

WOLF 359
"Succulent Rat-Killing Tar"

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INT. U.S.S. HEPHAESTUS STATION - COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - 1900 HOURS

RECORDING BEGINS

EIFFEL

This is the audio log of
Communications Officer Doug Eiffel.
I am speaking from the comms room
of the U.S.S. Hephaestus Station.
Welcome to day four-hundred and
forty-eight of our orbit around-

He BELCHES loudly.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

... red dwarf star Wolf 359.
Today's weather report: pretty
nominal. Surface temperature's
averaging at about... Oh, a crisp
4,500 degrees Fahrenheit.
Instruments are picking up less
than ten per cent chance of stellar
flares.

Just another happy, sunny day out
here. Seven and a half light years
away from Earth...

Eiffel pauses for a moment, and we hear the tinkling of
instruments and machinery at work. The room HUMS with
constant mechanical activity and beeps.

It's the closest thing these people get to silence.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Minkowski and I finally cleared up
that problem with the temperature
on the station. All the climate
control systems are back to normal,
and our stalwart auto-pilot HERA
promises she'll be a bit less gung-
ho in her efforts to conserve
power.

You know, I understand that, as an
artificial intelligence, it's
difficult for her to remember that
human beings can't function at four
hundred below zero.

(MORE)

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

That's fine, everyone makes mistakes, but if she could stop talking about my, "fragile, carbon-based, uncomfortably liquid body," it'd be a real breakthrough for human-AI relations.

Speaking of scientific advancement, it's been three days since Hilbert's come out of his lab.

I think this is the fourth time since mission launch he's been sitting with us at dinner, suddenly yelled, "Of course!" and ran off. I can't understand what Hilbert is saying half the time anyway. It's just as well - I'm still banned from the lab. You accidentally knock over one vat of acid and almost burn a hole in the hull and suddenly you're... well, yeah, I guess that's fair.

Whatever you're up to, Dr. Hilbert, best of luck.

We hear the sound of Eiffel UNWRAPPING and OPENING a carton. Eiffel TAPS it on a table three times.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

I've gotta be careful with these; Minkowski confiscated another cigarette carton today. You'd think that after a year and a half on this tin can our resident Statsi agent would let up. I get it... Cigarettes are contraband, but it's not like if she let me have one I'd immediately light it and accidentally set the station's air supply on fire. Again.

The people on this station have serious trust issues.

That makes the tally seventeen cartons that she's confiscated, and...

We hear the sound of a PANEL OPENING.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

One, two, three still tucked in the back of the auxiliary comms panel. Safe and sound - I gotta stay sharp about where I leave these things, though.

The panel CLOSES.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

I know I can't actually smoke them. I just like being able to... have them in my mouth. I like the taste.

(now with a cigarette in his mouth)

Oh yeah... eat your heart out, you succulent rat-killing tarr.

All righty folks, let's see if we can actually get some work done, shall we?

We hear the sound of a CONSOLE BOOTING UP over the following:

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Our mission tonight is the same as last night... and the night before that... and the previous four-hundred nights, unto the end of my attention span: scan the Heavens for any signs of intelligent life. Yesterday we spent a very relaxing three hours listening to absolute silence coming from the Theta Nu quadrant, and that was great. That was just great. Today, how about we take a look at what's going on around... the Alpha Psi sector?

We hear some TYPING into a console.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Is today the day that we make first contact? What do you say.... Alpha Psi One?

We hear a BURST OF STATIC. After a few moments:

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Outstanding.

(shuts off static,
scribbles on paper)
Alpha Psi sector, bearing one... no
contact. What do you say, Alpha Psi
two?

Another BURST OF STATIC.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
 (again, scribbling)
Bearing two... same... as... it...
ever... was. How are you feeling,
bearing three?

