

Oberyn couldn't help but scoff as he watched the Reachmen break off their assault on the walls to focus on the sortie sent out by the Lannister garrison protecting the city of Lannisport. It was a shame, really. The Reachmen had the advantage in numbers, and they were not notably lacking in bravery. Yet, they were repeatedly failing to take the walls of the city.

He supposed the will of the defenders outweighed the Reachmen in holding the defences of the city walls. The defenders always had an advantage in a siege, but the campaign was nearly reaching a month with no tangible results to show for it.

'Well, the Reachmen didn't have much luck, but the same could not be said about the Dornish.' Oberyn thought, his eyes gleaming with a wicked glint as he stared at the half-finished tunnel.

"It'll take only five more days, my prince. After that, the tunnel will be finished. The rain was a blessing in disguise. The soil has loosened up, making it easier for the men to dig. Of course, there is the trouble with removing the water in the tunnel, but that's not much of a hindrance to our efforts." Ser Ryon Alyrion said, grinning at Oberyn.

"Good. Are you confident you can complete the tunnel in five days?" Oberyn asked.

"I'm confident, my prince."

"Good work, Ser Ryon. I'll not keep you from your work Ser." said Oberyn, taking his leave from the mining site.

Oberyn found Lord Harman Uller and Ser Ulwyck Uller outside his tent, waiting for him with Lord Franklyn Fowler and Quentyn Qorgyle.

"It's time, my lords. We must inform the Reachmen. We are five days at most away from completing the tunnels." Oberyn said.

Instead of greeting this news with open arms, Oberyn noticed the lords were looking uneasily at each other.

"What?" Oberyn asked, looking curiously at his fellow Dornishmen.

"The Reachmen are getting tired of the siege. They think they should stop the attacks and wait for King Robert to attack from the east." said Lord Franklyn Fowler.

"Cowardly fools." Oberyn hissed. "If we stop the siege, the Lannisters will increase their sorties and attempt to breach our camps. The chances of our tunnel getting found out are too risky."

Oberyn began cursing the Reachmen under his breath as he paced inside his tent, looking furious. He was not going to let that brutish Stormlander stag beat him to the city because the Reachmen were a bunch of cowards.

"Call Lord Redwyne and Hightower to a meeting. I won't have them stand in our way of taking the city." Oberyn finally said.

Nearly half an hour later, Oberyn watched the Reach lords enter his tent with long faces. To his surprise, Lords Paxtor Redwyne and Baelor Hightower were not alone. There was Lord Alfyn Costayne and Lord Jon Bulwer.

"My lords. Please, take a seat." Oberyn welcomed his guests, giving them plush cushions and chairs to sit on while he signalled for the servants to bring more wine.

"Prince Oberyn. Why have you called us?" Paxtor Redwyne asked, making a face at the Dornish Red offered in a silver chalice for the Lord of the Arbor.

"I've heard a tell that you're stopping the siege until King Robert starts the assault on the east gate." Oberyn commented.

"If you're here to convince us to make another attempt on the city walls, don't bother. Your troops remain intact while ours have suffered great casualties. We'll not be launching another assault on the walls until his grace puts the eastern walls of the city under siege." said Paxter Redwyne, his beady black eyes trained on Oberyn with a glare.

"Our men are five days away from completing the tunnel. If you stop the assault and wait for his grace to put the city on siege from the other side, the Lannisters will have enough time to learn our plans." Lord Fowler said tentatively.

"Once the lions learn of our tunnel, they'll take countermeasures against us. We might end up unable to bring down their walls for months." said Oberyn, staring critically at the Reachmen sitting in his tent.

"Is that what you want, my lords? We can finish the siege and take the city if you continue the assault for just five more days. Or else, we can all stay outside the walls of this city for another month and maybe more." said Lord Uller.

"Our answer is still no. Enough of our men have died, Prince Oberyn. If you are so interested in maintaining the siege, you're welcome to attack the walls with your men." said Lord Costayne before taking to his feet.

Other Reachlords followed suit, except for Baelor Hightower.

"I apologise, Prince Oberyn. Our men are tired of death and blood. They need rest." said Baelor Hightower.

"Then those men should have stayed in the Reach instead of waging war against House Lannister." Oberyn growled coldly.

