

"Free Rain"

by Dominic Moore

An Introductory adventure for 1st level characters



This is an introductory module for 3-5 1st level characters using the Revised Edition of the Stars Without Number ruleset. The module is intended for two purposes: first, to bring a group of PCs together to start a campaign as well as provide them (if all goes well) with a ship, and second, to introduce the player and the GM to the mechanics of the Stars Without Number game. To that end, this short introductory adventure will most likely feature ground combat, hacking, starship navigation, spaceship combat, pursuit, and evasion. This will help players get a feel for the game.

It can also be played as a one-shot to "test the waters" of the SWN revised rules.

“One crime has to be concealed by another.”
– Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Planet

Odessa (Heavy Industry/Megacorps) is a dreary world of massive, planet-spanning manufacturing operations, sad tenement housing and polluted strip mines. It's one major urban center, Odessa City, houses about 3 million inhabitants, largely the bureaucrats and menial laborers who form the cogs in the machine. Odessa City always seems to be shrouded in rain and “fog,” or more accurately, smog, which is the result of a century of over-exploitation of the natural world.

On the streets of Odessa City, inhabitants often wear respirators over their faces, heavy raincoats to protect themselves from the polluted rain and they eat highly processed food that is often imported from other worlds.

Major corporations on Odessa include Manticore Industries, The Xian Combine and Punjagutta Production, all of which are conglomerates that produce dozens of products, from holoivid units to gravcars, and everything in between.

Despite Odessa's bad reputation, it also functions as a center of trade and commerce for the sector and attracts both reputable businessmen and shadier characters looking to earn a quick credit.

The Job

The PCs meet for the first time after responding to a vague advertisement on the local net seeking “freelancers” for a special project. The characters are savvy enough to read between the lines or desperate enough to take on any job, so long as it pays...

The Meeting

The GM may read or paraphrase the following text:



The streets are slick with rain as you step into the nondescript building in an industrial area of the city. The room you enter might be generously described as a “board room,” but the paint is peeling, the lights are flickering with age and the furniture has seen better days. You glance around the room and then take a seat with the other freelancers.

At the head of the table is Aaron Vershin, a corporate stooge and fixer working for Manticore Industries -- and your employer for this job. Vershin is dressed casually, and looks like he'd be happier in his typical business suit rather than meeting with mercenaries in one of Manticore's mothballed offices.

“Well, let's not waste any time,” Vershin says, frowning. “Two days ago, Manticore Industries was robbed. That is, our CEO, Kira Gurov was robbed, and she would like this matter dealt with without the public embarrassment that would occur if this incident leaked to the press.” Vershin looks around the room to see if anyone objects before he continues.

“Kira owns an old free trader, the “Free Rain.” She uses it for special assignments where Manticore needs to keep a low profile. The thieves stole the ship and within the next day they intend to have its identification codes changed and move it off planet.

Obviously we cannot allow this to happen. We need you to locate the ship and return it to Manticore Industries. For this service you can each expect 500 credits in compensation. Are there any questions?”

At this time, PCs may ask questions; you may also share the following information.

- The ship is not particularly valuable, but it has sentimental value to Manticore's CEO. (The truth is actually more complicated, but Vershin will not reveal anything more.)
- Vershin does not know the identity of the thieves, or the location of the ship, but knows where to direct the players: The Blast Furnace is a local bar that caters to smugglers, fences and other ne'er-do-wells.
- Odessa's dark net might also contain information about the heist, including communications between the thieves and potential buyers.

After he answers their questions, Vershin leaves in his gravcar. The PCs must now try and locate the missing ship, the "Free Rain." If characters want to purchase additional gear, they can do that at any time, with a trip to one of Odessa's automated markets where most common gear is available at list price and at the GM's discretion. (A Lazarus patch is a wise choice!)

Either way, most roads will lead to The Blast Furnace.



