We Consign Them to the Deep

A freeform larp about mermaids, bound together by the ocean, dooming sailors to the deep.

What is the game?

Some people who die at sea do not progress to the next stage. Instead, their soul gets trapped, stuck in the ocean. They become mermaids. Their body and soul made from land and sea. And though death was not their preferred option, in the ocean they have earned freedom and community that they did not possess previously. Some have escaped lives that bound and restricted them. Others have escaped worlds that were not built for them.

Once their soul reaches the sea they are met by others like them and every year, a select few of these mermaids are picked to conduct a ritual. They must scan the oceans and decide on a ship to sink. Little is known of what would happen if this ritual does not occur but rumours abound. Maybe the sea will drain and everyone will get swallowed up or maybe every single mermaid will get turned back into a human. The sands of time are falling and the mermaids do not have long to make their decision.

What you will need

This game is for between 2 and 6 players and can be played in person or online and should last around 2-3 hours. You will need to set up a video or voice call or a text channel and have a place where you can write notes together like a Google Doc, a Discord Server or a shared whiteboard.

There are five steps to the game 1) Discuss safety with your group 2) Build characters together 3) Build the ships that you will sink together, 4) Play the game 5) Debrief.

Safety Tools

Before character creation begins with your group, players should have the opportunity to share boundaries and access requirements with each other. This game has the potential to be dark. You may choose your own ways of being safe with your group depending on how well you know each other but it's recommended to have two mechanisms: a way to signal topic boundaries before the game and a way to interrupt content during the game.

When considering topics to exclude from the game, consider two aspects:
- This game includes discussions of how characters have died.
- This game includes discussions of people who are considered evil

Before the game, I'd recommend Lines and Veils. In your shared document, put a section for players to write Lines and Veils. Lines are topics that you do not want other players to touch at all. Veils are topics that can be present within the game but should not be explored in detail. For example, with a Line on drowning, drowning would not exist at all within the game. With a Veil on drowning, a character may have it in their backstory that they died by drowning but this will not come up within the game.

During the game, I'd recommend using the [Script Change](#) tool by Beau Jágr Sheldon... Script Change allows you to use certain keywords to move through the game. Particularly useful for this game are Fast Forward which allows you to move past a scene or area of content that a player is finding tough, Pause for breaking a game part way through either to calibrate with other players or simply to have a break, and Resume for returning to play. These can be done either out loud or over text and players may offer up explanation if they desire.

Character Creation

All characters are mermaids. These can be of any gender. They also can have died at any time in the past. Mermaids do not die of old age so they may have originated from any period of history. What's important is that they were once human, they then died and now they have an affinity to the sea. Anything more about the mythology of these mermaids can be discussed together and you may ask these questions during this phase.

Character creation works as a discussion. Players should be given a bit of time to consider each prompt in turn and then report back to the group.

Prompts

- *Think of an object on land. Choose something from around your room or environment if you'd like. Consider the object and use it to inspire what your character was like as a human. Who were they and how did they die?*
- *Think of an object that occurs within the ocean. It could be a plant, an animal, some flotsam, or jetsam that has fallen off a ship or wreckage itself. Consider the attributes that object has. It is shiny, spiky, mystical, curious. Use those to inspire how your character is in the sea and how they may have changed.*
- *How attached is this character to their humanness? Have they long forgotten what it means to be a human or is it still very near to them?*
- *Finally, think of a name and a personality for your character.*

For example, Julia has chosen a key for her object on land. She decides that the character was previously a prisoner and that time has made hard and cold. She then chooses a jellyfish for her ocean object which has made her more vibrant but also prickly and defensive. Having died at the hands of her captors, she still resents what happened to her on land. She calls the character Silvia.

After this, players can discuss with one another what their characters think of one another. How are they related to one another? What are the tensions between each other and what binds them together?

Ship Creation

There should be a minimum of 4 ships. Add an extra ship for each extra player over 4. Each of these ships have been marked out as having the potential to cause evil in this world. Maybe they have cargo that is a threat to the world, or the people themselves are evil or they pose a threat to the mermaids.

For each of these four prompts, the players will take a ship and write something for it each of them. So, player A may do the first prompt for Ship A, the second prompt for Ship B, and the third prompt for Ship C. Two minutes should be sufficient time to write a prompt but you may want longer or shorter depending on your group.

Prompt 1 - What is despicable about this ship? Why does it deserve to be sunk?
Prompt 2 - What is redeemable about this ship? Why does it deserve to be saved?

Prompt 3 - How, personally, is your character invested in this ship? Do they know someone on it or does it express a danger to you?
Prompt 4 – Pick a name for the ship, add any last details and if necessary, a devious twist.

Once the ships are complete, players should report back and introduce the ship they were last working on.

Note - If any of the players have problems with typing or writing, this step can be exchanged for discussing out loud. There are also examples of ships in the appendix of this document.

Playing the Game

Once the characters are created and the ships are made, check in with one another. Is there anything else you need to know to play the game? Take a short break and then get ready to play the game. The game can take anywhere from 20 minutes to 60 minutes depending on the discussions. Agree on a song or a code phrase that you will play at the beginning of the game and at the end of the game. Once the song has finished, you may begin.

