

D&D
ADVENTURERS
LEAGUE

SQUAMOUS WRITHINGS, PART 1

BENEATH THE SURFACE



CCGTHENT01-01



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SQUAMOUS WRITHINGS, PART I

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Steam has been rising from ruins east of the city of Thentia for almost two tendays. Scouts and adventurers have gone to investigate, but have not returned. What might be lurking in the depths of those dark places, and will it remain there?

A 2-hour adventure for 1st-4th level characters

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Beneath the Surface*, a D&D Adventurers League™ adventure. It is part of the official D&D Adventurers League™ organized play system and Con Created Content Program.

This adventure is designed for 1st through 4th -level characters, and is optimized for five 3rd-level characters. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in the adventure.

The adventure takes place in the Moonsea region, and will take the players to the city of Thentia and the surrounding area in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting.

THE D&D ADVENTURERS LEAGUE

This adventure is official for D&D Adventurers League play. The D&D Adventurers League is the official organized play system for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®. Players can create characters and participate in any adventure allowed as a part of the D&D Adventurers League. As they adventure, players track their characters' experience, treasure, and other rewards, and can take those characters through other adventures that continues their story.

If you're running this adventure as part of a store event or at certain conventions, you'll need a DCI number. This number is your official Wizards of the Coast organized play identifier. If you don't have a number, you can obtain one at a store event. Check with your organizer for details.

D&D Adventurers League play is broken up into storyline seasons. When players create characters, they attach those characters to a storyline season, which determines what rules they're allowed to use to create and advance their characters.

Players can continue to play their

characters after the storyline season has finished, possibly participating in a second or third storyline with those same characters. A character's level is the only limitation for adventure play. A player cannot use a character of a level higher or lower than the level range of a D&D Adventurers League adventure.

For more information on playing, running games as a Dungeon Master, and organizing games for the D&D Adventurers League, please visit :

www.dndadventurersleague.org

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Before running this module for your players, you should make sure you've taken the following steps to prepare.

- Make sure you have the most recent copy of the *D&D Basic Rules* or the *Player's Handbook*. Errata is available online.
- Read through this adventure to familiarize yourself with the storyline. Take notes or highlight areas you find important, or as a reminder during the game. Decide how you would like to portray NPCs, or choose tactics for use in combats.
- Be familiar with the monster statistics in the Appendix.
- If you want to use resources such as a DM screen, a battle map, miniatures, or other options, gather them together prior to running.
- If you can find out the composition of the group, you can make alterations as noted throughout the adventure.

BEFORE PLAY AT THE TABLE

Prior to game play, ask your players to provide you with relevant information about their characters.

- Character name and race
- Character class and level
- Passive Wisdom (Perception), which is the most commonly used passive ability check
- Other notes that you may like to have, or that are specified by the adventure, such as backgrounds, traits, fears, flaws, etc.

Ensure that each player has an official adventure logsheet for his or her character (if not, get one from the organizer). The player fills out the adventure name, session number, date, and your name and DCI number. In addition, the player also fills in the starting values for experience, gold, downtime, renown, and number of permanent magic items. He or she fills in the other values and writes notes at the conclusion of the session. Each player is responsible for maintaining an accurate logsheet.

If you have time or see the need to do so, you can do a quick scan of a player's character sheet to ensure nothing looks out of order. If you see magic items of very high rarities or strange arrays of ability scores, you can ask players to provide documentation for their irregularities. If they cannot, feel free to restrict item use or ask them to use a standard ability score array. Point players to the *D&D Adventurers League Player's Guide* for reference.

If players wish to spend downtime and it's the beginning of an adventure or episode, they can declare their activity and spend the days now. Alternatively, they can do so at the end of the adventure or episode. Players should select their characters' spells and other daily options prior to the start of the adventure, unless the adventure specifies otherwise. Feel free to reread the adventure

description to help give players hints about what they might face.

ADJUSTING THE ADVENTURE

Throughout this module, you will find sidebars provided that give information to assist you in making adjustments in encounters for weaker or stronger parties, as well as smaller or larger groups.

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

Party Composition	Party Strength
3-4 characters, APL <	Very Weak
3-4 characters, APL =	Weak
3-4 characters, APL >	Average
5 characters, APL <	Weak
5 characters, APL =	Average
5 characters, APL >	Strong
6-7 characters, APL <	Average
6-7 characters, APL =	Strong
6-7 characters, APL >	Very Strong

A result of average party strength indicates that no adjustments should be made for encounters.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

You are the Dungeon Master, and so you have the most important role in the game; making it fun for your players! It's up to you to help guide the narrative and bring the words on these pages to life. The outcome of a fun game session often creates stories that live well beyond the play at the table. Always follow this golden rule when you DM for a group:

Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the adventure when possible.

To reinforce this golden rule, keep in the mind the following:

You Are Empowered. You get to make decisions about how the group interacts

with the NPC's and the environment within this adventure. It is okay to make considerable changes or engage in improvisation, so long as you maintain the original spirit of what's written.

Challenge Your Players. Never being challenged makes for a boring game, and being overwhelmed makes for a frustrating game. Gauge the experience level of the players (not the characters) in the game, try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to give each of them the experience they're after when they play D&D. Everyone should have the opportunity to shine.

Mind the Time. Watch for stalling, since play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish too early; provide them with a full play experience. Try to be aware of running long or short. Adjust the pacing accordingly.

Keep the Adventure Moving. When the game starts to get bogged down, feel free to provide hints and clues to your players so they can attempt to solve puzzles, engage in combat, and roleplay interactions without getting too frustrated over a lack of information. This gives players "little victories" for figuring out good choices from clues. *The Dungeon Master's Guide* has more information on the art of running a D&D game.

SPELLCASTING SERVICES

Any settlement the size of a town or larger can provide some spellcasting services. Characters need to be able to travel to the settlement to obtain these services.

Spell services generally available include healing and recovery spells, as well as information-gathering spells. Other spell services might be available as specified in the adventure. The number of spells available to be cast as a service is limited to a

maximum of three per day total, unless otherwise noted.

