Let the Galaxy Burn Teaser 07 October 2021

**Chaos Arc**

**Chapter 1**

**Victory or Chaos**

**Regent of the Reach Willas Tyrell, 07.11.300AAC, Highgarden System**

A year ago, it would have been child’s play to summon the Lord of the Horn Hill System and give him his marching orders.

Seven Hells, House Tyrell had done exactly that when they sent him to the Iron Sector far away from – in theory – anything significant conflict! And it had been after the damn Dornish blew apart the shipyards of Westbrook, Ambrose and Honeyholt in their never-damned-enough Operation Midnight they boasted about everywhere a Reacher ear was near.

If the position was less advantageous than the total superiority his Lord Father had enjoyed so much, Willas would still have summoned his bannersman in a hurry at his return from Pyke.

For all the official apologies that would be given afterwards, it was better not to give the Dowager Lady of House Tarly the time to coach her son. And no, the Regent of the Reach hadn’t needed the loud ‘advices’ of his grandmother to realise that letting the ‘heroes’ of the Iron Expeditionary Force contact their spies and gain the full picture of the disaster was a very bad idea.

The problem was that they hadn’t given him the choice.

Lady Melessa Tarly had requested three days for her son to rest before they answered positively his ‘generous invitation’, and everyone aware of military realities knew how much the excuse was worth. After a long journey in Deep Space, anyone who wasn’t rested was likely on death’s door.

And Willas could do nothing but accept it.

His grandmother had whispered some of the most acidic expressions he’d ever heard – the ‘Queen of Thorns’ persona had regained a lot of her strength in the last seven days – but it didn’t change the truth.

House Tyrell had suffered humiliations after humiliations in the last months. House Tarly had not. The two systems where the son of the man who had killed the Usurper exerted an overwhelming influence were Horn Hill and Hunt Fields, and both were fortified and untouched by war. Assuredly they were on the frontlines with Dorne now, but the same had been said for Highgarden against the Lannisters not so long ago.

Worse, Lady Olenna’s ‘friends’ had whispered to her that Tarly officers had been introduced to local industrialists and influential aristocrats of Hammerhal, and this with the benediction of Lady Cordwayner. One year ago, Willas would have stopped it in the cradle – or any other member of House Tyrell would have. His father and Lord Gerold Cordwayner were great friends, and so were Loras and Arthur, Gerold’s eldest son.

There was a minor problem, however. Lord Gerold Cordwayner had died at the Harvest Graveyard when his ship of the line break in two or suffered one of the numerous catastrophic blows the Reach battle-line took that cursed day. Arthur Cordwayner had been on another ship of the line, but it hadn’t saved him either. In the end, the Lordship of House Cordwayner had gone directly to Bryan Cordwayner, the second son...who also happened to be a prisoner of war of the Dornish.

In practical terms, this meant Willas had exactly zero authority to tell Lady Cordwayner and the Dowager Lady Tarly to stop whatever game they were playing.

The boot was on the other foot, and not just because they were on the banners of House Cordwayner.

Yes, Willas was aware how bad the pun was.

The ‘Regent of the Reach’ groaned deep inside. Day after day, the *de facto* Master of Highgarden wondered why he had accepted the job. The power of his House was fissuring itself wherever he looked, and he spent close to twelve hours a day buried under problems which would give him plenty of grey hair if he was allowed to survive long enough.

“The Honourable Lord of Horn Hill, Wielder of Heartsbane, Lord Samwell Tarly! His Honourable Wife, Lady Asha Tarly!”

Willas and Garlan abandoned momentarily their chairs as the duo entered the large conference room. For the sake of the illusion he was still in control, the young Tyrell Regent hoped his exhaustion wasn’t too visible on his face.

As their ‘visitors’ took a good half-minute to walk the space separating them from his brother and himself, Willas focused on the young Lord. Given the rumours of heroism and peerless tactical skills spreading everywhere, had suddenly Samwell Tarly changed into a second Usurper’s Bane?

