

## G.O Thrones 191

### Chapter 191: Bad News from the Stepstones Islands

Maynard and Syrio stepped onto the terrace where Rhaegar had been waiting.

Maynard was the first to speak. "Prince, I've assigned the craftsmen from the slave ships to work at the Dragonpit and arranged for the children to learn their crafts. I've also started the apprentice training you ordered. There are one or two with promising talent."

Rhaegar nodded. "How many craftsmen are there in King's Landing?"

Before his trip, Rhaegar had laid out several long-term strategies, one of which involved gaining control over the city's smiths.

Maynard replied, "Including blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, and others, there are probably several thousand craftsmen in the city."

These craftsmen made a living through their trades and generally had no trouble making ends meet. It was a common occupation among the populace.

"Select some of the most skilled smiths to expand the workforce at the Dragonpit. Leave the rest for now," Rhaegar instructed.

It was sufficient to have a count of the craftsmen. They would comply when their skills were needed.

Having completed his report, Maynard stepped back, maintaining a respectful demeanor.

Syrio then stepped forward with a smile. "Prince, I've found an exceptional girl and plan to teach her myself."

"As you wish, just don't neglect your primary duties," Rhaegar responded, confident in Syrio's capabilities.

"I'll bring the girl later so you can meet her in person," Syrio said with a mysterious smile.

Rhaegar nodded, signaling them to retire with a wave of his hand. He turned back to watch his younger siblings as they continued their attempts to tame their dragons.

...

Noon.

The army of the Riverlands marched into King's Landing, their armor and shields adorned with clan crests:

A leaping trout, silver, on a field of blue and mud red, a flock of ravens on scarlet surrounding a dead weirwood upon a black escutcheon, A red stallion upon a golden escutcheon on brown and a red salmon.

Each banner represented the noble houses of the Riverlands.

Lyonel and his eldest son, Harwin, rode at the forefront, receiving cheers from the crowds and becoming the center of attention.

Viserys, looking healthy and vibrant, stepped out from the gates of the Red Keep, flanked by Rhaegar, to greet the army personally.

At the sight of the King and the Heir, the army halted, and representatives from each family came forward to pay their respects.

Viserys, calm and relaxed, warmly welcomed the Riverlands nobles. Rhaegar, by his side, took on the task of greeting the noble representatives.

"The Blackwood House greets you, honorable prince," a slender, dark-haired young man said, kneeling on one knee.

"Rise. What is your name?" Rhaegar asked, studying the youth who appeared slightly older than himself, with hands full of calluses.

"Samwell Blackwood, Your Grace," the young man replied, his chest puffed out and eyes gleaming with pride.

Rhaegar's interest was piqued. "The Samwell who dueled and killed the Lord of Bracken?"

Samwell flushed with excitement. "Yes, Prince, that was me."

"You should be proud of yourself, killing a grown man while still a teenager," Rhaegar noted, sensing a hint of modesty in Samwell's demeanor.

Samwell smiled sheepishly. "It was the Bracken House's foolhardiness that led them to fall before my sword."

"Hehe, I like your modesty," Rhaegar said, amused. He then invited Samwell to return to the Red Keep with him.

A group of young nobles, mostly second sons or illegitimate children seeking to make their mark, accompanied them. Rhaegar welcomed them warmly, memorizing their names and engaging them in conversation.

He learned about their backgrounds and situations, offering words of encouragement rather than rushing to recruit them. This subtle approach allowed him to gradually win their loyalty and trust.

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The welcome banquet was in full swing.

Nobles gathered in the Red Keep while soldiers enjoyed wine and meat in the courtyard. Rhaegar sat at a table with the children of the nobles, a gentle smile on his lips, listening intently as they shared their dreams. He mentally noted a few promising candidates.

Taking a sip of sake, Rhaegar leaned back in his chair, absently playing with a ruby in his hand. The gem, about the size of a pigeon's egg and carved into an octagon, was warm and smooth against his palm.

He had acquired it from the Red Witch, believing it to be a magical treasure capable of extraordinary feats. However, it had yet to reveal its secrets.

"It can absorb flames, that's all I know for now," Rhaegar murmured to himself, contemplating its potential.

Halfway through the banquet, Grand Maester Mellos hurriedly entered the hall. The elderly man, gasping for breath, handed a sealed letter to Viserys. "Your Grace, urgent news from Stepstones Island. You must be prepared," he said, his voice laced with worry.

Viserys, maintaining his composure, opened the letter and read it silently. As he progressed, his expression shifted from calm to deeply troubled.

Rhaegar, sensing the gravity of the situation, left his seat and made his way through the bustling hall to his father. "What is the news, Father?" he asked quietly.

Viserys's voice was grave. "The Dornish fleet has attacked Bloodstone Island, in collaboration with the Triarchy, destroying all defenses. The Sea Snake and his men have suffered heavy losses."

Rhaegar took the letter and read it carefully. Just two days ago, Prince Dorne had joined forces with the Triarchy to assault Bloodstone Island.

Rhaenys had rushed to aid with Meleys, and Laenor's Sea Smoke had incinerated many enemy ships. However, despite a patrol fleet from Storm's End driving back the attackers, the Sea Snake was injured, and Bloodstone Island was no longer secure.

"Damn it, the Dornish did get involved," Rhaegar cursed. He then turned to his father, his expression serious. "Father, the army of the Riverlands has gathered. Tomorrow, I will ride my dragon and lead our forces to the Stepstones."

King's Landing had received news that the White Harbor fleet had arrived at the Stepstones Islands, with fleets from Oldtown and Arbor en route.

House Grafton in Gulltown was consolidating its power and had dispatched half of their fleet in support. The kingdom had the strength to confront the Triarchy.

Viserys, his face stern, advised, "The Stepstones need support, but the Riverlands army has never participated in a sea battle. Listen to the Sea Snake's advice and don't be impulsive."

Rhaegar nodded solemnly, understanding his father's caution. The kingdom had been at peace for a long time, and the Riverlands army lacked experience, particularly in naval warfare. Their true strength was uncertain.

"Aegon is still on his honeymoon. You'll have to lead alone, so be careful," Viserys urged.

"I will, Father," Rhaegar replied, his resolve firm. The ambush by the Mountain Clans had taught him caution.

Viserys summoned Lyonel to discuss the army's situation. After a brief conversation, Rhaegar was the first to leave the table. As he exited the hall, the second sons and bastards, who had been captivated by his words, rose to follow him, ready to pledge their lives to his cause.

Noticing the shift, Rhaenys excused herself from the lady she was conversing with and followed, her dress trailing behind her. Harwin Strong, ever vigilant for the princess, also departed with her.

## Chapter 192: The Faceless Men – The Second Son's Regiment

After leaving the banquet and the Red Keep, Rhaegar made his way directly to the Dragonpit.

He gathered the remaining seven hundred Dragonkeepers and, under Maynard's supervision, chose the two hundred most skilled among them.

"One hundred of you will sail to the Stepstones Islands tomorrow," Rhaegar ordered, "and one hundred will be stationed at the Red Keep to reinforce the guard."

The battlefield needed seasoned warriors, and the Red Keep's defenses required reinforcement to form an elite royal guard.

"Yes, Prince," Maynard acknowledged, leading the chosen men away.

Syrio approached, his hair disheveled as if he had just woken up from a nap. Rhaegar gave him a questioning look.

"Prince, remember the girl I mentioned?" Syrio said, stepping aside to reveal a young girl from a foreign land, dressed in a black robe.

Rhaegar's eyes widened in recognition. "Sara?"

His memory was sharp, especially since she had helped him acquire a Valyrian Steel sword. Sara stepped forward, kneeling. "Thank you for taking me in, Prince."

Rhaegar cast another questioning glance at Syrio.

"Sara grew up in Braavos and trained at the House of Black and White," Syrio explained.

"The Faceless Men?" Rhaegar was surprised. The House of Black and White was the headquarters of the Faceless Men, the world's most feared assassins.

"I'm afraid I must disappoint you, Prince," Syrio said. "Sara failed their test. Her target was killed before she could act, ending her examination prematurely."

Rhaegar listened as the situation unfolded. After her failed assassination, the House of Black and White severed ties with Sara. Fearing for her life, she fled, eventually ending up as a slave in a gladiator arena after being captured by Unsullied troops.

Recently, a slave trader had bought her, intending to sell her in Pentos, but her ship was intercepted by the Three Daughters.

Rhaegar looked at Sara. "You wish to follow me?"

"Yes, Prince," Sara replied without hesitation.

"How can I trust you?" Rhaegar asked, wary of a former assassin.

Sara drew a dagger and held it above her head. "You protected me," she said earnestly.

