

Part 5 of Connection Concealed

Welcome to the Connection Concealed Desert Soundscape Tour! Grab your headphones and follow me, your guide, to the year 2061. Don't worry, we're taking the time machine. Ready? Set? Let's go!

We start today's soundscape tour with scene 10 of Connection Concealed. I consciously work on two scenes per episode for this story. I write down the goal of each scene and think about what feeling you, as a listener, should get while listening to it.

Scene 10 is a transition scene. Louise has just had her first real confrontation with Eleanor Lucas and needs a moment to process. We revisit some of the themes and questions that are important throughout the story. I also snuck in some more information about the world in 2061.

scene 10 starts

JUNE 8th, 2061. Region 5 of the American desert, Arizona, North American Province, 21.45 local time.

Which desert is this? All of them. Or rather: the ones in the Southern states of the current United States. For this story, I am assuming climate change has turned up the heat and made large parts of these states inhabitable because of desertification. It's one big desert now. There is almost no plant or wildlife in this desert. It's a dangerous place!

Louise widened her eyes in an attempt to stay awake. Not falling asleep was even harder now that the sun was setting. There was only a sliver of deep orange light at the horizon left. Complete darkness would descend soon.

Listen for the sounds of the pod! There are system bleeps left and right.

Louise checked the panel with the pod's system reports. Everything looked to be functioning properly. She still felt uneasy, though. Traveling through the desert at night was never safe. The pod drove itself, of course, recalculating the route as it went to avoid dangerous conditions.

The weather radar hadn't indicated any signs of extreme rain nearby so far. But after the recent attack, Louise wasn't too confident the global network would keep them out of harm's way. The network functionality had been fully restored within a few hours after shutting down, but what if it happened again?

Focus on Louise's movements now! You can hear the leather the seat, her sighs, her clothes moving. Let's also take a moment to think about the weather report. No extreme rain?! In the desert? Yup! Plenty of studies actually predict more extreme rain events in the deserts. It won't make them greener, though. It will just make them more inhabitable for everything and everyone.

Louise blinked at the thought. She stretched out her legs and groaned. Her muscles were unusually sore. She wanted to ask her watch to report on her body's hydration level, but then remembered her diagnostic chip had been disabled. She sighed.

Pay attention to the water machine! Can you hear Louise pushing the button to refill the bottle?

Louise got up from the chair to refill her water bottle. She glanced over at Hobbs, who was resting in the back of the vehicle. His chair was reclined all the way to make sleeping more comfortable. His chest slowly moved up and down. She was glad Hobbs had fallen asleep. Sharing a small space with him for more than 17 hours was a lot easier if she didn't have to talk to him.

Can you hear the soft music? I often use this type of simple instrumental music to indicate Louise is thinking about something. The music reflects her mood. In this case: not quite comfortable and pensive.

After leaving the army base, they had agreed to take turns monitoring the systems. She had insisted on taking the first 4-hour shift. Louise hadn't wanted to admit to him she was exhausted. She had pretended to be perfectly fine. She knew she wouldn't be able to fall asleep anyway. She had been too wound up.

Don't miss the sip! Then focus on how the background music changes to reflect what Louise is seeing and thinking.

Louise took a sip of the cool water as she peered through the large rear window. The rebels' car's headlights lit up most of the road between the pod and their vehicle. Behind it, there was nothing but darkness.

Why anyone would risk their safety and drive through the desert in an old car, without any information from the network about the conditions ahead, was beyond Louise's comprehension.

Time to go inside Louise's head so you, as a listener, get a reminder about what Lucas said. Can you hear how her memories are blown into her conscious mind?

Then again, there were plenty of things about Lucas and her people that boggled Louise's mind. She was still on edge after her encounter with Lucas in the bathroom. Lucas's arrogance and indignation had definitely rubbed Louise the wrong way.

Note the slightly more intense music to dramatize Louise's somewhat rigid thinking. I don't use choirs that often. But in this case, I wanted to give voice (pun intended) to a theme that's very important in this story.

You see, Louise is a follower. She follows the herd. She quickly pushes away her own thoughts and questions to comply with what society tells her she should think. A choir is

a perfect way to illustrate how a society where dissent is not welcomed has shaped who Louise is.

To claim innocence, to demand the benefit of the doubt, when you were the leader of a group that had attacked the Global Coalition numerous times, before and after segregating, was simply ludicrous.