The reality appeared disappointing...at first glance. The brown-haired boy was still fat for his age, though war appeared to have forced him to lose a little weight. His wife had not changed either. Whether her name was Greyjoy or Tarly, Lady Asha was moving like an animal in cage, perpetually trying to bite the hand which fed her.

Yes, Willas could recognise that with the benefit of hindsight marrying those two together had been a monumental mistake. It had likely saved the Iron Sector...or what was left of it anyway. But the price had been far too catastrophic in exchange. They had lost House Peake, House Rowan was a planet-sized warhead waiting to be detonated, and House Tyrell had received no gains from arranging this union...and would never will.

Of course, until the real reason he wanted to summon them was spoken, they all pretended to be the best of friends. Drinks were ordered, a peaceful music began to play, and there were compliments for the flowers sent and money spent on various charity organisations.

“We are glad you’re properly rested, my Lord.” Willas rolled his eyes. Garlan could have ignored the ‘excuse’, but with so many things going wrong, the ‘Gallant’ had his legendary patience on a constant decrease since the conflict had begun. “Since we have lost enough time, I will be blunt. We want to give you a new command, which, we all hope, will stop the next Dornish offensive before it can claim more of our systems.”

“I see.” Samwell didn’t look at him, instead he took one of the treats presented to him by the Tyrell butler...and posed it in front of him without eating him. That’s of course when his wife intervened.

“In this case, Lord Regent, Ser, we will be honest and straightforward. When this war began, House Tarly supported it because it was a *just* war. It was an opportunity to crush the arrogance of House Lannister. It was promises of great economic prosperity and important trade agreements which convinced the workforce of Horn Hill and our main partners to support the military operations. And it was oaths to Mace Tyrell and the so-called King Aegon VI Targaryen we were sworn to obey.”

Willas felt a growing pit opening in his stomach, because even if plenty of Houses no doubt felt that way, you never placed the oaths to your Lord Paramount like they were an afterthought at the end of a tirade.

“My Lord Father being indisposed, I am the Lord Regent of Highgarden and the Reach until his return.”

Which wouldn’t be for tomorrow, no matter what happened to the frontlines. Their rare agents among the Dornish had told them his Lord Father had been sent to Sunspear along with the other highborn hostages too valuable to be wasted in the prisoner camps. Rescuing him would require House Martell suing for peace...or paying a kingly ransom House Tyrell couldn’t afford.

“Yes. I notice you don’t speak about the mass-murderer waiting in orbit above this planet. You know, the one who killed ten billion Crownlanders because if he didn’t have the capital world of the Seven Sectors, no one would have it.”

Willas recognised immediately what Asha Tarly was doing. The black-haired Ironborn was playing the role of the ‘bad bannersman’, leaving her husband the good role. Had it been Melessa Tarly’s idea in the first place? Most likely. The Lady Dowager was born in House Florent, and the fox was a cunning animal.

“King Aegon...” Garlan cleared his throat, “King Aegon, the Sixth of the Name, has not-“

“Oh, please.” The Tarly Lady snorted, martial figure even when wearing a red-green robe. “The madman butchered King’s Landing population, okay? We do not have the full recounting of the battle, but it’s obvious he ordered a total bombardment against the largest urban centres of the capital world. I’m saying ten billion as a conservative number, by the way. There is a proper definition for what he is: *genocidal butcher*. You might feel differently. But House Tarly didn’t agree to support these atrocities when the call to arms came from Highgarden.”

“The Dornish began this war, and their atrocities-“ Garlan had not the time to finish this sentence.

“The Dornish struck military targets you were incredibly neglectful at protecting!” The black-eyed woman snarled. “And even if they didn’t, they killed less than a million overall. They didn’t raze planets. They didn’t create an ocean of blood, conducted hundreds of thousands of summary executions, and used forbidden sciences and other esoteric resources to conduct the greatest massacres possible!”

Somehow, Willas didn’t feel very reassured that the Lady Tarly didn’t know how ‘Aegon VI’ had been replaced.

