

Episode 14 Fractured

Kiefer leapt up from the sand, pelting Etta's coat with grainy dirt. The amplified wailing continued and he shielded his ears from the intense screeching with the flat of his palms. He dashed across to Sudo as she was thrashing on the ground. Trickles of blood stained the bronze earth with a burgundy petina around her head. Her arm was clutched closely to her chest, covering her source module power bank.

Kiefer didn't dare remove his hands from his ears; he'd seen plenty of Chronicler aggressors get their ear drums and eye sockets blown out from the frequencies of a simple vocodor, let alone the more powerful Cascader. The Famulancer wedged a foot between her arms and pried them away from her torso. The shouting and writhing continued, but he was able to see the sheen of the vocoder amp swinging loosely around her chest. He gave it a swift kick, the reinforced leather and steel toe of his boot cracking the amperage display and causing sparks and a puff of ozone to fill the air.

All that was left to break the defeaning silence where the whimpers of Sudo.

Etta removed her hands from her head. Her lips parted to call out to her fellow travelers and she realized her jaw and tongue were incredibly sore. It ached every time she moved her mouth. She quickly removed a glove to swipe a finger inside her gums and removed it, blood and saliva shining the tip of her finger. She'd bitten a small hole in her tongue with one of her incisors from clenching her jaw so tightly during the sound wave. She winced at the pain in her mouth, but was otherwise unharmed. Kiefer was crouched over Sudo, speaking to her gently and calming her like one would a scared animal. An animal. Etta came to her senses.

"Piotra!" she gasped.

The horse lay facing away from from her but within arm's reach. His legs were tucked up under his belly from being forced down by Kiefer's stranglehold. Breath came in short, shallow breaths. Etta scooted slowly across the sand on her knees and stuck out calloused fingers to rub the coarse fur across Piotra's broad shoulders.

"Easy boy. It's me, Etta." she whispered holding one of her cheeks taut to avoid rubbing her damaged tongue raw. Fingertips touched the bristly fur and the horse started, neighing loudly. The beast shot to it's feet, still facing the opposite direction as Etta tried her best to grab his reins.

"Steady on! Ho, Piotra. HO!" she yelled, pain radiating across her mouth and jawline. The beast wouldn't obey and started bucking.

"Etta, control that damn horse before he runs away with the medical equipment or tramples someone!" Kiefer barked.

Etta scrambled in front of Piotra's crazed movement to make sure he saw her. He reared on his hind legs and the Judge narrowly dodged under hoof. She held up both her hands to grab the reins. Piotra brought his muzzle and front legs down when he saw the wide-brimmed hat and scar across his master's face. A face of love and nurturing.

"There you are. You're always an obedient boy, even in the crowd noise of the Forecourt. What's a little more yelling got to do with you misbehaving?" Etta mused. Piotra seemed distracted and was still fussy, shaking his mane. Etta could feel something wasn't right. She saved a command word for when Piotra got out of order. Rowdiness seldom occurred for the trained gait horse, but she was glad to have memorize one as part of her equine training in the Judiciary.

"Pace Piotra. Pace." she said into the horses ear. He ignored her with another nervous whinny and glances from his brown eyes deflated Etta. No way he would've ignored this willingly. Fuzzy ears flicked haphazardly in the air. Piotra had gone deaf.

Meanwhile, Kiefer had set to work examining Sudo. She withdrew her arm every time Kiefer tried to take her wrist, so he tried a different approach. He gently placed his hands on either side of her temple, the plastic and rubber wrinkling on her mask.

"Sudo. Your vocoder and radio connection has been severed for the moment. You will need to verbally or physically affirm or disaffirm. If you hear me and understand, affirm." Kiefer said calmly.

".....Yes."

"Good job Sudo. Do you have pain in any other limb, your hips, or lumbar spine?"

"No."

"Okay. I am going to remove your mask—"

"NO!" Sudo yelled and instinctually raised her uninjured arm to swat at Kiefer.

