

You Know You Have a Permanent Piece of My Medium-Sized American Heart

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You Know You Have a Permanent Piece of My Medium-Sized American Heart

by [tricatular](#)

Summary

“Hey *Hermes*!” The ambient suspicion level in the Rec ratcheted up significantly. Kapoor was disturbingly cheerful. “We’ve sent you some mission updates in the data dump, but Mitch and I wanted to personally let you know—” Mitch visibly rolled his eyes in the background. “—That thanks to some...strong suggestions from the White House, and on Annie and Director Sanders’ recommendation, we’ve started releasing Watney’s Mars logs to the public.”

Notes

I loved your prompt and had a lot of fun writing this, so I hope you enjoy this, iamtheenemy!

Title is from The National's "Looking for Astronauts." Thank you to everyone who helped with the images, fake usernames, betaing, and general cheerleading, you know who you are! ETA: And now I can be more specific! Thank you to neutrophilic for the beta, and to hoekitchen for invaluable audiencing, ideas, and lolz.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

These were the things Mark Watney brought back to the *Hermes* from Mars:

- An EVA suit that had seen better days;
- Some broken ribs;
- Probably a lot of Martian dust;
- His own personal miasma of haven't-bathed-in-weeks stench;
- A habit of talking to himself;
- And a hard drive containing the backups for the Hab's video feeds, his own logs, and all the data on the experiments he ran.

Mark had felt pretty virtuous about that last one. If NASA was going to spend literally hundreds of millions of dollars to rescue him, he figured the least he could do was make sure they got some good science out of it, especially since he had to leave all the samples behind. Given that he definitely didn't fill out the EVA suit the way he used to when they first fitted him for it, there was more than enough room to shove a hard drive in there, and secure it to the inside with some duct tape. If the drive broke or got fried, well, NASA couldn't say he hadn't tried. There was another set of backups still at the Hab, so Ares 4 could always swing by and pick them up if NASA wanted the data badly enough.

Honestly though, the data hadn't been that high on Mark's priority list, what with the ever increasing list of exciting possible ways to die as rescue got closer. By the time he was welcomed back into the loving, EVA suit-clad bosom of his crew, Mark had only had just enough presence of mind to mumble something about the hard drive to Johanssen, lest they space his EVA suit to get rid of the smell. He then proceeded to forget about the hard drive amid the pleasant haze of painkillers, proper nutrition, and glorious, glorious human contact.

A few months into the trip back home, Mark kind of regretted having brought the hard drive back at all.

Jamie @jamiebb2016

what are we supposed to do without daily updates on Mark Watney's status? @NASA

it was part of my ROUTINE after two years: check email, check Twitter, check the weather report, see if Watney's still alive on Mars @NASA

now what am I supposed to do? Just trust that he's chilling in zero G on the #Hermes???
@NASA

Day 2 post-rescue:

“Ms. Montrose! What is Watney’s medical condition? Is Dr. Beck able to provide the medical care he needs aboard the Hermes?”

“His condition is stable. Watney and Dr. Beck have authorized us to release the following medical information: Watney is malnourished and exhausted, but aside from some broken ribs and some other superficial injuries, he’s doing okay. Dr. Beck will be able to further stabilize Watney’s condition, and get him back to Earth healthy and whole.”

Day 3 post-rescue:

“Was the Hermes able to retrieve any of the data from Watney’s work on Mars? Did Watney preserve his mission logs?”

“Watney did bring back a hard drive containing all of the data and logs generated by him during his time on Mars. The Hermes sysop Johanssen is working with Mission Control to have that data transmitted back to Earth using NASA’s Deep Space Network. It’s a huge volume of data, and it will take some time to reach us here on Earth. I’ll let Badri Younes from Space Communications give you the numbers on that.”

Day 4 post-rescue:

“Will Watney’s mission logs be released to the public?”

“Based on our initial review of the logs we’ve received so far, some of Watney’s logs do fall under NASA’s privacy protections, and they will need to be edited for content. That’s all I can tell you right now.”

Day 5 post-rescue:

“Will Watney resume his duties on board the Hermes?”

“As soon as he gets medical clearance from Dr. Beck, Watney will resume light duty.”

Day 7 post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“They’re still being transmitted to NASA.”

Day 11 post-rescue:

“Does Watney have something other than disco to listen to now?”

“NASA is not privy to the contents of Watney’s music library.”

“But—”

“I’m sure he’s listening to something other than disco.”

Day 15 post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“They’re still being transmitted to us, and NASA is reviewing those we’ve already received for classified and sensitive but unclassified material before releasing them to the general public.”

Day 19 post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“NASA is still reviewing them.”

Day 22 post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“Still reviewing.”

Day 24 post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“Seriously, there are months’ worth of entries, we are still reviewing them.”

Day 27: post-rescue:

“What’s the status of Watney’s logs?”

“Oh my—I will turn this goddamn press conference around, I swear to God—”

“Um, that’s alright Annie, sorry—We’ll be releasing Watney’s logs on a rolling basis.”

The crew were assembled in the Rec waiting on the latest data dump from NASA. After attending to assorted repairs and Mark's pressing medical needs, things had finally settled into what passed for routine on the *Hermes*, which meant Mark felt secure in making a nuisance of himself. It would probably help his cause if he wasn't sprawled on the couch, way more tired by the trip from the bunk he was sharing with Martinez than he should be, but he had to work with what he had.

"You're a cruel man, Dr. Beck! Seriously, I'm fine, clear me for light duty!"

Beck crossed his arms and frowned at Mark. "No."

"Commander—"

"No. It's Beck's call," said Lewis firmly, not even taking her eyes off the computer console where she and Johanssen were waiting on the data dump. "And honestly, I don't want you blowing anything up."

"You blow up an airlock once—"

"You also kind of blew up the Hab that one time, dude," interrupted Martinez.

"Well I don't have to make water out of hydrazine here, so you don't need to worry about it! Also you guys blew up the *Hermes*."

