

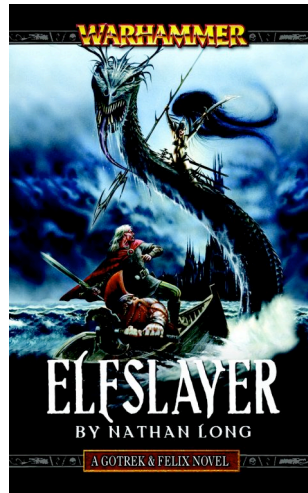
BL PUBLISHING

ELFSLAYER

A Gotrek & Felix novel

By Nathan Long

While travelling to Marienburg to fulfil his dying father's last request, Felix Jaeger and the Dwarf Trollslayer Gotrek run into their old acquaintance Max Schreiber and his beautiful travelling companion, the seeress Claudia Pallenberger. The two Imperial wizards have been sent to investigate disturbing portents off the north coast of the Empire and ask Gotrek and Felix to join them. Together the four companions set sail for the Sea of Claws, where they discover a terrifying plot that threatens the Empire and beyond.



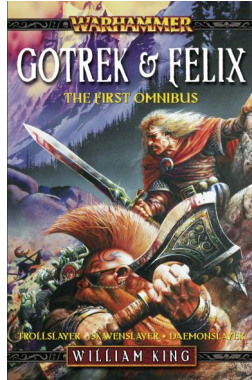
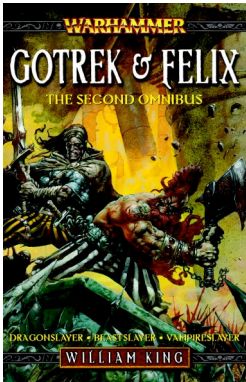
Can Gotrek & Felix fight their way through a black ark swarming with dark elves in time to stop a coven of sorceresses from unleashing a spell that could pull the very world itself apart?

About the Author

Nathan Long has worked as a screenwriter for fifteen years, during which time he has had three movies made and a handful of live-action and animated TV episodes produced. He has also written three novels, and several award-winning short stories. He lives in Hollywood.

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Book 10 – ELFSLAYER by Nathan Long

The following is an excerpt from *Elflayer* by Nathan Long.
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THEY MADE THEIR way circuitously back to the Three Bells, taking alleys and lesser bridges to avoid the watch. Felix was miserable the whole way, wet and cold in the windy Marienburg sunshine, with his drenched clothes hanging off him like they were made of lead and his boots squishing with every step. Gotrek, annoyingly, didn't seem bothered in the least.

Felix slowed as they reached the last corner before the inn, worried that there would be a company of the watch waiting for them at the door. He leaned his head out to have a look, and felt a different sort of chill as he saw that there were indeed Black Caps milling outside the door of the inn. He pulled back instinctively, but then looked again, frowning. If the watch was there for them, what were they doing carrying people out of the inn on stretchers? And why were the landlord and the serving women all talking to them at once?

‘Something’s happened,’ he said.

Gotrek had a look too, then shrugged. ‘As long as they’re still serving.’

He tromped forwards single-mindedly. Felix followed more cautiously, keeping his head down, but the Black Caps didn't seem interested in him or the Slayer in the slightest. They were too busy helping sickly-looking people out onto the street and interviewing the owner of the Bells. More sick people sat on the cobbles, coughing and retching. A few were weeping. People from

neighbouring businesses clustered outside their doorways, talking in hushed tones.

As they neared the inn, Felix staggered, hit by a wave of horrible odour, like rotting eggs and attar of rose mixed together. He covered his nose and mouth, and continued on. Gotrek did the same. The stench was making him dizzy.

A Black Cap held up a hand at the door. 'You don't want to go in, mein herr.' His eyes were streaming and he had a kerchief over his mouth.

'What happened?' Felix asked.

'Something in the cellar,' said the watchman. 'Came up like smoke, they say, and everybody who got a good whiff fell down like they was dead.'

