

## The Barbarian's Side (Part 2)

by Jonathan Munsterman

The sounds of steel meeting steel rang out loudly and clearly in the barbarian training grounds. Several recruits, sent from the Band of the Twisted Claw, were learning the art of sword fighting under the watchful eye of Grease and a few other barbarians. His great sword sitting on his personal weapon rack, Grease reached for a broadsword with a blunted edge and started walking through the grounds. Studying each recruit sharply, he thumps them with his blunted sword as needed. Starting with a young man, Grease lands a stinging blow on the man's thigh, "Watch your low guard, I just made you a gimp."

Moving on, Grease watched Sage sparring with a woman, who looked as if she had never held a sword before. With a heavy sigh, Grease marched right up to the two, "Sage, I will take over." "You got it boss." The skull-masked man quickly stepped aside as Grease stood in front of the woman. "Show me your stance," Grease growled, waiting for the woman to set herself. "Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong!" With each word, Grease proved his point with blows to all the unguarded parts of her body. "This is how you guard, use the base of the blade and the cross guard." The broadsword crashed against the longsword, but was stopped by the block. Grease let a grin creep onto his face. "Very good, seems you may learn yet. What's your name." "Illyria," was the reply. "Alright, Illyria, are you ready for hell?" Grease laughed, "Because that is where you are going from now on." With a curt nod, the woman retook her stance. "Let's start then."

~~~~~later that afternoon~~~~~

Grease sat with the others around the evening fire, enjoying their dinners when a woman approached the group. "Master Grease? Are you present?" With a quick wave, Grease stood up, wiping his hands on his tunic. "Right here Talia, whatcha need?" Talia made her way around the group and over to Grease, eyeing Sage as a bit of food hung from one of the orc skull teeth. "Your presence is requested at the camp of the Twisted Claw. You may want to bring another as well as your blades." "SAGE!" Grease bellowed, "WHAT!?" "Take a walk with me, bring your blade." Grease went to his weapon rack and hefted his great sword, the saw type object gleaming in the dusky light. Slinging the great blade onto his back, he waited with Talia at the edge of the camp for Sage to appear. "Where in the nine fires of hell is that man." "Waiting for you, of course." Sage's voice floated down from above them, the man himself sitting on a low tree limb. "Get down before I cut that tree down." With a laugh, Sage hopped from branch to branch, down to the ground. "That bird egg was fantastic, want one?" Sage held out a hand with shattered egg shell remains in it. "I'll pass this time, this is that task we have to take care of." With a nod, Sage tossed the leftovers over his shoulder and started walking with them.

"Hmm, not nice, not nice. Bird eggs on ground." A voice grated out behind them. Both men spun around, blades out and ready. A blue figure was sitting on the ground, picking through the egg shells Sage had tossed. "Peace, tis only Argyle. Argyle! What are you doing here and not at camp?" Talia demanded of the troll. "Me smell cooking, good food! No want bath, not nice."

Argyle retorted back, swinging his over-sized mace in the air. "Back to camp or no goat for a week." Talia stood, pointing out at the camp of the gypsies. "Awwwww, not nice, bad for Arygle." The troll slumped as he stood, shuffling back to the camp. Grease and Sage stood, slightly dumbfounded at what they had just seen. They followed Talia back to the camp, talking quietly to each other. "Not sure about that one, don't think his head is on straight." Grease nodded in agreement, knowing full well Sage could be just as odd quite often.

"Hail barbarians!" Thoren called out the four that entered the camp, Argyle scurrying away to some dark corner. Grease and Sage both nodded in answer, "Well met Thoren, we are here as per our agreement." With a nod, Thoren addressed the band of gypsies, talking about something to do with a dragon, gems and riddles. Grease didn't care, he was dwelling more on how to best protect the small troop as they were to march out soon. "Sage, you watch the left, I have the right." "Right." Sage nodded in understanding. "No, left, I have right." "Right." Sage nodded again. With a sigh Grease shook his head, "You know what to do." "Right." Sage nodded once more, a grin peeking out from under the orc skull mask. "Mercenaries! Are you prepared?" "Aye Thoren." "Let us be off then." Thoren and Talia led the group, Talia holding a small chest with something locked inside. Three others followed, two were in the magi training, the third was Illyria, the woman Grease had taken to personally train. Grease noted her bruised arms with a slight nod to himself, she was a fast learner but not as fast as his sword yet. "Argyle, come!" "OK!" A woman called out to the troll, who came scampering out with his over-sized club. "Arygle, defend." "Yah! Arygle thump gud!" Grease and Sage flanked these front few, the rest of the troop following. "So... what exactly are we doing?" Sage stepped closer and asked the woman leading Argyle. "We go to awaken the memories of Bloodtharken, the dragon spirit now. However, the Draco Disciples will try to stop us." "Leave that to us, considering you don't seem the type to know how to swing a sword." Grease chuckled as he looked over the woman. "My name is Adria, and I'm the one that sends the warrior recruits to you." She gave Grease a dirty look and stepped up her walking pace, leaving Grease with a smug look on his face.

