

THE COLD DARK

A CINEMATIC ONE SHOT FOR FREE LEAGUE'S ALIEN RPG



MARTIN V. PARECE II

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A word about A.I. art – the cover of this work was done by Midjourney, and several of my scenarios were done by WUMBO. It is important to understand that I do NOT support A.I. art commercially, but I simply cannot afford to hire an artist every time I produce this kind of free content. I have written six novels and an horror anthology to date, and I have hired a human artist every time. At my own great expense, I have retained an incredible artist for three upcoming novels, and I will always pay for a human being's artwork rather than use A.I. "art" for my published works.

That being said, character portraits are from thispersondoesnotexist.com.

Maps done with <https://newtbb.netlify.app/> because I am crap at maps, and this site makes it so damned easy!

Any events, names or faces used are not representative of anything or anyone, and no one can prove otherwise.

A big thanks to Free League for such a phenomenal RPG, the great science fiction masters of the golden era, my wife and kids for putting up with my "Go away, I have to write" shenanigans, and the Alaskan Bull Worm. If you know, you know.

Let's see how many of my easter eggs you guys can find? *evil grin*

Ver 1.04.18.23 – Fixed numerous typos, a continuity error in the universe number for The Darkness, and adjusted the night on GBH-168 to 12 hours.

NO MAN BUT A BLOCKHEAD EVER WROTE EXCEPT FOR MONEY.

- SAMUEL JOHNSON

I am sorry for the shameless, self-serving plug here. The above quote is often misquoted and misattributed to one Mr. Samuel Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain), though perhaps he at one point said something very similar. The fact is, I love producing Alien RPG content, and it is truly a labor of love. That being said, such labors take away from what little time I have with family or that I should be spending doing other labors, as my day job takes precedence.

I humbly ask, if you see any merit in these works, please consider purchasing my fantasy novels (The Cor Chronicles) or horror anthology (Tendrils in the Dark), all found in paperback or e-book on Amazon and other platforms. Details of those can be found on my website at <http://martinparece.com>, along with information on three new books coming this year!

Thanks so much, and I look forward to the next scenario!

WHAT'S THE STORY, MOTHER? (PLAYER/GM)

Starglider, a G-class shuttle registered to Seegson Systems traverses the dark void on its way from the core systems to the Frontier, its destination GBH-168 or Taurus II in the Murasaki 312 sector. On board are its pilot, a brilliant physicist and her son, and a company representative. The company assigned a physicist, one Dr. Sunil Mehta, to GBH-168 about a year ago, and about three weeks ago, he requested assistance.

GBH-168 is the perfect place for scientific research. So far from heavily populated space, it's ideal for hiding your work from competitors prying eyes; no one has any need to go here. It has no vegetation or animal life at all – a lifeless rock that is prone to wind and rain. In the four month summer, the planetoid has twelve hour days and four hour nights, and is a balmy 10-20°C. Unfortunately, *Starglider* is arriving in the middle of the planetoid's four month winter, with constant snowstorms and days of only four hours that reach a mere 0-5°C. The nights last twelve hours and get as low as -70°C!

Once *Starglider* has landed, the mission is to meet Dr. Mehta at his lab complex and assist him in whatever way necessary.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON (GM ONLY)

Dr. Mehta had his own ideas on the Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, and as he neared a theoretical breakthrough, the company sent him here to continue his research and start the experimental phase. Three weeks ago, he had that breakthrough and began building the machine that would break down, temporarily and in a controlled space, the barriers that keep overlapping universes from occupying the same space and time. He immediately reported and requested assistance from Seegson corporate in the form of Dr. Louise Mallory (PC), but he couldn't contain himself when he and his engineer, Jaleel Ekwensi, completed his Many Worlds Vibration Machine.

He began experimenting three days ago, opening portals to other universes, most of which were empty. On his twelfth attempt, he found a GBH-168 with no star and a barren, atmosphere-less landscape. A lifeform crossed over into our universe, a malevolent, intelligent Darkness that invaded the bodies of Mehta and his daughter Kalinda before Jaleel could kill the power.

To his credit, Jaleel realized what happened, especially when Mehta began imploring him to start the machine, to again open the portal. When he refused, they grew violent. Jaleel tried to escape, and in defending himself, Jaleel dealt Dr. Mehta a mortal wound to the chest with a fire axe. As the blood gushed and pumped from Dr. Mehta's chest, melting the snow outside the lab complex into a bloody mush, the body (and Mehta's

mind with it) died, but the Darkness would not release its control. It continued to pursue Jaleel, and he fled off into the night. With daylight returning, Mehta and his daughter, Kalinda, returned to the Lab Complex.

Jaleel, unfortunately, has been driven quite mad by what happened, but he has moments of lucidity during which he knows the machine must never be activated again. It is too powerful for anyone to have, and too dangerous to all of humanity. He went about sabotaging the complex. He first set out to break into the colony's reactor room, intending to cause it to overload and destroy them all. Unable to do so, he has damaged the power and comms network between the main complex and the lab, as well as damaged both colony tractors. He has broken into the main complex to steal supplies, and two days ago he took his axe to the colony transmitter to make certain no one can send a message back to Seegson.

In the meantime, the Darkness, through Dr. Mehta and Kalinda, has been trying to learn how to fix the machine. Fortunately, Dr. Mehta died before the Darkness could consume all his knowledge and memories, and Kalinda has almost none of the expertise necessary.

The Cold Dark is broken into three acts, and each of the four PCs will have different agendas for each Act. A particular event will cause the story to move to the next Act, and while I have written recommendations for certain occurrences in each Act, nothing else is scripted. Therefore, it is important that you, O Exalted Gamemother, know the PCs and NPCs inside and out to keep the story fluid and smooth. Properly told, *The Cold Dark* should evoke all the feelings that made the horror movies of my childhood great!

DESCRIBING THE CONDITIONS

No doubt, you have seen John Carpenter's masterpiece *The Thing*? While outside, GBH-168 should be described similarly to that Antarctic landscape. While it can be clear and sunny, almost not freezing during the day (which only lasts four hours), the night should be inky black, windy, and full of mass amounts of blowing snow that obscure everyone's vision, making them ask, "Did I really see something? Or was it a trick of the conditions?" As GBH-168 is currently in mid-winter, there are massive piles and drifts of snow, some thirty or more feet tall that simply will not melt until the summer months. This should give everything in and around the colony and lab complexes a closed in, isolated and claustrophobic feel. Atmosphere! Atmosphere! Atmosphere!

A WORD ON THE SHORT SHIFT

Since GBH-168's rotational period consists of four hours daylight and twelve hours of night, this scenario introduces the "Short Shift" to indicate a period of four hours. Therefore, the total day of GBH-168 is one Short Shift and two standard Shifts.

MANY WORLDS VIBRATION MACHINE

Spartan and utilitarian in form, this machine looks like it came straight from an old horror movie. A hodgepodge of metal – iron and steel, copper, and aluminum – comprise this evil looking contraption that has hundreds of ancient design vacuum tubes as part of its obscure function. An old fashioned display of numbered dials shows an eight digit number, 10178641, and a small knob is under each numeral, turned to a number corresponding to that above it. A huge tungsten dish, concave like a bowl and four feet in diameter, sits on a plastic plate on the floor, and a metallic ball about the size of a grapefruit is suspended above it by an arm connected to the rest of the machine.

