



INSPIRATIONS ...

Cthulhu Dark by Graham Walmsley

Alien RPG by Free League Publishing

Hostile – A Gritty Sci-Fi RPG by Zozer

Alien Genesys by Phillip Krzeminski

Alien Fuzion by Chris Dias

Aliens Adventure Game by Leading Edge Games

Aliens: Colonial Marines Technical Manual by Lee Brimmicombe Wood

SPECIAL THANKS ...

Paul Rivers, Walter German, Jasmin Neitzel, Sabine V, William H, Horst Wurst, Pearl Zare, Dan Felder, Gerrit Reininghaus, Alexi Sarge and other members of the Gauntlet RPG Community who have helped refine the rules in this and other forms.

If anyone can identify the artist of the illustration opposite, I would be grateful if they contacted me on Twitter @AlunRees14.

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CREATED BY ALUN REES

INTRODUCTION ...

CONCEPT

This is a game about people on the frontier of human space. Out here corporations compete for dominance while colonists risk everything to carve out a better life. **Alien Dark** is based on the **Cthulhu Dark** rules (by Graham Walmsley) modified to reflect the setting. While inspired by the Alien franchise and the **Alien RPG** (Free League Publishing) it could be adapted to other sci-fi horror setting, but GMs will benefit from buying both these games.

CHANGES TO CTHULHU DARK

Insight is replaced by *Stress* to reflect the strain of life on the Frontier as well as that imposed by the horrors characters will encounter. The rules also formalise the ways in which characters can sometimes achieve their aims through force when they *confront a threat*.

Characters can reduce the risk of breaking under the strain of their experiences if they *seek relief from the horror*, which is inspired by the Stress & Drug Moves in the **Cartel Quickstart** (Magpie Games).

Finally, the **Load & Equipment** rules draw heavily from the model established by games that have been **Forged in the Dark**.

AIMS

Players take the role of people working on the frontier of human exploration as colonists or ship's crew. They may have been scientists or colonial marshals or even marines before this, but now they are cogs in the corporate machine, being confronted with the harsh reality of the Frontier.

tone & subject matter

This is a game where corrupt corporations manipulate ordinary people for profit. This is a game where alien xenomorphs use human hosts as incubators ... there is [CONTENT WARNING] ... body horror. This is a game where the fate of any character is bleak. Even the mechanisms that help vent stress provide only transitory, and often costly, respite. Often that cost will be to another player character ...

SAFETY TOOLS ...

tone conversation and content warnings

CATS is an acronym for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject matter. The section opposite adopts this format to clarify what this game is about, and GMs are recommended to make that explicitly clear to players before play begins. A helpful CATS reference card is available [here](#).

The GM should ensure there are appropriate safety tools in play to ensure that if players are disturbed, it is only in a good way. The Gauntlet RPG Community (<https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/>) has a clear and explicit expectation with respect to safety at the table that is recommended to the reader. Specifically the GM is advised to make use of:

THE X-CARD

If anyone in the game encounters content that makes them uncomfortable, they can activate the X-Card by making an X with their arms or saying "X-Card" out loud or, if a literal X-Card is available in the centre of the table, just tapping it. They should indicate what content made them uncomfortable (they do not need to explain why), and the content will be removed or changed, the GM rolling back the fiction until before that material was encountered and moving forward from there. It is the GMs responsibility to make sure everyone is aware of and will respect the use of the X-Card.

AN OPEN DOOR POLICY

Anyone in the game (players or GM alike), may take a break or leave the table for a cool-down or to catch their breath without calling for an end to the session. The Open Door Policy should be explained by the GM before play begins, particularly as this game is likely to contain intense or sensitive content.

lines & veils

Before play begins, it is a good idea to discuss what concepts or material anyone may find particularly uncomfortable in play. "Lines" are content which will not exist in the fiction. "Veils" are content which are acceptable in the fiction but should not occur "on-screen"; the scene will 'fade to black'.

CHARACTER GENERATION ...

1. WHAT DID YOU DO BEFORE?

Role	Role Description	<i>Expertise</i> : as well as Fight & Shoot , and have	In your locker ...
Colonial Marine	You were just a kid when you signed up but the lustre wore off fast; too many bodies, too many lost friends	Heavy Weapons, Survival, Intimidate	Service Pistol
Colonial Marshall	You never took Company money to turn a blind eye ... maybe that's why you're here ...	Authority, Observation, Manipulation	Lowlight Binoculars
Company Agent	You were going to be the one to find the next big thing ... so how did you end up in the arse-end of nowhere.	Cowardice, ComTech, Manipulation	Uppers or Downers (you choose)
Criminal	You have done ... questionable things; but people don't care about that out here ... some even value it ...	Unobtrusive, Survival, Larceny	Illegal MultiKey
Medic	When someone got hurt you mattered so much; but you lost so many ...	Reassuring, Analysis, MedTech	MedKit
Bridge Officer	You were authority figure, role model, voice of the Company, and crew advocate. Shit it was awful.	Command, Manipulate, ComTech	Portable Diagnostic Device
Pilot	You were never in it for the money, you were in it for the thrills, but being an adrenaline junkie takes its toll.	ComTech, Pilot/Drive, Fast	Portable Diagnostic Device
Labourer	Someone had to build the Frontier, and that someone was you.	Tough, Heavy Machinery, Intimidate	Heavy Coveralls & Gloves
Scientist	You thought there were countless treasures out here waiting for you. Disillusion came quickly ...	SciTech, Analysis, ComTech	Data Tablet

2. WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

This also adds to your *Expertise* when the GM agrees.

