

UPGRADE CYCLE

a "Crime and Rockets" play by Scotto Moore

LORELEI, late teens, studying to be a field agent in an FBI-like organization, is nervously rambling to TRICK START, a space station engineer who is fiddling with hardware at a small bench as she speaks.

LORELEI: What happened was, I grew up on this mining colony right? And when I was fourteen, the union boss calls a strike, and that was cool until corporate showed up one day and literally nuked the entire colony from orbit. I was on a field trip with my class that day, so we just took the shuttle to the nearest station and begged them to let us in. I didn't care that my parents were dead, or my sister, I didn't care that I had no money or no place to go. All I fucking cared about back then was Jaxxer Kwee.

TRICK START: What the fuck is Jaxxer Kwee?

LORELEI: She was like, the best singer in the asteroid belt, total hot shit in the colony music scene right? I was like devoted to her, I had all her music with me on my tablet, I thought okay, it sucks that Jaxxer Kwee is dead but I'm gonna make sure her music lives on. But then I passed out, cuz the shuttle almost ran out of air, cuz the station commander was being a dick about everything, and then I woke up in medical, and my tablet was gone. My *music* was gone.

TRICK START: Didn't you have a backup?

LORELEI: Colony servers were melted slag, dude.

TRICK START: Didn't your fucking colony servers have a backup?

LORELEI: No, asshole, have you seen the rates for off-world data transfers? No way corporate would pay like that just to back up our shitty little servers. I mean, the union went on strike for *reasons* right?

TRICK START: All right, whatever, but what part of this am I supposed to care about?

LORELEI: I just can't believe I'm never gonna, like I can't find her music *anywhere*, it's like every last trace of her was vaporized. I stole a new tablet right away and I recorded myself, I tried to sing every Jaxxer Kwee song I could still remember cuz I knew I would forget eventually, but it was already too fucking late. I couldn't get through anything start to finish, the second verses were all just - and my shitty voice wasn't good enough to get the notes right anyway, and some songs I couldn't even remember their *titles*, I just knew they were *gone*. But Sally Childress told me you could maybe help.

TRICK START: Sally Childress - you mean Gunmetal Sally?

LORELEI: Yeah, I'm in field agent training with her girl Hannah now. She paid for Hannah's upgrade, for a graduation present right? She said my memories are probably still stored in my brain somewhere, like my brain got a hard reboot when I almost died and after that I just, lost the pointer to those memories or something? Because I swear I knew every fucking song by heart. I gotta get those memories back before I lose 'em forever, cuz I can't help it, I just keep piling shitty new memories on top. Sally told me you might have something that could help me.

Trick Start puts down the piece of hardware he's been dabbling with and finally gives her a close look.

TRICK START: I'm gonna assume you already searched every node on the entire public net, every propped up little machine in a closet that serves up bootlegs of every boring movie they ever made, every puny little tightbeam coming back from every shitty little inner system tugboat that thinks the rest of the solar system gives a single last shit about their shitty tugboat lives, I'm gonna assume you dug through one hundred percent of all the telemetry coming back from every single satellite with a live battery from the Sun all the way out past the fucking Oort cloud, and no matter how you refined your query, you did not find a single trace of Jaxxer Kwee right?

LORELEI: Right.

TRICK START: Okay, well, I could give you an upgrade that will fix the problem.

LORELEI: Really?

TRICK START: Sure, I can have it ready in like five minutes if I go warm up the printer.

LORELEI: Is it a brain implant? Is there like a surgery? Can we do the surgery today?

TRICK START: Jesus, no, where did you, did they actually cut people open where you're from? Because out here in civilization, we like to use this thing called "science". Just kidding, I don't know fuck-all about science, I just steal shit and sell it to people. So, I load software onto a pill full of nanites, which you swallow, and the nanites run that software in your brain, and suddenly you remember absolutely every single memory that ever left a chemical trace since you were born.

LORELEI: Oh my god. How much does it cost?

TRICK START: Well hang on, though, cuz what'll happen next is, you'll realize sure you have all your memories now, but you have them *all the time*, you're overwhelmed by this constant flow of emotions and just these cascading barrage of memories, including some that maybe shoulda stayed forgotten, like how good your life was before they blew up your colony.

LORELEI: Are you fucking with me?

TRICK START: No, I'm just saying, then you'll run back to me and tell me you want another upgrade that gives you fine grain control over the first upgrade, so you can slow things down or rewind or delete shit or just put like a search index on everything, because you never found those Jaxxer Kwee songs because you're so completely buried in all these other random memories.

LORELEI: Can you just give me fine grain control from the start? I mean what-

TRICK START: But wait, because then, when you do finally find those Jaxxer Kwee songs, you realize holy fuck, you are *deeply* disappointed with the fidelity here. They sound like ghosts of the original songs, wailing at you from a canyon miles away, because hello, surprise, your brain was never actually recording every fucking detail of your life in some new-fangled lossless memory codec, I mean come on let's be real.

LORELEI: Then what's the *point* of all this shit? What's the point of *you*?

TRICK START: Exactly, you're getting so pissed at me that you storm in here and you're like, can you please just help me dump these memories to an external system and run them through like forensic data restoration? Or maybe they just need to be uncompressed?

LORELEI: Do you even really know how any of this shit works?

TRICK START: And I'm like, sure we could do that, but look, processing cycles on a space station are fucking expensive right? Whereas for a much smaller fee I can upgrade the processing on all your existing upgrades, which by the way, this kind of data analysis actually runs faster in your brain anyway because you can leverage subjective tuning to accelerate computation, I mean who knows what this shit's supposed to sound like better than you right?

LORELEI: But at the end of all that bullshit, I would *have* those Jaxxer songs right?

TRICK START: Well but then you'll be like, oh I wanna play 'em for my *boyfriend* so he can *love* Jaxxer Kwee like I do, and I'll be like, well I'm not giving you a physical fucking data port my innocent young friend, but I do have an upgrade that will give all your existing upgrades *wireless*, using military encryption it goes without saying so turn off the wireless whenever the military is within range, which I don't remember what that range is but you can look it up I bet, or maybe it's classified, I haven't tried to figure it out actually. But who cares, because now, you *finally* have *perfect* versions of those Jaxxer Kwee songs, which will you please remember to *back that shit up this time*? Oh I should mention, by this point you no longer have real organic brain matter in your skull because the nanites self-replicate obviously and where do you think they're getting caloric energy to *run* all these fucking upgrades, I mean duh! So that might be a thing or whatever, although usually people don't notice the difference.

Long silence.

LORELEI: Come on, how much is it? I mean, I don't have any money right now, but I'm gonna graduate soon and when I get my first assignment, I can start making payments, would that be cool?

TRICK START: Kid - all I did for Hannah was fucking *Lasik*. Now get the fuck out of here.

Lorelei turns to go, despondent. As she reaches the door:

TRICK START: What kind of name is Jaxxer Kwee anyway? She from your colony?

LORELEI: No, somewhere else. Can't remember where.

TRICK START: I'm guessing Mars, sounds kinda Martian to me.

LORELEI: What do you mean?

TRICK START: So, the Martian settlers made up their own fucking alphabet, did you know that? Just to fuck with corporate. They use all these weird glyphs and like a million weird diacritics, and one huge branch of their language now can only be rendered correctly on 3d displays - all this just to fuck with corporate. I mean, can you imagine corporate buying Martian keyboards for their entire fleet? Come on, let's be real. *Pause.* Anyway, did you ever try searching for the Martian spelling of Jaxxer Kwee?

Lorelei smiles, exits. Blackout.