

G.O Thrones 591

Chapter 591: Accidentally Entering the Land of Long Summer

The Smoking Sea.

The sky and sea were shrouded in a thick mist, the surroundings eerily silent and lifeless.

"Roar!"

The acrid stench of smoke filled the air as a smoky, emerald-green dragon flame erupted from the sky.

Boom!

A dilapidated ship was struck, its already weakened mast collapsing with a thunderous crash.

"Roar..."

The ship's hull shuddered violently, and suddenly, countless Stone Men emerged, their heads poking out as they roared and snarled like wild beasts.

"Dracarys!" Rhaegar's voice was as cold as ice, and he gave the command without hesitation.

Cannibal's green pupils glinted with ferocity as it unleashed a torrent of dragonfire, venting its pent-up rage.

"Roar..."

With a muffled roar, the dark green flames completely engulfed the ship, swallowing it piece by piece. The Stone Men, like ants on a burning pan, flailed and screamed in torment as dragonfire consumed them. The ship slowly sank, and the wretched figures aboard plunged into the water like so many falling dumplings.

"Ready, release the arrows!"

Two hundred meters away, the Sea Snake watched grimly, commanding the sailors to fire.

With the sound of arrows piercing flesh, the sea turned blood-red. In no time, everything was still once more.

Rhaegar guided the Cannibal higher into the sky, matching pace with the serpentine Caraxes. Daemon's eyes were calm, though a deep, unreadable expression crossed his face.

"It's all settled," Rhaegar said indifferently, glancing sideways.

The sunken ship had flown the flag of Slaver's Bay, and the doomed Stone Men had been dressed as sellswords and slaves, with a few wearing armor bearing the three-headed red dragon emblem. They were the remnants of those who had followed his Good Uncle into the Smoking Sea last time.

Daemon rubbed his face and said calmly, "Let's go. I think I can see the island."

"Roar..."

Caraxes and Daemon moved as one, the large scarlet wings of the dragon flapping as they dove into the smoke that obscured their view.

"Be careful!" Rhaegar called out, raising an eyebrow in concern.

But neither man nor dragon heeded his warning, disappearing into the dense smoke with practiced skill.

Rhaegar's eyelids twitched as he watched them go. He couldn't help but admire his uncle's courage. Caraxes truly lived up to his name reputation as the "God of the Sea," navigating the treacherous waters of the Smoking Sea with explosive power and unerring precision. Despite the sea's effects, the dragon never got lost or went mad, leading the fleet safely for days.

"Roar!" The Cannibal bellowed, flapping its black wings in pursuit.

Rhaegar gripped the dragon saddle tightly as his body shook from the force of the Cannibal's movement. The dragon's temperament had grown increasingly volatile with each passing day.

He pursed his lips and glanced down at the fleet below.

"Roar! Roar!"

On the deck of the Sea Snake, Iragaxys roared restlessly, its pupils red with agitation. The young dragon was chained by the neck and feet, struggling against its bonds.

Rhaegar sighed softly. There was little he could do. Young dragons were even more vulnerable to the Smoking Sea's corrupting influence. Without the dragon tamer's whip, Iragaxys had nearly broken free.

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Sunset. King's Landing, Red Keep.

"Helaena, we should go see your father," Alicent said as she donned a cloak and pushed open the door to the council hall.

"Oh, yes," Helaena replied softly, still absorbed in her paperwork. With the King away, the responsibilities had piled up relentlessly.

"You need to take care of yourself," Alicent said, draping a cloak over her daughter's shoulders. It was late July, and the temperature difference between day and night in King's Landing was stark.

Helaena continued working, not lifting her gaze from the papers in front of her. Alicent sighed, shaking her head, and her eyes wandered to a tapestry hanging on the wall.

It was a cashmere tapestry from Lys, casually draped over a bamboo pole. Alicent walked over, her brow furrowing slightly. The tapestry depicted two scenes: one showed a blue dragon and a red dragon locked in fierce combat, their ferocity captured in vivid detail; the other depicted a mist-shrouded snow-capped mountain, its peaks disappearing into the distance.

Alicent was so engrossed in the intricate threads that she reached out to touch the blue and red embroidery. Just as her fingers were about to graze the fabric, Helaena suddenly spoke up, "The troops from Gulltown are on their way!"

"Huh?" Alicent was so distracted that she hadn't heard her daughter clearly.

Helaena's expression grew serious as she held up a document. "The Braavos and Pentos fleets are moving towards the lower Narrow Sea, and Lady Jeyne has deployed troops from Gulltown to Myr."

Beyond Pentos and The Gullet lie the Disputed Lands, where the Triarchy once stood. Myr, being the closest Free City to Pentos, is of strategic importance.

Alicent was startled by the news. "Isn't Baelon in Myr as well?" she asked, trying to piece things together.

Even if she wasn't fully aware of all the political intricacies, she knew where Rhaenyra's eldest son was. After a moment's thought, Alicent guessed, "Baelon is tied to his sisters, and Rhaegar wants Lady Jeyne to keep an eye on him."

Helaena blinked, considering her mother's reasoning. She hadn't thought of the situation in that way before.

Alicent placed a hand on her forehead, exasperated. "With Rhaenyra's temper, she'll turn the Vale upside down."

To be fair, Jeyne Arryn was a role model for the women of Westeros. She had inherited the Eyrie as a child, ruled the Vale in her prime, and became queen through marriage. With two pure-blood Targaryen children under her protection, no one dared to cross her. Rhaenyra's cunning and manipulation couldn't compare to Jeyne's, and Rhaegar's decision to entrust his eldest son's education to her was out of necessity. After all, Alicent herself had once considered sending her younger son, Daeron, to Oldtown to be raised by her late uncle, Lord Hightower.

Helaena frowned slightly as she finished reading the letter. After a moment, she set the paper aside. "Let's go," she said.

Alicent stood, her legs numb from sitting too long, and sighed. "Your father has been sleeping more and more lately. He's not awake for long."

Helaena nodded slightly as she rose, tightening her cloak around her. She glanced down and noticed that the cloak was a bright green, adorned with a few delicate, embroidered flowers.

Helaena shook her head softly and placed a hand on her growing belly.

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The Smoking Sea.

Crackling...

The sky and sea were in turmoil, thick black clouds splitting open with bursts of red lightning.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal let out a thunderous cry, diving from the sky with its tail sweeping across the boiling sea below.

Rhaegar's face darkened as he shouted, "Tighten the sails! A storm is coming!"

The fleet was tossed about by the surging waves, like rootless duckweed swaying in the wind. Sea Snake's expression grew grave as he swiftly ordered the sailors to take countermeasures. The sudden onset of the storm caught everyone off guard.

Boom!

In the distance, a flash of light shot up into the sky, sending waves crashing in every direction.

"Roar..!"

Rhaegar heard the distinct hiss of steam as water struck something molten. Caraxes, sensing the danger, quickly turned and flew in the opposite direction. The memory of the last time—when an underwater volcano claimed most of the fleet—was still fresh in their minds. The overwhelming volcanic ash had left an indelible scar.

“Lord Corlys, hurry!”

Rhaegar shouted, holding a glass candle in one hand and the sword Truefyre in the other.

Whoo-hoo-hoo!

The Sea Snake knew the urgency of the situation. He took the horn from the messenger and blew it with all his strength. House Velaryon's fleet, the mightiest in the Seven Kingdoms, responded instantly. The sails were raised, helmsmen turned the ships sharply, and dragon-powered winds surged to turn the fleet around.

Crack!

Lightning streaked across the sky as rain began to fall. Rhaegar soared above on the Cannibal, a raindrop striking his forehead.

Pop!

A sharp sting followed by a burning sensation made Rhaegar frown. He wiped the water off his forehead, only to feel a searing pain on his fingertips, as if bitten by a venomous insect. Realization struck him like a blow. “Acid rain!” he exclaimed.

The drizzle quickly intensified into a downpour, the sound growing louder and more menacing.

Roar...

Cannibal roared, its massive body shielding the fleet below as it shook off the corrosive rain.

Rumbling...

The undersea volcano in the distance continued its relentless eruption, shaking the heavens and the earth.

Splash!

A towering wave crashed into one of the warships, sending sailors tumbling overboard, their desperate screams echoing across the sea.

“Steer! Quickly!” Sea Snake's voice, usually calm, was now sharp with urgency. The Smoking Sea was indeed a cursed place, filled with catastrophic natural disasters intent on swallowing anyone who dared to enter.

Hulalalala...

Rhaegar's black robe was soaked as searing rain pelted him, the acid burning through his clothing.

Hum...

The "Bronze" scales and Cannibal shielded Rhaegar from the worst of the impact, but the force was still tremendous. His head rang with the force, his vision spinning as he slumped onto the dragon's saddle.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal roared in fury, spitting dark green dragonfire into the sky. The flames collided with the acid rain, producing thick white smoke. The dragon's green eyes darted back and forth, seeking a way out of the chaos. Finally, its nostrils flared as it caught a scent, selecting a direction with certainty.

"Roar!"

Without hesitation, the Cannibal surged forward, leaping over Caraxes and gliding just above the roiling sea.

Boom!

Red lightning split the sky, casting the world in a blood-red glow as dawn broke. Rhaegar, barely conscious, lay slumped on the dragon saddle, his eyes open just a slit, witnessing the apocalyptic scene unfolding around him. Dizziness overwhelmed him, and as he clutched Truefyre tightly, he succumbed to an uncontrollable sleep.

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Time slipped by slowly.

The darkness was absolute, leaving him disoriented and unable to discern north from south. Rhaegar had no sense of how long he'd been lost in the blackness.

"Croak."

A faint toad's croak echoed, and a cool sensation touched his skin. Confused, Rhaegar slowly opened his eyes. Above him, the sky was a deep, serene blue, with a few soft white clouds drifting lazily in the wind.

"Sssh!"

His head throbbed with pain, and he hissed in discomfort. Using his hands for support, he pushed himself up, feeling the dampness of the wet soil beneath his palms.

"Sssh..."

To his surprise, a toad was perched on his forehead, staring at him with lifeless, bulging eyes.

"Where am I?" Rhaegar muttered, looking around. He was surrounded by an endless sea of grass, the air filled with the fresh fragrance of earth. He scooped up a handful of the dark soil, its cool, sticky texture confirming the reality of his surroundings.

Rhaegar's eyes widened as he held the toad up to his face. "Where have you taken me this time?" he demanded, recalling his desperate escape from the Smoking Sea.

"Croak."

The toad's tongue flicked out, its grayish belly swelling as if it might burst.

"Roar..."

A dragon's snoring suddenly rumbled from behind, accompanied by the familiar scent of ash. Rhaegar turned sharply, his eyes widening in surprise. A dragon as black as charcoal lay on its back, its massive head flattening the grass, while hot air streamed from its enormous nostrils.

Rhaegar rubbed his eyes in disbelief. "Cannibal?"

Since when could dragons enter dreams with their riders?

"Gurgle."

The toad squirmed in his hand before dissolving into wisps of gray smoke, vanishing into the air. Rhaegar furrowed his brow but quickly began to piece together what had happened. The Cannibal's immense body lay sprawled on a slope, its scales steaming as water vapor evaporated.

Behind the dragon, an endless expanse of land stretched out. Rhaegar stood and saw a towering peak in the distance, its summit covered in heavy snow. The snow-capped mountains extended as far as the eye could see, shrouded in a thick, mysterious fog. He stood on tiptoe, straining to see through the haze, but the peaks remained obscured.

"This isn't just a dream," Rhaegar murmured, a smile spreading across his face as he gazed at the snowy mountains. "By some twist of fate, I've landed on that lost continent."

If he wasn't mistaken, this landscape was reminiscent of the Fourteen Flames from Daenys' prophetic dream.

"Roar..."

A high-pitched cry of excitement rang out as Iragaxys flapped its wings, eager to soar higher. Rhaegar turned in the opposite direction and saw the sea, veiled in clouds and mist, with the faint sound of waves reaching his ears.

"The Lands of the Long Summer," Rhaegar whispered, a sense of awe and exhilaration washing over him.

He took a deep breath, feeling his blood course through his veins as the pain in the back of his head began to recede. The air was rich with fire magic, more potent than he had ever experienced, and it eagerly flowed into every pore of his body.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal twitched its tail, drawing in an extraordinary amount of fire magic, which spread a soothing, exhilarating sensation throughout its massive form. Rhaegar inhaled instinctively, feeling the magic enter his body as naturally as a bird returning to its nest.

“Your Grace.”

A voice called out from behind. Rhaegar turned to see Sea Snake, a bandage wrapped around his forehead, his old face alight with a relieved smile.

Seeing his companion, Rhaegar’s heart lifted. “Your Grace, this is the Lands of the Long Summer,” Sea Snake said, his eyes shining with excitement as he cradled two tattered pieces of Dragonstone in his arms.

Chapter 592: Dragonbone Pit

"What's the situation? How many people were lost?" Rhaegar asked anxiously.

The eruption of the undersea volcano, coupled with the sudden storm, had been a disaster. However, Sea Snake was relieved to report, "We lost two warships, and only 500 people were injured."

"No more?" Rhaegar asked suspiciously. "This is the Lands of the Long Summer. How did we get here?" The storm had been massive, yet the damage was less than expected. Moreover, the land they now stood on was most likely the Lands of the Long Summer. It all seemed too easy.

"Prince, the remaining ships were damaged to varying degrees, and the sailors are doing their best to repair them," Sea Snake answered, then glanced at the huge black beast sprawled on the hillside. He admired it as he continued, "The storm was so fierce, but thanks to your dragon for finding its way, spewing dragonfire to guide the fleet."

The black wings had torn through the heavy clouds, and the dark green dragonfire had cut through the thick fog. The fleet had followed the dragon's path and, by sheer luck, found this lost continent.

Upon hearing this, Rhaegar looked back at the sleeping Cannibal and couldn't help but feel relieved. 'This troublesome dragon always comes through at critical moments,' he thought.

"Roar..." The Cannibal's pupils remained tightly shut as he greedily absorbed the fire magic in the air, exhaling hot air from his nostrils with each breath.

Seeing this, Rhaegar decided not to disturb the creature and signaled the Sea Snake to walk with him. The grasslands stretched out as far as the eye could see, and the breeze rippled through the tall grass.

The Sea Snake walked a short distance away, knelt reverently, and held a handful of soil to his nose. 'The land of my ancestors,' he thought. After more than two hundred years, the ancient bloodline had finally set foot on it again.