Spellcasting Services	Cost
Spell	
<i>Cure wounds</i> (1 st level)	10gp
<i>Identify</i>	20gp
<i>Lesser restoration</i>	40gp
<i>Prayer of healing</i> (2 nd level)	40gp
<i>Remove curse</i>	90gp
<i>Speak with dead</i>	90gp
<i>Divination</i>	210gp
<i>Greater restoration</i>	450gp
<i>Raise dead</i>	1,250gp
<i>Resurrection</i> *	3,000gp
<i>True Resurrection</i> *	50,000gp

*These spells require an additional expenditure of downtime days (150 for *resurrection* and 350 for *true resurrection*). This cost can be reduced by 50 days for each faction rank above 1 that the character possesses. This downtime is spent in community service for the church that provided the spell in question. The Acolyte Background feature does NOT reduce the gp or downtime cost for either of these spells.

ACOLYTE BACKGROUND

A character possessing the acolyte background requesting spellcasting services at a temple of his or her faith may request **one spell per day** from the Spellcasting Services table for free. The only cost paid for the spell is the base price for the consumed material component, if any.

Acolytes can call upon spellcasting services in and around Thentia as follows: Selune, Tempus, Tyr, Chauntea, Umberlee, Lliira, Mystra, Kelemvor.

DEATH AND RECOVERY

Sometimes bad things happen, and characters die. Since you might not have the same characters return from session to session, here are the rules when bad things happen to characters.

DEATH

A character who is killed during the course of the adventure has few options at the end of the session (or whenever arriving back in civilization) if no one in the adventuring party has immediate access to a *raise dead* or *revivify* spell, or similar magic. A character subject to a *raise dead* spell is affected negatively until all long rests have been completed during an adventure. Alternatively, each downtime day spent after *raise dead* reduces the penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks by 1, in addition to any other benefits the downtime activity might provide.

Create a New 1st-Level Character. If the dead character is unwilling or unable to exercise any of the other options, the player creates a new character. The new character does not have any items or rewards possessed by the dead character.

Dead Character Pays for Raise Dead. If the character's body is recoverable (it's not missing any vital organs and is mostly whole) and the player would like the character to be returned to life, the party can take the body back to civilization and use the dead character's funds to pay for a *raise dead* spell. A *raise dead* spell cast in this manner costs the character 1,250gp.

Character's Party Pays for Raise Dead. As above, except that some or all of the 1,250gp for the *raise dead* spell is paid for by the party at the end of the session. Other characters are under no obligation to spend their funds to bring back a dead party member.

Faction Charity. If the character is of level 1 to 4 and a member of a faction, the dead character's body can be returned to civilization and a patron from the faction ensures that he or she receives a *raise dead* spell. However, any character invoking this charity forfeits all experience and rewards from the session (both those earned prior to and after death during that session) and cannot replay that episode or adventure

with that character again. Once a character reaches 5th level, this option is no longer available.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Slavery abounds around the Moonsea, but it not localized to that region by any means. Far to the south, in the land of Chult, grungs are avid slave owners and traders. To keep up with growing demand for humanoid slaves, an envoy of grung were sent to the Moonsea to broker trade deals with Melvaunt and Mulmaster. However, the cold lands of the north are not hospitable for grung. To establish a base of operations, the grungs have made use of underground ruins to the east of Thentia, using magic to cause hot springs to rise from deep within the earth, and changing the very ecology of the ruins to something a bit more temperate.

However, the changes the grungs have wrought have not only altered some of the landscape in the area, but have caught the attention of chitines that already called the area home.

On the surface, steam now rises from the ruins east of Thentia, and the tundra around the area is now littered with sinkholes. While out for a ride not even a tenday ago, Reginold Swifthand's prize stallion shattered its front legs by falling into such a sinkhole. Now, the nobleman and stablemaster is determined to root out the cause of these changes appearing near the ruins. Scouts sent to investigate have not returned, however, and he is concerned with what might be lurking beneath the surface.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

Beneath the Surface is divided into four parts:

Part 1. The Horsemaster. (15 minutes)
Arriving in Thentia, the adventurers are called upon by Reginold Swifthand, a local

noble. He hires them to investigate the ruins east of Thentia, where an odd steam has been rising for many days now.

Part 2. Into the Ruins. (30 minutes) The characters travel to the ruins, exploring and finding several vents from which steam billows. Signs of activity are abundant, all leading down into the earth.

Part 3. The Jungle Below. (1 hour) Descending into the earth, the adventurers find a growing oasis, magically springing up from the cold stone, and signs that a portal was being constructed. The chitine who have taken over the area are none too happy to see them, however. Heading deeper into the caverns, it is obvious that these are the ruins of an ancient city, sunken below the surface by time. The grungs and their prisoners are found, but none are as well as they should be. An ancient map is found.

Part 4. Back to the Surface. (15 minutes) The adventurers return to Thentia with the captives, reporting to Swifthand. But there is still the matter of a certain map, and what treasures it may lead to. And what caused the grungs to become so weakened?

that can be witnessed just by walking down its streets.

Faction Requests. The Zhentarim may have heard rumors of a shift in the trade of slaves in the region. Always a group to stay on top of the market, subtly investigating what is going on would be prudent for future endeavors. Likewise, the Harpers may have heard similar rumors, and have sent agents to determine what is happening, so as to stamp out any new trade routes before they can get too dug in.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Any of the following hooks may justify the party's presence in Thentia during the start of the adventure.

From Thentia. One or more of the characters may call Thentia home. The summons of the well-liked noble, Reginold Swifthand, would come as a welcome boon to such a character.

Odd Rumors. Rumors of the strange steam rising from the ruins may have traveled around the Moonsea, and curious adventurers may go to investigate.

City of Magic. Thentia is a city unlike many others, a place where wizards and other magic wielders go to live and practice their arcane arts. While not everyone in the city is a magician, tales tell of the wonders

PART I. THE HORSEMASTER

The adventurers meet with Reginold Swifthand and learn of recent events.

1. THE STREETS OF THENTIA

The characters wander the streets of Thentia, getting a feel for a city overrun by mages.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. The city streets of Thentia are free of debris, more so than most other cities.

Light. The day is relatively sunny, a few wispy clouds covering the sun from time to time.

Sound. Townsfolk chatting, horses hooves on cobblestone, pigeons cooing from the tops of buildings.

Smell. The streets of Thentia have a lingering scent of citrus, perhaps lemon? Or is that grapefruit?

