



# Introduction



The merman drifted across the entrance room of his coral carved home and peered out the window. What he observed caused his already beaming face to smile even broader. A group of two dozen merchildren were gathered a short distance from his home, all huddled around a mound of coral. Today was the day he told his weekly stories to the children, and he felt this was the most rewarding part of his position as village sage.

The sage, who the village knew only as Darkconch, swam over to collect his byssal cloak from its place hanging on the wall, stopping momentarily in front of the mirror to adjust it around his rolls of a neck. The siren was a plump old man, with only a trace of white hair below his balding head. He had a jolly disposition, and his grin seemed to light up the room even more than the magically illuminated clam shell that shone in the corner.

Darkconch paused briefly before exiting his home, transforming his smile into the stern, more serious face his students were used to seeing. With that, he drifted out before the children and came to a sitting rest upon the coral.

"Now let's see" he mocked puzzlement, "what did I promise to talk about today. Oh yes! We were going to discuss the salinity of saltwater." The sage new the children's excitement for today's lesson, and was playfully toying with them. Immediate giggles and rebuttals came from the children.

"Oh, oh. I remember.", he corrected himself with a grin. "I was going to tell you about the surface world."

The excitement the merchildren had visibly increased at the thought of discussing this foreign world. The old sage shared in the excitement of today's lesson, for he knew that few of these children had ever even ventured up to the surface of the water, let alone ever seen the land of the surface world. He leaned back into the coral reef, folded his arms, and began.

"The surface world is a wondrous, and dangerous place. Things there are entirely different from what you know. Creatures there do not live in the water as we do, but survive in air. As a result, they are forced to live their lives only walking the

surface of the ground." He patted the coral he was sitting on. "It is as if each of you could only crawl across the surface of the ground, and never swim up." The merchildren gasped in amazement and horror. The active merchildren rarely even touched the ground, let alone imagined being trapped to it forever. In fact, merfolk often punished their disobedient children by forcing them to remain on the ground for short periods of time.

"What is air?", asked one of the youngest merchildren.

"Well, air is..." Darkconch thought a moment and smiled broadly. "Here, let me show you." With that, the sage - who was also very adept at magic - began casting a spell before the children. Within moments, the water in a small area in front of him opened up, revealing a pocket of air. The youth gasped and looked uneasy.

"It's alright." the sage chuckled. "This is air. Just as water surrounds all of us, our

homes, and our lands, air surrounds all of these things on the surface. Touch it.", he urged. A few of the bravest lads poked their hands in it at first, then the others followed suit. Soon they were becoming more daring, even sticking their heads into the air pocket. Darkconch let the pocket disappear slowly to attract the attention back to his lecture.

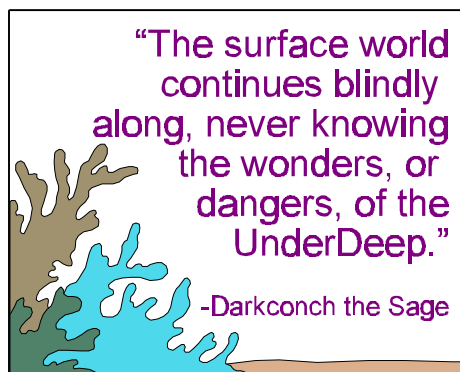
"Have you been to the surface world, Darkconch?", a question shot out.

"Yes, indeed. I visited the surface countless times when I was younger. Although it has been a while since I have ventured there.

"The surface world is a wild and violent place. The weather is constantly changing there, unlike our own homes under the sea. Some days it is so hot that it causes men to have water pour out of his skin, while other days are so cold that the very water freezes solid." The merchildren were becoming more horrified as the lecture progressed.

"There are violent winds and storms that cause such destructive forces they rip homes right up from the ground. Since water is so scarce, the humans there must carry it with them, and even search to find it in order to drink."

"Why don't they just move underwater?", a





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puzzled youth asked.

*"They cannot survive under the water", Darkconch explained. "Just as you or your friends would die if you went out of the water too long, they would perish if they spent too much time in the water. You see, while we breath water, they breath air."*

*"Where do the surface people come from?", another merchchild asked.*

*"Long ago, there were a foolish group of merfolk who decided to abandon the sea and move onto land. Now they have spent so long up there, they cannot return." the sage explained. "Although the surface people will tell you different. They foolishly believe that it was we who split off from them.*

*"Food is not as abundant there as we have here. They are unable to simply grab fish, clams, or lobster to eat. Many of the surface people have to search hard to find food, and many of them die from starvation. The surface dwellers not only have to search for food, but they also usually burn it with heat before they eat it. Because of the trouble, most of them simply purchase their food from merchants."*

*"Why do they burn their food", a curious student asked.*

*The sage chuckled. "I honestly do not know, Kelpna. Rather silly, isn't it? Not only do they burn their food, but they also use the skins of animals to cover their bodies up. Most of them cover themselves up with cloth."*

*"Doesn't that make it hard to move?", one questioned.*

*"Isn't that filthy after a while?", wondered another.*

*"True. But they do not have the same sense of worldly freedom that most UnderDeep races have. They believe it is not right for an individual to go uncovered, and the often use this clothing to show their social status." The children giggled at what, to them, seemed silly.*

*"I saw a surface person once." one of the merchchildren proudly explained. "My father and I saw him from a distance while he swam underwater. Father said they can use magic to breath like we do. Why don't we see more surface people visiting us?"*

*"Well, just as most merfolk do not know what is on the surface, most land dwellers do not know what is undersea. Many have no idea we even exist. The surface world continues blindly along, never knowing the wonders - or dangers - of the*

*UnderDeep.", the sage explained grimly.*

*"What does the surface world look like?", called someone from the back of the group.*

*"The surface world has mountains, valleys, and plains, just as the UnderDeep does, but not in as grand of scale." Darkconch explained. "Their deepest valleys do not come close to how deep many of ours run, and their highest mountain peaks appear as a dwarf compared to a large number of ours."*

*"What is a dwarf?", came a question from another of the merchchildren.*

*The sage sighed and smiled, "That is another story..."*

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Most adventuring and life in the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons® game takes place on the surface of the worlds. Most people never leave the surface land, and are unaware of what exists around them. The surface world has many wonders, this is undisputed. Fabulous castles, unique creatures, and strange treasures are only part of the intrigue. But what about below the surface of the waves? Most fantasy planets are far more water than land. Our Earth, in fact, is covered by over 70 percent water.



The oceans contain many of the same features that the surface land does. Mountains, valleys, caverns, and plains are all located beneath the waves as well. The fantasy oceans are home to some of the most horrific creatures of imagination. Dozens of intelligent races live in the seas. Most adventurers



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only see these races on isolated occasions, and then briefly. What do these creatures do under the sea? Don't they adventure and live just as the surface races do? Many of the most fantastic adventures lie beneath the oceans, just waiting to be taken on by brave heroes. This is what constitutes Fathoms: Aquatic Adventures.

Fathoms is a campaign setting designed specifically for underwater campaigns. These rules can be used to simply enhance the game of a campaign where surface races venture underwater, or may be used as the basis of a campaign itself. By using Fathoms as its own campaign, new aquatic PC races are introduced. Some of these will be names you may already know, such as mermaids, tritons, locathans, sea elves, and hai nu. Others are new races introduced in this text, such as the quirden

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When available, existing rules for underwater adventuring already laid forth in previous AD&D materials have been used. Where these stop, new rules have been given to expand the ocean into a very workable and enjoyable campaign setting.

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