

Dragon Turtle Grotto

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Dragon Turtle Grotto is a Fifth Edition plug-in adventure for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 11, 14, 17, or 20**. This document offers details for the 11th-level version. For the full adjustments for all level ranges, sign up for the DMDave Patreon. In this adventure, the characters must find the Grotto where dragon turtles lay their eggs. There, they will have to navigate the fickle tides as well as the traps left by the dragon turtle's allies.

Adventure Hooks

The Dragon Turtle Grotto Adventure Hooks table in the full version offers some ideas if you don't have a reason for the characters to investigate the Grotto. If you need to motivate the party with a monetary reward, their patrons offer 500 gp per level of the adventure.

Regardless of the adventure hook used, this adventure assumes that the characters have access to a ship. If the characters do not have a ship of their own, there are a handful of ways they might acquire one:

- The party's patron provides a crewed ship.
- Rina, the dockmaster in Port Haven, can introduce them to a ship for hire, which will cost them 20 gp per day. The party will also be responsible for funding any repairs needed by the end of the adventure.
- If the party has less savory connections, they can attempt to steal a ship from port or pirate another ship at sea.

The Sandpiper's Song

If the party hires a ship or their patron provides one, the Sandpiper's Song is available. Led by Piper Windrider, the Sandpiper's Song is an exploratory sailing vessel commonly hired by cartographers, adventurers, and explorers. Some of the important members of the crew include:

- Captain Piper Windrider (CG female elf **bandit captain**) is a happy, energetic captain who believes strongly in keeping morale high. She can often be heard singing sea shanties and elven ballads.
- First Mate Jaxon Mason (N male human **spy**) is a permanently frowning "rehabilitated" pirate who is fiercely loyal to Captain Piper for giving him the opportunity to make an honest living. He has a weakness for card and dice games.
- Navigator Ophelia Moonshadow (CN female tiefling **scout**) is aloof and quick to think others are treating her differently because of her race. She's a recent addition to the crew and resents Captain Piper's attempts to make her feel like part of the gang.
- Cook Talia Redbeard (LG female dwarf **noble**) is friendly but quiet. She prefers to listen to others tell stories instead of being the center of attention herself. She is able to turn out edible meals even on the longest journeys or stormiest seas.





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Background

Dragon turtles are typically solitary creatures, each with their own territory that they defend violently. Not much can overcome a dragon turtle's territorial nature, but the safety of their offspring aligns even the meanest of these beasts. Dragon turtles share a common nesting ground where their eggs can incubate in safety and their offspring can spend their early years protecting each other. The waters around Port Haven have a higher concentration of dragon turtles than nearly anywhere else in the ocean thanks to the presence of this nesting ground.

Although most locals are aware that a nesting ground must be near, very few are able to find its exact location without provoking the wrath of the adult dragon turtles. However, there are a few groups who successfully coexisted with the dragon turtles.

The first group lived long ago and venerated the dragon turtles. They were a rare subspecies of aquatic elf who used the

Grotto as a religious headquarters where they divined the future from the stars and protected the dragon turtle offspring with their lives. They died out decades ago, but some of their protections remain to this day.

The second group was a fearsome band of pirates led by Elizabeth the Scorching. They were permitted to store their loot in the Grotto in return for attacking any other ship that came near—a mutually beneficial arrangement. However, the pirates recently provoked a fight they couldn't win and were all killed, leaving their loot ripe for the taking.

Locating the Grotto

The exact location of the dragon turtle nesting ground is unknown and must be found using a skill challenge.

A skill challenge simulates a task requiring more time and effort than a single ability check. In its simplest form, the characters make a series of ability checks to earn a required number of successes before accumulating a maximum number of failed

checks—similar to how death saving throws work.

