**Chapter 13**

**The Siege of the Twins**

**Ser Stevron Frey 5**

Cleos was the first to die on the ramparts as the heretics and the beasts came back for another nightly assault. From the darkness there was a streak of unnatural blue light. The eldest son of Genna Lannister and five other men were decapitated by a sort of heretical scythe, and rat-like things tried to use the opportunity to arrive atop on the ramparts while there was a hole in this part of the defences. It didn’t work, but when the assault ceased and the monsters were dead or thrown out in the pus-filled moat, half a score men were dead and five more were screaming as poison and awful fluids were spreading inside their bodies.

There was no time to mourn the son of Emmon, and as for organising funerals worthy of his blood, the mere idea was absolutely ridiculous.

“Give him the last sacraments with the other dead and then place him on one of the burning boats with the rest of the fallen,” Stevron ordered to the septon. It did not escape him they were doing the same thing as the Tullys did for their dead. And yes, his Lord Father was complaining. But there weren’t any other alternatives. There were too many dead to even think about keeping them cold in the cellars, not to mention the pestilential ‘gifts’ the monsters loved to infect the dying with. As for sending them directly into the river, the Heir of the Twins was not so cold-blooded to command something like this. There were lizard-lions everywhere in the green fog, and hearing them feasting on the bodies of his siblings and family was already bad enough without having the confirmation from his both eyes.

“By the Mother, the Crone and the Maiden, it will be so,” the Faithful man replied.

The beasts and the sorcerers attacked again, and Stevron tried his best to not think how little help the Seven had been in this war so far. House Frey had welcomed the heretics with a lot of steel and fire, pouring oil and various substances on top of the heads of the bull-headed mutants, and inflicting hundreds of casualties for minor losses in return.

But they never stopped coming. Each time the fog was slightly lifting, it was to see columns of the direwolves’ banners bring with them hundreds more of the furry abominations and release them against the Twins.

“None of their men-at-arms and their blasphemous plate-armoured riders have tested us,” the eldest son of Lord Walder Frey said to his grandson Edwyn as he used a lull in the fighting to eat, drink, and rest.

“Symond said he had seen a lot of them busy building a contravallation line a while ago when the fog was lighter,” the deadly serious young man told him.

“Really?” Stevron felt a small tinge of hope, something he had believed long gone in his old soul. “Good! Perhaps our King and the rest of the Seven Kingdoms have not forgotten us!”

“It might be so, Stevron,” Ser Theo Frey intervened, “but the heretics have also built two circumvallation lines to protect their camp and their never-sufficiently-damned cannons. They have also dug plenty of holes to fill them with their ignoble sorcery and break the terrain. We can’t sally.”

“Sally with what?” Olyvar asked with the shadow of a chuckle on his lips. “Two-thirds of our horses are dead because of the monstrous artifices and flames of the Arch-Enemy. They also have a lot of infantry, far more than us...and the lizard-lions and these acidic toads are everywhere.”

“It is...”

“It is the truth,” Stevron interrupted before tempers grew out of control. “We can’t sally out to defeat these monsters. The heretics’ ‘cannons’ are too far, their army, their real army I mean, will have time to form for battle before we reach them, and most of our foot and knights are already exhausted. We must hold until the reinforcements of the Vale and the South reach us...”

“They will have to march very quickly,” Theo muttered under his beard. Stevron didn’t shout at him; the younger knight was not saying anything he had thought in the darkest moments of this siege.

“RAM! THEY’RE BRINGING A RAM AT THE GATES!”

There was a moment of silence and then it was like the Seven Hells had been opened. It started to begin acid rain, thousands of sorcery bolts shrieked and hurt the courtyards, and screams of hate were shouted from ten thousand inhuman throats.

“**WINTER IS COMING**!”

Before even climbing the stairs to a tower, Stevron saw the crippled form of Whalen in the middle of the courtyard, impaled by a scorpion bolt. When they reached the ramparts to fend off the beasts coming back with ladders and impossibly fragile siege towers, it was to be welcomed by the corpses of Aegon and Rhaegar, Aenys’ eldest and cadet’s sons. Each of them had been hit by at least five arrows.

“FOR THE TWINS!”

“FOR THE TWINS AND HOUSE FREY!”

“YOU WILL PAY YOUR TOLLS, HERETICS!”

But this time, their defence was not enough. By the time, they had removed the bull-headed creatures from the top of the walls and disabled several of the siege towers, the ram had reached the gates.

Despite every terror visited by the heretics upon his home, Stevron shivered when he saw the shape of the thing. The Northern smiths had forged their creation in the shape of a hellish direwolf. The metal was so black it seemed to absorb the light of torches, be they lit by Freys or heretics, and its maw was burning like the entrance of a demonic realm.

