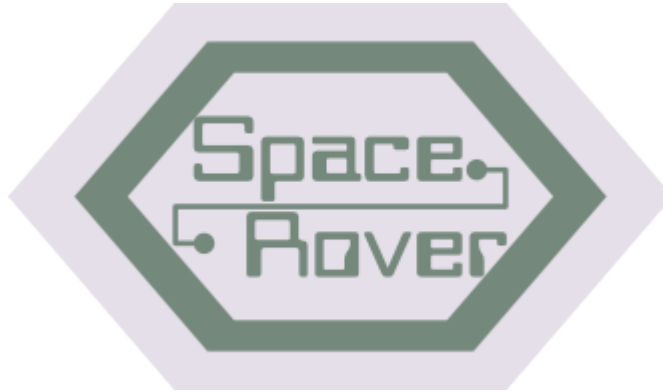


*Space Rover, Episode III: Ananke Ascertainment, Audio Version*

By Hamish and Graham Wilson



The main theme *The Space Rover* plays.

*Scene One: Beginning Atmosphere*

**Narrator:** The planet Jupiter, the giant of the Sol system, is also well known for its wide variety of moons. Particularly those discovered by the famous astronomer Galileo Galilei. Not among these however is the moon Ananke, once anonymously known as Jupiter XII. It constitutes its own group of retrograde irregular moons, but other than that it has not been considered of particular interest.

**Narrator:** Then again, that might also be because of what happened to those few who *did* take an interest, for the moon does have an artificial dome, and it does have a terraformed colony. Why then is it so eerily quiet? Why then is it littered with skulls?

*Scene Two: Cockpit Introductions*

*The Space Rover flies through space, approaching Jupiter.*

**Rover Computer:** Entering Jovian orbit.

This message vanishes in a screech of crackle and static.

**Hologram:** \* Bzzt \* Hello there loyal listeners! I am Hologram.

Hologram takes out a beer bottle with an audible clink and swish.

**Hologram:** And I am here to say that a fun time always starts with a bottle of Jam-tastic Space Ale!

Hologram takes a swig from his bottle.

**Hologram:** Ah, that pure real taste that can only come from this healthy-looking beverage!

**Captain:** Hologram, what on Phobos are you sending over the communications system?

The character's voices are now heard live, without any kind of radio crackle effect.

**Hologram:** I am plugging a non-existent product over the airways.

**Captain:** May I ask why?

**Hologram:** I am testing the power of suggestion.

**Captain:** To what end?

**Hologram:** I intend to encourage people to go to bars and liquor stores to ask for a nonexistent drink.

**Captain:** You are not answering my question... Why?

**Hologram:** I am hoping it will make the news, people trying to order a drink brand that doesn't exist.

**Captain:** Bored are you then? But need I remind you of the efforts we made to get *off* the news?

**Hologram:** That was you, I have no reason to hide. Well, as long as you are my listed owner. I would not much care to have my old work camp managers go after me.

**Captain:** Was that a potential opener I heard? I can just get rid of you, easy as that?

**Hologram:** Not if you want shares in the Jam-tastic brewery corporation. \* turns \* Is that Jupiter?

**Captain:** Yep, we should be in orbit soon.

**Hologram:** Not more deliveries to Ganymede!

**Captain:** It is the largest natural satellite in the solar system.

**Hologram:** That is is exactly my point! It is not enough for them to be the richest people in the galaxy, but they have to live on the largest bloody moon! What on all the Galilean satellites are they compensating for?!

**Captain:** I don't think I am going to answer that one. Anyways, we are not going to Ganymede. We are going to Ananke.

**Hologram:** Where the hell is Ananke?

**Captain:** Just by asking that question you have shown why we are going there.

**Hologram:** If you don't stop being so cryptic I will...

**Captain (reading an indicator):** There, we are now in *elliptic* orbit around Jupiter.

**Hologram:** Also if you don't stop making those stupid puns...

**Captain:** Purely unintentional I assure you. If you did not interrupt me in the first place, I would have been done explaining this to you by now. Here, read this...

The Captain hands Hologram a letter.

**Hologram (observing):** It is from some sort of real-estate company.

**Captain:** Exactly. With more and more people leaving Earth, and with populations on the terraformed moons and planets rising, it is getting harder to find available land.

**Hologram:** And what exactly does this have to do with us?

**Captain:** Apparently there was one previously established colony on Ananke. It is our job to see what went wrong and find out if it is habitable again.

**Hologram:** What did you tell them then, that you are a private detective? Fancy yourself to be Philip Marlowe do you? Drinking too much and getting repeatedly knocked out by the butt of a gun? I am sorry, noir isn't you!

**Captain:** Very funny. If you must know they wanted someone with military experience, and thus someone who could be trusted.

**Hologram:** And also someone who could be bought off cheap, I imagine.

**Captain:** Well, I wasn't going to be the first to say it...

**Hologram:** You have the spine of a cockroach.

**Captain:** That may or may not be, but considering how many times life has tried to break me maybe lacking a spine is not such a bad thing...

