MERFOLK

BY VAIDENON OF HUSTAN, WARDEN OF THE INKHORN FELLOWSHIP

Mermaids, Mermen, the Sea-Folk

> "Every sailor has seen a mermaid, if you ask him after his third cup. I have found three who saw one sober, and what they told me agreed so closely that I have stopped laughing."
>
> — Vaidenon of Hustan, Warden of the Inkhorn Fellowship, Tashal, Morgat 720 TR

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The Bestiary tells us that sailors on lonely night watches love best the tales of beautiful merfolk (Aquatics 1). It lists merfolk among the creatures of river and coast but says no more, and most Hârnic scholars regard them as a sailor's fancy. The Fellowship holds that they are real: a mortal people of the sea, with their own speech, kin and gods, seldom seen because they choose not to be. *(Inkhorn)*

The merman and mermaid are well-loved heraldic charges, especially among the Ivinians and Orbaalese (Heraldry; Orbaal). The Sindarin of Evael hold a daily market for fresh fish in their capital's Merfolk Square (Evael). And the drowned city of Ridow, under twenty fathoms of water in Ridow Bay, is carved with creatures half humanoid and half dolphin (Hârndex: Ridow). Hârn's merfolk, I am persuaded, are those creatures.

THE WARDEN'S NOTE

My three sober witnesses were a Thay pilot, an Orbaalese fisherwife and a Sindarin of Elshavel, who was mildly surprised that men doubt it. The pilot owed his life to a pod that lifted him onto a reef after a wreck. He told me they smelled of kelp and sang to each other the whole time, and that he has left a knife on that reef every year since.

APPEARANCE

A merfolk adult is six to seven feet long. Above the hips it is human: broad-chested, long-armed, with webbed fingers, a heavy mane of hair, and large dark eyes that have a second, clear eyelid for the water. A row of gill slits lies along each side of the ribs. Below the hips the body runs into a long, smooth, grey-blue tail ending in broad, horizontal flukes, like a dolphin's (Hârndex: Ridow). The scaled fish-tail of the heralds is a sailors' embellishment, true only of the river kin. Sea kin are pale beneath and darker above, and many paint or tattoo themselves with crushed shell and dye.

Females are smaller than males, with longer hair, and they are the singers. The tales that every sighting is of a woman say more about sailors than about merfolk (Aquatics 1); males are as common, but they keep further from boats.

ORIGINS

No one agrees where they came from. Ilviran scholars claim the merfolk as Ilvir's work, though they breed, as no Ivashu can (Ivashu 1). Students of the Earthmasters point to Ridow, which may be of Earthmaster make (Hârndex), and to its carvings. Jarin fishermen say the merfolk are the drowned folk of Nandar-Tem, the kingdom that sank between Hârn and Lythia in the Lost Years (Hârndex: Nandar-Tem). The merfolk themselves, I am told, say they are the warders of Eder, the Lesser God imprisoned beneath the Gulf of Ederwyn whose struggles raise its seas (Religion, Tribal Religion 1). The Fellowship leaves the truth to each game master; every tale is half-believed somewhere.

DISTRIBUTION

Sea kin live wherever there are rocky coasts, kelp beds, and quiet water away from men. Their heartland is the Gulf of Ederwyn: Ridow Bay, where the drowned city lies, and the reefs and islands off the south coast of Hârn, the waters of the Adaenum, Chymak, and Kamaki, who all worship aspects of Eder (Religion, Tribal Religion 1). Smaller pods range the Indatha Straits, the rocky coasts of eastern Melderyn and Orbaal on the Sea of Ivae, and the skerries of the Afarezir Islands. They are rare in the Gulf of Andurien, where the dolphins are thick, and rarer still in the Venarian Sea (Inkhorn).

River kin, the merrows, are a smaller, green-scaled people of fresh water. The Aquatics table finds merfolk in rivers more often than on the coast (Aquatics 1). Merrows live in the largest lakes, the slow lower reaches of great rivers, and

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the deltas: the Anoth delta, the lower Thard, the Eryn and Kald estuaries, and the great lakes of the interior. *(Inkhorn)* Fishermen call them "the ladies of the water" and leave the first fish of the day on a stone for them. I have seen the stones, and the fish, and in the morning the fish were gone.

