

G.O Thrones 171

Chapter 171: Unmatched in the Vale

"Oh haha, Pierce can't breastfeed anymore!"

The watching crowd erupted in laughter.

Pierce grimaced in pain but felt determined to charge again.

The kingdom had been at peace for many years, and most nobles and knights had never experienced war. As a minor noble with limited resources, Pierce spent his days managing his territory.

Naturally, his combat skills were no match for those of Godric, who was born in a den of crime.

Bang...

Godric forced Pierce's sword away and kicked him in the stomach.

Pierce fell backward, rolling and scrambling to get up.

"Hey, hey, you're a softy!"

Godric laughed wildly and approached with his sword.

"Son of a bitch!"

Pierce suddenly cursed, grabbing a handful of dirt and flinging it.

Caught off guard, Godric didn't dodge in time and narrowed his eyes.

Taking this opportunity, Pierce stormed forward and stabbed his sword into Godric's thigh.

"Ah!!!"

Godric let out a wail and fell to the ground, rolling in pain.

Pierce quickly retreated, looked around the room, and yelled, "I won, he can't get up!"

Unfortunately, no one cheered for him.

The way he won was disgraceful and earned him the nickname "Pierce the Pussy."

Realizing he had not won honorably, Pierce sheathed his sword and slipped away from the crowd.

Soon after, attendants dragged the wailing Godric away to the castle to call the maester for help.

Rhea stepped before the crowd and shouted, "The first fight is over. Does anyone else want to fight?"

Now that the tournament had begun, it couldn't just stop.

The guests responded in unison.

"I'll do it! Who will fight with me?"

As soon as the words fell, someone stepped forward, clamoring for an opponent.

It was a rare occasion to participate in a martial arts tournament, and such a small tournament was a great opportunity.

A tall man emerged from the crowd to act as his opponent.

Within a few moments, the tall man wielded his axe.

The tall man swung his axe and knocked away his opponent's long sword, winning the match.

Most of the crowd cheered, looking forward to the next match.

Rhea called for a squire to pour wine for the winner.

The tall man gulped down the wine and clamored for a rematch.

Another challenger stepped forward, and the two engaged in combat.

This time, however, the battle did not go as smoothly. The tall man's axe struck violently, shattering his opponent's spear and nearly cleaving him in half.

At this point, the brutal nature of the martial arts tournament became evident.

Gerold frowned and whispered, "Prince, martial arts always carry risks. We should stop now."

Today was a wedding, and while the initial trouble had been resolved, any deaths from the martial arts contest would be problematic.

"Don't worry, I'll handle it," Rhaegar reassured him, patting his shoulder and walking to the center of the grassy field with a warm smile.

"Prince, you want to compete too?" The tall man looked at the young prince with some hesitation.

Rhaegar drew the Dragon Claw sword from his waist and declared loudly, "If you defeat me, this sword is yours!"

Having just parted with Rhaenyra, his spirits were high and his energy boundless. It was the perfect moment to exercise his muscles.

At the sight of the Valyrian steel sword, everyone present stared in awe. There were only a few such precious weapons in the entire Vale.

The tall man breathed heavily, hardly believing his ears. "If I win, can I really have this sword?"

"A Targaryen is bound by his word!" Rhaegar drew his sword and took a stance.

He had learned his swordsmanship from Syrio and had complete confidence in himself.

"Good! Then I'll accept your challenge!" The tall man laughed and swung his axe, charging forward.

A Valyrian steel sword was a treasure that could be an heirloom for generations. As long as he controlled his strength and didn't hurt the prince, he could win this divine weapon.

"Courage, I like it!" Rhaegar felt no fear as the bear-like man rushed towards him; instead, he felt exhilarated.

As the tall man closed in, he swung his axe down with force. Heavy weapons like axes didn't require fancy moves—just strength and precision.

Clang!

The sound of metal clashing rang out as Rhaegar stepped forward and moved to the side, his Dragon Claw sword slashing the back of the descending axe. In an instant, the axe flew out of the tall man's hand.

Before the tall man could react, Rhaegar extended his arm, pressing the tip of his sword against his opponent's neck.

"You lose!"

The tall man's body stiffened, his eyes widened, and he subconsciously swallowed hard.

He hadn't even seen what happened before the tip of the sword was at his neck.

"You win, Prince." Acknowledging both his inferior status and strength, the tall man honestly admitted defeat and retreated into the crowd, his face flushed with embarrassment.

Rhaegar laughed, pointing his sword at the crowd of onlookers, and said arrogantly, "Is there anyone else who wants to challenge me? If you win, you can take this sword from my hand!"

He didn't know what had come over him. He just wanted to vent the excitement in his heart.

The martial arts competitions of his youth had left a deep impression on him, and he wanted to relive that excitement in this small arena.

"I'll do it!"

A burly young man stepped forward, eyes glowing. "Lester Waynwood. I wish to compete with you."

He was the heir of Ironoaks and had been trained as a knight since childhood.

"Strike, Lester!" Rhaegar stepped forward, unable to stop smiling.

Lester, also a swordsman, gripped his two-handed greatsword and attacked with great force. His assault was fierce, but Rhaegar maneuvered flexibly, waiting for the right moment to counterattack.

A series of collisions echoed through the arena. The Dragon Claw sword followed the blade of the greatsword, and as Rhaegar's footsteps closed the distance, his sword grazed his opponent's neck.

Lester continued his swinging motion, a thin trickle of blood oozing from a scar on his neck.

"Your sword is quick, Prince," Lester said, frozen for a moment and disoriented as he admitted defeat.

Rhaegar had only scratched his skin, but they both knew that if he could cut the skin, he could cut his artery.

"Anyone else? Fight again!" Rhaegar continued to invite challengers.

Most retreated, realizing the prince's superior swordsmanship, but some still coveted the Valyrian steel sword.

Within half an hour, Rhaegar had defeated seven opponents in a row, each time hitting the mark. The defeated fighters couldn't even touch him, and the victory was decided in moments. His swordsmanship was characterized by speed and precision.

Syrio had once said that Rhaegar's sword was so fast that one wouldn't feel the pain until the blood flowed.

This fast sword allowed him to duel evenly with him. Syrio's sword art emphasized speed and flexibility, appearing light and slow but full of deadly opportunities. Rhaegar had to be faster and more agile to compete.

"My lords, the tournament is not over yet. Does anyone still want to challenge me?" Rhaegar was in high spirits, opening his arms wide and looking around the crowd.

The onlookers exchanged glances in disbelief and remained silent.

The prince's swordsmanship was evident to all—not only could he defeat his opponents, but he could also ensure they weren't seriously injured. With such skill, entering the arena would only bring shame.

"Are we still going to let the prince fight?" Gerold stood beside Rhea and asked in a low voice. Rhaegar had sapped everyone's enthusiasm, giving them a good reason to end the fight.

Rhea did not answer him. Her brown eyes were fixed on Rhaegar in the field, her heart swirling with memories. Watching Rhaegar's skillful swordplay, she thought of an old friend: Daemon Targaryen. Back then, Daemon had wielded the Dark Sister and displayed his prowess in a tournament at Runestone, defeating several Knights of the Vale.

It was because of Daemon's skill and elegance that she had married the young Daemon under the arrangement of Queen Alysanne. The untamed nature of uncle and nephew was exactly the same.

Chapter 172: Jenny's Forbidden Glance

Second floor, balcony.

Rhaenyra leaned against the railing, watching the fight in the back garden.

"Rhaegar is still so playful," she remarked.

"Very brave and skilled," Jeyne commented objectively beside her.

Rhaenyra moved closer, caught a glimmer in Jeyne's eye, and laughed, "Are you going to be hanging out with Jessamyn all the time?"

"She and I are friends, soothing each other's souls," Jeyne replied lightly.

Then she shifted the conversation, asking, "Do you intend to follow the Targaryen tradition?"

Rhaenyra understood the implication and smiled, "Rhaegar will go for it."

"Bless you," Jeyne said, lowering her eyes and picking up a glass of red wine.

Rhaenyra sensed insincerity in her words. She watched Jeyne's demeanor closely, trying to discern her true feelings.

Jeyne turned her head, looking at the silver-haired Rhaegar with envy in her eyes.

"Jeyne," Rhaenyra called out.

Jeyne looked over.

"Have you ever farmed?"

"That's a farmer's job."

Rhaenyra continued, "Yes, I've never farmed either, but I've seen the farmers in the crownlands do it."

