

G.O Thrones 631

Chapter 631: Baelon "The Brave"

Half a month after the Battle of the Stepstones...

The Axe, Sothoryos Continent.

The barren island was covered in primeval forests and jagged rocks, with flocks of birds and beasts scurrying about from time to time.

Clang! Clang!

Beneath a stone mountain near the shore, a group of ragged young men and women swung picks and wheeled away rubble in creaking barrows.

"Hurry up, don't slack off!"

The overseer, a sellsword wielding a long whip, barked orders, urging each slave to work harder. Those who faltered for even a moment felt the lash almost instantly.

At the edge of the stone excavation site, two silver-haired men worked side by side. One planed the rock, while the other hauled it away.

"Brother, I'm hungry," the younger of the two gasped, his frail figure trembling as he hoisted a load of stones onto the cart. His once-pale face was now darkened, gaunt from hunger.

"Hang in there," the elder replied, swinging his pickaxe against the rock with force. "Lunch won't be served until noon." He pried loose a large stone, tossed it onto the cart, then fished out a small, sweat-stained piece of black bread from his collar. It was barely half the size of his palm, the rye flour mixed with husk and bran, hard as Valyrian steel.

Without a word, he handed it to his younger brother and went back to his labor.

"Brother... you've given me scraps again." The younger man's voice was filled with shame as he eyed the bread. He couldn't even bite into it, his teeth too weak to break the tough crust.

"Eat it quickly, before someone else takes it," Keelan muttered, his eyes scanning the surrounding slaves who watched hungrily. Most were on the brink of starvation, barely clinging to life. He and his brother, Kiel, were luckier than most, their silver-blond Valyrian blood earning them an extra piece of bread each day. It wasn't much, but it kept them alive—just barely.

"I thought we were going to have a good life," Kiel whispered, his head hanging as he kicked at the stones beneath his feet.

They had left the Smoking Sea behind, only to be captured by the newly risen slave city-states built on the ruins of the Old Empire of Ghis. Sold to the Citadel in the Western Continent, they were nearly used for human research. From there, they were sent to Volantis, but pirates from the Triarchy intercepted them, and they narrowly escaped an attack by a dragon.

At that moment, the brothers had embraced one last time, and prepared for death.

Who would have thought that, years after the Doom, dragons would be so common, attacking ships without warning? Fortunately, they had been rescued at the last moment... but not by saviors.

Unfortunately...

Keelan's face darkened, his jaw clenched as he muttered, "Unfortunately, those who saved us were pirates too. Might've been better to die in Dragonfire."

"You're right," Kiel agreed, struggling to gnaw on the bread, his teeth threatening to break under the effort. "The Citadel's food was better, but it was no place for men to live."

Keelan's grip tightened on his pickaxe, almost losing control of it.

Their ancestral home was Oros, the ruins of a Free City near the Fourteen Flames, twin to the distant city of Tyria across the sea.

After the Doom, Oros was shrouded in toxic smoke and haze for years, rendering it completely uninhabitable. The few who remained struggled to reproduce, but most of the children born were stillborn, deformed, or monstrous. By the time it came to their generation, all of their people had perished, leaving only the two brothers—Keelan and Kiel—normal and alive.

Having spent their entire lives together, shaped by Valyrian customs and isolation, their bond deepened in ways that sometimes crossed the boundaries of mere brotherly affection.

A few years ago, the mists over the Smoking Sea began to thin, and the once-active volcano beneath it fell dormant. Seizing the chance, the brothers cobbled together planks from a wrecked ship, and by sheer luck, managed to escape the cursed waters.

But their good fortune ended the moment they set foot outside the Smoking Sea.

"Work, or you'll feel the whip again."

Keelan, drenched in sweat, did his best to hold on to a vision of a better life, but the dream of reclaiming their ancestral home was slipping further away. They didn't even possess a single dragon egg, and here they were—still slaves.

The overseer had promised that when the Free Cities were established, all slaves would become free citizens. But Keelan had no illusions.

"I'd rather be eaten by a dragon," Kiel muttered, collapsing to the ground, exhausted and hopeless.

Rumble—

Suddenly, the earth trembled beneath them.

"An earthquake!" someone shouted, and the slaves scattered in panic, rushing out of the mine.

Outside, the sky was clear and serene, but above them, a green-and-white wyvern plummeted from the summit of the rocky mountain. Its massive body was battered and bloody, its wings shredded from the fall.

"Roar!"

A pale shadow descended from the clouds. A monstrous, emaciated dragon latched onto the wyvern's carcass, tearing at it with its blood-red maw.

"Dragon!" a slave gasped, frozen in disbelief.

The mercenary overseer screamed, dropped his whip, and fled. Everyone knew Sothoryos was a land of monstrous lizards and basilisks, but no one had ever heard of dragons in these lands.

Keelan swallowed hard, stiff as stone under the dragon's gaze. 'A living dragon... a real dragon,' he thought, paralyzed by awe and fear.

"Dragon! Look at me!" Kiel's voice suddenly rang out, manic and wild.

To Keelan's horror, his brother tore off his tattered clothes and began to climb the rocky mountain. His bare skin revealed something Keelan had long feared—large, dark scales covered Kiel's chest and back, and there was an unnatural hole in his chest where a faintly beating heart was visible.

Born in a cursed land, Kiel, too, was deformed.

On the opposite side of his chest was a tattoo—a green dragon, its head and tail coiled into a circle, the ancient sigil of House Belaerys.

"No! Get back!" Keelan shouted, terrified. He knew they couldn't tame a wild dragon, especially one without a rider. They had no claim to such a beast, no power to control it. They weren't Valyrian dragonlords—not anymore.

Keelan recalled sneaking into the ruins of their house, hidden beneath a broken bridge. There had been nothing left—no treasures, no dragon eggs, only the rotting corpses of Stone Men. The luck of House Belaerys had long since run dry.

And as for passing on their legacy... two brothers couldn't bear children.

The pale dragon, still tearing into the wyvern's flesh, paused. Its long, thin neck twisted, and its piercing red eyes locked onto Kiel's silver-haired figure. Something cruel gleamed in its gaze.

"Kiel, stop!" Keelan screamed from below, but Kiel kept climbing, his hand gripping the blood-stained stones.

The dragon's scarlet tongue flicked out, tasting the air, as if toying with its prey.

"Haha, look—" Kiel began, his arms raised as he came face-to-face with the beast.

In an instant, the dragon's blood-red mouth opened wide, and a searing ball of pale fire formed in its throat.

"Roar!"

Dragonfire erupted in a deadly bloom, filling the air with the crackle of burning flesh.

"No! No!" Keelan's scream echoed through the valley, his voice cracking with despair as he watched the dragon's flames consume his brother.

With a sickening crunch, the dragon closed its jaws, tearing through Kiel's charred body. Blood dripped from its maw as it tore away what little remained.

Satisfied, the pale dragon spread its massive wings and flew off into the sky, leaving only the echo of its roar in the wind.

Keelan fell to his knees, trembling, as the mountain fell silent once more.

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On the other side, Naath Island...

Splash, splash...

Waves gently lapped the shore as a small, rickety boat drifted in from the distant horizon. Triarchy mercenaries patrolled the beach, as they did every day, when they noticed movement aboard the drifting vessel—there were survivors.

Before long, several Tyroshi dignitaries, dressed in vibrant finery, arrived at the scene.

"Ahem..."

A black-haired man struggled to climb onto the dock, coughing violently as he spat out a mouthful of seawater.

"Who are you?" one of the sellswords demanded.

The man, however, offered no response, only a cold, ruthless gleam in his eyes. Without warning, he lunged at the nearest sellsword, sinking his teeth into the man's neck. With savage brutality, he tore the flesh and drank the blood like a wild animal.

"Dalton Greyjoy... you're alive?" one of the Tyroshi exclaimed in shock as they recognized the infamous Red Kraken, standing blood-soaked over the body of the fallen mercenary.

It was widely believed that Dalton had perished during the fighting on the Stepstones.

Dalton, his long, gaunt face pale and gaunt, looked up, his voice raspy with anger. "Damn you! Were you all useless, that you couldn't come to my aid?!"

If it hadn't been for his quick dive into the sea, his near-superhuman swimming ability, and the ten minutes he spent fleeing from the battlefield, he'd have long been fish food.

"That's not important. How did you get back here?" one of the dignitaries asked dismissively, more interested in the spectacle than Dalton's harrowing escape.

The distance between the Stepstones and Naath was vast—almost as far as crossing a continent.

"I have my ways," Dalton snarled, spitting blood onto the dock. He seized one of the dignitaries by the collar and dragged him closer. "Find me meat and a boat. The Targaryen dragons are coming."

For the first time, fear flickered in his eyes as he spoke.

There were four dragons in total, and two of them were larger than two warships combined. The moment he'd plunged into the sea to escape, the heat from their fire had nearly boiled him alive.

"What? A Targaryen Dragonlord is coming?"

Panic finally set in among the Tyroshi dignitaries, who began to pace and mutter anxiously. Their forces might be strong, but they were in no shape to face another war against the dragons.

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Dorne, Sunspear...

"Roar..."

Baelon's eyes gleamed as his voice thundered through the hall: "The Iron Islands have allied with the Triarchy to rebel. I've summoned the Riverlands lords and declared war on them!"

Prince Qyle looked uneasy. "Prince, your father's orders were different." The King had only instructed a total blockade of the Summer Sea—there had been no command to declare war.

"Well, there is now," Baelon snapped, his tone brooking no refusal. Already, he exuded the iron-willed authority of a ruler. Some people would pay in blood for challenging his power, especially after taming Uragax.

Dalton Greyjoy—the Red Kraken—who had vanished, presumed dead or hiding, would be dragged from whatever sewer he'd crawled into and dealt with once and for all.

Seeing Baelon's resolve, Prince Qyle could only nod, his face clouded with concern. Sunspear's military strength had been greatly diminished—the city itself left in ruins after the dragon melee, with many of its buildings reduced to rubble.

They were broke.

But Baelon didn't care. He strode out of the palace with purpose, ready to seek out the "stupid old man" to discuss his plans for raising an army. Word of the Stepstones had already reached King's Landing and spread across Westeros like wildfire. Soon, his name—and Uragax's—would be etched into the annals of history.

"The Red Kraken... you've destroyed the Iron Islands," Baelon murmured to himself, fingers curling around the hilt of his family sword, Dragon's Claw. The weapon filled him with courage, making him fearless of whatever challenges lay ahead.

Once he left, the grand hall of Sunspear fell silent. Prince Qyle slumped dejectedly on his throne, lost in thought.

From a corner of the room, a small, black-haired figure peeked out—a striking young woman with a tanned face.

"Coryanne, what are you doing here?" Qyle turned, startled to see his sister spying from the shadows.

She stepped out boldly. "Can I marry him?"

"Who? Who are you talking about?" Qyle's heart sank, a bad feeling stirring in his gut.

"Baelon. Brave Baelon the Second!" Coryanne declared, full of confidence. "All of Westeros is talking about his great deeds, saying he'll be the third great conqueror, after Rhaegar I." Her eyes gleamed with excitement. Marrying the future king—it was the ultimate prize.

"You're mad." Qyle rubbed his forehead in exasperation. "He's already engaged. To two different women, no less."

"But the man you arranged for me doesn't even notice me," Coryanne pouted, unwilling to let go of her ambitions.

Qyle's worry deepened. "He's not even officially betrothed yet! He hasn't agreed to it." King Maekar's third son, Maekar Targaryen, had returned to King's Landing after months of negotiation,

saying he would either travel to Sunspear or bring Qyle's sister to King's Landing so they could meet.

However, Prince Maekar had stayed in King's Landing for less than a month before hurrying back to Volantis. Rumors swirled that the King favored his third son and was dissatisfied with his eldest, who had never managed to claim a dragon. Some whispered that he might even change the line of succession.

But Prince Maekar had no desire to fight his brother for the throne and had exiled himself to the far-off city of Volantis.

Of course, no one knew the truth of these rumors. Especially now, when the heir had not one, but three dragons under his control.

"Will it ever work out..." Qyle muttered, glancing at his sister, who stood before him as beautiful as a flower in bloom. He buried his face in his hands, troubled by it all.

In any case, Maekar Targaryen would be a good match for his sister. He came from noble blood, was a dragon rider, and had the King's favor. Even if he never sat on the Iron Throne, the royal seat in Volantis was still an enticing prospect.

If Coryanne married him, it would be House Martell's chance at revival.

Chapter 632: The Heir Prince's Temporary Team

Golden Fields, Chroyane.

Rushing and roaring...

The waters of the Rhoyme flowed from upstream to downstream, shrouded in gray mist at its heart. A city lay in the shadows, veiled by the heavy fog.

This was once the most prosperous and majestic city of the Rhoynar, the site where the Valyrians fought a devastating battle with three hundred dragons. After the conflict, Chroyane was swallowed by the rising mists of the Rhoyme, its glory reduced to ruins and left with only the Stone Men—those stricken by grayscale.

Boom.

The sky was clear, and the sun shone brightly.

Through the mist soared a huge black creature, its hideous maw spewing endless torrents of green Dragonfire.

"Be careful, Cannibal," Rhaegar said, frowning slightly as the howls echoed below. It was the cry of the Stone Men, even though they had long since lost the ability to feel pain or think.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's green eyes gleamed fiercely as it swooped down, stirring the thick fog. Dark green Dragonfire ignited vast swaths of the shadowed ruins.

Chroyane had once been a city built on the water, nestled along the Rhoyme, the mother river of the Rhoynar people. Now, Dragonfire, tinged like falling ash, illuminated the land beneath.

Rhaegar watched it all, patting the dragon's back. "That's good, friend."

"Roar..."

Cannibal flapped its dark wings and soared higher, its nostrils flaring in disgust at the stench rising from below—as if something foul and unclean still lingered there.

...

After a short while, the man and the dragon returned to Dagger Lake.

“Roar...”

Caraxes circled in the air, its scarlet body writhing like a serpent, occasionally spraying sheets of Dragonfire in playful bursts. Its long, slender neck curved as it moved, and deep within its belly, an endless supply of flame churned. Flying and spewing fire seemed to be its way of relieving boredom.

With a rumble, the Cannibal landed with a heavy thud. The dark dragon, pale horns standing erect, lifted its head, watching the slender reptile in the sky.