Rhaegar's eyes flickered with contemplation. If Syrio was truthful, Sara was an outcast from the Faceless Men, struggling for survival. Her journey had been marked by hardship, leaving her vulnerable.

"So I will die for you," Sara declared in broken Valyrian, exposing her neck.

Rhaegar took the dagger from her and said, "Live well and stand in the sunlight." He tossed the dagger aside, where it landed with a clang.

"A faceless person does not deserve to live in the sunlight," Sara said, her voice tinged with loneliness.

"It doesn't matter. You're not wearing a mask yet," Rhaegar replied. "Follow me. One face is enough."

Sara looked up, her light green eyes filled with confusion. "Yes, Prince," she said, standing to follow him.

As Rhaegar walked out of the Dragonpit, the bright moonlight bathed the earth in a pale glow.

Dozens of fully armed youths, clad in armor, knelt in two rows, their eyes fixed on Rhaegar as he approached. The moonlight illuminated his long silver-gold hair, which swayed gently in the evening wind, and his violet eyes, calm and composed. His handsome face, still youthful, belied the calm authority in his movements.

Rhaegar looked down at the second sons and bastards kneeling before him and smiled. "Are you looking for me?"

He understood their urgency. The recent events had come as a sudden shock.

A black-haired young man at the front began, "Prince, the pirates of the Triarchy have invaded our territory. Please allow us to join you and help cut through the thorns!"

"Your name is Robb Rivers, if I remember correctly," Rhaegar said confidently.

Robb lifted his head, his excitement palpable. "I am honored that you remember my name."

Rhaegar waved a hand. "What kind of force can you muster for me if I give you the chance?"

"In one night, I can call up a group of five hundred men," Robb replied, then added, "All second sons and bastards, trained as knights."

"Very well. I want to see five hundred men in full gear by morning," Rhaegar said, reaching out to pull Robb to his feet. "You will be the commander of the Second Sons, directly under me."

"I will fulfill my mission!" Robb's body trembled with excitement, eager to begin his task.

"Go on, and keep it discreet," Rhaegar advised, patting Robb's shoulder. He then walked down the steps between the two rows of young men.

His mere presence and a simple glance caused their blood to boil with excitement.

In Westeros, aside from a few great houses, most noble houses had only the eldest son as heir. The eldest son represented the family and held the fiefdom and the people. The second sons were often seen as backups, or squires to their older brothers.

Lesser nobles, unable to support all their children, would equip their second sons with armor, weapons, and horses before sending them out to find their own way. Bastards, often despised, had even fewer prospects.

By bringing in second sons and bastards, who lacked family support, Rhaegar found a loyal and skilled force. Many of these young men were trained as knights, proficient in riding, archery, and swordsmanship, capable of outmatching ordinary peasants on the battlefield.

Rhaegar's army, apart from the 1,200-strong Dragonkeepers, was in need of reinforcement. The Second Sons' Regiment, comprised of these eager and skilled men, would form a formidable addition to his forces.

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On his way back to the Red Keep, Rhaegar rode in a carriage. In a dimly lit alley, a group of gold cloaks stood guard.

Rhaenyra, dressed in a black gown, stood on her tiptoes, watching the carriage slowly pass by.

"Princess, the prince has returned," Harwin said gently, holding a torch to light the way.

"I see him, Ser," Rhaenyra replied, a smile playing on her lips as she glimpsed Rhaegar's figure inside the carriage by the flickering light. "The banquet is not over yet. Let's return to the Red Keep."

"I've arranged a carriage for you," Harwin said, waving his hand to signal the gold cloaks to disperse. "Watch your step, Princess."

Rhaenyra smiled. "Thank you, Ser."

"Keeping the princess safe is the duty of the City Watch," Harwin replied solemnly, raising his hand in a gesture of invitation.

Rhaenyra gave him an skeptical look and gracefully boarded the carriage, lifting her skirt.

Harwin did not join her in the carriage but instead sent two gold cloaks to escort her, watching as the carriage departed. His eyes briefly revealed a glimmer of admiration.

Quickly composing himself, Harwin turned to the gold cloaks and barked, "Resume your patrols! No slacking!"

With that, he resumed his usual tough demeanor and led his men to patrol the city, diligently roaming the streets and alleys.

### Chapter 193: Sea Smoke Injury

The next morning, as the sun rose, hundreds of second sons and bastards, equipped with varying gear, guarded the closed gates of the Dragonpit.

With a rumbling noise, the gates slowly opened, and two dragon shadows burst out first.

"Roar..."

Green flames illuminated the sky as Cannibal soared into the clouds, followed closely by Syrax, heading towards Blackwater Bay.

As the two dragons flew away, a slender figure emerged from the Dragonpit's doors.

Sara approached the Second Sons and coldly commanded, "The prince has ordered us to head to the harbor to board the ships."

"Yes!"

Robb, now the leader of the Second Sons, led his group of comrades towards the harbor.

Sara glanced back at the shadowy entrance of the Dragonpit before following the group.

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Above Blackwater Bay, two dragons, one black and one gold, soared over the sea, occasionally gliding low enough for their feet to skim the water's surface.

"Rhaegar, be safe when you reach the Stepstones," Rhaenyra cautioned from her saddle.

"Don't worry, I'll be fine," Rhaegar assured her. "You just need to pick up the dragon eggs and head straight to Driftmark."

Rhaenyra was the nominal foster mother of Laena's two children and had promised to place dragon eggs in their cradles. After discussing it with their father, she agreed to ride the dragons away from King's Landing, traveling back to Dragonstone and then to Driftmark.

This not only fulfilled her promise but also helped strengthen the relationship between the Targaryen and Velaryon Houses.

As the sun continued to rise, the rocky island of Dragonstone came into view.

Rhaenyra stopped Syrax, and the siblings said their goodbyes.

Rhaegar guided Cannibal over Dragonstone and headed towards the Stepstones.

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Rhaegar's Cannibal flew over Dragonstone Island.

"Kill! Seize Bloodstone Island!"

"Shoot arrows!"

On the beach of Bloodstone Island, chaos reigned. Dark-haired and dark-skinned Dornishmen charged in groups, clashing with the king's soldiers led by the silver-armored and white-robed Cole, whose expression was grave. The tide repeatedly washed away the blood staining the beach as the two sides fought fiercely.

Beyond the island, another battlefield raged at sea. Warships, bearing seahorses and mermaids on their sails, were filled with soldiers shooting arrows. The pirate ships of the Three Daughters maintained a distance, their scorpion crossbows loaded and ready.

"Fire!"

At the command, the scorpion crossbows launched steel spears that streaked across the sky like meteors.

Boom...

The scorpion crossbows, with their immense power, easily pierced through soldiers and shattered the hulls of enemy warships. Hundreds perished instantly under the barrage.

"Roar..."

The dragon's roar echoed along the coastline as the scarlet-scaled Meleys and the Sea Smoke arrived, unleashing dragonfire upon the pirate ships below.

"Attack! Drop the battering ram!"

With the dragons on the battlefield, the Sea Snake raised his scimitar and ordered his fleet to charge. Both sides had roughly fifty ships each, but the pirates quickly lost control under the dragon's assault, with several ships succumbing to dragonfire.

"Set up the scorpion crossbows, aim at the dragon!"

Dozens of scorpion crossbows were reloaded and aimed at the two giant dragons.

"Fire!"

As the dragons descended to spew dragonfire, the scorpion crossbows were fired one after another.

"Dodge!"

Rhaenys commanded loudly. Meleys, burning the mast of a pirate ship with a burst of dragonfire, rose swiftly into the air, evading the steel bolts. The scarlet dragon moved like a streak of light, untouchable.

"Roar..."

An agonizing roar came from Sea Smoke, who had flown too low and was struck by a scorpion crossbow. A steel spear pierced through Sea Smoke's light gray wing membrane, scattering hot dragon blood on the sea.

With its wing damaged, Sea Smoke struggled to maintain balance. Laenor, shocked and panicked, urged, "Sea Smoke, fly up!"

In his haste to destroy the pirate ships, Laenor had driven Sea Smoke too low.

"Roar..."

Sea Smoke stabilized, screaming and flying higher, continuously spitting dragonfire in frustration.

"Maintain altitude, don't be reckless!" Rhaenys shouted, worriedly.

The force of the scorpion crossbows was enough to break through an adult dragon's scales, and the barbed steel spears made them difficult to remove. Sea Smoke, still a young dragon, was particularly vulnerable.

Fortunately, the spear had only pierced the wing membrane. Had it struck the neck or torso, Sea Smoke might have lost the ability to fly and fallen into the sea, becoming an easy target.

