

## A Barbarian Story: Jonathan Munsterman

~~~~~4 months after the shops of Bristol have closed~~~~~

It was cold, not a freezing cold but still cold enough for the woman to pull her cloak a little tighter around her body. The forest was quiet, all sound was muffled but the crunching of the leaves underfoot. "Snow is coming soon..." She spoke to no one in particular. "But your death comes now!" Several black cloaked figures stepped onto the path in front and behind of the woman. "Draco Disciples." She spat out the words as if they were poison. "Guardian of the egg, die quietly and we will be quick. If you resist, we will kill your partner." The one disciple that spoke, waved his hand once and 3 more black cloaks walked out, dragging a heavily armored man with them. "You honestly think that is going to stop me?" The woman laughed as she shrugged off the cloak, settling into a defensive stance with her shield and sword. "Then so be it." With a quick nod from the leader, the disciples drew their weapons. "You going to stand there all day or feel like helping?" The woman called the man in armor. Using that moment as distraction, the man slammed his heavy boot onto a disciple's foot and rammed his elbow into another's gut. The third disciple pulled out his sword but yelled as the man in armor was suddenly grinning in his face. "Hi, that's my sword on your back, I'm taking it back now, ok?" Before the disciple could move, a gauntleted fist crashed into his jaw, lifting him a few inches before falling with a thud.

As the entire group turned to look at the man, the woman charged the leader, crashing into him with her shield. Then the madness started. A massive sword cleaved through the air, the sound was like a cold howl of a winter's storm as it split the disciples into pieces. The clang of steel on steel rang loudly as swords struck the woman's shield, blocking each blow with ease. "You need to work on your guard." She slapped the leader's elbow with the flat of her sword, just as her trainer had done thousands of times to her. Spinning quickly, she dispatched 2 more behind her, flipping her shield onto her back to catch the sword being swung at her from behind. The numbers of the disciples were dropping quickly, too quickly for the leader to notice that suddenly he was the only one left. "Men! Jump her!" But his order was heard by only corpses, and the 2 travelers. In a panic he looked around, hoping for one to be left alive, only seeing a woman with long black hair, offset with a white streak on the front and a tall man, heavily armored with an even taller sword that he leaned on. "Who... who are you?" He stammered out. "Illyria, the Scorpions Champion." "Grease Lugnut, mercenary and siege engineer. And your killer." The great sword howled once more and the disciple fell, his head to one side, his body to the other.

"Uhn, that was sloppy, should have swung a little higher." Grease muttered as he wiped off his sword onto the leaves. "And next time you can be bait." He turned to Illyria, glaring at her. "But don't you want to play the hero each time? Besides, you looked like you were having too much fun." She walked over and kissed his cheek. "My hero." Grease laughed, looking at the broken elbow of the now dead disciple leader. "My favorite blow, I guess you did learn it. Only took how many blows to block it?" Laughing he kissed Illyria back. "Shall we be moving on?"

As they walked, Illyria started humming a song, not putting words to the tune. Grease stopped suddenly, looking over at Illyria, "Where did you hear that song?" "One of the gypsies was singing it when I went to visit them not too long ago, why?" Grease cracked his neck, looking

concerned. "Its a song of Lady Tso, she controlled the dead for a moment, but it spells trouble, not matter how you look at it. I don't want to have to think of her before the shops of Bristol open again." "Alright...." Arm in arm, the two walked on to the small village ahead. "It is a catchy tune though."

~~~~~5 months after the shops of Bristol have closed ~~~~~

Snow was falling softly on an open field as Grease trudged through the snow, his great sword slung on his back and his cloak giving him some warmth. Using his glaive as a walking staff, he felt his way through the snow drifts, muttering darkly to himself about the cold and how wet his boots were getting. He came to a split in the road with sign post, one leading to Bristol, the other leading to farm land. After a moments thinking, Grease started down the path leading towards Bristol.

