

Cipher 6: “EVERYTHING YOU’VE EVER WANTED”

Vox Elysium: A Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir

Written by Jon Jon Johnson

[00:00]

[Opening theme music]

[Previously on Vox Elysium - clips from Cipher 5]

NARRATOR: Flying V Presents: Vox Elysium, a Paperless Pulp Cyber Noir. Cipher 6: Everything You’ve Ever Wanted.

[Elevator ding, doors begin to close]

GENERIC 1: (muffled through door) Vivien? Viv! Would you hold the door please?

[Vivien hits the door close button over and over]

VIVIEN: Oh dear, oh my, the button isn’t working?

GENERIC 1: Are you hitting “door close” again by accident?

[Doors briefly open, then close again]

VIVIEN: I most assuredly am not!

[Elevator whirs and ascends]

VIVIEN: (Sigh of relief) Patience is a virtue, fellow Elysiite.

[Pleasant elevator music]

VIVIEN: I hate this cheerful shit. Could you not?

[Music cuts out, then changes to the Vox Elysium theme]

VIVIEN: Touché.

[She rides the elevator]

VIVIEN: One day I'll have a penthouse office overlooking all the little ants.

[Elevator ding, doors slide open]

[She walks into an echoing lobby]

[A clock ticks behind a desk]

VIVIEN: (Internal) *Doesn't matter how many times I'm here, this place is always impressive. Never a fan of filigree, but this is at least classy.*

SECRETARY: Hello Ms. Verity. Do you have an appointment with Mr. Grant?

VIVIEN: He requested I come up.

SECRETARY: Precisely 5 minutes early, as usual, Ms. Verity. Mr. Grant is just finishing his speech downstairs, please have a seat. May I offer you something to drink?

VIVIEN: Water. Sparkling Water. With a wedge of lemon.

[Bottle of water fizzing open, ice into a glass, fizzy water poured into glass]

[The secretary places it near Vivien, she picks it up and sips]

VIVIEN: (Satisfied Sigh) (Internal) *This is so much better than the bottled slop they sell everywhere else.*

SECRETARY: How's the morning been treating you?

VIVIEN: It was just lovely until someone attempted idle banter.

[The Secretary types behind her desk]

SECRETARY: Well... may your sky be blue and your trees be green.

VIVIEN: And in this moment I'd prefer something golden.

SECRETARY: Like...a coin?

VIVIEN: Like silence.

SECRETARY: Hm.

[Elevator dings]

SECRETARY: Oh! Mr. Grant is coming up the elevator now!

[Elevator doors slide open]

[03:09]

[Footsteps as Gabriel approaches]

GABRIEL GRANT: You're late.

VIVIEN: Nice try. I'm a few minutes early.

[She follows him into his office]

GABRIEL GRANT: Your effervescent wit aside, I meant that you're late on your deliverables.

[His office door opens with a creak and they walk through together, it closes behind them]

VIVIEN: How do you mean?

GABRIEL GRANT: The blank of Alexandra Adams? She delivered herself here, after meeting with one of our former employees in the Alley. [She sits in a leather chair] Evading you for two days I might add.

VIVIEN: Am I the Echo's Keeper?

[Gabriel opens a safe with a digital code]

GABRIEL GRANT: She is your *assignment*. And your *assignment* arrived here sans chaperone at the mixer celebration. Somebody helped her, and we don't know who. Time seems to be of the essence.

[He removes something and locks the safe again]

VIVIEN: And that undoes all my work in, say, recruiting Alexandra in the first place?

GABRIEL GRANT: Your previous merits have been accounted for, hence why you're still here.

VIVIEN: Yet you still have me working most of the time in the trenches. I was promised

—

[He walks across his office to open a cabinet for a file]

GABRIEL GRANT: Delivery on said promises is upon completion of your task, not before. Otherwise it would not be a proper reward.

VIVIEN: And you don't think a gift for my services thus far-

GABRIEL GRANT: I appreciate the clever attempt to steer the conversation away from your shortcomings.

VIVIEN: (Clicks her tongue, disappointed)

GABRIEL GRANT: Vivien, Sweet Viv.

VIVIEN: (Vivien exhales with exasperation at being called Viv- but she doesn't dare make too audible of a sound)

GABRIEL GRANT: -always thinking you're the one in control. At some point you'll realize that I'm usually a few steps ahead of you.

