

G.O Thrones 231

Chapter 231: The Appearance of Wildfire

Viserys gave a brief account of the situation in the Riverlands. The region was in chaos: the Brackens had rebelled, and the farmers were in turmoil. Of Old Tully's three sons, only the eldest had shown any competence, but he had been killed in a night attack by the Brackens.

The other two were either boorish fools or reckless men with no sense. The Tully House was expected to decline in the coming decades.

Rhaegar frowned as he listened. The nobles of Westeros had grown accustomed to his father's perceived weakness, emboldening them to rebel openly. Lord Lyonel had been wounded, and Harwin had retreated to Harrenhal, making the situation more difficult than anticipated.

Old Tully had followed the rebels to Harrenhal, leaving Riverrun leaderless. The Riverlands, divided by the Trident River, suffered from poor transportation and weak connections between the nobles, leading to widespread indifference to the Tullys' rule. It was the most disorderly of the Seven Kingdoms.

Rhaegar took his father's hand, looking at him with determination. "Do you want me to go and relieve Harrenhal of its siege?" With the speed of Cannibal, he could fly there and back within an hour. A few bursts of Dragonfire would quickly scatter the rebels.

Viserys' eyes flashed with a mixture of shame and pride. He clasped his eldest son's hand with both of his own, his voice thick with emotion. "Rest for the night first. You've just returned to King's Landing; you need a peaceful sleep."

After Rhaegar's decisive action against the Triarchy, Viserys fully trusted his son's abilities. Unlike the rugged terrain of the Stepstones, the open plains of the Riverlands offered no hiding places for rebels. There, dragons were invincible.

Rhaegar nodded. "Okay, tomorrow I will make a trip to the Riverlands. I'll deal with the Stepstones when I return."

The stronghold of the Triarchy had been reduced to ashes. The mercenaries on the Stepstones were now nothing more than scattered forces, easily swept aside.

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After leaving the chambers, Rhaegar lifted his eyes to see a black-clad figure waiting at the corner of the corridor.

"Rhaenyra, are you still here?" Rhaegar approached her.

Rhaenyra stood with her back to him, her arms crossed over her chest.

Rhaegar, unaware of the tension, asked with a smile, "Waiting for me?"

Swish-

A flash of cold steel cut through the air, aimed directly at Rhaegar's vital point.

In an instant, Rhaegar's face stiffened and cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Of course I'm waiting for you. If it wasn't me, it would be someone else," Rhaenyra said with a grin, pressing the dagger to his throat while she stroked the side of his face with her other hand.

"Sister, calm down," Rhaegar said, his pupils dilating in fear.

Rhaenyra leaned closer, her eyes cold and calculating. "You're here, but you haven't had time to finish carving your runes, have you?"

She knew that Rhaegar possessed a mysterious power through runes. The upper half of his body was covered in bronze runes that turned to green scales when attacked, but the lower half remained unfinished.

"Rhaenyra..." Rhaegar began, his voice a mixture of panic and determination.

After a brief moment of fear, he regained his composure. He knew she wouldn't hurt him; she was using this as an opportunity to teach him a lesson.

As expected, Rhaenyra withdrew the dagger slightly, no longer pressing it against his skin. Just as Rhaegar began to relax, the cold blade pressed against his face again.

"This dagger is for Jeyne," Rhaenyra said coldly.

Rhaegar understood. She was pushing him, making him face his mistakes.

"Rhaegar, you grew up under my care. I know everything about you," Rhaenyra continued, pressing the dagger lightly against his nose. Greenish scales appeared, blocking the blade.

The dagger slid down, revealing more green scales. Rhaenyra's eyes were calm as she said, "Remember your promise. Don't make me remind you."

Rhaegar gripped the dagger and replied solemnly, "Don't worry, my flame will never go out."

With that, he grabbed the dagger and discarded it, then bent down and lifted Rhaenyra onto his shoulders.

"Rhaegar..." Rhaenyra exclaimed in surprise, patting his back as the frostiness in her eyes melted away.

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The next day, the sun was high in the sky, casting thick, golden rays over King's Landing.

"Roar—"

A pitch-black dragon soared out of the Dragonpit, its shadow flashing across the sky. The civilians on Silk Street saw it most clearly as it headed towards the Riverlands.

At the old city gates, five hundred Second Sons, four hundred Unsullied, and three hundred Dragonkeepers stood in formation.

Rumble, rumble, rumble—

A four-wheeled carriage approached slowly, flanked by a hundred Vale knights clad in iron armor.

Inside the carriage, Rhaenyra and Jeyne sat opposite each other—one in a black strapless dress, the other in a long white gown. The atmosphere was tense and silent.

Jeyne bowed her head and spoke first, "Rhaenyra, I'm sorry."

"Apologies don't replace justice," Rhaenyra replied, crossing one leg and tapping her fingers on the back of her hand.

Jeyne took a deep breath and whispered, "I'll return to the Vale and never come back to King's Landing."

"Make sure you do," Rhaenyra said in a cold, clear voice.

Jeyne forced a smile, "I actually have a lot to say to you."

"If you say one more word, you won't be returning to the Vale at all," Rhaenyra snapped, her face turning icy.

The conversation ended abruptly.

Rhaenyra stepped out of the carriage, her snow-white calves disappearing under her black skirt. The carriage then left the city gates, heading towards the Vale. Three hundred Dragonkeepers followed, joining the knights as an escort.

The Second Sons and the Unsullied split into two groups, each heading out of the city gates to join the prince in the Riverlands.

Rhaenyra watched the carriage and procession disappear from view.

"Princess, let's return to the Red Keep," said Steffon Darklyn, the Kingsguard.

Rhaenyra touched the Valyrian steel necklace around her neck and smiled, "No, I'm going to the Dragonpit."

"Yes, Princess," Steffon responded, escorting her without question.

Feeling the cool three dragon-head pendants, Rhaenyra's mind settled, and she found herself missing Rhaegar.

"I think I'll take a trip to the Riverlands," she decided, seeking to distance herself from the recent confrontation with Jeyne.

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The Riverlands, Harrenhal

Summer brought scorching heat, and the castle grounds of Harrenhal were blistering.

"Pour on the oil, quickly!"

"Prepare the catapults!"

Outside the towering thick walls, thousands of peasants in rough cloth and linen surrounded the castle, forming a fierce and determined crowd. Most wielded makeshift weapons—manure forks and hoes, their equipment rudimentary at best.

At the forefront, ten large trebuchets were being positioned. Operated by hundreds of well-equipped soldiers in armor, each bearing a red stallion upon a golden escutcheon on brown—the emblem of House Bracken. Mixed among them were banners of other minor nobles, bannermen of House Bracken.

The siege of Harrenhal was a rebellion led by the Bracken House, with peasant support.

As commanders barked orders, soldiers carefully loaded barrels into trebuchets.

"Release!"

At the command, the trebuchets launched their loads. The barrels arced over the towering walls, crashing into Harrenhal's interior.

Rumble...

The barrels shattered, releasing green flames that spread rapidly.

The trebuchets were swiftly reloaded.

"Release!"

Barrel after barrel was hurled into Harrenhal. Some crashed against the city walls, while others flew farther, landing in the godswood at the edge of the walls. The green flames clung to the stones and continued to burn fiercely, requiring no additional fuel. The forest burst into flames almost instantly.

Harrenhal was once the largest and most majestic castle in Westeros, built on the northern shore of the continent's largest inland lake, the God's Eye.

Its thick and steep walls stood like cliffs, and the gatehouse alone was as large as most main castles. Five towers loomed within Harrenhal: the Tower of Dread, the Widow's Tower, the Wailing Tower, the Tower of Ghosts, and the Kingspyre Tower.

Since the burning by Balerion the Black Dread, none of the towers remained intact. They were twisted, their stones cracked and blackened ruins now stood where grand designs once existed.

A dark atmosphere prevailed over the ruins of Harrenhal, as the green flames of rebellion consumed its ancient stones.

Boom--

More barrels were hurled over the walls, and the green flames grew increasingly intense. Although the five towers remained untouched, they were now surrounded by fire.

Inside the city, fewer than 2,000 guards scrambled to defend Harrenhal. They climbed the walls and launched counterattacks with bows and arrows against the rebels below. However, the spreading wildfire was overwhelming, and the rear of the city was gradually consumed by flames.

"Put out the fire! The green fire is spreading to the towers!"

"Everyone, put out the fire!"

Under the clear sky, green flames raged in the dimly lit Harrenhal. Smoke and screams filled the air, creating a mournful symphony.

"Ah! Don't touch the green fire!"

"It's burning! It can't be put out!"

Soldiers and servants tried to extinguish the flames, but the green fire clung to their bodies and burned even more fiercely when water was poured on it.

The steward of Harrenhal recognized the wildfire, an alchemical product known for its extreme flammability and adhesiveness. It was as powerful as dragonfire and could explode on contact. Once banned from the Citadel, it now wreaked havoc.

On the city tower, Harwin, clad in armor and wielding a sword, watched anxiously. He was well aware of the horrors of the wildfire. In less than half an hour, it had spread across half of Harrenhal. At this rate, they would be burned alive before the rebels could breach the city gates.

Outside the city, the rebels began their assault. Braving a hail of arrows, they carried ladders and charged the walls.

"Surround the east gate! Don't let the Strong's escape!"

A Bracken commander gave the order, directing the chaotic masses to surround Harrenhal completely.

Inside, Harwin, filled with fear and anger, drew his sword and bellowed, "Use the rolling logs and oil! Do not let the rebels climb the walls!"

Regret weighed heavily on his heart. The long peace had dulled the vigilance of House Strong. They lacked war reserves, and their soldiers were poorly equipped. The battlements, once armed with stone throwers, were now defenseless due to decay.

If the defenses had been maintained, the few stone throwers below wouldn't have had a chance to show off. The rebels would have set themselves ablaze.

A guard ran up in a panic. "My lord, the fire in the godswood is too big! We can't control it!"

The situation was dire. The wildfire was spreading uncontrollably, driven by the wind and inching ever closer to the towers. Many servants had already perished in their attempts to fight the flames.

Chapter 232: The Arrival of Cannibal

Surveying the chaos below, Harwin found himself at a dead end. With too few men and the ferocity of the wildfire, the situation seemed dire. After a moment of intense deliberation, he pounded his fist against the battlements and gritted his teeth.

"Withdraw 500 men to fight the fire and dig a moat to separate the towers from the Godswood forest," he ordered, knowing it was their best chance.

"Yes, my lord."

The soldiers scrambled to pass on the orders. Harwin, drenched in sweat from the intense heat, felt like he was boiling alive.

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Inside Kingspyre Tower

Grover Tully, his hair half-white and his face gaunt, paced anxiously. His clouded eyes kept darting to the window. As Lord Paramount of the Trident and Lord of Riverrun, the power of the Tully family rested on his shoulders.

But because of his mediocrity and stubbornness, their reputation had plummeted. Now he found himself besieged by his own bannermen, cowering in the castle.

"Damn Brackens, I'll hang them all!" he cursed, his trembling hands betraying his fear.

From the lord's bedroom, he could clearly see the green flames ravaging the city. Even inside, the heat was suffocating.

Knock, knock...

A mature woman's voice called from behind the door, "Lord Tully, I've come to give Lord Lyonel his medicine."

Grover turned, his gaze falling on the large solid wood bed where Lyonel lay. Pale and sweating, Lyonel was unconscious, his right arm bandaged and his rounded stomach spasming occasionally. He had been badly injured during the retreat, with a broken right arm, a broken left calf, and two broken ribs.

"Goddamn Brackens, they all deserve to die!" Grover muttered, still seething from the night's attack that had claimed his eldest son.

"Lord Tully, if you don't answer, I'm coming in."

The knocking continued, impatience growing in the woman's voice. Grover, furious, pointed at the door and shouted, "Get out of here, bastard! Lyonel won't take the medicine you bring."

