

Cipher 4: “THE TRIP”

Vox Elysium: A Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir

Written by Madelyn Dorta

[00:00]

[Opening theme music]

[Previously on Vox Elysium - clips from Cipher 3]

NARRATOR: Flying V Presents: Vox Elysium, a Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir. Cipher 4: The Trip.

[Typing on a computer]

[Her morning alarm goes off, she stops typing to turn it off]

ALEXANDRA: (sighing with exhaustion) (internal) *Not a wink of sleep. Again. There's no way I'm getting this done by tomorrow night.*

[Alexandra's watch reminds her to “Relax... relax...”]

ALEXANDRA: Oh shut up! I'm taking this stupid thing off.

[She turns off her watch, it shuts off with a few corrective beeps]

[Knock at the door, the servant enters with a rolling breakfast tray]

SERVANT: Goodmorning Ms. Alexandra. I shall start your bath.

ALEXANDRA: Thank you. (internal) *I still don't know her name.*

[Distorted flashes of a remembered conversation... somehow]

GRAEY: *You okay?*

ECHO: *Am I being controlled by Vox?*

[Alexandra groans]

SERVANT: Miss?

ALEXANDRA: I'm fine. Just a headache from staring at a screen for so long.

SERVANT: I'll add some peppermint oil to your bath miss, that should help a bit.

[Servant walks to the bathroom] I've left some essence on the table for you, it'll perk you right up.

[Bath being run, then the servant walks around the room cleaning up]

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *I shouldn't skip breakfast this morning since I have to see Dr. Sharpe again. I'm not sure why Vivien is so insistent on it. I feel fine... besides the voices in my head. Is that something I should tell Dr. Sharpe about? I can't give Gabriel a reason to doubt his decision in me. Sharpe reports directly to Gabriel, I saw them chatting in the lounge. Maybe, I could take more breaks, give my head some time to breathe.*

[Water turning off]

SERVANT: The bath is ready, miss.

[Servant leaves room, Alexandra gets in the bath]

[Servant walks around, cleaning]

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *I need this to work. This was my choice, I chose this. I want to serve a bigger cause. Use my skills to make the world a better place and live in Vox, and here I am. Sitting in this ridiculous bathtub being hand delivered fresh fruit every day and I still feel unsettled. Everyone keeps saying this is my home now. It doesn't feel like it. But Gabriel did say that it would take some adjusting. I have to get my head right.*

SERVANT: When you are done, miss, your itinerary says you are meant to meet Dr. Sharpe in the medical station.

ALEXANDRA: Thank you.

[Servant exits]

[Bath water sloshing]

[04:30]

[Beep of far-off medical monitoring devices]

DR.SHARPE: Alexandra! How are you feeling today?

ALEXANDRA: Hi! Uhhh...I feel good.

DR. SHARPE: Well that's great to hear. How are you sleeping?

ALEXANDRA: Uhh, well I've been pretty busy with the code, but when I do sleep it's restful. My accommodations are incredible.

DR. SHARPE: Wonderful, glad to hear. According to your watch, you haven't been taking your daily essence. Why is that Alexandra?

ALEXANDRA: My watch? You've been tracking what I consume on my watch?

DR. SHARPE: Yes, we monitor all of us here, to make sure we are taking care of ourselves. Putting our best foot forward, always. Ah, but I see you aren't wearing it.

ALEXANDRA: It was distracting me. And don't you think that's a bit--

DR. SHARPE: Rest assured, it is perfectly standard. As a matter of fact, we test all of our products. Who better to try them out than the minds who make them, don't you think?

ALEXANDRA: I suppose that makes sense.

DR. SHARPE: Back to my question, why aren't you taking your daily essence? It is important after The Procedure. Mr. Grant has put a lot of trust in you and your programming abilities. We need to make sure you are taking care of that big brain of yours.

ALEXANDRA: Of course, no...you are totally right. I'll make sure to take my essence every time from now on.

DR. SHARPE: Be sure you do. Tell me, how is your sleep?

ALEXANDRA: You asked that already. (beat) My bed is a cloud, very comfortable. After working on the program all day, I'm out the second my head hits the pillow.