"Quiet, partner," Rhaegar murmured his usual reassurance, rolling off the dragon's back.

Dragons were always fierce, but Dragoneaters were even more cunning and unpredictable. They were calm enough most days, but when exposed to cursed places like the Smoking Sea or Chroyane, they became aggressive.

Next to the tent, Daemon, looking disheveled, stumbled out and yawned. "So, what did Your Grace find in The Sorrows?" He looked like he had just woken from a hangover, clearly irritated.

Rhaegar shook his head helplessly. "Wreckage and Stone Men everywhere. If I could have swept it all away, I would have, but all I found was a lot of ruined stone."

"Just rotten stone?" Daemon wasn't impressed.

Daemon glanced at him, then averted his eyes. "Then there's no mistake. At least three dragons from ancient Valyria fell there."

To build a Dragonstone castle, you need tons of stone—stone touched by dragonfire. The Golden Fields are deserted, and the nearby towns and markets refuse to answer commands. The fastest way to get the castle built is to use the best source of materials along the lower Rhoyme: Chroyane. There are endless stones and the bones of fallen dragons...

“Haha, who knows, we might even unearth the bones of Prince Garin,” Daemon snorted in contempt. Even if Garin's tale was tragic, it seemed unimportant to him. After all, the destruction of the Triarchy and Volantis was no small thing either.

Rhaegar, unwilling to engage, shifted the conversation. “Otto sent word that the combined forces of Bravoos and Lorath attempted a sneak attack on Norvos.”

He didn't say the result. There was no need—the attack had obviously failed.

Daemon, now washing his face in the lake to refresh himself, added, “A letter from King’s Landing says your precious son has tamed an old, nameless dragon and has already rallied the Riverlands lords to strike back at the Basilisk Isles.”

His eyes narrowed slightly as he spoke. “I heard it was a green dragon, no smaller than Vhagar?”

Rhaegar was startled by the news, letting the cold lake water reach his neck. His eldest son... had tamed a dragon? And now he was organizing the Riverlands lords to launch an attack across the Summer Sea?

“Strange...” Rhaegar paused, unsure whether to be proud or worried.

Daemon gave a knowing look. “The boy’s not doing too shabby, eh? He’s not so different from you when you were young.” His tone was calm, but his words carried weight. “Who managed to find an untamed dragon without drawing any attention?”

The lake rippled softly as Rhaegar climbed out, dripping water as he walked. “I also heard Baela is nearly here. Your good daughter burned down two thousand Sellswords in one swoop.”

“Huh?” Daemon frowned, caught off guard. Baela was no pushover, and her personality was fiercer than her mother’s or grandmother’s.

Under all the skies, the only person who could control Daemon was Baela—fearless, bold, and afraid of nothing. She would scold him if need be, and Daemon, for all his bravado, would endure it. After all, she was her father’s daughter.

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Three days later...

The green grasslands by Dagger Lake.

"Roar!"

A young dragon with dark green scales streaked with gray stripes flew overhead, its movements as graceful and quick as a butterfly. Below, a group of pale-faced Sellswords trudged along, their hands bound with thick ropes. In front of them, seven or eight war elephants marched heavily, their trunks swaying as they moved.

"Roar!"

The young dragon soared above the heads of the elephants, startling the largest creatures on land. In a moment of fear, they urinated and defecated in unison.

"We're here, Moondancer," Baela said with a grin, her eyes on the tents by the lake.

She tugged on the reins, expertly guiding the energetic Moondancer down toward the camp in a swift descent.

They had crushed a mercenary force of two thousand, captured fifteen hundred men, and seized seven war elephants.

...

Compared to the peaceful continent of Essos, the situation across the Narrow Sea was turbulent.

Sunspear, Tower of the Sun.

"Hurry, hurry, the council is about to convene."

Prince Qyle hurried, his short legs pounding against the stone floor, anxiety clear in his every step.

"Prince, there is still time," said Beric Dayne, Steward of Dorne and Kingsguard, with a complex expression. He took three steps for every one of the prince's.

For some reason, Prince Qyle had grown unusually slowly. Though he was already fourteen, he had never grown taller. The Maesters at the Citadel suspected childhood trauma had stunted his growth.

"There is no time to lose. Today is the first day," Qyle insisted, his old-fashioned demeanor for a teenager making it clear how much he valued first impressions.

Boom—

The great doors of the hall swung open, revealing the gathered assembly. The room filled quickly.

At the large conference table, Baelon stood, discussing battle strategies with serious intensity.

"Prince, I'm late," Qyle said, maintaining his polite manner and keeping his gaze alert.

"No, we're early," Baelon responded, raising his eyes slightly to acknowledge him. They exchanged a pragmatic glance.

Knock-knock!

Baelon rapped his knuckles against the white marble table, his expression stern. "Everyone, take your seats."

After nearly a month of waiting, the vassals from all corners had finally gathered.

"Yes, Prince." The lords and attendants answered in unison, taking their places as Prince Qyle watched them closely. Some were familiar faces, others not, but none were unknown to him.

Baelon, ever meticulous, began introductions in his typical plain manner. "This is Johanna Swann, the former Black Swan of Lys. She will be in charge of the rear in the coming campaign."

"Prince," Johanna greeted with a bright smile, dressed in a flowing black gauze dress.

One by one, the others followed. Among them was Maester Munkun, who had hurried from King's Landing to oversee logistics and offer counsel. Master Syrio of Myr, an old man skilled in assassination and intelligence gathering, had been forcibly conscripted into their service.

In addition to these, there were the lords of the Riverlands. Kermit Tully, Lord of Riverrun and Warden of the Three Rivers, was a seasoned commander well-versed in the art of war. His younger brother, Oscar Tully, a capable knight, was skilled in management and logistics, making him an excellent second-in-command. Then there were Benjicot Blackwood and Black Aly, the niece and nephew of House Blackwood, both formidable warriors.

Prince Qyle exchanged greetings with each of them, secretly impressed. For someone so young, already the heir to the Iron Throne, he was gathering a core team of remarkable talent. You wouldn't find such a capable assembly anywhere else in Dorne.

Boom—

The doors opened once more, and two figures entered the hall.

Baelon looked up, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Alyn, you've finally arrived."

Alyn was a handsome young man with short silver-blond hair and deep purple eyes, his posture upright and commanding. The two were old friends. Alyn, born a bastard to a family of shipwrights in Hull, had once been recommended as a squire by Lord Corlys Velaryon. After his brother Addam's exile, Alyn had been recalled, and though years had passed, he now served as the first mate in the Velaryon fleet.

Dressed in fine clothes, Alyn bowed and said, "Prince, I was ordered by Lord Corlys to bring twenty warships and 1,800 sailors from Hull."

"Is that all?" Baelon stepped forward to greet him, clearly expecting more.

Alyn, ever precise, replied, "The numbers may be small, but I assure you, they are the finest ships and sailors on the seas."

"When will Lord Corlys arrive?" Baelon asked, slightly relieved but still seeking the presence of the Master of Ships and Admiral of the Navy. A campaign against the Basilisk Isles could not succeed without a seasoned veteran of great prestige.

Lowering his voice, Alyn whispered, "Prince, your mother is against the war, and Lord Corlys is keeping watch against Pentos." His departure with this fleet nearly alerted the Prince of Pentos to launch an attack. "King's Landing is now under full martial law, and the Red Queen patrols the Gullet all day."

Baelon fell silent at the news. "All right," he said at last. He understood that hasty decisions could bring disaster. Yet putting down the rebellions in the Iron Islands and the Basilisk Isles was urgent—it wasn't just about revenge or winning favor with the Riverlands lords. This was his chance to prove himself and gain the prestige that came with victory.

His father had united Westeros through a series of relentless victories, won through blood and fire. Though battles like the Stepstones hadn't made much impact in Westeros, they were famous across Essos. The war that truly marked Westeros' rise was the obscure "War of the Two Bones." In that conflict, Cannibal stormed into Stone Hedge and burned all the male heirs of House Bracken.

The shock of this battle resonated through the noble class, serving as a stern warning against challenging the royal family.

Baelon knew the importance of such a message. If no one in the Riverlands could serve as an example, the Greyjoys of the Iron Islands would. The descendants of the ancient rulers who had dominated the Iron Islands for centuries were ungrateful, driven by nothing but plunder and chaos. Just as the Conqueror had wiped out House Hoare at Harrenhal, the Greyjoys of Red Kraken Dalton would meet the same fate.

"Prince, the Stepstones are still recovering. It would be wiser to move our forces to Lys," Alyn said, with the confident tone of an aristocrat. He had only just arrived, yet he was already offering tactical advice. Sunspear, after all, was too far from the Basilisk Isles. Lys was much closer.

Of course, the best staging grounds were Volantis or Slaver's Bay, but both territories were too sensitive for a royal heir to visit.

Baelon's eyes flashed with amusement. "No rush. The Iron Islands haven't been dealt with yet."

Alyn hesitated for a moment, opening his mouth as if to say more. But before he could speak...

"Prince! Prince!" another voice called out, loud and frantic. "I've fed all the dragons—more than ten goats!"

Baelon turned and blinked in surprise. Nettles, wearing a rough gray robe with a bamboo staff tucked under her arm, came rushing toward him. Her black hair had been shaved into a crew cut, her face round, her nose crooked, and freckles scattered across her cheeks. Dressed like a Dragonkeeper, the girl's tomboyish appearance was hardly flattering.

"Roar!"

Suddenly, a gray dragon flew past the Sun Tower, its excited, slender cry piercing the air. It circled slowly, joining the other dragons already hovering above.

Chapter 633: Baela's Bravery

King's Landing, the Red Keep.

The Hall of the Council.

"Lady Maris of Storm's End has sent a raven, offering 800 men to support the heir prince."

"Lady Margaery of Highgarden is willing to do the same, offering 1,500 men and half of Arbor's fleet."

Jasper, the Master of Laws, and Lyman, the Master of Coin, reported one after the other.

"Not bad. Add the fleet of House Velaryon, and we'll have an army of over 3,000 men," Viserys remarked, seated in the main chair with a satisfied smile. His grandson's declaration of war seemed more like a jest to him.

An army of 3,000 men would have no trouble taking the Iron Islands, but the Basilisk Isles would require further consideration.

"Your Grace..." Grand Maester Orwyle hesitated, as if holding back something.

Rhaenyra, seated to the left of her father, interrupted, her expression troubled. "Father, you should consider the motives behind their support." Her face showed clear disappointment.

Viserys scratched his chin, pondering, "What, are the conditions excessive?"

"Yes," Rhaenyra added impatiently, a sneer tugging at her lips, "the Black Widow of Highgarden wants Visenya engaged with her brother, she is simply blackmailing us."

Viserys frowned but said nothing.

Grand Maester Orwyle continued, "According to Lady Elenda of Storm's End, Prince Aemond killed Lady Maris's fiancé in a duel. The two were deeply in love."

The fiancé in question was none other than Ser Steffon of the Griffin's Roost, Lady Elenda's lover and the late Cassandra's beloved.

"What are you saying?!" Viserys was flabbergasted, certain he had misheard.

Aemond, his third son, was already married to Lady Celine of House Celtigar.

They had been wed for years, though their marriage was childless and their relationship strained. Rumors had recently surfaced that Aemond was involved with Lady Elenda of Storm's End, a scandal in itself. How could he have become entangled with Lady Maris so soon after?

"Your Grace, I understand your impatience, but please don't be hasty," Orwyle urged helplessly. "Prince Aemond is young and impetuous. It's possible there's nothing to it."

Viserys, overwhelmed by the growing confusion, found himself unable to make a decision.

Lyman hesitated before speaking again. "Your Grace, Lord Lyonel of Highgarden has proposed a marriage alliance with the royal family. What is your will?"

"No!" Rhaenyra cut in sharply. "There's no need to discuss this further. Neither Rhaegar nor I will allow our children to be used as bargaining chips."

Lyman fell silent, glancing uneasily at the old king. Though the King's presence in King's Landing was limited, his words still carried more weight than Rhaenyra's.

Rhaenyra's face darkened, visibly displeased.

"We'll discuss this matter again later," Viserys said with a nervous laugh, rising from his seat. "For now, instruct the two ladies to send the agreed-upon troops without delay to the frontlines."

"Your Grace is wise," the Sea Snake, who had been silently observing, remarked. Rising, he followed the royal party out, his tall figure moving gracefully beside the other advisers.

Viserys, having spent a lifetime navigating the court, had mastered the art of appearing oblivious. Yet, despite his long reign, he had never suffered a true political defeat.

...

At the same time.

Naath, the barren jungle.

"Work harder, and hurry up!"

"..."

Accompanied by the creaking of hacksaws, towering ancient trees fell to the ground. A large number of slaves stooped, and a dozen or so of them worked together to carry a thick log on their backs towards the shore, gritting their teeth as they struggled under the weight.

Clang!

Dalton's face was grim as he swung his axe and chopped at the tree trunk. He had just received the news that the Iron Islands had been destroyed. Pyke had been burned to the ground. The parents, brothers, wives, and concubines of his crew were all killed in the fire.

At that moment, a skinny slave walked over and accidentally tripped while picking up a tree branch.

Dalton's eyes were dark as he continued chopping, muttering, "When I have built my fleet, I will show you what true cruelty is."

The slave's body lay beside him, crushed into a grotesque pulp as the tree was felled. Dalton didn't even glance at it, as if it were no more than a fallen leaf on the ground.

Clatter...

Suddenly, the primeval forest was filled with noise, and birds scattered in all directions. Dalton's brow furrowed, and he looked up warily.

Boom—

The clouds above surged violently, as if some enormous beast were rushing through them, stirring up an inexplicable, chaotic wind.

"What is that..."

Dalton's sharp vision caught the movement in the sky. His pupils contracted. A pale shadow appeared above the clouds, its tattered wings blocking out the sun. A grey-white tail, sharp as a bee's sting, dangled downward.

"Dragon!!" Dalton exclaimed, his face changing drastically.

The grey-white tail vanished in an instant, but he knew exactly what it was. He would recognize those terrifying creatures that had burned through his family fortune even if they had turned to ash.

...

Essos, Forest of Qohor.

"Roar!"

The magnificent Moondancer soared through the air, gliding above the primeval forest. Baela's short hair whipped around her face as she surveyed the vast expanse below.

