

Afterglow - Treatment  
Kim J.Y. Han (한주영)

**Project Title:** Afterglow (여운)

**Genre:**

Cyberpunk, dystopian future, action thriller, heist

**Comps:**

AKIRA (1988) meets OCEAN'S EIGHT (2018)

**Logline:**

Amidst a civil unrest in Neo-Seoul “Steel City,” two unlikely fashion designers race to counterfeit a rare bioenhanced suit, which allows the rich to live forever and abandons the poor for dead.

**World:**

Environmental disasters devastate the earth, and the Great War of 2090 turns people against each other until there is no country left. The survivors take refuge in the relatively habitable Korean peninsula. But the radiation-poisoned and lead-toxic atmosphere grows to be livable only in a protective head-to-toe suit– bulky, heavy, and made of steel, like an armor. Two billionaires, Alder Raine and Hara Valour, not only survive but make fortunes by mass-producing these suits. Under their company Alderhaus, they build a vast dome called Steel City, on top of where old Seoul used to be. A triple-filtered Han River cuts through the city and generates energy like a dam. Only those that work for Alderhaus, a monopoly of all industries, becomes accepted as its residents.

In the year 2140, Steel City has become a self-contained dome, stratified by concentric circle districts, like an archery target from a bird’s eye view. The 1% live in the center Bullseye district, the upper class live in the ring directly surrounding it called Strata 1, and each inferior class lives in outer rings increasingly closer to the edge and less protected from the environment. Steel City isn’t 100% toxin-proof, and only the Bullseye and its adjacent upper class districts boast skyscrapers with top-notch filtration. There, the Elites roam free without their full-body suits and frequent expensive Afterglow centers providing “spa” treatments, which extend their life expectancies to their 70’s by purifying the toxins in their body and replenishing them with fresh blood. When the wealthy leave their districts, they wear loud and showy 100% toxin-proof suits that only they can afford.

The Elites flaunt themselves on their elaborate fashion show-auctions, and the Alderhaus Annual is the party of the century that tops itself in excess every year. Fashion becomes an integral way that the wealthy express their identity, while the lower classes wear worn-down, mass-produced suits in their everyday lives that blend them together. The poor know that fashion is the one industry that can pull someone from the slums to riches and fame, but they also know that it’s like winning a lottery ticket.

Steel City residents grow restless and angry that their lives are exploited and forsaken for the selfish and vain 1%. Unable to afford Afterglow or suits that provide proper protection, the majority of them only live until their 40’s or 50’s. Feelings of discontent begin to reach a boiling point with a growing number of anti-establishment Rebels. And so, rebellion brews...

**Theme/Tone:**

What happens when innovation becomes exploitation? Who gets left behind when we chase immortality? And how do we reclaim humanity in a world that's engineered to strip it away?

Afterglow is a social commentary on the pitfalls of technology, consumerism, and capitalism. It touches upon humanity's destructive relationship with the environment, growing inequality amidst systemic oppression, and the ethical implications of technological advancement. Grounded in the real anxieties of our time, this film questions the price of progress and the path that we are currently on in a rapidly evolving, tech-dominated world.

**Characters:****Jade Ha (30's, Korean)**

Born to the lower class, Jade was raised by a single dad at a farm on the outer edge of Steel City, Strata 10. Her father is the most important person to her, and she worries about his increasingly deteriorating health. Headstrong, meticulous, and ambitious, Jade works herself to the bone to become an expert on biotech fashion. She prefers practicality, technical excellence, and quiet elegance, over flamboyant and loud. She's tremendously smart and knows it. She believes that gaining success as a fashion designer for the Elites is the key to getting her father healthy. She loves her partner, Julian, and would never admit that she also really likes his high class privileges.

**Remy Serra (30's, Open Ethnicity)**

Ever since he was a child, Remy knew he was special. A prodigy originating from the middle class, Strata 6, he launched his own fashion line in his late teens. He quickly brought his parents to upper-middle-class comfort, even if they died in their early 40's. Confident in his metrosexuality, Remy has innate charisma that draws attention, even though he likes to keep everyone at a distance. Work takes up all of his emotional and physical energy, and his unique artistic vision makes him Alderhaus' youngest Head Designer yet.

