

SCENE 1

SFX: A shuttle screams past.

ANNOUNCER:

Numitron Tube, station Reaper.

VOICE:

...so we convert cryptos to bytes in a process known as
byteshifting...

SFX: The sounds of a virtual arcade.

AD:

Our brain-link technology is wireless and painless! VRs
compatible with your mind in any state, altered or not!
Only in station Loosebytes!

ANNOUNCER:

Station Infocon.

VOICE:

Come on, don't bite the bag on me, I almost got this code
working...

ANNOUNCER:

Now approaching the Numitron Tube Inner Layer.

SFX: The shuttle passes by.

PROGRAMMER:

Is it really okay for us to be down here?

HACKER:

Uh, I'm down here all the time. What do you mean?

PROGRAMMER:

I mean I guess *I*'ve never been down here.

HACKER:

Yeah, *that* wasn't obvious. Lighten up and stop being such a
zipperhead. Inner Layer's a fine place if you know what
you're doing. Besides, you're the one that wanted to try
adrenoshot.

PROGRAMMER:

...Eprinjection. And...I just really need to get this code done.

SFX: The hacker lights a cigarette.

HACKER:

I get it. Plenty of late-night hacks have been achieved through a couple hits. I'm not judging you for anything but calling it an eprinjection. People are totally gonna clock you as a Domer here and that is the last thing we want.

PROGRAMMER:

Uh, right.

DEALER:

Hey, uberkidgamma7!

HACKER:

Aw come on, don't use that old username!

DEALER:

You'll always be UKG7 to me.

PROGRAMMER:

Um. Hello.

DEALER:

And who's this?

HACKER:

This is my friend I was telling you about.

DEALER:

Uh-huh. You're the one who wanted AD?

PROGRAMMER:

Epi...adrenoshot. Is that the same thing?

DEALER:

Geez, what a chainik.

HACKER:

Lay off.

DEALER:

I'm a busy gal. Should I waste my time?

HACKER:

You're only busy because dealers have been disappearing all over the IL.

DEALER:

What can I say, I'm the best at keeping on the DL. Your buddy here might change that for me though.

HACKER:

Well, we got cryptos. Deal-p?

DEALER:

...T. Make it quick.

SCENE 2

SFX: Footsteps down a ladder.

SU-JIN:

Okay, watch your step there. The last rung is broken.

CAINE:

Got it. Wow, it's way brighter in here than I thought it'd be. I thought this was one of the abandoned stations?

SU-JIN:

It is. Station Prime used to be the mainline transportation hubs, but they stopped using it after the outer layer got so huge. This is the closest to the inner layer that we can reach from aboveground.

CAINE:

You seem pretty familiar with this place.

SU-JIN:

Is that a weird thing?

CAINE:

Not really. I mean, I guess since I live in the Tollbooth, this place just has more of a reputation. Y'know, for making sure people who want to disappear stay gone or whatever.

SU-JIN:

Hey, signal scramblers are great, but none of them are as good as just heading below ground. That's why we have an underground base for Zero Zero.

CAINE:

Speaking of Zero Zero...

SFX: Beep beep.

LOLA:

Hello, you two. I was wondering when you'd call.

CAINE:

Hi, Lola. We're at Station Prime now.

LOLA:

Did you hear that, Vic?

VIC:

Yep! Marked you guys on the map.

LOLA:

Thank you, Vic. And thank you, Caine, for accompanying Su-jin.

CAINE:

Well, I figured it would be less dangerous if it were just the two of us. I mean if it were, if it were, if there were two of us. Yeah.

VIC:

Right, right.

CAINE:

Um, so we're about eight stations away from the datacombs.

VIC:

More or less, but that's if you could travel straight through the Numitron. You'll probably have to take a couple detours. Wish we could find a faster way through, but since most people are smart enough to cover their way through the datacombs, it'll never stay the same long enough for it to actually matter to us. But Su-jin's pretty good at navigating, especially down there.

SU-JIN:

How often do you want us to call in again?