'They died?' Felix was shocked.

'No, sir,' said the Black Cap. 'Only fainted like, and very sick with it.'

'But what was it?'

'That's what the captain is trying to find out.'

'Sewer gas is what it was!' said a prosperous-looking merchant who appeared to have been hurried out of the inn in the middle of dressing. 'Damned city hasn't fixed those channels in decades. Manann knows what's growing down there.'

'It were cultists!' gasped a barman, looking up with bloodshot eyes from where he sat. He had flecks of bloody foam around his mouth. Felix remembered him from earlier when he had served them in the taproom. 'Cut a hole in the cask cellar floor. I saw it. Like a green fog it was. Then it got me.'

Could it have been only sewer gas? Felix looked at Gotrek. The Slayer's expression said he didn't think so.

'When did this happen?' he asked the barman.

'Just after lunch, sir,' he said. 'Right after you left in fact. I remember, because it was when I went down to bring up a new keg after you finished the old one that I saw the smoke.'

Felix exchanged another uneasy glance with Gotrek. He was willing to bet that their room had been broken into, and he wanted to

see if there were any clues as to who had done it, but he didn't want to poison himself to do it.

'How long before we can go in?' asked Felix.

The Black Cap shrugged. 'Not until the captain blows the all-clear.'

IT WAS AN UNEASY wait, with Felix watching the ends of the street constantly for Euler's Black Caps, and Gotrek grumbling about being thirsty, but fortunately, Felix wasn't the only one who wanted to go back in and get his things, and finally the captain gave in to the besieging guests who clamoured around him in various states of undress and distress, and said that they could all enter to retrieve their belongings, but that the inn would be closed immediately afterwards until it could be searched more thoroughly. The innkeeper looked sullen about this, but everyone else cheered and rushed in.

Gotrek and Felix followed the flow up to the second floor. The interior of the inn still smelled horrible, and the stink was worse in the confines of the narrow upper halls. Felix covered his mouth with his handkerchief, but he still felt the corridor swim around him, and had to brace himself against the wall for balance as they went along. They slowed and drew their weapons as they approached their room. Then Felix stopped altogether. The door was ajar. Had the Black Caps forced it? He certainly hadn't left it that way.

They crept to it and listened. Felix looked to Gotrek. He shook his head. The lack of noise did nothing to allay Felix's fears. It might only mean that their enemies were lying in wait. Gotrek raised his axe, then nodded.

As one, they jumped forwards and kicked the door in. It banged open and Gotrek leapt in, slashing left and right. He struck nothing. The tiny room was empty but for the expected furnishings, a bed along each wall, a wash stand and a clothes trunk. The beds had been smashed, the wash stand overturned, and the trunk had been opened and their few belongings strewn about.

Felix followed after Gotrek and closed the door behind them. Things would be awkward should the landlord come by and see the

damage. He looked around. The window that was the room's only source of light was open and there were fresh splinters on the sill, as if someone had gone in or out that way. It would have had to have been a very small and agile someone, for the window was tiny, and high up on the wall. A child might have done it – or a slim woman.

He pushed that thought away and searched through his few clothes. Everything had been ripped and cut, and he feared that his armour was stolen, but then he found it thrown in a corner, still whole, but reeking like everything else from the poisonous stink. Perhaps the vandals had been unable to tear it. The Slayer's bedroll had been hacked up too, but he had no clothes to ruin. He owned no other possessions that he didn't carry on his person at all times.

'Darts, nets, poison gas,' said Gotrek. 'Only cowards use such things.'

Felix looked at him. 'You think it was the same ones who attacked us in Altdorf?'

Gotrek nodded. 'And whoever they are, they want us alive.'

Once again the image of Lady Hermione and Mistress Wither looking down at him while he was bound and helpless came unbidden to his mind, and he shivered convulsively.