"Fly faster, Moondancer."

After roughly scanning the eastern area, she tugged on the saddle ropes, guiding the dragon towards another region.

Moondancer blinked its vertical pupils, its round dragon head turning as it flapped its wings, speeding westward. Though the daily patrol was tedious, the dragon never refused its rider's commands.

As the sun began to set, Baela sighed wearily, "Let's go back, Moondancer." She gently patted the dragon's back, a small gesture of comfort.

"Roar!"

Moondancer cried out happily, soaring high into the sky to greet the setting sun as they made their way back to Qohor.

...

Qohor.

Rhaegar sat in the newly rebuilt temple hall, discussing food and supplies with several of his advisers. Across from him, Daemon idly toyed with an exquisite jade wine cup.

Cole, clad in gleaming silver armor and a white robe, stood tall behind the king, having fought his way to Qohor in loyalty to the crown.

A gentle rustling... followed by the sound of orderly footsteps. Baela walked into the hall, alone.

Rhaegar noticed her and asked, "How did it go? Was everything all right today?"

The construction of the castle at Dagger Lake was progressing well, but the enemy's counterattacks were becoming increasingly aggressive. First, Norvos had risen in rebellion, and then the towns and markets in the Golden Fields had gathered mobs to resist.

Recently, Braavos and Pentos had rallied the Dothraki across the Great Grass Sea, leading them in raids that burned, killed, and looted their way to Qohor and the Golden Fields.

In just one month, chaos had swept across the continent of Essos.

"Your Grace, all is well," Baela replied, removing her slung pack as she stood at attention, her expression weary. She had been responsible for patrolling the Forest of Qohor to prevent Dothraki invasions, but after more than a month on patrol, she hadn't seen a single trace of the enemy.

Rhaegar smiled gently. "No one is ever truly safe. Daeron won't be as lucky as you." He paused, his gaze softening. "You've had a long day. Take a seat and rest for a while."

Baela was many things to him—his cousin, his adopted daughter, and his future daughter-in-law. She deserved some measure of special treatment.

"Thank you, Your Grace," she replied with a forced smile. "Though, I'd rather have some bad luck than waste all this effort for nothing."

With that, she moved to sit down next to her father.

Baela flinched and stared at her father in surprise.

"Do you think fate favors the unlucky?" Daemon's voice was low, his eyes sharp. "Daeron fought day and night in the Golden Fields. You should be grateful."

Baela's eyes widened in defiance, and she shot back, "Do you take me for a coward?"

There were only two main battlefields, and Daeron, had gained fame in the Golden Fields. Half of Essos was singing about "the bold Daeron" and the "Blue Queen." Meanwhile, she and Moondancer, though eager for action, had been stationed at the rear, their achievements paling in comparison.

Daemon, used to his daughter's frustrations, replied indifferently, "You're not even a coward." His gaze was cold. "How can you call yourself a warrior if you don't have strength at your core?"

Baela's temper flared. "What? Don't you think that's unreasonable?" Her pent-up emotions from the past month erupted. "Don't I want to go to war? Who was it that captured the war elephants pounding the ground at Dagger Lake?"

She had been stationed in Qohor only because her father and cousin had arranged it. If it had been up to her, she would have joined Daeron in quelling the rebellion in the Golden Fields, where she felt her skills belonged.

"But a few elephants and frightened mercenaries," Daemon retorted, his irritation growing. With an air of superiority, he ordered, "You should have stayed in King's Landing with your foster mother and fiancé. The battlefield is no place for a girl."

Daemon's temper flared further as he added, "Tyrosh sent word that Aegon was nearly killed by the Bastard of the Iron Islands in the Stepstones."

Baela's frustration reached its peak. "If a man can do it, I can do it too." With that, she grabbed her pack and stormed out the door, determined to find Daeron and join the effort to quell the rebellion in the Golden Fields.

Qohor and Norvos had each set ghostly green and scarlet fires that had nearly crushed the uprisings, leaving only scattered mobs in the Golden Fields still fighting.

The headstrong maiden left without a second thought, ignoring her father's protests.

Daemon's face was a conflicted mix of emotions, the soft words he wanted to say stuck in his throat. In that moment, he caught a glimpse of his late wife, Laena, in his daughter's retreating figure.

Rhaegar, who had watched the entire argument, took a sip of his wine and remarked softly, "Your children are grown. There's no harm in letting her explore the world with Daeron."

Though the youngest, Daeron was also the most composed, and the two young dragon riders had proven capable of quelling riots with ease.

Daemon, who had been somewhat placated by his good nephew's words, scowled suddenly. "Damn this Velaryon blood. Born to rebel." He immediately cast blame on the Sea Snake, who was far away in King's Landing.

Rhaegar smirked, suppressing a laugh. "Perhaps a daughter is not meant to be controlled by her father."

In truth, Baela's fearless spirit reminded Rhaegar more of a certain Rogue Prince than of the Sea Snake. Both were wild, unruly, and unwilling to accept any limits.

His second son, Aemon was really "blessed".

Chapter 634: Brotherly Rift

Half a month later, The Summer Sea...

"Roar!"

A naval battle erupted as planned. The old dragon, its moss-colored scales gleaming in the sun, circled the sea and sank numerous warships flying the banner of the Triarchy.

"Attack! Long-range archers, fire!"

On a warship bearing the flag of the Seahorse, Alyn, clad in silver-gray armor, commanded the archers. At his order, a volley of arrows rained down.

In contrast, the Triarchy pirates appeared defenseless. Their wooden ships were no match for the devastating power of the old dragon's assault.

"Dracarys, Uragax!"

Baelon, seated in his newly crafted green-and-grey saddle, shouted with excitement.

"Roar—"

The old dragon raised its head, roaring as green Dragonfire spilled from its mouth like ink. With a single powerful strike from its hind legs, it tore through the enemy's sails.

At that moment, several other dragons descended into the battle.

"Roar..."

Vhagar arrived first, its massive form blotting out the sky like a mountain. The overwhelming presence shattered the psychological defenses of the Triarchy pirates.

Iragaxys, black and red, followed swiftly. Weaving through the chaos of the ships, its dark Dragonfire exploded in all directions.

"Roar..."

A light grey dragon soared high above, occasionally launching massive fireballs down upon the battlefield before retreating to watch from afar.

The appearance of the dragons turned the tide of the battle in an instant, making the outcome one-sided.

"No, no, no!"

The Triarchy pirates scrambled in vain to operate their scorpion crossbows. Before they could react, a massive fireball engulfed them.

With a sizzling sound, they were reduced to ash, along with the smoldering remains of their ship's deck.

...

An hour later...

The sea was calm, and a dozen warships were burning furiously, gradually sinking into the waves.

"Clean up the battlefield and don't let a single pirate get away," Alyn commanded, his face solemn as he personally led the sailors, ensuring no loose ends were left.

Having spent years at the side of the Sea Snake, he had developed quite the general's bearing.

"Roar!"

...

Several dragons circled the sky, the grey one still holding half a charred corpse in its mouth.

"We won, but it wasn't easy," Baelon muttered, letting out a small gasp before laughing as he rode on the back of the dragon.

He had long since discovered that the pirates of Triarchy wanted to buy goods from Pentos, so he led his fleet to block the sea between Lys and Volantis in advance. A grand naval battle had weakened the enemy's forces.

Just as he was reflecting on the battle, a small dark spot appeared in his line of sight. The sky was a brilliant blue and white, while the sea stretched out, magnificent and endless.

"Roar!"

A young silver-grey dragon flew swiftly, pausing in midair several miles away.

Baelon's eyes narrowed in surprise. "Maekar?"

The young dragon with the massive head was Tyraxes, and the small figure riding it was his younger brother.

In the distance, Maekar glanced at the battlefield and said quietly, "Let's go, Tyraxes."

"Roar!" Tyraxes roared in protest but turned its head, flying back the way they had come. The war was over, and there was no more need to unleash Dragonfire.

On the other side, Baelon looked anxious. "Why did he leave?"

He hadn't seen his younger brother in a long time and missed the little lump. He guessed Maekar had come to help after hearing the commotion. Volantis was not far away, and there were patrol ships offshore.

'That kid...' Baelon thought, feeling a pang of reluctance as he watched the silver-haired figure disappear atop the silver-grey dragon.

As the eldest of his father's three sons, Baelon had once been close to both Aemon and Maekar. The three brothers had shared a deep bond, capable of doing anything together. But things grew complicated when Aemon began harboring hostility toward Maekar.

Baelon understood what had changed.

Of all his siblings, their father favored the three of them the most. As the eldest son, Baelon naturally received the best treatment, which Aemon accepted and even celebrated. However, their father's other favorite was Maekar, the youngest.

In Aemon's eyes, affection should flow from eldest to youngest, but being overshadowed by Maekar made him feel secretly aggrieved. Especially since Maekar, with his platinum blonde hair and blue eyes, did not resemble Baelon or their father. Yet their father preferred Maekar, claiming that his quiet and decisive nature reminded him of his own younger self.

Baelon recalled the time he and Aemon had snuck into a corner and overheard their parents talking at night. When their father spoke of Maekar, he described him as easygoing, with no ambition for the throne or worldly matters—much like he had been in his youth.

Their father, who had been weak and sickly as a child, never desired to take over his mother's inheritance. He treated Aemon and Maekar very differently. With Aemon, he was strict, demanding perfection and pushing him to excel in everything. But with Maekar, he was more relaxed, letting him study history, play the harp, and even manage a Free Cities trading port at a young age.

Over time, the gap between the brothers widened.

'Alas, there's nothing I can do about it,' Baelon thought with a frown, gathering himself as he resumed cleaning up the battlefield. After all, they were brothers, and no knot could not be untangled.

...

Volantis...

Tyraxes flew back within the Black Wall, gliding over the eastern district before landing in the courtyard of the Magister's Palace. As Maekar dismounted, a distant howl immediately reached his ears.

"Prince, you must help me!"

Startled, Maekar turned to see a familiar figure—a neatly combed head of blonde hair approaching quickly.

"Prince, it's too dangerous for you to go out alone," Tyland called out, bowing as he continued his earlier plea. "The slave ships from Slaver's Bay are still running rampant, and my brother, Lord Jason, remains captive in the Great Pyramid."

Desperation clung to Tyland's voice as he vented his frustrations, clearly weighed down by his worries.

Maekar regarded him with a strange expression. "Why not ask the Westerlands to send more gold and ransom your brother back? The old woman didn't say she wouldn't release him. The problem is that Jason Lannister refuses to pay."

Tyland's face twisted slightly, clearly pained by the suggestion. "Prince, my brother is the Lord of a region. It's undignified to pay ransom," he muttered, clearly uncomfortable with the notion.

"Being mocked as a miserly 'iron cock' and kept locked in a cage is even more undignified," Maekar replied, his tone practical. "Irina wrote to me recently. She said the slave ships will likely calm down soon and sail toward Sothoryos."

The old woman knew how to handle such matters. King's Landing had expanded her horizons, and she commanded respect with ease.

"Prince, Prince..." Tyland's voice grew more frantic as Maekar walked away, calling out to him with a worried look. He stretched out a hand, but Maekar did not turn back, offering only the sight of his retreating figure, short platinum-blond hair shining in the sunlight.

Tyland eventually stopped, realizing the prince had no intention of responding. His expression shifted, and he let out a sigh of relief. 'It's just as well he didn't agree,' Tyland thought to himself. 'My foolish brother is still too proud to pay, and perhaps a few more years locked up would do him some good.'

Feeling a sense of satisfaction, Tyland crossed his arms and moved on with his day.

However, from the gate of the Magister's residence, a small platinum-blond head peeked out, observing every move Tyland made.

"Tsk, what a brotherly relationship," Maekar muttered with a smirk, further sharpening his already well-honed instincts as a teacher.

No one can truly teach without everything. He may have studied many books under many Masters, but it's easy to be fooled when you're far from home.

...

In just a few days, news of the victory from the Summer Sea reached King's Landing. Rumors spread quickly through Flea Bottom and Silk Street, where even the lowest prostitutes and orphans whispered about it. The heir prince was preparing to attack the continent of Sothoryos and burn the remnants of the Triarchy to feed the dragons. Some even claimed that the heir prince was the reincarnation of the brave Baelon, who had tamed the mighty Vhagar in a previous life.

At the same time, in the Red Keep...

Rhaenyra, her face pale, walked alone down the corridor, her long, white legs carrying her with determined grace. In Rhaegar's absence, the advisers no longer took her seriously. They couldn't agree on how to respond to their eldest son Baelon's victory in his first battle. Their father, ever the master peacekeeper, had the advisers completely under his thumb, leaving Rhaenyra to bear the weight of the decisions.

The pressure now fell on her, both as Queen and the mother of the heir to the throne. Everyone demanded answers—whether to consider Highgarden's proposal for an alliance, or how to navigate the chaotic situation at Storm's End.

'What a joke!' she thought bitterly. She had no say in key decisions, yet all the responsibility was placed squarely on her shoulders.

"Damn it, these shameless bastards," Rhaenyra muttered under her breath, growing more and more furious. Her chest heaved with frustration. If only Rhaegar were here, none of them would dare to treat her this way.

...

After some time, she pushed open the door to her chambers with a creak. Removing her earrings and ring, she felt a great weight lift from her shoulders.

"Your Grace," said Mysaria, the White Worm, who was leaning casually against a cabinet with a kind smile.

"Your Grace, Mother..." Rhaenyra was greeted by a number of familiar faces in her chambers—her adopted daughter Rhaena, her second son Aemon, and Daemon's eldest son Gaemon alongside his younger brother Aenar. The two boys, being close in age, were currently being corralled by the slightly older Visenya, who was busy examining her younger brother Aegor's diaper with them.

"Look, a wee birdie!" Visenya exclaimed, yanking the diaper off and exposing poor Aegor.

"Cover him," Gaemon scolded, blushing slightly as he glanced timidly at Rhaenyra and his sister Rhaena.

Gaemon had come with Rhaena, accompanying their grandfather, Lord Corlys. Aenar, meanwhile, tilted his head, watching the scene unfold with a serious expression.

Rhaenyra's head suddenly throbbed, and she grabbed Visenya by the ear, trying her best to keep her temper in check. "Take the little ones and go outside to play," she ordered.