This skill challenge consists of the following elements:

- **Time Requirement.** Each check represents one day of searching.
- **Difficulty.** The DC for primary checks equals 10 plus half the adventure's level (rounded down). Add 5 to the DC for secondary checks.
- **Complexity.** The characters and their allies must succeed on five ability checks related to this skill challenge before accumulating three failures. If the characters succeed on the skill challenge they are able to find The Grotto. If they fail the skill challenge they are unable to find the Grotto and must begin their search anew.
- **Primary Checks.** When the characters partake in a skill challenge, they may commit any ability check they like to the skill challenge. Certain ability checks, however, lend themselves better to a successful outcome than others. These ability checks are primary checks and usually have a lower DC than their secondary checks. The primary checks for this skill challenge are Intelligence (Nature), Wisdom (Perception), and Wisdom (Survival).
- **Secondary Checks.** Secondary checks represent all the skills the characters may use to participate in a skill challenge that aren't considered primary checks. The main reason for the disparity between primary and secondary is that primary checks are a little more "obvious" in their function.



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- **Other Conditions.** A character that has proficiency with navigator's tools can use their proficiency bonus in Wisdom (Survival) checks. A character with proficiency in both the Survival skill and with navigator's tools makes any Wisdom (Survival) checks with advantage.
- **Consequences.** Each time a character fails a skill check as part of this skill challenge, they experience a random encounter. Roll a d10 on the Locating the Grotto Encounters table to determine what they encounter. Monsters marked with an asterisk use their normal stat block but have a swimming speed equal to their walking speed and can breathe underwater.

LOCATING THE GROTTA ENCOUNTERS

d10	Encounter
1-2	Stormy weather
3-4	An interpersonal conflict aboard the vessel
5	A migrating flock of 2d4 + 4 griffons
6	A pack of 1d6 giant constrictor snakes led by an aquatic spirit naga *
7	An angry aquatic remorhaz *
8	A roc looking to snag an easy meal
9	A dragon turtle protecting the Grotto from intruders
10	A coven of 3 sea hags looking to make a bargain

The Grotto

The Grotto is a series of partially flooded caverns worn into the side of a limestone cliff. Its location is a closely guarded secret, known only to the dragon turtles who lay their eggs there and a handful of their trusted allies.

General Features

Unless stated otherwise, the Grotto has the following features.

Architecture. The Grotto is a natural cave system worn into the coastal limestone cliffs. The ceilings range from 8 to 15 feet in most rooms. While the caves are durable it is possible to accidentally or purposefully



collapse them. Any time the walls or ceiling of the caves are exposed to a single effect dealing 50 damage or more (excluding poison and psychic damage), roll a d4. On a result of 1, the walls or ceilings of the room collapse.

Collapse. Any creature within a room when it collapses must make a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw, taking bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one, as tons of rock crash down onto them. The amount of damage is determined by the level of the adventure as detailed in the Collapse Damage table. A creature that fails its saving throw is restrained by the rubble. The restrained creature can free itself with a successful DC 30 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature unable to escape from the rubble can be carefully extracted with an hour of work. Of course, spending this much time on a task may put them at risk of drowning as the water levels rise!

COLLAPSE DAMAGE

Adventure Level	Bludgeoning Damage
11th	55 (10d10)
14th+	Available in the full version

Illumination. There are no light sources in the Grotto.

Magical Protections. Most of the cavern is unprotected, but areas 9 and 10 are warded by a *private sanctum* conferring the following benefits:

- Sensors created by divination spells can't appear inside the protected area or pass through the barrier at its perimeter.
- Creatures in the area can't be targeted by divination spells.
- Nothing can teleport into or out of the warded area.
- Planar travel is blocked within the warded area.

The stone around the cavern is also enchanted such that it is immune to all transmutation effects.

Tidal Flooding. The Grotto is flooded for most of the day and is only fully dry for 1 hour during low tide. Over the following 4 hours, the caverns slowly fill with water; they are traversable on foot but are difficult terrain. For 1 hour at high tide, most of the areas within the Grotto are fully submerged.

Keyed Locations

The following locations are keyed to the maps of the Grotto on page 7.

01 – Flooded Entrance

Tucked within a secluded cove, the Grotto's entrance is a yawning, flooded opening in a sheer limestone cliff. The jagged rocks around the entrance make it appear as if the cave were a massive dragon's mouth, waiting to snap down on anyone who enters.

The easiest way to approach the Grotto is using a rowboat, as the water near the entrance is too shallow for all but the smallest of ships. There are no paths leading to the entrance from land, but the 80-foot-high cliffs are relatively easy to climb, requiring only a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

The rocks at the bottom of the entrance form a dry path at low tide. A small tunnel at

the far side of the entrance leads deeper into the cave system. An observant character will realize that the tunnel is far too small for a dragon turtle to fit through.