“ARCHERS! KILL THEM! STOP THE RAM!”

But their efforts were in vain. The beasts towing this huge ram were hiding behind thick leather protections, and the metallic wolf itself was shrugging off arrows and scorpions like they were mere trickles of bees and mosquitoes.

“CONTINUE SHOOTING! PROTECT THE GATES!” He ordered all the while barking new commands to rally several hundred spears below in the courtyards. For if the heretics really broke the gates, it was truly the beginning of the end.

It didn’t matter that it should have been impossible to drag something so heavy in the uneven approaches of the Twins; the Starks and their pet demons had obviously done it.

The ram struck the gates. Once. Large fissures taller than Stevron appeared across its length. Twice. A good part of the upper sections crumbled and the sound of metal and wood faltering was heard by everyone’s who had the ears to listen to.

When the third strike came, there was a blue spark which severed the gates in two, and for a moment the Heir of the Twins heard the laughter of things which weren’t human.

A wall spears took position to bar the way to the mass of the monsters which were no doubt preparing to storm their way into the great castle of the Riverlands.

But breath after breath, turn of hourglass after turn of hourglass, no demons or beasts came.

As the smoke and the fog momentarily cleared, a lone rider waited in front of the position where the gates had stood. In his armoured hands was a banner of parley.

“Your Gates are broken, men of the Twins,” the emissary did not shout, but he did not seem to, as somehow the battlefield was strangely silent. “Half of your garrison is dead or dying, and your defence will not resist a new assault. Honour dictates we give you the terms of your surrender. Your spirited defence earned this.”

“We will never surrender to your forces, heretic,” Stevron realised it was him who had spoken the words instinctively.

“Do not be so prompt to refuse the conditions of my commander,” the dark figure mounting a demon-horse countered. “Should we storm this castle-“

“We will not surrender,” Stevron repeated. “We have a duty to the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, the Realms of Men, and the Seven-Who-Are-One.”

“Is it the will of Lord Walder Frey?”

There was no mockery in the Northerner’s voice, though Stevron would have preferred to find it. No, it wasn’t the will of his Lord Father. As soon as the first assaults had begun, Lord Walder had barricaded himself in his quarters with his last wife Selyse and several other mistresses of his, and refused to leave them, limiting himself to ridiculous order after ridiculous order.

“It is. Now return to your army before we shoot you for the crimes of your bad of murderers and heretics.”

The dark emissary laughed, and the sound was horrible in the silence of the Twins.

“You have until dawn to surrender. If you don’t, House Frey will end tomorrow.”

The mounted messenger disappeared into the night, and the torches flickered out.

**Lord Rodrik Harlaw 5**

The Twins had not fallen the day the ‘Plague Cannons’ had arrived. On this point Meera Reed – it seemed improper to give the Northern warlord the ‘Lady’ title – had been wrong.

Rodrik was ready to recognise it wasn’t going to change anything. Not with the once majestic bridge of the Twins in ruins and a lone ugly mass of debris being all that remained of the Water Tower. And not, as the latest crannogman messenger had informed them, with the gates of the eastern castle destroyed.

At dawn, one half of the Twins would be no more. The only question was if Ser Stevron Frey – the sorcerers of the Starks had long obtained the name of the enemy commander – was going to choose the courageous and suicidal last stand, or the merciful and damnation-filled proposition.

Usually, when the gates were broken, there wasn’t much point continuing the siege assuming the enemy was willing to give you terms of surrender. Terms Jory Cassel ‘the Black Spear’ had tried to give, the powers of Northern sorcery had made sure no one which was not dead drunk understood that the Stark messenger had respected the customs of Southern war.

Of course, it wasn’t a war they were all fighting in this siege of the Twins. It was a Crusade. And without speaking of all the legal complications that throwing down your swords involved, the Faith wasn’t an organisation which appreciated when your House surrendered to heretics.

There would be investigations of treason and plenty of excommunications. The High Septon and the Most Devout would lambast the lack of loyalty and faith of the Freys, and use their considerable influence to make the House’s name a synonym of betrayal and oath-breakers.

Inversely, if the Freys resisted to the last and became martyrs of the Faith, their legend was all but guaranteed...assuming the Iron Throne won this war, of course. But every Frey who was present at the Twins when the jaws of the Stark trap closed around them was not going to live to see it, or at least not as a subject of Rhaegar Targaryen.

It was not hard to see the good sides of this choice. The Northerners, it was futile to pretend the contrary, consorted with demons. His soul was likely damned too, since he was consorting with them. Not that he was too much bothered about it: the principles of the Drowned religion weren’t what one could consider ‘nice’, and the Ironborn had long been considered only a step below the worshippers of the Stark by the septons.

