

The cover art depicts a chaotic battle scene. In the foreground, a Grey Seer, a dark-skinned figure with a large, horned head and a long, pointed beard, is shown in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose. He wears a dark, tattered robe and has a large, curved blade or staff in his right hand. His expression is one of intense focus or aggression. Behind him, a massive, multi-headed Chaos Beast, resembling a dragon or a multi-headed dog, is roaring with its mouths wide open, showing sharp teeth and a red interior. The creature's body is covered in intricate, mechanical-looking details and glowing green energy. The background is a dark, stormy sky with bright green lightning bolts striking down. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and vibrant greens, creating a sense of dark magic and destruction.

WARHAMMER

GREY SEER

BY C • L • WERNER

A THANQUOL & BONERIPPER NOVEL

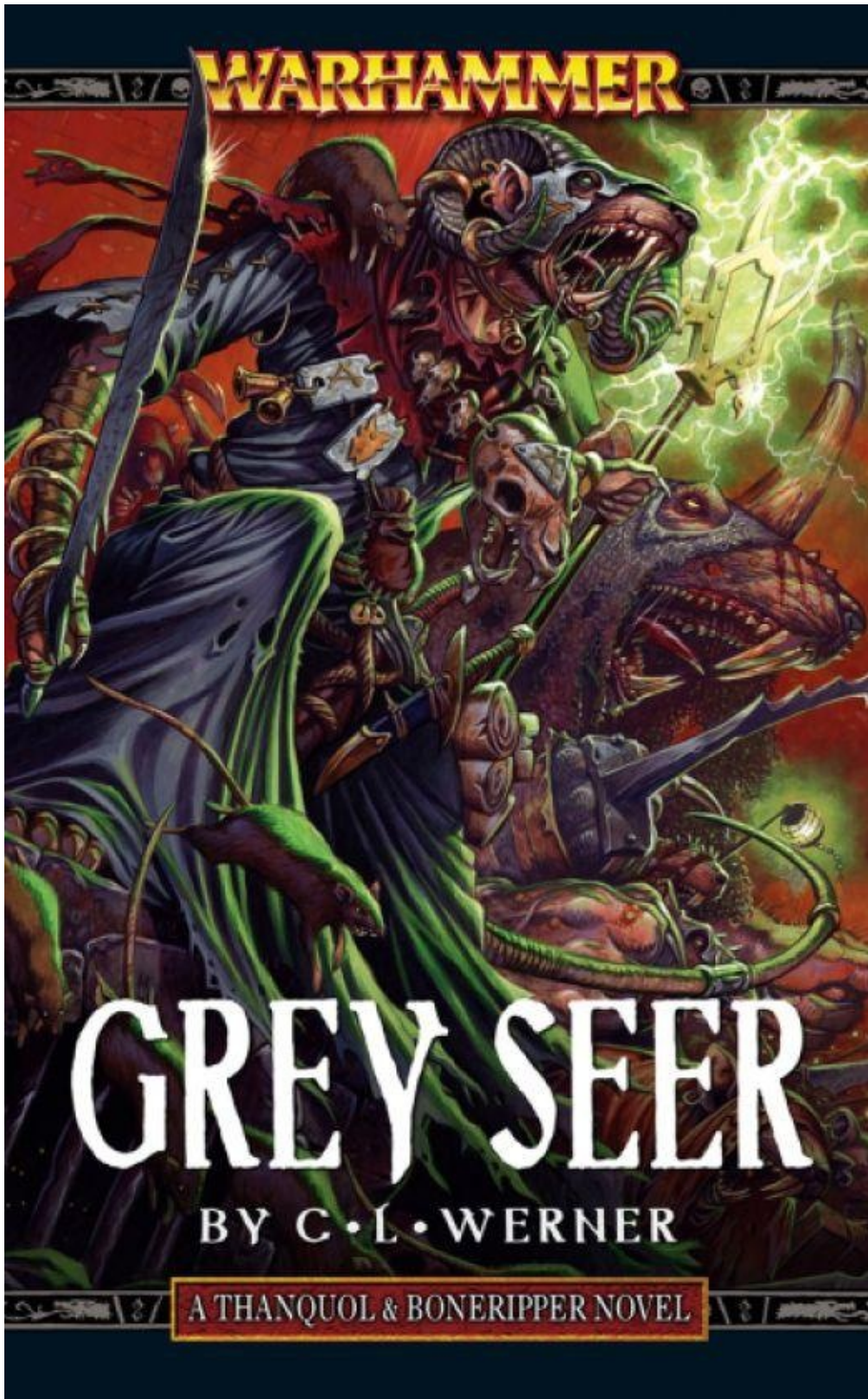


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A WARHAMMER NOVEL

Thanquol & Boneripper

GREY SEER

C. L. Werner



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This is a dark age, a bloody age, an age of daemons and of sorcery. It is an age of battle and death, and of the world's ending. Amidst all of the fire, flame and fury it is a time, too, of mighty heroes, of bold deeds and great courage.

