

Patrice Oakheart looked at the burnt smoking remains of the farming village with a sense of dread and anger. The wanton destruction and barbarity shown by the Lannister army were beyond inhumane. The worst part was that he could not help but take some responsibility for the loss of life that was before his eyes.

'If I had only sent more men to escort the smallfolk away from the village a little early then hundreds would've lived.

"Do not blame yourself, my lord. You did everything you could in the situation." said Ser Alester Redmayne.

Patrice just shook his head and turned his horse away not wanting to look upon the failure of his duty.

"Are there any survivors?" he asked once his sons Gwayne and Desmond returned to his side on their horses.

"None father." Gwayne said grimly. "Those monsters spared no one. Not even children."

Patrice could hear a slight infliction in his younger son's voice. It was only natural to feel so strongly especially when his younger son just had a newborn daughter before this blasted war came to their lands. The Lannisters didn't make it easy either as his most veteran soldiers and knights were horrorstruck at the depravity and butchering the Westerlanders have wreaked on their lands.

"Perhaps, there are survivors who escaped the slaughter. The survivors might have fled to the shores or deep into the woods." Desmond said, looking far worse compared to his younger brother.

Patrice knew the reason. It was his eldest son who found the well full of dismembered bodies of the men of the village. The women were strewn across the village in barns and houses with their bodies violated. It was as if hell had come to these lands. He wondered whether this was the same fate that befell King's Landing a decade ago.

"Ride back to the camp and get some rest. You look like you've not slept for days, Desmond." said Patrice, knowing that his eldest son had been chasing Gregor Clegane across the countryside.

"No father. I'm..."

"It's an order, Desmond. You'll return to Old Oak and take some rest. While you're there you'll review the preparations of Old Oak for a long siege with Maester Omer." he said sharply, leaving no room for discussion. "You're dismissed."

He watched his eldest son ride off after letting out a huff of protest.

"Father, he..."

"Your brother is too soft-hearted for this kind of battle. He is a good man but out of the goodness of his heart, he has extended our men far out of the reach of our supply lines by chasing Clegane." Patrice snapped, making his younger son shut his mouth with an audible click. "We are fighting this war to Lord Tywin's design thanks

to your brother The Old Lion wants to weaken the forces mustering at Old Oak so he can overwhelm us there and take the Ocean Road.”

“What’re you saying, father?” Gwayne asked tentatively.

“We retreat to our lines. We prioritise holding the Ocean Road and denying the Lannister army taking control of our castle.”

“But... but there are five more villages that we couldn’t evacuate! If we retreat, we leave them to the tender mercies of House Lannister.” Gwayne protested.

“We don’t have the men to spare and even if we did, I sense a trap is being set by the lions.” Patrice grimaced, giving the orders to retreat after burying the dead in the village.

He knew he was sentencing the rest of the countryside to Lannister cruelty but war seldom gives good choices.

A few days later, refugees began streaming in with stories of murder, rape, and butchery. Word spread quickly among the men and the clamour for taking the fight to the Lannisters only became stronger. But Patrice exercised caution and refused to give up the advantage by being goaded into a trap. His caution stemmed from the fact that the scouts he sent forth so far had not found the Lannister camp which deprived them of knowing the disposition of the Lannister army. The lords of Northmarch getting bogged down by the flood also played a crucial part in his decision to pull back his army and defend Old Oak rather than ride out to face the enemy in the field.

Patrice sat alone in his tent staring intently at the map sprawled out on his desk. He had marked all the villages the Lannister army had attacked in the past week and constructed a reasonable timeline. He was hoping he could find a place that’d facilitate the Lannisters to camp out and strike at these villages and withdraw in quick order. The flaps of his tent were suddenly thrown open as Ser Alester Redmayne walked in with haste holding a piece of parchment in his hand.