He grabbed her wrist as she swung, his fat, worn fingers wrapping around the entire width of her wrist and then some.

“My bedside manner absolutely has a limit,” he snarled. Sudo tried to free her arm but couldn’t move an inch. It was like trying to remove something from a steel vise clamp.

“I will do my best to aid you, but you have to help me.” he said, an air of calm returning to his voice. The tautness in Sudo’s forearm relaxed, and Kiefer’s grip on it loosened. It laid back down by the Chronicler’s side, still.

With two free hands, Kiefer ran his fingers under Sudo’s chin and found the twin clasps that hooked the mask to her cowl and unsnapped them. Supple rubber and acrylic bent and stretched under his grasp as he pulled the mask over the face of a young, short-haired girl. Soft cheeks were stained with tears and hazel eyes were bloodshot and puffy with pain and panic. Her bloody nose was the source of the blood caked on the sand. The same rough paw that threatened to snap her wrist a few seconds ago was placed caringly on her shoulder. Kiefer patted her gently.

“Take deep breaths and let me know if you feel pain anywhere else. I am going to fetch my shears and trauma kit. Can you wait patiently?” he asked. He cradled her head and turned it sideways, looking for any other damage.

“Yes.”

“Good Sudo. Patience shows true know-how.” Kiefer said. Sudo swallowed hard. It was a hard day to be patient.

The aluminum trunk was tipped over in the sand from the gale and Kiefer righted it with the help of Etta. Hinges squeaked from the sand filling their grooves but the two halves swung freely open, propped apart by the small mounds of dirt kicked up at Kiefer’s feet. Various bottles, bandages, and tools were stacked neatly on the shelves in Kiefer’s eyeline. He picked up a pair of angled scissors, two glass jars with a clear and amber liquid inside, and a small length of rounded wood about as long as Sudo’s arm from the elbow to the wrist.

“Are you gonna need to...amputate?” Etta asked feeling a bit queasy.

“Not at all. FRX transverse traumatic fracture can lead to hematoma and swelling that would pinch nerves and necrotize surrounding tissue. A splint cast should alleviate subdermal pressure and promote ossuary healing.”

The Judge looked at him blankly and scratched her head. “Right, well...let me know if I can help then...”

"Hold Sudo's other side down. Sudo, drink this." Kiefer said sternly as he put the jar of amber liquid up to her lips.

"What is that?"

"Field anesthetic. You will need it, trust me." Kiefer replied

Thick vapors from the jar made Sudo's eyes water even more. She thought it smelled familiar, like the dirty Orgiastic packs toasting their bottles of distillate in Cross Quarter public houses. She put her lips on the rim of the bottle slowly but Kiefer quickly lifted the bottle up causing her to swallow two big burning gulps. He pinched her nose shut and held her mouth closed to keep her from gagging it back up.

"...Sorry for the surprise" he said sheepishly.

Sudo's entire sinuous cavity burned and it felt like her throat was even hotter from the medicine that the parched air.

"Bastard. Your plan was to poison me and leave me to die-*hiccup*"

The Chronicler hiccup'ed again. Sudo could see two sets of Kiefer and Etta to despise for their treachery, but she was finding it harder and harder to focus. Her vision faded, then went black.

Kiefer washed his hands with the clear liquid and cut through Sudo's chronicler suit sleeve. He determines the extent of the damage of her mangled limb, bent in two places: it's a broken forearm.



Kiefer makes a medicine roll to try and set the bone and will receive a +1D for subduing Sudo with some pretty powerful alcohol distillate pulled straight from an Anabaptist high proof cask. He is also using a Splint to hold her arm.

Splints provide support to prevent the "Reopening" complication outlined in the Artifacts rulebook. INT+Medicine Dice Pool: 7D Difficulty: 2S

Sudo took 2 points of Trauma in this fiasco meaning it will take 20 days for her broken arm to fully heal. More rules about recovery on pg. 118 in the Katharsys rulebook

Kiefer - medicine to set broken bone - 3 2 2 3 6 6 5

Roll Scenarios

Tentpoles leaned together in the sand and where lashed together at the top. Etta's leather coat was spread wide across the joist to provide a little shade for Kiefer to work and Sudo to continue resting as the Borcan sun beat down upon their faces.

