

“If this keeps up your grace, we’ll be unable to fight the enemy with all our strength. The men of the south have not fought in knee-high snow. This will hamper our offensive and defensive capabilities.” Lord Yohn Royce said grimly.

“Is there no snow in the Vale, Lord Royce?” Daenerys asked curiously as she walked the length of the extensive trench line dug up by the men facing Castle Black.

Lyra Mormont and Arya Stark also flanked her despite telling them she did not need an escort. But the two ladies didn’t budge as they were ‘ordered’ by her husband to shadow her. Daenerys had some choice words to say to her husband about subverting her Queensguard to serve his interests, even if those interests were to safeguard her from harm. But Daeron was engaged in some discussion with the Red priests, which made her drop the issue temporarily as she didn’t want to undermine him in public. Not that she disliked the company of Lyra and Arya. It was just that she didn’t want the two ladies to feel obligated to always shadow her.

“There is snow, your grace. But this winter is different, and we tend to stay in our homes during winter. Even the Mountain clans know to stay in their mountains and not to raid our villages.” said Lord Royce.

“I see. These Mountain clans – they raid your villages with impunity to this day?” Daenerys asked, carefully stepping over a wooden plank on the ground.

“I’m afraid so, your grace. They’ve become a greater threat recently because the Lannisters smuggled weapons of greater quality to the clansmen. It has emboldened them to attack many of our settlements. This is why the Vale has not mustered our full forces.”

“I see.” Daenerys hummed thoughtfully. “Have your people not tried to negotiate with the clansmen?”

“Many have tried in the past, your grace. Either they kill off our emissaries or demand that we leave the Vale. As you can see, they have impossible demands.” Lord Royce said with a huff.

“And my family has never tried to dispatch these unruly clansmen from the mountains?” Daenerys asked with a troubled look.

“You mean using your family’s dragons?” Lord Royce asked with a strange look on his face that eluded her because it was gone the next moment she blinked.

“Yes. Surely, my ancestors must have noticed the cruel acts of the clansmen at some point. I believe a lady of House Royce once married an ancestor of mine during the Conciliator’s time.” Daenerys said.

“I’m afraid Lady Rhea Royce and Prince Daemon’s marriage ended the day they married your grace. They hated each other with a passion, and Prince Daemon made it a point to spend his time far away from Runestone and the Vale in general. If Prince Daemon even had the opportunity to know the difficulties the Vale faced, he’d be the last person to solve them.” Lord Royce said rather blandly.

Daenerys felt like she jumped into a tub of boiling water, hearing the words of Lord Royce. She had only read about the marriage of Prince Daemon Targaryen and Lady Rhae Royce in passing. She had assumed the former Lady of Runestone had simply been barren or died young without giving birth to any children from the marriage. She had not read anything indicating the couple hated each other so much.

“The Clansmen are First Men, are they not? They’re the original owners of the lands that your people took over during the Andal invasions. It could be said you are encroaching on the lands of the Clansmen and not the other way around.” Arya snapped coldly.

Daenerys stared at her goodsister with a raised eyebrow. She had not thought of thinking from the side of the Mountain Clansmen. However, she got the impression that these Mountain Clans of the Vale had more in common with the Dothraki after her brief conversation with Lord Royce. And yet, Arya raised a valid argument. If the Clansmen of the Vale had been chased out of their ancestral lands, it’d be fair to say their raids were to reclaim what they see as their lost territories.

“This is an old argument, Lady Arya. Many of the First Men houses still rule vast tracts of land in the Vale. My own house stems from the First Men.” Lord Royce said, letting out a long-suffering sigh.

“But you’re not First Men, are you?” Arya glared coldly at the old lord of Runestone. “Just like the Lannisters, Martells, Gardners and Durrandons. You abandoned your past and became Andals. Anyone who resisted converting to your religion was hunted down, and to this day, you’ve yet to stop your invasion of the First Men lands. It is not as if the Andals of Andalos crossed the Narrow Sea and kindly asked the First Men for a piece of land in the Vale. The Andals murdered, raped, burned, and looted the First men to claim the lands you so passionately defend today.”

Daenerys looked between the two, feeling wholly left out. At that moment, she realised this was probably why her ancestors let things be in the Vale. Thousands of years of conflict and bad blood would not be eradicated overnight. Using the dragons arbitrarily on one group also didn’t sit well with her after knowing the depth of conflict dating back to the times of the Valyrian Freehold.