The floor of the cavern is smooth and has no barnacles or plants growing on the surface. A character that succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check knows that this only happens if the rocks are regularly scraped, such as by the shell of a dragon turtle.

Encounter: Cavernous Lurkers. A group of monsters lives in the entrance. They are careful to make themselves scarce whenever a dragon turtle shows up, but attack anyone else who intrudes.

The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Flooded Entrance Encounter table. Monsters marked with an asterisk use their normal stat block but have a swimming speed equal to their walking speed and can breathe underwater.

FLOODED ENTRANCE ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
11th	3 water elementals
14th+	Available in the full version



Nacho Lazaro

Secret: Watery Tunnels. A character that enters the water at the far side of the cavern or that succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a very large submerged tunnel leading deeper into the Grotto. This winding tunnel has been worn smooth from countless dragon turtles pushing their way through. It is 100 feet long and leads directly to the submerged entrance (area 10).

02 – Bloated Corpse

The entrance tunnel snaking deeper into the limestone cliff has a foul smell coming from it. The cause becomes evident as the characters proceed deeper: something very large and very dead has washed into the tunnel and is blocking the way forward.

Hazard: That's Nasty. The corpse of an unidentifiable creature washed into the cavern as the tide came in. As it began to decompose, it bloated and became wedged in. Now the characters will have to find a way to remove it before they can continue forward. The corpse is a huge object with AC 8, 80 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Unless the characters are able to obliterate the entire corpse in a single blow, such as with the *disintegrate* spell, damaging the corpse fills the tunnel with putrid gases. If the characters deal damage with an area of effect, they run the risk of collapsing the entire tunnel (see General Features). The corpse is very delicate. Any attempt to physically move the corpse causes the decomposing flesh to rupture and release the putrid gases from within.

Hazard: Putrid Gases. If the corpse is damaged it deflates with a loud, wet, farting noise and fills the tunnel with putrid gases. These gases last until they are washed away by the next high tide. While the gases linger, any creature in the area is exposed to the bloat pox disease.

Bloat Pox. Bloat pox is a nasty magical disease caused by exposure to the rotting corpses of magical creatures. When a creature starts its turn in an enclosed area with the rotting corpse of such a creature, it

must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or become infected. The DC for the save starts at 13 and increases by 1 for each minute the creature remains exposed; it resets to 13 after the creature spends at least 10 minutes outside the enclosed area.

On a failed save, the creature immediately feels nauseous and becomes poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the infected creature can only regain hit points through magical means and has disadvantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. Over the course of 1d4 days, the rest of the symptoms manifest as the infected creature becomes bloated and covered in painful, dark purple pustules.

A *lesser restoration* spell suppresses the symptoms of the disease for 24 hours, but the disease itself can only be fully cured with a *greater restoration* spell or similar magic of 5th level or higher.