ON THEIR WAY OUT, Felix paid the landlord double what they owed him for the room. It was his father's money, and the least he could do for the trouble they had brought upon his establishment.

As they started down the street, Felix wondered if they might not need to sleep in the open, just so they wouldn't bring a similar fate to another hostelry. He was beginning to feel like he was the carrier of some deadly plague, and that he should keep away from human society until it had run its course. They needed to face these foes and finish them, but they didn't even know who they were.

A block away from the inn, someone called their names.

'Felix! Gotrek!'

Felix and Gotrek turned, their hands drifting towards their weapons. A coach was heading towards them and Max was leaning out the window.

‘I was just coming to find you,’ he said, then noticed that Felix was carrying his armour. ‘Have you left your inn?’

‘Uh...’ Felix paused, uncertain how much to tell him. ‘Our room was burgled,’ he said at last. ‘We decided to look for other lodgings.’

Max shook his head, bemused. ‘Trouble follows you two like a stray dog.’

‘More like a bat,’ said Felix under his breath, then spoke up. ‘What did you want to see us about?’

‘I have an urgent matter to discuss with you,’ said Max, opening the door to his coach. ‘Will you join me?’

MAX SAID NOT A word about the urgent matter in the coach as they crossed the many bridges and islands of the city to the Suiddock wharfs.

‘Are we going back to the Jilfte Bateau?’ asked Felix as the coach’s wheels boomed on the wooden planks of the docks.

‘No,’ said Max. ‘Our new companion waits for us at the Pike and Pike.’

‘New companion?’

But Max would say no more.

The coach came to a stop on a busy commercial wharf, with stevedores unloading goods from merchant ships flying the colours of Bretonnia, Estalia and Tilea, as well as dozens of Imperial and Marienburg vessels. They stepped down from the coach and Max led the way to a small tavern with a river pike impaled on a spear over the door. The place smelled, unsurprisingly, of fish, but the odour lessened as they made their way through the noisy taproom to a stair that led up to a small, but neatly furnished private dining room on the first floor.

Felix nodded politely to Claudia, who sat sideways on a cushioned bench by the fire on the left wall, her feet curled underneath her, then stopped dead as he saw the other occupant of the room, sitting ram-rod straight at the head of the table that filled the centre of the room. Gotrek grunted like he’d smelled something

foul. It was an elf. Felix understood suddenly why Max hadn't mentioned this earlier. He wouldn't have got Gotrek in the coach.

'Felix Jaeger,' said Max, 'Gotrek Gurnisson, may I present Aethenir Whiteleaf, student of the White Tower of Hoeth and son of the fair land of Eataine.'

The elf rose, inclining his head respectfully. He was tall, and as slender as a willow branch in his flowing white robes, but there was an air of youth and nervousness about him that made him look more awkward than graceful. He had the long, haughty features of his kind, but the nervousness showed also in his cobalt-blue eyes, which flicked about the room as he spoke. 'I am honoured, friends. Your acquaintance enriches me.'

'An elf,' Gotrek spat. He turned back to the door. 'Come on, manling.'

'Wait, Slayer,' said Max. 'If you still seek your doom, hear him out.'

'We go into the gravest danger, with you or without you,' added Claudia.

Gotrek paused at the door, his fists clenching. Felix looked from him to Max to the elf to the seeress, all waiting for the Slayer's decision.

At last the Slayer turned back around. 'Speak your piece, beard-cutter.'

'That is a myth,' snapped the elf. 'It never happened. You—'

Max held up a hand. 'Friends, please. This is perhaps not the time to bring up old arguments. We have little time.'

'You are right, magister,' said Aethenir. 'Forgive me.'

Gotrek just grunted.

Max offered Gotrek and Felix seats at the table and took one himself. Felix sat, but Gotrek remained standing, arms crossed, glaring at the elf.

'We met Scholar Aethenir last night,' said Max, 'when he came to a gathering of Marienburg magisters seeking their knowledge of the region of the Wasteland to the north and west of here.'