‘I suppose some grudges could be undone given enough time.’ Daenerys thought, looking at the Free Folk warriors and spearwives working side by side with the Northerners.

“Perhaps we should have this conversation at a later date. Let’s end one threat at a time.” Daenerys suggested tentatively before anything more could be said by either Lord Royce or Arya.

Thankfully, her intervention diffused the fraying tempers. After exchanging some pleasantries and wishing Lord Royce the best, Daenerys sought out her husband, who had proven elusive today. Along the way, she watched her Unsullied work diligently on placing pikes along the trenches and removing the snow trapped inside the carved-out space. She could not fathom why the men didn’t just use salt and remove the snow. She had seen it done in Winterfell while staying with the Starks. She could not fathom why the men were not doing the same here.

Even if she had her opinion, she kept silent as the men physically removed the snow from the ground. Some areas of the trenches were left exposed, while other areas were covered with wooden planks that allowed the men to cross to the other side of the trench safely. There were large siege towers with mounted scorpions arrayed behind the trench lines. She had come to know that particular construct was her husband’s idea.

“Siege towers are used for sieges, are they not?” Daenerys asked, looking curiously at her lady companions.

“They are, your grace.” Lyra Mormont said, nodding her head.

“Then why have we built siege towers? Aren’t we going to defend rather than attack?” Daenerys asked, staring at the many siege towers lining up behind the third and fourth trench lines.

"I suspect his grace wants to use the height of the towers and the mounted scorpions to take out the Others, your grace. I've seen several scorpion bolts being transported fitted with Dragonglass tips," said Lyra.

"I see." Daenerys let out a thoughtful hum.

She walked along the trenches, often greeting lords, knights and commoners alike. She even had the opportunity to meet some of the famed spearwives of the Free Folk. They all had a story to tell, and Daenerys found herself immersed in their tales. Sometimes, it became difficult for her to listen as people often had different slang. Most of the Free Folk spoke a bastardised version of the Common Tongue, or in some cases, they didn't speak at all and merely stared at her skittishly. Later, she learned that her purple eyes and silver hair made the Free Folk think she was some sorceress, and they feared she'd do something to them. Some of the Free Folk had even taken to call her the Silver Witch, which amused her a little.

After what felt like hours, she finally came across her husband, who was in talks with Brandon Stark, the Red Priest Benerro and a Child of the Forest. The three of them were sitting around a small fire burning on the ground while Ser Barristan, Ser Lyn and Thoros of Myr stood watch.

"Husband. I see you're hosting an interesting company. I hope I'm not intruding." Daenerys said, walking into the group with her two companions while her eyes lingered on the chestnut-skinned Child of the Forest.

"Not at all, your grace. We were just discussing plans to tackle the enemy and future endeavours should the war go in our favour." Benerro said, his eyes glowing ominously.

Daenerys blinked, and the Red Priest looked normal to her eyes save for the red tattoos that adorned his face and bald head.

"Please refrain from engaging in parlour tricks to cover yourself in mystery, Benerro. I thought vanity and theatrics were for vain men, not for men of spirituality." Daeron chastised the Red Priest.

"What is life without a little theatricality, your grace? I'm a priest born out of fire, and fire is passion. I should embody such qualities that the Red God represents." said Benerro, his eyes holding mirth.

Daenerys muttered a 'thank you' to her husband, who offered her his chair until Ser Barristan returned with a new chair. She was about to take the new chair, but Daeron shook his head, took the new one and scooted close to her side. She smiled at him for being considerate enough, as her legs were in pain after walking for so long in the snow.

"Oh! You are a man of passion now, Benerro. Does the faithful know the High priest of the Red Temple of Volantis enjoys theatrics?" Daeron asked amusedly.

Daenerys noted her lady companions take their leave instead of hanging around.

"Of course, your grace. The people know." said Benerro, summoning flames into his palms.

Daenerys sat up straight as she looked at the flames dancing on the Red Priest's palms with wide eyes. Unlike her, Daeron didn't bat an eye at the display.

"Impressive. But not as impressive as this..." said Daeron, with a look of concentration on his face.

Daenerys watched as Daeron's stormy grey eyes suddenly turned milky-white.

