

Cipher 1: "A MERE ECHO"

Vox Elysium: A Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir

Written by Latisha Jones

[00:00]

[Theme music]

NARRATOR: Flying V Presents: Vox Elysium, a Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir. Cipher 1: A Mere Echo.

[Distorted sound of a dog barking]

[Alarm going off, melody and vibration]

ECHO: (sighing) The sun shouldn't rise so early. (Grunts)

[Her hand hits the table]

[Jingling as she fumbles for her phone]

[Alarm turns off]

ECHO: Wait. My phone is charged?

[Digital clicking as she looks through her phone]

ECHO: (Internal) *I never charge my phone.* [ruffle of bedding] *I always mean to though.*

[drawer opens] *Good job, past me.*

[She takes something from her drawers]

ECHO: Guess I got real tidy last night.

[She flicks her bathroom light on]

ECHO: Wow! My bathroom looks... great! [Shower curtain is drawn open] (internal) *Did I drunk-clean?* (mumbles) I should do that more often.

[Shower turns on]

[She gets in]

ECHO: Ah! (internal) *Nothing like a hot shower to cure a hangover.*

[Dripping of water, gentle knocking]

ECHO: Ugh, my head. Who's here this early?

[Louder knocking]

ECHO: JUST A MINUTE! (mumbles) Damn it, not a second to-

[Front door opens]

ECHO: (Internal) *Did I not lock that door?*

VIVIEN: Come on, Echo. It's not like we have to go to work or anything.

ECHO: Vivien, you scared the shit out of me.

VIVIEN: You're welcome!

ECHO: Couldn't wait two seconds for me to finish showering?

VIVIEN: More like two hours. You always take too long.

[Shower turns off, curtain slides open]

[Footsteps, drawer opens]

ECHO: (internal) *Underwear. Uniform.*

[Knock on bedroom door]

VIVIEN: You've got nothing I haven't seen already. Let me in!

[Knocking continues]

ECHO: Don't be a creep, Vivien. Just wait!

[Echo gets dressed]

VIVIEN: You locked your bedroom door? Kind of paranoid, don't you think kiddo?

ECHO: Stop calling me kiddo.

VIVIEN: Oh don't be so sensitive. My birthday is four months before yours.

ECHO: I am well aware.

VIVIEN: So I get to call you kiddo for life.

ECHO: Great.

VIVIEN: And it's not like I didn't see everything last Halloween when you decided you wanted to trade costumes with that one guy in the middle of the bar.

ECHO: Always helping me relive my finest moments.

VIVIEN: Or when we were seven and you refused to wear that dress your mom wanted to stick you in.

ECHO: That thing was hideous.

VIVIEN: It really was. Oh and then there was that time you rebelled against "Spirit Week" in highschool and burned your class t-shirt in front of the whole school. Now that I think about it, you've been nude in public quite a lot throughout your life.

ECHO: Spirit week was and continues to be a conformist fever dream and you know it.

VIVIEN: Tell us how you really feel. No wonder you were voted "least likable".

ECHO: (Sighing) Not today Vivien... I'm exhausted.

[Footsteps, door opens]

[Door closes]

VIVIEN: Oh don't be mad. I brought bagels, we can eat them on the way. Didn't I say we were late? I want to get a good assignment in distribution.

ECHO: Never stopped being the teacher's pet.

VIVIEN: I'm a responsible adult who would like- at the very least- to not get fired.

ECHO: We have plenty of time. You're always five minutes early anyway.

VIVIEN: Hm. I'm drinking your coffee.

[Vivien walks to her kitchen]

ECHO: I think I've run out of pods. Check if there's a fresh box in the... the...

VIVIEN: [She opens a cabinet] Top right cabinet. There's more here!

ECHO: Yeah... (internal) *I never get more before I run out...*

[Coffee being made from pods; machine whirring]

VIVIEN: Well you know what they say, "Think it. Mean it. Do it."

ECHO: Yeah, about that-

VIVIEN: About what?

ECHO: "Think it, Mean it, Do it". Do I usually do it?

VIVIEN: You lost me.

ECHO: I mean, I woke up this morning and my phone was in its holder, fully charged.

VIVIEN: And that's noteworthy because?

ECHO: Don't you usually search for your phone a bit? Like maybe it fell under your bed or came off the charger somehow or you left it in your pocket.

VIVIEN: No, because- as I stated before- I'm a responsible adult. Unlike *some* people.

ECHO: And my shower things?

VIVIEN: What about them?

[Coffee is done brewing]

ECHO: They were where they were supposed to be. And I never remember to restock my coffee pods before I run out.

