**Chapter 27**

**The Siege of Wyl**

**King Daeron Targaryen**

Seen from the sky, the castle of House Wyl had seemed tiny, unimposing, and easy to conquer.

Of course, seen from the sky, he had a dragon and everything seemed tiny and fragile save maybe Casterly Rock and Storm’s End.

As much as he didn’t like to admit it in front of his Lords, advisors and captains, Daeron knew a great part of his successful raid was due to the fact he had caught the defenders of the Wyl harbour and the surrounding lands with their breeches down and their weapons rusting. Yes, it had been a happy surprise. The idiots had declared war but somehow were convinced their peace activities and defences were good for times of war. But no matter how stupidity they showed in the opening moves of the war, Daeron had known it wasn’t going to last. The Dornish waves of soldiers had certainly been inexperienced, boisterous, uneducated where war affairs were at stake and perfidious in the extreme, but even they could learn with the hammering they had taken.

Daeron knew in his heart and in his head he could have burned down Wyl a couple of moons ago. He had not tried to do so, obviously. As much as his victory seemed certain, the young King believed Queen Rhaenys must have entertained similar thoughts before her attack on the Hellholt. But there was a major difference.

At the time of her death, the sister-wife of the Conqueror had a dragonrider husband and a dragonrider wife to avenge her. Daeron had no one. Oh he had two sons now from Arianne. As such his line was rather secure. Or it would be secure, if the moment he died, the Blacks wouldn’t begin a new war and with no Green dragon to defend his lands, the result would likely be an unmitigated disaster.

His refusal to attack Wyl had effects he had not foreseen, unfortunately. Some of his captains and men had taken to call him when he was not present ‘Daeron the Prudent’. Farewell ‘Daeron the Brave’ or ‘Daeron the Daring’, they were calling him prudent and a few were muttering ruder and insulting words when no loyal man could hear them.

Sometimes these remarks depressed him. Had the war against the Blacks told them nothing?

Yes, he had been daring on the first battles he had fought. But there was a difference between a third son devastating his enemies when they couldn’t retaliate and a King against a fortress.

And really, it didn’t matter anymore. Attacking Wyl two moons ago would have been audacious, yes, and carried a slight risk. Attacking the walls with dragonfire now was an excellent manner to get Tessarion and himself killed.

“I see our good friend the Lord of Wyl has prepared a warm reception for us, Lord Royce,” his Master of Laws and senior commander in the Marches had arrived yesterday like him. Nightsong was far from the Boneway, and not many good roads linked the different forts of the Stormlords.

“Yes your Grace, he did...a suspicious soul would say he’s challenging you to lead your dragon against the defences.”

Daeron snorted as the eastern wind grew stronger in the morning, removing whatever order he had imposed on his silver hairs.

“I think we can admit between us that’s exactly what he has in mind. Clearly if he manages to kill a dragon, his failures and disastrous strategy will look a lot better when the time will come to send a raven to his liege.”

This enthusiasm was easily explained by the three ballista and the four scorpions he could see from his observation point, and they were not in an advanced position. It did not take an Archmaester to know they had to be siege engines on every side of the Wyl fort ready to shoot bolts and destructive projectiles the moment his Blue Queen moved into attack position.

“Agreed your Grace...I suppose we will just have to starve him first.” The Lord of Nightsong watched the lair of their enemies with non-disguised satisfaction.

“It’s not like it is going to be difficult.” The Green King replied with humour. Several knights and squires behind them chuckled or made sounds of approval.

Lord Belial Wyl was not going to be remembered as a particularly competent war commander, in his humble opinion. The Dornish murderer had totally neglected the little issue of protecting his convoys and supply lines during the first days of bloodshed, and that allowed him to torch hundreds of chariots and an uncountable quantity of food, weapons and equipment.

It was only after his retreat from Blackhaven that he had really begun to consider what it meant for his castle and his lands as a whole.

The result was under his eye, and was a testimony how ruthless the snake-lover and torturer of prisoners could be. Everything Tessarion had missed or been commanded not to burn, Belial Wyl had razed it and in the process he had confiscated for his castle most of the food and water reserves.

