

G.O Thrones 611

Chapter 611: Baelon and Silverwing

The meeting was drawing to a close. The advisers filed out, each lost in their own thoughts.

"Lord Corlys," Rhaegar called out, smiling at the striding figure at the front of the line.

The Sea Snake paused, puzzled. "Yes, Your Grace?"

"Let's talk for a moment. It's about the Stepstones." Rhaegar waved his hand, signaling for the other advisers to leave them.

Sea Snake frowned but followed dutifully. In no time, they came to a halt around the corner. Rhaegar's smile faded, and he got straight to the point. "Peace reigns in the Seven Kingdoms, but not in Essos and Sothoryos, where bandits and pirates are everywhere."

"Trees attract wind. It's a natural phenomenon," Sea Snake replied, drawing on his vast experience with political struggles. "When you're on the edge of the Storm, you have to be prepared at all times."

The world had changed beyond recognition. Westeros was united, with the Seven Kingdoms now pledging allegiance to House Targaryen. House Targaryen also controlled the Narrow Sea coast and the Forest of Qohor in the heart of Essos. Yet, the kingdom's power made it a target.

The Free Cities, led by Braavos, had formed an alliance, slandering House Targaryen and inciting the people of Essos to rise against the ancient Valyrian Dragonlords who once enslaved them. Meanwhile, the continent of Sothoryos remained a barbaric land where the remnants of the Triarchy had rebuilt the Three Cities Alliance. If left unchecked, they too could become a serious threat.

Rhaegar saw the entire picture clearly and didn't hesitate to point out the dangers. "Aegon wrote to me that a group of pirates has risen in the Stepstones, likely mercenaries from the remnants of the Triarchy."

The Triarchy had been torn apart by internal strife, with the powerful and wealthy at odds with the slave owners and mercenaries. The sellswords, uninterested in rebuilding cities that weren't theirs, had plundered ships and wealth before fleeing to the Stepstones, where they caused trouble. Their location was advantageous, stuck between the Narrow Sea and the only passage to Sothoryos, ensuring they could always find enough to sustain themselves.

Rhaegar's voice hardened. "I won't tolerate anyone acting recklessly in my territory. Their presence has seriously affected maritime trade."

"I want you to command the fleet of House Velaryon and regularly clear them out."

The Sea Snake regained his composure. "No problem, Your Grace."

He would send Addam to deal with the threat and prove to the world that House Velaryon was still formidable. That little red Kraken was nothing but a flash in the pan.

Rhaegar smiled slightly and offered his support. "Call Daeron. His dragon is ready for battle."

"Yes, Your Grace." The Sea Snake allowed himself a smile at the mention of 'bold Daeron' and gladly accepted the king's goodwill.

After losing his son and daughter, House Velaryon had fallen from power. But thanks to his granddaughter Rhaena and Daeron, the Cupbearer, the two young dragonriders had kept the family's name alive. Velaryon had proved it was still relevant to the kingdom.

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Midday had passed.

In the Dragonpit, sunlight streamed through the drawbridge, casting diamond-shaped slivers of light across the magnificent hall. The Dragonkeepers, serious-faced and disciplined, stood in two rows, each holding a bamboo staff.

Baelon stood at the center, his head held high with pride. Behind him, a boy and a girl stood on either side, both with silver hair and purple eyes. Their fair, innocent faces suggested they were no more than three or four years old.

A low rumble echoed through the hall. As the Dragonkeepers began their hoarse chanting, a dull thud resonated from one of the dragon pits. The pit itself was dark and gloomy, with the vague outline of something massive looming indistinctly within.

Baelon stared straight ahead, holding his breath.

Boom.

The ground trembled slightly, like the beat of a heavy drum.

"It's here." Baelon's body tensed as he saw the slender, horned crown emerge from the shadows, reminiscent of his mother's dragon, Syrax. A large, powerful wing extended, gripping the Dragonstone floor.

"Brother..." The girl's voice trembled as tears welled in her eyes. She clung to the boy next to her, sobbing. The boy's small mouth quivered, and he couldn't hold back any longer. The next moment, the siblings, who looked nearly identical, broke down, hugging each other and crying hoarsely.

Baelon, at this moment:...

"Roar..." The dragon, halfway emerged, paused suspiciously as if sensing the children's distress.

"It's okay, it's okay, Daddy's here!" Aegon suddenly appeared, scooping up the two precious children in his arms.

"Woohoo..." The siblings wept, burying their faces in their father's chest as they wiped away their tears.

Baelon, stunned and frustrated, accused, "Uncle, you're disturbing me."

The three siblings were supposed to see dragons, and the one capable enough would tame it. But now...

"Tough luck, eldest nephew," Aegon said, his face thick with an almost comical smugness. "I can't just let them cry, can I?"

"You..." Baelon was momentarily speechless, angered by his uncle's brazenness.

While the uncle and nephew exchanged words, Rhaenyra approached gracefully, interrupting. "Pay no attention to him. Idiots will drag your intelligence down to their level." She had just dismounted from her dragon and was dressed in a black, scale-like dragon-riding suit. Her silver braids tied back, she exuded a heroic air of competence.

"Fine," Baelon muttered, lowering his head. Looking at his childish, giggling uncle, he added helplessly, "You're right. He'll still outmaneuver me with his tricks."

Rhaenyra smiled. "Silverwing is a good choice. Have you made up your mind?"

Baelon was momentarily speechless.

"Roar!" The long-awaited Silverwing finally emerged from the dragon pit, its two pairs of backward-extending horns towering high. The dragon let out an annoyed roar at the crowd.

Covered in emerald green scales, with two sturdy silver-gray wing membranes, Silverwing's fearsome head tilted upwards like a mountain. The dragon bore the marks of many battles—dents on its neck and a broken horn—but despite the scars, its silver-gray wings remained in perfect condition, exuding a sense of majestic, ruined beauty.

Baelon was mesmerized, struggling to find the words to refuse. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been lured by his good uncle Aegon to tame the dragon.

"I have to go. I can't stay until the end of the banquet," Aegon said with a grin. He kissed the pair of children in his arms and beamed, "Jaehaerys, Jaehaera, say goodbye to everyone."

"Bye..." The two little ones obediently waved their hands as they nestled in their father's arms.

"Good boy, you're so clever." Aegon, whether anyone responded or not, joyfully carried his children out of the hall.

Rhaenyra sighed, placing a hand on her forehead, too weary to pay her half-brother any more attention. He let the Stepstones go unmanaged, spending his days indulging in pleasures with his wife and children.

The children bore the Targaryen name, born of Aegon and his concubine Daena. Though Rhaegar refused to acknowledge Daena's illegitimate dragonlord surname, it didn't change the fact that the two children were half Targaryen and half Aethyrys.

It was an unconventional marriage that had brought fresh blood into the family.

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Red Keep, Council Hall.

Rhaenyra, still clad in her dragon rider's attire, arrived with Baelon.

Creak.

The door swung open from the inside, and Tyland stepped out carefully, his meticulously combed golden hair gleaming in the light. He maintained a polite smile but didn't forget to turn back and remind, "Your Grace, I will inform Prince Aegon that he should accompany me to Slaver's Bay."

"Lord Tyland?" Baelon greeted, curious. "What are you doing in Slaver's Bay?"

Tyland then noticed the Queen and the Heir Prince. He hurriedly bowed, smiling sheepishly.

"Nothing, just... fighting crime."

"I see," Baelon replied, deciding not to press further. He then added, "When you return to Volantis, give Maekar my regards."

Baelon's younger brother was far away overseas, and Tyland rarely had the chance to see him.

Tyland's expression suddenly grew serious. "I will make sure he gets the message."

With that, Tyland departed, a relieved look on his face. After the morning meeting, overseas advisers like him and Otto would have to take the ship back, a far more comfortable journey than remaining in King's Landing.

"Stop staring; your father is getting anxious," Rhaenyra said, gently ruffling her eldest son's hair. She suddenly realized he had grown to chest height. As a teen, he was even sturdier than Rhaegar had been at the same age, a testament to his exceptional talent.

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Entering the council hall, Rhaenyra's eyes were drawn to the striking red carpet from Lys that covered much of the room.

"Mother!" A little girl with silver braids sat on the carpet, dropping her toy in surprise.

A soft thud followed as a white-haired child tumbled onto the carpet.

"Owww!"

The baby, just one year old and still teething, had fallen and rolled over, her wide eyes filled with confusion.

"Visenya, what are you doing?" Rhaenyra's eyelids twitched as she quickly scooped up the dazed baby, brushing the dust from her tiny white clothes.

Rhaegar, seated behind his desk, couldn't help but shake his head at the scene. His third daughter had inherited Rhaenyra's delicate beauty but, unexpectedly, had also inherited—and perhaps even surpassed—her mother's spirited personality. She was a bit too rough around the edges.

Visenya got up, patted the dust off her hands, and grinned. "Aegor is so sturdy, and he already knows how to call me sister."

She then reached for the 'toy' her brother had dropped and expertly cradled him in her arms.

"Ooh..." Little Aegor's eyes widened as he struggled weakly.

“Oww!” Visenya opened her mouth wide and playfully nibbled on her brother’s tender cheek, enjoying the sensation of her teeth grazing his soft skin. She was careful not to go too far, leaving his face only reddened, with no lasting marks.

Rhaenyra couldn’t bear to watch any longer. She guided her youngest daughter to a corner and glared at Rhaegar. “You’re too indulgent with her.”

“Ahem...” Rhaegar coughed to hide his embarrassment and joked, “That’s not so bad. When Aegor grows up, he’ll definitely respect his sister.”

“That’s not funny. Aegor will be terrified.”

Rhaenyra crossed her arms, looking ready to reprimand him. Rhaegar’s smile faded slightly under her gaze.

"You’re not helping. A three-year-old and a one-year-old—they won’t understand reason."

“I don’t want to deal with you,” Rhaenyra muttered, rolling her eyes, but then she broke into a smile. She moved closer, opened her arms, and hugged her brother, whom she hadn’t seen in a while.

Rhaegar, full of questions, couldn’t help but ask, “Are we done?”

“Yes, Qohor has all the supplies it needs,” Rhaenyra replied, now at ease. She sat sideways on his lap, wrapped an arm around his neck, and beamed. “Baelon contacted Silverwing. The female dragon is very fierce.”

Chapter 612: Dragonclaw — A Gift of Valyrian Steel

As he spoke, the smile on his handsome face mirrored that of his daughter, Visenya. But mother and daughter were practically identical.

Rhaegar sat up straight and, unexpectedly, asked, "Baelon, have you considered taming a dragon?"

His eldest son had been resolute, repeatedly refusing to claim the Grey Ghost over the years. Could it be that he could no longer resist the allure of dragon riding?

"No, Father," Baelon replied, scratching his head with embarrassment. He muttered, "I just wanted to try. But Silverwing doesn't seem right for me."

Silverwing was a magnificent and formidable dragon, its gentle nature making it ideal for younger siblings. But Baelon couldn’t admit that his interest had been sparked by his mischievous uncle Aegon. It was too embarrassing to admit he’d been tricked by a fool!

Rhaegar had anticipated this and sighed. "If you have the ability, you should have tamed a dragon by now."

The other children had already become admired dragon riders, their names celebrated throughout the realm. In contrast, Baelon, the eldest, remained dragonless. Nobles across the kingdom had begun to gossip behind closed doors about a weak heir to the throne—a serious concern.

"I’d still like to wait a bit longer," Baelon said, lowering his head and pleading softly, "Maybe not for much longer."

Rhaegar rubbed his brow and said, "Then you must decide soon. Silverwing is in the Dragonpit, Iragaxys is on Dragonstone, and Vhagar and Seasmoke are roaming about, all in foul moods."

There were only four unclaimed dragons left. With the Targaryen family flourishing and its descendants growing stronger, if Baelon didn't act quickly, he would inevitably be surpassed.

"I will, Father," Baelon said, nodding earnestly. He felt a sense of relief, as if he had been forgiven. Deep down, he knew that the day he would ride a dragon was approaching. The feeling grew stronger every day, gnawing at him like a persistent itch, leaving him a bit uneasy.

Seeing his eldest son, who now looked like a child who had made a mistake, Rhaegar didn't want to disturb his thoughts further. The Targaryens were a blend of madness and greatness, and their line produced geniuses who often strayed from the conventional path. Rhaegar himself had, at the age of six, dared to tame the Cannibal, a fearsome dracooner. His eldest son shared that bloodline, and it wasn't cowardice that held him back from taming a dragon.

"Alright, let's discuss some matters of governance," Rhaegar said, patting Rhaenyra's slender waist, signaling that the children were still present.

Rhaenyra smirked, stood up, and went to scold Visenya, who was using her brother as a cushion while playing. Poor Aegor, sitting obediently on the ground.

With the children occupied, the room cleared, and Rhaegar and Baelon were left alone. Rhaegar pulled out two letters and placed them on the table.

"What is this?" Baelon asked as he approached.

"Government affairs—though I prefer to call them troubles." Rhaegar held up three fingers, then pushed the envelopes forward, his expression serious. "You're not young anymore, Baelon. It's time you started sharing the burden."

"Yes!" Baelon responded eagerly, ready for the challenge.

"There are three matters. You can choose any one." Rhaegar's gaze was intense as he pointed to the first envelope, revealing his trump card. "The Red Kraken of the Iron Islands—a ruthless Ironborn who burns, kills, and plunders. Can you handle it?"

Baelon was taken aback. "A Greyjoy?"

"That's right." Rhaegar's face remained impassive as he waited for his eldest son's reply.

Baelon frowned, lowering his head in thought. The Red Kraken's fearsome reputation had spread far and wide, commanding thousands of Ironborn. Baelon had no dragon, no army. It was a battle he couldn't hope to win.

"Forget it. Let's move on." Rhaegar didn't push him, picking up the second letter. "The Wyvern eggs on Dragonstone have hatched again, and the Wyverns from the previous brood are now roaming free, causing havoc in the Crownlands, Gulltown, and the Stormlands."

"I..." Baelon's forehead was damp with sweat. He couldn't bring himself to accept the task. Wyverns were wild beasts with no intelligence. After hatching in large numbers, they terrorized the people near Dragonstone, preying on herds. If this problem had been given to his younger siblings—Aemon, Maekar, or even Dany—they could have dealt with it, each with their own dragon, more formidable than any Wyvern.