"I had always imagined that I would be able to make a tenth voyage," Rhaegar mused, but the Sea Snake's voice interrupted his thoughts.

Rhaegar looked down to see the Sea Snake's dark face slightly raised, his eyes glistening with tears. "Being able to set foot on this land is greater than the first nine voyages of my life," Sea Snake said deeply, even though he had traveled to Asshai in the east of the world and braved the glaciers in the far north. There was no greater significance than finding the Lands of the Long Summer.

Rhaegar helped the wounded Sea Snake to his feet and spoke with resolve, "We are not just here to find it. We will bring back the treasures left behind by our ancestors. Only then can we justify the twists and turns of our journey."

"You are right," the Sea Snake agreed, regaining his solemn expression as he picked up a piece of broken Dragonstone rubble. "Daemon rode the Blood Wyrn to explore the Snow Peaks and unearthed an ancient ruin."

The old rubble in his hands was a relic he had picked up from the ruins outside. Rhaegar took the Dragonstone rubble in his hands. It was cold and rough, a testament to its age and the external forces that had damaged it.

"Take me there. We can't miss any ruins," Rhaegar said firmly. 'Especially those near the Snow Peaks and the Fourteen Flames. Only the Dragonlord's house would be worthy of them.'

"Should we call Daemon?" Sea Snake asked cautiously. "Your dragon is sleeping. It would be safer to call him and Caraxes."

Rhaegar glanced back at the Cannibal, who remained oblivious. After a moment of thought, he said, "No need. There is no danger in the ruins on the ground. It's easier to uncover more secrets by splitting up."

The Fourteen Flames were more dangerous, and Daemon was willing to be the first to go. After exploring this continent, they could regroup.

Sea Snake considered this and agreed. "The fleet has suffered varying degrees of damage. We will stay here for a while, so there is no rush."

With that, he summoned a team of sailors to gather wood and headed for the snowy peaks.

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Not long after the team had left, a rustling noise stirred in the grass. The air on the empty slopes was thick with the smell of ash.

"Hurry up, don't be lazy," one of the shirtless sailors barked as they approached, carrying a thick pine log on their shoulders. The grassland stretched vast before them, but trees were sparse, forcing them to venture to the foot of the snow-capped mountain in search of usable wood.

"Roar..."

Suddenly, the Cannibal opened its vertical pupils, sensing something. It stretched its neck, peering toward the towering Fire Peak, though the summit remained hidden in the clouds.

Boom!

The massive dragon slowly rose to its feet, its enormous wings crushing the green grass beneath them. With a deafening roar, the Cannibal spread its wings wide and launched into the sky.

As the sailors passed by the slope, the powerful gusts from the dragon's wings knocked them to the ground, sending the pine log crashing beside them.

"A dragon!" one sailor cried out in alarm as he watched the black beast vanish into the distance. The other sailors, one by one, were paralyzed with fear, their legs shaking uncontrollably.

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Meanwhile, Rhaegar climbed the steep ridge, drawing closer to the snowy peak. Thankfully, the grassland wasn't far from the snowy peak, especially the spot where the Cannibal had landed. It would take about a day and a night to make the round trip.

"Your Grace, the sun here is no different from that of Westeros," the Sea Snake remarked, raising his hand to shield his eyes from the glaring sun as he surveyed the unfamiliar surroundings.

Rhaegar glanced upward. The sun hung high in the sky, its rays piercing through the clouds. He reached out, feeling the warmth on his skin after spending so much time under its light.

"The Lands of the Long Summer earned their name because it's perpetually summer here," Rhaegar explained. "The land is fertile, ideal for growing crops."

The Sea Snake wiped the sweat from his brow and noted, "The temperature here is indeed higher than in other places. In terms of climate, it's only slightly surpassed by the Summer Sea. Perhaps only the constant heat of the Summer Isles can compare."

'No wonder Lys was known as a "resort" and had attracted the conquest and rule of the Dragonlords', Rhaegar thought. He squinted slightly, his gaze drifting from the blinding sun to the sea where the fleet was anchored. The higher they climbed, the farther they could see.

The beach below was a stretch of golden sand, dotted with broken shells left by the waves. The fleet was moored nearby, shrouded in mist, making it difficult to see clearly. Beyond that, a gray expanse of rolling fog obscured the Smoking Sea, a reminder of the dangers that still lurked there.

Rhaegar recalled the route on the map and said cautiously, "Based on the landmass that remained after ancient Valyria fractured, we're likely on the edge of the Fourteen Flames."

After the Doom, ancient Valyria had splintered into a main continent and several fragments. The most fertile of these fragments was the one they now stood on: the Lands of the Long Summer. The terrain was flat, with extensive plains and fertile land.

The coastal region where the Dragonlords had once lived, known as the core of the Freehold Empire, had suffered the worst damage. It had been blown apart into three small landmasses and a scattering of islands of unknown size. The two main landmasses were separated by the Smoking Sea, which had formed after the continent split in two.

Rhaegar's thoughts turned to a bold speculation. 'With the destruction of ancient Valyria and the near-collapse of the Fourteen Flames, the peak shrouded in mist might be the only one that survived,' he thought, eyeing the thick fog that hid the snow-capped peak. If they explored it thoroughly, they might make an unexpected discovery.

"Your Grace, I found a stone tablet!" one of the sailors called out, pulling a broken slab from the ground.

"Let's take a look," Rhaegar said, his spirits lifting as he quickened his pace.

The closer they got to the snowy peak, the less green grass they encountered. The barren slopes were scarred with scorch marks, and gray-black stalactites, remnants of solidified magma, jutted from the ground. Rhaegar stepped on one, and it crumbled beneath his boot like scorched earth burned by dragonfire.

"Your Grace," one of the sailors said nervously, pointing to the irregularly shaped stone slab lying on the ground.

Rhaegar waved his hand dismissively and leaned in to examine it. The slab was covered in black grime, cracked and shattered. It felt warm and rough to the touch.

"Clean it up," the Sea Snake ordered, frowning.

The sailors hurried to comply, using their curved knives to scrape away the stubborn layer of ash that clung to the stone slab. With a few strokes, lines of writing began to emerge.

"This is the ancient oath of the Dragonlords," the Sea Snake said solemnly.

Rhaegar nodded, already familiar with the phrase. But as they continued, the writing below was badly damaged, making the text barely legible. He frowned and wiped more ash from the bottom of the stone, revealing two carved images.

One depicted a volcano flanked by a pair of statues, while the other showed a dragon with its head and tail facing each other, forming a closed loop. The dragon was stout, with a particularly slender tail. Beside it was another dragon, wings spread wide, its tail as thin as an eagle's, and its head tilted as if about to soar into the sky.

The two dragon totems were positioned opposite each other, with the volcano in between.

The Sea Snake pointed to the winged dragon and said with certainty, "This is the sigil of House Aurion. I once saw a breastplate left behind by a Dragonlord of Aurion in the masked temple of Qohor. It bore the same totem."

Rhaegar glanced at him, then pointed to the other symbol. "This is the mark of House Belaerys. It likely represents a marriage alliance between the two houses."

The Sea Snake examined the carvings carefully. "If that's the case, these ruins were probably built by one of the Dragonlords," he concluded. The Dragonlords of ancient Valyria were known for their tyranny and domination. Slavery, colonization, and fortress-building were common practices among them.

Rhaegar stood up and dusted off his hands. "There's no time to waste. Let's reach the ruins before dark."

With that, he gave the order, and the group quickened their pace.

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The sun rose and set, marking the passage of time until dusk settled over the landscape.

At the foot of the snowy peak, Rhaegar, clad in a black robe, crushed the frost beneath his boot with a crisp crack. He looked up to see the mountain soaring into the clouds like a colossal, gleaming sword.

"It's so cold!" he exclaimed, his breath forming a swift plume of white mist in the frigid air.

Suddenly, a shout broke the silence behind him. "Your Grace, come quickly!" Sea Snake's voice echoed with a mix of excitement and horror.

Without hesitation, Rhaegar turned and hurried down the lightly snow-dusted slope, skillfully navigating around the ridges of the peak. The sparse snow couldn't conceal the dark ground beneath, which was littered with crumbling walls and debris.

Sea Snake stood nearby, pulling aside a broken section of stone wall, his expression tense and alert. As Rhaegar approached, the chill in the air seemed to lessen, and his breaths no longer crystallized before him.

Crunch!

Rhaegar's foot landed on something brittle. He glanced down, his eyes narrowing as he realized he had stepped on a pile of rubble concealing a dark skeleton. The bones were slender, resembling those of a large cat or dog, but their inherent blackness was unmistakable.

Kneeling, Rhaegar brushed his fingers over the familiar texture of dragonbone. Gently pushing aside more rubble, he uncovered a small dragon skull adorned with horns, no larger than a soccer ball. A mix of emotions washed over him as he held the relic in his hands.

"Your Grace, there's more over here," Sea Snake called out gravely, stepping aside to reveal a broader view.

They stood within the ruins of what had once been a magnificent hall, now reduced to a collapsed ceiling and fragmented walls. Rhaegar's gaze followed Sea Snake's gesture, and his grip tightened involuntarily around the small skull he held.

At the center of the ruins lay a massive dragon skeleton, stretching seventy to eighty meters long, its bones as black as ink. Scanning the area, Rhaegar spotted several other dragon skeletons of varying sizes scattered among the debris, many broken and weathered by years of wind and snow.

One particularly striking skeleton rested against the edge of a broken wall. It spanned over forty meters, its spine severed at the cervical vertebrae. The dragon's skull leaned against the crumbling stone, empty eye sockets gazing skyward, evoking a profound sense of melancholy.

"This is a graveyard of dragons," Rhaegar murmured, his voice heavy with awe and sorrow.

Chapter 593: Firewyrms and Fire Ore

Rhaegar was speechless, overwhelmed by what he saw. It was the first time he had encountered so many dragon skeletons, and it felt as though he had stepped into a graveyard filled with death and silent wailing. "Your Grace, there are small inscriptions here," Sea Snake said quietly. Rhaegar, still dazed, slowly approached the ruins. The inscriptions were carved into a stone wall, dark and seemingly made of Dragonstone. Although the wall had been broken into several pieces, it was thick enough to have endured the passage of time. Rhaegar rubbed his brow, focusing on the small text. It was written in High Valyrian, mixed with some local dialects from the Lands of the Long Summer. As he translated, the words began to form a narrative: "Dragonlord... Daeryon... marriage..." Rhaegar's heart skipped a beat when he reached the name "Daeryon." The space bracelet given to him by his good uncle had once belonged to a descendant of House Daeryon. Among the forty Dragonlord families, House Daeryon's power had been formidable. His eyes flashed with recognition as he deciphered the remaining text, focusing on a series of vague incantations at the

beginning. He realized they were the opening words for learning a binding spell. Crack! Rhaegar picked up a piece of gravel and scratched at the stone, recognizing the incantation as one that top Dragonlord families might carve in important places like the Dragonpit to teach their children about dragons. Sea Snake, more interested in the final paragraph, read aloud, "Family marriage, mixing of blood." On the wall was a simple mural of a volcano, with a totem of two entwined dragons on the left. The right side of the mural was conspicuously empty. "This must be the Daeryon family's building," Rhaegar speculated, "and the totem is their family symbol." As for the blank space on the right, it likely belongs to a lesser-known Dragonlord family, one without a stable line of dragons or a dedicated totem. Such families, including House Targaryen, were considered impoverished compared to the native nobles of the Lands of the Long Summer or the powerful seafaring families with their fleets. Sea Snake, well-versed in his ancestors' traditions, cried. "Perhaps the family they were marrying into was yours or mine. The surnames of our three families were deeply intertwined in ancient Valyria. It's possible that two of these families were branches of the same bloodline. After all, the people of Valyria were originally a nomadic group. It wasn't until they mastered the dragons of the Fourteen Flames that they rose to power."

But Rhaegar was in no mood for humor. After the Doom, Valyria had fallen like a shooting star, with ninety percent of its culture and heritage buried beneath the magma. The Targaryens, the last of the dragon blood, remained but a shadow of their former glory.

"I'll take a look around, Lord Corlys," Rhaegar said somberly. He tied the small dragon skull to his belt and walked over to the dragon skeletons scattered among the ruins.

As a pure-blooded Valyrian, Rhaegar had always felt a special connection to dragons. He never regarded them as slaves, tools, or even cold-blooded animals. To him, dragons were sacred, the last vestiges of ancient Valyria's magic.

"Lord Corlys, help me cut off these dragon skulls," Rhaegar requested in a low voice, drawing his Truefyre and striking the spine of the dragon lying at the base of the wall. He intended to give the skulls a proper burial.

"Yes, Your Grace," Corlys replied, understanding the depth of Rhaegar's feelings. Just as the Velaryons loved their ships and the sea, Rhaegar's bond with dragons was profound. Corlys waved his hand, ordering the sailors to assist.

Clang!

Rhaegar swung his sword, and the blade lodged in a gap between the dragon's vertebrae, spitting out sparks. Years spent in the Dragonpit had taught him persistence, and he didn't pause, using the hilt of his sword to pry at the stubborn bone.

After a dragon fell, cleaning away the scales, flesh, and sinew was a laborious task. It was easier to cut through the spine and preserve the dragonbone intact.

Clang! Clang!

The sailors joined in, hacking at the dragonbone with their machetes. Rhaegar paid them no mind, his focus entirely on the skeleton before him. A rough count revealed at least five dragon skeletons scattered throughout the ruins. The largest lay in the center, while the smallest now hung from his belt as a grisly keepsake. The rest were strewn across the site, their bones shattered and crushed by time and decay.

Bang!

Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he intensified his efforts, each strike growing more forceful. Gradually, he became absorbed in the task, losing himself in the rhythm of the blows.

Bang!

A shard of bone flew off, sending sparks in every direction. Rhaegar instinctively raised his elbow to shield himself, but suddenly his vision blurred.

"Roar!"

In a trance, a pained dragon's roar echoed in his ears. His body stiffened, a sense of weightlessness flooding over him.

[This exploration mission is now open. The target is the remains of the dragons] announced the system's prompt, marking the beginning of an explorer mission.

Rhaegar frowned as the roar faded from his ears, and control of his body slowly returned.

"Hoo!"

He exhaled deeply, glancing around to ensure no one had noticed anything unusual. Satisfied, he opened the explorer panel.

