

Robert was at his wits end with the march towards Crakehall. There was no other way to describe the march along the Ocean Road other than hell. If there was a hell in Westeros, he had seen it as he marched his army into the Westerlands. Wherever the Lannister army had marched, it burned everything to the ground in the Reach. Whole villages were burnt, fields were burnt down, the smallfolk butchered, and wells were covered in mud and slime, making the water useless. Everything north of Old Oak was burnt to the ground forcing his army to create a long line of supply lines as foraging was out of option. Robert had thought this would stop once they reached the borders of the Westerlands.

Instead, it was the same inside the borders of the Westerlands. Nothing of worth was left standing in the land. It looked as if the Lannister army had looted the vast tracts of lands north of Old Oak. If there was something the Lannister army couldn't take with them, they burned it or destroyed it in some way. Some wells were filled with dead animals and mud, but their scouts had found a few wells with clean water. But it turned out to be a costly mistake to depend on the water from the wells the scouts found. The few men that unfortunately drank the water from the wells shat themselves to death. It took them a while to find out that the water in the wells that they assumed were clean water was instead filled with poison of some sort.

Even the maesters in his camp were hard-pressed to find what sort of poison the Lannisters were using. Some of the maesters had suggested the Lannister men had used a combination of poisons leaving unpredictable symptoms. This had left the maesters facing difficulty in treating the men without proper medicine. Ravens had been sent to the Citadel asking for aid, but he didn't know how that would pan out. Even if the Citadel sent forth some expert maesters, it'd take time for them to travel through the Ocean Road to reach his camp. He was not keen on waiting around for some old men in grey robes to travel from Oldtown to take the fight to the Lannisters. Therefore, he had men dig new wells along their path to Crakehall for clean water while leaving the poisoned soldiers behind in supply depots his army built along the Ocean Road. It was a bit tricky to dig up new wells because of the hilly terrain of the Westerlands. But it was better than waiting around forever to have clean water transported from the Reach.

However, food remained a problem for the army, which had to be transported along the Ocean Road.

Robert looked at the burnt remains of a village with a noticeable frown on his face atop his horse. He felt two of his Kingsguard knights slip into his flanks. Robert eyed Ser Barristan and Ser Arys Oakheart.

"Tell me, Ser Barristan. What do you think happened to the smallfolk in this village?" Robert asked, looking at the knight touted as the Bold by the Seven Kingdoms.

"They must have been relocated to Crakehall, your grace." said Ser Barristan.

"Hmm." Robert grunted before turning his sights on Ser Arys Oakheart. "What do you think?"

"Your grace?" Ser Arys blinked, looking taken aback at the question.

"What do you think happened to the smallfolk of the villages we found along the way?" Robert asked.

"Lord Tywin would have taken away the smallfolk from the villages like Ser Barristan said. However, I think the able-bodied smallfolk might have been forcibly conscripted into the Lannister army, with their family kept as hostages. Perhaps, they might be in Lannisport or Crakehall. Or..." Ser Arys trailed off with an uncomfortable look.

“Or?” Robert prodded.

“Or Lord Tywin must have killed them all. Without too many men, he’ll have fewer mouths to feed, allowing Lord Tywin to conserve his resources.”

Robert grunted, hearing the kingsguard knight’s loud and clear.

“I agree. I wouldn’t put it past those greedy blonde-haired cunts to do something like that. I should’ve listened to Ned that day after the sack of King’s Landing and hauled those Lannisters to the Wall or the block.” Robert growled, looking north where the rest of the Ocean Road was now sprawled out between several rocky cliffs and woods on either side.

“Your grace, the camp is ready. Perhaps, you’d be partial to spending some time under the tent’s shade.” said Ser Barristan.

“Yeah. Spending time inside the tent. That’s all I’ve been doing.” Robert growled, frowning at the road ahead before retreating into the tent.

When night came, Robert remained inside his tent, drunk out of his mind while cracking jokes at the expense of his guests.

“So, you’re saying you ran out of the crofter’s home after fuckin his wife while you thought it was the man’s daughter.” Robert laughed.

“Aye, your grace. To this day, Annie hasn’t forgiven me and refuses to believe I mistakenly snuck in through the wrong window. Her mother, on the other hand, is always welcoming.” Beric Dondarrion smirked as the men laughed and raised cups in his honour.

“Tell it true, Dondarrion. You...” Robert didn’t get to finish his question as he heard screams from outside his tent.

Rushing outside his tent with an assortment of knights and lords from the Stormlands and the Reach, he was greeted by the sight of a large volley of lit arrows falling down from the night sky.