“My lord, word from Old Oak has arrived. Lord Alester Florent has sent a five-thousand-strong army under his son’s command to protect Old Oak and Ocean Road.” Ser Alester reported with a happy grin on his trusted captain of guards’ face.

Relief flooded Patrice’s mind as he read through the message written by Maester Omer.

“It seems we’ll need to make preparations to accommodate Lord Alekyne Florent in our camp.” he muttered.

“By your leave, I shall see to the preparations my lord.” Ser Alester offered.

He was about to nod but a guard suddenly entered his tent unannounced.

“Forgive me my lord, Ser. The scouts have returned and they found the Lannister camp.”

His eyes widened as he realised the opportunity that was presenting itself. With additional troops to hold the Ocean Road on their way and his scouts pinpointing the Lannister camp, he could push back the Lannister army.

“Ser Alester. Have the scouts mark the positions on the map. I’ll also need to know the strength of the enemy we are to face and call forth my son.”

The preparations from there on out were fast-paced. The chances of the Lannister army relocating their camp were too much to ignore. He rightly feared the Lannister army was mustering a larger host and if that was the case then he needed to deal a blow to the Lannister army and boost the morale of his men. He wondered what his youngest son was doing. Arys was a competent knight and he hoped his son was serving the king ably in the Kingsguard.

‘At least, I’ll be meeting Arys soon enough.’ Patrice thought.

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Ser Gwayne of Old Oak felt like he could kill a thousand Lannisters and would feel not a thing after having witnessed the cruelty of the lions of the west. He supposed he shouldn’t have expected anything less from the family that butchered the wife and children of Prince Rhaegar. Still, there was something to be gained for the Lannisters in butchering the family of Prince Rhaegar. He could not see what benefit the Lannisters was hoping to achieve here by butchering defenceless smallfolk. If it was to piss him off and the men accompanying him then the lions had succeeded in their objective.

“Ser, the archers are in position.” Gorin informed him, looking at him most eagerly with wide brown eyes for orders.

Gwayne looked at the sky to see the light was slowly dimming. If they waited any longer, they’d be attacking the Lannister camp in low visibility. His father’s orders were to attack the enemy camp at night but he wanted these murderers to live and breathe in fear as he rains death down on them.

“Kill the lookouts and have a contingent of horses ride in to draw out these Lannister scum. We’ll bleed them dry in our soil.” he ordered, earning a vicious smirk from Gorin who nodded his head and went about to communicate his order to the men.

The archers began the initial assault by taking out the lookouts posted around the Lannister camp. The Lannister men became aware of their presence and began to gather especially after a contingent of mounted knights loudly charged into the Lannister camp. The ruckus of the battle attracted more and more Lannister men to come out of their tents and that was when he gave the signal for his troops to move in from the flanks. Archers led the attack from the forefront by raining fresh salvos of arrows on the unsuspecting Lannister men in the camp. Not everyone in the Lannister camp was armoured and that left the enemy suffering mortal wounds from his archers.

Closely following his archers were the infantry troops that clashed with the hastily put-up defensive lines of the Lannister army. As the battle raged on in the camp Gwayne held back the bulk of his forces comprising of his horses for the opportune

moment to strike. The light from the sun dimmed further and finally, he saw the huge behemoth of a man that was Gregor Clegane take the field.

“Tywin’s attack dog. You’ll meet your end here.” Gwayne muttered as he mounted his horse and took up a spear into his hand.

“My fellow knights! Today we put an end to killers of women and children. Today we shall introduce them to the steel of our swords. Today we’ll bring them to the Stranger!” Gwayne raised his spear and let out a shout taken up by the men as they were surging with bloodlust.

Together they rode down from the shade of the trees into the camp. The clapping of the collective hooves of their horses was akin to rumbling thunder from the heavens. Gwayne could feel his heart hammering in his body as he held the spear at ready.

“This is a righteous war. This is a righteous war. This is a righteous war.” Gwayne kept muttering inside his helmet as he drew closer to the Lannister men.

