

DRAGONSLAYER

A GOTREK & FELIX NOVEL BY WILLIAM KING

GOTREK & FELIX find themselves searching for an ancient treasure-hoard, and its scaly guardian. But hot on their heels is ruthless skaven-lord, Grey Seer Thanquol, who wants the experimental dwarf airship for his own nefarious purposes!

WILLIAM KING's popular Gotrek & Felix saga now stretches to six books. He is also the author of the ongoing Space Wolf series, and is currently developing an entirely new series from his home in Prague.



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

Price £5.99 (UK) / \$6.95 (US)

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Orca. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.

UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000

US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME

Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to www.blacklibrary.co.uk/store or www.games-workshop.com

PUBLISHED BY THE BLACK LIBRARY

Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK

Copyright © 2000 Games Workshop Ltd. All rights reserved.

Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

UK ISBN: 1 84154 122 2

US ISBN: 0 7434 1157 9



This is an excerpt from DRAGONSLAYER by William King, published by The Black Library in 2000.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd 2000. All rights reserved.

Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email publishing@games-workshop.co.uk or go to the Black Library website at www.blacklibrary.co.uk

from DRAGONSLAYER

FELIX STRODE DOWN the path into the small valley. He was pleased to see that Gelt still stood. It was a placid enough looking little town, if you discounted the high stone walls, topped with a wooden palisade, and the guard towers that loomed above the walls. It had been built on a knob of rock rising in the middle of the valley. From his vantage point on the trail above the village, Felix could see smoke drifting upwards through holes cut in the turf rooved stone cottages. There was a large central structure he took to be the inn. On a ledge above the village was what he first took to be another watchtower and eventually realised was the fortified entrance to the mine. A gravel path ran all the way down the hillside to the gates of the town.

Judging from the size of the place several hundred people lived there, and judging by the look of the fortifications, it would be a hard place to take by storm. From where he was he could see humans and dwarfs walking the stony streets in about equal numbers.

‘Looks like a safe enough place,’ he said aloud, as much to reassure himself as for the sake of speaking.

‘Aye, manling, providing the attackers don’t have siege engines,’ said Gotrek.

‘Or powerful sorcery,’ said Max Schreiber.

‘Or aren’t mounted on flying monsters,’ added Ulrika.

Felix glanced around at his companions. ‘Sorry I spoke,’ he said eventually. ‘I hate to destroy your cheery mood.’

‘Snorri is looking forward to a drop of ale,’ said Snorri Nosebiter. ‘Old Hurgrim said the Broken Pickaxe brews the best ale in the mountains.’

‘Then what are we waiting for,’ said Gotrek. ‘Let’s get down there.’

‘Don’t worry, Felix Jaeger,’ said Ulli. ‘No orc would dare attack Gelt while I am there.’

'Wonder if they have any bar girls,' said Bjorni. 'I could use a little company.'

'Maybe there'll be a game of chance,' said Steg. 'I brought my own special dice.'

Grimme merely shook his head, sucked his teeth, and marched stolidly down the hill. At the rear, Standa and Oleg glanced over their shoulders. They had their strung bows held ready in their hands, but there was no perceptible threat.

'Go on,' said Felix. 'We should be safe for this evening, at least.'

'If the dragon doesn't come get us,' said Oleg.

'Look on the bright side,' said Felix. Misgivings and forebodings aside, everybody looked a little happier once they were past the dwarf sentries on the gate.

THE BROKEN PICKAXE had a large common room. A roaring fire served to keep out the chill of the mountain night. Felix glanced around at the crowd. Their party was attracting a lot of attention, which wasn't surprising when you considered it. How often did these people see seven Slayers travelling in the company of five humans?

The crowd itself was an unusual one. It seemed to consist of an equal mix of humans and dwarfs. Most of the dwarfs had the pale faces and scrubbed clean look of miners after work. The humans were a more mixed bunch. Some of the tougher looking ones wore the warm leather garments favoured by high mountain prospectors. Others looked like peddlers, and shopkeepers. None of them looked exactly prosperous, but none of them looked starved either.

A silence had spread across the room as the Slayers took up one long table. This close to Karak Kadrin no one was going to be stupid enough to object. All of them knew exactly what the Slayers were and what they were capable of when annoyed. Felix had joined Ulrika, Max and the two bodyguards at the table next to the Slayers. Some semblance of normal business was restored when Gotrek called for ale. An order swiftly seconded by Snorri Nosebiter and Malakai Makaisson.

A fat-prosperous looking dwarf with a balding head, rosy cheeks and a long greying beard brought the ale over himself. Judging by the proprietorial air he cast over the place, he was obviously the owner of the inn.

