Disclaimer: I don't own HP, GOT, or ASOIAF. Would have finished the last two properly if I had.
Edited by Bub3loka

28th Day of the 5th Moon, 303 AC

Jon Snow, near Winterfell

They were less than a day from Winterfell, and the sun was slowly crawling to the west. The camp was already being set, for they had to be fresh for the coming battle, yet have enough distance from the Bolton army to get in formation should they attempt to force a battle.

The previous days were spent amongst the men, ensuring everything was organised and ready for battle. Wildlings did not practise things like formations and had no idea how to battle besides skirmishes, but the Blackfish had done a good job drilling them in the basics in the past fortnight. He had taken his time to speak with each of the lords and chiefs who had brought some men too, getting a feel for the characters of Lord Mazin, Larence Snow, and the mountain chieftains.

While Sansa kept everything peaceful enough for such a motley group, gathering a little over five thousand armed men did not make them a war-ready host. Even less so when all of them were used to a different type of fighting and were led by over ten different commanders.

Discipline, formations, morale, and a proper commander were the pillars that could make or break an army. After the last three days, the army was ready for a proper battle. Mostly. They were far from perfect, but they could hold the line, stay in formation, know whose orders to listen to, and recognise horn sounds. Most importantly, the men were eager for the fight, and the morale was soaring. His imposing return had served its purpose well.

Hundreds of men were toiling, eagerly digging trenches into the half-frozen ground around the camp and hammering down stakes in case of a night attack.

Ramsay was a tricky foe, and Jon wouldn't allow him to sow more chaos or exploit weakness. Only the strategy for tomorrow needed to be hammered out, but there was still some time before sunset.

In his free time, Jon turned to the young Lady of Bear Isle, a fierce little thing, to get a feel for her goals and try to return the Mormont family heirloom.

"I have no need for Longclaw, Lord Snow," Lyanna Mormont said solemnly as she looked at the offered Valyrian steel sword, though Jon struggled to take her small stature and childish voice seriously. "If Uncle Jeor deemed you worthy to wield it, I have no right to contest him."

"The blade has served me faithfully, but I have found myself a weapon more suited," he admitted, hand fondly moving towards his sword's hilt.

The young Lady of Bear Isle quirked her eyebrow. "Better than Valyrian steel?"

Jon unsheathed the blade; the dark bronze sword had a soft yet sinister, dusky glow in the shade. The moment it left the sheath, he could feel its full weight, his boots sinking half an inch into the soft grass underneath.

Gripping the hilt with his right hand, he slashed at the nearby boulder, cleaving it in twain. A heavy sword for a strong warrior—Robert Baratheon had done the same with his monstrous hammer and titanic strength at the Ruby Ford. Demon of the Trident, they called him, and no armour could stop the fury of a man swinging a thirty-pound warhammer with laughable ease as even the thickest of plate folded like a wet towel.

Predictably, Lyanna was standing there, eyes wide like saucers at the two pieces of rock, both easily thrice as heavy as her. Stiffly, she trudged over and ran her finger through the smooth cut.

To her credit, the girl gathered herself quickly. The surprise on her face faded, though her squared shoulders betrayed her nervousness. Now, she was eyeing him with a newfound reverence.

“My lord,” she said, voice not quite steady. “Keep Longclaw. I’m not a cur to ask for a gift to be returned. The moment Uncle Jeor gave it away, it no longer belonged to House Mormont.”

Jon inclined his head in gratitude and took his leave. The little bear lady was stubborn, but he would find other ways to repay her House. The battle was drawing near, and he had much to do.

To his surprise, the Northmen who had joined did so mostly out of loyalty. Some of their motives were selfish, like Mazin’s thirst for revenge and Larence Snow’s desire for his father’s name, but they were here in full strength for it. Even that much would never have been possible if he were not known as Eddard Stark’s son. It gladdened Jon that the Stark name still held weight in the North, and he couldn’t help but admire the man who raised him.

Eddard Stark was flawed like any other man, but the respect his name garnered still endured years after his death.

