

## **The Dread Lord of Essos**

### **Chapter 59**

Roose Bolton looked back at the sorry state of his men. An army that was once fifteen thousand strong had been whittled down to just less than ten. Instinctively, he peered up at the sky, searching for the scaled beast that was causing havoc amongst his ranks. That damn dragon would show up periodically and feast upon his men, snatching up and eating five or six for every meal. The worst part was that it was forcing them to take many unnecessary detours and extend their miserable trek across the frozen expanse of the North. This caused more problems than he would have liked.

Sickness had spread, and thousands had died during the freezing nights. Often they were too sick to continue marching, so they were left behind. It was a cold-blooded decision to be sure, but there could be no other way. They needed to get to Winterfell as quickly as possible, and the longer they continued traveling, the more of his men would succumb to the elements. Thankfully, they were aided by the small villages along the way. The villagers' food stocks and beddings were taken to help replenish their ailing supplies, and their wives and daughters were taken for entertainment. The men of the village were given a choice. Join their ranks or lose their heads. Roose was surprised by the number deciding to bend the knee. Those who didn't were dealt with by his bastard, Ramsay. In his opinion, his bastard had a little too much fun with that task. He would have to keep an eye on the boy. 'In these times, no one can be trusted,' he would often tell himself. Just then, the bastard joined his side.

"They say that according to the maps, we should reach the White Knife by afternoon tomorrow," Ramsay stated as he pulled his horse alongside his father's. Roose merely grunted his understanding. After reaching the river, they would still have a long way to go, but at least they could fill up their waterskins and fish for some fresh meat.

"We'll march for an extra hour tonight. Inform the commanders," Roose ordered. Without a word, Ramsay left his side to issue his orders to the men. They would grunt and groan, but that was inconsequential to him. Winterfell was the prize he had his eyes on, and nothing would stop him from taking it.

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Sitting on a flat rock next to the river, Harry tore off a bite of his beef jerky and chewed the spicy meat. Next to him was Lord Manderly, the leader of the waiting army. He was looking longingly at the bag of jerky resting on Harry's lap. Harry took the bag and handed it to the plump man. Manderly's face lit up, and he eagerly tore into it. How he had such an appetite at a time like this puzzled Harry. All around them, his men looked nervous and slightly sick to the stomach. Nerves from the upcoming battle were heavy among the men.

The land on each side of the White Knife sloped downward into a river valley, giving them the perfect, natural hiding spot for an ambush. Harry tore off another chunk of his meat just as someone nearby retched into the river. Ignoring this, he continued to enjoy his afternoon treat.

“How long until they arrive do you reckon?” Manderly asked through a mouthful of spiced jerky.

“Soon,” was Harry’s reply.

A few minutes later, they heard their cue. Daemon’s mighty roar was heard in the distance, making the men jump in fright. It amused him how scared they were of his dragon. He supposed that he couldn’t blame them. Daemon was a massive brute with teeth the length of a longsword. Harry lazily chucked the remaining piece of jerky into the water and grabbed his black helmet. Standing up, he looked down at Wyman Manderly and said, “It’s time.”

Now Lord Manderly lost his appetite. He closed the sack of meat and stuffed it behind his metal breastplate, clearly afraid that one of his hungry men might steal it in his absence. “Against the slope!” he called out loudly.

“Up against the slope! Arm yourselves!” his commanders repeated down the line. The clanking of metal armor and weapons was loud, but they were far enough away from Bolton’s army that it went unheard.

After some spying on Harry’s part, he discovered that Bolton’s army was roughly ten thousand strong ... twice as large as Manderly’s five thousand men. Manderly, however, had several advantages. Bolton’s army had been marching nonstop for weeks, while Manderly’s men arrived at their chosen spot several days ago. They had had time to rest and fill up on trout from the river. Bolton’s men would be tired, hungry, and probably weak from illness. Then there was the fact that they knew where Bolton’s men were. Bolton had no idea that Manderly’s men were lying in wait. Of course, the biggest factor was Harry himself and his dragon. Daemon alone would make up for thousands of men. Manderly waddled up next to him right before another roar was heard.