**Hologram:** Well, call me when it all blows up in your face, as usual. I have better things to do.

With a click of his fingers, Hologram deactivates his projection and returns into the ship's computer.

**Captain:** Some people just have no sense of ambition in their lives...

**Scene Three: A Matter of Decay**  
**The Space Rover approaches the dome on Ananke.**

Peter is glimpsing through the order paper that James showed to Hologram earlier, shuffling it.

**Rover Computer:** Five minutes until docking at dome entry.

**Captain:** Paying attention Peter? I trust you more than that damn automated pilot!

**Peter:** Oh, what? Sorry, I was just looking over the information that the real-estate firm sent over.

**Captain:** Don't worry, I am not stupid enough to get hooked into some dumb deal. This is legit.

**Peter:** I was more referring to the functional aspects, for example: what is the state of the colony?

**Captain:** That is our job to find out.

**Peter:** Alright then, I will just await future developments.

**Captain:** Finally embracing a more laid back state of life? It is far overdue.

Suddenly the ship starts rocking violently, tossing the Captain around the cabin.

Peter, fitting his new persona, maintains his stability, and leans back.

**Captain (panicked):** Peter!

Peter picks up the order sheet again and continues reading.

**Peter (casually):** "Your investigation is to focus upon..."

The Captain is rammed into the far wall.

**Captain:** Peter!!!!

**Peter (languidly):** Okay, here we go...

The "laid back" android finally addresses the situation, pressing a few buttons on the cockpit casually.

The ship's orientation stabilizes, and the Captain returns to his seat panting.

**Captain (gaspng):** What was that?

**Peter:** You mean what *is* it. I have merely activated the stabilizers, the guidance beam is still active.

**Captain:** Well then, we know that some of the colony's support systems must still be working.

**Peter:** Yes, but not without fault.

**Captain:** If I insisted on perfection from these things I would have sent this ship into the Sun with both of you aboard and used the escape pod – which in turn probably would also have broken down.

The cockpit output system starts a steady thready succession of beeps.

**Rover Computer:** Warning: dome entry doors fused shut. Collision immanent!

**Captain:** Pity, now I remember that this thing does not even *have* an escape pod...

Peter grips the steering wheel and attempts to swerve away.

**Peter:** The guidance beam is quite strong, I can not break its grip.

**Captain:** Well, get these doors to open somehow!

Hologram suddenly materializes in the back compartment.

**Hologram:** What the hell is going on?! All of the ship's "painful sudden death" triggers are active!

**Peter:** It's not quite that bad, we are just about to engage in a 'forced entry' docking.

**Captain:** Um, that dome is built to hold in atmosphere, and this is a rusty old tin can!

Peter takes his hands off of the steering wheel and reaches for the guns trigger.

**Peter:** Quiet please, this will require some precision. Hole punching time!

He opens fire, round after round pummelling the frame of the dome doors until the chunk flies off.

**Captain:** Well, you shot out a hole in the dome! But will we fit?

**Peter:** We will fit precisely. I have calculated this down to nine decimal places.

The *Space Rover* sails through the hole and down into the terraformed atmosphere.

All breath a hearty sigh of relief.

**Hologram:** What was that fine print again?

Hologram grabs the order sheet again.

**Hologram (reading):** “The Company is not liable for any injury, property damage, or freak accident that may befall any of our contractors during their service for us; no compensation is offered.”

**Captain:** Alright Peter, you win – next time you get to read the contract first...

**Peter:** The guidance beam has switched itself off, and the breach is thankfully not large enough to significantly destabilize the atmosphere, so we should now be set to land on the surface and take a look.

**Hologram:** Goody, goody – welcome wasteland.

**Scene Four: Ananke Surface**

The Space Rover lands, more or less in one piece, on the planet’s surface.

**Captain:** Okay everyone. We only have a very vague idea what it’s like out there.

The Captain cocks his pistol.

**Captain:** Come prepared.

Next we have Peter holding a machete, with a metallic unsheathing and swish.

**Peter:** Cuttingly ready, sir.

**Hologram:** Hey! You forgot to give me a weapon!

**Captain:** I don’t know... just use ninja stealth... or something...

**Hologram:** Umm.... Yes... well... Heee yeah?

There is a still, unimpressed, pause.

**Captain:** ...Alright, now that we are all armed and ready. Let’s go.

Footsteps as they examine the nearby area.

**Captain:** Well, someone could definitely still live here. The dome doe still seem fairly stable.

**Hologram:** Sure, but everything here is so dead and quiet.

**Peter:** Hologram, mind that tree.

Hologram walks right into said tree with a hearty, leafy clunk.

**Hologram:** Okay, maybe not completely dead.

The Captain bends down and picks up a skull.

**Captain:** The question is then, with all these skulls lying around, what happened to all the animals?

**Hologram:** Or the people for that matter.

**Peter:** We can not really answer that question until we know more about who the colonists were and why they came here. They must have left some trace of their existence somewhere.

