
Ironmask

A duel of two marcher houses on a ten by ten field, won by reading the other line.

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Tronsoft Games Package Specification v1.6.2

1. The field

The board is ten squares by ten. Two patches of standing water sit in the middle band; nothing crosses them and nothing sees down a file through them. Columns are lettered A to J from the left and rows numbered 1 to 10 from your own back row, so your standard begins somewhere on row 1 and the enemy's on row 10.

Each house musters 40 companies and deploys them in its own four home rows, every counter turned so the enemy sees only its back. Nothing on the field is hidden except rank: where a company stands, and where it goes, is public.

2. The muster

Twelve kinds, forty companies. A strike is settled by rank alone.

Mark	Rank	Number	Notes
10	Marshal	1	Beats every rank below it. Lost to the Assassin that strikes first, and to any Charge.
9	General	1	Second only to the Marshal.
8	Colonel	2	
7	Major	3	
6	Captain	4	
5	Lieutenant	4	
4	Sergeant	4	
3	Sapper	5	The only rank that lifts a Charge instead of dying on it.
2	Outrider	8	Runs any number of empty squares down a rank or file, and may strike at the end of the run.
1	Assassin	1	Loses to every rank on the board, but takes the Marshal if it strikes first.
X	Charge	6	Never moves. Destroys anything that strikes it except a Sapper.
S	Standard	1	Never moves. Walk onto it and the action is over.

3. Deployment

Place your forty companies anywhere in your four home rows. Click a rank in the tray and then a square; click a placed company to lift it again. The staff will lay out a deployment for you and you may change as much of it as you like.

The staff works to a doctrine. The standard goes in a corner, on a shoulder, in the centre or in a false corner; two or three Charges cover it and the rest are set as traps or a decoy cluster elsewhere; Outriders spread across the forward rows; two Sappers go forward for early charge-clearing and the rest are held back; the Marshal and General sit a row or two in, and the Assassin often shelters beside the Marshal. Corvel deploys to the same doctrines, so what you learn about one action tells you something, but never enough, about the next.

4. The move

- One square up, down, left or right. Never diagonally, never onto your own company.
- An Outrider runs any number of empty squares down a rank or file, and may strike the first enemy company at the end of the run. Running reveals it as an Outrider to anyone keeping papers.
- Charges and the Standard never move at all.
- No company may shuttle between the same two squares more than three times running. The fourth such move is refused.

5. The strike

Move onto an enemy company to strike it. Both ranks are shown to both houses at once: the lower is removed, and equal ranks remove each other. This is the whole economy of the game — a strike buys information at the price of showing your own rank, and a quiet move shows almost nothing.

- A Charge destroys any company that strikes it, except a Sapper, who lifts it.
- The Assassin takes the Marshal if the Assassin strikes first, and loses to everything else, including the Marshal striking it.
- Walking onto the enemy standard ends the action at once.

6. Ending

An action ends when a standard falls, or when a house has no company left that can march — nothing but Charges and its Standard — in which case the standard falls by default. If neither happens and no strike occurs for a long stretch, the action is adjudged on the weight of each muster, or drawn if the two are close.

7. The Dossier

The Dossier is the reason the game is not a guessing match. It keeps the account that a careful player would keep on paper, and it keeps it exactly.

What it knows

- **Every death is a reveal.** A strike shows both ranks, so every company that has fallen is a rank struck off the list. The Dossier always knows which ranks are still unaccounted for.
- **A company that has marched is neither a Charge nor the Standard.** Those two never move.
- **A company that ran a whole file is an Outrider.** No other rank can.
- **The counting binds everything together.** The unread counters must between them be exactly the ranks still owed, so narrowing one narrows the rest. When thirty-nine are known, the fortieth is settled by arithmetic alone.

What it prints

When it has narrowed a counter to something worth saying, it prints the band on the counter itself: **X?** where a Charge is likely, **S?** where a Standard is, **6–10** where the possible ranks have closed to a band, or the rank itself once the counter has been shown in a strike. While nothing is known it prints nothing, which is the honest state of the opening; the chips begin to appear around the seventieth move of a typical action and there are rarely more than a dozen at once.

Open any Corvel counter's card for the full spread over all twelve ranks, the number of ranks still possible, and — with one of your own companies selected — the odds that company faces if it strikes. Reading the papers is not a move: you may do it while the machine is thinking and after the action has closed. Your own pencil marks sit beside the machine's reading and are never overwritten by it.

8. The Corvel house

The machine reads the field through the same Dossier you do. It cannot see a rank you have not shown it, and the package's test harness proves this rather than asserting it: sixty times a game, the hidden ranks are reshuffled underneath the machine and it is asked to move again. It chooses the identical move every time.

Temper	Counts the ranks	Relief	Defence	Noise
Recruit	no	0	0	26
Officer	yes	0.2	0.5	9
Spymaster	yes	0.45	1	9

Recruit reads only what it has been shown and does not do the counting. **Officer** counts, guards its standard, and answers intruders. **Spymaster** counts and, above all, pulls a company out of danger rather than trade it away.

Measured, not claimed. Over 120 actions a rung, pooled across three seed families and both seats: Spymaster over Officer $57.1\% \pm 4.6$, Officer over Recruit $75.8\% \pm 4.6$, Spymaster over Recruit $85.0\% \pm 4.6$. Ablation of the dials one at a time showed that a single setting — relief, the credit for stepping out of danger — accounts for the whole top rung: revert it to the Officer's value and the Spymaster falls to 46.3%. Four other dials measured wrong-signed and were set back to the Officer's values rather than kept as tuning that measures backwards.

9. The screens

- **The field** carries the board, the counters and their chips, the lit squares of a selected company, a dashed trace of the last move and a ring where a strike was resolved.
 - **The Dossier** lists what has been read, folds the unread into one line, and opens a card on any counter.
 - **The Ledger** shows every company on both sides, with the fallen faded out.
 - **The Journal** records every move and every strike in order.
 - **The strip under the board** says whose turn it is and what just happened.
- An eye marker on a Vane counter means Corvel knows its exact rank.

10. Keys

- Arrow keys move the cursor; **Enter** picks up and puts down; **Esc** lets go.
- **D** opens the Dossier, **L** the Ledger, **J** the Journal.

11. Saving

The action saves itself after every Corvel move, and **Save** writes it out at once. One action is kept, under the single browser key `tronsoft_ironmask_save` in the `tronsoft_ironmask` namespace. Resume it from the title sheet. Finishing an action clears the save. If the browser refuses local storage the game says so and carries on unsaved.

12. A note on the seed

Launching with `#seed=1913` in the address pins the deployment and the machine's rolls, so the same action can be replayed exactly. The package's own gates use this to repeat their runs.

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