The Blast Furnace

One bright light among Odessa's largely nondescript warehouse district is this bar. Read the following as the players arrive:

You cover your eyes against the drizzle as you step onto the curb in front of your destination. A neon sign that says "The B---- Furnace" flickers over the door. Most of one word is burned out and clearly maintenance of the property is not near the high end of the owner's list. A tough looking bouncer stands outside the stained door that leads to the interior. You hear the dull thumping of music from within. The bouncer looks you up and down:

"10 credits cover," he says.

The PCs can pay 10 credits each to enter. They can also persuade the bouncer to let them in with a successful Cha/Talk skill check at difficulty 8.

Upon entering, read the following:

The thumping of music fills your ears as you enter this large and apparently re-purposed industrial site. The enormous concrete floor is filled with dancing bodies, stumbling past each other in various states of intoxication. Above you, metal catwalks cross back and forth, and a DJ wearing dark shades and sporting a red mohawk keeps the party thumping from his high perch. To one side is a long bar dotted with bodies hovering over drinks.

If the PCs approach the bartender, they can ask him about buying a Free Trader "on the cheap." The bartender might refer them to one of the other patrons. Allow them to role-play this situation and insinuate what they're looking for.

The players can also make a Cha/Connect check at difficulty 8 to find someone who knows a thing or two about stolen spaceships and is drunk enough to talk. They might also try to bribe a patron or find out the information in some other way. Regardless of the path they take, they will be led to Edgar Shadi, an out-of-work mechanic known for heavy drinking, loose lips and

working under the table for some of the toughest gangs on Odessa.

Shadi is nervous when the PCs approach him, but he also has a natural inclination to brag about his work, fixing stolen spacecraft. He can be persuaded with a Cha/Talk check at difficulty 12 or intimidated with a Str/Exert at difficulty 10. The PCs can get a +2 bonus to these checks by buying him several drinks (at 5 credits each). Alternatively, Shadi carries his personal Dataslab with him at all times and if they PCs could find a way to "borrow" it from him they could hack it with an Int/Program check at difficulty 8.

A failure to convince or pickpocket Shadi means that the mechanic looks for the first opportunity and leaves the bar. The PCs can follow him home with a successful Dex/Sneak at difficulty 8, and this also gets a +2 bonus if Shadi is intoxicated.

Shadi's Home

You follow Shadi's drunken stumble to a decrepit-looking apartment building. He nervously looks around but is too intoxicated to notice your presence. You stay just out of sight as the mechanic opens the door to his small apartment and disappears inside.

If the PCs follow Shadi home, they can break into his apartment with a Dex/Fix check at difficulty 8, and then find the information they need with an Int/Program check on his personal dataslab (at the same difficulty) while he sleeps it off. As the GM, you can give appropriate pluses and minuses to these checks depending on the situation.

However they obtain the information, either from Shadi's own mouth or by surreptitiously accessing it, the PC's learn the following:

- Shadi was working for a criminal enterprise which uses the front of "Red Sun Trading" to hide their illegal activity.
- Red Sun Trading specializes in smuggling, and its not normal for them to steal a spaceship.
- The day prior, the "Sunners" hired Shadi to do some work on a free trader. They wanted the transponders

changed and the ID codes wiped so that they could sell the stolen ship.

- The ship is being housed at a Red Sun facility here in Odessa City. The dataslab shows where Shadi went to do his work the prior day.

Red Sun Trading Offices

Once the PCs have learned the location of the ship and the perpetrators of the theft, they assemble at the Red Sun Trading offices. The building is a squat, single-story structure with a large warehouse to the side that also serves as a landing pad. The roof of this warehouse can open to allow craft to land, and then close behind them, allowing illegal modifications to be made away from prying eyes.

When the PC's arrive:

The Red Sun Trading Office is a low, squat structure built to maximize efficiency and minimize both expense and attention. It blends in seamlessly with dozens of other, similar, warehouses in this industrial area of the city. The front of the building appears to be a few small offices, while to the side is a large, square, warehouse. The perimeter is guarded by a chain-link fence. On the East side, a protrusion appears to be a large air filtration system of some kind. Red Sun's worn logo appears to over the main entrance -- a pair of double doors that look securely locked.

