

SCENE 1

SFX: An alarm. Tapping.

AI VOICE:

Good morning, Patton March. It's 6:00 a.m. Today's weather will be balmy with a light breeze, with a UV index of 3 in the Dome and 12 in greater Metropolis West. You have three appointments today at 8:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. Here is the news.

SFX: Door slides open. Echoing footsteps. Another door slides open.

NEWS ANCHOR:

Unrest continues in greater Metropolis West as riots continue to proliferate. Deltas, Epsilons, and even the classless are threatening to halt upcoming Class Upgrade ceremonies by disrupting smaller celebrations honoring those who would be upgraded. Here's one of those Deltas who's ready to become a Gamma.

DELTA:

It's really surprising that they're going this far, you know. These ceremonies used to be about bringing people together, rejoicing in their accomplishments, and how hard we've worked. I've been trying to get upgraded to a Gamma for almost a decade. Now these protestors are stopping traffic, they're making it hard to even get anywhere near Glasshouse... it's honestly kind of scary.

SFX: Patton spits. Water turns off. He taps on his comms. Dialing sounds.

CYBIL:

(SIGH) What is it, Patton? We're getting ready for school.

PATTON:

Have you heard what's on the news?

CYBIL:

No, and I don't see what it has to do with me.

MUSIC: "Chloroform [Gloomy Suspenseful BGM]" by Kuzu420.

PATTON:

Our people are terrified of those rioters crowding the streets! I don't know if it's jealousy or that they're just violent or what, but either way, it's making us look bad.

CYBIL:

I don't know what you want *me* to do about it, Patton. You've had me deploy Correctors to nearly every single one of those demonstrations. But there's only so many units we have compared to all the rabble, and it's wasting precious resources.

PATTON:

Maybe I should do another appearance... appeal to the younger crowd? I could schedule one today.

CYBIL:

You and I both have a major meeting today, so I would advise against it.

PATTON:

Well, who cares about some nebulous threat out in the Wasteland? That was a mistake made years ago.

CYBIL:

You know in the report I prepared for you, I told you those outposts would become a threat within the next several years, and that report is nearly a decade old. You have decided to put this off for long enough and now the tension of whether or not we should put them down has put us at a major disadvantage with the other Metropolises.

PATTON:

Ugh. Can this wait?

CYBIL:

You called me in the middle of getting my children ready for their day, so no. Speaking of which, Karine, you and Laurent call your father down. I apparently have to dedicate my full attention to this.

PATTON:

What's happening now is a threat to Metropolis West from the inside. That's far more insidious than the rejects we sent out to populate the outskirts. We dump our trash there, Cybil, it's called the Wasteland for a reason. If anyone's living out there, it's in meager conditions at best. We could set fire to the whole thing and start over.

CYBIL:

A targeted strike would fare better than firebombing our previous colonies... if we had the location more precisely. They've gone untouched by our Enlightenment initiatives—who knows what they may have read or internalized of what we've neatly cut away?

More pressingly, if other Metropolises see the kind of firepower we have, it will spell the end of any military advantage we'll have in space. Need I remind you it was your father who decided on settling citizens out there? And then, his decision to dishonorably discharge an entire fleet?

We are paying dearly for the progress he failed to enact and for the image that he tarnished of our Metropolis. That is our duty. Leave these petty unions and insurrections to Valeria.

PATTON:

Bah. After two weeks of her insisting that Correctors limit their use of less-lethals, I'm starting to think she's gone soft. Find whoever's behind all of this and get rid of them! These could turn seriously violent any day — first they do these sit ins, stop traffic, and then next... well, who knows? Do you think she can actually do this?

CYBIL:

I hand-selected Valeria as worthy protégé to my line of work because I saw her dedication. Unwavering loyalty and a commitment to protection. Not everyone can be born into high esteem, but she truly earned it with quashing that union years ago. And not everyone is simply selected on the behest of their beliefs, Patton.

PATTON:

There's a very simple mission I was born to complete. And it's all in the name. POTEN Co. - Power of Technology Enlightening the Nation.

Speaking of technology... when will Sentinel's patch be ready? It'll help Valeria's job out I'm sure.

CYBIL:

Soon enough. I've been collecting fragments of another program for use in this patch.

PATTON:

It's been eating up your time. Elections and the board's decision will be coming around soon, and I'd like to keep my seat.

CYBIL:

Oh, must be hard to not having a protégé of your own.

Rest assured, the patch will be done by our meeting this evening. I think you'll be quite happy with the results, but I want no further interruptions. Are we clear?

PATTON:

Crystal. I'll call a meeting with Valeria herself later to discuss options, before our appointment. I'm sure she won't disappoint.

SFX: Patton hangs up.

SCENE 2

SFX: Door opens.

SEBASTIAN:

Sorry I'm late. (SIGH) Working the graveyard shift sucks.

SFX: Bag drops.

CAINE:

Nah, we were waiting for you. Come on, sit down.

SFX: Sebastian walks over.

TARI:

Ugh, sheesh, Baz. You look... urgh. Really awful.

SEBASTIAN:

Thanks.