'You'll be wanting rooms for the night?' he asked.

'The Slayers will sleep in the common room,' said Gotrek. 'The humans might want their own chambers.'

'We do,' said Ulrika, glancing over at Felix. Max noticed this and looked away, adding, 'I'll take a room to myself.'

'Me and Standa will stay in the common room,' said Oleg tugging morosely at his moustache. Standa beamed approval of his comrade's decision. Ulrika agreed.

'I'll see the best rooms are aired and the beds turned out. There's a nip in the air, so you'll be wanting a fire, no doubt?'

Felix could imagine that the bill was increasing with every word, but so what, he thought. This might be his last chance of a comfortable bed in this life, so why stint tonight?

'Why not.'

'And you'll be wanting food too, no doubt?'

'Aye. Bring us the stew we smell and bread and cheese,' said Ulli.

'And more ale,' added Snorri. 'Snorri has a thirst.'

'And you'll be paying for the rooms and the food now, will you?'

The innkeeper was obviously taking no chances with their absconding without paying, even if they were Slayers. Possibly even because they were Slayers. After all, they were dwarfs who had somehow failed to abide by the normal dwarf code of honour. Malakai Makaisson dug into his purse and gold changed hands. Felix could not see how much but the innkeeper's eyes widened, and he became particularly jovial. It looked like Malakai thought the same way as Felix did about staying in the inn. 'And that'll keep the beers comin' ah nicht,' said Malakai. 'And ah'll be sleeping in the wagon so there's no need to clear me a space in the common room.'

Steg looked a little disgruntled by that, but after a sip of the ale, his expression became slightly more contented.

'That it will,' said the innkeeper and bellowed instructions to his staff. Bjorni's eyes widened as a busty barmaid approached. Within seconds, he was slapping her rump, and whispering in her ear. If the barmaid was offended she gave no sign.

Felix sampled a drop of the ale, and nodded. 'Malgrim was right,' he said. 'This is fine ale.'

'It's not bad,' allowed Gotrek, which for the Slayer was high praise indeed.

Now that he had been paid, the innkeeper seemed more inclined to be sociable. 'And you'll be taking the High Road to Radasdorp then?'

'If it's on the way to the dragon's mountain we will,' bellowed Ulli, obviously taking a great deal of pleasure from the buzz of conversation this started.

'So it's the dragon you're after,' said the innkeeper.

'Aye,' said Malakai. 'We're ganna kill the great big scaly beast-ie!'

'It's been tried before,' said the innkeeper. Felix looked over, his interest suddenly piqued.

'By whom?' he asked.

'Half a dozen Slayers have passed through here in the past couple of years, not all at once mind,' said the innkeeper. 'None of them ever came back.'

'The orcs probably ate them,' bellowed one of the humans.

'Or skinned them,' added another man ominously.

'Aye,' said an ancient looking miner. 'That'd be likely enough. One of the Slayers was found skinned alive and nailed to a tree by the roadside. They reckon the Manflyer is using his hide for a new pair of boots now.'

'Another's head was found on a spike up near the Mirnek Pass. The crows was pecking his eyes out so they was.'

'And there was one of those human knights, on a big black charger,' said the innkeeper. 'Said he had a magic sword and a dragon-killing lance.'

'He never came back either,' said one of the dwarfs gloomily.

'Most likely the orcs got him too,' said the first man who spoke.

'Or the human bandits. Henrik Richter is a nasty piece of work,' said the innkeeper. Seeing Felix's enquiring glance, he said, 'He's the local bandit chief these days. He's been forging the human bands into a small army. Since the Manflyer came the humans have needed it to survive. They say there'll be war for control of the high country between those two soon. I can believe it.'

'It sounds like the High Road has become very dangerous,' said Felix.

'This was never the safest of places to live,' said the innkeeper. 'But ever since the dragon came back it's got downright dangerous. I reckon it's only a matter of time before it attacks Gelt. It's

said to have destroyed all the other towns along the High Road now.'

'You mean we could just wait here and it will come to us?' Felix asked hopefully.

'Aye. Most likely.'

'Ah dinnae hae time tae waste. I want that beastie deid, and ah want it soon.'

'There's more glory in seeking it out!' shouted Ulli. 'And if any greenskin or any human tries to stop us, they'll get a blow from my axe.'

'Och, if any of them try to stop us, ah hae a nasty wee surprise for them,' said Malakai. Felix did not doubt that was true. He had seen ample evidence of the Engineer's genius at devising weapons. Of course, most of Malakai's weapons were experimental and subject to malfunction. Some of them might prove as dangerous to their wielders as to any foe.

