

SCENE 1

SFX: Knocking at the door.

KALEO:

(GROANS) Dude. *Levi*. Stop.

LEVI:

Not till you open the door.

KALEO:

I'm busy. Leave me alone.

LEVI:

Oh, yeah, you're so busy moping around your apartment.

KALEO:

Hey! I am not moping!

SFX: Kaleo opens the door.

LEVI:

Okay, then why do you look like such a mess?

KALEO:

First off, rude. Second off, it's like 7 in the morning?  
It's a perfectly reasonable time to be lying in bed.

LEVI:

Lying in bed... moping?

KALEO:

I wish I moved out to an apartment further from you, Levi.

LEVI:

Oh, you hate your younger brother that much? Rude.

SFX: Levi sits on the couch.

LEVI:

Mom and dad wanted me to check in on you. They said you haven't been on your radio slot in like, what, three days?

KALEO:

That's not *that* unusual.

LEVI:

Maybe for other people, but you're a workaholic. Plus, when you called the other day, you sounded like, super down. Hence, why I think you deserve a check-up.

SFX: Levi opens a bag of chips and starts eating it.

KALEO:

Stop coming into my place and eating my food, please.

SFX: He snatches the chips away from Levi.

LEVI:

Hey!

SFX: Kaleo sits on the couch.

KALEO:

Look, I'm just... tired right now, okay? I've been doing a lot of extra stuff on top of work.

LEVI:

What kind of extra stuff? You hanging out with Ava?

KALEO:

...I don't want to talk about that.

LEVI:

Oh, whoa, did something happen between you two? Is that why you're not on the air?

KALEO:

Have you listened to my show at all recently?

LEVI:

Hey, I have better things to do than follow my brother's work at all times. Fill me in.

KALEO:

We've just been pitching this story we wanna investigate to the station and the last time we were on air it... went a little haywire. Interviewed a Corrector, Ava couldn't stop pestering him, and...

LEVI:

You got fired? Aw shit, dude. Sorry.

KALEO:

What?! No. Geez, Moondog's competitive, but not *that* competitive. We're just both on a "probationary period" right now.

LEVI:

Correctors, man.

KALEO:

I was trying to get her to just... I dunno, calm down and not provoke him too much. And well, look what happened.

LEVI:

How long are you off for?

KALEO:

Four more days.

LEVI:

Ah, I see. Well, that explains part of the whole brooding thing you got going on right now, but, uh... what's the full story?

KALEO:

Oh, come on, Levi.

LEVI:

You come on, Kaleo! I heard how you said Ava's name. You guys are like, best friends! You're never that mad at her. Well, not for long at least.

KALEO:

Hey, I'm allowed to be angry with her.

LEVI:

I mean, yeah, duh. But this happened like, a few days ago, right? The last few times the two of you went on some zany misadventure, you stopped being mad at her in like, a *maximum* of twenty-four hours. So, what gives?

KALEO:

Because the last few times that we went along with her plan, it didn't jeopardize my job.

LEVI:

Okay. Understandable. But she did jeopardize your *life* multiple times. How come your job's more important than your life?

KALEO:

Because I need my job to live.

LEVI:

Also need your life to live.

KALEO:

You... ah, you know what I mean!

LEVI:

Sure, whatever you say Kaleo.

Look, I'm glad you're doing okay, even if things are a little weird right now between you and Ava. And sorry about your probationary period... thing. Just take care of yourself, maybe find some time to talk to her! Four days will be up before you even know it.

KALEO:

(HE LAUGHS) Thanks, Levi. Appreciate it.

LEVI:

Well, I'd better be off. Since you won't let me steal your food, I'll have to go grab breakfast somewhere else. You wanna join?

KALEO:

To be honest, I think I still need some time by myself.

LEVI:

Ah, no pressure, man. Maybe another day!

SFX: Levi turns to leave.

KALEO:

Levi?

LEVI:

Yup?

KALEO:

I appreciate you checking in on me. Seriously.

LEVI:

It's what family's for! Alright, see ya sometime!

SFX: Levi exits.

KALEO:

I should visit *him* more often.

SFX: His stomach growls.

KALEO:

Ugh, and maybe I should have taken him up on that offer...

Nah, I probably have something here.

SFX: Kaleo looks through his cupboards.

KALEO:

Aw, what? Did he *actually* steal my chips? He better not have done that on purpose.

SFX: Knocking at the door.

KALEO:

Levi, that better be you giving me back my food. ...Levi?

SFX: Kaleo opens the door.

KALEO:

What the...?

SCENE 2

AVA:

I mean, I'm so mad! I'm so—urgh, I'm so MAD!

SFX: Niusha fiddles with her silverware.

NIUSHA:

I'm aware, considering you haven't stopped saying that for the past hour. (SIGHS) Or the past three days. I think you're just going through the stages of grief or something.

AVA:

Grief? Over what?

NIUSHA:

I don't know, being on probationary period?

AVA:

I don't care about my job *that* much!

NIUSHA:

What's with you going all in on the investigation then? I thought you were doing that for a promotion.

AVA:

It's not all about the promotion, Niusha! It's about the truth. There's something going on here, something that they don't want us to find out about!

NIUSHA:

You sound like such a conspiracy theorist right now.

AVA:

They call them conspiracy theorists until they're proven right, you know.

NIUSHA:

I'm not trying to disprove you or anything, I'm just saying—!

AVA:

What, that I shouldn't be pissed?

NIUSHA:

I'm just *saying*, it's not super productive in your "search for the truth" right now.

AVA:

Well—it's just—I've hit a dead end.

