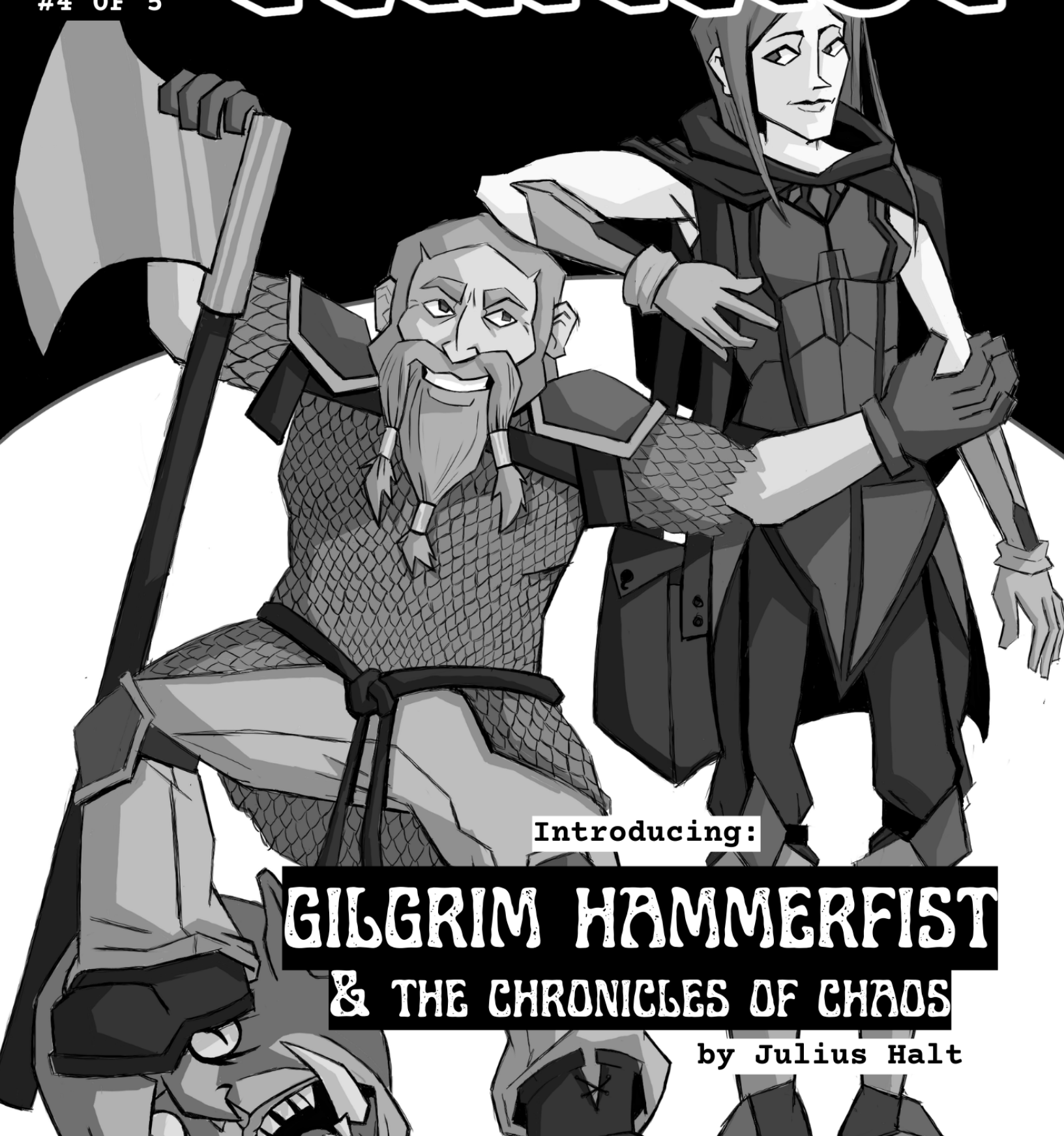




#4 OF 5

# ABSURD FANTASY



Introducing:

## GILGRIM HAMMERFIST & THE CHRONICLES OF CHAOS

by Julius Halt

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW?

i am creating. for it is what i was born to do.

