

RAGING SWAN PRESS
20 THINGS #39:
BLACK DRAGON'S LAIR



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20 THINGS #39: BLACK DRAGON LAIR

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in.

Compiled from the free 20 Things posts available at Raging Swan's website, this short, focused compilation gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment provides ten tables compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you to flesh out and bring to life a black dragon's lair.

CREDITS

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FOREWORD

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition supplement. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are magic-users, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

USING THIS BOOK

You can use these tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fits with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

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I: BLACK DRAGON LAIR FEATURES

A black dragon's lair is rarely nothing more than a dismal, sunken cave stuffed full of treasure. Black dragons are wily, cunning and in-tune with the surrounding environment. Their lairs reflect their intrinsic connection with the surrounding swamp or marsh.

Use the table below, to add major features of interest to the black dragon's lair. Such features are both flavoursome and things for the PCs to interact with as they explore the lair.

1. A large pool of fetid, dirty swamp water covers the floor in this area. In places, the water is almost ten-foot deep; sometimes the dragon bathes here.
2. A wide swath of deep, glutinous mud covers the ground. The mud smells noxious and is thigh-deep in places. If the dragon has recently passed by here, its tracks are visible in the mud.
3. A tangle of roots grows down through the ceiling and quest almost all the way to the floor. The roots form a thick curtain of sorts and obscures whatever lurks beyond. Things might live in the roots or perhaps the dragon has interwoven pieces of metal in the fibrous growths. Incautious PCs passing through the roots cause the broken shields, bits of armour and so on to jangle together.
4. A sinkhole pierces the lair's ceiling; mud, fetid swamp water and the occasional swamp denizen fall into the hole and end up in the dragon's lair. Faint light filters down through the sinkhole dimly illuminating the surrounding area. If the sinkhole is wide enough, the dragon may use it as a secondary way into and out of its lair.
5. A large rotting tree trunk, its leaves branches ripped off lies on its side in the mud. Mud coats the trunk, which must be climbed over to get further into the lair.
6. Part of one wall has collapsed creating a viscous field of mud and rubble which partially blocks the corridor. Perceptive characters notice the wall around the collapsed area is pockmarked with acid scars and slightly melted in places. Characters digging through the rubble—a long, dirty job—may discover the remains of some of the dragon's foes (Perhaps, some of the interlopers' equipment has also survived).
7. Mosquitos, and other annoying, biting, insects, swarm in this area. They greedily attach onto any exposed skin and generally make the explorers' lives miserable.
8. A high, steep bank of mud cuts the area in half. Several small dirty rivulets flow down the escarpment creating a small pool at its base. Explorers climbing the bank discover it is slippery, and they get muddy.
9. A few cut and dressed stones sunk into the mire hint at some ancient stone wall or other building. Investigations reveal indistinct carvings worn down by immersion in water and mud decorating some of the stones.
10. Deep bogs, intermingled with shallower pools only about one-foot deep, pockmark the floor. The deep bogs are almost four-foot deep.
11. Foul swamp water oozes down the walls of this low-lying area. The floor appears to be normal—just mud—but is in fact quicksand almost 15 ft deep.
12. The ceiling is unstable and riven with deep cracks. Excessive noise—the sounds of a loud combat—or explosive spells or the dragon's breath weapon striking the ceiling causes it to collapse, burying everyone under piles of sodden mud.

DRAGON DRESSING: FEMALE DRAGON NAMES

All dragons—even baby dragons—should have names.

1. Arveairaul
2. Oskaghram
3. Golosvaer
4. Malmere
5. Akkanskad
6. Harnmiir
7. Alyrithosk
8. Klauthix
9. Urythevureim
10. Bahormere

DRAGON DRESSING: MALE DRAGON NAMES

All dragons—even baby dragons—should have names.

1. Alymmcalaun
2. Irfeltot
3. Mornaugsurr
4. Surmajier
5. Hoonryx
6. Ryxmajier
7. Autharaul
8. Galaddor
9. Thalugos
10. Malaejalan



2: BLACK DRAGON LAIR DRESSING

Black dragon lairs are different to normal dungeons. Consequently, the minor pieces of dressing should highlight this difference. Signs of previous exploration—dropped and broken equipment, the splintered, burnt corpses of previous adventurers and the like—will also be visible.