NIUSHA:

There it is.

AVA:

And it's all Kaleo's fault!

NIUSHA:

Okay! Not the conclusion I was going for...

AVA:

If he hadn't stopped me while I was questioning that guy, we might have a better lead! More answers! Instead, I'm stuck poring through the same things I've been looking at since the beginning of time!

NIUSHA:

A bit dramatic, but okay.

AVA:

You say it's a Corrector bot, I say "okay!" and I look up a bunch of Corrector history, except there's not even that



much history on them, so I say, "let's look at their origins" except apparently *no one* wants to talk about how they come from a military system. "Why do you want to read about that?" everyone says, "It's all irrelevant, we don't even have a military anymore, haven't for a long time," and I say, "I KNOW, but I want to learn about it now, so pardon me for wanting to read some history from more than 70 years ago!" (SHE BREATHES) So. Dead end.

NIUSHA:

Maybe you should take a break.

AVA:

I've been taking breaks! The last few days have been nothing but a big break, and now I want to get back into it and I don't even know where to start!

SFX: Ava's comms rings.

AVA:

Ugh.

NIUSHA:

You... gonna get that?

AVA:

No. It's Kaleo.

SFX: The comms continues to ring.

NIUSHA:

It's still—

AVA:

Yes, it's still Kaleo.

NIUSHA:

It might be an emergency?

AVA:

Why do I need to be there for it?

NIUSHA:

Ava!

AVA:

Okay, fine, I'll answer.

SFX: She picks up.

KALEO:

Ava.

AVA:

Kaleo.

KALEO:

Uh, okay. Hi.

AVA:

What is it?

MUSIC: Multiplication by Bluemount Score.

KALEO:

Someone dropped a drive off at my door. And Ava... it has both of our names on it. I'm trying to open up the files on it, I'm gonna need some help with it, but... I think it's a lead?

SFX: Ava hangs up.

NIUSHA:

I heard that.

AVA:

No, you didn't.

NIUSHA:

He said he had a lead.

AVA:

But it's Kaleo—!

NIUSHA:

And that's what you wanted—!

AVA:

Yeah, but—!

NIUSHA:

Ava. You want the truth; you'll have to do some tough stuff sometimes! And besides, I think it'd be good for the two of you to talk about what happened rather than just flat out ignoring each other. Literally a couple days ago you *wanted* Kaleo to stay at our apartment. Now, what, you won't talk to the guy at all? I get being mad, but not communicating about that is just gonna make it worse.

AVA:

(SHE SIGHS) I hate it when you're right.

SFX: Ava dials Kaleo back.

KALEO:

Um, hey.

AVA:

Hi.

KALEO:

Bad connection or something, huh?

AVA:

Uh... yeah.

NIUSHA:

Ava.

AVA:

Not now!

So, you can just send it to me, right?

KALEO:

Actually, no. The drive that the info in is read-only; no transferring allowed. You'll have to come over. Or I can come over, I guess.

AVA:

You're not making that up?

KALEO:

Why would I lie about that? I'd rather send it to you, trust me, that'd be way faster than this.

AVA:

Alright, fine. I'll be there in half an hour.

SCENE 3

SFX: The door slides open.

AVA:

Kaleo.

KALEO:

Hello, Ava. Got anything to say other than just my name?

AVA:

Where's the drive?

KALEO:

I've been working on it since I called you. Here, pull up a chair.

SFX: Ava does. Kaleo types.

KALEO:

I had to call in a couple favors which went... well, it went some kind of way. But they walked me through cracking the security on it, and now it's some files that I assume you'd be able to make more heads and tails of.

AVA:

Okay, move over.

SFX: Ava scrolls through the files.

AVA:

Kind of weird that they addressed this to us. I mean, like, putting our names on it?

KALEO:

To be fair, we do say it on the radio all the time.

AVA:

And then finding your apartment? We have separate boxes for this sort of stuff. And who's making physical drives, anyways? Unless they're sending a virus or something—hang on. You sure this isn't a virus?

KALEO:

You tell me; you're the one sitting in front of my computer. And *you're* blocking the screen.

AVA:

Okay, it's probably not a virus.

SFX: A video loads up and plays.

MUSIC: Multiplication by Bluemount Score.

AVA:

Oh no, it is a virus!

KALEO:

Ava, stop, no it's not!

HAYDEN:

Kaleo Hale and Ava Jafari. If you're watching this, I assume it means you were able to crack the codes on the drive I dropped off. I didn't want to drop it in your mailing boxes—you can never be too careful, and this stuff you're gonna see, well... It's not exactly what I think Moondog or most other people for that matter would consider legit. But I want you to know—you're on the right track. Read through the files that I left on this drive. And once you've committed it all to your memory, you need to destroy it.

KALEO:

What the hell?

HAYDEN:

That stuff's not as important anyways. It's just context for the bigger picture.

You two need to meet with me. I can't tell you directly where or when but follow the information in the drive and it'll lead you to me. But I can't be here for long. At the end of the day, I've got to keep moving. So come find me—or lose your shot at unraveling this mystery with me.

SFX: The video ends.

KALEO:

I repeat—what the hell?

AVA:

There's other files on this drive, he said. It looks like it's transcripts and emails...

KALEO:

Wait, is this about the radio signals from before?

AVA:

Actually, no. They're about that building we found.

(GASP) There's even Corrector reports about it.

KALEO:

That... shouldn't be possible. Those files are confidential. Like the kind of confidential that makes you a sudden disappearance in the news.

I'm suddenly a little worried we opened this on my work laptop.

AVA:

You weren't worried when that video opened up?

