

JONATHAN
HICKS



THOSE DARK PLACES

INDUSTRIAL SCIENCE FICTION
ROLEPLAYING

Those Dark Places



Jonathan Hicks

 **OSPREY
GAMES**

OSPREY GAMES

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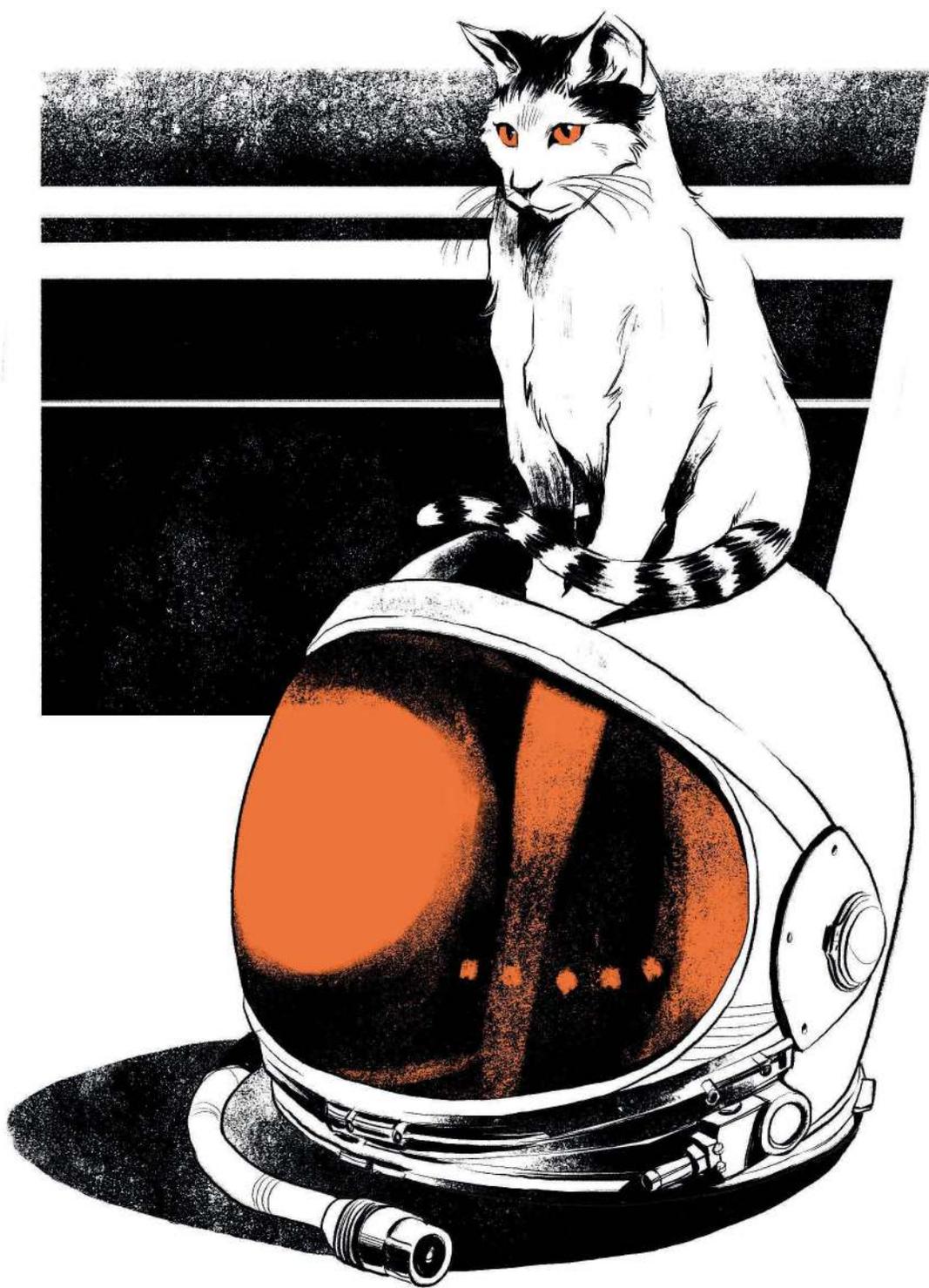
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INTRODUCTION

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On Sunday the 11th of July 1982, when I was very young, I sneakily watched a movie that would change the way I looked at science-fiction cinema. The movie was Ridley Scott's *Alien*.

I had never seen anything like it. I was brought up on the Star Wars movies, and one of my favourite shows was *Star Trek* – it was all very bright and full of adventure. There were heroes and bad guys and cute bleeping robots.

Then darkness. The universe was suddenly a dangerous and scary place to be.

Those Dark Places has been designed with the science-fiction thriller genre in mind, films such as *Alien*, *Outland*, *Silent Running*, and *Moon*. It is also influenced by video games like *Alien: Isolation* and *Dead Space*. A lot of these movies and games have something in common – claustrophobia and the idea that there is no escape from the situation the protagonists find themselves in. The best stories take place far from Earth, on space stations, starships, or lost colonies in the far corners of the galaxy: far from anyone else, far from aid. They revolve around being cut off in an alien environment, surrounded by things beyond comprehension, whether those things are real or figments of a mind lost forever in deep space.

You only have to watch the movie *Alien* to understand my meaning – a small crew of seven (about the size of a gaming group!) on a starship almost a year's travel from Earth. An alien organism that is totally incomprehensible to them, the life cycle of which is first experienced through invasion and violence, a creature that kills indiscriminately. Add to this the fact that those in charge might have actually known of its existence... that's some pretty powerful gaming material right there. The role-

playing and adventure opportunities abound. Skulking around the ship trying to find the creature, fighting it off as best you can, running for your life... this set-up and others like it just scream (excuse the pun) for a role-playing game (RPG).

WHAT THE GAME IS ABOUT

SO, WHAT IS INDUSTRIAL SCI-FI?

It's a genre that reflects the down-and-dirty, grim side of science fiction. There's a very blue-collar, hands-on approach to this kind of sci-fi, and it was prevalent in the 1970s and '80s. These films dealt with horror, suspense, and mystery, and the technology was very much of its time, and very analogue: all switches, levers, CRT screens, and heavy blast doors. There were no fancy touchscreens or polished white surfaces. Everything was either flickable or pressable, environments were claustrophobic, badly lit, and covered in wires, pipes, and grating, and the people involved were regular Janes and Joes: engineers, suits, police officers, and everyday citizens. The technology was harsh and physical, but that's what you want in the back end of space: hardy, solid machinery and technology that can be replaced or repaired easily. It's all very well having flashy voice-activated quantum computers with holographic projectors, but the moment it goes wrong you'll need a crew member with a PhD to get it running again. There's no time for that in the back of beyond, where the company is trying to save money and is just sending whoever wants to earn a bonus out there.

This type of science fiction was of its time, but it has translated to modern mediums, too, in computer games such as *Dead Space* and *Alien: Isolation*. It makes games much tenser. There's no reliance on fancy gadgets or equipment, and you're forced to deal with situations using just what you have to hand. If the job can be done with a big three-foot spanner, then there's no point in spending money on high-tech solutions. And if where you're going is 100 light years away and takes two years to get there... well, out of sight, out of mind.

Earth is the only place where you can stand outside and breathe; everything beyond Earth's atmosphere is a danger to the human race. There are no worlds where you can walk in the open without a spacesuit, and every station, outpost, and settlement is a steel and pipe nightmare with very few windows. It's a chilling thought. You've travelled to the outer reaches of nowhere. You're on a station that nobody cares about, or that has been cut off for days. You're investigating a settlement that doesn't even care about itself, and you can't even go outside for a few moments to catch your breath and get away from it all...

You can transplant any horror scenario into an industrial sci-fi setting. Psychotic murderer in a high school? How about a psychotic murderer on a space station? It's very easy to do. Ridley Scott himself said that one of his influences for the feel and atmosphere of *Alien* was *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which is about as far removed from science fiction as you can get. If you take the elements of a good thriller, murder mystery, fright movie, or horror film and transpose it to a claustrophobic, dark, gritty, industrial sci-fi setting, then you have your game.

The title *Those Dark Places* perfectly describes what this game is about: the shadowy corners of space that no one has ever explored. What is there? Is it intelligent? Is it a monster? And what would happen to small crews stuck in the deep-space stations and outposts that nobody visits, places where even light does not reach? What would that do to your mind? Your sanity?

FOR THE GAMEMASTER

Gamemasters – known in this game as General Monitors, or GMs – can run *Those Dark Places* however they wish. But they might wish to consider a few things that this game is trying to capture to reflect the science-fiction thriller genre.

The setting of the game is grim, dark, claustrophobic, and always hints at danger. Whether you have an alien creature on the loose in the station or there are shady corporate suits trying to make as much profit as possible by abusing the rights of their workers, the focus should be on the atmosphere as well as the story. Going beyond Earth offers few comforts, and open spaces can only be found on large bases with enough room to make a basic facsimile of Earth's parks. Most settlements and outposts are there to make profit or push exploration further – imagine travelling for weeks on a submarine to find that the only place you could take refuge was on an oil rig shrouded in permanent night.

These deep-space facilities have to conserve as much as they can in order to keep operating, so all resources are rationed and recycled. Water and air feels bland and stale, power is used only when required – and even then in minimal amounts – and the equipment is as simple as possible, built by the lowest bidder to cut costs.

Also, there is always the ominous thought that help is too far away to make any difference in an emergency. The team might be 20 weeks out from Earth, or from any other safe haven; that means a wait of 20 weeks for assistance after putting out a distress call. Travelling into those dark places of the galaxy where no one has ever been, or where no one has visited in a long time, can take its toll on people and machines, and if things go wrong, you're on your own. Ship crews and base personnel are trained in different areas to help fill gaps in the skill pool, so if a station becomes undermanned for any reason, it can still operate.

This game is about the horror that manifests itself in the darkest reaches of space, physically or mentally. Whether the horrors in the shadows are real or not... that's up to you.

FOR THE PLAYER

Creating a player character (or PC) to portray in *Those Dark Places* is a short and uncomplicated process, with a lot of the design detail going into the character's personality and emotional state, as well as the numbers on the character sheet. Although the stats of the character will have a significant impact on the character's welfare, they are not the most important aspect of play.

First, it is best to visualise the setting the character is in, and then decide what type of personality would be best to play. If the campaign is going to be military-based, then a uniformed and by-the-book PC type might be suitable. A private trader might be more open-minded and relaxed. If the character is on the wrong side of the law, then maybe paranoia would be a good virtue, or perhaps a blasé outlook on life.

These facets of a personality must be established before initial character creation can begin, but you might not want to get too hung-up on the psychological traits of PCs. *Those Dark Places* is designed for dark adventures in space, and it would be a shame for each heart-stopping action scene or act of drama to be bogged down by a player agonising over decisions. After all, when you're firing multiple shots at a mutated crew member who's trying to eat your flesh... well, it's impossible to think things through at a time like that. It's not chess. You have to think fast, and move faster.

There are a lot of choices for a player to make in *Those Dark Places*, but deciding what kind of PC to play is probably the most important of all of them. This book provides some basic guidelines for character types and crew positions to get players started, but the rules are loose enough that they can be applied to create any kind of character. In general, players can role-play as whoever they want: engineers, scouts, law keepers, technicians, robbers, marines, executives, pirates, bounty hunters, doctors... the list goes on and on.



THE RULEBOOK

The Player's Section has been designed to get the group into the atmosphere of the game straight away, and has been written from the perspective of a company representative interviewing new prospects: i.e., the players. If you're the GM, to help you get into the mood of the game, read the book aloud to the players as they go through the character-creation process, as this will allow them to experience the atmosphere of the game, as well as walk them through the rules step by step.

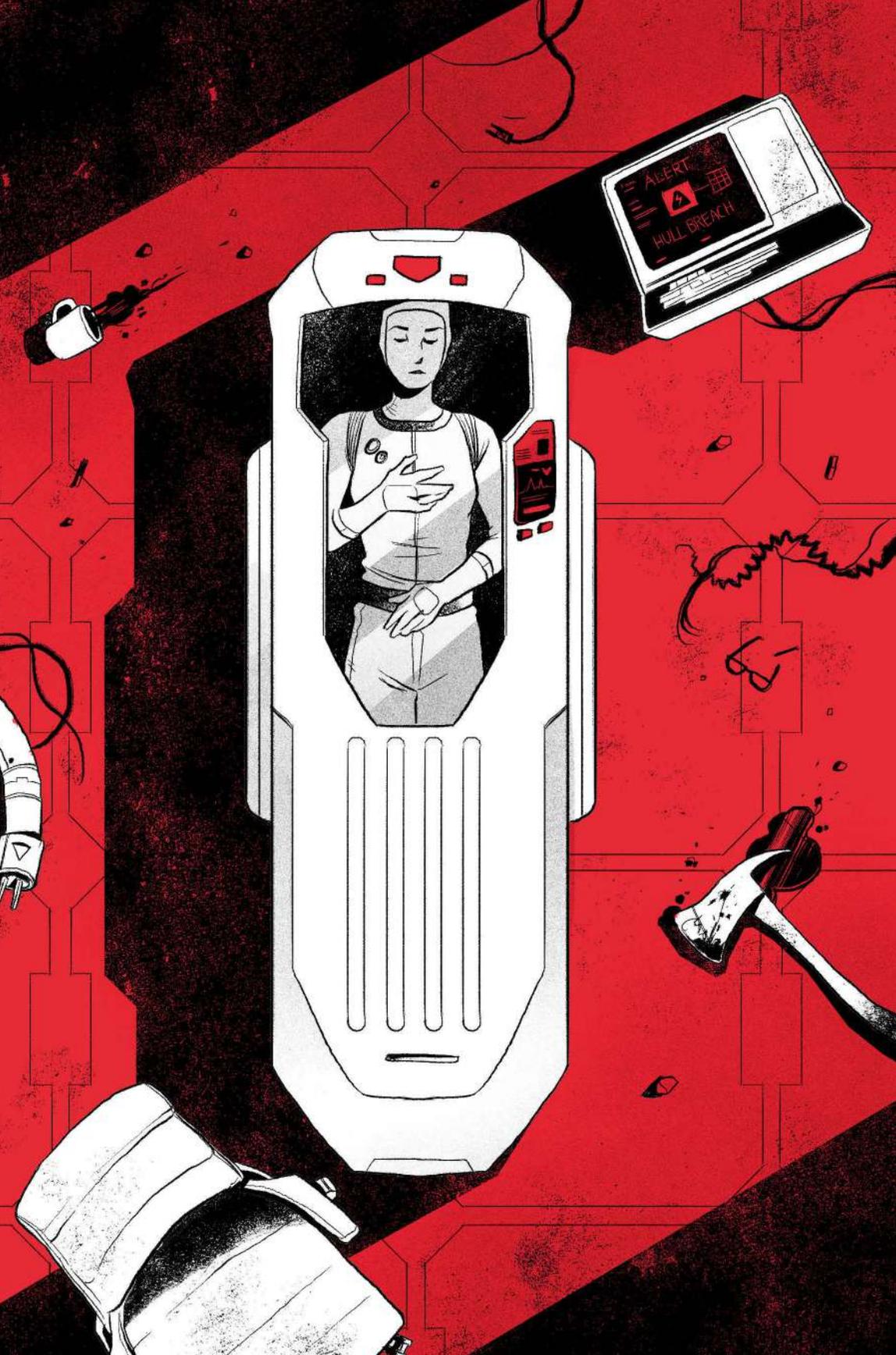
In both the Players' Section and the GMs' Section, there are sidebars that help to clarify certain areas of the rules and to introduce options you might want to consider to add to your game, but don't worry about these for your first few sessions. Just focus on getting to grips with how the game works.

All you need for this game is a single d6, or a d6 for each person – including the GM – taking part. Whether it's a traditional die, an app, or any other method of generating a random number between 1 and 6, that's all you'll need.





+++//01/**<<<
END



PLAYERS' SECTION

+++//02/**<<<

+++SYSTEM SEVEN-OH-SEVEN+++

+++GENERAL MONITOR IN ATTENDANCE+++

+++YOU ARE APPLICANT (THREE-TWO) OF (ONE-NINE-EIGHT)+++

Hi. Sorry to keep you waiting. Take a seat.

You can smoke, if you want, but there'll be a two-point deduction on your water allowance, we have recycling limitations in force. It's up to you.

Okay, so, let's see. First of all, here's your crew sheet. There are some details we'll need, the usual; name, sex, all those kinds of things. Your height and weight are important, as they'll be used to decide what kind of operations you're sent out on. Your description and distinguishing marks are for... identification purposes, so include hair and eye colour, and any scars or marks you think are important.

Your personality is up to you. We're not running a dating agency here, but we'd like an idea of what makes you tick: likes, dislikes, how you feel you'd handle yourself in a crisis. What drives you? You don't have to go into any personal history, this isn't psychoanalysis. That comes later. Just put down whatever you feel is important.

Oh, and you don't have to fill in that last part now. You can have some time to think about it and let us know when you're ready.

ATTRIBUTES

Now, there are four basic Attributes we need to measure to make sure that you're suited to the role you're applying for. These make up your CASE file, and these Attributes are represented by a number; the higher the number, the better you are in the Attribute. The three Attributes are CHARISMA, AGILITY, STRENGTH and EDUCATION. C-A-S-E. A CASE file. Get it? Yeah, we're comedians.

CHARISMA is your ability to deal with other people, socialise, and bargain. The ability to interact with others well is a must on long-haul missions with small crews, and the art of diplomacy and conversation when you meet people who have been out there for a long time is a very important skill.

AGILITY is a measure of your hand/eye coordination and physical skill. This covers quite a few things, including manual dexterity, shooting weapons, driving vehicles, and piloting starships. If you have to do something dextrous, or you get your hands on something that doesn't need brute force to operate, this is the score that represents your ability to do or use it.

STRENGTH is general health, physical power, and constitution. If you're climbing a surface, leaping a gap, taking a punch, or trying to withstand a harsh environment, then we'll refer to your STRENGTH score. It also represents how much punishment you can take physically, so bear that in mind.

EDUCATION tells us how well your brain works. It's not just about how smart you are or which university you went to, it's also a measure of how fast you can analyse difficult problems and how to react in mentally challenging situations.

Now, before you're put through any kind of formal testing, we'd like you to tell us how you think you score in each of these four areas. Take the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, and put one of these four numbers into each Attribute.

So, if you feel you're pretty good with a wrench and quite strong, but didn't pay much attention in class, then you could have CHARISMA 2, AGILITY 4, STRENGTH 3, and EDUCATION 1. Or, if you're a pretty good pilot, didn't work out or exercise as much as you should have, and spent a lot of time *actually* paying attention in school, you could have CHARISMA 2, AGILITY 3, STRENGTH 1, and EDUCATION 4. It's up to you how you score yourself, but you will be monitored in the simulations, so try to be honest. It'll help us decide where you should be stationed.

Once you've scored yourself, just tick off the number of circles on the CASE file to represent your chosen value, it's easier for our system to recognise a filled-in circle rather than someone's scribble.

USING ATTRIBUTES

So, the purpose of an Attribute is to give us an idea of how well you react in certain situations. What will happen is that we'll ask you a question about a situation that you have to handle. I'll present a scenario, then you tell us how you react and what you want to do to resolve the situation. We'll then decide which Attribute to use to resolve the situation and generate a random number between 1 and 6. We'll add the number we generate to the Attribute score chosen, and if the total score is 7 or more, you've been successful. Anything less than 7 is a failure.

Does that make sense? Look, I know, it's late, and you've been waiting for hours for this orientation and the waiting room is hot, boring, and stuffy, and you just want to get on with it. The last thing you want is to have to learn weird simulation rules, but out here it's what we've got to work with. If you want one of those fancy reality headsets, then get a berth on the next freighter back home.

Okay, how can I put this... tell you what, for now we'll use a six-sided die. I'll roll a single die to generate that random number and test how you respond under certain circumstances – I'll tell you what's happening, and I'll choose which Attribute to use.

This is what you do. Roll the six-sided die and add the score of the Attribute you want to use. You must score 7 or more to succeed. Anything below 7 is a failure. If the task you're doing is a bit easier, then we'll lower the score to 6, and if it's harder, we'll up it to 8. But in general, 7 is always the score to beat.

So, let's say you're in an airlock, and the pressure is dropping, and you have no suit. That's pretty bad, right? So, you have to use a heavy multi-tool to twist a safety valve closed. What Attribute do you use?

Well, if the valve is straightforward and the tool will do it for you, then that's a STRENGTH roll. You roll the six-sided die, add your STRENGTH score, and if the total is 7 or higher, you've turned the valve correctly and the pressure normalises. If you fail, you don't turn the valve and there are consequences – don't worry about that, I'll discuss that later.

Let's say you need to analyse a sample to make sure it's not a threat. You roll the die, add your EDUCATION score and aim for 7 or more. You see how this works?

Sometimes, the roll will be easier; let's say you're in the airlock, and there's a big sign telling you how to turn the valve. That's easier, right? So that lowers the target score to 6.

Sometimes, it'll be harder. Let's say you're in the airlock and the lights are flashing, there's gas everywhere, and the noise is horrific. That'd make things worse, right? Then the target number goes up to 8 to reflect that. You'll need to roll 8 or more...

What's that? Airlock safety training? Of course you will. Don't stress yourself out, that was just an example. Sheesh.



Every time you make a roll, it takes time, whether it's a general roll or a combat one. In the simulation, we call these 'rounds', and on average a round is five seconds. They can be a bit longer, depending on the circumstances, but we'll decide that when it happens.

LEVELS OF SUCCESS

Now, it's not that straightforward. Nothing is as simple as 'you succeed' or 'you fail'. There's always that sense of 'yeah, but...' Those moments when you *think* it's worked, and in general it has, but there's a catch. As in, you've locked the door, but there's a glitch, and it might unlock itself later, or you've managed to administer first aid, but perhaps the bandages aren't as good as you thought they were. Or maybe you managed to convince (as in con) the guard of your benign intentions, but later on he might reconsider his decision and think 'hang on a minute...'

