



LEGACY OF VOPVANA TECH

A METROPLEX ZERO SHORT STORY

If there's one thing I've learned about the people and places of Metroplex Zero, it's that they want many, many things, augments, upgrades, gadgets, and most important of all. They want to feel safe and secure. That's where we over at Secubotics come in. We provide the community the best in high-tec security, be it bots, cameras, thermal scanners you name it. We make it. Our service is the best and all the MegaCorps have no choice but to agree. I've been working for them as a product development researcher for a while now and I have to say it's not that bad of a place to be employed. Their gear is pretty snazzy and nothing has made me feel more safe. It had soft padding on the inside that configured to your body shape, almost feeling as if nothing were there. It moved naturally while also providing enough protection to stop a proton bullet.

For me, today was an especially important day. It was meeting time. Where all the executives, developers, and analysts get together to talk about strategies for customer conversion. The meetings were more like big brainstorming sessions. This time I had a big idea that was sure to be noticed by the bosses. If things go right. I could be promoted to senior developer. And all the great perks that go with it. Of course, no proper work day starts without a big hot cup of Wavewalk extra strength latte. I usually went for caramel but this time I went for vanilla. The coffee bar at work had a wide selection of goodies, they even had Pekinpaws breakfast loaf! But no time to eat today. No, I had to be sure I got this right.

As I raced to the meeting room I ran into one of my fellow research developers, Maxtom, he was around my age and we got along pretty well. He smiled at me as we continued on our way to the meeting room.

"Any new strategies Cathrise?" Maxtom was always supportive of my ideas. He would even help me out with some if I was in a rut.

"Oh yes, I think the bosses will like what I have this time." I was bursting with confidence. Out of all the researchers, I was one out of three women who were in line for senior developer. My chances of getting picked were pretty good. I had been working there the longest and my plan to implement the Critter Crawler Patrol Cameras after what was deemed 'The Santa Incident.' was so far successful and lucrative.

"Whatever it is, I'm sure it's great." Maxtom and I continued through the massive hall into the meeting room. The room was large, the walls were all large screens, two were projecting images of Metroplex Zero and its various shops and plazas, the other was flashing the Secubotics logo. At the head of the oval-shaped table sat our district manager, Enders. Next to him sat the empty senior developer chair followed by our fellow colleagues. Maxtom and I took our seats and waited for everyone else to settle in.

I took a sip of my latte, it was sweet and warm. I couldn't help but notice nearly everyone had something to drink. Usually an indicator of a long meeting. Not a big problem really, long meetings mean more time on the clock and more ideas to shoot across the room. Once everyone was settled the meeting could begin. Enders stood up and pulled some charts up on the screen behind him.

"Good morning everyone, it's meeting day yet again. Today we will discuss customer conversion and go over any plans to increase our numbers this year. As we know. Our lowest numbers come from the average consumer. How could us here at Secubotics make the average customer want our services?" We spent a good portion of the meeting bouncing ideas off one another. As a security corporation we could only offer a few services to the average consumer. We would have to find a way to expand our brand and get people buying our product. There were a few good ideas like upping the ante on our advertising and showing off some of our more user friendly tech. But I knew nothing could compare to my plan. I just hoped the bosses would agree.

When the time came for me to speak. I was pretty nervous. Sure I had gone through this a million times at my apartment. But a hologram is nothing compared to the real thing. All eyes were on me and I tried my best to keep my composure. I stood up and with a soft sigh I began my pitch.

"Hello everyone, as you all know I'm Cathrise, this whole time we've been brainstorming ways we could reach our customers in better and newer ways, so far, we've all been talking about what we could do for the consumer. But what I'm proposing today is all about what the consumer can do for us." I pulled up a hologram of a plain model representing the customer. As I spoke various images appeared next to the model of the many different brands Metroplex Zero uses and supports.

"Each consumer takes in information on a daily basis. When they get up, they choose which morning meal to have, they go to specific shops and buy specific items. Their minds are constantly processing this information. If we could figure out what the consumer wants on a psychological level, we could cater to their needs more precisely than ever." I paused for a moment to let everyone soak that in. It was a crazy idea that could require a lot of work hours, but I would do it all myself if it meant success. I continued my pitch with a great sense of confidence.

