

G.O Thrones 411

Chapter 411: Completing the Dragon Taming Spell

"Roar..."

Caraxes roared shrilly, his scarlet body undulating like a snake as he flew away from Myr with Daemon on his back.

Rhaegar remained calm, watching the man and dragon depart. From Daemon, he had learned that the two books detailed the brief history of the "Aethyrys" family.

The contents included taming and feeding dragons, blood sorcery, family reproduction, and more—akin to previous Dragonlords history books he has but far more detailed.

Seeing Rhaegar's silence, Rhaenys stepped forward to console him. "Ever since Laena lost her son in childbirth, Daemon has developed a great interest in magic, especially regarding the Dragonlords of Ancient Valyria."

The riot had broken out so suddenly that the Fearless and the Knights of the Vale were scattered throughout the city. Daemon's timely arrival had dispersed the hordes of rioters who had come to plunder the Dragonlord's ruins.

Rhaegar retracted his gaze and said unconcernedly, "It's fine. Targaryens will have to come into contact with this sooner or later."

His heir was soon to be born, and the Greens were falling apart under Alicent's machinations. United with Rhaenyra and Helaena, his position was unassailable.

It was time to expose the family to magic; they couldn't always rely on whips and yelling to control dragons.

With a determined heart, Rhaegar looked into the pandemonium of the deep pit. Inside lay a half-ruin with much yet to be discovered.

As he pondered, a clattering sound came from the pit and dirty, smelly figures began to climb out. There were quite a few of them - dozens, by his rough estimate.

Some carried broken sacks of gold, others held gold and silverware. A few held petrified dragon eggs and dragon bone artifacts.

"Heh, a lot of good stuff," Rhaegar murmured, his gaze cold as he motioned for the Fearless to swarm up.

Wise noble families never hid all their wealth in one place, understanding the need for multiple safe havens.

This semi-hidden site beneath Myr was one of the Aethyrys family's contingencies. In case of disaster, it was meant to help the descendants rise again.

Unfortunately, the Doom was a natural disaster, not a man-made one. The Aethyrys family members, along with their dragons, were buried in the eruption of the Fourteen Fires.

This semi-hidden site had remained unknown until now, becoming a windfall for the Targaryens.

Rhaegar couldn't help but smile. "The Targaryens could use a windfall like this."

After a thorough sweep, the Fearless captured all the dozens of troublemakers and detained them at the edge of the ruins. They weren't alone; the Fearless also apprehended any rebels who ventured into this part of the city, killing those who dared to resist.

In the end, these were merely poorly trained individuals. Without the advantage of numbers, they were like fish in a barrel.

Handing the fossilized dragon egg to Rhaenys, Rhaegar said, "Aunt, I'll go explore the ruins first. I'll leave this to you."

"Don't worry, I'll handle it," Rhaenys replied, examining the ancient artifacts seized from the chaotic crowd. She felt a responsibility to atone for the Myr riots and was determined to make things right.

Rhaegar reminded her, "Don't let any of them go. I have plans for them."

With that, he leapt into the deep pit.

The pit looked menacing from above, and the inside was no less intimidating. Rhaegar landed with a thud and rolled to lessen the impact.

As he touched the ground, he felt the cold black stone floor beneath his palm and smelled the stench of dried blood.

Pfft...

As he drew Truefyre from his waist, the blade of the black sword burst into flame, illuminating the path ahead. The passage was wide and deep, lit by the flickering firelight.

As Rhaegar moved forward, he found the passage surprisingly clean, though damp and cold. He walked fearlessly, his eyes sharp and focused.

Along the way, he encountered the dead bodies and traces of Dragonfire left by Caraxes. The passage led directly to an underground palace made of black stone, without any twists or turns.

The palace was not shrouded in darkness; oil lamps hung on the four walls, casting a warm glow. Rhaegar's nose twitched slightly as he caught a peculiar fishy-sweet odor. His mind raced—he had read about this in the books of the Citadel.

The Shivering Sea was home to whales and leviathans of enormous size. By processing the blubber of these creatures with blood sorcery, one could create lamp oil that lasted for a thousand years without going out.

Rhaegar was delighted. "To use such extravagant magical creations, this Dragonlord family must have been incredibly powerful," he mused.

The Targaryens were of middle to lower rank among the Dragonlords and lacked such deep heritage. Exile Aenar's situation had been dire. The Targaryens had migrated with only five dragons, and their magical artifacts were likely limited to the Valyrian steel swords, "Blackfyre" and "Dark Sister."

The Crown of Conquest and the Horned Dagger, made from rare materials, were hardly considered part of the family's heritage.

Rhaegar thought deeply. The Targaryens' migration across the Narrow Sea was probably due to more than the prophetic dreams of Daenys the Dreamer. The threat of another dragonlord family might have driven them to sell their ancestral lands and move.

He suspected that the Targaryens had failed in a power struggle with other Dragonlord families. After suffering significant losses, they had fled to Dragonstone. This theory also explained why four out of the five dragons they brought from Valyria had perished under mysterious circumstances, leaving only the young Balerion.

It was possible those four dragons had been wounded or sabotaged by their rivals.

Click!

With a kick, Rhaegar opened the lid of a black steel container. He looked down, frowning slightly.

At the entrance of the palace, there was a separate area where five oven-like containers were stacked. These containers could effectively retain heat and were used to store dragon eggs. As a child, he often held similar containers and talked to the dragon eggs inside.

Now, all five containers were lying on the ground, their dragon eggs missing. He didn't need to guess - they were undoubtedly in the hands of the people outside.

Looking deeper into the palace, Rhaegar saw rows of large crates, emptied and scattered horizontally and vertically. He sighed inwardly. "Their preparations were truly extensive."

But even the best preparations had their limits. Dragon eggs had a lifespan of a hundred years at most, and without proper preservation, they would lose their vitality within decades.

Wealth was valuable, but it had to be inherited by descendants. Had it not been for the Doom, the Aethyrys family's legacy could have made a comeback for their direct descendants.

Stepping over the container that once held the dragon eggs, Rhaegar walked to the center of the palace, where a massive cylindrical stone pillar stood.

The pillar, more than ten meters in diameter, had grooves hollowed out on the outside, filled with densely packed books.

With a sense of awe, Rhaegar gently picked up a book.

The books were made of paper and had long since weathered so badly that they crumbled at the slightest touch. Rhaegar felt a pang of pity and couldn't help but curse, "No wonder Daemon only took two books."

Those two books were made of a special parchment, far more precious and durable than ordinary paper.

Rhaegar examined the collection carefully. Almost all of the tens of thousands of categorized books had weathered, with only a small portion still readable.

"Forget it, let's keep them for now," he decided. These books, mostly biographies of Ancient Valyria and the human geography of the continent of Essos, could be recopied by maesters later.

Turning around, Rhaegar's eyes locked onto the surrounding walls of the palace. The walls, also made of black stone, were adorned with abstract murals.

A significant portion of the murals depicted dragons, detailing each stage of their lives. There were images of ancient dragons too old to fly, fierce adult giant dragons, and skinny young dragons.

Other scenes Harpies devouring people, nomads riding horses, and griffins fighting dragons for food.

The mural also featured several motifs of male and female coitus, with elaborate and complex actions. Rhaegar's eyes widened at the sight.

In the center of the mural, a particular pattern caught his attention. Two adult dragons with crowns on their heads were chasing each other, circling a disk. In the middle of the two dragons, words were inscribed in High Valyrian.

Rhaegar squinted at the inscription and exclaimed, "A Binding Magic Spell!"

Chapter 412: The Victory Method of Childbirth!

The orderly arrangement of the words codified a step-by-step pattern for taming dragons, laid out in Valyrian script. At a glance, Rhaegar recognized the third row of spells. Above them were the spell "Fly," which aided in taming the dragon, and the spell "Dragonfire," which aided in battle.

Flight and Dragonfire were both essential. They existed in the High Valyrian scripture and implied dozens of dragon-riding techniques, both simple and obscure.

Rhaegar was overjoyed and committed every word of the wall painting to memory. The Aethyrys family had placed an extraordinary value on knowledge. Each dragon-control technique was accompanied by a corresponding pattern.

For example, the simple command "Land" had variations such as "Emergency Landing," "Battlefield Landing," and "Sea Soaring" carved into the stone walls.

By using these commands and communicating the magic in the bloodstream, a dragon rider could ensure that the dragon clearly understood the instructions, thus avoiding tragic accidents such as falling to the ground or drowning in the sea.

Another example was the "Dragonfire" spell. Through subtle vocabulary, the rider could help the dragon maintain "relative sanity" in various situations and control the direction of its attacks.

Rhaegar had a clear concept of the supplemental binding spell. It was like a nanny-grade dragon taming manual.

"No wonder the top-ranked Dragonlord families had so many dragons. This is the meaning of Blood and Fire," Rhaegar mused, reaching out to touch the cool stone wall, his eyes bright with excitement.

He boldly speculated: The Dragonlord families of ancient Valyria lived in topless towers for generations, dedicating themselves to become Bloodmages and Pyromancers. From a young age, their sons and heirs learned to mobilize the magic in their blood and study the techniques of the Binding Spell.

Once they mastered the full binding spell, also known as "Dragon Taming," they could easily summon a dragon to their side and establish a strong master-slave relationship. However, this required the ability to tame a dragon and the presence of a dragon to be tamed.

During the ancient Valyrian period, dragons held a very high status and were loved and respected far more than the Targaryens of today. As a result, the relationship between the dragon rider and the dragon was one in which the dragon chose the rider, not the other way around.

Except for a few young dragons hatched from eggs, most of the Dragonlord's bloodline had to venture to the Fourteen Flames under their family's control to find unowned or wild dragons left behind by their ancestors to tame.

With a bloodline and a binding spell, about one-third of the Dragonlords succeeded. They would find dragons, gain their favor, and fly on their backs. The remaining two-thirds were disregarded by dragons that didn't see eye to eye or were burned by those with bad tempers.

In the long run, the Dragonlords were nurtured to be in awe of dragons and screened for excellent heirs.

Rhaegar's thoughts drifted far away, his heart filled with emotion. "A competitive environment of superiority and inferiority - the strong grow stronger and the weak grow weaker," he mused.

Seeing the cultivation methods of the top-ranked Dragonlord families, he understood why the Targaryen lineage ranked in the middle and lower tiers. During the era of Aenar, they were even close to a generation without dragons.

Currently, Targaryen dragons were imprisoned and raised from the moment they hatched, limiting their growth and reducing reverence for them. Furthermore, the abilities and personalities of the dragon riders varied widely.

In Rhaegar's generation, the siblings were fortunate enough to each tame a dragon, a rarity in ancient Valyria. In Jaehaerys' time, there were only three Dragonmasters among the surviving descendants, excluding those who died young.

There were more than five dragons during King Jaehaerys' reign-Balerion and Dreamfyre in King's Landing, at least two dragons on Dragonstone, including Cannibal and Sheepstealer, and possibly other wild dragons that may have perished at Cannibal's hands.

Cannibal was known to steal eggs and hunt hatchlings. The Sheepstealer and Grey Ghost survived due to luck and their unique characteristics. The Sheepstealer was highly intelligent with strong, thick scales, while the Grey Ghost was an expert at hiding, even from fishermen.

Young dragons without such skills or resilience would have a hard time escaping Cannibal's clutches. Even pure-blooded Targaryens were not guaranteed to tame dragons-wild dragons were feared and avoided.

Rhaegar's fame grew from his daring challenge of the Cannibal, while Aemond was fortunate to gain the favor of the Sheepstealer and passively tame the wild dragon. Without these two wild dragons, one of the six Targaryen siblings would be without a dragon to tame.

Rhaegar drew in a deep breath as a flash of insight illuminated his mind.

He suddenly remembered the Magic Tide!

"Magic tides don't happen more than once in hundreds of years, so why did it coincide with the rise of the Targaryens?" Rhaegar frowned, speculating.

In the dream world he had encountered a brief mention of something ominous: a rise followed by a fall.

Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he murmured softly, "Blacks, Greens, Velaryons, Daemon..."

The Dragonmasters of today were divided into four factions. If any of these factions let their ambitions go unchecked, it could lead to war and dragons fighting each other.

