VAC SUITS DUCT TAPE AND THE DEEP BLACK

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OVERVIEW

Vac Suits, Duct Tape and Corruption is a collaborative story-telling game about a crew of space scavengers exploring vast alien space hulks that are inimical to humans. The game requires one game master (GM) and one of more players to play the doomed crew. A game of Vac Suits takes about 3 or 4 hours.

This game tells the story of the blue collar crew of a scavenger ship as they penetrate deeper and deeper into an alien space hulk. As they penetrate the structure they may face not only pirates, alien beasts, and technical hazards, but they also the corruption that comes from being too close to thin spots in the fabric of reality. Beings from beyond space and time whisper through these thins, and their voices can drive humans mad. These are not stories of triumphant discoveries of lost technology, but of greed, insanity, and tragic death. Most of the crew will probably die, and those who don't may re-emerge as gibbering wrecks.

Chavez flicked the Hula girl stuck to her ship's comm panel as she slowly eased the *Riot Grrl* in next to the hull of the alien hulk. The wreck was immense, so it wasn't really a challenge to find a good place for the boarding charges, but it paid to be careful. Once she was a few meters from the hulk's hull she pressed the button to extend the boarding clamp. Nothing. *Fuck.*

Chavez tapped her comms and shouted "Hey, Hopper, get your fat ass to the front and get the fucking clamp extended. We're sitting here like a pretty girl at the prom with no one to dance with."

"Yeah, yeah, keep yer knickers on," came the crackled reply through her ear bud. She faintly heard the clang of wrench on metal as Hopper deployed his none-to-subtle repair techniques.

Christo, this was going to be one more thing to repair when they got back to the station, she thought. Chavez chewed on her bottom lip as nothing continued to happen. She let out a sigh when the clamp finally started to extend out of the front of the ship. The clamp locked to the hull of the alien ship, and Chavez entered the command to begin hull breach. There was a faint blue glow from inside the tunnel of the clamp as the cutting lasers went to work, and then a flash as the boarding charges detonated. She toggled the camera view to inside the clamp and saw a perfectly serviceable entry hole bored through the alien hull.

She flicked her comms again, "Alright folks, we have an entry breach, time to get your dancing shoes on. Get suited up, check your seals and we'll meet at the clamp in 10 to begin our little adventure. Dancer, don't forget actual ammo for that huge peashooter of yours this time, kay? Last time was embarrassing." Chavez smiled, stood up, and headed down to the hold to get ready.

HOW TO PLAY

Risk Roll

When your character attempts a risky task, say what you hope will happen and ask the GM and the other players what could possibly go wrong. Then gather 6-sided dice.

Take one light-colored die if the task is something your character would be able to do because of one of their Skills.

Take another light die for accepting a Devil's Bargain from another player or the GM. Devil's Bargains are described in the following section.

Add a dark-colored die if you are willing to risk your character's mind or body in order to succeed. You must include this die whenever your character uses Alien Tech.

Roll the dice. If your highest die is a:

Roll	Result…
1-3	Your character fails, and things get worse. The GM describes how. The GM may also allow your character to succeed, but things will get worse in some other way.
4-5	Your character succeeds, but there's some kind of complication. The GM describes the complication, then you describe how your character succeeds.
6	Your character succeeds. Describe how.

If your highest die is a dark die (or if a dark and light die tied for highest), and the dark die is higher than your current Corruption, add 1 to your Corruption. When you do, work with the GM to describe how the whispers warp your mind and body.

If you are unhappy with your roll and any dark die in the roll isn't the highest die, you may add a dark die to your dice pool and re-roll them all. You may keep adding a dark die and re-rolling until you're satisfied with your result or until a dark die is the highest die in your roll.

If you attempt to use a Risk Roll to defeat an Alien Beast in direct combat, you're gonna get dead. So rather than being that idiot, be smarter. Run, hide, or use Alien Tech against them. You can also fight to evade or bypass an Alien Beast, just not to kill it. Do feel free to deploy the old ultraviolence on anyone else you meet of course, just be sure that's the best plan of action.

Devil's Bargains

Space is a dangerous place, and sometimes a risky action is the best thing you can manage. The GM or any other player can offer you a bonus light die if you accept a Devil's Bargain. Common Devil's Bargains include:

 - Your character causes collateral damage or unintended harm.
 - Your character gets lost or separated from their companions.
 - Your character sacrifices an important item.
 - Your character betrays a companion.
 - Your character attracts unwanted attention.

The Devil's Bargain occurs regardless of the outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die.