"Everyone has their own specific things they enjoy. Right down to how we like to get ready for bed. If we were to somehow monitor their thoughts and actions, we could offer things that would guarantee sales and product usage. We already have the MegaCorps using our products each and every day. But the needs of individuals is where I believe we could see even more success." I let the hologram play for a bit longer before closing it out. Enders sat in his chair and pondered what I was saying to the team. It could have gone either way. But I was more than happy with what he said next.

"I like it." A large grin grew on his face as he stood from his chair "This is the kind of thing that could put us at the top of the corporate food chain." I could tell he was just as excited as I was. Everyone was looking at him with a surprised look. He usually shot down new ideas and when something made him happy. You had better hoped it worked. I was both elated and terrified. We spent the rest of the meeting discussing the different projects we could all work on. I was put in charge of the whole operation. The plan was to first, find ways to study the community. Next, we had to find a way to use the data we collect and utilize it in our tech and as a brand. Essentially, the goal was simple: figure out what makes people tick and use that to get them to buy our products and invest in our brand. I had split the team I was assigned into two groups. One group would study the busiest areas of Metroplex Zero and figure out which stores are visited the most. The second group was to come up with ways we could psychologically evaluate each consumer in an ethical way while also getting the maximum amount of information needed to come up with a decent outcome.

While I oversaw both teams, I was also doing a little research of my own. At first I thought this type of study and data collecting was relatively new for a security corporation. But it turns out something like this was implemented long ago by a long forgotten company known as Wolf Security Forum. Once I had discovered their old records I began to dig deeper into them. Nearly a hundred years ago. Wolf Security Forum was trying to implement a sort of implant into consumers bodies to help with their security systems, you could activate/deactivate your system from literally anywhere and it also monitored your vitals in case of a situation where you're being held hostage while on the phone with the company and the perpetrator was coaxing you to lie about your safety. From what I had gathered. It was rather successful. However there was something that seemed off about the whole thing. Mainly the fact that this company hadn't existed since a hundred years ago and the more I tried to find the analysts records of the implant devices and other forms of research they had, it seemed to run cold.

Loads of documents, video files, charts, diagrams and much more research material was either blacked out or just plain missing. It was strange. From what I did gather, it seemed that they were able to tell when a person was in need of help just by the way they reacted to certain situations, or rather their brains responses to fear and danger. I had spent a few days trying to find out more and when I finally hit a wall, I knew I had to rely on help outside of Secubotics. On one of my days off I went over to a well known freelance bar, it was called Greenthorn Industries Hideaway Bar and Restaurant.

Now, usually I never had the need to hire a freelancer, they were usually known for getting into more trouble than it was worth and most seemed keen to getting into trouble more often than not. But this required contacts I just simply did not have, and freelancers we're great at digging up all sorts of info. I had set up a meeting with a freelancer the bartender had recommended and sat patiently at the table waiting for him. I was skimming through the holographic menu, they had pretty much every drink at this place. I just ordered myself a Xavix energy cola with extra ice and a caffeine boost, as well as some Xenon hot chips to munch on while I waited. It didn't take long for the freelancer to take his seat.

"Hey there ma'am, I heard you needed some help. Name's Trev, how can I be of assistance?" He was a pretty nice guy as far as I could tell. He seemed eager to work. He shook his leg as he sat and waited. I wonder how long it had been since he had a big job.

"Hey there Trev, my name is Cathrise, I work for Secubotics. I am in need of some help. I've been doing some research on an old company called Wolf Security Forum and have seemed to reach a dead end. I need some help in getting their research records." I handed him a D-Stick with the various files and documents I had with me that so far led to a dead end. Either because there were no other files for that section or because nearly all the information was blocked out. Hopefully this Trev guy could help. He took the D-Stick and placed it into his suit.

