

OBLIVITY

By Rob Stringer

A scripted comedy series for radio

MISSIVES TO MARS

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

Week 3: BURNEY

BURNEY: Orpheus: transcribe.

ORPHEUS: Ready to transcribe.

BURNEY: It is dark in here. Fortunately my eyes are adept at acclimatising to the dark.

The Commander is insisting that there is tension in the base. This in itself is evident. There is always tension to a degree among my colleagues here. I, on the contrary, am capable of retaining my composure indefinitely.

Therefore I see no compelling reason to act upon this questionable exercise. According to Falconer we are not intended to send the letter that we dictate - nor will any recipient read it.

Theoretically, I could remain seated here for several minutes conducting no activity other than my involuntary internal biological processes, and no individual would be aware of my discreet mutiny.

In fact perhaps I shall, since there is nothing I wish to share with anybody, and nobody on Mars with whom I wish to communicate.

[EXTENDED PAUSE]

On the other hand, self-imposed indolence would represent a catastrophic waste of my potential. So perhaps instead I shall use this time to reflect on recent observations.

(CLEARS THROAT)

Dear Burney,

MUSIC:

SHORT INTRO MUSIC

ROB:

Missives to Mars: An Oblivity minisode.

BURNEY:

The recent grant from the Syndicated Intelligence Network for Interplanetary Science Technology and Exploratory Research, has been a boon.

It is liberating to explore whatever area of study I wish, with hearteningly expensive equipment that I may modify at will. While many of my professional counterparts are engrossed in concepts such as string theory - (IN BURNEY JOKE MODE) a theory which incidentally I find woolly at best - (TAKES A MOMENT TO ENJOY HIS JOKE, THEN SERIOUS AGAIN) I have the resources, authorisation and expertise to actually verify or discredit such phenomena.

With such means, I have the opportunity to make the most compelling and world-shattering observations known to humanity.

Hmm. There is mud on this torch.

I am receiving packages daily, and categorising them in earnest. Although progress would be faster, if I did not - quite curiously - find myself occasionally distracted; thinking not of how I will confront the fascinating challenges ahead of me, but considering instead... *Burney*.

Not myself of course - I have no tolerance for existential crises. I am referring to Burney - formerly Banks - who resides at Research Base Juliet; Burney who is my scientific associate, sole legitimate intellectual peer, and - more recently - spouse.

I am not certain why her image appears in my mind so frequently. Our marital coalition was facilitated in order to simplify scientific authorship, and serves us well. But while we are physically distant from each other I would see no reason for her to feature in my thoughts.

Until I can find out the answer, I shall continue to apply myself to simpler tasks, such as disproving the preposterous notion that there is anything other than an intrinsic dipole anisotropy to the universe. It really is as clear as the diurnal cycle.

Separate to my official research, I continue to conduct my extracurricular examination of the human behaviour within this research station.

When I first arrived at Persephone, I did not anticipate forging friendships with my colleagues here.

I am gratified to confirm that this is still the case.

In fact, our interactions have been particularly infrequent of late.

It is most probable that they recognise the significance of my work, compared to their own trivial activities, and are thusly respecting my boundaries.

I have even experimented with leaving my lab door open on occasion, to learn whether they would interpret this as an invitation to engage in casual conversation.

Thankfully, they have not.

Instead, they continue to perform their own responsibilities - or not, in the case of Lowell, who has recently spent long bouts of silence beside the window of the observation bay.

Christy appears to be conducting a sizeable excavation in the organisphere; I dropped by recently, to obtain her assistance in carrying a few substantial pieces of equipment, only to see the top of her head while she rampantly shovelled from inside the pit.

A bottle of Falconer's liquor was beside the door. I concluded it was placed there in error, so I retrieved it, in order to return it to the kitchen shelf. However the bottle never made that journey, because upon returning to my quarters, I discovered a task that warranted higher prioritisation.

I shall expound.

Earlier in the day, we had held a ritual of sorts to commemorate the deceased rodent. I was present, as I had intended to study the process of grief, and accordingly, I observed several clear manifestations of psychological distress: notably the decorative brassica, and lightly marinated oriental lilies.

