

5TH LEVEL



THE DM TOOL CHEST

BLOOD IN THE WATER

FIFTH EDITION ADVENTURE

A local dungeon is proving more deadly than usual and an old threat is riding the incoming tides of war



ADVENTURE PRIMER

Blood in the Water is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for **three to five characters of 4th to 6th level** and is optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 5**. Characters who complete this adventure should earn enough experience to reach one-third of the way to level 6.

A local dungeon provides a nearby village with an opportunity to delve it annually. This year the adventurers have not come back and the villagers suspect something sinister is at work. This adventure takes place in the [Freelands campaign setting](#) but fits into any existing campaign that has a small coastal town with only a few modifications.

BACKGROUND

The Tidal Caves are an underwater cavern just off the Breakwater Coast in the Freelands and within sight of the quiet village of Wakeview. For reasons unknown, each year, the ocean waves recede, and the caves are accessible to any who dare to brave their dangers. The Wakeview locals have made it an annual quest to send a band of heroes to reap the dungeon's rewards.

The caves' monstrous inhabitants have never been too difficult for the locals to manage — but this year the heroes have failed to return. The Wakeview Council is concerned and calling for volunteers to enter the caves and rescue their people. Time is running out for any hope of reaching them before the sun sets and the tides reclaim the cavern.

ABOUT THE TIDAL CAVES

Long before Wakeview came to call it the Tidal Caves, the underwater merfolk temple dedicated to the Deliverer was a

sight to behold. The songs of their worship rang out across the waves for all to hear, amplified by the *Tidal Pearl*, a holy relic that controlled the tides. The merfolk would use the Pearl once a year to pull back the waters and allow the small village of nearby shore folk the chance to join in their passionate songs.

The temple eventually was attacked by a band of roving merrow who were rampaging through the area. The shore folk eventually repelled the merrow but not before the crazed monstrosities collapsed the temple, killing the remaining merfolk and burying the *Tidal Pearl* in the rubble.

As time passed, the shore folk would forget the history of the temple and the merfolk's songs, but every year the Pearl would still pull back the tides to let them inside. Little did they know that the merrow would one day return, seeking the power of the Pearl once more.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

These are a few ways to get your adventurers hooked into this story:

The Annual Delve. The adventurers have been hearing stories of an underwater cave full of monsters that is only open once a year. Deciding to see it for themselves, they stop in the nearby village for supplies and find the villagers panicking.

A Town In Need. Brannon Gunnerson is an old family friend who recently wrote to one of the adventurers and invited them to come and try their hand at the annual delve. Poor weather conditions caused the party to arrive too late to join in, but they find the village in an uproar. Brannon pulls them aside and begs them to talk to the city council and rescue the missing villagers who went into the Tidal Caves.

Heroes for Hire. The adventurers decide to stop in the sleepy town of Wakeview while traveling along the Breakwater Coast. While enjoying a meal in the local tavern, a council representative makes a generous offer to hire them to enter the Tidal Caves and rescue their people before it's too late.

THE TOWN OF WAKEVIEW

Wakeview, like most settlements along the Breakwater Coast, is primarily a fishing village. The villagers have been fishing the waters of Bareth Bay for generations and don't care much for what happens in the outside world. The most excitement that happens in these parts — outside of old Kel Jakobsen having a few too many at the Ham & Cock and singing in the town square without pants — is the Annual Tidal Caves Delve.

The Delve typically takes a small team of prepared villagers a few hours to clear out. The heroes then return with exotic meats, rare plants, and the occasional piece of treasure from the creatures within the caves. But this year, they are long overdue, and many fear they are now lost.

THE TIMELINE

Once the adventurers reach Wakeview, they are now on the clock — the tides will reclaim the caves in 5 hours. From here on out, their decisions and delays will affect which sections of the Tidal Caves are flooded once they reach the caves. How you decide to track the time is up to you as the GM — there will be notes throughout the adventure to help guide you along with the timeline below:

Hours Passed	Areas Flooded
1	All Areas Clear
2	4
3	3 and 8
4	1, 2, and 7
5	All Areas Flooded

The adventurers will have the option of learning more about the Caves and gathering helpful supplies and information within the town. Depending on how they received this quest, the recommended place to kick this adventure off is by having them speak to Brannon in the Ham & Cock tavern or the Council in the town hall.

IMPORTANT NPCs

The following NPCs are important figures in the town of Wakeview or could provide additional information or assistance:

The Council is comprised of the village elders: Harold (LG, male human **commoner**), Gerta (LN, female human **commoner**, and Pashmina (NG, female dragonborn **commoner**). They tell the adventurers basic information about the town, provide a rough map of the caves, and recommend they speak to Brannon at the Ham & Cock to leverage his knowledge as a former adventurer. They urge haste and warn the party that the tides are creeping closer to reclaiming the caves every second.