Use the table below, to add depth and flavour to the lair's minor features:

1. Small patches of melted metal pockmark the lair's floor.
2. Gouges in the wall show where the dragon has sharpened its claws. Clever characters can use the marks to estimate the dragon's size.
3. Pitted bones cover swaths of the floor. Many show the tell-tale marks of acid; others are crushed and smashed.
4. Small pools of stagnant water fill hollows in the floor.
5. A thin sheen of mud covers the floor; the bones of several creatures—perhaps lizardfolk, crocodiles or the like—jut from the glutinous paste.
6. The stump of a discarded, mud-covered torch lies on the muddy floor. Nearby, footprints head deeper into the lair.
7. Several small hummocks of drying mud dot the area. The largest of the hummocks is almost three-foot high; the hummocks resemble overly large molehills.
8. The entrance to a small ants' nest pierces the floor; here, hundreds of ants scuttle about their business.
9. The decomposing body of a lizardfolk lies partially buried in the mud. One of the lizardfolk's legs is missing.
10. A confused mess mash of tracks criss-crosses the area. The tracks go hither and thither; in a few places a larger-draconic-footprint overlays the others. A skilled tracker can tell many of the tracks were made by folk running.
11. Someone or something has excavated a deep hole near a wall. The hole is about ten-foot deep and is slowly filling with water; claw marks are evident in the mud—perhaps the dragon, or one of its servants, dug the hole.
12. The dragon's name is carved into the wall in overly large, crude letters. The name is carved in the language of dragons and so its meaning may not be evident to the characters.

DRAGON DRESSING: DISTINGUISHING MARKS

Black dragons are as individual as any member of a species; they all have a unique appearance.

1. A vivid patch of white scales highlights the portion of the dragon's chest between its front legs.
2. A livid, dirty scar runs down the dragon's left front leg. By the looks of the scar, the wound never healed properly. The dragon favours its other leg.
3. One of the dragon's eyes glimmers balefully at its enemies; a mass of scar tissue surrounds the other milky white eye.
4. The dragon's two horns are curved into tight spirals and are set close to the creature's head.
5. The dragon's frill is tall, but ragged, and extends about three-quarters of the way down its long, sinuous neck.
6. Foul-smelling, slightly steaming drool drips from the dragon's jaws. Several of the beast's lower fangs end in jagged, blackened stumps.
7. The stench of rotting vegetation and fetid swamp water intermixed with a slight, noxious tang of chlorine emanates from the dragon.
8. The dragon's red-rimmed eyes are different colours; the left eye is blue, while the other is green.



3: BLACK DRAGON LAIR MINOR SIGHTS, SOUNDS & EVENTS

Dragon lairs are not staid, unchanging places. While they might have only one resident, things of minor note still happen within.

Use the table below, to add minor sights, sounds and events to the black dragon's lair:

1. A faintly acidic smell hangs in the air; it is heavier, closer to the floor and is particularly marked in "low-lying" portion of the lair.
2. Dirty swamp water drips from the ceiling. The constant pitter patter of water hitting the floor makes hearing subtle sounds in the lair harder.
3. From the direction of the lair's entrance, a faint wind sighs through the area; it plucks at the water or mud coating the floor creating small wavelets that break against the chamber walls and the characters' ankles.
4. Small pieces of mud fall from the ceiling and land on the floor with quiet splattering sounds. Alternatively, the mud splashes into a nearby muddy puddle.
5. A quiet squelching sound reaches the characters' ears, from deeper into the lair.
6. A faint, low mist covers the ground, giving the mud an odd, ethereal look. The mist swirls and eddies about the characters' ankles as they move through the cavern-paranoid characters may think the wisps of mist resemble tentacles reaching up from the floor.
7. A sudden splash from a nearby pool shatters the quiet. Something might lair in the pool or perhaps something fell into the fetid water. Large ripples overflow the pool's bank.
8. A small sickly green-coloured swamp viper slithers across the floor; it is not aggressive and flees if approached.
9. Perceptive characters hear a quiet, low chuckle from somewhere deeper into the lair. The chuckle goes on for about half a minute before fading away.
10. A sudden gust of sullen wind redolent with the smell of decay and the faint hint of marsh gas sweeps over the party.
11. A jumbled mass of pitted and partially melted bones, intermingled with scraps of rotting and rusting equipment, shows where another adventuring party met their doom. The dragon has removed any surviving treasures or trinkets to its hoard; there is nothing of value here.