VIVIEN: So you're confused because things in your house are... organized? [sips coffee] Oo, hey good coffee. What, do you think someone broke into your place and did your chores for you? If that's what burglars are doing now, sign me up for the next robbery. [sips coffee]

ECHO: I'm not saying I'm confused, it just feels weird. I don't remember cleaning.

VIVIEN: I don't remember last night either, but you don't hear me complaining.

ECHO: You don't remember last night?

VIVIEN: No. And you know what that means? That means we had a good time. Look, I'll make you a coffee TO GO. Emphasis on the TO GO.

[Another coffee being made]

VIVIEN: Anyway, nothing says "great night" like a post-work blackout, right?

ECHO: Right. Right. We went drinking.

VIVIEN: Yes. Drinking, dancing, other things that might not be entirely legal. I don't know why you are freaking out now. This isn't the first time you've done something unusual while drunk. Ooo, remember the time you rearranged all the furniture... in my apartment? I woke up and thought I had spent the night in a stranger's house.

ECHO: Sorry, yeah. I guess that's why everything feels so off this morning

VIVIEN: Yep. Here's your coffee. Now as they say, "Greatness Awaits."

ECHO: Fine. Fine. But I don't think "Greatness" awaits us.

VIVIEN: I suppose we will find out, it's Podium Day! Let's go, let's go!

ECHO: Why do I hang out with you again?

VIVIEN: Because I beat up Craig when he stole your fruit snack in Pre-K. And because I defended you when Bethany had you cornered in the middle school bathroom--

ECHO: She thought no one saw her taking Tim's wallet.

VIVIEN: You always did notice too much, Echo.

ECHO: How long are you going to hold all that over my head?

VIVIEN: Until it gets old, which it never will. Oh and there was that time--

ECHO: Okay, okay. Didn't you say we were in a hurry? I just need to find my--

VIVIEN: Keys?

[Vivien jiggling keys]

VIVIEN: Got them.

ECHO: Right. Let's Go.

[Sudden, distorted noise]

ECHO: Did you hear that?

VIVIEN: Hear what?

ECHO: Never mind.

[07:29]

[Transition into traffic noises]

[General chatter as they pass people on the sidewalk]

[Vivien hums Vox Elysium's theme]

ECHO: Ugh my head. Must you hum that stupid jingle?

VIVIEN: (sing-song) What? It's catchy. (she laughs) Vox Elysium really knows how to make an earworm. I wonder if that's why they're so successful.

ECHO: That... and they own the only clean water reservoir on this coast.

[Bus goes by, a part of the theme playing from speakers]

VIVIEN: See everyone loves a good song!

ECHO: (groans)

VIVIEN: Come on. Try it.

ECHO: (Hums the tone unenthusiastically)

VIV + ECHO: (They laugh as they hum the jingle, eventually stopping)

ECHO: What do you think they do at Vox?

VIVIEN: ... Manufacture clean air and water. Duh.

ECHO: No, I know that. But Clear Skies, Brighter Lives? I've always wondered what that slogan actually means. Like what do the higher ups do?

VIVIEN: It's not for the likes of us Labs to know. I'm sure it's important.

ECHO: You're sure?

VIVIEN: Figuring out the next big groundbreaking tech or something. All I know is, with that many members and more coming in by the day, the Grants are doing something right. Working to make the best possible. Bright skin, clean hands, water that doesn't give off that *water* smell. I don't know a single person on this coast who doesn't use Vox products. Maybe it is like Elysium up there. Paradise, you know?

ECHO: I guess. For a man who's never seen, people sure do love Gabriel Grant.

VIVIEN: I've always loved the design of their building. The view must be beautiful from so high up! So clean and sleek! Not like anywhere else.

ECHO: Eh. Our accommodations are cozy enough. Or give me The Alley! I don't care.

VIVIEN: Bite your tongue! No one wants to live there. I don't even want to put a toe over the jurisdiction line. It'll probably get stolen.

ECHO: You think someone in the Alley would steal your toe? (she laughs)

VIVIEN: I wouldn't put it past them.

[09:56]

[Artificial bell chimes]

[Creak of locker doors opening]

[A robotic voice through a speaker echoes in a large space]

ANNOUNCER: Welcome Vox Elysium Family. We hope you have a productive day. As a reminder, today is Podium Day, where our hardest workers are celebrated and

recognized. This month's prize is... A full 20 minutes in the Vox Elysium Headquarters lobby.

[Locker doors closing]

[Vivien and Echo walk towards their worksite]

VIVIEN: 20 minutes? I only got 15.

ECHO: You've been?

VIVIEN: Once.

PAT: Echo! Viv! Get in here!

VIVIEN: I hate it when he calls me Viv.