Jeyne looked puzzled, her eyes quizzical.

Rhaenyra explained, "The farmer plants seeds in the spring, tends them diligently, waters and loosens the soil, and then harvests the grain in the fall."

Under Jeyne's increasingly bewildered gaze, Rhaenyra became serious.

"I've been with Rhaegar from the moment he was born. I've been there at every moment of his life."

"Now that he's grown up, it's time for me to reap the rewards."

Lifting her glass from the table, Rhaenyra clinked it against Jeyne's. A crisp buzz echoed as Rhaenyra drank it all in one go, picked up Rhaegar's clothes, and strutted away.

Suddenly, she realized that her only remaining best friend was not pure of heart.

It made her wary.

A gust of wind ruffled her hair, and Jeyne awoke from her thoughts. The bewildered expression vanished, replaced by a determined look.

With Rhaenyra now out of sight behind the beaded curtains, Jeyne glanced up at the blue sky and the white clouds. The air carried a hint of summer warmth.

"Rhaenyra, now it's summer," she murmured to herself.

...

In the back garden, at the martial arts arena, the atmosphere froze as no one was left to fight Rhaegar.

Gerold asked Rhea about it, but she was lost in her memories and remained silent for a long time. After much thought, Gerold sighed and decided to handle the situation himself.

"Prince, your swordsmanship is unrivaled. I would like to ask you for a lesson," Gerold said, drawing his sword and walking towards Rhaegar in the center of the grass.

Rhaegar smiled, "Gerold, you are the groom today. Do you want to join in as well?"

"It's rare to see sword skills like yours. I want to give it a try," Gerold replied, holding his sword with a resolute gaze.

He wanted to test the prince's strength, much like he had wanted to test Daemon's.

"Very well, come on then," Rhaegar agreed, pleased with his persistence.

Gerold charged forward, swinging his sword with the wildness characteristic of a knight of the Vale. The Dragon Claw rose, and their blades clashed, sending sparks flying. Rhaegar twisted, his sword sliding against Gerold's.

Having watched several bouts, Gerold was familiar with the prince's fast sword. He quickly retracted his sword and slashed again. His movements were swift, his body full of force, and his two-handed sword cut through the air with a soft sound.

Rhaegar took two steps back, feigning a flaw, and raised his sword to block the heavy chop. Seeing the prince's chest exposed, Gerold pressed down on his long sword and lifted his leg to kick. But as soon as he lifted his right leg, he saw Rhaegar's triumphant smirk.

"Foiled," Gerold thought, realizing his mistake.

Rhaegar changed his stance, turning to the side. His opponent's long sword and right leg were now exposed. Without hesitation, the Dragon Claw flashed, and the sword slashed down.

The Dragon Claw struck Gerold's longsword, and the two swords met with a resounding clang. The Valyrian steel proved superior, and Gerold's two-handed sword broke with a snap. The broken sword flew out and fell onto the grass.

The hearts of the onlookers seemed to tremble with the broken sword. Gerold stood there, holding the broken sword, cold sweat dripping from his forehead. He realized that on the battlefield, it would have been his leg that was cut off.

Looking at Rhaegar, who smiled apologetically, Gerold forced a smile, though it was more a grimace.

"The loss was clear and decisive," he thought.

"Lord Gerold, I am sorry for the sword," Rhaegar said, sheathing his Dragon Claw and extending a hand.

"Your swordsmanship is truly outstanding!" Gerold replied, discarding his broken sword and gripping the prince's hand firmly.

Looking around at the stunned guests, Gerold suddenly laughed loudly, raising both hands and shouting, "My lords, do you accept such an heir?"

Silence. The nobles of the Vale looked at each other with varied expressions. The scene was cold for a moment, and Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he observed.

"Damn, what a fast sword technique! Whoever dares to disobey, I will not spare him first!" someone in the crowd shouted, followed by loud laughter.

The next moment, everyone began to laugh, beat their chests, struck the hilts of their swords on their waists, and chanted in a chaotic manner, "Long live the Targaryens! Long live the Heir!"

Rhaegar held the Dragon Claw in one hand and raised the other above his head. His stoic face melted into a radiant smile as he joined in the laughter.

The people of the Vale followed the tradition of honoring the strong, much like the people of the North in the Winterlands. Rhaegar's swordsmanship had convinced them, and they willingly offered their praise and allegiance.

With Gerold's mediation, the tournament came to an end. The guests returned to the castle, surrounding Rhaegar, singing, and intent on celebrating the great contest with alcohol.

...

Night.

Rhaenyra lay in Rhaegar's arms, a note clasped in her hand.

"Jeyne's leaving tomorrow. Are we coming with her?" she asked.

Rhaegar stroked her hair gently. "A letter from Erryk. The Mountain Clans' movements in the Mountains of the Moon are unknown."

Enjoying the soft touch, Rhaegar closed his eyes and sighed. "The battle at Longbow Hall is also stagnant. With Yorbert seriously injured, the Mountain Clans might make a big move."

"Do you think they'll launch a major attack?" Rhaenyra asked softly.

"I don't know," Rhaegar replied. "First, we'll escort Jeyne back to the Eyrie. If the Mountain Clans dare to show up in force, the Cannibal will burn them all."

He tossed the note aside, his expression indifferent. "The Mountain Clans are just savages. They're troublesome when they wander, but weak when they gather."

Rhaenyra nodded. "That's fine. Erryk's letter said he's already brought troops to the Bloody Gate to meet us."

With the allies in Gulltown secured, their trip to the Vale was halfway complete. King's Landing and the Stepstones Islands still awaited their return.

"Go to sleep. No touching!" Rhaenyra slapped his hand playfully.

Rhaegar arched his back in dissatisfaction, burying his face deeper into the softness.

Rhaenyra laughed in exasperation, wrapping her arms around his neck and rubbing it vigorously.

This pig just couldn't get enough of it.

Chapter 173: Black Wedding I

The following day.

In the morning, two four-wheeled carriages were parked in the front yard of Runestone. Jeyne sat in one of them, waving goodbye to Rhea, who was there to see her off.

"Forgive me for not being able to stay until the wedding banquet is over, Rhea," Jeyne said.

"The wedding banquet isn't as important as the Eyrie," Rhea replied solemnly.

"I'm leaving now. The guests are still waiting for you," Jeyne said, drawing the curtains closed.

Rhea gathered fifty guards and instructed them to escort Jeyne.

Rhaenyra, seated in the other carriage, watched Rhaegar on his white horse outside. The horse stomped its front hooves impatiently.

"We should ride a dragon. This is ridiculous!" Rhaegar grumbled, clutching the horse's belly.

"You should tell Jeyne that. She refuses to ride a dragon," Rhaenyra replied with a grin. "Don't worry. The Eyrie is only a few days away. We'll be there soon."

"Cannibal could make the trip from Runestone to the Eyrie in an hour," Rhaegar said, clearly frustrated. He hated wasting time on long journeys.

"Accommodate Jeyne. She's a Lady. She can't fall off the back of a dragon," Rhaenyra said, unfazed. She remembered how her father had forbidden her from riding dragons when she was younger. Every trip with him had been in a carriage.

Rhaegar sighed, taking the reins and urging the white horse forward. He wished he could let Jeyne leave with just the guards so he wouldn't have to escort her himself.

Gerold approached to bid them farewell. "Prince, the roads through the Mountains of the Moon are treacherous. Be cautious."

"Don't worry," Rhaegar nodded. "You just got married yesterday. Spend more time with Lady Rhea."

"I will," Gerold said, looking slightly shy as he thought about his new wife. He had had a wonderful night.

After a brief farewell, the two carriages left Runestone, accompanied by the guards. Rhea, Gerold, and a group of nobles from the Vale watched them off. Soon, the carriages disappeared from sight.

"Let's go back," Gerold suggested.

Rhea remarked casually, "Don't drink too much. You were so drunk last night. Be careful you don't die from drinking."

"Drinking and dying is a real man's destiny," Gerold retorted with a grin, finding an excuse for his love of drinking.

Rhea snorted and turned away, heading back. The master and guests had gone to see them off, leaving the castle quiet with only the servants remaining.

In the castle cellar, the wooden door was closed, but rustling sounds came from within. A servant passing by to fetch wine stopped, staring at the door in disbelief. Thinking a mouse had gotten into the cellar, he approached the door, puzzled.

...

Noon.

The procession back to the Eyrie moved slowly.

