

G.O Thrones 21

Chapter 21: Mysterious Bracelet

“Heh, she’s doing a pretty good job of pretending to be an exemplary mother and wife.”

Rhaenyra watched with a leathery smile as she walked between the ministers.

The resentment made Rhaegar shiver beside her.

“Sister, your grasp is hurting my hand.”

Rhaegar complained, trying to pull back Rhaenyra’s small hand.

Rhaenyra hastily removed her hand. “I’m sorry, I just forgot that you were still there.”

“It’s okay, just be careful of your image, a lot of people are watching the event.”

Gently reminding his sister, Rhaegar pulled his small hand away.

Rhaegar lifted his hand and glanced around twice. Suddenly, a face caught his eye.

Only to see that it was Daemon who was standing next to Viserys at that very moment, watching faintly as his brother and sister-in-law confessed their tender feelings for each other, the corner of his mouth curling up in a hidden sneer.

Rhaegar’s eyebrows furrowed, and he cocked his head to get a better look at them.

Suddenly, Daemon turned his head and locked onto Rhaegar.

Rhaegar was startled and couldn’t help but start to step back.

“No, what am I afraid of, is he going to eat me?”

Thinking of his identity, Rhaegar’s unconquerable energy rose, staring at him with wide eyes.

It wasn’t his imagination.

Daemon looked up and down at Rhaegar with interest, then smiled and nodded, no longer paying too much attention to him.

Rhaegar nodded, looking a little disappointed and a little grateful.

“What a frightening look, the sense of oppression is too strong.”

Rhaegar secretly breathed a sigh of relief, but in his heart, he thought of the sneer Daemon had just revealed.

What did this imply?

Why, seeing his father in love with Alicent, would he show such “contempt”?

Rhaegar suspected he was wrong.

But he couldn’t get Daemon’s slightly curved mouth out of his head. And he was sure that smile wasn’t fake.

“Forget it, no one else saw it. I’d better be good and hide somewhere else.”

Rhaegar was two paces behind Rhaenyra with this thought in mind.

The crowd took their seats as the banquet began.

Viserys called for Rhaenyra and Rhaegar to come closer to greet Daemon.

Rhaenyra had grown up worshipping her uncle. Needless to say.

“Rhaegar, my eldest son, there is no need to tell you that you already know,” Viserys took Rhaegar’s hand and introduced him to his brother.

Daemon nodded, his cold face trying to squeeze out a friendly smile that was a little out of place.

Viserys did not force his brother to smile, but smiled and said, “The Seven Gods have blessed us, Rhaegar had a chance meeting not long ago, and his ailment was cured, freeing him from his heart condition.”

Daemon said, “I have heard of this, the magical fruit given by the White Hart. It sounds like a story out of a storybook.”

“Haha, I didn’t believe it when I first heard, but the will of the gods is always full of deep meaning and Rhaegar is a Targaryen blessed by the gods.”

Viserys stared at Daemon with a strange look on his face, and his words were a shock to everyone in the room.

The eldest son of the King, the grace of the White Hart, and the name of divine grace from the mouth of the King...

What did the King’s words mean?

Could it be that he was hinting at changing the heir, as rumored outside?

A single sentence, as if a heavy hammer had been struck into the hearts of all the people.

Rhaenyra’s color changed slightly as she looked down at her younger brother, who was becoming more and more energetic with each passing day.

“I hope you’re always healthy and that sickness stays away from you,” Damon blessed, touching Rhaegar’s head.

It was Alicent who was out of place.

Her gentle face froze for a split second, secretly digging her nails into the flesh of her thumbs and forcing a smile.

Sooner or later, she knew this day would come.

In the beginning, Rhaegar had been terminally ill and did not have many days left to live.

With the death of the king’s eldest son, she would have her son, Aegon, in line for the throne.

Even if the king did not allow it, the ministers of the council would secretly support her. They would suggest to the king that he change the heir to the throne.

But she was undoubtedly dealt a fatal blow by Rhaegar’s miraculous healing.

From now on, even if there were people who didn't like the idea of Rhaenyra being a woman as the heir to the throne. Their support would only be for the eldest son, Rhaegar.

There would be no effort to support Aegon, the second son.

"Could it be that all I've tried to do all these years was for nothing?"

Alicent's heart was despaired, and bloodstains were torn from her thumbs.

Alicent silently bowed her head and lowered her presence so as not to draw attention to this out-of-control behavior.

"Thank you, Uncle," Rhaegar replied politely, feeling uncomfortable in the face of his uncle's blessing.

"I hope you won't take it personally if I said something unintelligent in the past, we're meeting for the first time and will have a brand new future."

How could he hide his little thoughts from Daemon, it was obvious.

Daemon rolled up his cuffs, took off a silver-colored metal bracelet, and said in a deep voice, "After the Stepstones war, the soldiers looted many treasures."

"Uncountable amounts of gold, gems of different colors and jewels..."

Rhaegar listened intently, interested in the war.

Daemon handed over the bracelet, "This bracelet was recovered from the crushed treasure chest of the Crab Feeder, it is cast in Valyrian steel and is being given to you as a welcome gift."

"Valyrian steel? That is truly valuable."

Rhaegar's eyes glistened, but his pride caused him to control the hand he was about to extend and to look at his father in expectation.

Viserys nodded: "A gift from your uncle, no need to refuse."

"Yes, thank you, Uncle."

When Rhaegar was given the green light, he immediately threw the discontent of his heart with Daemon into the air and snatched the bracelet with a whoosh.

Whatever deep resentments existed in the past.

Daemon was his good uncle right now.

"It's beautiful, carved and patterned."

He held the bracelet beautifully and wore it on his slim wrist.

"Maybe you should put that bracelet away, your wrist is too thin, it's easy to lose it," Rhaenyra said, touching her forehead.

"Hmph, I've always been a stickler for hard-won gains."

Rhaegar grunted softly in displeasure. He lifted his wrist to admire the forged Valyrian steel bracelet in the sunlight.

It was good enough to be used as a family heirloom.

“Exploration opportunity detected, the target is the mysterious Valyrian steel bracelet.”

The corners of Rhaegar’s mouth couldn’t help but curl as the system beeped suddenly, adding to his already happy mood.

The system panel appeared with a thought.

[Mysterious Valyrian Steel Bracelet]

Exploration Progress: 0.5%

After half a year, Rhaegar got the chance to explore again. He couldn’t say how happy he was.

With a face full of sincerity, he looked at Daemon and said gratefully: “I appreciate this, Uncle Daemon.”

The sudden move was a bit of a surprise to Daemon.

But he gladly accepted it when he saw that his nephew liked it.

“You don’t have to say thank you twice, especially to a loved one,” Viserys said, patting Rhaegar on the back of the head.

“Uh-huh, Uncle Damon is family.”

Rhaegar nodded his head, his pretty little face very happy.

Don’t say anything about being kin or not.

Now that Daemon had dealt Alicent a blow, he had to applaud and say that it had been a clean hit.

“All right, put that embarrassing face of yours away and bring out the temper of a prince.”

An eye-rolling Rhaenyra slapped her brother on the back of the head, teeth clenching in warning.

“Sure, hit me in the head, who’s responsible for making me stupid?” said Rhaegar, covering the back of his head, unconvinced.

“I’ll keep you in a little dark room of the Red Keep if you get stupid.”

Rhaenyra revealed a dangerous benevolence smile.

Chapter 22: A Special Dream

As the banquet stretched on, a fervent energy coursed through the veins of the nobles, causing them to surrender to the allure of the dimly lit ambiance.

Before the dance could begin, Rhaegar gracefully excused himself, feeling a wave of drowsiness wash over him.

Seeking respite, he retired to his chamber for a much-needed night's rest.

In the depths of the night, Rhaegar's peaceful slumber took an abrupt turn as he began to murmur unintelligibly in his sleep.

Within moments, he plunged into a harrowing nightmare.

In his dream, Rhaegar found himself stranded on a desolate island, shrouded in an eerie mist beneath a dark and foreboding sky.

A chilling silence enveloped the air, broken only by his own muted cries for help.

As if in response to his distress, the tranquil sea surrounding the island erupted into a tumultuous frenzy, monstrous waves crashing against its shores.

The encroaching tide swallowed the land inch by inch, forcing Rhaegar to seek refuge on higher ground, his heart pounding with fear.

Despite his efforts to climb a nearby coconut tree for safety, the relentless floodwaters continued to rise relentlessly, threatening to engulf him.

Just as despair threatened to consume him entirely, a colossal shadow loomed overhead, blotting out the moonlight.

Straining against his own terror, Rhaegar attempted to lift his gaze skyward, but his body remained paralyzed with fear.

"Hiss...." came a sinister whisper, sending a shiver down his spine, as the shadow descended closer, casting a chilling pall over his nightmare.

Amidst his mounting anxiety, a roar both familiar and alien reverberated from every direction, jolting Rhaegar from his unease.

The thunderous sound seemed to rupture his eardrums, suffocating him with its intensity as a frigid sensation of water enveloped his senses.

"Water... so much water... icy..."

The sudden disorientation sent shockwaves through his mind, his sleeping form outside the dream world reacting with involuntary tremors and a sheen of sweat coating his brow.

"No! No!"

As the sea surged in his nightmares, flooding his ankles with icy dread, Rhaegar snapped awake with a panicked cry, his eyes flying open as he struggled to shake off the lingering terror.

Knock Knock...

The sound of a gentle rap on his door accompanied Erryk's concerned voice filtering through.