But Baelon...

His disappointment was palpable as he muttered, "I can't."

Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged as he reached for the third letter.

"Rhaegar!" Rhaenyra's eyes were full of concern, and she shook her head at him. Their eldest son had no dragon, and they had worked hard to raise him to be cheerful and generous. If pushed too hard, he might become another cruel Maegor.

Rhaegar met her gaze briefly before turning back to Baelon. "Keep your head up. There's a third task."

Rhaenyra's brows knitted as she started to protest.

"I said there's a third task!" Rhaegar's voice grew louder, cutting off Rhaenyra's words and startling Baelon, who had been staring at the ground in silence.

Summoning his courage, Baelon gritted his teeth. "The third task—I'll do it, no matter what."

Even if it was difficult, even if it required a dragon, he would find a way. At worst, he'd seek out Silverwing and try to earn the dragon's approval. He had to prove to his father—and to the world—that he was not a coward.

Rhaegar chuckled. "Old Tully has died, and his grandson Elmo Tully is set to inherit Riverrun. The royal family needs a representative to attend the funeral."

"Huh?" Baelon's eyes widened in surprise. He had been prepared to make a great sacrifice, perhaps even risk being burned while taming a dragon.

"Silly boy, it's not as complicated as you think," Rhaegar said, leaning back casually. "But it's not without its challenges either."

"What should I do?" Baelon asked, taking the task seriously.

Rhaegar looked off into the distance, a touch of nostalgia in his eyes, before changing the subject. "Do you remember the Song of Ice and Fire I told you about?"

"Of course." Baelon nodded. He had never forgotten such an important legacy.

"In the prophecy, it says that darkness and winter will come to the North." Rhaegar tapped his knuckles on the table, a hint of doubt in his voice. "After ten years of long summer, does that mean the next winter will be even more severe?"

To be honest, he had recently had a nightmare—one where winter had come, and darkness had swallowed the land. Upon waking, he consulted Varys and the Red Priestess, and both had given the same cryptic warning: “When the water is full, it overflows; when it overflows, it must empty.”

House Targaryen had reached unprecedented heights, and the kingdom was more prosperous than ever. But all signs pointed to a coming test of fire and ice—one that would determine whether the Targaryens and Westeros could survive together.

Baelon held his breath, listening intently.

Knock, knock.

Rhaegar stopped tapping his knuckles and made his decision. “Forget the conqueror’s prophecy. Our house has always faced trials and tribulations.”

The Free Cities of Essos, the remnants of the Triarchy—these were only the enemies they could see. Many more vultures were circling, eager to feast on the dragon’s remains. This was something they had to prevent at all costs.

Meeting his eldest son’s expectant gaze, Rhaegar pushed an envelope forward, his voice grave. “The Seven Kingdoms are too divided, and many nobles are duplicitous towards the royal family.”

“If disaster strikes, how will the Targaryens hold Westeros together?”

“Should I win over Lord Elmo Tully?” Baelon touched the envelope, feeling a heavy sense of responsibility wash over him.

“No,” Rhaegar replied, shaking his head seriously. “Not just the Tullys. You must also win over the powerful nobles of the Riverlands, ensuring their true loyalty to the crown—and to you.”

Baelon was momentarily stunned. “But they’ve always been loyal to the royal family. Your influence even exceeds that of House Tully.”

Before his father had inherited the Iron Throne, his base of support had been in the Crownlands, the Vale, and the Riverlands. The old Lord Tully had been obedient, and the Riverlands’ nobles had played a major role in the campaigns against the Stepstones and the Triarchy. To this day, many widows and orphans remained in the Riverlands because of those wars.

“Influence isn’t the same as control,” Rhaegar said, his kind expression turning cold. “The royal family must have control over the unstable elements.”

Rhaegar had sought the counsel of Maesters, traveled to the East and West, and observed different systems of governance. He had learned that while the feudal system allowed for stable rule, it also made it easy for a monarch to be sidelined. In contrast, the more progressive parliamentary and federal systems of Essos centralized power but were plagued by instability and frequent regime changes.

“We are descendants of Valyria, outsiders in Westeros,” Rhaegar said, thinking deeply. “This means the best option for the Targaryens is to integrate rather than disrupt the existing system.”

Remaining rational, Rhaegar continued, “There are nobles in every kingdom who do not fully respect the king’s commands. Your task in the Riverlands is to rally those loyal to the crown and suppress the neutral and wavering factions.”

“That will provoke a backlash from the nobles,” Baelon said, understanding the dangerous nature of the task. Nobles, when threatened, would fight back with all their might.

“Don’t worry,” Rhaegar reassured him. “With the royal family’s influence over the Riverlands, it won’t be difficult to eliminate dissent. The Tullys, Strongs, and Blackwoods are all loyal and powerful. With them leading, neither the crown nor the nobility will falter.”

“Riverlands, Vale...” Baelon muttered, suddenly thinking of his sisters Dany and Anna, who had returned to the Vale. Lady Jeyne was rumored to be hosting a grand event in Gulltown, and the sisters had been summoned.

“You’re thinking of something?” Rhaegar asked, smiling slightly at the mention of the Vale. “The Riverlands and the Vale are perfect places to strengthen central authority. In time, we’ll focus on the Reach and Stormlands as well.”

The most challenging regions would be the North, the Westerlands, and Dorne. If Baelon and Jeyne succeeded, the Reach and Stormlands would be manageable. As for the remaining three, Rhaegar wouldn’t hesitate to use dragons as a deterrent.

In short, under Rhaegar’s reign, the nobles of the Seven Kingdoms would all face hardships.

“Yes, I can do it!” Baelon’s enthusiasm surged, and he felt more than ready to take on the task.

Rhaegar released the envelope, and Baelon quickly pulled it toward him. Rising to his feet, Rhaegar said, “Lord Lyonel and his eldest son, Ser Harwin, will accompany you. They’re nobles from the Riverlands and can assist you in every way.”

Then, as he walked out, Rhaegar added, “Follow me. You’ll need to present yourself well when you’re away from home.”

Baelon’s face lit up with joy, and he eagerly followed his father like a shadow.

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They left the house and headed to the King’s chambers. Rhaegar, calm and composed, opened the door to his private quarters. In truth, he rarely stayed here. Most nights, he spent in the Queen’s chambers, which had once been Rhaenyra’s Princess bedroom.

As the door swung open, the sunlight was immediately blocked by heavy curtains. Rhaegar entered, his gaze fixed on a wall near the fireplace.

“Wow!” Baelon’s eyes lit up as he followed his father’s line of sight.

The wall was adorned with intricate carvings and frescoes, but what truly caught his attention was the row of Valyrian steel weapons hanging from top to bottom. Among them were the recast “Dragon’s Claw,” the “Truefyre” with its inlaid flaming red heart, and “Blackfyre,” the symbol of kingship. Beside them hung a spear known as “Dawn.”

Directly above the fireplace, there was an imposing dragon’s horn, completely black and too large to be held by two people. Above the horn, a three-pronged arrow made entirely of Valyrian steel was displayed.

Rhaegar raised his chin slightly and said, “Choose one, my son.”

Baelon’s excitement was palpable as he rushed to the fireplace, carefully examining each Valyrian steel weapon. The Truefyre was dark as night, with star-like patterns glittering on its blade. The Blackfyre, once wielded by the Conqueror, bore the weight of history.

Baelon ran his fingers over each weapon before finally settling on the Dragon’s Claw. It was cold to the touch, with a blade so sharp it could cut a strand of hair. The black dragonbone hilt was carved into claws, gripping the rippling watery blade.

“A symbol of fearless courage,” Baelon murmured, his eyes resolute. With both hands, he lifted the ornate Dragon’s Claw. Turning to his father, he said, “Father, I will take the sword you first chose.”

Chapter 613: The Satisfied and Full Seasmoke

Half a month later...

King’s Landing, Dragon Gate

A white chariot rolled out of the city gates, led by royal knights bearing three red dragon banners. At the rear of the procession, Lyonel rode a tall horse, wiping sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. Close behind, Halwin, his face full of stubble, followed like a hunched-over black bear.

The horses' hooves trampled the roadside grass as they headed toward the Riverlands.

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Red Keep

Rhaegar stood by the window, watching the procession fade into the distance. His eldest son had set off, challenging the nobles of the Riverlands on behalf of the royal family—a display of both personal honor and duty.

"He's a good boy, with a bit of nerve," Rhaegar murmured as he pulled the curtains closed, trying to hide the reluctance in his gaze. Baelon had the courage and sense of duty befitting a heir prince. His fair face, which bore a striking resemblance to Rhaegar's own youth, often earned him extra paternal affection.

'I wonder if Maekar still has nightmares,' Rhaegar thought, his heart stirring with longing for his third son, far away in Volantis. Maekar was a quirky little fellow—mischievous, yet endearing, and sharp-witted when it mattered. Of his nine children, Maekar resembled Rhaegar the most. Even

Baelon, the eldest, and Aemon, the second eldest, who shared Rhaegar's looks, could not match their younger brother's character and approach to life. That was why Maekar had to stay in Volantis.

'I should visit him sometime,' Rhaegar reflected, sighing softly as he turned to face the wall adorned with a sculpted coitus fresco. The fireplace crackled, newly replenished with firewood, casting a warm light over the wall of collectibles. A row of Valyrian steel weapons gleamed—each one a priceless heirloom if taken beyond these walls.

Rhaegar approached and lifted the dragonbinder horn hanging high with one hand. He, too, was preparing to set off—heading to Sothoryos in search of Uragax and the elusive wild dragon.

"A wild dragon that exists only in fishermen's tales is a headache," he mused, stowing the dragon horn. His hand lingered over Truefyre, a sword he had not used in a long time. After a moment of hesitation, he took down his ancestral blade, Blackfyre.

With the Dragon Taming Whip and the Dragon Horn, Truefyre seemed redundant. This journey would take him through Sunspear, and it felt fitting to bring Blackfyre, the symbol of royal power. Unsheathing the sword, Rhaegar smiled wryly. "Consider it a consolation to Aegon the Conqueror."

...

One day and night later...

By afternoon, the rain had passed, and the sky cleared.

Boom!

A massive black creature soared over Shipbreaker Bay, its broad wings stretching like a curtain across the sky, breaking up the rainbow that had formed in the sunlight. On its back, Rhaegar closed his eyes, feigning sleep. He hadn't slept well the night before—Storm's End, plagued by thunderstorms year-round, had left the bed damp and uncomfortable.

It was unfortunate that Maris Baratheon had left just as they arrived, leaving Lady Elenda to host them.

There was no alternative—the King always traveled in style, and Rhaegar, leading the Kingsguard atop his dragon, visited every noble family along the way. It was an exhausting endeavor.

Clatter...

Suddenly, a surge of waves sent a dazzling flash of pale silver leaping into the air.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal, Rhaegar's dragon, growled, sensing something unusual. Rhaegar, attuned to his dragon's instincts, rolled over to investigate the situation below.

"Roar! Roar!"

They were at the edge of the Sea of Dorne, where a pale silver dragon shadow skimmed the waves, chasing after two indistinct black shapes. Rhaegar blinked in surprise and rubbed his eyes.

Boom!

A jet of orange and silver-gray dragonfire erupted, engulfing the two black spots in an instant.

“Roar!”

A shrill scream echoed for miles as the two wyverns, their wings aflame, plummeted into the sea. These wyverns were not large, only about five meters long, but once they fell into the water, they struggled desperately.

“Roar!”

The pale silver dragon shadow soared above, its hooked hind legs piercing the spine of its prey as it flew toward the shore, as if it were catching fish.

'It really is Seasmoke,' Rhaegar thought, frowning as he patted the Cannibal's back, signaling to give chase. Dragons were territorial creatures, their intelligence rivaling that of humans.

Seasmoke had hatched on Dragonstone and was tamed by the young Laenor before being brought to Driftmark. After Laenor's death, the dragon had roamed, seemingly searching for its lost master. While the inhabitants of Dragonstone and Driftmark occasionally spotted Seasmoke, the dragon had vanished from sight in recent years. Now, it appeared he was wandering near the Sea of Dorne once more.

The two dragons landed one after the other on the edge of the Rainwood in the early morning.

Sizzling!

Seasmoke lowered his head, tearing into the half-dead wyverns and gnawing on the succulent meat. A wisp of ash drifted by, causing his nostrils to flare slightly.

“Roar!”

Seasmoke suddenly raised its head, folding its wings protectively, and roared into the distance.

The Cannibal's cruel green eyes filled with indifference as it raised its head high, exuding a condescending air like that of a king.

The two dragons faced each other, Seasmoke's slight figure dwarfed by the Cannibal's imposing presence.

“Roar...”

The Cannibal let out a low, thunderous growl that shook the leaves above, a grim "smile" forming on its maw. Seasmoke's vertical pupils flashed with panic as it glanced toward the smaller dragon, recognizing the threat.

“Quiet, Cannibal!” Rhaegar commanded as he dismounted the dragon, stretching his stiff muscles. The discomfort in his back from a poor night's sleep was compounded by the strain of climbing up and down the dragon's massive body.

The Cannibal was a testament to its ancient and noble lineage, growing rapidly and steadily. Since the last winter, it had reached an astonishing 180 meters in length. According to his father, Viserys, the Cannibal was already on par with the decrepit Balerion, capable of crushing any other dragon in the House with ease.

"Climbing a dragon is exhausting. I envy Aegon not having to worry about this," Rhaegar said with a hearty laugh as he strode toward the dragon on the other side.

Seasmoke, sensing Rhaegar's approach, slowly backed up, a ball of fire building in its throat. But instead of aiming at the human, the dragon's gaze remained fixed on the Cannibal with predatory intent.

"Lower your guard, Seasmoke," Rhaegar instructed in High Valyrian, his boots crunching on the thick layer of fallen leaves.

"Roar!"

Seasmoke let out a low growl, wisely suppressing its dragonfire. Despite the putrid stench around him, the dragon recognized the human before him as a good person, someone it was still genetically bonded to.

Rhaegar approached, extending his palm toward the dragon. His voice was calm yet firm.

"Seasmoke, I know what you're searching for, but he's gone."

Poor cousin Laenor—he was never found. Even the Sea Snake and Aunt Rhaenys had given up hope, but Seasmoke remained loyal, still seeking its lost rider.

"Roar!" Seasmoke's roar echoed with sadness and anger.

