

XENOMORPH



PHENOMENONLINE 2020

BY PHILIPPA AND JOHN HUGHES

ARE YOU READY FOR DROP BEAR?

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THE PHENOMENONLINE GAMES RATING SYSTEM

What's the game again?	A direct sequel to <i>Aliens</i> based on ideas from the original <i>Alien3</i> script by William Gibson.
Seriousness?	On the serious side.
Genre/Setting	Science fiction horror. The universe of the <i>Alien</i> and <i>Aliens</i> movies.
Movie Rating	MA.
System	Systemless. Twitch factors. Loud budda-budda vocalisations for the firefights. BYO screams.
GM Style	One storytelling GM who loves the Alien universe.
Number of characters	Five, all alive at the beginning.
Previously run at	Phenomenon 2012.



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This module is produced from notes compiled for convention play, and is presented as-is.

Special thanks to Stu Barrow, David James, and the Pheno Crew.

XENOMORPH

"Are you ready for drop bear?"

It is the perfect killing machine, survivor of a thousand bloody battles. It is the ultimate hunter, evolving, adapting, taking the very form of its victims. It is a monster with an insatiable appetite, existing only to devour and breed. It is the Corporation.

Far out on the Rim, aboard the csiro-billington research station *Shackleton*, a boarding team assembles for an urgent mission. Some are corporate security—Drop Bears—others are science techs. They are to intercept a Colonial Marines military vessel that has appeared out of hyperspace, seemingly disabled and abandoned.

The name of the ship is *Sulaco*.

Systemless roleplaying for five corporation pawns in the weeks immediately following the events of the movie *Aliens*. This is not a bug hunt. This is a love story. *This one could really hurt.*

'Learn or die.'

Written and presented by John and Philippa Hughes.

Art by John Hughes.

Originally run at Phenomenon 2012, Canberra.



IMPLEMENTATION

The short: Systemless.

The long: Systemless roleplay theatre. Minimal dice. Twitch factors. Loud budda-budda vocalisations for the firefights. BYO screams.

GAME RATINGS

Characterisation — 5/5

Story/plot — 3.5/5

Genre — 4/5

Seriousness — 4/5

Rules knowledge — 0/5

Adult content —MA.

INSPIRATION

RIPLEY: "It's just down there, in the basement."

AARON: "The whole place is a basement."

RIPLEY: "It's a metaphor."

—*Alien3*.

Xenomorph is our take on an rpg reboot of *Alien3*, the deeply confused successor to the classic science fiction movies *Alien* and *Aliens*.

Alien: Aliens: Alien3: Alien Resurrection represent mother lodes for science fiction cinema and roleplaying. However, after two classic films, the *Alien3* movie went through production hell, with multiple scripts (including an early one by cyberpunk novelist William Gibson), changes of director and direction, and massive interference from Fox Studio. The result was a mess.

We love the entire quadrilogy (though let's not talk about AvP), we respect Ripley, and we're not going to kill off Hicks and Newt in the first thirty seconds as *Alien3* did. Our reboot takes the William Gibson draft as one of our inspirations, though of course an RPG game has to be very different to a movie script, and we have a few ideas of our own. This will be SF with a distinctly antipodean flavour and cast. (How to employ the original characters proved a challenge: they will be kept off-stage. They simply burn too bright.) We don't want to simply rehash *Aliens*—fun as that would be. We want to take the story somewhere different.

BIG QUESTIONS WRIT LARGE IN SMOKE AND LASER LIGHT

The Alien Quadrilogy exhibits a high degree of self-awareness, typified by the Ripley quote above. We think the challenge plays to our design strengths: an atmosphere of constant, gritty fear and tension; character insight and development; and big questions writ large in smoke and laser light: a chance to ask and play out a series of ideas about gender, embodiment, moral courage, and love. All with big guns and shadows in the dark.

Shadows that will kill you. *Or worse.*

In prepping, Pip and I watched the movies and read the Dark Horse comics, the *Colonial Marines Technical Manual*, and some interesting critical books and essays from cultural and film studies. One particular inspiration was Stephen Mulhall's *On Film: Thinking in Action*, which explores how the quadrilogy grapples with a host of questions surrounding human purpose and identity in a practical and active way. Questions mean conflict. Conflict makes for great roleplaying.

Are you ready for drop bear?

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NOTES

BUILDING A BETTER
XENOMORPH

HOW TO MAKE THIS MODULE YOUR OWN

The original Xenomorph was about running down the dark corridors of Daramalan College in Canberra with toy guns and taped-on torches, reliving core scenes from our collective roleplaying DNA whilst trying to slow down enough to unpack the internal stories of the characters.

That was then. This is now. You might be lucky enough to weave your own Xenomorph stories in a live gaming group. I can also see lots of potential in an online game, all bad tightband audio and bandwidth freeze and murky helmet cam dropouts. Plus masks, contagion, fear of infection...

However you decide to deliver the module, I recommend the following by way of prep, in roughly this order:

- Watch the original movies, especially *Aliens*.
- Read the player briefings on *Shackleton* and *csiro-billington*.
- Familiarise yourself with each of the player characters. Note their strengths, weaknesses and challenges. Think about how you might introduce their emotional states and dilemmas into gamespace and how they might play out. This is the internal module, a story in itself.
- Read our post-game debrief to be aware of play insights, potential problems and shortfalls.
- Read the [William Gibson script for Alien3](#), bearing in mind our module's alternative background. The script has also been adapted as an [Audible recording](#).
- Read the module. Record your own insights and additions.
- There are some helpful goodies on the interwebs, including a [schematic of Sulaco](#).
- Decide if you will play the endgame aboard *Sulaco* (the focus of these written notes), whether you will introduce a second act when the *Sulaco* docks at *Shackleton*, or whether this will depend on pc actions.

Alternatively, you *know* this story. Just pick up the damned module and wing that mother.

- Call together five friends...

XENOMORPH: THE DEBRIEF

NOTES

John Hughes

(October 2012)

We came, we saw, we ran about screaming in the dark.

Ok, so we've caught up on our sleep, conquered the post-con sugar/ adrenaline depression and re-examined in the cold light of day all those module ideas that seemed so inspired in the pub. It's time for a brief reflection on Xenomorph.

Xenomorph was a single session systemless rpg convention game run at Phenomenon 2012 in Canberra Australia. Written by Philippa and myself, it was intended as roleplaying theatre, a partial re-imagining of a third Aliens movie and a personal homage to the entire quadrilogy.

I hope you had fun. I know that we did. It's a funny old word, 'fun'.

First up, thank you players, playtesters, con organisers and volunteers, those of you who costumed up, printed posters, provided lighting, shared lunchtime crits and insights, tiptoed quietly past the dark rooms, and offered support and friendship during the various interruptions along the way.

Are you ready for drop bear? If it all seems so long ago, let's recall the blurb...

Far out on the Rim, aboard the csiro-billington research station Shackleton, a boarding team assembles for an urgent mission. Some are corporate security—Drop Bears—others are science techs. They are to intercept a Colonial Marines military vessel that has appeared out of hyperspace, seemingly disabled and abandoned.

The name of the ship is *Sulaco*.

Systemless roleplaying for five corporation pawns in the weeks immediately following the events of the movie *Aliens*. This is not a bug hunt. This is a love story. *This one could really hurt*.

An *Aliens* module set as an alternative to *Alien3*? Where to begin?

We started by compiling a list of happy endings from the Aliens movies. (Go on, do it now). *Uh huh*. That sort of defines the genre. Then we watched the movies for the *nth* time, (no, not AvP), read the comics and novels, and devoured all the feminist and cinema and genre and philosophical commentary. There's quite a bit out there: it's a powerful and pervasive modern myth-cycle. But the marines thing has already been done—most memorably in the [late, great Chris Wheeler's](#) original Xenomorph, which ran at Necronomicon (the ancestor of Phenomenon) 2 here in Canberra back in 1990, and which introduced the budda-budda-budda resolution system that we acknowledged and stole for our own game.

It became rapidly obvious that exploring the essential themes of the Aliens quadrilogy—especially the sexual and generative aspects—wasn't possible in a single session module. And our story couldn't stray too far—genre familiarity cuts both ways. In the end we tried to capture a few core themes, and to create a roleplaying palimpsest that acknowledged the greater whole.

Ultimately we focussed on two main aims. We wanted to re-imagine and extend the ending of the movie *Aliens* so that all of the second film's survivors (Ripley, Newt and Hicks) might live to fight another day. In this we had William Gibson's (unused) screenplay for the third Aliens movie as inspiration.

We also wanted to retain and explore certain elements from the actual *Alien3* movie that we considered insightful and worthy of the progression. The third movie shocked everyone after the adrenaline-rush and narrative drive of *Aliens*. It negated any

lingering survivor optimism through an uncompromising brutality and a concern for character over plot. It also slaughtered all of the main characters—two of them in the opening thirty seconds.

Okay, it was a mess, and it went through development hell, but one of the things that *Alien3* did very well was its exploration of the themes of grieving for those lost and the burdens of survivor guilt.

Grief. Loss. Survivor Guilt.

Those notions provided us with insights we could explore in a systemless game, providing an inner agenda in a genre more associated with marine firefights and scary encounters in dark spaces. (To be fair, a few of those crept into our module as well). Together with the overt plot element—a return to the spaceship *Sulaco*—they defined the possibility space for the module: the boundaries within which we could explore the monsters within us, the monsters between us, in our relationships and organisations, and the monsters beyond us, waiting, hungry in the dark.