"Are you alright, Your Highness?"

"Huh, no water... I'm still in my room..."

Confusion clouded his senses as Rhaegar surveyed his surroundings, the familiar comforts of his chamber gradually easing the remnants of his unsettling dream.

After a brief moment of consideration, Erryk refrained from barging in, respecting Rhaegar's space.

"I'm fine, Ser. I just had a nightmare," Rhaegar replied, his voice tinged with weariness.

"If you need anything, just call out," Erryk murmured softly, his heart sinking at the thought of Rhaegar's recurring nightmares. They had become all too familiar over their time together, and Erryk couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for the young prince's restless nights.

With no further words exchanged between them, Rhaegar nestled against his pillow, overwhelmed by a sense of despair. The nightmare had felt all too real, more terrifying than any he had experienced before, each beat of his heart a reminder of its lingering effects.

"Another nightmare... if this is the gift of the Dreamer, I want no part of it," he muttered dishearteningly, recalling the golden talent the System had revealed. It had been a while since he had experienced such vivid dreams, and tonight's episode had caught him off guard, leaving him feeling emotionally drained and vulnerable.

In that moment, Rhaegar couldn't shake the sensation of being lost and abandoned, like a stray animal left out in the cold wind.

As the system's announcement pierced through the heavy air, Rhaegar snapped back to reality, his mind still reeling from the nightmare.

With a shake of his head to clear the fog, he extended his arm to examine the silver bracelet adorning his wrist.

[Mysterious Valyrian Steel Bracelet] Exploration progress: 100%

The system's prompt reminded him of the completion of his exploration task. Rhaegar recalled the extensive time typically required for such endeavors, realizing that this particular exploration had begun around mid-afternoon.

Glancing at the dimly flickering wall, he estimated the time to be around 10 p.m., based on the usual schedule for extinguishing the torches.

"Approximately 8 hours," he murmured to himself, mentally calculating the duration of the exploration.

With a gentle sweep of his hand, Rhaegar collected the ethereal blue aura that had settled on his bed.

"Reward successfully claimed," the system confirmed.

"Recognition successful, identified as a valuable reward: the fire mage's magical tools."

"I wonder what kind of treasure it is?"

Driven by his insatiable curiosity about magic, Rhaegar wastes no time and activates the relic without hesitation.

"Congratulations, the fire mage's magical tool has been activated, you have received..."

[Space Bracelet] Grade: Excellent (Blue) Function: The inside of the bracelet contains three cubic meters of space. It cannot contain living beings. Evaluation: "This is a magical artifact dating back to the ancient Valyrian era, and its spatial attributes make it so valuable that even the noble Dragon Lords are seeking it out!"

As Rhaegar wears the Valyrian steel bracelet, he gently shakes his wrist, causing the surface to crack and shed its dust.

Gone is the original time polish, replaced by a subtle silvery gray hue. The overall appearance of the bracelet has transformed into a more refined state, with the pattern becoming even more exquisite, as if it had been meticulously recarved by a skilled craftsman.

"A bracelet of magic, a treasure coveted even by the dragon lords of Valyria?"

Rhaegar is filled with awe as he gazes at the mysterious bracelet in his hands.

Never did he imagine that he would come into possession of such a valuable artifact by chance.

"I really should thank Uncle Daemon once again for bestowing upon me such a generous gift," he muses, a sense of gratitude washing over him.

The explorer system included instructions for the use of the space bracelet, and Rhaegar carefully perused them.

"So that's how it is. Valyrian steel contains magic, and by inscribing space runes on this magical metal, you can create a space enchantment."

Rhaegar couldn't help but marvel at the wisdom of his ancestors.

Valyrian steel was already a rare commodity, but to find it imbued with space magic was extraordinary. Wizards capable of carving space runes were exceedingly rare, making space artifacts a precious find, produced only every few hundred years.

During the ancient Valyrian period, only the most powerful dragon lord families could possess such space magic weapons, often treasured as inheritance heirlooms.

However, despite being of Targaryen descent, their family's strength didn't rank high among the forty dragon lord families. Thus, there were no records of such magical treasures within their lineage.

The families of the Dragon Lords who once possessed Spatial Amulets had long been wiped out by the Doom, their legacies buried in the ruins of Valyria.

Rhaegar's breath quickened, his eyes transfixed on the Space Bracelet in his hands.

"This matter must remain a secret. Revealing it could only lead to trouble," he resolved firmly, acknowledging the gravity of the artifact's significance.

Without hesitation, Rhaegar picked up the fruit knife from the bedside table and sliced his forefinger, smearing blood onto the surface of the bracelet.

Buzz...

The bracelet emitted a soft, hazy glow before disappearing in the blink of an eye.

Simultaneously, Rhaegar felt an inexplicable connection between himself and the bracelet.

"The bracelet was forged by the strongest of fire mages. It has the function of bloodline identification."

"My Targaryen bloodline is enough to make this bracelet mine."

As the owner of the bracelet, Rhaegar willed it to shrink to a size suitable for wearing.

He slid the bracelet onto his wrist, marveling at the newfound power coursing through him. With a touch and a silent command, he summoned the fruit knife back to his hand.

"Return to me!"

With a whisper, the fruit knife vanished into thin air, leaving Rhaegar to explore the capabilities of his new artifact.

Delving into the empty space within the bracelet, Rhaegar discovered a plethora of treasures: mountains of gold, stacks of ancient Valyrian books, a dragon medallion, and an array of clothing and miscellany, all neatly categorized.

The sight of the gold piqued Rhaegar's interest. While he may have been a prince, the royal vault wasn't his to plunder. Now, with this newfound wealth, he could finally enjoy the freedom to spend without restraint, no longer bound by the confines of the Red Keep.

Chapter 23: Dragon Taming Handbook

Rhaegar scattered his entire stash of gold across the bed, creating a shimmering sea of wealth.

Despite the discomfort, he relished the sensation of lying amidst the glittering treasure.

With practiced ease, he cracked open the tome, its pages whispering tales of the Belaerys, a prominent family of dragon lords.

Emblazoned with the emblem of intertwined dragons, the Dragon's Medallion adorned their heraldry.

The Belaerys lineage boasted a rich history in ancient Valyria, spanning generations.

Over three hundred dragons had been bound to their name, with a peak of sixty-seven majestic beasts thriving concurrently.

Such a formidable legacy placed them among the top forty dragon lord families, surpassed only by a select few.

Among the family's prized possessions was the spatial bracelet adorning Rhaegar's wrist, designated for a specific heir, yet its fate remained uncertain.

As Rhaegar delved deeper into the text, each page brought a new wave of astonishment, causing him to sit up taller, his focus intensifying with each passing line.

The book provided a cursory glance at various Dragon Lord families allied with the Belaerys, offering rough assessments of their strengths.

After concluding the first tome, Rhaegar reached for the second, though its contents lacked the significance of the previous volume. It merely cataloged the bannermen sworn to the family.

Undeterred, Rhaegar swapped books once more.

Excitement surged through Rhaegar as he stumbled upon the "Habits of Dragons" section in the history segment of the first book.

His heart raced with anticipation as he silently prayed, "Please let there be something new in here."

"What exactly defines a dragon?"

"And where do they come from?"

"The Bond Between Dragon Masters and Their Kin..."

The opening chapter chronicled the genesis of dragons, their discovery, and eventual taming by the ancient Valyrians.

Yet, it was all old news, akin to the theories dissected by scholarly minds.

Disappointed, Rhaegar shrugged off the origins of dragons, his focus fixed on a more practical query: how were dragon eggs hatched?

Regrettably, the book remained silent on the matter.

Amidst the pages, Rhaegar encountered numerous tales of dragon taming by skilled riders.

"With the infusion of dragon's blood, one establishes a bond with the majestic creature, ascending its back to claim the title of rider..."

"Fireimages speculate that dragons possess intellect surpassing mere beasts, rivaling only the acumen of humanity..."

"As dragons age, they grow both in size and longevity, though many find flight elusive in their twilight years, burdened by their immense bulk..."

Carefully perusing the text, Rhaegar's eyes caught on a crucial passage:

"Dragons are creatures of the sky and wilderness. Their lords grant them the freedom to soar and nest at will. Yet, in times of conflict, they employ enchanted horns to summon their distant kin..."

"A magic horn? Another mystical artifact capable of summoning dragons?"

Rhaegar was taken aback by the revelation, having never heard of such a device before.

Unlike the traditional Targaryen method of using the ancient Valyrian language to command dragons, it seemed there were indeed special tools for taming these legendary creatures.

As Rhaegar read on, a profound statement leapt out at him:

"Dragons are not slaves; they are the very essence of their riders. Should you dare to chain a dragon to the earth, you will incur a dire curse."

A furrow creased Rhaegar's brow at the warning.

"The dragon cannot be subjugated like a mere servant, lest you face its wrath..."

Instantly, his thoughts drifted to the Dragon's Pit in King's Landing, a colossal structure erected during Maegor I's reign to house the Targaryen family's dragon breeding efforts.

Balerion, Vhagar, Meraxes...

Once, this cavernous pit housed legendary beasts like Balerion, Vhagar, and Meraxes, among others.

Presently, three dragons dwelled within its confines:

Dreamfire, Caraxes, and Syrax...

These creatures, permanent residents of the pit, had never known the freedom of the skies. Syrax, with its yellow scales, had resided there since hatching from its egg, bonded to Rhaenyra.