"I know you can understand," Rhaegar said gently. "Go back to Dragonstone or Driftmark and wait for your next rider."

Seasmoke shook its head in refusal, its massive body turning slowly. Rhaegar sighed. "If you stay, you'll have to learn to avoid humans."

Seasmoke tilted its head slightly, its thick tail swaying back and forth.

Rhaegar met the dragon's gaze, speaking sternly. "Stay, and wait."

Seasmoke, a dragon with exceptional intelligence who had seen many battles, understood the words. No other dragon in the House had been tamed by any of Rhaegar's younger children. Vhagar was too old, and the other dragons—Silverwing, Seasmoke, and Iragaxys—were not evenly divided among the heirs.

"Roar!"

Seasmoke lowered its head meekly, its intent to nuzzle the human in front of it clear.

"I'll take that as a yes," Rhaegar said with a smile, raising his palm to stroke the dragon's chin, feeling the fine, sharp barbs. Seasmoke responded by lowering its neck further, like a child seeking comfort.

Rhaegar, a father early in life, recognized the emotion immediately. "Good boy, you must have had a hard time over the years," he said softly, his voice warm and gentle—a rare display of emotion. One hand ran along Seasmoke's lower jaw, scratching an itch, while the other wrapped around the dragon's muzzle, letting the scorching dragon breath wash over him.

"Roar..."

Seasmoke slumped to the ground, its body tilting to the side as its amber eyes softened. The dragon's beauty was undeniable, its well-proportioned form and light silver scales reminiscent of its

mother, Dreamfyre. Seasmoke had an air of nobility and sanctity, a majestic presence from the last remnants of ancient Valyrian magic. It stood in stark contrast to the hideous Cannibal and the unusually evil looking Caraxes.

“Go ahead, eat your fill,” Rhaegar said, dodging Seasmoke’s affectionate nudge as it tried to rub its muzzle against his cheek. He held the dragon’s head, looking at the two charred wyvern carcasses. The dragon’s scales were rough, irritating his skin. Unlike the Cannibal, which would have snorted arrogantly and tried to knock him over, Seasmoke’s touch was gentle.

“Roar!”

One of the dragons, sensing its rider’s discomfort, let out a loud roar.

“Roar!” Seasmoke responded, picking up one of the wyvern corpses and tossing it toward the other. It was as if the dragon was saying, “Take this and leave!”

Rhaegar couldn’t help but smile, unable to suppress the amusement on his face. This was the difference between the older and newer generations of dragons—their emotions toward humans were more nuanced, more delicate. Just like Syrax and Sunfyre, their bond with their riders was something truly touching.

...

It was growing late, the sky awash with the dusky hues of sunset.

In the depths of the Rainwood, the black dragon had already departed, leaving behind a slimy pile of dragon dung.

“Roar!” Seasmoke, its wings brushing against the trees, took to the skies, heading toward the sea as it often did. Aside from Caraxes, known as the “God of the Sea,” Seasmoke—aptly named—seemed to love soaring above the waves more than any other.

The scene shifts...

The Boneway lies behind, with Summerhall visible in the distance—a magnificent palace complex, its white marble exterior crafted in a garden-like style.

“Roar...”

The fiery clouds of dusk stirred violently as a dragon’s roar, deep and thunderous, pierced through the heavens.

Boom!

In the garden below, amidst intricately carved beams and painted rafters, a pale blue dragon lifted its head, its sharp pupils gazing intently into the distance.

“Keep your voice down, Dreamfyre,” Helaena admonished, her voice serious. She sat in a nearby pavilion, her blue skirt flowing around her as she spoke. Her beautiful

face was marked with concentration, and her pale hands bore the embroidered patterns of a large ship crossing the sea.

“Mother,” a young girl approached, placing her small, white hand on Helaena’s calf. The girl was lovely, with honey-colored wavy hair and striking purple eyes. Her skin was a bit pale, and she was slender, her hair tied into two neat pigtails. She gazed up with large, watery eyes, a backpack slung over her shoulder.

Inside the pack was a pale purple dragon egg, its surface covered in fine scales. A faint crack had begun to form on the shell, hinting at the life stirring within.

Chapter 614: The Young Dragon’s Flight Dilemma

As night fell, the moon shone brightly in a sky scattered with only a few stars. Summerhall was peaceful, its palace aglow with light.

“Mommy, the eggshell is broken,” the little girl announced, cradling a pile of pale purple eggshells in her arms.

“Roar...” A newborn dragon, its body adorned with gorgeous purple scales and milky white horns, squatted in the corner, curiously peering around.

Helaena took a sip of wine, then bent down to pick up her daughter. “Your young dragon has hatched. You can keep the eggshell as a souvenir,” she said thoughtfully.

“Oh...” The little girl looked slightly disappointed. She had grown fond of the round, warm dragon egg, which she could cuddle and sleep with without fear of being bitten.

Rhaegar, observing the scene, smiled and suggested, “If Daenaera likes, she can piece the eggshell together and keep it by her bed.”

“Yes!” Daenaera’s eyes lit up as she clapped her hands in approval.

“Alright, I’ll find a craftsman,” Helaena agreed, though she seemed a bit troubled. She handed her daughter over to Rhaegar and called out, “Viserion, come and eat dinner.”

Rhaegar naturally took Daenaera in his arms, tilting his head to let her plant a kiss on his cheek. She obliged, wrapping her arms around his head in a big hug.

“Good girl. Remember to take care of your young dragon,” Rhaegar beamed, the picture of a doting father, as he personally picked up food and fed it to her.

Daenaera opened her small mouth and chewed slowly. She had always been a bit frail, with a pale complexion and a tendency to lose her appetite—traits that worried her parents.

Across the room, Helaena’s attempts to summon her son were met with little success. Resigned, she lifted her skirt and walked away from the table. Rhaegar’s gaze followed her.

“Roar...” In the corner, the young dragon raised its small head, nestled in a soft bed of stacked pillows. Next to it, a silver-haired boy with purple eyes squatted, engrossed in a book.

“Time to eat,” Helaena said, a note of exasperation in her voice as she gently pulled the somewhat tattered book from her son’s hands. The cover was intricately decorated with an image of a thousand ships sailing across the sea.

“I know, Mother,” the boy, replied, his face sweet and innocent.

“You haven’t greeted your father yet,” Helaena reminded him, ruffling his hair as she helped him to his feet. She considered herself fortunate to have given birth to twins—a son and a daughter.

The daughter had been born last, named Daenaera by her father, Viserys, in honor of his late first wife Aemma Arryn’s mother. The son, born five minutes earlier, had been named by Helaena herself to celebrate her father’s recovery and his reconciliation with her mother, Alicent.

“Viserion, come to me,” Rhaegar beckoned, motioning for the little one to sit beside him. He was, after all, immensely proud of his achievements.

Jeyne had borne his first two children, while Helaena had given birth to their fourth, a pair of twins.

Rhaenyra had followed with Visenya, their third daughter, and by bringing their youngest into the world—a baby boy named Aegor, just over a year old.

In all, there were nine children: five boys and four girls, all pure Targaryen blood. Excluding the stillborns, their survival rate alone had already surpassed that of his great-grandfather, the Old King, elevating the family’s power to new heights.

“One step at a time, don’t be afraid,” Helaena whispered, winking as she took her son’s hand and led him to the table.

Viserion lowered his head, his movements stiff, occasionally stealing a timid glance at his father, who was nearby.

“Come on, I’ve brought you a present,” Rhaegar said with a warm smile, pulling out the fashionable toys he had prepared—dolls, precious stones, and other treasures.

As the family’s territory expanded, greater control was required. Jeyne sat quietly in the valley, saying nothing. After Laena’s death, Rhaenys was lost and often traveled between King’s Landing and Lys.

With Dorne’s persistent unrest, Helaena temporarily resided in her fiefdom of Summerhall, forming alliances with House Tyrell and House Baratheon to garrison the border. The children had not seen their father in some time and were a bit distant from him.

“Eat your vegetables, Father,” Daenaera chirped, arching her head as she pushed a leaf of vegetables into Rhaegar’s mouth. Rhaegar opened his mouth and accepted the hurried gesture of love. Across the table, Viserion’s envy flickered in his eyes as he quickened his hesitant steps. With Helaena’s gentle guidance, he finally managed to sit next to his father, feeling both flattered and shy.

"Choose a gift and see which one you like," Rhaegar encouraged, rubbing his son's short silver hair. The little boy was introverted, rarely speaking as a child, often lost in a picture book biography. But Rhaegar saw this as a sign of inner beauty, cherishing his son's quiet nature.

"I want this one," Daenaera announced, climbing into her father's arms and reaching for the table. Her small hands grabbed a dragon doll and a blue gem, recalling how her uncle had a blue gem in his eye socket that he never let her play with. 'Stingy!' she thought.

Rhaegar looked at his four children and encouraged them, "Choose one, you can take a few more as well." It had been two or three months since he had last seen them, so he felt the need to offer something to win them over.

"I..." Viserion hesitated, not moving among the pile of gifts.

Rhaegar was surprised. "Don't like it?" he asked.

When he tried this before, Visenya was delighted and had even slipped a gem into her younger brother Aegor's underpants, hoping to stash it away as a little piggy bank.

"I like them!" Daenaera quickly answered, hugging the doll and gem tightly as she continued to pick out a small, rounded wooden sword.

"Wait a minute, let your brother choose one too," Rhaegar said, wrapping his arm around his daughter like she was a little cat. He then looked over at his four sons, "Choose one, don't be so shy."

Viserion looked timidly at his father, his hand pausing in mid-air.

"You can choose whichever one you like," Rhaegar said, his eyes bright with encouragement. He understood introversion—he had been rather withdrawn as a child himself. This was precisely why he had liked Maekar, who was also reserved, and why he treated Viserion with special care. Introverts often had their own plans in mind and were skilled at controlling situations.

"I'll choose this one," Viserion murmured, his eyes lingering on the wooden sword before finally reaching for an obsidian dagger.

Rhaegar noticed his fourth son's choice and gently intervened. "That's a keepsake from the Dragonkeeper," he explained. "It's not part of the gifts." He placed a firm hand in front of Viserion, signaling for him to hand over the dagger.

Viserion hesitated, a flicker of panic crossing his eyes. Rhaegar remained silent, waiting to see how his son would respond. In his mind, there were only two possible outcomes.

"Then, I'll give it back to you," Viserion whispered, reluctantly returning the obsidian dagger and reaching for another black crystal stone instead.

Rhaegar's forehead creased with frustration. He had expected his son to return the dagger and perhaps choose the wooden sword he had seemed interested in. Instead, Viserion opted for another crystal stone, further irritating his father.

Suppressing his displeasure, Rhaegar's gaze shifted to the small backpack slung over Viserion's shoulders—a bag Helaena had sewn for the children to carry their dragon eggs. At that moment, the knapsack appeared empty and dry, with no sign of the black dragon egg.

Rhaegar frowned. "Where is your dragon egg?" he asked, his tone serious.

The dragon eggs for his four sons were still in the cradle, placed there by Rhaegar himself. They were eggs from Dreamfyre, the dragon whose egg had failed to hatch when Rhaegar was young. He had never felt a connection with that black dragon egg, but since Helaena had tamed Dreamfyre, it seemed only fitting that Dreamfyre's egg should belong to her son.

Viserion lowered his head and muttered, "I put the backpack with the books in it. The dragon egg is in the room."

Rhaegar let out a deep breath, rising from the table. "I'm full," he said, his voice tight. "I'll go put Daenaera to bed." With that, he scooped up his daughter, her round tummy resting against him, and left the table.

As he walked away, frustration gnawed at him. How could his son, the child of the so-called "Cruel Rhaegar," be so timid? Viserion hadn't even fought for what he liked. Not even the dragon egg—coveted by the world as a priceless treasure—could hold his interest like those picture books did.

Once Rhaegar had left with Daenaera, Helaena and Viserion remained alone at the table. Helaena, with an innocent expression, scratched her loose bun and comforted her son. "Don't worry, he's just angry."

"I'm sorry," Viserion murmured, his lips trembling as he bowed his head in guilt. His father had come to visit for the first time in ages, and he'd only managed to make him angry.

"It's okay," Helaena reassured him, swallowing a mouthful of roast meat. "It's good to understand why he's angry." She then stood, stretching a bit as she walked around the table. "You eat first, fill yourself up, and then go to your room to rest," she said, instructing the Dragonkeeper to tend to the young dragon in the corner before following her brother upstairs.

Viserion watched, curled up in his seat, feeling more alone than ever. Once the young dragon was taken away, he was left in the empty hall by himself. His eyes fell on the book covers scattered across the table, stories of the legendary Rhoynar warrior queen, Nymeria, who had sailed with a thousand ships.

Dong! The clock struck, and a bat-shaped pendant popped out from its box. Viserion stared at it for a moment, lost in thought. Slowly, he reached out his hands.

"I'll take this one," he murmured to no one in particular. He picked up the obsidian dagger his father had left behind and, with his other hand, grabbed the small, rounded wooden sword. His gaze dull, he pressed the two items against the pages of the book, lost in his own world.

...

Attic, Princess's Bedroom.

"This child is weak and spineless, not of much use," Rhaegar remarked calmly, leaning against the window and gazing out at the night sky. Among his many offspring, few were as timid as Viserion. Even Aegor, his youngest son, whose milk teeth had yet to fall out, would bite back when his sister Visenya teased him too much. Viserion's behavior tonight had left Rhaegar deeply disappointed.

"Perhaps he just wanted to give his sister the gift he liked best," Helaena suggested gently, sitting by the bed as she tenderly patted their sleeping daughter. Her perspective was different from her brother's.

Rhaegar, not in the mood to argue, sighed. "If he's too afraid to express his love for something he truly desires, what great achievements can he hope to accomplish?" His four sons would one day inherit Summerhall and be tasked with overseeing Dorne, The Reach, and the Stormlands. How could he trust someone so timid with such responsibilities?

Helaena tilted her head, speaking with quiet wisdom, "Isn't someone who is willing to make sacrifices even greater?"

"Hm?" Rhaegar paused, then chuckled helplessly. "You're right. I hope I'm wrong."

At three years old, Viserion's personality was already forming. If all else failed, Rhaegar considered bringing Viserion to King's Landing to spend more time with Baelon. Perhaps his eldest son's courage could help sharpen the boy. Ultimately, it was Rhaegar's neglect that had left his son so vulnerable. Reflecting on this, he felt a sense of relief.