Mermaids make their final ritual discussions at the Great Well – an underwater whirpool where they can cast rocks. These final discussions revolve around who is best to sink. What ship deserves to leave this world? What will protect the human world? What would protect the ocean? However, they may also ask one question every 15 minutes to the well about one of the ships. Agree on a question to ask, generate a number between 1 and 20 then consult Appendix B for your result. This can help to stimulate discussion if you are unsure where to go next.

Making the Final Decision

Once they have made the final decision, each mermaid will throw a rock with the name of a ship on it into the Great Well. Technically, the best result for the mermaids is to reach consensus. However, with different plights and reasons to vote, mermaids may choose to vote with their heart rather than with their head. They do not know what the results will be apart from that consensus is best. Once a mermaid has made their final decision, the player should say out loud or type the words "I Consign Them to the Deep". Their character has thrown their rock into the well. They should find a safe place to log their answers such as a sheet of paper or on part of the shared document where others can't see.

When all mermaids have made their final decisions, they should reveal their decisions to the others. One player should then reveal the consequences. Play the song you have decided on to end the game.

If all mermaids choose the same ship - then that ship is sunk.
If the majority of mermaids choose one ship, but another ship is also chosen - the majority chosen ship is sunk, the minority ship receives great fortune, any mermaids who voted for the minority ship die.
If there is an equal amount voted for both ship - a random ship is sunk and a random mermaid dies.
If all mermaids choose different ships or if all the mermaids abstain - all of the mermaids die.

Debrief

It can be useful to debrief with your other players - to remind each other and yourself that you are not your character and you are not responsible for your character's actions. Go around each player in turn and discuss each question.

- What happened to your character after the ritual?
- How are you, the player and your character different?
- What are your plans for after the game?

Inspirations

As a disabled game writer, I am often inspired by tales of mermaids as disabled people who feel at peace with the sea but once they are put on land, they find the world unsuited to them. For that, I was inspired by "Part of That World: Finding Disabled Mermaids in the Works of Seanan McGuire" by Cara Liebowitz

I was also inspired by The Deep by Rivers Solomon which was in turn inspired by the song The Deep by clipping. The themes of collective pain and history held by people within a community.

Finally, I was inspired by The Life of Mermaids by Olga Rudak, Mira Suovanen, Jouni Karppinen, and Mo Holkar.

Playtesters

This game could not have been possible without the generosity of my playtesters: Robin Gurney, Ruth Foster, Erin Marsh and Michelle Taylor

APPENDIX A - Example Ships

The Bluebottle – A cruise ship that's filled with celebrities and tourists who have paid hundreds of thousands of pounds for the chance to be on the ship. They regularly abuse the people in their lives. They pay their workers incredibly little money and are responsible for hoarding a significant amount of wealth. However, aboard these ships are politicians and philanthropists who give vast amounts of money to charities.

Coyote's Rest – A fishing vessel that has managed to locate several mermaids and has several plans to capture and display mermaids and other sea life. This could be an end to the mermaid population if the secrets are revealed. However, there are stowaways on this ship – people who have tried to escape hardship from other countries and want to make new lives elsewhere.

HMS Scylla – A warship that is destined for a small country. By invading this country, there is the certainty of war that will kill thousands of people. By sinking the ship, it is unsure whether the vast amount of weapons on board will pause more of a risk to those on the seabed.

Jane's Revenge – This is a ship that contains vast supplies of oil and pollutants. This has the potential to pollute the air or spill within the ocean. Not only that but the safety on board the ship is lax and it is bound to set fire at any moment. However, travelling on this ship are several scientists who are travelling with highly specialised work on building sustainable energy systems that could reverse many of the negative impacts of this oil.

APPENDIX B – Questions to the Well.

Ask a question to the well then generate a random number between 1 and 20, this is your answer.

1. Once upon a time, this was like a fairytale. Maybe it should be a happy ending?
2. There is an incredible capacity within this ship. It has a great and powerful potential.
3. The moon and stars look over this ship and wait to see.
4. Significant weaknesses are hidden by its greater strengths.
5. Why swim upstream so often when you can follow the currents?
6. It is wise to be sceptical but will scepticism lead to inaction?
7. Momentum is important. Do not stop once you have started.
8. It is so much stranger than you imagined.
9. The world is very large. Which means that small decisions have big impacts.

10. The sea is powerful, wonderful, beautiful and must be protected.
11. We yearn for stability and security but can we ever reach it?
12. Everything must come to an end but that does not mean we should waste the journey.
13. It will not be the beginning, or the end, but a more terrifying middle.
14. It will feel like walking on knives, it will look like gliding on air.
15. Open your eyes.
16. Does everyone deserve forgiveness? How far is too far?
17. Sometimes the shadows we cast are more intricate that we could imagine.
18. I cannot give you the answers. I can only tell you the question is important.
19. There are billions of possible futures. How do we make it possible to get the best one?
20. Well done, congratulations, this is what you were looking for.