

Eddard let out a sigh of relief as the towering stone hill upon which Casterly Rock was made came into view. It was a massive hill spanning two leagues from east to west with a massive ringfort surrounding its peak along with a wide assortment of walls, watchtowers, and gates, making the seat of House Lannister impenetrable. But he knew the task of taking the Rock would be a bloody affair and perhaps even an impossible one. He had seen Casterly Rock from afar in the past, and he knew it was a castle that even Aegon the Conqueror would have struggled to take despite having dragons. He could not see any normal means to take the castle other than by starving the garrison holed inside.

And therein lay the problem. He knew a more unnatural means to take the castle, but it required asking for Harrion to use his magic and ships against House Lannister. His second son had already made his mark in the war by breaching the walls of Lannisport and smashing the Iron Fleet.

"Is that Casterly Rock?" Robb breathed out in awe.

Eddard smiled at his son's wonder at the behemoth that stood before them.

"Indeed. That is Casterly Rock, the seat of House Lannister."

"It's huge," Robb commented, looking at the massive castle with wide eyes.

"It's indeed. Even the wall pales in comparison to its height. The Lannisters of old dug tunnels inside and built dungeons, grand halls, courtyards, stables, armouries and other quarters inside the hill. The only structure that stands outside is the watchtower that stands at its peak."

"Then where is its entrance, father?" Robb asked curiously, holding on to his horse as they trotted towards the seat of House Lannister through the River Road at a sedate pace.

"Its entrance is on the south side where a natural cavern stands some 200ft high, accessible by a stone staircase. There is another entrance on the west side where galleys can access the cavern so long as the sea gates are open."

"So, it'll not be easy to breach the castle," Robb said after thinking over the description given by his father.

"No, it won't be easy." Eddard sighed, looking at the colossal stone hill that functioned as the seat of House Lannister.

Eddard would not have contemplated asking for Harrion's aid in a battle in any other situation. But this time, he made an exception. Several factors influenced his decision, and chief among them was the untimely passing of his childhood friend and King. Robert's abrupt passing had shaken him more than he let others see. Robert had been his foster brother; in time, he had considered the elder Baratheon a blood brother. Robert had also seen him that way despite the thaw in their friendship after the Rebellion. They had even rekindled their friendship over their shared grief over the loss of Lyanna. Robert had even restored some goodwill among the lords of the North by returning the Gift.

But all of that was now lost with Robert's untimely demise. The ravens claimed Robert's death happened because of a burst belly, but he didn't know what to believe as rumours were abundant claiming otherwise. Most rumours blamed a catspaw sent by Tywin Lannister, while others reasoned it was an injury Robert suffered during the siege of Crakehall.

In the end, the how hardly matters. Robert was dead with a weapon in hand on the battlefield. Eddard supposed his friend would've been happy to have died a warrior's death on the battlefield, even though the cause of death remained vague.

But the most damaging effect of Robert's death was the increasing disgruntlement among the lords of the North. Even the Northern lords who supported him the last time when some pitched in for independence have now switched sides. House Manderly had been one of his strongest supporters in keeping the others in line.

But this time, things were a bit different.

Eddard was sure ending the war quickly, and marching home was paramount to keeping the peace among the Northern lords. This was the third year-long war he had led the Northerners in the south, and he understood the wariness. Even if he was a Stark, there were limits to what he could demand from his lords. He could not guarantee whether his lords would behave should the war drag on for weeks and months as they starve out the Lannisters. It could end up creating a rift among the many lords of the North, and they could decide to make their grievances known to the rest of Westeros. To forestall this from happening, Eddard saw no solution other than a quick end to the siege of the Rock, enabling him to march the Northern army back home before something untoward happened.

"Stop! We'll set camp here." Eddard said loud enough for his men and the lords of the North to hear.

"But we are too far away from the castle, my lord." said Lord Medger Cerwyn.

"All the better." said Eddard, keeping a weary eye on the ringforts and watchtowers adorning the colossal hill. "We don't know the range of their siege engines, scorpions and bows. Until we know for sure, we'll not be taking any needless risk."