KALEO:

Most developers don't spend time making a custom video to show up for their virus, they just steal your information and go. Why would I be worried?

AVA:

Okay, whatever. Let me open up this report.. and listen to this.

"Corporal Tristan Dunajski was with the special unit assigned to taking in Lola Sunn and eliminating Vic Vass in the radio station on the outskirts..." and then, this.

"Dunajski reports that the team was incapacitated by the combined efforts of Vic Vass and a cyborg operative." See, it's in the reports! That Hobbs guy was just being cagey for no reason. And it says right here, "The cyborg operative had elements of Glasshouse technology." Doesn't that prove that it was created by the Correctors?

KALEO:

Well, yeah, but if it was Corrector tech, why would it be taking out Correctors?

AVA:

Glitch in the system?

KALEO:

Nah, a cyborg is still a person. Some AIs are basically people and glitches don't change that.

AVA:

So then, a cyborg gone rogue.

KALEO:

Could be a possibility? But I thought you said this was about the building.



AVA:

This is just one of the reports. I just chose this one  
'cause I wanted to prove myself right.

KALEO:

(SIGH) We're on a bit of a time limit, so let's skim a  
little bit.

SFX: Kaleo pulls his chair forward and scrolls.

KALEO:

Building codes, time of the radio station's establishment...  
audio files? Wonder if these are—

SFX: Error sound.

KALEO:

Not a compatible file type. Okay! So those aren't useful to  
us. Figures.

AVA:

But they're interesting!

Well, actually, I can just read those later.

KALEO:

Later? We're supposed to destroy this thing, that's what it  
said.

AVA:

Yeah, but... look, I just don't think it's smart to get rid  
of it when we might need to, y'know, refresh our memory or  
something. We'll destroy it after we get all of the  
information we need.

KALEO:

Makes sense... I guess.

AVA:

Hold on, scroll back—I think you just passed our first clue.

SFX: Kaleo scrolls back.

AVA:

“Find two thirds of the key, and it’ll lead you to me. One’s at the rathole, the other’s pay to play. Reverse engineer what you hear. And listen carefully to everything.”

Great, the guy thinks he’s clever.

KALEO:

At least we’ve got coordinates. These would put us at... huh. Why even bother with numbers when this place has a name?

AVA:

Why? Where is it?

SCENE 4

SFX: The ambience of a mall.

MUSIC: Executive Image from Zapsplat.com, Happy Dance by AlexMakeMusic.

ANNOUNCER:

Don't just go window shopping at the Glazing Plaza—buy to your heart's content! Panel District's the place to be, 'cause we have deals, deals, deals...

AVA:

The Panel District mall? How are we supposed to find one guy in this whole place?

KALEO:

That's the point, I guess. Hiding in plain sight.

AVA:

Even if this place is crawling with wannabe Correctors, I guess it'd be pretty easy to hide what you're doing. So many stores... it's way bigger here than Alteco's.

KALEO:

Yeah, and a bigger scented candle department, apparently. Let's walk, I'm getting a headache.

SFX: The two walk.

AVA:

Though I don't know that I'd call anything around here a rathole. We can start with the whole "pay to play" thing, then? That seems more obvious.

KALEO:

That's not the order of the hints. Shouldn't we follow the order?

AVA:

Must we always follow instructions?

KALEO:

Just think it would make our lives easier.

AVA:

I think what would actually make our lives easier is figuring out what we're even looking for. This whole key thing... do we know what the key even looks like? Or if it's a physical key?

KALEO:

I'm inclined to think it isn't, considering what the instruction said. Seems like it could be more of an acoustic thing?

AVA:

Well, good thing we've got two radio experts on the job.

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

Hey, you crazy kids! You look like the two of you are on the up and up of fashion.

AVA:

What, us?

KALEO:

Ignore them, Ava, they're just trying to sell us something.

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

No, look, I don't pay just anyone that compliment—I think you two would look real slick with a new set of sunglasses I've got here!

KALEO:

Thanks, but no thanks.

AVA:

I... yeah, sunglasses really aren't my thing?

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

Oh, but I promise these aren't just any sunglasses! They're polarized! Protection from radiation too!

AVA:

Pretty sure that's not how that works.

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

And they're slick light protection too.

SFX: Sunglasses clicks a button on a light.

KALEO:

Ow, geez, that's bright!

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

I bet you wish you had a pair of sunglasses right now, so you could test how effective they are against my sun light, that's Sun, space, light, now available for 14 cryptos—

AVA:

I feel like you waving the Sun, space, light around qualifies as a health hazard.

MALL RAT 1:

(HISSES) It burns!

AVA:

There you go.

MALL RAT 2:

You blinded him!

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

The kid probably needs actual sunlight, he's too pale.

MALL RAT 2:

You think you're so funny.

MALL RAT 1:

This is why we don't venture outside our territory.

(HISSES)

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

Cut it out with the dramatics. Shoo, get outta here, you're messing with my sales.

SFX: The mall rats stomp off.

KALEO:

They were pretty fashionable, why didn't you harass them?

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

If you call dressing in all black a fashion statement, sure. One of those little brats is my nephew, he just comes over here to bother me. Regular mallrat.

AVA:

Mall rat... hey, when they're not pestering you, where do you usually shoo them off to?

SUNGLASSES KIOSK ATTENDANT:

Just follow 'em, it's that store two floors up. Southeast wing, take the second escalator. And if you get to talking to them, tell 'em that if they can leave me alone for two hours, I'll buy 'em all pretzels.

Hey, you two look like a fashionable bunch! You ever consider wearing sunglasses?

