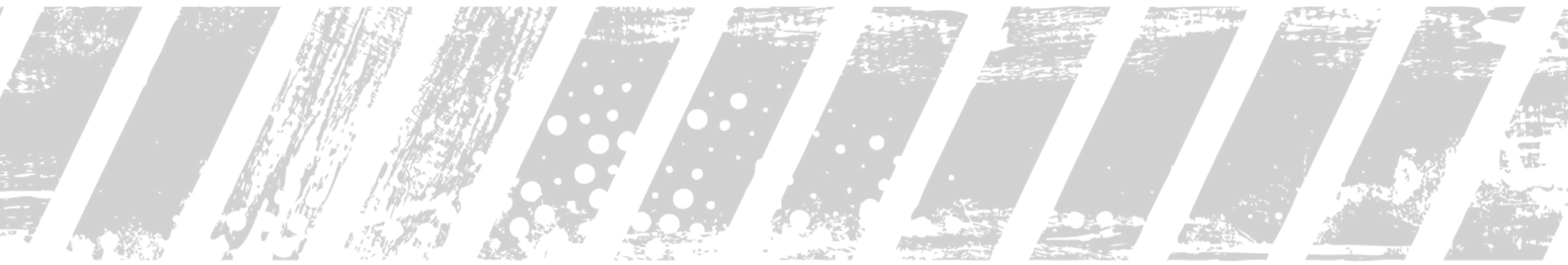# Those Dark Places

GM SIMULATION EXPANSION

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OSPREY GAMES

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first supplement for the *Those Dark Places: Industrial Science Fiction Roleplaying*.

The 'GM Simulation Expansion' is a short document that gives the General Monitor a few more options to play with in a game of Those Dark Places. In the core rulebook there were plenty of adventure hooks and ideas to get a game going, as well as the adventure 'The Argent III Report', and in this supplement there will be a few more ideas for different kinds of games…

In this document you will find some guidelines on how to introduce the 'unknown' to the game; alien horrors, cosmic terrors, and eldritch wonders. There will be a few new rules to help you incorporate these things into a session as well as adventure ideas to get you moving so you can let… things loose on the players.

As in the rulebook the new material is introduced as an interview with a GM. If these horrors are real or not is completely up to you so have a read and let your imagination go wild and remember; always keep your players on their toes. Also remember that if you introduce this strangeness into your game and your players do not respond to it you can always say that it was an actual training simulation and write it off!

Things are about to get weird in the deep dark.

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+++SYSTEM SEVEN-OH-SEVEN+++
+++GM MEETING+++
+++SUPERVISOR IN ATTENDANCE+++
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Hi.

Thanks for coming back in, I appreciate your time. I'll try and keep this short; we've got a whole bunch of new prospects and as much fun as they've had – what with running around trying to avoid axe-wielding murderers on distant mining stations or dealing with corrupt businessmen leaving them stranded six months from home - they're looking for something a little more... meaty.

So, I'd like to introduce you to the Simulation Expansion – 'WAW'. What does WAW mean? 'Weird and Wonderful'. Although I'm not 100% sold on the 'wonderful' part of that.

These simulations deal with something a lot of people laugh at a lot of the time, or they simply dismiss as stories or insanity, but we've all heard the stories. How can I put this…

Aliens.

That's it.

Do you remember the DSSV Perocles story a few years back? When they said they'd found the ruins of an alien outpost on a moon in the… hold on, I've got it written down here... FG-6542-MD system? For months the news was awash with 'this is it!' until the follow-up team found a dead crew and a scientist gone mad. He'd killed the others because they'd figured out that the alien outpost was just a forgotten Iridium mine built by an old company – Jabulani Limited, I think it was - that had melted under a huge radiation burst from the star, so it looked really unreal and… well… alien. When the other scientists on the Perocles pointed this out the lead researcher, who's entire career was now hanging on the find, flipped out. The follow-up team had to shoot him, and that was that.

Anyway, because of the hype and the publicity, we introduced a whole slew of new simulations into the mix to help prospects prepare for the possibility of contact, so now we have alien civilisations, creatures, monsters, species and all kinds of weird shit. Now, we didn't cover cultures and whatnot. We can't even begin to judge that and there's a whole separate department for that dream of possible ET contact. But, we did cover the dangers and the threats that explorers might find. One: it's much more likely and, two: it's just, you know… kinda fun.