"What'll we do, my prince?" Lord Uller asked once the Reachmen left the tent.

Oberyn glared at the entrance of the tent through which the Reachmen walked away.

"You said something about the North getting attacked by the Iron born, didn't you? Have you learned anything else?" Oberyn asked, glancing at Lord Uller while draining a chalice full of Strongwine, one of the sweetest of Dornish reds.

"Word has travelled to Fair Isle that the North is gathering all their ships to attack the Iron Islands."

"So, they beat back the Iron Fleet." Oberyn said, looking impressed as he knew the Ironborn were no novices when it came to naval warfare.

"Harrion Stark is said to be gathering the fleets and raising another army to invade the Iron Islands. Some say the Black Wolf became scared of the Ironborn and refused to even step out of his castle. Other rumours suggest Harrion Stark bewitched the Ironborn with his magic to wreak havoc in their home islands."

"So, all we have is a bunch of nonsense to rely on." Oberyn deadpanned.

“Unfortunately, yes.” Lord Uller shrugged helplessly.

Oberyn looked thoughtful for a moment before coming to a decision.

“Bring forth the maester. I have a raven to send to Avalon.” Oberyn ordered.

Stannis stared at the castle in the distance from behind a boulder. He could see small lights being lit around the castle walls as the skies darkened. Twilight was shining down on the castle of Silverhill, and Stannis couldn't help but worry about what was about to unfold. The next few hours would determine whether there was a need for a siege to take the seat of House Serrett. He'd prefer there was no siege, as the terrain was against his army. The only option in the siege would be to starve out Silverhill, but it'd require too many days. Using siege towers was impractical as the terrain was too rocky to pull siege towers and catapults near the walls.

Having accepted the inherent difficulties in breaching the castle walls using the usual methods of siege warfare, Stannis opted to send some of his trusted men inside the castle under disguise. At the same time, his army hid from the scouts of House Serrett. Only a portion of the cavalry was allowed to stay with him and waited for the signal from the saboteurs he sent forth. The skies got darker while Stannis and his men kept a close eye on the walls for the signal.

“Maybe the men have failed and got captured. It has been two days, my prince.” Lord Gulian Swann suggested, looking worriedly at the closing gates of the castle.

“I trust Ser Axell to capture the gate for us. He'll keep his word.” Stannis said with conviction.

“I hope so, my prince. The Reachmen, after all, are not known for their prowess in battle.” Lord Gulian commented, earning snickers from the Stormlanders in his company.

Stannis got the urge to grit his teeth, but he held off on his usual reaction despite the nagging from the cowardly lord of House Swann. After all, Lord Swann was given the chance to lead the party inside the castle. Not only did the Lord of Stonehelm refuse the offer, but the man also did not allow his sons to join Ser Axell.

“If you were so worried about the success of Ser Axell, you should've led the men inside Silverhill.” Stannis snapped back, shutting off all the snickering idiots.

Stannis was truly worried about the state of the Stormlands. He could see the lords of the Stormlands were getting more and more bold because of his elder brother's disinterest in ruling and Renly's lacklustre attitude when it came to governing. He resolved to rein in the stormlords after the war. There was some urgent need to bring some order over the stormlords lest they become too unbearable to manage in the future. It was one of the reasons why the Storm Kings faced a shrinking kingdom after every generation. The Gardner Kings had always taken great advantage of the internal strife and lack of unity among the stormlords. Stannis feared the same could happen if the stormlords were left under the rule of Renly.

‘There are so many mistakes that should be addressed once I ascend the throne.’ Stannis thought grimly.

“My prince, look! There is the signal.”

Stannis immediately looked to the top of the walls, and sure enough, he could see the light appearing and disappearing in a recurring pattern.

“Ser Balon. Give the signal.” Stannis ordered.

The second son of Lord Gulian Swann lit a lamp and placed it above the boulder for a moment. Ser Balon quickly removed it, and the lamp atop the wall of the castle stopped flickering.

“It’s Ser Axell’s men.” Stannis confirmed.

“It’s time. We ride to the gate at full speed. Alert the men.” Stannis ordered.

He gave the overall command of the army to Lord Mathis Rowan, who had joined his host from the Northmarch.

“Ride with me, Ser Balon Swann.” Stannis ordered, eyeing the bulwark form of the knight.