Depending on the GM set-up you may be either Corps, Crew or Colonists ... but what's your specific role? You do not have to choose a role related to what you did before, indeed it will broaden your expertise if you don't.

Are you 'Just Labour' or do you have a position in 'Administration' or 'Tech Support' or even 'Security'? Do you enjoy what you do, or are you doing it through gritted teeth?

3. THINGS ABOUT YOU ...

Describe yourself as others see you.

Which member of the group do you care most about? Ask them why?

Which member of the group do you care least about? Ask them why?

The GM may ask you to reconsider your choices at significant points.

4. WHY DID YOU COME TO THE FRONTIER?

Make a choice and then answer the question related to that choice ...

- **Duty:** you believe in some of that old-fashioned shit about family & community (& even flag) ...
What would it take for you to betray that?
- **Progress:** when you found out what they were doing out here, you had to come.
Who are 'they' and what have you heard? Are you here to help or hinder them?
- **Boredom:** it has to be more exciting out here than in the Core! Right?
What excites you most about life on the Frontier?
- **Curiosity:** you have always been fascinated by the unknown.
What would you give up to know more or understand what others fear?
- **Greed:** the life out here is crap but who knows what you could 'pick up' out here; know what I mean?
What stuff do you value more than anything or anyone?
- **Debt:** there comes a point when your options get real narrow ...
Who do you owe, and why?
- **Blackmail:** 'they' know stuff that could threaten those that matter to you.
Who matters to you? Who are 'they' and what do they know?

The GM may deny you your *Expertise* when you fail to live up to these choices ...

THE STRESS TRACK ...

When you see something disturbing, or when the GM says you do, roll 1d6 for

Stress: If you roll higher than your current **Stress**, increase **Stress** by one.

When you include your **Stress** die with ANY die pool, and it rolled equal to or greater than the highest roll, increase **Stress** by one.

Whenever your **Stress** increases, say how the increased **Stress** manifests.

When **Stress** reaches 6, you crack. Describe what happens & start a new character. Your original character becomes an NPC under GM control.

DOING THINGS ...

POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

The GM can always deny you the use of **Expertise** if local conditions are difficult.

INVESTIGATE

When you investigate (or search) someone, something or somewhere, roll 1d6.

Add another 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your **Expertise**.

Add another 1d6 if you are using the **Right Tool**.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. If your highest roll is:

1-3, you get the bare minimum amount of information you need to proceed, **BUT ALSO** mark the **Risk Clock** due to noise &/or clumsiness;

4-5, you get the bare minimum and you can also ask the GM 1 question;

6, you get the bare minimum and you can also ask the GM 2 questions, **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for **Stress**.

DO SOMETHING ELSE

When you do something other than *investigating or confronting a threat*, roll 1d6.

Add another 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your **Expertise**.

Add another 1d6 if you are using the **Right Tool**.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. If your highest roll is:

1-3, you barely succeed, and the GM may exact a cost or offer you a hard choice, **BUT ALSO** mark the **Risk Clock** due to noise &/or clumsiness

4-5, you succeed with no obvious complication or benefit;

6, you succeed brilliantly, and the GM will agree with you what extra benefit you get, **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for **Stress**.

CONFRONT A THREAT ...

When you engage a Warrior or Queen up close and personal, say how you die.

When you try to avoid a threat by hiding, roll to **Avoid detection**.

When you try to escape a threat by leaving the scene, roll to **Run for it**.

When you try to get past a threat, or distract it, etc., say what success would look like and roll to **Do something else**.

When you attack a threat, say what success looks like ('do them harm', 'drive them into cover', 'subdue them', 'drive them off for now' etc.), and roll 1d6.

Add another 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your **Expertise**.

Add another 1d6 if you are using a **Heavy Weapon**.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. If your highest roll is:

1-3, you fail **AND ALSO** mark the **Risk Clock** due to noise &/or clumsiness;

4-5, you succeed with no obvious complication or benefit;

6, you succeed brilliantly, and the GM will agree with you what extra benefit you get, **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for **Stress**.

If your opponent could harm you, **ALSO** roll ...

1 Failure Die if they are human, **OR**

2 Failure Dice if they are human and using Heavy Weapons or there's a risk of acid splash.

If a **Failure Die** rolls equal to or greater than the highest roll, then roll **1d6 for Consequences**. Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk.

If your highest roll is:

1-3, the consequences are bad ... agree with the GM if it's:

... bloody & you'll die without swift medical treatment; **OR**

... painful and you cannot use your Expertise until you get medical treatment.

4+, shit, you were lucky that time! It hurts, but you'll live ...

6, ... **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in (if it isn't obvious ...) ... Roll for **Stress**.

VITAL NOTE: Let the characters find out the hard way that the only way to harm a Warrior or Queen at range is with a weapon that has the [AP] tag. Non-AP hits do, though, by you a single action before the xenomorph acts again.

