

## G.O Thrones 661

### Chapter 661: Marching North to the Great Wall

A few days later...

An army of 5,000 Unsullied marched out of King's Landing, leading carts and horses laden with supplies for the transfer to Harrenhal. Above them, two scarlet dragons circled, their piercing roars echoing over Blackwater Bay.

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Harrenhal, countryside farmland.

"Hurry! Before summer's end!"

"Cut down all the trees! No manure pits for compost—everything goes!"

Farmers bent low over the fields, their scythes slicing through the summer wheat. Not just wheat—the fields were being stripped of soybeans, beets—anything edible and storable was harvested early. Everything was being sent to Harrenhal, the largest castle in the Seven Kingdoms, now becoming the center of winter preparations.

*Creak!*

A towering pine crashed to the ground, as several raftsmen jumped aside, shouting to one another. Pine and poplar trees fell one by one along the shores of the Gods Eye, timber to feed Harrenhal's growing need for firewood.

*Clang!*

Rhaegar stood by the lake, his boots sinking into the muddy ground, axe in hand. He worked steadily, cutting through the thick trunks with slow, deliberate strokes. Though the sun shone brightly in the early summer sky, his mind was far from the warmth of the day. Winter was coming, and food and firewood were vital.

Harrenhal had an abundance of fertile land, and the dense forest around the Gods Eye provided enough timber to fill the cellars beneath the Widow's Tower. The preparation was relentless.

Rhaegar was absorbed in his task until the sound of light footsteps reached his ears.

Rhaenyra appeared, wearing a simple black dress, a basket hanging from her arm. She smiled as she approached. "Take a break, it's time for lunch."

Moving from King's Landing to Harrenhal had felt like stepping into another life—a quieter, simpler existence, where the rustic farmland and muddy paths had a charm of their own.

"Have the farmers eaten?" Rhaegar asked, setting down his axe and wiping the sweat from his brow with a towel.

"They have. Everyone's been fed," Rhaenyra replied, shaking her head with a soft laugh as she opened the basket. "Tens of thousands of farmers are working because of your command. Of course, they can't go hungry."

Harrenhal was vast, its lands sprawling across the Riverlands, and its population had swelled under the king's reign. The Mushroom Market, a bustling trading hub, was under its jurisdiction, known

for its trade in mulberry silk, sweet wine, and sugar. Over the years, Rhaegar had discreetly encouraged the movement of vagrants and orphans to Harrenhal, bolstering its workforce. The castle's prosperity now rivaled that of any in the Seven Kingdoms. If not for the lack of a major port, it might have outstripped even the five great port cities, including Oldtown.

Rhaegar chuckled as he picked up a piece of bread, spreading it with salted meat sauce. "You wouldn't believe how much the population of the Seven Kingdoms has grown over the years."

"How much?" Rhaenyra asked, pouring him a cup of honey water.

"Otto once tried to conduct a census, but the Lord of the Riverlands chased him out," she added with a smirk. Population was wealth, and few lords liked outsiders meddling in their affairs. When Otto Hightower had served as Master of Civil Affairs, Rhaegar had pushed him to carry out a thorough census—an effort that earned Otto the unfortunate nickname "Master of Shit and Piss."

"About 120 million," Rhaegar said, taking a hearty bite of his meal.

Rhaenyra paused, startled. "One hundred and twenty million? I thought 20 to 30 million was already a high estimate."

She hesitated, brushing more meat sauce on her bread. The figure seemed impossibly high, especially given the limited productivity of Westeros. Could the kingdom really support so many people?

"And yet, it is so." Rhaegar himself found it hard to believe, but the shadow that had loomed over the Seven Kingdoms for so many years made it clear. "The Riverlands and The Reach alone have a combined population of over 50 million."

This wasn't just speculation; the numbers had been carefully verified. During the reign of his great-grandfather Jaehaerys, the population of Westeros had exceeded 100 million. It was a figure well-documented, as Jaehaerys and his queen had traveled the continent by dragon, conducting a personal census.

However, under his father Viserys's reign, population growth had stagnated for a time. When Rhaegar ascended the throne, the toll of war caused the population to plummet by millions—many of them adult men, along with women and orphans lost to the conflict. But under Rhaegar's rule, with his protection of war widows and orphans, combined with the prosperity of the decade-long summer, the population had rebounded swiftly.

This growth was especially noticeable in the Crownlands and the Vale, where land had been reclaimed to house the homeless. With the Riverlands at the core and extending outward to The Reach, the Crownlands, The Vale, and Storm's End, the total population of the Seven Kingdoms now exceeded 100 million once again.

By comparison, The North and Dorne remained sparsely populated, their numbers a fraction of the more prosperous southern regions. The Iron Islands, ravaged and broken, could no longer be counted. Only the Westerlands and the Stepstones still held relative economic strength, buoyed by trade and resources beyond farming.

"With so many people, they all trust you," Rhaenyra said softly, leaning against Rhaegar's shoulder. Her voice carried warmth, her gaze reflecting her admiration. She understood the weight of

leadership—being Queen of Lys was no easy task, let alone ruling all of Westeros with its seven kingdoms and nine great houses.

"It's all about survival. A King must fulfill his duties," Rhaegar replied. He finished his meal in a few swift bites, then stood up, clapping the crumbs from his hands.

"Let's head back," Rhaegar said, brushing off the dust. He took Rhaenyra's hand, and they began walking back towards Harrenhal.

The trees they felled needed to be properly dried; otherwise, they would rot and mildew. Harrenhal's efforts to stockpile for winter were thorough. Norvos had a special mineral that could turn firewood into long-burning coals, making them easier to store. The forest around the Gods Eye had already been cleared and converted into coal for the coming cold months.

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The next day, King's Landing.

Two green dragons soared over Blackwater Bay, flying from the Mud Gate and circling above King's Landing before descending slowly into the Dragonpit.

The crowds in Silk Street and Flea Bottom erupted into cheers, chanting, "Long live the heir prince!" as they spotted the dragons. Unbeknownst to them, the king and the royal family had already quietly transferred to Harrenhal. The presence of the dragons in the Dragonpit and the heir prince's return were symbols of life, stability, and peace.

The Red Keep, the Small Council Chamber.

Baelon and Baela, having safely stored the three eggs Moondancer had laid, convened a meeting of the Small Council in the name of the heir prince. The faces around the council table had shifted slightly.

Daemon, calm and composed, sat in the seat reserved for the king. Aemond occupied the former Hand of the King's chair to the left. Across from him, Alicent sat quietly in the Master of Laws' seat. The remaining advisers took their places, eager to hear the purpose behind the heir prince's unexpected return.

"Prince, what is the situation in the North?" Grand Maester Orwyle asked softly, breaking the silence.

"It's not good," Baelon replied, his voice heavy with concern. He glanced around at the council members before asking, puzzled, "Where are my father and grandfather?" He found it strange that neither of them had come to greet him, nor had his younger siblings.

"They're at Harrenhal," Aemond said, his single eye fixed on Baelon. He deliberately lowered his voice, a slight edge of menace creeping into his tone. "You can go find them if you like."

Grand Maester Orwyle stepped in, offering an explanation of the events of the past fortnight, including why Queen Mother Alicent had remained in King's Landing.

"Harrenhal is cold and damp," Alicent said, her face showing clear distaste. "I've had my fill of that place." She shook her head, recalling the years of isolation she'd endured there. "I'd rather stay here in King's Landing and face the cold than return to that miserable fortress."

Daemon leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "You say the wildlings are attacking in force, and the North is running out of food?" His eyes darkened with concern. This was troubling news. The North was the realm's first line of defense against the oncoming winter, and if things were dire there, it spelled even greater danger for the rest of the kingdom.

"Why don't we send supplies?" Lord Lyman, the Master of Coin, suggested, glancing around the room. "We have enough grain. The Crownlands, the Riverlands, and The Reach produce more than enough to feed the North."

The long summer had been generous, especially in the south, where the harvests were bountiful and the people lived comfortably.

"It's not enough, Lord Lyman," Baelon said, shaking his head gravely. "The North needs more than just food. They need all the support we can offer."

With the approval of the other council members, Baelon took a bold step. "I propose we gather an army—10,000 strong—and send them north immediately to reinforce the Night's Watch."

Daemon sat back, crossing his arms as he considered the proposal. His silence indicated agreement. "We'll need to inform your father about this," he said after a moment.

"I'll go find him," Baelon replied, his voice firm. He patted his chest, his young face filled with determination. 'I can't let Lord Cregan down, and I won't let the Wall fall while I do nothing.'

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Three days later...

Harrenhal, Water Gardens.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal twisted on the cobblestone floor, stretching its long neck as it unleashed a mighty roar. Overhead, a dozen dragons circled, their powerful wings stirring the thin clouds as they vied for space in the sky. Below them, in front of Kingspyre Tower, an army of 5,000 Unsullied stood at attention, their ranks perfectly still.

"Ga-ga-ga..."

Hundreds of ravens burst from the spire of Widow's Tower, their black wings beating furiously as they screeched, flying out to all corners of the Seven Kingdoms. Beneath the calm surface of Harrenhal, the seeds of war were quietly taking root.

Kingspyre Tower, Hall of a Hundred Hearths.

Viserys sat on the highest throne, frail and distant. His once sharp eyes now showed weariness. A blanket covered his legs, offering little comfort as he silently observed the discussions unfolding

below him. Most of the family had gathered, their voices mixing with the crackling fires that warmed the great hall.

"We're heading to the North. I want to lead the way," Aemond declared, a confident smile tugging at his lips. His single eye gleamed with determination.

"Yes, yes, you go first," Aegon mumbled, nodding quickly. He shrank back, clearly relieved that his brother was volunteering for the frigid journey. The idea of braving the freezing cold of the North didn't appeal to him at all.

"You're going too," Rhaegar said firmly, his gaze locking on Aegon. He wasn't about to tolerate his brother's laziness. The threat of White Walkers loomed beyond the Wall, and the dragons were the realm's best hope. As many Targaryens as possible would be needed in the fight.

Aegon's face fell, his earlier enthusiasm deflating like a punctured balloon.

Rhaegar turned his attention back to the room, his tone growing more serious. "We need to think carefully about how many dragons and troops to send."

Ravens had already been dispatched across the realm, summoning lords and soldiers to prepare for the coming battle. The number of dragons was critical, and not all could be spared.

'Father is too weak,' Rhaegar thought, glancing at Viserys. 'Vermithor must stay here.' The elderly king had grown frail, and his dragon, Vermithor, would remain behind to guard him.

'Aunt Rhaenys and Laenor will join us,' Rhaegar added, his mind racing through the family's assets. 'Laenor will command the Velaryon fleet, and they must reach the North before White Harbor freezes over.'

'Daemon can't leave,' Rhaegar noted. 'He and Caraxes are our main defense in King's Landing.' Daemon, with his fiery temperament, was a vital force that kept the capital secure.

'Helaena and Daeron will tend to their own responsibilities. The older children will stay behind, including Baelon and Maekar.'

"I'll go with you," Rhaenyra interjected, stepping forward and taking Rhaegar's hand. She pressed her shoulder against his, her determination clear. She wasn't about to let her brother face the long winter without her by his side.

Rhaegar hesitated for a moment, his heart heavy with the burden of leadership. But then he leaned in, pressing his forehead to hers in silent agreement. The King and Queen were stronger together.

"Take us with you!"

Baela and Rhaena approached, clutching the hem of their foster mother's skirt. They were no longer children but young women, eager to prove themselves. The thought of being left behind with their younger siblings didn't sit well with them.

"Your dragons are still too young," Rhaenyra began, her hand gently brushing the cheeks of her foster daughters.

"It's fine," Baela insisted, her bravery shining through. "We can accompany you. Winterfell is cold and bleak, but three dragons are better than one."

"But..." Rhaenyra hesitated, her heart softening. She turned to Rhaegar, seeking his guidance.

Rhaegar's eyes met hers, and after a brief pause, he nodded. The strength of their family was in their unity, and Baela's resolve was undeniable.

With that, the final preparations were set. Rhaegar would lead the expedition north with Rhaenys, Rhaenyra, Aemond, Laenor, and Baela. They would command eight dragons in total.

The army accompanying them consisted of 5,000 Unsullied, 3,000 Fearless, and 2,000 Gold Cloaks. The royal fleet would remain stationed between Harrenhal and King's Landing, while the remaining forces would be summoned from the local lords.

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Time passed swiftly, and half a month had gone by.

The Green Fork of the Trident, near Riverrun.

An army of tens of thousands marched steadily toward the castle across the river. At the heart of the formation, the Unsullied in their black armor moved with precision, their discipline unmatched.

At the vanguard, 2,000 cavalry and archers from Riverrun, Raventree, Stone Hedge, and other Riverlands strongholds led the way. Behind them, 3,000 logistical troops, gathered from both the Riverlands and the Crownlands, followed closely, ensuring the army's supplies were well-managed.

"Roar!"

Overhead, a magnificent golden dragon soared above the army, its scales gleaming in the sunlight as it chased another dragon—a mud-colored, ungainly beast.

The contrast between them was striking. The golden dragon radiated beauty and power, while the brown, mud-hued creature flew awkwardly, a stark opposition of grace and ugliness in the skies above the marching soldiers.

Chapter 662: Bankruptcy of Oldtown

The Twins, the Great Bridge.

"Your Grace."

Lord Forrest of The Twins greeted Rhaegar Frey of House Frey, his handsome, middle-aged face betraying his excitement. A noblewoman with sharp cheekbones and a stern expression followed closely behind, bowing slightly.

"Lord Forrest, I have tens of thousands of troops behind me, so I'll be depending on you," Rhaegar said, walking across the bridge over the rushing waters, gladly accepting Lord Forrest's hospitality.

House Frey was a relatively new house, its wealth built through control of the traffic on the Green Fork of the Trident. Its members were often known for their character flaws and lack of manners, but they had been loyal advisers to House Targaryen since the time of the Old King.

"Don't worry, I've already instructed my men to slaughter the pigs and sheep," Forrest said, his voice generous as he promised, "In response to your call, I will personally lead 600 cavalry and 800 archers north with you."

Forrest knew well that raising this many troops already pushed the limits of what was needed to safeguard House Frey.

Rhaegar smiled slightly but did not immediately agree. "Not yet," he replied. "There are still many who haven't arrived."

Forrest looked puzzled and glanced behind the king at the military lords of Riverrun. Soldiers from the Crownlands, including those from House Rook's Rest and House Rosby, were also present. As his eyes scanned the gathering, they fell on a yellow-jade dragon slowly descending onto the bridge.

"Your Grace!" Forrest's eyes lit up as he called out from afar.

Rhaenyra, dressed in black dragon-rider attire, her silver hair tied back, stepped onto the bridge with a confident stride. Forrest, eager to impress, quickly ordered his men to fetch wine and fruit, fawning over the still youthful and striking Queen.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Lord Forrest," Rhaenyra said as she graciously accepted, picking up a plump red grape and placing it in her mouth. After a brief pause, she picked up another and fed it to Rhaegar.

Rhaegar smiled wordlessly, enjoying the sweet, syrupy pulp.

"Your Grace, please come and rest at the castle," Forrest said, his smile growing more sincere as he led the way with a light step.

"Don't lose your composure, Forrest," the noblewoman beside him muttered, clearly unable to bear his obsequiousness, casting him a fierce glare. Forrest immediately straightened up, his face turning red with embarrassment.

The noblewoman snorted, then turned to Rhaegar and Rhaenyra with a smile that barely hid her disdain. "Please come, the Freys have prepared the finest banquet for you."

"Thank you, Lady Sabitha," Rhaegar replied, the corner of his mouth curving up as he took Rhaenyra's hand and led her toward the other end of the bridge.

Rhaenyra nodded slightly, glancing at her brother. Rhaegar turned just in time to catch her gaze. The next moment, the two siblings exchanged knowing smiles.

It was well-known that Lord Forrest of House Frey had once been one of Rhaenyra's most ardent suitors. During Rhaenyra's maiden years, known as the Realm's Delight, she and her dragon Syrax had been the most dazzling figures in the Seven Kingdoms. The Lannister brothers, Jason and Tyland, had nearly come to blows over their courtship of her, but Forrest Frey had been even more determined, willing to do whatever it took to win her favor.

Legend had it that on the night of Rhaenyra's wedding, Forrest failed to arrive at Dragonstone as promised, too devastated to attend. Instead, he hid in The Twins, weeping for an entire night, and regretted it for half a year. His eventual wife, Lady Sabitha, though neither beautiful nor particularly kind, was clever and avaricious.

It was whispered that she did not care much for men.