Wandering the streets of Thentia, you take in the marvelous sights. After passing through the gates into the city, under the watchful Eyes of Thauguran, you've seen one wonder after another. As you watch a broom and dustpan cleaning up a small pile of rubbish without the help of a person, a mighty roar and the sound of massive wings wrests your attention toward a high tower, massive windows open to the sky near the top. From one of these openings, a silver scaled dragon is taking flight, the force of its liftoff bending branches of trees far below. The dragon soars off from the Aerie, dwindling away out of sight, and you note that many of the townsfolk seem unaffected by the dragon's presence, as though it were a common occurrence. Thentia is going to be an interesting place, indeed!

Player's may be most interested in exploring the magical delights that Thentia

has to offer. After all, many mysteries are bound to be offered up in a city so inhabited by mages. In the interest of time, however, the characters notice several posters offering work to adventurers.

Your eyes still filled with wonder, you barely notice the lamppost until you almost run into it. Looking around as nonchalantly as possible, you see a handbill on the post, which states that Reginold Swifthand seeks adventurers to employ. Your coin purse ever willing to be filled, perhaps this Swifthand's contract would help it on its way to being sated.

If asking around town, the characters may find out the following information:

- Reginold Swifthand, a 38-year old human, is a well-liked noble of Thentia. He has been offered the position of Watchlord on several occasions, but has always turned it down.
- The Swifthands have been Thentia's top horse breeders for several generations.
- Reginold is the last of his house. His older brother died in a riding accident a few years ago, and Reginold never married. His dedication to his horses has always been his top priority.
- The Swifthand Stables' champion white stallion had to be put down after shattering both its front legs during a fall into a sinkhole eight days ago. Reginold was devastated.
- Many ruins can be found in the landscape around Thentia, mostly to the north and east. Recently, however, steam has been rising from some ruins to the northeast for almost two tendays now, an odd sight to say the least.
- Scouts that were sent to investigate the strange steam rising from the ruins have never returned.

- The Eyes of Thauguran help the Warders, the city watch, to perceive threats arriving at the walls of Thentia. Created by the wizard, Thauguran Westlook, they are able to alarm the city of the incursion of threats such as fiends, aberrations, monstrosities, undead, and any creature that skulks about invisibly.
- Thauguran Westlook spent one year as Watchlord during his creation of the Eyes, then packed up his house (yes, the whole thing), and moved on from Thentia, stating that his presence was no longer needed, and other worlds were calling.
- No, it isn't weird to see dragons coming and going at the Aerie. Silly foreigners. The silver dragon they saw is named Dyeusindra, and is a regular visitor to the city of Thentia.

2. SWIFTHAND'S EMPLOY

Seeking out the Swifthand estate to the northeast of the city, the characters are led to meet Reginold in the stables.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. The stable floors are littered with hay and the occasional horse dropping.

Light. Sunlight filters in through open doors at either end of the stable, as well as from the doors to each horse pen.

Sound. The snort and neighing of horses.

Smell. Hay and oats, horse dung, the sweat of horses recently worked.

The characters arrive at the Swifthand estate, and are met by Archibold, a light purple-skinned tiefling, who appears to be an employee of the stables. Still attired in very impressive riding regalia, he tells the group that Reginold and he just arrived back from a morning ride, and leads them to the stables.

Reginold Swifthand is found brushing down a stunningly white mare. As the characters speak with him, it is obvious that his love lies with his horses, and the loss of his champion stallion has cut deeply.

A handsome man, perhaps in his late thirties, stands next to a brilliant white mare. He nods in your direction, acknowledging your arrival, but continues to speak softly to the horse. A few moments go by as you watch Archibold take Reginold's place, leading the mare toward one of the stalls. Archibold seems to pull an apple from thin air, feeding it to the alabaster horse who whinnies happily.

Still watching the horse, Reginold greets you. "Welcome to my home. I am Reginold Swifthand, and that lovely lady is Cloudcutter, or CeeCee for short." He stares for another moment as the horse disappears into the stall, then turns his full attention toward you. "Now, how about some lunch and we can talk business?"

Reginold is a kind man, but can be shrewd with people who aren't horses. While he will chat for a short amount of time about the city or current events, he will seek to drive conversation back to the business at hand. He strongly desires, even needs, someone to find out what is happening out by the ruins, and where these sinkholes are coming from. While he is concerned about the people who went scouting the ruins, it is the death of his stallion, Aelfyre, that has driven him to seek out adventurers to investigate what is going on.

He offers to hire the adventurers for **100 gold pieces** to investigate the ruins and determine what is going on. If they are able to find and return the missing scouts, he will give them a bonus of **100 gold pieces**. He is willing to give them 50 gold pieces up front if they are in need of supplies before

they go. In addition, as long as they are under his employ, they are welcome to stay in his guesthouse here at the estate.

If a character wishes to purchase one of his horses, the least expensive of his geldings is worth a minimum of four times the price listed in the Player's Handbook. A character can make a DC 12 Nature (Intelligence) check to understand that these horses are of the finest breeding stock, and are well worth the price. A character who has a history of horse breeding may roll this check at advantage. If the group wishes to rent horses, Swifthand refuses the service of his animals, but points them to a stable in the city that rents pack animals. While he does not disdain lesser horses, it is obvious that he holds his in the highest regard.

Reginold can give the following information to the group, if they ask or haven't learned more from the townsfolk:

- The steam rising from the ruins appeared almost two tendays ago. While it has not been obviously dangerous, scouts sent to investigate have not returned.
- Shortly after the steam appeared, sinkholes of various sizes have started showing up in the landscape near the ruins, sometimes even closer to Thentia. Though there is no obvious reason, it has been spoken of in the city that something beneath the earth must have shifted.
- While the townsfolk are worried about the missing scouts, the Wards are not a large enough group to spare watchmen to investigate the ruins.

Before they leave, Swifthand gives them a letter and instructs them to visit an apothecary by the name of Bartleby Hansin before they head off for the ruins. The letter is a request to supply the adventurers

with a *potion of healing*, with Swifthand receiving the bill.

PART 2. INTO THE RUINS

The adventurers travel to the ruins near Thentia, seeking the cause of the mysterious steam and sinkholes.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. The land between Thentia and the ruins is mostly flat tundra with scrub brush, and some rocky areas.

Light. Sparse clouds fill the sky, offering only slight shade from the brilliant sun.

Sound. The crunching of brittle grasses beneath the adventurers' feet, the chirping and songs of birds nearby.

Smell. The scent of the ocean drifts to the characters on calm breezes. The cold, crisp air is clean and refreshing.