Outside, Aly Rivers' colorful face darkened, her green eyes cold. She held a bowl of soup, her ample figure tense with frustration. "Old fool with no vision," she muttered, turning to leave.

The surname of bastards varies from place to place, In the Riverlands, this surname is "Rivers".

Inside, Grover's anger quickly subsided as he approached Lyonel's bedside. "You're not good enough, to even have such a rude bastard daughter!" he spat.

Rumors swirled in Harrenhal that Aly Rivers might be Lyonel's illegitimate daughter or her mother may be the nurse of Harwin and Larys.

Regardless of her identity, Grover detested the green-eyed woman. The Maester had said Lyonel should wake in a few days after taking her medicine, but after four or five days, he was still feverish and delirious. Grover, suspicious, had stopped allowing Lyonel to take her medicine.

Boom!

A thunderous crash echoed through Harrenhal.

"The corridor is on fire, come and put it out!"

"Water's not working, use sand!"

Grover's heart pounded, his hands trembling more violently. Outside, the wildfire raged uncontrollably. The veranda overlooked a barn stocked with hay, always kept closed and poorly ventilated. As the wildfire breached the barn walls, the trapped gases exploded, and burning hay flew everywhere.

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The City Wall

The people, driven by desperation and rage, swarmed the city walls with ladders. Guards threw down rolling logs and poured boiling oil, temporarily halting their advance. Yet, more kept coming, undeterred by the carnage.

Harwin stood on the battlements, his voice raw from shouting orders. He was caught in a dire predicament, struggling to orchestrate the city's defense amid the chaos.

Outside the City Wall

Near the catapults, a soldier of the Bracken House reported urgently to his commander. "Ser, we've used all the wildfire we had."

"Is there no more?" The bearded commander, greedy, demanded more as his face contorted with frustration.

"The priests has only prepared so much. The rest of the Wildfire is too unstable to transport," the adjutant explained helplessly.

"Curse that bunch of useless fools!" The bearded commander spat, his disdain for the so-called sacrifices evident. He glanced at the walls of Harrenhal, where the mob was beginning to crest the battlements. "Drop rolling logs and stones! Smash them off the walls!"

The army command was ruthless, considering the frenzied mob expendable. Their lives mattered little in the face of his goal.

"Yes, Ser," the messenger responded, quickly scurrying away to relay the orders.

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Boom...

A large boulder crashed into the battlements, shattering chunks of the wall with each impact. The violent shaking made it nearly impossible for Harwin to stand, his heart pounding in his chest.

"Kill! Take all the food from the castle!"

"We're starving because these nobles have taken over the land!"

With the castle's supplies dwindling, the people scaled the walls and attacked the guards in desperation.

"Hold on! The kingdom's aid will soon arrive!" Harwin shouted, swinging his longsword at the attackers. As commander of the City Guard, he was used to dealing with unruly mobs and struck quickly and decisively.

"He's the heir of the Strong House! Kill him first!"

Harwin dispatched several attackers with brutal efficiency, quickly revealing his identity as a noble. Recognizing him, the ruffians were further inflamed and rushed toward him.

Westeros was built on a strict hierarchy. Nobles outranked knights, knights outranked commoners, and commoners outranked rogues. The few nobles held vast lands and lived in luxury, while the masses struggled to survive.

When the nobles ruled justly, the people could live decently. But when the nobles abused their power and preyed on the weak, the commoners were driven into poverty and despair. This systemic inequality bred deep resentment and frequent rebellions against the oppressive noble class.

Harwin, surrounded by the angry mob, shouted, "Get out of my way! My family has always been fair to the commoners!"

The guards rushed to his aid, clashing fiercely with the rioters.

Boom...

Outside the city, the stonethrowers continued their relentless assault. The battlements crumbled under the barrage, sending down debris and knocking down many of the defending guards.

Gradually, more and more people swarmed up the battlements.

Rumbling...

A loud noise echoed from below. Bracken soldiers had moved a siege wagon into position and rammed it against the gates of Harrenhal.

The city was besieged from within and without, and a wildfire still raged within the walls. Many servants had perished in the fire, buried beneath the collapsing buildings.

Harwin fought fiercely as he retreated, but his shoulder was pierced by a pitchfork, blood pouring from the wound.

Crisis after crisis, Harwin's heart pounded with anxiety, and despair began to creep in. The king's support seemed a distant hope, and it felt as if the Strong House was doomed to fall to the rioters.

"Fight harder! Give it all you've got!" yelled the bearded commander as the siege wagon pounded relentlessly on the gates.

His mission was clear: breach Harrenhal before nightfall and capture Old Lord Tully and the Hand of the King, Lyonel Strong. The Brackens weren't crazy enough to rebel without a plan; they wanted to use high-profile prisoners as leverage.

The scene was a nightmare.

Harrenhal Castle was engulfed in smoke and roaring green fire. The densely packed mob screamed wildly, clinging to the walls like ants.

From a distance, it looked like a vision of human purgatory.

Hoo...

A gust of wind blew away the clouds, revealing a clear blue sky.

"Roar..."

A deep, resonant dragon roar echoed across the battlefield.

A pitch-black dragon emerged from the clouds and swooped down over Harrenhal.

"Dracarys!" A young, clear voice commanded.

"Roar..."

The dragon slowed its descent, gliding along the city wall and spewing green flames.

"A dragon! Run!"

"It burns!..."

Cannibal revealed its true form, its piercing eyes sweeping over the terrified people on the battlements, all consumed by the dragon's flame.

As Cannibal glided upwards, the green Dragonfire blazed along the city wall like a string of fire.

"Prince!"

At the sight of the dragon and its rider, Harwin, who had been cornered, felt a surge of relief and joy and cried out.

Rhaegar, atop the dragon, his silver hair billowing and his black robes flowing, looked down.

"Ser, handle the fires. I'll deal with the rebels!"

Leaving the order behind, Rhaegar led Cannibal to the center of the battlefield.

"Yes, Prince."

With renewed vigor, Harwin quickly ordered his soldiers, "Five hundred men stay to guard the wall, the rest follow me to put out the fires!"

Cannibal's dragonfire had incinerated the rioters on the walls, sending the remaining climbers fleeing in terror.

With the dragon's arrival securing the front lines, Harwin turned his attention to saving the family castle.

"Roar..."

Cannibal hovered over the battlefield, unleashing dragonfire.

The siege wagons battering the gates were the first to be incinerated, their remains consumed by green flames.

"Run! It's a dragon..."

"Escape while you still can..."

Cannibal's massive size and black wings cast a dark shadow over the battlefield, blocking out the sunlight.

Rhaegar's expression remained inscrutable as he surveyed the chaotic army below.

He soon spotted the Bracken soldiers, their silver-gray armor standing out from the crowd.

"Cannibal, burn them all!" Rhaegar commanded, his eyes cold.

"Roar..."

With a mighty roar, Cannibal lunged at the retreating Bracken soldiers, unleashing dragonfire.

Boom...

A pillar of green dragonfire fell from the sky, striking with precision.

In an instant, the Bracken soldiers were reduced to ash, leaving no time to scream.

"Keep pursuing them!"

Rhaegar's gaze swept over the stone battering rams and bloodied rioters, his heart hardening.

If they dared to rebel, they must be prepared to die.

Cannibal flapped its wings, hovering and raining Dragonfire on the battlefield.

The rioters below screamed in terror, running like headless flies.

Amidst the wailing, they were transformed into charred corpses.

Chapter 233: The Sisters Arrive Riding Dragons

The green dragonfire swept across the battlefield, carving a scorched canyon and igniting green flames. Inside Harrenhal, the wildfire burned relentlessly, roaring with ferocity.

The dragonfire outside the city and the wildfire within created a terrible echo, transforming the area into a green-flaming purgatory.

Unlike the finite wildfire, the dragon's flames seemed endless. Cannibal's eyes glowed fiercely as it showed no mercy to the fleeing figures below.

Rhaegar, his sword in one hand, glanced at the chaos in Harrenhal. "It's really wildfire," he thought.

Thanks to his extensive education, Rhaegar understood the destructive power of wildfire all too well. He knew it was a rare alchemical product, rumored to contain a hint of magic. Its terrible destructive power and unstable nature had long led to its ban by the Citadel's maesters.

Watching the blazing wildfire from afar, Rhaegar could feel the intense heat and pungent smell. "After today, Harrenhal will need massive reconstruction," he thought, sighing for Lord Lyonel.

Wildfire could burn through wood, stone, and steel, and water could not extinguish it. Harrenhal had already suffered extensive damage in the aftermath of the Conqueror's War. The facilities House Strong had built over the decades would now be lost to the wildfire. Repairing the castle would cost a fortune.

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Inside Kingspyre Tower, the temperature in the lord's bedroom grew warmer and warmer after Alys River's departure.

Grover lay by the window, anxiously watching the chaos below. In his heart he cursed, "A bunch of useless children and grandchildren, why don't they lead the army to rescue me?"

After the attack on the camp that night, he had fled to Harrenhal under the protection of the guards. The Bracken House laid siege to Harrenhal and incited the people to attack the town.

Though the Blackwoods were more reasonable and did not participate in the night attack and siege, they were even more hateful.

The Lord of Blackwood had stationed his army outside Riverrun, blocking the path of House Tully's army and effectively preventing support for Harrenhal. He sat back and watched the Bracken House's evil deeds, hoping to reap the benefits.

There were 2,000 men left at Riverrun. Together with the bannermen Grover had gathered, he could probably build an army of 5,000 men. If one of his two sons could stand up and take charge, they could repel the Blackwoods' army and, in a matter of days, come to rescue their old father from the besieged city.

But if they had that kind of ability and courage, they wouldn't be useless sons.

Bang...

Grover knocked heavily on the wall, his heart burning with fear.

"Ahem..."

A cough rang out, pulling him back from his panic. Grover's spirits lifted and he looked back at the solid wooden king-size bed. On the bed, Lyonel's chest rose and fell violently, his eyes glazed over, and he was coughing hard, his neck strained.

"Lord Lyonel!"

Grover hastily helped him turn over and patted his back to clear his breath. Lyonel's face turned red as he held his breath, finally managing to spit out a mouthful of thick phlegm and take a deep breath.

"What time is it?" Lyonel asked, panting heavily, his eyes blank. He vaguely remembered the attack on the camp and falling from his horse, returning to Harrenhal and being treated by a maester. He had been unconscious for several days, his mind a jumble of confusion.

Grover looked sad and said, "We are trapped. The Bracken House does not want to let us go."

"Has the kingdom's support arrived?" Lyonel cleared his mind, thinking first of reinforcements from King's Landing. With Viserys' character, even if he was weak, he wouldn't tolerate his bannermen openly rebelling.

"Support..."

Grover's face turned bitter, unsure of what to say. The raven had been sent out, but the kingdom had been in war for years, and the Riverlands, Vale, and other kingdoms had depleted their troops. Gathering a large army to put down the rebellion would take more than a few days.

Seeing his expression, Lyonel understood the situation, sweat breaking out on his forehead. He also felt the heat.

"Roar!"

A loud and clear dragon roar echoed across the northern shore of God's Eye Lake, spreading throughout Harrenhal. Lyonel's eyes lit up at the sound, and his voice was harsh: "It's a dragon's roar."

When the Targaryens ruled Westeros, they never relied on an army; it was the dragons that ruled the skies.

"Help me up. The castle is on fire; I have to organize the men." Lyonel supported himself with his left hand and struggled to get up.

Grover reached out to support him, not refusing his request. The dragon had come. He finally felt a little relieved.

Noon arrived.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal circled Harrenhal, scorching the ground wherever it flew.

Charred bodies piled up at Harrenhal's front gate, occasionally punctuated by the anguished howls of the wounded. Rhaegar stood on the battlements, one hand covering his mouth and nose, his hair shielding his eyes from the smoke.