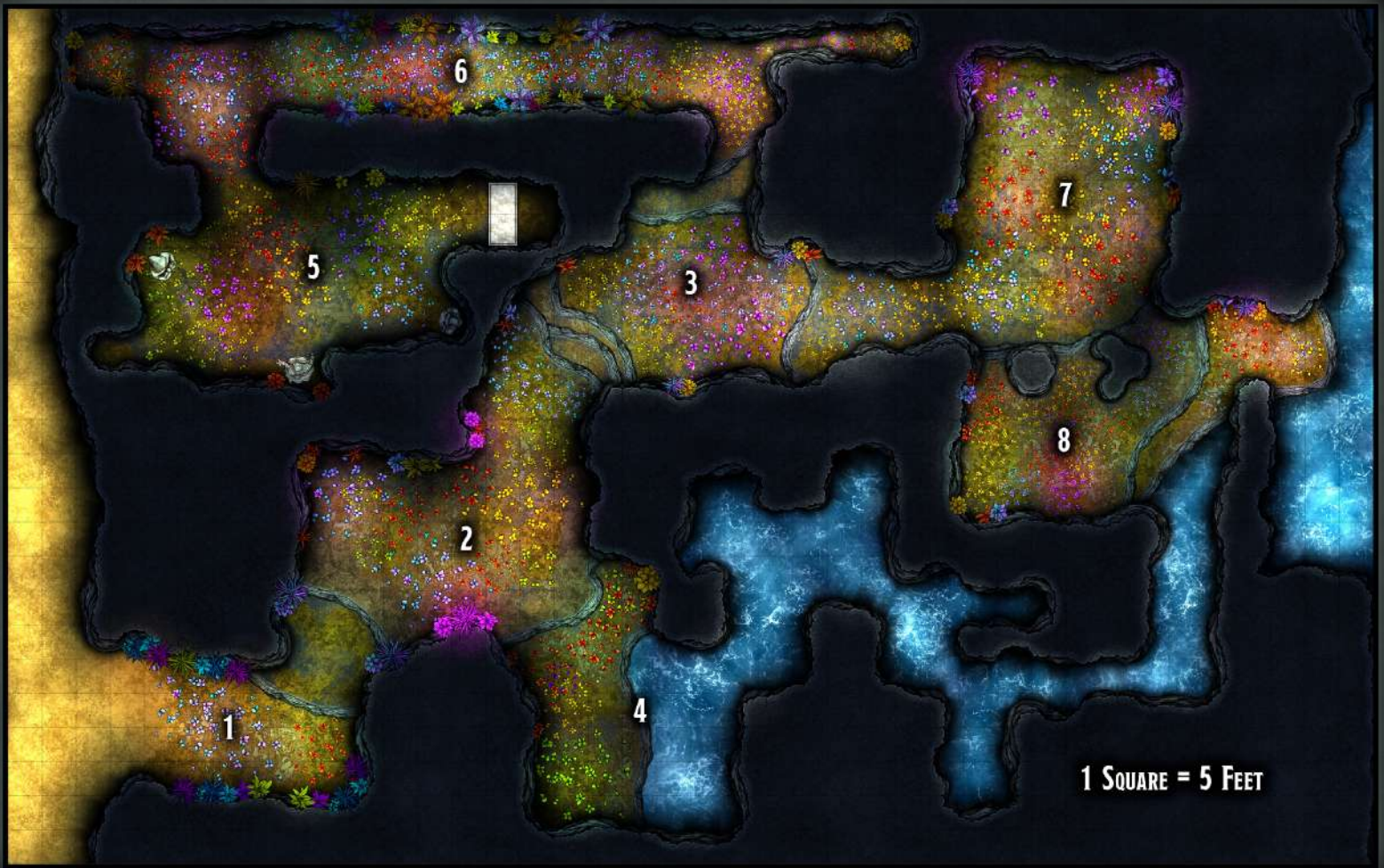
Brannon Gunnerson (NG, male dwarf **veteran**) is a helpful retired adventurer and Wakeview local. After years of military service and a brief adventuring career cut short — he was the lone survivor of his party after attempting to clear an ancient tomb — he came home to this quaint town and took over the local tavern, the Ham & Cock. He can assist with the following information:

- “The caves are barely dangerous enough ta even need ta bring a blade with ye. Just a few years back, I could clear it meself with m’bare hands!”
- “Three of our best were chosen this year — trained’em meself! Kayla, Sven, and Marcela shoulda been back ‘ours ago.”
- “The tides are coming in, and there’s nae a lotta time left ‘fore the sea reclaims what is hers.”
- “Old Kel Jakobsen might have some of ‘is fish breathing swill if you’re in need. Best to bring ‘im a bottle o’ wine if you go, tho.”