"Go support your father!" Rhaenys ordered, noting the reloading scorpion crossbows below. She decided against further engagement.

A few dozen scorpion crossbows might not harm Meleys significantly, but Laenor and Sea Smoke were at greater risk. Laenor, seeing Sea Smoke's bleeding wing, chose to follow his mother's orders.

Rhaenys sighed in relief and turned her attention to the pirate ships, her expression growing more solemn.

"Meleys, Dracarys!"

"Roar..."



Meleys, thrilled to be in battle again, turned swiftly, her dragonfire igniting a pirate ship. The flames, though powerful, only managed to set masts and armor ablaze, unable to cause widespread destruction due to the attack's distance.

The Sea Snake's fleet arrived, colliding with the pirate ships. Soldiers leaped over the sides, engaging in close combat.

"Roar..."

Two dragons circled in the sky, occasionally breathing fire.

Amidst the chaos, a distant horn sounded—a signal of arrival.

More than thirty warships emerged on the horizon, their sails adorned with a sun spear symbols—the Dornish reinforcements had arrived.

Swift and fierce, the Dornish ships joined the fray, attacking alongside the pirates of the Three Daughters.

"Fire!" commanded the Dornish, their arrows raining down indiscriminately amidst the chaos of battle, hitting both friend and foe alike.

The Sea Snake's fleet, burdened by scorpion crossbows, maneuvered along the periphery, taking advantage of the distraction to strike.

Rhaenys's dragon, Meleys, soared through the air, unleashing dragonfire upon the pirate ships, crushing them.

As the Dornish continued their attack, Rhaenys surveyed the grim scene, realizing the odds were turning against them.

"Corlys, we're outnumbered!" she exclaimed, her eyes darkening with concern as their forces dwindled.

With each passing moment, their fleet faced greater peril. Even the combined might of their dragons couldn't turn the tide of the battle.

Corlys remained resolute. "Hold fast. Storm's End's fleet will arrive soon!" he said.

Retreat was not an option. Since the Dornish joined forces with the Three Daughters, the conflict had escalated already.

The kingdom's fleet hastily advanced toward the warships of House Celtigar stationed at Claw Isle and at White Harbor, but they proved unable to withstand the relentless assault of the Dornish and the allies from the Triarchy.

#### Chapter 194: Cannibal's Crushing Grind

In the midst of the shouting, an arrow flew from behind.

With a sickening thud, it pierced the Sea Snake's right shoulder through a gap in his armor. Blood splattered, and the Sea Snake screamed in agony, staggering and nearly falling.

"Brother!"

Vaemon, hearing the cry, was shocked. He swiftly stabbed a pirate attempting to attack the Sea Snake and shielded him.

"Corlys!"

Rhaenys, watching anxiously, was equally alarmed and worried about her husband's condition.

"Shoot!"

A new volley of scorpion crossbows was fired, and Meleys surged into the air. The pirates below had anticipated the scarlet dragon's path and launched their steel spears accordingly.

Before Rhaenys could react, a spear hurtled towards Meleys' neck.

"Roar..."

Sensing the danger, Meleys dodged just in time, narrowly avoiding the fatal strike. However, the spear flashed dangerously close to Rhaenys' face. In an instant, cold sweat trickled down her brow, and the rushing wind stung her cheeks. She had come within mere meters of being impaled.

"Dracarys!"

Regaining her composure, Rhaenys, furious, urged Meleys into a frenzied attack, scorching the pirate ships' scorpion crossbows. Her desperate assault caused Laenor great concern. He attempted to alleviate the pressure on his mother by directing Sea Smoke in attacks on the pirate ships.

Despite their efforts, the battle deteriorated. As the Dornishmen finished firing their bows and arrows, they lowered their ramming horns, preparing for close combat.

"Mother, get in the air!" Laenor shouted suddenly.

The Dornish ships also bore scorpion crossbows and had locked onto Meleys, who was entangled with the pirate ships. But Rhaenys, ignoring the plea, continued her relentless assault.

"Fire!"

The command rang out, and the Dornish scorpion crossbows fired in unison. Sensing imminent danger, Meleys flapped her wings and soared upwards, narrowly escaping a barrage of steel spears.

"Attack! Board and fight!"

The Dornish warships crashed into the Sea Snake's fleet, and dark-haired, dark-skinned Dornish soldiers swarmed aboard. The battle's tide quickly turned for the worse.

The Sea Snake fought valiantly, protected by Vaemond and his men, but the enemy's encirclement tightened. The bodies of fallen soldiers were cast into the sea, and the Triarchy's pirates loomed closer.

The Sea Snake, drenched in blood, continued to fight fiercely, retreating step by step amidst the growing encirclement.

"Roar..."

A deep dragon roar echoed across the Stepstones, catching everyone's attention.

From the thick clouds, a pitch-black dragon shot out like a dark meteor.

"Dracarys!"

Rhaegar, perched on the dragon's back, gazed down indifferently as he uttered the High Valyrian command.

Cannibal swooped over the battlefield, its cold, merciless eyes gleaming. It opened its maw, releasing a torrent of Dragonfire.

Boom!

The dark green flames filled the air like smoke, engulfing half of the battlefield in an instant.

"Help!..."

More than a dozen pirate ships were consumed by the flames, their crews screaming in agony as they were turned to ash. Cannibal's Dragonfire was extremely adhesive, clinging to anything it touched until it was completely incinerated. The ships burned slowly, enveloped in the dark green flames.

"Roar..."

Cannibal, unafraid of flying low, glided close to the ground, its thick neck spewing Dragonfire in every direction. Its massive body blocked the sun, casting a shadow over the battlefield.

Rhaegar shouted to Rhaenys and Laenor, "Go support Lord Corlys! I'll handle this!"

Corlys was trapped in a fierce battle with the Dornish and the pirates of the Triarchy. The presence of two more dragons would be crucial in turning the tide.

"Be careful!" Rhaenys called back, worried about her husband. She urged her dragon towards the Dornish fleet.

Laenor, excited and determined, led Sea Smoke to support their fleet. As he turned, he glanced back to witness Cannibal's devastating assault.

"Roar..."

Cannibal rose higher, its powerful hind legs smashing into the mast of a pirate ship, nearly toppling it with the sheer force.

"Reload the scorpions, quick!"

Panicked, the pirates of the Triarchy pinned their hopes on the remaining scorpion crossbows.

Rhaegar commanded, "Dracarys!"

Cannibal, still climbing, lowered its head and unleashed another wave of Dragonfire. The steel spears of the scorpions were engulfed in the flames, melting into puddles of iron that fell into the ocean.

"Roar..."

Cannibal reached a certain height and then dove again, spewing eerie green Dragonfire onto the remaining pirate ships.

Boom!

The ships that encountered the Dragonfire were instantly engulfed in flames, leaving no pirates alive. The surrounding ships, their hulls scorched by the flames, faced their doom in utter despair.

In a matter of moments, the hard-won advantage of the Triarchy's fleet was gone. Compared to the 60-year-old Meleys and the young Sea Smoke, the 100-year-old Cannibal was an unstoppable force.

The giant dragon dwarfed the warships, and its green dragonfire clung to its targets, consuming everything in its path.

"Cannibal, turn around."

With the Triarchy's fleet in ruins, Rhaegar shifted his focus to the Dornish forces. After parting ways with Rhaenyra at Dragonstone, he had flown directly to the Stepstones without delay. His timely arrival proved crucial, as the Kingdom's fleet had been on the verge of disaster.

Cannibal's devastating attack on the Triarchy's ships quickly turned the tide of battle. The massive dragon's relentless destruction relieved much of the pressure on the kingdom's forces. Rhaegar then turned Cannibal on the Dornish fleet, unleashing dark green flames.

Meleys and Sea Smoke flanked Cannibal on either side, their differently colored scales adding to the intimidating presence of the dragons. Together, they rained destruction upon the Dornish fleet.

Boom!

A Dornish ship was incinerated, and thousands of soldiers perished in the dragonfire, their dying screams filling the air. With the dragons' support, the Sea Snake's forces rallied and broke through the pirate encirclement with renewed vigor.

Half an hour later, the Sea Snake and Vaemond sat in a pool of blood, their dark faces turned toward the sky, their chests heaving with exhaustion. The victory had been hard-won, and they were exhausted.

The surviving soldiers began to clean up the battlefield, tossing the bodies of pirates and Dornishmen into the sea. In the distance, the smoldering remains of enemy ships lit the horizon with dark green flames, casting an eerie glow over the ocean.

Rhaegar sat on Cannibal's back, listening to the dragon's triumphant roar. He enjoyed the thrill of its destructive power.