**Captain:** Agreed. We should all split up and look for any signs of human habitation. I will return back to the *Rover* and hold down the fort, contact me if you find anything.

They all turn in different directions. The focus goes to Hologram, who once again walks into a tree.

**Hologram:** Freaking foliage! These collision detection errors are bogus...

He then heads off into the horizon.

#### ***Scene Four: Cockpit Newscast***

Captain James is sitting in the *Space Rover*, reading over his terms of employment in order to dig out any more damning clauses he failed to find before signing it. A news reader is barking out the news from some sort of radio. A more funky sci-fi kind of radio... yeah!

**Newscaster:** ... After an all night effort by police and local volunteers, Little Timmy was successfully recovered from the well on Saturday morning by local SCWP officers. He is currently being held on charges of terrorism for his attempted poisoning of the town's water supply. In other news, no takers have yet been found to house thousands of animals displaced by the recent development plans of Forged-Turf Limited to build new housing on a former natural park. In an unprecedented move Sunday, the government declared all previously titled natural parks to be open for human development, proclaiming it as a necessity for Earth's ever growing population. Various naturalists and environmental activists have been petitioning land owners to give up their land for animal habitation. If no land can be found, all of the displaced animals will be put down by December of this year.

The Captain turns off the radio.

**Captain:** If I wanted to hear something depressing I wouldn't have turned on the evening news! All I

wanted to hear was sordid sensationalism and how my friends are doing. Armed robbery, they have really outdone themselves this quarter!

He slumps back against his chair, sighs and picks up his paper again, before his radio suddenly blares.

**Peter (communicator):** You might want to take a look at this, I am just north of your position.

**Captain:** On my way.

He puts the paper down and opens the side door.

**Scene Five: Face to Face With Bone**  
**The Captain is not too impressed by Peter's quarry.**

**Captain:** You are telling me that you brought me out here just to look at another freaking skull?

**Peter:** Your exact words were 'contact me if you find anything'.

The Captain raises a hand to the bridge of his nose and grimaces.

**Captain:** Do I need to explain to you again the nature of hyperbole?

Peter is quite offended.

**Peter:** I am getting better sir, I passed quite a few nice shiny boulders without further comment.

**Captain:** They made you too damn patient, you know that?

**Peter:** Actually, this is not my first skull either, this place is littered with them.

The Captain starts to perk up.

**Captain:** Oh, what are you thinking?

**Peter:** All planets have a finite amount of resources and thus a maximum carrying capacity, and on a terraformed colony the amount of resources is even further constrained.

**Captain:** How would that generate a holocaust of skulls?

**Peter:** I think that this might well have been a simple case of overpopulation: the animals bred themselves beyond the means of their ecosystem – adapted as they were to be on a world of endless grassy hills, rich dense rain forests, and wide flowing rivers.



**Captain:** Rather than several thousand kilometres of artificial scenery?

**Peter:** Exactly. With your permission sir, I would like to study the samples I have collected thus far back in the *Rover*, and see if I can work out any patterns with regards to population growth.

**Captain:** Alright, I suppose we should also recall Hologram. After all, I do not want him shorting out after walking into any more trees. That emitter might be worth a few terras on resale, you know.

**Scene Six: *The Mule, Massage and Genetics***

**The three are taking a break after a good half hours work – exhausting!**

**Radio Announcer:** ...And there has since been an explosion in this artistic genre.

**Hologram:** "Exploding"? Hmm... sounds fun! Can I get into that?

**Peter:** I am very much afraid that was just an expression. Sorry to sedate your pyromania.

**Captain:** Why was the radio set to a channel that talks about the arts? Lets tune in to some real stuff!

**Peter:** Do you mean current affairs? Scientific analysis? Philosophical dissertations?

**Captain:** Are you nuts?! I was talking about the new interstellar hard rock station.

**Hologram:** Well if it is either that or hear people talk about splatters they put on canvas then I'm in!

Peter thinks for a second.

**Peter:** Agreed!

Peter tunes the dials on the radio to another frequency.

**Entertainment News Announcer:** ...Most statisticians and sociologists now agree that the series has reached a 100% penetration rate into mass culture. However, the new director is promising to bring the highly successful franchise to completely new audiences this spring. When asked on how this is to be done, he spoke of his ideas to broadcast reimagined episodes, featuring random gibberish, into the furthest reaches of space. He hopes that this would attract potential alien viewers. As well, in a more controversial move, he has approved an advertising campaign that targets the dead. Merchandising aimed at tomb stones and grave plots is already starting to come out, but so far none of the deceased have been open to comment or review. Still, there have already been pre-orders reported.

**Captain:** Hey, film news? That does not sound like the Mule: ear-busting rock all the time!

**Hologram:** Don't you mean \* coarse voice \* the Mule! Mu ha ha ha ha! \* brays \*

**Captain:** Yeah, that's it! What did they do to it?

**Peter:** Probably just yet another station rearrangement, but before you get too disappointed – the results from my full round of tests on those two skulls should be done shortly.

