

SHAMANSLAYER

A Warhammer novel

by Nathan Long

When Gotrek and Felix travel north to seek the remaining members of the Order of the Fiery Heart, they find themselves with new companions and allegiances. Of course, there are rumours of beastmen lurking in the Drakwald, but there is far more to the story than they could have imagined. When they discover that the malignant forces of Chaos are at work, Gotrek and Felix find themselves battling not only for their honour, but for the very future of the Empire itself.



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 the Gotrek and Felix series with three novels to his name. He lives in Hollywood.

•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

GIANTSLAYER

William King

ORCSLAYER

Nathan Long

MANSLAYER

Nathan Long

ELFSLAYER

Nathan Long

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Felix Jaeger paused as he looked up at his father's Altdorf mansion under the grey winter sky. Did it have an empty, shut-up look to it, or was he just imagining it? Surely the marble steps hadn't been so dirty the last time he had visited. Surely the curtains hadn't been drawn. He climbed the steps to the door, then stopped again. Ever since he had found his father's ring on a cord around the neck of a skaven assassin on a beach by the Sea of Chaos, Felix had burned with fevered impatience to return to Altdorf to find out what the rat-faced villains had done to the old man. But now, on the doorstep of knowledge, he found it difficult to go on. For more than a month his heart had been filled with dread and uncertainty. How did the skaven come to have

the ring? Had they hurt his father for it? Had they killed him? Had they only stolen it and let him be? The questions had chased their tails inside Felix's head unceasingly as he and his companions had made their too-slow journey back to civilisation. But as much as the helplessness of not knowing had driven him mad, Felix suddenly feared knowing even more. If he knew, he would have to allow the emotions he had been stifling to come to the fore. If he knew, he would have to do something.

He cursed himself and squared his shoulders. He was like a man frightened of having a wound stitched shut – the anticipation was worse than the act. Better to take the pain and close it and heal.

He knocked on the door.

There was no answer. He knocked again, and waited again, trepidation rising in his heart. Then, just as he was wondering if he should find some way to break in, he heard locks turning and bolts drawing back. The door

opened and the grave, grey face of his father's butler looked out at him.

'Is he...?' asked Felix hesitantly.

'Your father is dead, sir,' said the butler. 'I'm sorry, sir.'

A hot rush of anger and regret flooded through Felix. He had known it, of course – known it all along – but it was one thing to know it in one's heart and another to hear it spoken as fact.

'And... ' he stammered. 'And how did it happen?'

The butler paused, a brief flash of fear disturbing his solemn features, then spoke again. 'Your brother is here, sir. Perhaps you should speak to him.'

Felix blanched. Otto was here? Speaking to him was the last thing he wanted to do! On the other hand, he would have to see him sometime. There were no doubt legalities to be attended to. He sighed. No point in avoiding the inevitable.

'Very well,' he said. 'Show me to him.'

The butler pushed open the door to Felix's father's study, a long dark room lined with ledger-filled bookcases and lit by a small fire in a large fireplace. Near the meagre blaze was a broad desk, almost buried in ledgers, stacks of papers, scrolls and leather folios, and surrounded by chests and strongboxes, all spilling even more papers and books. At the desk, almost entirely obscured by this mountain of paper, sat Otto, quill in one pudgy hand, bald head down, peering myopically at an open ledger by the light of a candle perched on top of the mess and muttering under his breath.

Felix stepped in and the butler closed the door behind him. Otto didn't look up. Felix paused, then cleared his throat and started forwards. Still Otto didn't look up, only kept murmuring and ticking things off with his quill.

Felix reached the foothills of the desk's clutter. He cleared his throat again. There was still no response.

'Ah, Otto...'

‘Thirty-two thousand, nine hundred and... and... Damn you! You made me lose my count!’ Otto looked up, his bearded jowls quivering with anger. ‘Why couldn’t you...?’ He froze as he saw who he addressed. ‘You.’

Then again after a few seconds, ‘You!’

‘Hello, brother,’ said Felix. ‘I’m sorry to—’

‘You dare to show your face here, you... you murderer!’ said Otto, recovering.

‘I didn’t kill him!’ exclaimed Felix, though he was suddenly bathed in a guilty sweat.

‘Didn’t you, by the gods? Didn’t you?’ cried Otto, rising up and stabbing towards him with his quill. ‘You come to see him for the first time in over twenty years and that very night he is found butchered in his bed! Do you count that coincidence? No? You might not have done the cutting, but, by Sigmar, you brought the knives!’

Felix hung his head at that, for he could not deny it.

Though he had not known it at the time, the skaven had been tailing him. They must have followed him to his father’s house. ‘What did they do to him?’

