

OBLIVITY

By Rob Stringer

A scripted comedy series for radio

MISSIVES TO MARS

A MINI-SERIES TO SUPPORT OUR
SEASON 2 [CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN](#)

Week 1: FALCONER

FALCONER: Orpheus, please transcribe the following.

ORPHEUS: Ready to transcribe.

FALCONER: Now. Following the events of the last few weeks, the atmosphere has been a touch - *tense* at Persephone.

I'll explain.

Sometime after Amos left, the crew filled me in on what I'd missed: namely the near-detonation of Lowell, near-obliteration of the base, and Lowell's idea - or the gerbil's idea, depending on who you talk to - to send said gerbil into space as a proxy explosive.

I was assured by Burney that the science adds up, and - since my time at Persephone has somewhat altered my perspectives on 'normal' - I forewent further questioning and trialled a new three-step approach to base management: nod, smile, and leave them to it.

This approach came in handy again soon afterwards, when Lowell declared his intention to honour the cybernetic rodent with a memorial service.

Lowell said a few words, of course. Burney said even fewer.

And Christy - well, she didn't speak at all. Which was my first clue that something was wrong.

Maybe if I'd have paid more attention, we may not have experienced the little... scene that evening.

Anyway, more on that shortly, because that's really what inspired this exercise.

I suggested we try something which the councillors at the academy often gave to some of the more... *volatile* recruits.

The idea is to write a letter to somebody you trust. Critically, you don't actually *send* the letter. It's more about getting your thoughts out, and being completely honest with yourself.

So I asked Burney where the journal room was, and he responded that we didn't have one. I asked him to design one, and half an hour later, he led me to a damp utility cupboard, informing me that he had 'removed the mops'.

Still, now he's installed an Orpheus interface, it looks very professional - that is if you either enjoy confined spaces, or have a *laissez faire* attitude to deep vein thrombosis.

The team were sceptical about the exercise, which I can understand; I've personally never been one for oversharing - not even with a blinking computer cursor like now - but I do think it will benefit *them*. So I said I'd go first. To set an example.

Anyway, I couldn't think of anyone I would particularly want to write to, but after some thought, you popped into my head. So:

Dear mum,

MUSIC:

SHORT INTRO MUSIC

ROB:

Missives to Mars: An Oblivity minisode.

FALCONER:

I hope you're well. I am fine.

[PAUSE]

To be honest I don't have much to say. Persephone is ... Well, let's say things are calming down and generally fine. The showers are hot; the quarters are cold.

The work is... the work is actually classified. So I can't tell you too much. But suffice to say it's very, very important. And I'm enjoying the challenge. Really, I am.

Most of the team are keeping to their own tasks. Mostly. Christy is busy with something in the organisphere; I'm not sure what exactly, but she occasionally emerges plastered in mud. I barely see

Burney at all - he receives various packages and then squirrels them away in his lab. While Lowell has been spending hour after hour in the observation room looking out into space. He says he's 'looking for a new constellation'. I could be concerned at such behaviour, but re: my new management style, I've opted to admire his commitment instead.

Thank you for the care package; I received it this week. Apparently it had been held up in customs. I'm told that staff are mandated to listen to any recorded nano-tapes that come through in case they hold secret Defector instructions. Once they could verify it was simply a recording of your group, the Senior Ladies Improvised Shanty Society, it was too late. The customs officer was found curled up and crying in the X-ray machine.

I'm sure he just had a pre-existing condition, and was nothing at all to do with your music; and the fact that he was kept insisting that 'the bees were living in his brain' was purely incidental.

I haven't brought myself to listen yet, but if the maddening silence of the void gets too much then... Well. You never know.

The torch is useful. The journal-room-slash-mop-cupboard doesn't have a light, so it's already getting some use right now. And my last torch gave up the ghost when we were - well, a while ago. This one looks much more robust -

FX:

TORCH FLICKERS

-except it's flickering. Excellent. I only just put a new battery in...

Thank you for the lavender face cream, the lavender deodorant, and the lavender lip balm. I also very much appreciated the hydrocortisone cream after discovering my latent allergy to lavender.