The Devil's Bargain is always a free choice. If you don't like one, just reject it (or suggest how to alter it so you might consider taking it). You can always just risk your character's mind or body and take a dark die instead.

Anyone may veto or suggest alterations to a proposed Devil's Bargain, especially if it would also impact their character.

Corruption Roll

Your Corruption shows how physical and psychological trauma are starting to fray your mind at the edges. It starts at 1. But the void is whispering to you, and you can't help but listen.

When your character witnesses or undergoes something disturbing, make a Corruption Roll by rolling one dark die. If you've made a Risk Roll which includes a dark die, and that die is equal to or higher than your highest light die in that roll, your dark die is automatically considered a Corruption Roll.

If you rolled higher than your current Corruption, increase your Corruption by 1 and work with the GM to describe how the whispers from the void warp your mind and body.

Reduction Roll

When your Corruption reaches 5, you may now reduce it by acting in the interests of the whispers from the void: destroying scavenged materials, preventing the use of Alien Tech, or sabotaging the other characters' exit from the alien ship. You should do these acts in a way that does not draw attention to yourself. The more it looks like an accident or simple bad luck, the better.

Each time you act in the whispers' interest, roll one light die.

If you rolled less than your current Corruption, your betrayal goes unnoticed and you decrease your Corruption by 1. If you rolled higher than or equal to your Corruption, you may still choose to reduce your Corruption by 1, but someone will notice your attempted betrayal.

You may continue reducing your Corruption in this way when your Corruption drops below 5, until you have 1 Corruption.

Losing Your Shit

When your Corruption reaches 6, your character is lost. This is an important moment: Everyone focuses on your character's last flashes of lucidity before they run away or turn against their companions.

The GM may allow you to take on a co-GM role, helping describe the terrors of space, especially any terrors that directly connect to your now-lost character.

CREATING YOUR SCAVENGER

First, you'll need a name. The genre often uses last names and call signs for this sort of thing. Some examples: Chavez, Hopper, Ace, Pouches, Grim, Kang, Squealer, Doolittle, Tenet, Preacher, Jane, Ripley, Velcro. Anything will do, just make it something the other players can scream over the comm as they're being eaten by a massive space ooze.

The nuts and bolts of your character come down to four things, Trade, Background, Drive and Alien Tech. Tech represents bits of weird alien gear your scavenger has picked up along the way. Tech can be really useful, but it also makes your character a target for the Whispers and adds to your starting Corruption. Work your way through the following lists to build your character. If nothing off the list takes your fancy, you can always design your own in collaboration with the GM (that's what the blank lines are for!).

Trade – this is what your scavenger does now as part of the crew.

- ❖ **Pilot** (skilled in flight systems, rash actions, command)
- ❖ **Heavy** (skilled in weapons, defense, athletics)
- ❖ **Mechanic** (skilled in tools, demolitions, environmental systems)
- ❖ **Xeno Specialist** (skilled in alien lore, weird science, alien symbols)
- ❖ **Point Man** (skilled in stealth, tracking, security systems)
- ❖ **Field Medic** (skilled in surgery, forensics, chemistry)
- ❖ _____

Background – who you used to be, and probably why you're here in the shit.

- ❖ **Disgraced Corporate Factor** (skilled in deception)
- ❖ **Wanted Criminal** (skilled in intimidation)
- ❖ **Orphaned Duct Rat** (skilled in climbing)
- ❖ **Disgruntled Asteroid Miner** (skilled in appraisal)
- ❖ **Retired Security** (skilled in tactics)
- ❖ **Downsized Station HR** (skilled in negotiation)
- ❖ **Asteroid Pirate** (skilled in ambush)
- ❖ **Fringe Academic** (skilled in alien biology)
- ❖ _____

Alien Tech – weird alien gee-gaws you've scavenged, salvaged or stolen along the way. You can choose up to three of these, but each one increases your starting Corruption by 1. Alien Tech has another downside as well, if a Risk Roll using Alien Tech turns into a Corruption Roll, the tech breaks and may not be used again.

- ❖ **Gravity Beamer** (holds one man-sized target in place)
- ❖ **Holograph Headset** (creates a man-sized illusion, sight and sound only)
- ❖ **Universal Translator** (allows you to understand foreign and alien speech)
- ❖ **Warpwall Generator** (creates a temporary 1x1x1 hole in solid objects)
- ❖ **Voidfield Goggles** (allows you to see through solid objects with 30' range)
- ❖ **Aerthric Adapter** (allows you to ask one question of a corpse)
- ❖ _____

Drive – what you want to do when you hopefully get out of this scavenging racket.

