

Fermi

By

M. Scott Burgess

INT. SCS SYRACUSE - HYPERSLEEP DECK

Captain Popescu of the Syracuse stares at a pair of hypersleep coffins as he finishes a drag from a cigarette.

Everyone calls him PAPS for short, and it's fitting, he has silver hair and deep wrinkles. He's pushing hard through his sixties and has developed a twitch in his left arm that he ties his damndest to hide.

Paps drops the cigarette butt and kicks it through the grated flooring. He hides the accompanying cigarette pack behind a large oxygen tank and then dials a command on a nearby control screen. The hypersleep coffins open.

Orange Liquid drains out from the two coffins and the hatches hiss as they open. The people within are named TURIN and LODGE, they jolt awake and choke the remaining liquid out of their lungs.

PAPS

Wakie, wakie. We've picked up a radio transmission.

Turin, a hard-nosed, twenty-something female wipes residual orange liquid from her face.

TURIN

Date?

PAPS

It's November. Same year. Get cleaned up, we're not too far from the source.

INT. SCS SYRACUSE - BRIDGE - 30 MINUTES LATER

Paps sits in the pilot's seat with his feet propped up on a console. In his hand is a coffee mug. His eyes are glued on a large viewport with the view of a moon directly in the middle of a sea of black. A few feet to his right is a screen playing an episode of *Gunsmoke*.

Turin follows Lodge onto the Bridge. Lodge is in his late 30s. He's a handsome man, with a cold, stoic look.

PAPS

(to Lodge)

Brewed some coffee for you.

Lodge snatches up the mug of coffee without slowing. Turin looks around the room for another cup.

TURIN

Only one?

PAPS

Princess, I thought you'd learn by now- greenhorns pour their own cup.

TURIN

I've been on this boat over three years, Paps.

PAPS

It don't count if you're asleep.

LODGE

So, what do we got, Captain?

PAPS

I like that Captain business, you should learn from this man, Turin.

Paps climbs up from his seat to switch off Gunsmoke and then walk up to the ship's viewport. He looks out at the moon while taking a sip of coffee.

PAPS (CONT'D)

Early this morning, comms picked up a distress call from this moon- It's a standard AI call coming from an old freighter. We're the only sentinel scheduled to be out this far, so let's do our job and shut it up.

TURIN

Why not just detonate it?

PAPS

Curiosity. I want to know what a Maroc-Class freighter is doing all the way out in our system.

TURIN

But the signal-

LODGE

It's fine. An extra hour ain't gonna make things any worse.

Lodge takes a last gulp from his coffee mug and hands it to Turin. She looks at it with a scowl.

INT. SCS SYRACUSE - LANDER DOCK

Lodge is in an environmental suit, examining a pulse rifle while Turin pulls on her own suit. Paps is in the cockpit of the lander, prepping it.

PAPS

The auxiliary thruster's still looking a little tight, but you know how to handle her.

Paps climbs out and lets Lodge get into the pilot's seat. Turin pulls on her helmet and climbs into the seat next to him.

PAPS

Oh, Lodge- almost forgot.

Paps pulls an old hand radio from his pocket and tosses it to Lodge. On the side are the words "Emergency Only" written in felt tip pen. Lodge rolls his eyes and slides the radio into a cargo net near his leg.

PAPS

Bon voyage.

Paps slams the lander's hatch shut and then closes the airlock.

INT. LANDER

Lodge pulls on his helmet and checks his levels.

LODGE

I'm clear when you are.

Turin pulls a level and the lander ejects itself from the Syracuse. After letting it float away for a moment, Lodge engages the thrusters and guides it toward the moon.

TURIN

You smelled smoke, right? When we woke.

LODGE

I can't smell anything anymore.

TURIN

I swear he has a pack of cigarettes hidden somewhere. I gotta get off this detail before he walks past an O2 vent and kills us while we're sleeping.

LODGE

He's not gonna smoke next to a vent. He's just doing it to fuck with you, Turin.

TURIN

And is that hand radio just to fuck with me? If anyone in the fleet knew we had a pair on board-

LODGE

Okay, he's a little nutty with the radio, but it's not gonna do any harm while it's off.

EXT. MOON SURFACE

The lander slows as it reaches the surface of the moon. It hovers for a moment as its legs extend before touching down.

After a moment, the lander's hatch pops open and Turin and Lodge climb out with pulse rifles dangling off their shoulders.

Turin follows Lodge as they moon-hop toward the crash site of a very large freighter craft that lays wrecked on the lunar surface.

Turin examines it and then hits Lodge's arm to get his attention.

He looks at her, as she speaks.

TURIN

It's in good shape for a crash.

Outside her helmet, she's silent, there's no atmosphere to carry her voice.

Lodge waits for her voice to be translated to text on a screen above her visor. He reads it and shrugs, then continues toward the freighter.

The two reach an airlock. Turin pulls out a few levers to open it and then the two climb in.

INT. FREIGHTER - AIRLOCK

Lodge shuts the airlock and then accesses the control systems. He presses a few buttons and the room fills with air. After a moment, the hatch leading into the rest of the ship slides open.

FREIGHTER AI
(Distress call)
Alert, Alert, this is the UES
Shandrin 9 requesting rescue at
coordinates 4298429145...

The AI voice continues to list numbers over the intercom before repeating the message after a 20 second break.

Lodge checks a readout on his wrist and then pulls open his visor. His face immediately scrunches up with disgust.

LODGE
God damn, this air is stale.

Turin pulls up her visor and makes the same face.

TURIN
No kidding.