When activated, the ball emits ragged blasts of energy that impact the dish, and when enough charge is built up, the universe to which it is attuned begins to overlap with ours. A ball of blue energy begins to form and grow into a ring that will eventually full the dish, and in the center of this ring of undulating quantum energy, one can see into the other universe. Objects, energy and perhaps even lifeforms, can pass through this portal, allowing a new form of universal exploration science fiction writers have dreamt of for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, it also allowed elements of the Darkness to invade our own!

And who knows what other terrors await us in the newly discovered Multiverse?!

On a final note, the machine uses vast amounts of energy, and every time it was activated, the lights noticeably dimmed at the main outpost complex. While this adds to the superstition of Sven (see below in NPCs), most of the locals assumed it had to do with whatever work the scientists were conducting.

THE DARKNESS

UNKNOWN LIFEFORM FROM GBH-168, REALITY VIBRATION 1.0178641

This lifeform from an alternate reality is unlike anything known to our science. It comes from a version of GBH-168 whose star went dark millions of years ago, but how this thing evolved is anyone's guess. The company would likely pay enormous amounts of money for this information or any information about this entity at all.

The Darkness has a hive mind, allowing all parts of it to have complete awareness of each other at all times, though they are incapable of sharing the knowledge of their hosts through this. Not unlike human beings, it wants nothing more than to propagate itself and spread across the universe, consuming everything and everyone in its path. Unfortunately, it has no method of locomotion that allows it to leave its home.

It has two forms described below, one which is incorporeal and through which it possesses living beings and its corporeal form when it has done so. Having found beings it can possess, and who have their own methods of travelling the galaxy, The Darkness has found its way to leave its prison home.

INCORPOREAL FORM

- Speed 2
- Health 2

The Darkness is very quick, receiving two turns per combat round and a slow and fast action each round. Essentially, it can only move with its actions or possess a live creature (slow action) in Engaged range. Should this happen, the target falls to the ground as he/she fights a battle of wills with the invader. The target must make a Manipulation check once per turn or lose control of his/her body. Once this happens, their consciousness is locked away until the Darkness is driven out (see Corporeal Form to the right). The now possessed victim rises in one round, and the Darkness will have complete access to the victim's full knowledge and personality in 4 shifts.

If the victim manages to succeed for six turns in a row, the Darkness will leave the victim and search for another. This individual is now immune to the Darkness.

In its incorporeal form, the Darkness cannot be harmed by physical means at all. It takes

CORPOREAL FORM

- Speed 1
- Health Special
- Armor Special
- Skills: As Host

When the Darkness has possessed a host, it subdues and imprisons that person's mind, taking control of its body. In four shifts, it will have a complete understand of everything that person knows and will be able to mimic the victim's personality perfectly, having all skills of the victim as well.

The poor soul possessed by the Darkness takes physical damage normally, even to the point of death. Unfortunately, this has no effect on the Darkness' control, and the body will continue to operate according to the Darkness' will. Unfortunately, if the Darkness is driven out, that person is now dead. A possessed body ignores the effects of all critical hits, but not the critical hits themselves. Example – if a victim ruptures their jugular while possessed, they bleed out in one round unless receiving medical aid. The body ignores the effects until the Darkness is destroyed, and then all effects activate immediately.

When possessing a body, the Darkness takes damage from light just like its Incorporeal Form, except that light takes longer to have an effect. In this case, the Darkness has 6 Health and 3 Armor against light. When it takes damage from light, the host body will scream and writhe in pain. When the Darkness has received 6 damage from light, it is destroyed and driven out. This frees the victim, assuming the poor individual hasn't received critical damage. If still alive, the possessed victim has no

damage from bright or nearby sources of visible light. The light from fire will cause one damage per round in Engaged range, and extraordinarily bright light sources (hi-beam flashlights, a vehicle's headlights, etc etc) will kill the Darkness (and has the advantage of being used at range!).

In this form, the Darkness will not enter a lit area for any reason, and it appears as its name would imply – as a writhing, undulating black cloud that entirely shrouds anything within it as it moves. It also cannot enter a sealed pressure suit.

Daylight eliminates the Darkness in either form – instantly when Incorporeal and in a Turn when Corporeal, during which time it cannot act due to the extreme pain it is in.

Hopefully, the PCs will deduce the Darkness has an aversion to light – there should be plenty of clues. It is of the utmost importance that you remember this, for a misstep on this could derail the entire narrative.

knowledge of the Darkness and remembers all his or her actions while possessed as in a fog or a dream.

In Corporeal Form, the Darkness can use any weapons of which it has knowledge from its host. Otherwise, it simply attacks with fists (6 base dice, 1 damage, stunts for additional damage), heedless of any physical attacks that come its way.

Also, the Darkness does not understand the need to eat, drink or sleep normally, and since it can continue to animate the body after its death, it simply doesn't care if its body dies. It ignores all effects from freezing, starving or dehydration.

LET'S TALK ABOUT STRESS, BABY

The stressors in this scenario are a little different from the standard Alien RPG story. You must remember the first time each PC encounters the Darkness is an occasion for increased Stress, especially the moment they realize it moves and acts with purpose and intelligence. Seeing someone invaded by the Darkness is certainly cause for Stress, perhaps even a Panic roll if it is one of the PCs. Dealer choice on this, but it should be seriously considered, especially for Chip or Louise if one or the other is possessed. Seeing a possessed person scream or writhe in pain when exposed to light for the first time is also cause for Stress. Finally, consider handing out Stress to PCs who make the public realization that they are isolated, expect to be dead or possessed before help arrives, or otherwise suggest that the group is doomed.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

DR. LOUISE MALLORY, PHD

SCIENTIST (PHYSICIST)



STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 3

WITS 5

- Comtech 3
- Observation 3
- Survival 2

EMPATHY 4

- Manipulation 1
- Medical Aid 1

Gear:

- Hand radio
- Seegson Systems Diagnostic Device
- Seegson P-Dat
- Personal Medkit
- \$300

Talent: Breakthrough

Signature Item: Unfinished scientific paper on a new interpretation of Many World Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics.

You're a loyal Seegson employee, hired right out of Cal Tech twenty five years ago, and you have worked on a variety of projects for the company over the years, always receiving praise and quality performance reviews from your peers, supervisors, and especially your mentor, Dr. Sunil Mehta. You spent five years on Dr. Mehta's team, helping him design a collection system for plasma trawlers, a theoretical device for essentially transforming elements by radiation bombardment, and many other projects.

You came to know his even keeled, soft spoken and friendly mannerisms well, and your son, Chip, grew close to his daughter, Kalinda. While your relationship with Sunil has always been friendly and professional, you couldn't help but notice the buds of young love beginning to blossom between the two teenagers.

And then two years ago, the company put you and Dr. Mehta on opposing teams to each pursue your own ideas on MWI. After a year, your project was shut down, you were shunted off to another sector of space and another project, and Dr. Mehta was sent to a small facility on GBH-168, a small planetoid known as Taurus II in the Murasaki 312 sector.

A few weeks ago, Dr. Mehta reached out to corporate, claiming he was near a breakthrough, experimental as well as theoretical, and he needed your immediate help, as you are the most brilliant physicist in the company. So, now you're on a shuttle to GBH-168 with your son, a pilot, and a company exec, and while you're saddened by the fact that Dr. Mehta's research has probably disproved your own, the scientist in you can't wait to see what he's accomplished.