**Alder Raine (80's, Open Ethnicity)**

Jeff Bezos meets Bernard Arnault. Before the Great War, the Raine family monopolized steel mills around the world. Passionate about fashion, Alder used his privileges to establish himself as the king of luxury fashion with his company, Alderhaus. Conveniently, he fell in love with Hara Valour, the queen of fast fashion. He and his wife hoarded the world's steel, fought their way to old Korea, and created Steel City by hand-picking its denizens.

Now, Alder and Hara are the world's two oldest living persons. With daily treatments at Afterglow and a slow, luxurious life in the Bullseye, their aging has slowed. But Alder is tired of the constant upkeep to extend his life, and his extravagant fashion shows now bore him to tears. Alder obsesses over building the Prototype, a suit that will make him not only immortal, but will allow him to travel outside of Steel City to see what other parts of the world he can conquer.

**Hara Valour (80's, Open Ethnicity)**

Mackenzie Scott meets Vera Wang. Before the Great War, the Valour family was the world's biggest weapons manufacturer. Hara set herself apart by building a thriving fast fashion company called Valoura. She was young when her family arranged for her to marry Alder Raine as a strategic match. Hara capitalized on the Raine family's steel supply and mass-produced steel suits through her factories that semi-protected people from the toxic atmosphere all around the world.

Hara's ambivalence toward her husband soon grows to disgust when her brand Valoura gets folded into Alderhaus. Moreover, when she comes up with the idea for the Prototype, Alder takes over the project until he silos her out of the process entirely. Hara keeps her anger at bay and begins to secretly work on her influence amongst the Steel City stratum, to take charge on her own.

### **Lowan Ha (50's, Korean)**

Lowan is content to live a quiet life as a farmer. He has wonderful memories in the house that he built with his late wife, who passed away when their daughter Jade was two. He thinks Jade takes after her mom, who was much more ambitious than him. Lowan is so proud of who Jade has become, and it delights him to see her move up in the world into a higher Strata, where she can be healthy and safe. When he falls ill to the Steel City's toxins, he keeps it a secret from Jade. He doesn't want to be the one to pull her back down.

### **Julian Vines (30's, Open Ethnicity)**

Raised in Strata 1, Julian comes from privilege and is somewhat aware of it. He's a therapist that listens to the champagne problems of the upper class, but also does pro bono work for lower class clients. He's a lover of art and met Jade at a gallery when she sold him a suit from her collection. He loves her and is proud to be her partner. Meanwhile, he stays far away from his mother, who he believes is morally corrupt.

### **Tari Vines (60's, Open Ethnicity)**

Buff, calculating, and unyielding, Tari is from a military family. A soldier through-and-through, Tari had a brief stint over at Afterglow, before going back to the military to lead it. She loves her son, Julian, but thinks he's too soft and is hard on him. She wants to fix their strained relationship but doesn't know how.

### **Dr. Gallo (70's, Open Ethnicity)**

Sly. More salesman-like in personality than scientist, but Dr. Gallo's resume speaks volumes about his genius. From Strata 4, Dr. Gallo rose up as a neurosurgeon, started Afterglow, sold it to Alderhaus, and became their Head General and right-hand man to Alder and Hara.

### **Ina Day (50's, Open Ethnicity)**

Warm, kind, and strong, but Ina knows when to turn on her ruthlessness. She's a transport driver in Strata 10 and got close to Lowan while collecting his farm produce. Under the radar, she's one of the Head Rebels and is waiting for the right opportunity to dismantle the Steel City Elites.

## Synopsis:

### ACT I

It's 2140 in Steel City. The Alderhaus Annual Fashion Show kicks off at the Strata 1 waterfall. Head Designer, REMY SERRA (30's, metrosexual, high self-worth), stuns with his collection inspired by unusual flora of bygone days. At the front row center, ALDER RAINE (80's but looking 60, skinny) and HARA VALOUR (also 80's but looking 60, elegant), Alderhaus autocrats and married partners, look bored in their pristine white steel suits. Other ELITES don ostentatious suits. At the back, JADE HA (30's, Korean, sharp and intense) looks modest and out of place. From the stage, Remy finds Jade and holds her stare. There's history between them.