Otto glared at him. ‘Schmidt found him in his bed, bound at the wrists and ankles. He... he had been tortured. There was no fatal wound. He seemed to have died of terror.’

Felix shuddered, remembering what the decrepit skaven seer had done to Aethenir and imagining it being done to his frail old father. Gustav Jaeger had not been a good man, but not even the worst of men deserved a death like that.

‘I’m sorry, Otto. It was indeed my enemies that—’
‘Sorry?’ interrupted Otto. ‘Do you think an apology will suffice? You caused the death of your father! Sigmar’s blood, you’re like a curse! I told you once before I never wanted to see you again. Everywhere you go, death and destruction follow. You can take your “sorry” and be damned with it. Now go, before you kill me too.’

Felix sighed. He couldn’t blame Otto, really. He was right. He was a curse. He had exposed Otto and his family to danger, had nearly got him killed in an attack on the street in Nuln, and then had come to Altdorf and

led his enemies to his father's house, where they had tortured him to death. And it wasn't just his own family Felix's presence had destroyed. He and Gotrek had been in a fight that had burned down an entire neighbourhood in Nuln, the crew of the *Pride of Skintstaad* had been slaughtered, thousands of innocent slaves had drowned with the sinking of the black ark of the dark elves, and there were more – many more – an army of dead who marched behind him, pointing at his back and whispering, 'I would yet live if not for you...'

Felix bowed to Otto sadly, then stepped back from the desk and turned to go. He had learned what he had come to learn. There was no reason to stay. Except...

Felix turned back around. 'There is one last thing—'

Otto's eyes went wide with angry surprise. 'Sigmar, don't tell me you have the brass to ask for an inheritance! After what you've done? You should be paid with a hangman's noose, not the gold of the man you murdered!'

‘I don’t want his gold!’ snapped Felix. ‘Would you let me speak?’

Otto crossed his arms over his ponderous belly, glaring, but waiting.

Felix took an envelope from his doublet. ‘Father asked me to do him a favour when I saw him. He wanted me to go to Marienburg and get back from Hans Euler an incriminating letter he had once written to Euler’s father.’

‘Euler,’ spat Otto. ‘That conniving little crook. I hope he rots.’

‘Very likely,’ said Felix, remembering his last duel with Euler where he had run him through. He held up the envelope. ‘I recovered the letter. But—’

‘But it’s too late now, as Father is dead,’ sneered Otto. ‘Well done.’

Felix’s hands clenched. He fought the urge to punch his brother in the nose. ‘But,’ he repeated as patiently as he could. ‘When I read the letter, I was very disturbed.’

Otto beckoned impatiently and Felix handed him the envelope. He continued speaking as Otto opened it and unfolded the letter.

‘Father said that it contained proof that he had smuggled goods into the Empire without paying the tariff, and that Euler meant to use it as blackmail to force him to sell him Jaeger and Sons.’

‘The swine,’ said Otto, beginning to read. ‘He’s ten times the smuggler Father ever was.’

‘But that’s not the worst of it,’ said Felix. ‘Look on the reverse. Father says that he has received from Euler’s father six rare books from Tilea, but that some of them are in poor condition and he wants his money back.’

‘So?’ said Otto, holding the letter closer to the candle to read it. ‘It wouldn’t have been the first time that old pirate tried to pass shoddy goods.’

‘The Maelificarium is a forbidden book,’ said Felix. ‘So is Urbanus’s The Seven Gates. They are tomes of the blackest magic. Men have been burned at the stake just for knowing their names.’

Otto grew still, staring at the letter.

Felix stepped closer. ‘This is more than mere smuggling, Otto. This is dangerous business. If Father made a habit of—’

Otto crumpled the letter and threw it into the fire.

Felix yelped. ‘What are you doing?’ He started towards the fireplace.

Otto stepped in his way, glaring into Felix’s eyes. ‘The letter was a forgery. A trick of Euler’s to try to bring us down. Father never dealt in forbidden books. Never. Do you understand?’

‘But how can you be sure?’ asked Felix. ‘Don’t you think we ought to tell someone? The letter names the book dealer that—’

Otto shoved him, snarling. Felix stumbled back, nearly tripping over a satchel full of papers.

‘By the gods!’ Otto cried. ‘Haven’t you done enough? You killed the man once already. Do you want to dig him up and kill him all over again? Do you want to kill me? Do you want to ruin me?’

‘Of course not,’ said Felix. ‘But...’

