

SCENE 1

SFX: Video game noises grow louder and then fall silent. Radio static.

MUSIC: Riverline by Tri-Tachyon.

SEBASTIAN:

Val, Caine, I'm gonna leave without you if you don't hurry up!

VALERIA:

Uh, you're not the only one who can drive!

SFX: Keys jangle.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey, I'm older! Give those back!

VALERIA:

Only if you can catch me, Kuya!

SFX: The two laugh and run past Caine.

CAINE:

Wait!

SFX: Whoosh. Footsteps.

MARICEL:

Anak ko, tell your brother and sister to be careful with the car while you're out, please?

CAINE:

Mom?

MARICEL:

I'll see you when you guys get back!

CAINE:

Wait, this is...

MARICEL:

We're making something special for you.

CAINE:

The memory of my 14th birthday.

MARICEL:

So, don't stay out too late!

SFX: Car horn honks.

MARICEL:

Sige, anak ko, go!

CAINE:

Mom, I l... I'm gonna go.

SFX: Car door opens and shuts.

CAINE:

..Uh, um...

VALERIA:

Wow, you're usually not at a loss for words. This is kind of a relief. Before you ask a bunch of questions: no, we're not ghosts, yes, you are currently playing Arcadia, and yes, we can hear you and you can interact with us.

CAINE:

Um, ghosts?

SEBASTIAN:

Aw, have an imagination, Caine. And a little sympathy—this game was designed for people who want to relive their memories, which means usually they're... kind of old. Speaking of old, how old are you now?

CAINE:

I'm 22.

VALERIA:

Wow, so this memory's already eight years old. Are you sure you want to continue this one or...? I mean, we can always circle back around to it. You've got 45 minutes with us, but memories are pretty quick. Just keep an eye on the clock.

CAINE:

I...uh...

VALERIA:

Where to?

CAINE:

So, all of this... it's just a game?

SEBASTIAN:

Yep.

CAINE:

But...all of it is in my head.

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah, that's usually what a memory is.

VALERIA:

Oh, be nice, Seb! Everyone's a little... confused their first time.

CAINE:

Well, if this is my memory, then how are we talking to each other like this?

SEBASTIAN:

Okay, uh...so we're Sebastian and Valeria, but sometimes we're your dad or your bot or your best friend. We're programmed into the game to help you navigate it. We take up most of the processing power of the game and the rest of it is filled in by your memories, wherever you want to go.

VALERIA:

Which, before we get more into explaining ourselves, you should decide.

CAINE:

Can we just...drive and see where we end up?

VALERIA:

Yeah. Of course.

SFX: The car revs.

SCENE 2

SFX: Su-jin hits the glass.

SU-JIN:

Caine! Goddammit!

Ray gun! Right, right... Where did I put it?!

SFX: The ray gun clicks.

SU-JIN:

Come on, come on...of all the days to forget to charge my
STUPID power pack!

SFX: The ray gun clatters on the ground.

SU-JIN:

Ugh. I should go pick that up.

Okay, Su-jin, think. Think. God, I wish Eun-hi were here.
What would she say? "Hey, Su-jin, good job for getting your
friend trapped under there, ya dunce!"

No, she wouldn't say that. And either way, she'd probably
say what she always says. "Knowing the cause means knowing
the solution." So...I should figure out what caused that
power surge.

SFX: Zap.

SU-JIN:

That sounded like it came from under the glass.

Hey Caine, are you okay? Are you hurt? (NO RESPONSE) Well,
it was worth a...shot?

SFX: Video game glitch noises.

SU-JIN:

Oh, no no no-please re-establish connection! Neural links
are so dangerous and this machine's probably over fifty
years old!

SFX: The video game pings.

SU-JIN:

Okay. I need to run a diagnostic and quick. Where is the back panel of this thing...

SCENE 3

SFX: The video game ping from earlier.

VALERIA:

Caine!

CAINE:

Where am I?

SEBASTIAN:

You disappeared for a second.

CAINE:

W-What do you mean?!

SEBASTIAN:

Uh, kind of what I said? You disappeared.

VALERIA:

There's not really a better explanation for it. You were sitting in the back of the car and then you weren't, so we stopped here.

CAINE:

Which is where, exactly...?

