**War of the Ten Warlords**

**Chapter 6**

**Death to the False King**

*Several battle-cries are old. ‘Death to the False King’ is one of them.*

*In 296AAC, several maesters closely affiliated to the Targaryen regime presented in the Red Keep their huge illustrated book Loyalty to the Iron Throne to the then Prince Viserys Targaryen. Under the praises and the revisionist writing, the authors affirmed the infamous war cry originated from the First Blackfyre Rebellion and was shouted spontaneously by Crown soldiers charging the rebels of Daemon Blackfyre at the Battle of Redgrass Field.*

*Like many things written in this book, it was a monumental lie.*

*The original battle-cry had been shouted the first time by the Faith Militant when Maegor the Cruel burned the first Great Sept of King’s Landing. Yes, ‘Death to the False King’ was originally one of the most virulent anti-Targaryen rally calls. And one might argue it was one which caused plenty of trouble to the rider of the Black Dread. A dragonlord has one of the most dangerous weapons known to Mankind able to unleash dragonfire on its enemies, but he needs some people underneath him to rule. If no one toils the fields anymore, if the planets burn, if the armies go into rebellion as their pay fail to come into their pockets, even the Black Dread can’t and won’t save you into the end.*

*Maegor learned a bit too late this painful lesson and lost his crown.*

*Jaehaerys I succeeded him and this should have been the end of it. Aenys had been weak and indecisive. Maegor had been cruel and ignorant. Between them, the two brothers, the very blood of the Conqueror, had showed every trait making a king unfit for the Iron Throne.*

*With Jaehaerys the Conciliator, the Targaryen had the portrait of a monarch, who while not perfect, could listen to his subjects and make reasonable decisions concerning the realm. The era of madness and rebellion was going to pass away from memories.*

*Then Viserys I ascended to the Throne and the seeds of the Dance were sown across the realm. Rhaenyra and her half-brother Aegon plunged the Seven Sectors into one of the greatest wars – civil or external – Westeros and Essos had ever seen. And once again the calls were shouted by smallfolk and highborn alike.*

*Death to the False King.*

*Death to the False Queen.*

*Perhaps it would have stopped there. If the Targaryen had been able to remember the perils of the past, they certainly would have.*

*But they didn’t. Aegon the Unworthy poisoned forever the waters of peace when he legitimised all his bastards on his death bed, and the result was civil war and brother against brother once again. The Blackfyre Rebellions would set the realm aflame, and that no side could unleash dragons anymore was a meagre consolation. Both sides would claim unavoidably their sovereign was the legitimate one, and of course the other was the ‘False King’, the false-born and treacherous candidate having no rights to sit on the Iron Throne.*

*The Blackfyres never managed to conquer Westeros and for a time from Winterfell to Sunspear the billions of Westerosi felt a long era of peace would last centuries.*

*But the problem was still there. The madness continued to lurk in the hearts of the Targaryens, and under Aerys II it finally exploded.*

*The calls were different for this rebellion, though. The coalition of the North, Vale, Storm and River demanded death for all adult Targaryens. The Iron Throne replied by giving the nickname of Usurper to Robert Baratheon.*

*And for a few years the Targaryens seemed vindicated. They found in Balon Greyjoy a new ‘False King’ to crush militarily and thereby prove their moral and physical superiority.*

*But nothing can last forever. The military, while outwardly impressive, was a Behemoth with feet of clay. The Lords were vicious predators prompt to turn on each other for favours, money or warships. The economy was bleeding gold and steel while the pockets of the lower classes were emptied. The merchant classes had to endure more and more taxes.*

*And the King was a madman.*

*The time was right for a new candidate to step in. It was time for a silver-haired Prince to rebel against the madness of the Lord of the Seven Sectors. It was time to repair the errors of the last two decades, and once more raise the torch of justice and prosperity.*

*Death to the False King Rhaegar Targaryen, and may his successor heal the wounds of Westeros.*

