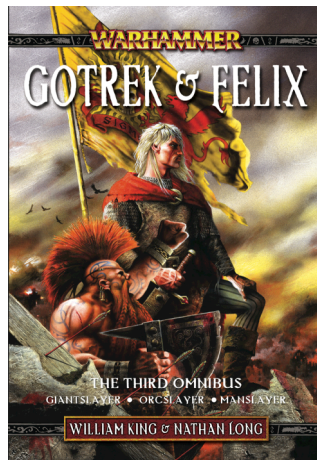


GOTREK AND FELIX: The Third Omnibus

By William King and Nathan Long

Would-be poet Felix Jaeger accidentally signs up for a lifetime of adventure after swearing a drunken oath to the dwarf, Gotrek Gurnisson. The trollslayer is wandering through the Old World, seeking an honourable death in combat to redeem his honour. As the pair survive one adventure after another, with Gotrek vanquishing the most fearsome opponents, will Felix ever be able to fulfil his vow and return to a normal, peaceful life?



About the Author

Nathan Long was a struggling screenwriter for fifteen years, during which time he had three movies made and a handful of live-action and animated TV episodes produced. Now he is a novelist, and is enjoying it much more. For Black Library he has written three Warhammer novels featuring the Blackhearts, and has taken over

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William King's short stories have appeared The Year's Best SF, Zenith, Interzone and White Dwarf. He has written seven Gotrek & Felix novels and the Space Wolf novels, starring Ragnar Blackmane. He lives in Scotland.

•GOTREK AND FELIX•

GOTREK AND FELIX: THE FIRST OMNIBUS

(Contains the novels TROLLSLAYER, SKAVENSLAYER and
DAEMONSLAYER)

William King

GOTREK AND FELIX: THE SECOND OMNIBUS

(Contains the novels DRAGONSLAYER, BEASTSLAYER and
VAMPIRESLAYER)

William King

ELFSLAYER

Nathan Long

•ALSO•

BATTLE FOR SKULL PASS

Nathan Long

The following is an excerpt from *Gotrek and Felix: The Third Omnibus* by William King and Nathan Long, Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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With a heavy heart, Felix Jaeger watched the last of the remaining Kislevite warriors place the corpse of Ivan Petrovich on the pyre. The old warrior looked somehow smaller, shrunken in death. His face showed none of the peace that was supposed to belong to those who had entered the realm of Morr, God of Death, but then, Felix supposed, Ivan's last few moments had been anything but pleasant. He had witnessed his only child, Ulrika, transformed into a vampire, a soulless blood-sucking thing, and he himself had met his death at the hand of her undead master's minions. Felix shivered and drew his faded red Sudenland wool cloak about him. Once he had thought himself in love with Ivan's daughter. What was he supposed to feel now?

The answer was that he did not know. Even when she had still walked among the living he had been unsure. Now, he realised, he would never really have the chance to find out. Somewhere deep within him a slow, sullen, smouldering resentment against the gods was fanned to flame. He was starting to understand how Gotrek felt. He looked over at the Slayer. The dwarf's brutal features were uncharacteristically thoughtful. His squat massive form, far broader than any human's, looked out of place among the Kislevite horse soldiers. He knuckled the patch covering his ruined eye with one massive hand, then scratched his shaved and tattooed head reflectively. His great crest of red dyed hair drooped in the cold and snow. He looked up and caught Felix's glance and shook his head. Felix guessed that in his own strange way Gotrek had liked the old march boyar. More than that, Ivan Petrovich had in some way been a link to the Slayer's mysterious past. He had known the dwarf since the time of his first expedition to the Chaos Wastes many years before.

The thought made Felix realise just how far from home Ivan had fallen. It must be three hundred leagues at least from here in the dark forests of Sylvania to the cold lands on the edge of Kislev that he had once ruled. Of course, the old boyar's realm was gone now, swept away by the vast Chaos invasion that had driven as far south as Praag.

‘Snorri thinks Ivan died a good death,’ said Snorri Nosebiter. He looked glum. Despite the cold, the second Slayer was no better dressed than Gotrek. Perhaps dwarfs simply did not feel discomfort like humans. More likely they were simply too stubborn to admit it. Snorri's normally stupidly cheerful features were masked by sadness. Perhaps he was not quite so insensitive as he seemed.