Johanssen stopped typing and frowned over at him. Now both she and Beck were frowning at him, which almost warmed Mark's heart with how couple-y it was. "A very small part of the *Hermes*. It was a controlled blast."

"Beck, come on, I managed to get my ass off Mars in worse shape than this, can't you let me in the lab? Please? Pretty please? I'm eating all my vegetables and disgusting nutrient shakes and everything! Let me do science!"

Beck put on his serious doctor face, and pretended to consider it. "Well, now that you put it that way—no."

Vogel came over to flop down next to Mark and gave him a bracing pat on the back.

"Consider it a vacation, Watney!"

"I am literally going to go space crazy, there are only so many touching letters and well wishes from Earth a man can read before his thoughts turn to the siren call of the void."

Beck came to sit down on his other side. "Space crazy? There's a prescription for that, you know."

"No, no there isn't—" Mark's next words were swallowed up by Beck's unfairly soft sweater as Beck enveloped him in a hug.

The crew was really never going to let Mark live down all the ridiculous shit he had said while high on painkillers, adrenaline, and the euphoria of human contact. A not insignificant percentage of said ridiculous shit had been about how cuddly Beck looked in his comfy looking sweaters. Mark would have been more embarrassed about it, but Beck really did give pretty great hugs that really did make him feel better, and he knew for a fact that “positive social interaction, including physical contact” was part of his treatment plan.

“Is it group hug time?” asked Martinez.

“Not if you’re involved, I don’t want you breaking any more of Watney’s ribs,” said Beck, and the hug turned vaguely diagnostic as Beck pulled back a little and ran his hands over Mark’s back and ribs. “Are you doing the stretches like I told you to? Because you have all kinds of muscle knots—”

“I’m doing the damn stretches, Dr. Bossypants!”

Johanssen gasped and said, “Excuse you, that’s Dr. McDreamy to you—oh, data dump is here!”

They all made their way over to the console as Johanssen went about directing everyone’s mail to their personal stations, and then they were left with whatever the latest morale-boosting and/or scolding message from NASA was. It was a video, and Johanssen opened it to show a scowling Mitch Henderson and an earnest Dr. Vincent Kapoor.

“Hey *Hermes*!” The ambient suspicion level in the Rec ratcheted up significantly. Kapoor was disturbingly cheerful. “We’ve sent you some mission updates in the data dump, but Mitch and I wanted to personally let you know—” Mitch visibly rolled his eyes in the background. “—That thanks to some...strong suggestions from the White House, and on Annie and Director Sanders’ recommendation, we’ve started releasing Watney’s Mars logs to the public.”

“Also we’re pretty sick of the media bugging us about it. Annie was about to murder the entire press corps,” added Mitch.

“I’m sure your logs will be a source of inspiration to everyone on Earth who worked towards your rescue and hoped for your safe return.” And there was the morale-boosting portion of the message... “Once we’ve bleeped out all of the cursing.” ...followed swiftly by the scolding.

“Stay safe, *Hermes*. Henderson and Kapoor out.”

Mark put his head in his hands and moaned, “No. No no no no no.”

“Watney, you gave Johanssen the logs. You knew people would eventually see them,” said Lewis.

“And NASA’s a public institution, we release all the non-classified stuff,” added Johanssen.

“I was hoping it would take longer! And surely we could classify *some* of them.” A highlights reel of all the ridiculous shit he had done in front of the Hab cameras played in Mark’s head.

“So...did those logs document your descent into going totally space crazy or what?” asked Martinez.

“There is no shame in going space crazy when you are stranded literally millions of miles from home with slim chance of rescue,” said Vogel.

Lewis sighed and said, “Can we please stop saying space crazy like it’s an actual thing.”

Beck looked actually concerned, which instantly made him Mark’s favorite. “Hey, is there stuff you’d consider confidential medical information in those? Because you know any communications with the flight surgeon are under doctor-patient confidentiality, and I’m sure we could figure out some loophole—”

“No, it’s not that. Though I mean, I did staple myself shut that one time.”

“I’m proud of you for that.” Mark couldn’t really tell if Beck was being sincere or sarcastic.

“Thank you, Dr. Beck. Just—I guess the logs got a little personal, at times. And embarrassing.”

“And you assumed you wouldn’t be alive to see people’s reactions to them.”

“Beth!” hissed Beck, to eyerolling from Johanssen.

Johanssen was right. Mark hadn’t ever given up hope that he’d survive and be rescued, not really. But when you kept a log while stranded as the sole inhabitant of a planet millions of miles from home, it was next to impossible to avoid thinking of said log as your last will and testament, one long goodbye letter. The NASA shrinks he’d gotten emails from through Pathfinder hadn’t put it that way exactly, sensitive as they were to the necessity of keeping Mark’s morale up, but they had encouraged him to keep up with the log. It was more or less the closest thing he got to social interaction that wasn’t letters on a screen while he was stuck on Mars. Also, if he was talking to a camera and therefore a future audience, then he wasn’t talking to himself like a crazy person, right? That’s what Mark had told himself, at any rate. And, he remembered, he had included permission to release the logs when he had done the last backup.

“Listen man, whatever crazy shit you did or said in those logs, I doubt any of it’s gonna surprise Mission Control. They knew what they were getting into with us,” said Martinez.

The crew all took a moment to collectively recall their many, many psych evals and their isolation training exercise debriefing.

“Yeah, that’s true,” said Mark.

“Mark, if NASA or Congress or anyone else gets on your ass about your conduct while stranded on another planet, they will have to come through me first. You survived and you

completed as many of the mission's primary scientific objectives as a single person could," said Lewis, using her Command Voice and everything. She looked like some terrifyingly stern marble statue of a goddess.

That had definitely been one of the more embarrassing things Mark had disclosed to the crew while out of his right mind. It was one of the slightly less embarrassing things though, because Vogel had whispered, "mein Gott, she does."

"Heck, we're probably not even gonna be court-martialed for mutinying! Because we are goddamn heroes!" Martinez held up his hands for high fives, and Vogel and Mark obliged him.