Though ignorant of dragon lore, Rhaegar understood the stark contrast between life within the Dragon's Pit and the untamed wild.

He knew one undeniable truth: any dragon entering the pit would be bound in chains.

Dragons, fiercely territorial, were bound to clash when forced into close quarters.

The maesters advised chaining the dragons to prevent bloodshed and safeguard the younger ones.

As Rhaegar absorbed these warnings, he recognized the gravity of the situation. These were not idle musings of maesters but the documented wisdom of ancient Valyria's dragon lords—a lineage surpassing even the Targaryens.

"When the opportunity arises, I must share these findings with my father and defer to his judgment," Rhaegar mused silently.

With the book swiftly devoured, Rhaegar carefully stashed it within his bracelet, wary of causing any damage to the precious tome.

The knowledge within was priceless, each word a treasure for the Targaryen family.

Rhaegar lingered over the remaining books, their volumes numerous.

In the grip of intense concentration, time sped by like a galloping horse, and before he knew it, night had given way to dawn.

As the morning sun bathed the room in its golden light, Rhaegar, having foregone sleep, emerged from his study.

Cautiously eyeing the door, he swiftly concealed the books and the bed of gold within the confines of his small bracelet.

Not now, he thought, unwilling to risk discovery of his clandestine activities.

Casting a weary glance at his reflection in the bedside mirror, he sighed at the sight of his dark, panda-like eyes.

Yet, the wisdom gleaned from the night's reading offered solace.

The books held secrets not found in any known records, detailing the intricacies of the Targaryen lineage.

For instance, taming a dragon was more than mere instruction—it required unwavering will and belief.

A tamer's resolve must be resolute, for any hint of weakness would be sensed by the dragon, rendering taming impossible.

Taking initiative, climbing onto the dragon's back, and issuing commands with conviction were paramount.

Only through such displays of strength and determination could the bond between dragon and master truly flourish, soaring together across sky and sea, united as one.

Filled with anticipation, Rhaegar washed himself before bestowing a tender kiss upon his egg, his heart brimming with hope.

"Swiftly hatch, for the sky awaits our journey!" he exclaimed with conviction, his voice ringing out boldly.

He harbored no doubt in his ability to become a dragon master, for to question himself would be to forsake the Valyrian blood coursing through his veins.

Pushing open the door, Rhaegar's gaze met Erryk's, finding encouragement in the warmth of his brown eyes.

"Ser, could you spare me the enigmatic looks? They're rather unsettling," Rhaegar remarked as they concluded their breakfast.

Erryk, taken aback, responded, "Of course, but know that I harbor no doubts about your ambitions."

Rhaegar's cheeks tinged with a faint blush as he brushed off the comment, "Such matters are of little consequence. Today, we have a tournament to attend."

Though yesterday's events had been cut short to welcome Daemon, the tournament was set to span seven days, with daily contests.

The haughty Dornishman remained under close watch in King's Landing.

Today, a valiant knight would seek retribution and earn the king's favor.

Chapter 24: Syrio's Swordsmanship

The tournament stood as a beacon of the kingdom's pride, drawing eager nobles from all corners.

As Rhaegar made his way to the event, the grandstands were already teeming with spectators, their anticipation palpable in the air.

With swift steps, he approached, catching sight of his father seated prominently upon the high stage.

Drawing nearer, he observed the throng surrounding Viserys, the atmosphere charged with excitement.

Viserys occupied the central seat, flanked by Lyonel Strong on his right and his Uncle Daemon on his left.

Positioned just below Lyonel, Rhaenyra sat with a regal air, her demeanor befitting her status as heir.

Though the success of last night's banquet remained a mystery, Viserys appeared in good spirits, a smile gracing his features as he caught sight of Rhaegar's arrival.

Waving enthusiastically, he beckoned, "Come quickly, my son. You retired early last night; today, you shall sit by your father's side."

"The maester advises that children retire early and rise early, ensuring swift growth," Rhaegar quipped wryly as he approached Viserys, his tone playful yet affectionate.

Lifted into his father's embrace, Rhaegar settled comfortably on his lap, his fingers deftly plucking fruit from a nearby platter as he basked in his father's affection.

"Why don't I see the bracelet? Didn't you like it?" Rhaenyra inquired with a smile, noticing Rhaegar's bare wrist.

"It's a bit too large for me," Rhaegar replied nonchalantly, brushing off the matter.

The truth was, the bracelet's normal size was uncomfortable for him to wear, and he didn't want to attract any unnecessary attention, especially after shrinking it to conceal its magical properties.

Deciding to stow it away for later use, Rhaegar discreetly placed the bracelet in the incubator housing the dragon eggs. With no one paying much heed to the small incident, they all awaited the commencement of the tournament with a sense of calm.

In a bid to appease the tensions from the previous day, the usual events such as riding, shooting, and melee were omitted for this particular match. Instead, the focus was solely on dueling.

As the two combatants made their separate entrances into the arena, all eyes were on them.

One of them, the young man from Dorne, was undoubtedly the star of the day.

The other figure, however, failed to impress the crowd.

A swordsman with curly hair and a slight stature, he lacked the imposing armor that typically adorned duelists, instead opting for a lightweight leather attire.

"That's Syrio!" Rhaegar exclaimed, his eyes widening as he recognized the curly-haired swordsman.

Viserys cast a curious glance at Rhaegar, asking, "Do you know who that swordsman is?"

Rhaegar nodded, "We shared tea together yesterday. He's a wandering swordsman with impressive skills who wished to pledge his allegiance to me."

As he spoke, Rhaegar couldn't help but smile faintly.

Viserys subtly furrowed his brow and stroked his chin in thought. "Let me guess, you declined his offer?"

"Yes, he's a mysterious man of uncertain origins. I couldn't trust him," Rhaegar replied casually, popping a reddish candy into his mouth.

"You made the right decision. I received some news this morning that I can share with you," Viserys said, winking at Lyonel as he ruffled Rhaegar's hair.

Lyonel rose from his seat and produced a small note, reading aloud, "Syrio Friar, born to a minor noble family in Braavos, later joined a certain sect of believers and frequently undertook perilous missions."

"Two months ago, he assassinated a prominent figure in Braavos, resulting in a warrant for his arrest across the realm. He was subsequently apprehended and brought to Westeros."

"Half a month ago, posing as a wandering entertainer, he gained the trust of a nobleman's daughter and made his way to King's Landing."

"Yesterday afternoon, at the banquet following Prince Daemon's return, he enlisted in the tournament and challenged Degas Orleans to a duel."

Lyonel relayed Syrio's background in one breath, taking a sip of wine to moisten his throat before turning his gaze toward Daemon.

Daemon's expression remained neutral and indifferent.

Rhaegar listened attentively, silently impressed by Lord Lyonel's astuteness.

"To impart a lesson, remember that no wall is impregnable under the sky, and strength lies in honor and integrity," Viserys remarked, delighting in his eldest son's astonishment.

"I understand, Father," Rhaegar replied obediently, absorbing his father's words.

Viserys took pride in his son's compliance, resolving to impart more lessons and guidance to his eldest in the future.

"The duel is about to begin," Rhaenyra's clear voice interrupted the exchange between father and son.

The two contestants positioned themselves in the dueling arena.

The Dornish youth wielded his spear, cautiously circling Syrio, while the referee signaled the start with a blow of his horn.

Unlike the previous day, the Dornish youth seemed more subdued, likely wary of Caraxes's presence.

Meanwhile, Syrio remained stationary, his one-handed sword held behind his back.

"Shorty, who sent you here to meet your end?" the Dornish youth taunted, attempting to provoke Syrio.

Syrio, however, remained unfazed, replying in a calm tone, "All men meet their end eventually. But I don't believe it's my time just yet."

"Is that so? I see death in your future," the Dornish youth retorted as he cautiously approached with his weapon.

"To speak of death is to invite it. And perhaps it is you who will die."

Syrio continued to hold his sword single-handedly, unfaltering in his stance.

"Little swordsman, I'll cut off your legs and make you a true half-man," the Dornish youth threatened.

With a tentative thrust, the Dornish youth initiated the attack, his movements swift and precise.

But Syrio was even faster.

With a swift strike, he deflected the spear's shaft with his sword, causing the weapon to veer off course.

Taking advantage of the opening, Syrio swiftly stepped forward and aimed a blow at the Dornish youth's elbow, successfully landing the hit before retracting his foot into a defensive stance.

Meeting the Dornish youth's indignant gaze, Syrio remarked lightly, "Short? You'll come to know my greatness when your head rolls at your feet."

Though angered by Syrio's words, the Dornish youth exercised restraint, refraining from acting impulsively.

The duel reached a stalemate, with neither side making a move.

Unimpressed by their lack of action, the spectators jeered, urging them to continue the fight.

It was clear that the duel needed to reach a decisive conclusion soon.

Either Syrio would emerge victorious by beheading the Dornish youth.

Or the Dornish youth would swiftly dispatch Syrio, allowing a more skilled knight to execute him in turn.

Listening to the uproar from the spectators, Syrio sighed deeply. "I had intended to grant you a few more moments of life, but death is as inevitable as the flow of water."

"Quit your babbling. I'm not intimidated by a dwarf who can't even mount a horse."

Despite the Dornish youth's curses, he remained hesitant to launch an attack.

Syrio chuckled softly. "You're mistaken. I'm taller than a horse's saddle, I've measured."

Before the Dornish youth could react, Syrio sprang into action, his movements swift as the wind.

Closing the distance between them with remarkable speed, Syrio caught the Dornish youth off guard.

