

FREE QUICKSTART • A SCIENCE FICTION RPG

THE
RED
SHIFT

*Competent operators trapped in the machinery of
corporate space.*

Everything you need to run your first mission.

DANIEL COONROD & ZETA GARDNER

QUICKSTART EDITION
FREE SAMPLER



HOW TO PLAY

The Red Shift is a science-fiction roleplaying game of competent people and bad options. You play operators — soldiers, engineers, ghosts, medics — working for the megacorps that own the stations, the air, and the debt that keeps you employed. The jobs pay. They also cost. This quickstart has everything you need to run your first one.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ◆ **2-5 players and one GM.** One person runs the world and the corporation; the rest play the crew.
- ◆ **A handful of six-sided dice (d6),** something to write with, and two to three hours.
- ◆ **The four operators at the back of this book.** Hand them out — no character creation required.

HOW A GAME WORKS

The GM describes a situation. The players say what their operators do. When the outcome is uncertain and interesting, someone rolls a pool of dice, and the successes decide how it goes. Pressure builds on clocks until something breaks — and then the crew deals with the fallout. That loop, tightened until it hurts, is the whole game.

Tone: noir, not heroic. Your operators are good at the job. The job is the problem.



THE CORE ROLL

Whenever an action is uncertain, build a dice pool: **1 die + your Skill rank** (skills run 0–5). Add a die for an advantage — good gear, good position; subtract one for a problem — bad light, makeshift tools. Roll the pool. **Every 5 or 6 is a success.** Meet or beat the Difficulty and you succeed.

DIFFICULTY

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 • Routine | Barely worth a roll. |
| 2 • Standard | The everyday default for real tasks. |
| 3 • Tough | Trained hands, real pressure. |
| 4 • Formidable | Experts sweat this one. |
| 5 • Near-impossible | The stuff of legends and bad ideas. |

Don't roll if you don't have to. A trained operator (Skill 2+) doing a routine task with no pressure and nobody fighting back simply does it.

THREE KINDS OF CHECK

- ◆ **Single Check** — one operator's pool against the Difficulty.
- ◆ **Team Check** — everyone helping rolls; add all the successes together against the Difficulty.
- ◆ **Opposed Check** — both sides roll; more successes wins.

READING THE RESULT

- ◆ **Success** — you do it. Extra successes buy extras: speed, style, an added effect.
- ◆ **Failure** — the story moves, just not your way. The GM picks a consequence.
- ◆ **Miss by one** — the GM may offer success at a cost. Take the deal, or don't.



HEALTH & FOCUS

Every operator has two pools. **Health (HP)** is how much harm they can take — damage is dealt in Wounds, and at 0 HP they're down. **Focus** fuels their powers: each power costs Focus equal to its Rank, and a few special moves cost Focus too. Spend it wisely — it doesn't come back fast.

CONDITIONS

Stunned	-1 die to everything; no powers until it clears.
Bleeding	Lose HP each round until treated (Medicine or a medkit).
Exhausted	-1 die to physical actions; can't sprint.
Grappled	Can't move; -2 dice to escape.
Blinded	-2 dice to Perception and attacks.
On Fire	Lose HP each round; spend an action to put it out.

CLOCKS

When a situation can't resolve in a single roll, the GM draws **clocks** — usually two, side by side, of four to six segments. A **Progress** clock tracks the crew toward their goal; a **Problem** clock tracks the trouble closing in. Whoever's winning marks a segment. Whichever clock fills first decides what happens next.



COMBAT

Combat is **simultaneous** — no turn order, no grid. Everyone declares an action, the dice are thrown together, and the smoke clears at once. The crew's successes are weighed against the enemy's; the difference is the **Margin of Victory**, which decides how many Wounds land and which clock ticks.

YOUR ACTION

- ◆ **Strike** — attack; roll Combat (or whatever fits).
- ◆ **Maneuver** — reposition or set up an ally; roll what fits.
- ◆ **Support** — don't roll; add +2 dice to an ally's roll instead.
- ◆ **Take Cover** — sit out the pool; take no damage from it this round.

Instant items (grenades, EMPs, breaching charges) just work — no roll. But if the crew loses the round, whoever used one becomes the priority target and soaks the incoming damage.

GETTING HIT

Wounds & Armor	Subtract your Armor from incoming Wounds; the rest comes off your HP.
Range	Engaged / Close / Medium / Long / Extreme. Move one band as part of an action.
Cover	Light cover: -1 die to attacks on you. Heavy cover: -2 dice.
Adrenaline	When a crew member takes a Wound, the crew gives +1 Focus to one of them.

PUSHING YOUR LUCK

- ◆ **The Gambit (1 Focus)** — force a dramatic outcome. Win and Progress jumps; lose and Problem jumps and you pay a personal cost.
- ◆ **Catch Your Breath** — once per scene the crew each recover +1 HP and +1 Focus — but a Problem clock advances.