At the Afterparty, Elites place bids for Remy's designs, though strangely, Remy isn't there. At Alderhaus Corporate, Remy gets fired by DR. GALLO (60's, sly), Alder Raine's right-hand man. Enraged, Remy speeds home on his motorbike, when a huge truck comes out of nowhere. He flies onto the concrete. Back at the party, REBELS cause havoc, but SOLDIERS subdue them quickly. Jade is disturbed when Elites go about their business, like nothing happened.

At her condo in Strata 3, Jade receives a steel envelope, an invitation for a meeting at Alderhaus. Jade and her loving partner, JULIAN VINES (30's, self-aware, masculine), ride out in their motorbikes to Steel City's outer edge, Strata 10. They find Jade's father, LOWAN HA (55, brawny for his age) unconscious in his steel farmhouse. He has the Sickness that inevitably afflicts lower class citizens. They rush Lowan into the Strata 1 Afterglow. Jade can't afford its treatment, but Julian's mother, its former top executive, helps out despite her estrangement to Julian.

Remy wakes with tubes hooked up at Afterglow, barely alive. Hara Valour reveals to him that her husband, Alder, put a hit on Remy. Remy knew too much about the Prototype, the secret bio-enhanced suit tech being developed so that Alder may be immortal. Though Hara secretly revived Remy, Alder and the whole world think he's dead. Hara wants Remy to stay underground and steal the Prototype. Alder shut her out of the production process even when the Prototype was her own idea to start with. Hara will make sure that Remy's ex, Jade, will become the new Head Designer at Alderhaus. She will be his in. Wanting revenge on Alder, Remy signs on.

Lowan has tubes hooked up all over, where old blood pours out of him, purifies through the Afterglow machines, and new blood pumps back into his body. Though unconscious during the treatment, he smiles as if he's in ecstasy. Waiting in the lobby, Jade sees the news of Remy's death and sheds a tear. She takes the steel envelope out of her pack and thinks.

Two months later. Jade taps her steel badge at multiple doors to enter the Alderhaus Prototype lab. On a dish-like table are mysterious materials called Strands, which supposedly freeze aging. They're long, startlingly blue ropes that almost look alive. At the lab, Jade is watched and forbidden from dissecting them. Each Strand repels each other and burns human skin at touch. Her challenge is to bind the Strands *and* make them compatible with the human body.

On her way home, Jade is followed. She roars through Steel City to lose her tail, but the motorbike corners her in an alley. To her shock, it's Remy, back from the dead. He has a blocker device, which prevents anyone from hearing them. Without revealing that he's working for anyone, Remy fills Jade in on his fake death. He invites her to join him on a heist, to counterfeit the Prototype and make it available to the public. Shocked and suspicious, Jade declines. Risking

her job means risking her father's life. She needs the life of riches provided by being the top designer in all of Steel City. Remy gives her the blocker device and shares coordinates of a place she must visit, if she wants to find out about the truth.

## ACT II

Jade finds a way to magnetize the coating of the Strands to bind them without killing them or diminishing their abilities. Dr. Gallo is pleased. But the Strands still attack human skin. Jade is alarmed to see the terrible burns on a human TEST SUBJECT, who receives a heavy payout. Jade requests to meet with Alder Raine, but Dr. Gallo shuts it down. Alder doesn't meet with anyone. Jade hasn't gone to Remy's coordinates, and she isn't sure she wants to. Jade must complete the Prototype to counterfeit it, and when she does, she'll help her father first.

Lowan's health has taken a downturn. He was lively and improving after moving into Jade's but now he's foaming at the mouth like he has withdrawal. Jade grows suspicious. The Elites frequent Afterglow without a hint of addiction. Could it be that Lowan is addicted to it? She drills Julian, who seems to know something about Afterglow but won't tell her. Feeling betrayed, Jade storms out. She rides to the coordinates, a military base in Strata 10, and waits. Large transport trucks leave in the dead of night. She follows. In the morning, Jade realizes they're Afterglow blood drive trucks. They give treatments to the citizens in the slums. But instead of transfusing back all the purified blood, they only return a diluted mixture of clean blood and liquid drug called Yellow. They steal and take the rest, a large volume of blood, back to the military base.

