

MONSTER STORY: TROGLODYTE

Splash. A red blot is drying on the wall of the cave. A bit of kobold blood, some guano, venom drained from a giant spider corpse. A good mix, perfected by years.



My claws spread the substance out, drawing uneven curved lines upon the rough stone. The markings tell a story – every one of them that I leave on these walls, every one of these painted on my own scales. This one is a warning to all those who would set foot on our land. They would die and their bile would be used to leave warnings to those who would follow.

I keep tracing the lines, curving them in tight small circles – it is a sign of anger, of fury. My people were slaves once – subjugated to serve the accursed dark elves in the under-cities of great depths. Their cruel magics bound our minds to their will and we toiled endlessly not knowing rest or pride. Many of my ancestors died harvesting the shade crystals – the source of the elves' power. The stories of their pain and death mark many surfaces here.

The markings allowed our elders to guide us to freedom – they told us who we are, allowed us to break the bonds of the elves' magic and to awaken our ancient pride. We have escaped, though many died in the attempts and during the journey upwards, for the path out of the great depths of the elvish cities lies through tunnels of unimaginable darkness where terrible things dwell.

We have settled these caverns and have called them home, as many others have. First the goblins and the kobolds did not understand the markings staking our claim. We made them understand with blood and pain. We bide our time as our territory grows, as the stories we leave through our markings grow. There are many tribes here – some are powerful and not to be trifled with. Others, like the hobgoblins are complacent and do not heed the warnings of the markings. Their time will come soon. And then there are the surface dwellers. They mean to encroach on these caves and we must not let them.

We have felt the tremors of the terrible earthquake above decades ago and have felt it to be the work of the same powers that the dark elves have called upon. Intruders from the surface seek to claim the riches of the caverns – secrets left behind by those who lived here long ago, secrets best left undisturbed. For, as our ancestors learned, no one uses this power for good once they obtain it – only to enslave and oppress. Never again. We will make sure of that and the markings will guide us and tell our story.