

JESS DEMPSEY, FIRST WOMAN ON MARS

A Half-Hour Radioplay for
The Grayscale

By Andrew Terrance Kaberline

TEASER

The sound of a cassette tape being put into a tape deck, and rewind.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

I'm rewinding our story now. Normally, I can send my tapes directly to the distributors for you, the listeners, but this one is special. As far as I can tell, it's not made from field work. This is the original. The higher ups would notice if it went missing. Quite frankly, I don't its origins, or how we came to obtain this tape. But nonetheless, we own it.

The tape deck clicks.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

It's ready. I'll just hit play.

The static of a tape being played underneath the action.

*Three perfectly spaced *beeps*, then, our broadcast...*

DEMPSEY

18 hundred hours, August 10th 2012...Day 1 of Expedition Magellan... All are present...I think that's pretty dumb to say, but they make me do it. It's just me, so if you hear my voice, you know- All are present. I'm supposed to address myself as commercial astronaut Jessica Dempsey, but hey, ground control isn't here right now, so I'm going to go ahead and say whatever the hell I want!

Jess Dempsey, First Woman on Mars, here.

If you are listening to this and wondering how you could be so lucky like me, well then go submit a video before they close the application window. That's all I did. Well, not ALL- They need someone who is resilient, curious, and creative in a pinch. I'm that gal, and if you are, well then what are you waiting for? Submit a video and come join me! They will send you in a group of four, first one isn't until 2013. Mark your calendars.

I'm the pilot of the pilot program. Patient Zero. Modern day Columbus. Only differences are I'm a woman, not Spanish, and I brought my own spices. Oh that brings me to the one negative.

The food is like airline food, but more, paste like. I can't complain too much. I'm super happy that I'm being fed.. I'm sure things will get better once I get the farming system up and running...if you are on the next flight up, would it kill you to bring a few bottles of champagne?

Anyway, one of the pluses of being the first one here... I get to decide what life on Mars is... that's nuts even to just say out loud, I can't- I get to jump start a whole culture. I get to lead- I get to pick...Holidays! In fact, as my first order of business as First Woman on Mars, I'm decreeing today Founders Day. An annual celebration of the day that Jess landed on the Red planet. It will be more festive where there's champagne and other people, but for now, I'm content- nay- ecstatic to celebrate alone.

Day one. Over and out!

The tape recorder clicks, paused, for a moment.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Jess Dempsey. 25 year old female. Dreamer. Contest Winner. Proud first resident of Mars. A woman full of resilience, curiosity, and creativity. A list that does not include teamwork, because for Jess Dempsey it won't be necessary. A noteworthy American, Jess Dempsey is about to go on an adventure like no other explorer before her, for she will see the results of being truly alone, all the way at one end of the Grayscale.

The tape recorder is fast forwarded. Overtop,

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Excuse me for a moment. We need to fast forward. A lot.

ACT ONE

The tape begins again.

Those same three blips signal another recording.

DEMPSEY

18 hundred hours, August 10th 2013...Day 366 of Expedition Magellan... All are present. Happy Founders Day to me! And to any new residents of Mars! And to you too, ground control.

It's a big day today. The next four astronauts move in. It was nice to have some alone time, but I'm ready for their arrival. I'm trying not to keep my hopes up. I don't want to think that four adventure hungry explorers are going to waltz through the door of my compound, and then it turns out they're weirdos, or attention whores, or- I know that some of the early rounds of the application were based on internet votes... I'm not doubting the people at Expedition Magellan, but, you gotta make a buck you know?

Which reminds me, this will be my real on air debut. They're supposed to be bringing the cameras with this group. Which means no more voice transmissions! I have to put on my face! Haha

Not because I'm trying to impress anyone, or, I'm sure my actions will speak for themselves. I- I like looking at my best. People take you more seriously. It's not that I'm trying to impress boys. I think the other female astronauts will be concerned with that. Three of us, two of them. Those are scary numbers yeah, but that's not why I'm here. I'm an explorer first, astronaut second... reality star is really far down that list.

Really all this waiting is the worst. I've been good. I've been really patient all year, but knowing that they are just a few hours away- I'm starting to get nervous. I can't be helped!

I wonder what food they will bring. I'm gonna ask as soon as ground control becomes live again. I should wait until the newbies touch down, but, the food is what I'm most excited about.

