHARD: How do you feel?

JASON: I don't know. It's...it's quiet. I think I can stand, Dad. I'm okay.

PERRY: Hey! Hey, over here!

He signals to some emergency vehicles that are driving toward them, jogging toward them.

Richard sets Jason down on the tarmac and the boy does indeed seem fit enough to stand up. Jason looks back at the Kryptonian aircraft they just emerged from with some element of recognition on his face.

JASON: It's from Krypton.

RICHARD: (*surprised*) Yeah. How did you know-

JASON: Because I am too.

Lois and Richard look at each other, and then down at Jason. He simply looks back at them.

LOIS: Who-

JASON: No one. I had it figured out, Mom. It's okay. I talked to Clark about it. (*to Richard*) You're still my Dad too. And you always can be. If you want. I was afraid if I told you I knew, you wouldn't be. (*he shrugs sheepishly*) But I guess that was-

RICHARD: Oh, Jason...

He hugs the boy. Jason hugs him back. Lois watches with her hand across her mouth. When Richard has finished the hug, he looks at Jason, amazed, and ruffles his hair.

RICHARD: No dizziness? You feel okay?

JASON: I'm fine, Dad. Why wouldn't I be?

RICHARD: (*wonderingly*) He did it. My God, he did it.

Perry runs back with the first of the emergency crew. He is pale and very visibly upset. A few of the paramedics run to Lois, Richard and Jason and begin checking them over as Perry speaks.

PERRY: The *Planet*...the entire building...it's gone.

LOIS: Cl...Superman?

PERRY: Survived. Took the gang out too by the sounds of it. Reports say he's going for

Gotham.

LOIS: Batman...

PARAMEDIC: *(to Richard)* Sir, you and your wife and son had better come with us. It might not be safe here.

LOIS: He's not my...

RICHARD: Safe?

The word seems to pull him from his stupor, and make him come to a realisation. He kisses Lois on the lips suddenly, before she can react. He pulls away and she simply stares at him, lost for words.

RICHARD: I'm sorry. Just, I...I had to do that. One more time. Don't tell Clark.

LOIS: Richard, I...

RICHARD: I know you don't. I have to go. I have to help him. I owe him. I owe him too much. We all do. *(to Jason)* I love you.

He turns and jogs over to the Kryptonian craft. Jason watches him go, confused.

JASON: Daddy!

He tries to break free of Lois, but for the first time in a long time, his mother is able to overpower him and stop him from wriggling free. We see the surprise in Jason's face, the frustration.

The craft powers up, the side door sealing, leaving Jason, Lois and Perry behind. Richard sits at the controls in the cockpit and takes a deep breath.

RICHARD: Alright, Krypton. Let's see what you got for me...

Act III, Scene XII

Wayne Manor. The sunlight is beginning to wane over Gotham Bay in the distance. Alfred Pennyworth and Lucius Fox stand in the grounds, looking up into the sky.

ALFRED: Here he comes.

LUCIUS: We sure about this?

ALFRED: Why? Got a better idea?

LUCIUS: *(accepting the truth of this)* Okay.

The lead Batman AVATAR gently lands in front of the two men, bringing Superman with it. He dismounts as gracefully as possible and immediately recognises one of the two men there to greet him.

SUPERMAN: Lucius Fox.

LUCIUS: It's an honour.

ALFRED: Alfred Pennyworth, at your service.

SUPERMAN: *(nodding to the AVATAR)* I recognise the voice. So. Bruce Wayne's most trusted business associate and the man who darns his socks, both offering to help me take him down. Is there something about his hiring practices I should know?

ALFRED: *(gesturing to Wayne Manor)* We don't have much time. Please. And, uh, I do a little more than darn his socks...

We cut to Superman, Alfred and Lucius emerging from the hidden elevator. Alfred reaches over and pulls a lever on the wall, setting off a series of huge halogen lights springing into life.

Superman walks into the Batcave in all its glory. Rebuilt and extended when Wayne Manor itself was rebuilt, the once-claustrophobic cavern has been hollowed out and made into what looks like the mirror opposite of the Fortress of Solitude; all blacks and greys as opposed to crystalline whites, but apart from the colour palette the theme is similar - technology abounds; there are several huge computer monitors, and to one side, poised like a tiger mid-spring, is a spare version of the Tumbler. Superman allows his eyes to settle on it.

SUPERMAN: Didn't I destroy that?

LUCIUS: One of them.

ALFRED: Tsk. Bloody billionaires, eh?

SUPERMAN: He built all of this?

ALFRED: We helped a bit. But yes, he did. Didn't trust any contractors to do it for obvious reasons so he spent nine months here, the first nine months of his exile after Mr. Dent died, down here, drilling, excavating. He slept down here almost every night. I brought him Thanksgiving turkey down here.

SUPERMAN: Why show me this? Why betray him?

LUCIUS: Because it's not him anymore. And I think you know it too, Mr. Kent.

SUPERMAN: *(conversationally)* Right. Figures. Is there *anyone* left who doesn't know who I am?

ALFRED: We kept one identity secret. We'll do the same for yours.

LUCIUS: He has your powers. Correct?

SUPERMAN: Yes.

LUCIUS: You seem to have regained some of your strength.