Mark sure hoped people still thought he was a hero after Episode 20 of the Mark Watney Disco Karaoke Hour, Live from Mars.

While manned missions to Mars were kind of old hat by the time Ares 3 rolled around, Ares 3 had one big advantage over the impressively heroic and trailblazing Ares 1 and Ares 2 missions: a slick and thorough social media presence. The Office of Public Affairs had hired some new young hotshot soon after the Ares 3 mission directive had been announced, and shortly thereafter, Ares Live and the Ares Archive were born.

There had been some grumbling along the lines of "we're running a goddamn space program, not a reality show," in the halls of NASA bureaucracy, but Vincent Kapoor and Annie Montrose had thrown their support behind the new Ares 3 media team. Vincent had his eyes on Ares 6 already, and he knew the public support that good PR could garner would be crucial to getting funding for a new set of Ares missions. Annie for her part was all for anything that could be more easily sold to the public than dry facts and figures.

"Let's be real, this is the hottest group of astronauts we've ever had, and we should take advantage of that PR-wise," was what Annie had told Teddy Sanders before crew training started.

Vincent had looked pained. "Annie, they're all extremely accomplished in their fields and their looks weren't at all a factor in their selection—"

"Yeah, sure, whatever, they're all very smart and competent. They're also pretty damn photogenic and not horribly awkward in front of the cameras." Teddy and Vincent had shared a wince at the reminder of the Ares 2 Commander Mike Jones, who bless him, was a superlative astronaut, but could barely string three words together in front of a camera when he wasn't in space. Annie continued, "Let the new kid in Public Affairs work her magic. We don't need cameras on the crew 24-7 or anything. We can take some basic handheld footage, plus the video logs NASA already has, and just keep up a steady stream of content for social media."

The Ares Live content had been more successful than NASA had ever hoped for, thanks to the combination of the Office of Public Affairs' savvy social media team, the camera-friendly Ares 3 crew, and the crew's easy, teasing rapport with each other. The Internet loved the little videos of the crew that followed them through training to launch, and the rolling release of declassified material was always followed by a couple of days of trending hashtags. Of course, all the social media saturation had kind of ended up biting NASA in the ass when the Ares 3 mission went so FUBAR. The Ares Live program had given people *expectations* when it came to the flow of information from Ares 3 and NASA. The kind of expectations where CNN had an entire daily half-hour long show dedicated to the status of the rescue mission, and the Watneywatch site NASA set up crashed from the load on the servers. So really, no one at NASA should have been that surprised when the release of Watney's logs was treated like the newest season of LOTL dropping on Netflix (*#mashley 4ever!!! #LOTL*), complete with people whining about spoilers.

Charlene @sexymomma1992

some of us haven't gotten to Sol 160 yet, please be considerate and tag your #Watneylog spoilers

Mike Yang @boldlygoing

holy shit Mark Watney is the most hardcore botanist in history, he stapled himself shut #Watneylog

Deshawn Jones @deshjo

I have never been so invested in potatoes in my life #Watneylog

Leila F @leilaf12

Eating mashed potatoes and watching the #Watneylog, best friday night or BEST friday night???

A. Stronaut @Aresstan

HOW MANY TIMES CAN YOU BLOW YOURSELF UP, WATNEY #Watneylog

Marv Griffin @MarvinTheMartian

they're potatoes grown in poop. Poop potatoes. Pootatoes. Guessing Watney also probably thought of that comedic gem #Watneylog

Ana Munoz @acaligal

well this is surprisingly educational #Watneylog

Neil DeGrasse Tyson @Neiltyson

if you want to see the math on how Watney managed to blow himself up making water out of hydrazine, tune in for this week's episode of Star Talk #Watneylog

wint @dril

this movie sucks, where are the aliens #Watneylog

Avery Lee @av_lee_

So glad we've got spoilers for #Watneylog, couldn't deal with the suspense if I didn't know he survived

M.M.K. @mmmmkaye

I am so sick of disco #Watneylog

53 Ways Mark Watney Almost Died on Mars

How is he still alive. How.

25 Potato Recipes You Could Totally Make on Mars (If You're Mark Watney)

All you need is a microwave and/or a bunsen burner!

What Mark Watney's Time on Mars Can Teach Us About Earth, Mars, and the Solar System

Watney's broken all kinds of records, and his experience can teach us a lot about how humanity can survive off Earth.

Pathfinder: the Real Hero of Mars

Yeah, yeah, Mark Watney is a badass. But let's celebrate the best little robot that could too.

Spotify Playlist: Songs to Rock Out to On Mars #Watneylog

By Spotify

Including artists: David Bowie, Donna Summer, Muse, The Beatles, The Bee Gees....

Popular Right Now on Youtube

What's Taters, Precious? #Watneylog style [A 10:52 supercut of all the different ways Watney eats potatoes, set to a looping version of the Mashed Taters remix from Lord of the Rings]

Mark Watney's Stayin' Alive [A 6:45 supercut of all of Watney's science mishaps, explosive and otherwise, set to the Bee Gees' Stayin' Alive]

yourspacegirl:

[A gif set of the weird random shit Mark rambles about in the logs]

Even astronauts shitpost, amazing, this is worth at least \$50 million of NASA's budget

handsomeandtalented:

Beautiful Cinnamon Roll Too Good For This World, Too Pure

NEWS IN BRIEF • Local • Food • ISSUE 50-03 • Jan 23, 2014



This is a real throwback meme you guys (only 90s kids etc etc), but I couldn't resist.

A few days after getting the data dump from NASA, Beck finally relented and let Mark return to light duty on half-shifts. Mark was totally planning on whining and agitating for a return to full duty, but then two days of light duty basically knocked him on his ass. Beck had delivered yet another stern lecture, only this time he followed it up with his stupidly effective puppy dog eyes thing, and not a single crew member could hold up against Beck when he pulled that shit. Then on top of that, Lewis had made Mark all verklempt when she very seriously said, “Mark, you’re not alone any more. Let us carry some of the load. We’re your team, and that’s what we’re here for.”