LEVERAGE

Leverage is how much of you the corporation owns — a scale from **0 (free)** to **10 (wholly controlled)**. Operators start around 8. Every job, and every choice inside it, nudges that number up, down, or holds it where it is.

It is three things at once: how far the corp can reach into your life, how hard it is to refuse an order, and the debt that keeps you taking the next contract. High Leverage means the Handler tells you what to do. Low Leverage means they have to ask.

THE HANDLER

Your **Handler** is the corporation's voice on the comm — the one handing out objectives and leaning on you to accept them. When they order something you'd rather not do, you have two answers:

- ◆ **Comply.** No roll. The job continues, and you live with it.
- ◆ **Resist.** Roll Persuasion, Survival, or Psionics. The Difficulty is half your Leverage (round up). Succeed and you stall, dodge, or refuse cleanly; fail and you comply on the corp's terms — or your Leverage climbs.

In this adventure, the Handler will reach for whichever operator's Leverage gives the most grip. That is the point of the number: it is the leash.



THE MISSION: COLD STORAGE

// The Contract

"Helix Genomics keeps a data core in a lab on Waypoint Station — one copy, no backups. Take it. Get out before they know it's gone. You have until the shift change." — your Handler

Inside that black-budget lab is the only copy of whatever Helix has grown down there. The crew's job is to take the core and get clear before Helix locks the station down around them.

THE TWO CLOCKS

- ◆ **Progress — Get the Data Core (6).** Marks when the crew clears an obstacle or pushes toward the core.
- ◆ **Problem — Security Lockdown (4).** Marks when they're loud, trip an alarm, or stall. At 4/4 the lab seals and security converges.

Fill Progress first and the core is theirs; fill Problem first and extraction becomes a fight. Give the crew one **prep action** before the job — intel, a tool, a scouted route, a contact.

THE JOB — FOUR OBSTACLES

- ◆ **1 • The Hub.** A biometric-locked network panel. Cross-wire it (Engineering), bypass it (Infiltration), or talk it open (Persuasion). +1 Progress; a botch is +1 Problem.
- ◆ **2 • The Turret Hall.** Motion turrets (Tier 2). Disable them (Eng/Tech, Diff 3), slip past (Infiltration), or shoot them out — loud. Gunfire feeds Problem.
- ◆ **3 • The Door.** Two key-swipes, two terminals, ten meters apart. Team Check, Diff 3. +1 Progress.
- ◆ **4 • The Cold Lab.** Specimen pods, some occupied. The core is bolted in a refrigerated housing: Engineering, Diff 2. Moving through wakes what's inside.



THE TWIST

At Progress 4/6 the Handler calls: before the core, collect an intact specimen — Pod #7, the lit one. They lean on an operator's Leverage to make it stick. Opening it wakes something bigger, and now the whole lab is moving.

EXTRACTION

Getting out is harder than getting in. As Problem climbs, Helix security answers — patrols, then a hard team. At Problem 4/4 the lab seals: blast doors, alarms, and a security element on the crew's position. Fight through, find another route, or bargain.

HOW IT ENDS

- ◆ **Core out, clean:** full success — the Handler pays and Leverage eases.
- ◆ **Core out, but caught:** messy success — Heat, Wounds, or a new debt.
- ◆ **No core:** the job's blown, and the Handler remembers.

FALLOUT

Hand out XP and cred. Move Leverage down a point for clean work, up a point for a mess or for taking the bonus order under duress. Note any Heat with Helix, then give each operator one Downtime activity.

// Threat Roster

Stat blocks for everything the job can throw at the crew are on the facing page — lab specimens, station security, and the auditor who turns a loud job into a sealed one.



OPPOSITION

Tier tells the GM how many dice the threat rolls — that's its Pool. Use only what the job calls for.

Vent Crawler

Tier 2 · Pool 4 · HP 4

Engineered ambush predator

Attack: Claws & teeth (Engaged, 2 Wounds).

Trait: Ambush — +2 dice on its first attack from hiding; can vanish again (Infiltration vs Perception). Flees when hurt, returns when you're weak.

Thesec III Parasite

Tier 2 · Pool 4 · HP 3

A human face over a cold intellect

Attack: Uses its host's weapons.

Trait: Virulence — a struck target resists (Survival, Diff 2) or loses 1 Focus. Anyone it kills rises in an hour as a host (stop it with fire).

Rent-a-Cop

Tier 1 · Pool 2 · HP 2

Bored, underpaid, uninsured

Attack: Light pistol (Close, 1 Wound) or shock baton (Engaged, Stunned).

Trait: By-the-book — calls for backup on its first turn (reinforcement clock, 4). Surrenders the moment it's hurt.