'And what might that be?' asked a large burly man who looked more like a mercenary than a prospector.

'Onybody that's interested can attack us and find oot,' said Malakai with a hint of satisfaction. Felix was now really curious about what the Engineer had up his sleeve.

'There are plenty here in the mountains will take you up on that,' said the man with a sneer. Felix wondered if this fool was tired of living. It was not wise to sneer at any Slayer, even one as relatively even tempered as Malakai was.

'They're mare than welcome tae,' was all the Engineer said in response, and returned to glugging down his beer.

The innkeeper said, 'You pay no attention to Peter. He is a surly chap at the best of times, and these are not the best of times. He used to make a living selling all along the High Road. Now there's damn few left to sell to. The dragon's seen to that.'

'We'll change that!' bellowed Ulli. His boast was met with laughter from the other tables. For some reason, the dwarfs present refused to take the young Slayer as seriously as the others. Ulli did not seem to mind as long as he was the centre of attention.

'You may laugh but you'll see. You won't mock us after the dragon is dead.'

'You'll be dead as well,' shouted someone and the others laughed.

'What of it,' shouted Ulli. 'Everybody dies.'

'Some sooner than others,' said Peter.

Bjorni had the barmaid on his knee now. She was running her fingers through his beard while he looked up at her with a lascivious leer. A moment later the woman was tumbled off his knee by a huge man with a scarred face and massive hands. He was without a doubt one of the bouncers.

'Leave Essie alone,' he said, his voice flat and menacing.

'Let it be, Otto,' said the innkeeper. 'You know this always happens.'

'What is that to you?' asked Bjorni innocently.

'She's my wife.' Felix groaned aloud. He had seen women like Essie before when he and Gotrek worked the taverns of Nuln. Women married to large violent men who thrived on their jealous attention. He couldn't understand why they did it, but they did. The bouncer looked over at him.

'What are you whining about, boy?' he said. Felix looked up at him. The man was big. Perhaps a head taller than he was, and broad in proportion. His arms looked almost as large as Gotrek's.

'Some ale went down the wrong way.'

'Watch it or I'll take that tankard and stick it up your...'

Felix looked at him, and started to rise from his seat, but it was already too late. Bjorni had taken his fist and whacked Otto between the legs while the bouncer wasn't looking. The big man groaned and bent double, and as he went over Bjorni took his tankard and smacked him hard on the head. Otto's eyes crossed and he slumped forward unconscious.

'Not the first jealous husband I've had to deal with,' said Bjorni tugging lasciviously at the wart on his nose. 'Now, love, what say you and me find a quiet corner and...'

The girl was bent down over Otto and shrieking. 'Otto, what has that brute done to you?'

'He'll be all right in the morning,' said Bjorni. 'Now how about we go behind the woodshed. There's a big gold piece in it for you if...'

'Go to hell,' said Essie. Bjorni shrugged and sat down again. 'Another ale, landlord. My jar is suddenly empty.'

The innkeeper was looking at the Slayers warily again. Still, with his biggest bouncer down, and the newcomers not seeming about to start any more trouble, he decided it was best to humour them.

'More ale, it is,' he said.

'I'll help you carry him upstairs,' said Steg to Essie, moving over to the slumped body and making as if to pick him up.

'Don't bother,' said the girl. 'I don't need any of your help.'

Steg shrugged and dropped the body once more. Felix wondered if he was the only one to notice that the bouncer's purse was suddenly missing from his belt.

'I think I'll just go for a walk,' said Steg.

'Ah think ah'll go with ye,' said Malakai. 'It's about time for me to turn in anyway.'

If Steg was disappointed at missing the opportunity to search Makaïsson's wagon, he did not show it.

'Time for bed,' said Felix, looking over at Ulrika to see if she agreed with him. She nodded and they made their way up the stairs.

GRUND HUGENOSE OF the Broken Nose tribe looked down on the village. His orcish eyes were much keener than any human's, and even by the dim light of the two moons he could make out all he needed. From his vantage point, he could see the wagon in the courtyard. It told him that someone would be leaving the small fortified outpost soon. That meant manflesh, and steel weapons, and maybe gold and rotgut booze. He slipped back from the cliff edge, and headed up the trail.

There was no need to tell the Manflyer about this, he decided. It was a small party and the spoils would be barely enough for him and the lads. He would get his warband together, and make sure that whatever was on that wagon would be his before the next night's stars shone.

FELIX AWOKE TO the sound of metal ringing against metal outside the inn. He threw open the shutters and looked out to see what was going on. From the racket he half expected to see half a dozen orcs sword fighting with Templars in the courtyard but the source of the noise was not immediately evident. After a moment or two of looking he noticed that the back of Malakai Makaïsson's cart was bouncing up and down, and that the covered wagon was where all the row was coming from.