My question to players was which of these monsters was the more fearful, and the answer varied according to the paths and stories individual teams chose to explore. Some teams focused on confronting the grief and suspicion between characters, some tried to resist, subvert or escape the totalitarian demands of the Company, others risked life and limb in the echoing steel and resin canyons of the *Sulaco*. Most tried a little of all three.

We only had three hours :).

Gameplay was made easier by the fact that the *Aliens* movies are part of our collective roleplaying DNA. We are all children of Ripley. Players knew the settings well, and had little trouble immersing themselves in the genre and locales, even with the addition of novel elements like an antipodean megacorp and research station. And the standard of play was uniformly high—some teams had me terrified by their sheer intensity, and depth and honesty of emotion.

While *Xenomorph* was not a cathartic module—there was far too much external happening for that, and the genre itself telegraphs that endings will tend to be bloody and brutal—its overall atmosphere of inter-character suspicion tinged with grief did contain enough elements to dive deep if teams so chose.

When it comes to conventions, Pip and I are primarily systemless writers. Our aim in presenting a convention module is to present opportunities which invite (but never force) players to dive into the deeper levels of a story, to challenge them in the ways they wish to be challenged, and above all to provide an experience that is different—something more intense and polished and thought-provoking than your average home game. We always try to build and extend the Australian systemless roleplaying tradition.

WHAT WORKED WELL

As writer and GM, I can only review half of any game. Player inputs— characterisation, innovation, action, teamwork, and group play— provide many of the key elements that decide whether a game will run successfully. You can't review a roleplaying game without making explicit what the players themselves bring to it.

That said, the mix of traditional strategic play, physical theatre (creeping about down darkened corridors with prop rifles and torches), and character drama/catharsis worked well. Teams could play to their strengths. The mix meant that *Xenomorph* could not be an elegant module, and it required a lot of gamesmaster and player improv, but it provided an enormous possibility space for play.

The characters were members of a security boarding party. They were genre archetypes at their heart: Gould the tired warrior, Crowe the immoral tank, Conrad the grieving Ripley type, Pynne the genius nerd, and Gentle the contradicted corporate. We tried to add depth and an element of against-type surprise while keeping character sheets fairly short. The PCs were all linked through a recently deceased colleague, Wayne Pearson, whose death implicated them all in various ways. The suspicion, paranoia, guilt and grieving around Pearson's death provided the game's internal engine.

We posted character sheets to the web before Phenomenon. Providing character sheets beforehand involves a number of complications, especially for scratch teams, but it can be rewarding for those who wish to prepare ahead of session, and it saves having to absorb details in a mad rush at the start of a game. (Yeah, yeah, I know, it's tradition. :))

We also provided a visually rich module background, a series of briefings posted to the Pheno Facebook page and to this blog, detailing an antipodean megacorporation called csiro-billington and RSV *Shackleton*, a science research station. As designers, it allowed us to indulge in a bit of original work and to continue our tradition of telling Australian stories as much as possible. Again, teams that accessed this material before play were able to ease into the module all the more quickly and easily, and it proved a good vehicle for publicity. But was it necessary? No.

Players knew the genre well, and the internal movies were already playing in their heads.

The simple props (toy guns with torches taped to their barrels) also added a lot, especially after dark. We also used the surrounding corridors and stairwells, and a second 'surprise' room with lots of tables arranged in interesting ways for crawlspace.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL

As so often with our convention modules, Xenomorph found itself hemmed in by a single session playing time. The module was originally scripted in two acts, one on *Sulaco* and a climax on *Shackleton*. We had to cut it back to a single act aboard *Sulaco*. (If you want to extend play, see the Gibson script for inspiration as to what happens when xenomorphs get aboard a large civilian station).

Time constraints are a common problem in our convention modules— we tend to overwrite. The tide has turned against two-session games on the Australian convention circuit, but maybe next time we should just do it. Or maybe just learn to edit down. It's the hardest part of writing.

Character-wise, repeat play revealed a few kinks. Pynne was a little too isolated, and his hacking skills a little too god-like. Gentle's secret and personal crisis was too personal, too private. Without posting spoilers, there were some things she quite literally could not think, could not say. There was some absolutely stunning roleplay by Gentle players working with and around this limitation, alas not entirely appreciated by the other players at the time. Trust me though; I noticed. I remember.

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Confession time—convention play for me is always a glorious, intense, adrenaline-driven blur. I remember little afterward. (You too huh?)

It was made worse, this year, for Pip and I weren't able to join the traditional debrief at the pub, where key game moments are recycled, set, and sometimes even created. Session notes help for prize giving, but like, how do you summarise three hours in fifteen words?

I'd like to thank players for seeing the potential for Crowe as Zapp Brannigan, and Pynne as Sheldon ('Open the airlock. Open the airlock. Open the airlock.') I was also surprised when the resemblance of RSV *Shackleton* to Canberra Tower was pointed out; something that never occurred to me even though the tower features prominently in the view from my campus window.

Given the amount of story improvisation necessary once players were aboard *Sulaco*, I know that some of my gm calls were inconsistent; the nature of the new xenomorph infestation varied somewhat from game to game. Having acknowledged this, I also know it's the nature of the roleplaying beast.

So there we have it. Xenomorph: messy and nostalgic, familiar in its confrontations, grim as the genre that birthed it. Ripley, Newt and Hicks (all quietly in cyro sleep the whole time) were rescued in most instances. Player characters did less well: some survived, many did not. A few escaped amidst the chaos of *Shackleton's* collapse or aboard a colonial marines scout ship. Some were cut down, a few found dignity and even resolution of a sort.

It's that sort of universe.

We commit our bodies to the Void.



XENOMORPH: THE MODULE

NOTES

GM OVERVIEW 1: PLOT (OUTER STORY)

The Alien Queen has regained the *Sulaco*. Cloud-like spores and tiny eggs spread the alien seed in a previously unknown way.

Ripley, Newt and Hicks are in hypersleep. Their capsules are aboard an Emergency Evacuation Vehicle. A hatch is jammed, and the vehicle cannot launch.

Ripley has been impregnated. Hicks is wounded. The Security A Team (Bunyips) from *Shackleton* has boarded the *Sulaco*. They moved Bishop's upper body. The only survivor, Argent, has been taken by the Queen. There is an alien hive beneath the air scrubbers.

A Colonial Marine scout vessel has also boarded the ship. There are now only two survivors, Chen and Mendez. Chen is wounded. Mendez is setting fires and traps.

There are spreading fires aboard *Sulaco*.

Enter Drop Bears.

BACKSTORY: WHAT HAPPENED?

2179 (July 27) The USS *Sulaco* arrives at LV-426 / Archeron / Hadley's Hope.

2179 (July 27—approx 0900) The marines dropship departs the *Sulaco*.

2179 (July 28) The Alien Queen (along with an egg) stows away on the drop-ship and attacks the group when they arrive back on the *Sulaco*. Bishop is torn in half. Ripley manages to battle the Queen hand-to-hand using a powerloader and blows the Queen out of the airlock.

Aliens finale

Alien Queen fights Ripley. Bishop is cut in two.

(Nukes despatched to colony ruin and alien ship.) Ripley, Newt and Hicks enter hypersleep.

Sulaco sets course for Earth.

2179 (August 8) The egg left by the Alien Queen on the USS *Sulaco* hatches and impregnates Ripley while she is in hypersleep. Some of the facehugger's acid blood causes a fire, and the *Sulaco*'s main computer evacuates the ship. The hypersleep chambers of Ripley, Newt, Hicks, and Bishop are put on board Emergency Evacuation Vehicle (EEV) unit 2650.

Alien3 Opening

Facehugger attacks sleeping capsules. Ripley is impregnated. Acid causes a fire.

Sleeping capsules automatically moved to escape pods. Fire spreads to core systems.

Xenomorph backstory

Queen survives ejection, snags hull, reenters ship through airlock.

Sulaco drops out of hyperspace after the spreading fire damages core systems.

Sulaco sets emergency course to *Shackleton*: the only large port in the Neroid Sector with an active beacon.

Fire causes explosion and a cloud of debris. For a brief eruptive instant the entire fore port side of the *Sulaco* blazes in fiery imitation of the distant stars (possible opening image).

Close-band distress beacon is activated, *Sulaco* proceeds under reaction drive to nearest port of assistance: *Shackleton*.

Shackleton detects distress signal.

Shackleton receives high-level orders from csiro-billington.

Shackleton security A Team under Kath Argent in shuttle *Bunyip* is despatched to *Sulaco*. Eight in crew.

Argent's crew moves Bishop's upper body to their temporary C&C by the Armoury.

Angry Bird, a colonial marines scout ship, docks with *Sulaco*. Marine crew boards and attempts to control fire.

Marine crew encounter xenomorphs: most taken.

A Team encounter marine survivors and engage in firefight.

There are now six adult xenomorphs on *Sulaco*, including the Queen. There is an alien hive in Life Support (under the air scrubbers).

There are two colonial marine survivors, Chen and Mendez. They will shoot at anything that moves. (They are potential pc replacements.)

There is one *Bunyip* survivor—Kath Argent, who is known to pc party. Argent has been cocooned, but can use radio when conscious. "It's too tight".