Kiefer finished wrapping a sling and splint around the passed out girl. Etta held her back up so Kiefer could make one more pass around her bare shoulder with the clean white cloth.

"Will she heal alright?" Etta asked, tucking stray bits of gauze under Sudo's arm.

"Yes. Her pulse is steady and there was no open fracture. Plus, she is young. Youth heals quickly."

"About that. She seems too young to be traveling the wilderness, what the hell are Chroniclers doing sending children to do their tasks hundreds of kilometers away?"

"Perhaps she volunteered?" Kiefer questioned.

Two adults stared down at the young chronicler, disheveled chestnut hair and silver capped teeth gleaming in the harsh rays as she snored softly in a drunken stupor.

The party will camp here for the day, using another day's rations for no progress to let Sudo recover. Etta is bitter about Piotra, but says nothing to Sudo. Buckle up kids, it's time for another overland travel segment. I'll roll a single d6 against a weather and wandering encounter table I've made. Weather is rolled every day and encounters every 3 days

Roll Scenarios

DAY 8 Dust Storm

Resources: 22

A dust storm kicks up at the base of some taller foothills and makes sticking to the coordinates difficult for the party. They get a bit disoriented in the blinding winds and only make 10km of travel for the day.

DAY 9 Clear Skies

Resources: 21

Rolling valleys and rising bluffs give the party a buffer from the wind and a bit of shade as they travel. They make up for lost time from yesterday by walking an additional 5km.

DAY 10 Clear Skies, Fosser's abandoned settlements

Resources: 20

Good weather continues for the group, even Sudo finds a small wellspring of courage despite her broken arm and they complete an additional 5km.

Etta perception - 1 1 6

Kiefer perception - 3 6 4 5 2

Sudo perception - 5 2

A drying marshland stretches out for roughly a km as they exit the valley. Dank smells waft across their noses on a breeze but even more distracting is the bits of stone and wood strewn about in the muck. Telltale signs of a former settlement or at least a few dwellings built out of sight of travelers or raiding clans who would seldom take this wilderness route.

After traveling a bit further, the group discovers a stacked stone foundation of shale several meters past plumes of tall spiked grass. Kiefer stands guard and Sudo and Etta take a closer look.

[roll effect]

But neither of them roll high enough to discover a slab door set into the ground, disguised as part of the stone floor. Kiefer shrugs and they continue on.

DAY 11 Clear skies

Resources: 19

Wow, I've rolled a 4 on my weather and encounter table the past 4 days, they're lucking out with this overland travel! I suppose I have to take the small wins where I can. Death a thousand fold always waits around the corner. Its perfect timing for a change of scenery anyhow...

The oppressive heat of the Black Lung gave way to warming light and cooler air on the three travelers backs as they made their way southward, leaving behind the dry, barren desert and flat plains. Passing one last small bluff, a stunning vista makes the party freeze on top of an overlook. Snow capped peaks crested the blue-grey sky ahead and spanned the breadth of their gaze even from several hundred kilometers away. The alpine tundra lay spread out beneath them, providing a shocking display of yellows and greens that assaulted the senses.

“Astonishing. Pure, high ground...” Kiefer breathed.

“Wait til those blowhard Protectors hear about this back at the Garamond in the quarter. That old fogey Adalia will be the one buying me drinks this time.”

Etta nudged Sudo’s shoulder opposite her sling.

“Worth breaking something for the view eh?” Etta remarked

“Hardly, but this view is impossible to codify. Only a memetic wall could replicate this in high enough quality, make no mistake.” Sudo replied taking in the sight.

“Well well, I’ll take that as a ‘it’s too beautiful for words, Etta’,” she joked.