‘Do you know what would happen if you were to “tell someone”?’ sputtered Otto, limping forwards ponderously. Even in the ruddy light of the fire his skin looked pale. ‘The witch hunters would be here before you could snap your fingers, and every book, every ledger, every letter owned by father, and by me, and by Jaeger and Sons, would be impounded and pored over for evidence of more witchery. They’d take me too, and Annabella, and my son, and you, if they could catch you, and what your “friends” did to Father would be nothing compared to what the witch hunters would do to us. Is that what you want? Do you want to see us racked and flayed?’

‘Not at all,’ said Felix. ‘But—’

‘But nothing!’ said Otto. ‘What Father did or didn’t do doesn’t matter. Jaeger and Sons is a legitimate company now. We deal in wholesome goods and honest services. Leave the past alone and go away, I beg you, Felix!’ He

caught at Felix's shirt front and stared pleadingly up at him. 'I beg you!'

Felix blinked, for the anger that had blazed within Otto's eyes was gone. All that was left was fear.

□□*

The streets of Altdorf were choked with refugees and soldiers returning from the war. Families with all their belongings on their backs wandered through the Konigsplatz staring up at the tall buildings in awe.

Broken men with stumps for legs or hooks for hands begged in the shadow of the Temple of Sigmar. Mothers hugged weeping children to them to try and keep them warm in the winter wind that whistled through canyon-like alleys. Ragged columns of spearmen and crossbowmen shuffled after their sergeants with unshaven faces and thousand-yard stares.

Felix saw none of them as he wandered back from his father's house to the Oxen's Yoke, where he and Gotrek had taken a room upon returning to the city. He was still wondering if he had done the right thing by promising

Otto not to tell anyone about the letter. As much as Otto seemed to think otherwise, he didn't truly wish his family any harm, but at the same time, books like those named in the letter were harmful to everyone. He wished now that he had shown it to Max. He wasn't the sort to bring the witch hunters into things. He would have taken care of things discreetly. Maybe he could still tell him. They had only said goodbye yesterday, though the magister had made it pretty clear that he hoped they wouldn't see each other again for a good long time. Felix could understand why. Their sojourn on the Sea of Chaos had aged Max terribly. He had spent most of the trip back to Marienburg lying in a bunk in the captain's quarters of the dark elf galley they had taken, shaking and sweating with some sort of fever, while the flesh melted from his bones at an alarming rate. Claudia Pallenberger, the seeress from the Celestial College whose premonitions had taken them there in the first place, had fared little better, raving and weeping in her sleep, and dull and unresponsive when awake. Felix

had been more nursemaid than captain on that long, painful voyage, and he had feared many times during its course that his inexpert ministrations would kill the two mages, but they proved more resilient than he could have hoped, and by the time the ragged black ship had been accosted by the Marienburg Harbour Patrol they were able to come to the deck and make their way across the gangplank on their own power.

Neither, however, had fully recovered. Though Max's keen wit and his humour had returned to him, he remained terribly gaunt, even after a week of Marienburg chowders and black beer, and his hair, which had been brown streaked with grey before the dark elf sorceresses had shaved him bald, was growing in snow-white.

Claudia's scars were more hidden. Except for her shorn hair, she quickly regained her beauty and health, but there was a gravity and sad understanding in her eyes that had not been there at the start of the trip. She had seen the cruelty and depravity of the world, and had been marked by it.

Felix was sorry to see it, for her innocence and youthful arrogance had been charming, but at the same time, it had got them all in a lot of trouble – and this experience, bitter as it might have been for her, had undoubtedly given her wisdom that would make her a better, more responsible seeress in the future.

Max and Claudia had spent the day they'd had to wait for a riverboat to take them to Altdorf recovering at an inn, while Gotrek and Felix went back to Euler's house to recover Felix's father's letter from Euler's safe. That had been an adventure in itself, complete with monsters and mayhem, but they had got it at last, and after a journey of twelve days toiling up the Reik, they had returned to Altdorf the previous evening.

Their leave-taking had been friendly, if a bit subdued. Max and Claudia thanked Felix and Gotrek for getting them through the adventure alive, Felix thanked Max and Claudia for the same thing, Gotrek grunted, and that was that. Max led Claudia away to face charges of

misconduct and recklessness at her college, and Gotrek and Felix went to look for drinks and a room.

Felix was a little surprised – and a little disappointed – that Claudia hadn't tried to kiss him as they parted, but perhaps the streak of wild rebellion that had sent her into his arms had been burned out of her when the brand of hard-won wisdom had been burned in. As Max had said, given a second chance and the gift of forgiveness, we may all live long enough to learn from our mistakes, and make amends for them. He hoped it were so for Claudia. Felix chuckled ruefully at the thought of all his recent goodbyes. It seemed he had only just got back to the Empire and everyone was telling him to leave again. But that wasn't a bad thing, for he had a debt with the skaven to settle that might just get him killed, and it wouldn't do to bring any innocents along for the ride.