- ❖ Finally pay off your ship and get out from under the thumb of those corporate assholes
- ❖ Publish your findings on Xenomorphs in the Journal of Alien Studies
- ❖ Start your own custom ship modification shop on Gravitas Base
- ❖ Free your family from debt bondage on Calceri
- ❖ Prove to your true love's aristo family that you are a worthy suitor
- ❖ Retire to a cozy custom habitat on your own private asteroid
- ❖ Start your own gang in the shipbuilding yards of Comorant Station
- ❖ _____

BEHIND THE SCREEN

How to Run *Void Suits, Duct Tape, and Corruption*

Void Suits is a game about desperation and greed, and the kind of decision making that gets people in over their heads, or even dead in a grimly lit corridor on a wrecked alien spaceship. Greed is what drives Scavengers to fly out into the graveyard of deep black looking for riches and alien technology. Foolhardy pride

is what drives scavengers deeper into a deadly hulk. Early successes after a hull breach give the crew a sense of success and competence. As they penetrate deeper into the hulk, however, Corruption will begin to fray their minds and the bonds that hold them together. Their increasing Corruption and desperation will often push them from a position of *we* to something more like *me* or even *me versus them* as the chances of leaving alive grow slimmer and fainter and notions of sacrificing the goals or even lives of their crew mates seems like the only option.

At the start of the game, read the following text to the players to set the tone:

> *No one ever really escapes the deep black and the whispers of the void. Most scavengers eventually fly out into the dark and vanish. Those who do return often do so alone and with a head full of screaming ghosts. The vast dark is a place where you can make your fortune, but the cost is high. Very high.*

Creating a Salvage Run

A game of Vac Suits should be built around the usual genre tropes, but each Run should also have a core or central theme, something you can tie disparate into to give the game a sense of context and cohesion. The theme allows you to better knit together the physical nature of the hulk, the human and alien foes it contains, as well as the alien technology it might contain.

Theme – First decide on one core organizational idea for your Salvage Run. This should probably be a single word or phrase, and one that suggests a lot of detail and possibilities. For example, Betrayal, Duplicitous AI, or Starvation.

Moments – This is the freewheeling part of the design process. If your Run were a movie, what scenes or elements would you want it to contain? Moments are usually short scene fragments that lean heavily into evocative terms and images. The moments should also tie back into and reinforce your chosen theme. So, if you chose *Betrayal* as your theme, you might include a moment like "A mummified scavenger lies in the corridor, shot in the back, and with his vac suit obviously stripped bare", or "a scrawl in blood on the wall of an alien corridor that says *They Can't Be Trusted!"* You should aim to write up at least ten moments for your Run that you can drop into the game as situations present themselves.

Conditions – Next, you should develop a list of conditions, which are ways that the Corruption caused by Whispers from the Void can manifest in the player characters, This does not have to be limited to mental conditions, but could and should include things like mutations, diseases or whatever your imagination can come up with. So, for our example of Betrayal, you could write a condition like "your left hand occasionally acts as if of its own volition", or "you seem to have the worst possible luck with equipment malfunctions". You should have between 3 and 5 conditions written up for your Salvage Run.

The Salvage Run

As the Scavengers probe deeper into the alien hulk they will move through 5 different sectors, starting with Sector 1. Each sector is defined by the terrors that will seek to hinder or kill the crew, and also the temptations that will draw them further in to the Alien Hulk. The Crew may not progress into the next sector until they have encountered at least one terror and temptation from their current sector.

Sector One:

The **terrors** in Sector One exists to breed confidence in both the players and crew. You can index the horror and death awaiting them further in, but terrors here should relatively easy to overcome. Some examples terrors for Sector One would be a competing but somewhat hapless Scavenger Crew; small or less lethal aliens; or wounded examples of larger ones.

The **temptations** in Sector One should play on the Scavengers desire for notoriety and filthy lucre. These should be made of gossamer rather than gold however and should take the form of hints and rumours that promise riches deeper within the hulk. Some examples: A stranded Scientist who knows the way deeper into the hulk; A map or other gear form a previous crew that seems helpful in some way; or information from the hulk's systems that give hints and clues to the nature and contents of the hulk.

Sector Two:

The **terrors** in Sector Two are environmental and exists to delay and separate the crew. These terrors show the players the dangers of the hulk itself. Some examples: Blast doors that suddenly split the crew, sections of blasted and ruined corridors or rooms that need to be traversed vertically with the aid of ropes or anti-gravity; poisonous/acidic clouds or alien fungus; carnivorous alien plants.

