**War of the Ten Warlords Arc**

**Chapter 7**

**The Siege of King’s Landing**

*It had existed for only three hundred years, but for the men and women living during the War of the Ten Warlords, King’s Landing had always been there.*

*It was a sea of starscrapers and monuments proclaiming the might of Westeros.*

*It was the most populated planet of the Seven Sectors. It was also the most populated system of the realm. Not even great, mighty and ancient Oldtown came close: King’s Landing had seventeen billion to Oldtown twelve.*

*Thus as the first battles were waged, there was still a certain optimism in the streets, despite the terrible financial difficulties met by the new government of King Viserys Targaryen.*

*King’s Landing, despite a Behemoth fratricidal battle, a coup, and perhaps the greatest civil war ever fought in this quadrant of the galaxy, stood. It was not unmarked, it was bloodied, but it stood.*

*And it was not defenceless.*

*Setting aside the massive defence fleet of the system, which was considerable and had plenty of capital ships to boost its tonnage, King’s Landing was a heavily defended world, as befitted its status of capital.*

*The Crown Army on 01.06.300AAC had been close to seven hundred million men strong, but in all urgency and with the desperate hiring of sellswords from Essos and the mustering of many hordes of militia-conscripts, this number was now close to a billion men...and women.*

*Such had been the desperation and the meagre resources the previous edicts forbidding women bearing arms had been rescinded in urgency. Of course, it had only been a mere two weeks and not many female adults had been willing to enlist.*

*There were also two hundred and ten million Marine Infantry to reinforce them, but many had joined the side of Aegon VI Targaryen, more were mustered aboard the King’s Landing Defence Fleet or required to garrison the arsenal-planet of Dragonstone, or were deployed across the Crown Sector to suppress rebellions and insurrections.*

*The regime of King Viserys III had a huge list of problems only military force could solve, they could not deny this.*

*But at all times, King’s Landing was the capital, and prestige if nothing else demanded it was heavily defended.*

*As such the planet garrison – Gold Fists, Goldcloaks, militias, conscripts, noble’s private guards and sellswords companies all included – was approximately worth six hundred million men and women.*

*And it didn’t count the Behemoths, the gigantic anti-air batteries, the electronic scramblers, the artillery continental city-killers, the nuclear silos and diverse earth-shattering weapons the Targaryen dynasty had accumulated in three centuries of reign.*

*The civilian underground refuges were legion. The military bunkers were likely greater in numbers.*

*A campaign in this maze of streets promised an ocean of blood and entire field armies crippled for months.*

*Orbital superiority was not a priority; it was an absolute necessity to have a chance to limit your own losses. As Galactic Targaryen News had prattled endlessly for years, even the Rebels and the Ironborn, utterly insane in their usurpation attempts and crimes against their legitimate monarch, had not dared attack straight on the defences of King’s Landing.*

*And Operation Downfall and the demise of King Rhaegar had proved it was infinitely preferable to have your own men in the place to take the capital.*

*Therefore before the terrible date of 01.01.300AAC, many Kingslanders were debating if this war was as terrible as the rumours made it to be.*

*Yes, there were awful whispers from Fawnton, the River Sector and elsewhere, but King’s Landing stood. And as long as the capital stood, the edifice could be rebuilt, beginning from the Crown Sector. King Viserys III appeared the kind of sovereign who took his duties seriously. The fleet was stronger than it had been in months, as corruption was no longer tolerated and incompetent officers were court-martialled.*

*The Conqueror Himself had created the Seven Sectors starting only with Dragonstone and Driftmark. Nowadays, the industrial resources and the pool of manpower available to the Green Dragon were incomparably stronger.*

*As long as King’s Landing stood, everything could be rebuilt.*

If *King’s Landing stood.*

*There still were armies and fleets available to crush the terrible uprisings and civil rebellions everywhere.*

If *the Red and the Green Dragon didn’t destroy each other first.* If *they didn’t condemn humanity to the darkness...*

Extract from the essay-pamphlet *The Dragon loves to bathe in human’s blood*, author unknown, proscribed text of 301AAC.

**Lord Jacaerys Velaryon, 03.10.300AAC, King’s Landing System**

Three more scout cruisers died before the orbital defences of the capital were neutralised.

In the grand scheme of things, it was a small number. And scout cruisers were hardly the more difficult warship to build once war-times measures and construction priorities were implemented.

Or at least it would have been, if the shipyards supposed to build said warships were not currently self-destructing, venting air and debris, or suffering the delicate attention of nuclear detonations courtesy of the incoming bombardment.

Under his eyes, trillions, maybe hundreds of trillions of Golden Dragons’ investments were pulverised or rendered unusable. Plasma and laser batteries roared a new salvo before being silenced forever. Missile tubes larger than those embarked on the flanks of battlecruisers became dispersed in dozens of parts with their gunners and whoever had been nearby.