[Dragon Remains] Exploration progress: 0.2%

Rhaegar stood before the dragon skeleton, his sword, Truefyre, still lodged in the gap between the vertebrae. He glanced down at the ground, spotting a small, unremarkable piece of black bone residue.

"Do you wish to rest in peace as well?" Rhaegar murmured, his voice a mix of relief and helplessness. The dragons buried here were not just remnants of the past; they embodied the sorrow and defiance of creatures that had fallen from greatness.

The eruption of the Fourteen Flames, the very heart of Valyria that Rhaegar had once revered as his sanctuary, had come without warning—bringing with it true helplessness and despair.

Bang!

Rhaegar had no more words. He simply resumed the repetitive motion of swinging his sword, his thoughts heavy with the weight of history and loss.

...

Night fell, and the sky was dotted with stars. It was hard to believe that a patch of land in the Smoking Sea could offer such a clear view of the sky.

"Roar..."

The ground trembled softly beneath their feet, the sound of shifting earth echoing around them. In the distance, Firepeak loomed, its jagged silhouette piercing the night sky. At first glance, it was several times larger than Dragonmont on Dragonstone, yet it possessed an even more awe-inspiring presence.

"Roar!"

A black dragon silhouette soared overhead, disappearing into a cave on the mountainside. Moments later, it emerged, agitated, and flew off in search of another cave, where volcanic ash had settled.

Over two hundred years ago, these caves had all been dragon nests. But after the Doom, the flowing lava sealed them off, restoring Fourteen Flames to its original, impenetrable form.

...

Fourteen Flames, underground mine.

Click!

A cluster of torches flared to life, casting flickering light on the dust-laden tunnel, where cobwebs hung thick in the air.

"Fourteen Flames, living up to its name," Daemon muttered, covering his nose and mouth, his eyes sharp as an eagle's. He had initially scouted the caves on the mountainside, but Caraxes's enormous body couldn't fit inside, so he settled for exploring the underground mine instead.

During the Freehold Empire, the Fourteen Flames had been a hellish realm for slaves, who were forced to dig day and night, their lives treated as expendable. Historical records spoke of several uprisings, and it was here that the faiths of Braavos and the Faceless Men had their origins.

As Daemon ventured deeper into the mine, he encountered a grim sight—scattered bones, brittle and dried with age. Most were human, though a few belonged to sheep and pigs. The bones crumbled at the slightest touch, a testament to the years they had lain undisturbed.

Daemon remained vigilant, quietly drawing Dark Sister from his belt. He had something to prove—to show his nephew that he was the right man to hold the title of a "Targaryen Prince." He was determined to rid himself of his brother's disapproving gaze.

The deeper he went, the wider and higher the tunnel became, which struck him as unusual. He had no idea how long he had been walking when suddenly, a bright light ahead blinded him. Daemon's eyes narrowed as he tightened his grip on Dark Sister.

Turning a corner, his view expanded, revealing a vast chamber. The stone walls were embedded with various ores, gleaming brightly in the dim torchlight. But what truly caught his attention made his expression change.

A dragon!

Or rather, the skeleton of one. The enormous remains sprawled across the cavern, so vast that he couldn't take in its entire form at a glance. It resembled a dark fortress, a testament to its once-mighty presence.

Daemon cautiously approached, examining the skeleton with care. The bones were slender, suggesting the dragon might have resembled Sunfyre or Silverwing in life. At a rough estimate, it measured over 150 meters long, even larger than Vhagar. In the history of House Targaryen, only Balerion the Black Dread and the Cannibal could compare in size.

"An unfortunate old dragon," Daemon murmured to himself, lowering his guard as he drew nearer. The skeleton, curled up in an uncomfortable position, seemed to bear the scars of many battles. One of its wings was completely shattered, as if it had been torn off by another dragon. Its head, chest, and tail bore deep scratches, evidence of countless fierce encounters.

Daemon felt a wave of ancient, indifferent power emanating from the dragon's remains, pressing down on him like an invisible weight. Scattered on the dusty ground beneath the skeleton were a few bronze scales, each the size of a palm, reflecting a dull light.

He bent down, picked up one of the scales, and carefully slipped it into his pocket.

"Roar..."

Suddenly, a piercing dragon roar echoed through the cave, filled with menace and fury. Startled, Daemon whipped his head around. "Caraxes!?"

Without hesitation, he abandoned the cavern filled with ore and dragon bones, retreating swiftly through the tunnel in search of his dragon.

...

Underground mine.

The dark red ore all around radiated an oppressive heat, filling the air with a sense of despair.

"Roar..."

Caraxes clung to the stone wall, his body coiled like a serpent, radiating pure murderous intent.

Gurgle...

"Sssss..."

The monstrous beast opened its lamprey-like mouth and lunged at Caraxes, spitting red saliva everywhere.

Boom!

Caraxes's pupils flared with fury as he unleashed a torrent of dragonfire.

"Ssshhhh..."

The creature pushed through the flames, its scarlet body shimmering with a strange, moist luster as it writhed in agony. The beast was eyeless, earless, and noseless, its body covered in fine scales. It looked like a snake, but it wasn't—a grotesque, twisted, rotting thing, defying easy description.

"Roar!"

Caraxes roared and spread its wings, lunging at the creature. With a thunderous crash, the two beasts collided and crashed to the ground. Though massive, the monster was only the size of a young dragon, no more than ten meters long.

Puff! Puff!

Caraxes's eyes burned with ferocity as its powerful jaws snapped down on the creature's flexible body. Its claws tore into the beast with brutal efficiency, as if confronting a natural enemy. The scene was terrifyingly savage.

Plop!

The monster was ripped to shreds, collapsing into a mass of soft, rotten flesh.

“Roar...”

Without hesitation, Caraxes's claws crushed the putrid remains, reducing them to a pulp as red fluid seeped out.

Crack!

Caraxes snorted, its nostrils flaring with hot air as it leaned forward and bit into a piece of the red ore embedded in the stone wall. With a few crunches, it crushed it and swallowed it down.

Its pupils narrowed slightly, a hint of satisfaction in its gaze. Finally, Caraxes settled against the stone wall, resting after the brutal encounter.

Chapter 594: Dragon Soul's Guidance

The next day, the sun rose, casting the first rays of light onto the snow-covered mountains, making the snow at their base sparkle. Rhaegar lay among the ruins, sheltered from the wind and rain by a large dragon skull. Nearby, several other dragon skulls had already been severed and tied with ropes, ready for transport.

The sailors, rising early, gathered firewood to start a fire.

Suddenly, the dragon skull glowed briefly, then quietly melded into a solid mass. A voice rang out, waking Rhaegar from his slumber.

[This exploration is complete. Please pick up the lost treasure.]

Rhaegar opened his eyes as the system panel appeared before him:

[Dragon's Remains]

Exploration progress: 100%

"One night has passed. How fast!" Rhaegar rubbed his cheeks and looked around. A red halo, the size of a watermelon, floated above the closed jaw of the giant dragon skull. His lips curled into a smile as he reached out to touch it.

Pop!

The bubble-like halo burst, transforming into a small cluster of bright light that shot into his palm.

[Relic successfully picked up, testing in progress...]

[Testing successful. Determined to be a legendary relic: Dragon Soul's Wish.]

The prompts appeared one after another, and a dragon tooth called "Dragon Soul's Wish" materialized in his mind.

"Legendary level? What a pleasant surprise," Rhaegar muttered, feeling a surge of excitement. With a thought, the dragon tooth appeared in his hand. It was entirely black, with a sheen that glimmered in the sunlight.

"A dragon tooth... let's see the trigger conditions." Rhaegar, filled with anticipation, examined the small print on the system panel.

[Wandering souls, dragon visions, fulfilling wishes, and repaying them.]

"Wishes and repaying them?" Rhaegar pondered for a moment. No one had ever collected the dragon bones in these ruins. Yesterday, he had severed the dragon's skull, intending to bury it underground. This action must have triggered the explorer's quest.

"So, the activation condition for the relic is the funeral of the dragon's bones." Rhaegar felt a sense of responsibility as he held the small dragon skull tied to his waist. It was a fair trade; after all, he was willing to help these dragons who had died in vain.

As he stepped out of the dragon skull, Sea Snake approached, chewing on a piece of roasted meat. "Your Grace, the ruins have yielded very little. Shall we move on?"

"Of course." Rhaegar gazed determinedly at the mist-covered Fourteen Flames. "The grasslands are too vast. Let's go to the Fourteen Flames first." And return the dragon skeletons to their former lair.

Unaware of Rhaegar's true intentions, Sea Snake believed the prince simply wanted to explore the Fourteen Flames. He nodded seriously, "I will send the sailors to search everywhere and find more ruins."

...

At noon, a convoy of carriages made its way across the grasslands at the foot of the snow-capped mountains. The wheels occasionally sank into the soft soil, causing the carts to groan under the strain.

Creak, creak...

The sailors pushed with all their might, urging the makeshift carts forward. Several large and small dragon skulls were carefully placed on one of the carts.

"I'll help," Rhaegar said, rolling up his sleeves. He joined in, pushing the cart with all his strength.

"Roar!"...

A black dragon's shadow suddenly swept across the sky, its red wing membranes flaring like giant fans. Rhaegar looked up at the sound. Iragaxys wasn't flying high, and it let out a piercing cry as it passed overhead, disappearing into the vast sea of grass.

"Iragaxys, what happened?" Rhaegar muttered, frowning slightly. As the young dragon flew by, he noticed a bloodstain on its scaly belly. Iragaxys had grown significantly since it first entered the sub-adult stage, far more than when it had been raised in the Lands of the Long Summer.

Plop!

Distracted by the sight of Iragaxys, Rhaegar didn't notice as the cart suddenly lurched out of a pothole. The Sea Snake, panting and wiping the sweat from his face, remarked, "Your Grace, we're almost at the Fourteen Flames."

Rhaegar responded with a thoughtful "mm," his eyes narrowing as he realized Iragaxys had just come from the direction of a Fire Peak. In the distance, the grassy fields gave way to a barren land shrouded in fog.

In Daenys' dream, Rhaegar had seen this place once before—the foot of the Fourteen Flames.

...

Across the Narrow Sea, in Dorne's Vaith River Valley...

"Dragon!!"

"Run..."

"..."

Panic swept through the black-haired, brown-skinned Dornishmen as they fled their castles and villages in terror. The sky darkened under the shadow of a dragon, its brown-mud Dragonfire raining down mercilessly. Poorly equipped armies perished by the hundreds, their bodies reduced to charred, foul-smelling remains.

In a single night, the rebuilt cities of Vaith and Godsgrace, along with the coastal city of Tor, were once again consumed by a sea of flames. The hot summer air was thick with the sounds of wailing and despair.

...

King's Landing.

"Roar!"

The mud dragon soared above the city, its wings flapping with an unsettling excitement. It seemed intent on disturbing the revelers in Silk Street and Flea Bottom, swooping low to startle them before circling twice and finally landing in the courtyard of the grand Red Keep.

Inside the council hall, tensions boiled over into a heated argument.

Alicent's eyes blazed with anger. "What did you say? You burned the lands of Dorne?"

"That's right," Aemond replied coolly, leaning back against the table. "Someone sent word to Braavos and Pentos, recruiting soldiers without permission. That's a violation of the law."

Alicent's fury intensified. "You're insane! The scars of the Dragon's Wroth are still fresh, and the Dornish have barely recovered. You're provoking them into rebellion!"

Under Rhaegar's strict policies, Dorne had been blockaded at the Prince's Pass, Boneway, and the Greenblood River, leading to economic collapse and a sharp decline in population. Burning down three noble castles in one fell swoop would only fan the flames of unrest.

Aemond's voice was cold and unyielding. "If they dare to rise, I'll burn them all to the ground." 'If they dared to conspire with the enemy today, they'd rebel tomorrow. Better to crush them now.'

"Seven hells!" Alicent was near collapse, her voice rising in desperation. 'Are you possessed?' she thought. The fleets of Braavos and Pentos had not yet attacked, and the war was still in its early stages. Aemond's reckless assault on Dorne was causing turmoil within their own ranks. What would the nobles of the kingdom and the loyal houses of Dorne think?

"It's too late to regret it now that the flames have already consumed them," Aemond said, taking a sip of his wine, his demeanor defiant. He was merely following his brother's orders to secure the safety of Dorne, the Stepstones, and the Narrow Sea. The Dornish needed to be punished for their treachery.

"What are you doing? This kingdom is not yours!" Alicent placed a hand on her forehead, her voice a mix of frustration and pleading. "You're only going to spark greater backlash by doing this."

Aemond shrugged, indifferent to her concerns. Who would be the first to feel his wrath if he lost an eye in Dorne?

Realizing her words were falling on deaf ears, Alicent turned to her daughter, who was diligently working through petitions. "Helaena, write a conciliatory letter to Prince Qyle of Dorne in the king's name." She hoped the young prince could quell the unrest in Dorne.

"Relying on a child who hasn't even outgrown his milk," Aemond scoffed, shaking his head. Since Dorne's surrender, power had been in the hands of Mors Manwoody of Kingsgrave. The young Prince of Dorne, not yet ten years old, was little more than a puppet.

"What else can we do?" Alicent's voice was laced with exasperation. "Wait until the people of Dorne rebel, and Rhaegar returns to cut off your head in a fit of rage?"

Aemond's expression darkened, and he replied bluntly, "He'd sooner cut off yours."

"Aemond!" Alicent gasped, shocked and furious, about to launch into another tirade.

"Wait a moment," Helaena interrupted softly, raising her hand timidly to stop the argument.

Both Alicent and Aemond turned to her, expecting some wise counsel from the acting queen.

"That..." Helaena hesitated, pointing at the goblet in Aemond's hand. "That's my wine. You have to pay for it."

...

At the same time, an emergency meeting was taking place in Lys Topless Tower.

Bang!

Rhaenyra slammed her goblet down on the table, her voice seething with anger. "Aemond set fire to Dorne. I've received letters from the Dornish nobles, filled with nothing but reprimands!"

The letters were crammed with every kind of obscenity imaginable. She felt the urge to tear them to pieces and swallow them whole.

"We're powerless to stop him. We can't control his dragon," Mysaria said resignedly, her tone reflecting the weight of her swollen belly. If a dragon rider decided to do something reckless, who could stand in his way?

"We have to offer an explanation, understand?" Rhaenyra's eyes blazed with intensity. "Dorne will rebel and ally with the Free Cities, rekindling old enmities."