'The same region that my visions are leading me to,' said Claudia, leaning forwards meaningfully.

‘A book was stolen from the library of the Tower of Hoeth,’ said Aethenir. ‘A book containing maps and descriptions of the area you call the Wasteland, and the elven cities that once graced it, as it was before the Sundering ravaged both land and sea and changed the coastline forever. I must recover this book.’

‘And...?’ said Gotrek when the elf didn’t continue.

‘And?’ asked Aethenir.

‘Where is my doom in this?’

‘Don’t you see, Slayer,’ said Claudia, speaking up. ‘The book details exactly the same area that my visions have told me will be the birth of the destruction of Marienburg and Altdorf. This is not coincidence. Some great evil is brewing there. We must go and prevent it.’

‘It is my belief,’ said Aethenir, ‘that those who stole the book are agents of the Dark Powers, and seek some ancient elven artefact in one of the ruined cities. I know not what it might be, but an item of great power in the hands of the pawns of Chaos can only spell ruin and despair for the peoples of Ulthuan and the Old World.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Felix. ‘If this is such a grave threat, why are the elves not going in force? No disrespect to you, high one, or to Herr Schreiber and Fraulein Pallenberger, but why have you come to us? Why haven’t you brought the navy of Ulthuan with you?’

Aethenir hesitated, looking down at the table, then spoke. ‘As I explained to the magisters last night, the Tower of Hoeth is the centre of magical learning in Ulthuan. There, the greatest mages of the world are taught the one true art. The tomes and scrolls housed within its white walls make up the most complete, and most dangerous, library that exists in the world. The tower itself is reputed to be unreachable and unbreachable. Never has anything been stolen from it before.’ Colour came into the high elf’s cheeks. ‘The loremasters of the tower are proud of this reputation, and do not wish it to be known that this shame has befallen them, so they have dispatched me, a mere humble initiate, to retrieve the book in secret before any know that it is missing. I have come with no escort except a few of my father’s household guard, all sworn to secrecy,

on the pretext of examining some pre-Sundering ruins in the pursuit of my field of study. It was felt that any larger force would call attention to the theft.'

Gotrek snorted. 'Typical elven shiftiness.'

Felix frowned. 'How soon would you be leaving on this journey?' he asked.

'Immediately,' said Max. 'Scholar Aethenir has hired a ship, and its captain is prepared to sail on the evening tide.'

Felix turned to Gotrek. 'Slayer, I still must retrieve Euler's letter.'

Gotrek nodded. 'Aye. And I've no time for elf snotling chases. I'll pass.'

He turned to the door. Felix rose to follow him, bowing to Max, Aethenir and Claudia. 'I'm sorry, but...'

'I dreamed of you, Slayer,' called Claudia, as Gotrek pushed open the door. 'I saw you in the bowels of a black mountain, fighting foes without number. I saw blood rise like a tide to drown you. I saw a towering abomination crushing you in its claws.'

Gotrek paused in the doorway. Felix stopped behind him, shooting a dirty look back at Claudia. Had she really seen these things, or was she just wooing the Slayer with the only lure that could sway him?

Gotrek looked to Max. 'Do you vouch for this girl's seeing, wizard?'

Max nodded gravely. 'Yes, Gotrek. She has been judged to have true powers of divination by the Lord Magisters of her order.'

'Gotrek,' Felix said. 'I cannot go.'

Gotrek nodded, but a light had kindled in his single eye that Felix hadn't seen since he had fought Magus Lichtmann and his cannon daemon. 'Do what you have to, manling,' Gotrek said. 'I won't stop you. But I must fulfil my doom.' He turned to face Claudia, Max and Aethenir. 'Right,' he said. 'I'll come. But keep the elf away from me.'