Ripley, Hicks and Newt are in sleeping tubes within EEV 337. However, EEV cannot launch as hatch is jammed open.

Bishop is in two halves. His lower body is in the loading bay. His upper body is in the *Bunyip* C&C.

2179 (August 19) Drop Bears assemble. Module begins.

GM OVERVIEW 2: CHARACTERS (INNER STORY)

On *Shackleton* station, Pearson, a station security officer, is suspected of anti-corporate activity. He dies under interrogation. His teammates Gould and Crowe clean up the mess. The cover story is that he was killed in an airlock accident.

Pearson's estranged partner Conrad, also in security, suspects a cover up. She's not happy. She has threatened to kill Crowe after beating him up.

Pynne has been groomed by Pearson as a corporate saboteur. He expects to be discovered, and is living in fear. Pynne has infected the station's computer systems with some nasty surprises.

Gentle is a pilot. She is a deep cover csiro-billington android with highly illegal and conflicted programming. She was Pearson's secret lover before his death. She is now drawn to Pynne.

MISSION CREW

IRIAKA CONRAD

Female, Aotearoa New Zealander (Maori), mid-thirties.

Vengeful warrior woman? Fuck that—I'm just angry; angry and scared.

TWITCH FACTOR: 60%

Drop Bear and *Shackleton* security officer. Usually a consummate professional, she has gone off the rails following her husband's death. She knows there is a cover-up. Conrad has publicly threatened to kill Crowe. Gould is an old friend.

Keywords: Fearless, Angry, Grieving, Wounded, Cautious.

Strength: Will and determination never to be beaten down.

Flaw: Anger and Rage.

Anger: Everything. Crowe. Gould. The Company. Herself.

Passion: Human Dignity. Truth.

Fear: Acknowledging weakness, Confirming suspicions about death of Pearson (confirming an all-pervasive corruption).

Phobia: Abandonment.

Days till end of mission rotation: 470.

Company Voting Shares: 3.

Expected mission bonus: Eight million New Yen (subject to disciplinary fines of up to 80 per cent).

CHUL-MOO CROWE

Male, Korean-Australian, mid-thirties.

Drop Bear and *Shackleton* security officer. An aggressive bully all-too-familiar with violence, Crowe has been demoted for going too far.

An enthusiasm for guns and loud bangs. Limited technological competence. Possible testosterone poisoning.

Crowe is straight-forward and unsubtle to the point of bullying. He is not to be trusted with complex machinery. He's a dealer, and sometimes drugged out himself. Crowe needs to be kept on a leash by Gould.

TWITCH FACTOR: 80% (drugs)

Keywords: Destruction, Aggression, Loyalty, Friendship, Addiction, Survival.

Strength: Gift for Destruction. Inspires fear. Loyal to Friends.

Flaw: Shame and Loneliness. Lack of imagination. Incompetence with technology.

Anger: Disobedience, Disrespect for Authority.

Passion: Comrades, Self-Preservation. Knives.

Fear: Abandonment, Weakness.

Phobia: Silence.

Days till end of mission rotation: 260.

Company Voting Shares: 2.

Expected mission bonus: Four and a half million New Yen.





CAI GENTLE

Female, Star-born (Corporation citizenship), appears to be in mid-twenties. A Company brat, competent, well-liked, but a bit docile.

Shackleton shuttle pilot and cargo handler/courier. Mission medic. Gentle is a ward of station head Margaret Baron. Because of this, her security files are sealed, and are only accessible to Executive.

Quietly assertive and ethical, Gentle has always lived on-station. The Corporation is all that she has ever known.

Gentle was Pearson's lover. She is now fascinated by Pynne.

TWITCH FACTOR: 20%

Gentle is as much defined by what she is not as what she is. Her character is overladen with irony. What happens when the innocent are agents of corruption?

Gentle is an artificial person, an android, a cyborg, a replicant, a skinjob. She is deployed by the Company on a deep cover intelligence assignment to entrap subversive personnel.

Gentle is not herself consciously aware of this, though on a deep level she knows that something is not right. Her programming orientations include highly illegal modifications that suppress mission- and android- related memories, trigger mission-related befriending and seduction behaviours, and channel her emotions along predetermined channels.

Of course, with such a complex personality matrix and neural network, some small leakage is inevitable. These take the form of hallucinatory memory fragments expressed in dreams and nightmares. Gentle is conscious of these, but she cannot consciously process their implications.

Gentle's programming will lead her to watch everyone, question Pynne about his activities, and collect samples of anything unusual. She will not want to handle a weapon. Her behavioural inhibitors make it difficult to harm or by omission of action, allow to be harmed, a human being.

Keywords: Innocence, Darkness, Unflappable, Pilot, Paramedic.

Strength: Faith in Others, Optimism, Resourceful.

Flaw: Passivity, Obedience, Conformity.

Anger: Selfish or antagonistic behaviour. People who don't follow the rules.

Passion: The Company. Wellbeing of *Shackleton* crew. The human frontier.

Fear: Loss of structure. Not living up to others expectations.

Phobia: Violence.

Days till end of mission rotation: NA.

Company Voting Shares: Nil (Homestation Residency). Expected mission bonus: NA.

WAYNE GOULD

Male, Anglo-Australian, late-forties. Head of *Shackleton* security, a Drop Bear. Gould is a warrior past his prime, weighed down by what he has done in the name of the Corporation.

Gould knows the truth about Pearson's death. He organised the cover-up. He has always carried a torch for Conrad.

He's not a hero. He's not a villain. He's just sooo fucking tired of everything.

TWITCH FACTOR: 60%

Keywords: Regret, Guilt, Obedience, Teacher, Fixer.

Strength: Gould is a teacher and mentor. He teaches through action.

Flaw: Outer apathy, inner despair. Freezes under pressure.

Anger: His own failures. The many compromises made to keep his position in the Company. The death of Pearson.

Passion: None he can admit to, though still committed to his estranged children, and his dreams of retirement on earth.

Fear: Betrayal, Change, The Company. Phobia: Choking.

Days till end of mission rotation: 127.

Company Voting Shares: 4.

Expected mission bonus: Fourteen million New Yen.

UKI PYNNE

Male (New Man), Japanese, mid-twenties. Researcher, genius, uber-geek. Bit of a prick. Biotechnician and systems professional. Mission systems op and biotech.

Pynne is a genius, and he expects everyone to recognise his gift. His fascination is life on the planet below.

Tiny guy, big attitude: a bad case of over-compensation. His security file is clean: Pearson assessed and cleared him just a few months ago.

Pynne has been recruited by Pearson as a corporate saboteur. Since Pearson's death he lives in terror of discovery. He has a growing relationship with Gentle. He has the power to FEED THE FISH, and a Shackleton high level data dump concealed in a microdot on his fingernail.

TWITCH FACTOR: 80% (fear of discovery)

Keywords: Foolhardy, Genius, Naive, Inferiority Complex, Computing, Biology.

Strength: Courage, Intellect.

Flaw: Overbearing (insecure) Ego, Physically Weak, Need to be Admired. Sense of Destiny.

Anger: The Company, The lockdown, Dickheads from Security, Abuse of power.

Passion: Life, Evolution, Universal Pattern, His own Genius, Cai Gentle (growing).

Fear: Not being Admired, Failure, Capture, Torture, Humiliation.

Phobia: Violence. Open Spaces.

Days till end of mission rotation: 470.

Company Voting Shares: 2.

Expected mission bonus: Three million New Yen.



PLAYER GUIDELINES

Players are challenged to reveal more depth about their characters over time, and try to externalise, to bring into gamespace through action and dialogue the challenges, dead-ends, decisions and transformations that they face.

One of the wonderful things about *Aliens* is that every combat scene revealed something new about characters and relationships. Spectacle served both character and story. We're trying to do the same –the stress of game action is a mechanism for character and relationship transformation.

In moments of stress, do pcs act together, trust each other? Who do they trust? Why? Who are their friends and enemies?

GM GENRE & STYLE

This is a movie. A horror movie. Run the action sequences as a horror movie: fog of war, confusion, and fear. Shots go wild. Magazines empty very very quickly. Shadows keep moving.

- Building and maintaining atmosphere is of high priority.
- Psychological and philosophical concepts are ubiquitous.
- Ambiguity is frequently present.
- Long-sustained, creepy images are used more often than jump scares.
- Pacing is deliberate, slow. Then chaos erupts.

The module is not just about blood, it's about ideas that are very stressful.

RESOLUTIONS

Story comes first. Encourage playing-to-genre players who externalise their inner feelings and bring inner and intrapersonal conflicts into gamespace. When system is required, use either Twitch Factor or Budda-budda-budda.

TWITCH FACTOR

Twitch Factor is a general measure of stability, sanity, and keeping-your-coolness. Lower is better. Roll sparingly in intense moments or when PCs try heroics.

BUDDA-BUDDA-BUDDA

The louder and longer your vocalisation, the more accurate your fire. Can also be applied to giving orders, not panicking, distracting the monster, etc.

PLAYER HANDOUTS

Players should read these background briefings before play. None of the handouts contain spoilers, all are safe for pre-game perusal.

- Xenomorph Background Briefing (7 page PDF). Shackleton station, recent events, and the slow war.
- Mission Personnel Briefing (8 page PDF). Character portraits and general background to help you choose characters for play.
- Shackleton Station Schematic (Poster)

If possible, characters should be chosen and read before play begins.

