

Welcome anyone! This is one of our unfinished episodes. The script is mostly unrevised, so any grammar check/sensitivity reading will have come after. You may see some highlighted parts, which are usually notes to check accuracy or pronunciation notes for our cast. Here, you get to see our writer's stream of thought, so please be kind and remember that what you see in the final product is never a first draft! With that, please enjoy!

EPISODE 13 - COMPUTER CONSCIOUSNESS

CW for hospitals, blood, body horror, attempted murder?, facing mortality, and parts of the body described in explicit detail.

Nanos pittered hurriedly through vents that circulated cold, dry air throughout a cramped and cluttered room; dark if not for the large monitors that cover bits of the walls like patches over ripped fabric. At the curl of a fibonacci spiral of discarded blueprints and machinery that looped its way through the room a large, bubbling vessel is choked at the base by cables. Inside the cylindrical container swirled a clear, metallic fluid. Wires eeled through it, coming to an unnatural resting place inside the womb of metal and pulsing flesh in the center. It can think, though it can't breathe. It can feel, though it can't see. It was still the most fundamental part of a person. It can't sink to the bottom while suspended, and the cord that hung from the underside undulated and pooled in a spiral beneath it.

A click. A whirr. Three sharp taps.

Notch slotted a final piece into place as the prosthetic came to life before him. The wrist turned and the fingers closed and opened at his mind's command. He held the arm up to admire the handiwork. Another brilliant device.

An anonymous employer had been commissioning him directly for a while, starting first with requesting custom smaller parts and eventually growing their orders to include complex fluid systems and prosthetics that come as close to the human equivalent as is possible. They paid well, too. Well enough to keep Notch living comfortably in a small space in the underbelly of western Nexus and provide him ample access to whatever parts he needed to complete the project.

And oh, what a magnificent project. His mind was tested every day, and with each new part he created he could picture the end product more and more. He loved this job far more than his previous one, since he was able to run his own operation easily on the side with access to a distributor right next door and thousands of waiting clients looking for cheap prosthetics and bio replacements just on the other side of a wide screen.

The downside was that this particular project is finally done. With each part he had made, the inevitable end grew closer and, finally, he had reached it. He wouldn't be completely down on his luck, but the numbers he'd been making were ridiculous compared to

what everyone else tended to pay. That was his own doing, of course. His dream for a long time was to make functional and accessible prosthetics for those who weren't beholden to a company that gave them the benefit; and through his small business he'd managed to make that dream a reality. But it was only made possible by the amount that this larger buyer had been paying.

Notch closed the arm in a case lined with layers of padding with a low sigh and locked it tight. He pushed it gently through a small slot in the wall at the end of his desk onto a belt that carries it next door. His distributor lived there; a faceless user who would deliver his product to its intended recipient; no doubt waiting impatiently for the last piece of their project. His fingers brushed the case as it drifted away, carrying his security with it.

Notch spent the rest of his day out, walking along the crowded sidewalks next to the sheer drop down further into the city. He didn't look down into it as he passed, simply keeping his eyes and feet sure and steady. The dark pit was ablaze with neon signs promising various products and drawing so much attention that they just blend into the noise. The air was thick and the lungs it filled are used to its arrival, and so Notch breathed it in easily as he came to a stop in front of his favourite parts shop.

He purchased a couple things, took some others since the owner knew him well enough to put aside what no one was buying, then

left with his arms fuller than when he'd arrived and his spirits a little higher with the promise of another project; despite its lack of complexity and monetary return. He chose not to return to his place, instead sitting on a high spot looking over the crevice. He unpacked everything and took some time to look over all of the pieces. It was always relaxing to just listen to the sounds and take a moment to enjoy his hobby, and this was his favourite place to do it.

Unfortunately, by the time he heard footsteps approaching him it was too late to prepare for the hand that landed on his shoulder, unbalancing him from his perch and sending him plummeting into the depths of the city.

He got lucky.

Notch somehow managed to land on a sidewalk offset further from the side of the crevice. It was a shorter fall. He only broke a couple ribs, some bones in his legs, an elbow or two; nothing too serious. Nothing they couldn't fix. Or so he thought, though he was quickly proven wrong by the tech available in the only hospital nearby that was able to take him in. Notch may have thought that was odd, but his comprehensive skills being addled with pain and harsh lights made it hard to parse what exactly was happening in the moment.