“Archers,” Harry reminded Wyman.

“ARCHERS AT THE READY!” Manderly yelled out. His commanders repeated his order, and the archers moved to the back of the line, crates of arrows at their sides and ready to be fired.

Harry placed the black helmet over his head, and he pulled Fiendfyre from its scabbard. He held the dark blade up to his eyes and examined the edge. It was razor sharp, just as always.

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Roose looked back over his shoulder, terrified by what he saw. The giant, black beast was breathing walls of fire over the furthest ranks of his men. Even from so far away, he could still

feel the heat of the inferno, and he could hear the screams of his men burning. He snapped the reins and made his horse gallop faster. His men were panicked and scattering with most running toward the river with the desperate hopes that they could somehow find safety from the hellish flames in the depths of the frigid water. The beast's roar made him angle his head away, lest his eardrums rupture. In the close distance, Roose could see where the land began to slope down. However, he could only see a sliver of the water from the far side of the river before the valley wall sloped back up. His horse was panting, blowing out huge clouds of mist from his flaring nostrils. He didn't know where his son Ramsay was, nor did he care. All his thoughts were focused on getting as far away from that flying menace as possible. His next thoughts were confusion mixed with terror.

Roose found himself hurdling through the air before slamming into the snow-covered ground hard. "OOF!" he grunted in pain, though thankfully, the thin layer of snow provided enough padding to keep him from breaking any bones. He rolled onto his knees and immediately discovered the problem. His horse was flat on its side, thrashing with an arrow shaft sticking out of the side of its neck. Behind him, the other horse-mounted riders were sharing similar fates. Arrows rained down on them, piercing any bits of flesh that they could reach. Horses were dropping like flies, hitting the ground and sending clouds of snow and dirt into the air. One of his commanders, Horrolo he thought it was, took two arrows in the chest. His horse reared, and he tumbled over the back and hit the ground where he was crushed under another falling horse. This didn't stop the horse riders from further back. They galloped through the bed of fallen bodies, ignoring their screaming brethren and sometimes even trampling them as they fled from the black dragon that was getting ever closer. More arrows followed, taking them out as well.

'Where in the seven hells are those arrows coming from?!' Roose asked himself. He then turned to the river and saw flying from below the closest side of the shallow valley. "Shit," he cursed and pushed himself to his feet. He was about to run the opposite way and stopped short. There was a massive wall of terrified men running in his direction with a dragon flying right behind them. Then a war horn blared from the river. Roose quickly spun on the spot and witnessed thousands of men climbing over the lip of the slope, fully armored and armed.

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The horn boomed in Harry's ears, and the men all around him let out their warcries and began climbing the sloped wall, weapons in hand. Harry let them go first since they had a harder time climbing the cold, frozen slope. Turning to Lord Manderly, Harry smiled amusedly. Wyman looked ready to vomit. It was one thing to romanticize war, but actually fighting in a battle was another thing altogether. The stout man began to tremble so hard that his armor plates were rattling against each other.

"Are you ready for battle?" Harry asked him as men pushed past them.

"Uhhh," he responded with a blank, fearful expression.

“Good,” Harry smiled. “Let’s go,” he said, grabbing Manderly by the back of his metal breastplate and dragging him forward.

“Stop shoving!” he complained as helped him up the slope. The man was too heavy to climb the incline without help. Harry was ratcheting him up the dirt wall with his shoulder.

“I wouldn’t have to shove if you could just get your ... fat ... ass ... up ... the ... goddamn ... hill,” Harry punctuated each pause with a mighty shove against the man’s wide, round ass. Finally, Harry placed his hands on the man’s ass (something he really didn’t want to do) and gave him a powerful push. Wyman screamed as he flew up into the air and landed on the top, his round body rolling away from sight. Harry huffed and grabbed his sword. With a powerful leap, he jumped clear over the incline and landed next to Manderly who was still trying to roll off of his back. Harry grabbed him by the front of his breastplate and tugged him to his feet.

