

## **The Dread Lord of Essos**

### **Chapter 61**

The journey from the first battlefield was long and cold, Lord Manderly had thought as he shivered through his many layers of blubber. With nothing to do except sit on the back of his horse, he cured his boredom by recounting his many heroic deeds as he and his men clashed with the Boltons. 'They will write songs about me,' he thought smugly.

In his delusional mind, Lord Manderly pictured himself as a broad-chested and valiant warrior singlehandedly taking down dozens of men. Reality couldn't have been farther from the truth. However, the truth had no place in history, Manderly knew. As the victor, he was the one to decide what the truth was. His internal pontifications of the future were put on hold as one of his Captains called out to him.

"My Lord! The forward scouts have informed me that Winterfell is only a mile beyond the upcoming tree break!"

The news should have been joyous. It meant that their long and miserable struggle would soon be ending. They would take back Winterfell from the clutches of the Ironborn, and he would finally get to return home to his warm bed and full larder. His stomach didn't agree with those sentiments. Just the thought of another fierce battle made his guts churn and ...

"We'll stop here for the night," Manderly called back as his stomach gurgled. "Give the men time to rest. Now, if you will excuse me ..." He slid off his horse and nearly fell as his feet hit the frozen, uneven ground. Holding his gut and clenching his buttocks, he disappeared into the forest for a bit of privacy.

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Asha Greyjoy's eyes fluttered open. Something had woke her up. Rolling onto her side, she looked out the window and found the sky colored in reds and oranges. The sun was barely making itself known. Having stayed up most of the night drinking, this was way too early to be waking up. Her pounding head and dry mouth were a reminder of why it wasn't a good idea to drink yourself sloppy, but how could she pass it up?

The previous day, her men came across a wagon full of trade goods while on patrol. After killing the trader, they discovered it was loaded with expensive wines and liquors from that new city in Essos. Had she decided to send the goods back home like she was supposed to, they would have been very welcome in the Iron Islands, but she felt that her men deserved a treat. The celebration was joyous and lasted into the wee hours of the night. Unfortunately, now she was paying for it. The blast of a warhorn made her flinch and grit her teeth. Her temples pulsated, and her head throbbed painfully. Just then, one of her men rushed into her room without knocking on the door. Asha immediately sat up, exposing her nude breasts.

“The Manderly army approaches!” he told her, but not before taking a quick look at her chest. Asha didn’t bother covering up. It had been a long time since a man first took her, and she was no longer shy about nudity. Even so, such an indiscretion against her would not go unpunished, and she reminded herself to have the man horse whipped after this was all done. Not having the time to worry about that now, Asha got out of bed and grabbed the pile of clothes from the floor. As her body straightened back up, she saw that the man was still greedily staring at her nude form.

“OUT!” she barked, and the man quickly left her room. Muttering under her breath, she threw on her clothes and draped a fur over her shoulders.

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“Where is he, My Lord?” Manderly’s Captain asked as they looked up at the sky. “He said daybreak ... Did he not?”

“He did,” Manderly confirmed, turning his head from side to side but not seeing anything. That wasn’t surprising as the sky was full of dreary gray clouds.

“We are almost within range of their archers,” the Captain nervously said.

“We must trust his word,” Manderly reiterated shakily. He was very nervous but tried not to show it. Winterfell was a hulking castle, and they had no shot of penetrating its thick walls.

“There!” one of his shoulders shouted. Manderly looked at him and saw that he was pointing at the sky. Following his finger, Manderly saw the black dragon breaking through the cloud cover in a shallow dive. His men cheered happily, knowing they hadn’t been left like pigs for the slaughter.

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Melisandre’s arms tightened around his waist as Daemon swooped wide circles around Winterfell. She gasped nervously as the dragon suddenly dove. The wind was cold and fierce, which wasn’t something she enjoyed. Harold chuckled as she hid her face against his back.

