

Getting in over your head

Sink-or-swim rules for the DRAGONQUEST™ game

by Craig Barrett

In the realm of the Deep, mankind is an alien. Given the most sophisticated modern equipment (or its magical equivalent in the DRAGONQUEST™ game), man is still only a visitor here. He does not really belong in this environment.

He is, however, a persistent visitor. Whether freshwater lake or saltwater ocean, the Deep is a repository of mysteries and treasures that has lured man from time immemorial. So, DRAGONQUEST game players ought to reconcile themselves to the fact that sooner or later one of their characters is going to be drawn into an aquatic adventure. If he is going to survive that adventure, he better have an idea of what could happen to him once his head goes under the surface.

These rules are an attempt to meet that need for knowledge of underwater life and activities; be aware, however, that every effort has been made to adhere to existing DRAGONQUEST rules. When necessary, realism has been sacrificed to playability. So, players should start thinking of swimming (which, for clarity's sake, includes skin diving) as an adventure skill (according to rule 83.0), not as an acquired skill (Chapter VII).

Swimmers

Every DRAGONQUEST character begins campaigning with the Swimming skill at Rank 0. A character can keep himself afloat in the water if he doesn't panic, but that's about all. He can hold his breath for 6 pulses (30 seconds), but the thought of *diving* is utterly appalling to him. As the PC increases his Swimming Rank, he begins to extend these and other abilities; by Rank 10, he is an adept Swimmer.

To chart this progress, use the experience point costs listed for Stealth, which are exactly the same for Swimming, on the Experience Point Cost Chart (87.8). Up through Rank 4, EPs are applied to this skill as described under rule 87.5; from Rank 5 on, EPs are applied directly, as described under rule 87.6.

When a PC achieves Rank 1, he acquires these abilities: diving under the surface to a distance of 7½ feet (1.5 cubic hexes), holding his breath for 6 pulses while diving and swimming, and swimming without stopping (hereafter called a *sprint*) a maximum distance of 25 yards, at a speed of TMR ½.

With each advance in Rank, diving distance increases by 7½ feet, underwater time increases by 2 pulses, and sprint distance increases by 75 yards. Swimming speed

increases to TMR 1 at Rank 3 and to TMR 1½ at Rank 8. For all humans, chase speed in the Adventure Sequence (see 80.0, paragraph 2b, and Movement Rates, 65.0) is determined by multiplying the TMR by 50 yards/minute. Note: A PC must spend 3 pulses (Ranks 1-4) or 6 pulses (Ranks 5-20) hyperventilating before diving; if this isn't done, his diving time is reduced by 30%.

Divers

Some PCs begin campaigning at a higher Swimming Rank. The Diver is a person who was born and raised around water, and who probably learned to swim very soon after he learned to walk. He has a natural affinity for water that is almost magical and that no landsman could ever hope to match.

In order for a player to develop a PC who is a Diver, during the character generation process he simply opts, when he comes to rule 8.7, for his PC to be a Diver in lieu of enrolling the PC in a magical college. The PC automatically receives the Swimming skill at Rank 5 (worth 7,500 EPs), along with the following advantages:

1. A Diver can progress to Rank 20 in the Swimming skill. With each advance in Rank from Rank 11 up, diving distance increases by 9 feet, underwater time increases by 3 pulses, and sprint distance increases by 100 yards. At Rank 12, his swimming speed increases to TMR 2. (EP costs for Ranks 11-20 are 5,000 EPs per Rank.)

2. If a Diver becomes a Beast Master specializing in aquatics, a Navigator, or a Ranger specializing in the ocean environment, his EP cost for advancing in that skill is reduced by 25%, provided that his Swimming Rank is at least 2 levels higher than his Rank in that skill. Also, Divers have their success percentages in these skills modified by 5 points in their favor, whenever these skills are used in, on, or under the water.

3. A Diver who becomes a water mage receives a +5 addition to the base chance of performing any talent, spell, or ritual of his College. No Diver may become an air mage, fire mage, earth mage, or black mage.

Players are not encouraged to blithely enter their PCs into the Diver class. Unless the player expects most of his PC's early adventures to be in and around water, the advantages of the Diver class are insufficient to compensate for not being allowed immediate entrance into a magical College

or ready access to "The warrior alternative" (see DRAGON® Magazine, issue #86, p. 24). The Diver option is primarily included for GMs to use in creating very important NPCs who ought to have special aquatic advantages due to their origins, and to illustrate the fact that latecomers to the sea face enormous difficulties in attempting to match the prowess of people who have spent all their lives in and around water.