'What is it, Felix?' Ulrika asked.

'Don't know,' he said, 'but it looks like Malakai is up to something.'

'If it's important we'll find out soon enough. Now come back to bed,' she said. Glancing back at her naked form he did not have to be asked twice.

FELIX'S LEGS ACHED from the strain of the constant uphill walking. His feet were sore from slamming down on the hard rocks of the High Road. He drew his red cloak of Sudenland wool tight around his shoulder, glad of it now. Despite the brightness of the sun, it was chilly in these mountain heights and getting chillier. A cold breeze blew down the valleys, and ruffled his hair with invisible fingers.

He smiled at Ulrika. They were getting on better today, as they usually did after the nights they slept together. She smiled back warmly. Felix could tell she was as tired as he, if not more so, but was determined to show no sign of it. Felix felt a certain sympathy for her. She had grown up on the flat plains of Kislev and had even less experience than he of mountain walking. He at least had travelled among the peaks before he had fallen in with Gotrek. Oleg and Standa were quite visibly faltering. Their breath came in gasps, and every now and again, one or the other would bend over almost double, legs spread wide, hands resting on thighs, heads bowed as they attempted to catch their breaths.

Of all the humans, Max Schreiber showed the least sign of fatigue, which surprised Felix no end. He had gotten used to thinking of the wizard as a sedentary scholar, and yet he had taken to the hills as if born to them. He leaned on his high staff and spoke encouragingly to Oleg then put his hand on the Kislevite's shoulder. Felix could have sworn he saw a spark of energy pass between the two men, and then Oleg rose to his full height, and began to walk with renewed vigour. Perhaps that was Max's secret, Felix decided, maybe he was using his magic to give him strength while they walked, and maybe he had used it to lend some of that strength to Oleg.

Whatever it was, it was effective, Felix thought. Max seemed almost at home here as the dwarfs, and, until today, Felix would have thought that impossible for any human. The dwarfs were unbelievably cheery, considering they were Slayers and bound on a mission that most likely meant their deaths. They strode along tirelessly, taking the steepest of gradients with no apparent effort, sometimes deviating from the path, and scrambling easily up near vertical slopes apparently just for the sheer joy of it.

Only Malakai did not do so. He stayed with his cart at all times, goading his ponies when they balked on the steep inclines, keeping a beady eye on their surroundings and most especially on Steg, whenever the suspected thief strayed close to the cart. Gotrek and Snorri led the way. Felix could see them at the head of the column, cresting the nearest ridge, where the pathway wound ever higher and further up slope.

'It is beautiful, is it not?' said Ulrika. Felix glanced around knowing what she meant. The mountains had a strange barren loveliness that seemed like a reward for making the effort of walking among them. On either side loomed the great grey flanks of mountains, spotted here and there by the green of woods and scrub brush. High above them glittered the snow-line, and the chill proud peaks. Boulders rose from the mountainside, and occasionally blocked the path. Felix guessed that this was where stones had been dislodged and rolled downslope.

Far below them, he could see Gelt. Through a pass between two nearby mountains he could see that the trail wound down to a cold clear lake.

'Yes, it is,' he said. 'Though not nearly as beautiful as you.'

She shook her head. 'You are a shameless flatterer, Felix Jaeger.'

'It is not flattery. It is merely the truth.'

She turned and looked away for a moment, and her smile took on a strange sad quality. 'What am I going to do without you?' she asked.

'What do you mean?'

'I have never met a man who makes me feel like you do.'

Felix knew she meant it as compliment but felt embarrassed nonetheless. 'Is that good or bad?'

'I do not know,' she said. 'I do know it is confusing.'

He struggled for a reply, and could not find exactly the right words to say what he felt. He was almost glad when he heard Gotrek bellow, 'Looks like trouble ahead!'

FELIX AND ULRIKA made their way to the crest of the ridge. The path ran on, descending into a small valley before passing once more over a series of ridges that rose like giant frozen waves to the horizon. Gotrek and Snorri stood on the ridge, silhouetted against the skyline.

A quick glance showed Felix exactly what Gotrek meant. Moving along the path towards them were a group of greenskin warriors. Felix tried counting them, but there were too many and too tightly packed for him to be very successful in his efforts. He gave up somewhere over twenty.

'There are fifty-four of them,' Ulrika said.

'Your eyes are better than mine.'

'Either that or my counting skills are.' He knew she was attempting a joke but he could hear the strain in her voice.