“Oh ... Yes ... Thank you, King Harold,” he huffed and puffed, wiping beads of sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. How the man could sweat during the winter was a mystery to him, but that was beyond his concern. Wyman Manderly was on his own now. Hopefully, his men would keep him safe.

It had been a while since Harry had last enjoyed the chaos of battle, and his sword was begging for blood. Without waiting, Harry eagerly charged into battle. Within a minute, he was far ahead of Manderly’s charging men, and arrows were falling all around him. Ahead of him, a soldier was coming right at him on the back of a speckled white and brown horse. With his perfect vision, he could see that the man was heavily armored as he lifted his sword with the intention to strike. Harry angled directly for the charging horse. The man’s scream of anger was loud ... even louder than the maelstrom of disarray going on around them. He had his eyes locked on Harry. Only feet away, the armored warrior swung mightily for his head. Sidestepping and ducking, Harry spun and used the momentum to cleave the man’s leg off mid-thigh. His metal leg guard did nothing to stop his dark blade. Harry didn’t look back as the man’s leg spun away while he screamed in agony.

Harry could sense the arrows above him and occasionally changed his angle of attack to avoid getting hit ... not that it would have done anything to him. His armor was made of Dragon Steel and couldn’t be pierced by the sharpest swords on the planet, but that didn’t mean that an arrow couldn’t find a seam. Another horse rider galloped by and swung for him. Harry’s sword collided with his, sending him falling over the back of his horse, his cheap sword cut in two. A spear-wielding rider with a shield was coming up on his left. His shield was held up high in an attempt to block the falling arrows. Harry threw his sword and watched it tumble through the air. The tip of the sword pierced him right below the armpit, driving itself deep into his ribs. With just a thought, the sword appeared back in Harry’s hand before the man had time to scream. Further in front of him was the main body of Bolton’s army. The ground soldiers were running in a panic, looking back with fearful glances. Daemon did another pass by and unleashed a stream of white-hot fire along their flanks. This created a wall of fire behind the scared men and blocked any chance of retreating. Harry ran directly toward them.

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Roose saw the waves of men coming over the slope, some of whom were holding turquoise banners with a white merman holding a trident. 'Manderly!' he hissed in his head. He knew that Lord Manderly was nothing but an overweight buffoon, but that mattered little in his current situation. All he could do was turn back and rejoin the majority of his men.

Running as fast as his old legs could carry him, Roose ran through the rain of arrows while horses and their riders dropped around him. One horse with an arrow sticking out of his hindquarters spun as he ran by, bumping him and sending Roose into the snow. He spat out a mouthful of dirty snow and got back to his feet. Looking back, the number of men coming from the direction of the river was only growing. Looking ahead, the dragon flew in low and breathed its fire all over the furthest part of the battlefield. Flames and smoke erupted from the ground, creating a towering inferno that effectively stopped any chance of escape. They were trapped, Roose quickly realized. They had no other choice. They had to fight. Roose grabbed the hilt of his sword which was cast in the shape of a flayed man and pulled it from its scabbard. "Our blades are sharp," he whispered the family motto. With nothing left to do, he made his way back to his men to begin the battle.

His heroics were stopped short, however, when he saw a very large man in black armor taking on his army alone. A spearman charged him, his pike aimed true. As the spearhead reached the dark warrior, he simply turned his body and let the spear move past him. Grabbing the shaft of the spear, the armored man pushed it down and drove the head into the ground. Roose watched in fascination as the spearman screamed as he was lifted high into the air by his own spear. His body vaulted over the armored man and was thrown brutally into the ground with a loud thump. With the spear still in his hand, he spun and hurled it into the coming horde of men. The spear rocketed forward and impaled two of his men who were running in line. No sooner than the spear left his hand, another of Roose's men stepped up with his sword drawn. The fight ended pathetically quickly.

Roose watched as his man ran up to the armored warrior before stopping so quickly that his booted feet slid out from underneath him. Falling on his ass, his eyes went wide in terror before he began scuttling back. "DREAD LORD!" he cried out in fear. Just then, the man in the black armor held his sword out, and Roose gasped as the blade ignited into flames. His man screamed and rolled onto his hands and knees. As he got to his feet to run, the flaming sword was swung downward in his direction. A fireball launched from the tip and struck his man on the back. His body was instantly engulfed in fire. An amused laugh left the dark warrior's hidden lips.