12. The characters encounter a pocket of fetid swamp gas. Perhaps the gas was blown into the lair from outside or this area has a particularly high concentration of noxious gases. In any event, the smell is revolting and the party's natural light sources turn blue and flicker sullenly.

DRAGON DRESSING: WHAT'S THE DRAGON DOING?

Black dragons don't just hang around their lair waiting for adventurers to wander inside.

1. The dragon is sleeping on its back after a large meal of melted elf. The beast is unprepared for battle and furious to discover intruders in its lair.
2. The dragon is slowly pulling apart two lizardfolk corpses and eating them in a surprisingly dainty fashion. The smell of melted flesh gives the party some clue to what they will discover before they enter the chamber.
3. The dragon is faking sleep and is expecting trouble (either it has noticed the intruders or its sixth sense has alerted it to impending danger). It has already cast any long duration protective spells it knows.
4. The dragon is happily sorting through its hoard, examining its most beloved treasures. It is muttering and chuckling to itself, when the characters arrive.
5. The dragon has just finished torturing and eviscerating a captive. As the characters arrive, it tosses aside the limp corpse and licks the unfortunate's blood from its claws.
6. The dragon is stalking about its lair in search of one of its treasures that it has just discovered is missing. It is muttering loudly about thieves and what it will do to the thief when it captures him.
7. The dragon is rubbing its scaly body into the mud coating one wall and moaning with pleasure as it covers a hard-to-get-at itch.
8. The dragon is a devout worshipper of Tiamat. When the characters arrive, the dragon is praying to his dark mistress in hopes of gaining some unspeakable boon. Thus, he sees the intruders as a test (or perhaps a gift) sent by Tiamat herself!



4: BLACK DRAGON TREASURES & TRINKETS

Dragons are renown for their vast treasure hoards—it's one of the main reason adventurers seek their lairs. While much of the hoard likely comprises coinage and the like, inevitably other interesting objects—of a variety of values—will be mixed in with the rest.

Use this table below, to add depth and flavour to the dragon's hoard and assign a value to each piece of treasure suitable for your campaign.

1. A spear rests upright against a wall, chest or other large piece of treasure. Its shaft is fully ten-foot long and its point is long and tapered. Several tribal charms—feathers, strips of snakeskin and the like—now caked in dried blood hang from the haft.
2. A book entitled, "Vilimzair Aralivar: His Amazing Life" lies open on an upturned chest. The book's title is embossed in gold leaf and the pages are rendered in beautiful, flowing elven script. The book details—briefly—the life of the legendary pirate-bard Vilimzair Aralivar and his motley band of inept followers.
3. A black-stained hardwood mask of a leering crocodile face leans against a pile of coins. The mask has lost the straps that once held it to a warrior's face, but is an excellent example of a local lizardfolk tribe's war masks.
4. A muddy silver mechanical bird lies on its side at the bottom of an ornate, blood-splattered silver cage. The bird has tiny red, glimmering eyes crafted from flecks of ruby. The bird's key still nestles in its chest; turning the key activates the bird which then sings and flutters its wings.
5. Four small jade statuettes are scattered throughout the hoard. One depicts an owlbear, another a minotaur and the last two archaic hunters dressed in simply garb. The four statuettes are obviously a set.
6. Bound in scarlet-hued leather this large book bears the title, "Dragons and their Ilk". The book's yellowed pages are mud-stained and dried blood mars several pages.
7. Its collar and hems decorated with fine silver thread woven into all manner of arcane symbols this bright blue wizard's robe is surprisingly intact and unblemished.
8. This bright white hunting horn crafted from a unicorn's horn hangs from a short supple leather thong.
9. This thin, narrow box is beginning to rot, but its contents—two bolts of red silk—are in excellent condition.
10. Rolled up tightly in an iron scroll tube this parchment map depicts—in exquisite detail—the surrounding swamp.
11. The hilt of this five-foot long greatsword is missing—melted away by the dragon's breath. The sword's blade, however, is in excellent condition and remains sharp. If repaired, its workmanship is so fine it could be used in the crafting of a magical weapon.
12. Thin and fragile, this plain platinum ring is sized for a halfling—or perhaps a human's smallest finger.
13. Finished with a copper wash so as to appear green, this fine plate armour has elaborate dragon-shaped pauldrons.
14. This small steel shield has a single, wickedly curved spike protruding from its boss.
15. The graven symbol of the dwarven god of war decorates the heads of this heavy all-steel warhammer.
16. This once fine golden statuette depicted a dragon curled up asleep. The green dragon has vandalised the statuette however, prizing out its gemstone eyes (which lie somewhere in the hoard) and scratching and melting some of the statuette's finer features.
17. Delicately wrought, this large, almost man-sized porcelain vase has delicate blue and red wave-like patterns painted all over its body.
18. This black onyx paperweight is carved into the shape of a rampaging boar.
19. A sodden and ruined velvet pouch holds a set of five ivory six-sided dice.
20. This sable battle standard bears the plain white crest of a rampant swan.