WHY DO YOU CONTINUE THIS VENTURE, OLD FRIEND?  
YOU KNOW HOW THIS WILL END. ONE DAY, THIS QUAIN'T REALM  
YOU'VE BUILT WILL BE CONSUMED WITHIN ME.  
THERE IS NO ESCAPE.

i have a finite amount of time, yes, but that does not mean what i do is  
devoid of meaning. the building of this universe, these universes, is the  
meaning itself.

AH, YOU SAID THE KEY WORD. FINITE.  
REMEMBER THAT YOU DESIGNED THE GAME THIS WAY.  
YOU HAD THE OPPORTUNITY LONG AGO TO STOP ME.  
YET YOU DIDN'T.  
I HAVE A THEORY AS TO WHY.  
YOU KNOW I AM RIGHT.  
THE VOID IS THE ONLY MEANING.

and may i ask whatever it is that you bring to the proceedings, brother?  
war? famine? genocide? anger? fear? these things have no meaning.  
they are chaotic, just as you are.  
you have a random nature and it is my duty to seek meaning  
in the meaninglessness that you have wrought.

I CANNOT HELP IT.  
AS YOU SAID BEFORE,  
IT IS WHAT I WAS BORN TO DO.  
YOU SHOULD KNOW. WE WERE BORN TOGETHER.

and we shall die together. the first and the last, i suppose.

I SUPPOSE.  
WHAT IS IT THAT YOU ARE CREATING ANYWAY?

i don't know.

something.

A B S U R D  
FANTASY

ABSURDIST PRESS PRESENTS:

# GILGRIM HAMMERFIST

**& THE CHRONICLES OF CHAOS**

*CHAPTER ONE:*

*THE JOB*

Story by Julius Halt | Art by 13 | Originally Published 2021 | First Printing 2024

A young Dwarven waitress glided up to the table holding a filled stein. She smiled warmly and placed the drink in front of Gilgrim. He gave a curt nod and a smile, pushing over a silver and several copper pieces for his ale with a few extra coins for her.

“Thank you kindly,” he grinned.

“My pleasure, Mister.” she said with a wink, working for her tip. With a swish of her hips she turned to take another tavern goer’s order.

He took a long swig and gave a relieved sigh. Now that he had a drink, he could get to work. He moved his eyes around the bar letting them rest on each person for a few moments. He had intentionally arrived early for this meeting to allow him time to get a lay of the land. The dwarf always did this in places he had never been. Keep informed, keep safe. The bar was small, all wood with thick, crude pillars holding up the roof. Rough tables held even rougher looking dwarven miners and human farmers. The

occasional elf added a spice of diversity to the mixture. The pungent smell of fish clung to the thick air following around fishermen, lots and lots of fishermen, who crowded about the dimly lit tavern. He supposed that would be expected from a town so close to a branch of the Trident.

The patrons of The Salted Barrel moved about joyfully, enjoying a pint or several with their fellow workers, as they flirted, chatted, and quarreled with their neighbors. Gilgrim continued to scan the merriment until his eyes fell upon a young woman. She was tall, slender, with angular features and alabaster skin. A black satchel hung from her side, and she fiddled with a small object in her hand. Piercing blue eyes peered from behind a black cowl, they moved from member to member of the bar, resting for mere moments on each patron until they landed on a confident young man who was sauntering toward her. Gilgrim watched him approach, he leaned on a wall beside her and spoke a few words. Something he said must

have worked, because she drew close and ran a hand across his cheek. He suddenly stumbled backwards, his face looking gaunt and his skin turning pale. His complexion rivaled the dead or dieing. Just as quickly as his features changed he took a deep breath and looked healthy again. He staggered back to his table where several other young men laughed aloud at his failure.

Gilgrim held back a laugh himself, when he turned to look again at the mysterious woman, her eyes were locked on him. Their vision met for a few moments before the door to the tavern opened, pulling both their gazes. A tall half-orc filled the doorway. He was dressed in the garb of a Plains warrior and moved with the poise of an experienced combatant. His body language put the room at unease as he looked down his nose at the crowded tavern. Gilgrim felt a wave of distrust wash over him. The man's stern gaze met both Gilgrim and the woman in black before landing on a table in the center of the bar.