LOLA:

Call in every thirty minutes. Once you're past Station Gamma we won't be able to get in contact with you at all, but from your last call you should only be gone for an hour before you come back to a call zone. We'll mark your location along the way and we'll come down if you don't make it back in time.

VIC:

So, don't spend too long down there!

SU-JIN:

Don't worry! The module should be a pretty quick install. And since Caine's with me, it'll be even faster! Right, Caine?

CAINE:

Yeah, yes, mhm, yeah, okay, yes.

LOLA:

(O.C.)

Talk to you in half an hour.

SFX: Beep beep.

CAINE:

Okay, I didn't want to sound stupid in front of them, but what...what exactly are we installing again?

SU-JIN:

Whaaat?! You don't know what my super complex device that I've been working on for like, three years is? For shame, Caine. For shame.

CAINE:

Alright, alright, okay, I get it. Just tell me, what is it?

SU-JIN:

Well, Lola and I both knew that we'd run out of processing power for Zero Zero eventually, so I've been developing this forever. It's called a haustoria device. Er, at least, I thought it would be cool to call it that. Basically, what it does is siphons power from any source that's running and sends it to Zero Zero. Vic wrote a code that I integrated about a month ago that also tells us about information flow, so people can't reroute the power—sooo, basically when we install it on some of the POTEN Co. servers, they can't go around the device without us knowing. Plus, I made it all wireless, so it won't degrade! Basically, we only need to mount the power system up and then anything that's in contact with it when we start it up will be linked to the system. Then bingo! All the power we could want and/or need.

CAINE:

Oh yeah, well, you know. Basically.

SU-JIN:

Hehe.

CAINE:

Well, lead the way, then. Clock's ticking.

SCENE 3

SFX: Running footsteps.

CLIENT 912:

That dealer was right, she *is* good at staying incognito.
But you're not.

SFX: Cloak swish.

CLIENT 912:

Time's up, parasite.

PROGRAMMER:

Ah!

CLIENT 912:

What's this? Yeah, a little drug's not gonna get you
anywhere near fast enough to outrun me. I'm part machine,
pal.

Well, I know you paid for this. And I overheard about how
you've been getting worked to the bone. And I can relate. I
feel bad for you. Sort of. Mm, only sort of.

SFX: Client 912 smashes the syringe. Xir cardioplate starts to
groan.

PROGRAMMER:

What's wrong with your... Oh my god.

CLIENT 912:

Don't look at me like that.

SFX: Metal thud.

CLIENT 912:

Besides, you're how I'm gonna get this patched right up.
Doctor Haven will fix up both of us.

PROGRAMMER:

Both of us?

CLIENT 912:

Oh, I'm gonna mess you up real good.

SFX: An object gets thrown and clatters to the ground.

HACKER:

Hey!

CLIENT 912:

Ugh, for the love of...

HACKER:

Hey, bit rot! Cut it out!

CLIENT 912:

No stalling.

SFX: Client 912 slams the programmer to the wall.

PROGRAMMER:

Ah!

HACKER:

Anyone can see you're not in great shape. You look buggy as hell. But I bet you could fix it.

CLIENT 912:

How?

HACKER:

I...uh...

PROGRAMMER:

The datacombs. Your generator's got cut functionality, but if you plug into the datacombs, you could get enough power to bring it back up to speed. No more relying on anyone else to help you out.

CLIENT 912:

Hah! Only idiots believe that the programmers who made the datacombs are that skilled. Who says it's gonna work?

HACKER:

I do. I can plug you into it.

CLIENT 912:

So long as I let this little leech go, right?

SFX: Another metal slam.

HACKER:

You read my mind.

SFX: The programmer falls to the ground. Footsteps.

CLIENT 912:

Come on.

PROGRAMMER:

Wait, don't go!

HACKER:

I'll be fine, zipperhead. Go finish your code.

PROGRAMMER:

I...

SFX: Footsteps.

HACKER:

Alright, follow me.

SCENE 4

ANNOUNCER:

Station Kyrka.

