

### Cipher 3: “(RE)EDUCATED”

Vox Elysium: A Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir

Written by Latisha Jones

**[00:00]**

[Previously on Vox Elysium - Clips from Cipher 2 play]

NARRATOR: Flying V Presents: Vox Elysium, a Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir. Cipher 3: (Re)Educated.

[Scribbling in a journal]

[Sounds of conversation around her]

ECHO: (Internal) *Every morning, the same damn headache. I feel like I'm losing chunks of time. Maybe I should go back to Dr. Sharpe. Although Sharpe would probably just say "it's a hangover". Pfft. Every day this week I've woken up like I have a hangover. But there's never any bottles or cans around. [Ominous noise] What's wrong with me? I feel so stupid writing in a notebook like some depressed teen, [page turn] but this is the only way I can be sure I'm not being monitored. Although Vivien seems to always pop up at the least opportu-*

VIVIEN: Hey Echo, [journal slams shut] we were supposed to eat togeth- What's this?

ECHO: Nothing.

VIVIEN: It doesn't look like nothing.

ECHO: It's just a journal. To write down ideas.

VIVIEN: Ideas. And what kind of ideas are you having, my dear Echo?

ECHO: Nothing, just random thoughts. Dreams sometimes. A grocery list.

VIVIEN: Grocery list.

ECHO: Yeah. I ran out of salt.

VIVIEN: Ha. Keep your secrets.

ECHO: Hey, where were you yesterday, I--

[Artificial bell chimes]

PAT: LUNCHTIME OVER!

ANNOUNCER: Vox Elysium Family. I hope you are dressed, pressed and ready for success. We are receiving a surprise inspection from our own CMO, Ms. Sarafina Grant. [gasps around the room] She will be visiting our humble operation and meeting our staff, assuring the happiness of each and every one of you. Any discontent will be handled directly by Ms. Grant to the best of her ability. Let's make this a shining day.

ECHO: "Handled"? CMO?

VIVIEN: Chief Morale Officer. Come on.

[Chairs scraping, footsteps]

PAT: Echo! Viv!

[They approach Pat]

VIVIEN: (mumbling) What now?

ECHO: How you doing, Pat?

PAT: Ready for the day to be over. You two are in Group One.

VIVIEN: What?

PAT: Yeah. So grab your stuff from your locker and line up at the front.

VIVIEN: Up front? I'm... We're pre-cleared. I don't need inspection.

PAT: Orders come from above me. Get in. Get out. Line Up. Dr. Sharpe is waiting to welcome Ms. Grant. (shouts) Russell, of all the days to be out of proper uniform.

VIVIEN: Come on, Echo.

[They hurry to the lockers]

ECHO: Wait. What's going on? Why do we need to get our things?

VIVIEN: In case we get taken for re-education.

ECHO: Taken? By who? Vivien, you're practically sweating.

VIVIEN: (sharply) Do I really have to explain everything to you?!

**[03:48]**

[Locker opening, bags taken out, locker closing]

[Shuffling feet]

[Very quiet chatter]

DR. SHARPE: Straighten up, Everyone. She's coming.

[Room quiets]

[A car approaches outside, and stops]

[Someone gets out, enters a code at the door, and enters in their heels]

SARAFINA: Dr. Sharpe. How lovely to see you again.

DR. SHARPE: You too. You seem well.

SARAFINA: Oh, I am. Doctor, you really should join my brother and I sometime at headquarters.

DR. SHARPE: I wouldn't want to intrude.

SARAFINA: No intrusion at all. I'll have my secretary set it up.

DR. SHARPE: While I do appreciate the offer, I assume your brother isn't very happy with me right now.

SARAFINA: My brother doesn't fully understand that genius can take time. As well as innovation. Let me handle him and I'll expect to see you at HQ in no time.

DR. SHARPE: You are too kind.

SARAFINA: You flatter me. Now, you there! Let us take a look at this new crop of Laborers, shall we? I hear production is steady.

[Footsteps]

PAT: Yes Ma'am. No major upsets, but no vast improvements in yield either. We are sustaining as it were.