Rhaegar had once said that since Dorne had already submitted, it was time to win them over. If possible, marrying the realm's nobles into Dornish families was a prudent move. But burning down the Vaith River Valley would only deepen the Dornish people's hatred of the Dragon's Wroth.

"Forgive me, Your Grace," Mysaria murmured, her eyes heavy with fatigue. "Instead of arguing, we should send a letter to Sunspear, ordering Lord Qyle and Lord Mors to calm the situation."

Rhaenyra's expression softened, and she nodded emphatically. "Yes, that's what we'll do!"

"Your Grace, may I speak?" Varys interjected, his hands tucked into his pockets, his face betraying a hint of hesitation.

Rhaenyra looked at him curiously. "What is it, my Topless Tower Master?"

"It's a grave matter that requires your immediate attention," Varys sighed, pulling a piece of parchment from his sleeve. "Yesterday morning, Lord Mors was murdered in a brothel in Planky Town by a group of children who call themselves the Orphans of the Greenblood River."

"What?" Rhaenyra gasped, snatching the parchment from his hand.

The letter detailed the shocking assassination. Dragonfire had barely scorched the land for a day and a night before Mors was brutally slain. The news of the return of the Dragon's Wroth had already spread throughout Sunspear.

Mors had been killed by a group of orphans, children who had lost their families in the war. He had been stabbed dozens of times, his head smashed beyond recognition.

"Who is in charge of Sunspear now?" Rhaenyra's heart pounded with anxiety. Mors had been the royal family's representative in Dorne, and his death could signal a complete loss of control over the region.

Varys, touching the tattoos on his shaved head, ventured a guess, "It seems that young Prince Qyle has taken command. He's organized his guards and ordered the army to blockade Sunspear."

"Phew, that's a relief." Rhaenyra exhaled, some of the tension leaving her shoulders. As long as Sunspear remained secure, the garrison in Planky Town could maintain control over eastern Dorne. If the Prince's Pass and the Boneway held in the north, the rebellion could be contained.

"Your Grace, the matter is far from resolved," Mysaria cautioned, her brow furrowed. "We need to appoint someone to assist Prince Qyle, to ensure the young prince isn't easily swayed."

Rhaenyra nodded in agreement, her tone cautious. "Who would be suitable?"

"Someone loyal to the crown and from Dorne, of course," Mysaria hinted, her eyes flicking toward the Kingsguard standing vigil at the door.

Rhaenyra considered this and recalled a newer member of the Kingsguard, who had recently assisted Commander Erryk in guarding the Red Keep. Ser Beris Dayne of Starfall, the modern-day Sword of the Morning.

"Let him go. Ser Beris has always been a loyal adviser to the royal family." Rhaenyra made her decision, taking a deep breath. The loyalty of a Kingsguard was unquestionable, and Beris came from one of Dorne's noble houses. There was no one more suitable.

Mysaria nodded approvingly at the queen's choice.

Rhaenyra then turned her attention to another pressing issue, her voice growing cold. "The raven that brought the news to King's Landing should carry another letter—one condemning Aemond's reckless actions. He must be held accountable."

Burning Dorne without permission, especially at such a critical time, could easily spark a full-blown war.

Mysaria hesitated. "Your Grace, you know Aemond's temperament. He won't listen; he'll only respond with mockery."

"Do it!" Rhaenyra's voice rose sharply, her anger barely contained.

"Yes, Your Grace." Mysaria quickly rose and left the room.

Varys followed, leaving Rhaenyra alone in the now-empty hall. The silence pressed in on her as she slowly closed her eyes, leaning back in her chair with a weary groan. "What a tormenting disaster."

Without Rhaegar, everything felt like an uphill battle. Constraints and challenges were everywhere, forcing her to retreat when she longed to advance.

...

The scene shifts to the Lands of the Long Summer, at the foot of the Fourteen Flames.

"Roar..."

Thick fog swirled around Rhaegar and his men as they ventured into the desolate landscape. From somewhere in the distance, a piercing roar echoed through the mist.

"It's Daemon's dragon," Sea Snake warned, his voice tinged with concern.

Rhaegar waved a dismissive hand. "It's fine. I don't sense any danger."

Behind him, the sailors struggled as they pushed a heavy cart uphill, the fog making the ascent even more arduous. The thick haze obscured their surroundings, leaving Rhaegar to peer into the mist, searching for any landmarks.

After some time, his persistence paid off; he found the entrances to two underground mines. A large pit caught his eye, and he smiled. "This is it."

With a great deal of effort, the sailors pushed the cart into the mine.

"I'll check the other side. Let's split up," Rhaegar said, patting Sea Snake on the shoulder before heading into the second mine alone.

"Your Grace," Sea Snake called out, momentarily stunned. He didn't have time to stop Rhaegar before he disappeared into the fog.

Resigned, the Sea Snake ordered the sailors to bury the dragon bones and abandon the cart.

...

On the other side of the mountain, Rhaegar found himself tumbling into the mine tunnel as the ground gave way in a sudden landslide.

Crack!

A bone snapped as he hit the ground, sending up a cloud of dust.

"Cough, cough..." Rhaegar covered his mouth and nose, his eyes scanning the dark, damp tunnel. The space stretched deep and far, shrouded in pitch-black darkness. Stumbling slightly, he drew his

blade, Truefyre, from his waist. The black sword ignited, flames bursting along the edge, casting flickering light against the shadowy walls.

Using the fire's glow, Rhaegar kicked aside a heap of bones and pressed forward. After what felt like an eternity of walking through the dimly lit tunnel, he finally reached a wide corner. Here, the ground was clear of bones, and faint glimmers of crystal ore shone through the dust.

"This is the place," Rhaegar muttered, surveying the area carefully. With Truefyre still ablaze, he dug a deep pit into the earth, the black blade cutting easily through the soil. He gently placed the small dragon skull, which had been tied to his waist, into the pit.

When the task was done, Rhaegar drove Truefyre into the ground and closed his eyes, waiting in the silence. This was the last of the dragon bones, the one that should finally activate the relic.

"Roar..."

The sound of a dragon's roar echoed in his ears, deep and powerful.

[Congratulations, the wish of the dragon soul has been activated, and you have obtained...]

[Dragon Soul Guidance]

Level: Legendary (Red)

Function: Grants directional guidance (based on the dragon's memories before death).

Comment: "The dragon soul carries the wisdom of ages, revealing an extraordinary tale."

A dragon tooth appeared out of nowhere, its dark surface etched with pale, glowing lines. In an instant, five dragon-shaped figures, each of a different size and form, emerged from the markings. Before Rhaegar could react, the tooth flew back into his palm, trembling gently, almost as if it longed to show the way.

"Guide the way... to the Smoking Sea?" Rhaegar whispered, as new thoughts began to flood his mind. The dragon whose bones he'd buried had been a giant, its skeleton larger than that of the slender Caraxes. The beast had likely lived for more than sixty years—a wealth of knowledge and memory for him to draw upon.

And now, with the guidance of five dragons, that knowledge was his to unlock.

Chapter 595: The Cannibal's Hibernation

The tunnels branched in all directions, illuminated by the vibrant glow of various ores. Rhaegar relied on his senses to search for the buried history hidden within. It was still early, and he needed to explore the Fourteen Flames. As he ventured deeper into the pitch-black tunnel, the intensity of the fire magic in the air grew stronger. With each breath, his heart filtered the pure magic, gradually strengthening his body.

"Roar..."

Halfway through, a thunderous roar reverberated through the tunnel, dislodging loose gravel from above. Rhaegar's eyes flashed as he raised Truefyre and identified a fork in the tunnel. Without a word, he sped into it...

Boom!

“Roar...”

The Cannibal’s ferocious growl echoed as wisps of greenish Dragonfire curled from its mouth, ready to erupt at any moment. Several abominations emerged from the pits.

“Sssh...”

With a piercing shriek, the pits burst open, releasing red-bodied monsters. Their gaping mouths and thick bodies crushed the rocks, like death worms poised to devour life.

“Roar!”

Dark green Dragonfire spewed forth as the Cannibal pounced with lightning speed. With a loud crack, flesh tore apart, and blood splattered throughout the mine, clinging to the soft, flabby red flesh.

“Roar!”

The monsters fought back, trying to wrap their thick bodies around the dragon’s claws.

Pop!

The Cannibal’s pupils filled with cunning and cruelty as its claws lifted and fell, grinding the monsters into pulp.

Boom!

One of the abominations opened its ugly mouth and spewed a red flame that resembled acid. The battle-hardened Cannibal turned its head, narrowly avoiding its vulnerable eyes. The red flame seared the dragon’s neck, white smoke rising from its dark scales.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal felt a slight sting and, unable to restrain its rage, stretched its neck and bit the monster to pieces.

Gulp~

The dragon’s teeth shredded the rotten flesh, mixing it with the stench of heat as it swallowed.

Suddenly, the Cannibal felt a sense of fullness.

"Roar..."

Its pupils flashed with confusion as its scarlet tongue licked its mouth, feeling a strange addiction. Glancing around, it saw the ground littered with the corpses of monsters. Some attempted to crawl back into the ground, while others writhed and screamed in agony. The Cannibal’s nostrils flared as it caught a repulsive scent, one that instinct told it to reject.

After a brief pause, the dragon opened its mouth, picked up a half-dead monster in its jaws, and chewed, blood spurting as it fed.

“Cannibal!”

Suddenly, its rider’s voice echoed from the entrance of the mine. Rhaegar sprinted towards the scene but halted abruptly at the sight before him.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal was engrossed in its meal, roaring at the driver as it continued to tear into the corpse. The taste reminded it of the young dragons it had hunted in the past—soft, plump meat, hot as fire, and radiating a special kind of heat.

Rhaegar’s eyes widened in shock. “Firewyrms!?”

"Roar..."

The Cannibal seemed to respond, flinging a piece of the remains at the King, splattering hot blood everywhere.

“Be careful, man!”

“Wyrms aren’t a good ingredient,” Rhaegar warned the greedy Cannibal, using his sword to lift the remains of the finely scaled carcass.

In both ancient Valyria and Barth's writings, dragons and wyrms were natural enemies, constantly battling in the sky and underground. While the two species might have shared the Fourteen Flames as their nesting ground, territorial struggles were inevitable. Even though wyrms were tough and capable of spitting fire, they were no match for dragons. Dragons couldn’t burrow underground, which gave them a chance to breed—but could they really be eaten?

“Grrrr... grrrr...”

The Cannibal answered with action, digging into the ground with its powerful claws and snatching up the fleeing wyrms, swallowing them whole.

“Alright,” Rhaegar conceded, feeling the dragon's possessiveness over its food through their deep soul link. With each bite, a surge of chaotic fire magic filled his body. The fire magic was particularly violent and corrupt. While Rhaegar’s own fire magic was like a clear stream with fish visible in the water, the Cannibal’s was restless and explosive, like a firecracker ready to ignite. The fire magic from the Firewyrms was akin to magma spewing from a volcano—mixed with ash, smoke, and ominous, harmful substances.

As the Cannibal chewed, the flesh and blood were broken down in its stomach.

Bang!

Rhaegar sensed something strange and touched his chest, feeling his heart race. He called up the system panel.

[Rhaegar Targaryen]

Comment: "Descendant of Valyria, returning to the embrace of The Lands of the Long Summer."

Rhaegar scanned the panel, noting a slight increase in the bloodline percentage but no other changes. His gaze settled on "Pure Water," and he guessed the reason. The ability to share his poison resistance with the dragon must have allowed the Cannibal to safely consume the wyrms, which would otherwise be harmful to its flesh and blood.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal's green eyes gleamed with excitement as it finished the last wyrm and charged into another tunnel.

"Where are you going?"

Rhaegar was stunned, feeling an inexplicable heat surge through him.

Boom!

In response, he heard the sound of rocks shattering as the black dragon barreled forward, widening the tunnel with its sheer force.

Crack! Crack!

The Cannibal sniffed the air, found a pit filled with red ore, and began devouring it. Rhaegar followed closely behind, watching as the dragon feasted on stone.

In that moment, Rhaegar's pupils shrank as he inhaled the thick, almost tangible fire magic. Each unmined red orb glowed like a bonfire in the night, radiating an intense heat.

"This ore naturally contains fire magic," Rhaegar whispered, watching the Cannibal devour the red ore. The dragon chewed quickly, reducing an entire wall of ore to rubble until it could eat no more. Stretching its thick neck, it let out a deep, rumbling burp.

The Cannibal shook its massive body lightly before curling up at the edge of the pit, its glowing vertical pupils slowly closing. Soon, its hot breaths became long and steady as it drifted into a dormant state.

Rhaegar was surprised. 'The wyrms and the red ore must have provided the Cannibal with enough energy,' he thought.

The last time the dragon went into hibernation, it had been after devouring the remains of the wild dragon Morghul. The Cannibal had slept for three days and nights, and when it awoke, it had grown to a size that surpassed Vhagar, the largest dragon at the time.

Rhaegar smiled, a hopeful gleam in his eyes. "When you return to the Lands of the Long Summer, how far will you grow?" he wondered aloud.

Before setting foot in the Lands of the Long Summer, he had only a vague idea of what ancient Valyria was like. Now that he was here, he realized how different it was. The air was thick with fire magic, and special ore like that found in the Fourteen Flames was abundant. No wonder Balerion the Black Dread had grown so massive. A dragon born in these lands had a significant advantage over those hatched in Westeros.

Rhaegar fell into a trance, muttering, "No wonder Daenys' dream showed Balerion being chased by several dragons." He suspected the Fourteen Flames had consumed too many special ores, leading to conflicts with other dragons.

Crack!

Rhaegar snapped off a piece of red ore with his bare hands, feeling the concentrated fire magic within. He knew that the growth of dragons was inseparable from the nourishment of such magic. The existence of the Fourteen Flames seemed like a breeding ground for dragon growth.

Rhaegar turned the ore over in his hand, contemplating its potential. He crushed it with force, the fire magic swirling around his fingers. Unfortunately, the magic was too complex, filled with impurities, and unsuitable for direct absorption.

"To use it, you must purify the impurities little by little," Rhaegar murmured, eyeing the red ore embedded in the stone walls around him. It wasn't suitable for humans to absorb, but it could be fed to dragons.

He realized its value. 'It must be used....'

...

Night had fallen over King's Landing, and the Red Keep was shrouded in shadow.

"She sent me a letter," a deep voice resonated in the dim candlelight.

Helaena knelt on the carpet, silently sewing a girl's dress. She did not look up.