KALEO:

We're gonna look like weirdos following a couple of kids.

AVA:

It's a mall, we're allowed to walk around. Come on, we're gonna lose them.

MALL RAT 1:

Dude, I'm freaking out.

MALL RAT 2:

Just stay calm. No one's gotta know.

KALEO:

That's them.

AVA:

Up the escalator we go.

MALL RAT 1:

You keep saying that sort of stuff.

MALL RAT 2:

Why? It's not actually a big deal.

KALEO:

Stay low, Ava, they're going to see us.

AVA:

It looks more suspicious if you're ducking around.

MALL RAT 1:

It's a big deal to me! Some of my family works in this mall.

MALL RAT 2:

So does some of mine! They're not like... in cahoots or whatever.

MALL RAT 1:

Wait, dude. Are those people following us?

MUSIC: Tense Detective Looped Drone by ZakharVahala.

KALEO:

Nice going, Ava.

AVA:

How is this my fault?

MALL RAT 2:

'Scuse me, coming through!

MALL RAT 1:

Out of my way, we're going up!

SFX: People get shoved out of the way.

AVA:

After them!

KALEO:

What do you mean "after them", I'm not chasing them!

AVA:

Ugh, of course you're not going to!



KALEO:

Do you even—sorry, if I could just scoot past you—realize  
how you sound?!

AVA:

We're on a—excuse me—time limit! Can you just focus on the  
bigger picture, please!

SFX: Ava and Kaleo run after the mall rats.

MALL RAT 1:

Begone from us, foul creatures!

KALEO:

Why are you saying that? Why are you saying that?!

MALL RAT 2:

Stop following us!

AVA:

Where are you going?

MALL RAT 1:

I summon thee, shadows of the dark, bind these—oof!

SFX: The mall rat trips.

AVA:

Ooh, ouch. Are you okay, kid?

MALL RAT 2:

NOOOOOOO!!!

MUSIC: Romantic Violin Suite by GoodBMusic.

MALL RAT 1:

Go on... without me...

KALEO:

What.

MALL RAT 1:

Leave a studded belt on my grave...

MALL RAT 2:

I will. I promise I will.

AVA:

I'm not gonna kill him.

MALL RAT 2:

Maybe *you* won't.

KALEO:

Guys, can everyone just stop now?

SFX: The music fades out anti-climactically.

AVA:

Here, let me help you up.

MALL RAT 1:

I think I twisted my ankle.

MALL RAT 2:

That's what happens when you wear platform boots everywhere.

KALEO:

Okay, tough guy, you're also wearing platform boots.

MALL RAT 2:

These are my action boots.

AVA:

I think you dropped something.

MALL RAT 1:

(GASPS) Don't look at that!

MALL RAT 2:

Aw man, it's all over.

AVA:

A "Blitzer Bratmobile" keychain? Do you guys listen to this band?

MALL RAT 2:

Yeah. They're pretty awesome.

KALEO:

More importantly, did you steal this?

MALL RAT 1:

We just didn't have enough cryptos for it.

AVA:

For a keychain?

MALL RAT 2:

We spent it all on pretzels.

KALEO:

Kid, where'd you take this from?

AVA:

The keychain says it's from "Zero Cool."

KALEO:

Oh God. I haven't been in one of those stores in ages.

AVA:

What, too cool for band merch and outdated streams?

MALL RAT 1:

They're called *vintage* streams.

AVA:

You're making me feel old.

MALL RAT 2:

We're there all the time, I don't wanna make a big deal that we stole something.

AVA:

We don't have to tell anyone.

KALEO:

Ava.

AVA:

*Fine*, I guess we can return it for you. Kaleo, it's just a keychain.

KALEO:

Yeah, but mall security might not see it like that. Just walk us over to where you took it from, and we'll put it back.

SCENE 5

MUSIC: Drum&Bass Rock Pendulum Inspired Instrumental by Hyde.

ZERO COOL ANNOUNCEMENT:

What's up, yo? Welcome to Z-Z-Z-Zero Cool! (Zero Cool!)

SFX: Airhorns blast over an explosion sound effect.

AVA:

Wow, this place is..

KALEO:

Weird? Overpriced? A rip-off of way cooler stores, perhaps?

AVA:

It's called Zero Cool, I don't think it's trying to be cooler.

KALEO:

Ooh, bad joke, even for you.

AVA:

Let's go return this, shall we?

SFX: The shop bell rings as they step into the store.

CASHIER:

Welcome to Zero Cool, you need my help with anything?

KALEO:

We're good, just browsing.

CASHIER:

Isn't everyone.

AVA:

Yeah... yeah. I'm just gonna go behind this cardboard cutout of some stream star now.

MALL RAT 1:

You're making her suspicious!

AVA:

I dunno, I didn't expect her to be really mean off the bat and it kind of flustered me!

KALEO:

Well, that doesn't seem to have been a problem in the past.

AVA:

It's different, she and I are not hosting a show together!

KALEO:

Oh?

AVA:

Never mind! Kaleo, can you go... I don't know, walk somewhere else so she pays attention to you instead?

KALEO:

Uh, okay. Here I... go?

SFX: Kaleo walks away.

CASHIER:

Hey, you look kind of familiar.

KALEO:

Do I?

CASHIER:

Did you work here before?

KALEO:

Oh, well—yeah—when I was like, in high school, though.

CASHIER:

Really now?

AVA:

Does it go here?

MALL RAT 1:

That's not band merch, that's for cartoons.

AVA:

Okay, is she going to care? It's back here, at least.