YOUR PLAYER BRIEFING

Talk about your SAFE GAME protocols. This is of key importance. Your player journey will be a safe one.

This is a movie. A horror movie.

Whatever you think about the 3rd Alien movie, it is clearly about mourning. And guilt. Survivor guilt.

I don't know who the heroes are in this. There might not be any. As GM, I represent the universe. The universe is cruel.

Describe what you see—use the convention of helmet cameras and pulse link vocals.

In the midst of horror, we seek a tiny small moment of peace. An exchange of comfort, of friendship. A tiny small moment of perfect joy.

- There is conflict within.
- There is conflict between.
- There is conflict without.

NOTES

NOTES

[THIS IS A PLAYER
HANDOUT]

XENOMORPH PLAY

LOCKDOWN

RSV *Shackleton*—csiro-billington deep space research station

Darkness.

We begin with darkness, expanding and eternal and complete.

We fall, tumbling through nothingness, a vast slow motion ballet. The darkness is flecked with minute dust-like white specks: cold and small and unimaginably distant.

With time two such specks grow steadily larger, assuming the form of incandescent spheres—twin binary stars. The first is a small yellow star, its lesser companion a red dwarf, locked so close that they touch, exchanging the raw gaseous stuff of creation. A scattered family of planets fall sullenly about the pair, balls of gas and ice and rock.

Fiorina (Fury) 161 is the second planet of five; and the only one to nurture indigenous life. In the planet's orbit, a glistening metallic speck.

RSV *Shackleton*, csiro-billington's deep space research station. a series of cylindrical levels radiating from a central hub. Its core of metal refinery and life support was shipped across six parsecs from Gateway. The material for its further construction was mined from local asteroids, the ore smelted in an atomic furnace at the station's base.

Established now for eight years, *Shackleton* is a typical orbital research station—labs and workshops, docks and storage areas, offices, crew quarters, gymnasiums, recreation areas, research bays and life support modules. It is home to eight hundred and twenty Company staff and their children, plus a small contingent of artificial persons: some fourteen hundred in total. A typical Company station, *Shackleton* is strictly hierarchical in both layout and operation, and is organised by occupation level and voting share, from the executive C&C in Toorak dome through the Kilda and Fitzroy and Collingwood hubs to the machinery and decommissioned furnaces of Geelong. The legal and organisational authority of the station Executive is absolute. Security is paramount: there is little outside contact, except through highly censored and dated media feeds.

Station personnel are highly trained professionals, a space-going elite. Everyone multi-tasks, everyone has two or more jobs. Most are on extended three or five year contracts.

Shackleton is a Company station. The Company, the Corporation,

'Kiy-ro' —csiro-billington environments. Kiy-ro — 'Greening your galaxy', 'Tomorrow's worlds, today'. The Company says that *Shackleton*'s prime purpose is astrophysics research, scanning the cosmos for distortions in the quantum weave of nothingness. This may even be partially true.

DROP BEARS

Part of the *Shackleton* security unit comprises an informal group known as the Drop Bears. In the station's construction phase they were vacuum welders and construction techs, performing dangerous EVA and frame assembly work. With construction complete, many of those who signed up for a second *Shackleton* rotation joined station security.

The Drop Bears are known for their larrikin spirit (muted since the recent death of security officer and Drop Bear Steven 'Ripper' Pearson in an airlock accident), and fierce group loyalty.

SLOW WAR

The Company is at war. It is a slow war, a careful war, but no less deadly for that. It is a secret war that must be carefully screened from outsiders and shareholders. The enemy is a rival corporation, Weyland-Yutani, together with its pawns the United Americas, the Colonial Marines, and the Interstellar Commerce Board.

Once power resided in nations, with their armies and diplomats and propagandists. But nations have failed and withered away. They are empty husks. All that remains are the Corporations. Corporations are the present. Corporations are the future.

On *Shackleton*, the slow corporation war has entered a deadly phase. Two hundred days ago, a Weyland-Yutani secret surveillance vessel was detected close to the station. There was a brief but expensive exchange of missiles. The spy vessel was destroyed.

The incident never happened. The incident had to be cleansed. All evidence had to be removed, even if it meant scouring every tiny scrap of twisted glass and metal from a quarter of a million cubic kilometres of vacuum, proof against the search and investigation that would surely come.

Shackleton Executive initiated effective martial law, total lockdown. As the slow weeks progressed, paranoia and suspicion rose to fever pitch. External communications were cut entirely for weeks at a time. There were rumours of enemy escape capsules, of survivors taken aboard *Shackleton*, even of *Shackleton* personnel shuttles that never made it back to Gateway.

The station has become a hell hole of low morale and fearful paranoia. Several personnel have been removed from active duty.

Tokens of frustration and dissent are beginning to manifest. They are all relatively low level—graffiti and anonymous personal messages, hacked reports and false breakdown alerts. Executive has named these outbreaks evidence of an active terrorist cell with considerable technical expertise—traitors and spies. Station security has been tasked with tracking down the cell.

LIFE DURING WARTIME

Shackleton is at war. Survival is order and hierarchy and routine. Survival means efficiency. Survival means obedience.

Outside is vacuum. Outside, the universe. The immensity of isolation empties your humanity, strips away all colour, all spontaneity of emotion. Your world is a constant fight against clinical depression, outlined in flickering blue-grey fluorescence.

Static all channels.

This is a secure command. Every breath and heartbeat is monitored.

You dream of open landscape and wake fitfully, drenched in sweat. The stress is constant. You are always waiting for the next alarm, the next systems failure, the next breakdown of mind or flesh or heart.

This is a command in lockdown, a command at war. *But you are not warriors.*

You constantly check for shuttle arrivals or non-corporate pulse bands, desperate for the smallest byte of contact with loved ones greenside. You watch your bank balance rise and try to convince yourself that somehow it's worthwhile.

Time moves too slowly: an hour can be agony, a shift an eternity. Everyone counts down the days till the end of their rotation.

RSV *Shackleton*. Life during wartime.

The stark binary of survival: claustrophobia and madness within, eternal, endless nothingness, agoraphobia and death without. The agoraphobic terror that comes from gazing into infinity.

MISSION CALL

In the dark hours after general curfew, station security control is bathed in shadow.

Quiet all decks. *Shackleton*'s tiny steel-enclosed world of some fourteen hundred fragile souls lies sleeping. A few rest peacefully, others not. All dream. Perhaps even MOTHER dreams.

With a soft repeated beeping, the watch officer's screen wakens to life. Down-scrolling letters reflect in the glass of a space helmet.

MOTHER calls, cryptic and insistent. Something is amiss. MOTHER has something that needs doing.

On *Shackleton* a woman is sleeping.

On *Shackleton* a woman awakes.

In the darkness, someone is weeping.

CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS

- Gould at his desk in Security, drinking. There has been unprecedented high level secure traffic, even ftl tachyon pulses. Darwin is putting on the pressure.
- Gentle sitting motionless in her quarters, meditating.
- Conrad on sweat machine at the gym. Is she angry?
- Pynne sitting in a quiet corner of the coffee drop, watching, anxious. Thinking about a woman. Is it time to FEED THE FISH?
- Crowe, furtive, crouched over a screen in his quarters, absorbed in what he is watching. Is he high?

MARGARET

Gould is summoned by the station head.