Situations like these are represented in the simulator as a partial success, one of three levels of success. There's a complete failure, which is rolling below 7, or whatever the target number is. Then there's a complete success, which is rolling above the target number. But there's also a partial success, which is rolling dead on the target number.

So, if the target number is the standard 7, rolling less than 7 is a failure, rolling higher than 7 is a success and rolling exactly 7 is a partial success. But remember to always add or subtract any bonuses or penalties when you roll. For example, you might have a weapon or object that gives you +2; so if you rolled a 5, you would then add a bonus of 2, making 7 – a partial success.

Okay, so that's nice and simple, but how do these partial successes play out in the simulation? Glad you asked. The General Monitor of the simulation, or the GM, will make a note of the result and maybe, maybe, it will work against you later. You don't know. You see, in these simulations we monitor how well players react to failures, and the prospect of failures, as well as their reactions to their successes.

How this plays out, and how the GM uses these moments of uncertainty, is out of your hands. The consequences of your partial success – or not-so-bad failure if you're the pessimistic type – might come back to haunt you later on in the simulation. You'll just have to grit your teeth and deal with it when, or if, it happens.



OPPOSED ROLLS

Sometimes, you'll be up against other people rather than a critical situation. This results in an opposed test, where both parties roll to see who comes out on top. This is simple: each side rolls a die, adds the applicable Attribute score and any bonuses, and the highest roll wins. If the rolls are tied, then roll again until there's a winner – unless it's combat, where there are a few differences. But I'll address them later when...

What? Well, yes, there's a chance that you'll have some... conflict. Look, a lot of the places you'll be visiting are in the back of beyond, and some of them have been cut off from central for so long that they no longer think the law applies to them. It's risky, but... look, you did read the pamphlet before signing up for this, right? I'd hate to think you signed on the dotted line without knowing the full details of what you'll be doing out there.

Anyway, we'll come back to that. For the purposes of these tests, all of the Attributes will be used at one point or another for opposed rolls against non-player characters, or NPCs – in other words, the characters that we'll control.

However, you will be going into the simulations with other crew members who are vying for positions, and you can also make opposed rolls against them using AGILITY, STRENGTH, and, sometimes, EDUCATION. The only opposed roll you can't make against other actual crew members, or 'players' in this instance, is the CHARISMA one. It'd be unfair if you could influence other player's decisions and actions by making these rolls, so they don't count.

CREW POSITIONS

Now, there are ways to get bonuses to the rolls, and these will give you a better chance of beating that target score. These bonuses are linked to the position on a starship or space station that you go for.

There are seven different crew positions to choose from, and each one gives you some benefits in that area of speciality. We like to make sure that all positions are covered, no matter what happens, so choose two of the positions available below, a Primary Position and a Secondary Position. A group can choose the same positions if they wish, but I suggest you discuss this with your crew so that there's a good spread of abilities. No point in screaming for a medic when everyone's an engineer, am I right?

A Primary Position will give you +2 to the die roll. So, when you are given a task, we'll look at which Attribute you'll be using, and then we'll also see whether your

crew position is applicable. If the crew position is suitable, then you'll roll the die, add your Attribute score to the result, and then add a further 2 to the score. Does that make sense to you?

Let's say that you're giving first aid to a fellow crew member. The difficulty is 7, as normal, and you'll be adding your EDUCATION score to the die roll. In addition, your Primary Position is Medical Officer, which is applicable in this situation, so you can add a further 2 to the roll. That means if you had an EDUCATION of 3 as well as the Medical Officer crew position, you would add a total of 5 to the die roll.

The Secondary Position is exactly the same, except you add +1 rather than +2 to the roll. This is how we do things out here, we like to have abilities in reserve in case of emergencies, when you need to fill a crew position at a moment's notice for... whatever reason.

Think hard about which two crew positions you want, and, like I said before, check with your fellow crew members to see where their strengths lie. We don't want skills crossing over too much and not being distributed properly. Oh, and no matter what, all vessels require a Helm Officer and Navigation Officer.

For your choice of Primary Position, fill out two circles on your crew sheet. For your Secondary, just fill out one.

HELM OFFICER

If you're at home behind the wheel, then this position is for you. Choose the Helm Officer position to drive or pilot any kind of craft, from wheeled ground transports to starships.

NAVIGATION OFFICER

Getting from point A to point B across the galaxy takes a long time, so it'd be nice to know that you're heading in the correct direction. The Navigation Officer position teaches you directional awareness, as well as the technical know-how.

SCIENCE OFFICER

If there's a problem concerning physics, biology, chemistry, or any other field, then the Science Officer steps up. From actual research to working out stellar anomalies, from interpreting data to making a hypothesis, this position can prove quite enlightening.

SECURITY OFFICER

There's always trouble out there, so having some combat skills is never a bad thing. Security Officers get a bonus every time they are involved in any kind of combat, from throwing punches to firing guns.

LIAISON OFFICER

Some settlements seem to forget that they're part of a larger entity, and they tend to develop a frontier mentality and ignore the rules. Then there are the problem suits, local officials who love to impede official enquiries, and store staff who might be trying to sucker you. Liaison Officers deal with the face-to-face diplomatic side of things.

ENGINEERING OFFICER

At some point, things will break down and need repairing, replacing, or reprogramming. Engineering Officers have the glamorous job of tinkering with broken pipes, blocked air vents, and smoking computers.

MEDICAL OFFICER

The importance of the Medical Officer cannot be understated. It's dangerous out there, and anything from first aid to emergency surgery is performed in the deep dark black. In fact, in our experience, the Medical Officer is the most relied upon position for all vessels and stations.

>> //[001] WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Some players might question what their 'role' is in the group; in many RPGs, characters are designed to excel in specific areas, creating a party of experts that can weather most storms. *Those Dark Places* isn't designed that way, because who is ever prepared for the unexpected?

This is a game where the players play characters who might not be the best fit for the job at hand. Yes, they might have chosen to be a doctor, but that doesn't mean they're any good at it, especially if they have an EDUCATION score of 1. This game is about using what skill you have to survive the unknown and get past the darkness within and without; a game about challenging fate not with a set of

skills designed to help you 'win', but by doing what you can to survive with what you have!

As a player, you might still want to have a say in how the party hangs together, and to ensure that the group has a good selection of abilities to maximise their chances. Speak to the rest of the group and the GM, as there are more extensive descriptions of the Crew Positions in the General Monitors' section, and there are notes on which Attribute is best for which position. This will help you to choose and design a character that suits your style of play, and that complements the rest of the group.

>>//[001] END<<

CONFLICT AND DAMAGE

Inevitably, at some point, you will have a major issue with someone, and it will escalate into violence. We don't condone violence in any way, but nor do we restrict our crew from defending themselves or taking action. Please be aware that insurance does not cover acts of aggression perpetrated by our employees, and there are a few waivers as far as being attacked are concerned, so please try to avoid conflict at all costs. Our underwriters get very nervous.

For the purposes of this simulation, combat is divided up into the rounds we talked about earlier. Each round is five seconds long, and in that round you can move, throw a punch, hit with a weapon, fire a weapon, that kind of thing. Projectile weapons are designed to fire a single shot per round; we learned very quickly that firing a stream of bullets at a high rate on a spaceship isn't as cool as it seems in the movie theatres.

INITIATIVE

In any situation you'll want to know who goes first, who gets the first blow in, who fires the first shot and all that. This is worked out with everyone – even the characters who are not actual players – rolling a die and adding their AGILITY Attribute, and the highest score goes first, the next highest goes second etc. If anyone ties, they roll again against each other for that position in the order sequence. This order remains the same for subsequent rounds.

So, characters A, B, C, and D are about to get into it; A rolls the highest so A goes first. B and C roll equal, so they're tied for second and D rolls lowest, so they're going last. As B and C rolled equal they roll again and this time C wins, so they are now after A, followed by B and then finally D.

Lots of letters flying around there. I'm going to use names from now on.



HAND TO HAND

First of all, there are the obvious hand-to-hand incidents involving punches, kicks, and so on. In the simulation, we'll use an opposed roll for these kinds of things. Both sides roll a die, add their STRENGTH score, and anyone with the Security Officer crew position gets an extra +2 or +1 to the roll, depending on whether they took it as a Primary or a Secondary position. The highest roll wins, and the loser must deduct 1 point from their STRENGTH score. If the rolls are tied, then no blows have landed for this round.

So, for example, let's say that... oh, I don't know, let's call him Brian... has a STRENGTH of 3 and is the Security Officer, and his opponent has a STRENGTH of 2. They both roll a single six-sided die and they both add their STRENGTH scores. Brian, however, gets an extra +2 to his roll thanks to his Primary Position as a Security Officer. Brian rolls a 4, and adding his STRENGTH of 3 and his bonus of 2 gives him a score of 9. His opponent rolls a 4, which when added to his STRENGTH of 2 results in a 6. Brian wins this round, so his opponent reduces his STRENGTH score by 1.

Melee weapons – such as cudgels, spanners, and the like – are dealt with in the same way, and do up to 2 points of damage. I'll explain the damage scores in just a moment.

FIREARMS

Then there are projectile weapons. Now, hold on, before you start wearing a standard issue 10-mil on your hip, let's be clear about something: firing a high-velocity weapon on a spaceship or space station is a BAD THING. One shattered viewport or punctured seal later, and you'll be wondering why it's gone very cold and your eyeballs are frozen. Weapons are for serious situations only, and carrying them around is an absolute no. Only trained personnel, mainly Security Officers, are allowed weapons, and this is usually just the Dazer Mark III stun gun. It shoots a dart that delivers an electric shock, which is painful. Trust me on that.

Anyway, to shoot a weapon, you're using your AGILITY score. To hit a target, you roll the die, then add your AGILITY score and a +2 or a +1 if you're the Security Officer. The target to beat is usually 7, but if your opponent is closer, say 3–6 metres, then it's 6, and if they're further away, say 20 metres or more, then it's 8.

If it's a hit, then damage is taken away from the target's STRENGTH score as normal, but again we'll talk about damage later.

The target can attempt to dodge, and that raises the target number for the shooter by 1. So, if you're shooting at normal range, then the target number is 7, but if the target dodges, then it goes up to 8. However, if the target attempts a dodge, then they will lose their next chance to attack in any way during that round, whether the dodge was successful or not. The declaration to dodge must also be made before

the roll to attack is made.

So, let's say that... erm, let's call her Florence... say that Florence is shooting at her opponent. She takes aim with her Dazer, but the opponent sees her intention and decides to dodge. The choice to dodge means that the opponent is forfeiting their next chance to attack as they focus on not getting a stun dart in the face. This raises Florence's target number from 7 to 8.

DAMAGE

So, here we are at the nitty gritty of it all. The rolls have gone against you, and you've been hit, so what happens?

Well, any damage you take is deducted from your STRENGTH score. Once your STRENGTH reaches 0, you're unconscious. If it goes to -2, you're in serious trouble, and you'll die in a number of rounds equal to your full STRENGTH score unless you get first aid. If it goes beyond -2, then you're dead.

Sorry.

So, how do you work out how much damage you take? Well, as we discussed in the Hand To Hand section, if you get hit with a punch or a kick, you'll take 1 point of damage.

But if you get hit by a metal pipe or spanner, then you'll take either 1 or 2 points of damage: this is what we call variable damage. Each weapon has a damage cap – the maximum damage you can take from that weapon – and we work out the actual damage you take from that weapon by rolling a six-sided die.

So, a metal pipe has a damage cap of 2. You roll a six-sided die, and if the number rolled is 2 or more, then you have taken 2 points of damage, which must be removed from your Strength score. Because the damage cap is 2, you cannot take more than 2 points of damage, even if you rolled a higher number than 2. If you rolled a 1, then you only take 1 point of damage.

Here's another example. Let's say that you're attacking an opponent using a pistol that has a damage cap of 3. If you roll a 1, you do 1 point of damage. If you roll a 2, you do 2 points of damage. If you roll 3–6, you do 3 points of damage.

But here's the kick, which is why you need to make sure you're aware of everything and avoid fighting at all costs – for hits on static or surprised targets, the damage taken is automatically the full amount. Sudden ambushes can do some serious harm.

Get it? Great. Below you'll find the different kinds of damage that combat inflicts. Try to make a note of them – even though this is a simulation, they are a pretty good reference, and might give you pause if you think about getting involved with some crazy with a gun.

WEAPON	AMMO	DAMAGE
Punch / kick		1
Cudgel / rod		2
Pistol	12	3
Rifle	30	4
Shotgun	8	5 at range difficulty 6 3 at range difficulty 7 2 at range difficulty 8
Dazer Mark III	3	4 (non-lethal below -2)
Explosives		4 damage to all in a five-metre radius

OTHER SOURCES OF DAMAGE

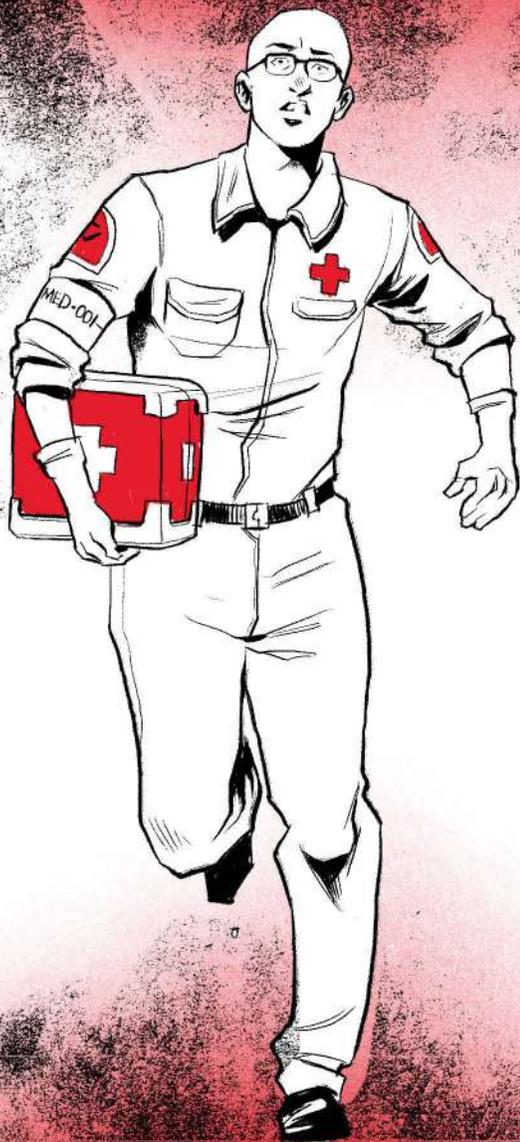
You can get hurt by other means, of course.

If you are starved of oxygen, take damage from a dangerous source, or get surprised by something nasty – like gas, poison, radiation, fire, drowning, or the infinite vacuum of space – you will take 1 point of damage per round. This could take you below 0, so make sure your crewmates know where you are, yes?

If you fall from a height you take 1 point of damage for every 2 metres you plummet. Sounds weird? Well, if you fall between 1 and 2 metres, you're fine, just a bit bruised, and you'll take 1 damage. If you fall 2–4 metres, you'll take 2 damage. For a fall of 4–6 metres, you'll take 3 damage, and so on. Get it now? Look, just watch your footing and don't worry about it.

HEALING

Anyway, if you get hurt, get to a Medical Officer or an autodoc. Medical attention restores 1 point of Strength per hour. If you can't, then make sure you have a medical kit with you, which will restore a single point of Strength until you find better help. If this only gets you to 0, then you're still unconscious, and your buddies will have to help you out, so don't go out there alone.





>> //[002]+++000<< CHARACTER DEATH

It's a sobering thought – you've done your very best, but the character simply couldn't make it through the horrors and has succumbed to the dark. It's never a nice moment, and it can be quite upsetting, annoying, and downright inconvenient when a carefully crafted character meets a sorry end.

What does the player do now that their character has met their demise? Do they just sit the rest of the game out? Not necessarily.

The nature of character creation means that a player can create another PC quite quickly. All that remains is getting the new character into the action.

This can be done in one of two ways:

Firstly, the new character could be another crew member on the ship. Perhaps they are part of a larger crew elsewhere on the vessel, or they're still in LongSleep and are waiting to be woken up. Perhaps the now-dead character put out a distress call before they died, and the new character has arrived on a ship that has come to help out. They might even bring something that aids the players. Perhaps the group needs to get out of a room or a location they're trapped in – could the new crew member help? There are plenty of possibilities here for skin-of-the-teeth rescues.

Alternatively, the new character could be a person at the location they're visiting: a technician, doctor, or some blue-collar worker who's sick of the situation and just wants to help, perhaps for the benefit of the company, the group, or simply for themselves.

Character death doesn't mean that the player has to lose out on the evening's session, and a new character could introduce an entirely different dynamic to the group.

>>//[002] END<<





PRESSURE

Okay... look, this is a bit of a touchy subject, and I either get whining or bravado, but there's something that we'll have to measure to make sure that you're suited for life out there. There are all kinds of things that will test your patience, your will, and your sanity, and long periods of time away from Mother Earth in a tin can will take their toll. And please take notice that I said *'will'*. I don't care how strong-willed you think you are, everyone suffers from stress in one way or another.

Okay, in simulation terms, this is how it works. You decided on the scores that best represent you, so this will give us an idea of your stress level.

First, add your STRENGTH score to your EDUCATION score. This is your Pressure Bonus. Fill in a number of boxes equal to your Pressure Bonus on your crew sheet.

There will come a time when you are asked to make a Pressure roll. These rolls are made when something happens to you, or you find yourself in a situation where your mind could be put under undue and maybe even impossible pressure.

Perhaps you're trapped in small area and the decompression siren is wailing—stressful, right? How about you've just walked into a room and a crewmate has exploded all over the place due to a malfunctioning atmosphere sensor? No, don't make that face, these things have happened. How about a frozen corpse bouncing off a window, or a friend with bits of their body missing staggering down a corridor, crying for help? How about a guy whose mind has just cracked holding a gun to your head?

Yeah, you're acting as most people do; you make that face when you either dismiss it as 'one of those things', or ask 'how bad can it be?' Friend, I'm telling you, you can detach from reality when you watch this stuff happen on an entertainment console, but in real life? Right now you're safe and cosy, and you haven't been breathing unrecycled air for months. Don't tell me you can handle it until you've been stranded for weeks, stuck in the dark with... with *things* on the loose. Stressful situations can have all kinds of effects, and this is how we portray it in the simulator.

The Pressure Level is an indicator of building tensions, the strain of dangerous situations, and the ongoing stress that a person accrues as problems mount and TERRORS UNFOLD! Sorry – I can't help a few theatrics every now and then. But, yeah, this is all about the continuous build-up of tension and what it can do to a person. You can tick off the boxes representing your Pressure Level on your crew sheet, but don't use anything permanent. It'll fluctuate over time and it gets all messy and annoying if you ink it.

When asked to make a Pressure roll, you roll the six-sided die and add your Pressure Bonus. The target to beat is 10. If you roll 10 or more, then you're OK, just a little shaken. If you roll 9 or less, then you're stressed, and your Pressure Level goes up.

Your Pressure Level is a number from 0 to 6, and all fresh-faced crew members such as yourself start at 0. Every time you fail a Pressure Roll, you add 1 to this score.

At 1 you're a little stressed; this doesn't help, but everyone gets a little bit stressed, it's just the nature of the job.

However, each time you fail another Pressure Roll, the score goes up by a further 1 point. If your Pressure Level is 2 or more, this is when things get interesting.

Every time your Pressure Level goes up over 1, you roll a six-sided die. If the score is less than but NOT equal to your Pressure Level, you will suffer a... what's the best word for it... look, we'll call it an 'Episode'.

So, for example, you fail your Pressure Roll, and the score goes up to 2. You then roll a six-sided die, and if the score on the die is 1, then you suffer an Episode. If you then fail another Pressure Roll, your Pressure Level will go up to 3, and you have to roll another six-sided die. This time, if you roll a 1 or a 2, you will suffer an Episode. If you roll equal to or above these scores, then nothing happens, but the scores do not go down.

Episodes are mental breakdowns that can affect you physically and mentally. They can affect your ability to function, send you into a manic rage, or make you catatonic. No, really, you think I'm making this stuff up? I honestly wish there was a way to make this sound better, but there it is; there are only so many times we can make it sound like it hardly ever happens, but during a 25-year tour, every crew member is almost guaranteed to witness it at least once, maybe even experience it, and we need to make sure that you're prepared, or at least informed. For the insurance, you know how it is.

So, if you do suffer an Episode, roll a six-sided die and consult the table below and remember – all effects are cumulative. So if you roll a 1 on your first Episode, you will lose a point of AGILITY, and if you roll a 1 again on your second Episode, you'll lose another point of AGILITY. Attribute scores can reach 0 this way, rendering you weak and powerless. If this happens you're pretty much unconscious, unable to function properly - except for maybe a few slurred words - and the rest of the crew will have to help you. If things have gone south, well... not the best of conditions to be in, is it? You'll be out of action until you get into a LongSleep chamber – I'll explain that in a minute.

However – and this is really important – the die roll on the table below cannot go above your Pressure Level. So, if you're at a Pressure Level of 3, you cannot suffer the effects of the die rolls for 4, 5, or 6 in the table. If you roll higher than 3, you will only suffer the effects of result 3.

ROLL	EPISODE
1	IN SHOCK Body suffers uncontrollable shaking. Reduce AGILITY by 1 point.
2	IN SHOCK Body suffers fatigue. Reduce STRENGTH by 1 point.
3	IN SHOCK Cognitive abilities suffer. Reduce EDUCATION and CHARISMA by 1 point.
4	RIGID You can barely communicate and are rooted to the spot in fear, eyes always on the source of the stress. You remain this way until the source is removed – or you are removed – and once this happens, all Attributes are reduced by 1 point.
5	CATATONIA You will fall to the floor and curl up, unresponsive, virtually unconscious, for a number of minutes equal to a single die roll. Once recovered, all Attributes are reduced by 1 point.
6	INSANE FEAR AND DRIVEN TO VIOLENT FLIGHT You will fight whoever and whatever to get as far away from the source of the stress as possible. Once away, you will fall catatonic and suffer the results of 5 above.