And since travelling southwards through the Boneway was far too long and would only hamper the Dornish war effort around Yronwood, the madman had taken a step further and expelled his own smallfolk, throwing them directly on the path of his army and creating a huge mess.

“We are going to send the smallfolk to the Northern Marshes of the Reach and the southern Westerlands,” Daeron told his elderly bannersman. “These regions are in need of resettlement, and the populations which have survived the Dance and the Iron Fever will have fewer complaints about living next door with former smallfolk of Lord Wyl.”

At least some good would come out of this war.

“The Princess of Dorne and the other Lords of the desert are not going to be happy when they will hear of this.”

“I don’t think I care a lot about their happiness and feeling, Lord Caron.” The Blacks and all the other potential enemies had apparently declined to come out of their houses and challenge him for the Iron Throne, but the Dornish invasion could have easily began a second great war in less than a decade. Add this to the cost of raising troops and keeping them in campaign, and most of the attitude his bannersmen felt towards Sunspear and the desert-dwellers had been destroyed.

And for what? A few castles in the Marches that had never been theirs in the first place?

It was madness, and it was time Wyl and consorts paid for it.

“I will leave you six thousand men to make sure there are no sally and no reinforcement attempt. Twenty ships will patrol the Sea of Dorne to sink smugglers and reinforcements. Every trebuchet and siege engine we can transport by land while keeping Nightsong and Blackhaven strong is on its way.”

“Wyl will fall,” Royce Caron promised. “This I swear my King, on the honour of my House.”

“I will hold you to your word. That Lord Belial Wyl continues to dirty this land with his foul breath is something to be rectified as soon as humanly possible...”

**Princess Aliandra Martell**

It had been two moons, six days and a few turn of hourglasses since Lord Wyl and his charming and loyal allies had killed the border patrols of the Marcher Lords and invaded the realm of the Green Targaryens.

Aliandra wanted to believe that if all of the warmongers were in her room today, they would change their opinion about how necessary the war they had started truly was. It was possible they would apologise and offer excuses for their atrocious conduct. She was not going to watch the horizon and do nothing until that legendary day arrived.

“I do not like the tone of the Targaryen’s message, Uncle.” The young Princess said after throwing the offending piece of parchment on the desk she had forced servants to drag from Sunspear to Yronwood.

“Your realm invaded his, Niece.” Lord Manfrey Gargalen retorted sardonically. “He was not going to send you flowers and ask for a betrothal of your children.”

This was assuredly something to keep in mind, but Aliandra still didn’t like the phrasing King Daeron Targaryen had used to formulate his demands.

The courtesy formulas were there, of course. The traditional greetings and her titles had been written too.

But there was an undertone that felt like a slap on her face. It made her skin crawl and Aliandra could almost compare the veiled insult to the ones adults reserved to their disobedient children.

She and Dorne were in the wrong. It was her inability to rein in her aggressive bannersmen which was the cause of this war. But the words of the dragonlord were adding more wounds to the list of injuries.

“I am almost of the mind to refuse his terms,” Aliandra admitted. “I want to see Lord Wyl dead and his corpse devoured by the black vipers which are the only friends of his family, and I certainly won’t share many tears for the loss of his lands. They never contributed much to the treasury, and now that they’ve been ravaged by one dragon, two armies and Lord Wyl himself, they won’t earn me more gold and silver.”

“We won’t be able to improve our hand in the negotiations,” the Lord of Salt Shore reminded her. “If there is a company of sellswords or of men-at-arms still raiding in the Marches and north of it, I have no idea where it is. The Boneway and the Prince’s Pass are abandoned to our enemies, and to conquer them again, we will have to kill and defeat hundreds of troops in well-defended passes, and our infantry will have to do it in half the time it takes to call a dragon from its pit. Wyl must be under siege by now, and we aren’t able to organise a relief column...because the dragon prevents that too.”