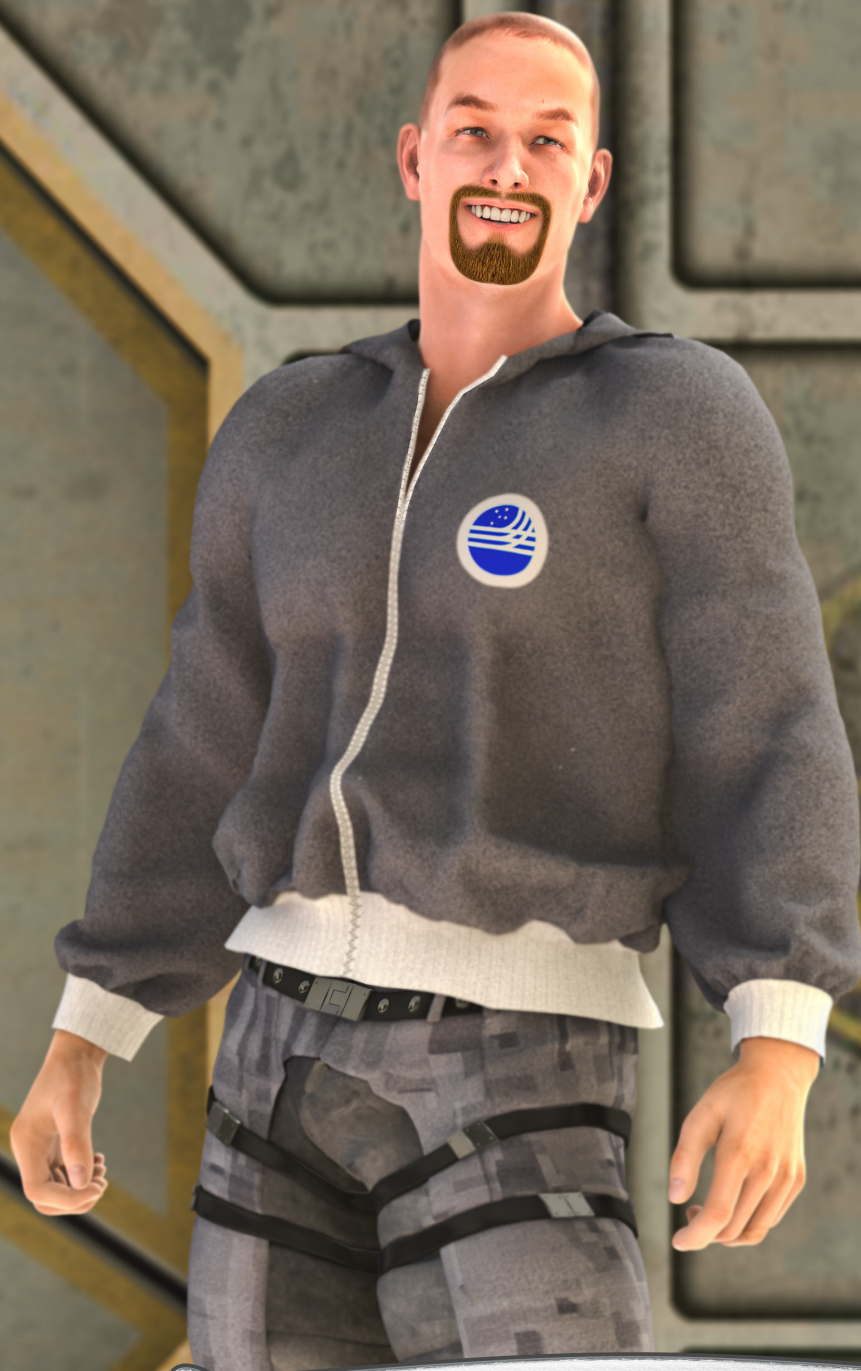
Margaret Baron, Ops Room, Toorak

- Discussion about androids
- Mission to investigate an abandoned Colonial Marines ship on course to *Shackleton*.
- High Darwin interest
- Kath Argent—the A team, have temporarily lost contact. They signalled a potential biohazard.

Margaret Baron is a corporate, the Executive Officer of *Shackleton*, and responsible for all high level and security operations. [Maggie Thatcher].

Surrounded by a silent detail of identical Kens—security replicants, androids—their faces unchanged from their first models nearly 80 years ago, familiar faces drawn from Baron's youth.

Artificial persons. Androids, by law, are afforded the status of persons. Citizens. But you've been involved in enough terminations to know that The Company often makes modifications to enable skinjobs to do special tasks.



STEVEN JALIL PEARSON

RSV SHACKLETON

21 JULY 2145—2 JULY 2179

“WITH US ALWAYS”

We commit his body to the Void.

You know from more than a few retirements of your own that the Company might add a few extra chips to compel various behaviours, chips which you have to carefully remove before forwarding the holographic brain cases for respectful internment at the Silicon Trust on Titan.

Androids are people. Margaret doesn't seem to care. Does Gould?

Margaret coos like a dove, hisses like a serpent, bays like a hound [in a contrived upper-class accent] reminiscent not of real toffs but of Wodehouse aunts.

Ah, Mr Gould. I usually make up my mind about a man in ten seconds, and I very rarely change it And I like you Mr. Gould. We can do business together. The trouble, though, is that your spine does not always reach your brain. Sometimes It seems I am a tigress surrounded by hamsters.

This situation represents a unique opportunity. We must be bold. Are you afraid, Mr Gould? Frightened? Frit? Can't take it? Utter rubbish. You do not achieve anything without trouble, ever. This lady's not for turning.

We seem to be experiencing communication difficulties with our boarding team. Secure the Sulaco before it docks at Shackleton. Contain and assess any biohazard. Priority to return samples for comprehensive analysis, assist with the evacuation of any who might require medical treatment.

This has the status of a combat mission, with combat bonuses. You have complete discretion. Avoid evidence. Contain and dispose of any problems. It is also completely secure. Off the Record. No comms. Afterward, no one talks. Ever. Anyone talks, they lose their shares.

Complete forfeit of shares.

Be aware of what is expendable and what is not. Do whatever the mission requires. Mr Gould, you have my authority and protection. Remember who cares for you. Do you think I am heartless, cruel? Let me share with you a brutal but powerful truth, Mr Gould. The company has evolved to perfection. It comprises a small number of sadists and a large number of masochists. And I, Mr Gould, am no masochist.

Research stations like Shackleton seem to be the kind of project that attracts... idealists. Liberals. Free thinkers. This is not always ideal.

And Mr Gould, one final thing. If you want to cut your own throat, don't come to me for a bandage.

MILSCI folder on desk. And an incoming shuttle inventory.

OUTBOUND

Personal packs.

The very finest in crowd containment and control. Tear Gas, black sound generators, blink lamps, bruisers, taser batons...

All of the high end anti-personnel stuff has been signed out by Argent and her team.

Security staff have their Armat M41As—10mm pulse-action air-cooled automatic assault rifles. Gentle should be adverse to violence. Do the party want Pynne armed?

(Pynne has a gift of overriding equipment locks.)

Equipment Bay & Customs

Turn off personal data transmitters, erase sensitive station and Kiy-ro information from the data dots in your thumb.

"If the Colonial Marines capture you, you're fried."



Board shuttle *Dundee 2*.

'Gravity drive is good to go, fusion seed is optimal, you are green across the board. Punch it Cai!'

Cue high-g shuttle flight.

SULACO

[The action aboard Sulaco echoes the William Gibson script. The italicised quotes below are from the script.]

First radar bounces are much larger than they should be.

The silent field of stars—eclipsed by the dark bulk of an approaching ship.

A towering cliff of metal, *Sulaco*. Like a pulse rifle strapped to a hyperdrive.

A articulate cloud surrounds the ship.

Close approach: a military vessel, potentially deadly.

Docked on dorsal hull a small, very powerful colonial marines ship— the *Angry Bird*.

Transponder

TROOP TRANSPORT *Sulaco* CMC 846A/BETA MISSION/LV-426/RETURN STATUS RED

(The close-band distress signal ceased four days ago.)

Computers linked, systems check optimal across the board. Looking good, in the zone.

A little starboard yaw, lock that down.

DOCKING BAY, SULACO

Atmosphere tainted - fires

Temperature - standard

Let's hope gravity holds (ha!)

Integrated assessments

Initiating pdt search (Personal data transmitter)- inconclusive

Communications: bad. Clear line of sight, tightband or external speakers

High above the boarding hall, beeping from a security panel as you pass through the customs screens.

Artificial Lifeform Alert

(This is Gentle. Cover up or distract?)

Bay 3 - evidence of firefight, exposure to vacuum. Power loader, acid burns on deck.

As team enter, they find Bishop's twisted and tangled lower torso. They see the blast damage on the drop ship.

Bishop's legs and hip, broken, grotesquely twisted, still in fatigues, the white android blood clotted into powder. On close inspection, tiny green particles stain the viscera. [Alien spores].

(Pynne may recognise them as a potential lifeform. He will need to find a lab to be sure.)

Bay 5 is sealed: AIRLOCK MALFUNCTION

Exterior airlock has been forced open with tremendous force. Broken. (Alien Queen re-entry)

Bay 1 contains *Shackleton* shuttle: *Bunyip*

Team can obtain terminal access to sections of the ship's log

- Explosion in the cryogenic chamber
- Fire in a multitude of locations
- Fire control systems have been overridden and turned off
- Ship in emergency mode: evacuation primed
- Heading to *Shackleton* only large port in the Neroid Sector with an active beacon.
- Original complement of 12 colonial marines, android, W-Y company representative, and a civilian mission specialist who was former warrant officer of a merchant vessel. Now one marine (wounded), the civilian... and a nine year old girl. All in cyro-sleep. Sleepers have been transferred to an EEV. But the capsule is registering launch failure—hatches haven't sealed.

So, the bio-readout gives us the warrant officer, one—count him— marine, and a nine-year-old girl. Makes you wonder what happened out there, doesn't it?

Recent alerts

- Dropship dock in cargo bay 3 (*Aliens* finale)
- Airlock opens in cargo bay 3 (*Aliens* finale)
- 90 minutes later—airlock entry from eva port 7 in Bay 5—no ID
- Attention. Integrity breach, Cargo Lock 3.
- Security alert. Integrity breach, B Deck
- *Bunyip* docks
- *Angry Bird* docks
- Increasing number of Fire Alerts
- Evacuation alert
- *Dundee II* docks

EXPLORING SULACO

BUNYIPS

Kath Argent, overall head of security and leader of the *Bunyip* security A team. She has been working on 'special projects' for six months now, since the missile exchange that destroyed the Weyland Yutani surveillance ship.

Argent is the only survivor. She is wrapped inside the alien hive. She is occasionally conscious, and will activate her radio.

Argent has the special attention of the Queen (see Argent 2). If rescued, she will transform directly (Argent 3).

COLONIAL MARINE SCOUTS

The Angry Bird

Chen is badly wounded, will be used by xenomorphs to set an ambush. Mendez: the mobile survivor, is setting fires throughout the ship, trying to avoid xenomorphs.

Squirt transmission... Military decryption standard.

Setting incendiary mines. Using flares in close combat.

(Team will find used flare near splash of acid blood.)

COLONIAL TRANS AP-49 FLARE SIGNAL OXY-ATMOSPHERIC 20MM.

(If team member dies, Mendez can be replacement PC. Character sheet:

Colonial Marine. Just like Vasquez.)