Helaena blinked and suddenly said, "Aemon hasn't been back in a long time." She believed her son was destined for greatness, that the throne in her dreams belonged to him. But she knew Rhaegar wasn't interested in discussing it, so she shifted the conversation to something that might hold his attention.

Rhaegar sat back on the edge of the bed, replying cautiously, "Qohor is at war year-round. Aemon has to stay and defend the realm."

"His fiefdom is in Stonehelm," Helaena countered, her tone indifferent.

Rhaegar snorted. "Tell him that. See if the boy is willing to give up Qohor."

Qohor was a hotbed of conflict. Situated in the vast Forest of Qohor on the eastern continent of Essos, it was a land rich in resources—forestry, animal husbandry, fishing, and farming. An extinct volcano outside the city also made it an ideal place for dragons to dwell. After Aemond took control of Qohor, he faced attacks from the remaining Free Cities of Braavos, Pentos, Norvos, and Lorath. Only four of the Nine Free Cities remained, and none were willing to allow House Targaryen to occupy Qohor unchallenged.

This struggle was the cause and core of the ongoing war. Even their uncle, Daemon, had ridden Caraxes into battle for this critical territory, which would determine whether House Targaryen could establish a stronghold on the mainland of Essos.

Rhaenyra went to Lys to gather supplies to support the battlefield in Qohor. The remaining Free Cities clung desperately to their positions, fearing that if they relented, they would eventually be annexed by the Targaryens.

Chapter 615: The Old Dragon Forced to Relocate

The next day...

As dawn broke, a black dragon erupted from the garden of Summerhall. It crossed the Boneway and soared over the Sea of Dorne, where the wreckage of broken ships piled up along the shores.

...

Coastal area of Sunspear City.

The fishermen quietly set sail, hoping to catch fish and shrimp in the early morning calm.

Boom.

A massive black creature flew past, its wide wings casting a shadow that swallowed the sky, like a thick, dark cloud blotting out the sun.

"A dragon!"

The fishermen screamed in terror, abandoning their boats and leaping into the sea. The fear instilled by the Dragon's Wroth ten years earlier still haunted their memories, passed down even after two generations.

"Roar..."

Luckily, the fierce beast only skimmed the coast of Dorne, continuing its flight toward the junction of the Narrow Sea and the Summer Sea.

High above, Rhaegar laughed and patted the dragon's neck. "You scared them, Cannibal."

"Roar!" Cannibal let out a low, rumbling roar, its chest rising and falling as it picked up speed. The man and the dragon had risen early to bid farewell to the beautiful surroundings of Summerhall.

This was merely a detour, as Rhaegar paid a visit to Helaena and her two children. The mother, son, and daughter were no ordinary family; they bore the burdens of House and Kingdom alike.

Margaery, the Little Rose of Highgarden, and Maris Baratheon of Storm's End—both close friends of Helaena—stood by her side. Together, the three women supported one another, uniting The Reach and the Stormlands, and for years, they safeguarded the Dornish Marches.

The civil war in Dorne raged on, with the rebels, known as the "Greenblood Orphans," mastering the art of guerrilla warfare, striking swiftly and vanishing just as fast.

Led by Prince Qyle of Sunspear, they blocked The Prince's Pass and the Boneway, confining the rebellion to the barren deserts of western Dorne, whenever the rebels attempted to storm the passes, it was Helaena who drove them back with Dreamfyre, maintaining the fragile peace in the Dornish Marches.

"After we return from Sothoryos, we'll take the children back to King's Landing for a while," Rhaegar said, breathing in the cool sea breeze as he resolved his thoughts. His children could grow to be dragons or mediocrities, but they would never be sheep.

"Roar!"

Suddenly, a thunderous dragon roar echoed across several nautical miles, radiating boundless fury.

"Cannibal!" Rhaegar exclaimed, startled. He quickly steered the dragon toward the source of the roar.

Cannibal's glowing green eyes narrowed, its thick neck twisting as it flapped its wings and sped eastward. Soon, small islands began to dot the vast sea ahead, and a cluster of glaring flames came into view, accompanied by billowing smoke and distant screams.

"Roar! Roar!"

A pale silver dragon shot into the sky, flapping its wings with a mournful cry.

"The Triarchy pirate ship!" Rhaegar recognized the burning vessel at once, along with the scorched and melted scorpion crossbows on its deck.

"Roar!"

Seasmoke circled low, a gaping hole torn in its right wing membrane, blood trickling from the wound. Rhaegar frowned as he watched the pale silver dragon ascend into the clouds and vanish from sight.

This was near the Stepstones, the treacherous waters lying between the Narrow Sea, the coast of Dorne, and the Summer Sea. The islands were loosely garrisoned between Bloodstone and Grey Gallows, leaving the edges vulnerable. Slave ships, stowaways, and pirates often bypassed the garrison, sneaking through these waters unnoticed.

It was unfortunate for this Triarchy pirate ship to have crossed paths with Seasmoke, which had been roaming the area. Seasmoke might not recognize the banners of House Targaryen or House Velaryon, but it surely remembered the foul stench of the Triarchy pirates. Its first flight had been during the first battle of the Stepstones, a conflict that had dragged on for years.

As Rhaegar looked down, he saw that the pirate ship had burned to the waterline and was sinking, while several smaller ships remained intact nearby. One of these ships flew the sails of a Harpy, clearly marking it as a slave ship from Slaver's Bay.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed with the temptation to set it ablaze. But just as he was about to act, a group of dark-skinned people emerged from the slave ship, waving white flags in surrender.

"Indigenous people of the Summer Isles?" Rhaegar muttered, intrigued. He had heard that the people of the Summer Isles were often enslaved, valued for their strength, robustness, and resistance to illness. Grey Worm had once mentioned that half of the Unsullied in any given training cohort came from Summer Isles stock. However, their natural resistance to discipline meant that their survival rate in the harsh training was low.

Now, these dark-skinned natives fell to their knees on the deck, pleading for mercy in broken Valyrian. It was clear they had been coached by the cunning slave traders.

Rhaegar hesitated, pondering for a moment. He did not give the command for "Dragonfire." Instead, he decided to let them go and return to Slaver's Bay. Perhaps it was better to give them a chance at survival there rather than consign them to death by dragonfire.

With a final glance, Rhaegar looked away. "Let's go, Cannibal."

"Roar..."

Cannibal's eyes remained cold and indifferent, not sparing the pitiful creatures below a second thought as it turned and flew straight toward the continent of Sothoryos.

...

The man and the dragon soared away, disappearing into the horizon.

Meanwhile, a few slave ships sent crews to salvage the gold and silver treasures from the smoldering remains of the pirate ship. After hastily dividing the spoils, they set sail, eager to escape before trouble found them.

Three ships crossed the Narrow Sea, making their way back to Slaver's Bay on the distant shores of the Eastern Continent. One ship, however, veered off course, choosing to sail independently. It bypassed the endless coastline of Dorne and ventured into the Summer Sea, heading toward Oldtown.

The sea breeze whipped fiercely, and the ship sliced through the waves with determination. Below deck, in the cramped, dimly lit cabins, men, women, and children huddled together, their clothes ragged and their faces etched with despair. On this vessel, their origins and races meant nothing; they were all slaves, subject to the whims of their captors.

"Brother," a voice called softly.

By a small, barred window, a young man with white hair crouched, his arms wrapped tightly around his legs. His ordinary features were marked by a pair of deep blue eyes that seemed out of place in their vividness.

"Don't worry," said another, his tone reassuring. The older man, with silver-blond hair and a serious expression, pulled his younger brother close. "We're not being taken to the ruins of the Old Empire of Ghis to rebuild the slave cities."

The young man tilted his head back, his white hair brushing against his brother's chin as he reached up to stroke the stubble there. "I heard the dragon's roar. It was thrilling."

The silver-blond man lowered his head, his eyes filled with longing. "A living dragon... that's incredible!"

...

It was nearing noon in the Green Hell of Sothoryos.

"Roar..."

The fearsome dragon, 180 meters long, stood imposingly, its pitch-black scales gleaming with a metallic sheen under the harsh sunlight. Its massive jaws clamped down on a green-spotted wyvern, tearing into the struggling creature as its feeble chirps faded into silence. Sharp claws ripped open the wyvern's belly, spilling its innards onto the jungle floor.

At the edge of this gruesome hunting scene, Rhaegar, clad in a black robe, knelt by a campfire, roasting a skewer of fruit. He had recently returned from the Basilisk Isles, where the stench of parasites still lingered in his memory, feeding off the cries of the starving. The islands were now under the control of the remnants of the Triarchy, who had replaced the slave traders and smugglers. Only the unfortunate prostitutes had been spared; no one would bother to drive away those who sold their bodies for survival.

Rhaegar's inspection had revealed that the Basilisk Isles had become a stronghold for Triarchy pirates, serving as the first line of defense against foreign threats. Meanwhile, three new Free Cities had sprung up along the coast of Sothoryos. These were based on the Isle of Tears, the Isle of Axe, and the Isle of Naath.

The Isle of Tears, hidden behind the Basilisk Isles, was a swampy, muddy place, once home to the now-ruined colony of Gogossos, abandoned by both Valyria and the Old Empire of Ghis.

The Isles of Axe and Naath were located on the eastern coast of Sothoryos. The Isle of Axe, shaped like its namesake, had been visited by Nymeria during her legendary voyage, though pirates had driven her away. Naath, independent of the mainland, was situated in the southwestern corner of the Basilisk Isles, surrounded by satellite islands rich in resources.

The Triarchy had chosen their locations well for rebuilding the Free Cities. If all went according to their plan, they could establish a new Triarchy, one that might rival the previous empire.

"But it won't go well," Rhaegar murmured, his thoughts turning to the prospect of colonizing Sothoryos. The last time they had conquered Slaver's Bay, their hold was fleeting, and they hadn't even had time to divide the land among nobles. It would not be easy for the Triarchy to establish a strong foothold on this hostile continent.

"I need to rethink our strategic goals when I return," he muttered to himself. The ongoing war in Qohor had already drained the kingdom, yet it was a fight they could not afford to abandon. If they shifted their focus to Sothoryos, they risked being drawn into a war on two or even three fronts.

"A House Council is necessary," Rhaegar decided, determined to prevent his enemies from gaining any advantage, even at the cost of economic growth.

Boom.

A gust of wind swept through the jungle, the moss-covered canopy shuddering with the reverberation of a dragon's roar. Rhaegar looked up to see a massive beast flying low overhead.

"Roar..."

Uragax, the old dragon, stretched its neck and let out a low, rumbling growl at the Dragoneater below. The foul stench of the dragon's breath reached Rhaegar even from a distance.

"Roar..."

The gluttonous dragon howled in return, its malicious green eyes filled with hatred. Rhaegar shook his head, choosing to ignore the simmering enmity between the two beasts.

The more time he spent with them, the more he realized that Uragax was a wise, ancient dragon, indifferent to most things and content to stay within its territory. It was Cannibal who was vicious by nature, hostile toward all dragons.

No dragon that had crossed paths with the Dragoneater had escaped without knowing fear or hatred. Its fighting style was brutal—a heartless predator that preyed on its own kind, striking at their weakest points.

"Uragax, when you're healed, come with me!" Rhaegar shouted into the sky, casually tossing the charred fruit skewer aside.

Boom.

The only response was silence, save for the dry leaves and dust kicked up as the old dragon landed.

"Roar..."

Uragax shook its massive head, and its two large, curved horns sliced through tree trunks, carving a battered path through the dense forest. Rhaegar stood before the old dragon, welcoming the scorching breath that washed over him, and the shadow that gradually engulfed his form. The

dragon, though aged and battle-worn, was still a formidable presence, its sheer size commanding awe. If it were pitted against another, even Vermithor, the Bronze Fury and third-largest of the house, would struggle to match it. Only Vhagar might stand as its equal.

Rhaegar's eyes gleamed as he raised his hand high. "Uragax, come back to Dragonstone with me."

"Roar..." The old dragon lowered its head in silence, resting its rough jaw in Rhaegar's palm as it slowly eased its mountain-like body down to the ground. At that moment, Rhaegar's gaze sharpened as he noticed something troubling—a deep, ragged scratch across the dragon's forehead. The wound was gruesome, oozing foul-smelling blood that still emitted wisps of smoke.

"What is this?" Rhaegar's expression darkened as he examined the injury more closely. "Did you fight another wild dragon?" The severity of the scratch suggested a fierce opponent, not one to be easily dismissed.

"Roar..." Uragax's pupils closed as it hung its head sorrowfully, refusing to respond as it lay down. Rhaegar was puzzled but continued to press. "If something can hurt you like this, it's even more reason for you to leave with me." Whether the adversary was a wild dragon or something else, Rhaegar's goal was clear: to bring this ancient, rebellious dragon back under Targaryen control.

Since the Red Comet had fallen, the tide of magic had surged, reviving long-dormant forces across the world. Dragons like Morghul of the Smoking Sea, Iragaxys hatched by the Braavosi, and Thunderstrider had all risen again. Even Rhaegar himself, along with others like the elusive Shadowbinders and the Water Wizards, had felt the resurgence. If there was indeed another wild dragon in Sothoryos, Rhaegar would not be surprised.

Ooooo~

Rhaegar closed his eyes, summoning the ancient power of his dragon blood as black fire encircled his body. In an instant, his black robe began to flutter wildly in the wind, twisting and swaying like a living shadow.

"Roar..."

Cannibal roared, its pale green pupils glowing with a dragon-shaped rune. With a powerful flap of its wings, the beast soared into the sky, leaving the crushed remains of the wyverns behind without a second glance.

"Roar!"

The old dragon before Rhaegar widened its vertical pupils in surprise, a strangely human-like expression of wariness crossing its face. It crawled backward cautiously, recognizing the sound of the horn that had echoed through the cold depths of the Dragonpit more than once—each time heralding the fall of one or two of its kin.

"Woo-woo-woo..."

Unmoved, Rhaegar produced a bloodstained, moss-colored scale from his sleeve. The scale, about the size of an adult's palm, was cracked and weathered, a remnant shed by the old dragon after

sustaining an injury. Calmly, Rhaegar rubbed the scale against the dragon horn, and the scalding blood was absorbed into the dark Valyrian steel surface.

Hum...