The **temptations** in Sector Two should be overwhelming evidence of some kind that the crew is on the right track. Some examples: corridors and rooms that are far less damaged than in Sector One, rooms and corridors with functional ships systems or other similar tech; furniture, fittings, art or other elements of the hulk that more clearly show the nature of the aliens who built it.

Sector Three:

The **terrors** in Sector Three are designed to create suspicion between the crew. Scavengers will begin to doubt their companions' motives. Some examples: stolen gear in someone else's possession; whispers and visions of deceit and betrayal; navigation mistakes – dead ends, circles, etc.

The **temptations** in Sector Three are personal for the crew and should evoke or connect to their chosen drive. Visions, dreams or whatever that connects the PC to their drive as a reminder of why they press on.

Sector Four:

The **terrors** in Sector Four are monstrous. Their role is pursue, drive, and harass the crew into the last sector. Some example: Dangerous Xenomorphs from various media; dangerous noises and movement in your peripheral vision; Psychotic AI with control over ship systems.

The **temptations** in Sector Four are just beyond reach. They are there, right on the other side of the shock proof glass or the ruined hanger bay. The crew just need to go a little deeper, one more door or stretch of passage. These are the siren call of wealth and fame that will pull the crew into the final sector of the Run.

Sector Five:

The **terrors** in Sector Five are in the minds of the crew. They are designed to foster doubt and betrayal and pit the crew against on another in a desperate explosion of violence and betrayal. Corruption waits just out of sight. Some examples: Faustian deals that involve attacking other crew members; isolation and despair; body snatcher style doubles of the crew.

The **temptations** in Sector Five are always the possessions of others, or things are perceived to possess. Anything a crew member desperately needs or wants should be given to someone else. Some examples:

Visions related to your core drive who counsel betrayal; the thing a crew member has always desired, in the hands of someone else; a tempting sacrifice to get away or get ahead (you knock down your crewmate so the Alien Horror will stop to feed on him while you get away, that sort of thing).

A NOTE ON ADAPTATION AND OTHER RESOURCE SHENANIGANS...

You can take modules and setting elements from pretty much any Sci Fi game with the right horror elements and use them in Vac Suits. They can be a great source of inspiration for all the moving parts listed above, and this can be a very low cognitive workload way to run your first couple of Salvage Runs. All you need to do is take the content of those other books, pick the bits you like, and arrange them around the framework presented here.

SALVAGE RUN: *THE BLACK OBELISK*

OPENING SCENE

As the battered cargo transport Shining Glory glides closer to Black Obelisk, the true size of the Hulk becomes clear to the crew. It is jet black, and looks to be several kilometers across, and more than a kilometer high. You can see massive, ragged gaps blasted in its surface, obviously caused by massive naval weaponry of some kind. Your intelligence suggests that the center of the Obelisk is your destination, so your pilot finds a likely unmarred section of jet black hall and begins the breaching process.

THEME

Frozen

MOMENTS

These can be used to reinforce the theme and add colour and texture to the Run at any opportune moment

- ❖ The desiccated corpse of a spindly alien star farer is frozen to the wall of a corridor
- ❖ Your vac suit creaks alarmingly as the cold stiffens its fibers
- ❖ Tendrils of violet frost creep across the visor of your helmet
- ❖ You can feel the chill of this room even through the insulation of your suit
- ❖ Ice coats this entire room and footing becomes treacherous
- ❖ Sky blue tendrils of vine with tiny white flowers fill this space, somehow surviving in the cold of vacuum
- ❖ The room is full of carbon fiber cargo containers, all of which crumble at a touch from the cold
- ❖ You can see huge claw gouges in the frost on the wall, obviously fresh
- ❖ Scraped into the wall here are checks marking off many days, the last are faint and wandering
- ❖ You begin to see vaguely human shaped ice sculptures in rooms and corridors. Were they once alive?

CONDITIONS

These are the conditions that may affect the Crew as their Corruption increases. They are not necessarily permanent but should show how Corruption and privation are changing them.