"Cousin, I'm glad you made it in time," Laenor said, flying over on Sea Smoke, his voice tinged with relief.

"I didn't expect the Triarchy's attack to be so fierce either," Rhaegar replied, understanding the gravity of the situation.

After receiving the raven's message last night, he and his father had quickly mobilized their troops, but even then, they had almost been too late.

"You two stop chatting and hurry to support Bloodstone Island with me!"

Meleys flew past, Rhaenys's voice stern and urgent.

"Cannibal, follow!"

Rhaegar directed his dragon toward the smoke-filled Bloodstone Island.

At that moment, on Bloodstone Island, Cole and his soldiers were locked in fierce combat on the beach. The battle had reached a critical point.

Chapter 195: Returning to Dragonstone Island

The Dornish, known for their fearlessness, charged with a ferocity that regular soldiers could not withstand. Cole, locked in battle, fought with increasing desperation, his vision reddened with rage.

"Dornish bastards!" he roared.

Hailing from Blackhaven, Cole's father had served as a steward under the Lord of Dondarrion. Cole had once defended against a Dornish incursion and harbored a deep-seated enmity towards them.

However, the King's soldiers were no match for the relentless Dornish. As more of his companions fell, the Dornish gained the upper hand.

"Roar..."

A scarlet dragon swooped in, its flames scorching the beach and reducing the Dornish to ashes. Cannibal followed closely, its green Dragonfire splitting the battlefield.

"Cannibal, land!" Rhaegar commanded after a moment's thought. The dragonfire carried the risk of collateral damage in the melee.

Cannibal descended, its wings kicking up a storm as it landed, crushing several soldiers under its feet and roaring triumphantly.

"Retreat! Retreat!" The sight of the dragons shattered the morale of the Dornish, and they fled in disarray.

"Pursue!" Cole shouted, his sword dripping with blood as he continued the charge.

"Stop, Cole! Retreat at once!" Rhaegar's voice cut through the confusion. The fleeing Dornish were an easy target for Cannibal's dragonfire, and pursuing them would only lead to more unnecessary bloodshed.

Cole paused, panting heavily, his white robes stained red. He glanced up at Rhaegar, still in a battle trance.

The soldiers stopped their pursuit, rounding up any remaining Dornish who couldn't get away. Most of the enemy fled toward the sea, attempting to evacuate in small boats.

"Dracarys!" Rhaegar ordered. Cannibal unleashed green dragonfire that engulfed the retreating Dornish, leaving none alive.

"Whew! The battle is over," Cole sighed, removing his helmet. His handsome face was etched with exhaustion and relief.

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Noon

On Bloodstone Island, Sea Snake recovered from his wounds while Vaemon led his soldiers in clearing the battlefield. Laenor patrolled the waters with Sea Smoke, wary of any possible sneak attacks by the Triarchy.

Only then did the fleet arrive from Storm's End. Sixteen ships and two thousand men sailed through the burning green dragonfire of the battlefield and anchored off the coast of Bloodstone.

Rhaenys greeted them in her husband's stead, accompanied by Rhaegar, Laenor, and Tyland.

A small boat pulled up to the beach, and a middle-aged man with black curly hair, fancy clothes, and a bloated figure disembarked, surrounded by a dozen soldiers.

With a stern expression, Rhaenys said in a deep voice, "Cousin, you are late!"

The middle-aged man with a large belly and loud voice replied, "Cousin, Father and I received the news and came immediately to support you."

Rhaegar glanced sideways at Laenor, who quietly informed him, "He is Borros Baratheon, eldest son and heir of Lord Boremund."

Rhaegar frowned and said, "That fool who can't read a word?"

Boremund Baratheon was a brave lord with a history of remarkable deeds, but his son was another matter.

Borros was known more for his temper and his dependence on others than for any skills of his own.

Rhaenys, showing no patience, stepped forward and demanded, "The raven sent a message last night; you should have arrived this morning. Without your delay, my husband would not have faced such a bitter battle."

"Cousin, I came with good intentions. You shouldn't yell at me!" Borros shouted, his face flushing with anger.

"Borros, do you not fear tarnishing the Baratheon name by delaying the battle?" Rhaenys advanced on him, crossing the guard's barrier and grabbing Borros by the collar.

Borros' expression darkened as he glared at Rhaenys, not daring to speak out of turn. She sniffed the air and caught the unmistakable scent of alcohol, immediately understanding the cause of the delay.

"Borros, how dare you drink on the march!" Rhaenys scolded, her face as icy as her tone.

Borros, angry and defensive, shouted, "I've only had a few cups; it has nothing to do with the delay!"

"Shut your stinking mouth!" Rhaenys snapped, her eyes filled with disappointment. "The fleet stays, but you and your guards will return to Storm's End. I will send a raven to inform your father of this!"

Her connection to the Baratheon family ran deep; her mother was a Baratheon, making Borros' father, Boremund, her uncle. Even her hair, mostly black with silver streaks, hinted at her mixed heritage.

She had never expected her cousin Borros to behave so dishonorably in the midst of war.

The Sea Snake had been injured before, and today he had taken an arrow, falling into a coma. As his wife, Rhaenys needed to attend to him, but dealing with Borros' incompetence added to her burden.

With a final glare at Borros, Rhaenys turned to attend to her husband's care.

As they walked along the road, Rhaenys asked Rhaegar, "When will the support from the Riverlands arrive?"

"Tomorrow night at the latest," Rhaegar replied, considering the distance from Blackwater Bay to the Stepstones.

"The fleets from Velaryon, Celtigar, White Harbor, and the Stormlands are already gathered, but the remaining reinforcements need to hurry," Rhaenys sighed. "It's fortunate that the fleets of the Three Daughters and Dorne were decimated this time. We can breathe a little easier."

Over 80 enemy ships had been burned, and thousands of soldiers had perished in the dragonfire, significantly weakening the alliance of the Three Daughters and Dorne. It would be some time before they could threaten the Stepstones again.

Tyland interjected urgently, "Our ships have suffered heavy losses, many are damaged, and we are running low on food and fresh water."

"If the ships are damaged, mobilize the shipwrights to repair them and send people to secure more supplies," Rhaenys replied, too weary to delve into the details of the battle damage.

In recent days, the army had been exhausted, maintaining their hold on Bloodstone Island with relentless patrols and combat.

"I'll take care of it," Rhaegar said. "The Triarchy will not attack again so soon. Laenor can patrol Bloodstone Island while I ride Cannibal to Driftmark to hurry the supplies."

Driftmark, with its many harbors, served as the gateway between Blackwater Bay and the Narrow Sea, making it a crucial supply point during the war.

King's Landing would send supplies to Driftmark, from where they would be transported to Bloodstone Island.

Rhaenys thought it over and nodded. "Good. Then you escort the transport ship."

She needed to remain on Bloodstone Island, and Rhaegar and Cannibal were the fastest means to get to and from Driftmark. Additionally, having a dragon escort the transport ships would save manpower and resources, allowing more supplies to be transported safely.

"I'll leave now, just in case there's any delay," Rhaegar said, accepting the mission without hesitation.

Bloodstone Island was strewn with corpses, and crabs swam in, drawn by the scent of blood. Transporting the wounded and repairing fortifications would keep Tyland busy.

Rhaegar approached Cannibal, who was lying on the beach, gnawing on charred carcasses. Seeing Rhaegar approach, Cannibal spat out half of a corpse in disgust and snorted.

"Let's go, old friend," Rhaegar said, climbing onto the dragon's back and settling into the saddle.

Cannibal roared, flapped its wings, and rose into the air, heading swiftly down the Narrow Sea towards the Gullet.

Chapter 196: Newborn Dragon

Evening.

The Cannibal hovered over Dragonstone Island, circling in wide arcs. Rhaegar, perched on the dragon's back, looked down and saw several warships anchored along the shore.

"Is this the royal fleet Rhaenyra spoke of?" he mused, remembering her plans to assemble a small fleet.

"Cannibal, land!" he ordered.

The island of Dragonstone was strategically located on the Gullet and collected substantial taxes from passing ships. The island's city also contributed significant tax revenue, allowing Rhaenyra to finance a fleet to bolster King's Landing's defenses.

The Cannibal descended slowly and landed in front of Dragonstone's black stone gates. As it touched down, the gates swung open and dozens of guards emerged, led by a man with black hair and a cold, stern face.

Rhaegar noticed the stag crest on the man's breastplate. "You are a Baratheon?" he asked from his saddle.

"Jon Baratheon of House Baratheon of Dragonstone," the man replied, dropping to one knee. "Greetings, Your Grace."

Great houses can have many branches.

For example, the Arryns in Gulltown and the branches of House Royce in the Gates of the Moon, branches are common for such great houses.