"A bit miserable," Rhaegar whispered in Rhaenyra's ear, feeling a hint of pity for the lovestruck man.

"Then go comfort him," she teased.

Rhaegar let out a breath, leaning closer as he playfully brushed his lips against her ear. Rhaenyra's cheeks flushed slightly, and she shot him a sharp glare.

When she had still been heir to the Iron Throne, Rhaenyra was most adored by the nobles of the Riverlands and the Crownlands. Both House Blackwood and the now-destroyed House Bracken had hosted her and her dragon, Syrax, with great honor. Even after her marriage, the Riverlands remained her preferred destination for receiving guests.

The one place she dreaded visiting was The Twins, seat of House Frey. Not only was Forrest Frey overzealous in his affections, but his wife, Lady Sabitha, had also made her desire for Rhaenyra quite clear.

The couple, it seemed, shared the same obsession. A perfect match indeed.

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Night had fallen.

Ten thousand troops made camp, cooking their meals over fires that lit up half the sky. Inside the castle, the hall was packed. Though not particularly spacious, it was filled with tables, chairs, and benches, and the best dishes were served to the guests.

Up on the second floor, Rhaegar sat, clutching a raven in his hands.

"Quack, quack..."

He gently removed the small letter tied to the bird's leg, and the raven flew off in a panic. As Rhaegar read the letter, the pleasant look on his face gradually faded, replaced by a cold expression.

"Your Grace, is something wrong?"

Forrest, who was nibbling on a crab, asked anxiously.

"It's those lords who still haven't arrived," Rhaegar muttered darkly, handing the letter over in frustration. "The Reach and the Westerlands aren't that far apart, yet they're dragging their feet on sending troops."

"What? How dare they neglect you!"

Forrest exclaimed, his eyes widening as he skimmed the letter. It explained that Lord Jason of Casterly Rock had fallen ill since his return from Slaver's Bay, leaving the Westerlands without leadership and delaying their military response.

The situation in the Reach was somewhat better—Highgarden had sent 1,000 cavalry and 2,000 infantry, while House Rowan had provided 800 cavalry and 1,200 archers. Together, they had raised a force of 5,000 soldiers and were marching north through Bitterbridge.

However, other houses had contributed fewer troops, and the Oldtown faction, along with House Tarly, had outright refused to send any.

When Rhaenyra took the letter, she exclaimed, surprised, "The merchants from Qarth entered Oldtown and used loans to bankrupt the Oldtown Bank?"

Earlier that year, young Lord Lyonel Hightower, supported by his uncle Otto and cousin Queen Alicent, had married the daughter of House Tarly—a shrewd woman named Samantha Tarly.

Ambitious and driven, Samantha had championed the creation of the Oldtown Bank to bolster the Hightower family's wealth. Her plan had succeeded, with many nobles and merchants from the Reach depositing large sums of money at high interest rates.



Yet the bank had gone under so swiftly.

"The merchants of Qarth raised the interest rates and drove the Oldtown Bank into bankruptcy," Rhaenyra said gravely, her tone laced with frustration. "Those damned vampires—they want to drain the Reach dry."

Bankers were often seen as shameless. With the nobles of the Reach now financially tied to Qarth, the entire region was dependent on the foreign bankers. Whether that would prove a blessing or a curse remained to be seen.

"The Oldtown Bank has collapsed, and House Hightower is already expelling the Qarth merchants," Rhaegar added in a low voice. "But the merchants refuse to leave, so Lady Samantha has called on her brother, Lord Alan Tarly, to muster troops and rally the Oldtown nobles for war."

Oldtown's power was not to be underestimated. Many wealthy families in the region were vassals of House Hightower. For example, House Beesbury of Honeyholt, where the current Master of Coin, Lyman Beesbury, hailed from, was nearly as influential as some of the great houses.

"The merchants of Qarth are refusing to leave," Rhaenyra said in disbelief, scanning the letter again. "And it says here that they produced... your personal agreement, allowing them to dock in any port?"

Rhaegar stiffened, momentarily lost for words. Of course, he had signed that agreement. He'd anticipated Qarth causing trouble, but not to the extent of bankrupting the Oldtown Bank and forcing Lady Samantha to turn against them.

"What should we do?" Rhaenyra asked softly, her voice cautious. "Should we notify Oldtown to halt the fighting and honor the agreement?"

"No," Rhaegar replied, shaking his head. That would mean oppressing Oldtown. He won't do that to his vassals.

"Then what should we do?"

Rhaenyra asked, her purple eyes flickering with uncertainty. She was out of ideas. After all, not abiding by the agreement could be a solution in itself.

"Whoever causes trouble will be burned to death," Aemond, who had been quietly observing the situation, suddenly spoke up. His voice was cold as he added, "Qarth is just a city full of greedy bastards. I can crush them in two weeks, riding them down like Sheepstealers."

"The royal family cannot take the lead in breaking promises," Rhaegar replied, maintaining a sense of dignity.

Aemond's face darkened with displeasure. "This isn't allowed, that's not allowed either," he scoffed. "Are you going to let the Qarth vermin do whatever they please?"

"That's an idea..." Rhaegar murmured, his mind racing.

He couldn't break his word, nor did he want to pressure Oldtown too much. But perhaps letting them handle Qarth themselves would serve both purposes—stall Qarth while allowing Oldtown to manage the problem. Once the North was dealt with, he could address this matter properly.

"Qarth is not a strong city, brother," Aemond said, his one eye gleaming coldly as he drew his dagger and began to toy with it. His preference for a swift, decisive solution was clear.

Qarth's origins were shrouded in mystery, but its people had a long history of arrogance. As descendants of ancient Valyria, they looked down on all other races and cultures, none more so than the merchants of Qarth—a trade hub where multiple cultures intersected. To Aemond, they deserved to burn for meddling in Targaryen affairs.

"We'll wait a bit longer," Rhaegar decided. "Send a letter to Oldtown soon, offering some form of conciliation." He glanced at Aemond, already considering the letter's content. It would explain that the royal family was in a difficult position, subtly hinting that Oldtown should take matters into its own hands. If Qarth continued to be unkind, they shouldn't be surprised if the Targaryens responded in kind.

"I heard Lord Alan Tarly is a capable man—he fought in the defense of Prince's Pass at a young age, didn't he?" Rhaegar shifted the conversation smoothly.

"Yes, Alan is skilled in martial arts and wields his house sword, Heartsbane," Rhaenyra added softly. "Lord Lyman's grandson is also named Arlan; he'll likely join forces with Oldtown's army."

Rhaegar smiled slightly, then burned the letter over the candle's flame. "It's a pity about Oldtown's forces. Otherwise, The Reach would have had thousands more troops."

"And what about the Westerlands?" Aemond asked, his thirst for battle evident as his gaze shifted toward House Lannister, who had continually stalled.

"Lord Jason is unwell," Forrest interjected, his tone skeptical. "That man's always been greedy and miserly. Could it be that he's using this illness as an excuse to avoid sending troops?"

House Lannister was a cunning one. Its ancestors had seized Casterly Rock through deception, and it wouldn't be surprising if they withheld aid unless they saw some profit in it—especially when the help was intended for the North.

"Send word to Tyland," Rhaegar ordered after a moment of reflection. "Tell him to urge Lord Jason."

The Westerlands were crucial, but they had always been a somewhat independent region within the Seven Kingdoms, less susceptible to royal commands. Westeros itself was divided into eight parts, with the North, Westerlands, and Dorne functioning as the most autonomous. Even royal decrees struggled to hold sway in these lands. Since the Conquest, to stabilize the realm and curb potential rebellion, marriages had been arranged with the Vale and Stormlands, and alliances formed with the Riverlands and Reach to balance power between the regions. Now, while helping the weak North and volatile Dorne was necessary, the prosperous and powerful Westerlands posed a greater concern.

"Why don't I go to Casterly Rock and take a good look at Jason myself?" Aemond smirked as he stabbed his dagger into the table, his eye gleaming with menace. To him, the Lannisters were no different from the merchants of Qarth—both deserving of death for defying the king's will.

"Give Jason one month," Rhaegar commanded. "Let Tyland deliver the message. If he's still unwell by then, I'll send Daemon to 'cure' him personally."

#### Chapter 663: Capturing the Children of the Forest

Time flew by, and another half-month had passed. The army left The Twins, officially entering the swampy, malarial lands of the Neck.

"Roar!"

A golden dragon soared above the dense jungle, guiding the army below. The force had swelled since their departure, with more feudal lords from the Riverlands sending troops. House Arryn of the Vale led an alliance of 3,000 Knights of the Vale and 5,000 archers and foot soldiers. More forces continued to gather.

Clop, clop, clop...

The horses' hooves trampled the rotten mud, sending foul-smelling sludge splashing into the air. Rhaegar rode alongside the lacquered white Round Palace carriage. As the curtain parted, it revealed a pretty face.

"A letter from Lord Rowan. The Reach army has crossed The Twins," Rhaenyra said with a bright smile, holding the letter in her small hands.

With the arrival of the Reach army, their northern force would soon number 30,000 strong.

"Put it away for now. There are too many mosquitoes here," Rhaegar replied, waving at the swarm of insects as he gently drew the curtain closed.

"We should ride the dragons," Rhaenyra suggested, leaning against the window ledge and clapping her small hands together. The curtains framed her head, leaving only her bright purple eyes visible.

Rhaegar pulled the curtains fully shut, teasing, "We're almost at Greywater Watch. Next time, just say so sooner."

"Mm-hmm~~" Rhaenyra hummed, retreating into the carriage as she embraced her adopted daughter, whispering softly to her.

The Neck was a natural fortress, sapping the morale of any army that dared pass through it. Furthermore, this was a coalition army, hastily assembled from various kingdoms, lacking true organization. The king's presence, however, boosted cohesion and ensured the arriving forces would follow the same path.

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The sun set, and dusk gradually settled over the land. In the depths of the jungle, a gray castle covered in rubble appeared before the army. It was neither majestic nor grand—short, old, and weathered. Standing alone in the black and green forest, it resembled a watchtower gazing into the distance.

"Finally, my aching back!" Aegon grumbled, his face twisted with discomfort.

Rhaegar dismounted, looking up and around.

"Roar..."

A loud, muffled dragon's roar echoed from deep within the forest, its enormous body hidden among the trees. Sunfyre and Sheepstealer had landed earlier and were now being herded by the Dragonkeepers as they fed. Above, three dragons hovered in the sky. Syrax slowly descended toward the tower of the gray-white castle, while Moondancer and Morning circled each other like dancing butterflies.

"Your Grace, please forgive the modest conditions of Greywater Watch," Hall Reed, one of the Kingsguard, said respectfully as he led the way. Hall, born to House Reed of Greywater Watch, was the youngest son of the previous Lord Reed. Skilled in martial arts and keenly intelligent, his return to Greywater Watch was like a son coming home.

"Anyone who hosts the king is treated kindly, no matter the circumstances," Rhaegar replied, recalling his correspondence with Lord Reed.

Creak.

The doors of the lacquered white chariot swung open, and Rhaenyra, dressed in black, stepped down gracefully.

"Roar!"

A pale pink Morning flapped its wings and flew toward her, its large body crashing into the side of the chariot. Mud splattered in all directions, just as Rhaena stepped off, catching some of it.

"Haha, Morning loves you so much," Baela mocked from behind, a smirk on her face.

Rhaenyra patted her skirt, checking to see if any mud had landed on her, then took Rhaegar's hand naturally.

Shortly after, Lord Bard Reed of Greywater Watch emerged and warmly invited the group into the castle.

"Your Grace, please come inside."

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Night had fallen.

In the dimly lit bedroom of Greywater Watch, the quiet was broken by a sharp crack. The tallow candle on the Weirwood table sputtered, spitting out sparks. Rhaegar sat at the table, carefully reviewing letters from King's Landing and various factions.

The main issues revolved around Golden Fields and Oldtown. Daeron had secured a loan from Qarth, recruiting a large number of homeless people to join the efforts of reclaiming the land. A Dragonstone Castle, on the shores of Dagger Lake, was steadily taking shape, with new land being extended outward to establish a foothold for the town.

But the situation in Oldtown was tense. House Hightower and the merchants of Qarth were at odds, and the young Lord Alan Tarly had gathered 1,000 archers, 800 infantry, and 200 cavalry, ready to strike at a moment's notice.

"Still reading the news?" The door creaked open, and Rhaenyra entered, freshly bathed, her long silver-and-gold hair still damp. She approached slowly, drying her hair with a cloth. Her ample chest pressed against Rhaegar's back as she leaned over, peering at the letters scattered across the table.

"It's all trivial matters," Rhaegar muttered, leaning back into her, resting his head in the curve of her neck, where the sweet scent of her skin enveloped him.

"And a letter from Baelon," Rhaenyra said with a smile, picking up an unsealed letter. It spoke of preparations being completed at Harrenhal, with the Riverlands and the Vale mobilizing for the

coming winter. King's Landing remained mostly peaceful, though prices had begun to rise, and half a month ago, in the middle of August, a sudden chill had swept through the city. Firewood and warm clothing were becoming scarce, with Qohor's cheap wool and mulberry silk flooding out of Blackwater Bay.

"The ten years of perpetual summer are completely over," Rhaegar said gravely, glancing up at Rhaenyra. He whispered, "I predict it will start snowing by mid-September. The people of the Seven Kingdoms are going to suffer."

Snowfall in September was rare outside of the North, especially in the Vale. Ten years of summer had caused the people to forget the harsh cold of winter. How many would perish in the snow this time?

"I will be with you," Rhaenyra murmured, rubbing her forehead against his. "We will defend the Wall, drive back the cold and the darkness from the North, and everything will return to normal."

Rhaegar closed his eyes, breathing in the scent of soapberry from her hair, his mind turning to the looming battle against the White Walkers. The conqueror's prophecy weighed heavily on his heart. The last time mankind had fought the White Walkers was 8,000 years ago. He remembered the ancient murals he'd seen as a child in the underground mines of Dragonstone, their hideous faces etched in stone.

How could he wield his sword against the dead and such monsters?

"I hope they can withstand Dragonfire," he murmured with a wry smile as he rose and made his way to the bed.

Outside the castle, the army was encamped three li away. Bonfires dotted the horizon, casting a glow that illuminated the night sky, while the distant, chaotic singing of soldiers echoed faintly.

As the night deepened, dark clouds rolled in, veiling the bright moon.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo..."

The sound of birdsong drifted in through the window, clear as though the birds were perched just outside. Rhaegar lay down on the hard bed, burying his head against the warmth of Rhaenyra's bosom. Slowly, he drifted into sleep, where hazy dreams began to take shape.

White.

A vast, endless expanse of pure white stretched out before him, as if the sky and earth had merged into one. Heavy snow blanketed everything in sight, and a biting wind howled fiercely through the desolate landscape.

Tap, tap, tap...

A rotting warhorse, frozen and decayed, trudged slowly through the snow. One of its blue eyes dangled grotesquely from its socket, still loosely connected by strands of blood and tissue. Rhaegar stood amidst the snow, his expression confused as he took in the strange sight. The horse passed by, its large hoof, covered in thick white hair, resembling that of a snow beast as it clamped onto its belly.

"A dead horse?" Rhaegar muttered, his mind slowly processing the unnatural sight. His eyes narrowed as he looked closer.

Boom.

Suddenly, his gaze locked with a pair of cold, icy blue eyes, as lifeless and chilling as death itself. Rhaegar's pupils contracted, and he instinctively reached for his sword at his waist.

"Hmph..."

The rotting horse snorted heavily, its blue-eyed rider moving further away with each slow, deliberate step. The rider was a hideous creature—pale, wrinkled skin stretched tightly over its skeletal frame, with messy white hair framing its face. The creature's blue eyes scanned its surroundings, cold and merciless, brimming with aggression.

For a fleeting moment, Rhaegar thought the creature had spotted him.

But no—it rode on, pausing briefly at certain spots, as though marking the land.

"Is that... a White Walker?" Rhaegar's eyes widened in disbelief. His heart raced as he watched the figure vanish into the blizzard. If this truly was a White Walker, it would confirm all his darkest fears. The Conqueror's prophecy, the ancient murals in the Dragonstone mines, the prophecy of Norvos—it was all real. Everything he had prepared for wasn't just an alarmist fantasy.

Flutter, flutter, flutter...

With a mere wave of the rider's hand, the snow bulged and shifted. From beneath the frozen ground, thousands of corpses and skeletons began to claw their way out, rising to form an undead army. The strange rider looked on with satisfaction as the dead gathered behind him, then continued forward on his decaying warhorse.