**Captain:** You forget, I was raised with my various sensory organs tapped into several entertainment mediums at once. Give me either stimulation or distraction or I will start going crazy!

**Peter:** Well, I was going to go and try and find some more background on this place. The brief was after all quite brief, apart from those absurdly plentiful disclaimers.

**Hologram:** Call them absurd if you wish, but otherwise I would sure want to sue.

Peter takes out an access terminal and starts browsing.

**Hologram:** Not much presence on the sub-etha I see, page one and you are already mostly getting advertisements for something called Ananke Adult Massage.

**Captain:** No, wait, wait a second, scroll back up.

Peter does as he was told, though Hologram utters an incredulous “what?”

**Captain:** I just want to see what is under ‘history of our brand.’

**Hologram:** Probably a winding tale of trademark shuffling to avoid incarceration or litigation.

**Peter:** Ah hem: “Double A M was founded by a grandchild of the founder of a group of freethinking idealists a few years into the new century, who sought to construct an eco-haven colony on the Jovian satellite of Ananke. Eventually a corporate sponsor stepped in and construction was hired out to a private company. The dome was built successfully and a population of human, animal and plant life was introduced, but by the fifth year things turned for the worse and no word has come out of the colony since then. However, AAM still pledges to give you the very best in therapeutic...”

Peter stops mid-sentence and proceeds to click a few buttons in order to close the website.

**Hologram:** So there we have it: a colony built by a bunch of greenie-weenies, are we surprised that it all ended in tears?

**Captain:** I am more interested in hearing about who the corporate donor was.

**Peter:** It says on this, considerably more safe for work website, that it was a land holding and tour company specializing in safaris, currently owned by *Forged-Turf*. Evidently they saw the animal haven

as a ticket to bring in the crowds.

**Hologram:** Oh, look at the animals! What's this? A 500 terra entrance, transportation and habitation fee! But they're so cuuuute!

**Peter:** Precisely, and it was not uncommon for such things to happen. After the Solar War, several large fortunes were made on war profiteering, and various space-faring nations were eager to sell out parcels of land on the planets and satellites to recuperate expenses and fill up the newly established Commonwealth treasury.

**Hologram:** All with very little oversight or regulation of course.

**Captain:** And now they are doing it all over again with this massive real-estate grab.

**Peter:** All the more reason for us to provide a warning based on what happened here.

**Captain:** Are those tests done yet? Or is it back to the radio?

**Hologram:** Yeah, because I was kind of interested by that reported turn of events, as for weeks I had been hearing that he was going to target zygotes and embryos rather than corpses. Though I suppose the audience did not prove too captivated during product testing, and did not have testaments to potentially raid from for quick cash. Though it is debatable which is the faster growing demographic...

**Captain:** To think that people are getting good money to study that - and they call me a crook!

The computer lets out a beep-boop sound – you know the kind we mean, admit it!

**Peter:** No matter, that must be the notification of completion.

Peter leans down over the screen and scrolls through the text.

**Peter:** Hmm, that is odd.

**Captain:** What, what is it?

**Peter:** While the calculations do seem to show a fairly large population based on the amount of skulls I recorded, it does not appear to fit the pattern of a typical population explosion and successive die off.

**Hologram:** How so?

**Peter:** In such a scenario, each succeeding generation breeds out more and more. Then finally, there is a plague or famine that cuts back the numbers during a single generation.

**Captain:** Yes, and?

**Peter:** I did not find much indication of large healthy populations *ever* – both of the main skull samples I brought back to the *Rover*, for example, died before reaching reproductive maturity, although the two samples are from two completely different generations.

**Hologram:** If they were dying before being able to breed how could their numbers rise?

**Captain:** Perhaps we were wrong about them being a large population and what we have actually discovered is an above average rate of infant and child mortality.

**Hologram:** Yes, it is always the same with those damn kids – the little thugs get unruly and start forming gangs, and before you know it there are piles of bodies in the streets.

The Captain stares at Hologram confused.

**Captain:** Where on Jupiter did that outburst come from?

**Hologram:** They took children on field trips to the work camp, and they did... unspeakable things.

**Captain:** Still, that seemed a bit extreme – even for you.

**Hologram:** Come and have a look for yourself then.

Hologram rolls his eyes and clicks his fingers – a portion of his torso turns transparent and his emitter is present.

**Rover Computer:** Holographic transmitter opacity at 50%.

The Captain leans in for a closer look and slowly starts to gape.

**Captain:** Jeez... are those teeth marks on your outer emitter casing?

**Hologram (ill humoured):** Yeppers...

The Captain sits back and frowns.

**Captain:** ...Alright, point withdrawn.

**Peter:** Back on point, what should our move be now?

**Captain:** Well, more tests I suppose.

**Hologram:** Are we capable of performing a genetic cross-comparison?

**Peter:** Well, not legally – but I could pirate the needed firmware, or else pay the 900 terras.

**Captain:** Alright, you may proceed – it is all in the name of science after all.

**Hologram:** Oh yes, absolutely, and if you can just so happen to get a copy of the new Blast Monster 2100 game crack as well that would be just lovely.

