

# Episode 11: Wake up Call

Sudo waited until she could hear a steady rhythm in Etta's heavy snoring. She counted the repetitions of her breath and listened for breaks in the pattern.

*No medical records of apnea or somnambulant behavior. Pulse most likely at 64 beats per minute. REM sleep in less than 3 minutes* Sudo calculated in her mind.

The Chronicler reached under her sleeping roll, fumbling around in the dark until her fingers brushed the acrylic lenses of the goggles on her mask. She rose from her bedroll, careful not to brush any stray sediment that would awaken Etta, and stretched the mask over her face, tucking in fringes of dirty brown hair that would otherwise be pulled out from the friction of the rubber on her scalp.

The brick wall cover was only waist high but provided plenty of cover for travelers to camp off the side of the road. It's neglected wrought iron hoops held fast in cement collars, rusted over from infrequent rain showers.

Sudo nimbly vaulted over the wall and headed for the cactus Etta had eaten behind earlier. Her keen ears heard Etta's mention of a Scrapper before they bedded down, and if one was this far out bringing a haul back, it was a mandatory directive to at least try and flag them down for trade.

Sudo dialed up the brightness of her digital pad display enough so that it mimicked an e-torch at full power. Her fast fingers dialed in a repeating pattern of flashes, an archaic code from the Bygone peoples deciphered from fragments of the Stream in Clusters across the continent. Sudo didn't know exactly what the pattern was saying but was willing to take the chance for a decent trade outside the city. She held her whole arm up, the display illuminating a dozen meters or so in front of her, blinking like a beacon in the night.

"Bring me your treasures, sand worm. Help me fill in the gaps in the database and bring me back to the Mainframe once more..."



Barter and trade gained a resurgence after the apocalypse, particularly as it relates to the in-game mechanics between Chronicler and Scrapper cults. Scrappers want money and Chroniclers want the artifacts they find in the wastes, simple as. High value artifacts for Chroniclers are the fuel that drives them to delve deeper into discovering remnants of the Stream – the emergent artificial sentience at the dawn of the Transhuman era prior to the Eshaton. *The Stream recorded and catalogued the pure, digital knowledge of mankind in its algorithms and it's beauty and intelligence was revered more than it was feared. However, over time it began to take on a mind of it's own. Humans sought this sentience out and although they didn't understand it, they found something they could believe in.*

*Before the Eshaton, they called themselves Streamers. They were a movement of like-minded people that put the continuous flow of data, The Stream, at the center of their lives. These humans were the neurons in its global network, and it transmitted the impulses to entire cultures. Humanity's knowledge had merged into the Stream and had become it's central meme. But the Eshaton interrupted this flow of data, and tore apart the intricate web, losing centuries-old knowledge. Any residual heuristics or memories in the minds of the surviving generations were lost over time in the era of the beast. In the age of Homo Degeneration the Chroniclers started calling the enormous catastrophe in 2073 the Zero Event. The new Streamers tried to keep what little ancient knowledge they had and expand upon it. Across Borca, they collected user manuals, storage disks, circuit boards, and server stacks. In the first decades, the Streamers were only technophile looters, disorganized and leaderless. But their desire for the rebirth of the Stream seemed to propel them all down the same path. Shared heuristics and common goals gave rise to a new cult who sought to Chronicle all that had been found to prevent the repositories of the Bygone peoples from being lost again.*

Sudo's shoulder was just beginning to tire when she heard a sliding, scraping sound off in the distance. A few moments later she could make out the ruffled animal skin coat

and leather rigging on the Scrapper walking toward her. As the desert wanderer drew nearer, Sudo heard them call out, "Scrap for sale...fair-trade accepted." The voice was dry and hoarse, the product of an lifetime of inhaling sand and dust from salvaging.

The man's face was a roadmap of scratches, melanoma spots, and a bleach-blond goatee. His coat swayed side to side and Sudo could see an elastic tool belt wriggling from side to side on his waist, hammer and pickaxe clanging together with each step.

The sled the Scrapper pulled behind him ground to a halt and he unburdened himself from the shoulder harness. He put up a hand to shield his eyes from Sudo's still-flashing light.