Special: Dr. Mallory receives +2 to any Observation or Survival check involving physics and -2 for biology.

CHIP MALLORY

KID



Talent: Dodge

STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 5

- Mobility 3

WITS 3

- Observation 3
- Survival 2

EMPATHY 4

- Manipulation 1
- Medical Aid 1

Gear:

- Hi-Beam Flashlight
- Radio Controlled Car
- Yo-Yo
- A Set of Polyhedral Dice
- \$4

Signature Item: Woven multi-colored bracelet made by Kalinda Mehta.

You've just turned eighteen, and in seven months, you're supposed to start college somewhere. Unfortunately, you have no idea where you're going, because the acceptance letters aren't quite rolling in like your mom expected. She, of course, expects you to go into the sciences, and you tried to be interested in them. You really did, but it's just not your thing. You don't know what your thing is. You've always been kind of a nerd, hanging out with theatre kids, enjoying ancient classical music, and playing "those" role playing games.

That is, until you met Kalinda Mehta. She's kind of a nerd, too, but a different kind of nerd. After all, her dad is one of the lead physicists in Seegson. The two of you became friends, and while you're not really sure why, you started to make her interests your interests. The two of you became almost inseparable. You were each other's first kiss. You gave her a wild daisy that night, a small and admittedly ridiculous token of your affection, but you were just a kid. She put it in her favorite book, Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

A year ago, Kalinda and her dad moved away to some tiny planet in the middle of nowhere. Before she left, she gave you a bracelet she made herself, and you've never taken it off except to shower. You stayed in touch by network email, but there have been no calls. Supposedly, bandwidth is limited out there. You did get a picture from her three months ago – she was building a snowman on a snow covered plain, and her smile gave you a sick feeling in your heart.

But now you're on the way to see her, and it's the best thing ever. Mom's been assigned to Dr. Mehta's project, and you simply can't wait to see Kalinda again. You hope she feels the same way you do.

MERCEDES LAMARA

COMPANY AGENT



Talent: Take Control

STRENGTH 3

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 1
- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 5

- Comtech 2
- Observation 3

EMPATHY 2

- Manipulation 3

Gear:

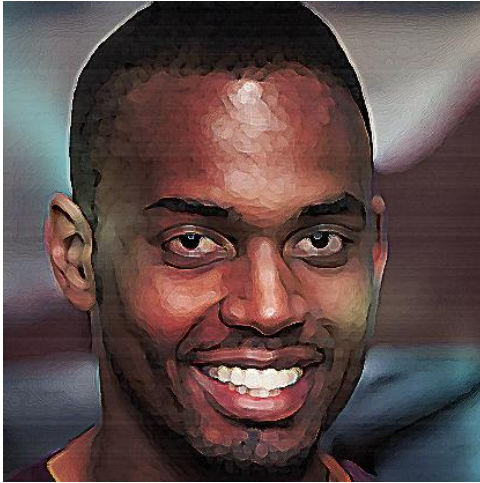
- Leather briefcase
- Rolex
- M4A3 Service Pistol w/ 1 reload
- Data/Access Card with Executive Clearance
- \$1000

Signature Item: Letter of authorization from Seegson's Director of Scientific Projects that allows you to take control of any project as necessary.

Twenty five years old, you're set to rise quickly in the ranks of Seegson Systems or whatever company you decide, should Seegson become stagnant. Gorgeous and generally considered sexy as hell, you're not afraid to leverage those assets to get what you want. They were given to you and not making use of any asset is a waste of material. Your smile has charmed the pants off dozens if not hundreds of higher level execs, college professors, and other week minded fools, and you've worked hard to make it appear sultry and not predatory.

Your chance has come. Some egghead in Theoretical Projects claims to be on the verge of a breakthrough, and the Director of Scientific Projects (who is completely under your thumb) believes it will provide Seegson an advantage the likes of which no company has seen since the legendary Sir Peter Weyland unveiled FTL travel, androids and atmo fusion reactors. You quickly convinced him that an executive needed to be present.

As far as your new crewmates are concerned, you're there as an observer to report fully back to corporate about the discovery and its implications. In actuality, you're to observe, understand, and when necessary, take complete control of the situation. The only thing that matters is what this means to your career. If this is the right project – and if the excitement of the director is any indication, you think it is – this could propel you right to the top of Seegson, or perhaps even given you something that would make you a god to an even larger and less scrupulous company like Weyland-Yutani or LaSalle Bionational.



Talent: Reckless

STRENGTH 4

- Close Combat 1
- Heavy Machinery 1
- Stamina 1

AGILITY 5

- Piloting 3
- Ranged Combat 3

WITS 3

- Comtech 1

EMPATHY 2

Gear:

- M4A3 Service Pistol w/ 1 Reload
- Hand Radio
- Maintenance Jack
- Mk.50 Compression Suit
- \$400

Signature Item: A shell casing from the stray bullet that nearly took you out. You wear it on a chain around your neck.

Everything was set from the day you were five. When you graduated high school, you went straight to the USCMC Flight Academy, where you excelled for three years. All you ever wanted was to fly interceptors and come home the ace, having blasted dozens of UPP commie bastards out of the sky.

And then you went through basic just before your last year in the academy, and some moron with a loaded weapon fired in a random direction. The round hit you in the neck, severing your spinal cord, and by all rights, you should be dead. If it weren't for the heroic efforts of the medics, incredible skill of an on base surgeon, and the amazing technology of 2179, you would be dead. Or at least paralyzed from the neck down, which probably would have been just as bad.

Even still, the USCMC couldn't use you, and you were suddenly out on full disability. You considered joining up with the ICSC; they don't have enough fighter pilots to be picky about little things like this, but as you soul searched, you knew your heart wouldn't be in it. On the verge of total depression, you ended up taking a job for Seegson. It wasn't flying fighters, but at least it's flying.

It's almost as boring as sitting at home watching the network fifteen hours a day, this shuttling of scientists who think they know everything, company reps who think they own everything, self-important dignitaries, and all their snot nosed spawn across known space, but in the end, you're the pilot. You're in charge, and they have to listen to you or they die. Literally.

But there's no heroism in it, no threats to defeat to protect your way of life, and sure as hell no excitement. But you smile and fly on.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

There are only a handful of NPCs on the colony, and I have provided a background for them below. I have not included gear or relevant stats for most of them, as they should be narratively unneeded, BUT if a PC should die (because that NEVER happens in Alien RPG), feel free to give them starting character statistics as befits the character or the situation you need to fill.

PAUL WHELAN

COLONY MANAGER / AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER / COMMS OFFICER / ...



When Paul introduces himself, he often gets odd looks, and sometimes people make comments of why he works for Seegson, or how did a Weyland get a post on a backwater planet. He hurriedly explains that there's no relation – he's a Whelan (spells it) and not a Weyland (emphasizes the D). Regardless, he doesn't mind quiet postings, though this one is turning uncomfortable. He's generally friendly but seems nervous and flustered right now.

When the PCs land, he'll ask them to enter the colony complex as quickly as possible. Night, and a storm, are coming. He's glad the PCs are here to look at and repair his transmitter and network connection, and he will be unhappy to learn otherwise.