“We’re under attack. Take cover!” Robert screamed, taking a shield from nearby and holding it over his head. He fell to a knee and angled his body in a position that gave him maximum cover under the shield.

He was joined by many like-minded knights, looking to stay put and brave the volley of arrows rather than make a run for it.

“Your grace!” Ser Arys Oakheart joined him, locking shields with him, giving him more cover.

“Good man.” Robert nodded at the Kingsguard knight.

“Your grace, here, take this.” Ser Arys offered his white helmet.

Robert merely shook his head as arrows began to bounce off his shield with distinct thudding sounds when they found their mark.

“We slowly retreat with each step towards the tent. My hammer and armour are in the tent.” said Robert.

“All right, your grace.” Ser Arys said.

Together they moved slowly under the constant barrage of arrows. Robert could only grit his teeth as more and more arrows rained down on top of them while screams of the men filled the night sky. Robert crawled back into his tent with Ser Arys by his side. He managed to take Godsgrief into his hand and take on a helmet as well. He had no time or luxury to put on his armour because his tent caught fire.

Robert immediately exited the tent with Ser Arys by his side. They found Ser Barristan waiting outside with his shield raised over his head, ready for battle.

“Your grace.”

“Ser Barristan. Let’s go kill some lions.” Robert bellowed, running straight in the direction the arrows were coming from before the Kingsguard knights could say anything.

“Your grace. Wait!”

Robert ignored all the calls for caution as he was itching for blood. His antlered helmet and the gleaming warhammer let the men know their king was leading an attack against the enemy.

“To me! To me!” Robert shouted, running towards the edge of the camp, rallying the men towards him for an attack.

“To the King!”

“To the King!”

“Baratheon!”

Many more shouts joined him, and Robert lived the moment. He could feel his blood dance in joy as the thrill of battle overcame him. This was what he missed, the thrill of staring death in the face in the field. Raising his warhammer high for all to see, Robert led the men towards the enemy but to his displeasure, he could see the enemy was retreating. He could hear the sound of hooves disappearing into the distance, but he was unwilling to let them escape that easily. He didn’t brave volleys of arrows to turn back halfway from a battle.

Therefore, he ordered the charge of the cavalry to ride down the attackers hiding in the dark. Ser Barristan quickly arrived at his side with a horse for him. Robert was quick to climb over the horse, but he refused to retreat as Ser Barristan suggested.

“Your grace, we are getting spread out and separated from the camp.” Ser Barristan warned. “We’re losing the high ground. Our men will be more vulnerable to enemy archers.”

Robert just grunted. “Forward!” he yelled.

Howling sounds filled the air all of a sudden as a volley of fire arrows once again filled the night sky. To Robert, it looked like small falling stars as the flamed arrows rained down on his army. He immediately raised his shield, braving the volley of arrows head-on without surrendering his equanimity. Fire arrows were less dangerous when there was nothing around to catch fire. Fire arrows tend to have heavier arrowheads which also blunted the arrow, making it less dangerous than regular arrows. He urged his horse forward, never breaking a stride despite the arrows raining down on him. He could feel he was just

climbing a slope with the ground littered with arrows that were aflame. If it weren't for the heat of the battle, he'd have stopped to admire the beautiful sight of little specks of light littered across the ground on a night that had barely any moonlight.

However, Robert was forced to pull on the reins of his horse and come to a stop as the enemy launched round objects dipped in oil that immediately caught flame once they rolled over the flame arrows littering the ground.

"Oh, fuck!" Robert grunted, struggling to control his horse as the globes of flames rolled down the slope, picking up traction with every passing second.

The rolling mass of fire crashed into his men, who were struggling to turn away from the approaching fire. To make matters worse, more arrows rained down on them. Robert grunted when an arrow punched into his thighs.

"Your grace! We must retreat. We are in the range of their archers." Ser Barristan said, coming to his side, keeping a shield over Robert as an extra layer of protection.

"No!" Robert grunted.

"We can't see them because of the darkness. We'll lose more men if we press on." Ser Barristan warned.

Robert could feel the rage build up in him at his inability to crush some skulls. However, he was not blithe about the situation he found himself in.

"Your grace. They're throwing tumbleweeds made into a roll." Ser Arys said.

Robert dithered for a moment watching the men around him scream and stampede as they were either lit on fire or they were being peppered with arrows. He cast one look towards the enemy hiding in the shadows and then at the bloodied men. His mind wavered.

"Retreat!" Robert ordered, turning his horse around.