The Targaryens had united the continent of Westeros for over a hundred years. Yet in that time, only four dragons had died, three of them victims of war: Meraxes, Quicksilver, and the wild dragon of the Smoking Sea, Morghul.

Rhaegar chuckled, "Division and control have their uses. Ancient Valyria existed for centuries without succumbing to power struggles."

History confirmed this truth.

Aegon the Conqueror, the first generation, ruled with his two sister-wives.

The second generation, Aerys and Maegor, seemed harmonious, though Maegor's reign was brutal.

Jaehaerys, the third generation, saw conflict as Maegor killed his nephews Aegon and Viserys, and the Black Bride Rhaena fought for her daughters' claim to the Iron Throne. This era was marked by the fiercest conflict, even resulting in the death of a dragon.

Aemon and Baelon, the fourth generation, experienced great sadness as almost all thirteen siblings died young.

It was as if they had been born to be sacrificed.

Viserys and Daemon, the fifth generation, had a relationship that broke and healed many times. Rhaenys once challenged for the Iron Throne, and the Targaryen relationship with House Velaryon remained strained.

In Rhaegar's generation, four siblings shared the same parents, but his stepmother, Alicent, frequently caused turmoil.

It had only been six generations, but there was already so much animosity.

In contrast, during the ancient Valyrian period, the forty dragonlord families continually invaded Essos, plundering colonies and slaves. Yet they coexisted peacefully and maintained their glory for countless centuries.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with determination as he considered this. "Think long term to ensure the family's eternal prosperity."

Zira!

The Truefyre in Rhaegar's hand slashed against the binding magic spell on the mural, leaving no traces behind.

With a few swift strikes, he nodded in satisfaction. "Well done."

He considered the possibility that someone else might have entered the ruins. The disorganized rebels posed no real threat; none would survive.

"Daemon must have recognized it," Rhaegar thought darkly. No wonder Daemon had only taken two books and had been so excited about his haul.

"Forget it. Sooner or later, I'll find out," Rhaegar shook his head, not dwelling on it.

The Binding Magic Spell would eventually be passed on to the family members. The key was to establish strict rules to prevent its misuse.

Turning around, Rhaegar circled the four stone walls, examining the murals' contents. The scenes were reminiscent of the ruins of the Belaerys family.

Most of the murals depicted the long history of the Aethyrys family. According to the records, they were once exceptionally glorious, being among the original Valyrian shepherds who discovered and attempted to tame wild dragons.

However, the family's fortunes had fluctuated. At the time of the construction of this half-site, House Aethyrys was at its lowest point, ranked in the middle to upper echelons of the forty dragonlord families, having been pushed out of the top ranks.

At its peak, the family boasted fifty-four dragons and up to forty dragon riders, only slightly inferior to other top Dragonlords families.

Rhaegar read and savored the history of the Aethyrys family. Taming dragons, breeding dragons, and mastering blood sorcery were the cornerstones of the top dragonlord families.

And then there was...

Having babies! Having children!

Intermarriage within the family was common - brother and sister, uncle and niece, aunt and nephew. Often there were multiple marriages.

External marriages only involved selling off the family's excess children to the outside world.

Others Dragonlords Houses?

Marriages!

Powerful Seafaring Houses?

Marriages!

Native Nobles of the land of Long Summer?

Marriages!

These three groups were the core of power in Ancient Valyria: the Dragonlord Houses dominated the skies, Seafaring Houses conquered the seas, and the native nobles of the Land of the Long Summer owned the fertile land.

Each Dragonlord family did not necessarily intermarry with other Dragonlords, but they did form alliances with the maritime families and the native nobles. Invasions required troops and wealth, and the importance of the seafaring nobles was emphasized along the Narrow Sea.

The Velaryon and Celtigar Houses, both of ancient and noble bloodlines, had been staunch allies of the Targaryens for many years.

When Aenar went into exile, they followed close behind. The native nobles, however, did not leave their lands, and the Targaryens lost any alliances they might have had in that regard when they left Valyria.

Returning to the subject at hand, House Aethyrys produced a large number of heirs through internal intermarriage. These numerous heirs formed a vast network of alliances, resulting in a large family with even more allies. It was a pure method of having children in order to win.

However, with power came corresponding troubles. The family did not have enough dragons to share among all its members. Those with dragons held high status, while those without had a lower standing. The more capable members managed more of the family's affairs, while the less capable waited for death.

Over time, family power struggles became inevitable. Because of this infighting, House Aethyrys name was both envied and despised by other dragonlord families.

An internal conflict could be resolved in a matter of months under controlled circumstances. Several, if not a dozen, dragonlords would unite and rally their allies to attack each other. Hundreds of Aethyrys would die in each conflict.

In the heat of the moment, dragon battles would break out, and even adult dragons would fall. But as soon as the scales of victory tipped, the fighting subsided. To make up for their losses, the victors would aggressively focus on having more children.

Within a few decades, the family's numbers would rebound, and new dragon eggs would hatch. At times, the house was unusually united, sharing the same beliefs and goals. Rarely did they disregard the survival of their dragons for the sake of infighting.

As a result, despite frequent internal conflicts, they managed to stay in the middle of the rankings, although they rarely made it to the top.

Quite outrageous!

Chapter 413: Dragon Taming Tools

Rhaegar couldn't help but feel a surge of admiration. It was hard not to be impressed by such a "prolific" dragonlord family.

"No wonder there are so many depictions of coitus on the murals," he mused. "The ancestors left detailed instructions for future generations."

He sighed, "An enigmatic family style, no wonder the Targaryens struggle to compete."

Consider the Targaryens:

Aegon married his two sisters and had only two sons.

Aenys I had three sons and three daughters, one of whom died in the cradle, while Maegor had no children and murdered two of his brother's sons in a dastardly act of kinslaying.

Jaehaerys I fathered thirteen children, yet none survived to inherit the Iron Throne.

Rhaegar's own father, Viserys, had four sons and two daughters.

"Even without the glory of battle, he lived up to his reputation as the young king," Rhaegar thought. "To be born is to contribute!"

Daemon fathered two daughters, with one son who died young.

"Retribution," Rhaegar muttered. "As an uncle, he coveted his niece and tried to kill his nephew."

Reflecting on his own situation, Rhaegar pondered, "Rhaenyra has given me two sons, which barely meets the standard."

With the experience of his late mother, Aemma, he couldn't risk overburdening Rhaenyra.

"I'll need other wives," Rhaegar thought secretly.

The Dragonpit housed young dragons like Stormcloud and Tyraxes, Dragonmont had the masterless Silverwing and the wild dragon Grey Ghost, and Dragonstone Island had two dozen dragon eggs.

With more heirs, there would be enough dragons to share.

Deep in thought, Rhaegar muttered, "Aegon, that boy, is good material for producing children."

The reproduction of the Targaryen bloodline couldn't rely on him alone. Aegon, with his boundless energy from frequenting brothels, could be put to better use.

"Aemond and Daeron must also grow up quickly," Rhaegar mused. "It is our duty to restore the Targaryen glory!"

"That's what brothers are for," Rhaegar declared, clenching his fist and pounding his palm.

In a single thought, he determined the future paths of his younger brothers. The three siblings his father had worked so hard to give him would not be coddled.

"Make use of them!" Rhaegar decided.

...

As dusk approached, Rhaenys stood guard at the edge of the deep pit, her eyes scanning the darkness for any sign of her nephew.

"Rhaegar has been down there a long time," she murmured, worry creasing her brow.

Gray Worm approached from the side, his voice raspy. "Princess, shall we imprison the restrained troublemakers?"

His abdomen was wrapped in bandages, stained with fresh blood. Rhaenys glanced around. Hundreds of Fearless stood in a circle, surrounding a group of kneeling disorganized people. Beyond the ruins, thousands of Vale Knights patrolled, maintaining order in the city.

The presence of Cannibal had dealt a severe blow to the rioters' morale, and the chaos was gradually subsiding.

"Wait a little longer. Rhaegar should be coming out soon," Rhaenys replied. She knew there was no immediate danger in the deep pit, but it probably contained valuable treasures that would take time and effort to retrieve.

"Roar..."

Cannibal let out a low growl, its green vertical pupils fixed intently on the deep pit, sensing a disturbing presence.

Rhaenys and Gray Worm felt their hearts skip a beat at Cannibal's agitation.

Rustle...

The sound of someone climbing echoed, and a figure emerged from the pit.

"It's me!" Rhaegar called out, dirty but smiling broadly. His happiness was evident.

Rhaenys examined him closely, noticing several new items on his person. A scroll hung at his waist, faintly glowing, while he twirled a silver-gray steel necklace in his right hand and carried a blackened whip in his left.

Rhaegar's smile was infectious, clearly indicating a successful haul.

Rhaenys sighed in relief, stepping forward with concern. "I thought something had happened to you when you took so long."

Had anything gone wrong with her nephew, her cousin—normally passive—would surely fight her to the death.

"Good things need to be searched carefully. It takes time," Rhaegar said, raising his hands to display his findings.

Rhaenys hesitated for a moment, her gaze intensifying. The necklace had a ring and clasp structure, with a water ripple pattern swirling on its surface.

"Valyrian steel?" she asked, her eyes widening. She took the necklace into her hands.

Indeed, it was a Valyrian steel necklace, made of the same material as Dark Sister. She raised the necklace above her head, and under the reddish hue of the setting sun, the round pendant exuded an ancient aura.

On one side of the pendant, two dragons wore crowns. On the other, strange, difficult-to-understand inscriptions were etched.

Rhaenys examined it again and shifted her gaze to the bracelet Rhaegar was wearing—a Valyrian steel bracelet with similar inscriptions.

She wasn't a fool. She stroked the necklace with a sense of reverence, understanding the significance of the treasures Rhaegar had unearthed.

After a moment, she reluctantly handed the necklace back to her nephew.

"The gods have favored you. Every good thing falls into your pocket," she said helplessly.

Rhaegar smiled brightly and looped the necklace around his wrist. The murals, books, containers, and treasure chests in the semi-ruins were mere fronts; the real treasures were buried deeper.

Facing a Dragonlord family with an ancient bloodline, Rhaegar expected to find hidden treasures. He used the mysterious scroll capable of detecting ancient Valyrian relics to guide him. Buried beneath the palace's stone pillars was the Valyrian steel necklace he now held.

Inside the pendant, there was a five-foot square storage space, significantly larger than the three-foot square of his space bracelet. Inside, a small mountain of gold and various rare ores were stored.

Rhaenys glanced at the pitch-black soft whip again and asked bluntly, "Is this also a treasure?"

"Indeed," Rhaegar replied, his smile widening.

In terms of value, the pitch-black soft whip surpassed even the space pendant. The whip, black as the deepest night sky, was made of an unknown material, possibly the tendon of some creature. Its surface was covered with fine, scale-like barbs. The grip, a foot long, was cast in Valyrian steel and inscribed with mysterious runes more arcane than those on the space items.

Simply looking at it could induce dizziness and discomfort.

Splat!

Rhaegar flicked his wrist, and the whip flew like a snake, lashing heavily against the ground. It stirred up a puff of dust, leaving behind a small pit.

"Roar—"

Cannibal suddenly roared harshly, its wings lifting its body as it stood, emitting a pungent odor of ashes. This odor, distinct from the stench of its usual diet, was something only dragons could sense. The air filled with the smell of ashes, making it seem as if a disaster loomed.

Splat!

Rhaegar cracked the whip again.

"Roar—"

Cannibal's green vertical pupils flashed with tyranny, and it could no longer hold back a mouthful of Dragonfire.

Rhaegar's expression remained calm as he suddenly commanded in High Valyrian, "Attack upwards!"

The words carried an undeniable, mysterious authority.

In an instant, Cannibal's green pupils cleared. Its neck rose high, and it unleashed a torrent of ghostly green Dragonfire into the sky.

Splat!

Rhaegar cracked the whip a third time, a smirk forming on his lips. "Stop!" he commanded.

Cannibal obediently closed its jaws, lowering its head. Its green vertical pupils locked onto its rider, filled with curiosity as it sniffed vigorously.

The dragon clearly understood its rider's instructions and carried them out naturally after years of bonding. Yet the disturbing scent remained.

As Cannibal's massive head nudged closer to him, Rhaegar smiled apologetically. "Well done partner, sorry for scaring you."