It was a massacre. There was no point to pretend otherwise.

And yet as long as there was no surrender from the Red Keep or any of the senior commanders left in system after the stampede of Viserys’ fleet, everything was done according to the laws of war.

*Nearly* everything was done according to the laws of war. Certain of the most bloodthirsty officers had to be reminded that shooting the escape pods of the enemy was simply not done.

“I don’t know where we are going to find the supplies and the fuel to continue this war, but it won’t be here,” Theon Greyjoy murmured.

The two of them were completely alone on the secondary bridge of the Balerion, but Jacaerys had activated all the possible anti-spying measures at his disposal and a few more he wasn’t supposed to have in his possession.

“We will in all likelihood have to withdraw back to High Chelsted,” the Admiral whispered back.

It was something which would have to be done...assuming the warships in this fleet still could do it. High Chelsted, for those who didn’t know how to read a star map, was two jumps away from King’s Landing, and Jacaerys could name without effort ten warships which would not endure a short jump, never mind two long ones.

“We should stun him, confine him to his quarters, and withdraw from this bloodbath,” the legitimate Lord of Pyke said in a very, very careful voice, “our fleet is more or less gone and we won’t be able to launch any operations for at least a year, and that’s if we are lucky and the other fronts have accomplished their objectives. The...the last thing we need is to lose the army we have in our transports.”

Jacaerys returned to him a grim expression.

“Yes...and no. Suppose we turn around right now. Sooner or later, and I’m ready to bet it will be ‘sooner’ than ‘later’, Viserys’ fleet will come back, they will transfer shipyards and repair ships from the rest of the Sector, and we will have a population of millions if not billions of Green supporters ready to rebuild the orbital damage we have done. If we leave King’s Landing intact and loathing our guts in our rear, we will regret it in a few months as they cut down our last bastions and bases in the Sector.”

“At least it would preserve the Army,” Theon retorted, clearly unconvinced. “You have seen like me the natural strategic and tactical talent of ‘His Grace’ when he is opposed by someone who is not throwing victory away to please him. We have twenty million Crownlanders and about fifty million Reachers in the transports and auxiliaries’ hulls. If we take the same ratio of casualties the capital ships did...”

Jacaerys shivered. This was a good point. Unfortunately, it wasn’t like he could do anything to stop this disaster. He could do nothing to stop another disaster, if he was adopting a realistic perspective.

“But we can’t stop him. Aegon often listened to us before, but now how little advice he is willing to not reject out of hand comes from his Red Witch. So if we tell him to take a prudent course, at best he will ignore us, at worse he will execute us to prevent further desertions and mutinies.”

“Even though it would kill his Presumptive Heir and make sure Driftmark will never kneel to him ever again?”

“He already did it for the Antlers,” the silver-haired highborn reminded him, “and I doubt he paused a single second to consider the consequences.”

And the consequences were already really bad. Adrian Buckwell had been far from perfect, but he had been the Heir of the Antlers, and fairly loyal when it came to his sworn regiments.

Maybe they could have tried to spin a fabricated story with some preparation. But there had been no damage-control and no communication lockdown when Aegon had decided Adrian was to die. In mere hours, hundreds of thousands men had known of this murder...and the Antlers soldiers and sailors had not been exactly happy to hear that what were legitimate concerns before were now worth a death sentence.

There had been furious fights aboard many warships and transports. By all accounts, the casualty number was close to twenty thousand already. And the Seven only knew how many Buckwell loyalists had stayed quiet but were now bidding their time, waiting for their revenge.

“No Theon, we can’t rely on our birth, our titles, or our value to remain alive.”

Internally, it made him sick and tired. Hundreds of hours trying to be the best, thousands of hours of devotion and unquestioned obedience, and as a result they had a madman who thought their very lives were his to end by the millions when he wished it.

Perhaps the titles, his name, and the honours had made him close too often his eyes on the flaws of the Targaryen dynasty.

Alas, now that his eyes were wide open, it was too late to take the helm and purge the problem.

“In this case, I think it is best we prepare some...contingency plans.”

“Theon, we can’t kill him. If we do, the Reachers in our rank will run back to Highgarden without a second thought...and I fear many Crownlanders will imitate them.”

“I was more thinking along the lines of removing the Kingsguards, the Red Witch and her fellow cultists, before locking him down in his cabin,” said the Lord of Pyke with one of his infamous smirks.

“I’m listening.”

Under their feet, the Balerion fired once more, but this time it was different. This time the onslaught wasn’t directed at the crumbling orbital defences.

This time it was the planet itself which was the target.

**Ser Justin Massey, 03.10.300AAC, King’s Landing System**

Justin had never had the leisure to be on the receiving end of an orbital bombardment in his life.