However, players who feel that they're getting their value's worth can make their PCs into Divers if they wish. While this excludes them from using the warrior alternative, PCs who are Divers can always enter a magical college at a later stage of their careers.

In addition, Swimmers are not forever barred from the higher ranks of the Swimming skill. Once a Swimmer has achieved Swimming Rank 10, any further EPs obtained during aquatic activity *while wearing a merfolk's cap of woven gold* can be applied toward achieving Swimming Rank 11 and up. Without a merfolk's cap, swimmers must pay 7,500 EPs/Rank to achieve Ranks 11-15, and 10,000 EPs/Rank to achieve Ranks 16-20. In this way, a Swimmer can go as high as Swimming Rank 20 if he desires, but he uses the skill increases per Rank described under the "Swimmers," heading above, not the increases given for Divers. Swimmers are never Divers: the advantages of Divers described in this section never apply to Swimmers, no matter how high a Swimming Rank they achieve. (But Swimmers *do* get TMR 2 at Swimming Rank 12.)

As to whether Divers who are already water mages (or some other type) can also become air, fire, earth, or black mages, using the option described in Eric Goldberg's DRAGONQUEST article in Chaosium's *Thieves' World*, this should be left to GM discretion. I would favor it, providing the Diver became a water mage *before* becoming any of the other four types, to fully establish his mastery of the water environment.

Underwater combat

All surface dwellers, whether Swimmers or Divers, suffer one common disability underwater: they are "legally blind." They can locate light sources, and they can see, fuzzily, for about 3 hexes, but that's all. Fortunately, this problem can be overcome by using goggles (which block peripheral vision into the rear half of each hex on the character's right and left front) or a diving

mask (which gives unobstructed vision in those hexes).

Less easy to overcome is the 25% visual distortion with regard to distance, size, and angles that also affects all surface dwellers underwater. Only experience teaches compensation for this, so distortion is reduced to 20% at Rank 1, 15% at Rank 2, 10% at Rank 3, 5% at Rank 4, and 0% at Rank 5 and above. This affects all ranged and melee combat, underwater only.

Other than that, aquatic combat is essentially governed by rule 67.0, with directions reversed: base chance of a character on the surface hitting a character underwater is reduced by 20, with the added provision that no character who is 5 cubic hexes or more below the surface can be hit by ranged combat from the surface. Base chance of a character below the surface hitting a character above the surface is reduced by 15.

All ranged weapons are useless underwater, except for three. Crossbows and heavy crossbows can be used, with reduced ranges of 3 and 4 hexes respectively, but no change in the base chance for being underwater. Nets used underwater have a range of 2 hexes, with -10 to the base chance for the second hex only.

Both in and under the water, any melee or close combat weapon has its base chance reduced by 10. Underwater, both Class B and Class C weapons suffer a further reduction of -20 to their base chance, as well as -5 to their current damage modifier. The

minimum Physical Strength for proper use of Class B and C weapons is increased by 1 while underwater.

These reductions do not apply to magic weapons. Likewise, the fact that surface dwellers are unable to make effective vocal communication while underwater does not affect the use of magic. The limited sounds that are possible serve magical purposes perfectly well. However, the process of casting a spell, vocal or not, reduces underwater breath time by 1 pulse in all cases — unless the Water Breathing Spell (41.G-12) or the merfolk's cap of woven gold is being used.

A note on watergoing monsters: In addition to the 13 creatures listed in the Aquatics section of the DRAGONQUEST rule book, the rules also contain swimming information for crocodiles, giant land turtles, suarimes, nixies, fossergrim, nagas, water elementals, and the demons Furcalor, Vephar, and Forneus. Tigers and sabertooth tigers may also be met in the water, and these have TMRs of 1 and ½, respectively. Other non-aquatic creatures that are in water seldom move faster than TMR ½.

Buoyancy

Another critical factor in underwater combat is buoyancy (hereafter abbreviated as BCY). With positive BCY, an object rises in water; with negative BCY, it sinks. At 0 BCY, an object floats where it has been placed until it is moved.

