



MONSTER STORY 2: BUGBEAR

The creature was not what I expected. The tracks in the moss were bird-like, but there was nothing avian about the body of the towering brute blocking my path.

A curse under my breath as I wished I had spent more time studying the prints as I usually did out in the woods. I would not have settled for my flimsy makeshift spear as a weapon of choice had I known my foe would be this massive.

The creature was panting heavily – its enormous bulk rising and falling visibly, its raspy breath visible in the cold, damp cave air. It seemed pleased to see me, relishing the violence to come, weighing its heavy club of rotten wood, as if trying to judge how many crushing blows I would take. Not many, I thought to myself, as I tried to center my attention.

Its face distorted by a wide, murderous grin, the giant launched towards me. It was slow, its steps heavy, but there wasn't much room for acrobatics. Dodging under its first swipe, my spear managed to slash through the straps holding its armor together. The inconvenience only seemed to amuse it as it threw off the hanging plate and advanced on me, its hardened flesh bearing the scars of many battles.

I stumbled as I tried to retreat, yet with my last strength I thrust my spear – again and again and again. All my desperation, all my hatred of this forsaken place went into the strikes that I hoped would be enough to bring the beast down. To my horror, the attacks left only flesh wounds as the monster let me wear myself out and become careless with my strikes. A crushing strike of the club caught me square in the chest, sending the world spinning. I felt a heavy impact of the cavern floor and barely managed to open my eyes. The brute was advancing, its grin widening. Its skull belt, it seemed, was overdue for a new trophy.