VIVIEN: Not always?

GABRIEL GRANT: Admittedly. You are, in fact, one of the brightest I've seen in my time here.

VIVIEN: Thank you, Mr. Grant.

GABRIEL GRANT: I would like to remind you that your candidacy for life at Vox is on the line.

VIVIEN: How could I forget?

GABRIEL GRANT: Which means, seeing as Alexandra's Blank came here of her own accord, not kept an eye on by you...

VIVIEN: I'll have to redeem myself.

GABRIEL GRANT: Undoubtedly you'll be reporting your next assignment here in no time, with a sparkling commendation from me, personally, for your entryway into the innermost chambers of Vox Elysium. And just maybe, ready for The Split.

[Gabriel's Zippo flick, flame, lighting a cigarette and exhaling]

GABRIEL GRANT: Call me sentimental, but I love the occasional archaic artifact. The primitive design of a Zippo lighter is so quaint. Cigarette?

VIVIEN: You read my mind.

[Zippo flick, flame, lighting a cigarette and exhaling]

VIVIEN: So my next assignment?

GABRIEL GRANT: Still to be determined while we wrap this one.

VIVIEN: Surely something I can do to expedite that.

GABRIEL GRANT: I'm so glad you asked.

VIVIEN: (Internal) *Walked into that one.*

GABRIEL GRANT: I was thinking you might let Vox do a little matchmaking for you.

VIVIEN: Pass.

GABRIEL GRANT: Come now, Viv. Wouldn't you feel much better with some stupid, handsome arm candy?

VIVIEN: It's simply not appealing.

GABRIEL GRANT: Oh, surely it is? A woman of your talents could always hide her considerable mind behind a smokescreen like that.

[She takes a cigarette draw]

GABRIEL GRANT: We always love to have a patsy, just in case we get caught, no?

VIVIEN: Oh knock it off. I know when I'm being managed.

GABRIEL GRANT: (beat) Think on it.

VIVIEN: What does this have to do with expediting my current assignment?

GABRIEL GRANT: Nothing, just a tangent.

VIVIEN: Hmph.

GABRIEL GRANT: But apropos to your assignment...

VIVIEN: "We are in the business of making a better you."

GABRIEL GRANT: Clever girl.

VIVIEN: Oh come off it, Gabriel, I'm a grown woman.

GABRIEL GRANT: (Suddenly colder) Then I'll thank you to act like one.

[He takes a cigarette draw]

GABRIEL GRANT: Alexandra's blank is in custody downstairs.

VIVIEN: Well then, my work is done.

GABRIEL GRANT: Wouldn't you like to see the culmination of your ill-performed labors?

VIVIEN: I brought you Alexandra. Helped design Echo's apartment just the way Alexandra would.

GABRIEL GRANT: And Alexandra's efforts, unlike yours, ultimately, have led us to the culmination of our great work.

VIVIEN: So without me, you never would have gotten this far.

GABRIEL GRANT: How proud you are to be a stone. So eager to be trod upon while others approach the monument to greatness.

VIVIEN: And here I thought you hated getting mud on those fancy shoes.

[She takes a cigarette draw]

GABRIEL GRANT: Credit where credit is due of course. Had you not brought Alexandra to us, we would be decades behind in our work. There is some commendation in your skill in acquisition.

VIVIEN: Every organization needs it.

GABRIEL GRANT: But discovering the genius is a pale substitute for the genius itself. Do not forget that you have only played half your part.

VIVIEN: I have an eye for talent.

GABRIEL GRANT: But your hand in management is quite lacking. The curtain falls on Act 2 of your performance to scattered and scant applause.

VIVIEN: Is this a monument or a play?

GABRIEL GRANT: (Scoff) Only a pedant attacks technique in lieu of the argument. You are, I'll credit you again, phenomenal at the subtle art of casting aspersions.

VIVIEN: Just as you're phenomenal at hiding criticism within the compliment.

GABRIEL GRANT: You know, I do so appreciate that you're one of the few who can parse that information.

VIVIEN: It's why I'm sitting here now, smoking one of your cigarettes. I'm one of your best and you know it.

GABRIEL GRANT: My best don't leave their charges unattended, allowing them to infiltrate an event where they nearly cross paths with--

VIVIEN: Look if I apologize, will you drop it?

GABRIEL GRANT: I am not interested in your apologies.