TARI:

I kind of feel like you should quit.

SEBASTIAN:

Hey, someone has to keep the lights on.

SFX: Sebastian sits.

SEBASTIAN:

(WINCES)

VIC:

That looks like it hurt.

SEBASTIAN:

Warehouse work. I pulled a muscle like two hours into the shift and didn't really get to do much except ice it for like, twenty minutes. Eh, least I'm not going back in for another couple days. What about you, Caine?

CAINE:

Well, I got in touch with some of my old clients for deliveries, but prices are... (SIGHS) Ever since they started running Sentinel, water prices are through the roof. Some

junkers started tailing me while I was on route because they knew I had a couple tanks. It's bad.

VIC:

There's not a lot of hacking jobs out there right now. Everyone's on guard, but no one's in the mood to pay up. Probably could siphon a couple funds from a Gamma or Beta class?

SU-JIN:

Yeah, work is going poorly for pretty much everyone these days. Actually, I heard a new union's popped up, so I'm gonna swing by their meeting with Indra and Tari to see what's going on with them. That's my update.

INDRA:

Yep. Dunno how it'll actually go, but it's worth it for us to see what they're about.

TARI:

But what about you, Caine? You said you wanted to wait for Baz for a reason.

CAINE:

Right. So... during the first protest we all did at the Windowpane, you remember how it took a while for us all to regroup?

TARI:

Sure, we didn't get back here until nightfall.

MUSIC: "Ominous Criminal Atmosphere" by Universfield.

CAINE:

The woman I saw at the gala was there and when I chased after her... it was Val. Don't know her ranking, not really, but it seems to me she was in charge of at least a few operations.

INDRA:

So she's gone full Corrector, huh?

SEBASTIAN:

There's no way Val's doing that of her own free will.

CAINE:

Even so, she said she'd hired both Dax and Haven to come looking for me, which means...

SU-JIN:

She's probably got the same information that Haven had about Cair Mallplex.

INDRA:

Yeah, haven't heard anything about Haven skulking around. So she's either dead, in which case, good riddance, or she's laying low. Probably means your sister got the intel and then dumped the doctor when she didn't deliver.

SU-JIN:

So! One threat down, but the outposts are still in jeopardy.

TARI:

They were always going to be in trouble. We've just been buying time until we can take it all down.

INDRA:

Question is if Valeria's going to spill. Even if she's not high-ranking, word about something like that will travel fast.

CAINE:

Well, she gave me her private line, so...

I think I could meet with her? Kuya, you should come too.

SEBASTIAN:

Yeah, I don't know what's gotten into her, but we could find out what happened at least. See if she really has gotten that information, and then convince her why she shouldn't talk.

TARI:

I mean, POTEN Co. gets its hooks in some people. And it's no easy thing to get them to leave. If she doesn't listen, then, what will you do?

SEBASTIAN:

...Let's not worry about that yet.

CAINE:

Not sure when we can meet with her, but... do I have the go to send her a comm?

VIC:

Your comms is encrypted and secure, I say go for it.

SEBASTIAN:

The sooner we meet with her, the better.

INDRA:

Just... keep your head on a swivel. Still could be a trap at the end of the day.

SU-JIN:

And hey, as always, we're here for you. We're heading out later to catch that meeting, but if you need me, I'll come back for you.

CAINE:

I know you will. Thanks.

SFX: Typing.

CAINE:

(SIGH) Alright, done. I guess we'll see what she's up to... if she responds.

SCENE 3

SFX: Door opens.

VALERIA:

Director March.

PATTON:

Valeria! Always a pleasure. Sit, sit.

SFX: Footsteps. Valeria sits.

MUSIC: "Dark Sedation - True Crime Loop Music Track" by
JoelFazhari

PATTON:

Do you know why I called this emergency meeting with you?

VALERIA:

I believe I have some idea why.

PATTON:

Well, you might remember that you were supposed to be dealing with those pesky protestors that have been causing problems all around the Metropolis.

VALERIA:

I'm... aware.

PATTON:

And yet, in the past two weeks, I've mostly seen things get worse and worse. Why is that?

SFX: Valeria's comms goes off.

PATTON:

You should really silence that when you're in a meeting.

VALERIA:

I usually have fairly pressing matters to attend to, so you'll have to forgive... me...

SFX: Valeria pulls out her comms.

PATTON:

Can that wait?

VALERIA:

Uh, sure. I mean, yes it can.

SFX: Valeria puts her comms back.

PATTON:

Good. So, would you like to answer my question?

VALERIA:

(CLEARS HER THROAT) Dealing with these rebels takes time. And in the interest of not making us look bad, I'm trying to do this carefully.

PATTON:

And how exactly does it help that we have all these lawless "rebels" running around the city? They're certainly making headlines.

VALERIA:

It's a phase. And besides, the rest of your Enlightenment enforcers are making sure the news keeps the narrative tight.

PATTON:

And yet people are still sympathizing. Shouldn't we... thin the horde a bit?

VALERIA:

If you're questioning my use of force, I'd kindly ask you to back off.

