

Surge and Wylde

C5: THE ONLY GATE

Known Infections: ?

Sol 2, 16:03

The wind blows hard until it doesn't, and the dust storm stops. Wylde and Surge feel silly holding a single umbrella stem with four hands and walking like ducks. They stick out like Rudolf's nose from the Sky Grid satellites, but not one viewer saw them walking to Wylde's combination motorcycle.

'Did you fart?' Wylde snorts, plugging his nose and cleaning out the sand in the motorcycle's carburetor.

'Sulfur,' exclaims Surge, straight-faced, pulling his aviation goggles over his face. 'The smell is getting stronger the closer we move to Angel Garrison's front gate. If you notice, there is the lightest smell of seaweed, even burnt fish as an aftertaste.'

'It was a joke.' Wylde said, mounting his ride and

shaking out his helmet. 'There is a hint of your bad cooking too.'

'Try something funny next time.'

'Testing one, two, three,' shouts Wylde into the helmet mic as he speeds off towards the Angel Garrison compound.

Surge turns his head away from Wylde and doesn't bother pointing out the bugs smacking their googles or that if he slows down, they wouldn't need to spend a day cleaning guts and goo off their visors. Surge puts a tissue up his nose to block the foul smell of rotten eggs, intensifying as the gate appears between the horizon line and crowning mountains.

'Are you going to contact Metropolis Live and tell them about their mistake? Our turbine can't leak gas,' states Wylde, wiping the goopy bug guts off his spectacles. He turns to Surge, sitting in the jiggling, wiggling sidecar, stiff as a statue and tries to wave at him for a reaction.

Wylde can't read Surge's face because he's wearing kooky round telescopic glasses, contrasting Surge's awkward choice of aviator jacket, cowboy boots, and white gloves, the same type pilots wore to flying small open-cockpit bi-planes.

Surge doesn't answer.

'Well, don't have a hissy fit over my bad jokes,' adds Wylde, noticing his voice jiggle. He looks down and sees they are driving over ribs in the road.

'Sorry Wylde, I am pondering those tracks on the road,' announces Surge. 'But, I am more concerned with the

work tracker's lost connection.'

'Shouldn't the signal be stronger as we get closer to the campus?'

'Yes. What is your hypothesis on those peculiar tracks?'

'The road was paved a few days before today's big press release, so I have no idea,' answers Wylde, looking at the repeating set of ridge marks on his motorcycle's side. 'But now I know why your voice sounds bouncy. Try sending another message to Team,' yells Wylde over the roar of his motorcycle engine. 'See what he knows. Team lives on campus. He should be available.'

'I will try Leo first. Move me out of these ruts,' points Surge as he dialled Leo on the work tracker. 'I do not want to sound like I am talking into a fan.'

Wylde moves, and the motorcycle and sidecar stop bucking. He pulls the brake and kicks the gear shifter into neutral as the bike cruises over the final rise. He studies the ruts Surge pointed out. Because of the Sun's angle, the dents looked more like slivers of glass on the pavement.

'Something is not right,' mumbles Surge, looking up to Angel Garrison's front gate. 'Team is not answering his work tracker. Maybe you are right, and his is missing,' states Surge, pressing the work tracker's help button at the bottom of the article. The Metropolis Live article disappears. No connection appears in its place.

'He better not be. We need his turbine jumper to restart

the Deep Drive,' Wylde frowns, looking at Angel Garrison's only access gate from the top of the hill's rise. 'Where the hell is Landers? Try phoning him.'

'Not possible.'

'Why not?'

'Angel's signal is also completely gone.'

'How is that possible?' exclaims Wylde. 'Leo's radio tower clears the peaks of all the mountains on this side of the Angel campus.'

'Maybe they know,' points Surge towards the dozen men operating the gate.

'Those look like Crown men. What are they doing here?'

'I am more concerned with those people sitting in their transports, beyond the gate, than the Crown men. Look,' Surge points with his gloved hand as they rolled up to the front Angel's front gate.