He then turned in Roose's direction, and Roose could clearly see that his man was correct. This was indeed the famed Dread Lord of Essos. The black armor, the fiery blade, the beast who brings death from above ... it was all true. He had heard the tales but always put them in the back of his mind. He was in Essos and far away from Dreadfort, so there was no need to worry.

Perhaps he should have taken the rumors more seriously, he thought as he stared at the man. Roose had to admit that the man was intimidating to look at. His armor reflected no light while his cream-colored cape seemed to shimmer while fiercely snapping in the stiff wind. Roose's feet refused to move, but when the Dread Lord began walking in his direction, he knew that he had to act. Gathering his courage, he held onto the grip of his sword tightly and charged at him. Closer and closer he got, his breath coming out in thick clouds of mist. Mere feet away, Roose held his sword up high like the avenging god that he saw himself as and swung down with all of his might.

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Harry watched in amusement as Roose Bolton came charging in his direction. 'At least he is courageous,' Harry thought as he neared. He lifted his sword, and the clean, silver blade brightly reflected the weak rays of light that were breaking through the gray clouds. Only feet away, he opened his mouth and bellowed a massive warcry. His sword came down, and instead of moving, Harry lashed out with a spartan kick and connected squarely in the man's chest. His sword flew out of his hand and skidded across the slick snow while his body continued to move forward. However, while his body was moving forward, his legs and back were parallel with the ground, and he landed with a thunk similar in sound to a pumpkin being dropped on a stone floor. Bolton's eyes were glazed as he lay there, barely moving. Harry chuckled while reaching out with his senses.

Twisting his arm and covering the back of his head with the broad side of his sword, a loud, metallic clang rattled his ears as he blocked an attack from behind. Twirling around in a flash, Harry barely had time to see the wide, alarmed eyes of his would-be attacker before his flaming sword lopped the man's head off. As his head rolled and fell off of his shoulders, the neatly cleaved skin of his neck stump sizzled from the heat of his blade. His knees buckled, and the headless body dropped to the side. By that time, Manderly's men had joined in on the fun. Harry stepped up to the next man who was wielding a battleaxe.

The man was hulking, Harry had to admit and was much broader in the chest. His armored shoulders were covered in a robe of thick, brown fur that Harry guessed was from a bear. The man screamed and swung for his neck. Harry ducked, and the axe passed just over his head. The man then swung downward, intending to cut him down the middle. Harry turned his body, and the axe blade slammed into the ground with thundering force. Before he could pull it from the ground, Harry pressed the bottom of his boot on the wooden handle to keep it in place. Harry elbowed him once ... twice ... and on the third time, he connected directly with the man's nose. He cried out and stumbled back, holding his nose while blood poured down his chin. "AHHH! YE H BASTARD!" he yelled and lunged forward. At the last second, Harry sidestepped just as Roose's attack came from behind. Harry held out his foot, tripping Roose. Roose stumbled forward and accidentally drove his sword into the rampaging man's belly. Again, Harry chuckled with humor as he pulled the battleaxe from the ground.

Above, Daemon dove in and grabbed three of Bolton's men in his jaws before angling upward and flying off. The noise on the battlefield had gotten progressively louder as swords and shields clashed together, not to mention the constant roaring of a dragon with bloodlust. Roose was struggling to pull his blade from the man's belly while Harry lifted the axe over his head and screamed like a madman. Roose heard the noise, turned around, and dove to the side, missing the axe's edge by inches. Instead, the axe came down on its original owner, splitting his head in half down the middle. Both sides of his head split apart at the neck, and the two halves of brain sluffed out of their bowls. Harry kicked away the dead body before it had time to fall and swung the axe again at Roose who was scrambling away on the ground. The axe barely missed him, embedding itself deep into the ground. "FATHER!" Harry heard from the side. Bolton's bastard, Ramsay, had decided to join the fight.