After a relentless bombardment of dragonfire, the enemy army had collapsed and fled in panic. Hundreds of Bracken soldiers lay dead, with more than a thousand killed among the attacking mob. The rest had scattered, too numerous for the Cannibal to kill.

Rhaegar's priority was the safety of Harrenhal, not the slaughter of a fleeing mob.

"Prince, the fires are still raging. We must leave the city," Harwin said as he ran up to the battlements, his face gray with soot and worry.

Sand was the only thing that could weaken the wildfire, and the soldiers were doing their best to contain it. But the fire in the Godswood was hard to put out.

The Godswood, a sacred grove within the walls of castles throughout the Seven Kingdoms, was a place of prayer and worship for those who followed the old gods. In the center stood a weirwood tree with a face carved into it, surrounded by other trees and flowers. Harrenhal's Godswood covered twenty acres and included numerous pines and sentry trees.

The wildfire had spread through the Godswood and threatened the castle's five towers.

Hearing this, Rhaegar nodded. "How is Lord Lyonel? I hear he is injured."

Lyonel Strong was a dedicated and responsible Hand of the King, and Rhaegar had great respect for him.

Harwin's eyes brightened with a mixture of relief and sorrow as he replied, "Father has just awakened. I have ordered him and Lord Grover to be evacuated from the city."

"That's good." Rhaegar sighed in relief.

"Roar!"

"Roar..."

Suddenly, two piercing dragon roars echoed over Harrenhal. Rhaegar and Harwin raised their heads simultaneously, searching for the source of the sound.

In the clear blue sky, a massive dragon with pale blue scales soared over the vast God's Eye Lake, ruffling the clouds. At the same time, a slightly smaller golden dragon glided low over the surface of the lake before rising into the air.

On the backs of these dragons sat two Targaryen women, one older and one younger. Rhaegar's keen eyes recognized them instantly. "Rhaenyra, Helaena?"

The light blue dragon was Dreamfyre, and the gold one was Syrax.

Dreamfyre, being larger, flew faster and soon arrived at Harrenhal, wings beating powerfully.

"Brother!" Helaena called in her clear, youthful voice. She wore her hair in a bun and a simple white dress, and sat happily in Dreamfyre's newly added saddle.

"Helaena, what brings you here?" Rhaegar called to his sister, leaning against the battlements.

"Roar..." Syrax arrived next, landing heavily on the walls and creating a gust of wind. Rhaenyra, sitting in Syrax's saddle, held on tightly and said, "She insisted on coming and outran me."

Rhaenyra had planned to come alone, but Helaena had joined her after hearing that she was going to Harrenhal to find Rhaegar. As soon as Helaena heard the news, she eagerly flew out of King's Landing on Dreamfyre.

Dreamfyre landed gracefully on the city wall and lowered its neck for Helaena to dismount. Unfastening the chain around her waist, Helaena slid down Dreamfyre's smooth back instead of using the soft ladder.

"Brother, why didn't you call me when you came to Harrenhal?" Helaena asked, running to Rhaegar and hugging him tightly.

"Princess," Harwin greeted her respectfully.

"Hello, Ser," Helaena replied, nodding before looking back at Rhaegar with curious eyes.

Rubbing his forehead, Rhaegar said, "I'm here to quell a rebellion, can't you see the chaos below?"

Helaena, unaware of the destruction, looked puzzled. She had been so focused on flying with Dreamfyre that she hadn't noticed the devastation.

"Rhaegar, what happened to Harrenhal?" Rhaenyra asked as she climbed down from Syrax, frowning at the flames still raging in the Godswood. From the color of the flames, she had initially thought they were dragonfire.

Rhaegar sighed and rubbed Helaena's head. "The Bracken House found the wildfire and nearly breached the gates. The Strong House suffered greatly."

Rhaenyra looked around, taking in the scorched earth and the devastation. "I should have come with you," she whispered.

"If you had, the three dragons might have burned the entire rebellion to ashes," Rhaegar replied with a wry smile. "But now, go meet with Lord Lyonel. We'll spend the night outside the city."

"Alright," Rhaenyra and Helaena responded in unison.

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Into the Night

The north shore of God's Eye Lake was lit by a sprawling campground, campfires flickering against the night sky. Soldiers patrolled both the castle and the campsite, while servants were busy organizing the salvaged goods.

Inside the largest tent, Lyonel lay on a simple wooden bed, his freshly changed bandages stark against his skin. Surrounding him were Rhaegar and his two sisters, Harwin and Grover.

"Prince, it's a good thing you got here when you did. It would have been all over otherwise," Grover said, raising a glass of red wine in a toast.

Rhaegar nodded in recognition, tapping the tabletop. "My lord, the raven sent to your family should have reached them by now. We should hear news soon."

Despite his skepticism about the abilities of the two Tully sons in Riverrun, Rhaegar hoped they would at least make a move to help their father.

Grover's face tightened and he waved his hand dismissively. His two incompetent sons might see his predicament as an opportunity to take control of Riverrun rather than to save him.

Lyonel, speaking weakly but with determination, interjected, "Prince, with your escape from the Stepstones, the Riverlands can launch a counterattack."

Chapter 234: The Mark of Cannibal

Morning Meeting

Upon awakening, Lyonel was bombarded with information. He learned of Rhaegar's attack on the Triarchy and the impending victory over the Stepstones.

With a dragon returned to the land, the rebellion in the Riverlands seemed manageable.

"Lord Lyonel, tend to your wounds," Rhaegar said, eyeing Lyonel's bloated form with concern.

Lyonel patted his chest and coughed twice. "My physique is fine."

The Strong Hpuse, true to its name, boasted robust and healthy members, except for Lyonel's second son, Larys, who was born with a clubfoot and fragile health.

Seeing Lyonel's resilience, Rhaegar continued, "The rebel lords are led by the Blackwood and Bracken House. I intend to crush them with blood."

Blatant treason demanded a stern response.

"Prince, your idea is understandable," Lyonel replied, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "But these houses have deep roots in the Riverlands, going back thousands of years. Too much bloodshed could provoke a backlash from other nobles."

The nobility was a peculiar group, often at each other's throats. But if the royal family decimated a major house, it could spark widespread resentment.

Rhaegar nodded, understanding the delicate balance. "What do you propose?"

"Be polite first, and only then use force to avoid a bad reputation," Lyonel suggested. "Send someone to negotiate with both families to gauge their attitudes."

The Blackwoods, though involved in skirmishes with the Riverrun army, still showed some sense and could be swayed. Conversely, the Brackens acted with reckless abandon and would need to be severely punished.

By exploiting the enmity between the two houses, they could quell the rebellion with minimal casualties.

Rhaegar agreed, considering Lyonel's advice. "I know Samwell Blackwood, the Blackwood heir. We may be able to win him over."

He also noted that Robb Rivers, leader of the Second Sons, was from Blackwood, and was Samwell's half-brother, a bastard son of the Lord of Blackwood.

Rhaegar and Lyonel then delved into specific strategies, their discussion stretching into the night.

...

After leaving the tent, Rhaegar stretched his back, feeling the tension of the long discussion ease. The cool night air was a welcome relief.

Rhaenyra and Helaena walked out together, their faces reflecting the glow of the campfire.

"Rhaegar, you should rest," Rhaenyra said, taking his hand in concern.

Helaena, leaning against Rhaegar's leg, clasped her small hands together and watched quietly. Except when she was riding her dragon, she was generally introverted.

"Okay, you two share a tent and watch each other," Rhaegar suggested, his eyes softening. He gently tugged at Helaena's small hand.

It would be safer for the two sisters to sleep together in the wilderness. Rhaenyra looked at Helaena and took her hand helplessly. Since taming Dreamfyre, Helaena had grown bolder every day.

She wondered how worried Alicent would be if she discovered Helaena had snuck out of King's Landing.

"Roar..."

A dragon's roar echoed across the night sky, coming from the direction of Harrenhal. The huge dragon flew overhead, momentarily blocking the moonlight and casting a dim shadow.

Rhaegar squinted, watching Cannibal's movements. The typically lethargic dragon that preferred to sleep was unusually restless.

Boom...

After circling twice, Cannibal landed on the shore of God's Eye Lake, its massive body towering over the three siblings. Its broad wings spread wide as it flapped and shook itself.

"What did you find, partner?" Rhaegar approached Cannibal's hind feet and tapped its scales, sensing its discomfort.

Cannibal leaned down, its house-sized head arching over Rhaegar. Its green vertical pupils stared intently at God's Eye Lake.

Rhaegar followed Cannibal's gaze. The lake's surface was dimly lit under the night sky, with occasional moonlight causing slight ripples.

"Roar..."

Cannibal let out a low, growling roar and nudged Rhaegar, urging him to climb onto its back. It had sensed something unusual near the turquoise-colored lake.

Rhaenyra, surveying the tranquil God's Eye Lake, said suspiciously, "Rhaegar, your dragon seems to be looking at the Isle of Faces."

A dragon's height and vision were different from that of a human. Even in the dark, its keen eyes could see clearly.

"Roar..."

Cannibal lifted one of its powerful hind feet and scratched a groove in the lake's grass with its massive claws. Its slitted pupils stared intently at Rhaegar, conveying a silent message.

Rhaegar studied the dragon's actions, memories of the recent past flooding back. He recalled Helaena taming Dreamfyre and their visit to the Isle of Faces. When Cannibal had left, it had gouged marks into the earth with its claws.

Seeing the similarity now, Rhaegar's eyes widened as he exclaimed, "The mark!"

Having spent years with Cannibal, Rhaegar understood the dragon's behavior intimately. Dragons, with their intelligence rivaling that of humans, remembered places, events, and grudges vividly. However, it was unusual for them to leave marks.

"The Isle of Faces..." Rhaegar murmured, his mind sifting through historical records.

Twelve thousand years ago, Westeros was ruled by the Children of the Forest and giants, with no humans present. The First Men, fleeing the oppression of the old Valyrians, invaded Westeros from the Dornish Arm, igniting a war known as the Dawn Age.

This war, a clash between the First Men and the Children of the Forest, lasted for an indeterminate period of time, probably some two thousand years or more. Eventually, wise leaders from both sides swore an oath on the Isle of Faces.

The pact stipulated that the First Men would own the coasts, plains, grasslands, mountains, and swamps, while the great forests would forever belong to the Children of the Forest.

To commemorate this peace, faces were carved into every weirwood tree on the island, bearing witness to the pact made under the Old Gods.

This ushered in four thousand years of peace, known as the Age of Heroes. But this peace was shattered by the arrival of the Andals, who invaded from the Five Fingers Peninsula.

Armed with superior iron weapons and savage tactics, they slaughtered the Children of the Forest and burned their sacred groves, replacing the Old Gods with their Seven.

This devastation drove the Children of the Forest north of the Wall, where they faded into legend, their history recorded only in ancient texts.

Rhaegar sighed in awe, "The Freehold of Valyria was truly formidable."

Even the mighty House Targaryen was only one of forty dragonlord families. The exiled Aenar Targaryen had foreseen Valyria's doom through the prophecy of his daughter Daenys, leading them to Dragonstone and survival.

"Roar..."

Cannibal grew impatient and nudged Rhaegar hard enough to make him stumble before turning and crouching down.

Rhaegar steadied himself and said softly, "Hang on, I'm coming."

He climbed up the soft ladder onto the dragon's back, then looked at his sisters. "Are you going back to rest, or are you coming with me to explore the Isle of Faces?"

"I want to go!" Helaena exclaimed, raising her small hand and quickly climbing up the ladder onto Cannibal.

Rhaenyra, intrigued, gave Helaena a boost. "I'll go too."

Once all three were seated on Cannibal's back, the dragon, satisfied, flapped its wings and took off, gliding over the God's Eye Lake. Rhaegar relinquished the saddle to his sisters and stood on the dragon's neck, his silver hair blowing in the evening wind.