CAINE:

Through crumbling rooms, deserted tunnels, and forgotten passages, I followed Su-jin. No matter where we were in the labyrinth of the Numitron Tube, monikers and usernames were thrown on the wall in paint. Graffiti in colors that made your eyes swim in the half-dark. Were they memorials? Or shouts in the underground to say that these people were here? It seemed strange that anyone would leave pieces in places, trapped beneath the surface. But maybe in these untraceable lines under the Metropolis, they meant more.

SFX: Footsteps.

SU-JIN:

Still admiring the tags?

CAINE:

Yeah, I guess you could say that.

SU-JIN:

They're pretty cool, aren't they. I used to love this one. "Rocketeer52." This tag used to show up everywhere, even aboveground! I haven't seen their tag in a while. I wonder if they're okay. Or still alive.

CAINE:

...Yeah.

SU-JIN:

I mean, the fact that Rocketeer even made it all the way down here...Station Kyrka's pretty deep. Plus, one of the original transport lines, so it's got an electric rail, too! I wonder how they took this many different cans of paint down here?

CAINE:

Just seems kind of sad, you know, that no one's ever going to see these things.

SU-JIN:

What do you mean? We're seeing them right now.

CAINE:

Well, no, I know that. But how many people really come through these tunnels? And how many of those people actually care about the stuff that people left behind?

SU-JIN:

Hm. I think that's kind of the point though? It's not really for other people. It's for yourself. I don't think Rocketeer ever made this tag expecting that a young Su-jin was going to be totally enamored with it. It's a reminder that you were here. And that whatever you make *is* here.

CAINE:

...Hm...

SU-JIN:

Sorry, did I say something weird again?

CAINE:

Uh, no, no, you didn't. You keep asking that.

SU-JIN:

I guess I don't want to weird you out.

CAINE:

Huh?!

SU-JIN:

Well, I mean...I've only really known you for a month and a half. That's not even factoring in that you're not always at Zero Zero base.

CAINE:

Well, I still have a job. Well, sort of a job?

SU-JIN:

See, like, that's my point! For Lola and Vic, Zero Zero is everything to them.

CAINE:

And for you?

SU-JIN:

For me...I've always felt like the odd one out. I joined Zero Zero when I was younger, so I always feel like I'm a step behind. And it's not like I don't believe in it, it's just...I feel like such a kid sometimes. Like I haven't really proved myself to either of them, so they don't trust me. I still live with my moms for crying out loud and they don't even know I'm in a rebel group! I don't know. It just feels like you're the first person who's trusted me. I don't want to mess that up.

CAINE:

Um...if it makes you feel better...you're the first person I've trusted in a long time, too.

SU-JIN:

Really?

CAINE:

Yeah.

SU-JIN:

That—that means a lot.

CAINE:

Uh, anyways, so, we should probably get going...

SFX: Rocks begin to slide.

SU-JIN:

Whoa, watch out!

SFX: Crash!

CAINE:

Su-jin? You okay?

SU-JIN:

Ugh, yeah. One of those rocks smacked me pretty hard in the head. Ouch.

SFX: Caine's comms alarms.

CAINE:

Oh, glad I didn't drop this. That's my alarm to call Lola and Vic.

SFX: Beep beep.

LOLA:

Hello.

CAINE:

Ugh...we got caught in a cave-in at Station Kyrka, so if you're gonna come get us, you're gonna have to find another way in.

VIC:

Caine! Where's Su-jin? Are they okay?

SU-JIN:

I'm fine, no worries! Everything is totally, one hundred percent fine.

VIC:

Uh, that doesn't really *sound* like you're fine. Man, I knew I should have come along!

HAVEN:

(LINE FROM THE NEXT SECTION)

...to justify it.

LOLA:

(O.C.)

Who was that?

SU-JIN:

Wait, who?

HAVEN:

...enough. Who's with you?

LOLA:

Who else is there with you?

CAINE:

No one's with us, Lola!

VIC:

...Lola?

LOLA:

Mark their location. I need to know.