Sure, the Fireblue rebels had changed their ways in the last decade. They had started to focus on further isolating themselves from the rest of the world instead of attacking it. But who would be stupid enough to think that made them trustworthy all of a sudden?

Okay, time to get back the pod and Louise's movements. In this story, I usually use piano music to indicate Louise is unable to control her body or her emotions. When she's lost in thoughts and/or more emotional than usual, you'll often hear a warm piano in the background. As if she is closer to who she really is for a while. You can hear this in the other episodes too!

Louise sat back down. Her eyelids were heavier than before. It felt like her body was about to shut down completely. She felt her eyes closing and was unable to stop it.

Did you hear Hobbs getting up while Louise dozes off?

Hobbs's nasal voice startled her for the second time that day.

"I'll take over," he said.

Louise's eyes snapped open.

We're fully present in the pod again. Focus on the movements of Hobbs and Louise. We're just present for a while.

"No, I'm fine," she responded defensively.

He gestured at the large clock on one of the monitors. "It's time."

Louise checked and saw that indeed 4 hours had passed. “Oh, right,” she muttered apologetically.

She hauled herself out of the chair, her legs aching even more than before. Her temples were throbbing, which made her wince.

“Nothing to report?” Hobbs asked.

“Nothing. Kept the same speed the whole time. Nothing on the radars either.”

“Alright. Try to get some sleep. You’ve been awake far too long,” Hobbs said, actually sounding sincere.

Louise looked at the chair at the back of the pod. She shrugged. “Okay, I guess I should give it a try.”

Notice the piano? You know what that means, right? Louise is giving in to her body and letting go. She allows her body and emotions to take the lead for a moment. We started the scene with Louise uptight and struggling, now she has finally given in.

He nodded, pushing past her and looking down at the displays. “It’ll help.”

Louise plopped down and was surprised at the relief she instantly felt. She reclined the chair until she was comfortable.

“Oh,” she thought, “I should have done this a lot sooner.” The soft leather of the chair was warm compared to the chilly air around her. She smiled at her heavy boots sticking up in the air.

As Louise closes her eyes and starts to drift off, she is sucked into a dream. The music supports this. It arrives quite suddenly and more loudly than usual. She instantly disconnects from the world around her. We go with her.

The first thing Louise saw once she had closed her eyes, was Michelle’s face. It wasn’t the Michelle Louise had seen today. No, this Michelle looked much more friendly. Her smile made Louise’s breath catch.

Michelle is a significant character in Louise's present and past. As a listener, you don't get all the information just yet. But Michelle's voice ringing in Louise's ears gives you an idea of the impact Michelle has on Louise.

She thought she could hear Michelle's voice, but was still awake enough to realize she was probably imagining it. It didn't stop the pang of longing in Louise's chest.

Was it silly of her to believe Michelle had flirted with her for the first time in many years? And was she a fool to be happy about that? "I am," Louise thought, right before drifting off. "But I don't care."

And...we're in Louise's dream. Michelle is everywhere. We don't find out what Louise and Michelle are doing in the dream, but the music certainly suggests it's more pleasant than sitting in a pod in the middle of the desert.

end scene 10

scene 11

We only have a moment! Scene 11 starts! This scene is a shift in the story. Things are about to change. We go from reflection to action.

"What the fuck?!"

Louise is stuck in that foggy place between dream and reality. Can you hear her struggle? The pull of the darkness?

Louise frowned. She turned on her side and tried to get back to the blissful darkness.

"You have got to be kidding me! Thomas!"

Louise wakes up and all sounds illustrating the dream are gone...

Louise opened her eyes. It took her a few moments to remember where she was and who she was with. The chilly, stale air of the pod triggered her memory.

While Louise is trying to remember where she is, Hobbs is busy in the background. Can you hear him?

She pushed herself up. Her head was spinning, her mind still foggy. She blinked a few times to get her eyes to focus. Hobbs was sitting on his hands and knees, opening a panel under the control displays.

That's when it finally hit her. It was dark and quiet. And they weren't moving.

Oh dear. Something is clearly wrong. Here's some music to make you experience it along with Louise!

She hurried to her feet and looked through the rear window. The car with the rebels was parked behind them. Their headlights were the only reason Louise was able to see anything at all.

"What the hell?!" she muttered and turned to look back at Hobbs.

He was pushing all sorts of buttons, but the control panels remained dark. The pod wasn't responding.

Louise's mind finally kicked in. "We need to establish if this is an electrical or a software failure."

Notice the music becomes softer here? Louise's mind is catching up, and she's taking back control. Everything is less overwhelming for a moment.