*It was an enticing dream.*

*It never happened.*

*This was no longer a game where there were two factions. In his rash prophetic-obsessed actions, Rhaegar Targaryen had done worse than Aegon the Unworthy: he had given many of his great bannersmen claimants to the Iron Throne. Lannister, Martell, Hightower and Stark had all blood-ties to the Targaryen dynasty now...and a few million good reasons to raise their flags in rebellion.*

*And in these troubled times, where was the legitimacy? Having or not the Conqueror’s Blood in your veins was not what it mattered. It was the number of Lords, armies and fleets willing to follow you into the inferno of the War of the Ten Warlords.*

*From the Harvest Graveyard to the radioactive ruins of Fawnton, from the banners of the Black Dragon at Gulltown to the nightmares of the Iron Sector, the war cry came, irresistible and dark.*

*Death to the False Kings. Death to the Targaryens. Death to the Mad Dragons.*

Extract from the *Era of Warlords*, by Bran Manderly, 370AAC.

**Davos Seaworth, 26.09.300AAC, The Twins System**

“Lord Mallister, welcome to the Twins,” Davos politely began after a formal military salute.

“Thank you, Admiral Seaworth,” replied the Lord of Seagard. “It is a moment that we have awaited for a long time.”

And for plenty of legitimate reasons, Davos was sure, as the thousands of Northerners and Riverlanders walked in a disciplined formation across the tourist bays of the orbital station *Walder the Great*.

The view was spectacular, especially after all these months spent watching recording and low-resolution holographic images of Westerosi star systems. Northern warships had excellent reasons to forbid any reinforced glass alloy and burying their command bridges deep inside a durasteel hull, but it didn’t change the fact you were often missing the beauty of the universe.

Today this was not the case. Below their feet, Bridge’s Edge was an orb of white, blue and green shining under the sun of Twin A.

More than seventeen years after the battle won by Lord Bolton, the Northern navy was now once again undisputed master of the Twins System.

“I understand the losses have been minimal so far,” Lord Jason Mallister commented, his austere face giving him a resemblance with one of those sea eagles his House was enjoying training.

“They have been under our most optimistic previsions,” the former smuggler agreed. “The Sixth Fleet of the River Sector – which as we all know was mostly the Freys and their bannersmen – tried to fight us but we caught them while they were still in complete redeployment. Their fleet was divided into three formations and their land regiments had no time to build adequate bunkers or anything like that. They lost four ships of the line, three armoured cruisers and six battlecruisers in the affair, and after five hours of battle, the Haigh’s Fort Garrison understood there was nothing they could do to inconvenience us.”

And if he was going to be honest, even Davos and his senior commanders had been astonished by the magnitude of their victory. Yes, they had known the new missiles and the years-long training, the new doctrines, the long-range shattering impact of the new armoured cruisers and all the new toys were supposed to give them an edge over the River Navy and all their enemies in the South.

They had still been staring with their mouths wide open at the sheer massacre the Battle of the Haigh’s Fort had been. Some of his officers had even manifested a sort of guilt...his flag lieutenant had compared it at sending newborn chicks against the direwolves.

“It was not a complete success, of course,” Davos commented for the assistance more than for Lord Jason Mallister. “Lord Charlton and Lord Vypren’s ships of the line were far enough to avoid entering our missile range and they had the mental...flexibility in them to get out of the system with their fleet’s remnant before we forced them to surrender. Still, overall the main goal was achieved: we took the Haigh’s Fort...and the Night’s Watch had plenty of new recruits.”

Hundreds of grins and satisfied smiles appeared on the visage of the Stark and Mallister spacemen. Davos, with the authorisation of his liege and their allies, had been vocal months before this war started the women and the men under their command had to know the real war fought by the rest of the Northern military was the one which mattered. Yes, crushing the supporters of whatever dragon the local River Lords supported was not to be neglected, but the Great Enemy was massing its forces against the Wall, it was not sitting at King’s Landing.