Jon’s thoughts drifted towards Shireen Baratheon and her greyscale as his feet carried him through the camp. The ailment was magical in origin, he could easily tell. But it was unlike anything else he had encountered in his previous life. He could feel a cold, twisted curse lay dormant beneath the flaky, hardened skin. Whatever the maesters had done to treat Shireen had halted the spread of the greyscale, rendering it inert. But it was only slumbering, not vanquished.

It could be dispelled, that much Jon was certain, for it had not taken root into her very bloodline. It would take some effort, but he had dealt with worse before.

Shireen was bright, pleasant, and somewhat shy, and Jon was glad she was safe. He had taken his fill of slaughter and death, and the knowledge that he had saved an innocent life lessened the hollowness in his chest that came with dark magic. There were no regrets in offering his protection to Shireen; it felt *right*.

It had been too long since he had saved anyone, both in this life and the past. He had almost forgotten the raw joy and the rush of satisfaction, even if it came from a place of selfishness. It was done because of the blood connection and the want of a family, no matter how distant. But even if she'd been a stranger, he'd have done the same.

The past days had left little room for rest or reflection, and he did not find a proper moment for a deeper chat with Sansa. She had spent most of the time resting when not ahorse to travel, and Jon had spread himself thin through the camp. And when it came time to wrap up for the day, he would fall asleep the moment he touched his bedding. The two months in the wolfswood had scarcely allowed him any rest, and he needed all the shut-eye he could get before the battle.

He could seek Sansa out, but now was not the time. The many secrets aside, Jon was not blind—he could see the affection in her blue eyes as she stole glances at him. It burned brighter than anything should have been between a brother and a sister.

Yet now was not the time or place to deal with such a thorny issue.

A scout found him later, looking all hurried.

"A party approaches, lord Jon," said Josh, a huntsman from the hills, his breath misting over the cold air. "They're calling for a parley."

Jon swiftly gathered a small entourage. Tormund for the wildlings, Hugo Wull with his big belly for the mountain clansmen, Ser Davos, Lord Jonos Mazin, the Blackfish, and Lady Lyanna Mormont.

Sansa arrived soon after, and Brienne of Tarth helped her mount on her mare.

"I wish to join," she declared.

Jon studied her. Her face was pale but calm.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes." Sansa sounded confident, but he could read the unease behind the mask—her lips were set in a tight line, as if she was afraid her mouth would quiver. Yet Jon Snow would not deny Sansa this wish, and motioned her to follow as they rode off.

They met on a stretch of grass between camps, about midway between Winterfell and their encampment.

From the south, the Bolton party approached with no hurry. All of them were clad for war, and their coat of arms was proudly displayed. The white sunburst of House Karstark, the rusted long axes of House Dustin, the roaring giant of House Umber, and the black horse head of House Ryswell.

At their front was a rider with the pink banner, the Flayed Man of House Bolton.

A dead man walking, even if he just did not know it yet.

Ramsay even looked the part with his sunken eyes and blotched, pallid face. It made for a jarring sight, especially with the wormy lips twisted into a mocking smirk as if he knew a jest nobody else did.

“My beloved wife,” he called, oily voice thick with false fondness. “How I’ve missed you.”

Jon felt Sansa tense beside him, stiffening like a block of ice. Her reaction pleased the bastard, who grinned all the wider.

“I thank you all for returning my lady wife safely to me,” Ramsay continued, addressing them all. “Now, dismount and kneel. Surrender your host, name me Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North. I shall grant pardon for deserting the Night’s Watch, forgive your treason, and put an end to this foolish revolt.”

“Shove your pardon up your arse,” Hugo Wull spat.

Jon outright laughed, the mocking sound carrying across the hill. Ramsay’s grin faltered, only for a breath, before returning with forced ease. Jon could feel his anger now, bubbling underneath the smile.

“Come, bastard, you don't have the men. You don't have horses, and you don't have Winterfell. Why lead those poor souls to death like lambs to the slaughter?” Bolton asked with a faux righteousness. Gods, the bastard sure liked the sound of his voice. “There is no need for battle, Snow. Get off your horse and kneel. I am a man of mercy.”