SARAFINA: Sustaining is adequate. But wouldn't you rather be thriving?

PAT: Well, that's what you're here for.

SARAFINA: Exactly. Let's begin. [snaps] You there, bring Josie to me.

[Someone walks off]

DR. SHARPE: Josie, you've told me often of her talents, but I've never seen her in action. I've always wondered when you'd bring her around.

SARAFINA: Oh, it's quite a sight to watch her work.

[Tap of tiny footsteps and a small bark]

ECHO: (Internal) *That bark...*

SARAFINA: Josie, darling.

[Dog noises]

SARAFINA: (Cooing to the dog) Who's a good girl? Yes, you are. Yes, you are.

DR. SHARPE: Josie's a dog.

SARAFINA: Is that a problem, Dr. Sharpe?

DR. SHARPE: When you said that Josie can sniff out dissidents and distractors, I didn't realize you meant literally.

[Dog growls]

SARAFINA: Dogs are excellent judges of character, Doctor. Especially those like Josie. She's had extensive training as a therapy dog, you see. She can smell out disquiet in a person in an instant.

DR. SHARPE: So those she identifies-

SARAFINA: (Laughs lightly) Josie, go make some new friends.

[Dog scampers towards Echo]

ECHO: (Internal) *Of course she'd beeline for me.*

[Josie barks and begins licking Echo]

DR. SHARPE: Is this normal?

SARAFINA: No. This is not her normal indication pattern.

ECHO: (laugh) Okay. Okay, here's a... well... I don't carry treats.

DR. SHARPE: Do you know this dog?

ECHO: No. No. I've never seen a dog before in my life.

SARAFINA: Josie seems quite taken with you.

ECHO: What can I say? She's very friendly.

SARAFINA: Be that as it may, she's here to work. Josie!

[Josie stops]

SARAFINA: Search.

[Josie whines and scampers off]

SARAFINA: Now, while she's doing that, maybe you'll tell me what is it about you that has Josie so worked up?

ECHO: Maybe I just have one of those smells? I did have bacon this morning.

SARAFINA: Hmm. Echo, is it?

ECHO: You've heard of me?

SARAFINA: Oh yes. You've recently been assigned here, you arrive to work late most days, you spend most of your time with fellow Laborer Vivien and you've been to Dr. Sharpe several times this week for fainting spells.

ECHO: Yeah.

SARAFINA: You seem unconcerned.

ECHO: Should I be?

[Josie growls]

JACK: (whispering urgently) Shoo! Go away!

DR. SHARPE: Ms. Grant. Josie seems to have found someone.

[Sarafina walks over to Jack]

SARAFINA: And who might you be?

JACK: J-J-Jack.

SARAFINA: Jack. And why are you so unhappy here?

JACK: I'm not. I just didn't sleep well last night.

SARAFINA: Are you implying that my dog is ill trained by singling you out? You wouldn't insult my little Josie that way would you?

ECHO: He didn't- mmmf [Vivien puts her hand over Echo's mouth]

VIVIEN: Shhh.

JACK: I didn't mean anything by it. It's just that sad and tired can look alike, you know.

SARAFINA: Oh absolutely. I completely understand. That's why we'll make sure you get as much rest as you need.

JACK: Please. I have to go home tonight. My wife, she's worried—

SARAFINA: Jack. Jack. Don't simper. Now you can either walk calmly to the truck or I can have my men take you to the truck. [Jack whimpers] Either way, you're going inside. Understand?

JACK: Yes.

SARAFINA: Good. Now bend down, pet Josie and tell her she's a good girl.

[Josie licks her lips]

JACK: G- Good girl, Josie.

SARAFINA: Good. Now off to the truck!

[Jack walks off, whimpering]

SARAFINA: Well I'm feeling generous today, I suppose I'll be on my way. On to the next factory.

PAT: Back to your stations.

[Artificial bell chime]

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for participating in this month's Inspection Day.

[Footsteps as people disperse]

SARAFINA: Dr. Sharpe, the girl.

DR. SHARPE: Echo?

SARAFINA: I asked you to keep a close eye on her, did I not?

DR. SHARPE: Yes, ma'am.