"He's gone." "All clear." A small group of Draco Disciples emerged from the snow drifts, all unusually white cloaks and outfits. They quickly swapped the signs on the post, with the Bristol sign now pointing the opposite direction Grease was traveling in. He had been tricked.....

~~~~~Back at small campsite~~~~~

"Where the hell is he...." Sage grumbled. "He knows full well what happens when he misses a game of chess with me." The skull masked man grinned at Illyria and lick the edge of his sword. Illyria put a hand on her sword pommel. "And what pray tell might that be?" She asked carefully. "Another game of chess of course!" Sage exclaimed, throwing his sword into the boar that was cooking over a large fire. Peering at the sword, he nodded. "Almost done! BUT! Argyle would be more fun to play, he was a natural until that cloud came in and wiped out the board." He sat on the snowy ground with a thump. "However, I beleive our uninvited guests would like to play, am I RIGHT?" With his last word, Sage threw a burning log into the snow covered brush nearby. With a yell, 4 disciples jumped out, patting down their cloaks to put out the fire.

Laughing, Sage pulled out his sword from the boar and grinned, looking quite insane with the skulls ghoulish grin glimmering in the fire light. One disciple dressed in white stepped forward, a sabre in hand, and pointed at Illyria, "We are here for her, surrender peacefully and we will take only her. Resist and I will kill you masked one." Sage cackled madly and raised his on saber. "You're not the first to say that, but that will be your last time saying it." The masked man leap at the disciple in white only to crash into the snowy ground. Shaking his head and brushing off the snow, Sage laughed again. "Not bad, yer fast." He slowly stepped toward the disciple, his saber on his shoulder, looking almost relaxed and gaurd down completely.

Illyria watched carefully, failing to notice the other three disciples surround her. She froze as a dagger tip gleamed in the fire light a hairs breadth from her neck. "Move." She slowly rose and walked with the three, away from the camp site. Sage was watching as he and the disciple in white circled each other. A loud snap from the fire seemed to be the signal, both fighters lept at each other. They locked swords face to face, both matched in strength. Thinking quickly, Sage pulled back then slammed his head into the disciples face, the skull mask cracking down the center and falling to the ground. "Damn you, I had an orcs soul in that skull!" Sage used the hit to push the disciple back, his blade singing through the cold air, seeking the flesh of his foe.

Despite the blood flowing freely from his nose and forehead, the disciple parried and countered Sage's blows. Sparks flew from the two fighters as their swords met myriads of times, shadows dancing in the night from the fires light. The two broke from the fight for a minute, both trying to catch their breath. Sage frowned as he noticed that he was bleeding lightly from several wounds, "You have some moves, you have lasted longer than others but not the best still." The disciple's outfit was spattered in flecks of blood, bleeding from a few of his own wounds. "Indeed." Was all he said, and rushed Sage, sword ready to strike. Sage had hoped for this, waiting until the last moment, he fell to the ground and rolled under the disciples swing. The disciple stood transfixed, Sage's sword sticking out his back. "In..deed..." With a grunt, Sage pulled his sword free, pushing the disciple aside as he brushed more snow off his body. "Dammit, Grease is going to kill me..." He took off running in the direction he saw Illyria go with the disciples.