SEARCH A LOCATION

When you try to find something useful and appropriate to the location you're in, roll 1d6.

Add another 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your *Expertise*.

Add another 1d6 if you are using the **Right Tool**.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. **If your highest roll is:**

1-3, you find something ordinary and everyday appropriate to the location, **BUT**

ALSO mark the Risk Clock due to noise &/or clumsiness;

4-5, you find something potentially useful and appropriate to the location, roll another d6:

1: Something you could improvise as a weapon

2: Alcohol

3: First Aid kit (a single use MedKit)

4: A lost or discarded ID Tag/KeyCard

5: A piece of routine safety equipment

6: See 6, below ...

6, you struck lucky ... agree with the GM what you've found (see the Equipment section of the rules, but remember it has to be appropriate to the location your in), **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for *Stress*.

RUN FOR IT

When your choices are limited and the GM agrees there's a reasonable route by which you can escape the scene, roll 1d6.

Add 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your *Expertise*.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. **If your highest roll is:**

1, you're in trouble, choose to get caught **OR ... escape and roll for Stress**;

2-3, you can escape but agree with the GM what (or who?) you have to sacrifice or leave behind;

4+, you made it ... for now. You've escaped the scene of danger; what do you do?

6, ... **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for *Stress*.

AVOID DETECTION

When you're at risk of being found, say how you avoid attention &/or neutralise the interest of who or what's looking for you, and roll 1d6.

Add 1d6 if what you're doing benefits from your *Expertise*.

Add another 1d6 if you are using the **Right Tool**.

Add your Stress dice if you dare. **If your highest roll is:**

1-3, you'll need to **Run for it**;

4+, Pheww! You're OK for now; you're still in the scene, what do you do?

6, ... **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for *Stress*.

COOPERATE OR COMPETE

If any PC(s) cooperate with you to investigate or do something else, everyone who is cooperating rolls their dice and the highest roll, by anyone, applies. **However**, everyone who rolls 1-3 marks the *Risk Clock*. You cannot cooperate on any other move.

If any PC(s) compete with you, everyone who is competing rolls their dice and the highest die wins. On a tie, the highest total succeeds. If that doesn't resolve the tie, then highest current Stress wins. If that doesn't resolve it, everyone rerolls.

TRYING AGAIN

Unlike the rule in Cthulhu Dark, you cannot try again, though another character could. If you want to increase your chance of success you should include your Stress die in your dice pool. Life is tough on the Frontier.

SEEK RELIEF FROM THE HORROR ...

When the fiction allows and the GM agrees, describe how you try to reduce your *Stress*. Whatever you do, there is always a cost ...

Reduce *Stress* by 1 and roll 1d6 ...

- **IF YOU VERBALLY ABUSE, BULLY, OR SHAME SOMEONE ...**

1-3, your inadequacy is clear to anyone watching, including you. You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again;

4+ & they are a PC, your words hit them really hard ... **THEY roll for *Stress***;

4+ & they are a NPC, agree with the GM a consequence for their relationship with you &/or how the group is put at risk as a result;

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

- **IF YOU BEAT SOMEONE UP ...**

1-3, you are disgusted with yourself. You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again;

4+ & they are a PC, you really hurt them ... **THEY roll for *Stress***;

4+ & they are an NPC, agree with the GM whether you ...

... run off to be on your own for a while.

... do something that puts the team at risk.

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

- **IF YOU INDULGE IN MEANINGLESS SEX ...**

1-3, your partner sees through your empty affection and you are ashamed. You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again.

4+, things go very badly ... agree with the GM whether to apply the 4+ result from **verbally abuse, bully, or shame someone**, or **beat someone up**;

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

...

- **IF YOU GET DRUNK OR HIGH ON UPPERS ...**

1-3, you're nasty when under the influence and you're ashamed of yourself. You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again.

4+, agree with the GM whether you ...

... make a scene that attracts unwelcome attention; OR

... let something slip to the wrong person; OR

... carelessly wreck something important or meaningful.

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

- **IF YOU TRY TO NUMB YOUR PAIN WITH DOWNERS ...**

1-3, you're distracted by your need for another fix, really, just one more ... You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again.

4+, agree with the GM whether you ...

... push someone who cares about you, or is important to the group, away;

... overlook a crucial deadline, detail, or event that puts the group at risk;

... steal something that's important to someone you care about, or to the group, or the mission, that you could trade for more drugs later.

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

- **IF YOU LOOK FOR HONEST HUMAN CONTACT ...**

1-3, they see your hollow camaraderie for what it is; a self-serving pretence, and you are ashamed. You cannot use your *Expertise* until *Stress* goes up again.

4+, there's a blow-up ... agree with the GM whether to apply the 4+ result from **verbally abuse, bully, or shame someone**, or **beat someone up**;

6, it was really worth it: reduce *Stress* by an extra 1.

XENOMORPH BEHAVIOURS ...

Only characters with **Fast** or **Heavy Weapons Expertise** can act before a xenomorph when it first appears in a scene. **Roll to determine what it does** when it appears ...

- **Facehugger:** roll for **Stress**, and ...

