

THE AQUARIUM TANK

by Jeff Yaus, published at www.folded.com

Author's note: This was an attempt to create a Dialect setting that's a little more lighthearted than most. I wrote this when introducing a bunch of tweens to the game, and wanted their first experience to have an ending that might not be happy per se, but would at least be bittersweet instead of tragic.

Our building has a large, central tank, full of thousands of fish — the main attraction. But off to the sides are several dozen smaller, separate tanks, each meant to show human visitors a different aspect of aquatic life. One such tank depicts our type of marine life, an artificial reef with creatures of many species.

We are those creatures.

Each day, the aquarium's humans lift the lid, provide us each with food tailored to our own diets, and close the lid. Then come the visitors: unknown humans who stare through the glass, press up against it to examine us closely. We see them, we hear them, but we do not touch them nor they us, for ours is a community separate from the humans, from the big tank, and from the ocean.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Life in the tank.** What defines our daily life? What do we do from day to day?
- **Captivity.** Do we like being safe, fed, and cared for — or do we resent being stuck in this little rectangular box? What do we think about the humans, and how do we react to the aquarium staff? To the visitors?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- We are of many different species. How do we determine responsibilities of who does what?
- Do we share the artificial reef in the tank, or do we each have our own spaces?
- Is there a difference in our community between those who were born and raised in the aquarium, and those who were brought here from the outside world?
- When someone does something unacceptable, how do we deal with it, since we cannot cast them out or even get far away from them?
- What is our favorite event?

AGE TRANSITIONS

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation. It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

The humans start introducing a few new fish, and are always talking about "transitioning this tank". They start removing some of the artificial reef in the tank "so the fish get used to being in a wider space". How do we react to these new fish, and why do the humans want to give us more space?

One night, we saw an octopus in another tank open its top hatch and crawl out. It never came back. Escape from the aquarium is possible!

We got up close to our tank's hatch and could smell fresh seawater, and knew that its source must be close by. How could we get out?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass. The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

The humans removed the rest of our artificial reef, so they can get this tank ready for the new exhibit that is arriving. Soon, we will be moved out of our home here and into the big central tank with thousands of other sea creatures who we've never met.

At night, when the humans all left, we saw that the building is adding a new seawater tank, and are piping in seawater from outside, which is what octopus must have used to escape. We just had to wait for the right time, when the humans forgot to close the right valves -- and we jimmied open the latch, wriggled and leaped into the pipe, and swam as fast as we could until we reached ocean water. Now, we huddle together for safety in a small inlet just beyond the end of the pipe, waiting until we think it is safe to emerge into the wider ocean.

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

We are now part of a much larger community of thousands of fish and other creatures, and are no longer our own small community. What do we each retain of our old ways?

We have rejoined the ocean, no longer part of any tank, free to go where we please, part of the larger world of creatures. What do we retain of our old ways?