

For sail: One new NPC

Welcome to the mariner aboard in your game

by Scott Bennie

The mariner is a non-player character for the AD&D® game, a fighter sub-class that specializes in the skills and weapons mastery appropriate to seafarers. Mariners may be of any alignment; two well-known sub-variants of the mariner are the neutral buccaneers and evil pirates, who are identical to mariners in every respect. They use the attack and saving-throw tables of fighters, and they have no innate spell-casting abilities. Starting ages, initial funds, restrictions on material and magical ownership, and the like are as per the fighter class.

To become a mariner, a non-player character must have a strength of not less than 12, an intelligence of 12 or greater, a dexterity of 13 or greater, and a constitution of not less than 10. They do not gain bonuses for earned experience. Mariners may be humans (with unlimited level advancement), elves (either grey or high), half-elves (with one parent either grey or high), or half-arcs. Elves may be multiclassed as mariner/magic-users, mariner/clerics, mariner/thieves, or mariner/thief/magic-users. Half-elves may be multiclassed as mariner/clerics, mariner/magic-users, mariner/thieves, or mariner/cleric/thieves. Half-arcs may become mariner/assassins, mariner/clerics, or mariner/thieves. Level limits are as per the fighter class in *Unearthed Arcana* in the case of nonhumans, except that a dexterity of 17 is required to exceed 10th level, and a dexterity of 18 is required to exceed 12th level.

At the DM's option, a half-elf mariner or mariner/thief may be declared to have had an aquatic elf parent. Such a character cannot cast magic and is limited to the 6th level of advancement as a mariner, but he or she can breathe water automatically by means of gills on his or her neck. The character may also communicate with dolphins, taking the dolphin's tongue as a language (as well as the sea elves' tongue).

Armor and weapons

Mariners normally wear only leather armor, because shipboard work is too strenuous for bulkier dress. Before battle, magical chain mail, ring mail, or studded leather may be donned, but such armor will be taken off again as soon as the fighting is done. Mariners value movement and low encumbrance highly.

Due to their training and agility in combat, mariners gain a +2 bonus on their armor class while wearing leather or no armor at all (so that AC 8 becomes AC 6). This armor bonus is cumulative with the wearing of magical rings, bracers, and other items that alter armor class. Mariners will use only small-sized shields (the sort that can be used to defend against one opponent at a time), and may use spiked bucklers.

Mariner NPCs begin at 1st level with proficiency in three weapons. They gain a new weapon for every three experience levels they rise (*i.e.*, a new weapon at 4th, 7th, 10th, etc., level) and wield weapons with which they are not proficient at a -2 "to hit" penalty. Mariners gain new attacks per round as a fighter does; they may also use oil or poison (if the DM permits), but will rarely do so.

Because shipboard fighting takes place in close quarters and striking speed is so important, mariners only use certain hand-to-hand weapons and no others: hand axes, clubs, daggers, hammers, knives, saps, scimitars, quarterstaves, and one-handed swords (broad, long, and short). These weapons are also very effective against lightly armored opponents. Short spears and tridents will be used in initial boarding actions and may be taken with proficiency, though these weapons are usually discarded in close combat. Being skilled at close-quarters fighting (including "pier six brawls") gives mariners a +1 bonus to hit when using their fists, using either Method II for unarmed combat (*Unearthed Arcana*, pp. 106-107, or

the variant combat system in Best of DRAGON® Magazine, Volume 4, pp. 42-44).

Mariners use various missile weapons that adapt well to seafighting. Javelins and harpoons are favored for their range and power, and spears are often cast between ships as well. Mariners may also be proficient at heavy weapons such as ballistae and catapults, and mariners who dive underwater may chose to be proficient with the underwater net (see the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, p. 56). Note that the fitting of a catapult aboard a ship is a tricky thing, as the shot may fly through the ship's own rigging and sails.

