

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 67

Harry was in a freefall for at least twenty seconds before his feet hit solid ground with a booming thump. He bent his knees to absorb the shock of the sudden deceleration. The ball of light over his head cut through the overwhelming darkness of the cavern. Harry looked up and saw the hole he had just come down through. A normal man could never hope to return back through it. It was far too high and out of reach. Harry ignored it and studied his surroundings.

The cavern he was in was massive. It wasn't man-made. He could tell instantly that it had been carved from eons of erosion. The walls were slick and glistening from dripping water. Harry forced the ball of light higher until it reached the cavern roof. He then expanded the ball until everything was visible. The cavern was roughly oval-shaped, and he could see only two exits. The one furthest away from him was a jagged tunnel that disappeared into the darkness. The one closest was an opening in the wall the size of a beachball where water poured in. Harry went over to investigate.

The closer he got to the source of the water, the more sulfurous it smelled. Upon closer inspection, he saw that the opening produced a three-foot-wide river of pale, cloudy water that reached halfway down the cavern floor before curving right and disappearing into a deep crack in the ground. Small, milky white salamanders scurried across the river's bottom, desperately trying to hide from the sudden light. Harry ignored them and focused on finding the Old Ones. By all indications, they were somewhere down the dark tunnel. Harry recalled the light and shrunk it to a reasonable size before heading toward the tunnel.

The tunnel was difficult to traverse. The ground was incredibly uneven, so Harry levitated above and floated down it. He could feel the Old Ones' panic growing with every meter crossed. The tunnel was long and twisting. In certain parts, it branched out into multiple directions, and Harry was certain anyone who made it this far would get lost. Harry just followed their fear. He eventually reached the end of the main tunnel and exited into an even larger cavern than before. This one was different.

Before him was a small city spread out in every direction. The cavern was so large that Harry couldn't see where it ended. Like before, Harry pushed his ball of light higher into the air and over the city. It grew and grew until it was like a miniature sun, spreading light across the entire city. Loud, pained screeches filled the otherwise silent air, and hundreds of large, winged creatures flew out from the city's depths and circled high above. The buildings were ancient, though they appeared in relatively good shape. A foul mustiness hung in the air, which made his nose tickle. The buildings were large. The biggest of them was only three stories high. The only exception was a building located in the middle of the city. It towered over the rest. Harry guessed that that was where he needed to go.

The city was obviously abandoned long ago, though he had no idea why. Whoever built this city put a lot of time into it. The outsides of each building were decorated with ornate reliefs depicting various people and animals. The human carvings were all nude with exaggerated genitalia. Harry guessed they might have been placed there to honor some long-forgotten fertility god. Harry heard a deep thump as he passed one building. Pulling out his sword, he ignited the blade to lighten his path a bit more. He walked up to the door and examined it. The once thick wooden door was now rotted and barely hanging onto its bronze hinges. One swift kick sent the rotted wood flying into the building. An ear-piercing screech from just beside the empty door frame made him jump in surprise. Out of the building ran a rat-like creature. However, this was no normal rat. This one was the size of a large dog, and its tail was three times the length of its body size. The tail wasn't fleshy pink like a normal rat's. It was covered with a sleek coat of black fur and was decorated with white fur rings going down its length. It screeched angrily at Harry, bearing its beaver-like teeth. It charged forward, biting Harry's thigh. Harry just let it. He didn't care how strong that thing's bite was. Its teeth would never penetrate Valyrian Steel. The creature screeched in pain when its five-inch teeth clanged against the hardened metal. In response, Harry gave it a swift kick and sent it scurrying off into the city.

The closer he got to the middle of the city, the more he began to smell the foul stench of rotting flesh. It was a sickly sweet smell that turned his stomach. He continued down the narrow lanes, all the while, the flames from his sword cast strange shadows on the walls. He had a strange feeling that the shadows were looking at him, watching his every move. Besides the buildings, the city was completely barren. Nothing had been left behind. He didn't spot a single old cart or piece of broken pottery. There was nothing. When he turned the corner and came upon the skyward temple, he discovered what was creating that horrific smell. An army of rotting humans stood out front, blocking his path forward. Just by looking at them, he could tell that the majority were native Lengi ... or at least had been. Now, they were eight-foot-tall animated corpses, lumbering and wheezing as they stood there. As Harry made himself known, they slowly turned and spotted him.

