

SESSION 7

Guns in the Dark

A Beginner-Friendly Traveller Teaching Campaign

REFEREE USE

The first prize has made the Travellers visible. A contact burns in the dark, closing fast, asking questions with drive flare and weapon locks. This session teaches starship combat as a crew effort: every station matters, damage is expensive, and escape can be victory.

Field	Briefing Detail
Campaign	Book One: The Drinax Training Arc
Session Type	Adventure Session
Target Play Time	Three Hours
Audience	New Traveller players and a new Referee
Rules Goal	Teach basic starship combat, roles, range, damage, and escape decisions
Campaign Goal	Prepare the crew for ship combat as costly teamwork, not isolated gunnery

DESIGN NOTE

This is an original teaching session document for personal table use. It is designed to be compatible with the tone and campaign frame of Traveller and The Pirates of Drinax, but it does not reproduce or replace official rulebooks or published adventures.

2. Session Snapshot

Item	Session 7 Detail
Session Number	7
Session Title	Guns in the Dark
Target Play Time	Three hours
Primary Teaching Focus	Basic starship combat rounds, ship initiative, pilot actions, gunnery, sensors, engineering support, damage control, and retreat.
Primary Story Focus	A rival or angry response ship intercepts the crew after its first prize, forcing the Harrier to fight, bluff, flee, or force surrender.
Main Traveller Mechanics	Ship combat sequence, range and thrust, station actions, attack checks, damage, emergency repair, morale, and escape as victory.
Main Drinax Concept	Every prize creates a reaction. A privateer ship survives by teamwork, discipline, and knowing when not to press the attack.
Expected Session End-State	The crew survives its first starship combat or chase, records ship damage and reputation effects, and understands every station role.
Recommended Prep Time	Ninety minutes. Prepare one enemy ship profile, station quick cards, damage notes, and escape options.
Difficulty for New Referee	Moderate to High. This is the first session with a full team-based combat subsystem.

CONTINUITY FROM PRIOR SESSION

Session 6 should have ended with the crew taking, sparing, botching, or publicizing its first prize. Before play, check prize value, target story, warning transmissions, ship condition, cargo or prisoners aboard, Drinax Trust, Pirate Reputation, Merchant Reaction, and whether anyone has reason to pursue the Harrier.

3. Referee Overview

This session introduces starship combat as a team activity. The encounter should be short, tense, and understandable. The point is not to destroy the Travellers. The point is to show that ship combat uses the whole crew, burns money, damages systems, and creates consequences even when the crew wins.

The opposing ship may be a rival corsair, an armed trader, a hired escort, a bounty hunter, or a patrol craft depending on what happened in Session 6. It does not need to be stronger than the Harrier. It needs to be dangerous enough that players learn to respect space combat.

The session should give every station something to do: pilot, sensors, gunner, engineer, commander, medic, broker, and security. Escape, surrender, intimidation, disabling fire, and negotiation are all valid outcomes.

REFeree NOTE

Starship combat should feel expensive before it feels cinematic. Even a glancing hit may mean repairs, fuel loss, frightened passengers, cargo damage, or a new enemy.

4. Teaching Goals

Player Learning Goals

- Understand basic starship combat sequence and station roles.
- Learn that pilot, sensors, engineer, and command actions matter as much as gunnery.
- See that range, thrust, position, and initiative shape the fight.
- Practice damage control and retreat as normal choices.
- Understand that ship combat can be won without destroying the enemy.

Referee Learning Goals

- Run a short ship fight or chase without drowning in options.

- Ask each station for action during every meaningful round.
- Use enemy morale and objectives.
- Translate damage into immediate table tension.
- End the encounter when the decision is clear, not when every hull point is gone.

Campaign Learning Goals

- Show that the first prize changed how others see the crew.
- Introduce rival ships as recurring campaign pressure.
- Make repair costs and ship condition matter.
- Prepare the crew for more complex space threats later.