He hugged the dragon's roughly scaled snout, rubbing it affectionately to show his closeness.

"Roar!"

Cannibal shook its head in irritation, dislodging Rhaegar's touch. Its large, copper-bell-like eyes locked onto the whip in his hand.

The dragon was certain the whip was the source of its agitation. The sound of its lash had startled it, causing the instinctive release of Dragonfire.

Rhaegar stored the mystic scroll and the pitch-black soft whip into the space necklace, then wrapped his arms around the formidable dragon once more.

"Don't be angry, it's just a dragon taming tool."

Chapter 414: Ancient Scale

"Roar..."

Cannibal finally settled down, closing its vertical pupils to avoid looking at its rider. The sudden appearance of the dragon taming whip had inexplicably caused this king of wild dragons to resist. If it weren't for the fact that the item was in Rhaegar's hands, Cannibal, with its cruel nature, would have already bitten it to pieces.

Rhaegar, amused, vigorously rubbed Cannibal's black scales. He understood why Cannibal reacted this way.

The pitch-black whip was an ancient dragon taming tool known as the Dragon Taming Whip. According to the ancient books found within the space necklace, the dragon taming whip was one of the few effective tools for taming dragons, making its value greater than even a space tool.

The Aethyrys family, with its noble and ancient lineage, possessed several space props but only two dragon taming whips. One of these, hidden in the space necklace, was left for future generations.

The dragon taming whip had a crucial role. Made from an unknown material and processed by Pyromancers and Bloodmages, it inflicted severe pain on a dragon when it struck, penetrating even their tough scales. The grip was inscribed with mysterious runes, allowing it to briefly command the dragon, especially when paired with a binding spell.

The Aethyrys family used the Dragon Taming Whip to increase the efficiency of their heirs in taming young dragons. The whip's strike was unbearable for young dragons. During family civil wars, the whip could also calm dragons that had lost their riders, preventing them from rioting and attacking indiscriminately.

However, the whip was only a tool and was never meant for excessive use. Overuse could lead to rebellion from the intelligent dragons. History recorded instances where a dragon tamer who abused his dragon with a whip was torn apart in retaliation within days.

Cannibal opened its vertical pupils, flashing with surprise.

Rhaegar smiled. "You're not normal, and you might not even be a native dragon of Dragonstone Island."

Several ancient books were hidden in the space necklace, containing valuable knowledge. Some described the phenomenon of dragons eating each other. Dragons, being highly territorial, normally did not disturb each other. However, in cases of conflict where a dragon was injured, consuming the carcass of another dragon could aid in recovery.

Ancient texts elaborated on dragon eaters, emphasizing two key points:

1. They grow faster and are more lethal.
2. Once identified, they should be executed.

This incident severely weakened the family, causing them to fall from their middling position. First they fell to the middle and lower ranks, and when no new dragon eggs hatched, they slipped even further down.

It took decades for the family to recover, and only after a new dragon egg was hatched did they manage to climb back to the bottom of the ranks.

However, Cannibal was Rhaegar's dragon, and despite its instincts, it had restrained its desire to eat other dragons over the years.

"Roar..."

Sensing Rhaegar's thoughts, Cannibal's green vertical pupils flashed with cunning. The dragon turned away arrogantly, ignoring him.

It seemed to say:

Have I eaten a dragon behind your back? Do you even know?

Rhaegar's face darkened slightly, and he clenched his fists.

After ten long years of taming Cannibal, only one young dragon, Stormcloud, had hatched on Dragonstone.

Good thoughts, Good thoughts, Rhaegar told himself.

Tessarion's hatching place was the Dragonpit in King's Landing, not to be counted within Dragonstone Island.

Rhaegar gritted his teeth silently. "One young dragon in ten years is still normal," he reassured himself.

As a qualified dragon rider, doubting his own dragon was not an option. Rhaegar forced a kind smile. "Cannibal, you'll be in the Dragonpit from now on. Dragonstone Island has changed ownership."

"What, are suspecting it of eating dragons?" Rhaenys clasped her hands on her chest, her eyebrows arching with amusement.

Rhaegar's expression tightened, and he didn't answer.

Rhaenys continued, "Silverwing is a very fertile female dragon. She has been resting for the past few years, but she shows no intention of laying eggs."

"I know, Aunt," Rhaegar replied, covering his forehead with his hand. Thankfully, Cannibal had shown restraint.

Rhaegar shook his head and decided to think of something more pleasant.

In a flash of inspiration, he called up the Explorer's System Panel.

[Lost Dragon Taming Tools]

Exploration Progress: 10% (Pause)

[Valyrian Steel. Space Necklace]

Exploration Progress: 15%

Two ancient relics had triggered additional exploration quests.

Rhaegar's mouth curled into a slight smile. "Completing the Binding Spell and obtaining the Dragon Taming Whip by chance has been very lucky," he thought.

He wondered what other relics the explorer might uncover.

Phew...

At sunset, a group of fine cavalry bearing the banner of the three-headed red dragon arrived swiftly. The leaders were Robb of the Second Sons Regiment and Willam of House Royce.

Upon seeing Rhaegar, both men broke into smiles and knelt on one knee. "Prince, the chaos within the city has calmed down. Please advise us," they said in unison.

Rhaegar internalized his emotions and asked, "How many soldiers did we lose?"

In a newly conquered city-state, rebellion was inevitable. It was crucial to manage losses without depleting their own forces.

Robb's face darkened slightly. "The rebellion came suddenly. The Second Sons sacrificed over a hundred men, the Fearless lost over five hundred, and the Vale Knights suffered more than eight hundred casualties."

Willam, similarly, looked down guiltily. After capturing Myr, the army had adopted a rotation system to maintain order. Many soldiers who died were killed while enjoying the city-state in small groups during their off-duty time.

Hearing this, Rhaegar's eyes flickered as he glanced at the hundreds of chaotic people detained by the Fearless.

Two thousand Fearless, two thousand Vale Knights, and eight hundred subordinate soldiers.

More than one-fifth of the troops lost in a single bout of rebellion. It was a significant number.

Rhaegar's face remained impassive as he ordered, "Root out the old nobles who provoked the riot and arrest all those who refuse to surrender."

Robb hesitated. "Prince, the number of rebels is not small."

All along their route, there were not ten thousand, but several thousand besieging the streets and alleys.

Rhaegar glared at him. "Then arrest them all. Do not spare a single one holding a weapon."

"Yes!" Robb led the order and moved quickly.

Rhaegar's gaze fell on the hundreds of detained chaotic folk. He addressed Gray Worm, "Detain them all and deal with them first thing in the morning."

Gray Worm nodded, indicating he understood. During the riot, he had been patrolling the streets and had almost been killed by the armed rebels. As an Unsullied, he would show no mercy to those who had tried to kill him.

It was getting late.

Rhaegar walked out of the ruins and headed outside. The Magister's Mansion covered a large area; while the main complex had collapsed, the outer garden buildings remained intact.

Rhaenys followed with quick strides, her brows furrowed. "Rhaegar, how are you going to handle this?"

The riots in Myr were rooted in the provocation of the old nobles and the blind following of the commoners. Behind the scenes, it wasn't hard to guess that Braavos was involved, providing a large number of weapons.

Rhaegar, in a complex mood, thought of the over a thousand soldiers who had sacrificed their lives. He said, "The only way to pacify a place is through a combination of killing and offering incentives."

Seemingly careless, his words conveyed a chilling aura.

Rhaenys' eyebrows knitted in concern, worried that this might lead to excessive killing.

...

The next day.

The sky was blue, and the sea breeze carried the scent of thick smoke.

At Myr Harbor, in the Execution Square, the blackened heads of a gathering crowd chattered and raved. A thousand Fearless and a thousand Vale Knights maintained order, surrounding the square in layers. The air was thick with the smell of fish.

Most of the crowd were ragged slaves, huddled together in fear. At the front of the square, a row of plainly dressed commoners knelt, their numbers ranging from one thousand to eight hundred. Men and women, old and young, all bowed in submission.

In front of them, on a platform made of mud-brown stone bricks, dozens of richly dressed men and women were forced to kneel, their hands tied behind their backs. After days of riots, judgment day had finally arrived.

"Roar--"

A roar, as deep as a flood bell, resounded through the harbor as a black dragon hovered in the air, its wide wings casting a shadow over the crowd.

"Gulp..."

Even the innocent slaves tensed at the sight of the massive dragon, unconsciously swallowing their saliva. The Deathwing's fearsome reputation had spread across the continent, comparable to the Black Dread that once ruled Westeros.

"Roar..."

A scarlet dragon emerged from the city-state and circled the black dragon. The two dragons danced together in the sky before landing.

Boom...

The ground shook as the dragons landed, their massive feet trampling the harbor floor. Cannibal's wings supported its body, making it look like a mountain of charcoal-black coal.

"Roar!"

Cannibal tilted its head up, letting out an intimidating low roar. Wherever its green vertical pupils gazed, a cold, gloomy aura filled the air, chilling the onlookers to their core.

"Cannibal, that's enough." Rhaegar sat steadily on the dragon's back, in a good mood. As he stood up, a voice rang in his ears.

"This exploration is complete. Please pick up the lost treasures."

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow as the system panel surfaced.

[Lost Dragon Taming Tools]

Exploration progress: 100%

"Done, a little slower than the space necklace." Rhaegar pressed down the corner of his mouth and scanned around.

On one side of his waist, he wore Truefyre; on the other, he had the dragon taming whip. A red halo, the size of a watermelon, floated over the saddle on his right.

With experience, Rhaegar reached out and gently poked the halo.

Bo...

The soft touch sent a shiver through his hand, and the red halo exploded into a cloud of red light, the starbursts drilling into his hand.

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

"Detection successful. Determined to be a Legendary Relic: Fourteen Flames Remnant."

"Sure enough, it's Legendary Grade, worthy of being a dragon taming tool passed down through the ages."

Rhaegar rejoiced as a tattered scale, named Fourteen Flames Remnant, appeared in his mind. With a thought, the scale materialized in his hand.

The scale was bronze in color, only half intact, and the size of an adult's palm. It was similar to the [Dragon's Legacy] obtained from exploring Bellerion's skull, both exuding a rustic sense of age.

As Rhaegar touched the scale, the system panel provided additional information.

"Mēro perzot gihoti / Elēdroma iārza sir (Ghostly flame and song of shadows)."

"Izuli ampā perzi, Prumi lanti sēteksi (Two hearts as embers, Forged in fourteen fires)."

Chapter 415: The Targaryens Will Make You Stand Up Again!

"A marriage vow..."

Rhaegar paused, stunned for a moment.

The small lines of text revealed the traditional marriage vows of the Dragonlords of Ancient Valyria.

He pondered briefly and then had a rough idea.

Marriage, blood, scales...

The method of activation might require two people connected by blood. The prerequisite: Targaryen blood.

Rhaegar pursed his lips and smiled. "This will be a bit difficult to decipher."

He vaguely sensed that the ashes of the Fourteen Flames could activate the precious dragon relics in question. This intuition, though elusive, felt very real.

Flipping the tattered scales in his hand, he realized he would need to return to Westeros to find someone to help.

With a flick of his wrist, the scales disappeared.

In their place appeared a Valyrian steel carving knife, inscribed with codified runes. The knife was only about the length of a palm, its surface covered with rough and unfamiliar inscriptions, and its blade exceptionally sharp.

Rhaegar touched the space necklace around his neck, a relic from the morning's harvest.

The system panel font shifted.

[Valyrian Steel. Space Necklace]

Exploration Progress: 100%

The retrieval and detection screen jumped to the next message.

"Congratulations, the space necklace has been activated and you have obtained..."

[Carving Knife]

Grade: Excellent (Blue)

Function: Excellent Carving

Evaluation: "Proficient in various carving techniques, simulating ancient carving methods."

The trigger condition was simple: fire magic, common to Pyromancers and Bloodimages.

Rhaegar flipped the carving knife in his hand and then retrieved the space necklace a moment later. For now, it would not function.

"It might be necessary to hone the craft until it imitates the mystical inscriptions on other relics," he mused.

He looked at the knife in confusion. "I can carve stone, but what else do I need?"

Rhaegar knew little about the ancient techniques that the knife required.

