

G.O Thrones 571

Chapter 571: Passing the Torch

It had been a long time.

The Night's Watch walked out of the council hall with an encouraging smile on his face. It was clear that the expected funding had been applied for.

Lyonel and Roderick then walked out, both with sour expressions. They glanced at each other and snorted simultaneously.

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In the hall, sunlight streamed through the stained glass window, warming his arms.

"The North, the long summer..."

Rhaegar's eyes were deep as he stood in front of the window, gazing into the distance. He promised to provide the Night's Watch with enough supplies to sustain 3,000 men through a harsh winter. The prisoners in the dungeons were theirs to take, and they would receive additional iron armor and tools. However, the rest would have to be managed cheaply by the Night's Watch. Reinforcements were out of the question. The royal family was not foolish, and Cregan would have to find a way to help himself.

"Chirp, chirp..."

A magpie flapped into a tree, perched on a branch, and tilted its head while chirping. The sound brought Rhaegar back to the present. Reflecting on the combined strength of the royal family, he thought, 'I still don't have enough control.'

Since ascending the throne, the Targaryen Empire had expanded its territory: the Seven Kingdoms, the Stepstones, the Triarchy, Volantis. Slaver's Bay was semi-liberated, awaiting colonization by the nobles of the Seven Kingdoms. Yet, conquering a land did not mean ruling it smoothly. The autonomy of the nobles in the Seven Kingdoms was too high. Each of the seven great warden houses managed their regions independently, with their own agendas.

Rhaegar frowned slightly, tapping his fingers rhythmically on the window frame. 'Dorne, the Westerlands, the Iron Islands...' he pondered. The royal authority in these three regions was extremely weak. After the war in Dorne, the people there both hated and feared the Iron Throne, with their economy and livelihood in sharp decline. For now, they posed no threat and could be governed gradually.

The Westerlands and the Iron Islands were different. House Lannister was full of megalomaniacs, experts in paying lip service. Despite repeated calls for war, Lord Jason Lannister always found excuses, sending his advisers to do the dirty work. The Ironborn were even worse—a group of unproductive pirates. House Greyjoy of Pyke had a family motto: "We Do Not Sow."

'If I want to rule for a long time, the Seven Kingdoms must erase the roar of lions and the krakens,' Rhaegar thought, a hint of severity flashing in his eyes and a sense of crisis rising in his heart. There was discord within his family, and wolves and vultures lurked in the Seven Kingdoms and Across the Narrow Sea. If a natural disaster were to strike, how would the Targaryens respond?

Rhaegar carefully calculated his available forces. The only troops he could muster were the 5,000 Unsullied he had captured in Astapor. The former 3,000 Fearless were divided between King's Landing and Lys, unable to form a formidable fighting force. The Gold Cloaks and Dragonkeepers were too few to be of much use in a skirmish. 'People are too restless to be united,' he mused.

Setting aside military matters, Rhaegar considered the number of dragon riders in his family who could fight. Besides himself, Daemon and Aemon could be recruited, and Aunt Rhaenys would not refuse.

Laena and Helaena were pregnant, rendering their combat effectiveness negligible. Sunfyre was badly injured, and Aegon was completely ruined. Rhaenyra and Daeron could barely be counted, bringing the total to six dragon riders. Including his father, and counting the children Baela and Maekar, there was one adult dragon and six young dragons, insufficient for war.

'The House may seem powerful, but it is still not enough to form a crushing force,' Rhaegar sighed with regret. 'The children are still too young, and the future of the House lies with them.' The House would only truly grow when the next generation matured.

With this thought in mind, Rhaegar clenched his fist and said with determination, "Aegon's wedding is on the agenda, and Aemond's speed must be increased. I can't do it alone." Though great ability brought great responsibility, he was about to sire a new generation, while his bastard brothers had yet to prove themselves. He felt not only a duty to his father but also to the dragon in his crotch.

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Following Rhaegar's gaze, he gradually moved away from the Red Keep.

The Sevenstar Cathedral stood as a magnificent new building in King's Landing, attracting the faithful daily to convert to the new religion. The cathedral, located in the back, was a tall, domed structure positioned between Silk Street and the square. Built entirely of black Dragonstone, it featured a sphinx and a dragon sculpture flanking the main entrance.

In the pavilion in front of the building, Maester Munkun, book in hand, stared sternly at the children before him, his pale face rigid. Baelon hung his head in frustration, while Aemon looked up, pouting in protest. The sisters Baela and Rhaena stood on either side of a listless Lyanna.

"Oh dear," Maester Munkun sighed after a long pause. "None of you have completed the homework assigned by the school."

"Old bastard, I finished mine!" Aemon crossed his arms, clearly upset.

Maester Munkun flipped through Aemon's book and then said, "Your handwriting is good, but you haven't done any of the handicrafts I assigned."

"I did," Baelon interjected, raising his hand.

Maester Munkun's face darkened as he pulled out a scroll. "Prince, your swordsmanship is commendable, but your handwriting doesn't reflect your skill." His voice rose suddenly, startling the children. Lyanna's eyes filled with tears; it was her first day of class, and she had nothing to do with the issue.

"I'm going to find my sister..." Lyanna's nose turned red, ready to give up, but Baela quickly covered her mouth.

Baela and Rhaena held down the youngest child, the little radish, with serious expressions, preventing her from crying. Lyanna's head tilted back, and sad tears streamed down her face.

"Okay, I don't want to waste your time," Maester Munkun said, still cultured, as he assigned more homework. "Prince Baelon, I will assign you a study partner to complete the history and mathematics homework."

Then, looking at the clearly unconvinced Aemon, he said seriously, "In seven days, you will plant a flower in a pot and bring it to me."

"Why?" Aemon asked. He had done the best work, perfectly according to the books.

"Yes, why?" Maester Munkun retorted. "You have enough wisdom, but you don't use it well. Instead, you waste your talent."

Many people wish to learn, devote themselves to academic research, and regret their lack of aptitude. Among the princes and princesses, Aemon had a photographic memory and the potential to become a Maester. However, the King would not allow his children to become the second Dragonless. Maester Munkun could only train Aemon's laziness and arrogance through piano, gardening, and stonework to temper his patience.

Aemon was speechless, searching for a loophole to refute. Unfortunately, a good brain can only remember things, not create them out of thin air.

Baelon patted his brother on the shoulder and asked, "Maester, are you going to arrange a study partner for me?"

"Who told you?" he wondered. 'Of course, the King and Queen.'

Maester Munkun, prepared, clapped his hands. "You can rest assured that you will be satisfied."

With the applause, a boy emerged from the flowers outside the pavilion. He had curly brown hair, darting brown eyes, and walked with his chest puffed out and back bent. It took him three minutes to walk from the flowerbed to the pavilion.

Maester Munkun pulled the boy over and introduced him with great fanfare, "Lyonel Tyrell, the current Lord of Highgarden, is temporarily enrolled at the school."

Little Lyonel looked around, finding only princes and princesses. He didn't dare to speak. Usually, the people he met were lower in status and would greet him. Suddenly, in a new environment, he struggled to adapt.

Maester Munkun, conscientious and responsible, took Baelon, who was eyeing Lyonel, and said with a smile that hid a knife, "The Prince will be studying with this Lord, and Your Grace himself will take time to check your homework."

The two boys were speechless.

"It's getting late, so I'll take my leave," Maester Munkun said, clutching his books under his arm. With a stern face, he departed.

The two boys looked at each other, the atmosphere indescribably awkward. "Hmph, what a terrible Maester," Aemon huffed, turning away. As he passed the flowerbed, he paused, plucked a daisy, and continued walking.

"Let's go and have a look," Baela said, dragging Rhaena along with her.

"What about me?" Lyanna asked, her eyes full of grievance.

"You come with me," Baelon replied, taking his sister by the hand. He turned to Lord Highgarden and said, "I'm going back to the Red Keep to read my history books. Do you want to come?"

Little Lyonel scratched his head, hesitating. "Yes, Prince?" he asked uncertainly.

"Oh, let's go," Baelon sighed, bearing a burden too heavy for his age. The three of them walked out of the school gate together.

Bang! As soon as they stepped outside, little Lyonel stumbled and nearly fell. The person who had bumped into him didn't even look back, tightening his collar and quickening his pace.

Baelon was dumbfounded. "Stop!" he called out. Upon closer inspection, the person was wearing a brown linen coat that looked dirty, though not particularly worn. He wasn't very tall, had narrow shoulders, and his hair was completely covered by a woolen felt hat. Hearing Baelon's call, he tried to run away.

"Stop, brat!" Arryk appeared from the side, grabbed the brown collar, and pulled off the patched felt hat. Dark brown curls spilled out, revealing a freckled face with a crooked nose. Arryk glanced at the purse she had grabbed from the other's sleeve and handed it to Lyonel. "She's a repeat offender, Prince," he said, pressing the prisoner in front of Baelon.

Baelon tilted his head to get a better look at the prisoner's face, his eyes widening in surprise. Nettles shrank her shoulders and smiled awkwardly. "Sorry, I'm working to pay for my studies."

It was night in the royal chambers of the Red Keep. Rhaegar had just seen off the delegation from the North when he noticed two figures bustling about. His wife, frowning, was packing alongside her companion.

Confused, Rhaegar looked to Rhaenyra, who was oiling and caring for "The Realm's Delight" at the edge of the bed. "Are you going out?" he asked suspiciously.

"Sort of," Rhaenyra replied, nodding slightly. She gestured toward the table. "Laena wrote to me. She's not feeling well and asked me to take care of her."

"Laena should ask her husband to do it," Rhaegar said, taking the letter out with some doubt. "Aegon is getting married soon. We should go together."

Aegon, the prince of the Stepstones, held a higher status than Aemond and Daeron. As the wedding organizer, Rhaenyra's presence was crucial.

"That's a shame," Rhaenyra whispered, feigning sadness. "According to the news, Daemon has gone to Slaver's Bay to lord over the people. I'm afraid I won't be able to make it to the wedding."

"Daemon is back in Slaver's Bay?" Rhaegar's eyes flashed, catching the point.

"I'll take Baelon and the others with me. If Jeyne is agreeable, I can also take care of Daenerys and Anna," Rhaenyra continued. "After all, it's time for the two sides to cultivate their relationship."

Rhaegar frowned. "But Aegon's wedding is coming up!"

"And Laena needs someone to look after her," Rhaenyra insisted, looking up at him, refusing to back down.

Rhaegar rolled his eyes, skeptical. Rhaenyra turned her head away in silence. She couldn't stand being in the same room as Jeyne, so she might as well return to Lys.

Of course, Laena had indeed written, mentioning that her pregnancy symptoms before the due date were not right.

Chapter 572: Daemon's Ambition

The night was deepening at the Red Keep, within the sept. Rows of tallow candles burned, their light dispelling the darkness. Rhaegar sat before the circular altar, his palms warmed by the candlelight.

Boom! The sept doors opened, and Erryk announced, "Your Grace, the Prince and Princess have arrived."

Rhaegar remained silent, his eyes fixed on the skull of Balerion above the altar.

"Father," Baelon said, stepping forward with a puzzled expression. He was accompanied by a listless Daenerys.

"Balerion was the last living creature to have seen ancient Valyria before the Doom," Rhaegar said, turning to face his children.

Baelon and Daenerys were both taken aback by his words and looked at the huge, black skull.

Rhaegar leaned forward and took one of the children's hands in each of his, asking seriously, "Balerion is a legend. What do you see in it?"

"Power," Baelon answered, not very confidently.

Daenerys tilted her head and guessed, "Ancient?"

"No!" Rhaegar shook his head. "It's heritage. Balerion followed Aenar all the way to Dragonstone and then followed the conqueror to establish the Targaryen dynasty. He is ancient and noble, carrying the dragon's bloodline. Just like the children before you, you are the continuation of our bloodline."

Baelon seemed to understand, but said, "Balerion's experience can be traced back to before the Doom when our House was already powerful. There were many dragon families stronger than the Targaryens. We were not the only ones."

Rhaegar recalled Daenerys' dream, in which the Fourteen Flames roared with dragons. The young Balerion was only one of them. It seemed he was still an outcast dragon without a master.

"Father?" Baelon and Daenerys were puzzled and didn't know why their father had summoned them. Before being brought here, they had been playing in their rooms when Ser Erryk suddenly came to their door.

Rhaegar came back to his senses and asked with a smile, "I heard that you made new friends today?"

He was, of course, asking Baelon, as Daenerys had not gone out at all. The boy's eyes lit up as he happily shared, "I met Nettles, the woman who helped me on Driftmark."

"Anyone else?" Rhaegar continued.

Baelon hesitated for a moment, thinking, "Lord Lyonel is very introverted, but fortunately, he has a good personality."