Cannibal flew low, his tail skimming the surface of the lake, creating ripples. Soon they reached the Isle of Faces and landed in the heart of the island.

"I'll explore first," Rhaegar announced, jumping down from the dragon's back. He saw several thick, ancient Weirwood trees with twisted branches like a witch's fingers.

Weirwoods were rare in the south. Nobles who worshipped the Old Gods usually planted one in their godswoods, but on the Isle of Faces, multiple weirwoods stood together.

The weirwoods were dense and foreboding, their red leaves rustling in the breeze. Carved faces on the trunks, with crimson sap oozing from their eye sockets, gave an eerie impression.

Rhaegar gripped the hilt of his Dragon Claw sword, scanning the area for danger. Once assured, he lit a torch and called out, "It's safe. Come down."

Rhaenyra and Helaena climbed down, each carrying a torch. The island was covered in vegetation, with the weirwoods adding to the unsettling atmosphere.

"Cannibal, what did you find?" Rhaegar asked, touching the rough bark of a weirwood.

Cannibal responded with a low, rumbling roar. Then, using its wings to brace itself, it swung its thick tail, sweeping away the vegetation on the island.

...

The climate of the Riverlands is warm and fertile, nurturing a variety of shrubs, tropical flowers, and grasses on the island. Cannibal swung its tail, clearing a large area of space, but it didn't stop there. The dragon continued its relentless cleanup.

Situated in the center of God's Eye Lake, the Isle of Faces is a rare island in the heart of the lake. Its size is substantial, larger than a typical castle's grounds. However, it couldn't withstand the ravages of Cannibal's massive body. In a short time, the once lush island was reduced to a chaotic landscape.

Rhaegar allowed Cannibal to continue its work, not resting himself. There were seven weirwood trees on the island, and Rhaegar explored each one meticulously. When he touched the last tree, the thickest of them all, a sharp voice startled him.

"Stop, Targaryen heir!"

Rhaegar paused, looking back warily. From the shadowy hillside, a small, stooped figure emerged, leaning heavily on a walking stick.

Chapter 235: The Green Man and the System Mission

The figure moved quickly and deftly, emerging from the shadows and running down the hill into view.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra called out, startled. She pulled Helaena with one hand and stopped Rhaegar with the other.

"Roar..."

Cannibal roared, its pupils fixed on the short figure, hot streams erupting from its mouth and nose. The smell it sensed came from this small intruder.

Rhaegar held up his torch, the light piercing the darkness to reveal the figure's face. It was a small, stocky old man dressed in coarse linen. Despite his age, he had dark, curly hair and a beard. A wreath of flowers and vines adorned his head.

"Don't be afraid, it's just an old man," Rhaegar said, stepping forward to reassure his frightened sisters.

The old man held a twisted walking stick made from a weirwood branch, his flesh trembling slightly as he ran toward them.

Rhaegar quickly drew his Dragon Claw sword and coldly demanded, "Who are you and why are you on the Isle of Faces?"

Everyone knew that the Isle of Faces was supposed to be deserted.

The old man raised his walking stick above his head with both hands and replied honestly, "My name is Greenhand Gal. I am a Green Man, guardian of the Oath of Allegiance."

As he spoke, his green eyes darted back and forth between Rhaegar and his sisters, his large belly wobbling with each movement.

"A Green Man!" Rhaegar was stunned and lowered his sword slightly.

The Green Men were not a specific race, but a mysterious and ancient order. After the Children of the Forest and the First Men had sworn their oaths on the Isle of Faces, the sacred organization of the Green Men had been formed to guard that weird island. But the Green Men, like the Children of the Forest, had long since vanished from the history of the world.

Rhaegar remained cautious. His eyes narrowed as he asked, "What proof do you have?"

"The Green Man is the Green Man, there is no proof," Greenhand Gal replied bluntly. "I really am a Green Man, but that's all there is to it."

"You've been living on this island?" Rhaegar pressed, still skeptical.

"There's nothing to eat or drink on the island. I'd starve to death," Greenhand Gal said sincerely, with a broad smile. "I usually work as a witch doctor in a village near Harrenhal, exchanging my services for food."

The Green Men were human, after all. Like any human, they needed to eat, drink, and sleep, making it impossible to completely escape human society.

Rhaegar frowned, half believing what he heard. He turned back to Rhaenyra, who looked equally puzzled.

Rhaenyra's thoughts shifted and she asked, "What is your last name and how are you related to Greenhand Garth?"

Greenhand was a title given to a king of the First Men during the Heroic Era. This king was said to be broad and fat, with antlers, green hair and eyes.

He had magical powers that caused flowers and grass to grow wherever he went. With his blessing, virgins had their first menstruation, old women returned to menstruation, and pregnant women could give birth to two or three babies at once. There were many legends about him.

Garth the Greenhand sired many children. His eldest son, Garth Gardener, founded House Gardener and became the first King of the Reach.

House Gardener fell in the Conqueror's War, and the current Wardens of the South, House Tyrell of Highgarden, were chosen by Aegon the Conqueror because of their close intermarriage with the Gardeners and their shared bloodline with Garth the Greenhand.

Hearing Rhaenyra's question, Greenhand Gal scratched his head uncertainly. "I don't have a family name. I'm from the Reach. I heard the weirwood say I should become a Green Man, so I came to the Isle of Faces."

"As for my relationship with Garth the Greenhand..." He thought for a moment before smiling sheepishly. "I suppose I have a bit of his blood in me, enough to boast the nickname."

In fact, most of the nobles in the Reach had some blood of Garth the Greenhand.

With a question and an answer, the situation became clearer.

Rhaegar frowned. "Why do you want to keep me from touching the Weirwood?"

"The old gods guided me. They forbid your touch," said Greenhand Gal, trying to look as serious as possible. "The Isle of Faces is the last remaining piece of rich land in the south, dedicated to the Old Gods. The dragons will destroy it."

In utter disbelief, Rhaegar clarified, "I touch the Weirwoods and it destroys the Isle of Faces? What kind of logic is that?"

The Isle of Faces was just a deserted island with no people and no value except the Weirwoods. How could he destroy it? Unless...

Rhaegar's eyes flashed as he glanced at the last Weirwood, his thoughts racing. With that in mind, he walked a little closer to the Weirwood.

"Wait!"

Greenhand Gal shouted hastily, his forehead glistening with sweat. "Prince, I have a very bad premonition. Please stay away from here."

As Rhaegar approached the weirwood, he could almost hear a wailing sound coming from it. His heart pounded and his body grew hot with tension.

Ignoring Gal's plea, Rhaegar placed his palm on the rough bark of the tree. The appearance of a fat old man claiming to be a Green Man and trying to dissuade him with a few words seemed absurd.

Cannibal, eyes fixed on the weirwoods, appeared expectant. Rhaegar dismissed the myths of the Children of the Forest, the First Men, and the Green Men. These ancient beings had been relegated to legend, their power diminished long ago.

At their peak, they had been no match for the Dragonlords of the Freehold. As a descendant of the ancient Valyrian dragonriders, he had no fear of the so-called Old Gods.

As his palm touched the bark of the weirwood, the system echoed in his mind.

"This mission is open. The target is the Weirwood bearing the Oath of Allegiance."

[Weirwood of the Oath of Allegiance]

Exploration progress: 0.1%

There was no cataclysm, no celestial upheaval. No gods watched, and no demons cursed. Everything was calm and quiet. A smile touched Rhaegar's lips as he stroked the bark of the weirwood.

"Unexpectedly, I've activated an explorer mission," he thought, secretly pleased.

"Nothing happened?" Greenhand Gal stood frozen, stunned by the scene.

Rhaenyra stood, holding her torch and shaking it slightly.

"You want something to happen?" Rhaenyra replied, her tone slightly mocking.

He felt uneasy, but the weirwood seemed unharmed. Listening to their conversation, Rhaegar's mind raced with possibilities. The relics this time might affect the Isle of Faces.

"Rhaenyra, let's spend the night here," Rhaegar suggested, pulling a spare blanket from his space bracelet. He needed to stay close to the Weirwood to maintain the progress of his exploration.

Rhaenyra didn't object, though she eyed Greenhand Gal warily.

Sensing the change, Gal backed away, "My boat is at the shore. I'll leave now."

With the Weirwood unharmed, there was no reason for him to stay. Reluctantly, he took one last look at the Weirwood, then turned and disappeared into the night, carrying his walking stick.

"Roar..."

Cannibal's low growl echoed as the dragon lay protectively beside Rhaegar and his companions. Rhaegar lit a campfire for warmth as Rhaenyra and Helaena slept beside him under the stars.

...

The sun shone brightly the next morning, filtering through the red leaves of the weirwoods and illuminating Rhaegar's face.

"Roar..."

A distant dragon's roar and the sound of running water woke Rhaegar from his sleep. Groggy and disoriented, the first thing he saw was the eerie, bleeding face of a Weirwood, causing him to roll away in panic.

Regaining his composure, Rhaegar propped himself up on the damp ground, feeling both frustrated and helpless. He muttered angrily, "What taste did the Children of the Forest have to carve these faces?"

Calming his racing heart, he noticed the blanket wrapped around his waist. The campfire had burned out, and Rhaenyra and Helaena were nowhere to be seen, probably out exploring.

A system notification rang in his ears. "Exploration complete. Please retrieve the relic treasures."

Rhaegar's mood lifted. He checked the system interface.

[Weirwood of the Oath of Allegiance]

Exploration Progress: 100%

The once repulsive Weirwood seemed softer now. Rhaegar stood and circled the tree, finding a watermelon-sized reddish glow on its canopy.

"Found it," he murmured, reaching out to touch the glowing spot.

With a gentle touch, the red halo exploded into brilliant points of light and merged into his hand.

"Relic picked up successfully. Detection in progress..."

"Recognition successful. Judged as a Legendary Relic: Slash and Burn."

"Legendary level," Rhaegar thought elatedly. He saw a sickle and a piece of charcoal.

He tried to pull out the sickle and the charcoal.

"Relic not yet activated," the system informed him.

Rhaegar hesitated before examining the [Slash and Burn] relic alert.

"Slash or Burn?"

A simple prompt appeared. Rhaegar guessed it was a multiple-choice question. Without hesitation, he chose the Burn option, aligning with the Targaryen motto: Blood and Fire.

The bronze sickle shattered, disappearing from his mind. The charcoal ignited, glowing red-hot.

With a thought, Rhaegar tried to manifest the charcoal. It appeared, hovering before him.

Just as he reached out to grasp it, the charcoal exploded, scattering ash into the soil and merging with the land.

Suddenly, the entire Isle of Faces began to tremble as if struck by an earthquake.

"Gahhhhhh..."

The tremors sent black swans fleeing from the lake in terror.

Rhaegar struggled to maintain his balance as another system notification chimed.

"Congratulations, Slash and Burn has been activated. You have obtained..."

[Earthbreaking Fire]

Grade: Legendary (Red)

Function: Taps into the flames deep underground, subliminally transforming the land.

Evaluation: "A disposable fire, fleeting."

Chapter 236: The Ambition to Rebuild the Dragonpit

After reading the description of the system, Rhaegar's face changed dramatically.

"Flames hidden deep underground... isn't that magma?" he murmured. The volcano on Dragonstone Island was filled with magma.

Boom...

A small patch of earth mixed with carbon ash suddenly exploded, forming a round pit the size of a face. Rhaegar quickly backed away, thinking the magma was about to erupt.

But he was wrong.

The Isle of Faces, in the center of God's Eye Lake, was an island. No matter how much underground flame gathered, it couldn't erupt magma here. But something else appeared.

Water.

A small pool quickly formed at the bottom of the pit. Rhaegar stood guard, unsure of what was happening. The water in the pool bubbled and hissed.

Whoosh...

A misty mist rose from the puddle, warm and damp. Rhaegar sniffed the air and detected a strong smell of sulfur. He stepped closer and boldly dipped his hand into the water.