1, it leaps at your face; roll to **Do something else** to hold it off every turn until you, or someone else, succeeds brilliantly, while the GM's cost may be becoming a host.

2-3, it leaps, and you must agree with the GM whether: its tail entangles your legs and you fall over; or, your arms and you drop whatever you're carrying. Roll to **Do something else** to get free every turn until you, or someone else, succeeds brilliantly, or the GM's cost may be that it leaps at your face (see above).

4+, it skitters towards you lashing out with its tail; what do you do before it rolls again?

6, adrenaline kicked in: reduce **Stress** by 1 the first time this happens in the scene.

- **Chestbuster:** before it escapes into the nearest duct, roll for **Stress**, and ...

1-2, it leaps at you; roll to **Do something else** to dodge its razor-sharp teeth. The GM's cost may be that you roll for a **Consequence** as if you'd been successfully attacked by a human.

3+, it snarls and is gone before you recover from the shock.

6, adrenaline kicked in: reduce **Stress** by 1 the first time this happens in the scene.

- **Warrior:** roll for **Stress**, and ...

1, it's on you; do you **Confront** it up close and personal or **Run for it**?

2-3, it tries to grab you; do you **Confront** it up close and personal, **Do something else** to avoid its venomous tail every turn until you succeed brilliantly or the GM's cost may be that you are subdued & carried off, or **Run for it**?

4+, it pauses, assessing the threat you pose; what do you do before it rolls again?

6, adrenaline kicked in: reduce **Stress** by 1 the first time this happens in the scene.

- **Queen:** roll for **Stress**, and ...

1-3, she lumbers towards you with the aim of tearing you to pieces. Do you **Confront** her up close and personal, **Do something else** to avoid or distract her, **Avoid detection**, or **Run for it**?

4+, she lets out a shrill cry that will bring d6 Warriors into the scene in d6 turns; what do you do before she rolls again?

6, adrenaline kicked in: reduce **Stress** by 1 the first time this happens in the scene.

THE RISK CLOCK ...

The Risk Clock Is divided into 4 sections:

Passive: The hive is not suspicious and any xenomorphs stumbled upon are usually quiescent; until all 4 boxes are marked when xenomorphs become ...

Active: solitary xenomorphs will be on the move, but their actions will not be strategic or coordinated; until all 3 boxes are marked and ...

Search: The hive is aware of a possible source of food or hosts and multiple warriors will begin an active and coordinated search, beginning to close in on, or even herd, the characters; until both boxes are marked and time is running out ...

Assault: The characters will become aware of xenomorphs massing until the single box is marked, when they will be subjected to a coordinated attack by the hive in the form of at least 1 warrior per PC in the group. If they beat off the attack or find secure shelter, they should expect increasing numbers of warriors to make successive attempts to kill or capture them ... unless they can disrupt the hive by killing the Queen ...

The Risk Clock will always be marked if ...

... a PC rolls 1-3 to **Investigate**, or **Do something else** or **Confronts a threat** with firearms or explosives;

... a PC enters an unexplored location while still unaware of the Xenomorph threat;

... a PC searches a location in the hope of finding something useful; or

... a PC deliberately makes noise, such as when they fire a weapon etc.

The Risk Clock will also be marked if ...

... the GM judges it is fictionally appropriate or a logical consequence of a **seek relief from the horror** roll;

The GM will mark ALL the Passive & Active boxes if ...

... a PC demonstrates they are a credible threat to the Queen or her eggs, by killing a warrior, causing significant collateral damage in the vicinity of the eggs, or discharging weapons widely.

The GM may clear marks in the Risk Clock if they feel the PCs have lain low for long enough &/or made a significant move to a new location.

EQUIPMENT ...

All equipment is described by its:

Name: which usually makes function clear;

*: availability usually restricted to the military or corporate security;

(Bulk): How bulky and encumbering is stuff

(-) – negligible bulk when carried

(■) – takes up 1 Equipment box when carried

(■ ■) – takes up 2 Equipment boxes when carried

(■ ■ ■) – takes up 3 Equipment boxes when carried

[Usefulness]: tags that apply to its use;

<Limited number of uses>: some items of equipment come with a maximum number of uses before they need to be recharged or replaced.

If no limit on uses is indicated, then the item can be used indefinitely. However, the GM may use 'now broken' or 'out of ammo' as a cost or part of a hard choice, when dramatically appropriate.

SAMPLE EQUIPMENT

Data Tablet [Analysis] (■) Downers/Alcohol [Seek Relief] (-)<1 use>

EVA Hard Suit [Protection Clumsy] (■ ■) EVA Pistol [Close AP] (■)

EVA Suit [Clumsy] (■) Fire Axe [Intimate AP] (■ ■)

Fire Extinguisher [Close Stun] (■)<1 use> Flares [Intimate Stun & Light] (■)

FlashBang Grenades [Close Stun Area] (■)<2 uses>

Grenades [Close Heavy AP Area] (■)<2 uses>

Heavy Flashlight [Intimate Light] (■) Heavy Overalls [Protection Clumsy] (■ ■)

Illegal MultiKey [Larceny] (■) Improvised weapon [Intimate] (■)