PATTON:

Oh, don't take offense, Ms. Reyes. I'm simply suggesting that if it'll take this much time, we might as well stop having these Epsilons and classless folks limping home to say how "brave and noble" they were in the fight against those big, Bad Alphas.

VALERIA:

With all due respect, Director, this is my job, not yours.

PATTON:

A little proposal like this can't be hurting your pride.

VALERIA:

Patton, when I busted one of these unions before, I was on the inside. Now that I'm on this side of law, I'm trying to take a slightly more tactical approach.

Not that you would know much about tactics, considering...

PATTON:

Ah ah. You know that appointment Cybil and I have later is technically for our eyes only.

Though you know I hate to pull rank.

VALERIA:

I'm just saying, you're missing a *big* piece of the puzzle.

PATTON:

Well, I don't know that you need to be much involved, unless you've got some hidden cards in your slots.

VALERIA:

I—!

PATTON:

Right. So, I'm going to leave this important task of protecting the Metropolis from these protestors to you. Can you do that?

VALERIA:

(SIGHS) Already on it. Are we finished?

PATTON:

Sure we are. Thanks for your insights on your work. Let's circle back on your progress soon. Bye bye now.

SFX: Valeria gets up. The door closes.

VALERIA:

(GRUMBLES, SIGHS) Okay, keep it together, Reyes.

SFX: Valeria pulls out her comms and taps it.

CAINE:

(ECHOING)

Val, it's Caine. I thought about it—we should talk. When can you meet? Sooner rather than later, please.

VALERIA:

(LAUGHS) Impatient as ever.

SFX: Tapping.

MUSIC: "Fester" by GabrielDouglas.

VALERIA:

Tonight. I'll come alone. Easier and safer to come to Glasshouse—I'll keep you hidden. Meet at the mall on Butiko Avenue at 1900. Can't guarantee safety for more than just you, so I suggest you come alone too.

I'll be watching over you.

SCENE 4

SFX: A bus door opens. Three footsteps walk off, one person with a cane.

TARI:

Is that the last transfer?

SU-JIN:

Uh, yep! I know, four was kind of a lot.

INDRA:

And we still have to walk five blocks? There better be seating there. We've been on public transit for nearly three hours. This "Pavement" group better be worth it or I'll be pissed.

SU-JIN:

I know, sorry. I was thinking we'd take a car, but we're less traceable this way.

INDRA:

I'll live, but we'd better call one on the way back.

SU-JIN:

Yeah, I will. We'll have to walk a couple blocks one way or another so it's not obvious where we came from.

Ugh, god, living in a panopticon sucks. Anyways, we'll be going... that's 12th and Mission, so this way.

SFX: The three start walking.

TARI:

It's good that Pavement's got a place to meet, since they only formed like, what, about a week ago?

INDRA:

Yeah, but it started as some student club, so it's been going on longer. No telling if they'll be any good or not, could just be a bunch of teenagers.

SU-JIN:

Eh, I don't want to knock it because they're young. Ji-yeong's been heading up a lot of the college effort and they have all the time to do sit-ins and stuff like that.

INDRA:

Fair.

TARI:

I haven't really seen much in way of what they're doing, though! From what I can tell, it's not a historical group or anything, so it seems like they got bold enough to actually make a group and start doing stuff because of Zero Zero.

SU-JIN:

Yeah, we're in the news. Not that all press is good press, they're making us out to be the bad guys in their coverage.

TARI:

Ah, that doesn't surprise me much. Like I've said, Glasshouse has always been big on controlling a narrative. But I doubt that people trust it much.

INDRA:

Nah, when some upgrade-wannabe starts yapping on about how they're shocked at how violent protests are when they're killing people in the streets—on a *regular* day—then there's gonna be some doubt. People see what they want to, though. Usually can't change their minds.

SU-JIN:

I know. I kind of wonder if we shouldn't be pushing back more... but I don't want to make that call too early. Could hurt people pretty badly... and I hate to say it, but it would also make us look bad if we started it up now.
(SIGHS) It's hard to take charge.

TARI:

Comes with the territory, I guess?

INDRA:

You're what we've got, Yi. And if I didn't like what you've been doing, then I'd leave. But I haven't yet.

SU-JIN:

Hah, someone's gotta figure out what we're doing now that we're in the news.

Looks like this is the place.

SFX: Rhythmic knocking. No answer.

INDRA:

Knock harder. Like this.

SFX: Banging. No answer.

TARI:

Maybe we should just push on it?

SFX: Pushing. No answer.

TARI:

Okay, did we get the wrong—!

SFX: The door swings open.

SU-JIN:

Hi?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

You're here for the Pavement meeting?

SU-JIN:

Yeah.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Okay, come in.

SU-JIN:

Uh, hey, before you go. I was wondering if there was like, a leader or someone you could point me to? I'm from Zero Zero and...

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Oh. We don't really... do leaders?

TARI:

Huh? Why not?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

It's like... well, hierarchy is kind of what got us here, right? So, replicating that in our everyday organizing is repeating the exact same thing. And we as a group aren't really interested in that.