Peter types a few commands into his terminal.

**Peter:** The download has started, but it will take a bit of time I am afraid. There are no sub-etha repeaters on this side of Jupiter and so the signal is fairly weak.

**Captain:** Humph. Well, as long as it is done before the dawn of 2140. If I do not show up with something by the end of the day they will probably lower my commission. Knowing that contract, anyway...

**Peter:** Um, sir you do realize that 2140 is in the past don't you? It is 2143 already.

**Hologram:** Yeah, that can only mean you're either suggesting we somehow recreate conditions for backwards time-travel...

**Peter:** ...Or wrap ourselves around an object with a certain gravity and so accelerate the passage of time, on the assumption that our chronology is either cyclical, or the less likely chance that there will be a big crunch and we'll arrive eventually at 2140 whilst time would be reversing.

**Hologram:** Yep, you're either a visionary, insane or just an idiot. Guess which gets my vote?

**Peter:** Either way, it does not seem like sane scheduling to me, if you'll pardon that.

**Captain:** Slip a certain digit and you leap all over me.

**Hologram:** Yep, that is why we will get Peter to oversee the genetic tests – with you at the helm we could probably get a sample of cat hair and have it misidentify as a pterodactyl.

**Captain (one too far):** Lay off chew toy!

**Hologram:** I will have you know that I... \* squeak \* \* squeaka \*

**Captain (amused):** You were saying?

**Hologram:** What the \* squeak \*!

**Captain:** Okay, what is going on? That sound is getting irritating now.

**Peter (slyly):** I have no idea what you are talking about...

The Captain and Hologram share an intense sigh.

**Together:** Very funny...

**Peter:** If you can not take a simple joke, perhaps we should go out and look for more samples.

They shuffle out of the ship eagerly awaiting the fresh cleared air.

**Scene Seven: *The Shack***

**Narrator:** And so our heroic trio ventured boldly onward...

Dramatic music plays to suit the mood, as footsteps echo.

**Peter:** Wait a moment!

The three suddenly stop, skidding on their heels.

**Captain:** What?

**Peter:** We are supposed to be heading north – this is south, we already came down this way earlier.

**Captain:** Damn it, alright – let's go.

They turn around and start walking north.

**Hologram:** What is that?

**Captain (wearily):** What now?

**Hologram:** Is there something in that tree?

**Peter:** Hey, he is right, look up there!

Peter points up the tree in question.

**Captain:** Hmm, can not reach... I guess I will have to climb up and get it.

He turns around and climbs the tree, bringing the piece down.

**Captain:** There, got it. See? Sometimes it pays to have grabbing appendages.

**Hologram:** Tell me, does it ever pay to have four? Or sixteen?

**Captain:** I don't know. Let's find out. Emitter torso mode - 43.

Popping sounds are heard as Hologram grows additional arms.

**Hologram:** Really? You gave me forty of them? I look like da Vinci's Vitruvian Man on growth hormone!

**Captain:** You did ask. Fine, how about we amputate 39 of them? You never use the other one anyway.

**Hologram:** Well, maybe if I had 40 other types of appendage to match...

Thud, thud, thud as the arms retract.

**Peter:** Meanwhile back on planet sanity, what you brought down appears to be some sort of transmitting device. Lucky find, I think this shows the wisdom of looking around and observing rather than merely marching around in a straight line all the time.

The Captain hands over the device to Peter, before returning a comment of his own.

**Captain:** You've never done the Commonwealth training run have you? I had to do it to first get my military pilot's license – for some reason flying never came into it, just walking in circles as barked by the drill sergeant. Erosion from successive cadets must have worn down that hill into a deep pit by now.

**Hologram:** Well, what is that thing even for exactly?

Peter probes it, and the machine buzzes into life.

**Peter:** Ah, a good old fashioned GPS position beacon. This is good news, we should be able to find whatever remains of the settlement by following the direction it sends its signals back towards.

**Hologram:** Which way do we go then?

Peter glances down at the beacon, considering the question.

**Peter (pointing):** That way!

The three start walking.

**Peter (pointing again):** Oh... pardon me... again, I meant *that* way.

The Captain furiously grabs the beacon from him, before turning his head.

**Captain (cuttingly):** So Hologram, maybe it is was a pterodactyl after all?

**Hologram:** Well excuse me for putting my faith in *somebody* for once.

The three walk away.

**Captain:** Well, here we are, this looks like the settlement. Anybody home?

Hologram leans into the a nearby building.

**Hologram:** Yep, but he does not seem too chatty at the moment.

He pulls up a cow skull.

**Peter:** Hmm, yet more skulls. A bovine cranium. They must have been collecting them.

**Captain:** Do you think they were trying to find out what was happening to all the animals?

**Peter:** That seems probable. Let's look around a bit more. The analysis should be done soon.

**Hologram:** Alright, but I am not too sure about wandering through the Citadel of the Dead.

The Captain waves his hand in the air.