In a desperate attempt to fend him off, the Dornish youth thrust his spear forward in a sweeping motion.

But Syrio deftly evaded the attack, using the back of his sword to knock the spear's tip to the ground.

Seizing the opportunity, Syrio swiftly raised his sword and plunged it into the Dornish youth's chest.

A spurt of blood erupted from the wound, and the Dornish youth's resistance crumbled instantly.

Confusion clouded his eyes as he struggled to comprehend why he was dying so swiftly.

"You...sneak attacked..."

With a final glare of disbelief, the Dornish youth loosened his grip on the lance and collapsed to the ground.

Syrio, filled with a sense of pity, seized the Dornish youth's hair and exposed his neck.

"Your instructor taught you techniques but failed to instill in you the value of your own life," Syrio remarked solemnly.

With a swift motion, he raised his iron sword high and severed the Dornish youth's head from his body.

Chapter 25: The King's Mind Games

As Syrio emerged victorious from the duel, the crowd erupted into a chorus of cheers and applause, acknowledging his exceptional skill with the sword. The referee, sensing Syrio's readiness to continue, inquired if he wished to proceed with the match.

"Indeed, I strive to claim the title of champion," Syrio declared confidently, his grip firm on his iron sword as he graciously bowed to the king and the assembled audience.

Viserys observed the proceedings with a sense of amusement, harboring some goodwill towards the foreign swordsman who had bested the Dornish challenger. Syrio's prowess was evident as he effortlessly dispatched one opponent after another, his elegant swordplay captivating the spectators and earning their admiration.

As the sun reached its zenith, signaling noon, Viserys decided to bring the tournament to a halt. Rising from his seat with a stretch to ease his tired muscles, he expressed his satisfaction with the spectacle.

"An impressive display of skill!" Viserys remarked, addressing the gathered crowd.

Upon his command, a servant approached Syrio and relayed the king's desire to speak with him. Syrio, ever respectful, approached the edge of the dueling ring and knelt before the platform where Viserys sat.

"Why remain below, swordsman? Come join me up here," Viserys invited, gesturing for Syrio to ascend.

With his sword resting on his knee, Syrio replied with conviction, "I fight for honor. Should I emerge victorious and claim the championship, I will pledge my allegiance to Your Grace."

"Intriguing," Viserys responded with interest. "The tournament concludes in five days. If you emerge as the champion, I shall grant you a boon."

"I am deeply grateful for your generosity, Your Majesty," Syrio expressed his thanks humbly.

Viserys then signaled for Syrio to step back, taking Rhaegar's hand as he began to depart from the gathering, followed by the other guests as they trailed after the king.

...

As they settled in Viserys' study within the Red Keep, leaving the excitement of the tournament behind, Viserys posed a question to his children.

"Do any of you wonder why I made a promise to that swordsman?" he inquired, his gaze shifting between Rhaegar and Rhaenyra.

Rhaegar furrowed his brow, contemplating the question, while Rhaenyra responded with a hint of disinterest, "You once mentioned that the best way to truly understand someone or something is to observe them over time."

Viserys nodded approvingly at her recollection. "Indeed, observing is key."

With a slight smile, he continued, "Having capable individuals in positions of power serves as a preventative measure against potential risks. Additionally, it allows us to continue investigating the origins of any threats."

Perplexed, Rhaegar interjected, "But wouldn't ignoring the risks lead to consequences?"

"Exactly," Viserys affirmed. "Which is why I aim to instill in you both the importance of remaining vigilant and never underestimating potential dangers."

Viserys retrieved an example from history, recalling the Battle of the Stepstones. "The Stepstones hold significant strategic importance," he began, addressing his children. "Yet, during the invasion by the Three Daughters, do you understand why I refrained from sending troops preemptively?"

Rhaenyra hesitated before responding, her complexion paling slightly. "You wished to avoid inciting war and facing scrutiny from the realm," she offered tentatively.

Viserys shook his head gently. "Incorrect. The Battle of the Stepstones was defensive in nature. History remembers the king's triumph over the Three Daughters' pirates as a testament to his strategic brilliance."

Turning to Rhaegar, Viserys sought his son's opinion. "What do you think?"

Rhaegar furrowed his brow in thought before replying, "Because someone else was bound to defeat the Three Daughters..."

Viserys smiled, pleased with Rhaegar's straightforward answer. "Precisely, Rhaegar. You have a keen insight."

Applauding his son's astuteness, Viserys continued, "The Three Daughters' aggression directly threatened the sea serpent Corlys Velaryon and his family. Corlys would not sit idly by."

Rhaenyra, however, remained puzzled. "So? You allowed the pirates to harm your people and prompted the sea serpent to wage war instead of taking decisive action yourself?"

In her view, it was the king's duty to confront the Triarchy head-on rather than shifting the burden of war onto his subjects and potentially jeopardizing his own authority.

Viserys remained composed as he addressed his daughter's skepticism, patiently unraveling the complexities of the situation.

"During the Triarchy invasion, your mother tragically passed away during childbirth, and Rhaegar, as my son and potential heir, was born unconscious," he began, his tone measured. "According to tradition, my brother Daemon was the natural choice to ascend the Iron Throne."

He continued, recounting the turbulent events. "However, I was resolute in my decision to name you, Rhaenyra, as my heir. When tensions escalated with Daemon, I acted in anger and banished him from court."

Viserys met Rhaenyra's gaze evenly. "Consider, in such a precarious situation, could the royal family afford the risks associated with initiating a war?"

Rhaenyra attempted to counter his explanation. "But we have dragons and loyal lords!" she protested.

Viserys countered her argument with a sobering reality. "These dragons were in the Dragon's Pit and on Dragonstone. How many dragons were available for war? And who would command the tumultuous seas, even if we were to mobilize our forces?"

His words left Rhaenyra at a loss. "But Daemon has Caraxes, and I could lead the army..." she began, only to be interrupted by Viserys.

"Daemon has been cast out by me, forfeiting his claim to the throne. Would he then pledge his loyalty to me or to you, the newly appointed heir?" Viserys questioned pointedly.

"Absolutely not! Nor would I seek Daemon's help with a straight face."

"Syrax is a young dragon who has never been to war, would I risk sending my newly designated heir, you, into battle, potentially exposing you to assassination?"

The weight of Viserys' words bore down on Rhaenyra, silencing her protests. She realized the grim reality of the situation and found herself unable to respond.

Viserys' words cut through Rhaenyra's uncertainty like a blade, laying bare the harsh realities of politics and war.

He paused, allowing the weight of his words to sink in before continuing. "On the contrary, the royal family dispatched only 3,000 soldiers, while Corlys and Daemon bore the burden of launching a private war against the Three Daughters for the realm's sake."

He recounted the sacrifices made and the lack of tangible rewards, his voice steady and unwavering. "Years of relentless battle, untold toil, and depletion of resources—all for a claim to a desolate island."

Viserys took a measured sip from his glass, his gaze piercing. "And what did they gain? Nothing. Corlys and his family were shattered, forced to retreat from the Stepstones. Your uncle Daemon, burdened by the weight of his position, relinquished his crown and returned to King's Landing, humbly seeking peace."

He approached Rhaenyra, his tone firm yet gentle. "Meanwhile, you, my chosen heir, have grown into a remarkable individual, and peace prevails throughout the realm."

"Do you now understand, my daughter?" Viserys asked, his words laden with wisdom and insight.

Rhaenyra was struck by her father's foresight, realizing the complexities she had overlooked in her simplistic understanding of the situation. His words resonated deeply within her.

For a moment, the figure before her seemed both familiar and unfamiliar, evoking memories of the father she once knew – one who possessed a smile for everyone.

She bowed her head respectfully. "Father, the Seven Gods have bestowed upon you unparalleled wisdom. I have doubted you, and for that, I am deeply ashamed."

Viserys, though sometimes indecisive as a king, demonstrated astute political awareness that Rhaenyra could not overlook.

Chapter 26: Dreamer

Viserys placed a reassuring hand on his daughter's shoulder, whispering softly, "There's no need to rush, my dear. You have a long journey ahead, and in time, you'll learn the ways of leadership and governance."

"I'm truly sorry, Father," Rhaenyra murmured, her eyes welling with tears as she felt the depth of her father's love, willingly embracing him.

"It's alright. A father's duty is to ease the burdens and pave a path of ease for his child," Viserys comforted her tenderly, gently running his fingers through her hair.

Rhaenyra's guilt deepened at his words, and she nestled closer to him.

"Well, don't let Rhaegar catch you looking so sentimental," Viserys teased lightly.

"Hmph, he wouldn't dare," Rhaenyra retorted, breaking away from her father's embrace with a stubborn huff.

"What's gotten into you?" she added, shooting a pointed glare at Rhaegar.

Meanwhile, Rhaegar remained speechless, feeling awkwardly out of place amidst the sudden emotional exchange.

Here they were, having a pleasant conversation, and suddenly emotions were running high between the two of them. It left him feeling awkward, embarrassed to be the only one standing on the sidelines!

What more could they possibly expect from him?

Feeling the tension, Viserys pulled Rhaegar into a hug, offering a gentle reminder, "Don't tease your brother, he surpasses you in certain areas."

Rhaenyra stubbornly averted her gaze, remaining noncommittal.

"Tell your sister what you've gleaned from this experience," Viserys chuckled, turning to Rhaegar.

"Are you sure?" Rhaegar hesitated, casting a tentative glance at his sister.