Nearing the ruins, the steam rising from small vents in the ground is obvious. Less noticeable are the areas of weakened ground that could potentially prove hazardous. Characters who pass a DC 12 Perception (Wisdom) check, or have a passive Perception of 12 or higher, notice the places where the ground sags slightly, as though the earth beneath has been hollowed away. If none of the characters see these depressions, or those who see them fail to warn their comrades, have those who have not noticed the potential sinkholes roll Dexterity saving throw, DC 13. A failure results in the character walking into a weak spot, which gives way beneath them. It is not large enough to fall into, but causes 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage. In addition, the character must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. A failure means their leg has been severely injured, and their movement speed is reduced by 10 feet. If the character fails the Constitution saving throw by 10 or more, their leg is

broken, and they gain a level of exhaustion as well. Healing the character of the damage taken can remove the reduction of their movement speed.

Optional Rule

The character must receive magical healing, gaining back the total amount of hit points lost in their fall, in order to regain their movement speed. If magical healing is not available, they must splint the broken leg and rest for at least one day per point of damage taken for the break to heal. The speed reduction lasts for another day per point of damage taken after that.

Note that this may cause a game to run longer than intended, so it is not recommended to use this optional rule if you are on a 2-hour time limit.

When the characters reach the edge of the ruins, read or paraphrase the following.

Steam billows from several vents in the ground, apparently natural holes that lead down into the dark. Most are too small to allow passage, but there may be something larger up ahead.

Fragments of stone buildings jut up here and there, signs that a town once stood here long ago. As you progress, you realize there is a definite difference in the temperature here. While it's not quite what you would call hot, the further you go into the ruins, the warmer it gets. Ahead you see a thick plume of smoke, larger than those you have passed.

As the group enters the ruins, they notice that despite the chill of the air, condensation is building up on their armor, clothes, and even skin. Proceeding on, they find several large vents that billow steam, but seem too small to traverse. At last, they come to a strange sinkhole, a 20 foot wide by 10 foot tall gash in the ground. An earthen ramp leads down through the steam that emanates from the hole. This seems to be the characters' best way down.

PART 3. THE JUNGLE BELOW

Descending into the earth, the group makes a surprising discovery. Through a strange jungle they must travel, seeking answers and missing people.

1. THE SUNKEN CITY

The adventurers find some strange tidings within this strange, underground jungle.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. The jungle is already thick with trees and vines, making much of it difficult terrain.

Light. Shortly after entering, dim light is present, coming from a source ahead of the party. The light source flickers erratically, though, sometimes going out for a dozen breaths, and then coming back strongly.

Sound. Though the jungle is lush with plant life, there are no sounds of birds or other life one would expect to hear, making it a bit eerie. A faint hum that falters in time with the flickering light grows louder the further the group moves into the cavern.

Smell. Exotic flowers and freshly moved earth.

As the characters enter the cavern, read or paraphrase the following:

Whatever you were expecting to find as you descended into the earth, the view comes as a surprise. A thick, lush jungle spreads out before you, your vantage point giving you just enough of a view to let your eyes skim over the tops of tropical trees. Vines grow up from the loamy earth, cracking and moving the cavern's rock. Light, from a source as yet unseen, shines dimly throughout the cavern, yet seems to flicker erratically. As your eyes adjust, you see an enormous statue of an armored knight, fallen to the ground and broken only a dozen feet down the escarpment before you. Not far from that, you swear those boulders look like the remains of a building. Perhaps your eyes are playing tricks on you?

While the ruins above ground have been damaged by time to the point that they are merely lumps of stone, the characters find themselves walking into what appears to be a city, still largely intact. Vines and other jungle plant life have erupted from much of the area, though, and so the city buildings are shrouded with leaves and creeping plants. The buildings themselves seem to be made of granite similar to that of the walls of the cavern, and many are covered in thick moss.

The characters may investigate the ruins as they go, though they will find very little of use to their current mission. Finding such an archaeological site such as this may excite some characters, however, and they should be reminded that they may return here with the proper dig site equipment...after the current situation has been resolved. However, a quick DC 13 History (Intelligence) check will reveal to the adventurers that this city predates the current architectural styles around the Moonsea by several hundred years at least. If the character succeeds by 5 or more on their check, they notice some similarities to

Ancient Netherese architecture, yet some distinct differences as well.

Characters who succeed on a DC 13 Perception (Wisdom) check as they move through this area of the jungle will notice signs of humanoid life. A discarded ration tin, perhaps a dropped copper coin or some small trinket. A DC 13 Survival (Wisdom) check will allow a character to notice odd footprints heading toward the source of the flickering light further into the cavern, as though the creature that made these prints had wide, splayed feet, with webbing between its toes.

As they move further towards the center of the cavern, the group will notice cobblestones appearing along the way, as though this was once a grand avenue. The further along they move, the less dirt and debris cover the road, though small plants have started to grow up between the cobblestones.

Characters with a passive Perception of 15 or higher, or characters who roll a DC 15 Perception (Wisdom) check, will notice that some of the buildings in this area have significant amounts of spider webs within them, noticed through open doorways and windows. If investigated, nothing living is found, though several skeletons of smaller animals are littered throughout the webs.

Treasure. A DC 13 Investigation (Intelligence) check will reveal scattered treasure throughout the webs as well. The group finds a dried and cracking leather pouch, which holds 4 hematite stones, each worth 10 gold pieces.

2. FAILING MAGIC (MAP 1)

The adventurers find the source of the flickering light, and perhaps the cause of this strange plant life.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. The area is overgrown with jungle plants, though the clearing with the orb is mostly free of trees. Vines and moss grow haphazardly on the cobbled ground where water does not flow. Water ranges from a few inches deep to almost two feet in areas. The area where the altar sits under the water is three feet deep.

Ceiling. The top of the cavern is 35 feet above the clearing.

Light. The orb that emanates the light filling the cavern is flickering wildly, casting warm illumination, and then going completely dark. Shadows are thrown wildly about, causing the scene to be even eerier.

Sound. Languidly flowing water, and the hum of the orb, which seems to falter in time with the failing light.

Smell. Musky plants, the faint scent of mildew or pond scum, coming from the areas of the water that have little motion.

As the characters arrive at the clearing near the center of the cavern, read or paraphrase the following:

The jungle opens up into a large clearing, and the sound of running water is familiar, yet strange in this place. Shadows dance violently in the strobing light, the source of which becomes clear. An orb of undulating liquid thrashes about, suspended perhaps a dozen feet above the ground, near the center of the clearing. From within its watery surface, light emanates brightly, flashing wildly, then goes out completely. Tense moments go by, and you wonder if the strange light has finally burned itself out, then it slowly begins to glow erratically, deep within the odd orb.