The following assumptions are made for game purposes only: When used to balance weight, 1 BCY point equals 5 pounds. How fast an object rises or sinks depends on how much BCY it has in excess of 0 BCY, with 1 BCY point equal to 1 TMR. Maximum rates are TMR 4 in ascent and TMR 7 in descent.

Example: If a Diver wants to raise a 15-pound object from the bottom of a lake, he can attach three 1-pound flotation bags (each filled with +1 BCY equivalent of air) to get 0 BCY, and then he can add one more to get 1 TMR of lift. The object will rise 1 hex every pulse until the bags reach the surface. Attaching a total of seven flotation bags would give the maximum ascent of TMR 4.

Example: To gain extra "bottom time," a Diver can hold onto a line attached to a heavy weight and move with it as far down as he likes. If the diver is at 0 BCY, a 35-pound weight will take him down at the maximum rate of TMR 7.

Human males have +1 natural BCY and require a 5-pound weight belt to achieve 0 BCY, human females have a +2 natural BCY and require a 10-pound weight belt. Or, natural BCY can be overcome by expending Agility points, with 1 AG point equal to 1 BCY point.

Example: A woman of AG 15 can use 2 AG points to overcome her +2 natural BCY, rather than a 10-pound weight belt.

Similarly, the Diver described above

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could have used 4 AG points to lift the 15-pound object to the surface, rather than four flotation bags. While Physical Strength states how much one can carry (see rules 4.1 and 82.9) and indicates how much energy is needed to overcome the inertia of objects in water (to lift, pull, or push), Agility dictates whether one can or cannot move that weight. Use this formula: $1 \text{ AG} = 1 \text{ BCY} = 1 \text{ TMR}$.

This can become dangerous, though, because AG points are also required for a swimmer so that he can move *himself* in water. At Ranks 1-2, 6 AG points are required per $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR of speed; at Ranks 3-7, 3 AG points per $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR; at Ranks 8-11, 2 AG points per $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR; and, at Ranks 12-20, 1 AG point per $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR. These AG points are *not lost*, and AG used for swimming can be simultaneously used for combat, stealth, or when determining Initiative Value. But AG points used for swimming *cannot* also be used for BCY.

Example: At Swimming Rank 9 and AG 15, with a 5-pound weight belt for 0 BCY, a Diver needs 4 AG points to swim at 1 TMR and 4 more to lift the 15-pound weight at 1 TMR. This would still leave him 7 AG points unused and a total of 11 AG points available for combat (his normal 15 minus only the 4 AG points used to lift and move the 15-pound object).

Example: A woman of AG 15 would have 13 AG points available for combat if she used 2 AG points to overcome her natural

BCY, no matter what her Rank is or how fast she chooses to swim. With a 10-pound weight belt to counter her natural BCY, all 15 of her AG points would be available for other uses.

All of these points to the trouble a clothed and armored man has in water. Clothes become waterlogged rapidly, and their weight affects both BCY and AG, with a minimum AG loss of 2 points. Shoes absorb an additional 1 AG point; boots, 2 AG points. All types of armor except chain mail have 30% added to their weight; all types of armor except plate mail add 1 to the wearer's AG loss, and plate mail *doubles* its AG loss.

Example: Wearing chain mail armor and seven pounds of clothes and boots in water, a man of AG 25 has a total AG loss of 7 points (2 for clothes, 2 for boots, and 3 for armor). He also suffers -10 BCY ($7 + 42 = 49$ pounds of weight, divided by $5 = 9.8$, rounded up to 10). His natural BCY is +1, but the additional 9 AG points applied to BCY gives him a net result of 0 BCY. With 7 AG points already lost, that leaves him with 9 AG points to spare. He can easily apply 1 AG point to moving the weight he's carrying and 6 AG points to swimming, no matter what his Swimming Rank is. He even has a total of 8 AG points for combat (his 9-point reserve minus 1 point needed to keep the burden he's carrying in motion).

With only AG 16, he would have enough points to keep afloat, but not enough to

swim even one stroke. How long he could float like that, or whether he could unburden himself, would depend on GM discretion. With only AG 15, he couldn't even float. He'd sink at a rate of TMR 1, starting the moment he entered the water.

If two men grapple in the water (two combatants, or a drowning victim clutching in panic at his rescuer), all of their AG points are absorbed in combat and cannot be used for BCY. (The same is true of a man who is entangled.) Men in this condition rise or sink according to their combined BCY, with -2 BCY added to their total to account for the effects of mutual awkwardness in water.