SOCIETY

Merfolk live in pods of related families, two to twelve strong, led by the eldest singer, who is usually a female. Pods meet in late summer at gathering places such as Ridow, where they trade, settle quarrels, and choose mates; a pod's young (one in two or three years) are born in the water and swim at once. Merfolk have no fire and work no metal. They make tools of bone, shell, stone, and driftwood and covet iron above all things: knives, fish-hooks, needles, and spear-heads taken from wrecks or traded from men. In return they offer pearls, amber, ambergris, coral, and salvage. Pods that trust a fishing village may herd fish into its nets.

Their speech is a whistling, clicking song that carries for leagues under water. A few learn some Hârnic, Ivinian, or Sindarin; merfolk speakers of a human tongue have Language ML 20–40 (Inkhorn). They revere Eder, whom they call the Caged One, and sing to calm the Gulf's storms. They hate Morgath's servants, who seek the drowned, and they fear the wrecan (Aquatics 3).

SENSES

Merfolk see well in dim water but poorly in bright sunlight (Eye −3 on a sunny surface, Inkhorn). Their hearing under water is extraordinary; they hear a boat's oars at a league. They breathe both water and air. Out of the water their skin dries and cracks. They can stay ashore for hours equal to END; thereafter they gain one Fatigue Level an hour, two in sunshine (Inkhorn). On land they drag themselves on their arms (MOV 1) and all physical skills are at −40.

MERFOLK AND MEN

Merfolk are curious and wary. Most pods watch a passing ship from a distance and leave it alone. Many save drowning sailors, as dolphins do, and set them ashore. Netted, speared, or robbed of their young, they are vengeful: they cut nets, drive fish from a village's grounds for years, and sing boats onto rocks. Sailors say that a mermaid seen on a calm day means a storm by nightfall. This is true more often than not, because merfolk come up to sing when Eder stirs.

COMBAT

Merfolk fight in the water, where they have every advantage. They throw and thrust bone- or coral-tipped spears and tridents, and use shell and bone knives, kelp nets, and their bare hands. A favourite tactic is to overturn a small boat (a pinda, dory, or coracle: four merfolk, a combined STR roll against the boat's Hull, Inkhorn) and drown its crew one by one. A merfolk that grapples a swimmer dives with him: see Pulled Under (Fish, Inkhorn). Merfolk flee a fight they are losing, and they are seldom found afterwards.

USES AND TREASURE

Merfolk carry little. A pod's treasure, kept in a sea-cave or in Ridow itself, may hold pearls (2d6 seed pearls and 1d3 fine ones), worked amber, ambergris (1d6 oz at 180d an ounce, Pricelist), and salvaged coins and iron from wrecks. A trading pod pays a knife with a pearl. There is no lawful trade in merfolk, but Azeryani buyers would pay 2,000d or more for a living mermaid for a Pamesani arena; captives die within weeks. Mermaid hair, combs, and "mermaid's purses" (the egg-cases of skates) are sold as charms against drowning. They do not work (Inkhorn).

SPECIAL RULES

SONG OF LURING (INKHORN)

A merfolk singer can sing to call, warn, or lure. A luring song carries a quarter league over water at night (300 yards for river kin) and lasts as long as the singer keeps it up. The singer rolls Singing. On a success, everyone who hears it tests WIL × 4; on a CS, WIL × 3.

CS: unaffected, and knows the song for a lure. **MS:** unaffected but uneasy. **MF:** walks or steers towards the singer, and may test again each minute at WIL × 5; companions may restrain him (a grapple). **CF:** as MF but without further tests until the song stops or he is in the water, where he must swim (Skills 10). Anyone who cannot hear, such as a man with wax in his ears, is immune. A singer can choose to free a listener at any time.

OUT OF WATER (INKHORN)

MOV 1 ashore and −40 on all physical skills. After END hours out of water, one Fatigue Level an hour (two in sunshine). A merfolk at Fatigue Level 5 out of water dies in END × 10 minutes unless returned to it.

WATER-BREATHING

Merfolk never drown and hold their breath on land as men do under water. Drowning rules (Skills 10) do not apply to them.

RELIGIOUS VIEWS

- Eder (tribal): the Adaenum, Chymak, and Kamaki tell of "Eder's singers" and leave offerings on reef rocks (Inkhorn, after Religion, Tribal Religion 1).
- Sarajin: Ivinians call them Njehu's daughters and count it lucky to see one, unlucky to harm one (Inkhorn).