In an instant, the horn glowed with a hazy reddish hue, and tiny characters began to appear, overlapping and intertwining until they formed an azure dragon-shaped inscription.

"Roar!"

Uragax's pupils widened further, a newfound sense of kinship stirring the blood in its veins. Although puzzled, the old dragon remained still, recognizing the bond it shared with the silver-haired human before it, unwilling to harm him.

"Roar!"

Rhaegar blew the horn with all his might, secretly employing the ancient technique of the "Dragon Dance." Gradually, the old dragon calmed and prostrated itself once more.

"Come with me," Rhaegar urged when the sound finally ceased. His face was pale from the effort, but he extended his hand in invitation. "You are already a Targaryen dragon—you can't run away."

"Roar..."

Uragax tilted its head as if contemplating the words, then rose to its feet and took flight.

Boom.

Cannibal swooped low, landing back in its original position, its tail lashing past Rhaegar as if in impatience.

"Let's go!" Rhaegar commanded as he climbed onto Cannibal's back, a smile curling at the corners of his mouth.

"Roar!"

Cannibal shot into the sky, quickly catching up to the rejuvenated old dragon, spitting out a mouthful of dark green Dragonfire in protest. But the old dragon paid it no heed, crashing headlong through the ashen flames as it headed toward the Summer Sea.

For a dragon, moving was no big deal.

...

Dorne, Sunspear.

Prince Qyle, a young man with a troubled expression, paced restlessly through the palace. Worry gnawed at him. Dorne was beset by internal and external threats, and now the Red Kraken had appeared to add to his woes.

The Greenblood River, the lifeline of Sunspear, was under the control of the Iron Throne, with only 30% of its profits allocated to Dorne each year. It wasn't much, but it was enough to maintain a comfortable lifestyle for House Martell. Now, however, the Red Kraken in the Iron Islands was wreaking havoc, abducting natives of the Summer Isles and plundering merchant ships in the Summer Sea. This relentless piracy was devastating maritime trade and cutting deeply into the income of House Martell.

“What should I do?” Kyle muttered to himself, his face pale with anxiety as he nervously scratched at his hair.

"Roar..."

Suddenly, a deep dragon roar echoed through the palace. Kyle's spirits lifted, and he rushed to the nearest glass window. His eyes widened as he took in the sight of the three towering walls of Shadowtown.

Boom!

A black dragon shadow streaked across the sky, swiftly pursuing an ink-green dragon. The two mighty beasts hovered side by side above Sunspear, their presence casting ominous shadows over the city.

"Excellent!" Kyle's face lit up with a rare smile as he dashed out of the palace. He recognized the dark dragon immediately—it was Cannibal, the infamous “Deathwing,” known for its terrifying appetite not only for people but for other dragons as well.

His father, Prince Qoren, had met his end in the flames of this very dragon.

Chapter 616: The Assassin from Asshai

It was midday, and the sun shone brightly over Sunspear as Rhaegar landed his dragon, greeted by a grand reception.

“Your Grace,” Prince Kyle called out, trotting along with a face beaming with joy.

“It's been a long time, Prince.” Rhaegar dismounted from the dragon's back, his eyes scanning his loyal adviser to the Iron Throne.

Since childhood, he had been filled with both fear and admiration for dragons and had found it difficult to resist Targaryen rule. The adviser's constant admonitions had also shaped him into a gentle and chivalrous leader.

Kyle's forehead glistened with a fine line of sweat, unable to hide his excitement. “Your Grace, please follow me into the Sun Tower.”

“Lead the way,” Rhaegar replied, sweeping his gaze around the room. He spotted Beric Dayne, the Kingsguard and Regent of Dorne.

“Your Grace,” Beric said with all the righteousness in the world as he bowed to the king. Despite the weight of his responsibilities, he had not forgotten the original intention of joining the Kingsguard.

...

The Tower of the Sun, Throne Hall.

Rhaegar changed into a light yellow robe in the style of Dorne and took his place at the head of the banquet. A little girl with black hair and olive skin crept up beside him, staring intently. This was Coryanne Martell, the youngest daughter of the former Prince of Dorne, Qoren—a much-loved little princess.

Rhaegar glanced at her, though his thoughts were elsewhere. He had deep connections to House Martell. Qyle and Coryanne had once traveled together by boat to Braavos and Volantis's capital cities when they were attacked and taken hostage.

Coryanne had even been engaged to a member of the Triarchy's parliament, but his head was severed before the marriage could take place.

"Sorry I'm late," Qyle said as he hurried about, instructing the servants to set the table. He had been feeding the dragons, preparing livestock for the two enormous, castle-like beasts, and watching as dragonfire poured out.

Rhaegar waved his hand, his tone serious. "The orphans of the Greenblood River are rebelling, pirates are emerging from the Summer Sea, and the Prince still has much to worry about." His visit to Sunsphear was meant to help Qyle consolidate his rule and guard against threats from the Iron Islands and Basilisk Isles. Unlike on land, dragons were slightly less formidable at sea. Sunsphear, sitting on the docks of the Greenblood River, could serve as an ideal bridgehead.

Qyle, though young, had a thick skin and spoke without hesitation. "Your Grace, I really need money and trade. Pirates have been stirring up trouble along the coast, causing panic in the city." As he spoke, a pleading expression crossed his pale face.

Though Qyle looked young with his baby face, he was fourteen years old and already had the mature thinking of an adult.

"There's also the Greenblood River Dock," Qyle continued, "where the ships are packed every day, but most of them stay in the inns, and the bulk of the business is going to Oldtown and Lannisport."

His complaints were relentless. Since Dorne became independent, nobles across the territory had seized control of maritime trade. Now, as morals declined, Dorne had split into East and West, and merchants were reluctant to come.

Rhaegar listened patiently before offering a solution. "The rebels and pirates are a result of Sunsphear's lack of defense. Strengthening maritime trade will provide the funds needed to arm an army. I'll notify the three Free Cities of the Narrow Sea to increase trade with the Greenblood River and, incidentally, provide protection for Dorne's coastal areas."

The rise of the Red Kraken and the Alliance of Three Cities foretold trouble brewing in the Summer Sea. If the Stepstones were used to link the two sides of the Narrow Sea and Dorne's coast, a naval blockade could be formed to isolate the continent of Sothoryos. Colonization, however, was not the best option. Westeros was already sparsely populated, and moving to the barren continent of Sothoryos wouldn't aid in development. Instead, they would trap their enemies in a land infested with mosquitoes and poisonous miasmas, cutting off their sources of food and clothing.

"I can't thank you enough, Your Grace," Qyle said, nearly jumping with joy as he raised a cup of Harrenhal's special sweet fruit wine in celebration.

...

After lunch, Rhaegar suggested a tour of the Greenblood River. As the only large dock in all of Dorne, it would bear the burden of the sea fleet's entry and exit in the future.

"Your Grace, I see you have brought another dragon with you. Is it like Vhagar from the time of the Conqueror?" Qylebrant asked, full of enthusiasm as he walked and talked, mentioning dragons.

Rhaegar shook his head. "No, it's not. This is an old, solitary dragon that rarely shows itself to the world." Uragax was a wild dragon without an owner that had survived the Doom. Rhaegar intended to find a suitable rider for it and fully integrate the dragon into House Targaryen.

"It is an unparalleled honor to become a dragon rider," Qyle flattered, then suddenly said, "Your Grace, I heard that you have several daughters. I wonder if you are interested in marrying them?"

"Huh?" Rhaegar paused, realizing something was amiss. 'This kid doesn't care about dragons; he's just after my bloodline.'

Qyle continued sincerely, "I remember from the history books that the Old King, the Arbiter, fathered thirteen children in his lifetime and betrothed several of his daughters to noblemen of good character."

As a Prince of the Realm and head of House Martell, which ruled the Dornish domain, asking the King for the hand of an orthodox Targaryen Princess would add noble Valyrian blood to his family, thereby strengthening the alliance between the two houses. It was a royal family's reward for its loyal advisers and an important part of Dorne's true integration into the rule of the Iron Throne. With a Princess as his wife, who would dare question his status? Just like Lord Corlys of House Velaryon, whose wife was a dragon rider!

Rhaegar's expression remained unchanged, and his tone was light. "Do you know what happened to the daughters of the Old King who married outsiders?"

"Er..." Qyle was at a loss for words.

Among the many daughters of the Old King, only one was actually married outside the family—Daenaera Targaryen, who married into the Vale. She wed an old man decades her senior and died of puerperal fever at the age of 18. Another Princess, Viserra, was engaged to the Lord of White Harbor, but she broke her neck while trying to escape the marriage. The remaining Princesses either became holy sisters, prostitutes, or were mentally deficient and easily seduced.

To be fair, even for girls from ordinary noble families, their fates were not as disastrous as this.

"I'm sorry, Your Grace," Qyle said, lowering his head in guilt. "I shouldn't have mentioned your family's sad story."

"Hmph!" Rhaegar snorted, his voice firm. "My daughters will not marry outside the family—at least, not if they don't want to."

"Your Grace," Qyle hesitated, then cautiously asked, "what do you think of my sister?"

Rhaegar frowned. "I already have three wives, and my oldest child is only two years younger than Coryanne. I'm not the Sea Snake, I won't marry someone a decade younger than me."

"No, no, you misunderstand," Qyle quickly corrected himself, adding, "You have several sons, and marrying a woman from House Martell would also be a sign of trust."

Rhaegar did not refuse again and fell into deep thought upon hearing this. An alliance was indeed the most direct way to establish a bridge between nobles. House Arryn of the Vale and House Baratheon of Storm's End were both potential allies for House Targaryen. One of them obstructed the weak control of the North, while the other had opposed Dorne for generations. Dorne had submitted to the Iron Throne, and it was only right to give it due trust.

After a moment of silence, Rhaegar met Qyle's determined gaze and said indifferently, "My eldest and second sons are already engaged, so your younger sister can only choose from the younger boys."

After a pause, he emphasized, "If their personalities don't match, I won't force an engagement on children who are not yet of sound mind."

"I am most grateful, and House Martell will forever follow the banner of the Iron Throne," Qyle replied with a beaming smile, bowing respectfully.

As he noted the other man's smiling face, Rhaegar felt a sense of unease. He turned away and strolled along the banks of the Greenblood River. He had mentioned choosing a boy, and it would likely be his third son, Maekar. Maekar was his favorite son, and he had originally planned to betroth him to Aegon's daughter, Jaehaera. But Viserion and Aegor were too young—they were still too young to "fly". Maekar, at seven years old, was five years younger than Lyanna Martell, making them a barely suitable match.

...

As they walked, the sky darkened. The group, escorted by guards, reached the far side of the Greenblood River, in the region that was once Lemonwood. After the Dragon's Wroth, Lemonwood had been tragically scorched by Sunfyre, reducing large swathes of the forest to charred earth as far as the eye could see.

A deep, rumbling growl echoed through the surviving trees, where the old, dark green dragon slithered along, its breath rustling the shrubs, causing them to crackle and sway violently.

"Your Grace, that's the cargo ship at the dock," Qyle said, pointing to the multitude of ships crowding the wide river. The vessels ranged in size, flying the flags of various nations, making the scene as bustling as the Mud Gate in King's Landing.

Rhaegar's eyes were drawn to the banners of Oldtown's Hightower and House Velaryon, which marked a fleet of two merchant ships that stood out among the others. Suddenly, a small sailing ship bearing a black flag caught his attention.

"Where is that ship from?" Rhaegar asked, his brow furrowed in curiosity. It was unfamiliar to him.

Qyle strained on tiptoe, eager to explain to the king, but his stature failed him, leaving him sweating in frustration. Beric, standing nearby, answered respectfully, "That ship is from Asshai. It's been anchored in the Greenblood River for several days. Rumor has it that sorcerers aboard the ship are accompanying the Velaryon fleet."

"Is it connected to the Sea Snake?" Rhaegar inquired openly, comfortable in the presence of his Kingsguard.

Belis's expression grew serious as he pondered the question. "I'm not certain, Your Grace, but Lord Corlys has been fixated on modifying his grand ship. He sent men to consult with the sorcerers of Asshai. Whether there's a direct connection, no one can say for sure."

"Brother."

Qyle's ear twitched as he heard his sister's voice, surprised to find her behind him. Turning, he saw Coryanne standing by a wooden box at the river's edge, her face pale and distant. In her hand, she held a small seashell, her movements strangely entranced as she slowly approached.

Concerned for his sister, Qyle reached out as Coryanne, with a dreamy smile, handed him the shell. "Why are you here?" he asked, bewildered.

"Get out of the way!" a guard suddenly barked, snapping Qyle back to the tense reality around them.

Clang!

A long, black sword plummeted from the sky, pinning a palm-sized poisonous spider to the ground in an instant. Rhaegar swiftly grabbed the stunned Qyle and crushed the spider underfoot, shouting, "You ghostly thing, do you want to die?"

Qyle had suddenly changed his expression moments before, walking directly toward the river as if in a trance. He never imagined someone would attempt an assassination in broad daylight.

"Sssshhh!" Coryanne's pupils turned pitch black as she bared her fangs like a beast before spinning around and leaping into the river.

"Sister!" Qyle cried out in shock, about to dive in after her.

"Don't worry, it's a fake!" Rhaegar held him back, his gaze icy as he fixed his eyes on a small Asshai boat shrouded in black canvas.

A slender figure stood on the boat, motionless as a corpse. The swift current carried the boat away, and it vanished silently behind a larger ship nearby, leaving no trace.

"Protect Your Grace!" Beric unsheathed his ancestral sword, Morning, and positioned himself in front of the two kings.

At that moment, beggar-like children appeared on both sides of the Greenblood River, their eyes glowing with eerie intent as they stared at the group. Rhaegar's expression hardened as he realized that someone was trying to assassinate Qyle and incite chaos in Dorne.

Chapter 617: The New Ruler of Slaver's Bay

Boom!

Suddenly, a violent wind howled through the air as the sky was torn by the dark shadow of a dragon. It crashed to the ground like a meteor.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal's cold, lifeless eyes glared as it stretched its neck, surveying the surroundings before letting out a wild, earth-shaking roar. The Green River churned in response, and the air temperature surged.

"Gulp..."

Dozens of ragged orphans swallowed hard, their dry throats tightening as they stared at the dark dragon's massive throat.

"Dragon!!"