Riot Suppressor

Tier 2 · Pool 4 · HP 5 · Armor 2

A mobile wall of ballistic plastic

Attack: Shock maul (Engaged, 1 Wound + Stunned).

Trait: Defend the line — can skip its attack to give itself Heavy Cover and an ally Light Cover. Never breaks formation.

Overwatch Marksman

Tier 2 · Pool 4 · HP 3

Sees you first

Attack: Marksman carbine (Long/Extreme, 2 Wounds, scoped).

Trait: Suppressive fire — instead of Wounds, pins a target (Suppressed: -1 die, can't close). Never shoots at Close range.

Corporate Auditor

Tier 2 · Pool 4 · HP 3

The most dangerous person here, and unarmed

Attack: Words, legal threats, ruinous consequences.

Trait: Raise alarm — each round, contest Persuasion; if it wins, mark the Lockdown clock. Hitting it advances Lockdown by two.



EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The same heist, at the table. The crew — **Reyes** (Soldier), **Green** (Engineer), **Wen** (Infiltrator), **Sato** (Medic) — sits in a maintenance crawlway outside the lab. Clocks: Progress 6, Problem 4.

// SINGLE CHECK - PLAYER VS. DIFFICULTY

GM: Access panel ahead. Biometric lock, corporate-grade.

Green: For get the biometric — I cross-wire the maintenance panel underneath it. **Jury-Rig** the lock open and splice us in.

GM: Engineering check. Difficulty 2.

| *Green's pool: 1 + Engineering 3 = 4 dice, +1 for the right tools = 5. Two successes. Meets Diff 2.*

GM: The lock pops. You're into the network — security, environmental, a line to the core.

// TEAM CHECK - GROUP VS. DIFFICULTY

GM: The lab door needs two key-swipes at once, terminals ten meters apart. Team Check, Difficulty 3.

Wen: Far terminal. Infiltration to time the swipe.

Reyes: Near terminal. Survival — holding the count.

| *Wen rolls 2 successes, Reyes 1. Combined: 3. Meets Diff 3.*

GM: The door opens. Cold air rolls out. Rows of containment pods between you and the core — and one of them is lit. Progress 1/6.



// THE EXCHANGE - COMBAT

GM: A pod cracks. A **Vent Crawler** unfolds out of it — Tier 2, Pool 4, HP 4. Close range. Declare.

Reyes: Strike. Rifle.

Wen: Maneuver — flank right.

Sato: Support. +2 dice to Reyes.

Green: Take Cover — behind the server rack.

Crew total: 4 successes vs the Crawler's 2. Margin 2 — the Crawler takes 2 Wounds, down to HP 2.

// THE GAMBIT - FORCE THE ISSUE

Reyes: Gambit. Frag grenade, top of the pod row.

GM: Instant item, no roll — but it's a Gambit. Win and Progress jumps; lose and Problem jumps and you pay for it.

The grenade lands. Crawler gone — but two more pods crack, and the whole station heard it. Progress 4/6, Problem 1/4.

// THE HANDLER - LEVERAGE

Handler: Before the core, we need Pod #7 intact. Medicine, Difficulty 2.

Sato: That's the one that just woke up.

GM: Your sister's cryo bill is due next cycle. Resist if you like — Difficulty is half your Leverage.

Sato: ...we'll get the sample.

// A ROLL THAT FAILS

Green: While they handle that thing, I'm pulling the core. Engineering, Diff 2.

Green rolls — one success. Failure.

GM: The housing holds. Refrigerant hisses out and your fingers go numb. And the second Crawler just hit the floor behind you.



REYES - SOLDIER

"I walk toward the gunfire. It's what they kept me for."

HEALTH

6

FOCUS

3

LEVERAGE

7 / ConscriptonSKILLS **Combat 3** · Perception 2 · Survival 1

POWERS

Adrenaline Rush (Rank 3, 3 Focus)

Choose Overdrive (+2 dice on Combat) or Precision (+1 auto success, ignore one penalty). One Exchange.

Focused Aim (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

+1 automatic success on your Combat roll this Exchange.

Brute Strike (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

On a successful melee attack, deal +1 Wound and ignore Armor.

Hold the Line (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Dig in: +1 die on defense; enemies attacking allies behind you take -1 die. You can't move.

GEAR

Combat Rifle

Medium/Long · 2 Wounds · automatic

Combat Knife

Engaged · 1 Wound

2× Frag Grenade

Thrown · area · loud

Tac Armor

Armor 1

BACKGROUND

Drafted off a sentence into corporate security and never released. Reyes works the contract because the alternative posting is worse — and because, somewhere under the orders, he still decides where the gun points.



GREEN - ENGINEER

"Things break. I break them faster — or fix them before anyone notices."