There are four guards working the night shift at the building. All are "Martial Humans" as on p. 195 of the SWN rule book. (HD:1, AC 10, Atk. +1) They all carry laser pistols (1d6 dmg)

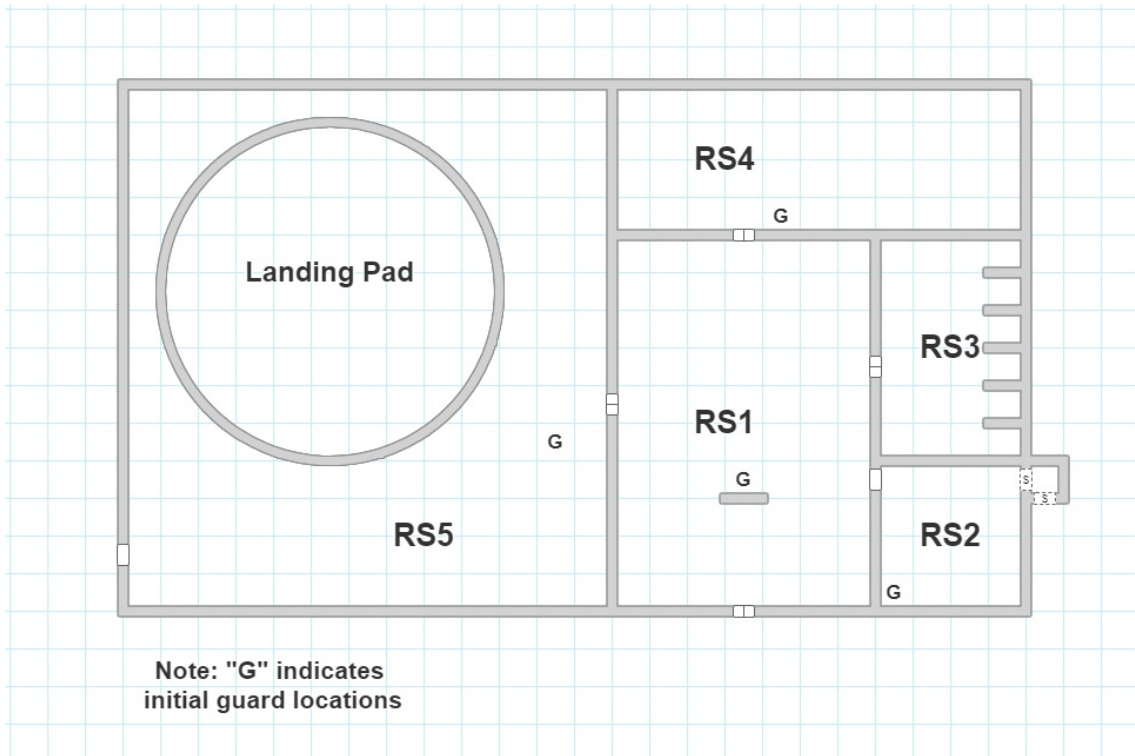
Four guards patrol the premises after-hours. They keep in regular communication with one another. If any one guard engages in open combat, all four will immediately move to engage as well.

Red Sun Guard: [][]

Red Sun Guard: [][][][]

Red Sun Guard: [][][][][]

Red Sun Guard: [][][]



Unless suppressed, security systems protect the entire building. Any unauthorized entry to any part of the structure will trigger internal alarms within five minutes, (The Security Office itself is an exception, see RS2) as well as summon three guards while the fourth guard summons backup.

About ten minutes after the call, another group of guards arrives. This time, there are three more Red Sun Guards (you can use the same stats as before) but they are also accompanied by a "Veteran Fighter" (HD:2, AC 14, Atk. +2)

The backup guards have the following HP (or you can roll your own.)

Red Sun Guard: [][][][]

Red Sun Guard: [][]

Red Sun Guard: [][][][][]

Red Sun Veteran: [][][][][][][][][]

In general, characters may attempt to assault the building, guns blazing, or they might sneak in, either through the air purification system (see RS2) or through the main doors, or the rear access door to the warehouse. Finding the opening in the air purification system (marked as a secret door on the map) requires a

Wis/Notice check at difficulty 7.

