

Smoke bellowed out into the clear blue sky from many parts of Blacktyde. In some parts of the island, people were running away from their villages and homes in fear as bright silver flames devoured everything in their path. But the commonality was not the fear of the people on the island, nor was it them fleeing their homes. The commonality was that all those flames were burning away in Ernst at spots where Harry found the highest concentration of the Drowned Men.

Harry used the All-seeing table to great effect to track down all the scattered Drowned Men on the island and merely had the Wildfire pots do the dirty work for him. Of course, a lot of civilians fell victim to the Wildfire he unleashed, but the blame was on them for shielding those priests from Harry. He had offered them safety if they handed over the Drowned Men to his custody. Unfortunately, most villages on the island refused to do so, and Harry had no choice but to burn those sorry bums out of hiding. It was cruel, heartless, and probably amounts to many war crimes in his old world, but in Westeros, this was an acceptable strategy in warfare. Even Harry didn't like what he was doing, but it had so far been efficient in keeping the populace under control.

Fear was a powerful tool, but it was only effective when offered a path to escape a cruel fate. After all, fear without a sense of hope would make people fight to their last breath. The trick was to immerse the populace under great fear but take the pressure off their shoulders by giving them a path layered with hope for a better life.

Harry cleared his throat before he applied the *Sonorus* charm to his throat. He stared ahead at the village before him, standing atop a boulder with his Valkyrie guards flanking his sides.

"Greetings to the village of Shagga from Harrion Stark of the North. We have your village surrounded, and as you can see, my ships are floating over your village. I do not wish to kill your families and your children. My demand is simple. Hand over all the Drowned Men in your village, and I'll swear as a Stark to leave your village intact. Failure to comply with my demand will result in your deaths and the destruction of your village to fire. The trails of smoke that you can see in your eastern skies stand as examples should you defy me. I'll give you until sunset to comply, and your village will be set ablaze after that."

Harry cut off the magnifying charm and stepped down from the boulder.

"Anya, you stay here. Should the village defy me, you know what to do." said Harry, looking at her arrows blessed with the power of fire for emphasis.

"Aye, my lord." Anya nodded firmly.

"Good. Kyla, the people in the village might need a proper push. So, you stay here and ensure the people are ready to make a proper decision." Harry said to his other Valkyrie guard, who was entrusted with the element of lightning.

The red-headed woman nodded and joined her Valkyrie sister to bring the village to heel.

Meanwhile, Harry moved towards the army camped outside the village with Adela by his side. Maege Mormont and Dacey Mormont were present, leading the men and women of Bear Island. The eastern parts of Blacktyde were the responsibility of House Mormont to

occupy and pacify. But it was a slow-moving process than Harry envisioned when he launched the invasion of Blacktyde.

“Lord Stark. We can attack the village and take the priests as prisoners.” Lady Maegh Mormont offered.

“No. If I solely wanted to capture the Drowned Men, I’d have let you take them forcefully from the village.’

“Then may we ask why?” Dacey Mormont asked curiously.

“I want them to acknowledge their defeat more than anything else. It’ll help us administer the island after the war is over if the people acknowledge their defeat.” said Harry.

He could see he did not convince the Mormonts, and he did not blame them. They had never waged a war of this scale in their living memory. Only he knew what he planned to do with the Iron Islands in the future. The rest of the Northern lords were content to keep the North in stasis while he sought its expansion. The embers of discontent against the Iron Throne were already present in the Northerners. The lords of the North were discontent to let the south rule over them now that House Targaryen was chased out of Westeros. It was only a matter of time before the clamour for independence became stronger. And when that happened, the North needed to ensure its maritime security and trade were not left to the mercy of the southern kingdoms.

Harry was sure his actions in the Iron Islands would most likely earn him a less-than-stellar reputation. Sometimes, the ends justify the means.

In the end, he was sure the Ironborn Islands were better off under his control rather than remain under the grip of the pirate culture prevalent amongst its people.

Harry heard the sound of a bowstring releasing, and he knew what was about to follow. He turned to look at the spectacle like everyone else. Harry stared stoically as an electric-blue-coloured arrow sailed straight up, released by Kyla. It was another of the special arrows he had painstakingly built. The arrow, once travelling a sufficient distance high into the sky, exploded in a shower of blue sparks. The blue sparks floated in the sky, making everyone stare in fascination. Slowly but surely, the sky began to darken with thunderclouds. The sun in the sky was bolted out as dark clouds gathered over the entirety of the village. Brights arcs of lightning split the sky, and thunder shook the earth.