He will argue against the PCs going out at night for any reason, stating that the cold will kill you before you reach the first marker, and the tractor is down. He'll also want to make sure the PCs secured their ship.

SVEN AND CONNIE NIELSEN

SEEGSON STORE MANAGERS / COLONY SUPPLY MASTERS



Sven and his wife Connie run the Seegson Company Store, as well as handle supply requisition requests from the colony's limited population, including special project requests from Dr. Mehta. Connie is the strong, silent type, only speaking when necessary, and she is unconcerned about the strange happenings around the colony. She's been on the Frontier her whole life. Sven, on the other hand, is terrified, holding it together only through his wife's assurances. Deeply superstitious from his father's Scandinavian roots, he is certain that a *geist* of some kind has arrived at the colony, possibly awoken by the scientists' experiments. It won't take much for him to decide to bail from the colony.

TALIA KESIA-SMITH

LPN / COLONY MEDIC



Every colony or outpost, no matter how small, needs a medical staff, and Talia is it for GBH-168. She goes where the work is, but she hates the frozen hell that is this posting, and she can't wait for her six month shift to be up. Regardless, she does her job with cool efficiency and care, not that anyone gets more than a sinus infection here.

Though she keeps her feelings mostly to herself, she is rattled by the recent goings on, especially that someone broke into her Infirmary. The loss of Network connectivity is the final straw, and she's already demanded that Paul check on the scientists (which he hasn't done).

DR. SUNIL MEHTA

STONE DEAD PHYSICIST POSSESSED BY THE DARKNESS



Dr. Mehta's theories turned out to be correct, and though he asked Seegson to send Dr. Mallory, he simply couldn't wait. The result was... unfortunate, and he was the first one to be possessed by the Darkness. Jaleel struck a death blow to his chest with a fire axe early on, but while Dr. Mehta died, his body continues under the control of the Darkness. His only goal is to get his Many Worlds Vibration Machine up and running to bring more of his species to this universe. Then, some sort of vessel is needed to take them further into this universe.

Dr. Mehta should be played with a sense of oddity. The Darkness inside him does not have full access to his memories, as he was killed before it fully understood how to access and operate his host. He won't recognize Dr. Mallory right at first, and his mannerisms will come off aloof. Additionally, he doesn't seem to have all of the knowledge that Dr. Mehta should have, forgetting the name or meaning of basic scientific terms such as vacuum, electron or light. He needs help rebuilding the machine that Jaleel Ekwensi has savaged, because he understands little of the physics or engineering behind it.

He generally wears a turtleneck sweater and slacks, having changed clothes to cover the wound that killed him.

KALINDA MEHTA

DR. MEHTA'S DAUGHTER, NOT DEAD YET, POSSESSED



STRENGTH 2

AGILITY 4

- Mobility 2

WITS 4

- Comtech 3
- Observation 3

EMPATHY 4

- Manipulation 2

Talent: Beneath Notice

Signature Item: A wild daisy Chip gave her the night they kissed, pressed between the pages of Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

Kalinda became possessed by the Darkness at the same time as her father, but she is still alive and in there... somewhere. Unfortunately, the Darkness has full access to her memories and knowledge, and will act indistinguishably from the real Kalinda. It'll use this to lull the PCs into a false sense of security and to help capture Chip, then running to his mother exclaiming Chip has been in an accident to get her as well!

As far as freeing Kalinda is concerned, see "The Darkness" above, and though the GM should use her relevant stats whenever appropriate, she will attack with 6 Base Dice and 1 Damage as per The Darkness' corporeal stats.

Otherwise, Kalinda is friendly and outgoing, if somewhat reserved as part of her nerdiness. She will seem genuinely happy to see Chip and Dr. Mallory, giving hugs and such as appropriate. She has a better understanding of human relationships than her father, but as she is not a scientist, she cannot help rebuild the machine.

JALEEL EKWENSI

ENGINEER



Talent: True Grit

STRENGTH 5

- Close Combat 2
- Heavy Machinery 3
- Stamina 3

AGILITY 3

- Ranged Combat 1

WITS 4

- Observation 1

EMPATHY 2

Gear:

- Cold Weather Gear
- Fire Axe (+0, 2 damage)
- Medkit
- 4 Bottles of Water and 4 Prefab Meals
- 2 Doses Naproleve, 5 Doses Neversleep and 2 Doses X-stims

Signature Item: “I guess this,” he says as he hefts a fire axe.

Jaleel has worked for Seegson for twenty years, and he's coming up on retirement. His investments have done well, and he was looking forward to cashing out after this assignment. Once, he understood the purpose of the machine, Jaleel immediately had misgivings, uncertain as to whether anyone or any company should have such an ability.

When Dr. Mehta unleashed the Darkness, even on such a small scale, from Universe 1.0178641, his misgivings turned into a plan of action. He knew the machine could not open to that Reality again, or any other that may contain something worse, and he, quite frankly, went a little off the deep end. He attacked the non-functioning machine with his axe, damaging it severely. The possessed Dr. Mehta and Kalinda confronted him, and he struck a killing blow into the doctor's chest. He hesitated at attacking Kalinda, allowing the Darkness inside Dr. Mehta time to get the now dead doctor back on his feet. At this, Jaleel fled the lab, and they did not pursue.

He has since been sabotaging the outpost, starting with the power conduits and comms cables leading from the main facility to the lab. He damaged the tractors and has broken into the Cantina for rations and water, as well as the Infirmary for medical supplies. He tried to get into the reactor room (to annihilate the colony) under the C3 Center but was foiled by the locking mechanism. Several axe marks will attest to his attempts to get in. The day before the PCs arrive, he damaged the colony's transmitter, cutting off all network access.