Light and heavy crossbows are commonly used, since these weapons have great range and penetrating power against lightly armored opponents. Longbows and short bows require greater care than crossbows and are more easily damaged by seawater, and thus are usually not learned. Mariners can use crossbows with great accuracy, gaining a +1 "to hit" bonus when using them. This results from using them so often on normally unsteady ships and from practiced aiming at individual targets. Crossbows may not be reloaded by mariners in a ship's rigging; solid footing is required to crank the weapon.

Parrying & disarming

Sea combat is not always to the death; it is often preferable to capture opponents, as experienced sailors are hard to come by. Thus, mariners often try to win fights by killing as few sailors as possible. Defensive parrying and disarming strikes are frequently used as a result, as is subdual (*Unearthed Arcana*, p. 106).

Mariners can effectively parry attacks when using scimitars, swords, clubs, or staves. Parrying involves subtracting a mariner's total "to hit" bonus (including strength and magical adjustments) from the "to hit" roll of an attacking opponent. The mariner may elect to parry one attack directed against him for every attack per round that the mariner normally gets, but cannot both parry and attack in the same round unless he successfully disarms his opponent (see below). A mariner must state, before the attack against him is rolled, whether he intends to parry that attack. A blow cannot be parried more than once, and a parry cannot be redirected as an offensive attack once it is declared.

Only weapon attacks made from man-sized or smaller opponents can be parried; claw attacks and blows from giants, demons, dragons, undead, purple worms, etc., cannot be turned aside. Although a mariner cannot parry when surprised, he can parry an opponent who has won initiative against him.

Mariners use the disarming rules as noted in *Unearthed Arcana*, p. 106, but have a special ability available to them. If a mariner successfully disarms an opponent, the mariner may strike at the opponent again, either to kill or subdue, as an extra attack above and beyond all others allotted that round. Optionally, if using a sharp-edged weapon, the mariner may place the weapon against a vital spot on the opponent and demand the victim's surrender. If the victim refuses, the mariner gains automatic initiative to strike, and gains a +3 bonus to hit and damage the opponent. This attack will finish out the attacks for the mariner in that round.

Mariner skills

Shipboard life and familiarity with the sea gives the mariner NPC a wide variety of special talents. These skills are listed below and described individually.

1. Swimming: It can be assumed by the DM that any character who has lived by a body of water can swim. Mariners are excellent

swimmers capable of swimming faster and surviving longer in the water than any other character class. Specific rules on swimming, drowning, and hypothermia follow.

Movement: According to the *DMG* (p. 56), the base swimming rate is equal to dungeon movement rate (i.e., one-third normal wilderness movement rate). This produces the following rates:

Move rate	Distance traveled in:	
	1 round	1 segment
6"	60'	6'
9"	90'	9'
12"	120'	12'
15"	150'	15'

Mariners swim at a 15" movement base. Wearing non-magical leather armor and every 50 gp of encumbrance (100 gp for mariners) reduces a character's swimming movement by 3". At 0", the swimmer cannot maintain his buoyancy and will be forced to walk on the bottom of the body of water (provided he can breathe, of course). Magical ring mail, studded leather, and chain mail are the equivalent of non-magical leather, if waterproofing was part of the dweomer cast upon such armors. Magical leather armor counts as no armor at all.

Because water density restricts movement, "retreat" movement is only twice the base swimming rate. All movement submerged is half the surface rate.

Drowning: When a person swims in water for an extended length of time, there is a chance that the swimmer will not be able to maintain his buoyancy; then he will drown. Consult the chart below, doubling the amount of encumbrance for mariners and treating magical ring mail, chain mail, and studded leather armor as non-magical leather, to determine at what interval a drowning check must be made. Magical leather is equal to no armor at all.