"Okay," Visenya muttered, not daring to argue. She quickly picked up Aegor and ran out of the room, with Gaemon and Aenar following closely behind—Gaemon making sure to grab the discarded diaper on his way out.

Soon, the bedchamber was quiet, with only two adults and the older children remaining.

"I'm exhausted," Rhaenyra sighed, walking to the table to pour herself a glass of wine. Rhaena approached to help, and Rhaenyra gently took her hand, guiding her into a chair.

"There have been many storms lately," Mysaria remarked. "The heir prince is very talented, and his first battle was a great victory."

Over the years, the once-contemptible White Worm had not aged noticeably, but her bearing had become more refined. She had risen to the upper classes, in no small part due to the influence of her being a mother.

Rhaenyra regarded her as a trusted confidante, but even so, she couldn't help but say, "War is never that simple. There are vultures everywhere, and inside the Red Keep, I'm surrounded by good-for-nothings."

With Lyonel Strong's resignation as Hand of the King after his injury, the Small Council had lost half its power. With Rhaegar away in Essos, the rest of the council had crumbled further. Fortunately, the Master of Whisperers and the Grand Maester remained loyal, allowing them to maintain some control.

"War is a disaster," Mysaria replied, her eyes thoughtful, "but it can also be an opportunity. I've heard that Lady Baela and Prince Daeron have earned the king's trust by quelling the riots in the Golden Plains."

"I'd prefer they both come home and take care of things here," Rhaenyra said absently.

Rhaena, seated at the table, remained silent, though a trace of disappointment crossed her face. Her dragon was still too small to be of use in battle. While her sister and her fiancé could achieve great things, she remained in the Red Keep, looking after the children.

Chapter 635: Blood Dragon's Wild Dance

"Don't worry, there's always a place for us to shine," Aemon said with a grin, giving a playful shoulder bump.

Rhaena hastily looked down, trying to hide her emotions beneath her brow.

"The Small Council is not what worries me the most. After all, they are subject to the royal family." Rhaenyra rubbed her brow, a sense of loss in her voice. "Baelon is very brave, but it tears me apart to think of him—a mere child—going off to war."

She hadn't been able to sleep for the past few nights. Even in sleep, the cries of her child echoed in her ears, nearly crushing her heart.

"So, what are your thoughts?" Mysaria, the White Worm, leaned forward, her gaze locking onto Rhaenyra's.

The queen is a woman, and women are naturally soft and afraid of war, her fears growing with each passing day as her child remained on the battlefield.

After a moment of contemplation, she spoke, "I think the continent of Essos is on the right track, and Rhaegar should be brought back to take charge."

"You can manage the overall situation, and only a little help is needed," Mysaria replied, frowning slightly.

Mysaria, still thoughtful, said, "If you've made a decision, I can send a raven to deliver the message for you."

The uncle and nephew who would dare to kill even gods were stationed on the continent of Essos, and the rebellion could not withstand the wrath of the Dragonfire. It seemed wise to withdraw in time.

"Fine, write the letter," Rhaenyra agreed, reaching for documents from a drawer to look them over. "Baelon's fleet is cruising in The Summer Sea, and supplies must be transported from Lys and Tyrosh."

The two Free Cities lacked leadership, and their efficiency left much to be desired.

Mysaria finished writing and suggested, "Ravens aren't as fast as dragons, and no one can control the order."

Rhaenyra paused, glancing back at her two children. "You can't leave King's Landing. Lys needs someone in charge."

"A member of the royal family settling in will give Prince Baelon peace of mind on the frontlines," Mysaria replied confidently.

Mysaria continued, analyzing the situation. "Prince Aegon is recovering from his injuries, Prince Aemond is missing, so the only person you can count on is the child you raised yourself."

"Send me," Aemon said without hesitation, his face uncharacteristically serious. Being able to deliver a message to his father and manage the rear for his brother was the task he had longed for.

"I can go too," Rhaena's voice came out as a whisper, barely audible. "I'm young, but I think I can make it across the Narrow Sea."

Mysaria glanced at Rhaena and responded solemnly, "The Prince's dragon can already handle itself."

Rhaena couldn't hide her disappointment as she passed, her heart heavy.

Rhaenyra reached out, her hands brushing the faces of her two children, her gaze gentle as a pool of still water. She examined every strand of hair, every pore with care.

"Go, both of you," she suddenly declared, pulling the children into a warm embrace and kissing each of them softly. "One of you will go to the other side of the Narrow Sea, and the other to The Eyrie in the Vale."

Rhaena looked up in surprise, her cheeks pressed gently against her mother's soft shoulder.

"You will go to The Eyrie and find Lady Jeyne," Rhaenyra instructed, her delicate fingers pressing lightly on her daughter's arm. "Have her send troops from Gulltown to reinforce the battle at The Summer Sea."

"Yes, Your Grace," came the quick response.

Rhaenyra's eyes misted over, but her resolve remained firm. "Right, let's get ready quickly," she added softly, releasing her two children.

While her foster daughter changed into her dragon riding clothes, Rhaenyra called her second son, Aemon, into another room—the king's chambers.

Though it was broad daylight outside, the bedroom was dimly lit. Rhaenyra drew back the curtains, allowing sunlight to spill over the silver and gold hair of mother and son.

Aemon stood in the doorway, waiting for her words.

“Your dragon is bigger and stronger,” Rhaenyra began, a touch of nostalgia in her voice as she gently ruffled Aemon’s hair, just as she used to do with Rhaegar when he was a child.

“And the journey ahead will be long and dangerous.” Her tone turned serious. “First, go to Storm’s End and secure Lady Maris’s support. Then, you must find your third uncle, Aemond.”

“I will,” Aemon replied with a nod, his determination clear.

“After that, I need you to go to Qohor. Find your father and persuade him to return himself,” Rhaenyra continued. The matters in Tyrosh and Lys were of less importance now. Aemon understood the deeper meaning of her words—the tide of war was shifting, and soon, it would be up to his father and uncles to lead the charge.

“That’s enough for now,” Rhaenyra said, taking a deep breath. She turned away to discreetly wipe the tears from her eyes. When she faced her son again, she moved toward the wall, where the clan sword Truefyre hung. Taking it down with care, she handed it to Aemon, her face tender. “Take it,” she said softly, offering it with both hands. “Take your father’s sword. From now on, you are a man.”

Aemon’s spirits soared, his hands trembling as he touched the scabbard. Truefyre, inlaid with rubies, symbolized “blood and fire”—the beginning of war. He marveled at the legacy it carried, just like the other great swords: Blackfyre, which stood for royal authority, the Dark Sister for unity, and Dragon Claw for bravery.

“I won’t let this sword down,” Aemon vowed, gripping it tightly.

Rhaenyra, filled with emotion, touched the Valyrian necklace around her neck. Her fingers lingered on the dragonhead pendant of Balerion on the left, then moved to the dragon pendant of Vhagar on the right. Finally, with a resolute gesture, she removed the Meraxes pendant from the middle. Aemon watched in surprise as she linked it to a chain and placed it around his neck.

“This is a reward for your mission,” she said, her voice warm. “It’s from your father. Now, it’s yours.”

Aemon touched the pendant, feeling the lingering warmth from his mother’s skin. Rhaenyra cupped his face in her hands, kissing his left cheek gently, her lips trembling with unspoken words. “Go now,” she whispered, “and remember to feed your dragon well.”

With Truefyre in hand and the pendant resting against his chest, Aemon left the chambers, excitement coursing through him.

...

The skies above King’s Landing trembled as two young dragons—one green and the other pale pink—took flight from the Dragonpit, soaring in opposite directions.

The green dragon, powerful and fierce, swooped down from the high clouds, its long, scorpion-like tail cutting through the waves of Blackwater Bay below. The sun dipped toward the horizon, casting a tranquil glow over the sea and the city.

On the open-air corridor of the Red Keep, Rhaenyra stood at the railing, her knuckles white as she gripped the stone edge. She watched the dragons vanish into the distance, her heart heavy with unspoken fears.

Though the scene was peaceful, the tension in her body betrayed the storm within.

...

Qohor.

Qohor.

A pale green dragon, its butterfly-like grey and white markings blending seamlessly with the dense forest below, danced through the air.

"Hurry up, Moondancer," Baela tugged on the reins, urging the young dragon to fly faster.

Moondancer responded with a soft, long whistle, leaning into the rush of wind as it dove down from the sky, heading toward the towering Free Cities built into the mountains. Its wings fanned out, sending a gust of wind swirling up leaves in its wake. The dragon was fast, its movements light as a swallow.

Before the sun had fully set, Baela and Moondancer landed smoothly. Baela bit off her leather gloves and took long strides toward the temple hall. The rebellion in the golden fields had been mostly quelled—only a few insignificant stragglers remained.

Her king and cousin had summoned her back urgently that night.

"Daeron didn't come back?" she asked as she entered the hall, where Rhaegar was busy planting flags across the sand table.

"He's still tidying up," Rhaegar replied.

Baela glanced at the sand table, covered with towns and markets occupied by the House on the continent of Essos. A surge of pride filled her. Compared to Daeron, who focused on rebuilding villages, deploying war elephants, and reclaiming water channels, she preferred invasion and conquest, carrying forward the glory of ancient Valyria.

"It seems you get along well," Rhaegar noted, in a good mood. He pulled down a flag and planted it in Pentos, muttering, "The Disputed Lands are impassable, not like the Valyrian roads in Pentos."

Baela observed him and asked, "Do you want a road that connects everything?" She could go to war and knew she was well-suited for command.

"Of course," Rhaegar said, smiling, "but not right now."

Baela was puzzled. "Come and see," Rhaegar beckoned, resting his fingers on the edge of the sand table where The Summer Sea lay. He couldn't help but groan. "My eldest son is here, having defeated the pirates of the Triarchy. A good boy, with some skill for warfare."

"Isn't that a good thing?" Baela ventured cautiously.

Compared to their difficult father, Baela and her sisters deeply respected their cousin, who always wore a smile. A smile was not a sign of weakness, just as a cold face was not a weapon. The former warmed hearts, the latter pierced them.

"It's a good things, but not everything is good," Rhaegar said, pointing at the Narrow Sea and then The Summer Sea. "The kingdom needs more land to conquer. Sothoryos is too barren."

As Rhaegar expected, after suppressing the rebellion, his eldest and second sons should have turned their focus to Essos, cultivating the fertile golden wilderness. But Baelon, not one to follow rules, had rushed into war against the Basilisk Isles. The war, which had just subsided, flared up again—this time shifting to The Summer Sea.

Baela, ever astute, asked bluntly, "Your Grace, what do you want me to do?"

Rhaegar smiled slightly, appreciating her directness. "Two things: First, go to The Eyrie in the Vale and ask Jeyne to send troops from Gulltown to defend against Braavos and Pentos. Second, drag Aemon out of his comfortable lair in King's Landing and position him to guard Tyrosh and Lys from the rear."

Baela listened carefully, then asked, "Am I staying?"

Tyrosh had a role for her, and it was better to be with her fiancé than continue patrolling the Forest of Qohor.

"As you wish," Rhaegar said, unconcerned. "But be careful on the road. I have a bad feeling about this." He paused, thinking of the bearded priests of Norvos and the nightmares by Dagger Lake. None of it boded well.

"Understood," Baela replied, her voice high with excitement. She barely caught her breath. "I will complete the mission."

With that, she strapped on her backpack and strode out the door.

Rhaegar watched her leave in silence, hoping in his heart that this reassignment would prove to be perfect.

...

Forest of Qohor.

"Roar!"

The young dragon soared into the air, its light green scales blending seamlessly with the dense forest below until it vanished into the vast wilderness.

"First stop, The Eyrie."

Baela pulled out a piece of parchment, carefully jotting down the route before slipping it back into her backpack with satisfaction. She was a meticulous person, always cautious, fearing she might miss even the smallest detail.

"Roar!"

Moondancer, thrilled by the journey, snorted and picked up speed, blowing away the fallen leaves swirling around her.

Chapter 636: Blood Dragon's Wild Dance II

Soughing...

Tall trees formed a dense canopy, their fallen leaves and branches carpeting the forest floor in thick layers.

"Roar!"

A piercing cry suddenly echoed through the boundless primeval forest. A silver-haired figure, wielding a pickaxe with desperation, swung furiously at a large, hound-like creature shaped like a dragon.

"Roar~~"

The brown-bellied wyvern with scaly hide let out a mournful wail, its sharp head exploding into a gory mess.

"Haha, what good luck," Keelan panted, drenched in sweat. He hoisted the hundred-pound corpse and slung it onto his pickaxe.

This was Axe Island, deep in the uncharted jungles of the Sothoryos continent—a wild, deserted place teeming with nothing but Triarchy pirates and enslaved souls. Keelan had escaped here to fulfill his brother Kiel's dying wish. Kiel, burned to ash in the cremation rites of the Dragonlords of Valyria, had left behind a burden Keelan now carried.

"It's getting dark," Keelan muttered, tapping his trembling legs as he trudged toward the bare mountain range ahead. The entire island was hostile, but no place more so than the barren, towering peaks looming in the distance. No vegetation grew on them, and in many places, the scorched earth was visible—evidence of past destruction.

Halfway up the mountain, hidden in the jagged rock, lay a cave. The wind howled through it like the wailing of a ghost.

"Breathe fire and harness wings... Stand with two heads and sing in three..."

Moonlight bathed the ground as Keelan approached, an ancient Valyrian song drifting through the cave, its melody haunting and filled with infinite sadness. Keelan's face was ashen as he dragged the lifeless brown-bellied wyvern behind him.

'I'm going to die.'

Wild dragons had no masters. But if Keelan didn't fight for his life, his dream of escaping the Smoking Sea would be nothing more than a memory of a life spent in chains.

Rumble—

The cave trembled as though something enormous was shifting inside.

"By my voice, words of fire... Blood magic, the sacrifice has paid off."

The dragon chant continued, growing louder and more dissonant. The pitch grew sharper, more frenzied.

Boom—

A pale dragon head, crowned with twisted horns, emerged from the dark, damp depths. Bloodshot eyes with vertical pupils snapped open. Tick-tock, tick-tock... The creature's long, sinewy neck extended, and its jaws parted, revealing jagged, irregular fangs. Hungry saliva dripped from its maw, pooling on the ground. Only one head was visible, yet the entire cave radiated a twisted, malevolent energy.