SARAFINA: We shall discuss this later when you join us at Vox.

DR. SHARPE: Yes, ma'am.

SARAFINA: Come Josie!

[Josie shakes herself, barks, and scampers off]

**[09:20]**

[Lockers opening, items being stuffed inside, lockers closing]

[Light chatter]

VIVIEN: (exhales) Lord, she scares me.

ECHO: Vivien, why are you so terrified?

VIVIEN: What do you mean, why?

ECHO: How many people do you think will get taken today?

VIVIEN: I don't know. Four. Five. As long as it isn't me.

ECHO: That's a pretty awful thing to say.

VIVIEN: Everyone feels that way, I'm just honest about it. It's all a game. A numbers game, A psychological game. It's got its players, it's got rules, and we are just pieces on board. The trick is to play the game so it doesn't play you.

ECHO: I don't want to play this game.

VIVIEN: Too bad. You live, you breathe, you work. Playing the game is as automatic as your next heart beat...

ECHO: I'm sorry if watching other Labs getting hauled off doesn't sit right with me.

VIVIEN: You barely knew him.

ECHO: He was nice to me.

VIVIEN: He'll be fine..

ECHO: Well, that's not good enough.

VIVIEN: It better be. Echo, look around you. Your apartment is company property. Same with the building, and the sidewalks, and even the freaking bus. So questioning what they do with their unhappy workers is not a smart thing to do.

ECHO: No, but it might be wise. I can see you couldn't care less. (beat) Listen, I'll catch up with you later.

VIVIEN: Fine.

**[10:47]**

[Heavy machinery, fading into the background]

[Fast footsteps towards someone]



ECHO: Hey Esther! Wait up!

[Footsteps slow]

ECHO: Can I go on smoke break with you?

ESTHER: I'm not in the mood for company. And you don't smoke.

ECHO: Fair. I thought maybe you could use a friend.

ESTHER: We're friends now?

ECHO: I'd like to be.

ESTHER: I'm not friends with Elysium spies.

ECHO: What?

ESTHER: Sarafina didn't take you. Why?

ECHO: I had nothing to do with that. Listen, if you tell me to go, I'll go. But Jack... I'm as upset as you are.

ESTHER: (long beat) Fine. Here.

[They walk around the corner to an echoing space, she strikes a match to light cigarettes]

[The sounds of the machinery have faded]

ECHO: How are you doing?

ESTHER: Well, I don't know if I'll see my best friend ever again and I'll still have to go to work like it didn't happen. I'll still have to smile when I come in every day and pretend that I don't want to burn this place down. I'm fantastic.

ECHO: I'm so sorry. I didn't know Jack well, but he seemed like a good person.

ESTHER: He was... I mean, is. Crap, they've already got me thinking of him in past tense.

ECHO: Of all the people to take, I wouldn't have thought they'd take someone so... well... chipper. Is there anything I can do to help?

ESTHER: No. You... You've actually already helped.

ECHO: What?

ESTHER: Look around. Everything is business as usual. Nothing to acknowledge that one of our own was taken. So, yes, you stopping, even for a little bit, means something. At least to me.

ECHO: It's terrible the way everyone just accepts that people get taken. It makes me sick. If there was a way to bring him back, I'd do it.

ESTHER: Hey Echo... (whispers) Do you know how to get to The Alley?

ECHO: I haven't been there, but yeah.

ESTHER: Jack's wife lives there. I don't know if she knows what's happened to Jack. Can you go see her?

ECHO: Why can't you?

ESTHER: I was involved in an "incident" in The Alley a little while back. I'm not allowed to return. But I think they'll let you in.

ECHO: They who?

[Esther inhales on her cigarette]

ESTHER: Even though the Alley isn't controlled by Vox, they still have guards posted at every entrance. They are the ones who decide who goes in and out. Most people just freely walk through their checkpoints on their way to work, but an unlucky few like myself, we have a more... memorable experience. I would still avoid the surveillance cameras if I were you, just to be safe.

ECHO: I'll go. How will I know where she lives?

ESTHER: It's just off the main road above a Ramen shop. The walk up leads to a red door with red shutters on the windows. It's easy to miss if you are not looking for it, but it's there.