‘There are no good deaths,’ Felix muttered under his breath. When he realised what he had done, he offered up a silent prayer that neither of the dwarfs had heard him. He had, after all, sworn a vow to follow Gotrek and record the Slayer's doom in an epic poem what seemed

like a lifetime ago. The dwarfs lived only to atone for some supposed sin or crime by meeting their doom at the hands of a mighty monster, or in the face of overwhelming odds.

The surviving Kislevites filed past and offered up their last respects to their former lord. Many of them made the sign of the wolf god Ulric with the fingers of their left hand, then cast a glance over their shoulder and made it again. Felix could understand that. They were still almost within the shadow of Drakenhof Castle, that mighty citadel of evil the vampire lord Adolphus Krieger had sought to make his own. He had possessed an ancient amulet and a plan to bring all the aristocracy of the night under his command. Instead he had succeeded only in bringing his own doom.

But at what cost? So many had lost their lives. There was another mass pyre nearby that the surviving Kislevites had hastily constructed for their own fallen. A second one contained the remains of the vampire's followers. Here in the cursed land of Sylvania these men were not

about to leave any corpses unburned to face a possible dark resurrection at the hands of a necromancer.

Max Schreiber strode forward, leaning on his staff, looking every inch the imposing wizard in his golden robes. Not even the bloodstains and sword rips in the clothes detracted from the man's dignity, but there was something dead in his eyes and a bleakness to his features that matched Gotrek's. Max had loved Ulrika, probably more than Felix ever had, and now he too had lost her forever. Felix hoped that in his grief the wizard would not do something stupid.

Max waited until the last of the Kislevites had filed past the boyar's body, then he looked at Wulfgar, the ranking leader. The horse soldier nodded. Max spoke a word and banged the butt of his staff on the ground three times.

With each strike, one of the pyres burst into flames. The sorcery was strong and obvious. Golden flames flickered into being around the damp wood and then settled on them. The nails driven into Snorri's skull reflected the

light, making it look like he had a small blaze atop his shaven head.

Slowly smoke rose, the wood blackened and then burst into more natural flame. Felix was glad of the wizard's magic. There was no way under these conditions that even the dwarfs would have been able to light a fire.

Swiftly the fires spread and soon the sickly sweet smell of roasting flesh filled the air. Felix was not prepared to stay and watch Ivan be consumed. The man was a friend. He turned and strode out from the ruined hall into the cold air. The horses were waiting, and the wagons of the wounded. Snow covered the land. Somewhere out there was Ulrika and her new mentor, the Countess Gabriella, but they were out of his reach now.

War waited in the north. Chaos was coming, and it was there the Slayers expected to find their destiny.

The old woman looked weary. The children marching along beside her looked starved. They wore the usual rags common to Sylvanian peasantry. Their eyes were

studies in hopeless misery. Beside them a few men in blood-spattered tunics grasped pitchforks in frozen fingers. Felix saw tiredness war with fear in their faces and slowly win out. They were scared of the riders and the dwarfs but they were too tired and too hungry to run. ‘What happened to you?’ asked Gotrek in a manner that was anything but reassuring. The massive axe he held in one fist made him even more threatening. ‘Why do you wander these roads in winter?’

It was a good question. Any sensible peasant would be huddling in his hovel right now. Felix already knew the answer. These were refugees.

‘Beasts came,’ said the old woman eventually. ‘Out of the woods. They burned our houses, burned the inn, burned everything, killed most and carried others off.’

‘Most likely wanted breakfast,’ said Gotrek. The expressions on the faces of the refugees told Felix that they had not needed to know that.

‘Beastmen?’ Snorri had perked up, as he always did at the prospect of a fight.

‘Aye, scores of them,’ said the old woman. ‘Came out of nowhere in the middle of winter. Who would have thought it? Maybe the zealots are right. Maybe the end of the world is coming. They say the pale lords have returned and that Drakenhof Castle is inhabited once more.’

‘That’s something you don’t need to worry about any more,’ said Felix, then wished he hadn’t. The hag was looking at him as if he were an idiot, which he supposed he was for saying such a thing. Of course, any Sylvanian peasant would worry about Drakenhof Castle and its inhabitants, no matter what some ragged stranger said.

‘You say they burned down the inn?’ said Max.

‘Aye. Killed the innkeeper and most of the guests.’