“Will you give them terms too?” He asked to the young woman perched on her lizard-lion. The ‘Plague Cannons’ were less efficient at breaking walls than the monstrosities on the eastern bank, and the rather lacklustre skills of the Ironborn in siege warfare were another hindrance, not an help.

“Yes,” the brown-orange haired warlord curtly replied. “According to our agents, Lothar Frey is known to be more pragmatic than his older half-brother. And he has a fair majority of the women and children of the Twins under his protection,” Meera Reed added like it was an afterthought.

This made a lot of sense. Clearly, the intelligent decision would have been to empty the Twins of all the smallfolk and non-warrior mouths that weren’t going to be useful and send them south of the Red Fork, but the Freys had not done that. The evacuation of the eastern bank had only begun when the defeated companies of the Riverlands had returned, far too late to order a general retreat to Riverrun or somewhere out of reach of the Starks and the Greyjoys.

“But he won’t accept,” the war commander of the western bank continued. “You and I know this.”

Rodrik nodded. Lothar Frey was not a knight, that much was true, but he wasn’t an imbecile. The twelfth son of Lord Walder had to know that among the terms of surrender for his men and himself, there was a formal obligation to abjure his faith and swear himself to the Gods of the North. Hells, maybe the terms involved the entire population of the Twins swearing their allegiance to one of the four Demon-Gods. The Freys of the eastern bank had not let the parley emissary speak about this issue.

“I know. And you’re going to lose time here.”

“Yes, but it’s time I can afford to lose, unlike Jory Cassel and his forces.” The crannogwoman told him. “Tywin has still failed to pass the Red Fork, and in two days, my blocking forces and your liege’s reavers will capture Fairmarket. The forces of the West will be blocked behind the Blue Fork.”

“And if they aren’t?”

“If they aren’t,” shrugged Meera Reed, “I can always retreat northwards in the swamps of the Neck or to Seagard. But it won’t come to this. The Plague Cannons will need two or three days to finish these walls.”

How this young woman could smile while watching the walls of the Twins take day after day a diseased colour, Rodrik preferred not to think too much about it. By now, fungi, algae, mushrooms and a lot of pus were covering many sections of the western castle’s outer works, and the green fog and the rain seemed only to accelerate the corruption of the Riverlands’ citadel. It was absolutely disgusting, and as each dawn arrived, there were more and more demons and beasts crawling around their camp, and the air was more and more...different. It was heavy, filled with power, and every principle of his books appeared to crumble a little bit at a time.

Unlike some braggarts, Rodrik had refused to utter one of the Demon-God’s names since the siege had begun. He was not dumb enough to attract the attention of creatures lurking and awaiting in the darkness.

“There will be reinforcements coming on the eastern bank by then.” It was to be expected; the Twins and Seagard were the last great fortresses before hundreds of leagues. The next human-made obstacles were Harrenhal and the Riverrun; the natural ones were the three Forks and the Trident.

“Yes...I don’t think they are going to give me compliments about the efforts we have made to make this castle presentable to Nurgle.”

The last word pulsed with power and the lizard-lion appeared to grow by a few inches, the grass around their post seemed to be more alive, and the decay was more virulent for his old nose.

“I won’t swear my allegiance to him,” the Lord of Ten Towers found in him the strength to reply.

“We have two other Gods and one Goddess...” was the less-than-reassuring answer.

**Lothar Frey 4**

The servants had cleaned the blood off from the parchment as best as they could, but despite their best efforts, the message still had many red dots upon it.

This was what happened when your maester was left alone, and one of the ravens which arrived to his tower revealed itself a two-headed monster when the demonic illusion dropped.

Thank the Father, there had been two soldiers resting nearby, and as a result they had ‘only’ lost the maester and five ravens. Who knew how many servants and soldiers would have had their throats torn apart when this thing assaulted them after they closed their eyes?

It was one more unnecessary death. The message was coming from the heretics, and it was a repeat of their terms of surrender after he had ignored the latest attempt of parley.

“They must really want us in chains and praying to their demons,” the commander of the western castle of the Twins said in a thoughtful voice.

“Every Faithful they are taking prisoner can be returned against the Iron Throne,” his younger half-brother Perwyn reminded him. “We loved thinking the enemy was commanded by mindless cruel beasts when we began this Crusade, but the heretics have human minds, no matter how damned and depraved.”

“A good point,” Lothar conceded while throwing the message into the chimney where it promptly burned. “And this is why we must deny them.”

“We will,” Perwyn yawned. “Or we will try, at least. Once most of us on the walls are dead, the western gates will be broken as easily as the eastern ones and they will enslave the population of the Twins.”

