

# Cloverspring Swamp: A Black Dragon Encounter

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## Read to Player (Hook):

The oppressive silence of the Cloverspring Swamp is broken only by the rhythmic croaking of unseen frogs and the buzzing of fat, lethargic flies. The air hangs heavy with the scent of decaying vegetation and the fetid musk of stagnant water. Mangled cypress knees pierce the murky surface like skeletal fingers reaching for the sky, and gnarled branches of ancient, moss-draped trees form a claustrophobic canopy overhead. Sunlight struggles to penetrate the dense foliage, casting long, eerie shadows that writhe and

twist on the fetid water below. Your path through is a treacherous mix of mud and hidden roots.

As you press on, a low growl echoes through the swamp, a sound that sends a shiver down your spine and raises the hairs on the back of your neck. The murky water begins to churn, and a monstrous black shape emerges from the depths.

## Setting:

The party finds themselves deep within the treacherous Cloverspring Swamp near the lowlands outside of Cresthaven. The oppressive atmosphere and murky water create a sense of danger and claustrophobia. The young black dragon lies submerged in a particularly stagnant pool, its presence hidden until it chooses to attack.

## Player Configuration:

This combat encounter is designed for a party of 4-6 adventurers of 5th level or higher.

## Main Challenge:

**Tenebris** (Young Black Dragon): Tenebris is a vicious predator, but unlike some dragons, he isn't above a little cowardice. He will happily fight opponents he deems weaker, but against a well-matched group, he'll resort to dirty tactics and retreat if necessary. He will use the swamp environment to his advantage, ambushing the party from the murky depths and using his blindsight to navigate unseen. He revels in inflicting pain and suffering, toying with wounded prey before delivering the final blow.

### Tactics:

Tenebris will use the following tactics during the encounter:

- **Acid Breath Ambush:** Upon sensing intruders near, Tenebris erupts from the pool, unleashing a blast of acid breath in a surprise attack aimed at the party clustered together. He will target the weakest member of the party first, using his bite and claws to inflict maximum damage.
- **Hit and Run:** Tenebris will use his superior mobility to his advantage, attacking from the water and then retreating back into the depths before the party can retaliate. He may even drag an injured party member underwater to drown them.
- **Spells:** Tenebris will use his spells strategically, such as casting darkness 10' to hinder their attacks. He may also use spells to manipulate the swamp environment, creating difficult terrain or obscuring the battlefield.
- **Foul Temper:** If the fight doesn't go his way, Tenebris's temper will flare. He may lash out with reckless attacks, forgetting about his hit-and-run tactics in his rage. This could be an opportunity for the party

to exploit his weakness.

- **Cowardice:** If Tenebris is on the verge of defeat, he will not hesitate to flee. He may even abandon his hoard altogether if he feels his life is in danger. However, this doesn't mean he's given up. A black dragon never forgets a slight, and Tenebris will likely plot his revenge from the shadows.
- **Retreat:** If Tenebris is losing or if you just want to have the battle change to an environmental challenge, have him diving to this pool and describe him sliding out of sight into a cave hinting that there is more to the pool.

## Possible Player Actions:

The party has several options for dealing with the dragon:

- **Direct Assault:** The party can attempt to attack the dragon directly, using ranged attacks and spells to overcome its superior size and strength. However, the dragon's murky water concealment and blindsight make this a risky proposition.
- **Area of Effect Spells:** The party can use spells that create difficult terrain or obscure the vision of the dragon to make it harder for it to attack.
- **Grappling:** The party can attempt to grapple the dragon and drag it out of the water, negating its blindsight advantage. However, this is a dangerous tactic, as the dragon will thrash and bite to try to free itself.
- **Escape:** The party can attempt to escape from the swamp altogether. However, the dragon may give chase, making escape difficult.
- **Deception:** Tenebris is arrogant and enjoys toying with his prey. A clever party member may be able to trick him into revealing himself or attacking recklessly. They could use illusions to distract him, forge a truce (that Tenebris has no intention of keeping), or appeal to his vanity to get the upper hand.
- **Exploiting his Cowardice:** If the party can make Tenebris feel threatened by a superior force (even a bluff or illusion), they may be able to scare him off without a fight.