Incinerator Unit [Close Flame Area] (■ ■)<4 uses>

Industrial Bolt Gun [Close AP] (■)<4 uses>

Lowlight Binoculars [Observation] (■) MedKit [MedTech Seek Relief] (■)

Motion Tracker [Close Observation] (■)<4 uses>

Portable Diagnostic Unit [ComTech] (■) PowerPak [Recharge] (■)

Pulse Rifle [Long AP Heavy] (■ ■) Pump Action Shotgun [Close Area] (■ ■)

Sidearm [Close Hidden] (■) Smart Gun [Long AP Heavy Area] (■ ■ ■)

Stun Baton [Close Stun] (■) Uppers [Seek Relief] (-)<1 use>

USCM Armour [Protection] (■) USCM EVA Hard Suit [Protection] (■)

Utility Tool [Intimate] (■) Walkie Talkie [Far] (■)

Welding/Cutting Torch [Intimate AP] (■)<4 uses>

EQUIPMENT TAGS:

[Hidden] – requires a search of some kind of to find it.

[Intimate] – no more than a few paces away for it to have an effect.

[Close] – up to 15 paces away.

[Long] – up to 100 paces away, if line of sight allows.

[Far] – a kilometre or so as long as radio reception is clear.

[Heavy] – potentially more lethal due to explosive power, calibre, &/or rate of fire.

[AP] – the only way to kill a warrior xenomorph.

[Light] – ignore the environmental condition 'dark'.

[Flame] – these are the only way to kill a warrior or queen xenomorph.

[Stun] (and hits from non-AP weapons) – buys you time.

[Area] – automatic weapons or explosives with a blast area.

[Protection] – destroyed while negating one instance of acid/warrior/queen attack.

[Recharge] – clears d3 uses for any equipment with limited uses.

[Clumsy] – you cannot use physical **Expertise** while using this.

[Seek Relief] – required for certain rolls to **seek relief from the horror**.

[Observation, Investigate, Analysis, ComTech, Larceny] – this item acts as the **Right Tool** for the job when applying the listed **Expertise**.

LOAD & MOBILITY ...

Remember this is a retro sci-fi setting where technology resembles a 1980's view of the future. Electronics are bulky and engineering equipment is huge.

All characters start play with 'What you stand up in', a Bag/Knapsack, and a Personal Data Transmitter/ID built into a KeyCard relevant to role. These contribute nothing to Load and have no effect on Mobility, which begins as Quick.

If you want to move quickly and squeeze through small spaces, your Load is limited to Light (up to 2 equipment boxes).

If you're content to move at normal rates, you can carry a Medium Load (up to 4 equipment boxes).

If you're prepared to only move slowly & clumsily, you can carry a Heavy Load (up to 6 equipment boxes). The GM may also deny certain types of **Expertise**.

If you carry someone or things above this limit (up to 2 more boxes), then you are over-burdened and CAN'T DO ANYTHING EXCEPT MOVE VERY SLOWLY.

Mark your Equipment as you pick it up, noting changes in Mobility as you go.

ADVICE TO THE GM ...

A LOVE LETTER TO THE ONE-SHOT

Alien Dark tries to balance the tension inherent in the gradual, but inevitable, increase in Stress, and the risk of a character cracking, against playability across several sessions. Across those sessions the GM should look for opportunities to provide interludes during which the characters have time to ***seek relief from the horror*** &/or help them see their interactions as potential triggers for one of those moves.

However, it can equally well be played as a 3-4 hour one-shot.

If that's the chosen mode of play then the love letter below will set starting Stress at 2 (or 3, if characters are unlucky) and present the GM with some complications with which to begin play. Results might even lead to the Risk Clock being marked if the starting situation made that fictionally appropriate. It will also stimulate players to ***seek relief from the horror*** sooner rather than later.

Dear [character name]

This isn't your first rodeo. It's not the first time you've come face to face with the harsh realities of Frontier life. What's the worst thing you've witnessed or experienced out here?

How do you routinely self-medicate so you can forget about it for a while?

Do you ...

... verbally abuse, bully, or shame someone;

... beat someone up; indulge in meaningless sex;

... get drunk or high on uppers; try to numb your pain with downers; or,

... look for honest human contact?

Whichever you choose, mark Stress (instead of reducing it) and roll 1d6 on the relevant table to seek relief from the horror. If you roll 6, mark Stress again.

EXACT A COST OR OFFER A HARD CHOICE

This can be difficult before characters become aware of the threat. Instead, consider this an opportunity to narrate scrabbling in the ventilation ducts, dripping viscous fluid dripping from above, an inhuman shriek echoing through the space, etc. ... and exact the cost of a Stress roll for everyone present ...

DRIVE UP THEIR STRESS

Alien Dark is intended to follow a cycle of play approximating: **Explore - Experience stress - Seek relief from stress - Generate complications to play off; Repeat.**

While it's perfectly possible to enjoy a session where characters explore a series of locations, have some frights and confront an alien or two, it is even more satisfying when characters need to seek relief from the horrors they encounter, and then live with the consequences or complications they cause.

The GM shouldn't wait for evidence of a xenomorph infestation but look for opportunities in early scenes to call for a Stress roll.