Harry trained his eyes on the castle as it grew larger and larger. At the last second, Daemon extended his massive wings and pulled up. His sprawling wings flapped powerfully, slowing them into a hover. Down below, Harry could see the panicked Ironborn scrambling to escape the beast. A few brave warriors fired arrows at his dragon, but there was no hope of them penetrating its armored scales. Slowly, they began to sink, and when they were at the right height, Daemon’s maw erupted in a short burst of wickedly hot fire. Everyone guarding the gate was set ablaze, and the lucky few who were far enough away from the flames ran into the castle. As Daemon landed, Harry easily slid off his back and helped Melisandre off. No words

were said. He had his job, and she had hers. Harry and his dragon guarded the gate, though no one was dumb enough to set foot outside the castle when a fire-breathing beast was on patrol.

Melisandre dropped to her knees and began praying to her fire god. The frigid air around her started growing warm. Before long, it was sweltering. The dirty snow beneath her melted into a puddle, wetting the bottom of her dress. Her eyes were subordinately closed in a show of respect to her god, so she could not watch as the iron gate glowed red. The color lightened as it grew hotter, first orange, then white. After a few minutes of this, the iron began melting. The sheer weight of the gargantuan gate was enough to pull it down and cause the metal to twist and warp. The sound of it hitting the ground was deafening, and when all was said and done, the gate was nothing more than a pile of wreckage that had fallen off to the side, leaving a wide-open path for the invaders. Melisandre opened her eyes and smiled. After thanking R'hllor for his gift, she walked to her Lord with wide hips swaying and wrapped her arms around his armored waist. "It is done, My Lord," she said sweetly.

"Excellent job, my dear," Harry praised her as he turned and kissed her forehead. Melisandre closed her eyes and purred sexily. All she wanted was for this to be over with so she could celebrate with Harold in a nice warm bath before moving their celebration to a nice warm bed. After that, they could go home to the city she loved. 'All in good time,' she promised herself. Her moment was interrupted by screaming soldiers as they poured in through the open archway. Harry turned to face her, and Melisandre couldn't help but kiss him deeply. She was very pleased when he reached down and palmed her ass. When his lips found her neck, she mewled cutely and squirmed in his grip. Sadly, their intimate embrace couldn't last forever. He let her go and helped her back onto the back of the dragon.

"Stay on Daemon, and no one will bother you," he told her, not wanting her to enter the castle where the fighting would be. Melisandre nodded and was secretly happy to be back on the dragon. The beast's body was extremely warm. She wasn't happy when he nodded and disappeared into the castle, leaving her alone.

Harry stayed back for the most part, letting Manderly's men do most of the dirty work. They far outnumbered the Ironborn, who had less than eight hundred men after sacking Winterfell. Still, it was a dangerous task. The Ironborn hid in alcoves and empty rooms, ready to ambush them at an opportune time. Harry had done his part to soften them up. The previous day, he had one of his drones act like a trader and drive around a wagon full of his strongest alcohol. Of course, he was quickly spotted since he wasn't trying to hide, and the goods were taken. From the number of empty bottles strewn throughout the castle, Harry suspected they had had a night full of drunken merriment. He also suspected they had terrible hangovers, which was exactly what he was hoping for. Screams and the clanking of metal echoed through the hallways and corridors. Harry walked alone, moving his way into the castle's upper floors. Pushing open a closed door, he heard silence, then out of nowhere, a sword flashed, and his ears were filled with a warcry. Raising his arm, he blocked the cheap blade just before it came down on his head. The sword bounced off with a spark, and he felt heavy vibrations down his arm. The man had put all of his

strength into that swing. Harry shoved him away, sending him tumbling head over heels into the room.