A wide pool of dark water swirls slowly beneath the globe, and you notice several small tributaries working their ways from other parts of the jungle into the strange lagoon.

On the far side of the water, a huge slab of granite rests, jutting upward at least 20 feet from the ground. Strange markings form an incomplete circle on the face of the stone.

Just beneath the surface of the water, directly below the globe of liquid and light, is an altar of bones and sticks. Worked into the top of this altar, and staring upward toward the orb, is a humanoid skull with blue-green gems in place of its eyes. One of the zircons is cracked, damaged during an altercation between the grungs and the chitines who fought over who would control this area. The broken gem is the cause of the failing magic of the orb.

A DC 15 Arcana (Intelligence) check will reveal to a character that some ritual has been worked here, creating this strange, life-giving orb. Not only does this orb give off light for the jungle plants to thrive in; it seems to have summoned them up, as well as redirecting the flow of the water that is now pooling here. A DC 15 Nature (Wisdom) check will allow a character to realize this altering of the underground water flow may have to do with the strange

sinkholes appearing across the landscape above.

The altar is anchored to the ground, though it can be moved with a DC 13 Strength check, pulling the anchors out of the sodden ground. However, moving the altar from the water for more than one minute, or destroying the altar (AC 10, 15hp), will destroy the magic worked here, causing the globe to disappear. The jungle will begin dying off, without the light and magic to support it.

The cracked zircon could be fixed with a *mending* spell, and the light of the globe will become continuous.

If the zircons are taken, it ends the magic. They are worth 50 gp each.

Investigating the granite slab reveals carvings in some strange language. The words are written in Grung, more than likely a language the characters have never witnessed before. *Comprehend languages* can be used to understand the words, but they are just random phrases, words of power rather than sentences. However, a DC 15 Arcana (Intelligence) check will reveal to a character that this is an unfinished magical portal, a permanent gateway to another place once it is finished.

On a DC 13 Survival (Wisdom) check, a character notices more of those strange, webbed footprints leading off, further into the jungle. They also see several tracks, which lead them to believe that humans or some other humanoids were also moving in that direction, possibly with their feet loosely bound.

The adventurers are not alone here, however. A group of five **chitine**, led by a **choldrith** named S'szzax, are watching from a tunnel in the cavern ceiling. They have a strong desire to make this area their new home, having been repelled by the grungs on several occasions. They and their

spider pets are the source of the webs the characters may have seen in the buildings.

Adjusting the Encounter

These adjustments are not cumulative.

Very Weak: S'szzax will not join the battle. Remove two of the **chitine**.

Weak: S'szzax will not join the battle. Remove one of the **chitine**.

Strong: Remove a **chitine**. Add a **choldrith** to the group that attacks.

Very Strong: Add a **chitine** and a **choldrith** to the group that attacks.

TACTICS

S'szzax is waiting for the perfect time to set up an ambush. If the characters move to destroy or move the altar, however, he shrieks in rage and orders the **chitine** to attack without mercy. They drop lines of web and scamper down to deal with the interlopers.

If the group does not try to move or harm the altar, S'szaxx will wait until the group moves on from the clearing, deeper into the jungle, then will send his **chitine** to attack them from behind.

S'szaxx, however, is something of a coward, and while he holds his **chitine** in thrall, he does not move in to fight. If combat initiates in the clearing, he will remain in the tunnel above, and will move back to gain full cover. If ambushing the adventurers in the jungle, he remains amongst the trees, seeking full cover where he can. If discovered in either place, or before the last of his **chitine** die, he will flee. It is only in the face of certain triumph that S'szaxx will move in to help with the fight, gloating over his impending victory.

Treasure. The **chitines** have various bone carvings, worth 100 gold pieces total. In addition, S'szaxx has a *potion of healing*.

3. THE CULPRITS (MAP 2)

In a small town square, the jungle having been cleared away, the adventurers find the grungs and their captives.

GENERAL FEATURES

Terrain. While jungle grows wildly around the small square, overcoming buildings and statues, the square itself has been cleared of plant life by the grungs.

Ceiling. The top of the cavern is 35 feet above the square.

Light. If the glowing orb in the clearing is still active, the area is dimly lit, though it may still be flickering if the adventurers did not fix the gem in the altar. If the altar was destroyed, the whole cavern is now in darkness.

Sound. The raspy, sickly breathing of prisoners. A half-hearted croaking noise from a grung who is near death.

Smell. Exotic plants and flowers, but with a sickly sweet undertone; the scent of the dying and the dead.

As the characters arrive at the small square, read or paraphrase the following:

A sour, pungent odor assails your nose as you near what appears to be a town square that has been cleared of trees and vines. Weak pleas for help are following by the sound of wet, wracking coughs.

Peering into the plaza, you see a large cage made of wooden poles in the center of the cleared area. Inside are several humans, as well as a halfling, a wood elf, and a firbolg. Most are lying very still, though a few feebly attempt to pry at the padlock and chain holding the gate shut.

Black doorways into buildings that surround the square stare impassively at the prisoners.

On the far side of the cage are three grungs, lying motionless on the

cobblestones. Characters who move around the cage will see them, and even from a distance, they look odd. Having never seen grungs before, the characters may not know that they are supposed to be brightly colored, but these have been leached of their pigments, and are a pale, sickly white. Still, the sight is unsettling, and only one moves at all, laboriously breathing, barely holding onto a thread of life. It is unconscious, and cannot be woken without magical healing first, which will only buy the grung another several minutes of life at best, it's life force being drained by some unseen power. The other two grungs are already dead, and their bodies reek of decay.

DMs may allow players to make History (Intelligence) or Nature (Wisdom) checks to know what a grung is. Since they are from a land far, far away, it is unlikely they have read or heard about them, however, so the DC for the check is an 18.

A DC 13 Medicine (Wisdom) check done to determine what is wrong with the grungs lets a character know that this does not appear to be a disease or poison, and while no wounds are obvious on the bodies, it seems almost vampiric in nature, with their life forces being drained away. What kind of creature may be capable of doing such a thing is left up to their imaginations, as no known lore is available to guide them to the truth. They will have to find answers deeper in the ground.