Rhaegar stared, utterly overwhelmed. The sight of the dead resurrecting before his eyes struck him to the core. It reminded him of the Shadowbinder's curse he had once witnessed as a child, stranded on Crackclaw Point. The curse had fed on the shadows of the dead, growing ever stronger, spreading like an unstoppable cancer until it devoured everything in its path.

Pop.

Just as he prepared to observe the rider further, the dream shattered.

"Cuckoo, cuckoo..."

The sharp sound of birds chirping cut through the haze. Their calls seemed more urgent than before. Rhaegar slowly opened his eyes, shaking his head to clear the remnants of the vision.

"Rhaegar, I'm sleepy," Rhaenyra mumbled beside him, her voice soft and drowsy.

Rhaegar groaned, a terrible headache pulsing through his temples. He propped himself up on one hand and rubbed his forehead. As he shifted beneath the quilt, something felt off. He frowned, lifting the edge of the quilt to reveal the pale, mottled Weirwood planks beneath.

Suspicion crept into his eyes as he quietly slipped out of bed. Leaning down, he kissed Rhaenyra's flushed face softly and whispered, "I'll be back in a bit."

He grabbed the shirt from the bedside table, buckled his sword, Blackfyre, to his waist, and headed toward the door. Before stepping out, he glanced out the window, his mind still heavy with the memory of blue eyes and the rising dead.

...

Greywater Watch, the swamp.

A silver-haired figure moved steadily through the thick brush and tangled obstacles, following the faint trail left by animals. Rhaegar didn't know how long he had been walking, but he pressed on. Soon, a low-growing species of Weirwood came into view, its crimson leaves stark against the darkness.

Whoosh.

As Rhaegar halted, a figure flickered into view. It was small and thin, no larger than a child. In the moonlight, its skin appeared green, draped in rough animal hides.

"Ula-ula~~"

The figure paused briefly in front of the Weirwood, muttering something incomprehensible to Rhaegar before vanishing as quickly as it had appeared. But even in those brief moments, Rhaegar had seen enough—hair like bark, eyes filled with ancient wisdom, and rags hanging from its frail frame.

Stunned, Rhaegar stepped closer to the Weirwood. The tree's trunk was thick and sturdy, a sorrowful face carved deeply into its surface. In the dim light, the face seemed to bear its suffering, as if confessing long-held pain.

"Did you lure me here?" Rhaegar muttered, eyes narrowing as his hand hovered near the trunk.

Silence.

The swamp, the trees, everything was enveloped in an unnatural quiet. Rhaegar's face hardened. He slammed his hand against the pale bark, his voice sharp. "Ungrateful!"

Zilla!

Dark scales began to form on his forehead, horns pushing through as black flames surged along his fingers. The flames consumed the Weirwood, charring its bark in an instant, while the red leaves caught fire and burned like tinder.

"Ahhh!" A piercing scream echoed through the air as a magical ripple pulsed from the tree.

Thud.

A small, green figure tumbled to the ground.

Swish!

In a flash, the blade of Blackfyre was at its throat. The creature froze, its hand halfway to its waist, too terrified to move further.

"Children of the Forest," Rhaegar hissed, his gaze cold. He pressed the sword harder against the creature's throat. "Did you lure me here on purpose?"

"Ula-ula~~" The creature gestured frantically, as though trying to explain itself.

Pah!

Rhaegar struck it across the face with the flat of the blade. His voice was ice. "Speak human words."

"I lured you here," the Child of the Forest admitted instantly, now speaking fluent Common Tongue, fear evident in its trembling voice.

#### Chapter 664: The Cold God and the Night King

The dark clouds gradually dispersed, allowing the moonlight to bathe the earth. The Blackfyre's flames extinguished, leaving the Weirwood charred and reduced to ashes. Rhaegar stepped on the fallen Child of the Forest, raising Blackfyre slightly as he loomed over it.

"Who are you, and why did you lead me here?" he demanded, his mood soured from being woken in the dead of night.

The Child of the Forest, small and timid, whispered in a soft, trembling voice, "You may be the Prince from the prophecy. You were meant to receive guidance from the Heart Tree."

The Children of the Forest were once mysterious and revered, legendary beings. Yet, as Rhaegar looked down at the frail creature beneath him, he couldn't help but think of their fall. First defeated by the First Men with their bronze weapons, then the First Men were overthrown by the Andals wielding iron. In the end, the Dragonlords of Valyria drove away the Andals, cementing their place at the top of the world's hierarchy.

He stared at the Child with a strange expression. "You're weaker than I imagined," he said coldly.

The Child of the Forest looked up, defiant despite its fear. "We have magic," it retorted sharply, its voice shrill, hands waving in frustration. "We don't need the brute strength of a stupid giant."

Rhaegar's eyes darkened, his patience wearing thin. The creature at his feet was small and delicate. Judging by its facial features and the bandeau around its chest, it was female, with chestnut curls, large green eyes, and round ears—nothing like the mythical creatures described in history books.

"I really do have magic!" the Child of the Forest huffed, rising to its feet. In a fit of frustration, it rummaged in its pocket and pulled out... a pumpkin. Without hesitation, it hurled the pumpkin toward the swamp.

Boom!

The pumpkin exploded with a force that startled even Rhaegar, its blast powerful enough to rival a young dragon's Dragonfire. His eyes widened in surprise as he assessed the destruction.

"See?" the Child of the Forest said, its green eyes gleaming as it sensed an opportunity. "I can help you. I will guide you to the way to fight the cold and the darkness."

Pop!

Rhaegar's hand cracked across the Child's face, sending it sprawling back onto the ground with a shocked grin. He bent down, yanking the torn pocket off the creature's animal-skin skirt.



"Ahhh!" The Child of the Forest, enraged and humiliated, yelled in frustration. "The White Walkers are coming! Do you want to win this war or not?!"

Her magical weapons—her greatest leverage—had been stolen, and the human dared to strike her.

"You know how to fight the White Walkers?" Rhaegar asked, eyeing the Child of the Forest with renewed interest, though most of his attention remained on how many more "pumpkins" the creature had in its pocket. One, two, three, four... Six or seven, he estimated. He thought about giving a few to Rhaenyra for self-defense.

At this, Rhaegar's expression turned serious. He didn't reach for the dagger this time. Dragon glass—also called obsidian—was rare in Westeros. Fortunately, there was a known deposit under Dragonstone.

"Dragon glass... It can truly kill a White Walker?" Rhaegar crouched down, picking up the frail figure before him.

The Child of the Forest clutched the obsidian dagger tightly to its chest, watching Rhaegar's every move. "Yes. White Walkers are the physical embodiment of the God of Winter on Earth. Only fire magic—its opposite—can counter them."

The creature paused, its voice turning more menacing. "My people possess many obsidian weapons. I can provide them to help you fight the White Walkers."

"Thank you," Rhaegar replied, though his tone remained flat, as if speaking to a child. He then asked, softly but with growing curiosity, "Who is this 'Cold God'? Even the White Walkers have a faith?"

"The Cold God is the embodiment of winter itself—of cold and darkness," the Child of the Forest explained with both anger and fear in its voice. "He created the White Walkers and uses them to lead his army of the dead."

Rhaegar frowned, still puzzled. "Does the Cold God have a physical form, like the Heart Tree?"

He needed to know whether this god was a tangible force, or just an abstract figurehead, like the Seven. Many gods had shown signs of existence—the Heart Tree, the Lord of Light—but what of this Cold God?

"No one knows for sure," the Child of the Forest admitted, its eyes clouding with memories. "But the Cold God cannot be killed. He has taken the form of a human leader to command the dead."

"The Night King?" Rhaegar guessed.

"Yes." The Child of the Forest nodded eagerly, hope flickering in its eyes. "The Night King hasn't awakened yet. You still have time to defeat the wights."

Rhaegar paused, his mind racing as he tried to piece everything together. The Conqueror's prophecy was real. The Night King and the wights were real. But the Night King, while powerful, was not necessarily the Cold God itself—just its human embodiment.

The Night King still slumbered in the Land of Always Winter, while his White Walkers had already stirred beyond the Wall. Their movement had alarmed the Children of the Forest, driving them south, seeking help from those who might stand a chance.

"So..." Rhaegar's thoughts shifted as he regarded the Child of the Forest with a calculating gaze. His voice turned cold as he posed his question, "Why should I help you?"

The Child of the Forest froze, startled by his bluntness. "The White Walkers will cross the Wall," it said anxiously. "You and your people will die."

"Not necessarily," Rhaegar replied, a confident smile spreading across his face. "The White Walkers can't swim, can they?"

He considered the natural defense of Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, where the Wall met the cold, fast-moving waters of the Shivering Sea. If he moved his House across the Narrow Sea to Essos, the White Walkers would be unable to follow.

"Those are your advisors speaking!" the Child of the Forest insisted, its voice urgent. But it failed to grasp the full cunning of human nature. Wasn't it the duty of a king to protect his people, even if it meant abandoning the land? Hadn't the hero Azor Ahai made similar sacrifices 8,000 years ago?

Rhaegar chuckled softly, brushing his hand through the Child's chestnut curls. His tone was light, but his words were sharp. "I'm no Warden of the North. I have no reason to sacrifice everything."

He could lead the people of the Seven Kingdoms to safety, just as the Warrior Queen Nymeria had once done with the Rhoynar, fleeing from their doom. But if he was to stay and fight, the Child would have to show him that victory against the White Walkers was within reach—and give him a reason worthy of the risk.

The Child hesitated, its green eyes narrowing. It opened its small hand, which had been plucking leaves nervously from its hair, and spoke with renewed sternness. "What do you want, greedy Valyrian?"

The Child's resentment was clear. Once, the First Men had been their most fearsome enemies. Then came the Andals, even more ruthless. And the Valyrians—the cruelest of all—had crushed them both.

Rhaegar smiled, the look of triumph unmistakable. "Your pumpkins," he said casually. Then, his voice hardened, like the roar of a dragon. "And the magic of the Children of the Forest—including their obedience and loyalty to their king."

"Why not?" Rhaegar shrugged, unfazed. The Children of the Forest possessed ancient magic and legendary knowledge. And the Targaryens, with their dragons and lineage, were an old and noble House—one that commanded respect. "As they say, 'Empty vessels make the most noise.' It's time for a forgotten clan to resurface, to share the burden with the Targaryens and their dragons."

Besides, Rhaegar thought, those pumpkin bombs were highly effective. Who knew how many could be produced or what other magical weapons the Children might be hiding?

The Child stepped back, fear and indignation flashing across its face. "No," it said, shaking its head. "We signed a pact with the First Men, agreeing to live in peace."

Rhaegar stood up, resting his sword, Blackfyre, on the ground. "Am I a First Man?"

The Child of the Forest froze, taken aback. Of course not—Rhaegar was a Valyrian, one of the ancient and fearsome dragonlords, far more dangerous than the First Men.

Rhaegar's lips curved into a soft, gentle smile. "Then what do I have to do with the agreement you made with the First Men?"

"The Children of the Forest and humans can't coexist," the creature replied impatiently, clearly agitated. Its mind raced, searching for an answer. "Dead men can't swim, but the White Walkers are intelligent."

Rhaegar crossed his arms, listening intently.

"We once shattered the Arm of Dorne," the Child said gravely, its eyes full of warning. "The White Walkers know ice magic, and they could cross into the mainland the same way—through the remnants of the Arm."

Rhaegar's expression darkened, the weight of the threat sinking in. The Child of the Forest, sensing his fear, pressed on. "If the White Walkers aren't stopped, countless living people will be turned into wights, and the world will fall into cold and darkness."

Even the Children of the Forest would be hunted down and destroyed by the White Walkers. They had nowhere to hide if the dead came.

Rhaegar sighed, sheathing Blackfyre. "Allegiance can wait. For now, let's focus on what else can stop the White Walkers."

Without hesitation, he scooped up the small Child of the Forest with one hand and started back toward Greywater Watch, striding through the swampy terrain. In his eyes, the creature was already a prisoner—and he would extract every bit of value from it.

The Child's mood brightened, and it spoke eagerly. "Your sword, Blackfyre, and the dragons in The Neck—they're all weapons against the White Walkers. Your army needs to be armed, and I can provide thousands of obsidian weapons."

Rhaegar didn't show much reaction, remaining indifferent. "I'll send word to King's Landing immediately. They'll begin mining more dragonglass."

But his thoughts wandered back to the mysterious "pumpkin bombs." He had never seen them before, but their power was clear—they were easier to use and more convenient than wildfire.

As they neared Greywater Watch, Rhaegar asked, "What's your name?"

The Child of the Forest, now resigned to its fate, answered listlessly, "Billbo."

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow, finding the name oddly endearing for such a strange creature. "That doesn't sound like a woman's name."

"Children of the Forest don't need to mate," Billbo replied flatly.

Rhaegar smirked, already imagining Rhaenyra's surprise and delight when he presented this strange new ally.

...

The North, The Wall.

Night had fallen, and the cold wind howled through the frozen expanse.

Bang! Bang!

"Roar! Put your backs into it!" A desperate voice echoed across the battleground as two giants slammed their massive bodies against the iron bars of the Wall's gate, loosening the ice spikes that clung to its surface.

Arrows, burning with flames, embedded themselves in the wildlings, their bodies dripping with blood as they struggled to press forward. A ring of fire, fueled by oil, blazed on the ground, holding back the wildling horde. Neither side dared to make the next move—the wildlings unable to breach the Wall, the Night's Watch unwilling to step beyond its protection.

Only the two giants remained, throwing themselves against the gate in a desperate attempt to break through, enduring the cold wind and scorching heat of the flames. The fire singed their hair, and the ice on their heads melted, trickling down in streams of water.

"I can do it!" an ugly giant bellowed, his rough voice carrying across the battlefield. With both hands gripping the iron bars, he strained, lifting the gate a foot off the ground.

Whoosh!

A volley of arrows rained down, finding their mark in the neck of his companion. The second giant let out a low groan before collapsing with a thunderous crash, his massive body falling into the flames. The stench of charred flesh mixed with the already heavy air, adding to the grisly scene, not far from the burnt corpse of a mammoth.

"Ah, you're dead!" the ugly giant cried in anguish, his strength faltering.

Clang!

The iron gate crashed back down, sending a cloud of snow into the air. The barrier had held, but only just.

"Charge!" a voice roared from the wildling ranks.

The fallen giant's body extinguished much of the fire, and the horde surged forward, trampling over the corpse. The ground trembled under their weight as they advanced.

Rumble.

Suddenly, the Wall itself seemed to come alive. The ice groaned, and the firelight cast a chilling, eerie glow upon its frozen surface.

Swish!

A massive scythe, suspended by an iron chain, dropped from the heights of the Wall like a bolt of lightning. It swept across the battlefield with terrifying speed, cutting through the wildlings in its path. Bodies were cleaved in two, and blood splattered across the snow in a gruesome display.

The carnage was instant, devastating the barbarian ranks and sending a wave of terror through their hearts.

Whooooosh—

A long, mournful horn sounded from the rear of the wildling army. It was the call for retreat.

Chapter 665: Dragons vs. Giants

Barrowlands

Tens of thousands of troops marched like a tidal wave, heading straight for Winterfell in the North.

"Roar..."

A huge black creature streaked across the sky, slowing down as it hovered above the Kingsroad. The sound of hooves stamping the ground was deafening. Facing the coalition army head-on, a cavalry unit galloped toward them.

"Whoa..."

The strong, white-haired old man tugged on the reins, a massive two-handed sword strapped to his back. All the soldiers wore the thickest leather coats, with two or even three horses each, carrying weapons, food, and armor.

Boom.

The Cannibal landed with a long, echoing howl. Thousands of warhorses flinched and neighed, rearing back in fear. The knights tightened their reins, struggling to keep their horses from collapsing under the dragon's presence.

Rhaegar sat upright in his saddle and recognized the leader of the army before him. "Lord Roderick Dustin, are you also heading north to the Wall?"

The strong old man was indeed Lord Roderick, who had recently visited King's Landing. He was a powerful warrior and strategist, known to the people of the North as 'Roddy the Ruin.'

Clop, clop, clop.

Roderick, carrying the banner with the head of a direwolf, bellowed in his rough voice, "Thank the Old Gods, Your Grace, for leading an army to the aid of the Wall. The North will never forget!"

As he shouted, his weathered face broke into a broad smile. His army, the Winter Wolves—comprised of the North's first 'warriors'—was about to march to the Wall. They would resist the cold with their own flesh and blood, sacrificing their lives to give their families an extra mouthful of hot food. With the dragon-riding King of the Seven Kingdoms leading them, they might even eat well before they die.

As Rhaegar looked at the laughing old lord, he felt a deep sense of awe. "Return to your unit. All provisions will be taken from the coalition army."