"Lower that flasher, Chronicler. I may be old but my sight is still as sharp as a cat"

Sudo lowered the light and dimmed the digi pad display. She flipped on her vocoder

"Sudo-19 interfacing. Keep your distance and prepare lists of fair market value"

"Yeah, yeah, drop the pretense and theatrics. I don't wanna be here all night so let's fast forward through the procedure."

"Noted. Are you accepting a recursive information trade or solely drafts as payment?"

"Eh, I've got enough potential honey holes to keep me busy through my dying days. *cough* Just the Drafts to keep my belly full until the last dirt nap, if you please."

"Affirmative. Show me what you've got."



**C.** Let's see: I'll determine how many kilos of artifacts the Scrapper has found with a D6. Only 1kg but it is Tech Level III, worth a nice price for Chroniclers to resell.

A. Etta - Expression 5D - 5 4 6 5 6

B. Kiefer - Perception 6D - 4 2 2 1 6 6

C. Unknown Scrapper - Amount found of Tech III scrap 1D - 1

### Roll Scenarios

"Bundle the oxidized iron components, and compromised PCB with the copper bits. Is this acceptable?"

“Pshaw, I’ll make that deal. I’m not gonna complain about lightening my load past nightfall.”

“I am short on the proposed purchase price, give me 36 seconds.”

Sudo reached inside her heavy rubber cape that draped around her shoulders and grabbed the polymer handle of her mobile Draft Printer. The chunky rectangular machine was approximately 13 inches long and featured a small display screen with a raised keypad to the side of it. Her spindly fingers glided over the glyphs and numerals on the keys with precision as she logged her command line request. Microchips and random access memory inside the handheld terminal locked in the request under Sudo-19’s digital signature.



The Draft Printer offers Chronicler Ranks of Mediator and above the ability to print Drafts into economic circulation. The number of Drafts that can be printed per month are equal to the Chroniclers Resource level x 50. Sudo is currently at 1 Resource but 50 is plenty purchase this Tech Level III scrap for 25 Drafts. More trade rules can be found in “Services” on pg. 187 in the Katharsys rulebook.

The machine whirred and spat out a small stack of Drafts in denominations of 5. Sudo tugged the fresh bills free from the exit port and passed them over to the scrapper.

“Thank you kindly,” the Scrapper said and turned around to offload the material from his banged up sled. He threw in a gnarled looking burlap sack and a short length of rope along with the goods.

“Even light loads get heavy over time,” he said. “Throw it over your shoulder and cinch it here and here.” He demonstrated tying a slip knot and worse the burlap like a knapsack before passing it to Sudo who copied the knot and his movements perfectly.

“This one thanks you for your transaction and help toward our goal. The Stream encompasses all.”

The Old Scrapper chuckled, “Sure...sure.” He sniffed the air. “Hmm. Ozone. You better recharge before the rain dampens you, The Stream, and whoever you’re traveling with. Fare thee well heh heh.”

The old man hitched the harness over his shoulders and took a deep breath to tug his rickety sled off on the fortified roads toward the city. Sudo watched him until he merged into the inky blue of the night and crept back to her bedroll to catch some shuteye.

## **[Dawn, 15km outside of Justitian]**

Droplets of rain pattered softly on top of the cowhide leather hat still pulled down over Etta's closed eyes. She groaned as the sound of distant rolling thunder vibrated in her ears.

*Better than a lightning bolt strike or a rooster call* she thought. She stretched her arms and legs and hopped to her feet.

"Come on then, Sudo. No dicking around today, we've got clicks to cover and rain to beat..." Etta looked around to see Sudo alright awake and upright, standing next to Piotr.

"Well, no flies on you. Let's get a move-on."



The party will push their limits today to make it to the Ignatz crossroads. Sudo Travel Distance is about 5km less than Etta's, but they'll both need to expand EGO points to push through the rain to make their rendezvous at the end of a 30km travel day. It can be exhaustive, and EGO points regenerate slowly, gaining 1 back every 24 hours.

Between Etta's tanned leather hat and coat and Sudo's cape, the pair stay relatively dry as they migrated southwest. However, wet mud began to leak in every seam as the rains come and go and it's not long before they both start to get waterlogged.

The signposts for Justitian were replaced with new way markers for settlements. Etta peered through the driving rain and made out several wooden arrows labeled "Ignatz" and "Cathedral City" both pointed in the same direction.

Her toe struck a third arrow buried in the ground. She knelt down and pulled it free from the sludge, wiping the front with her hand.