Suddenly, a lot of snow fell on Benerro's palms, snuffing out the flames momentarily. Daenerys immediately looked up to see ravens flying above them. A little bit of snow even fell on her head, making her scowl at her husband for his silly games.

"I'm sorry, Dany. I'm working on the accuracy." Daeron said with an apologetic look as he helped to get the snow out of her hair.

"Humans have not changed much, even after thousands of years. You remain immature, corruptible by an iota of power and easily led astray."

Daenerys looked at the Child of the Forest, who finally broke its silence since she joined the group.

"Ha! It speaks. I was wondering whether you understood a word I was saying." Benerro said, wagging a finger at the face of the Child of the Forest.

By the looks of it, the Child looked unimpressive despite the finger of the Red Priest caught fire.

"You look at the elements and call that your gods." the Child said with a scoff, reaching out its small hand towards the flame and snuffing out the flame by catching the finger between its small fingers. "As I said, you've not changed much."

"I suppose the tree gods make more sense than a god who lives in fire." Benerro joked, making Ser Lyn crack up.

"Ah, apologies, your grace." Ser Lyn bowed his head.

Daeron just waved dismissively.

"Anyway, let's come to the matter at hand. Do your people have any objections to the plan?" Daeron asked, staring at the Child curiously.

"Allowing the Wall to fall would be a mistake, but I understand your armies might not be capable of sustaining themselves for long under this weather. We'll undo the protections on the Wall along a selected area as you suggested." The Child said, its golden yellow eyes trained on Daeron.

"Good." Daeron nodded before turning his sights on Benerro. "What about you, Benerro? Can you ensure the rest of the Wall's protections are strengthened even if the enemy uses the Horn of Winter?"

"Our power comes from the Red God or maybe the element of fire, as this Child thinks. I do not claim to know everything about the divine. I'm not that arrogant. Whatever it is, I know it'll lend us strength to preserve life in our world. We can strengthen the spells on the Wall, your grace." Benerro promised.

"Good. Then I'll leave the Wall in your capable hands." Daeron nodded at the two.

A few minutes later, it was just Daenerys, her husband and Bran.

"You are going to let the Wall fall?" Daenerys asked incredulously.

"We need to let the dead cross but on our terms. If we fight and delay, we'll soon be at a disadvantage. The Night King knows this. That's why he chose to wait. But if we tempt him by lowering the magical protections on the Wall, he might take the bait." Bran answered.

Daenerys looked at the otherwise silent cousin of her husband with a raised eyebrow.

“Bran speaks true. The Night King cannot use the Horn of Winter in his possession without consequences. The Children left certain protections on the Horn exactly for this reason. His powers will be considerably diminished once the Night King uses it.” Daeron explained succinctly.

“I’m sorry. Just what is this Horn of Winter you are talking about?” Daenerys asked confusedly, looking at her husband and Bran Stark.

“It’s a legendary artefact created by the Children to call the Giants, the First Men, the Green Men and their own people to gather against the Night King. It was allegedly used once by Joramun, a King-Beyond-the-Wall, to wake the Giants from the earth. Right now, the Horn is in the Night King’s possession, and so is our uncle.”

“What?” Daenerys said, frowning at Daeron.

“Benjen Stark joined the Night’s Watch after the Rebellion. He has been missing for the last couple of years. The Night King holds him prisoner now for the blood of a First Men to saturate the runes of the Horn. When the Night King blows the horn, it should theoretically have the opposite effect. The Horn will undo the work of all the four races that fought together in the last war.” Daeron explained.

“Hence, the Wall would fall by the corrosive magic of the Night King.” said Bran, staring coolly at the Wall. “But it can be on our terms if we act fast.”

“Then, shouldn’t we save your uncle?” Daenerys asked.

“No.” Daeron answered shortly.

“What do you...?”

“If I try to save Benjen Stark, we’ll all die.” said Daeron, standing up abruptly before leaving Daenerys in the company of Bran.

“He’s right, you know.” Bran spoke up, bringing her attention to the crippled cousin of her husband. “Our plan hinges on the Night King using the Horn of Winter. If we manage to save Uncle Benjen against all odds, we’ll suffer grave losses and perhaps even lose this war. So...”

“You’ll sacrifice him to win the war.” said Daenerys, not feeling well at the prospect of her husband sacrificing his uncle.