TARI:

I see. So, what are you interested in?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Our group is called Pavement in honor of revolutionaries who came before us. "Under the pavement, the beach!" And sure, the beach has been pretty much all washed up—no pun intended—since Glassers have been pulling water from it to cool their machines...

In any case it's all about bringing down the current system.

SU-JIN:

Well, that's what we want too! I thought it would be cool to, you know, talk about what we're up to, maybe join forces for a similar cause.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

We're all for that. Just look around and chat with people, see what they're up to.

INDRA:

You don't have a person who keeps track of what's going on?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Like I said, no leaders. We're all fighting for the same thing. As long as we have a unified cause, it'll pan out.

INDRA:

Right.

SFX: The door opens.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Oh, hi!

I gotta go, some of my friends are here.

INDRA:

Okay, at least some of these people are treating it like a hangout more than anything.

TARI:

People do need to socialize. So, let's see what the rest of this is like first. Mm, shall we split up?

SU-JIN:

Yeah, it's not too big of a place. Meet back up before this event ends?

INDRA:

I'm not doing any socializing if I don't have to, but, ugh, fine. See ya.

SCENE 5

SFX: Elevator climbing, then a ding.

CYBIL:

Here's our stop. Let's not be late, Valeria, Patton.

SFX: The elevator opens. Footsteps echo as the elevator closes behind them.

PATTON:

I do love meeting in these rooms. Seeing all of the Dome just fills me with pride. We're doing something right. Have you been up here before, Valeria?

VALERIA:

Not often, but I have.

CYBIL:

Your gaze is wandering. The outer city's really not much to look at from this high up. Of course, we'll get some more construction done and it'll be more serviceable but...

VALERIA:

I know. Force of habit. Used to look at Glasshouse from the other side.

PATTON:

And aren't you lucky that you're here?

VALERIA:

Mm.

CYBIL:

Our stakeholders should be up here already. Valeria, would you go greet them? I'd like to talk with Patton and ensure we're on the same page.

VALERIA:

Will do.

SFX: Footsteps.

MUSIC: "Chloroform [Gloomy Suspenseful BGM]" by Kuzu420.

CYBIL:

How was your meeting with her?

PATTON:

As expected. I only told her what I thought she should be doing.

CYBIL:

Up to her whether she takes your word or not.

PATTON:

You sure put a lot of faith in her.

CYBIL:

She's proven it.

PATTON:

Not to me.

CYBIL:

What will it take to prove it to you, besides my word?

PATTON:

Talk is cheap, that's all I'm saying. Talk is cheap.

SFX: Valeria returns.

VALERIA:

Everyone's present. And of course, no one has any weapons, but I double checked.

CYBIL:

Very good.

PATTON:

Well, this is a private meeting, so until further notice, you're off work.

CYBIL:

Yes, you're dismissed. It'll be rather tedious for you, I'm sure. But I have high praise and much to say on your behalf, so expect a positive review from our stakeholders as well.

VALERIA:

Thank you, Cybil.

SFX: Cybil and Patton walk off and open a door.

STAKEHOLDER 1:

Good evening, Director March, Director Blanche.

CYBIL:

Good evening, everyone. Thank you all for meeting with us.
We so appreciate your time.

STAKEHOLDER 2:

What do you intend to prioritize this cycle?

PATTON:

As you know, we've been really keen on our Enlightenment initiative and focusing our funds there. Cybil has something to show you about that, I'm told.

CYBIL:

I do, in fact. I've been working on this for nearly a month now, but it was a little turn of fate and inspiration from my protégé that made this happen.

SFX: A briefcase opens. Typing. A startup sound.

MUSIC: "Under Hover" by Stirquoise.

SENTINEL:

Hello, friend!

PATTON:

Meet the new and improved Sentinel.

CYBIL:

With a new name, of course, for this function. Introduce yourself, please.

SENTINEL:

I'm Lookout! Your new pal. I can be installed on your comms or computer to help manage your information on every platform. I can also help with keeping your devices secure, managing your data, and even chat with you about whatever

you want! I'll help you "look out" for anything that comes your way!

PATTON:

Cybil told me that this friendly little program is just dying to help out with all of that, including Enlightenment. Plus, he helps us keep abreast of all the information that passes through him, ready for analytics if needed.

STAKEHOLDER 1:

I'm impressed. Your muse, Cybil – what's their name?

CYBIL:

Valeria Reyes. She works as my Head of Security, but her start wasn't too different than Lookout here. She saw an illegal operation and very cunningly infiltrated it, through friendliness and tactical warmth. And when the critical point arrived, she proved her allegiance to Glasshouse and thereby entered it. Because it turns out, sometimes all you need is a little foothold, a little trust that makes a tiny crack in the enemy line turn into an opening for you.

SCENE 6

CAINE:

You think she's actually going to show?

SEBASTIAN:

She messaged back and said she would.

CAINE:

Okay, yeah, she said she would, but it's been like, I don't know, twenty minutes! And normally, you know, Valeria, she's basically on time to everything, she's that kind of person, she's always on top of that kind of thing, so it just seems weird to me—!