MALL RAT 2:

She's super particular, she hates when anything is out of place.

AVA:

Fine, I'll keep looking.

KALEO:

Hey, wait. Is this...?

CASHIER:

Old audio file player. Most of the stuff we keep here is stored on vintage formats. It can play pretty much anything, so if you find anything pre-Incendiary, this thing can probably still read the file.

KALEO:

Man, I always wanted one of these as a kid. I thought they were so cool. Plus, I loved getting CDs and cassettes for birthdays, Christmas, whatever.

CASHIER:

Oh yeah, this thing could play all of those and more.

AVA:

'Sup, Kaleo?

KALEO:

Uh... what's up with you?

AVA:

Dropped it off, kids made their way out. We're good.

Uh, what other files do you think this could play?

CASHIER:

That one's just the standard version. Honestly, if you want something that'll decode the older files too, you'll probably want a collector's version.

KALEO:

Where could we find one of those? Not here, I guess.

CASHIER:

Oh no, totally here. We have some really cool ones in the back.

AVA:

Could we use one of them? Just for fun?

KALEO:

Uh...



CASHIER:

You *totally* want to, don't you?

KALEO:

It could be fun.

CASHIER:

Yeah, why not? Just be careful, or my boss will have my head. I can't come back with you, 'cause I have to man the front, otherwise I'd totally geek out about it with you.

KALEO:

Oh. Oh! Cool, yeah, thanks. We'll be quick.

CASHIER:

Catch.

SFX: The cashier tosses a set of keys to Kaleo.

CASHIER:

Have fun. But not too much fun.

KALEO:

Haha.

SFX: Kaleo and Ava walk away and unlock the back door.

KALEO:

So, what's with the sudden interest in getting back here, Ava? I didn't want to waste our time, we don't have to play with this.

AVA:

Sound files. What we have in the drive! Didn't you say they weren't-!

KALEO:

—Compatible files. And this is “the rathole” or whatever.  
That actually makes a lot of sense.

AVA:

Come on, let’s open them, then!

KALEO:

Let me load them up, hold on. This is exciting, I’ve never  
gotten to use one of these before.

SFX: Kaleo plays different files of music stored on the drive.

KALEO:

Oh, I swear to God, if this is just another guy trying to  
get us to play his music on air, I’m so not into the whole  
ARG thing.

AVA:

They’re a little too short to be tracks, right? How are we  
supposed to know which one’s the right one?

KALEO:

Let me play them again.

SFX: They play again. Kaleo stops on the third track.

KALEO:

This one’s weird. Sounds like it might have gotten garbled.  
Or someone reversed the track.

AVA:

Reverse engineer what you hear. That’s what he said, right?

KALEO:

Right, but—!

AVA:

Let's do it then!

KALEO:

Ava, this is a really expensive piece of equipment!

AVA:

We're just gonna reverse the audio.

KALEO:

But I don't know how to do that safely! We might corrupt the file or something, or...

AVA:

Done.

SFX: Ava presses buttons. The file plays forwards.

MUSIC FILE:

D-R-O.

AVA:

Wonder what that last section was.

KALEO:

Oh, that actually worked. Huh.

AVA:

So now I'll just save the file.

KALEO:

Oh, wait, no no no, Ava not that one—!

SFX: An alarm blares.

AVA:

Uh oh.

KALEO:

Uh oh does not cut it!

AVA:

I can fix it

KALEO:

Just move over!

SFX: Kaleo presses buttons rapidly.

KALEO:

Okay, okay, that should fix that... turn this back, get the file down...

SFX: The door opens.

CASHIER:

What did you do?!

KALEO:

Hang on, I can explain!

CASHIER:

I say be careful and you totally screw it up!

AVA:

It's not what it looks like.

CASHIER:

Whatever. Get out of here, you two.

KALEO:

I'm really sorry.

CASHIER:

I thought you were cool, man.

KALEO:

(SIGHS)

SFX: Kaleo walks away.

AVA:

Kaleo, wait!

SCENE 6

SFX: Food court ambience. Footsteps.

MUSIC: Intervention by Scott Buckley.

AVA:

Kaleo, seriously, stop running away!

KALEO:

I wouldn't have to keep running if you stopped following me!

AVA:

What?

WHAT?!

SFX: Ava runs forward and grabs his arm.

AVA:

I said stop!

KALEO:

Let go of me.

AVA:

You can't actually be that upset that we got kicked out of a store that you don't even like!

KALEO:

I'm not upset over that. God, nobody ever seems to know what I'm actually feeling. Nice. Awesome!

AVA:

Maybe if you communicated a little more, I would get it. But you just love shutting up about everything! Pretending everything's fine.

KALEO:

As I seem to recall it, you didn't want to talk to me at all today. You only came over because you thought I had a lead. And it's all about the lead, isn't it? It's always about the story, it's always about "the truth", always about the "bigger picture", right? It's never ever about the one person who keeps getting screwed over by your search for whatever you randomly decided is the only thing worth paying attention to!

AVA:

That's not what it's like!

KALEO:

Really? Levi was right—you've literally risked *my* life for whatever dumb thing we're doing! You make me chase after you to make sure you don't get yourself killed, except the difference is I *care* about what happens to you. But if Kaleo has some guy find his address, if he gets hurt, or humiliated, or loses his job, it's totally fine, right?

AVA:

I care about you! Why do you think I don't care about you? That's why I do all this stuff alone most of the time! But the truth should matter to you.

KALEO:

You think it doesn't matter to me?