The prisoners are very weak, but are all living except one human, a scout from Thentia. In order to save the remaining eight prisoners, the characters must release them and get them to the surface, returning them to Thentia. They have scant hours left before the prisoners die, and so will not have a chance for a short or long rest from this point on. Healing magic does not seem

to help them more than making them seem healthier for a few minutes, at which point they return to their prior condition.

Speaking with them, the characters may learn that the prisoners were captured in or around the ruins above by grungs. In the following days, sickness seemed to overcome the camp, and many of the grungs have not been seen in several hours. The three near the cage collapsed within the last hour. Because none of the captives speak Grung, they did not know what their captors said to them, or what their final intentions were for the prisoners, though they did see the chains and manacles that are kept in a nearby building, objects often seen at slave markets.

Not all of the grungs are gone or are dead, however. Their leader, a **grung wildling** named Aisin, two of his **grung elite warriors**, and five **grungs** remain in a nearby building, the one where the prisoners saw the grungs carrying in the manacles and chains. While the life draining has affected them as well, they have managed to stave off the worst of the effects, and can act normally. Three rounds after the characters free the prisoners, the grungs emerge from the building, set on recapturing their prizes, and adding new slaves to their pens. They were preparing to leave the area when the adventurers arrived, having decided they could not overcome whatever power has been draining their life forces.

Adjusting the Encounter

These adjustments are not cumulative.

Very Weak: Replace Aisin's stats with that of a **grung**.

Remove **grung elite warriors**.

Weak: Remove **grung elite warriors**, add one **grung**.

Strong: Remove one **grung**, add one **grung wildling**.

Very Strong: Remove two **grungs**, add one **elite grung warrior**. Increase Aisin's hit points to 40, and the **grungs** hit points to 18.

TACTICS

Aisin will command his grungs from the doorway of the building, using it as cover to duck behind whenever he can. The elite warriors will focus on spell casters, aiming to take them down quickly, while the grungs will attempt to grapple melee opponents in the hopes of poisoning them. Once poisoned, they will leap away to poison others, or will attack with their daggers if opponents are already under the effects of their poisonous skin. Should the battle go poorly for the grungs, Aisin will call out to any not engaged with the characters and order a retreat. Should they manage to flee, they will leave the cavern and head toward the Moonsea itself, planning to swim across to Mulmaster and make use of the magical portal there to return to their home in Chult.

Should the characters fall to the grungs, Aisin and his folk will take them prisoner, adding fresh slaves to their roster to be returned to Chult. Kind DMs may allow the grungs to be attacked on their way out of the cavern by S'szzax and his chitine, allowing the characters a chance to flee. If the grungs make it out of the cavern and back to the surface world, they do a forced march north of Thentia to Melvaunt, where they hope their slaver contacts will have a way for them to return home to Chult.

Treasure. Aisin carries a *pearl of power*. Amongst him and his lackeys, the characters also find carvings and gems worth 100 gold pieces.

In the building that the grungs came from, a scroll case is stuffed in a corner. Within is an ancient map, drawn on dragonhide. A DC 13 Perception check allows a character to realize the map is of the sunken city, and it is obvious that the city has much more to explore. What's more, it has a building

marked as GADOR. Those who speak Elvish may recognize the word as an ancient form of the Elven word for vault. However, those who speak or can read Ancient Netherese know that it could also be translated to mean prison. Either way, something of interest lies deep beneath this sunken city.

In the same building is a pile of gear and supplies taken from the prisoners. There are three sets of leather armor, one set of studded leather armor, six daggers, two shortswords, a longsword, two shortbows, and two quivers of arrows. Several sacks and backpacks lie empty, their contents missing. While the characters could deprive the prisoners of their goods, treat these items as non-treasure, which the characters do not get to keep at the end of the adventure.

If the adventurers release the prisoners and guide them back to the surface, award each character **100 experience points**.

PART 4. BACK TO THE SURFACE (CONCLUSION)

Having defeated the grungs and freed the would-be-slaves, the adventurers return to the surface and Thentia.

Meeting with Reginold Swifthand, the characters receive their rewards. Using the information they have reported, Swifthand later informs them that the Watchlord approached a local wizard who is well known for his divination magic. The mage was unable to scry deep into the sunken city, but was able to discern that some terrible and ancient force is present there. The map found by the adventurers may prove very helpful in the days to come.

This is where *Beneath the Surface* ends. This trilogy is continued in the next module, *CCCTHENT01-02 : Those That Dwell Beneath*.

REWARDS

Make sure the players note their rewards on their adventure log sheets. Provide them with your name and DCI number (if applicable) so they can record who ran the session.

EXPERIENCE

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes and divide the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards listed are per character. Give all characters in the party non-combat experience awards unless noted otherwise.

COMBAT AWARDS

Name of Foe	XP / Foe
Chitine	100
Choldrith	700
Grung	50
Grung Elite Warrior	450
Grung Wildling	200

NON-COMBAT AWARDS

Task/Accomplishment	XP / Character
Rescue the prisoners	100

The minimum total award for each character participating in this adventure is **450 experience points**.

The maximum total award for each character participating in this adventure is **650 experience points**.

TREASURE

The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Characters should attempt to divide treasure evenly whenever possible. Gold

piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

Consumable magic items should be divided up however the group sees fit. If more than one character is interested in a specific consumable magic item, the DM can determine whom gets it randomly should the group be unable to decide.

Permanent magic items are divided up according to a system. See the sidebar if the adventure awards permanent magic items.

TREASURE AWARDS

Item Name	GP Value
Hematite stones	40
Zircons	100
Bone carvings	100
Grung treasure	100
Quest Reward	200

Permanent Magic Item Distribution

D&D Adventurers League has a system in place to determine who is awarded permanent magic items at the end of a session. Each character's logsheet contains a column to record permanent magic items for ease of reference.

- If all the players at the table agree on one character taking possession of a permanent magic item, that character gets the item.
- In the event that one or more characters indicate an interest in possessing a permanent magic item, the character that possesses the fewest permanent magic items gets the item. If there is a tie in the total number of permanent magic items owned by contesting characters, the item's owner is determined randomly by the DM.

PEARL OF POWER

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

The pearl's brilliant nacreous quality fades to almost black after being used, only to waken at the following dawn. A description of this item can be found in **Player Handout 1**.

POTION OF HEALING

Potion, common

A description of this item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (pg. 187).