“The Ironborn believe their Drowned god is entangled in a battle with the Storm god in perpetuity. Now they know, I’m the storm.” said Harry before boarding the airship that came down from the sky to pick him up.

It only took the villagers a few hours to make up their decision. They hunted down the six Drowned Men in the village and presented them to Harry to be spared from what they feared was the wrath of the Storm god. The villagers also allowed the Mormont-led army into their village while surrendering any weapons in their possession.

When the village was made safe for his entry, Harry arrived with six of the priests of the Drowned god bound in ropes. He had them split into groups of three while Harry personally planted two Weirwood saplings on the ground. The rocky terrain was blasted away by his magic, and a bit of potion designed to accelerate the growth of the magical tree set the ball rolling. Within half an hour, two large Weirwood trees sprung up at the centre of the village, and Harry carved the five-pointed star on the bark of the trees.

“I’ve fought and defeated House Blacktyde and your warriors in combat. I’ve paid the Iron Price, and today I claim this island as part of my fiefdom.” Harry loudly proclaimed before nodding at the guard holding one of the priests.

One of the priests was brought forward and forced to his knees. Another guard brought forth a block of wood, and the two guards forced the priest to press his head against the block.

“As lord of Blacktyde, my first act of Lord of Blacktyde is declaring the Drowned men as criminals.” said Harry, accepting the blade a guard handed to him.

With one swing, Harry decapitated the priest. He paid no heed to the blood spilt, the severed head or the shaking upper body of the priest. He gave the sword back to the guard.

“Remove the heads of these pests. Their kind has no place in my lands.” Harry declared.

Harry watched patiently, along with the gathered villagers and his fellow Northerners, as five more heads hit the ground. When the execution was done, Harry had the guards hang the headless corpses on the branches of the Weirwood tree.

“The Old Gods demand blood from the enemies of the North. I’ll give them all the blood they need.”

Before Harry left the village in peace, he left some protective enchantments and charms on the Weirwood trees to protect them from the Ironborn.

‘When some idiot Ironborn grows the balls to go against his edicts and try to cut down the Weirwood trees, they’d be in for a nasty surprise.’ Harry thought with a snort, looking at the village from his airship as he made his way to the former spot of Blacktyde castle.

He had a few more Weirwood trees to plant and an invasion of the Harlaw to plan.

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Rodrik Harlaw sighed in contentment as he enjoyed the peace and quiet in his library. If all his time could be spent in this abode, he’d have done so without question. Alas, he could not afford to spend even an hour in the library these days. He supposed there were ample reasons that demanded his attention elsewhere.

War, he knew, was a messy affair. Sadly, his goodbrother had yet to learn that lesson properly. Rodrik had hoped Balon's misadventures would end with the thorough beating the Baratheon king gave during the rebellion.

But nothing of the sort happened.

Instead, revenge and hatred blazed inside Balon's heart. Rodrik couldn't fault the man as Balon had lost two sons to his failed rebellion. He could understand vengeance, but what he didn't understand was Balon's decision to launch an attack on the North of all kingdoms. If Balon had attacked the Riverlands, it'd have been strategically sound as the Lannisters would end up fighting the Baratheon armies far longer, which in turn would've give the Ironborn more time to reave the Riverlands. He had even requested Balon to attack the Riverlands if he was hell-bent on attacking the greenlanders.

As usual, Rodrik's advice fell on deaf ears, and his foolish goodbrother attacked the North. The newly raised castle Avalon at Sea Dragon Point was Balon's main target.

Rodrick knew what Balon was doing. Balon wanted to take Eddard Stark's son as retribution for holding Theon.

'Perhaps, the fool thought to kill the Stark boy and avenge the two sons Balon lost.' Rodrik thought with a sigh.

Not only did the attack fail, it seemed to have brought the Black Wolf to their shores. The tales coming from Blacktyde brought nothing short of horror to Rodrik. The men spoke of flying ships spitting flames as high as the Wall consuming castle Blacktyde. Great ships flew in the skies of Blacktyde, raining down death and arrows that spat out great fires and unleashed the fiercest of storms. Even the bravest Ironborn have fled the island, fearing for their lives. The tales brought forth by the fleeing men also carried words of the Stark boy executing all the Drowned Men on the island and planting giant Weirwood trees wherever he went.