For some reason, abandoning Benjen Stark to the mercy of the White Walkers felt wrong. She knew war was ugly and often left people with little choice, but Benjen Stark was the maternal uncle of her husband. She didn’t want him to do anything that he’d later regret. Leaving Benjen Stark to die alone in the hands of the Others sounded like something that’d affect Daeron after the war.

She abruptly stood up, causing Bran to frown at her.

“Daeron understands what must be done to win, your grace. And winning this war is more important than anything else, no matter the cost.” Bran calmly said, staring unblinkingly into Daenerys’ eyes.

“We are both greenseers, Daeron and I. If there was another way...” Bran let that hang between them.

She turned away from Bran Stark and walked after Daeron into the tent. Daenerys found her husband sitting on their shared bed with Lightbringer and Dark Sister on his lap. She joined him in bed, placing her head on his shoulders while gazing at the two swords.

“You’ve seen the future, haven’t you?” Daenerys whispered.

Daeron had confided in her about his magical powers that awakened after his resurrection at Castle Black. He had warging powers before, but after he drank the sap from a Heart Tree, his powers had expanded beyond limits, and he became a greenseer like Brynden Rivers.

“A version of the future, yes. The choice was made long before I came here.” Daeron said, staring at the swords with a conflicting look.

“Choose what, my love?” Daenerys asked softly.

“You or Benjen Stark. And I’d choose you and our children a thousand times over anyone else.” Daeron whispered, pulling her closely against his body.

With a startling realisation, Daenerys understood her husband was sacrificing Benjen Stark for her and the child growing in her womb.

‘He must’ve seen my death.’ Daenerys mused, nuzzling into her husband’s side, listening to the pleasant thrum of his heart.

At that moment, she vowed to let nothing come between her and Daeron, be it gods, demons or men. The pair of lips that pressed down on her head made her warm despite the biting cold of the North.

“If you saw the future, you should know more about our child.” Dany commented idly, enjoying the ministrations from Daeron, who was rubbing her back.

She could hear her husband chuckle.

“The future is subjective, my love. It’s always in flux. My visions can change as time passes. What I can see are possibilities and nothing more.” Daeron explained.

“Hmm.” Dany mewled as she felt some unknown tension on her back eased thanks to her husband’s ministrations. “Still, you might have an idea. How many children do we have?”

“Eager to make more children, are you?” Daeron whispered hotly into her ear, making Dany excited as a shiver passed through her spine all the way to her toes.

“If my king will have me, I’ll be more than happy to warm his bed whenever he pleases.” Daenerys said sensually, fluttering her eyebrows at her husband.

The kiss that followed was warm and tender, filled with passion and love they held for each other. When they pulled back, Dany found herself seeing the lust shining in her eyes from the reflection in the grey eyes of her husband.

“If my queen is willing, I’ll have her now in bed.” said Daeron, gazing at her lovingly.

“I’m always willing.” Daenerys breathed, her heart hammering inside her body.

In the next moment, she was tearing away her husband’s clothes while he was doing the same to her. Even the cold of the Long Night could not stand a chance to snuck out the warmth she was feeling as they made love inside their tent.

Daeron flinched slightly while tightening the greaves on his right leg. After tying the laces of the greaves properly, he turned his eyes on his wife, who was soundly asleep in their shared bed. Most of her lithe body was covered under a thick woollen sheet sans her left leg. That sole naked leg was enough to entice Daeron to stay in bed with his wife, but time was against him.

Letting out a sigh, Daeron moved closer to his wife and sat on the bed. The cold winds howled outside as the Long Night had consumed the continent from the Wall to Dorne. Ravens had come from the Citadel that the deserts of Dorne were now covered in snow, and cold winds were keeping the Dornish lords confined in their castles. The thick sleet covering the roads and all the major locations in Westeros brought forth a temporary thaw in the many battles being fought. Now, it was a matter of surviving the winter.

“Dany. You should wake up.” Daeron whispered against her ear, making his wife let out a groan.

He could see Daenerys blearily open her eyes. He couldn’t help but tuck a stray lock of hair that clung to her cheek behind her ear, and that was enough to wake his wife. Daeron moved back on the bed, making room for his wife to sit up on the bed.

“Is it time?” asked Daenerys, fully sitting up in bed, letting the woollen sheet slip down her shoulders to her shapely hips, consequently leaving her breasts and belly button bare.