After a short time, the troop came to the town of Bristol. "Sage, hold your steel until needed." Grease murmured to the skull masked man. "Gotcha boss." Both sheathing their blades, but never let their guard down. They passed beer pubs, armor smiths, a blacksmith forge, a veritable town it seemed until they came to a garden area with a lone tree, growing low to the ground with spirits climbing and exploring the area around it. "That one." Thoren pointed to a brightly colored red spirit with a flame yellow face. "Give this gem to her, and follow her path." The large man handed Illyria an amber gem. Gently holding the crystal, Illyria walked up to the spirit and offered it with an open hand. The light glimmering off the stone caught the spirits eye, approaching cautiously. Grease nodded to Sage, unsheathing his great sword as Sage pulled out his saber. "Follow her," Thoren directed, "for she will lead us to the Paragons." Grease felt his senses grow sharp as the thought of a fight made his blood rise. The spirit seemed in a trance, leading the troop through part of the city, to small open courtyard. "They wait for us..." Thoren said almost spitting out the last word. "This is what we hired you for, go earn your pay!" Grease thundered out into the area, Sage following shortly. "Alright boys! Lets play!" Grease roared out to the waiting group of cloaked figures. As a bowling ball crashes into a set of pins, Grease slammed his shoulder into the largest of the group, only 4 of them. The cloaked figure crashes to the ground, completely winded from the shoulder charge as Grease turns his blade to another figure. Two short swords flashed as Grease brought his large sword up to block. "Grease! LOOK

OUT!" Grease turned his head to see a massive ball of magic coming rocketing towards him. "This is gonna hurt!" Grease shoved off the cloaked figure and turned to brace for the spell. The explosion rocked him hard, sending his sword flying in the air and slamming Grease into the ground. "NO!" Sage yelled out, already locked in with another figure, trying to hold his ground as the second came to double team him. "Me smash gud!" Argyle came bounding in, swinging his club madly and slamming it into the ground in front of the second disciple. The cloaked man stumbled back, trying to dodge away from the large club. Sage was in a rage at seeing Grease go down, he quickly dispatched the first disciple and turned to the second, "Now you DIE!" Kicking Argyle out of the way, Sage cut the figure to ribbons with blurring speed. In the midst of all the combat, Talia ran up in front of the disciple that cast the explosive spell at Grease. Murmuring a few words, she unleashed a minor spell that stunned and sent the disciple to the ground. Sage ran over to Grease, who was seeming to come out of being shell-shocked. "What the hell is wrong with you!? You know better than to be blind sided like that." Grabbing Grease roughly by his armor, Sage dragged him up to his feet, shaking him roughly. "I know, I know! I got sloppy!" "Damn right you did!" Shoving Sage off, Grease looked around for his sword. With a sigh of relief, he found it lodged in the center of a may pole with a black cloak pinned under it. Tugging the blade out, Grease and Sage took the rear guard as the troop ducked into an alley.

Emerging from the dark corridor, they came out under a large tree, with a massive nest cradling an equally large egg. The gypsies circled the area, watching the spirit interact with four paragons. Grease and Sage were off to the side, inspecting damages to armor and weapons. "This better be coming out of their coffers." Sage grumbled as a large nick marred the edge of his saber. "Someone stop her!" A scream rang out as a woman dressed in a red hoop skirt and dress laughed madly as spirits of the dead engulfed the dragon spirit, taking it away with them. "Hold your blade, this was not in our contract." Grease pushed Sage's saber down. Once dispersed, the gypsies awarded the champions as Guardians of the Egg, whatever that meant to them. Grease shrugged and elbowed Sage, "Let's go, we have first watch tonight." "Fine, fine..... say Grease, how good do you think that troll would be at barbarian chess?" The two fighters walked back to their camp, bantering as they left.