



FLARELIGHT

SHIP'S MANUAL

The star at the heart of the Kerrek Reach has begun to flare on a rhythm no model predicts. You have one survey ship, six berths, and 2000 days.

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The Situation

Kerrek is a quiet yellow star with one inhabited world, Ardent, and a station that has spent two centuries doing nothing more dramatic than refuelling ore haulers. Eleven years ago the star began to flare. Not violently, and not at random: on a rhythm, and the rhythm is tightening.

You have been given *Flarelight*, a hull rated for survey and nothing more, and a commission with a hard end date. Find out what is doing this. The station will buy whatever you dig up along the way, which is the only reason the expedition is affordable at all.

Nothing in the Reach is scripted. The star field, the worlds, what is buried on them, where the Warden sites are, and which stretches of space belong to which species are all generated for your campaign and stay fixed for its duration. Two captains never get the same map.

At a glance

Players	One
Length of a campaign	Two to five hours for a first run
Time limit	2000 days from departure
Stars to chart	44, plus one that does not appear on any chart
Starting funds	1,200 credits
Starting endurium	60 units
Endings	6
Saving	One slot, in the browser, at any time

A campaign is a race against the flare, not against the clock: the deadline is generous if you keep moving and ruinous if you prospect forever. In twelve measured playthroughs of the documented route the expedition finished on day 277 at the median, the fastest on day 233 and the slowest on day 303.

The Ship

Seven systems can be refitted at Kerrek Station, each in classes from 0 to 5. Class 0 means the bay is empty. You begin with the hull's stock fit and a terrain vehicle in the hold.

System	What it does	Classes	Class 5 total (cr)
Drive Coils	Hyperspace speed and fuel efficiency. Also sets in-system manoeuvre time.	0–5	15,600
Deflector Grid	Absorbs incoming fire before the hull takes it. Recharges between actions.	0–5	12,500
Hull Plating	Raw structural integrity. When it reaches zero the ship is lost.	0–5	11,000
Beam Array	Primary energy weapon. Damage scales with class and with the gunner's command skill.	0–5	13,500
Torpedo Rack	Heavy ordnance. Hits harder than beams but expends stores.	0–5	12,800
Cargo Pods	Hold capacity for minerals, specimens and relics.	0–5	8,600
Survey Sensors	Scan resolution in orbit and detection radius on a planet surface.	0–5	9,200

Refit costs are cumulative: the figure shown is what it costs to take an empty bay all the way to class 5. Upgrading one class at a time costs the same in total, so there is no penalty for buying capability late.

Reading the flare index

The arc at the top of every screen is the flare index. It is the one instrument that never turns off, and it tracks how far into your commission you are. It changes colour as the star's rhythm tightens: warnings arrive on days 900, 1350, 1700, and on day 2000 the commission ends wherever you happen to be standing.

Fuel and range

Hyperspace runs on endurium. Your bunkers hold 60 units plus 45 for every class of cargo hold you have fitted. A jump costs fuel in proportion to distance and inversely to your drive coils, so the single best investment in the early campaign is engines. Endurium sells for 9 credits and costs 12 to buy back, which makes running your own refinery from mined ore worth doing.

If you are ever broke and dry at the same time, the quartermaster will sign out a small ration of endurium once a month. It is not generous and it is not meant to be, but it means a bad run of luck cannot leave you permanently parked.

The Crew

Six posts. Each post draws on one skill, and every skill matters somewhere: an under-trained communications officer will hand you alien speech with holes chewed through it, and an under-trained science officer will hand you a survey that says very little.

Post	Skill
Captain	Command
Science	Science
Navigation	Navigation
Engineering	Engineering
Communications	Communication
Medicine	Medicine

Species and aptitude

Crew can be replaced at the station. Species differ in what they learn cheaply: a multiplier above 1.0 means training that skill costs proportionally less, below 1.0 that it costs more. Hiring fees are one-off.

Species	Fee	Comm	Scie	Navi	Engi	Comm	Medi
Human	200	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Velian	340	0.8	1.5	0.9	0.6	1.0	1.5
Thal	380	1.4	0.7	0.9	1.5	0.5	0.8
Iyari	420	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.6	1.7	1.0
Ghorn	360	0.9	1.1	1.6	1.3	0.7	0.4

Human. Adaptable, unremarkable, everywhere. No aptitude is wasted and none is exceptional.