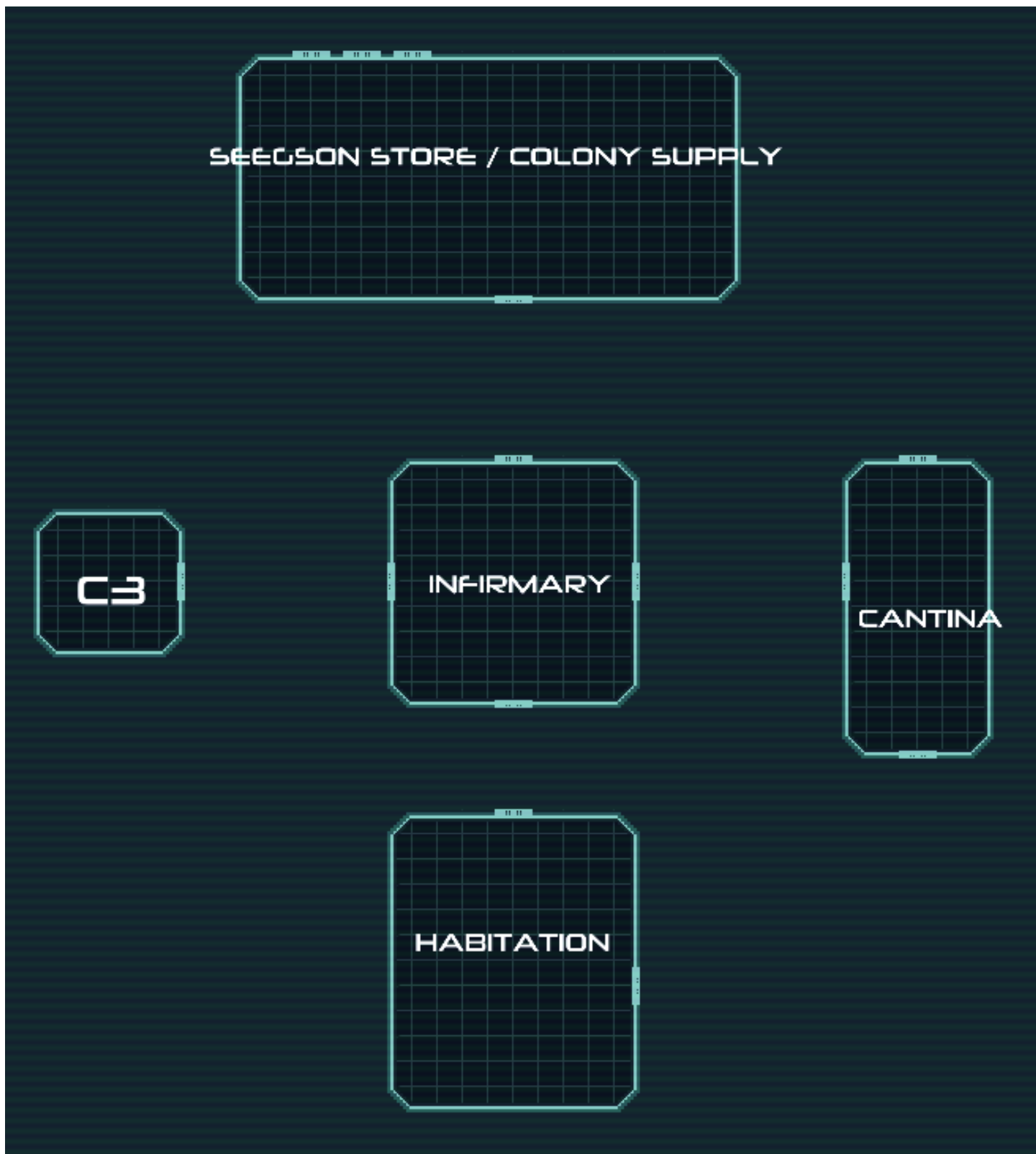
Jaleel is a tough cookie. He stays outside during the day, of course, usually keeping an eye on the Lab complex, but at night, he tries to spend as much time as he can indoors at the main facility. He keeps close tabs on the locations of the various NPCs so that he knows when and where it is safe for him to get some shuteye indoors. His cold weather gear mostly protects him, but he's not fond of sleeping outside.

When he is encountered, Jaleel should be played as desperate and babbling uncontrollably about stopping the evil and how no one can ever leave GBH-168 again, because we don't know who's who and who isn't who and what could be... He will resist, even attack to kill, anyone who stands in the way of these goals. In his mind, they're all dead already anyway.

And unfortunately due to his compromised mental state, Jaleel has not realized that light is the weapon to use against the Darkness, and he will accuse anyone saying so of being mad.

MAPS AND COLONY DESCRIPTIONS

GBH-168 MAIN FACILITY



A cluster of unconnected prefab buildings, the main complex on GBH-168 has just the bare minimum of facilities for the outpost. Due to the near constant snowfall and regular blizzard like conditions, nylon rope runners connect one building to the next, allowing persons to follow them to their destinations as visibility can drop to only a few feet in one of the planetoid's storms. Underground conduits connect power and intra-outpost comms to each building, though these are currently down to the lab complex for reasons unknown to the locals.

Infirmary: This seven meter squared building lies at the center of the complex, and has an unlockable door on each side. Talia Kesia-Smith spends most of her time here, reading, and she sometimes even sleeps here. She considers herself fortunate that she wasn't here two nights ago when someone rifled through and stole medical supplies, leaving her quite the mess to clean up. She doesn't understand who would do such a thing or why, since the supplies are basically free if needed anyhow. On a successful Observation roll, the PCs can find d6 Naproleve, d6 Neversleep, d6 X-stims, 2 Medkits and a Surgical Kit here.

Cantina: Three meters by nine, this building is a Cantina only in label. It's really nothing more than a narrow cafeteria, with enough prefab meals, water, and coffee to last ten people another three months. The building itself does not lock, but for rationing purposes, colony members must use their thumbprint to access food and water. Coffee is free until it runs out, and a successful Observation roll will find two jugs of moonshine under a sink. It is restocked by Sven and Connie as the monthly supply ships come in. In fact, Sven was on his way to do so when he heard a ruckus inside, interrupting Jaleel as he hacked his way into the distribution cabinets with his axe. Jaleel made off with whatever he could grab as Sven came inside, and the latter never got a clear look at the invader. This has added to Sven's superstition, and he refuses to go outside at night or let Connie do the same.

Seegson Store / Colony Supply: About a thousand square feet, this is the largest building in the main complex. Connie and Sven run the place, handling standard colony supply orders, as well as making any special orders of the outpost's crew. Standard rations, water and such are free through the Cantina, but anything special has to be paid for out of wages due. The PCs can find pretty much any basic equipment or gear here (no pressure suits as the atmosphere is life supporting) for sale at standard pricing (excluding weapons), especially anything made by Seegson (excluding a Working Joe). A P5000 Power Loader sits in the back corner, unused as the colony never receives anything so heavy. There is one main door that Connie or Sven electronically lock if no one is present, and a trio of heavy duty loading doors are in the back corner, opened only by a thumbprint and retina scan from Sven or Connie. Cold weather gear is available here for \$200 per set and will reduce the need for checks in Freezing conditions from once per turn to once per hour (weight 1).

Habitation: About 30% larger than the infirmary, this building contains semi-private bunkrooms for the inhabitants of the main facility, as well as two triple decker bunkbeds available to the occasional visitors or truckers. A small number of recreational items are here as well, including pool, shuffleboard and foosball tables, a snazzy holographic chess set and an antique appearing juke box programmed with a wide selection of classic songs from the 1960s through 1990s. The outpost's tractor is parked outside on the eastern side of the building, its battery and drive system savaged by Jaleel. No one was in habitation at the time, and Connie found it a few hours later when she went to load it for a supply run to the lab. It is completely inoperable, though scavenging parts from the other tractor (parked at the lab complex), combined with some inventive combination of electronics and spare parts from the Seegson Store might make it run again. This is your call as a GM, and its likely the PCs will consider it too much effort anyhow.

C3: Command, Control and Comms, this building is the center of the outpost's nervous system. Only Whelan has access to it, via thumbprint and retina scan, and he generally will be found here. The network transmitter for the colony is on top (virtually destroyed by Jaleel), and the colony's tiny fusion reactor is in a sublevel beneath the floor. The hatch leading to it requires no special access, but a heavy security door protects the reactor room itself and is only accessible by Whelan. Jaleel scratched up the door pretty well with his axe but did no real damage.