"In addition, there was a boat builder named Alyn. He was introduced by the Lord Sea Snake and assigned to serve as a squire to my brother Aemon. It is said that he accompanies Aemon in his gardening and teaches him stone and wood carving."

Rhaegar's eyes twinkled, but he did not pursue the matter. Instead, he said sternly, "Tomorrow morning, you two will take a boat to Myr with Anna. Ser Arryk will accompany you for protection."

"Myr? Why?" Baelon asked, confused.

Rhaegar's mood was complicated. With a sigh, he explained, "Your mother is returning to Lys with Aemon and Baela, and I've changed your travel plans."

Rhaenyra was determined to do this, and no one could stop her. But Baelon and Daenerys would not benefit from accompanying her. So, Rhaegar made a last-minute decision to send the three of them to Myr. The Triarchy had masters in Lys and Tyrosh; Myr should also have a decent ruler.

Drawing close to Daenerys, Rhaegar held his daughter and stroked her soft cheeks. "You must look after Anna and teach her well in Myr."

"Will Anna learn differently from us?" Daenerys asked, her purple eyes full of curiosity.

Rhaegar smiled. "You'll see when you get there. You can take Stormcloud with you."

The eldest son inherits the Iron Throne, and the eldest daughter inherits the Vale. On the condition that Aemon and Maekar each inherit one of the Free Cities, Myr will be left to his second daughter, Anna. Anna and Baelon are inseparable, and the Iron Throne will remain under their control in the future.

This will strengthen the power of the three siblings and free them from Rhaenyra's influence over her eldest son. Rhaenyra's prejudice is too great and can affect Baelon's judgment.

Baelon anxiously asks, "Must I separate from Aemon?"

"This is only temporary. Aemon also needs to get familiar with Lys," Rhaegar tried to persuade him.

Baelon was sullen. "He'll miss me."

The brothers had been inseparable since birth. Aemon had cried half the night after he was burned yesterday. Rhaegar rubbed his eldest son's head and said, "I'm sure he'll miss you too."

The bond between his eldest and the second son was indeed very strong. In contrast, Maekar had been alone in Volantis for a month, and his two brothers had not been worried.

Baelon asked reluctantly, "Why is Mother going back to Lys? We've only just arrived."

"Lady Laena is not feeling well. She needs to look after her," Rhaegar replied in an official tone.

"It's because of what happened yesterday, isn't it?" Baelon quickly deduced.

Rhaegar shrugged, unable to answer. "Mother is so stubborn!" Baelon pouted.

"I won't deny that," Rhaegar smiled wryly. "But you must never say that again."

Rhaenyra had always been headstrong, but she was not the only one to blame. A little time apart would do her good. After Aegon's wedding, he would consider a second expedition to the Smoking Sea in search of dragons and the Dragonhorn. He would feel much more at ease if Rhaenyra stayed in Lys.

Baelon obeyed his father but remained upset. Rhaegar had to persuade him, "Lady Laena's children are important. They will be your helpers in the future."

"I don't like it," Baelon turned his head away angrily.

"Keep yourself in check, Baelon," Rhaegar frowned, not wanting to see a foolish boy acting on impulse. Baelon had no choice but to close his mouth in frustration.

"Come on, I'll teach you some skills," Rhaegar said solemnly, taking one child in each hand.

"People say that dragons are the last magic of ancient Valyria, but that's not accurate."

Baelon and Daenerys looked at him curiously.

Rhaegar's mind stirred, and bronze dragon scales appeared on his body, forming a full suit of armor.

"Wow!" Baelon exclaimed, his spirits lifting as his jaw nearly dropped.

"Bronze, one of the runes I have mastered," Rhaegar explained, introducing the basics of runes.

"You are still young, and it's time to learn real magic, instead of just moving the magic in your blood with binding spells."

"Can we learn to do this?" Baelon asked, his eyes lighting up as he set aside his unhappiness to touch the bronze dragon scales with fascination. He clenched his fist and knocked on them, producing a loud sound. They felt incredibly strong.

Rhaegar laughed proudly. "Of course, you are my children."

Without further ado, he took his children's wrists and taught them how to mobilize the fire magic in their blood. Baelon and Daenerys studied diligently, memorizing the flow of magic. Though they couldn't yet condense a single piece of bronze, they had taken the first step.

"Father, this feels amazing," Baelon said, clenching his fists and gathering all his strength.

"You are still too young," Rhaegar reminded him, rubbing his head. "Don't use it recklessly, just remember it."

"Yes!" Baelon promised.

Daenerys, standing nearby, blushed as she tried to summon the fire magic in her blood. After a while, she let out a long sigh of relief.

Rhaegar, amused, took a dragon horn dagger from his breast pocket and held it out to the siblings.

"Look, I borrowed it from your grandfather."

"A dragon horn dagger!" Baelon exclaimed, taking the dagger and examining it as if it were a treasure.

At the beginning of the House, there were four Valyrian steel items: the swords "Blackfyre" and "Dark Sister," the Conqueror's Crown, and the Dragonhorn Dagger of Aenar the Exile.

Rhaegar touched the rippling steel blade of the dagger in front of the two children, and a flame quickly spread.

Zilla! The temperature rose sharply, and Baelon let go of the dagger with a "sizzle."

"Be careful," Daenerys said, her face tightening as she took her brother's hand and blew on the burn.

"He's fine," Rhaegar said, his tone calm. He picked up the dagger and placed it in front of the siblings. "Look closely. What's on it?"

Baelon glanced at his sister and then at the dagger, which was burning red and emitting white smoke. The surface seemed hollow, with several lines of tiny characters appearing.

Baelon carefully observed and translated each word: "The Song of Ice and Fire..."

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Slaver's Bay. Meereen, the ruins of the square.

"Roar..." A golden dragon lay on the ground, its body covered in blackened burns, moaning weakly. In the moonlight, a figure with silver hair stood.

"My Prince, the fleet is ready." Grey Worm approached, his head bowed, speaking stiffly. It was clear he was reluctant.

"Prepare sufficient supplies. The Good Masters of Yunkai will pay for them." Daemon did not turn his head, his gaze fixed on the moonlit sky.

"Yes!" Grey Worm took a deep breath and silently withdrew. If he could have fought, he would not have wanted to serve. Thinking of this, he glanced at the outer edge of the square.

"Roar..." The Blood Wyrms lay on the ground, their snake-like necks stretched out, their ferocious dragon's mouths chewing on a goat. Every member of the Targaryen family was like an immovable god to ordinary people.

"Alas!" Daemon placed his hands on his stomach, a hint of melancholy on his stern face. He had been pushed aside by his relatives for an impulse.

"My ancestors all had their own supreme honor." Daemon sighed to the sky, stroked the fine lines at the corners of his eyes, and his eyes grew even gloomier. He had been banished from King's Landing, stripped of the honor that belonged to the Targaryens. This situation was not new to him, but this time, he had no idea how to return to his family. His family had always been the most important thing in his heart.

Daemon took a deep breath and rubbed his face vigorously with both hands, as if trying to make himself more sober. A letter from Volantis had arrived, informing him that Laena was pregnant again. Daemon was more surprised than happy to hear the news. He had already decided that Baela would be his heir and had set aside the White Worm for that purpose. Now Laena was pregnant, possibly with a boy. How fickle life is.

Daemon glanced at the badly injured Sunfyre and thought of the unborn child. 'My promise still stands. I will catch you a wild dragon,' he whispered. According to the original plan, after conquering Volantis and Slaver's Bay, he would explore the Smoking Sea with Rhaegar and the Sea Snake.

Now that their relationship has broken down, his plan collapsed. But Daemon does not want to give up and plans to try it alone.

The Smoking Sea has many buried treasures. His nephew Rhaegar once found a secret treasure in it and brought out a hatching egg. The wild dragon Morghul also emerged from the Smoking Sea. Daemon believes that the treasures may be available to everyone, including the young dragons in the Smoking Sea. In this way, he hopes to regain his lost honor.

"Follow me to inspect the fleet, Caraxes!" Daemon's eyes flashed, and he turned to face the scarlet dragon.

"Roar..." Caraxes' pupils narrowed as it swallowed the burnt goat in a few bites. It then flapped its large wings and soared into the sky.

Chapter 573: Alicent's Return to King's Landing

The next day, the weather was fine.

King's Landing, Mud Gate.

"Roar!"

A slender silver dragon soared through the sky, flying over Blackwater Bay and crying out. Rhaegar stood on the dock, watching a royal ship slowly sail away. A few small figures stood at the end of the ship, hundreds of meters away. Baelon, dressed in black, held Lyanna's hand as she looked back at him with reluctance. The three of them were heading to Myr, leaving their parents' sight for the first time.

"Prince, the sea is rough. You should go inside and rest," said Arryk thoughtfully. He took off his white robe and put it on the Prince and Princess.

Baelon rubbed his nose and said, "Wait a minute. Dany is still riding her dragon."

"Brother," Lyanna's eyes were red, and she leaned her head against Baelon's chest, feeling safe and secure like a kitten.

Baelon rubbed her head and comforted her seriously: "Don't be afraid, we are the real dragons."

"Roar..."

A young dragon's roar came from behind, as if in response to his words. Arryk turned around and frowned. He saw Nettles, dressed in a rough hemp outfit, rubbing her dark, crooked nose and holding a cage with a young dragon in it. Seeing that someone had noticed her, she pretended to be calm: "I'm just looking. All Dragonkeepers go through this."

A day earlier, she had been an intern Maester at the Royal Academy, "working and studying." Unfortunately, she was caught in the process of "studying" and was expelled from the Academy. Baelon took pity on her and recruited her into the ranks of the Dragonkeepers.

"Well, the journey by sea is long, and it's good to have someone to keep Vermax company." Baelon stepped in to smooth things over, taking care of the commoner girl who had helped him.

"Pfft, hmph." Nettles, a carefree person, gave the "little brother" a flirtatious wink before slipping away with the iron cage. Arryk watched with a frown that could wring a fly to death.

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The ship gradually disappeared from view, and Rhaegar regretted averting his eyes. Nearby, a vessel bearing the Seahorse flag was moored, its sailors on high alert as they loaded cargo. Rhaenyra, dressed in a long red skirt, was speaking face-to-face with the serious-looking Sea Snake.

"Thank you for escorting our fleet to King's Landing to Lys, ," she said.

"I don't deserve the praise, Your Grace," the Sea Snake replied, crossing his arms. He looked modest, though pride flickered in his eyes. "The war has just ended, and there are many pirates still roaming around the Stepstones. You must be careful."

"Isn't there a naval garrison on the Stepstones?" Rhaenyra asked, puzzled.

"There is, but their fighting power diminishes when they go to sea," the Sea Snake explained confidently. "Volantis and Slaver's Bay are already gathering places for mercenaries and wandering knights. With the Triarchy pirates led by Tyrosh, the forces of the Stepstones are insufficient."

Only a few years had passed since the Targaryen dynasty had conquered both sides of the Narrow Sea. The Free Cities and Slaver's Bay, with their deep-rooted rule, had formed their own armed groups. After the fall of the Triarchy, these mercenary groups had redirected their efforts towards Volantis and Slaver's Bay. Now that these two had been conquered and destroyed, the mercenaries had nowhere to go. Cutting off their access to wealth naturally led to trouble.

Rhaenyra listened carefully, occasionally glancing at Rhaegar, who was looking out at the bay. "I will take Syrax, Moondancer, and the Trickster with me as part of the combat force," she said casually.

Laena had originally been responsible for eradicating pirates. With it's rider pregnant, Vhagar could not go alone.

"Just in case, it would be better to send a warship for protection," the Sea Snake suggested generously. He called over a young man with a sideways glance. "Addam, come and meet Your Grace."

"Yes, Lord," Addam replied, dropping what he was doing to approach.

The Sea Snake placed a hand on Addam's shoulder and smiled confidently. "Addam of Hull, one of the best sailors in my fleet, has won many battles."

Rhaenyra looked him over, her eyes flashing with memories. "You're the shipwright who saved Rhaena and Maekar?"

"Yes, Your Grace," Addam said, embarrassed, his hands betraying his excitement.

Rhaenyra smiled slightly, her eyes flicking between Addam and the Sea Snake. "I haven't thanked you for that, so I owe you a favor."

Addam beamed, his emotions clear on his face. "I will definitely protect Your Grace and the young princes."

"Okay, enough of this nonsense," the Sea Snake interrupted cautiously. "After you arrive in Lys, Your Grace, please take good care of Laena."

"Don't worry," Rhaenyra promised, distracted by Rhaegar, who was turning to leave. She wanted to say goodbye properly, but Rhaegar didn't even look in her direction as he left with the Kingsguard. Rhaenyra was in a daze, her eyes unfocused.