03 – Observatory

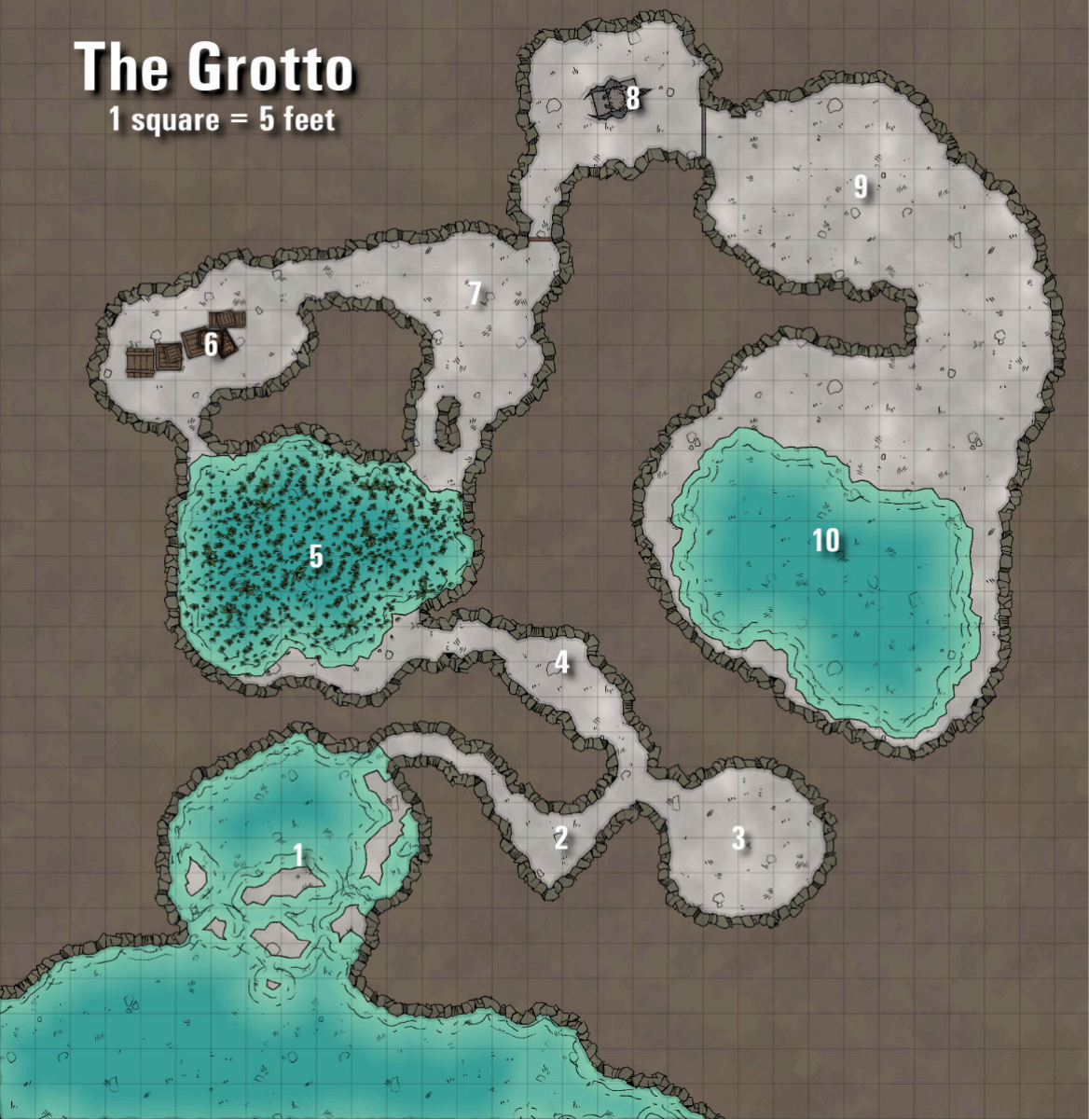
Unlike the rest of the Grotto, the ceiling of this chamber is a smooth dome with a round hole at its center leading towards the surface. Although it may have once offered a clear view to the sky, it is currently completely overgrown with plants. Patchy algae growing on the smooth stone around the hole gives the impression of an abstract painting.

This room was once an observatory for an ancient race of aquatic elves (see Background). They carved their constellations into the smooth ceiling to use as a reference when stargazing. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that something is carved into the ceiling below the algae. These carvings can be fully uncovered if the group removes the algae with magic such as *prestidigitation* or some good old-fashioned elbow grease.