Remy finds Jade, startling her. Her blocker device had a tracker. Jade is wary of him, but more furious about Afterglow. Even though she's been paying a premium for Lowan's treatments, he's a Strata 10 citizen, and Afterglow is treating him as such. Even if it keeps him alive, it's unfair that Lowan gets his blood stolen and has a debilitating addiction on top of the Sickness. Remy thinks the blood may be linked to the Prototype. Furious, Jade teams up with Remy to find out.

Meanwhile, word spreads of Rebels destroying Strata 10 farms. Lowan, fresh after an Afterglow session that he begged to receive, asks Jade to take him back to his farmhouse. There, Jade is surprised to see INA (50's, gypsy-like), a produce transporter she's known all her life, taking care of the place. Lowan and Ina seem to care deeply for each other. Ina is devastated at how weak Lowan looks. She says the Alderhaus military is destroying farms and blaming Rebels. Jade notices that Ina's suit has bullet marks. Is she a Rebel? Is Lowan?

Now having the ability to bind the Strands, Jade weaves them into a full-body suit. It's tailor-made for Alder Raine's slim size, but it's useless until Jade figures out how to make it work with the human body. The image of blood flashes in Jade's mind. An impulsive act, she cuts her palm open and spills her blood onto the Strands. They seem to absorb them, as if feeding on them. Thereafter, the Strands glow a healthy sheen.

At night, Jade goes to Remy's undercover Strata 10 condo. They think that the Strands are living, organic materials that consume human blood. In order to build the Prototype, they must better understand the Strands. Remy knows how intense the security at Alderhaus is, and how they watch Jade's every step. They need to find out where it comes from and steal from the source. As they work together, their chemistry rekindles. Remy apologizes for leaving her in the past. He was afraid of his feelings toward her, and he ran as soon as he felt them. Jade sways.

Jade makes up with Julian, though she isn't sure if she still loves him or if she needs to use him to find out more about Afterglow. She asks him to set up a meeting with his mother, TARI VINES (50's, military-born-and-bred), who was a high-level exec at Afterglow and is now Head General for the military. Julian concedes. Despite their estrangement, Tari will do anything for her son. Secretly, Remy reports to Hara and asks her help to understand what the military does with the stolen blood. Remy tails military vans and rides into the black market, where the bags and bags of blood get taken into a heavily-fortified underground bunker. There, Remy gets captured.

Jade meets with Tari at her military suite in Strata 1. Julian has admitted to the corruption at Afterglow that treats clients differently based on their class. Instead of confronting Tari, Jade begs her to give Lowan the proper Afterglow treatment that the Elites receive. In exchange, Jade will help Tari rekindle her relationship with her son. Tari, expression unchanged, orders Soldiers to bring in a battered-up prisoner, Remy. Jade begs for Tari not to hurt him. Tari says Remy was tailing the military, with the help of Hara Valour. Jade is stunned that Remy was working for Hara.

Tari hasn't decided where her loyalty lies yet, whether Alder Raine or Hara Valour. While she's been ordered to keep the Strands safe in the bunker, she doesn't know how they are meant to be used. Whatever it is, she wants in *before* Jade goes to Alderhaus. To their surprise, Tari gives Jade and Remy some of the Strands and lets them go. Tari tells Jade to never see her son, Julian, again. Jade asks if she'll help Lowan if she does what she says. Tari, unflinching, doesn't answer.

Jade is hurt by Remy's betrayal. Remy opens up to Jade and tells her the whole story, from how he lost his parents at an early age, how he lost everything when he was left to die, and how it was Hara who saved him. Remy believes that if there's anyone that can change the world, it's Hara. Once Alder is gone, she'll take power. She is the lesser evil that they must choose. Jade isn't convinced, but the heist must go on. If Afterglow doesn't save her father, the Prototype will.