"Don't worry Cathrise, if they've hidden something, no matter how far back, I can find it for you. I'll take my payment later on. For now, how about another drink?" He ordered us a couple more colas and I ordered more hot chips for the table. He seemed to really enjoy the chips. We sat and chatted for a bit, I let him know about what I had been researching so far and he proceeded to tell me all sorts of similar jobs he had done in the past. All in all it was a nice time. I just hoped he could find something useful for my project. All I had to do now was be patient.

Little did I know how patient I would have to be. It had been about three months. Trev and I would keep regular contact and the things he did end up finding over time were pretty helpful. On my end. The first two strategies seemed to be working. Using the information my teams had been gathering we found ways to present our products to the people out in the various plazas that were engaging and our sales were looking pretty good. For now, Enders seemed to be happy, that's what mattered. I had to admit I was getting rather anxious, sure things were working out for now, but if I could figure out how to literally get into the heads of our consumers. We could become the biggest MegaCorp in Metroplex Zero.

Just when I thought I would have to wait for a few more months. Trev had messaged me. He had asked me if we could meet at my apartment, which was fine. I sent him the coordinates and in about half an hour he was at my door. I had let him in and offered him a seat in the kitchen. "Want any coffee or a power drink? I think I have Wilkonbrew Power drinks." I looked through the holographic screen on my fridge he just shrugged.

"I'll take a latte if you have any" Trev seemed easy to please. The only latte I had was Wolfoods Amaretto but he didn't seem to mind. I poured him a hot glass full. "So I'm guessing since you're here you found something out?" I poured myself a glass and sat opposite of Trev. Eager to hear his answer.

"Oh I found something alright. I did a little digging into that Wolf Security Forum for you. Turns out. They were only in business for about ten years max, and the reason why will blow your mind." He took another sip of his latte and handed me a flash drive.

"It's all in there. I'm gonna warn you though. Some of it is kind of intense. But I think you'll find all of it useful." I was excited. I paid him for all his help and he stayed for a while to talk about how he came across this information. He wouldn't say much, but that's to be expected. Most in his line of work got things in less than favorable ways. I didn't mind. I respect anyone who is willing to do what it takes to make a living.

Once Trev headed out I went through the sliding door that leads into my office. I inserted the flash drive into my holo-projector and began to read through what Trev had found. He was right. They were only in business for about ten years, they started up as a simple residential security company, providing simple services such as cameras, alarm systems and the like. In just three short years they bloomed into a huge corporation. Making their own apartments and flats with the best security available, each apartment had their own cameras and personal alarm systems among other various security features.

After the apartments became a success, they eventually ventured into healthcare clinics, that's when they started putting into play the idea of the implants. When I had first begun researching Wolf Security Forum, it had seemed that the implants were just an idea pitched to the public to see their opinion on it. But what Trev had found out was far more interesting, the reason I couldn't find any more research notes on the implants is because Wolf Security Forum did the research under a different name. Vopvana Tech.

Vopvana Tech was an offshoot group supported by Wolf Security Forum, when they opened the healthcare clinics, WSF allowed Vopvana Tech to use patient records in their research for the implants. Vopvana Tech also took in patients as a care facility. They would conduct various experiments on the patients in their care, trying to pinpoint the exact hormones in the brain that process fear and anxiety. In order to do this, patient's would be subjected to various forms of mental and physical torture while their brain activity was monitored.

It was horrific, the company was brought down when a whistleblower exposed Wolf Security Forum and Vopvana Tech, the company was brought down and nearly all records destroyed. All the records Trev had dug up were in the old Vopvana Clinic. He also gave me blueprints the company had for the implants and a few other experiments they were conducting. A lot of the files had ideas and plans similar to my own. I wasn't sure how I felt. Seeing what this old company had done for the sake of becoming a mega corporation made me feel a little unsettled. I decided to hide my findings from the others for now. I had to figure out where they went wrong so we wouldn't make the same mistakes.

As more time passed the strategies from both teams seemed to be working. The first team, run by Maxtom, was in charge of developing products that were easier on the eyes. So far all the products we did have for personal use, only came with one color set and little to no options for customization. Maxtom and his team developed completely custom looks and uses for the user-friendly products and even displayed them in the plazas at various kiosks and tables.