They might also find some other creative means of entry. Reward creativity!

If combat ensues, remember to make a morale check when the first NPC is killed. See p. 59 of the SWN rules.

RS1 – Entryway and Lobby

The front doors are locked, but can be disabled with a Dex/Fix check at difficulty 10 on the accompanying external keypad. One guard is stationed here at the front desk terminal. Anyone entering the area or approaching the front doors will be challenged, asked to leave immediately, and attacked if they persist. The large double doors to the East of the security station, which leads to the warehouse, are also locked.

The hangar doors can be opened from the Security Office.

RS2 – Security Office

This large room contains the main security station console for the Red Sun Offices. Because the Red Sun

Trading group uses this room for covert meetings, it is (ironically) the only room in the building not under direct surveillance. Instead, the guard in this room is under orders to never leave his post except for necessities. There is a large locker in one corner.

The console in this room requires that a line shunt be installed before a hacker can access the system. Once installed, a quick look at the console will offer the following options:

- Suppress Security systems: Int/Program Difficulty 8 - This stops all security systems and will no longer alert the patrolling guards or the backup forces about unauthorized entry. This also opens the doors leading to the hangar and warehouse.
- Download Information from Red Sun Database: Int/Program Difficulty 9 - A successful download from the Red Sun databases reveals a great deal about their smuggling activity. This message chain might be of interest to the players:

"...I don't care what you think. I'm not paying you unless you do it the way I want you to. We need to bring in more Reverie to supply the demand on the street. I've got a supplier off-planet and the quality is like nothing the peons can get on Odessa. Increase your shipments inbound and bribe the customs officers if you have to. Free Rain has a hold for this kind of thing. Use it you imbeciles or I'll never give you another cred." - K

A follow up is appended:

"Does she think we're fools? If she won't pay us for risking our necks running Rev than take the ship from her and we'll sell it to the highest bidder. What's she going to do, call the cops? She's knee deep in unregulated pharms... We'll run them all right, but not for her."

Loot: In the security office locker the PCs can find one suit of Security Armor (AC 14, p. 65) and a Laser Rifle (1d10 dmg, p. 67)

RS3 – Office Cubicles

This area contains several cubicles for the office workers

who manage the legitimate front of Red Sun's operations. The dataslabs are powered down and the desks are covered in refuse.

There are 50 credits to be found in one of the desk drawers, as well as a holoivid comedy called "Fast Times at Odessa High" featuring the exploits of the city's teenage ruffians.

RS4 – On-Site Laboratory

This room contains office equipment as well as a workstation with a small laboratory setup. Two doses of Reverie (SWN p. 73) are on the desk. This version of Reverie has been modified from its original form to induce an even greater feeling of relaxation and bliss. Otherwise the effects are the same.

A compad lies on a desk. It contains notes about pharm manufacture and documents describing how Reverie has been altered to increase its addictive appeal.

Loot: A Lazarus patch is found in one of the laboratory's storage crates.

RS5 – Warehouse and Hangar

You enter an enormous warehouse with very high ceilings, the top of which looks as though it can open and shut to allow small spacecraft to take off and land. Most of the room is taken up by maintenance and fueling equipment. A series of computer consoles lines the East wall.

On the landing pad is a spaceship -- the Free Rain. The stairs are extended down but there are no signs of activity inside.

The computer consoles on the East wall can be hacked with a successful Int/Program check at difficulty 8. This allows the roof of the hangar to open and the Free Rain to leave easily. Otherwise, the PCs could blast their way out with the ships guns, but this would surely attract unwanted attention. There is a small service door on the West wall of the hangar. It is locked, but can be forced with a Str/Exert check or picked with a Dex/Fex check, both at difficulty 8.