If there was any justice in this world, Lord Belial Wyl would be here to answer his acts and Aliandra would have orders her spearmen to open his belly and let snakes feed on his insides. Not that the punishment the Marcher Lords were going to give him promised to be an easy death, but the Wyl of Wyl was going to escape the traditional judgement House Martell reserved to its most treacherous bannersmen.

“Wyl is a lost cause, yes. And not just because he’s encircled by an army outnumbering his last loyal soldiers three to one. He must have filled his larders and granary with the convoys he received at the beginning of the war, but now he’s a dagger pointed at whoever is the closest to him. His honourless deeds, his raids, and his ‘evacuations’ have made sure all our smallfolk are going to look nervously at us, because if one Lord can treat them like they are scarabs to be trampled upon, the rest of the Dornish knights and nobility can too.”

Thanks the Seven, the self-proclaimed ‘peerless strategist’ had not successfully breached the Marches’ fortresses and attacked the Reach farms and large plains. If he did, the Stormlanders, Reachers and Westerners would be busy burning their shores, mustering new armies and descending the passes with murder in their eyes.

“But the first proposal is way above what I want to accept. I can accept modifying the frontier and ceding Wyl and its surrounding lands. The Father Above knows this might lessen tensions and decrease the opportunities of our warmongers to provoke a new war this decade. However, King Daeron wants also us to recognise our guilt in beginning this war, and in the ‘us’ he clearly demands House Martell by name.”

“This is going to be...politically difficult.” And if it wasn’t an understatement of godly proportions, nothing was. “Anything else particularly outrageous?”

“We would have to destroy several watch towers belonging to Lord Fowler.” The towers in question were still garrisoned by Dornish soldiers belonging to the hawk and controlled the middle of the Prince’s Pass. “We would need to pay a sum of two hundred thousand gold dragons or its equivalent. Several of our harbours per the Iron Throne’s would have to accept anti-piracy patrols from the Greens in their docks. Our salt traders, in other words you, dear Uncle, would have to send five ships to King’s Landing per year and the price per pound would be fixed by the Master of Coin.”

The eyes of the Gargalen narrowed threateningly.

“And last but not least, should a war come between the Blacks and the Greens, we would need to stay ‘neutral’...by sending a force of five thousand ‘sellswords’ against the false-crown of Stone Hedge.”

Aliandra accepted the first proposals were always largely over what emissaries and Kings hoped to obtain, but even by these standards, it was far too much. Dorne’s army was still on the field, not a major fortress had yet fallen to the Targaryens, and the shock of waging a war in early spring must have hurt the Greens as much as Dorne.

“We will have to find ways to make the Green King...reconsider his terms...”

**Ser Endrew Selmy**

This war was horrible.

To begin with, knights were about as useful as armour on a donkey. Endrew had lost the number of times he was forced to leave his horse behind to participate in an ambush, and if he heard the words ‘goat path’ more than once per day after this war, he was going to break a few wooden swords in anger.

That was fine for him at first. The Selmy knight hadn’t liked going to war in the first place, and he liked it even less these days. As hundreds of knights tended to die in glorious cavalry charges, the less of them there were the better by the Warrior.

But the weather was deeply unpleasant for men ensconced in heavy armour. There was a lot of rain every three days, which made the camps and the terrain unpleasantly wet, and then the warmth came back, a dry and suffocating south wind bringing the climate of the desert to their faces.

Despite the efforts of the maesters and the healers, the siege camps around Wyl were filled with sick warriors, and every night camp followers and soldiers alike fought a hopeless struggle against mosquitoes and the bloodsucking insects of the Marches. And when those were dealt with, the prudence recommended to keep an eye open for the snakes and the scorpions which hid under rocks and barrels during the day.

This was not any kind of war the soldiers had fought in the last decades. Discontent was spreading in the ranks. Many Reachers arrived after the first moon were whispering it was a ‘dragonless’ war, ignoring the fact it was a dragon which had broken the supply lines of the Dornish.

It didn’t change the reality, unfortunately, that Endrew dearly wished to return home. The messages he had sent to Lord Larys Strong had not been answered, nor were the short reports he had delivered to older agents of the Master of Whisperers.