"Stop! Leave him alone!" Suddenly, Baela's voice rang out from the other side. Rhaenyra froze and looked sideways. Baela was furious, her arms outstretched to protect Aemon, who stood his ground. Maris, dressed in a pale yellow dress with her hair tied in a plait, looked miserable, her chest heaving.

"Aemon doesn't want your gift. Don't come any closer!" Baela glared at Maris.

Aemon's face was crumpled in fear, and he cowered behind Baela. Though the news of their engagement had not yet spread, their relationship was closer than ever.

Maris held a delicate gift box in her hand, a dagger inlaid with rubies inside. Her face darkened. "I just wanted to give the Prince a farewell gift."

Bang! Baela flipped the box over and, like a hen protecting her chicks, warned loudly, "Put away your evil thoughts, you wicked woman!"

Aemon nodded repeatedly. "Yes, yes!"

Maris's chest heaved with anger, and she opened her mouth to scold her.

"What do you want, Lady Maris?" Rhaenyra approached, her eyes piercing as she looked at the fallen dagger.

Maris hesitated, then forced a smile. She picked up the hem of her skirt and quickly fled the scene. Rhaenyra stared coldly after her, seeing through her scheme. Maris had tried to seduce Rhaegar before, and now she was trying to seduce her sons. 'What a dream!'

"Well done," Rhaenyra praised Baela, who was proud of her success and raised her chin.

"Come with me!" Baela put her arm around Aemon's neck and, despite his resistance, followed her foster mother.

Aemon felt tears streaming down his cheeks. 'They are all bad women,' he thought.

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As the ships left the dock one by one, Rhaegar returned to the Red Keep. He entered Maegor's Holdfast and went straight up the stairs.

"Brother," Helaena suddenly called out to him from a corner.

"Why are you here?" Rhaegar stopped and saw her standing alone on the edge of the open-air balcony. She was wearing a blue dress, her silver hair flowing naturally. It looked like she had been waiting for a long time.

Helaena, with her hands on her stomach, looked a little confused. "The delegation from the North has left, and Lord Lyman has complained to me about the lack of funds in the treasury."

"He wants you to persuade me to spend less money, right?" Rhaegar guessed, then joked, "I wish every Master of Coin was as conscientious as him, spending every halfpenny twice over."

Helaena nodded in agreement. "Yes, he said you were spending money recklessly."

Rhaegar looked at her and, thinking of old Lyman's desperate plea for help, sighed. 'He really knows how to complain. Even enemies don't complain so directly,' he thought.

There was a moment of silence. Rhaegar took Helaena's hand and, with his other hand on her stomach, asked curiously, "Are you feeling unwell?"

Helaena had been given a leave for her pregnancy. "I'm fine, just as usual." She tilted her head and said, as if possessed, "We need more fire."

Rhaegar was momentarily stunned.

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The summer passed and early autumn arrived.

King's Landing.

The sun was high in the sky, its scorching rays beating down, causing people to sweat profusely. The Dragon Gate, the majestic city gate, opened.

Gurgle, gurgle...

On the dry road, two carriages rolled over the grass in front of and behind each other. The former was escorted by three Fearless in black armor, with three red dragon banners flying. The curtain was lifted, revealing a head. Alicent glanced around at the Fearless, hoping to see the caravan behind her. She had come from Harrenhal.

The other caravan was much longer and more impressive. Most importantly, the knight carrying the banner with a green topless tower was from House Hightower.

"Is Selene up there?" Alicent asked, her eyes wide with curiosity. She then quietly retreated into the carriage. She had only been allowed to return to King's Landing after her eldest son Aegon married her niece Selene.

"I wonder how my children are doing." Alicent clasped her hands together and closed her tired eyes, whispering a prayer: "Seven Gods, please protect us."

...

Red Keep.

Lyonel was busy directing the servants as they prepared for the wedding ceremony. From the Throne Hall to the Banquet Hall, from the Red Keep's front courtyard to the backyard's Godswood, everything was meticulously in place.

It was noon, and the guests had arrived, the wedding proceeding smoothly. Rhaegar sat on the Iron Throne, watching as Aegon and Selene completed a traditional Westerosi wedding ceremony, accompanied by the reading of a holy brother.

The holy brother, with a stern expression, intoned, "Prince Aegon, please cover the bride with your cloak."

Aegon, avoiding further eye contact, slowly removed his cloak and placed it on Selene's shoulders. In Westeros, the groom's cloak symbolizes that the bride will live under her husband's protection and enjoy the rights of a wife. Afterward, Selene kissed him, marking the official end of the ceremony.

"Oh!" Daeron led the way, followed by Aegon's friends, who spirited the unsuspecting Selene away. According to tradition, the wedding night was an indispensable part of the celebration, and Aegon was no exception.

Maris led a group of noble ladies, who almost stripped Aegon of his pants.

"Hahaha, well done!" Rhaegar laughed heartily, pointing at Aegon, who was surrounded by women. With a mischievous smile, he urged, "Quick, don't let him run away!"

"No, no, no!" Aegon protested, pretending to be dignified, holding his belt with one hand while trying to fend off the advances with the other. He couldn't suppress a smile. "I really want to see it. Let's do it in private."

The noble ladies were all aflutter, unsure how to proceed. After a moment, Aegon let out a scream, "Who pinched me?!"

Rhaegar, hearing the commotion, laughed even more heartily.

Traditional weddings in Westeros were different, often marked by the boisterousness and mischief of the aristocracy. Fortunately, the two ceremonies he had chosen were ancient rites from Valyria, avoiding the filth and aggression typical of Westerosi customs.

At his wedding with Jenny, the boisterous wedding pranks segment was stingily canceled.

Chapter 574: Sheepstealer vs. Black Goat

The wedding was a half-serious, half-playful affair, with guests all in high spirits. Soon, cheerful music began to play, and the noblemen started looking for their dancing partners.

"Rhaegar, where's my wedding gift?" Aegon called out, pushing his way over, his chest puffed out and lipstick smudges all over his face.

Rhaegar, who was chatting with his father, Viserys, clapped his hands and said disdainfully, "Wipe your face. It looks like you just came back from a brothel."

Aegon, with a smug expression, sighed deeply, "These noble ladies are much hotter than prostitutes."

It was a pity his little chase was almost thwarted by an unscrupulous woman.

"Your Grace," two Dragonkeepers slowly approached, carrying an incubator that looked like a furnace. In front of Aegon, Rhaegar opened the lid, revealing a dark purple dragon egg in the thick white smoke. He smiled lightly and said, "Happy wedding, brother."

"This dragon egg is quite beautiful," Aegon said, his eyes burning with desire as he reached out to touch the egg. He yanked his hand away in pain. "Is it the egg of Dreamfyre or Silverwing?" he asked. Such a beautiful dragon egg will surely hatch without a hitch. 'When the time comes, it will be a contest between it and Sunfyre to see who is more majestic and handsome', he thought.

Rhaegar put down the lid and smiled without saying a word. Viserys, leaning on his crutch, watched his two sons get along harmoniously and breathed a sigh of relief. "This is the egg of Vhagar, which Rhaegar found in Dragonmont."

"That old dragon's egg?" Aegon was taken aback and asked the servant to carry the incubator back to the bridal chamber. Vhagar had stopped laying eggs many years ago, and every egg from it was precious.

Rhaegar still smiled, his head tilted in a mysterious way. Aegon was left to fill in the blanks. It wasn't that the eggs of Dreamfyre and Silverwing weren't good, but there was another reason. Vhagar's eggs had been stored in Dragonmont for many years and were about to expire. Just like this traditional wedding in Westeros.

As a good brother, Aegon had to take on the burden of showing goodwill to the nobles and hatching the eggs. The three of them had a great time together, and Aegon performed a ton of drinking on the spot.

After finishing a bottle of sweet fruit wine, Aegon's cheeks were flushed, and he leaned on Rhaegar, muttering, "Rhaegar, when will you find Sunfyre a medicine?" Sunfyre was so badly injured that he was still in Meereen. Without his dragon companion, Aegon felt like a cat scratching itself.

Rhaegar's eyes flashed, and he replied, "Don't worry, it won't be long." Before exploring the Smoking Sea, he had planned to make a round trip to the continent of Sothoryos. The last time he encountered a wild dragon in the Sea of Dorne, he will never be at ease until he had found out the truth.

"Okay, you're the one who said it." Aegon's eyes widened, and he smiled foolishly.

Just then, a figure barged in.

"Viserys."

Alicent, in a green dress, entered with her fingers clasped together. She spoke in a formal tone, "Are you okay?"

Aegon looked up at her and said blankly, "Mother~"

"Aegon, you've grown up," Alicent said, glancing at her husband before looking back at her drunk eldest son. She reminisced, "In the blink of an eye, you're already married."

"Mmm," Aegon nodded forcefully, complaining, "But I don't like that Hightower's woman."

Alicent's expression froze, and she accidentally broke a fingernail. "Aegon, you've had too much to drink. Go and rest for a while."

Viserys patted his second son on the back to save his wife. Aegon looked around, muttering in dissatisfaction, "Fine, I'll go find Daena. I'm marrying her next month."

After he left, Alicent's expression softened. Viserys said nothing, gesturing to a nearby seat and whispering, "Sit."

"Thank you." Alicent smiled awkwardly and then sat down, fiddling with the hem of her skirt. She had not returned to King's Landing for many years, living in seclusion at Harrenhal and serving the Seven. Now that she was suddenly back in the public eye, she felt uncertain about her role as Queen Mother.

The atmosphere at the table had become dull since her arrival. Alicent looked around, her eyes settling on Rhaegar. She hesitated and asked, "Helaena wrote to me. She's pregnant."

"Yes," Rhaegar said, taking a sip of wine and appearing calm and collected. "You're going to be a grandmother."

'Hmm... It's hard to distinguish between a grandmother and a great-grandmother in this house,' she thought. Alicent lowered her head in disappointment, unable to accept it. Her thumb bled from where she had been picking at it. After fighting Rhaenyra for half her life, she found herself in this situation.

After a long time, Alicent reluctantly accepted the reality and several times wanted to speak but stopped. She wanted to stay in the Red Keep. Harrenhal was a good place, but it was not a place for humans. Being confined in the chapel all day and watched by holy sisters every moment was almost driving her crazy.

"That..." Alicent gritted her teeth, swallowing her pride.

"You can stay at the Red Keep," Rhaegar interrupted her. "Helaena needs someone to look after her. She wants you to stay."

"Really?" Alicent was stunned, unable to believe what she had heard.

Rhaegar nodded, calmly saying, "Stay. Rhaenyra is not in King's Landing. The Red Keep needs a capable woman to run it." Helaena was a little scatterbrained and could not be expected to manage the court. Jeyne had the ability and ideas, but she would eventually return to the Vale.

"Okay, I will definitely take good care of everyone," Alicent said, smiling, slightly freeing herself from her humble position.

Rhaegar didn't care either. House Hightower was temporarily managed by Lyonel Hightower, who was only twelve years old. Otto was exiled, and it was unknown whether he was dead or alive. Alicent could not stir up any trouble in the court.

"Oh, I just saw Daeron. Why isn't Aemond here?" Alicent hesitated slightly and asked, "Aemond should also be getting married soon." Harrenhal was cut off from the rest of the world, and she had not yet heard of Cassandra's death.

Rhaegar's eyes flickered slightly, uncertain. The Kingsguard, Cole Criston, had left for overseas half a month ago. There should be news by now.

...

Essos, Qohor.

"Roar!" A shrill roar echoed through the clouds as the ugly, brownish-black dragon soared through the sky.

"Dragon!..."

"Hide in the caves!"

Suddenly, the Free City, nestled in the mountains, erupted into chaos and confusion.

Aemond laughed heartily, his lips curling into a cruel smile as he watched the terrified civilians below flee. "Dracarys, Sheepstealer!"

"Roar!" Sheepstealer scanned the area with bloodshot eyes, roared, and swooped down, spitting dragonfire at a tall black goat statue in the center of the city.

Boom!

Dragonfire rained down like molten mud, burning holes in the statue and causing it to collapse.

"Run!"

"Ah..."

The civilians screamed in agony, their bodies wrapped in the earthy brown dragonfire, which gradually consumed them.

Qohor revered the "Black Goat" as their deity. The destruction of the Black Goat statue severely damaged their faith.

"Roar!" Sheepstealer sniffed the air, locked onto a direction, and pounced like a cat on a mouse.

Boom! The dragonfire destroyed the wooden fence at the back of the mountain.

"Baa-baa~~" The sheep pen was destroyed, and the goats fled, bleating and running from the dragonfire.

