

WOLF 359

"THE EMPTY MAN COMETH"

Written by

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BEGIN RECORDING:

INT. HEPHAESTUS STATION - COMMS ROOM - 1400 HOURS

EIFFEL

This is the log of Communications Officer Doug Eiffel, recording from the Comms Room of the U.S.S. Hephaestus Station. Welcome to Day 530 of our little camping trip to the Leo Constellation.

We hear the PA CHIME overhead.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

And you're just in time for today's weather.

HERA

(PA announcement)

Attention crewmembers. It seems that the ion wind cluster that I've been monitoring for the past twelve hours is veering towards us after all.

We hear Eiffel GROAN.

EIFFEL

Balls.

HERA

I'd hoped to avoid any direct contact with the anomaly, but its path is shifting faster than I can adjust our trajectory, and it's now in a direct intercept vector. Please take a moment to ensure that all of the cautionary measures we discussed earlier have been properly implemented. The interior environment of the Hephaestus should remain largely undisturbed, but brace yourselves for light turbulence and impaired functionality in some of our electrical systems for the next three and a half hours. Thank you.

The PA CHIMES again.

EIFFEL

I swear to God... if it's not a passing comet, it's a solar flare. If it's not a flare, it's a geomagnetic storm. Now it's ion wind! Who knew there could be so much freaking weather without an atmosphere...?

We hear the DOOR to the Comms Room OPENING.

MINKOWSKI

Eiffel, you locked down the solar panels this afternoon right? I want to make sure that we're ready for whatever this ion wind thing can throw our way.

EIFFEL

Can we ever really be "ready" for anything, Commander?

MINKOWSKI

I just want to know if we're safe.

EIFFEL

Define "safe."

MINKOWSKI

Eiffel, come on, it's a simple question.

EIFFEL

Ooorrrr is it?

BEAT.

MINKOWSKI

Are you done now?

EIFFEL

Yeah, I think that ran its course.

MINKOWSKI

Did you have fun?

EIFFEL

Ehh, not really. Low hanging fruit. But, yeah, I closed up the panels this morning, and double checked to make sure they're set about an hour ago. Hatches are battened down.

MINKOWSKI

Oh. Good. Might just get through this without too much damage.

EIFFEL

Riders on the storm, man, riders on the storm.

A SOUND kicks up. It's a new sound, one we haven't heard before. Definitely coming from a machine, it kind of sounds like an old-school stock ticker.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Whoa, haven't heard that one in a while.

MINKOWSKI

What is that?

We hear Eiffel starting to TINKER with machinery.

EIFFEL

Pulse beacon relay receptor. Basically, one-way space fax. Looks like something's coming down the pipeline from our friends over at Canaveral.

MINKOWSKI

We're getting a message from Command?

EIFFEL

It's been a while, hasn't it? Whatever happened to those weekly calls from Mom and Dad?

MINKOWSKI

What's it say?

EIFFEL

Decoding transgalactic transmissions ain't like dusting crops, farmgirl. Gimme a moment.

He tinkers for a moment, then the sound CHANGES into the much more recognizable sound of PRINTING. After a moment it stops.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Here we go, let's see.

(clears throat)

"The golden rose is ready for melting.

(MORE)

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Proceed with designation Alpha.  
Beware. Five. The Empty Man has  
awoken."

His tone goes from chipper to very confused over the course  
of reading that message.

MINKOWSKI

What? Give me that.

(beat)

Well, that makes no sense. You must  
have transcoded it wrong.

EIFFEL

Uh-uh. While I won't deny that is  
totally something that could  
theoretically happen, if there'd  
been a transcription error we  
wouldn't be looking at words. We'd  
have like, I don't know, random  
strings of ampersands and sevens. I  
don't know what they're playing at,  
but this is the message Command  
wanted us to have.

MINKOWSKI

But it makes no sense.

EIFFEL

Uh, yeah, I'm kind of relieved we  
agree about that.

MINKOWSKI

Well can we radio them and ask for  
a clarification?

EIFFEL

Unfortunately the good folks at  
Goddard Futuristics spared every  
expense when they put together this  
boat. We only get high speed  
cablevision for the incoming -  
we're still on dial-up for the  
outgoing. We can send something,  
but it'll take about two weeks to  
get a message back to Earth... and  
that's *if* this ion thing doesn't  
slow it down.

MINKOWSKI

So then what the hell are we  
supposed to do with this?

EIFFEL  
 Hang on, I've got an idea.

BUZZER.

                  EIFFEL (CONT'D)  
 Doctor Hilbert, you copy?