“I understand your...reluctance to fight for Aegon VI.” Willas affirmed. “But we have not the choice.”

He tried to find the eyes of Samwell Tarly, but the Lord of Horn Hill was perfectly content eating and looking at his wife. Bastard.

“Why not?” Asha Tarly was a bitch. Everyone was aware of the reason House Tyrell couldn’t easily turn their backs on the cause of Aegon VI Targaryen. His sister was officially wed to him, and even if the last supporters of his cause dropped dead tomorrow, House Lannister and House Martell would refuse to leave them as Lord Paramount. “He is here, alone, broken, and his remaining supporters are worth nothing.”

“Many of his supporters still hold large strongholds in the River Sector!”

“For all the good it’s going to do to us...” the black-haired Lady answered sardonically. “We can’t supply them, and the moment the Starks come for their throats, they will surrender or they will die. Unless you mean the rumours of genocide coming from Atranta are going to help us?”

“This is-“

“But honestly, it doesn’t matter.”

“It doesn’t?”

“No. This was a war fought for Reach interests. And right now, it is House Tarly’s opinion that the interests of the Reach have been slaughtered, ridiculed, humiliated, and torn apart for the pride of two imbeciles. You may wish to continue to fight for Aegon VI and Mace Tyrell’s legacy. We do not.”

Ordinarily, after hearing of their bannersmen speaking like this, guards would have been called, and various warnings about seditious moves would be said.

And Willas couldn’t do it anymore.

House Tarly was the only thing which prevented the entire collapse of the ‘Dornish front’ right now. If he arrested Lord Samwell and his wife, it would be a question of days before Horn Hill turned its cloak along with House Hunt. House Florent would follow. And ‘Queen Rhaenys’ and her fleets would pour into the gap in their defences. Hammerhal and Norcross would either fall or change their allegiance. Highgarden would be totally cut off from the Hightower-sworn Houses, and Lord Leighton would of course recognise everything was lost and pull back his fleets before signing a cease-fire with the Dornish.

Even if the Red Viper didn’t come in person to storm the gates of Highgarden, the war would be over for House Tyrell.

Willas bitterly – and silently – thanked his father, his grandmother, and all the persons who had made this hellish situation possible in the first place.

“A different King would see the interests of the Reach incredibly threatened,” House Tarly knew it as well as he did, of course. “I am not going to say Joffrey *Lannister* can’t be reasonable. He can, especially with Lord Tywin dead. But the death of the Old Lion will force him to make compromises with his main bannersmen and the most important mega-corporations of Lannisport and the Western Sector. He will want to support industrialisation on a grand scale. Planets like Horn Hill are not what they desire from the Reach’s defeat. The Lannisters and their vassals want worlds much like Westbrook is now: little orbital industry left, and a workforce mostly dedicated to exporting its food production’s surplus. House Lannister wants indeed the entire Reach under a single crown. But in this vision, all Lords will be demilitarised and told to buy their weapons at Casterly Rock or from one Western weapon-maker.”

“And Dorne?”

“Dorne wants to break the Reach,” Willas replied bluntly. “The different Hightower bannersmen and some of our frontline Hightower knights have already received overtures to promise them their own separate kingdom once we are defeated. Rhaenys Martell and her forces want to dismember the Reach until they can swallow it piece by piece. They don’t have the resources to conquer and administrate us, so they try to break us until we will be assimilated on their schedule.”

“This sounds very much like speculation,” at last Lord Tarly decided to intervene in the debate.

“Not really,” Garlan denied. “We received an offer from unofficial channels from Dorne less than thirty-hours ago. To keep it simple, they want *everything*.”

“Everything?” There was no need to be a great judge of people to know Asha Tarly didn’t believe him.

“They want to keep every stellar system they have south of the Mander Rift,” his brother explained.

“Which is rather reasonable,” the damn woman interrupted him again. “Because you know, you aren’t going to retake them anytime soon save by using the first waves of assault ships as target *sponges*.”