GBH-168 LAB FACILITY

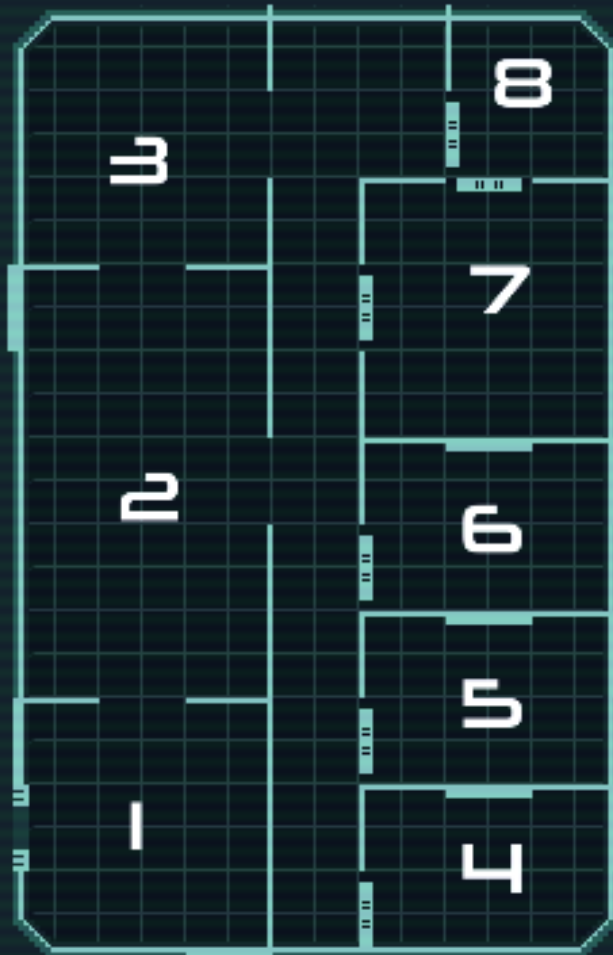
The Lab Facility is ten miles east of the main complex, a journey that will take just over three hours on foot due to the amount of fallen snow. This journey must be attempted during the day, because at night the hike is closer to five hours, and the PCs must make checks against Freezing every turn due to the extreme cold. Surely, the PCs will suggest just flying there with their ship. Whelan will warn them off of this, saying that there is no place to land at the lab, and if they ignore him, they'll find that the snowdrifts tower by twenty feet or more over the lab. Attempting to land in it is all but impossible, likely causing permanent damage to the ship, and then how do they get from the ship to lab in thirty or forty feet of snow? No, the only way is to take the road, which currently has two to three feet of snow on it, accumulated since the tractor went down. Describe the journey as arduous, and have the PCs make some Mobility checks to avoid falling or turning an ankle as they walk down the "road" with the snow piled thirty feet up or more on either side of them.

At some point, you may call for an Observation check to spot where Jaleel dug into the ground to sabotage the conduits connecting the lab and the main complex. It is covered with snow by now, but sharp eyes might notice the disparity in the height of the snow or even brown dirt mixed among it.

If the PCs set out at first light, they should arrive at the Lab with less than an hour of daylight left. This is problematic because the Lab has no power, and therefore, no heat! When the sun sets, temperatures will drop below freezing quickly, causing any PC not equipped with cold weather gear to make Freezing checks every turn. Even still, once per hour is not an ideal situation when night lasts 12 hours! While the GM shouldn't give this information away at this point, instead planting the seed by having Whelan or one of the other NPCs say, "Just make sure you get there before nightfall, so you don't freeze to death!" Malcolm Edmonton, of course, has a pressure suit (which will protect him from the Darkness if he's wearing it) that will protect him from the cold, but his air supply will run out long before 12 hours.

The Lab Facility is a single, rectangular prefab building about 50% larger than the infirmary at 7 meters by 11, the interior of which is detailed below. One other note – before the building lost power, Dr. Mehta (with Kalinda's help) used the control terminal in the office to reduce all light output to 10%. This will allow others to see when light is restored, but will not cause the Darkness any harm.

Another tractor is parked outside. All six tires are flat, and the drive system has been savaged by Jaleel. However, the battery pack is operational and could be scavenged to provide the complex power – 24 hours if the PCs power just the lower level or 12 hours if they power the entire facility. Scavenging and installing it requires a Heavy Machinery check and a "Short Shift" of work.



1. ENTRY/MUDROOM

2. REC ROOM

3. KITCHEN

4. BEDROOM

5. BEDROOM

6. BEDROOM

7. OFFICE

8. LAB ACCESS

Entry/Mudroom: This is the only point of entry, and the automatic door appears to have been pried open just enough to let one person pass through. Snow has blown a few feet into the room, and there are empty racks for boots and cold weather gear. There is nothing to find here, and an open doorway leads into the next area.

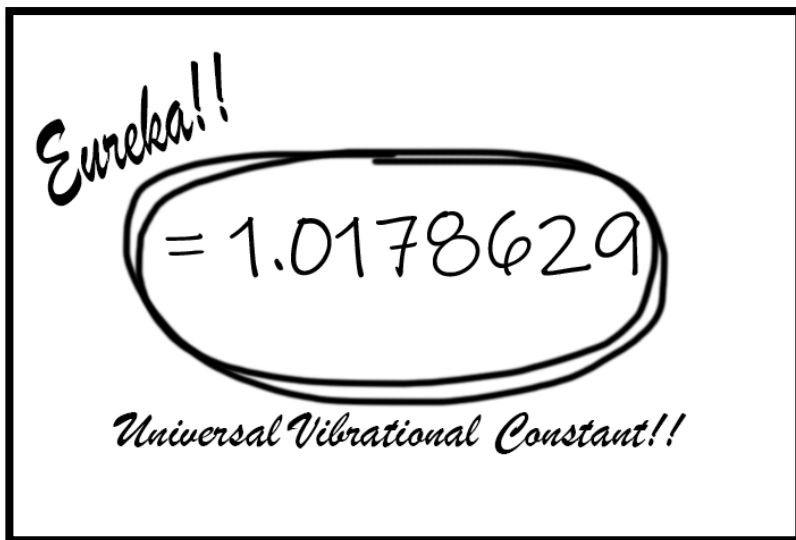
Rec Room: The largest room in the Lab Facility, this 3 by 5 meter room contains a couch, a single recliner (both in disrepair and duct taped together) and a vid-wall. Also, an upright arcade machine of *Storm!* is in one corner. This is the latest video game based on the movie of the same name by legendary director Tim Dameron, putting the player in the boots of Sergeant Stirling Storm, Medal of

Honor recipient and hero of Pandora who took down five UPP commandos and a dropship with nothing but his M41A pulse rifle! Of course, nothing works for lack of power.

Kitchen: Prefab meals, water, and some small comforts like bags of microwaveable popcorn. There is an electric stove, microwave, and meal hydrator, but still no power. There is also a sink which dripped at some point, but now the drips have frozen into a picturesque waterfall from the tap to the sink's drain. There is one large window looking into the frozen landscape, and the Darkness will not enter during the day.

Bedrooms: Kalinda, Dr. Mehta, and Jaleel each slept in one of these. The GM is free to order them as preferred, but I recommend Jaleel in 4, Dr. Mehta in 5, and Kalinda in 6. The doors are standard plastic prefab with conventional doorknobs and locks. Only Jaleel's will be locked. Jaleel's will be messy and rifled through, as if it were searched or someone left in a great hurry. Dr. Mehta's is well ordered, nothing out of place at all and no personal touched. If the PCs search this room, they will find a bloody sweater with a large rend in the chest under the mattress, as well as blood spattered pants. Kalinda's room is a messy girl's room with clothes strewn everywhere, much to the chagrin of her father (when he was alive, that is). There is nothing of interest here, though a search will turn up her favorite book, Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and the pressed daisy might just fall out of it. Each bedroom has a small, frosted over window, and The Darkness will not enter during daytime.

