



MONSTER STORY: SHAMAN

The responsibility of a leader is a heavy burden to bear. My tribe made a good life for themselves on the remains of the sundered world. The food was sufficient, if not plentiful, our enemies lived in apprehension, if not in fear.

It was survival, yes, but was it a life? Would we ever reach the glory promised to us by the spirits of the land whose voices I hear? The promises came, and I led my warriors into battle and they ripped our foes apart limb from limb, winning us a chance to survive another day, another week, another year. Survive. Nothing more.

It made the tribe happy for the hard-won spoils taste sweeter than they should, no matter how sparse they truly are. We settled for what we got and we persevered.

But I am no ordinary shaman. My essence is attuned to many kinds of voices, not just the spirits my people are accustomed to. The new whispers that entered my mind were dark and hollow, like a shadow sliding across a stagnant pool. Barely leaving a trace. The promises they made went beyond survival. They showed greatness, true greatness, like that of the colossal cities of the dark elves deep in the earth – things of legends. Terrible and glorious.

Such power was available to those who were willing to strive for it, for those willing to find the tools necessary and to have the courage to use these tools. The swirling energies promised to me made my past magics seem weak in comparison. I was no longer content to perform weather dances and battle rituals, healing the wounds of my tribe's warriors and interpreting omens. I yearned the true power, unleashing terror, inspiring awe. It was all possible but for that I needed something else in addition to my abilities. Obsidian. The shade crystal, the powerful focus of magical energies.

The surface has precious little of it and so my visions have led my tribe down into the depths of the caverns – a decision that was questioned by many and understood by few members of my warband. There we made a new home – finding a set of chambers, growing accustomed to hunting the strange subterranean beasts. Making peace with some of the inhabitants of the caves, slaughtering others. There was no shortage of violence to go around in these depths and that has kept my tribe happy. Such is the way of the orc.

All this time one thing was on my mind. Obsidian. The power it contained beckoned and I have charged my orcs with finding it at any cost. Some of those who did were deformed into wretched, mutated creatures as their weak bodies could not contain the crystal's glorious potential. Other shards have made their way to me. Every one of these, I have put to use. It grew my mystical power. I have experimented with granting additional prowess to some of the beasts that my tribe keeps with some success.

As far as my warriors know, we might have been squatting in a dank, moldy cave, but in reality we were sharpening the blade that would cut a bloody swath through our enemies old and new. There was but one thing left. Now that I knew the properties and a way to focus the energies of the obsidian crystals, I needed a large and stable supply.

The descent into the city of the dark elves was a difficult trial, even for me. The hollow voices guided my steps. The spells I have rehearsed proved effective on the sentries and made my passage undiscernible even to the powerful wards put in place by the subterranean masters of magic. I was able to infiltrate the obsidian storage of the great dark city.

I remember the feeling when I set foot in that room. Pulsating with energy. Unending power. Unlimited potential. Stack upon stack of the refined crystals – more than I ever thought could exist in one place without immediately causing a second cataclysm. I collapsed to my knees in awe and I couldn't help but weep in the sheer astonishment of what this meant.

I carried off as much as I could. The dark elves' vengeance would likely come for me but surrounded by my warriors in the upper caverns and with all this power at my disposal I now felt confident I could protect myself. The power emanated from my heavy bag – waves of energy so strong they created palpable distortions in the dark air of the caverns around.

This would change everything.

The obsidian was safely stashed in secret hiding places around the warcamp and harder to access parts of the tunnels. It was now only a matter of forming a plan of how and when to unleash the power at my command. My strolls through the endless foreboding caverns got longer and more pensive as I perfected my designs, immersed myself in them. I longed to put my newfound power to a worthy test.

It was then I heard stumbling steps up ahead. A dry smile cracked my withered lips as I grasped a shard I was wearing on my neck, feeling the energy course through me, hearing the echoes of the hollow voices in my mind. The poor wretch was doomed, whatever it was. Greatness awaited.