

## The Dread Lord of Essos

### Chapter 35

Lord Tywin hadn't been having a good time as of late. Robb Stark's army had been pushing toward Casterly Rock at a slow but steady pace over the last few weeks. Town after town, stronghold after stronghold were captured in his mad rush to take the old lion out. 'He will find out that I'm not so easy to kill,' Tywin thought to himself as he drank his mulled wine. A sudden knock on his door made him look up from his reports. "Enter!" he called out.

The door to his office opened and a red-faced Maester came waddling in out of breath. The rotund, older man was graying, though he still had a full shock of messily-shorn hair. His mustache and beard were overgrown and unkept. It was a look that many shared in the Westerlands those days. With Stark's army controlling most roads and trade routes, the houses of the West quickly found their supply lines cut off from the outside world. That meant no more food from the Reach. They would have been truly fucked if his grandson didn't practically own the seas. As such, boatloads of fresh food arrived daily while his warships stopped the Iron Islanders from raiding them. Even with his generosity, there wasn't enough food to feed the entirety of the Westerlands. Still, Harold made sure that Casterly Rock's larders were completely full at all times. Sadly, there were things that they would have to do without.

"What do you want?" Tywin asked the sweaty man. He wasn't in the mood for any nonsense.

"News from King's Landing, My Lord," he replied, handing Tywin a sealed letter. Tywin quickly snatched it and sent him away. Once the Maester had closed the door behind him, Tywin opened the letter and greedily read every word twice.

"Shit!" he cursed quietly and slammed the letter down onto his desk. A rebellion had erupted in King's Landing. His grandson, Joffrey, was dead along with most, if not all, White and Gold Cloaks. There was no news regarding his son, Jaime. A sour look crossed Tywin's face.

In truth, Joffrey got what he deserved. Tywin knew very well that the boy was rotten to the core. With the way he acted and how he treated the smallfolk, it was only a matter of time before the kettle blew its top. It was a big reason why Tywin had been staying away from the capital. That and he wasn't confident that Joffrey wouldn't order his beheading. But even though he deserved his fate, it was still a major blow to his family's security. He had spent a lot of time and money getting his bloodline onto the throne. Now his family's grip on the throne was as shaky as ever. Another knock on the door pulled him from his thoughts.

"WHAT?" he yelled angrily.

"A r-report from the frontlines, My Lord," a nervous-sounding voice came from the other side of the door.

“Bring it in,” he called back and waited as the older boy hesitantly opened the door. “Hurry up!” Tywin barked. The boy squeaked and quickly pushed through, handing him the report before making his escape. Tywin sneered as he watched the little shit go. Not bothering to wait, he tore it open and read it as fast as possible. Getting up from his chair, he walked to the room that his younger brother was using while taking a break from the fighting.

“Kevan ... Read this,” Tywin said, thrusting the letter into his hand. Kevan did as he was ordered. “Well?”

“Certainly good news,” he said, looking up. Robb Stark had suddenly pulled back and was in full retreat. It was as shocking as it was surprising.

“Good news?” Tywin raised an eyebrow, staring directly at his brother.

“Yes. The Northerners are moving away from Casterly Rock ... east down the Gold Road,” Kevan reiterated. “That sounds like good news to me.”

“Why didn’t they move north toward Riverrun instead?” Tywin asked. “If they were retreating, wouldn’t they be moving to a friendlier area? Instead, they are moving east into hostile territory.”

“They must have a reason,” Kevan said. Tywin handed him the letter he had just received from King’s Landing. His face paled once he read it. “You think Stark is making a push for the throne?”

“Yes ... It’s what I would do,” Tywin told him.

“So what should we do?”

“Gather whatever troops are nearby and try to catch up to Stark. Attempt to slow his progress as much as possible. I’ll order the rest of the army to push east as quickly as possible. I can only hope the Reach is patrolling their lands. Perhaps they will slow the North even more.”

Kevan nodded in understanding. “I’ll gather my things.”

“Good. Make haste,” Tywin told him before going back to his office. He needed to send a raven to try and discover what had happened to his son. He also needed to send a raven to his grandson in Essos. Tommen was now needed in King’s Landing.

### **The Dread Lord of Essos**

Mace Tyrell licked his greedy lips as he read the entire message several times. His spies in King’s Landing had just informed him of some very serious events that had occurred very recently. Joffrey was dead, and King’s Landing was left not only Kingless but also without any type of security. There was no one there to protect the Baratheons’ claim over the Seven

Kingdoms. It was ripe for the plucking. The Iron Throne had never been so open for the taking in all of history. He, of course, immediately pictured himself sitting on the throne of a thousand swords, his back straight and his chest puffed out as the Lords and Ladies fawned over him. He saw a certain curvy, redheaded temptress by his side, helping him lead the Seven Kingdoms back to prosperity during the day. At night, she was by his side in bed, pleasuring him in all of the ways that a King like him deserved.