Kel Jakobsen (LN, male half-elf **commoner**) is Wakeview’s elderly alchemist and bitter town drunk. He does not take too kindly to outsiders, and his — often cantankerous — thoughts slip through his non-existent filter. The store’s stock contains common Kel can brew *potions of waterbreathing* for 200gp each, but he will contribute them for the good of the village if convinced with a successful DC 15 Charisma check. This check can be done with advantage if the adventurers gift him a bottle of alcohol. It takes 30 minutes for Kel to brew enough for the entire party. He can impart the following rumors to them while he brews:

- “Not many ‘round here remember the legends of the monsters of the caves, but ol’ Kel does! Horrible creatures destined to rise from the waters to take revenge on us shore folk!”
- “The caves were once a temple to a banished god that is trying to get back into this world. Every year it tries to open the gateway but fails. Every year it’s getting closer to succeeding!”
- “If you’re going into the caves, bring me back some Ruby Kelp, and I’ll reward you handsomely!”



THE TIDAL CAVES

The once resplendent merfolk temple has collapsed into a series of caves covered in coral and underwater plantlife. Bits of marbled pillars and the remains of ancient statues peek through places, but the sea has reclaimed the area, leaving little trace of the temple. Every year the caves become home to a new host of predators and exotic plant life for the locals to harvest.

It takes 30 minutes for the adventurers to reach the caves by horse and 1 hour by foot. The entrance leading down into the caves is at the base of a sea stack 200 feet from the shore. The magic of the *Tidal Pearl* pushes the waters back to an unnaturally extreme low tide, leaving a path to the entrance.

GENERAL FEATURES

These features are prominent throughout the Tidal Caves unless otherwise noted in the keyed location descriptions:

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. Colorful coral and plantlife cover every surface of the caves. The floors are incredibly slick from the wet plants and coral, giving disadvantage to any Dexterity checks made while standing on it. Ceilings are 12-feet high throughout.

Lighting. Bioluminescent plants and creatures living in the coral create dim light throughout the caves.

Flooded Caves. Depending on when the adventurers arrive and how quickly they explore the caves, certain sections will slowly begin to flood as the tide rises (see The Timeline). If the adventurers explore these submerged areas, they will be

subject to underwater combat and rules (see Unusual Environments in the DMG and Underwater Combat in PHB).

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the provided map of the Tidal Caves:

OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE

When the adventurers reach the Tidal Caves' entrance, read the following aloud:

The waves have receded and bared the ocean floor to the blue skies above. Large puddles sit amidst seaweed and bits of debris line the newly extended sandy beach, reaching out much further than the typical low tide. Sitting a couple hundred feet from the old shoreline is a sea stack with an entrance leads down into a wet cave with softly glowing walls.

The sun is setting, and time is starting to run out — the waves are already creeping noticeably closer.

Encounter: King of the Caves. If the tides have flooded area 7 and the **Hydra** is still alive, it is waiting at the entrance when the adventurers leave the caves.

1 - ENTRANCE

The entrance slopes down into a small, damp cave filled with plants, seaweed, and sand. The walls are encrusted coral, and the salty taste of seaspray fills the air.

Encounter: Shock & Squeeze. Prior to flooding, this area has two giant sea snakes (use **giant constrictor snake** stat block) hiding among the coral and plants. They will attempt to ambush the adventurers as they enter the room and get a +4 bonus to their Stealth check. If this room floods, there are two **giant electric eels** (see Appendix) swimming in this area.

2 - ACID CAVE

Colorful plants cover the floor, and seawater drips from the ceiling of this small cave.

Hazard: Acidic Plants. The plants on the ceiling hide a 5-foot patch of green slime (see Dungeon Hazards in DMG) in the center of the room — Anyone actively searching notices a shimmer with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

3 - KELP FILLED CAVE

Shimmering fronds of red kelp line the walls and a whiff of decay mixes with the brine in the air.

Treasure: Ruby Kelp & Sven. The bloated corpse of the missing villager Sven is leaning against a wall in this area. The discoloration of his skin and dried foam on his mouth make it clear that a toxin or poison killed him. He is wearing a set of leather armor with a short sword still sheathed at his waist. Near the body is a backpack containing an adventurer's pack and 20 pounds of ruby kelp worth 50gp to an alchemist. Another 80 pounds of ruby kelp hangs from the walls, and it takes four people a total of 1 hour to harvest all of it.

4 - PARTIALLY FLOODED CAVE

A young woman's corpse hangs from the wall, pinned there by a thick metal harpoon. Before the incoming tides submerge the entire room, an already flooded tunnel leads to the caves' back and into area 8.