“Women are handing poison and many pacts have been sworn.”

“I saw many of our men who fell from the ramparts rise again as green-skinned undead, brother,” Perwyn spoke in a tone where hope and joy were completely missing. “I want to believe death will be a release from this litany of horrors, but I don’t know if it is true.”

Lothar watched his younger half-brother yawning for a few seconds before nodding.

“Go sleeping, Perwyn. You aren’t much of use to me exhausted like you are...”

“Olyvar is on the eastern bank.” The argument was uttered like a curse and death sentence. And if he was pragmatic, Lothar was going to admit inside his thoughts it was one.

The eastern gates were broken, and the Northerners had killed thousands of their defenders and the hastily armed servants and men in age to wield a weapon.

It meant Stevron, their Lord Father, Perwyn’s brother, their other siblings and every man-at-arm still alive on the eastern Twins were going to be slaughtered when dawn came.

Many had already perished. Stevron had sent a message by homing pigeon after the gates were broken, and if the heart of the words had been to confirm there would be no surrender, the list of the Freys who died for the Twins had been added to it.

It was a far longer list than Lothar had ever imagined reading. Cleos, Whalen, Aegon, Rhaegar, Alesander, Bradamar and to them were added Ser Harys Haigh and Walder Vance.

Of course, it was just the deaths of the Siege. Since this failure of a Crusade had been declared, Merrett and Benfrey had been struck down by assassins, and Black Walder had betrayed them and paid the price for it.

House Frey was no stranger to calamities and disastrous seasons, but this autumn had taken a bloody toll upon them, and the moment the eastern Twins were lost, it was going to get worse.

“I will wake you up once the assault begins,” Lothar had no doubt this was going to be absolutely horrible: the heretics were going to want to prove it was better to lay down arms than fight to the bitter end. “But you need to sleep, and it’s not like you or anyone else here can do something to save our siblings on the other side of the Green Fork.”

If the bridge had been intact, evacuation would have been the thing to do. But the bridge was no more, the Water Tower protecting it was destroyed too, and there were things in the water and the green fog which prevented any idea of using boats and rafts to flee to the western castle.

“Is there any hope?”

“No,” hope was sometimes a balm for the soul, but in this instance the situation was so desperate it wasn’t worth lying. “The Mallisters were besieged in their inner citadel last time we’d heard of them, and the Three Sisters have fallen somehow. As long as they have the Greyjoys on their side, the demon-worshippers have their supply lines and home waters safe. On our side, the Lannisters’ armies should still be around Riverrun, and on the eastern side, the enemy has begun contravallation efforts in case the Vale forces arrive in time.”

Not that it would come to that, of course. Unless the enemy commander who controlled the host of heresy and ruin was far stupider than Ryman – something the Battle of the Red Tears didn’t support – the moment his patrols told him the Vale and the rest of the Seven Kingdoms’ armies were close, he would storm the Twins, parley or no parley, dawn or no dawn.

And as for the western bank, it didn’t matter if Lothar could see fifty or one hundred thousand spears coming to deliver him, not if they weren’t on the same side as his walls. The Green Fork was larger than it had ever been during the decade-long summer, and its current was particularly violent. Without a bridge, an army couldn’t cross. Something that wasn’t true for the heretics; the eternally-damned crannogmen were using their lizard-lions to visit their fellow heretics when they wanted.

“Edmure Tully abandoned us.”

Lothar had to be strong not to chuckle. Their Lord Father had criticised, berated, and insulted Hoster and his brood for years. At times like this, it wasn’t exactly surprising the old and new prejudices came back.

“Yes and no,” the twelfth son of Lord Walder Frey told the fifteenth’s, “he didn’t come here to defend with us our home, but we abandoned him during the last battle, and if half of what the soldiers said is true, we were thorns in his boots every time something had to be decided.”

Lothar wasn’t going to say their new Lord Paramount was a brilliant commander of men, because it wasn’t true. But there had been many things the son of Hoster Tully had no control upon, like the Blackwood betrayal, and for all the blustering of certain of his half-siblings like Ryman and Aenys, House Frey had been defeated faster and in a similar humiliating fashion when compared to their trout-liege.

“The shame should be shared, but Edmure Tully isn’t here, unlike us...”

**Lord Elbert Arryn 2**

Before this Crusade, if one of his friends had told him he would hate a river, Elbert would have laughed.

A river was just a large amount of water. It was not alive. Not liking its colour was one thing, but hating one?

This was before he was east of one, and the heretics were west of it, out of his reach.

“A bridge,” Robert cursed loudly before barking the two words. “My knighthood and my warhammer for a bridge.”

“This should be cheap, for a bridge,” remarked the Heir of the Eyrie.