'Approaching the colony you notice the blast shutters are down ... that's weird ... roll for Stress'

'The sun sinks just as you land ... it won't rise again for 5 standard days ... Gee it's suddenly less hospitable ... roll for Stress'

'The plaza is deserted apart from a child's ball being rolling back and forth by a chill wind trapped by the deserted buildings ... that gives you the creeps ... roll for Stress'

'The miles of piping creak and groan as the sun warms them ... but there's not a single human sound ... Damn, that's freaky ... roll for Stress'

DENY THEM EASY SOLUTIONS

One driver to explore a location that common sense tells players to avoid is to ensure their characters start without things they will need to confront the threats they will discover. The GM should make sure that starting equipment matches the starting situation.

'You've been away from the colony on a maintenance run so as well as the basic starting equipment on your character sheet you each have a Utility Tool while the Rover has a pair of Walkie Talkies and a Crowbar (Improvised Weapon) on board.'

'This is a commercial starship so the equipment locker contains a Motion Tracker, Cutting Torch, Bolt Gun, Service Pistol, Incinerator Unit, and PowerPak; but these are issued at the Captain's discretion. Only his Keycard opens the locker. There is a standard.'

'Sadly the shuttle will require the Captain's KeyCard to launch ... where did you last see her?'

'The missile failsafe control is deep in the lower engineering deck.'

DENY THEM TIME ...

Adding a time pressure can force the pace of exploration.

'They are still alive but you need to get them to a functioning Med Bay now!'

'Your contract is explicit so you'll need to avoid those penalty clauses if you are to make the next payment on the ship and to the crew.'

'The gas giant provides a dull ochre light, but even that will disappear in an hour when it falls below the horizon.'

'A message has arrived from the Company confirming that you have 24 hours to send the required information.'

'The atmosphere leak (or self-destruct sequence) means you cannot hang about.'

PLAY ON THEIR WEAKNESSES OR MOTIVES

Use the reason they came out to the Frontier to tempt them or force their hand.

'The survivors are the closest thing to a family you have. Don't you have a duty to help?'

'You tell people you'd die rather than give up on what you believe in. What do you do?'

'Looking around the lab, and what they are doing here, you think back to why you came out here. Do pull the pin or call the Company?'

'You came out here for excitement, right? How long do you intend to saty in this locker?'

'The adjoining building houses the base mainframe, and all the research files they've accumulated. What do you do?'

'Others may fear this thing, but you're better than them ... you need to understand it ... what do you do?'

'In the chaos the casino vault will be unguarded ... what do you do? Stay and help or make a quick detour?'

'The recorded message is pretty explicit about what's going to happen to Mia if you don't follow through. What do you do?'

PLAY ON THE GROUP DYNAMICS

'You care about Donner, don't you? ... do you leave him in there?'

'The door is closing too fast ... who do your save?'

'She beat you up pretty bad earlier ... is it time for payback?'

INCLUDE SOME NPCs

There is a better than average chance that a PC will crack and become an NPC under GM control during a session so ensure there is the potential to introduce an NPC for a player to pick up during play. Survivors or marooned ship crew, for instance, or have NPC members of the crew to call on.

SAMPLE SESSION STARTERS ...

Characters are members of a starship crew:

- contracted to undertake a survey of a mothballed industrial complex made up of acres of tunnels and pipework. They have to split up to get it done within a matter of days or they'll suffer penalty clauses ...
- woken from cryosleep by 'Mother' when she picks up an automated distress signal from a starship. If it's a wreck then the salvage could make their fortune ...
- woken from cryosleep by 'Mother' when she picks up an automated distress signal from a planet where there is shake and bake terraforming colony. 'Mother' logs the call with 'the Company' who confirm the need to offer all aid to the colony ...
- woken from cryosleep by 'Mother' when she picks up a non-random signal of unknown from a planet where there is no record of human habitation. 'Mother' logs the call with 'the Company' who confirm the need to investigate this apparent anomaly ...

Characters are colonists on some god-awful rock:

- contracted to map and survey the planet's geology with an eye to mining opportunities. The volcanic sinkhole they find has signs of significant mineral deposits which could make their fortune ...
- sent on a routine maintenance run that will take several days when their rover breaks down. Luckily for them there's a worked out mine within half a day's walk where they can shelter from the in-coming weather front that is disrupting their comms ...
- sent to find Davis when he didn't report in from a routine inspection of the tunnels beneath the reactor. He's probably just gone on a bender again ...

Characters are Colonial Marines ... but wait ... that's not what this game is about ...

... THEN PLAY TO FIND OUT ...

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL – JANUARY 2024

This section offers some supplementary material developed over the previous four years of playing the game. It also suggests additions based on the more mature mechanics developed for one of this game's successors: [Against the Dark Conspiracy](#).

CHARACTER GENERATION

Consider offering players a choice of 2 of the three Expertise listed under 'What you did before' (Page 3). Then offer them a free choice of any third Expertise so they can develop a broader skill-set across a group.

A NEW WAY TO SEEK RELIEF FROM THE HORROR

One of the tropes of the genre is that characters sometimes do stupid things. This rule addition encourages PCs to do likewise by offering them greater rewards if they take the new option to *seek relief from the horror* (Page 6):

- If you go off alone somewhere the GM agrees is 'threatening or potentially dangerous' to get your shit together ... **in addition to reducing Stress by 1** choose one of these automatic benefits
 - **reduce Stress by another 1**
 - **regain your Expertise**

BUT ... THEN ...