Riding back to the camp, he was once more overcome with the same emotions he felt when Tarly routed his army at Ashford. The only saving grace was that he lost fewer men here than in the battle of Ashford. At least, he hoped that was the case.

"Aaaaaahhhhhh!"

"Help! Please no. Help!"

Harry's eyes twitched in irritation at the constant moaning and crying for help from the half-burnt bodies littered on the shore of the Iron Islands.

"Sectumsempra."

The dark-cutting curse cleaved through the neck of two Ironborn reavers. Their heads hit the floor, their bodies twitching on the sand with blood pooling around them, turning the white sands of the island into dark red.

“That’s better.” Harry muttered, enjoying the peace and quiet that prevailed in the wake of the death of the two pirate scum.

He watched the tides continue to crash into the shores, occasionally bringing planks of wood or even just dismembered bodies of his enemies.

“Such a waste.” Harry shook his head at all the death and destruction that was before him.

Harry had extended an olive branch out of the goodness of his heart, asking for the surrender of the Ironborn. He had used the sonorous charm to amplify his voice and promised to give them a second chance from his airship. When he gave the offer, the Ironborn responded by launching a scorpion bolt at him which was very rude. He thought he was teaching the Ironborn idiots a lesson when he had the entire ship consumed in fire, burning the crew alive in their precious ship. Apparently, the Ironborn were thick-headed morons who didn’t seem to have inherited survival instincts. The remaining Ironborn ships tried to attack him instead of surrendering, which just pissed him off.

That was a terrible move from the remaining Ironborn. He had their ships destroyed in quick order, and the survivors were summarily executed, except for the thralls and a few useful sailors. Harry set his eyes on the flying carpet that was coming towards his position after scouting around the wreckage of the ships. Harry had modified the initial set of enchantments to make the flying carpet into a small scouting vessel for some of his students to use. The problem was that only Anya could use the carpet effectively since she was the only one with the skill to use a power ring among his students properly.

He had a feeling Elsera Snow would also have that skill, but she had yet to properly control her outbursts of magic. She was clairvoyant when it came to magic, but her struggles remained in controlling the enormous magical power she was blessed with. Jon also had the potential capability to use magic to control the carpet, but Harry had not tested it out yet. After all, he had yet to give any proper training to Jon other than some reading material that explained some of the basic training exercises Jon could use.

The carpet hovered a few feet away from the sandy beach, allowing Anya and Kyla to walk out of the carpet.

“No more survivors?” Harry asked, looking at his two students who had mastered the special bows he had gifted them.

“None, my lord.” Anya replied, her black hair billowing behind her back, but that could not hide a few arrows missing in her quiver.

Harry didn’t comment on that, as he knew Anya despised the Ironborn with a passion. It’d take a genuinely insane person to like the Ironborn in general. The Ironborn were a leech to civilisation in the grand scheme of things. Their entire culture was poised to wage war on the basic concepts of a functioning society. From what he had learned, the Ironborn were little better than the Dothraki barbarians of Essos. The world won’t miss them if a few more wind up dead.

“Good. With most ships of the Iron Fleet destroyed, we can focus on the invasion of the Iron Islands. Have the word sent to the lords to assemble their men at Avalon. It’s time Pyke gets another visit from the men of the North.” said Harry.

“My lord. Look.” said Kyla, pointing to the distance where banners could be seen fast approaching them.

“It’s the Mormonts.” said Harry, noticing the bear banners carried along by the group.

Suddenly, Harry felt his magical senses feel a strong echo of magical power from the island. He turned his sights westward, where he could feel something calling out to him. As the group approached him, he felt the call of magic from the island become much sharper. The group of Mormont men came to a stop at a respectable distance and dismounted their horses. It was only when the leader of the group removed the helmet that Harry realised not all in the group were ‘men’.

“Lord Harrion. On behalf of House Mormont, I welcome you to our lands.” said Dacey Mormont, bowing at her waist.

“Lady Dacey.” Harry nodded at the heir of House Mormont, noting that the Dacey was wearing boiled leather armour with a green cloak around her shoulders.

“You’ve relieved us from the raids of the Iron Fleet, Lord Harrion. House Mormont would be honoured to host you and your people in our halls.”

Harry kept only an ear out for what Dacey Mormont was saying while most of his focus was on the echo of magical energy he was picking up. It was almost like a magical beacon without a map to pinpoint the location. It was frustrating not to know. He turned his focus on Dacey, who was looking expectantly at him.