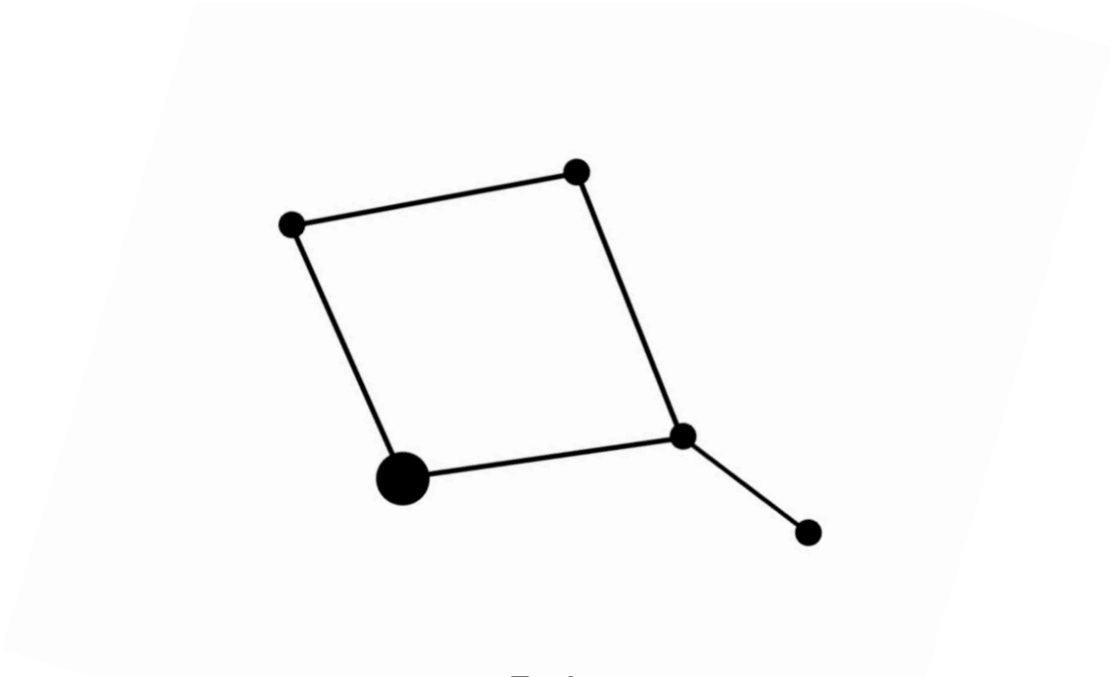
Secret: Constellations. Dozens of constellations are carved into the ceiling and labeled in elegant Elvish writing. A character that can read Elvish can see that the constellations all seem to be named after

The Grotto

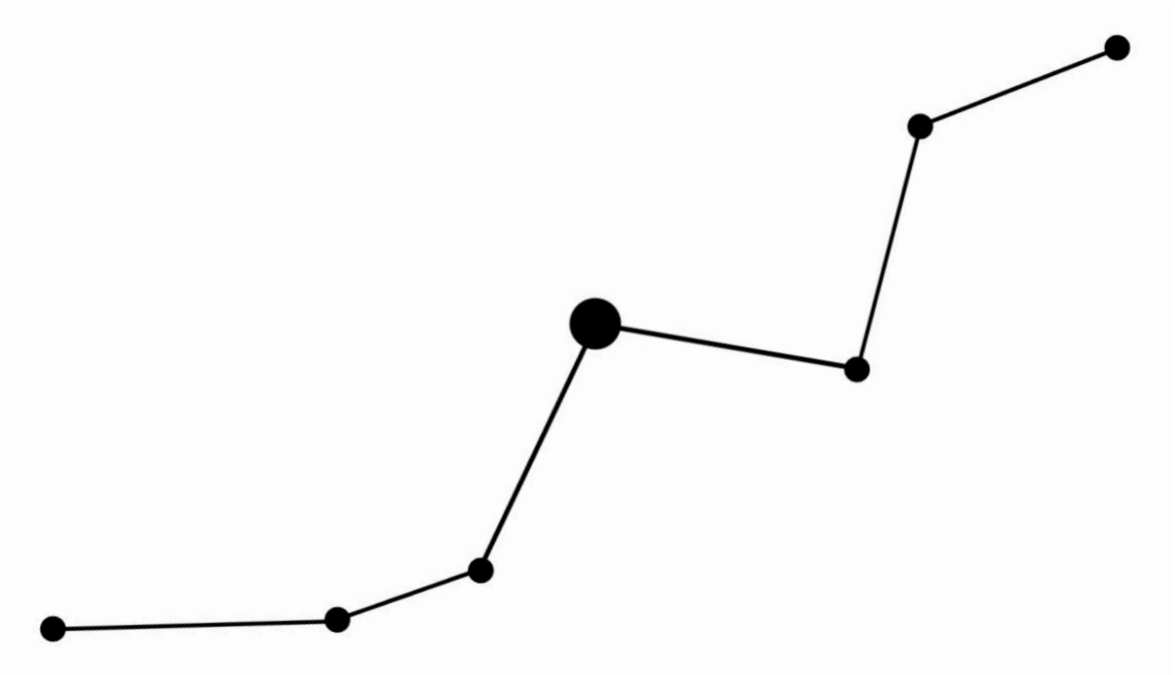
1 square = 5 feet



Constellations



Turtle



Dragon

creatures: owl, turtle, bear, pegasus, dragon, sphinx, etc. If the characters look specifically for a dragon turtle constellation, reveal that although there are constellations named after both the turtle and the dragon, there is no dragon turtle constellation.