~~~~~Back on the snowy road~~~~~

Why does this always happen to me... Grease sighed as he sat down in the snow, making sure his glaives blade was hidden in the snow so that it appeared all he carried was his sword on his back and a walking staff. He was surrounded, 5 draco disciples, all dressed in white with their swords out. Grease pulled out his great-sword and threw it away, point first into the snow. As much as he prided himself as a fighter, he wasn't the most brilliant tactician. "I came here under the assumption of going to visit Bristol for a bit, you know, see the gypsies and all." One of the disciples sneered and spit on Grease's sword, "We have lost many of our numbers, but we continue to grow, no thanks the the Band of the Twisted Claw." Grease went ridged, his grip tightening on his massive weapon. "Don't.... do that.... He made that sword, you won't do that again." With a laugh, the disciple kicked frozen dirt at the sword. "Must have been a shoddy to make that sword." Grease moved like chained lightning, lunging at the disciple that spoke. With what sounded like a small thunderclap, the massive weapon spilt the white figure from head to toe. "I made this though, think it will do for now?" The remaining disciples all rushed in, swords pointed for a thrust. With a roar of anger and rage, Grease unleashed his full wrath upon the disciples, his weapon giving a low howl as it was loosed upon its foes. Swinging wide, the glaive crashed into the first of the four disciples, who caught the weapon upon his own sword, hoping to block. The power behind the weapon shattered the sword in the disciples hands, killing him instantly as it continued on its gristly path. The rest jumped back, now seeing the power the weapon was swung with. "Yeah, that's right, who's scared now eh? COME ON!" Not giving them a moment to pause, Grease charged the three remaining, scattering them like chaff on the wind. Another disciples life was claimed by a crushing blow from the enraged barbarian, a second one had his legs cut out from under him. "I'm coming BACK for you." Grease snarled, chasing after the last disciple that had taken off running. After running a short distance, Grease stopped and hefted up his glaive, testing the weight. See that Grease has stopped, the disciple that had run from the barbarian, stopped to catch his breath. He looked up at a sharp whistling sound, and the last thing he saw, was the powerful weapon falling from the sky directly down at the disciple.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Grease turned back to the maimed disciple and stomped over to him. Grabbing him roughly by the brooch, Grease barked at him, "Who sent you!" "Heh..hahahah... the Dark Queen of course." A hard punch silenced the disciple. "I know that, why do you wear white." "We are an elite group, trained for winter fighting. No thanks to you though, I'm the last

alive." He spat on Grease's hand, only to receive another hard hit. "Stop that, it's bad manners. I'm giving you a warning to pass on, my contract with you all is now null and void. Try and touch ANY of the ones I care about, and I will hunt you to the ends of the earth, UNDERSTOOD?!" Grease roared the last words into the disciples face. "You won't die, you'll just pass out from lose of blood." Grease dropped the man and went to gather his weapons, praying that he had done the right thing and that everyone was safe. Once the snows melted, he knew it was going to be war....

Sage went crashing through the under-brush, following the trail left behind the Draco Disciples that had captured Illyria. Snapped twigs, deep footprints, bits of cloth and a small amount of blood was left behind along the trail. 'That better not be her blood, Grease is going to snap if it is.' Sage thought to himself, shuddering at the last time Grease had gone berserk. It was not long before Sage caught sight of a few figures ahead of him and there was a tussle going on. Illyria was practically dancing around the Disciples, like a leaf on a tumbling breeze. Sliding sideways, she stepped aside a crushing blow from a heavy sword. Stepping forward quickly, she practically walked up the blade and dropped her stone-formed fist into the disciples face, slamming him hard to the ground. Jumping back, Illyria quickly spun around and swung a hard upper-cut right into a disciples jaw, feeling the bones shift from the impact. Stars exploded in her vision as something smashed into the back of her head, causing her to stumble forward and falling to her knees.