"Is Rhaenyra still on the island?" Rhaegar asked, not pressing further on Jon's parentage.

"The princess is here. I've already sent word of your arrival," Jon replied.

"No need for that. I'll go straight to her," Rhaegar said, climbing down the soft ladder and heading for the gates.

"Wait, Prince," Jon interjected, stepping in front of him. "The princess has not yet given you permission to enter. Please wait."

Rhaegar froze, his eyes narrowing. "Do you see who I am? Do I need permission to enter Dragonstone?" he said, pointing at himself in disbelief.

Jon's face remained stern. "Anyone entering Dragonstone Island must have the Princess's permission."

Rhaegar's smile faded. "I didn't hear you. Say it again," he demanded, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword, ready to draw.

Jon noticed Rhaegar's hand on his sword and took a deep breath. "Prince, anyone who wants to..."

"Jon, shut up!" Rhaenyra's voice rang out sharply, cutting him off.

Jon turned to see Rhaenyra hurrying down the winding stairs behind the black stone gates, followed by a group of guards.

"Princess!" Jon bowed respectfully.

Rhaenyra motioned for him to step aside and approached Rhaegar. "He is my newly appointed Navy Commander. He's still learning," she excused herself.

"Navy Commander, huh? Quite a title," Rhaegar said with exaggerated dissatisfaction. "Since when do I need permission to set foot on Dragonstone?"

"Don't be angry, he doesn't know any better," Rhaenyra soothed, placing her hand over Rhaegar's still gripping the hilt of his sword. Dragon Claw had almost spilled blood.



She had rushed out of the castle upon hearing the Cannibal's roar, just in time to witness the standoff.

"If anyone in King's Landing dares to treat you like this, I'll would feed them to the dragons," Rhaegar said, looking Rhaenyra straight in the eye and gently pushed her hand holding his sword.

Rhaenyra was speechless and waved for everyone to leave.

Once they were alone, she suggested, "There's a new hatchling in Dragonmont. Want to see it?"

"Alright, but we have to leave for Driftmark soon," Rhaegar replied, his tone resigned.

"It's fine. The baby dragon is in the castle. It's beautiful," Rhaenyra said with a smile, pulling him inside.

...

In the main hall of the castle, three dragon eggs of different colors sat in containers on the table.

"These are the eggs that Syrax laid. I'm choosing them for Laena's children," Rhaenyra said, her eyes sparkling as she caressed each of the eggs.

"Any two will do," Rhaegar replied absently, his attention focused on the small creature in his hands - a young dragon the size of a house cat. He examined the hatchling carefully, noting its golden pupils, bright silver scales, and slender body. For now, it had no horns or crown.

"Roar..." The young dragon stretched its neck and let out a soft roar, flapping its wings and wriggling in his hands, unafraid of strangers.

Rhaenyra laughed at the sight. "You like this baby dragon?"

"Of course, every young dragon is a Targaryen treasure," Rhaegar said. "Judging by the color of its scales, it should resemble Meraxes when it grows up."

"When it gets a little bigger, you can take it back to the Dragonpit," Rhaenyra suggested, reaching out to nudge the dragon cub's head. The hatchling roared in protest.

"Careful, the little one has a temper," Rhaegar cautioned.

Rhaenyra pouted. "Do you want to name it?"

Rhaegar nodded, though he was known to struggle with names. The name "Cannibal" had been given by the residents of Dragonstone Island. Seeing his hesitation, Rhaenyra suggested, "Why don't we just call it Meraxes?"

The Targaryens often named their dragons after gods of the old Valyrian religion—Balerion, Meraxes, Vhagar, and so on. This included Caraxes and Syrax.

"I don't like repeating names," Rhaegar said decisively. "Its scales are bright silver. Let's call it Stormcloud."

"A plain name," Rhaenyra said, sounding unimpressed.

"Well, let me take a look at your dragon eggs," Rhaegar said, holding the young dragon, Stormcloud, in his arms as he examined the three dragon eggs. From left to right, they were green, bronze, and red with black markings.

"I plan to give those two away," Rhaenyra said, pointing to the green and red-and-black eggs.

"You chose them?" Rhaegar asked.

"Yes," Rhaenyra replied, handling the bronze egg carefully. "They are Syrax's children, and I'm keeping this one for my children's cradle."

Rhaegar looked at her, seeing the maternal glow emanating from her. "Good choice. I think it can hatch a new Bronze Fury."

Rhaegar laughed and placed the young dragon, Stormcloud, on the bronze egg. The bronze was more golden, similar to Vermithor, who had begun with light golden scales that had darkened over the years to a powerful dark gold.

After selecting the eggs, a Dragonkeeper took the young Stormcloud and the bronze-colored egg with him. As the day waned, Rhaegar and Rhaenyra left the castle and headed for Driftmark.

At dusk, clouds drifted across the sky, resembling maple leaves against the setting sun. Walking on the Stepstones, the sea breeze blew against their faces, mixing with the salty, fishy smell of the ocean.

"Roar..." A low roar came from above, and a dragon shadow appeared briefly in the clouds and mist. Rhaegar looked up, but could not see the dragon.

Not paying much attention, he continued up the stairs until a strong wind blew from behind him, causing his hair to flutter. He turned to see a light gray dragon standing behind him, its wings outstretched.

"Gray Ghost!"

Chapter 197: Taming A Second Dragon?

Seeing the dragon in front of him, Rhaegar called out its name in one breath, "Gray Ghost."

"Roar..." The Gray Ghost roared, tilting its head, its pupils scrutinizing him.

"Does it appear often?" Rhaenyra asked, observing the Gray Ghost.

The last time Rhaegar had seen the Gray Ghost was two years ago, during a night spent on Dragonstone Island when it had briefly appeared in the clouds.

Rhaenyra stepped in front of Rhaegar, her voice cautious. "The Gray Ghost has always been active around the reef piles on the east coast. It never comes near the castle."

After many years, the Gray Ghost had matured past the stage of a young dragon. Its light gray scales, white wing membranes, and backward-curved gray horns gave it a distinctive appearance.

Its slim and even body was about the same size as Sunfyre, marking it as a young dragon.

Ta Ta...

The Gray Ghost flapped its wings and moved, its hind feet stepping on the stone paths as it cautiously approached the siblings, never taking its eyes off Rhaegar. Its long neck stretched out, sniffing at the two of them.

Suddenly, the Gray Ghost's pupils glowed, and it raised its head to roar in joy.

Rhaenyra was taken aback. "Rhaegar, why do I feel like it's celebrating?"

"I feel the same way," Rhaegar replied. He gently pushed down Rhaenyra's arm, which she had raised protectively in front of her chest, and took a step towards the Gray Ghost.

Man and dragon were only a dozen meters apart, and soon they were face to face. The Gray Ghost watched his movements, folded its wings, and prostrated itself on the stone steps.

Rhaegar approached it slowly, extended a hand, and tentatively said, "Courageous little dragon, do you still remember me?"

Their first encounter had been at Dragonmont when he saved the Gray Ghost from becoming prey while trying to tame Cannibal.

"Roar..." The Gray Ghost responded to Rhaegar's voice, its breath filling the air with a salty, fishy smell.

"Ugh! It stinks!" Rhaegar exclaimed, pinching his nose and closing his eyes against the foul wind.

As the roar ended, Rhaegar felt a cold, rough touch against his palm. He opened his eyes and saw the Gray Ghost rubbing its head against his hand.

"Rhaegar, the Gray Ghost is very close to you," Rhaenyra said cautiously, shocked.

Dragons were solitary creatures. One person could usually only tame one dragon unless the dragon died, allowing for a new bond.

Rhaegar had been with Cannibal for many years, and other dragons, including the Gray Ghost, typically wouldn't show affection towards him. But now, the Gray Ghost's eyes were full of affection for Rhaegar.

"Maybe it's because I saved it," Rhaegar mused, smiling as he hugged the Gray Ghost's head, stroking its scales.

Over the years, whenever he visited Dragonstone Island, he had felt a gaze watching him. Now he realized it had been the Gray Ghost observing him from the shadows.

"Courageous little dragon, do you also want to be my partner?" Rhaegar asked, pleased with the dragon's intimacy.

"Roar..."

The Gray Ghost lifted its head from Rhaegar's stroking hand, reluctantly shook it, and gazed towards the end of the long stone stairs. Rhaegar followed the dragon's gaze to the black stone gate of Dragonstone Island.

He realized the Gray Ghost was indicating that Rhaegar already had a dragon.

Understanding this, Rhaegar said regretfully, "Unfortunately, I was hoping to ride on your back and fly for a while."