Another BURST OF STATIC. After a BEAT:

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
 (over the static)
Well, folks I don't need to tell
you that we are in for one exciting
evening. I mean, I don't know if
you have any dinner plans, but-

Suddenly, the static CHANGES. For a second it kind of WHOOPS,
the kind of noise a radio makes as it changes station. Then,
back to STATIC.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
... what the hell was that? Did I
just hear...? I... thought I heard
something for a moment there.

Umm... hello?

STATIC.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
Alpha Psi sector, bearing three? Is
anybody out there? Does anybody
copy?

STATIC.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
... no, I suppose not. I must be
hearing things. I mean, hearing
things is my job but - you know
what I mean.

BEAT. STATIC plays in the background.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

You know what, I think I need some coffee. Yeah, that'll make things better. I'll... I'll be right back.

RECORDING STOPS.

RECORDING RESUMES.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Aaaaall right, I'm back. And I have coffee.

We hear him take a SLURP through a straw.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Of course, it's not actually coffee. It's mostly blended seaweed with some proteins and stimulants. Hilbert says he got it as close to the taste of coffee grounds as he could, but... that's not saying much.

SLURP.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Calling it coffee helps.

SLURP.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Speaking of the good doctor, I passed by his lab on the way to the kitchen. Some pretty weird noises coming from inside, even for him. Check this out.

EIFFEL'S RECORDING: It's a disconcerting and difficult to follow mixture of sounds. Some BANGING, some THUMPING, SCRAPING, etc. Mixed in there, are definite hints of some kinds of animal noises: SNARLS, HISSES, ROARS, etc. It's all jumbled up, chaotic gibberish, however. Nothing we can identify.

After a few seconds of that:

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

So that's happening. Once again, I hope you know what you're doing, Dr. Hilbert.

There is the sound of BUZZER.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Oh no. Looks like we have an
unscheduled caller on line one,
dear listeners.

MINKOWSKI

(over intercom)

Eiffel?

EIFFEL

Yeah, Minkowski?

MINKOWSKI

Excuse me?

EIFFEL

How may I be of service Commander
Minkowski, sir? Don't tell me you
need more cigarettes already, I
gave you a full carton this
afternoon.

MINKOWSKI

Very funny. Eiffel, did you read
your copy of Pryce and Carter?

EIFFEL

My copy of what?

MINKOWSKI

Pryce and Carter's Deep Space
Survival Procedure Protocol Manual.

EIFFEL

Was that one of those mandatory
mission training things?

MINKOWSKI

Yes.

EIFFEL

In that case, yes, I definitely
did.

MINKOWSKI

Did you now? Because I happened to
find your copy of the D.S.S.P.P.M.
floating in the observation deck.

EIFFEL

Oh?

MINKOWSKI

Still in its plastic wrapping.

EIFFEL

Oh. In *that* case, I've been busy.

MINKOWSKI

Get to it, Eiffel. We may be eight lights years from Earth, but we still do things by the book - this book, in fact. I want you to have it read by 0600 tomorrow.

EIFFEL

Gee, Commander, I'd love to do that but I've got all of this deep space survey to do tonight, very, very complicated technical stuff that requires my full attention. So-

MINKOWSKI

If you can't recite that entire book backwards and forwards by tomorrow I'll not only confiscate the cigarettes you've got in the comms panel, I'll make you watch as I flush them out the airlock. One by one.

BEAT.

EIFFEL

Well, clearly this is an important matter that requires my immediate attention.

MINKOWSKI

Glad we understand each other.

BUZZER.

EIFFEL

(dripping with venom)
And I'm so glad that your shriveled husk of a dictator's heart is as warm as a decompression chamber. Ugh. All right, let's just get this over with. HERA?

HERA

Yes, Officer Eiffel?

We now hear HERA, Hephaestus's Station on-board AI. She speaks with a pleasant, bright female voice, although periodically there are slight DISTORTIONS in her voice. (changes in her pitch, repeated words, etc.)

EIFFEL

Have you got this... Jimmy Carter thing in your databanks?

HERA

Pryce and Carter's Deep Space Survival Procedure Protocol Manual is among the files I have access to.

EIFFEL

Could you please reproduce the contents of that file?