Office: This 3 x 3 meter room contains a desk, several whiteboards, and a terminal from which Dr. Mehta sent his message to corporate asking for Dr. Mallory's presence. The whiteboards are covered with messy diagrams and equations, which Louise will immediately recognize as part of Dr. Mehta's hypotheses on Many Worlds Interpretation. One equation has a solution that's written larger than everything else and circled twice. Written next to it are the words "Eureka!" and "Universal Vibrational Constant". Dr. Louise Mallory knows that Dr. Mehta believed that the universes overlapped, and remained separated only because they "vibrated" at difference frequencies. He believed that if he could isolate this universe's UVC, he could then begin to explore other universes.



If the Lab has power, a PC could make a Comtech check to hack Dr. Mehta's files. Doing so will find almost a year of boring status reports, but with an increasing sense that he was getting close. The PCs will find the message requesting Dr. Mallory from several weeks ago, as well as a personal entry where he claimed to have isolated this universe's UVC, and he and Jaleel were going to build the machine he designed two years ago that would allow him to open rifts between parallel universes. Though she was technically a competitor, he wanted her help on the experimental stage of the project since

she is, "the most brilliant scientist he knows". Starting five days ago, they will find a dozen entries titled "UVC" with a number incrementing up 0.000001 each time. Apparently, Dr. Mehta couldn't wait. Nine of these state "Empty/No Findings" and one contains observations of another frozen, ice and snowbound world. Number eight specifically mentions opening a portal that showed a mirror image as another Dr. Mehta and Jaleel stared back in them in awe as they apparently worked on the same project. The twelfth and last entry is dated three days ago, and has no description of what was found

at UVC 1.0178641. Of course, this is when the Darkness came through and invaded Dr. Mehta and Kalinda before Jaleel realized something terribly wrong was happening and killed the power.

Lab Access: Practically a closet, the access hatch into the lab itself is set into the floor here. The connecting door to the Office is sealed and can only be opened with restored power, and then only with Dr. Mehta's code (which he doesn't know) or a Comtech check. Of course, a PC can try to force it with Heavy Machinery, regardless of the power situation. The door to the hallway has already been forced open by Jaleel and will not close again.

The Lab: The Lab itself is about half the square footage of the upper level, with block columns as load bearing members every so often. In the center of the room is the Many Worlds Vibration Machine. Unless they've restored power, the PCs will find this room pitch black. If it is still daytime, Kalinda and Dr. Mehta will be asleep in the corner, and they will awaken immediately, shouting in alarm (and maybe pain?) if the beam of a flashlight strikes them. They will not return upstairs during the day, staying below and stalling for time if necessary. If the PCs restore power before coming here, Kalinda and her father will already be awake.

An Observation check will tell the PCs that the machine has been vandalized, and it can be repaired with a Heavy Machinery check and a Shift of work. The lab itself contains all the components necessary, as well as enough parts to patch the power (but not network) conduits between the main outpost and the lab (also a Shift of work).

ACT I

Easily enough, Act I begins with the PCs coming into orbit around GBH-168, noting that no one from the outpost is reaching out to them. This is odd, but the colony landing beacon is on as normal. They make planetfall (Piloting check as per RAW), and when within a mile of the landing pad, a crackling Paul Whelan reaches out by hand radio. He explains that the colony network connection is down, and they should land and make it into the colony complex ASAP. Night is coming within an hour, and a major snowstorm is on its way.

This gives the PCs time to explore, talk to the locals, and learn about the strange happenings around the outpost. Anyone they speak to will tell them to wait until daytime (two shifts away) to go to the lab, due to the sub-freezing temperatures.

If the PCs investigate the outpost's network dish, they find sabotage on a successful Heavy Machinery or Observation check. They can find enough spare parts to jury rig it in the store, requiring a Shift of work and a successful Heavy Machinery check. If the same PC makes a successful Observation check on the damaged dish, tractor, or dispensers in the Cantina, they'll come to the conclusion that something like an axe was used in all instances.

As a side note, when Mercedes Lamara knows that company protocol is to mount a search and rescue mission after any colony or outpost network connection has been severed and not restored within twenty four hours. Generally, it would take seventeen days for them to pull together a ship and crew and get them all the way out here.

The people at the main complex don't even know that power and comms are down to the lab. They often don't hear from or see anyone from the lab for weeks at a time, so it never crossed Whelan's mind to check. Of course, Talia's concern is growing.

Possible Act I events:

- While outside, a PC spots a figure running through the snowstorm, around the corner of a building. This is Jaleel Ekwensi, but the PCs should not directly encounter him this Act. Perhaps they find his footprints the next day coming in from or heading out into the snowy wasteland.
- Jaleel breaks into and sabotages the PC's ship, and they may not even be aware of it until it's too late! You may have to retcon this as happening, especially if a bright PC gets the idea of using the ship as a safe haven from the Darkness.
- Jaleel confronts Paul Whelan, trying to get the man to access the reactor to cause an overload. Whelan of course refuses, and Jaleel murders him in a fit of frustrated rage before running off into the night.

Act I Agendas:

- **Dr. Lousie Mallory:** Find out what the locals know of Dr. Mehta's work. Since you're a Seegson employee, see if there's anything you can do to help while you're waiting.
- **Chip Mallory:** This wait is killing you. See if you can get Manager Whelan to let you call down to the lab and talk to Kalinda.
- **Mercedes Lamara:** Confirm all company assets are secure and accounted for, and take charge if necessary. See what the locals and what Doctor Mallory know about Mehta's work.
- **Malcolm Edmonton:** Another bullshit rock on the Frontier. Find something to keep you busy around here while you wait for the storm to pass.

ACT II

Act 2 begins when the PCs set out for the Lab Complex. If they wait until the sunrise (which they really should to avoid freezing to death), the day will be clear and almost blinding with the sun's reflection off the fallen snow. If they leave right at dawn, it will take most of a Short Shift to arrive, leaving them with precious little time to explore and restore some semblance of power and heat.

They will encounter Kalinda and Dr. Mehta here, who will climb out of the underground lab when the sun sets. Alternately and as stated above, if the PCs investigate quickly, they may find the two "asleep" in a corner down below, awakened by the flashlight. Until power is restored (which the PCs should need to do quickly), Dr. Mehta and Kalinda will ask the PCs to keep any flashlight beams directly off of them, as their eyes have become very accustomed to the dark.

Dr. Mehta will seem confused by the newcomers at first, only becoming friendly when his daughter says, "Father, it's Louise and Chip!" Dr. Mehta will seem off to Louise and Chip, his knowledge apparently lacking. Kalinda will say he's very tired from working so hard. Dr. Mehta will be quick to show Louise around the lab, especially the machine, and he'll insist that the crew help fix the machine. If asked about any of the obvious damage, he'll say that his engineer, Jaleel Ekwensi, went berserk, damaging much equipment before running off. They haven't seen him in a couple days.