“No need for battle?” Jon snorted, unimpressed with the cleverly worded insult. But two could play that game. “Nay, I very much want to *fight*. Your neck would not wring itself on its own. Of course, a battle need not happen if you are a man of mercy. Only one man must die—you against me, here and now.”

Ramsay went still, and then his jaw clenched. He had not expected such a firm rebuttal, not when he thought he held all the advantages.

It was almost an insult in its boldness, but it could not be shrugged off lightly. Refusing would mark Ramsay a coward, and soon enough, his men would know their commander was not willing to fight. Morale would falter, and even the lords who supported him would remember. Jon knew creatures like this; they thought themselves cunning while lurking in the dark, but when the time came for an open fight, they lacked the spine to make the hard choices. To prove himself capable and keep his men in line, he would have to resort to greater atrocities down the line…

Predictably, the Bolton bastard chuckled, a raspy, jarring sound without an ounce of joy.

“I keep hearing stories about you, bastard. The way people in the North talk about you, you're the greatest swordsman since the Age of Heroes! Maybe you're that good.” He paused theatrically as if thinking things over. “Maybe not. It matters little, for my army will beat yours. I have over eight thousand men here. You have, what, less than half?”

Jon wanted to laugh—Ramsay was genuinely confused. Killing all those scouts in the wolfswood had paid off. The host had gone to great lengths to do away with all the enemy scouts, and now Ramsay was going in half-blind. Or was it perhaps the hubris born out of the success of all his previous little plots?

“Aye, you have the numbers,” Jon agreed quietly. “But will your men want to fight for a craven like you when they hear you wouldn't fight for them?” The purpose of the meeting was over; he had taken measure of his foes, now was the time to prod and see what came out.

“You're good, bastard,” Ramsay sneered. “Very good. But tell me, will you let your brother die because you're too proud to surrender?”

A hot rush of anger crept up his spine, but Jon’s face remained impassive. Clearly, Ramsay was trying to play some twisted game. Yet, he would not give Ramsay the satisfaction or the knowledge that he had been aware of Rickon’s death.

“My brother died when the Turncloak took Winterfell.” The cold words made Ramsay pause, looking at him with wonder and a sliver of confusion. And it was true in a fashion; the moment Winterfell had fallen to deception, it spelt the end of Rickon and Bran, even if they lingered on afterwards.

“Are you sure, bastard?”

Ramsay nodded towards the tall, old man wearing the Umber coat of arms. This probably was Hother Umber, who had handed Rickon over to the Bolton bastard. Jon carefully committed his face to memory, hoping to meet him in tomorrow's battle.

The Umber stiffly reached for a big bag on his saddle and hurled it. The severed head of a black direwolf rolled through the grass, stopping before Jon’s horse.

“Direwolf pelts make for good cloaks, I hear—”

“You're going to die tomorrow, Lord Bolton,” Sansa hissed coldly. “Sleep well.”

Words said, she wheeled her steed around and rode back to their camp.

Ramsay merely smirked.

“She's a fine woman, your sister. I look forward to having her back in my bed. A pity poor Rickon would have to die for your stubbornness.” The bastard shook his head with mock regret. “And you're all fine-looking men. My dogs are desperate to meet you; I haven't fed them for seven days. They're ravenous. I wonder which parts they'll try first. Your eyes? Your balls? We'll find out soon enough. In the morning, then, bastard.”

Ramsay turned and spurred his horse south, followed by his retinue.

Was this… *this* the clown who had taken down House Stark? Jon expected someone resourceful, ambitious, and charismatic. Yet all he saw was a posturing mad fool with plenty of cruelty and a sliver of low cunning. It felt almost insulting to consider Ramsay Snow his great enemy.

The Bolton Bastard was too pitiful, too pathetic to deserve Jon’s hatred.

No, this was merely a mad dog that needed to be put down before it could bite anyone else. And then, Jon would take back Winterfell and everything that belonged to House Stark.