After a couple days of various abscission surgeries and restorative procedures, he was deemed "good as new" and sent back to his regular life. Except when Notch returned, his room had been cleared out. Not entirely, not even enough for an outside party to notice. But Notch did.

The blueprints that had been pulled up on his monitors were gone, replaced with his regular home screen. Cables with nothing attached to them slithered across the floor, and the drawers on his workbench were open wounds, missing their vital components. They didn't even bother to clean up. They just left the room in disarray. Whoever they were, they sure didn't know how to properly clear a place.

Notch didn't move for a while, sitting a bit helplessly in the doorway. He could continue. He could keep going. A notification pinged on his messenger and he moved for the first time in order to open it. It came from a client. *The* client. It held an invoice for a terribly large payment. Far too much for a prosthetic arm. He scanned the message until he reached the note at the bottom.

Here is our final payment. The extra is to compensate for the loss of your property, and for the hospital bill. We trust the rest will cover your silence.

It was unsigned, as always. Notch sank heavily into his desk chair, allowing it to spin him around while he processed the

words. It made his legs ache. He drew them up to his chest. He had enough to continue. He had *plenty*. But each part he had made started to piece itself together in his mind. The client he'd sold it to began to feel less anonymous. Their intentions were clear. He had fallen into the wrong hands, and he hadn't realized until he'd already been wrung out and left to dry.

[TRANSITION]

EXT. TALSORIAN STREET

[FOOTSTEPS, CITY AMBIANCE. BEEPS FROM MEMORIE'S COMM.]

VOICEMAIL. You have. One. New message.

[BEEP.]

MEMORIE'S MOM. Hi button. I got your message. I'm *so*, so sorry about what happened. Work has been crazy recently, and we need to be here to keep you and Soma comfortable!

MEMORIE. (*bitterly*) Of course.

MEMORIE'S MOM. But I get it. I really do. I hope you know how much it hurts me that I can't be with you little sparks more often, and I know your dad feels the same way. We just can't be there all the time, especially with this new code-sorting project dad has to deal with, and the infrastructure changes to Arachne's towers they're making us work overtime on. But I'm going to try harder.

MEMORIE. You always say that, and nothing ever changes.

MEMORIE'S MOM. (*overlapping*) I want to be more present. And you're right. You shouldn't be the only one making sure Soma gets what he needs. I'll try to be home tonight. No, I *will* be. I promise.

MEMORIE. You *always* say that and *you're still never here*.

MEMORIE'S MOM. (*overlapping*) I love you cookie. I love you so much. Don't forget that.

MEMORIE. *(muttering)* You make it really easy to, sometimes.

MEMORIE'S MOM. I'll call you again when I'm on my way home.
Goodbye, I'll see you soon.

[BEEP.]

VOICEMAIL. Press. One. To delete. or press. Two. To repeat the
message. Or. Hang up.

[BEEP.]

VOICEMAIL. Goodbye.

MEMORIE. *(quietly)* I'll see you soon...

THESIA. Uh, am I interrupting?

MEMORIE. Oh, Thesia! No, not at all. Um, what's up?

THESIA. Sorry, I just couldn't help but overhear some of your
conversation with your... mom?

MEMORIE. Oh. Yeah. No. It's nothing.

THESIA. With that look on your face? It doesn't seem like
'nothing.'

MEMORIE. Sorry.

THESIA. Don't apologize, Memorie. You have nothing to be sorry
for.

[BEAT.]

THESIA. Can I sit down?

MEMORIE. Sure.

**[FAE SCOOT OVER A LITTLE TO ALLOW THESIA ROOM. THERE'S A
MOMENT OF AWKWARD SILENCE.]**

THESIA. I'm not going to remind you how lucky you are that you
know your mom. You already know that.

MEMORIE. *(a bit bitter)* Yeah.

THESIA. But that doesn't mean having parents is the greatest thing ever.

MEMORIE. Yeah, well. I'm still fortunate, I know that. And they take care of us. I can't complain.

THESIA. Sure you can. It makes you angry that your mom isn't there, yeah?