Hobbs glared back at her. "Look around. We don't have power. It's electrical."

Louise shook her head. "The pod could be in safe mode. We need to reset it manually."

He got to his feet and gestured at the panel. "Be my guest."

Louise squatted down. "The switch should be in a separate..." She found the little panel she was looking for and opened it. "Here it is."

*The music building up again can't be a good sign, right?
Louise doesn't know yet, but we know trouble is coming.*

She flipped the reset switch, fully confident this would kickstart the engine. She waited for the comforting hum to return and the lights to switch back on.

But nothing happened. "This doesn't make any sense at all," Louise thought out loud.

Can you hear Hobbs pulling at the door in the next few seconds? Also, pay attention to the music. It has gone from 'something seems not right' to 'yeah, definitely in a lot of trouble'.

"I'm going outside to check if we hit something," Hobbs said. He pulled the handle to open the door of the vehicle manually. He had to try twice before it finally slid open.

The door opens and we get our first real experience of the desert. Creating an atmosphere like this is always a challenge. It often needs all sorts of details before it's credible. Can you hear the expanse of the desert? The dirt? The spooky music? I think we were better off inside the pod!"

Louise followed Hobbs outside. The hot air hit her in the face as if she had stuck her head into a grill oven. "Dang, if this is what it's like at 23.00, what the hell happens during the day?"

Louise raised her hand and squinted into the harsh light. She didn't know whether to be embarrassed because the rebels were witnessing their misfortune, or to be grateful to have potential help nearby.

Louise looked for Hobbs. He was lying on the road with his head under the pod. She bent down, keeping her voice quiet when she said: "Anything?"

The music takes on a role of its own here. It's almost like it's commenting on the story. "Battery intact? Oh, that's bad!"

Hobbs's head reappeared and he sat up, looking worried. "Nothing. Battery looks intact." His eyes gazed over her shoulder. "It's them," he whispered angrily.

Louise met his gaze. "How?"

The sound of a door opening and closing stopped Hobbs from explaining. He jumped up with a soft groan.

Louise turned around, holding her hand up against the painful light again. She felt a drop of sweat roll down her back.

"Did your self-driving super pod take a wrong turn?"

It was Lucas, sounding genuinely amused. Louise didn't think it was funny at all.

Hobbs stepped in front of her before she could reply. "How about you keep your distance?"

Pay attention to the steps on your right! Lucas is walking over!

Lucas stopped dead in her tracks. It was hard to see her expression.

"Looks like you need some help." Her hands were resting on her hips.

"Go back to your vehicle," Hobbs said in a threatening tone.

Keep following Lucas for a moment. Can you hear the door open and close?

Lucas laughed, shook her head and turned around. Hobbs snorted. "Bet she knows exactly what is going on," he said under his breath.

Louise heard the car door close again. "Maybe," she replied quietly. "Let's go take another look inside."

The music is commenting again, as if it is trying to warn Hobbs and Louise. Or us.

Hobbs squared his shoulders and nodded. They were about to step back into the pod when everything went dark.

Okay, the music is fed up with being subtle. Darkness in the desert? NOT good. Who knows what's out there? Louise and Hobbs definitely won't see it coming now! This situation just got worse.

We also discover Lucas is happy to make things harder for Hobbs and Louise. She switches off the lights just to make a point. Sure, Hobbs is an ass to her, but is that reason enough to endanger everyone?

Louise's head snapped to the side, glaring at the car. Its lights were off. Hobbs cursed. "Oh for fuck's sake!" He raced off in the direction of the rebels.

Creepy voices let us know something might indeed be out there. Or maybe Louise is just scared and these are the voices in her head warning her. Everything is growing in intensity as she loses control over the situation. Can you hear her breathing? What will she do? How will she respond?

There was almost no moon tonight and his silhouette soon became hard to see. Louise hesitated another second, then hurried after him.

Pay attention to Hobbs's voice. It does an actual bounce from the right to the left!

"Turn the lights back on!" Hobbs's angry voice seemed to bounce off of the car. Louise heard a window slide open.

"I thought you didn't want our help."

Louise's eyes adjusted to the darkness as she caught up. She could make out Lucas's face and saw Woodward sitting in the passenger seat.

The hair on the back of her neck rose. They were extremely vulnerable out here, she realized. Who knew what weapons Lucas and Woodward were hiding in all that darkness?

"Turn the frikkin' lights back on," Hobbs growled.