5. Rules Introduced This Session

Rule or Concept	Why It Matters	How It Appears in Play	Teach Detail	Beginner Mistake to Avoid
Ship Combat Rounds	The table needs order during crisis.	Each round gives stations meaningful actions.	Teach sequence and spotlight.	Do not let one player run the ship alone.
Ship Initiative	Who acts first changes danger and leverage.	Used once contact turns hostile or time-sensitive.	Use simple initiative process.	Do not recalculate endlessly.
Pilot Maneuvers	Position and range are survival tools.	Pilot chooses close, evade, hold, run, or angle for weapons.	Teach broad options.	Do not make it a movement puzzle.
Sensors and Targeting	Information wins fights.	Sensors identify locks, ranges, damage, and enemy intent.	Give useful reads.	Do not make sensors passive.
Gunnery	Weapons create pressure, not just damage.	Gunner can warn, disable, fire, or hold.	Teach one or two attack examples.	Do not solve every problem with firing.
Engineering and Damage Control	The ship stays alive through repairs and power choices.	Engineer stabilizes drives, power, heat, or damaged systems.	Use simple urgent tasks.	Do not wait until after combat to ask engineers what they do.
Escape and Surrender	Survival is victory.	Either side may break off, surrender, bluff, or cut a deal.	Use morale and goals.	Do not require a fight to destruction.

6. Rules Intentionally Avoided

Rules or Subsystem	Why It Is Delayed
Fleet Combat	The crew needs one ship-versus-ship encounter before handling multiple vessels.
Advanced Missile Exchanges	Use simple weapon pressure unless the table already knows missile detail.
Boarding Actions	Boarding combines personal and ship combat. Save it for later.
Detailed Salvage	A disabled ship may create a future hook, but do not stop for full salvage rules.
Complex Electronic Warfare	Use basic sensor and comms pressure only.
Ship Design and Refits	Repair and status matter now. Upgrades can wait for downtime.

7. What the Players Should Learn

Players should learn that starship combat is not a gunner minigame. The ship lives or dies through shared decisions: who commands, who maneuvers, who reads the enemy, who manages damage, who fires, and who decides when the prize is not worth the repair bill.

- Every station should act during a ship crisis.
- Running away can be good command.
- Damage creates story pressure after the fight.
- A disabled enemy is more useful than wreckage if the crew needs leverage.
- The ship is both home and weapon. Protecting it matters.

8. What the Referee Should Practice

- Start with detection and choices before initiative.
- State range, enemy posture, and escape routes clearly.
- Ask each station what they do before resolving the round.
- Keep enemy goals simple: test, punish, seize, delay, or drive off.
- Use damage tags and urgent repairs instead of overexplaining technical results.
- Let negotiation return after shots are fired.
- Update ship condition immediately after the session.

REFEREE NOTE

If the players freeze, ask the captain for intent, then go station by station: pilot, sensors, engineer, gunner, command, support.

9. Three-Hour Session Timeline

Time	Segment	Purpose	Referee Notes
0:00 to 0:15	Opening recap	Review first prize consequences and ship status.	Tie enemy motive to Session 6.
0:15 to 0:45	Contact in the Dark	Detect and identify the approaching ship.	Let players choose posture.
0:45 to 1:30	Hail, Bluff, or Battle Stations	Run the opening exchange and move to initiative if needed.	Use roles before weapons.
1:30 to 2:15	Ship Combat or Chase	Run two to four meaningful rounds.	Keep the fight readable.
2:15 to 2:45	Damage, Terms, or Escape	Resolve surrender, pursuit, repairs, or break-off.	Update ship status.
2:45 to 3:00	Debrief and Hook	Record consequences and point to faction pressure.	End with a reaction.

10. Required Materials

Checklist	Checklist
☐ Character sheets	☐ Enemy ship profile card
☐ Ship record sheet	☐ Ship combat quick reference
☐ Campaign ledger	☐ Station role cards
☐ Sector or subsector map	☐ Damage control note sheet
☐ World or route notes	☐ Range and status tracker
☐ Session handout	☐ NPC cards for enemy crew
☐ Dice	☐ Scratch paper or index cards
☐ Basic task check reference	☐ Optional ship silhouette or contact marker

For this session, use one enemy ship with a clear goal. Give it enough threat to teach the rules, but do not build an encounter that requires perfect tactics to survive.