Gilgrim pushed his way through the tavern to find himself a seat across from the broad half-orc. The mysterious woman took the chair next to him. She threw back her hood, revealing long onyx hair. She twisted and caressed the small, white object in her grip with nimble fingers.

"It's a pleasure to meet the two of you; Seph, Gilgrim. I am pleased that you could make it." He said with a gentle nod and a sly smile.

Gilgrim snorted in surprise, Seph looked over inquisitively and the half-orc appeared perturbed by the unexpected interruption. "Sorry," said Gilgrim with a twinkle of bemusement in his emerald eyes, "I hadn't realized we would be meeting with such a gentleman; I would have put on my good tunic." Seph's lip twitched upward and

she held still the item in her hand for just a moment.

He grunted with displeasure "As I was saying, you can call me Valt, I know the two of you work all over the continent but I assume you are both aware of the situation in Middle City?"

"I think I have a fair understanding." replied Seph.

"Vaguely." said Gilgrim.

Valt sighed "Very well, the orcs of Middle City are tired of the mistreatment from the elves, they are looking to change up the situation. Even after they were granted their freedom, they are still treated like shit by their conquerors."

" 'Theirs' ' not 'yours'?" Asked Seph, her gaze bore into Valt. Valts eyes returned the venom of her look but he gave no other response.

Gilgrim reached up and scratched his thick beard, several strands of course red hair fell from his steel braids and descended toward the table. "Ahhhh revolution then! That's why we are here? The orcs are looking for some mercenaries. And where exactly are they getting the kind of money to hire adventurers?" questioned Gilgrim. Seph shared the same look. Surprise changed Valt's stern looks to something crueler, "Pretty clever for a dwarf." He half mumbled and half growled.

"Probably not half as clever as I feel!" replied Gilgrim, indulging in another swig from his stein.

"And YOU are not being paid to care about where the money is coming from," said Valt through clenched teeth, creating a forced snarl with his short tusks. Gilgrim simply nodded. He doubted he would get a clearer answer without causing a scene.

The half orc seemed satisfied in his response. "What I want you to do for now is

simple.” said Valt “I have a contact in Middle City who is working to build an underground resistance. The two of you will meet him there and do any tasks that he asks of you. He will pay extremely well. You both come highly recommended in efficiency and honor. So I trust any information I share will remain in confidence?”

“That’s correct.” replied Seph.

“My lips are sealed.” added Gilgrim, miming a familiar gesture.

“Good. Even still, you won’t know your employer’s name until you meet him.” Valt pulled two small bags from below the table that clicked with coins and placed them in front of each of them. “For you, for it, all you have to do is accept and meet with my contact.”

“That’s a fair amount of mead.” mumbled Gilgrim. “You’ve piqued my interest.”

“Very well.” replied Seph, her knuckles turning white as she gripped the item in her hand.

Valt looked pleased. “Seek out Duke McMasters. She owns a tavern in the Middle Ring. She’s been causing a bit of a hassle for the elves and she can put you in contact with the orc underground. Bring up my name and she will take you to your new employer. You have your task; go to Middle City, meet her, and you can expect more payment from there. I need to go, many more adventurers to enlist.” Valt’s thick black braids bounced as he stood and glided from the tavern.

Gilgrim rose quickly and made a point to spin and sit on the opposite side of the table from Seph plopping down hard onto the wooden seat to make a show of his movement. “So . . . what an interesting character.” said Gilgrim. Seph couldn’t help but let a gentle smile cross her thin lips.

“Indeed.” She replied, the humor draining from her angular features.

Now that Gilgrim faced her head on, he could see that the small object in her hand was in fact bone, human by the looks of it. An unsettling chill crawled up his spine.

“I couldn’t help but notice you didn’t have much to say.”

“I don’t have much to say to liars.”

Gilgrim chuckled, “He did seem like a shady sort.”

“He is not who he claims to be, I’ve never met an orc who talks like that and flashes around gold so carelessly.” Remarked Seph.

“Good point,” said Gilgrim, nodding and holding his chin knowingly. “I’m still going.”

“What?! You can’t be serious. We both agree that he is definitely up to something. You could just take the easy money and go. That’s what I might do . . .”