It was awful to admit this declaration was disgustingly accurate.

“They want Goldengrove.”

“Oh?” For the first time, the daughter of the traitor Balon was surprised. Not so much her husband, however.

“Yes, I suppose that with Lady Peake’s having the best claim, they would seize the chance.”

“Glad you agree,” Garlan added darkly. “North of the Mander Rift, they want the systems to be divided between themselves and the Stormlanders. South of Highgarden, House Hightower will be recognised as legitimate rulers of a new kingdom which will encompass Oldtown, Blackcrown, Orme, Three Towers, Arbor, Sunhouse, Uplands, Graves, Honeyholt, and Bandallon.”

The last move alone would be devastating, since most of the untouched industrial and manpower potential of the Reach was including these systems.

It was an extremely seductive move for House Hightower. It was a trap too. It was true that only Honeyholt had been raided in the initial phase of the war and thus seen its shipyards destroyed. But Willas knew this wasn’t where the Dornish daggers waited. Oldtown needed an enormous foreign market to export its manufactured goods. Its huge merchant fleet – which had suffered some losses but remained considerable – was only financially sound if they had at least the Reach to export their cargoes without customs and other ruinous taxes.

His grandfather Lord Leighton was aware of that, since House Hightower had not negotiated behind their backs. But how long it would stay that way remained an unpleasant question...

“I freely admit the cost of this breaking would be felt more badly at Highgarden than anywhere else.” If someone thought the Martell and their spears were going to let them stay in power, Willas had a lot of war bonds to sell them right now. “But no one in the Reach will be untouched. The first reports coming from the agents were able to sneak into Nightsong and the other captured systems make clear the Dornish are deliberately trying to change us. Be it religion, succession laws, food, industry, social hierarchy...let be no mistake, if we don’t reconquer these systems, in two decades, these systems won’t be inhabited with Reachers. They will be Dornish in every way which matters.”

It was costing them a lot of occupation forces, and there was violence. Yet the defeat of House Tyrell at the Harvest Graveyard had been so total that for all intent and purposes, all the ‘insurrections’ achieved was to kill a lot of men loyal to House Tyrell.

And in the meanwhile, House Martell recruited young women *of the Reach* to serve in the Dornish forces...where no doubt they would be suitably indoctrinated to be loyal to House Martell.

“I admit these terms are particularly...bad.” Samwell Tarly agreed. “And no, I don’t want to have Oberyn Martell as my liege. Nor do I want to see my culture disappear. But.”

“But?” Willas knew it was both a relief before more bad news came.

“But the fact remains, as it stands, the only battles the Reach fought against the Dornish fleet resulted in one-sided massacres. As bad as it is to negotiate with Rhaenys Targaryen or someone Dornish now, one more lost battle and our enemies will likely be able to impose the peace terms in this very palace. And I don’t think their offers will stay as they are once our resistance is crushed.”

“Obviously, no one can promise victory with complete certainty,” Garlan acknowledged with humility, “but we have modernised in a hurry some of our formerly mothballed ships, and introduced new starfighters and new tactics in order to counter the weapons of the Dornish Navy. The new command we were speaking of is New Barrel. We are reasonably sure the enemy is going to attack it before the end of this month, and we think the forces assigned to it will be sufficiently trained and receive enough new equipment to deny the system to the Dornish.”

It was a very big risk they were taking, and not just by naming Samwell Tarly at the head of its new...well, in tonnage, it was more a flotilla than a proper fleet, even if you counted the Tarly squadron which was supposed to add its strength to the committed warships.

There was a long technical discussion between his brother and the ‘big-boned’ Lord, and to his relief the Lord of Horn Hill appeared to be convinced by the gambit they were playing.

“This new strategy has merits.” The survivor of the insane war which had raged in the Iron Sector affirmed. “Of course, Horn Hill will need...reassurances to be comfortable about it.”

Yes, it was definitely Dowager Lady Melessa who had written their speech.