There are ways to reduce your Pressure Level, but these cannot be done during simulation time. The only way for this to happen is to spend time in a stress-free environment, either back on Earth for a few days or in a LongSleep chamber. Yeah, we'll talk about LongSleep chambers later, but for now all you need to know is that they are the perfect way to reduce stress. The sub-zero temperature, the gas and drugs that are pumped into your body to slow the metabolism, and the extended time in there really helps. For every full day you're in a chamber, your Pressure Level comes down by 1 point and all of your Attributes are increased by 1 point until they reach their original scores. LongSleep chambers are the best way to reduce stress.

And before you ask, the answer is no; you can't use a LongSleep chamber unless the ship is in transit or it's a real emergency, as they take a lot of power. That's why ships go into hibernation mode during transit: to conserve power. I'll explain it later, but take it from me, there are no easy fixes for reducing stress.

EQUIPMENT

Don't worry about equipment – we'll supply everything you need out there, and vessels are always well-equipped. As far as purchasing things is concerned, just put it on credit using your ID, and we'll deduct it from your pay and bonuses once your tour is over, or once you decide to quit.

That covers everything: food, board, medical provisions. Of course, you might want to keep your spending in check; if you want to sleep off-ship and stay in a fancy hotel, then go ahead, but the costs will soon mount up.

Certain pieces of equipment will give you a +1 bonus to your roll; let's say that you need to fix a door lock and you have a handy set of tools to do just the job. You roll your die as normal but because you have the proper tools you'll get a +1 to the roll, making it easier for you. Perhaps you have a laser sight for your Dazer – that'll help you aim, so that's a +1 to your roll to hit.

Each crew member gets a standard crew pack, which includes the following:

AN ID CHIP

These chips get you into approved areas, work as proof of identity, and allow you to purchase goods on credit. Most people have their chip embedded into a card or wear it around their neck, but the chips were designed to be put under the skin, in the forearm or under the back of the hand. It's up to you if you want to implant your chip, but if you do, make a note of where it is. You won't be able to purchase weapons or illegal items with your ID chip, and if you do try, then you'll be automatically reported and will either have your pay docked or be prosecuted.

A COMM UNIT

This is a handheld communicator with a surface-to-orbit range. They're only good for voice communication, and you can contact individual comm units like telephones or broadcast to a group.

DAZER MARK III STUN PISTOL

NO. MODEL:

4 SHEETS: SHEET 1

APPLICATION FILED NOV. 1. 2481

A. SIGHT • B. BARREL • C. COILS • D. TRIGGER • E. STABILIZER • F. CHARGE COMPARTMENT
G. REPLACEABLE CHARGE • H. POSITIVE CONNECTOR • I. NEGATIVE CONNECTOR

FIG. 1.

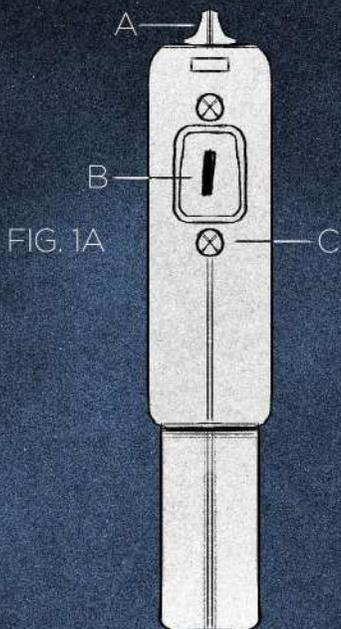
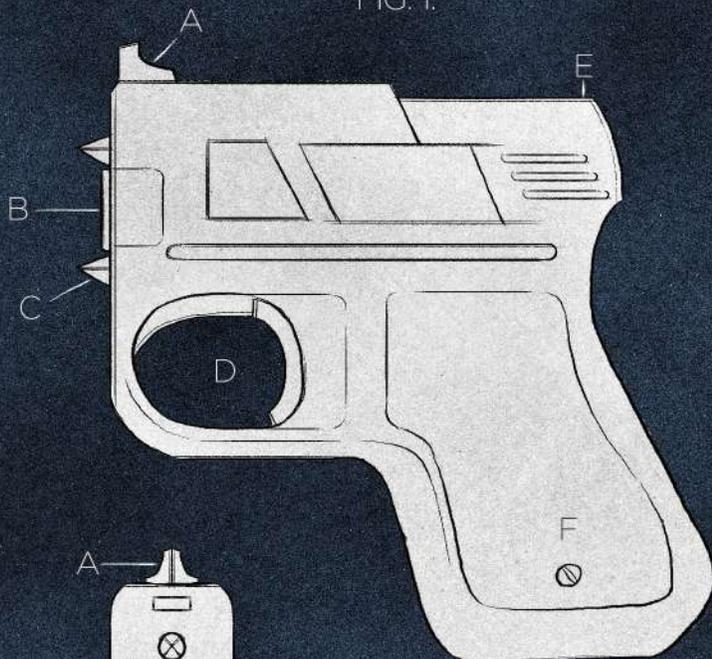
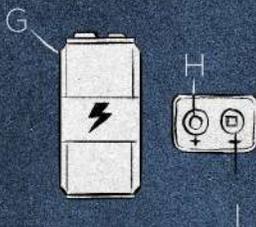


FIG. 2.
CHARGES



A SMALL SELECTION OF WEAPONS

Two Dazer Mark III stun pistols, which you're allowed to carry but it must be declared to the powers that be if you need to carry one on a station or around a settlement. Then there are two security pistols and a single shotgun, but these are for emergency use only, when all else has failed, and are locked away in a security locker, usually found in the hold but that's up to the crew. I see that look on your face; no, these weapons are to be shared between the crew, they're not a small arsenal each, so decide who's carrying what before you dish them out. And, remember what I said about punching holes in spaceships.

A FIRST AID MEDUNIT

These are small, about the size of a cigarette packet, and helpful out in the field.

That's it. All the tools and food you'll need will be supplied by the company. Just flash your ID at the reader, and you should get what you need.

>> //[003]+++000<<< EQUIPMENT

Equipment in *Those Dark Places* isn't a long list of items followed by prices; that's not the aim of the game, and long shopping trips pre- and post-adventure are out, I'm afraid.

Instead, imagine what would be needed on a starship or station and just make it available or unavailable depending on the game you're playing, or the location the players are in. If you're not sure about an item, then roll a d6: evens means it's available, odds means it's not available.

Most ships/stations have everything a character needs: medical facilities, weapons, food, and tools. Simply make a note of how many ships/stations are on hand and rule that each one has at least one of what the players need – it's up to you whether the equipment is easy to access or not!

So, for example, let's say the players are on their ship; they'll have access to everything listed in a standard crew pack, as well as one set of tools, one medical bay, and so on. If they were docked, there would be two of everything, as they will be available on the ship and in the station.

Just imagine what a ship would have on board to keep everyone fed, the ship running, and the crew alive.

>>//[003] END<<<

STARSHIPS AND TRAVEL

And before you mention it, the answer is yes; all ships are now fitted with Gravity Assisted Drives, so time dilation isn't that much of a factor any more, perhaps a few weeks' difference at most after a tour. Don't worry about it, the folks back home might have a few extra grey hairs when you return, and you'll be a month or two younger than everyone else.

Anyway, starships. These are the workhorses of the company, and they do all the heavy transport work, no matter what the cargo. They also act as couriers, as many settlements and outposts have no communication with the outside world for weeks at a time.

Now, each vessel must have qualified crew in the Helm and Navigation positions, either as a Primary or Secondary position. If there's nobody with these skills, the ship is not flying.

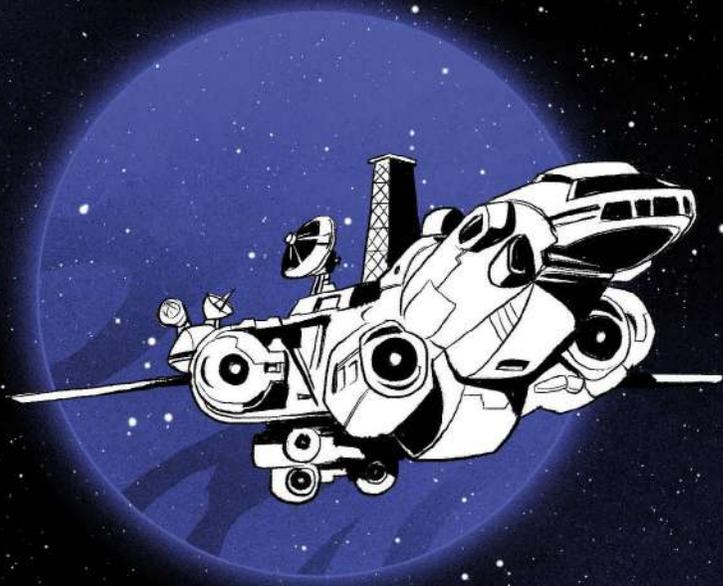
So let's have a look at how you'll be getting across the stars. Most company personnel get their start on a commercial starship, and you'll learn the trade in transit. Yeah, you'll spend weeks and months in a LongSleep chamber as you journey between locations, but there are always a few days at either end when you'll be up and about and doing your duty. Travel generally works like this:

1 – CREW BOARDING AND PRE-FLIGHT PREPARATIONS

Everything needs to be checked: computing systems, engineering, piping, vents, recyclers, scrubbers, route and navigation data, control systems, life support, artificial gravity... look, I have a list of almost 140 items to check, and that's just the primary inspections. The sub-system and secondary systems checklist is just as long. This can take up to five days, and during this time the ship will be accelerating to speed, at the end of which you'll be able to kick in the Gravity Assisted Drive. If you're towing something, these checks have to be done for the tugboat and the thing you're towing, so you can easily double that time.

2 – LONGSLEEP

Once the gravity drive takes over, you can then hit the LongSleep chambers. They're really simple and you don't even have to use needles any more. Attach the monitors to your wrists, chest, and temples, drink that cocktail of dog's piss – yes, it really does taste that bad – and lay yourself down to sleep. The canopy will close over you, and



once you drift off, the chamber will lower the temperature and slowly feed the drugs you need in gaseous form. It's best to wear the loose, thin, mesh clothes provided, and expect a slim chance of relieving yourself in your sleep; it gets a bit messy for some people, probably about 1 in 6 wake up a bit... well... dirty. It's nothing to be embarrassed about.

3 – WAKING UP

When the ship reaches its destination threshold, roughly three days before you arrive at the final destination, the automatic systems will begin the slowdown and wake you up. Waking up is a bit of a chore, I'll not lie to you. It's like waking up with a really, really bad hangover: headache, nausea, the whole thing. You'll experience some weakness in the limbs, so please don't try to get up straight away, no matter how much you stink. If you have automatons on board, they will help – I'll talk about them later – but take it easy. There'll be little to no muscle degradation, but the longer you're in the chamber the longer it takes to be able to take those first few steps. On average it works out at about a minute per light year travelled, so sometimes it takes a while. Get in the shower, have a cup of Joe, and you'll be fine. Oh, and if you must throw up, just do it on the floor. We don't want lumps in the extractors.

4 – POST-FLIGHT CHECKS

Once you're up and around, you can start the deceleration procedure. The Gravity Assisted Drive will already have cut out, and the ship will have started to slow, so you'll be running the post-journey checks just as you did with the pre-journey preparations, and checking on cargo, passengers, and whatever else you're out there for.

5 – AUTHORISATION

Upon arriving at your destination you'll be contacted by their traffic control. You'll identify yourself, your cargo, and your reason for being there, and the transponder will do the rest. As long as admin have done their job properly, the destination will have received a notification and manifest, so things should be pretty smooth. As long as you have authorisation from the company, they can't really say no to you.

6 – RESUPPLY, RECHARGE, AND DO IT ALL AGAIN

The 25 years will be over before you know it.

Commercial starships are able to travel a single light year in seven days, and for the love of God don't ask me how they do that. It's called a Gravity Drive and it bends space and time and warps something to do with something – look, ask a scientist. We press go. The spaceship goes. That's all I know.

Anyway, that's pretty good going, considering, and there are plans to improve that to match the abilities of military vessels – one light year every five days – but it's all about cost. This is why we have the LongSleep chambers; with some of the longest journeys lasting anything between 18 and 24 months, it's no surprise we have them. An average journey when you start out is around two to three months, but as you get further out, the trips get longer between established stations. Our furthest station is four and a half years away, did you know that? That's a Corsicana Refinery Station over a gas giant orbiting N Vel, way out in the dark.

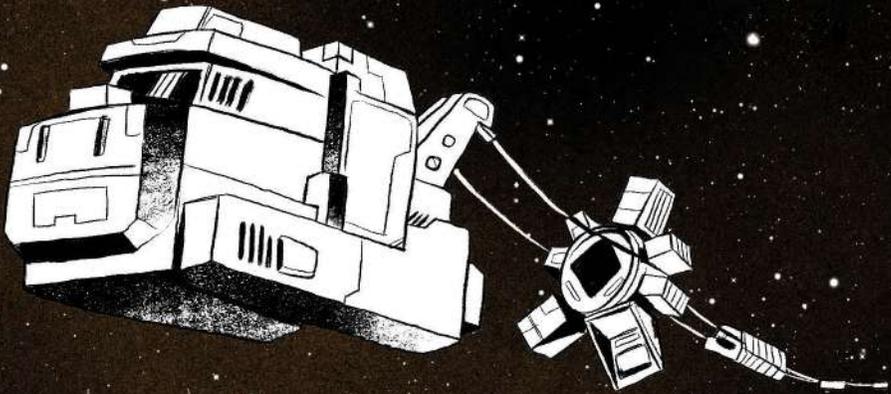
The ship itself is 20% living space, and 80% machinery and engines. It takes a lot of tech, energy, and piping to get people across the stars, so don't think you'll have a lot of room to stretch. Yes, the ships are huge, but there's very little space to run around. You'll be cocooned inside, surrounded by shielding and hull plates, and the only place you'll have a view is on the bridge. All the other corridors are simply access routes to other areas of the ship, and you'll only use these when necessary. In most cases, vessels are at least 250 metres in length; this makes them quite diverse and able to tackle many different kinds of roles.

The fact is, these ships get you from A to B, and they can take a lot of punishment. They're designed for extended stays in space, and absorb strikes from dust, radiation, bursts of energy, and all manner of threats so that you can drift through the cosmos all tucked up in your LongSleep chambers, safe and sound.

LANDING

Now, there's a huge rule that every crew needs to be aware of. Never – ever – land on a planet unless you're given authorisation to do so (such as a survey mission) or if it's a bona fide emergency. Starships are primarily designed for use in space, and most stations and outposts are in orbit, on planetoids, on moons, or on asteroids. You'll dock there, and any travel to actual planets will be done by shuttle, by the people who are already there.

If you must land on a planet, then make sure you have the power to get off again. Landing and taking off will use a lot of energy, and the primary drive engines will



take a lot of punishment, especially if they've not been used for orbital insertion for a while. There aren't many planets with an atmosphere and suitable gravity out there, and all of them are hostile to humans if you step outside without a full suit on. It'd be nice to think that we could just set up a second Earth and colonise at our leisure, but the galaxy isn't letting us. It's like telling fish to live in the desert.

>> //[004]+++000<< PAYMENT AND RETIREMENT

Payment is a different matter from equipment – in many RPGs, players expect a monetary reward for their services, and this game is no different.

The denizens of deep space work towards an end goal; completing 25 years in the blackness. Once those 25 years are done, then they retire on the proceeds of their labours and live the rest of their lives in luxury. This 25 years includes time spent in a LongSleep tube, so if a worker sleeps for a year, works for six months, and then sleeps for a year coming home, that's two and a half years they are being paid for. This all counts towards their 25-year goal. Sometimes they'll get a bonus, and it's possible to shave a little time off their service so that they retire earlier and get a better pay-out at the end of it.

So, let's say the players have completed a mission that took them a year in total – five months out, two months there, and five months back. That's an entire year of pay towards their retirement fund.

But, let's say that they did exceptionally well; that deserves a bonus. The usual bonus payment is 50%, so they get a year and a half's pay for their one-year trip. That gets them half a year closer to retirement, which better their chances of making it out of the deep dark black alive and well.

However, if they fail their mission for any reason, or it turns out to be a bad outcome for the company that has hired them, then they get only half of the agreed pay towards their retirement, making their goal that much further away.

If the player wants to continue using their character after the mandatory 25 years in space, then they are welcome to do so. Of course, any player character can also resign their position at any time.

Most other games have an experience system that gives the player characters equipment, improved skills, and notoriety. In *Those Dark Places*, the characters' aim is to simply stay alive and make it to retirement.

>>//[004] END<<

IN CLOSING

That's pretty much it from me. I've given you the basics, what's out there, and what's expected of you, and hopefully this simulation will give us a better idea of what you're capable of, or at least show us that you're a massive liar when it comes to scoring yourself! Only joking. Seriously, though, you'd better not have made any of that up.

All that remains is to throw you into the simulator and see how you get on. I'm sure it'd be nice to just ask you questions and roll the die – it'd certainly be a lot more fun for me – but the company has spent a lot on this machine, and it'd be a shame not to use it.

Just remember, this is an orientation, and if you feel that the role you're in doesn't suit you, then speak up and we'll try to find you a role that does suit.

And look – I know that this has been a long afternoon and you're probably tired and just wanting to get back out into the more open chambers, but listen. Just one last thing. Exploring space is a hell of a thing, but you need to make sure that this is what you want. Like, what you really want. There are all kinds of stories about things going wrong, things happening to people, or things being discovered that have created all kinds of problems, especially for those who are unqualified to handle it. The idea of space exploration to further the frontier of mankind is noble, but right now it's about furthering the profit margins, you know that. We all know that. Let's not kid ourselves, there's money to be made, and out there is the place to make it. But things happen in those dark places of the galaxy that can drive a person insane, out there in the reaches, alone, with nothing but a few feet of metal and shielding keeping you from certain death. You'll be cocooned in metal for months, even years, and won't see sky for all that time.

Are you sure this is what you want?



+++//02/**<<<
END



GENERAL MONITOR'S SECTION

+++//03/**<<<

+++SYSTEM SEVEN-0H-SEVEN+++
+++SUPERVISOR IN ATTENDANCE+++

Afternoon. Or is it evening? I've totally lost track of time in this place. I think I still have some dilation lag, I've only been here for a day and I'm still adjusting.

Right. OK. I've just had a long orientation session with some prospectives, and we're going to be putting them through their paces in our simulator, but we'll need someone to guide them through it and make decisions on what happens next based on their choices and the results of their actions. It's going to be up to you to guide them through it and be the arbiter of the story and the rules of the simulation. You'll be the General Monitor, or the GM, or just the Monitor.

Remember, you're not against the prospects, the crews... oh, I'm not sure what to call them. Tell you what, let's call them 'players'. You're not against the players, you're simply presenting a situation for them to react to and hopefully get out of, and if they do die – simulated death, of course – then that's their lookout and we'll have to find another prospect. Player.

Anyway, I won't get ahead of myself. You were present at the orientation, right? Well, we'll use the six-sided die analogy here, as well, so that you'll be properly prepared for when you go in.

THE RULES

The basics of the simulation have been laid out in the Crew Orientation and these are the rules of the system that everyone needs to know. However, as GM there are a few things about all this that you need to know independently of the prospects... sorry, *players*. Damn.

THE ATTRIBUTES

A player is basically using an avatar in the simulation to represent them, and these avatars are the player characters, or PCs. We've learned from years of experience that the character is not a true representation of the individual who controls it. I mean, come on, we asked them to score themselves on their own CASE file, and do you know anyone who would be 100% honest about their abilities? So these PCs will be controlled by the players, but you'll be controlling everything else. You'll be responsible for the location details, the mission, setting up, and refereeing the situations the PCs find themselves in, as well as controlling all of the characters that the PCs encounter. The characters that you'll be controlling are called non-player characters, or NPCs, and they each have a CASE file which consists of the four Attributes: CHARISMA, AGILITY, STRENGTH, and EDUCATION.

Anyway, these Attributes are the basic abilities of all deep space travellers, and are represented by a score between 1 and 4, with the four numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 being placed in the four different Attributes. Where these numbers are placed is up to the player, and the higher the score, the better they are in that Attribute.

Anyway, you know all that, so how are these four Attributes used in the simulation? Well, I'll talk you through each one, so that you'll know in case any of the prosp... *players* ask you any questions.

CHARISMA

Charisma is the ability to deal with other people. This score represents a character's ability to connect with people on a personal level, their social skills, and their chance of being successful in a social situation. Any attempt to coerce, convince, or communicate intentions – good or bad – is decided by rolling the d6 and adding the CHARISMA Attribute score.

The difficulty can be adjusted depending on the character's relationship or history with the target character; if they've never met or hardly know the individual,



then the target is set at the standard 7. If they get on or have some familiarity, then that's a little easier, and the target is set at 6. If they have a troubled history, through previous dealings, crew positions, or reputation, then that's more difficult, and the target is set at 8.

CHARISMA can also be used to bargain with or command NPCs using a simple opposed roll, with modifiers to the target's roll depending on the relationship status as listed above.

However – and I can't stress this enough because you will not *believe* the issues we've had with this in the past – the Charisma roll can *never* be used on PCs. So another player or NPC can never influence or command a player's PC, make them give up equipment, or make any decision they would not have otherwise made. NPCs and other PCs cannot control the decisions or destinies of a PC, and if they want a PC to go along with them, then they'll have to convince the PC in question through coercion; kind of a 'role-play' situation where we can judge how they'll manage interpersonal and social situations. This gives us a good idea of a player's suitability for certain roles (and it's sometimes good for a laugh when we replay the recordings; there was this one time when a player looking to be a Liaison Officer got their medicine mixed up with... no matter, I'll tell you later).