Normal exertion

Time spent active in water is always costly in Fatigue points for a landsman. Whenever a character spends a significant portion of any given hour in water (see 82.1, paragraph 3), consult the Fatigue and Encumbrance Chart (82.9) as though he had been carrying 60 pounds of weight for a full hour, and charge him the appropriate number of FT points. The exercise rate should be read as one level higher than the same exercise on land. (In lieu of assigning it a higher rate, the cost of strenuous exercise is doubled.)

This does not include the FT cost of anything being carried, pushed, or towed in water for a significant amount of time. Determine this cost separately, again at a rate one level higher than on land.

Exceeding the limits

Up to this point, the life of a Swimmer or Diver is relatively easy and uncomplicated. As long as he stays within his limits (and out of the reach of the nasties, he doesn't have much to worry about. But if he wants to complicate matters, he can exceed his limits — for a price.

1. If a character dives past his Rank limit, he *immediately* expends 1 FT penalty point for every 5 feet that he exceeds it by.

2. If a character exceeds his sprint limit, he *immediately* expends 1 FT point for every 5 yards (+5 per Rank), or portion thereof, that he exceeds his limit.

3. During the tactical stage (rule 80.0, section 3), a character may double his TMR for a number of pulses equal to his Swimming Rank. To do this, he must have enough free AG points to account for the extra speed (at the usual AG cost for his Rank). He must also pay 1 FT point per $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR of extra speed, payable every 10 pulses, or portion thereof, spent at extra speed. Underwater, the FT penalty is payable every 5 pulses, or portion thereof. This burst of extra speed is possible only once per sprint or dive.

4. A character may exceed his underwater time by a number of pulses equal to one-half of his Willpower (rounding down), at a cost of 1 FT point every third pulse. The first FT penalty point is lost on the first Willpower pulse. If the character is not able to take a breath by the time these pulses are

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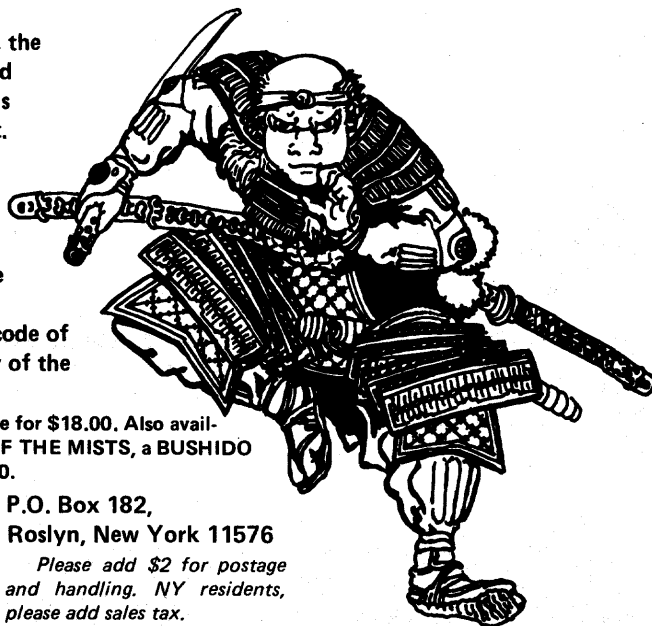
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used up, he *immediately* begins to drown.

5. In addition, whenever a surface dweller dives past 33 feet, he *immediately* loses 1 FT penalty point. Another point is lost going past 66 feet, and another going past 99 feet.

FT penalty losses due to these five causes are cumulative during a single sprint or dive. (A sprint is ended when at least 3 pulses are spent at rest; a dive, when the character resurfaces.) If a character accumulates FT penalties greater than one-third of his original Endurance level (rounding down), the effect is the same as if he had suffered these losses due to a wound (rule 19, paragraph 2): the character is immediately stunned and begins to drown if still in the water.

Fortunately, so long as the character doesn't incur the drowning penalty, FT losses due to these five causes are fairly easy to recover — unlike normal FT losses, which aren't. Once the character is able to spend time resting totally out of the water, his rate of recovery is determined by dividing his normal FT level by his Swimming Rank (rounding up). The result is the number of pulses of rest it takes him to recover each FT penalty point. (FT points lost to causes other than these five cannot be recovered in this fashion.)