"Absolutely. Exceptional insights should never go unshared," Viserys reassured him.

With a nod, Rhaegar began slowly, "In a dream, I once heard a phrase: 'Killing with a borrowed knife.'"

"Killing with a borrowed knife?" Viserys echoed, taken aback by the unfamiliarity of the phrase.

A moment of silence stretched before Viserys's smile faded, conceding, "Indeed, it's 'killing with a borrowed knife.'"

"A profound saying, encapsulating great wisdom," he added solemnly.

"And there you have it, can you appreciate your brother's wisdom?" Viserys turned to Rhaenyra.

"All men have their dreams; Rhaegar's are just a bit more peculiar," Rhaenyra replied, her pride preventing her from conceding any hint of inferiority.

"No, Rhaegar's dreams are far from ordinary. Remember Daenys the Dreamer?" Viserys's tone turned serious.

"Daenys Targaryen, the young girl known to the world as the Dreamer, relied on a dream prophecy to save the Targaryen lineage," Rhaenyra interjected, recalling the historical context.

Viserys tenderly stroked Rhaegar's forehead, his voice softening. "I paid little attention to your dreams until the past six months, when Erryk informed me of your frequent nightmares."

"That could be the mark of a Dreamer, in my estimation."

"Perhaps, but I find it unsettling, and the nightmares torment me," Rhaegar confessed softly, not denying the truth of it.

"Rhaegar, you must heed my words," Viserys's demeanor grew unusually grave. "Our family has produced many Dragonlords, but few Dreamers."

"What is the power of dragon intimidation compared to the gift of prophecy?" he continued. "Your dreams, whether beautiful or nightmarish, may hold valuable warnings. Embrace them and interpret them wisely."

Rhaegar leaned into Viserys's embrace, sensing his father's excitement, barely contained despite his trembling.

"When your sister was young, I had a dream that has remained etched in my mind, never to be forgotten," Viserys confessed, tears welling in his eyes as he lifted his head to meet Rhaegar's gaze.

"I pursued that dream with all my heart, paying a terrible price for it, yet it has yielded naught," he continued, his voice heavy with emotion.

Taking a deep breath, Viserys composed himself. "Now, with you possessing the health and talent I once dreamed of, I should find contentment."

"Rhaegar, remember my words. Do not squander your gift; do not view it as a burden," he urged earnestly.

Moved by his father's vulnerability, Rhaegar remained silent, reaching up to gently wipe away his tears.

"I will, Father," Rhaegar affirmed silently in his heart.

With the weight of their discussion weighing heavily upon him, Viserys realized his emotions were getting the better of him and decided to end the conversation.

Preferring solitude, he instructed his children to retire to their rooms and rest.

...

The siblings strolled aimlessly down the lengthy corridor, emerging from their father's study.

"Are your dreams truly prophetic?" Rhaenyra suddenly inquired.

"Mostly, they're fragmented bits of information that are difficult for me to decipher," Rhaegar responded honestly.

"Fair enough. So, what have you been dreaming about?" Rhaenyra halted, bending down to meet Rhaegar's gaze.

Rhaegar, uncharacteristically aloof, recalled the events of the previous night, a flicker of insight crossing his mind.

"I had a rather unsettling dream last night. It jolted me awake," he remarked, feigning mystery.

"Tell me about it!" Rhaenyra's curiosity was piqued.

Suppressing an eyeroll, Rhaegar continued, "I dreamt of an invisible and intangible dragon, claiming it wanted me as its rider."

"How could you know it was a dragon if it was unseen and unheard?" Rhaenyra interjected, her confusion evident.

"I could sense its presence, hear its growls," Rhaegar retorted. "And please, refrain from interrupting."

"Fine, fine. Continue," Rhaenyra acquiesced impatiently.

Rhaegar fabricated further, "The dragon informed me it couldn't meet me yet, as there's an entity in King's Landing that disgusts it."

"And what might that be?" Rhaenyra queried without hesitation.

"The Dragon's Pit," Rhaegar declared, straightening his posture.

"But the Dragon's Pit has stood for years, hosting countless dragons, including my Syrax," Rhaenyra remarked, uncertain upon hearing the revelation.

Rhaegar elaborated on his fabrication, "The dragon insisted it belongs in the open skies and wilds, deeming the Dragon's Pit too confining for its growth."

"It also expressed disdain for being confined and enslaved, shackled like a common slave," he added, weaving the tale further.

"Is that truly what the dragon conveyed to you? You're not fabricating this, are you?" Rhaenyra scrutinized Rhaegar with a dubious gaze.

"That's exactly how it unfolded in the dream, whether you choose to believe it or not," Rhaegar retorted, his tone firm.

"I'll inform Father; I doubt he'll question the validity of my dream," he added with a soft grunt, extricating himself from Rhaenyra's skeptical grasp.

"That may be so, but since the construction of the Dragon's Pit, the maesters have been vigilant in their oversight, and nothing untoward has occurred," Rhaenyra countered, offering a practical perspective.

"And how can you be certain there are no nefarious individuals among the Maesters?" Rhaegar speculated, his thoughts drifting to the Maesters of Oldtown.

He had harbored a distrust of the maester order from the outset, their chained collars a symbol of suspicion in his eyes.

"Perhaps you're correct. Father did emphasize the importance of trusting our dreams," Rhaenyra conceded, encouraging her brother to value his visions.

The gift of prophecy was an ancient heritage, and any Targaryen endowed with it held a position of authority not to be disregarded.

Preferring not to disillusion her brother, Rhaenyra opted to end the debate.

The siblings exchanged further conversation before parting ways to their respective chambers.

...

With the door to his room looming ahead, Rhaegar walked with his head bowed, lost in thought about his abilities as a Dreamer.

As he approached, a message flashed on the system panel.

[Rhaegar Targaryen]

Skills: Dreamer (Gold), Longevity (Green)

Bloodline: Old Valyrian Dragon King (12%)

Skills: Old Valyrian Language (Proficient)...

Relic: Blood and Fire (Flame Resistance +50%)

Evaluation: "Possessing a robust Dragonlord bloodline, comparable to those of the Valyrian Freehold era."

Chapter 27: Helaena

Rhaegar's gaze lingered on the talent column displayed in the system panel, his focus drawn to the sparse entry for the "Dreamer" talent. There was little elaboration beyond its classification as a Gold grade talent.

Despite his various acquisitions, the Skull of Balerion remained his most prized relic, its legendary status denoted by its striking red hue.

The grading system he had come to understand ranked relics as Legendary (Red), Epic (Purple), Excellent (Blue), and Good (Green). Below the Good grade, the existence of lower tiers remained a mystery.

The Gold grade designation hinted at the immense potential inherent in the Dreamer talent. Rhaegar had experienced countless dreams—visions that spanned dragons, flames, and looming conflicts. Among them were strange, otherworldly phenomena, as well as eerily accurate prophecies.

The encounter with the White Hart in Kingswood, a creature that had not only materialized from his dreams but also aided in his recovery, underscored the significance of his innate gift.

Reflecting on his father's recent remarks, Rhaegar found himself reassessing the recurring nightmares that had plagued him. Slowly, a newfound appreciation for the capabilities bestowed upon him by the Dreamer talent began to take root within his heart.

Grunt~~

Rhaegar was abruptly pulled from his reverie by the unsettling sound of rolling objects echoing through the empty corridor behind him.

With a cautious glance over his shoulder, Rhaegar scanned the dimly lit hallway.

Erryk, his usual companion, was absent tonight, having been called away by his father, leaving Rhaegar feeling distinctly uneasy at the unexpected disturbance.

As the leather ball skittered across the floor, its movement seemed eerily out of place in the hushed stillness of the night.

Summoning his resolve, Rhaegar called out into the darkness, his voice cutting through the silence in an attempt to draw the attention of any nearby servants on duty.

"Who's there?"

Yet, despite his efforts, the echo of his own voice was the only response that greeted him.

A shiver ran down Rhaegar's spine as he retreated, his gaze lingering on the door to his room, looming ominously in the dim light. With a swallow, he took a hesitant step backward, his nerves on edge as he braced himself for whatever unsettling encounter might await him.

Ta-da-da-da...

In that moment, the soft echo of footsteps reached Rhaegar's ears, the sound of leather shoes with cowhide soles treading lightly on the wooden floorboards.

Turning swiftly, Rhaegar caught sight of a fleeting white figure darting past in a flash of moonlight. "Brother, do you want to play pickleball?" came a small voice, interrupting the stillness of the night. There stood a young girl in the hallway, clad in pink, clutching a leather ball in her tiny hands, her gaze fixed eagerly on Rhaegar.

With silver-white hair and delicate features, she bore a striking resemblance to their shared bloodline.

Rhaegar's expression darkened as he recognized the figure before him—his half-sister, Princess Helaena.

"Helaena, what are you doing out here in the middle of the night?" Rhaegar's tone was stern, his frustration evident as he addressed the young princess.

Helaena hugged her beloved pickleball tightly, leaning against the corridor wall with a sheepish smile. "Aegon plays pickleball during the day, so I play at night," she explained innocently.

Concern etched into his features, Rhaegar approached his sister. "Children should be asleep at this hour, Helaena. Why aren't you in bed?"

Helaena flinched as her seldom-seen brother approached, her gaze dropping to the floor. "I can only play secretly while he sleeps because Aegon won't give me a ball to play with," she admitted softly.

Rhaegar's expression darkened at her words. "He doesn't play with you? Doesn't your mother care about that?" he asked, his tone laced with disapproval.