The second team was run by one of the other researchers named Marol, she helped design and create new looks for the critter crawler cameras and even fine tuned them to listen and follow commands from the users and stay within their residents. That way, we have the halls of the living complexes and the residents monitored by our corporation.

We had opened up a few new locations and started offering more personal services to residents and even providing extra security in the plazas by utilizing our facial recognition scanners on their cameras. That way, if a thief was in the area and trying to return to a business they stole from recently or hit another one, they would automatically be recognized and the guards can take them off the premises.

It was going rather well, but, according to the chief of staff, Dax, Enders wanted more. He wanted to see how far we could go. How close we could get to literally being in the minds of the consumer and using that to steer them towards us and our business. I was unsure how we could try and implement these methods without being so barbaric. I mean sure, you have to do what it takes to make it to the top, but when people's lives are at stake, it's hard to figure out the line between revolutionary and ethical.

I had spent weeks going through the old Vopvana Tech records. They were the only things left of their existence. And possibly for the better. I knew that the punishments now were on the harsh side, who knows what they really do to prisoners. But those laws and punishments have been long-standing and the fact that they were brought down for their cruelty showed just how drastic their methods were. I wanted so desperately to use their findings for our own version of the implants, but how could I do it in a way that's not harmful to the people? Consumer or not, we can't just go experimenting on them for our own gain.

I started looking up studies of the brain and it's various responses to certain types of anxiety and fearful reactions that we knew so far. It was all pretty promising and there was enough information for me to at least pitch the blueprints for the implants. As reluctant as I was, I knew that the implants could be revolutionary for Secubotics. I took the blueprints and uploaded them to a D-Stick. Keeping the original in my apartment was the safest option. I had everything prepared to pitch the implants. I just hoped that the research I had was enough.

I had gotten my morning coffee and headed into the meeting room once more. When Enders called on me. My heart was racing yet again. I stood up and pulled the blueprints out on the holo-screen, with a deep breath I began yet another pitch.

"Good morning everyone, as you know all of our new strategies are very successful and I'm proud to be working with such a capable group. However, I believe we can take this a step further. What I have here could revolutionize our whole business strategy for years to come. These small implants will be able to detect when a person is in danger using data gathered from their vitals and alert our security guards and units in a timely manner. These small devices will be connected to specific glands that can detect fear and anxiety. With enough testing I'm sure we can get the implants to tell when people are in real danger." I paused for a moment and took a deep breath before continuing.

"However that's not all, while the implants will help our customers feel more safe, the implants will also feed data from their mind to our servers, as the customer goes through their daily life, the implants will be constantly taking in the information then customer does on a daily basis and will be able to tell when they interact with something they enjoy and the things they do not enjoy. This way, Secubotics can pinpoint what a customer enjoys and use it to our advantage."

To say Enders was excited for this plan to work was an understatement, he put a good portion of the profits we were making to fund more research of the implants usage. I tried my best to keep it as ethical as possible and throughout the research process I was going over everything at least three times over. Things were going well. The only issue was finding volunteers to test the implants sensitivity to fear. We ended up having to give extra pay to a few of the employees and have them sign consent waivers.

Once the implants were in place, I decided the best way to test them was to come up with scenarios in which the employee would be in a sort of 'dangerous situation.' An actor would pose as a hostile individual and try to attack the employee while they were in the halls of our building. While this was happening we would monitor the implants reactions. Of course, the employees did not know that this would happen. They only knew that we were going to be monitoring their vitals and the reactions of the implants.

We waited a few weeks before having the actors show up and when they did the results were surprising. The implants were able to tell when the employees were scared and gave notifications to our security system to help the 'subject in danger' and the employees were able to deactivate the implants. One issue was, the implants would activate if, say, someone were to play a prank on you and scare you, or if you were sleeping and suddenly woke up. They seemed sensitive to all forms of fear rather than when someone was being attacked. I wasn't sure how to work out the kinks and Dax wanted me to fix it right away. The good thing was the implants seemed to be feeding in the positive responses at an alarming rate, pinging our servers when they use products they enjoy and documenting the reaction to our files.