PRESSURE

Now, there are changes to the Pressure rules regarding alien stuff to reflect how we're simply not ready to face this kind of thing. In general terms, the things we deal with on a day to day basis affects us and that's why we have the Pressure system in place, to reflect that. However, there's always a part of us that kind of knows that what we're dealing with is shocking but kind of, I don't know, in the 'real world', I guess. Do you see what I mean?

So, anyway, these new rules for the simulation reflect that we're not ready for such things and that the sheer otherworldliness of what we come across can break down our resolve because we don't have the emotional experience or mental capability to deal with it, making us more prone to episodes. That's the scientific talk. We just say 'strange things make us lose our minds'.

Any new creature that the players come across and have to deal with have a Pressure Modifier in their statistics, or a Pressure Mod. This is the number of points that the player must reduce from their Pressure Bonus when rolling to see if they are affected, and the number of points they have to add to their Pressure Level if they fail the roll instead of the normal single point. So, if they came across a creature with a Pressure Mod of 2, then when rolling to see how they react they have to reduce their Pressure Bonus by 2 points, and if they fail they have to add 2 to their Pressure Level.

Does that sound bad? That's because it is. This means that the player will be more susceptible to Episodes, really serious ones, reflecting the fact that they simply cannot comprehend what they are dealing with.

The ongoing effects of Episodes are still a thing, as well, and can be triggered by the same kind of environment they first encountered the alien. Did it attack them in a dark maintenance corridor? Then ALL maintenance corridors will be an issue. Did it appear while they were in a LongSleep chamber? Then ALL LongSleep… look, you get it, right? It's pretty rough. Aliens are weird, man.

Wait… right, I'm not supposed to call them aliens, I'm supposed to call them 'entities'. I think it's because when you say 'alien' it conjures up a while lot of decades of imagery from popular movies and culture. I'm not supposed to draw them comparisons, it seems. Huh. I wish they'd left that note before my last two orientation meetings.

ENTITY TYPES

Anyway, there are different kinds of entities but right now I'd like to go over a few that you might want to throw at your players, including some hooks for reports. The different types share the same CASE file layout, although some creatures will just have AGILITY and STRENGTH like the creatures I talked about in the main simulation, as well as the Pressure Mod score and any other special skills or instructions.

Also, entities can have scores outside of the normal values, so they can have STRENGTH and AGILITY scores higher than 4, pretty much as high as you need them to be. Just remember that the foes need to be a challenge and not a doom, so while you're sniggering over your STRENGTH 20 monster with a Pressure Mod of 100, just think how the players are going to feel about that when their efforts have come to nought and they were always going to fail. Yeah, I know these simulations can be grim, but come on. Perspective.

These examples might give you an idea on how to create your own entities, as well. Feel free to adapt and change as you see fit and remember; keep your players on their toes! Don't let them review this and give them any kind of idea of what to expect and change what you want to make sure that they're surprised. However, if you're going to make changes then make them before the simulation starts and not during, like you're just making stuff up on the spot. That never works, the players will see through it and they'll just figure that they're actions don't mean that much if you're just going to randomly throw stuff at them. Plan ahead, make it make sense. Not that it will make sense. You know what I mean.

THE CREATURE

Have you seen that vidflick where there's an alien creature hunting that group of soldiers, and the lead guy pretty much nukes an entire outpost full of civilians to kill it and the film ends with the line 'the true monster is man'? Yeah, well, that's a pile of crap.

You see, when it comes down to it, when you're up against creatures you simply don't know anything about and are unable to even slightly comprehend, let alone predict what they're going to do next, it's got nothing to do with morals. Once these things are in your face, slobbering to get into your suit or break through your visor, what won't you do to get them off?

When we talk about creatures, we're talking about alien species that are pretty much like the species of different animals we had on Earth, like lions or alligators.

What's an alligator? Oh, come on.

Look, you know the vat-bred dogs and cats we have on some ships and stations? They're pretty common and predictable, right? As in habits and mannerisms and actions? Well, imagine you came across a creature like that you couldn't even begin to second guess. That's the creature.