The Free Rain is a specially modified Free Merchant:

“Free Rain”

HP: 20

AC: 14

Armor: 2

Speed: 3

Crew Skill +1

Power: 10/0 free

Mass: 15/0 free

Crew: 1/6

Hull Class: Frigate

Weapons: Multifocal Laser (+3/1d4, AP20) Sandthrower (+3/2d4, Flak)

Defenses: Burst ECM Generator (negates one hit)

Fittings: Spike Drive-1, Fuel Bunkers, Atmospheric Configuration, 160 tons of cargo space, Smuggler’s Hold (2 tons of secret cargo)

Cost: 1,005,000 credits, 50,000 maintenance

The Free Rain is a battered and worn free merchant class trade ship. It appears to be lightly armed, although some interesting modifications have been made. You notice that the ship has advanced ECM capabilities which might just save the crew in a pinch. There is space for the standard allotment of crew, a common area, and a spacious cargo hold. This is a ship meant to stay under the radar and move small amounts of valuable cargo.

To take control of the ship, the players will need to pass an Int/Program check at difficulty 8 to override the ship’s computer locks, or they can pass a Dex/Fix check at the same difficulty to “hotwire” the controls. If both of these fail, consider giving them some other opportunity, such as a dataslab placed in one of the offices (or carried by a guard) that provides access to the ship’s systems.

NOTE: The Free Rain has smuggler’s hold with space for 2 tons of secret cargo. Kira Gurov is using this ship to smuggle pharms along with her erstwhile partners: Red Sun Trading. The PCs should have an opportunity to detect this compartment using the rules on page 100 of



the SWN core book. A basic search should allow a Wis/Notice check at difficulty 10. The longer they spend in the ship (such as during a spike drill) the lower the difficulty should be.

When the players board the ship, they can contact Aaron Vershin for further instructions using the ship’s communications systems. Vershin instructs them to take the ship out of system, to the neighboring star, Gandril. Vershin also transmits charting information, an updated “rutter,” for this jump.

Outward Bound

As the Free Rain enters orbit, warning lights sound in the cockpit. A fighter swoops in behind the ship. You are being intercepted! A voice crackles over the speakers:

“Unidentified free merchant, you are a rogue ship suspected of violent acts against Red Sun Trading. Surrender at once!”

The PCs are being attacked by a Red Sun Strike Fighter (SWN p. 104). Remember that the Free Rain’s Sandthrower is a flak weapon, and therefore gets to roll to-hit and damage rolls twice and take the higher result when facing fighter hulls!

Be sure you read and understand the space combat rules on p. 114 before you run this section of the adventure.

The PCs should designate a pilot and various departments. The GM should have copies of the relevant portions of the rules printed for the players, so that they can make choices about their use of Command Points.

This is an opportunity to teach them how space combat will function. A few good crises should keep the action moving!

Red Sun Strike Fighter
(HP 8, AC 14, Armor 5, Crew Skill +2, NPC CP: 4)
Weapon: Reaper Battery (+4/3d4, Clumsy)

Strike Fighter: [][][][][][][][][][]

If the PCs are victorious in their combat, they barely get a moment to rest before another Red Sun Strike Fighter appears on long range sensors. This ship will attempt to get a sensor lock on the Free Rain and pursue them. This allows an opportunity to use the detection, pursuit and escape rules on page 112 of the SWN Core book.

First, in order to determine if there is a sensor lock, the pilot of the fighter and the PC's comm officer roll an opposed Int/Program skill check. The fighter (the observer) gets a +2 bonus to this check because their Free Rain is a larger Frigate class. (This is in addition to the crew skill of +2, for a total of +4.) If the fighter gets a sensor lock, a long range chase will ensue, where opposed Int/Pilot skill checks can be made, each at +1 because of the spike drive rating in addition to other bonuses.

If the pilot of the Free Rain wins the pursuit, they get a six hour lead on the fighter. If they fail, the fighter can engage them and another space combat will ensue.

