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Short Story

The
ENEMY of
my **ENEMY**

Part One



Maxwell Alexander Drake

The Enemy of My Enemy

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An



Short Story

Maxwell Alexander Drake

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Lead Lore Design - Steve Danuser
Lead Tie-In Writer - Maxwell Alexander Drake
Content Editor - Robert Lassen

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



[The Enemy of My Enemy](#)
[Part One](#)

[About the Author](#)



THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY



“We are ogre!” Grazdin slammed his meaty fist on the rough wooden table. “We were not born to kneel and cower!” His growled shout reverberated off the thin walls of the tiny shack he called home.

A grin sprang to Brozka’s lips. Partly because Grazdin was not yelling at him, partly because he enjoyed watching his friend, Akani, cower before the elder’s onslaught.

Akani, like Brozka and the other three adolescent ogres gathered in secret here tonight, was true of heart. But Akani let her tongue wag before her brain thought about what she said. Small for an ogre, she was the most agile of their kind Brozka had ever known.

If only her brain could keep pace with her hands!

The thought made Brozka laugh aloud.

Grazdin stood to his full height, his balding head grazing the nine-foot ceiling as he glared at the gathered adolescents. The elder let his ire linger on Brozka before he spoke again. “Our ancestors would *spit* in our faces if they saw us living so.” He spat on the floor, then ground his tusks against his thick, dark-olive colored lips. As sudden as his anger welled up, his face softened and his shoulders slumped. Letting out a grunt, he waved a hand and turned away. “You youngsters know of nothing else. Slavery is the life you were born to. Why should I expect more from you?” He hunched down and picked up a bowl of mashed oats from the table. Giving the bowl’s contents a grimace, he shoveled a spoonful of the tasteless gruel their dal masters provided into his mouth.

When the elder failed to return his attention to the group, Mulna rose from her seat. “Explain it to us, then. It is why we

The Enemy of My Enemy - Part One

are here. Why we risk coming to you after curfew each week." Of all Brozka's friends, Mulna was the one he respected most. Shaking her head, Mulna looked at the others, hoping for some support. None of the five young ogres gathered here tonight came to her rescue. Akani averted her gaze, and Brozka could only shrug.

What can we do?

When Mulna made to return to her seat, frustration washed over Brozka. He jumped to his feet. "You preach about us not understanding what it means to be ogre. How the way we live insults our ancestors." He had never spoken so to Grazdin, nor any elder for that matter, but he was tired of the old ogre's talk and lack of action. They had been coming here for months now, and each time they left all he felt was... defeated. "You whisper about battle and war. The honor of dying in combat. About how horribly our elven masters treat us. But you omit how we are supposed to change any of it!" He took a step forward, hovering over Grazdin's massive shoulder. "We are here. We are listening. Yet you say nothing!"

Grazdin sat with his spoon halfway to his mouth, calmly watching Brozka rant. Placing the spoon into the bowl, and the bowl onto the table, the elder stood and met the younger's stare.

The older ogre was a good head taller than Brozka, though the younger would still be growing for another five years or so. It took all of Brozka's willpower not to break eye contact. He stood firm. Finally, the elder pointed a clawed finger at the vacant chair. "Sit!"

When Brozka returned to his seat, Grazdin grabbed a stool and slid it before the five youths. "You all misunderstand. I do not bring you to my—" He glanced around the small, one-room shack and frowned. "—home to incite a rebellion. I bring you here so you can learn our history, and remember."

Jondak shook his head. He was the youngest of the group, and most of the time his rashness matched his age. "I care nothing for our history! I want only to take control of my future."

"Then you are a fool." Grazdin harrumphed. "For without understanding where you come from, you will walk like the blind towards certain doom."

Jondak *was* a fool as far as Brozka was concerned. He was not even sure he liked the young whelp. Jondak was more of a tagalong than an actual part of their group.

"Certain doom is living as slaves to the elves." Dak lifted his bulk from his chair. The largest of the adolescents in attendance—larger by far than many adult male ogres—Dak was slow to speak. But when he did, what he said made sense. Turning, he faced the others. "Why do we allow this to continue? We are stronger than any other race. I say we rise up and break our bonds!"

"And our master's skulls!" Jondak added.

All of the young ogres nodded in agreement. Akani wore a large, open grin upon her face.