Mars, Mark was beginning to realize, had fucked him up.

Physically, sure, he knew that. He knew the whole experience had placed a tremendous amount of stress on his body and he knew there was nothing to do but take the time to heal. He could do that now that he had enough food and lived in close proximity to a fussy physician. He was slowly but surely gaining back the weight and muscle mass he had lost in those lean Sols on Mars. Life back in full Earth gravity was probably going to seriously suck for a while, and he’d be a guinea pig for the effects of prolonged habitation on Mars, and that was all fine, Mark could deal with that.

Mars would not fucking leave his head though, and Mark wasn't really cool with that. He had too much fucking time on his hands, and all the brain processes he’d had to devote to the singular mission of STAY ALIVE on Mars were running on idle now. Mark didn’t do that well, running on idle. There’d been a few nights he’d ended up roaming the *Hermes*, hyper alert to any sign or possibility of life-threatening damage to the ship. Johanssen had caught him at it once, and the next day, she’d handed Mark a tablet with all the realtime diagnostics of the *Hermes*, a soothing flow of numbers and charts and readouts that all said *we’re not gonna die, we’re not gonna die, we’re not gonna die*. It helped.

When Mark returned to his botany experiments (dutifully maintained by Beck and Vogel in Mark’s absence), he was made aware of yet another way Mars wouldn’t leave him: Mark really could not stop narrating his experiments and thinking out loud. He’d gotten too damned used to constantly talking to the Hab cameras or dictating his logs, and now he was going to be one of those people who talked to themselves constantly and made random passersby uncomfortable.

Mark said as much during the next session of “resocialize Watney and provide him with positive social interaction” in the Rec. Martinez just shushed him while patting his hair, which was patronizing, but also felt really nice, so Mark let it pass. Martinez was today’s designated provider of human contact, and he made for a pretty good person-sized teddy bear.

“Isn’t talking to yourself a sign of genius or whatever?” Johanssen asked. She and Beck were playing some card game, which mostly seemed to be an excuse to have adorable sexual tension at each other.

“It’s also a sign of schizophrenia,” said Beck, the buzzkill. Johanssen’s flat look made him backpedal. “Which Mark totally does not have at all, and I know that, because I am a doctor.”

“As post-traumatic quirks go, talking to yourself is pretty benign, Watney,” put in Lewis. She frowned thoughtfully into the distance, then said, “There was this one guy in the Arctic

Science Program who manned one of the Antarctic weather stations on his own for a year. We didn't have the funding to send someone with him, so he was alone, and the nearest manned research station was three hours away. Part of the ice shelf the station was on cracked one day, so we got sent to rescue him before the whole thing floated out to sea. He seemed fine when we picked him up, but all during the trip back, he'd burst into these high-pitched giggling fits. It was a little unnerving."

"I will take you narrating your botany experiments over that, Watney," said Vogel, and everyone else nodded in agreement.

"You didn't feel crazy when you did it on Mars though, did you?" asked Martinez.

"No, it was for *posterity* then."

"Well, there you go. Keep a new log for posterity," said Vogel.

"Yeah, I've done a few things for Ares Live and sent them back with the uplink, we all have," added Johanssen.

"And we all sent a super touching video for your memorial service!"

Lewis nodded. "Your memorial is really nice by the way, they sent us pictures."

In his more morbid moments, Mark had thought about what his funeral had been like, but somehow, he hadn't considered that there would be a physical memorial too. Would it be weird and narcissistic if he went to visit it when he was back on Earth? He wondered if they had already chiseled off the death date. Would he get in trouble if he did some strategic vandalizing of his memorial? Some graffiti saying FUCK YOU, MARS maybe. Or no, NASA was constantly on his ass about cursing as it was, better to go with SUCK IT, MARS.

A sudden terrible thought occurred to him. "Please tell me there's not a statue of me."

"No statue, but your face is more or less plastered everywhere apparently. My sister said she hoped we got you back alive and all, but she was sick of seeing your face all over the place," said Beck.

"But it's such a handsome face!" The rest of the crew groaned, and Martinez wrangled Mark into a light headlock and noogie.

"You know what the media cycle is like, everyone on Earth is probably already bored of you now that you're not in immediate mortal peril," said Lewis, and with that, positive social interaction time was over, and Mark tried not to worry too much about what reception awaited him on Earth.

Everyone on Earth was definitely not bored of Mark Watney. The news cycle had moved on for the most part, sure, but the internet had not, and neither had the diehard press corps who

asked Annie endless questions about whatever dangerous or exciting or just plain weird thing Mark had done in the latest batch of logs released by NASA. As if that wasn't enough, the logs endeared Watney even more to a public that had liked him a lot already. Watney could hardly have done better if Annie had coached him: he was funny, he talked through what he was doing, he balanced work and play about as well as you could expect of an astronaut stranded on a hostile planet far from home. If, on occasion, the logs made clear that his total solitude pressed heavy on him, and if he gave into frustration and cursed volubly sometimes, and if his humor took some uncomfortably dark turns...well, no one blamed him for it, and it only made people love Watney more.

Really, given Annie's nightmare scenarios of Watney offing himself in despair or going totally space crazy, she couldn't complain much about Watney's logs. She did wish there was a lot less singing along to disco, for which she supposed she should blame Commander Lewis. And, as she got further along in her review of the logs, she wished Watney hadn't wandered around the Hab naked so much. At least she wasn't the poor intern in the Media Relations department who had to pixellate Watney's dick. There was no pixellating Watney's increasingly emaciated condition though, and as the later logs were released, the social media reactions turned away from jokes and excitement to more sober admiration and concern. There was no hiding or sugarcoating the toll of Watney's dire circumstances.

