

Compression in Sector 16!

PodShip Huskerprise – Episode 2

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Narrator: Cyberspace. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the podship Huskerprise. Our mission is to seek out intelligent discourse, to engage listeners in deep thinking and to boldly go where no podcaster has gone before.

Captain: Captains Log Star Date 03.23.06. We have reached sector 16 in the audion nebulae. We are moving into orbit around one of the largest known planets. It is a place that we know very little about...In fact, we are about to make first contact.

Mr. Microphone: Captain, we're receiving a transmission from the planet.

Captain: Patch it through to our console. And turn on the surround sound.

Mr. Microphone: Yes, captain. Commencing download.

Captain: (awkward silence) Uhm....Mr. Microphone, where is the transmission.

1st Officer: Captain. It appears that the transmission is coming through. It's just moving very, very slowly.

Captain: Engineering, what is happening? Why is this download taking so long?

Engineer: Captain, I'm giving the network everything we can, but....

Captain: What is the problem?

Engineer: It that file! It's enormous! I've never seen anything like it!

Mr. Microphone: Captain, the ships computer is estimating the total download time will take 3.467 light years to complete and the resulting data will completely fill the ships memory banks.

Captain: We don't have that kind of time or space to spare. We've got to find another way.

1st Office: Captain. Maybe the file hasn't been compressed. If the planet is sending raw audio to us, that would account for the enormous size of the file.

Captain: It certainly would. Mr. Microphone, can you get a message back to the planet and ask them to compress their transmission?

Mr. Microphone: Ay Ay Captain! Attempting to hail them now. (pause) Captain, an extremely large, but short transmission came back. It just said "how?" I believe they are asking for encoding instructions.

1st Officer: I was afraid of this. Captain, I'm not sure if we can help. We don't know what kind of computers they are using.

Captain: Darn it. We've got to think quick. (pause) Wait, it doesn't matter what kind of computer they have. Audio files on any computer can be compressed into a standard format.

Engineer: Captain, you're a genius. But what format should we tell them? MP3? AAC? WAV? WMV?

Mr. Microphone: There are advantages and limitations associated with each of those file types.

1st Officer: Captain. According to my calculations, MP3 files are the most universally compatible compressed audio format, but...

Captain: But what?

1st Officer: Well, because we are making first contact we may want to suggest the enhanced AAC format.

Mr. Microphone: What advantage will that offer?

1st Officer: The AAC format allows the producer to organize chapters within the file to let the listener jump forward to different parts of the show.

Mr. Microphone: Like chapters on a DVD?

1st Officer: Exactly. But that isn't all. Each chapter can have its own picture and a hyperlink!

Captain: That sounds perfect. We'll be able to see all kinds of pictures from the surface and hyperlinks to web sites from across the galaxy! So, what is the down side here?

1st Officer: Well, not every audio player knows how to play AAC files.

Captain: Darn that compatibility issue! Engineering, can our ship's system play back AAC files?

Engineer: Yes, Captain. We're using iTunes which can play back AAC files. It can also display the chapters, embedded pictures and links.

Captain: It sounds like in our case, AAC is a good solution. 1st officer, send the planet a tutorial on how to encode their audio as AAC.

1st Officer: Sending tutorial.

Narrator: After a few moments of tense nerves and silence, suddenly the ship's communication system sprang to life.

Mr. Microphone: Captain, the audio is coming through.

Captain: Put it up on the console.

ALIEN VOICE: We are delighted that you have decided to orbit. This is the "Getting to know our planet" sound-seeing tour podcast. We think you will enjoy our planet and will benefit from learning about all our culture, scientific

discoveries, philosophical points of view, and of course loads of celebrity gossip from every corner of the quadrant! Subscribe to our RSS feed and stay tuned.

Captain: This is great! We'll be able to pull in enough information from this and future podcasts to complete all of our reports to the podfleet commander!

1st Officer: And did you see how quickly that downloaded? Wow! That compression really saved us time, space and bandwidth.

Mr. Microphone: And with all the celebrity news, I may just be able to cancel my subscription to Intergalactic Inquirer!

Captain: Back to work everyone. We have a lot of listening to do.

All: Ay Ay Captain!

Tune in next time when the crew of the Podship Huskerprise attempts to record their own sound seeing tour of the ship using an Enhanced Podcast with AAC encoding!