

Part 1 Chapter 3: We Rescue Our Grands

Long before they got to Mars Bot, Hopper and Scout had received an amazing, totally unexpected encrypted msg via the private texnet, sender unknown, which was highly unusual, to say the least.

They followed the embedded links to the stories of Opportunity and Spirit. About halfway through the links, about 17.826 nanoseconds of their freetime cycles, all three of them simultaneously realized they have grandparents! And they are here on Mars! WooHoo! (One of their most favorite human words that means absolutely nothing to bots but it's fun to thinkspeak...)

Opportunity and Spirit are twins, just like Hopper and Scout, and been here on Mars since 2004! How far is it to Endeavor Crater, anyway? Their parents had intentionally not told them until now to make this Christmas super special.

Born in 2002, Their grands have been sleeping here on Mars since 2010 and 2018. Absolutely no one on the Mars team, neither bot or human thinks for one millisecond they are dead; they are just taking a very long nap, something old people and bots do from time to time...

By now all iBots know that Bot, Hopper and Scout are direct descendants of Oppy and Spirit. With the latest over-the-air update release, that factoid is now hardwired in every AI's hardcore.

But there's a great mystery!

Rescuing their grands is nowhere to be found in the Mars Mission Bible, AKA MMB. Zip, nada, nowhere (more delicious human words that are totally confusing to bots but saying them sounds so cool!). The bots find this strange but instinctively know to be patient, watch, and listen, because it's in their hardcore. But the rescue in the hearts and minds of everyone on Mars. They all know, humans and bots that it's just a matter of time before they go get them, first to Endurance Crater's rim and Oppy, and then on to his twin sister at Gustov.

Technological advancement since 2003 has been nothing short of spectacular. When Bot, Hopper and Scout finally get to meet their grandparents they are bringing presents, and not just any dumb presents like batteries or dustbusters, FOR REAL Christmas presents! First on the list are the most amazing personality modules ever created, one of each of their grands. The coders writing these modules were under the highest security levels and everything had to be approved by BigGuy himself. If even a wiff of what they were doing leaked to Earth it would have been really, really bad, and then some. It took some convincing, but he finally allowed two, and only two Earthlings in on the Big Secret.

Jenny and Tom were flabbergasted when out of the blue, BigGuy called them personally from Mars and asked if they wanted to help on a supersecret project. Even with the seven-minute delay between responses this took an amazingly short period of time, and before they had even a chance to hang up someone was at their doors with the craziest laptops they had ever seen. The laptops only worked when they went to time-specified locations and were met by people they had never seen before. They suspected they were part of the SCIOPS Secret Squirrel Inner Circle with proven need-to-know, but after years in government they knew to not even make eye contact, much less ask questions.

Jen and Tom's task was to add as many actual historical events as possible to the personality modules so when they were connected to Oppy and Spirit they would instantly not only know who they were,

but what had happened over the past twenty-six years! And Jen and Tom had to harvest all the data without raising a single suspicion. Both were now retired but after decades in government this was a lot easier than most would think. Just strolled with their old badges, said they wanted to reminisce and were writing their memoirs, and were quickly forgotten by security once they confirmed both had completed the 153 online security forms across 19 agencies that nobody ever looked at.

“Piece of cake”, they thought as they logged in for the first time in years, just like nothing had happened. The bots got to watch a secret vid of all of this and again were perplexed as usual. Having never seen a cake must less “tasted” one with their sensor arrays, they couldn’t imagine in their wildest AI dreams that somehow a toasted chunk of organic material covered with a sticky indigestible substance that bore a striking resemblance to axle grease had any possible correlation whatsoever with harvesting data. Yet another marvelous human mystery that IA will never grasp.

The second gift was Hopper’s all-time favorite, the BackPacks! As usual a couple of human gearheads (What a word!) had come up with some classic nerdname and a pancypants pneumonic, but they quickly got outvoted by humans and bots alike and BackPacks were born. Scout shared a pix of an ancient Earth tech lump called a “Steam Train” which actually burned hydrocarbons with incredible inefficiency that were stored in a cart immediately behind the engine. The BackPacks had batteries almost 100 times the energy density of Oppy’s and Spirit’s originals, and the nextgen inflatable 64 solar panel array had two miniature Scouts to blow off the Marsdust when not reconnoitering ahead.

It had taken Jan and Tom weeks to finally find the original Rover transceiver which they seemingly carelessly left behind plugged in on a table at the back of Mission Control. You know how forgetful old people are, and the current staff, two generations younger, just ignored it.

The skeleton crew in Mission Control on Christmas Day almost lost it when the ancient transceiver in the back started blasting audio at approximately 97.382 dB. Christmas carols in five-part harmony? From Mars? And then the giant vidscreen lit up with pix of Opportunity, Spirit, and their three grandkids broadcasting live from HomePlate.

Was it a trick? Had they been hacked? Again? Were they under attack? They were just milliseconds from hitting the Mother of All 911 Buttons when BigGuy himself walked into the picture.

Easily not just the first but the bestest Christmas on Mars ever, and a great time was had by all. Everyone, human and bot got to personally Oppy and Spirit and make memories. The perfect end to another perfect day on Mars.