MEMORIE. Mhm.

THESIA. Then be mad. Throw a rock. Punch a wall.

MEMORIE. *(amused)* Dunno if I should do that last one.

THESIA. *(smiling)* Maybe not. You might hurt yourself.

MEMORIE. Could you punch a wall?

THESIA. What, with this?

[HER ARM WHIRRS.]

MEMORIE. Sorry, I don't mean to offend you or bring up anything bad...

THESIA. No, it's alright. I probably could punch something pretty tough with this thing.

[IT HITS AS SHE PUNCHES HER OTHER PALM.]

MEMORIE. Careful, don't hurt yourself!

THESIA. Hah, don't worry. My other arm's tech too, just a bit more subtle.

MEMORIE. Oh. I didn't realize.

THESIA. This one's better for punching, though. It's pretty cool, right?

MEMORIE. Yeah. Where'd you get it?

THESIA. From my captors.

MEMORIE. Oh, if you don't want to talk about it-

THESIA. I'm happy to tell you. Especially if you're curious.

MEMORIE. I really want to know.

THESIA. Well my arms, along with most of my body, were replaced.

MEMORIE. So are you, like, fully a bot?

THESIA. Not *fully*. I still have my mind.

[TWO TAPS ON METAL.]

THESIA. And what's left is, well, better.

MEMORIE. Better?

THESIA. Yeah. I'm grateful for what they did to me.

MEMORIE. *Really?*

THESIA. Of course. It's their technology that allowed me to escape, and get back here. I actually did punch a couple walls on my way out.

MEMORIE. That's amazing.

THESIA. Right?

MEMORIE. When did you escape?

THESIA. About four and a half months ago. Five tops.

MEMORIE. Really? Why the latency?

THESIA. You're full of questions.

MEMORIE. Do you mind?

THESIA. Not at all. Let's just say I had some loose ends to tie up. It took longer than I thought it would; I had to be careful not to be seen. I didn't want any rumors spreading, that would've made it a lot harder for me to reconnect with the revolution.

MEMORIE. Because more people would be out looking for you.

THESIA. Sure. I had to let my captors know I'd died, too. (*weirdly teasing*) I'm getting pretty good at faking my death.

MEMORIE. So they're not going to look for you here?

THESIA. Nope. As long as everything goes according to plan.

MEMORIE. You're so brave. And... I never properly said thank you for helping us out at the access center the other night. So uh, thanks. You really gave us a save.

THESIA. Don't mention it.

[BEAT.]

MEMORIE. I knew you'd come back.

THESIA. (*smiling*) Impossible.

MEMORIE. I never gave up hope. My friends and I have been looking for proof that you survived for a while now. I wish I could tell them they were right. But I know it'd be dangerous.

THESIA. Well, they'll know soon enough. You know as well as I do that the Revolution won't stay hidden for much longer. There's more and more talk about doing something big. Something *real*.

MEMORIE. Yeah. I'm a little worried about it, but I think it's a good idea.

THESIA. I do too.

[BEAT.]

MEMORIE. Do you think this time will be different?

THESIA. I can't say for sure.

MEMORIE. Hm.

THESIA. But there's always hope, right?

MEMORIE. Right.

[BEAT.]

THESIA. You should probably head home soon. It's getting late.

MEMORIE. *(sigh)* I hope Mom comes home tonight.

THESIA. Me too. It's the least she could do.

MEMORIE. Thanks. For talking to me. For coming back. For the save. You're a hero, you know? An actual one. Your return is going to inspire a lot of people.

THESIA. That's very flattering. But I've made a lot of mistakes. I'm not the hero.

MEMORIE. You are to me.

[FAE GET DOWN.]

MEMORIE. See you soon, Prince!

[FAE WALK AWAY.]

THESIA. *(quietly)* Goodbye, Memorie.

[TRANSITION]

Notch began to feel the weight of mortality suddenly throw itself onto his shoulders. He could have *died* if he wasn't so lucky. Or did they even intend to kill him? Notch wasn't sure. It was possible that they had, and just sent him the invoice once they'd realized he'd survived. Or, perhaps, they'd planned to keep him around all along, and just meant to send him a message. It was also possible he had no idea just who he was dealing with, and there really was no way of knowing.