Sansa Stark

After the sunset, they were all gathered in the command tent, and Sansa joined in. Wun Wun's enormous, hairy form had also hunched its way inside, observing silently just like her; the giant could not speak the common tongue but could understand well enough.

It was a strange thing to watch Jon command a war council. Stranger still was the ease with which he did it. Most of the men seated here were lords and warriors twice his age, veterans of many battles and skirmishes, and had "eaten more salt than you have seen bread" as the Wull had said to Larence Snow, who was merely three years younger than her brother. And yet, when Jon spoke, they listened.

There were no empty threats or bluster; it was just Jon going over the map and discussing the tactics at length, listening to each man and every suggestion. Merits and demerits were weighted with cold precision, and each idea was laid bare. There were no shouting matches, no venomous whispers, no petty snubs—the sort of games she had seen time and again in southern courts. Jon allowed no room for such things, and somehow, none dared try.

Jon carried himself every inch as she had imagined a king would in her childhood. Powerful, patient, and firm. With just a tunic of grey linen and a sword on his hip, he looked more regal than the drunken Robert Baratheon or the cruel Joffrey could ever hope to be.

Sansa watched the meeting quietly. What could she say among seasoned knights and old chieftains? Her knowledge of war was shallow, and she had no desire to weaken Jon's position by speaking out of turn.

Soon, the meeting drew to a close. One by one, the men streamed out of the tent, eager to catch some shut-eye before the battle.

Tormund lingered, approaching her brother once the rest had left. "Did you really think that cunt would fight you man to man?"

Jon snorted softly. "No. But refusing the duel makes him look weak. His men will think him weak should he refuse a battle where he holds the advantage. The Northmen suffer no cravens and weaklings."

Tormund gave a short laugh and clapped Jon on the shoulder. "Sleep well, Lord Snow. You'll need your head sharp on the morrow."

And then he was gone, leaving only the two siblings alone in the command tent. Even Brienne had been ordered to guard the entrance outside, the Northmen not trusting the heiress of Tarth, who wanted to 'play-knight'.

Heart filled with trepidation, Sansa finally approached Jon. They had barely talked since he returned. She knew her brother had been busy around the host, but she had longed for that time the two of them had spent together in Castle Black.

“Do you think we can win?” she asked, a sliver of worry slipping into her voice.

“Without a doubt,” he said, words spoken with iron surety.

She wanted to believe him. Gods, she did. But she had lost too much, and the memories had been brought back to her mind as she saw his face today.

“But Ramsay—”

“Sansa.” Jon gave her a sad smile. “I saw Rickon’s body. I will not be led astray by his trickery. We've come this far, and I know what I'm doing. The Bolton bastard will not live to see the next sunset. I swear this to you. Trust me.”

She didn't know why, but all her worries and fears seemed to melt away at the sound of his calm voice. She couldn't help but hug Jon fiercely, feeling his strong hands wrap around her a moment later.

It felt warm and safe, and Sansa realised that everything felt right in the world once again, as if nothing could hurt her anymore. Tears welled up in her eyes. But for the first time since she went south, those would be tears of happiness, not sorrow.

Time lost its meaning, but eventually, they parted. The loss of Jon’s warmth was felt all too keenly.

“I owe you an apology,” Jon uttered, voice thick with feeling.

“You’ve done nothing wrong.”

“I’ve kept things from you. After the battle…” He trailed off and offered a rueful smile. “I’ll tell you everything. I promise.”

He brushed the tears from her cheeks with a callused thumb and pressed a soft kiss to her brow. “Sleep well, sweet sister.”

“Wait!” she cried, and Jon stilled, turned to gaze at her with those two amethysts that did unspeakable things to her insides.

Blushing furiously, Sansa fumbled inside her sleeve and pulled forth a small strip of cloth—a favour she had sewn by the candlelight the night before. A red direwolf embroidered on pale grey wool.

The seconds passed as Jon stood still as a statue, gazing at the favour in Sansa’s outstretched hand. Then, he wordlessly took the grey strip, tied it round his wrist with a firm knot, and placed a second kiss upon her brow.

As she stood there stunned—both at her own audacity and her brother's acceptance—Jon slipped away from the tent, leaving Sansa alone, her face aflame.