AVA:

Apparently not over your reputation! Like, yes, I'm sorry I'm a total weirdo who cares about "random" things, things that have mattered to me for a long time, but it matters SO MUCH MORE that you come off as the cool, calm Kaleo that everyone on the radio likes. Y'know, that's actually why I haven't been able to tell what you're thinking, 'cause you're constantly putting on a front that isn't even you.

KALEO:

Well, one of us has to be normal! It's better than having people stare at us all the time!

AVA:

People are staring RIGHT NOW! Get over it!

SFX: People whisper.

KALEO:

Goddammit.

AVA:

Look, if I'm too weird for you, why don't I go do this on my own? I bet that'll make you real happy.

KALEO:

Would you just stop doing things on your own?! I already established that I do not want you doing that!

AVA:

You know what, though? You're slowing me down. And I don't need you here. You insist so much on following the rules, sticking to the script. Hell, that's probably why you care so much about being cool, about making sure you always put me in my place.

KALEO:

Ava, I... no. I'm sorry. I don't want you to think that. I don't really mean what I said, I...

AVA:

You sure about that? 'Cause that sounded pretty real.

KALEO:

Sounded pretty real when you said I was slowing you down.



AVA:

Yeah... no. I didn't mean that either. I'm sorry.

KALEO:

Maybe we should sit down. Talk about this, properly, yeah?

AVA:

I think to sit down here we need to get something to eat.

KALEO:

Then let's get something. I think people usually argue less on a full stomach, right?

AVA:

That's probably true.

KALEO:

Anything you're craving in particular?

SFX: A jingle plays.

CHOW KEN MASCOT:

You're a winner! At Chow Ken, eat a treat and get a prize almost every time! (A JINGLE PLAYS)

AVA:

What is that?

KALEO:

Do you mean the super grating sound effects or the mascot? I think it's supposed to be a bear? Or maybe it's a mouse.

AVA:

Er, no, what are they advertising?

KALEO:

Oh, it's an automat. It's kind of like a vending machine for hot food, I guess you'd say. You just pay and push a button and presto, you got a meal. They've got that whole video game theme going.

CHOW KEN MASCOT:

All you have to do is pay to play, the automat way!

SFX: At the end of the jingle, a distinct tune plays.

KALEO:

I think we just got the second clue.

AVA:

What exactly are we supposed to do with it?

KALEO:

The last part we found of the key was a song, right? So, this one must be too. The clue said, "Listen carefully to everything you hear." And that jingle...

SFX: The jingle plays again.

AVA:

It can't just be that, right?

KALEO:

No, you're right. There's gotta be something else. Come on, let's... y'know, investigate.

AVA:

Now you're talking my language.

SFX: They run in.

PATRON:

Hey, are you in line?

AVA:

Not yet just looking.

Yeah, mostly just food machines. All the seating's outside...

KALEO:

Wait, listen.

SFX: Someone pushes a button, producing a musical tone.

CHOW KEN AI:

Thanks for ordering from Chow Ken! You got the SPAM MUSUBI and MISO RAMEN.

AVA:

The sound of the buttons.

SFX: Another person presses a button, producing more musical tones.

CHOW KEN AI:

Thanks for ordering from Chow Ken! You got the TAKOYAKI and CHOW KEN SPECIAL.

KALEO:

Sounds like it's just a scale from top to bottom, that makes things easier... but where are we supposed to input it? I mean, as good as musubi and takoyaki sound, that melody's way too long.

AVA:

Look, over there. There's one machine that's out of order. Wanna try it there?

KALEO:

Good eye.

SFX: They press buttons on the machine.

PATRON:

Hey, you know that one's out of order, right?

KALEO:

Yeah, and?

PATRON:

Oh! Uh. Okay.

KALEO:

That's the first part... then it went...

SFX: Kaleo plays the tune by pressing the buttons. We hear another tune, then a clatter.

AVA:

The other part of the melody must be in this drive.

KALEO:

And how exactly is this supposed to lead us to our informant?

AVA:

Remember what the first file said, right at the very end? Check out the drive. There's our other half.

KALEO:

D-R-O-exclamation point-D?

AVA:

It's pronounced "droid", first of all. And second of all, we passed right by this place earlier. Let's hurry.

SCENE 7

SFX: A sliding door opens to an internet café.

PIERS:

Welcome to dro!d, an internet café! I am Piers! What can I do for you? Would you like to reserve a computer, a room, or other device?

KALEO:

Er... we're here to see someone.

PIERS:

Would you like to reserve a computer, a room, or other device?

AVA:

I don't think this is the droid we're... searching for, whatever. Cool bowtie though. Is there like, a person we can talk to?

KALEO:

Don't think so. The whole place is run by artificial intelligence.

PIERS:

How am I doing? If you'd like to talk to a customer service representative, please say "Customer service."

KALEO:

And what's the wait time on that?

PIERS:

Approximately 79 minutes.

AVA:

We'll pass.

KALEO:

Look, um... Piers?

PIERS:

Would you like to reserve a-

KALEO:

No, no, we're good.

But don't AI usually have a little more... I dunno,  
intelligence going for them? This just sounds pre-recorded.

PATRON:

Hey, droid? I'm done, charge it to my account.

PIERS:

Done and done. Thank you for stopping by!

PATRON:

You two new?

AVA:

To internet cafés, no. To this place? Yes.

PATRON:

Well, don't expect to have conversations with the AI here.  
They're all reformed malfunctioning ones, so they're  
basically braindead.

KALEO:

Uh, that's... really weird.

PATRON:

Hey, I didn't make the place.

SFX: The patron exits.

PIERS:

Welcome to dro!d, an internet café!

