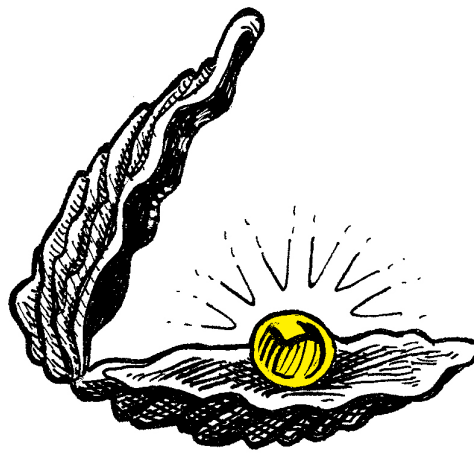


The Amazing Aquarium at Dragonara Beach



A Dungeons & Dragons Adventure

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INTRODUCTION

This adventure is intended for a party of three to five level two characters. It takes them on a dungeon crawl in search of treasure, meeting curious creatures along the way. It will take the players around three to four hours to complete the adventure.

It can be easily adapted to any fantasy setting or game. Specific details are designed with the *Dungeons & Dragons Fifth Edition* rules in mind.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

A long time ago the wizard Nescio founded a small wizard's academy near the town of Dragonara. It was called The Aquatic Society of Dragonara and had as its goal to research the sea and its denizens. Of main interest were the arcane phenomena pertaining to merfolk.

At the Dragonara Beaches an impressive fortress was built where the Aquatic Society could conduct its research. Its impressive aquarium within was opened regularly to visitors, who came from all over the region to admire the wonders of the sea. Of particular fame was an oyster which held the Golden Pearl. It was said to come from a merfolk kingdom deep in the sea.

Nescio grew obsessed with merfolk and their fabled kingdoms. He started to perform grotesque experiments to transform people into merfolk. Sadly, he turned mad, alienating all but his closest allies. The regular exhibitions ceased and his apprentices fled away. Memories of the Aquatic Society faded. Rumors abound in Dragonara about the strange fortress at the beach, its dangers and treasures shrouded in mysteries.

When the characters visit the fortress, they will discover that Nescio's madness has turned into a curse. Nescio is incessantly performing trivial experiments in his laboratory, aided by his loyal familiar Frogman. The only apprentice that stuck to him during his mental descent has been the victim of a failed experiment and lurks the aquarium as a mutated monstrous merfolk, guarding the Golden Pearl. The exhibition area still looks well-maintained thanks to The Handyman, a flesh golem that serves as the janitor of the building.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The characters can find the fortress in a secluded part of the beaches near Dragonara. They can be drawn to the dungeon for any of the following reasons.

TREASURE

You have heard stories about a forgotten wizard's academy called the Aquatic Society of Dragonara. It is said that within the walls of its fortress great riches can be found. You are eager to go explore and make a name for yourself!

POTION OF WATER BREATHING

The alchemist Domenico Abruzzo has enlisted your help to visit an old fortress near Dragonara said to be a forgotten wizard's academy. He is looking for the Golden Pearl, a pearl originating from a mysterious merfolk kingdom which is purported to hold magical powers. His intention is to use the pearl as an ingredient for a *potion of water breathing*. He will reward the adventurers 25 gp each if they bring him the Golden Pearl. Anything else found within the fortress is of no interest to him.

DRAGONARA

About 4 miles from the fortress lies the small town of Dragonara. It has around 1,500 residents and consists mostly of humans and halflings. Its main economic activity is fishing. Significant locations in Dragonara include the following:

Town Hall. Dragonara is governed by Maestro Mastroianni, a male human noble.

Market Square. The main source of fresh supplies is the market square, where fishermen peddle their daily catch.

Harbor. At the harbor boats can be hired from fishermen.

Michelangelo Merchandise. The main source of various adventuring gear is Michelangelo Merchandise, owned and operated by Marcello Michelangelo, a male human merchant.

Alchemist. The male human alchemist Domenico Abruzzo sells a *potion of healing* for 50 gp.

The Mermaid's Pearl. The local inn is owned by Ariel, a female halfling commoner. She serves seafood and wine. There are a few rooms available for rent.

TOWN RUMORS

Characters can learn the following information about the fortress if they spend some time in town and talk to the locals.

- A treasure called the Golden Pearl is rumored to be in the fortress. It is believed it holds magical properties.
- Every once in a while a brave soul tries to venture within. They always disappear without a trace.
- It is said that a mad wizard lives inside its walls.
- The mad wizard used the place to conduct crazy experiments.
- A strange silent giant guards the place.