"Hot!" Rhaegar murmured, plunging both hands into the water. A word came to him: Hot Springs!

Rumble...

The trembling of the Isle of Faces continued, gradually lessening in intensity. The weirwood trees shook and shed their red leaves. Moments later, the trees stood bare, and the small puddle was surrounded by fallen leaves.

Rhaegar sat on the ground, gazing at the puddle, red leaves covering his silver hair and shoulders.

"Is this the [Earthbreaking Fire] effect? A small hot spring?" Rhaegar mused, resting his chin in his hand.

On second thought, hot springs relied on underground heat. The presence of a hot spring indicated a significant change in the island's underground structure.

His eyes fell on the system's description again, noting the phrase "transforming the land".

Rhaegar scooped up some warm spring water and tasted it. The taste of sulfur was strong, pungent, and astringent.

The taste sparked many thoughts. The Dragonlords of Valyria lived amidst the Fourteen Flames, a perfect environment for dragons because of the active volcanoes. The island of Dragonstone also had a volcano, where Vermithor and Silverwing slumbered.

Volcanic landscapes were rare in Westeros. The only other known place with hot springs was Winterfell, home of the Starks, with a significantly higher underground temperature.

Considering this, Rhaegar speculated, "At the very least, the geothermal temperature beneath the Isle of Faces is high enough to make it a better place for dragons than the Dragonpit in King's Landing."

This revelation rekindled his old idea to rebuild the Dragonpit. Staring at the steam-filled spring, Rhaegar felt elated. "What a precious piece of land, worthy of a legendary relic."

He began to consider claiming the Isle of Faces for himself.

"Roar..."

A dragon's roar interrupted his thoughts. Rhaegar looked up to see Rhaenyra riding Syrax, dressed in a black gown.

"Rhaegar, there's been an earthquake on the Isle of Faces. Come with me," Rhaenyra urged, looking worried as she guided Syrax to land.

"Roar.."

"Roar!"

Two dragon roars echoed through the sky as the sunlight was blocked by massive, charcoal-black dragon wings. Cannibal had taken to the skies and was circling low over the Isle of Faces, clearly fascinated by the island.

Helaena was riding a panicked Dreamfyre, approaching from the direction of the beach on the Isle of Faces. Dragons have sharper senses than humans, and the three dragons were immediately alarmed by the island's tremors.

Seeing Syrax hesitating to land, Rhaegar shouted, "I'm fine, don't worry!"

He was indeed fine; he had caused the commotion and knew its source. If anything was wrong, it was the few remaining Weirwood trees. The hot spring had appeared right next to them, where the underground temperature was highest. He hoped they could withstand the heat.

As the aftershocks subsided and calm returned, Syrax and Dreamfyre landed first, allowing their riders to dismount. Rhaegar pointed to a small puddle on the ground and grinned. "Look, a hot spring!"

"Huh?" Rhaenyra looked confused as she stepped over the thick carpet of red leaves.

"Brother, are you all right?" Helaena's eyes were filled with concern as she trotted over to Rhaegar.

She and Rhaenyra had been up early. Dreamfyre had wanted to play, so Helaena had accompanied the dragon to the shore of the Isle of Faces. Rhaenyra had been uneasy and had called Syrax to keep watch, still debating whether to wake Rhaegar when the earthquake startled them all.

Seeing the concern in Helaena's eyes, Rhaegar ruffled her hair and smiled. "I'm fine, really."

He had explored a Legendary Tier Relic and activated it, resulting in the unexpected bonus of a hot spring. Over time, the geothermal heat on the Isle of Faces would only increase, enhancing the Targaryen family's domain.

"It really is a hot spring," Rhaenyra remarked, stirring the puddle with her fingers, her surprise evident.

She did not dwell on the high underground temperatures. As Princess of Dragonstone, she was accustomed to volcanoes and the conditions necessary to raise dragons. To her, the hot spring merely indicated high underground temperatures, not the extreme environment dragons required.

Rhaegar laughed, "The hot spring appeared out of nowhere and seems to be expanding."

Rhaenyra frowned slightly, still puzzled by the sudden appearance of a hot spring on the Isle of Faces. Unable to figure it out, she decided not to worry. When she felt the warm spring water, her eyes lit up with excitement. "If the hot spring gets bigger, we could build a pool exclusively for the royal family."

Hot springs were a rare luxury, inaccessible to most.

Rhaegar agreed, "Yes, I'll provide the labor and you can finance the construction of a great pool."

He had thousands of slaves outside King's Landing, perfect for the task.

Rhaenyra nodded eagerly, "Uh-huh."

The thought of having an exclusive hot spring bath in the future filled her with happiness.

...

The Free Trade City-State of Lys

In the dilapidated Perfume Garden, a group of conspirators were plotting something significant.

Tyrosh was represented by a lean young man with fiery hair, playing with a skull-shaped wine glass.

His name was Baromy Strode, the current Archon of Tyrosh. As for the former Archon, an elderly man in brocade robes, he now lay dead at Baromy's hands.

The only remaining representative from Myr was a fat, dark-skinned man with a whip at his waist. He had been the first to flee when their city was attacked. Myr's forces had been decimated, with only five hundred Unsullied surviving the assaults of the slaves and the wealthy.

In Lys, the Rogare family had been destroyed, leading to a slave uprising.

In the midst of the chaos, a strong man with curly black hair and dark brown skin, Bambarro Bazanne, emerged. Once a smuggler, Bambarro had saved enough over the years to build a fleet. He seized the opportunity during Lys' turmoil to steal power and become the new leader.

The fat Myrish man spoke first. "News of the dragon's attack on the Triarchy has spread throughout Essos. The Sea King of Braavos has only agreed to send a letter condemning the King on the Iron Throne and has refused to send troops."

"It's the same everywhere," Baromy scoffed. "Other city-states have retreated as well, only daring to send letters of condemnation."

Baromy had risen from the ranks of mercenaries. His rise to Archon was due to his daring during the dragon attack. He had plundered the wealthiest merchants and hired more mercenaries. His audacity had paid off.

Bambarro of Lys took a small bottle from his pocket and said in a deep voice, "The mastermind of the attack has returned to Westeros. We must take action to show the people that we are doing something."

They weren't the last desperate fools gambling their lives. They needed to set an example for the high-ranking magisters and rich merchants who felt persecuted, demonstrating their resolve.

The small vial contained Lys' Tears, a poison that could take a life without the victim knowing.

"Who should we target?" asked the Myrish representative.

"There are two other dragon riders on the Stepstone Islands," Baromy suggested.

"I agree..."

...

A few days later.

The northern shore of the God's Eye.

Swish swish...

Four hundred Unsullied and five hundred Second Sons marched in, forming neat rows.

"Greetings, Prince!..."

A thousand voices cried in unison.

In front of them stood a massive black dragon, as imposing as a small mountain.

"Roar..."

Cannibal roared, its feet firmly planted on the ground, wings spread wide, generating powerful gusts of wind.

Rhaegar stood beneath its head, glancing sideways at the assembled army.

His expression remained calm, indifferent to the thousand-strong force before him.

He turned his gaze towards Harrenhal in the distance.

The green wildfire had finally been extinguished.

After the fire, Harrenhal, already in ruins and decrepit, looked even more desolate, like a dying candle.

The five towers were charred black by the flames.

The forest of sacred trees was reduced to ashes, and even the nearby city walls were cracked and burned.

Smoke rose from the ruins, making the twisted towers appear even darker.

Lyonel was seriously ill and Harwin was on patrol.

Rhaenyra had taken on the role of first steward, directing the servants to clean up the towers and move supplies.

"Robb," Rhaegar called.

Robb, clad in a heavy steel helmet, stepped forward immediately and saluted, "Prince!"

Rhaegar glanced at him and ordered, "Lead the Second Sons to Riverrun. If you meet the Blackwoods' army on the way, you know what to do."

Robb, already prepared, replied firmly, "I guarantee a safe arrival."

Rhaegar nodded and motioned for him to rest before leaving.

Robb led his party to a barracks the Strong House had set up in advance.

Rhaegar's eyes flickered as his mind wandered.

He should have left for Riverrun days ago.

For some reason, he was waiting for Robb and the Second Sons to arrive.

Most of the soldiers of the Second Sons came from the Riverlands, often the second sons or illegitimate children of noble families.

Robb himself was a favored bastard of Lord Blackwood.

This organization wasn't just powerful in arms; it was a valuable political asset.

The Strong House's army passing through the Blackwoods' garrison and the Second Sons doing the same were two different things.

Dragons were effective in battle, but Lyonel's advice to win hearts and minds by using internal factions was sound.

Robb and the Second Sons were instrumental in quelling the rebellion in the Riverlands.

As Rhaegar reflected on this, a phrase from his dreams came to mind.

"War is the continuation of politics."

Wars were caused by political failures.

His thoughts returned to the Unsullied and his gaze fell upon them.

Rhaegar looked at an Unsullied commander with three spikes on his helmet and asked, "What is your name?"

The officer stiffened and blurted out, "Grey Worm."

"Grey Worm," Rhaegar repeated, confused. "That's the name the slave masters of Astapor gave you, isn't it?"

He knew something of the Unsullied.

Every day, names were drawn from slips of paper with colors and different types of reptiles on them.

Together they formed the name of the day.

Chapter 237: The Dragon Has Three Heads

"Yes, Prince," Grey Worm replied, looking straight ahead.

"Why don't you all change your names so you're no longer tied to slavery?" Rhaegar asked, intrigued.

The Unsullied had been trafficked as children, and by the age of four or five they should remember their original names.

Grey Worm replied solemnly, "The name that once brought me pain and enslaved me is no longer a burden."

"The day Astapor fell, I sought your protection," he continued, his chest swelling with pride. "Since that day, I have kept the name Grey Worm. It now symbolizes my sanity and my courage to fight for freedom."

Swoosh...

As he spoke, the Unsullied struck their round shields with their spears in unison, their eyes filled with admiration as they gazed upon Rhaegar and the dragon.

Rhaegar's expression softened as he surveyed the more than 400 Unsullied, his gaze calm and collected.

From this diverse group of warriors, he sensed a pure essence.

It was called "Faith."

They longed for freedom and peace, and they saw Rhaegar as their beacon.

The old and new gods would not save these castrated slave soldiers.

But Rhaegar, who had burned the city with his dragon, would.

Rhaegar Targaryen, Breaker of Shackles, Ruin-Maker; that was what they believed.

Rhaegar withdrew his scrutinizing gaze and smiled, "A perfectly trustworthy army."

"Grey Worm," he called.

"Yes, Prince!" Grey Worm stepped forward, his voice firm.

Rhaegar resumed his authoritative tone, "We don't need too many troops to put down the rebellion. Harrenhal has suffered greatly from the fire. Lead the army to station here and prevent any counterattacks."

"Yes, Prince!" Grey Worm accepted the mission and immediately led the troops to join the patrol.

Rhaegar raised his head to the sky and murmured, "Riverrun City, Blackwood..."

...

Dusk.

Three dragons rose from Harrenhal and soared toward Riverrun. The sun dipped below the horizon, casting a reddish haze over the flat, fertile land. Rivers flowed endlessly, and farmlands stretched as far as the eye could see-this was the Riverlands, the Land of Fish and Grain."

In the heart of the noble path, the farmland had been pillaged and burned, mostly by marauding bands of outlaws.

"Roar...",

As they neared Riverrun, Cannibal slowed and roared a warning. Rhaegar looked down and saw a large, well-fortified camp on a high hill not far from Riverrun. Watchtowers, archery posts, horses, and other defenses were in place. At the foot of the hill, a meandering stream provided a natural barrier.

Rhaegar took one look and knew the general in charge was strategically astute. The hilltop camp was easy to defend and difficult to attack. With sufficient supplies, it could withstand a prolonged siege. It would be a tough nut to crack.