Sometimes Willas wondered how low had they fallen than they required to bribe their own bannersmen to continue this terrible war. Most often, he wondered how worse it could get before it got any better.

“What sort of reassurance do you need?”

“Oh nothing too onerous. We just would be incredibly appreciative if we had the assurance House Tarly will pay only for the war pensions of the men sworn to my authority.”

Willas desperately wished for any sign Samwell Tarly – or his wife for that matter – weren’t serious.

But they were, and he saw no sign of weakness in their eyes. Asha Tarly, in fact, seemed to relish in the blow she had just struck.

No doubt Melessa Tarly had informed her how ugly the pension issue promised to be for the next months, never mind the next years.

And if other systems demanded the same thing...Highgarden would have to pay these astronomical sums alone.

They were so screwed.

**‘King Aegon VI Targaryen’, 08.11.300AAC, Highgarden System**

If Jacaerys had ever entertained the idea being a responsible ‘King’ in a period of crisis was fun, the las days would have confirmed beyond doubt it wasn’t.

And if it was possible to give Westeros the true Aegon VI without losing his head in the next hour and allowing the Seven Sectors to fall in more madness than they were currently plunged into, the Heir to Driftmark would never have ‘claimed’ the throne under any circumstances.

Unfortunately, Aegon was madder than their most bitter political opponents had warned the Quadrant before everything went up in flames.

And this meant that for all sins, Jacaerys was forced to play the role with a face he utterly loathed.

If only it was the smallest of the repayments he had to pay for a long series of sins...

“How badly it is going to impact the economic situation?” He abandoned those dark thoughts, concentrating instead upon what could be done. “I am afraid I don’t know about the figures to realise the magnitude of how much the pensions are going to cost.”

“In practical terms,” Willas Tyrell shook his head, “the reality is that we won’t be able to pay anything like half of the pensions we owe in the long term. House Tarly refusing to pay is a problem, but the fact is after the Harvest Graveyard cost us eighteen million dead alone, the pensions for the families of our fallen soldiers and spacemen was always going to be something which would drag us into financial ruin. The only reason it’s not worse is...well, we don’t have to pay the families of the systems currently under Dornish occupation.”

Jacaerys grimaced.

“Are you telling me that if we manage somehow to turn the situation around and beat House Martell and House Lannister, our economic situation is going to worsen?”

“Yes, yes it’s exactly what my brother says.”

Jacaerys turned towards Margaery Tyrell...well, Margaery Targaryen, though it was at best a polite fiction these days. Whether he was the real Aegon or not – and he wasn’t – the exiled Lord of Driftmark was not going to try to share the same bed as ‘his Queen’. The icy glares the daughter of Mace Tyrell gave him were sufficiently cold to make clear trying to enforce his privileges of ‘husband’ would likely be the last thing he’d ever do in his life.

“How do we solve it, then?”

“By being more ruthless than our enemies.”

This was the answer he would have expected from a Lannister, not from a Tyrell.

“I can’t cut the budget of the hospitals nor anything which includes health. The agricultural power of all the planets we still have is more vital than ever. And the military budget always takes priority, clearly. Everything else is going to receive drastic cuts.”

“This will be in addition to the large expansion of the war bonds we have in mind.” His ‘wife’ told him. “And you will be pleased to know most of the Crown assets you left at Highgarden are going to be used as collateral for the new set of wartime measures.”

For a single second, Jacaerys wondered if there would be something left of a central authority next year. Civil wars had rarely been good for the legitimacy of House Targaryen to say the least, but even the Dance of Dragons had not resulted in such a quick collapse of the Crown.

“I will bow to your greater knowledge of economics and other non-military fields.” The former Admiral said. “But I must admit I’m incredibly...ill-at-ease that we are giving a defensive command to a Lord who has no reason to be loyal to you or me.”

“I share your fears to some extent.” Willas commented thoughtfully. “The problem is that between how many senior commanders your little disaster in the Crownlands and my own father cost us the number of reliable commanders is dangerous close to zero.”