No armor or encumbrance — 2 hours
 Leather armor (non-magical) — 1 hour
 At least 50 gp enc. — 1 hour
 Leather and 50 gp enc. — ½ hour
 At least 100 gp enc. — ½ hour
 Leather and 100 gp enc. — 1 turn
 At least 150 gp enc. — 1 turn
 Leather and 150 + gp enc. — 5 rounds
 At least 200 gp enc. — 5 rounds

The base chance for drowning is 25%, modified as follows:

Salt water: -10%
 Calm water and/or weak current: -20%
 Choppy water or moderate current: -0%
 Rough water or strong current: +15%
 Storm (check every turn): +50%
 Treading water (0" movement): -15%
 Every previous drowning check made: +10%
 Every level of mariner or sea-deity cleric: -3 %/level
 Every level of sea-deity worshiper: -1 %/level
 Buoying device: -5% to -50%

Note that if a drowning check is called for twice (e.g., if the swimmer is wearing leather and has 100 gp encumbrance during a storm), the character must make two drowning rolls, and the +10% factor for previous checks made applies from the first roll to the second roll.

Hypothermia: Hypothermia from exposure to cold waters can cause drowning. A *ring of warmth* or similar magic item or spell will prevent hypothermia; otherwise, a drowning check must be made every turn that the water temperature is below 50°F, or every two rounds if the temperature is below 40°F. The addition to the drowning roll is as follows:

Water temperature below 60°F: + 10%
 Water temperature below 50°F: + 30%
 Water temperature below 40°F: + 60%

2. Diving: Although water can cushion a fall, a person jumping into it from a great height is going to be hurt. Mariners are accomplished divers, however.

Diving into water in heavy armor carries dire consequences. If a person leaps into the water in any armor except leather, he will take half the damage that he would have sustained had he fallen on solid ground, and is likely to sink as fast, if not faster than, an anchor.

In order to successfully dive, the water must be deep enough to recover from the fall. For a dive of 30' or less, the minimum depth is 4' (5' for non-mariners). For a dive of between 30' and 90', the minimum depth is 8' (10' for non-mariners), and for a dive above 90', the minimum depth is 12' (15' for non-mariners). If the water is too shallow, the diver will sustain half the damage he would have suffered had he struck hard ground, minus a number of hit points equal to twice the depth of the water in feet subtracted from the height of the fall in feet (as the water decreases the diver's velocity and absorbs some of the kinetic energy).

Even without minimum depths, falling into the water can hurt, although not as badly as falling onto solid ground. A diver is able to jump from as high as 50' without taking damage; every 10' above the maximum height will cause the diver to sustain 1d6 damage (75% of which is counted as incidental damage, as per the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, p. 72). If the diver is encumbered, the minimum safe height increases; wearing leather armor (and every 100 gp amount of encumbrance) reduces the safety height by 10' increments to a minimum safe diving elevation of 20'. Mariners have an increase in their safe diving elevation of 10' per level, to a maximum of bonus of 150' at 11th level.

3. Holding breath: A character is normally able to hold his breath for only one round, emerging from the water to regain his breath at this time. Mariners are exceptionally good at this skill and are able to hold their breath for two rounds, plus one round per four points of constitution (four rounds at constitution 10- 11, five rounds at constitution 12-15, and six rounds at constitution 16 and above). A character forced past his limit takes 1d6 hit points damage, cumulative, per round (1d6 on the 1st round, 3d6 on the 2nd round, 6d6 on the 3rd round, etc.) of which 75% is incidental damage (*DMG*, p. 72), as will a character who exceeds his depth limit (75' for non-mariners, 125' for mariners).

4. Navigation: Navigation is the science of directing ships over large bodies of water. In medieval times, the technology of navigation was very primitive (the compass was not employed aboard ship until after 1300 A.D.); while Prince Henry the Navigator advanced the training of navigators, technological developments in navigation were insignificant until well after the medieval period. In an AD&D universe, magic usually replaces technology, and ships might carry magical instruments that perform the same function as an astrolabe or sextant. These devices would be among the most valuable treasures aboard a ship.

A navigator's chief function, of course, is to plot the ship's course. To determine the accuracy of a course, plot the route between the point of departure and destination, checking for errors daily by rolling percentile dice. Subtract the mariner's navigation roll from the score. If the total is greater than zero, then that is the percentage that the course is in error. For example: A ship has a course plotted that will allow it to sail sixty miles in a day. The navigator makes a 10% error. The ship is 10% of 60 miles off course, or 6 miles. There is a 50% chance that the direction of error is portside and 50% chance that it is starboard; the DM may wish to adjust the direction of the error, given phenomena such as strong winds or current.