Daeron had the feeling his wife purposefully did that because he could see a grin tugging at the corner of her ruby lips.

“I’ll never let you leave the bed after we win this war.” Daeron whispered throatily, pressing a kiss on Daenerys’ forehead.

“Bold words, husband. I’ll be holding you to that oath.” Daenerys gave him a sensual wink that threatened to escalate their passion, but Daeron managed to take a deep breath and rein in his emotions.

“Get ready. There are souls waiting to be released from the Night King’s thralldom.” Daeron said stoically, turning away from his wife to stare into the embers burning inside their tent.

“There is no need to worry, husband.” Daenerys pressed herself against his back while whispering in his ear. “We’ll win.”

‘Minx.’ Daeron thought, shaking his head at her antics.

He turned around and captured her lips in a searing kiss, which quickly launched a small make-out session in their tent as he dragged a naked Daenerys into his lap.

Half an hour later, Daeron was standing close to Drogon, dressed in boiled leather armour just like his wife, who was getting ready by strapping a bow on her back.

“Dragonglass-tipped arrows are fastened on the saddle.” said Daeron, tightening the belt on his wife’s waist that secured the Valyrian Steel dagger.

“I know. This is the third time you are telling me, and you’ve tightened that belt enough times, my love.” Daenerys said with some exasperation.

“All right. You’re ready.” said Daeron, patting the belt one last time, earning a glare from his wife.

He raised his hands in surrender and stopped fussing over his wife as she began climbing to the saddle on top of Drogon. The black dragon glared at him with its large yellow eyes, letting out a snort in his direction. He picked up the quiver full of Dragonglass-tipped arrows and followed behind Daenerys. Unlike normal quivers, this one was different because it was designed to keep the arrows from slipping out quickly. This also meant it'd be a tad difficult to quickly pull out the arrows from the quiver. Still, it'd be easy should the additional strap be taken away from the open portion of the quiver.

"Are you settled in? Do you need anything else?" he asked once Daenerys settled on the saddle safely by locking in the chains.

"I have everything I need." Daenerys assured him.

"Do be careful while you climb down. Drogon can be a little bit mischievous." She warned as he climbed back.

"I think I can handle...whoa!" Daeron had to jump down from Drogon's body as the large dragon chose to flap its wing for no reason.

Daeron could see the black dragon eye him out of the corner of its left eye. He could see Daenerys chuckling and whispering something to Drogon from her saddle. But he didn't bother to learn what she was saying or make unnecessary moves as he knew Drogon could easily flatten him into a fine paste with its tail. So, he let someone else do it in his stead. Rhaegal snapped its jaws threateningly towards Drogon, forcing the black dragon to step back with a growl.

"Lykir, Rhaegal." Daeron pressed his hands against the bright green scales of his dragon. "Lykir!"

He rubbed the scales of Rhaegal, calming the green dragon to some extent, but Rhaegal continued to glare at Drogon. Rhaegal disengaged from the glaring contest when Daeron climbed aboard and secured himself on the saddle. Binding himself with the chains of the saddle, he secured himself atop Rhaegal. Unlike Daenerys, he opted out of using a bow but had fastened a few Dragonglass-tipped spears near the saddle. He had Lightbringer and Dark Sister strapped to his waist and shoulder. The spears were most likely unneeded, but if he wanted a long-range weapon for some reason, he preferred a spear instead of a bow.

Once he was satisfied with his current status, Daeron gave the signal to the men. Two horns were blown loud and clear. The first was for the Children to pull back the magic on the Wall, while the second was for the benefit of the men standing ready for what comes next. They waited a long moment, but nothing happened.

"Well, the Wall didn't fall down. So, that's somethin'." Edd shouted at him from near the fourth trench line.

"You sound disappointed, Lord Commander." Daeron shouted back amidst the howling winds.

"That wall of ice has been standing there for thousands of years. I'm not the only one to think it'd be mighty amusing to watch it fall." said Edd, his usual dark humour shining through despite the seriousness of the situation.

"You keep strange friends, my love." Daenerys quipped with an amused smirk on her face.