Jacaerys couldn’t stop a grimace to stop appearing on his face.

“I realise we failed to-“

“Failure is too weak a word to describe the absolute propaganda fiasco you created,” Margaery hissed, managing to look like a rose...a rose with a lot of thorns as her fury increased. “My father proved he was a buffoon and shouldn’t have been allowed to command anything bigger than a scout cruiser, but at least he lost a conventional battle and had the good sense to surrender. He lost a war, but at least it was warrior against warrior, Admiral against Admiral. The scale of the defeat was unprecedented, but we didn’t bathe in the blood of innocents AND lost!”

“I am not Aegon.” A sentence he was forced to repeat incredibly often since he had revealed the ‘substitution’ to the Tyrell siblings.

“I know you’re not Aegon!” the ‘Targaryen Queen’ answered. “If you were, I would have invited you into my quarters before giving you the same treatment the Dornish gave my ancestors.”

“Sister.” The warning in Willas’ voice was clear.

“Fine.” And Margaery Targaryen nee Tyrell stormed out of the room.

For a good minute, none of the two men spoke.

“What a waste.”

“Indeed.” Jacaerys didn’t know if Willas spoke about the war, the ‘Royal Marriage’ issue, or some other disaster which had been revealed in the last months, but it was truly a waste. Between Aegon, his father, Mace Tyrell, and frankly thousands of highborn minds including one Jacaerys Targaryen, the kingdom had turned into something straight from the darkest nightmares.

“To return to the strategic situation, I think it’s a ‘damned if we do, damned if we don’t’,” the Regent of the Reach confided to him. “We have to hold the line Lyberr-Fire Ball-Bridges-New Barrel. If we don’t, Goldengrove is going to explode in our faces before I can do anything to stabilise it.”

“And there aren’t a lot of things at Westbrook which can deter the Dornish if they come that way.” The system was still trying to recover from the initial ‘Midnight raid’. And once Westbrook was gone, Highgarden would be threatened from another direction...meaning the last major fleet they possessed would have to retreat from Dustonburry...again.

“Yes. Trying to commit what we sent to New Barrel and the other potential targets is a greater risk we will admit officially, but if these ‘invincible Dornish starfighters’ and the other ships responsible for the Harvest Graveyard rout us again, the ambitions of our less-than-loyal bannersmen won’t matter anymore. We need a victory before this year’s end, or the war is lost.”

**Lady Asha Tarly, 08.11.300AAC, Highgarden System**

One could easily say her husband was a bit too submissive when it came to the women he loved, which meant his mother and herself.

The same couldn’t be voiced for the men he was tied by blood or something else. Axell Florent was learning it the hard way.

“Respectfully, I still think we should have pressed for more concessions,” the ex-Inspector-General of Harlaw said, adjusting his ridiculous green-gold uniform. Of course in her opinion, most of the uniforms of the Reach were ridiculous. If they were half as competent as their clothes were ornamented, Highgarden and its bannersmen would be the masters of the known galaxy.

Alas for them, they were rather far from this state of affairs.

“And respectfully, I disagree, Ser Axell.” There was no ‘grand-uncle’ recognition, the two respected each other, but there was little familial warmth when they weren’t in public. “As tempting as it is to let the Tyrells pay for our fuel expenditures, the only thing it is going to do is to accelerate their downfall.”

The Florent commander grunted before conceding the point.

“I know. I suppose...I suppose I am only human. After decades spent enduring their mockeries, I am glad that at last, the armoured boot is on the other side and trampling the Tyrell pride.”

“No one is arguing they don’t deserve it, Ser Axell,” Asha intervened. “Still, Garlan Tyrell thought that the available forces can protect New Barrel.”

“As long as there is an enormous Tarly commitment,” the old man derisively said. “We aren’t contributing in starfighters, but the four armoured cruisers and two battlecruisers will be yours. Half of the light cruisers and scout cruisers are too. Save the heavy cruisers, this small Task Force belongs to Horn Hill, not Highgarden.”