1st Day of the 6th Moon, 303 AC

Jon Snow

It had been a serene, uneventful night, like a calm before the storm. Even Ramsay had not been foolish enough to attempt a night attack on the blind, or perhaps he had seen their preparation for it.

The dawn was chilly, cold enough to cover the ground outside with hoarfrost, but the sky above was cerulean as far as the eye could see, unmarred by clouds. It was a good day for battle and bloodshed.

Over five thousand men would follow him into battle, and the weight felt odd on his shoulders. This would be his first true battle. He had been all too used to being on his lonesome; even as a Lord Commander, Jon was only responsible for a few hundred black brothers. This was different.

He cleared his mind of all emotion, keeping it empty and ready to respond to whatever challenge arose.

While Eddard Stark had taught him well, Jon had no experience in planning big battles, and the Blackfish's aid was invaluable. The old knight was a veteran of countless battles, and he had fought in each conflict since the War of the Ninepenny Kings. It pleased Jon greatly that the dragons had remained a secret—Ramsay would have never been so calm if he had known of their existence, nor would he dare to field his army today. The three had flown by night, circling far behind the army or gliding low over the treetops.

The agreed plan was to make Ramsay commit most, if not all, of his forces before throwing the dragons in. None among them knew for certain how devastating the young drakes might prove. They were still half-grown, untested in actual battle. But Jon hoped they could cause mayhem and break the enemy lines with fear if not fire.

If they struck too soon, Ramsay would fall back, hiding behind Winterfell's walls, which were impossible to take by storm. Even the dragons could not burn the gates down without braving the marksmen on the walls.

If the dragons came too late, they risked a rout. Worse, Ramsay had nearly five times the lancers they had mustered, a force that could wheel around their flanks and crush them from the back. If Jon wanted to win, Bolton's heavy lancers had to be the first to go, and that was the plan.

He was done donning his armour, and his gaze settled on Sansa's favour. The fine piece of cloth was too heavy in his hand and looked outright wrong in contrast to the sinister spell-forged bronze.

Yet he fastened it to his vambrace anyway.

Jon left the tent and walked to the southern edge of the camp. On the way, he was joined by Ghost, who padded after him like a pale shadow.

The Blackfish would have the command of the reserve; Jon trusted the old knight enough to decide when and where to use them. Larence Snow and Lord Mazin were in the rear, hidden within the woods with all the cavalry. After the fighting started, they would go around and hit the enemy at the sides or rear. Leading horsemen through the forest was a slow thing, for the clustered trees and gnarly roots forced the riders to lead their steeds by foot.

Such a tactic could only work because no Bolton scouts had returned alive from the wolfswood. Even tonight, Ghost had prowled through the treelines, stalking for any foes too brave or foolish to make another attempt.

Brienne, Podrick, and a few men would remain behind to guard the ladies. He had ordered them to take his cousin and flee should the battle take a turn for the worse. The clan heads and wildling chieftains were all at the front and would fight on the first line, as the First Men tradition dictated. Morgan Liddle and Sigorn Thenn would hold the left flank, and Torghen Flint and Soren Shieldbreaker would command the right one. Jon would lead the centre with Hugo Wull and Tormund, where the heaviest fighting would be.

As he got to the front, he was greeted by solemn faces staring south over the breath of rolling low hills, where Bolton had positioned his forces just half a league from Winterfell, and they were moving forward slowly, already into formation. At the crest of a nearby hill, four burning crosses with flayed corpses bound to them could be seen. It was a poor intimidation tactic—the wildlings were jeering, more amused than frightened, and the mountain clansmen were angered at the sight.

Jon's host had taken camp in a twisting valley between two hills higher than the rest, so the Boltons could not count their numbers before battle and only see their first lines once fielded. They had decided to present a hollow centre to bait the cavalry into an ambush at the second line. Such trickery was only possible due to the terrain.

Soon, the wildlings and the mountain clansmen grouped up, forming ranks properly, all of them grim-faced as they stared at the coming Bolton host. It was not the best formation, but it would do. Jon looked around and nodded—they were all in position.