His horse slammed into a soldier who looked like he was just shitting his pants while Gwayne stabbed his spear through the neck of an unsuspecting Lannister soldier. His spear broke in his hand and he was forced to unsheathe his sword after he regained some semblance of control over his horse. He trotted the horse forward and sliced through the back of the neck of a Lannister soldier. He hacked and slashed through the Lannister men steadily gaining ground against the Mountain who was swinging his massive sword like a battering ram. He saw an opportunity when the Mountain turned his back and began fighting three men.

Urging his horse forward, Gwayne surged ahead gaining speed. He raised his sword eager to claim the glory of felling the Mountain but Clegane turned at the last moment and what happened next was not something he properly saw. He was flying away from his horse for some reason and with a painful crash he fell to the ground. He was breathing heavily and there were black spots in his vision. It took him a moment to realize his eyes were getting clouded by blood pooling into them from his head. He quickly pulled his helmet away from his head and wiped the blood away.

A bestial growl alerted him to the fact that he was in danger. Gwayne rolled forward on instinct and that saved his life as a massive sword slammed into his previous position. Turning around he saw the behemoth figure of Gregor Clegane marching towards with him with a murderous look. He scrambled back in fear as the giant came towards him.

Out of nowhere, his friend Gorin came to his rescue. But he watched with horror as Gorin fell flat on the ground from a single punch from Clegane. Then the giant man stomped with a bellow on Gorin’s head with all his might. Gwayne heard a sickening crack as his friend’s head was crushed under the massive leg of the Mountain.

Gwayne breathed hard as he became consumed by rage. With a mighty roar, he climbed to his feet raising his sword to take the head of the monster that was standing before him. He threw a few quick jabs at Clegane but the man was very good with his footwork despite his massive size. Letting out a frustrated yell he went for a slash against Clegane’s shoulder but the Mountain was faster. He was forced to defend himself as Clegane surged forward with a speed that took him by surprise.

The Mountain's massive greatsword came at him with a force and speed that made him freeze in indecision. And that indecision cost him as the greatsword struck his longsword with a force that made his sword bite into the chainmail on his shoulder.

"Ahhhhh!" Gwayne screamed as he could feel sharp steel biting into his bones.

Chafing under the pain, he saw the giant head of Gregor Clegane coming towards him in full force and then he knew no more.

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Addam Marbrand was a man loyal to the Lannisters. All that he learned and all that he enjoyed was owed to Lord Tywin from the moment he served as a page in his younger years. His family had always enjoyed closer ties with the Lannisters of the Rock. Their loyalty was proven true when Lord Tywin called his banners to crush the Reyne-Tarbeck rebellion. Ever since then, House Marbrand had enjoyed far closer ties with the Rock.

That was not the only reason why he was adamant to see the Lannisters win this war. Jaime was his childhood friend and he'd see to it Lord Tywin's eldest son get released from captivity.

"Ser Addam. The men are ready." said Ser Flement Brax.

Addam nodded at the black-haired knight. He mounted his horse and slowly trotted forward observing his five-thousand-strong mounted cavalry.

"Our orders from Lord Tywin are simple. We ride fast on our horses and take Bitterbridge in Lord Tywin's name. As you might've noticed we won't be depending on our supplies to fight this war. We'll have to forage from the ripe fields of the Reach and their wealthy castles. Any riches that we take will be shared equally amongst the men. Our goal is Bitterbridge and anything between us and our goal is the enemy."

Ser Addam unsheathed his sword raising it high in the air.

"What do we do with our enemy?" he shouted at the top of his lungs.

"We kill them all!" the men shouted back thrusting their swords high.

"What do we do with our enemy?"

"We kill them all!"

"Good. Because they'll be looking to kill you lot as well. So, let's kill the fuckers first." Ser Addam, turned his horse around and charged down the hill parting away from the Gold Road and the main host as planned.