Encounter: One Fish, Two Fishpeople. There are two **merrow** and a **hunter shark** in this area. The merrow use their harpoon ability to pull adventurers into the water for the shark to attack.

Treasure: Kayla & Pearls. The body pinned to the wall is the missing local villager Kayla. She is wearing a gold medallion — a holy symbol of Kylon, the goddess of luck and wealth — worth 50gp, and a set of ruined chain mail. A necklace of five small white pearls (50gp) is on a merrow's neck.

5 - THE DELIVERER'S TEMPLE

Ancient marble statues and pillars lie along the long chamber's sides, broken, covered in barnacles, and barely recognizable. An elaborate crystal altar carved into the shape of a massive oyster sits at the far end, a fist-sized shimmering pearl hovering inside it.

Encounter: Dark Merrow. Two two **merrow** warriors and a **merrow priest** (use the **merrow** stat block and add the **priest** stat block's spellcasting trait and guiding bolt ability with the damage type changed to lightning) in this area waiting for the cave to flood so they can reach the pearl.

Treasure: Holy Relic. The *Tidal Pearl* (see sidebar) is protected by a crystal altar that only opens when completely submerged in seawater. The Altar weighs 500 pounds, has an AC of 25, 50 hit points, and half of any damage done to the altar is reflected onto the attacker. If the altar is removed from the temple it loses its ability to reflect damage. While the merfolk wished to open their doors to the shore folk, they did not completely trust them with their holy relic and protected it while they visited the temple. Removing the *Tidal Pearl* from the altar breaks the yearly cycle of the cave opening, and replacing it will reestablish it.

TIDAL PEARL

Wondrous item (pearl), uncommon

While holding this pearl, you can cast the spell *control water* without components once per long rest.



6 - ALICE'S GARDEN

This chamber holds a kaleidoscope of colorful plants and sea urchins. There is a sweet smell in the air that is thick and cloying, almost perfume like.

Hazard: Magic Urchins. The sea urchins are giving off a pheromone that fills the entire area. Anyone who can smell them must succeed a DC 18 Charisma saving throw or be compelled as if under a *charm person* spell to eat one of the urchins. Anyone eating an urchin must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. Eating an urchin results in suffering from visual and auditory hallucinations for 1 hour and gaining disadvantage on attack, ability check, and save rolls.

7 - HYDRA LAIR

The bioluminescence in this massive cavern is stronger than the rest of the cave and fills the chamber with bright light.

Encounter: King of the Caves. There is a **hydra** that the merrow brought with them to unleash on Wakeview. If the tide floods this section, the hydra holds its breath and waits as long as it can before moving to the entrance to wait for the merrow priest in area 5 to meet it.

8 - BACK CAVERN


This small cave is either the hiding place or the tomb of the last Wakeview local adventurer, Marcela. The merrow in area 4 injured her but managed to escape as they killed Kayla. Narrowly dodging the hydra, she is tucked behind a boulder in this area, terrified. If the tides flood this cave before the adventurers reach her, they will find her drowned corpse.

Marcela Shadbak (NG, female half-orc **veteran**) is an aggressive and competent warrior who is also Captain of the Wakeview town guard. She's severely injured and — while grateful — embarrassed for the need to be rescued. If alive, Marcela has 5 hit points remaining and wields a *+2 longsword*.

AFTERMATH

If the adventurers defeat the merrow and rescue Marcela, the town of Wakeview hails them as heroes. They will mourn the loss of their heroes and will pledge to bury them with all honors. If the Council promised any reward, they pay it gladly.

If the adventurers removed the *Tidal Pearl* and broke its link with the temple, the town is not pleased with them — the tradition of clearing the caves each year is vital to them.

If the adventurers failed to defeat the merrow, the hydra feasts on their corpses. The merrow then use the *Tidal Pearl's* power to flood Wakeview and let their hydra rage through it, slaughtering everyone in sight. 

APPENDIX

GIANT ELECTRIC EEL

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 60 (8d10 +16)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances lightning

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Water Breathing. The eel can breathe only underwater.

Slippery. The eel has advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to escape a grapple.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shock. The eel emits a pulse of electricity around its body. Any creature within 5 ft of the eel takes 11 (2d10) lightning damage and must make a DC 12 Constitution check or be stunned until the eels next turn. Creatures grappled by the eel automatically fail this save.

CREDITS

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Cover Illustration: Dreamstime

Cartography: TJ Phoenix, [Forgotten Adventures](#), [Dyson Logos](#)

Interior Illustrations: Dreamstime, [Fat Goblin Games](#)

Chaos Mage Design: [DMDave](#)

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL
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