Above the camp's gatehouse flew a noble banner depicting crows surrounding a weirwood tree. Rhaegar recognized it: "House Blackwood."

His respect for the Blackwoods grew. The camp's location was strategically brilliant.

House Blackwood's Raventree Hall lay west of the Red Fork River, south of Harrenhal. Running Stream was at the confluence of the Red Fork and Tumblestone Rivers. House Bracken's Stone Hedge was north of the Red Fork and northeast of Riverrun. The Blackwood-Bracken conflict raged on the north bank of the Red Fork, in fertile pastureland.

Recently, Harwin's army from Riverrun had clashed with the vanguards of both houses. House Bracken, recovering from defeat, had launched a night attack on Harwin's camp. Harwin and the Tullys had retreated to Harrenhal.

Now the Blackwoods had set up camp south of Riverrun and west of Stone Hedge, effectively blocking the route between Riverrun, Stone Hedge, and Harrenhal. They didn't attack, but they were a thorn in the side, destabilizing the Riverlands.

Their tactics were notorious, but undeniably effective.

As the campfires began to cook dinner, Cannibal swooped down and wreaked havoc.

"Dragon! The dragon is coming!"

"Hide in the burrows!"

The presence of the black dragon caused instant panic. Soldiers abandoned their posts and dove into the holes they had dug for cover.

"Roar!"

Before the soldiers could fully retreat, Dreamfyre and Syrax swooped down, their wings whipping up fierce winds.

Crash!

At Helaena's command, Dreamfyre flicked his tail and snapped the camp's flagpole.

In an instant, the three dragons rose again.

Syrax flew close to Cannibal, and Rhaenyra, clad in her black dragon armor, shouted, "Rhaegar, is this all we're doing?"

She had been expecting an attack as the dragons swooped down.

Rhaegar looked at the chaos below and chuckled, "No need for violence today."

The three dragons flew over the barracks, confident that the Blackwoods would make the right choice.

"Roar..."

Cannibal roared, lifting his wings in the turbulent river toward the city of Riverrun. Dreamfyre and Syrax circled around, close behind.

...

Riverrun.

A sturdy, triangular castle built where the Tumblestone River meets the Red Fork. The castle is relatively small, bordered on two sides by the river, with a large man-made moat on the west side.

When the water gate is opened, the trench fills with river water, transforming the castle into a small island surrounded by water on three sides and nearly impregnable.

At that moment, Riverrun's Watergate was open. Water flowed around the castle and the drawbridge was raised.

"Roar..."

The dragon's roar echoed as Cannibal flapped its wings and slowly descended in front of the water-filled trench. Rhaegar, seated on his saddle, looked down at the garrison on Riverrun's battlements and shouted, "The Prince and Princess of Targaryen have arrived! Summon the sons of Lord Tully to welcome us!"

"Roar..."

Syrax and Dreamfyre followed, landing one on either side of Cannibal. The three dragons raised their heads, staring at the triangular castle.

The garrison, having never witnessed such a sight, nearly lost their composure. In a panic, they hurried down the battlements to notify the two gentlemen in charge.

Rhaegar watched calmly, a slight smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

The Tully family, as the Lords of the Riverlands, held a crucial position. To pacify the rebellion, Riverrun had to be visited first.

...

Nightfall.

On Bloodstone Island, patrol ships continued their nightly rounds, diligently scanning the waters. They intercepted a small sailboat attempting to smuggle goods.

There were three men aboard, all from the Stormlands of Westeros. Upon capture, the soldiers discovered the boat's cargo: leather, barley, and dozens of bottles of red wine from Lys.

One of the smugglers, trembling with fear, knelt and begged, "My lord, please, we are only trying to make a living."

"Save your breath, smuggler!" A soldier kicked him to the ground, spitting in contempt. Smugglers were despised, even lower than poachers in Westeros.

"Let's see what we have here," a middle-aged voice commanded. Two silver-haired, dark-skinned figures emerged from the patrol ship: Commander Vaemond and his nephew, Laenor.

Vaemond examined the cargo with a practiced eye. When his eyes fell on the red wine, his expression changed. The prolonged war had left ample supplies, but good wine was in short supply. The quality red wine was a rare treat.

"Take the wine and throw these men into the sea," Vaemond ordered, his voice cold and dismissive. The Valyrians, with their maritime heritage, knew well the ruthless law of the sea.

The smuggler pleaded desperately, "My lord, I have a pregnant wife to care for. Please, show mercy. The Old and New Gods will bless you."

Vaemond remained unmoved. "Do as I said. Feed them to the fish."

"Yes, my lord," the soldiers replied, dragging the men to the edge of the ship. Panicked, the smuggler shouted, "Wait! I have two bottles of Dornish Summer Red - ten years old, the finest wine you'll ever taste!"

"Wait," Vaemond commanded, intrigued. "Aged Summer Red?"

The smuggler nodded frantically. "Yes, my lord. It's on the ship. A gift for you."

"Fetch it," Vaemond ordered, his interest piqued. The smuggler rushed to the ship and returned with a wooden case containing two bottles of wine, the liquid inside as crimson as blood.

With shaking hands, he offered the bottles. Vaemond opened one and took a deep breath, savoring the fruity aroma. "True summer red," he confirmed with satisfaction. He passed the other bottle to Laenor. "Enjoy, nephew. It's been a while since we've had good wine."

"Thank you, Uncle," Laenor said, pleased. It had been a long time since he had tasted good wine.

Vaemond smiled, pleased. "Take the wine. Dispose of the rest."

The soldiers quickly executed the smugglers and plundered the remaining goods. Before they left, they set fire to the sailboat.

With the precious bottle of wine, Laenor returned to Bloodstone Island, eager to share his find with Aegon. He found his cousin secluded in his tent.

"Cousin, look what I've got," Laenor announced, lifting the tent flap.

"No, no! Don't come in yet," Aegon cried, his voice strained. He lay naked, his hands hidden under the blanket.

"Oh, by the Seven Gods!" Laenor exclaimed, turning away in embarrassment. "Sorry, I didn't know you were busy."

"Just a moment," Aegon grunted, his movements quickening. His body tensed and he let out a low moan.

"Are you finished?" Laenor asked, half amused, half annoyed.

Chapter 238: Aegon's Little Buddy

The next day at dawn.

In the Great Hall of Riverrun, Old Tully's two sons and a retinue of retainers lined both sides of the room. Above them, in a separate chamber, Rhaegar, clad in black, sat on the Lord's high seat.

A bell chimed softly as Helaena, standing by Rhaegar's side, rang it to summon the servants. Rhaenyra quickly took the bell from her and gave her a stern look. Helaena shrank back, snuggling into Rhaegar's lap, silenced.

BANG!

The hall doors burst open and Robb Rivers strode in, helmeted and tired after a grueling day and night journey to Riverrun.

Rhaegar, his hands on the armrests, tilted his head, "Milov, step forward."

Milov Tully, the second son of Old Tully, stepped forward, his head hanging low with trepidation. His lewd, gaunt appearance spoke of a life of debauchery.

Rhaegar eyed him with disdain, "Riverrun has a thousand defenders. Why did you avoid fighting?"

The Old Lord Tully sons had been left to stew for a day and a night; it was time to see what they were made of.

Milov, barely lifting his head, replied weakly, "Prince, my father ordered us to defend the city, not send troops."

Rhaegar snorted and summoned Old Tully's youngest son. This man, fat as a pig with a mop of red hair, resembled a reborn boar.

Before Rhaegar could speak, the young man blurted out, "I wanted to send troops, but no one would obey my orders."

His face, trembling with random jerks, showed a lack of intelligence that explained his failure to command.

"Enough, both of you, get out!" Rhaegar bellowed, not wasting another look.

The Tully brothers, relieved as if pardoned, slipped out the side door.

Riverrun was the stronghold of the Tully House, and this meeting was crucial to the safety of the Riverlands. Yet the brothers showed no concern, only an eagerness to avoid responsibility. Rhaegar sighed, momentarily sympathizing with Old Tully's plight.

At that moment, a young man with black hair stepped forward and asked, "Prince, I hear the chaotic army is besieging Harrenhal. Are Lord Lyonel and my grandfather safe?"

Rhaegar recognized the young man. It was Elmo Tully, the sixteen-year-old grandson of Old Tully and the only son of the heir who had died in the rebellion.

"Lord Lyonel is recovering and Lord Tully is well," Rhaegar replied.

Elmo, relieved, inquired further, "Prince, with both lords well, do you have a strategy for dealing with the Blackwoods and the Brackens?"

His temperament mirrored that of his grandfather and late father: not possessing great skills, but brimming with cleverness.

Rhaegar surveyed the hall, noting the absence of significant bannermen and a lack of leadership.

In response to Elmo's question, he declared, "The Blackwood and Bracken House have risen in rebellion and will face severe consequences."

The room erupted in murmurs. Elmo's eyes lit up with anticipation. With his father dead and his uncles being useless, Elmo stood to inherit Riverrun when his grandfather died. If he could use the royal family to subjugate the Blackwoods and Brackens or take territory from them, his future as lord would be much more secure.

"Robb," Rhaegar called, gesturing to his loyal supporter.

Robb stepped forward, his head held high. Rhaegar continued, "At Lord Lyonel's suggestion, we will negotiate with the two houses first. As Lord Blackwood's son and heir, you will lead the way."

Rhaegar's choice of words - "lead the way" - was deliberate. His gaze shifted to Elmo, scrutinizing him. "Your uncles have proved not being capable enough. As the ducal family of the Riverlands, Riverrun should send a representative."

Elmo hesitated, taken aback. Despite his knightly training, he had never seen the battlefield, living a sheltered life under the protection of his grandfather and father. Now he was being asked to represent his family against the rebels. The pressure was immense.

Rhaegar tilted his head, a smirk playing on his lips. "What, you don't dare?"

Compared to House Bracken laying siege to Harrenhal, House Blackwood is much easier to deal with.

With Robb leading the way, the pressure is off Elmo; if he backs down, three generations of the Tully family will be ruined.

Elmo gathered his courage, the prince's taunt spurring him on. "I will represent my house and convince the Blackwoods to surrender," he declared loudly.

Stepping forward in this capacity effectively positioned Elmo as the family's heir. He had to rise to the occasion.

"Very well," Rhaegar said, sitting up straighter. "You will be the messengers to invite Lord Blackwood to Riverrun for negotiations."

Elmo was taken aback. "Lord Blackwood's army is stationed outside the city. Why would he come to us?"

"That is not your concern," Rhaegar replied firmly. "Invite him here under the guise of a visit to the Targaryens."

The Blackwoods had been slow to attack, probably hoping to take advantage of the situation. The show of force by the three dragons was both a warning and a gesture of goodwill.

With Rhaegar's orders, Robb and Elmo had no choice but to comply. "By the prince's command, we leave now," Robb said crisply and turned to leave. Elmo hesitated, but followed.

Once they were gone, Rhaegar turned to the Maester. "Write a letter inviting Lord Bracken to Riverrun and send it with a raven to Stone Hedge."

The maester bowed and withdrew.

Rhaegar's plan was clear: show courtesy before resorting to force. If the two lords came to Riverrun, they would be captured and sent to King's Landing for judgment. If they refused...

Three dragons were ready to make their presence felt over Riverrun.

A day later, at the Blackwood House camp.

Inside a large tent, Robb and Elmo were led in, bound and gagged. Waiting for them was a stern, middle-aged man with black hair - Lord Blackwood - and his eldest son, Samwell Blackwood.

When Lord Blackwood saw Robb, he frowned and ordered, "Untie him."

The ropes were removed and Robb immediately addressed his captors, "Lord Blackwood, we are emissaries from Prince Rhaegar. He invites you to Riverrun to meet and negotiate."

Despite his predicament, Robb refrained from calling Blackwood "Father" to avoid further complicating matters.

"Breathe and speak slowly, brother," Samwell urged, helping Robb to his feet.