11. Opening Situation

READ OR PARAPHRASE

The Harrier has left the scene of its first prize, but space is not empty. A contact appears at the edge of sensor range, matching course too cleanly to be coincidence. The signal is dark at first, then sharpens. Drive flare. A tight transmission. A demand for identification, explanation, or surrender depending on how bold the other captain feels. The crew has seconds to decide: answer, run, hide, bluff, or go to battle stations.

12. Key NPCs

Name	Role	First Impression	Wants	Knows	Helps	Complicates	Skills
Captain Rellis Vane	Rival Ship Captain	Cold, clipped, and confident.	Test or punish the crew after the first prize.	The Harrier has taken its first target.	May negotiate if respected.	May press if the crew looks weak.	Pilot, Tactics, Leadership, Persuade
Asa Drel	Enemy Gunner	Quiet, professional, no wasted words.	Disable without dying.	Knows target priorities.	Can call for ceasefire if outmatched.	May take a hard shot if insulted.	Gunner, Mechanic, Recon
Inko Marr	Enemy Sensor Tech	Nervous but sharp.	Keep the captain informed.	Can read Harrier damage or bluff.	May leak fear over comms.	May expose crew weakness.	Electronics, Recon, Comms
Jalen Mor	Crew Advisor	Hard voice over internal comms.	Keep the crew alive.	Ship damage becomes future debt.	Can remind crew of options.	May criticize reckless command.	Pilot, Mechanic, Engineer
Kestrel	Ship Voice	Calm, delayed, precise.	Stability and clear commands.	Can report status and warnings.	Provides system alerts.	May phrase alarms too clinically.	Computers, Electronics
Merev Sol via Rumor	Broker Contact	Not present, but useful context.	Know what story reaches the market.	Brokers listen to combat rumors.	Can later interpret reactions.	May sell the story if profitable.	Broker, Streetwise

13. Key Locations

Location	Description	First Notice	Useful Details	Complications	Relevant Checks	Campaign Connection
Harrier Bridge	Command center for combat decisions.	Every screen matters at once.	Use for command, pilot, sensors, and hail.	Conflicting orders slow action.	Leadership, Pilot, Electronics.	Makes crew roles real.
Engineering	Drive, power, heat, and emergency control.	Vibration, warning lights, hot metal.	Engineers keep the ship alive.	A fault can turn small damage serious.	Engineer, Mechanic.	Turns damage into campaign cost.
Gunnery Station	Weapons control and firing solutions.	Target locks and power warnings.	Gunner can pressure without firing.	Bad shot may escalate.	Gunner, Tactics.	Shows restraint and threat.
Sensor and Comms	Eyes and voice of the ship.	Static, locks, ghosting, comm pings.	Identifies enemy intent.	False reads cause wrong choices.	Electronics, Recon, Comms.	Links to future electronic play.
Dark Transit Zone	Open space between ports or worlds.	No help is close enough.	Escape vectors matter.	Distress calls may reveal location.	Astrogation, Pilot.	Shows isolation of space.

14. Scene-by-Scene Outline

Scene 1: Contact in the Dark

PURPOSE	Start with detection and uncertainty.
SETUP	A ship matches course after the crew leaves its first prize or risky route.
WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN DO	Scan, alter course, go quiet, hail, prepare weapons, or check escape vectors.
RELEVANT CHECKS	Electronics 8+, Recon 8+, Pilot 8+, Astrogation 8+.
LIKELY OUTCOMES	The crew learns enough to choose posture.
FAILURE COMPLICATIONS	The enemy gains better position or reads the Harrier first.
REFEREE ADVICE	Start before initiative. Fear begins with uncertainty.
TRANSITION	A transmission or maneuver forces response.

Scene 2: The Hail

PURPOSE	Give the crew a chance to avoid or shape combat.
SETUP	Captain Vane demands answers, payment, surrender, or proof of authority.
WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN DO	Bluff, negotiate, threaten, identify, stall, offer terms, or go to battle stations.
RELEVANT CHECKS	Persuade 8+, Leadership 8+, Deception opposed, Advocate 8+.
LIKELY OUTCOMES	The crew may gain time, learn motive, or avoid combat.
FAILURE COMPLICATIONS	The enemy locks weapons, calls the crew liars, or starts closing.
REFEREE ADVICE	Let the first words matter. Then decide if timing requires initiative.
TRANSITION	The encounter becomes chase, battle, or tense standoff.