‘Snorri was looking forward to a bucket of vodka,’ said Snorri. ‘Snorri thinks those beastmen need to be taught a lesson.’

Gotrek nodded agreement. Felix had been afraid of that. The fact that there were less than a dozen unwounded Kislevite horse archers, the two Slayers, and Felix and

Max to face what sounded like a mass of beastmen did not daunt either dwarf in the least. The Kislevites, hardened warriors from the march lands where human territories bordered Chaos, had sense enough to be worried, Felix could tell from their expressions. ‘Don’t go,’ said the old woman. ‘Ye’ll just get yourselves killed. Best come with us. Stephansdorp is just a couple of days’ walk south of here. It’s less than a day without the snow.’

‘If it has not been burned to the ground too,’ said Gotrek, somewhat unhelpfully. A couple of the children whimpered. One or two of the men looked as if they were fighting back tears themselves. Felix could not blame them. Doubtless only the thought of sanctuary among their kin in the nearby village had kept them going. Even as Felix watched, one man collapsed onto his knees, letting his pitchfork fall from numbed fingers. He made the sign of Shallya on his breast and bowed his head. Two of the children went over to him and began to tug his sleeves, whispering, ‘Da-da.’

‘Best get going if we’re going to overtake these beastmen,’ said Gotrek. Snorri nodded agreement. Wulfgar shook his head. ‘We will guard these folk en route to their kin,’ he said. ‘We must find a place for our wounded.’

He looked almost shamefaced as he said it. Felix did not blame him, though. The Kislevites had been sorely demoralised by the death of Ivan, and the events at Drakenhof had been enough to dent the courage of even the bravest. Gotrek stared at Wulfgar for a moment. Felix feared the Slayer was about to give the horse soldier the benefit of a few well-chosen words concerning the courage and hardiness of Kislevite humanity, but he just shrugged and shook his head.

‘What about you, Max?’ Felix asked. The wizard considered for a moment before saying, ‘I will come with you. These beastmen should be cleansed from our land.’

The tone of the wizard’s voice worried Felix. He seemed well nigh as bitter and full of rage as Gotrek. Felix hoped

that he was not becoming unhinged by grief over what had happened with Ulrika. On the other hand, he was glad Max was coming with them. The wizard was worth a company of horse archers when it came to a fight. Briefly, Felix considered sloping off with the horse archers himself, but decided against it. Not only would it have gone against the oath he had sworn to follow the Slayer, but Felix felt far safer in the company of Gotrek, Snorri and Max than he would in the company of the Kislevites, even if they were going hunting for beastmen. 'Best be getting on then,' he was surprised to hear himself saying, 'if we want to get there by nightfall.'

'This place has certainly changed since we were last here,' said Felix, looking at the still smouldering ruins of what had once been a walled village. Nobody paid him the slightest attention. They were all too busy looking at the wreckage for themselves.

There was not much left. Most of the hovels had been made of wattle and daub with thatched roofs. Their walls

had been kicked in, their roofs burned. Only the inn had been a more substantial structure, of timber and stone. It had taken a fair time to collapse, he guessed. The flames must have been fierce indeed to consume the structure. A pity it was gone, he thought, for the weather was already starting to worsen.

Even as he watched, shadowy figures moved within it.

They were too big and too misshapen to be human.

There was only one thing that looked like that.

Beastmen! Snorri almost howled with joy when he realised what they were seeing and brandished his axe and his hammer in the air. Gotrek raised his axe, ran his thumb along the blade until it drew blood and then spat a curse.

If this intimidated the beastmen, they gave no sign. A group of them emerged from the ruins of the inn. Some of them possessed bovine heads, while others had the heads of goats or wolves or other beasts. All of them were massive and muscular. All of them were armed with crude spears, massive spiked clubs or hammers.

They were an incongruous sight. The last time Felix had passed through this place, the Green Man had been occupied by humans and he had passed an evening in bizarre conversation with the vampiric countess. Now the whole small village surrounding the inn had been swept away. In his lifetime Felix had seen a great deal of slaughter and a number of villages razed, but he knew he would never get used to it. The senseless carnage fuelled his anger and his resentment.

The dozen beastmen swept forward. They obviously felt no fear at facing such a small group of opponents.