"You will go no further, infidel," a voice filled Harry's head. It tried to sound authoritative, but it was laced with fear. It was obvious who he was talking to.

"Do you think this pathetic heap of carcasses will stop me?" Harry verbally asked. He could feel the Old Ones bristling with annoyance. They didn't like being treated like petulant children. Harry expected them to lash out, and he wasn't disappointed.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw something coming straight down at him. At the last second, he threw up a magical bubble shield just in time to intercept the projectile. There was a loud bang and a shower of golden sparks as something large collided with his shield. It tumbled to the ground, and Harry got his first look at it. It was one of those flying creatures that were scared off by the light. Studying it closer, Harry discovered that it looked remarkably similar to the wyverns of Sothoryos. It was slightly smaller but no less vicious. It pushed itself upright and shook the cobwebs from its head. It looked at Harry and let out a high-pitched squealing roar. At the same time, the army of undead began running at him. The flying beast began flapping its

large, bat-like wings, ready to take off. As it jumped into the air, Harry disappeared and then reappeared on the beast's back. It roared in disapproval as it struggled to remain in the air with the added weight. Still, it was able to go airborne. The undead creatures hissed in anger and looked up at him, only for a ball of magic to land at their feet. The explosion was concussive, tearing dozens of them into pieces by the blast.

Harry was forced to duck as another wyvern attempted to take his head off as it flew just over him. The one he was on was having some trouble flying. It didn't know if it should focus on flying or attempt to get him off its back. Its long neck curved to the side, and it opened its maw, revealing rows of needle-sharp, conical teeth. Another wyvern attempted to side-swipe him, but it quickly lost a wing with one swing of his blade. It tumbled out of the air, yowling all the way down. As another flew by, Harry blasted it out of the air with an explosive hex. Its body corkscrewed to the ground with one wing and its neck twisted into unnatural positions. The one he was riding then thought it was a good idea to snap at him. The butt of Harry's sword contacted the top of its head. A loud, meaty thunk told him that the blow had been severe. In fact, it was so brutal that the creature was knocked clean unconscious. Its wings stopped flapping, and Harry tailspun to the ground. Leaping from the creature's back, Harry overcharged his blade and landed right in the middle of the undead horde. His flaming sword slammed into the ground, and a shockwave of fire radiated out in every direction. Corpses were sent flying, their decaying flesh instantly igniting. The shockwave hit the front of the temple, blowing the silver door inward and tearing off the outer decorative facade.

Harry stood from one knee as chunks of stone and body parts rained down all around him. With a wave of his hand, hundreds of eagles were transfigured from the rubble and flew into the air. They made a beeline for the enraged wyverns still circling overhead. Many eagles were destroyed by the vicious hunters, but some got close enough to use their wickedly sharp talons and beaks to tear at the wyverns' eyes. Harry did his part by firing piercing bolts one after another. At some point, the few remaining wyverns decided it was best to tuck tail and run. They flew off to the farthest distance of the cavern, leaving the eagles to continue protecting the sky above him. On the ground, the corpses were still trying to attack. Most of them were in too bad of shape to do anything. It was hard to attack without arms or legs. A few severed heads clicked their jaws at him while others used their arms to crawl toward him, dragging their torsos that were severed at the waist. Harry ignored them and entered the temple.

As he got further away from the destruction at the entrance, Harry saw that the temple's interior was lavishly and ornately decorated. Silver plate covered practically every wall, though it had long since tarnished. The tarnished silver made the temple seem more eerie than it already was. Old torches lined the walls in their silver holders, and a snap from Harry's fingers made them burst to life. Harry concentrated, seeking the Old Ones. He then looked up. They were at the top. He went straight for the stairs.