## Potential Outcomes:

- **Victory:** If the party defeats the dragon, they can claim its hoard as a reward. The dragon's lair may also contain other treasures, such as magical weapons and armor.
- **Defeat:** If the party is defeated by the dragon, they may become its prisoners or be devoured outright.
- **Escape:** If the party manages to escape the dragon, they can continue on their way through the swamp. However, the dragon may still pose a threat

in the future.

## Further Ideas:

- The party may discover clues that lead them to Tenebris's lair before they encounter him. These clues could include dragon scales, tracks, or the remains of previous victims, some possibly still clinging to life as a twisted amusement for the dragon.
- Tenebris's true lair is a cave located at the bottom of the stagnant pool. The murky water and the swirling fog obscure the entrance, making it nearly impossible to detect unless Tenebris chooses to reveal it, or he is killed.
- The party may learn of a local hermit or druid who knows about Tenebris and can offer them advice on how to defeat him, perhaps detailing the dragon's weaknesses or cowardly nature.
- Tenebris's hoard could include a key or artifact that is essential for the party's quest, but also a particularly nasty magical item that reflects his sadistic personality. This could be a cursed weapon that inflicts excruciating pain on its victims or a cruel torture device. The party will have to decide if the potential reward is worth the risk of using such an evil item.

## Tenebris Lair

To enter the lair, the party will need to brave the murky depths. The stagnant water is a murky green, visibility limited to a few feet at most. The descent is a treacherous one:

- **Depth:** The opening is roughly 20 feet below the surface of the water.
- **Current:** The stagnant water offers no current, but the descent will likely stir up sediment, further reducing visibility.
- **Hazards:** The murky water might conceal hidden dangers like submerged branches, sharp rocks, or even aquatic creatures drawn to the commotion. The Dungeon Master can decide if there are any environmental hazards or encounters during the descent.

### Reaching the Cave:

Once the adventurers reach a depth of 30 feet (20 feet down + 10 feet up), they will find themselves at the entrance of a natural cave. The water level drops here, creating a small air pocket within the cave. The air inside the cave is likely stale and damp, but breathable.

The stench of decay and dragon musk mingles with the damp air as you enter Tenebris's lair. Light from torches dances across a scene of avarice and

chaos. Treasure spills out from a gaping maw in the cavern wall, revealing the dragon's ill-gotten gains.

### **Scattered Riches:**

- Heaps of silver coins, dull and tarnished, lie scattered across the cavern floor, a testament to Tenebris's careless hoarding.
- A single, ornately carved chest, crafted from a dark wood and banded with iron, sits precariously on a rock outcropping. Its hinges are broken, and its contents lie spilled out – a jumble of gemstones, glittering in the flickering torchlight.
- A heavy canvas bag, bulging at the seams, leans against the wall. This likely holds Tenebris's collection of gold coins, the clinking of loose change a constant reminder of his greed.
- Amongst the coins and gems, a motley collection of jewelry is strewn about. Tarnished silver necklaces, chipped gemstones set in crude rings, and a single golden bracelet adorned with a grotesque gargoyle all hint at Tenebris's lack of discrimination in his plunder.

### **Magic and Mystery:**

- Tucked away in a shadowy corner, half-hidden by a pile of bones, lies a leather satchel. This likely contains Tenebris's collection of magical items – potions with swirling, unknown liquids and scrolls tied with faded ribbons. The air around them crackles with a faint magical energy.

## **Treasure:**

Don't forget treasure is heavy and getting it out of the cave can be a challenge onto itself.

- Copper pieces: 3,000
- Silver pieces: 67,000
- Gold pieces: 50,000
- Platinum pieces: 3,500
- A pouch containing 1,000 gp worth of gemstones
- A suit of +1 chain mail, marred by cruel gouges and scratches that hint at its dark history
- A potion of healing
- A scroll of fireball
- A jeweled amulet that, when activated, releases a debilitating aura of pain on all nearby creatures (including the wearer). This could be a powerful tool in the right hands, but its cruel nature may make some party members hesitant to use it.

Should the party emerge triumphant from their encounter with Tenebris, they will find themselves in possession of a substantial quantity of prime black dragon hide. This material is highly sought after by skilled armorers due to its unique properties. See [How it's Made: Dragonhide Armor](#) for more details.

**Experience Points:** 2,750 for the dragon, plus any experience for treasure