Answering calls came from elsewhere, from the snow-girt woods around the sacked hamlet. Felix hoped he and the others had not bitten off more than they could chew.

As the beastmen loped forward, Gotrek and Snorri raced to meet them. Raced was probably the wrong word under the circumstances, Felix decided. The dwarfs' short legs carried them at what would have been a comfortable jog for Felix. In any case, the distance between them closed swiftly. Felix looked at Max to see if the wizard was

going to cast a spell. Max scanned their surroundings looking for other attackers. He seemed confident that the Slayers could handle the beasts.

Gotrek hit the pack slightly ahead of Snorri. His axe hurtled through a tremendous arc, lopping off the arm of the nearest beastman, opening the stomach of another to send a wave of blood and bile spraying to the ground, and smashing through the raised club with which a third attempted to parry. A moment later Snorri took down the disarmed beastman with a stroke of the hammer he held in one hand, and buried his axe in the skull of another.

There was a sickening crunch like rotten wood splintering as he drove it home.

Within a few heartbeats five of the beastmen were down. Gotrek and Snorri barely slowed. Gotrek leapt forward and chopped a wolf-headed creature clean in two, sending its upper body one way and its lower body another. Snorri whirled like an Arabyan dervish and brought both his weapons smashing into another Chaos spawn. The hammer tenderised flesh even as the axe

smashed ribs and bit deep into the creature's lungs. It stood for a moment, blowing bubbles of bloody froth from its chest before it collapsed.

The surviving beastmen had not even had time to realise the scale of the casualties they had taken. They swept forward, trying to overwhelm their foes. They obviously had confidence in the sheer brutal power of their blows, but they had reckoned without the strength of Gotrek and Snorri's stark ferocity. Gotrek whirled his axe in a massive double arc, driving them back. Snorri dived forward to land on his side and hit the snow rolling. He barrelled into the legs of one beastman, tripping it, while his axe took another behind the knee sending it stumbling to the ground. Without breaking stride, Gotrek brought his axe down twice with all the force of a thunderbolt. Felix knew that neither of the fallen beastmen would rise again, given the sickening power of those blows. A heartbeat later, the axe had risen again to behead another beastman.

Now the Chaos creatures were dismayed. They turned and fled. Gotrek's axe took another in the back. Snorri pulled himself to his feet and lobbed his hammer, catching another on the back of the skull, sending it tumbling forward into the snow. A few moments later, Snorri had reclaimed his hammer and turned the beastman's skull to jelly with it.

Felix glanced around. More groups of beastmen had emerged from the wood, just in time to witness the rout of their fellows. Felix could see that there were not nearly as many as he had feared. There were three groups with, at most, five members. It looked like the largest part of their force had emerged from the inn. Nonetheless they looked like they were considering a charge when Max raised his arms and began incanting a spell. In seconds a sphere of light brighter than the sun appeared in each of his clenched fists. When he opened his fingers bolts of pure blazing golden power lashed forward. They ravaged among the brutes, charring flesh

and melting bone. It was all too much for the Chaos creatures. They turned tail and fled into the woods. Felix was amazed. Events had moved so swiftly, he had not even managed to bloody his sword. He felt almost embarrassed when he considered it. Seeing his expression, Gotrek spoke up.

‘Don’t worry, manling. You will get your chance to kill Chaos spawn when we follow these beasts to their lair!’

‘I was afraid you were going to say that,’ Felix said. He moved into the ruins of the inn. Butchered bodies were everywhere. Human bones lay in the snow, cracked for marrow and gnawed by powerful jaws. He felt like being sick but he controlled himself.

‘Looks like they stopped here for a snack,’ said Gotrek.

Two hours later, massive trees loomed all around them. The snow was falling so heavily that Felix could barely see ten feet ahead of him. They had long ago lost all sight of the beastmen’s tracks. Now it was only a matter of trudging forward through the storm, making sure to

keep his eyes fixed firmly on Gotrek's broad back. The wind whined in his ears. The snowflakes melted in his hair. His breath emerged in frosty clouds. His fingers felt too numb to hold a sword. He was not sure that if he was attacked now, he would even be capable of fighting. He sincerely hoped the Slayers were in a better way. Right now he desperately wished he had gone off with the Kislevites. Now was not the time to be caught in the Sylvanian woods by a sudden blizzard.

They needed to find shelter soon, or they were doomed.

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