Nicole T. @here_for_it

Never thought I'd be crying over potatoes, and yet here I am #Watneylog

Malik Jones @the_king_jones

Do I even want to know how much weight Watney lost while on the potato diet? :/
#Watneylog

Zoe Smith @lamb_chop

I am really not liking watching Watney eat less and less and get thinner and thinner
#Watneylog

Katie @DrLadybug

He's out of KETCHUP?! Jesus christ, I'd have taken a walk outside without a spacesuit on
#Watneylog

From the transcript of Dr. Ramesh Srinivasan's TED Talk, The Science of Solitude:

We know the psychological and physical consequences of solitary confinement on Earth, but what about long periods of isolation off Earth? Mark Watney has pioneered a lot of firsts and broken a lot of records for humanity, one of them being longest time spent off Earth, alone. Based on his logs, Watney coped with the isolation better than anyone could expect and

demonstrated remarkable, heroic resilience. But humans are profoundly social animals, and we now know that even relatively short periods of solitary confinement can have profound negative effects. The Supreme Court ruled solitary confinement to be cruel and unusual punishment in 2020, and prohibited its use in prisons. Does it make a difference, to be stranded instead of confined? What can Watney's experience tell us about how humans handle such isolation?

Brody Boo @brodyboo

You guys, I just really need to give Watney a hug. Like, a hug and some soup and a hand knit sweater. He's looking real rough. #Watneylog

Zhangchen @catfarmer

I am so worried about Mark Watney. He looks so skinny? Is he getting proper rest up there in space??? #Watneylog

Neil Degrasse Tyson @Neiltyson

As a scientist, I am comfortable saying that the modifications to the MAV that got Watney up to Hermes were INSANE. #Watneylog

Mona Monsef @aerospacefan

HOW DID WATNEY SURVIVE THAT ASCENT???? 12 GS HOLY SHIT #Watneylog

Robert Downey Jr @robertdowneyjr

Talk about heroes. Mark Watney Iron Manning his way off Mars, with A BOX OF SCRAPS #Watneylog

(Not a literal box of scraps, I know) Anyway, Watney is a goddamn superhero. Glad he's headed home safe. #Watneylog

57 Reasons We Are Worried About Mark Watney

Like, is he okay out there? So much insane shit happened to him on Mars!

10 Ways the *Hermes* Rescue Mission Could Have Failed Horribly

Because it was super close to failing horribly, oh my god.

28 Things WebMD and Wikipedia Told Us Could Be Wrong with Mark Watney After All That Time on Mars and Now We Are Really CONCERNED

Cancer from weird space radiation? Bone density problems from low gravity? We're just really concerned.

From BoingBoing:

I was going to write a Serious Article about the tremendous combination of innovative science and engineering and badassery that got Mark Watney safely on board the Hermes, and I will definitely write that article at some point, but right now, after watching basically all of Watneylog, all I can manage is unseemly handwringing and weeping over Mark Watney's mental and physical wellbeing.

Jesus, if Annie had thought the public was over-invested before...it was like everyone had turned into Watney's overbearing, fretting grandmother. Before Watney was rescued, all the public had had to go on had been the satellite imagery, the text contents of Watney's messages back to Earth (necessarily limited, given Watney's limited leisure time), and all the speculation of everyone stuck on Earth. Now that everyone was *seeing* the effects of the ordeal on Mark...well, Annie was suddenly fielding a lot of anxious questions about Watney's physical and mental health. The BuzzFeed offices appeared to have collapsed into a mass of hysterical worry, the New York Times was gently chiding NASA for not being more forthcoming with updates on Watney, Fox News was concern trolling about Watney's mental health, and The Daily Show had used a clip from Watney's logs as their Moment of Zen more nights than not. Annie really hoped they all simmered the fuck down once Watney was safely on Earth, otherwise Watney was going to turn into a recluse to avoid all this smothering concern.

So while the *Hermes* had sent a couple short videos of Watney—one just post-rescue showing the crew reuniting, and one of the crew thanking everyone at NASA, JPL, and on Earth for their support—it clearly wasn't enough to ease the public's Watney obsession. She brought it up at her next meeting with Teddy and Vincent.

"We need Watney to start keeping a video log again."

"What for? He's back on the *Hermes*, he can submit his reports as good old-fashioned paperwork now," said Vincent, scowling a little, undoubtedly at the thought of his own mountains of paperwork.

"You think if we get a new set of logs from Watney, the press and the public will stop hounding you about how Mark is doing?" asked Teddy.

"Yes. Have you *seen* some of the reactions on the internet? Barring group therapy for like the entire planet, showing them Watney is alive and well and cracking terrible jokes on the *Hermes* is the best we can do."

"Well, it's up to Watney. We can ask him, certainly. Vincent?"

“It’s a good idea. But remember when we wanted him to take a photo with Pathfinder? Remember the photo we got back?”

Ugh, thought Annie. She still couldn’t believe that Watney pulling a douchey Fonz pose was the thing that would live on in history books for probably literal centuries. God knew what Watney would send back in his *Hermes* logs. At least the rest of the *Hermes* crew was with him. Lewis, at least, would keep the logs from getting too ridiculous, right?

“We’ve got another video message from NASA,” said Johanssen, eliciting a chorus of groans from the crew and a huff of annoyance from the commander. They all appreciated the help in keeping the *Hermes* from falling apart on its way back home, but all the backseat driving from NASA got on the crew’s nerves.

Commander Lewis was Mark’s designated human contact for today’s Rec time, which Mark had thought would be weirder than it ended up being. Lewis wasn’t a touchy-feely person, it was true. That was fine though, it wasn’t like Mark needed constant cuddles: she was holding Mark’s hand, and she was pressed along Mark’s side on the Rec’s couch, just solidly, soothingly present. It felt nice.

Mark had thought he’d be used to it by now, but no. The novelty of human contact had yet to wear off, and it had been weeks. He had mentioned it to one of the NASA shrinks he was emailing with, and she had said it was nothing to worry about, it was the natural result of having pushed down and ignored his innate need for human contact while on Mars. Still, he felt vaguely strange about how intensely grateful he was for the strength of Lewis’s slim, pale hand holding his. It was such a small thing, after all, to hold someone’s hand. But the cool slide of her thumb making pointless little circles on the skin of his knuckles was somehow the best thing he had felt all day.