04 – Barnacles

The floors, walls, and ceiling of this cavern are completely encrusted with barnacles. The sharp crustaceans make for treacherous footing and can shred nonmagical footwear and clothing but are otherwise harmless. The entire area is difficult terrain.

05 – Low Point

This room slopes steeply down into a 20-foot-deep basin full of vegetation-choked water writhing with slimy, eyeless cave fish.

Encounter: Tide Pool Dwellers. The cave fish are deeply unsettling to brush against but are otherwise harmless. The hidden monsters inhabiting the water basin, however, attack anyone who moves through the room.

The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Tide Pool Dwellers Encounter table. The **shambling mounds** here can hold their breath for 1 hour (long enough to survive the high tide).

TIDE POOL DWELLERS ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
11th	2 shambling mounds
14th+	Available in the full version

A 15-foot vertical rise with slippery water plants covering the first 10 feet leads to a higher cavern. This rise requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb. On a failure, a character falls into the water below.

06 – Pirate Booty

Boxes, barrels, and chests are neatly stacked at the center of the room while a banner decorated with a stylized dragon turtle with a skull and crossbones on its back is tacked to the far wall.

This room is the highest point in the Grotto and is safe from tidal flooding. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recognizes the banner as the symbol of Elizabeth the Scorching, a famous and recently deceased pirate (see Background).

Trap: Buried Treasure. The treasure is protected by a *glyph of warding* (Spell Glyph). The save DC and spell contained within depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Buried Treasure Trap table. The glyph itself is inscribed on the floor and is hidden under one of the treasure chests, making it impossible to detect without magic. The glyph activates if any creature who is not a member of the pirates enters the room.

BURIED TREASURE TRAP

Adventure Level	Save DC	Spell
11th	15	<i>freezing sphere</i>
14th+	Available in the full version	

If the spell is triggered, any art objects in the Pirate Treasure table are destroyed. Additionally, if the spell deals 50 damage or more, the room collapses (see General Features). Collecting the treasure after the room collapses requires 1 week of downtime.

Treasure: Gimme Dat Booty. The pirates were very successful and have amassed an impressive amount of wealth. The contents of this stash depend on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Pirate Treasure table.

PIRATE TREASURE

Adventure Level	Treasure
11th	10,000 gp; 1,000 pp; 5 art objects worth 250 gp each; and a <i>cloak of elvenkind</i>
14th+	Available in the full version

The Sovereign's Claim. If the characters are following the Sovereign adventure hook, the crown jewel can be found in this treasure trove.

07 – Danger Door

This cavern is nearly fully above the waterline, only becoming covered by an inch or two of water at high tide. A metal door with an intricate inlay of elves gazing up at the night sky stands slightly ajar at the northern end of the chamber. A sign with a symbol crudely painted onto it is propped up against the door.

A character that knows thieves' cant recognizes this as a symbol meaning "danger."

Secret: Ancient Elves. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (History) check recognizes this as a depiction of an ancient race of aquatic elves who venerated dragon turtles and placed a great deal of importance on cosmic divination.

08 – Shrine

A huge marble statue of a dragon turtle rests at the center of this room. A massive metal door looms large behind it. A sword covered in mysterious black runes that seem to subtly shift over time is jammed into the seam between the two halves of the door, a skeleton crumpled beneath it.

Treasure: Makeshift Crowbar. Someone tried to break into the dragon turtle's nesting ground years ago. Evidently, they failed. The skeleton has nothing of value on it, but the sword is a cursed *nine lives stealer longsword*.



Dirrequest

Curse. This sword is sentient and contains the soul of Maldroth, a servant of a Great Old One. Maldroth is neutral evil with an Intelligence of 13, a Wisdom of 9, and a Charisma of 16. The sword has hearing and darkvision out to 120 feet and can communicate with any creature carrying or wielding it. While a creature is attuned to this sword the black runes on the weapon slowly transfer to its user over 1d4 months. When the runes are fully transferred, Maldroth possesses the creature, gaining total control over the creature's body and memories.