Felix pushed through the leather curtain of the Oxen's Yoke and strode to the table at the back where Gotrek sat alone, a stein in one fist and another brimming before

him, waiting to be consumed. The Slayer too had been changed by their journey into the Sea of Chaos. Like Max and Claudia he had been scarred, the palms of his powerful hands melted to the smoothness of candle-wax by the arcane power that had coursed through his rune axe when he had chopped the Harp of Ruin in half on the deck of the skaven submersible. But where the wizard and the seeress had been sobered by the danger of the experience, Gotrek had been revived. His single eye was once more bright and alert, his orange crest high and freshly dyed, his beard neatly plaited and his squat, powerful frame fairly vibrating with barely controlled violence.

Felix wasn't sure what had caused the change. The escape from the black ark had been one of the most gruelling challenges they had ever faced, and yet Gotrek seemed fitter and healthier than ever. Perhaps it had been the opportunity to fight the age-old nemesis of his race, the dark elves. Perhaps it had been the prophecy the daemon had spoken in the summoning chamber, that

Gotrek was fated to die killing a daemon greater than himself. Whatever it was, Gotrek was in better spirits than he had been since they had left Karak Hirn.

The Slayer looked up as Felix motioned to the serving girl for an ale and sat down beside him.

‘What did you learn, manling?’ he asked.

Felix sighed. ‘Everything I feared. My father is dead. The skaven tortured and killed him.’ He clenched his fists and turned to look at the Slayer. ‘I vow that I will have my revenge on that vile old rat or die in the attempt.’

Gotrek nodded approvingly. ‘Well said.’ He took a pull from his stein. ‘Though he could already be dead. He fell into the sea.’

Felix shook his head. ‘No. He lives. I know it. And I will kill him.’

The serving girl brought Felix’s ale.

Gotrek raised his stein. ‘To vengeance,’ he said.

Felix did the same and they knocked them together. ‘To vengeance!’

They both drank deep, then slammed the mugs down on the wooden table. Felix wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He felt as if, after such a pronouncement, he should get up and stride off manfully towards his enemy, but he had no idea where the evil ratman might be.

‘So, er, where do you suppose we find him?’ he asked after an awkward minute.

Gotrek belched and started on his second beer. ‘I wouldn’t worry about it, manling. If he’s alive, I’ll wager he’ll find us. All that is required is that we be ready.’

‘Aye,’ said Felix. ‘Ever vigilant.’

‘There he is!’ said a high voice from the front of the tavern.

Gotrek and Felix jumped up, almost upsetting their steins as they drew sword and axe, but it was no skaven sorcerer who had cried out, but a youth in squire’s livery, who was pointing directly at them.

Felix blinked in confusion. The boy had a bowl haircut, and was dressed in doublet and hose of deep blue, with a

red heart haloed by fire emblazoned on the right breast. He stood with a tall, frail-looking old knight with a bald head and a magnificent white beard, whose pale blue eyes shone with the light of fanaticism. Under a heavy wool mantle, the knight wore clothes of the same blue. Felix had never seen either of them before in his life. 'Do you know them?' he asked Gotrek out of the side of his mouth.

'No,' said Gotrek. 'Do you?'

'Haven't a clue.'

The knight made his way across the taproom with stiff dignity, while the youth, who could have been no more than seventeen, followed in his wake.

Gotrek growled a warning as the two approached the table, but the old knight never took his angry eyes away from Felix's face.

'What do you want with me?' Felix asked.

The old knight reached into a pocket within his cloak and pulled out a book. He cast it on the table with a

disdainful flick of the wrist. ‘Are you he who wrote this dreck?’

Felix looked down at the book. It was the second volume of his travels with Gotrek. He blinked with surprise. It was the last thing he had been expecting.

‘Well, I wouldn’t call it dreck,’ he said at last. ‘But, yes. I wrote it.’

‘And did you venture ’neath Karak Eight Peaks with the templar Aldred Keppler, of the Order of the Fiery Heart?’

This was getting stranger and stranger. Felix exchanged a glance with Gotrek. The Slayer shrugged.

‘We did,’ said Felix at last. ‘What is this all about?’

‘And did you take the sword Karaghul from his corpse, though it was not yours to take?’

‘Uh, well...’ said Felix.

‘Answer not, craven,’ cried the old knight. ‘For I see it upon your person even now!’ He thrust an accusatory finger at Felix, his eyes blazing with righteous fury. ‘The sword belongs to the Order of the Fiery Heart! Your

twenty-year thievery is at an end, Felix Jaeger. Return it to us at once!'

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