SUPERMAN: Not enough.

LUCIUS: Well.

We cut to the three men walking to a specific part of the cave, containing many different

varieties of Batsuit all fitted on life-size mannequins. Superman runs a hand over them.

LUCIUS: Let's see what we can do to even the odds a little more...

A montage begins of Superman being kitted out. As he's being suited up, we cut to other scenes across the city, including:

Garcia backstage at City Hall, checking his watch. It's 7:50pm. He looks sick with nerves, glancing out at the empty podium soon to be occupied.

Commissioner Gordon and his men, arranged in a loose perimeter around Arkham Asylum in the Narrows. Gordon checks his watch and looks up into the skies.

Superman tests out various devices integrated into his new suit, including the same jet-boots fitted to the AVATARS, projectile-firing wrist-mounted launchers etc.

Batman, hovering above the Narrows, the full Moon behind him, his cape billowing. The classic image of the Dark Knight.

Dr. Quinzel, carrying a bundle of something, rushes into the same cell in Arkham we saw her enter earlier. She beams manically and drops the bundle on the bench inside the cell, as its sole occupant stands with his back to her, looking out the window, up at the full Moon in the skies above with the Bat silhouette perfectly framed against it.

DR. QUINZEL: I gotcha what you wanted. All of it.

We see that the bundle she dropped on the bench is, amongst other things, a battered purple suit and a pair of white gloves.

DR. QUINZEL: Y'know I been thinking...maybe I could get a costume too?

JOKER: (without turning) Knock yourself out. Please.

She squeals in excitement and runs out of the cell, leaving him alone once more. He continues to stare out of the window.

JOKER: Full Moon always brings out the crazies...

He begins to laugh.

We go back to Wayne Manor, to Alfred and Lucius. They're looking at something off-camera.

ALFRED: Ready?

And we see Superman for the first time. He's wearing a remarkably Batman-esque outfit, covered almost head to toe in heavy shielded armour that looks as if it will stand up to all but the most fearsome blows. A hasty re-spraying job has been done on the colour scheme so that the bulk of the suit is very dark blue, with the exception of the boots and cape, both red. His head is uncovered but he's wearing a sort of visor across his eyes.

Two control sticks extend from the wrists of his suit, nestling in the palms of each of his hands.

SUPERMAN: Ready.

LUCIUS: (checking watch) 8 o'clock.

ALFRED: Godspeed, Mr. Kent.

SUPERMAN: Thank you. Both of you.

Both men nod, then retreat twenty or thirty feet. Superman looks straight up. We see through the visor he's looking through - it shows a tactical readout of everything he's seeing - threat assessment, distance to target, as well as displaying weaponry options. We see his thumbs working on the control sticks in his hands. A targeting receptacle appears and bursts into red life on the ceiling above his head.

He leaps into the air, a good forty or so feet up. His jet-boots ignite on the way up, maintaining his height, and with a flick of one of the switches on the control stick, hidden

launchers built into his armoured shoulders release two mini-missiles into the cave ceiling above. Debris spews forth and a hole appears, and gunning the throttle on his boots, Superman is through the gap and out into the open air.

Ready for the final battle.

Act III, Scene XIII

Outside Arkham Asylum, Commissioner Gordon's phone rings. He answers it.

ALFRED: (V/O) Commissioner. Remember me?

GORDON: His friend. I remember you.

ALFRED: You said it didn't matter what he looked like.

GORDON: That was when I trusted him.

ALFRED: Trust me now. Tell the Mayor to delay the press conference. Don't let any of the prisoners or inmates out.

GORDON: Know something I don't?

ALFRED: Look up.

We cut to Superman, leg rockets firing at maximum velocity. Gotham below him blurs past, a maze of twilight streets. He's not looking down, though, but straight ahead, at a dot on the horizon, hovering in mid-air, rapidly approaching.

Batman senses something, hears something. He turns. We have time to catch a glimpse of a savage smile on his lips as he sees what's bearing down on him. He makes no effort to get out of the way.

Superman lets loose with a battlecry, filled with rage and pain and outright determination, before impacting dead-centre on Batman, sending both tumbling through the Gotham skies.

Commissioner Gordon has seen everything. Hope kindles in his eyes.

ALFRED: Game's not over yet.

GORDON: I'm on it.

We cut to the Mayor, just assuming his position on the podium. There's pandemonium in front of him from the assembled press.

JOURNALIST #1: Can you confirm the rumours that *all* prisoners are to be set free??!

JOURNALIST #2: Are you really going to turn the keys to this city over to a vigilante?

Someone runs from the wings and whispers into Garcia's ear. He looks as if he's about to faint with relief. He leans into the mike.

GARCIA: Sorry ladies and gentlemen. Unavoidable delay.

He rushes off-stage, to even more bedlam from the assembled press. Soon, however, news breaks of what's going on in the skies over the city and everyone, Garcia and the journos included, assembles around every television they can find.

Across Gotham, across Metropolis, everyone is doing the same thing. Lois Lane and Jason White have just been dropped off at Clark's apartment. The news channels are displaying the live video feed from Gotham. Lois' hand creeps into Jason's and she squeezes it, hard. They sit down together and begin to watch, unable even to speak.