                  HILBERT  
 (over intercom)  
 Loud and clear, Eiffel. What is it?

                  EIFFEL  
 The words "golden rose" or  
 "designation Alpha" mean anything  
 to you?

                  HILBERT  
 What? Why?

                  EIFFEL  
 We just got a weird ass telex from  
 Command, we're trying to make heads  
 or tails of it.

                  MINKOWSKI  
 Read him the other thing, the thing  
 about the man.

                  EIFFEL  
 Oh, yeah. Uh... "The Empty Man has  
 awoken." Ring any gongs?

                  HILBERT  
 Afraid not, Eiffel. Not entirely  
 sure what that could be a reference  
 to.

                  EIFFEL  
 (to Minkowski)  
 Hmm. Well, worth a shot.

The COMMS MACHINE SPRINGS TO LIFE AGAIN.

                  EIFFEL (CONT'D)  
 Oh. Uhhh, un momento, por favor,  
 Doctor Hilberto. Looks like we're  
 getting another wire.

THE MESSAGE GETS PRINTED.

                  EIFFEL (CONT'D)  
 All right, let's see... "The  
 Andromedas are broken."  
 (MORE)

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

The northern light should be reversed. Alert. Four. The Empty Man approaches."

(beat)

Have, like, a whole bunch of drugs been made legal while we've been up here? Am I missing out on that?

MINKOWSKI

All right, hang on, let's look at this rationally. So the first two sentences of both of those messages make completely no sense, right?

HILBERT

Right.

EIFFEL

Right.

MINKOWSKI

Right. But then the back halves followed a pattern. It's a warning, then something about this Empty Man, whatever that is.

EIFFEL

Yeah, and there's those numbers. Five on the first one, then four on the second one.

HILBERT

A countdown, maybe?

EIFFEL

What happens when we run out of numbers? The Empty Man commeth?

A silent beat. No one has a good answer to that question. The SHIP CREAKS. Finally:

MINKOWSKI

All right, look. For the time being, we have no idea what these messages mean, so let's not get worked up about them. If Command is trying to... warn us about something, there's not much we can do about it just from these messages. So let's focus on what we do know is real, like this ion cloud we're about to go through. All right?

EIFFEL

Yeah.

HILBERT

Indeed.

EIFFEL

Good plan.

The COMMS MACHINE WINDS UP. It PRINTS out a new message.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

(clears throat)

"The frozen pages are blank. Decide what to do with the time that is given to you. Emergency. Three. The Empty Man hungers."

BEAT.

MINKOWSKI

On second thought, I'm gonna inspect the armory to make sure that all of our stores are in good working order.

HILBERT

And I'm going to run a few security checks on our airlock perimeter.

EIFFEL

Right, yeah, good plans.

BUZZER. A DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

I'm just gonna... hold down the fort here. I guess.

Umm, one second, dear listeners.

STOP RECORDING.

RESUME RECORDING:

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Hi again, folks.

It's been about three hours since I turned off the recorder. And things have been pretty quiet. Minkowski and Hilbert have been checking the station's systems, making sure that nothing is too far out of the norm.

(MORE)

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

They've locked up all of the airlocks and access points, so we should be... pretty safe. Based on our... limited perception of safety. Oh boy.

Hey, speaking of...

The DOOR OPENS.

MINKOWSKI

All right, just finished our third sweep through the station, and everything is locked up tight.

HILBERT

The sensory alarm system is calibrated to its most sensitive setting. If anything other than ourselves moves through the station, we should know about it.

MINKOWSKI

And I've retrieved two of the handguns from the armory, so if and when this Empty Man thing shows up, we should be ready for it.

EIFFEL

Only two guns? There's three of us.

MINKOWSKI

Hilbert's not a trained marksman, and I'm not putting a gun in the hand of a civilian just yet. It's you and me, Doug.

EIFFEL

Oh great. The full hoo-ah.

The SHIP shakes as a TREMOR runs through it.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

What the hell was that?

MINKOWSKI

Easy, Eiffel. We're hitting the worst of the ion winds, that's our scheduled turbulence. How are you doing Hera?

HERA

Acceptable, Commander, although certain systems are beginning to show signs of strain.

MINKOWSKI

Do you best to keep things under control. Let us know if anything goes seriously wrong.

EIFFEL

Hey, on the plus side at least we haven't had any other messages from Command, so maybe this whole thing has just blown -

The COMMS MACHINE starts to WHIR. PRINTS a message.

BEAT.

HILBERT

You had to say something. You had to open your mouth.