It was a monster of pure chaos, deranged and unnatural.

"Gulp."

Keelan swallowed hard, frozen in place. He stared straight ahead, his mind blank, his breath forgotten. Even the nursery rhyme he had been humming slipped from his memory, as every hair on his body stood on end.

"Roar..."

The pale wild dragon's scarlet, vertical pupils flashed with a fierce light, and a low, rumbling growl squeezed out of its throat like a sound wave. Slowly, it revealed its skeletal, slender body. At first glance, it looked like a living skeleton.

Plop.

Keelan bit his tongue, forcing himself back to full awareness, and threw the wyvern corpse toward the awakened wild dragon. The pale creature glanced at it, its sharp wings hooking onto the corpse as it crushed the body beneath them. Its scarlet tongue flicked out, licking at random. Flesh and earth alike were ground into its gaping maw.

"Dragon, be quiet!" Keelan's heart pounded as he pulled out a dagger and sliced his wrist. Black blood spilled out, the scent quickly arousing the dragon's ferocity.

Keelan backed away cautiously, muttering a desperate chant under his breath.

Boom.

A few tense seconds later, the pale wild dragon stopped advancing. It lowered its head, licking the sandy ground stained with dark blood. Keelan's eyes widened as he extended a tentative hand.

The dragon moved slowly, its long tongue lazily licking its hideous muzzle as it glanced sideways at the small insect approaching—Keelan.

In the next instant, its scarlet pupils gleamed with savage intent.

"Roar!"

...

The Next Day, Volantis.

Whoosh!

The alarm blared as the patrol fleet set sail, one ship after another.

"Prince, Prince!" Tyland hurried toward Maekar, who was preparing to mount his dragon, his voice frantic. "The Red Kraken's fleet is approaching the port!"

"I know," Maekar replied calmly, fastening the saddle buckle around his waist. "Send a raven to Baelon. Tell him to watch over Lys and the Stepstones."

Without another word, Maekar tapped his dragon's silver-gray scales. "Fly, Tyraxes!"

"Roar!"

Tyraxes stretched its neck, roaring as it leaped from the Black Wall, misty wings unfurling in the wind.

Beyond the harbor...

Whoosh!

Dozens of warships cut through the Summer Sea, sailing in perfect formation, ready to storm Volantis. At the head of the fleet was a three-masted ship flying the golden Kraken banner of House Greyjoy.

"Loose the arrows!" The bearded commander ordered, and the pirates unleashed a deadly volley. On the shore, the patrol ships of Volantis formed a defensive line, the Unsullied in their black armor standing resolute.

"Roar!"

A dragon's roar echoed through the sky, signaling the battle's beginning.

"Dracarys, Tyraxes!"

Maekar, perched atop his dragon, his sapphire eyes fixed on the fleet below, gave the command. Tyraxes roared in response, swooping down toward the lead warship. A plume of silver-gray dragonfire poured from its maw, resembling smoke and mist.

"Ahhh!"

The golden Kraken banner ignited instantly, flames consuming the ship, killing and maiming many in the process. A smaller dragon joined the assault, tipping the scales of battle—but it wasn't enough.

"Roar..."

From a distance, a low, thunderous dragon roar reverberated for miles. The sound came with the force of a storm.

"Dracarys!"

A massive, moss-green dragon descended from the clouds. Following its orders, it unleashed a devastating attack, leaving chaos in its wake. Baelon, wearing a silver-and-gold cape, rode the dragon, his hair tousled by the wind. He locked eyes with his younger brother, Maekar.

"Roar!"

Tyraxes soared overhead, easily dodging arrows and spears, raining down dragonfire with lethal precision. Maekar stayed low in the black steel saddle, perfectly in sync with his dragon. Together, they were a force that could tear through any enemy formation.

"I'll help you, Maekar!" Baelon shouted, his voice filled with excitement. "Let's drive these Triarchy pirates back where they came from!"

There was no reply from Maekar, but after a moment, a small white hand emerged from the black steel saddle, giving a thumbs-up.

"Haha!" Baelon laughed and rode his dragon, sweeping across the battlefield. Though he had only brought one dragon, its sheer power sent the enemy fleet into disarray.

Whoosh—

A fleet approached from the direction of the Stepstones, its sails bearing the sigils of three red dragons and a blue seahorse. With this new, powerful force, the Triarchy's fleet collapsed completely.

By the time the sun reached its zenith, the battle was over.

...

Volantis, Magister's Palace.

The two brothers dismounted from their dragon and walked hand in hand toward the palace.

Baelon, overjoyed, couldn't stop talking. "The Triarchy lost 40 ships, big and small, so they won't be able to fight a naval battle anymore."

Maekar remained silent.

"Why are you so quiet?" Baelon asked, feeling a little strange when his brother stayed quiet.

With a sigh, Maekar finally spoke, "We haven't found the Red Kraken."

The fleet had been so weak, as if it was a hodgepodge thrown together at the last minute.

Baelon was no fool and immediately caught on. "A distraction," he said, realization dawning. One fleet would attack Volantis while the Red Kraken led the main force to strike somewhere else.

"But where could he go?" Baelon wondered aloud. There were no Free Cities nearby that could be easily taken.

Maekar frowned and muttered, "I thought he might go to Lys or the Stepstones, but it seems the Red Kraken doesn't have the guts."

Where else could he go?

Just then, a voice interrupted their thoughts.

"Prince!"

As soon as the brothers entered the gate, Tyland, fully armed, rushed out, clutching a letter in his hand. Seeing the two young princes approaching hand in hand, he nearly stumbled backward in surprise.

"What's wrong, Lord Tyland?" Baelon, who was more composed, couldn't help but frown. Could he really trust such a flustered teacher?

"Er..." Tyland glanced at Maekar, hesitating. "This letter is for the young Prince."

As the loyal Governor of Volantis, he would of course deliver the news directly to the one in charge.

"Let me see," Maekar said, taking the envelope and opening it. He leaned over to Baelon so they could read it together.

The letter was signed by Irina Daeryon of Slaver's Bay. Its meaning was clear: Volantis wanted to join the war against the Basilisk Isles, and Slaver's Bay was willing to offer manpower and resources. The conditions, however...

A dark line appeared on Baelon's forehead as he glanced at his brother, who was only chest-high. 'This woman... she's actually trying to take advantage as an old woman.'

"I won't agree to it." Maekar crumpled the letter into a ball, tossed it to the ground, and stomped on it. "Old woman."

She coveted his body, but he wouldn't let her succeed. Even if Volantis was poor and broken, and every Unsullied sacrificed, Maekar would not allow an old woman with malicious intentions to have her way.

...

Another day and night passed.

The Axe, In a bare mountain dragon lair.

With a low rumble, the pale wild dragon wriggled its ghostly body, devouring the decaying corpse of a wyvern.

"Hooo... hooo..."

A wheezing sound echoed from the top of the cave. Half of the creature's body was charred black, the other half a twisted, living corpse. Its silver fur had fused into a sticky, matted mess, and it lay curled miserably in a gap in the rock wall.

"It hurts... it hurts..."

A miserable groan escaped from the creature as it opened a single purple eye. The charred body shifted slightly, revealing a face half burned, half intact. The once silver-and-gold fur had melted into a paste, sticking so tightly to its skin that it could barely open its eyes.

Keelan was not dead—at least not yet.

The ritual of taming the dragon, taught in the ancient texts, had been useless. He had still been attacked, grievously wounded. The pale wild dragon was cruel by nature, seeming to enjoy tormenting its prey, allowing Keelan to linger in agony, licking at the last remnants of life.

Sizzle!

The wyvern's flesh was torn away, bloodied carrion writhing with maggots. The dragon feasted until its hunger was sated, the madness in its scarlet eyes fading slightly. It crawled back to its nest like a dying beast, frail and emaciated, with its dark bones visible beneath its thin skin and scales.

The stiff grinding of its neck and body as it moved betrayed its great age.

Keelan lay on his side, one blind eye tracking the huge creature as it slithered past him.

"Uhh..."

His burnt waist twisted with a final burst of strength, and he let his body fall. With a sickening thud, he crashed onto the dragon's back, his body slamming into its hard scales. The recoil was nearly enough to make him lose consciousness, and the sharp crack of breaking bones rang in his ears.

CRACK!

The massive beast jerked in pain, crashing into the cave wall. The impact caused the entire cave to collapse around them.

"Roar..."

The pale wild dragon poked its head out from the rubble, flapping its tattered, pale wings. With a wild roar, it shot up into the night sky.

In an instant, the sky blazed with light, as if fireworks had exploded across the heavens—from Axe Island to the Basilisk Isles, from the Summer Sea to the Sea of Dorne.

The only sounds that remained were the man's low, broken screams, and the frenzied roar of the terrible beast.

Chapter 637: Blood Dragon's Wild Dance III

King's Landing, the Throne Hall.

"You are right, but the matter of marriage requires careful consideration."

In the dimly lit hall, Viserys sat on the Iron Throne, negotiating with several royal advisers and vassals.

"Your Grace, the young and capable Lord Lyonel of Highgarden is a fine match," Lyman Beesbury, an old man in poor health, suggested.

Grand Maester Orwyle interjected, "If that is your choice, then Lord Lyonel of Oldtown is also an excellent candidate."

"That's not the same..." The advisers began to argue, their voices echoing in the flickering candlelight.

Viserys leaned wearily against the Iron Throne, his hand resting on the armrest shaped like Vermithor's head. He closed his eyes in exhaustion.

He had not slept in three days.

The advisers resembled caged birds, eager to push him into the same old marriage alliances forged by his grandfather Jaehaerys. But Viserys wasn't Jaehaerys, and Rhaegar's children were the concern of his children, not his.

First, he would secure the loyalty of his vassals, then he would pretend not to hear their incessant bickering.

As the night wore on, the old king fell asleep.

The advisers continued to argue, unaware that their king was no longer listening. After all, who wouldn't want to marry into the royal family and claim the bloodline of the ancient Valyrian Dragonlords?

Soft snoring began to fill the hall.

Viserys slept soundly until—

Crack!

A sudden clap of thunder shook the hall, sounding like a silver vase shattering.

Viserys jolted awake, mumbling in confusion, “Water... so much water...”

His chest heaved as he caught his breath. It had been a nightmare, a terrible and torturous scene.

He looked around, his eyes landing on the white-robed Arryk. “What time is it?” Viserys asked urgently.

Arryk glanced out the window and replied solemnly, “It’s nearly the bat hour, Your Grace. It’s raining heavily in the city.”

The sound of rain must have been what had disturbed Viserys in his sleep.

“Is that so?” Viserys muttered, his face pale. He gripped the object in his hands more tightly.

Crack!

His left index finger caught on the fang of the dragon-shaped armrest, tearing open a small cut. Viserys stared, wide-eyed, as blood began to well from the wound.

The rain intensified outside, drumming heavily against the windows and filling the air with thick vapor.

Looking out into the storm, Arryk, a member of the personal Kingsguard, silently drew the curtains shut. “I hope the Prince is safe,” he murmured.

The Kingsguard, unable to ride dragons, remained in King's Landing, bound by duty to wait.

...

Storm's End, Courtyard.

The sound of rain pattered steadily on the stone, accompanied by flashes of lightning that illuminated the dark clouds above. The heavy rain fell in torrents, soaking the land beneath.

Aemon, draped in a crimson cloak, dashed out of the castle into the downpour.

“Prince, please stay for the night!” several guards called after him, trying to dissuade the storming Prince.

“No! I will not serve Lady Maris,” Aemon snapped, quickening his pace. The rain drenched his gold and silver hair, blurring his vision as he hurried through the courtyard.

Roar!

The Trickster, his dragon, lay coiled under a rain canopy, waiting for its indignant rider. They had arrived at Storm's End under thick clouds, and now the heavens had opened.

Aemon reached the dragon, slapping its dark green scales slick with rain. He leaned in, whispering in its ear, "Listen to my commands, Trickster."

He couldn't bear to spend another moment in that cursed castle.

Despite the risks of riding a dragon in such weather, he was determined to leave.

Roar!

The Trickster shook its head, then bent low, inviting Aemon to mount. This was no ordinary dragon—it could navigate through storms with ease, defying the fury of nature.

"Good boy, Trickster," Aemon muttered, casting one last glance at the open hall of Storm's End before retching in disgust.

Damn that old woman! Gold-digging whore!

He had been sent here to assemble the fleet and aid his brother in the Summer Sea campaign, and to search for his uncle, the one-eyed Aemond. But the negotiations had gone sour.

When the subject of his uncle arose, everything had taken a dark turn. Despite Aemon's insistence, Lady Maris of Storm's End had responded with insolence.

Sitting arrogantly upon the throne in the hall, she had crossed her legs and sneered, "Lift up my skirt and satisfy me with your mouth, and the armies of the Stormlands are yours."

Bah!

Aemon cursed under his breath, his anger simmering. "Damn old woman, always scheming about us brothers."

The rain intensified, the cold drops stinging his skin as they fell harder. Shivering, Aemon climbed nimbly onto the dragon's back. He had already made up his mind.

"We're heading to Evenfall Hall on Tarth. They won't turn away a Targaryen named Aemon."

Prince Aemon, heir to the Old King, had been supporting the Lord of Tarth against the pirates of the Triarchy before being slain by an assassin from Tyrosh. Now, with Storm's End behind him, he looked toward Duskwood—a place where both dragon and rider could rest.

Roar!

The Trickster blinked its vertical pupils, eager to take to the skies. Its wings spread wide as it launched into the storm, the slender tail, reminiscent of a scorpion's, buzzing and slicing through the rain as they soared higher, piercing the storm's heart.

...

Above Shipbreaker Bay.

Rumbling thunder echoed across the sky, accompanied by the roar of fierce winds and driving rain that swept over the land.

Roar!

A young dark green dragon, Trickster, unfurled its wings and soared through the stormy skies, flying steadily despite its vertical pupils being unable to distinguish direction in the storm.

“Achoo! Achoo!”

Aemon sneezed twice, rubbing his nose uncomfortably. He muttered in frustration, “My brother and Maekar manage just fine with a single call, but here I am, nearly losing my footing.”