"Aegon plays with me when my mother is here, but he doesn't when she's gone," Helaena replied, her voice tinged with sadness as she shook her head.

Rhaegar's anger flared at the injustice of it all. Taking Helaena's small hand in his own, he spoke with determination. "I'll take you back to your room for some rest. Tomorrow, I'll have the craftsman make you a custom leather ball so you won't need this one anymore."

Without uttering a word, Helaena remained rooted in place, her back pressed against the wall.

"What's the matter? Why aren't you happy?" Rhaegar inquired once more, refraining from attempting to coax the petite Helaena.

Helaena simply shook her head, clutching the ball tightly to her chest.

"Are you worried that Aegon will try to take the ball from you?" Rhaegar treaded cautiously, recalling Aegon's past behavior.

Helaena glanced up at him, her lips pursed in a pout, but she remained silent.

"In that case, why don't you leave the leather ball with me? You can take it out whenever you want to play without worrying about Aegon," Rhaegar suggested tentatively after a brief pause.

"Alright. I'll give you the ball. Aegon won't dare to take it from you," Helaena whispered, her violet eyes shimmering brightly as she nodded her head firmly.

Extending her hand, she relinquished the leather ball she had been guarding to Rhaegar's grasp.

This little girl isn't naive; in fact, she possesses quite a bit of courage, and she knows that Aegon wouldn't dare challenge Rhaegar.

Rhaegar shook his head, his smile fading. "Not this one. Tomorrow, I'll have a new leather ball sent to you. You can give this one to Aegon for his play."

Relenting, Helaena's face lit up with a radiant smile.

Helaena's room was situated on the same floor as Rhaegar's.

Initially, she and Aegon had shared living quarters with their mother, Alicent.

However, with the arrival of the baby, Aemon, Alicent found it challenging to handle his crying.

Thus, she arranged for three separate rooms to accommodate each of the children individually.

Listening to Helaena's account, Rhaegar learned that the servant who usually looked after her had been frequently called away for work lately.

Consequently, Helaena and Aegon spent most of their time together during the day.

This arrangement often left Aegon in a position to bully Helaena, prompting her to seek solace in nighttime play when he was resting.

Rhaegar had been unaware of these circumstances, as it coincided with Rhaenyra's return to the Red Keep for the tournament.

Being short-staffed was, unfortunately, a common occurrence.

Sending Helaena back to her room, Rhaegar leaned casually against the doorframe and playfully advised, "No more late-night escapades. You know, the Red Keep is teeming with ferocious dragons after dark. You wouldn't want to be their midnight snack, would you?"

Rhaegar then feigned a dragon's roar, complete with clawing motions, trying to spook his little sister.

However, Helaena simply covered her mouth, giggling uncontrollably, completely unfazed by his antics.

"Heh, looks like you're quite the brave one." Rhaegar chuckled, admiring her fearlessness.

Captivated by her adorable laughter, Rhaegar couldn't resist the urge to playfully pinch her cheeks, almost as if he couldn't help himself.

He saw Helaena suddenly stop, her smiling face vanishing in an instant before he could even lay a hand on her.

"What's wrong, Helaena?" Rhaegar's concern was evident as he noticed the abrupt change in her expression.

"Hungry wolves staring at lambs," Helaena nervously muttered, her eyes fixed straight ahead.

"What do you mean, Helaena? Did you see or hear something?" Rhaegar's mind raced, connecting Helaena's cryptic words with the rumors swirling around her.

He suspected that she might possess a gift similar to his own, one of prophecy and foresight.

But Helaena silently retreated into her room, closing the door behind her, shutting Rhaegar out.

He hesitated, hand raised to knock on the door, but ultimately decided against it. Helaena seemed to be in a state of self-preservation after whatever premonition she'd had, and it didn't feel right to disturb her.

"Helaena, go rest, and I'll make sure to order you a new Leatherball," he called softly through the closed door, before retreating to his own room in silence.

...

He still had a plethora of old books stored away in his space bracelet, waiting to be explored.

If he wanted to truly grasp the intricacies of the Dreamer's talent, he might need to delve into these texts first.

His attention lingered on the Bloodline section of the system panel.

[Rhaegar Targaryen]

Bloodline: Old Valyrian Dragon King (12%)

Since the awakening of the Explorer system, the Bloodline section had undergone frequent changes.

Initially, it stood at a modest 5%, but after acquiring "Fire and Blood," it surged by 8%.

Despite subsequent fluctuations, it continued its gradual ascent.

Rhaegar speculated that the percentage reflected the purity of his bloodline, as suggested in the evaluation section.

"A robust lineage of the Dragon Kings, boasting excellence even amidst the era of the Old Valyrians."

Within half a year, the purity of his bloodline had soared to 12%, more than doubling its original value.

The "+" sign preceding the percentage had vanished, indicating that the efficacy of "Blood and Fire" had reached its zenith and would no longer increase.

"Returning to the texts, ancient Valyria boasted numerous families of dragon lords. What significance does a pure bloodline hold?" Rhaegar mused, recalling Viserys's remarks about the Dreamer's talent.

Determined not to squander any potential, Rhaegar now held his abilities in the highest regard.

Chapter 28: Gossip

Amidst dark clouds looming overhead and rough waves crashing against the shore, Rhaegar's slender frame ascended a coconut tree. His gaze darted anxiously at the rising water below.

Cold tendrils wrapped around his ankles, gradually creeping up to engulf his calves. Though panic gripped him, his attempts to call for help were stifled, his voice silenced by an unseen force.

A deafening rumble shattered the uneasy silence as lightning rent the sky, illuminating the darkness with its blinding flash. Torrential rain began to cascade down, drenching Rhaegar to the bone.

"Where... where am I?" he muttered, disoriented by the sudden deluge.

A low, ominous hiss reverberated through the air, mingling with the roar of thunder. Rhaegar's eyes widened in astonishment as a colossal creature emerged from the dense clouds, its massive wings beating rhythmically as it soared into the distance.

Straining to catch a glimpse of the creature amidst the downpour, Rhaegar was met only by the relentless patter of rain against his skin, its rhythmic cadence filling the air with a sense of foreboding.

As rainwater trickled down his cheeks, Rhaegar instinctively raised a hand to wipe it away.

When he opened his eyes once more, the behemoth was circling back, its massive wingspan casting a shadow over the island below.

"Ah...! Stay away!" Rhaegar cried out in terror, his heart pounding in his chest as the creature drew closer, its ominous silhouette looming overhead.

In the blink of an eye, darkness consumed him, and he was jolted awake, violently thrown from his bed.

"What in the seven hells!" Rhaegar exclaimed, his breath coming in ragged gasps as he scanned his surroundings, his senses on high alert.

The familiar sight of his room greeted him, and he sank back onto the bed, wiping the cold sweat from his brow with a trembling hand.

"Damn it, another nightmare," he muttered, his voice trembling with fear. "And it's the same one as before, haunting me like a relentless specter."

It seemed that these recurring nightmares had taken root in his subconscious, tormenting him with their vivid imagery and unsettling themes.

Rhaegar sighed heavily, his mind still reeling from the ordeal. "Perhaps they're just figments of my imagination, but they feel all too real."

Yesterday, he delved deep into the pages of ancient tomes, poring over them until the early hours of the morning. The Dreamer talent had been consuming his thoughts ever since.

It was a peculiar phenomenon, but perhaps a blessing in disguise. Each successive nightmare seemed to unveil a new layer of understanding.

"Anything out of the ordinary tends to stir up trouble," Rhaegar mused, frustration evident in his voice as he ran a hand through his tousled hair. "These recurring dreams hold some sort of prophetic significance, that much is clear."

His brow furrowed in deep concentration as he pondered the implications of his nocturnal visions.

...

After finishing his meal, the servant brought the usual fare of bread, milk, and fried eggs.

"Shall we attend the tournament today, Prince?"

Rhaegar took a final sip of milk just as Erryk entered the room, timing his arrival perfectly.

"Not much to see there. Let's head to the Dragon's Pit instead. I've yet to visit," Rhaegar replied calmly, dabbing at the milk stains on his lips.

"Very well," Erryk responded in his deep voice.

As he headed towards the door, Rhaegar reached for a piece of parchment on the table and carefully rolled it up.

The Dragon's Pit lay quite a distance from the Red Keep, so the squire had arranged for a carriage in advance.

Erryk's gaze lingered on Rhaegar, his expression tinged with concern, as if he were wrestling with unspoken words.

Growing weary of the scrutiny, Rhaegar finally broke the silence. "Ser, is it because I'm dressed the wrong way? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Erryk hesitated briefly before responding, "It's nothing about your attire, Your Highness. You just seem a bit off today."

They had traveled quite a distance and it was hard not to worry about the normally jovial prince. He was silent the whole time.

Rhaegar sighed, a weariness settling over him. "I had another nightmare," he admitted, his voice heavy with fatigue.

The concern in Erryk's eyes deepened as he observed the exhaustion etched on Rhaegar's face. "Perhaps you should seek counsel from a Maester. Sleeplessness and nightmares are troubling signs."

Rhaegar's smile was wistful. "No need for that. My father taught me to embrace all dreams, whether pleasant or otherwise."

"With all due respect, Your Highness, you seem to prefer the pleasant ones," Erryk remarked, his brow furrowing in worry.

"Don't fret over me, Ser." Rhaegar interjected, brushing off the concern. "Experiencing life's ups and downs early on isn't necessarily a detriment."