ECHO: Yeah. You're too classy not to be called Vivien.

VIVIEN: You understand. There are so few who do.

[Faster footsteps up stairs]

PAT: You're late! You're in the repurposing center today.

VIVIEN: No, we're in distribution. I was promised distribution.

PAT: Yeah, you should have been on time. And your bathroom break is in 4 hours.

VIVIEN: Pat—

PAT: Do you want me to make it 5? Now get.

ECHO: Come on, Vivien, let's not make it worse

VIVIEN: (mutter) Damn Donkey Flea.

ECHO: Meh. [footsteps as they continue] I've become quite used to being disliked.

Guess you haven't quite gotten there, huh "Viv".

VIVIEN: Oh shut up.

ECHO: It's not going to be that bad. The Repurposing Center is—

VIVIEN: 30% recycled sewage, 30% animal feces, 40% toxic rainwater for a total of 100% awful.

ECHO: Maybe we'll get assigned to recycled plastic and tech?

VIVIEN: Yes because melted plastic and circuit boards are SO much better. Told you we shouldn't have been late.

ECHO: Look, I'm sorry. I was just in a bad headspace this morning.

[Distorted dog bark from nowhere]

ECHO: (sucks in breath)

VIVIEN: Echo? What's wrong?

ECHO: A bark? I think. I heard barking.

VIVIEN: Like from a dog?

ECHO: I know it sounds ridiculous especially since—

VIVIEN: Dogs aren't allowed on this side of town because they are an “unnecessary distraction”?

ECHO: Yeah, that.

VIVIEN: Are you feeling ok? You look...

JACK: Morning!

VIVIEN: Ugh.

ECHO: Don't be mean, “Viv.” Goodmorning uh- I'm so sorry...

JACK: No worries, y'all aren't usually assigned over here. Name's Jack.

ECHO: Echo.

JACK: Nice to meet you! This is Esther.

ESTHER: (scoffing) You'll love it here. Working in *Repur* is a real treat.

JACK: Oh come on, it's not as bad as all that. See you all at lunch!

ESTHER: (to Jack) How are you so awake right now?

[Vivien hums theme]

[Heavy machinery noises]

RALPH: You two. Pat sent you over?

VIVIEN: Yes. But heavy machinery. Screw and gears. Sewage. It's not really my talent.

RALPH: Too bad. You're both in metal stripping today. Follow me.

[Footsteps, heavy machinery continues]

[Banging, hissing, sound of wrenches]

RALPH: Now the robots do a lot of the work taking apart the old cars, trucks, construction vehicles, you name it. But you need to hit the exhaust button every hour on the hour or else you could pass out on the fumes. You'll be stationed next to Jack and Esther who can show you the ropes. If you have questions, save them. There's work to do. I expect a full report during your bathroom break.

VIVIEN: Our bathroom break is only 15 minutes.

RALPH: The report should only take 10 minutes max. 5 minutes is more than enough time to do your business and return to your station. Jack does it all the time.

VIVIEN: But today's our first day in this department.

RALPH: What's your point?

ECHO: (Coughing)

RALPH: Are you alright?

ECHO: Yes. I just- (wheezing)

[Distorted dog bark]

VIVIEN: Echo?

[A male voice: Are you ready?]

[A voice like Echo: Yes.]

[A male voice: Then I'll see you on the other side. A better you awaits, Alexandra.]

[Distortion increases]

ECHO: (Cough, wheeze)

[Echo collapses]

[13:34]

[Medical station noises, beeping of heart monitor]

ECHO: (Groggy waking noises) (Internal) *Wha-*

[Sarafina and Vivien are heard talking through the door]

SARAFINA: What happened in there?

VIVIEN: I don't know

SARAFINA: She's *your* friend, is she not?

VIVIEN: I've never seen her like that before.

SARAFINA: Figure out what's going on, or should I let Gabriel know of your incompetence? Don't make that face.

VIVIEN: I didn't make--

SARAFINA: You're always welcome to join me for re-education. (beat) Get it handled, or we will find someone else who can.

VIVIEN: I will.

[Footsteps; door opens; Vivien enters]

VIVIEN: Hey, sleepyhead.

ECHO: Where am I?

VIVIEN: Med Clinic. You gave me quite a scare. What happened to you?

ECHO: Allergic reaction, I think. A really bad one.

VIVIEN: I... didn't know you were allergic to anything.

ECHO: I've always had them, but I only had big reactions like that to very specific chemicals...

VIVIEN: Hm. Well, I wish I knew that sooner, this could have been avoided.

ECHO: How could it have been avoided if you had known about it sooner?

VIVIEN: Maybe we can get back to work now.