'You said you didn't believe there was a gas leak, but this looks pretty real to me,' said Wylde, stopping the motorcycle short of the main gate and turning off the engine. He looks from the top of the bubbly fog covering the new Angel tower. Then follows it out to the shoreline. It's impossible to see the coastline from this angle. He looks in the other direction to the residence. The fog seems to end where the mountains divide the main campus area from the live-in residence area.

'Turn around. Can't you read?' shouts one of the

officers, stomping out towards them, pointing menacingly at the makeshift sign warning everyone to leave the area. There is a new warning with fresh red paint reading: **VIRUS ALERT.**

Surge and Wylde look past the Officer at the Chicken wire blocking the road into the compound and retractable road spikes below the wire.

‘It looks like the cloud that hung unnaturally over the campus fell to the ground,’ Wylde whispers.

‘I don’t think so,’ counters Surge.

‘Are ya deaf?’ the Crown Officer’s eyes bulge out in fiery.

Wylde is too engrossed by the short road leading down to the parking lot. The gaseous fog lingers around the parked transports, the same way a light mist or dew might cover the ground on a chilly day. Several employees are sitting in their vehicles, staring past the white misty gas at nothing.

‘There is a major gas leak,’ shouts the Officer, stepping up to Wylde’s stopped motorcycle.

Wylde still isn’t listening but scanning the gaseous vapour becoming thicker near the center of the campus, where it looks like a scoop of vanilla ice cream or a giant smoking bubble. Several employees are wandering in and out like silhouettes. It’s hard to tell if more of his co-workers are inside the brewing bubble, spanning from the ocean, covering the entire campus area and stopping short of the

residence area. 'Then he spots Jewel, his wife.

'Did you hear me,' the Crown Officer shouts again, but his gas mask distorts his voice, making his words sound like the rumbling engine between Wylde's legs. 'The Deep Drive is broken. This gas leak is serious. You need to turn around.'

'Contact our CEO, Leo,' shouts Surge, unstrapping his helmet and adjusting his goggles. 'And where is Landers?'

'What happened to those people?' demands Wylde, spitting and pointing at Jewel's transport. 'Why aren't you doing anything?'

The Crown Officer seems weary and won't look at the fog behind him. Instead, he calls over three other Officers outfitted in masked, covering their faces. One of the men is as large as Wylde's motorcycle and sidecar combined.

'Show me some ID,' they command, drawing their sticky blasts.

Wylde fumbles for his ID without taking his eyes off Jewel. He also wonders if his daughter Macy is still in the Programming Center, in residence, at the back of the second ring of mountains.

'Wylde,' whispers Surge into his helmet mic, staring past the Crown Officer and road spikes. 'I don't think Landers' replacement cares, and no one has seen Leo for two days. You better look at those shipping containers. Look what those men are putting inside.'

Wylde isn't listening to Surge as he pulls out his campus ID. He narrows his eyes at a man in a semi-transparent skin-tight suit with a large white X painted across his chest, pulling his wife out of her car. This man, like his wife, is not wearing a gas mask. Surprisingly, the man seems immune to the gas, but his wife is dopey-eyed and staring blankly.

'I need to get in there right now,' ejaculates Wylde.

The Crown Officer leans in and studies Wylde's ID. 'Calm down and move your finger, please,' implies the Officer, giving a hand signal to his fellow Officers. 'Are you Wylde? If these credentials are true, the gas leak should be the first warning on your Cell Bank.'

'We never picked up our Cell Banks,' offers Surge, showing his ID badge, noting the hand signal the Officer uses, meaning: get ready to pounce. Surge leans in closer to read the Crown Officer's name tag. 'That's why we are here now, mister Montague. As one of the power engineers who built the Deep Drive Turbine, I assure you, there is no way the Deep Drive caused a gas leak.'

