

Rover

A one-person show
Draft 1.B 21Nov17
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Character

Rover - The Mars Pathfinder, Sojourner, that was launched in Delta II from Cape Canaveral on December 4th, 1996, and landed on Mars on July 4th, 1997. Sent as the first American exploration of Mars to take pictures and samples, it maintained communication with NASA for more than ten times the expected mission duration. What was supposed to be a seven-day (seven sol) mission, became an eighty-five day mission (eighty-three sols). The rover continued to function past losing communication, it simply strayed too far from its base station despite being instructed to remain in place on sol ninety-one.

The character is young, adventurous, and excitable. It knows who it is; it is simply looking for its reason in the world. Despite being one of the most important contributors to turn of the century science, it is left feeling alone and confused, stranded without communication.

A note on the soundscape

Sound is an integral part of this production; sound in some form, be it music or effect, should be maintained throughout. There are moments of vocal expression and moments of underscoring. These can be switched. These can be changed. Music can be incorporated as best suits the performer and production. The opening is written to be a piano solo; perhaps this can be adapted. The original soundscape is included with this script and notes are made as to where tracks were placed. License holders have permission to use the original soundscape and make changes as they see fit. They are also invited to reinvent the soundscape in accordance with their design.

In the dark, we hear praise of ROVER. Radio archives, documentaries, soundscapes describing and applauding the scientific advancements of the 90s. Blastoff and lights up on Mars. ROVER takes the stage, lost in wonder of its surroundings. It finds itself at an electric piano, carefully starting the beginning of "Dear NASA", absorbing itself in the music. Measure 91: the sounds of Mars begin to fade in; the soundscape of instruments and synthesizers slowly adds to the piano performance, creating the world. The piece comes to an end and the sounds continue.

Rover: Def, initialize. Orientation equals input dot split at position at direction equals at orientation negative one to orientation one. End. Def turn L. At direction one asterisk negative one. At direction zero. End. Def turn R. At direction negative one asterisk zero. At direction zero asterisk negative one. End. Def Cam range. Group. Latitude planet-o-centric. Longitude direction equals positive east. Longitude domain... three sixty.

The red planet. The beautiful red planet. It doesn't seem real. Do I just... go for it? I'm nervous... I'm stuck. Oh, but I'm excited.

ROVER hesitantly steps into a different world, and with this step, the world comes alive. Rover speaks into a tape recorder while it explores.

Rover: July 4th, 1997. Mission report number one. Dear Earth. Dear NASA. Timing? Impeccable. Independence Day. And here I am. Step one was straightforward. Step one was arduous; the journey. But I'm here, and so it's a success. This little microwave in Ares Vallis, has a land to explore. An interesting land. Beats the ship though. Oh, no offense pathfinder. I appreciate the lift. But, seven months, it's time to get out and explore. For the first time. This place... Cold. Dry. Rocky. Home. And who am I?

SOJOURNER
I GUESS I'VE GOTTA GET MY NAME
OUT IN THE WORLD TO STAKE MY CLAIM
SOJOURNER
THE SOUND OF THAT

IS SOMETHING THAT
IS SOOTHING ALL THE SAME
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
I CAN SEE AND I CAN BE
THE LAND IS OPEN JUST FOR ME
I CAN DO WHAT I NEED TO
BUT FIRST I CLARIFY THE WHO
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
THE SOUND OF THAT
IS SOMETHING THAT
IS SOOTHING ALL THE SAME
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
THIS SPACE IS RED, SPACE OVERHEAD
IS DARKER BUT IT'S STARKER
WITH THE HUE THE SUN AND WHO IS ONE
TO BE AND SEE AND DO
ME I SEE WHO I CAN BE
A JOB SPECIFICALLY FOR ME
A ME THAT'S MADE JUST FOR THIS JOB
SO WHAT'S THE JOB TO DO?
WHAT STORY WILL ENSUE?
BUT FIRST OF ALL THE WHO
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
WHERE TO START AND WHERE TO GO
THE PART APART FROM WHAT I KNOW
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
THE ME THAT'S NEW TO SEE THE VIEW
THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS I HAVE AROUND
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
THE SOUND OF THAT
IT'S SOMETHING THAT'S
EXCITING AT
THE START OF IT
THE HEART OF IT
A HEART TO START APART FROM IT
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER
SOJOURNER

Oh, right! Mission report number one. Landing: successful.
Surface contact: successful. I am Sojourner, the traveler,

the pathfinder. I've been sent with very little. I have programming for movement. What else? A camera. A camera. Pictures incoming.

