

NIGHTSOWN

Write a charter. Sow the dark.

The manual — version 1.0.0

Tronsoft Games

Nightsown

A 4X of charters, hulls and a sky that runs out of ore. Every figure in this manual is read out of the game's own data files, so what follows is how this copy actually behaves.

1 · The charter

A charter is a people written down. You buy one from a budget of 135 points. Nothing else in the game is decided so early or matters so long, for a charter is the shape of every decision you make for the next hundred seasons.

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Habitat

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Three axes — gravity, warmth, radiance — each with a centre and a tolerance. A world inside all three bands is habitable, and the closer to the centres it sits the more people it holds. Tolerance runs from 0.08 to 0.45 and costs 140 points a unit of width.

The centre of a band is free. That is deliberate and it is not an oversight: worlds are generated flat across each axis, so a band centred at 0.8 finds exactly as many worlds as one centred at 0.5. What you pay for is width, because width is what buys choice.

Growth, mining, foundry

Trait	Range	Base	Points per unit
Growth a season	0.04 – 0.20	0.04	340
Mining skill	0.60 – 1.80	1.00	30
Foundry skill	0.60 – 1.80	1.00	30
Affinity, each field	0.70 – 1.60	1.00	40

Growth is the dearest line on the sheet because the ledger is counted in souls.

Traits and flaws

At most 2 traits and 2 flaws. A flaw refunds points; a flaw you can live with is the cheapest thing in the game.

Trait	Cost	What it does
Deepminers	16	Crusts give up their ore a third again as readily.
Stonehearts	26	Colonists endure worlds outside the charter's tolerance at a fourteenth of capacity instead of dying.
Cradleborn	14	The charter sails with two extra seedships and a full hold.
Long Sight	12	Every scanner reads two hexes further.
Shipwrights	18	Hulls are laid down for four parts in five.
Quick Study	18	The first three marks of every field come at half cost.
Flaw	Refund	What it costs you
Brittle Hulls	-10	Structure holds an eighth less punishment.

Flaw	Refund	What it costs you
Unyielding	-12	The charter cannot temper a world toward its own tolerance.
Shallow Crust	-16	Reserves run out a third sooner.
Slow Hands	-12	Foundries answer to fewer hands.
Dim Eyes	-8	Every scanner reads a hex less.

Two of these were mispriced through most of the game's development, and the way they were wrong is worth knowing: a scanner penalty reads like a combat flaw, but its real cost is knowledge — a charter that cannot see worlds cannot settle them, and it ends the game with half the population of one that can.

The six written charters

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Charter	Gravity	Warmth	Radiance	Growth	Time	Found	Points
Verdant Compact	0.50±0.26	0.52±0.26	0.48±0.24	0.120	1.05	1.05	125
Cinderfolk	0.55±0.25	0.72±0.24	0.66±0.23	0.155	1.50	1.10	130
Glasswrights	0.42±0.26	0.44±0.26	0.56±0.28	0.120	0.85	1.15	127
Stoneborn	0.62±0.20	0.40±0.18	0.38±0.20	0.110	1.55	1.75	130
Marrowreavers	0.48±0.24	0.58±0.24	0.52±0.24	0.150	1.30	1.10	129
The Tideless	0.50±0.32	0.50±0.30	0.50±0.28	0.160	1.00	1.05	124

Charter	Traits	Flaws	What they are
Verdant Compact	cradleborn	—	Gardeners with a wide tolerance and a long memory. They sow early and argue later.
Cinderfolk	deepminers	dim_eyes	Bred for hot rock and thin light. Their mines go deeper than anyone thinks wise.
Glasswrights	shipwrights	brittle_hulls	Lens-grinders and hull-cutters. They see a neighbour coming and build the answer cheaply.
Stoneborn	stonehearts	no_terraform	They will live anywhere, badly, and out-build you from a world you would not have taken.
Marrowreavers	shipwrights	brittle_hulls, no_terraform	A charter written around a gun. Their hulls are thin because their wars are short.
The Tideless	long_sight	dim_eyes, slow_hands	They breed faster than they can count and settle anything with a crust.

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2 · Worlds, ore and the clock

A world holds a crust of iron, cinder and glass, and the crust does not refill. Concentration falls as reserves fall, so the same mines yield less every season — a world worked hard for forty seasons is not the world you settled. This is the clock the whole game runs on. Expansion is not greed; it is the only way to keep a foundry fed.

Rule	Value
Hands per thousand souls	1
Mines a hand can work	1.4
Foundries a hand can work	1
Ore a mine lifts a season	1.6
Works a foundry returns	1
Works per thousand souls	1
Reserve exponent (how fast a crust thins)	0.5
Capacity at the charter's ideal	90,000
Capacity at the edge of tolerance	15% of ideal
Capacity outside tolerance	5% of ideal
Tempering steps a world will take	6

Habitability is a signed fit: 1 at the charter's ideal, 0 at the edge of its tolerance, negative beyond. Nothing in the sky is unseizable — but a world outside your bands will never be worth much.

