

# ***HONOURKEEPER***

*A Warhammer Novel*

*By Nick Kyme*

In the ancient days of the Old World, long before the time of men, the dwarfs and elves are at the height of their prosperity. As King Bagrik of the dwarfs and Prince Ithalred of the elves forge a trade pact, a vast horde of northmen attacks the elf settlement. When King Bagrik's son is slain, the dwarfs join forces with the elves, eager for vengeance. Can the dwarfs and the elves put aside their differences long enough to prevail over foe?



## **About the Author**

Nick Kyme hails from Grimsby, a small town on the east coast of England. Nick moved to Nottingham in 2003 to work on White Dwarf magazine as a Layout Designer. Since then, he has made the switch to the Black Library's hallowed halls as an editor and has been involved in a multitude of diverse projects. His writing credits include several published short stories, background books and novels.

You can catch up with Nick and read about all of his other published works at his website: [www.nickkyme.com](http://www.nickkyme.com)

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Beyond archer range, King Bagrik surveyed the carnage of the battlefield from atop a ridge of stone. Across a muddy valley riddled with trenches, earthworks and abatis his army gave their blood, sweat and steel. Sat astride his ancestral war shield, carried by two of his stoutest hearth guard warriors, the king of Karak Ungor had an unparalleled view.

The silver moat the elves had fashioned shimmered like an iridescent ribbon, reflecting the flames of burning towers. Bagrik watched keenly as gromril-plated bridges were dropped over it, landing like felled trees for the siege towers and warriors with scaling ladders to cross. On the opposite side of the ridge where it fell away into a shallow ravine, Bagrik could hear the heartening din of smiths at their forge fires, toiling in the dwarf encampment making more bridges, bolts for the

ballista, quarrels and pavises. The smell of soot and iron drifting on the breeze was like a taste of home.

Bagrik's expression hardened as a siege tower lurched and slipped on one of the bridges, falling into the molten moat and taking most of its crew with it. Others had better fortune, and battles erupted across the length of the elven wall with spear, hammer and axe.

He swelled with pride at the sight of it, all of his hearth brothers locked in furious battle with a powerful foe. Sorrow tempered that pride, and wrath crushed both emotions as Bagrik glowered at the city.

Tor Eorfith the elves called it. Eyrie Rock. It was well named, for the towers at the zenith of the city had soared far into the sky, piercing cloud and seemingly touching the stars. They were the dominion of mages, great observatories where the elven sorcerers could contemplate the constellations and allegedly portend future events.

Bagrik wagered they had not seen this coming.

He had no love for sky, cloud and stars; his domain was the earth and its solidity beneath and about

him gave him comfort. The earth contained the essence of the ancestor gods, for it was to the heart of the world that they had returned once their task was done. They had taught the dwarfs how to work ore to forge structures, armour and weapons.

Grungni together with his sons, Smednir and Thungni had shown them the true nature of magic, how to capture it within the rune and etch it indelibly upon blades, talismans and armour in order to fashion artefacts of power. Bagrik had no love for the ephemeral sorcery of elves. Manipulating the true elements of the world in such a way was disharmonious. At best attempting to control them smacked of hubris, at worst it was disrespectful. No, Bagrik held no truck with such transient things. It angered him. The mage towers had been the first to go.

Crushed by hefty chunks of rock flung by dwarf stone throwers, the towers had exploded in a conflagration of myriad colours as they were destroyed, the arcane secrets and the alchemy of their denizens turned against them, and only serving to affirm Bagrik's

vehement beliefs. They were just blackened spikes of stone now, broken fingers thrust into an uncaring sky, their communion with the stars at an end.

It was a fitting epitaph.

For the briefest of moments the air was on fire as elven sorcery met dwarf runecraft, forcing Bagrik back to the present. Further down the ridge, their litanies to the ancestors solemn and resonant, the runesmiths worked at their anvils. Not mere forgesmiths' anvils, no. These were runic artefacts – the Anvils of Doom. Agrin Oakenheart, venerable rune lord of Karak Ungor led his two apprentices, esteemed master runesmiths in their own right, in the rites of power as they dissipated hostile elven magicks and unleashed chained lightning upon the foe. With each arcing bolt, Bagrik felt his beard bristle as the charge ran through his ancestral armour.

Death wreathed the battlefield like a sombre shroud, but it was at the gatehouse where its greatest harvest would be reaped.

Break the gate, break the elves. Bagrik clenched his fist as his gaze fell upon the battle being fought there. He would settle for nothing less...

‘Heave!’ Morek bellowed above the thunder. The dwarf’s voice resonated through the bronze mask of his helmet as he urged his warriors again.

‘Heave with all your strength. Grungni is watching you!’

And all thirty of his hearth guard warriors did.

Beneath the gromril-plated roof of a battering ram, the armoured dwarfs pulled the ram back for another charge. Runes etched down its iron shaft blazed as the gromril ram-head, forged into the bearded visage of the ancestor god Grungni, smashed into the gate. It was a barrier the likes of which Morek had never known, adorned with gemstones and carved from seemingly unbreakable wood. The eagle device upon the gate barely showed a scratch. The elves, despite his initial beliefs, knew their craft. Morek was determined that it

would not avail them. Sweating beneath his armour, his orders were relentless.