SPECIAL RULES

Creatures can have a variety of special attacks from flight, spitting acid, to poison quills. Physical attacks are resolved using STRENGTH and ranged attacks use AGILITY. Damage is usually 2, and the ongoing effects can be variable. For example, an acid attack might burn through a suit and do damage over 2 rounds as well as open the suit to vacuum, or a dart may be poisoned and reduce the player's STRENGTH by 1 point per round until unconsciousness, or even death. Remember to make clear notes of what the attack does before play begins.

These creatures can be found anywhere, but popular locations are labs where genetically altered animals go nuts, abandoned stations where creatures have mutated, deep hollow asteroids where dormant monsters lie in wait and desolate planets where the creatures are the last living thing and hibernate in wait for food. ie Players.

EXAMPLE

AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	3
PRESSURE MOD	2
DESCRIPTION	1.5 meters in length, four legs with claws, two forearms for manipulation. Long snout with jagged teeth for tearing, with two eyes large and white, one large iris that can adapt to bright and low light in an instant. Long tail used for balancing and grabbing, barbed. Head surrounded by mane of quills that vibrate when ready to attack as a signal to other creatures to charge. Travels in packs of 1-4.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- The players discover an asteroid that is porous and filled with caves, but also filled with dormant creatures that react to heat and light.
- Corrupt elements in the company send the players to an abandoned mine where they know are inhabited by creatures, as they want to observe the creature's capabilities.
- The players come across a research ship that has been taken over by the creatures and the survivors have taken refuge in the heart of the huge ship. The players have to evacuate them as soon as possible.
- The surface of a desolate world has been overrun with creatures, and the players' ship has crash landed there.

THE STALKER

This is my favourite.

The stalker is kind of like a creature but a bit more intelligent, perhaps even a hyper-evolved creature that's on the verge of full self-aware sentience, or even so far beyond it that it has become something far removed from the norm. These entities also have EDUCATION scores, not that they've had any schooling or they are fully intelligent. The EDUCATION score is more of an indicator of how the creature reacts to the players, if it falls for their traps or figures out their plans. It's not gong to be playing chess with them, but it will be smarter than your average monster.

These aliens – sorry, entities – are also quite strong and fast, so they tend to have higher scores. If you really want to mess with the players, have them covered in natural armour, too – reduce any damage scores by 1 point, making it harder for them to simply blow the thing away with a pump action.

They can also have really weird attacks like acid spit, or spines it can launch, or extendable tails. As with the normal rules, physical attacks are judged by STRENGTH and ranged attacks by AGILITY, and the attacks have die caps of 2 or 3, depending on just how nasty a mood you're in. Take a look at the attacks in the CREATURE entity above and put them to use, and vice versa.

How it looks is completely up to you. Weird slimy clump of tentacles, bony exoskeleton killing machine, even a shapeshifting mass of bone and flesh – the stranger you can make it the better. Make it so alien in appearance and action that the players won't know what's coming next. The shapeshifter is good for that; a bunch of already paranoid spacers not knowing who in the group is the threat can make for a tense session.

These entities can be found anywhere, but the usual location is on the surface of planets. Long-forgotten vaults on asteroids or frozen remains on comets are cool, but the rule is that no starship lands on a planet's surface unless absolutely necessary, so dropping your ship on blasted barren world when you're not supposed to adds all kinds of tension. It also works well with science vessels and exploratory craft, ships that have the job of trailblazing and entering new star systems on resource surveys.

EXAMPLE

STRENGTH	5
AGILITY	4
EDUCATION	2
PRESSURE MOD	3
DESCRIPTION	This particular stalker appears to be a huge two-metre spider but the legs are more sinuous, like tentacles that can extend up to six meters to snare a prey in the hooks that line the limb. They are able to subtly change their body colour to blend in to their surroundings, and their body has a chitinous armour that is hard to penetrate.
SPECIAL	Attack hooked tentacles, damage 3, able to tear through unarmoured suits. Chitinous armour, -1 to all damage rolls.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- Members of the company send the players to a barren moon to capture and return a specimen of this new life form.
- A stalker is loose on board the ship but it only kills in self-defence, as it is looking to get off the vessel before it suffocates in this alien environment.
- A remote mining rig has had a few mysterious deaths in the lower catacombs of the planetoid it is digging out, but they have production targets to reach so they refuse to shut down.
- A company scientist is so enamoured by this alien creature they decide to let one loose on the players' ship to see what happens, and they send a SAM along to record the results.