RENOWN

All faction members gain one renown point for successfully completing the adventure.

DOWNTIME

Each character receives **5 downtime days** at the conclusion of this adventure.

DM REWARDS

You receive **150 XP, 75 gp, and 5 downtime days** for each session you run of this adventure.

DM APPENDIX.

NPC SUMMARY

Below is a list of named NPCs that appear in this adventure.

Reginold Swifthand (REHG-ehn-OHLD SWIFT-hand). In his late thirties, Reginold is a handsome human with dark hair and light green eyes. His family has long been nobility in the city of Thentia, and they breed champion quality horses. Though he is without an heir, it has never crossed Reginold's mind to find a wife, as his horses are all he's ever needed. He is a kind man, but is quick to anger if someone abuses an animal, especially a horse. Around people, he gets by, but can be socially awkward from time to time as his mind turns to what must be done to care for the horses that day.

Archibold (AHRCH-eh-BOHLD). A tiefling of apparent middle-age, who is in service to Lord Reginold Swifthand.

Dyeusindra (DIE-ay-US-en-DRA). A silver dragon that is a common visitor to the city of Thentia.

S'szzax (SUH-ss-ZACKS). A choldrith who commands a small group of chitine that live in the sunken ruins of a long-lost city near Thentia.

Aisin (AHY-zin). A grung wildling who was charged with creating a portal near the northern coast of the Moonsea, and magically altering the underground lair to suit the needs of the grungs.

APPENDIX. MONSTER/NPC STATISTICS

Chitine

Small monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)

Hit Points 18 (4d6 + 6)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Athletics +4, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive

Perception 10

Languages Undercommon

Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The chitine has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the chitine to sleep.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the chitine has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Perception (Wisdom) checks that rely on sight.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the chitine knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The chitine ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Multiattack. The chitine makes three attacks with its daggers.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage.

Choldrith

Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather armor)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Religion +2, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive

Perception 12

Languages Undercommon

Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The choldrith has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the chitine to sleep.

Spellcasting. The choldrith is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The choldrith has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, resistance, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, healing word, sanctuary, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, spiritual weapon* (dagger)

Spider Climb. The choldrith can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the choldrith has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Perception (Wisdom) checks that rely on sight.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the choldrith knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The choldrith ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage

Web (Recharge 5-6). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The target is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained target can make a DC 11 Strength check, bursting the webbing on a success. The webbing can also be attacked and destroyed (AC 10; 5 hit points; vulnerability to fire damage, immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage).

Grung

Small humanoid (grung), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 11 (2d6 + 4)

Speed 25 ft., climb 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4

Skills Athletics +2, Perception +2,
Stealth +4, Survival +2

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Grung

Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP)

Amphibious. The grung can breathe air and water.

Poisonous Skin. Any creature that grapples the grung or otherwise comes into direct contact with the grung's skin must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature no longer in direct contact with the grung can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Standing Leap. The grung's long jump is up to 25 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Grung Elite Warrior

Small humanoid (grung), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 49 (9d6 + 18)

Speed 25 ft., climb 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Skills Athletics +2, Perception +2,
Stealth +5, Survival +2

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Grung

Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious. The grung can breathe air and water.

Poisonous Skin. Any creature that grapples the grung or otherwise comes into direct contact with the grung's skin must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature no longer in direct contact with the grung can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Standing Leap. The grung's long jump is up to 25 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Mesmerizing Chirr (Recharge 6). The grung makes a chirring noise to which grungs are immune. Each humanoid or beast that is within 15 feet of the grung and able to hear it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until the end of the grung's next turn.

Grung Wildling

Small humanoid (grung), lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 27 (5d6 + 10)

Speed 25 ft., climb 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Skills Athletics +2, Perception +4, Stealth +5, Survival +4

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Grung

Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP)

Amphibious. The grung can breathe air and water.

Poisonous Skin. Any creature that grapples the grung or otherwise comes into direct contact with the grung's skin must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature no longer in direct contact with the grung can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Spellcasting. The grung is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It knows the following ranger spells:

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *jump*

2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin*, *spike growth*

3rd level (2 slots): *plant growth*

Standing Leap. The grung's long jump is up to 25 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start.

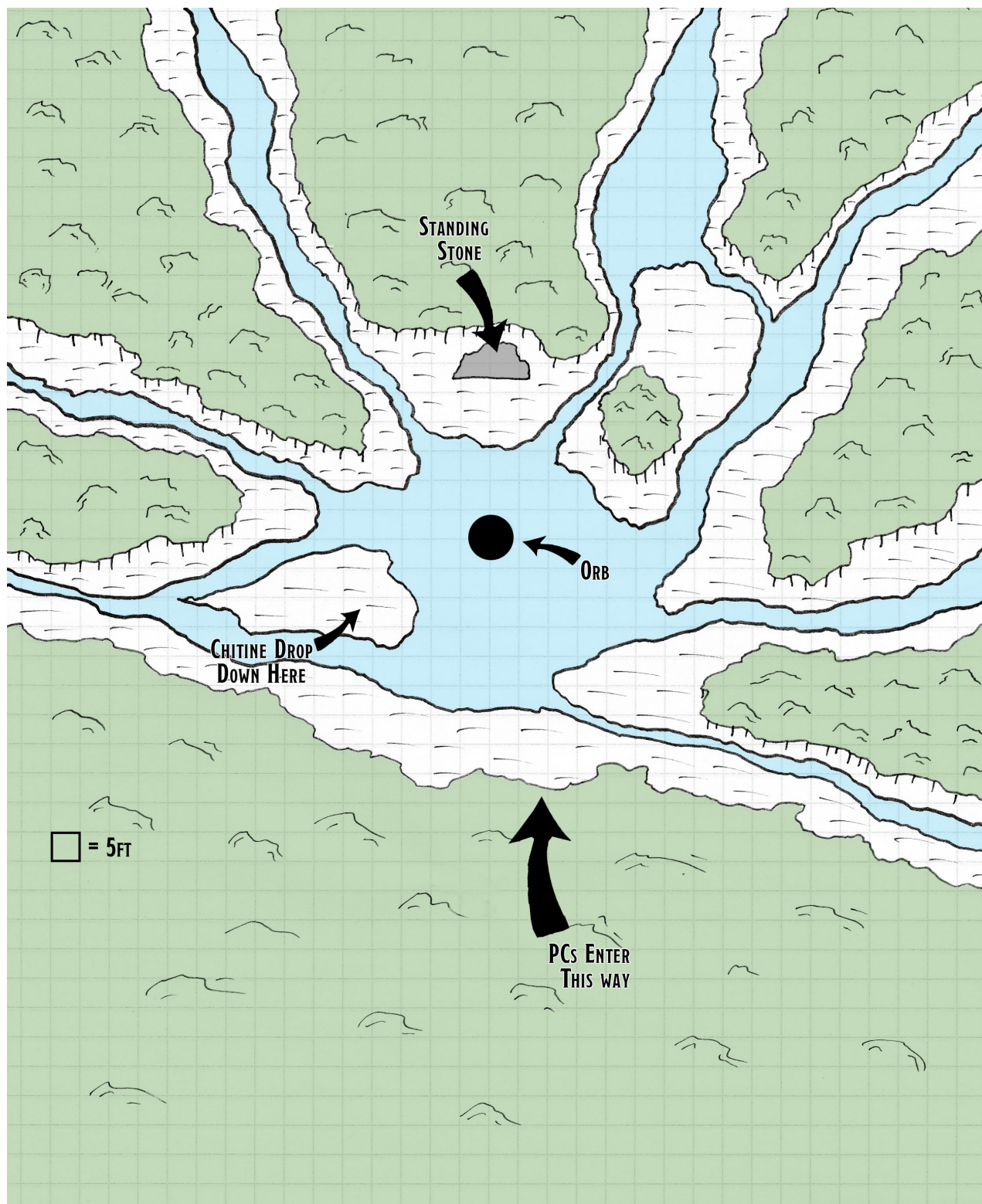
Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (2d4) poison damage.

