

Ulfric had failed. He'd failed his brothers and sisters of Skyrim, his people, and especially his comrades. During the jolting wagon ride, Ulfric stared at the passing snowy forest and mountains in the distance, mentally cursing himself for leading his men into an ambush.

Ralof, one of his most loyal men, glanced at the newcomer. Ulfric paid them no mind, for he was too deep in thought, trying to reign in his anger and fury at himself and the Imperials.

So many of his countrymen had died in the wars past and now, it seemed, more would die for nothing.

"Skyrim was fine until you Stormcloaks came along," the man across from him snapped. His dirt coated face glared at Ulfric before looking back at Ralof. "Empire was nice and lazy. If they hadn't been looking for you, I could've stolen that horse and been half way to Hammerfell. You there." He nodded his head to the strange newcomer. "You and me – we shouldn't be here. It's these Stormcloaks the Empire wants."

The thief's words only reminded Ulfric of their fate, that his loyal soldiers would die by the Empire's hands, because he had failed them. What could he do? His hands were bound and his mouth was gagged, keeping him from shouting to free them. There was nothing he could do. He felt helpless and weak and more than anything, Ulfric hated feeling that way.

"We're all brothers and sisters in binds now, thief," Ralof muttered to the thief across from Ulfric.

"Shut up back there!" one of the soldiers yelled.

The thief glared back at Ulfric, who narrowed his eyes on the man. In his mind, he could see the battle playing over in his mind as he recalled it to figure out what had gone wrong.

"What's wrong with him?" The thief nodded his head toward Ulfric.

Ralof, so quick to rise to anyone's defense, especially Ulfric's. He was a good and loyal lad, and an even better soldier. "Watch your tongue! You're speaking to Ulfric Stormcloak, the true High King."

The High King of what? For all his fighting, all his striving, every dream he had set aside to pursue the dream of a free and independent Skyrim, what had Ulfric achieved?

Nothing.

"Ulfric?" the thief asked, as if it were a curse. "The Jarl of Windhelm? You're the leader of the rebellion. But if they captured you... Oh gods, where are they taking us?"

Ralof hung his head and Ulfric felt a pang in his chest. "I don't know where we're going, but Sovngarde awaits."

The thief glanced around nervously, eyes darting to and fro. Ulfric glanced back at the Imperial soldier following them on a horse. He could jump down, try to escape, but Ulfric was an honorable man and he hadn't the heart to abandon his men. His strategic mind knew he wouldn't get very far.

"Hey, what village are you from, horse thief?" Ralof asked.

"Why do you care?"

"A Nord's last thoughts should be of home."

Ulfric thought of his own home, of his family. He thought of all the soldiers who had died on foreign soil in his arms. How many of them had he had to comfort, to remind them of their home, to spare them the pain in their last moments?

Too many to count.

By then, the wagons pulled beneath the wooden gates of a small little town that Ulfric quickly recognized. Helgen. He hadn't been to the place in years, but it hadn't changed. Most of the small towns in the countryside of Skyrim looked the

same. People walked along the edges of the road and some stood on the wooden decks outside their homes. One father told his son to step inside.

Ulfric glanced up at the sky.

The wagons jolted to a stop and the Imperials ushered them out. Ulfric was the first to stand, ignoring the pain from his bruises in the previous battle. He had taken a good beating from the soldiers, even after they knew they had him in their clutches.

“Wait! We’re not rebels!” The thief behind Ulfric began shouting and thrashing, looking in every direction for somewhere to run off to. Ulfric pushed all the other noises from his mind as he stepped up to the Imperial Captain.

“Ulfric Stormcloak. Jarl of Windhelm.”

“It has been an honor, Jarl Ulfric!” Out of the men calling to him, Ulfric recognized Ralof’s.

He stepped forward, meeting the gaze of the Imperial Captain with a relaxed expression. In fact, as the other men were called up to Helgen’s city square, Ulfric’s heart and mind felt at peace. His heart rate had slowed as he looked up at the sky. No part of him feared death. What he feared was watching each and every one of his soldiers, his brothers and sisters of Skyrim, all dying. That, Ulfric could not handle.

General Tullius walked up to stand directly in Ulfric’s face. Just like that, his anger returned, worsened by Tullius’ smug expression. “Ulfric Stormcloak,” he sneered. “Some here in Helgen call you a hero. But a hero doesn't use a power like The Voice to murder his king and usurp his throne.”

*“It was no murder! I challenged him to a duel and we fought with honor!”* Ulfric wanted to say. Instead, he grunted furiously and gritted his teeth, unable to do or say anything else.

“You started this war, plunged Skyrim into chaos, and now the Empire is going to put you down, and restore the peace.”

Peace would never be restored as long as Skyrim was ruled by the Empire and handed over to the Elves on a silver platter. Ulfric hadn't started this war; the Empire did, but he had wanted nothing more than to finish it. Skyrim to rule herself in peace, for there to be no more war, so that his people could finally be free to live their lives as they chose.

Distantly, a roar echoed but it was lost behind Ulfric's infuriated thoughts.

As the priestess began giving them their last rites, one of Ulfric's old friend, Vothad, stepped up. "Oh, for the love of Talos, shut up and let's get this overwith," he snapped. He looked just as furious as Ulfric felt.

His chest ached as he watched his childhood friend bend the knee to those Imperial dogs. "Come on, I haven't got all morning."

Ulfric remembered a time when they were boys, how often they would eagerly wait for their parents to finish explaining the rules of a game to them so they and the other children of the town could go play. Vothad had never been one for patience.

"My ancestors are smiling at me, Imperials. Can you say the same?"

As the axeman brought the blade down on Vothad's neck and his head fell into a box on the other side of the block. Ulfric shifted his eyes to the sky. *Go in peace, my friend.*

"As fearless in death, as he was in life." The words came from Ralof and Ulfric was thankful that someone had said something to honor him. Volad deserved better.

The stranger was brought up to kneel at the block next. Just before the blade was brought down, another roar pierced the sky, this one far closer.

Ulfric glanced up at it and saw something he never dreamed he would bare witness to. It landed on the tower overlooking them all, just before it gave out a mighty roar once again.

A dragon.