



Metropolis Live

C2: WHITE CLOUD

Known Infections: ?

Sol 2, 15:55

Metropolis Live hits over a billion viewers in less than 3 seconds. It has nothing to do with Metropolis Live owning the Sky Grid satellite network and being the only company to broadcast a detailed view of the Angel Garrison's compound. What is making billions tune is what the live satellite isn't showing.

Nosy viewers can select any camera onboard the Sky Grid satellite to view the campus. Most cameras are simply ways to zoom up on extreme details, like a man picking his nose while parked in the campus lot or zoom out far enough to see all of the Angel campus, its figure-eight-shaped ring of mountains and the entire Diablo county. But the whole viewer base is only interested in one camera called the Penetrator. A lens even the Crown's space agency is jealous

of and regards as an illegal entry into the world of spying and consumer privacy. At the moment, it is focusing on a massive white bubbling cloud rising high enough to cover even the titanic superstructure built mid-campus.

The Penetrator performs as its name suggests. The desert surrounding the mountains hides intricate tunnels systems running deep under the campus, through its vast mountains, including Snow mountain, Gaurd mountain and the most prominent called the Southern mountain. It also gives an X-ray-like view inside the guardhouse, standing at Angel garrison's only gate in and out of the campus. And the insides of large Semi-trucks concealing thousands of wooden coffins. But the Penetrator's weakness is extreme heat and cannot see the superstructures just below the peak of the cloud nor anything else below its billowing surface.

'A centimetre past the top layer of that misty cloud is a black hole,' announces a media specialist.

'I be think'in someone stole the whole campus, or it was never there in the first place. We's in real trouble,' commented another viewer.

'They do'in that on purpose,' posts another viewer on Metropolis Lives comment section. 'Bet it's to block a raid from aliens. That meteor that landed at noon, like I always said, was aliens, no if, and's or three-eyed butts.'

While pacing in his tank, Simon knows none of these claims were true. Still, the glitch in Sky Grid's premium

camera makes him nervous. Something more costly than the satellite itself should just work. He pulls a black ball out of a leather pouch and connects with Maximus.

‘Your expensive toy is useless,’ opinions Simon, blocking the stiff Sky Xs, dressed in tight blues, from seeing the dapper man projecting from the orb’s northern pole.

Maximus smiles down on Simon, projecting from his black orb, then looks out the Sky Grid’s Observatory. He also sees the smoky cloud, even from space. After taking a deep breath and raising his chin, he says, ‘Overheated water vapour exceeding natural temperatures. A flaw in your designs.’

‘And the last flaw you will find in my plan,’ exclaims Simon, trying to find hidden meaning in Maximus’s less than satisfactory explanation. ‘I have already sent you a fix for the Penetrator’s faults.’

‘Something else is troubling you.’

Simon takes longer than usual to answer, trying to judge what Maximus knows about the meteor that struck the ocean at noon and the tech Aerial created. Not wanting to linger, he boasts, ‘I found something.’

‘Is it on another lens? One none of our billions of viewers will ever use. And the only one that shows something of value.’

‘Correct,’ states Simon, realizing Maximus’ question is rhetorical.

Maximus flicks a switch, and the observatory window fills with video footage from one of Sky Grid's landscape lenses. The lens zooms in on the desert next to the guardhouse through a dust storm and whiffs of the white cloud spilling over the lower mountain ridges.

Simon calls for the lens to stop when a cowboy boot comes into focus.

'Is that a hand sticking straight out of the ground?'

'It is. I picked up a body buried at the edge of a dune.'

'There are two bodies.'

Simon sneers because of the missed detail and switches the camera to infrared. Indeed, two bodies are mangled and buried in the sand.

'You are correct,' Simon says, holding back his urge to swear.

'Our missing employees, buried from earthquakes.'

'Damn it,' Simon mumbles, wishing he knew Maximus' source. 'The infrared reading from the thermographic camera shows a second pair of hands but not a third. We are still missing one more employee. Should I have one of the Crown pick them up before they choke on dust?'

'Leave them. These wandering souls will take care of themselves.'

'You aren't worried they might leak photos or sensitive information on their Cell Banks?'

'They are two of three Angel campus bodies who

didn't receive their Cell Banks.'

'They still have work trackers.'

'I wouldn't worry. The superstructure is no longer broadcasting a signal, and the nearest alternate connection is across Diablo County. They will die before sending any valuable information.'

'I will keep a camera on them,' scoffs Simon as Maximus's image fades.

Simon continues watching the two men trying to free themselves from being buried alive as one hand snakes its way through the man on top and past their sandy grave. Simon smiles and thinks of the weapon these two will help him find.