After a tense silence, someone finally screamed, and the crowd on both sides of the river scattered in a panicked frenzy. The scene resembled a mass exodus.

The Cannibal looked on with contempt, slowly crawling towards the rider, its form towering like a mountain.

Even the top dragon riders may be helpless in situations like this. But him and his dragon were connected in mind, making a sudden attack impossible.

"Your Grace, Your Grace," Qyle stammered, trembling uncontrollably in the presence of the dragon. He clung to Rhaegar like a small, frightened bird.

"You've got company, boy," Rhaegar said, releasing him and glancing at the fleeing orphans. "Are they the Greenblood Orphans?"

"They are. I never would have guessed," Qyle admitted, gradually regaining his composure.

"If you can't fight them, assassinate or murder them. It's the old Dorne trick," Rhaegar remarked with a mocking tone, unimpressed. The despicable methods of the Dornish were well documented in history.

With that, he strode toward the distant Lemonwood forest.

"Your Grace, what about the Asshai ship?" Qyle asked, still seething from the near-death experience.

"You can go after it," Rhaegar replied dismissively without turning back. "Ordinary people cannot defend against the methods of a wizard."

The sight of the sailing ship and the slender figure on board gave him the distinct feeling of a Shadowbinder. Even if he pursued it on a dragon, eradicating the root of the problem would be difficult.

"Your Grace, where are you going?" Qyle called out, gritting his teeth as he chose to follow in Rhaegar's footsteps.

...

"Roar..."

The old, dark green dragon lay on the ground, its scarred head resting on its shoulders, a thunderous snore rumbling from its rough throat.

"Get up, Uragax!"

Rhaegar approached and gently patted the old dragon's rough muzzle. He had originally intended to stay the night in Sunspear, but that plan was long abandoned. Someone had hired Asshai sorcerers to assassinate the Prince of Dorne, an act that crossed a dangerous line.

Rhaegar knew he must hurry back to King's Landing, uncover the masterminds and those who stood to benefit, and dispatch troops to strengthen the naval blockade along the sea route connecting the Narrow Sea to the coast of Dorne.

"Your Grace, are you leaving?"

Qyle's eyes brimmed with tears, his reluctance to part evident. Since the death of their father, Prince Qoren, House Martell's grip on Dorne had weakened considerably. Now, threats to their lives and wealth had become all too real.

Rhaegar patted the old dragon's head with one hand and beckoned Qyle with the other. "Come here, I'll give you a parting gift."

Qyle's eyes lit up at the words, and he overcame his fear of the dragon, running over.

"Roar..."

The old dragon let out a deep, untimely growl, its hot breath washing over the boy. Qyle's face turned white, and he nearly collapsed.

Rhaegar helped him up, moving him a safe distance from the slumbering dragon.

“Dream on!”

Rhaegar was momentarily at a loss for words, but then he pulled out a blue crystal plaque engraved with intricate inscriptions. “This is a charm carved from a rare gemstone. It can block evil spirits and enchantments. Keep it with you for protection.”

Unlike the Targaryens, House Martell lacked the magic of dragon blood and was more susceptible to sorcery. Even a small enchantment could easily manipulate them.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” Qyle said, accepting the crystal charm as if it were the most precious thing in the world. He immediately hung it around his neck.

With his instructions given, Rhaegar turned and walked over to the old dragon, attempting to rouse it.

Boom.

The Cannibal flew overhead, its massive wings casting a broad shadow and filling the air with the acrid smell of ash.

“Roar!”

Uragax opened its vertical pupils, rose, and swept its tail to clear some space before lazily reclining again. This charred forest suited it well. Not far from Sothoryos, it could occasionally hunt wyverns. There were also plenty of lively humans and livestock nearby, much more than it had encountered in its previous, lonelier days.

But the most important thing was that the old dragon disliked the Dragoneater and refused to share territory with it.

“You're staying here, Uragax?”

Rhaegar frowned at this unexpected turn of events.

“Roar...”

The old dragon rubbed its snout against Rhaegar's, resting its jaw on a tree trunk buried in ash, finding comfort in the green hell it now called home. It preferred this natural setting over the jagged island of its past.

“Stay here, then. You might even encounter a wild dragon,” Rhaegar said, pressing his forehead against the dragon's muzzle and gazing into its amber pupils. Unlike most dragons, which were restless and indifferent, this one radiated a calm wisdom. The longer they were together, the more evident this wisdom became.

“Roar...”

The old dragon let out a low growl, clearly unconcerned. Rhaegar, caught in a mix of emotions, decided not to press the matter. He had initially hoped to find the “white wild dragon” that fishermen had spoken of on the continent of Sothoryos, but the dragon horn had not produced the desired results. If that wild dragon wasn’t Seasmoke—the fishing dragon—but a true adult dragon, it meant that the range of wild dragons extended as far as the Summer Sea, putting Uragax at risk if it stayed in Dorne.

More troubling was the possibility that someone might attempt to tame the dragon. If that happened, it would be a total disaster.

“Roar!”

Uragax seemed to sense his thoughts. The dragon nudged Rhaegar’s chest with its snout, gesturing toward the dragon horn tucked away in his space necklace. The two had formed a tenuous connection through this dragon-finding artifact, and Uragax would not allow a mere human to get too close.

Despite this, Rhaegar was still hesitant. House Targaryen already had more than twenty dragons, and both King’s Landing and Dragonstone were becoming crowded. Ever since they lost their riders, Vhagar and Seasmoke had been wandering. If Uragax continued to roam the wilds, how was that any different from staying on the continent of Sothoryos?

“Your Grace!”

Just as these thoughts crossed his mind, a guard hurried over, clutching an envelope. Ignoring Prince Qyle’s curious gaze, the guard handed the envelope to Beric, the Kingsguard. Beric examined it with a serious expression, then handed it to Rhaegar.

Rhaegar’s eyes narrowed as he took the letter and began to read. As he carefully absorbed its contents, his expression grew grave.

“The ruler of Slaver’s Bay!”

The letter had come from King’s Landing, containing separate reports on Qohor and Slaver’s Bay. While the former had won a battle, which was of little concern, the latter had seen the sudden rise of a new ruler who had consolidated power over Slaver’s Bay and detained Tyland, who had been visiting.

“The lands of the Old Empire of Ghis have always been a thorn in the side of Old Valyria,” Rhaegar muttered, gritting his teeth. He whistled sharply into the sky.

“Roar...”

The Cannibal, who had been circling overhead, finally descended. Rhaegar climbed onto its back, giving Uragax one last glance as the old dragon settled back into its resting place.

“I’ll find you a rider,” he said softly. “You can stay in Lemonwood for now. If wild dragons do invade, it will serve as a warning.”

With that, Rhaegar knew he had to return to King's Landing. The victory at Qohor had shifted the balance of power across the three continents, and he needed to act swiftly.

...

Slaver's Bay.

Meereen, the Great Coliseum.

"Oh, yeah, fight well!"

"Harder, hammer that peasant!"

Thousands of spectators packed the stands, their cheers echoing across the coliseum as they watched the brutal "duel" unfold below. The wide arena had been deliberately transformed into a muddy quagmire, where two figures rolled about, exchanging blows in the filthy mess. To be precise, only one of them was doing the punching.

"Haha, poor curly lion!"

A towering figure, standing 6'6" with a shock of purple hair, twisted his hips in a grotesque parody of a dance. The burly man, despite his size, wore layers of women's clothing, adding a bizarre flair to his already unsettling appearance.

"Ho ho~~"

The other figure, a blonde, lay gasping in the mud, his head and face covered in filth. He was clearly struggling.

"Again, stupid!"

The purple-haired man was Racallio Renndon, a notorious pirate. During the first Battle of the Stepstones, he had formed an alliance with Prince Qoren of Dorne, driving back Daemon, who had found the barren islands intolerable. Racallio briefly occupied the Stepstones, declaring himself king.

Now, he grabbed the blonde man and punched him twice in the stomach, forcing him to spit out bile.

He raised his hand triumphantly, then slapped his plump chest under his tattered clothes.

Despite his burly frame, Racallio possessed a strangely delicate heart, evident in his twisted enjoyment of the spectacle.

In the audience, a beautiful maiden with silver and gold braids, dressed in a fur skirt, sat calmly, savoring rare red grapes she had never tasted before.

"Lady, what you did to my brother was too much!"

Next to her, Tyland watched with incomprehension, unable to sit idly by.

Below, Racallio dragged the blonde figure up once more, shoving him back into the mud for another degrading "bath."

The silver-haired maiden turned her head sharply, tapping the ground with her staff-like scepter in clear displeasure. "Mind your title, Lord Tyland," she commanded.

Tyland's expression froze, and he struggled to find his voice. "Your Grace, the Queen of Meereen," he finally managed to say, the words tasting bitter on his tongue. Saying such a thing went against his conscience, but his brother had brought this upon himself.

Though the brothers were born only five minutes apart, their treatment had always been worlds apart. At times, Tyland wondered if he might have been the firstborn, with the midwife simply making a mistake.

The silver-haired maiden lifted her chin, adopting an air of authority. "Release him, Racallio," she ordered.

It was clear that the shift in her status had been sudden, and she had yet to fully adapt to the power and responsibility that came with her position.

"Yes, Your Grace!" Racallio responded with an almost playful obedience, twisting his barrel-thick waist as he pulled the dazed Jason out of the quagmire.

Seeing this, Tyland spoke up in protest. "Your Grace, we came here to exchange ideas peacefully." How could you justify beating someone like this? It was excessive!

The silver-haired maiden frowned slightly, her voice firm as she responded, "It's not you who was struck, Lord Tyland." She continued, her tone laced with cold logic, "You are a courteous gentleman, but your brother is foolish and arrogant and deserves to be punished."

The moment they met, he had called her a bastard and sought to divide the hard-won lands she had fought to reunify. Three hundred years ago, a man like that wouldn't have been fit to feed a dragon.

Chapter 618: Maekar Targaryen

"These are our terms: one hundred gold dragons!"

"For ship?"

"No, for person."

Inside the Great Pyramid of Meereen, the silver-haired Queen, who had initially looked pleased, once again received the Lannister brothers.

Jason was covered in mud, except for his face, which had been roughly washed, and he was in a daze. He couldn't believe it—he, a Lord of the First Rank, had not only been beaten up but was now being held hostage in the main hall for ransom.

Tyland opened his mouth wide in shock. "Even if we wanted to, we couldn't pull together that kind of money."

His brother had led a large fleet, but all the sailors had been detained. To rescue them, he would have to pay one hundred gold dragons per person, which was better than just killing them all and being done with it.

"I can't come up with that kind of money, and don't even think about it!" Jason exclaimed, his face bruised and swollen. He would never spend an extra gold dragon to rescue anyone—not even if the Conqueror were still alive!

"There you go again, crying poverty." The silver-haired Maiden sat on her throne, her tanned long legs folded to the side, looking down her nose at Tyland. "Who would believe that, coming from a Lannister?"

She began counting on her fingers. "Everyone knows that your stables and kitchens are made of solid gold."

"Yes, everyone knows!" Racallio, dressed as a woman in seven colors, crossed his arms and agreed with the Queen.

"No, not even one gold dragon!" Jason shouted again, like a clown performing on stage.

The silver-haired woman covered her forehead with her hand and waved impatiently. "Maybe we should shut him up. A complete idiot, who has no right to an equal dialogue."

Bang!

Racallio punched Jason in the stomach, sending him crumpling over like a golden shrimp.

"Hey, we agreed to negotiate, not fight!" Tyland protested, his eyelids fluttering in shock. Although he admittedly didn't like his twin brother much, he couldn't just let him be bullied in front of his eyes. What did they take the Iron Throne and House Lannister for?

Seeing this, the silver-haired Maiden nodded. "Take him away and treat him like a guest."

"Yes, my Queen." Racallio gave a wicked smile and dragged the semi-unconscious Jason under his arm.

"No, no!" Tyland was horrified and moved to stop him. His niece was only two years old, and he couldn't allow his brother's reputation to be ruined.

"Don't worry, Racallio has some strange quirks, but his orientation is still quite normal," the silver-haired woman reassured with a feigned air of generosity.

Tyland, ever the cautious adviser, had always maintained a polite demeanor in her presence. Upon hearing her words, he hesitated but didn't dare to question her. Instead, he turned away and took a deep breath. "Lady Irina, I can agree to those terms on Jason's behalf. Let's move on to business."

There was no denying that Jason was an arrogant fool. As his twin, Tyland felt it was his duty to protect him, but it was up to Jason to show some sense. 'This is not Westeros, and it is certainly not the Westerlands ruled by House Lannister,' he thought. 'Perhaps a good beating will teach him humility and courtesy.'

"Call me 'Your Grace'!" Irina raised her chin, emphasizing her status once more.

Tyland chuckled. "Haha, and what is your law, and where do you rule?"

"My bloodline is my law, recognized by the three Free Cities rebuilt from the ruins of the Old Empire of Ghis," Irina replied, twirling a lock of her silver-blond hair around her finger, flaunting her Valyrian heritage.

"As far as I know, your rule rose as suddenly as a storm," Tyland remarked, his gaze betraying a hint of surprise as he studied her silver hair and purple eyes. He asked cautiously, "Forgive my impertinence, but what is your family name...?"

Just four years ago, Slaver's Bay had been devastated by a bastard dragonlord lineage.

Irina straightened her back, her eyes reflecting distant memories. "Daeryon! The ancient and noble Dragonlord bloodline, the Warden family of the Thirteenth Peak of the Fourteen Flames."

"..." Tyland was stunned by her bold revelation, momentarily at a loss for words. 'Another Dragonlord bloodline... Wow. I wonder how the king will react to this news—perhaps he'll burn Slaver's Bay again.'

"Er, this is truly surprising information," Tyland coughed twice, hesitant. "You should be aware of the disaster that befalls anyone who falsely claims an unknown Dragonlord surname."

He was being polite, offering her a warning, as she had shown him a similar courtesy. Not just anyone could claim descent from the Dragonlords by adopting a fabricated surname.

Irina Daeryon remained unfazed. "Do you think I'm lying, Lord Tyland?"

"Not at all, it's just... the truth," Tyland replied with a forced smile. He had no desire to be beaten like Jason.

"You're very honest, and that annoys me," Irina said, resting her hand on her side and looking away. "I've heard of the Bastard Dragonlord, an impostor with Aethyrys blood. I am nothing like that."