Thank you also for the bandages, aspirin, tweezers, hypodermic needles, vehicle extrication collar, disposable catheter, thermal blanket and tourniquet.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were clearing out your medical cupboards.

And yes. Thank you also for the photograph. And yes, as per your message written on the back, I do remember that day. Of course I do. The beach holiday to New Skegness. One of the few days you took me out of the academy. And actually you may think I'm smiling in it, but I can assure you I remember the

day vividly, and it was very sunny, and it's just a squint.

And yes there was a reason I had burnt *him* out the photo, and you know that, and it's not fair to ask, OK?

(COLLECTING SELF) Anyway, the memorial service. That's what I was going to say.

We put up a small statue of sorts in the recreation room. Burney begrudgingly provided some sort of meteor...ite? -roid? And Lowell used his lasers to carve it into the shape of the gerbil. Although he's not yet perfected his aim, and the result has rather penetrating, bulbous eyes, and altogether too many legs, and - I tend to hide it with a cushion when I'm in there.

Anyway, we had put the statue up when Christy approached to lay some flowers down. At least that was what was planned. Flowers. Not several heads of fresh broccoli.

I'd have been tempted to believe it was just one of Christy's 'ways', if it weren't for the platter of braised oriental lilies at supper that evening.

Fortunately, I'm proud to say that even Lowell had the good sense to refrain from poking fun at her.

And he finished his plate too.

Things were all getting back to normal, until bedtime. I was searching for my last remaining bottle of crème de menthe - I've taken to having a small glass before bed, just to help me relax.

The bottle had disappeared - I imagine somebody moved it for safekeeping - and I found Burney in the corridor heading towards the storage room holding the gerbil cage. Lowell appeared a moment later begging for it back.

I was prepared to leave them both to argue it out, as I had more - pressing concerns - but then Christy rounded the corner a moment later, covered in dirt. She swiped the cage from Burney, marched over to Lowell and presented it to him.

Except Lowell didn't take it. He simply grinned and said he was 'just messing about'. Well. That seemed the end of it to me, but apparently not to Christy, as she suddenly exclaimed that she was 'sick of everything' and threw the cage rattling down the corridor.

All departed. Including - in line with my new and improved frame of mind - me.

And the next morning I suggested this exercise.

I must try to spend some time with Christy soon. I imagine the isolation is getting to her. And she's not as strong as she thinks.

FX: TORCH FLICKER THEN CLICK OF TORCH SWITCH - CLICK, CLICK, CLICK

Why won't this thing work properly?

Oh, thank you also for sending on my Martian Hexagon. You're right, I must've forgotten it.

I'm keeping in touch with developments on Mars. It sounds like our troops are generally holding the Defectors back - although I'm told they get stronger by the day. If I was there I'd definitely be -

PAUSE

Do you ever stop and wonder why the Defectors choose to, you know...

I mean they must have all made the decision to switch at some point. Not that I think they had good reason - of course not. But, just in terms of strategy, it's important to understand your enemy's motivations. Isn't it.

I suppose that's why we keep carrying out certain procedures with captured Defectors, like the ones that -

- ah - ha.

You almost got me talking about... *him* there, didn't you. Well, nice try. But that's not going to happen. I'm sure you think I have some terrible suppressed rage or something, but really, I'm ok.

FX: FLICKER, CLICK CLICK CLICK

Ugh, this bloody torch!

FX: BANGS TORCH HEAVILY ON DESK.

PAUSE

There.

FX: CLICK CLICK CLICK

FALCONER: Except now it doesn't switch off. Excellent.

Anyway. As I said, I really don't have much to say. So I'll sign off there.

Not that you'll ever read this of course, as it's just an exercise.

So. Take... care... and -

Oh this is daft.

BEAT

Goodbye.

BEAT

(QUICKLY - SHE CAN'T HELP HERSELF) Yours sincerely Mildred.

BEAT

Orpheus please delete this.

ORPHEUS: Message deleted.

FALCONER: Right. That's that.

Oh, and I must say, Orpheus, it's lovely to hear you behaving at last.

ORPHEUS: (SINGING - OPERATICALLY?_) My pleasuuuuure!

FALCONER: Smile; nod; leave them to it.

FX: CHAIR SCRAPES BACK. THE DOOR SWISHES OPEN.

END: