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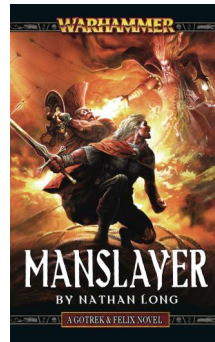
## ***MANSLAYER***

A Gotrek & Felix novel

*By Nathan Long*

*Dwarf Trollslayer Gotrek Gurnisson and his human companion Felix Jaeger continue their adventures in the ninth Gotrek & Felix novel.*

*Gotrek and Felix return to the Imperial city of Nuln. There, where they bump into Gotrek's old friend the Slayer Malakai Makaiison, who is helping the Imperial war effort by transporting cannons to the frontline in his airship the Spirit of Grungni. After a series of mishaps it becomes clear that traitors are at work, trying to sabotage the Empire's artillery production. Can Gotrek and Felix expose the culprits before time runs out for the beleaguered armies of the Empire?*

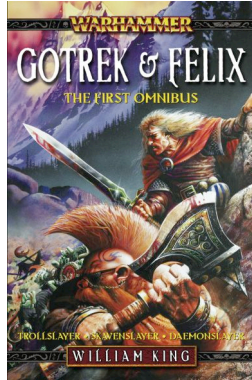
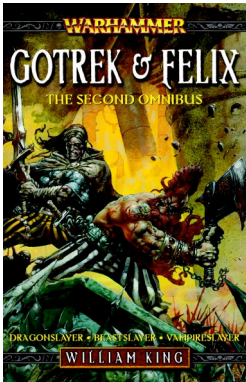


### **About the Author**

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 *Manslayer* by Nathan Long.  
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GOTREK AND FELIX caromed through the twisting, uncooperative streets of Shantytown like lunatics, trying to keep the receding airship in sight. It was heading due east, and all the streets seemed to head every direction but. They were constantly having to zigzag and double back as the black oblong shape disappeared behind tall, gabled tenements and massive crenellated warehouses, only to appear again as they turned a corner and found it drifting away from them above the moon-washed rooftops.

Harlots and other late-night walkers shied away as Gotrek and Felix staggered drunkenly past, shouting commands and obscenities at the sky. An undermanned watch patrol almost moved to block them, then thought better of it and let them pass. Cats and dogs and rats scurried into the shadows at their approach.

The Spirit of Grungni led them out of Shantytown and through the government buildings and trading houses of the Neustadt towards the Universitat. There the streets became wider and the way easier, and the airship seemed to be slowing. This was good, for Gotrek and Felix were slowing too. Felix was gasping and sucking wind, weakened by too much wine. Gotrek showed no signs of losing his breath, but he was groaning and holding his belly with each step. Felix thought he could actually hear the ale sloshing inside the dwarf, but it was probably his own stomach he heard.

At last, with a roar they could hear from the ground, the airship reversed engines and came to a slow halt over the high grey stone

turrets of the massive, castle-like central building of the College of Engineering. Lights on the roof underlit the brass gondola and Felix could just see ropes dropping from it.

Gotrek and Felix fetched up panting and gasping against the College's intricate iron gates a few moments later. Four wary guards stepped out from a guard house just inside, spears at the ready. More watched from the tops of the fortified walls.

'Mak...' said Gotrek. 'Mak...' then vomited a vast quantity of ale all over the wrought iron bars.

'Hoy!' said the guard captain, stepping forward. 'Get away, you filthy drunks! I'm not cleaning that up. Go home and sleep it off!'

Gotrek's hand shot through the bars and caught the captain by the belt, then pulled him down to his level. 'Makaïsson,' hissed Gotrek, as the other guards shouted and stepped forward, drawing their weapons. 'Fetch Malakai Makaïsson. Tell him Gotrek Gurnisson wants to see him.'

The other guards shouted at Gotrek to let their captain go, but Gotrek wrapped his powerful fingers around the man's neck and he frantically waved them off.

'It's too late,' squeaked the captain. 'College is closed for the night. No visitors. You'll have to come back in the morning.'

Gotrek shook him. 'Fetch him now or I'll come in there and feed you your sword, pommel first.' He shoved him back into his men.

The captain choked and recovered himself as his men started forward again. For a moment it looked like he was going to let them try to chase Gotrek off, then he reconsidered and called them back.

'Leave him, but watch him,' he said, massaging his bruised throat. 'Brugel, go ask Professor Makaïsson if he'll see a filthy drunk named Gotrek Gurnisson.'

AFTER WHAT SEEMED like several hours to Felix's foggy brain, he and Gotrek looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps. Out of the shadow of the entry of the college's massive central building came a small squad of guards escorting a short, broad figure in a thick, fleece-lined leather jerkin. He wore a peculiar leather cap with goggles pushed up over his shaggy brows, and a slot at the top to

make room for a short crest of bright red hair. It looked like he had just come off the airship.

‘Whur’s the liar claimin’ tae be Gotrek son of Gurni?’ spat the dwarf in his strange, thick accent. ‘Whur’s the eejit dinnae know the Daemonslayer’s been deid these seventeen—’

He broke off in mid-sentence as he caught sight of Gotrek standing at the gate. He stopped and stared. ‘Weel noo, ye look like him, right enough.’ He shot a glance at Felix. ‘And this looks like young Felix an’ aw.’ He crossed his arms over his massive chest. ‘But Maximillian Schrieber said ye went intae some hell-gate in Sylvania and never returned. How am ah tae be sure ye ain’t some daemons of the void in disguise?’

Gotrek roared and plucked his axe from his back. He slashed left and right, making a big X in the air with it, then held it at the ready and stumped towards the gate, shoulders lowered. ‘Are you calling me a daemon, Malakai son of Makai?’

The guards shouted and advanced, lowering their spears. The captain drew a pistol from his belt and aimed it through the bars, but Malakai just grinned and waved them back. ‘Put it awa’, boys. Put it awa’ and open yon gates. There’s but the one who can wield yon axe!’

The guards hesitated, but at last their captain motioned them forward and they drew the bolts and pushed on the bars.

Malakai threw his arms wide as the gates swung out and Gotrek and Felix stepped in. ‘Gotrek Gurnisson, I’m grieved tae see ye hivnae met yer doom, but ah’m glad tae see ye no’ the less.’

He clasped Gotrek’s hand and slapped him on the shoulder.

‘Well met, Malakai Makaisson,’ said Gotrek gruffly. ‘I hope you have some ale here. I lost some just now and I’ve got a bit of a thirst.’

‘WHY AM AH HERE?’ Malakai shrugged as he lit an oil lamp and set it on a low desk. ‘Ach weel, wae one thing an’ another, I’m no’ welcome in the dwarf holds at the minute, so here ah came an’ offered ma services. Made me a professor, if ye can believe it.’

Gotrek and Felix sat on an unmade day bed in the middle of a vast, high ceilinged workshop that was apparently Malakai's office, located on the third floor of the college's main building. It was chilly in the room, for it had no roof and the east wall was only half-built. Scaffolding rose before the unfinished wall, and building stones and sacks of mortar were stacked at its foot. Night air and moonlight poured in through it, while high overhead, a canvas tarpaulin snapped in the breeze like the sail of a ship.

In the moonglow beyond the yellow light of the lamp, Felix could make out the looming shapes of partially assembled machines, strange weapons, odd bits of pipe, scrap metal and glass tubing, short-legged tables covered with scribbled-upon sheets of vellum, and what looked like an enormous metal horse. Felix thought he recognised one of the machines as a drill of some sort, and another as a lathe, but the rest were far beyond his understanding.

Malakai potted about among it all like a gardener seeing to his prize roses, straightening and checking and adjusting things all around the room, and chattering all the while.

'Ah'm sorry for the state o' the place, but ah heard the skaven made a wee mess o' things here at the college some twenty years past and they hiv niver got around to fixing it up again.'

'Er, yes,' said Felix, face flushing. 'We'd heard about that.' And had a hand in the destruction, he thought guiltily. He didn't say anything, however. The whole incident was a bit embarrassing.

'That'll change noo ah'm here,' Malakai continued. 'Have this place straight in a jiffy. And better than it was afore.'

'So Max Schrieber survived Sylvania,' said Gotrek, sipping the mug of ale Malakai had found for him. 'And Snorri Nosebiter?'

'Oh aye,' said Malakai. 'They both of them made it back to Praag, ready t'fight the hordes come spring, just as ah wis. But it niver happened. The marauders milled outside the city for a few mair weeks, then just turned aroon an' went back hame. Seemed tae've lost all heart, somehow.' He sounded sad at the memory. 'Max thought it might hae somethin' tae do with the vanishin' of them tae wee sorcerers, but nobody ever really learn't the why of it.'

‘Are Max and Snorri still alive?’ asked Felix.

‘Max is – weel when ah saw him four days ago he wus. He’s at Middenheim, wi’ the defenders, where ah’ve just come frae.’ His brow creased. ‘As tae Snorri, ah dinnae noo for certain. After the spring thaw came tae Kislev that year, he went aff wi’ some Empire mercenaries, chasin’ a herd o’ beastmen south towards the Middle Mountains. No’ heard o’ him since. Grimmir grant that he met his doom.’ He looked pensive for a moment, then shrugged and grinned. ‘But enough about aw that. Whur hae ye been these seventeen years? I’ll wager that’s a tale worth the telling.’

‘Well,’ said Felix, frowning. ‘I’m not sure where to begin.’ He looked over at Gotrek and saw that the Slayer was lying back on the day bed, his one eye closed, snoring gently.

Malakai looked over and clicked his tongue. ‘Och, the laddie’s fallen asleep. Ach weel, no’ a bad idea at that. Save yer story, young Felix. It’ll keep. Come on. Ah’ll find ye a bed.’

FELIX WOKE WITH the familiar feeling of opening his eyes in an unfamiliar place that he had experienced so many times in his travels with Gotrek. He was in a small, clean, cell-like room, lying on a narrow but comfortable bed. His head pounded and, strangely, the pounding seemed to echo through the waking world. For a long, disorienting moment he had no idea where he was. The place was too nice to be a jail. He tried to think back. There had been a tavern, and a fight, and then a drunken walk. He had laid down beneath a fountain. Had he fallen asleep there? No! The Spirit of Grungni!

Suddenly it all flooded back. He was in the dormitory of the College of Engineering. The pounding in his head was from last night’s drinking. The pounding that shook the room was the morning artillery practice at the Imperial Gunnery School, a few streets away. Felix sat up and rubbed his temples, groaning. Did they have to start so early? It was hardly civilized.

After pulling on his boots and breeches and finding the wash room and water closet, he asked directions of a fresh-faced and much too chipper engineering student, then shuffled at last back into Malakai’s enormous workroom. Felix squinted painfully in the blaze

of sunlight that streamed through the unfinished wall, and looked around. A work table had been cleared off and Malakai and Gotrek were wolfing down a breakfast of eggs, sausage, bacon, black bread, ham, griddle cakes, pale lager, and that vile Tilean import that some called the black oil of Nuln, coffee.

Gotrek's appetite seemed none the worse for last night's excesses, but Felix's stomach churned at the sight of all the greasy food.

'Welcome, young Felix!' called Malakai, much too loud. 'Sit down and dig in before Gurnisson eats the lot.'

Felix fought down the urge to heave. He wiped his clammy brow. 'Is... is there some tea, perhaps?'

'Ah'll have one of the lads brew up a pot,' said Malakai, then shouted towards the back of the room. 'Petr! A pot of Cathay fur oor guest!'

Felix clutched his head, certain it was going to shatter.

A moonfaced youth with wild blond hair and a chinstrap beard poked his head up from the innards of a dismantled steam tank. He had wide, watery blue eyes that he blinked rapidly. 'Aye, professor,' he said. 'Right away.' He clambered out of the tank, but caught his foot on a valve and sprawled face-first on the floor. He was up in an instant, blood leaking from his nose. 'No harm done,' he piped. 'No harm done.' He scurried out of the room, bumping into a telescope as he went.

Malakai shook his head. 'Poor wee lad. My best student. Can set the calibrations on a pressure gauge near as weel as a dwarf, but cannae see past his haund, and he could trip o'er a dust mote.' He chuckled as he stuffed a chunk of ham in his mouth. 'He'll be coming to Middenheim to help oot in the engine room. But he's no allowed on the bridge. He'd wreck us.'

Gotrek looked up, his single eye bright. 'You're flying to Middenheim?'

'Aye. The Imperial Gunnery School has asked me tae tak a shipment of cannon there.'

'You're taking me,' said Gotrek. 'I want to be there before the end.'

‘O’ course,’ said Malakai. ‘Always happy tae help a Slayer find his doom.’

‘Can we leave today?’ asked Gotrek.

Malakai chuckled. ‘Much as ah’d like it, laddie, nae. The last cannon won’t be test-fired till tomorrow morning. We’ll leave jist as soon as it’s loaded.’

Gotrek grunted unhappily, but Felix hid a grateful smile. Another night in a proper bed would not go amiss.

‘Ye’ll still get there mair than a fortnight quicker than if ye marched,’ said Malakai, amused.

Petr rushed into the room with a teapot in one hand and a cup and saucer in the other. He wove successfully around a jewellers stove, but his feet got tangled in a block and tackle and he flew forward with a cry. He managed to twist as he fell and landed on his shoulder, saving the teapot and cup from destruction, but slopping scalding tea all over his hands.

He sprang up again and set the teapot and cup before Felix, wincing. ‘Sorry! Sorry!’ he said. His hands were lobster red.

‘Go soak those in cold water, laddie,’ said Malakai. ‘Ye dinnae want blisters.’

‘Aye, professor,’ said Petr.

He hurried away. Felix couldn’t bear to watch him go.

‘Cack-handed pillock,’ muttered Malakai. He turned to Gotrek and Felix with a sigh. ‘When ye’ve finished wi’ yer breakfast, ah’ll take you o’er to the Gunnery School tae meet Lord Groot, who runs the place. As the trip is Imperial business, he has final approval on all ma crew. But dinna worry.’ He winked. ‘Ah’ll put in a good word for ye.’

IF THE COLLEGE of Engineering was big, the Imperial Gunnery School was enormous, a vast complex of workshops, firing ranges, forges, and dormitories surrounding the soaring black granite majesty of the school building itself, which rose above the city like an unimaginably large engine of war, all spires and spikes and saw-toothed crenellations. Fearsome soot-blackened gargoyles jutted from every corner and cornice. Tall, narrow, red-glassed windows

gleamed between towering buttresses like the vents in the iron door of some infernal furnace.

Lord Julianus Groot did not look like he should be in charge of such a forbidding place. A thick, cheerful, pot-bellied man with greying mutton chops and a few wisps of hair trailing across his round, bald head, Groot looked more like a village smith than the High Chancellor of the Imperial Gunnery School, which was his official title. He wore a singed leather apron over his black brocade robes of office, and had his trailing sleeves tucked into heavy leather gloves.

‘Any friend of Malakai Makaisson’s is a friend of mine,’ he said, crushing Felix’s hand in a powerful grip. ‘A better ally the Empire could not have.’

Felix and Gotrek stood with Lord Groot and Malakai in a sweltering forge room where ranks of sweating smiths pounded and shaped steel on regimented rows of anvils as overseers moved among them, observing and criticising. It did nothing for Felix’s headache.

Felix was surprised to hear the chancellor speaking with the flat, common accent of the Handelbezirk – the mercantile neighbourhood that was the heart of Nuln’s ever-spreading network of trade. He would have expected a man with a title to speak in the more refined and cultured speech of the nobility. Perhaps Groot had bought his way into his title. Rumour had it that the Countess had done stranger things for money.

‘It’ll be good to have seasoned warriors escorting our guns,’ he said, gripping Gotrek’s hand. ‘When you’re up against the Ruinous Powers even a flying ship isn’t safe. Some of them beasties have wings. You’ll have some sorcerous help too, Makaisson.’

‘Oh?’ said Malakai, squinting suspiciously. ‘And jist who might that be?’

Groot turned and called back into the haze of smoke that veiled the room. ‘Magus Lichtmann, come meet your travelling companions!’

Gotrek, Felix and Malakai looked up. Felix wasn’t sure what he expected. Some malefic figure striding out of the smoke with

glowing eyes? A wizened old man in a pointy hat? What he saw was a tall, beardless man of middle age, bent over an anvil, observing intently as a smith shaped a cannon fitting. He glanced up and firelight winked off his spectacles. ‘Hmmm? Oh. Terribly sorry, my dear Groot.’

The magus picked his way through the forges to the chancellor. He was thin to the point of being skeletal, with a prominent throat apple, a weak chin, and a beaked nose beneath a mushroom cap of reddish brown hair. He wore the orange and red robes of the Bright College, and like Groot, he protected his attire with a sooty leather apron. His spectacles were made of delicate steel wire, and his eyes, behind them, were green with flecks of gold.