The disciple grinned as he was about to bring his sword down, plunging it at Illyria's back when his body froze. Looking down, the blade of a long sabre grew from his chest as a voice hissed into his ear. "Back stabbing is for protecting others only." Sage shoved the body off his blade to the ground. "You alright?" He asked Illyria, making sure she wasn't bleeding. "My head hurts, but I will live." With a laugh Sage thumped her on the back, offering a hand to get her on her feet. "Come on, food is probably burned by now but that's what makes the deep insides really tasty." Snow was lightly dusting onto the corpses, only to be disturbed by the wild wolves that would be getting a free meal.

~~~~~In a small shop near  
Bristol~~~~~

Grease knocked on a heavy oaken door, a small sign above it read 'The Empty Satchel'. The door creaked open and Grease was thrown to the ground, a knife at his throat. "What do you want here, black cloak." A red haired man growled. "Sorry Ix, it was all I had to keep from freezing." Grease grinned up at the man, letting the hood fall back from his face. "Well if it ain't Fall-apart!" Ixous was shorter than Grease by half a head but built much more sturdy. His brown duster and off-white shirt gave him the look of a seasoned traveler. The red haired man helped Grease to his feet, clapping his taller friend on the shoulder. "Get inside and warm yourself then! Tien is finishing dinner if you would like some." Laughing, Grease dusted off the snow from his back. "I just might, I've come on a bit of business as well." Ixous took his friends cloak and hung it on a peg, motioning to a fire. "Sit and have a drink, then we can talk."

Grease sat on a polished stump, serving as a seat that was good for him with all his armor encumbering him. Ixous came over with two large mugs and handed one to Grease. "Hot cider,

spiked with rum." Ixous said grinning. "Good choice." Grease grinned back and took a swig, his eyes watering at the burning sensation ripping down his throat. "Gwahhhhhh, good stuff. Now, about some business with you. I need a new set of gauntlets, good strong leather ones." Ixous leaned back in his chair to listen. "The kind that can save my hands from a blunted blade but still light enough that I can move and block fully, think you can do this?" Grease looked over to Ixous who smiled and laughed. "Consider it done. Give me 2 days to finish them and then a few hours to decorate them. Sound good to you?" Grease nodded and tossed Ixous a small bag of coin. "For the supplies, I insist." Ixous left Grease to tend to the fire, insisting that Grease stay until his request was done. "I could use a hand watching for more of those black cloaks, ever since the regular shops of Bristol closed down for the winter, they have been causing trouble. They seem to want my elemental warding materials but I keep that locked away."

Grease nodded and stood by the window, "I'll do what I can, and maybe help out around your shop here. Its going to be hard to relax when the snow melts.... the final war begins then....."

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The trees had grown green again as the familiar sound of metal ringing against metal sang from the fighting arena of the barbarians. Two figures danced a steely dance, each trying to twist, strike and pin the other with their weapons. One was a woman with a white streak of hair offsetting the darker coloration. The other was a taller man, heavily clad in leather armor with golden scorpions emblazoned on the shoulders. With a sudden lunge, the man swung high as if to strike down on his opponents shoulders then dropped quickly, connecting solidly with the womans leg.

"How many times do I have to remind you, watch that low gaurd." Grease crossed his arms, looking down at Illyria who was rubbing the spot where he had landed his blow. She glared up at Grease and quickly retook her stance. "Well, only way to learn is to do, right?" Faster than he could react, Illyria swung in fast and landed a blow on his leg, in the same form he had done to her. Biting his lip hard, Grease hopped for a moment, trying hard not to curse from the hit. "Right, yeah, just like that." Smiling, Illyria kissed Grease, "I'm sorry, did I do it right?"

"Yes, yes you did." Grease took both the weapons and hung them on the weapons rack. "That should be enough for now, but you need to retake the training just like all the other Gaurdians to become Draco Hunters."

"Why? I completed everything and much more last year?" Illyria took her sword down, practicing moves in the air slowly and rhythmically. "And what have I said about training?" With a sigh, Illyria sheathed her sword. " 'Training never ends for those that hold a sword' Yes I have heard you say that before."

"Right, because you get rusty and forget things." Grease picked up one of the new short swords Morgan had made, which she insisted on calling a 'Fairy Sword'. "The gods know why she ever picked a name for this, not much for my liking."

"No, but I like it." Grease turned around, suddenly face to face with Nanus. "Nanus! Where in

the nine fires of hell did you come from!?” With a grin and a shrug Nanus replied, “Blame my parents.”

With a groan Grease pulled a set of daggers from his belt. “Here, they ready for you.” He tossed the set to Nanus, who caught them deftly. “Very nice, thanks. These will slit many a draco throat.” Illyria walked over, wrapping an arm around Grease. “And where is my new sword hmhhh?”

“Morgan has yet to finish it, but it will be ready soon. Maybe.... When you are done with training?” Illyria took a step back with a frown. “All of it?” “ALL of it my dear.” Grease grinned at Illyria, his hand reaching for a broadsword. “Care to get started?” The sun light gleamed as two swords started their dance of death again, with the sound of Grease laughing. “Just like old times, right?”

THWACK! “Gah!” Illyria yelped at the hit, rubbing her right shoulder. “Yeah, just like old times.”

-----late in the dark of night-----  
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“I told you I don’t like meeting like this.”

“Shut up, we have a job for you and you know what happens when we are denied.”

“Several of your men dead in a frozen field?”

“Fool, they were expendable. Now, do we have a deal?”

“How about I kill you and just take the money?”

“And what of the others you love and protect”

“...Fine, we have a deal.”