Another sword was quick to follow. It thrust toward his neck, and Harry twisted to the side and let it pass by him. At its furthest, Harry grabbed the blade and hit it with magical lightning. There was a blinding flash, a loud pop, and a pained scream. Stepping into the room, he saw what he was working with. The man he had pushed down was just getting up. The man he had electrocuted was on the ground, convulsing, and there were two more getting ready to attack. Throwing his hand out, a blast of fire erupted from his palm, setting the two men on fire. Their screams would have given any normal man nightmares. Blinded by the fire, they ran into each other and fell to the ground. They did the correct thing and rolled around, trying to extinguish the blaze, but it was useless. His magical fire wouldn't be quenched until they had been turned to ash. The convulsing Ironborn still on the ground was already as good as dead. Harry showed mercy and ended his suffering. Focusing his power, the man's metal helmet caved in from all sides and crushed his head into paste. His body immediately fell limp. Harry then turned to the last man. Wide, terrified eyes met his determined gaze, and the man stumbled backward, trying to get as far away from him as possible. His back hit the stone wall, and he had nowhere to go.

"Demon!" he gasped as his body trembled terribly. The shaking was so bad that his sword dropped from his hand and hit the floor with a loud clang. Harry could only chuckle at his conclusion.

"Close enough," Harry chuckled again. Pulling out his sword, he decided to give the man a quick death. There was no need for any unnecessary suffering. Harry only got one step closer when the man let out a high-pitched scream, turned, and jumped out of the open window. Harry blinked as his scream became increasingly softer as he plummeted to the ground. Hearing a soft thump, Harry went to the window. He certainly wasn't expecting that. Sticking his head out, he looked down and saw the man sprawled out on the ground. If he had been hoping for a quick, clean death, he was wrong. All four arms and legs were bent in unnatural angles, and Harry could see the man coughing and gasping. The drop was long but not long enough to ensure an instant death.

"Huh," was all Harry could really say. 'The snow must have softened the impact,' he thought. With an amused snort, Harry turned away from the window and continued through the castle.

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Asha pulled her sword from the corpse's belly and took note of her situation. Two more of her men were dead, and she only had three more with her at that moment, one of them being her brother, Theon. The clattering of boot steps could be heard coming up the stairs. From the sound, she could tell it was more soldiers than she and her men could currently handle.

"Follow me," she quietly called out to her men. They moved slowly through the corridor and away from the oncoming steps. "We need to get down to ground level. There's a small tunnel

that goes under the wall. We can make it to the woods and then back to our ship. It's our only hope," she said as the dragon outside roared again. They could feel the stones vibrating under their feet from the loud roar. Dust was knocked free from the ceiling and slowly covered their heads and shoulders. Asha didn't enjoy running like a coward, but she also didn't like the idea of becoming dragon fodder. With the castle full of intruders, there was nothing else they could do. The fight was already over. The only question left was if they would make it out alive.

"How do you know about the tunnel?" Theon asked her. He had lived in Winterfell most of his life and hadn't heard about this tunnel.

"The Maester told me before I slit his throat," Asha said easily. The fact that the Starks had been keeping this a secret from him severely irritated him. In his heart, he knew that they would never accept him or fully trust him. Then he remembered that he had, in fact, betrayed them. Theon was momentarily filled with shame before his survival instincts kicked in again. He couldn't think about that right now. All his focus should be on his plan for escape.

Asha picked up the pace until they were nearly in a dead run. Ahead of them, a body slammed into the wall from a connecting side corridor, and then out stepped a man in black armor. He drove his black sword into her fellow Ironborn's belly. She could distinctly hear the blade bury itself into the stone wall. The Ironborn wailed in agony as he gripped the blade in his stomach. Stopping dead in their tracks, Asha watched with horrifying fascination as the Ironborn's legs gave out, and he slowly slid down the wall. The black blade must have been razor sharp, Asha theorized, because as the man slid down, his flesh offered no resistance. Fueled by his own body weight, his body was slowly split in half until the blade exited just left of his neck. When the body finally tumbled over, the two vertical halves of his torso flowered open and dropped with a meaty thump. The dark warrior pulled his sword from the stone wall and turned to them.