The Vale road was dangerous, with only a single, treacherous mountain path available. To return to the Eyrie from Runestone, the group had two possible routes.

One route followed the seashore, passing Iron Oaks and the Old Anchor before entering the interior of the Vale of Arryn. However, this path, close to Longbow Hall, had been abandoned.

The second route led to Gulltown, where they could take a boat down the Bay of Crabs to the Inn at the crossroads. From there, they would enter the Vale of Arryn through the Bloody Gate via the high road. This remote and flatter path was the one they chose.

"Rhaegar, do you want to take a rest?" Rhaenyra asked, feeling uncomfortable after half a day of travel.

Rhaegar looked up. The sun was high, and the temperature was rising.

"Wait until we pass through the canyon ahead. We'll rest then," he replied.

Scouts familiar with the route were aware of any obstacles. Being close to the Mountains of the Moon, they knew Mountain Clans and Shadowcats roamed the area. It was safer to find a stable place to rest.

Twenty miles away, a group of Mountain Clans, dressed in animal skins and carrying stone axes and bronze spears, moved through the mountains.

"The Vale bitch is just ahead. Hurry up!" urged an ugly, burly man leading the group.

He walked at the forefront, followed by his men. The mountains and forests were teeming with more of their kind, rolling in and out of view.

...

At the Old Anchor, hundreds of cavalymen galloped along, kicking up dust in all directions.

They were the Cavalry of the Vale, assembled by Yorbert Royce. A few days earlier, the mountain clans besieging Longbow Hall had been defeated.

On their way back, they were ambushed by the remaining tribe members, suffering heavy losses due to an inside job compromising their route.

According to scouts, the Mountain Clans had gathered again and were marching towards Runestone, where a grand wedding was happening. Not only half the nobles from the Vale but also Lady Jeyne Arryn of the Eyrie were attending the wedding.

The severely wounded Yorbert ordered a return to Runestone at full speed.

...

Runestone.

Whoosh...

An arrow flew past and struck the bull's-eye.

In the training yard, Rhea drew her bow and shot another arrow. Around her, other nobles were also drawing their bows, competing in archery.

"Haha, I'm thirsty. No more archery for me," a certain lord exclaimed after missing the bull's-eye. He tossed aside his bow and called his friends to return to the castle.

Seeing this, Rhea put down her longbow and said, "We've been at this for half a day. It's time to prepare lunch!"

The wedding banquet had lasted for three days, and today was only the second. Besides feasting and drinking, archery and hunting were part of the festivities.

At Rhea's suggestion, the nobles complied and returned to the castle together.

Inside the hall, waiters prepared and brought dishes to the table. The men sat in the hall on the first floor, while the women gathered in the side hall on the second floor.

Rhea sat at the head of the table on the first floor, discussing hunting plans with Gerold.

Simple but hearty dishes were served, and the waiters opened wine barrels, pouring wine into jugs for the nobles in turn.

"Haha, I know I'll be fighting later, so I need to drink up now," a big man laughed, downing his cup of wine in one gulp.

A short male attendant approached Rhea, bowed his head, and poured her wine.

"Thank you," Rhea said, waving him away.

Patting the table, she stood up and raised her glass, drawing everyone's attention. The hall quieted, and all eyes were on her.

Rhea took a deep breath and spoke cheerfully, "Thank you all for coming to my wedding. Here's to you!"

"Haha, drink, drink!" the nobles cheered, slapping the tabletop and raising their cups.

The life of the nobles could be monotonous, with only banquets and martial tournaments to spark their interest.

As the wine flowed, the revelry reached its peak. Some nobles, who weren't drinking, ate a bit of food and brought out dice for games.

Bang—

Suddenly, the castle door closed with a muffled sound. Some looked over, seeing nothing amiss, and continued their festivities. Others, however, were more alert.

Old Lord Grimm Grafton, the Lord of Gulltown, sensed something was wrong. Frowning, he called his grandson over and whispered, "I feel a bit uneasy. Help me upstairs and fetch your sister."

Living over 60 years had made Grimm cautious and discreet, never one to take unnecessary risks.

Joffrey set down his glass and obediently helped his grandfather leave the table. Joining them was Lester Waynwood, who had earlier challenged Rhaegar. He had his eye on a Vale girl and was eager for a private meeting on the second floor.

Chapter 174: Black Wedding II

The banquet didn't falter despite a few missing attendees; instead, it grew more boisterous with time. The aristocrats pushed and exchanged glasses, their laughter and chatter filling the hall.

Rhea leaned back in her chair, irritated by the noise. She drained her glass of wine, intending to get up and leave.

Her husband, Gerold, sat nearby, fiddling with his knife and fork. Rhea had forbidden him from drinking, warning him that he wouldn't be allowed to go to bed if he did.

"My lord, have a drink!" a waiter whispered, approaching with a flask of wine.

Gerold waved him off impatiently. "Go away, don't bother me!"

The smell of the wine made him feel as if worms were writhing in his stomach, his heart itching with desire. Shaking his head, he gazed at the table and suddenly froze.

He noticed the footwear of the head waiter - a pair of fine buckskin boots, far too luxurious for a mere servant.

Upon closer inspection, he saw dark red stains on the boots. Gerold's frown deepened. He recognized the color as dried blood.

Lifting his head, Gerold stared at the male servant's face. The man kept his head down as if to avoid recognition. Sensing Gerold's gaze, the attendant slowly raised his head, revealing a familiar, smiling face.

"Lord Gerold, long time no see!"

It was the face of a teenager Gerold knew only too well. "Arnold!!!" Gerold exclaimed, his voice a mixture of shock and anger.

Arnold was a former retainer of Runestone who had gone to the Eyrie to challenge Jeyne's authority, only to disappear after being driven away.

As Gerold called out his name, Arnold's smile turned grim, and he spun around to flee.

Gerold shouted, "Guards! There's a traitor in the castle, catch him!"

But no one responded.

Suddenly, a middle-aged man with his feet on the table, drinking from a wine bottle, collapsed to the ground, his body limp. His neighbor nudged him, only to find black blood seeping from his mouth, emitting a thick, fishy odor.

"Poison in the wine!" someone bellowed, overturning the table in front of them. Panic erupted as nobles realized the danger, their revelry turning to chaos.

Plop plop...

As the shout echoed, a series of thuds followed. Black blood streamed from people's mouths as they collapsed to the ground, their necks contorted in death. Within moments, the hall was strewn with dozens of corpses.

Horried, Gerold turned his head to see Rhea slumped over the dining table, her body convulsing in pain, clearly poisoned as well.

"Rhea!" Gerold cried, desperately shaking his wife. He had loved his valiant cousin since childhood. When he became an adult, Rhea had married Prince Daemon of the royal family, leaving Gerold to wait over ten years for his chance to be with her. They had just shared their first night together.

"No! Rhea, please, stay with me..." Gerold trembled, his voice breaking.

The old gods did not favor him. Rhea's mouth opened wide, black blood spilling out, her eyes bulging. Soon, her neck lolled, her legs stilled, and she stopped breathing.

"No! No, no, no!!!" Gerold wailed in despair, clutching Rhea's lifeless body. He hadn't even had a chance to tell her his final regret.

Rhea was dead. Painfully dead.

"Draw your weapons and run!" someone shouted.

A few who hadn't drunk the poisoned wine drew their weapons, attempting to push open the castle gate to escape. In the chaos, more people succumbed to the poison, dying horrifically at the table.

From the shadows, dozens of men dressed in animal skins emerged, wielding clubs and axes, attacking the survivors.

Arnold hid behind a pillar in the hall, clutching a wine bottle, his face twisted with madness. "You didn't support me. I'm the rightful heir to the Eyrie. You all deserve to die!"

"Bastard! Bastard!" Gerold's eyes were red with fury as he held Rhea's body, glaring at the murderer.

He and Rhea had been married for just one day, and now this bastard had poisoned his new wife.

"Rhea! Wait for me. I'll make him pay for your life!" Gerold stood up, his grief-stricken body trembling. He picked up a dead man's sword.

Arnold, startled, called out to the Mountain Clansmen, "Kill him! Someone, come and kill him!"

A dozen or so Mountain Clansmen glanced back and chose to ignore him.

"He's a fool leading the way. Dead is dead," one muttered, grabbing a piece of mutton and stuffing it into his mouth. "Go open the gate and inform the others to attack."

"Get lost! If you want to go, you go. Don't order me around!" another wildling snapped, walking towards the remaining survivors with his weapon.

"Kill them!" he shouted.

...

In a Canyon

Rhaegar rode his white horse, leading his party into the narrow mouth of the canyon. Suddenly, a chill ran down his spine. Overwhelmed by the sensation, he felt a profound sense of unease.

"What's going on?" he muttered, rolling up his sleeves. The fine hairs on his arms stood on end, something that had never happened to him before.

As the group continued to move forward, Rhaegar looked up at the sky, puzzled. The sky was blue and clear, but there was no sight of the dark figure of Cannibal. The dragon had flown ahead and was hunting near the Bay of Crabs, unable to wait for the slow-moving convoy.

Despite this, Rhaegar wasn't overly concerned. Runestone and Gulltown were built north and south of each other, and they had already traveled half the distance. With Cannibal's speed, it would take only ten minutes for the dragon to return.

Gada Gada...

The wagon wheels crunched over the gravel, creating a piercing sound as the group entered the middle of the canyon. Rhaegar held the reins tightly, his agitation growing with every step. He had a bad feeling.

Prompted by his instincts, he pulled the reins, stopping his white horse. The carriage behind him gradually slowed to a halt. Rhaenyra poked her head out of the carriage curtain, smiling.

"Why have you stopped, Rhaegar?"

"Where is Syrax?" Rhaegar asked directly, not wasting any words.

"Syrax?" Rhaenyra paused, confused. "She went hunting."

"Can you sense her and call her back?" Rhaegar suggested, while mentally calling out to Cannibal himself. He trusted his premonition. Something was terribly wrong.

"I'll try," Rhaenyra said, her expression uneasy. She focused on sensing Syrax.

With a nudge of his horse's belly, Rhaegar rode to the back of the line and found a lean soldier.

"Send someone to the front to find out what's going on!"

"Yes, Your Highness!" The soldier responded quickly, turning to call for men.

Whoosh—

A bone arrow flew in, landing at the soldier's feet. Rhaegar's pupils contracted, and he immediately drew his Dragon Claw sword.

Swish swish swish...

In the next second, a rain of dense bone arrows fell from the sky.

"Ah!..." The soldiers in the queue barely had time to react before they were struck by the arrows, letting out cries of pain.

The lean soldier was just about to draw his sword when a bone arrow struck the back of his neck, the tip emerging from his mouth. He collapsed, lifeless.

Chapter 175: Black Wedding III

"Dodge!!!" Rhaegar shouted, alerting Rhaenyra in the carriage as the soldier fell dead before him.

Ding ding ding ding ding—

Bone arrows rained from above. Rhaegar swiftly swung his Dragon Claw sword, deflecting the incoming arrows.

"Whinny~~" His white horse wasn't as fortunate. An arrow pierced its eye, and the horse let out a pained cry, stumbling before collapsing to the ground.

Plop...

Rhaegar fell heavily onto the back of the horse, rolling quickly to avoid being crushed. Bone arrows continued to fall, narrowly missing him as he scrambled to his feet, agilely knocking away another arrow with his sword.

While Rhaegar managed to dodge the arrows, his soldiers weren't as lucky.

"Ah!..." The soldiers in the canyon became living targets, falling quickly to the relentless assault.

Rhaegar's primary concern was the two wagons, especially Rhaenyra still inside. The solid wood of the wagons withstood the bone arrows, the thick wood preventing them from piercing through. Only a few iron-tipped arrows managed to penetrate, but just barely.

Rhaegar sprinted towards the wagons, his Dragon Claw flashing as he deflected more arrows. Reaching the side of the carriage, he ducked into the limited shelter it provided.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra's frightened voice called out from inside.

Bone arrows had found their way through the carriage windows, but Rhaenyra had heeded Rhaegar's warning and was huddled in a corner, avoiding the deadly projectiles.

"Stay hidden and keep quiet!" Rhaegar called back, relieved to hear her voice. He knew he had to protect her at all costs. Besides his father, Rhaenyra was the most important person to him.

"Rhaegar, what's happening? Get inside the wagon!" Rhaenyra's voice trembled, clinging to the corner of the wagon. She had heard the soldier's screams and feared for Rhaegar's safety.

Rhaegar didn't have time to answer; his eyes darted to the other wagon. Jeyne and Jessamyn were inside, their screams audible, indicating they were still alive.

As Rhaegar's thoughts wandered, the rain of bone arrows ceased. He pressed against the wagon, wary of making any sudden moves, uncertain if a second volley might follow.

Suddenly, from the bushes and rocks on both sides of the canyon, Mountain Clansmen emerged, armed with bows and weapons.

"Kill! The Vale bitch is in the cart!" an ugly, lanky man shouted from atop a huge rock, his voice echoing through the canyon.

The Mountain Clansmen discarded their crude wooden bows, leaping down the hillside like a swarm, rolling into the valley. Rhaegar peeked out to see hundreds of attackers swarming into the canyon.

"Dammit, we're in big trouble!" he muttered, pressing his back against the wagon and tightening his grip on his Dragon Claw sword. He hadn't expected an ambush between Runestone and Gulltown; this road had never been dangerous before.

"Hold on! The Cannibals are hurrying back!" Rhaegar called to Rhaenyra in the wagon, trying to bolster both her spirits and his own. When the arrows first fell, he had mentally summoned the Cannibal dragon, hoping it would arrive in time to turn the tide.

In a short span, hundreds of Mountain Clansmen had descended into the canyon, menacingly advancing toward the two wagons.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra poked her head out, her eyes wide with fear as she saw the approaching horde. Without her dragon, she felt powerless.

Inside the other wagon, Jeyne and Jessamyn clung to each other, huddling in a corner. Jeyne's arm was pierced by an arrow, blood soaking through her sleeve.

"Mountain Clans, we've been ambushed!" Jeyne whispered, pulling back the corner of the curtain to glimpse the surrounding attackers, her fingers trembling. The sight of the Mountain Clansmen brought back haunting memories—her father and brothers had perished in a similar ambush.

"Surround the wagons and kill the Vale bitch!" the Mountain Clans' leader shouted.

At his command, the attackers closed in on the two wagons, weapons drawn. In the face of this dire threat, Rhaegar made a swift decision and stepped out from behind the wagon. He needed to buy time, knowing that the Cannibal dragon was only minutes away.

Gripping his Dragon Claw sword tightly, Rhaegar stepped in front of the wagon, ready to defend those inside.

The Mountain Clansmen, seeing only one young man standing against them, laughed heartily and tightened their circle.

"Stop!" Rhaegar shouted, his voice cutting through the air. Blood surged through his veins as he prepared for the inevitable clash.

No one heeded his command. The Mountain Clans continued their advance, treating him as nothing more than a minor obstacle. They believed one boy could easily be felled with a single swing of an axe.

As Rhaegar advanced to meet them, his voice grew cold and resolute. "I am Rhaegar Targaryen, heir to the throne. Stand down, or face the consequences!"

His declaration was met with derision. The Mountain Clans had slain many lords of the Vale and had always thrived in chaos and defiance.

"Rhaegar, listen to me! You can still escape!" Rhaenyra's voice called from the wagon behind him, urging him to save himself while there was still a chance.

Rhaegar didn't waver. His expression relaxed into calm determination as he faced the enemy. Behind him were Rhaenyra and Lady Jeyne. He would not abandon them.

"I am of true dragon blood," he murmured, raising his Dragon Claw sword to his eyes. The blade glinted with a deadly light.

His father once asked him what the dragon's claws symbolized. His answer was simple: "Fearlessness."

Now, he would embody that will.

"Kill him!" the Mountain Clans' leader bellowed, pointing at Rhaegar.

With a roar, the Clansmen charged. The gap between them closed rapidly, and Rhaegar could almost smell their rank odor.

He slowed his breathing, tightened his grip on the sword hilt, and waited for the right moment.

"I'm going to chop off your white-haired head!" one Clansman yelled, swinging a stone axe at him.

Rhaegar sidestepped, swinging his sword in a fluid motion, and decapitated the attacker. The head rolled away as more Clansmen lunged at him with their weapons.

In an instant, Rhaegar was surrounded. He thrust his sword through one man's throat, then pivoted to slice another's neck. Blood sprayed in all directions.

The Clansmen cursed and attacked with stone axes, spears, and mallets. Rhaegar moved with practiced precision, each stroke of his sword finding its mark. He was relentless, his movements becoming a blur of steel and blood.

"Get away! I won't die in a place like this!" he roared, cutting down another attacker.