Treasure: Empty Shell. A character that succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a well-disguised button that, when pushed, causes the shell of the dragon turtle to swing open. Inside is an alabaster-encrusted sextant and a few heavy tomes written in Elvish. The books detail how to use this magical sextant to divine the future. The exact nature of this magical sextant is not detailed in this adventure and is best left as a plot device.

Puzzle: Starry Door. The heavy metal door is locked with no obvious handle or unlocking mechanism and exudes an aura of strong abjuration magic. While it is locked, nothing short of divine intervention or a *wish* spell can force the door open or damage it. The door has a smattering of pearls inlaid in it, one of which is much larger than the rest. When two of the pearls are simultaneously touched by a living creature (or multiple creatures), a beam of starlight connects them.

In order to open the door, the dragon and turtle constellations found in the observatory (area 3) must be overlaid on each other (see the Starry Door diagrams on the following page).

Trap: Searing Starlight. If two pearls are connected that are not part of the dragon turtle constellation, each creature touching one of the pearls takes 2d10 radiant damage.

The light connecting the pearls lasts for 1 hour, after which the door must recharge for 24 hours before an attempt to open it can be

made again.

When the characters successfully recreate the dragon turtle constellation on the door it swings open and allows the characters to access area 9.

09 – Gravel Beach

The floor of this cavern is covered in a deep layer of sandy gravel that gently slopes down towards the south. The gravel is difficult terrain.

Treasure: Gold-Digger. If one or more characters spend at least 10 minutes sifting through the gravel, they discover an egg. Ask the characters how long they wish to sift through the gravel and have them designate a character to make an Intelligence (Investigation) check. The character adds a +2 bonus to the check for every character that assists in the search; for each additional minute spent searching beyond the initial 10, the character can add another +1 bonus to the check (maximum bonus of +10). Refer to the Gravel Beach Treasure table to determine what the characters find.

GRAVEL BEACH TREASURE

Check Result	Treasure
9 or lower	Nothing
10-15	An unfertilized dragon turtle egg
16 or higher	A fertilized dragon turtle egg

Unfertilized Dragon Turtle Egg. Dragon turtle eggs are considered a delicacy by the wealthy and can also be used by some alchemists. Each unfertilized egg is worth 50 gp.

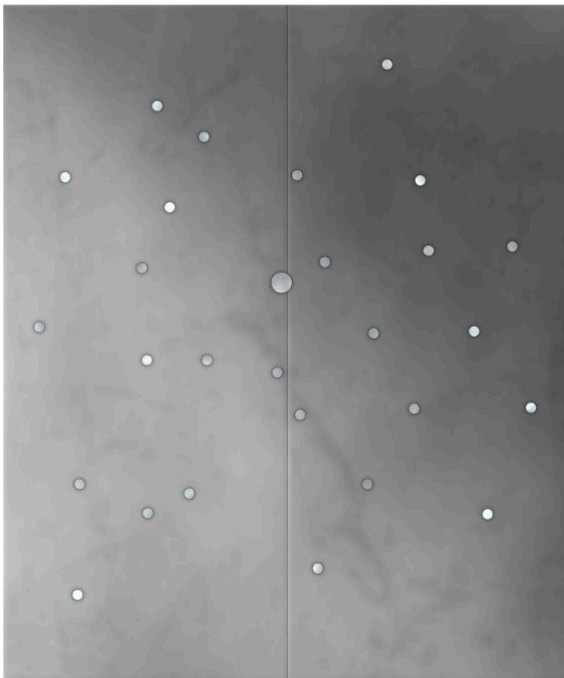
Fertilized Dragon Turtle Egg. Overconfident or foolish aristocrats and beast tamers are willing to spend 1000 gp or more on a fertilized egg. An enterprising party may also try to ransom the egg back to a dragon turtle in return for the location of a sunken ship, assistance in a battle, or some other boon.