SFX: Car door opens.

BENJIE:

I don't know, you don't seem much older than Sebastian. Are you sure that you're the right-

DAX:

I am. And I own this building now, if you didn't understand that, so what I say goes.

MARICEL:

Ay, mahal, tanga siya... anong gagawin natin?
(Oh, love, he's an idiot...what are we doing?)

BENJIE:

Darling, wala tayo sapat na cryptos... please think of the kids.

(Darling, we don't have enough cryptos...)

DAX:

Yeah, anything you're saying to each other you can say to me.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey, Mom, Dad. What's going on?

DAX:

So. I guess you're Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN:

Most people call me Seb. And you are?

DAX:

...Dax.

SEBASTIAN:

Well, Dax, it's good to meet you. Guess I'll see you around.

SFX: Footsteps.

SEBASTIAN:

Caine, stick around with Val, I'm gonna work on some stuff upstairs.

CAINE:

...That's right.

VALERIA:

Mama, ito ang taong bumili ng apartment?

(Mama, this is the guy who's buying the apartment?)

MARICEL:

Oo.

CAINE:

I stayed with you this day, Val. I kept hiding behind you and Mom, trying to figure out who this guy was, what he wanted with the apartment, why he kept yelling at Dad...

DAX:

And I expect you to get rid of this junk the other tenants left behind!

BENJIE:

They might come back. I'm not throwing away their memories for you! You own the building, not me or my family.

DAX:

At least toss out your own filth!

SFX: Metal clatter.

BENJIE:

(OVERLAPPING WITH DAX)

You come in here and start trampling on my family's things, our livelihood—you cannot come into our space! You are not entitled to the part of this building my family lives in, I have signed contracts and I... putang ina!

DAX:

(OVERLAPPING WITH BENJIE)

You're a "family man", right? but you won't even do as I say to keep your family off the goddamn streets! I may not have the contractual power, but I sure can make your life a living hell if you keep talking...

CAINE:

I guess in the middle of everything he didn't notice me. Or thought that I wouldn't notice the way he talked to Dad or gave weird looks to Mom and Valeria, who wouldn't stop speaking Tagalog around him. But when he eventually spoke to me...

DAX:

Hey, there. I'm Dax. I, ...well, I guess your parents must have explained why I'm going to be staying here. What's your name?

CAINE:

Caine Alon Reyes. They/them pronouns, please.

DAX:

Oh wow. You tell people your whole name, huh? Your parents said you should? I'll tell you this right now, Caine, most people shouldn't know your whole name. A lot of bad people can use it against you. But don't worry, you can trust me...

SFX: "Trust me" echoes and blends with Sebastian's voice.

SCENE 4

SFX: Traffic.

SEBASTIAN:

Trust me, Caine, it's not as scary as it looks.

CAINE:

Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN:

You do remember this memory, right?

CAINE:

I thought we were with Dax.

SEBASTIAN:

Memories are funny that way.

CAINE:

This is...under the Missile?

SEBASTIAN:

Kiiind of. Your sense of direction is very bad. You might wanna consider getting like, an all-purpose bot or something.

CAINE:

That's right. I ended up getting Jet like a year after this.

SEBASTIAN:

Okay, this is the clearest space I could find to drive. We probably won't hit anything. Probably.

CAINE:

Oh man, and I really wanted to hit someone the second day I learned how to drive. Whatever shall I do?

SEBASTIAN:

I guess you could settle for hitting that pillar over there.

CAINE:

Psh, haha.

SFX: Seatbelt click.

SEBASTIAN:

Okay, so you're buckled up. What do you do next?

CAINE:

Uh, adjust my mirrors.

SEBASTIAN:

That's good, you can do that.

CAINE:

Kuya, are you even paying attention? You're supposed to be teaching me. I should have asked Valeria again, shouldn't I?

SEBASTIAN:

Nah, it's not good to bother her all the time. Besides, I kind of... owe her one.

CAINE:

It's not like you to actually care when you owe something. Is everything okay?

SEBASTIAN:

This isn't actually your second day of driving, is it?

CAINE:

Wha-no yeah, I mean, yes, it is! It totally is my first time driving! What is this? I don't even... What is that, where the stick is? What does that say? PRNDL? I have no... what? I don't even know what you call this... Who's car?