ROVER takes a picture. Flash. It examines the picture, and upon approval, it stops the recorder. Playback. We hear static from the tape recorder. Morse code. Robotic sounds. Despite being able to understand ROVER's speech, we can't understand its language. The playback continues, growing into something as ROVER sets the recorder down near the piano. This soundscape underscores the action of ROVER decorating the stage. The space transforms into one that ROVER calls home. It takes more pictures and hangs them. Time passes.

Rover: Mission report number twelve. They may all look alike, but each tells a story. Silica. Igneous rock, thermal activity. A photo that tells of a battle-worn hero, persisting in new form. Basalt. What rock hides under the soil? This story is that of secrecy; a stealthy character hiding; from what? And these. A smooth exterior but a mixture inside, an army melded into one, a force of the past. The force, lost, but the impact left for others to see. I hope you're liking my photos as much as I am, NASA. They tell a story, you just have to look.

Mission report number twenty. More rocks for you, as requested. And here's a picture of pathfinder. It's like a flower in a desert.

Mission report twenty-nine. I wish I could send back physical rocks. Are you sure all you want is pictures? I'll keep doing what you say, and I'll keep trying not to send any repeats.

The sounds of and incoming dust storm begin faintly in the distance, taking over the soundscape through the following reports.

Rover: Mission report forty-three. Sunset on Mars is beautiful. I can see you in the distance, NASA. Earth. Hi!

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Rover: HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME
HAPPY BIRTHDAY SOJOURNER

You sent me, a robot, to test the planet. You only needed a week's worth of data, that's why everything after sol seven felt so repetitive. And now I'm not hearing any communication from you because everyone's en route! With all of the pictures, samples that I've sent, now you're on your way to be here with me! If the first ship left immediately after the seventh sol... it took me December, July, seven months, July, sol one hundred and forty-seven, December, five months... you're almost here! I only have fifty sols to prepare. What do I need to do... oh you're going to love it here. The view.

They're the same stars you can see from Earth. But it's so much... clearer. There's silence here. Silence in the sounds, and silence in the sights.

With each constellation, ROVER plays fragmented melodies on the piano. They loop into the soundscape

Rover: Those stars, right? Those make Orion, the hunter. His belt, his spear. Human imagination is really amazing. I personally don't see it, but then again, I'm not on Earth. Did you know in Japan they see Orion as a woman; her Kimono draped from her arm. And that one, the Big Dipper. "La Casserole" in French. Or if you're an ancient Egyptian, it's a bull, and those stars are a man laying down. Behind them there's a hippo with a crocodile. Cassiopeia, a simple "W". Or, for the Chinese, a bridge of the kings. An Arabian camel constellation. Taurus, a bull, what's a bull to each culture? Food? Power? Protection? Is Libra law and liberty for everyone? Scorpion's claw, a boat... humans place their worlds in the stars; you see what you know. I can see all the stars, but I don't know anything. Culturally. But maybe that's better for me. There's a universe out there, a symphony in the silence. I can't see anything, but I can hear all of it. Every last star. Stars, stars...

ROVER adds to the art piece while the fragments of melodies turn into an underscoring.

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The winds of Mars weave musically throughout the space. ROVER soaks in the sounds.

Rover: You control the world. On Earth you're only two feet big. Here, you're much larger. You exist in that wind. You exist in the rumble of the gravel. You even exist in the twinkle of the stars. So who needs NASA? You're a conductor of your own symphony.

After a beat, ROVER becomes lost in thought. He pantomimes instruments creating spectacle that gives life to the music in his head. He leaves us with loops that become a full song.