She had been born in the Lands of the Long Summer, was well-versed in the oral tradition of inherited knowledge, and had escaped the cursed land with great difficulty. She was a true dragon, like her kin on the Western Continent.

Tyland hesitated slightly before interrupting, "You are right. Let's move on to the troubles with the slave ships."

The previous topic was too sensitive. It was better to hurry up with the negotiations and leave with everything intact.

"Speak," Irina gestured with a raised hand, always maintaining the refined etiquette of the aristocracy. She was still adapting to her new environment, learning to integrate into a world with different norms and values. Ancient Valyria had fallen, and aside from their kin on the Western Continent, the prestige of the Dragonlords surnames had faded.

"Lady, the slave ships have been raiding vessels near Volantis and the Stepstones, which has severely disrupted our maritime trade," Tyland said, regaining his composure as he explained the purpose of his visit. On behalf of the Iron Throne and Prince Maekar, he admonished Slaver's Bay for its vile actions.

"I'm sorry for the impact on your business," Irina replied, her eyes flashing with a hint of regret as she offered the apology.

Tyland, quick-witted, couldn't help but respond with a touch of cynicism. "My father once told me that any elaborate excuse is meaningless before the word 'but.'"

Irina smiled slightly and quickly added, "But!"

Tyland:...

He realized then that reasoning with women like her was futile.

"This is Slaver's Bay, and we need slaves," Irina continued, her voice unwavering. "Just as House Lannister sits on a mountain of gold, I cannot forbid you from digging for it."

'If the Slaver's Bay doesn't capture slaves, what do you expect us to do—farm barren land or fish for stinking shrimp in the sea?'

Tyland was exasperated and he responded firmly, "You should exercise some control. Besides, the slave trade is a sin and will be punished by both the old and new gods."

"The slave trade is an ancient tradition," Irina retorted, frowning. "Both the Old Empire of Ghis and ancient Valyria permitted the existence of slaves."

"Precisely, and that's why both of those great powers you mentioned have already fallen," Tyland countered, seizing the opportunity to press his point.

"This..." Irina was momentarily speechless. The origins of the Doom were uncertain—whether natural or man-made—but one thing was undeniable: the ancient Valyrians had committed countless atrocities.

Sensing her hesitation, Tyland spoke with a touch of arrogance, "On behalf of the Iron Throne, I am officially warning you to cease the brutal practices of the slave ships at sea, or you will face dire consequences."

With the weight of authority behind him, his words carried a threat.

"And what if I refuse?" Irina's face darkened slightly. Without the slave trade, what would sustain her people? The slave trade was legal in the Freehold Empire; she had committed no crime.

"Then you..." Tyland paused, then said, "Then you will face serious trouble, and my king will be furious."

"You are a loyal adviser who knows how to stay out of trouble," Irina observed calmly, neither offended nor intimidated. "It seems we cannot reach an agreement. When your brother pays the ransom for his freedom, I will release you as well."

"What?" Tyland was stunned. He didn't fully comprehend her words until the slave soldiers seized him by the shoulders.

"Treat him well," Irina instructed, feeling weary and in need of rest. "Prepare a plate of quail for me, and don't let any mutton near the table."

"No, no! You can't treat an adviser like this!" Tyland cried out in desperation, struggling against his captors.

Irina merely rolled her eyes and walked away, heading back to her sleeping quarters.

Suddenly, a strong wind gusted through the window, causing the lightly draped curtain to billow.

"Huh?" Irina paused, her breath catching as something caught her attention.

Boom.

A massive shadow streaked across the sky of Meereen, swiftly ascending the Great Pyramid. The sheer force of its impact shattered large panes of glass.

"Dragon!"

A heart-wrenching cry echoed from outside the tower, followed by the chaotic sounds of people stumbling and falling.

Irina's eyes widened in alarm as she rushed to the window.

"Roar!"

A colossal creature with a silvery-gray body and misty wings flashed by, moving with the agility of a swallow.

"Dragon! Prepare yourselves!"

"Hurry..."

The slave soldiers shouted, frantically turning the scorpion crossbows on the city walls and launching long steel spears.

Boom.

The silver-gray dragon dove through the red-brick sky of Meereen, unleashing a torrent of gray Dragonfire that billowed like smoke or fog.

The Dragonfire obscured everything in its path, and the dragon darted in and out, its terrifying roars reverberating through the city.

Suddenly...

"Roar!"

The silver-gray dragon soared out of the Dragonfire, gliding effortlessly past the towering city walls. The scorpion crossbows struggled to find their mark as the dragon swept through the gray Dragonfire like a string of beads.

"Ah!"

"Fire! Help..."

The city walls erupted in flames, reminiscent of a festering wound, as the slave soldiers screamed in agony, tumbling to the ground and trampling over one another in their desperate attempts to escape.

"A dragon! A living dragon!"

Inside the Great Golden Pagoda, Irina trembled, her eyes brimming with tears.

...

A long time later, in the square of Meereen...

"Roar!"

The silver-gray dragon stood tall, its enormous head swiveling as it surveyed its surroundings. Its cold, vertical pupils were filled with an ominous intensity.

The slave soldiers surrounded the beast from a distance, tensely gripping their spears but not daring to approach.

"Quiet, Tyraxes," Maekar commanded from the saddle, his small face calm and vigilant. He had lost his teacher, and Volantis could no more do without Tyland Lannister than the Stepstones could do without their uncle, Aegon.

Well... it shouldn't make much difference.

“Prince!”

After a long wait, Tyland finally appeared, his face flushed with excitement. He knew that someone would come to his rescue. Accompanying him was Irina, flanked by her bodyguards.

Irina's gaze was fixed on the menacing silver-gray dragon. At over twenty meters long, it stood as tall as a small castle. It might not be as large as the fully-grown dragons, but to the tiny slave soldiers, it was still a fearsome beast.

Tyraxes was unlike any other dragon. Apart from its silver-gray scales and misty wing membranes, its head was about three times larger than that of an average dragon, and its exposed fangs were like a giant guillotine, capable of splitting mountains and crushing stones.

The dragon's tail lacked a dorsal fin, ending instead in a flattened, shell-like shape that resembled a powerful battering ram as it swayed. One shoulder blade and half of its wing were covered in silver-gray scales that shimmered with a colorful sheen, reflecting halos of light in the sun.

At first glance, Tyraxes appeared fierce and hideous—a war machine designed for maximum lethality.

“Have you been kidnapped, Lord Tyland?” Maekar asked, tilting his head to the side with a mischievous gleam in his sapphire-like eyes.

Chapter 619: The Blue Queen's Cub

'My teacher is useless!' Maekar thought bitterly.

“No, it was a kind attempt to keep me here,” Tyland said with a sheepish smile, offering a weak excuse.

“Mm-hm,” Maekar grunted, casting a sideways glance at the silver-haired woman in the distance. A Valyrian becoming the Queen of Meereen and ruler of Slaver's Bay? 'There's something off about the teacher's teachings if even a fallen Valyrian can claim to be a ruler over and over again.'

“Prince, what is your name?” Irina stepped forward, her eyes burning with curiosity as she looked at the young boy on the dragon. He appeared to be around seven or eight years old, his translucent platinum blonde hair catching the sunlight. His gloomy blue eyes were almost as dark as purple, and his pale face had an oddly endearing quality.

Maekar first glanced at the nearby slave soldiers before responding flatly, “Before asking someone else, you should introduce yourself first.”

As he spoke, he discreetly waved at Tyland.

“Oh,” Tyland nodded vigorously, then scrambled up the rope ladder on all fours.

Irina didn't attempt to stop him. After introducing herself, she asked, “Targaryen's younger brother, can you speak now?”

The Targaryens, far away in the Western Continent, were the only family capable of controlling dragons. The two houses had once been closely allied.

“Maekar Targaryen,” Maekar replied, standing tall and pulling back his shoulders. “Third son of Rhaegar Targaryen the First, Prince of Volantis.”

“Prince?” Irina echoed, momentarily confused.

“Yes,” Maekar nodded. “Your slave ships have disrupted trade in my Free Cities.”

Of all his siblings, only his eldest brother Baelon held the title of heir and Prince of Dragonstone. Maekar, stationed far away in Volantis, bore the title of Prince, though it was prefixed with “Interim.” He could officially inherit the title when he came of age.

Irina’s eyes gleamed even brighter at his words, and she took a step closer. “I have entertained your teacher. Would you honor me by joining the banquet?”

A boy with a potent dose of dragon blood, accompanied by a magnificent, powerful sub-adult dragon—it was as alluring as a drug.

“No!” Maekar refused outright, frowning. “My mother told me to stay away from bad women.”

Did she think he was a fool? The way she looked at him, it was as if she wanted to carve a piece of flesh from him—something that might compromise his innocence.

“You can stay. I swear on my life and the honor of my house that I will never harbor the slightest ill will towards you,” Irina said, raising her hand in a solemn vow.

“Save it.” Maekar tugged on the reins and issued a stern warning. “I won’t be taken in by your sweet talk, just like I don’t believe in your fake last name.”

House Daeryon, the supposed Dragonlord lineage she claimed, had perished long ago in the Doom.

“I sincerely hope you’ll stay as my guest!” Irina’s eyes sparkled as she added, “I admire your father greatly, and I could even invite him to visit Meereen.”

At the mention of his father, Maekar’s expression darkened slightly. “You don’t want him here.”

“Perhaps I could go to King’s Landing to meet him?” Irina suggested boldly. Her commanding presence matched her frank tone. “I share the same blood as your family, the ancient Valyrian Dragonlord blood.”

She had no dragons and no living relatives. Her great-grandmother had perished halfway there, never escaping the smoke that had haunted her all her life. But Irina ruled Slaver’s Bay, and alongside the other coastal Wise Masters and Good Masters, she held the power to influence the war. A Dragonlady without rivals but with considerable strength shouldn’t be dismissed by the petty Targaryen kings. The best path forward for the descendants of Old Valyria was to renew the alliance between their houses.

Maekar’s face scrunched up like a bun, and he hesitated before saying, “You still haven’t given up.”

Was she really planning to ask his father for a marriage? Regardless of her bloodline, Maekar didn't like older girls. It was one of the few things he and his father differed on.

"You can think of it that way, but I'm not that desperate," Irina declared, puffing out her modest chest with pride. "I just want to see your father. He owes me some sheep."

Pat!

Maekar pulled out a handful of gold dragons and tossed them at her, bluntly retorting, "He doesn't owe anyone anything, you old woman."

Then he patted the silver-gray scales of his dragon, signaling it to take off.

"Roar!"

Tyraxes raised its head and roared, spreading its massive wings before launching into the air with a powerful kick. As the dragon soared over the smoky Meereen, Tyland's panicked screams echoed in the distance. The roar of the beast reverberated across the Free Cities.

...

Across the Narrow Sea, in Driftmark, at the docks of Hull...

The Sea Snake walked alone along the dockside, his long, tigerish eyes scanning the shipwrights and sailors hard at work.

Sizzle...

A figure with short silver hair sat cross-legged nearby, methodically polishing an axe blade on a whetstone.

"Addam," the Sea Snake called out as he approached the handsome young man, who was dressed as a shipwright.

Addam looked up, surprised to see the Sea Snake. "My lord, why are you here?"

"Just wandering around. The kingdom needs our ships," the Sea Snake replied with a natural ease. "Your brother Alyn has joined my fleet. He's a better sailor than you."

Addam's eyes darkened, and he forced a smile. "He's a great lad—works hard and never complains. Much better than his older brother, who has to fight off seasickness every time he goes to sea."

With that, Addam returned to sharpening the axe blade, occasionally testing its edge by chopping into a wooden board.

Four years ago, he had defied the orders of the one-eyed Aemon and led the army back to Hull. As a result, Corlys had called him in for a private meeting, where he was stripped of all titles and dismissed as a sailor. His status plummeted, and he returned to his old trade as a shipwright.

The Sea Snake observed Addam's despondency but turned away without a word.

Addam clenched his lower lip, stubbornly watching the old man's retreating back.

“By the way,” the Sea Snake suddenly turned back, his tone thoughtful, “there will be more wars in the kingdom. Do well at the shipyard—there’s no shortage of opportunities for a hero.”

Without waiting to see if Addam understood, the Sea Snake turned and left.

Addam stood there, stunned and at a loss.

“Shipyard?” he murmured to himself.

His maternal grandfather had been an old shipwright, his mother a ship’s captain, and he had inherited the family shipyard. In Driftmark, families like his were numerous, all living off the sea and their crafts.

Addam was momentarily confused, but then he recalled a sail plan he hadn’t been able to understand at all. It had been sent from a wizard of Asshai for study and was kept strictly confidential.

...

Late afternoon in High Tide City...

A dragon as black as coal lay in the castle courtyard, devouring a goat fed to it by the guards.

“News from Qohor: Daemon and Aemond burned Lorath and forced the Four Cities Alliance to retreat,” Mysaria, the White Worm, reported, her voice calm and measured.

“Lorath is just a barren Free City,” Rhaegar replied.

“Norvos is equally barren, but it can still sway the course of war,” Mysaria countered, standing slender and graceful in front of the window, recounting each detail with precision.

Rhaegar sat on the king’s throne made of driftwood in the Hall of Nine, rubbing his temples as a headache began to form. ‘Only when you become king do you realize how difficult it is to be the most powerful person in the world,’ he thought.

Qohor was embroiled in war, the remnants of the Triarchy were resurging, and a new ruler had emerged in Slaver’s Bay seemingly out of nowhere... It was no wonder that no king in history had ever sought to expand their territory excessively. Even the revered Old King had focused on consolidation and strengthening his rule.

The dynasty’s territory was expanding, and enemies were on all sides.

“Hah...” Rhaegar sighed, lamenting softly, “The Freehold Empire had a thousand dragons and ruled the Valyrian Peninsula and much of eastern Essos. Am I being too ambitious if I try to dominate both sides of the Narrow Sea?”

The thought had crossed his mind more than once—conquering Braavos and Pentos, eliminating two of the Nine Free Cities. That would leave only Norvos and Lorath, both militarily and

politically weak. Norvos lacked a warm port, and Lorath didn't even have one. Together, they might be a tough challenge, but divided, they would be easy prey. The pressure would be much less.

"Your Grace, I advise against this," Mysaria said, leaning against the window frame, her voice rational and steady. "All the major banks in the world owe money to the Iron Bank; we cannot afford to make enemies on every front."

