

Operation Subtle Lies

By Jonny White

Theme: Halloween

Scene: Operation planning room in hell (like WW2 room). Operations table off to stage left, with various items (such as dolls, buildings, country flags) on it, characters with sticks to push the items around. Red lighting if lighting used. Sign on back wall "Operations". Easel or flipchart slightly right of stage centre.

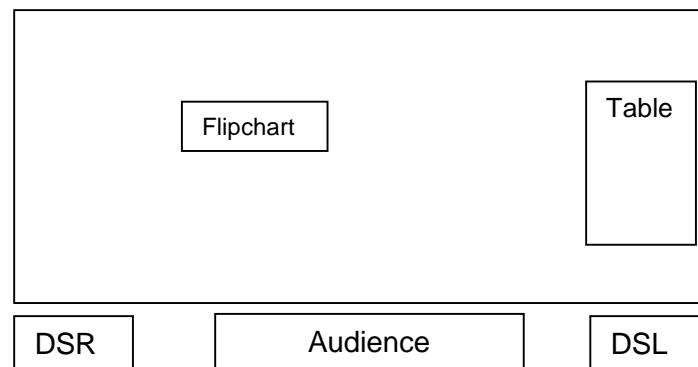
Characters Field Marshall Horrid (FMH in stage directions)

Sergeant Sulphur (SS in stage directions)

Corporal Chaos (CC in stage directions)

Private Putrid (PP in stage directions)

Other non-speaking characters busy rushing around, making the whole scene appear frenetic and energetic.



SS enter from DSR goes to flipchart. CC enter DSL, goes to flipchart, PP enters USR goes to table. CC points something out to SS then exits USL as PP takes paper from table to SS then returns USL as Horrid enters. (Total time about 12 seconds)

Enter Horrid from DSL to stand SL of flipchart.

Sulphur Ten 'shun. [*Salutes and stands back SR of flipchart*] Officer present in Operations.

Other characters have disappeared offstage, SS looks bemused

Horrid As you were. [*SS drops salute*]

[Activity starts up again]

How goes the battle plans then, Sulphur.

Sulphur Better than expected, Field Marshall Horrid Sir. We've identified some areas of enemy activity where we know we'll be able to secure a major stronghold if we plan right.

Horrid Very good Sergeant. Demonstrate, please.

Sulphur [*Leads Horrid to the flipchart, pointing as he speaks. CC SR, FMH SL*] This here is where we lost a battle only last week. Suffered minor casualties only, and we have re-grouped and planned an attack to regain that ground within the month.

Horrid And who's in charge of this part of the campaign?

Sulphur Corporal Chaos, Field Marshall Horrid, Sir.

Horrid Chaos eh? [*Pause to think*] She's a tireless worker. It's about time we promoted her. I'll see how she performs on this one. Meanwhile, get her in here, I want a word.

Sulphur Certainly, sir. [*Shouts*] Chaos. Get here.

[Enter Chaos at a run from USL, behind flipchart to stand beside SS, SR]

- Chaos** Yes Sir, what is it. *[Notices Horrid, and stands to attention, saluting]* Sorry Sir, didn't notice you there Sir, what can I do for you Sir?
- Horrid** At ease Corporal. Sergeant Sulphur tells me that you're in charge of a campaign to regain lost ground. *[SS moves forward to stand immediately in front of flipchart to get out of the way of dialogue between FMH and CC, writes something on the chart.]*
- Chaos** *[Still standing stiffly to attention]* Yes Sir. That's right Sir.
- Horrid** *[Moves across to CC, standing DS of SS, SL of CC]* Tell me a little about it, Corporal.
- Chaos** Yes Sir, thank you Sir. It's called Operation Subtle Lies, Sir. *[SS exits to table for a piece of paper]*
- Horrid** How does it work?
- Chaos** What we've done is re-invented an old festival and had it widely accepted in one part of the battle zone. It's working very well at the moment. Most people haven't recognised its dangers. What we're trying to do is establish that festival in the area we've got the problem. It's slow going, but in conjunction with a few other campaigns, I think it will work quite well.
- Horrid** Very good, Corporal. And the name of this festival?
- Chaos** Halloween, Sir.
- Horrid** Halloween. *[FMH wanders DSL as he speaks, deep in contemplation]* Ah, yes. Perfect. *[FMH turns and addresses CC. Enter SS to stand SL of flipchart. FMH still addressing CC]* Let me guess, it's the day before the enemy celebrate their festival of All Saints Day.
- Sulphur** *[Moves forward to join FMH]* That's right, Sir. We thought a little play on the words of All Hallows' Evening would go down well with the enemy, and we were right.
- Chaos** Yes Sir, the American people went for it straight away. But the problem area at the moment is the British Isles. We thought that it would be fairly simple, but they have this other stupid festival that they celebrate around that time ...
- Sulphur** ... and it's not even religious.
- Horrid** Let me guess. It's that event of theirs where they celebrate somebody trying to blow their king up with gun powder? *[Pleasant memories, FMH wanders to DSR]*
- Sulphur** That's right, Sir. *[Standing SL of flipchart]*
- Horrid** Don't worry too much about that one. *[FMH stays DSR]* That was one of mine originally. The plot failed, but it did cause a lot of confusion at the time. And I do like a nice bit of confusion. *[Pause, then returns to stand by flipchart]* What form does this Halloween take then?
- Chaos** Oh, there's all sorts, Sir. In America, it is really popular. Some people have realised that it's something to do with our side of the battle, but we've introduced it in such a way that most people think it's just a bit of a laugh...
- Sulphur** ... nothing serious, just an excuse to dress up.
- Horrid** *[Raises eyebrows]* Dressing up?
- Sulphur** Yes, sir. That was Private Putrid's idea.
- Horrid** Well bring her over here and get her to explain it to me.
- Sulphur** Sir. *[Calls offstage]* Private Putrid. Over here girl, on the double.
- Putrid** *[Enters from USL]* Yes sir? *[Notices Horrid and salutes]* Private Putrid six oh one three two two, sir.
- Horrid** As you were, Private.
- Sulphur** Tell the Field Marshall your idea about dressing up, Private.
- Putrid** Well, Sir. It seemed that the American people generally seemed to have a fascination with our forces. So when Chaos managed to get this Halloween festival established, I thought it would be a good idea if we got them to dress up like our soldiers. *[Almost an afterthought]* Some of them even dress up as the High Commander himself.
- Horrid** Really? That is good news.
- Putrid** Yes, Sir