‘Again! There will be no rest until this gate is down!’

Shock waves ran down the iron with the impact as dwarf tenacity met elven resistance and found each other at an impasse.

Breathing hard as he wiped his beard with the back of his glove, Morek paused a moment and detected the groan of metal high above. It was the third day of the siege; he’d had plenty of time to survey the city’s defences. The elves had cauldrons above the gatehouse.

‘Shields!’ he roared, long and loud.

The hearth guard reacted as one, creating a near-impenetrable shield wall to protect the vulnerable flanks of the battering ram.

Near-impenetrable but not invincible.

There was a whoosh of flame and an actinic stink permeated Morek’s nose guard as the elves released their alchemical fire.



Screaming drowned out the roar of the conflagration as hearth guard warriors burned down like candles with shortened wicks. Reflected on the underside of his shield Morek saw a blurred shape fall from the narrow bridge where they made their assault and land in the moat beneath. A pillar of blue-white fire spiralled skyward as the burning dwarf struck the moat, so high it touched cloud. The elves, employing more of their thrice-cursed sorcery, had filled a deep trench around their city with molten silver and the alchemical fire's reaction with the shimmering liquid was spectacular yet terrifying.

A second deluge of the deadly liquid smashed against the battering ram, as the elves vented their stocks in desperation. Heat came through Morek's shield in a wave, pricking his skin despite his armour. He grit his teeth against the onslaught, watching iridescent sparks crackle and die upon the stone at his feet as the elven siege deterrent spilled away.

No screams this time. The attack abated. Two cauldrons had been expended. The elves had no more. It

would take time for them to replenish the deadly liquid fire. In the brief respite, Morek took stock and smiled grimly. Only three hearth guard dead: his warriors had closed ranks quickly. But the elves had more. As the battering of the gate resumed, a flurry of white-fletched arrows whickered down at the dwarfs from above, thudding into shields and plate. Despite the armoured canopy of the ram, Morek took one in the pauldron. The dwarf at his flank, Hagri, was struck incredibly between gorget and face-guard, and died gurgling blood. Morek chewed his beard in anger. Hagri had fought at Morek's side for over seventy years. It was no way for such a noble warrior to die.

The arrow storm was relentless, the dwarfs effectively pinned as they raised shields again, unable to work the ram and protect themselves at the same time. Peering upwards through a crack between shield tip and the ram canopy, Morek saw white-robed elves – stern of face with silver swan helmets gleaming – loose steel-fanged death with ruthless purpose. Archers lined the battlements and as Morek scanned across he saw one of

the elven mages incanting soundlessly as the battle din eclipsed his eldritch tongue. In a thunderclap of power, the mage was illuminated by a crackling cerulean aura. Forked lightning arced from his luminous form and the mage's silver hair stood on end as the energy was expelled, straight towards Morek and his warriors. But before the bolts could strike they hit an invisible barrier and were deflected away. Blinking back the savage after flare, and muttering thanks to Agrin Oakenheart's runesmiths, Morek tracked the bolt's erratic deviation.

One of the distant dwarf siege towers assaulting the eastern wall exploded as the lightning found a new target and vented its wrath. Dwarfs plunged earthward from the high parapet of the tower, mouthing silent screams. The assault ramp and the upper tower hoarding were utterly destroyed. Fire ravaged it within and without, and the siege tower came to a grinding halt. In its place though, three more towers moved into position, dragged and pushed by hordes of dwarf warriors, those at the front protected by large moveable pavises of iron and wood. As one, the heavy armoured ramps crashed

down upon the elven parapets, crushing them before disgorging throngs of clansdwarfs.

All across the churned earth, as far as the deepening black of oncoming night in the distant east and west, the dwarfs marched in droves. Teams of sappers flung grapnels, heaving as they found purchase to tear down ruined sections of tower and wall.

Quarrellers, crouching behind barricades or within shallow trench lines, kept up a steady barrage of bolts in an effort to stymie the heavy death toll being reaped by the elven archers and ballista. On the bloody ramps of the siege towers, and battling hard upon scaling ladders, dwarf warriors fought and died. But it was at the great gate, the principal entrance to the elven city, that the fighting was fiercest. Knowing this would be so, Morek had taken his finest hearth guard warriors and told his king he would break it. He had no intention of failing in that oath.

‘We are like stuck grobi sat out here,’ said Fundin Ironfinger, a hearth guard warrior crouched behind Morek, his shield locked with that of his thane.

Morek had to shout to be heard above the insistent thud of raining arrows.

‘Bah, this is nothing, lad – a light shower, no more than that. They can’t shoot at us forever, and once the elgi run out of arrows we’ll have this gate down. Then they’ll taste dawī steel–’ Morek was forced to duck down as the storm intensified.

‘Eh, lad?’ he said during a short lull in the arrow fire, looking back at Fundin.

The hearth guard didn’t answer. He was dead; shot through the eye.