Little gold and glory had been found in this war. Ransoms could not be delivered when every side was killing its prisoners – the Dornish tortured the poor souls that had the bad luck to fall into their bastard’s hands, and they had returned the favour by slitting the throat of every Dornish they found.

“I have heard rumours this war is soon going to be over,” a Crownlander knight spoke with a heavy accent which said the man had spent years on the other side of the Narrow Sea before returning to Westeros. “There are ravens exchanged between Stonehelm and Yronwood.”

“I don’t know,” a Stormlander in Connington colours answered while watching a massive stone being prepared on a catapult. The knight shrugged when the man sworn to King’s Landing sent him a black eye. “Oh, our King and some Dornish may exchange some ravens and talk about peace, but our presence here means that whatever these sand-dwelling bastards and what our King wants are two very different things.”

“TREBUCHETS AND CATAPULTS!”

Four large red flags were lowered in roughly the same heartbeat, and five trebuchets and three catapults threw their massive projectiles against the fortress of Wyl. One went too low, as the escarpment the Dornish outer wall was tall and the servants of the catapult had judged badly the trajectories required, but the other found their marks, and stone and wood cracked and fell in the distance.

This was not the only sign the siege engines had found their marks. An army was noisy and loud, but even then the screams coming from Wyl told them the defenders had not enjoyed this stone ‘gift’.

“It is going to take a long time to bring down these walls,” a young Reacher affirmed, one who by his looks should have stayed at home waiting to have a beard before pestering his master for knighthood. “We shouldn’t wait that long. There is no glory and no honour crushing a man under rocks.”

Endrew scoffed loudly.

“By all means, boy. Go tell Lord Caron you disagree with the King’s commands.”

The boy reddened and blustered.

“We have more than three times the number of men inside Wyl!”

“And do you think the bastards in command of the other side care about something like honour?” the Selmy knight spat on the ground. “I saw some of my own men be gutted and slaughtered while they had their hands and rainbow banners in mercy. If we try to storm this fortress today, poison and the scorpions on top of the dungeon are going to shred us and make us regret to have come into this world.”

The Reacher boy spluttered in indignation before abandoning the position and most likely returning to his tent.

“You shouldn’t have done this, Endrew. Now he’s going to return home and complain to his father.”

“If he leaves before the siege is over, it will be desertion, no matter what his parents are going to pay the bards and the maesters to proclaim. I’m more worried about dying from the pox or one of the nasty things we have in the camp.”

And desertion was also beginning to be a problem, especially among young and green knights who had never seen a siege or a battlefield with their own eyes.

Behind his helmet, Endrew Selmy sighed. This war not the one the Iron Throne wanted, the men-at-arms and the knights were not prepared for it, and they had to finish it quickly, before the first signs of summer arrived and they all cooked in their armour...

**Lord Belial Wyl**

“What do you mean we have no more meat to eat?” You said to me yesterday we had three pigs, a dozen chickens and one goat in the larder!”

If he had a whip in his hand at this instant, Belial would have struck the quartermaster directly on the nose and taught him a painful lesson for his incompetence.

Too bad, he hadn’t, but that didn’t stop him from seizing his servant by the arm and he was able to stare at him directly in his brown eyes.

“Where are our supplies?”

“The ceiling...Lord...the ceiling...collapsed...”

“Ridiculous!”

But a few heartbeats later, the time for him to run down the stairs of the Eastern Tower, he had to acknowledge the quartermaster hadn’t been wrong. The ceiling had indeed collapsed...burying everything nearby in a cloud of dust and a hill of debris. At least Belial imagined it was like that. It was impossible to go to the end of the corridor and his eyes were not good enough to pierce whatever was behind the greyish suffocating air.

“I want a complete inventory of what we have left!” He roared to his quartermaster. Internally, he knew he shouldn’t roar like this, but for the first time he was feeling dread. The top of his dungeon was by a large margin the tallest observation point of this part of the Marches, and his sentinels had not seen the shadow of a horse detachment in the mountains or a sloop at sea. And without reinforcements, there was no way to replenish what had just been lost. His men were going to dig out the debris and save what they could in the larder, but not many could be used until the sun set and the trebuchets and other siege weapons ceased their hellishly effective stone volleys.