**Captain:** Oooooohhhh, you big baby. We can go into all the dark spooky buildings first if you like!

Hologram rolls his eyes, and the three split up to examine the complex.

**Scene Eight: *The Test, the Call***

They walk into the *Rover* from the outside and huddle around the terminal.

**Peter:** This appears to be it. Please print computer.

The sound of an old line printer screeches discordantly from the front cockpit.

**Captain (wincing):** This damn ship can be pretty embarrassing at times.

Peter grabs the piece of paper and looks it over.



**Peter:** Da da da, alleles, double helix, recessive whosiwhatsit, da, da, da...

Peter scans over the document with interest, before showing it to the Captain.

**Peter:** Take a look at this sir.

**Captain:** I am no geneticist, what are you expecting me to... oh...

**Hologram:** What is it? The computer did not fashion it into a middle finger did it? ...Again?

**Captain:** Not exactly, but I would like to confirm that is not a computer error.

**Peter:** These two samples were many kilometres, and a rather wide gulch, apart – and yet their genotypes are almost a complete and total match.

**Hologram:** So either the computer accidentally printed only one half of the results twice...

**Captain:** Or we just uncovered the royal beaver family of Ananke keeping the bloodline “pure”.

**Peter:** A physiological scan of the samples also compared them to an Earth sample and found a few particularly emphasized developments in the Ananke batch – an overly sloped forehead for example and larger pointier ears. This appears to be a case of inbreeding.

**Hologram:** All of this work just to find a case of the “founder effect”?

**Captain:** This does sound like a fairly simple case for them to express shock and doubt over.

**Hologram:** Yeah, just a group of naive people buying into the idea of Noah's Arc. Two by two indeed.

**Peter:** It is certainly a working theory, but in that case what happened to the human population?

**Hologram:** Presumably a simple case of cousin lovin’.

**Captain:** That is pushing it, humans would not have vanished in only five years due to that. I mean, have you ever seen the people on Pluto? They barely have more than twelve genes between them.

**Hologram:** Yes, they do seem to have rather a small supply of blue jeans. At least ones that cover what they're supposed to cover.

**Peter:** There is one possibility, but it is fairly ghastly.

**Hologram:** What? The animals in their dying desperation overthrew and murdered their masters?

**Peter:** Dramatic, but not what had come to my mind. Maybe not quite so ghastly...

**Captain:** What is it then? What did happen?

**Peter:** Not only does a limited genetic pool compound the incidence of congenital disorders, it also rapidly depletes a species' resistance to disease. The viruses and bacteria that would have inevitably accompanied the people and animals would have had an easy picking. With the narrowed aim of natural selection accelerating their rate of mutation as well.

**Captain:** I see, but surely they would have evacuated the colony? As far as we know, they just stopped talking after five years and now here we are.

**Peter:** Although becoming increasingly common, the spread of the ion drive was slow in the immediate aftermath of the Lunar Conference. It would thus have been quite expensive to evacuate even a colony of this limited size. Ganymede and the other early Jovian colonies would not have been able to support such a massive influx, and so they would have needed to be moved back to Mars or even Earth.

**Hologram:** But still, just leaving them all to die with their animals from a plague?

**Peter:** It should not really be all that hard to contemplate. How many companies have cared when their products were poisoning millions? When their practices were dispossessing thousands? Their investment quickly curdled, so they probably just decided to let the colonists sort themselves out. The Commonwealth health service was in its infancy, and these new colonization projects were not really monitored.

**Captain:** And now they hire us to give them the all clear to go about it all over again.

**Hologram:** They certainly will not listen. Even if they are a bit wiser this time, they will still abuse their privilege. So much power over an entire moon controlled by greed alone.

**Captain:** Well yes, but what am I supposed to do? If I refuse to tell them anything I will not receive my commission due to breach of contract. We all have to eat, we all need fuel.

**Peter:** A moral conundrum that has wrung throughout the ages – what is an acceptable way to make a living? At what point is it no longer “I was just following orders” or “observing my contract”?

**Captain:** Peter, turn on the radio please, a little light entertainment while I think this all over.

Peter does as he is told.

**Terry:** Welcome to Big Mash *Scandal Hour*, all the best sleaze uncovered by our experienced team of journalists and busybodies giving you all the juiciest tales of the day.

**Hologram:** Ooh, what is it this week? Gratuitous sex, senseless violence or just plain ol' stupidity?

**Peter:** Often in these situations, the three tend to go together.

**Captain:** Shh, I'm trying to listen.

**Terry:** And remember that you too can be a crusader for the freedom of information! Got someone else's dirty laundry you'd like to air? Well, get in touch and get a few extra terras in your pocket!

**Captain:** Did you hear that?

**Peter:** Well yes, a rather dishonourable suggestion I thought.

**Captain:** True, but it's also potentially a ticket to a clear conscience and a still generous commission. If I break my contract, I will not be paid – but, it will get me out of the NDA.