The sky

Terrain	Move	Scan	Damage	Cover	What it is
Open void	1	0	0	0.00	Empty sky. A hull crosses it at its rated speed.
Dust veil	2	2	0	0.25	Cold dust. Slows a hull, blinds a scanner, and hides what sits inside it.
Ember drift	2	1	6	0.10	Burning debris. Scours plate off anything that ends a season inside.
Gravity shoal	impassable	0	0	0.00	A knot of dead mass. Nothing under sail crosses it.
Ion reef	1	0	0	0.00	Charged shallows. Screens will not hold here, so a fight in a reef is fought on plate.
Star	1	0	0	0.00	A star and its world. Ships may hold orbit, land, mine and build.

3 · The yard

Nothing is bought off a list. A hull is a frame with slots; a design is what you fit into them, and it is legal only within the marks your scholars have taken. Cost, speed, structure, plate, screens, guns and every flag a hull carries are computed from the parts fitted — there is no hidden statistic.

Hull	Role	Structure	Slots	Needs
Needle	survey	60	1 drive, 1 screen, 1 plate, 2 scanner, 1 special	—
Drover	freight	130	1 drive, 1 screen, 2 plate, 1 scanner, 4 hold, 1 special	—
Seedship	colony	110	1 drive, 1 screen, 1 plate, 1 scanner, 2 hold, 2 special	—
Cutter	escort	150	1 drive, 2 gun, 1 screen, 2 plate, 1 scanner, 1 special	fabric 1
Lancer	line	300	1 drive, 4 gun, 2 screen, 3 plate, 1 scanner, 1 hold, 1 special	fabric 3
Bastion	heavy	620	1 drive, 6 gun, 3 screen, 5 plate, 1 scanner, 1 hold, 2 special	fabric 6
Ossuary	siege	420	1 drive, 3 gun, 2 screen, 3 plate, 1 scanner, 4 hold, 3 special	fabric 5, vitalism 3
Redoubt	fixed	500	5 gun, 4 screen, 4 plate, 2 scanner, 1 special	fabric 2

Drives

Component	Needs	Figures	
Vane drive	—	speed 2	Cold gas and patience.
Coil drive	drives 2	speed 2.9	The first drive worth the name.
Lattice drive	drives 4	speed 3.7	Standard fit for a war fleet.
Sunwake drive	drives 7	speed 4.6	Burns bright and reads bright.
Riftrunner drive	drives 10	speed 5.6	Crosses a quarter of the sky in a season.

Guns

Component	Needs	Figures	
Sparker	—	damage 12, band close	A welding rig with ambition.
Harrow beam	kinetics 3	damage 26, band close	Cuts plate at knife range.
Sunlash	kinetics 6	damage 48, band close	Two exchanges and a cutter is gas.
Pyre lance	kinetics 9	damage 82, pierce 0.15, band close	The last argument of the line.
Ray projector	aether 2	damage 22, pierce 0.45, band standing	Reaches through a screen rather than at it.
Gravitic lance	aether 5	damage 44, pierce 0.55, band standing	Screens are a suggestion to it.
Voidcaller	aether 8	damage 76, pierce 0.65, band standing	Rings a hull like a bell until it stops.
Shrike rack	kinetics 1, optics 1	damage 30, band long	Strikes first and can be shot down.
Harpy rack	kinetics 4, optics 3	damage 58, band long	Opens a battle before the beams are in reach.
Tempest rack	kinetics 7, optics 5	damage 96, band long	A season's ore in a single salvo.

Screens

Component	Needs	Figures	
Haze screen	aether 1	screen 40	Thin, and it does regather.
Mantle	aether 4	screen 90	The line's standard screen.
Aegis	aether 7	screen 160	Beams break on it. Lances do not.
Starward screen	aether 10	screen 260	A small sun's worth of held field.

Plate

Component	Needs	Figures	
Ferro plate	fabric 1	plate 30	Rolled iron. Cheap and honest.
Layered plate	fabric 3	plate 70	Iron and slag in leaves.
Adamant plate	fabric 6	plate 130	Heavy, and it will be missed when the ore runs out.
Voidglass plate	fabric 9	plate 210	Spun glass and iron. Absurd and effective.

Scanners

Component	Needs	Figures	
Eye	—	scan 4	Reads four hexes of sky.
Long eye	optics 3	scan 7	Reads a neighbour's yard from home.
Deep eye	optics 6	scan 10	Sees through a veil at a cost.
Oracle	optics 9	scan 14	Very little crosses the sky unseen.

Hold

Component	Needs	Figures	
Hold	—	capacity 500	Five hundred tonnes or five hundred souls.
Deep hold	fabric 4	capacity 900	Braced for the long crossings.
Cavern hold	fabric 8	capacity 1400	A town's worth of hold.