1-3, the GM introduces a threat appropriate to one level above current DANGER.

4+, the GM introduces a threat appropriate to current DANGER

6, you get to act before the threat does ...

THE NEEDS OF THE ONE ...

This is a genre where not everyone is always a team player. Therefore, while *seek relief from the horror* remains the principal means by which PCs can manage their Stress, consider adding this new rule:

*"A PC can reduce Stress by 1, if they accept the GM's offer to **mark 1 RISK in place of the erased Stress**, because sometime the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many ..."*

This is *not* intended to be available to players on demand. It is for the GM to offer the opportunity when they want to accelerate the pace of play and descent into the horror by generating more **RISK** to play with

MODIFICATION TO ALL MOVES:

Whenever a move (Pages 4 -5) says *"BUT ALSO say what freaks you out &/or reminds you of the danger you're in ... Roll for Stress"* ADD *"and mark INTEL"* to the end of that move description. This will generate **INTEL**, a new resource for PCs to spend (see below).

Also, when a move (Pages 4-5) says *"you succeed brilliantly, and the GM will agree with you what extra benefit you get"*, consider offering the PC a free 1d6 roll on the *search a location table* (Page 5) as the extra benefit. Getting lucky and stumbling on something useful can fuel the narrative (e.g. an ID Tag/KeyCard), or give them some hope or an edge in a difficult situation.

NEW MOVE – CHASE THEM

Sometimes PCs don't want to sit and wait, they want to hunt down the xeno in the ducts ...

When they are getting away and the GM agrees there's a reasonable way for you to catch them before they escape, roll 1d6.

Add 1d6 if it's a 'foot chase' and you have **Survival** or **Fast**, **OR** they are trying to 'hide' among debris or cargo etc. and you have **Observation**.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. **If your highest roll is:**

1, Dammit, where are they?!? You are ambushed by the threat.

2-3, Dammit they're fast! They'll get away **UNLESS** the GM **EITHER** allows you catch them at the cost of a confrontation where you're at a disadvantage **OR** you agree to have **dropped something** you had with you and **marked RISK** before you try to *chase them* again.

4-5, you catch them unless the GM chooses to spend **RISK** to impede you and *force* you to *chase them* again.

6, you succeed brilliantly and agree with the GM what extra benefit you get, **BUT ALSO** say what freaks you out &/or highlights potential danger ... Roll for **Stress and mark INTEL**.

INTEL – A RESOURCE FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS:

INTEL is a non-specific PC resource accumulated by rolling well. It represents information, knowledge or understanding that PCs pick up without realising its value at the time.

If the GM agrees that a PC has appropriate fictional positioning the **PC can SPEND 1 INTEL they have earned to do any one of the following ...**

- **Recover their Expertise**, as they focus on what they know and get their mojo back.
- **Reduce RISK by 1**, once they've encountered a xenomorph of any kind, as they use what they've learned to cover their tracks &/or become more aware of the danger they present.
- **Discover some information without rolling to investigate**, as they compel/convince an NPC to share what they wouldn't otherwise volunteer (or recognise the importance of) **OR** interrogate and make sense of a source of digital or paper-based data.
- **Find shelter that's secure or a way to make their current location secure**, for now at least, as they use what they know or realise to find a place to re-group and get their shit together.
- **Find a way out of the current scene that isn't obvious**, as they use the clues they have picked up about the environment they're in to find a 'safer' ways of getting from A to B, such as via a ship's duct system ...

When one PCs spends INTEL to, for instance, **find shelter** any other PC in the scene shouldn't have to spend INTEL to benefit from it unless the spending PC successfully avoids detection to hide before anyone else notices!

RISK – AS A NARRATIVE TOOL:

The original **Risk Clock** (Page 7) used accumulating **RISK** as a way to support the GM by suggesting how the xenomorph hive responded to the presence of the PCs and was intended to gradually build 'risk' and tension player character 'intruders'. The option presented here provides more guidance and a set of stepped encounters triggered when **RISK** is marked. These are options, not rules; use them as inspiration rather than a limit on GM (or player) creativity.

PASSIVE: The Hive doesn't yet see the PCs as hosts or threats.

When you mark DANGER, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1, Introduce a previously unknown NPC

2-3, Slime ...

4-6, Something Worrying (such as ... unexplained noises; unexplained marks or damage; evidence of 'moulting'; evidence of violence) or Horrific (such as human remains or evidence of 'hosting') or ... an Egg ...

Every time you encounter an Egg, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1-3, Closed, but will open if approached or when **RISK** is next marked in the scene.

4-5, Already open, a Facehugger reveals itself somewhere else in the scene.

6, Opens in front of you & the Facehugger acts.

ACTIVE: The Hive is uncertain about the risk (or opportunity) that the PCs constitute.

When you mark RISK, there's Slime or other evidence of xenomorphs BUT there's also a quiescent Warrior nearby, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1-3, they don't reveal themselves until **RISK** is next marked in the scene.

4-6, they uncurl from their hiding place **BUT** adjust their first Behaviour Roll (Page 7) by +1.