We cut to Batman and Superman, in mid-wrestle, three hundred feet up. Superman wriggles free of his opponent and uses his boots to arrest his speed, giving him sufficient purchase to swing a punch into Batman's jaw, sending the Dark Knight into a tumble that takes him clean through several of the support pillars of an elevated train bridge. The bridge sags.

And the lights of a train shine brightly in the Gotham night. Superman throws himself into a dive even as the train driver slams on the brakes. Superman latches onto the front of the train and cranks up the power in his boots' thrust as much as he can, further slowing the train down. But it's not enough.

The train goes over the edge of the destroyed bridge, plunging down, Superman

attached to its nose. Passengers scream.

And then it stops. And reverses. And we see Batman dragging it back from the opposite side. Metal squeals against metal with the incredible strain and Batman uses his heat vision to fuse it back together again until the train is righted back on the tracks.

*Superman detaches from the nose and flies up into the air-
-and Batman hits him head-on.*

As they rocket through the air, towards an area of parklands, Batman gets his hand around Superman's throat.

BATMAN: Who's your tailor?

SUPERMAN: Missing your toys, Bruce? Here.

He twists his body around so that his shoulder launchers are pointing towards Batman. Targeting reticles appear on Batman's torso.

SUPERMAN: Have them back.

Mini-missiles fire and impact at pointblank range, blowing the two combatants apart from one another, causing both to crash into the woodlands in different trajectories. Trees tumble as both men scythe through them at high speed.

Superman gets to his feet. We see through his visor as it switches automatically to heat-vision night enhanced mode. We see a heat signature immediately identified ahead. Superman's leg rockets fire. He scoops up a massive felled tree trunk and, flying ahead, swings it in a long lazy arc-

Batman has time to turn before the massive trunk, swung like the world's biggest baseball bat, swats him like an oversized fly down into the grassy surface below, creating an impact crater. Superman drops the trunk with some satisfaction and, not resting on his laurels, turns himself upside down and shoots down into the impact crater, hard on Batman's trail.

We stay on the surface. There's a thump. And another. At each thump the ground around us shakes as if an earthquake is taking place. We get a quick shot of three overhead helicopters, one police and two news, all covering the action.

And then, like a cannonball, Batman is expelled from his underground battlefield, sent flying high into the Gotham night. He goes right through the tailfin of one of the helicopters, sending it into a fatal spin towards the treetops below.

*Superman is on the scene before that can happen, putting his fists through the cockpit glass and ripping the pilot and co-pilot from their seats, pulling them to safety even as their copter blooms into flame on the greenery below. He deposits both safely on the surface-
-and is grabbed from behind. Batman squeezes, and we hear the unmistakable crack of ribs. Superman cries out in pain.*

BATMAN: Miss me?

Superman brings his leg up and around, so it impacts Batman in a very specific area. Batman's grip abruptly loosens and Superman is able to wriggle free. He cocks his head in mock sympathy as his opponent's eye-watering discomfort.

SUPERMAN: Shouldn't have gotten rid of *all* that armour.

He hits Batman with an uppercut that sends him high into the Gotham night once again. Superman springs after him, leg rockets firing, but when he reaches the required altitude Batman is nowhere to be found. Superman turns, and we see his combat visor trying to lock on to something.

Something black zips across his field of vision. Superman tries to follow, but it's gone

before he can track it.

It happens again, closer this time. Superman tries to connect with a punch, but in vain. And then something hits him, from behind, not very hard, but hard enough to make him gasp in pain. He spins, but Batman is gone.

BATMAN: Face it.

Superman turns again. Batman is there, twenty feet or so away, floating effortlessly, in stark contrast to Superman's already quite battered appearance and artificial method of staying airborne.

BATMAN: I'm stronger than you. Faster. There's no way you can beat me.

SUPERMAN: Sounds familiar. You didn't listen. Why should I.

Both men begin to circle the other, waiting for the right time to strike.

BATMAN: You're not me.

SUPERMAN: Look who's talking about identity. *(taps his head)* Is it crowded in there, Bruce? Since the Fortress? Think about what you've been doing! The first time we did this, I told you I didn't think you were a killer. I still don't.

Batman closes his eyes and shakes his head for a moment, as if trying to clear his head. Superman sees this and presses the moment.

SUPERMAN: He's in there. You've got to fight him, Bruce. You can beat him.

BATMAN: You preach about morality to *me*? You've never lost anything in your perfect little life.

SUPERMAN: I lost my parents! My race! My whole *world*!

BATMAN: Did you watch them die in front of your eyes? Did you look into the face of the son of a bitch who killed them and feel too weak and too scared to do anything about it?

SUPERMAN: Revenge is no reason to be a hero!

BATMAN: Revenge is *ALL I HAVE LEFT!*

With a roar of anger, Batman makes his move. Superman tries to anticipate it, tries to dodge, but Batman's rage is simply too much and though Superman lands a few blows, his opponent's strength and power simply allows him to shrug them off.

Whether accidentally or by design, the two are heading back towards the Narrows, towards Arkham Asylum. Superman impacts the ground between Gordon's circumference and the entrance of Arkham. Gordon waves his men back desperately.

We go inside Arkham Asylum. Dr. Quinzel is arguing furiously with one of the guards inside.