"Shall I send the scouts, Lord Stark?" Galbart Glover asked.

Eddard nodded at the lord of Deepwood Motte before turning his sights on the hill. He hoped Tywin Lannister became reasonable and surrendered the Rock without a siege. But Eddard knew it was too much to hope an arrogant man like Lord Tywin would become reasonable overnight after plunging the Seven Kingdoms into a needless war.

"Lord Glover." Eddard called before Galbart Glover could leave.

"Yes, my lord."

"Order the scouts to look out for Prince Stannis's army. They should be nearby."

"Of course, my lord."

But the scouts found no sign of Prince Stannis' army. However, they found a camp of bandits, and Eddard caught them after a brief battle. He later learned the bandits were deserters from the Lannister army. From the bandits, they learned Prince Stannis' army, and the knights of the Vale moved out of the Gold Road and joined the royal host camped south of Casterly Rock. Once he knew their location, he sent messengers to the Prince's camp. The night passed without much happening, but when the daylight came, Eddard was greeted by the messengers he sent holding an invite from Prince Stannis.

"He's inviting you to his camp?" Ser Brynden asked, frowning at the parchment that bears the royal seal.

"He's inviting House Stark, House Tully and a few chosen lords from the Riverlands and the North. I believe he means to receive oaths of fealty before the siege begins." said Eddard.

"Are you going?" Ser Brynden asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Prince Stannis is the rightful heir of Robert. Of course, I’ll swear my oaths should he demand it.”

“But I can see the hesitation on your face, Lord Stark.” Ser Brynden pointed out.

“I wish the war was over before any oaths were exchanged.”

“I see. Your lords are giving you trouble.”

“Not trouble.” Eddard shook his head before sighing. “We Northerners like to stay away from southern affairs. It has never brought us good fortune in the past.”

Suddenly, they heard a great commotion outside the tent, making both men curiously stare at the tent's entrance. When they stepped outside to see what was happening, they found a massive ship floating in the sky, casting a giant shadow on their camp. Eddard was never so relieved to see the floating behemoths of his son in the sky than in that moment.

Harry had found it odd when he received an urgent communication from Marwyn with a message from his father. The contents of the message further confused him as his father was asking for his aid to breach Casterly Rock. He had been utterly surprised to see his father ask for assistance in a battle and blatantly ask him to use magic. But that surprise was short-lived after Harry interacted with a few lords of the North. Even reading their surface thoughts was enough to let him know the lords of the North were contemplating breaking away from the Iron Throne.

Harry was not so surprised by the notion of independence but by the thoughts swirling inside the minds of many lords who thought they could claim independence right now. Harry could only scoff when he saw such idiotic ideas in the minds of his fellow lords. The North was nowhere near ready to claim independence. The North's trade with Essos was minuscule compared to their trade with the rest of the Seven Kingdoms. Even now, most trade with Essos was happening using Braavosi ships, as the North lacked ships and connections to the rest of the Essosi market. They were only building up merchant relations with the rest of the Essosi cities, and a rebellion when their economy was on the precipice of growing would rock the boat too much. A growing economy needed stability more than anything else. That was one of the reasons why he was expanding the North's territory into the Iron Islands.

However, that doesn't mean he was not sympathetic to the cause of Northern independence. The North going independent was as inevitable as the rest of the Seven Kingdoms going their own way. Harry was certain the Seven Kingdoms would not hold together for long. He gave it at most a decade before the internal politicking and rivalry tore apart the kingdoms. House Targaryen managed to hold on to the Iron Throne because they kept the other kingdoms in check and allowed limited influence as well as limited self-rule. But that structure was threatened when the Lord Paramount of the Stormlands became the King of Westeros. The ruling house of the Stormlands now holds the title of King of Westeros, and it'd only be a matter of time before the other kingdoms rail against the undue influence of the Stormlanders on the Iron Throne.