“This isn’t funny,” grouched the Heir of Storm’s End.

“It wasn’t a joke, Robert.”

His Stormlander friend grunted. Good, because Elbert had been saying the truth there. Bridges over rivers as large as the Green Fork were indeed extremely expensive, and it was one of the major reasons the long leagues between the Trident and the Twins had none. The other reasons were explained by the long feuding history of the Houses in the Riverlands, and the depredations of the Ironborn, whose raids had destroyed plenty of great works before the Conquest.

In silence, the two men watched the fires lit by their enemies. They were not natural these fires. Some were blue, while others had a deep black shade. They were evident signs that the heretics were there in strength, and that the protection the Faithful had sworn to give had crumbled like one of those snow castles every child of the Vale loved to build when the bad season came.

“I hope the Lannisters will make these bastards pay,” the son of Steffon Baratheon said as the sky became clearer over the Mountains of the Moon.

“I know they will,” Elbert answered. “Everyone knows Lord Tywin Lannister always pays his debts and never forgive a slight. But I’m afraid vengeance is all he will achieve once he hammers the Ironborn. The heretic’s plan has worked all too well.”

“We have this army,” protested the Baratheon scion, “and many more coming behind us.”

“And how will we feed them if the devastation is as complete as we fear?” the Heir of Jon Arryn questioned his friend. “Launching a Crusade at the eve of autumn was already moderately risky, despite the good harvests. But we haven’t been able to find a sack of grain or a bag of apples from all the villages we have reconquered these last days. All the food of our army will have to come from somewhere, and if the Northern Marches are not available, the bread and the meat will have to come from somewhere else. ”

“You think this was deliberate.”

Elbert nodded, all the while silently wishing Robert had stayed longer at Storm’s End to receive the lessons upon war and strategy every Heir of a Lord Paramount took for granted. Oh, there was nothing wrong with his courage or his notion of tactics upon a battlefield. Indeed, Robert Baratheon was a warrior who had few peers in this field of expertise. But when it came to logistics, to the ‘boring’ details of transporting one hundred sacks of flour from the mill to the hungry army, there the melee tourney’s veteran was suddenly out of his depth.

“If the last ravens we have received are reliable, they have butchered the population of Seagard, besieged the Twins, slaughtered Sentinel’s Stand, and sunk all ships around the Three Sisters. And once they blockaded all the castles of the Northern Riverlands Marches, they began to empty the lands of its inhabitants, its granaries, its barrels, and more or less everything we wanted to feed our army. We have enough supplies to reach the Twins and our supply line is working. But if we can’t use the Twins as a supply depot, we won’t be able to go further than the plains of House Sentinel as long as the fleets haven’t sunk the Manderly warships and reconquered the Three Sisters.”

This was a brutal and merciless strategy, and there was no way to remedy it in days or fortnights. Elbert couldn’t repopulate empty villages with a click of fingers – and he tried his best to avoid thinking about the fate of the smallfolk which had disappeared in the aftermath of the rout of the Battle of the Red Tears.

“Whether the Twins still stand or not when we reach it in two days, we must absolutely do our best to avoid a second defeat here,” Elbert declared to his friend as dawn came. “The defeat of Tully and his bannersmen has already cost us nearly every chance to invade the North this year. If we are beaten there, the Marches will be the battlefield for the rest of autumn and there are no castles between here and the Trident big enough to protect twenty thousand men from the elements.”

“I’ve seen the Twins once,” Robert said before drinking a cup of Dornish red. “The castles are well-fortified, and heretics will lose thousands trying to storm them. If the Freys perish before we arrive, we may be able to shatter the beasts and their sorcerer masters in one battle and hunt them until the swamps.”

“May the Father Above hear you,” Elbert answered in a heartfelt tone.

Before he had the time to send a messenger to send the wake-up call, north of them an immense column of blue lightning was lit.

**Hoster Blackwood 1**

The rain had stopped when dawn and the signal came.

The Flint sorcerers lit the beacon, materialising the fires of the Architect of Fate in reality.

And the army answered.

“THE TWINS FALL TODAY! TZEENTCH WILLS IT!”

Hoster raised his sword and his shield in salute, and two hundreds men of House Blackwood did the same thing behind him.

“DEATH TO THE TARGARYENS! DEATH TO THE FREYS!”

The beasts of the Northerners were the first to charge into the mud and the swampy ground protecting a half-protection to the castle, but the men of Raventree were right behind them as terrible incantations were unleashed at the ramparts and the archers hiding behind their crumbling stones.

If they had been normal men, the mud and the water may have drowned all of them, since they were in plate armour and this kind of heavy equipment was too cumbersome to save your skin when the ground sucked you below. But this time the holy runes on their armours prevented this. They were slower than beasts and the warriors sent by the Gods, but the vanguard had to remove the stones and debris gathered by the Freys to replace their destroyed gates.