Only one roll may be made for a vessel each day, using the highest navigation roll of any mariners aboard. The navigation roll is subject to the following modifiers.

Two or more navigators in consort: +15%*
 Ship sailing against moderate current: -5%
 Strong breeze: -10%
 Ship is old or worn (unseaworthy): -10%
 Ship sailing against strong current: -15%
 Strong gale: -25%
 Storm or greater force winds: -50%

The following technological modifiers are also used:

Primitive technology:

Out of sight of landmarks: -30%

Rudimentary technology (compass, cross-staff, astrolabe):

Light cloud cover: -10%

Heavy cloud cover: -25%

Advanced technology (post-astrolabe):

Light cloud cover: -5%

Heavy cloud cover: -10%

* – See note below on two navigators in consort.

A character with a secondary skill of navigator (as per the *DMG*, p. 12) has a base *navigation/piloting* score of 40% and a base *sea lore* score of 10%. These benefits come from training prior to attaining 1st level.

A character may increase his *navigation/piloting* and *sea lore* scores if he takes a 5% experience-point penalty and takes an extra week of training between levels. The extra training costs 100 gp/level, so a 5th-level mariner training for 6th level would pay 600 gp. The 5% penalty on experience means that the character must drop 5% of all experience earned, slowing his level advancement rate. The *navigation/piloting* score will then advance by 2% per level (to a maximum score of 70%), and the *sea lore* score increases by 4% per level to a maximum of 50%. If a character has a 50% score in *navigation/piloting*, he may work with another navigator with a similarly high score in consort, improving their mutual chances of success.

5. Piloting: Piloting is the science of directing a ship through a hazardous area (e.g., an icefield, lake with jutting rocks at irregular intervals, a reef, or a strong current which pulls ships into danger). When the possibility of such disaster occurs, the mariner must make his piloting roll, which is identical to the navigation roll. The roll is subject to the following modifiers:

Two or more pilots in consort: +15%*

Lighthouse in area: +25%

Ship is unseaworthy: -10%

Strong breeze: -10%

Ship sailing against strong current: -15%

Light fog: -15%

Strong gale: -25%

Heavy fog (¼ mile visibility): -30%

Storm or greater force winds: -50%

* – See note above on two navigators in consort, under #4.

The roll should be made for every 5 miles of hazard. If, for example, a ship is threatened by a passage 15 miles long that contains jagged boulders, the piloting roll must be made three times. The DM must determine the degree of hazard beforehand; if the ship misses the piloting roll, it takes damage according to the severity of the hazard and the amount by which the piloting roll was missed (refer to the table in the *DMG*, p. 54):

Minor hazard

Missed by	Damage
01-20%	Light
21-35%"	Light to moderate
36-00%	Moderate

Major hazard

Missed by	Damage
01-10%	Light
11-20%	Light to moderate
21-35%	Moderate
36-00%	Moderate to heavy

Critical hazard

Missed by	Damage
01-10%	Light to moderate
11-20%	Moderate
21-35%	Moderate to heavy
36-00%	Heavy

MARINERS EXPERIENCE TABLE

Experience points	level	8-sided dice		Level title
		Exp. for accum.	hit points	
0–	2,250	1	1	Sailor
2,251–	4,500	2	2	Ship's mate
4,501–	9,000	3	3	Sea dog
9,001–	20,000	4	4	Seaman
20,001–	40,000	5	5	Seafarer
40,001–	75,000	6	6	Sea rover
75,001–	150,000	7	7	Sea hawk
150,001–	300,000	8	8	Ship master
300,001–	575,000	9	9	Mariner
575,001–	850,000	10	9+3	Mariner (10th level)
850,001–	1,125,000	11	9+6	Mariner (11th level)

275,000 experience points are required to achieve each additional level above the 11th. Mariners gain 3 hp per level after the 9th level.