At Remy's condo, they dissect a Strand and find that it's an extremely complex organism, nothing like they've seen before. They think it's a mutated species from outside of Steel City. Its microbiome outer layer detoxifies pollutants, and the stem cell fibers create oxygen pockets and convert toxins into nutrients. Surprisingly, its fungi base has nano-scaffolding with security code to unlock only with someone's DNA. Jade and Remy know immediately that the DNA can't be anyone other than Alder Raine's, and it has to be blood. They need Hara's help to meet Alder.

Jade returns to her condo, where Julian waits outside. Jade breaks his heart and sends him away. When Jade enters her home, she finds her father cold on the ground. He's dead. Jade is overcome with rage and grief. Alder Raine, Hara Valour, Tari Vines... Who is to blame? Was it murder? Jade rides out into the depths of Steel City. She knocks on a door, tears running down her cheeks. Ina opens the door, and immediately knows something is wrong.

### ACT III

Jade, escorted by several GUARDS, rides the elevator up to the top floor of Alderhaus Corporate. She enters the VIP meeting suite, an entire floor consisting of water fountains, baroque gardens, and whole orchards of fruits. It's stunning. Jade's blood boils inside. She walks into a circle of dozens more Guards. In the middle, Alder Raine and Hara Valour sit on a plush couch, drinking tea. Tari and Dr. Gallo stand behind them. None of them wears heavy suits in the pure, filtered air. Jade stares them down. Each of them possibly killed her father.

Jade speaks. She has all the pieces to make the Prototype, except Alder's blood. All she needs is a prick, and she can complete her task. Alder erupts into a howling laughter, like he's never been so entertained before. Hara stays stone-faced. So does Jade. Determined, she explains. The Strands are security coded to Alder's DNA, which is why they react poorly to anyone who isn't him, like they're allergic to them. Once she gets Alder's blood, she can unlock the biological system from within the Strand, and reprogram it so that it has no security code, or tailor the DNA to whoever else wears it. Alder is impressed. No one has gotten this far.

Alder wonders... How did she do it? He glances at Hara. It turns out, Alder already has a suit that Dr. Gallo made for him. He wanted to keep it a secret and test the patience of those in his inner circle, so that he could figure out who he could trust. Hara stands up, stunned. Alder is disappointed, but he knows how much his wife hated him all her life. He's surprised it took her this long. Guards raise their weapons at Hara. Hara lies and places blame on Tari, who gave Jade the Strands. Alder is surprised. Another traitor? Half the Guards turn their weapons to Tari.

BANG. A shot fires. Jade, Tari, Dr. Gallo, and Hara, all jump to the floor and lie flat. All except for Alder, who has been shot in the stomach. He groans. Tari screams for the Guards to hold. Jade notices one Guard that's trembling on the side. The shooter. Could it be Remy? Tari approaches Alder and opens his shirt. Underneath, Alder wears the Prototype suit. He smiles nefariously. He's unhurt. But before Alder even speaks, Tari slices his bare neck clean with a blade. Blood gurgles out of him. Any blood that drips down to the Prototype, it absorbs hungrily.

Tari quickly takes the Prototype off Alder's body and orders the Guards to save as much of his blood as possible. They must quickly preserve them for Jade to use. Hara thanks Jade and Remy for their work. Thanks to them, the world can now be a better place. She will produce as many Prototype suits as possible and save humanity. Remy takes off his helmet and nods. Tari stares down at Hara. Now that Alder's dead, Hara will only be a figurehead, and Tari will have the real power with the military behind her. Tari approaches Dr. Gallo, who's hiding behind the couch in fear, and stabs him in the heart. They don't need him anymore. Jade watches it all, sickened.

Back at the Prototype lab, the Strands glow brightly as they consume Alder's blood. Still under great scrutiny, just under a different regime, Jade unlocks the Strands and re-codes them. Remy double checks her work. Jade is icy toward Remy, who tries to talk to her. Tari tries on the suit, satisfied. Hara wants to launch another fashion show, in which they share the good news of the Prototype for the people of Steel City. Numb, Jade tells Remy to handle it and leaves.