“Something my mother was very really happy about,” Sam grinned. “Many officers in the Highgarden council rooms are aware of the bargains, but House Fossoway of New Barrel isn’t. They will see House Tarly is defending their system from the bloodthirsty Dornish while the Tyrells can’t send a single important capital ship.”

Willas Tyrell of course didn’t have a lot of choices. Between the Lannisters and the Martells, the Regent had to block the most direct jump paths leading to Highgarden. And this involved large fixed defences and the last ships of the line.

“Let’s not be too enthusiastic,” Axell sighed after a few heartbeats. “I want really much to believe you two will win at New Barrel, but our agents are better than the Tyrells’, and they affirm the Dornish are going to launch an enormous offensive north of the Mander Rift. They won’t target the Bridges System, not when many forts have been deployed to all jump points, but they can and will target the Fire Ball System.”

And once they took Fire Ball, the door was opened to Goldengrove.

Goldengrove, seat of House Rowan. And their Lord had perished at King’s Landing because Aegon Targaryen was a murderous imbecile.

Before this war, House Rowan could be counted among the most loyal bannersmen of House Tyrell, if one excepted the Heiress of the Noble House.

Now? Asha had seen the reports from Lady Melessa’s network, and they made for ugly reading.

The only reason it hadn’t exploded in the flames of insurrection was because there were Tyrell ships and soldiers controlling the orbital infrastructure and weapons. That didn’t mean it could be sustained for long. There were millions of people walking in the streets every day to demand explanations, and since they weren’t receiving those they wanted, the popular pressure was not in support of House Tyrell, more in finding an end to the hostilities.

“If we lose Goldengrove, it will be impossible to strike back at the Lannisters.”

“Let’s be serious a few instants,” Asha shook her head. “We can’t really ‘strike back’ at the Lannisters. Hell, I’m really surprised Baelor Hightower hasn’t already convinced the Tyrells to step down and be replaced by Oldtown as Lord Paramounts. The last major fleet of the Reach is his to command.”

“Garlan and Willas Tyrell have a few capital ships,” Ser Axell Florent frowned. “It wouldn’t be enough to counter Hightower ambitions, but they would not go down without a fight. The resulting conflagration would allow the Martells to dictate their terms in the weeks after. Not that it is going to change anything in the end, of course.”

Asha chuckled.

“You don’t believe the waves of new construction are going to make a difference, Ser?” Asha knew the opinion of the Reacher, obviously.

“We all know there is no way House Tyrell will be able to find the crew for those new warships.” The dark-haired highborn answered. “They should already be scrapping all ships of the line and focusing on the battlecruisers. Unless ‘Queen Rhaenys’ returns the millions of prisoners of war in the next months, the Tyrells are going to face an awful shortage of experienced spacemen and other military personnel. And they have other problems.”

“Fuel,” Asha began. “Paying their soldiers and their administration. Salvaging the merchant ships they still have.”

“Trying to adapt their trade balance when they used the pillage of the Storm Sector to fill their purses,” Sam added. “They can’t rely on royal loans and other forms of investment from the Crown Sector either.”

And that was just the evident economic blunders Mace Tyrell had left as his legacy.

“The Sector is rich, but the enemies of the Roses are plundering it like Mace Tyrell stole with the benediction of Rhaegar Targaryen.” Asha grimaced. “House Tyrell and its main allies won’t last six months. And that’s if the Martells or the Lannisters don’t manage to rout their last fleet.”

“If that happens, it is going to be ugly,” Sam whispered. “Not as ugly as Pyke maybe, but...”

“It will be in the very heart of the Reach,” Axell Florent finished. “And while I hate House Tyrell, I wish there was a way to prevent this...chaos. Unfortunately, it is entire possible there is no solution. This war began badly, and the military disasters made the internal situation considerably worse.”

“Victory or chaos...”

Asha thought ‘victory and chaos’ was more appropriate. But saying it would be far too depressing...