"Why should I?"

Louise put her hand on Hobbs's shoulder. His whole body tensed up. She pushed him aside as kindly as she could. She didn't want to offend him, but a pissing contest with Lucas wasn't going to get them to safety.

We see a different side of Louise here. Even though she's scared and vulnerable, she steps in and stops Hobbs from picking a fight with Lucas. She makes a different choice than Lucas did. She pushes the conflict aside and asks for help to get them all back to safety.

"We have to restart our pod," she sighed. "It would be helpful to have some light." She couldn't bring herself to add 'please.'

"Don't you have flashlights?" Lucas asked skeptically.

Lucas is still being a smart ass. It's up to us to listeners to decide if she has the right to be or is just being a pain. Maybe she's as uptight as Louise is in a way?

Louise closed her mouth abruptly. Of course, they had. Wow, they were really making themselves look like idiots here.

"Yes, of course," she replied, trying to sound confident. "But your headlights make it easier."

Lucas snorted. But she hit a switch and the lights came back on. Louise met Lucas's cold gaze, tilting her head in gratitude.

"Hobbs, let's get to work," she said. They headed for the pod.

Lucas yelled after them. "If you can't get it to work within 5 minutes, you better get in our car."

Hobbs responded instantly, but softly so only Louise could hear him. "No fucking way."

We again see the difference between Hobbs and Louise. He responds from his gut feeling. His focus is on hating the rebels, Louise's focus is on the situation they are in. She is not completely blind to what needs to be done, despite her distrust of the rebels.

Louise rubbed her cheek. She actually thought Lucas had a point. Staying out here for too long was a bad idea. They had to keep moving.

Back inside the pod, she decided to try another reset before further considering getting into the rebels' car.

Hobbs grabbed his terminal and started to tap the screen vigorously. "Damn it. Nothing." He looked up, his eyes filled with rage. "They're using a scrambler. That's what all of this is."

Louise nodded while she was thinking. It was possible. She kneeled down to flip the reset switch again.

Hobbs continued. "We better search their car."

Louise looked over her shoulder. "No way."

"Why not?! They're fucking with us!"

"They might have weapons."

Louise blew out a frustrated breath. The reset hadn't worked.

Can you hear the terminal hitting the chair?

Hobbs threw his terminal on the chair. "Of course! Why the hell are we unarmed?"

Louise pushed herself up. "Because we're on our way to inspect hardware, not to kill people."

Hobbs shook his head. Louise gave him a moment to gather his thoughts. She suspected he'd come around soon.

Louise again stays calm. She even gives Hobbs the time he needs to think things through, despite her apparent dislike of him. Louise might have been caught off guard in earlier

episodes, she is becoming stronger now. The roles have reversed. Hobbs is now cocky and angry, Louise is calm and more focused.

“Without a connection, we can’t request a new pod,” he stated, calmer than before.

Louise pursed her lips. “Even with a connection, it would take hours and we would be sitting ducks out here.”

He frowned, his eye twitching. “We could ask them to drive to the nearest city. Contact HQ there.”

Louise considered this. “I doubt they’ll agree to it, though. And I don’t know if we should risk exposing Lucas.”

Have you noticed the music building up? Clearly, something is about to happen. Or we’re nearing the end of the episode...

Hobbs nodded slowly. “You’re right. She’s not supposed to be here. The Council would freak out if it leaked.”

“I say we grab our gear and,” she paused, “ask for a ride, I guess.”

He groaned.

Can you hear Louise cursing while she tries to open the storage compartments?

Louise didn’t wait for his approval and opened one of the storage compartments. It wasn’t easy without the electricity.

“Let me help,” Hobbs sighed.

“Thanks,” Louise answered and stepped back. “How about I go talk to Lucas?”

You can follow Hobbs grabbing the gear and putting it on the floor

He put one of the cases with their gear onto the floor. “Yeah. Probably best you do it.”

Louise sighed and nodded. She didn’t like what she was about to do, but she had to do it. “I guess I can be nice,” she thought. “Or at least pretend to be.”

The music comments on Louise's thoughts. 'Pretend to be' is almost like an afterthought, like she feels that's what she is supposed to think. The music, in contrast, is like a twinkle. It challenges what we hear Louise think. It's more playful and light. It's a wink, because we as listeners know Louise won't be able to keep this up.

That's it for this Soundscape Tour mixed with some director's commentary ;) Hope you enjoyed the trip! If you did, let me know. I might do this more often then!