AGILITY

Agility is a measure of physical prowess and co-ordination. This covers everything a character has to do that doesn't require brute strength or raw power. If a PC has to delicately adjust a machine, correct a small physical error in something technical with small tools, or do anything that doesn't fully require them to tense their muscles or rely on their strength, then they're going to be using AGILITY.

This also covers piloting or driving vehicles of any type, shooting or throwing weapons, and even doing delicate things such as surgery.

STRENGTH

Strength is general health, physical power, and constitution. This covers anything where characters have to use some muscle. Throwing or taking a punch, climbing a wall, leaping a gap, lifting a heavy weight, or trying to force something open – or closed – all use the STRENGTH Attribute. It is also a measure of constitution and how they withstand a harsh environment, such as cold and heat, or even a vacuum.

STRENGTH also represents how much punishment a character can take physically, and it decides whether a character is injured, conscious, or even dead.

EDUCATION

Education is an indication of a character's knowledge and learning, how smart they are, and how they react to situations that require a degree of thought or intelligence. It's not a scale of highly intelligent down to lack of wits; an EDUCATION score of 1 does not mean the character is stupid or a drooling idiot, just that they did not pursue an academic career for their own reasons. It's also a measure of how quickly a character can analyse problems, or how they react in mentally challenging situations.

Don't assume that a PC, or even a player, with a score of 1 in the box is ignorant. We've had complaints about that in the past, and we hate that whole 'disciplinary action' thing.

Attributes are used at all times, so when the player wants to make a roll against anything, then they roll the die, add their Attribute score, and have to score 7 or more to succeed. This is modified by the crew positions below, and there are three levels of success: failure, partial success, and success. I'll explain the differences later.

CREW POSITIONS

This is where things get a bit more interesting. You'll be amazed at how many players look a little downhearted when they think about the numbers they have to roll for a success, but once they're told about crew positions, they tend to brighten up a bit.

A crew position, be it a Primary or Secondary position, allows a player to modify their die roll. Each crew position can have quite an impact on the roll, the situation, and the kind of Attribute roll required.

Most crew positions add a modifier to a particular Attribute, but sometimes they can modify additional Attributes, too. Take the Helm Officer position, for instance; the main Attribute that will be used for this position is Agility, because this Attribute relates to the dextrous handling a vehicle will require through the use of handlebars, wheels, control sticks, foot pedals, or whatever it takes to control it. However, perhaps a character is trying to identify a certain kind of ship or vehicle, or they're trying to explain to another character what they need to do to control a ship; in this case, a character would roll EDUCATION and add their Helm Officer modifier, using their knowledge of starships to improve the roll.

You can let the players know about which Attributes suit which position if you want, before they choose their scores, but it's sometimes a lot more interesting (and entertaining) if you don't. I mean, yes, they may *want* to be a pilot – but that doesn't necessarily mean they're going to be a *good* pilot, does it?

Does that make sense? Basically, you have to make two choices. Which Attribute best

works for the roll, and whether a crew position will add any modifiers to the roll.

Are you OK with the six-sided die analogy? It's just easier, and the odds are a pretty good indicator of the chances in the simulator.

Sometimes, players and GMs might disagree on what constitutes a realistic modifier to an Attribute roll. The Monitor's word is final in these situations, but you could also offer a compromise in some disputed cases: for example, if the player wants to use a Primary Position to modify a roll, you could meet halfway and allow +1 to the roll instead of +2.

OK... fancy a break? We've got some great coffee here, and if you want to give up some credits, we've actually got the real thing. Let me know and I'll order some.

Anyway, let's have another look at the crew positions available to the prospects... *players!* Ah! I was doing so well!

>> //[005]+++000<< THIS IS YOUR GAME

In this section of *Those Dark Places*, you will find everything you need to run a game of mystery and suspense in the deepest reaches of space.

First of all, however, there is one thing that you need to remember before diving into the darkness: **THIS IS YOUR GAME.**

That's right. You have purchased this game, so it's yours to do with as you wish. The main rule here is to have fun with it. Don't like a certain rule? Remove it or change it to suit your game and group. Prefer to have your starship get to its destination a bit faster? Then change the travel time from one light year per week to one light year per whatever-works-best-for-you. If there's anything about the rules or even the setting that you don't like, or it's not working for you or your group, then adjust it to suit. The rules are simple and flexible enough to be changed or dropped, and if you have some ideas of your own for rules, then add them in; house rule it, as long as the rules that are being used are set before play and everyone is aware of them.

There are plenty of guidelines on how a game of *Those Dark Places* should be presented and how adventures should be played, but absolutely none of it is set in stone, and playing might give you ideas of your own. So even though this rulebook is designed to give structure, if you think your way works better, then just change the rules.

Maybe you want your game to be a bit brighter, with sleeker ships, shiny surfaces and fancy high-tech. It makes no difference to the system, go ahead and change it. Maybe you want the player characters to walk on the surface of worlds with no protective equipment, in a setting where the colonisation of other planets is rife.

Go for it. It's your game.

>>//[005] END<<



HELM OFFICER

Anything to do with piloting, steering, or controlling any kind of vehicle is included under the Helm Officer position. Whether it's a scooter, powered exo-loader, groundcar, bike, skyspinner, or starship, the Helm position will allow the character to drive it, or at least attempt to.

Use this position when piloting ships and other vehicles, making decisions on manoeuvring, or making judgements on any tricky docking or launch procedures. The Helm Officer position mainly connects to AGILITY.

NAVIGATION OFFICER

A sense of spatial awareness and an uncanny knack for knowing where you are is a must in deep space. Whether they are plotting a course for a C-Class Cargo Freighter, mapping a route across a world, or simply finding their way through a station, the Navigation Officer makes sure that the crew knows where they are, where they're going, and where they should be.

Use this position to make sure you don't get lost in space, on a station, or on a world. The Navigation Officer's knowledge of ships, stations, and settlements is the crew's ticket from one system to another, and is key to being able to navigate across a world, so make sure there's someone who can sit in the chair and point you in the right direction. The main Attribute this connects to is EDUCATION.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Even if the mission is not about research, it's always a good idea to have a Science Officer on board. Deep space is full of surprises, and discovering new elements and biological structures that can be exploited for profit is something all companies strive for – and come on, let's be honest, that's why we're out here, right? All crews are encouraged to have a Science Officer in their ranks, or at least someone with basic training, so they can take advantage of new discoveries as quickly as possible.

This position covers all disciplines – physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, etc. – and the Science Officer is expected to be up to speed across many fields of research, a job they take very seriously. The main Attribute this position connects to is EDUCATION.

SECURITY OFFICER

This is a simple crew position, but one of the most requested; no matter where you go throughout explored space, there's bound to be trouble, and crew members trained in combat are essential to protect the cargo and the ship. And the crew, of course.

A Security Officer is trained in the use of all kinds of weapons and hand-to-hand combat. This position connects to the AGILITY Attribute for shooting or throwing weapons, and to STRENGTH for hand-to-hand and melee combat.

LIAISON OFFICER

The best way to get through any situation is with words and diplomacy, especially when you're dealing with representatives of other companies. The Liaison Officer is the face of the vessel, and the first person that settlement and station heads will speak to. The Liaison Officer can make deals and broker arrangements, and every crew should have one.

Use this position to be the voice of reason and deal with other people. The main Attribute this position connects to is CHARISMA.

ENGINEERING OFFICER

It's never good when things go wrong, especially when you're eight months into a 12-month journey. In fact, the Engineering Officer is so important that they are the first crew member to be woken from the LongSleep chambers, just in case there have been any issues en route.

Use this position when something needs repairing, replacing, reprogramming, jury-rigging, or correcting. From the smallest computer to the biggest engine vent, Engineering Officers have the job of making sure it keeps running. The main Attribute this position is connected to is EDUCATION.

MEDICAL OFFICER

Being in the back of beyond has a whole set of risks, and when you're weeks or months away from a medical centre, you'll need as much first-class first aid as you can get. This is where the Medical Officer comes in to help with headaches, bruises, burns, breaks, and detached limbs. The medical suite on any starship is fully equipped to handle almost every kind of medical emergency.

The main Attribute this position is connected to is EDUCATION.



CREW POSITIONS AND USING OTHER ATTRIBUTES

As you can see, each of the crew positions is connected to a main Attribute, but the positions can affect other Attributes, too. Sometimes, a crew-position modifier can be applied to a different Attribute if that crew member's speciality has a direct effect on the task at hand. For example, you can add a modifier to STRENGTH if the Engineering Officer needs to pull away a difficult panel when repairing the ship, reflecting that the crew member might know a trick to removing the panel. Or you could add a modifier to AGILITY if the Medical Officer is doing some delicate surgery, reflecting their knowledge of the procedure.

Although the main Attributes connected to each crew position are the ones you should generally use, it's always a good idea to allow some latitude, or even use a more realistic Attribute to reflect the situation. If you or the player isn't entirely sure that the position is relevant, then instead of a +2 modifier, change it to a +1 so the crew position has at least a little bearing. If it's a Secondary Position, then it's up to the GM whether the modifier is used, and the GM's word is final in this regard.

INTERPRETING THE DIE ROLL

Once the Attribute has been decided on and any relevant crew-position modifiers have been added, it's time to make the roll.

The general success/failure rule is 'roll a d6, add modifiers, and score 7 or more', and this will generate a pass/fail result.

There are some situations in which the task might be easier than normal, in which case you can lower the target number to 6, and sometimes tasks will be harder, in which case you should raise the target number to 8.

Occasionally, the combination of the Attribute and the crew-position or other modifier will already meet the target number; in this case, the action is an automatic success. If, for any reason, the target number is beyond what the die roll will reach, even with modifiers, then the action is an automatic failure.

Sometimes, however, success is not always complete, in the same way that failure is not always certain. If the player rolls dead on 7 – or on whichever target number has been chosen – this can be classed as a partial success, or a skin-of-the-teeth-with-consequences pass. This means that, yes, the player's character has succeeded in their roll, but only just, and the success might not be total.

How this partial success plays out will depend on the circumstances. Let's look at some examples of successes, failures, and partial successes, which might help to make it a bit clearer for you.

SUCCESS

A success is just that; the player has rolled their die and scored higher than the target number. They've fired their weapon and hit, they've attempted to seal a door and done it, or they've tried to convince someone that their way is the best way and managed to do so. Basically, the player has stated their intention, the bonuses to the die roll have been applied, and the final score is higher than the difficulty number you have set. That's pretty much it, but the results of that success are up to you to interpret. It can be straightforward; the situation has been presented, the player has declared their intentions and what they'd like to happen, the roll is made. That's the easy part, and it's the part that all players strive for.

Let's say, oh, I don't know – let's call her Andrea. Let's say Andrea desperately wanted to seal a door because some drug-addled psycho who's been trapped on a space station alone for two years has decided she's a hallucination and she needs to die. You know, you might think that's extreme but you just wait 'til you read the some of the actual reports coming out of the expanse... anyway, Andrea needs to close the pressure door and make sure that the psycho can't get to her. She says: "I want to close and seal the door!" and rolls her die.

If she rolls higher than the target number, she has succeeded. The door seals, and the danger is trapped on the other side, unable to get to her. Andrea is safe! Hooray! I mean, not all situations will be as dangerous or bleak, but it's a good example.

FAILURE

This is simple – you failed. You wanted the computer reprogrammed? You can't do it. You tried to shoot the guy in front of you? You missed. You needed to fix the engine part? It's still broken. Failing a roll means that the action the player wanted to make isn't happening, and you'll have to adjudicate the results of that failure depending on the situation.

Let's go back to Andrea; she has run through the door, the attacker is coming at her, covered in the blood of his victims and wearing what appears to be a string of bloodied sausages around his neck – oh, I can't wait for you to read the report about this one – and he's swinging a fire axe around his head. She says: "I want to close and seal the door!" and she rolls her die, but she rolls less than the target number. That's

a failure. The door closes, but it doesn't seal, and crazy axe person comes barrelling through to ruin her day. Again, not all failures are this extreme, it might just be a simple "No, the computer isn't fixed," or, "No, the NPC won't do what you've asked," but it's a good example, and I *really* want you to read the report!

>> //[006]+++000<< AUTOMATIC SUCCESSES AND FAILS

The chances of a fail or a success in this game are pretty high, and there might come a time when the players realise that no matter what they roll, they're going to fail, or alternatively, they might not have to roll, because even if they roll a 1, they're going to succeed.

If you'd rather give your players a better chance of getting through the darkness – or trip them up when they think they've got it in the, bag – you can always use the rule that a roll of a natural 6 (that is, a result of 6 on the die before any modifiers) is an automatic success, and a roll of a 1 is an automatic failure.

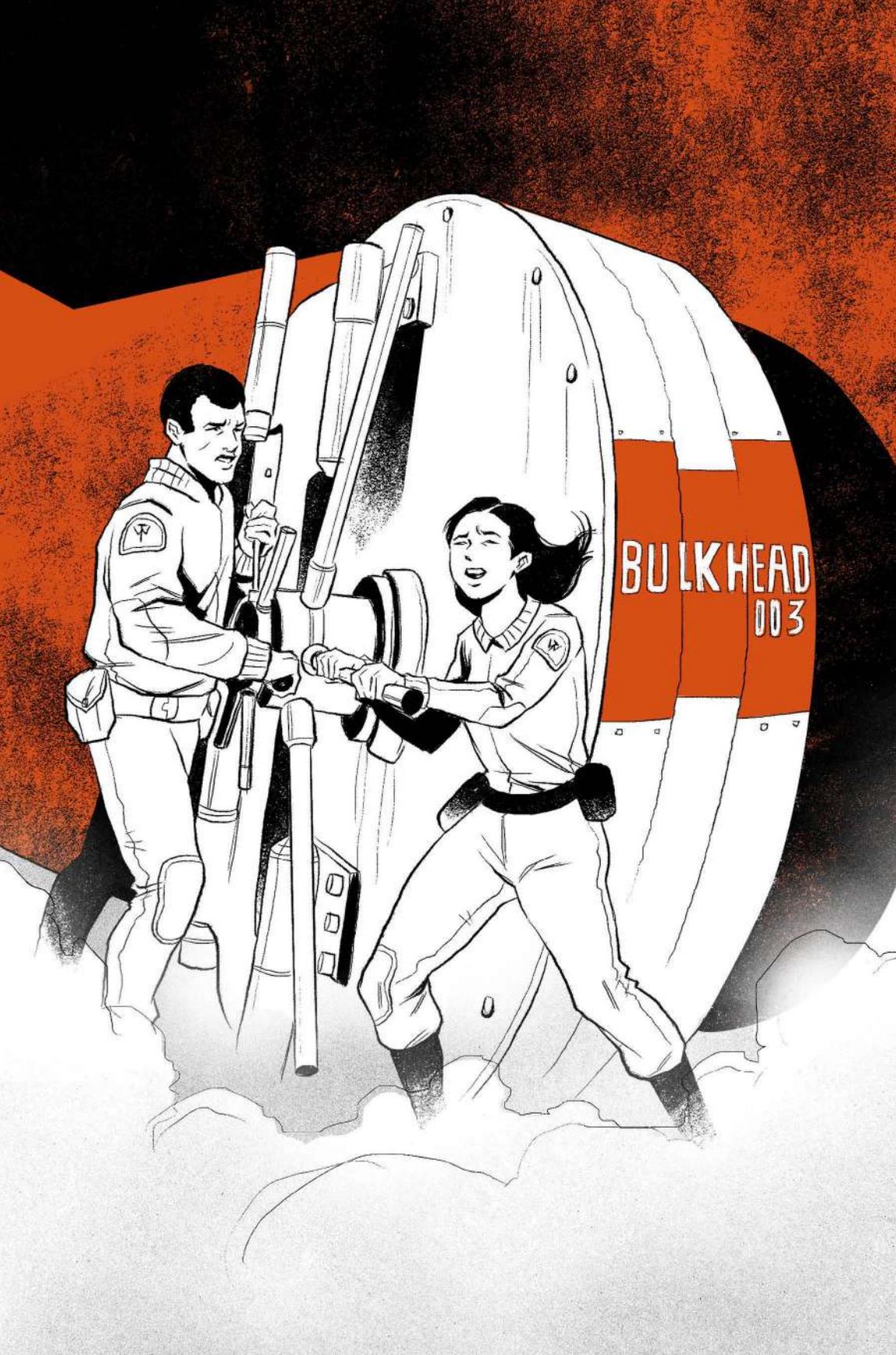
This gives a much more high-adventure feel to a game, with victory being plucked from the jaws of defeat through one lucky roll (or vice versa), and it makes the game much more unpredictable and fun for your players. It might also be helpful if any players have chosen STRENGTH and EDUCATION scores of 1 and 2 – those Pressure rolls are impossible otherwise, which makes for a rough ride!

>>//[006] END<<

PARTIAL SUCCESS

This is the interesting one, one that will give you a chance to react to situations creatively and get the players all nervous. When a player rolls dead on the target number – after modifiers from the Attribute and crew position scores – then this is classed as a partial success. Yes, they succeeded, but maybe not 100%, and this can cause problems for the players further down the line. Yes, they might have repaired the computer, but it could break down later on. Yes, they might have hit the guy with the shot, but the wound is minor, just a graze. Yes, they managed to con that NPC into giving up his security codes, but later on that same NPC might realise he's been had and go after the PCs.

A partial success is just that – partial. It might benefit the players in the short term, but there might be repercussions later on. Of course, allowing the players to think that



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they're going to pay for their almost-failure later is a great way to get them nervous, to add a level of suspense to the proceedings and see how they react to it. Having the Sword of Damocles hanging over... what? Damocles. You know, courtier of Dionysius, the sword and the horse's hair... look it up, it's an anecdote about the ever present threat of danger to those in power. Sorry, I'm getting away from the point. The point is, if the players know that they've only partially succeeded, then they'll be looking over their shoulders wondering when they'll be punished for it. In some cases, you don't even have to have something bad happen – the sheer expectation of doom from the players can send them into a panic without any help from you!

Let's go back to Andrea. She says: "I want to close and seal the door!" and she rolls her die, but she rolls exactly the target number after she has added the bonuses for her Attribute and her crew position. That's a partial success. The door closes and, as far as she's concerned, it's sealed. She runs off further into the station, but after a few minutes, the axe-wielding killer works out the lock and opens the door. Yeah, she earned a few minutes of breathing space, but the danger isn't over.

Of course, Andrea, realising that the partial success means that the danger is probably far from over, might decide to do something else to make sure the killer is stopped. She might weld the door shut, try to find a way to decompress the corridor the killer is in, or just double-double-triple check the locks. That's fine. Let her roll. If she succeeds, then well done her, but problems might come back to get her in spite of that. Maybe she decompresses the corridor and it shuts down a major system. Maybe she welds the door shut and then something happens that means she has to get back through it in a hurry.

Like I said, maybe the fact that the players are stressed out over the partial success is enough, and it's the threat of something bad happening that has a negative effect. There are many ways to make your players sweat!

>> //[007]+++000<< FINDING INSPIRATION

Games of *Those Dark Places* are atmospheric, moody sessions that have a hint of desperation, danger, and horror. The style and setting is heavily influenced by the dark, industrial-style science fiction of the late 1970s and early 1980s. If you want to know the kind of thing I'm talking about then check out the following films and games:

Films:

Alien (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1979)

Outland (Dir. Peter Hyams, 1981)

Blade Runner (Dir. Ridley Scott, 1982)

Video games:

Dead Space (EA/Visceral Games, 2008)

Alien: Isolation (SEGA/Creative Assembly, 2014)

As well as having excellent stories and performances, these movies and games rely heavily on design and atmosphere. The darkness, shadows, and claustrophobia – even in such huge locations as future Los Angeles – make for intense viewing, and experiencing such places in the video games really drives home the helplessness you feel when trapped in a tight location about as far away from help as you can get.

The core idea behind games of *Those Dark Places* is that they are dark, grim, and tinged with the idea that danger and death are just around the corner. Space is big, black, and cold, and it's not where human beings should be at all.

The danger can be whatever you want it to be. It could be devious corporation suits or corrupt officials trying to get a percentage through scheming and murder. Perhaps a blue-collar worker has decided to put their skills to a more nefarious use, and hopes that being far away, deep in the darkness of space, also means that they are far away from justice.

Perhaps the threat is a science experiment gone wrong, or a computer intelligence that controls an entire space station suffering a breakdown. Perhaps a scientist has put progress ahead of morals and ethics, and they've created or unleashed something abominable.

Perhaps the stress and loneliness of the dark has finally taken its toll, and human life has become as nothing to some people. Only through sharing their suffering will they feel whole again.

Perhaps it's something unimaginable. Perhaps there are things in the dark that we should never have sought out, things hidden away that should never have been discovered, creatures we should never encounter. What will the unknown terrors – imagined or real – found orbiting dead stars do to an already fragile mind?

Those Dark Places is a mystery science-fiction game that asks these questions, puts the players into dangerous situations, and allows stories of dark, terrifying days to be told.

>>//[007] END<<

EQUIPMENT

If you feel that a piece of equipment might help a player to get the job done, then go ahead and add a +1 bonus to their roll. Let's say they're doing a bit of first aid on a fallen friend; if they have a medical kit, then that's going to help, so allow a +1 bonus to the roll. If they're trying to fix an engine and they have a toolkit with



everything they need to do the job, then that's a +1, too. If they've got hold of a pistol with one of those fancy targeting-assistance scopes, or whatever the space army guys call them, then that's a +1. If you feel it'll help, then don't be shy.

Also, if the player feels that the equipment should benefit their roll, then listen to what they have to say and decide whether this is the case. If you agree, then no problem, but don't let them fool you; in desperate situations, a player might try to convince you that a +1 bonus for tools used is a great idea, even if the tools aren't up to the job. "Hey, this pen will fit in the hole, I'll use that to make the broken button work!" they'll say. "That's a +1, right?" No, Carl. No, it isn't.

>> //[008]+++000<< USING PRESSURE IN THE GAME

Stress can be a killer, and in this game that can be taken literally. The Pressure mechanic is for moments of high drama and tension during play sessions, but there are limits.