Females recover FT penalty points as if they were one Swimming Rank higher than their current level.

A character has one hour to recover FT penalties; all unrecovered points after that time become normal FT losses that will have to be recovered in the normal fashion. FT penalty points are treated as lost points for all purposes until they are recovered. If a character hyperventilates for a full dive, but only dives for 70% or less of his allotted underwater time, 1 FT point lost during that dive is automatically restored at the end of the dive.

Also note that a character can exceed his TMR limit while descending, without penalty, by making a *sounding* dive. This is only possible at Swimming Rank 8 or higher. The technique is to float on the surface at 0 BCY, often while using a diving mask and snorkel to observe below. When the character wants to make an extra-rapid dive, he jackknives in the water, throws his feet into the air, and descends at TMR 3 (for males) or TMR 2 (for females). Hyperventilation cannot be used with a sounding dive.

Even the number of FT points a character has can be exceeded (as in rule 82.6), but for a character in water, this is dire danger. The character may expend "phantom" FT points up to one-half of his initial FT points (rounding down) in aquatic activity. In the pulse in which the last phantom point is expended, he immediately collapses. These phantom FT points must be "restored" by sleeping 1 hour per 2 points, and only when this is completed can the character begin restoring real FT points. (By now, FT penalty points have become normal FT losses, of course.) For

rule 82.6, paragraph 3, 1 phantom FT point equals one half-hour of exhaustion.

Drowning

Drowning is the greatest danger a character faces in the water. Aquatic enemies may or may not be present in any given situation, but wherever there is water, there is the danger of drowning.

For game purposes, drowning is a process of Fatigue and Endurance point loss. In the pulse a character is declared to be drowning, he loses 1 FT point, and then continues to lose 1 FT point every pulse thereafter. When he has lost all FT points, he is stunned. In the following pulse, EN point loss begins at the rate of 1 point per pulse. When all EN points are gone, the character is dead.

Once drowning has begun, the process continues until it is corrected by direct action, or until the character dies.

Drowning may result from several things. Whenever a character underwater uses up all his breath time, including his extra Willpower pulses, he is declared to be drowning. Swim rate is reduced to 1/3 TMR (plus BCY ascent rate), and the character immediately makes a Willpower test to see if he panics. If he rolls equal to or less than (Willpower \times 4), he retains his self-control and can continue to help himself (by releasing his weight belt if he hasn't already done so, for example). If he rolls higher, he panics and can no longer help himself.

A character who is stunned in or under the water is also declared to be drowning. He cannot recover from being stunned or panicked until after the drowning process is stopped (presuming he's rescued).

Panic may result from anything that would cause panic on land (see rule 64.1, for example). When consulting the Fright Table (44.8) for characters in water, any result from 26-95 should be considered as panic only — use the 26-76 explanation (recognizing that in water a panicked, drowning victim is virtually immobilized). All panicked victims begin to drown.

In addition, a Rank 0 Swimmer who (voluntarily or involuntarily) enters a free body of water up to neck level makes an immediate Willpower check. If no fright occurs, a further WP check is made every 30 seconds the swimmer remains in the water at that depth, or whenever an event occurs that would frighten him (such as a splash sending water over his head). If fright occurs, consult the Fright Table, with 01-20 as given and 21 + as a panic reaction.

Rescue and recovery

To rescue a drowning victim, the rescuer must come into close contact and execute a successful restrain action (16.5) on the victim. A victim who is either stunned or not panicking presents no problems (use the PS and AG of the rescuer, \times 3, only), and the victim can be pulled to safety at $\frac{1}{2}$ TMR (if rescuer has a Swimming Rank from 1-7) or 1 TMR (if rescuer has a Swimming Rank from 8-20).

A panicked victim, however, will attempt to grapple (16.3) any rescuer who comes within range *and* sight. If the grapple action succeeds, the rescuer must attempt to break the victim's hold, or both may sink (see Buoyancy, above). To lessen this risk, two rescuers may make a combined restrain attempt on a panicked victim.

An unstunned victim may also attempt a self-rescue by using a grapple action to seize a rope, branch, floating log, bush, or some other object that is within reach and sight, and pull himself to safety. Base chance of the grapple is determined as if the object were a person with PS 0 and FT 0 (see 17.6, Strike Chance Modifiers). A panicked victim suffers a -10 penalty to his base chance.