“My Lord, Ser Xor sent me to tell you the archers are trying to climb the slopes with fire arrows....”

Belial felt his heart burn in hate and loathing. Was there something that could turn right in this war?

“Tell Ser Xor I am going to return to the walls as soon as I have fully ascertained the damage here,” The Lord of Wyl told the messenger. “I am confident he will be able to slay the enemy’s archers or force them to retreat with his two scorpions.”

The Stormlanders had longbows outranging the curved bows of his archers, but behind stone and mortar, this was no contest. And in this duel, he had no sizeable drawback. Yes, his men could not easily recover their arrows, but the same was true of the greenish northerners. And unlike they, two-thirds of the forces under his command had been trained in the use of several poisons, be it the common viper ones or the agonising scorpion and sand viper concoctions.

“We will need to decrease our rations in consequence,” and by this he meant his servants and sworn swords were going to decrease their rations in consequence. He was the Wyl of Wyl, and thus indispensable to the continuity of the Dornish domination of the region. Two of his cousins had perished in the retreat, the former Prince had executed many of his line so in every way Sunspear, Godsgrace and the other key citadels of Dorne could not afford to let him perish at the hands of the dragon-loves.

Besides, who else would command the loyalty of all the smallfolk the Marchers usurpers had spirited away? No, the Princess bitch would have no choice but to come to his rescue. If she tried to do anything else, she would be up to her neck in rebellion until she died in her bed.

The image of the female on her knees when facing all her bannersmen brought him a tired smile...until the servants who had managed to remove enough debris to reach the door of the larder came back with sinister expressions.

“The door is broken, my Lord, and most of it has been buried under the stone and the dust. I will need two scores of men immediately...”

“You will have them.” The archers were a nuisance, but saving the meat and the supplies was more important...

But when he emerged under the sun, it was to see the courtyard in flames.

“My Lord! The archers and the catapults are sending flame projectiles!”

This time, Lord Belial Wyl could not stop himself from breaking the nose of this imbecile of messenger.

“Instead of wasting my time, take a basin, fill it with water and stop everything from burning! Are you a man or a sheep?”

CCCCRRRRAAAACCCK!

A huge boulder had half-bounced, half-slammed against the walls of his dungeons, and the highborn commander froze as he saw large fissures widening and expanding under his gaze.

“This is impossible...this ancient holdfast was rebuilt to withstand dragons...surely nothing else can break my...”

The next trebuchet shot unleashed a rain of stone and less recognisable debris.

Belial Wyl cursed the Heavens and the Hells. He shouted to the skies, vociferated insults against the Marchers, the dragon-lovers, this bitch of a Martell Princess, and Westeros as a whole.

This was not possible. He was the Wyl of Wyl, the legitimate Master of the Marches. The blood of the Ancients ran in his veins.

His fortress was not going to break after a mere five days of siege engine’s assault.

It would not!

**Ser Lucas Wode**

Lucas vomited the contents of his stomach for the third time today into Ironman’s Bay.

This was not his first time aboard a ship. Twice already he had been aboard a carrack of the Vale to cross the Narrow Sea. But each time, the Father and the Crone had blessed their travel and the weather had been, if not completely windless and with a supporting breeze, at least devoid of storms, icy gales and monstrous waves.

Alas, it was nicely describing the conditions surrounding him today. The sky was this shade of colour bards and artists always debated if it was a dark grey or a lighter black. The wind was so strong and so devastating the sails were to his eyes fighting the enraged fury of the storm to remain intact. The air and the waves were incredibly cold. Lucas had heard some of the sailors joking that a man thrown into this dark sea would freeze before being wet. He was not sure they were wrong.

Yes, it was a fine time to die at sea, and if someone told him it was spring before the meagre light of the day succumbed to the night, the Riverlander would have told the man he was a liar. Ironman’s Bay was looking like a cursed haven these days, leagues of water the Gods had forsaken long ago.