Oleg and Standa got into position beside them. They had already strung their bows. Ulrika began to ready hers. Max took up a position beside them, leaning on his staff with both hands. 'It seems we are outnumbered,' he said eventually.

'They are only greenskins,' said Snorri. 'No need to worry.'

'They outnumber us more than four to one,' said Max. 'That causes me just a little concern.'

'One dwarf is worth ten orcs!' boomed Ulli.

'Particularly in bed,' said Bjorni with a leer.

'Don't you ever think of anything else?' Felix asked.

'Sometimes I think about fighting,' said Bjorni. 'And I think now is as good a time as any to dwell on that.'

'Aye,' said Gotrek. 'That it is. We'll meet them here, and let them come up at us. I would normally take the battle to them but it would be a pity to fall to an orcish scimitar when there's a dragon in these mountains.'

'Sound thinking,' said Felix ironically. Behind him he could hear Malakai Makaiisson's cart rumbling slowly up the hill. Felix sincerely hoped that Malakai had the weapons he had been promising and that they worked.

'Snorri thinks we should just charge them,' said Snorri Nosebiter.

'I think Gotrek's plan is better,' said Ulli. Felix wondered if he heard just a little fear in the boastful dwarf's voice. It would not surprise him. Emptiest vessels make the loudest noise, his father had always claimed. And he should know, thought Felix, for his father was a very loud man.

'I wonder if they have any gold,' said Steg. 'You can never tell. If they've just robbed a prospector they might have.'

He became aware of the looks the others were giving him and shrugged affably. 'You never know. That's all I'm saying.'

'I'm more concerned as to whether they have any bows,' said

Gotrek. 'Being pin-cushioned by greenskin arrows is no death for a Slayer.'

'I might be able to do something about that,' said Max Schreiber. 'If the winds of magic are strong enough, and there's no shaman down there.'

'Doesn't look like there is,' said Gotrek. 'If there was he would be dancing around and chanting nonsense to his gods.'

The orcs were maybe four hundred paces below them now. Just out of arrow range but closing fast. Felix could hear their savage guttural war-cries. They brandished their weapons menacingly.

'Maybe we could turn back,' said Ulli. Felix glanced over at him. He looked pale, and a little shaken.

'That might not be a bad idea,' said Gotrek. Felix looked at Gotrek curiously. In all their long association, this was the first time he had ever heard the Slayer evince a desire to retreat.

'Why?' he asked.

'Because there are some more greenskins to kill down there.'

Felix looked back in the direction they had come. Orcs and other smaller creatures were pouring down the slopes behind them. It appeared their line of retreat was cut off.

'This is not looking good,' said Felix. He noticed that some of the smaller greenskins were mounted on huge spider-like creatures. Just the sight of those savage steeds made his flesh crawl. They were coming on with terrible speed. He began to think that perhaps the Slayers had been overconfident proceeding into the mountains in such a pitifully small party.

'For them, manling,' said Gotrek. 'For them.'

'I wished I shared your confidence,' said Felix.

'Ah'll deal wae this bunch,' said Malakai. 'You see tae the yins in front o' ye.'

'Are you sure you're up to it?' said Felix.

'Ye can bet on it,' said Malakai. With one hand he pulled a lever and the canvas cover of the wagon dropped away. Revealed was an odd looking multi-barrelled gun, mounted on a tripod. Felix had seen a smaller version of the weapon before, and knew what it was capable of. Malakai pulled the brake lever of the wagon on, locking it in position on the far side of the hill.

The spider riders to the rear had begun their advance up the hill. Felix watched as Malakai sighted down the barrel of his weapon and clutched the trigger guards tight. Felix risked a

glance at the other side of the hill. The orcs had begun their climb, shouting confidently as they came. Felix knew that if their foes had any idea of what was waiting for them at the top of the hill, they would not be so confident. Still, he wondered, would it be enough?

Ulrika, Standa and Oleg had begun to fire their short composite bows. Arrows whooshed away downhill, and impaled three of the leading orcs. Two went down, one with an arrow through his eye, another with an arrow through his throat. The third kept coming despite the feathered shaft embedded in his breast.

In response to the arrow fire, the greenskins began to spread out so they would not be quite so tightly packed together and not make such good targets. Savage they might be, Felix thought, but they were not stupid. At this moment, he wished he had learned to use a bow. In his youth he had been given some training with duelling pistols, but none in archery. It was not the mark of the gentleman his father had hoped to turn him into. Right at this moment it would have been very useful though. Apparently the orcs agreed, several of them had unslung bows from their backs and begun to string them. It looked like an archery duel was about to break out. All around him, the Slayers bellowed taunts at the greenskins, mocking them, and brandishing their weapons.