“What do you think, Trickster?” Aemon patted the dragon’s back, talking more to himself than expecting a reply. “Doesn’t that seem unfair?”

Trickster didn’t respond, but it increased its speed, its vertical pupils glancing cautiously toward a certain area.

“What’s wrong, Trickster?” Aemon asked, his senses sharpening as he looked back over his shoulder. His visibility was poor—only a few dozen meters in the overcast sky. The sounds of rolling black clouds, pattering rain, and crashing waves filled his ears.

Roar!

Suddenly, Trickster tensed and swooped low, skimming over the waves as it let out a warning roar.

Aemon’s face paled slightly, his hands tightening on the saddle grips. Water streamed down his cheeks, though he couldn’t tell if it was rain or cold sweat. Trickster’s agitation spread to him, and his heart began to race.

The dragon glided just above the water, skillfully dodging jagged reefs as it pressed on toward their destination.

Crackling—

A sudden flash of crimson lightning split the night sky, illuminating the storm-soaked world like daylight.

Aemon quickly glanced over his shoulder.

Roar!

A pale silver dragon surged through the dark clouds, its roar cutting through the storm. Aemon’s eyes widened in alarm. “Seasmoke!” he shouted, recognizing the silhouette.

The rain lashed against his face as he studied the shape, then let out a long sigh of relief.

It wasn't an attack—it was just Seasmoke gliding through the sea fog, its familiar form cutting through the storm.

“Luckily...” Aemon muttered, relaxing his grip. He knew Seasmoke's docile nature; it wouldn't attack unless provoked.

As soon as the words left Aemon's mouth—

Sssh... Roar!

A loud crack of thunder split the sky, followed by the enraged roar of a crazed beast echoing through the storm.

Sssh... Roar!

Seasmoke let out a panicked cry, blood dripping from one of its wings as it dove sharply, lowering its body in an attempt to escape. Before Aemon could react, he was stunned by the deafening roar.

In the next instant, a pale, bone-looking creature broke through the clouds, its large, tattered wings flapping as it rapidly closed in on the wounded dragon.

Crack!

The pale shadow lunged, opening its foul-smelling maw. Its sharp fangs tore into Seasmoke's bleeding wing, crushing scales and bone with a vicious bite.

Seasmoke shrieked in agony, his body lurching mid-flight as the pale creature clamped down on his shoulder blade. The attacker shook its head violently, trying to rip the wing clean off.

“Dracarys!” Aemon shouted desperately.

At that critical moment, a burst of orange dragonfire erupted from Seasmoke's mouth, striking the head of the pale beast with a blinding flash.

Boom!

The fire lit up the stormy sky, revealing the horrifying appearance of the Pale Wild Dragon. It had a skeletal frame, wings riddled with holes, and a grotesque, drooling mouth. Its sickly body seemed to drip with a nightmarish saliva, giving it a twisted, unnatural look.

Sssh...Roar...

The Pale Wild Dragon screeched in pain, releasing its grip on Seasmoke's wing. Its scarlet eyes, burning with rage, locked onto Trickster, the young green dragon not far away. Without warning, it spewed a stream of pale dragonfire, sparks flying like deadly fireworks.

“Quick, Trickster! Get out of the way!” Aemon tightened the reins, instinctively raising his hand to shield himself.

Trickster reacted with lightning speed, its scorpion-like tail swaying as it nimbly dodged the pale flames.

“Well done,” Aemon breathed, his hair plastered to his face by the rain. His eyes darted to Seasmoke, who was still shrieking in pain, the wing injury leaving him vulnerable. If Aemon left now, the wild dragon would finish Seasmoke off. But if he stayed...

Trickster pulled back, giving Aemon a better view of the pale wild dragon. His brow furrowed in concern. The creature, which looked like a Dragoneater, was enormous—at least twice Seasmoke’s size. It must have been nearly 80 meters long, rivaling dragons like Silverwing or Caraxes.

But what troubled Aemon most was the decaying aura the creature exuded. This was no dragon in its prime. It was a walking corpse, with a lifeless, rotting presence.

Sssh...Roar...

The Pale Wild Dragon let out another bloodcurdling roar, charging at Trickster with ferocious speed.

“Do you remember what I said, Trickster?” Aemon’s voice trembled with urgency as he tightened the saddle straps.

There was no choice now—this wasn’t just about fighting. It was about survival, preventing the wild dragon from killing Seasmoke and escaping with their lives.

Roar!

Trickster hissed in response, its powerful body coiling as orange flames gathered in its mouth. The young dragon had been bred for battle, fearless even when facing a far larger foe.

“Good boy. Follow me!” Aemon commanded, a flash of determination in his eyes as he pulled the reins to change direction.

Trickster responded instantly, disappearing into the thick sea fog with swift, fluid movements.

Boom!

A torrent of pale dragonfire fell from the sky, hot on their trail.

“Be careful, Trickster,” Aemon urged, his heart racing. He glanced back at the wounded Seasmoke, torn between helping and fleeing.

He remembered a reef cliff along Shipbreaker Bay, a place just narrow enough for a young dragon to hide. Fighting wasn’t an option; running would only bring more danger. Neither King’s Landing nor Dragonstone had enough forces to defend against a wild dragon like this. If Aemon led it back, countless lives would be lost.

Chapter 638: The Battle of Shipbreaker Bay

It was raining... pouring. The night was thick with the deluge.

Roar!

The Trickster soared through the storm, navigating the sky as it shifted from the open sea to a craggy cliff, where smaller shapes darted about in the shadows.

Aemon wiped the rain from his face, squinting up at the night sky.

Crackling—

A flash of lightning split the darkness, followed by a deep rumble of thunder. Through the storm clouds, the silhouette of a massive dragon emerged—its size overwhelming, four times as long as a young dragon.

“Let’s turn around, Trickster,” Aemon said quickly, tugging on the saddle rope as he spotted a turn along the jagged cliff. The reef cliffs were like a long, narrow maze, and with the storm overhead, it was nearly impossible to tell sky from sea.

But he remembered.

Trickster narrowed its vertical pupils, tilting its head before flipping sideways, executing a rapid, precise turn. Its muscular body moved with agility, reacting as if it anticipated Aemon’s every thought.

Boom!

A searing white stream of dragonfire crashed into the cliff where they had been moments before.

“Faster, Trickster. See if you can shake it off,” Aemon urged, a small smile creeping across his face despite the danger. If they could pull off the maneuver, they might lose the Pale Wild Dragon behind them.

Even the swiftest dragons would stay grounded in this storm, and Driftmark was too far. They had no choice but to evade their pursuer.

Sssh...gah...

The Pale Wild Dragon reappeared, breaking through the dark clouds. Its nostrils flared as it sniffed the air, its blood-red eyes scanning the cliffs.

“Faster,” Aemon muttered through gritted teeth. “We’ll make for Stonehelm!”

Apart from Vermithor, no dragon could decisively defeat a Dragoneater like this wild beast. Meleys might put up a fight, but at best, it would end in a deadly draw. If Aemon could lure the Pale Wild Dragon to the isolated Stonehelm, maybe they’d cross paths with his one-eyed uncle, Aemond.

And if that failed, they could always hide in the Rainwood.

Crackling—

The rain grew heavier, pounding down so fiercely it was nearly impossible to see.

The Pale Wild Dragon circled above the maze of reefs, occasionally spewing dragonfire to illuminate the rain-soaked world.

“Dracarys, Trickster!” Aemon shouted, his voice barely audible over the roar of the storm and the waves crashing below.

The Pale Wild Dragon, sensing its prey, lowered its head. Its scarlet pupils gleamed with hunger as it sought its next meal.

Roar!

Suddenly, a sharp dragon’s roar erupted from the side. Trickster darted forward like a spear, its scorpion-like tail straight and tense, surging toward the massive dragon.

With a deafening rumble, Trickster unleashed a torrent of orange dragonfire. It struck the Pale Wild Dragon’s side, exploding into a mushroom cloud of flame and heat.

Roar!

The Pale Wild Dragon let out a shriek, but the flames consumed it. The dragon’s side was scorched beyond recognition—its once-bright scarlet eye burst and shattered, while pale scales were stained with dark, foul blood.

When the smoke cleared, the wild dragon staggered, casting a desperate glance with its remaining eye. But the damage was done.

By the time it opened its eye again, the young dragon and its rider had already disappeared into the storm.

Roar!

The pale wild dragon growled, its throat rumbling as it flared its nostrils, searching the air for a scent. It hovered relentlessly over the group of reefs, unwilling to leave.

Meanwhile, in a shadowed corner of the rocky cliff...

Trickster panted, his hind legs braced against a jagged reef column, his chest heaving with exhaustion.

“It’s still here... can it smell us?” Aemon muttered, his face flushed as the rain streamed through his soaked hair. He and Trickster had done everything they could, but the constant strain of flying in the heavy rain had taken its toll. If they stayed tangled in this fight much longer, they would end up crashing into the sea.

Boom!

A blast of pale dragonfire streaked down from the sky, striking the distant waves. The light from the flames illuminated the churning sea.

Roar!

A sudden dragon roar echoed from afar, cutting through the storm.

Aemon's eyes darted down. The pale wild dragon froze, swiveling its head warily—its remaining eye darting back and forth, unable to fully assess its surroundings. The injured eye socket, still oozing blood, was left exposed.

Then, from the dark clouds, a light silver dragon dived headlong, trailing silver and orange dragonfire in its wake.

Boom!

The fiery blast struck the pale wild dragon squarely on the side of its head. It let out a piercing shriek, shaking violently as the flames scorched its empty eye socket. The great beast wobbled unsteadily, nearly crashing into the cliffs below.

“Seasmoke!” Aemon exclaimed, a mix of surprise and relief flooding his voice.

Without hesitation, he commanded, “Go around to the back, Trickster!”

With Seasmoke buying them time, the blind Dragoneater wouldn't be able to focus on them.

Roar!

Seasmoke, though injured, had landed a solid hit. It rose unsteadily into the air, one wing hanging limply by its side. It was clear that the older dragon could barely stay aloft.

Furious, the Pale Wild Dragon turned its focus away from Trickster and charged after Seasmoke, determined to finish its wounded prey.

“Dracarys!” Aemon urged, and Trickster sprang into action. The young dragon lunged forward, unleashing a torrent of fire. The flames struck the Pale Wild Dragon on the neck, scorching its pale scales black.

Grr...

The Pale Wild Dragon growled low, its neck smoldering as it flapped its tattered wings and disappeared into the stormy clouds above.

“Missed... but that was close,” Aemon muttered in frustration, slamming his fist against the saddle. He squinted through the rain, watching the Pale Wild Dragon vanish from sight.

Roar!

Trickster let out a low hiss, circling back to the cover of the rocks. His tail, scorpion-like and tense, swayed slowly as he caught his breath. The young dragon's chest rose and fell heavily; the strain of the battle was evident. This was its first real fight, and both it and Aemon were physically and mentally drained.

Roar!

Seasmoke cried out in pain one last time, narrowly avoiding a bolt of lightning as it limped away in the direction from which it had come. The Pale Wild Dragon was gone, retreating into the storm. Seasmoke, too, was leaving.

Time passed slowly...

Aemon and Trickster remained hidden among the rocks, watching as Seasmoke's pale silver form gradually faded into the distance.

"Are they all gone?" Aemon whispered, his spirit still on edge as his purple eyes scanned the darkening sky for any sign of the pale beast.

His heart raced, his senses alert. His purple eyes, wide and searching, occasionally narrowed to vertical slits in the rain. Despite the downpour, his throat felt parched, and his skin was flushed with heat, a combination of exhaustion and the lingering tension of battle.

Roar!

Trickster let out a soft roar, and for the first time, the tip of its tail—previously twitching with tension—dropped naturally. Aemon glanced back, finally allowing himself to relax.

"Great... Let's go too," he whispered, the relief clear in his voice.

The dragon's tail, sensitive to the slightest vibrations in the air, could detect any hidden presence. Anything invisible to the naked eye wouldn't escape its senses.

Trickster cautiously poked its head out, scanning the area for danger. Once certain it was safe, the young dragon leapt into the sky, chasing after the light silver form of Seasmoke. Aemon didn't stop him, gulping down rainwater to quench his parched throat.

Tarth was closer now—closer than King's Landing or Stonehelm. Seasmoke was just ahead, and the thought of safety spurred them forward. Trickster wove nimbly through the dark clouds, evading the booming thunder and heavy rain as they flew.

The flush on Aemon's cheeks began to fade, and his head swayed with exhaustion. His vision blurred.

"I feel dizzy," he muttered, reaching instinctively for the necklace around his neck and the Truefyre sword at his waist. These treasures were precious—he couldn't afford to lose them.

Roar!

After a while, Trickster broke free of the dark clouds, emerging into a sky gradually clearing. The first rays of dawn touched the horizon, casting a soft light over both man and dragon.

"It's dawn, Trickster," Aemon murmured, closing his eyes as he gently stroked the dragon's scales. Trickster began to slow, its scorpion-like tail swaying lazily in the peaceful morning light.

Hum...

Suddenly, Trickster's tail snapped to attention, twitching violently and pointing straight down toward the blanket of clouds below. The dragon's pupils contracted, and it let out a panicked roar.

Roar...

Crack!

Aemon felt his body lurch violently as a foul gust of wind hit him, followed by the sickening sound of bones snapping. Before he could react, everything tilted, and he found himself falling—weightlessly.

“Trickster?” Aemon called, his voice dazed, as confusion clouded his mind. He blinked, trying to make sense of the sight before him.

He was still in the saddle, falling helplessly. Above him, Trickster’s head grew smaller and smaller in the distance, the dragon’s lake-colored eyes locked onto him—silent, unblinking.

What?

Aemon’s heart raced as his gaze flicked to the severed head of his dragon. The familiar dark green neck was nowhere to be seen, the head torn from its body.

Boom!

The Pale Wild Dragon let out a triumphant roar as its bony, skeletal form swooped through the air. Its slender, needle-like tail flicked back and forth, almost lazily.

Aemon felt a hot flash in his throat, and a deep, wrenching sorrow swelled in his chest. “So close,” he whispered, his voice barely audible over the roaring wind.

The sun continued to rise, casting light on the distant silhouette of Tarth, just a few nautical miles away.

Plop!