The Winter Wolves were all older men from the North, many with graying beards like Roderick. But their expressions were solemn, and they were unafraid of the snowstorm or the dragon. They were truly elite.

"Thank you, Your Grace," Roderick said, dismounting. He strode up to the black dragon, bowing on one knee. Though easygoing, the old man valued tradition and kindness. The South's support for the North was an indelible bond.

Rhaegar slid off the dragon's back, and Roderick watched him with shining eyes, fully aware of the dragon's terrifying power.

"How many men are in your army?" Rhaegar asked.

"Over 2,000 in total, along with tens of thousands of cattle, sheep, and horses," Roderick replied matter-of-factly. "This year's harvest was destroyed, and every household can only rely on food stored from previous years to survive the winter. We had to bring any extra men and livestock."

Not only did those staying behind need food, but so did the men marching north. Livestock was the best source of sustenance.

"The army will first settle in Winterfell, then the cavalry will march to the Wall ahead of the others," Rhaegar declared. He gazed out over the barren, snow-covered land. "The Riverlands will send food supplies without fail. There's no need to worry about hunger or cold."

The Others were the true enemy, and only with their defeat could victory come. To that end, the entire realm must support the North. With Rhaegar I of House Targaryen's reputation, the nobles of the Seven Kingdoms would obey.

"Thank you, Your Gracious Grace," Roderick replied, his voice carrying across the desolate wilderness. He was no flatterer, but his gratitude rang clear and true.

...

Days of Marching

Winterfell, Godswood.

Drizzling...

Warm spring water gurgled softly, sending faint ripples across its surface as the black dragon's tail skimmed the water. The Cannibal crouched nearby, half its massive body immersed in the hot spring. Its green, vertical pupils were half-closed as it dozed peacefully.

In the vast forest surrounding Winterfell, the snow blanketed the ground more than three feet deep. A cold wind blew from time to time, swirling snowflakes and dropping them onto the dragon's thick scales.

“No! You can’t do this to the Heart Tree!” A shrill shout suddenly pierced the air, followed by the sound of stomping in frustration.

Rumble...

A towering tree crashed to the ground with a deafening noise, sending snow flying in all directions. Soon, more trees followed, falling one by one.

The Winter Wolves, clad in thick furs and wielding axes, worked tirelessly to fell the trees of the Godswood and the surrounding Wolfswood. Watching in dismay, the Child of the Forest gnashed her teeth in protest. "You must respect the Heart Tree! You can’t cut down the forest!" it cried.

The trees had long served as a protective barrier for the Children of the Forest, and eight thousand years ago, the ancestors of the present men had cut down most of the forests and Heart Trees when they first landed on the continent of Westeros.

"They're not cutting down Heart Trees, just ordinary wood," Rhaegar said calmly, placing a hand on the chestnut-brown head of Billbo. "Winterfell needs firewood, and Wolfswood is part of the North. Sacrifices must be made."

“No, if you cut down the forest, nature will take its revenge,” the Child of the Forest warned, her large green eyes glaring. She climbed around the trees like a nimble monkey, occasionally darting behind Rhaegar and grabbing at his clothes, trying to scramble up him.

Rhaegar shook her off and paid her no mind. “The weirwood will remain. If you're afraid of losing your home, you can always move to Kingswood or Rainwood.”

After spending some time with them, Rhaegar had come to find the Children of the Forest surprisingly fun. Simple-minded, small, and largely unthreatening, they were also clever and adept at magic. No wonder they had been unable to compete with the First Men and were driven north of the Neck.

...

Leaving the Godswood, Rhaegar made his way through the muddy water left by the melting snow, heading back to the castle. As soon as he pushed open the door, he saw Rhaenyra directing her servants, who were hard at work repairing the castle and walls, settling the troops, and carrying provisions to the storage cellars.

Rhaenyra was dressed in a long, heavy black gown, her regal presence commanding. Her aloof demeanor radiated the majesty of a queen, and she had naturally taken up the role of Winterfell's hostess. With Lord Cregan's wife having died young, the great fortress was still run by the aging Maester.

“Rhaegar, you’re back,” Rhaenyra called as she briefly glanced up from her work. She quickly pulled a piece of paper from her sleeve. “Where are Baela and the others?”

Rhaegar looked around but saw only the bustling servants. “They’re tidying the crypts. It’s warmer down there, better for the dragons,” she explained, her eyes full of concern as she stepped closer,

standing on tiptoe to adjust his collar. Moondancer and Morning, the young dragons, were too small to withstand the cold of the North. Thankfully, the crypts were large enough to shelter them.

Rhaegar leaned down slightly, letting his chin rest on Rhaenyra's soft shoulder, savoring the warmth of her presence. He slipped his hands under her arms, took the letter, and began to read it.

"This is from the Wall. Is something wrong?" Rhaenyra asked, craning her neck to peek at the letter.

Rhaegar's face darkened as he skimmed the words. Gently, he cupped her narrow waist with one hand, holding the letter with the other. "It's not good news," he said gravely. "The wildlings attack the Wall every few days, and the Night's Watch is exhausted from defending it day and night."

"I suppose I have to go," Rhaegar murmured, though his voice carried a weight to it. The long-standing conflict between the North and the wildlings seemed unresolvable, and the Wall had become a great divide between them.

"Leave Winterfell to me. Send word if you need anything," Rhaenyra whispered softly, offering her final instructions.

Rhaegar nodded, though his mind was already racing with ideas on how to resolve the issue with the wildlings. The appearance of the Others posed a threat to all living people, both inside and outside the Wall.

The wildlings attacked out of desperation, seeking survival. If possible, Rhaegar knew it would be best to allow tens of thousands—perhaps hundreds of thousands—of wildlings to migrate south of the Wall. Otherwise, those left outside would inevitably join the ranks of the army of the dead.

...

King's Landing

The Red Keep, Council Chamber.

Daemon sat at the head of the table, his patience thinning as the discussion dragged on.

"Lord Jason Lannister has yet to send his troops," one councilor began, frustration clear in his voice. "Even the Lord of Golden Tooth has already dispatched his cavalry north."

"Lord Jason is bedridden," another chimed in, "but we have no idea how serious his condition is."

"He's defying the Iron Throne!" Lord Lyman growled, his face dark with anger. "Ignoring orders in the kingdom's time of crisis!"

The king's authority was sacred and inviolable, and yet, here was a Lord openly disobeying the crown.

'How can the Lord of Casterly Rock lead the way in disregarding royal orders?' Lyman seethed.



“Forgive me for speaking plainly,” a new voice interjected, “but as far as I know, Lord Lyman’s house hasn’t sent anyone north either.”

All eyes turned to Lord Desmond of White Harbor, the Northern representative seated at the Small Council. Lyman’s face flushed red with fury, momentarily lost for words.

“That’s not true!” Lyman stammered. “Ser Alan Beesbury answered the call and is defending against foreign forces.”

Otto Hightower, seated to the side, quietly diffused Lyman’s embarrassment. “Indeed,” he added, “Ser Alan has responded in your name, Lord Lyman.” Otto’s presence in the council room was a recent development; though he had been away in Norvos, the royal court had been short-staffed, and his return was timely. Though not universally liked, he was capable of resolving administrative issues efficiently.

Desmond narrowed his eyes at Otto’s interference. “The merchants of Qarth had an agreement with His Grace,” Desmond said pointedly, “and White Harbor has not driven them away.”

“That’s because White Harbor is frozen for half the year,” Otto retorted coolly. “And there isn’t a single Manderly bank to speak of.” His tone carried a clear edge. Both men were old foxes, masters at hiding their true motives. Desmond, unable to reply, looked away, embarrassed.

Sensing the moment to press his advantage, Lyman spoke again. “Lord Jason has openly disobeyed the king’s orders. He must be punished.”

“And what punishment do you suggest?” Desmond asked, intrigued. He hoped for something that would align with his own interests.

“Whatever His Grace deems appropriate,” Lyman replied smoothly, pulling a letter from his sleeve.

Grand Maester Orwyle stood up, took the letter, and passed it to Daemon. “The king’s intent,” Orwyle whispered as he handed it over, “is that Lord Jason’s delay in sending troops must be addressed. A dragon should be sent to ‘examine’ the situation. Only then can the royal family’s authority be restored.”

Otto nodded, clearly in agreement. His displeasure with House Lannister was evident.

Daemon read the letter slowly, his gaze sweeping across the room, taking in the faces of the council members. He paused for a moment, then, without warning—

Bang!

He slammed the table, the noise echoing through the chamber. “Very well,” he said, his tone cold. “Let’s see just how ‘sick’ Lord Jason really is.”

“Roar...” A shrill, eerie screech pierced the air, coming from outside the window.

...

In the back garden of the Red Keep, the ground was dusted with thin layers of snow. October's delicate flowers were wilting under the cold. From the snow rose a scarlet dragon, its body as slender as a serpent. Snowflakes scattered as it shook itself, its sharp, devilish head tilting upward. Its long, piercing cry reverberated through the keep. The dragon, restless and eager, awaited its next command.

...

The Wall

*Dum dum dum!*

The dull, powerful beat of war drums echoed through the frigid air, causing the snow-covered ground to tremble.

"Charge!"

Tens of thousands of wildlings surged from the Haunted Forest, their roars filling the icy expanse as they launched wave after wave of relentless assaults.

Before they could even reach the Wall, a rain of arrows descended upon them, striking with lethal precision. Blood splattered in bursts across the snow, and the bodies of wildlings fell like discarded rags, littering the ground. But more came. They trampled over their fallen companions, driven by desperation, pushing ever closer to the Wall.

"Release the arrows! Pour the fire oil down as well!"

Old Benjicot's voice boomed from atop the Wall, his sword drawn as he commanded the Night's Watch to fight back against the onslaught.

"This won't hold!" Cregan yanked Benjicot over, his eyes filled with worry. "Sooner or later, we'll run out of arrows and fire oil."

"What else can we do, my lord?" Benjicot shook off the younger man's grip, his face stern. "The Night's Watch swore an oath to guard until the very end." Even if it means starving. Even if it means running out of ammunition.

A sudden roar from below shook the ground. Cregan's heart sank as he raced to the watchtower for a better view. His eyes widened at the sight below.

The wildling horde had parted in a wide, orderly fashion, creating a path. From within their ranks, a towering mammoth lumbered forward, dragging a massive tree trunk behind it. Its snorts filled the air as it charged, swinging its long trunk like a battering ram.

Behind the mammoth came a terrifying sight—giants. A dozen of them, towering seven or eight meters tall, their bodies clad in animal skins and thick furs. They stormed toward the Wall in a tight formation, shoulder to shoulder, an unstoppable force of sheer muscle and rage.

At the head of the pack was an ugly giant, brandishing a monstrous, modified mace. With a deafening crash, it smashed the weapon into the underground passage gate of the Wall, shaking the ancient stone fortress to its core.

"Quickly! Pour the oil!"

The Night's Watchmen scrambled in terror, hoisting oil drums toward the parapets. One man, in his panic, lost his grip, and the barrel slipped from the wall before it could be opened.

*Boom!*

The barrel exploded violently upon hitting the ground, but the blast did little to halt the advancing giants. Led by the monstrous giant, four or five of the towering creatures huddled at the base of the Wall. Together, their immense strength focused on the iron gate, which groaned under the weight of their combined efforts.

The gate began to lift. Slowly, with a rumble that seemed to shake the entire Wall, it rose, revealing the thick wooden door behind it.

"I'll handle this!"

"Haha, the giants are unstoppable!"

"Damn the crows!"

The wildling horde charged through the flames ignited by the fire oil, pushing deeper into the tunnel. With the iron fence destroyed, the solid wooden door stood no stronger than paper before the savage assault. Wild men hacked at it recklessly, and in no time, a groove was chiseled out of the thick wood.

The Night's Watchmen atop the Wall looked on in horror, their hands and feet growing cold as they watched the door give way.

Ten brave Night's Watchmen broke away from the larger group, grim resolve etched into their faces. With death in their eyes, they followed Cregan toward the winch ladder.

*Boom!*

*Boom!*

The muffled sounds below were the giants hammering against the remnants of the iron fence, attempting to tear it apart. Cregan held his breath, silently praying to the Heart Tree. There was no enemy too strong, no situation too desperate.

*Boom!*

The iron fence groaned as large chunks of stone crumbled from the wall. Cregan stepped onto the long ladder of the winch, closing his eyes tightly in anticipation.

Suddenly, a sound pierced the chaos—a deafening roar that shook the air, like thunder rumbling across the land.

*Sigh...*

Cregan's heart leapt. His eyes snapped open.

*Boom!*

A dark shadow fell over the snowy battlefield, spreading across the land as it approached the Wall from the distance. Massive black wings, as dark as coal, loomed like a curtain in the sky. As they flapped, the wind howled, extinguishing the light of the sun.

"Dracarys!" A cold, commanding voice echoed from above.

*“Roar...”*

The black dragon sliced through the sky, its sharp hind legs landing on the battlements of the Wall. Lowering its head, it unleashed a torrent of greenish-black dragonfire. The flames fell like ash, drifting gently but devouring everything they touched. Wildlings, caught in its deadly path, screamed in agony as the dragonfire clung to them, burning with the intensity of bone ash.

*Roar! Roar...*

Moments later, the sky filled with the thunderous roars of two more dragons. The magnificent golden dragon and the grotesque mud-colored beast flew in pursuit of the black dragon, their mouths agape as they spewed their own dragonfire. Yet no matter the commands of their riders, the two dragons refused to cross beyond the Wall, circling overhead but never passing the ancient barrier.

*Boom!*

The Cannibal clung to the edge of the Wall with its massive forelimbs, its talons digging into the stone. It stretched its long neck, spilling as much of its dark green dragonfire as it could across the battlefield below. Its glowing, green vertical pupils were narrowed in concentration as thick, scorching smoke billowed from its body. It was as if some great threat lurked beyond the Wall, drawing the dragon's relentless gaze.

...

His forehead and heart were marked with dark, scaly patches, and his left arm had transformed—covered in black scales, it had tripled in strength. With every step, the air around him crackled with raw power, as if the dragon within him had fully awakened.

Chapter 666: The Giant and the Advisors of the Children of the Forest

Boom!

The solid wooden door exploded into splinters as a grotesque head the size of a dustpan smashed through.

"Oh, I broke the door!" the ugly giant exclaimed, grinning with delight. He pulled his head back, reached through the door with his massive arms, and yanked out the heavy bolt that had secured it.

Suddenly, a hundred-pound sack of steelskin slammed against the walls as the door flew open. The ugly giant took the lead, and behind him, three towering, ferocious giants barreled into the underground passage.

"They're coming," Rhaegar muttered nonchalantly, twirling his sword as if the advancing giants were of little consequence.

"If you dare to block my way, I'll nail you to the ground," the ugly giant snarled, his eyes locking onto Rhaegar's calm, purple gaze. He furiously swung his enormous mace forward, interpreting Rhaegar's defiance as a challenge.

"Smash your head!" the ugly giant bellowed, lumbering forward awkwardly. With one massive hand, he raised his mace high and brought it crashing down.

*Pop!*

Rhaegar anticipated the move, rolling to the side and slipping under the giant's legs. The massive swing missed him by inches. Before the giant could recover, Rhaegar thrust his sword into the giant's calf, piercing through the leather-wrapped boots.

*Clang!*

Blackfyre's dark blade sank into flesh but stopped at the hard bone. The ugly giant roared in pain, lifting his leg and kicking Rhaegar, who was barely knee-high to the giant, out of the way. As the giant reached with his free hand to grab him, Rhaegar's eyes narrowed, calculating his next move.

Rhaegar didn't stop. He hurled Blackfyre at the giant's towering legs, then leapt up, climbing the rough leather trousers like a cat scaling a tree. Fighting a giant on the ground was too risky—best to take the high ground.

"I'll help you!" one of the other giants roared, charging in with his mace raised.

“Get out of my way! I don’t need your help!” the ugly giant bellowed, wincing in pain as he backed up. His massive body slammed against the stone wall, trying to crush Rhaegar against it.

But Rhaegar was faster. In a few agile bounds, he regained his sword and climbed onto the giant’s shoulders. “I’ll cut your ear off,” he said with a grin. True to his word, he swung Blackfyre, severing the giant’s ear in one swift strike.

Blood gushed from the wound, and the giant howled in agony, clutching his head in shock. Rhaegar, ever nimble, dodged the flailing arms as the giant stumbled around. As the giant screeched and waved his arms, Rhaegar clung to the matted, filthy hair, using it like a rope as he swung himself higher.