"Roar..."

Cannibal growled lowly, carrying Rhaegar as it climbed up next to the stone platform. Each step collapsed large swaths of the plaza's stone floor.

Rhaegar shook his head slightly, considering learning some woodcarving, forging, and other skills. "I need to be trained in various crafts," he thought.

Just as he was contemplating this, Cannibal lowered its neck, bringing the saddle of its spine level with the stone platform.

"Good work, partner."

Rhaegar smiled and jumped off the dragon's back with a thud.

In contrast, Meleys crept to the periphery of the platform, allowing Rhaenys to climb down the soft ladder under the escort of the Fearless. The human-dragon bond was evident in their coordinated movements.

"Prince!"

Gray Worm held his spear and stood tall.

Behind him, dozens of old nobles knelt, staring at Rhaegar with faces full of abhorrence. Among them were leaders of the old nobles and implicated family members, representing about two-thirds of Myr's old noble power.

Rhaegar surveyed them repeatedly, smiled faintly, and asked, "Do you plead guilty?"

The words immediately drew backlash.

"You demon, intruder!"

"A dragon-worshipping demon as brutal as your ancestors."

"You invade our homes and take away our slaves..."

Whimpering and raucous, the old nobles who once held their identities with pride now raged like common street vendors, breaking into a fit without any decorum.

Rhaegar's ears hurt from the noise. He walked towards the higher platform, a place of higher authority. Gray Worm turned to follow, waving his hand at the Unsullied guards.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The Unsullied were expressionless, their spears turning on one end, and their big sticks delivering bang-bang-whacks.

At once, the shouting and cursing stopped, replaced by wailing and cries of pain.

Rhaenys took three or two steps onto the high platform, crossing over the disorganized old nobles.

All bark and no bite, they were just a bunch of paper tigers.

"Roar!"

Just then, Cannibal roared into the sky, a mouthful of ethereal green Dragonfire clashing high above. Instantly, both the old nobles on the platform and the civilian slaves in the square fell silent.

Thousands of pairs of eyes fixated on Rhaegar on the platform.

Rhaegar's face remained calm, accustomed to the weight of everyone's gaze.

"Roar!"

Cannibal ceased its Dragonfire, but its throat continued to emit a suppressed low growl.

Rhaegar stood with his arms folded, the black dragon's head hanging beside him. One man and one dragon, embodying the presence of a king.

Clattering...

The civilians and slaves fell to their knees in unison, shivering under the gaze of the Dragonlord and the evil dragon. No one dared to face their fear head-on.

Rhaegar looked down upon them, a sense of grandeur rising in his heart. He shouted loudly, "Stand up!"

Silence filled the square. Except for the Fearless and the Knights of the Vale, no one dared to rise.

"I said stand up!" Rhaegar shouted a second time.

The civilians and slaves trembled. A few rose in fear, but most remained indifferent.

"Rhaegar." Rhaenys, standing to the side, tried to warn him. The power in Myr still lay with the old nobles and slave owners, not with the downtrodden slaves who had lost their spirit of resistance over the years.

"Aunt, the Narrow Sea War is over, and there shouldn't be so many more deaths," Rhaegar said, his eyebrows softening as he interrupted her.

In Lys, he had gathered a group of old nobles and wealthy merchants to stabilize order. But here in Myr, seeing that the nobles could not be practical, he had a new reform strategy in mind.

Turning his back on Gray Worm, he waved his hand gently.

Gray Worm nodded heavily and gave the order.

A few Unsullied's eyes glazed over, and their spears fought to stab the old nobles in front of them.

Pfft...

The iron spearhead pierced into their body, churning the internal organs as the Unsullied twisted their hands.

"Hoo~"

Two men, one woman, and one old man, four old nobles, fell to the ground in agony, their blood soaking their elaborate clothes.

Within moments, they were dead.

The Unsullied moved nimbly, pulling out the spears and piercing the jaws again, lifting the bodies and hanging them above the high platform.

A grim public display.

The remaining old nobles who witnessed this scene were crazed with fear, squealing and struggling.

The Unsullied showed no mercy, swinging their spears and beating them into submission.

All of this was observed by the commoners and slaves.

"The old oppression is over, you should stand up!" Rhaegar shouted.

Swish...

Seeing their former masters executed, many slaves stood up excitedly.

There was nothing more uplifting than seeing those who had enslaved them put to death.

Rhaegar deepened the divide, transforming the conflict between the old nobility and the Targaryens into a conflict between the old nobility and the slave class.

The root cause of the unrest was rebellion against Targaryen rule. What Rhaegar wanted to do was show the people the evils of the old rulers before they turned against him.

A sea breeze blew, spreading the smell of blood from the corpses throughout the square.

All the slaves smelled it, eager to take their revenge.

Rhaegar looked on and asked aloud, "The old nobles and slave masters have oppressed you mercilessly. The commoners struggled to eat and the slaves were harassed. Why did you join them in rebellion?"

Deadly silence.

Rhaegar looked around and continued, "Now the old nobles and slave owners are lambs to the slaughter. No one dares oppress you anymore. Shouldn't you be happy?"

The commoners and slaves looked at each other in dismay, realizing the truth in his words.

Slowly, they found the courage to rise.

Rhaegar waved his hand again, his voice stern, "There are no slaves in Westeros, and with Myr under the jurisdiction of the Iron Throne, there is no longer any need for enslaved people!"

As the words fell, ten Unsullied stepped forward, raised their spears, and ran through an equal number of old nobles.

The commoners and slaves were in an uproar, hugging each other in twos and threes and staring in fear.

For the new rulers, they had only fear. They feared that if they displeased them, the dragon would burn them to death.

Rhaegar didn't care. All he needed was blood for blood to cleanse the commoners and slaves of their allegiance to the old nobles and make them accept Targaryen rule.

Gray Worm dragged an old nobleman by the hand and knocked him down in front of Rhaegar.

The old nobleman had a pair of triangular eyes, his body was as thin as a reed, and he emitted a foul odor.

At that moment, three people stepped off the stage.

A wealthy man in rich clothes, a commoner with a weathered face, and a slave with scars all over his body.

A woman and two men, none of them very old.

The three people walked onto the high stage and stood at Gray Worm's gesture.

Without turning his head, Rhaegar snapped, "Tell me, what evil has this old man at your feet done?"

The slave was the first to rush forward, his dark-skinned face flushed with rage as he shouted angrily, "He has killed many innocent slaves, snatched the young children of slaves and toyed with them to death, both male and female!"

Another man also stepped forward and spoke angrily, "He privately raised taxes in the harbor, forcing the fishermen to sell their wives and daughters to him at a low price when they couldn't afford to pay the taxes!"

The three men took turns speaking, exposing the old noble's heinous crimes one after another, each more disgusting and outrageous than the last.

This was the norm among the captured old nobles.

As their sins were listed, the commoners and slaves in the square gritted their teeth, their eyes reddening with empathy and rage.

In a free-trading city-state like Myr, some commoners and slaves did live better lives.

But it was never them.

Whenever life fell short, anyone had the right to resent.

Swish!

Rhaegar drew Truefyre, and with a swing of his pitch-black sword, he decapitated the old noble.

Tens of thousands of eyes stared at him in unison.

Rhaegar held his sword in both hands and declared, "The old nobles and slave traders have forced you to kneel by worldly law; the Targaryens want you to stand!

"There are no slaves in Westeros, the Iron Throne treats everyone the same!"

His voice was deafening and went straight to the heart.

At that moment, his silver hair and purple eyes were imprinted in the eyes of all civilians and slaves.

He replaced their stereotypes of brutality and evil dragons by ideals of equality and justice.

A kneeling slave angrily rose up, tearing his voice to shout.

"Long live the Targaryens!"

A stone sent up a thousand ripples.

More slaves rose to their feet and raised their voices.

"Long live the Targaryens!"

"Long live the Dragonlord!"

Above the Fish execution square, not a single civilian or slave remained kneeling; all stood straight.

Their eyes burned, their voices broke, all looking at one person.

Rhaegar Targaryen.

At this moment, Rhaegar also looked at them and raised his hand in a strong wave.

The Unsullied struck quickly, stabbing all the old nobles on the stage through the chest.

One of them cursed loudly in his final moments, "Invaders! The other free trade city-states won't let you go!"

Rhaegar calmly replied, "It is not the Targaryens who destroyed you, it is your insatiable greed."

Without their own oppression and enslavement, this day would not have come.

"Roar!"

With a growl, the Cannibal's huge body climbed to the side of the high platform, its green vertical pupils staring at the detained crowd of disorganized people.

In front of the civilians and slaves, Rhaegar raised his eyebrows and said aloud, "The Targaryens brings peace and justice, but it does not allow for questioning or harm."

"In the name of Viserys I Targaryen, I sentence the rebels to death!"

After saying this, he looked sideways at the Cannibal and mouthed the dragon-taming words, "Dracarys!"

The words were spoken in High Valyrian, containing waves of arcane and powerful magic.

Its meaning was: Burn them all.

The Cannibal's vertical pupils flashed with cruelty, and its jaws opened wide.

"Roar--"

The monstrous Dragonfire swept out, enveloping thousands of people like smoke and mist, turning the square into a sea of green dragonfire.

Chapter 416: Braavos' Intelligence

A few days later.

Myr, Dancing Street.

Situated in the western district of the city-state, the area was small and cramped, favoring the convergence of the largest number of slave groups.

As far as the eye could see, the grayish-white rotten buildings were densely packed, resembling a messy beehive.

"Keep order, don't cut in line!"

Near noon, hundreds of Unsullied soldiers split into two lines to maintain a long queue of slaves.

The number of slaves stretched far into the distance, all lined up in rags, many dragging their families along.

Thanks to the loose layout of this slum, several similar lines extended outward, each guarded by specialized Unsullied soldiers.

At first glance, it looked like a distribution of free porridge.

In reality, it was not.

At the front of the line, a dark-skinned slave held a four-sided stone plaque in his hand, dancing with excitement.

"Plaque, I have a plaque!"

The shout was so loud that he wished for everyone to hear it.

The slaves around him didn't reject it but instead cast envious and expectant eyes.

"Next, what's in hand?"

A stone table was set up at the end, and an elderly slave in coarse linen clothes buried his head, asking the next slave in line his usual question.

The man was thin, his skin darkened from the sun, and he cowered under the questioning.

Humbly, he spoke, "Stonemason, I used to repair palaces for slave owners."

The elderly slave raised his eyes and pulled out a triangular stone tablet from a basket at his feet with his large, dry hand, asking for details of his name and age.

The skinny slave told the truth and was also careful to name his hometown before being trafficked.

"That doesn't need to be known, from now on you are all citizens of Myr."

The elderly slave's voice was raspy as he used a special dye to write down the information on the stone tablet.

The stone tablet was then handed to a group of neighboring craftsmen.

Someone took the stone tablet, picked up a chisel and carving knife, and marked it according to the dye.

After a few moments, the stone tablet was formally handed over to the skinny slave.

Seeing the other person's excited expression, the elderly slave raised his eyebrows and asked, "The stonemason trade is short of people, two meals and half a copper star a day, do you want to do it?"

"Yes!" The skinny slave agreed in one breath, carrying the triangular stone tablet, and joined the team of craftsmen carving stone tablets on the spot.

The elderly slave was used to this and continued to ask the next slave for information.

The stonemasons stayed behind to work, the literate ones stayed with the healers, and the old, weak, women, and children returned the way they came.

The stone tags issued varied.

Common slaves were given squares, various types of craftsmen were given triangles, and healers were given circles.

Each stone tablet served as a piece of identification, recording name, age, and craftsmanship.

Holding it was the only way to completely get rid of slavery and become a full-fledged citizen of Myr.

...

The former site of the Magister's Mansion.

The large hole in the site of the Dragonlord has been completely sealed off, and the ruins have attracted a large number of workers freed from slavery to take care of the cleanup.

In a garden building, a white stone loft.

Rhaegar leaned against the wide floor-to-ceiling windows, holding a stone in one hand and carving with a knife in the other.

His hands, white as jade, moved deftly, sending shards of stone falling like snow as he carved a simple four-sided stone tablet.

Thud!

Casually tossed, the plaque fell into a nearby basket.

Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged as he continued to carve the next piece of stone.