Grazdin laughed at this outburst. "If there was still a gateway to Akashidak, your words might have weight, my boy. But that portal is gone. Destroyed along with so much of Amaril, with most of our people stranded in the realm beyond. As strong as we ogres are, we are weak in number here. What could the few hundred of us do against the multitudes who bind us to their will?"

"We could fight!" Anger began to boil inside Brozka.

The elder shook his head. "You would die."

Akani leapt to her feet, sending her stool thumping to the floor. "Then we die in battle! That would not only make our ancestors proud, it would return our spirits to the Warfield. We could then be reborn on Akashidak!"

"Dying in battle brings honor." Grazdin passed a cold gaze over the small group. "Being slaughtered like an animal for the butcher does not." He looked up at Akani. "And how do you know your death in this realm would not trap your soul here as well? Perhaps those who die on Norrath never reach the Warfield of Akashidak."

Brozka could tell his friend had not thought her logic through, as usual. Picking up Akani's stool, he motioned for

The Enemy of My Enemy - Part One

her to sit. "I am not suggesting we overthrow our masters. But we could escape. Toskirakk still stands. We could go there. Live with our own kind, in our own city. Free from the hatred of the dal here in Tahrin."

"So you have mastered the art of sailing the oceans, have you?" A mirthless grin came to Grazdin's lips. "Or were you planning on sprouting wings and flying to Amaril from here?"

It was Brozka's turn to be embarrassed by not thinking before he spoke.

Fool! Toskirakk. A child's dream.

Even with the mental chastising, the humiliation did not stay with him long. His anger rose to the surface once more. "So what do you suggest we do?"

"Again, you misunderstand. I do not expect you to do anything except learn. Perhaps the time will come in your life when things change, and you can use the knowledge I give you to live as a true ogre. If it does not, you will be able to pass our knowledge on to the next generation." Grazdin's scowl deepened and, for the first time, his age showed. Sagging olive skin hung loose over his stooped shoulders. His rapidly thinning hair made a weak graying ring around his skull. Even his tusks were dull. Brozka did not know how old the elder was, but he was sure Grazdin was well over a hundred.

As Brozka studied the ogre he had known his whole life, realization washed over him. "I understand all too well now." He rose and nodded to the others. "Our elders are content to sit and talk. If action is to be taken, it falls upon the shoulders of the young. Their time has passed them by and—"

Strong hands gripped Brozka's upper arms, lifting him up and sending him sailing across the room. He landed on the table, crushing it under his weight. The bowl of mashed oats flipped off, slamming into the far wall.

Rolling over, he found Grazdin looming above him. "You will not insult me in my own home!" The older ogre reached down and grabbed the younger by his leather vest. Brozka made to remove the elder's hands and was shocked by the old ogre's strength. Grazdin pulled him up, then off his feet and

into the air, slamming his head and upper back against the ceiling. "You impetuous whelp. Do not mistake my acceptance for complacency!" The elder ogre flung Brozka to the floor once more. "We cannot fight the elves because it would be a worthless battle." He crossed his thick arms over his chest. "And escaping the city of Tahrin means being hunted like animals out in the wild. An even less honorable death. If you were not such a—"

The building shook, sending Grazdin lurching backward.

Those still sitting rose and glanced around. Dust rained down from the ceiling as the walls shuddered around them. Akani and the others made for the door as Grazdin reached down and helped Brozka to his feet. Racing outside, the pair stepped into chaos.

Tahrin burned.

Though a thick layer of clouds blotted out all light from the moons and stars, the city itself glowed. In every direction Brozka looked, flames licked into the sky. Thick smoke billowed up, adding its blackness to an already dark night.

Ogres and dwarves spilled from the ramshackle buildings that made up this district of the city. Each face reflected the surprise and fear clawing at Brozka.

A silhouette glided over the street they were on, darker than the sky above. Brozka saw a glint of red as it raced toward where they stood. Whatever it was, it was massive. It stretched from the tops of the buildings on one side of the street to above those on the other. Something slammed into his shoulder, driving him against the wall.

"Dragon!"

Grazdin's shout was drowned out by a loud rush of air. An instant later the street exploded with fire. Unbearable heat washed over Brozka in a wave that drove him to his knees. Looking up, he saw burning liquid pour from between teeth as large as broadswords. The fire illuminated the beast, glinting off its scales.