"You don't have to speak, sister," Aemond said, seated cross-legged on the other side of the room. He adjusted the candlestick, flicking the wick to brighten the flame.

Helaena kept her head down, saying nothing.

"The Dornish don't deserve pity, do they?" Aemond pressed, searching for agreement in her silence.

In the faintly lit room, the siblings faced each other. Helaena's expression remained blank, her thoughts distant. She had always been more of a listener.

"Sigh."

Aemond exhaled softly, his shoulders slumping as he leaned toward his sister, though he hesitated to move any closer. Helaena glanced at him briefly, then bent her head to cut the thread. "You should go back now," she reminded him.

Who could discipline a child for mistakes made in childhood? She was the older sister, but she couldn't bring herself to chastise him.

"Go away."

Aemond flushed with embarrassment. His eyes fell on the small shirt she was embroidering with a purple flower, and he changed the subject. "Are you planning to dress my nephew like a girl?"

"Different seeds produce different flowers," Helaena replied indifferently, as if nothing truly mattered anymore.

"Alright," Aemond muttered, not fully understanding but knowing his sister didn't want him there.

"I'm going to patrol the Red Keep. You should rest early," he said, standing up and strapping on his sword. Reluctantly, he pushed open the door. He had wanted to spend more time with her, even if they didn't fully understand one another. Their blood bond brought a sense of ease.

Bang.

The door closed softly, but the sound still seemed heavy in the quiet room. Helaena looked up, a flicker of confusion in her eyes. She stood and searched for the basket where she kept her spools of thread. Finding another small boy's garment, she resumed sewing, her hands moving in silence...

...

The Narrow Sea, off the coast of Claw Isle.

The waves crashed against the shore in the still of the night. Flares illuminated the silhouette of a vast fleet, their sails adorned with purple shells and golden scales, symbols of Braavos and Pentos.

Thump, thump, thump...

The sound of drums echoed across the sea. Under the cover of darkness, another fleet crossed the Bay of Crabs, its sails bearing the crest of an eagle.

Chapter 596: The Dragon's Transformation

Time passed quickly, and the autumn leaves fell. Near the Summer Sea, the temperature remained high...

At the foot of Fourteen Flames Mountain in the Lands of the Long Summer, a harsh sun beat down.

"Your Grace, the exploration team is back." Under the scorching sun, the Sea Snake hobbled up the mountain slope.

"Be careful." Rhaegar helped him up, then asked suspiciously, "How is the situation?"

Three months had passed. The king and his adviser had traveled nearly the entire Lands of the Long Summer, searching for hidden ruins. The Sea Snake looked up at the clear sky, wiping the sweat from his brow. "The sailors sailed 200 miles west and found only the ruins of a Free City, nothing more than crumbled stone."

Rhaegar sighed. "It seems there is little hope."

The vast land they stood on was as large as a region of Westeros, but it was trapped in the peculiar climate of the Smoking Sea. There were vast grasslands, but not a single river with drinkable fresh water. The fresh water they drank each day was still taken from the snow on the distant peaks.

The resources for trees, fisheries, and animal husbandry were nearly nonexistent. Aside from a limited area of old-growth pine trees near the snow-capped peaks, it was difficult to find any vegetation beyond scattered weeds. The land was almost devoid of birds, fish, or insects, and it fell silent at night.

The Sea Snake hesitated for a moment before speaking again. "Your Grace, our supplies will last another month, but we must plan ahead."

"I understand," Rhaegar nodded. The gravity of their situation was clear. Supplies would be exhausted in a month at most, even if they resorted to slaughtering the cattle and sheep meant for the dragons. Otherwise, someone would have to venture into the fog and attempt to fish in the Smoking Sea. No one believed they could catch anything in the boiling, salty waters.

Rhaegar exhaled deeply, then said firmly, "Pack up. We'll leave the day after tomorrow."

"The sailors will be grateful to you, Your Grace," the Sea Snake replied solemnly.

After that, the two parted ways. The Sea Snake returned to the camp to sort through the porcelain, broken swords, and tons of ore mined from the Fourteen Flames, all gathered from various ruins.

...

Rhaegar walked into the underground mine with a solemn expression. After thoroughly exploring the Fourteen Flames, he discovered that most of the nests above the mountainside were blocked off, tangled in layers of withered vine roots. Without a dragon's aid, breaking through would be nearly impossible.

"Breathe fire and harness your wings.

Stand with two heads and sing to the three.

By my voice, the words of fire."

In the dimly lit tunnel, Rhaegar advanced with Truefyre in hand, his voice echoing through the narrow passage as he sang an ancient Valyrian ballad. It was a song passed down through generations of his house, used to awaken sleeping dragons.

And now, it was time to wake the Cannibal.

Three months ago, the dragon had gorged itself on wyrms and pyroxeres ore, sinking into an unbreakable deep sleep. But with their departure imminent, the beast had to be roused. Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with anticipation, his voice growing deep and powerful as he chanted, "Blood magic, the sacrifice has been paid..."

He wanted to see with his own eyes what his dragon had become.

Rumbling echoed from deep within the tunnel, the sound of scales scraping against stone walls. A hot blast of air blew past, causing the flames of his torch to flicker. Rhaegar strode forward steadily, and through the darkness, he saw a massive silhouette, its enormous head slowly shifting.

"Roar!"

A thunderous roar suddenly filled the crypt, and the dragon's head lunged forward, expelling ash-like flames. In an instant, the chamber was illuminated by a deep green light.

"Cannibal, wake up!" Rhaegar's face was alight with excitement, his gaze fixed on the awakening beast. The green Dragonfire that once filled the air now dispersed, as if breaking free from the constraints of gas and liquid, forming silent ash particles. The embers floated and swayed, deliberately avoiding Rhaegar and instead attaching themselves to the cracked walls.

Boom!

The flames spread rapidly, transforming into a fiery inferno. Rhaegar's breathing quickened, and a smile tugged at his lips.

Boom!

A black dragon head slowly emerged from the darkness, its three pairs of long, curved gray-white horns appearing ferocious against the backdrop of its malevolent green eyes. In the shadows, it resembled a terrifying, ancient god.

Rhaegar extended a hand and smiled. "Old friend, you've finally woken up."

"Roar!"

The Cannibal's pupils glowed with a hungry green light. One of its wings slammed down, causing the ground to shake violently and sending rocks tumbling as its sharp, gray-white claws dug into the earth. Then, the dragon's entire body emerged from the shadows, its scales gleaming with a metallic sheen in the firelight.

Bang!

The dragon's massive head thrust forward, its snout colliding with Rhaegar's outstretched palm. It seemed to be answering its rider's call.

Rhaegar closed his eyes, sensing every change in the dragon. His lips curled into a slight smile.

...

Outside the Fourteen Flames, on the barren land, withered vines had been woven into a small nest. Daemon, dressed haphazardly, was swinging his sword to chop firewood. He didn't get along with his nephew, and his disdain for the Sea Snake was even greater. Upon arriving in the Lands of the Long Summer, he chose to live alone. Fortunately, the only real danger in these lands were the Firewyrms.

Crack! The pine wood split cleanly, releasing a sharp snap. Daemon wiped the sweat from his brow and slapped his aching back. 'Farmers are better suited for this kind of hard labor,' he thought, with a twinge of bitterness. 'It's a shame the Dark Sister has been reduced to a mere tool for chopping wood.'

"Roar..." A melodious, high-pitched screech echoed from afar, and the clouds overhead swirled like whipped egg whites. Caraxes swayed through the sky like a

snake, flapping its large wings to create a gust before lowering its hind legs and descending slowly.

Boom!

Daemon glanced up, pride gleaming in his eyes. A massive, scaly, red-colored serpent-like creature landed before him, its appearance noticeably altered from three months ago. The once dark, dirty scales now gleamed with a vivid, blood-red hue. Its slender neck moved with a snake-like flexibility, no longer losing balance when extended. The sharp, fierce dragon head clutched a gray sheep in its jaws, thick blood dripping from its mouth. Caraxes now truly looked like the Blood Wyrms it was named after.

"Caraxes, come here and let me have a look." Using the Dark Sister for support, Daemon's voice carried a magnetic command.

"Roar..." Caraxes responded to its rider's call, leaping down the slope and extending its snake-like neck to nuzzle its head against Daemon.

"Good boy, good boy," Daemon murmured, his hands resting on the dragon's hot mouth as he looked it over with delight. The beast had grown significantly since their arrival. Three months ago, Caraxes had been about 70 meters long, similar in size to Meleys, and slightly smaller than the wild Sheepstealer. Now, its scarlet body had stretched to over 80 meters, with a wingspan broad enough to cover a warship. In terms of size, Caraxes now rivaled the Silverwing of Dragonstone, even surpassing Sheepstealer.

Daemon and the dragon shared a moment of mutual affection, rubbing their heads together. But then Daemon noticed the dead sheep and exclaimed, "Did Corlys bring sheep?" He was puzzled, remembering that only goats had been brought from Dragonstone. "Where did you get the sheep, Caraxes?"

Daemon frowned, pulling a handful of gray, soft wool from the dragon's teeth.

"Roar!" Caraxes let out a satisfied moan, swallowing the sheep whole. Daemon's frown deepened, and he was about to press further when...

Rumbling.

Suddenly, the ground shook, as if a giant beast were breaking through the earth. Daemon quickly turned, realizing the noise was coming from the foot of the Fourteen Flames.

"What is it?" he muttered, drawing the Dark Sister. Grabbing the rope ladder, he swiftly climbed onto Caraxes' back.

...

Boom!

A deafening explosion rocked the underground mine as a surge of greenish Dragonfire erupted, shattering the solid stone walls in an instant.

Roar!

The long-slumbering beast burst from the cave in a flash of blinding light.

“Fly, Cannibal!” Rhaegar commanded, his voice calm yet powerful, his black robes billowing around him as his intense gaze followed the dragon.

Roar!

The Cannibal roared into the sky, its sharp gray horns slicing through the clouds of dust that obstructed its view. With a powerful beat of its dark wings, the massive dragon ascended, its enormous body cutting through the air like a force of nature.

Rhaegar’s silver hair whipped wildly around him as he threw his head back and laughed, a triumphant sound that echoed across the mountains. The Cannibal gave him a sidelong glance before turning its attention to the summit of the Fourteen Flames, hidden beneath a thick layer of cloud. The dragon opened its mouth and unleashed a torrent of green Dragonfire, the flames flickering like ghostly ash as they scorched the air.

Pop!

Man and dragon soared straight through the Dragonfire, the intense heat burning small holes in Rhaegar’s black robe. But his grin only widened, his hand gripping the hilt of a black dragon horn, triumphant and unbothered by the flames licking at his clothes.

Roar!

The Cannibal let out another thunderous roar, its thick tail whipping through the air and smashing a chunk of volcanic rock as it circled the towering peaks of the Fourteen Flames. The dragon’s immense power seemed to transcend mortal limitations, a force far beyond the strength of men.

Far below, Daemon sat astride Caraxes, watching the spectacle unfold above. The black dragon soared recklessly, its roars shaking the sky as it unleashed more Dragonfire, painting half the sky an eerie green—like a hellish mirage.

“His dragon became more powerful,” Daemon muttered, his voice filled with both awe and a tinge of something darker. His fingers tightened around the hilt of his sword as his gaze remained fixed on the black dragon above.

As he watched, the full scale of the Cannibal’s growth became apparent. Compared to the Fourteen Flames, the black dragon had grown monstrously large. Its immense black wings cast a vast shadow over the mountain, almost completely eclipsing the towering peaks beneath it.

...

“Cannibal, faster!” Rhaegar shouted, slicing his palm and allowing blood to flow freely.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal bared its jagged white fangs, conjuring a whirlwind that carried the scent of ash and death. Rhaegar’s eyes gleamed with joy as he observed the dragon’s immense power. After devouring the wild dragon Morghul, the Cannibal had grown to an impressive length of 150 meters, surpassing even Vhagar, who was over 180 years old. It had become the largest dragon in the world.

Now, it had grown even more. By his estimation, the Cannibal stretched over 160 meters, dwarfing dragons like Silverwing and Sheepstealer by double their size.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal unleashed a torrent of emerald Dragonfire, its green eyes reflecting a cold indifference. With each increase in size, its combat prowess had advanced exponentially, promising even greater power as time progressed.

Suddenly, the dragon tooth clutched in Rhaegar's hand began to emit a soft glow. His gaze sharpened as he raised the obsidian fang etched with pale dragon patterns. The atmosphere around them shifted dramatically; the very sky and earth seemed to tremble as clouds parted violently, forming a swirling circular barrier around the revealed peaks of the Fourteen Flames.

“Roar... Roar...”

A cacophony of chaotic dragon roars filled the air as the black dragon tooth vibrated, projecting five spectral dragon forms of varying sizes. Rhaegar remained composed, his eyes fixed on the unfolding spectacle.

The largest of the apparitions, a phantom dragon rivaling Meleys in size, let out a thunderous roar before diving straight into Rhaegar's forehead.

Hum.

Rhaegar's eyes closed as a flood of unfamiliar memories surged through his mind: visions of the Fourteen Flames, flowing magma, and groups of silver-haired figures flashed before him. The spectral dragon quivered before dissolving into a cascade of ephemeral bubbles, each containing fragments of ancient recollections that pieced together seamlessly within his consciousness.

An expression of profound realization crossed Rhaegar's face as he murmured to himself, “The Dragon's Horn...”

Chapter 597: Young Dragon of the Smoking Sea

The image captures what lies in the depths of the heart.

Dark clouds shroud the sky, with relentless wind and waves crashing in the distance. Rain drips steadily, while the mist swirls into a tightening vortex.

Crack!

A bolt of lightning strikes, accompanied by a shrill dragon's roar.

“Roar...”

The perspective zooms in closer, revealing a figure cloaked in dark blue. Rhaegar's eyes are closed, and his brow suddenly furrows.

“Roar...”

A dark blue dragon's shadow bursts through the storm, its piercing eyes searching with an extraordinary resilience. The dragon shadow flies faster and faster, almost as if it's heading straight for you.

Boom!

The shadow reveals its true form, spewing dragonfire at the encroaching storm. The blue dragonfire whirls like a silky sea current, quietly consuming the storm.

‘A lost young dragon!’ Rhaegar thought, tilting his head slightly as joy welled up within him. The dragon wasn’t very large, about the size of Iragaxys or Stormcloud—a sub-adult young dragon. This matched the information he had received.

Crackling...