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- Ilvir: Ilviran scholars claim them as an Ilviran creation; merfolk do not care for Ilvirans (Inkhorn).
- Halea: Haleans tell the merfolk tales as allegories of beauty that cannot be possessed (Inkhorn).
- Morgath: Morgath's agents hunt the souls of the drowned (Ghosts 1); merfolk kill Morgathians on sight (Inkhorn).

FOLK TALES

The Bride of Ridow

A Kandian fisherman's son of Sarkum followed a song out into the Gulf in a coracle and was not seen for seven years. He came back thin and laughing, with a pocketful of pearls, and could not remember his own name. He walked into the sea again at the next midsummer. His mother keeps a lamp in the window to this day.

Torbel's Net

An Orbaalese fisherman netted a merman off Sherwyn and kept him in a tank in his yard, hoping to sell him. For three years after, no herring came within a league of Sherwyn, until the fisherman's neighbours broke the tank and carried the dying merman back to the sea. The herring came back the next spring (Orbaal; Inkhorn tale).

The Mermaid of Thay

Men of Thay say a mermaid sat singing on the harbour mole on the night before the Rape of Thay, and that those who listened slept through the Ivinian attack and lived (Orbaal; Inkhorn tale).

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- A travelling showman at a fair has a "mermaid" in a barrel of brine: a dying river merrow, netted in the Thard. Her kin are following the showman's barge.
- Strange pearls, each drilled and carved with a spiral, are turning up in Golotha and Coranan. They are merfolk trade-tokens taken from a slaughtered pod.
- At the lowest spring tide, the white arch over the cave on Ridow Bay's south shore is uncovered (Hârndex: Ridow). A merfolk pod watches anyone who tries to enter.
- A wounded merman washes ashore near Tormau with a black, cold blade in his side: a Bukrai Blade (Morvrin). Something is hunting in the deep.

ENCOUNTERS

aquatic. The Fellowship proposes that a result of "Merfolk (River 11–20, Coast 87–90; Aquatics 1)" be resolved on this table:

D100	RESULT
01–45	A sighting: a head and shoulders at dusk, gone at a second look
46–65	Song at night (Song of Luring: one singer)
66–80	A pod of 2d6 (river: 1d3 merrows), curious, following the boat
81–88	A stranded or netted merfolk (50% young)
89–95	Merfolk trade: pearls left on a rock in exchange for iron
96–00	A Ridow warband: 2d6 armed males (Gulf of Ederwyn only; else a pod)

Something in the Water (salt) 99, Merfolk sighting (Fish), resolves on this table.

RUMOURS

RUMOUR	TRUTH	WHERE
A mermaid was seen singing on the rocks outside the harbour; there will be a storm.	partly	any port, esp. the Gulf of Ederwyn
The merfolk of Ridow pay for iron knives with pearls, if you leave them on the arch rock at low tide.	true	Rethem, Melderyn (Ridow Bay)
Merfolk are the drowned of Nandar-Tem, and they want company.	false	Orbaal, Ivinia

ECONOMIC DATA

ITEM	PRICE	SOURCE
Pearl, seed (merfolk trade)	1d6d	Inkhorn
Pearl, fine	by the gem rules	Inkhorn
Ambergris	180d/oz	Pricelist (Whaler)
Merfolk trade-token (carved pearl)	2d6 × 10d to collectors	Inkhorn
Living mermaid (Azeryan, illegal)	2,000d+	Inkhorn

THE FELLOWSHIP'S ADDITIONS

- Merfolk as a mortal, breeding people with dolphin tails (sea kin) and scaled tails (river kin, merrows), and their origins, society, and trade
- Song of Luring (a WIL test), the out-of-water rules, and water-breathing
- Their distribution, religion, tales, prices, and the encounter sub-table

Everything else follows HârnMaster 3 and the Columbia Games articles cited, which the Fellowship commends to every reader.

CREDITS

Writer: Vaidenon of Hustan. Set down by Lesli of Bifel and his homunculus, Claudin.

Sources cited: Columbia Games' *Bestiary* (Aquatics 1, 3), *Ivashu* (#4611), *Religion* (#4401: Tribal Religion), *Hârndex* (Ridow; Nandar-Tem), *Heraldry*, *Evael*, *Orbaal* and the HârnMaster 3 core rules (Skills 10); the fan price list by Fenhorn (ambergris); Fish, in this Physiologus.