To put it more bluntly: more than half of the noble families in Westeros were indebted to the Iron Bank. If the king led an army into battle, not only would the Lords be difficult to manage, but they might also sabotage his efforts behind his back. This was the inevitable complexity of politics, where everything was entangled and complicated.

The Freehold had once considered attacking Braavos, but the Iron Bank's influence and the courage of the then-Sealord had deterred them, leading to an alliance instead.

Braavos's unique location—with no arable land and natural protection by a fog barrier—made it a costly and pointless target.

Rhaegar's jaw tightened as Mysaria continued. The more they talked, the worse his headache became. The Iron Islands, the Basilisk Isles—difficult locations with little strategic value, yet filled with troublemakers.

"But there is some good news," Mysaria added with a small smile. "Daemon and Aemond have returned victorious, and Lord Tyland has safely returned from Slaver's Bay."

This news was only half a month old, but it had been a relief. The king had hurried back from Dorne to prepare the fleet for an anticipated attack on Slaver's Bay. Thankfully, the threat of war had not materialized.

As they conversed, Rhaenys entered the hall, holding a young boy with short silver-blond hair in her arms, beaming with excitement. "Rhaegar, come with me to the Dragonpit."

"What is it, Aunt?" Rhaegar asked, rising from his seat, confused.

...

The former site of High Tide City, now serving as a temporary Dragonpit...

"Roar!"

A 20-meter-long ethereal blue dragon let out a thunderous roar, flapping its silver-white wings.

"Quiet, Thunderstrider," the two elderly Dragonkeepers called out, their bamboo canes knocking against the ground as they attempted to drive the dragon back.

With a low rumble, Thunderstrider retreated into a corner. From the shadows emerged a massive dragon with cobalt blue scales and copper-colored claws, jaws, and belly.

"Tessarion," Daeron said softly, as he and Rhaena stood hand in hand before the elegant dragon.

"Roar..."

Despite being over thirty meters long, Tessarion still retained the temperament of a little princess. A female Dragonkeeper stepped forward from the shadows, holding a slender chain in her hand. The chain clanked noisily as it swung from the dark yellow claw of a young dragon.

“Roar~~”

The young dragon, its earth-yellow body covered in scales and fine horns on its forehead, flapped its wings restlessly, its scarlet vertical pupils darting around. The female Dragonkeeper’s voice was calm and soothing as she led the young dragon toward Daeron. “Prince, this is the first offspring of your dragon.”

“I can hardly believe it—Tessarion hatched a young dragon so quickly,” Daeron exclaimed with joy, reaching out to touch the young dragon.

Dragons do not have fixed genders; the one that lays eggs is typically regarded as female. Shortly after Tessarion reached adulthood, she laid a clutch of five eggs—an unprecedented feat.

“Roar~~”

The young earth-yellow dragon hissed sharply, unleashing a mouthful of yellow flames at the large hand approaching it. Daeron jerked his hand back in surprise.

Rhaena, eyes wide with amazement, held a small boy with silver hair and purple eyes in her arms. “Aenar, look how fierce this young dragon is. Do you like it?” she asked encouragingly.

The little boy, about three or four years old, was small and delicate, with a face that bore a striking resemblance to Daemon’s. His timid expression masked a hint of immature ferocity.

“It’s a bit ugly,” Aenar remarked, his pale skin like his mother’s and his serious purple eyes reflecting his judgment. On his back, he carried an exquisite basket, inside of which lay a scarlet dragon egg adorned with spiral patterns.

Chapter 620: Baela’s Hatred

Time flew by, and half a month later...

King's Landing, Mud Gate.

Boom!

A massive scarlet creature, resembling a giant serpent, soared over Blackwater Bay, its wide, fleshy wings casting a shadow over the towering city gate.

The people in the city looked up, their reactions a mix of cheers and curses. Among them, none were more delighted than the prostitutes of Flea Bottom.

...

Red Keep.

"Son, I'm home!" Daemon shouted, striding quickly into the hall.

In his haste, he hadn't taken the time to change. He was still clad in black steel armor, scratched from battle, a scarlet cloak draped over his shoulders, and a dragon wing helmet tucked under his

arm. His lean figure moved with purpose, and his long silver-and-gold hair flowed freely, framing his youthful yet stern face.

"Father!!" A silver-haired boy, sitting in the hall, jumped to his feet in surprise at the sound.

Rhaenys stood off to the side, arms crossed, murmuring, "Be careful, he's not going anywhere."

The boy, his milk teeth showing in a wide grin, threw himself into the cold, metallic embrace of Daemon's armor.

"Look what I brought you, Gaemon." Daemon lifted his eldest son with one arm, pulling out a Dragonbone dagger from behind his back. It was a prize from the battlefield of Qohor, taken from a Norvoshi temple. While not as precious as Valyrian steel, it was a rare treasure nonetheless.

"I like it," Gaemon said, his hands gripping the delicate dagger as he shyly wrapped his arms around his father's neck. He didn't mind the smell of dragon breath mixed with blood that clung to his father.

Daemon's mouth curled into a smile as he gazed at his son. "What have you been up to while I was away? You seem full of spirit."

As he spoke, he glanced at Rhaenys, who remained expressionless. "Tessarion hatched a young dragon named Morghul," she said casually. "Quite the sought-after creature these days."

That young dragon, with its earthy scales and crimson vertical pupils, had already been deemed a fierce and aggressive beast by the Dragonkeepers.

Daemon's smile turned playful. "My son doesn't need a young dragon to make his mark."

"Right!" Gaemon nodded proudly. "I have Thunderstrider."

Daemon's smile widened as he ruffled his son's messy hair. That dark blue, sub-adult dragon had been a precious find from the Smoking Sea, one that Daemon had captured with great care. Though still too young to ride, Thunderstrider was already tamed and bound to Gaemon.

Rhaenys watched the two of them, her expression unreadable. "Just because you don't care about it doesn't mean others won't fight over it."

Daemon frowned slightly, caught off guard by her words.

Knock, knock.

The sound of knocking on the hall door made him turn. Standing in the doorway was another boy, much younger, with a knapsack on his shoulders. He looked at Daemon weakly, unsure of his welcome.

...

Not long after, at the Dragonpit...

Roar!

"..."

Several dragons of varying sizes crawled around the vast hall, hissing angrily at one another.

"Moondancer and Trickster are growing like wildfire," Rhaegar remarked, standing by the campfire, his gaze fixed on the two enormous creatures nestled together.

One was darker in color, with gray stripes that resembled tree rings at first glance. The other was vividly colored, sporting a pair of sharp dragon horns and a long, scorpion-like tail. Both sub-adult dragons were under twenty years of age, with Trickster—the larger of the two—already stretching over twenty meters. Their robust frames radiated raw power.

"The Trickster has quite the appetite, and it's not picky—cows, goats, pigs, it devours them all," Aemon boasted, a proud smile on his face. "Just like its rider—smart and capable."

"Is that so?" Rhaegar's eyes sparkled as he looked his second son up and down. Aemon was carefree, taking after no one in particular. Unlike his older brother, Baelon, who was calm and composed, Aemon was bold and adventurous.

Rhaegar had also noticed how the twins had begun to grow apart, not just in personality but in appearance as well. Baelon had grown stronger, with a more intense gaze, while Aemon, leaner and swift, wore his short silver-blond hair in contrast to his brother's longer locks. The resemblance between them, once nearly identical, had lessened. Perhaps it was their hearts that set them apart.

"Of course!" Aemon replied confidently, meeting his father's gaze without hesitation. "The people of Tyrosh and Lys know me. I've repaired and rebuilt half the bridges and canals in both Free Cities."

As the future Prince of Lys and husband to the Queen of Tyrosh, Aemon had his own role to play. With Baelon often consumed by matters of state, Aemon believed he might one day be named Hand of the King. His knowledge of domestic affairs was considerable, as he had spent much time among the poor, the homeless, and the prostitutes in every slum.

With their mother away in Lys and their uncle Daemon fighting in Qohor, much of the management of the Free Cities had fallen to him and his foster sister, Baela.

"Not bad, you've got some talent," Rhaegar said with a faint smile, offering rare praise. He knew his second son well enough to understand that Aemon couldn't resist a bit of recognition.

"Hey, where's Baelon?" Aemon asked, a note of pride in his voice, eager for his brother to witness his achievements.

Aemon's excitement dimmed, but his thoughts quickly shifted. "I heard from the merchants at the docks that Maekar flew to Slaver's Bay on dragonback and rescued Lord Tyland... but left his brother, Lord Jason, behind."

"Who told you that?" Rhaegar frowned.

"Everyone knows," Aemon continued, undeterred. "Maekar was reckless. He only rescued Lord Tyland."

Rhaegar's gaze sharpened as he turned to his son. "And what exactly are you suggesting? That Jason is somehow more important than Tyland? Or are you accusing your half-brother of deliberately leaving that fool behind in Slaver's Bay so his teacher could inherit the Westerlands?"

His voice was laced with frustration. Truth be told, Rhaegar often wondered if Jason's brain was filled with nothing but air. The audacity of that man to ride into Slaver's Bay, make claims on territory, and then insult the master to his face. But what irked him even more was his second son's veiled complaint, whether intentional or not.

Aemon was taken aback and quickly explained, "I only meant that it was dangerous for Maekar to rescue Lord Tyland alone. A long-term plan should've been considered."

"Yes, Father," Aemon bowed his head, not daring to argue further.

Seeing his son's submission, Rhaegar softened slightly. "You are blood brothers, bound by the same fate. Your glory is my glory, and your failure is my failure. If a brother is in trouble, you must help him—not mock or gossip behind his back."

"I understand," Aemon muttered, eyes cast to the floor.

Rhaegar, uninterested in prolonging the lecture, waved him off. "Go now. Don't leave your fiancée waiting."

...

On the other side of the Dragonpit...

Roar~~

A young, earth-colored dragon tore into a roasted goat, its sharp teeth and claws making quick work of the meal.

"Do you want this dragon, Aenar?" Baela asked, standing beside her half-brother. Tall for her age, she gently patted his head. At fifteen, she was already a striking young woman. With a dark complexion, her delicate features were framed by short silver-blond hair, her ambitious purple eyes shining.

Her twin sister, Rhaena, stood next to her, looking far less developed, almost like a child. Rhaena also glanced at Aenar and whispered, "Morphul is a fine young dragon, and it's growing fast."

Her words carried an implication as her gaze drifted toward a corner of the Dragonpit.

Roar!

A pale pink sub-adult dragon fluttered its wings, graceful like a butterfly. Morphul was not large, barely over ten meters, but it had reached the size where it could carry a rider. Rhaena didn't expect her dragon to be much use in battle, but it was enough to indulge her occasional desire for dragon riding.

Aenar, carrying a basket on his back, looked doubtful. "I already have a dragon egg," he said, bouncing the basket slightly as he spoke.

"Dragon eggs are hard to hatch," another voice interrupted.

Gaemon appeared, followed by a pale blue sub-adult dragon. Baela glanced back, her voice indifferent. "Gaemon."

Gaemon, with his delicate features, looked up proudly. "Father's back—he gave me a gift." With a flourish, he drew the Dragonbone dagger from his waist, waiting for his sisters to admire it.

"Oh," Baela responded, barely interested. She took Aenar's hand and began to lead him away.

"Come, I'll show you Moondancer. Maybe Aemon has a gift for you and Rhaena somewhere."

They walked quickly, almost as if they were avoiding a nuisance. Rhaena hesitated, torn between her siblings, but eventually touched Gaemon's head in passing before following Baela.

Gaemon stood frozen, his hand slowly lowering the dagger as he watched them go.

This entire scene was witnessed by Daemon, hidden behind the bronze doors. His eyes narrowed, his voice low. "She still holds a grudge."

Baela, with her fearless and competitive nature, was so much like him. A true tomboy, brave and proud. But she had never forgiven him for Laena's death in childbirth, blaming it on him as if it were his "masterpiece." And to her, young Gaemon, born on that same tragic day, was the unwitting accomplice.

"She doesn't truly hate Gaemon. She just doesn't want to confront it," Rhaenyra explained softly from the sidelines.

Visenya stood by, clutching the hem of her skirt, her small hands gripping her younger brother Aegor tightly.

Daemon took a deep breath, feigning indifference. "Let her be. She's already gotten what she wanted."

Baela still held the right to inherit Tyrosh, even though he had two sons—Gaemon, his firstborn, and Aenar, his second—both carrying the Targaryen name. Gaemon was being raised by his cousin Rhaenys and had the young dragon Thunderstrider by his side, securing his future. Aenar, meanwhile, had his mother, Mysaria, and the care of his two older half-sisters. As long as the children didn't clash too often, Daemon thought, that was all that mattered.

Rhaenyra nodded, well-acquainted with her foster daughter's nature. Baela was a good girl, one who despised intrigue and manipulation—but fate had made her a girl in a world ruled by men. Taking care of her half-brothers was her way of defying Daemon.

"You've raised quite the fine group of children," Daemon remarked, shifting the conversation. His gaze fell on Visenya. "You only have one daughter. Why not find her a companion who's been by her side since childhood?"

"Gaemon?" Rhaenyra was caught off guard, not expecting him to bring it up.

Daemon nodded. "Yes. He's the last piece of Laena left behind."

"I'll consider it," Rhaenyra replied carefully, unwilling to commit. "But Maekar is very protective of his sister. We should wait until the children are older before discussing such things."

"Maekar?!" Visenya perked up at the mention of her half-brother's name, still tugging at Aegor's face. Aegor, looking like a rag doll, drooled helplessly as his sister manhandled him.

"You misheard," Rhaenyra sighed, gently prying her son from Visenya's grip. She gave her daughter a playful nudge. "Go have a look at Morghul. You might like it."

A newly hatched dragon was undeniably valuable, and for a girl without one, there was hope in taming such a creature.

"That ugly dragon?" Visenya wrinkled her nose, glancing over at the young, earth-colored dragon tearing into its meal. It looked more like a winged desert lizard, its sharp scales and horns leaving marks on the Dragonstone floor.

"I'll go!" Visenya's eyes lit up as she pounded her chest excitedly and ran off.

The dragon might be ugly, but it looked fierce—just like the villainous beast in her storybooks, the one that always stole the princess away. And she liked it. Fierce and ugly was just her type.