SEBASTIAN:

It's not even 7 o'clock yet, cool your jets.

CAINE:

(SIGH) I'm trying but... what if this is a trap?

SEBASTIAN:

If it is, it's not a very good one. There's like eight different escape routes we could take.

CAINE:

Okay, but... she might have covered all of them.

SEBASTIAN:

I-I don't see why she would even feel the need to do that.

CAINE:

Kuya, think about it! Why was she looking for me? I mean, she must have needed me for something?

SEBASTIAN:

Have you considered she didn't capture you back when you met before?

CAINE:

Obviously, but she definitely has the upper hand here. This is her turf.

SEBASTIAN:

You have to stop viewing it as a fight. Let's just see what the situation even is.

CAINE:

It's Val, Seb. That's why I'm worried it might be a fight.

SFX: Footsteps.

MUSIC: "Courage My Love" by Mr Smith

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

My ears perked up as I heard someone rounding the corner. One pair of boots on the pavement. No other accompaniments, and I figured if she'd stationed other Correctors, they would have swooped us up by now.

I wasn't sure why Seb was being so trusting. Maybe because he hadn't seen the Valeria I did. How she stood the way I'd seen Correctors do, their hand always at their weapon, the ramrod stance. How coyly she'd told me that she was in charge of the people mowing us down. He hadn't heard her admit that she had known all that time that I was alone.

Then again, I couldn't deny that flicker in her eyes, the sincerity in her outstretched hand. I was torn between those feelings, and Valeria's voice ran a hot blade on their ragged edges.

VALERIA:

Caine.

CAINE:

Ate. You're... y-you're actually here.

VALERIA:

Feel like I should be saying that. Didn't know if you'd actually show or if... well, I don't know. It's good to see you.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Sebastian had disappeared into the darkness, but I could still sense his breath catching in his throat. Here was his sister, alive and well, after years of being away. He'd never experienced a disappearance from either of us, not the way I had, twofold. Valeria approached, and her gloved hand gently took mine, sending a little buzz up my arm.

SFX: Cloth shuffling. A small electric buzz.

VALERIA:

You're actually real. God, it felt like seeing a ghost when I spotted you at that party. Actually... well, it still feels like I'm seeing a ghost. (LAUGHS) What's with this whole... cape and costume?

CAINE:

Okay, first of all, it's a *cloak* and second of all, I'm not trying to get spotted here.

VALERIA:

I told you I'd keep you safe.

CAINE:

Yeah, well... you didn't say you'd *guarantee* safety if I wasn't alone.

...Seb?

SFX: Footsteps.

MUSIC: "Potential" by 1000 Handz.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Valeria's face seemed frozen as he walked into the light. I half-laughed to myself, because it must have been the same way I'd looked when I'd seen him again. Maybe the same way I looked when I saw her. Val was never one to cry, but I could see tears shining right on the edge of her eyelids.

SEBASTIAN:

You don't have to say anything.

VALERIA:

(LAUGHING) I – God, are you kidding me? I have so much to say to you. To both of you! We're together again. We're finally together again.

SFX: Hugging.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Valeria pulled us all into a hug and for a moment, it felt exactly like before. As if we'd just finished messing around in the stores, buying nothing and wandering around until Correctors forced us "suspicious characters" to make a run for it. The bright lights of the Plaza Mall cast the silhouette of the three of us, arms around each other, reunited. But our shadows are longer now. The years had still passed, left us all older and more scarred around the edges.

As if she'd read my mind, Valeria pulled up her sleeve to show her scar, right where Sebastian and I had ours. Though hers was smoothed, like she'd taken better care of it, there was a deep, uneven gouge beside it – Rossum had told me when I rediscovered mine that she and Valeria had tried to take it out and failed. A day I'd only remembered as Val going to the hospital, which we so rarely did.

VALERIA:

In case you didn't believe me, I am who I say I am. Valeria Tala Reyes.

SEBASTIAN:

Sebastian Bayani Reyes.

CAINE:

Caine Alon Reyes.

SEBASTIAN:

Val. What *happened*? The last time we saw each other, we were still in our apartment in the Tollbooth. I can't understand how you even got here.

VALERIA:

I promise I'll explain everything. But come with me where it'll be safe. You know, we didn't get these scars for nothing.

SFX: Footsteps.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Was it a trap or did she really have answers? Sebastian started to follow her lead, and... well, I didn't have a choice at that point. We were supposed to look out for each other.

Three shadows, lost and found in different ways, made their way across the edge of that twilight city, to a place only one of them knew.

SCENE 7

MUSIC: "Strange Dreams" by HoliznaCC0.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 2:

So, what is Zero Zero actually about?

INDRA:

Taking down the people in power.

SFX: Whoosh.

TARI:

Making a new start.

SFX: Whoosh.

SU-JIN:

We know this system isn't working, and there's no reforming it, but we need everyone's collective power to bring it down.

What about you? Pavement is all about...

PAVEMENT MEMBER 3:

Revolution. Getting rid of what's broken.

SFX: Whoosh.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 4:

They're automating everything to get rid of us. So it's about time we get rid of them.