Stannis rode out with many brave knights from the Stormlands and the Reach surrounding him on their horses. They urged their horses to pick up speed as time was of the essence. Luck was the only thing now keeping their hopes up for a quick victory. The gates of the castle remained open thanks to the efforts of Ser Axell’s men. As Stannis reached closer to the gate, he could see fighting going on the walls of the castle. He urged his horse to go faster as every moment was precious.

“Enemies ahead.” Ser Balon Swann cried, pointing ahead towards the gates of the castle.

Sure enough, Stannis could see some men rushing to defend the gates of the castle.

“Crossbowmen, forward! Use the crossbows on my command.” Stannis shouted.

Stannis gave the command as they neared the gates, and the crossbowmen let loose the bolts. One by one, the men of House Serrett fell as the bolts pierced their bodies. Stannis unsheathed his sword and made himself ready for the battle.

“Attack!” he screamed, raising his sword high in the air as he rode through the gates.

His horse smashed away an unknown soldier while he cut open the throat of a soldier holding a spear. Stannis swung his sword to his left, parrying a spear aiming for his side. He was quickly forced to bring his sword back to stab a soldier from behind his neck. He swung his sword many times, cutting and parrying as he battled inside the walls of the castle.

“Do not allow them to take back the gate. Hold the gate at all costs!” Stannis shouted, making his horse turn at the last moment, escaping a spear thrust.

Stannis stabbed his sword down and engaged in a small bout with a swordsman. He eventually won by stabbing his adversary in the eye. All around him, men were battling and dying.

“Fight! Fight to the last!” Stannis screamed, hacking and stabbing at anyone unfortunate enough to cross blades with him.

His sword was drenched in blood, as were the greaves and gauntlets he was wearing. He didn’t know how long he kept cutting down enemy soldiers, but Stannis fought till he could no longer exert himself. His sword arm felt like it could no longer move an inch. Thankfully, by that time, Lord Rowan arrived with the rest of the army, and House Serrett could no longer withstand the assault. Stannis

only stopped cutting down men when he saw most men bearing the banners of House Serrett were throwing down their weapons on the ground. The ground was littered with bodies, limbs and blood.

Stannis grimaced as the heat of the battle slowly left him, and the stench of death invaded his nostrils. He could feel his limbs slowly losing their strength, but somehow, he held on to his sword. The blood on his armour and shield made his skin crawl, but he clamped his mouth shut and urged his horse forward.

“My prince.” Lord Mathis Rowan called, coming closer atop his horse. “We have the main keep surrounded. Perhaps, we should offer terms to Lord Serrett.”

“Good. Let’s ensure Lord Gideon Serrett understands the folly of aligning with the lions.” Stannis smirked, aligning his horse towards the keep where Lord Serrett and his family were huddled in.

The surrender of Lord Serrett was a sordid affair. Lord Gideon had lost three cousins and a son during the course of the battle. The lords of Northmarch were particularly unapologetic for Lord Serrett’s loss, as the man had flooded their lands by breaking the dam built across the Lesser Mander during the invasion. The lords of the Northmarch had even petitioned him to have Lord Serrett executed, but he denied such a harsh punishment. Instead, he decided to capture Silverhill’s treasury and had it split evenly among the lords of the Northmarch. He also forced Lord Serrett to sign away a portion of gains from the silver mines the man owns for the crown. The lords of Stormlands were left in the lurch with nothing except for the glory of victory. The cautious and more respectful conduct he received from the stormlords post the victory celebrations in Silverhill let Stannis know that the lords received his message loud and clear.

Stannis found it ironic that he was far more popular among the Reachmen than his fellow Stormlanders.

With Silverhill falling to his army, the path to Deep Den was now open. He had already sent scouts ahead to chart a good path for the army to take Deep Den from the west. The faster Deep Den fell, the faster he could join the siege of Lannisport and Casterly Rock.

‘I wonder how others are fairing in this war.’ Stannis wondered.

“Your grace.”

Robert looked at the idiot who distracted him from enjoying the sweet taste of Arbor gold.

“What?” he snapped.

“Your grace, Lord Tyrell and Lord Dondarrion are here to see you. They say it is important.”

Robert frowned at the young mousy looking boy. He could not even remember retaining a boy like this in his services.