SEBASTIAN:

Good question. Who is car?

SFX: They laugh.

CAINE:

Okay, yes, maybe I have been driving without you guys.

SEBASTIAN:

I noticed the car wasn't charged yesterday. Before you went with Val.

CAINE:

...Am I in trouble?

SEBASTIAN:

Show me how well you can drive.

CAINE:

Uh...okay.

SFX: They drive.

SEBASTIAN:

Caine?

CAINE:

No, wait.

SEBASTIAN:

Stop the car for a sec.

SFX: The car turns off.

CAINE

I don't want this part to happen yet.

SEBASTIAN:

You're a pretty good driver.

CAINE:

Thanks.

SEBASTIAN:

How long do you think you could drive for?

CAINE:

I know what you're thinking. You were talking about it yesterday. With Val. I heard you.

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah. We fought about it.

CAINE:

She thinks you're crazy.

SEBASTIAN:

I know.

CAINE:

So...

SEBASTIAN:

We should get you back home. I don't have anything to teach you.

CAINE:

Why didn't I stop you?

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah, we can drive again tomorrow if I have some time.

CAINE:

I might have been the last person you told.

SEBASTIAN:

Do you wanna drive us back home? It'll probably impress Mom and Dad. ...No, I won't take credit for it. You did teach yourself after all. Come on, let's go.

CAINE:

Didn't you understand why I asked you and Val to drive with me? You both seemed so far away. I wanted to be your little sibling again before we all grew up. I just wanted to be with you guys again. I still...

Sebastian? Valeria? Where are you?

SFX: Beep!

SCENE 5

SFX: Beep!

SU-JIN:

There we go, glad the diagnostic hooked up alright. I should remember to thank Min for this.

DIAGNOSTIC:

Audio enabled. Hooked to device code 4RC-D1A.

SU-JIN:

Menu options.

DIAGNOSTIC:

1, Software. 2, Hardware.

SU-JIN:

Two.

DIAGNOSTIC:

1, Memory storage. 2, Graphical interface. 3, User interaction. 4, Connections.

SU-JIN:

Four.

DIAGNOSTIC:

1, Power supply-

SU-JIN:

One.

SFX: Whir. Beep!

DIAGNOSTIC:

Alert! There are two power supplies running to the system. May result in overloading and shutdown of the system.

SU-JIN:

Two? Hang on, identify power supplies.

SFX: Beep!

DIAGNOSTIC:

Printout on screen. Read aloud?

SU-JIN:

No, thank you.

Let's see, power supply 1 expected, connected to and route through block 76-FQ12, that must be the datacomb section assigned to Faradize...

Power supply 2... Power supply 2 unexpected, connected to unknown device, loop route through 4RC-D1A.

Hang on. Diagnostic, request device code please.

DIAGNOSTIC:

4RC-D1A.

SU-JIN:

Loop route... oh come on, Su-jin, how did you not realize it? Caine is the unknown device. Or something on Caine. They must have picked up an electrical discharge when they shocked themselves... and they kept saying how their arm hurt. Okay. Uh, diagnostic, run eval on 2.

DIAGNOSTIC:

Power supply 2 is fluctuating. It appears to turn off every six minutes for a period lasting on average 32 seconds before powering back on again.

SU-JIN:

There should be a map for technicians...yes, good, there's a printed one here. Hah. Wow, this is old.

SFX: Paper tearing.

SU-JIN:

Sorry. I mean, I don't think anyone was using that, but...anyways. Alright. Cyberwar is over there and Blazeblast Unlimited is there which means I'm gonna be cutting this one pretty close. Um, diagnostic? How bad would it be if I disconnected supply 1 from the device?

DIAGNOSTIC:

Power supply 1 disconnection while power supply 2 remains connected will lead to surges concurrent with power supply 2.

SU-JIN:

That's what I thought. And last thing—how long ago was there a surge for 2?

DIAGNOSTIC:

2 minutes ago.

SU-JIN:

This thing probably can't take more than a couple more surges before kicking it. Thanks, diagnostic.

DIAGNOSTIC:

Disconnected.