Darkness enveloped him as he hit the cold, unforgiving sea. The salty, briny water rushed into his nose and mouth, and everything faded to black.

...

,

Roar...

The pale wild dragon let out a roar, its breath like steam hissing through its throat. One side of its head looked grotesque, almost skeletal, with a blood-red mouth chewing hungrily on something unseen.

“No! No! No!”

On the dragon’s back—covered in jagged, bony spines—a half-charred figure lay crumpled against an iron plate. Its one remaining purple eye was wide with horror, wailing in anguish. The iron plate was tangled in frayed, vine-like ropes, many of which had snapped and dangled uselessly in the air.

The half-burnt figure, its body seared black, lay helplessly on its side, a witness to the massacre. As it watched the dark green dragon with the long tail fall helplessly into the sea, it let out a mournful, broken roar—a sound of deep, despairing grief.

That had been s dragon of House Belaerys.

The only dragon capable of navigating through the eye of a storm. A name tied forever to the winds and waves, now extinguished in a single, brutal moment.

Roar...

The pale wild dragon's nostrils flared as it heard the pitiful murmuring from its back. Without hesitation, it spat out a blast of pale, ghostly dragonfire. The sickly flames hissed through the air, silencing the wails in an instant.

The sky fell into an eerie quiet.

The dragon's jaws dripped with the sweet, metallic taste of blood, and from its back, the scent of burnt flesh lingered in the air. The young beast lowered its head, peering toward the sea below, where the wreckage of the once-proud dragon now stirred the waves into large, crashing swells.

Hum—

A faint red glow flickered on the horizon, but the pale wild dragon ignored it. The surface of the water quickly returned to its calm, azure state, as though nothing had ever happened.

The dragon opened its remaining right eye wide, scanning the area for any signs of life. Finding none, it let out a satisfied snort, then flapped its wings and soared back toward its lair, disappearing into the thick clouds.

...

A few days later.

Qohor, the Temple Hall.

In the dimly lit hall, the statues of gods and goddesses stood in silent rows—except for the Black Goat, which loomed large above the rest. The flickering light from the hearth cast eerie shadows over the room.

Rhaegar lay on his back beside the roaring fire, his eyes closed, resting more deeply than he had in a long time.

Crack!

The firewood sparked, the sound echoing faintly through the vast, empty hall. It was the only noise breaking the stillness. Rhaegar slept soundly, oblivious to the seven statues of the Mother Goddess in the corner, their compassionate eyes seemingly fixed on him.

His eyelids twitched, and a soft voice whispered in the distance, calling to him.

"Who's calling me at this hour?" he mumbled groggily, his face showing irritation at being disturbed.

He opened his eyes to find Daemon standing by the bed, flanked by his twin foster daughters and Daeron. Their expressions were strange, as if they were concealing something, their emotions tightly controlled.

Rhaegar's gaze swept over them all before settling on Baela. "I thought you returned to Westeros," he said, surprise in his voice. "Where's Aemon?"

"Aemon..." Baela's voice cracked, her eyes brimming with tears. She could barely speak. "He..."

Before she could finish, Daemon placed a large hand on her shoulder, gently interrupting her.

"Leave us," he said quietly, his eyes lowered.

The children obediently withdrew from the room, leaving Rhaegar and Daemon alone. A deep sense of foreboding settled over Rhaegar, his unease growing. If Rhaena had traveled all the way from King's Landing, there was no reason Aemon shouldn't have come with her.

Daemon said nothing at first, simply standing at his nephew's side. Then, after a long, tense silence, he placed a hand on Rhaegar's shoulder, his lips moving as though to whisper the words that weighed so heavily on him.

Rhaegar stared into the flames, unmoving, his mind racing, his heart bracing for what he somehow already knew.

After what felt like an eternity, Daemon let out a soft sigh and stepped back.

"I..." Rhaegar's voice rasped as he turned his back to the fire, his body rigid with tension.

Daemon met his eyes, but Rhaegar's face betrayed no outward emotion. Instead, a cold, hollow grief, mixed with simmering rage, filled his gaze.

The room was silent except for the crackling of the fire, but in that silence, the weight of loss hung thick in the air.

Chapter 639: Burning Storm's End

A day and night had passed.

King's Landing.

Roar...

In the morning, a massive, jet-black creature soared over Blackwater Bay, casting a long shadow over the capital. Its pitch-black wings stretched across the sky, and where they passed, the smell of ash lingered in the air. It felt as though destruction could fall at any moment, the dragon's presence thick with suppressed fury.

At the Red Keep, attendants scurried about in tense silence, while the guards stood at their posts, wordless and rigid.

Tap... tap... tap...

The sound of footsteps echoed down the corridor, each step sharp and deliberate, as if the very floor beneath trembled in response.

Erryk, Commander of the Kingsguard, stood vigil outside the king's chambers. His eyes widened as the figure approached, and he hastily shouted, "Your Grace!"

"Your Grace!" echoed the Maesters, nobles, and ministers gathered at the entrance. They bowed their heads and curtsied in a constrained, uneasy manner.

Creak.

Rhaegar, his face grim, pushed open the heavy door.

"Father..."

Inside, two boys stood, their eyes brimming with unshed tears. Baelon and Maekar had returned as soon as they heard the news.

Rhaegar's gaze lingered on Baelon, whose face mirrored his own, and the familiar pang of grief struck him. Aemon had looked so much like him, almost indistinguishably so. His throat tightened, and he swallowed hard.

"Leave us," he said quietly, his voice raw.

It wasn't just two boys inside the king's chambers, and this was not the place for their youthful grief.

"Father, grandfather is very ill," Maekar whispered, glancing toward the bed.

Rhaegar nodded curtly. "I know." He waved them away.

The boys shared a look before slipping out the door, leaving their father to the silence of the chamber.

Rhaegar parted the bead curtain and stepped inside. His father lay on the sickbed, his once strong frame now frail. Surrounding him were Rhaenys, Corlys, and Helaena, their expressions heavy with sorrow.

"Rhaegar..."

Viserys's face was pale, his eyes clouded with guilt. He looked at his eldest son, whose face was etched with sorrow, and tears welled in his own eyes. He had failed—he hadn't been able to protect his grandson, and now tragedy had descended upon them.

Rhaegar's gaze swept the room, his emotions turbulent, but there was one absence that stung him: Rhaenyra was nowhere to be seen.

"Your Grace," Grand Maester Orwyle whispered, stepping close to Rhaegar. "The Old King is overwhelmed with grief. Please, for his sake, restrain your emotions."

Rhaegar closed his eyes briefly, signaling for the Maester to leave. He was exhausted—utterly drained, inside and out. Too tired to speak, too weary to feel anything but a hollow ache.

“Your Grace, my deepest condolences for what transpired at Shipbreaker Bay,” Corlys Velaryon said, approaching solemnly. “House Velaryon stands ready to answer your call.”

He placed a firm hand on Rhaegar's shoulder, his expression weighed with sorrow. Corlys, too, had known the boy—had watched him grow. He had even named him after his father-in-law. If fate had not been so cruel, Aemon would have been his grandson-in-law.

Rhaegar didn't open his eyes. Silence was his only response.

Rhaenys followed her husband's lead, embracing her nephew. Her voice, soft and laden with grief, whispered, “The gods are cruel. They always take away those we need the most.”

Rhaegar opened his eyes, a dark shadow flickering within them, but said nothing as she left.

Helaena approached next, her face drawn with a complex mix of emotions. Her once-beautiful features now held a hint of helplessness, her violet eyes downcast. Who could have expected a simple task to end in such a devastating loss?

Rhaegar's voice, hoarse and strained, broke the silence. “Where is Rhaenyra?”

He ran a hand through Helaena's silver hair, grief and fatigue pulling at his features. He wasn't alone in his sorrow.

“She's over there,” Helaena replied softly, her violet gaze drifting out the window, toward the distant coastline.

...

The coast of the Stormlands.

A group of fishermen had gathered along the beach, shouting as they pulled at their heavy nets.

"It's a dragon wing!"

"It really is a wing..."

One by one, the fishermen murmured, their faces pale with fear.

Roar!

Suddenly, a deep dragon roar echoed through the sky. The men looked up in terror as a yellow-jade dragon swooped down from above.

A silver-clad figure slipped gracefully from the dragon's back, sliding down one of its wings. As she landed, her feet faltered, and she rushed toward the tangled fishing net.

The fine mesh was soaked, and within it was a dark green dragon wing, its flesh pale from the seawater. Blood oozed faintly from the wound, tainting the sea with its sadness.

Plop!

The figure fell to her knees. Her hands tore apart the damp net, revealing a red cloak, its fabric hooked onto the dragon's limp forelimb.

It was Aemon's cloak.

Roar!

Syrax crouched low to the ground, letting out a mournful, melodic wail that echoed across the shore. Even the great dragon couldn't hide the grief it shared with its rider.

Boom!

Syrax's wings spread wide, casting a shadow over the beach, and with a mighty gust, it overturned the moored fishing boats, the wind howling with sorrow.

Rhaenyra stood nearby, her eyes red and swollen from days of fruitless searching. When she turned and saw the tall figure approaching, she sobbed, her voice a broken whisper: "The cloak... his..."

For days and nights, she had searched for her son, and now, her heart was breaking beyond words.

"I know," Rhaegar whispered, his steps slow and careful as he closed the distance, desperate to hold her.

"Aemon..." Rhaenyra choked, clutching the soaked red cloak to her chest. Her child—her second son. The pain was too much to bear.

Tears streamed down her face as she pressed the cloak tightly against her, trying to find any trace of his scent. But there was nothing, only the bitter smell of seawater and death.

"Don't be sad. They will all pay," Rhaegar said softly, his own eyes red with grief as he pulled her into his arms.

Feeling the warmth of his body, Rhaenyra's icy hands and feet slowly began to thaw. Her mind, numb with despair, finally began to register something beyond flames and death.

She buried her head in his chest, sobbing quietly, her lips trembling as she whispered, "My child...is gone!"

"I know," Rhaegar murmured, resting his chin on her tear-streaked neck. His voice, firm and steady, was filled with both sorrow and resolve. "He was my child too."

Then, with a slow, deliberate turn of his head, Rhaegar's gaze settled on the tall castle looming in the distance along the shore.

...

Night fell.

Dark clouds blanketed the sky, obscuring even the faintest trace of starlight.

Storm's End, Great Hall.

"Your Grace, I am so terribly sorry about the accident. The fishermen have recovered... something." Maris, dressed in a black gown, descended nervously from the throne.

Tick... tock...

A single drop of water fell from a crack in the great hall's door, a lingering remnant of the heavy rains that had battered the Stormlands days before.

"Your Grace..." Maris's voice wavered with sorrow, her eyes swollen and red, like two bruised walnuts.

But the hall remained eerily silent.

Rhaegar stood alone, unmoving. He quietly studied the ancient castle, its stone walls weathered by countless storms. His eyes drifted east, then west, taking in every corner, as though he were memorizing the place where so much had gone wrong.

He showed no emotion—no rage, no sorrow—only the quiet, unnerving calm of a man who had lost too much.

Maris, struggling for words, could feel her fear tightening around her. She cleared her throat, summoning her courage. "Your Grace, I... I never meant—"

Her words were cut short by a dismissive wave of his hand.

She fell silent, gazing at him with pleading eyes.

"Lady," Rhaegar asked, his voice low and steady, "was it in this castle that my son was driven away?"

"No, no!" Maris stammered, startled by his sudden words. Panic gripped her. "It wasn't me! I never drove him away, I swear!"

Rhaegar didn't acknowledge her denial. His eyes remained fixed on the ancient stone walls. "My son is gone, and my family remains fractured," he said, his voice hollow.

"Your Grace, please!" Maris dropped to her knees, her body trembling as tears streamed down her face. "It wasn't me... I swear, I never meant to..."

"That's not important," Rhaegar murmured, casting a brief, detached glance at her. "I only hope your family is reunited."

With those words, he turned and strode toward the castle gates, ignoring her desperate pleas.

Crack!

Lightning slashed across the sky as he stepped outside, illuminating the dark clouds that now churned ominously, promising yet another storm.

The guards flanked the entrance, their faces drawn and pale, their heads lowered in uneasy silence, trying to make themselves invisible.

Roar...

A deep, bone-rattling roar echoed across the sky, as though the heavens themselves had been torn open. The guards dared to look up.

Beyond the towering walls of Storm's End, a massive black dragon stood menacingly, its thick neck looming over the castle's tallest tower. Its glowing green eyes, filled with a sinister and untamed fury, burned through the darkness.

The creature radiated an unmistakable aura of destruction, a reflection of its rider's suppressed rage and grief.

Without hesitation, Rhaegar mounted the dragon's back. The great beast spread its wings, and with a powerful leap, it launched into the stormy sky.

...

The beach by day was cold, but at night, it was desolate.

Patter... patter...

The rain fell steadily, turning the golden sand into thick, churning mud. A black dragon stood on the shore, its menacing head angled toward Storm's End, sharp fangs grinding together as though anticipating violence.

Rhaegar stood before the dragon, his purple eyes fixed on the ghostly green flames that illuminated the distant night sky. The air was thick with rain, but beneath the steady downpour, the faint sound of something collapsing reached his ears, mingling with the distant wails of despair.

Boom!

A gust of wind swept across the beach, carrying with it the acrid smell of goat and dragon.

Roar!

Sheepstealer landed heavily on the shore, its shriveled, battle-worn head looking even more grotesque beneath the rain, its scales slick with moisture.

"Brother,"

Aemond leaped from Sheepstealer's back, running toward the shore while his eye remained fixed on Storm's End, now consumed by a sea of green flames. The eerie fire clung to stone and iron, burning relentlessly, even as the rain fell in sheets. A ghostly mist rose from the wet flames, turning the scene into a surreal nightmare, the sound of rain becoming a tragic soundtrack to the destruction.

"You're here," Rhaegar said, his voice barely above a whisper. His head tilted slightly, unsurprised by his brother's arrival.

"You burned Storm's End!?" Aemond's voice trembled with disbelief. He could hardly believe what he was witnessing—the seat of House Baratheon, reduced to flames. Maris, Elenda, and Floris—all inside.

"I thought you wouldn't dare show your face," Rhaegar replied, his eyes narrowing as he looked Aemond over with cold disdain. "Everyone involved in my son's death will pay."