DR. SHARPE: Great, so there are no nightmares, no restlessness?

ALEXANDRA: (Lying) Nope! Feeling great.

DR. SHARPE: My job here is to ensure anyone who has undergone The Procedure has a safe and pleasant transition. So, if there are any concerns, I'm here to help you. No matter how trivial they may seem.

ALEXANDRA: About that... How many others have had this procedure done?

DR. SHARPE: Oh a few. But everyone takes to it differently. There are many factors to take into account.

ALEXANDRA: Right, well... I should mention... there are these moments when I'm programming.

DR. SHARPE: Moments?

ALEXANDRA: Yes, they feel familiar but they don't? More like... memories? But not quite that.

DR. SHARPE: Tell me about them.

ALEXANDRA: The memories? Well...it's just mostly conversations with people that seem to know me but I don't know them. And they call me a different name.

[Dr. Sharpe types notes]

DR. SHARPE: Interesting. Do any of these "memories" scare you?

ALEXANDRA: No. Not really. It feels more like eavesdropping really. Like being in the same room when someone else is on the phone.

[More typing]

DR. SHARPE: Interesting. How often do these occur?

ALEXANDRA: Not much. A few times a day. Just depends.

DR. SHARPE: So, you are saying you are having daily hallucinations and you haven't reported them? Interesting.

[More typing]

ALEXANDRA: Oh, well I didn't think they were that big of a deal.

DR. SHARPE: (sighs deeply) Alexandra, what happens to you matters to a lot of people. Mr. Grant will not be pleased to hear that you've kept this from us.

ALEXANDRA: Oh, I'm sorry. I promise, I wasn't hiding it or anything, I've just ignored it. I've been so focused on the program and making sure I am doing everything I can.

DR. SHARPE: My dear girl, it's nothing to be nervous about, just a side effect of having your mind altered. You must have been scared.

ALEXANDRA: Of course I am. I still feel like I don't have a handle on my own reality. I feel like I'm floating with nothing to anchor myself to. And I'm tired. [Dr. Sharpe types] I'm so tired. I'm just running in place while trying to grasp what it is I'm meant to be doing. Wouldn't you be scared?

DR. SHARPE: How about this? I won't mention it to Mr. Grant if you promise to report when you have these hallucinations. That way I can see if there is a way to prevent them so they don't interfere with your work. How does that sound?

ALEXANDRA: Ok.

DR. SHARPE: Rest assured that these flashes have no bearing on reality. If you take your daily essence, and report to me with ANY hallucinations, uneasiness, or restlessness, all will be well.

ALEXANDRA: Of course, it won't happen again.

DR. SHARPE: (With a smile too wide) I know it won't, Alexandra. (pause) These are exactly the kind of distractions that cannot continue and it will only get in the way of the work we are doing here. Don't you agree?

ALEXANDRA: Yes, I know my purpose here, I don't want to jeopardize that.

DR. SHARPE: Precisely how I feel! To fully understand the magnitude of what we are doing, it's important to see the Why. ...I'd like for you to check in with Mr. Grant today.

ALEXANDRA: What for?

DR. SHARPE: I believe he may have some answers to this problem. Perhaps the remedy.

ALEXANDRA: A remedy? Ok.

DR. SHARPE: Good. Tonight, you will join us for an evening essence and we will get rid of those pesky flashes for good.

[09:58]

[Footsteps in a quiet hallway up to Gabriel's office, his muffled speech heard behind a door]

GABRIEL GRANT: This is unacceptable. If I give an order, I expect it to be executed without delay. You were instructed not to let it out of your sight, report on anything and everything. And you failed. [pause; more footsteps] I don't want your excuses. Find the Blank. Do your job. Don't make me regret choosing you.

[Digital beeping as Gabriel hangs up the call]

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *Damn...who is he talking to like that? He's usually so nice.*

[Alexandra knocks]

GABRIEL GRANT: Come in.

[She opens the creaking door, steps inside, and closes the door]

ALEXANDRA: Mr. Grant. I didn't mean to interrupt, I was told to come see you. Is everything alright?