THE ANCIENT

This is a good one. Ancients are entities that are advanced enough to be smart and star-faring but might have cultures and moral attitudes far from our own, as well as being physically different. Have you been told about 'Uncanny Valley'? It's why synthetics are built to be recognisably false, if the SAM engineers made them look too human you'd be able to just about tell and that makes them repulsive. It's the same with sentient beings; you see them as creatures, different from you in every way, but there's an intelligence in the actions and the language, and the eyes say strange monster but the smarts are there. That makes us, as humans, uncomfortable and there's a deep down revulsion that we might not be able to control, an ancient bestial fight-or-flight reaction that could make first contact the worst moment of human history.

Ancients have CASE files the same as normal people and these can be whatever you want them to be, as per the guidelines above. It'd be easy to have them humanoid with funny heads, and that'd probably make them more appealing to human sensibilities, but it's pretty much guaranteed they won't be like how they're presented in the vidshows. They might not even be mammals, or even carbon-based. They might just be brain matter in jars that use different robotic suits depending on the need.

They might also have strange morals, completely incompatible with ours. What if they saw violence as an art form, torture as an entertainment piece. What if their attitudes to sex were different, or what if they considered other species, even on their own world, as less than deserving of rights or even humane treatment. Their views on life and even existence might be so different it could be seen as not only immoral but downright dangerous. What would we as a species do to protect ourselves from that?

Ancients are usually encountered on their own worlds or their ships might be detected while surveying a new system. Perhaps the player discover an abandoned outpost that leads them to the ancient's homeworld. Those first few steps could decide the fate of an entire civilisation.

EXAMPLE

CHARISMA	2
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	1
EDUCATION	4
PRESSURE MOD	2
DESCRIPTION	At 1.5 metres in height and dressed in flowing robes of grey, these ancients appear, at first, to be hunched over humanoids (in reality, they are most certainly not). With a distinct thorax joined to the lower body by a thin spine, almost insect-like, and with four arms and two short unjointed legs, they are dextrous in low gravity but hindered in higher gravity. They have great bone crowns across their head where flesh is stretched and these have veins that change colour depending at a rapid rate; this is their language, and the rate of change and the mix of colours refer to emotional states and words. They have no understanding of any aural language. They are incredibly intelligent but they have no sense of compassion or fear towards any other species.
SPECIAL	Immune to all PRESSURE rolls. -1 to AGILITY in 1G, -1 for every 0.5G above that. Normal in 0.5G.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- A sudden contact situation draws the players into a world of bizarre alien customs where human beings are their playthings.
- A lone Ancient discovered on a small alien outpost does everything it can to kill the humans that have found it so that its existence remains a secret.
- Ancients kidnap the players to experiment and test them to see how they can be used to further their own civilisation. Can the players escape this mad house of unknowable alien technology?
- An Ancient species is on the verge of extinction. What do they leave behind, and what will they do to protect their heritage from human interlopers who see this failing civilisation as a corpse to be picked over?

THE ELDRITCH

Now, this is a really peculiar one but Doctor Howards in psychotherapy asked that we put it in. I'm not sure about the reasoning because it seems to be a no-win situation for everyone involved but some players seem to like the idea of investigating these things and then just running away when they find the truth, and the entity itself. To be fair, everything leading up to the big reveal can be really exciting.

These entities have statistics off the scale and don't consider the human race a threat; in fact, they're so ancient and out there the chances are they don't even notice our existence and would step over us as a person would over insects in a field. We're nothing more than annoying bugs they can swat away, and that's not surprising seeing as though they've existed since the beginning of time.

'What's the point?' I hear you cry. Well, the great thing about these entities is that they can be combined with any of the above examples to create some major problems for the people in the simulation. In many cases the players will find old ruins or references to these eldritch entities, and follow clues to uncover their existence. This might take them to places where these entities have either created or influenced life forms that aggressively protect them. Imagine Creatures guarding a tomb on an asteroid that a dead race of Ancients built to honour their Eldritch god, and a Stalker is unleashed on the players if they get too close to discovering the truth. Imagine if the power of the Eldritch being also influenced humans, and a cult of worshippers started creating problems for the companies as they try to awaken their god and offer the human race as tribute.