He swiftly shifted the conversation. "Now, about that forge you mentioned, where can I find it?"

Erryk said, "There's a skilled blacksmith located on the Street of Silk. His craftsmanship is highly esteemed."

"Excellent," Rhaegar replied, a spark of enthusiasm igniting in his eyes. "Let's make a stop there on our way."

With their destination decided, Erryk directed the coachman to hasten their journey toward the forge.

...

The royal carriage not only boasted exquisite beauty but also remarkable swiftness as it gracefully traversed the bustling streets, eventually arriving at Silk Street. With a gentle halt, it positioned itself before a seemingly inconspicuous blacksmith's shop.

Parting the curtains, Rhaegar's gaze fell upon the scene outside, where a robust, youthful figure hammered away at the forge, sparks dancing in the air.

"This lad is the grandson and apprentice of the old blacksmith," Erryk remarked as he assisted Rhaegar from the carriage.

"Go and fetch your grandfather," Erryk casually instructed, flicking a glimmering gold coin towards the apprentice blacksmith. "Inform him that a distinguished guest awaits his presence."

"Of course, Ser Kingsguard," the apprentice acknowledged, recognizing the resplendent figure clad in silver-armored robes. With haste, he abandoned his work and dashed towards the shop.

Before long, a portly old man, scarcely reaching five feet in height yet boasting a full, bushy beard, emerged from the shop - the proprietor himself, Ornn.

With a hearty stride, the elderly blacksmith approached the pair, his voice resonating with warmth and hospitality. "Esteemed guests, I, blacksmith Ornn, bid you welcome," he proclaimed, executing a bow towards Rhaegar with some effort.

Observing the rotund figure before him, Rhaegar couldn't help but conceal a hint of amusement. Despite standing face to face, Ornn's stout and plump stature suggested a formidable presence that might easily flatten him.

Producing a rolled cylinder of parchment, Rhaegar presented it to Ornn, elucidating, "This contains the blueprint for a bracelet. I require an exact replica crafted with utmost haste."

"Consider it done. Should it be tailored to fit your wrist?" inquired Ornn, his confidence unwavering.

"Yes, precisely. It is intended to replace a gift that proved ill-fitting," confirmed Rhaegar, outlining his requirements.

Assuring the customer of his capability, Ornn thumped his chest confidently. "Fear not. Retrieve the bracelet before dusk, and I guarantee it shall meet your specifications."

"I trust in Erryk's commendation. See to it that he is duly compensated for his services, Ser," Rhaegar concluded, sealing the agreement with succinct efficiency.

Old Ornn, however, refused the bag of coins that Erryk proffered, declaring, "I seek no payment other than the honor of seeing a prince adorned with my craftsmanship. It is the most precious reward I could desire."

"Intriguing. And how did you discern my royal lineage? Dare you hazard a guess as to which prince I am?" Rhaegar inquired, a playful glint in his eyes as he regarded the stout blacksmith.

With solemnity, Old Ornn responded, "I have witnessed the king escorting his second son, Aegon, during a past event. Judging by your age, you must be the firstborn son of the late queen, the fabled Sleeping Young Dragon, Rhaegar."

"The Sleeping Young Dragon?" Rhaegar echoed, a bemused expression crossing his features. "What curious moniker is this? Does it pertain to me?"

Unnerved by his inadvertent slip, Old Ornn fell silent, murmuring a hasty apology for his misstep.

Observing Old Ornn's reticence, Rhaegar redirected his attention to Erryk, his countenance marked by dissatisfaction. "Ser, when was I bestowed with such a name?"

"Since the conclusion of the last Kingswood hunt, tales of your inherent vulnerability and the White Hart's benediction have circulated widely among the populace," Erryk murmured, casting a cautionary glance towards the aging blacksmith.

"The King issued a decree expressly forbidding any discussion regarding you, yet rumors persisted," he continued in a hushed tone.

"It was not until your gallant reception of Princess Rhaenyra on her return journey and your subsequent public appearance that the moniker gained traction."

Furrowing his brow, Rhaegar queried, "So my father's decree confining me to the confines of the Red Keep is somehow linked to this?"

"In part, yes. However, His Grace's motivations are multifaceted, and the full extent of the matter remains shrouded..." Erryk trailed off cautiously.

"One reason suffices," Rhaegar interjected tersely, indicating a desire to conclude the matter.

Chapter 29: The Bastard

Rhaegar interrupted with frustration evident in his tone:

"Father grounded me over mere gossip. Isn't that excessive?"

"Gossip can be harmful. His Grace simply wanted to protect you from any potential trouble," Erryk explained.

Rhaegar scoffed bitterly, "He was worried someone might fill my head with dangerous notions."

Listening intently, Erryk paused to consider Rhaegar's words.

"The Sleeping Dragon!"

The moniker implied weakness and vulnerability, suggesting the infant's frailty. But "infant dragon" also carries the connotation of youth and potential.

"If a dragon were to awaken from slumber, what would be its first act?"

Rhaegar pondered aloud, his expression thoughtful.

Upon awakening from a deep slumber, a dragon's primary task is to nourish itself and mature into its full dragonhood.

"And what name would befit such a transformation?"

"Awakened Dragon" or "Roaring Dragon"?

This was a deliberate effort to sow discord by spreading the reputation of the King's first son.

"A sleeping dragon may be vulnerable, but it's preferable to one that never wakes at all." Rhaegar consoled himself.

Meeting Erryk's gaze squarely as he issued his command: "Ensure he receives every penny of his wages, and henceforth, any rumors concerning me are to be reported to me directly."

"Consider it done," Erryk replied with a grimace, acknowledging the directive.

"Let's go. Take me to purchase some toys for toddlers, and then we'll head to the Dragon's Pit," Rhaegar declared, his mood darkening further as he stepped into the carriage.

...

The wagon came to a halt on Silk Street, where Erryk swiftly darted off to procure an array of toys, stuffing them into the carriage before they continued on to the Dragon's Pit.

Perched atop a mountain, the Dragon's Pit stood apart from the bustling city center, its surroundings notably more tranquil.

Upon arrival, no welcoming party awaited them at the gate; only two armored guards stood sentry.

Spotting the royal carriage, one of the guards approached, curiosity evident in his tone: "Which lord graces us with his presence?"

"Rhaegar Targaryen, firstborn son of Viserys I!" Erryk announced proudly as he emerged from the carriage.

Although they couldn't see the prince himself, the guards saluted, recognizing the authority conveyed by the white robes of the Kingsguard, and promptly opened the gate to admit them.

The Dragon's Pit sprawled across a vast expanse, boasting numerous entrances and exits scattered throughout its perimeter.

Aside from the grand front gate, there were caves nestled within the mountain and openings carved into the cliffsides—pathways through which the dragons could freely roam.

Outside the gate, the royal carriage remained under vigilant guard, while Rhaegar opted to traverse the grounds on foot, stepping into the expansive courtyard reminiscent of a grand schoolyard.

At the far end loomed a towering, magnificent domed structure, the focal point of the pit.

Scattered throughout the courtyard were the dragon trainers and keepers, bustling about their duties. The majority hailed from Valyrian lineage, their loyalty to the Targaryens spanning generations.

Fluent in the ancient Valyrian tongues, they possessed the unique ability to calm the dragons' restlessness and were tasked with ensuring the creatures' well-being, providing them with sustenance and care.

"Greetings, Your Highness!" They all saluted respectfully as Rhaegar entered the Dragon's Pit.

"Rise. I'm here to take a look around," Rhaegar stated bluntly, cutting straight to the chase.

"I'll be your guide today, Your Highness, as Bass is absent," offered a young apprentice, his features marked by black hair, dark eyes, and a somewhat pallid complexion.

"And what's your name?" Rhaegar inquired politely, extending the courtesy of acknowledgment.

"I am Maynard Waters, Your Highness," the apprentice replied, his voice soft and smile shy.

"Waters?" Rhaegar's brows furrowed slightly, recalling that it was a surname often associated with bastards in certain regions of Westeros. In the Crownlands, Waters was the designated surname for such individuals, much like Snow was in the North.

Rhaegar glanced down at Maynard and couldn't help but notice his plain attire, adorned with a few patches here and there. It was evident that Maynard wasn't living in the lap of luxury.

The plight of bastards was a harsh reality; they often faced discrimination and disdain, even if they were educated or talented. Maynard's demeanor betrayed a hint of insecurity, a feeling all too familiar to those born on the wrong side of the sheets.

Sensing Maynard's discomfort under his scrutiny, Rhaegar felt compelled to offer some words of encouragement, albeit abruptly. "Lift your head up. You've been blessed with a face that's not unpleasant. Don't shy away from it."

Maynard complied, lifting his head with a humble smile, though the shadow of his origins lingered in his eyes.

"The world may remind you of your birth, but that doesn't define your worth. Each person has their own talents, and being a bastard doesn't diminish that," Rhaegar continued, offering a brief but heartfelt reassurance.

Acknowledging the weight of societal judgments based on lineage, Rhaegar couldn't help but silently thank his own mother for the honor she had bestowed upon him.

"Thank you, Mother," he murmured in a silent prayer before nodding to Maynard and proceeding on his way.

Being sad and crying under the covers at night was no longer an option. Now he had to be a leader for himself, and he couldn't mix his personal feelings with his work time.

"Tell me, how many dragons reside within the Dragon's Pit?" Rhaegar inquired as they made their way.

"There are three in total: Dreamfyre, Caraxes, and Syrax," Maynard replied promptly, his demeanor swiftly adjusting to one of professionalism.