GABRIEL GRANT: How many times must I tell you, call me Gabriel. Everything is fine. You needn't worry. I spoke with Dr. Sharpe earlier and he informed me that you will be joining us on our next trip, and I'm thrilled to hear it. It's time for you to go deeper.

ALEXANDRA: Trip? Deeper?

GABRIEL GRANT: Yes. And I shall be joining you. You, and a few other core members of Vox Elysium. Once you see it, I am confident that you will have everything you need to finish the program and ascend higher.

ALEXANDRA: This is the remedy that Dr. Sharpe mentioned.

GABRIEL GRANT: Very astute. The fact that you've been invited to participate in our next gathering is a great honor. Very few people have what it takes to truly see our vision, let alone take part in this particular ceremony.

ALEXANDRA: And you believe that I do?

GABRIEL GRANT: Of course, you wouldn't be here if that wasn't the case. Tell me Alexandra, do you feel like you belong here?

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *How the heck do I answer that?* (to Gabriel) Of course, I do. I made my choice with no regrets. I'll do what it takes to crack this program and push us forward.

GABRIEL GRANT: Excellent. I promise Alexandra, after tonight, everything will be made clear. You'll see the inner workings and take your true place.

ALEXANDRA: (With uneasiness) I look forward to it.

[12:02]

[Chirping of birds outside, insects chirping in the night]

[Knock at Alexandra's door, Vivien walks in]

VIVIEN: Hey kiddo.

ALEXANDRA: Vivien, hi! What are you doing here?

VIVIEN: I'm here to take you to the gathering. It's so exciting! You, Alexandra, are going deeper into the fold today. You know how many people would kill to be in your shoes right now? Gabriel Grant himself is excited to have *you* be a part of the inner fold.

ALEXANDRA: Right.

VIVIEN: Aren't you excited?

ALEXANDRA: No, I am. Just a little nervous.

VIVIEN: You can talk to me, Alex.

[Distortion, flashback of one of Echo's conversations]

VIVIEN: It's all 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.

[Distortion ends]

VIVIEN: Alex?!? Alexandra! You okay? Are you feeling alright?

ALEXANDRA: Yes, it's fine. It's nothing. I just don't want to let anyone down.

VIVIEN: You won't. Mr. Grant and Dr. Sharpe wouldn't have insisted you join them if you weren't ready. Alex, did you have another hallucination?

ALEXANDRA: Y-- you know about those?

VIVIEN: They needed to tell me so I can keep a better eye on you. What if something happened and no one knew how to help you?

ALEXANDRA: Well... it's still a little strange that my doctor would tell you about my health.

VIVIEN: Alexandra, we are family. I believe you will understand more after the ceremony.

ALEXANDRA: Right, of course. What's so special about this... gathering?

VIVIEN: You'll see.

[13:55]

[Footsteps, scattered conversation in the Green Tree Lounge]

[Sounds of a simulated summer evening]

VIVIEN: Alex?

ALEXANDRA: Sorry! Just taking in everything. I didn't know the lounge changed at night. I've never seen the stars like that.

VIVIEN: It's a simulation, but it is beautiful. Come this way, there is someone Gabriel would like you to meet.

[They walk through the crowd]

VIVIEN: Here we are... Ms. Grant.

SARAFINA: Good evening, Vivien.

VIVIEN: This is Alexandra Adams.

SARAFINA: A pleasure. Sarafina Grant, I've heard a great deal about you. My brother practically sings your praises.

[Distortion, memory of Echo's life]

SARAFINA: Josie seems quite taken with you.

[Josie barking happily]

ALEXANDRA: Hello Josie! It's nice to see you again.

SARAFINA: You've met?

ALEXANDRA: Once. Gabriel said it was unusual for you two to be separate.

SARAFINA: She is very dear to me. Though she is conspicuous. Are you excited about this trip?

ALEXANDRA: Yes, about that. Are we taking a bus or--

SARAFINA: (Laughing) Oh dear, it's not that kind of trip. Though it's sure to take you somewhere. Dr. Sharpe has told me about some of your recent unsettling experiences.