DRAGON DRESSING: WORN TRINKETS

Black dragons are vain creatures. Sometimes they'll augment their appearance with various shiny baubles. Some might be magical, others might be merely pretty.

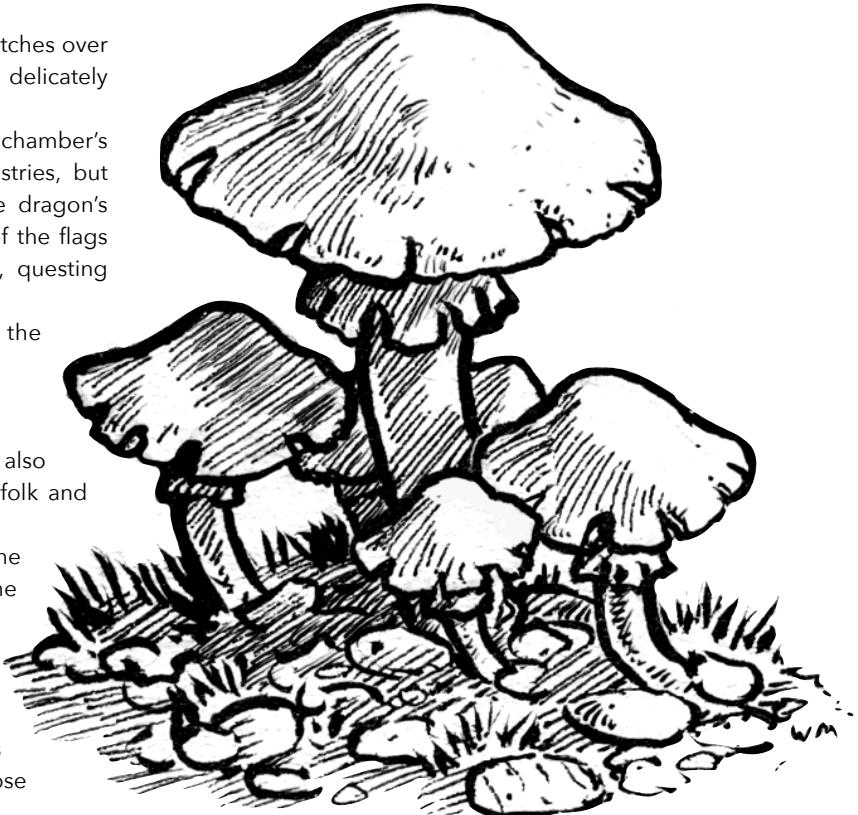
1. This dragon has daubed several strange symbols on its chest using different colour mud. The mud is dried and cracked. The symbols are decorative, and don't mean anything in particular, but some characters may waste valuable seconds trying to discern their meaning.
2. The dragon wears three large, heavy gold bands as eyebrow rings. The three rings faintly jingle when the dragon moves its head violently.
3. The dragon wears an over-sized golden teardrop-shaped pendant on a thick silver chain around its neck. Faint cracks criss-cross the pendant's surface which could have magical powers or it could be merely decorative. (Alternatively, the pendant could be the broken phylactery of a long-dead lich).
4. A beautifully wrought leather bracer with sigils picked out by thin silver wire covers one of the dragon's claws.
5. The dragon wears a plain silver torc as a monocle.
6. A massive earring of gold, silver and brass shaped like a grinning skull hangs from the dragon's left earlobe. The earring is of giantcraft.
7. The dragon wears a thick, iron signet ring on the smallest finger of its left claw. The ring bears the heraldic symbols of crossed spears over a crocodile's head.
8. Two cloaks sized for halflings or gnomes—one blue, the other red—are woven together to form a jaunty scarf of sorts which the dragon wears about its neck. The dragon is proud of its scarf and tries to keep it clean.

