

ASHEN STARS

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demo game

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ASHEN STARS



Stowaway is a 15-minute **Ashen Stars** demo written by Kevin Kulp

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STOWAWAY

DEMO GOAL

Your job is to give new players a fast 20 minute experience that feels like the best part of Star Trek, Firefly and Aliens put together. This requires a cinematic demo that stays rules-light, even as it explores the game's major mechanics and themes. A quick game like this gives the player the cinematic feel of *'holy crap we're all going to die,'* lets them save the day against high stakes, and lets them see how general and investigative skills work. Just be sure to split up the tasks between different PCs, and have only 1-2 PCs on any given task. Ignore all extraneous rules and skills and only focus on the relevant ones. Don't explain any rule until it actually becomes necessary in the demo.

DEMO SUMMARY

A jaggar serf (p. 198 of the *Ashen Stars* core book) has been sent from its mothership on a suicide mission to infiltrate and disable the players' ship. It has crashed its small shuttlecraft through the bulkhead, slipped inside and ripped apart wiring for the ship's propulsion and life support systems. It has also set a bio-explosive that will render the ship completely inoperable for hours, long enough for the jaggars to attack them without fear of resistance.

Ask the players to name their ship. The demo starts in media res with the sabotaged ship spiraling down towards a planet's surface. In 15 minutes the PCs have to (a) diagnose the sabotage, (b) save the ship, (c) kill or capture the Class-K alien entity, (d) disarm the alien's explosive bioweapon. One or two of the PCs are in the cockpit and piloting the ship, with the rest of the PCs in the engine room fixing the sabotage and killing the alien saboteur.

Players use their investigation skills to quickly diagnose the sabotage (with the GM saying flat-out *'you know how*

this skill works, so you see the problem immediately.') The players spend skills from their pools to fix the sabotage and quickly combat the alien. This combat is complicated by the shuddering of the ship and requires athletic rolls. Meanwhile, the pilot uses his skills to try and pull the ship out of its fatal dive, with successes buying time, and can influence the fight through technology on the bridge. As soon as the sabotage is fixed and the alien is defeated, the alien's explosives must be vented to space or disarmed. Once that occurs the crew is saved. If the explosive is not disarmed 10 rounds after the scenario starts, the ship is destroyed along with all life aboard it.

Action will proceed in rounds. All characters start in the correct locations. Explain how the mechanic works: d6, aiming for a normal target number of 4, with each spent point from a skill pool adding +1 to the roll. Other factors (such as the jostling of the ship) may raise the target number. Move quickly around the table, asking what the characters want to do and only explaining rules as necessary.

THE ALIEN MENACE

The Class-K creature is a jaggar serf (p. 198 of the *Ashen Stars* core book). Already injured from crashing its shuttle into the side of the ship, it now wishes to disable the ship for several hours, long enough for its horrible brethren to approach in another spacecraft and seize the ship. Having just successfully sabotaged power and propulsion systems, the jaggar has set an organic explosive device to explode in mere minutes. If it succeeds the ship will be helpless.

Jaggar Serfs

Abilities: Athletics 6, Health 8, Scuffling 8, Shooting 8
Scuffling Weapons/Damage: chatak +1 (a multi-bladed short sword made of chitin)

Shooting Weapons/Damage: disruption pistol +1 (non-lethal setting deactivated)

Hit Threshold: 3 (+1 if fully behind cover, +1 if in the dark)

Tech: Personal Bluffer (pixelates and jams surveillance tech and headsets), Tether, Rosetta Chip

Alertness Modifier: -1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Savvy Modifier: -2

The jaggar serf will scuttle through the dark beneath the engine bay, striking out at the characters to distract them until the bomb explodes. It will largely ignore the weapons officer and will focus on killing the engineer who is trying to fix the sabotage damage. This creates a secondary goal for the PCs as the weapons officer tries to keep the engineer alive.

The goal of this demo is to make the players excited about the game. If the players take down the jaggar easily and anti-climactically (unlikely due to the dark and plentiful cover, but possible), and you have enough time, that's an ideal moment for a second unexpected jaggar serf to rise up directly behind a PC. Use your best judgment on this and err on the side of a shorter demo.

SETUP

- ▶ 2 players: The Wrench and the Gunner are in the crowded, confusing space beneath the engine room. Assume a NPC Pilot who stays off-camera.
- ▶ 3 players: The Pilot is in the cockpit. The Wrench and the Gunner are in the crowded, confusing space beneath the engine room.
- ▶ 4 players: As 3 players, and add the Stratco to the engine room area. He has some skill as a medic.
- ▶ 5 players: As 4 players, and add the Hailer to the bridge.