The rule of one man, one dragon had been established since the days of the Freehold. No one could control two dragons.

"Roar..."

The Gray Ghost's eyes flashed with thought. It twisted its body and used its flexible tail to wrap around Rhaegar's waist.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra cried out in alarm as the Gray Ghost lifted Rhaegar and placed him on its smooth spine.

Stunned, Rhaegar asked, "Gray Ghost, are you offering me a ride?"

The Gray Ghost raised its head proudly and spread its wings.

Seeing this, Rhaenyra reached out and shouted in surprise, "Rhaegar, hold my hand!"

Rhaegar extended his hand, and with a strong pull, he helped Rhaenyra onto the dragon's back.

"Roar..."

As soon as Rhaenyra was securely on the dragon's back, the Gray Ghost roared and soared into the sky.

"Be careful, Gray Ghost doesn't listen to me," Rhaegar warned, laughing as he held Rhaenyra close.

"You're the only one brave enough to ride a wild dragon!" Rhaenyra's heart raced as she experienced her first ride on a wild dragon.

The Gray Ghost flew swiftly, its balanced body easily maneuvering through the air, diving into thin clouds. The two of them laughed and screamed, bathed in the light of the setting sun.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, a loud roar echoed across Dragonstone Island. Cannibal's roar carried a strong sense of warning.

The Gray Ghost, trembling at the sound, fear evident in its eyes, quickly descended and landed on the Stepstones near the black stone gate. The memory of the black dragon that once hunted it was still vivid.

Once they landed, Rhaegar helped Rhaenyra to her feet and they slid down the dragon's wing.

Stroking Gray Ghost's wing, Rhaegar smiled and said, "Cannibal is angry. This is as far as we go."

"Roar..."

The Gray Ghost looked at Rhaegar one last time before turning and flying towards the east coast of Dragonstone Island.

"It's jealous," Rhaenyra said, amused.

"Maybe," Rhaegar replied, watching the Gray Ghost until it disappeared into the clouds.

Other than Cannibal, no dragon had ever been this close to him. Even Syrax avoided Cannibal out of fear.

In high spirits, Rhaegar took Rhaenyra's hand and said, "Let's go. Your two adopted daughters are still waiting for their dragon eggs."

"Hmph, I only care about my future children," Rhaenyra teased, tossing her long hair as she strode towards the black stone gate.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with understanding as he followed her.

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Night had fallen, and the stars were faint in the sky.

Driftmark, High Tide.

"Rhaenyra, you're finally here!"

Rhaenyra and Rhaegar walked into the grand hall of High Tide, greeted warmly by Laena, who had been waiting eagerly.

Seeing Rhaegar, Laena curtsied gracefully and smiled, "Cousin, you're equally welcome."

Her demeanor remained poised and elegant, showing no sign of impropriety.

"I should be at the Stepstones, but I came on a mission," Rhaegar chuckled.

He admired Laena's composure, as if her relationship with her husband, Daemon, and their familial ties were purely cordial.

"There's no need for formality with me. Quickly bring out the eggs; I'm here to adopt a daughter," Rhaenyra said with a warm smile, extending her hand to Rhaegar.

Rhaegar took off the case strapped to his back and opened it, revealing two dragon eggs.

The Space Bracelet couldn't hold living things, so the eggs had been carried by Rhaegar himself.

At the sight of the eggs, Laena's smile widened, and she embraced Rhaenyra gratefully.

A maid quickly went upstairs to fetch the nanny and bring down the two children.

Seizing the moment, Rhaegar discussed the ongoing war in the Stepstones and the challenges of transporting goods and supplies.

Chapter 198: Helaena and Dreamfyre

One month later

Stepstones Island

"Roar..."

A black dragon and a light silver dragon glided through the air and landed on Bloodstone Island.

"The prince is back, make way!"

The soldiers, recognizing the black dragon, hurriedly stepped back and warned the newcomers to keep their distance. Dragons were formidable creatures, best admired from afar.

In the past month, the landscape of Bloodstone Island had changed dramatically. Several towering watchtowers now dotted the coastline, vigilantly scanning the seas. Rows of barricades lined the beach, ready to thwart any enemy attempts to land. The rocky caves in the mountains had been explored, with the high ground chosen for the construction of cave fortresses. Tents were pitched, and soldiers sat around fires, diligently polishing their weapons.

Rhaegar surveyed the bustling camp, then dismounted his dragon.

"Cousin, let's go to the tent first," Laenor suggested as he dismounted from his own dragon, a smile on his face.

He had grown fond of his cousin. Of course, it wasn't an attraction in the romantic sense. Rhaegar was handsome, of noble birth, and had a powerful dragon at his command. He was also kind and easygoing, making those around him feel at ease.

Rhaegar brushed back his long hair and laughed softly. "Good. Lord Corlys is healed. It's time to formulate a plan to counterattack the Triarchy."

Laughing and joking, the two cousins made their way to the command tent.

Since the last battle to defend Bloodstone Island, the pirates of the Triarchy had been unusually quiet. In the intervening month, the fortifications around Bloodstone Island had been nearly completed. Fleets from Gulltown, Oldtown, and Arbor Island had arrived to reinforce them.

Now Bloodstone Island had more soldiers and generals than ever before, and more than a dozen patrol ships circled the island daily. Rhaegar and Laenor also rode their dragons to scout the surrounding seas.

Meanwhile, a few small contingents of pirates had been sent from the Triarchy, but they were easily dispatched. The situation was favorable, making it an opportune moment for a counterattack.

As they approached the central command tent, several young soldiers in fine armor stood guard.

"Prince!"

The soldiers greeted Rhaegar as he arrived. One of them, a black-haired boy, stepped forward and said respectfully, "Prince, Lord Corlys and Ser Tyland are inside."

Rhaegar nodded. "Robb, how's it going as a commander?"

Robb's face was serious. "The brothers of the Second Sons are united in their determination to fight for you."

"I look forward to seeing your performance," Rhaegar said, patting Robb on the shoulder. Leaning forward, he added with a smile, "I've sent someone to take your sister back to the Red Keep. Don't worry."

Robb's face lit up with gratitude. "Thank you, Prince."

"You serve me well; I can't let you worry," Rhaegar replied, lifting the curtain and entering the tent.

Robb quickly held the curtain open for Laenor, then followed them inside. The Second Sons were Rhaegar's direct subordinate troops, led by Robb. As a mid-ranking commander, he was qualified to join them in the tent for the strategic discussions.

Rhaegar and Laenor entered the tent and found a long table in the center with a sand table on it. Sea Snake and Tyland sat on either side of the table, neither speaking. Sara, acting as a servant, was quietly wiping the table. When the three inside noticed the newcomers, they nodded but remained silent.

Rhaegar and Laenor exchanged looks, both sensing the tension. For some reason, Sea Snake and Tyland had been at odds since their arrival on Bloodstone Island, and the rift had only grown.

Sea Snake wanted to solidify their position by fortifying Bloodstone Island and slowly expanding their defenses to Grey Gallows Island. His strategy was to occupy the two largest islands in the Stepstones, turning them into a stronghold against the Triarchy.

Tyland, however, strongly disagreed. He argued that maintaining even one island was already draining the treasury, let alone expanding further. Tyland sought a swift victory, believing that the treasury could not sustain a prolonged conflict.

Seeing the impasse, Rhaegar shrugged and took a seat. Although he was the king's heir, he had little experience in command and preferred to observe and stabilize the army.

Additionally, Tyland's contentious stance served his father Viserys' purpose of keeping the powerful Sea Snake in check.

After a short wait, more people entered the tent: Rhaenys, Vaemon, Cole, and fleet commanders from various regions. The meeting began with Vaemon reporting, "Pirates of the Three Daughters have been spotted near the Grey Gallows. They may be preparing to attack."

"Send more patrol ships and stay on guard," Sea Snake replied.

As Sea Snake spoke, Tyland quickly interjected, leading to another argument between the two. One faction preferred to wait and fortify, while the other advocated taking the initiative. The commanders exchanged glances but remained silent, divided in their loyalties: Cole sided with Tyland, Vaemon remained silent, and Rhaenys remained neutral. Rhaegar and Laenor simply listened, reading the room.

Rhaegar noted that most of those present seemed eager to end the conflict quickly, suggesting that Sea Snake's cautious approach was less popular. The argument continued until noon, when the meeting was suspended and everyone left the tent.

As Rhaegar prepared to leave, Rhaenys handed him a letter. He read it, frowning. "The Dornish want to make peace," he said.

Rhaenys guessed, "I suspect foul play."