DR. QUINZEL: You said eight o'clock! You *promised!*

GUARD: Jeez, Doctor! You sound like you *want* these loonies released! We got our orders to postpone opening the cells, and I say thank God! End of story!

He turns away. Harleen fixes him with a look of pure hatred and looks around. Her eyes alight on a tray full of syringes, and as she sees them, something seems to unhinge once and for all inside that pretty little head of hers. She grabs a handful of syringes and lunges at the guard.

He goes down screaming.

We cut away to the battle raging outside. Batman is on the attack, not giving Superman the time to get up. He unleashes blow after blow, each more devastating than the one before. One smashes the combat visor into pieces. Superman tries to activate the jet-boots and scorch his opponent, but just as he previously resisted the Tumbler's turbo boost, so Batman simply shrugs off the intense heat and with two precise strikes, destroys the boots, rendering

Superman grounded. A savage blow to the midriff sends pieces of Superman's armour splintering off.

Superman stands. Batman allows him to do so. He looks like the angel of Death, merely awaiting his moment to end the fight once and for all.

SUPERMAN: Please, Bruce...you're not yourself. Something happened in the chamber - your mind...akkk-

He trails off as Batman places a hand around his throat and lifts him into the air. They rise and rise until they're a hundred and fifty, two hundred feet straight up, above the Asylum. Rain begins to lash them as a thunderstorm brews over Gotham.

We cut to inside Arkham. The door to the Joker's cell opens to reveal Dr. Harleen Quinzel, now thoroughly insane. She holds a double handful of syringes.

DR. QUINZEL: He needled me, I needled him! That's funny, huh?

Inside, the Joker stands and faces the open door of his cell. He is not smiling in the least.

JOKER: Hilarious.

And with that, he walks imperiously out to freedom, Dr. Quinzel scampering after him like an adoring lapdog.

High above, Superman is fighting to stay conscious as Batman's fingers tighten around his throat.

BATMAN: You had all of this power...and you wasted it. I won't make the same mistake. First Gotham, then...

And he stops. And looks behind Superman at something we can't make out.

BATMAN: What the hell?

He takes his hand from Superman's throat, allowing the Man of Steel to simply fall from his grasp and begin dropping toward the ground two hundred feet below. As his limp body falls out of shot, we see what Batman was looking at.

A white dart. A plane. Heading directly for him.

RICHARD: Surprise, you bastard.

Batman reacts.

RICHARD: EJECT!

He fairly screams the last command and a hole opens in the cockpit above him. His pilot's seat seems to grow a solid bubble around it and it shoots upward, clearing the fuselage of the plane just as the whole thing impacts Batman.

On the ground below, as Superman's body hits the surface, Commissioner Gordon and his police contingent shield their eyes from the sudden fireball that lights up the Gotham sky.

Watching on television, Jason White falls to his knees.

And the Joker sweeps through Arkham's reception area, taking a moment to topple a guard who makes a belated grab for him (having until that moment been glued to the news footage). The Joker grabs a blade gleefully tossed to him by Dr. Quinzel and slashes the guard's throat, pirouetting gracefully to a stop as the guard's lifeblood seeps out between his fingers.

He takes a deep steadying breath, as if he's just done something particularly therapeutic, and walks outside.

Batman, sent sprawling by the plane collision, is thumped into the ground also. Dazed, he takes a few moments to get to his feet. We see something touch down in front of him, and it resolves itself into a futuristic ejector seat device, with a solid transparent bubble that

dissolves into nothingness upon contact with terra firma. Richard steps out from within it just as Batman gets to his feet, scarcely able to believe his eyes.

BATMAN: Who...who the hell are you?

RICHARD: Me? Just a regular guy.

Batman swings a punch, but somehow, by his recent standards, it's remarkably slow in its execution and Richard is able to step around it. As Batman processes this puzzling downturn in his powers, Richard smiles and lays a beauty right on his jaw, a real teeth-rattler that sends the Batman staggering backward. He rubs his face in disbelief and staggers, putting his hand to his head as dizziness surges through him. Richard is sure to stay close.

Superman, until now still stunned by the high fall he just took, starts to come around back to consciousness again. He gets to his knees.

RICHARD: *(shrugs)* Okay. Maybe not completely regular.

And to the disbelief of Batman, of Gordon and his watching cops, of the entire world's media watching, Richard White begins to beat on the Batman. He steps around punches. He dodges kicks. Batman tries to take off and finds that he can't so long as Richard maintains close proximity to him.

And he lands blow after blow after blow, raining them down on Batman's face, his solar plexus, until the Dark Knight, weak and unable to take any more, is hit with one last shot of such power that it seems to come from Richard's toes right up through his whole body. He thumps the ground, out cold.

Richard stands over his unconscious body, breathing heavily, fairly shaking with exertion and excitement. He turns until he sees Superman, still on his knees, and a huge disbelieving grin breaks out on his face.

We see the image of Richard White triumphant beamed across the world, to Gotham and Metropolis and beyond, and to one extraordinarily proud little boy in particular, who is just as stunned as everyone else by what he's just witnessed.

RICHARD: *(shrugs)* He wasn't so tough.

JOKER: Try me.