In Harry's mind, the best time for the North to go independent was when the rest of the Seven Kingdoms were fighting each other, not when most of the kingdoms were supporting a single king. Right now, Stannis Baratheon was the ticket for the North's independence more than Robert

Baratheon. All they had to do was wait for the tensions to rise in the south when it became public that Stannis had abandoned the Faith of the Seven. It'd snowball from that issue into many more. After all, he had seen quite a goldmine of plans brewing inside Prince Oberyn's mind. Plans that Harry saw as an opportunity to unravel the Seven Kingdoms at the seams.

If anything, Harry preferred half a decade of peace to build up the North's economy. Even this war had thrown some of his plans to expand the economy of Avalon. Therefore, he was more than happy to end the war and pack up the Northern lords before they say or do something that jeopardises the status quo.

After a short discussion with his father and Ser Brynden Tully, they devised a plan that'd deliver the least bloody victory. While Harry could breach the entrance of Casterly Rock, the natural defences offered by the cavern would rob many soldiers of their lives. He could've escorted the men through the cavern, but his father was adamant not to take him with the army.

So, they devised the idea of breaching the Rock's defences from the place the Lannisters least expected. That was how Harry found himself on his airship transporting the Riverlanders and Northerners through the ringforts and watchtowers at the peak of the hill. Under the cover of the night, the guards didn't notice an army slipping past their eyes. Those who noticed anything amiss found themselves silenced with their throats slit or a crossbow bolt through their eyes. Harry didn't get to watch how the rest of the fight went as he was not allowed to march with the army. His father and Ser Brynden led the assault on the Rock, supported by their most loyal men.

But that didn't mean he was idle. While the army led by his father and mother's uncle fought their way down from the top, Harry spread out more of his mapping snitches to map out Casterly Rock. At first, he had only meant to map out Blacktyde and Harlaw, as those islands would be annexed into the overseas territory of the North. But now, Harry was determined to expand the scope of his map to the entire continent of Westeros. Unlike the Marauders' Map, this map would not be detailed with the names of every person and their location. In Hogwarts, it was possible because the castle was enriched in magic, and the castle had its own wards to tap into. In Westeros, that was not the case. The most magically augmented areas he had found in this world were the Wall, Skane and Dragonstone.

The most he could do right now using the map was for navigation. If he could connect the mapping snitches with other all-seeing tables, he could develop the most sophisticated navigation system this world had ever seen. Potentially, he could keep track of all his ships using the same system. Once he developed a swift communication method, the military powers and logistics of the North would improve drastically. Perhaps there was even a chance that he could end up replicating the attention to detail in the Marauders' Map on his map in time with more modified charms and wards.

The mapping snitches continued to plot the area around Casterly Rock and even the many tunnels inside the giant hill unseen by the fighting men. The docks were some of the first areas to be mapped by the snitches. Once they were finished with Casterly Rock, Harry also meant to release them on Lannisport. While his map didn't provide all the names of individuals in an area, it did plot the natural resources, buildings, ships and even armies. He wasn't sure whether House Lannister would get to keep the lands and the castle after the war, but if they did, he wanted to keep an eye on their fleets and strength. The map would be an excellent tool in keeping an eye on his new enemies as he had no doubt made an enemy of House Lannister with his indirect involvement in tearing down Cersei Lannister from her position as Queen of the Seven Kingdoms.

He couldn't help but smile as he saw the army camped outside Casterly Rock appear on his map with different banners blinking into existence on the table. He only had to wait a little longer for the Northern and Riverlands army to appear camped near the River Road.

"It looks like the map is working, my lord." said Anya, looking at the table where the map was being constructed, including all the intricate details of the terrain.

"Look. Even the gold veins in the castle are showing up on the map." Kyla said, looking in awe as the map continued to trace intricate details of Casterly Rock.

Harry grinned as he watched his mapping snitches work their magic by tracing everything he needed from the Rock.

"Do you plan to map out Fair Isle as well, my lord?" asked Adela.