The letter also mentioned that Lady Jeyne Arryn of the Eyrie had arrived in King's Landing, expressing gratitude for the King's assistance in quelling a rebellion. The letter concluded with an invitation for Rhaegar to return to King's Landing, both to receive the Dornish envoy and to attend a banquet for Lady Jeyne.

"Dornishmen..." Rhaegar murmured, his eyes flashing with suspicion. He doubted their sincerity, knowing them to be a resilient and rebellious folk.

"Your father needs your advice," Rhaenys urged.

Rhaegar nodded. "I'll leave with Cannibal. Keep a close watch on the Triarchy."

Sara and Robb will stay here on Bloodstone Island and act as his eyes.

...

King's Landing, Dragonpit.

"Dreamfyre, Dracarys!" Helaena's clear, childish voice echoed through the cavernous space.

"Roar..." Dreamfyre, the majestic blue dragon, lay prostrate on the ground, responding with a gentle roar.

Clad in a small white dress and deerskin boots, Helaena approached Dreamfyre, her light purple eyes filled with determination. She squatted down, gazing into the dragon's eyes.

Dreamfyre tolerated her presence and wouldn't harm her, but it also wouldn't obey her commands or engage with her beyond passive acceptance.

A low rumble filled the air as the massive doors of the Dragonpit slowly creaked open.

"Roar..." Dreamfyre's roar was one of surprise as it rose from the cold floor.

"Roar!!" The shadow of a dark dragon loomed over the entrance, landing with a gust of wind that swept through the Dragonpit.

#### Chapter 199: Alicent's New Allies

As Dreamfyre watched, the Cannibal slowly climbed into the Dragonpit. The Dragonkeepers rushed to calm the nervous Dreamfyre, knowing the Cannibal's unpredictable nature.

Helaena turned to look at the imposing black dragon and her eyes lit up as she saw the handsome young man on its back. With a joyful shout, she called out, "Brother!"

Rhaegar had already spotted Helaena's tiny figure. Dismounting from the Cannibal, he approached her with a smile.

"Brother, you're back!" Helaena ran up to him, wrapping her arms around his waist.

"I had some things to take care of, so I came back temporarily," Rhaegar said, patting her head affectionately.

Helaena, always diligent and determined, spent countless hours in the Dragonpit with Dreamfyre, dreaming of the day she could ride her dragon.

"How long will you be here this time?" she asked, her eyes full of hope.

"I'm not sure, but I should be able to stay for a few more days," Rhaegar replied thoughtfully, bending down to pick her up.

Helaena beamed and nestled her small body against his, delighted by his presence.

"I have something to show you," Rhaegar said, carrying her over to the Cannibal.

The Cannibal shook its massive frame, and an iron cage covered with a black cloth fell to the ground. Rhaegar caught it effortlessly with one hand.

Helaena's eyes widened with curiosity. "Brother, what's in the cage?"

"It's not a bug, if that's what you're worried about," Rhaegar teased.

"I'm with Dreamfyre every day now. I don't play with bugs anymore," Helaena replied, a little exasperated.

Since Rhaegar had scolded Aegon the last time, Helaena had focused her energy on taming Dreamfyre, abandoning her previous interest in bugs.

Rhaegar chuckled and unveiled the black cloth.

"Roar..." A young dragon with bright silver scales curled up inside the iron cage, roaring at the outside world.

"It's a dragon!" Helaena exclaimed in surprise.



Rhaegar grinned proudly. "A new hatchling from Dragonstone Island. I named it Stormcloud. It will stay in the Dragonpit from now on."

"Can Aemond tame it?" Helaena immediately thought of her younger brother, who often watched her and Daeron with their dragons, yearning for one of his own.

"He can give it a try," Rhaegar suggested.

"Oh, brother, you're the best!" Helaena cheered, planting a kiss on Rhaegar's cheek.

Rhaegar wiped his cheek with mock annoyance and called over a Dragonkeeper. "Watch over the young dragon. Its name is Stormcloud."

"Yes, Prince," the Dragonkeeper replied, lifting the iron cage and carrying the alert young dragon away.

With Helaena still in his arms, Rhaegar returned to the Red Keep.

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Rhaegar returned to the Red Keep by carriage. When they arrived, Helena followed the caretaker to her room, and the two siblings separated.

Rhaegar went to his bedroom and called for hot water to be prepared for a bath. All dragons had a sulfurous smell, and the riders picked it up as well.

As he soaked in the hot water, there was a knock at the door.

"Knock, knock..."

Rhaegar, fully immersed in the steaming water, asked lazily, "Who is it?"

"It's me, Prince," came Erryk's voice.

Rhaegar opened his eyes and recognized the voice. Erryk had been charged with protecting Jeyne and opening the Vale's trade routes. It had been a while since Rhaegar had heard from him, indicating that he must have returned to King's Landing with Jeyne.

"Come in, Ser," Rhaegar said.

The door creaked open and Erryk, dressed in silver armor and white robes, stepped inside. "Prince, the king is giving a banquet for Lady Jeyne and has summoned you."

"I see," Rhaegar replied. Then he asked, "How is the Mushroom Set Caravan? Is the Vale matter settled?"

"Tormund has successfully established the Mushroom Set Caravan in the Vale with Lady Jeyne's assistance," Erryk reported, admiration in his eyes. "Lady Jeyne has rallied many nobles who suffered during the Black Wedding, and the Vale is now stable."

"How is Lord Yorbert?" Rhaegar inquired, thinking of Lord Protector of the Vale he had yet to meet.

"Lord Yorbert is still recovering from his injuries. Lady Jeyne has persuaded him to stay and assist with the administration in the Eyrie," Erryk explained.

Rhaegar nodded, satisfied. He had expected Yorbert to return home eventually, especially since Jeyne was reclaiming her authority, making the regent's role redundant.

Seeing no further questions, Erryk prepared to leave. However, Rhaegar remembered another matter and asked, "Did you bring that giant descendant back to King's Landing?"

"Yes, his name is Porus. He has been very obedient since his capture and is now in the Red Keep," Erryk replied.

Porus, the half-giant, was a wildling discovered as part of the Mountain Clans' rebellion. Unlike the three-meter-tall half-giant Rhaegar had previously killed, Porus was smarter and had surrendered. King Viserys, impressed by his size, kept him in the Red Keep as a kind of living spectacle and uncredited vassal.

...

The banquet hall buzzed with anticipation as tables laden with food awaited the start of the feast.

Seated on the main throne, Viserys observed the courtiers' lively performances.

Meanwhile, in the back garden, two elegant women sat beneath a canopy of fish motifs.

Alicent, clad in a green dress, held a book in her hand, while Jeyne, in a sleek black dress, addressed her gently.

"Your Grace, I've prepared some delicacies from the Vale. I hope you'll enjoy them," Jeyne offered.

Alicent graciously replied, "Thank you, Jeyne."

The two were old friends, bonded by their connection to Rhaenyra, who served as a link between them. Despite their age difference—Jeyne being three years older than Rhaenyra and Alicent eight years—they often corresponded as pen pals.

However, their relationship soured after Alicent became the Queen, leading to a rift in communication.

Jeyne's unexpected visit to King's Landing prompted Alicent's curiosity. "Jeyne, what brings you here?" she inquired, dispelling formalities.

Jeyne hesitated momentarily before gesturing to the book in her hand. "Ten Thousand Ships—I recall it's Rhaenyra's favorite," she said.

The book chronicled the journey of the Rhoynar warrior queen, Nymeria, who led her people westward to evade the Valyrian Empire's invasion. Nymeria, as a prominent figure, also married into House Martell and played a crucial role in unifying Dorne.

Rhaenyra idolized Nymeria, finding inspiration in her story.

"Yes, Nymeria's tale has always resonated with me," Alicent acknowledged, though her smile held a hint of worry as she attempted to hide the book.

"Is there a page that is torn out?" But Jeyne was quicker, noticing a torn page.

Chapter 200: Rhaegar Is a Fat Piece of Meat

Jeyne examined the missing page that would have documented Nymeria's first marriage.

As she flipped through the book, a nostalgic smile crept across her lips as she recalled the fleeting moments of her teenage years - years that had, in truth, been far from glorious. Skepticism and doubt had shadowed her youth.

Alicent watched Jeyne calmly, waiting for her to speak. After a brief silence, Jeyne looked up and smiled apologetically. "Sorry, I got lost in thought for a moment."

Alicent responded coolly, "The feast is almost over, Lady Jeyne."

"I wanted to make a gesture of friendship," Jeyne said quietly. "I did my research before coming to King's Landing, and I believe you need an ally."

"I am the Queen. Do you think I am in trouble?" Alicent's tone was calm and confident.

Jeyne replied bluntly, "I've heard the term 'Greens.'"