THE AQUARIUM

Following an old abandoned path to a secluded part of the Dragonara beaches a decently sized fortress appears at the seaside, the waves crashing against the quays out back. A withered sign above its large entrance door near the large tower shows that these ruins belong to The Aquatic Society of Dragonara. The small windows up high reveal darkness within.

Entrance. The large stone double doors are easily opened into area 1.

Windows. The windows are too small even for Small creatures to move through. However, at the back of the tower the stones surrounding one window have crumbled to create a space large enough for Medium creatures to enter the fortress. If the characters enter in this way, more stones will come down after the last character enters to block the exit.

Alarm. If the characters enter the fortress through the windows, an *alarm* is triggered and a small hand bell will sound for 1 minute.

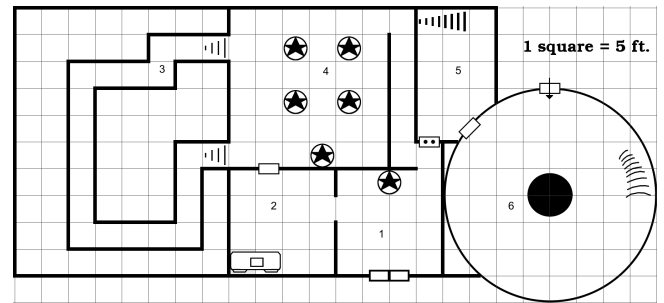
WANDERING MONSTERS

Every time the characters take a rest or an action that can attract attention (such as making a lot of noise), roll a d20 and refer to the following table.

d20	Monster
1	2 gray oozes lurking at the ceiling
2	2 rust monsters nibbling on some iron scraps
3	1d8 giant fire beetles crawling past
4	Frogman (see area 8 at page 4) on the hunt for some beetles
5-20	No encounter

LOCATIONS ON THE FIRST LEVEL

The following locations are identified on map 1.



map 1

1. ENTRANCE HALL

A faint salty odor comes at you as soon as you open the doors. At the back there is a statue of a merfolk holding a lyre. He looks exuberant and seems to juggle several gold pieces, frozen in mid air. A sign to the right reads *start of the visit* with an arrow pointing onwards, into a narrow hallway past a door holding a sign reading *private*.

Floating Gold Pieces. The 6 gp are floating due to a **gelatinous cube** engulfing the statue.

Statue. If the statue is not engulfed anymore, it will at repeated intervals welcome visitors by saying:

Welcome all! Come and see the wondrous secrets the sea holds!

Wooden Door. The door leading to area 5 is locked and can be opened with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check or forced with a successful DC 10 Strength check.

2. GIFT SHOP

Shattered racks are everywhere. Between the scant remains you see all sorts of figurines and withered books. A large desk stands at the southern wall, with a small safe on top. Near the same wall you spot two large vats.

Figurines and Books. The figurines depict sea creatures and are made of decayed wood. The books can barely be deciphered but seem to contain colorful illustrations of sea life.

Safe. The safe is made of iron and looks rusty. It's locked and can be opened with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check. It has an Armor Class of 15 and 6 hit points.

- *Treasure.* The safe contains 14 gp, 18 sp and 15 cp.

Desk. In one of the drawers a key can be found that can be used to open or lock all wooden doors.

Vats. Both vats feel heavy to move. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the second vat to be remarkably free of dust.

- *Vat 1.* Filled with hay. In it is a marble figurine of a seahorse.
 - *Treasure.* Throwing the figurine into the water while saying its command word *horsey* will cause it to transform into a seahorse as if *find familiar* has been cast. This ability can be used only once.
- *Vat 2.* Contains an **ochre jelly**.

3. EXHIBIT TUNNEL

As you walk in the tunnel and peer through the clear crystal glass, it feels as if you are many feet deep in the sea. Although a lot of signs talk about the colorful flora and fauna, you are unable to see any. Instead festering seaweed and bleached coral abound. Suddenly something shines amidst the darkness: a golden pearl, lying in the opened shells of an oyster. In the distance you see a dark looming figure coming closer.

Crystal Glass. The glass is under an *arcane lock*, making the AC to break it 23. A piece of glass (10 ft. by 10 ft.) has 50 hit points. If an attempt is made to break the glass, The Handyman from area 4 will come in to repair it.

Looming Figure. The looming figure is the **merrow** living in the aquarium.

4. EXHIBITION GALLERY

The salty air disappears to make way for a rotten stench. A large figure made of various patches of human flesh and fish skin is sweeping the floor with a broom. He wears a withered leather suit containing tools. The room is as tidy as it must have been in its heyday. In the midst stand several formaldehyde jars containing curious creatures, cross-breedings of humans and fishes. And the western walls contain the first glimpse of the aquarium, which can be explored further via the tunnel.