It's the day of the fashion show, now renamed Valoura Annual. Back in her condo, Jade rests her eyes. Her place is messy. She's clearly been hard at work. She fidgets with the blocker device that she kept. Someone knocks on the door. It's Ina. It's time. Jade, Ina, and hundreds of Rebels ride through Steel City. Some Rebels split off. Julian receives a message from Jade. It reads, "I'm sorry." BOOM. Suddenly, a distant explosion rattles his whole building. Julian runs to the window. Various spots in Steel City are spitting fumes. Jade, Ina, and the Rebels arrive in the middle of Valoura Annual. Gunfire erupts. Some Guards fight with the Rebels. Rebels restrain Hara, Tari, Remy, and the Elites. Bullets stop flying when Ina points a gun at Tari's head.

One of the Rebels broadcasts the scene to all of Steel City. At Afterglow centers, Rebels burst in and take control. Jade speaks to the crowd. This was the day that Hara Valour and Tari Vines planned to launch the Prototype, a bioenhanced suit that can purify toxins and make its

wearer immortal. What they won't tell the public is that they will sell it at an exorbitant price so that only the Elites can afford it. Not only that, the Prototype requires an enormous volume of blood every day to keep functioning. These are blood stolen from the poor, from the very public that Hara claims to help. This is not a solution, it's a crime. Jade won't let it happen.

Jade and the Rebels have bombed all facilities that contributed to the production of the Prototype. As Steel City's new leader, Jade will come up with a different solution to survive this world, where they don't forsake humanity to do so. Now, the only remaining traces of the Prototype are the ones that Hara and Tari are wearing. Jade has programmed for the Prototype to self-immolate upon exposure to the liquid drug, Yellow. Jade takes out a vial of the drug. She asks Hara and Tari to give up the Prototype willingly, or else. Hara steps out of her suit, but Tari doesn't. Jade extends a hand to Remy: "Who is the lesser evil? Who will you follow?" Remy takes her hand. Jade gives him the Yellow drug and motions for him to pour on Tari.

The whole world watches as Jade stands tall in front of the two Prototype suits, one with Tari screaming inside, burning and reducing to ashes. Unbeknownst to them, a half dozen Strands glow a healthy sheen on a dish-like table, covered under a sheet of cloth, in Jade's room, and we...

CUT TO BLACK.

## Writer-Director's Statement:

AFTERGLOW is a cyberpunk dystopian thriller that reflects my uncertainties and fears about the future. I was drawn to this genre because it can so aptly mirror the fractures in our society: the way corporations commodify lives, the way technology promises salvation but often delivers control, and the way beauty can contribute to hyper-consumerism while being a tool for resistance. While this film is still a fun and propulsive thriller, it's also a raw and personal film. It's an unapologetic commentary on the modern world that continues to sacrifice humanity and the environment for the sake of consumerism and capitalism.

In AFTERGLOW's "Steel City," fashion becomes the center of how society functions. In a toxic atmosphere where one needs to wear full-body suits to survive, fashion isn't just an aesthetic—it's armor, power, and identity. The rich wear their privilege in the form of expensive, outlandish, hand-made designer suits, while the poor scrape by in the shadows of the city in cheaply-made, mass-produced suits.

We follow two unlikely fashion designers from the fringes of society, who decide to steal and counterfeit the ultimate prize, the rare bioenhanced suit called the Prototype that provides immortality to the one percenters that can afford and access it. In this futuristic yet eerily plausible world, they become the voice of the disenfranchised that refuse to be exploited and controlled.

Steel City will pulsate with bold colors, vibrant costumes, and defiant characters. A visually engaging experience, AFTERGLOW will be an intricate collision of high-tech and decay, neon and shadow, tactile and charged. It will utilize complex camera movements that capture the chaos and energy of its futuristic setting, close-ups and extreme angles to heighten the intensity of action sequences, and sweeping shots that create a deeply textured and layered world.

AFTERGLOW serves as a visceral, dynamic, and intellectual playground for exploring complex issues of a society under authoritarian control and overwhelming corporate greed. It's a tale of resistance and a fight for a future where everyone has the right to live—not just survive.