And with a savagely powerful thrust, the knife the Joker is carrying goes right through Richard White, from back to front. Richard lets loose a liquid gasp as blood fills his mouth. Gordon, his cops, Superman, all react with shock and horror - no-one had even seen the Joker creep across the grounds.

Jason White watches his father fall forward to his knees, the hilt of the knife still buried in his back, the blade deep in his heart. Richard has time to touch the wound, to look at Superman as the Man of Steel races toward him and catches him as he slumps forward.

JASON: NOOOOOOO!!! DADDY!!!!!!!

His fists pound the television screen but he lacks the strength to break the glass. Lois scoops him up and hugs him even as he bucks and kicks against her, overcome with terrible grief.

We cut to Richard in Superman's grasp. He looks up, still somewhat astonished by the fate that has befallen him, into the eyes of the Man of Steel. A corner of his mouth tugs upwards.

RICHARD: Now we're even.

And with that, Richard White dies.

Cops rush forward, shouting warnings. The Joker stands with his hands raised above his

head, shouting placatory statements.

JOKER: Don't shoot! I'm unarmed! I surrender unconditionally!

Superman lays Richard's head down gently on the grass. He closes his son's beloved adoptive father's eyes for the final time.

And then he raises his head. And this is a Superman we've never seen before. This is a Superman ready to kill.

The Joker looks at him and shrugs, gesturing to the prone body of Batman slumped nearby.

JOKER: He *started* it. No-one, do you hear me, *no-one EVER* gets to do that but me!!

With a wordless roar Superman is on him. The Joker shrieks in delight as Superman rolls him, doesn't fight back as Superman begins to pound him. Police make as if to rush to the scene, but with an arm here and a gesture there, James Gordon forbids them from moving a muscle, and so they simply stand as watch as Superman begins to beat the Joker to death right in front of their eyes.

JOKER: (*laughing uncontrollably*) And here I thought *Dent* was good!

Superman roars and continues the beating, until he's tackled by a screaming girl. It is, of course, Dr. Quinzel, who tries to stab him with more syringes. They break on his skin and the remains of his Batman-like suit harmlessly and he swats her away. A few of Gordon's men grab her and restrain her. She screams and bites and writhes, hurling insults at Superman as she does so.

DR. QUINZEL: Don't you hurt him! You can't hurt him!

Superman dismisses her, turning his back. The Joker has gotten to his feet, albeit with some difficulty. He spits out a mouthful of blood and beckons Superman on with a smile, pointing up at the helicopters above their heads.

JOKER: Come on, hero. Come on, Boy Scout. Kill me. Kill me while the world watches.

And indeed the world is watching as Superman walks toward him, stopping to pick up the knife the Joker used to murder Richard White on the way. There's murder in Superman's eyes.

The Joker spreads his arms wide, bows his head and closes his eyes, in a perverse mockery of the Crucifixion. Moonlight glints off the knife's blade as Superman gets within striking distance of his prey.

And a figure rises, seemingly from the dead.

BATMAN: Now you know.

Superman stops his approach. Batman walks to him and stands between Superman and the Joker.

BATMAN: Now you know what it feels like. To see someone die in front of your eyes. What it is to be human.

SUPERMAN: Get out of my way.

BATMAN: No.

SUPERMAN: GET OUT OF MY WAY!

BATMAN: It's over.

There are tears in Superman's eyes, we see. We cut quickly to Metropolis and see a quick shot of Jason and Lois. Jason is still in the throes of grief but both are watching the live video feed of Superman standing over the Joker. Jason blinks through his tears.

SUPERMAN: He'll kill again.

Commissioner Gordon, stepping close to cover the Joker, hears all of the following.

BATMAN: That's because he's a monster. But we're not. I understand now. I was wrong. I thought you had all this power and you saw us as weak, and that's why you kept wiping our noses and saving our asses. But the truth is, with all this power, it would take all of the willpower in the world *not* to become a monster. With or without Zod's help, I was about to. But you, you *never* did. You were better than us. You deserve the name we gave you. Don't throw it away now.

JOKER: (*clapping his hands*) You *still* don't disappoint me. We're set for such times together, you and I...oh, not to forget our new friend here, who seems to have *almost* as much potential for-

Batman pauses in his speech to Superman, and then without looking, simply throws a backhand fist out and catches the Joker square in the face, flooring him with such ferocity that we get the distinct impression he won't be opening his eyes for a while, not to mention using his original front teeth ever again.

BATMAN: It's over.

Superman nods. He drops the knife, then goes back to where Richard's body lies.

Fade out.

Act III, Scene XIV

Richard White's funeral service. Jason sobs uncontrollably against his mother. Perry White is there, with the other Daily Planet staff. Clark Kent sits with Lois and Jason, his eyes red-rimmed.

After the service concludes, Lois and Clark exchange words as Jason enters Lois' car. He sits inside, staring into space. Clark extends his hand and Jason looks at him, but doesn't take his hand. Clark withdraws it after a moment. Lois gets into the driver's side and the car drives away, Clark watching it go.

A presence at his shoulder. It's Bruce.

BRUCE: Clark.

CLARK: Bruce. Thanks for coming.