He could not believe anything living could grow so large.

The flames struck the ground just past where his small

The Enemy of My Enemy - Part One

group stood huddled against the building. It bathed over those standing in the street, both dwarves and ogres alike. If they screamed, the sounds of their bodies igniting drowned it out.

In the second it took the dragon to disappear into the darkness, the street turned into funeral pyre. Everyone caught in the blast lay crumpled on the ground, a mound of charred corpses, their flesh popping and hissing. The scent of the cooking meat made Brozka's stomach growl before his mind made the connection to what it was he smelled. Disgusted, he turned and heaved.

Motion caught his eye. Grazdin brushed passed him toward the fire. Reaching out, he tried to stop the old ogre. "They are dead! You cannot help them."

The elder shook him off and continued forward. "I must get back inside!"

The buildings on either side of the street were ablaze, including half of Grazdin's tiny home. Brozka tried to take a step forward, but the heat would not allow it. His skin already felt as if it would blister if he stayed where he was. "Grazdin!"

Several clawed hands grabbed him and pulled him away. Spinning, he looked into the terrified eyes of Akani. "We cannot stay here!"

Brozka nodded and the five of them moved back from the area of destruction as Grazdin disappeared through the door to his home.

Jondak lead the group by a good twenty feet. When they reached an intersection, a horde of kobolds poured out from the cross street. The little brown creatures all wore mismatched armor and wielded tiny thin blades. Before Brozka or any of his friends could react, several of the draconic beasts leapt on top of Jondak, stabbing him over and again. He flailed his arms, smashing those attacking him to the ground. But for each he dislodged, two more replaced it. In an instant, Jondak disappeared under a sea of tiny brown limbs and the flashes of blades slick with blood.

Cut off, they had no choice but to retreat back toward the flames.

Lacking the element of surprise, and seeing their victims were trapped, the kobolds followed at a less frantic pace.

The four remaining ogres spread out in a line, walking backward. As small as the kobolds were, if Brozka's group became surrounded, they would not last long.

A kobold holding a spear yelped and broke from the line. It ran at Brozka, spear held high. Just as the creature jabbed, Akani's hand whipped out and caught the tip. Startled, the small creature held onto the other end of the weapon as he was lifted into the air. Akani used its spear to flick the creature back at the horde pressing in on them. The kobold smashed into the front line with a meaty thwack, sending at least a half dozen of his fellows to the ground. Spinning the tiny spear around, Akani held it like a dagger.

The reprieve was short-lived as the kobolds behind stepped over their fallen comrades and filled the hole created by Akani's attack.

The heat of the fire behind began to burn Brozka's back and he knew they had reached the end of their retreat. The others seemed to notice the same and all four came to a stop.

"Come meet death!" Dak's bellow startled the kobolds in front. One even dropped its sword, turned and tried to push through the throng clogging the streets. When it failed to penetrate those behind, it turned and scooped up its weapon.

The two groups stood looking at each other for a moment before the kobolds started yapping in their native tongue. Brozka could tell they were working up the courage to attack en masse. Once they did, no matter how many his group killed with their bare hands, he and his friends would all die here in this street.

The kobold's sporadic squawks turned into a rhythmic chant that began to build in power. Just as it reached its peak, the wall of the building to the left burst open. Gripping a weather-worn book in one hand and wielding a mace as big as the stump of a small tree in the other, Grazdin stumbled into the street. Bellowing, he swung his weapon in a wide, slashing arc that swept a dozen kobolds away in a spray of

The Enemy of My Enemy - Part One

black blood. Taking a step forward, the elder's backstroke took out at least half as many as the first. This time the four adolescent ogres were in the path of the destruction. Brozka raised a hand to protect his face as broken bodies sailed past, covering him in blood and gore.

By the time Grazdin took his third step, the horde of kobolds had broken, running down the street in chaotic panic.

Turning, Grazdin wore a smile bigger than any Brozka had ever seen before on the old ogre. The elder raised an arm and wiped black blood from his forehead. "If only the little bastards were orcs, this day would be perfect!" He pointed back into the building he had bashed his way from. "Inside is a sack with more weapons. Get them."