ECHO: And who were you–

[Thick fabric moving as Echo sits up]

VIVIEN: Echo, relax. [Echo stops] Who knows what this... *episode* has done to your head.

[Knock at the door; Dr. Sharpe enters]

DR. SHARPE: Hello Echo. Glad to see you awake.

ECHO: Yes. I'm sorry. You are...?

DR. SHARPE: Forgive me. Dr. Sharpe. Yes, you don't generally visit me. You are usually so careful with your work. Can you tell me what happened today?

ECHO: Just an allergic reaction I think. I've always had reactions to certain chemicals... you'd think my body would acclimate, but, uh-

DR. SHARPE: Yes, it's hard to breathe in the Repurposing Center on a regular day, but there's nothing about chemical allergies in your chart. Why is that?

ECHO: It's never been a problem before. I don't think...

DR. SHARPE: Hm. Well, let's look you over to make sure that there are no more lapses in your record. Vivien, you can go.

VIVIEN: But–

[Sharp snap]

VIVIEN: Fine.

[Footsteps; door opens as she exits]

DR. SHARPE: Sorry to be so abrupt. I just want to examine you privately. To preserve confidentiality of course.

ECHO: Sure. Ok.

[Click of penlight]

DR. SHARPE: Look here, now here. Have you had any other symptoms today?
Extreme thirst, chest pain, disorientation?

ECHO: No. Just a little... unsettled.

DR. SHARPE: Unsettled. What do you mean?

[Dr. Sharpe writes something down]

ECHO: Nothing... It's like a bad hangover.

DR. SHARPE: Bad hangover? Do you drink frequently?

ECHO: Vivien would say yes, but honestly I don't drink all that much. Apparently we did go out last night-

DR. SHARPE: Ahh. Well, nothing cures a hangover like some rest. Take this note and give it to the guard on your way out.

[He tears a sheet and hands it to her]

ECHO: I'm going home?

[Echo swings her legs down]

DR. SHARPE: Between your hangover and fainting, it sounds like a case of anaphylactic sensitiva.

ECHO: What?

DR. SHARPE: Stress, my dear. Just get some rest. Let's have another check in tomorrow.

ECHO: Okay.

DR. SHARPE: Have a good day, Echo.

[Footsteps as she exits; door opens]

[Dr. Sharpe scribbles notes to himself]

[Someone else wearing heels comes in]

SARAFINA: So what do you think?

DR. SHARPE: It's still in the early stages. We have nothing conclusive yet.

SARAFINA: I find that hard to believ—

[Vox Theme plays from cell phone]

SARAFINA: Yes... Yes. Nothing's changed. I'll have them keep a closer eye on her. No, I will handle it.

[Call ends]

SARAFINA: Doctor. Keep me updated daily about our subject's progress.

DR. SHARPE: Yes, ma'am.

[17:28]

[An echoey space, nearing outdoors]

ECHO: Hey. HEY! I know you can hear me.

GUARD: What do you want, Lab?

ECHO: The doctor said I could go home.

GUARD: You're not clever, Laborer. Get back to work.

ECHO: I have the note. Here.

[She hands him the note]

GUARD: Collapsed on the workfloor, did you? Hm. (shout) Open it up. This little Lab doesn't want to work anymore.

[Buzzing and clicks like a prison gate unlocking]

VIVIEN: Wait! Wait!

[Vivien runs up to her]

ECHO: Vivien?

VIVIEN: The doctor said I can go too, as an escort.

ECHO: What?

VIVIEN: What if you have a dizzy spell and collapse on the way home. You'll need someone there.

ECHO: I guess.

[Gate screeches as it's opened the rest of the way]

GUARD: Hmph! No one wants to work these days.

VIVIEN: Just let us out. She's sick. Unless you want to catch it.

GUARD: Catch it? Get out!

VIVIEN: That's what I thought.

[Later, near the street]

[A bus passes by, playing the theme again]

ECHO: You can't catch an allergic reaction.

VIVIEN: He clearly didn't know that. How are you feeling now?

ECHO: Still a little weak, but better.

VIVIEN: Good. You know in all the time I've known you, I've never seen you pass out like that. I thought you were completely healthy.

ECHO: I am. Mostly. But I keep some things private.

VIVIEN: Echo. We shouldn't have secrets.

ECHO: It wasn't a secret.

[Footsteps]

VIVIEN: Echo, wait...

ECHO: I told you, I'm fine.

[Distorted dog barking]

[Ringing in Echo's head that gets louder, and she begins to cry out in pain]

[Vivien cries out to her too]

[The barking and distortion drown her out]

[Echo collapses]

[End Theme & Credits]