And then there was no time to think anymore.

“TZEENTCH WITH US! VICTORY!”

“PAY YOUR TOLL HERETICS!”

The two forces slammed into each other like two mammoths fighting for their territory. There was no subtlety, and no tactic. It was just two blocks of men hacking and slashing, doing an honest job of murdering each other.

Two strikes and his blade went deep red. Two more and he saw a weasel face look at him with loathing eyes before half of his nose, and the lower part of his jaw began to piss blood and the Frey soldier fell.

Pikes were broken. Armours were sprayed with pus and blood. Step by step, the Blackwood infantry advanced into the Twins’ courtyard, massacring the weasels and pushing a battlecry from time to time. For centuries the Riverlands were forced to pay toll to the Freys to whatever goods and supplies travelled on their lands, and the Tullys had always failed to take seriously his Lord Father and his predecessors seriously. The Freys had been elevated too far above their stations of bridge-keepers, and nobody curbed their arrogance anymore! Today this ended! Today Walder Frey and his countless brood were punished and eradicated as their actions deserved!

“KILL THEM! KILL THEM ALL!”

“BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD!”

Hoster tried very hard to not spit when the blood-red armours of the Cerwyn and their hounds joined them. The young Blackwood was a loyal worshipper of the Lord of Sorcery, and for all the oaths sworn before going to war, there wasn’t much love between them and the berserkers of Khorne.

At least it meant they had won this battle.

The courtyard had plenty of beast and Northern corpses, along with a few Blackwood men, but there were far more Freys carved apart. Everywhere banners of the twin towers were seized and trampled under their feet. The walls were unmanned and more men and sorcerers were pouring into the fortress, slaying the defenders.

A blade clashed with his, and Hoster Blackwood smiled at the sight of the high quality armour his opponent was armoured with. Only the sons and the grandsons of Walder the Late were equipped like this.

“Kneel Frey, and you may rule upon the ruins of your bridge for a few decades!”

“The armies of the Seven Kingdoms will crush you, traitor!” the Frey swordsman retorted as their duel accelerated.

“A lizard which tries to convince himself he is a dragon? A lowly rose which replaced the green hands? A pigeon pretending to be a falcon? You have chosen the wrong side, once again Frey!”

“We are followers of the Seven! I am a follower of the Seven and a loyal servant of the Iron Throne!”

“Your gods have never existed save in your delusions!” Hoster’s blade narrowly missed the throat of his enemy. “Tzeentch, Khorne, Slaanesh and Nurgle ARE the True Gods! Witness their power!”

Hoster wasn’t a dedicated sorcerer, but he had enough mastery of the subject to curse the Frey in the name of Tzeentch, and seconds later his opponent began to burn in blue flames.

“Where are your Father, Warrior and Mother now that you really need them?” Hoster shouted to the dying swordsman and the five or six men of the Twins still fighting. “I would say they have abandoned you, but that would imply they’ve ever existed! BOW! SURRENDER TO THE WILL OF THE GODS OR DIE!”

His blade burning with the power of sorcery, the third son of Lord Blackwood slaughtered the foot of House Frey. Arms, legs, heads; the weasels lost quite a few limbs before their last breath.

Hoster raised his sword, his mind eager for more glory. The resistance in the courtyards and the outer walls was largely over, now the main prizes were Lord Frey and his Heir in the dungeon, and if-

THUNK!

He was suddenly lying on the cold hard courtyard. Why was he not fighting? What had happened? He was in pain. Pain! Pain!

Hoster managed to move his head enough to see the arrow which had bypassed his armour right under his right arm. The runes and the enchanted steel should have parried the projectile, but somehow, there had been a flaw in the protections...and this white arrow had hit him right where they were at their weakest.

The young Blackwood had enough lucidity to see two sorcerers approach, but there was no hope in his heart anymore. The pain was more and more unbearable, and a river of blood was flowing out of his wound.

Had it always been his destiny to come here and to fall in this courtyard? Was he cursed from birth to fight against the Freys but to be unable to see the triumph of the Black Crusade over House Frey?

“So be it, Divine Tzeentch,” the dying Blackwood spoke, “I...accept...your...will.”

*Just remodel this fortress with your power and erase the Frey’s presence. I don’t want anyone in a generation to remember their name*.

It was his last prayer, and as he closed his eyes forever, Hoster heard great laughter and knew the Architect of Fate would do his utmost to do exactly that.

**Ser Stevron Frey 6**

By the time they barricaded themselves in the hall of his Lord Father, Stevron discovered he had no great regret left in him. He was never going to be the Master of the Twins; that much was a certainty. But the last days had proved there were far worse outcomes in the life of a loyal son.