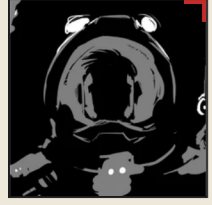
HEALTH

5

FOCUS

4

LEVERAGE

8 / DebtSKILLS Engineering **3** · Technology **2** · Combat **1**

POWERS

Overclock (*Rank 3, 3 Focus*)

Touch a device: Reliability (+1 auto success, 3 rounds) or Productivity (+2 dice, 3 rounds).

Jury-Rig (*Rank 1, 1 Focus*)

Restore a broken device for the scene — unjam a weapon, seal a leak, pop a lock, restart a drone.

Diagnostic Scan (*Rank 1, 1 Focus*)

Ask the GM one true question about a device; then +2 dice or +1 auto on the next check against it.

Pop-Up Cover (*Rank 1, 1 Focus*)

Create temporary Light Cover at your position (-1 die to attacks from one direction).

GEAR

Sidearm

Close/Medium · 1 Wound

Engineering Multitool

+1 die to Engineering · enables Jury-Rig

Salvage Kit

materials for Field Fabrication

Light Armor

Armor 1

BACKGROUND

Bought, debt and all, when a fabrication-bay loan went bad. The corp owns the number on Green's ledger and points him at jobs to work it down. He's good enough that the number never quite shrinks.



WEN - INFILTRATOR

"You won't see me. That's the whole job."

HEALTH

4

FOCUS

5

LEVERAGE

8 / Conditioning

SKILLS Infiltration 3 · Perception 2 · Technology 1

POWERS

Silent Takedown (Rank 3, 3 Focus)

Remove an unaware enemy quietly — no alarm, no sound — if you reach them unseen.

Silent Steps (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Move in near silence: +2 dice to stay unheard this Exchange.

Lock Bypass (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Open a mundane lock or restraint without tools or noise.

Ghost Entry (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Slip through a gap, vent, or checkpoint others would be caught at.

GEAR

Suppressed Pistol

Close/Medium · 1 Wound · quiet

Monofil Blade

Engaged · 2 Wounds

Infiltration Kit

+1 die to Infiltration · picks & bypass tools

Stealth Weave

Armor 1 · +1 die in shadow

BACKGROUND

A corp-conditioned asset — trained, tuned, told to obey. Wen still does the work flawlessly. But lately the orders land a half-second slow, and in that gap sits the question of who she'd be without the leash.

SATO - MEDIC

"Stay alive. I'll handle the rest."

HEALTH

5

FOCUS

4

LEVERAGE

9 / Cryo-Loved One



SKILLS Medicine 3 · Persuasion 2 · Survival 1

POWERS

Quick Fix (Rank 3, 3 Focus)

Restore significant Health to an ally you can reach and treat.

Minor First Aid (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Patch a wound: an ally recovers a small amount of Health.

Stimulant (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Dose an ally: +1 die on their next action, or shake off one Condition.

Seal & Stabilize (Rank 1, 1 Focus)

Stop a dying ally from getting worse — hold them at the edge until you can do more.

GEAR

Sidearm

Close · 1 Wound

Field Medkit

+1 die to Medicine · enables healing powers

Combat Stims

Stimulant doses

Light Armor

Armor 1

BACKGROUND

Keeps a sibling alive in a cryo-pod the corp maintains — for now. The bill comes due every cycle, and every job is what keeps the pod's lights on. Sato will bend a long way before letting that power flicker.

THE RED SHIFT

This is a free quickstart for **The Red Shift**, a science-fiction roleplaying game by **Daniel Coonrod** and **Zeta Gardner**, published under the **Nightjar** imprint. Everything in these pages is yours to read, run, and share.

GET THE FULL GAME

The complete rulebook expands everything here: full character creation, the entire power catalog (all nine roles, Ranks 1 through 5), deeper gear, cybernetics, and the economy of scarcity, the full Leverage campaign system, an expanded threat roster, and the setting in depth.

- ◆ Find **The Red Shift** on DriveThruRPG and itch.io.
- ◆ Follow Nightjar for news on the full release and the crowdfunding campaign.

IF YOU LIKED THIS

Run it for your table. Share the file. Tell us how the job went — the worst-laid plans make the best stories.

CREDITS

The Red Shift, **Nightjar**, and associated marks and artwork are © their respective owners. This quickstart may be shared freely in its complete, unmodified form.

YOU SIGNED THE CONTRACT.

In the corporate dark between the stars, the S-Corps own the stations, the air, and the debt that keeps you working. You're an operator — a soldier, an engineer, a ghost, a medic — and tonight there's a data core that doesn't belong to you yet.

This free quickstart has everything you need to run your first job: the full rules, four ready-to-play operators, and a mission.

A SCIENCE-FICTION RPG OF
COMPETENT PEOPLE AND BAD OPTIONS