Robb nodded, "The prince wants to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and persuade the Blackwoods to surrender."

"Oh, he thinks he's invincible because he has dragons?" Lord Blackwood scoffed.

Robb paused, then raised his head defiantly, "You can refuse, but if dragonfire rains down, I may end up inheriting your lands and your castle."

"How dare you! Who gave you the courage to speak to me like that?" Lord Blackwood shouted, pointing an accusing finger at Robb.

Even if the family line were to die out, a bastard would never inherit. Lord Blackwood realized that Robb's provocation was deliberate, meant to force him to consider the consequences.

Calming himself, Lord Blackwood asked, "What does the prince intend to do with our family?"

"I don't know," Robb answered honestly.

Samwell looked confused. "Brother Robb, you're the Prince's closest advisor. Hasn't he given any indication?"

Robb shook his head and said, "The Blackwoods have not caused as much trouble as the Brackens."

Samwell looked at his father, who was deep in thought. The implications were clear: the Brackens were the primary culprits.

Half an hour later, Lord Blackwood rubbed his temples and sighed, "I'm going to Riverrun to meet the Prince. Samwell, you will stay here and lead the army."

"Yes, father," Samwell replied, concern evident in his voice.

...

At the same time.

In Stoneleigh City, the maester received a raven's message and promptly delivered it to the Lord of Bracken, Amos Bracken. Amos, a square-faced young man with brown curly hair, read the message carefully.

When he reached the end, his face contorted with rage. Tearing the letter to shreds, he cursed, "Damn them! Do they think they can trick me into entering Riverrun City? Do they take me for a fool?"

The maester, standing nearby, cautioned, "Lord Amos, scouts report there are three dragons in Riverrun. It might be wise to meet with them."

Amos glared at him, "Nonsense! If I go there, I'll be walking into a trap!"

The maester sighed, bowing his head. Amos, still agitated, snapped, "Go and tell that fool to prepare more wildfire, and bring the priestess here. I need her counsel."

"Lord Amos, Tru was a maester once. You should show some respect," the maester replied in displeasure.

Amos dismissed him with a wave, "Stop arguing and do as I say!"

The maester, feeling disrespected, had no choice but to leave with a sullen expression.

Not long after, a voluptuous woman in red robes, a priestess from a foreign land, arrived.

...

Two Days Earlier

Bloodstone Island

Aegon rose from his bed, his hair disheveled and spread out around him. He had spent the night indulging in various pleasures. Laenor, standing nearby, looked at him with a playful smile and held up a bottle of wine.

"I found a bottle of Summer Red. Let's share it?" Laenor suggested.

Aegon, irritated and dismissive, threw on some clothes. "Keep your distance. I'm not interested in a man's appetite," he snapped.

Laenor's preferences were known, but Aegon had not yet explored such inclinations. He was particular about his partners, and men were not among his choices.

Laenor's voice remained soft. "Relax, Aegon. You're my cousin. I'd never touch you unless you wanted me to."

Aegon, clearly still in a bad mood, grabbed the bottle from Laenor. "What good wine can there be on this island? It's not worth washing my cock with," he said roughly. He bit off the cork and, to Laenor's horror, poured the wine over himself to clean up.

"No!" Laenor exclaimed, clearly distraught. "This is Dorne's Summer Red, aged ten years!"

It was too late. The bottle was already empty, and Aegon threw it to the ground, shattering it. He looked at Laenor with dark, empty eyes. "Summer Red? Ten years old?" he repeated, mocking the meaning.

Laenor's face was a mixture of helplessness and frustration. "Yes, a bottle worth a hundred gold dragons."

Aegon's face twisted in a mixture of realization and indifference. "A hundred gold dragons? You should have told me sooner. My cock isn't worth that much."

Gritting his teeth, Laenor replied bitterly, "Then perhaps you should have chopped it off."

Chapter 239: The Most Vicious Insult

Riverrun

The rhythmic beat of drums echoed through the hall of Riverrun as Lord Blackwood entered with a solemn stride.

Above the hall, in a large chamber, Rhaegar lounged in a high seat, one leg crossed and his hand resting on his face.

"Ah~, " he sighed contentedly as Rhaenyra peeled a grape and offered it to him. He accepted the grape with a look of mild surprise and chewed thoughtfully.

Rhaenyra, unusually attentive today, rolled her eyes before returning to her seat.

"Click, clack..." came the sound of stones hitting each other. Helaena sat on her knees in front of a table, engrossed in a game with two stones.

Below, Lord Blackwood watched the scene - the three Targaryen heirs in their various states of distraction. Feeling the weight of the moment, he bowed deeply. "The Blackwood House greets you, Your Grace!"

Rhaegar smiled slightly and peeled a grape for himself, the hall otherwise silent except for the occasional murmur of Helaena.

Lord Blackwood sensed a rising tension and surveyed Robb and Elmo, noting that the atmosphere was far from ideal. The intimidation was palpable.

After a moment's contemplation, he adjusted his approach, "Princess, it has been a long time. May the old gods praise your beauty."

He bowed respectfully and looked up at the table.

Rhaenyra looked at him, a small smile playing on her lips. She shifted slightly, her embarrassment evident as she tucked a lock of hair behind her ear.

The Blackwoods had been her staunchest supporters, though their relationship had grown distant since 111 AC. Still, the Blackwood House continued to send annual greetings and gifts, a gesture to maintain their ties.

Noticing Rhaegar still watching her, Rhaenyra sighed and replied formally, "May the old gods forgive your sins, Lord Kellan Blackwood."

Lord Blackwood, whose full name was Kellan Blackwood, felt a slight relief at her response. He then said, "Princess, the emissary from Riverrun has invited me here for negotiations. How may I be of service?"

Eager to put the conversation on a more stable footing, he tried to discern the intentions behind the summons.

Rhaenyra remained silent, deferring to Rhaegar, who began tapping his fingers on the tabletop. Finally, Rhaegar spoke, "Lord Blackwood, your house has fought a private war with the Bracken House, refused royal mediation, defied the orders of your liege, Grover Tully, and even clashed with the forces of Riverrun."

Each point was punctuated by a tap of his fingers, the sound echoing like a drumbeat in the hall.

Rhaegar's hand stilled, his voice turning icy. "Lord Blackwood, can I understand that you and your house are in rebellion?"

Silence fell over the hall, heavy and foreboding. Lord Blackwood stood in that brief, tense silence, grappling with the gravity of the accusation.

Kellan's heart skipped a beat as he regretted coming to the trial. This wasn't a negotiation - it was a condemnation.

Swallowing hard, Kellan spoke in a deep voice, "No! House Blackwood is loyal to Targaryen rule and has no second thoughts."

Under such pressure, he had no choice but to bow his head, and his words were sincere. Before entering Riverrun, he had seen the three dragons with his own eyes, especially the black, colossal Cannibal, towering like a small fortress. Such extraordinary creatures were beyond human resistance.

Rhaegar's voice rose, "But you disobeyed the king's order, attacked your feudal lord, and stationed troops outside of Riverrun without authorization!"

With a thud, Kellan fell to his knees and bowed his head. "Prince, those orders came from me alone. I alone bear the responsibility."

When he came to Riverrun, he did not expect to leave unscathed. After insulting both the royal family and the Tullys, he knew there would be a price to pay.

Rhaegar looked down at him with an indifferent expression. The quick confession was noted.

"Rhaegar, we need the Blackwood army to confront House Bracken," Rhaenyra whispered in his ear, offering a letter in her hand.

Rhaegar's cold demeanor softened as he read the letter from the Bracken family, detailing their refusal to admit guilt and their defiance. This was a house that called for stern measures.

Following Rhaenyra's advice, Rhaegar rose, walked to the edge of the room, and announced, "Lord Kellan, you will return to King's Landing alone to confess your sins. Your eldest son will inherit your title and lead the army to atone for these transgressions."

He preferred not to deal harshly with nobles who confessed willingly. The final judgment was left to his father and the Small Council. Samwell Blackwood, Kellan's eldest son, had already pledged loyalty and could serve as a sharp sword for their cause.

Kellan slowly closed his eyes and accepted his fate, "Yes, Prince."

He had anticipated this outcome and the loss of his position, but it was a small price to save his house. Moreover, their longtime rivals, the Bracken House, were on the brink of destruction.

With trembling legs, Kellan rose and walked out of the hall, his back heavy with resignation. Robb, feeling a pang of sympathy, lowered his head, remembering the Prince's words on the journey here—House Blackwood must surrender quickly or face dire consequences.

"Robb."

Rhaegar called out, catching his attention.

Robb lifted his head and responded, "Prince, what is your command?"

"Take the men of the Second Sons and mobilize Commander Samwell's army. March to Stone Hedge immediately."

Rhaegar's mind was clear and his plan was already in motion.

"Yes, Prince."

Robb bowed and left to carry out his orders.

Rhaegar then turned to Elmo. "Gather a thousand soldiers and block their retreat along the Red Fork River."

Elmo, not daring to refuse, left quickly. He had just returned to Riverrun and now had to leave again without rest. The exhaustion was obvious, but Rhaegar did not care.

Everyone had to work for the sake of their families.

"Rhaegar, shouldn't we return to Harrenhal first and discuss our strategy with Lord Leonor?" Rhaenyra stepped forward, her voice low.

The Blackwoods had 2,000 men, while Riverrun could barely muster 1,000. If both sides set out at the same time, it would take about a day and a night to reach Stone Hedge.

"No need. We will rest in Riverrun tonight," Rhaegar replied firmly. He turned and smiled. "Lord Leonor's allegiance is to a benevolent king, and his actions will reflect that benevolence. I have my own ideas."

Suddenly, a sharp crack echoed through the room. Helaena stood stunned, the stones she had been playing with shattering in her hands.

"Broken," she murmured in confusion.

Rhaegar glanced over, curious. He took her hand gently, ruffling her lightly curled silver hair.

Helaena looked up, confused, and let him ruffle her hair with his large hands.

"Never mind, I'll ignore both of you." Rhaenyra said, unable to bear the sight of the siblings' closeness. She gave Rhaegar a look before leaving.

Rhaegar smiled, ignoring the meaning of her glare. When you are a young man, it is important that you keep to yourself.

...

A day and a night had passed.

Blackwood's army had maneuvered into position. They were now camped five miles south of Stone Hedge, a castle located south of the Red Fork River, near the Inn of the Kneeling Man, High Heart, and Acorn Hall, and east of Riverrun. The castle itself was built on a hillside, with a ridge running along its south side, creating a natural barrier.

Meanwhile, Riverrun's army had reached the banks of the Red Fork River first, effectively blocking Stone Hedge's retreat to the north. Despite the looming threat, Stone Hedge remained eerily silent, its gates tightly shut, the atmosphere tense and foreboding.

"Roar..."

Rhaegar arrived astride Cannibal, the dragon's wings flapping mightily as it descended. The wind whipped his black robe around him—he had grown fond of this attire after his campaigns in the Triarchy Kingdom. The loose black robe was fast, durable, and sturdy, perfect for battle. Anticipating a fierce clash, he had donned it in advance.

Boom!

Cannibal landed on the muddy ground, spraying dirt in all directions. As Rhaegar dismounted, Samwell rushed over.

"Prince," Samwell said respectfully, "Amos Bracken it's trapped in the Stone Hedge and cannot avoid battle. Shall we prepare for a direct attack?"

Rhaegar laughed derisively. "Amos talks tough in his letters and claims he will defend the castle to the death."

The letter from Amos had been half a plea about the kingdom's injustices and half a tirade against the Blackwood House, refusing to admit any fault and eager for immediate war.

Robb approached, his expression grave. "Prince, Lord Amos has forced many civilians into Stone Hedge, probably hoping to use them as human shields to deter you."

"A despicable tactic," Rhaegar spat, then said firmly, "Send a message to Amos. Tell him to meet me at the city gates for a talk."