Only when the drowning victim reaches or is brought to a place of safety — essentially, out of the water, though the GM may rule a character halfway up on a log or rock to be considered safe — can an attempt be made to end the drowning process.

Every Swimmer and Diver learns lifesaving techniques when he learns to swim, and improves them as his Swimming Rank increases. Therefore, the rescuer with the highest Swimming Rank should make the primary lifesaving attempt. The base chance for this is the total of the victim's remaining FT and EN points at the moment of the attempt, plus (the rescuer's Swimming Rank \times 3). If a D100 roll is equal to or less than the base chance,

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drowning stops at once. If not, drowning continues, but further attempts may be made every pulse until the victim is saved or dies. If more than one rescuer is present, a second rescuer may assist by adding his (Swimming Rank x 2) to the base chance. (An unstunned victim who is not panicking may add his unmodified Swimming Rank to that of a single rescuer.)

An unstunned victim who has performed a self-rescue may attempt a self-save by adding his unmodified Swimming Rank to his remaining FT and EN points; a panicked victim uses only his FT and EN points. The self-save attempt may be repeated only until the character becomes stunned.

If the victim is under the Spell of Flotation (41.G-4), the extra Willpower pulses added to his breath time are increased by 50%, and his chance of resisting panic is increased by the strength of the spell (base increase of 5, plus 1 per mage's Rank). All rescue and lifesaving attempts (both by himself and others) also benefit by the strength of the spell. (Attempts by a panicked victim to grapple rescuers are *reduced* by the strength of the spell — the magic helps its target in spite of himself.)

In the pulse that a lifesaving attempt succeeds, all FT and EN losses end. Panicked victims will not resist lifesaving, though they may have resisted rescue, and panic ends in the pulse that lifesaving succeeds. Beginning with this pulse, stunned

victims may attempt to recover from stunned (see rule 19).

Once the drowning victim has been saved, recovery of FT and EN points lost due to near-drowning depends on the victim's fitness, as measured by his Swimming Rank. First, lost EN points are recovered at a rate of 2 per Rank for every six hours the victim sleeps. Once that process is completed and all EN points lost due to near-drowning are recovered, then FT points lost due to near-drowning are recovered at a rate of 2 per Rank every hour the victim rests. If no EN points were lost, FT recovery may begin at once.

New weapons and basic goods

The following items should be added to the weapons and goods lists:

Diving knife: 14 oz., PS 7, MD 11, base chance 50, damage modifier +1, range P (not weighted for throwing), Class A, use MC, cost 12. Skill Ranks with daggers apply.

Diver's safety line: 150 ft. long, 15 lbs., 15 SPs.

Diving goggles: 9 oz., 15 SPs.

Diving mask: 16 oz., 30 SPs.

Snorkel tube: 12 oz., 2 SPs. Used to breathe while floating facedown in water. Sounding dives will not dislodge it. Be sure to clear it of water before each use.

Weight belts: 5-pound type, 3 SPs; 10-pound type, 4 SPs; 15-pound type, 5 SPs. Belts have quick-loose ties and should be put on last when donning diving gear so that they can be released without trouble during emergencies.

Flotation (air) bags: 1-pound size, 2 SPs.

Diver's net sack: 8 oz., 1 SP. Since water flows through the fine, cut-resistant mesh, the sack never adds + BCY beyond whatever is placed inside. It has a drawstring closure.

Diver's belt: 12 oz., 4 SPs. Belt has sewn pouches for items small enough to pass through the mesh of a diver's net sack, and it also has loops for carrying tools and weapons.

Calf sheath: 8 oz., 2 SPs. Used for carrying a diving knife (only) at the calf; can be used on either leg.

Remember that the gear that a diver actually wears is made for underwater use and never imposes BCY or AG penalties on the wearer — except for weight belts, which affect BCY.

A final word: These rules are designed for a Mediterranean-style climate. If campaigns are to occur in cold Northern waters, be prepared to add warm clothing — long-johns, for example (of the waterproof sort) — to the basic goods list.

In real life, the hallmark of the good swimmer or diver is caution. Wisdom dictates that he knows his limits and that he doesn't go beyond them. Hopefully, that principle has come across in this article. If a Swimmer or Diver stays within his limits, he can collect all the rewards of the Deep and perhaps suffer none of its penalties. ♣



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