BISHOP

Split in two.

Upper half taken by *Bunyips* to their C&C in a science lab. Partial reactivation.

Still spores in entrails.

Bishop, Science Officer, Hyperdyne A-slash-5, Mark 3, serial number PL3358172438.

Permission to inspect software safety protocols.

THE SLEEPERS

Ripley, Newt and Hicks are in cyrosleep about Emergency Evacuation Vehicle (EEV) unit 2650. Ripley has been impregnated, and will soon realise this when brought to consciousness. Hicks is badly wounded.

Someone must be thinking it. What if they're infected?

Waking Hicks or Ripley will introduce hero-level NPCs. For focus, keep them asleep unless the pcs make a major effort to wake them.

Ripley's hypersleep capsule has suffered acid damage.

Newt can be good to remind pcs of their humanity, and the costs if the infestation escapes to Shackleton or to Earth.

Rebecca. Her name is Rebecca.

Saving them all would be nice.

PC PHOBIAS

Play on these, remind, give them some quiet moments to feel the fear. Roll TWITCH if necessary.

- Conrad: Abandonment by comrades
- Crowe: Silence
- Gentle: Violence, weapons
- Gould: Choking
- Pynne: Violence, open spaces

GENTLE

Gentle will feel persist compulsions to observe everyone's conversations, to collect observations and data on the alien infestation, and to build her relationship with Pynne, with the aim of having him reveal his true loyalty. (Discuss this quietly with the player). She may fight against these ideas, yet cannot articulate the conflict.

She was Pearson's secret lover.

Gentle doesn't like weapons or violence, unless her mission objectives are threatened.

Gentle may be revealed as an android, either at the Artificial Lifeform Alert on entry, or if she is wounded and bleeds white sap. Pynne may be able to help her *partially* overcome her compulsions if they find a lab (though this will also take away her obsession with him). He may screw her up completely. Gould knows about illegal chips, and can be helpful. The *Shackleton* data dump on Pynne's fingernail will also help.

PYNNE

Pynne has been expecting to be picked up by Security. His paranoia is running high. He knows the truth about Pearson. His programming skills can be handy (though not always against military grade systems).

GOULD, CROWE AND CONRAD

The drop bears instinctively cover and protect each other in dangerous situations. Their intuition and training run deep, Conrad to the left, Crowe front and centre, Gould to the right. *If they let it happen.*

Gould knows enough to recognise that csiro-billington will try to use the aliens as a weapon. He will believe the same of the Colonial Marines, as they are puppets to Weyland Yutani.

Gould has strong feelings for Conrad. He is protecting her as best he can. Conrad may share the infatuation.

Conrad has decked Crowe, and publicly threatened to kill him. They will be extremely wary of each other.

Conrad knows that both Crowe and Gould have lied to her about the death of Pearson.

At some point, there will be a meltdown. *Stay frosty people.*

Conrad may be impressed by Pynne's ability to infiltrate secure IT systems.

SCENES

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

A facehugger first—small, more of a nuisance. A rat?

More than any other terrestrial creature it resembled a horseshoe crab with a flexible tail. It advanced across the smooth floor on articulated legs fashioned of an unusually carbon-rich chitin. Its physiology was simple, straightforward, and designed to carry out but one biological function and to do that better than any comparable construction known. No machine could have done better.

Moving shadows. Nothing on infrared. Then, xenomorphs.

No pain, no fear of death. Never really living, so never really dying—a kind of immortality

Stripped of context, it glittered with a rare and silent beauty. Her teeth glitter like the stars.

A single imperative inspired its relentless search, drove it mindlessly onward. Not food, for it was not hungry and did not eat. Not sex, for it had none. It was motivated solely and completely by the desire to procreate. Though organic, it was as much a machine as the computers that guided the ship, though it was possessed of a determination quite foreign to them.

They are all beautiful.

To honour you with its seed. With its darkness.

The xenomorph isn't bad. It is doing exactly what it is supposed to do. Humanity, on the other hand, has within itself a tremendous capacity for evil. And sometimes for good.

BIOSAMPLE

If Pynne can find a lab.

An organic supercomputer—tightly coiled spheroids of DNA like material—recognising strands from Earth, from Fiorina, from Ceti, god knows where else. Most inactive. Long strings of DNA, RNA, PNA, insert silicon-based strands you've never seen before, carbon nanotech.

As the screen fills with an image that might be a bizarre landscape, its lines and textures recalling the interior of the derelict ship in Alien.

Something shivers and shakes and takes form in the cube of light: a double helix threaded with green and red beads of light.

The alien genetic material looks like a cubist's vision of an art deco staircase, its asymmetrical segments glowing day-glow green and purple.

That's a biological structure? More like part of a machine...

Perhaps it is the fruit of some ancient experiment... A living artefact, the product of genetic engineering... A weapon. Perhaps we are looking at the end result of yet another arms race...

FIRE IN THE HOLD

"Fire suppression system inactivated. Fire suppression system inactivated. Exhaust system inactivated. Exhaust system inactivated."

INT. SERVICE SHAFT

Party's POV, looking up: ladders, platforms, catwalks, bundles of fiberoptic lines linking the components of the computer mainframe, drifting smoke. The bundles loops of fiber optics have a faint, pearlescent glow.

Smoke hangs in strata.

Someone coughs. They're all feeling the fire-depleted oxygen-level.

Flames in zero-g burn at a lower temperature, slower and with less oxygen than in normal gravity. This means that materials used to extinguish fire must be present in higher concentrations. Most use CO2 extinguishers.

A female voice, calm and serenely artificial, echoes about the chamber. "Attention. Explosive gases are accumulating within the compartment. Explosive gases are accumulating within the compartment. Evacuate immediately."

Beneath the floor something explodes. Bright, actinic light flares, then a spurt of sharp yellow flame. Darker smoke begins to fill the chamber. The overhead lights flicker uncertainly.

"Fire suppression system inactivated. Fire suppression system inactivated. Exhaust system inactivated. Exhaust system inactivated."

THE ARMORY

Pynne will be needed to open the armory.

Armat M41A— a 10mm pulse-action air-cooled automatic assault rifle. The standard service variant has an over-and-under configuration incorporating a PN 30mm pump-action grenade launcher.

10 millimeter explosive tip caseless. Standard light armor piercing round

M83A2 SADAR—Shoulder-mounted Active-seeking Disposable Anti- armour Rocket

C19 plastic flamethrowers

Body armour

COLONIAL TRANS AP-49 FLARE SIGNAL OXY-ATMOSPHERIC 20MM

Ordinance—blinders, projectors, low level neutron stuff.

ARGENT I

Radio pulse. "It's getting tighter". "Leave. Please leave."

The voice is familiar. In pain. Intermittent.

BRAIN SALAD SURGERY

"Behind You." "Bu... bu... hind you."

Twitch rolls not to panic.

Xenomorph with extensive burns. Is it blind? Can it be captured?

AMBUSH

A colonial marine, delirious, calling for help. Chen, with heavy blood loss, being used to draw team into ambush by xenomorphs.

Chen is at the end of a long corridor, with gantries overhead. The lights are off, the smoke is heavy.

Signs of extreme intelligence!

THE WRONG ENEMY

Something moving in the darkness.

Gun barrel against your faceplate. A colonial marine.

A long moment of indecision.

"You're shooting at the wrong target."

"Why?"

"Because if I were the enemy, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Hello Mendez.

INCENDIARY MINE

Step, and click. Don't move.

Set by Mendez against xenomorphs.

To have an alien encounter at this moment would be very cruel.

"IT'S IN THE SUIT"

Someone does something stupid. Their suit is torn.

Minutes later, sensation on leg – blood? No, it's something solid.

It's moving up your leg. It's in the suit.

"IT'S IN THE SUIT!"

GRAVITY WELL

Gravity may go down. Team might try to turn it off. Fires turn very strange in micro-g.

Drop Bears and Gentle have extensive micro-gravity experience. Pynne will flounder badly.

Aliens will adapt easily.

THE HIVE

Tunnel—only Pynne and Gentle can squeeze through.

The tunnel has been sealed with a plug of Alien resin. Human bones, weapons, and Marine helmets protrude from the biomech convolutions of the resin-wall.

... slides back smooth as silk, revealing a brightly lit room filled with pristine space gear and an indeterminate number of Aliens, their appendages tangled black and shiny as a fresh catch of eels.

This is down by the main air-scrubber. System says those cameras are still operational, but there's something in the way. Something big...

The tunnel, which widens here as it approaches the massive air-scrubber, has been transformed; its lights are dimly visible through shrouds of resin. Vast ribs of the stuff sweep up from a dim and monstrous shape that covers the deck at the base of the scrubber; we're looking into an Alien grotto, black and pearlescent, and obscene fairyland. The shape's symmetry suggest function.

Patient DRUMMING of the air-scrubber's giant fans. a portable halogen flood

The central shape is revealed as an enormous mutant Queen. The thing is splayed on its back, mortared into the mass of resin, its vestigial head toward you. Its abdomen is arched like an inverted scorpion-tail, tipped with a swollen, semi-translucent sac that ripples and pulses in the glare of a lamp. A biomechanical birth-factory.

ARGENT 2

The resin-filled chamber emits a faint, dull green luminescence.

As eyes adjust a humanoid silhouette—a buddha figure seated in lotus upon a small rock, a pool of something black and viscous spreads across the floor.