Shocking things happening – discovering a body, witnessing a horrific incident, even having to take an action that's questionable but necessary – should be key moments in the game, and a Pressure roll should be called only then. Don't call for a roll every time something even slightly shocking happens, or if you've set up a red herring (a 'jump scare', if you will) that can be dismissed after a few moments. At that rate, you'll have most of your players curled up into tiny balls, and that will cause the game to grind to a halt, as well as making it harder for everyone else.

Pick out two or three key moments in your adventure and make them your Pressure points, such as the discovery of a body, a sudden explosion or decompression, or a moment of mortal danger that threatens the players. Don't call for a Pressure roll if the players expect certain shocks; for instance, if they have been warned there is a body and they've been asked to view it, don't roll for Pressure when the mortician pulls the sheet back.

Pressure rolls can change the direction a game takes and a player's involvement in it, so use them well!

>> //[008] END<<

CONFLICT

Now, this has already been covered in the Crew Orientation section, so you have the details. Because combat affects the players more than the GM, they deserve to know the ins and outs of how we deal with conflict, so that you're all on the same page.

The thing is, we really want to make sure that the players understand the seriousness of conflict when they're out in the deep black, and to make sure they don't consider it a normal part of life out there, or even worse as some kind of game. This is serious sh... stuff. I mean, proper serious. People die, and that can affect the whole crew, both logistically and mentally, sending teams into downward spirals they might not recover from. That can cost the company a lot of money.

So, what I want to talk to you about is how you get across the seriousness of combat. Don't make it a simple case of 'roll your die, you hit, minus two points, next round'. Not only does that come nowhere near the reality of the situation, it's as boring as hell!

This is where you need to get detailed. Explain how the gun kicks in the hand, the bullet tearing into flesh, blood spraying. Bones breaking. The terror of being hurt, injured, the pain of being hit, describe the agony that must be involved in this, even from the NPC's point of view. It doesn't sound pleasant, does it? It's not meant to be! We've made it clear that violence in the deep reaches of space is a really bad thing, so it's up to you to reinforce that!

When describing these situations, there might be times when you realise that the situation could be made harder by the unfolding events. Let's say that there are two characters having a fight in a maintenance corridor that's undergoing an emergency vent of CO2.

No, you're right, they shouldn't be in there during a vent, but that's not important; the fact is that there are circumstances that might make things difficult. The venting gas could make aiming difficult – that'll put the target number up by one. Perhaps the CO2 is making them dizzy – that's another point added to the target number. Maybe one of the combatants has taken cover behind one of the CO2 pipes – that'd make it harder to hit, so the target number goes up by one. Do you see how the environment affects the rolls? There could be all kinds of things going on that will make it more difficult for the characters to hit.

This also calls for more description; you can describe the gas making characters choke or obscuring vision, and describe how disorientating or terrifying this makes the situation. Always make sure the players realise that what is happening is BAD and that BAD THINGS are going to happen.

Then there's the flip-side to this; are there any circumstances that would make the combat easier? Perhaps one of the characters is wearing a breather mask, so the gas doesn't affect them. This means they don't suffer any target-number penalties, but the opposing character will. Maybe the opponent isn't expecting an attack; this

makes it easier to hit them, perhaps reducing the target number by one, and the shot will automatically do maximum damage. There can be benefits as well as problems.

How the elements of a situation affect the target numbers is up to you, but be fair; racking up a whole slew of penalty modifiers can make the encounter frustrating and, even though I did say that combat should be dangerous, it shouldn't be infuriating to the point of wanting to quit the simulation.

>> //[009]+++000<<< ONGOING EFFECTS OF EPISODES

That Episode your character suffered might have made a big difference to the adventure they were on – and it could also affect future scenarios.

When a character suffers an Episode, it's a traumatic experience, and it might damage the character mentally; such emotionally charged incidents can't be simply brushed off with a few hours in a LongSleep pod, and certain triggers might make the Episode resurface and affect the character in other ways.

First of all, when a character suffers an Episode and has to roll on the table, have them make a note of what it was that caused the Episode and the number they rolled. Then, break that down into the root cause; seeing a corpse, being trapped in a flooding room, being plunged into darkness with a killer on the loose, being forced into a tight space where there is no air or escape. . .

All of these things and more can be part of an Episode, and if the character relives the moment or is forced into a situation where they have to experience these feelings again, then it will have a detrimental effect on their capabilities, both physical and mental. In short, should they be put in a similar situation, then their difficulty target number will be raised by the number they rolled on the table when they had the Episode. So, if they rolled a 2 on the table, then a standard difficulty target will be raised from 7 to 9. This reflects their reaction to the stimulus, which might result in a physical and emotional reaction that makes their job that more difficult.

However, they can attempt to control their personal demons. Every time they equal or beat a target number with the negative modifier, they conquer their fears somewhat; in this case, you can reduce the modifier by 1 to a minimum of 1. They might be able to conquer the fear somewhat, but it will always be there.

So, let's say that Lisa's character was attacked in the dark by an unknown assailant, and the incident caused an Episode. Lisa makes a note of the number rolled, a 3, and the fact that the Episode occurred in the dark, so now every time she has to make a roll in darkness, or close to darkness, the Episode is triggered and she gets a +3 to the target numbers set while she is in the dark. If she beats or equals the target number, then she has gone some way to conquering her fear, and she can reduce the modifier from +3 to +2. However, the fear will always be there, and the modifier can never go below +1.

And don't just make the rolls and suffer the consequences; role-play it! If the situation means your character has to face their fear, then make sure it becomes part of the story you're telling.



About to be sent into a narrow air duct? “No way, man! You ain’t getting me in there!”
Being told to get into a leaky spacesuit and go outside the ship? “You’re kidding, right? I don’t care that I’m the only one here that can fix it, get someone else!”
Have to dive underwater? “Do you not remember what happened at the refinery? I’ll wait here, thank you very much!”

>>//[009] END<<

RUNNING A SIMULATION

The role of a General Monitor is quite an important one. The GM is not only there to adjudicate the rules and interpret the die rolls, they are also there to really sell the location and situation the players find themselves in. It’s up to you to guide the simulation, make sure the encounters are tough but fair, and decide how NPCs, creatures, and the environment react to the actions of the prospects.

Now, there’s a lot of technical stuff you’ll have to learn – programming the simulator, controlling the NPC avatars, and deciding on how the simulator reacts to player decisions based on the unfolding situation – but let’s stick to the basics for now. I’ll explain what is expected of you before we start getting you clued up with the simulator’s interface.

Don’t be daunted. It might take a few runs to get you fully used to the responsibility, but if you have any kind of VR Control Interface experience then you’ll find all of this second nature. Still, it never hurts to go over these things.

As GM it’ll be your responsibility to make sure that the players are given fair treatment in the simulator. Their welfare will be in their own hands as they make decisions based on the information you give them, but the simulation itself will be created by you, presented by you, and pretty much led by you. This means that you will be creating incidents, or as we like to call them, ‘reports’, that the players will have to navigate through.

Think of it like this; you create a story and a setting, and you tell the players what they see, hear, and smell. You do not tell them what they should do, what they should think, or how they should feel about things; that’s up to them to decide. All you have to do is create the world for them to interact with.

Here are some examples. There are two prospects in this particular simulation, Brian and Andrea, and the GM is taking them through the encounter. Now, I’ve done this in the style of the analogy we’ve been using, with the six-sided die, to keep the example simple. The simulator itself will be much more involved, and I don’t want to complicate the issue.

First of all, this is an example of standard scene-setting: getting the atmosphere right and describing to the players what they can see.

GM: The cargo ship you have docked with has powered down, but the life support and artificial gravity are still operating. It's cold; not enough to chill you to the bone, but enough to see a faint mist form with every breath. The airlock door opens, and the corridor ahead is wide, pentagon-shaped, and lined with piping, lit sparsely so the shadows are deep and pronounced. There's a faint smell of rotting meat. What would you like to do?

ANDREA: Well, the lights are sort of on and there's atmosphere, so the damage we saw outside the ship couldn't have penetrated too far.

BRIAN: If it was damage to the ship; remember, it looked like the rent was bent outwards.

ANDREA: It was a big hole. Unless an elephant wanted to get free, I can't see what would have done that kind of damage.

BRIAN: What's an elephant?

ANDREA: It doesn't matter. GM, how far does the corridor go back?

GM: It runs for about 30 metres before it ends in another blast door. It's sealed, and the red light is on.

BRIAN: Emergency lock. There's something on the other side of that, and it's not good. GM, I shine my lamp down the corridor and turn up the intensity. What do I see?

GM: The light brightens, and you see thick support struts every five metres. About 20 metres down, a pair of legs is sticking out from behind one of the struts.

ANDREA: I'll call out. "Hello?"

GM: No response.

ANDREA: I'll pull my Dazer and make sure it's armed, and slowly walk towards the strut, weapon ready.

BRIAN: I'll make sure she has enough light and walk next to her so that she's not blinded.



GM: You approach the legs, and as you get closer you see that the boots and leggings are ripped and torn, and the legs within them are skeletal. When you reach the strut, you see that it is a rotting corpse. You have no idea how long it's been there, or even what sex it is, and its lower half has been shredded by something sharp.

BRIAN: Well. That explains the smell.

Do you see how it works? You set the scene and the players react, and in turn you react to the players. The whole thing could be described as a kind of collaborative storytelling, and I'm not going to lie, we've seen some amazing situations occur in the simulator. I wish we could record some of them, it's like watching an improvised play unfold.

The next example is an interaction between the players and an NPC. There's a bit of die rolling in this one to get you used to the way the simulator plays.

GM: The station manager isn't impressed. As he walks into the room in his high-credit suit and even higher-credit shoes, he glares at you with anger. His slicked-back hair is quite literally shining with oil, even in the low light of the office. (Here, the GM plays the NPC and even changes his voice to a rough, menacing tone.) "What is the meaning of this?"

BRIAN: (Here, Brian speaks as his avatar.) "Are you the station manager?"

GM: (As station manager.) "I am."

BRIAN: "Then tell your goons here to back off. We've towed an abandoned cargo ship here under a Cunningham Company bond, and no matter what local laws you have, you can't deny safe harbour."

ANDREA: (Speaking as her avatar.) "And they took my Dazer. I'll be getting that back."

GM: "We are not under contract with Cunningham Company, nor do we have any dealings with them."

BRIAN: "But this is a freeport, so any vessel is allowed to dock."

GM: "But an abandoned cargo ship with a possible contamination? Why would I want that here?"

BRIAN: “Look... let’s be honest. Possible contamination or not, we get a nice fat bonus for salvaging, and we could have taken the ship to any one of three stations in this sector. You not only get to charge Cunningham Company for the berth of our ship, you get to charge through the roof for berthing a hazardous vessel, and you, personally, get a cut of the salvaging rights for hosting the ship. That’s a good deal, right?”

GM: Nice. Brian, is Liaison Officer your Primary or Secondary crew position?

BRIAN: Secondary.

GM: Okay, roll the die, add your CHARISMA score and also add 1.

BRIAN: (Rolls die.) My CHARISMA is 2 and I have a plus 1 for Liaison Officer being my Secondary Position. I rolled a 5, so plus the rest that’s 8.

GM: That’s a success. The station manager thinks about it. “Well... since you put it that way...”

Do you see how that worked? The GM and the players spoke as they thought that their characters’ would, and the interaction was decided by a die roll. The GM can also modify the target number; if he felt the argument Brian gave was done well and was quite convincing, he might have lowered the target number to make it easier for him. If he had blustered or been unconvincing, he might have raised it. This is the GM’s discretion, but remember, you’re not against the players. Make it challenging, not impossible.

The final example is a combat situation, where we’ll bring these elements together.

GM: The air is blurred with acrid smoke, and the emergency lights are flashing, almost blindingly. In the distance there are shouts, but they seem to be receding. The sirens are going off throughout the station, but they’re muted, like they’re underwater. Suddenly, another shadow comes barreling through the darkness!

ANDREA: I have the shotgun, I’ll shoot!

GM: OK, but the smoke will make it harder to hit. The range is close, making it a 6, but the smoke raises that to 7.

ANDREA: OK. One die plus my AGILITY score plus 2 for my Security Officer Primary Position. That's plus 4 and I roll... 4.

GM: That's a hit! The infected crew member, delirious with bloodlust, gets hit square in the chest. The damage rating of a shotgun at this range is 5.

ANDREA: I roll a 4.

GM: That's enough. The blast kicks you back, the flash is almost blinding, and the clothes of the crewman rip apart. He's flung back through the door.

ANDREA: (To Brian.) "Get that door sealed!" I'll pump another round... ah, it's my last shot!

BRIAN: "I'm trying!" GM, what do I need to seal the door properly?

GM: It's quite an easy job normally, but the violence and the smoke is making it difficult. You need to roll a 7.

BRIAN: Okay. Can I use my Engineering Officer Primary Position?

GM: Of course.

BRIAN: Okay, that's... a 7 dead on!

GM: The door closes and seals just as another one of the infected crewmen comes blundering out of the darkness. All you can hear is him banging on the door, howling.

ANDREA: "We need to get out of here! Are there any other routes from here to our ship?"

BRIAN: "I have no idea, we need a map! Why in the hell did they open the sealed door on the wreck? It was sealed for a reason!"

ANDREA: "Damn the Cunningham Company and their genetics! What have they unleashed?"

GM: This is a stressful moment, both of you roll.

ANDREA: Oh, no! I'm already on one point after that crazy woman with the severed arms tried to... urgh, I don't want to think about it.

GM: Make the roll.

BRIAN: I rolled an 8! Damn, I've got a stress point.

ANDREA: I rolled a 9! I've got two stress points!

GM: Roll the die. If you get a 1 you'll experience an episode.

BRIAN: Not now! Not now!

ANDREA: I roll...

Dramatic pause. The die clatters.

ANDREA: I roll a 4! Thank f...!

BRIAN: "We have to go! Now!" I'll grab Andrea and run to the next blast door. Are there any maps or signs?

GM: No, but at that moment the door you just sealed grinds and whines, and slowly starts to rise. You see several dirty, bloodied fingers pulling it up...

BRIAN: What? How?

GM: Your roll to seal the door was only a partial success. What do you do?

And that ends our examples.

As you can see, each situation called for a different approach by both the players and the GM. The rolls decided the actions the players wished to take, and regardless of the outcome of the roll, the GM had to adapt to the results. Anything can happen, and the GM has to be ready to respond.

It is the GM's job, actually it's their responsibility, to create a simulation that all can become involved in and, dare I say it, enjoy. What does this entail? Hard work, imagination, a flair for the dramatic, the ability to improvise, a working knowledge of the rules, a sharp wit, the ability to arbitrarily interpret the rules and make decisions based on dice rolls and common sense... sounds daunting, yes?



Well, yes and no. It's true that, out of all the players sat around the gaming table, the GM will have the hardest job, but all the requirements listed above are not a necessity. It's true that GMs need some flair and a lot of imagination, but you wouldn't have applied for this role if you had none of that, would you?

GMs are the anchor of the simulation – they design the situation, talk the players through the proceedings, and generally control the events and unfolding plot that are generated by the scenario. You, as the GM, will be the one who plays all the other characters and brings them to life.

You've got that look in your eye. Having second thoughts? OK, look, let's have a review of the main requirements of a General Monitor and address them one at a time.

KNOW THE RULES

This goes without saying. The rules have been created to decide the outcome of decisions and actions, and are the basis of the game. It is the GM's responsibility to know the rules as well as, if not better than, the players. This is not an immediate requirement, as there is a learning curve inherent in all of this, but at the end of the day, the GM will need to know the mechanics of the game and how to implement those mechanics. So, read up on the rules, make some test dice rolls to come to grips with the mechanics, and take it from there. Expect stoppages and pauses as you refer to the rules during your first simulations, as there is a lot of information, and learning it all off by heart straight away is a fanciful notion, and almost impossible.

BE A STORYTELLER

This is true, also. One reason why some GMs take on the role is so that they can express themselves as storytellers, narrators if you will.

DESCRIBE THE SETTING TO THE PLAYERS

GMs must describe the location: what the players can see, hear, and smell.

PLAY THE ROLES OF ALL THE OTHER CHARACTERS THE PCs WILL MEET

There might be a lot of other characters for the GM to portray, each with their own personality and visual distinction, which is also part of describing the setting. These characters are controlled by the GM and not the players, which is why we call them NPCs. Some NPCs might have goals and objectives of their own; others might be bit players, and simply hand over information or help in passing. Think of it in terms of movie billings – there are major characters who are important people and need detailed back stories, then there are the walk-on parts who need little decoration, and finally there are the extras who are, for all intents and purposes, background dressing.

ARBITRATE THE RULES

You decide on the situation, and what merits a dice roll and what doesn't. You also decide on the difficulty and the nature of the threat, but the aim is not to design something to see whether the players survive – if prospects died on a regular basis in the simulator, then nobody would ever want to take part again. Let your simulation tell a story. And even though there will be moments of conflict and suspense, the GM should not be 'out to get' the players. We don't want prospects going out into the deep black expecting failure, do we?

Just be cool.

>> //[0010]+++000<< A GAME OF THOSE DARK PLACES

It's fine having all these directions about how a game should be run, but what kind of game should you be presenting to the players?

Those Dark Places is a science-fiction game that deals with the darker side of space travel and exploration, the down-and-dirty working man and woman's point of view. Industrial science fiction is all pipes that seem to have no true function, dark corridors, and windowless, thick bulkheads to keep out the radiation. Starships aren't sleek, or homes from home, they're industrial hellholes designed to be practical, not comfortable. The monitors are simple, old-fashioned CRT screens that are designed to keep costs low and be easy to fix or replace. In place of flashy touchscreen interfaces there are chunky, serviceable buttons and grimy keyboards. Everything is designed to keep the costs down and the profits up, and margins do not include creature comforts.

If you need inspiration for the kind of atmosphere this game is trying to evoke, there are two

films you should watch: *Alien* (1979) and *Outland* (1981). These films show the cramped conditions, the claustrophobic atmosphere, and the sometimes miserable working environments on a starship and planetary station, respectively. The stories are very human, with individuals being pushed to the edge of sanity, physical endurance, and mental ability.

Apologies for any spoilers below!

Alien is about the fate of a crew facing the unknown, and not just the titular alien – they find themselves in a situation that other powers have put them in, a situation they must deal with as best they can. *Those Dark Places* has not been explicitly designed with aliens or stellar beasts in mind (but don't let that stop you if you want to include that kind of thing); however, this game is very much based on the problems that the crew of the *Nostromo* deal with, like damaged engines, personal conflicts, and the struggle of realising that you're still ten months from home and have a situation to deal with before you can resume your journey. It doesn't have to be an alien causing the trouble; it could be corporate espionage, faulty parts, secret orders to investigate a resource-rich planet to jump a claim, or a stowaway on board. Any of these things can cause a problem, increase stress, and create a situation the players have to wriggle their way out of.

Outland, on the other hand, is a very human story set on a mining station. Greed and corruption are countered by duty, with innocent people caught in the crossfire and workers being abused and taken advantage of. The suits don't care; they're getting a slice of the action, the profits are up, and if a few workers don't make it... well, that's the price of business. But when a person appears on the scene who can't be bought, bribed, or threatened, what will these same suits do to protect their investments? What will they do to protect their secret?

Both of these films share a common design and atmosphere: everything is dirty, used, and old. The lighting is dim, and everything is in shadow; no doubt this is a visual choice by the respective directors, but for story purposes, this is most likely because power is at a premium. If something doesn't need to be lit, then don't light it. Beards and sallow looks might result from water rationing, and the claustrophobic corridors, low roofs, and lack of open spaces with windows create heightened tension, which creates conflict. The thick walls are the only thing keeping the characters safe from the deadly vacuum outside, but they've spent so long inside that the walls are closing in. There is a lot that can go wrong, and if the corporation has cut corners, then there's a good chance it will.

Any plot from any source can be transplanted into a game of *Those Dark Places*. Murder mystery, psychological horror, stories about the abuse of power or technology, or new discoveries... if you can get a decent thriller out of it, then take it and put it in a tin can in outer space.

>>//[0010] END<<

THE ROLE OF PLAYERS IN THE SIMULATION

We've talked a lot about the kinds of things that can happen out there, but we haven't really talked about the role of the players in all this. I mean, we've not addressed what it is they'll be doing – and after all, this simulation is supposed to be giving us an idea of what they're capable of. So, what's their purpose? What's their *modus operandi*? *Modus...* it's Latin. Mode of operating. Look, it's about what they do and why they do it. They need a reason to head off into the far reaches of space.

To keep things simple, we've given the players some pre-prepared reasons to go into the dark; they can be Colonial Marshals investigating the goings-on of deep space settlements, or they can be what the companies like to call Filler Teams, basically jack-of-all-trade crews who go out to solve problems. To save time, and money, the crews are usually mixed up so there are technical, medical, and combat specialists involved. These are Deep Space Support Teams – DSSTs, or Dusters, as some people like to call them – and that's what we'll be focusing on here.

Don't let this limit your choices, of course. If the players have some experience and they want to flex their creative muscles a bit, then by all means run the kind of simulation you think will work best. The focus on DSSTs is just to give newer prospects a bit of focus, so they have a reason to be going out there and getting involved in the day-to-day problems of the known galaxy. If you want to shift the role they play and create something more suited – say, a salvage team, or a cargo transport team, or even something exotic like a scientific research team – then be my guest. You're the General Monitor, so do whatever works for you and your group.

So, DSSTs... yeah, saying Dusters is easier, isn't it? Dusters are crews of varying abilities and skills who are sent to locations throughout explored space to take care of problems and situations. Sometimes they'll be assigned to a station for support, where the operations need help setting up or just getting up to speed, but in general they're problem solvers and trouble-shooters. Dusters are given legal permission to really get into the inner workings of a location and sort stuff out.