HERA

Certainly. Would you like me to broadcast this throughout all of the station?

EIFFEL

Oh, uh, no, no, no. Let's have this be a "just the two of us, totally secret, never tell Commander Minkowski" thing, all right?

HERA

Very well. Ready to begin?

EIFFEL

Ready as I'll ever be. Take me away, sweetheart.

An aggressively cheerful, monotonously bland MELODY begins playing through the intercoms. It's the kind of thing that you'd hear while watching a how-to video on an elevator. Over that, we get-

HERA

Pryce and Carter's Deep Space Survival Procedure Protocol Manual.

Over the following we periodically hear Eiffel REACTING. It's mostly GROANS.

HERA (CONT'D)

"Congratulations on your assignment to a deep space outpost. Whether your stay is of a scientific, exploratory, or disciplinary nature, we hope that you enjoy a peaceful, restive, minimal-casualty residency in your spacecraft of choice."

"To maximize your chances of a successful return to Earth with all your limbs and faculties intact, please display a strict adherence to the following one thousand and one survival tips."

EIFFEL

One-thousand and... it's the extra one that's really annoying. Geez, I'm gonna need more coffee.

HERA

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number One: Always read the instructions before operating any piece of machinery. Deviating from this might result in the loss of valuable equipment, which could lead to heavy fines or death.

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number Two: begin every day with a few minutes of exercise. Isometric exercises are no harder to do in zero gravity than they are on Earth and just as rewarding."

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number Three: Spacewalks are a serious matter. They are very delicate operations filled with hazards, so only use them as a source of amusement if you are really bored."

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number Four: Conserve your oxygen. Even in environments with an air recycling system, oxygen can be limited, so keep your breathing at a slow, steady pace. Remain calm. Failing to remain calm, could result in your grisly, gruesome death, so whatever you do, do not panic. Panicking will only serve to accelerate your oxygen consumption and make your already likely demise a certainty. If you want to avoid dying, painfully, alone, in the cold darkness of space, gasping desperately as freezing oblivion silences your pathetic hopes and dreams... relax."

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number Five: Remain positive at all times. Maintain a cheerful attitude even in the face adversity. Remember: when you are smiling the whole world smiles with you, but when you're crying you're in violation of fleet-wide morale codes and should report to your superior officer for disciplinary action."

"Deep Space Survival Tip Number Six: be mindful of your personal hygiene. Begin every day with a shower, and remember to brush your teeth at least four times a day."

As HERA continues unto Survival Tip Number 6, the console lets off a series of BEEPS. We hear the same RADIO NOISE that we heard before.

EIFFEL

Oh my God, there it is again!

HERA

... remember to brush your teeth at least four times -

EIFFEL

HERA, shut up.

She does. The music and the narration are CUT OFF. The radio noise continues.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

That's definitely a transmission. I might be able to clean it up a bit, actually. Come here, you. Hold on.

We hear Eiffel tinkering with his controls. The RADIO NOISES FLUCTUATE WILDLY. It gets louder, softer, goes up, goes down... for a moment here and there we might even be able to make out something familiar beneath all the interference.

It feels like Eiffel is getting somewhere when suddenly -

STATIC.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

No, no, no! Come back!

STATIC. BEAT.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)
 Damn it... I've lost the signal
 again. But I'm not crazy - there's
 definitely something out there.
 C'mon, talk to me, whoever you are.
 I say again, Alpha Psi Sector,
 bearing three - do you copy?

His question is answer by the distant, muffled sound of an
 EXPLOSION.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
 What... what was that? Are we
 seriously blowing up now?

BEAT.

 EIFFEL (CONT'D)
 Is there a survival tip about what
 to do if we're blowing up?

BUZZER.

 MINKOWSKI
 (over intercom)
 What the hell was that? Eiffel,
 were you smoking again?

 EIFFEL
 I was not!

 MINKOWSKI
 If I come down there and find a
 single burnt match -

BUZZER.