VIVIEN: Then what am I to do to get you to drop this?

GABRIEL GRANT: I am interested in rectification.

[He draws from his cigarette]

VIVIEN: And what about me requires rectification?

GABRIEL GRANT: Aside from the absolutely sour attitude you wear so proudly when things don't go your way--

VIVIEN: Charming.

GABRIEL GRANT: I want you to realize that everything now rests on this Blank.

VIVIEN: Echo.

GABRIEL GRANT: I don't care what its name is, and neither do you. I want you to realize that everything rests on the final transformation. So I will let you in on where the plan stands, hinging of course on our dear Alexandra's code. Once we have rid ourselves of everything that held us back, we no longer need to discard it. We can repurpose it.

VIVIEN: So the blank...

GABRIEL GRANT: Yes, becomes our new source of labor. Programmable. Able to perform any task that high civilization deems below us.

VIVIEN: And the cost?

GABRIEL GRANT: Is all up front, through the maintenance of technology. You don't pay a blank... provide them housing and food perhaps.

VIVIEN: But they could live off of nutrient paste and in low-cost barracks.

GABRIEL GRANT: No need for medical expenses, we can simply discard them and make more.

VIVIEN: So we transform everything we hate about ourselves...

GABRIEL GRANT: ...Into the fuel that keeps us happy instead.

VIVIEN: That's...

GABRIEL GRANT: Brilliant?

VIVIEN: (calculating) The Split takes everything bad about us as people, suppresses it and puts it to work.

GABRIEL GRANT: The completed split is going to revolutionize the world.

[He stands and walks a short distance]

VIVIEN: Wouldn't people be morally opposed to slavery?

GABRIEL GRANT: It's not slavery -- don't mistake Blanks for people, Viv, they're the worst parts of us transformed. This is a form of liberation for both the prime and the blank.

VIVIEN: The Vitruvian Ideal re-imagined.

GABRIEL GRANT: Oh that's good, we can use that: "Achieve your Vitruvian Ideal"

VIVIEN: Just fancy enough that no one will look that up.

[Gabriel pours himself a drink]

GABRIEL GRANT: If I had been able to put my blank to work, I wouldn't ever even have to pour my own whiskey.

VIVIEN: You have a Blank?

[He walks back]

GABRIEL GRANT: Had. Naturally I wanted to be the first to experience pure bliss in separating from my negative self. Unfortunately the thing was quite useless, as most have turned out to be. The pain of its existence seemed to be too much. It would have been a shame not to put it out of its misery. Only good for the occasional experiment... until Alexandra that is.

VIVIEN: Do you decide what goes into your blank?

GABRIEL GRANT: In a sense... a person's unconscious pushes the undesirable traits forward. Something about how we internalize everything negative about ourselves... they're very easily compartmentalized and removed.

VIVIEN: What did you remove from yourself?

GABRIEL GRANT: Well, when I felt the Split, I believed it to primarily be laziness and a lack of ambition.

[He takes a drink]

VIVIEN: What would the Blank's name have been?

GABRIEL GRANT: Of no import; I did not care to hear the name of all the worst parts of me. Look what I have become now that I have ceased to laze about, calling it "rest and replenishment," or held myself back with excuses.

[He takes a drink]

VIVIEN: I wonder what parts of me I'd...transform.

GABRIEL GRANT: Oh, your irresponsibility for one. Your irreverence, another.

VIVIEN: Oh how grateful I am that the decision is not in your hands.

GABRIEL GRANT: And here you should be thanking me for elevating you to this position, making it all a possibility.

VIVIEN: How very gracious.

GABRIEL GRANT: A trait I'm glad I managed to keep.

VIVIEN: But the new program?

GABRIEL GRANT: Will help us in so many ways. Not only will it allow us to control the Blanks, it lets us determine which traits to keep in the Primaries. It grants us the ability to rewrite the unconscious in the moments just before the Split. Vivien, I have only recently come to realize that it was not luck that left me as I am now. It was my ambition and my determination that had been transformed into destiny. And now that I have ascended, I can guide the rest of this tattered world into the future.

VIVIEN: And when I've ascended?

GABRIEL GRANT: ...We'll assess.

VIVIEN: So long as I can support the great Gabriel Grant in achieving the sublime future he has determined for us all.

GABRIEL GRANT: Do I discern a hint of sarcasm?