And assuming he even thought for a moment that kneeling in front of demon-worshippers was the right thing to do, what sort of damnable future the Twins would endure?

Most of his line was dead now, and the survivors were not long for this world. Ryman had been decapitated by a goat-headed thing on the towers, Edwyn had lost a duel against one of the heretics’ axe-wielding warriors.

Petyr, Aegon, Walder, Walton, and Steffon had all perished in the brutal bloodbath of the courtyard and the towers.

His grandsons Patrek Vance and Bryan Frey were missing, and if the Seven were good, the boys had been killed quickly.

It was the only things they could hope for in this Siege: die quickly and painlessly, pray your soul was safe, and recite the holy words to give you assurance your body wasn’t going to be mutated beyond recognition when you died.

“They will need to bring a ram or one of their sorcerers to break the doors,” Arwood said. To everyone’s surprise, included his own, Hosteen’s son had fought his way through a horde of bull-like mutants and survived to speak about it. “That will delay them a bit.”

“Not enough,” Olyvar muttered before taking one of his seats. “Before we abandoned the outer walls, no one saw any reinforcements coming to relieve us.”

“We were wrong to think our defences could withstand days of sorcerous assaults and daemonic raids,” Stevron acknowledged, feeling very, very older than his age. “This siege didn’t last long enough for the Vale or any Crusade army to rush northwards and reinforce us. And we were too confident the Green Fork was our greatest advantage when in reality, it proved our greatest flaw.”

Something began to strike against the wooden doors painted with the grey and blue sigil of House Frey. Then it stopped for twenty heartbeats...and it resumed, only there were a lot of ‘somethings’ striking against the doors now.

Naturally, a disaster never arriving alone, it was the moment their Lord Father chose to regain consciousness on his throne-seat.

“Stevron! What is the meaning of this?” squeaked the Master of the Twins. “Why am I not in my bed?”

“Good morning Father,” the Heir to the Twins replied. “You are not in your quarters because at this moment, there are heretics in it.”

“Heretics? Ludicrous! Why would they storm my quarters when I will surrender to them at dawn?”

The five scores or so of men present in the hall watched their genitor and liege with loathing and hatred. Stevron had told them what his father’s intentions were and how to prevent this betrayal to pass, but being informed and learning of it with your own ears was something very different.

“Dawn is long gone, Father. I chose to not surrender the castle, and the forces of evil have stormed our home.”

The next moments were the longest series of curses and insults Stevron had ever heard, and his long decades of life had made sure he knew plenty of them. His Lord Father had a lot of flaws, and this included a foul mouth.

“You doomed us all! You doomed us all!” the time of insults was over, at least for now.

“Yes,” Stevron replied unflinchingly before turning anew to face the doors. “But it will be the doom of a loyal House against evil, and hopefully it will give courage and defiance in the hearts of the warriors fighting against these abominations.”

“You believe you can betray me like this?” Lord Walder Frey shouted. “I am the Master of the Twins! And you are not my Heir!”

Wood splinters were thrown as the doors began to break.

Stevron breathed loudly.

“I’ve found a lot of your letters while you were sleeping, Father,” he admitted while keeping both eyes on the imminent collapse of their last protection. “You betrayed us and the realm first. And you’re not the Master of the Twins anymore because the Starks and the horde of horrors they call bannersmen have conquered this castle and destroyed our bridge. Therefore, I am not your Heir.”

“**FREYS! YOUR NEW MASTERS ARE COMING!**”

The doors exploded and a demon looking like a two-headed blue vulture stormed in.

“FOR THE TWINS AND FOR THE SEVEN!” Stevron roared before charging the abomination.

**Jory Cassel 5**

Looking at the crucified corpse of Lord Walder Frey was a sight that Jory wasn’t growing tired of. Since the mortal remains of the former Master of the Twins were exhibited in the middle of his ruined holdfast, it was the perfect insult to the old weasel.

“Fortunately, the sons aren’t of the same mould as the father,” Jonelle Cerwyn told him.

Jory snorted. Trust a warrior of Khorne to see the doomed defiance of Ser Stevron Frey and his half-brothers, sons, grandsons and nephews as a good thing.

“I have many words to describe their resistance, but ‘fortunate’ does not come near the top,” the Black Spear replied after several heartbeats. “This castle held us at bay for too long, and Meera Reed is still besieging the western castle.”

“What did you expect?” Jonelle declared bluntly. “You saddled her with the Ironborn, and everyone knows the reavers are useless in a siege!”

Coming from a Khornate warlord – who was the closest thing the North had to Ironborn – the remark was both damning and ironic.