And no way of knowing if they'd change their minds and decide to off him anyway.

He spent the rest of the evening and night securing his room with everything he had. In a fit of mute panic he created a custom bolt to reach across his door and a couple locks that would hopefully keep the best hackers out (if he had any confidence in his abilities, of which he had a bit). He began to enclose what files he had left into an external source, then ensured his capsule storage was full. Enough food to last him a small while. Hopefully he'd receive confirmation of his safety in one form or another before it ran out.

His next step was to research. It was so *tedious*. He could spend less time programming computers to do this digging for him than to keep doing it himself, and some part of that set his envy alight. Why couldn't he work faster? Why wouldn't his fingers move as fast as his mind?

They were inferior. He stared at them, burning holes through his palms with his gaze. An idea came to him right after the image did, and he immediately picked out his tools and got to work on his new tendons. A ravine in his forearm was created as what was old was methodically replaced with something new. Each thick wire stretched from muscle to bone, covered in fluid and fragments of what organic matter he used to have there. A perfect consummation of man and machine. He turned over his wrist, flexed the fingers one by one, and his grin grew wider with each one that moved. He tried them on the keys and, to his delight, the tapping rhythm

became faster and faster with each piece of code he entered. This, he could work with. This was better.

A few days later his knees gave out when he tried to stand. He heard one crack on the floor. He barely felt it, though, his mind easily guiding his hands to a drawer where his tools had been shoved aside in lieu of taking up space. Soon into the day a thick, red trail seeped its way under the desk, and two metal plates gleamed brightly at the crux of both his legs. He found it a simple task to kneel and clean up the leftovers of his project.

It doesn't take very long after for Notch to realize his body is hindering his work. It creaks and groans at the places where metal meets flesh, and he finds himself replacing more of himself with more complex systems than he had ever made for clients.

Well, most clients.

He'd admit, his last project before his "accident" had taught him much about the human body and how it could be improved. The lungs he found hindering with the lack of air filtering through the room had caused both an installation of a vent, and, when that brought some unsettlingly clean air into his space, an installation of a pump system behind his still-fractured ribs. His eyes tended to start hurting from the amount of time he spent before a monitor, so his easy solution was to replace one with an adaptive one that allowed him to receive higher levels of light input and filter

them before getting to be too much. (He simply covered his other eye. It was too much work to operate on both.)

Eventually, though, he got to thinking that there was a better solution; a *long term* solution to his troubles. Notch was still digging. He'd found very little on his ex-client due to the nature of his voluntary isolation and the limited accessible information on this apparently high-profile. He kept trying to find ways to eliminate distraction and heighten his productivity, but it still didn't feel like enough. He still felt disconnected.

It came to him nearly too late. His food supply had begun to dwindle and his morale was lacking. But while silently begging the small external drive inserted into his computer to give him an answer, it struck him.

What if he was plugged in instead?

He jumped up, metal hitting the floor as he dove headfirst into his storage cabinet and got to work collecting the parts he needed for his most efficient creation. A perfect solution, one he could practically see in his mind's eye. It was a fable, a tale that was told to children so they'd never anger the Ghosts, or something along those lines.

Don't go too deep, the story warned. Don't go looking. Because they'll find you, and they'll keep you.

Notch isn't worried about Ghosts. He's not worried about going too far into the system. He was going to travel further into the code than anyone had before him, and he was going to find what he was looking for.

A click. A whirr. Three sharp taps.

The final monitor turns off, the last of what's left in the room. The only noise left now is the low hum of the container, powered externally, and the vent that knocks against itself as it dies out due to lack of maintenance. It's hard to tell how long it takes before that goes quiet too, and all that's left in the nearly abandoned complex is Notch. It is him, stripped to the only materials that still make him *him*. He would be frowning if he had a mouth, due to his final discovery. What he'd been searching for. An answer. One that meant he had failed to help people.

One that told him that he had doomed them instead.

He allowed his consciousness to float through the code aimlessly. A boat on the oxymoron of an empty ocean, pondering what could be done. He spent far too long coming up with the answer to that question.

Anything could be done. He had the entirety of Talsoria in his grasp.