Lightning and thunder crash, stirring up the torrential rain and a thick mist. His vision begins to blur, making it difficult to see clearly. Rhaegar’s heart sinks, but he forces himself to stay calm.

“Roar...”

The young blue dragon lets out another roar that echoes through the raging storm. It dives from the sky, disappearing into the turbulent mist below.

In an instant, the scene shifts.

The ruins of an old, dilapidated Free City emerge before him. Rhaegar’s eyelids twitch in shock. “Is there such a place in the Smoking Sea?”

Drizzling...

The storm grows fiercer, with the chaotic sky seeming to collapse. Large fish with jagged fangs and gray, slimy scales wriggle through the rain, which crackles as it hits the ground.

“Roar...”

The young blue dragon glides past, clutching an ugly monster in its jaws, and lands on a cliff by the sea. As it gnaws on the bloody fish, it turns its head, casting a gaze in this direction. Though the dragon’s head is obscured, its dark, vertical pupils stand out clearly, flashing with deep, keen insight.

Pop~

The fragments of memory shattered once more, leaving behind a trace of spiritual energy. Before Rhaegar could react, it felt as though fireworks exploded in his mind, sending a warm surge of energy coursing through his body. Suddenly, the weakness he had felt from the dragon-head necklace vanished completely.

“Roar... Roar...”

Though the memory had seemed long, in reality, only a brief moment had passed. Rhaegar quietly opened his eyes, and a faint, invisible light flickered within them. As the last few roars faded, the scattered fragments of memory gradually dissipated. Rhaegar’s spirit felt invigorated as he absorbed all the information, making it his own.

In just a few seconds, he had gained a wealth of knowledge. His eyes deepened as he murmured, “The ruins where the dragons’ remains were found are indeed the work of the Daeryon family.”

The remaining memories of the five dragon spirits confirmed that they were all dragons of House Daeryon. The Doom had come too swiftly, and the dragons, unable to wait for their riders, were

instead consumed by the magma that rained from the sky. Beyond this, there were only insignificant fragments.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's green pupils dilated as its wings snapped shut, sending it into a steep dive, launching an attack. Rhaegar's body swayed as he was momentarily taken aback.

Roar!

The Cannibal opened its massive jaws, unleashing a torrent of ash-like dragonfire. In the next instant, the dragonfire struck a nest halfway up the Fourteen Flames, instantly incinerating the surrounding yellow vines.

Roar!

A panicked shriek echoed from the nest as a black dragon shadow flew out in terror. It collided with the dragonfire, and the scarlet membranes of its wings clung to its bones, seared by the green flames.

"Roar! Roar!"

The dragon shadow cried out as it flew, racing toward the snow-capped peak in agony.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's green eyes gleamed with a predatory intensity, its massive body hovering in the air as thick saliva dripped from its dragon mouth.

"Control yourself, old friend," Rhaegar said, holding the reins and soothing the beast. "We'll have a good meal later."

"Roar..."

The Cannibal growled, licking its scarlet tongue over its upper lip before descending from the sky. Rhaegar paused for a moment, unable to help but admire the creature. The man and dragon were in perfect sync, each sensing the other's hunger. The hunger was so intense it could have consumed them both, but the fact that the Cannibal resisted such a powerful urge was proof that it was gradually mastering its nature.

'A true transformation,' Rhaegar thought with joy, his gaze lifting to the solitary snow peak.

He almost didn't recognize the black dragon that had burst from the nest. As a dragon without a rider, Iragaxys had roamed the Lands of the Long Summer for three months, with no one to watch over it. Occasionally, it would appear, snatch a goat from a ship, and vanish. Now, it had nearly doubled in size, reaching an impressive 20 meters. At this size, it was no longer a sub-adult—it had reached the threshold of adulthood. The older Tessarion was only slightly smaller.

'The Fourteen Flames' influence on dragons is truly astonishing,' Rhaegar reflected, his eyes filled with longing.

It was no wonder ancient Valyria had once supported forty Dragonlord houses and raised a thousand dragons at its peak. And it was no wonder that such a terrifying land could only be destroyed by a natural disaster, for nothing else could have brought it down.

...

Two days later...

“Roar!”

Halfway up the Fourteen Flames, the black dragon clung to the rocky cliff, stretching its neck into a nearby nest.

“Cannibal, be careful!”

Rhaegar hung upside down on the dragon’s back, his heart and eyes full of helplessness. The black dragon paid no heed, scraping at the rocks with its sharp claws before withdrawing its gray-white, horned head. With a crunching sound, the fearsome creature spat out a piece of finely scaled flesh.

Rhaegar glanced at it and sighed, rubbing his forehead. “You’ve already eaten enough.”

For three days, the beast had been hunting Firewyrms, emptying nest after nest across the Fourteen Flames, searching for any hiding places the creatures might have found.

“Roar...”

Suddenly, a high-pitched, shrill cry echoed from the horizon. The gluttonous dragon whipped around, its pupils narrowing with a fierce look.

“Calm yourself, my friend,” Rhaegar said soothingly.

A massive, scarlet-colored, snake-like creature glided towards them, its large wings spread wide. Daemon, fully armed, rode atop the dragon. Rhaegar patted the Cannibal’s back and said, “Let’s go.”

“Roar!”

The Cannibal roared defiantly, leaping from the Fourteen Flames and gliding with extraordinary agility. It was a dragon built for speed, unburdened by the heaviness of Vhagar or Vermithor. Even the swiftest of dragons, like the Blood Wurm, would struggle to escape its grasp.

...

The Cannibal soared across the Great Grass Sea, cutting through the mist that hung over the shoreline. House Velaryon’s fleet awaited them, anchored in the slightly rippling waters of the Smoking Sea. The Sea Snake was waiting in a small boat near the beach, with Caraxes keeping watch nearby.

“Land,” Rhaegar commanded.

At the sound of his voice, the Cannibal descended slowly, touching down with a controlled grace. Rhaegar slid off the dragon’s back and joined the Sea Snake and Daemon.

As soon as they met, the Sea Snake spoke up, “Your Grace, two of our ships are too damaged to repair with wood. We’ll have to abandon them.”

Rhaegar nodded, unsurprised. It was just another sacrifice for House Velaryon, to let go of such costly warships.

Daemon tilted his head, asking, "Have you decided on the route?"

"Of course," Rhaegar replied with confidence.

According to the dragon spirit's guidance, the young dragon and the Dragon's Horn were likely in the same place—the ruined Free Cities seen in the memory fragments. The Lands of the Long Summer lay north of the Smoking Sea, a hidden continental plate shrouded in mist. The ruined Free Cities, however, were on the coast, in a region with an extremely harsh climate. This meant they were situated south of the Smoking Sea, among the many Free Cities built around the Fourteen Flames—in other words, the ruins of the Free Cities Empire.

Daemon narrowed his eyes, asking, "Are you sure you want to leave this place?"

"I've always kept the purpose of this journey in mind," Rhaegar said with certainty.

Leaving the Lands of the Long Summer would be easy, but returning would be far more difficult. The route to the ruined Free Cities would inevitably cross the perilous Smoking Sea. Fortunately, Rhaegar knew the way well and could avoid many of the dangers.

"We'll sail according to this sea chart. The Cannibal and I will lead the way."

Rhaegar pulled out a newly drawn sea chart, showing the distance between the Lands of the Long Summer and the ruined Free Cities. The Sea Snake took the chart, his expression serious. "It's about a three-day journey, barring any unforeseen events."

Rhaegar mounted the dragon's back and said calmly, "If you travel with me, there will be no accidents."

"Roar!"

The Cannibal shook its massive body and launched into the air, its hind legs propelling it upward. Daemon smiled and made his way towards the awaiting Caraxes.

...

Half an hour later...

"Roar!"

A dark dragon shadow emerged from the beach, its scarlet wings beating against the air. The fleet had already sailed far ahead, just visible on the horizon, trailing behind. As the dragon soared through the layers of mist, the Lands of the Long Summer faded back into its eerie, deathly silence.

The scene shifted.

Snow-capped mountains loomed in the distance, and at their base, the vast grassy plains stretched out, swaying gently in the wind.

"Moo~~"

A dozen sheep bleated weakly as they grazed on the sparse grass. Their dirty, emaciated bodies were a stark contrast to the lush pastures they yearned for. From time to time, one of the sheep would lift its head, gazing numbly at the sky as if wary of some lurking predator.

Squeak...

Not far away, on a hidden hillside, three figures lay low to the ground, wrapped in sheepskin coats and covered in dirt, blending into the landscape. The breeze stirred, revealing the gray, tangled hair of an old woman and two young companions. The old woman was hunched, her milky white eyes empty and sightless. The two teenagers beside her were pale, their faces gaunt from hunger, looking like wildlings from beyond the Great Wall.

“Grandma, those people are gone,” the maiden whispered, her lilac eyes fixed on the sheep grazing below.

There had been dozens of sheep, but two dragons—one black, one red—had descended upon them, leaving only half of the flock. If the sheep hadn’t been hidden in the cave, the dragons would have devoured them all.

Dong!

The old woman struck the ground with a branch, producing a dull thud. The maiden listened to the sound and lowered her head in silence. They were fortunate the dragons had left, or they would still be cowering in the cave, terrified.

Boom!

The old woman struck the branch again, her hollow eyes turning towards the beach. An unnatural flush of excitement crossed her weathered face.

“The dragons are gone,” the maiden murmured, her voice hoarse and tinged with sorrow.

Three dragons had appeared in their world, but none belonged to them. Instead, they had brought further disruption to an already harsh existence.

Dong!

She beat the ground harder, struggling to rise from the grass. The maiden reached out to help but was pulled forward instead. Together, the old woman and the young girl, both small and frail, began walking toward the beach like two sheep on an uncertain journey.

“Baa~~”

The young girl, eyes wide with a mix of hope and desperation, herded the sheep forward as if they were her most precious possession.

Chapter 598: The House of Aurion

Time passed quickly, and three days slipped by.

The Smoking Sea lay shrouded in mist, with eerie howls echoing from all directions. Drizzling rain turned into a sudden downpour, the cold, piercing raindrops soaking everything in their path.

“Roar!”

A deep, thunderous roar shook the air, reverberating through the dark, charcoal-black wings of the dragon as it stirred the rolling clouds. Rhaegar, drenched to the skin, looked down at the fleet below. Twenty ships sailed ever closer to a cliff hidden within the thick fog.

“A little closer, my friend,” Rhaegar murmured, his eyes locked on the approaching shoreline.

After three days of calm sailing across the vast Smoking Sea, the fleet had finally reached the far side of ancient Valyria. This had to be the place the dragon spirit had guided them to.

“Roar...”

Suddenly, blue fire flashed within the dark clouds, followed by a piercing roar.

“Cannibal, hurry!” Rhaegar shouted, looking up as he caught sight of a vague dragon shadow.

“Roar...”

The Cannibal’s green pupils flared with ferocity as it broke through the heavy clouds, roaring in response.

Crackling...

The rain intensified, now accompanied by jagged silver lightning.

“Roar...”

A streak of blue dragonfire shot past, grazing the side of the black dragon. With a loud boom, the Cannibal tilted its head, disoriented. A flash of blue light, like a bat, pierced the clouds and plunged into the murky sea below.

But this only enraged the giant beast.

The Cannibal’s side and neck, drenched in rain and emitting white smoke, showed no damage, but the pain and humiliation were undeniable, fueling the wrath of the wild dragons king.

“Quiet, Cannibal!” Rhaegar called out, his nerves on edge. He hadn’t expected the young dragon to attack.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal shook its head, and without hesitation, its massive body dove in pursuit of the tiny blue dragon.

“Control yourself!” Rhaegar’s face tightened as he pulled hard on the reins.

The Cannibal cast a glance at its rider, but instead of slowing, it accelerated, dark green dragonfire already burning in its throat.

How dare that young dragon strike first? It would have to pay the price—by enduring the wrath of a dragon far greater than itself.

Crackling.

Lightning split the sky, illuminating the dark curtain of rain. The young blue dragon revealed its true form, skimming just above the surface of the sea. Rhaegar fixed his gaze on the creature, a sense of wonder stirring within him.

The young dragon was cloaked in dark blue scales, its wing membranes a silvery white, resembling a storm-tossed seagull. Its body was well-proportioned, its flight smooth and powerful. Dragons came in various shapes and sizes, each reflecting their unique natural talents. Cannibal, Vhagar, and Vermithor were all large and bulky, while Dreamfyre, Silverwing, and Tessarion were more streamlined, making them adept at flying and maneuvering. Sunfyre was an exception—slender, with a long neck, lean body, and extraordinary endurance. Only two other dragons shared such a physique: Meraxes, one of the three dragons that founded the house, and its descendant, Quicksilver. Sadly, both silver-scaled dragons were long dead, leaving the golden Sunfyre as the last of its kind. Of course, Caraxes was also unique, a serpentine dragon unlike any other in the house's brief history, resembling a Firewurm with wings.

“Roar!”

The blue and green dragon screamed in terror, speeding across the sea, driven by fear of the Cannibal's putrid scent. It knew if it didn't escape, it would surely die.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal dove first, its massive body overshadowing the smaller dragon, its enormous jaws slowly opening.

Boom!

Dark green dragonfire rained down from the sky, falling like ashes and forming a misty halo of fireflies. Each spark sizzled on contact with the rain, turning into white-hot smoke. In an instant, the pungent smoke coalesced into a mushroom cloud, and the remaining dragonfire struck the young dragon with lethal speed.

Roar!

The young dragon screamed in agony as the dragonfire penetrated its scales, igniting a blaze across its body. The Cannibal's green eyes gleamed with a fierce hunger as its enormous body swayed, preparing to devour its prey.

“Steady, Cannibal!”

Sensing the danger, Rhaegar quickly pulled the reins, trying to adjust the dragon's course. Without a dragon whip, it was difficult to control the enraged beast.

"Snap out of it!" Rhaegar shouted, his black robe rippling as he shifted into his dragonborn state. Dark scales and horns appeared on his forehead, and black flames flickered around his body.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal was forced to lift its head, flapping its wings as it changed course, releasing the small snack it had nearly claimed.

“Behave!” Rhaegar commanded firmly, steering the dragon towards the cliff by manipulating the reins. By now, the fleet had docked, and the crew was searching for a way to land.

"Roar..."

The young blue dragon, narrowly escaping, disappeared into the night. The Cannibal’s green pupils glowed with resentment as it shook its head violently, emitting a low growl.

