

SHAMBLER'S MOUND

By Peter von Bleichert

For beginning or low-level PCs



Setting

Vast Mushswamp stains the map. A raised road cuts through this morass, and a floating hamlet—its human residents call it Mushswampton—has sprung up and grown beside it. The Mushswampfolk distill bravery-inducing spirits (temporary +2 to save vs. fear effects/-1 skill checks) called 'blue moon,' and move about the dark still waters in shallow canoes, trapping crayfish, furs, and small crocodiles. They trade these items for grain as well as other staples and comforts. Though there is no organized law in Mushswampton, the Tableau—a council made up of the oldest Mushswampfolk and where blue moon flows freely—makes decisions, such as when it is time to hire mercenaries.

Hooks

An alternative starting point could be the Murkmire Swamp town of Gnatdamp (see "Gnatdamp: A Sanctuary in the Swamp," by Michael Curtis, *Gygax Magazine*, Issue 1) where the party is approached and hired by Marsh-Hand Phaid Torngrasp or the town's Sentinel to accomplish any of these adventure hooks:

1. Footpads (brigands) have been camping in the swamp and carts full of Mushswampton wares are disappearing from the road. The Mushswampfolk pay or trade with the party to chase off the footpads, kill them, or capture their leader.
2. A strange green glow has been reported emanating from Mushswamp. The Mushswampfolk pay or trade with the party to investigate.
3. A crocodile named Scar is snatching Mushswampfolk from their canoes. The Mushswampfolk will pay or trade with the party to kill this menace, and bring his hide and meat back for a bonus reward.

Encounters

Making their way along Mushswamp road, PCs encounter Footpads who will rob anyone they can get the better of.

Shaken by the last attack, and despite strange sounds and odors that emanate from Mushswamp, the road feels relatively safe. That is, until a carapaced clawed creature leaps from the waters to snap and grab at the party. This medium-sized crayfish [DM: This could be a Chuul modified to be a surface dweller and stripped of its poison tentacle net].

Catching their breath, and as the swamp's eerie mist momentarily lifts, the PCs spot a strange glowing island just off the road.

In order to reach it, the PCs must traverse a muddy hazard that threatens to suck them down, claim their weapon-in-hand, and fill their throat and lungs with stinking muck.

Certainly dirty, though closer to the strange glowing island, what appeared to be a submerged log is in fact the crocodile Scar. The vise of his jaw reaches and closes down upon anything unfortunate to get in its way, and, if the swamp-dweller is injured, it lunges with its full body-weight, throwing itself up upon the squishy islet to add the swing of its tail to the melee.

Surviving Scar's wrath means the party reaches the glowing island. Once upon its spongy ground, there is soon a tickle as flesh-seeking rootlets pierce boot leather. An immobile shambling mound carpets the small island, and stores it electricity in an old collapsed druid's cairn that contains the belongings of at least one former adventurer [DM: add a gem, some gold, a weapon, or a magic item as loot]. The carpet Shambler's goal is to survive and eventually spread throughout Mushswamp. The PCs must defeat the shambler or be grappled and dragged to the cairn for envelopment and digestion.