His purple eyes sparkled with focus, long silver and gold hair dancing in the wind as he vaulted onto the top of the giant’s head. He crouched there, poised for the final blow.

“Say goodbye to the world, ugly thing,” Rhaegar murmured, lips curling into a faint smile. He raised his sword, aiming for the crown of the giant’s head—the most vulnerable spot on the human body.

“Let him go!”

“No!”

The two giants charged recklessly, desperation in their eyes as they tried to save their companion. Rhaegar stood his ground, unwavering, his gaze fixed ahead. With a swift motion, he brought Blackfyre down.

*Clang!*

Before he could strike again, the foul stench of the giant’s hand reached him, followed by a gust of foul wind as it swung toward him from behind. Without hesitation, Rhaegar leapt into the air, twisting his body in a half-turn. As he spun, his right hand, still gripping Blackfyre, faintly glowed red. In his left, a black flame flickered to life—dark as night and thick as sludge.

With a flick of his wrist, Rhaegar hurled Blackfyre at the ugly giant’s face. The blade flew true, embedding itself in the giant’s skull with a sickening thud.

"Ahhh!"

For the first time, the ugly giant screamed in agony, Blackfyre lodged deep in his face. His entire body convulsed violently as he collapsed to the ground, writhing in pain. The giant clawed desperately at his face, rolling in the snow and mud, trying to extinguish the searing black flame that clung to him like death itself.

Rhaegar landed gracefully, his feet barely making a sound as he took a few light steps backward, his movements fluid and precise—like a dancer in the midst of a roaring inferno. The sword, still ablaze with black eerie flames, pointed straight ahead. With a delicate motion, he traced crescent shapes in the snow with its tip, all the while his expression remaining calm and focused.

In that moment, he embodied an aura of absolute mastery, surpassing even his famed swordsmanship teacher, Syrio. It was clear that, even without dragons, Rhaegar could have crushed the Seven Kingdoms through his martial prowess alone.

"I'll kill you!"

"Roar!"

The remaining two giants, enraged by the sight of their companion's suffering, charged at Rhaegar, their massive forms barely fitting in the narrow underground passage. Their fury filled the air, and the ground shook beneath their feet as they thundered toward him.

Rhaegar didn't flinch. He hadn't even caught his breath, yet his resolve hardened. With a calm focus, he wrapped the dark flames around his blade, the black fire swirling and dancing along its edge.

Now, it was time to get serious.

Whoosh!

A volley of arrows flew through the air, striking the two giants square in their chests and limbs. Their roars of pain echoed through the tunnel. One giant, hit directly in the chest, collapsed to the ground with a thunderous crash.

"It's your turn to say goodbye," Rhaegar said lightly, his voice calm. He stepped onto the giant's shoulders, using the height to launch himself into the air. As he leapt, he brought Blackfyre down in a swift, brutal arc.

*Pop!*

A flash of dark light streaked through the air as Blackfyre pierced the old, cracked skin of the giant's neck. The blade cut deep, severing the carotid artery in an instant. Blood erupted, spurting wildly as the giant let out a final, choking roar.

As Rhaegar landed, more arrows rained down from above.

While Rhaegar used the distraction to sever the Achilles tendon of the second giant, who had been shot, a dozen Night's Watch members rushed forward to swarm the beast.

"Roar, get out of my way!" the injured giant bellowed in rage. It grabbed one of the Night's Watch members in a massive fist and crushed him instantly, reducing him to pulp. With a furious swing, it knocked three more men into the frost-covered walls, their bodies slamming into stone. Blood sprayed from their mouths as their organs shattered on impact.

A horrible wail erupted from the giant as blood poured from the wound.

*Ssshhh...*

The wildlings behind the giants scrambled to the ground, desperate to force their way through the narrow opening. Their burning eyes fixated on the underground passage, the only path forward.

“Move!” one of the giants growled, swatting aside a few wildlings as they tried to squeeze through. The opening was too small—only two giants could crawl through at a time, causing chaos as the wildlings were blocked outside.

With a thunderous crash, the solid wooden door reinforced with Steelskin was torn apart. The giants who had broken through grabbed the door panels and used them as makeshift shields.

Rhaegar's expression darkened. Seeing the giants advance, he reached for something hanging around his neck—a small, pumpkin-shaped bomb.

"Wait... wait..." Rhaegar murmured, watching as seven or eight giants forced their way into the passage. He was just about to throw the bomb when a shrill cry came from behind.

A small, green figure darted across the snow, nimble and fast, moving like a large squirrel.

...

Beyond the Great Wall

*Roar!*

A barbarian, his face hidden behind a ferocious mask, blew his war horn, signaling the wildling army to launch a frenzied assault. The Night's Watch on the city walls struggled to hold their positions, barely able to withstand the giants breaking through the gates.

*Roar!*

The Cannibal, its eerie green eyes filled with cold malice, spewed streams of green dragonfire across the battlefield. Half the ground was scorched in a sickly green blaze, wildlings howling as they burned. In their panic, the flaming barbarians fled, spreading the fire to others as they desperately tried to escape.



The dragon, black as coal, trampled the city walls, its massive wings flapping as it roared again and again. It was like a beast from the darkest nightmares, a creature of destruction laying waste to the battlefield.

With a thunderous rumble, the intense heat of the dragonfire melted the frost clinging to the Great Wall. Massive chunks of ice broke free, crashing down in an explosion of snow and debris.

Through the snow and fog, a giant crept forward, leading wildlings into the underground passages at the base of the Wall. Even the dragon's terrifying presence wasn't enough to stop the relentless offensive.

*Roar...*

The Cannibal hesitated, shaking its head as if sensing its rider's thoughts. Its unsettling green eyes flickered with uncertainty, watching the chaos below. From its vantage point, the wildlings looked like a swarming mass of ants, undeterred by fire or death. The dragon glanced upward, scanning the skies.

Above, two other dragons—the magnificent golden one and the ugly mud-colored beast—hovered, circling high in the air. They roared and spat flames, but their fire couldn't reach the wildlings, as if they were tethered by some instinct, unable to cross the Wall.

“Fight back! Stop the barbarians from breaking in!” Old Benjicot shouted, his voice booming as he sprinted along the battlements, sword in hand, rallying the Night's Watch to hold the line.

The Cannibal's gaze shifted to him for a brief moment, its scarlet tongue licking its fearsome, fanged maw.

*Roar!*

With a sudden, ferocious howl, the black dragon launched itself into the sky. Its massive wings flapped with violent force as it leapt from the battlements and soared over the heads of the wildling horde below. Its powerful hind legs slammed into the frozen earth just outside the Wall, shaking the ground beneath it.

The Cannibal's enormous wings settled against the ground as it twisted its neck, scanning the battlefield with a menacing glare. Its dark, menacing presence loomed over the frozen wilderness.

"Roar!"

The Cannibal's green pupils boiled with ferocity as it unleashed a torrent of dragonfire toward the city gate, engulfing the wildlings who dared to breach it. Their screams were drowned in the roaring flames, and the dragon's massive body shuddered involuntarily, filled with unease and anger. Its immense black wings, like the blades of a scythe, cut through the air, while its tail, heavy as a battering ram, swept across the battlefield, smashing everything in its path.

"Dragon!"

The wildlings cried out in terror, witnessing the ferocious beast that had crossed the Wall for the first time.

*Roar!*

The sound, as deep and thunderous as a distant storm, echoed for miles, shaking the forest and scattering the snow. The Cannibal, nearly 200 meters long, moved through the battlefield like a living engine of destruction, leaving a trail of hellish carnage behind it—fire, death, and ruin.

...

#### Inside the Underground Passage

"Don't kill them—spare them!" the Child of the Forest pleaded, her tiny hands clutching at Rhaegar's dragon-patterned sleeve. Rhaegar's face remained expressionless, his cold gaze fixed straight ahead.

The door to the underground passage had collapsed, and dark green dragonfire clung to the rubble, burning fiercely. One unlucky giant, trapped beneath the crushed stones, screamed in agony as the fire crept over his body, burning him alive. The other giants crowded around, desperately trying to dig through the debris to rescue him.

Outside, the wildlings and giants wailed in unison, their cries a twisted symphony of pain. The Cannibal's dragonfire was strong enough to melt iron and stone, and it inflicted the most excruciating torture on those caught in its flames. Nothing that came near the fire at the city gates survived for long.

Rhaegar turned his head, half of his face obscured by black scales. His cold, purple eyes gleamed with a sinister light. This was not hesitation—it was the pride that ran through his Targaryen blood.

"The giants will be useful against the Others," whispered the Child of the Forest, hoping to protect their ancient allies.

"Your Grace?" Cregan's eyes widened as he noticed the strange squirrel-like figure standing beside Rhaegar, its green eyes glowing with urgency.

Rhaegar's gaze flickered, and he made his decision. Without a word, he strode toward the ugly giant slumped against the wall, gasping for breath. Slowly, he raised Blackfyre, the sword of House Targaryen.

"What are you doing?" the giant rasped, his voice filled with pain. Half his face was burned beyond recognition, twisted in agony.

"Bring your face closer," Rhaegar commanded softly, his tone calm but guarded, as he pointed the tip of his sword at the giant's disfigured face.

The giant froze, his eyes darting toward his fellow wildlings, who had all but abandoned him. Then, noticing the Child of the Forest standing by the side of this terrifying human, he hesitated.

"Child of the Forest, are you with the humans now?" His gruff voice was laced with anger, and a trace of betrayal.

"Bring your face closer, friend," the Child of the Forest said gently, bowing slightly as they extended a hand in a gesture of peace.

After a moment's hesitation, the giant lowered his head, lying down in submission, his grotesque, still-burning face exposed.

"Tell your people that both the giants and the Children of the Forest will serve the Dragonlord as advisers," Rhaegar said, his voice soft but commanding as he pressed Blackfyre's blade against the giant's scarred face. An inexplicable ripple of power surged through the blade, and the black flames that had scorched the giant's flesh flowed along the spine of the sword, infusing the Valyrian steel with their searing heat.

Chapter 667: Waking the Bronze Fury

**Hum—**

The blade of Blackfyre shimmered, sending out subtle ripples across its surface, as if water flowed along its path. The once silver-gray sword, now darkened by the flames of Balerion's dragonfire, seemed even more profound—its depth accentuated by the black fire that coursed through it.

Rhaegar let out a soft exclamation, noticing the subtle transformation in the sword's appearance.

"I'm fine," the ugly giant muttered, gingerly touching the burns on his face. "It doesn't hurt anymore."

"Giant, call your people," the Child of the Forest urged cautiously, stepping closer. Her large green eyes were fixed on the giants still digging at the rubble. Seven of them remained, making eight in total, including the one before them. Far fewer than the ancient tribes of giants, but still a formidable force.

"Call them?" The ugly giant hesitated, his gaze shifting to the silver-haired human in front of him. Fear mingled with the anger in his heart. The humans had killed two of his companions.

"Hm?" Rhaegar's eyes narrowed, and Blackfyre's flames flared to life again.

Before the giant could react, a thunderous roar echoed through the air.

*Roar!*

A shadow fell over the entrance to the underground passage as the giant crumpled to the ground, startled. The overpowering stench of dragon, mixed with the earthy smell of sheep, filled the air. The rough, brown scales of another beast—Sheepstealer—blocked the entrance.

"Be quiet, Sheepstealer."

A cold voice broke through the tension, and the air seemed to heat up instantly. The mud-colored dragon, with its twisted, misshapen form, slithered forward. Its dry, putrid head tilted to the side, and its sunken eye sockets glared with malevolence. The dragon let out a low, menacing grunt, nostrils flaring with each breath.

The ugly giant stiffened, his eyes darting between the fearsome Sheepstealer and the human warrior. His thick lips trembled. No matter how tall or powerful a giant might be, he knew he was no match for even a young dragon. His mouth, capable of chewing through wood, was nothing compared to the fire-breathing jaws of the beast before him.

"A giant is no adviser," the ugly giant said, summoning the last bit of courage he had left. He tried to defend his dignity, but his voice wavered.

Rhaegar's eyes darkened, and he raised his left hand high. Sheepstealer's pupils constricted, and the dragon's snorting stopped as its jaws parted wide, revealing rows of sharp, saliva-drenched teeth.

The ugly giant shuddered, giving in. He crawled from the ground and began searching for his people. When he called, the other giants emerged, slapping the ground in frustration but quickly retreating behind the Child of the Forest for safety. Giants did not submit easily, but they listened to their allies. Brave, yes—but not foolish.

Seeing their behavior, Rhaegar silently laughed and sheathed Blackfyre. He valued these massive creatures. They were wild, dangerous, but knew when to bend in the face of overwhelming power—a useful trait, especially for a group of savage giants.

Not long after...

Castle Black was thrown into an uproar as eight giants, dragging one of their own with a broken leg, emerged from the underground passageway. The Night's Watch scrambled, drawing their weapons, ready to fight to the death against these towering beasts.

But the tense, desperate atmosphere vanished the moment the young king, Rhaegar, and Lord Cregan stepped out after them.

**"Roar..."**

The black dragon circled outside the Wall, spewing dark green dragonfire that incinerated wildling after wildling. Rhaegar glanced back, his expression one of shock. Dragons had never crossed the Wall—that was an obscure, but well-known, piece of history.

His great-grandfather, King Jaehaerys I, had visited the Wall with Queen Alysanne.

Alysanne's dragon, Silverwing, had famously refused to fly beyond it, no matter how hard its rider tried. Yet, there was no record of Vermithor, Jaehaerys's other dragon, ever hesitating. According to stories told by his father, Viserys, Old King Renly had aided the Night's Watch in defending against a wildling invasion. Vermithor likely crossed the Wall then, though the records were unclear.

When Rhaegar had arrived at the Wall with the Cannibal, he had felt it—the great dragon beneath him, resistant, almost fearful of what lay on the other side. The Cannibal had refused to cross, something deep within it sensing an ancient danger.

Rhaegar hadn't pressed the issue, not with the current crisis at hand. Instead, the Cannibal had ravaged the wildlings outside the Wall, leaving Rhaegar to hold the underground passage and prevent an invasion.

"The Cannibal crossed the Wall on its own," Rhaegar murmured, his heart swelling with something like pride.

The sound of hooves followed, crashing like drumbeats against the frozen ground.

Roderick Dustin led the charge, the Winter Wolves—two thousand strong—charging toward the Wall in the dead of night. Behind them flew the banners of Riverrun's trout, the Twins' Long Bridge, and the golden apple tree of House Rowan. A dozen banners fluttered high, each representing a cavalry unit ready to fight.

"The time for counterattack has come!" Roderick's voice boomed, and he waved his banner as he galloped at the front of the charge.

Rhaegar's mind raced. He needed to act quickly. He shouted up to Aemond, who rode a dragon overhead, "Stop the army! I'll open the gate!"

Without wasting a second, Rhaegar dashed up the winding staircase toward the Wall's winch. The Night's Watchmen, seasoned and swift, worked the winch to hoist the king to the top of the Wall.

"Out of the way—Nuno will handle this!"

The ugly giant pushed aside the Night's Watchmen as if they were children, grabbing the winch with one hand and spinning it like a toy. Soon, the gates began to creak open.

From atop the Wall, Rhaegar surveyed the battlefield beyond. Eerie green dragonfire scorched the wilderness, and the anguished wails of the dead echoed through the air. The black dragon—Cannibal—was a force of pure destruction, turning the battlefield into an inferno of death and despair.

Sensing Rhaegar's gaze, the black dragon paused in its frenzy, its glowing green eyes scanning the city below with a flicker of recognition. The slaughter slowed as the beast regained some control over its bloodlust.

Ignoring Old Benjicot's attempts to stop him, Rhaegar leapt from the watchtower without hesitation, plunging into the chaos below.

**"Roar..."**

The Great Wall stood 800 feet high, and as Rhaegar plummeted toward the ground, he landed squarely on the black dragon's outstretched wing.

"Open the gates, Cannibal!" Rhaegar commanded, pulling on the reins as he climbed back into the saddle. The cold of winter and the presence of the Wall were straining the dragon's sanity, making it restless. As cunning as the Cannibal was, it still required the steady hand of its rider to remain focused.

With a powerful beat of its wings, Cannibal folded them inward, its massive hind legs slamming into the ground below.

*Roar...*

The dragon's roar reverberated like thunder across the frozen battlefield. Its thick, powerful tail swung through piles of rubble, churning the snow and breaking through the melted frost. A ray of light pierced the underground tunnel as the debris was cleared.

"Charge!"

Roderick's battle cry rang out, and he surged forward at the head of the cavalry, riding his yellow-maned warhorse into the fray. In perfect formation, thousands of mounted troops poured through the now-open gates.