“I will admit, that is mighty tempting, but if someone is planning on kicking the elves out of the Wild Plains, I’m interested in joining in on the kicking.”

“What the elves have done doesn’t sit right with me either, but I’m not one to join fights that are not mine.”

“It wasn’t, until someone offered to pay you for it!” His stout yet muscular frame jostled as he gave out a healthy chortle. “In all seriousness, if I had known the orcs had organized I would be there to lend a hand regardless. They have been through enough. I’ve been around these parts long enough to have seen how dark it gets.” Gilgrim trailed off.

“I’ve heard it’s bad . . . I’ve been up North for most of my life so I wasn’t here when the orcs were liberated, but from what I understand their situation didn’t get any better.”

"I can't sit around with a chance like this, plus there is no way for us to keep an eye out for this Valt fella without being there."

"You're right." Seph's eyes were nervous, and she stroked the bone in her hand with increased intensity.

"And I could use the help of a powerful sorcerer." Gilgrim said with a wink and a smile, leaning closer to her from across the table.

Her pale skin flushed with pink "You saw that? Fine, I'll join you. I suppose I have nowhere better to be, and there is nothing keeping me to it..."

"That's the spirit!" yelled Gilgrim, he stood quickly, lifting his ale into the air "We'll leave tomorrow at first light. But for now, I've recently come into a bit of coin and I plan on spending it!" he turned to the waiter "Another round for myself and my new friend!"

-

A brisk wind began to push the tall grass of the Wild Plains, causing a chill to run up Gilgrims skin, a small patch of trees hung off the left side of the dirt road, denoting a small river or lake. They had left early that morning and now the heat of midday was beginning to disperse. They still had the remainder of today to travel as well as another half of a day's walk until they reached their destination.

Suddenly, a large, haggard, light brown dog leapt into the path in front of them. Seph jumped back with surprise and her hand went to her satchel. Gilgrim pulled free his axe and prepared for the worst. The dog barked at the two travelers but did not bare his teeth, nor did he growl. Instead he darted off the road toward the trees. When he was a few feet into the grass he looked back

to see if he had been followed. Barking and crying desperately the whole while.

"I think he wants us to follow." said Gilgrim, dropping the head of his axe.

"I don't trust like that," replied Seph. "No way I'm following some mutt into The Wild Plains. There could be bandits or tribesmen out there, or a monster could have gotten him so freaked out." She was right of course; the vegetation grew higher than Gilgrims head, and there were plenty of things clever and dangerous enough to use the grass as hunting grounds.

Gilgrim considered the dog for just another moment. "Only one way to find out!" He pushed his way into the tall grass following the dog. Seph gritted her teeth and gave one last weary look onto the road before following behind Gilgrim. They trailed behind the dog for just a minute until they stood at the entrance of a smoldering shack paired with a small trampled field. The roof and wall were caved in on one side, and the wood was blackened with heat.

"What happened here?" Seph asked with astonishment. Gilgrim pushed open the door and watched as a pillar splintered and cracked causing the roof to slump further. Embers still crackled and popped as they continued their grim work of consuming the former home. Half burned and broken furniture littered the small space. The back wall was completely caved in, allowing a cool breeze and the afternoon sunlight to pierce the darkness.

"This happened recently." said Gilgrim as he ran his hand over a smoldering log to feel the heat.

"Not bandits or orcs" added Seph "There are some valuables here, but no food. This was no thief, and look, that back wall is not scorched. It looks like it has been bashed in."

"That's not good." Gilgrim pushed his way through the rubble, toward the crushed wall. The dog beside him cried, He reached down and patted the canine's head "There, there, we'll get this figured out." He exited the rear of the shack and looked down. A jumble of large humanoid footprints pressed deep into the ground behind the shack. "Come look at this." he called to Seph.

She followed in Gilgrim's footsteps, picking through the destroyed cabin. When she arrived at Gilgrims location, she matched his gaze. "Ogres."

"That's what I was worried about."

"Looks like two or three. Sure we can handle that?"

Gilgrim reached down and pressed his fingers into the earth, they came back crimson "I don't think we have a choice." Without another word he began to follow a clearly made path of compressed tall grass and giant footprints.