While things were going relatively well, I spent countless hours trying to figure out how we could help the system differentiate between someone under attack and someone just scared by something meager. I'm not sure how, but I came to the conclusion that we could use the model for our eye scanners and instead of using them to scan locations and bring up specs for something that you needed. You could use them to deactivate the alarm in case you were not in an emergency. We could rebrand them as a package deal and offer them free when you get the implants. The plus side would be that when a customer was using something they enjoy, their eye scanners built-in camera would snap a photo of what products or things were nearby causing a positive reaction. Sending the photos directly to us, further helping our teams cater to the consumers and what they enjoy.

Enders was impressed with my idea and decided to go with it. The testing process for the eye scanners was easy and the employees who had them were happy to have brand new scanners. The true test was seeing if they could turn off the implants.

We had an actor sneak up behind one of the employees during their break to scare them. The notification came up and on their eye scanner, a question popped up, asking if the user would like to contact the authorities. They chose the 'yes' option and one of our security guards came shortly and took the actor to the back room. While in the back room, the employee had decided to calm himself by having a bag of Flyroot Cheesy chips, the picture that was taken by the scanner was clear as day.

It worked. It actually worked.

We decided not to go public with the implants until we secured a contract with at least one establishment inside of Metroplex Zero. I already had a place in mind to ask. The freelancers bar. If we could get a few freelancers to be on board with the implants, we would be flooded with sales. I had contacted the owner of the bar and set up a meeting with him and Dax. The owner was pretty reasonable, he agreed to pitch the implants to the patrons of the bar if we could equip his bar with the latest security systems we were offering to the bigger named bars. It was an easy decision.

Before long we had freelancers of all types coming to our main building to set up appointments for the first implant surgeries. Within a few weeks, we went live with their release. I never would have thought that so many would want one. We were absolutely flooded with appointments. Using our profits to open up clinics and repair centers. The repairs were not too invasive and usually were only required when the implant devices began to malfunction or fail to send notifications to the eye scanners. It took some time and tinkering. But Secubotics was becoming one of the big names in Metroplex Zero. Enders definitely took notice and when the time came to pick a new senior developer. He chose me without hesitation. It would take some time to fully transition into my new position, but either way I was just grateful that I was able to find an ethical solution to our problem.

More time passed and more people were buying the implants, we even had to hire styling specialists to help us come up with more design options for the eye scanners. There were a few new designs out there, made so they weren't too invasive for the user and even ones available to be configured to power suits. It was amazing, seeing this become a reality, but the feeling of dread sat deep in my stomach. I was the only one who knew the origins of this idea, the dark practices and ethical blindness of Wolf Security Forum and Vopvana Tech. Names that were lost to time.

I had hidden the original files and documents that Trev and I had recovered. Locked away in a place only I knew how to get to. Even that didn't give me comfort. There were times when I questioned pitching the implants, especially when I first witnessed the hungry look in Dax's eyes when we first started testing them. He would always ask about the methods we were using and how we could take them a step further. Using the excuse that it's what the big bosses like Enders would want. I would try to ignore it and tell him to trust the process. Who knows if what he was saying was actually true or if he was just trying to get us to work harder.

There were times when I would get lost in thought, thinking about the consequences of essentially experimenting on the consumers of Metroplex Zero. I decided to take a small vacation to get my head together again. It pained me to think of how close we could have been to becoming exactly like Wolf Security Forum. It was one of my biggest fears about this project. Taking their personal information straight from their minds was one thing. But I couldn't imagine what would happen if we resorted to the experiments that Vopvana and WSF we're conducting.

I was glad that we had all these new devices and more flow of MetroCreds. And I was glad that I had actually gotten the promotion. What sat with me was all the reports, photos, and recordings from Vopvana Tech. The images played in my mind nearly every time I closed my eyes. While I was working, it was easy to forget about the whole thing and focus on something else. But being home ended up being the hardest. I would often go for walks or binge watch movies to try and not think about it. But it did not help at all, I had to talk to someone about it. So I chose the only person that I knew I could trust to keep this quiet and someone who had seen what I had. Trev.

