

Dark Waters: Dredge Permadeath Rules & Survival Guide

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Welcome to Dark Waters

In Dredge, you're not just fishing--you're surviving.

The ocean holds mysteries, but your own mind might be your worst enemy. This is the full official ruleset I'm using for my Dark Waters: A Dredge Survival permadeath playthrough.

If you want to follow along, or even try it yourself, here's exactly how my run operates.

CORE SETTINGS

- Permadeath: One life only. Death ends the run.
- Manual Save Rule: Saving only allowed when docking. No mid-ocean saves or reloading after mistakes.
- Madness Strike System: Major mistakes are tracked as Madness Strikes. 3 Strikes = forced retirement, even if technically still alive.
- Pursuits Allowed: Optional side quests allowed but must be weighed carefully due to Panic risk.

THE MADNESS STRIKE SYSTEM

Madness Strikes reflect major survival failures. Not every tiny mistake gets punished--but serious ones do.

Madness Strike Triggers:

- Returning to port after dark without a valid quest reason.
- Taking hull damage due to player error (panic, collisions, or poor navigation).
- Panic-induced collisions or navigational failures.
- Ignoring safe docking while Panic levels are high.
- Failing a story objective because of Panic-induced errors.
- Getting stranded or softlocked due to poor planning.

Valid Exemptions (No Strike):

- Returning late while actively completing a quest that requires night-time.
- Damage from unavoidable, scripted random events.
- Mechanical failures (Switch crashes, frame drops, game bugs, etc.).

HALLUCINATIONS: THE "IS THAT ROCK REAL?" CLAUSE

As Panic builds, hallucinations start playing tricks. You may see:

- Red-edged rocks.
- Floating rocks that vanish.
- Phantom birds.
- Darting shadows.
- Distant glowing eyes.
- Strange boats or shapes.

The rule is simple:

Hallucinations alone don't cost you a Madness Strike.

But... If a hallucination leads to a rule violation? That's still on me.

Quick Reference Table:

- See hallucination but avoid safely: No Strike
- Crash into hallucination, take damage: Strike
- Stay out past dark due to hallucination confusion: Strike
- Panic escalates leading to failure: Strike
- Return safely despite hallucinations: No Strike

(This rule was added after the infamous "Rock Debate of Day 4.")

RUN TERMINATION RULES

- 3 Madness Strikes = run failure.
- Death (ship destruction or full Panic) = run failure.
- No reloading or resets allowed.

CRITICAL GEAR CLAUSE (SOFTLOCK RULE)

Some failures aren't instant--but they make the run unsalvageable.

- Loss of irreplaceable critical gear = run failure.
- Applies to essential equipment: fishing rods, engines, lights, dredging gear.
- If I lose essential equipment and cannot reasonably replace or repair it, the run is declared unsustainable.
- This prevents "limping" runs where I technically survive but am functionally doomed.

OPTIONAL RULES & FLAVOR

- Journal Tracking: Each Madness Strike logged in my blog entries.
- No Outside Help Rule: No guides, spoilers, or maps during the run.
- Blind Navigation Encouraged: I rely only on the in-game map, journal, and visual landmarks.

CURRENT MADNESS STRIKE COUNT:

(This section updates as the blog series progresses.)

SURVIVOR'S NOTE

These rules balance tension, risk, and storytelling. Mistakes matter, Panic feels meaningful, but the Madness Strike system allows for mistakes without pure masochism. It simulates my character slowly unraveling -- while you get to enjoy the chaos.

For more: <https://survivorincognito.co.uk>