He seemed like an emotionless stone carving machine.

Knock knock...

Across the lavishly decorated room, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

Rhaegar's hand was a little sore, and he casually greeted the visitor.

Creak—

The door to the room pushed open, revealing Grey Worm in black armor.

Grey Worm tilted his head, straightened his non-existent collar for the sake of solemnity, and strutted into the bedroom.

Since the event a few days ago, the bloated, rusty machine that was Myr had been back up and running, and everything was thriving.

In particular, the entire city-state was in a positive mood as the former slave population had left slavery and moved closer to the Iron Throne as commoners.

Capturing the city-states, freeing the slaves, and establishing a new order...

Grey Worm, who was born as a slave, felt honored and glad that he had made the right decision and followed the right person.

Seeing that Grey Worm did not speak for half a day, Rhaegar dropped the engraved stone plaque and said, "Say something, or get to work."

A bit of awareness, I'm working and you come to stand around?

Although carving wasn't just about filling in gaps, it was also about sharpening one's skills.

"Ahem..."

Grey Worm's face reddened slightly with embarrassment. He coughed lightly twice to hide it and said, "Prince, there is a letter from Gulltown, from Lady Jeyne of Eyrie."

"Jeyne?"

Rhaegar was surprised and put down his carving knife.

Clang!

When the carving knife touched the marble floor, it made a crisp, pleasant sound, slicing through the marble like iron.

Rhaegar let out a "tsk," momentarily forgetting the sharpness of this tool again.

After several days of use, it had no special effect but was incredibly efficient.

Grey Worm stole a glance and pulled out a letter while gently suggesting, "The city has recruited enough stonemasons; you don't need to do this yourself."

The policy of identity stone tags had been proposed by the Prince, and was initially seen as a pie-in-the-sky, time-consuming, and tedious endeavor.

There was a saying in Tyrosh: for every word from a slave owner, a slave must be prepared to have his legs cut off.

Unexpectedly, the introduction of the identity stone plaques caused a great response, especially among the slave community. Everyone fought for it.

Even if Myr's slavery system was overthrown, the slaves who couldn't feed themselves still had doubts in their hearts, and they couldn't shake off the shadow of being enslaved for decades.

It was impossible to get rid of the lowly status they once had.

Rhaegar, familiar with history books, understood the importance of a sense of belonging.

Through fragmented images in his dreams, the concept of identity stone tags came to mind.

By issuing identity stone tags in the name of the Iron Throne, slaves who obtained them would no longer be slaves and could loudly proclaim themselves as legitimate citizens.

Although the essence was just a simple stone, it could fill the inferiority in a slave's heart.

At the same time, it created unimaginable cohesion through the stone tablet.

The effect was similar to the unified coinage system of Westeros, where one knew the origin of the coin as soon as it was used.

Slaves holding the stone tablets were very happy to shout that they from Myr.

Because they were no longer slaves.

Rhaegar listened to Grey Worm's admonition, acknowledged it, and murmured, "Instruct the stonemasons to speed up the progress and strive to carve stone tags that satisfy everyone. Increase the reward from half a copper to one."

The stone tags were important but only for a short period of time.

To maintain the effect, people still had to be sustained.

Myr was in a state of flux, and creating jobs allowed the poor to earn a living.

The food provided by the Iron Throne went back into their pockets.

Either way, this not only fueled the city-state's economy, but also increased the motivation of the former slaves.

Having seen the power of the prince's policies, Grey Worm had nothing to disobey and immediately said, "I will inform them."

"Remember to recycle the scattered coins and uniformly issue the new copper coins," Rhaegar reminded as he took the letter.

This was one downside of free trade city-states: the coinage system was scattered, and the coins introduced within the city-states did not circulate well.

As a trading city-state that traveled in all directions, there was no excuse for this.

But, during reconstruction, using the currency of Westeros as much as possible would help increase the sense of identity among the people.

When the harbor is redeveloped, one can consider starting a small bank solely owned by the Iron Throne to ease the pressure from the Iron Bank.

It was difficult to keep getting stuck with Braavos on the economic front.

Gray Worm nodded quickly, making a mental note to remember Rhaegar's instructions.

Rhaegar smiled and opened the letter sealed with red wax, saying, "No need to be nervous, the current atmosphere is just fine."

As a child witnessing the chaos in King's Landing, Rhaegar had longed to implement measures to establish order.

At the very least, he didn't want the displaced people from all over to flood into the city, causing overcrowding and a rise in crime.

Unfortunately, Westeros was rife with prejudice and resistance to change, giving him little opportunity to act.

Myr, however, was a different story. Here, he had the freedom to implement his ideas.

The introduction of identity stone tablets provided the people with status symbols, effectively discouraging outsiders.

The information on the stone tablets was also crucial, mapping out the identities of craftsman, healers, religious figures, and so on.

These people were hidden talents, essential for forming the new system.

Grey Worm, relieved but maintaining his serious demeanor, reported on recent affairs in the city, both large and small.

Rhaegar intended to use this period to establish a new system in Myr, with the initial goal of strengthening centralization.

Westeros operated under a feudal system, with power scattered like a bowl of rotten porridge.

In contrast, Myr had only one city-state, providing an opportunity for the unification of governmental orders.

Rhaegar listened attentively to Grey Worm's report while reading Jeyne's letter with a good mood.

The last time he saw Jeyne was in Gulltown.

The general process included burning the Braavos fleet, disciplining Aegon, and reorganizing defenses.

They even found time to get intimate.

As he read the letter, Rhaegar's expression changed several times.

[Braavos has hired a fleet for the second time, and it has joined with Qohor to buy off the Dothraki cavalry; they are preparing to attack Pentos].

"Braavos is still relentless," Rhaegar muttered, furrowing his brows.

Since their failed surprise attack, Braavos had shifted from overt actions to covert ones, providing Dorn with food and weapons, inciting riots in Myr, and hiring mercenaries to provoke conflicts in the Stepstones Islands.

All these actions made it increasingly difficult to bring the war to a close.

"If you dare come, you will die!" Rhaegar said coldly, his attention returning briefly to the letter as he continued to study it.

At the end of the letter, a handwritten note from Jeyne contained only a few sentences. Rhaegar's gaze intensified as he absorbed each word, his expression changing subtly with each line.

Meanwhile, Grey Worm continued his report, unaware of Rhaegar's growing distraction. "The repairs to the harbor are complete, and Lady Karl has rebuilt the dye factory. She has also applied for port trade development."

In Myr, three temporary representatives had been appointed to represent the slaves, the commoners, and the old nobility. Karl, from the servile faction of the old nobility, focused on Myr's specialty in textiles, especially cloth and lace.

As Grey Worm spoke, he noticed Rhaegar's wavering attention and lowered his voice, "Prince, are you alright?"

Rhaegar, snapping out of his reverie, lifted the letter with a grin. "Good, very good!" he exclaimed. The sunlight streaming through the floor-to-ceiling windows illuminated the letter, making the thin pages nearly transparent and the words almost indistinct.

Flipping the letter back and forth, Rhaegar's smile grew wider, barely containable.

Observing this, Grey Worm ventured cautiously, "Something good?"

"Nonsense," Rhaegar replied with a grin that contradicted his dismissive words. "Go down, contact Pentos first, then send a message to Tyrosh."

Braavos' intention to attack Pentos, an ally under the Iron Throne, was problematic, but Rhaegar was not eager for a confrontation. Recent reports indicated that Daemon had finally subdued the Tyrosh rebels and was preparing to bolster their defenses.

Don't think that you can have a free city and not make a contribution to the cause.

Grey Worm, his face a mask of dutiful solemnity, nodded and exited.

Chapter 417: Pioneering Lords

Bang—

The door to the room closed hastily, signaling the urgency of the one who had just left.

Rhaegar couldn't help but grin as he held up the letter, his heart swelling with joy. Jeyne was pregnant. The timing suggested it was from their last encounter in Gulltown.

He murmured to himself, "Am I actually decent at this whole fatherhood thing?"

Already, his thoughts were consumed with the future of his yet-to-be-born third child. He wondered if it would be a boy or a girl, and if it would inherit the distinct features of House Arryn.

He vaguely remembered that Targaryen tradition often saw the firstborn inherit the mother's physical traits, especially if the mother was from a different lineage.

Rhaegar thought for a moment, then smiled and muttered, "It's my child, it doesn't matter if they like an Arryn."

Rhaenyra's children were already destined to occupy the positions of first and second sons, so there was no need to worry about Jeyne's child competing for titles. He was ready to accept this child wholeheartedly.

Besides, having an Arryn-looking heir would make inheriting the Eyrie and the Vale more logical in the future.

"Uh huh..." Rhaegar's eyes sparkled with anticipation.

Jeyne had not yet been given a formal wife title, which meant her child would technically be a bastard. But with the ongoing war, the plan to formalize more marriages was still far off.

And then there was the hurdle of Rhaenyra. The Faith of the Seven would likely protest loudly, and many traditional nobles would oppose such arrangements.

There were also lords who would use the situation to challenge Jeyne's, opposing the inheritance by a woman.

Rhaegar weighed his options, but no clear solution emerged. The only way to break through these obstacles was to become strong enough.

He glanced sideways at the blue sky over Myr, his mind already strategizing.

Myr, nestled in a Bay and bordered by the Sea of Myrth that flows into the sea, boasts an ideal and strategic location.

The city-state's creativity and ingenuity are evident in its well-developed industries, including high-density lenses for astronomical observation, triple-shot crossbows, and delicate lace.

Myr's architecture combines elements of both land and water styles. The city is adorned with white stone pavilions, fountains, statues, and plazas. A small, meandering river flows through moats inside and outside the city-state, connecting the port on the west coast with the Sea of Myrth in the east.

Wealth is plentiful in Myr, and several small banks operate within the city. To avoid provoking public anger, Rhaegar has chosen not to interfere with these banks for now, leaving that task for later.

As he surveyed the city, Rhaegar couldn't help but be mesmerized. "What a treasure," he muttered to himself.

Of the three city-states, Lys and Myr were his favorites. Lys had the largest population and a thriving pleasured houses industry, making it home to many wealthy individuals.

Myr, however, was the most versatile, boasting some of the finest craftsmanship in the world. Its location on the Essos mainland made it a prime candidate for colonization and expansion.

Initially, Rhaegar had planned to leave Lys to Daemon, drawing 50% of its city-state taxes and using it as an overseas transit station. However, Daemon's arrogance led him to seize Tyrosh, a city in relative decline.

Tyrosh was known for its mercenaries and thriving slave trade. Attempting to eradicate slavery and stabilize unemployed mercenaries was a daunting task, but Daemon seemed eager to tackle it himself. Rhaegar decided to let him suffer the consequences and see if he had the talent to rule.

"Myr is a land worth developing," Rhaegar thought, his violet eyes glowing with a bit of light.

He considered the backup measure of marrying again to ensure that even if a child could not inherit the Eyrie, they would carry the Targaryen surname. If the child was not welcomed elsewhere, he would divide Myr among them.

He was not afraid of sibling rivalry. Dividing territories among his children and turning their focus outward was the right approach.

Harrenhal, the Prince's Palace, Lys, and Myr were enough to provide for four children, excluding the eldest son who would inherit the throne. If that wasn't sufficient, he could take Dorne, which, despite being a desert, had rich oasis lands that could be divided among his children.

Rhaegar looked up to Aegon the Conqueror and his great-grandfather Jaehaerys. Conquering land while having children was the path to Targaryen strength. More land meant more children, and more children meant more land to conquer.

With each generation, Targaryen would grow stronger, avoiding endless internal conflict. Rhaegar's vision was clear.

This is not the time of Ancient Valyria, where forty Dragonlord families competed against each other.

In the present day, the lands without dragons are plentiful, and the Targaryens, who command these majestic creatures, are seen as the Chosen Ones.

Having tasted the success of dismantling the Triarchy, Rhaegar's enthusiasm for conquering new lands grew stronger.

Invasion? No. Essos was originally a colony of the Freehold.

By reclaiming these lost territories, the Targaryens would be restoring the glory of the Freehold.

With this thought in mind, Rhaegar picked up the fallen carving knife and prepared to head out.

He was only 16 years old and already on the verge of becoming the father of three children.