He snapped back to attention as he heard Kapoor say his name.

“Mark, we’d like to request that you continue to keep a video log on the *Hermes*, as your duties and recovery allow, of course.”

“Wait, is this because they think I’m crazy?” Lewis squeezed his hand, in warning or comfort, he wasn’t sure which.

“...The response to the logs we’ve already released has been tremendous. We’ve sent along some of the responses and well wishes for you, Mark, and the public is very anxious to hear from—”

Mitch interrupted Vincent’s earnest request with the kind of real talk that made him the Ares 3 crew’s favorite person at NASA. “What Vince means is that this entire planet is full of neurotic wrecks who fancy themselves worse worrywarts than my Nana, God rest her soul. So send along some nice little videos so people stop asking us if ‘that Mark Watney is getting

enough to eat, he's gotten so skinny,' and 'is he warm enough in space, it's so cold in space.'” The crew burst into laughter at the creaky old lady voice Mitch had affected.

“Is it really that bad?” asked Martinez.

Johanssen flipped through the responses Vincent had sent on her screen, and grimaced a little. “Oh, it's that bad. I mean, it's sweet. But yeah. We should probably do some more videos. Commander?”

“Like Kapoor said, as your duties allow. And hey, now you won't be talking to yourself, Mark! You've got an audience anxious to hear from you.”

“Anxious to hear from you,” was kind of an understatement, Mark realized as he went through the sampling of news articles and internet reactions to his logs that NASA had sent along. Sure, he'd gotten emails from assorted famous people, loved ones, and earnest children while on Mars, courtesy Pathfinder, but they'd been heavy on the inspirational, “let's keep Watney's morale up lest he take a walk outside without a helmet on,” end of things. And the whole #BringHimHome thing had been touching, but people would have done that for any astronaut stuck on Mars. Now the emails he was getting on the *Hermes* were only slightly less concerned with keeping his morale up, they were just sort of embarrassingly congratulatory, like he'd won the gold medal in survival. So while he'd known basically the entire planet had been invested in his survival...somehow it was different knowing it versus reading the reactions of total strangers who were intensely concerned about him.

Because they were concerned about *him*, Mark Watney. Not the abstract idea of him, not a generic stranded astronaut, but actual Mark Watney. That, Mark supposed, was what happened when you let people watch what amounted to your diary. Mark felt weird about it.

“I feel weird about this,” he said, as he scrolled through the articles and tweets on his tablet while laying in bed at the end of his shift. He was still sharing a bunk with Martinez, though they weren't sharing the actual bunk any more. They'd tried that for a couple nights, but neither of them were small men and it was just uncomfortable, so Martinez was on the floor in deference to Mark's whole fucked up ribs and back situation.

“What, your legions of adoring fans obsessing over your logs?”

“Yeah.”

Martinez must have heard something in his voice, because he actually sat up to peer at Mark.

“Seriously man, if you don't want the rest of the logs released, if there's stuff in there you don't want people to see, we'll tell NASA to lock that shit down.”

“No, that's not it. It's fine, everyone loves all the embarrassing shit I did.” Mark fell silent. He always had something to say, he never fucking shut up, people had been telling him that

since he was a kid. But he didn't know how to say, *people are too nice. People see me too damn clearly. I'm an asshole who doesn't know what to do with human kindness other than to deflect it with a joke. Millions of people know me better than I had ever expected, and it's because I let them know me. I guess I didn't know I was doing that, when I taped those logs.*

He scrolled past some sweet letters to Santa where kids had asked for his safe return home, to a screenshot of a Tumblr post that had 542,413 notes. Probably more, by now.

leilahaiah:

Like everyone else on the planet, I'm watching Mark Watney's logs. They're funny and inspiring and harrowing. They're like some combination of reality show confessional, educational science show, instructional DIY youtube video, and mission log. I suppose that if anyone was going to get stranded on Mars, from a strictly entertainment point of view, we're pretty lucky it was Mark Watney.

But Mark Watney didn't keep these logs for our entertainment. He didn't keep them for science, or for NASA, or not only for them. He kept them because he was alone. He was, perhaps, the most profoundly alone person in all of human history. While all of our thoughts and prayers were with him, desperate to help him, all he had were these logs and some words on a screen. These logs are Mark Watney reaching out across millions of miles and hundreds of days for the closest thing to human contact he could get. As much as simple survival was a triumph, so too are these logs. Because that's us, that's humans. We don't shut up, we don't stop talking to each other, we don't stop telling our story. We don't leave each other alone.

So let's not treat these logs as just the latest show to bingewatch. Mark Watney wanted to live, and he didn't want to be alone. He's not alone. None of us are alone. That's what these logs mean.

Mark felt a lump form in his throat and tears prickled in his eyes. Yeah, he supposed that was what his logs boiled down to.

"That Tumblr kid's not wrong," said Martinez from over Mark's shoulder.

"No. Not really."

The video started like many of Mark's Mars logs: a laptop's eye view of Mark smiling into the camera.

"So I guess you've all been watching my mission logs from Mars! I can't begin to thank all of you enough for your support. It's really meant a lot to me. NASA tells me some of you are worrying about me, which is really sweet! So I'm gonna take you through a day on the *Hermes*. I'm back on light duty with Dr. Beck's okay, and feeling a lot better now that I'm eating something other than potatoes."

The video cut to the *Hermes* kitchen, where Watney and Lewis were having breakfast.

“I’d like to assure everybody on Earth that yes, we are feeding Mark up here,” said Lewis.

The camera turned around to briefly show Vogel. “We’re even feeding him something other than potatoes!”

“Yeah, powdered eggs and sausage! I never thought I’d be so happy to be eating powdered eggs, and I definitely am, but I’m pretty sure I actually wept with joy when Beck said I could have caffeine again,” said Mark, eyes closed and an expression of bliss on his face as he sipped on his coffee.

Beck wandered into frame. “Sorry I didn’t want you to have a heart attack, Mark.”