"Roar!" Sheepstealer, full of excitement, destroyed more sheep pens, driving hundreds of goats out of the pasture.

"Well, let's have a feast," Aemond said, his one eye glinting as he looked back at the Forest of Qohor. He did not stop the Mud Dragon from acting on its own. He awaited reinforcements to completely capture the Free City.

"Roar!" Sheepstealer roared ferociously, burning one goat after another, and landed to feast on them. The surrounding herdsmen and guards saw this and slowly backed away in panic, not daring to interfere.

...

Forest of Qohor

Clap, clap, clap...

"All troops, speed up! Prepare siege equipment!"

Cole, clad in silver armor and a white robe, rode a heavily armored war horse, energetically commanding the troops. In the lush primeval forest, the army, a motley mix of people numbering no less than 10,000, advanced. Two flags were particularly conspicuous in the front row.

Otto, looking solemnly at the Free Cities of Greystone visible in the distance, said, "Aemond has started!"

Behind him, dozens of guards, all wearing armor with the green-on-white Hightower emblem, stood ready. "That kid is too impulsive. We have to hurry and clean up the mess for him."

Bartimos Celtigar followed closely behind, leading a hundred-man guard. The old man, with sparse silver hair and green eyes that flashed with brilliance, rode a white war horse. Unfortunately, his hand had been cut off, so he could only use his feet to step on the stirrups. "Let's go!"

Cole, supported by the two old foxes, shouted out the military order. Behind the main force, a 3,000-strong mercenary army and a 5,000-strong Dothraki cavalry followed closely.

After a long time. Qohor, the city gates.

The 3,000 Sellswords lined up in perfect formation, pushing out siege engines and catapults. "Ooh-la-la~" The Dothraki cavalry surrounded the city on horseback, brandishing their curved swords and squealing.

Cole, with his usual righteousness, asked, "Do we wait for the Prince's orders or attack the city?"

"Not yet." Otto, with deep eyes and wrinkles around the corners of his eyes, thought for a moment and said, "Qohor has a weak defense and only the standing army of the Unsullied."

Bartimos looked at the black-armored soldiers on the city walls and made up his mind: "We'll burn the city with the dragon, then claim we'll spare their lives if they surrender, and trick the commoners into opening the city gates."

Cole frowned and hesitated, saying, "This goes against the honor of knights."

"Haha, but this is war." Bartimos smiled slyly and said proudly, "The purpose of our trip is to achieve the greatest reward with the least sacrifice."

He had married his daughter to the one-eyed Aemond. For this, he almost fell out with the Sea Snake. For the sake of a dragon, he used all his financial resources to support his one-eyed son-in-law and establish an exclusive territory.

Qohor, one of the Free Cities, not only has the most complete smithing techniques in the world, but also boasts wool, silk, lace, and other expensive fabrics, which are cheaper than those in Myr. Taking down Qohor will bring a steady stream of wealth.

...

Back Mountain Ranch

"Roar!" Sheepstealer lay on the ground, surrounded by scorched earth and the charred bones of goats.

Swish! An army of 800 Unsullied, armed with spears and round shields, slowly approached.

"Attack!" The commander, whose helmet had two spikes, shouted loudly and threw his spear first. The Unsullied followed suit, hurling their spears in a dense formation.

From a distance, Aemond watched, laughing mockingly. "You're digging your own grave."

Boom! Sheepstealer spread its wings and stood up, its massive body shaking the ground.

Clang! The spears rained down on its thick, muddy scales.

Flap!

Sheepstealer raised its eyes in mockery and, with a flap of its wings, knocked away a large number of spears. For a dragon in its prime, human attacks were like tickling—nothing more than a joke.

"Burn them all, Sheepstealer!" Aemond's one eye darkened as he gave the order coldly.

"Roar!"

Without giving the Unsullied army a chance to react, Sheepstealer took off with a running start, and mud-like dragonfire spread across the sky.

"Ahhh!"

"Retreat, counterattack!" The Unsullied army suffered heavy losses from the dragonfire. The terrified commander, still not daring to retreat, drew a second spear from his back.

Chapter 575: Searching for the Wild Dragon

In the blink of an eye, several days had passed, and King's Landing had returned to its usual state. The Silk Street, Flea Bottom, and other notorious areas buzzed with gossip about the prince's wedding. Rumors swirled that a second wedding might be on the horizon.

Over Blackwater Bay, a cobalt blue dragon roared as it soared across the vast, dark sea. It soon glided over Hull on the island of Driftmark, circling a few times before heading toward The Gullet.

Meanwhile, on Dragonstone, the Cannibal stood on Dragonmont, its black wings spread wide. With a thunderous roar, it launched itself into the sky, crushing the cliff beneath its hind legs. Its massive body blotted out the sun, sending fishermen on the beach into a panic.

The two dragons descended slowly, landing in parallel—one behind the Stone Drum Tower, followed closely by the other.

...

The Stone Drum Tower, beneath which lay the underground greenhouse, was dimly lit by the torch Daeron held in his hand. He glanced around anxiously before speaking, "Brother, are we really going to set off?"

Click!

Rhaegar, standing by the wall, skillfully opened the incubator and carefully counted the dragon eggs inside. He set down the undamaged eggs with a satisfied nod. Then, turning his attention to a pile of fossilized eggs in the corner, he picked up a dark red one, and replied calmly, "Aegon has been pestering me. How can I refuse?"

Weighing the stone-covered dragon egg in his hand, Rhaegar added, "This is the one I've been looking for."

Daeron's eyes lit up with excitement as he leaned in closer. "Is this the fossilized dragon egg you found in Sothoryos?"

"Let's get going. We'll be back in a few days," Rhaegar said nonchalantly, tossing the egg aside before clapping his hands. "That way, Aegon won't keep thinking about it."

"Good." Daeron carefully cradled the fossilized egg like a diligent Maester. As they exited the greenhouse, the Dragonkeepers of Dragonstone were already waiting.

Rhaegar's expression grew serious as he issued commands in High Valyrian, "Iragaxys and the Grey Ghost will return to Dragonstone and guard the eggs on Dragonmont."

"As you wish," the Dragonkeeper responded, lowering his staff and bowing respectfully.

Rhaegar paused, considering his next words, before adding, "Move the Wyvern eggs out of the greenhouse and try them on Dragonmont."

The Dragonkeeper hesitated but then nodded. "Yes, Your Grace."

Though familiar with Wyverns due to their profession, the Dragonkeepers knew that hatching these creatures—natives of Sothoryos—had proven difficult in Westeros. So far, none of the eggs had hatched. Rhaegar's mention of it was a subtle reminder for the Dragonkeepers to give the matter more attention.

As dragons aged, their appetites grew. The House's dragons had multiplied from just a few to a dozen, and each one required a substantial amount of fresh meat, which was becoming increasingly expensive. If the Wyverns could be successfully bred in Westeros, they would provide a new, high-quality food source for the dragons.

After Rhaegar and Daeron departed, the Dragonkeepers entered the greenhouse and began lifting out a nest of colorful, round eggs that resembled stones.

Click!

One of the black-spotted dragon eggs at the bottom quietly and almost imperceptibly cracked open.

...

King's Landing, Red Keep.

"This is the monthly expenditure for the Dragonpit, Your Grace," Lyman said, speaking slowly and methodically as he held a ledger in his hands.

Helaena sat behind her desk, her expression serious as she toyed with a light blue stone ball. "I'll review it carefully," she replied.

"Your Grace," Lyman began hesitantly, despite having lost his sight many years ago, his instincts still sharp. "When the king is away, did he inform Prince Aegon to govern in his stead?"

Given the little princess's usual demeanor, it was hard not to wonder if she had lost her wits.

Helaena tilted her head, her voice full of confidence. "Aegon is with his bride. He likely won't be coming."

"Well, you're probably right," Lyman murmured, somewhat taken aback. He set a few pages from the ledger on the desk before leaving with a heavy heart, silently praying there were no errors in the accounts.

Helaena glanced at the papers and began flipping through them. "The cost of cattle and sheep, the Dragonkeepers' food and supplies..." she muttered to herself, the quiet council hall echoing with her soft voice, occasionally punctuated by a few approving "mm-hmm's."

Knock, knock!

The sound jolted Helaena out of her thoughts. She looked up, surprised.

Alicent stood in the doorway, holding a tray with a bowl of chicken soup. "I'm not hungry yet," Helaena said softly, closing the account book. "This is too complicated. I need to take it slowly," she thought.

"Drink some. It's good for your health," Alicent urged, stepping forward to place the bowl on the table. "And try to cut back on the Maester's pregnancy tonic. A balanced diet is more effective."

Helaena frowned, her voice tinged with doubt. "I don't drink that stuff." She scooped a bit of the chicken soup with the spoon, then put it down, her appetite absent. "I don't want to drink this either."

Alicent sighed, her heart heavy with concern over her daughter's detached nature. "I still can't believe you're really pregnant with his child."

"What's so strange about it?" Helaena asked, her hand resting on her stomach. Her eyes took on a contemplative look as she added firmly, "My flame can only be passed on when I'm by his side."

Alicent's face tightened, her thoughts elsewhere, as she habitually tuned out her daughter's words.

"What are you looking at?" Alicent asked, changing the subject as she moved to her daughter's side and opened the ledger. "I don't know how to run a kingdom, but managing daily expenses should be straightforward."

Helaena tilted her head, a trace of confusion on her face.

Alicent scribbled a note at the end of the bill, seemingly offhand, "Rhaenyra isn't at the palace, so for now, you are the Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. You'll have to get used to these responsibilities sooner or later."

"She will come back," Helaena said quietly.

"Really?" Alicent murmured, lowering her eyes as she placed a hand on her daughter's shoulder. "Who knows?" she added wistfully.

...

One day and night later, over the Stepstones...

"Roar!"

Cannibal dove at breakneck speed, its powerful hind legs skimming the sea's surface and sending a massive wave crashing up, towering over a dozen meters high. Tessarion clung to its back like a small cobalt-blue butterfly, struggling to keep pace.

Rhaegar glanced back and shouted, "Let's rest for the night on Bloodstone Island!"

"Good!" Daeron, drenched in sweat, replied with relief. They had entered the southern reaches of the Narrow Sea, nearing the borders of the Summer Sea. The scorching sun was enough to make even a Targaryen feel like a Velaryon.

Rhaegar smiled and patted the Cannibal's back, signaling the dragon to slow down. Cannibal was so fast that the young Tessarion could barely keep up. If not for waiting on Daeron and his dragon, Cannibal could have crossed the distance between Dragonstone and the Stepstones in half a day.

Rhaegar spotted the outline of Bloodstone Island in the distance. "That's it, Cannibal," he said.

"Roar!"

Tessarion was the first to respond, neighing excitedly as it flapped its cobalt blue wings with renewed energy, eager to land. After half a day of flying, the two goats it had devoured that morning were long digested.

"Slow down, Tessarion," Daeron urged, startled by the sudden burst of speed, as he tried to calm the dragon's eager spirit.

Rhaegar shook his head with a laugh. This journey to the continent of Essos was as much about tracking a wild dragon as it was about gathering Wyverns as food for Sunfyre.

The last report suggested the wild dragon was enormous, but its exact size remained unknown. While the Cannibal could likely hold its own in a fight, there was always the risk of the wild dragon escaping with injuries. Bringing Daeron and Tessarion along could tip the scales at a critical moment.

"Roar..."

Before Rhaegar could turn, a piercing roar echoed from the direction of the archipelago.

"Dragon!" Rhaegar's pulse quickened as he quickly scanned the horizon.

Cannibal's green eyes darkened as it shot upward, breaking through layers of clouds and mist. Below, a small island covered in lush vegetation came into view. Several large ships were hastily weighing anchor, their decks swarming with activity.

"Roar..."

A pale silver dragon glided past, its scales shimmering in the wind, its sharp vertical pupils locked onto the humans aboard the ships.

"Dragon!"

"Release the arrows! Drive it away!"

A large group of foreign mercenaries, clad in armor, poured out onto the deck, drawing their crossbows and aiming at the dragon in the sky. But provoking the beast was a grave mistake. The dragon's eyes flashed with fury, and its temper flared.

Seasmoke, enraged by the challenge, dove toward the lead ship, unleashing a torrent of orange and silver dragonfire.

Boom!

Dragonfire rained down from the sky, engulfing the deck in flames and decimating the Sellswords below.

Roar...

As the panicked cries of the Sellswords echoed, Seasmoke darted through the air with deadly precision, unleashing its fiery wrath without missing a target. A one-sided massacre had begun.

Hoo!

Cannibal swooped in, its massive wings blotting out the sun and casting a shadow over the islands below.

"Ahhh!"

A group of Sellswords, ablaze and desperate, looked up in terror as they fled, their faces drained of color.