“All right. Let them in. Call Ser Barristan as well.” Robert said, his words slurring towards the end.

Robert stayed put in his seat, pouring himself another jug of wine. While enjoying the wine, Robert heard the footsteps closing in. He rubbed his eyes as light filtered into his tent as Mace Tyrell, Beric Dondarrion, and Ser Barristan walked inside.

“Comer, all of you. Is it time for the siege to begin?” Robert asked, adjusting himself in his chair.

“I’m afraid not, your grace. Siege engines and towers are being built as we speak. It’ll take us a day more to complete the works, and then we can start the siege.” Lord Dondarrion spoke.

Robert frowned at being forced to camp outside the walls of Crakehall while the Dornish were attacking Lannisport and Eddard was fighting the lions in the field. He felt like he was being kept safely tucked away, and that made him mad.

“What is it then?” Robert growled.

“We have received word from Prince Stannis. He says Silverhill has fallen, and House Serrett surrendered. The Prince rode out and took the castle by surprise.” said Beric Dondarrion.

“Ha! Finally, some good news.” Robert smacked the table before him, making everyone flinch at the sound. “What news do you have about the siege of Lannisport?”

“I’m afraid there is nothing interesting to report, your grace. You know, the Dornish. They remain outside the walls, wining and dining, while good Reachmen fight to take the city’s walls.” Mace Tyrell complained.

Robert got the urge to dismiss the simpering Tyrell, but he could not be bothered to do so. Instead, he just shrugged and turned his eyes on Lord Dondarrion.

“Has there been any word from Eddard?”

“The northerners have waged a bloody campaign all over the coasts. The northerners led by Lord Eddard sacked Ashemark. House Ryswell took the mines of Castamere. The Crag and Banefort surrendered without a fight seeing the folly of supporting Tywin Lannister.”

Robert laughed aloud, his whole body shaking with glee.

“I should have joined Ned instead of slugging through this wasteland. Tell me more. Is Ned going to march on the Rock?” Robert asked eagerly, looking at Beric Dondarrion.

“Not yet, your grace. Sarsfield stands between them and the Rock. Ser Brynden has been sending out riding parties, testing the castle’s defences. Once Sarsfield falls, the path to Casterly Rock will open before our allies in the North and the Riverlands.” said Beric.

“Hmm.” Robert grunted noncommittally.

He supposed there was still time for him to meet Eddard and fight side by side like in the old days.

Harry read the small parchment Maester Marwyn had given him at Avalon. It was a short message from Oberyn Martell requesting his aid to bring down the walls of Lannisport.

Under normal circumstances, he'd have set aside such a request even if Obery'n's offer of reduced port fees for his ships was an enticing offer. It was not as if he had some immediate plans for using the ports of Dorne. But the offer was quite interesting, and he had plans to expand his trade fleet. Not to mention, his plans for greater expeditions to distant lands of Essos and Summer Isles required Dorne's assistance.

It was not just the prospect of expanding his trade fleets that made Harry consider the request. The siege of Lannisport was undoubtedly going to be the centre of attention in this war. This provided him with an opportunity to show his power to all of Westeros and his new enemies in the Free Cities. The Ironborn had generously provided him with a convenient avenue for displaying his power and scaring away any of his potential enemies. But having a small display of power at Lannisport might also get him a good amount of prestige. It also helped Prince Obery'n was offering him the harbour of Fair Isle and a few ships from the Dornish fleet for the invasion of the Iron Isles.

"I suppose having my display of power openly done before the lords of mainland Westeros would give me more exposure." Harry muttered with a thoughtful frown.

"Ser Celos"

"My lord?"

"Have word sent to the rest of our ships to sail as planned towards Blacktyde. We'll be going to Lannisport before joining them on the attack. Dorne has pledged her support for our invasion, and I have some business to conduct with Prince Obery'n."

"Umm... my lord. We are flying. How do we send word...?" Celos Poole asked, looking lost.

"Tell Anya. She'll take the flying carpet and inform the captains." said Harry.

Harry waved dismissively as Celos bowed and went about issuing orders. Meanwhile, Harry moved closer to the glass window of his airship and stared ahead. A fleet of thirty ships was arrayed below on the ocean, all with full sails, intent on teaching a lesson the Ironborn could never forget.