Panic immediately froze her until he took his first step toward them. Coming to her senses, Asha shoved two of her men forward. "Attack!" she shouted before tucking her tail between her legs and running for it. Screams and the impacts of metal on metal were heard behind her, but Asha wasn't about to waste a single second looking behind her. She slipped into another side corridor, her head twisting from side to side as she looked for an escape. She found a stairwell that led down and went down it two steps at a time.

Theon was huffing and puffing as he closely followed his sister. He wasn't even paying attention to where they were heading. All he wanted was to get into the safety of the woods. Through twists and turns, they somehow found their way to the ground floor. They tore past several groups of men fighting, ignoring their screams and cries of pain. At some point, Theon nearly fell when he slipped on a large pool of blood. Thankfully, he regained his balance, but that mistake cost him. He was now half a corridor behind his fleeing sister. Still, he followed her every move. Asha turned left and out of sight. A few seconds later, Theon followed. The cold wind hit his face, and his heart soared when he realized he was outside. The castle wall was a short distance away, and he could see that his sister was running toward a specific place. The stitch in his side was growing more painful, but he ignored it as much as possible. Freedom was

within reach. "There! Stop them!" Theon heard from behind. He didn't look back to see who it was who was yelling. His eyes were locked onto his sister's back. Asha reached a small stone shed and disappeared inside. When he finally arrived, a trap door was wide open, and Asha was nowhere to be seen. Theon didn't hesitate to jump down into the unknown. His feet hit a stone surface, and he was off running into the darkness.

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"In there! They went in there!" Harry heard one of Manderly's men shout while pointing at a dilapidated stone hut. They ran into the building, and Harry followed. When he arrived, they were all standing around an open trap door, though no one was going in.

"Well?" Harry asked impatiently. One of the men looked up at him.

"It's dark, Mi'Lord. We can't see," he said, hoping he wouldn't be ordered down anyway. Harry sighed and jumped down. As soon as he landed, he ignited his blade, filling the narrow tunnel with light. He began walking as more of the men joined him. The tunnel was longer than he expected, spanning hundreds of meters. Being tall and broad-shouldered, Harry couldn't take it on the run, forcing him to go slow and steady. As he neared the end, the tunnel lightened. Extinguishing the fire from his sword, he reached a rickety wooden ladder that led up and out of the tunnel. Climbing through an open trap door, Harry spotted two fingers in the distance, running through the woods.

"I got 'em," one of the men said confidently while aiming his bow. He let loose an arrow that missed the closest of the pair by several feet. Harry snatched the bow from his grip.

"Arrow," Harry ordered, holding out his hand. He took the arrow that was handed to him and notched it. Holding the bow steadily, he pulled back the string and aimed.

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Theon Greyjoy wanted to shout with glee when he exited the tunnel and reached the safety of the woods. At least he did until an arrow whizzed by him. He put on a burst of speed and nearly caught up with his sister when he suddenly felt a piercing pain in his buttocks. "AAAAAAH!" he shouted, losing his footing and hitting the ground hard. He saw his sister look back with a frightened expression. Theon followed her gaze and saw the dark-armored man coming directly for them in the distance. Turning back to his sister, Theon pleaded for help. "ASHA!" he cried out, but his sister broke left and barely dodged an arrow that embedded itself into a tree directly where her head would have been. "ASHAAAA!" he screamed, wincing in pain as he crawled. His sister never looked back. Within seconds, she was out of sight.

His fingers dug into the snowy ground as he pulled himself along. He grunted when a boot hit his back and pinned him in place. "Theon Greyjoy ... What a pleasant surprise," an amused

voice said. Theon tried to break free but hissed in pain from the arrow sticking out of his ass. "Allow me to get that for you."