His voice dripped with venom. If that foolish woman hadn't driven Aemon away, none of this would have happened. What good was a marriage alliance to a lord's family when it couldn't even protect his blood?

Aemond's eye narrowed, his chest tightening as he struggled to find his voice. "This has nothing to do with me," he said quietly. "I didn't know my nephew was passing through here."

He had watched Aemon grow up, the boy always trailing after him with bright, admiring eyes. Even though Aemond had chosen to back his sister's claim, he had never meant harm to his own family.

"I know," Rhaegar said flatly, his tone as cold as it had been all night. "Otherwise, you wouldn't be standing here."

Aemond exhaled, relieved. He took a cautious step forward, trying to bridge the gap between them. The argument with Maris—her threats, her obsession—had driven him away from Storm's End that night. He'd gone to Stonehelm to escape. If only he'd stayed...

Bang!

Rhaegar's hand shot out, seizing Aemond by the hair, and with brutal force, slammed their foreheads together. His expression darkened, anger twisting his features. "Where were you that night?" he demanded, his voice a low, dangerous growl. "Do you know my son searched everywhere for you?"

Aemond winced, his vision swimming from the impact. "Brother, we should be focusing on vengeance," he said, his voice strained, his one eye burning with guilt. "The war isn't over!"

Rhaegar's fury didn't abate. "My son sought you out before he was killed, and where were you? You failed me—you failed him." His voice was sharp, edged with both rage and pain. If Aemond hadn't stirred up trouble at Storm's End, a child wouldn't have been forced to travel through that storm.

"I'll be the vanguard," Aemond nearly shouted, desperate to make amends. "I'll avenge our nephew! Storm's End will burn, and so will the Iron Islands and the Basilisk Isles."

"Remember your words," Rhaegar spat, releasing his brother's hair with disgust. "Now go to where you belong."

Aemond stumbled back, his expression cold as he turned and walked toward Sheepstealer, who waited in the rain, its shriveled wings twitching.

Roar?

The dragon let out a low growl as Aemond mounted, and within moments, they soared into the stormy sky, disappearing into the dark clouds above.

Once again, Rhaegar stood alone on the rain-soaked beach, the dragon by his side his only companion. He remained silent, the weight of loss pressing heavily on him. Reaching into his cloak, he pulled out a dragon's horn, black as the night around him. Its surface was etched with dragon runes, and as he stared, one of the green runes began to fade.

"Aemon... are you still alive?" Rhaegar whispered, his heart tightening painfully.

If his son lived, he would find him. If Aemon was dead, he would bring back his body. The Stormlands would soon be part of the Crownlands, and when they were, he would send every man he had to search.

Chapter 640: Seasmoke Finds Its Rider

The next day.

King's Landing, the Red Keep.

Caw, caw, caw...

A dense flock of ravens took flight, black wings cutting through the pale morning sky. One by one, they soared from the Red Keep, carrying messages to every castle across the vast land of Westeros.

In the distance, dragons began to stir. Emerging from their Dragonpits, they took to the air, their powerful wings casting shadows over Blackwater Bay as they set off on their journeys.

At the Mud Gate, the bustling docks had fallen eerily silent. The usual flow of goods and trade came to a halt, and the sailors of the royal fleet, their faces grim, loaded cargo onto ships bound for The Gullet. The air was thick with the tension of what had been lost.

The death of a young Prince had shaken the realm to its core.

Not since 101 AC, when the valiant Baelon Targaryen succumbed to his sudden illness, had an heir fallen. But this—this was more than the loss of an heir. A precious dragon rider was gone.

...

Red Keep.

Alicent, her face etched with sorrow, gently supported her husband as they approached the door to his daughter's chambers.

Knock, knock.

"Rhaenyra," Viserys called out, his breath labored, "my child, are you all right?"

Rhaenyra had returned the night before and had locked herself inside ever since, refusing to eat, drink, or even bathe.

Viserys understood the weight of such loss—he had buried too many of his own children before they were old enough to understand the world.

"I'm fine, Father," came the reply.

Rhaenyra's voice was unsettlingly calm. Inside, she still wore yesterday's clothes, stained and disheveled, her appearance as bleak as her tone.

Viserys felt his heart sink. "Aemon... he was just a boy. But this storm will pass."

No one could feel the weight of it more than her. Aemon had been the one she sent out. A decision she had made. The child she had loved and lost.

"Rhaegar has already set out," Viserys said softly, limping forward, his hand outstretched to take hers.

"I know." Rhaenyra sidestepped, avoiding his touch. With a fluid motion, she slid the sword back into its sheath and murmured, "It will be all right."

Viserys' hand froze mid-air, the pity in his eyes unmistakable. She wasn't all right. She was anything but.

"Rhaenyra, you should eat something. And bathe," Alicent spoke up, her voice colder than intended, but she could not suppress the words. She had watched this scene unfold, and though her heart ached, her own children were alive and safe. She hadn't suffered the same devastation.

"Yes, you're right," Rhaenyra replied, biting her lip as if holding something back. She turned abruptly toward the door. "I still have children. I need to check on Visenya and Aegor."

She couldn't stay a moment longer—if she did, the tears would come.

Bang!

The door slammed shut behind her, the sound reverberating like a blow to Viserys' heart.

Viserys stood motionless, distraught, his hand still outstretched as if trying to reach her. Alicent stepped closer, watching him with a mix of emotions, gently resting her hand on his arm, trying to steady his uneven breathing.

...

Driftmark, Hull.

Boom.

A massive jet-black dragon soared over the island, followed closely by a large green one and a pale blue. Below, the harbor was filled with ships bearing the blue seahorse banners, their decks packed tightly together.

Corlys Velaryon strolled through the bustling port, his eyes scanning the fleet. His heart felt heavy.

"Corlys, come!" Rhaenys called out.

Dressed in black dragonrider's leathers, she strode toward him, pulling off her gloves as she approached a wooden shelf. Corlys turned, surprised by her presence.

"You should be in King's Landing, keeping the Queen company," he remarked.

"I went," Rhaenys said, a hint of emotion in her voice as she leaned against the shelf. "But not every woman needs comforting. The cruelty of fate is plain for all to see."

"Then it is especially cruel to you and me," Corlys sighed, his weariness seeping into his words. He, too, felt the sting of loss deeply. His son and daughter were long gone, neither taken by natural causes, and he, now an old man with white hair, was left to mourn them both.

"But you and I have done nothing wrong," Rhaenys's eyes flashed with anger. "Last night, there was a fire at Storm's End. Lady Elenda, along with Maris, Floris, and hundreds of others... none survived."

Her voice trembled as she spoke of her mother's ancestral home, now reduced to ash. Storm's End, a place that once held so many memories, was gone—consumed by flames.

Corlys frowned but said nothing. Aemon's treatment at Storm's End would enrage anyone, and though Lady Maris had deserved punishment for her actions, the destruction of Storm's End seemed too far-reaching.

"That's too much," he muttered, then asked, "Are there any direct heirs left in House Baratheon?"

He recalled there was a daughter married into another house—the third of the four Storms.

"Do you think anyone burning with that kind of rage would leave behind an heir?" Rhaenys said bitterly, her voice tight with anger. "The King has decreed that House Baratheon will be stripped of its titles, and that a Prince's Palace will be built on the ruins of Storm's End, in memory of his son."

"He means to replace the Lords of the Realm?" Corlys's face turned pale. The very idea chilled him.

The power structure of Westeros had remained unchanged for centuries, not since the Conqueror unified the Six Kingdoms. Even then, Aegon the Conqueror had retained the feudal lords, only replacing kings with lords. The thought of directly abolishing a noble house, incorporating its lands into the Crownlands—it would be a seismic shift.

Loyalty to a lord was one thing; loyalty to a king, another entirely. The erasure of House Baratheon and the construction of a palace on Storm's End's ruins would send shockwaves through the noble houses of Westeros.

Rhaenys's voice was filled with sadness. "Dalton Greyjoy was foolish enough to pull the trigger, becoming the unfortunate example."

Everyone knew Lady Maris's arrogance had led to this, yet none dared speak of it openly.

"Power is like the sea," Corlys said, his tone somber. "Its waves are ever-changing. We should stay clear of this. It's better to prepare for the next war."

"Yes... another war," Rhaenys echoed, shaking her head with a hollow laugh. There was no humor in it. Her son had died on the battlefield at Rainwood, and her daughter had perished on the battlefield of childbirth. It seemed as though their entire lives had been spent waging wars of one kind or another.

"Come on, Rhaenys," Corlys said softly, his worry clear as he reached out to stroke her face. "Our children are gone, but we still have to keep going."

"You're right," Rhaenys sighed, leaning into his touch. For a moment, they stood there, finding solace in each other's presence—the only comfort they had left as an old, battle-worn couple.

...

Narrow Sea, Tarth Island.

A lush, vibrant island nestled near Shipbreaker Bay, just across the sea from Storm's End. Known as the Sapphire Isle, its coastline shimmered with azure waters, giving the place a serene, almost dreamlike quality.

In the early morning, the pier was already bustling with life. Fishermen and fishmongers were hard at work, selling their fresh catch to eager buyers. The air was filled with the sounds of voices bartering, the scent of salt and sea heavy in the breeze.

"Bastard, give me a big fish!" a tall man called out mockingly as he approached one of the stalls, his voice dripping with humor.

Laughter rippled through the nearby crowd as they watched, but the fishmonger remained unfazed.

"Coming, just a moment," he replied, his tone kind and steady. He took the jibe in stride, as if used to such remarks.

With practiced hands, the fishmonger quickly gutted a large fish, scales glistening in the morning light. His knife flashed as he cleaned the fish with skill and precision, then wiped the blade on his apron. Tying the fish by the mouth with string, he handed it to the tall man.

"Six copper stars, please," he said with a chuckle, running his hand over the silver stubble on his chin.

The tall man, momentarily fascinated by the fishmonger's swift knife work, couldn't help but exclaim, "Your knife is fast—doesn't suit a bastard."

With a grin, he dropped a handful of copper stars onto the cutting board and hurried away with his prize, the crowd dispersing as the morning routine continued.

The fishmonger, his silver-blond hair and dark skin setting him apart, returned to his work. Despite his striking appearance, no one knew the truth of his parentage—he bore the name Storm, the surname given to bastards of the Stormlands, and no one ever questioned it.

Nearby, a conversation caught his ear.

"Did you hear? A Prince riding a dragon died!" one man said, his voice low but urgent.

"Is that true?" another asked, clearly skeptical.

"Of course it's true. They even pulled the dragon's wing from the sea."

The fishmonger paused, his hands slowing as he leaned in to eavesdrop. The quayside was calm, but the idle chatter had taken a darker turn.

"I also heard a dragon fell on the island—right in the courtyard of the Lord's castle," someone added, fueling the growing rumors.

"My cousin's a herdsman. He said they delivered goats to the castle this morning—must be feeding the beast," another voice chimed in.

The story spiraled further, with someone suggesting the Lord himself planned to tame the dragon and take to the skies.

The fishmonger, his interest waning, shook his head. It was all too far-fetched. Disappointed by the exaggerations, he returned to chopping the fish with steady hands.

He couldn't sell the fish heads—those were saved for his wife and children, a humble meal after a long day at the docks.

Roar!

A pale silver dragon suddenly soared into the sky from a hidden corner of the island, its screech piercing the serene blue heavens.

"Dragon!" someone at the wharf shouted, and in an instant, the crowd gathered, eyes wide with awe.

In a place like this, far from the grandeur of King's Landing or Driftmark, the sight of a dragon was rare, something many would never witness in their entire lives.

Roar!

Seasmoke let out another cry, but its flight was unsteady, one wing still badly injured. The dragon faltered in the air, its massive form struggling against the sky.

All eyes were fixed on the dragon, mesmerized by its presence. No one noticed when the fishmonger quietly slipped away.

...

Sapphire Beach.

Seasmoke screamed as it flapped its uncoordinated wings, the injury making its movements clumsy. It descended in a series of shaky falls until it finally crashed into the soft sand, sending a cloud of gravel and dust into the air.

The dragon lay there for a long moment, struggling to rise. Eventually, it rolled over, pushing itself out of the sand and shaking its massive body free of debris.

Roar...

The cry was weaker now, filled with pain. Seasmoke's amber eyes scanned the forest on the far side of the beach. It seemed drawn toward it, as though knowing it needed to find shelter and heal its wounds.

Then, something familiar caught its eye.

A figure appeared from the trees, someone both known and strange.

Roar!?

Seasmoke tensed, crouching low, its amber pupils widening in suspicion. The dragon prepared to strike, muscles coiled, nostrils flaring.

The figure stopped, frozen in place, staring at the dragon in disbelief.

One second... two seconds...

For several long moments, the man and the dragon stared at each other, neither moving. The air itself seemed to still, the world holding its breath.

Roar...

Seasmoke blinked first, its tense form relaxing. Slowly, it crouched down, no longer threatened.

Tap, tap...

Hesitant, the figure removed a fish-stained apron and took slow, deliberate steps toward the dragon, his eyes fixed on the familiar light silver scales. The smell of the dragon—strong and earthy—filled his nostrils, flooding him with memories.

In that instant, Laenor's eyes widened, and he gasped, "Seasmoke!"

As soon as the words left his lips, something deep within him stirred. Ignoring everything else, he rushed toward the dragon, arms outstretched.

It all came rushing back.

Betrayed by someone he loved, stabbed in the back, cast into the ocean, and washed ashore on Tarth. From nothing, he had built a new life, becoming a humble fishmonger. But now, with the sight of Seasmoke, the memories returned with vivid clarity.

He remembered it all.

Roar!

Seasmoke's pupils brightened at the sound of that familiar voice. The dragon let out a joyous cry and lunged forward, closing the distance between them.

"You found me, Seasmoke!" Laenor cried, tears streaming down his face. He threw himself at the dragon's feet, rubbing its rough jaw, feeling the familiar warmth beneath his palms. The texture was just as he remembered—like the stones he had once used to sharpen his sword.

Roar!

Seasmoke released a long, triumphant cry, its body collapsing onto the sand, enveloping its long-lost rider in its protective shadow.

In that moment, a roar of pure joy echoed across the island.

No one knew that the unremarkable fishmonger from Tarth had just become a noble dragon rider once more.