“Land!”

Rhaegar ordered, gripping the reins tightly as he wrestled with the dragon. After a fierce struggle, the Cannibal growled irritably, folded its wings, and headed towards the cliff. A wise dragon knows when to bide its time. Sooner or later, it would taste the young dragon.

“Hmph!” Rhaegar snorted, glancing back at the spot where the young dragon had vanished into the distance. There was nowhere else for it to run—it was trapped by the land and the sea. He could always resume the hunt when the storm passed.

Crackling.

Amid the thunder and lightning, the Free Cities were washed by the relentless rain, giving them an eerie, ghostly appearance.

Crackling.

Suddenly, several crooked arrows shot out from the shadows, aiming for Caraxes as it soared through the stormy sky.

"Roar!"

Caraxes glanced down, ready to flap its wings and dodge, but the arrows were easily blown away by the fierce winds—no more of a threat than twigs snapped from a branch.

Daemon’s expression darkened. He drew his blade, Dark Sister, and shouted, “Be on guard! Someone’s in the city!”

"Roar!"

The Cannibal had just landed, but upon hearing the warning, it immediately took off again, diving toward the ruined Free Cities, which lay in shambles beneath a blanket of scorched earth.

Rumble!

The ground trembled slightly as a noise echoed from a nearby corner.

“Dracarys!” Rhaegar’s face turned ashen as he gave the order.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal unleashed a torrent of dragonfire, sweeping across the crumbling city walls and turning the rainy night into a green inferno. In the light of the flames, a tattered flag became visible atop the wall. Rhaegar’s eyes narrowed as he recognized it—a dragon with wings spread wide like those of an eagle, its head tilted as if poised to take flight.

As the dragonfire blazed past, the flag wavered and fell.

Suddenly, several hunched figures emerged from the shadows. They were clad in rags, with silver roots of hair visible beneath their tattered hoods. Their movements were strange, a mix of hunching and stooping.

Rhaegar stared in disbelief, his voice tinged with shock. "The House of Aurion?"

...

Across the Narrow Sea, in Pentos, the night was dark, the sky adorned with scattered stars. Autumn had arrived, bringing with it a chill that permeated the air. The cold night wind blew, causing the bonfires on the sea to flicker unsteadily.

Whoo-hoo-hoo!

A fleet bearing the emblem of a golden balance on its masts was returning. The once-proud flag now hung in tatters, a clear sign of a defeated army.

"Speed up! We're almost at the harbor!"

A commander with gray, curly hair shouted, his voice trembling with tears of excitement. His eyes reflected a mix of relief and desperation—no one could truly understand the fear that gripped him, knowing the Lord of Light was watching. The ugly brownish-mud dragon had incinerated Braavos' purple fleet, leaving the Bay of Crabs filled with wailing and burning corpses.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

The commander's voice cracked as he urged the crew on, his entire body shaking with fear.

Whoosh!

Just then, a gust of cold night wind swept through, extinguishing the torches on the warship. The commander's spirit tensed, and he slowly lifted his head, his movements stiff with dread.

A pair of amber pupils glared coldly from above.

"Roar!"

The cobalt blue dragonfire ignited, dispelling the darkness that loomed overhead. Tessarion's eyes were icy and merciless, his wings beating powerfully as he hovered in the air.

"Dracarys!"

The boy's command rang out, piercing the still night.

"Roar!"

Tessarion wasted no time, unleashing a torrent of dragonfire.

"Ahhh!"

The commander was caught in the blast, his head and face engulfed in flames. He screamed in agony, covering his burning head, but within seconds, his body went rigid and he fell silent.

The other sailors stood frozen in place, paralyzed with fear, awaiting their inevitable end as the dragon circled above, ready to bring death.

Chapter 599: Filthy Bloodline

The Smoking Sea, a place where lost things linger.

The sky was dim, and the atmosphere hung heavy with an eerie stillness. Torrential rain stirred up a thick mist, while strange fish leaped from the ruins only to plummet back into the murky waters below.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal loomed in the ruins, its massive, dark body like a mountain blocking out half the sky, shielding Rhaegar from the cold rain. Rhaegar stood before the dragon, his eyes cold and focused on the scene ahead.

“Dragon!!”

“It’s a dragon—and a ship...”

A group of ragged, silver-haired figures huddled in the ruins, their eyes wide with fear as they whispered amongst themselves, staring at the black dragon in awe and terror.

In the dim light cast by the dark green dragonfire, Rhaegar could see them clearly. A dozen young men of Valyrian descent, clad in tattered armor and clutching rusty swords. Yet there was something deeply unsettling about them—these men were strange, even deformed. Their faces were mottled with tiny scales, their large purple eyes distorted or split, and their spines twisted unnaturally. Some had protruding teeth, others had upturned noses, and their hands and feet were misshapen.

‘This is a group of... freaks,’ Rhaegar thought, his eyes dark and inscrutable as his expression hardened.

“Roar!”

The Cannibal, soaked by the relentless rain, was in a foul mood, its massive jaws emitting wisps of green fire that crackled in the damp air.

“Dragonlord! The foreign Dragonlord...”

The crowd cried out in panic, their voices trembling as they looked up at the towering figure of Rhaegar, their fear palpable.

Rhaegar stood with a commanding presence, his wet silver hair clinging to his face, embodying the inhuman beauty of House Targaryen. Compared to him, the deformed figures before him were nothing more than a pitiful rabble.

“Which Dragonlord is it?” someone whispered, their gaze fixed on the black dragon towering over its rider, its mouth curled in a cruel smirk, eyes glowing with a sinister green light. The dragon’s cunning gaze seemed to fix on the crowd as if it had found a delectable feast.

Pat!

Rhaegar stepped forward, kicking an ugly, monstrous fish out of his path. His voice rang out, sharp and demanding: “Who will tell me the origin of these Free Cities and your people?”

Silence!

A dead silence fell over the crowd. They lowered their heads, hiding behind one another, wishing they could disappear into the cracks in the ground.

Rhaegar scanned the group, but saw no threat—only fear and faces turned away in shame. They concealed their deformed bodies, desperate to hide the fragility that lay beneath their twisted exteriors.

The Sea Snake led the sailors ashore, surrounding the ruined Free Cities with a practiced precision. “Your Grace,” the Sea Snake muttered, his expression dark as if he were gazing upon something monstrous.

When he first set foot in the Lands of the Long Summer, he had hoped to find descendants of Valyria. But after three months of fruitless searching, he had neither discovered any bloodlines that survived the Doom nor encountered a single noteworthy creature. And now, in this desolate Free City, he was confronted by a grotesque array of... freaks.

“Calm down, Lord Corlys,” Rhaegar said, narrowing his eyes as he pulled out his dragon-finding compass and began his calculations.

The stone pointer spun wildly before settling, pointing to the western edge of the ruined Free Cities, toward a crumbling building near the cliffs by the sea. This indicated that the young blue dragon hadn’t fled but was still hiding somewhere on this land. Consequently, what he sought must also be here.

Tap, tap, tap...

The rain gradually subsided, and a figure emerged from the ruins behind the crowd. He was cloaked in a gray robe riddled with holes, leaning heavily on a cane made of twisted rattan as he limped forward.

“Welcome, distant guests,” the man greeted them, lifting his hood to reveal a rugged, yet handsome face.

“Who are you?” Rhaegar asked, his voice sharp.

The man had long gray hair, dull eyes, and a black robe that barely concealed his bare, crippled foot. He looked less like a Valyrian descendant and more like a warlock from Qarth.

“My name is Xar, Your Magnificence, Dragonlord.” Xar bowed slightly, clutching his cane as if it were a lifeline.

“Xar?” Rhaegar’s eyes flashed with interest. “What is your family name?”

He had seen the banner of House Aurion earlier and was keen to know more.

Xar lowered his head, his voice trembling as he replied, “Dragonlord, there is no need to test us. We are all descendants of the Dragonlord Aurion.” A flush of excitement crossed his stiff face as he added, “May I ask, which house do you hail from?”

His cloudy eyes flicked toward the black dragon, revealing a genuine awe. A true adult dragon—a rarity even before the Doom. To this group, descended from a lineage long thought extinct, the sight was beyond belief.

Rhaegar stood in silence for a moment, his hand tightening around the hilt of Truefyre at his waist. Yet, he didn't strike. Instead, he gave the Sea Snake a subtle nod.

Understanding the cue, the Sea Snake's eyes lit up. He stepped forward and proclaimed, "Before you stands Rhaegar of House Targaryen, King of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, Protector of the Realm, Conqueror of the Narrow Sea, Emperor of Volantis, Breaker of Shackles, Ruin Maker, and Dragon Herder!"

His voice was powerful, echoing through the damp night air.

Xar was stunned. He whispered, "House Targaryen..."

Wasn't that the family of exiled Dragonlords? The very house that had once been the laughingstock of Valyria?

"Roar..."

The Cannibal roared, lowering its massive head as its green eyes glowed with a murderous intent.

Rhaegar stood firm before the black dragon and spoke in a deep, commanding voice, "I have come seeking an ancient Valyrian treasure, one that can heal my father's damaged spirit. Do you know of such a thing?"

...

Late at night, the rain had finally stopped, leaving a heavy stillness in the air. Two tall figures wandered through an abandoned, crumbling palace, their footsteps echoing softly off the decaying walls.

Rhaegar stepped over the rotting bricks and stones, his eyes filled with doubt. "You said this was Tyria, the place where the Soul Restoring Orchid grows?"

Tyria, an ancient Free City, was well-documented in various Dragonlord texts. It had once been one of the central Free Cities of Valyria before its fall.

Grey Hair Shire, ever humble, answered Rhaegar's questions with unwavering deference. "Yes, as you said, Tyria was destroyed long ago after the Doom, leaving no trace of its former glory."

It was late at night, and the rain had stopped. Two tall figures walked through an abandoned, crumbling palace.

Rhaegar stepped over the decaying bricks and stones, his eyes full of doubt. "You said this was Tyria, where the Soul Restoring Orchid grows?"

Tyria was clearly recorded in various Dragonlord books as an ancient Free City, one of the more central Free Cities of ancient Valyria.

Grey-haired Xar, always humble, answered all questions. "As you said, Tyria was destroyed long ago after the Doom, and there is no trace of its former glory."

Then, he volunteered, "You mentioned you came from the Lands of the Long Summer. There should be another Oros ruin on the other side of the Smoking Sea. My ancestors have been there before. If the fleet does not choose to cross the Smoking Sea, but instead searches for land masses in parallel, it may just happen to come across that ruin."

Rhaegar's eyes flicked as he asked, "Is your ancestor really the Dragonlord Aurion, the survivor who proclaimed himself the Emperor of Old Valyria in Qohor?"

"He did not proclaim himself. At that time, my ancestor was a great man who restored the glory of Old Valyria," Xar immediately retorted, not noticing his footing and almost tripping over a rock.

Rhaegar glanced at him but said nothing. Realizing he had become too emotional, Xar quickly changed his tone. "Of course, no one could have imagined that a fellow Targaryen could take root in the West. Not only did he unify the First Men, the Andals, and the Rhoynar, but he also brought both sides of the Narrow Sea and Volantis back into the realm of Old Valyria."

As he spoke, his eyes filled with envy, and his unsteady footsteps became lighter. Such achievements were exactly what the Dragonlord Aurion had pursued. Upholding the will of their ancestors, ancient Valyria was the hope that sustained them in this prison.

Rhaegar thought to himself, testing, "The Dragonlord of Aurion disappeared into the Smoking Sea, so why did he leave a bloodline in Tyria?" This was what concerned him. The Emperor of ancient Valyria, a survivor of the Doom, was one of the few noble Dragonlords who could ride a dragon. The stories he left behind were far more valuable than a ruined Free City.

"Your Grace, that's a long story," said Xar, lowering his eyes and speaking in a low voice. "Our ancestors wanted to return to the Free Cities, but they were attacked by extreme weather and monsters, and ended up in Tyria. Tyria was in ruins at the time, and the fleet led by my ancestor was almost destroyed, so they could only settle here temporarily. But then disaster struck."

At this point, Xar walked slowly to a blackened wall and said, "The dragon died."

"The dragon of the Dragonlord Aurion?" Rhaegar asked.

"Yes, a fierce red dragon," Xar replied, looking pitiable. "It was like the scarlet dragon that the Dragonlord riding with you was riding, but it was even more massive."

Upon hearing this, Rhaegar nodded slightly. The entire fleet was destroyed, and the only dragon was injured and fell. The Dragonlord of Aurion completely lost the means to restore ancient Valyria, and even more so, the ability to leave the Smoking Sea. Without a doubt, he must have been trapped to death in Tyria.

"But... your bodies..." Rhaegar paused, his voice barely audible.

"You mean our deformities." Xar, whose hair had turned gray, was already numb to the question. He replied flatly, "The Smoking Sea is a cursed land. Whether we marry outsiders or follow tradition to maintain our bloodline, the newborns will have problems—more or less."

The entire population of Tyria was less than a hundred. Most were born with deformities, either idiots or cripples. Even the newborns in recent years were monsters with scales and tails, dying soon after birth. It wouldn't be long before Tyria became a dead city.

Rhaegar's brows knitted together, deepening his understanding of the Smoking Sea. 'No wonder there were no natives in the fertile Lands of the Long Summer. If there were, they must have been cut off from their bloodline.'

"Therefore, Your Grace," Grey-haired Xar fell to his knees and pleaded, "for the sake of our shared dragon's blood, please bring my people out of the Smoking Sea and save them from further degradation."

Rhaegar's expression did not change as he refused. "My ship cannot carry so many people."

"Your Grace, I beg you to show mercy." Grey-haired Xar raised his cane and struck the charred Black Wall, earnestly saying, "You will receive the gift of friendship for ensuring the continuation of another ancient Valyrian bloodline."

"Such as?" Rhaegar asked, tilting his head.

"The Soul Restoring Orchid you need is cultivated in a secret chamber." Grey-haired Xar's eyes were full of sincerity, his speech quickening. "There are also some relics left by our ancestors, which will definitely not disappoint you."

"Oh, there's a secret chamber?" Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he looked at the nondescript, broken walls in the ruins.

Boom! Xar made a simple gesture, and a gap cracked open under the charred black wall, revealing an underground entrance.

"Your Grace, all you have to do is enter, and you will get what you want."

Chapter 600: The Horn Sounds, Dragons Dance

Grey-haired Xar looked sincere, as if he were ready to sacrifice everything. Rhaegar, amused, smiled. Despite the seemingly earnest expression, he sensed a hint of deception.

