

The Man of Words

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Moonbase Theta, Out

[This piece originally appeared as part of my weekly newsletter, The Full Lid](https://alasdairstuart.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/fairlady1.jpg)

[here \(https://us8.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=a0e2b590b7db9ab7d2927942c&id=081050ec85\).](https://alasdairstuart.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/fairlady1.jpg)

Moonbase Theta is shutting down. As the corporate enclave that owns it shifts form, and unease on Earth, begins to rise, the experiments are put in storage and the crew prepare to go into stasis for return to Earth. Crewmember Roger Bragado-Fischer sends weekly reports, closed out by the short personal message he's allowed every week for his husband, Alexandre. It's been a long tour and Roger is ready to come home. But home is further away than he thinks.

Moonbase Theta, Out (<https://monkeymanproductions.com/moonbase-theta-out/>) is a masterclass in invention, writing and acting. Invention because the format of the show, five minute reports delivered by a single voice, gives it a lightness of touch and an intimacy that benefits every aspect. This feels like a slightly blue collar science station reporting in, the sort of place that the *Nostromo* would stop off at and trade coffee and beer with. The sort of place that is perpetually a couple of hills away from Sam Bell's lonely outpost. The crew have tensions, friendships, tragedies. It's a workplace, just one a quarter of a million miles away. That familiarity lures both us, and Roger, into a false sense of security as does the bite sized nature of the episodes.

Writing, because DJ Sylvius (<https://twitter.com/MonkeymanProd>) slowly unravels Roger's world with masterful ease. What begins as minor workplace irritation becomes major world shaking events. World building is subtly baked in and even when exposition is used, Roger is literally being paid to brief people about life on the base. It all makes sense, it all feels real and earned and that makes the back half all the more effective. The final two episodes especially do a brilliant job of placing the events we've seen in a wider context and showing us not just the terror of being left behind, but the strange beauty and temptation that comes from being awake in places like this. It's not horror, not at all, but it's also a show that isn't afraid to explore the untidy edge of human emotion with clear, kind eyes.

Finally, it's a masterclass in acting. Leeman Kessler (<https://twitter.com/leemankessler?lang=en>), who I've had the privilege of *working alongside* (<https://ghostwoodsbooks.bandcamp.com/>), does extraordinary work as Roger. His warm, friendly tones instantly put you at ease and establish Roger as a fundamentally likable leading man. Then, Leeman and DJ slowly curdle them as tragedy and stress take their toll. An episode that opens without the usual introduction makes you sit up straight. An episode that closes with Roger using the personal message time to tearfully plead with Alexandre to take drastic action doubly so. Leeman is utterly convincing here as a decent, put upon man in an impossible situation. It's one of the best podcast performances I've ever heard.

Moonbase Theta, Out is everything science fiction likes to say it is. Character driven, action defined, intellectual and concerned with the human condition as well as the unfolding plot. Season 1 is available now through all good podcatchers.

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