Alternate level titles may be substituted for mariners who are buccaneers or pirates, such as Corsair and Privateer. Certain titles such as first mate, navigator, lieutenant, and captain should be reserved for the positions typical of any ship.

MARINER SKILLS TABLE

Level of Mariner	Navigation/ Piloting	Predict Weather/ Sea Lore	Climb Ropes/ Ladders
1	65%	40%	80%
2	68%	45%	82%
3	71%	50%	84%
4	74%	55%	86%
5	77%	60%	88%
6	80%	65%	90%
7	83%	70%	92%
8	86%	75%	94%
9	89%	80%	96%
10	92%	85%	98%
11	95%	90%	99%
12	98%	93%	99.2%
13	101%	96%	99.4%
14	104%	97%	99.6%
15	107%	98%	99.7%
16+	110%	99%	99.8%

Note: When using the tables in the *DMG*, ignore the references to fires. Otherwise, as far as hull damage and repair time are concerned, they are applicable.

6. Climb ropes/ladders: The movement rate of normal ladder climbing is 4"; the normal movement for rope climbing is 2". With a successful climb ropes/ladders roll, a mariner can double his movement rate. If the roll is unsuccessful, the mariner falls. Slickness of the rope, etc., are important factors that modify the roll. Climbing a ship's rigging is the same as climbing a ladder, as far as mariners are concerned.

The *climb ropes/ladders* roll is also used if the mariner is climbing under extreme stress, such as in heavy seas and storms, in boarding actions in combat or when the ship is rammed, when a large wave or high winds strike the ship, and so forth. Mariners do not normally roll to climb either ropes or ladders aboardship, though non-mariners have a 20% chance of falling or stumbling until they get their "sea legs" (in 2-5 days).

7. Predict weather: Using this skill, a mariner has a percentage chance to predict the weather in the immediate area (within a 5-mile radius of his position) within the next eight hours. This skill is usable only on the sea or in shore-lying areas.

8. Sea lore: This skill is similar to a bard's legend lore, but deals with knowledge of nautical legends, such as recognizing the names of sunken ships and remembering their history, recognizing uncharted islands from rumors and reports of landmarks, identifying sea monsters and ghost ships, knowing how to tie 101 different knots, etc.

9. Shipwright and ship evaluation: A mariner knows the arts of ship construction and can determine its quality with minimal inspection. Ships have four quality classifications:

Unseaworthy: This is the most decrepit ship type. If you notice rats scurrying in droves down the ship's gangplank prior to departure, it's probably unseaworthy. In high winds, unseaworthy ships take hull damage in addition to the usual chances for a catastrophe: 1-2 points of hull damage in a strong gale, 1-3 points in a storm, and 1-6 points in a hurricane. Unseaworthy ships are capable of only 75% normal speed, and cost -10% to -30% of the normal ship price.

Average: The normal quality of seagoing ships. They also take damage in addition to the usual broken masts, etc., taking 1 hull point per hour in a storm, and 1-2 in a hurricane. They have approximately normal speed, costs, and capsizing chances.

Good: These ships are built with time and care. Good quality ships often serve as the flagship of a small nation's fleet or command vessels of a larger nation's fleet. They take 1 hull point damage per hour in a hurricane, and have -10% to their capsizing and wind damage results percentages (see *DMG*, p. 54). These ships cost twice normal price and will only rarely be available for sale.

Excellent: The best ships are of excellent quality, designed by experts and built by masters. An excellent vessel serves as the flagship of a large seafaring nation's navy, and as such are never available for sale, although they make a great prize in a naval battle. They have only a 5% chance to capsize in a storm (a 15% chance in a hurricane) and take -30% to their wind damage percentage. They move through the water at +10% speed.