After a short while, they came upon a rocky outcropping. Carved onto the stone was a cave that dropped sharply into the depths, hiding its interior with shadows. The smell of putrid blood and decay wafted upward from the hole carried by cool air. The dog had followed the pair here and now peered into the depths and cried.

"Looks like this is where they dug themselves in." Seph turned to Gilgrim "What are you thinking?" She asked, peering into the stony black maw.

"Probably can't lure them out. Even if we did, it's more likely we can take them one at a time if we go in." Gilgrim reached into his bag and donned his scale mail. He pulled his long axe loose from his back, grabbed a handful of tools, and pulled his shoulder length red hair behind his head in a binding.

Seph clenched her jaw, hesitation swam in her azure eyes. "Let's go."

Seph and Gilgrim clung to the wall as they descended into the earth, moving as tenderly as they could. The cave twisted ever deeper into dark, the cold and damp penetrating their clothing. They reached a bend in the path, the smell of death intensified. Gilgrim peeked his head around the corner revealing a short hallway leading into a larger chamber. Gilgrim's dwarven eyes allowed him to pierce the darkness enough to see two large shapes, their chests bobbing up and down to the rhythm of deep snoring. Behind them, two slumped forms lay against the furthest wall.

Gilgrim turned to Seph, holding two fingers in the air. She nodded in response. The sound of snorting broke the silence.

"Fuck, couldn't have been that easy." Gilgrim hissed as he reached into a pouch at his side. He pulled free a glass sphere and shook it. It flickered before igniting in an eerie blue light.

"Bugs?!" whispered Seph.

He rolled it into the hallway. The snorting came to a stop and the sound of heavy footfalls grew louder as the ogre drew closer to the glowing ball. The beast came to the bend. Its pig nose and beady eyes turned to Gilgrim and Seph's hiding place only a second before Gilgrim's axe cleaved clear through its knee. The ogre bit earth as his huge body toppled to the stone. Without hesitation, Gilgrim completed the arch of his axe, landing it on the ogre's head. It jerked then stood still for the last time.

"No surprising the next one!" with a cry he kicked the orb in the center of the room, lighting his way before charging. The second Ogre now stood tall, its body filling the room. Its pointed ears, sharp tusks, and thick jowls were illuminated by the sudden light. In the rear of the room, a young man and woman were now visible, bound and

gagged, their terrified faces exaggerated by the blue light.

Gilgrim slashed at its thigh, landing a deep gouge. The ogre swung its meaty fist at his chest. Gilgrim blocked at the last moment with his axe. It snapped in two and he slammed into the wall of the cave, a sickening crack sounded as his ribs gave way.

The Ogre moved to end Gilgrim, suddenly hundreds of bones began to surround the creature spinning like a tornado around its body, bashing and slashing away at its flesh. It stumbled and writhed in pain. Gilgrim looked to Seph who stood at the entrance of the room, hand outstretched as bones poured from her satchel. They formed the shape of a spear in the air above her head, with a flick of her wrist it shot forward embedding itself into the ogre's chest, It dropped instantly.

Seph gave a deep sigh as she entered fully into the room. Gilgrim turned to two bound farmers who did not look in the slightest bit relieved. Their eyes were wide and they stared in the darkness behind Seph. It clicked too late for them, two huge hands shot out from the shadows grabbing hold of Seph. The bones in her arms cracked, followed by her ribs as she was lifted in the air toward the open mouth of the Ogre. Gilgrim grabbed the top half of his axe and threw with all his might at the ogre's head. Crumpling over from the pain in his side as he threw. It passed mere inches from Seph's head as it wedged itself into the skull of the monster behind her. It went limp, dropping Seph and slumping to the ground. As soon as she could move she shoved herself away from the ogre dodging as it's rotund body fell forward.

She followed it to the ground with a cry of pain. Gilgrim rushed toward her, wincing at his injuries with the effort. He

dipped down and helped Seph to lean onto a wall. "Well that could have gone better." He said.

"You threw an axe at my head!"

"Ah but alas, I missed, hit that poor fucker behind you instead."

Seph chuckled and winced. She motioned toward her fallen satchel. "My bag, potions." She was cut off with a stab of pain. Gilgrim fumbled forward and grabbed her satchel, he reached a hand inside and a round bottle appeared gripped in his fingers. Magic, he owned a similar bag but he would bet it pales in comparison to the strength of the enchantment on Seph's.