His stomach being well and truly empty at this point, the knight returned by the captain’s side, wondering if coming there had not been the greatest mistake of his life. The weather was worse than during the winter moons he had survived in the Vale hills, and the island ahead of them was emerging like a horrifying creature from the mists.

Reason and the near-empty purse he had tied to his belt reminded him rather pointedly why he was here. Lucas needed money. Money and lands. In a fair world, he may have had them now that his father had lost a leg and was unable to ride to war or across their lands.

To be fair to his father, Lucas had received the armour, the shield and the horse he wanted at the end of his squire years and Ser Jason Redlance knighted him. That and a few silver coins had seemed a nice gift when he had been joyous from the victory over a score of bandits. But with the old man weakening day after day, he had hoped for the confirmation he would succeed him as the Wode Knight.

“And it’s a confirmation which never came...” The native of the Riverlands grumbled.

In his better days, Lucas acknowledged he may have listened to a bit to the ramblings of Ser Jason and closed his mouth in the presence of some Lords. Times were changing. The Black Kingdom was not the Seven Realms the Conqueror had forged and united with the Iron Throne. House Wode had become unexpectedly the chief bannersman of House Butterwell on the shores of the God’s Eye. And most important of all, suddenly women were not considered out of the succession from the start.

“She played her game too well,” Lucas admitted to the winds and the waves, where three greater ships, including the *Sea Eagle*, were sailing together.

Lucas had been so confident, so certain of his triumph he had gone to the Vale with his friends without a glance back. And when he had returned, it had been over.

House Wode had gone from tiny and insignificant Knightly House to mid-rank Masterly House. His fighting skills had not impressed the court so much as his absence of good ruling – or of governance of any sort. His father had abdicated and his older sister Zoe had become Mistress Zoe of House Wode, by the Grace of the Seven the authority of the Black Crown.

He had been given fifty silver Stags and told to place himself under the authority of the Hand for more special tasks. And it apparently involved sailing to a part of the former Seven Kingdoms most civilised folks loved to forget.

The name was the Iron Islands. Lucas not sure which choice between the black and this godforsaken place was the worse one.

“Come on, land-dweller! It’s time to justify your knighthood!” The second of the ship – which for some reason escaping him had been named the *Lovely Bertha* – called him, and for an uncountable amount of time and tasks, Lucas Wode asked for his legs and his arms to do things he would have rather avoided or sent a squire to do in his stead. But he had no squire. And his insignificant position aboard the ship would last as long as there wasn’t an obedience refusal or the sailors had a reason to complain about him. He had to fill his purse if he wanted to have a nice bed and a reputation in the Riverlands at their return, and he wouldn’t get them if he angered the Seagard captains or the envoys of the Hand.

And as much as some of the other ‘land-dwellers’ were eager to leave the ship and come ashore, Lucas had already known in his guts what the sailors whispered; this island was perhaps a good place to build a fisherman’s harbour and build a nice sea-faring family, but at the moment they were preparing to debark goods, tents and tools, it was absolutely desert.

No, it was desert and creating a sort of dark aura. The ruins of what must have been a splendid castle a decade ago – Grey Garden or something like that – must have commanded the bay, but there was nothing living anymore there, or at least no humans were visible.

Despite the best efforts of all involved, loading the small boats with men and supplies was some complicated task he understood maybe a tenth of it, and when he set foot on the islands the Ironborn had called Harlaw before receiving a dragon’s punishment, there was no relief, just exhaustion.

But he, as much as everyone else, heard the clear voice of the Master of Ships, Lord Alyn Velaryon, proclaiming words few men had uttered in the last one hundred and thirty years.

“By the authority of Her Grace Queen Baela Targaryen, Sovereign of the Kingdoms of the Vale, the Riverlands and the North, Queen of the Andals and the First Men, Protector of the Realm, Defender of the Faith, True Lady of the Seven Kingdoms, Dragonrider of Moondancer, and Lady of Stone Hedge, I, Lord Alyn Velaryon claim this island and the surrounding waters and declare them part of the Black Kingdom under the name of Westmark Island. If someone desires challenge the claim of Her Grace, raise your voice or stand forever silent.”