Daeron grinned at his wife but soon returned to keeping his focus on the giant wall of ice. The Wall remained intact despite the magical protection being rolled back by the Children. He realised the Night King might need a little push to take the bait. Therefore, he took a deep breath before splitting

his consciousness into the ravens he had gathered for the occasion. After warging into their minds, he directed them to fly straight up to the top of the Wall. The ravens arranged themselves in a wide arc as they beat their wings with all their might, flying against the wind and sleet to reach the top. Once they reached the top, Daeron was about to make them glide down beyond the Wall, but the lands beyond the Wall were consumed by pitch-black darkness that did not allow for a speck of light to survive.

‘So, this is the Long Night.’ Daeron thought, seeing the veil of darkness that consumed the lands beyond the Wall.

He let the ravens fly along the length of the Wall, searching for a small peek of the enemy. But there was no such luck. It was as if the night had consumed every inch of the land beyond the Wall. Fortunately, he was prepared for this eventuality. He pulled two owls into the group to support the ravens, and keeping the owls at the forefront of the group, he sent them beyond the Wall. Daeron managed to see what was happening beyond the Wall using the owls. He saw the army of the dead stretching across for miles and even into the woods beyond the Wall. There were all sorts of creatures as well, joining the army of the dead under the thrall of the Others. Bears, wolves, Giants, Mammoths and all sorts of creatures were arrayed against the Wall, with the Others riding dead horses. What freaked him out more were the rows of giant ice spiders with Others sitting atop their heads with their sharp ice spears.

Fortunately, he could not see any reanimated flying creatures anywhere within the Night King’s army. He supposed the birds could not fly after their feathers and wings fell off after death. The magic of Others could only go so far as to resurrect the dead. Their magic was not strong enough to restore the flesh and all the properties of the dead creatures while they were alive.

Daeron searched for the Night King among the vast army arrayed beyond the Wall. He could see the innumerable cold blue eyes being trained on him as he watched the large army through the eyes of the owls. Suddenly, he felt a powerful presence push against his hold on the owls and ravens. Immediately, he traced the presence and found a White Walker standing atop an Ice Spider with a spear in hand. Unlike the other White Walkers, this one had spikes grown out of its head akin to a crown.

“Night King.” Daeron breathed out, watching the leader of the Others jump down from the Ice Spider’s head.

He could feel a renewed push coming from the Night King to push him out of the minds of the owls and ravens, but Daeron pushed right back. He held his ground within the minds of the owls and ravens, refusing to let the creatures to the mercy of the Night King. However, he made the avian creatures keep more distance, and the pressure lessened on his mind. If the Night King was dissatisfied by Daeron’s continued presence, he didn’t show it. Instead, the Night King stabbed his ice spear into the ground and took out a dagger made of ice.

Two Others dragged Benjen Stark forward. The Night King promptly plunged the dagger straight into the heart of the last living son of Rickard Stark. Wrenching the dagger from the heart, the Night King allowed Benjen Stark to bleed out. The Night King then shot a look at Daeron, who was watching everything from the eyes of the owls.

‘Is he expecting I’ll rush in to help Benjen Stark?’ Daeron wondered.

If that was the case, then the Night King’s thought process factored in human emotions. It was an interesting discovery highlighting that the Night King understood human emotions and intimacy

despite its inherent urge to kill all life on the continent. Daeron watched from the eyes of an owl as another White Walker brought a large horn and let it drench in the lifeblood of Benjen Stark. He could see Benjen Stark had stopped moving, and the White Walker offered the blood-drenched horn to the Night King.

“Stand fast, everyone! The Horn of Winter is about to be blown.” Daeron shouted to his men as he watched the Night King slowly bring the blood-soaked horn to his icy lips.

Daeron immediately let the owls and ravens cross the Wall as the horn was blown. He immediately felt his mind reeling after hearing the sound from the horn, followed by a long crack forming on the Wall. He was forced to leave the minds of the two owls and ravens because the disrupting power of the Night King eclipsed his ability to defend, thanks to the Horn of Winter. More cracks began forming on the Wall, and soon enough, a portion of it tumbled down with a thunderous crash, covering Castle Black under large blocks of ice. It was as if a sizeable rectangular doorway was carved from the 700ft high wall. The rest of the Wall remained intact as Bennerro and the Children promised. He hoped they could maintain the rest of the Wall intact as the plan hinged on the Night King leading his army through the current pathway opened through the Wall.