He climbed staircase after staircase, and nothing came to stop him. When he reached the final level, Harry stopped in front of a massive set of double doors. Unlike the other doors, the plating covering these were made of gold. Harry took a moment to study the reliefs on the doors. Just

as with the pillars he had seen before, three figures were depicted in the artwork. They were tall and lanky, holding spears at their sides. Each was sitting on a throne of equal size and style. This told Harry that they probably shared power equally. Above the figure on the left was a crescent moon. The one on the right had a blazing sun resting above his head. The one in the middle, who appeared to be female, wore a crown of flames on her head while a star hovered above it. The star was inlaid with a pale blue crystal. Harry immediately recognized it. The eye of the Ice Dragon constellation always pointed North. The tip of the tail always pointed South. He had seen this kind of stuff before. False gods always latched onto some force of nature and spun a tale to the uneducated masses. These three appeared to have chosen things that produced light ... the sun, moon, and stars.

He placed his hand on the door to push it open and hissed in pain. With a thought, the armor from his arm disappeared, and he saw that his hand was blackened and withered. The curse crept up his forearm and almost reached his elbow when Harry concentrated and focused his magic. The curse stopped and slowly began retreating. It moved down his forearm, leaving unblemished skin in its wake. It reached his hand, then moved down his fingers. Once it reached his fingertips, the curse disappeared. Harry flexed his hand and wiggled his fingers. Relieved that no permanent damage was done, he magicked the armor back on his arm and blasted the doors in with a wave of his hand. The wood core of the doors splintered violently while the gold plating twisted and tore. The broken pieces scattered through the dark room, creating a loud echo. Harry stepped in before the pieces even came to rest.

The room was unnaturally dark, and his magical ball of light barely brightened the ground a few feet in front of him. The flames from his sword didn't do much better. The room was being kept dark through magical means ... he was sure of that. He concentrated on locating the Old Ones but could barely feel them. They were trying to hide, but he knew they were somewhere in there. Harry took a step forward, and a quick flash of light made him react. His sword came up just in time to block a strike from a glowing spear. Fiery sparks burst from his sword as the two metals collided. The blow was powerful, and he felt the vibrations all the way to his bones. Harry grabbed the handle of the spear and pulled it with all of his magical might. A shadowy figure squealed in panic as it was pulled from the darkness. He grabbed the creature and spun it to the opposite side of him as another spear plunged forward. The spear struck the creature in the arm, making it cry out in pain. Harry didn't waste time. He thrust his flaming sword forward and pierced the creature's belly. A pitiful moan echoed across the room, but it quickly turned into a panicked, ear-piercing screech as Harry absorbed its power into his sword. Furious hissing came from two sides of him. The creature thrashed violently, trying to pull away from his sword, but it was no use. It quickly grew weaker as his sword pulsed with power. Finally, its legs gave out, and it dropped to the ground with a thump. It gasped one last time, and the room suddenly brightened a bit. Harry then got a good look at the two remaining false gods.

Both were tall, standing at eight feet or more. Their faces looked Lengii, but they had been twisted by thousands of years of foul magic. Their heads were mostly bald, but the female had a few wisps of long, silver hair. Both of their faces were withered to nearly skin and bone, and the skin was wrinkled and saggy. They wore long robes of black and gold, which mostly hid their

bodies. Their hands, however, were gripping matching spears. Their fingers were long and bony and were capped with long, sharp fingernails. They were looking at Harry with the utmost contempt.

"You dare?!" the woman hissed, gripping her spear menacingly.

"I do," Harry simply replied, pushing the tip of the flaming blade into the downed Old One to make sure it was dead. The sword's tip pierced its forehead, and Harry pushed down until it contacted the stone floor. He pulled it out with a wet schlick sound.

"Why do you come here?" the male hissed. "You do not belong!"

"I came because you attacked me first. I usually do not let such insults go unpunished," Harry truthfully told them.

"We attacked because you brought R'hllor's whore onto our land!" the woman sneered angrily. "We will not tolerate this!"

"Why do you care if Melisandre is here? From what I know, there are other followers of R'hllor in Leng," Harry asked, confused.

"The others are insignificant. They hold no true power, but still, they will be dealt with. But the whore ... she is the blasphemer's favored. We could feel it the moment she stepped foot on our land," the male angrily explained.