10 – Submerged Entrance

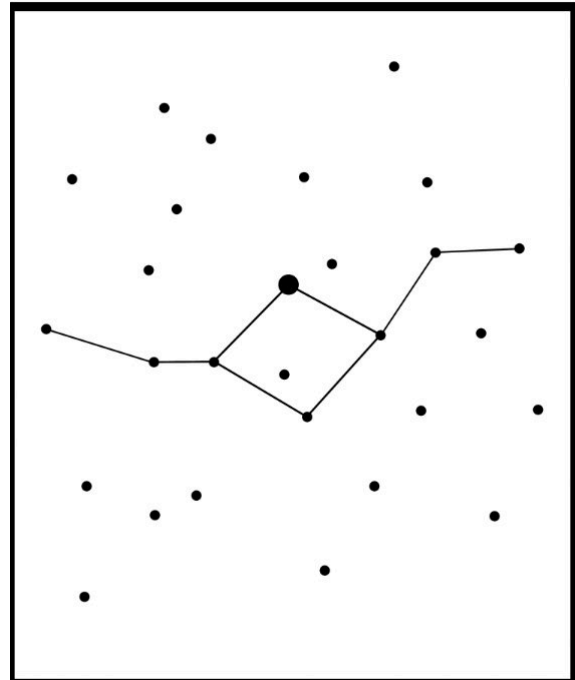
This absolutely massive cavern has soaring 30-foot-tall ceilings. The floor slopes steeply down to a deep pool of still water.

When the characters arrive, a single adult dragon turtle named Tikkysta (tih-KISS-tuh)

Starry Door



Starry Door (Solved)



is laboriously making her way up the shore towards the gravel beach (area 9) while a handful of curious hatchlings mill around her. While dragon turtles aren't as intelligent as their winged brethren, she is certainly smart enough to realize that she is at a disadvantage fighting on land. Instead of engaging the adventurers inside the Grotto, Tikkysta tries to threaten them into leaving.

Secret: Watery Tunnels. A character that enters the water or that succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a very large submerged tunnel leading out of the Grotto. This winding tunnel has been worn smooth from countless dragon turtles pushing their way through. It is 100 feet long and leads directly to the flooded entrance (area 1).

Encounter: Angry Mamma. If the characters insist on provoking a fight, Tikkysta (a **dragon turtle**) abandons the hatchlings to their fate and attempts to flee through the watery entrance.

The number of dragon turtle hatchlings the party faces depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Angry Mamma Encounter table. Dragon turtle hatchlings use the **giant crocodile** stat block, which is marked with an asterisk to indicate the following changes:

- Their size is Large.
- They have the dragon creature type.
- They have darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- They can speak and understand Aquan and Draconic, although their vocabulary is limited to that of a toddler.
- Instead of the Hold Breath trait, they have the Amphibious trait. (They can breathe air and water.)

ANGRY MAMMA ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
11th	2 dragon turtle hatchlings (giant crocodiles*)
14th+	Available in the full version

Encounter: Boats A-Rockin'. If the characters provoke Tikkysta and she successfully flees from the nesting ground, she swims out through the Grotto's entrance (area 1) 3 rounds later and calls for backup. If the party's ship is within sight, she immediately attacks it from below. Otherwise, she waits for the party out of sight in the water. If the party has no ship and it is clear that they can easily evade her through flying, teleportation, or other means, Tikkysta reluctantly retreats, vowing vengeance upon them.

The nature of the encounter depends on the level of the adventure, as shown in the Boats A-Rockin' Encounter table. See the Angry Mamma section above for details on the dragon turtle hatchlings' statistics.

BOATS A-ROCKIN' ENCOUNTER

Adventure Level	Encounter
11th	1 dragon turtle
14th+	Available in the full version

Aftermath

If the characters successfully completed their Adventure Hook objective, their patron rewards them as promised. If they did a good job, their patron may have further work for them, if they're interested.

If the Grotto is destroyed, the local population of dragon turtles decreases significantly as they move to a new nesting ground. If the dragon turtles know that the characters caused its destruction, they will be hunted down any time they travel by ship, quickly becoming blacklisted by all but the most daring captains.

If the characters found the magical sextant in area 8, they may wish to spend downtime learning its secrets. It could lead to further adventures by foreshadowing a coming evil, or even lead to conflict with groups who desire it for their own purposes. The Port Authority and the Deep Dwellers of Port Haven, for instance, would both pay dearly for such a device! Ω