Now that he and his entire command were though, he knew he would have dearly liked to never have experienced the feelings which came with it.

At the risk of repeating himself, it was not a pleasant experience. Despite being close to three kilometres below the surface, the walls were shaking, and it was no natural series of earthquakes. There was dust coming from micro-fissures which had not been there hours ago.

Some part of him wished to be outside, killing the defilers of the capital, unleashing the fury of the Behemoths under his command.

The other part of him knew doing such a thing would be a death sentence. Behemoths were kings of the land battlefields, as long as there was no orbital support involved. Dozens of fliers, they could handle. Thousands of tanks would be destroyed in mere minutes. But a heavy cruiser hundreds of kilometres above their heads? The enemy could be at Casterly Rock for all the range the Behemoth’s weapons had. Behemoths were colossal machines of war, but the first Targaryen Kings, for what had to be excellent reasons three hundred years ago, had divided the area of responsibilities: to the Behemoths the honour of crushing everything walking, running, crawling or moving in any fashion on a planet; to the dragons the honour of setting the void and crushing everything the Behemoths couldn’t handle.

It sure must have been a fine arrangement at the time. The tiny problem was that dragons had been a bit extinct for the last century or so. While some part of him was glad this was the case – Aegon the Mad was as insane as Aerys, best not face him with a dragon by his side – in desperate situations like this, a big nasty fire-breathing reptile would have been a nice thing to have on their side.

“The bombardment has destroyed the anti-air batteries of Quadrant 4, Ser,” informed him one of the sensors-technicians he had kept with the small army of assistants, guards, and Behemoths pilots. “The sub-cities of Canter and Blue Field have been completely destroyed. Reports are partial, but two of the pre-war behemoths underground mustering points did share this fate with fifty-seven percent certainty.”

Sometimes, the General admired how these bureaucrats in technician robes managed to deliver bad news in a monotone voice.

Admiration was not how he felt today. He knew that bunkers or not, shelter or not, tens of thousands people had just died in brilliant flashes.

Justin was not going to pretend he descended every day from his Behemoth to dine with smallfolk beggars, but he had sworn vows to defend the population of the capital from the monsters Aegon the Mad had mustered to kill them all.

“General, priority communication from Lord Staunton,” the lieutenant he had charged to oversee communications announced.

“Put him on personal display,” he answered.

The visage of Baelor Staunton looked far more livid and exhausted than he had ever seen him. The Lord of Rook’s Rest was in general taking great care of maintaining an immaculate appearance, but today his greying hairs were dishevelled and he looked like he had slept in his uniform.

It would have been funny if they all didn’t look the same.

“The Daeron Fortress is gone,” began bluntly the man that for best or for worse was now the supreme authority of King’s Landing. “They have razed it by orbital strike twenty minutes ago.”

“They are completely mad,” before he would have put some outrage in his voice. Now it was just a matter of conversation. “There were three massive industrial nodes surrounding it!”

And if they had struck that hard the Fortress, there was not a lot of doubt the settlements and the underground shelters had been incinerated along with it. This was what? Three or four million people killed in the blink of an eye.

“If the inferno they create is any judge, they are wiping out all the suburbs, starscrapers, buildings and cities of Quadrant Four to make sure their landings will be unopposed. If it was any other opponent, I would be a bit less confident about predicting their moves, but it’s obvious by now our dear Crown Prince is not a master in the field of subtlety. My analysts and I predict he will try to pour his troops by the Red Banner’s starport and the surrounding fields four hundred kilometres to the north.”

“For a direct assault against the Old and the Dragon Gates?” He had heard some stupid tactics and strategies from officers who really should know better, so this move wasn’t the most idiotic move he had ever heard. It still figured in the top ten, though.

“It would be good for his ego. The Dragon’s Gate is the only defence to never have fallen since King’s Landing exists.”

“Unless my memory fails me, isn’t the reason for this invincibility the astounding number of macro-plasma weapons and expensive top-secret devices emplaced everywhere near it?”

“Why, I believe you are right, General Massey.” Baelor Staunton gave him a thin smile before turning deadly serious. “As you pointed out, it would be something exceedingly stupid for him to do. So we can’t be certain he will try to fight the strongest defences of King’s Landing in a frontal assault without more of his...sorcery and heretical deeds. On the other hand, if he does try, he will certainly have to send the Behemoths he has left against our walls.”

“Leaving my Behemoths free to rampage in his rear and cut supply lines and reinforcement waves while he’s busy hammering the walls.” He finished grimacing. “I will try, but I must warn you my Lord that if they continue this bombardment for a few more days, even my Behemoths will have serious trouble walking through this hellish landscape.”

“If they continue to bombard us a few more days, Ser,” the Commander of the Red Keep declared in a fatalistic tone, “everyone on this planet is going to die...casualties are already in the millions and climbing.”