Tormund came next to him and slapped his armoured shoulder, but it produced almost no sound as if he had struck cotton instead, and the old wildling recoiled in surprise. Jon snorted when Giantsbane cautiously leaned over and hesitantly gave his breastplate a knock, and was again met with silence.

"Can ye even move in that fancy Southron steel of yours, Lord Snow?"

"Well enough to fight," Jon said.

No more words passed between them—there was nothing else to say, and even Giantsbane did not jest before battle.

Tormund grunted, his gaze turning to the coming Bolton forces at the far end of the hilly field. Jon remembered this expanse of rolling hills from his childhood. It had been full of grazing cows and sheep, but cattle had long been eaten clean, and the shepherds had been chased away or killed.

The enemy halted shy of a mile from their position. A figure came forward on his horse, leading a tied-up boy. Even with Jon's enhanced sight, he had to squint to properly make out the details of their faces at this distance. Ramsay's ugly face and pink armour were easy to recognise, and the boy looked like Rickon. However, his hair was not dark auburn but bright red like a carrot. His eyes were not blue but light grey. Jon could see how the child could be mistaken for his youngest cousin from afar.

Ramsay drew a dagger and slowly raised it in the air. After a short pause, he cut the cords around the boys' wrists. *'Quite the flair for the dramatic,'* Jon mused. *'The bastard's talent definitely lay in theatre and acting.'*

The boy was soon sent running towards their army. Ramsay then got a bow and, with slow and exaggerated motions, nocked each arrow and let them loose one after another. He wasn't even trying that hard, as the first was wildly off course, but each next one went closer and closer to the running boy.

If that was the real Rickon, Jon would be beside himself and would do something very impulsive and desperate, like charging forward in an attempt to save him. For good or for ill, he knew that Rickon was already dead, and watched impassively as the boy rushed on desperately. A small part of Jon wanted to do something, but now was not the time. The lives of his men weighed far more than the life of a single boy.

He schooled his face as the fifth arrow pierced the poor boy through the chest, sending the young body tumbling into the grass like a ragdoll.

The time for bloodshed had come, and Jon strapped on his helmet.

Ramsay looked disappointed at the lack of reaction, as if his favourite toy had been stolen. After a few moments, the Bolton cavalry was ordered to charge.

They started at a slow trot. It was like a river of steel and muscle spilling over the field. Over two thousand lancers slowly formed into a wedge-shaped formation, and the thundering of the hooves could be heard all the way from here. Jon looked around at his men—they all looked uneasy at the imposing sight.

"STEADY!" Jon cried out, and the men stood firmer. The timing was everything here; the enemy could stop their charge and wheel around if they retreated too early. If they withdrew too late, the charge would run them over before they could reposition.

At about three hundred yards, the Bolton lancers sped up into a brisk gallop.

"RETREAT," he cried out, and the men around him instantly turned around and started running north with all their strength.

The thunder of hooves grew louder with every breath, but Jon and his men reached the second line thirty yards behind, slipping between their ranks. All the men there were grim-faced, kneeling with their spears and pikes lowered to the ground.

As soon as Jon got behind them, he turned to face their pursuers. They were riding at full tilt and were almost upon the Stark host. This was the moment of truth. A weak line of men would get trampled through, but a dense one would hold.

“SPEARS! GROUP UP CLOSER!”

The wall of spears was swiftly raised, and, at this point, the cavalry had gained too much momentum to halt or turn around. The foremost ranks slammed headlong into the hedge of iron, impaling themselves on the forest of spears, shrieking in pain as their riders were hurled from their saddles.

A handful managed to breach the line where gaps formed in the chaos, lances striking home—but the charge had lost all speed.

Riders were dragged from their mounts and hewn down, or crushed beneath panicked steeds. Some dismounted in time, only to be trampled by those coming from behind, or swept into the snarling back ranks of Northmen, where axes and war-picks awaited them.

Everything turned chaotic. The air reeked of blood, filled with the high-pitched whining of dying horses and the wet, gurgling cries of men. The charge had been halted, and now was the time to spring the trap.