Rodrik had known Balon was committing folly by attacking the North, and therefore, he had only sent forth a token force. Those ships now lay at the bottom of the sea with all hands lost or dead. He did not want more death for his people or for his family. He had already lost two distant nephews on the ships he sent with the Iron Fleet.

He could smell the fear in the air even inside his castle despite the brave faces his family tried to portray. Rodrick knew it was much worse among the populace of the islands. Unlike Blacktyde, Harlaw was densely populated and richer. An attack the likes of which was unleashed on Blacktyde would create a higher death toll in Harlaw, and it'd cripple the island economically. Already Harlaw saw little trade because of the failed rebellion. Hunger and poverty were fast spreading, and the latest war would only exacerbate the struggle of the people. In times of such great peril, people get swayed by easy solutions and reaving the bountiful lands of the Greenlanders becomes an attractive prospect. In the throes of blood, war and suffering, the short memories of people would make them forget that it was the Old Ways that caused all the problems to begin with.

Rodrik couldn't help but sigh as another worry settled in his mind. His sister's son Theon remains a hostage in all but name with the Starks. If something were to happen to Theon, he suspected Alannys would waste away in grief.

'Not that there is hardly any grief to go around.' Rodrik thought grimly.

His sister had seen two of her sons fall victim to Balon's idiocy. The sole daughter of Balon Greyjoy and his sister was desperately trying to please her father by proving herself at sea.

'A fool's errand.' Rodrik scoffed at Asha's vain attempts.

Asha was never going to be accepted as a viable heir to Pyke or the Seastone Chair, no matter what she accomplished in the sea. If Theon lived past this disastrous war, Rodrik would ensure the boy inherited Balon's seat. Theon's fostering in the North might actually be a boon for the Iron Islands.

Of course, everything depended on Theon staying alive.

'And myself.' Rodrik added as an afterthought.

Dispelling the dark thoughts about war, Rodrik opened the book he had left on his table. Just as he turned a page, the Ten Towers shook, followed by a deafening sound that nearly made Rodrik jump out of his seat. Screams followed the unholy loud sound that shook his castle, which made Rodrik run to the window of his library. When he looked outside, he could see nothing amiss save for the people running and screaming on the village below the Book Tower.

Rodrik immediately turned around when he heard the door of his library swung open to admit a white-faced guard enter.

"My lord. There are ships...flying!" the guard managed to say, but Rodrik could see the terror in the man's eyes and words.

"Where?" Rodrik asked, hoping he was not showing fear on his face despite his heart filling with nothing but dread.

"E...east, my lord. The Watchtower...it...it's gone, my lord." the guard shook as he spoke.

"Gone? Gone where?" Rodrik asked, with wide brown eyes as his mind finally registered what the guard was saying.

Without wasting time, Rodrik ran as fast as his legs could carry. He climbed down a flight of stairs to the lower level, where he could observe the towers on the western parts of the castle. But, just as he neared the place, a veil of darkness fell over the entire castle. Rodrik had to catch himself by holding himself against the wall as all light dimmed and a weight settled on his shoulders.

"People of Harlaw, I'm Harrion Stark, the Lord of Avalon. Your people, on the orders of Balon Greyjoy, attacked the North. For every Northerner killed, I have killed a hundred of you in Blacktyde. It is now cleansed of the Drowned Men who spit nothing but venom from their mouth and enslave you to a demonic entity, the Drowned demon. I've come to relieve you of

your burdens. If you resist me, fire will take your castles, and storms will blow away your sails. Surrender to me, seek refuge in me, and I'll offer you mercy. Stand against me, I'll become your death."

Rodrik gasped as the pressure bearing down on his shoulders lessened somewhat.

"You have till sunset to decide."

The eerie voice whispered before disappearing into nothingness.

Rodrik managed to walk the rest of the way and stare out of the open space that allowed him to see three large ships floating in the sky while the tower close to the harbour was turned into rubble. But it didn't end there. Rodrik could see ships in the distance sailing towards his castle with the many banners of the North flying proudly in the wind.

Despite being a learned man, Rodrik could only gape at what he saw. His books could never paint such a picture in his mind, but his eyes were certainly doing exactly that.

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Harry made sure it was a spectacle when he rode into the courtyard of Ten Towers atop his horse with trumpets blaring loudly accompanied by drums. He made sure to do so because there was some use for theatrics to keep up appearances in public. He was a conqueror and a high lord of the North. He had demonstrated his power in Blacktyde, but now it was time to show some restraint in Harlaw.