Possible Act II events:

- If a PC is outside or near the entrance to the lab building alone, Jaleel Ekwensi attempts to sneak up on him/her and take them out with his fire axe. He'll flee if he hears others coming, or if he thinks he cannot win. A Manipulation check at -2 can get him to stop his attack, but he'll run at first sign of Dr. Mehta or Kalinda, screaming, "I killed him!"
- This is good if the PCs begin to question helping fix the machine - Kalinda draws Chip away, takes him back to her room. She wants to hear all about what he's done over the last year. She will, of course, seduce him to lull him into a false sense of security, and then try to subdue him. Remember, she doesn't care if she kills him or not, because the Darkness can possess and animate even the dead. After, she'll telepathically let her father know, who'll excuse himself from working on the machine. She'll then run to Dr. Louise Mallory, saying, "Chip's hurt! Come quick!" Leading Louise to her bound and unconscious (possibly dead) son, she and her father will extort Dr. Mallory's continued work. If she tries to overpower them, they will not harm her, but she will find them to be immensely strong.
- Jaleel Ekwensi attacks the PCs while they try to repair the damaged conduits connecting the main facility to the lab. He will not attack if there are more than two, but maybe they spot him. Perhaps they can talk to him (Manipulation check) and get him to stand down and explain himself, though it will sound like half mad raving.
- Another snowstorm blows in, making travel back to the main facility impossible. It lasts as long as you need it to, narratively speaking.

Act II Agendas:

- **Dr. Lousie Mallory:** Locate Dr. Mehta and his work. Help him any way you can.
- **Chip Mallory:** Find Kalinda and make sure she's okay!
- **Mercedes Lamara:** Understand the doctor's work and make sure it's all true. Insist on proof and do whatever is necessary to get that proof!
- **Malcolm Edmonton:** Your honorable side is kicking in. Follow orders and keep everyone safe.

Act II ends when the PCs finally finish and activate the machine, opening the portal to universe 1.0178641, and d6 entities of Darkness come through every round it stays open.

ACT III

As in any horror movie, Act III is where the shit hits the fan, and the story will be driven almost exclusively by the PCs' agendas and motivations and everything that has happened so far in the scenario.

If the PCs need a breather, and after all, the Darkness is faster than a human, try to line up Act III so that it starts at sunrise. This would allow the PCs to escape outside and have a moment to think about their next actions. However, I would only consider this if Jaleel sabotaged their ship. Otherwise, it's just too easy for them to get on their ship and fly away. Also, if the ship is sabotaged, the PCs can find whatever parts they need in the Seegson Store, but the repairs will take a shift of work.

If the PCs jury rigged power to the lab using the tractor's batteries and some spare parts, activating the portal drains all the remaining power, plunging the complex into darkness. At least, this closes the portal, allowing only one round worth of the Darkness to pass through! If the PCs fixed the power by patching the conduits sabotaged by Jaleel, well, they're in a lot of trouble. Unless a PC uses a slow action to turn off the machine (or damage it), it will continue to allow the Darkness through at D6 entities per round.

It is very likely someone will suggest setting the colony's reactor to overload. This is easily accomplished with both a Comtech and Heavy Machinery check, but it requires a shift of work.

Possible Act I events:

- Jaleel Ekwensi intercepts the PCs as they try to escape the lab complex. Maybe he attacks them? Maybe he's in a lucid moment. Dealer choice, or let the PCs make a Manipulation check to see.
- If the PCs patched the damaged power conduits earlier on and are therefore feeding power to the lab complex, they run across Jaleel Ekwensi as he hacks at their repairs. Maybe he attacks, maybe he runs, or maybe he talks?
- If they open the portal at night - With Kalinda's knowledge of the main complex, the Darkness knows there are more hosts waiting back at the main outpost. Much faster than the PCs, they instead go past our PCs to invade the other NPCs. Even Jaleel perhaps? (This could make for a very dangerous encounter).

Act III Agendas:

- **Dr. Lousie Mallory:** Chip is the only thing that matters, even at the loss of your own life. Get him away safely.
- **Chip Mallory:** Kalinda is in there somewhere, you know it. Save her. Risk your own life, if need be, but not Mom's.
- **Mercedes Lamara:** Okay, so there's a little hiccup, but you know what this all means. If you can't save the tech, save all the research, and if you're the only one who makes it out of here alive, all the better for your career!
- **Malcolm Edmonton:** Scientists... So, thanks to the scientists, everything is going to shit. Somehow, you need to stop all this, save everyone you can, and leave no threat to humankind.

ESCAPE AND DENOUEMENT

The scenario ends when the PCs are either all dead or possessed or have escaped. If necessary for extra dramatic effect, have a PC make one final Piloting check to get the ship away. Below you'll find a few scripts you can hand to the PCs before the camera fades to black. While these do not represent every possible ending, they tend to be the most likely outcomes. Feel free to devise your own on the fly to fit your scenario's exact situation.

In the case of the PC's escape and colony's destruction:

This is <character name> of the USCSS Starglider reporting. I will write a full length report and enter it in the official log. Hopefully, this information will make it to the scientific community, so we don't follow in Dr. Mehta's footsteps. His theories and invention are too dangerous. We barely understand the dangers in our own universe, much less countless others. The colony on GBH-168 is a total loss, wiped off the face of the planet to keep the entities from spreading further. I think we succeeded. <pause> Every time I see a shadow or a dark corner of the ship, I have to shine a light on it to be sure they're not on board, waiting for me to look away, let my guard down, or nod off. I've turned on the ship's disaster beacon to make sure someone in the core systems picks it up as we pass through. I'll be sleeping with the lights on while heading home. This is <character name>, signing off.

In the case of the PC's escape, but the colony is not destroyed:

This is <character name> of the USCSS Starglider reporting. I will write a full length report and enter it in the official log. Hopefully, this information will make it to the scientific community, so we don't follow in Dr. Mehta's footsteps. His theories and invention are too dangerous. We barely understand the dangers in our own universe, much less countless others. The colony on GBH-168 is a total loss, overrun by those entities from that other reality. <pause> Every time I see a shadow or a dark corner of the ship, I have to shine a light on it to be sure they're not on board, waiting for me to look away, let my guard down, or nod off. I've turned on the ship's disaster beacon to make sure someone in the core systems picks it up as we pass through. I'll be sleeping with the lights on while heading home. This is <character name>, signing off.

Mercedes Lamara manages to be the sole survivor:

This is Mercedes Lamara, sole survivor of the Starglider and the horrible accident on GBH-168. For unknown reasons, perhaps the extreme isolation of the outpost, every member seems to have succumbed to a sort of insanity, and the outpost, its staff, and the scientific research is a total loss. I'm no pilot, but I've done the best I can to set course for the nearest Seegson presence in the core systems. With any luck the company will pick me up. <says the next sarcastically> Heaven forbid someone like Weyland-Yutani finds me first. Lamara signing off.

Somehow, the scenario ends with the final PCs trapped in the colony complex or their disabled ship:

This is <character name> of the USCSS Starglider making a log in case anyone finds it. Dr. Mehta's research has let something terrible into our universe. Everyone is dead, or taken over by these entities, and now, I <or we as the case may be> am trapped. A rescue mission should arrive in the next two weeks. If I survive that long, I may be able to raise them on radio to warn them before they land. If I survive that long. I won't let them take me the way they have the others. I'm very tired.