The bastard's brown horse rumbled toward him, its large hooves tearing up the ground. Ramsay was leaning over and had his sword out to the side. This time Harry didn't move. He called upon his powers, angled his body, and with a backhanded hammer strike, Harry connected with the front of the horse, just below the neck. Its neck snapped loudly, like a thick branch breaking from a tree. The horse's dead body tumbled to the side, throwing Ramsay from its back. The dark-haired boy hit the ground hard and rolled to a stop. Harry was surprised that he wasn't dead on impact. He did notice that his arm was bent at a very painful-looking angle. An enraged scream from his other side let him know that Roose was back on his feet. He came at Harry with fire in his eyes and the axe in his hands.

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Ramsay groaned as he pushed himself into a kneeling position. He cried out in pain when his broken arm was jostled. All around him was death and destruction. Had his life not been in immediate danger, he would have relished the chaos unfolding. He looked around for his sword and found it lying on the ground a short distance away. He pushed himself to his feet and stumbled over to it. Picking it up, he saw one of his father's spearmen driving his pike into the belly of his opponent at full sprint. The tip broke through the man's back, and the foot or so of the wooden shaft sticking out of his body was smeared red with blood. Another man was stumbling around close by, holding his arm right below the point where it had been severed. Blood squirted from the stump on his forearm. His cries of misery were glorious to behold. Turning around, he saw his faithful horse dead on its side. This was no big loss to him, other than the fact that he was now without a mount. He then heard his father's grunts, and Ramsay turned in that direction.

Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't care what happened to his father. In fact, he would be more than happy to slit the man's throat while he slept peacefully. However, the times they were in were uncertain, and Ramsay knew that there were active plots by his father's bannermen to take control of Dreadfort. If Ramsay survived this battle and his father did not, he would suddenly be without protection. As a bastard, he would hold no claim to his father's title. Surely, someone would come to claim the title, and his father's men were definitely not loyal to his bastard son. Until Ramsay had a rock-solid plan, his father needed to stay alive. At the moment,

this was an uncertain outcome. His father was grunting, screaming, and swinging a battleaxe like a man half out of his wits while his opponent lazily blocked every strike with a flaming sword. Ramsay stared at the sword in wonder. With every collision with the axe, sparks and embers erupted from the point of contact. His father's swings were getting slower and weaker. Ramsay could see that the battleaxe had taken considerable damage from the constant parrying. He could clearly see that King Harold, the so-called Dread Lord, was merely toying with him.

He had, of course, heard all the rumors about the man. Growing up as Jaime Lannister's bastard, he had broken free of that title by moving to Essos and gaining power through violence and war. Ramsay hated him with a passion. Harold hadn't done anything to personally offend the boy ... no, his hatred came from pure jealousy. He was everything that Ramsay wasn't and everything he wanted to be.

The Dread Lord used the armor covering his forearm to block a weak strike from his father. His father then stumbled back as a backhand connected with the side of his face. Ramsay could see blood pouring from a fresh cut that had opened up on his cheek. He knew that his father wouldn't last long. Ramsay held his sword in the hand that was still working and began moving. Just as he began limping over to them, his father bellowed in rage and used every last ounce of strength to lift the axe up over his head. He rushed forward, swinging the axe down, but the Dread Lord was too fast. He moved to the side, swiping his fiery blade across his father's belly.

Instantly, his father's armor turned white hot. His scream was terrible as he was cooked from the inside of his armor. Ramsay could see steam escaping from the seams of his chestplate. The look on his father's face told him everything he needed to know. It was twisted in a grotesque howl of agony as he stumbled past his attacker. His pain didn't last long. With a powerful strike to his midsection, his father's torso, head, and arms twisted through the air, leaving his bottom half to fall in the snow. The dirty, white snow quickly colored red as pools of blood leaked from the severed part of his lower half. His top half landed a few feet away. His father's arms waggled around for a few seconds before they slumped uselessly at his sides. The Dread Lord then turned his attention to Ramsay Bolton.