SFX: Whoosh.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 5:

Before the Incendiary, things were never this bad. Our world is built on a bad foundation, but at least the foundation was something real.

What's your endgame?

TARI:

Getting rid of exploitation. It happens from the bottom to the top and it's what POTEN Co. and the whole rotten thing relies on.

SFX: Whoosh.

SU-JIN:

Uh... ensuring human rights would probably be top of the list, I would say. I had it better off than a lot of people, and that was built on someone else having a worse time. And even then, I still had a hard time so someone with way more cryptos could, what, buy world-ending weapons and a fancy meal in the same transaction? I don't want people to suffer, and especially not just to make more suffering.

SFX: Whoosh.

INDRA:

POTEN Co. could feed and house everyone in the Metropolis for a fraction of what they spend. I want people's needs met, which means a few heads apparently have to roll.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 4:

So violence *is* the answer?

INDRA:

Sometimes.

SU-JIN:

Sometimes.

TARI:

...Sometimes.

SU-JIN:

But not always. It's part of a bigger toolbox, but it's usually not a great first course of action.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 2:

So in the new world, if we make it, how do we get all that done? If you're trying to build stuff.

INDRA:

One step at a time.

TARI:

Slowly, but surely...?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 2:

Isn't that too simple?

SU-JIN:

There's not really another way to do it.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 5:

I mean, sure, but what's the timeline?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 3:

Do you just choose someone to oversee all of this stuff?
Cause otherwise, someone else will just take over from
their side.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 4:

In which case, how do you know they won't suck too?

PAVEMENT MEMBER 1:

Power corrupts people. That's why we don't have—!

SU-JIN:

Leaders, I know.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 3:

It's easier to just break it down.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 5:

Something better was there before, we just have to get back
to it. The natural way of things.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 4:

So we'll take it down with you.

PAVEMENT MEMBER 2:

But I guess we can't promise much more than that.

SFX: The warehouse door shuts.

INDRA:

That was exhausting. I talked to too many people, I never want to do that again.

TARI:

And kind of... well, I hate to say it, but a lot of that was straight up nonsense.

SU-JIN:

Hey, not everything.

TARI:

Sorry. Are you still bothered by the whole "leader" thing?

SU-JIN:

I mean, yes and no. Like obviously I'm still insecure about my situation, so your support before we got in – very much needed. But also, they're pretty disjointed about exactly what they're doing.

INDRA:

Can't have everyone drive the car or it goes nowhere. There has to be some direction. Good to hear that they were saying though... we're at least going the same way.

TARI:

Well, some of them want to go backwards. And just going backwards doesn't guarantee that it was better. "Natural way" – hah!

SU-JIN:

But they do have a point about us both not really knowing where we're going. Some of those were legit questions. I do believe that we're going to do this. That we're going to organize and topple POTEN Co. But I guess the question is, what do we do after the fall?

Like, what exactly are we going to do to set up the things that we want? How do we stop other Metropolises from just seizing power once we take it all down to zero, you know? There's so many moving pieces, but we have to look at all of them, all at the same time... otherwise, you know, we're spouting nonsense too.

INDRA:

Sounds like you need more of a pep talk, Yi.

TARI:

You're not the sole person in charge of everything. That, I'd agree with, it'd be too much to handle by yourself. And it's not what you're good at, so to be honest, you'd just burn yourself out. That's what happened with Nell plenty of times. To make this work long-term, you have to choose what you can do, then do it.

INDRA:

You're good at making people *do* something, not just believe in it. Taking a step makes other people take their own. Some of those people have the motivation to work on those issues, we just need to give them the structure and resources to make it happen. With more people, you have the ability to solve all those problems, but it means people have to work together.

SU-JIN:

Heh. Thanks. I did need that.

SFX: Su-jin's comms beeps.

SU-JIN:

It's Caine.

SFX: Su-jin pulls out their comms/

TARI:

Oh! Uh, is it a check-in or do we need to get going?

SU-JIN:

Uh, no, they say they're still in Glasshouse and still on guard, but their sister hasn't sprung a trap or anything. She's just happy to see them, sounds like. Which could be suspicious anyways.

And they confirmed that their sister is official Head of Security... Oh shit. She's apparently Director Blanche's right hand.

TARI:

Kind of precarious for her to know about back home, but that does open up an opportunity for us. Leverage the family angle, find an in with Blanche, make some sort of deal?

INDRA:

Cutthroat.

TARI:

That's business, kid!

SU-JIN:

I... was thinking along similar lines. We're not going to get much out of Blanche. Aside from my personal moral stance on that, I doubt she's interested in much else other than cryptos and power, neither of which we've got.

But Sebastian had the right idea about convincing her. I just think they should aim higher and try to get her on our side.

TARI:

That would stop the threat to the outposts. But like I said before, POTEN Co. gets under the skin and into the brain of a lot of people.

INDRA:

She might be a lost cause, considering her rank. I think Sebastian's blinded by time and distance.