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STAT BLOCKS

MERMAN (SEA KIN)

Habitat: Coasts, reefs, kelp beds
Height: 6′ 6″ (length)
Weight: 220 lb
Diet: Fish, shellfish
Lifespan: 60–80 years
Group: Pods of 2–12
Size: Medium/d6

ATTRIBUTES

15 Str	13 Eye	11 Int	14 End
14 Sta	16 Hrg	14 Aur	01 Mov
11 Dex	10 Sml	12 Wil	20 Swim
15 Agl*	12 Voi	11 Cml	

**Agl 04 on land*

SKILLS

60 Initiative	75 Dodge
65 Awareness	60 Stealth
95 Swimming	50 Singing
40 Net[1]	

60 Trident 5p *(or spear; thrown)*
50 Dagger 4p *(bone or shell knife)*
50 Unarmed 2b *(grapple; Pulled Under)*
[1] Net: kelp net

ARMOUR

B2 E1 P1 F4 GAC 1

STRIKE LOCATIONS

01–08	Skull	33–36	•Hand
09–12	Face	37–48	Thorax
13–15	Neck	49–58	Abdomen
16–22	•Shoulder	59–64	Hips
23–28	•Upper arm	65–92	Tail
29–32	•Forearm	93–00	Fluke

• Odd = Left, Even = Right. The Fellowship plan (merfolk): Tail and Fluke count as Leg locations (Tail = Thigh/Knee/Calf, Fluke = Foot); Hips = Groin.

- On land MOV 1 and −40 to physical skills (Inkhorn). Water-breathing: never drowns.
- Language: own song-speech; 1 in 4 speaks a human tongue at ML 20–40.

MERMAID (SEA KIN)

Habitat: Coasts, reefs, kelp beds
Height: 6′ 0″ (length)
Weight: 170 lb
Diet: Fish, shellfish
Lifespan: 60–80 years
Group: Pods of 2–12
Size: Medium/d6

ATTRIBUTES

12 Str	14 Eye	12 Int	13 End
13 Sta	16 Hrg	16 Aur	01 Mov
12 Dex	10 Sml	13 Wil	22 Swim
17 Agl*	17 Voi	15 Cml	

**Agl 04 on land*

SKILLS

60 Initiative	85 Dodge
70 Awareness	70 Stealth
95 Swimming	80 Singing[1]

45 Trident 5p
45 Dagger 4p
40 Unarmed 1b *(grapple)*
[1] Singing: Song of Luring

ARMOUR

B2 E1 P1 F4 GAC 1

STRIKE LOCATIONS

As the Merman (sea kin).

- Song of Luring: listeners test WIL × 4 (WIL × 3 on the singer's CS).
- Eye −3 on a sunlit surface.

MERFOLK YOUNG

Habitat: With its pod
Height: 3′ 0″ (length)
Weight: 50 lb
Diet: Fish
Group: With pod
Size: Small/d4

ATTRIBUTES

06 Str	14 Eye	09 Int	08 End
09 Sta	16 Hrg	13 Aur	01 Mov
09 Dex	10 Sml	09 Wil	18 Swim
15 Agl*			

**Agl 03 on land*

SKILLS

50 Initiative	75 Dodge
60 Awareness	70 Stealth
90 Swimming	

30 Unarmed 1b

ARMOUR

B1 E1 P0 F4 GAC 0

STRIKE LOCATIONS

As the Merman (sea kin).

- Under 12 years. Netted young are the commonest cause of merfolk vengeance.

MERROW (RIVER KIN)

Habitat: Great lakes, deltas, slow rivers
Height: 5′ 6″ (length)
Weight: 140 lb
Diet: Fish, frogs, waterfowl
Lifespan: 40–60 years
Group: 1–3
Size: Medium/d6

ATTRIBUTES

11 Str	10 Eye	09 Int	12 End
12 Sta	14 Hrg	15 Aur	03 Mov
11 Dex	14 Sml	13 Wil	16 Swim
15 Agl*	15 Voi	12 Cml	

**Agl 05 on land*

SKILLS

55 Initiative	75 Dodge
60 Awareness	80 Stealth
90 Swimming	65 Singing[1]

45 Dagger 4p
35 Bite 2p
50 Unarmed 2b *(grapple; Pulled Under)*
[1] Singing: Song of Luring, 300 yards

ARMOUR

B3 E3 P2 F4 GAC 1

STRIKE LOCATIONS

As the Merman (sea kin).

- Green-scaled, pike-toothed tail; hair like water-weed. Slithers ashore across mud and reeds (MOV 3).

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