To calculate the hull points of major ship types in their assorted conditions, consult the following chart:

Ship	Unseaworthy	Average	Good	Excellent
Galley, small	1d4+2	1d6+4	2d4+4	1d6+6
Galley, large	1d6+2	1d8+4	2d6+4	3d4+4
Merchant, small	2d6+6	2d8+8	3d8+12	4d6+12
Merchant, large	3d6+9	3d8+12	4d8+12	6d6+12
Warship	3d6+4	3d8+6	4d8+6	5d6+12

A mariner is also trained in the art of ship construction and design. A 3rd-level mariner is able to design and oversee the construction of a seaworthy (i.e., average) vessel; a 10th-level mariner can construct (with an experienced building team) a good quality ship; and a 11th-level mariner (with master craftsmen) can produce a vessel of excellent quality. It is up to the DM to determine the construction time and costs in accordance to manpower available and the monetary system of the campaign.

10. Languages: A mariner automatically knows the common tongue, but instead of an alignment language (which may be learned later), a mariner knows a strange dialect called "the sea tongue," a language used in ceremonies by religions devoted to the worship of sea deities, and known to the leaders of sea peoples such as aquatic elves, triton, koalinth, mermen, etc. A mariner receives a great amount of language training and may pick up a new language (provided it is of a marine human or demi-human) at 3rd level and every three levels afterward (6th, 9th, etc.) until he reaches his maximum language total.

A mariner can also learn as many signaling codes as he can learn languages. A mariner automatically knows a "common" flag code and a "common" conch-horn code, and may pick up new codes at 3rd level and at every three levels afterward, or at a rate of six

months training, minus one month for every point of intelligence over 12 to a minimum of one month.

11. Command skills: A mariner knows how to handle a ship in a sea battle with great effectiveness. At 10th level, a mariner can also rouse his crew so they fight at +10% morale and +1 to all "to hit" rolls. Such a rouse requires three uninterrupted turns, and the entire crew must be gathered to listen. A mariner is also aware of the function of each man aboard ship and may substitute for any position if required.

12. Undersea combat: Although subject to the same weapon restrictions of any land-dweller when fighting underwater, a mariner is skilled beyond any other human in undersea combat. At 3rd level, a mariner has +2 to his initiative roll when battling a land-dweller underwater; at 7th level, a mariner actually has a chance to tie initiative against an undersea denizen if he exceeds its initiative roll by three (i.e., 4-1, 5-2, 5-1, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1), and he wins if he exceeds its roll by four or more (i.e., 5-1, 6-2, 6-1).

13. Find secret/hidden doors on ship: A mariner has the same percentage to find secret doors as a thief does. This does not translate to a knowledge of how to locate secret passages in buildings on land.

Special options

Proficiency skills: The mariner, before attaining first level, has the option of dropping one proficient weapon and concentrating on marine skills. If the mariner chooses the proficiency skills option, he will have one level greater ability in *sea lore*, *predict weather*, *shipwright*, and *language attainment*, and two levels greater ability in *swimming*, *diving*, *navigation*, *piloting*, and *climb ropes/ladders*.

Mariner's armor: This special leather armor is constructed by the most skilled tanners and armorers. It is not magical, but acts as if it were for swimming and diving purposes (equal to no armor). It is waterproof, as is normal leather. Cost varies according to region and economic conditions, but it is at least four times the cost of ordinary leather armor (usually 20 gp). It must be tailored to fit the individual and requires 30 days to prepare.

Henchmen and hirelings: Mariners may hire and class of character and take on any henchmen, as per fighters. They do not construct freeholds as do fighters, though any mariner of 5th level and above who owns a ship may serve as that ship's captain; he will attract a body of 2-20 0-level sailors and 1-4 mariners of levels 1-4. Other crewmen must be hired or found individually.

Mariners of 1st level may serve as mates (or sergeants), as per the *DMG*, pp. 33-34. Mariners of 2nd to 4th level may serve as lieutenants, and those of 5th level and up may be captains. Mariners who are ship captains may be hired to lead expeditions for trade, military, exploration, or private purposes. Adventures may encounter them frequently in coastal areas. Fleet commanders are almost always 9th level and above. ✕

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