I was fortunate not to have been experiencing hunger at the time. In fact for several days now I have found my appetite to be - similar to the meal in question - stemmed.

I have also observed a light sweat on my palms - despite the temperature being set to the optimal 23 degrees - and a perceptibly quickened heart rate.

My general health is excellent, so I am yet to identify the root cause of these physiological anomalies. Perhaps Burney may be able to offer an explanation; I will consult her next time we make contact.

I am not sure when this will be.

Returning to the day in question: I was in the process of returning Falconer's liquor, as mentioned previously, when I stopped by the quarters I share with Lowell, remembering that the room still contained the now uninhabited cage of the deceased mammal. I resolved to place the item in storage, as it was now clearly superfluous, and I was also interested in testing a theory that my unexplained physical complaints may have been the result of an allergy to members of the order rodentia.

I had reached the corridor when Lowell was behind me imploring me to return it to our quarters. I was on the cusp of highlighting the irrationality of this request, when Christy and Falconer approached either side of us. Falconer appeared somewhat inattentive and apathetic, while Christy was pallid, and encased in earth, like an ambulatory cadaver.

I was dwelling on this peculiar panorama, when Christy unceremoniously pulled the cage away - with a force, might I add, that was precipitously close to afflicting my hands with friction burn, had it not been for the aforementioned sweat which fortuitously lubricated my palms - and offered the item back to Lowell.

Lowell's response to this outrageous act was to extend a smile into a fixed rictus, and declare himself to be indulging in tomfoolery.

Upon hearing this, Christy - rather than accepting this turn of events as closure on the matter as I'm sure the rest of us did - bellowed something unnecessarily melodramatic, then tossed the cage a full three feet - before striding back in the direction of the organisphere.

Even I could not explain this behaviour; although it did call to mind similar puzzling occurrences from the place back on Mars that I once called home.

Having a sizeable immediate family, I benefited from an embarrassment of case studies for my childhood dalliance in social anthropology: indeed, what with that, my after-school quadratic equations club; and my attempts to revolutionise the grading system for gravel, I was quite the renaissance youth.

I remember one such occasion when my siblings and I were presented with a number of Comrade Clarence action figures. My brother, Burney, appropriated Sky Shooter Comrade Clarence; my brother Burney seized Canyon Combat Comrade Clarence; and my sister, Burney, sequestered the Merciless Marine Comrade Clarence.

I naturally coveted the Sand Sniper Comrade Clarence, intending to replace the laser rifle accessory with a miniature microscope of my own design. I do enjoy sand.

Problematically, this model was also the preferred choice of my other brother, Burney. I was ready to put my case forward, but soon agreed to relinquish the figure following a demonstration of Burney's physical prowess, and my first introduction to the experience known colloquially as 'a dead leg'.

During these negotiations, the range of action figures had been reduced to one: Financial Advisor Comrade Clarence.

I will not pretend that I was thrilled with the outcome, but in the days following, I made the best of the situation and immersed my Comrade Clarence in activities befitting his skills. It was on the third day, while we were occupied by a detailed expenses ledger, when I realised my brother, Burney, had stopped playing with Sand Sniper Comrade Clarence and was watching me.

He approached, I flinched - expecting further tutorials in the art of limb-smiting - when he unexpectedly commandeered my Comrade Clarence, and replaced it with the Sand Sniper.

PAUSE

To this day I have not settled on an explanation.

PAUSE

Speaking of irrationality, Falconer continues to be an interesting subject for observation. Life at the base has certainly become more interesting since her arrival.

It may cheer her to know that she is not directly accountable for *all* of the recent disruption we have experienced. However I do not think I will communicate this to her yet, as it is much more instructive to study her when she believes her circumstances to be of her own doing.

PAUSE

Burney would not approve of my methods.

PAUSE

Well. I believe I have remained here for a sufficient amount of time. I shall retrieve Lowell from the observation room window for his opportunity.

Orpheus, delete.

ORPHEUS: Message deleted.

BURNEY: Ah - before I go.

FX: SOUND OF TORCH BEING TAKEN APART

BURNEY: If I just open this, and tweak that, and shift this: There. One repaired torch.

FX: CLICK CLICK

BURNEY: What would they do without me?

END