



# MONSTER STORY: CAVE BEAR

By EB Darwin

I am alone. I entered these caverns with two other hunters, on the trail of a magnificent beast – a bear of such massive proportions as to leave even the most stout-hearted in a paralyzing panic.

This creature would be my most ultimate trophy and I would end the terror it brought to our village. The hunt was on.

My companions and I followed the trail from the dark forest, tracking footprints with a span larger than two hands of a hulking man. Snapped twigs, bowed bushes, mountainous piles of scat, this beast did not move stealthily. It is an apex predator, hunted by nothing save humans, and even then, it would make short work out of the most skilled warrior.

The three of us knew what we were doing and we knew it would take our combined training, skills, and cunning to trap and slay this ursine monstrosity.

It led us to the dark caverns, a place that we knew to be infested with all manner of dark and foul creatures. We knew of the dangers that lurked within and we were prepared. A slit throat of a goblin there, one of the annoying shrieking mushrooms here. The hunt continued.

As our eyes adjusted the darkness, we could hear the beast not too far away, snorting, growling, plodding through the caverns, not a monster willing to step in its path. We entered a large cavern, high ceilinged, open ground. Here we would meet our quarry. It turned and stood on its hind legs. Such raw power, roped muscles twitching under heavy fur. It was scarred, one eye milky, having obviously survived many hunts. This would be its last, I was certain.

My two companions, giddy from the thrill of the hunt, advanced before we could signal to each other. The fools stepped forward, let arrows fly into the bear's hide. With a lightning strike of its enormous claws, the bear decapitated them. Their headless bodies, letting loose geysers of blood from their torn necks, collapsed to the ground. The bear snorted, almost taunting me, before bolting deeper into the caverns.

I pursued, foolish perhaps, but I saw it could be wounded. I tracked it deeper and deeper through the tunnels, beginning to wonder if I was the hunter or the hunted.

I came to a bend in the tunnel. Peering around, I saw that the bear stood in a colossal cavern nearly the size of a cathedral. This would be the last stand. I knew now it would not be easily vanquished, that it would in defeat still have fight left in it. I readied myself. The bear's maw opened wide, baring yellowed fangs the size of daggers, and bellowed an ear-splitting, earth-rumbling roar. Every foul creature in this gods-forsaken place would know I was here. If I survive this fight, it won't be my last.