Gotrek raised his axe above his head, and bellowed, 'Come on up and die!'

'Snorri wants to fight!' shouted Snorri Nosebiter.

'I slept with your mothers,' shouted Bjorni, then fell quiet, as the other dwarfs all stared at him. 'Well, needs must when daemons drive,' he muttered at last. As the dwarfs hurled insults Ulrika and the Kislevites kept up a steady stream of arrow fire at the orcs. Three more fell but the rest howled angry war-cries and kept on coming.

Suddenly a sound like thunder erupted behind them. Felix looked back to see that Malakai Makaisson had activated his gun. Flames flickered as flint strikers struck home. The barrels rotated and death roared forth from the weapon. As Felix watched one of the spiders crumpled in the middle, its body torn asunder, its legs twitching feebly. Malakai moved the gun slightly on its tripod and the arc of fire changed. A second spider crumpled and then a third.

Unfortunately, the roar of the gun spooked the ponies. It was either that or the sight of the unnaturally huge spiders coming towards them. They began to rear and buck and lash out with their hind legs, kicking at the cart and wrestling with their harness in a desperate attempt to get free. One of the kicks smashed into the brake lever, knocking the mechanism loose and snapping it in two. Another flurry of blows sent the cart rumbling downslope. Slowly at first, and then moving ever faster, it picked up speed. Felix considered racing after it and trying to stop it, but swiftly realised that it was futile. There was no way a man of ordinary strength could bring the careening vehicle to a halt.

If Malakai Makaisson was dismayed he gave no sign of it. He shouted a dwarf warcry and kept firing, mowing down another spider rider. The last two moved to intercept him.

'Beware, manling,' Felix heard Gotrek say, and twisted his head to look at the oncoming orcs once more. Half a dozen of them had managed to get their bows ready and were returning fire at the hilltop. Felix flinched as arrows blurred towards him, then suddenly Max Schreiber raised his hands and finished whatever spell he had been muttering. A glowing sphere of golden light sprang up around the hilltop. The arrows struck its shimmering translucent surface and caught fire, disintegrating harmlessly in a shower of sparks.

The advancing orcs halted in confusion, dismayed by this display of sorcerous power. The Kislevites kept the stream of arrows coming, taking down two more orcs. Felix guessed that they had taken perhaps ten of the orcs out of the combat now. Still, that left more than enough to overwhelm the hilltop. A crunching sound behind him drew his attention again. He looked back.

Through the shimmering haze he saw that one of the spider riders had got in the way of the cart and had been crushed under its heavy ironshod wheels. The last one was torn to shreds by a burst of fire from the organ gun. Malakai continued to rumble downhill into the horde of goblin troops. Felix could see them looking up at the oncoming Slayer with wide-eyed panic. Malakai continued to bellow and roar challenges as he raced towards the small greenskins.

A shout from the front drew Felix's attention back there. The orcs had gotten over their dismay swiftly enough and continued their advance. Realising the futility of their efforts the greenskin archers had put away their bows, drawn their heavy black iron

scimitars, and now rushed to join their comrades. Felix hastily judged the distance and readied his own dragon-hilted sword.

'I reckon you've time for one more shot, and then you'd better get your blades out,' he told Ulrika.

A faint smile curved her lips, as she drew the bowstring to her cheek and loosed. 'You don't say,' she said as another orc dropped. From behind them came the sound of explosions. What was Malakai up to, Felix wondered? He dared not look and see the first of the onrushing orcs were almost within striking distance. Ulrika fired once more at almost point blank range, and then hastily dropped her bow and drew her sword. Felix stepped forward, ready to interpose himself between her and anyone who might strike at her before her weapon was out.

The sound of Max's chanting altered, and the sphere of golden light collapsed inwards, tendrils of energy congealing into a far smaller sphere about the size of a man's head that hovered just in front of Max. Another gesture shattered the sphere and sent bolts of golden light raining down onto the orcs. In an instant the whole front row was felled by the blaze of magical energy. Felix saw one orc sink to its knees, the whole front of its chest ripped away, its ribs visible through the smoking hole in its armour.

'Right, lads,' said Gotrek. 'Let's get stuck in!'

It was all the encouragement the Slayers needed. All six of them raced forward at the discouraged orcs who stood gawping at them, the momentum of their charge lost in the face of Max's magical onslaught. Even as Felix watched Gotrek stormed in amid the orcs, his axe rose and fell in a bloody arc, smashing through one orc to bury itself in the chest of another. With a brutal twist, the Slayer pulled it free, and sliced about him, the mighty mystical blade transformed into a whirlwind of death in his hands.