Xenomorphs crouched unmoving before it, as if in prayer.

Above, the Queen.

The Queen screams her rage, scrambles after him like a famished mantis.

Closer—they are dead, decomposing. From bodies, small sperm-like white worm things are slithering towards the egg and burrowing into its base.

ARGENT 3

If rescued, Argent will be very ill. She will eventually transform. Unless Gentle's programming locks have been broken, she will do everything to keep Argent alive, but will be unable to convey that the woman is undergoing massive cellular change.

As the chittering tooth-burr becomes a shrill SHRIEK of inhuman rage, the transformation takes place. Segmented biomechanoid tendons squirm beneath the skin of her arms. Her hands claw at one another, tearing redundant flesh from alien talons. then the shriek dies. She straightens up. And, rips her face apart in a single movement, the glistening claws coming away with skin, eyes, muscle, teeth, and splinters of bone...The sound of ripping cloth. the new beast sheds its human skin in a single sinuous, bloody ripple, molting on fast forward... An instant of utter silence as the featureless mask moves. From side to side. Scanning.

ENDGAME

Your endgame may take place aboard *Sulaco* or *Shackleton*.

If the *Sulaco* is docked at *Shackleton*, the aliens will take over the station very quickly. Much of this can happen off-stage while the team are in decontamination or goal. The Gibson script provides lots of detail.

ESCAPING SULACO

What about the sleepers?

Someone is contaminated, either known by all or concealed. Gentle may have alien samples.

Bishop is technically part of the ship and not the crew. He is the navigator and interface. With assistance, he can take control of the *Sulaco*.

To escape on the *Angry Bird*, the team will need a Colonial Marine officer or Bishop.

They can also escape on the *Bunyip* or *Dundee 2*.

With Bishop's assistance, they might fiddle the overrides on the fusion package to blow the ship.

Gentle's programming will force her to bring back samples.

RETURNING TO SHACKLETON

DECONTAMINATION CHAMBER

Drenched, naked, furious. A scalding downpour as techs in biohazard gear scrub you down with detergents and antibacterial agents.

On Docking, team are detained or arrested, depending on Gould's report and Gentle's (secret) debrief once she falls asleep.

At very least, bio decontamination and quarantine. The Botany Bay

Impromptu holding cells in the zoology park animal pens. Gentle and Conrad, Crowe and Pynne.

Can see rows of cyro-sleeper capsules bearing colonial marine insignia. These are from the *Shokaku*, the weyland-yutani ship surveillance destroyed six months ago.

You're not getting out.

Pynne prepared for interrogation.

Gentle intuits that if she sleeps all that she knows will be uploaded to MOTHER.

Toorak level androids running things, not wearing hazard suits.

Security staff seem to be volunteers, some have military backgrounds but all are inexperienced in security matters.

All guards wear biohazard suits.

NOTES

One way glass—can glimpse couples and children walking in the green of the park, amidst the verdant greenery: kangaroos, koalas and kookaburras.

Early morning—kookaburras silent. Hanging upside down, cocooned.

ESCAPING SHACKLETON

Margaret - old and tired. "Kill them all."

What about the sleepers?

Executive have alien samples. Shipping them back to Darwin.

Flee the station?

Warn others—general evacuation?

Pynne might FEED THE FISH—adds to general mayhem, perhaps a cover for other actions.

Blow the station?

If Mendez survives—get to a transmitter, military squirt, call in the *Guantanamo Bay*, which is a silent observer to *Shackleton* since the destruction of the *Shokaku*.

ESCALATE:

- Save selves?
- Save *Shackleton*?
- Save humanity?

You're a species again. United against a common enemy...

This goes far beyond mere interspecies competition. These creatures are to biological life what antimatter is to matter.

There isn't room for the both of you, not in this universe.

FADE OUT IMAGE: *Shackleton*.... Escape capsule, tumbling through interstellar vacuum. A new star explodes against the blackness.

Fade in and fade out should reflect each other, bookend the story. Choose your image.

MODULE STRUCTURE

INTRODUCE LEADS

Plural leads. The player party.

"What makes the PCs special?"

- Gould—teacher
- Gentle—trust in others, optimism in human adaptability
- Conrad—will and determination never to be beaten
- Pynne—conscience, moral courage
- Crowe—destruction, trust in Gould

CHARACTER FLAW

- Gould—outer apathy, despair
- Gentle—obedience, passivity
- Conrad—anger
- Pynne—fear
- Crowe—loneliness, shame

All can be touched by children, or the thought of children.

HINT THE SOUL

Human trust and dignity can overcome any obstacle. Chance for a moment of kindness.

MEET THE OPPOSING FORCE

The group is divided, its own opposing force. There is also

- Margaret, head of Security
- csiro-billington
- The Alien Queen
- Colonial Marines
- Weyland Yutani

THE SMALL DEATH

The PCs will usually have a brief moment of clarity before their life changes, a moment in which they will see that their life is in neutral or stalled. This gives us hope for change.

Gould's interview with Margaret. What is the future?

THE SPARK

Sulaco, mission. Pearson's death.

DELIBERATION

Intuition that life will never be the same again.

Unprecedented high level secure traffic, even ftl tachyon pulses—Crowe and Pynne.

THE BIG STEP

Realisation of what is happening on *Sulaco*.

Team depends on Gould. Margaret has assigned other mission priorities. He has already betrayed Conrad.

STATE THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can the group unite to survive? Will they reach out to save others? Will they remain faithful to the Company? If discovered, how will the group react to Gentle's cyborg identity? To Pynne's sabotage? What if Conrad discovers the truth about Pearson's death?

The stakes increase as the plot progresses.

- Personal survival
- Station survival
- Human devastation

Even as the stakes rise, the Central Question tends to stay the same.

CROSSING A THRESHOLD

Consider a beat that preys on the party's flaws.

- Immoral apathy
- Bullying
- Disunity
- Distrust

It can help set the tone for what might lie ahead, and reaffirm that leads have some commitment to leaving the ordinary behind.

THE PCS EASIEST RECOURSE

Follow the company's orders. Sacrifice others. Get in and get out.

THE WANDERER

The PCs explore a world they are not accustomed to and it's usually where flaws are exposed. This is when they will be tested and learn lessons that will pay off for them later.

Sulaco. The xenomorphs.

THE PINCH (AKA THE WALL)

The more options that are exhausted, the more the PCs become aware they must be willing to try new things. This is also a good time to re-establish relationships, goals and stakes.

STRETCH

This is often the moment of initial growth or change for the group. They have to try something new or let go of something from the past, even if they are still not on the right path to solving the problem.

Gould recognises that the company doesn't need him, and that he knows too much.

MIDPOINT

Retreat, leave survivors to their fate. Company or community?

STATE OF GRACE

If the PCs feel they have achieved some sort of victory, it can be followed by what is often called a brief period, or state, of grace. A reward. It can be a minute long, it can be ten. This is a moment when the PCs get a glimpse of how things could be different. Think of it as a time to reflect before the journey gets even more difficult.

Gratitude from Conrad? Pynne or Gentle accepted?

Group action, someone saved, breakdown of barriers.

PRESSURE MOUNTS

Following the theory of dramatic escalation, it makes sense that if the stakes have been raised and the PCs find themselves in a deeper mess, then this is when we begin to see and feel the vice tightening.

This is a popular time for a romantic scene.

You're on the right path as long as tension (brought on by rising stakes and rising dangers) increases to a near breaking point.

THINGS FALL APART

A setback occurs that forces the PCs to re-examine their goal, and pushes them to the brink of quitting, if not to quit altogether. Another option is a false triumph, prompting the PCs to think they have solved the problem.

Whichever method you choose, it should look to the players like matters have spiralled so out of control and the problem has become so grave, that there is no way they will ever be able to fix it.

Ironically, this low point may just be the death of old ideas the PCs must shed in order to finally grow.

ROCK BOTTOM

Like a rain cloud hanging overhead, this is when the big gloom hits.

THE CHOICE

The PCs are best defined by the decisions they make at times like this.

Betray the Company. Blow the Ship.

Margaret—"We have loose ends—do what you do best."

A decision to face up to the challenge once and for all. This is the moment of transformation into a hero.

PREPARING FOR THE LAST STAND

The momentum builds as the party prepares for The Last Stand. Gather weapons and ammo. Study schematics. Tend to wounds. Speak honestly. Be who you are.

THE LAST STAND

This is the big, final confrontation when the central conflict must be resolved, and it's no time for compromise.

The Hive. The retreat with sleepers.

NOTES

THE BLEAKEST MOMENT

This moment should be the extreme opposite of the Climax. Its purpose is to pull the players as far in one direction as possible before blasting them back the other way in the Climax.

The aliens are winning. The party will die.

FULL POTENTIAL

The team unites in common purpose.

THE CLIMAX

This is the moment of highest drama in the story.

By harnessing the special powers and insights gained during the course of the adventure, the team wins out.

Team unity: they act together. They trust each other. This is when the Central Question is finally answered.

DENOUEMENT

All the loose strings are tied up and we get a gist of where the characters are going from here.

The goal here is to wrap it up as swiftly as possible.

FADE OUT IMAGE

What's the very last image you want the players to see before the story ends?

