

The story of Grimwald

prologue

His early years Grimwald spend in the clan hold. He played with other dwarven children under the watchful eyes of the hearth mother and her hearth guards. He enjoyed himself playing typical dwarven childhood games like "Kick the goblin" and "Watch out for the troll!" as well as carving little statues out of mining rubble and setting up small battlefields with his friends and creating labyrinths and tunnel complexes out of pebbles and rocks. Then one day when he was only 20 years of age alarm bells rang. They rang much closer than they ever had before. Quickly the hearth guards filed the children in ranks of three and started marching them away when a horde of goblins burst into the hall.

The older hearth guards who had always been so patient and kind launched themselves into the goblin tide in a frenzy of bloodlust to break their charge so the children could retreat and the younger guards form a shieldwall blocking of the tunnel. As the other children were marched of into safety Grimwald stayed behind the lines of the hearth guard and watched the battle. He saw the heart mother, her body pierced and run through by goblin spears and javelins, her limbs broken by their clubs still clawing and biting ferociously and rip out the goblin leaders throat as they met in death's embrace. The battle ended quickly, many dozens of goblins lay dead, but also a few of his playmates and of the hearth guard, a great loss, mourned by all. Grimwald wept for the first and last time of his life. He wept bitter tears of anguish, anger and outrage that the foul greenskins had soiled the sanctity of the hold and destroyed what he cherished and loved.

The alarm bells were no longer the occasional background sound in the hold they had been before. They now carried with them the promise of destruction and death and each time he was gripped with anger and fear... and they seemed to ring ever more frequently. Four years later his father told him to prepare for a journey. He met with a small group of other dwarves and their children.

They went by way he had never seen before. Through secret passages and past many traps, through great halls with mighty, huge statues of the clan's forebears. Through the tombs of fallen heroes, rich golden runes describing their great battles and deeds. His father reading words in high dwarven of copper rune disks revealing doors and granting safe passage.

After a week and a half Grimwald entered for the first time into the world above. He saw the sky, the clouds and the stars and was frightened at the strangeness and width of this great vault and the strange lamps that lit it. As the years passed he grew more accustomed to this strange world, but never came to feel at ease outside. As the party travelled through the world above with its many strange creatures and forms more and more split of from the group to go their separate ways. By the time he and his father reached the city they were travelling alone. His father told him he would become his grandfather's apprentice.

His grandfather Ragnar was his only clansdwarf in the city. His skin was wrinkled and his eyes filmed,

but when he spoke there was steel in his voice, even though he never spoke loudly. When he first saw his grandfather Ragnar asked him: "What do you want?". Grimwald thought for a while and answered "To preserve the clan against the greenskins." His grandfather nodded and said "We shall see.". His father left the next morning.

His grandfather was a hard task master forcing Grimwald to spend most of his time grinding stones, pounding metal and pushing bellows in the heat of the forge while explaining nothing about the craft or rituals he performed. Whenever Grimwald would ask something Ragnar would answer "Asking is a fool's way of seeking what is hidden. Use your mind, not your mouth." Or something of the sort. Grimwald would comment that it is hard to think while he was constantly hauling loads of ore and pulling carts to this Ragnar would answer "If your body cannot work at the same time your mind does you might as well as ask for Dumathoin's sleep and save everyone some trouble." or something of that ilk. Over the years while talking little and thinking more and more he delved deeper into his grandfather's secrets.

Twice a year they would get other dwarves visiting them. In the spring a group from clan Silver Spear would come to the city for 20 days and stay with them. They brought many hides, tusks and claws with them from the spine of the world where they lived and traded for food and spices and Ragnar always gave them many throwing axes before they left. Their clan was a great friend of the Axegrinders and they were mutual friends the Golden Axe's clan. Each time the night before they left they would sing the mournful song of their joined expedition to reclaim an old hold. How they slew many giants and together with the barbarians drove off the orc and goblin and slew the hill and mountain trolls. But how ultimately their king was fallen to the ancient evil that awaited them deeper in their hold and how their prince was lost in the lands of the gold dwarf.

In the summer there would come a single dwarf from clan Axegrinder and before his coming Ragnar would toil away beating sheets of copper, silver and gold and pounding intricate runes in them. Ragnar himself however would grow more faint with every day. After 10 years Grimwald could no longer contain his curiosity and when Grimwald asked what he was doing Ragnar, uncharacteristically answered his question.

"This is how I give what remains of my life to my clan. My lifeblood joins with that of Dumathoin. It flows to preserve His people and my clan." Grimwald asked to be allowed to give his lifeblood as well, because Ragnar was weakening and since this was exactly what he wanted. Ragnar for the only time in all those years laughed out loud and said "We shall see.".

From that time on, however, Ragnar allowed Grimwald to perform the decoration of the weapons and armour forged by him and allowed Grimwald to assist in the binding rituals to bestow the blessings of The Keeper Under the Mountain upon armour and weapons. In time Grimwald learned to recognize the motions, words and materials associated with magic, he also observed the qualities of different metals and how to shape, harden, weld, anneal and alloy them and could see that his grandfather was pleased he found out these secrets.

When Grimwald turned 40 his grandfather said to him "We dwarves can only endure against the greenskins and giantkind through our superior craftsmanship and our greater knowledge. If you would serve your clan this is what you need to build. You are too young to know anything or be able to do anything well, this comes with age. So for you to be able to get old enough to be of any use we will have to teach you how to survive." From then on each day his grandfather would teach him to master various types of armour and weapons and after ten years even allowed Grimwald to attend the city militia training days. When after many years he managed to strike his grandfather in a practice match. His grandfather commented: "Well you know your way around weapons well enough for now. It is time to find you a profession. Will you fight? Will you craft?" Grimwald answered: "I will give my lifeblood to Dumathoin's people and my clan, I will master crafts and gain wisdom."

Ragnar then closed his shop and together they made a long trek into the mountains. On a wind swept, barren plateau Grimwald was abandoned and told not to come back until the Silent Keeper accepted that he had what was needed. Grimwald wandered around until he noticed runes hidden in the scratches upon the rocks. He followed the instructions and was led past many traps and through secret passages. As he wandered his body grew fainter, but within him he felt growing a clarity and resolve and all his past experiences became clear as crystal in his mind's eye. He felt that through the pressures from outside a diamond was forming in his body. Faint with exhaustion, hunger and thirst he found a cavern, the walls exposed gleaming veins of gems and in the center there rested a huge gem carved into an anvil. Exhausted Grimwald collapsed upon the anvil. When he came to he found himself surrounded by dwarves in priestly robes performing the ritual of initiation on him, before he fainted again.

When he awoke next he found food and water and after having rested and eaten he started on his way back. From then on when the clan's holy days were celebrated his grandfather would tell him tales of the history of his people and the exploits of the Gods and the dangers of the world.

Then one day his grandfather commented: "You will learn no more hanging around here. Find a fresh vein of wisdom and craft and mine it, this will do you good" and threw him outside in the cold. Grimwald was at first stung by his grandfather's abrupt ending of his apprenticeship, but found that resting with his pack was Ragnar's old axe and his favourite tools. Grimwald swore to the Silent Keeper he would not betray his grandfather's trust in him and return with secrets of his own!