

= You Win or You Die =

" You Win or You Die " is the seventh episode of the HBO medieval fantasy television series Game of Thrones . It was written by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss , and directed by Daniel Minahan . Set to air May 29 , 2011 , the episode was released in advance immediately following the conclusion of " A Golden Crown " to HBO customers with access to HBO Go .

The episode furthers the story line of deterioration of the political balance of the Seven Kingdoms , with Eddard Stark revealing what he has discovered to Cersei Lannister while King Robert is still away on a hunt . The title of the episode is part of a quote from Cersei Lannister during the final confrontation with Eddard : " When you play the game of thrones , you win or you die . There is no middle ground . " The catchphrase has been frequently used during the promotion of both the books and the TV series .

The episode attracted 2 @.@ 4 million viewers in its initial airing , with a total of 3 @.@ 2 million including the follow @-@ up airing . The episode was generally well received by critics for its well @-@ acted dramatic tension , but with several criticizing the coupling of exposition and nudity as " sexposition . "

= = Plot = =

Like previous episodes , " You Win or You Die " interweaves action happening in multiple separate locations within and around the Kingdom of Westeros . While the dramatic center of this episode is in the capital of King 's Landing , where the title quote is issued , ongoing events at The Wall and Winterfell in the north and with the Dothraki across the Narrow Sea continue , and events at the Lannister army 's camp are depicted as well .

= = = At the Lannister camp = = =

Lord Tywin Lannister (Charles Dance) talks with his son Jaime (Nikolaj Coster @-@ Waldau) while the former is skinning a stag , symbolic animal of the house Baratheon . While Tywin chastises Jaime for causing the recent troubles with the Starks , he nevertheless believes this war is the perfect opportunity for the Lannisters to set up a dynasty as the new rulers of the Seven Kingdoms . Tywin gives half of his forces to Jaime to attack Riverrun , the seat of House Tully and Lady Catelyn 's childhood home , in retaliation for Catelyn 's seizure of Tyrion .

= = = At Winterfell = = =

The captured wildling Osha (Natalia Tena) , now a servant of the Starks , is harassed by Theon Greyjoy (Alfie Allen) , who warns her that if she had been arrested in his homeland the Iron Islands , she would have suffered a worse fate . As Maester Luwin (Donald Sumpter) tells Theon to leave her alone after witnessing Theon 's sexual advance on her , he asks Osha why she and other wildlings are coming south from the Wall . She reveals they were fleeing from the White Walkers , who have apparently returned after millennia of slumber , and declares that every army in the Seven Kingdoms should be marching north to confront that threat .

= = = At the Wall = = =

Benjen Stark 's horse returns from north of the Wall without him , much to the worry of his nephew , Jon Snow (Kit Harington) . Later , to Jon 's disappointment and anger , he is told he has been assigned as a steward to the Lord Commander instead of a ranger , like his uncle . Jon suspects Ser Alliser Thorne 's (Owen Teale) involvement , as revenge for Jon defying him ; however , Sam (John Bradley) believes that this assignment may mean he is being groomed for command . As Jon and Sam take their vows near a heart tree , Jon 's direwolf brings him a dismembered hand .

== In Vaes Dothrak ==

Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) attempts to convince Khal Drogo (Jason Momoa) to return to her homeland and reclaim the throne of the Seven Kingdoms , but he is not interested . While Daenerys and her entourage go sightseeing at a market , Ser Jorah Mormont (Iain Glen) receives a pardon for him to return to the Seven Kingdoms from an informant of Lord Varys (Conleth Hill) . Jorah realizes this means the order to assassinate Daenerys has been officially issued and quickly saves her from a wine merchant who tries to poison her . Drogo , angered by the attempt on his wife 's life , vows to his followers that he will lead his people to cross the Narrow Sea to invade the Seven Kingdoms as revenge and reclaim the Iron Throne for his unborn son .

== In King 's Landing ==

Ned (Sean Bean) confronts Queen Cersei (Lena Headey) , telling her that he knows Prince Joffrey and his siblings are not King Robert 's (Mark Addy) children , but were incestuously fathered by her brother Jaime . Cersei defends her affair with Jaime , comparing it to the ancient Targaryen practice of wedding brothers to sisters and saying she tried to love Robert , but he refused to love her because he was still in love with Ned 's deceased sister , Lyanna . Ned shows Cersei mercy and tells her to leave the capital with her children before he tells Robert the truth .

Unexpectedly , Lord Renly Baratheon (Gethin Anthony) returns and informs Ned that , while hunting , Robert was mortally wounded by a boar . On his deathbed , Robert dictates his will to Ned , in which Robert makes Ned the Lord Regent and Protector of the Realm until Joffrey comes of age . Ned writes down Robert 's words , but instead of using " Joffrey , " Ned writes " my rightful heir , " making the succession ambiguous . Robert signs the will without reading this change in wording and begs Ned to make Joffrey a better man . Robert also tells Ned that he was wrong to have ordered Daenerys Targaryen 's assassination and orders Ned to let her live .

Fearing Cersei and the Lannisters will use this time to their advantage , Renly tries to convince Ned they should raise an army and launch a coup d'état ; however , Ned refuses him . Ned wants to assure the crown passes to the rightful heir : Stannis Baratheon , Robert and Renly 's brother . Ned writes a letter to Stannis informing him of the situation , dispatching it to Dragonstone , Stannis ' island fortress . Ned also reveals to Petyr " Littlefinger " Baelish (Aidan Gillen) the truth of Joffrey 's heritage , to which Littlefinger suggests they allow Joffrey and the Lannisters to take the throne , and if Joffrey proves to be an unfit ruler , they can use the truth to overthrow him and make Renly the king instead . Ned refuses such treason , asking Littlefinger to secure the support of the City Watch to overpower Cersei 's men @-@ at @-@ arms if they attempt to seize the throne .