"Your Grace, House Aurion was also married to House Targaryen. The forty Dragonlords are all one family," Xar said, his hoarse voice trying to evoke memories of ancient Valyria.

"Haha," Rhaegar chuckled, then casually asked, "How long has the Thunderstrider been in Tyria?"

"Thunderstrider?" Xar was taken aback, clearly not understanding.

Rhaegar remained calm. "That is the young dragon with the dark blue scales. Daemon has already begun to capture it and has even named it in advance. It earned the name for its courage to travel through thunderstorms."

Xar hesitated, his composure faltering. "Your Grace, that is a wild dragon from outside, belonging to—"

"Belonging to the Targaryens!" Rhaegar interrupted, leaving no room for argument. "That dragon hatched from Dreamfyre's egg, and no one else can claim it."

Xar's smile turned sheepish. "Yes, it belongs to the existing Dragonlords."

It was clear during the conversation that Rhaegar had a specific objective and hadn't arrived in Tyria by chance.

"Have you seen any dragons other than Thunderstrider?" Rhaegar asked, his eyes flashing with curiosity.

"No, absolutely not," Xar replied, waving his hands emphatically. "The Smoking Sea is simply not suitable for dragons. Even finding food is a challenge."

"Are you sure?" Rhaegar's face grew cold as he tossed a sea chart onto the ground.

Xar picked up the map, and as he examined it, cold sweat began to run down his face. The map depicted a simple route leading to a ruin in the Smoking Sea, with a note from House Belaerys.

A red line arced from that ruin to another—Tyria. The two ruins were not far apart, separated by the vast Smoking Sea. To the south lay a large landmass, marked with an undersea volcano and a large red cross.

Rhaegar drew Truefyre from his waist and said coldly, "The Smoking Sea is vast, and a wild dragon roams freely. I don't believe you haven't seen it."

The Lands of the Long Summer are shrouded in fog, an undiscovered landmass until recently. Apart from barren islands, Tyria is the only place to stay. The strange fish that fall with storms provide natural sustenance, and the young dragon Thunderstrider, after crossing the Smoking Sea, became active near Tyria. The former wild dragon of the Smoking Sea, Morghul, had survived there for decades and likely wandered around Tyria as well.

"Your Grace, I am not lying," Xar stammered, panic evident in his voice. "Tyria has a harsh climate. During storms, we might hear the occasional dragon roar, but no wild dragons appear."

"You're lying!" Rhaegar's eyes narrowed as he raised his sword to Xar's neck. The cold Valyrian steel pressed against Xar's throat, the dark blade flashing in the light.

Xar froze, stammering, "Don't kill me! There are relics of our ancestors in the crypts. You can take them all."

"Your bloodline is loathed by the dragons," Rhaegar said confidently, boldly speculating. "You tried to tame the dragons, but you were not recognized and were burned by Dragonfire."

He glanced around at the ruined Free City under the night sky. The scorched earth reeked of burning corpses, remnants of the Doom. The cracked, dried ground blended into the environment, while the buildings surrounding the palace were newly ruined, still covered in ash. Even after the rain, the lingering smell of sulfur hung in the air, a scent that Xar, with little contact with dragons, would struggle to distinguish.

To Rhaegar, who had been riding dragons since childhood, the situation was as obvious as a girl standing naked before him. Xar, with his gray hair, stood frozen, sweating nervously. The silver-black wild dragon had indeed appeared in Tyria. Its lair was just outside the Free Cities, but no one had ever been able to tame it. Anyone who dared approach was burned to ash. Years ago, the wild dragon had vanished without a trace, and everyone assumed it had perished somewhere in the Smoking Sea.

"Your Grace..." Xar's voice trembled, his eyes widening in fear.

Pop! Truefyre pierced his throat, the black blade emerging from the back of his neck.

"Ho ho~~" Xar gasped, blood spurting from his eyes as he clutched the wound, his cry hoarse with disbelief.

Rhaegar's expression remained calm as he whispered, "The descendants of a Dragonlord who seek to tame dragons can not be trusted."

With that, he pulled Truefyre free, the blade grating against bone as it slid out. Xar's body, still warm, collapsed with a thud into the wet, muddy ground. Rhaegar lifted the hem of his cloak and wiped the bloodstains from the blade, then looked down at the hole in the ground. "They've been trying to lure me down there. What kind of danger lies hidden?"

One thing was certain: the Soul Restoring Orchid truly existed. It was the special plant Xar had mentioned first. 'I still need to learn more,' Rhaegar thought, not trusting the half-truths he'd been told. He silently raised his head.

Hoo! The dark clouds above stirred, a fierce wind tearing through the pitch-black sky, revealing a pair of glowing green eyes. The Cannibal flapped its massive wings, slowly descending from the clouds.

Boom! The ruined palace was obliterated, reduced to rubble beneath the dragon's feet. Rhaegar raised his hand to shield his face from the flying debris.

"Roar..." The Cannibal stretched its neck, sniffing cautiously at the underground entrance, letting out a low growl of warning.

...

Ruins of the Free Cities.

In the mountains to the west. The ground was barren, scorched earth, with mountains rising one after another, all devoid of vegetation. At the foot of a collapsed, dormant volcano, Dragonfire flared up from a nest.

"Roar..." The young blue dragon floundered within its nest, its shiny scales scraping against the stone walls in an attempt to mitigate the damage caused by the dark green Dragonfire. Inside the shadowy nest, skeletal remains could be faintly seen, along with fossilized dragon eggs and various rare minerals in the corners.

Caraxes, with its long, snake-like neck, hissed as it sniffed the scent of the young dragon. "Roar!" Caraxes leaped nimbly off the side of the volcano, landing with a thud in front of the nest at the mountain's base.

Daemon swayed slightly, his expression grave. "Catch it. Don't hold back."

"Roar!" A dark shadow streaked across the night sky, its red pupils scanning below to locate a familiar scent. Daemon glanced at it but paid no attention. His nephew and the Sea Snake were preoccupied with the locals—one searching for the Soul Restoring Orchid to cure his brother, and the other trading supplies for the remnants found in the ruins. Daemon, however, had taken on the task of capturing the young dragon.

...

The ruined palace.

Tick-tock, tick-tock...

Rhaegar descended the stairs and entered the silent underground chamber. The air was cold and damp, carrying a faint stench of decay.

Hum...

Truefyre burned fiercely in his hand, dispelling the darkness and casting flickering light across the stone walls. Rhaegar felt a slight dizziness but pressed on, carefully navigating the dripping, uneven floor.

Click!

Rhaegar misstepped, his foot striking a loose piece of masonry. In an instant, wall lamps flared to life, one after the other, casting a dim halo of light around the chamber.

Boom!

Before he could react, the trapdoor behind him slammed shut with a thunderous crash.

"Roar..."

Rhaegar spun around, hearing the distant growl of the Cannibal. But the entrance was sealed tight, and the mechanism hidden from view. He smiled faintly. "Trying to trap me here to die, are you?" he thought. No wonder Xar had been so eager to lure him into the underground palace—this was the plan all along.

But even if he was trapped, how did they expect Daemon and the Sea Snake to handle the situation? Did they truly believe the Cannibal would obey a group of masterless, bastard Dragonlords?

"A ridiculous trick," Rhaegar muttered, shaking his head. He didn't think much of this desperate ploy; he knew the other side understood that he wouldn't let them escape. Their desperation had driven them to such futile measures.

Now fully illuminated, the underground palace stretched out before him. His gaze was drawn to several halos of light in the center of the chamber, brightening the otherwise dark space. As he approached, his eyes widened.

In the middle of the vast chamber, a deep pit had been dug. Inside lay massive black dragonbones, its size reminiscent of a small mountain range. Rhaegar moved closer, inspecting the remains. The dragonbones stretched sixty meters long—clearly a dragon in its prime.

"It seems that Dragonlord Aurion was indeed a force to be reckoned with," Rhaegar mused, recognizing the significance of the find. A dragon of this size would have had the power to restore ancient Valyria, but tragically, its master had chosen the wrong path and perished as a result.

The sight of the skeleton was sobering. One wing had been almost completely crushed, the thickest vertebrae were snapped, and the dragon's already menacing skull was riddled with cracks, its horn crown broken off. These injuries, by any account, were fatal.

"It's hard to imagine what kind of monster could inflict such wounds," Rhaegar whispered, reaching out to touch the bones. A sense of awe filled him. Despite its grievous injuries, this red dragon had managed to bring Dragonlord Aurion to Tyria—a testament to its fierce nature. What a pity it had met such a fate.

Unable to trigger the hidden mysteries he hoped for, Rhaegar reluctantly withdrew his hand. As he surveyed the area around the dragon skeleton, he noticed scattered remains—humanoid bones, fish bones... and several deformed dragon bones, resembling wingless, clawless Firewyrms.

In the rotting soil, amid these remains, several bright and beautiful orchids bloomed.

"Soul Restoring Orchids!" Rhaegar exclaimed, jumping into the pit to quickly gather the precious plants. There were five of them, each carefully placed in a sandalwood box.

Boom!

Suddenly, the ground beneath him trembled. Rhaegar's expression shifted as he swiftly rolled out of the pit. The soil churned violently, releasing a hot blast of air.

Boom!

A crack tore through the floor of the underground palace, and a dazzling red glow shot out. Even from a distance, Rhaegar could see the bubbling underground lava.

"Is this part of the palace's design?" he wondered aloud, recognizing the intricate traps woven into Tyria's very core—a hallmark of the Free Cities Empire.

"Sssssss..."

A hissing sound echoed above the lava as an ugly Firewurm emerged, its thick, serpentine body slithering up from the molten depths. The creature, drawn to the heat, locked its gaze on Rhaegar, its murderous intent unmistakable.

"Hisssss!" The Firewurm's flames, though not as hot as Dragonfire, were just as deadly. The smoke and corrosive fumes that accompanied them were perfect for killing humans.

Gulp~

Rhaegar rolled to his feet, his gaze immediately drawn to the boiling underground lava. Amidst the magma stood a circular altar made of black Dragonstone, with a statue of a dragon on each side. His eyes locked onto a massive horn at the center of the altar—completely black, inlaid with red rubies, and shimmering with a metallic luster. The surface was engraved with tiny, densely packed characters.

"The Dragon's Horn!" Rhaegar's eyes widened, his throat dry and hoarse.

"Sssss..." The Firewurm thrust its grotesque head forward, roaring as it climbed toward him. Seeing that Rhaegar wasn't moving, it spat another jet of flame in his direction.

Rhaegar glanced sideways at the attack, rolling out of its path just in time. As he did, he mentally reached out to the Cannibal outside.

"Sssss..." The Firewurm, relentless, roared like a mad beast, its mouth wide open as it unleashed another burst of flames. This brainless creature seemed driven purely by instinct.

"Firewyrms... they're just like maggots in the gutter, utterly disgusting," Rhaegar muttered as he dodged the creature's attacks, his eyes frequently darting toward the ancient horn on the altar. The underground lava was rising steadily, nearly engulfing the Dragonstone altar. From the cracked rocks, more Firewyrms could be heard roaring in the distance.

'No wonder the Dragonhorn was never taken. It was guarded by a nest of Firewyrms,' Rhaegar thought, clenching his teeth. The moment he saw the Dragonhorn, he understood the tragic fate of Dragonlord Aurion. The ancient Dragonlord must have known about the Dragonhorn in Tyria and sought to claim it, only to meet a terrible end, dooming his descendants.

"The Dragonhorn is mine!" Rhaegar's eyes flashed with murderous intent as he plotted how to claim the treasure.

"Sssss..." The Firewyrms lunged at him, spitting out a glob of slime from its segmented mouthparts, aiming to swallow him whole. Rhaegar, quick on his feet, retreated from the edge of the pit, narrowly avoiding the creature's attack. As he jumped, he caught sight of the dragon's corpse, tilting precariously over the edge of the pit.

"That's it!" Rhaegar's eyes lit up. He scrambled onto the Dragonbone, quickly cutting a length of the saddle rope, and wrapped it around his arm. Without hesitation, he leaped.

"Sssss.."

Rhaegar's eyes snapped open as the sound of the Firewyrms' hiss filled the air. He tore off the space necklace around his neck, quickly wrapping it around his left wrist. With a wave of his hand, he moved within a foot of the dragon horn.

Hum—

His spirit surged from him, locking onto the dragon horn—thick as two men's arms—and instantly transporting it into his bag.

"Sizzling..."

Just as he secured the horn, a Firewyrms lunged from the side, its maw wide open, ready to bite. Rhaegar's face contorted in shock, his mind going blank for a split second.

Instinct took over. The spear with a Valyrian steel tip, "Dawn," materialized in his left hand, and he thrust it into the Firewyrms' mouth, its saliva hissing on the weapon's surface.

"Get out of my way!" Rhaegar roared, pouring all his strength into the attack.

Pop!

The spear pierced through the Firewyrms' upper jaw, the cold, gleaming tip breaking through its scaly hide. Rhaegar released the spear, using its momentum to swing upwards, gripping the spearhead and yanking it out in a sharp, fluid motion.

Sizzling—

Hot blood sprayed as the Blackfyre-imbued spear drove through the Firewyrms' head. The creature died instantly, its lifeless body plummeting into the lava below.

Before Rhaegar could catch his breath, the remaining Firewyrms in the underground palace attacked again, their numbers overwhelming. It was a close call.

"Roar!"

The entire underground palace shook violently as green flames melted the stone ceiling. A black dragon's claw tore through the ceiling, crashing down.

Pop!

One of the Firewyrms, unable to dodge in time, was crushed to a pulp by the dragon's mighty claw. The palace continued to tremble, the roaring growing more deafening as the structure began to collapse.

Roar!

The hideous head of the Cannibal smashed through the underground palace, its glowing green pupils locking onto Rhaegar. With a powerful bite, it clamped onto the dragon's backbone, lifting the saddle high into the air.

Rhaegar clutched the reins, the Cannibal soaring into the sky like a kite caught in a fierce wind.

Rumble!

The underground palace collapsed completely, the black dragon's head rising from the rubble, scattering dust and debris. It shook its massive neck, and the saddle in its jaws shifted, allowing Rhaegar to land on the flat expanse of the dragon's back, his body shielded by his "Bronze" rune scales.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal roared triumphantly into the sky, carrying its rider higher and higher, leaving the destruction of the underground palace far below.