No miniatures or battlemat are needed for combat. Instead, describe the space and make up any detail needed. All PCs have disruption pistols (page 143 of *Ashen Stars*)

Read Aloud

Your ensign looks worried. 'Sir, it's worse than we thought. The alien shuttle pierced the side of the ship. We've locked off oxygen loss, but something alive is loose down there. It's

in the engine room, and...' The ship shudders from explosions somewhere aft, alarms start blaring, and all the cockpit lights flicker off. '...and I think it's trying to sabotage us.'

You're aboard your ship [ship name]. You're now in a rapidly decaying orbit around planet Chan-3 and the ship can't survive entry into the atmosphere. Your crew has at least three goals in the next few minutes before everybody dies: diagnose and fix the sabotage. Capture or destroy the Class-K alien threat, and find out if he left behind any surprises. Pilot the ship out of danger.

Go.

The Cockpit

The cockpit is cramped and slightly grungy. When the demo begins only emergency lighting and backup systems are working. The sensor screen that dominates the forward wall flickers with static as it shows the swirling tornado clouds of Chan-3. Sensor alarms indicate that the ship is in a deadly spiral down towards the planet.

While the cockpit begins with audio and visual contact with **Engineering**, the alien's Personal Bluffer will quickly disrupt this unless someone in the cockpit takes steps to override and restore communication.

The Pilot, and possibly the Hailer if there are five or more players, begin in the cockpit.

Cockpit Goals

- ▶ Slow the ship's out of control dive, giving the others time to restore power to engines and life support. The ship will hit the atmosphere and rip apart in 5 rounds if not maneuvered towards safety. **Astronomy** is used to understand that it's possible to skip the ship across the top of the atmosphere like a stone off the surface of a lake. A difficulty 5 **Helm Control** success is required to achieve this, giving an additional 10 rounds (i.e. the rest of the demo) of safety.
- ▶ Steady the ship to reduce shuddering and bouncing that is making every other task more difficult. A difficulty 4 **Helm Control** success allows normal difficulty targets for the rest of the demo. If the ship is not steadied, everyone on the ship must make difficulty 4 **Athletics** checks each round or have their difficulty targets for that round increased by +1.



Example: *The pilot decides not to steady the ship. Down in Engineering the Wrench must make a difficulty 4 athletics check or have his difficulty targets for fixing the sabotage increased from 4 to 5. If he's clumsy, he better spend those points!*

- ▶ Identify the threat. **Bio Signatures** can be used from the cockpit to identify the alien species and give its location. If the jaggar serf is using its Personal bluffer, a 1 point spend is required to overcome the interference. If this is not attempted, the Pilot can not reasonably affect the fight (unless the player comes up with something else clever.)
- ▶ Understand the alien. A PC with **Xenoculture** who asks about jaggars should be told a bit about them, such as that they occasionally use bio-explosives to disable hostile ships and that there is probably a very large ship full of hostile ones nearby. If disabled, the ship will be invaded within the hour.

- ▶ Help during the fight. Once sensors are used to locate the jaggar serf, ship systems (including minor force fields or robotic fuel maneuvering arms, whatever you like) can be used to corral or trap the alien. This requires a difficulty 4 **Systems Design** roll each round it is attempted; success will move the alien a meaningful distance or prevent it from moving for one round.
- ▶ Identify the bio-explosive. Once the alien's little present is discovered by PCs, the pilot can use **Explosive Devices** to identify it as incredibly dangerous. It can then be safely moved to an airlock or (for a 1 point spend) remotely disarmed.

Beneath Engineering

After physically crashing a shuttle through the ship's bulkheads - briefly describe the wreckage, sealed-off behind shimmering emergency force shields - the jaggar serf headed straight to the engine room. There it ripped apart the controls for life support and propulsion.



The area beneath the ship engines is dark, cramped and crowded. Flashing lights cast unlikely shadows. across bulky equipment, and wiring panels are ripped open, their exposed wiring sparking and sizzling in the darkness. PCs beneath Engineering start in audio contact with the cockpit, but this quickly cuts out due to the alien's Personal Bluffer. As described above, the Pilot or Hailer will need to override this interference.

The Wrench and Gunner begin beneath Engineering; they may be accompanied by the Medic and the Stratco if there are many players.

Goals

- **Identify the Problem:** A PC with **Forensic Engineering** understands that the sabotage isn't sophisticated; it is clear that something ripped open a wiring conduit and ripped apart data and power cables to the engines and life support systems. Given enough time it can easily be repaired; since the crew doesn't have much time, it can probably be quickly jury-rigged.

Assuming, of course, that the hiding alien doesn't kill the Wrench while he's working.