 HILBERT
 (over intercom, coughing)
 Eiffel's not at fault, commander.
 Loud noise came from my laboratory.
 Apologies, didn't mean to cause
 distraction.

Hilbert talks very quickly, and in the background of his
 intercom we can occasionally hear the CRACKLE OF FLAMES.

 MINKOWSKI
 Doctor Hilbert? Are you okay?

 HILBERT
 Naturally. Why is the state of my
 health in question?

MINKOWSKI

That was a rather loud explosion.

HILBERT

Oh. Erroneous assumption. Loud noise was not explosion.

EIFFEL

Then what was it?

HILBERT

Don't know. Something else. Not explosion. Something... less destructive. A hair drier perhaps.

BEAT. The sound of flames gets LOUDER.

MINKOWSKI

Dr. Hilbert... is anything around you on fire?

HILBERT

Definitely not. Well, probably. Too busy with experimental sample to look around. Rigorous observation cycle, must devote full attention. Hilbert out.

BUZZER.

MINKOWSKI

HERA?

HERA

The current temperature in the laboratory is two-hundred and ten degrees Fahrenheit, and rising.

MINKOWSKI

And I'm guessing that the fire-containment system...

HERA

Is still out of order due to last week's electrical outage.

MINKOWSKI

Great. Well, I guess we gotta break into his lab and make sure he doesn't die.

EIFFEL

Hey, I'm still banned from those premises, and last I checked he outranks me. This is all you.

MINKOWSKI

Eiffel, a man's life might be at risk!

EIFFEL

If only we didn't do things by the book around here...

MINKOWSKI

If you're not down at the lab in five minutes I am going to

EIFFEL

What's that Commander?
You're breaking up. The fire must be interfering with the intercom system. Are you there? Do you copy?

MINKOWSKI

make sure that your rations for the rest of the mission are nothing but oh don't you dare, do not do this Eiffel, I am not playing around, I swear to God.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

(lower, sotto)

Where's that mute button...? Ahh, yes.

(louder)

Oh no, Commander!

MINKOWSKI

Eiffel!

BEEP. Minkowski is cut off.

EIFFEL

Have fun with the rescue op.
(sighs contentedly)
Ahhhh, alone at last.

HERA

Would you like me to resume the reading where we left off?

BEAT.

EIFFEL

As... *scintillating* as that sounds, HERA, I think we can just leave it.

HERA

Are you certain?

EIFFEL

Yeah, I got the gist of it.
Besides, I feel like there's
something I'm-

The RADIO SIGNAL springs back to life. It's much LOUDER than
it was before.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Forgetting! Right, that! What are
you?! Who's out there?!

(clears throat)

Hello? Does anyone copy? This
Douglas Eiffel aboard the U.S.S.
Hephaestus Station. Please respond.
Again: is anybody out there? Please
respond.

And then, suddenly, the radio signal CLEANS UP, and it
finally becomes recognizable as an old song from the 1910's.
The transmission is weak and beat up, but we can definitely
make out the song.

For a long beat (about one verse of the song) Eiffel is
silent. Then, he BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Oh God. Oh sweet, merciful tap-
dancing zombie chorus girls. It's
an old radio broadcast from Earth,
a signal sent out... God, this must
be decades old. All this time, it's
just been traveling through space,
bouncing from star to star... I
mean, just imagine... of all the
odds, of all the space, it happens
to run into us. You gotta wonder
how many things this song has
seen...

Well, it looks like I didn't
stumble onto alien life today.

But, you know, as consolation
prizes go, a reminder that Earth is
out there, waiting, with all its
hi-fis and smoking sections and
triple white chocolate mochas with
whipped cream... that ain't half
bad.

Heh. Well, until we meet again,
this is Hephaestus Station Comms
Officer, Doug Eiffel, signing off.

... I should probably go make sure
Hilbert isn't burning to death.

BEAT.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Ehh, I'll go after the song is
over.

The remainder of the song plays out.

RECORDING STOPS.

END OF EPISODE 1.