BRUCE: Yeah, well. We have things to do, right? Places to go? Cold, remote places with glowing magic switcheroo boxes. Unless you...

CLARK: Wanting to hold onto them a little longer?

BRUCE: I'll miss the flying. That never gets old. *(he taps his head)* But I want him out, Clark. I can control him now, but...I want to be alone inside my head again.

Clark nods. Both men are walking away from the assembled mourners to a more secluded part of the cemetery. Clark glances back at the scene of Richard's funeral.

BRUCE: I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything.

CLARK: He was a good man. I was starting to think...I don't know. That humans were different from me.

BRUCE: Sounds like-

CLARK: I know. I know exactly who it sounds like. So what I'm trying to say is...I understand. And if there's one good thing to come out of all of this, it's that I know I'll never be like him. I know what it's like to be human.

Bruce simply nods. Clark's eyes are downcast now. He sighs heavily.

CLARK: Jason blames me.

BRUCE: Clark, I...kids...not exactly my strong point. Sorry.

CLARK: Maybe you should adopt.

BRUCE: Why does *everyone* keep thinking that?

CLARK: Oh I don't know, Bruce. The intense brooding? The excessive violence?

BRUCE: Right. And having a kid around is gonna *help* with that?

As they walk out of shot, still bickering, a robin sings to itself on the branch of a tree.

Act III, Scene XV

Lois and Jason arrive at Lois and Richard's old house by Metropolis harbour, with the seaplane dock empty. Lois is on the phone to Perry White, who we cut to when he speaks.

LOIS: He wants to...look for things his Dad might have left behind.

PERRY: I understand. Uh. Lois, about work...take as long as you need. Clark too.

LOIS: I still have the Morgan Edge exposé to write, Chief.

PERRY: Actually...Jimmy Olsen already submitted it.

LOIS: *Jimmy?*

PERRY: Yeah. The kid really came through. I passed it to the police yesterday. They've issued a warrant for Edge's immediate arrest. He's finished. Now if only I had a paper to print the damn thing in...

Jason walks inside and sits alone, still staring blankly ahead. Lois, her conversation with Perry complete, sits near him and seems about to try and start a conversation several times, but is unable to think of anything to say that won't seem trivial to the things that are racing around inside the little boy's head.

JASON: He didn't kill him.

LOIS: I know.

JASON: I should be glad. Cos if he had...everything would have changed.

Lois bites her lip. She moves so she's sitting right beside her son and she throws an arm around him, hugging him close. She kisses the top of his head.

LOIS: You don't have to be glad. It's okay not to be.

JASON: Is this what being a hero is, Mom?

LOIS: I don't-

JASON: Always being scared that the people you love are in danger? Worrying that they'll die? Not being able to be bad, even if being bad would make you feel better sometimes?

LOIS: I don't know, Jason.

EDGE: I do.

Lois spins, gathering Jason up in her arms protectively in the one motion. Morgan Edge is standing behind her. He's holding a revolver. He does not look especially sane.

EDGE: Your boy's right, Lois. Being a hero stinks. Just like destroying a man's life. I had everything.

LOIS: Leave us alone! Get the hell out of my house!

EDGE: Oh, I don't think so.

He cocks his gun and aims it directly at Lois' head.

EDGE: I'm doing you a favour. When Darkseid arrives, Superman himself will wish for as quick a death as I'm about to grant you. Goodbye, Lois.

A shot rings out. Jason screams. Lois cries out in terror.

But she's fine. The bullet didn't come from Edge's gun. He brings his free hand up to touch a wet stain on his shirt, spreading fast. It's blood. Astonishment spreads across his face.

Two more shots ring out. Morgan Edge falls to the ground in a lifeless heap.

Lois and Jason face their rescuer.

LUTHOR: Boo.

He walks forward and kicks Morgan Edge's corpse with a toe, testing it for signs of life. None are forthcoming. He grunts with satisfaction, then seems to notice that Lois and Jason are still terrified. The old traces of Luthor charm and geniality are conspicuously absent from him now as he addresses them both, but particularly Jason.

LUTHOR: You saved my life once. Saved me when you could have let me fall. And if there's one thing I *despise* beyond all others, beyond even ol' Red Pants, it's being in someone's debt. Consider that debt repaid. In full.

He turns and walks away, but pauses at the door.

LUTHOR: Maybe I'm not the best person to ask about heroes. But I know that sometimes...I envy them. I envied your father. Both of them.

JASON: Thank you.

LUTHOR: (*rolls eyes*) Don't start with *that*. (*to Lois*) Edge wasn't kidding about Darkseid. When he comes, tell Big Blue to come see me. Maybe he'll see there are worse things out there than the (*and he says it with relish, glancing down at Edge's body in triumph*) Greatest Criminal Mind of Our Times. *Adios*.

He flips them a jaunty salute and is gone. Lois and Jason stand there for another moment, over the dead body of one of the world's richest men lying sprawled over their living room in a widening pool of blood.

JASON: I want to go home, Mom. Home to Clark. To...my Dad.

Lois nods, and hugs the boy close.

Fade out.

Act III, Scene XVI

Alfred Pennyworth is running through the woods, severely out of breath. He keeps looking over his shoulder. He brings up his weapon and squeezes off a few rounds. His pursuer pops up from behind a tree trunk and returns fire.