SU-JIN:

Okay. Disconnect from block 76-FQ12...while I'm down there, I can charge my powerpack, I come back... and I don't let Caine die. Yep. You got this.

SCENE 6

SFX: Footsteps.

CAINE:

Feel like I've been walking for hours. And it doesn't help that I just can't see anything. Valeria? ..Why am I even calling for anyone anymore.

VALERIA:

I heard you the first time.

CAINE:

Valeria? What's with the darkness?

VALERIA:

Mom and dad busted the generator. Again.

SFX: A door slams open.

DAX:

I swear, you don't know when to quit!

MARICEL:

Ben, get away from the-

BENJIE:

No, I know it'll work if we have just a little more power next time!

DAX:

Yeah, there's not going to be a next time.

MARICEL:

Itigil mo yan, Ben!

(Stop it, Ben!)

BENJIE:

Kailangan namin ito!

(We need this!)

DAX:

Look, the fact is you can't handle these things on your own, so I'm taking this away from you. You can't even take care of your own surviving kids while you-

BENJIE:

Just shut up!

CAINE:

I don't like this.

VALERIA:

Me neither.

DAX:

At least someone's looking out for the Reyes' while you two lose your jobs. This is mine.

MARICEL:

I don't trust you with that.

DAX:

And I don't trust whatever the hell you just said to your husband. We both have to deal with that, don't we?

VALERIA:

Are you okay?

CAINE:

I meant I don't like this memory. Why do I have to think about these again? It's not like I don't think about this every day.

VALERIA:

That's probably why they're showing up, honestly.

CAINE:

I wish I could do something different. Remember it differently, you know?

VALERIA:

I mean, this will all change over time anyways. This probably isn't even close to how it actually happened. But no matter how you remember it, it's still just a memory.

CAINE:

I know.

VALERIA:

Do you want to stay in this one?

CAINE:

Not really. But now it's the only thing I'm thinking about right now.

VALERIA:

We'd better finish it then.

CAINE:

I'm scared.

VALERIA:

They're only memories.

CAINE:

They still hurt.

VALERIA:

...Yeah.

SFX: Knocking.

CAINE:

Who's that?

VALERIA:

Stay here. I don't want anything to happen to you.

BENJIE:

You better not come back in here, Dax.

VALERIA:

I'm gonna go get the door.

CAINE:

It's probably Dax.

VALERIA:

...Right. At the very least I want to be there with Mom and Dad.

CAINE:

I'll come with you.

VALERIA:

It-It's okay. You can go to your room and sleep. I mean, it is pretty late.

CAINE:

You know I'm seventeen, right? I can handle myself, especially when it come to my bedtime.

VALERIA:

I know. But I'm supposed to be looking after you. What else is an older sister for?

CAINE:

...And that was that. There wasn't anything else that I remember from that night. I didn't want to deal with Dax or Mom and Dad yelling or any of it, so I just...I said good night. And I went to bed.

No one really thinks that the last time they talk to someone will really be the last time.

The next morning, Dax told me that you'd all gone off to talk with some POTEN Co. executive and hadn't come back. I feel so horrible for saying this, but when you hadn't come back... I didn't think I should... I didn't think to wait for you. For a year, I watched Mom and Dad wait for Sebastian to come back home. We all looked for something, some sort of sign from him to say that he was alright, that hiding out somewhere, that he ran away but would come back. I probably looked the hardest. And when nothing ever came back, I think you kind of just kind of gave up, right, Valeria? You saw our parents fight over him, grieve over him, hear his voice when he wasn't even there. But most of all, you saw how they wanted to believe he was alive. That was when you started trying to be the one to take care of me while we were still suffering. While you were still suffering. I'm so sorry about that.

I still need you. Both of you. God, I wish you guys were still here.

SEBASTIAN:

We are.

VALERIA:

You still have time with us. Here, at least.

SEBASTIAN:

Come on. Let's go to a better memory.

SFX: Car keys jingle.

SCENE 7

SFX: Su-jin jumps down with a clang.

SU-JIN:

I'm gonna have to find another way back up, huh?

76-FQ12, 76-FQ12...FQ39, FQ-45, whoops, wrong direction, FQ...
FQ-12. Alright, I'll just go ahead and..

SFX: Switch. Powering down noise.