"Seasmoke!?"

Rhaegar's eyes widened as he recognized the pale silver dragon wreaking havoc below. A moment of realization struck him—no wonder Seasmoke had been missing from Dragonstone and Driftmark; it had flown to the Stepstones. The dragon was still within the dangerous territory where wild dragons prowled.

Roar...

Seasmoke obliterated the last ship before catching sight of the shadowy form of the Cannibal overhead. Rhaegar, his mind racing, intended to send Seasmoke back to Dragonstone.

Roar...

Sensing the overwhelming presence of the Cannibal, Seasmoke hesitated for a brief moment before plunging toward the other end of the island, fleeing in the direction of Cape Wrath.

"This dragon!" Rhaegar muttered, shaking his head in disbelief as Seasmoke's figure soon vanished over the horizon. He had no intention of pursuing it and sighed, "Let it go."

A dragon as loyal as Seasmoke was a rare find in this world. Who knows, perhaps some worthy soul would tame it again one day.

Just then, Daeron, riding Tessarion, flew in, circling the burning fleet. "There's a ship from the Citadel!" he called out in astonishment.

Rhaegar turned at the sound, ignoring the smuggler's ship that was still ablaze. His gaze settled on a sunken ship beached on the island's shore, its distinctive sails unmistakable.

"It really is the Citadel," Rhaegar murmured, tilting his head in thought.

...

Lys.

"Roar..."

A thunderous roar echoed through the depths of the Dragonpit, reverberating with a note of inexplicable sorrow.

Boom!

The Bronze Gate creaked open slowly. Rhaenyra, draped in a flowing red cape, walked gracefully into the Dragonpit.

"Mother, Your Grace," a group of children called out as they ran over, interrupting their play to greet her.

Rhaenyra smiled warmly, gently waving them off. "Go on and play. I'm here to see Laena."

As the children scampered away, Rhaenyra turned and spotted Laena sitting on the ground, leaning against the edge of the Dragonpit. Concern etched across her face, she approached. "The Maester said you should be resting in the Topless Tower," Rhaenyra said softly, bending down to help her up.

Laena had grown noticeably thinner. She looked up, her eyes vacant, as if the very essence of her spirit had been drained away. Dressed in a simple white gown, her face bare of any adornment, she appeared almost ghostly in the dim light of the Dragonpit, her presence unsettling against the shadows.

Chapter 576: The White Worm With No Way Out

"Laena!" Rhaenyra's voice was filled with concern. "You really should be resting."

Laena had been consumed with worry ever since Daemon's banishment from King's Landing. If she continued this way, she might manage, but the baby she carried could not.

Laena rubbed her forehead, trying to muster some strength. "I'm fine. Trust me."

"I can't trust you in this condition," Rhaenyra replied, pulling her into a protective embrace.

As they took a few steps, Laena clutched her stomach, wincing in pain.

"Still not feeling well?" Rhaenyra asked, her worry deepening.

Laena forced a smile. "It's nothing serious."

But they both knew the truth. The Maester had warned that the last miscarriage had caused permanent damage to her womb. This pregnancy was fraught with risk.

Suddenly, a mournful cry echoed from deep within the Dragonpit.

"Roar..."

Laena gritted her teeth and took another step forward. "Vhagar is worried about me."

"Dragons can always sense their rider's emotions," Rhaenyra acknowledged, though her tone was far from reassuring. "Come back with me. Stop burdening yourself with worldly matters."

"I can't," Laena whispered, her voice hoarse and filled with sorrow.

Rhaenyra's eyes narrowed in confusion. "Why not?"

Laena sighed deeply, her voice heavy with complex emotions. "My mother sent word. Daemon has taken a fleet into the Smoking Sea."

"What?" Rhaenyra gasped, her shock palpable. "Rhaegar and the others had agreed to enter together."

"Yes, but Daemon has never been one to keep his promises," Laena said, her gaze distant, lost in thought.

Rhaenyra's anger flared, but there was also helplessness in her tone. "I'll inform Rhaegar, pray that Daemon stays safe."

The Smoking Sea had always been a symbol of peril, even for someone as famous as the Rogue Prince.

...

Late at night, atop the flat-topped Topless Tower, the Queen's bedroom lay in shadow.

Creak.

The door swung open, and Rhaenyra entered, rubbing her shoulder and dragging her feet, utterly exhausted. She had just put Laena to bed, a task that had drained what little energy she had left. At least she had done her best to fulfill the Sea Snake's request.

With a sigh, Rhaenyra reached behind her to undo the ties at the hem of her skirt. As she began to remove her red dress, her eyes caught sight of a stack of papers on the round table.

"What is this?" she murmured, curiosity piqued.

Slipping into a blue nightgown, Rhaenyra picked up the papers and began to read. As she scanned the contents, her expression shifted from fatigue to surprise, then quickly to anger. Each page detailed port taxes and various types of trade in Lys—seemingly mundane, until she noticed circles drawn around certain suspicious loopholes.

Port fees, smuggling operations, slave trading... the evidence was damning.

"Johanna, how dare you deceive me!" Rhaenyra hissed through gritted teeth as she reviewed the incriminating details. The corruption was undeniable, each marked item pointing directly to Johanna's involvement. A fallen maiden sold into a brothel, yet she continued training female slaves and bed slaves for the powerful.

The more Rhaenyra read, the more her anger grew, her breath quickening as her nightgown rose and fell with each exhale. Finally, she could take no more.

Bang!

She stormed out of her room, her face dark with fury.

"Your Grace," Ser Lorent, who stood guard at the door, exclaimed, startled by her sudden exit.

"Don't worry about me. I'm just going to look around," Rhaenyra snapped, her voice firm as she headed directly for a specific room on the next floor.

Lorent hesitated, his surprise evident. As he glanced into the room she had left, he noticed a map spread out on one of the round tables, its details eerily aligned with the documents Rhaenyra had just reviewed.

...

Half an hour later, Rhaenyra approached a secluded bedroom and knocked on the door.

Creak.

The door opened from the inside, and Mysaria appeared, leaning casually against the door frame.

"Are you looking for me?" Rhaenyra asked, getting straight to the point as her eyes scanned Mysaria. The last page of the stack of papers had led her here, showing a diagram of this very room.

Mysaria crossed her arms, meeting Rhaenyra's gaze. "It's me, Your Grace."

Rhaenyra raised an eyebrow. "What do you want from me?"

She studied Mysaria's pale, alluring face with disdain. As Daemon's paramour, Mysaria had no place in her life, and Rhaenyra made no effort to hide her dislike.

Remaining calm, Mysaria responded as if they were discussing trivial matters. "I want to prove that I can help you."

"Help me?" Rhaenyra scoffed. "And why should I believe you can? Besides, I don't trust you."

Had she not possessed such inner restraint, Rhaenyra might have ended Mysaria's life right then. She needed no assistance, especially not from someone like her.

But Mysaria showed no urgency, accepting the rejection without flinching. "Would you like to come in? I have information about the Black Swan's private dealings."

Rhaenyra narrowed her eyes, sensing danger.

"I have no ill intentions. I just seek a stable life," Mysaria continued, raising her hand in a solemn vow. "I swear on the child in my belly."

Rhaenyra's gaze flicked to Mysaria's swollen belly, and she instinctively touched her own chest. Even now, her breasts still produced milk. As a mother of many children, she found herself willing to offer a sliver of trust to another mother.

"Tell me more," Rhaenyra said, entering the room, intent on skipping the pleasantries.

Mysaria smiled as she poured a drink for Rhaenyra, then began to speak with enthusiasm. "The Black Swan is quite resourceful. She was a courtesan in Lys many years ago."

"Your Grace was able to secure control of Lys so swiftly after the government fell largely because of her."

"But with that influence came vices she couldn't shake," Mysaria continued, her tone growing colder. "A woman who uses her body to gain power will never escape the stigma. After the fall of the Triarchy, Lys's powerful elite managed to retain 30% of their influence, all thanks to the Black Swan's underhanded dealings. She secured their loyalty by catering to their interests."

Rhaenyra frowned, processing the information. "How do you know so much? She never revealed anything to me."

"Those in high places rarely notice those beneath them," Mysaria replied, her voice tinged with sadness despite the smile on her lips.

Rhaenyra's expression grew pensive, thinking of Daemon, who had abandoned her. The wedding that should have taken place was canceled, leaving Mysaria—the White Worm—cast aside.

"What do you want?" Rhaenyra asked, her tone serious. She knew that anyone who offered such valuable information must have an agenda.

Mysaria's gaze softened, and she confessed, "I seek your protection. I want to live in peace."

"Why me?" Rhaenyra remained cautious.

"I have no choice," Mysaria replied with a bitter smile. "Daemon is gone, my wealth is gone, and I imagine you need someone clever to handle certain matters."

If she hadn't been backed into a corner, Mysaria would have steered clear of the royal family. These dragonriders were like gods to ordinary people, and to be close to a king was as dangerous as being near a tiger—especially one with a temperamental nature.

Rhaenyra studied her intently, as if trying to peer into her soul. After a long silence, she finally spoke. "You can live under my protection."

"Thank you, Your Grace," Mysaria said, her expression relaxing as she bent down to bow.

"Wait," Rhaenyra said, catching her by the hand to stop her from bowing over her swollen belly. Her voice was stern. "I have a condition. You must remain loyal and help me root out crime."

Mysaria froze, her emotions mixed, before nodding. "I promise, Your Grace."

She only wanted to live peacefully and bring her child safely into the world. If the cost of that peace was loyalty and helping to dismantle the Black Swan's network, so be it. Mysaria would show the Black Swan just what the White Worm was capable of.

...

In the dead of night at the harbor, the bonfire flickered brightly against the dark sky, and the sound of waves crashing against the shore filled the air.

Addam walked alone to the edge of the beach, his expression serious and focused. A single-masted sailboat was anchored in the reef area, its silhouette barely visible in the dim light.

"My Lord," a burly man dressed as a fisherman greeted him respectfully from the shore.

Addam nodded, a hint of unease in his movements, as he handed the man a sealed letter. "Make sure this reaches Qohor," he said solemnly.

The letter bore the emblem of the Seahorses, a mark of House Velaryon.

The fisherman pounded his chest with one hand in a gesture of loyalty. "You can count on me," he promised before turning to board the sailboat.

Addam watched in silence as the boat sailed off into the night, its outline gradually fading into the darkness. The letter had been entrusted to him by Lord Corlys Velaryon, with strict instructions to ensure its delivery to Lord Bartimos of House Celtigar.

House Velaryon and House Celtigar were connected by blood and shared a proud heritage as noblemen of Old Valyria. Bartimos had aligned himself with One-Eyed Aemond, and it was no surprise that the Sea Snake, too, had thrown in his lot with the same faction.

Disillusioned with both Daemon and Rhaegar, Lord Corlys had pledged his allegiance to Rhaenyra. The intricate web of alliances meant that contact with One-Eyed Aemond was inevitable, despite the tensions that lay beneath the surface.

"Lord Corlys, your foresight is truly remarkable," Addam murmured to himself, a mix of admiration and uncertainty in his voice. He turned and began to make his way back, lost in thought.

He couldn't shake the feeling that Lord Corlys had deeper expectations for him—expectations that went beyond the traditional teachings of a knight. There was something more, something unspoken, that weighed heavily on his mind as he walked away from the harbor.

Chapter 577: The Blood Wyrms are Hurt

The next day, the sky was a vivid blue, and the grass gleamed a lush green. Rhaegar strolled across the grassland behind Twin Castle, his eyes fixed on the letter in his hands. The letter was brief, but its contents were anything but simple.

"Daemon actually ventured into the Smoking Sea!"

Rhaegar frowned slightly, a swirl of emotions stirring within him. His uncle certainly had grand ambitions and always managed to find a way to make his presence known. Yet, it was unlike Daemon to leave home so willingly.

'Let him explore the Smoking Sea first,' Rhaegar thought, shaking his head, unwilling to get involved.

"Roar..."

Cannibal crouched on the grass, its back arched high, sensing its rider's unease. Rhaegar glanced at the dragon and said flatly, "Eat your sheep."

"Roar..."

Cannibal's green pupils narrowed in displeasure. The massive beast twisted its body, its front paws crushing the charred skeletons on the ground with its wings. 'Foolish rider, unworthy of a dragon's affection,' it seemed to think.

"Brother, we've got all the food and drink ready!" Daeron called out from a distance, his chest and back laden with cloth pouches.

Rhaegar chuckled silently. "Why not have your servant carry it?" he asked, tearing up the letter as he walked toward his eager younger brother.

Daeron puffed out his chest and laughed. "I'll carry it myself. Your squire deserves a break."