Patched Figure. The figure is The Handyman, a **flesh golem** that can cast *mending* at will. He is tasked

with cleaning and repairs and will only attack if provoked. He wears a set of two keys, one of which looks slimy and green.

Keys. The regular key can be used to open or lock all wooden doors. The slimy green key can be used to open the doors and chest described in area 11.

Formaldehyde Jars. These five jars contain grossly mutated fish-human hybrid creatures.

- *Emergency.* If the red button in area 12 is pushed, the creatures come alive and break free to attack intruders. Use the statistics of **kuo-toa** without weapons and a bite attack that deals 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

5. HALLWAY

Near the start of a staircase you see a wet pool, formed by droplets falling from the ceiling.

Wet Pool. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a patch of green slime hanging from the ceiling (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 105).

6. LIBRARY

When you enter this large round chamber with a pillar in the center, the smell of stuffy old books comes at you. Specks of dust circle in the stale air, shone upon by the small snippets of sunlight coming in through the windows up high. There are bookcases all around. Yet not all are filled to the brim with books, as if someone has taken a lot of books to his study, not to return them.

Bookcases. When the bookcases are investigated, 4 **swarms of animated books** (see the Appendix at page 6) will attack.

Books. Searching through the books will reveal that a lot of experiments have been held in the building to create new lifeforms modeled after merfolks. The pride of the place was the Golden Pearl, said to come from a merfolk kingdom.

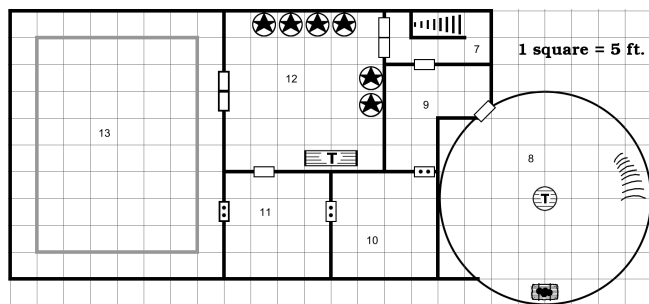
- *History.* A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check reveals that the place was run by a wizard named Nescio, who led the experiments. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check one can discern from the records that he is cursed by his thirst for knowledge.
- *Arcana.* A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the Golden Pearl has magical

properties and can be used as an ingredient for a *portion of water breathing*.

Treasure. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation or Arcana) check reveals a *spell scroll of false life*.

LOCATIONS ON THE SECOND LEVEL

The following locations are identified on map 2.



map 2

7. HALLWAY

This small hallway contains two doors, one of which is a double door made of metal. The other is a regular door made of wood.

Nothing of note can be found in this hallway.

8. DINING HALL

A thin layer of smoke permeates the room. Someone is cooking. In the middle stands a large round table that looks in disrepair. The walls are covered all around with shelves containing pots and urns in various sizes. There is even a wine rack, with cobwebs concealing a few remaining bottles.

Cook. The person cooking is Frogman, a **giant frog** with human arms and legs. He can understand Common and Elvish, although he cannot speak. He is the familiar of Nescio and will lead friendly adventurers to him in area 12.

Shelves. The pots and urns contain various types of food. Most contents have turned stale. An old cleaning schedule hanging at one case stipulates that the gallery and aquarium are exempt and are the sole responsibility of The Handyman, who should not be disturbed in his work.

Wine Rack. Between a few old bottles of red wine a curiously clean bottle of Prosecco di Mago can be found. It contains 10 glasses of prosecco, that behave as if being cast by *goodberry*.

9. HALLWAY

This arched hallway leads to two other doors. In the corner is a small basin from which a faint red glow emanates.

Basin. The basin contains a clear liquid and seems to hold a red ruby at the bottom. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that it actually is a reflection from a red banded agate (worth 10 gp) at the ceiling.

Liquid. The liquid is acidic. A creature coming into contact with it will receive 1d6 acid damage.

Wooden Door. The door leading to area 10 is locked and can be opened with a successful DC 10 Dexterity check or forced with a successful DC 10 Strength check.

10. APPRENTICE BEDROOM

A damp, dank air permeates this cramped bedroom. One bed has withstood the test of time. A small wooden chest lies in a far corner amidst the rubble.

Chest. The chest is made of rotten wood and can be smashed easily.

- **Treasure.** The chest contains a few personal belongings of a former apprentice: a dagger, 7 gp, 10 sp, 1 opaque pink light rhodochrosite (worth 10 gp) and a diary.