They should be brining new applications to the farming mechanisms, which is NEEDED. Right now, all the "crops," are so mushy. I prefer the supplement pills.

I should really clean before they arrive. It's a tight space, but it dirties easily. I'll start with the floors and... Oh, let me shut this thing off. Next time you hear my voice it will be on a TV screen. Jess Dempsey, over and out!

Tape recorder fast forwards some.

Three Blips.

DEMPSEY

18 hundred hours, August 17th 2013...Day 373 of Expedition Magellan... I am present. The new astronauts have been missing now for 7 days. Ground Control has been on radio silence since that same day. Food supply is still manageable... I was outside tending to the farm today. It's hard work for just one person. I was looking at the ground and I saw footprints in the red ground. For a moment I thought, I thought I wasn't alone. They were mine of course. It's silly, I know.

Pause.

DEMPSEY

The little light is still on, so I know you're still receiving these transmissions, ground control. Find a way to communicate back... updates... please.

Over and out.

Fast Forward.

Three Blips.

DEMPSEY

18 hundred hours, August 31st 2013...Day 387 of Expedition Magellan... I am present. Are you? I can't bear going outside anymore. It's vast. I'll stay in here. The light is still on... I'm not recording anything else until you talk to me, ground control. Jess Dempsey going into radio silence effective immediately. Fix it, ground control. Fix it.

Fast Forward.

Three Blips.

Pause.

DEMPSEY

I have no idea what day it is. That's- That is not why I'm recording again. I said I wouldn't transmit anything until you moved first, ground control, but there is an... issue. It's not the food. I've stopped farming all together. I just couldn't stand the taste of that gruel, so I'm just taking the supplements now. Saves me water I would've wasted on irrigation.

But that's not the point. I'm going to play some of my old recordings. Tell me if you hear anything funny.

DEMPSEY plays the clips from the computer system in her compound.

These are old clips.

CLIP

"... I've never considered myself a farmer, but there are sprouts. A LOT of sprouts. I'm, I'm really doing this-."

DEMPSEY

Did you hear that? That *Thing*. It's been there since the beginning.

CLIP

"... If you are listening to this and wondering how you could be so lucky like me, well then go submit a video before they close the application window."

DEMPSEY

Then here's one from August.

CLIP

"... 18 hundred hours. August 1st, 2013- Why I say 18 hundred hours, right? I mean, what time zone am I supposed to be in? Anyway--"

DEMPSEY

There's something out there, walking the same path everyday. If you have any scientific explanation, please contact me, quickly... It sounds like it's getting closer.

ACT TWO

Three blips.

DEMPSEY breathes heavy.

DEMPSEY

I've never ran so fast in my life. It's out there. Like, right there. Outside the compound. I heard it make its rounds. I thought it had gone, but, but it came back.

The side of the compound, it's done. This is government grade reinforced steel and concrete, and this, this thing, put a perfectly round dent in the side... it must be the size of an elephant. But I don't know how it did this. I can't fathom. I hear it when it walks by, but to make a dent this size- I was inside, and I didn't hear anything. Is this a space thing? Like sound is deafened? But, then- that can't be because I can hear it walking by the compound. I'm sorry, this all must be very confusing to you. It's confusing to me. I must be losing my mind.

I was outside. And it saw me. It turned around and started running, so I started running. Maybe it's not hostile. But I don't want to take any chances, cause, you know, it's not like you equipped me with any weaponry. I've got a million farming tools, but nothing I can use to fucking defend myself! Little oversight there, ground control!

I didn't get a good look at it. And even If I had... I wouldn't tell you. Assuming you're listening. Maybe, maybe you knew something was up here, and you sent me anyway. Maybe there never was a mission planned, or a tv series, or more astronauts. Maybe you wanted some live human bait, and decided to get someone who no one would notice was gone. Well bravo, you found me! If that's the truth, then I want you to think, was it worth it? How must it feel to know that there is someone trapped and alone with threats to her health, and you put her there, and that you just sit back and watch me go crazy like this- What good must this be accomplishing for anyone?

Please send help. And food. And people. And weapons. My health is dependent on your response.

Fast forward.

Those familiar blips.

DEMPSEY screams. We hear her struggling with something, something large trying to hold her down. It's yelling, but it's indistinguishable. A true moment of conflict and commotion.