VIC:

Hey, wait--! ...Okay, I'm staying on comms with you two. Just finish the mission, alright? If it's not blocked off, there should be an emergency exit door that connects to another station. I didn't want you guys to take this route, but it's the only way...dammit. The two of you need to pass through Faradize. I definitely won't be able to contact you there. So be careful.

SU-JIN:

Okay. Goddammit-Caine, do you see the haustoria anywhere?

CAINE:

Um...oh, yeah, it's on this side. It dropped down to the tracks. I'll just-

SU-JIN:

Wait, Caine, the tracks are-!

SFX: Zap!

CAINE:

Ouch! Geez, what the hell?

SU-JIN:

(SIGHS IN RELIEF) The tracks are still live. I'm glad you only got a little shock.

CAINE:

Yeah, I guess. But my arm feels all weird. Ugh. At least I got the device. Come on, let's find that exit.

SCENE 5

ANNOUNCER:

Station Kyrka.

SFX: Footsteps.

HACKER:

So...don't talk much, huh?

CLIENT 912:

No.

HACKER:

That's okay. I'm not gonna pry about what's up with you or anything. I *do* however, have a little bit of curiosity about whoever that Haven person is.

CLIENT 912:

She's from Glasshouse.

HACKER:

And?

CLIENT 912:

That tells you everything you need to know about her.

HACKER:

Okay, very unfair assessment. Glasshouse isn't all bad.

CLIENT 912:

And I guess you believe that because you've got "friends" there.

HACKER:

Hey, geez. You don't see me judging your lifestyle.

CLIENT 912:

This isn't about a lifestyle. This is about you being too stupid to realize that people all over the Metropolis use each other.

HACKER:

And sometimes people are just friends with each other.

CLIENT 912:

Don't pretend you're better than me.

HACKER:

Look, Glasshouse isn't what it used to be. It's been falling apart for years. And people aren't loyal to POTEN Co. the way they used to be.

CLIENT 912:

Hah! Loyalties never stay the same. People choose what's convenient for them.

HACKER:

Right. And what's generally served as convenient for me is giving the benefit of the doubt to people. Like you.

CLIENT 912:

...Hmph.

HACKER:

So, you didn't quite answer my question. Who's Haven?

CLIENT 912:

Mm, she's a hijacker that calls herself a medical professional. Outfitted me with this wrecked cardioplate and a prosthetic lung. I've been stuck with her for three years now. It's... the worst kind of life.

HACKER:

And I guess what I'm expecting if this datacombs thing doesn't work.

CLIENT 912:

...Yeah.

CAINE:

Anyways, so, we should probably get...

CLIENT 912:

Someone else is in here. Hide.

HACKER:

What? Why?

CLIENT 912:

Hurry up!

SFX: Crash!

HACKER:

Ugh, dusty.

SFX: Client 912 coughs violently.

HACKER:

Your prosthetic lung isn't running. Do you have an external device for that too?

CLIENT 912:

Here.

HACKER:

Hold still.

SFX: Tap, tap, zap!

HACKER:

Got it.

SFX: Client 912 breathes deeply.

HACKER:

You okay? I can't believe that shut off just because of a little jostling, that's super dangerous.

CLIENT 912:

No, I haven't had it running for a couple weeks now.

HACKER:

What?

SFX: Beep beep.

CLIENT 912:

Hide in here.

HACKER:

Oof!

CLIENT 912:

She's always on videocomms. Stay out of the way.

SFX: Beep beep.

HAVEN:

Client 912, I see you somehow got your lung running again.

CLIENT 912:

Turns out your job is pretty easy after all. Hey, maybe I don't need you.

HAVEN:

Tell me where you are. I can't see with all that dust.

CLIENT 912:

Hell no.

HAVEN:

Pity I haven't gotten around to replacing your brain yet. Maybe if I turn off your lung again, you'll get enough brain damage for me to justify it.

CLIENT 912:

I'll just power it back on.

HAVEN:

I know you didn't do that yourself. You're not smart enough. Who's with you?

CLIENT 912:

Come find me and maybe you'll find out. Oh wait, you can't. And I'll be long gone before you figure out what I'm planning.