AVA:

Oh, man, yeah. This is weird. Isn't there anything we can do?

KALEO:

I don't know. It might be a software thing.

AVA:

Or... just a hunch...

SFX: Ava reaches forward and pulls off the bowtie.

KALEO:

Hey, I know it was a cool bowtie, but you didn't have to steal it.

SFX: Piers blips.

AVA:

It was more like a collar, I think.

PIERS:

Hello?

KALEO:

Hey there, Piers.



PIERS:

Hello. Welcome to...(SHUDDERS) Why do I keep saying that?  
Wait, am I talking? Can you hear me?

AVA:

We can.

PIERS:

Well, goodness. Let me remember what you two were saying...  
you were looking for someone?

KALEO:

Yeah. We've got two-thirds of a key.

PIERS:

An acoustic one? Why, yes, I know exactly what you'll be  
playing it for. Follow me.

SFX: Piers leads the two into the back room.

PIERS:

It's better if we can have a little more privacy. Go ahead  
and play those two files, here.

AVA:

Oh, okay! Connection coming out of the chest. Just plug it  
in... here?

PIERS:

Post-haste!

SFX: Ava plugs in the drives. The tune plays in its entirety,  
which Hayden then whistles along to.

HAYDEN:

Well done, Kaleo and Ava. Well done! Wait, Piers, where are we? This isn't where I put you.

PIERS:

I'm not sure. I don't quite remember what I was doing, but I think this is an internet café.

HAYDEN:

It's dro!d, remember? Stationed you there on purpose, but you ended up getting caught, huh?

PIERS:

Suppose so, Mr. Dunajski. Sorry to inconvenience you.

HAYDEN:

I'm just glad you're okay, man. Good on you guys for saving Piers from a fate worse than death.

AVA:

Hang on, Mr. Dunajski? You mean like Tristan Dunajski?

HAYDEN:

Yeah, that's my older brother, but I wouldn't be caught dead in the same room as him. Or any Corrector for that matter. I'm Hayden. Your mystery benefactor. Sorry if my delivery scared you, Kaleo, you just had an easy address to find. But still, apologies for being a little mysterious. You can't be too careful. Speaking of which...

SFX: A laser bolt.

KALEO:

Okay! Piers had a ray gun installed in his arm! Very normal!

HAYDEN:

Whoa, whoa, whoa! Just shot out a security camera. I wouldn't dream of hurting the two people who could be our chance to revealing everything. Piers, if you would?

PIERS:

I'm supposed to give this to you two!

SFX: Whirring, then a clatter.

HAYDEN:

I got that from the scene of the crime. Heard Tristan was on the squad, and I thought he might have really kicked the bucket this time. He was fine, looked like he was getting bandaged up by—get this—Lola Sunn. Isn't that crazy?

KALEO:

But I thought she and Vic Vass were—!

HAYDEN:

Not just the two of them either. I counted three other people besides them, plus maybe an all-purpose bot. Either way, this isn't from any of them. This is from when I went back to investigate after they cleared out.

KALEO:

So that abandoned radio station was the base for them. Zero Zero.

HAYDEN:

Yep. And I saw the two of you coming out from there, too.

AVA:

You saw the cyborg! You know what it is!

HAYDEN:

Kind of? I think you guys need to do more of the digging on that. Turn that hunk of metal I gave you around.

KALEO:

HavenHealth. That name sounds familiar.

HAYDEN:

She was a colleague of Lola Sunn's back when Sunn was still in Glasshouse. Got kicked out about five months after. Her work, like Sunn's, was part of a military tech development program.

AVA:

But there isn't a military in Metropolis West. Not anymore.

HAYDEN:

That's what people keep telling you, I know.

KALEO:

Hayden, you said that Zero Zero "cleared out." Where did they go?

HAYDEN:

Geez, did you guys even read the documents I gave you? They left. Left the Metropolis.

KALEO:

That's... no, that's impossible. You'd be killed before you even breached the perimeter. And even if you did leave... man, the next Metropolis is, what? Thousands of miles away with nothing in between them.

HAYDEN:

Piers, you're plugged into the drive. Call up the codes.

SFX: Piers whirs.

PIERS:

Here you are.

HAYDEN:

Secret signals have been sent out, over and over again, from points only a few *hundred* miles out from Metropolis West. These are some of the instructions on how to get there.

Now Piers, please destroy the drive like I instructed Ava and Kaleo to do.

AVA:

Wait, no!

SFX: Laser blast.

MUSIC: Resonance by Scott Buckley.

PIERS:

All done.

AVA:

Why would you do that?! That was valuable information!

HAYDEN:

Too valuable. Like I said, you can't be too careful. You wanna know why I move around so much? I track these signals—any unusual signal—and I get rid of it.

KALEO:

You said you don't want to be a Corrector, but you're pretty good at destroying evidence.

HAYDEN:

I'm still helping you, aren't I?

AVA:

Then why wipe out information?

HAYDEN:

To keep it safe.

MUSIC: Parasite by Scott Buckley.

HAYDEN:

You wanna know why the Metropolises haven't all banded together, haven't made a brave new world for us all to live in? They're preparing for war. Again. The Prodigy program, the program that made Lola Sunn, Elizabeth Haven... Alyce Dunajski... and countless others. They were a loophole that let POTEN Co. and Celadon Carbonate keep developing "paramilitary" weapons. The only reason those communities out there are safe is because Glasshouse can't find them again. *That's* why I have to destroy this information. Because if it falls into the wrong hands...

Look, I know it's wrong, in some ways. I'm sure plenty of people want to run away and die, trying without the guidance of the people there. But I can't let them get found out. Not while this much is still on the line.