SU-JIN:

Oh god, I hope that was the right thing to do.

SFX: A loud metallic bang. Footsteps.

CLIENT 912:

Okay, then, here. Plug me in here.

HACKER:

We have to go deeper than this if you're trying to-

CLIENT 912:

I'm sick and tired of this! We're just walking deeper and
deeper into this for no reason. You know, I get the feeling
you're just buying time for yourself.

HACKER:

Not at all.

CLIENT 912:

I can hear how nervous you are.

HACKER:

Latent threats aren't really my style.

CLIENT 912:

Then get to work plugging me in already.

HACKER:

I just said it's not going to work here.

CLIENT 912:

I don't care.

HACKER:

This is near Faradize, it is bad luck to plug in here.

CLIENT 912:

Rrgh, stop making excuses and just DO IT!

HACKER:

Fine!

SFX: Rummaging.

SU-JIN:

Just plug in your powerpack and go. We can do this, nice and easy, just hurry up and—

Oh g— stupid! No cord! Shit, I must have left it with the diagnostic. I was in such a rush...

HACKER:

Let me just untangle this.

SU-JIN:

Ugh. Ugh, no. ...But I have to.

I'll just make sure to give it back. Hey!

CLIENT 912:

What is it with people yelling "Hey!" at me today?!

HACKER:

Wh—how did you get here? Did you come from Faradize?

SU-JIN:

No time! I'm very sorry for what I'm gonna do.

CLIENT 912:

You're not doing anything.

SFX: Client 912 punches Su-jin.

SU-JIN:

OW!

HACKER:

You can punch ghosts?!?!?!?

CLIENT 912:

They're not a ghost, dumbass, they're just a nuisance.
Gimme that cord.

HACKER:

Here.

SU-JIN:

I really meant it when I said I was sorry.

CLIENT 912:

You wanna fight?

SU-JIN:

Not really.

CLIENT 912:

You look like you're about to lose.

SU-JIN:

I...probably will.

HACKER:

You're really doing this?

CLIENT 912:

One act of kindness today was already asking a lot of me,
pal. Don't push it.

HACKER:

Okay, not my place to step in.

SFX: Client 912 kicks Su-jin's legs out from under them.

HACKER:

Yeowch, hit the floor!

SU-JIN:

Oh my god why am I wasting my time on this! Let me just...

CLIENT 912:

Get back here!

SFX: Fwing!

CLIENT 912:

What was that?

HACKER:

It's a—!

SFX: Flash! The two of them wince.

SU-JIN:

I am genuinely really sorry about the flash bomb and I promise I will bring this back!

CLIENT 912:

I'm gonna find you! And I am gonna kill you!

SFX: Footsteps.

SU-JIN:

Ow. Ow. Ow. God, that person hits hard. Charge powerpack and then get back to Caine. Just hang on...

SCENE 8

SFX: Keys jingle. The car engine cuts.

VALERIA:

We're here.

SEBASTIAN:

Back at the beginning.

CAINE:

Back home.

VALERIA:

Let me get the door for you.

SFX: Car door opens.

BENJIE AND MARICEL:

Happy birthday, Caine!

CAINE:

Aw man, I forgot that you guys made me an ice cream cake that day.

BENJIE:

Sorry it's melting, anak, I left it out on the counter too long.

VALERIA:

I don't think the candles are helping.

CAINE:

It's okay, dad. It looks really good.

MARICEL:

Oh, my youngest is not so young anymore. You're growing up too fast.

CAINE:

I know. I kind of feel that way too.

MARICEL:

But you'll always be my youngest child.

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah, that's kind of how age works.

VALERIA:

Seb, be nice.

BENJIE:

Ang tagal! You wanna blow out the candles now?

(You're taking too long!)

CAINE:

Yeah, I do.

VALERIA:

Make a wish.

SEBASTIAN:

Make it a good one.

CAINE:

I will.

SFX: Caine blows out the candles.

BENJIE:

What'd you wish for?

SEBASTIAN:

Come on, you know if they say, it won't come true.

CAINE:

I don't even remember what I wished for on my fourteenth.

But I do remember this being one of my favorite birthdays. No one came to bother us. Just me, my family, and an ice cream cake that melted everywhere. Staying up and talking, not worrying about the next day. Just being excited about getting older instead of terrified of the future. Without living every day looking back at the horizon you left behind.