- **Fix Life Support and the Engines:** Temporarily repairing life support and the engines takes 1 success for each, at a Difficulty Number of 4; however, the PCs suffer a +1 penalty due to darkness until life support is turned back on, and (depending on athletics checks) possibly an additional +1 unless the Pilot can hold the ship steady. Meanwhile, the alien will be attempting to kill the PC doing the work. Do not tell the PCs the difficulty, but do describe how it is difficult to work while menaced by an alien monstrosity in the bumpy dark.

Fixing Life Support will restore lights, making the alien easier to see. Fixing the engines will allow the Pilot to steer the ship out of immediate danger, removing the need for constant athletics checks.

- **Find the Alien:** The jaggar serf is sly, but not intelligent. It hides in the darkness above the ripped apart wiring, waiting for prey. A Difficulty 6 **Sense Trouble** (due to the darkness and the jaggar's natural stealth) will alert the PCs to danger seconds before the alien attacks. See page 77 of the core book for Surprise and Cover rules.

- **Fight the alien:** The jaggar already knows it is on a suicide mission, but will try to stay alive long enough for the bio-explosive bomb to detonate. It will try to scuffle against armed opponents if it thinks it can get close enough, and it will snipe from darkness against an opponent who excels at hand-to-hand combat.

After the initial assault the jaggar will dart into darkness and use the ship's engine as cover as he shoots at the Wrench making repairs. It will also try to circle around and attack again. As the GM, make the player feel stressed and harassed as they try to fix the engines despite being attacked. The jaggar can be brought down in only two shots from a sidearm; try to make sure it dies with style, allowing the PCs to feel heroic.

As always, allow clever PC tactics the chance to succeed. for instance, the Pilot may be able to locate the alien on internal sensors and use the ship's systems to help neutralize it. If so, let the player describe how it works.

- **Find the explosive:** Hidden in the corner of the room is a bio-explosive that looks like a crackling, bubbling seed made from chitin. This chitinous pod is a mixture of virulent chemicals and bio-poisons that reacts explosively with air. It will explode 10 rounds after the scenario begins, taking out the engine room and everyone in it if it is not already disarmed.

A difficulty 3 **Sense Trouble** will alert a PC to its presence. Any PC with **Explosive Devices** skill can determine that it is very close to detonating. A 1 point spend from **Explosive Devices** will delay it long enough to get it safely to an airlock; a 2 point spend will safely disarm it.

Wrapping Up

The scenario is over when:

- The PCs have successfully killed the alien, fixed the sabotage and neutralized the bio-explosive
- The ship plunges into the atmosphere (5 rounds after scenario start if not corrected by the Pilot)
- The bio-explosive explodes (10 rounds after scenario start)
- The demo runs out of time

When the demo finishes, answer any questions for the players. The Ashen Stars core rulebook is available to buy on the Pelgrane Press website - www.pelgranepress.com

ASHEN STARS

NAME :

SPECIES : Human

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 3

WARPSIDE POST : Pilot

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Anthropology	...1...	.....	.....
Archaeology	...1...	.....	.....
Botany	...1...	.....	.....
Geology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Human	...1...	.....	.....
History, Kch-Thk	...1...	.....	.....
Vas Mal Culture	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...2...	.....	.....
Zoology	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Flirting	...1...	.....	.....
Inspiration	...1...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Astronomy	...2...	.....	.....
Bio Signatures	...2...	.....	.....
Chemistry	...1...	.....	.....
Energy Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....
Holo Surveillance	...1...	.....	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....	.....
Industrial Design	...1...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...6...	.....
Ground Craft	...5...	.....
Health	..10..	.....
Helm Control	..10..	.....
Preparedness	...2...	.....
Scuffling	..10..	.....
Sense Trouble	...6...	.....
Shooting	..10..	.....
Shuttle Craft	...4...	.....
Surveillance	...4...	.....
Systems Design	...3...	.....
Systems Repair	...5...	.....

You're a hotshot pilot who loves to show off. No one has more confidence in your abilities than you do, and it's justified; you know this ship like the back of your hand. You know what she can do. Anyone who damages it is in for a world of trouble.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

- 1/
- 2/
- 3/

PLAYER

ASHEN STARS



NAME :

SPECIES : Human

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 4

WARPSIDE POST : Wrench (Systems Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC

RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Botany	...1...	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....

INTERPERSONAL

RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...3...	.....
Bureaucracy	...1...	.....
Downside	...1...	.....
Reassurance	...3...	.....