Pellets of yellow paint explode all over the other side of the tree trunk Alfred is hiding behind. Lucius Fox advances on his position.

LUCIUS: Give it up, English man! You're outflanked and outgunned!

ALFRED: *(to himself, ruefully)* What part of this is meant to be bloody fun??

He launches himself from behind cover and back into the combat zone. He and Lucius exchange fire for a few seconds, finding cover where they can.

And then a new shape joins the game. It catapults itself across from one of the wooden huts, slinking from tree to tree. Alfred and Lucius both clock it at the same time. The new shape is lithe and fast and alarmingly well versed on the tactics of keeping itself behind cover.

BRUCE: *(V/O)* Mind if I join?

Alfred and Lucius exchange looks. We cut to Bruce, holding his own paintball rifle, jogging swiftly from tree to tree, sweeping the barrel around to cover the most likely avenues of covering fire-

And then he's caught in a crossfire, splattered repeatedly from both sides by pink and yellow paint. The balls keep coming. Bruce looks up as Lucius and Alfred close on his position.

BRUCE: I uh, I think you got me.

Another few rounds hit his chest, of both colours. Bruce winces.

BRUCE: Hey! Easy with those.

ALFRED: A mere human again? Not the Dark Avenging Angel of Death And Telling His Only Bloody Friends To Sod Off anymore, eh?

LUCIUS: Mm-hmm.

BRUCE: Look. *(he throws down the gun)* I'm an idiot. I'm a fool. In my defence, I *did* have an insane alien general criminal mastermind lodged in my cerebral cortex.

ALFRED: How hard did he try and escape?

BRUCE: *(smiling ruefully)* Pretty hard...

ALFRED: Well, both of us are enjoying retirement *immensely*. I've got tickets for Wimbledon. I'm going to Glastonbury. Our Peggy's kids are coming to stay over at weekends.

BRUCE: You? Tennis? Rock music? *Kids*?

ALFRED: *(defensively)* Yes?

BRUCE: Come back to me. Please. I need you. Both of you. What do you say?

Alfred and Lucius look at each other.

More paintballs pepper Bruce Wayne's body and legs. He yelps in pain until the bombardment stops, only because both have run out of paint bullets. Covered in paint, Bruce looks down at his body.

BRUCE: Is that a yes...?

Act III, Scene XVIII

Perry White takes his place on a podium and addresses a crowd before him. Behind the stage, the huge Daily Planet globe rests on the ground in front of a modern, sparkling building.

PERRY: Ladies, gentlemen, welcome to the opening of the new *Daily Planet* headquarters. Made possible through our new partnership with billionaire philanthropist and all-round annoyingly good-looking guy, Bruce Wayne. Bruce?

He makes way for Bruce, who stands at the podium and looks out over the crowd. As before, his eyes alight on Lois and Clark, who watch him with interest from a few rows back. He winks at Lois. Clark shoots him a glare.

BRUCE: Thank you Perry. I watched with horror, as everyone did, when Metropolis lost one of its landmarks to the gang rampage sponsored by Morgan Edge. Thankfully the last few weeks have seen the end of Edge's empire, not to mention the end of Edge himself.

Clark makes his way out of the row of journalists. Bruce's eyes flick to watch him go and a slight ghost of a smile tugs at the corner of his mouth.

BRUCE: It's with pleasure that I link WayneCorp to the *Daily Planet* media group and donate the use of my Metropolis building to serve as the new headquarters of the world's greatest newspaper. Long may it continue to stand for truth and justice. And I look forward to the day when the globe can be raised to the roof of the building to once again take its place amongst Metropolis' landmarks. Which should be in about three months...

He pauses theatrically and right on cue, a blue and red figure swoops down from the skies and lands on the stage beside him.

BRUCE: ...or, it could be right now.

The crowd go wild.

Bruce steps forward and shakes Superman's hand. There's a spark of understanding between the two men that was absent before, a mutual respect for one another. When they speak, their words are solely for each other; the crowd are making too much noise for their conversation to be overheard.

SUPERMAN: Still miss the flying?

BRUCE: Always.

Superman smiles, hops down off the stage, and grasps the Planet globe. He rises majestically into the air with it to huge applause from all, carrying it safely to the rooftop and securing it in place with a few well-timed blasts of heat vision.

As he flies off, Perry waves to him, and then looks to Lois and nods. She knows she's being thanked for seeing him through the despair in Perry's own way, and she nods back.

Act III, Scene XIX

Commissioner Gordon, in his office in Gotham Central. The window is open and there's a sudden breeze that scatters some of the papers on the desk in front of him. Gordon doesn't look up.

SUPERMAN: Commissioner.

GORDON: *(still not looking up)* Do all of you do that?

SUPERMAN: Only the best of us.

Now Gordon does look up. He regards Superman with a good deal less suspicion than in their previous meeting after the first encounter with Batman.

GORDON: What can I do for you?

SUPERMAN: For me? Nothing.

Gordon sighs.

GORDON: He's innocent. Scot free. Haven't you heard? Garcia made it one of the conditions of agreeing to plead guilty on the corruption charges. *(dryly)* I uh, I kinda think he didn't want Batman to hold any sort of grudge against him.