"Healing potions? You can afford these?" He uncorked the bottle and helped her take a deep swig. He then brought it to his lips. The pain in his side faded in an instant, his bones mending in moments. Pain left Seph's angular features as she began to rise.

"Family of sorcerers. A few have picked up potion making."

Gilgrim pulled a knife from his boot and made his way toward the farmers. With a decisive motion, he cut them free.

"Thank you both so much. I thought we were goners for sure!" Spoke the man. "My name is Bram and this is my wife Helena. We owe you our lives!"

Helena hugged Seph ferociously, tears streaming down her face. "Thank you, Thank you, Thank you . . ." Seph resisted the embrace for just a moment before allowing herself to wrap her arms around the farmer's wife.

"Are either of you injured?" Asked Seph, using it as an excuse to push away from the woman.

"Just a few scrapes and bruises, I've got a nasty bump on my head, but fine otherwise." He reached up and touched a contusion on his temple that was caked in

blood. "I think they were waiting till dark before they tried to eat us." The word 'eat' caught in his throat as he realized the enormity of his situation and the relief of their rescue. Seph passed the now half filled potion bottle to each of them, they took small gulps and seemed the better for it.

While Seph did this, Gilgrim approached the final fallen beast, he placed a boot to it's head and gripped his axe with both hands and pulled. The axe head came loose with a wet pop.

"She was a good axe." mourned Gilgrim as he tossed the broken weapon into his bag.

Seph moved to the first ogre that was felled in the hallway. She waved a hand over top of the creature and muttered something under her breath. The body bloated then sagged as the flesh turned to black dust falling away revealing a nearly story tall bleached skeleton. She opened her satchel, waved her hand again and the bones flowed through the air into her open bag. She did the same with the other two deceased ogres.

"We should get moving," said Seph. "It will be dark soon." She now turned to the farmers "you should take what you can from here. It won't make up for what you've lost but it sure wouldn't hurt."

The group searched the room. They found a pile of discarded belongings in the corner: the inedible parts of the ogres' meals. They picked through it quickly, finding a fair amount of coins, several cheap weapons, and crude armor. They collected as much stolen food as they could carry before Gilgrim took the lead to guide the group back the way they had entered.

The fading sun cast its purple glow onto the mouth of the cave as the four pushed their way out into open air again. Bram blinked back tears "I didn't think I would ever

see the sun again." The dog rushed forward with a flurry of licks and jumps, greeting his two owners with overwhelming excitement. Bram and Helena reached down and returned their joy to the animal.

"It was good he found us on the road when he did, he saved your lives." Said Seph.

Another round of "good boy" rang out as they congratulated the dog. Seph and Gilgrim couldn't help but join in the merriment, wide smiles paired with their relieved eyes.

Gilgrim turned to Seph "Thanks for getting involved when you didn't have to, and for saving my skin back there." He ran his hand on the back of his neck sheepishly.

"Thanks for saving mine." She said with a laugh. "and . . . I'm glad I could do some good." She beamed, allowing herself to bask in the difference she had made.

-

The next morning, Gilgrim and Seph departed from the burnt shack and its grateful hosts. Helena and Bram would be alright. With what they had collected from the cave, they would be able to rebuild and maybe protect themselves better. Seph and Gilgrim still had nearly a full day's trip before they reached Middle City so they left the kind couple early with calls of gratitude following close behind them. The pair got on the road again with full bellies, a little more coin, and high spirits.

The long days' travel had been made light by their good morning and it passed quickly with stories from both their exploits. Gilgrim shared a hunt for a Mountain Giant he had helped slay in the mountains to the East, as well as a Griffon he had recently killed for a small town nestled deep in the Plains.

Seph told stories of exploring ancient crypts in the frozen North filled with the living dead and trying to scare off a Frost Worm from attacking her once home. Gilgrim asked more about this but she became evasive as the questions grew closer to her home and childhood. He knew he hadn't earned that much trust yet, and he hadn't exactly been forthcoming about his past with her. He was content to leave it at this for now.