"Show me around then. I've never been close to a dragon before."

"I am afraid I can't, Your Highness."

Curiosity piqued, Rhaegar pressed further, "Why can't you show me around? Do the dragons harbor animosity towards people?"

"No, Your Highness. The reason is that Princess Rhaenyra and Prince Daemon were here just before you, intending to take the dragons for a ride," Maynard disclosed truthfully.

Rhaegar's eyes sparked with anticipation at the mention of his sister's presence. Eager to join her and perhaps coax her into allowing him a dragon ride, he instructed, "Take me to her then. I must meet with the dragons."

"Very well. The princess has only just arrived. Let's hasten our steps; there's still time to catch up," Maynard agreed, calculating the time in his mind as they hurried along.

Breathless, Rhaegar hurriedly ascended the platform, barely catching his breath. Just in time, he witnessed a pair of dragonkeepers soothing Syrax and removing the shackles from her feet.

Meanwhile, the scarlet Caraxes stood ready on the other side.

In the midst of the two dragons stood Daemon and Rhaenyra, clad in their dragon suits, engaged in conversation.

"Sister!!!" Rhaegar's excited shout echoed as he dashed towards Rhaenyra, heedless of Erryk's counsel.

Startled by his sudden appearance, Rhaenyra turned to him with confusion evident in her expression. "Rhaegar, what brings you to the Dragon's Pit?"

Drawing closer, he seized his sister's hand with pride. "Didn't I mention last night? The dragon in my dream warned that the Dragon's Pit isn't safe, so I came to investigate."

"I thought you were attending the tournament, but upon entering, I heard you were here as well."

"So, are you seeking me out or the dragons?" Rhaenyra teased, amusement lacing her words.

"Of course, I'm seeking you out. The dragons are just a bonus," Rhaegar replied, unable to contain his excitement at being in such close proximity to the magnificent creatures.

Admiring Syrax's graceful form, he remarked, "This must be Syrax, isn't it? She's as splendid as you."

In contrast, Caraxes's imposing head caught his attention, prompting him to add, "And Caraxes here is truly remarkable."

Rhaegar's preference for Syrax's elegant physique was evident in his brief compliment.

"Syrax is named after the Goddess of Harvest. Naturally, she's beautiful," Rhaenyra replied, seeing through her brother's intentions with a knowing smile.

With arms folded across her chest, she inquired knowingly, "So, dear brother, now that you've seen everything, what else brings you here?"

Chapter 30: Refusing the Request

"Ride a dragon! I want you to take me for a ride on a dragon," Rhaegar eagerly declared.

Rhaenyra couldn't stifle her laughter and affectionately ruffled her brother's hair. "I had a feeling you had something in mind when you sought me out. Otherwise, you wouldn't have come here so eagerly."

"Then, dear sister, may you grant your brother's request?" Rhaegar implored, his eyes filled with anticipation as he gazed at her.

However, Rhaenyra's smile turned apologetic as she gently declined, "I must disappoint you. I already have plans to fly to Dragonstone Island and back with Uncle Daemon, and it will be quite late by the time we return."

Undeterred, Rhaegar persisted, "I can accompany you to Dragonstone Island. I haven't been back to our homeland yet, and I don't mind if it takes longer than expected."

Driven by his desire to ride a dragon, Rhaegar grasped his sister's hand and shook it earnestly.

Caught between her brother's pleading eyes and Daemon's presence, Rhaenyra hesitated. She glanced at Daemon, silently seeking his opinion.

Observing the exchange, Rhaegar also turned his attention to Daemon, curious to see his reaction.

To their surprise, Daemon remained nonchalant, his tone casual as he remarked, "He can join us if he wishes, but your father may not be pleased if he learns I took his heir and eldest son on a journey."

The underlying message was clear: while he was willing to accommodate Rhaegar, the responsibility ultimately fell on him, and it was a risk he wasn't eager to take.

It was a tactful yet firm way of declining the request.

Rhaenyra couldn't help but sigh as she squeezed Rhaegar's hand tightly, apologizing, "I'm sorry, Rhaegar."

"Today's journey is too far, but how about I take you for a dragon ride over King's Landing next time?" she offered, attempting to soften the disappointment.

Rejected, Rhaegar's disappointment was palpable, though he maintained his princely demeanor, concealing his emotions. Withdrawing his hand from Rhaenyra's grasp, he took a step back and forced a reluctant smile, "Very well, I shall await your promise then."

Though his words were accepting, the sadness in his eyes remained evident.

Rhaenyra couldn't overlook her brother's disappointment, but considering her agreement with her uncle, she had little choice but to leave the matter for another time.

"I'll make it up to you later, Rhaegar," she resolved silently.

"Princess, you may ride Syrax now."

As the dragon keeper unshackled Syrax, addressing Rhaenyra in High Valyrian, she responded in kind, "I understand."

Taking Rhaegar's hand once more, Rhaenyra led him away from the dragons, handing him over to Erryk with instructions, "Keep an eye on my brother, and ensure he doesn't venture into the dragon's pit."

Erryk nodded in acknowledgment, "Of course, Princess."

After giving Rhaegar's hair a gentle pat and offering a few words of reassurance, Rhaenyra proceeded toward Syrax.

Throughout the exchange, Daemon remained silent, observing from the sidelines.

"Uncle, shall we depart?" Rhaenyra called to Daemon as she climbed onto Syrax's back, securing the safety chains around her waist.

"I thought you were taking him," Daemon remarked casually as he mounted Caraxes.

"Rhaegar is still young, and a long journey on a dragon's back, exposed to the elements, may be too much for him," Rhaenyra explained with a smile.

"But you were riding dragons at his age. Early exposure to dragons can be beneficial," Daemon countered, his tone neutral.

In the Targaryen family, riding dragons was practically a rite of passage.

"There will be opportunities in the future," Rhaenyra dismissed the discussion of gender roles, eager to change the subject. "Let's make it a race to Dragonstone Island. Who do you think will arrive first?"

Daemon shrugged, his indifference evident as he remained silent, content to let the matter rest.

In the background, Rhaegar stood amidst the crowd, his gaze following the graceful ascent of the two dragons into the clouds until they vanished from sight. Erryk, ever vigilant, observed Rhaegar closely, noting the absence of any noticeable emotional fluctuations beneath his composed exterior, a realization that weighed heavily on his heart.

But Erryk wasn't the only one paying close attention to Rhaegar.

Among the onlookers stood Maynard, his eyes fixed on the tightly clenched fists behind Rhaegar's back.

"A golden opportunity," he murmured to himself.

Although Maynard maintained a stoic expression, inwardly, excitement stirred within him, his hands and feet trembling slightly.

Tired of being the object of scorn, Maynard, despite his vast knowledge, remained subject to prejudice among his peers. Assigned to the Dragon's Pit, he had hoped for recognition for his diligent efforts, perhaps even acknowledgment from the royal family. As he watched the Targaryens effortlessly ride dragons, he yearned for a nobleman to elevate him to the skies. Yet, his aspirations seemed destined to remain mere dreams.

But now, a chance presented itself.

Wasn't this the perfect moment? The young prince, left behind by his sister, appeared in need of reassurance and companionship. Of course, assuming the current activity piqued his interest and that his psychological needs aligned with Maynard's assumptions.

With a myriad of thoughts racing through his mind, Maynard summoned his courage and spoke up:

"Prince, would you like to witness another dragon? There's one called Dreamfyre in the Dragon's Pit, larger and older than the two you've just seen."

Rhaegar turned abruptly, his gaze piercing Maynard's pale face, noting the tremor in his voice and the nervous swallow. Yet, this minor detail failed to deter him.

Born a bastard, Maynard faced immense pressure in engaging with an unattainable prince. But his offer intrigued Rhaegar.

"Lead the way."

Rhaegar's tone brooked no argument, his determination evident. Despite Erryk's attempts to dissuade him, Rhaegar's intense gaze silenced any objections.

"Let's proceed; we have a long journey ahead of us today," Rhaegar declared, brushing past the dragon keepers who conversed in a tongue foreign to him. Maynard took the lead, descending the stairs into the depths of the Dragon's Pit.

The Dragon's Pit buzzed with activity, dragon nests scattered about, mostly hidden underground to prevent roof collapses caused by the dragons' movements.

Under Rhaegar's command, Maynard felt a surge of satisfaction as he guided him through the tunnels, utilizing every bit of vocabulary he possessed to describe the majesty of Dreamfyre.

Dreamfyre is a formidable female dragon and has birthed numerous eggs, one of which belongs to Rhaegar.

"Dragons reproduce through the hatching of eggs, yet it's curious that they lack a discernible gender. Human attempts to assign gender to dragons are misguided," Maynard explained, eager to showcase his knowledge.

"So, dragons reproduce asexually?" Rhaegar inquired, his interest waning.

Chuckling nervously, Maynard replied, "It's unclear, Your Highness. But dragons like Vermithor and Silverwing, mounts of the Old King and Good Queen Alysanne have been known to mate, unlike their solitary counterparts."

Interrupting, Rhaegar urged, "Enough about dragons, Maester. When do we reach Dreamfyre's lair?"

Apologizing profusely, Maynard humbly admitted, "We've reached the entrance to Dreamfyre's lair, Your Highness. Shall we proceed?"

As Maynard's words sank in, Rhaegar realized they had journeyed far through the winding tunnels. Before them yawned a vast opening, darkness swallowing the path ahead, beckoning them onward.