Velian. Pale, slow-moving natives of a frozen shelf world. Superb diagnosticians, poor mechanics.

Thal. Heavy-worlders raised under three gravities. They fix engines and win arguments.

Iyari. Feathered empaths of the Concord. They hear meaning where others hear noise.

Ghorn. Silicate lifeforms who think in vectors. Excellent pilots; medicine baffles them.

Training

Training is bought in the station's schools, ten points at a time, and gets more expensive as a skill climbs toward the ceiling of 250. Buy communications early if you intend to talk to anyone; buy science early if you intend to know what you are looking at.

Travelling

The Reach is a chart 250 units on a side. Five positions matter: docked at the station, in the home system, in orbit around a body, on a surface, and out in hyperspace between stars.

Plot a jump by choosing a destination on the chart. The ship spends fuel and days in proportion to the distance. Mid-jump you may be found by somebody, and who finds you depends on whose space you are crossing — which is worth knowing before you cross it.

You can also stop inside a species' territory and broadcast on open channels. That is the reliable way to meet somebody: waiting to be stumbled upon works eventually, but a commission with a deadline cannot afford to wait.

Surveying

From orbit, a survey reports the world in as much detail as your sensors and your science officer can manage. A poor survey gives you class and gravity. A good one gives you atmosphere, weather, tectonics, expected mineral wealth, and life. A survey also marks the strongest seams on the surface before you descend, which is the difference between prospecting and wandering.

Class	Can land	Mineral wealth	Life
Gas Giant	no	0.00	0.15
Molten	yes	1.15	0.02
Rock	yes	1.00	0.05
Ice	yes	0.70	0.10
Desert	yes	0.85	0.30
Tundra	yes	0.75	0.55
Oceanic	yes	0.45	0.85
Jungle	yes	0.55	1.00
Terran	yes	0.65	0.95

Mineral wealth and life are the multipliers the generator applies before local variation; a gas giant cannot be landed on at all.

On the Surface

Landing puts the terrain vehicle on a 48 by 28 map that wraps east to west. Drive with the arrow keys or W A S D, or with the compass on the panel. Everything you drive over that is worth having goes into the vehicle's bay, which holds 40 units; lifting off transfers the bay into the ship's hold.

Terrain	Hours to cross	Passable
Plain	1	yes
Broken Ground	1.6	yes
Ridge	2.4	yes
Basin	1.2	yes
Liquid	0	no
Ice Sheet	1.8	yes
Growth	1.5	yes
Sand Sea	1.9	yes
Lava Field	2.6	yes

Hostile worlds wear the vehicle down: heat, pressure, storms and quakes all cost hull. The engineer can patch it in orbit, and the station can rebuild it for 9 credits a point, but a vehicle reduced to nothing is recalled and you will be buying another for 1,200 credits.

A world does not replenish. What you take is gone, and the map you uncovered stays uncovered for the next visit — so a rich world is worth several trips, and a stripped one is worth none.

What the ground is worth

Mineral	Credits per unit
Ferrite	3
Silica	4
Cuprite	7
Alumide	10
Titanate	17
Cobaltine	24
Chromite	31
Molybdite	46
Rhodite	72
Iridite	105
Aurium	150
Endurium	90

For scale: a world surveyed at wealth 2.5 held 124 separate deposits totalling 2,058 units, worth about 53,652 credits if you could lift all of it. You cannot lift all of it in one trip.

Live specimens are worth more than ore and fight back. Their value scales with how dangerous they were to take.

Life class	Credits	Threat
Flora	30	0
Grazer	75	1
Predator	160	3
Exotic	340	2

Contact

Seven species share the Reach. Each has a posture that opens them up and a posture that closes them down, and neither is obvious from looking at their ships. You choose a posture and a kind of message; they answer, and the answer moves your standing with them up or down.

Message	What it does
Hail	Open a channel and identify the ship.
Question	Ask what they know. The way to earn clues.
Statement	Offer something about yourself. Builds rapport slowly and safely.
Offer Trade	Sell cargo at whatever the rapport will bear.
Break Off	Close the channel.

Standing runs from -100 to +100. At +60 a species will answer questions properly, and two of them are holding a piece of what you need. Below about -45, most of them stop talking and start shooting.

Your communications officer is the translator. At low skill the translation arrives with words missing, and a message you cannot read is a message you cannot act on. This is the most common reason a first campaign stalls.