Given his Longevity, he could live to be a hundred years old.

At the current rate of births, it was difficult to estimate how many heirs he would have.

He was determined to fight and secure territory for his descendants.

...

Myr, outskirts of the eastern city.

"Roar..."

"Roar..."

Two adult dragons, one black and one red, circled overhead, leading the cavalry below as they sped along.

In the distance, the thick walls of Myr were faintly visible.

Cannibal flapped its wide wings and glided low, exploring towards the southeast. After about a quarter of an hour, a cavalry group of several hundred riders stepped onto a wide avenue paved with black dragon stones.

This was Valyrian roads, a special path for the transportation of supplies and armies during the ancient Valyrian period.

The road branched off in two directions: one leading to Pentos in the north and the other to Volantis along the Rhoyme River.

At one time, there were more than just the nine Free Cities; there were also more prosperous towns in the western part of Essos. Unfortunately, these went up in flames with the destruction of ancient Valyria.

In the present, the road to Pentos ends halfway. The road to Volantis is even more completely destroyed, ending in a barren wasteland.

"Roar-"

With a snarl, Cannibal leapt over the low, barren woods and flew over the wide river.

The great river flowed swiftly, heading southeast. At the end of the river was a vast stretch of unclaimed land in the eastern reaches of the three city-states of Myr, Tyrosh, and Lys. This area is known as the Disputed Land.

In the center of the Disputed Land are two huge, unnamed inland lakes. The river then led to these inland lakes, connecting the northern half of the Disputed Lands.

Rhaegar rode on the back of his dragon, overlooking the long river and the land below.

The fast river had less sediment accumulated in its channels. Irrigated by the river, the land was fertile, and the mountains were filled with various shrubs and herbs.

The most satisfying point for Rhaegar: the land was flat enough, a standard plain.

To the northeast of Myr were the Hills of Norvos. To the east was the confluence of the Rhoyme and other minor rivers, which formed a natural partition.

In other words, this land was perfect for farming.

After flying for a while longer, Rhaegar instructed Cannibal to land. The dragon picked a piece of riverbank, and its huge body slowly descended.

"Roar..."

Meleys circled twice and also landed not far away, carrying Rhaenys.

Aunt and nephew looked at each other and silently surveyed the nearby land.

Half a minute later, the cavalry of the Second Sons Regiment, led by Robb, arrived.

Robb rolled over and dismounted, ordered the brothers of the Second Sons to look around, and walked towards Rhaegar with a few of his capable subordinates.

"Prince, what are your orders?" Robb's face was serious.

Rhaegar waved his hand dismissively, "Don't be so nervous, just take a moment to appreciate the land we've conquered."

The Triarchy was broken, and the so-called Disputed Lands were now Targaryen territory.

Robb, being a resourceful individual, observed the river bays piled up with fine sand and couldn't help but recall the fertile soil and rich vegetation they had encountered on their journey. The land alone was as valuable as any he had seen, it just lacked population and towns.

Rhaegar minced no words, saying bluntly, "The brothers of the Second Son Regiment have no fiefdom, and the Disputed Lands have no lord. They deserve recognition."

To truly control the three city-states, the Disputed Lands had to be used. Myr was well-positioned, with hundreds of thousands of slaves with skilled skills, and trade could be reopened to gain wealth.

Lys and Tyrosh, however, had made their fortunes selling slaves, pleasure houses, and mercenaries, all of which were forbidden in Westeros. Rhaegar was personally unwilling to profit by such means.

With a growing slave population and countless slaves, land was the solution. He would divide the land among the loyal knights of the Regiment of the Second Sons, make some of the slaves into lords, and thus establish his territory in Essos.

Robb was surprised at his words and, after some thought, spoke up.

Rhaegar encouraged him, "Speak your mind. You are the commander of the Second Sons Regiment; it is only right to fight for their interests."

"Prince, with all due respect," Robb began, choosing his words carefully, "the land is indeed fertile, but the brothers of the Second Sons Regiment are all poor. Even with the pioneering order issued by you, they don't have the money to run their territory."

A qualified noble territory needed at least a castle. Additionally, farming tools, grain to feed the people, and mills to process rice and flour required significant capital investment.

Robb was confident that if the men under his command had that kind of money, they would rather retire to a Lys's Pleasure House for the rest of their lives.

Rhaegar felt Robb's concern was justified, for he had already thought about these matters. There were many lands in Westeros, but few poor knights had started from scratch to create a new noble house.

The highlight of a noble's second son's life, aside from the death of his older brother, was often serving the great nobles. For commoners, being ordained a knight was considered a blessing from the Seven Gods.

It was the poor knights who were the mainstream of society, providing human resources for the ongoing noble endeavors.

Rhaegar thought for a moment, then spoke seriously, "The royal family can provide some of the loans. How many do you think would dare open up new territories?"

"Prince, the treasury doesn't have that much money," Robb replied with a sad face.

As commander of the Kingsguard, he had often heard Master of Coin Lyman's complaints.

"I know better than you how much money the treasury has," Rhaegar said, his expression unchanged. "I want to open up the Wasteland, and I need at least thirty new lords willing to try."

"Thirty people..." Robb's face softened a little. He clenched his teeth and said, "I can find them, but they will need enough money, as well as the help of maesters and healers."

Without sufficient funds and technology, failure would be inevitable.

"No problem. Survey the land along the Myr River bay and identify areas suitable for reclamation."

Rhaegar gave Robb a heavy pat on the shoulder, his determination evident.

There were knights of the Second Sons who were willing to become lords, and there were slaves who could act as laborers—just what was needed.

As for where the money would come from?

The Iron Bank.

Turning to Rhaenys, Rhaegar looked expectantly and asked, "Aunt, can House Velaryon still get in touch with the Iron Bank?"

"In the middle of a war, the Iron Bank will not lend to the enemy," Rhaenys sighed softly, quickly understanding her nephew's thoughts.

Rhaegar grinned, his eyes flashing with determination. "If we can't ask it from the Iron Bank, we can use the local banks do it for us."

All three city-states maintained banks, and these resources could be utilized.

The Iron Bank, as the largest bank, would not pass up the opportunity to annex other smaller banks.

As for whether the Sealord of Braavos would object?

The Sealord was just one figurehead; he couldn't represent the entire power structure behind the Iron Bank.

Chapter 418: Dorn's Great Attack

The Next Day

Morning came to Myr, and the city buzzed with repair and rebuilding activity.

West Coast Harbor

The sea rippled gently as several three-masted sailing ships anchored, their broad sails billowing in the wind. On the shore, a squad of Fearless stood tall, clad in black armor and wielding spears.

Rhaegar watched the hundreds of Second Sons before him with a bland expression.

"Prince, thank you for your kindness. We will not fail you," said a young man with a silver trout emblazoned on his breastplate. His voice was solemn, full of power.

Several young knights stood beside him. These knights wore no noble coats of arms on their armor, indicating that they were of bastard or commoner descent, much like the landless knights.

Rhaegar smiled faintly and instructed, "Communicate well with Old Lord Tully and explain the Iron Throne's loan information."

He then repeated the instructions to the rest of the Second Son regiment.

Thirty Second Sons of noble birth had obtained the Pioneering Order and enlisted their companions of lower birth to assist them.

The young man from House Tully nodded vigorously, his seriousness evident. "Don't worry, we will do our best to convince the house head to support us."

"Very good," Rhaegar praised, "The war won't end for a while; you have plenty of time."

After exchanging a few more pleasantries, the hundreds of members of the Second Sons regiment, with grateful faces, saluted in unison and boarded the large ship flying the flag of the three-headed red dragon.

The Iron Throne's money alone was insufficient to establish a territory. The men traveled back to Westeros to garner support from their family elders, hoping to build their territories better and faster with the help of knights, experienced farmers, blacksmiths, and artisans. They would also need a certain amount of armor, weapons, and war horses to be considered qualified lords.

The waves gently churned as two large ships sailed out of the harbor. Rhaegar watched silently, his violet eyes reflecting deep thoughts.

Issuing the Pioneering Order was a good strategy to solve the surplus of slaves and reclaim the disputed land. However, it wasn't enough.

In all free trade city-states, slave owners would encircle land outside the city-state for their own use, planting orchards and farmland. Interrogating the executed slavers revealed that these places yielded good harvests every year.

Orchards and farmland were vital components of the city-state's economy. Previously controlled by slavers who used slaves for cultivation, these profitable lands now fell into Rhaegar's hands, offering great potential.

As he pondered, several differently dressed figures approached—gorgeously attired women, wide-bodied civilians, and even old slaves in rags.

Rhaegar's ears twitched slightly as he turned to stare at them. The approaching figures looked humble, hurriedly lowering their heads under his gaze.

Rhaegar's eyes were intense as he stared at the middle-aged, overweight man. "Sandro, clean up the manors outside the city and reorganize the commoners to work," he ordered.

He was considering reforming the manor system, introducing a new labor relationship and payment method. The Iron Throne would assign manor owners to various agricultural tasks, with points awarded for each job completed.

After each season's harvest, these points could be exchanged for supplies or money. In this way, workers would receive benefits without falling into an oppressed mindset. By avoiding direct monetary payments, unauthorized strikes could be prevented, ensuring the smooth operation of seasonal agriculture.

Sandro, his face full of determination, replied, "Yes, Prince. I will quickly restore order to the manors."

Rhaegar nodded and turned to the aged slaves, their faces etched with the hardships of life. "Screen the those who have families. Whether it's for the manors or reclaiming the territory, there's no shortage of work."

In Myr, the ratio of civilians to slaves was as high as one-third. The functioning of the city-state depended heavily on slaves, many of whom had families. Compared to solitary slaves, those with families were more stable and reliable.

The old slave's wise eyes shone with understanding, and his voice was deep. "There are many jobless former slaves in the Free City who would be happy to serve."

He was a respected figure among the slaves, fluent in several languages, and knowledgeable in astronomy and medicine, elected as one of the slave representatives.

After the commoners and slave representatives had spoken, it was the turn of the old noble's representative.

Lady Karl, a beautiful woman with deep olive skin and sensual red lips, reported with a hint of self-consciousness, "Several bankers have departed for Braavos to seek a loan from the Iron Bank."

"How much can they borrow?" Rhaegar inquired, not well-versed in this area.

Karl blinked her beautiful eyes thoughtfully. "About twice as much as their own bank savings. The merchants of Braavos aren't foolish. The Myr bankers can probably only borrow so much."

The Iron Bank had a long-standing reputation for dealing with all of Essos before the Doom. They were confident enough to lend money to an enemy force, confident that the borrower would not renege on it. However, they still required proof of repayment.

Rhaegar nodded, his mind working quickly. "That's enough. The money stored in several banks is sizable."

Any one of the bank's savings was not inferior to the national treasury that his great-grandfather and father had accumulated over decades. Borrowing such a large sum of money would be sufficient not only to develop the disputed lands but also to ease the financial strain of building on the Stepstones Islands and repairing Myr and Lys.

Rhaegar continued, "Stretch the loan term as long as possible, ideally up to the maximum of 60 years."

The Iron Bank's maximum borrowing term was 60 years. When his great-grandfather Jaehaerys built the Kingsroad, he took out a 60-year loan, paying it off in a dozen years. However, Rhaegar had no intention of repaying it.

Karl's face paled slightly, and she gently reminded him, "Prince, the power of the Iron Bank is not to be underestimated."

With enough wealth, the Iron Bank could mobilize the power of half of Essos to collect a debt.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with a hint of amusement. "The Targaryens' dragons have reclaimed the land of Essos. Do you think I care?"

Repay the debt? Unless Braavos changed its Sealord and moved from hostility to alliance with the Iron Throne, there was no hope of recovering even half a copper.

Karl's eyes darkened and she said nothing more. She was a merchant, not a warrior.

"Prince, there is news from the Prince's Palace!"

Gray Worm hurriedly approached, leading a team and looking slightly anxious.

Rhaegar's expression tensed as he greeted him and received the letter. The red lacquer seal bore the image of a roaring lion, signifying the sender: Tyland Lannister.

Rhaegar quickly unsealed the letter and read it carefully. Tyland lived in the Prince's Palace, serving as Rhaegar's eyes and ears in the Dornish borderlands. Given Dorne's past aggression towards the Stormlands, the Vulture Mountains were always a potential hotspot for conflict.