Lodge runs through a few more functions on the control panel and then lifts his pulse rifle off of his shoulder.

LODGE
Come on, this way.

INT. FREIGHTER - CONTROL DECK

Turin and Lodge enter the Control Deck. To one side are the flight controls, to the other, are a trio of fogged up hypersleep coffins. A green light at the top of one signifies that it's occupied.

LODGE
You wake the trucker, I'll shut
this thing up.

Turin nods and gets to work opening the coffin. It hisses and slides open, a man, named COVINGTON, sits up and chokes out brown fluid.

Meanwhile, Lodge bangs his fists on the control screen in frustration.

LODGE
 God damn it! I hate these ancient
 systems.

Covington is a balding, slightly-overweight man, in his late 40s. He stares at Lodge in confusion. He struggles to speak as he wipes the dirty brown fluid off his face.

COVINGTON
 Wha- Who are-

LODGE
 (yelling)
 What are the override codes?

Covington looks at Turin and then at her pulse rifle.

COVINGTON
 Are you pirates?!

LODGE
 Ah, screw it!

Lodge gives up on the control screen and rips open a nearby panel. After studying the wiring, he grabs a handful and tears it out.

FRIEGHTER AI
 ...Coordinates 429842-

The voice on the intercom dies out.

TURIN
 (to Lodge)
 That wasn't just the audio right?
 You cut the signal?

LODGE
 Yeah. Probably screwed up some
 other things... but, yeah.

Covington climbs out of his coffin and stumbles onto the grated flooring. He backs away from the two intruders.

COVINGTON
 What the hell is going on here!

TURIN
 We had to kill your comms.

COVINGTON
 Why?!

Turin's eyes tighten on Covington.

TURIN

What's your year?

COVINGTON

2384... How long have I been out?

TURIN

It's 2461- November.

COVINGTON

What is that? 80 years? That can't be right... Where's Brucey?

Turin looks at the other hypersleep coffins- their lights are all red.

TURIN

I don't know.

COVINGTON

Christ-

Covington climbs up to his feet, fighting the pain in his joints. He grabs a nearby towel and begins wiping the remaining brown liquid off himself.

COVINGTON

So... Did we win?

Lodge is still at work going through the computer systems but he lets out a chuckle.

LODGE

Not even close, man.

TURIN

(clarifies)

We're in the Spica system. When Earth went, our founders came here. We've started over.

COVINGTON

Started over? How's that possible?

TURIN

The Bats found Earth because we were beaming radio broadcasts into space for over 300 years. It was a calling card to come attack. We remain invisible because we strictly enforce complete radio silence.

COVINGTON

You said Spica? Wait, none of this makes any sense. How the hell did I end up out here? When Brucey and I heard about the attacks, we dumped our freight and started heading toward Capella... There's no reason in hell why we should be all the way out here.

LODGE

Log's showing that you were boarded before changing course...

COVINGTON

Why would...

Lodge pulls up his rifle and looks around nervously.

LODGE

This is bait... Turin, you need to get him back to the Syracuse. Now!

Turin looks at Lodge with confusion. She's about to speak, but Lodge puts a hand up to shush her.

Suddenly, a large shape emerges from a shadow at the end of a corridor. It's a shapeless metallic monstrosity with robotic tentacles sprouting out of it - a BAT.

LODGE

Go!

Lodge begins firing at the Bat as it charges toward him. Turin grabs Covington's arm and drags him toward the airlock.

INT. FREIGHTER - AIRLOCK

As Turin and Covington reach the airlock, they hear Lodge's screams, it's followed by a loud, bellowing horn that shakes the entire freighter.

Turin pulls down her visor while Covington struggles to climb into one of the freighter's environmental suits.

TURIN

Get that on quick!

The Bat enters their view at the opposite end of a corridor. It pulls itself toward them at an incredible speed.

TURIN

Hurry!

Turin fires a few rounds at the Bat, but her bullets ricochet off its body.

Turin looks at Covington. He's only halfway into his suit.

TURIN

I'm sorry!

Turin swings her weapon around and fires at the airlock hatch. It dents and then blasts open. Both Turin and Covington are sucked out as the entire chamber ruptures open.

EXT. MOON SURFACE

Turin flies across the surfaces of the moon and then bounces hard a few times before coming to a stop in a haze of moon dust.

She struggles to get back on her feet.

A few meters away, Covington lies dead, his face distorted in a frozen scream.

From the hole in the side of the freighter, the Bat pulls itself out and scans the surface for her. When it finds her, it launches itself at her.

Turin spins around and runs for the lander. She's fortunate that the blast launched her in the right direction.

When Turin reaches the lander, she flings the hatch open and propels herself in.

INT. LANDER

Turin powers up the Lander for launch. Outside the window, she can see the Bat bound toward her with incredible speed.

Turin watches desperately as the lander's systems boot up.

TURIN

Come on, come on!

Once the system lights go green, Turin hits the thrusters. The ship blasts off, but before it can climb high enough, the Bat launches itself upward and collides with it.

The lander spins out of control and crashes back down onto the moon. Lights go red as the oxygen inside begins to leak out.

Turin's helmet is cracked. She struggles to orient herself.

Outside the window, the Bat slowly walks toward its catch.

Turin breathes hard and looks across the cockpit, searching desperately for any form of salvation. But the only thing she finds is an idle hand radio.

Turin grabs it and turns it on just as the Bat reaches the lander and its robotic tentacles begin to embrace the craft.

Turin hits the transmission button.

TURIN
(screaming)
They found us!

A second later, the Bat rips the lander open and reaches in to grab Turin.

The End.