'The gas leak and the power outage are not your concern. For your safety, I ask that you come with us,' mutters Montague, taking his ringing black Cell Bank out of his holder, answering, 'Yes, Commander, power engineers. One of the two is Wylde.'

The Officer nods and removes his sticky blast from his utility belt.

Surge takes his helmet off and leans towards the Officer, dimly hearing the words *detain* and *arrest*. The Officer's eyes narrowed, and his free hand unbuckles the strap around his sticky blast. He hangs up and bares his teeth, signalling to three men.

'Wylde, we are in trouble,' whispers Surge. 'Start your hog.'

'My wife,' utters Wylde, watching the two men, with the large white X's on their chests, walking his wife over to a wood pine box. He stands up and pulls the engine throttle as they help her inside the pine box. Two other men, carrying what looks like a lid for the wooden box, place it over her head. Jewel's eyes open as she lies down inside without resisting.

'What the hell is this?' bursts Wylde.

Surge pushes Wylde back into his seat.

The Officers surround the motorcycle and undo the straps on their sticky blasts.

'Wylde, put this beast in gear and get us out of here.'

Montague aims his sticky blast at the motorcycle, 'Arrest these men.'

'Wylde,' insists Surge into his helmet mic. 'We need to leave,'

Wylde never takes his eyes off Jewel, but he starts the engine and kicks the bike in gear. 'I'm going to ram through those dirty dozen Officers.'

‘A fool’s move,’ ejaculates Surge springing up like a jack in the box as Montague presses the firing switch on the sticky blast. Numerous stingy, pink lines shot out of the blaster. Surge removes his helmet and swings it at the sticky spray, deflecting most of the strings into the sky. His helmet also connects with the bounding Montague. ‘We will never move past those road spikes. And the barbed fences will rip us apart,’

Wylde rolls the throttle, redlining the engine, as Montague recoils, and several of the dozen dirty Officers, slower to react, shoot their stick blasts. The tires kick up enough sand off the tarmac to weaken the sticky blast’s sticking power. Still, the sticky blast strings land on the sidecar as the bike swings around, and many more grip Surge’s aviation jacket.

Surge winds his arm like a windmill before Wylde’s bike stops fishtailing. The sticky strings became a long thick rope, and Surge whips them out, wrapping them around the large Crown Officer’s wrist as they sped past.

‘Come with us, Fatso,’ quips Surge, reading the Officers name tag with his hawk-like eyes.

Fatso, with a sinister grin, reaches out and catches Surge’s hand. For a moment Surge feels his butt leave his seat. Wylde slaps his hand into Surge’s chest, pressing him into the sidecar, but Fatso is too heavy to be moved in this tug of war. Surge saves himself by unfastening the glove’s



clasp. The loosened glove slips off, sending Fatso backwards.

Fatso curses and swings at them instead of figuring out how to pull the sticky strings off his wrists. The lines around his wrist and torso became taught as the sidecar moved away.

‘Don’t drive too fast, Wylde. I don’t want to ruin that man,’ insists Surge, as the combination slows.

‘We are barely moving now,’ states Wylde in a panic.

‘Don’t worry,’ assures Surge, watching many of the stings stretch like bungee cords, then break and rebound.

Surge and Wylde watch the other Officers dodging the rebounding stings in the rearview mirror. After pulling Fatso up to his feet, the other Officers use a special detergent to rinse the sticky string. Before Surge and Wylde disappear over the first desert slope, Fatso tries to throw the stolen glove. It springs back and slaps him in the face.

‘What the hell was that?’ demands Wylde, with spitfire confidence, rolling the throttle to the limit. ‘We should have driven inside. Jewel is there.’

‘I saw her, Wylde. I saw her. Team might be inside of one of those boxes too. We cannot turn the Deep Drive back on without him. We still need to get in there. Diablo County and the sharp end of a media stake will not be forgiving if we do not.’

‘Fine, Surge. But my wife comes out of that coffin first.’