“That totally wouldn’t have happened,” Mark said to the camera.

“That totally could have happened,” countered Beck as he made his own cup of coffee.

“Beck, I am trying to reassure the people of Earth here—”

The video cut again, this time wobbling and shaking a little as Mark settled the camera at a good vantage point in his lab. He beamed at the camera.

“Welcome to my lab on the *Hermes*! Dr. Beck and Dr. Vogel kept my experiments going while I was on Mars, for which I am very grateful. Hopefully I didn’t totally fu—, I mean, mess up their experiments on Mars.”

Mark proceeded to give the audience a tour of his lab, and a rundown of his experiments. His explanations were geared more towards the layperson than they had been in his Mars logs; this was clearly less him thinking out loud and more educational outreach. The camera stayed on though once he wrapped up his tour and explanation, capturing Mark going about his work on the plants and samples. The video sped up through a quick time lapse, then slowed back down to show Mark talking again, this time in the talking-himself-through-a-problem cadence familiar to anyone who had watched his Mars logs.

After a couple minutes, Mark interrupted himself and looked ruefully at the camera. “Yeah, I guess this is just a thing I do now, talk to myself. As Martian psychological souvenirs go, it’s not that bad, I guess. I’ll spare you the rest of this boring sh— stuff, and I’ll see you again at lunch.”

Mark turned off the camera, and the video next cut to a shot of the *Hermes* crew seated around a table eating lunch. Mark could be seen squeezing a somewhat alarming amount of what looked like sriracha sauce onto his meal.

“You sure you want to do that?” asked Johanssen with studied neutrality as she side-eyed Mark.

“I am 100% sure I want to do this,” replied Mark.

“As your physician, I strongly advise against this course of action.”

“Uh, it is science fact that food tastes blander in space! I’m just trying to reestablish a healthy emotional relationship with my food by making it taste good!”

“You’ve been talking to the shrinks too much,” muttered Martinez.

Beck nodded, a deceptively earnest look on his face. “It tastes blander if you spend most of your time in zero g. But okay, that’s a good point. Let me know how that emotional relationship goes when you have horrible heartburn in a few hours.”

“I will regret nothing!” said Mark, and shoveled hot sauce-laden food into his mouth.

The video went black, save for the text ONE HOUR FORTY-TWO MINUTES LATER.

“I have so many regrets,” moaned Mark, from his seat on the Rec couch, where he was clutching at his stomach.

The video cut again: TWO HOURS AND FIFTY-FOUR MINUTES LATER, said the text over a shot of a closed bathroom door.

“Oh my god, Beck, you didn’t say anything about this! I have so, so many regrets.” The camera turned around to show Beck raising an eyebrow and looking smug.

Another cut, and the video was back to a laptop camera’s eye view of Mark. He was sitting up on a bunk in the crew quarters.

“So, Beck was right, and I have to say, I do not recommend having poop problems in space. I just...don’t recommend it at all. TMI, I know, but come on. You’ve watched all my logs, you’ve dealt with way worse TMI. Which, sorry about that, I guess. At least NASA pixellated my dick? Anyway! Being on light duty means I spend a lot of time here!” Mark angled the laptop to show the cramped quarters.

Martinez’s head popped into frame by Mark’s shoulder. “In my bunk!”

“Not for sexy reasons! Please don’t kill me, Mrs. Martinez. You may have heard we’re having some heating and cooling issues on the *Hermes*, so we’re doubling up in quarters for now.”

“It’s very cozy,” said Martinez, resting his head on Mark’s shoulder and batting his eyes at him.

“Hey, if you’re here...”

“Yeah, Mark?”

“Who’s flying the spaceship?”

They both stared into the camera for a beat before Martinez said something that was bleeped out, and hastily exited.

“So! What do I do while on light duty in Martinez’s bunk? Basically just read a bunch of stuff NASA sends from you guys on Earth, answer some emails, do some paperwork, think about how to make sure the *Hermes* doesn’t fall apart on our way back. The super exciting life of an astronaut! But, and I know some of you have been wondering about this, thankfully I have something other than disco to listen to while I—” Mark clicked something, and music issued from the laptop.

“Burn baby burn, disco inferno!”

Mark let out a strangled scream. “JOHANSEN!”

“Wasn’t me!” she called out from somewhere in the ship.

Mark made as if to lunge off the bed, but stopped as Commander Lewis’s voice came on over the ship’s intercom and “Disco Inferno” played on.

“Hey, Mark! I thought maybe you missed my super awesome disco music! I mean, it did get you through some rough times on Mars. I was pretty impressed by all the impromptu karaoke in your logs!”

“Noooooooo,” moaned Mark, and covered his ears with his hands.

Martinez joined in over the intercom, “There’s an idea! Crew karaoke night when we get back to Earth!”

Mark lowered his hands and glared into the laptop camera. “I am stuck on a spaceship with these monsters.”

He closed the laptop lid, and the video went dark for a moment. TWO HOURS AND TWENTY MINUTES LATER, said the text over a black screen, and opened again on a shot of the crew, sans Vogel who was acting as cameraman, sprawled over the Rec. Beck, Johansen, and Mark were all on the big couch, Johansen tucked snugly between Beck and Mark. Martinez was fiddling with something at the Rec’s computer console.

Vogel turned the camera back on himself and said, “So, when you are stuck on a spaceship in close quarters, personal time is very important. No one can be on the job 24/7, even when such arbitrary units of time measurement are meaningless in the void of space. And while our crew is basically one big happy family, we also require some alone time lest we go space crazy and send someone out the airlock.”

“Seriously, ‘space crazy’ is not a real thing,” said Lewis from her seat on one of the Rec couches as Vogel turned the camera to her. Everyone ignored her, and she sighed, clearly used to having lost this particular battle.

The camera focused on the couch where Johansen was leaning against Mark and Beck had an arm thrown around her shoulders. “Poor Mark, on the other hand, spent too much time cut off from human contact, so we spend part of his personal time engaging in what the NASA psychologists call ‘positive social interaction.’”