Interesting stuff. Perfect for a simulation.

EXAMPLE

CHARISMA	Do these things even have Charisma?
AGILITY	I guess they've evolved beyond the need for gymnastics
STRENGTH	What's a good number for 'shitloads'?
EDUCATION	What wouldn't they know?
PRESSURE MOD	4 to 6
DESCRIPTION	These entities can take all kinds of forms; planet-sized gas clouds, great globs of flesh and bones, or almost recognisable shapes that defy the rules of time and reality. They exist on another plane and just outside of our reality. They are, for want of a better word, gods.
SPECIAL	There's no specials for this one. I can't even imagine how it would go if a player actually saw one of these things.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- An ancient book from Earth's history is found in a private collection and leads to a moon in a far-flung star system where a temple to an Eldritch has been built by a long-dead race, and it is said to contain the secret to immortality. It's a trap, of course, and has been set up so that when a sentient race arrives the Eldritch can track them back to where they came from and devour their civilisation.
- A human cult is ritually sacrificing kidnap victims to their sleeping Eldritch god to keep it appeased. However, if they are stopped then the god will manifest and wipe out entire solar systems to gather the souls it demands.

THE UNNATURAL

This is a kind of a jack-of-all-monsters, weird monstrosities you can throw in with some kind of possible real-world explanation, like genetic abominations or animated corpses. They vary from twisted humans to vat-bred animals with a taste for human blood, all the way to corrupted people influenced by strange alien technology or creatures born from an amalgamation of all three.

That's why they are listed as 'unnatural'; there's something recognisable in there, but it's so twisted and torn it's barely what it was. Creatures are scary but watching a human being's bones extend into blades that erupt from the end of every limb as they scream into the dark, and then stagger towards you to tear you apart... yeah, that's not gonna be a nice thing, especially if you knew the poor bastard.

How did they get like this? Well, genetic experimentation is a favourite – what with the number of barely legal research stations there are dotted around known space – and the old 'what would happen if I mix up this human DNA with this weird stuff I just found!' is an absolute must. These kinds of creatures are completely unpredictable and can create quite a scare when unleashed.

Another good one is being corrupted by weird alien technology, the body being bent out of shape by a signal or a goo or an infection. While the players are trying to figure out what the tech is they then have to deal with a major problem regarding their colleague's insides exploding into scary tentacle monsters. Excellent.

The thing is, knowing who they were before they were twisted – and wondering if there is still a human being in there experiencing everything that is happening but unable to control it – can be just as scary, if not more so, than coming across something completely alien.

EXAMPLE

CHARISMA	1
AGILITY	3
STRENGTH	4
EDUCATION	2
PRESSURE MOD	3
DESCRIPTION	After coming into contact with an infection, these unfortunate individuals were twisted into something unnatural; their arms broke in several places as jagged bone turned into spines, their legs cracked into powerful legs bent the wrong way and their heads elongated into an ovoid shape with a small, screaming face filled with fangs. If there is anything human left in there is unknown – pray that there isn't. Just don't let them touch you!
SPECIAL	Bone spike attack, 3 damage. Able to leap through the air up to six meters and still attack. 1 in 6 chance of infection if they successfully attack another human and draw blood, rolled for every hit. If infected, a human turns into one in 1D6 minutes.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- A genetic scientist has attempted to create a human who can survive the vacuum of space in hardened skin and powerful organs. However, the procedure has driven the subject insane and he is on a murdering spree; how can the players stop someone almost impervious to everything?
- A mysterious artefact filled with a white goo is infecting humans and turning their bodies into crooked, twisted monsters of sharp bone and acidic saliva that kill everything in sight. Is the goo alien or some human creation gone wrong?
- Crossing vat-bred animals with newly discovered bacteria that the scientists believe will help accelerate growth was a great idea on paper, but when furless cats grow far beyond what is normal and develop a hunger that can't be satiated, things get a little hairy.
- A signal is causing certain people to suffer horrendous hallucinations that make them mutilate themselves and try to force others to do the same. Where is the signal coming from, and is it human?

CONCLUSION

Okay, that's enough of that. You've got enough here to get you going so stat up those monsters and let them loose. Remember – keep them on their toes!

Right. Coffee time. No, tea. After all that I think I need something less stimulating.

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