Scene 3: Battle Stations

PURPOSE	Make every role active.
SETUP	The crew assigns station actions for the first combat round or chase turn.
WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN DO	Pilot maneuvers, sensors track, engineer routes power, gunner locks, captain commands.
RELEVANT CHECKS	Pilot, Electronics, Engineer, Gunner, Leadership.
LIKELY OUTCOMES	The Harrier enters the first round with a clear plan.
FAILURE COMPLICATIONS	Actions duplicate, conflict, or leave one system unsupported.
REFEREE ADVICE	Ask each station for one clear action.
TRANSITION	Resolve first exchange.

Scene 4: Two to Four Combat Rounds

PURPOSE	Teach the rhythm without overlong battle.
SETUP	The enemy fires, evades, demands surrender, or tries to disable the Harrier.
WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN DO	Attack, evade, jam lightly, repair, break off, hail, or force surrender.
RELEVANT CHECKS	Gunner, Pilot, Engineer, Electronics, Tactics, Leadership.
LIKELY OUTCOMES	The crew damages, evades, disables, or outlasts the threat.
FAILURE COMPLICATIONS	The ship takes damage, cargo is threatened, or enemy reports location.
REFEREE ADVICE	Stop when the decision is clear. Do not grind.
TRANSITION	Move to terms, escape, or repair.

Scene 5: Damage, Terms, and Aftermath

PURPOSE	Make the cost visible.
SETUP	A ship is damaged, someone backs down, a warning escapes, or repairs are needed.
WHAT THE PLAYERS CAN DO	Negotiate surrender, rescue survivors, break off, repair, loot, or make a threat.
RELEVANT CHECKS	Engineer 8+, Mechanic 8+, Persuade 8+, Broker 8+, Medic if injured.
LIKELY OUTCOMES	The fight ends and the campaign ledger changes.
FAILURE COMPLICATIONS	The enemy escapes with a story or the Harrier carries damage forward.
REFEREE ADVICE	The aftermath teaches more than the attack roll.
TRANSITION	Session 8 can begin with faction reaction and Aslan pressure.

15. Core Checks and Suggested Difficulties

Situation	Skill	Difficulty	Success	Failure
Identify unknown contact	Electronics or Recon	8+	Learn ship type, vector, or likely intent.	Contact gains surprise or better position.
Plot escape vector	Astrogation or Pilot	8+	Find a route to break contact.	Escape costs time, fuel, or position.
Read enemy hail	Investigate or Recon	8+	Sense bluff, anger, or fear.	Misjudge willingness to fight.
Coordinate first round	Leadership	8+	Stations act in useful order.	Two stations duplicate effort or miss a key task.
Evasive maneuver	Pilot	8+ or 10+	Improve defense or range.	Lose position or strain systems.
Acquire firing solution	Gunner or Electronics	8+	Gain a credible shot or threat.	Shot is poor or delayed.
Emergency repair	Engineer or Mechanic	8+ or 10+	Stabilize a stressed system.	Damage worsens or costs later repair.
Force enemy surrender	Persuade or Leadership	8+	Enemy accepts terms or breaks off.	Enemy fights one more round or runs.

16. Player-Facing Choices

Choice	Why It Matters	Benefit	Risk	Later Effect
Answer the hail or stay silent	Sets tone and reveals confidence.	Talking may avoid shots.	Silence may be treated as guilt.	Shapes enemy report.
Fight, run, or bluff	Defines command style.	Avoiding damage may be best.	Bluff may fail under sensors.	Affects crew culture.
Disable or destroy	Controls moral and material cost.	Disabling leaves leverage.	Destruction creates hatred and evidence loss.	Shapes pirate reputation.
Protect cargo or pursue enemy	Forces priorities.	Cargo may be mission-critical.	Enemy may escape.	Affects profit and future threat.
Repair now or keep pressure	Balances survival and offense.	Repair prevents worse damage.	Enemy may gain advantage.	Affects ship ledger.