"Hard to tell...looks like just letters and numbers. A...2...something...5? Any ideas?"

*click click*

Etta dropped the arrow back in the wet sand and brushed her hands on the side of her coat, leading Piotr and the Chronicler further down the road.



On the roads around the Protectorate there are isolated settlements that operate independently from the rules of Supreme Archot in Justitian. If there are any Game Masters listening out there, you have plenty of seeds and bread crumbs to layer in your campaign as long as you don't mind reading! Check out the story behind the A235 settlement on Degenesis.com or page 94 in Justitian: The Righteous Fist sourcebook.

### **[Late afternoon, 40km outside Justitian]**

The rains abated but the wet sand and grime caked on the soles of the Etta and Sudo made every step an effort. Sudo in particular made more and more radio clicks to signal a brief rest on the side of the fortified roads—much to the frustration of Etta.

"This starting and stopping cannot continue. Ride on Piotr for a bit so we can keep moving."

*click click*

"I'm not asking. The Ignatz crossroads is another 10km and we must arrive tonight for our rendezvous. Up you go."

Etta offered a strong forearm to help Sudo onto Piotr who lacked stirrups and a proper saddle for mounting.

*click click*

**A.** Etta dropped her arm and placed them akimbo on her hips. She could feel her wet socks continue to wilt the flesh inside her boots. Her frustration was mounting.

#### Roll Scenarios

"You seem to be under the impression that this is an independent democracy. Let me clarify: I am the law and you are my charge. I know that Chroniclers don't travel often and I assume that splashes in mud and muck can interrupt electrical systems. Take this time to check your equipment and we can continue to make progress."

Etta stuck her arm out again.

*Hmph. Not as dumb as she looks. Better a working vocoder than a compromised voice, but I cannot account for variables in animal psyche. Patience and temperament is the game.* thought Sudo.

*click*

Etta made sure Sudo was seated between the saddlebags and whispered in Piotr's ear as the Chronicler fidgeted with her vocoder and cape stuck underneath her.

"Easy boy. We'll try not to make a habit of this, I promise"

\*horse snort"

### **[Night, 50km, outside of Justitian, the Ignatz crossroads]**

The night air in the desert sapped heat from an exhausted Etta, even with a small blanket draped over her shoulders inside her coat. Her feet were blistered and weathered. She didn't think she could walk another kilometer without the soles of her feet shedding blood in her boots but the sight of a fire a few dozen meters in the distance gave her a renewed spark of hope.

"Sudo, can you see that fire too?"

*click*

As they drew closer, the campfire light shed brighter detail on it's surroundings: a large 3-person tent with the front flap drawn shut, a chestnut brown horse bedded down among a patch of flowers, and a large riveted trunk with a long shackle padlock on the front. The metal cube had an axle run through the middle that attached to two wheels on either side as a sort of makeshift buggy.

Sudo climbed down from Piotr and immediately went and sat cross legged by the fire, removing her gloves to tend to her pruny wrinkled hands underneath.

Etta shook her head and called out while steadying Piotr.

"Hello? City Judge and guest on the premises. **Huc armatus venio sed cum pace.**"

Rustling inside the tent made Etta momentarily tense up as the flap was brushed aside and two Spitalians, a male and female, exited.

White and black neoprene patterns on their suits cast a soft glow against the fire light as they strode across the open space toward the campsite arrivals. They had an edge in

their clean faces, with taut jaws and creased, stern brows set below completely shaved heads. The female's skin was a light olive complexion whereas the male was as pallid the moon above. Both Spitalians stood taller than Etta, and she had to adjust her gaze ever so slightly to meet their eyelines. However, she stood her ground and rested a hand on Piotr for comfort, although the pack horse didn't seem to be too bothered by them.

The female carried a metal clipboard in one hand and stuck out the other to greet Etta, "Ines Devant, Chief Anesthesiologist. This is My cohort, Famulancer Kiefer Stukov."

Spitalian Stukov stood at a parade rest and acknowledged his introduction with a nod. His stocky neck stretched the shoulders of his suit and rigid musculature filled out sleeves and joints at the elbows and knees.

Etta took the hand and shook it firmly.

"City Judge Etta Jungbau," she said and looked at Sudo sitting on a stray boulder next to the campfire. "My...adherent, Sudo-19." she concluded a bit dubiously.