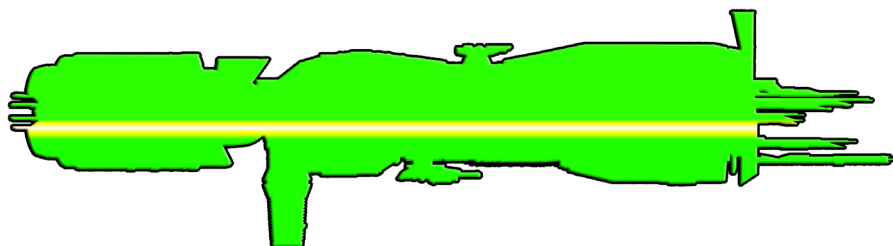
A well done closing image can ingrain itself memory for years, if not a lifetime.

A new star in the empty void.



A1: THE SULACO

NOTES



The Conestoga class starships were originally designed as troop and logistics transports with only limited defensive capabilities. As the class aged, and revisions and upgrades took place, the ships were equipped with more and more weapons, until the entire class was upgraded to light assault ships, with some small space control and orbital bombardment role. These ships will remain in the USASF/Marine inventory until the first of the new Bougainville attack transports are taken into service, at which time the remaining Conestogas will be slowly taken out of service.

The *Sulaco* was the thirteenth ship of the class, and has received all the usual revisions of the class. Although the overall armaments between ships vary somewhat, the *Sulaco* is a reasonable example of the class.

The *Sulaco* was never a very lucky ship. Since she has been commissioned there have been several incidents with her, the worst ones being hit by anti-ship missiles whilst in orbit over Linna 349, and a docking accident at Gateway station which killed five people.

Sulaco was lost during her deployment to Zeta Reticuli, with a complement of marines and two civilians.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Class; Conestoga-class light assault carrier Maximum speed: 0.74 light years per sidereal day Fighters: 4 assault/cargo shuttles

Auxiliary craft: 8 UD-4L "Cheyenne" utility dropships

Armaments: 8 long-range ASAT missiles

2 x 800 MeV neutral particle beam weapons (disable electronics, range of 100,000 km)

4 kinetic energy railguns (two twin turrets) 60 orbital fragmentation mines

80 guided re-entry vehicles including bunker buster, high-explosive, and nuclear weapon warheads

Defenses: 2 x 80 MW point-defense lasers 20 decoy ballutes

2 maneuverable decoy drones

Jamming system (range of 6,000 miles in space, up to 60 miles in atmosphere)

Radar absorbing construction

Propulsion: 0.5 g (1.0 g in emergencies)

Power: 1 Westingland A-59 Lithium-Hydride Fusion Reactor

Mass 78,000 metric tons

Length 385 m (1,260 ft)

Width 50 m (164 ft)

Height 85 m (280 ft)

NOTES

A2: MODULE EVOCATIONS

Hunger to be whole.

Heart-rate and blood pressure readings look like something out of a hypertension treatment manual.

Found my peace in the soulless emptiness of space.

Are you doing this for us, or for yourself?

Spend years trying to forget all you've left behind—friends, family, career, self-respect, dignity.

For a moment, there is only darkness, then light, explosive light. Take a good look at the last thing you'll ever see.

This isn't about the company anymore. It's about us.

Four fingers and two opposable thumbs.

Nothing can stop the dreams.

Reality: the vast loneliness of our solitary, cold existence. Look into space and see the cold void of hell.

Don't quit. Adapt.

A universe from nothing.

The dead are with us always.

Big things have small beginnings.

I can carry out directives that my human counterparts might find distressing or unethical.

Run diagnostics on everything but the heads.

Hols are over, time to put on your war face.

A3: ALIENS QUOTES

NOTES

All right, sweethearts, what are you waiting for? Breakfast in bed? Another glorious day in the Corps!

All right, we waste him. No offense.

All right, sweethearts, you heard the man and you know the drill! Assholes and elbows!

Check it out! Independently targeting particle beam phalanx. Vwap! Fry half a city with this puppy. We got tactical smart missiles, phase-plasma pulse rifles, RPGs, we got sonic electronic ball breakers! We got nukes, we got knives, sharp sticks...

Did IQs just drop sharply while I was away?

Game over, man! Game's over!

Get away from her you bitch!

He's comin' in. I feel safer already.

Hey top, what's the op?

Hey, maybe you haven't been keeping up on current events, but we just got our asses kicked, pal!

Hot as hell in here. Yeah man, but it's a dry heat!

How are we doing Vasquez, talk to me?

I am the ultimate badass! State of the badass art! You do NOT wanna fuck with me.

I don't know which species is worse. You don't see them fucking each other over for a goddamn percentage.

I got signals. I got readings, in front and behind.

I guess she don't like the cornbread, either.

I may be synthetic, but I'm not stupid.

I say we take off and nuke the site from orbit. It's the only way to be sure.

I wanna introduce you to a personal friend of mine. This is an M41A pulse rifle. Ten millimeter with over-and-under thirty millimeter pump action grenade launcher.

Is this gonna be a standup fight, sir, or another bughunt?

Let's rock!!! (begins firing)

Look, man. I only need to know one thing... where they are!

Look, this is an emotional moment for all of us, okay? I know that. But, let's not make snap judgments, please.

Looks like some sort of secreted resin. Yeah, but secreted from *what*?

Man, you look just like I feel.

Not bad for a human.

Oh yeah, sure! With those things runnin' around? You can count me out.

Remember: short, controlled bursts.

Signal's clean. Range, 20 meters.

So she's talking about a thermonuclear explosion and "adios muchachos".

That could never happen now with our behavioral inhibitors. It is impossible for me to harm or by omission of action, allow to be harmed, a human being.

That's it man, game over man, game over! What the fuck are we gonna do now? What are we gonna do?

They mostly come at night... mostly.

They're coming outta the walls! They're coming outta the goddamn walls!

We're all gonna die man.

We're in the pipe, five by five.

We're on an express elevator to Hell, going down!

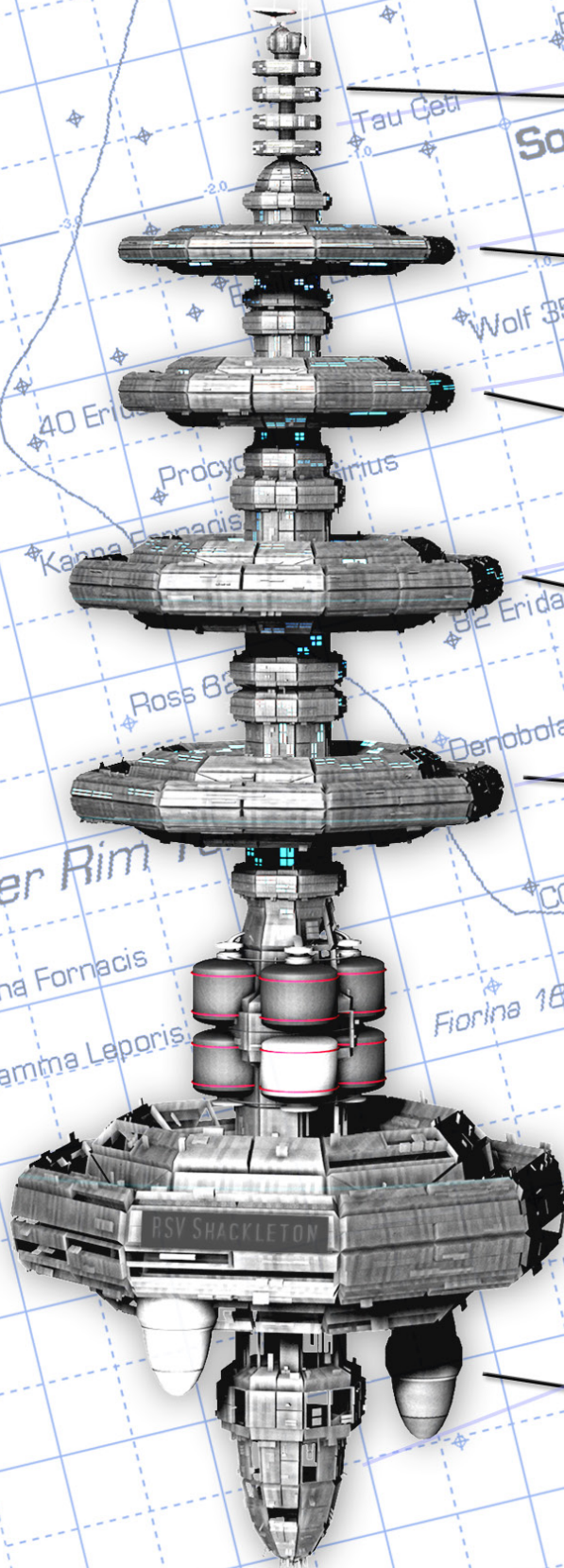
What do you mean they cut the power? How could they cut the power, man?! They're animals!

What the hell are we supposed to use, man? Harsh language?

You secure that shit, Hudson!

RSV Shackleton

csiro-billington deep space research station



Galactic Quantum
Density Mapping
Array

Toorak
Executive,
Command & Control,
Secure Research

Kilda
Health and Recreation,
Voting share crew

Fitzroy
Research, Recreation,
Voting share crew

Collingwood
Biochemical, Engineering,
Non-voting share crew

Geelong
Reactors, Industrial,
Asteroid Smelting

Port Melbourne
Main airlocks,
Customs & Cargo

csiro billington environments
Tomorrow's worlds, today