The air grew slightly cooler as they descended into the scattered shrub and vegetation in the tundra below. The ground beneath their feet changed from the parched and cracked earth to patchy soil with flowers with jagged rocks, slowing their pace as they picked their way through the rough terrain.

DAY 12 Blistering Heat

Resources: 17

As they traverse, the party encounters a small winding river that cut through the path, rushing over moss-covered rocks and trickling down into shallow pools. Uneasy terrain and a hot day uses another day’s worth of resources, especially as Etta and Kiefer had to help Sudo and Piotra stay steady over crags and gaps underfoot.

DAY 13 Windy, Friendly Encounter

Resources: 15

Cutting winds swipe through the sparse trees and foliage and threaten to take the party and their gear over the side of crags or bash them against larger boulders. They decide to hunker down, nestled between gigantic rocks to wait out the strong mountain gusts coming from the titanic Alpine region.

It was a rather sleepless night as the canvas tent material and cramped conditions between the boulders made everyone sleep in tighter quarters than usual. Kiefer and Etta were drift deeper into sleep, physically exhausted from helping the handicapped horse and Sudo. Though the Chronicler kept taking sips of the distillate to dull the pain, it only took a slight edge off of her aches. Cold sweats and pained grunting kept her the limbo of consciousness as a different kind of pain took over. Pain from an old wound, deeper set than her bones...and the stuff of nightmares clouded her mind as she dozed off.

An open palm slapped across a cheek. It was a girl. She was 11 years old.

“Abigail, straighten up you little quim! This Judge asked you a question.”

Her cheek burned. She ran her tongue over her chipped teeth from falling – no, from being pushed down stairs. She could taste the shit stains in the air. She could smell oil and perfume. She was nervous. Skid road in Eastside, Justitian. End of the line.

She counted the shoe lace loops on a shoe, the stitches in a pant leg, and cracks in the plaster on her wall in less than a few seconds. She could draw maps from memory. They looked like black spider webs on paper. People looked at her strangely. She hated it.

Another slap. Cheap metal rings scraped her lips. Tilda the skid road housing mistress. A cunt.

“Abi, I swear by all I’ll rough you up and feed you to the cockroaches in the desert if you get another mark for thieving!”

She was 12 years old. Her teeth ached all the time, rotting in her skull. She distracted herself by sneaking away to read in candlelight with [REDACTED]. RELIGION IS THE OPIOID OF THE MASSES. THE STREAM ENCOMPASSES ALL.

A punch in her nose. Tilda was getting weaker with age. Probably too much huffing [REDACTED]. OPTIMIZATION BEGINS WITH A CLEAR MIND. ILLICIT SUBSTANCES WEAKEN THE APPARATUS .

"Get bent you haggard bitch. You couldn't break wind with your old wrinkly hands."

She felt good saying it. It made the busted nose hurt less. Tilda hating being called old and haggard, worse than being called a bitch. It was worth the next punch. A parting gift.

"Take her out of my sight. She's more trouble than she's worth and deserves to die in the Cleft." Tilda scoffs to the figures. They've come to take her away. Innocent. Innocent.

I'M FUCKING INNOCENT. WHAT DID I DO?

YOU WILL FIND SHELTER IN THE STREAM. REPORT THE CORRUPTION.

Blood leaks from her nostrils and she can't breathe through one side. Less shit to smell in Eastside. Cloaked orange eyes stare down at her. Piercing through her blurred vision. They look like mechanical monsters. Nothing new in this perverse place.

A young Judge with slicked back hair has her arm. He is keeping her standing. He isn't harsh when he speaks, just plain.

"I've got somewhere new you can stay. You're gonna have to work, but I won't hurt you. There's others like you in the Cleft, tiny one. You'll see."

Maybe he isn't a liar

The mechanical monsters push a stack of bills into the Judge's chest. He looks at her and turns his head away in shame.

He was a fucking liar

The monsters swallow her in their smooth capes.

[white noise]

White noise to cleanse the background and focus the apparatus. I am the apparatus. Sudo-19 function of program. Reference: shattered cross. Authorization: Fragment Monochrome.