The wildling army had numbered 100,000 strong, but the madness of the dragon had already decimated 30% of their forces. The survivors scattered in terror, fleeing for their lives. The combined forces of the kingdoms gave chase, launching into yet another wave of merciless slaughter.

*Boom!*

The Cannibal landed heavily atop the Great Wall, its immense chest rising and falling as it let out a guttural growl. Thick trails of saliva dripped from its menacing maw as it surveyed the carnage below.

Rhaegar, seated upon the dragon's back, watched the battlefield in grim silence. His violet eyes scanned the chaos, assessing the devastation. Suddenly, both man and dragon looked up, their gazes drawn northward.

Far beyond, deep in the Haunted Forest and the snow-covered Land of Always Winter, a strange stillness gripped the frozen landscape. A cold wind began to rise, creeping across the horizon with silent intent. It felt like a harbinger—a chilling breath from the farthest reaches of the North.

...

### **Oldtown, High Tower**

The towering white spire of the Hightower rose like a sharpened sword, though its tip was incomplete—blackened by the soot of countless fires. Inside, high up in the tower, a heated argument raged on, the voices of a man and a woman clashing with the intensity of a storm.

"The merchants of Qarth are despicable scum! The King's Tower is giving us the green light to kill them!" Samantha Tarly's voice rang out, her face flushed with emotion.

"No!" Lyonel Hightower, her young husband, shot back, his tone wavering. "The Thirteen are rich beyond measure—we cannot afford to offend them."

"The enemy is at our doorstep, Lyonel!" Samantha shouted, her frustration boiling over. Her eyes blazed as she confronted the boy who, at only sixteen, was not yet a true Lord.

Knock, knock!

A hurried knock came at the door, followed by the urgent voice of an attendant. "My lord, Lord Alan has clashed with one of The Thirteen—they're fighting!"

Samantha's face paled. "Which Lord Alan?" she demanded, her voice trembling.

Lyman Beesbury had recently abdicated, leaving his grandson, Alan Beesbury, as the Lord of Honeyholt. But the squire's reply hit closer to home.

"It's your brother, Lord Tarly."

That was the final straw.

“Lyonel, send out the troops,” Samantha urged, her impatience barely contained. Her voice shook with fury as she clenched her teeth. “The merchants of Qarth are bullying us, and yet you still haven’t summoned your advisers?”

Lyonel stood frozen, the weight of his young lordship pressing down on him. The thought of his brother-in-law embroiled in a fight with the powerful Thirteen of Qarth left him paralyzed. His boyish face, unmarked by years of experience, was filled with uncertainty.

But then, something shifted. The honor of House Hightower—Oldtown’s beacon of power and legacy—flashed in his mind. A dark plan began to form, one driven by desperation and the need to protect his house.

Lyonel’s fists clenched, and his face reddened with a mixture of fear and fury. Moments later, a green flame ignited at the top of the Hightower, a signal of Oldtown’s resolve.

...

### **Harrenhal, Isle of Faces**

*Roar...*

A moss-green dragon, ancient and massive, crouched by the shore, its wings flapping softly in the breeze. Its enormous body was half-hidden in the dense undergrowth, and with a low, contented sigh, it closed its eyes, the rhythmic sound of its breathing blending with the rustle of the trees.

Deep within the dragon's lair, black Dragonstones were piled like mountains, casting shadows across the cold, cavernous space. The wind howled through caves of varying sizes, each echoing with the eerie whistle of air passing through ancient, jagged stones.

*Trot, trot, trot...*

Light footsteps echoed on the uneven ground, the flicker of a torch casting fleeting shadows along the walls. The flame’s warm glow revealed the depths of the cave, illuminating an ancient place of power.

“Breathe fire and master your wings...” A soft, haunting chant filled the cavern, its melody both ancient and powerful. “Stand with two heads and sing to the three.”

The voice belonged to Baelon, his face emerging in the flickering torchlight as he continued the High Valyrian incantation.

“By my voice, the words of fire... blood magic, the sacrifice has been paid.”

The chant, meant to awaken the dragon, grew more intense as Baelon’s expression tightened with concentration.

Suddenly, the ground beneath him rumbled. As the song faded into silence, a colossal silhouette stirred in the depths of the cave. Baelon stepped forward cautiously, his eyes locked on the shifting shadow, knowing full well the fury that lurked within.

And then it came.

*Roar!*

A mighty bronze head erupted from the ground, its massive jaws spewing forth a column of golden fire that lit up the entire cave. Its scales gleamed with a metallic sheen, reflecting the firelight in a dazzling display of power. This was Vermithor, the Bronze Fury—his grandfather Viserys's dragon.

*Roar...*

Vermithor's cold, solemn pupils fixated on Baelon, its maw opening wider as it advanced, a clear threat. To awaken such a beast was to invite danger, for dragons did not take kindly to being disturbed from their slumber.

"Quiet, Vermithor!" Baelon commanded, his voice sharp as he drew a dragon-taming whip from behind his waist.

The dragon's piercing eyes narrowed, focusing on the silver-haired boy and the dark whip in his hands. For a tense moment, the air hung heavy with the threat of violence, golden dragonfire rumbling in the depths of Vermithor's throat.

But then, slowly, the tension ebbed. Vermithor lowered its sharp-horned head slightly, its gaze flicking between Baelon and the whip. The fierce fire building in its chest receded, and the bronze dragon's broad, brown wings settled across the stone platform.

Without its rider, it had no desire to stir.

The temperature in the cave dropped even further, the bitter cold creeping in from outside. Yet here, deep within the Dragonpit, surrounded by ancient stone and the faint heat of Vermithor's dormant fire, the dragon found its rest once more.

**"Vermithor, I need your help."**

Baelon stood before the mighty bronze dragon, his chest rising and falling with each breath. His great-uncle Daemon had left King's Landing with Caraxes, the Blood Wyrn, and now the Dragonpit was empty. The capital had never been so vulnerable, teetering on the edge of chaos. His grandfather's health was failing, and with no dragon to defend the city, its enemies would soon descend upon it like vultures. Why not leave Baelon in charge with Vermithor by his side?

*Roar!*

Vermithor's pupils flashed darkly, the great beast understanding the boy's request but unwilling to comply so easily. Vermithor, the Bronze Fury, served only the truly strong—not those who merely craved power.

"Follow me, now!" Baelon's face darkened with frustration, and the crack of the dragon-taming whip echoed against the stone walls of the cave.

*Roar!*

Vermithor's rage was instantaneous. The enormous dragon lunged forward, its massive head knocking Baelon to the ground with brutal force. If it weren't for the bond between them, the dragon might have devoured him in a single bite.

"You think I'm a coward, Vermithor!?" Baelon shouted as he struggled to his feet, his eyes blazing with defiance.



A flicker of green fire glimmered in his purple eyes as he revealed his true form—a dragonborn. Three shimmering green scales appeared on his forehead, and his fangs grew longer and sharper.

*Roar?*

Vermithor hesitated for the first time, his wide nostrils flaring in uncertainty.

*Crack!*

The whip snapped again, this time coiling around Vermithor's thick neck like a black serpent. The powerful Bronze Fury was brought under control, forced to yield to the tamer's will.

"To serve the House, I need your power," Baelon said solemnly, his palm igniting with green flame. The magic bound them in ways Vermithor could not resist.

*Plop.*

The great dragon stumbled, unable to withstand the restraint of the Dragon Taming Whip. Its massive head slammed onto the stone platform, shattering a chunk of Dragonstone with its jaw. Taking advantage of the moment, Baelon leapt onto Vermithor's back, climbing up along its massive brown wing.

*Roar!*

In a furious response, golden dragonfire erupted from Vermithor's mouth, lighting the cavern like a blazing furnace. The heat was so intense, it felt as if the cave itself was melting, rumbling with the force of the dragon's unleashed fury.

Outside, Uragax—another dragon resting by the shore—looked up, confused by the sudden tremors and the roar echoing from within the towering cave.

*Boom!*

A colossal figure, covered in bronze scales and crowned with sharp horns like a thorny bush, exploded out of the cave. Vermithor soared into the sky, his brown wings beating with thunderous power as he climbed higher above Gods Eye Lake.

"Dracarys, Vermithor!" Baelon's voice rang out from the dragon's back, clear and commanding.

*Roar!*

Vermithor answered the call, unleashing a torrent of dragonfire skyward. The fire blasted through the heavens, scattering the dark clouds with its aftershock.

"Haha, let's go back to King's Landing!" Baelon shouted, his laughter filled with exhilaration as he rode the mighty Bronze Fury. He gripped the saddle and waved the dragon whip, ready to reclaim the capital.

Vermithor's fierce, vertical pupils glanced back at Harrenhal one last time before the massive beast soared across the vast expanse of Gods Eye.

*Roar...*

Uragax, still by the shore, let out a long, echoing howl before taking flight. The dragon followed in pursuit, trailing after Baelon and Vermithor as they headed toward King's Landing.

## Chapter 668: The Presence of the Others

The North, The Wall.

The towering ice structure had reformed with frost, blocking the bitter cold wind from beyond the Wall.

"Hurry, pile the bodies together."

"Work quickly, finish before dark."

For the first time in half a year, the black-cloaked Night's Watch set foot outside the Wall to clear the battlefield. The ghostly green Dragonfire had long since died down, and the blackened scorch marks were buried beneath the snow. Yet, the stench of burnt flesh still lingered in the air.

The Haunted Forest swayed slightly, causing the snow on the treetops to fall.

The clatter of hooves echoed in the distance, growing louder.

Roderick led the Army of the Winter Wolves out of the forest, their horses moving slowly. Each veteran soldier had a rope tied to their ponytail, dragging behind them a long line of captured wildlings. The wildlings had scattered in all directions after their defeat.

"By order of the king, arrest all rebellious wildlings."

Bound and defeated, the wildlings hung their heads, their faces as white as mourning clothes.

...

Inside the Wall, heavy thuds echoed through the snow. Thud. Thud. The boots that made the noise were as large as millstones. Giants, several of them, moved slowly, their chests and backs weighed down by baskets filled with dark, steaming slime. The pungent stench of sulfur filled the air without the need to look down.

"Damn humans, you make Nuno carry the shit."

The ugly giant stood at the base of the Wall, defiant, his face twisted in displeasure. Two black-cloaked crows, armed with shovels, loaded a fresh, sticky lump of excrement into his basket.

"This is dragon dung, you idiot," Rhaegar warned, his glare menacing. "You destroyed the gate to the Wall, and now I'm cleaning up your mess."

The underground passage had been wrecked by the giants' recklessness. Repairing it with surface stone was impossible, so black Dragonstone was the best solution.

"I don't want to carry it. It stinks," Nuno grumbled, his already ugly face twisting further in disgust.

"You should be grateful the Cannibal can still defecate in the cold," Rhaegar replied lightly, taking a step back.

The coal-black dragon lay nearby, quietly observing. It opened its miserable green, vertical pupils and stared at the giant, who, compared to the dragon, was no more significant than an insect.

Nuno stiffened and obediently prepared his basket. "Dragon dung is very good and very hot," he muttered.

The Child of the Forest approached cautiously, circling the dark dung. "I can feel the black Dragonstone you melted contains fire magic."

"Will it keep away the White Walkers?" Rhaegar asked, his tone serious.

"The answer requires proof," murmured the Child of the Forest, her green eyes shimmering faintly. "When Brandon the Builder raised the Great Wall, he used magic to imbue it with power to repel the Others."

The black Dragonstone and the Wall contained different kinds of magic, but their effect was the same. It was like lighting a cluster of fireworks to ignite a pile of dull candles—both dispelled the darkness, but one was far brighter.

Rhaegar's brow furrowed slightly, as though he understood only in part.

"We're back, Your Grace!"

Roderick's shout echoed through the air as the Winter Wolves poured out of the underground passage in perfect unison.

Rhaegar glanced sideways at the sound.

"Behave yourselves and get in the snowdrift!" the old lord barked, hot-tempered as ever. He untied the horse's tail and cracked the whip, driving a dozen wildlings into a corner. The rest of the Winter Wolves followed suit, treating the wildlings—ancient enemies for centuries—with roughness.

Rhaegar's frown deepened. Without a word, he turned and ascended the winding ladder toward the winch.

...

Atop the Wall, the Night's Watch was busy repairing the battlements.

"Your Grace," Cregan greeted him, bowing respectfully as he approached. The relief on his face was clear—dealing with the wildling army had been no small feat.

"Where is the Lord Commander of the Night's Watch?" Rhaegar asked, scanning the area for the figure in black robes and white hair.

"Lord Commander Benjicot is at the watchtower. Follow me."

Cregan led the way, and soon they came face to face with the emaciated "old man."

"What does Your Grace command?" Benjicot asked, his grave expression matched by the stern wind that whipped at the fur around his collar.

"I need to speak with you about the wildlings," Rhaegar said, looking at the Lord Commander with mixed feelings. Once the Lord of Raventree Hall, Benjicot had been banished to the Wall—yet here he stood, risen to a position of power once again. Little did Rhaegar know, competence always finds its way to the surface.

"I know what you mean. Let's speak under the shed," Benjicot said, tightening his collar as he led the king and Cregan to a corner, sheltered from the wind.

The fire flickered gently, sparks splashing into the air as the three sat around it, reaching out to warm themselves. Rhaegar wasted no time.

"There are White Walkers beyond the Wall, and the free folk cannot simply be killed off," he stated bluntly. "The best solution is to move them within the Wall."

He couldn't make the mistake of "killing the goose that lays the golden egg." Allowing the wildlings to die or be driven into the arms of the Others would only swell the ranks of the undead.

"Your Grace, I understand your ambitions," Benjicot said, stirring the fire with a branch to make it burn brighter, his eyes dark and thoughtful. "But this is the North. The wildlings and the Northerners have been enemies for generations. Even the Night's Watch is filled with hatred for them."

Integrating the wildlings behind the Wall would be no easy task. Trusting them was one thing, but persuading the people of the North to accept them was another.

"The people of the North believe in order and tradition. Reconciling them with the wildlings will be nearly impossible," Cregan added, shaking his head with a sigh. As Lord of the North, his authority was clear, and his perspective carried the most weight. From birth, the wildlings had been seen as enemies—those views were deeply ingrained.

"It has to be done," Rhaegar said sternly, his voice leaving no room for debate. "If the free folk aren't allowed behind the Wall, the Others' numbers will skyrocket."

"I can persuade the opposition within the Night's Watch," Benjicot said, his face expressionless. The wildling attack had decimated their ranks. Out of the original 2,000 members, barely a few hundred remained, and half of the 3,000 new recruits had been lost. With so few left, and a proper reshuffling of roles, opposition could be contained.

After speaking, Benjicot's sharp old eyes shifted toward the young Lord of the North.

Cregan looked hesitant, but after a long pause, he finally nodded. "I can arrange for the wildlings to be given the Gift's less fertile lands. I'll do my best to appease my advisers."

That was as much as he could offer.

"Let's do it." Rhaegar tossed a log onto the fire, patting his hands to rid them of snow.

"I'll speak with Lord Roderick first," Cregan said, rising quietly, the weight of responsibility heavy on his shoulders. He left without another word, disappearing into the growing night.

By the fire, only Rhaegar and Benjicot remained. After a few moments of silence, Rhaegar broke it. "Are you doing well at the Wall?"

There was something different about a man who had lived through the passage of time, and Rhaegar felt it in Benjicot.

"Not bad, though the Wall doesn't have the warmth of the Riverlands," Benjicot replied with a laugh, his weathered face crinkling. From his features, it was clear he had been a handsome man in his youth.

"Your grandson has inherited Raventree Hall and serves at my eldest son's side. He's a courageous lad," Rhaegar remarked, sounding weary as the conversation drifted to more personal matters.

"I heard Samwell died a heroic death," Benjicot said calmly, his voice steady even as he spoke of his only son's demise. "He was worthy of being my son." There was a quiet, generous dignity in his eyes as he delivered the painful news.

Rhaegar nodded, but said nothing. Samwell had been a good man, but it was a pity he had fallen to the Ironborn.

"Do you remember the maesters and prisoners you banished?" Benjicot shifted the conversation with a light joke. "When I first arrived, the Maester of the Dragonpit—who had lost his hand—was still alive. He froze to death the following winter."

The Citadel had been abolished, replaced by the royal school, and its former prestige had crumbled. The maester, who had once harbored selfish ambitions for the dragons, had fared no better.

Rhaegar barely reacted, raising his eyelids with disinterest. The old stories of his youth held little appeal now.

The two men chatted in fits and starts, as the fire burned brighter with each log added. Darkness deepened, and beyond the flames, the wildlings were being rounded up by the Night's Watch and brought back to the Wall.