Rover: The low rumble of your wheels on the ground.

The wind that dances overhead.

The colder wind, more distinct in sound.

The energy, the atoms and the elements.

And the stars, distant and percussive in their dialogue.

ROVER cuts off the loops as if he is a conductor.

Rover: The repeating symphony of your everyday.

ROVER cues the instruments again. They come in as an ensemble, stronger and more musically than before. He conducts, maybe even dancing around the imaginary space occupied by the instruments he's created. Eventually the instruments fade one by one until he cuts off the final loop.

Rover: This is the Mars that you get to keep. The Mars that's keeping you. You see NASA? I'll be just fine here on my own. You've given me free roam over something beautiful, something my own. No more stress, no more trying to impress people I can't even see. I'm living for myself, now, and there's an entire Mars to explore. Valleys, craters...

If Ares Vallis was this rich in data, imagine... I could get you so many pictures, so many samples.

No. I'm seeing it for me, now. That's all that matters. Billions of people on Earth, and how many of them could see me? Only a handful in mission control. To the rest of the world... I was just an example. A low-cost icon of possibilities. Well, I'm going to do a heap of a lot more than you could've ever expected. A one week mission. Ares Vallis.

ROVER finds himself at the edge of the stage, again, contemplating the world in front of him. Does he come closer to stepping off? Where would that take him?

Rover: Two mega-hertz imbedded computer. Thirteen watts. Pathfinder, thirty-five. Former disrupted, prior maintained. Debugging unsuccessful. Battery supply, self-sustained. Internal heating and daily recharging maintainable. In Ares Vallis' nighttime temperature. I can't know if the rest of the planet is the same unless I go there. Mission simulation, scenario: colder climate. Mission result, failure, battery temperature unmaintainable. Mission simulation, scenario: maintainable climate. New factor: distance from the pathfinder. Mission result, unknown. Connection importance undeterminable. Mission simulation, scenario: staying in Ares Vallis. Mission result... battery maintainability... oh.

Please help me, NASA. Join me, bring me back, send me something, anything, but... did I help you? Was this mission important? Or did we just determine Mars is a waste of time? Will you... ever be here? I don't want to be just a scholarly article, a review of a lost attempt. Please, keep trying. If I'm part of a legacy... I know myself, but I'll only exist if...

DEAR EARTH
YOU DON'T KNOW ME
BUT I DO
I KNOW YOU

DEAR EARTH
YOU DON'T KNOW YOU
BUT DOES ANYBODY EVERY KNOW THEMSELF?

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ROVER begins to lose energy but maintains drive. Static begins to interrupt the music and lyrics. Lyrics that are mouthed but not vocalized are marked with brackets. The song "breaks" as it nears the end.

EXAMPLE, ART
THE SKY BECOMES THE LIMIT, COLORS, LIGHT
IT CAN BE WHAT YOU NEED
EX[ample], THE ARTIST..
EX[ample]..
EX..
THE ARTIST
THEY PUT THEIR SOUL [in it], LIVING IN IT,
THEIR LEGACY

BECOMING [something] NEW
[leaving] A PATH FOR THE OLD

EXAMP... EXAMPLE, A THOUGHT
WHO CAN SAY WHAT [lives on], MEMORY
IT COULD LIVE IT COULD FLY
IT COULD BE FORGOT
WITH ANOTHER [you] CAN PASS IT ON, OR
WITH YOU, IT COULD [die]

[becoming] SOMETHING OLD
[leaving] A PATH [for the] OLD

THE SUN [is] MOVING [up]
THE [planet] MOVES AROUND
EVERYTHING IS [relative]
[to where] YOU ARE ON THE [ground]
ON THE [ground]
[on the] GROUND
IN THE SKY
TIME WILL AL-
TIME WILL AL-
TIME WILL ALWAYS PASS YOU BY

REWIND, RESET
TIME WILL AL-
REWIND, RESET
Def, initialize, orientation equals input dot
SOJOUR[ner]
SO[journer]

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