He fought with increasing ferocity, his will unbreakable. More wildlings joined the fray, encircling him with layers of bodies. The fallen corpses piled up, limiting his movement.

The air was thick with the stench of blood. Rhaegar's pale skin turned crimson as he continued to fight, his body radiating heat.

Chapter 176: Bloodline Awakening – Pyromancer

Rhaegar's sword opened the enemy's belly, and intestines spilled out with a sickening gurgle. Blood splattered across his face, coloring his purple eyes with a touch of scarlet. His chest heaved, his breath hot and heavy, distorting the air around him.

Whoosh—

A dark arrow descended from the sky, piercing his left shoulder with tremendous force. Rhaegar staggered, glancing up to see the Mountain Clans leader on the canyon ridge, holding a curved bow.

Pfft...

A bronze spear struck from behind, piercing through his back and out his stomach. Searing pain shot through him as blood flowed from the wound. Rhaegar turned and decapitated the sneak attacker with a swift strike of his sword.

"Heh..."

Blood dripped from the corner of his mouth, and Rhaegar's body trembled slightly. Despite the wounds, he felt no pain. His mind was clearer than ever, and his body surged with newfound strength. He sliced through the spear shaft protruding from his abdomen.

"Out of the way, I'll kill him!" a booming voice called out.

Rhaegar's vision was obscured by the throng of Mountain Clansmen. He saw them parting, some being thrown aside like rag dolls. The space around him cleared, giving him room to move.

Through blood-stained hair, Rhaegar saw a massive figure charging towards him. An ugly Mountain Clansman, over three meters tall with gnarled muscles and an ox-horn helmet, barreled forward.

"Descendant of giants?" Rhaegar thought. True giants stood around six meters tall; this brute must have giant blood in him.

"Shorty, I'll tear you apart!" the giant bellowed, raising a shield-sized palm to strike.

Rhaegar sidestepped, slashing at the giant's wrist.

Clang...

The sound of metal against metal rang out, sparks flying. Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he continued to dodge. The giant paused, revealing crude iron wrist guards beneath his thick fur sleeves.

Taking advantage of the giant's confusion, Rhaegar bent his knees and lunged, aiming for the giant's abdomen.

Clang...

Again, the sword met resistance. "Haha, my belt is sturdy!" the giant laughed, slapping his stomach with a resounding thud. His body was covered in hidden protective gear.

Rhaegar rolled and swung his sword once more, this time cutting through the giant's chest. The blade sliced through animal skin, and foul blood sprayed out.

"Ah! Tran will crush you!" the giant roared, his massive hands swiping at Rhaegar like gates.

The surrounding Mountain Clansmen hesitated, forming a loose ring around the two combatants. Rhaegar dodged the giant's blows, but a spear thrust blocked his escape.

Bang--

With a momentary lapse, Rhaegar couldn't dodge half giant Tran's massive slap. He raised his arms, bracing with his dragon claws, but the force sent him flying.

"Rhaegar!!!"

Rhaenyra's scream pierced the chaos, her eyes welling with tears. Hidden in the carriage, she couldn't see the full battle but saw Rhaegar, bloodied, hurtling through the air.

He hit the ground with a heavy thud, his head buzzing. Instinctively, he rolled to lessen the impact. His skin flushed red, steam rising from his body, especially from the wounds on his shoulder and abdomen. Blood sizzled on the grass.

Suddenly, a system beep echoed in his mind.

"Congratulations, the blessing of the Lord of Light has been activated. You have obtained..."

Through blood-stained eyelashes, Rhaegar's vision cleared.

[Pyromancer]

Grade: Epic (Purple)

Function: Stimulates the power hidden in the bloodline.

Evaluation: "Empty of blood, now you have gained a corresponding talent."

A token engraved with the blazing sun's red heart materialized, then burst into flames. The firework-like sparks floated down, merging into his flesh.

Zira--

Flames ignited from the corner of his eye, drawing his attention.

Whew...

Fire erupted from his body, spreading to every corner. His long silver-gold hair flew wildly, sparks crackling. Slowly, Rhaegar stood, Dragon Claw in hand, feeling warmth and strength surge through him.

He looked down at his abdomen. The blood in his wound coagulated under the flames. Rhaegar grabbed the spear's tip and yanked it out with a puff. Blood spurted, quickly igniting, as the flames converged on the wound, sealing it.

He repeated the process with the arrow in his shoulder, his mind racing. Realization dawned as he called the system panel.

[Rhaegar Targaryen]

Talent: Dreamer (Gold), Pyromancer (Purple), Longevity (Green)

Bloodline: Ancient Valyrian Dragonlord (+42%)

Skills: Sword Mastery, Spear Mastery, Old Valyrian Language Proficiency...

Relics: Blood and Fire, True Dragon's Blood, Dreamscape...

Evaluation: "Ancient bloodlines are awakened, and powerful gifts are born. The Dragonlord's bloodline is purified."

"Have I become a Pyromancer?" Rhaegar muttered, puzzled. His bloodline purity had been stuck for years, unable to cross 40%. Now, as a Pyromancer, his bloodline had advanced.

Or perhaps, it was the purification of his bloodline that made him a Pyromancer. The two elements complemented each other.

Contemplating for a moment, Rhaegar gripped the blade of his Dragon Claw tightly and drew it across his palm.

A stabbing sound, his palm cut, and blood stained Dragon Claw. Instantly, the blade burst into flames, the unique water wave pattern of Valyrian steel seeming to come alive, rippling slightly.

"Fire! Flames are burning on his body!"

The transformation startled and terrified the besieging Mountain Clans.

"Get out of the way! The tribe has plenty of torches; what are you afraid of?"

The half giant pushed aside his kin blocking the path and charged with his fists.

Rhaegar, expressionless, clasped Dragon Claw with both hands, silently acclimating to the flame's enchantment. When the half giant's fist came crashing down, Rhaegar didn't dodge. Instead, he rushed forward, slashing his sword across his unprotected fingers.

Splat...

Three thick fingers were severed, falling to the ground.

"Ah! Damn it!"

The intense pain drove the half giant into a frenzy, arching his back and waving his arms wildly. Rhaegar struck again, this time slicing into the giant's bare arm, the blade lodging deep in the bone.

The giant wailed and cursed, pressing the blade against his arm, and with a mighty effort, yanked it free. Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged as he abandoned the sword and dodged.

"Die, bug!"

The half giant, believing he had disarmed Rhaegar, laughed harshly and lunged with open arms.

"It's you who should die!"

Rhaegar rolled forward, turned to face his opponent, and swiftly thrust out his right arm. The space bracelet on his wrist flashed, and a two-meter-long spear materialized in his hand.

Poof...

The spear's one-foot-long head plunged into the half giant's heart.

"Ho ho..."

With his heart pierced, the half giant's eyes widened, and a huge mouthful of blood gushed out. Using his last strength, he tried to close his arms around Rhaegar.

Rhaegar pulled out the spearhead, gripping the end with his left hand, and thrust it forward, stabbing the giant in the throat. With a powerful swing, the Valyrian steel tip shattered the cervical vertebrae, decapitating the giant.

Chapter 177: A Dragonlord's Wrath

The giant's head rolled away, its size dwarfed by the fury in Rhaegar's heart. Blood boiled through his veins, his entire body surging with untamed energy.

Under the flames, he felt invincible.

Rising, he picked up the flaming Dragon Claw with one hand and gripped his spear with the other. His eyes, sharp and cold, scanned the Mountain Clans, who now hesitated to advance.

After killing the Half Giant, the flames around him intensified, dancing wildly in the wind.

Rhaegar advanced toward the gathered Mountain Clans, his arms spread wide, head held high, and bellowed:

"Come on! Kill me! Kill a Dragonlord!"

Fear gripped the Mountain Clans as they stared at the fire-wreathed silver-haired boy.

Continuing forward, Rhaegar pointed his spear at them, his voice booming, "I am Rhaegar Targaryen. I am Rhaegar Targaryen! Who dares to take my life?"

His voice echoed through the Vale, reaching every ear.

At this moment, he was fearless.

With the bloodline of the Dragonlord and the talent of a Pyromancer, he was no ordinary human being.

The Mountain Clans retreated further, pushing and shoving each other, none daring to be the first to attack.

A young man engulfed in flames had slain the strongest descendant of giants in the Vale, a spectacle that transcended their comprehension.

In their eyes, Rhaegar was no longer human. He was a fire god who had performed a miracle.