HAVEN:

Client 912.

CLIENT 912:

That's *not* my goddamn name.

SFX: Beep beep.

CLIENT 912:

Can you unwire me from this comms?

HACKER:

Uh, let me see.

SFX: Unscrewing noises.

HACKER:

This isn't permanent, mind you—the comms is directly interfaced to your cardioplate, so I'm just redirecting power flow. Once you hook up to the datacombs...*if* it works, she'll be able to contact you again.

CLIENT 912:

Better than nothing.

HACKER:

...Why'd you do that just now?

CLIENT 912:

Because...you're...useful to me. Haven shouldn't know what cards I have in my slots.

HACKER:

Okay.

SFX: Electric pulse.

CLIENT 912:

We should get a move on. Those other people are still here.

HACKER:

Lucky that we got caught on the side where we can double back. I wouldn't want to pass through Faradize. That place gives me the creeps.

SCENE 6

SFX: Arcade noises.

SU-JIN:

One last push...

SFX: Scrape!

CAINE:

Got it.

SU-JIN:

How's your arm?

CAINE:

Still feels weird. (THEY PUSH THEMSELVES UP FROM THE GRATE)
So this is Station Faradize. I didn't think this was a real place.

SU-JIN:

Yeah, it's gotten quite a reputation over the years. What did you hear about it growing up? I'm curious.

CAINE:

Uh, mostly things like...people died playing the virtual reality systems here or, I dunno, underground cyborg cage fights. That's why they shut it down.

SU-JIN:

Oh, yeah, I heard that one. I also remember people saying that the VR was gonna take its revenge on all the newfangled stuff and that's why Loosebytes doesn't do immersive VR anymore. 'Cause you know...

CAINE AND SU-JIN:

You die in the game, you die in real life!

SU-JIN:

But it is kind of weird that the power's still on.

CAINE:

I guess it must still be hooked up to the datacombs since it's so close. Whoa, what is happening?

SU-JIN:

Are you standing near something that's on, or...?

SFX: A switch.

SU-JIN:

Okay, you heard that too, right?

SFX: Flash!

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

And suddenly, awoken from its death, one of the VR machines powered on. The enormous screen flashed the black and white static of a lost signal connection. The static snow blinded us for a second. I stumbled backwards, but Su-jin seemed frozen to the spot. They looked up at the same time I did—just in time to see a huge glass dome plummeting down on them.

SFX: An engine starts.

SU-JIN:

I know we were just joking about the VR thing but IS THE VR SYSTEM LITERALLY TRYING TO KILL ME UNDER THIS GLASS?!

CAINE:

Move!

SU-JIN:

Caine!

SFX: Su-jin pounds on the glass.

SFX: Start-up noise.

VOICE:

ARCADIA: THE VR GAME OF MEMORIES. START.

SU-JIN:

Hang on Caine, I'm gonna get you out!

SEBASTIAN:

Hello.

CAINE:

S-Sebastian?

END EPISODE.

MUSIC: Caine's Theme.

Hi, Eli Ramos here, creator and editor of Under the Electric Stars. The song you just heard was Caine's Theme, written and performed by yours truly. If you liked this episode, please share it with your friends and rate and review it wherever you're listening to us. You can find us social media: we're @utes_podcast on twitter and undertheelectricstarspodcast on tumblr. You can also find us on Patreon at mxeliramos--that's M-X-E-L-I-R-A-M-O-S. Please support us if you have the means. Our voice talents are as follows: Christine Kim as Su-jin Yi, Rhea Anne as Caine Reyes, Chaitrika Budagamunta as Lola Sunn, Kevin Paculan as Vic Vass, Rey Angel as Client 912, Stephanie Arata as Haven, and John Pataneaude as Sebastian Reyes. Additional voices were provided by yours truly, Audrey Pham, Tyler Jay, Melody, and Erik May. A special thanks to Jordan Davis, a \$20 patron on our Patreon. And to everyone, thanks for listening, and see you in Metropolis West soon.