- ❖ Fingers and toes go numb
- ❖ Teeth chatter uncontrollably
- ❖ A desire to lie down and rest
- ❖ Hallucinations of alien faces in the frost
- ❖ Intense fits of shivering
- ❖ A limb goes completely numb and unresponsive
- ❖ You can hear the howl of an icy gale that isn't really there
- ❖ The mind wanders constantly and it is tough to focus
- ❖ Weapons and tools want to slip out of your hands as if covered in ice
- ❖ Feelings of paranoia, someone is poking holes in your vac suit and letting in the cold

SECTOR ONE

Terrors: A Corporate Science team has arrived on the hulk just after the Crew. They threaten the Crew with sanctions in order to intimidate them into leaving, backed up with a few obvious firearms. They will also demand information about the Hulk. They have no empathy or warmth in them and will respond only to logic or threats. The Corporate crew are easily overpowered however, and don't have the minerals, firepower, or authority to back up their threats. How this conflict plays out will be an illuminating window into the Scavenger Crew's approach to problem solving.

Temptations: The Science crew will either drop rumours or physical proof suggesting the presence on the Obelisk of Drive Crystals, which are almost beyond value since the warp tunnel to this system collapsed and no more can be imported from outside. Try to get the crew talking about what they could do with that kind of wealth, back in the world.

SECTOR TWO

Terrors: The crew comes to a blasted out section of the Obelisk which they must cross to continue. Corridors and rooms have been shattered by some unimaginable violence, and everything here is coated in ice, making hand and footholds treacherous. Crew members who fall may have to make their own way back to the group, and there is the possibility of frozen metal giving way at the wrong moment, standing the crew in two halves staring at each other across and icy chasm.

Temptations: The Crew discovers a cargo hold with whole stacks of the kind of special box carriers specifially designed to hold Drive Crystals. All the carriers are empty. In a lonely stretch of corridor the Crew find a long dead human scavenger. Beside this frozen corpse is a nylon carryall full of shimmering dust. An analysis of the dust shows it to be the remains of a Drive Crystal. Ask the group what they think happened to the crystals in the hold and in the nylon carryall.

SECTOR THREE

Terrors: This sector is a veritable maze of corridors and small rooms. Frost coats everything, but when scraped away the Crew find alien symbols in every rooms and corridor. Might these be instructions, or directions? The crew should be forced to rest here while they figure things out, and at least one crew member will have a dream or vision of being betrayed by another party member.

Temptations: During the rest, one crew member find a memento of home in a pocket of their vac suit that they had forgotten was there. Get the players talking about their drives and what has prevented them from achieving their drives so far. Look for opportunities to weave the character backstories together, and also to emphasize how one character may have held another back from their goals.

SECTOR FOUR

Terrors: Once through the maze the hulk takes on a decidedly more alien cast and more cyclopean dimensions, almost as if the larger Obelisk has been built around another structure of some kind. The ice itself will begin to hunt the Crew here. They will encounter sentient, mobile, but formless creature made of deep blue crystal that move by forming pseudopods, legs and tentacles of ice to crawl along floors, walls and ceilings. The further into the Sector they push, the larger and more numerous the creatures become. Eventually, the crew will discover a massive archway made of deep blue crystal that the creatures seem reluctant to enter. This is their only respite from the icy hunters.

Temptations: This sector is littered with organic-looking crystal pillars, each with Drive Crystal sized indentations scattered up and down their surface. Some of the indents even have Drive Crystals in them, but the crystals resist casual attempts at removal. The ice creatures will press the Crew relentlessly and give them no time to examine the pillars in any detail or make any expended attempt to remove a crystal. They can stop and face an icy death, or push on and leave a fortune behind.

SECTOR FIVE

Terrors: Through the Archway is a huge open space littered with more crystal pillars, these ones looking more like cave formations, stalactites and stalactites. The cavern itself looks more like a cave than a starship, and is filled with narrow bridges and small landings. The entire crew will begin to hear (feel?) a hum or buzzing in their heads. This will resolve into a cold voice telling them that their friends are going to betray them and keep all this wealth for themselves. In between these paranoid warnings, the voice mutters about intruders, and keeps asking where its offspring have gone. The whole cave will prove to be formed of sentient crystal, and it will not only hammer the crew with psychic attacks, but can also subtly change it's shape to confuse and separate the crew. Any action taken in the Crystal Cave must have a dark die added to the die pool.

Temptations: The icy voice will also whisper softly to each crew member about how they can achieve their every desire, if only they will obey the voice. It will say that if too many crystals removed at once it will cause a disaster. It will also reform its physical space to separate and confuse the Crew, making it look, whenever possible, like the crew themselves are being secretive and sneaking off for their own gain. The Cavern can also move the crystals up and down on its walls, and ones that looked like low hanging fruit may prove impossible to reach upon closer inspection. Once a single crystal is removed, the whole cavern will begin shaking and the icy voice will screech inside everyone's head about killing the intruders.