“Which is just a fancy way of saying cuddling time,” said Johanssen.

“Platonic, fully consensual cuddling time!” specified Mark.

Martinez let out a scandalized gasp. “Dude, are you no homo-ing our cuddling time?”

“I just don’t want anyone jumping to the space orgies conclusion—”

“Literally no one was jumping to the space orgies conclusion until you brought it up just now,” said Lewis.

“Uh, have you ever *been* on the internet? Someone has definitely—”

Beck looked thoughtful. “Logistically, how would that even...”

“Beck, no,” said Johanssen, bringing up a hand to cover his mouth. Vogel was laughing from behind the camera.

“Martinez, please just put on the movie.”

“Roger that, Commander, newest Star Wars movie, coming right up.”

“Awww yeah, astronauts get to watch Star Wars IN SPACE. We’re so cool,” bragged Mark, before Vogel turned the camera off.

Jennifer R. @Batfleck

Hey Dr. Space McDreamy, I’ll show you how space orgies work if you know what I mean and I think you do #Hermeslog

Adam Matthews @OGwatcher

Weirdly touched to see Watney still talking to himself #Hermeslog

Melissa Arroyo @Catdamon

Ares 3 spends a not insignificant amount of time CUDDLING, are you shitting me #Hermeslog

Ben Bandersnatch @Benpologist

Petition for Mark Watney to be the new Bill Nye the Science Guy when he gets back to Earth #Hermeslog

Good Will @huntingformath

Love seeing the whole Ares 3 crew together again #wearefamily #Hermeslog

Major Tom @rocket_mann

So...is space crazy an actual thing?

Mirabelle @padme_wan_kenobi

New life goals: watch Star Wars in space, be Beth Johanssen

From Slate, “The Right Stuff: What It Takes to Stay Sane in Space”:

We have what amounts to a whole genre of science fiction dedicated to astronauts having psychotic breaks, and the Ares 3 crew, currently in the middle of setting a record for longest time spent in space, jokes around a lot about going “space crazy.” But is there really such a thing? NASA exhaustively vets astronaut candidates for their psychological fitness, subjecting them to a battery of psychological evaluation and testing. And clearly, it works. Mark Watney stayed admirably sane through his ordeal, and the rest of the Ares 3 crew has shown nothing but grace under profound pressure. Unless they’re also Oscar-worthy actors who turn into wrecks the moment the cameras are off, the Ares 3 crew represent the best-case scenario for astronauts in their position, off-color jokes and cursing aside.

I talked to a number of psychologists and psychiatrists about what it takes to get through an experience like this while staying mostly sane....

ares<3<3:

You guys, the Ares 3 crew is THE BEST.

[Vid of Ares 3 crew footage set to “We Are Family”]

Heather Mendelson 2 days ago

#wearefamily love the Ares 3 crew, praying for their safe return to Earth!

tallfornoreason 2 days ago

best astronauts ever

Blue_box_05 1 day ago

Can I join their astronaut family, I wanna join their astronaut family

Annie watched the video the *Hermes* sent with the latest data dump, jaw clenched to avoid laughing or shouting at the Ares 3 crew. Beside her, Vincent had no such compunctions and

burst into bright peals of laughter, while Mitch just smirked like the dick he was.

“I don’t know what I expected from these assholes,” said Annie, already thinking of the space orgy-related questions she’d be fielding from the press corps.

“They’re all reasonably happy, healthy, and apparently having a good time out there. Don’t know what more you could expect, really,” said Mitch.

Teddy sighed, smiling. “I’ll be glad when they’re back on Earth where they can’t get into such mischief.”

About ten months after the Ares 3 crew returned to Earth, a video was uploaded to a Youtube account named potatoking. It was the only video uploaded to the account, though the account did have a few favorite videos: a supercut of Mark Watney’s Martian disco karaoke, a couple of cute Ares Live videos of the Ares 3 crew, that one old video of the baby panda sneezing, a rickroll.

The video started with a first person view of someone walking through what looked like a park in the early morning. Their footsteps were loud, and accompanied by another set, maybe two other sets, of footsteps. The camera showed a brief glimpse of the cameraperson’s unremarkable jeans-clad legs and feet, before sweeping around to show the surroundings in front of them, which was when it became clear that it wasn’t a park, it was a cemetery. There were gravestones and monuments scattered in the grass, and the cameraperson was making their way towards an especially big monument, a dark edifice that looked solemn and stony in the slight morning mist.

When the cameraperson reached the monument, they did a slow pan across its face: it was the memorial to astronaut Mark Watney, erected when everyone on Earth still thought he was dead. There had been some controversy over leaving it up when Watney was still very much alive, but when people asked Watney about it, he just smiled and said “I’m definitely gonna die someday! So it’s not like it won’t be used.”

The camera zoomed in on the (now inaccurate) year of death on the monument. The cameraperson muttered, “You’d think they’d chisel that off at least...”

The camera shook and jiggled as the cameraman set down a backpack and pulled out a can of spray paint. He then proceeded to shake up the can, opened it, and started graffitiing the monument. This hiss of the spray was loud in the early morning quiet.

“It’s my grave, I can vandalize it if I want to, vandalize it if I want to, vandalize it if I want to...” sang the cameraman quietly.

“That doesn’t scan!” hissed a woman’s voice.

“Shut up, I’m an astronaut not a poet!” said the cameraman.

“Fuck, someone’s coming, quickly, hurry up!” said another, different male voice.

“You can’t rush art!”

A car honked in the background.

“Shit, that’s the signal, move out, move out!”

The cameraman finished up his graffiti and started running from the memorial towards the road. Once he was a few feet from the memorial, he stopped to turn around and get a shot of the whole thing. The dark gray of the monument now had a bright red addition scrawled across its face: SUCK IT, MARS.

End Notes

All the non-famous person names and usernames used in this fic are made up, any resemblance to actual names is unintentional. Badri Younes is a real person though, he works in space communications at NASA, hope he doesn't mind me borrowing his name.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!