TECHNICAL

RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Astronomy	...1...	.....
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....
Chemistry	...1...	.....
Data Retrieval	...1...	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....
Energy Signatures	...1...	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....
Forensic Engineering	...2...	.....
Holo Surveillance	...1...	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....
Industrial Design	...1...	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES

RATING	POOL
Athletics	...8...
Business Affairs	...2...
Ground Craft	...6...
Health	..10..
Infiltration	...3...
Preparedness	...4...
Scuffling	...6...
Sense Trouble	...4...
Shooting	..10..
Systems Design	..10..
Systems Repair	..12..

You're absurdly protective of your ship. You know you don't need to, but she's your responsibility to keep running smoothly. The last time someone stowed away on board and tried to hurt her, you responded... badly.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/

PLAYER

ASHEN STARS

NAME :

SPECIES : Kch-Thk

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 4

WARPSIDE POST : Gunner (Weapons Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC

	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
History, Kch-Thk	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL

	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...2...	.....	.....
Cop Talk	...3...	.....	.....
Interrogation	...4...	.....	.....
Intimidation	...5...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL

	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Evidence Collection	...3...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...3...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...3...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES

	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...9...	.....
Battle Console	..10..	.....
Health	..12..	.....
Migrate Consciousness (Kch-Thk)	...6...	.....
Preparedness	...3...	.....
Scuffling	..12..	.....
Sense Trouble	...6...	.....
Shooting	..13..	.....
Surveillance	...4...	.....

You are effectively a 7 foot tall battle-trained locust, and you are the ship's troubleshooter. That means that when there's trouble, you shoot it. Or rip it apart with your claws. You aren't particularly picky.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/

PLAYER

ASHEN STARS



NAME :

SPECIES : Human

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 3

WARPSIDE POST : Hailer (Communications Officer)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Anthropology	...2...	.....	.....
Archaeology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....	.....
History, Human	...1...	.....	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...2...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Downside	...1...	.....	.....
Flattery	...3...	.....	.....
Flirting	...3...	.....	.....
Impersonate	...1...	.....	.....
Reassurance	...1...	.....	.....
Respect	...2...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Data Retrieval	...1...	.....	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...5...	.....
Communications Intercept	...9...	.....
Filch	...5...	.....
Health	...9...	.....
Helm Control	...2...	.....
Infiltration	...5...	.....
Medic	...2...	.....
Preparedness	...5...	.....
Public Relations	...5...	.....
Scuffling	...5...	.....
Sense Trouble	...4...	.....
Shooting	...9...	.....
Surveillance	...6...	.....
Systems Design	...2...	.....
Systems Repair	...2...	.....

Your friends love you and strangers call you sleazy but that's only when you've beaten them out of something they want. You're smart, fast, and brutally competitive. For you, every interaction is a competition... even if the other person doesn't know it.

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/

PLAYER

ASHEN STARS

NAME :

SPECIES : Human

DRIVE :

GROUND SIDE POST :

HIT THRESHOLD : 3

WARPSIDE POST : Stratco (Strategic Coordinator)

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

ACADEMIC	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Forensic Accounting	...2...	.....	.....
Forensic Psychology	...1...	.....	.....
History, Combine	...1...	.....	.....
Law	...1...	.....	.....
Linguistics	...1...	.....	.....
Xenoculture	...1...	.....	.....

INTERPERSONAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bullshit Detector	...1...	.....	.....
Bureaucracy	...1...	.....	.....
Cop Talk	...1...	.....	.....
Downside	...1...	.....	.....
Impersonate	...1...	.....	.....
Inspiration	...1...	.....	.....
Negotiation	...3...	.....	.....
Reassurance	...1...	.....	.....
Respect	...1...	.....	.....

TECHNICAL	RATING	POOL	BOOST?
Bio Signatures	...1...	.....	.....
Decryption	...1...	.....	.....
Explosive Devices	...1...	.....	.....
Forensic Anthropology	...1...	.....	.....
Imaging	...1...	.....	.....
Kinetics	...1...	.....	.....

GENERAL ABILITIES	RATING	POOL
Athletics	...6...	.....
Business Affairs	...5...	.....
Ground Craft	...2...	.....
Health	..10..	.....
Medic	...7...	.....
Naval Tactics	...6...	.....
Preparedness	...6...	.....
Public Relations	...8...	.....
Scuffling	...9...	.....
Sense Trouble	...6...	.....
Shooting	..10..	.....

You're the ship's business manager, medic, and the closest thing to a captain it has. You're a two-fisted lawman who isn't afraid to talk his way out of trouble. But if that doesn't work, you're usually the one who starts swinging first. You've ruined more than one investigation contract that way...

WEAPONRY

You have a disruption pistol fitted with a Gun Nanny (page 145 of Ashen Stars). When you turn your gun to lethal mode, the Gun Nanny warns you if taking the shot and destroying the enemy will damage your reputation.

PERSONAL ARC

1/

2/

3/