VIVIEN: So when I undergo the Split--

GABRIEL GRANT: --if--

VIVIEN: --will I get to decide what parts of me go?

GABRIEL GRANT: That is a conversation.

VIVIEN: Between...us?

[Beat; he swirls his drink]

GABRIEL GRANT: Perhaps it's time.

VIVIEN: For... what, more drinks?

GABRIEL GRANT: I'm deliberating. On the one hand, you're one of the most brilliant people to ever come under my wing.

VIVIEN: I sense a "but..."

GABRIEL GRANT: You're also devious, cunning, and manipulative.

VIVIEN: Oh stop, you'll make me blush.

GABRIEL GRANT: And irresponsible, churlish, petulant...

VIVIEN: Okay now actually stop.

GABRIEL GRANT: But you did make at least one salient point earlier, and that is the notion that without you, we would not be where we are now: on the precipice of destiny.

VIVIEN: Continue.

GABRIEL GRANT: I would like to share with you...the epiphany.

VIVIEN: I'm listening.

GABRIEL GRANT: I think it must be seen to be believed.

[12:45]

[They walk out of his office, door swinging behind them]

SECRETARY: Mr. Grant, you have an--

GABRIEL GRANT: Cancel it. Reschedule it for the same time next year.

SECRETARY: Yes sir!

[Elevator dings, opens, they walk in]

[Gabriel enters a long and complex code inside, Vivien attempts to memorize it]

VIVIEN: (Internal) - *01123581321345589144233377610*

[Happy chime, ding, elevator begins moving]

GABRIEL GRANT: I've no doubt you just attempted to memorize that code.

VIVIEN: Am I so predictable?

GABRIEL GRANT: In sharing this with you, I fully expect you to be able to return down here at some point.

VIVIEN: Those numbers have any meaning?

GABRIEL GRANT: Always looking at the minutiae and never the larger, beautiful whole, Vivien. It's the Fibonacci Sequence.

VIVIEN: I never cared for Math

GABRIEL GRANT: Not Math, as in Arithmetic, but Math as in Mathematics. The Fibonacci sequence gets us to the golden ratio. Perfection.

VIVIEN: Well I'll be.

GABRIEL GRANT: I trust that with that glance you've already committed it to memory, so I won't repeat myself.

VIVIEN: I'm honestly quite flattered by this confidence you have in me.

GABRIEL GRANT: I trust you'll do everything to keep it.

[Elevator ding, door slides open]

[A sound of a being that is too large to describe: thunder, distortion, radio signals, echoes, beings passing to and fro, reality bending and shattering and echoing, somehow impossibly trapped within and beyond this building level]

VIVIEN: (awestruck, truly) What is this?

GABRIEL GRANT: "The Entity."

VIVIEN: I feel like I just lost my mind.

GABRIEL GRANT: You did. DON'T touch it. Anything that touches it becomes a part of it. Sort of poetic, is it not?

VIVIEN: How did you capture this... thing?

GABRIEL GRANT: You don't expect me to give up all of my trade secrets do you?
Perhaps we are simply the chosen ones, made to wield such power.

VIVIEN: Seriously, what am I looking at?

GABRIEL GRANT: I do not truly know. My guess is that if we're an infinitesimal fraction of the universe...then this is the next step up. Like we're nothing more than atoms to this entity.

VIVIEN: It's... unending.

[A ringing that builds and fades]

GABRIEL GRANT: And to think, this is merely the form that our brains choose so that we can understand.

VIVIEN: What does it look like to you?

GABRIEL GRANT: A nebula. The birthplace of galaxies. You?

VIVIEN: Like...interweaving roads of stars, of dreams, of fires... of memory...

GABRIEL GRANT: Incredible. I suspect, similar to when the Split occurs, you see what drives you. I aspire to create the new world. (beat) I hope you now see why you'll never truly be on my level, Vivien. You're good; I'll give you that. Excellent even. But you will never be a genius.

VIVIEN: It's...it's incredible.

GABRIEL GRANT: And you will soon be a part of this grand design. I have but one more thing to ask you, in fulfillment of your mission.

VIVIEN: A-anything.

GABRIEL GRANT: Follow me once again.

[The door slides shut, and the grand cosmic stuff fades]

[Elevator climbing, silence for a long while]

[Ding]

[16:15]

[Door slides open]

[They step out]

VIVIEN: The labs?