17. Consequences and Branching Outcomes

Clean Success

The crew identifies the threat, uses stations effectively, avoids serious damage, and drives off or disables the enemy. Ship Status remains Operational, perhaps with minor stress. Reputation grows as capable and disciplined.

Mixed Success

The crew survives and achieves its goal, but the ship takes damage, cargo is affected, a warning is transmitted, or the enemy escapes with a useful story. Add repair cost and a future response.

Complicated Failure

The Harrier is damaged, forced to flee, loses cargo, suffers a reputation hit, or owes a repair debt. Do not strand the campaign. Convert failure into repairs, rescue, debt, port restrictions, or a rival who believes the crew can be hunted.

CONSEQUENCE

The first ship fight should make the crew proud and nervous. Record damage, ammunition, fuel, enemy survival, witnesses, and who made the command decision that mattered.

18. Combat, Conflict, or Crisis Guidance

Combat is the focus of this session, but it should not be a long duel to destruction. Use clear stakes, short rounds, and enemy morale. The enemy has a goal and will break off, surrender, or bargain if that goal becomes impossible.

- Enemy purpose: test, punish, capture, drive off, or reclaim reputation.
- Enemy morale: breaks if clearly outmatched, damaged, or offered survivable terms.
- When enemies retreat: after taking serious damage, losing position, or transmitting warning.
- Terrain or cover: open space, range, thrust, sensor noise, and escape vectors replace walls and crates.
- Nonviolent exits: bluff, surrender, ransom, apology, proof of authority, or mutual withdrawal.
- Consequences of damage: repairs, debt, reduced capability, cargo loss, and reputation.

19. Ship, Trade, Law, or Faction Notes

Category	Session 7 Use
Ship Operations	Primary focus. Every station should matter during contact, combat, and repair.
Trade	Cargo and profit may be threatened by damage or pursuit.
Cargo	Cargo can be damaged, used as leverage, or abandoned to escape.
Passengers	If aboard, passengers react to danger and may become witnesses.
Fuel	Chase and evasive action may increase fuel or route pressure.
Starport Procedures	After the fight, ports may ask about damage, weapons, or distress signals.
Law Level	Simplified. Combat reports, transponder logs, and distress calls shape later legal risk.
Local Authority	Not present unless a patrol responds later.
Drinax Reputation	Affected by whether the crew survives and how public the battle becomes.
Imperial Attention	Possible if weapons fire occurs near regulated traffic or Imperial registry ships.
Aslan Attention	Not central, but a watching Aslan vessel can foreshadow Session 8.
Pirate Reputation	Strongly affected. Destruction, mercy, and retreat all tell different stories.
Merchant Reaction	Affected if the crew looks disciplined, reckless, or weak.

20. Campaign Ledger Updates

Checklist	Checklist
☐ Enemy ship name and type recorded	☐ Ship damage or system stress recorded
☐ Enemy captain reaction recorded	☐ Repairs needed and estimated cost noted
☐ Combat method summarized	☐ Fuel, cargo, or passenger effects noted
☐ Escape, surrender, or victory recorded	☐ Warnings or transmissions noted
☐ Drinax Trust adjusted	☐ Pirate Reputation adjusted
☐ Merchant Reaction adjusted	☐ Imperial Attention adjusted if relevant
☐ Crew morale or fear noted	☐ Open rival or retaliation hook recorded
☐ Session 8 faction hook recorded	☐ Lessons learned by each station noted

21. End-State of the Session

- The Travellers have fought, evaded, or negotiated through their first starship combat encounter.
- Every player has seen how at least one shipboard station contributes under fire.
- The ship ledger includes damage, repairs, or operational stress if applicable.
- The enemy outcome and reputation effect are recorded.
- The group understands that ship combat is dangerous, costly, and team-based.
- Session 8 can introduce faction pressure, especially from observers, merchants, or Aslan interests.

22. Hooks into the Next Session

Hook Type	Hook
Direct Hook	A faction contact or Aslan-linked observer asks about the battle and what authority the crew claims.
Optional Player-Driven Hook	The crew chooses whether to repair, pursue, hide, report, or use the enemy ship as leverage.
Consequence-Based Hook	A clean victory earns respect. A messy fight creates repair debt, witnesses, or a rival who wants another round.