As such the eleven million men who had decided swearing the rest of their life to the black was preferable to the fate the Northern cannons had in fate for them were a very welcome addition. And they would soon be joined by several millions more from the Twins, Erenford, Charlton and Vypren Systems.

“Lord Charlton died in this very system, I’m told,” the River Lord said as new windows gave them the view of the assembled fleet around the former Frey planet.

“Yes, his Pride of Charlton and the most damaged units of his Sixth Fleet mounted a jump point system to slow us down while the rest of their intact units withdrew to Vypren.”

And unfortunately from his point of view, it had worked. Jason Mallister had had to reduce to debris the Erenford defences while Davos and Twelfth Fleet won at the Haigh’s Fort. As a consequence, by the time the Northern and River squadrons had operated their junction, the surviving Charlton-Vypren coalition had been too far away to hunt down.

“Charlton will not prove too difficult to breach, but Vypren will certainly be another story,” the Master of Seagard declared.

“This is why you sent one ship of the line and two armoured cruisers to Fairmarket, my Lord.”

“True and I suppose I’m a bit greedy right now,” the smile was almost apologetic. Almost. “That said, whether Vypren sees reason before we are able to dictate him our terms with our batteries pointed at his chief citadel or not, the real challenge will begin at Shawney and Wayn’s Fort.”

“Indeed,” these two Lords, by most recent reports, had declared for King Viserys Targaryen, expelled the foreign merchants and executed most of the agents they had been able to discover. Consequently, neither Davos nor any of their allies had a good idea what they were doing, but there was not a high chance he was going to enjoy their preparations if they were given the time to fortify properly their home systems. “And we need to defeat them if we want to secure the stars west of the Green Rift.”

This was not a strategy Davos completely agreed with, he would have preferred beginning east and link with the Vale, but political considerations and the need to take Riverrun and block the Lannisters before they had the time to spread into the River Sector had taken priority above else.

“What about House Frey as a whole? Are they going to cause us further problems Admiral?” asked the chief of staff of Lord Mallister.

“I would be tempted to say no, Captain,” Davos replied levelly. “On the other hand, I’m sure Lord Stark thought the same thing when he killed the treacherous Lord Walder and dozens of Freys seventeen years ago. They have taken terrible losses and I’ve already confirmations we exterminated eight secondary branches, but the Freys are breeding faster than rabbits.”

How Lord Walder had possibly thought it was going to be a good idea to have so many family when the succession issues appeared on the horizon, he had not the slightest clue, but it made them a pain to find them all and make sure they were no longer a problem.

“We killed Lord Emmon, his sons and his grandsons in the previous battle at the Haigh’s Fort. We also removed Alesander, Merrett, Lothar, Jammos, Whalen, Hoster, six Walder and two Rhaegar Frey from the rolls of nobility. That accounts for Emmon’s line and we got more sons and grandsons of his brothers here. We also captured Genna Frey born Lannister, Tywin’s only sister and on this planet there are a few more daughters and wives which will be sent to Silent Sister’s septs.”

“The weasels married in the Goodbrook, Vypren, and Paege Houses in our Sector,” Lord Jason Mallister gave his own tally when Davos had finished giving his list of Frey casualties. “Those will be dealt in time if they can’t be trusted. We got Maester Petyr one year ago and Kyra Frey recently.”

It had to account for most of the Frey family, Davos hoped. There were some of Lord Walder’s youngest children at Rosby but from the best reports they had, the trio had taken the Rosby name and had never caused the North any problems. Geremy and Raymund Frey were serving in the Night’s Watch. Some daughters who were visiting Darry had claims but they could be ignored for the short-term.

“That leaves this insolent Most Devout Luceon.”

“We have his name on our black list,” Davos promised.

“Good...who do you have in mind as a military governor for the Twins System while we continue the war?”

“Lord Stark suggested sending a message we are not pleased with Lord Lannister’s policy in this theatre...” Davos passed his hand in his beard. “Our new interim ruler of the Twins will be Domeric Bolton, Heir to the Dreadfort.”