FELIX FOUGHT WITH his conscience as he walked with Gotrek, Max and the others to the wharf where their hired ship was docked. What

should he do? Did he wish them a good voyage and have another go at Hans Euler tomorrow, or did he go with them and forget retrieving the incriminating letter? To whom was he more beholden, Gotrek or his father? Which vow came first? He had followed Gotrek for twenty years, and had never taken another vow that contradicted the one he had made to the Slayer. But Gotrek wasn't family. He wasn't on his death bed. On the other hand, what if the Slayer met his doom at last and he wasn't there to witness it? That would invalidate their whole reason for travelling together. It would be a terribly anti-climactic ending to such a grand adventure.

At last he sighed and dropped back to Gotrek, who had fallen a little behind.

'Slayer,' he said. 'I can't make the decision to stay or go.'

Gotrek shrugged. 'A dwarf's first loyalty is to family. I will not begrudge you this.'

Felix nodded, but continued pondering. Gotrek's permission to leave didn't actually make his decision any easier. Mad as it sounded, he would still rather go with Gotrek towards his doom. He didn't really care what happened to Euler. It was his father who had forced him into conflict with him. It would serve the old buzzard right if Felix just sat on his hands for the next seventeen days and let Euler send his letter to the authorities. And yet, he had promised. Hadn't he just told Claudia that a vow was a vow, no matter—

Seventeen days! Felix's heart lurched. That was it! That was the solution.

He turned to Gotrek. 'I've made up my mind,' he said. 'I have seventeen days to recover the letter, so I will go with you. It can't be more than a week up the coast and a week back. So we will have a day or two once we return, to take the letter back from Euler.'

'We may not return, manling,' said Gotrek.

'Then it will be fate that kept me from fulfilling my promise,' said Felix, insistent. 'Not lack of will.'

Gotrek raised an eyebrow at this but said nothing as Felix went to tell Max of his decision.

THE HOSPITALITY OF Clan Skryre Warleader Riskin Tatter-Ear, commander of the skaven burrows under the fish-stinking man-warren the humans called Marienburg, amounted to a single damp room at the far end of an unused tunnel, barely large enough to house Thanquol, let alone all his retinue and Boneripper, and for which the impertinent young pup expected to be paid a fortune in warp tokens! The gross disrespect of it astounded Thanquol. Did he not know who he was? In the old days a mere warleader would have bowed and licked his hind paws in his eagerness to serve a grey seer of his renown.

The cold welcome had done nothing to improve Thanquol's mood, already befouled by the slow, miserable journey that had brought him here. In his day the palanquin-bearers had been speedy and subservient. They had known their place and how to get one to one's destination without colliding with every skaven coming the other way. Now it seemed more than they could do to all move in the same direction at once. It was therefore with little patience that he listened to his overpaid, under-successful assassin make yet more excuses.

'My abject apologies, oh most forgiving of skaven,' said Shadowfang from the floor where he knelt before him. 'But though our sleep-smoke missed them at the drinking place, all is not lost.'

'No?' said Thanquol. 'Have you managed to poison yourself in the process, then?'

Issfet tittered fawningly at that, and Thanquol nodded approvingly. He liked his servants servile and obsequious.

'No, grey seer,' said Shadowfang. 'But we have sneak-followed the pair to a ship, and have tortured one of the sailors to reveal its destination.'

'And...?'

The assassin squirmed uncomfortably. 'They have no destination, sagacious one. They hunt-see something in the stink-swamp, but know not where it is.'

Thanquol turned this information over in his head. It was unfortunate that Shadowfang had once again been unable to capture his two nemeses, but it would not be the most terrible of plans to

follow them into the Wasteland where there would be no one to interfere or come to their rescue. Yes, perhaps it was for the best. Now he only needed some way of following them there.

He turned to Issfet. 'What manners of conveyance does this fool Riskin have at his disposal?' he asked. 'Quick-quick.'

The tailless skaven bowed and once again nearly lost his balance. 'I shall enquire, oh most effluent of masters.'

ELFSLAYER can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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