So, find Elizabeth Haven. She knows something, I know she does. You're already on the hunt for this cyborg. And once everything's together, all the pieces will be in place for the truth to be revealed.

KALEO:

We... we can try.

HAYDEN:

Good. That's all I can really ask of you.

Piers, I trust you've found a way out of here?

PIERS:

I have. I shall be returning to you shortly.

HAYDEN:

Goodbye, Kaleo and Ava. Next time we talk, hopefully all the pieces will be together. Just remember the song. Now go.

SFX: Kaleo and Ava depart.

PATRON 2:

Hey, did you see that AI up at the front?

AVA:

Nope. Was there one there earlier?

PATRON 2:

I thought so. Oh, there's one over there. I gotta get back to class...

SFX: Kaleo and Ava exit dro!d.

AVA:

I can't believe Hayden destroyed that drive. There was so much we won't get to know.

KALEO:

I know. But them's the rules.

Hey, would you check my bag? Front pocket.

AVA:

Now of all times? Kaleo, I—!

Is this the drive?

KALEO:

A copy of it.

AVA:

You broke the rules.

MUSIC: Lost Ambient Lofi - Sad Background Music by Lesfm.

KALEO:

I did.

I wanted to prove to you that I do care about all of this. Y'know, the truth and all. I shouldn't let my ego get in the way of it. This thing is way bigger than both of us, and I don't care what it takes, I wanna make sure it gets brought to light.

SFX: Ava hugs Kaleo.

AVA:

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

(SHE CLEARS HER THROAT)Um, and Kaleo. I want you to know that you're the best partner I've ever had doing all this junk. But I don't want you to put it all on the line. At the end of the day, I don't want you to get hurt.

KALEO:

Well, I'll do my best.



SCENE 8

SFX: Ava enters her apartment.

AVA:

Niusha? *Niusha*?

Guess she's not home.

SFX: Ava plugs in the drive.

AVA:

Now to read some of these files. Let's try "Outposts beyond Metropolis West."

SFX: Ava clicks on a file.

AVA:

County Fair Mallplex, or Cair Mallplex. One of the major outposts beyond Metropolis West, situated somewhere in what was historically called the "Central Valley." Pre-Incendiary...

MUSIC: Modular Ambient 3 by sscheidl.

NELL:

The site was best known for its agricultural communities, which were used as resources until POTEN Co. established the outer rim of Metropolis West as part of its power grid, meant to supplement the Numitron Tube. Instead of agricultural farms, the Central Valley became cryptocurrency farms. The resulting displacement of people were then recruited into the Metropolis West militia, before its official disbandment.

After the discharge of all members of the 207<sup>th</sup> Fleet, Cair Mallplex was established. Its current location has been obscured from POTEN Co. The company routinely instructs technicians sent out to repair the cryptocurrency farms to also seek out Cair Mallplex, but multiple attacks on the

road and obfuscation of signals that Cair Mallplex has sent out has kept it relatively safe from intrusion.  
Furthermore—

SFX: A knock at the door.

AVA:

Huh?

Niusha, is that you? Did you forget your keys?

SFX: Ava looks through the camera.

MUSIC: Ethereal Wasteland Music 1 by sscheidl.

AVA:

Kaleo?

SFX: She opens the door.

AVA:

Kaleo, what are you doing here—

KALEO:

Ava...

SFX: The sound of high heels. Then, a ray gun cocking.

HAVEN:

Hi there, Ava. I think you and Kaleo here have something I want.

END EPISODE.

Hi, Eli Ramos here, creator and editor of Under the Electric Stars, an Aster Podcasting Network production. 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 on our website at [undertheelectricstars.com](http://undertheelectricstars.com), or on social media: we're @utes\_podcast on Twitter and undertheelectricstarspodcast on Tumblr. You can also find us on Patreon at [mxeliramos](https://www.patreon.com/mxeliramos), that's M-X-E-L-I-R-A-M-O-S. You can support Aster Podcasting Network at different tiers and get rewards like early access to episodes, annotated scripts, commentaries, behind the scenes posts, art, and even merch! That's not just for Under the Electric Stars, but all the shows on the network. The money you give directly goes to supporting our editor, showrunners, and actors who make these shows possible. Please support us if you have the means. Any amount helps.

Our voice talents are as follows: Dylan Vodzak as Levi Hale, Matheus Nogueira as Kaleo Hale, Serena El-Hajali as Ava Jafari, Setaareh Nikbin as Niusha Jafari, August Carraway as Piers, Everett Yang as Hayden Dunajski, Katriel Rose as Nell Palomo, Stephanie Arata as Elizabeth Haven.

Additional voices were provided by yours truly, Kai Ramos, Jenny Pan, and Alex Kingsley.

Attributions for sounds and music used can be found in the show notes. Thanks to Ezra Lee Buck, a \$20 Patron on Patreon. And to everyone, thanks for listening, and see you in Metropolis West soon.

Oh, and one more thing. If you're listening to this on our regular feed, you'll be hearing this episode on November 26<sup>th</sup>, the birthday of my dear partner and member of Aster Podcasting Network, Inigo Sherwani. Inigo's stuck with me through creating Under the Electric Stars and helped me build up Aster Podcasting Network. And they are an absolute gem of a person. Speaking of gems, if you want to support them, you can check out their show, Crown Jewels: wherever you find podcasts, on Twitter @crownjewelspod, and you can check Inigo's account while you're at it @inigio\_, I-N-I-G-I-O, underscore. Happy Birthday Inigo! Hope you have a good one.