SEBASTIAN:

Do you want your presents now?

CAINE:

You guys got me something?

VALERIA:

We fixed up Sebastian's old radio for you.

CAINE:

Right. A hand-me-down.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey, it's a nice radio and I know you like it a lot. So, it's yours now. You can listen to old Ansible tapes, record your own stuff, maybe even use it as an LPS. Whatever you want!

VALERIA:

Plus, I got you a plasma knife!

SFX: Knife activates.

CAINE:

Whoa! Val, this is amazing! Wait, am I even allowed to own one of these?

VALERIA:

Not technically until next year...but then how are you gonna learn to do all the cool tricks? You just gotta promise me you won't hurt yourself with it.

CAINE:

Thank you, guys.

SFX: Radio static.

SU-JIN:

Caine!

CAINE:

Su-jin?

SEBASTIAN:

Is that your friend?

CAINE:

Yeah, yeah—I'd almost forgotten that they were out there.

SU-JIN:

I hope you can hear me—I can't tell!

SFX: Video game glitch noises. Valeria and Sebastian's voices glitch in and out.

VALERIA:

Something's wrong.

CAINE:

What?

SU-JIN:

You need to disconnect yourself from the game before I get you out of there!

CAINE:

What's happening?

SEBASTIAN:

The game is losing power.

VALERIA:

Okay, I'm getting you out of here.

CAINE:

Wait—I thought I had more time—

VALERIA:

What are you doing?! Come on!

CAINE:

I don't want to leave you all again!

SEBASTIAN:

You're gonna die if you stay here.

CAINE:

You guys are gonna die too!

VALERIA:

Caine... you said it yourself. It's just a game.

MUSIC: A slowed down version of Riverline by Tri-Tachyon.

CAINE:

It's not just a game, Val! I can't lose you guys again.

SEBASTIAN:

You're not gonna lose us.

CAINE:

But I already did! But here, it feels so real, it feels like nothing bad ever happened. It's not fair.

SU-JIN:

Come on, Caine, please!

VALERIA:

You're not alone anymore, Caine. You don't need us like you did before.

CAINE:

I don't want my memories, I want you back! I want you back! They aren't you!

SEBASTIAN:

They don't have to be. You'll always have us in one way or another. I promise you will.

CAINE:

I can't leave you guys, I can't...I don't want...

VALERIA:

I know you don't. But it's our job to keep you safe, remember? As your guides in Arcadia...and as your older siblings.

CAINE:

I just... I miss you guys.

I love you. I love you so much.

VALERIA:

We always knew that.

SEBASTIAN:

And we love you too.

SFX: Caine takes a deep breath. Glass shatters. They exhale.

SU-JIN:

Oh my god.

CAINE:

S... Su-jin?

SU-JIN:

You're okay!

SFX: Su-jin hugs Caine.

MUSIC: Et in arcadia, ego by Eli Ramos.

SU-JIN:

Oh-gosh-uh, sorry if you... didn't want to be hugged.

CAINE:

No, I needed that.

SU-JIN:

You're crying.

CAINE:

Yeah, I... yeah.

SU-JIN:

I was so worried about you. I'm so sorry I left you behind.

CAINE:

But you came back for me.

SU-JIN:

Of course I did.

SFX: Caine hugs them back.

CAINE:

Thank you.

SU-JIN:

I'll always come back for you.

END EPISODE.

Hi, Eli Ramos here, creator and editor of Under the Electric Stars. If you liked this episode, please share it with your friends and rate and review us wherever you're listening to us. You can find us on 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: John Patneaude as Sebastian Reyes, Dominique Valencia as Valeria Reyes, Rhea Anne as Caine Reyes, Rey Vargas as Maricel Reyes, Chrstine Kim as Su-jin Yi, Kevin Paculan as Benjie Reyes, David McGuff as Dax Pastore, and Rey Àngel as Client 912. Additional voices were provided by yours truly, Robin Guzman, and Erik May. A special thanks to Jordan Davis and Fran Carr, \$20 patrons on our Patreon. And to everyone, thanks for listening, and see you in Metropolis West soon.