Up in the canyon, the Mountain Clans leader, eyes wide with disbelief, shouted frantically, "Kill him! He's exhausted, kill him!"

He had met the Flame Witch of the tribe and knew the will of the God of Flame. The fire-bathing boy before him had to be a fake.

"Fake!"

Hearing the commander's order, the Mountain Clans forced themselves to stop retreating, trying to resist the urge to flee.

Rhaegar continued to advance, his expression indifferent. With each step, he closed the distance between them.

The Mountain Clans gripped their weapons tightly, their fear palpable.

"Go! He is alone!"

A shout came from the crowd, and the Mountain Clans, overwhelmed by the intensity or unable to cope with the fear, rushed forward in a swarm.

Rhaegar's face remained calm and unperturbed, his spear and sword at the ready.

The distance closed rapidly, and soon their weapons clashed.

"Roar!!"

Suddenly, a dragon's roar echoed through the sky, and a vast shadow enveloped the entire Vale.

Boom...

Ghostly green Dragonfire cascaded from the sky, a torrent engulfing half of the Vale. The Mountain Clans didn't even have time to scream; they were incinerated instantly, turned to ash within moments.

Rhaegar tilted his head back and closed his eyes, standing resolute in the Dragonfire.

Nearby, everything—rocks, grass, trees, and even iron weapons—had melted away, leaving a vast expanse of scorched earth. In the eerie green glow of the Dragonfire, only Rhaegar's reddish aura remained.

Half a second later, the flames ceased.

Cannibal's immense black form hovered above the Vale, its green eyes blazing with madness, dragonfire still spewing from its maw.

"It's over."

Rhaegar opened his eyes as the flames on his body gradually extinguished. Looking around, he saw nothing but devastation; no survivors remained.

Turning back, he saw the two carriages, miraculously unscathed by the Dragonfire.

Suddenly, his ears twitched at a faint sound.

His gaze locked onto the upper part of the canyon. The leader of the Mountain Clans had crawled up from the ground, running in a panic.

A faint sting in his left shoulder made Rhaegar smirk.

The dark arrow had hurt him, but the leader wouldn't escape.

He picked up his spear and hurled it.

The spear cut through the air, and with a swift descent, it pierced through the fleeing leader's chest, pinning him to the ground.

A mouthful of blood spurted out as the leader writhed and wailed in agony.

Rhaegar's eyes flashed as he switched Dragon Claw to his right hand and climbed the hill to the canyon's top.

Jogging to his opponent, he saw the pleading look in the leader's eyes.

Rhaegar hesitated.

Then, with a swift motion, he swung his sword several times, severing the leader's limbs.

He had intended to extract useful information, but the leader's expression revealed nothing.

"You don't deserve a quick death."

Pulling out his spear, Rhaegar staggered, almost collapsing.

"Roar..."

As the battle's adrenaline waned, sharp pain surged through his body. Rhaegar sucked in a breath, his mouth twitching from the agony.

It hurt too much! Especially the wound in his lower abdomen, as if someone had yanked out his intestines, cleaned them, and stuffed them back in.

"Roar..."

Cannibal swooped down, his wings casting a shadow over the land as he descended, his body blocking out the sunlight.

Sniffing the air, it detected the scent of blood as Rhaegar's wounds pulsed, blood gushing forth without the support of flames.

"Rhaegar!"

Rhaenyra's panicked scream pierced the air. She bolted from the carriage, tears streaming down her cheeks, scrambled up the hill, and threw herself at Rhaegar's side like a possessed woman.

Rhaenyra had stayed hidden, knowing she would be a liability to Rhaegar in the midst of the Mountain Clans' siege. But with Cannibal's return, she was overwhelmed with relief and rushed to her brother's side.

"Oh... your wound..."

Rhaenyra covered her mouth, tears flowing freely as she examined the heavily bleeding wound, her heart breaking at the sight. This was the brother she'd raised since childhood, their bond deeper than blood.

Suddenly, she thought of something.

"Rhaegar, bear with it."

Gritting her teeth, Rhaenyra tore at the fabric of her skirt, hastily wrapped her arms around Rhaegar's waist, and clumsily fashioned a bandage to stop the bleeding.

Rhaenyra grimaced, sweat beading her forehead as she supported Rhaegar's weight against her body as his legs gave out. The wound was severe and he couldn't use his waist.

"Just a little longer, we need to stop the bleeding," she murmured, her eyes brimming with tears as she worked frantically.

"We need to leave," Rhaegar rasped, enduring the pain as he leaned heavily against Rhaenyra's shoulder.

He hadn't felt the extent of his injuries during the battle, but now the pain was searing.

"We can't go to Eyrie, it's too far," he continued, his voice strained. "Back to Runestone. It's risky, but we have no choice."

Rhaenyra's heart skipped a beat. "But what if there's a traitor in Runestone?"

"We must risk it," Rhaegar insisted. "The Mountain Clans may have only sent a fraction of their forces. The rest could be waiting in Runestone."

Runestone housed many of the Vale's nobles. If it fell to the Mountain Clans, chaos would ensue.

Rhaenyra hesitated, fearing the danger. "Gulltown?"

"Not safe either," Rhaegar replied. "Runestone it is. We'll rally the nobles and prepare for the worst."

"Okay," Rhaenyra nodded, resigned. "Let's get you on Cannibal."

With great effort, they helped Rhaegar onto Cannibal's back, the dragon obediently lowering itself for its rider.

Chapter 178: Cannibal's Wrath

"Rhaenyra, I'm here to help you!"

Jeyne's hoarse voice rang out.

Rhaenyra turned to see Jeyne struggling up the hill, carrying an unconscious Jessamyn.

"How is she?" Rhaenyra asked, forcing a smile, her concern more perfunctory than genuine.

"She's weak from blood loss," Jeyne replied, her voice dazed. She gently laid Jessamyn on the ground and moved to support Rhaegar.

Rhaegar glanced at her, noticing her dull eyes and slight tremble—signs of shock.

"Be careful not to aggravate the wound," Jeyne warned, carefully taking Rhaegar's arm, her grip tight.

She had witnessed Rhaegar's solo stand against the Mountain Clans. In the heat of the battle, she had drawn her dagger, ready to end both her and her friend's lives if Rhaegar fell. By some miracle, they had survived.

Bloodied swords, flying sparks, and a blazing dragon had been her reality moments ago. Her worldview had been shattered and reshaped by the sight of Rhaegar's valiant fight and the dragon's fiery wrath.

"This is a miracle!" Jeyne murmured, clutching Rhaegar's arm tighter, seeking security.

With great effort, Rhaegar flattened himself on Cannibal's back. The saddle would only worsen his injuries.

Rhaenyra and Jeyne climbed off the dragon, then carefully lifted Jessamyn onto its back. Syrax, not as swift as Cannibal, was still on its way back.

Rhaenyra settled into the saddle and earnestly pleaded, "Cannibal, fly us back to Runestone safely."

"Roar..." Cannibal rumbled, slowly standing and flapping its wings to stabilize its flight. It understood the gravity of the situation.

Behind the saddle, Rhaegar and Jessamyn lay on the dragon's back. Jeyne sat between them, holding each of their hands, her eyes tightly shut as she fought her fear of heights.

She held on firmly, though the fear of falling was unfounded; Cannibal, an adult dragon, had a broad back and flew smoothly, ensuring their safety.

...

Runestone

The outer walls of the castle stood firmly shut. Soldiers atop the battlements drew their bows, loosing arrows and hurling logs and stones down upon the attackers. Below, clusters of Mountain Clansmen swarmed together, their crude ladders and siege wagons crashing chaotically against the city gates.

"Don't stop the rolling logs! Bring up the oil!" bellowed Gerold, clad in iron armor, commanding the battle from the city gate.

"Lord Gerold, we're running out of soldiers at the gates!" Lester Waynwood arrived breathless, panic evident in his eyes.

"Send a team to reinforce them, now!" Gerold's face was smeared with blood as he shouted orders.

An hour earlier, most of the guests at the wedding banquet had died from poisoning. Amid the chaos, a dozen Mountain Clansmen infiltrated the castle through a secret passage, intending to kill the survivors.

Fortunately, Gerold and a few other Vale knights held their ground, fighting the intruders to a standstill. Lester and Joffrey, positioned on the second floor, provided critical support, helping to repel the attackers.

However, their relief was short-lived. A large force of Mountain Clansmen appeared outside Runestone City, forcing the soldiers to immediately shut the gates and prepare for a siege.