Eiffel SIGHS, then slowly grabs the new message.

EIFFEL

"The broken flower is in the vase. Don't listen to your eyes. Danger. Two. The Empty Man sees you."

Okay, officially now, what the hell? What's coming towards us? What is this apparently indescribable thing?

MINKOWSKI

Don't freak. I don't like this any more than you do, but we're still on a space station, eight light years away from Earth. Things can't just *show up* on our doorstep.

EIFFEL

You know Commander, that would be a pretty good argument - if we didn't have a crazy plant monster living in our air vents! Or if we didn't get those weird whispers when we lost power. Honestly, there's a lot of stuff that goes down around here that really shouldn't be possible, but here we are.

HILBERT

Hera, are there any objects or  
crafts on an approach vector  
towards the Hephaestus?

HERA

N-no, Doctor Hilbert, not... at the  
moment.

MINKOWSKI

Hera? You don't sound very  
confident.

HERA

Well, the ion winds are interfering  
with my sensory instruments, and my  
visibility of the airspace around  
the Hephaestus is down to 81%.  
Nothing is showing up on my sensory  
input, but I'm working with blind  
spots. However, the possibility of  
an object being nearby is  
mathematically unlikely.

EIFFEL

"Mathematically unlikely"? That's  
the best that we can do right now?

HERA

I'm sorry! I'm dealing with a  
rather extreme weather condition  
here, and a boarding party wasn't  
exactly something I prepped for  
this morning. Visibility down to  
56%.

EIFFEL

Oh this just gets better and  
better.

The COMMS MACHINE comes to life again. PRINTS A MESSAGE.

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Umm... "There's no way out. There's  
no way out. But there is a way in.  
Danger. One. The Empty Man shall  
knock."

BEAT. Then, as one:

Hera? EIFFEL (CONT'D)

Hera? MINKOWSKI

HERA

Still at zero sensory contact.  
Visibility down to 37%.

EIFFEL

Is there anything we can do to get  
out of here? Can we... put the  
station in reverse and back out of  
this cloud or something?

MINKOWSKI

Hera's already using all of our  
engine power to compensate for the  
ion winds, if she tried to change  
course now, we might end up -

HILBERT

Shhh. Quiet.  
(beat)  
Don't you hear that?

Now they do. There's a soft METAL CREAKING coming from  
outside the station. After a moment:

EIFFEL

What's that?

HILBERT

Could just be side effect of the  
ion winds. We're going through the  
worst of it now, it might be  
exerting enough energy on the ship  
to cause a temperature fluctuation.  
It could just be metal in the  
ship's hull expanding a bit.

EIFFEL

There are a lot of "could"s in that  
explanation, Doctor.

MINKOWSKI

Hera. Is anything going on with our  
hull?

HERA

Not... as far as I can tell,  
Commander, but visibility is down  
to 9%. I'm basically flying blind  
for the next few minutes.

A few other noises creep in. Some air hissing, some other  
metal groans, perhaps something resembling a THUNK.

HILBERT

Just the Hephaestus compensating for the weather conditions. Atmospheric regulators, barometric stabilizers, all just doing their job. It's all regular noises in the process of keeping the interior of the Hephaestus a warm and stable environment.

MINKOWSKI

Are... you sure about that, Doctor?

HILBERT

No, but I like the sound of my voice a lot better than the sounds of what's going on out there.

THUNK. THUNK. THUNK. THUNK. It's a sharp, metallic knocking sound. A LONG BEAT.

MINKOWSKI

Hilbert? Thoughts?

HILBERT

Well, that sounded like one of two things. Option one is simply the hull cooling after coming into contact with a... unusually warm pocket of gas that's been swept up in the wake of the ion winds.

EIFFEL

What are the odds of that being the case?

HILBERT

Within the realm of the possible. Barely.

MINKOWSKI

What's the other option?

THUNK. THUNK. THUNK.

HILBERT

Something's walking on the outside of the Hephaestus.

EIFFEL

Oh, it's him. It's definitely him.

MINKOWSKI

Shh. Stop that. We don't know that, Eiffel. Listen to Doctor Hilbert. It could just be the station reacting to the ion cloud. There's a perfectly reasonable explanation here.

EIFFEL

C'mon, Commander! After all the crazy wamajama that we've seen up here? And with Command braking radio silence for the first time in months to warn us? Yes, there's perfectly reasonable explanation, and it's that the empty, hungry thing is out there right now, about to go Big Bad Wolf on our straw house!

MINKOWSKI

Hera, there's nothing moving inside the station aside from the three of us, right?