Seeing that bastard in Essos build such an empire from absolutely nothing was a slap in the face to a man like him. 'I am ten times the man he is,' Mace thought to himself a thousand times. Sure, he was Lord of the Reach, which in itself was a boon most would kill for. Mace, however, wanted more. 'I am the only man to defeat Robert Baratheon, and yet I was forced to bend the knee to him?' he asked himself. 'And now I kneel for the Usurper's children,' he spat. Of course, the Battle of Ashford had already been won by his bannerman and Lord Randyll Tarly before Mace even stepped foot on the battlefield.

Mace was tired of not getting the respect that he deserved. The lovely Melisandre remained with Harold even though Mace promised to give her not only all the riches that she could imagine but also a position in the Court. She passed over the chance to become Lady Melisandre for a bastard that was ruling in the barbaric Disputed Lands. The shame of rejection was a stain on his family name, or more accurately, his personal name. He was sure that his underlings were making fun of him.

However, no one would speak ill of him if he were sitting on the Iron Throne. His heart hammered in his chest as he went over the possibilities in his mind. There was little doubt that other Lords would immediately make a play for the Crown. They had very little time to do so. Joffrey had a brother after all, and young Tommen was surely being called upon right that instant. Fortunately for everyone else, Tommen was safely tucked away all the way in Essos. Even so, Seven Swords wasn't all that far from King's Landing, and Harold's ships were very fast. If someone wanted to go after the Crown, they would need to act immediately. Mace quickly burned the letter and started to plan his next course of action.

### **The Dread Lord of Essos**

Jaime Lannister scooped water from the large, brass bowl and into his hands. Leaning over, he splashed the clean water onto his face and washed off the layer of soapy suds that was clinging to his skin. He continued cleaning himself until he had done every part that he could. Once finished, he tossed the used water into a drainage hole.

Deep underneath the Red Keep, in a large and nicely furnished dungeon cell, Jaime sat ... a prisoner of the smallfolk. Though the word prisoner might be a little too strong. He had been promised that no harm would come to him. The smallfolk claimed that they had written to his son in Essos to tell them that they had him in custody "for his safety". They wrote that Harold could come and retrieve him at his earliest convenience. Or so they claimed. Jaime knew that they wanted him to come and claim the throne. Claiming him was just an excuse to get him

here. It had been easy to see that they weren't happy with their leadership as of late. If he were being honest, he wasn't either, but he had a responsibility to protect Joffrey.

Though he was in custody, they did treat him well. He received three large meals a day and was provided clean water for drinking and washing. His cell was nicely furnished, and some would even say comfortable. This was, of course, the dungeon that the Crown used for important prisoners. Lords and their family members were usually the ones afforded such accommodations. Mainly, the prisoners of these cells were the ones being used for political purposes. These cells were currently emptied, save for one. Jaime heard the door to that part of the dungeon open. Thinking it was time for his meal, he went over to the bars and waited, but the people who came in were definitely not his normal captors.

In came a group of seven men all wearing white robes cinched around the waist by a seven-stranded belt with each strand being a different color. Around their necks, they each wore a crystal. Jaime immediately recognized them as Septons of the Faith. He was instantly on guard due to the fact that their normally clean robes were splattered with droplets of fresh blood. Stony-faced, one walked to the door and unlocked it. Opening the door, he stepped aside as two others rushed in and grabbed Jaime's arms. Jaime thrashed around, but the older men appeared to be abnormally strong. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't break their grip on him. "What's the meaning of this?" he called out angrily. The Septons remained stony-faced.

They dragged Jaime out of his cell and through the dungeon door. Jaime's eyes went wide when he saw his normal guard on the ground with his throat slit open. The corpse's eyes were wide, and he still wore a look of terror on his paling face. Though he fought them along the way, he was pulled down the corridor and up through the castle. When they finally exited the castle and made it into the courtyard, Jaime saw dozens of bodies littered across the ground. Most were smallfolk, but there were some Septons amongst the piles of bodies. They were easy to spot with their bloodied, white robes. Knives and swords were laying on the ground, some near pools of blood. Down toward the gate, Jaime could hear more fighting going on. The loud, metallic clanking of swords was easy to recognize. The five Septons not holding his arms wordlessly grabbed the fallen weapons from the ground, then they pushed forward.