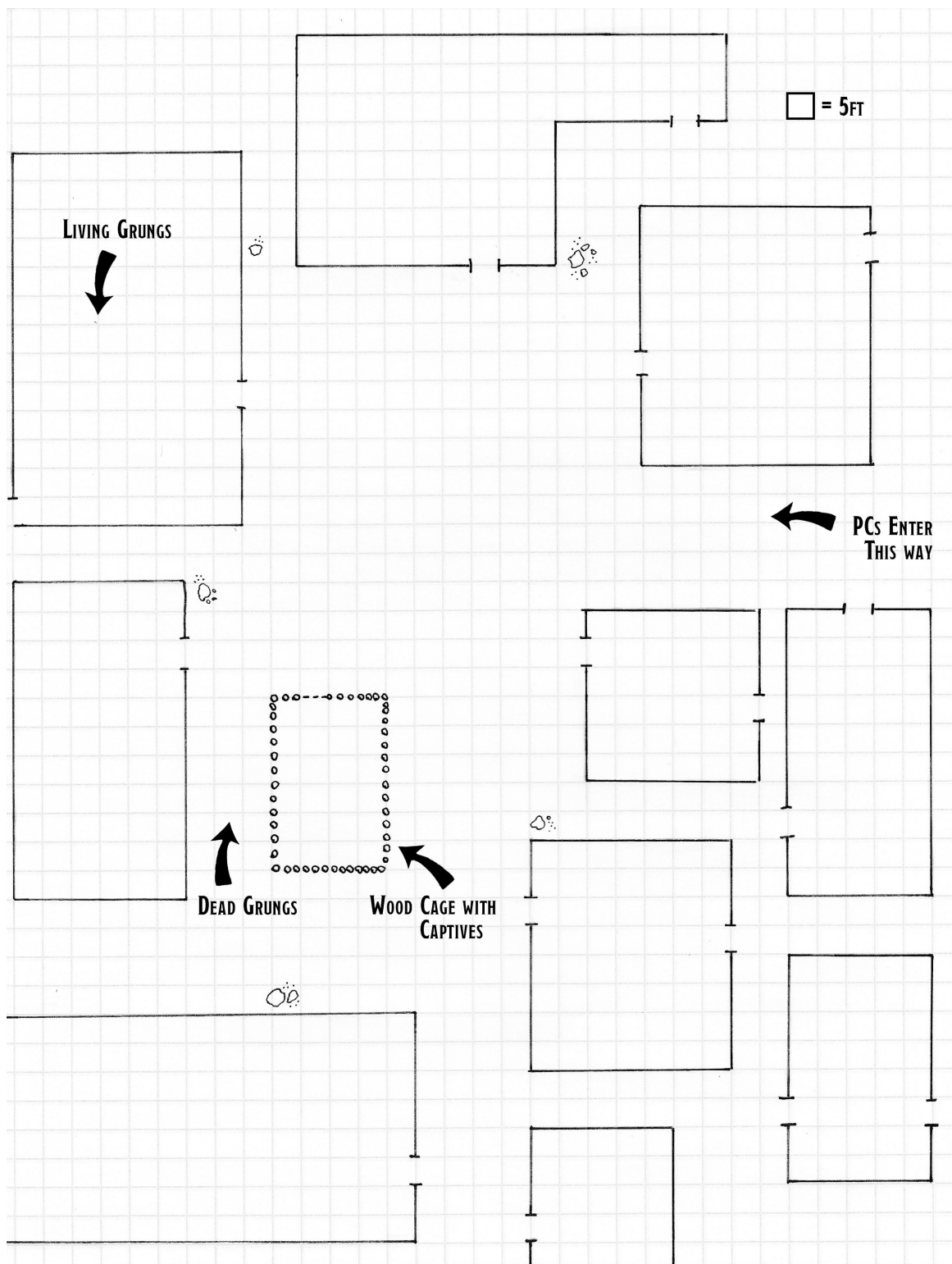
APPENDIX. MAP I

The characters encounter a group of chitine, and the source of the odd jungle growth.



APPENDIX. MAP 2

The characters find the missing people and their captors.



PLAYER HANDOUT I. PEARL OF POWER

PEARL OF POWER

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

The pearl's brilliant nacreous quality fades to almost black after being used, only to waken at the following dawn. You can use an action to speak this pearl's command word and regain one spell slot of up to 3rd level. Once you have used the pearl, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

Results Code for CCCTHENT01-01, Beneath the Surface

If you are DMing this adventure between the months of August 2017 and December 2017, please show your players this page. The QR code below can be scanned, and will allow them to give feedback and results on the adventure to influence the storyline in the future.

If a player does not have a mobile device, please ask them to head to <http://www.whpublications.com/surveys/> to enter their feedback. Thank you!