SUPERMAN: Can't imagine why.

GORDON: Indeed. So the city is denying that any deals ever happened. The burn marks on the gang victims, brushed aside.

SUPERMAN: But not by you.

GORDON: How can I trust him again?

SUPERMAN: Give him a chance. And... I'll be here. Only if you need me.

GORDON: I'll consider it.

We stay on Gordon as another light breeze blows through the office, signalling Superman's departure. He looks lost in thought for a moment. His eyes are attracted to his desk, where a picture of Gordon and his former colleagues sits; amongst them the cops killed by Dent and Anna Ramirez. Next to this picture is one of Gordon and his wife and children.

Act III, Scene XX

James Gordon is at school. The bell rings for recess and he walks into the schoolyard. We see the three bullies from the earlier scene notice his arrival and move into step behind him. James notices the shadows falling over him and turns. His eyes widen.

BULLY #1: Where's your little tough guy friend now, Gordon?

JASON: Right here.

Wearing his satchel, he walks up to James, who reacts in surprise.

JASON: *(to Jason)* Mom's sending me here for the term.

BULLY #1: Good...

The three lunge for Jason. His eyes widen. He goes down sprawling under the assault, no longer able to use his powers to defend himself. We see James back off, confused, fearful, as he watches his friend take a pounding.

And then his jaw sets. And James Gordon launches himself into the fray.

We cut to a little after. Both boys are dishevelled and sitting in the principal's office. She has just finished bawling both of them out by the looks of it.

JAMES: What happened to your...?

JASON: I lost them.

JAMES: So why did you help me? You knew you couldn't win the fight anymore.

JASON: *(shrugs)* So?

James grins. And the two boys begin to chatter to each other afresh.

Act III, Scene XXI

The Batcave. Bruce walks around, looking up at ceiling and the hole blown clean through it with a rueful expression. He turns to Alfred.

BRUCE: I'm gonna bill Kent for that.

ALFRED: You might want to reconsider that, sir.

He flicks a switch and a new light source is activated, revealing what sits beside the Tumbler within the Cave. Bruce's mouth falls open.

It's a plane. But not like any plane on Earth. In fact it resembles very much the remodelled plane created from the Kryptonian crystal, except in black...and from above, its wings and fuselage create the perfect shape of a Bat in flight.

BRUCE: How...

ALFRED: No idea, sir. He delivered it before you returned from Metropolis on your little errand. Said you'd understand.

Bruce doesn't reply. He's running his hand over the plane's surface, clearly at a loss for words, and sorely tempted to jump into the cockpit and take her out for a spin now, despite being dressed in his Bruce Wayne civvies.

ALFRED: Oh, and he asked me to give you one more thing...

He hands Bruce an envelope. Bruce takes it from him with a frown, before ripping it open. Alfred, unable to stop himself, leans in to see what it is, and we see a slightly bemused look on his face. He looks at Bruce quizzically.

ALFRED: Something going on I should know about, sir?

Bruce is holding a ring. Its stone is large, and very green indeed.

BRUCE: Was there a message?

ALFRED: Something about trust, I think.

Bruce simply nods. He understands the message very well indeed. He doesn't put the ring on, merely pockets it. He looks longingly once again at the plane, all sleek and tempting and new, but with a force of will steps away from it.

BRUCE: I could use some air, Alfred.

We cut to both men walking out onto Bruce's balcony, the one with the view over Gotham Bay. Bruce looks out at the city he calls home, conflicted emotions on his face.

BRUCE: I thought it was about power, Alfred. I thought if I had more, I'd be able to stop the hurting and the suffering that goes on there.

ALFRED: Life's never that simple.

BRUCE: A wise man once told me you either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain. He was talking about power. I was too dumb to realise it, and I nearly ended up sharing his fate.

ALFRED: You make the tough choices.

BRUCE: And I'm making one now. I quit, Alfred. I can't do this. You were right.

ALFRED: No. I wasn't, sir. I thought, Lucius thought, that you were alone in this fight. But I've seen that there others like you out there, human or not. You're not alone. And you owe it to them to stay at it. Who knows. You could end up leading a bloody team of them one day.

Bruce turns his back on Gotham. He's a beaten man. He shakes his head and looks at Alfred sadly.

BRUCE: No. I can't, Alfred. I'm sorry.

A smile breaks out across Alfred's face as he looks at Bruce. He walks to his old friend

and very gently turns him around so he's facing Gotham once again.

ALFRED: Look.

Bruce looks. And there, shining into the Gotham skies, is the Bat-signal. Calling for help. Calling for Batman.

We cut to Commissioner Gordon, on the roof of Gotham Central, standing beside the Bat-signal. He looks up at the beam of light beside him and he smiles.

Bruce absorbs this, takes in what it means, and we realise when he stood out here before, this was what he was what he was waiting on. His shoulders straighten out. He stands taller. Determination seeps back into his body. The billionaire playboy drops away to be replaced by the Dark Knight.

Bruce turns to Alfred.

BRUCE: *(Batman voice)* Let's get to work.

ALFRED: Now you're talking.

As they walk back into the house-

ALFRED: We've got to talk about that stupid voice of yours.

Fade out.