23. Referee Quick Reference

Item	Reference
Session Goal	Teach basic starship combat as team-based crisis play.
New Rules	Ship combat rounds, initiative, pilot, gunner, sensors, engineering, damage control, escape.
Important NPCs	Captain Rellis Vane, Asa Drel, Inko Marr, Jalen Mor, Kestrel, Merev Sol.
Important Locations	Harrier Bridge, Engineering, Gunnery, Sensor and Comms, Dark Transit Zone.
Likely Checks	Pilot, Electronics, Recon, Engineer, Mechanic, Gunner, Leadership, Persuade, Tactics.
Main Complications	Unclear enemy intent, weapon lock, warning transmission, system damage, escape decision.
End-State	Ship combat resolved and damage, enemy outcome, reputation, and repair needs recorded.
Ledger Updates	Enemy ship, damage, repairs, fuel, cargo, transmissions, reputation, rival hooks.

REFEREE NOTE

End the combat when the tactical answer is clear. The campaign gains more from aftermath than from five extra rounds of attrition.

24. Player Handout Page

PLAYER HANDOUT: BATTLE STATIONS

A ship is closing in the dark. It may be a rival, a hunter, an angry trader, or someone with questions about your first prize. Every station matters. Your goal is not automatically to destroy the enemy. Your goal is to survive, protect the ship, and decide what kind of reputation follows you.

Known Situation

- An unknown or hostile ship is matching your course.
- Your actions after the first prize may have drawn attention.
- You can answer, bluff, run, fight, or negotiate.
- Damage to the Harrier will matter after the battle.
- Escape can be victory if the ship survives.

Battle Station Questions

Question	Why It Matters
Who commands this round?	Clear command prevents duplicated effort.
What is the enemy trying to do?	Motive shapes whether to fight, flee, or talk.
What range do we want?	Position decides risk and weapon usefulness.
What must we protect?	Cargo, crew, drive, passengers, and reputation may compete.
When do we break off?	A retreat plan avoids pride-based disaster.

Crew Task List

Role	Focus
Captain or Mission Lead	Sets intent and final call.
Pilot	Controls range, evasion, and escape.
Sensor Operator	Reads enemy movement, locks, and damage.
Engineer	Keeps power, drives, and damage control alive.
Gunner	Threatens, disables, or fires.
Medic or Support	Handles injuries, panic, and passenger reactions.

25. Appendix: Notes, Tables, and Optional Adjustments

Shorter-Session Adjustment

Start with the enemy already identified and hostile. Run two combat rounds, then force a surrender, escape, or damage-control decision.

Longer-Session Expansion

Add a pre-battle stalking phase with sensor ghosts, false hails, and route choices before initiative.

If the Players Choose Violence

Let them fire, but make damage, logs, repairs, and reputation matter. Do not make destruction automatically profitable.

If the Players Avoid Violence

Reward a clever bluff, retreat, or negotiation with lower repair costs and a stronger reputation for discipline.

If the Players Ignore the Hook

The contact keeps closing, then asks for identification or begins a target lock. The crew can still choose how to respond.

If the Crew Lacks a Key Skill

Use backups, task support, or ship automation. Missing skill coverage should create tension, not a campaign stop.

If the Referee Wants More Roleplay

Let the enemy captain speak between rounds. A battle with voices is more memorable than silent dice.

If the Referee Wants More Action

Add a second hazard such as cargo shifting, a passenger panic, or a temporary drive alarm. Keep it to one extra complication.

Optional Rumors

Rumor	Use
The first prize was noticed faster than expected.	Links directly to Session 6.
A ship with dark transponder habits hunts careless raiders.	Foreshadows the enemy contact.
Brokers pay more for crews who can survive retaliation.	Connects combat to future trade.
The Harrier has old scars for a reason.	Reinforces ship history.
Someone watched the battle from farther out.	Foreshadows faction or Aslan pressure.

Optional Complication

OPTIONAL COMPLICATION

During the fight, an unidentified passive sensor contact appears at long range. It does not intervene, but it records enough to matter later.

Optional NPC Reaction

Rao respects survival with control. Oleb respects victory with story. Jalen respects crews that repair before boasting. Merchants respect predictability. Pirates respect fear.