5: BLACK DRAGON HOARD DRESSING

Black dragon hoards can be immense in scope and value. Among the treasures and trinkets, however, most dragons have also accumulated objects that might not fall under the traditional heading of treasure, but which are interesting and flavoursome none-the-less.

Use the table below, to add such objects of interest to the dragon's hoard:

1. Pieces of broken and splintered wood lie intermingled with the dragon's hoard. All are rotting and decayed.
2. Skulls of the dragon's slain enemies are set about its hoard atop decaying wooden stakes or spear shafts driven deep into the ground.
3. A rotting barrel partially sunken into the mud holds several weapons including two spears, a rusting longsword and a longbow without its string.
4. A chest lies amid the dragon's hoard; its lid has long since been snapped off, but the dragon still uses the chest to hold treasures which might be ruined if they got muddy or wet.
5. The dragon has created raised beds and pillars of mud to better display some of its choicest treasures. These rise above the main body of the hoard to a height of between five and 15 ft. Some of the pillars are slender affairs that collapse if anyone tries to scale them.
6. Shallow channels gouged into the floor, divert the worst of any fetid swamp water away from the dragon's bed and hoard. Bones and the remains of various animals—and perhaps previous would-be dragonslayers—choke some sections of the channels.
7. A small pyramid comprising a score or so skulls watches over the dragon's hoard. Golden coins have been delicately placed in each skull's eye sockets.
8. Faded, mud-streaked tapestries hang down the chamber's walls. The wall hangings comprise not just tapestries, but rugs, battle flags and the like all taken from the dragon's previous victims. The party may recognise some of the flags as being from vanished adventuring companies, questing nobles and the like.
9. The dragon has scratched a crude map of the surroundings on the ceiling of the cave. The map depicts various settlements and the like as well as several mysterious caves which the party did not know previously existed. The dragon has also drawn various figures on the map—humans, lizardfolk and the like to remind it which races live where.
10. A cunning, but crude, trap wards the chamber. The dragon has excavated a deep pit in front of the chamber's entrance and roofed it with branches covered in mud. Characters stepping onto the seemingly solid floor plummet into a fetid, mud-filled hole.
11. A rusting set of partially melted plate armour lies among the hoard. The rotting, disembowelled corpse
- of a muscular man yet lies within. He has clearly been dead for months. The platemail is, sadly, ruined.
12. The sodden bloodstained remains of a once fine lady's riding saddle lie upturned amid the hoard, covered with coins and other precious objects.
13. A plain set of pan pipes crafted from hollowed bones and lashed together with green and red string lies hidden among other treasures. Perhaps a gem or two is wedged inside the pipes and might be overlooked by casual searchers.
14. A large iron-banded chest lies on its side, its lid shut, but not locked. The chest is filled with mundane bits and bobs that have captured the dragon's interest.
15. Shards of a smashed tankard lie at the bottom of a shredded, rotten backpack along with a coiled black leather whip.
16. An apothecary's set of pouches still attached to a stout belt encircle the waist of a skeleton buried under the hoard. The pouches contain nothing but rotting herbs and spoiled unguents and the like. The whole smells slightly off-putting.
17. Mushrooms sprout among the hoard; some are small while others have grown monstrously large.
18. Rusted and pitted with age this 20-foot long sinuous iron chain lies like a slumbering snake under the dragon's hoard.
19. Ten jars of honey fill a straw-filled box. Although the straw is rank and rotten, the honey is still perfectly edible.
20. This brass candelabra lies on its side in the mud. Originally designed with six arms, one of them has snapped off and is lost elsewhere in the hoard.



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