Naturally, no one spoke against it...and once enough time had been spent to fill with sand three or four hourglasses, small cheers echoed on the desolate beach as the dragon flag was unfurled and stood proudly in the violent wind.

**King Daeron Targaryen**

It was good, Daeron confessed to himself, that he had never intended to make Wyl a major bastion of the new Stormlands Marches of his realm.

As the sun brought light and warmth to the mountainous region, the castle was presenting a tapestry of complete destruction. The outer walls and the dungeons had collapsed, most of them in a complete manner. There was a lot of smoke from what had certainly been the archer tower on the great escarpment. There were corpses everywhere.

And naturally, wherever there was a massacre or two, the crows were there, feasting on humans, no matter how many arrows his archers tried shot at them.

“They tried a counter-charge when we advanced towards the large breach created by our trebuchets,” Royce Caron informed him in a grim manner. “Since we had ten times their archers and plate armour against steel of poor quality, it didn’t last long. There were no prisoners.”

Daeron didn’t wince. Twice Lord Wyl had been provided an opportunity of surrender by a herald; twice he had refused. And given how the Stormlanders felt about the Wyl of Wyl and his chief torturers, what his infantry had done to the Dornish was not a surprise.

No, if anything what Daeron was bothered about was the absence of regret he was feeling in his heart.

Wyl was not the first castle he saw that had been stormed by an army, though he prayed it would be the last for many, many years.

Arguably, the bards, the maesters and the flatterers would tell Lord Wyl had reaped what he had sown. And they wouldn’t be wrong.

But as the last King to sit on the Iron Throne of Aegon the First, Daeron considered the entire affair a monumental waste of lives, gold and energy. And the extinction of the Wyl line was another painful reminder that yes, Noble Houses could and would die if one committed too many mistakes at court or at war.

“Wyl will not be rebuilt.” He told his Master of Laws.

“I can’t say I’m sorry to hear it, your Grace.” The Marcher Lord replied. “I suppose we will have to build a few watchtowers for the new frontier.”

“Yes, one for each defendable pass ceded by Sunspear.”

The crows continued their disgusting feast less than half a league away.

“It’s...there’s a small chance this is a trap, your Grace.”

Daeron chuckled.

“I thought the same thing, to be the truth. They launch a war for reasons we don’t understand, their Lords are complete morons and couldn’t find the edge of their swords even if they were impaled on it...and after a couple of moons they declare their willingness to make peace with rather generous conditions.”

No matter that he hadn’t received the hostages and the salt and the gold in the quantities he asked for, the whole war reeked like a trap filled with excrements and snakes.

“If the realm I rule was extending from the Wall to the Marches, I would have tried to make these negotiations more difficult. In the current circumstances, I dare not.”

“The Blacks.”

“The Blacks,” the dragonlord repeated with a sour expression. “We have lost men, gold and precious moons of harvest. I do not think the Northerners will attack us this year, but we don’t know how long this period of peace will last, and as long as we’re at war, they’re growing stronger and we...we are getting weaker.”

The Lord of Nightsong nodded.

“Still...the loss of Wyl will give us a longer and more advantageous shield against any Dornish incursion in the future. They will hesitate twice before trying again...”

“I do not find this exactly reassuring.” The young King gritted his teeth. “I’m sure they hesitated seven times during winter, but they all jumped on their war horses the moment spring was announced all the same...”

Moreover, this conflict had pretty much poisoned the relationships between Dorne and the Stormlands-Reach for a few more generations. The marriages his Council had advised between highborn and merchant families were as useful as the skull of Vhagar now. Until the end of his reign, he was going to have to garrison the Marches because this season had proved the Dornish couldn’t be trusted.

This war had been a victory...and this wine of triumph was definitely something he already regretted enjoy drinking.

“My only consolation is the fact a defeat would have been worse...”

**Author’s note**: And so the Dornish war ends...and the reconquest of the Iron Island can begin!

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