Snorri raced in behind him, axe and hammer held at the ready. He lashed about him with mighty strokes, uncaring of his own life. Each of his blows downed an orc reducing them to lifeless husks in an instant. The other Slayers joined them, forming a wedge that cleaved through the orcs, like a ship sailing through a sea of green blood. Felix watched in awe at the destruction the dwarfs wreaked. He doubted that a company of knights could have created more havoc than the Slayers had in those few brief instant.

Bjorni head butted one orc and as it drew back, he lashed out with his axe severing its head. Laughing like a maniac, he stamped on the foot of another, kneed it in the groin and then drove his axe into its chest before it could recover. Pale-faced Ulli moved alongside him using his own axe two-handed, hewing at his foes like a woodcutter chopping a trunk. Felix could see he was far less skilled than the other dwarfs but his strokes were nonetheless effective, powered as they were by his mighty dwarf muscles.

Steg lurked at the rear, lashing out with his pickaxe at any orc who threatened to get round his comrades. His eyes darted everywhere, as if looking for loot, but not even his greed could get the better of him in the middle of this swirling, turbulent melee. Grimme fought off to the right on his own, and the carnage he created was appalling. He used his huge hammer two-handed but with a speed that rivalled Gotrek's. One mighty blow reduced an orc's skull to jelly. A second sideways stroke knocked a greenskin head clean off, sending it flying a hundred strides down the slope.

A company of men would have routed in instants under the fury of the slayers' attack, but these orcs were made of sterner stuff. For a moment only they wavered, and then they threw themselves into the fray with a berserker bravery that almost matched their foes'. They swarmed in over the dwarfs, seeking to overcome them with sheer weight of numbers. A few of them, noticing the humans who stood waiting on the hilltop, swept past the Slayers and charged. Felix considered the position for an instant. Would it be better to wait or charge? Here, they had the advantage of position. If they charged they would have the advantage of momentum.

A glance told him that the orcs did not seem to be too winded by their uphill run. He reached his decision instantly.

'Let's go!' he shouted, and ran forward. Ulrika and her bodyguards followed.

'Stay close. Watch each other's backs!' Ulrika cried. Felix was glad she had thought of it. It was the one advantage they might have in the midst of the chaos that surrounded them.

Moving downslope added to his speed. He selected the largest of the onrushing orcs as his target and raised his blade high. At the last second, he brought his blade down, ducked under the orc's stroke and with a backward slice chopped it across the

spine. He felt bone crunch and leather give way under the impact of his razor-sharp blade and then the orc dropped, its legs no longer obeying it. Standa kicked it in the head as he passed, and the orc grunted and lay still.

Felix was lost in the madness of battle. He ducked and dodged, parried and struck, thrusting out with his blade into the tightly packed mass of bodies. Sweat almost blinded him, blood splattered his face and arms. The howls and screams of his foes almost deafened him. The shock of each parry almost tore his blade from his numb fingers.

He lashed out to left and right, trying always to keep Ulrika in view, lest a foe strike her down unawares. He saw her fighting with her long Kislevite sword. She moved through the fray like some warrior goddess. If she could not match the orcs for strength, she made up for in speed. Battle madness seemed to overtake her. Felix had fought her once in play, but had never really witnessed her fight in earnest. Some primordial rage seemed to fill her, and transformed her into an engine of destruction. She danced through the battle like a flame, whirling and cutting, and leaving a trail of death in her wake. Behind her Oleg and Standa fought like men possessed, guarding her flanks. They lacked her skill and speed, but fought with the deadly competence of veterans.

Out of the corner of his eye, Felix caught a flicker of golden light. He glimpsed Max moving through the orcs. His whole body was surrounded by a flicker of yellowish light which seemed to deflect blows. Whenever his staff struck an orc there was a flash of utter brilliance and the smell of burning meat filled the air. Felix knew that the mage's enchanted weapon was burning through whatever it touched. The moment passed. Another orc attacked and Felix was hard pressed to defend himself. He backed away up the hill, frantically trying to keep his balance as he parried, desperately hoping that he would not trip over some unseen obstruction, like a boulder or an orc corpse. His foe was a massive orc. A head taller than he, and half again as broad. Its long apish arms gave it greater reach. Its red eyes were filled with hate and bloodlust, and spittle and foam erupted from its mouth, drenching the tusk-like teeth that protruded from its lower jaw. It looked like it fully intended to kill Felix then eat him. It was very strong and very fast and for a sickening instant Felix doubted his own ability to stop it.