I had messaged him about having some coffee at my place, I even sweetened the deal by promising him some Xenon hot chips and a half of Pekinpaws breakfast loaf. He came the very next morning. I had the coffee ready and poured him a cup. He sat at the table, leaning his back on the wall, I poured myself a cup and sat facing him. Trev had helped himself to the breakfast loaf and smiled.

"Thanks for inviting me over, it's been a while. Those implants really are working out great. How have things been going for you?" He took a bite of his slice and a sip of coffee. I took a sip of mine and sighed.

"Well I got a promotion, we were able to implement the devices without resorting to the barbaric practices that Wolf Security Forum were practicing." I sighed again. Just being able to mention it to someone was a huge weight off of my shoulders. Trev nodded in agreement.

"Yeah I'm glad. That stuff was pretty intense, I hadn't seen anything like that in a while." He took another sip of his coffee. I had shifted a bit in my seat.

"How do you deal with all of that? I haven't had a decent rest in a while, it's like all I ever see is the images running around in my head." I had taken a second to catch my breath, I wanted so desperately to ask him how he could be so calm after everything, I felt like the words just fell out of my mouth.

"I was wondering how you would take it. Honestly, for me, it's something I see so often that it hardly bothers me anymore, but when I had first seen something that gruesome. I had nightmares for weeks. I found that putting things in a new light helps. Like with this." He took a moment to pause and take a bigger drink of coffee before continuing.

"Sure, the things Vopvana Tech and Wolf Security Forum did were horrible. But they already paid for what they did. Did their victims ever get peace or closure? It's hard to say. But they were forgotten long ago and I think that is for the better. And thanks to you, no one ever has to remember them ever again. Sure. We remember, but personally, I'm grateful for the fact that I was part of keeping the people from being exposed to them, and that I helped bring something good to the people of Metroplex Zero." He went on to say that I shouldn't let this thing keep me from enjoying my life, and from enjoying the fact that we can make a change here and now. It was refreshing talking to him. He made me feel better about everything and he was easy to talk to. We had spent the rest of the day chatting and talking about the various things we had been up to since our last meeting. I thanked him for his help and I let him know that if he ever needed anything, he could shoot me a message and I'd be there in any way I could. He smiled and said he was always a ring away. He gave me a new sense of confidence that I seemed to have lost. This whole ordeal had taken a number on my mental health. But Trev helped me see that I could rise above it. And make it better for my sake, and for my fellow people of Metroplex Zero.

From here on out, the implants had made an impact. Sure not everyone had one, and there were people who simply hated them outright, saying we're spying on the citizens of Metroplex Zero and have ulterior motives. I mean it was kind of true, we were using the photos the eye scanners sent in to tweak our sales and even designs of the new models, it wouldn't be long before we switched from pictures to live feed. But I wasn't going to let that stop me from making more improvements to the implants and finding even more ways to keep the residents and businesses of Metroplex Zero safe. I made it my goal to ensure their lives were as little danger as possible and I would see to it personally that we implement strategies and make products that are nothing less than the best option for the safety of the community. Things would be better and I would do what I could to make that possible.

I had gone back to work, with a new sense of pride and ready to take on anything. I walked into the office and headed towards Dax's room, I walked through the sliding doors, Wavewalk extra strength latte in hand, and took a seat in front of his desk. He wasn't physically there. In his chair sat a hologram of him, he had left Metroplex to take his own vacation and was talking to me remotely, he had the biggest smile on his face.

"Hey there Ms. Senior Developer, how are you?" His grin was wide and you could see all his teeth even through the hologram. I chuckled a bit.

"I'm good, ready to get to work." I was ready, more ready than I ever had been. My talk with Trev really had me in a good mood.

"Great, I need you to get your team together and get the new line of eye-scanners out and ready to ship. I trust you Cathrise. And what's more impressive is that the big bosses seem to trust you as well. Keep it up champ" His hologram faded away and I took a drink of my latte.

Secubotics was on the rise at becoming the biggest security corporation in Metroplex Zero, and I knew that if the opportunity came, I could find newer and better ways to get profits. All I had to do was bet on myself and keep my head up high.