"It's not that bad, little brother." Rhaegar took the large bundle, considering that Aegon's lands weren't as lenient as they seemed.

A soft hum filled the air as Rhaegar's space necklace activated. The red dragon on the round Valyrian steel pendant opened its eyes, swallowing the supplies into its five cubic storage compartments, enough to sustain them for half a month.

Daeron's eyes widened in surprise, his curiosity piqued by the magical item. "Isn't it magnificent?" Rhaegar asked with a smile, touching the pendant. "If I get the chance, I'll make one for you too."

"Really?" Daeron was taken aback, knowing there were only two such space artifacts in the family. Even their eldest sister, Rhaenyra, didn't have one.

"Just wait a little longer." Rhaegar placed his hands behind his back and climbed onto the dragon with practiced ease. His spirit power had grown, and his skill in engraving runes had improved by leaps and bounds. Once he mastered the fusion of fire magic and runes, he would be able to craft a spatial artifact.

"Roar!"

With Rhaegar securely on its back, the Cannibal let out a long howl, trotting to the cliff's edge. It plunged downward, its black wings skimming the sea before surging upward into the sky.

Roar!

From the high walls of Twin Castle, Tessarion emerged, his cobalt blue body gleaming like a jewel. For a sub-adult dragon, it had nearly reached full size. In two more years, it would be fully grown.

...

The Smoking Sea.

Under the blistering sun, the heat was so intense that it created layers of gray mist, distorting the air as far as the eye could see. The darkness was so oppressive that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, only the thick fog and the choking stench of death. No one in their right mind would venture near this place. Those who dared would find the fog revealing the devil's hand, its terrifying wail striking fear deep into their hearts.

"Roar..."

A thunderous dragon roar pierced the silence as a scarlet rift tore open the sky.

"Roar!"

Caraxes' pupils gleamed with a ferocious light as its serpentine body broke through the fog, surging out of the Smoking Sea. But the danger was far from over. Clinging to its massive, scarlet-scaled body were hordes of gray-skinned creatures, their scaly forms packed tightly like ants.

"Dracarys, Caraxes!" Daemon's eyes turned blood-red, his body exuding a murderous aura.

"Roar!"

Caraxes lifted its head and unleashed a torrent of scarlet dragonfire into the sea. The flames exploded into a towering mushroom cloud, crashing down into the waters. The sound of burning flesh crackled in the air as the creatures, now aflame, burst apart and plunged into the sea like dumplings. The dragon glanced back, only to see its rider besieged.

Several of the creatures had huddled beneath the dragon's wings, avoiding the direct blast of dragonfire. They now swarmed the blood-soaked figure in the saddle like living corpses.

"Bastards!"

A flash of malice crossed Daemon's eyes as he stood, unsheathing his sword and swinging it in a deadly arc.

Pili-pulu...

Several grotesque heads toppled from their bodies, and the headless corpses tumbled down, crashing into the seabed.

"Roar!"

With Daemon regaining his balance, Caraxes suddenly surged forward, shaking violently like a writhing snake. In an instant, the remaining stone men were flung off, scattering into the sea.

Daemon coldly surveyed the scene, ripping off his tattered crimson cloak and quickly inspecting himself. His once-mighty black steel armor was riddled with gashes, soaked in blood, and half of his entrails hung from his shoulder. His silver hair, now singed and curled, fell across his face like the gnawed remnants of a battle.

"Go, Caraxes!"

Daemon's voice was deep and resolute as he cast one last look back at the thick, mist-shrouded Smoking Sea. The danger here needed no further words.

As the long, thin dragon tail vanished into the clouds, a deep, jagged cut was revealed on Caraxes' lower abdomen, and scalding dragon blood dripped down.

Zilala...

The seawater hissed and steamed as it turned red from the blood. The dragon and its rider disappeared into the distance.

Yet, the ten large ships that had accompanied them were nowhere to be seen, lost along with their sailors in the treacherous Smoking Sea.

...

Night fell over Sothoryos, casting a heavy shadow on the Basilisk Isles.

“Asshole, pull your pants up!”

“Fuck off, I’m not done yet...”

"...."

The town reeked of filth, with wooden stakes forming a rough circle around the squalor. The air was thick with the stench of urine and excrement. Scantly clad prostitutes laughed and flirted with the leathers and slave traders, their shrill voices piercing the night. One of the traders stumbled, nearly lifting off the ground as he lost his balance.

In a shadowy corner, two figures in black robes moved quickly, their faces hidden.

"No news from Sowtown," Rhaegar said as he walked, indifferent to the chaos around him.

Sothoryos was far from uninhabited. The Basilisk Isles were littered with towns that had been built, destroyed, and rebuilt countless times. These settlements were filled with mud and blood, teeming with runaway slaves, prostitutes, and smugglers. Once, slavers from Slaver's Bay would come here to buy human cargo before that trade fell apart.

Daeron, walking beside his brother, glanced uneasily at the men and women copulating by the fire. His cheeks flushed with embarrassment. 'How can they be so comfortable in the mud?' he wondered.

"Hurry up, don't dawdle," Rhaegar ordered, his gaze flicking over the scene with disdain.

Sowtown was no place for nobility, and it cared little for titles like king or prince. Rhaegar had come to seek information from a forest witch, but the old, ugly, and blind woman had the nose of a hound. The moment she saw him, she began barking and scurried under a table. The visit had been a waste of time.

Soon, they arrived at the ramshackle wooden gate of Sowtown.

“Hey, who are you?” one of the guards slurred, his breath heavy with alcohol. The other guard, steadier on his feet, pointed at the brothers and shouted.

“Leather buyers, my friend,” Rhaegar replied, lowering his head to hide his silver hair beneath his hood.

The guard's eyes gleamed with greed, eager to extort a bribe. Rhaegar moved slowly at first, then with a sudden burst of speed, he snapped the man's neck with a swift motion.

The guard froze, his expression blank as he suddenly found himself staring at the ground. Then, he collapsed, unconscious.

“Go!” Rhaegar commanded, kicking open the wooden gate with a powerful strike.

Daeron swallowed hard and hurried after him. "Where are we going?" he asked, anxiety creeping into his voice. The night was dark, and the wilderness was no place to linger.

“Green Hell,” Rhaegar replied, his voice deep as he quickened his pace, entering the dense forest outside the town.

"Roar..."

The tall grass rustled violently, and a dark mound rose, transforming into the thick neck of a dragon. Cannibal's pupils dilated, glowing with a green light as it stared southward, toward the distant end of Sothoryos.

Without hesitation, Rhaegar climbed onto the dragon's back. Daeron, trailing behind, found Tessarion sleeping soundly in a corner, oblivious to the commotion.

Chapter 578: The Stolen Wild Dragon

Green Hell.

The vast primeval forest stretched endlessly, encompassing mountains, wastelands, and swamps under a star-speckled sky. In an unnamed valley, the ground was strewn with rubble and debris, the remnants of something long forgotten.

Pop!

The sharp sound of a blade piercing flesh echoed through the night. Rhaegar, clad in a black robe with silver hair partially obscuring his piercing eyes, drove the "Dawn" spear into the neck of a dragon-shaped skeleton.

The skeleton was in a pitiful state, with only a thin layer of decayed flesh clinging to the bones. The spear penetrated a section of the neck that bore clear signs of gnawing, leaving behind a charred stain on the bone.

"Brother, is this a wyvern?" Daeron asked, his young face illuminated by the small fire he had just lit, a spark of curiosity in his eyes.

Rhaegar pulled the spear free and examined the charred residue on his fingertips. This skeleton had been discovered by chance. Judging by the level of decay and the scorching climate of Sothoryos, the creature had been dead for no more than three days.

"Are there any signs of wild dragons?" Daeron asked, suddenly alert.

"I can't be sure," Rhaegar replied, picking up a burning branch and moving away from the fire. "It's getting late. You stay here. I'll scout the area."

If this were a wyvern's habitat, traces of wild dragons might be nearby. Daeron hesitated but eventually nodded, staying by the fire as instructed.

"Roar!"

Tessarion lay atop the valley, his gaze fixed on the somber rider below. The dragon's pupils were wide, and its spirit shone brightly in the night.

...

Rhaegar stepped carefully on the gravel in the valley, the torch in his hand pushing back the encroaching darkness. He noted with interest how wyverns seemed to favor gravelly terrain—something worth sharing with the Dragonkeepers back home.

Hoo—

A gust of night wind swept through the valley, causing the torch's flames to flicker and dance. Rhaegar tilted his head, satisfaction gleaming in his eyes. In a concealed corner of the valley, an

uneven cave entrance came into view. At the mouth of the cave, a large mound of dried, blackened dragon dung was piled high. The stench was overpowering, a pungent mix of sulfur and decay.

There was no mistaking it—this was the dung of a giant dragon.

Rhaegar unsheathed the Dawn Lance, murmuring, "Apologies, old friend," before plunging the spear into the mound.

The blade, a foot long, slid easily into the dung, revealing its interior to be hard and dry, far from the sticky consistency of fresh waste. 'At least three days old,' Rhaegar thought, his eyes brightening as he bypassed the pile and ventured into the cave.

The size of the dung pile caught his attention—it was enormous, nearly half as tall as a man. The dragon that produced it must have been truly massive. 'It could be the wild dragon I encountered in the Sea of Dorne,' he mused, his mind racing as he navigated the dim cave.

Click!

His foot struck something hard, like a round stone. Rhaegar looked down and discovered two colorful wyvern eggs partially buried in the sand.

...

It was midnight. The campfire blazed brightly, the crackling flames driving away the relentless mosquitoes. Rhaegar returned to camp, walking slowly and cradling two wyvern eggs in his arms.

"Brother," Daeron greeted him, taking the wyvern eggs as he tended to a steak sizzling over the fire.

"I found a pile of dragon dung. We need to be cautious," Rhaegar said, frowning. He was never fond of playing hide-and-seek with danger.

"It's fine. At least we have a clue," Daeron replied, understanding that their main goal was to find fresh blood for Sunfyre. Discovering signs of wild dragons wasn't unexpected. After all, the Cannibal itself was once a wild dragon. No one knew whether it hatched on Dragonstone or wandered to Dragonmont, a living volcano, to nest. One day, another wild dragon might follow the scent and fly to Dragonstone.

Rhaegar smiled, his gaze drifting toward the valley where the Cannibal rested. The massive dragon, exhausted from a day of flying, lay sprawled on the ground like a mountain of coal, its eyes closed in deep slumber.

Suddenly, Rhaegar froze, his expression curious. "Where is your dragon?" he asked.

Daeron glanced around, then said, "Probably out hunting." Tessarion, being smaller, found it easier to cover long distances. It was common for him to sleep in the forest during the day and hunt at night.

Rhaegar's frown deepened. "There are wild dragons in Green Hell. We shouldn't stray too far from our dragons."

Those who had suffered knew all too well that a dragonrider was nothing without their dragon.

...

On the other side of the forest, a magnificent cobalt-blue dragon lay nestled among the trees, snorting softly as it sniffed the air, inching deeper into the vast wilderness. Suddenly, the dragon's

head snapped up, its pupils flashing with curiosity. A strange scent had caught its attention, leading it toward an unremarkable low mountain in the distance.

"Roar!"

With a roar of excitement, the dragon spread its wings and soared into the sky, flying swiftly toward the source of the intriguing scent.

...

The night grew deeper, casting an even darker shadow over the valley. The two brothers slept in their clothes, but Rhaegar seemed troubled, his brow furrowed and his body slightly hunched as if burdened by uneasy dreams.

Suddenly, a thunderous roar shattered the stillness.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's eyes snapped open, its green pupils narrowing with fierce intensity. With a powerful leap, it launched itself into the sky.

"Roar... Roar..."

From the darkness, a swarm of small dragon-like creatures emerged, bursting into the night like a plague of locusts. The Cannibal surged into their midst, its massive jaws snapping up seven or eight at once, sending pieces of their flesh flying.

"Hiss... hiss..."

As they revealed their true forms, the creatures were less than a meter long, with uneven ridges along their backs and bellies the color of brown mud. These were a dangerous offshoot of the wyverns, notorious for their swarming behavior, akin to bats or wasps. Individually weak, they could strip an elephant to its skeleton in moments when they attacked in numbers.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal's pupils widened in fury, and it unleashed a torrent of dark green dragonfire. The flames spread quickly, like smoke and mist, igniting the night sky with a deadly, greenish glow. The wyverns shrieked in pain, colliding with one another and spreading the dragonfire like a plague. Soon, the sky was raining green fire, a lethal downpour of burning flesh.

Cannibal snorted in disdain, darting through the fiery rain, devouring charred wyvern carcasses with ease. No creature dared to challenge it and live.

