

A detailed illustration of a Gnoll character, a creature with a grey, spotted body and a long, flowing red mane. It has a single visible white eye and a wide, toothy grin. The character is wearing a red cloth around its neck and a metal helmet with a faceplate. It is holding a long, curved blade in its right hand and a staff or polearm in its left. The background is dark and rocky.

MONSTER STORY: GNOLL

My one good eye is still not used to how dim everything is down here – still squinting, still coughing at the dampness of the air.

You can feel it thick-sick with spores of the pathetic plants that manage to survive here. Not that up where I came from is better of course. Scarred land they call it, ruined plains – miles and miles of wasteland marked by wrecks of long-abandoned buildings and settlements. Home.

I come down here often in search of a score. These tunnels are dangerous, yes, but they bring rewards to those smart and cunning like me, those who know where and how to look. The wretches that inhabit this dimness are so scared for their life – they are easy prey for someone who is only after their things. Yes, not all have something worth taking, but I make do. Sometimes the smaller and more pathetic creatures can help find a bigger prize – jealousy and ill wishes are plentiful down here.

Weapons, tools, bits of armor, even shiny bits that make the fur stand on the back of your neck – all will do. I take all of it – quiet where I need to be, quick when I wasn't quiet enough, deadly when I am not quick enough to get away. The hobgoblin stock-piles are easy to break in to and the slobbering bugbear guards are usually asleep on the post. And then there are the hated orcs. I spit and hiss even thinking of the bastard race. There are not many of them down here but I always draw a blade whenever I spot one. I like to make them bleed, choke on their own blood.

They hold sway over much of the Scarred lands above, all the good hunting grounds, all the good water. My pack fought them and fought them and we lose for we are too few and they are fierce in open combat. Many friends I lost to the orcs. My mate. I like to make them bleed, especially for that.

So now we scavenge for what we can – taking, robbing, stealing. We bring it back and then it is sold in the stinking alleyways of the remaining human towns, arranged through those who are not too picky to deal with us. We get rich. There are many in the Scarred lands who would spill blood for coin and soon we will have coin enough to spill a lot of orcish blood. The lands will not know such a bloodletting since the great cataclysm that scarred and ruined them.

But I must be vigilant, my p

rey is on the move again. She has a small bag with her – I hear some promising jingling but also a large mallet that she seems able to swing well. She seems to have gone to the section where the strange idols guard small trinkets – knowing the idols' power I dared not take these. Taking it from her will be much easier. All I need is the bag and the maul – I don't care if she lives, I can smell that she's suffered many wounds. Killing her would make the blood race faster but I must be careful – it is the prize that matters, something to bring back to the pack.

Every trinket is a coin, every coin is a mercenary, every mercenary is a dead orc bleeding into the Scarred Lands that will belong to the Gnolls once more.