The thundering of hooves boomed in his ears as his men followed his lead. The banners of golden lions fluttered in the wind as they rode down from the hills into the plains of the Reach. He threw his eyes further east where he could see another large host of some four thousand mounted men riding along the Gold Road. This second host was led by Ser Kevan Lannister and Lord Roland Crakehall. Their goal was to take Tumbleton and then join him while they march further west against Robert Baratheon's host.

It was a bold plan. Lord Tywin's plan depended on their ability to quietly and quickly take Tumbleton and Bitterbridge while Lord Tywin draws in the Baratheon host into the Ocean Road. If the war was to end in favour of House Lannister, then Robert Baratheon was to be taken captive. With the Baratheon king their captive, they can negotiate with Lord Arryn and force Prince Joffrey's early ascension with a regency council ruling till the prince attains his majority. He just hoped everything went according to plan as the other kingdoms were slowly but surely mustering their armies.

If the gods were in favour, then Gerion Lannister's peace overture with House Tully would end up working in their favour.

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"So, what do you think?" Harry asked Marwyn who was sporting glassy eyes while looking at the two dragons sitting in two corners of the room minding their food bowls.

For the ice dragon, he had given a bunch of pineapples which the vegan dragon was all too happy to munch on heartily.

"It's quite fascinating my lord." Maester Marwyn mumbled, never taking his eyes off the fire dragon which was gorging itself on a cooked piece of lamb. "I have never heard of a dragon with four limbs."

"I know ice dragons have four limbs. Perhaps, using the ice dragon crystals has changed the fundamental nature of the fire dragon." Harry theorized, scrutinising the fire dragon.

"Simply fascinating." Marwyn breathed out, slowly reaching his hand towards the fire dragon that was focused on the meat in the bowl.

At the last moment, the fire dragon let out a displeased screech and breathed out a plume of fire towards Marwyn. Harry hastily put up a shield that kept the old Maester safe from dragonfire.

"Well, that was close." Harry muttered, while Marwyn backpedalled after the hatchling's reaction. "I think he is just shy."

Harry looked between the two dragons and sighed. Both dragons were not as friendly as he had hoped. He had thought the dragons would take a liking to him since he was the one to hatch them.

'Maybe, they'll just need time to adjust.' Harry thought.

He restored the wards in the room and left the dragons to spend their time in peace. He gathered he'd let the two dragons separated by the protective wards until they finish their meal before confining them to their respective dimensions in the magical trunk.

"A raven came from Winterfell. Lord Stark has issued orders declaring Lord Jorah Mormont to be a slaver. He is travelling from Winterfell to Bear Islands to take Mormont's head."

Harry frowned. "Without hearing his side?"

"The accounts of the survivors we found must've been convincing. Lord Ryswell also found a few survivors. They also blamed Lord Mormont as the culprit who sold them to a slave ship from Essos."

"I don't understand. What're slave ships of Essos doing here? Why are they so bold to come on this side of Westeros?"

"I've received word from Hightower that the Ironborn are engaged in slave trade once again to stabilise their finances after the war." said Marwyn.

"I see. So, the Iron Islands are giving these slave ships port facilities in return for coin. And King Robert and the Royal Fleet is otherwise engaged."

"I'm afraid so my lord."

Harry let out a grunt as he stared at the sea. Down below the shores of his castles, the works on ships and ports were going ahead despite the many hindrances that were coming his way.

"Tell the men to speed up on their work with the ships. Before this month ends, I at least want two ships to my name." Harry ordered.

"I shall convey your wishes to the workers my lord."

"Mmm. If there is something that needs my attention, I'll be with Elsera. I promised to teach her to charge the sun runes." said Harry, walking away while Marwyn looked out towards the sea where men were toiling away at the shipyard.

Nothing was certain but Avalon might just escape the demands of the war in the south. If it does, then there was a chance the shipyard might just get finished in time.