It only took a few minutes for the meagre light sneaking past the dark clouds in the sky to be blotted out as a veil of darkness consumed the sky. Daeron warged into a few more owls and had them stand watch at the giant opening on the Wall. He even had one settle on his shoulder for a better view of the battlefield when the fighting started. For now, the men lit fires along the four trench lines, giving their side some much-needed visibility. But how long that would last in the snowstorm needed to be seen.

An excerpt from The Second Long Night by Samwell Tarly

Only in children's stories have I heard of the Long Night, a long historic event thought to be mythical for centuries, but I saw the Night enveloping the skies in a veil of darkness. Darkness gathered beyond the Wall, hiding in its bosom, the fearsome creatures of ice and death holding nothing but hate for all life.

Antilife, is what I found staring at the gaping hole left on the Wall.

From the darkness came the creatures of the night, the mysterious Others or White Walkers. My dearest friend, the King, later called them by another name. Ice Fey or Winter Fey, he called them.

I asked Daeron Targaryen why he called them as such. And the answer he gave was both troubling and confusing. To Daeron, the Others were the antithesis of the Children of the Forest. Exactly why the King of the Seven Kingdoms believed so remains unknown. But I believed him because I knew the depths of his Greenseer abilities go beyond my understanding. The minuscule that I know about Greenseers suggests that King Daeron had the power to peek so far into the past and see the origin of the Others.

As a learned man, I know nature functions in a delicate balance. Nature uses certain corrective forces to find the balance whenever this delicate balance is threatened. My faith in this principle makes me believe that the Others were the corrective act of nature, born to curb the hubris of mankind and keep the powers of the Children of the Forest in check. But my logic cannot fathom a race of beings born with the power to corrupt life itself and create a mockery of it.

Perhaps, logic fails in the matters of magic and sorcery, as my mentor Archmaester Marwin often said.

Either way, myth became a reality for Westeros when the Wall fell. The Horn of Winter, created by the runes of the First Men and the Children of the Forest, brought down the Wall that stood for more than seven thousand years. But thanks to the intervention of the Red Priests of Volantis, the Wall didn't fall in its entirety. Only the portion of the Wall that stood close to Castle Black fell when the Night King used the Horn of Winter. The Horn of Winter was a magical device to awaken the Giants from their slumber, but in the hands of the Night King, the corruptive magic of the Others could be focused to shatter the Wall. Not much is known about the Horn of Winter or why it was even created in the first place. Many speculations were there about the origin of the Horn, but nothing could be substantiated with proof. Those who knew of its origin preferred to remain silent, including King Daeron the Third, who expended considerable efforts to retrieve the artefact after the Great War.

Despite my best efforts, I could not coerce my good friend from divulging what he knew about the artefact.

'Some things are better left unexplained.' said the king, and that was the end of it.

'Leave the past to the dead.' said the Children of the Forest when asked about the Horn of Winter, pretty much mirroring King Daeron's advice.

The Horn of Winter, for reasons unknown, was a device capable of inflicting damage to the Wall. But the Children and the Red Priests were wily enough to see the benefits in allowing the Others south of the Wall. Therefore, they devised a plan with King Daeron that allowed the Night King to breach the Wall but simultaneously forced the Others to traverse a chokepoint defended by the armies assembled under King Daeron's command. Pots of Wildfire, deep trenches filled with whale oil, armies of men armed with dragonglass weapons, the strength of Giants capable of shaking the very earth itself, the magical might of the Children and the Red Priests and finally, the dragons of Daeron Targaryen and Daenerys Targaryen stood between the Others and the rest of the Seven Kingdoms.

Despite the mighty armies arrayed against the Others, the battle was sure to be bloody. After all, the full might of the Dead were arrayed against a divided Westeros despite the best efforts of King Daeron and Queen Daenerys. Sadly enough, the only people experienced in fighting the Others were the Children, the Free Folk and a few Night's Watch brothers, including myself.

This was why King Daeron set the army under his command in the form of a pentagon despite the thousands of mounted knights under his command from the Reach, the Riverlands, the Vale, the Crownlands and the North. Unlike other battles fought in Westeros, King Daeron realised early on that it'd be a disaster to attack the numerically superior army of the dead on horseback without properly cutting them down in size. The offensive roles in the army were given to archers positioned at the centre circle inside the pentagon formation formed by the army, the siege engines behind the fourth trench line and the Targaryen dragons.

Time would prove this strategy to work seamlessly in thinning down the mindless horde of the great enemy.