Whether the conversation was successful or not, the effort had to be made. If dragonfire ended up destroying the city, public opinion would favor Rhaegar's attempt at diplomacy.

"Yes, Prince," Robb replied, sending a bastard son of a knightly family loyal to the Brackens to deliver the message.

After a tense wait, the messenger returned with news: Amos had agreed to meet, but with two conditions. They were to speak only under the battlements at the city gates, and Rhaegar was to bring only one dragon, allowing Amos to escape quickly if necessary.

"Roar..."

Rhaegar glanced up at Syrax and Dreamfire circling above, their vertical pupils fixed on Stone Hedge.

"No problem. I'll meet him," Rhaegar said with a confident smile. He called for Robb and some guards to accompany him.

...

Arriving at the gate of Stone Hedge, Rhaegar and his retinue were met by a grim-faced Amos Bracken standing beneath the gate stacks, surrounded by a large group of soldiers.

Rhaegar approached slowly, a smile playing on his lips as he approached the drawbridge. Cannibal eyes glinted from the shadows, its green pupils glowing with a menacing light.

Robb followed close behind, sword in hand, proclaiming loudly, "Behold Rhaegar Targaryen, eldest son of Viserys I, Breaker of Shackles, Maker of Ruins, and the Heir to the Iron Throne!"

Amos hesitated for a moment, processing the string of titles.

Rhaegar, accustomed to such introductions, remained calm. In addition to his identity, the titles of "Breaker of Shackles" and "Maker of Ruins" were earned after the burning of the Triarchy, reflecting both awe and fear.

With both parties now only five meters apart, Rhaegar's expression hardened. "Amos, release the civilians in the city and you will be left with a whole body."

Amos gripped the hilt of his sword, his voice defiant. "Prince, if you withdraw now, the Lord of Light will forgive your sins."

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow. "Has the Bracken House changed its beliefs?"

Some lords in the Riverlands believed in both the Old and New Gods, including houses like Blackwood, Bracken, and Tully.

Amos raised his chin arrogantly. "I have the protection of the Lord of Light. The gods have given me strength."

He drew his longsword and pointed it at Cannibal with reckless bravado. "Targaryens are of fire, and the Lord of Light has given me fire."

"From wildfire?" Rhaegar frowned, wondering if Amos was as foolish as he seemed.

"Wrong!" Amos roared, seemingly emboldened. "Wildfire is but a product of alchemy. I have the aid of the Lord of Light."

Foolishness! Rhaegar decided, losing interest in further dialogue. "Release the civilians, or Stone Hedge will be reduced to rubble."

"They are my people; they will live and die with me!" Amos declared with a mad look. "The Targaryens are full of sin, you are also a abomination created by sin."

Rhaegar's face darkened, fury burning in his eyes. Even Robb stiffened, inwardly raging at Amos's audacity.

Seeing Rhaegar's anger, Amos laughed wildly. "You are full of sin and filth.. The king will assign you to follow the tradition and accept that even more abominable creatures are born."

"Roar!"

Cannibal roared, stretching its thick neck, its gaze locked onto Amos. The dragon's green pupils glowed ferociously, sensing its master's wrath.

The humiliation cut deep. The Targaryen tradition, a point of contention for centuries, was rarely mocked so openly since the reigns of Maegor the Cruel and Jaehaerys I.

Rhaegar's purple eyes turned scarlet, flames dancing within. One thought consumed him.

His voice was hoarse but resolute: "Dracarys!"

Chapter 240: When the Sun Sets, Your Bloodline Will Be Over

Boom...

A pillar of ghostly green dragonfire descended, crossing the narrow suspension bridge and crashing into the stone city gate.

"No! Get out of the way!" Amos Bracken, shocked by the approaching flames, shoved the guards aside and threw himself at the open gate.

Zira...

The relentless dragonfire slowly melted the stone gate. As the flames roared, Rhaegar, clad in black robes, stepped forward, his face cold and unyielding.

Behind him, Robb and the guards fell to the ground, shielding their heads from the searing heat.

"Roar..."

The dragonfire ceased, and Cannibal let out a low, menacing growl, flapping its pitch-black wings. Rhaegar approached the city gates.

The dragonfire had incinerated a group of soldiers, leaving only charred remains. The stone gatehouse above crumbled, its surface twisted and molten.

Bang...

Rhaegar kicked open a burning wooden gate and found Amos Bracken trembling at the foot of the wall.

"Come out, Lord Amos!" Rhaegar's voice was icy as he grabbed Amos by the collar and lifted him up.

"Let me go, I am a follower of the Lord of Light!" Amos's feet dangled from the ground, his eyes wide with terror as he struggled against Rhaegar's grip.

"It doesn't matter who you follow. I have no intention of killing you now." With the rebel leader in his grasp, Rhaegar's anger simmered, replaced by cold determination.

"Release Lord Amos!" The soldiers defending the city rushed down the stairs, forming a hesitant semicircle around Rhaegar. None dared approach, wary of the black dragon glaring at them.

Ignoring the soldiers, Rhaegar spoke softly, "Amos, you have insulted me and you will not die easily. He threw Amos to the ground in disgust."

Swoosh...

Rhaegar drew his sword and pointed it at the cowering Amos. He looked at him with contempt, as if he were already dead.

Before Amos and the assembled soldiers, Rhaegar made a chilling proclamation. "When the sun sets, your bloodline will be over!"

His words were like shards of ice piercing the silence. A gust of wind ruffled Rhaegar's long silver and gold hair. Amos and his soldiers fell silent, all eyes fixed on the young heir, their expressions a mixture of fear and awe.

Rhaegar's eyes were cold and detached, ignoring the fear, anger, and pleas around him. He turned and walked calmly out of the Stone Hedge, his black-robed figure radiating resolute authority. No one dared follow or speak. The weight of his words hung in the air.

On the suspension bridge, Robb stood and asked with suppressed anger, "Prince, shall we attack immediately?"

"Let us wait," Rhaegar replied, his voice calm. "Let Stone Hedge have the last sunset."

Robb was confused. "Sunset?"

He looked at the guards, who shared his confusion. They hadn't heard Rhaegar's explanation, but his determination was unmistakable. The sun was still rising, nearing its zenith around 10 am.

Moments later, Rhaegar returned to the army encampment. As he dismounted, he was surrounded by Samwell and other officers.

"Prince, does the Bracken House intend to resist to the end?"

"When will we attack the city?"

The questions buzzed around him like flies. Rhaegar's gaze remained fixed on a distant hill. He ordered, "Reinforce the patrol. Don't let a single man escape."

The officers, sensing an imminent battle, were elated. Only one noticed something different about Rhaegar.

Rhaenyra stepped onto the muddy grass and grabbed Rhaegar's shoulders. "Rhaegar, do you have something to tell me?"

Their eyes met, reflecting each other's determination. After a moment's silence, Rhaegar blinked and smiled. He wrapped his arms around Rhaenyra's waist and buried his head in her hair.

"Nothing, just a trivial matter."

"I can handle it for you," Rhaenyra whispered, holding him close.

"Don't worry, it's just a dirty task," Rhaegar replied, lifting his head and pointing to the distant hill. "The evening sun will add much color tonight."

Patting her slender waist, he released her and strode toward the hillside. In Rhaenyra's uncomprehending eyes, he added, "Take care of Helaena. We don't need Syrax and Dreamfire this time."

He alone would ride the dragon, bringing the Bracken House the dragonfire they deserved.

...

Stone Hedge, Great Hall

Amos burst through the door like a mad dog, yelling, "A maester, fetch me the maester!"

A servant, head bowed, whispered, "My lord, the maester has disappeared."

"Bastard, no sign of him at this hour!"

Amos' hair was disheveled, his eyes darted nervously around the hall. "Call the Red Witch and that stupid pig."

"Yes, my lord."

The servant, sensing his master's unstable mental state, quickly retreated.

Amos breathed heavily, cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. The fear of Rhaegar's words gnawed at him. He had to act or face dire consequences.

He pulled a token from his pocket and clutched it tightly. Made of iron and engraved with a fiery red heart, it felt warm and heavy in his hand.

"The Lord of Light will bless me..."

Murmuring a prayer, Amos dashed out of the hall through a side door.

The castle was eerily quiet. Servants hid in their rooms, a stark contrast to the usual bustle.

Ignoring the silence, Amos ran to the forest of sacred trees in the center of the castle. The small forest, a few acres in size, was filled with pine and birch trees. In its center lay the stump of a felled weirwood tree, its bright red leaves scattered like blood on the ground.

Amos' face twisted with conflicting emotions as he stared at the stump. The Bracken House had long worshipped the Old Gods, but the arrival of the Red Witch had changed everything. Her miracles in the name of the Lord of Light had overshadowed the glory of the Old Gods.

Against the advice of his bannermen, Amos had cut down the sacred weirwood, abandoning the Old Gods for the Lord of Light.

Treading on the red leaves, Amos steeled himself.

Soon, the forest echoed with the sound of footsteps. Hundreds of soldiers halted at the edge, guarding their lord.

Two distinct figures stood in the forefront. One was a towering, bear-like man in gray robes. The other, a striking red-haired sorceress, wore a beautiful red robe.

"Lord Bracken," the Red Witch spoke, her voice a sultry whisper. Her white, lithe thighs peeked out from under her red robe as she moved, her tone inviting and seductive.

The gray-robed fat man shivered and covered his ears, unable to bear the sound. His name was Tru, expelled from the Citadel for an accidental wildfire outbreak during his experiments.

Amos' face was grim. Struggling to maintain his composure, he asked, "Red Witch, can the Lord of Light you spoke of really make my army impervious to Dragonfire?"

The Red Witch, shaken by his grip on her shoulders, gently placed a finger on his lips. Amos stepped back, confused.

"Do not worry. The Lord of Light is the one true God. You must believe in His greatness," she said confidently. Bending down, she picked up a fallen leaf. "The old gods never protected you, but the Lord of Light shows you the future."

She held the leaf up into the sunlight. With a whoosh, it burst into flame.

"Watch. This is your destiny," she said, throwing the burning leaf to the ground. The dry red leaves quickly caught fire, crackling as they burned.

Startled, Amos kicked the leaves away and hid next to the Red Witch. She smiled at him, her eyes glowing.

The leaves burned out, but the fire spread to the felled weirwood stump and ignited it. The Red Witch stepped forward and waved her hand over the flames.

With a hiss, the fire roared to life and engulfed the stump. The Red Witch smiled and gestured invitingly to Amos.

Half believing, half skeptical, Amos approached the burning weirwood and stared into the flames. The heat was intense, making it hard to breathe.

As he watched, a vision formed in the fire. Amos' tense expression relaxed as he became mesmerized by the sight.

No one knew what he saw, but he was convinced.

The Red Witch placed a hand on his shoulder and whispered in his ear, "Do you believe now?"

Amos nodded, spellbound. "I believe that the Lord of Light is the one true God."

He suddenly remembered something. "Prepare the sacrifices, as many as needed."

"Fifty will suffice," the Red Witch replied, her eyes shimmering. "But they must be pure bloodlines of the ancestors."

"Who will meet the requirements?" Amos asked.

"You recently married. I remember you have a bastard son."

"Use him," Amos agreed without hesitation.

"As you wish, my lord." The Red Witch bowed, her robe parting to reveal curves that glowed like flames.

Amos watched her greedily before turning to Tru. "Tru, come here!"

Tru approached reluctantly with a bitter expression on his face.

The Red Witch walked past him and Tru quickened his pace, bowing his head. His intuition screamed that she was dangerous, very dangerous.

Amos, still staring at the flames, ordered, "Prepare all the stored wildfire and tell the soldiers to carry it to the walls."

Catapults were ready on the walls. Amos planned to use them to hurl wildfire at the dragon.

Tru didn't dare argue. He followed orders without question, his spirit was already broken by forced servitude.