Dusters require at least one Engineering Officer, one Security Officer, and one Medical Officer, as either a Primary or Secondary position, to be able to ship out. This gives the group focus and purpose once they're given orders and told to go off and solve a problem somewhere, and these positions are required for a Duster team as it covers three main areas of expertise required; when things go wrong out there it's usually mechanical failure, a medical emergency, or someone needs dealing with. It also means the players aren't milling around in a simulated lobby somewhere, wondering what they're supposed to be doing and how they're supposed to do it. Being given orders and being told where they should be and what they should be doing is a great motivator. If



you make the situation *their* responsibility, you'll be amazed at how fast they'll want to get involved with the simulation, and the deeper they're involved, the better the results.

Of course, being Dusters is a great way to get players involved initially, but there are other crew types you might want to consider. At the end of the day, it's up to them.

Yes, I know we don't experience proper 'days' and it's a standard 24-hour sequence. It's just a figure of speech.

CREW TYPES

So, let's discuss the kinds of crews we send out there into the dark. We mainly dispatch commercial vessels, but we have all sorts of crew types. Your recorded abilities and crew position will decide on the type of team you join, but remember that no matter what, every ship requires qualified crew in the Helm Officer and Navigation Officer roles, as either a Primary or Secondary position.

It's not uncommon for any old vessel to be commandeered and modified for another type of duty. More than once we've had cargo transports changed into passenger ships, or service vessels used as tugboats. Crews and their ships might have specific roles in a fleet, but they are all at the service of the company they represent, and they can be instructed to change roles if the need arises. Just remember: the ship isn't yours. It might feel like it, but it really isn't. You go where you're told.

At this time we have no simulation available for situations involving ship-to-ship conflict or any other kind of vessel combat. The very nature of these huge lumbering beasts means that there's no cause for such a thing: they are a means to an end. It's not like they're as manoeuvrable as an atmospheric fighter, or there are any ship-to-ship battles. That's hardly ever happened. We might introduce simulated starships at a later date, but right now they are a means for getting from A to B.

CARGO TRANSPORTERS

These crews are specifically trained to travel to every type of station, outpost, and settlement you can imagine. They are, quite literally, the lifeline of the explored galaxy, as they distribute food, equipment, and medical supplies across the stars.

There are very few places that are self-sufficient. Only the largest settlements have areas where they can recreate Earth-like conditions with hydroponic chambers and next-generation recycling facilities, and even these are barely passable. No matter how independent a settlement thinks it is, every single one requires a visit from a cargo transporter.

Cargo-transporter crews are hard-working and have an eye for detail. There's a lot of competition between crew members, mind you, as there are performance-related bonuses in play, and everyone wants to get in on the action. Take unloading, for example; it's the recipient's responsibility to unload a cargo ship, but any member of the crew of that ship can lend a hand. However, due to insurance requirements, only one crew member can help, and they get a bonus to their overall pay. Who wouldn't say no to that? And it's randomly generated – if more than one crew member applies for extra duty, then they have to make EDUCATION opposed rolls until someone rolls higher than everyone else.

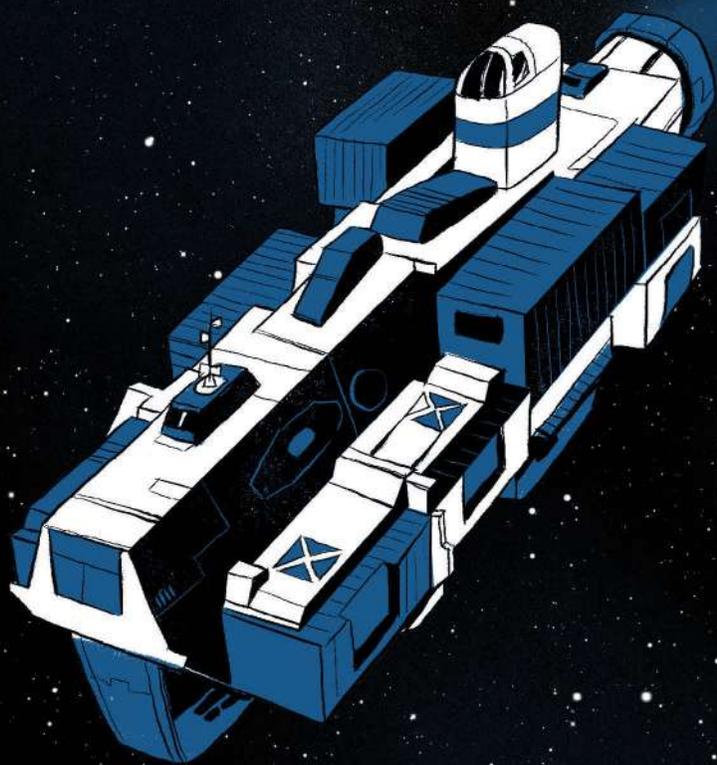
It's a cut-throat business and... what? No, I didn't mean that literally... although there was this one time... nah, forget it.

>> //[0011]+++000<<< TRANSPORT

You might be wondering where the rules for starships and vehicles are; quite simply, there aren't any... at least, not yet. This game focuses on the cramped locations and situations where vehicles wouldn't be of any use, and the slow, lumbering vessels are too hefty and cumbersome to be represented by any statistics that a PC could use.

Players can only point their ship in the direction they want it to go and press a button. They are simply a means to an end, a flying brick hauling the players from point A to point B, and the rules cover what they can do at these two points.

>>//[0011] END<<<



TUGBOATS

Those stations, refineries, and orbitals got out there somehow, and very few are built on-site. Tugboats do the back-breaking work of dragging these stations out to their designated sectors.

It's long, arduous work. To prevent stress on both the ship and the thing it's towing, the outbound travel times are tripled, so a one-month trip turns into a three-month trip; the return trip is as normal. Even when they reach their destination, the crews have to establish the base, get everything up and running, and make sure that it is habitable for when the personnel arrive.

This is a lonely business. Standard stations are taken out by general crews, but the larger ones require a work team, who the crew has to look after, manage, and account for. There are some refineries and industrial platforms that work and process as they are towed, and these need extra care, with frequent stops during the journey to monitor the cargo.

PASSENGER SHIPS

Speaking of transporting personnel, this is the responsibility of the passenger vessels. When people think of a ship designed for passenger use, most imagine those liners you see back in the home system, where the super-rich spend most of their time. That's about as far away from the truth as you can get.

While there are those... individuals who enjoy paying for a berth on one of our ships to experience frontier life, starships are not designed for comfort or leisure. Passenger ships usually differ very little from cargo vessels, except that they have extra space for more LongSleep chambers and living quarters. There's also a lot more room inside these vessels for people to wander and 'get away' from each other (some of the company personnel haven't been trained for extended space flight like the starship crews have), along with with some entertainment and socialising activities.

It is the crew's responsibility to care for, protect, and manage the personnel on board, make sure their needs are attended to, and manage any conflicts or issues. Passenger ships might spend most of their time in transit, but there are the few days between departure and arrival where everyone has to share communal space, and anything can happen.

SERVICE VESSELS

When a station needs fixing, when whole sections of bases need replacement parts along with the expertise to fit them, and when other vessels need help stuck out in the black or between destinations, service vessels are sent to assist. With medical, engineering, and refuelling facilities on board, these ships operate at the farthest reaches of explored space, and can spend years jumping from star to star, answering requests for assistance and repairs.

This makes serving on them a little risky, which is why we offer extra bonuses and shares to crews who operate them. With constant requests for assistance, there is very little downtime for service-vessel crews, and they'll spend a lot of time working towards aiding others while not using their LongSleep chambers, preparing parts and equipment for the job in hand – crews want to make sure that the replacements they're transporting are ready to go upon arrival because delays can cause all kinds of problems - while also trying to do their own prep for the long haul across the stars. There's a level of stress involved in making it to destinations on time and doing the required work correctly that few other vessels endure, so we only pick the hardest crews for these ships.

SCIENCE VESSELS

The companies are always looking to expand their horizons, and there's always that one scientist who's sure that they've found a suitable Earth-type planet, or a world with an atmosphere that supports strange and wonderful life. Which, as we know, is always 100% wrong. You've got to wonder whether we're actually alone in the universe, and all the galaxy is good for is resources.

Still, these science vessels spend their time travelling to distant stars that monitoring stations have scanned and probed and deemed profitable to travel to, and then they spend months and months scanning worlds and rocks and dust clouds to see whether we can use them for anything. There are all kinds of materials we can obtain from minerals, radioactive substances, chemicals, and even really basic cellular organisms, so these expeditions are not only furthering our sphere of influence and expanding our knowledge, they're a great source of income.

Once a science vessel has deemed a system resource-rich, the crew will send back the details to central, and they'll determine what stations and bases need to be towed out there or constructed – and that's the science vessel's job done. They then move on to the next star to see what wonders they'll discover.

You're going to ask me about the Virginis outbreak, aren't you? Of course you are. Look, it was a faulty ship seal, and the crew had some bad luck, and some of



them paid the price. I'm not going to get into that genetic mutation nonsense, I'll leave that to the sensationalist press, thank you very much.

ARBITER SHIPS

Some of the outposts might tell you differently and try to push that 'frontier law' rubbish, but there is a legal system that controls every base and settlement, and the arbiter ships are the vessels that make sure everyone remembers that, or even enforce it if necessary.

Most space dwellers call them Colonial Marshals, and while that's true to a certain extent, arbiter crews are more like investigators and judges, making sure that people get a fair hearing and the punishment fits the crime. In extreme circumstances, they will transport criminals to face justice on larger stations, but this is only for the bigger problems.

Marshals – to use the nickname – will travel to locations to make sure that they're following the rule of law, investigate crimes from something as small as petty theft through to assault and murder, and make decisions based on evidence. This will lead to mandatory sentences based on the book, or decisions made based on the situation and circumstances that arise. Whatever benefits the location as a whole, to be honest. It's always better to have an outside force make these decisions, as having them made by possible friends or enemies of perpetrators might make a bad situation worse.

TACTICAL VESSELS

Crews with a military background (private or government) might find themselves on tactical vessels. Although some governments and the bigger companies have their own large military vessels, the general tactical missions are taken care of by these smaller crews. They don't have military-grade ships, but the vessels are equipped with a mass-driver cannon and a drop shuttle for planetary insertion. Honestly, though, I can't remember the last time that a planet drop was required.

Most of the time, they'll be taking care of the civil unrest that arbiters can't handle, or making sure that certain bases aren't the subject of hostile takeovers. In extreme circumstances, you will get places that declare themselves independent, or they'll try to take over and keep the profit. When they take up arms and get physical, we send in the tactical vessels and lock the place down. Large skirmishes and wars are best left to the big guys, but if you have an armed insurgency because a few miners decide that they know best and want the money for themselves, then send in the tactical team.

MULTI-ROLE VESSELS

This is probably the first kind of vessel that prospects will operate on while we ascertain what role best suits them in the fleet: these are the ships assigned to Dusters.

Multi-role ships are literally just that; they are the jack-of-all-trades of starships and they'll go wherever they can, if they can. If an emergency cargo needs taking, they'll take it. If a station needs new workers at a moment's notice, they'll take them. If a base needs new equipment or repairs and it's not a huge job, then these ships are on hand to help. For initial surveys until the full science team arrives, they'll do. If there's a problem with petty crime or a situation arises, then they'll double as arbiters in the interim. If you need some firepower and a couple of the crew have weapons training, then they'll lend a hand or give a show of strength.

It's a hard job on a multi-role vessel, as crews never know where they will be sent next, or for what. The bonus situation is worked out on a mission-by-mission basis, so even though there can be risks, this is made up for by the possible benefits, and the company will try to match the pay-out of the dedicated vessels or compensate for any unforeseen circumstances.

OUTPOSTS AND SETTLEMENTS

So, now you know how to get there and in what, let's discuss the kinds of places players will be going to.

We discussed this a little earlier, but I'll go over it again now. Once the crew is on that ship and on their way out there, they won't have natural air and open spaces for a long, long time. Every station, base and settlement is an enclosed location built to keep people alive, and the only time crews will experience an open space is in one of the big chambers on one of the larger bases or vessels. Get used to a life of corridors, low-ceilinged rooms, and recycled... well... recycled everything, practically.

These places are built to stop every nasty thing you can think of from killing you, so they're not pretty. It's all very practical. Everything is judged by cost, so why make it big when you can make it just right? Each station has all kinds of purposes but, primarily, they exist to serve the company and not much else.

This can make some of the denizens surly and a little dismissive of visitors. There are some places where the majority of the workers have been there for more than a few years, and that can make them territorial and unpredictable. Some simply enjoy



it, some have nowhere else to go, but some do this to themselves; they overspend on their allowances, eat into their pay cheques and realise they have no money to go home with. It's a vicious cycle in some places, and the company will do what it can to help out, but it's up to individuals to take care of their own finances. That affects starship crews as well as base personnel, so bear that in mind.

Bases are built in all kinds of places and serve all kinds of purposes. Space stations are your general orbitals, usually in support of a planetary base. Space platforms can be doing anything from refining to processing to acting as a service base. Moon/planetoid and asteroid bases do the same as the other stations, but they've been built into an existing body; the asteroid bases are usually part of a larger field and are used as the focal point of a mining fleet. Planetary bases sit on the surface of a world with an atmosphere of some kind or another, and these are the most rare, as there aren't many worlds out of the hundreds we've explored and registered that will allow us to do that.

The roles of bases are varied, and they usually do a bit of everything; it helps keep the costs down if resources can be spread across several different uses.

RESEARCH FACILITIES

There are some things that are better played with out in the far beyond. Whenever a scientist has an idea for anything chemical or biological, or wants to manipulate energies they don't fully understand, then what safer place to put them than around star a few dozen light years away from everyone else?

Don't get me wrong, they're not just crackpots intent on blowing themselves up, but after the Oberon incident that's what most people think, isn't it? Why take the risk of experimenting with dangerous things close to innocent people?

That's not to say that every research station is a place of high risk; there are plenty of places where scientific work is done to simply manufacture existing breakthroughs – mainly pharmaceutical because that's where the money is – and there are lots of stations that are hired out to private companies that do a variety of research on all sorts of things.

These places need constant resupplies and personnel changes. You'll find that a lot of jobs concern research stations.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STATIONS (RMSs)

Asteroids, moons, and planetoids can be filled with all kinds of minerals, radioactive substances, and exotic materials, and it used to be the case that companies would transport the raw materials back to Earth to be refined there. Not anymore. Now we have permanent RMSs mining, refining, and transporting the finished resources ready for use.

They're huge, and they'll spend years in a star system, drifting from one location to another, stripping what they need. The largest ones sit in orbit around a world and send down teams to mine, or they'll sit over an asteroid and strip it until there's nothing left. When they're full, they're towed back to Earth to deposit their finds, and then taken back out to the next system. They're like small mining towns and are fully independent, with their own energy sources, reactors, hydroponic centres, and all kinds of things that enable them to stay out there for months at a time with little to no support.

They even have their own ships for orbital insertion, transport, and everything else they'll need to strip a system. Resource management is the number one source of profit for the companies, and the companies make sure they do their job efficiently and without interruption. There are some amazing bonuses for RMS workers and their support staff, but they're quite literally years away from home.

SURVEY OUTPOSTS

These function much like research stations, except they have a specific purpose: to explore, catalogue, and survey a star system.

Survey outposts are positioned on planets or moons that have direct and easy access to the rest of the system. They are completely self-contained, and are designed to last for several years, depending on the size of the system and the number of places that can be explored. They are always accompanied by three full-size starships – one cargo transport and two science vessels – and each of the science vessels has full clearance to land on the surface of a world as well as dispatch planetary rovers. These rovers are quite large in themselves, almost like mobile houses with eight huge wheels and room for several personnel and laboratories, and they can travel across a world for up to six months. This enables them to do extensive exploration.

As wonderful as exploration and discovery is, the survey teams have a primary purpose: to discover new resources. As the human race expands across the stars, and Earth and its dependants in our solar system make ever more demands for resources, new materials are always needed.



Not what you thought, eh? Look, there's a lot of money to be made in survey teams. Some of the claims rights can set you up for life, and just maybe – someday – we will discover an Earth-type world with something more than single-cell mush that we can colonise for real. Until then, it's all about the profit.

MILITARY BASES

I have no idea why we cover these in the orientation, as we never go to military bases, but I guess it serves as a warning. The military, whether they're government or company, have nothing to do with us. If a boundary beacon comes up on your scanners and it's a military identification signal, just stay away. It's the easiest thing to do.

SIMULATION IDEAS

Look, I'm not going to lie to you – there are a lot of people who see the simulations as some kind of game. In fact, during downtime (and if the station's power reserves allow it) there are a lot of us who go into the simulator and create scenarios just for the hell of it. Running around abandoned stations looking for prizes, playing hide-and-seek on a mining colony, stupid stuff like that. It's all harmless fun, but it can really show the range a simulator is capable of. With the correct input, we can pretty much create any world we want to. In fact, there's a simulation in there that does an amazing recreation of a 'forest', with 'trees'. It's nothing special, we had to recreate it from pictures and video, but it just goes to show the diversity of a simulator and how you can use it for anything, if you've got the imagination to push it that far.

Simulations take the form of 'reports'; I'm going to be honest, we actually call them 'adventures'. No, really! Don't use that term with the officials, though, they prefer to keep things 'proper'. At the end, the survivors (if any) can give a brief outline as to what they have experienced and then sign off.

After the simulation is over, it's a good idea to write these down or, even better, actually make an audio recording of them, with the players speaking about what they have experienced. This is a good way to keep a record of the adventure, and if it's an ongoing simulation, you can play back the previous week's report to remind the group where you left off in the last session.

Also, it's a great way to introduce any new prospects, especially if it's an ongoing training simulation and one of the players has died in it. Not literally, of course. Let's say that something goes horribly wrong, and the crew is wiped out or lost. Instead

of just saying ‘that’s the end of the simulation’, have the players create new avatars to investigate what happened to the previous team, and play the last recorded report to get the group back into the flow of things.

Reports can be about anything you want them to be. Below are just a few ideas as to the kinds of problems the group can have out in the deep black.

THE PERSONNEL REPORT

The main problem with exploring the great unknown? It’s the people we send out there. Yes, machines break down, starships splutter, and computers get cranky, but all of these things are fixable. With a well-applied spanner, drill, or kick we can get machines working again, but people? Sometimes, they’re a liability.

Personnel reports are about the individuals we meet out there. Perhaps a technician has been pulling double shifts for two weeks in the bowels of an atmosphere circulator. In that darkness, that heat, surrounded by the thumping and roaring of the machinery, there’s more than a little chance she could be sent off the rails. What do you do? The last thing you want is some insane tool-wielding maniac thumping around in the heart of the machine that’s keeping everyone alive. Or what if a doctor has decided that the patients are better off dead? Or the marshal has taken to firing his gun a bit too much? What about entire stations affected by adverse conditions, sending everyone into murderous rages? What do you do then?

So, what do you do? Talk them down? Wrestle them to the ground? Open fire? How do you react to a situation where the actions of one, or a few, can adversely affect the many? How you handle these problems will reflect on you and your future dealings with others, as it all goes down into the reports, and there are a lot of suits who read them.

For example, there was an incident on Station Galileo last year where a senior system operations technician had decided that she’d had enough of the boring monotony of the everyday running of the station and decided to play little ‘jokes’. By ‘jokes’ I mean she started opening doors to the vacuum, closing down life support in certain areas, and switching off the artificial gravity during medical procedures. Nice. Three people died, and when they traced the problem back to her, they decided to go in all guns blazing. She died, as well as her assistant who was tied up in a corner, and then the investigation discovered that there was an undetected chemical leak into the airflow of her office; she had been slowly poisoned over weeks, and this had led to her psychotic episode.

Now, if the marshals kicking down the door had tried to talk her down, they might have stopped her and realised this later, but there was also the fact that she could have done something really serious, such as shut the station down completely

or opened all the doors. A decision had to be made, and that's what they did.

That's just an example; personnel reports can cover everything from disgruntled ex-employees and accidents caused by lack of training to sudden and disastrous psychotic incidents.

THE ACCIDENT REPORT

Everything that keeps us alive out there is man-made. It's a machine. Everything we touch, breathe, see, stand on, lie on, eat, and use is a tool designed to keep us moving and working. When it goes wrong, it's usually fixable, replaceable, or patchable. When it goes *really* wrong, it can kill a lot of people. Yeah, to be honest, I was supposed to sugar coat that for you, and I kinda didn't. Sorry.

When things go wrong, the suits upstairs are going to want to know why. How did it happen? Why did it happen? Who was responsible? How can we stop this from happening again? Basically, they'll want to get it fixed so that it doesn't affect productivity, then point the finger at someone so that the company doesn't have to accept liability.

What about those incidents when things just keep going wrong and teams have to keep up with the problem? Like a chain reaction they have to keep ahead of? There was an incident on Mariana – yeah, they made a movie of it, but they really overdid the action sequences – where a cascade effect knocked out systems on a dry dock, and the domino effect knocked out starships berthed there. Imagine a simulation where the players had to keep ahead of a problem in case it destroyed everything? Imagine something like that, but with a fission reactor on a habitat ring! Thousands of people at risk! I just thought of that. I'm writing that one down.

THE INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE REPORT

You're not naive. You know how this works. There are a lot of businesses out there trying to get themselves involved in a lot of lucrative operations, and they'll do whatever they can to secure and take advantage of them. Making claims and taking advantage of new resources is fine and all, but if another company wants in, they'll do whatever they can to make that happen, and that's when it becomes *not* fine.

Leave the legal and business stuff to the suits in the boardrooms back on Earth, or whatever station they're working out of. It's the on-the-ground dirty stuff you need to look out for.

Industrial espionage takes many forms: stolen data, pilfered equipment, sabotaged machinery, even murder. Yes, there are operatives in certain companies

who will go that far to get results for their employer, and even though the company will act all surprised and shocked when it happens, they'll be quick to take advantage of the situation and reap the rewards.

Espionage is usually the first thing investigators think of when reporting accidents – and, to be honest, they're not wrong a lot of the time – but it's something that needs to be looked at very carefully before any accusations are made. After all, you don't want to accuse – or upset – the wrong people.