Tyland's meticulous handwriting carried urgent news:

"The Vulture Mountains are in turmoil. A large number of people are pouring in, invading the Boneway and the Prince's Pass..."

The letter also detailed recent movements in Sunspear. Braavos had dispatched a small fleet that crossed the Narrow Sea, breaking through the patrol ships of the Stepstones Islands to provide a significant number of mercenaries.

Rhaegar finished reading and exhaled, "Dorne is about to get serious."

Strategically, the Stepstones Islands should send troops to blockade the sea near Sunspear to stop Braavos' fleet from offering support. However, the Stepstones Islands' military strength was stretched thin, with most forces engaged in the disputed lands among the three Free Cities.

Maintaining a full blockade with continuous patrols was impractical, leading to inevitable gaps that Braavos exploited with small fleets.

After careful consideration, Rhaegar instructed Grey Worm, "Myr is on track. Maintain order here and remind Rhaenys and Daemon to watch out for sneak attacks from Braavos."

Jeyne's letter had warned of a potential attack on Pentos, but it was possible that the true target could be Myr. Deception and diversion were strategies Rhaegar himself often employed.

Grey Worm nodded repeatedly. "Yes, Prince."

Rhaegar's eyes flashed with determination as he left the harbor. The challenges of attacking the Triarchy across the sea were becoming clear: reinforcements took time, troops were scattered, and the rear remained unstable.

Fortunately, with all three Free Cities now stabilized, they could afford to reinforce their positions and prepare for potential threats.

...

At the Same Time

Stormlands, East Coast

"Roar..."

A light silver dragon soared through the sky, weaving through thin clouds. Below, the ocean stretched endlessly, its rippling waves sparkling under the morning sun. The beach shimmered gold as the tides swept sea crabs and shellfish ashore.

Tap, tap...

Two figures walked side by side, strolling against the morning sunrise.

Laenor looked despondent and said helplessly, "It's been so many days, and Aemond still won't send troops."

"House Swann has offended him," Cole replied carelessly, lowering his head. Even the cool touch of his bare feet on the sand couldn't lift his spirits.

Laenor looked up to the sky, sighing as he complained, "This is a battlefield, not a child's playground. Something will happen to him if he continues like this."

Cole remained unconcerned. "He is a prince and has a king for a father. He has the luxury to be capricious."

"Cole, are you listening to what I'm saying?" Laenor was surprised; this wasn't like the words that usually came from his gentle companion.

Cole's face fell as he replied defensively, "What I'm saying is that the Dornish can't reach us and it's only a matter of time before we win."

Though his words were quick, they lacked conviction. Laenor frowned and lowered his head without pursuing the matter. He could see that his partner was too distracted to discuss the battlefield.

Sighing softly in his mind, Laenor decided to continue the distraction. For a time, the two men, having nothing to say, walked in cold silence.

After a long pause, Cole asked hesitantly, "Laenor, how are you and Celine doing? Lord Corlys places great importance on the heir. He should be pushing you to produce an heir."

"Celine? Why are you asking about that?" Laenor froze at his words.

Celine Celtigar was his wife, whom he had married at the end of last year. Not long ago, Celine's father, Lord Bartimos of Claw Isle, had been sentenced to death by the Iron Throne for smuggling goods and had written to ask for mercy.

Cole waited for an answer. Laenor, feeling depressed, laughed bitterly, "If I could see my wife as often as I see you, I would have had a child long ago."

With a twinkle in his eye, Cole said, "I've been out a lot lately. I thought you were returning to Driftmark Island."

"No, my brother, you thought wrong," Laenor laughingly denied it.

"Then where did you go?" Cole raised his head, directly pursuing the question.

Laenor's smile stagnated, his gaze becoming somewhat evasive as he explained, "There are always people inviting me to drink, and I can't refuse."

Chapter 419: Seasmoke Out of Control

Cole couldn't tell if he was happy or angry and asked, "Are you sure?"

"Of course." Laenor denied it, putting an arm around Cole's shoulder and laughing with a boozy gesture, "My favorite thing about riding dragons and drinking wine is that it gets my blood pumping."

"I hope so." Cole lowered his head again, subconsciously pulling away from the arm around his shoulder.

Seeing this, Laenor knew he was in the wrong and took the initiative to show affection, "Don't sulk. Remember that Red Gem you had your eye on last time? I'll give it to you when we get back."

Compared to his former lover Joffrey, he was more willing to satisfy Cole with material things. Cole came from a commoner's background and had lived in poverty since childhood. It was not easy to be knighted, and he had a strong desire for money.

Cole sniffed, forcing a smile, "You are always so generous to me."

"That's right, we're good brothers," Laenor grinned, wrapping his arm around Cole as they continued to walk forward. Using money as a form of appeasement always worked.

Cole didn't struggle, following Laenor toward a reef area.

"Roar..."

The light silver dragon chirped in boredom, swooping further out to sea. With a plop, it plunged its feet into the water, capturing a large fish. The dragon hissed softly, seeking out other sea fish to feed on.

Cole glanced at the distant light silver dragon and suddenly asked, "Laenor, do you ever think of Joffrey?"

Laenor blushed, feeling annoyed and guilty, "He's been sent across the Narrow Sea. I haven't seen him in a long time."

"Yes?"

"Of course."

Their conversation, seemingly small talk, carried hidden agendas. The more Laenor talked, the more unhappy he became. The guilt of his infidelity made him not want to continue.

"Laenor."

As they approached the reef area, Cole stopped and called his name softly.

Impatient, Laenor turned, "Cole, we're out for a walk. Let's not talk about unhappy things."

"You're right."

Cole lifted his head, his previously complex eyes now cold and determined. His steps were sharp and light as he approached Laenor, drawing a cold, gleaming dagger from behind his waist.

"Cole..."

Realizing something was wrong, Laenor turned back to ask. But before he could finish, Cole's large hand tightened around his neck, silencing him.

"Laenor, you have been unfaithful, and the Seven Gods will not forgive you."

Cole's face was livid as he strangled Laenor, his right hand driving the dagger violently into Laenor's back.

Plop! Plop! Plop!

A series of stabs, the dagger soaked in blood.

Laenor, unprepared, felt his strength wane as blood poured from the wounds in his waist. His powerful struggles diminished to weak, feeble motions.

Pfft...

Cole released him, and Laenor fell limply to the ground, staring up in disbelief.

Breathing heavily, Cole yelled, venting his fury, "What do you take me for? A whore at your beck and call, selling myself for money!"

With that, he kicked Laenor in the head, the blows landing with sickening thuds.

Laenor, unable to resist, rolled back and forth, attempting to crawl away, his palms pressed into the sand.

"Get back here!"

Cole wouldn't let him escape. He grabbed Laenor by his silver hair, pressing his head hard into the wet, muddy sand.

"Your bloodline is noble, you are a dragon rider, you are marvelous..."

Cole's eyes were red, venting his heart's dissatisfaction, letting out all his pent-up rage and lowly emotions.

After torturing his former lover for what felt like an eternity, Cole finally dragged Laenor up from the beach. His body was numb from blood loss, his eyes as lifeless as a dead fish's.

The sneak attack had come too fast, leaving him no chance to resist.

Laenor's head drooped, his mouth opened, but no sound came out.

Cole, expressionless, dragged him into the sea like a discarded carcass.

The tide churned, wetting the legs of Cole's rolled-up pants. The cold sensation invigorated his nerves.

"Cole..."

Laenor, now fully submerged in the water, mustered the last of his strength to clutch at Cole's coat, a look of desperation in his eyes.

He was terrified.

Thoughts of his parents, his sister, and his wife alone in their house filled his mind as he faced death.

Responsibilities and unfulfilled dreams surfaced in his head; he realized he hadn't lived enough.

"Die!"

Cole growled, ignoring Laenor's pleading eyes, and flung him into the crashing waves.

Plop-

A wave crashed, and Laenor, drowning in remorse, was swallowed by the sea.

Cole's eyes widened in horror. He swallowed hard, realizing the gravity of his actions, and turned to flee.

Hidden among the reefs was a wooden boat. Desperation fueled his frantic movements as he pushed the boat into the sea, leapt in, and began to paddle furiously.

His direction was not towards the Narrow Sea to the east but southward towards Cape Wrath.

The sun was rising, and the morning chill was dissipating.

No one on the vast, empty beach witnessed the murder.

Except for...

"Roar!!"

A sharp roar echoed across the shore as the light silver dragon, Sea Smoke, returned, its vertical pupils filled with endless fury.

Just moments before, it had sensed the pain and anger of its rider.

This overwhelming negative emotion deeply agitated Sea Smoke's nerves.

"Roar..."

After a frantic search with no sign of Laenor, Sea Smoke roared angrily, unleashing its Dragonfire in a blind rage.

It searched up and down the beach, but its rider was nowhere to be found.

The dragon, intelligent as any human, quickly realized that something terrible had happened to Laenor.

"Roar!!"

Sea Smoke's vertical pupils turned blood-red, every inch of its flesh and blood seething with rage as it flew back towards Mistwood.

Dragonfire spewed uncontrollably along its path.

The Rainwood burned, and the villages in its way were engulfed in flames.

Sea Smoke was beyond reason, consumed only by an uncontrollable fury.

In its singular mind, one thought remained:

Find the rider! Burn everything in sight!

...

In the afternoon

Stonehelm, Cape Wrath.

Beneath its grayish-white walls, thousands of Dornish soldiers scrambled to climb, their roars of rage and screams of pain echoing through the air.

On the city wall, Lord Swann, pale and strained, desperately commanded the defense.

As the minutes dragged on, his face grew ashen, a sense of powerlessness seeping into his bones.

One mile outside the city, a well-organized Dornish force of a thousand soldiers stood ready.

At the forefront of their formation, in addition to a dozen stone throwers, were an equal number of scorpion crossbows.

Originally designed for long sieges, these crossbows had evolved to target not just fortified forts but also swift cavalry and the dragons in the sky.

In terms of destructive power, they were unparalleled.

Olyvar Yronwood stood proudly at the front, bellowing, "Load the crossbows and aim them at the gates!"

With Braavos as an ally, unexpected advantages like these siege weapons were at hand.

With the scorpion crossbows and stone throwers, breaching the city walls was only a matter of time.

The Dornish soldiers stood at attention, efficiently loading steel-tipped bolts into the scorpion crossbows.

At Olyvar's command, they unleashed a relentless barrage on Stonehelm.

The catapults and scorpion crossbows fired incessantly, their impact shaking the city walls and causing chunks of stone to collapse, scattering debris everywhere.

Lord Swann's face turned ashen as he watched his defending troops take heavy casualties and the walls of Stonehelm begin to crumble.

"Fire!" Olyvar shouted, his expression cold as he watched his forces pound the city.

His method of attack was brutally straightforward, sacrificing his soldiers in relentless suicide attacks.

It was costly in lives, but brutally effective.

The defenders trembled at the sight of bloodied Dornish soldiers.

Faced with an enemy of overwhelming numbers and firepower, their morale crumbled in despair.

Boom!

A rolling stone launched from a catapult slammed into the city's battlements, right where Lord Swann stood barking orders.

Feeling the rush of air, Lord Swann turned, his eyes widening in horror.

Rumble—

With a deafening crash, the wall exploded into a cloud of gray masonry, mingling with the blood and flesh of the castle's lord.

"Lord Swann is dead!"

"Lord Swann has fallen in battle!"

The sight sent a shockwave through the defenders, who had been watching their commander.

Panic spread through the ranks.

The castle, now in chaos, teetered on the brink of collapse.

...

Dusk.

Crow's Nest Castle.

Royce Caron's face was ashen as he held a raven-sent letter, his body trembling.

The letter read: Lord Swann was killed in battle. Stonehelm has fallen.

Lord Morrigan of Crow's Nest stood beside him, his expression equally grim. "Lord Royce, we must send troops immediately."

Stonehelm was the first line of defense on the Cape Wrath. With the Dornish occupying it, they had the advantage of attack and retreat, making the war much more difficult.

Bang! Royce slammed the table heavily, shouting in frustration, "Where is Prince Aemond? Has he not sent troops yet?"