Suddenly, Benjicot pulled a silver flask from his coat and asked, "Have you ever met your grandmother?"

"Huh?" Rhaegar blinked, taken aback by the sudden question. He shook his head. "No, I've only seen my mother once in my dreams."

"Your grandmother was a beauty," Benjicot said, his eyes reflecting a distant memory. "Daella Targaryen, the sixth daughter of the Old King, had skin as white as milk and a temperament as gentle as a kitten." There was a trace of regret in his voice, as if her memory still stirred something within him.

Rhaegar frowned slightly and replied casually, "It's normal for my great-grandfather to have traveled the Seven Kingdoms and visited Crow's Nest Hall with my great-grandmother."

Rhaenyra had been there too. Samwell Blackwood, had been among her suitors.

He had even stabbed a Bracken for making a rude comment.

"No, it was more than just a visit," Old Benjicot said, his expression turning serious. "Your grandmother was of marriageable age at the time, and I was fortunate enough to be one of the candidates."

The young Princess Daella had met many promising men from across the Seven Kingdoms. Unfortunately, few had managed to impress her. On one occasion, she faced an insult from House Lannister, which enraged the Old King, already anxious about his daughter's future. But fortune smiled upon Princess Daella when she visited Raventree Hall and met the eldest son and heir of the Blackwood family: The Old Benjicot, now sitting across from Rhaegar.

Rhaegar, unfamiliar with the past, listened quietly. Benjicot had been one of the most handsome men of his time—skilled in archery and swordsmanship, proficient in the harp, and well-versed in history. It was easy to see why Daella had fallen in love with him at first sight. They had even shared an affair during her stay at Crow's Nest.

However, the Faith of the Seven had poisoned many hearts. Devout as she was, Princess Daella had been horrified to discover that the Blackwoods worshipped the Old Gods. Heartbroken and fearful, she fled from Crow's Nest, and their relationship was never consummated.

The Old King, frustrated and tired of the endless obstacles, eventually married his daughter to Lord Arryn, who had retired from public life. At the age of 18, Daella entered The Eyrie, only to die of puerperal fever at 19.

"My grandmother was an innocent maiden," Rhaegar said, his voice flat and tinged with coldness. "Like many of her sisters, she didn't have a happy ending."

He knew well the tragic fates that had befallen his mother, grandmother, and many of his great-uncles and aunts. Saera Targaryen, who had traveled to Volantis, had once remarked that the continent of Westeros was too cold to welcome the Targaryens with their fiery blood. The Faith of the Seven and the Citadel had long been targets of suspicion and retaliation.

"If your grandmother had married me, things might have turned out differently," Benjicot mused. "She was truly a wonderful woman, but the Old King never had much patience when it came to his daughters' marriages."

Having many children had been one of the Old King's greatest strengths, but the misfortunes that plagued his children became the darkest stain of his later years.

"No one is perfect," Rhaegar murmured softly, reluctant to pass judgment on the figures of history. Without the help of the Explorer's System and the care of Rhaenyra from an early age, he knew he wouldn't have achieved what he had.

Benjicot gave a small smile, raised his silver flask, and said, "To Princess Daella."

Taking a sip, he passed the flask to Rhaegar, who stared at it for a moment before taking a small sip himself. "To my great-grandfather, Old King Jaehaerys I."

Benjicot chuckled, patting his thigh as he stood up. Before leaving, he offered a parting word, "I support your decision. The free folk are also part of the Kingdom."

With that, he returned to the gathering of Night's Watch.

Rhaegar sat in a daze, staring at the flask's empty bottom. He began to understand the meaning behind Benjicot's words. The elder had a unique perspective, shaped by his origins in the Riverlands—a view that differed from the rigid prejudices of the North against the free folk. The divide between the Northmen and the free folk, after all, was rooted only in which side they had chosen when the Wall was built.

...

The next day...

The main force from Winterfell arrived at the Wall. Leading the way were 5,000 Unsullied, marching into Castle Black with precision and imposing discipline.

"Your Grace, we've brought plenty of food and livestock," Grey Worm reported, standing tall and proud after commanding an army of over 10,000 men on the long journey.

"Well done, you've had a long journey," Rhaegar praised, watching as the carts of supplies were unloaded. With this abundance, they now had enough resources to sustain a major battle.

"Thanks to Her Grace, the Queen," Grey Worm added quietly as he passed. "She also asked me to tell you to rest."

Rhaegar's heart warmed at the message. He turned and gave Grey Worm a nod. "The wildling army has collapsed. Select some men and go beyond the Wall to scout the situation."

Beyond the Wall, the White Walkers roamed freely. While the White Walkers could glean information from the free folk inside the Wall, the free folk remained ignorant of the growing threat. Reliable eyes were needed to assess the danger.

"Yes, Your Grace," Grey Worm replied loyally, without hesitation.

By the afternoon, the sun peeked out from behind the clouds, and Castle Black came to life. The newly arrived allied forces set up camp and lit fires, bringing a rare buzz of activity to the usually quiet stronghold.

...

In front of the underground passageway, Grey Worm stood ready, a spear in his hand. The steel tip had been replaced with a dragonglass dagger.

"Is this thing really useful?" Robb asked, seated on his warhorse, doubt in his voice. Half the arrows in his quiver had been replaced with dragonglass tips, as ordered by the King.

"I don't know," Grey Worm responded matter-of-factly, testing the spear with a few practice swings. "Just follow orders."

"Don't worry, use it. It's meant for the White Walkers," a voice piped up. The Child of the Forest, hidden in a corner, spoke without stepping any closer.

Grey Worm and Robb exchanged a glance before each turned to gather their selected men.

"Porus, come with me. Bring me a weapon that suits me," Grey Worm called.

A small giant, five meters tall, strode over, clad in heavy silver-gray armor.

"Nothing for you, half-blood giant," the Child of the Forest remarked, tilting its head in amazement.

Porus frowned, clearly displeased. "Porus is a small giant, not a half-blood giant," he corrected, swinging a massive battle hammer that hung from his back with great force. The ground seemed to shudder slightly under his movements.

Bang! Bang! Heavy footsteps echoed from behind.

The giant Nunu approached, his eight-meter-tall frame towering over the smaller giant. His voice rumbled like distant thunder as he asked, "You're also a giant. When did you enter the Great Wall?"

"I'm from the south," the little giant replied proudly, lifting his head to observe Nunu's ugly, weather-beaten face and rough leather coat.

"The armor you're wearing is sturdy," Nunu noted, his eyes filled with envy as he knocked his fist against the little giant's solid armor. It was clear he had taken an immediate liking to this smaller counterpart. Supplies were scarce among the free folk, and they lacked the resources for proper equipment. Most iron weapons were either seized from the crows or bought from passing merchant caravans.

For giants, who required enormous amounts of metal for their armor and weapons, it was rare to see anyone so well-equipped. Even having an iron-studded mace was considered a powerful asset.

"Of course. It was forged by the best craftsman," the little giant said with pride, his honest face glowing. He clenched his fist and playfully knocked it against Nunu's chest. "You're quite the beauty yourself—so tall and strong."

Nunu's grin stretched wide, laughter booming like thunder across the snow.

"What? A woman?" Robb asked, stunned, as he stared at the shaggy, rough-looking giant.

Grey Worm, trying to maintain composure, muttered, "Maybe." He, too, wasn't sure. The giants, large or small, were both part of the expedition, but given Nunu's appearance, who could tell their gender?

"Here, take my hammer," the smaller giant offered, scratching his head before handing over his cherished battle hammer.

Nunu accepted it with a grin, then returned the favor by handing over the oversized bow and quiver slung across his back.

The Child of the Forest, who had been observing nearby, clapped his hands in excitement.

"Child of the Forest, go away. You're not allowed past the Great Wall," Nunu said, frowning as he flicked the small figure—who resembled a squirrel more than a man—into a nearby snowdrift.

Coughing and spitting out a mouthful of snow, the Child of the Forest scurried away angrily.

With a grunt, Nunu straightened up and opened the repaired iron gate. Its ears and fingers, which had been severed by Blackfyre, had miraculously healed, thanks to the special medicine of the Children of the Forest—and, of course, the incredible resilience of the giants.

## Chapter 669: The Army of the Dead

### Casterly Rock, the Westerlands

A towering, craggy cliff loomed over the land, with a steep, ancient castle built against the mountainside.

"Roar..."

A long, piercing dragon roar echoed through the air. It was as if a scarlet serpent-like dragon was climbing the steep walls of the city.

Below, the guards stood pale and trembling, their hands barely steady as they gripped their weapons.

Inside the castle's grand hall, Daemon held the Dark Sister close and whispered, "I heard someone was ill, but it doesn't look that way to me."

"Prince, please calm yourself," pleaded a young, handsome knight, his hand gripping the hilt of his sword as he watched Daemon's every movement with nervous intensity.

"Oh, do I seem impulsive?" Daemon tilted his head, pressing the Dark Sister's blade closer to the neck of the man sprawled at his feet.



Jason Lannister lay stiffly on the floor, pale as the stone beneath him, his hands raised in submission. A cold Valyrian steel blade rested against his throat, while Daemon's heavy boot dug into his chest, pinning him mercilessly. Looking up, Jason met Daemon's icy gaze and cursed his luck. He had underestimated the reckless nature of the Rogue Prince.

His attempt to offer a warm welcome—hoping to cover up his mistake of delaying his troops—had failed the moment Daemon kicked him to the ground, stomping on his pride as easily as his chest.

"Am I reckless, Lord Jason?" Daemon asked, lifting Jason's chin with the tip of his sword, his expression half-amused, half-menacing.

"N-no, of course not," Jason stammered, shaking his head quickly. He dared not contradict the prince, forcing a weak smile to hide his fear.

"You see, Ser Adrian," Daemon continued, now addressing the young knight who had dared to stand his ground. His tone was playful, but his words sharp. "I come in friendship—as a friend of House Lannister."

With that, Daemon lifted his foot, releasing Jason, who immediately scrambled behind the safety of the guards, his body trembling with relief.

Adrian Tarbeck, however, was not so easily cowed. He drew his sword and stepped between Daemon and his lord, his stance tense.

"Don't be nervous," Daemon said, his voice almost dismissive as he sheathed his sword and pulled up a chair. "If I wanted to kill someone, you wouldn't be able to stop me."

Adrian frowned but said nothing, though his distrust was clear. He opened his mouth to respond when suddenly, another dragon's roar echoed from outside—long and thin, carrying with it a warning to all within the castle.

Daemon smiled faintly, listening intently. His arrogant posture betrayed no concern for the men around him.

"Prince, what brings you here?" Adrian asked through gritted teeth, though he already knew the answer. Behind him, Jason Lannister still cowered, his once-pristine blond hair now a disheveled mess.

"The Kingdom Alliance has already reached the North," Daemon said, his expression darkening.

"Why have the Westerlands delayed sending their forces?" His gaze shifted to Jason, who flinched.

"From what I've seen, Lord Jason doesn't seem to be as 'unwell' as you claimed in your letter."

Daemon's eyes narrowed as he recalled the sight of Jason earlier, drinking and indulging with whores—far from the ailing man described. His boot on Jason's chest had been a fitting punishment for such deceit.

"We'll send troops—right away!" Adrian said quickly, pulling on Jason's sleeve to snap him out of his stupor.

"Yes, yes, of course!" Jason stammered, still dazed. "We'll march from Golden Tooth immediately."

Daemon's eyes lingered on the two men, cold and calculating. "This is your first warning. Next time, Dragonfire will do the talking."

With a sharp movement, Daemon stood, pressing his hands on the armrests of the chair as he rose. His dark attire, sleek and powerful, made him appear more dangerous than ever. His long, silver-gold hair flowed behind him as he strode toward the exit, leaving the room in tense silence.

...

Outside the castle, Caraxes waited.

"Roar..."

The scarlet dragon stretched his long neck, opening his sharp maw to let out another shriek. He flapped his wide, leathery wings, lifting off the ground with a thunderous beat. His two hind legs, small but powerful, spread as he launched himself off the towering cliff, diving downward.

Through the thick layers of mist, the scarlet dragon tore through the barrier of clouds, disappearing from view. The proud lords of the Westerlands could only watch in awe and fear as the red dragon vanished into the hazy skies, its presence a sharp reminder of the power Daemon Targaryen wielded.

...

The Wall, to the North

The crunch of light footsteps echoed in the snow as a small group moved slowly forward.

Grey Worm, clad in black armor, marched at the front, his olive-toned face hardened by the cold, now marked with frostbite from the relentless wind. His determination remained unshaken despite the harsh conditions.

"How long do we have to keep walking?" came a muffled voice from a tall giant wrapped in thick animal furs, his rough hands gripping the reins of a mammoth. His bulk made him look more like a bear than a man.

"Soon, just a little longer," replied Giant Nunu, turning to glance back at the rest of the group. Nunu carried a newly acquired war hammer on its back and led six other giants—four large and two small—along with two mammoths draped in animal skins and straw.

The giants, like Nunu, were wrapped in heavy furs, dragging sleds loaded with supplies behind them. These were her people, survivors of the harsh cold, now on the verge of a new life within the Great Wall.

"Okay, whatever you say," the tall giant muttered, satisfied with the answer. Not known for his brains, he fell silent. The other giants, grunting softly, kept to themselves, more like silent shadows as they trudged forward.

Robb, riding his emaciated warhorse, glanced over at Grey Worm. "We've notified more than a dozen free folk tribes, but we still haven't seen a single Shadow of the Dead."

"Just wait a little longer," Grey Worm said, his eyes fixed ahead, unwavering in his loyalty to the king's orders.

Robb sighed inwardly. Without Nunu's help, the free folk beyond the Wall might have torn them apart by now. But the Shadows—those legendary creatures of death—they weren't something that could just appear on command. His eyes lifted to the darkening sky, sensing an approaching snowstorm. If they didn't return to the Wall before it hit, they might all be stranded.

"Owww... oww... ow..."

A mournful howl suddenly cut through the cold air, drifting from deep within the forest. Robb's senses sharpened. He quickly disassembled his longbow. "Something's up," he said, his sharp eyes scanning the snow-laden trees.

"Don't worry. It's probably just a pack of wolves hunting," Grey Worm replied, though he too unstrapped his spear and round shield, sensing the growing tension.

Nunu sniffed the air, its large nose twitching. His expression shifted, a trace of concern crossing its features. "No... that's not an ordinary wolf. That's the howl of a direwolf."

"Direwolf?"

The dozen or so humans in the group froze, exchanging uneasy glances. None had ever encountered such a beast before. Like the White Hart, the Giants, and the Shadow Creatures, Direwolves were creatures of legend, rarely seen and even less often survived.

"Owwwwww..."

The rustling of bushes grew louder, the wolf's howl more piercing and frantic.

Plop!

Suddenly, from the thicket, a massive white wolf burst into view, charging out of the forest in sheer panic. Its snow-white fur gleamed against the grey sky as it ran for its life.

"Direwolves are solitary," Robb muttered, watching in awe. "To see one flee..."

The Direwolf, a creature at the top of the food chain, wouldn't run unless something far more terrifying was close behind.

Whatever was coming, it was worse than anything they had expected.

"Everyone on guard! It could be the Thenns!" Robb shouted, drawing his bowstring tight.

The Thenn were a breed apart from the other free folk—ruthless, bloodthirsty, and notorious for cannibalism. But there were no bone arrows whistling through the trees, and the forest was eerily quiet.

The snow-white direwolf bolted south, heedless of the blood dripping from its wounded hind leg. The unseen pressure weighed heavily on the group, a growing dread gnawing at their hearts.

Robb and Grey Worm remained locked in place, eyes fixed on the treeline, nerves taut as bowstrings. The giants, sensing danger, hefted their wooden weapons and began slowly dragging their supply-laden sleds backward.

But whatever lurked in the forest had no intention of letting them retreat.

Rustle... rustle...

A sudden burst of noise broke the silence—heavy stomping, as if a thousand feet pounded the snow at once. Yet the forest remained still, the only other sound the wind stirring the leaves. It was as if the very trees harbored ghosts, watching and waiting.

"Be careful, everyone. Retreat slowly," Grey Worm ordered, his voice low and measured. He was an experienced warrior and knew when to fall back.

Rumble... rumble... rumble...

The ground beneath them seemed to shake, the sound swelling, growing louder. Grey Worm's eyes widened, his body tensing as an icy shiver ran down his spine.

"Roar..."

Out of the forest charged the first wave of the dead—dressed in tattered wildling clothes, their ghastly grey faces contorted in a savage snarl. Their eyes glowed with an eerie blue light.