Then, as soon as it hits our ears, it's over.

Fast forward.

Three Blips.

DEMPSEY

I went outside again. I was right. It's not friendly... Still no weapons... Supplements are low... The first aid kit here is pretty great though. It's just camped outside the compound now. I don't think it likes when I leave. So I guess, I guess this is my home now... If you've got any hot ideas, please, don't hold back.

Fast Forward.

Three blips.

Mostly quiet except for the calls of the monster in the distance.

DEMPSEY whispers.

DEMPSEY

It's circling the compound... I'm hiding under my bed. It's been trying to look in through the windows... I don't want to give it anymore information. It's better for my safety if it thinks I'm dead. Now, i'm just sort of listening...

The Monster calls out. It might be an animal noise, but it's pretty clearly saying "Dempsey."

DEMPSEY

Did you hear that!? How? No, no, no, no. Dempsey. It knows my name. That doesn't make sense! How does, how can it know my name! Did you tell it about me?

Why would you do that? What did I do to deserve this? I want to go home. Please, please, please. Why does this have to happen, it just doesn't make sense.

Fast Forward.

Three blips.

DEMPSEY

It's just outside the door. It's going to get in. This is the end apparently. Some expedition this turned out to be. I hope we never send anyone else to this stupid fucking planet.

The Monster bangs at the door.

DEMPSEY

You want to come in? Then come in! Do your worst. Eat me, or kill me, or whatever you want. I don't care anymore. Why me? Why do you feel this need to torture me? What could I have possibly done to you that warrants this sort of response!

I trusted you, ground control. I trusted you with my well being, I trusted you to protect me, to help me reach new parts of my life that I didn't think capable, to make me a better person!

Take a wide fucking look! Fall at the feet of your creation! The woman of Mars in all of her glory.

The door flies open. DEMPSEY is in hysterics. The sound of a group of men rushing in.

DOCTOR

Dempsey. Dempsey, stand down! (To his men) Sedate the inmate.

DEMPSEY cries a loud.

DOCTOR

Inmate! I need you to calm yourself. We cannot do anything for you until you calm yourself. Match my breathing.

They breathe together. Slowly, things become calm.

DOCTOR

You haven't been eating Dempsey.

DEMPSEY

I don't see the point.

DOCTOR

There's always a point with a hunger strike. What do you want this time, better food?

DEMPSEY

No, it's not-

DOCTOR

Cause last time we gave you a fork, you tried to cut open your neck.

DEMPSEY

I want to be outside. I want to be with the others.

DOCTOR

That's an unreasonable request.

DEMPSEY

I don't feel healthy. Is there something wrong with me?

DOCTOR

You're perfectly healthy, Dempsey. You know what you've done. Just do your time quietly, and then you can move past this.

DEMPSEY

It's so hard.

DOCTOR

How about some motivation? You stay strong. You eat your food. You finish your sentence without anymore outbursts, or else I'll take away the tape recorder.

DEMPSEY

NO!

DOCTOR

Calm yourself!

DEMPSEY

I'm calm.

DOCTOR

I don't want to take it away, so don't make me, you understand?

DEMPSEY

Yes.

DOCTOR

Just hang on Dempsey, and everything will turn out fine.

The DOCTOR leaves, closing the door behind him.

The button on the tape recorder is pressed.

DEMPSEY makes the familiar blip sound effect with her mouth.

Now, with a much cheerier disposition...

DEMPSEY

It's a great day for Martian-Americans. I, Jess Dempsey, have conquered the beast. It was a wild fight, but, it's gone. I must thank ground control for getting back to me in the nick of time. The ships have been repaired. The new astronauts are on their way. Hopefully they will get here in time to celebrate our new holiday, Warrior's day, commemorating Jess Dempsey's brave fight against the indigenous monsters of Mars. I hope they bring champagne this time. Until then, Jess Dempsey, over and out.

The tape recorder finds the end of the tape.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Jess Dempsey. 25 year old female. Dreamer. A woman full of resilience, curiosity, and creativity. An American explorer focused on mapping the darkest regions of her mind. Not alone in her pursuit, mind you, for the consequences of life, deserved or not, have placed many others on this particular path. Tracing uncharted depths that man is not meant to encounter, not on the Grayscale, and certainly not in real life.

END