“I have been sending her some reinforcements for two days,” Jory had no need to justify himself, but it was best to leave no misunderstandings with the commander of one of his Hosts.

While the great bridge of the Freys was no longer available, between enchanted boats, the lizard-lions and some rafts, he could transfer about a thousand foot and rapidly recall them if need to be, just as long as they weren’t heavily armoured.

“Not enough to compensate for the Ironborn marching south,” grunted the Khornate woman, and Jory had to admit that for all her lack of courtesy and talent for the greater arts of command, Jonelle Cerwyn had a point here.

The Ironborn of Balon Greyjoy had proven they had a taste for blood and massacre at Seagard, but when it had come to more complicated sieges, they were prompt to abandon the tedious and dangerous affairs as soon as they were able to find excuses.

In the last five days – well three days before the eastern castle fell – famous reaver captains and Lords of Great Wyk and Pyke had taken their loot, their salt wives, and their supplies, and marched south to challenge the armies which would no doubt come to contest their conquest of the lands between the Blue and Red Fork.

“They are imperfect tools anyway,” Robin Flint commented, having evidently stopped his business of binding their enemies’ souls to various artefacts of power. “One or two defeats, and Balon Greyjoy will flee to his precious Iron Islands and try to renege on his oaths.”

“And it is exactly why Lady Saara was sent by Lord Stark there,” Jory smirked.

“How...prudent,” the Tzeentchian sorcerer chuckled. “Have you changed your mind about a certain topic, commander?”

“I have not,” after ten times, Jory wondered why the Flint persisted. “The stones of the Twins and the new fortress and the bridge we will build on this location will be given to Grandfather Nurgle and his followers.”

“This is not going to be a quick of affair,” the blue-cloaked Host commander warned. “Even after the western castle falls, the builders of Greywater Watch will need more than four moons to rebuild major fortifications on every side, and that assumes we are in full control of the surrounding lands.”

“You want to make a point. Get to it, Flint,” Jonelle Cerwyn barked.

“If you were willing to let us unleash our greatest spells and weapons,” the face of Robin Flint was hidden beneath a blue hood and shadows, but it didn’t take much imagination to know he was smiling widely. “We could have this fortress bowing to you before sunset and a bridge built within the fortnight.”

A loud rumble and thunderous footsteps announced the presence of Bog Boggs.

“The liaison with our Gods remain tenuous here, servant of Tzeentch,” the Nurgle commander began. “This isn’t the time to destabilise the entire tapestry of Art in misplaced enthusiasm. And oaths were made-“

“Oaths which promised the fortress of Twins would fall thanks to your efforts,” the sorcerer hissed. “I fail to see how those were fulfilled.”

“Without us, the bridge would still be intact and the Freys would move their reserves as they wished, forcing us to attack in perfect synchronisation both castles,” Bog Boggs retorted, his anger a cold and vicious whisper.

“That sounds-“

The Tzeentchian worshipper was forced to swallow his last words as Jory raised his right fist to intimate them silence.

“The Host of Disease will continue to besiege the western castle with twenty sorcerers in support,” the Black Spear commanding the Northern Vanguard ordered. “I give you three days to end the Frey’s resistance. If Lothar Frey and his last brothers are still alive and defiant by then, there will be new commanders and certain promises will need to be amended.”

“The Host of the Reaper and Lady Reed won’t disappoint you,” Bog Boggs declared before leaving this improvised gathering of the Host commanders. Jory then turned towards Jonelle Cerwyn.

“Please tell me I can raid south and harass the greenlanders,” the red-armoured woman did not beg, but it was a strong demand.

“No need to,” Robin Flint chuckled, “before sunset, they will be there.”

“Are you sure?”

The sorcerer sniffed in derision.

“Fifty-two thousand men advancing under the Arryn, Baratheon, and Tully banners can’t be hidden from our sight, especially with a single true road to watch for.”

“Good,” the Host of Slaughter’s greatest warrior smiled carnivorously. “This time, we may have a few worthy skulls to bring back in front of Khorne’s throne.”

Jory Cassel rolled his eyes before giving his next command to the Host of Destiny. Fifty-two thousand men, even if each one had the courage of a sheep, was a mighty host and there were fewer than ten thousand true warriors on this side of the Green Fork. If they tried to fight them on open ground, his vanguard was going to be buried under the numbers, especially with so many heavy horse from the Vale on their enemy’s side.

“It is time to contact Lord Edward Stark. I want to know if the rest of the Hosts are ready to exploit the opportunity we have offered them.”

**Author’s note**: One castle still stands...but it’s on the wrong side of the Green Fork for Elbert Arryn and his army. Of course, Jory Cassel and the majority of the non-Nurgle forces are on this side too...

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