Despite heavy casualties, the Mountain Clansmen persisted in their relentless assault.

Gerold grabbed a messenger, his voice tense with urgency. "Did the raven carrying our plea for help to Gulltown get out?"

Gulltown, the closest and most powerful town, was their best hope for reinforcements. The Lord of Gulltown and his family were also present in Runestone, ensuring that any message would be quickly acted upon.

"The raven has flown out, my lord," the messenger confirmed.

Relieved, Gerold released the man. The Royce House of Runestone was among the most powerful in the Vale. The city's walls were as robust as a fortress, and they commanded hundreds of cavalry and three thousand soldiers.

However, with half their forces transferred to support Longbow Hall, only about a thousand soldiers remained in Runestone.

Outside the city, the Mountain Clansmen's assault was unrelenting. The sheer number of attackers stretched as far as the eye could see.

Gerold had just experienced the agony of losing his wife, and now, for the first time, he found himself commanding a large-scale battle. His heart was heavy with unease.

The siege wagons ground to a halt at the city gates, their hammers pounding repeatedly against the doors. Soldiers on the walls poured oil and shot arrows in a mercilessly.

The oil ignited instantly, engulfing the siege wagons and the surrounding Mountain Clansmen in flames. Screams of agony echoed through the battlefield, mingling with the acrid scent of blood and burning flesh.

"Attack! Climb the walls!" a burly, disfigured man shouted as he climbed a ladder, urging his fellow tribesmen to follow.

This was Shae, the eldest son of the Stone Crows tribe's patriarch. His two younger brothers had been sent on another mission.

Despite the defenders' best efforts, the sheer number of Mountain Clansmen proved overwhelming.

Logs and stones rained down from the walls, and oil fires blazed, but the attackers continued to climb. The walls of Runestone, only seven or eight meters high, allowed a few determined invaders to slip through the defenses.

"Kill!" Gerold drew his sword and slashed at the Mountain Clansmen who managed to breach the walls. But no matter how quickly he moved, he couldn't prevent more from scaling the fortifications.

Soon, more than a dozen Mountain Clansmen had reached the top, killing soldiers and causing chaos.

Shocked and desperate, Gerold rallied his troops to defend the city. Suddenly, a dragon roar echoed from the distance, silencing the battlefield as all eyes turned to the sky.

A pitch-black dragon burst through the clouds and swooped down on Runestone. Its ghostly green flames scorched the battlefield, leaving screams of agony in its wake. Another dragon, golden and majestic, followed close behind, unleashing its own torrent of golden fire.

"No! What kind of monsters are they? Run!" The sight of the dragons' fury sent the Mountain Clansmen into a panic, abandoning their weapons and fleeing in terror.

"Burn them all!" Rhaenyra, sitting on Cannibal's back, her face contorted with rage, commanded the dragon to unleash its fire.

The two dragons, one black and one gold, circled above the battlefield, their flames crisscrossing in a devastating pattern. The Mountain Clansmen, packed tightly on the ground, were incinerated en masse.

Rhaenyra, consumed by vengeance, pursued them relentlessly. She and Rhaegar had nearly perished at the hands of these savages, and she was determined that they would pay in blood and fire.

"Help! Help me!" came the desperate cries of the fleeing clansmen, their voices cut short by the dragons' fire.

In moments, the area around Runestone was reduced to scorched earth, littered with the bodies of the dead. Only a few Mountain Clansmen escaped into the Vale and the forests; the rest were consumed by the dragonfire.

Rhaenyra's eyes were red, her face streaked with dried tears. "Rhaenyra, stop chasing!" Jeyne cried out in panic, clinging to Rhaegar and Jessamyn on the dragon's back.

"Be gentle, Jeyne," Rhaegar's face was pale as he held Jeyne's trembling hand. He shared her desire to annihilate the Mountain Clans, but the pain from his wounds was unbearable.

Rhaenyra snapped out of her fury at the sound of his voice, turning to look worriedly behind the saddle. "Cannibal, land at Runestone," Rhaegar commanded, patting the pitch-black scales beneath him.

The dragon obeyed and descended toward the besieged city.

Chapter 179: Runes: Bronze and Bridled Serpent

"Roar..."

Cannibal couldn't hear Rhaegar's voice, but their minds were as one, and the dragon immediately responded to his command.

With a final blast of Dragonfire incinerating a group of fleeing Mountain Clansmen, Cannibal turned and soared towards Runestone.

Syrax, however, did not take the command and continued to pursue the Mountain Clansmen as far as the eye could see.

As a almost adult dragon, it was impervious to ordinary bows and arrows, except for the deadly scorpion crossbow. Rhaenyra was relieved to know that Syrax could handle himself.

Cannibal flew over Runestone and landed in the clearing of the front yard. On the city walls, Gerold had dispatched all the Mountain Clansmen who had breached the defenses, his eyes now fixed on the two dragons.

Everyone in Westeros knew that dragons were synonymous with power, but few had actually witnessed their might. Seeing the two dragons incinerate thousands of Mountain Clansmen left Gerold in stunned awe. It was as if he had witnessed the power of the gods.

"Quickly! The prince is hurt, get the Maester!" Jeyne's voice broke through Gerold's daze, her urgent cry snapping him back to reality.

...

Night fell.

In a dimly lit bedroom, Rhaegar lay unconscious on a bed, his body stripped bare. Herbs and bandages covered his shoulders and abdomen, treating his injuries from the recent bloody battle.

Despite the severity of the fight, his injuries were limited to two major wounds and several bruises.

The Runestone Maester had assessed his condition and determined that neither wound was critical. The arrow hadn't hit any bones, and the stab wound in his abdomen hadn't damaged his intestines. With proper care and prevention of infection, he would recover.

Creak...

The door to the room opened slightly and Rhaenyra entered, carrying a bundle in her arms.

"Rhaegar," she called softly, hoping to wake him.

Seeing no response, Rhaenyra walked silently to his bed. In her arms were two precious items: a sheathed half-sword and an ancient bronze breastplate.

She drew the sword halfway, revealing the undulating pattern on the Valyrian steel blade. This sword, called Lamentation, was a treasured heirloom of House Royce of Runestone.

She placed the sword beside Rhaegar and placed his left hand on the hilt. Then she placed the bronze breastplate at his feet, making sure one foot touched it.

The breastplate, aged and green with patina, bore faint runic carvings around its heart and edges.

The Royce House, founded in the Heroic Era, was known as the "Bronze Kings". They specialized in bronze casting and still used bronze armor and weapons, a tradition reflected in the nickname Daemon once used for his ex-wife, "Bronze Bitch".

The Royce House worshipped the Old Gods and believed in the power of runes, which they inscribed on their bronze armor to increase its strength and protective properties. The breastplate Rhaenyra brought was the oldest surviving piece, rumored to be thousands of years old.

"Rhaegar, you must wake quickly," Rhaenyra whispered, planting a soft kiss on his forehead.

Fetching Lamentation and the Bronze Armor was Rhaegar's request before he lost consciousness, believing that these ancient objects would give him strength.

Though Rhaenyra didn't fully understand their significance, she granted his wish. She knew that Rhaegar had a passion for collecting antiquities, and many of the exotic items he had given her had been acquired at great expense.

With her task completed, Rhaenyra hesitated before deciding to stay. She removed her boots and climbed into bed beside Rhaegar, lying on her side with her head propped on one hand. She didn't feel comfortable leaving him alone and wanted to be by his side all the time.

According to Gerold, a hidden tunnel had been discovered in Runestone, leading to the massacre of almost all the Vale nobles who had attended the banquet. Though the tunnel was now sealed and soldiers patrolled Runestone around the clock, Rhaenyra's fear persisted. She didn't want Rhaegar out of her sight.

As sleep overcame her, she remained unaware of the significance the two artifacts held for Rhaegar.

A system prompt echoed in his mind: "This quest has begun. The target is the Valyrian steel sword, Lamentation."

Exploration Progress: 0.3%

Time passed, and in the middle of the night, another system beep sounded: "This exploration is complete. Please retrieve the lost treasure."

Then: "This quest is open. The target is the Runic Armor."

[Runic Armor]

Exploration Progress: 0.3%

Rhaegar's eyelids fluttered slightly as if disturbed, but he did not wake up. He had long wanted to explore the Royce family's treasures, Lamentation and the Bronze Armor, but had refrained due to the complications of his marriage relationships with them.