Horrid Very good, carry on. *[Putrid exits to table]*

Chaos It's really funny, because people haven't realised that we're gradually infiltrating their lives with this sort of thing.

Sulphur They think it's just a bit of a laugh and a joke ... *[PP exit to table]*

Chaos ... and that it doesn't really matter ... *[FMH is studying the flipchart intently at this point]*

Sulphur ... whereas in fact we're gradually infiltrating them without them realising.

Horrid *[FMH turns away from flipchart and addresses SS. Taps board with left hand]* What's happening in the British Isles then?

Sulphur Well, Sir, we've got some of the major supermarkets to promote the idea by selling really cheap witches hats and devils forks and tails right next to the kids sweets.

Horrid Brilliant. Get to them through the kids. And is it going well?

Sulphur Mostly, yes. *[A bit hesitant]* Although there is resistance. *[FMH takes a step towards SS. As he delivers the next line, he is highly embarrassed and turns away DSL so that FMH hopefully won't hear the end of the sentence]* Some of the enemy's troops are organising alternative events at their churches ...

Horrid *[FMH grabs SS by shoulder with left hand and spins him round so the two are facing each other, very close. Shouts.]* And what are you doing to stop that?

Chaos *[Coming to SS rescue]* Kids love dressing up, Sir. *[FMH turns in disbelief that CC dares to interrupt. PP enters from table area to stand between SS and flipchart, SL]* So we placed a few suggestions that they could be fancy dress, and then we get people along in our battle dress. *[Hesitant]* It's a real scream.

Putrid *[Interrupting to rescue CC. FMH turns in disbelief at the interruption. SS tries to stop her talking, but FMH agrees with PP.]* It's really funny because they don't know what to do and they're just so polite that they don't say anything.
[Exit CC around back of flipchart to USL and the table.]

Horrid That's good. Make sure that these things just get accepted. Once the first phase is deemed acceptable, then we can press in with further offensives.

Sulphur Yes sir. Just like we did with the horoscopes.

Horrid Absolutely. How's the tarot campaign doing?

Sulphur Private Putrid has been looking after that one. Private? *[As PP starts to speak, SS goes to the table]*

Putrid We've managed to get most of the TV magazines to print adverts for tarot phone lines so that people keep seeing them. It's gradually becoming part of everyday life, and most people seem to think that they are okay.

Horrid Excellent. All we need to do is keep watering down the things that they believe in, and soon they won't have any power. *[CC enters from round the back of the flipchart during the next sentence to stand DSR of flipchart]* What else are you doing for Halloween?

Chaos Lanterns, Sir.

Horrid *[Turns to CC]* Lanterns?

Chaos Yes Sir.

Horrid Not that old pumpkin lantern thing we started with the Norse people centuries ago.

Chaos That's the one sir.

Putrid What was that then Sir. *[Really sucking up to FMH]* I've not heard about that one.

Horrid They thought that when anyone was killed in battle that their spirit went wandering in search of a home. We created a real spirit of fear in them.

Chaos That's a good one, isn't it. Bit of a long way from what actually happens, isn't it?

Horrid Absolutely. *[Continues to explain to PP]* We got the people to carve pumpkins in the shape of a friendly smiling face and to put candles inside to "guide" the spirits into their new resting place, the pumpkin.

- Sulphur** *[Enter to stand in between PP and FMH]* But of course, if they didn't do this we went and took over their house to scare them a bit. It was real fun that one.
- Horrid** *[Still to PP]* The Norse people were **really** scared of us. *[Turns to address SS. PP exits]* And so you've brought that tradition back to life?
- Sulphur** Yes Sir, but we've removed the fear part of it, and made it much more subtle. They think it's just a game.
- Chaos** But it's all about infiltration, Sir.
- Horrid** Excellent. Keep going. You're doing a grand job.
- Sulphur** Thank you, Sir.
- Horrid** *[Joins CC on SR side of flipchart]* And you, Corporal Chaos. If you carry on like this, there may well be a promotion in line for you.
- Chaos** That would be appreciated, Sir. *[Salutes and exits]*
- Horrid** *[To SS]* I think Operation Subtle Lies is going to be a real success. *[In deep thought, wanders across to DSL]* If we can make them think that these things are all perfectly acceptable, then we've got our foot in the door and it will take a lot of work for the enemy to push us back. *[Returns to stand SL of SS]* I can see that I can leave the campaign in your capable hands, Sulphur.
- Sulphur** Yes Sir. Thank you Sir.
- Horrid** *[Slaps SS on chest with back of right hand]* You need to start thinking about Christmas, though, Sulphur. The enemy are too strong there.
- Sulphur** *Don't worry, Sir. We've got lots of ideas for that. If you've got a minute, perhaps I could tell you about them. [Starts to exit, deep in conversation with FMH. SS US of FMH, FMH lagging slightly behind so as not to block SS] We've worked out that materialism and television are the key to infiltrating Christmas. What we're going to do is ... [Should be off stage by now]*

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