"They're wights! They're here to eat us!" Nunu bellowed, furious, as he swung its massive battle hammer.

Bang!

Two of the dead crumpled under the weight of the hammer's blow, their bodies reduced to pulp under the one-meter-wide head of the weapon. The force of the strike scattered the other ghouls, and Nunu's roar echoed across the frozen landscape.

Crackling...

But a moment later, the fallen ghouls began to twitch, their joints rotating unnaturally, limbs twisting as they scrambled back to their feet. As if nothing had happened, they lunged once more.

Nunu, caught off guard, was tackled to the ground by a wight that clung to his chest, teeth bared.

"Roar!"

More wights swarmed, like ants descending on a fallen prey. Their hideous growls filled the air as they piled onto the giant.

"Help! Save Nunu!" Grey Worm shouted, his face pale with alarm. Without hesitation, he drove his spear into the chest of an advancing wight, but the undead horde showed no signs of slowing.

*Pop!*

A miraculous scene unfolded. The undead, impervious to the warhammer's crushing blows, suddenly froze in place. Their bodies disintegrated like fragile building blocks, collapsing into dust.

Grey Worm stood momentarily stunned, then glanced at the spearhead in his hand—polished with dragonglass.

"It's the dragonglass! Dragonglass can kill the undead!"

With renewed vigor, Grey Worm spun his spear with lightning speed, creating an impenetrable barrier as he cut through the swarm of wights. His movements were swift and precise, the black blood of the dead spraying in all directions.

The others quickly followed suit, drawing their dragonglass daggers. The giants, lacking such weapons, wielded their massive wooden clubs, which—while not as lethal as dragonglass—still packed enough force to flatten a wight with a single blow.

"Roar! Come to Nunu!"

Despite the hundreds of wights, Giant Nunu roared in fury, rising to his feet as he ripped the undead clinging to his body away, hurling them to the ground. Each impact sent up a cloud of snow, the stiff bodies of the wights breaking apart beneath the relentless assault of the giant's fists and feet.

"Hurry! Throw everything away!" Grey Worm shouted, urgently stripping the young giants and mammoths of their heavy supply bundles.

*Shhhhhh...*

The army of ghouls pressed in closer, their numbers unrelenting. Like swarming mosquitoes, they bit and clawed at the living with savage fury. The situation was growing dire. Nunu, swinging his warhammer with one hand, scooped up Grey Worm and Robb in the other. His massive feet kicked away the stumbling wights, each step sending corpses flying.

"Whoa, whoa..."

A sudden, hoarse neigh echoed from the distance.

In an instant, the chaotic horde of ghouls froze, as if they had received some unseen command. Grey Worm, cold sweat dripping down his face, poked his head out of Nunu's grasp to see what had caused the sudden halt.

At the edge of the forest, deep pits had formed in the snow. Emerging from the shadows was a decaying warhorse, its rider pale and haunting. The strange man sat tall in the saddle, his face expressionless and lifeless, one hand gripping the reins, the other slowly rising into the air.

He moved like the commander of this ghastly army.

The air grew thick with dread as the man opened his mouth, though no sound came. Yet the effect was immediate.

"Roar..."

The army of ghouls erupted into motion, their ice-blue eyes flashing with renewed menace. Thousands of them surged forward, as if driven by the silent will of their mysterious leader.

Chapter 670: The Red Queen Arrives at the Great Wall

Seven days and nights later...

Outside the Great Wall, deep in the Haunted Forest, a massive wolf with snow-white fur limped out of the trees, each step labored. The creature was immense—five meters in length and two meters tall at the shoulder. Even against the blanket of snow, it stood out like a ghost.

*Clang!*

The hurried ringing of a bell echoed from atop the Wall, a signal from the sentries.

"Every day, more wildlings enter the Wall. Security is getting worse," Cregan remarked, his voice filled with concern as he walked along the battlements. His face showed the strain of recent days.

Rhaegar, walking beside him, was resolute. "We must keep accepting them. The free folk govern themselves. If trouble arises, their tribal leaders must deal with it."

*Ding-dong!*

The bell tolled again, more urgently this time. Both men glanced up, and Rhaegar quickened his pace toward the watchtower. As soon as he reached it, his eyes caught sight of the enormous, snow-white wolf below.

"That's a direwolf—and it's white!?" Cregan exclaimed, his eyes wide with shock. It was the first time he'd ever seen a living embodiment of House Stark's sigil.

"There's someone on its back," Rhaegar said, his sharp eyesight catching the black-armored figure slumped across the wolf. Without hesitation, he turned and rushed down from the battlements.

When they reached the ground, they saw it clearly—the direwolf carried a rider, an Unsullied soldier clad in black armor. The Night's Watch hurriedly lowered the direwolf into the underground passage using a winch and a long ladder.

As the figure on the wolf's back slid to the ground and turned over, Rhaegar's heart froze.

"Grey Worm!?"

He rushed to the fallen warrior, disbelief and fear flooding his mind. Gently lifting the limp figure, he looked down at his trusted commander.

*Shhhh!*

The direwolf bared its teeth, growling low and menacing, poised to attack.

"Easy now. We mean no harm," Cregan said, approaching with his arms outstretched, trying to calm the beast.

The direwolf seemed to understand, its growl fading as it backed away warily, curling up in the corner. Its left hind leg was mangled, a large chunk of flesh missing, the wound festering. The bite marks were unmistakable—it had been injured by something far more deadly than the cold.

Cregan stood by, his breath heavy, shielding Rhaegar from danger.

"It's Grey Worm. He's been attacked," Rhaegar muttered grimly as he inspected the wound. Grey Worm was deathly pale, his body rigid from cold and blood loss. A deep, penetrating wound marred his abdomen, and bite marks covered his limbs. He had clearly lost a significant amount of blood.

"Hold on, Grey Worm. I'll take you to the Maester," Rhaegar said, his voice thick with urgency as he lifted the commander in his arms and made his way back into Castle Black.

Grey Worm, the commander of 5,000 Unsullied and 3,000 Fearless, was one of Rhaegar's most valuable and loyal assets. If not for the dire threat of the White Walkers, Rhaegar would never have risked sending him out on such a dangerous mission. But now, the worst had come to pass—Grey Worm was grievously injured, and those who had gone with him, including Robb, the small giant Porus, and the giant Nunu, were missing.

*Kaboom!*

Rhaegar kicked open the attic door of Castle Black's library. "Tru, quickly, help me!" he called out in a low but commanding voice.

The attic was a clutter of alchemy tools and strange devices, the air thick with the pungent smells of potions and chemicals. A tall, rotund figure stood at an experimental table, carefully mixing a glowing green liquid.

"Be careful, Your Grace," Tru said in alarm, setting down the vial of green solution with care and wiping his hands on his grey Maester's robe.

Rhaegar placed Grey Worm gently on the bed in the corner, his voice sharp with urgency. "Cut the nonsense, Tru—lives are at stake."

Tru looked slightly hurt but quickly set to work. He removed Grey Worm's battered armor, his hands moving efficiently as he began the treatment. "Penetrating abdominal wound, but the object missed the vital organs... strange, though." He muttered to himself, then added, "There are many surface wounds. He'll need a special solution to clean them."

Rhaegar stood by, watching as Tru worked with practiced skill. In no time, Grey Worm was wrapped in bandages, his body mummified in layers of cloth.

"The injuries are severe, especially the frostbite," Tru said, wiping the sweat from his brow as he took a deep breath. "But he's in excellent physical condition. He'll pull through, I'm sure of it."

Rhaegar didn't reply immediately. His gaze darkened, and suddenly, a black mist began to swirl from his right hand.

*Sssshhh...*

From the mist, a flat, round serpent materialized, slithering onto Grey Worm's bandaged body. The creature greedily absorbed the dark mist that enveloped him, its thin form coiling and shifting as it worked its magic.

Moments passed, and then—

"Cough, cough..."

Grey Worm coughed violently, a mouthful of foul blood spilling from his lips. His chest heaved as he sucked in a sharp breath of air.

"Are you all right?" Rhaegar asked, his voice filled with concern.

Grey Worm blinked, his eyes fluttering open. The moment he saw his king, emotions overwhelmed him, and tears welled up in his eyes. "The White Walkers... we encountered the White Walkers. Robb and the others... they got separated." His voice trembled as he recalled the harrowing ordeal.

They had been ambushed by an army of the dead, barely managing to fight their way out. But then a mounted White Walker appeared from the shadows, cold and arrogant, its ice-blue eyes filled with disdain for the living.

Grey Worm had seized an opening and fought the White Walker one-on-one, but his hardwood spear had been shattered into dust by the creature's ice spear in a single blow. The next instant, the icy blade had pierced his abdomen, and the pain had overwhelmed him. When he awoke, the battlefield was silent and dark—Robb, the giants, and the rest were gone, leaving him unconscious and alone.

Fortunately, the direwolf had returned to the scene and, instead of devouring him, carried him to safety. He had barely survived.

"Your Grace," Grey Worm choked out, lowering his head in guilt, "Robb and the others have disappeared. What are we to do?" His voice broke, the weight of failure heavy on his shoulders.

"You focus on healing first," Rhaegar whispered, his tone soft yet commanding. He quietly summoned the power of the runes, pushing more energy into the serpent to speed up Grey Worm's recovery.

*Creak*

The door swung open from outside, and a figure clad in green burst into the room.

*Sniff, sniff...*

The Child of the Forest's nostrils flared slightly in surprise. "It's the sacrificial power of the First Men... and the putrid stench of White Walkers."

The small figure darted across the room, moving quickly to Grey Worm's bedside, its bright green eyes scanning every detail. First, it spotted the serpent coiled around Grey Worm, its body exuding black mist, and a flicker of hatred crossed the Child's face. Then, as it took in the sight of Grey Worm's bandaged, mummy-like form, that hatred shifted to fear. It gingerly lifted Grey Worm's scratched arm, inspecting it closely.

"Careful, he's still injured," Tru said, trying to nudge the Child of the Forest away.

The Child bared her teeth in a silent snarl, sending the plump Maester scrambling backward.

"Don't scare him. He's valuable," Rhaegar said, grabbing the Child's head and pushing it down gently while brushing aside her chestnut-colored hair.

This wasn't an ordinary creature. Tru was skilled in alchemy and could create wildfire—a weapon more potent than oil, and more practical than a pumpkin bomb. It was invaluable for defending the Wall.

"Yes, yes, of course," Tru nodded quickly, patting his head nervously while hugging his small, plump frame.

The Child's gaze remained uneasy, his voice tense. "The White Walkers are here, aren't they?"

The tension in the room thickened. The Child knew what it had smelled. Grey Worm's wounds, particularly the bite marks, told the story—he had been attacked by a corpse bear, one of the terrifying creations of the White Walkers.

Rhaegar's eyes darkened as he nodded. "Yes, the White Walkers are gathering an army outside the Wall, including their corpse bears." The army of the dead was terrifying—no human force could stand against it for long. And with the dragons unwilling to cross the Wall, not yet acclimated to the freezing cold of the North, their strength was still uncertain. The enemy remained hidden in the shadows.

The Child of the Forest muttered, "If we want to defend the Wall, we have to go beyond it. If we find the Heart Tree in the lands beyond, the Greenseer will tell us how to defeat the White Walkers."

"Aren't you a Greenseer?" Rhaegar asked, frowning slightly.

The Child, with its brown skin, chestnut hair, and small stature, was a strange creature. Those with green eyes, like Terry, were typically the Greenseers of the tribe, gifted with the magical "Green Sight" that allowed them to see into the future.

"I am a Greenseer, but not the strongest," the Child replied, its voice low and strained.

"Only the most powerful Greenseer can see all—predict everything, including the



weaknesses of the White Walkers.” The Child’s own powers, though impressive, were limited. Only the most gifted could match the threat of the undead.

Rhaegar fell silent, deep in thought. “My dragon can cross the Wall,” he said, “but the true strength of the White Walkers is still unknown.”

With Robb and the others still missing beyond the Wall, it was imperative to find a way to rescue them—and uncover more about the army of the dead. The Night King might still be dormant, but winter was coming fast. This might be their best chance.

“The White Walkers can raise the dead, but they themselves are not invincible,” the Child said eagerly, its green eyes glowing with hope. “If we can find the legendary Heart Tree and the strongest Greenseer, we can destroy them all.”

Rhaegar’s mind raced. He recalled the prophecies of Quaithe, the mysterious witch from Slaver’s Bay.

Two of her predictions had already proven accurate. The “dead dragon” likely referred to his second son, Aemon, though whether Aemon was alive or not remained unclear. Then there was the warning about the man with the wounded knee, which now seemed to suggest the dragons’ reluctance to cross the Wall—the magic protecting the Wall was strong, keeping both White Walkers and dragons at bay.

But the final prophecy, along with Vaegon the Dragonless’s last will, pointed East—to Asshai, the shadowed city. Quaithe had hinted that the solution to the White Walker threat lay there. Rhaegar trusted Quaithe’s cryptic wisdom more than the Child of the Forest’s wild claims. After all, the serpent by his side had once tricked him—but its abilities were beyond question.

“Rest and don’t think too much,” Rhaegar said softly to Grey Worm, withdrawing the serpent as he patted the commander’s shoulder. The Child of the Forest’s eyes sparkled with anticipation, waiting for an answer, but Rhaegar paid it no mind. Instead, he instructed Tru to keep a close watch over Grey Worm, then grabbed the Child by its curly brown hair and dragged it out of the room.

“The Wall must be defended, but on our terms,” Rhaegar muttered to himself as the door shut behind them.

...

Bay of Seals, Eastwatch-by-the-Sea

The Wall stretched thousands of miles from east to west, its easternmost edge jutting into the icy waters of the Bay of Seals. Along this colossal barrier, the Night’s Watch had built more than ten strongholds to defend against the threats of White Walkers and wildlings. Eastwatch-by-the-Sea, guarding the eastern end, stood sentinel over the cold, unforgiving bay.

*Splash!*

Waves crashed against the shore, breaking on the ice drifting atop the frigid waters. A fleet of ships, bearing the green-and-white seahorse sigil of House Velaryon, docked at the stronghold. Thousands

of soldiers disembarked with military precision, their boots crunching in the snow as they assembled.

*Roar!*

Above, a majestic red dragon, its scarlet scales shimmering in the winter sunlight, soared through the skies. A crown of fierce, horned crests circled its neck, and its massive wings beat furiously against the cold air as it patrolled the Wall. From the ground, it looked like a flash of red lightning cutting through the sky.

“What’s the situation, Rhaenys?”

Corlys Velaryon, dressed in heavy cotton armor, stood calmly before the dragon. His gaze was sharp, but his posture was relaxed.

“Stay down, old girl,” Rhaenys Targaryen murmured to Meleys, the scarlet dragon, who shifted restlessly. “There aren’t many Night’s Watchmen here at Eastwatch, but no signs of wildlings attacking the city.”

Meleys, however, refused to cross the Wall. She sensed something beyond the frozen battlements that made her uneasy. Rhaenys understood her dragon’s reluctance.

“Don’t worry, the Night’s Watch aren’t that useless yet,” Corlys said with a reassuring smile. He took off his cloak and draped it over his wife’s shoulders.

Thanks to the Old King’s attention, the Night’s Watch had been granted large swaths of land and significant funding to repair their fortresses. Viserys had inherited his grandfather’s commitment, and under his reign, the Watch had remained strong, bolstered by royal support. Now, with Rhaegar on the throne, their strength rivaled that of the noble houses from the First Men.

*Roar!*

A light silver dragon suddenly soared overhead, gliding along the Wall’s edge and heading west over the Bay of Seals.

“Where is Laenor going?” Rhaenys asked, her voice edged with concern as she watched the silver dragon disappear into the distance. Something in her gut told her that danger awaited beyond the Wall.

Corlys followed her gaze, his expression turning serious. “The Bay of Seals has frozen early this year—we’re already behind schedule.” He paused before adding gravely, “Castle Black may need reinforcement. Laenor’s heading there to support them on our behalf.”

Rhaenys frowned, the tension in her chest building. “Viserys warned that the White Walkers are real. We can’t afford to take any risks.” She was mindful of the true purpose behind their journey north: to aid in the defense against the looming threat beyond the Wall.

“Don’t worry about him,” Corlys said confidently, puffing out his chest. “Laenor’s not the reckless boy he once was. He’s more than capable.” He glanced at his wife with a grin. “Besides, it’s not like the royal family has any spare dragons lying around.”

The House of Velaryon had long stood at the top of the Seven Kingdoms, the most reliable and powerful ally of House Targaryen. Their shared history from ancient Valyria bonded them in blood and fire.