In the valley below, Rhaegar awoke as expected, blinking at the sky. For a moment, it seemed like a meteor shower.

"What's happening?" Daeron mumbled sleepily.

"Nothing. Go back to sleep," Rhaegar replied, spotting the Cannibal's silhouette and relaxing. The wild and once untamed dragon was more than a match for the dangers of this harsh land.

However, unseen by them, a pair of copper-colored vertical pupils watched the scene unfold from a distance. Deep within a lush, primeval forest, a massive creature lay hidden, its dark green form covered in moss. Its breath was so hot that it scorched the grass and trees around it. The amber-colored eyes followed the Cannibal's movements, filled with deep-seated vigilance and hostility.

Even from miles away, the familiar stench of ash filled its nostrils, a scent that made the creature sick with loathing.

...

A low mountain.

"Roar!" Tessarion followed the scent, gliding over the rugged terrain until it finally discovered an underground cave. The entrance was dark and deep, radiating intense heat that piqued the dragon's curiosity. Tessarion's head tilted slightly, its limited instincts urging it forward, drawn by the familiar warmth of fire. Without a second thought, the dragon ventured into the cave.

Plop!

With a misstep, Tessarion's wings failed to catch the ground, and it tumbled headlong into a pool of hot spring water, sending a towering wave crashing against the cave walls.

"Roar... Roar..."

Panic gripped Tessarion as it choked on a mouthful of the steaming water, nearly drowning in the process. The heat, however, kept its blood simmering, preventing the shock from overwhelming it. In a frantic scramble, it clambered out of the sulfurous pool, dripping wet and trembling.

As Tessarion lifted its head, it froze in awe. The cave was vast, its walls adorned with rope-like roots descending from above, and glimmering crystals embedded in the stone. In the center of the cave bubbled the hot spring, its white steam rising like ghostly tendrils.

"Roar?" Tessarion's pupils dilated as if it had stumbled upon paradise. Entranced, it began gnawing on a shiny crystal, oblivious to everything else around it.

The cave was connected to the earth's molten core, and the searing heat reminded Tessarion of Dragonmont. It pranced about, splashing in delight, but then, without warning—

Crack!

Tessarion's snout, full of crystals, stepped on something unusual. It turned to find a dark mass of dragon dung beneath its claws. The hardened outer shell of the dung had cracked, and as Tessarion lifted its cobalt-blue claws, a sticky, hot mess oozed out. Two eggs—one black, the other yellow—rolled away, narrowly avoiding its claws.

"Roar?" Tessarion's pupils contracted, and it lowered its head, spotting a broken eggshell beneath its claws. The shell was green and white, with the egg's contents now mixed with dragon dung and mud.

It's broken!

Tessarion's head tilted in confusion, its scarlet tongue flicking back and forth as if trying to understand the situation. But before it could process what had happened, danger closed in.

"Roar—"

A roar, full of rage, echoed through the night, and a blast of hot wind surged into the cave, as powerful as a thousand-ton force. Tessarion's cobalt-blue scales bristled with fear, sensing the imminent threat.

In desperation, Tessarion spat out the crystals and quickly snatched the black dragon egg into its mouth. Panic-stricken, it scrambled up the cave walls, its wings clawing at the earth as its belly scraped against the rough surface, leaving deep furrows in its copper-colored scales.

Before the cave's true master could return, Tessarion bolted out of the cave, fleeing into the forest. In its haste, it unleashed a burst of cobalt-blue dragonfire, igniting a towering pine tree into a blazing torch. Terrified, it flew in the opposite direction, flapping its wings furiously.

Moments later, the night sky filled with howling winds.

"Roar!"

A dark green shadow streaked across the sky and descended upon the cave like a falling star. The impact was immense, forming a deep crater as the enormous dragon landed. The ground trembled as dust and debris scattered.

The wild dragon's pupils were ablaze with murderous intent as it plunged its bare head into the cave, searching frantically. But what it found only fueled its rage. Half of the dragon dung was crushed, and only the yellowish dragon egg remained intact.

"Siong!"

The wild dragon let out a heart-wrenching cry, a mix of anguish and fury. Its desire for revenge now consumed it. With a savage growl, it withdrew its head and glared at the trees ablaze with cobalt-blue dragonfire.

Hoo hoo hoo...

After a deep, furious inhale, it locked onto the direction in which Tessarion had fled. Without hesitation, it spread its massive, milky-yellow wings and soared into the sky.

"Roar!"

The dragon's roar shook the entire primeval forest, sending birds and beasts fleeing in every direction. Tessarion, realizing the gravity of what it had done, glanced back in terror and flapped its wings even harder.

Boom!

Suddenly, a blazing ball of fire fell from the sky. A colossal, moss-covered green dragon, as large as a mountain, loomed above the clouds. Its fangs were razor-sharp, and its mouth gaped wide, dripping with foul-smelling saliva.

Tessarion's pupils constricted in fear as it caught sight of the monstrous dragon, its maw gaping with malice, saliva glistening ominously in the moonlight.

Chapter 579: The Last Remnant of Old Valyria

The ghostly green fire fell upon the barren land, briefly illuminating the night sky as if it were day.

Pop!

A spear pierced a stone wall, revealing an irregular piece of ore with spidery red veins inside. Rhaegar twisted the ore in his hands, exclaiming in surprise, "A rare and special mineral."

He retrieved a gray, oval-shaped stone from his space necklace and held it up to the greenish Dragonfire. This stone, a rare mineral stored in the Daeryon family's space bracelet, paled in comparison to the one in Rhaegar's hand.

"Brother, this stone wall is no ordinary stone wall," Daeron said, his hands busy feeling around the rugged, scratched surface of the valley's outer wall. "It was made by a dragon."

Rhaegar's sharp eyes recognized the marks immediately. The grooves were caused by the sharp edges of dragon scales rubbing against the stone. The special ore was likely left behind by a wild dragon scratching itself here, mixed in with the scales.

Daeron smiled excitedly. "What is this ore used for? My brother has many special ores, but he never uses them for carving or forging."

"Blood Silver Stone, a substitute for blood sacrifice," Rhaegar explained patiently, holding up the blood-shot mineral. "If you forge magical items, it's an indispensable top-tier material. For engraving a spatial item, Blood Silver Stone has the best magic effect."

"Let's go." Rhaegar pocketed the ore and used his spear to lift the charred corpse of a Brown-bellied Wyvern at his feet. The dragon's roar echoed through the night, banishing any remnants of sleepiness from the brothers. They had stumbled upon a new clue in the valley.

"Roar..."

Before they could take two steps, a thunderous dragon roar exploded in their ears. Rhaegar, startled, looked up immediately.

Hoo!

Above the valley, the Cannibal hovered in circles, its cold green pupils indifferent, with deep green fire surging in its throat.

"Where is Tessarion? Hurry!" Rhaegar's face paled, and he sprinted toward the valley's edge. The bond between man and dragon was strong; he sensed the bloodthirsty vigilance in the Cannibal's growl.

"I don't know," Daeron replied, stunned, instinctively following his brother. Tessarion was a proud dragon who often refused food from the Dragonkeepers, preferring to hunt on its own.

"Roar!"

As soon as the words left his mouth, a familiar shrill roar pierced the night. The dark sky was shrouded in thick clouds as a cobalt blue dragon burst through, its magnificent wings ablaze with blue flames, screaming in panic.

"Tessarion!" Daeron was dumbfounded, his heart aching at the sight of the injured dragon.

"Roar..."

Suddenly, a thunderous roar echoed through the heavens, accompanied by a blinding flash of lightning. A dragon's blood-red mouth tore through the thick clouds.

Drizzle...

The rain fell heavily, kicking up a cloud of dust. Rhaegar looked up, and with the aid of the silver lightning, he could see the hideous dragon's head, scarred and menacing.

"Roar!"

The dragon's head reared back, its narrow pupils glowing with rage, and it spat out a torrent of orange and green Dragonfire.

Roar!

Tessarion let out a terrified cry, catching sight of the approaching fiery dragonfire, feeling the specter of death looming.

'No!' Daeron cried out in alarm.

Crack!

The cold rain slapped his face, and the blinding lightning tore through the sky. Rhaegar closed his eyes gently, feeling an uncanny connection with the dragon.

Roar!

In an instant, a pair of wings, dark as death, unfurled in the night sky. The black dragon opened its maw wide and descended from the sky.

Boom!

The dark green Dragonfire tore through the rain, colliding with the wild dragon's fiery breath. The clash of Dragonfire created a brilliant explosion of dark green and blue, as if trying to paint the entire sky.

Cannibal's eyes blazed with fury as it twisted its neck and dove, crashing into the wild dragon with a ferocious, bone-crushing impact.

Sizzle!

Hot dragon blood splattered as the hook-like teeth pierced the scales.

"Roar!"

Tessarion, caught between the two beasts, witnessed the dark dragon's savage attack and let out a heavy, resigned roar.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon roared in fury as the Cannibal's teeth sank into its thick neck. It thrashed wildly, swinging its head in an attempt to break free. Yet the Cannibal remained unmoved, its abyssal jaws slowly closing, while its sharp claws tore open the wild dragon's chest.

Rhaegar and Daeron looked up together, a chill running through their bones. The black dragon resembled a terrifying evil god, its massive wings stirring up clouds of black mist, evaporating the rain before it could fall.

Meanwhile, the wild dragon finally revealed its true form. Its entire body was covered in moss-like dark green scales, and its wings were broken and yellowed with age. Its head was huge and elongated, the details of its horned crown obscured by the darkness. Only its drooping lower jaw, wrinkled flesh, and the scars beside its vertical pupils were visible. Even from a glance, it was clear this dragon was vicious and ruthless.

"Brother, it's the wild dragon!" Daeron's entire body stiffened, his voice trembling.

Rhaegar, his gaze fixed on the brutal clash between the two dragons, responded gravely, "I know." The wild dragon had come so suddenly, even chasing Tessarion. It had caught them completely off guard.

"Your dragon came for you—hide!" Rhaegar wiped the water from his face, drew his dragon whip, and charged into the rain. Despite the downpour blurring his vision, the wild dragon's enormous size was unmistakable. Even if it hadn't grown as rapidly as the Cannibal, it was definitely on the threshold of adulthood.

"Brother!" Daeron, filled with worry, started to follow.

"Hide, quickly!" Rhaegar shouted, leaping forward like a wild goose.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon stretched its neck, letting out a rough, ear-splitting cry that seemed to scorch the sky and boil the sea.

Sizzle!

The Cannibal's eyes, full of cunning and cruelty, seized the opportunity. Its claws tore into the wild dragon's chest and belly. The two adult dragons tangled in the sky, their collision stirring up a whirlwind of sadness amidst the dark, weeping clouds. It was like watching a hungry wolf lock its jaws around the throat of a cunning rabbit.

Boom!

Taking advantage of a momentary gap, the wild dragon unleashed a torrent of Dragonfire, shaking its neck and crashing into the Cannibal.

Zilala...

Rain fell on the two dragons, turning to white smoke as it touched the fire. The Cannibal's pupils dilated in pain as the blue Dragonfire approached.

"Roar!"

Its roar was filled with rage as the wild dragon managed to break free, its massive body swaying. Its neck was now a bloody mess, teeth marks covering it, with blood spurting like a fountain.

Roar!

Within seconds, the wild dragon's strength faltered. Its wings collapsed, and it plummeted to the ground with a heavy thud.

Rhaegar had just leapt out of the valley when the dragon's massive body crashed down beside him. Scales struck the ground, sending up a shower of sparks, and Rhaegar felt his head go numb. Mud and water surged like a tidal wave as the dragon's tail slammed into him.

"Bronze!" Rhaegar raised his arm to block the blow, green dragon scales enveloping his body.

Plop!

The mud slapped him hard, sending his lithe body tumbling to the ground like a kite with its string cut. The impact was excruciating.

Rhaegar's body went numb, his vision blurred. The only sensation left was the residual numbness from the immense impact.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal roared like a mad beast, its green pupils squeezed shut as it swayed erratically, gliding low through the pouring rain. White smoke rose from its dark eyelids, obscuring the extent of the damage.

"Roar!"

Rhaegar propped himself up on one arm, gritting his teeth in pain. As he looked around, the sky was dark as ink, and the earth had turned into a muddy swamp, swirling with vapors.

'It hurts so much,' Rhaegar thought, his body racked with pain. He shook his head vigorously, trying to regain consciousness. He despised pain. A wound of this magnitude could easily kill him.

"Roar..."

A low dragon roar reached his ears, accompanied by the pungent, fishy smell of dragon blood. Rhaegar opened his eyes dazedly, seeing the dark green dragon lying before him like a fallen mountain, its body turned over and covered in mud and sewage.

"It fell?"