By the time Robert dies , Renly has fled the capital , and Joffrey has already ordered his own coronation within a fortnight . As Ned and his allies enter the throne room , he gives Ser Barristan Selmy (Ian McElhinney) Robert 's will to read out aloud . Cersei refuses to follow Robert 's will and tears it up , ordering Barristan to seize Ned . Ned orders his men to arrest Cersei and Joffrey . As both sides prepare to fight , the City Watch slaughters the Stark men while Littlefinger holds Ned with a knife at his throat , telling Ned that he should have listened to Littlefinger 's advice about distrusting him .

== Production ==

== Writing ==

The episode was written by the showrunners David Benioff and D. B. Weiss , based on the original novel by George R. R. Martin . The chapters included in " You Win or You Die " are 46 , 48 @-@ 50 , and 55 (Eddard XII , Eddard XIII , Jon VI , Eddard XIV , and Daenerys VI) , making it the episode that includes fewest chapters of the source novel in the entire first season . Among the scenes created specifically for the show were a meeting between Tywin and Jaime Lannister (as Lord

Tywin is field dressing a stag) and a " training " session between Littlefinger and two new female recruits for one of his brothels .

= = = Casting = = =

" You Win or You Die " marks the first appearance of Charles Dance as Lord Tywin , the patriarch of the Lannister household . Cast in the role shortly after the production began , Dance had been the first choice of the producers and one of the fan favorites for the role . Author George R. R. Martin commented that " his commanding screen presence and steely charisma should make him the perfect Lord Tywin . " The deer that is field dressed by Tywin in the opening scene was a real dead stag . Dance had no previous experience with skinning and gutting , and before filming the scene practiced for an hour with a butcher .

= = = Filming locations = = =

Most of the episode was shot on set at the Irish studios of The Paint Hall . The exteriors of the entrance of Vaes Dothrak were filmed in the Sandy Brae area , and for the confrontation between Eddard and Cersei taking place in the Red Keep 's gardens (identified as a godswood in the novels) the production used the cloister of the St Dominic Monastery in Rabat , in Malta .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" You Win or You Die " ' s first airing was seen by 2 @. @ 4 million viewers , stabilizing the show 's ratings . This could be considered positive when taking into account that the episode had been offered in advance during all the preceding week in HBO 's online service , and that it was aired in a three @- @ day holiday weekend which often results in lower viewership . With the second airing , the total audience for the night was 3 @. @ 2 million viewers .

= = = Critical response = = =

The episode was well received by critics . Time 's reviewer James Poniewozik called " You Win or You Die " the " most thrilling and thematically rich hour to date , " AOL TV 's Maureen Ryan found it an excellent outing that " saw the stakes raised in satisfying and suspenseful ways , " and HitFix 's Alan Sepinwall called it a terrific episode and commended how " it turned the spotlight on the characters who are villains in Ned Stark 's version of the story . "

Poniewozik continued : " We knew this would be a significant episode if for no other reason than that it contains the scene ? alluded to in the episode 's title ? that gives the series its name , " a sentiment Sepinwall agreed with . Myles McNutt , writing for Cultural Learnings , also considered " You Win or You Die " a climactic moment in the series . IGN 's Matt Fowler noted that this was the episode that saw Ned Stark " unfortunately thwarted by his own honorable intentions , " but that his " stubborn nobility is what makes Ned such a great character . "

The final showdown with the Lannisters seizing control from Eddard was much discussed , with many commentators criticizing Ned 's ingenuity and his actions during the episode . In The Atlantic , Scott Meslow wrote that Eddard could never win the " game of thrones " because he is dedicated to playing by the rules . In his opinion , " one can 't afford to play fair " when the only outcomes are " win " or " die . " McNutt felt that the climax at the episode 's end " was really well handled by both the cast and the director (Dan Minahan) . "

As well as the final confrontation between Eddard and Cersei , other scenes were praised by the critics . The introduction of Charles Dance as Lord Tywin Lannister was considered " a beauty " by Todd VanDerWerff from the A.V. Club , who admired how a single scene depicted not only the

relationship between Tywin and Jaime , but also all the dynamics of the Lannister clan . He also praised the work of Nikolaj Coster @-@ Waldau in the scene , commenting that despite having few lines , he transmitted that Jaime is cowed by his father very well . Maureen Ryan agreed with that sentiment , and also lauded Natalia Tena 's short appearance . David Sims (a second reviewer for the A.V. Club) highlighted the work of Mark Addy in his final scene , extending the praise to the rest of his work on the series .

Critics agreed that the scenes with the Dothraki were strong , with the storyline having improved significantly since the first episodes . Poniewozik stated that " this was the first week for me that the Dothraki scenes were not just absorbing but felt like the characters were as well @-@ imagined as those in Westeros , " and McNutt felt the episode " finally allows Khal Drogo to become an actual character . " Drogo 's rant vowing to give his unborn son the Iron Throne led to compliments about Jason Momoa 's intensity and Emilia Clarke 's calm and loving facial expressions .

However , the scene where Littlefinger exposes his motivations while hiring two whores for his brothel was largely criticized as an example of the show 's perceived abuse of conversations with prostitutes as an expository device , a situation for which Myles McNutt coined the term " sexposition . " Aidan Gillen 's acting was consistently praised and the comparison between Littlefinger 's actions and faking an orgasm was considered apt , but many agreed with Meslow 's statement that it was " annoyingly overshadowed by the series ' most gratuitous sex scene to date . " Among other criticisms were the scene 's excessive length , the repetition of the dramatic approach , and the assumption that viewers were not going to pay attention when presented with a long exposition that did not include sex .