A horn had already echoed in the distance, and the left and the right flanks were already closing in the pincer, boxing in the Bolton horsemen that had been drawn too deep into the host. Those towards the back had managed to stop their charge before crashing into the bloody melee at the front. But now their formation was broken, their momentum was gone, turning them into easy pickings.

Jon unsheathed his sword and threw himself into the fray, followed by Ghost. His blade rushed forward, relieving two fallen horsemen of their heads before they could even act. The third foe tried to raise his sword to block Jon’s swing. Yet he was too slow as the dark bronze blade sliced through his coifed neck like a hot knife through butter.

The next foe managed to block Jon with his shield, but it broke under the strength of his strike. The 0following swing bisected the man from head to toe, cleanly slicing through bone and steel with slight effort.

An axe bounced off his side, and Jon spun only to see a Ryswell man-at-arms swinging at his neck again. Jon slapped away the coming axe with his left hand while slashing his sword, relieving his foe of his head. A spear poked at the gap of the armpit, but it failed to pierce the ringmail underneath.

Ghost was beside him, fangs tearing through steel, flesh, and bone with nary an effort. Swords and axes bounced off his fur, barely leaving a mark.

Jon did not bother with defence. His strength, speed, and the spell-forged armour made such things redundant. He plunged into the heart of the blood-drenched melee, blade sweeping in great arcs, cutting through steel, leather, and flesh alike. Shields were cracked open, bones split, and men screamed. Each blow was a kill; few needed a second as Jon did what he did best.

Kill.

Weapons bounced harmlessly from his cuirass, doing no damage, not even the slightest dent. Jon was simply too quick for most men to react to his strikes. It was a slaughter, for only the best castle-forged steel could resist the heavy bite of the heavy sword more than once. And even if they did, a man's joints couldn't bear the brunt of his blows or the weight of the blade. Before he knew it, a bloody trail of corpses and decapitated heads had formed behind him.

With a war cry on his lips, Jon leapt over another fallen horse, his sword cleaving through the air and bisecting yet another foe.

The battle was bloody. No, it was no longer a battle; this had turned into a slaughter, for none could halt Jon in the chaos, and it took him a mere heartbeat to kill a man. But the continuous exertion started to take its toll, slowing him down and forcing Jon's strikes to the weak spots of the enemy armour. Jon did not stop—each time a new foe arose, he would strike him down.

His blood sang at the carnage he was causing as the foes fell in droves around him and Ghost.

Time lost meaning, and everything almost blurred in a haze as men fell to his blade. Soon, he found himself facing a knight wearing a full plate suit emblazoned with the twin rusted axes of House Dustin. Jon simply shoved the shield down with his left hand and headbutted the knight with all his strength.

The spell-forged bronze absorbed almost all of the impact for Jon, but the Dustin knight tumbled to the ground. Jon simply stepped on his gorget to stop the fallen man from moving. With a push, his sword sank into the breastplate like a hot knife through butter, piercing through the thick steel, arming doublet, and ringmail straight into the heart.

As the dying knight twitched one last time, Jon warily looked about. Around him, only scattered cries remained; the few Bolton and Ryswell horsemen still alive were surrounded and quickly killed. The ground behind him and Ghost was strewn with a crimson carpet of fallen corpses and chopped limbs. Ghost padded beside him, breathing heavily, the direwolf dyed crimson from snout to tail.

Panting, Jon leaned upon the pommel of his blade, which still pierced the fallen knight. Even his strength had its limits, and swinging the heavy bronze blade was a taxing affair. He had killed more men than anyone else, and he had killed them swifter.

He took a stock of his body. The armour had done its job, and he was unharmed save for the slightest of bruises where maces and bludgeons had struck him head-on. Even that pain was quickly fading away.

After half a minute, Jon gathered himself and pulled his trusty bronze sword from the Barrowknight below with a squelch. There was no more time to rest. The Bolton horse was dealt with, but now their foot was coming like a tidal wave.

Jon took a deep breath. “FORM RANKS!”