Harry frowned thoughtfully at the question raised by his Valkyrie guard. It was unlikely that he could annexe Fair Isle from the Westerlands. But he could gain it if he used the Imperius Curse on Stannis. The problem was he didn't have the manpower required to properly subjugate the island and turn it into an integral part of the North. He was already going to get his hands full with turning Blacktyde and Harlaw into safe heavens for his fleet. He had only planned to take Blacktyde but ended up overextending his hand by staking his claim on Harlaw as well.

'Perhaps it'll be wise to revisit the annexation of Fair Isle on the next war.' Harry mused.

"No. We'll leave the island alone for now. While it holds some strategic importance, Fair Isle does not host a fleet that could threaten us in the future." Harry said after thinking it over in his mind.

"Lord Jorah Mormont escaped lord Stark's punishment by boarding a ship and escaping justice in the middle of the war. It'd be useful to watch the ships passing through the sea lanes close to the island." Anya suggested.

"Hmm. You raise a good point. Do we have enough runestones?" asked Harry.

"Not enough to cover the whole island. But we have time to make new ones." said Anya.

Harry rubbed his face tiredly, realising he'd have to power through another sleepless night. Fortunately, he had a remedy to that particular dilemma.

"Tell the kitchen staff that I require coffee. A lot of coffee." said Harry.

A disgruntled huff was let out by Fenris, who emerged from under the table after having a long nap.

"And Fenris needs...chicken?" Harry looked in askance at his familiar, whose look somehow mirrored a disappointed face.

"He'll have fish today." Harry said instead, and he could see the black furry face of his familiar light up.

'Hmm. I'm getting better with my warging powers.' Harry thought, knowing that he was getting better at reading the emotional state of Fenris because of his warging powers rather than any fancy facial reading skills.

Stannis Baratheon didn't know whether to thank Eddard Stark or curse the man for cutting the war short by delivering a dishevelled, wounded, but otherwise healthy Tywin Lannister to his tent in chains. It was not just Tywin Lannister, but the entirety of House Lannister was present in his camp, including the garrison and even the household of Casterly Rock. Due to less space, they were held outside his tent under the watch of the sturdy men of the Riverlands and the North.

'Hmm. Lord Stark and Ser Brynden did their duty to their king without making any demands. They should be thanked and rewarded for their services.' Stannis decided.

"Your actions have saved the lives of many Lord Stark, Ser Brynden. I thank you both and your men on behalf of the Seven Kingdoms." Stannis nodded at both men.

"Your grace." Lord Eddard nodded but remained silent otherwise.

But Ser Brynden, unlike the Silent Wolf of the North, had some things to say.

"The credit must go to Harrion. Without the lad's ships, we wouldn't have been able to breach the walls of the Rock." said Ser Brynden.

"Yes, indeed." Stannis breathed, remembering the massive flying ship he had seen commandeered by the Stark boy when the lad visited Dragonstone.

"Is it true that little Harrion burned down the Iron Islands? He was such a sweet lad when the last I saw him. Maybe my daughter left a lasting impression on him to change him so." said Prince Oberyn, laughing boisterously with his Dornish friends partaking heartfully.

"I don't know about burning down the Iron Islands, Prince Oberyn. But he brought a squid from the Iron Islands." Ser Brynden said with a rather proud look as some Northmen brought forth a bound Balon Greyjoy into his tent and had the man kneeling next to Tywin Lannister.

Stannis supposed there was ample reason for the man to be proud. Harrion Stark was half Tully from his mother's side. The boy had made waves with his craft, his name known in all corners of the known world. And now, the lad had shown his magic was not just a tool for making fancy swords but a weapon of great power. He supposed he ought to reward the Starks for the services rendered. After all, they delivered him two traitorous Lord Paramount to his mercy.

'The Old Gods are mighty. I hope they'll bless my line with magic like the Starks.' Stannis thought, staring coldly at Tywin Lannister and Balon Greyjoy.

The war was finally over. And now, the reign of Stannis Baratheon would begin.