SEARCH: The Hive recognises the PCs as threats or potential hosts.

When you mark RISK, a number of Warriors equal to the number of PCs in the scene appears **BUT** adjust each Behaviour Roll (Page 7) by +1 OR -1 towards a 2-3 outcome, so it's more likely to try to grab you than attack).

When the last HUNT box is marked, the PCs become aware of more Warriors massing nearby.

ATTACK: The Hive recognises the PCs as a critical threat.

When you mark the single Attack box, there's a coordinated attack by at least 1 or 2 warriors per PC in the scene; adjust all their Behaviour Rolls by -1 as they seek to eliminate the threat to the hive.

If you beat off the attack or find secure shelter, you should expect increasing numbers of warriors to make successive attempts to kill or capture you. The only way to avoid this escalation is to disrupt the hive by attacking (and killing?) the Queen ...

RISK – AS A RESOURCE FOR THE GM:

This change introduces the option for the GM to **spend RISK** to influence the narrative.

The GM can SPEND 1 RISK (and erase it from the track) to:

Describe something suspicious or mysterious, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1-2, Mysterious (or intriguing) transmission or file/data is discovered

3-4, Abandoned gear, vehicle or (even) ship

5-6, Someone behaves suspiciously (introduce a new NPC if necessary)

Hint at an NPC's dubious motive, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1-2, Corp entanglement

3-4, Larcenous intent

5-6, Extremist belief (Anti-Corp or Xeno Cult etc.)

Declare an NPC has gone missing, but may, of course, just be running late ...

Declare that an NPC begins to fit, having been previously, and possibly inexplicably, infected ... CHESTBURSTER! Every PC in the scene rolls for Stress!

Declare that an NPC is a secret (and sinister?) synth, with motives that are not obvious (see above).

Declare a technical issue with a vehicle, system or item of gear when a PC tries to use it. Repairing it will take time &/or tools &/or parts ... that aren't here ... but might not be far away ...

Declare that a Threat has 1 extra Stress in reserve, allowing them to make a Threat more challenging than listed Stress suggests &/or reactivating any Threat that is not a 'confirmed kill' ... perhaps while that confirmation is being sought ...

Declare a complication, the GM rolls 1d6, or chooses:

1-2, a xenomorph, appropriate to the current DANGER enters the scene.

3-4, there's an unexpected structural obstacle between where the PC is and where they want to be.

5-6, there's an NPC (who may not have been encountered before) in need of help.

RISK – ALWAYS ESCALATES:

Offering the GM the opportunity to spend RISK means that the Risk Clock might run backwards, reducing the tension the clock is intended to generate. Therefore, if the GM gains the power to spend RISK, current RISK is always the highest level RISK reaches. It never de-escalates. Once, for instance, 5 Risk have been marked, it doesn't matter if the GM subsequently spends RISK, so only 3 of the 4 boxes on the Passive track are marked ... the Hive remains Active.

These changes cancel the need for the two existing Risk Clock rules (Page 7) that state:

The GM will mark ALL the Passive & Active boxes if ... a PC demonstrates they are a credible threat to the Queen or her eggs, by killing a warrior, causing significant collateral damage in the vicinity of the eggs, or discharging weapons widely.

The GM may clear marks in the Risk Clock if they feel the PCs have lain low for long enough &/or made a significant move to a new location.

NEW MOVE – PURSUE A LONGER TERM OBJECTIVE ...

Sometimes the GM may want to set up the initial conditions of a game with a clear macguffin that will drive the initial activity of the PCs or use when they need to undertake significant repairs etc. Alternatively, the GM may want to intersperse periods of high drama with extended montages that flesh out the environment in which the PCs find themselves.

When you have spent a 'shift' on a longer term objective such as fulfilling your contract obligations, or exploring a large complex environment, roll 1d6.

Add another 1d6 if what you are doing benefits from your *Expertise*.

Add another 1d6 if you're *working away from the other PCs with an NPC*.

Add your Stress Die if you are willing to take that risk. **If your highest roll is:**

1-3, some progress made but *not enough to mark the Progress Clock*, you'll have to come back to this area/task again **BUT** also mark **RISK** due to noise &/or clumsiness.

4+, you make solid but routine progress, *mark the Progress Clock*.

6, you make brilliant progress and *mark the Progress Clock*, **AND** gain the **automatic benefit of a 6 on search a location**. Finally, say what freaks you out &/or highlights potential danger ... Roll for *Stress* and mark **INTEL**.

You can work 2 consecutive shifts with no ill effects BUT:

- if you work a third shift without a shift's break, *mark Stress*.
- if you work a fourth shift without a shift's break, *mark Stress* and *Expertise* is **unavailable** until you complete a shift of rest.

THE PROGRESS CLOCK

This represents the number of successes necessary before the contract is complete or the environment mapped, for instance. It could require 2 results of 4+ in at least 3 'areas' or on 5 'tasks'. The key is to have the players contribute to a montage that sets the scene and builds a sense of place.

The GM should ask each of them a question during their shift such as:

How do you go about the task/survey/exploration?

What natural or human-made feature do we see in the background as you do so?

What makes you think this is going to be easy money?

What worries or disturbs you during this shift?