Sudo whipped her head around, staring at the trio. Firelight gleamed in the round, dead eyes of her goggle lenses.

*Careful Judge. Misnomers lead to mismatched hierarchies and virulent programming.* Sudo thought.

Ines stared down at the clipboard, occupied by its contents as she spoke. "Good you've come. The hour was late and I was reluctant to leave Stukov alone with all these supplies." She made a few checkmarks with a thin stylus she'd unclipped from the top of the board and looked up again. "I presume your horse is able to bear a load?"

"Yes, with the proper equipment. Are we to take the entirety of that trunk?" Etta questioned, looking beyond Kiefer's frame at the metal box next to the fire.

"It's bulk isn't indicative of weight. It is water tight and weather resistant. Stukov has indexed its contents for delivery to Lucatore and may borrow from it as he sees fit."

The large man spoke, first to Ines, then to Etta. "Yes madame, full inventory list and surplus supplies for the journey. If we have medical needs, I will be able to address general maladies, orthopedic ailments as well as minor spore infections."

*Ah, a doctor on the road will be a godsend, and at least he talks.* thought Etta.

Ines was already looking down again at the clipboard again and spoke off-handedly to Etta. "You're going to be in excellent hands, Judge. Stukov speaks a bit of the Nomad



Clanner cant if you encounter any belligerents. Some things just can't be untaught, I suppose. Right Stukov?"

"Yes madam."

**B.** Etta smiled politely, but desperately wanted a place to unroll her bed and let her feet rest. Kiefer watched her shift from foot to foot.

Kiefer - Perception 6D - 4 2 2 1 6 6

### Roll Scenarios

Kiefer seemed keenly aware of her discomfort as he spoke up again. "Chief Devant, we should let the new arrivals rest. I will help saddle your horse."

"Make it so, Stukov."

"Yes madame"

Kiefer snapped to a salute from his parade rest and set about rousing the horse from the patch of grass. Etta bowed slightly to Ines.

"Thank you. It was nice to meet you, Chief Devant."

"Mutual. Farewell." she said hurriedly. Ines wheeled around to enter the tent again, emerging again without the clipboard. Instead she wore a shoulder-slung bag with an integrated bandolier. Liquid filled glass vials as big as her thumb were slotted in the leather loops.

She breezed past Etta and Sudo who had taken up space on the ground near the fire. With a bit and bridle already over her horse's head, she swung her long legs up and over the saddle. Stukov stood aside as she leaned down and spoke to the Famulancer in a hushed tone. Stukov nodded again and said out loud, "Yes madame. At any cost."

Heavy hooves beat the ground as the Spitalian Anesthesiologist galloped away from camp.

Stukov watched her go until she was out of sight and joined Etta and Sudo at the campfire.

"I will take first watch this evening. The only foot traffic we can expect is from Ignatz to the East. The tent should stifle some of the light from prying eyes in the Southwest and we're still too far outside Enemoi clan territory to be in danger. Judge Jungbau, I suggest resting so you can continue to march without foot pain tomorrow."

Etta processed the brief quickly, just as she'd practiced to do so during barracks meetings in Justitian. "Are you a mind-reader? Do they feed you a special diet in the Spital during training to diagnose at a glance?" Etta joked.

The comment seemed to go right through Kiefer. "Simple physiology. I could tell from your gait that you've got discomfort in your lower extremities. Properly dried footwear will prevent hindfoot ulcers. I have a length of string if you'd like to hang your socks over the fire."

Etta blinked slowly, a bit embarrassed at her comment. She was already mourning the loss of real conversation to make the time on the road pass in her head. *sigh. A dial tone and a doctor with no bedside manner. It's going to be a long trip to Lucatore.* she thought before responding out loud, "Sure, thanks Kiefer. I reckon Sudo and I could be stand to air out a bit."

*click*

Kiefer raised an eyebrow and cleared his throat as he headed back toward the open tent. "Well, if you're all set, the fire should die down soon. Good night."

Sudo removed her mask and hunkered down beside the glowing embers at the base of the fire. She was quite content at the newest addition of the traveling detachment and grinned at her inner schemes: *Someone to add more logic to our detachment instead of listening to another mouthpiece of Supreme Judge Archot. My decision matrix grows by the day...perfect for game theory regarding the aftermath in Lucatore..*