He tilted his head, cautiously reaching out.

"Sighing..."

The wild dragon's eyes snapped open, its vertical pupils narrowing as its head and jaws pushed against the ground. It floundered and struggled in the mud.

Rhaegar's senses sharpened instantly. He glanced at the dragon whip in his hand, a sudden idea sparking in his mind. As if possessed, he moved forward, his eyes darkening with intent.

Crack!

A bolt of lightning flashed, illuminating half the vast landscape. The wild dragon let out a high-pitched roar, its body arching mightily as the shoulder blades connecting to its wings cracked with a loud snap.

In that instant, Rhaegar saw nothing but an insurmountable wall before him—an immense beast towering at least 300 feet high.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon, caked in mud and water, shook off the filth. It began to run, trying to take flight. Each stride was like an earthquake, the ground quaking with its every step. Trees toppled in its wake, branches and leaves scattered by its powerful wings as it rose awkwardly into the air.

Rhaegar stood stunned, never having witnessed such a fierce dragon. But there was more to come.

"What is that?"

Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he stared at the long, dangling strips hanging from either side of the dragon's neck. At first glance, they could be mistaken for vines or branches, but Rhaegar saw them clearly.

His pupils constricted. Reflected in his eyes was a tangled mass of rope. Even in its disheveled state, the material was unmistakable to him. Rhaegar, who had spent his childhood in the Dragonpit, recognized it instantly.

It was a special rope used to secure a saddle, with the fallen part being a woven ladder for climbing. The material was made from a unique plant core, tanned with a special hemp oil, an ancient Valyrian craft. It was not only strong and durable but also fireproof.

Rhaegar's breathing quickened, and he exclaimed in shock, "The dragon had a master!"

The intact saddle confirmed it—there had definitely been a rider. This was no wild dragon, but one that had lost its rider, once the mount of a Dragonlord.

"Roar!"

At that moment, the Cannibal crashed into the mud, its powerful chest carving a deep furrow in the earth. A low growl rumbled from its throat as its head plunged into the murky water, churning it violently.

In the next moment, the Cannibal's pupils dilated, its green eyes bloodshot and filled with rage. They were the eyes of a demon crawling out of hell.

"Fly, Cannibal!"

Rhaegar scrambled up the dragon's back using his hands and feet.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's mouth cracked open slightly, its green eyes locked onto the wild dragon struggling to stay aloft, thick saliva dripping from its jaws. The wild dragon had more experience in battle, but its opponent's attack was devious, almost blinding it. This was no ordinary dragon, and the method of attack was unlike anything the wild dragon had faced before.

Rhaegar lay flat against the dragon's saddle, growling, "Leave it, hurry!"

The Cannibal glanced back, sensing the rider's determination. Its mouth began to froth with furious saliva.

With a powerful leap, its wings crushed the trees in its path, and its tail whipped around as it soared high and fast into the sky.

"Roar!"

Cannibal roared, closing the distance to the wild dragon, which was flying erratically above. It reached out with its maw, spitting saliva into the abyss below.

Chapter 580: Capturing the Wild Dragon—Uragax

Crack!

The giant jaws locked onto the twisted shoulder blades, and the wild dragon's wings drooped instantly under the crushing force. In a dragon fight, disabling the wings is crucial.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon let out a mournful roar as one side of its body went numb, its wing losing all sensation. In a desperate, panicked attempt to resist, it spewed Dragonfire, but it was futile.

Rhaegar trembled with intensity, his eyes fixed on the tattered hemp rope draped across the wild dragon's back. Gritting his teeth, he urged, "Harder, Cannibal!"

As far as he could see, the rope, now filthy and encrusted with mud, looked like it had been dragged through a sewer. It wrapped around the dragon's neck, anchored by a heavily corroded iron plate at the top—the worn base of what had once been a dragon saddle.

Rhaegar tightened his grip on the dragon whip, a realization dawning. "It really is a remnant of a Dragonlord," he thought. This was a dragon without a master, yet one that had once borne a rider.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal, driven by a deep-seated desire for revenge, bit down harder, crushing the bones of the wild dragon's wing and twisting its massive body.

Boom!

One sharp claw clamped around the wild dragon's neck, while the other tore into a flailing leg. The rain poured down on the two battling beasts, the sound of splintering bone and ripping flesh echoing through the storm. A large chunk of meat was torn off by the Cannibal's fangs, and the dragon's head shook as it devoured the flesh.

The taste of blood only intensified the Cannibal's ferocity, awakening a primal desire to consume. It continued to bite and swallow, piece by piece, prolonging the torment.

The Cannibal didn't end the battle with a single, merciful bite. Instead, it savored the destruction, eating the wild dragon slowly and cruelly, bit by agonizing bit. No dragon in the world could challenge the majesty of the king of wild dragons. Killing a dragon, even an adult one, was not difficult for such a beast.

"Roar..."

The wild dragon moaned in agony, its body succumbing to the relentless assault. As it fell uncontrollably, it lowered its head in a final, desperate attempt to bite back at the vicious Cannibal.

A sudden stumble!

The wild dragon's sharp teeth sank into the dark dragon's neck, struggling to pierce the tough scales, bright blood blooming like scarlet flowers. Cannibal's green pupils narrowed, growing even more sinister as it clenched its opponent's claws with a burst of strength, the sickening crunch of breaking bones echoing through the air.

"Roar..."

The wild dragon's pupils dulled, its jaws loosening around the Cannibal's muzzle as the loose flesh of its neck began to sag and deform. Rhaegar watched intently, his eyes reflecting an indecipherable light as he raised and lowered the dragon-taming whip. The choice to kill or spare was a mere thought away.

Suddenly, the wild dragon slowly twisted its neck, and its amber pupils came into view. Rhaegar was momentarily stunned, seeing a complex mix of emotions—hatred, resentment, and a deep weariness—flicker in those massive eyes. A wave of realization surged through him.

This was no mere wild dragon. It was a creature that had once known a master, now wandering alone across the continent of Sothoryos. Rhaegar lowered his head, recognizing the error in his initial assumptions.

The wild dragon was old; its loose, sagging skin revealed as much. Though not as decrepit as Vhagar, it was certainly older than Vermithor, which had matured and aged rapidly. In contrast, Dreamfyre and Silverwing, though smaller and less imposing, still retained their youthful vigor, with no signs of aging. Even the Cannibal, with its thick scales and prominent horned crest, had not yet left the prime of its life.

Rhaegar's mind cleared, noticing a subtle shift in the wild dragon's eyes. Dragons have distinct growth periods, peaks, and aging phases. This dragon looked ancient, but who knew its true age?

Dragons typically live around two hundred years. The Doom of Valyria occurred over two centuries ago, aligning with the natural lifespan of a dragon. If this wild dragon had hatched in Sothoryos, its age would be roughly accurate. But if that were true, it would be a wild dragon by nature. Yet the saddle on its back proved it had once been ridden.

Was it once the mount of an ancient Dragonlord before the Doom? Or a descendant who fled to Sothoryos afterward?

'No,' Rhaegar thought, shaking his head. 'The descendants of the Dragonlord could not have tamed a dragon without some great effort.' This wild dragon likely existed before the Doom, meaning it must be over two hundred years old.

"Roar..."

Cannibal tore off another piece of flesh, causing the wild dragon to tremble violently in pain, letting out a mournful cry of despair. At the edge of life and death, the will to survive surged stronger than anything else. The wild dragon's neck shook wildly as it launched a desperate counterattack, its massive body—over 100 meters long—striking back.

Crack!

The scarred beak of the wild dragon's snout clamped down on the Cannibal's hind leg, sharp teeth piercing deep into the flesh.

"Roar!"

Cannibal roared in pain, then swallowed the bloody chunk it had torn free, releasing its grip on the wild dragon's claws and kicking it away.

The wild dragon's survival instinct had kicked in. When prey fights back with such ferocity, a direct confrontation becomes too risky. The only way to win was to wear down its will, like a hunter tiring out a wild pheasant. With its wing broken, the wild dragon couldn't escape. Its only choice was to fight with everything it had left.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon's grip weakened, its neck loosening as it gasped for breath, head drooping and shaking. In that moment, Rhaegar's eyes flashed with resolve, and he made a swift decision.

"Stop, Cannibal!"

Before the dragon beneath him could fully register his command, Rhaegar sent a powerful mental directive into its mind. With a sudden burst of energy, he stood up, sprinted across the dragon's broad back, and leapt into the cold, driving rain.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal roared in surprise as its massive body glided past, its dark wings momentarily shielding Rhaegar from the rain. His heart pounded in his chest, and he swallowed hard as he plummeted through the air. Below, the vast forest stretched out like a green ocean, the moist wind howling around him.

Barely able to see in the storm, Rhaegar focused on his breathing, adjusting it by feel. He drew out the dragon whip he had been holding tightly.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon let out a continuous roar, its flight becoming more erratic as it descended lower, just beneath Rhaegar. It frantically tried to regain its balance, twisting from a backflip into a steep dive. Hearing a noise behind him, the dragon turned its head in confusion.

A silver-haired figure flashed into view.

"I'm here!"

Rhaegar's eyes snapped open, and he roared with all his might.

Whoosh!

The dragon whip shot out like a striking snake, coiling around the wild dragon's bloodied neck in a tight loop. Overjoyed, Rhaegar used the momentum to swing his body through the air, landing precisely on the dragon's back with a half-turn.

Plop!

He fell heavily onto the rusty iron plate of the saddle, landing on his knees. "Big guy, that's enough!" Rhaegar reached out, skillfully grabbing the rope of the dilapidated saddle. With all his strength, he began to ride the fierce dragon.

Such a magnificent beast would be a pity to kill. He wanted to ride it—and conquer it.

"Roar!"

The wild dragon, shocked and enraged at being ridden, instinctively struggled, thrashing violently. But Rhaegar held on, tightening his grip.

Boom!

Unable to shake off its persistent rider, the wild dragon lowered its head and dove, unleashing a furious blast of Dragonfire. The orange and green flames erupted into a mushroom cloud, the searing heat rushing toward Rhaegar like a massive, fiery net.

But Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged, his heart steady as he shouted, "Come!"

Pop!

The two-colored Dragonfire engulfed him, gently caressing his face and flowing down each silver strand of his hair. His purple eyes shone brightly, unwavering in the midst of the inferno.

Hum!

Suddenly, a gray light appeared on his forehead, just as the wild dragon tried to break through the mushroom cloud. Rhaegar's heart swelled with joy, and a smile curled at his lips. Slowly, he closed his eyes.

"Croak."

A toad croaked in his ear, and a gray toad materialized out of thin air. In that instant, both man and dragon, locked in their fierce struggle, felt their pupils darken...

The foggy space was so dark that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Slowly, a consciousness began to awaken, its presence tentatively exploring the shadowy void.

Suddenly, a shout pierced the silence, echoing in High Valyrian.

"Uragax!!"

Silence.

Not a sound disturbed the oppressive stillness.

"Uragax!!"

The cry was repeated, this time with more urgency, as if summoning a companion.

In the darkness, three eggs appeared, their surfaces gleaming faintly: one dark red, one deep green, and the last speckled white.

Roar.

One of the eggs began to tremble, tiny cracks forming on its bright, moss-like rhombus-patterned shell.

One second, two seconds...

"Roar~~"

The egg split open, revealing a small, green dragon head that poked out, tiny and agile.

"Uragax, your reincarnated body has hatched!"

A hoarse voice rang out, trembling with excitement.

Roar.

No sooner had the green dragon hatchling emerged than a large hand seized it by the neck, lifting it roughly as if it were no more than a chicken. The hatchling panicked, its wide eyes darting around in fear.

The cave was dark, the walls carved with strange inscriptions that gave the impression of a place dedicated to the worship of dark gods. Figures in black and red robes moved about like shadows, their faces hidden, their movements eerily mechanical.

"Roar~~"

The young dragon froze momentarily, its pupils quietly shifting. Then, all at once, the sounds around it vanished, as if the world itself had fallen silent. In the void, a pair of purple eyes appeared,

seeming to pierce through time and space, reaching deep into the hatchling's consciousness as if entering a dream.

"Croak."

The sound of a dull toad broke the silence, and the illusory scene shifted.

...

Outside the cave, an open canyon spread wide. A towering volcano loomed in the distance, its crater boiling with molten lava, spewing pungent black smoke into the sky. Despite the volcanic fury, the canyon floor was thick with vegetation, birds chirping and squawking as they twisted their heads on branches and rocks.

In the depths of the canyon, a heavy, low breathing echoed ominously.

Clap!

A pale dragon tail, as thick as a ship's mast and as long as a pine tree, swayed and then fell limp against the stone wall at the edge of the canyon, sending a shudder through the earth.