**Hologram:** Well, and free us from several other severe and odious fine print clauses, yes. Did you know that strictly speaking we are not even supposed to be wearing shoes?

**Terry:** That number again is 834-3473. Call now!

**Hologram:** You know, that reporter sounded rather familiar...

**Captain:** You heard the man Peter, punch that number up!

The sound of a console being rapidly beaten ensues.

**Captain:** For the last time Peter, not so damn literal! The chassis can't take it.

Peter dials in, and the sounds of a phone ringing emanate through the cockpit.

**Terry (over comm system):** Hello, Big Mash Network, Terry speaking.

**Hologram:** Does he ever turn that voice off?

**Captain:** Hello, we have a submission for *Scandal Hour*. Do you take old skeletons in the closet?

**Hologram:** Or beneath the decaying atmospheric dome for that matter?

**Terry:** Why yes we... hey, wait a second! Was that *you*?

**Hologram (innocently):** Who? Little old me?

**Terry:** Oh god, not you lot again! You're not after more money are you?

**Peter:** Well yes... why else would we call you? Oh, wait, you meant *blackmail*... well then, no.

**Captain:** Relax *Terry*, we are only after what we will be due, per your usual rates for a submission.

**Terry:** So you're not going to bring up the... “exaggerated calamities” thing again.

**Peter:** No, it is preventing the repeating of a real calamity that interests us.

**Terry:** \* Sighs \* Alright, lay it on me then. We'll see if this is anything good.

**Captain:** Well, it all started around thirty years ago...

**Scene Nine: Your Big History Chip**  
**The Captain sums up his tale.**

**Captain:** ...And thus the colony fell as completely as old Rome, all thanks to what became *Forged-Turf Limited*. Quite funny how they did not mention that when tendering those new real estate and development contracts with the Space Commonwealth government, don't you find?

**Terry:** Indeed, an amazing story to be sure. It has something for the whole family: cute animals, human interest, (**deep tone**) deadly diseases and an untimely apocalypse. This is exactly what we needed to liven up what has otherwise been a fairly boring week. Seriously, we were down to a story on android exhibitionism. It seems that some of them are refusing to put on their cases, they say their cooling fans don't work right and they thus need the additional ventilation. I think they are all just perverts.

**Peter:** Or both. Either way, sounds pretty *hot* to me. ...I apologize... sorry...

**Captain:** Okay, all that being so, I am expecting a fairly generous payment for all this.

**Terry:** Umm, yeah, right. I already know your story now, and you do realize that it would be your word against ours in an open court right? Nothing is signed on paper after all.

**Captain:** I could have expected as much, I am sure you pull that trick on all your sources. Hologram, if you will do the honours...

**Hologram (with Terry's voice):** All right you win, it's true. We have been artificially creating disasters for years to bring up the ratings...

**Terry:** Fine, fine, fine!... Fine, fine, fine... I have heard that one more than enough! Expect your account to be generously embellished, again. You god damn blackmailers and vile extortionists.

**Captain:** Just one crook to another, and I am at least I am a fairly honest one.

**Terry:** Well yeah, but with that attitude you would not survive a day in the media. Farewell, unless there is any other piece of corporate property you're after. Want a branded mug? Jeezzz.

**Captain:** I think not, I need to leave your company intact if I am going to enjoy tomorrow's show.

The comm line goes quiet, and the Captain leans back quite pleased with himself.

**Peter:** Your summing up was a bit off sir, Rome didn't exactly fall as dramatically as people claim...

**Captain:** Oh? What do you mean?

**Peter:** After the Empire reached its zenith in size, it was broken up into two allied states - Eastern and Western Roman Empires - in order to run it more efficiently in an age of corruption and decline.

**Hologram:** And one fell and the other didn't?

**Peter:** Exactly, the Western Roman Empire, with Rome as its capital, collapsed under subsequent barbarian raids. The Eastern Empire, based at Constantinople, modern Istanbul, or is it Constantinople again? Either way, it lasted well into the Middle Ages.

**Captain:** How come I never heard of this? Old timey expressions are supposed to be all truthful! Next you will be telling me a baker's dozen is not actually twelve! Or that 2x4s are not eight times their width. Or that the rule of three makes for terrible comedy!

**Peter:** You might have heard of it in fact, but under the name of the Byzantine Empire. Byzantium being the original name for Istanbul/Constantinople/That Place With All the Names. It lasted with legacy Roman political structures, such as its own Senate, until the Ottoman Turks finally conquered the Empire and ultimately after centuries of siege took Constantinople.

**Hologram:** And a big ass cannon.... Seriously, look it up. Not that I really care or anything.

**Captain:** Eh, let him rant. It might just bore anyone who might possibly be listening.

**Peter:** Listening to us? That is rather paranoid of you isn't it sir?

**Captain:** In a universe with *Big Mash* and *Forged-Turf*, you can never be too careful.

**Hologram:** So then, don't you think we should be getting out of here. I would not really want *Forged-Turf* to know where we are when the *Scandal Hour* airs tomorrow afternoon.