Strike Fighter: [][][][][][][][][][]

After defeating or evading the Red Sun ships, the PCs will need to navigate to the transition zone in order to jump to the Gandril system. This takes 48 hours. Usually, the pilot would need to make an Int/Pilot skill check to jump safely to the Gandril system. But because the difficulty for this check is 5, (7 base difficulty and -2 for updated rutter) no check is needed and the jump automatically succeeds. (See SWN p. 111)

The ship will spend six quiet days in hyperspace before emerging in the Gandril system.

Gandril System

Gandril is a backwater system, consisting of three major gas giants and boasting higher than usual levels of radiation. There are no inhabited planets. Vershin's message will instruct the PCs to bring the ship to the small moon of one of the gas giants, where there is a secret Manticore Industries base. It will take another 48 hours to travel from the transition zone in Gandril to the secret base.

The base consists of nothing more than a landing pad, an airlock that connects to frigate-sized ships, and a few simple rooms. Most of these are laboratory and dorm space for the workers who manufacture the modified Reverie pharms.

The PCs are met in the arrival area, just past the airlock, by Aaron Vershin and two of his bodyguards.

"Thanks for the ship," Vershin says, "we'll put her back to work. I suppose you'll be wanting your payment?"

If players confront Vershin about the pharm smuggling, he laughs them off and calls them naive. In fact, Vershin never intends to pay the PCs at all, instead he will try to surprise and kill them where they stand, easily disposing of the evidence. An Int/Notice check of difficulty 6 will detect that Vershin is nervous and that he's biding his time to strike. It might be possible to talk Vershin out of killing the players by offers of bribery or promises of further illegal work, but these should be difficult, at least Cha/Talk difficulty 12.

Otherwise, whether the PCs or Vershin strikes first, combat ensues. For simplicity's sake, all three are considered martial humans. (HD 1, AC 10, Atk. +1). Vershin carries a monoblade knife (1d6 dmg) but the two bodyguards have Laser Rifles (1d10 dmg).

Vershin: [][][][][][][][][][]
Bodyguard: [][][][][]
Bodyguard: [][][][][]

When the dust settles, the PCs can take their payment, 500 credits per player, from Vershin (he carried the money but intended to keep it for himself after the PCs were dead) and loot any weapons. If they explore the complex, they find evidence of pharm manufacturing but mostly in the form of unrefined base components and little of it is usable. The GM could give the players a selection of pharms (SWN p. 73) if more of a reward is desired.

The dozen or so Manticore employees who work at this secret facility will hide at the first signs of combat. They allow the PCs to leave with the Free Rain.

As they take off, they receive a transmission relayed from the base. It's the voice of Kira Gurov:

"I just saw your antics on the security camera footage. You disposed of Vershin and now you think you can take what's mine and get away with it? You think you can double-cross me? You've seen nothing yet. I will find you. I will chase you. I will hunt you down. Remember that when I come to find you... Kira Gurov does not forget when she is wronged!"

With that threat, the transmission ends.

Note: Alternative outcomes are possible at the discretion of the GM. If the PCs kill Vershin and then attempt to return the ship to Gurov, either because they do not know about Manticore's smuggling of illegal pharms, or simply don't care, Gurov might offer them employment instead. In this case they could acquire a Patron and a ship -- perhaps leased from Manticore instead of stolen. In such a situation they might find work conducting smuggling operations or missions of corporate espionage as reprisals against Red Sun Trading or to disrupt the

other megacorps.

However this interaction goes down, all surviving PCs receive 3 XP.

What happens next is up to the GM and the players. The PCs have a ship, but also a powerful adversary, (or Patron) and they may not be able to return to Odessa without facing consequences. Alternatively, they could try informing the authorities about Manticore's activities, but the government of Odessa is bought and paid for by the megacorps. Stay or flee, trade or pirate, explore, or whatever else you desire, the choice is yours!

Credits

Art for this module is taken from the Stars Without Number art pack. Individual pieces are by Christof Grobelski, Joyce Maureira, Grzegorz Pedrycz, and Tan Ho Sim.

The map was created with tools from Mipui.net.

Thank you to Kevin Crawford for creating a fantastic game!