“Yes. I’ll be happy to spend time with your family. I’ll also be in need of your ravens.” said Harry changing some of his plans on the dime.

Harry gathered he could just send ravens to hasten the preparations in Avalon. The Iron Islands were not going anywhere. He could afford to spend a few days in the Bear Islands to check out the magical energy signature he was picking up. The fact that the Mormonts were desperately trying to ingratiate themselves into his good graces should be a boon in tracking down the origin of this magical energy.

Strangely, he was finding a similarity between the magic he felt from the Bear Islands and that of Nymeria Sand. It was just a feeling, but often his feelings tended to be true. Thinking about Nymeria brought him thoughts about the war in the Westerlands.

‘I wonder whether Oberyn is close to getting his revenge for Elia Martell.’ Harry thought.

Oberyn Martell took a deep breath. There was a strange silence that hung in the air. The clouds were fast getting filled with dark clouds. He hoped the wind would carry away the rainclouds as rain would give the defenders of Lannisport an advantage.

Twelve days had passed since the siege began, and Oberynd had enjoyed every day, unlike some. The Lannisters were kind enough to send out sorties to destroy their siege engines, and he enjoyed cutting them down with great pleasure. While the siege engines of House Redwyne were important, the city would not fall with those tricks. The walls surrounding the city were too well-built to fall with siege engines and too high for ladders or siege towers to be effective. The best bet to make the city fall into their hands was deep mining. That was why he had the Dornish army focus on digging a tunnel southwest part of the city.

Unfortunately, the rocky terrain surrounding the city was proving to be a hindrance in quickly completing the tunnel before the Lannisters found out. Draining the last drips of Dornish red in his cup, Oberynd walked out of his tent with his spear in hand.

“My prince.”

“Lord Franklyn.” Oberynd nodded at the lord of Skyreach and a capable warrior.

Oberynd had given the command of the Dornish army that was fighting together with Paxter Redwyne and Baelor Hightower to Lord Franklyn Fowler. While Lord Fowler ensured the Dornish presence in the attempts made by the Reachmen to scale the walls of the city, Oberynd looked after the progress of the deep mining.

“Did Redwyne stop tire of the siege? I don’t see any significant movement from the Reachmen.” Oberynd commented, both of them walking towards the southern corner of their camp.

“Lord Redwyne has decided to use siege towers to make an attempt on the city walls. He is waiting to see whether it’ll rain today. It’d be a significant advantage for us if that were the case.” Lord Franklyn pointed out.

“Not so much of an advantage. Rainwater will flood our tunnel, hampering our efforts.” said Oberynd.

“That’s unfortunately true. How far along are we with the tunnel, my prince?” Lord Fowler asked.

“Not far enough. The ground is hard, filled with large rocks. It’ll take us maybe two or three weeks to finish the tunnel.” Oberynd said unhappily.

Oberynd felt a cold breeze pass through him, making him look at the sky. A small drop of water fell on his nose, making him frown at the sky.

‘The gods are cruel.’ Oberynd thought, looking at the sky with lugubrious eyes.

One drop became many in a matter of a few seconds, making Oberynd let out a curse. The warhorns from the Reachmen came a few minutes later, signalling the beginning of their attack.

“Go, Lord Franklyn. Good hunting.” said Oberynd.

Oberynd didn’t waste any moment and ordered the men to set up some supports inside the tunnel. He also ordered the men to retreat outside the tunnel if the rain persisted immediately and the tunnel caved in. To his displeasure, the rain showed no sign of stopping. In fact, it was strengthening, threatening the tunnel they had painstakingly dug over the last two weeks. He spent some time overseeing the men safely sent inside to mount support beams along the length of the tunnel.

“My Prince.”

Oberyn looked up from the work of his men to see Ser Ryon Alyrion approach him.

“Lord Redwyne has started the assault.”

“I want channels cut around our tunnels to lead the rainwater away from our tunnel as much as possible. Do it fast.” Oberyn ordered before taking his leave with Ser Ryon by his side.

When he found a good vantage point to look at the battle, he found three siege towers being moved against the city’s walls.

“The Reachmen are fortunate. The rain will keep the city garrison aiming properly with their siege engines. Their hot oil also won’t be as effective either.” Ser Ryon said excitedly as the siege towers drew closer towards the city’s walls.

“Do you think they’ll manage to breach...” Ser Ryon trailed off as horns blared from the other side.

Oberyn watched as the city’s defenders sent a sortie against the Reachmen.

“We’ll see soon enough, my friend. Soon enough.” said Oberyn, once the screams of men filled the air as they began killing each other in earnest.