The closer they got, the louder the fighting became. By then, the sun had almost completely set, making it dark and hard to see. Everything was covered with a fiery orange sheen of light. Still, Jaime easily saw the spray of blood as a Septon took a man's head off with a single swing of a sword. Off to the side, an old Septa screamed like a mad harpy as she plunged her dagger into a man's back over and over. Even as he toppled over and fell to the ground, she rode the body down, continuing to scream and stab him. It was as though she was possessed, Jaime thought as his body was jerked forward. A Septon was repeatedly run through with a sword, but somehow, he continued to fight. With three swords sticking out of his belly and back, he brought his own club down hard enough to completely cave in the skull of his enemy. The sound was sickening, Jaime had to admit. It sounded like someone had dropped a ripe pumpkin on the hard, stone ground.

He was dragged further down the road as more smallfolk poured from their homes with torches and weapons in hand. Somehow his captors, despite being much older than him, moved with the speed and grace of men less than half their age. They swung their blades as though they had been born with them. It was disturbingly unnatural. Once again, Jaime tried to break away from their grip but was rewarded with a strike on the back of the neck. He cried out as his knees nearly buckled from the pain. Forced to keep moving, unfortunately, his feet were no longer complying after the brutal strike to his neck. That didn't stop the Septons from dragging him forcefully down Shadowblack Lane. The toes of his boots scraped across the cobbled path as the clanking of swords continued with every moment that passed.

"Where are you taking me?" Jaime groaned from the pain. His head sagged, so he couldn't see much more of the fighting, but the yells and screams of pain told him that many were still dying. He didn't know how long he had been dragged down the road, but his strength slightly returned eventually. He looked up and saw the charred and soot-blackened stone walls of the Great Sept of Baelor. The white marble plaza was also heavily stained, not only from an apparent fire but also from a battle. Bodies were stacked in at least three different piles from what he could see. The once-white, marble ground was smeared with blood and grime from the city beyond. Even the statue of Baelor hadn't escaped the battle unscathed. It had been pulled from its plinth and lay in pieces, scattered throughout the plaza.

Circling the burned-out building were dozens ... possibly hundreds of Septons and Septas, all dressed in their white robes. Each was holding a weapon of some sort. Their eyes were just as blank and glassy as those who had pulled him from his comfortable prison cell. He could see that they were dragging him to the main door of the building ... or at least where the main door used to be. The only things that remained were the metal braces and hinges that once kept the large, thick doors in place. On the ground were piles of ash and charred wood that had been kicked aside to clear a path into the building. From instinct alone, he knew that going inside that building was probably not going to end well for him. As such, he gathered the last of his strength and kicked his legs out, hitting the Septon walking directly in front of him. He didn't even yell as he fell forward and became impaled on his own sword. Thrashing wildly, Jaime still couldn't break free. His eyes widened dramatically when the Septon stood up and turned to him, his longsword clearly protruding from his chest. A stain of red slowly began growing on his white robes until nearly the entire front was soaked in blood. Without saying anything or even making a face, one of his brethren pulled the sword from his chest. He dropped the sword onto the ground, and they all turned and started dragging him through the doorway.

Around the raised, marble pulpit they dragged him and through another burnt door. The Hall of Lamps was only a ghost of what it once was. The once beautiful, colored glass globes that hung from the ceiling were all broken and crunched under their feet as they walked. Where a pair of double doors once was, it was now an opening to the actual Sept. Under the broken and caved-in dome above them, seven aisles stretched out in every direction like the spokes of a wagon wheel. The seven altars were beyond repair and yet, a candle burned at each of them. Where the aisles met was a pile of rubble that had once been the domed ceiling. As they moved forward, the ground at the aisles' junction gave way with a loud, thunderous groan of broken

rock and collapsing earth. The stone rubble dropped down into the chasm, but Jaime was unable to hear it hit any kind of bottom. The air around them became cold ... freezing even, and the candles were snuffed out, leaving thin twists of black smoke rising into the air. Jaime shivered from the cold, but also from fear. He looked around rapidly, desperate for an escape. Suddenly, a burning light began to grow from deep within the chasm. Jaime was unable to see what was causing it, nor did he want to. It mattered not what he wanted, however. The Septons were dragging him forward until his toes were hanging over the edge. Unable to stop himself, he looked down and nearly pissed himself. Using all of his efforts, the moment they tried to throw him in, Jaime lashed out and pushed one of the Septons into the void. No scream was heard as he tumbled over the side. Jaime didn't bother waiting to hear if one was ever going to come. He turned and ran as fast as possible. Only a few steps were taken before something grabbed his leg. Looking down, he could see a twisted black arm twice as long as he was tall pulling him to the edge. Jaime clawed at the ground beneath him, screaming for anyone willing or able to help. No one came to his aid as he slipped over the edge, and the lights went dim once again.