



MONSTER STORY: WYVERN

I knew I was much too old for this when they asked me to come along. Come, Elder, we will protect you, your wisdom will guide us to unimaginable riches and secrets you could only dream about!

Went for it like a mush-brained youngling. Well, no need to dwell on it, can't keep it against them now that they're all dead.

My knowledge has served me well and knowing the tongue and customs of the greenskins came in handy as I bribed the goblin with my makeshift dagger and bartered my life from the marauding hyena-like creature who was more interested in my possessions than my life. Yet for the last few hours I felt a presence stalking my path – something big, though yet unseen. You don't live as long as me in places where I lived without learning to feel when you are being watched.

So that is how it feels to be prey. The screech of claw against the rocks, slithering of scales against the stone – a giant lizard of some sort? I try to keep to the shadows but I know the beast has my scent. My many wounds bleed and I am not hard to track.

This large cavern is taking me in the right direction. On the opposite side of it, high up on a ledge I see dim light filtering into the darkness of the underground. Safety at last! I rush to make my way up the slope, towards the light where I can see the exit, but it is now that my stalker makes its appearance – as I grab at a stone to pull myself up, I hear a barely audible slither and a terrible pain in my foot as mighty jaws chomp down on it. Screaming in agony I tumble down and find myself face to face with a monster of legends. A wyvern! I have read much about the poisonous tail spikes of these insatiable predators but my predicament does not leave much time to ponder lore.

I roll aside just in time to avoid a powerful claw strike – these are razor sharp and sink into stone as if it was a trunk of a tree. I shudder at the thought of what would happen if these were to rend my flesh. As the beast struggles to free its winged arm I take my chance and take a wild swing with my club – all that was left of my walking stick. An audible crack and a hiss of pain tells me the beast felt it, yet now it is free and I must flee. As I rush off, a whip of its spiked tail catches me in the back – the wound is not that serious but it burns. Taking cover behind a boulder I feel the bloody gash on my back – indeed, blood is mixed with the emerald venom on my fingers when I examine my hand. Time is short.

Limping, I make way to a small crevasse in the cavern walls – the beast rushes to chase me but I make it just before it catches up to me. Panicked, my vision blurring from the venom taking effect I think, my mind racing feverishly. Of course! The damned thing will eat anything. Reaching into my pack I take out some of the snake meat that I was saving for later and the little bag of the poisonous herbs I found earlier. Wyverns will eat anything without thinking – I throw out my improvised bait and sure enough the beast, gulps it up, the chunk of meat disappearing instantly in its giant maw. It still scratches and thrashes against the small opening where I am hiding, trembling, but now I know it's only a matter of time before my own poison works.

Indeed, soon I hear the mad struggle give way to a hiss of agony as the huge winged shape thrashes on the floor, its insides set aflame by the herbs I mixed. Now is my time! I rush out, my club swinging, going for its head. In its mad erratic movements, it does not try to evade me and I get several mighty blows in – it is as if the strength of my youth returns in this desperate hour. Its tail, waving around chaotically catches me again and again, the spike leaving bloody gashes on my arms and chest. I pay no attention to it as I strike the monster's head until a loud crack echoes through the caves and its mad struggle subsides.

I let go of my club, resisting the consuming desire to fall to my knees in exhaustion. For a moment I consider taking samples from the monstrous corpse in front of me but quickly decide that survival is the only thing that matters now. Swaying, my vision swimming I make several uncertain steps towards the ledge – where I see the pale daylight seeping in, promising salvation.

Step, another step. Pushing myself to the very edge of my strength, beyond it, just to get to the light. The burning of my wounds becomes too much to bear. The venom coursing through my aching body finally overcomes me. I stumble and fall, coughing up blood, everything going dark.

I raise my head to look at the light one last time. So close, yet an infinity away. I knew I was too old for this.