At the heart of the Old World sprawls the Empire, the largest and most powerful of the human realms. Known for its engineers, sorcerers, traders and soldiers, it is a land of great mountains, mighty rivers, dark forests and vast cities. And from his throne in Altdorf reigns the Emperor Karl Franz, sacred descendant of the founder of these lands, Sigmar, and wielder of his magical warhammer.

But these are far from civilised times. Across the length and breadth of the Old World, from the knightly palaces of Bretonnia to ice-bound Kislev in the far north, come rumblings of war. In the towering World's Edge Mountains, the orc tribes are gathering for another assault. Bandits and renegades harry the wild southern lands of the Border Princes. There are rumours of rat-things, the skaven, emerging from the sewers and swamps across the land. And from the northern wildernesses there is the ever-present threat of Chaos, of daemons and beastmen corrupted by the foul powers of the Dark Gods. As the time of battle draws

ever near, the Empire needs heroes like never before.



Chapter one

Something in the Sewers

‘Fast-quick, flea-maggots!’

The scratchy voice was thin as a whisper, like the rasp of snakeskin against cobblestone, but it carried through the dank, crumbling tunnels like a thunderclap. Scrawny rats with jaundiced eyes and matted fur skittered away, hugging the earthen walls as the fury of the voice moved them to flight.

For others, retreat was an option long ago taken from them. Emaciated creatures nearly as thin as the starveling cave rats, their scarred bodies covered in stringy brown fur, cowered and grovelled but heavy chains of corroded iron forced them to stand their ground. Each of the creatures was a horror of blisters and scabs, their bodies gouged by the violence of whip and fang. Only the most sardonic of observers would liken them to men, though there was a loathsome mockery of man in the shapes they wore. The things that dangled limply from their wasted arms were as much paws as they were hands. Naked tails, scaly and pallid, lashed the floor between their clawed feet. Above the iron collars that circled their necks was a narrow head, pinched and pulled into the rodent-like visage of an enormous rat. Yet even here could be found a gruesome echo of humanity, for it was more than the blind fear of vermin that shone in their beady red eyes, more than the unthinking pain of a simple beast that gave their gaze its stamp of dejected misery.

‘Fast-quick!’ the voice snarled again. This time the words were punctuated by a loud crack as a scaly whip, like the severed tail of one of the creatures, flashed through the green-shadowed gloom of the tunnel. Something cried out in a wordless shriek that spoke equally of pain and terror. The echoes of the cry had not even started to shudder through the tunnels when the slaves were moving once more, attacking the walls with their clawed hands, slashing and scratching at the earth and rock with frantic desperation.

Kratch coiled the macabre whip around his arm, exulting in the panic of the slaves. Not the slightest twinge of sympathy for the miserable throng moved him; pity was a concept utterly alien to the skaven mind. The slaves existed only to further Kratch’s own position and power; beyond that simple fact, Kratch had no concern for them or

their suffering. It was the most basic foundation of skaven society: the weak existed to exalt the strong.

Kratch rubbed his white-furred hands together, a pleased gleam in his eyes, as he considered the wisdom of such an arrangement. Perhaps he would have been less pleased had the Horned Rat not smiled so kindly upon Kratch and made him one of the strong. But the skaven god had favoured him, shaping him in the belly of his brood-mother and placing his mark upon Kratch. The ratman lifted a paw to his forehead, stroking the bony nubs protruding through his fur. Horned skaven were the chosen of their god, the voices and instruments of his will. More than the frayed grey robes and warpstone charms he wore, it was his horns that marked Kratch as one of the exalted, one of the grim brotherhood of sorcerer-priests known as the grey seers.

As he stroked his tiny horns, some of the pleasure ceased to sparkle in Kratch's eyes. He had been marked, but he was still far from the magnificence he wanted. Kratch was young, barely eight winters from the whelp-nests, his horns still developing and his magical knowledge small. He was only an adept, an initiate into the secrets of the grey seers, not a grey seer himself. One day he would wield such power, but until then he would be an apprentice, serving those who Kratch knew were his inferiors for all their horns and magic.

Kratch looked away from the frantic slaves, casting an appraising glance over his shoulder at his current 'master'. Grey Seer Skabritt was several times again as old as Kratch, his horns grown into a double-curved knot of bone that encased the sides of the priest's head like a helmet. Skabritt fancied himself a cunning strategist and plotter, weaving a nest of intrigue and deception to cloak his activities from his many rivals and enemies, but Kratch knew he could do so much more with Skabritt's resources and power.