ECHO: I'll find it. What's her name?

ESTHER: Maria.

ECHO: Okay.

ESTHER: (beat) You're a good person, Echo.

ECHO: Thanks.

ESTHER: Try your best to stay that way.

[Mechanical bell]

ESTHER: Break's over. You be safe out there, Echo.

ECHO: You too.

[Footsteps of Esther walking away]

**[14:11]**

GUARD: (On Bullhorn) Shift 1! CLOSING TIME!

[Clicking and buzzing sounds of the main door]

[Many footsteps as people leave]

[Echo is far away, outdoors, and hears Vivien cry out]

VIVIEN: Echo! Echo, where are you?

ECHO: (internal) *Sorry Vivien. I can't have you hanging around my neck for this one.*

**[14:31]**

[Footsteps towards a quiet part of town]

[Artificial bell chimes]

[Quiet chatter]

ANNOUNCER: You are now leaving Vox Elysium company property.

GUARD: (at first quiet, then louder as Echo approaches) Welcome to the Alley. If you are found with any weapons or anything that can be used as a weapon, your property will be taken and you and your family will be removed from the vicinity. It is illegal to tamper with the surveillance cameras placed through The Alley, as they are there for

your safety. Should one be found tampering with cameras a Patrolman will administer the appropriate consequence.

ECHO: (Internal) *Sure is hospitable here.*

GUARD: You there.

[Echo stops]

ECHO: (internal) *Shit.*

GUARD: I haven't seen you before. Identification.

ECHO: I'm... from the Facility. Here to clean up some loose ends after today's Inspection Day.

GUARD: No one told me you were coming.

ECHO: You think they'd broadcast my presence? You are making it very difficult for me to remain inconspicuous. Gabriel will have your badge for this. Or maybe you'd like to join us at The Facility?

GUARD: Uh, no that won't be necessary. Right this way.

ECHO: Good choice.

[Footsteps away from checkpoint]

[Gate swings open]

ECHO: (Internal, after a beat) *That was terrifying. Luckily he didn't seem too bright. Hm. Ramen place. I think this is the one. And there's the red shutters.*

[Footsteps up metal stairs]

ECHO: Hello? Maria?

[She opens a door, it swings open]

ECHO: (Internal) *there's no one here...*

[She looks around the room, the door swings shut]

[Sound of a wall clock ticking]

[Someone behind her slurps]

ECHO: AH! Jeez! You scared me.

SCOUT: Looking for someone?

ECHO: What's it to you?

SCOUT: You know, for a factory worker who's supposed to be so compliant, you sure aren't shy about asking questions.

ECHO: How do you know I work at a factory?

[Noodle slurp]

ECHO: Are you just going to slurp like that or are you going to answer me?

SCOUT: There you go again with the questions. My boss told me to be on the lookout for someone like you.

ECHO: Who are you?

SCOUT: Ahh. See, you're asking the wrong questions. The right question is...

ECHO: Who's your boss?

SCOUT: Exactly. But we can't talk here. Come along. My ramen's getting cold.

[He stands from a chair]

ECHO: (Internal) *This feels like a setup. But maybe he knows something that will help me. Maybe Esther wanted me to find this guy... Guess I'll have to take my chances.*

[Brisk footsteps walking away]

ECHO: Hey. Hey! Wait!

**[17:28]**

[Chime of a clock]

[Loud club music and conversation in background]

ECHO: What is this place?

SCOUT: "Byte Me"

ECHO: Screw you!

SCOUT: No! It's the name of the club, "Byte Me" with a y. My boss is an expert coder with a great sense of humor. I'll take you to the back.

[They walk through the club, the sound first increases then dampens as they go through a gate and enter a hallway]

[Knocking]

REGGIE: (through the door) Who's there?

SCOUT: Reggie, you know it's me.

REGGIE: Yeah, but who's with you?

ECHO: My name is Echo, and I can speak for myself.

SCOUT: The boss wants to meet her. Catch my drift?

[Keys, unlocking of door, door opens with a loud creak]

SCOUT: Thanks, Reg. I always feel safer with you around.