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *(Scoff) Dr. Sharpe, why don't you just announce it over the intercom? When Sarafina looks at me, it's like she's trying to see underneath my skin.*

Breathe, Alexandra. But what is this Trip? Why are they both looking at me like that? I just want to go ho--

SARAFINA: Alexandra, is there something you would like to share?

ALEXANDRA: (Nervously) Uh...nope. Just excited to be here.

[Sound of a melodic chime]

SARAFINA: I believe that is your cue to leave, Vivien.

VIVIEN: Yes. (to Alexandra) See you soon.

[Vivien walks away]

ALEXANDRA: Wait, I-

[Server approaches with a shot on a tray]

SERVER: Here you are, miss.

ALEXANDRA: What is this? More essence?

SARAFINA: Of a sort.

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *This doesn't look like the normal essence, it's not green. It's gold, and thick, like cream.*

SARAFINA: Think of it as Your Remedy.

ALEXANDRA: So, if I drink this I will be able to crack the program?

SARAFINA: *When...*you partake with us, you will have all the answers.

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *My stomach is in knots, and I could actually go for some real essence, not whatever this is.*

[Serene music stops]

[A single set of footsteps approaching, and a small audience clapping]

GABRIEL GRANT: Welcome. Please take your seats in the circle, you'll find your mats to be quite comfortable.

[Shuffling as everyone sits]

GABRIEL GRANT: My dearest friends. My innermost circle. Welcome. Some of you have been here before. Some of you are new. For those who have not been a part of this ritual, I'd like to take a moment to set the scene.

[Sound of a gong; purposely vague tribal/Eastern music]

GABRIEL GRANT: About five years ago, I was a lost soul. Like most people in this world, I felt purposeless. Without direction. So I decided to embark upon a spiritual quest. My guides led me deep into the forests where I was given a most special substance.

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *Not very specific, is he? No, Alexandra, he is our host. Shut the thoughts down.*

GABRIEL GRANT: This same substance now sits before you. As I knelt, I drank this most precious liquid... and discovered life. True life. Another dimension, if you will.

ALEXANDRA: (Internal) *If he pulls out a guitar I'm going to--no. SHUT UP, BRAIN.*

GABRIEL GRANT: And it was in this dimension that I met the single most important element to Vox's success. A being beyond comprehension who has since shown me the path to greatness. Upon my awakening I thought, "Why should I be the only one to experience such bliss? Others must have access as well." So I contained this being... this "Entity" if you will (no small feat I might add), and packaged the substance that brought me such understanding, and I have brought it here for you. My chosen few.

[A few people clap and cheer]

[Regular Green Tree Lounge music resumes]

[Chatter begins]

GABRIEL GRANT: (distorted) There is only Vox. Elysium is waiting.

[Sounds of the forest increase]

ALEXANDRA: (distorted) Make it stop. Please. I want it to stop.

GABRIEL GRANT: You must learn to let go, dear Alexandra. (distortion) Let go and become one with us.

[Sound of a heartbeat]

[Distorted flashes of Echo's experiences]

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

VIVIEN: What? It's catchy. Vox Elysium really knows how to make an earworm.

[Distorted flashes continue]

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

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

ECHO: Alexandra Adams.

[Distortion increases; the dog bark pushes through]

VIVIEN: Echo!

[Alexandra groans]

ALEX/GABRIEL: You chose this.

[Distorted sound of her watch telling her to Relax]

[Distortion breaks down, warping further, then finally breaks through with some clarity]

[Alexandra cries, now more lucid]

ALEXANDRA: (whispered) Elysium.

GABRIEL GRANT: (still echoing slightly at the beginning) Amazing, isn't it? I've got you. Shhhh. I've got you. I would never let harm come to you, Alexandra.

[Her crying begins to subside]

GABRIEL GRANT: How do you feel? You understand it all now don't you? What Elysium is? What you must, without question, be helping us move toward.

[She thinks]

ALEXANDRA: Yes...I understand.

GABRIEL GRANT: Here is your watch, my dear.

[He snaps on her watch, it beeps three times]

GABRIEL GRANT: It is time to celebrate.

[End Theme & Credits]