HERA

That's correct, Commander.

MINKOWSKI

And all of the entrances to the station are still closed, right?

HERA

Rig- err, yes. Sure. Probably.

BEAT.

MINKOWSKI

Probably?

HERA

I... I'm having some trouble connecting to Aft Deck Airlock number 3. I'm getting some low-level electromagnetic interference. Climate and pressure controls register as normal, but I cannot confirm that the airlock has not been opened.

The COMMS MACHINE PRINTS out another message.

EIFFEL

"Zero. The Empty Man is with you.  
Extreme danger. Zero. The Empty Man  
is with you. Extreme danger."

That's all it says.

For a LONG BEAT, things are silent. The ship creaks lightly,  
and various ambient noises go back and forth as the seconds  
tick by. Is there something else up there with them?

HERA

Not to alarm you all, but my  
systems indicate a power  
fluctuation is immane -

The lights FLICK OFF just as there's a loud KNOCK against the  
hull. And just like that, everyone snaps.

MINKOWSKI

RIGHT. EIFFEL. AIRLOCK 3.  
FLASHLIGHT ON AND DON'T GO  
WEAPONS FREE UNTIL I FREAKING  
TELL YOU.

HILBERT

Commander, I must insist we  
secure my samples and also  
there are aggressive anti-  
carbon emulsifiers which we  
could -

EIFFEL

OH GOD OH GOD WHAT THE HELL  
WAS THAT? THIS IS IT, WE'RE  
GOING TO DIE, RUN FOR YOUR  
LIVES!

HERA

Hold on! Hold ON! Lights back  
to nominal in exactly one  
second.

Everyone freezes for a second BEAT. The lights FLICK BACK ON  
and the COMMS MACHINE SPRINGS TO LIFE AGAIN. It PRINTS OUT A  
NEW MESSAGE.

EIFFEL

Oh Goddamit.

MINKOWSKI

What?

EIFFEL

You have got to be kidding me.

HILBERT

What?

EIFFEL

Those sons of bitches!

MINKOWSKI

What?!

HILBERT

What?!

Eiffel lets out a SIGH. Then:

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

"The preceding six pulse beacon relays that you have received, have been part of a psychological experiment. Please disregard the content of these messages, and return to regular operational activities as soon as possible. Please record, and clearly label, any unusual crew behavior, deviation from protocol, or undue lack of decorum that resulted on account of the transmission of these messages in your daily logs. Thank you for your cooperation."

HERA

Well, following *that* this is going to seem a lot less sexy, but we're finally starting to move past the ion wind cluster. Visibility returning to normal, and systems stabilizing. I can confirm that there are no outside presences or lifeforms with any degree of nutritional insufficiency at this time.

MINKOWSKI

Thank you, Hera.

EIFFEL

Those bastards! How dare they-

MINKOWSKI

Eiffel.

EIFFEL

- put us through something like that? It's cruel! And sick! And other adjectives! What kind of person is deranged enough to call *that* an experiment?

MINKOWSKI

Relax. We've all had enough excitement for one evening. C'mon, let's all just take a moment to cool off, gather ourselves, and... really reflect on how horrible what was just done to us was.

EIFFEL

Commander, you're not going to just leave things at that, are you?

MINKOWSKI

Oh, don't worry. I think you'll find that, what did you say it was? Two weeks? Two weeks from tomorrow the folks at Command are going to get a fantastically worded message from the three of us, telling them exactly what we thought of their little test. I just wouldn't want to spoil something like that by rushing into it. I think, gentlemen, we need a proper night's sleep to really let our anger reach it's full potential.

HILBERT

I concur wholeheartedly, commander. If you require any sentiments beyond the reach of the English language, I am happy to supply alternatives in Russian, Norwegian, German, Swedish, or Afrikaans.

EIFFEL

Hey, kids, I'll log it in all six.

MINKOWSKI

Sounds good. Good night, Eiffel. Doctor.

HILBERT

Good night all.

EIFFEL

Good night!

The Comms Room door CLOSES.

Oh, hell, speaking of logs... I guess you caught all of that, so you might be able to pick up the effect your twisted experiment had on us. Hint: IT WAS AWFUL.

Sorry if things got a bit crazy for a while there, dear listeners, but... well, you see the kind of things we have to deal with.

(MORE)

EIFFEL (CONT'D)

And I used to complain about my  
boss at Pizza Hut...

Anyway, from the U.S.S. Hephaestus  
Station, this is Communications  
Officer Doug Eiffel, signing off.

Good night, folks!

STOP RECORDING.

END EPISODE.