SU-JIN:

I know maybe this sounds a bit silly or even lovestruck, but... I really believe in Caine. And Sebastian, too. They both care a lot about their family. Even though Caine sounds pretty on edge right now, I know they want to understand Val and bring her back. Obviously, she has to want to change too. And Caine says she at least pulled back on slamming down our protest, so there might be something there.

I just hope it's enough.

SCENE 8

MUSIC: "Part VII" by Jahzzar, from the album "Moonxine"

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

We'd walked into a neighborhood that looked so different from the one we'd grown up in. The buildings weren't all crammed together, with crooked alleys winding between. They were orderly, straight rows lined with clean, black gates. No spikes or wires crowned the tops – they were too high to even climb. Instead, small cameras, lights, and speakers perched above, watching, shining, and playing tones that made you antsy just to stand there.

SFX: Camera zooms and static tones.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

But Valeria, again, waved her hand across the panels and every single one turned off.

SFX: Powering down.

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

The gate in front of her condo was the largest, with a panel up front.

SCANNER:

You are being recorded. You may be permitted entry with approved facial recognition scan. You are being recorded.

SFX: Footsteps. Negative beep.

SCANNER:

Alert. You are being followed by two—!

SFX: Laser charge.

VALERIA:

Override facial recognition and turn off weapons systems for this entry. Thank you.

SFX: Beep. Power down.

SCANNER:

Approved.

SFX: The gate opens.

CAINE:

(UNDER THEIR BREATH)

Not scary at all.

SEBASTIAN:

No, yeah, this is weird.

SFX: Door slides open.

VALERIA:

I know it's no house, but the place is all mine!

MUSIC: "Part VII" by Jahzzar, from the album "Moonxine."

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Huge windows lined each wall, though from the outside, all of them were tinted, not showing a single inch of the interior. Valeria's penchant for keeping logs was obvious from her space - there was a shelf full of the same kinds of tapes she always used to record. Save for that, this lower floor was devoid of her personality. There was a couch, a rug, modern-looking lamps, a coffee table... all generic and catalog-ready, like someone else had set it all up with a veneer of fancy normalcy.

Val didn't stop to offer a seat on the couch, brushing past the mild shock Sebastian and I had. Instead, she bounded up the stairs and we mutely followed. At least that part looked a little more lived-in. An old video game poster with cyan stars and a purple-haired protagonist, a mostly made bed with scattered electronics on the bedside nightstand and desk, and even more cassettes.

Val hopped on the bed and god, that déjà vu packed a mean punch. I sat on the floor, while Seb took her desk chair.

VALERIA:

I mostly work downstairs and it's for guests and stuff. But you're no ordinary guests. So, look thee upon my mess and tremble. (LAUGHS)

SEBASTIAN:

(LAUGHS) God, this place is luxe.

VALERIA:

I know. I got set up with it about three years ago. I guess I hadn't really thought about getting a place for more than one at that point.

CAINE:

Yeah. Why?

VALERIA:

But I'm set to get promoted. Once I do that, we could totally get a place for the three of us!

CAINE:

Uh, what?

SEBASTIAN:

Come again?

MUSIC: "Part IX" by Jahzzar, from the album "Moonxine."

VALERIA:

Well duh, now that we're all together again, you'd want to come live in Glasshouse. I can't guarantee I could get you a job or anything. But it's cushy being an engineer, Seb, I promise. You basically work two hours a day max and no one cares if you mess around the rest of the time. It's practically expected! And Caine, I know you didn't officially start working until after I left, but you could still drive, I know you were a natural at that. You could even be a racer! Sports and entertainment are really big—!

CAINE:

(SCOFFS) It's not like our lives got put on pause, you know! W-we have... things we're doing!

VALERIA:

(SNORTS) Come on, there's no way you like whatever Metropolis jobs you're working now. They suck, we all know that.

SEBASTIAN:

There's more to life than work.

You know, like... friends? Found family? Hobbies, things to do?

VALERIA:

(LAUGHS) Surely you can't be serious. All of that stuff is in Glasshouse too. And probably better.

CAINE:

I really don't think so.

VALERIA:

I would have expected this kind of talk from Seb. But you wanted to get out of the outer city with me! You told me that!

SEBASTIAN:

A lot has changed since we left home, Val. Caine's older, so are we.

VALERIA:

But you're still my older brother. And Caine's still our younger sibling.

SEBASTIAN:

...Look. Why don't I tell you about what happened after I left home?

CAINE:

(NARRATING)

Carefully, Seb started explaining that he'd found a way out, fled to an outpost – that he didn't name – and tried to bring us there, but never heard back. That he'd built a life out there. Hearing his story a second time brought me closer to him, knowing that he'd felt the same sting of rejection I had. Feeling like he'd been abandoned, knowing

we were on the same side. That we'd always believed. That the bright fire of revolution he'd passed to me hadn't died, only been dimmed for a little while when it felt like he was alone.

But the chasm between Val and I only seemed to grow wider. No matter how I thought about it, I... I couldn't think of a way that she hadn't made a totally selfish decision. And now, she wanted us back in her life? To pretend like nothing had ever happened, after she'd charged other people to chase me down like some bounty? I felt like I was watching someone wear her face and act all the wrong ways. How could this be her? How could Sebastian believe that this was *our* sister?

