

but they fell on Stark and Lannister alike, rattling off armor or finding flesh. Tyrion lifted his shield and hid beneath it.

The hedgehog was crumbling, the northerners reeling back under the impact of the mounted assault. Tyrion saw Shagga catch a spearman full in the chest as the fool came on at a run, saw his axe shear through mail and leather and muscle and lungs. The man was dead on his feet, the axehead lodged in his breast, yet Shagga rode on, cleaving a shield in two with his left-hand battle-axe while the corpse was bouncing and stumbling bonelessly along on his right. Finally the dead man slid off. Shagga smashed the two axes together and roared.

By then the enemy was on him, and Tyrion's battle shrunk to the few feet of ground around his horse. A man-at-arms thrust at his chest and his axe lashed out, knocking the spear aside. The man danced back for another try, but Tyrion spurred his horse and rode right over him. Bronn was surrounded by three foes, but he lopped the head off the first spear that came at him, and raked his blade across a second man's face on his backslash.

A thrown spear came hurtling at Tyrion from the left and lodged in his shield with a woody chunk. He wheeled and raced after the thrower, but the man raised his own shield over his head. Tyrion circled around him, raining axe blows down on the wood. Chips of oak went flying, until the northerner lost his feet and slipped, failing flat on his back with his shield on top of him. He was below the reach of Tyrion's axe and it was too much bother to dismount, so he left him there and rode after another man, taking him from behind with a sweeping downcut that sent a jolt of impact up his arm. That won him a moment's respite. Reining up, he looked for the river. There it was, off to the right. Somehow he had gotten turned around.

A Burned Man rode past, slumped against his horse. A spear had entered his belly and come out through his back. He was past any help, but when Tyrion saw one of the northerners run up and make a grab for his reins, he charged.

His quarry met him sword in hand. He was tall and spare, wearing a long chainmail hauberk and gauntlets of lobstered steel, but he'd lost his helm and blood ran down into his eyes from a gash across his forehead. Tyrion aimed a swipe at his face, but the tall man slammed it aside. "Dwarf," he screamed. "Die." He turned in a circle as Tyrion rode around him, hacking at his head and shoulders. Steel rang on steel, and Tyrion soon realized that the tall man was quicker and stronger than he was. Where in the seven hells was Bronn? "Die," the man grunted, chopping at him savagely. Tyrion barely got his shield up in time, and the wood seemed to explode inward under the force of the blow. The shattered pieces fell away from his arm. "Die!" the swordsman bellowed, shoving in close and whanging Tyrion across the temple so hard his head rang. The blade made a hideous scraping sound as he drew it back over the steel. The tall man grinned... until Tyrion's destrier bit, quick as a snake, laying his cheek bare to the bone. Then he screamed. Tyrion buried his axe in his head. "You die," he told him, and he did.

As he wrenched the blade free, he heard a shout. "Eddard!" a voice rang out. "For Eddard and Winterfell!" The knight came thundering down on him, swinging the spiked ball of a morningstar around his head. Their warhorses slammed together before Tyrion could so much as open his mouth to shout for Bronn. His right elbow exploded with pain as the spikes punched