THE SURVEY REPORT

There's something of a romantic myth surrounding survey missions. Popular media seems to think they're all about glorious vistas, amazing tension-filled discoveries, and beautiful long-winded descents to the surface of a world set to rousing, powerful music.

Yeah.

In reality, it's a lot of pointing sensors at rocks and making notes. Most of the time, the starships stay in orbit of a star, and the crews just catalogue the readings they get and leave marker buoys to claim the find, if there's no buoy there already.

It's when the ships are given the go-ahead to touch down that things get really interesting. If the surface of a planet, moon, or asteroid is secure enough to land on, then a survey ship can do so, either by taking the whole vessel down (which companies don't like, remember) or sending a shuttle down, and then the survey team can get up close and personal with their find. They work on the basis that they get a share of anything they discover – it's not a lot, but around 3% of surveyors make discoveries they can retire on. The chances are the same as rolling two sixes one after another.

Of course, exploring a planet can reveal all kinds of problems, like unstable surfaces, lethal bacterial strains, and unknown exotic particles or materials. There are all kinds of monitoring, safety, and quarantine procedures that slow things right down, and some teams have been known to spend a year or more surveying a single planet.



THE HOSTILE TAKEOVER REPORT

I was on a station once, way out in that slice of space owned by Wayne/Tanaka, and we were just finishing up a refit when we got a call that Cambridge-Wallace Inc. had pretty much bought out WT and had taken over operations in the sector. It didn't go down very well, and there was some violence on the station. Cambridge-Wallace didn't wait around, and they sent in people to clear the station so they could bring in their own crews. They didn't send in Union reps or Marshals, either, they sent in armed military personnel, who pretty much herded us all onto a garbage hauler to get us to the next station, one owned by Frisso Limited. They didn't want us there at all.

There were fights on the station; guys who had been there for years and were months away from retirement were being told their pensions were void and they were out of a job. Of *course* there was fighting. People died. I was there.

Hostile takeovers can be just that. It might seem like a term the suits use to describe their underhanded tactics to acquire business interests, but that hostility can take physical form, and it's the ground-level grunts who take the beating. They didn't want to be in that situation, the military guys didn't want to be kicking people out of their homes, and the suits made billions of credits.

I suppose, when it happens, the only questions are: whose side are you on, and what are you going to do about it?

Just as a disclaimer, that question is rhetorical and designed to illicit a response based on a non-factual simulation. We're not endorsing resistance or the use of force, and we vehemently condemn the use of such. Phew... almost forgot the absolving legal stuff, then.

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATHS REPORT

This is a tricky one. Deaths on a station or in a facility are rare, but they do happen, and more often than not it's an accident or a faulty seal or just a cracked mind. Sometimes, however, it's something darker. This is usually a job for the Marshals, but sometimes a whole team needs to be involved, and some places rely on Dusters to get the job done.

Basically, we're talking about murders and the like. Now, the company guys don't like the word 'murder' as it has negative connotations, so they call them unexplained or mysterious deaths. So, basically, murder.

Investigating a murder, checking the crime scene and the cause of death, interviewing people, and perusing statements can take a lot of time and work. Sometimes the company just wants it done and dusted, they don't care who gets busted as long as someone does and they can get things back on track. However, it's

why the murder happened that truly makes them nervous. Personal dilemma? Bad working conditions? Disgruntled employees fighting back? An internal business deal gone wrong? They don't want these things being connected back to them, and unless you have concrete undeniable evidence, the chances are they'll be able to wash their hands of it.

THE SCIENTIST REPORT

Believe it or not, there are still a lot of people who really distrust science. They hate experts either explaining facts or revealing truths to them. I know, right? However, scientists still have to be regulated and checked on; I mean, we don't want some clever scientist going off and doing illegal experiments on people, do we? Again, I mean.

When investigating scientific bases and stations – especially ones where the company is unsure of what they're doing, even though they gave them a huge grant, or the ones that have been out of contact for a few years – teams have to be extra cautious. These bases are sealed, usually for good reason, and they could be dealing with anything: bacteria, new genetics, automatons, artificial intelligence (AI), experimental medicines and surgical procedures, engine tests, and all kinds of things they feel might benefit the human race... and profit margins, of course.

THE CLASSIFIED REPORT

I can't tell you about this one. Shouldn't have mentioned it. Sorry.

Have a read through the report at the end of this, it's the basis of a simulation you'll be asked to run as a test. It's called 'The *Argent III* Report' and it covers this kind of stuff. It'll also give you an idea of how to design and prepare your own reports.



>> //[0012]+++000<<<
THE SETTING

Those Dark Places does not have a defined central setting, and allows for some leeway in designing and running a game. As in some of the best dark science-fiction movies – the original *Alien* and *Outland* especially – there is just enough information to give the story depth, but the history and setting remain vague.

But some groups might want a bit of background to give their adventures context, something a little beyond vague references to the world beyond the hull of their starship. So below are a few details that can give some context to the bleak industrial world of the future.

Earth is a shell of what it once was. Although 12 billion people still live on the surface, the ecosystem is corrupted almost beyond saving, the planet is dotted with city-sized atmosphere circulators, and nature is little more than a memory, stored away in genetic banks and specially designed reservations in the hope that one day the planet will be habitable again.

The atmosphere circulators, or 'Lungs', are colossal pieces of engineering roughly 20 kilometres wide, with gigantic towers stretching a kilometre and a half or more into the air, giving the impression of a huge pipe organ reaching into the sky. These towers feed breathable air into the atmosphere across an area of around 200 kilometres. The breathable air is produced by genetically altered algae through forced photosynthesis, and once exhausted, these algae can be used as a food product.

The Lungs are found near coastlines, where the water can be desalinated and treated in huge quantities for consumption, and huge sprawling cities have been built to house the millions of people who gather around the circulators so that they can breathe more easily. The air quality beyond the circulators' area of effect is very low but survivable, although the quality of existence and life expectancy is incredibly reduced.

The cities built around the Lungs are dense and built upwards, resulting in buildings rising up to a kilometre into the air with at least 200 floors, and also being at least a kilometre wide at the base. In fact, a lot of the buildings are self-contained communities surrounded by smaller skyscrapers measuring around half a kilometre. The largest buildings are closest to wherever the Lung has been built; the further away you get from the Lung, the smaller and more dilapidated the buildings become as the air becomes more and more stale.

Food is produced by the Lungs as a by-product of their process, and plants are produced in orbital farms, as well as from cloned meat grown in vats, supplemented by artificial supplements and soy. Real meat is such a luxury that 95% of people can go their entire lives without eating it.

The human race has spread across the solar system, and this requires resources, resources they are already stripping from local worlds and moons. But beyond the solar system are more lucrative opportunities, like previously undiscovered metals and radioactive materials for new technologies, exotic materials and compounds for expensive pharmaceuticals, and the ability to conduct exploration and research outside the legal influence of the governments that still cling on to power.

The governments are as they are now, with countries observing the same protective attitude towards their borders as they did in the twenty-first century, but continents have become much more cooperative thanks to the state that the world now finds itself in. Moving populations to space stations, moon bases, and fledgling colonisation projects on Mars and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn has helped to reduce the strain on planet Earth, but these projects require resources, and the best materials are found outside the solar system.

Enter the companies.

The companies are the firms that take care of the messy business of exploration, research, and resource appropriation. They initially branched out by picking up government contracts, then used the subsidies to fund their own expansion, and now the companies come in all shapes and sizes. From the small HedgeLundis Corporation, which has little more than a thousand personnel and ten starships taking precious gases from the upper atmosphere of gas giants eight months from home, to the multi-system Cambridge-Wallace Inc., which sends dozens of vessels to dozens of space stations and mining outposts in all directions, sometimes a year or more from Earth. No matter the size, these companies are almost a law unto themselves once they leave the edge of Earth's solar system. It's just the Interstellar Department of Trading (IDT), a pan-governmental body that oversees practices and competition beyond the Oort Cloud, that represents the interests of every country on planet Earth, that keeps them under control with the Extrasolar Judiciary and their Marshals.

At least, that's the intention of the IDT. Light years away from Earth, months from home, even the most devoted of Extrasolar Judiciary members like to make their lives as easy as possible, one way or another.

>>//[0012] END<<





FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

Wow. It seems that everything we're talking about here is some kind of danger, eh? There's more of it in this section, but let's try to focus more on the people who *won't* be trying to take your head off.

The characters that you as the GM will be playing in the simulation are known as NPCs – non-player characters. These include pretty much everyone from the highest-hitting business operators to the guys who sweep the floors between shifts.

In general, all standard NPCs have Attributes of 2, with a single Attribute of 3. If you have to create a NPC on the spot because the players have taken an interest in them, or you need to have them make a roll because of a situation that has arisen that requires an arbitrary decision, then simply decide what the NPC does and assign the score of 3 to the Attribute that pertains to that role. So, a guard might have STRENGTH 3, a doctor might have EDUCATION 3, and a businessperson might have CHARISMA 3.

In general, NPCs only have Primary crew positions, but you can add the Secondary bonuses if you want to, just to flesh them out a little. It's all depends on how much detail you want in your simulation, but remember that you'll be juggling these characters about, so don't get them or their CASE files mixed up!

For example, the players might have been injured, and instead of pressing on, they decide to retreat to the habitat section for treatment. You haven't allowed for this, and you need a doctor, so you take the basic Attributes of 2, make the EDUCATION score 3, and there you go. And because the NPC is a doctor (her Primary Position), she gets +2 to her roll if she makes any rolls to do with medicine. If she was a doctor's assistant or only had rudimentary first aid skills, the Primary Position score would be +1.

More-detailed NPCs require a little more attention. These are the characters who will have a much larger role in the lives of the players, characters who are important to the simulation and the unfolding adventure. Sorry, *report*. I need to get out of that habit.

You can create these characters in the same way as a PC using the rules we presented in the Crew Orientation section. They will have a CASE file, their crew positions will be clearly defined, and they'll even have their equipment listed. Not only that, you can create something of a background for them, and include their reasons for being at the location, and how their presence aids or hinders the players.

Here are some examples:

LAURA HINDER	
DOCTOR	
CHARISMA	3
AGILITY	2
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Medical Officer

JULIA BAUER	
SCIENTIST	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Science Officer

SAMSON BURGEN	
BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE	
CHARISMA	4
AGILITY	1
STRENGTH	2
EDUCATION	3
Primary	Liaison Officer

MARK NEWBOLD	
PILOT	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	4
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	3
Primary	Helm Officer

PAUL SQUIRE	
MARSHAL	
CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	4
STRENGTH	3
EDUCATION	2
Primary	Security Officer

KOFI ACKAH	
NAVIGATOR	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Navigation Officer

MIGUEL RONSON	
ENGINEER	
CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	2
STRENGTH	3
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Engineering Officer

SYNTHETIC AUTOMATONS

Synthetic Automatons, or the SAM series, are artificial humans that were originally created for long missions in deep space. They are primarily synthetic with some vat-grown tissue to complement the technology, such as muscle tissue for the more delicate jobs and some brain tissue for self-determining functions. Although they appear human, closer inspection reveals they are anything but; the skin is too smooth and lacks pores or hair, the eyes are fixed and do not dilate, and they do not sweat or breathe. But unless you get right up close and personal with the machine, it looks like the real thing.

The AI installed in a SAM is the most advanced AI that Cambridge-Wallace Inc has ever produced, even better than those multi-role JACOB models that Hindenburg Inc. made. In combination with actual human tissue, the AI functions as a normal human brain, but without emotion or psychological impairment. This makes them perfect for long-term missions, and the SAM is usually the only crew member awake during transit, as they require no sleep, food, or stimulation. They are not 100% reliable, however, and so far there have never been any vessels fully crewed with them. Human beings still make the best decisions in dangerous situations.

Synthetic automatons have the same CASE-file statistics as any normal human, and at least one can be found on many of the starships that ship out now. It's a comfort to many crew members that they're being looked after while they're all cooped up in their LongSleep chambers. There are newer models that mimic the human form almost perfectly, right down to the smallest detail, but many crews complain of their not-quite-human appearance and prefer the rubber skinned models. 'Uncanny valley' I think is the term.

Between you and me? I agree. I shipped with one between Mars and Titan, once, and it was enough to make me give up spaceflight. The captain of the boat kept comparing the SAM to a serial killer: "He might be smiling, but his eyes say otherwise". Creepy stuff.

>> //[0013]+++000<< PLAYING A SYNTHETIC AUTOMATON

It's perfectly possible to play a SAM if the player wishes. It's exactly like playing a normal PC, except they mostly operate on simple logic; if a door needs closing to save the ship, they will close it, regardless of whether there are still crew members behind the door who will perish. They can be personal and pleasant, but they are never emotional, and so the Pressure rules do not apply to them.

This makes them a boon to the group, as they can be relied upon to never stress out. And as a learning machine, they can always pick up habits and quirks, what their designers call 'surface-level human qualities', which can endear them to a long-serving crew. However, they can't be relied upon to do the humane thing, and will always act for the benefit of the bigger picture, i.e. the company.

>> //[0013] END<<

CREATURES

There are also animals you might want to include. Most animals are synthetic recreations or genetic copies of the original – ship's cats have become popular recently, especially ones cloned from original genetic code. Animals do not need the Charisma or the Education scores, just the Agility and Strength ones. You might want to make a note of their reaction to being disturbed or approached, as well. There are three reactions: 'Friendly', 'Neutral', and 'Hostile'.

So, for example, a ship's cat is quite small but fast, so it will have an Agility of 3 but a Strength of 1. It's most probably friendly – it would have been bred that way – so its reaction would be Friendly.

However, let's say the ship has vat-bred a big dog that they want to use as a security measure. He's big and fast, so his Strength is 3 and his Agility is 3, and he has been bred to attack, so his reaction is Hostile.

The Attributes and reactions all depend on the creature, really, and how it fits into your game. You can even mix the reactions, if you want. The ship's cat might be Friendly now, but upset it, and it'll attack you, becoming Hostile. The ship's dog might be Hostile when you run into it, but the owner might activate its control collar, and the next thing you know it's being Friendly.

Then there's the unknown. This is a difficult thing to talk about, most people just make jokes and don't take it seriously, but we have to talk about the possibility that we actually make contact with an alien organism at some point that's a little bigger than



bacteria... you know what, forget it. It's not a required addition to the schedule, and we'll talk about it once you've had a few months out there. When you've seen the weirdness and insanity for yourself, and heard the stories, you might be in a more receptive mood as far as talking about aliens is concerned.

CONCLUSION

It's a big galaxy out there. It's riddled with settlements and outposts on just about any surface you can put a settlement or an outpost. There are hundreds of space stations of varying sizes, from small, house-sized satellites to huge, city-sized monstrosities, and the claims built into moons and asteroids can house between a few hundred and tens of thousands of people. The density of humanity thins the further you go out into the black; imagine starting off in a densely populated city and then heading out into the fringes, where few people live and scratch a living. It's like that, but with less air and more gamma radiation.

It's hard to prepare people for the dangers and threats that are out there, and it's even harder to give them the mental fortitude to weather it. Short of building a dedicated training vessel to actually throw prospects out there – and, let's face it, the company ain't paying for that – the simulations are the best we can do to give some idea of what to expect.

Prospects, players, victims, whatever you want to call them, they can go through the simulations as many times as they please, and there are those who request certain scenarios even after they've qualified, mainly to experience different situations and get a whole new set of skills or experiences to help them on upcoming missions.

My best advice is this – don't treat it like a simulation. Run them through the report, roll the die, but always remember that this is a serious business. Oh, we can joke and make fun of things that have happened, or that we've heard about, but once you're out there in the vastness of harsh, unforgiving space, that humour goes out of the window, and the jokes are forced and nervous. That's what you need to try to impress on the players: the danger. The unknown. The unpredictability of people, planets, and technology.

It's up to you as the GM to get all of these things across, create the atmosphere, make sure the NPCs are real enough for the players to want to interact with them, and devise scenarios that will challenge and thrill the players. I mean, we don't want to put them off space travel, but we also don't want to sugar coat the whole thing.

I think I'm pretty much done here. We've gone over our limit, actually, so I'll make sure to log that on your worksheet. Thanks for your time.

Take care.



+++//03/**<<<
END





THE ARGENT III REPORT

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This short adventure for *Those Dark Places* is a mystery surrounding the sudden reappearance of the *Argent III*, a research vessel thought lost for 60 years. The players are commissioned to travel to the Procyon binary star system, 11.45 light years from Earth, to collect a crew that has been working on a planet-orbiting refinery, which is now scheduled for demolition after having stripped the planet clean of resources. Upon arrival, they discover the crew missing and a mystery vessel in the area...

PREPARATION

If you intend on being a player in this adventure, all you need to do is create a character. **YOU MUST NOT READ ANY FURTHER**, as knowing what is to come will ruin the experience not just for you, but also for the other players at the table.

If you intend to be the GM, then it's a good idea to read the adventure thoroughly before running it, and maybe even spend some time making notes about the parts you want to focus on. Knowing the adventure inside out before play will make the experience easier for you and more immersive for your players.

BACKGROUND

Cambridge-Wallace Inc. has a small job that needs sorting out – the company has a space station scheduled for demolition and salvage in the Procyon binary star system, 11.45 light years from Earth, and the three-person engineering team they sent there several months ago to finalise the demolition is ready to be picked up and returned home. The players are dispatched on a Cambridge-Wallace bond to collect the team and return them to the Titan Staging Station in the Sol System. The outbound trip to the Procyon system takes 81 days, and it's not expected the players will have to stay for longer than three days while they load the crew and their equipment on board.

THE ADVENTURE

To get the players involved in the adventure, simply have them as crew members serving on a vessel owned by Cambridge-Wallace Inc., or have them be commissioned by the company they do work for. If they're a Duster team, then they're instructed to travel to the Procyon system to complete the bond.

In actual fact, the pickup isn't as easy as it seems (of course). Upon arriving at the station, the players find no crew waiting for them, and the area on the station where the team was supposed to be bunked shows signs of violence. Then, as the station orbits around the dead planet, another ship hoves into view: the *Argent III*, which has been lost for the better part of a century. This exploration vessel was headed for a star three years out from Sol, but vanished less than a year into its mission. The clues point to the crew members being taken to the *Argent III*, but the old ship has barely any life support or power.

Upon investigating the *Argent III*, the players find several of the original colonists, as well as some of their descendants, and they discover the lengths to which the ship's crew have gone to survive, as well as the reasons why they kidnapped the engineering crew...

The sequence of events is laid out as a story for the players to follow, but should there be any die rolls required, the text will be presented in bold to make it easier for first-time GMs and to help them make decisions.

SECTION ONE – THE DISCOVERY

ARRIVAL

The game begins with the players in LongSleep. Read this aloud:

Back on the Titan Staging Station in the Sol System, the departure place for many vessels headed out into the stars, you received a contract from Cambridge-Wallace Inc. – probably the largest corporation in explored space. The company wants you to travel to the Procyon binary star system to collect a three-person crew, who have been overseeing the last stages of demolition of a space station. The contract is simple: head to the station, which is about 81 days away, collect the team and their equipment, and then head back. If your ship is able to complete the contract within 170 days, then there would be a nice performance bonus added on to the normal fee. Cambridge-Wallace Inc. is nothing if not generous.

The threshold has now been reached, and your vessel has decelerated, which has automatically triggered the waking process. The LongSleep chambers hiss open, and slowly, your senses begin to return...

Awakening from LongSleep can be an uncomfortable process; there is a 1 in 6 chance that a player has relieved themselves while asleep for nearly two months. The players will smell stale, and they'll be disorientated and aching for a while. In all, it will take about an hour before they're fully awake, but they can wash, dress, eat, and get back into some form of shape in that time.

Once they're awake and alert, they can take their stations. They'll still be three days out from the Procyon station, so they'll have their checks to do before arrival. There's no need to make any rolls during this time, as the players are not under any duress and are carrying out their assigned tasks.

THE STARSHIP

Unless you have decided otherwise, the players have a standard cargo vessel, a type that is used for general-purpose contracts and that can be adapted for a variety of roles. It would add atmosphere if you describe the vessel, and maybe even take the players on a tour of the ship.

Let the players name the ship. Most vessels are named after historical and literary figures, fictional and non-fictional, and others are named after famous Earth-bound locations. This is done to tie in the crew and the ship with the cradle of humankind, a connection to the Earth they have left far behind.

THE STATION

Now that they are in range, the players can try to contact the three-person engineering crew. However, repeated attempts to raise the crew are met with no response, and even though the channel is open and the system shows the messages are being received, there is no answer from the team.

Scanners show the station and a faint heat bloom from the generator the crew were using. The station is now a hulk, a carcass stripped of its refinery machinery and even its plating, so it appears as a skeletal derelict, drifting in orbit around a dead black planet that has long been robbed of anything of worth. The only habitable section is next to a docking umbilical, and it consists of a hallway and a room that the crew were using as an operations base during their stay. This is where the heat bloom is coming from.

Any scientists in the group using the sensors could make an EDUCATION roll plus bonuses at the standard difficulty of 7. Success indicates that the energy output is sufficient to power a localised life support system, with air, recycling, and artificial gravity. Partial success shows that the output can be used for life support, but the player isn't sure whether it's enough, and a failure shows the power bloom but nothing else, with no indication of what it is powering. This should give the players an idea of what to prepare for.

Docking with the station is easy; the docking umbilical is extended and open for anyone to use, so attaching the ship is straightforward. The umbilical between the ship and the station has no gravity, so the players will have to drift from their airlock to the station's airlock. They'll find the outer door unlocked, although they will have to open and close it manually using a turning handle to the side of the door, both inside and out. The umbilical is filled with atmosphere from their ship, but it's up to the players whether they approach the station in spacesuits.

Once they're inside, they realise there is already pressure in the airlock and there is artificial gravity. The inner door is also unlocked, but opens under its own power.