The adept lashed his tail in annoyance. Looking at Skabritt caused Kratch's blood to boil with resentment. The grey seer stood well away from where the slaves were working, surrounded on all sides by his armoured stormvermin. The big black-furred skaven kept an easy grip on their halberds when they weren't scratching fleas from their fur. So very like Skabritt to spare himself any chance of danger. Distance would protect him from any cave-in that might result from the attentions of the work gang on the crumbling walls. The stormvermin would guard him against the unlikely, but possible event of a slave revolt. The armoured ratmen would cut down any berserk slaves long before they could lay a paw on Skabritt.

However, such hazards were perfectly acceptable for Kratch to be exposed to. The skaven gnashed his fangs as he reflected on that fact. Skabritt had insisted it would be a good learning experience for his apprentice, something to bolster his abilities to command and lead the unwashed masses of the Under-Empire. More pragmatically, Skabritt could always get another apprentice if something went wrong.

'Fast-quick!' Kratch growled, spinning back around and striking out with his whip. He wasn't sure if the brown-furred wretch he struck had really been slacking off and didn't really care. Lurking about in this forsaken network of burrows – burrows that had been sealed off since the skaven civil war – was far from Kratch's idea of safety and comfort. The number of stormvermin Grey Seer Skabritt brought along, and the amount of warpstone tokens he had spent in the markets of Under-Altdorf arming them, told Kratch that his mentor expected trouble. That Skabritt had not shared from

what quarter he expected that trouble didn't do much to reassure Kratch.

Still, the adept reflected, Skabritt would hardly put himself at risk for some miniscule gain. Whatever he hoped to find in the abandoned burrows the slaves were excavating, it would be something of importance. Perhaps some lost cache of warpstone or a lost trove of Clan Skryre technology. Kratch began to salivate as he considered the magnitude of such a find. Skabritt would earn the favour of the seerlords and the Council of Thirteen itself presenting them with such a treasure. Or perhaps he would instead choose to deal with a single clan, tempting them with the power his discovery would offer them. Under-Altdorf was a nest of intrigue already, each of its dominant clans striving against the others for control of the city, the largest in the entire Under-Empire with the exception of Skavenblight itself. Clan Skryre would pay well for anything that would tip the balance in their favour, just as the other clans would pay to keep such power from slipping into their paws.

Whatever Skabritt chose to do, Kratch would be there, clinging to his tail every step of the way. Even if only the smallest portion of the wealth and glory Skabritt was after trickled down to his apprentice, Kratch would take it. Unless of course he saw some way to cut his mentor out of the equation. Accidents did sometimes happen, like the time a swamp troll had broken free in the mines beneath Rat Rock and nearly devoured the grey seer. In the right paws, a sharp file and a rusty chain were as deadly as any assassin's poisoned dagger.

A sharp squeal of alarm stirred Kratch from his murderous visions. The adept cracked his whip against one of the slaves, slashing through its mangy hide, then wrinkled his snout in disgust. The workers were venting the musk of fear from their glands. Kratch fought back the instinctive response to do the same, his contempt for the wretches overcoming the tyranny of biology.

The slaves were skulking away from the wall of the tunnel. Kratch could see a dark opening where the bloodied paws of the skaven had broken through into a sealed chamber. A murky, stagnant odour wafted from the opening, overcoming even the pungent musk of the frightened slaves. Kratch felt a tremor of anxiety as his senses drank in the cold, evil smell. He quickly calmed himself. Anything with such an intimidating stench would also be obscenely powerful. His thoughts turned to visions of some lost trove of warpstone quietly festering away in the dark for six centuries and again his jaws became moist with anticipation. There was certainly a suggestion of warpstone about the clammy stench issuing from the darkness.

Kratch started to scramble down from his perch atop a pile of loose earth. Sounds behind him had the adept spinning about in alarm, one paw slipping to the dagger concealed in the sleeve of his robe. A gruff snarl froze Kratch's hand. The adept winced, screwing his eyes shut and lifting his head, exposing his throat in deference and humility to the creature he called master.

Grey Seer Skabritt had been drawn from his cautious observation point well away from the excavation by the clammy smell issuing from the opening. There was a feverish light shining in the priest's eyes as he shuffled forward, his stormvermin flanking him.

'Yes-yes,' Skabritt chortled, clapping his paws together. 'Mine it is! Power-strength! The Wormstone belongs to Skabritt!' The grey seer's eyes narrowed with suspicion, casting a hostile glance at slaves, stormvermin and apprentice alike. In his