Specials

Component	Needs	Figures	
Sowing rig	—	—	Turns a hold of colonists into a colony. Consumed in the sowing.
Legion bay	vitalism 2	legions 2	Two legions and the racks to land them.
Burner	vitalism 4	bombard 1	Burns works and people off a world from orbit.
Veil cloak	optics 5	—	Shortens a rival's reading of you by three hexes.
Engine works	fabric 5	—	Mends eight parts in a hundred each season in orbit.
Seeker screen	optics 4	—	Shoots racks out of the sky before they arrive.
Tempering rig	vitalism 4, fabric 3	—	Tempers a world one step toward the charter's tolerance.

The commonest mistake in a first game — and the one the machine itself made through a whole development cycle — is a war fleet with no legion bay in it. Such a fleet beats every squadron a neighbour owns, burns their yards, and takes nothing. Guns win the sky; legions take the ground.

4 · The season

Every charter gives its orders, and the season then runs for all of them together over 6 impulses: movement and the battles movement causes, then hazards, standing orders, the economy, repair, what each charter now believes, and the victory test. Nobody moves second, and nobody sees your orders before giving theirs.

Movement and scanning

Rule	Value
Base speed	2
Added speed per drive mark	0.45
A world reads at	4 hexes
A dust veil costs a scanner	2 hexes
A veil cloak shifts detection by	3 hexes

Battle

A battle is fought over three closing bands — long, standing, close. Rack launchers reach at long range and can be intercepted; lances carry at standing range and pierce; beams strike at close range and strike hardest. Screens absorb until they fail, then plate, then structure. An ion reef stops screens holding at all.

Rule	Value
Exchanges before a battle breaks off	8
A side disengages below	35% of its opening strength
Screens regained each exchange	25%
Accuracy at close, standing, long range	92%, 78%, 62%
Chance a rack salvo is intercepted	22%
Troops in a legion	900
Souls behind each defender	30
Garrison advantage	1.5
Population lost when a world falls	15%

Study

Six fields — kinetics, aether, drives, fabric, optics, vitalism. A mark opens hulls and components. The cost of the next mark rises as $30 \times (\text{mark}+1)^{1.75}$, multiplied by your charter's affinity in that field.

5 · How a game ends

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Ending	Condition
Conquest	Every other charter is driven from the sky.
Ascendancy	Meet the current world-share threshold (scaled by surviving charters), hold at least 1.7x the runner-up, and keep both for 5 consecutive seasons.

Ending	Condition
The ledger	At the horizon the deepest ledger wins: 10 a world, 1 per thousand souls, 1 a foundry, 4 a research mark, 2 a hull.

Population dominates that ledger, which is why a charter that only fights is usually a charter that only comes second — and why a charter that never fights loses the worlds it would have grown on.

6 · Scenarios and skies

Scenario	Charters	Seasons	Sky	Worlds
The Contested Verge	3	70	The Contested Verge	30
The First Sowing	2	40	The Cradle	14
The Long Dark	5	100	The Long Dark	56

The Contested Verge. Thirty worlds and three charters, none of them far enough from the others. The Verge is the standard game of Nightsown: sow wide, mine deep, design the hull that answers what your neighbour built, and settle it before the ore runs out.

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The First Sowing. Two charters wake in the same small sky. Yours holds one world, a survey party and a sowing party. Find worlds your kindred can breathe on, sow them before the Cinderfolk do, and hold what you have sown for forty seasons.

The Long Dark. Fifty-six worlds, five charters, a hundred seasons. Distance is the first enemy here: a drive mark is worth more than a gun mark until the sky closes, and the charter that reaches the far crusts first writes the ending.

The campaign — The Charter War — runs 5 stages, carrying your marks, your designs and your charter forward, with a branch on a stage lost rather than a wall.

The commanders

Temper	Expand	War	Study	Works	Defence	What they are
Sower	1.35	0.55	0.85	1.05	0.7	Sows first and argues later. Builds seedships while the ore lasts.
Reaver	0.85	1.6	0.85	0.95	0.9	Reads a neighbour's yard as a shopping list.
Adept	0.95	0.8	1.5	1	0.95	Spends the early seasons in the laboratory and the late ones collecting.
Broker	1.1	0.75	1	1.4	0.85	Counts crusts. Mines out a world and moves the ore where it earns.

Skill	Study share	Blunder	Aggression	Look ahead	Design skill
Novice	0.22	0.3	0.55	6	0.55
Adept	0.3	0.12	0.85	10	0.8
Ace	0.34	0.03	1	14	1

Measured on this build: novice 3 – adept 13, adept 6 – ace 10, novice 3 – ace 13, sides swapped between games.

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7 · Where the files are

Every rule quoted in this manual lives in a plain JSON file you can read and change: `rules/standard.json` for the ruleset, `units/` for hulls, components and charters, `maps/` for the skies, `scenarios/` and `campaigns/` for the games, `ai/profiles.json` for the commanders, `terrain/space.json` for the sky itself. The engine is in `engine/`, unminified. Run `node validate.js` inside the package to check a modified copy against the specification.

Nightsown is an original game. It is not a recreation, port or adaptation of any published title. Generated from the shipped data on 2026-08-04.

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