Now, with Rhea dead and the Runestone in turmoil, everything had been simplified. At Rhaenyra's request, Gerold had generously loaned the artifacts.

Creak...

The door opened again and a silhouette stood at the entrance, peering through the narrow crack.

"Rhaenyra..." Jeyne murmured softly. Her long chestnut hair hung over her chest as she spotted her best friend lying on the bed.

She left the room in silence, closing the door behind her.

...

At dawn the next day, Rhaegar was awakened by a system alert.

"This quest is over. Please retrieve the lost treasure."

He groggily opened his eyes, blinking in the dim morning light. A small, delicate hand rested on his chest, and he felt the warmth of a body beside him.

"Rhaenyra?" he murmured.

Rhaenyra blinked awake, her eyes meeting his. She had fallen asleep in her clothes, keeping watch over him through the night, her hand still gripping the hilt of his sword. At his feet lay the battered bronze breastplate, glowing faintly with a purple aura.

Rhaegar realized immediately that Rhaenyra had retrieved the items he had requested. He called up the system interface to check the status of the exploration quest.

[Lamentation]

Exploration Progress: 100%

[Runic Armor]

Exploration Progress: 100%

Turning his head, he saw the half-sheathed Valyrian steel sword in his left hand. Beside the scabbard, another purple glow emanated from the ancient bronze breastplate. With effort, Rhaegar moved his fingers to touch the purple halo and nudged the other glow with his foot.

Two fireworks-like bursts of purple light erupted, and the system beeped.

"Relic picked up successfully, detection in progress..."

"Detection successful. Judged to be epic relics: Runic Greatsword and Watcher's Armor."

Rhaegar's heart leaped with joy at acquiring two epic-level relics. Before he could investigate further, the system provided more details.

"Congratulations, the Rune Greatsword has been activated. You have obtained..."

[Rune: Bridled Serpent]

Grade: Excellent (Blue)

Function: Activates the power of the snake, quickly recovers from injuries.

Evaluation: "One of the advanced runes, rare and precious in the age of disappearing runes."

"Congratulations, the Guardian Armor has been activated. You have won..."

[Rune: Bronze].

Grade: Good (Green)

Function: Provides protection.

Evaluation: "One of the basic runes, a good way to save your life."

As the knowledge of the runes flooded his mind, Rhaegar felt a rush of pleasure that seemed to come from his very soul, causing him to roll his eyes in ecstasy.

"Ah!!"

A sudden, mournful cry pierced the morning air and echoed through Runestone. The voice was young and filled with terror.

Chapter 180: The Serpent's Ability

The screams continued, though the thick stone walls of the castle muffled the sound, making it faint in the bedroom.

Rhaegar lay there, absorbing the knowledge from the two runes, his breath quickening. The infusion of such knowledge was intoxicating, almost addictive. After a few moments, he felt the rush subside and took a deep breath.

"Bronze, Serpent," he murmured, sifting through the newfound knowledge.

The runic system was fundamentally different from the magic system. While his talent as a pyromancer allowed him to manipulate flames, runes offered a unique way to harness magic through specific symbols and formulas.

Runes acted as a specialized medium for magic, requiring mental focus to carve and activate their powers. The Serpent Rune, for example, not only created a physical mark, but also established a specific spell or gesture for quick activation. The Bronze Rune, while basic, provided rare defensive capabilities, forming a magical armor piece by piece.

As he grasped the significance of the runes, Rhaegar felt a mixture of shock and exhilaration. He tried to sit up, but pain shot through his left arm and abdomen, forcing him to lie down again.

"I should test these runes," he thought, deciding to try something practical despite his injuries.

Rhaegar glanced at the sleeping Rhaenyra beside him, a faint smile touching his lips. The fact that he was alive and surrounded by those he cared about filled him with contentment.

"Serpent," he mentally commanded, focusing his mind to carve the first rune of his life.

Carving a rune required a supply of magic, but it wasn't as demanding as the pyromancer's talent, which required pure dragon blood or an affinity for fire.

Every Targaryen carried a trace of magic in their blood, a heritage of "Blood and Fire."

Enhanced by Dreamscape and his knowledge of runes, Rhaegar's mental power was formidable. Concentrating deeply, he felt his magic flow smoothly throughout his body

Buzz...

A bright light flickered in Rhaegar's heart as his mental strength mobilized the magic in his blood. Given his strong Targaryen bloodline, the magic was strong and robust.

The light grew brighter, outlining a streak as black as ink. Rhaegar frowned slightly as a strange murmur filled his ears. He remembered the words about runes on the Explorer's System: "Each rune is a treasure to the world, and its birth is highly anticipated."

Rhaegar smirked, dismissing the ethereal whispers, and focused on engraving the runes. Time passed slowly, and morning sunlight streamed through the glazed window, casting a warm glow on the corner of the bed.

On Rhaegar's bandaged chest, a dark, black serpent symbol began to form, emitting thick black smoke. The serpent was long and twisted, with no eyes, nose, teeth, or tongue, only a large black mouth disproportionate to its head.

This was the prototype of the serpent rune. The next step was to create a spell or gesture to fully control the rune. Rhaegar's talent with runes was remarkable; he engraved the advanced rune with precision and ease.

He decided to implement a dual control system using both a spell and a gesture. This precaution was recommended in the runic knowledge, as one could never predict when they might lose the ability to speak or move.

"Reverse!" he whispered in High Valyrian, setting the first stage. Suddenly, his face paled and cold sweat broke out on his forehead. The magic in his blood was almost gone. Any further extraction might burn out his blood supply.

"Roar..."

Just as he hesitated, a deep dragon roar echoed in his mind. A wave of fiery magic flooded his body. Rhaegar immediately recognized it as the magic of Cannibal, his dragon. Dragons were magical creatures, and their bodies were reservoirs of fire magic.

This was the effect of the [Knight's Oath]. Cannibal, as his guardian knight, shared a magical bond with him, allowing the transfer of power.

Buzz...

A powerful magic filled the room. The spell and gesture were successfully set, and the rune was quickly engraved. The serpent rune twisted and turned, its slender body forming a circle with the mouth biting into the tail.

Dark light blossomed, and wisps of black smoke filled the room, dispersing the morning sunlight that filtered into the bedroom.

"Uh huh~~"

Rhaenyra grunted softly, her eyelids fluttering slightly as her arms and legs began to move.

Rhaegar hesitated, then stopped supplying magic, causing the snake rune to dissipate. The bedroom returned to normal.

"Rhaegar..."

Rhaenyra woke, her eyes opening in a daze.

"Calling someone?"

Rhaegar smiled and took her small hand from his chest.

"You're awake?"

Rhaenyra's almond-shaped eyes widened in surprise, and she sat up quickly, a delighted curve appearing on her lips.

"Rhaenyra, I'm hungry," Rhaegar said with a pitiful look, pointing to the morning sun.

Yesterday's intense battle had taken its toll. Ninety percent of his blood and magic had been drained, leaving him weak.

"You wait, I'll prepare something for you right away."

Rhaenyra hurriedly got out of bed, hastily put on her boots, and dashed out the door.

"I still want to ask about the situation in Runestone..." Rhaegar trailed off as she disappeared.

With a resigned smile, he retrieved a loaf of bread, a plate of ham, and a bottle of milk from his space bracelet. Having such an artifact, it was only natural to keep some food handy.

He intended to tease Rhaenyra, but she had already run off. After finishing his meal, Rhaegar felt much better, his hunger satiated.

"Let's test the ability of the Bridled Serpent Rune," he murmured.

Rhaegar extended his right hand, touching his thumb and pinky together in a swearing gesture. Magic flowed, and the black serpent rune appeared. He directed it towards the wound on his abdomen. The serpent released its tail and slithered into the wound.

Zi Zi...

Black smoke began to rise from the wound, visible to the naked eye. However, the smoke wasn't caused by the serpent, but by the dirty air that had accumulated in the wound.

The serpent opened its mouth wide and inhaled the black smoke. As it inhaled more and more, the pain in the wound lessened.

After about five minutes, the serpent, now bloated, closed its mouth. When Rhaegar examined the wound, the black smoke had diminished considerably. The snake, resembling a fat loach, twisted its body and returned to his hand.

Rhaegar understood that his mastery of the serpent rune was not yet sufficient to heal the wound completely in one go. He would have to wait for the snake to digest before attempting another healing session, probably by this time tomorrow.

"Rhaegar, I'm back. You must be starving," Rhaenyra's hurried footsteps echoed outside the door as it creaked open.