Who is out there

Species	Ship	Opens to	Closes to	In a fight	Hull / shield / gun
Iyari Concord	Concord courier	Friendly	Hostile	Trader	60 / 30 / 9
Thal Ascendancy	Ascendancy lancer	Hostile	Obsequious	Proud	130 / 60 / 22
Kerekh Swarm	Swarm cluster	Obsequious	Friendly	Hive	90 / 25 / 16
The Vess	Vess bathysphere	Friendly	Hostile	Riddler	110 / 90 / 14
Umbrite Reclaimers	Reclaimer frame	Obsequious	Hostile	Machine	170 / 110 / 30
Rift Corsairs	Corsair raider	Hostile	Friendly	Pirate	100 / 40 / 24
Warden Sentinels	Sentinel	Friendly	Hostile	Guardian	220 / 160 / 38

The table above is the shape of each species, not a script. What they actually do in an engagement depends on their temperament and on how the engagement is going for them.

Iyari Concord. Feathered empathis. They trade in meaning as readily as in metal.

Thal Ascendancy. Heavy-worlders who respect only those who stand straight.

Kerekh Swarm. A hive that measures every vessel against its own worth.

The Vess. Gas-giant dwellers who answer questions with better questions.

Umbrite Reclaimers. Machines left running by the Wardens. They dislike armed strangers.

Rift Corsairs. They do not want to talk. They want the hold.

Warden Sentinels. The last standing order of a civilisation that is otherwise dust.

Fighting

Engagements are fought across four range bands. Torpedoes reach further than beams and you carry a finite number of them at 25 credits each. Shields soak damage and recover between exchanges; hull does not recover without a yard.

You are a survey ship. You will lose most fair fights, and the orders that keep you alive are the unglamorous ones: stand off to open the range, then run. Each attempt to break contact teaches your helm something about the pursuit, so a failed run is not a death sentence. Surrender always works and always costs you the hold — which is a far cheaper loss than the ship.

The Sunwell

Somewhere off every chart there is a star that does not appear on any of them. Reaching it needs three independent bearings, and no single source has more than one.

Relic	What it is
Warden Cartouche	A palm-sized slab of folded metal. One face carries a fixed point in the sector, cut so deeply it was clearly meant to survive its makers.
Sunwell Tablet	A reader-slab still faintly warm. It holds an operating litany for something the Wardens called a sunwell - a machine set into a star.
Ansible Core	A lattice that answers when spoken to. Without it, nothing Warden-made will open.

Relics that are not part of the plot are simply valuable, and the station will buy them.

Cross all three and the hidden star can be plotted. What is waiting there is a machine, and it is the reason Kerrek is flaring. You will be offered a choice about what to do with it. The choice you are allowed to make depends on what you are carrying and what you have learned to say.

Ending	What it means
Quench the Sunwell	You spoke the litany and let the machine go cold. The flares stop within a season. Nobody in the sector will ever know how close the sky came to openi...
Take the Tap	You did not stop the sunwell. You bent it. Kerrek Station will burn a star's worth of power for a thousand years, and the Concord will never trust a h...
Shatter the Well	You put every torpedo you had into the lattice. The star throws off one last flare, beautiful and fatal, and three inhabited worlds pay for your certa...
Dead in the Water	The bunkers ran dry between stars. The recorder keeps running for a while after the lights go out, which is how anyone will know what you found.
The Sector Burns	The cascade reached the inner stars before you did. What is left of the sector will be argued over by whatever comes after.
Ship Lost	The hull failed. The recorder will be found eventually, or it will not.

Scoring

Your score rewards finishing the commission, finishing it early, charting worlds you did not strictly need to chart, and coming home solvent. A campaign completed on the documented route scored around 1,678 at the median.

Saving, Settings and Housekeeping

The game keeps one save slot in this browser's local storage, written when you ask for it and offered back the next time you open the page. Clearing site data for this page clears the save. Nothing is sent anywhere; the game makes no network requests and works with the machine offline.

Everything is reachable from the keyboard as well as the pointer. On a surface, the arrow keys and W A S D drive; Escape closes any panel that is open.

A first campaign

Fit sensors and a cargo hold before you leave. Work two or three rich worlds near home until you can afford class 2 or 3 drive coils, because everything after that is cheaper with better engines. Then find the Warden sites, then go and talk to people. The measured route spends its first eighty days doing nothing but mining and refitting, and still finishes with most of the commission unspent.