[Keycard swipe, chiming as the door opens]

[Heavy buzz of fluorescent lights]

GABRIEL GRANT: There.

VIVIEN: ...Echo?

GABRIEL GRANT: If you can accomplish this, then I will deem you worthy for-

VIVIEN: The Split?

GABRIEL GRANT: For further advancement.

VIVIEN: (frustrated) How much more-

GABRIEL GRANT: Need I remind you of how badly you most recently failed?

VIVIEN: (Internal) *My biggest mistake was giving him that ammunition.*

GABRIEL GRANT: Let her see you.

VIVIEN: That's it?

GABRIEL GRANT: Then you must choose me.

VIVIEN: Why?

GABRIEL GRANT: You're a clever girl. I'm sure you can extrapolate the reasons.

[He retreats, swiping his card through another beeping door]

[Door closes; a clock ticks on the wall]

[Vivien approaches the cell where Echo slightly struggles against her restraints]

ECHO: ...Vivien?

VIVIEN: Echo.

ECHO: (Groggy) What're you...

VIVIEN: I've done everything Vox Elysium has asked.

ECHO: (still groggy) You have no idea how relieved I am to see you. (beat) What's wrong?

VIVIEN: (Internal) *This is a Blank. But she's a human person...dammit! This is exactly what Grant meant. This is a test. The moral quandary... can I consign another human being to essentially slavery? Brainwash another person into total compliance? Subservience?*

ECHO: Vivien, say something.

VIVIEN: (Internal) *Not only that...my...friend. Really my only friend. Gabriel Grant doesn't view me as an equal...but Echo, she at least respected me, treated me like a friend and--*

[Echo's restraints jangle]

ECHO: Vivien, please you have to help me!

VIVIEN: (Internal) *On the other hand, the golden ticket to a sublimated self. The perfect embodiment of me. And everything in my life, taken care of.*

ECHO: Hey...are you ok?

VIVIEN: (Internal) *She's imprisoned in a tiny lab room and she's asking me if I'm ok? I guess it'll be easier when they're not capable of independent thought...they won't have personalities. They won't really be people.*

ECHO: Viv, you're scaring me.

VIVIEN: (Internal) *And they won't know any better. And on the other side of it, me, in a perfect easy life. Haven't we suffered enough, Echo? Alexandra...Ech...hmmph. Alexandra's still gonna be there though. It's not like that's gonna change. It just means sacrificing this blank, and whichever one gets yanked out of me.*

ECHO: Why're you looking at me like that?

VIVIEN: (Internal) *It's so easy...is it too easy? No. Philosophically bad. Morally bad. But...in a world where everything is shit, why not make the shit work for us? Why not be the ones who benefit for once, instead of the ones toiling away in those awful factories and in the gutters.*

ECHO: Viv, that smile is really creeping me out.

VIVIEN: (Internal) *Sparkling water. Not just water, but sparkling water. Luxury. Whiskey and cigarettes. The Green Tree Lounge. No more labor, just a nice life. And I. deserve. a. nice. life. The perfect evolution of me. Vivien ascendant. Vivien Transcendent.*

ECHO: ...ok if you're gonna murder me can you just do that now? The anticipation is killing me.

[A ringing noise; Vivien finally snaps out of her inner monologue]

VIVIEN: That's it.

ECHO: I was joking!

VIVIEN: That's what we sacrifice. We offer up the vulgar. The lewd. The petulant. The incessant. The dysfunctional. The overthinking. The anxiety. The depression. The self-loathing. We give that up in order to become better.

ECHO: It's me. Viv what the hell are you talking about.

[Vivien steps closer]

VIVIEN: My name. Is. Vivien. This is goodbye, you poor, pathetic blank.

ECHO: Vivien what the fuck does that mean?

VIVIEN: I've chosen!

GABRIEL GRANT: (muffled) Well done.

[The door unlocks for Vivien]

ECHO: Vivien, you can't just leave me here.

VIVIEN: Don't worry. You'll be happier soon. Ignorance is bliss after all.

ECHO: Please get me out of here.

[Vivien walks away]

VIVIEN: Sorry kiddo. For once in my goddamn life, I choose myself.

[She goes through the door and shuts it with a bang]

[Echo continues to cry out for her, muffled]

VIVIEN: What now?

GABRIEL GRANT: Why...now you get everything you've ever wanted. Bring me
Alexandra.

[End Theme & Credits]