"What do you have against R'hllor?" Harry asked them. He didn't really care. Their fates were already sealed, but he wanted to sate his curiosity.

"He is a deceitful schemer who claims to hold dominion over our light. Through his deception, we were attacked and forced to hide in the shadows. Our followers have dwindled, and we are forced to feed on the scraps they provide us from above," he stated venomously.

"So you feed on light?" Harry asked. "Is that why this room is so dark? You've been absorbing the light my magic produces?"

"Yessss," the woman hissed. "And such an exquisitely tasteful treat it was. I look forward to drinking your magic. Perhaps we will finally grow strong enough to freely walk in the light and take vengeance on our enemiesssss."

"You mean Melisandre?" Harry asked amusedly. The curvy redhead had a real talent for annoying self-conscious women. The woman sneered in return.

"The whore will be dealt with soon enough. Even now, our followers are closing in on her, and we will send her bloated head to the Red Temple. R'hllor will once again know our might!"

Harry rolled his eyes and sent a mental ping to his drones, just in case. "There's just one problem with that," Harry stated evenly. "By forcing others to do your will, you've angered the True Gods. There's a price on your heads ... and I intend to collect," he told them as the woman stepped up to him while the male slipped around behind him. Harry didn't back down and remained calm.

"Is that so, Little One?" the woman sneered in a sing-song voice. Harry could see her decrepit hands tightening around the spear's shaft. The woman smirked at him, and Harry smirked back before disappearing. The spear of the lunging man behind him passed through the air right where his spine had been half a second before. The razor-sharp tip plunged into the woman's belly just as Harry appeared behind him. Harry kicked the butt of the spear, driving further into the woman's body. The end of the spear burst through her back and oozed oily black blood. She shrieked an agonizing cry of pain as she gripped the shaft of the spear.

"Mezkala!" the other Old One cried out, horrified by his mistake. Harry's sword pierced his unprotected back, and he drove it down to the hilt. His gurgling wails were the last thing Harry heard as he absorbed the creature's power. His body trembled and spasmed as it was sucked dry, and when its arms went limp, Harry flared the flames of his blade and set it alight. Pulling his sword from its back, Harry kicked it away from him and sent it tumbling to the ground. It remained there, a burning pile of withered meat. Harry then turned his attention to the woman. She had fallen to the ground with the spear still buried in her stomach. She was holding the shaft and looking up at him. Her breathing sounded ragged and wet. In a last attempt to save her pitiful life, she blasted Harry with as much psychic power as she had left.

He had to admit, it was very powerful. His head thrummed with her power, making him hiss in pain. He quickly severed the connection and kicked the spear's shaft. The woman screeched in pain, and the attack stopped.

"Unfortunately for you, Crone, I always collect," he stated before driving the blade of his sword into her open mouth. Her rotting teeth broke away as the blade sank through the back of her skull. The sallow skin of her face sizzled and blackened as Harry's sword siphoned off the last remaining bits of her power. Once she was dry, her body burst into flames, and the room brightened considerably. Harry pulled the sword from the corpse's mouth and stepped back from the smell of burning flesh.

As he looked around the room, Harry spotted the three identical thrones lined up side by side against the furthest wall. He examined them and found that they were also gold-plated. Wealth was hidden in this city, and Harry planned to have his drones come down here and strip it clean. Other than the thrones, there wasn't much else in the room. The only other thing worth looking at was a table near the thrones with what appeared to be a crystal ball sitting on top. Harry went over for a quick look.

It was spherical and made from very high-quality glass. On the inside, dark purple smoke lazily danced around a blood-red gem. He wondered what they were using for. Harry placed his hand on the orb and studied the magic within. "Ah," Harry said, nodding his head. It was an amplification tool. They used it to amplify their psychic powers to reach the farthest places on Leng. This was how they could mentally coerce the guards to attack him from so far away. Harry snapped his fingers, sending the orb to his ship where he could study it further. With nothing left for him here, he decided to check on Melisandre. He disappeared, leaving behind three corpses, two of which were still smoldering.