REGGIE: Shut up. He's in his office.

SCOUT: Much obliged.

[Footsteps down the hallway]

[Knock on an office door]

SCOUT: Bossman, you busy?

GRAEY: (through door) Depends on why you're disturbing my evening.

SCOUT: I brought someone you might want to meet. Came looking for Maria.

GRAEY: Ah yes. Come in. Come in.

[Door swings open, footsteps inside]

SCOUT: So are you proud of me or what?

GRAEY: Yes. Yes. You've done a good job, is that what you want to hear? Now get.

SCOUT: (to Echo) You see how I'm treated? I work my fingers to the bone and this is the thanks I get. I tell ya, I get no respect.

GRAEY: Yes, you are very neglected. Would an open bar make you feel better?

SCOUT: Now you're talking my language. Bye-Bye.

[Scout leaves through the door]

**[19:23]**

[A quiet office, the door creaks closed]

ECHO: Wait. Can you stay? Can he stay?

GRAEY: Scout will be nearby, you have my word.

ECHO: Who are you? Why did he say you've been waiting for someone special? [Graey looks through files in a cabinet] Do you know what's happened to Jack?

GRAEY: Let's take that one question at a time, shall we?

ECHO: You think I like being left in the dark?

GRAEY: (smirks) Fair enough. They call me Graey. You can spell it with an "a", an "e"... or an "ae"--dealer's choice.. As for you Echo, that answer is a little more complicated. If you'll indulge me for a moment, why did you come to The Alley?

ECHO: Jack's a... friend of mine. He was taken to The Facility. I came to tell his wife.

GRAEY: Tell me Echo, do you know what The Facility is?

[He flips through some papers]

ECHO: (Internal) *Why do I get the sense that I'm being handled?* (to Graey) I keep on hearing rumors.

GRAEY: The Facility is a medical and bio research lab beneath Vox Elysium's HQ. The Facility's motto is "Better living through science".

ECHO: That doesn't sound too bad.

GRAEY: On the surface perhaps. Echo, what does it mean to have a better life? Clean Water. Clean air? Healthy food?

ECHO: (Internal) *This jerk, wasting my time. Just tell me what you know, or let me leave.* (to Graey) I guess.

GRAEY: And what if you could have none of those things, but through science, they found a way to make you content with the scraps that they gave you. Smile in the face of poor working conditions and squalid apartments.

ECHO: I would tell you that it sounds ridiculous.

GRAEY: Is it? Is that why everyone is so afraid? Why Vox Elysium has that terrifyingly beautiful and deeply effective "morale officer"? It was scary enough to bring you here. Scary enough to make Jack's wife run.

ECHO: How did you—

GRAEY: Everybody runs. No one wants to be the next one carted off to become an empty shell. Or worse.

ECHO: How do you know so much?

GRAEY: (sighs, some reluctance before admitting) I used to work for Vox. They had me programming something important but they wouldn't tell me what it's for. I thought I was meant to enhance the human brain, create neural links that could make sharing our thoughts almost instantaneous. Imagine how quickly knowledge could be passed among people like that. I soon realized that their motives were not based on the same definition of progress. So I botched the code and ran. To buy us all a little time. It was an unsavory experience to say the least.

ECHO: (Internal) *Why do I feel he's not telling me something? What's the angle?* (To Graey) I'm sorry.



GRAEY: I suppose you mean, “You feel sorrowful for my experience,” empathizing with me, but not taking any blame for something that was not your fault.

ECHO: Yes, but I’ve never thought about that... expression in so much detail.

GRAEY: No one does. And that’s my gift, Echo, the details. Yours is that you seem to be the key to some new development in their programming.

ECHO: Is that why I’ve been losing memory, blacking out for hours at a time?

GRAEY: Blacking out huh? I’d wager that, if you thought about it, there are many things you don’t remember besides just a few hours here and there. Your birth date, for example?

ECHO: My birthday... My birthday is...

GRAEY: Let’s try something really basic... Your parents’ faces?

ECHO: (long beat) What happened to me?