From some dark depth of his mind bubbled up the realisation that if he fell here, he would never get his chance to confront the dragon. As if in answer to this, he felt new strength flow into him from the sword. The tidal wave of energy drove back fatigue and fear. He blocked the orc's blow easily, catching its blade with his own, and holding it with ease, as if the orc did not outweigh him by ten stone. He saw a look of shock twist across the orc's face, as it registered this feat by its relatively puny foe.

Then time seemed to slow for Felix. He moved at normal speed but everything around him moved at half its usual pace. He drew his blade back from the orc and before it had time to respond separated its head from its shoulders, then he moved forward into the fray once more, killing as he went.

In an instant the orcs realised they were overmatched. One of them turned to run, and, in a heartbeat, all of his surviving brethren came to the same decision. As they chose to flee the dwarfs cut them down. As they ran the Slayers and their human companions followed. The short-legged dwarfs were soon outdistanced but the humans managed to keep up and chop down a few more from behind.

Still, there were too many to overtake and kill them all, and Felix realised that if they kept on the orcs might regroup and overwhelm the humans. He shouted for Ulrika and her bodyguards to halt and reluctantly they obeyed. The orcs kept running.

From behind the ridge-top came the sound of another explosion. Felix could see a cloud of black smoke rising skyward. Instantly the thought came to him that Malakai Makaisson was down there somewhere, fighting alone against a horde of goblins.

'We've got to get back and help Malakai,' he said, and saw understanding pass across Ulrika's face. She nodded and turned at once, Standa and Oleg following her. Felix cursed under his breath as the strain of running up hill told on his legs. His clothes were already saturated with sweat and wet with blood. His muscles ached from the strain of the fight. Yet he forced himself to keep up with the Kislevites.

He saw that the Slayers had already turned and were moving across the ridge top in the direction of the other battle. He rushed onwards as they vanished out of sight, feeling confident

that as they had vanquished the savage orcs, the goblins were likely to prove far less of a threat. Then the thought of those giant spiders entered his mind, and his feelings of confidence vanished.

Silhouetted on the ridge-line, Max Schreiber raised his staff high. A nimbus of yellowish light flickered around him, but it was less bright than it had been and Felix knew instinctively that Max had exhausted a great deal of his strength. Even so, he swirled his staff around his head, and as he did so, the tip seemed to catch fire. Angry golden light blazed brighter and brighter with each rotation of the staff, as if it were a firebrand catching alight in the motion. Finally, having gathered sufficient power, Max unleashed it, sending a torrent of energy vanishing downslope. The spell was answered by the high pitched, piping screams of dying goblins.

Felix crested the ridge ahead of Ulrika and her bodyguards, and looked down on a scene of appalling carnage. The Engineer's cart had cut a bloody swathe through the goblin horde's ranks. The huge spiders were crushed or blown apart. Many small goblin bodies lay still on the ground, testament to the terrifying power of the organ gun. Malakai himself stood precariously atop the cart which had crashed to a halt in a depression by the side of the road. He tossed black bombs into the massed goblins.

The greenskins huddled together, kept at bay by the power of the explosives, as they tried to gather their courage and assault the inventor. Now it looked as if Max's spell and the sudden advent of six Slayers was enough to daunt them completely. They turned and fled back the way they came. Seeing their departure, Felix decided that he had had enough of slaughter for one day, and slowed from a run to a walk. Ulrika and the Kislevites swept past him, and moved to join the Slayers below.

Felix let them. He knew they would never catch the greenskins now.

**The adventure continues in
DRAGONSLAYER!**



More Gotrek & Felix from William King!

The dwarf Slayer, Gotrek Gurnisson, is seeking an epic death in battle, to atone for an unspeakable dishonour. His human companion, Felix Jaeger, has drunkenly sworn to record the dwarf's doom in an equally epic poem. Follow their saga across six rollercoaster novels from William King.

TROLLSLAYER · SKAVENSLAYER · DAEMONSLAYER
DRAGONSLAYER · BEASTSLAYER · VAMPIRESLAYER

More Warhammer from the Black Library

· **WARHAMMER NOVELS** ·

GILEAD'S BLOOD by Dan Abnett & Nik Vincent

HAMMERS OF ULRIC by Dan Abnett,
Nik Vincent & James Wallis

THE WINE OF DREAMS by Brian Craig

DRACHENFELS by Jack Yeovil (Kim Newman)

GENEVIEVE UNDEAD by Jack Yeovil (Kim Newman)

KONRAD by David Ferring

· **WARHAMMER FANTASY STORIES** ·

REALM OF CHAOS

eds. Marc Gascoigne & Andy Jones

LORDS OF VALOUR

eds. Marc Gascoigne & Christian Dunn

— www.blacklibrary.co.uk —