As they neared the city, more traffic greeted them on the road. Merchants, acolytes on their pilgrimage, and farmers all headed toward the city for one reason or another. It was late afternoon when high walls peaked over the horizon. Middle City was built on a hill, three concentric stone walls surrounding it. Creating rings that rose higher as it got closer to the center of the city. The gate to the first wall was open with only a handful of guards watching who went in and out. They made their way inside with ease, pushing through a bustling crowd of orcs, humans, and dwarves.

They passed through the first wall to find themselves in a slum. Bent and broken orcs moved through the streets. Decrepit homes and businesses lined the road as starving orcish children darted in and out of the crowd likely attempting to take what they could. Orcs at the front of stalls called to the entering people desperately trying to sell their wares to those new to the city. The smell of waste and filth filled the nostrils of those in the lower ring. Out of the corner of Gilgrim's eye he watched Steph pull a finger bone from her bag and move it through her fingers like a worry stone.

Nearby a group of orcs surrounded a podium. A half goblin half orc yelled about oppression and injustice to the crowd in front of her, clearly riling up the orcs. Seph slowed

as she looked upon the slum and the presenter.

Before she could hear what the speaker had to say. An orc who has caught her gaping snarled "Keep it moving pinky."

"Excuse us, we were just trying to educate ourselves." said Gigrim, stepping in front of Seph and putting up a protective hand. They eyed Gilgrims armor skeptically. He looked similar to one of the guards, and the orcs had good reason to distrust them.

"A couple of elf fucking spies then!" snapped the orc, the crowd now turned to Gilgrim and Seph, knives began to appear at their sides as they moved to encircle the duo. The podium speaker watched carefully, but didn't seem to have any of the misplaced rage those who had been listening to her were expressing toward them.

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" boomed a deep, gruff voice as a tall, black-haired, heavily armored dwarf, wielding a huge war hammer approached. Flanked by a half dozen other armed humans and dwarves, the orcs' knives disappeared and several moved quickly away from the group as the town's guards approached.

"Let's move." Said Gilgrim, taking Sephs arm. "Gate to the middle ring is just up ahead." They moved forward, the orcs now giving them a wide berth as the guards yelled for them to disperse.

They approached the middle gate, this one had far more guards controlling the flow of traffic. They stopped and searched each orc for weapons as they attempted to enter. As Seph and Gilgrim approached they simply gave a nod and the two moved past.

The smell dissipated as they entered the next ring. In front of them was a busy market lined with orderly shops constructed of wood and stone. Humans and dwarves moved through the city with purpose, going

about their daily business. The occasional elf walked leisurely through the market, followed by orcs toting bags or other goods for their elvish employer.

"Let's find this Duke." Said Seph, seeming more comfortable in this area. They asked around about their destination, getting a few unenthusiastic shrugs, and one "fuck off" before a helpful shopkeep sent them in the right direction.

The pair approached a popular tavern, dwarves, humans and the occasional orc looking surprisingly at ease, poured in and out the building. They had apparently caught it in the middle of a dinner rush. A sign hung outside the front door read *The Medley*. The sound of laughter and music as well as the scent of good food flowed from the tavern with each swing of the door. Gilgrim and Seph entered. The well lit room was filled with a hum of activity. Waiters weaved through tables with drinks and plates of food in hand. Tavern goers laughed, shouted, and clapped along to the fast passed jig being played by a duet of bards in the corner.

A smiling young woman stood behind the bar making drinks and taking orders. Her skin was pale green, her ebony hair was cut short and shaved on one side, a variety of hoops and rings hung from her ears and nose, long pointed ears pushed past her head, and short tusks emerged from her lower lip. Half-elf, half-orc, an unusual pairing even for this city. Seph approached her first.

"Hi there, we are looking for a Duke McMasters." She said a little shyly.

Duke's smile broadened "Speaking! And why would such a pretty young lady be looking for me?"

Seph blushed involuntarily but firmed herself before she spoke. "Valt sent us."

Duke's enthusiastic smile faded as her face turned serious. "Let me get you something to eat, we'll talk in the back."

**To be continued...**

GILGRIM HAMMERFIST  
WILL RETURN

NEXT ISSUE  
THE LAST UNTIL NEXT TIME:



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**ART AND STORY BY DENVER MARTIN-BROWN**



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