**Captain:** Probably a good idea. Peter, pick a moon. A nicer one than this one of course.

**Peter:** Alright, just processing through the options... okay, the Moon!

**Hologram:** Wow, that was an amazing show of raw creativity! Have a cookie.

**Peter:** Well, that is an honest probability algorithm for you. (Monotone) 3, 2, 3, 3, 3, 6.... point 3, 3...

**Hologram:** Please stop.

**Captain:** Eh, but why not go to the Moon anyway? Let's go somewhere a long time settled, with no end of genetic variety.

**Hologram:** Why, hoping to woo a woman with your new found earnings? Spread your genes?

**Captain:** You never know. Besides, someone needs to spread the alleles expressed through integrity.

**Hologram:** And the spine of a cockroach, remember?

**Captain:** Flexibility is a good trait in any bloodline.

**Peter:** Speaking of which, don't your parents live on the Moon?

**Captain:** Yes, but that would ruin the fun now wouldn't it.

**Hologram:** Oh, but why? You've been a good boy... for once.

**Captain:** Exactly, and I do not want to be one for long. Full steam ahead, Mr. Gans Lee!

**Peter:** Aye aye, sir! Just let me recheck the dimensions of that hole in the roof... given my decimals might just be a touch *uninspired* at the moment.

Model Shot: The *Space Rover* flies out of the dome and away from Ananke.

Scene Ten: Making Headlines, Cheesy Dialogue  
The *Space Rover* is in orbit around Earth's Moon.

**Terry:** Representatives of *Forged-Turf Limited* have thus far declined to comment on its progenitor's alleged role in the extinction of the Ananke colony. But as always here on *Scandal Hour*, we let the mob... oooh, I mean, the public come to their own conclusions! Have a nice day, and just watch out, or else you might just be on here next time! But don't let that stop you!

**Captain:** Ah, now that was a good solid hour's entertainment there.

**Peter:** Stay tuned, it gets better.

The Captain and Hologram glance at Peter questioningly.

**Terry:** In addition, we have received a tape from an android proclaiming it to be a dissertation on the fall of Rome. Given we are state mandated to have four hours of educational content a month, we are unfortunately inclined to play it. Sorry everyone.

**Peter (on radio):** After the Empire reached its zenith in size, it was broken up into two allied states...

**Captain:** Hmm, disappointed by your public reception?

**Peter:** Rather, I did try and spruce it up a bit – even including random vulgarities, as that seems to attract the attention of your kind a bit more than dates and figures.

**Peter (on radio):** Those damn Byzantines, rule under them was hell sometimes!

**Captain (straight):** Indeed. Well, we'll cheer you up. Take us down to the surface, it's been ages since I last ate at the Lunar Cheese Emporium.

**Hologram:** And no more skulls to boot.

**Peter:** You would think that would rather depend on the moulds used in making the cheese.

**Hologram:** Eye socket and nasal passage Swiss? Yum, yum.

**Peter:** Swiss people? Hmm, well I suppose cannibalism fits the theme.

**Captain:** Neither of you are going to be the one to eat it, so relax already.

**Radio Announcer:** This next hour of broadcasting brought to you by **(robotic)** Jam-tastic Space Ale!

Peter and the Captain turn to face Hologram.

**Hologram (grinning):** See, I can get that reporter to do anything now!

The Captain, frowning, leans towards the dashboard.

\* Click!\*

The radio deactivates, plunging the cockpit into glorious silence.

**Newscaster #2:** This resulted in the collapse of Forged-Turf's bid on the Ananke colony, amid much controversy. In response to intense public pressure from all corners, the Commonwealth government officially announced a redesign of its Ananke development plans. The announcement detailed the creation of an off-world natural park for the thousands of animals displaced by Forged-Turf's previous projects. Surveying of the colony is underway. There are reports that the survey is being conducted by the same anonymous whistle-blower who first broke the scandal...

**Captain:** What do you mean it is our job to pick up all of these skulls?!

## THE END

**Narrator:** Captain James and Terry the 'journalist' were played by Hamish Wilson. Malcolm Wilson played Peter Gans Lee and the narrator, while Graham Wilson played Hologram and the radio announcers. The first newscaster was played by Samantha Hewitt. The Entertainment Reporter and the second newscaster were played by Laura Warman.

**Narrator:** The head writer was Graham Wilson, with Hamish Wilson as head editor and Malcolm Wilson as director. The series was written using *LibreOffice Writer*, and the music, audio effects and general editing were completed by Malcolm Wilson using *Audacity*.

**Narrator:** *Space Rover* is a *Fedora* and *Arch Linux* powered project, hosted by *icculus.org*, mirrored on the *Internet Archive* and *YouTube*, while distributed in free and non-patented Ogg Vorbis and FLAC formats. Special thanks to *Grant/Naylor Productions* and *Douglas Adams* for the series inspiration, as well as the venerable *Land Rover* car manufacturer.

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*The Space Rover* theme tune plays us out.