Dutifully, another hearth guard moved up the line to take his place and Fundin’s body was edged beyond the relative protection of the canopy to be punctured with further arrows.

No, Morek thought grimly, he had no intention of failing in his oath but if the arrow storm didn’t end soon, he’d have no warriors left to break down the gate and fulfil it. Touching the runic amulet around his neck, he made a pledge to Grungni that this would not be so.

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The air was thick with arrows, bolts, fire, lightning and stone. Bagrik watched as a battery of mangonels flung massive chunks of rock that had been hewn from the hillside and smashed them into Tor Eorfith, shattering walls and pulverising flesh and bone. With grim satisfaction, he saw one missile strike the central arch of the elven gatehouse where his hearth guard stood beleaguered beneath their battering ram.

Elven bodies fell like white rain.

Cheers greeted the destruction of the gatehouse, the arrow storm brought to an abrupt and bloody halt. Debris fell along with the elven dead, fat pieces of rock and limp bodies bouncing off the gromril roof of the battering ram.

Morek urged the hearth guard on to even greater efforts. They swung and pushed, swung and pushed with the thunderous insistence of an angry giant. At last, the runes upon the ram-head were doing their work, forcing cracks into the sorcerous wards that galvanised the gate. Magic permeated all that the elves did; it was even

seeped into the very rock and wood of their settlements. Tor Eorfith was no different. It had been enchantment that had repulsed the dwarfs for this long. That protection had ended with the life of the silver-haired mage, now nothing more than a shattered footnote in history, dead and broken at the foot of the outer gatehouse wall.

Thickening cracks appeared in the eagle gate as it finally yielded to the punishing efforts of the hearth guard.

Morek could sense they were close.

‘One last pull!’

With an almighty splintering of wood, the elven gate was split in two. Through the rough-hewn gap, Morek glimpsed azure robes and shining elven mail. A cohort of spearmen faced them; tips angled outward like a forest of razor spikes. Then as one the elves parted like a crystal sea to reveal a pair of bolt throwers of ivory-stained wood, and both fashioned into an effigy of a hawk.

The dwarfs raised shields as the javelin-like projectiles flew at them. Three more of the hearth guard were killed, impaled on the sharp missiles. Morek swung his axe once the barrage was over, working out the stiffness from his shoulder. The spearmen had closed ranks again, ready to skewer the foe. Morek raised his axe, runes upon the blade shimmering, and signalled the charge.

Bagrik watched the gatehouse fall and the hearth guard rush forward to meet the elven spearmen within. The high ridge was an excellent vantage point to view the battle from and the king took in the full spectacle. Even as the elves fought, as they spat arrows from their tower walls, unleashed arcane fire and lightning and thrust with gleaming spears and swords, Bagrik could tell that this was the final push. The dwarf army was on the brink of breaking through.

Three long days, and the cusp of victory was within his grasp. It did nothing to satisfy him, it did not slake his thirst for vengeance, nor did it quieten his



anger. No protracted siege this; no picket lines had been erected, no wells blocked or provisions destroyed or tainted. Full assault. That was all. Come his reckoning at Gazul's Gate, the final portal before admittance into the Halls of Ancestors and the dwarf afterlife, Bagrik would be held to account for the blood expended.

He cared not.

'My king,' the voice of Grikk Ironbeard, captain of the ironbreakers, interrupted Bagrik's thoughts. Grikk bowed low before his king as he announced himself. Not one inch of the ironbreaker's body could be seen beneath the all-encompassing suit of gromril. Even his face was concealed behind a stylised dwarf mask. Only Grikk's wiry black beard was visible. It was a necessary precaution. As an ironbreaker, Grikk was responsible for guarding the dwarf underway, a dangerous underground road between the holds that was fraught with many monsters. Today, Grikk had a different task. But it was one for which his ironbreaker armour and his skills as a tunnel fighter were ideally suited.

‘Rugnir and the sappers are ready. The final assault can commence.’

Bagrik nodded, his gaze drifting over to the south wall of the city where Rugnir and the hold’s engineers were tunnelling in preparation to undermine it. Bagrik had five throngs of clan warriors held in reserve, together with the hold’s longbeards to exploit the breach when it came.

Bagrik’s gaze remained fixed as he replied gruffly.

‘Secure the tunnel, kill any opposition.’

‘Yes, my king.’

Grikk departed swiftly, the sound of clanking armour left in his wake.

Bagrik watched a moment longer before he gave the order to advance. An entire phalanx stood upon the flat ridge, clan warriors and hearth guard all. Ten thousand more dwarfs. The hammer with which to crush the elves beneath the anvil of warriors already breaking through the elven defences below. War horns blared down the line one after the other, raising a thunderous

clamour. The dwarfs' march towards the elven city was resolute and relentless. Bagrik went with them, brought to the forefront of the attack and into the cauldron of battle by his shield bearers.

Regarding the bloody fire-wreathed vista, the swathes of dead, the wanton destruction levelled at two great civilisations, Bagrik couldn't help wonder.

How did it all come to this?

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**HONOURKEEPER** can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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