Diary. The diary is written by an enthusiastic apprentice. The latest entry tells how honored he feels to be the subject of the next experiment by Nescio, who promised him the ability to breathe under water like merfolk. He is dismissive of the skeptics who have fled the premises in the week before and praises Nescio's boundless curiosity.

11. NESCIO'S BEDROOM

As you breathe the air in here you can taste the salt. Two doors have locks that emanate a faint green glimmer. Not much has remained save for a small chest giving off the same glow. At the center of the room various metal scraps lie on the floor.

Metal Scraps. Above the scraps a **gelatinous cube** hangs from the ceiling and will come down when someone steps underneath it.

Locks. All green locks, including the chest, are under an *arcane lock*, making the DC to open 25.

Chest. On top of the chest lies a diary. The chest contains 2 opaque black obsidians (worth 10 gp each), 2 opaque gray-black hematites (worth 10 gp each), and a *spell scroll* of *thunderwave*.

Diary. The diary is written by Nescio. Its handwriting becomes more erratic towards the end, until at a certain point it merely repeats the word 'knowledge'.

12. LABORATORY

Thin layers of mist are everywhere. Liquids of all kinds of colors are bubbling inside variously shaped glasswares. Heaps of books are scattered around the tables and on the floors in erratic fashion. At the sides several formaldehyde jars can be discerned, holding what can best be described as grotesque cross-breedings of humans and fishes. And in between all this arcane chaos a hooded figure wearing a black robe is running around frantically, screaming: "Knowledge! Hahaa! Experiments! Experiments!"

Hooded Figure. The hooded figure is Nescio, a **nothic**. If asked, he can tell about the threats in the aquarium, which he regards as a nuisance. If he believes the adventurers will help him, he will give them a *potion of healing*. However, he does not desire to part with the Golden Pearl.

- **Background.** Nescio is the mage who once led the Aquatic Society of Dragonara. His obsessive desire to know everything about merfolk and the Golden Pearl made him go mad. He became accursed. His only desire is to find ever more knowledge and keep doing experiments. He is unable to speak whole sentences.

Formaldehyde Jars. These six jars contain grossly mutated fish-human hybrid creatures.

- **Emergency.** If Nescio pushes the red button, the creatures come alive and break free to attack intruders. Use the statistics of **kuo-toa** without weapons and a bite attack that deals 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Green Key. Nescio holds a slimy green key that can be used to open the chest and doors in area 11.

Red Button. If Nescio feels threatened, he will push a red button near him on the table. This will trigger the formaldehyde jars here and in area 4.

13. AQUARIUM

Doors open to reveal the top of the aquarium. The stale sea air fills your lungs. All around the aquarium is a small pathway. Looking into the water, you can clearly see the Golden Pearl lying in its oyster between patches of overgrown seaweed. Yet the stillness of the water is overruled by loud buzzing all around the docks.

Buzzing. The buzzing is caused by a **swarm of wasps** (see the variant sidebar on insect swarms at page 338 of the *Monster Manual*).

Aquarium. The aquarium is 30 ft. deep. The seaweed makes the area lightly obscured if swimming around in it. A **merrow** will attack anyone on sight.

- **Background.** The merrow is the unfortunate result of an experiment involving the apprentice whose diary can be found in area 10.

The Golden Pearl. The Golden Pearl is worth 250 gp. It can be used to create a *potion of water breathing* per the rules of crafting a magic item as described at page 128 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

EPILOGUE

If the characters have explored the dungeon and obtained the Golden Pearl, the adventure has ended. It can provide the seeds for a next adventure with the following hooks.

Nescio's Revenge. If the characters did not kill Nescio, he can come after them in order to retrieve the Golden Pearl, which is dear to him.

The Merfolk Kingdom. The Golden Pearl could be the start of a quest to find the merfolk kingdom from which it originates. If the *Potion of Water Breathing* hook was used, a potential ally in the search is Domenico Abruzzo. Information pertaining to the location could be planted in the library or told in conversation by Nescio.

APPENDIX

SWARM OF ANIMATED BOOKS

The animated books were crafted by Nescio to guard the library against intruders.

Constructed Nature. A swarm of animated books doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

SWARM OF ANIMATED BOOKS

Medium swarm of Tiny constructs, unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 21 (6d6)
Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)	5 (-3)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Dex +4
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7
Languages -
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Antimagic Susceptibility. The books are incapacitated while in the area of an *antimagic field*. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the books must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

False Appearance. While the books remain motionless and aren't flying, they are indistinguishable from normal books.

Swam. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a book. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage, or 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.