The four looked at each other before Mulna ducked into the building. She returned with a dirt-covered burlap sack. Inside were several more maces, much like the one Grazdin held, and one large sword that Dak picked up, his eyes wide.

"Come." Grazdin turned and started the way the kobolds had fled. "We need to figure out what is happening here."

Brozka jogged to catch up with the elder. He eyed the old leather-bound book the elder cradled in the crook of his arm. "Where are we going?"

The old ogre used his mace to point toward the center of the city. "To the palace. That is where the best defenses are, and where we can join the fight with the most efficiency."

Mulna appeared on Grazdin's other side. "Join the fight! With the elves?"

Grazdin came up short and squared his shoulders on the young female. "What else? If you have not noticed, our kind is being slaughtered along with the dal!"

"Perhaps that is because the dragons do not know our situation." Mulna cast a glance Brozka's way. "This is our chance, can you not see? The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

Waving a hand, Grazdin started walking again. "Bah! Do not spout tactical drivel at me, girl. I have lived it, while you whelps have not."

"Halt!"

Brozka's heart skipped a beat at the command. Glancing around, he saw five armed elves melt from the shadows of a nearby building, their purple capes marking them as royal guards.

Each had a longsword and dagger drawn. None looked happy to see them. "Why are you ogres armed? You know it is forbidden for you to have weapons inside the city." The one who spoke wore some insignia upon his shoulder, but Brozka had never learned what they stood for.

I simply know it means this one is in charge.

Placing the head of his large mace on the ground, Grazdin leaned on its handle. "In case you have not noticed, your city is under attack."

The elven officer's face twisted into a sneer. "And for all we know, you lesser races are in league with them."

A growl erupted from the elder. "I should kill you where you—" The elder's eyes popped open and his hand shot to his throat. In the dim light Brozka had not seen the elf move. But when blood began streaming from between the elder's fingers, he did not need to see the wetness on the tip of the dal's sword to know what had happened.

"Elder!" Dak ran forward, swinging his large blade like a scythe harvesting grain. The sword slammed into the chest of the elven officer, cleaving him in half. It did not stop until it had passed through two of the other elves as well.

Mulna used the shaft of her mace to knock aside the blade of the guard in front of her before bringing the weapon's head down on the elf's helmet. The dal's head disappeared in a spray of blood and his body slammed to the ground.

The last elven guard turned and ran.

Brozka caught Grazdin as the old ogre's legs crumpled. With the help of Akani, he laid him gently on the cobblestone street. "Elder, I..." He had never seen so much blood pour out of an ogre before.

Grazdin shook his head weakly. He reached out, took Brozka's hand and placed it on the old book he carried. "L—learn... remember..." The words came out in a bloody gurgle.

The Enemy of My Enemy - Part One

Then the elder's eyes rolled back into his head and his chest compressed for the last time.

Upon the blood-spattered cover was embossed the insignia of Grazdin's old war clan. Brozka ran one thick finger over the image, tracing its lines. He shifted his gaze to the body of the ogre who had been like a father to him. How could the gods allow the elder to die with such dishonor? Looking up into the sky, he screamed, pouring all his rage and pain into it.

When all the breath was gone from him, Mulna placed a hand on his shoulder and helped him rise. "We must go." Without a backward glance, she started walking – not toward the palace, but away from it.

Brozka tucked the elder's book under his arm and looked at Akani. She wore a puzzled look that matched what he himself felt. He turned back to Mulna. "Where are you going?"

"Where we should have gone in the first place." Mulna didn't break stride. "I am taking us to join the dragons!"



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maxwell Alexander Drake—or Drake as he is known to friends and fans alike—has been writing professionally since 2007. In addition to working for SOE on the EverQuest Next project, he teaches creative writing at fan conventions and writers conferences across the country, as well as holding monthly classes at the Clark County Library District in Las Vegas.

Find out more about him and his schedule of appearances on his official website, www.maxwellalexanderdrake.com.

The Genesis of Oblivion Saga is Drake's first major series and has won both a 2009 and 2011 Moonbeam Young Adult Fantasy Award for excellence in literature, as well as being named Dragon Roots Magazine's Best New Fantasy Saga.

You can read the first five chapters of *The Genesis of Oblivion Saga*, as well as keep up to date on this series at its official website, www.genesisofoblivion.com.