Alicent's eyes swept over Jeyne and she snorted, "But you're wearing a black dress."

"With all due respect, I don't think much of the Greens, and I don't think they can challenge the Heir," Jeyne said with a knowing smile. "And I'm a confirmed Black, as all seven kingdoms know."

"Then why have you come to me?" Alicent's patience was wearing thin.

Jeyne's smile faded, replaced by a serious expression. "I will be in King's Landing for a while. You and I can benefit from each other."

"I have a husband," Alicent replied, a hint of mockery in her voice. The bond between Jeyne and Jessamyn was well known throughout the Seven Kingdoms.

"Alicent, you need to face reality - no one will help you but me," Jeyne said seriously. "You fear Rhaegar because of your ambition, and I can help you deal with that fear."

Alicent once coveted the Iron Throne, but Aegon had no name, no title, and few supporters. She wanted to give up, but she was afraid Rhaegar would get even with her after he ascended the Iron Throne.

Jeyne's words struck a chord with Alicent. "If you and I are to form an alliance, what do you bring to the table?" Alicent asked, her eyes narrowing.

"It's not just an alliance - it's mutual support," Jeyne insisted. "You are concerned about your children's future, and I can help you to secure it."

Alicent's expression remained guarded, but she listened intently.

Jeyne recognized the look on Alicent's face and knew her instincts were correct.

"The war for the Stepstones has drained the coffers of the kingdom. Eventually that land will come under the rule of the Seven Kingdoms," Jeyne said.

"If you win the war, you could offer the Stepstones as a fief to Prince Aegon, and I'll make the arrangements," she continued.

Alicent frowned. "It's a barren land. Even a proud man like Daemon wouldn't rule it."

"The King plans to build fortifications there. With its strategic location, it will become a lucrative place for taxing passing ships," Jeyne argued. "Keeping Prince Aegon away from King's Landing will prevent him from causing trouble."

Alicent fell silent, weighing the pros and cons.

Jeyne pressed on, "When Prince Aemond comes of age, I can also secure a fief for him in Gulltown."

Originally, Gulltown had three noble families. The Shetts and a branch of House Arryn were involved in the rebellion and had fallen out of favor.

Jeyne intended to install new noble powers to divide House Grafton's interests. This would bring Alicent to her side and yield significant benefits.

Alicent was clearly tempted by the idea of securing fiefdoms for her two sons. The importance of the Stepstones was undeniable, otherwise the kingdom wouldn't have waged war against the Triarchy for years. Gulltown, one of the five major ports in Westeros, was the perfect choice for a fief.

Breathing slightly heavier, Alicent said seriously, "Your offer is very tempting. What do you want in return?"

There's no such thing as a free lunch. Jeyne's demand must be significant.

Jeyne smiled, her red lips parting to reveal the answer. "Rhaegar."

"What?" Alicent froze, not understanding.

Jeyne expected this reaction. She slowly stood up, a smile playing on her lips. "Rhaegar will become the king of the Seven Kingdoms. I want to be his queen."

Alicent was even more confused, her thoughts in turmoil.

For half a second, Alicent stood numbly, gripping the book in her hand tightly. Her eyes turned cold. "You're delusional. Rhaegar only has eyes for Rhaenyra. I won't help you."

For some reason, whenever Rhaenyra was involved, Alicent became subconsciously agitated.

Jeyne's eyes glinted as she tilted her head. "In what capacity are you saying this? As Alicent or as the Queen?"

Alicent was Rhaenyra's best friend, but as the Queen, she was the person Rhaenyra hated the most.

Alicent was momentarily stunned, confusion flashing in her eyes. Compared to Jeyne, who aimed to challenge Rhaenyra, Alicent was the first to betray her.

Alicent suddenly laughed. "To have friends like us, Rhaenyra is truly unfortunate."

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Banquet Hall

Rhaegar hurried to the feast to entertain the bannermen who had traveled from all over the realm. Aegon was also present, though he sat alone in a corner, nursing a glass of wine, far from the Hightower entourage.

Bang...

The doors swung open, and the rhythmic drumming of the Kingsguard filled the hall. "Lady Jeyne of House Arryn, Lady of the Eyrie and Warden of the East," a herald announced.

Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, Jeyne entered with grace and elegance. Flanking her were Rhaenyra and Alicent, one on each side, their presence commanding attention.

Jeyne and Alicent wore their usual attire, while Rhaenyra wore a striking red strapless gown, her silver hair intricately braided, her violet eyes sparkling.

"The Vale greet you, Your Grace," Jeyne curtsied to Viserys.

"House Arryn is a valued ally. No need for formalities," Viserys replied warmly, obviously pleased.

Jeyne stepped back and, without acknowledging Rhaenyra or Alicent, made her way directly to Rhaegar.

It was time for the dance.

The nobles paired off, and the atmosphere grew lively with music and conversation. Jeyne held out her hand to Rhaegar with a smile. "Aren't you going to ask me to dance?"

Rhaegar looked around the room. The musicians were playing lively tunes and couples were dancing happily. After a moment's hesitation, he took her hand and warned, "I'm not much of a dancer."

"Just follow my lead. I'll guide you," Jeyne reassured him, her smile sweet and encouraging.

As they moved to the center of the hall and began to dance, Jeyne placed her hands on Rhaegar's shoulders. "The dance is much like a battlefield," she whispered. "The difference is there's no blood."

Rhaegar chuckled, puzzled by her analogy, but as he pondered her words, he missed a step and stepped on Jeyne's foot. "I told you, I'm not much of a dancer," he apologized.

Jeyne flinched but remained determined. "Take your time. We have plenty of it."

"I'm not one to waste time on things I'm not good at," Rhaegar muttered, continuing to dance awkwardly.

Jeyne gritted her teeth and clung to Rhaegar's clothing, refusing to give up.

From a distance, Rhaenyra watched them with a puzzled expression. She hadn't yet understood her friend's intentions.

"Rhaegar seems to be enjoying himself," Alicent observed, approaching with a glass of wine.

"Of course he is," Rhaenyra replied with a hint of sarcasm. "He's probably crushing Jeyne's feet."

In just one dance, Rhaegar had already stepped on Jeyne several times, and Rhaenyra couldn't help but laugh. Rhaegar had always been reserved, uninterested in parties, and bad at dancing.

Alicent sighed, a hint of exasperation in her voice. "Aren't you suspicious at all?"

Rhaenyra turned to her, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Alicent never spoke lightly. Their years of enmity had taught them both to be careful with words.

Alicent gestured to Jeyne. "She has proposed to your father. The candidate is Rhaegar."

"Are you sure?" Rhaenyra asked, her disbelief obvious.

Alicent nodded, enjoying Rhaenyra's shock. "Jeyne wants Rhaegar. Don't tell me you didn't see that."

Rhaenyra remembered her recent conversation with Jeyne in Runestone. She had sensed Jeyne's interest in Rhaegar, but had hoped her warning would deter her. Clearly, it hadn't.

"Thank you for the information, Alicent," Rhaenyra said, taking a deep breath before walking over to the dancing couple.

"You're welcome, Rhaenyra," Alicent replied, sipping her wine with satisfaction. She had agreed to help Jeyne, but she couldn't resist keeping Rhaenyra informed. Playing both sides allowed her to profit from the unfolding drama and sit back and watch the conflict unfold.

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Viserys savored the sizzling lamb at the main table, his eyes fixed on Rhaegar dancing with Jeyne. His wide smile revealed his contentment. He adored his eldest son, who was not only handsome and intelligent, but also skilled in the martial arts.

Rhaegar's exceptional qualities were a rarity in House Targaryen. Unlike Viserys, his grandfather Baelon or his great-grandfather Jaehaerys, Rhaegar bore a resemblance to two of their most legendary ancestors:

Aegon the Conqueror and Maegor the Cruel. Perhaps he also reflected Aegon Targaryen, the eldest son of Aenys I, who was murdered by Maegor.

These men were characterized by wisdom, courage, and a strong sense of duty, in contrast to Viserys and his immediate predecessors, who often indulged in pleasures in addition to their responsibilities.

Seeing Rhaegar dancing was a rare sight. It pleased Viserys to witness his son embracing the social joys of being with a woman, especially one of Jeyne Arryn's stature.

Jeyne, as the Lady of the Eyrie and the head of House Arryn, held significant influence. Moreover, she had no parents or brothers, making her an ideal match.

Whoever married her would gain control of the Vale and secure their descendants as legitimate heirs to House Arryn and its lands.

As Viserys enjoyed the moment, a sudden movement caught his eye. Rhaenyra was making her way through the crowd, her expression determined.

She headed straight for the center of the dance floor in an aggressive manner.