SEBASTIAN:

So... when Caine found me, it took a while to adjust. But obviously, they wanted these answers. And now you have them too.

VALERIA:

Finding your way out there with no resources... that's pretty amazing. I was hurt for a long time when you left, but I had to make some kind of peace with it. Especially with Mom and Dad acting so irrationally.

I wish I tried to find you. But it was easier to just... tell myself you were dead. To bury the part of me that missed my big brother along with you. I'm sorry.

SEBASTIAN:

It's okay. I get it was a long shot trying to radio both of you... but, you know. I wanted to be a family again too.

VALERIA:

And, here we are! The Reyes siblings, back in action!

SEBASTIAN:

Val, y-you're kind of missing the point.

CAINE:

No! Kuya, stop. Val, your turn.

VALERIA:

Right. Seb said you want answers, and knowing you, you want answers now.

CAINE:

Yeah, I think I'm entitled to that!

VALERIA:

Okay, okay. I want you to hear this, before I say anything else: Glasshouse is good. Living here is pretty much everything I dreamed it would be, except I was alone. That was the biggest sacrifice I'd ever made, but I just...

I want it to pay off. I want everything I did to have worked. Please, if there's anything to get from this, I want you to get that.

SEBASTIAN:

I... am gonna try to understand. I want to understand how you got here. No more stalling now, or Caine will blow a fuse.

MUSIC: "Part X" by Jahzzar, from the album "Moonxine."

VALERIA:

After you left, things were *awful* for me and Caine. I'm sure they've said all of this, but we sold almost everything you owned, trying to make up for the debts you'd left in your wake, and the ever-growing hole in our parents' pocket from hiring investigators and engineers to track you. I can't blame you for it, Sebastian. I really can't. Grief does a lot to people. But I stayed strong. I was the only *sensible* adult. They lost their jobs at the station. For four months, I was our only income, working 12-hour shifts at a crummy POTEN Co. warehouse. For the last few months of school, Caine went hungry and cold in our apartment, and I could only ask Rossum or Dax to lend so many cryptos. Finally, I got Mom and Dad jobs where I worked, and it was a relief to actually pay for things. To start saving up to get Caine away from everything.

(LAUGH) And of course, they had to ruin it all by joining some stupid union!

SEBASTIAN:

...Caine said you told them they were doing something illegal.

MUSIC: "Unknown Dreamstate" by Unheard Music Concepts.

VALERIA:

You know what's funny? Since we were all minors when they stuck these things in our arms, *that* was legal. We were property. And they didn't even work.

These damn trackers. They'd blown so much of their funds just to keep an eye on us. Put devices inside of us and hooked them up to our hearts. Seb, you remember. How painful getting these was, how we were both sick for days after. I thought those complications would have stopped them from putting it in Caine, but they just loaded them up with so much anesthetic... well, you probably don't even remember coming out of that back alley surgery. But their locator? Too high-tech for our little apartment. They ran our power grid ragged for no reason.

And still, they told me. Look out for your brother and little sibling. Make sure they're okay, make sure they're not in trouble, make sure you keep an eye on them just in case. We only got into a couple scrapes with Correctors, but we always got away — be fast enough, talk them down, have a girl beat them up and leave them too embarrassed to say a thing. So: perfect records! No arrests! But here went our parents, doing something that would have been a death sentence for their kids! Union activity? I mean, don't be greedy after you waste everything on what was functionally a dead kid at that point!

CAINE:

Val, you didn't...

VALERIA:

I pretended to join up, then I turned them in. And doing that changed everything for the better.

END EPISODE.

OUTRO:

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. Check out our new website at undertheelectricstars.com and talk to us on social media: we're [undertheelectricstarspodcast](https://www.tumblr.com/undertheelectricstarspodcast) on Tumblr, and @utes-podcast on Bluesky. If you really like our show, you can find us on Patreon at [patreon.com/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! The money you give directly goes to supporting me and the actors who make these shows possible, so please support us if you have the means. Any amount helps. Full transparency, we make \$64/month, and pretty much all of that goes to our actors. I take a nice little cut of \$5 and literally the rest of it goes to paying the actors. If you would like to contribute a little more to the writing, directing, and editing that I do, as well as the phenomenal talent of our actors, truly anything you can give is amazing. Speaking of them... Our voice talents are as follows: Jae "GameJae" Shinn as Patton March, Lushika Preethraj as Cybil Blanche, John Patneaude as Sebastian Reyes, Rhea Anne as Caine Reyes, Philomena Sherwood as Tari de Whitte, Kevin Paculan as Vic Vass, Christine Kim as Sujin Yi, Raine Yoali Olachea Martinez as Indra, Motzie Dapul as Valeria Reyes. Additional voices were provided by yours truly, Eli Ramos, May Ramos, Brandon Leland, Kai Ramos, Lianna Anderson, and Merry Wolf. Attributions for sounds and music used can be found in the show notes. Thanks to Audrey Pham, our \$20 Patron on Patreon. And to everyone, thanks for listening and see you in Metropolis West soon.