Blacktyde only had strategic value in terms of the island's position and nothing else going for it except for human resources. Harlaw was not like that.

The island of Harlaw was one of the most populated islands among the Iron Islands. It also had many mines of iron, lead, tin and many other earth elements that Harry coveted. It was also strategically positioned to keep the rest of the Iron Islands in line should the need arise. Now, it was a matter of enforcing his terms on Harlaw and pulling it into his sphere of influence. After all, he had some plans on how to effectively use the cheap iron ore of Harlaw to his benefit.

"Lord Stark."

Harry noted the brown-haired man, who had a wizened look plastered on his face, greeted him as Harry climbed down from Sweetie.

"You must be Lord Rodrik Harlaw." Harry said, looking at the finely dressed man who was covered in boiled leather clothing from head to toe.

"I am, my lord. House Harlaw extends you our heartfelt welcome."

"I'm sure that's the case." Harry drawled, looking at the less-than-happy faces of the people assembled behind the Lord of Harlaw.

“Let’s conduct our meeting in a more comfortable setting.” Lord Harlaw suggested.

“Yes, let’s do that.” Harry agreed.

A few minutes later, Harry, along with Leobald Tallhart, Robett Glover and Maege Mormont, were sitting inside the lord’s chamber of the Ten Towers.

“My demands are simple. Harlaw will be under the direct oversight of Avalon. You’ll swear off all allegiances to House Greyjoy and henceforth accept the Wardenship of the North under House Stark of Winterfell. You’ll swear yourself to me as my bannerman and swear oaths to Winterfell as well. Like Blacktyde, Harlaw will become an expanded territory of the North. No longer will you call yourself Ironborn or follow the pirate culture. You’ll also have to hand over all the priests of the Drowned god to my army.”

Harry’s demands only made Rodrik Harlaw gape openly.

“You can’t be serious?” Lord Harlaw spluttered indignantly.

“On the contrary, I’m deadly serious.” Harry said coldly.

“These terms are non-negotiable, Lord Harlaw. King Robert’s methods have clearly not worked to cull your people’s stupidity. The North is taking matters into our own hands to put an end to this madness.” Robett Glover said firmly.

“Consider it a mercy that you and your castle exist instead of being consumed by a burning inferno like Blacktyde.” Leobald Tallhart warned, conveying the threat of total destruction in a manner that made Rodrik Harlaw look lost.

“You have lost, Lord Harlaw. You are outmanoeuvred and without any allies. It’s time for you to surrender and seek Harlaw’s destiny elsewhere.” Maege Mormont advised more kindly than the others.

“Balon Greyjoy and his beliefs are a dying breed Lord Harlaw. One way or the other, I’ll break the Ironborn and your Drowned god on my knees. It’s your choice whether to tide over the storm or get swept away by it.” Harry warned the man who was struggling with indecision.

“Many have tried in the past to destroy us or change us, Lord Stark. Many have threatened us with destruction, but here we stand.” Lord Rodrick finally said.

“Your ancestors have done great work in preserving their culture, fighting off their enemies and keeping the Iron Islands safe even from the dragons.” Harry acknowledged the Lord of Harlaw. “But they made one mistake, Lord Harlaw. They sired you all in my lifetime. The Iron Islands will obey me and grow richer under my rule. You can stand back and watch as I defy thousands of years of your history and ancestors.”

There was nothing else for Lord Harlaw to do but surrender to Harry’s terms.

Harry watched the silver scythe banners of House Harlaw dip as the banners of black wolf flew high on the remaining nine towers of the castle.

'The first phase of the invasion is nearly over. Now, I've got to kill a god.' Harry mused, turning away from his banner, fluttering in the wind.

So far, the Drowned god had maintained its silence. He supposed he'd have to take some drastic measures to force the entity out of the spirit realm, and he knew just the right thing that'd force the Drowned god to descend into the mortal plane.

"We need to fasten our work in Harlaw. Send out men to hunt down the Drowned Men and declare a reward of fifty dragons for anyone giving us valuable information. Make it a hundred for those who deliver us a priest of the Drowned god alive." Harry ordered, looking at the assembled lords.

"It'll be done, Lord Stark." Robett Glover promised.

"Good. Meanwhile, I have to pay a visit to Pyke and Old Wyk. Lord Glover, you are in command of Harlaw. I'll leave Blacktyde in your capable hands Lord Tallhart. Lady Mormont, you'll be joining me on my journey ahead."