GRAEY: I’m not completely sure. Whatever was done to you, I’m sure it has something to do with this.

[He opens a drawer and hands her a poster]

GRAEY: Here.

ECHO: A missing poster? This is... me.

GRAEY: And yet, not you. Check the info.

ECHO: Alexandra Adams.

GRAEY: Seems you have a twin. I must say the resemblance is uncanny.

ECHO: (Internal) *A twin?* (to Graey) Maybe they took her, like they took Jack. And then wiped my memory of her somehow...

GRAEY: Hard to know for sure. My guess is that you and your twin are a part of some grand plan that most likely has something to do with the programming the Grants had me working on.

ECHO: Where did you get this poster?

GRAEY: We found it over in Blue Lake, off Vox property, the town where all the teachers and business types live. It was taken down almost as soon as it was put up.

ECHO: Someone is looking for me?

GRAEY: You? No. But someone seems to be looking for this Alexandra Adams. I also found this during my time at Vox.

[He hands her a brochure]

ECHO: A brochure. "Let the light of Vox Elysium burn away your impurities. Unburden yourself, and join the family"

GRAEY: I can only assume that if your twin has gone missing, something's clearly been done to you. There are experiments being done on the human mind, and Gabriel is in the mix... Alexandra is in all likelihood the latest experiment in Vox's cutting edge tech in building a community of "better you's." She might even be the key to his ultimate vision: A world dependent on products built by the Grants. (beat) You okay?

ECHO: Am I being controlled by Vox?

GRAEY: I don't know. But the answer to that and the key to your friend Jack's salvation, and your twin's whereabouts, is probably HQ.

ECHO: So it's lost forever.

GRAEY: Not necessarily. (raised voice) Scout, can you come back in here.

**[25:09]**

[Door opens]

SCOUT: Yeah?

GRAEY: Close the door and lock it.

[He steps in, door closes, his keys jingle]

GRAEY: Do we have what we need for the P/D?

SCOUT: Yeah.

GRAEY: You'll be taking her with you.

SCOUT: What?

GRAEY: And get her a dress.

SCOUT/ECHO: What?!

SCOUT: That's ridiculous.

ECHO: Answer my questions, Graey. What's a P/D? Why do I need a dress?

GRAEY: Take it easy kids. P/D is a Pick up and Drop Off. Let's just say that there are some things people can't get in Vox Elysium, and I can. Second, there's a very important celebration Gabriel has been planning for some time. All of the "important" people will be there. But more importantly, that means there will be no one at The Facility. If you are able to get in, you might be able to find some clues to your sibling and your friend Jack. I know The Facility well. I have people on the inside keeping track of door codes. All we needed was an opportunity... then you show up. If you follow my instructions to the letter, you should be able to get in and out with nobody none the wiser. What do you say?

ECHO: I suppose you want something out of this.

GRAEY: Pardon?

ECHO: You aren't just doing this out of the goodness of your heart are you? What's in it for you?

GRAEY: (long beat) Do you know why people drink? Gamble? Are addicted to sex?

ECHO: Everyone has their vices, I suppose.

GRAEY: Exactly. Everyone has their dark side. It's human nature. How would we know light if we never experienced the dark?

ECHO: Your point?

GRAEY: My business operates in the dark.

ECHO: So it's bad for business.

GRAEY: Crudely put, but accurate nevertheless.

ECHO: Ok... but why me? Why not you?

GRAEY: They know my face. And with Scout, well, someone needs to be the getaway driver. You could pretend to be Alexandra.

ECHO: Won't they be suspicious when two Alexandras show up?

GRAEY: Not if you stick to the shadows.

ECHO: That seems poorly planned at best. I mean you really want me to infiltrate one of the most powerful organizations with nothing but a dress and a map?

GRAEY: A very nice dress and a very good map. Do you want to find answers to all of your questions or not?

ECHO: (beat) When does this thing start?

SCOUT: In two days.

ECHO: Two days?! How am I supposed to-

GRAEY: Tick-Tock, princess.

ECHO: Do you really think I can save Jack?

GRAEY: You won't know unless you try.

ECHO: (Beat) Okay.

[End Theme & Credits]