Theon choked out a cry of pain as the arrow was ripped from his ruined buttock. His eyes were watery, and snot was running down his chin. "ASHA!" he squealed one last time before someone kicked him in the face. He was dragged to his feet and could barely stand due to the sudden concussion and injured backside.

"The Starks are very eager to see you again, Theon," the dark figure told him. Theon knew that this wouldn't end well for him. "Take him away and put him in chains," he ordered.

"What about the other one, Mi'Lord?" Theon raised his head and looked around for his sister, but his vision was too blurry to see anything properly. He groaned and let his head slump.

"She's long gone by now, but I'm sure I'll see her again soon," the dark figure chuckled. As he was being dragged away, Theon's vision darkened, and he finally lost consciousness.

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By the time they had taken back Winterfell, Harry was sick of the freezing temperatures of the North. He wanted to spend some time traveling and exploring the rest of the unknown world before the winter fully set in. Deciding to take a break, Harry left a copy of himself in the North to help get things in order for the return of the Stark women. Once done, his copy would return Melisandre to his city. Before venturing forth, Harry wanted to relax in his city for a while. Being away from home for so long helped him appreciate what he had built. Most of his city's permanent residents had probably already forgotten how hard and dreary life was outside his city walls.

Appearing in King's Garden, Harry walked across the bridge, enjoying the salty air. Large trading vessels were still coming and going, ensuring prosperity for years to come. The wind outside the city walls was strong, and Harry could see decently-sized whitecaps crashing against the rocks. The massive walls protected the city from the turbulent weather; however, the bridge didn't offer that same protection. The wind whipped his hair around, and more than once, he had to brush it away from his lips. Harry could feel the effects of winter. The air was colder than when he was last there. His people wouldn't have to worry about the winter chill, though. The same runes and enchantments that kept the city cool in the summer would also keep it warm in the winter.

Reaching the castle, everyone inside seemed to have been informed of his arrival during his walk across the long bridge. As soon as he entered, he was met by his Mistress of Coin, Missandei. Behind her was a wall of servants waiting for any orders he might have. She immediately stepped up to him and lowered her head subordinately. "Welcome back, My Lord," she said. He had missed her soft, sweet voice.

"It's good to see you again, Missandei," he smiled at her. "Very good, indeed," he added when he saw her dress. The expensive silk fit her slim form wonderfully, and the deep neckline accentuated her perky breasts. "I wish to have a meeting with you tonight," he told her, unable to keep the impure thoughts from his head. "Come to my room after dinner, and we'll ... talk about a few things."

Missandei looked a bit embarrassed but pleased nonetheless. "Of course, My Lord ... Whatever you desire," she pledged. Harry could see the blush forming on her smooth, dusky skin. After informing his staff that he had no immediate use for them, Harry began making his way to the upper part of the castle where his room was located. On the way, he met another familiar face. Cersei was waiting outside of her room looking like a wet dream. A soft, sensual smile was plastered across her beautiful face.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Nephew," she greeted him. Her eyes were practically twinkling.

"And you, Cersei," Harry smiled back. His eyes drifted down her form. The dark purple dress she was wearing looked great on her. It was form-fitting with large slits up the skirt that went all the way up to her hips. The entire dress was accentuated with various gold and jeweled bits. "New dress?" Harry guessed. Cersei smiled wider and spun.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I think the dressmakers in King's Garden are very happy you've returned. That dress must have cost me a small fortune," he said with a teasing smile.

"Indeed, it did," she smiled, not bothering to lie. "But I'm not altogether happy with it. It's too heavy for my tastes," she said, turning to go back into her room. Before she did, she pulled the straps from her elegant shoulders, and the dress dropped from her sexy body and pooled at her feet. Stepping out of the expensive pile of material, she looked over her shoulder with a seductive expression he knew very well. No words were needed. She walked into her room with her hips swaying and her luscious cheeks jiggling. The fact that she didn't close the door told him everything he needed to know. Not one to pass up such an invitation, Harry followed her in and shut the door behind him.