Through the door is a main corridor, with the doors either end welded shut. The only other door is straight ahead, where a bunk room has been converted into a three-bed dorm for the engineers to sleep in, with a shower and foodbank at the far end. Their equipment is stacked neatly in the corridor ready for transport, but a couple of the lockboxes are on the floor and split open. Personal belongings and a few tools are strewn across the floor.

SECTION TWO – THE INVESTIGATION

It appears there has been a struggle: a violent, bloody struggle. In the hallway there's a smear of blood running from the bunk-room door to the airlock, as if someone has been dragged there, and the bunk room itself has been turned upside down, with a tossed cot, clothes strewn across the floor, and personal belongings ransacked. Closer inspection, or perhaps a successful EDUCATION roll at difficulty 7, reveals that the water recycler has been torn from its mounting, and any and all food rations have been taken.

Let the players do some investigating, checking the hall, the boxes (in which they'll find a lot of used monitoring and sensor equipment, as well as specialist tools for disassembling interior units), and the bunks themselves. The three engineers are:

Bautista – Engineering Operations Manager, in charge of the crew, 39 years old with 11 years of deep-space experience.

Manuela – Engineering Operative, 32 years old, with eight years of deep-space experience.

Williams – Engineering Operative, 26 years old, with five years of deep-space experience.

They players will find items strewn across the floor, such as clothes, plastic plates and cutlery, boxes, and broken furniture. One of the cots has been tossed over, and there is a large amount of blood on the sharp corner of it, as if something has hit it heavily. **A successful EDUCATION roll at difficulty 6 shows that mixed in with the blood are a few strands of dark hair, so this might mean that whoever was injured hit their head.**

As the players find out this information, there is a signal from the ship; the proximity sensors have detected another ship in the vicinity.

SECTION THREE – THE APPEARANCE OF THE *ARGENT III*

Upon returning to the ship, the players find the sensor screens are lit up, and proximity alerts are softly chiming. The unknown vessel isn't close enough to be a threat, but its sudden appearance was worthy of activating the automated warning systems.

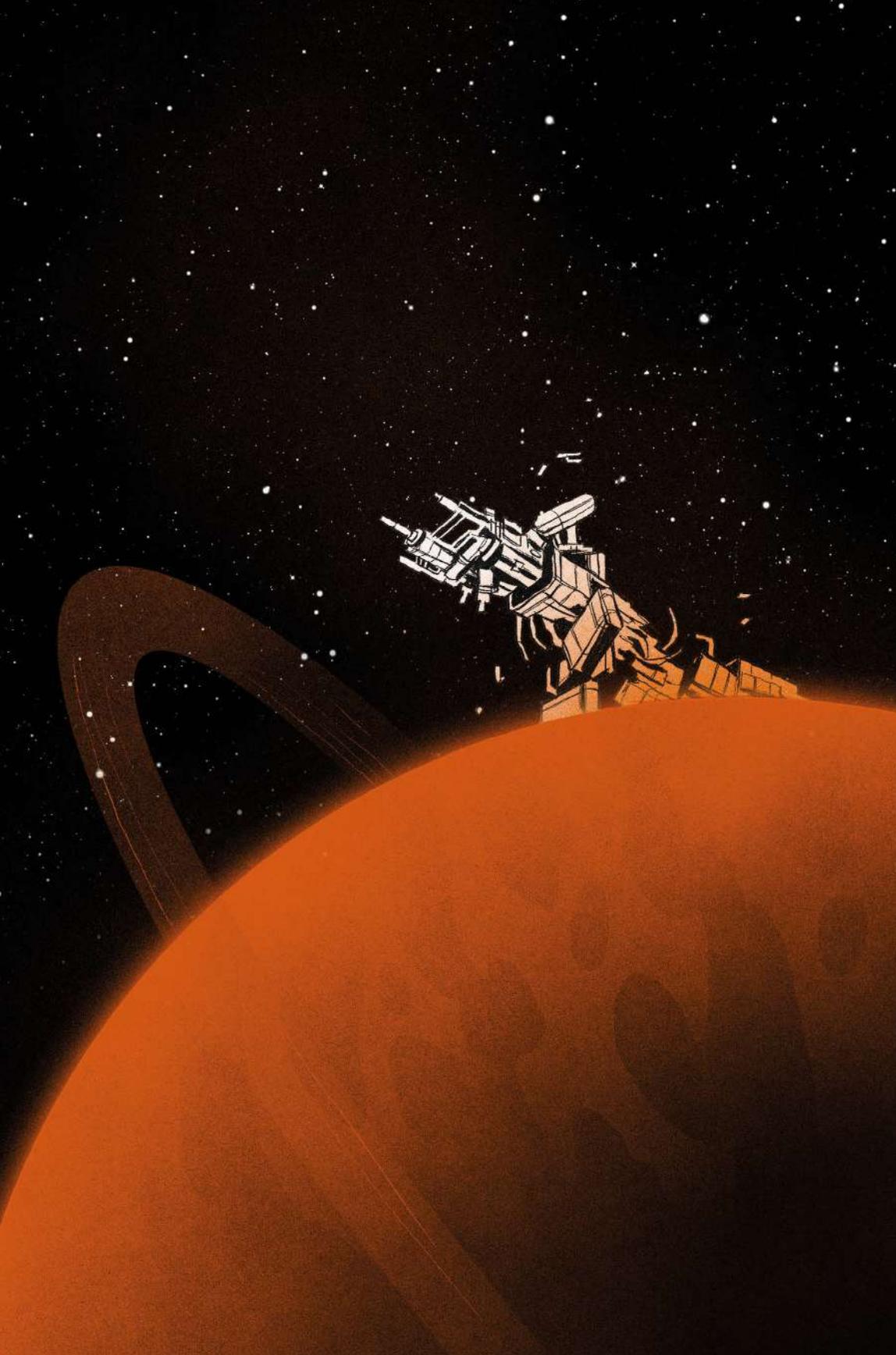
The ship has slowly started to appear from the other side of the dead planet. It has no running lights, and there is no identification or transponder signal. In fact, there are absolutely no transmissions or open channels from the vessel at all. The vessel itself is huge, perhaps a kilometre in length, and the design suggests it is an old ship. The only readings are a fluctuating power output.

Running the specifications of the ship through the identification computer reveals that it's not listed among the current ID files that all ships use, but something comes up in the historical files. The design of the ship matches the *SS Argent III*, one of four long-range exploration vessels sent out into the black a little more than a hundred years ago. The other three ships were recalled once the improved Gravity Assisted Drives were finally introduced, and such huge, long-range ships were rendered obsolete, but the *Argent III* never responded, and was reported lost five years later. The ship and the 100-strong crew were never heard from again.

But there it is.

Communicating the find to the nearest station will take around three weeks, reflecting the time taken for the transmission to arrive at the station and for orders to be sent back. If the players want to do that, and they don't mind waiting for a reply, then they're quite welcome to do this. The reply will be a simple one: investigate the ship and appraise her for possible salvaging, which means a huge payday for the players, double what they're being paid now, on top of their standard pay for this contract.

However, the only claim registered in this area of space is the now-dismantled station, so the players could board the ship and claim salvaging rights for themselves. Also make it clear that if they do not return with the three engineering crew members, this will be marked as a mission failure, and they will receive only half their pay – which means they'll still have a long way to go until retirement.



SECTION FOUR – APPROACHING THE *ARGENT III*

The vessel itself is long, bulky, and covered in sensor towers and relay dishes. The technology is very old; in modern ships, the communication and sensor equipment is part of the hull or tied into a single comms structure, but here the equipment forms a mass of clunky, towering protrusions that cover the ship like sores. All of them are shattered, broken, or bent, and it appears the ship itself isn't in any better shape.

The hull is covered in impact dents and scoring; if this was any other ship, it would have been scrapped and repurposed half a century ago. It appears to be ready to fall apart and, indeed, there are several panels and pieces of debris drifting along with it.

Anyone using the sensors can make an EDUCATION roll plus bonuses at difficulty 8, as the age of the vessel makes it a little more difficult to identify its systems because it is of a design not seen any more in explored space. Success indicates that the energy output is enough to power life support, but the fluctuating power levels indicate there is something wrong with the power core of the vessel. Partial success shows the output is capable of powering life support, and a failure shows the power output but nothing else.

There are no signs of any major docks or entrance ports, but there is one docking umbilical towards the fore of the ship. On one of these is a shuttle-sized vessel, around ten metres long. The only other way of accessing the vessel is by an airlock around halfway down the ship's hull. All the viewports have been covered with metal panels from the inside, even the bridge window.

This will mean that the players will have to place their ship opposite the hull and spacewalk to the airlock. Extra-vehicular activity – EVA – can be stressful for anyone not used to it, so because this is probably the crew's first EVA, and because they are travelling to a dead ship with a chance that there has been some foul play, **ask for a Pressure roll from each player.** All they can hear as they cross the gap is their own breathing, the humming and bleeping of their spacesuits, and the blood rushing through their ears.

The airlock is unlocked and easy to open, but it requires swinging open manually, which only serves to highlight the age of the ship. **Once in, they players will have to work out the archaic pressurisation controls. An easy EDUCATION roll at difficulty 6 should do it.**

SECTION FIVE – INSIDE THE *ARGENT III*

Although the spacesuits register a breathable atmosphere, it is quite thin. The gravity registers as 1G, perfect Earth-type conditions, and there is a large amount of moisture in the air. PCs can remove their helmets/suits if they wish, but the thin air makes it hard to catch their breath, and any hard physical actions will result in a penalty of -1 to STRENGTH, after which the player's mental faculties will be reduced as they struggle to breathe, reflected in a -1 penalty to EDUCATION.

The inside of the vessel is grotesque. The walls are covered in mould, and the panelling is rent, torn, and bent out of shape. **An EDUCATION roll plus bonuses at standard difficulty 7 will tell the players that this is a result of both prolonged stress on the ship's superstructure and apparent attempts to patch failing areas.** This gives the corridors and rooms a slightly warped feel, as if they are imperceptibly out of shape. It's very disorientating.

The light is dim, with a sickly greenish tint as a result of the mould smeared over the light fittings. The only functioning lights appear to be emergency ones; the main lighting is either smashed or deactivated. There is no sound; usually, there would be the faint background hum of the engines, but the low power output means there is none of that, nor the faint vibrations sometimes felt. The ship feels incredibly alien.

There are several areas the players can explore where they'll find signs of life; rooms with bedrolls in them and personal items, as well as signs of wall drawings and old paper books.

RECYCLING ROOM

The Recycling Room is a huge area that smells of human waste and rot, where brownish water is slowly being siphoned off into huge clear barrels covered in dirt and mould. There are several different types of recycling unit in here, all tied in to the original ship's unit. **An EDUCATION roll plus bonuses at standard difficulty 7 will tell the players that the units are from different vessels and are from different decades, including an obviously recently fitted one – the engineering team's portable recycler.**

THE MEDICAL BAY

This large room contains some broken LongSleep pods. They conform to an older design that was not intended for long-term use, and in which the passengers would sleep suspended in liquid. Inside these pods are now wilting plants, which are surrounded by heat lamps and all apparently near death.

Further down is a large area where vats of a yellow liquid are bubbling and hissing. Inside are human body parts at different stages of growth. These are old cloning vats, which were originally used to regrow missing limbs for workers, but now several limbs – mainly legs and arms – seem to be growing in each vat.

The point of this cloning becomes obvious when the players see what's next to the vats – a kitchen. **At this point, the GM can call for another Pressure roll once the realisation sinks in.**

After the players pass out of the kitchen, they come to an area that was once the bridge of the vessel, but which now seems to be some kind of communal area, with beds and tables to eat at. The main window is covered in metal plating and hanging sheets, with added struts stretching from floor to ceiling, giving it a cathedral-like vaulted appearance. In fact, the whole area feels like some kind of religious centre.

Then they hear the gasping.

It's Manuela, one of the engineering operatives. She is pale and withdrawn, and she seems amazed to see the players. She is making short gasps as she struggles to catch her breath. She is locked inside a storage crate, like an animal in a cage. Her hair is thick and unkempt, her face dirty, and her clothes soiled and torn. She appears to have been in there for a long time.

She stretches out an arm, and the players see bloody bandages covering her bicep. "Please be real," she gasps. "Please be real."

Once the players assure her that they are indeed real people, she'll ask to be released, telling them: "We need to get out fast before the crew return, they're all in the engine room putting positive vibes onto Bautista, and Williams is dead. We have to go!"

If pushed, she will fill the players in:

We were finishing our work and we heard the airlock open. We thought a retrieval ship had arrived early, and wondered why they hadn't communicated with us, but then before we could get out of bed to see, these... people walked in. They were thin and white-skinned, and they had long hair and beards, and they looked like all bone and hanging skin with growths, and oh, it was foul, the smell, it was just foul. And they didn't say anything, just started grabbing our equipment and opening boxes, and when Williams grabbed one, they hit him with a huge spanner, killed him. Then they grabbed us and dragged us to their shuttle, and brought us here. They took Williams, too, and stripped him and threw his corpse into that recycling machine they made us add our portable unit to. God damn.

Then they took Bautista away, and carved chunks out of my arms and legs, and threw me in here. We tried to fight, but there were lots of them, and the air, you just can't breathe in here. Next thing I know I'm having a half-cloned arm offered to me as food, my own damn arm! Oh God! They're taking chunks off me and cloning them for food!

Bautista says he was taken to the engine room; the engine is failing rapidly and giving off all kinds of radiation. They want him to fix it, but they don't speak any language, they just hum and grunt at each other, like speaking isn't a thing any more. There are kids here, all deformed and twisted. Bautista thinks the radiation has been leaking for a generation or more. They don't seem to have feelings, and if anything bad happens, they just stand around humming with their eyes closed as if that's going to make things better. Bautista calls it positive vibes, it's like they're willing things to get better because they have nothing else, it's what they do around him as he works on the engine.

Look, we have to go. Bautista says the radiation has probably killed him already and this ship is doomed to die here. We have to go, please!

The players have a choice; they can either take Manuela and head back to their ship – they'll have to send someone over to get a spare spacesuit for her – or they can head to the engine room to see whether they can save Bautista.

RESCUING BAUTISTA

Heading to the engineering section or waiting in hiding for the *Argent III* crew to return with him are the only ways to rescue Bautista.

The engineering room is dangerous – in fact, the radiation levels start to spike as the players approach, and their suits warn them of this. If they stay for any length of time down there, the radiation will be terminal.

If the players manage to get to Bautista by waiting for the crew to return, by fighting their way through, or by trying something sneakier, Bautista will only have one thing to say:

Leave me. I'm dead. The radiation is already cooking me from the inside, and my chances of survival ended a long time ago. I tried to fix the ship, I did, but it's hopeless. These poor bastards are all dead, they just don't know it or accept it. They'll just keep drifting and birthing monsters.

I'm going to open the bafflers and flood the ship, try to overload the engines, and hopefully end all of this. Just get out, leave me. A medical unit can't save me now, the least I can do is put these poor people out of their misery.

LEAVING THE *ARGENT III*

If the players decide to cut their losses and leave with Manuela, they can do so. Getting back to the ship is a long-winded affair, as there are no serviceable spacesuits on the *Argent III*, so a player will have to EVA back to the ship to collect one for Manuela.

This could be a tense affair. Are the crew of the *Argent III* on their way back from the engine room while the player fetches a spacesuit? Are the players still on the *Argent III* in any danger as they wait for the return of their companion? Will the crew of the *Argent III* discover them? Highlight the tension, the shadows on the walls, and the apparent sounds of people approaching.

If you want to add some excitement, have a single *Argent III* crew member discover them as they prepare to leave. The crew member is bedraggled, dressed in long strips of cloth that hang from a pale-skinned body of bone, and the sunken wide eyes are deep and soulless. The hair is long and white, and thick with grime, with a beard much the same, wispy and patchy. The skin is covered in lesions and growths, probably tumours and cysts. When he sees the players, he screams and runs back down the corridor to warn the others.

The players can give chase to stop him, but within three rounds they're out of breath if they're not in spacesuits – remember to reduce physical actions by 1 point. If the players are armed, they can try to stop the crew member that way, but if he does get away, he'll return with the entire crew within 10 rounds, so the players will have to make successful AGILITY rolls at difficulty 7 to hurry up with their escape. They make this roll every round, and once all of the PCs have made a single successful roll, they are all away and travelling to their ship.

In total, there are 45 *Argent III* crew members.

ARGENT III CREW MEMBER	
CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	2
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	1

If the *Argent III* crew members get to the players, they can be held back by weapons fire; they are especially terrified of Dazer stun guns, and the charge they deliver causes the crew members to scream in terror and hide. This is enough to hold them back to enable the players to make their escape.

If at any time a player, or the players, are taken captive, they will be locked in storage crates much like the one Manuela was imprisoned in. This is not the end of

the adventure, as they can plot their escape – remember, their ship is still waiting for them to return and if any player for any reason remained on the ship, they can mount a rescue mission. If the player (or players) accept their fate, then this is the end of their mission, and they will be trapped here for four months until a rescue team arrives in the form of armed officers. Of course, if Bautista sabotages the engine it will also be the end of their lives, unless they stop him.

Once back on the starship, the players can set a course out of there. Upon returning to the Titan Staging Station, they will be paid the full amount – after all, the situation was not their fault – and that is the end of the adventure. Sadly, there is no salvage payment; the *Argent III* was owned by Cambridge-Wallace Inc., and if there are crew members still on board, then there are no salvage rights.

MISSION REPORT

This is the final mission report of the Procyon station and the discovery of the *Argent III*.

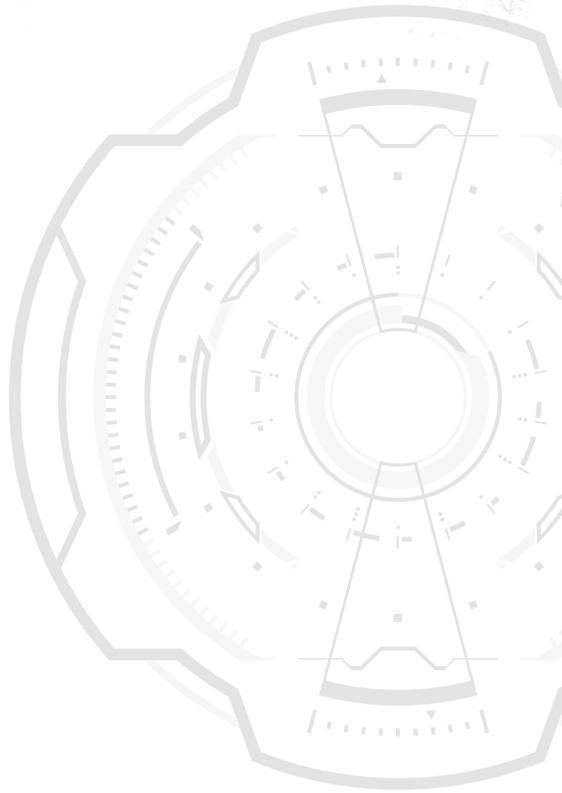
The Procyon Station demolition has been postponed until the progress of the previous engineering crew can be ascertained.

The *Argent III* has been rediscovered, with the descendants of the original crew on board. However, the failing engine core – the reason why the ship vanished and was reported lost – emitted radiation that directly affected the physical and mental abilities of the crew members and their descendants, resulting in them attempting to continue their existence by... other means until they reached the Procyon system, where the engine finally ceased functioning.

Upon sending a contact team to the Procyon system, it was found that the engine had finally given out. The *Argent III* crew are now all deceased, the ship is being monitored, and a reclamation ship is being arranged.

Out.

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END



CREW SHEET

AND QUICK REFERENCE

CREW SHEET

[Name]

[Description]

//Case File

CHARISMA



[penalties]

AGILITY



[penalties]

STRENGTH



[penalties]

EDUCATION



[penalties]

>> Crew Positions

Helm Officer



Navigation Officer



Science Officer



Security Officer



Liaison Officer



Engineering Officer



Medical Officer



>> Pressure

Pressure Bonus

Pressure Level

EPISODES

NOTES

TIME LEFT UNTIL RETIREMENT

Years

Months

Days



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DAMAGE

WEAPON	AMMO	DAMAGE
Punch / kick		1
Cudgel / rod		2
Pistol	12	3
Rifle	30	4
Shotgun	8	5 at range difficulty 6 3 at range difficulty 7 2 at range difficulty 8
Dazer Mark III	3	4 (non-lethal below -2)
Explosives		4 damage to all in a five-metre radius

PRESSURE

ROLL	EPISODE
1	IN SHOCK Body suffers uncontrollable shaking. Reduce AGILITY by 1 point.
2	IN SHOCK Body suffers fatigue. Reduce STRENGTH by 1 point.
3	IN SHOCK Cognitive abilities suffer. Reduce EDUCATION and CHARISMA by 1 point.
4	RIGID You can barely communicate and are rooted to the spot in fear, eyes always on the source of the stress. You remain this way until the source is removed - or you are removed - and once this happens, all Attributes are reduced by 1 point.
5	CATATONIA You will fall to the floor and curl up, unresponsive, virtually unconscious, for a number of minutes equal to a single die roll. Once recovered, all Attributes are reduced by 1 point.
6	INSANE FEAR AND DRIVEN TO VIOLENT FLIGHT You will fight whoever and whatever to get as far away from the source of the stress as possible. Once away, you will fall catatonic and suffer the results of 5 above.

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

LAURA HINDER	
DOCTOR	
CHARISMA	3
AGILITY	2
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Medical Officer

JULIA BAUER	
SCIENTIST	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Science Officer

SAMSON BURGEN	
BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE	
CHARISMA	4
AGILITY	1
STRENGTH	2
EDUCATION	3
Primary	Liaison Officer

MARK NEWBOLD	
PILOT	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	4
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	3
Primary	Helm Officer

PAUL SQUIRE	
MARSHAL	
CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	4
STRENGTH	3
EDUCATION	2
Primary	Security Officer

KOFI ACKAH	
NAVIGATOR	
CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Navigation Officer

MIGUEL RONSON	
ENGINEER	
CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	2
STRENGTH	3
EDUCATION	4
Primary	Engineering Officer

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