A young maester, his eyelids fluttering nervously, replied, "Prince Aemond heard the news and has flown on his dragon to lead the army to strike."

"Strike? Where is he striking?" Royce's eyes widened, his voice frantic.

With Stonehelm captured, Crow's Nest was now the frontline. A risky counterattack on Stonehelm could only result in more losses.

The maester quickly answered, "He must have just departed. We can send a message to stop him."

"Then what are you waiting for? Send the message immediately!" Royce roared, nearly exploding with anger.

If Stonehelm was lost, the ruthlessness of the Dornish would mean no survivors for House Swann. As the commanding officer, Royce would bear the responsibility.

"Yes, my lord." The clerk, drenched in sweat, fled to carry out the order.

Lord Morrigan furrowed his brow, pointing to the map on the table. "Prince Aemond is willing to send troops. Together with Ser Laenor of Mistwood, two dragons and thousands of Stormlands warriors can recapture Stonehelm."

He tried to calm Lord Royce. The battle had always been in their favor, which was why Prince Aemond had delayed his troops, stalling the battle.

The reason was obvious to anyone clever enough to guess. Now, with Lord Swann dead, the two dragon riders could turn the tide.

Royce, his face set in a grimace, gritted his teeth. "That Targaryen brat, so narrow-minded. Elenda should never have let her daughter marry him!"

Targaryen's marriage to Baratheon's daughter was an encroachment on certain rights of House Baratheon. With Aemond officially marrying Lady Cassandra of Storm's End, it was easy for him to meddle in Stormlands affairs. With such an ill-intentioned brat in power, the Stormlands nobility would suffer.

"This is not the time for that discussion," Lord Morrigan murmured. "Remember, you also took the that position thanks to the royal family."

"We must send a message to Mistwood," Murrigan continued, "and inform Ser Laenor to lead an army to close in on Stonehelm."

Royce sighed deeply. "We also need to send a message to King's Landing to urge the Crownlands to speed up their support."

The Dornish had come in force, exceptionally well-armed, backed by Braavos and the remnants of the Triarchy. The Stormlands needed all the support they could get from King's Landing.

Chapter 420: The Sea Snake's Fury

King's Landing.

Council Hall.

Inside the austere decorated council hall, the royal advisers sat around the long table in tense silence. Grand Maester Orwyle had just received a series of raven letters from the Stormlands, each bearing worse news than the last. Confirmed by Master of Whisperers Tormund, the situation was dire.

The atmosphere was heavy, and Viserys, seated at the head of the table, looked visibly uncomfortable. The Stormlands, previously thought to be secure, were now delivering the worst possible news.

Viserys glanced sideways at Sea Snake Corlys, seated across from him, whose expression was dark and foreboding. Corlys sat with his arms crossed, his gaze intense and unyielding, exuding the regal aura of his Nine Voyages.

Knowing he couldn't remain silent any longer, Viserys coughed lightly and addressed the council, "My lords, let's discuss the situation in the Stormlands."

His knuckles tapped on the table, pulling the advisers from their thoughts. Looking at Corlys, Viserys lowered his voice, "Lord Corlys, I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I hope the Seven Gods will bless Ser Laenor."

According to the reports, Laenor had disappeared under mysterious circumstances, with no sign of his body. His dragon, Sea Smoke, had gone berserk, attacking the residents of the Stormlands indiscriminately and causing numerous casualties in Mistwood. It was obvious that Laenor had been murdered.

Corlys raised his head stiffly, his eyes burning with suppressed anger. "Thank you, Your Grace. I believe my child will survive, just as I did in my youth."

Over fifty years old, Corlys' life experience was extensive enough to fill a book. Despite knowing his child's dire fate, he maintained a composed demeanor.

"My heartfelt blessings," Viserys said, trying to comfort him. He then turned to the advisers, "With the Dornish occupying Stonehelm and Ser Laenor missing, only Crow's Nest and the Rain House remain on the Third Front. Do we need to send additional reinforcements?"

Mistwood had managed to block the Dornish attack but couldn't withstand an out-of-control dragon.

Otto was the first to respond, "Your Grace, the King's reinforcements departed recently. It's not advisable to draw more troops for now."

Lyonel quickly followed, "The Narrow Sea War has passed, and many armies have been mobilized. Calling up more troops might cause opposition from the local lords."

The Vale had heavily contributed to the attack on Myr. The Riverlands, Westerlands, and North had also added several armies to overrun Lys.

Lyman, with urgency in his voice, said, "The Triarchy has invested too many troops, and with the Dorn Rebellion close behind, we are in a critical situation."

"Lord Lyman, we have defeated the Triarchy. The situation is not as dire as you suggest," Jasper countered. "The Reach, Westerlands, and Vale should still be able to draw more troops."

Westeros was vast, and more troops could be gathered with some effort.

Otto, after a moment of silence, refuted his ally dismissively, "The Westerlands are garrisoned to defend against the Ironborn, and the Reach guards the Prince's Pass. These are critical positions."

Since the Second Battle of the Stepstones Islands, the Ironborn had been restless, harassing Lannisport and the Riverlands' sea border cities. For Dornish invasions, the Prince's Pass and the Boneway were always the first choice, requiring substantial defenses.

A militaristic strategy could only be employed when absolutely necessary.

Jasper, rebuffed, fell silent in resentment.

"What exactly should we do?" Viserys asked, his gaze darting around the room, seeking a satisfactory answer.

Lyonel and Otto exchanged a knowing look. Both were intelligent men who quickly read each other's thoughts.

With a stern face, Lyonel said in a decisive tone, "Your Grace, with the reinforcements from the Crownlands, the Stormlands have enough troops to deal with the Dornish invaders. It's best for us to respond to any change with no change."

"Exactly," Otto interjected, adding, "The Stormlands may have lost a controllable dragon, but they still have another capable of handling the situation."

The two men spoke in turn, deftly sidestepping various issues such as the interruption of the war's rhythm, Aemond's insubordination, Laenor's harboring of his former lover and the disappearance of his current lover with him.

Without a qualified commander, the leadership of the Stormlands Coalition Army was riddled with errors and omissions.

Viserys listened, slightly reassured, but then brought up a concern, "Sea Smoke is out of control, causing many casualties. He may be looking for his rider."

His voice carried a note of disappointment. A dragon going berserk would not only affect the battle but also tarnish the Targaryen's reputation.

The most crucial point for Viserys was the fear that someone might hate dragons enough to kill the defenseless Sea Smoke.

Every dragon was a precious, irreplaceable asset.

The council began to lean toward a calm approach, advising the king to rest easy and leave the Stormlands to their own devices.

Not everyone was happy with this approach, however.

Bang!

Corlys, already dark-faced, could no longer suppress his anger. He slammed his hands together and angrily rebuked, "We can't just stand by! The Stormlands lack a competent commander, and delaying action will only worsen the situation!"

As a seasoned warrior who had truly experienced the battlefield, Corlys had already analyzed the mediocrity and incompetence of Royce Caron, and the capriciousness of Aemond from the few words in the letter.

These problems might not seem serious in everyday life, but they were fatal on the battlefield.

A commander who couldn't effectively lead his men was worse than useless.

A dragon rider who disobeyed orders was a hindrance.

Viserys was taken aback, staring at Corlys in bewilderment. The confidence instilled by his advisers began to waver.

Corlys quickly stepped out of his seat, producing a map from his sleeve, and spoke sharply, "Dorne dared to challenge the authority of the Iron Throne, thanks to the support from Braavos and the remnants of the Triarchy's Kingdom. Controlling the sea is the key!"

"The navies of the three city-states are all deployed, always on guard against foreign enemies," Viserys said in a deep voice.

He knew the Triarchy's movements all too well. The city-states harbored rebels with ill intentions, and the two allies, Pentos and Volantis, were also ambitious. He had to watch out not only for the clearly hostile Braavos, but also for the seemingly harmless allies. It was human nature.

Joining the war together wasn't feasible. With the Targaryens occupying three city-states, Pentos and Volantis were only willing to accept a few port taxes. They were deterred only by the dragons and the assertiveness of the eldest Targaryen son.

Viserys suspected that the shadows of Prince Pentos and Magister Volantis were among the supporters transporting supplies to Dorne. The power of ancient Valyria had cast a deep shadow over Essos. Likewise, a powerful Targaryen-ruled Westeros posed a threat to the balance of power.

Corlys glanced at him, pointed his finger at the Stepstones Islands on the map, and replied with a didactic tone, "Rhaenys and the others are holding down the Free Cities, and Prince Aegon can easily mobilize a two-thousand-man navy."

Of all the advisors in the room, he was the only one who knew the ways of war. Even as he received the news of Laenor's assassination, he had been strategizing.

Viserys, upon hearing this, gazed at the map and fell into silence. He knew little of war but understood the importance of Aegon's defense of the Stepstones Islands. This maintained the transit of the lower half of the Narrow Sea and prevented other free cities from plunging into the disputed lands from the sea.

Corlys tapped his hand on the table and urged, "Your Grace, what are you hesitating for? The Dornish are coming on strong; this isn't the small matter it was a few days ago."

Before Viserys could respond, Otto frowned and spoke out in warning, "Lord Corlys, I deeply sympathize with your loss, but I must ask you to maintain basic respect for the king. You are only a advisor."

Otto, despite his selfishness, knew the importance of upholding the king's authority at critical moments. Whether it was Daemon or the Velaryon House, those who did not abide by the rules of right were considered enemies by him.

Corlys glared angrily, his face grim as he turned on Otto. He held nothing but contempt and disgust for this selfish and discreet second son of Hightower.

Seeing that the two were at odds, Viserys looked back and forth, habitually trying to make peace. "Otto, Lord Corlys was momentarily agitated and is acting in the service of the realm."

"I'm merely reminding him of the etiquette between a ruler and a subject," Otto replied coolly.

"Hmph!"

Corlys snorted disdainfully, then directed his spear-like glare at Viserys and said bluntly, "Your Grace, I seriously doubt Lord Royce's ability to command. I request permission to lead the troops into battle!"

As soon as the words fell, the conference hall fell silent. The Royal advisers stared at him, their thoughts hidden behind their eyes.

Corlys didn't give them a chance to question him and laid out his strategy. "Dorne invades the Stormlands; the only landing point is Stonehelm. Given Dorne's national conditions, 20,000 regular troops almost draws the entire realm's strength, leaving their defenses lax."

Viserys' spirit lifted, his interest piqued.

Corlys glanced at Otto with contempt, his finger tracing from Stonehelm on the map to Sunspear. His voice dripped with determination, "Prince Aegon leads the Navy of the Stepstones Islands to move out, under my full command, to directly destroy Martell's stronghold!"

With the pain of his son's death fueling his anger, Corlys' hatred reached its peak. The tight, step-by-step strategy seemed too cumbersome. Controlling the sea and stopping secret support to Dorne seemed even harder.

So, he chose the highest-risk, greatest-reward strategy: Rush straight to Sunspear and decapitate the Martell leadership.

Viserys listened attentively, slightly excited. "A brilliant plan, but it contains great danger."

Taking out the Martells might allow Dorne to be incorporated into the realm.

Corlys' eyes were as sharp as a hawk's. "Dorne is not rich; we could draw Prince Aemond's dragons. Two dragons will surely be able to break through Sunspear."

Even the strongest castle was no match for dragons. Sunspear, with its mud and stone walls and open terrain, was vulnerable to a dragon attack.

Lyonel and Otto, though lamenting the madness of the plan, joined the discussion. After some debate, Viserys suddenly asked, "Shall we recall Rhaegar?"

Corlys' face softened slightly, and he replied, "The prince is still in Myr; he should rush back when he hears about this."

Viserys nodded, growing more satisfied. With his eldest son by his side, he had a backbone for foreign wars.

Just as the King and advisers were fervently discussing, Tormund, who had been silent, stood up and said in a low voice, "Your Grace, I have information you should be aware of."

Viserys froze and turned to look at him. The other royal advisers similarly directed their gazes towards him.

Feeling the pressure, Tormund pulled out a letter from his sleeve and handed it over, saying heavily, "Dorne has experienced a decrease in food production since the beginning of the year."

A large number of stragglers have converged on the Vulture Mountains. Tens of thousands of people, both young and old, are showing signs of invading the Prince's Pass and the Boneway."