‘Terribly sorry,’ he said again in a clear, educated voice as he nodded around at them all. ‘Julianus and I have been attempting to develop a new alloy, using magical flame to smelt together metals at temperatures impossible to achieve with mundane fire alone. I was just observing how our latest sample behaved under the hammer.’ He smiled at Groot. ‘Very malleable, Julianus, but not yet as strong as it could be, I believe.’

‘I’ll have a look in a moment, Waldemar,’ said Groot. He turned to the others. ‘Professor Makaiisson, Slayer Gurnisson, Herr Jaeger, may I present Magus Waldemar Lichtmann, a Magister of the Bright College, and also an engineer of great renown.’

Magus Lichtmann bowed and extended his left hand, and it was only then that Felix noticed that the magus didn’t have a right hand. His right sleeve was pinned up just below the elbow. ‘A distinct pleasure, professor,’ he said, shaking Malakai’s hand. ‘Your advances in engineering are well known to me.’

He grinned sheepishly as he turned to shake Gotrek’s hand and then Felix’s. ‘Apologies for the left-handed handshake,’ he said. ‘People often find it a bit unnerving. I lost the right in a fire. Highly embarrassing for a bright wizard, but I was young then, and hadn’t yet learned control.’

Malakai raised an uneasy eyebrow. ‘I hope ye have the noo. Airships are a wee bit flammable.’

The Bright Wizard laughed, a loud, horsy bray. ‘Oh yes, I’ve gotten a bit better since then, thank you. I can keep my flames to myself.’

‘Magus Lichtmann is going to Middenheim to help in the fighting,’ said Groot.

‘I am very much looking forward to it,’ said Lichtmann. ‘It has been a long time since I have been in battle, and never anything on this scale. But a man of conscience cannot, at a time like this, continue to hide in the halls of academia. He must act. He must do his part for his homeland and his people. And I am hoping to put some of the new ideas that Groot and I have been developing to the test of war.’

‘Weel, yer welcome aboard, magister,’ said Malakai. ‘Ah’ll be happy to hiv someone tae blether wae. This alloy sounds interestin’.’

‘It certainly is,’ said Lichtmann, his eyes brightening. ‘It’s a simple idea really, but hard to execute without a Bright Wizard’s ability to control the temperature of fire. You see...’

As Lichtmann began to explain – and Felix’s eyes began to glaze over – a young man in the colours of the college poked his head through the door of the workshop, saw Groot, and hurried to his side, his face tight with tension. ‘My lord,’ he murmured in the chancellor’s ear. ‘Might I speak with you?’

Groot nodded and turned to the others. ‘Would you excuse me a moment?’

He stepped away and listened as the student whispered urgently in his ear. Felix and Gotrek waited, sweating in the heat, while Magus Lichtmann continued to babble to Malakai about melting temperatures and tensile strength, whatever that was.

After a moment Groot nodded and said, ‘Aye, that’s bad,’ then rattled off a rapid series of orders and sent the youth running back the way he had come.

The chancellor sighed and returned to his guests. ‘Sorry about the interruption. There’s been a theft. I’m afraid your flight might be delayed, Malakai.’

‘What?’ barked Gotrek. His single eye blazed.

‘Whit happened?’ asked the engineer.

‘A barge full of gunpowder was stolen during the night,’ said Groot. ‘Gunpowder meant for the cannons you will be carrying. The Dwarf Black Powder Guild delivered it yesterday to our landing near Glory Bridge in preparation for loading it onto the Spirit of Grungni tomorrow. It was under heavy guard all night, but by morning the guards had vanished along with the barge and the powder.’ He shrugged and scratched his bald head violently. ‘Wish they’d told me sooner, but they wasted two hours running about seeing if someone from the City Council had ordered the barge moved.’

‘You can’t leave without the powder?’ asked Felix.

‘The cannon are useless wi’ no powder tae fire them, lad,’ growled Malakai. ‘Wi’out it they’re jus’ pretty pieces of iron, an’ no reason tae take ’em to Middenheim.’

‘Sabotage,’ said Magus Lichtmann. ‘This is vile. Someone has done this to weaken the defences of the Fauschlag.’

‘It’s worse than that,’ said Groot. ‘The fiends could have done that by setting fire to the barge and blowing up the powder. Instead they’ve stolen it. That means that, whoever they are, they plan to use the powder for their own purposes.’

‘And I’m guessin’ it won’ be tae make fireworks,’ said Malakai, grimly.

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