

G.O Thrones 51

Chapter 51: Revealing Talent

"Nonsense! I have witnessed your cruelty firsthand!"

Alicent's fervor blazed, her gaze piercing Rhaegar with disgust.

Rhaegar's lips curled into a sneer. "Had I truly intended harm, you would not have had the opportunity to intervene and cradle him in your arms like a nursing mother."

Alicent instinctively glanced down at her chest, only to find her nightgown soaked. Tears and mucus stained Aegon's face, mingled with droplets of spilled emotion.

Without a word, Rhaegar tossed her a cloak and averted his gaze. "You cannot discipline your own son, leaving me, as his brother, with the responsibility."

"I trust my own eyes," Alicent retorted, her hatred for Rhaegar palpable as she wiped the dirt from Aegon's face.

"Tell me, Aegon," she pleaded, her voice filled with desperation, "has he harmed you?"

Aegon sobbed uncontrollably, glancing anxiously at Rhaegar, too frightened to speak.

Rhaegar raised an eyebrow in smug satisfaction.

With clenched teeth and a racing heart, Alicent delivered a resounding slap across Aegon's cheek and snapped, "Snap out of it, Aegon!"

"Tell me, has Rhaegar harmed you?" Her voice rose to a shrill pitch.

Aegon flinched at the blow, his cheek reddening rapidly as he stammered through tears, "He struck me... and he burned me with fire..."

Rhaegar's brow furrowed slightly at the accusation, casting a scornful glance at the trembling boy.

"Brat, you dare add fuel to the fire!" he muttered under his breath.

Alicent's anger erupted as she confronted Rhaegar. "Do you hear me? Aegon accused you of beating him, and I saw you burn him with that searing bracelet! What could he have done to provoke such cruelty from you?"

Rhaegar stood speechless in the face of Alicent's accusations, unable to muster a response.

Alicent's words poured out, fueled by righteous indignation.

Reading Rhaegar's silence as indifference, Alicent's resentment flared, ready to unleash a torrent of rebuke.

Before he could speak another word, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed from the corridor, interrupting the tense confrontation.

Rhaegar's gaze lifted, settling on the arrival of Kingsguard Captain Harrold escorting Viserys, and Rhaenyra, cloaked, following close behind.

Despite his dizziness, Viserys forced himself to focus, his voice weak as he asked, "What is this commotion, disturbing the peace in the middle of the night?"

At the sight of her husband's arrival, Alicent's tears flowed freely, her cries filled with anguish. "Look at Aegon! If I hadn't intervened, he would have been subjected to Rhaegar's torture!"

Not one to remain silent, Aegon joined his mother's lament with his own cries.

A somber silence fell over the hut as all eyes turned to the distraught mother and son, locked in an embrace, tears mingling.

Viserys, his expression tinged with suspicion, turned his gaze to Rhaegar, his voice ringing with authority. "Rhaegar, is it true what your mother says?"

"She's not my mother, just a stepmother," Rhaegar retorted, his tone devoid of deference.

The confrontation escalated, with Rhaegar vehemently denying Alicent's accusations.

His biological mother had long since died in childbirth, leaving Alicent as his stepmother, a figure he viewed with disdain for coveting his sister's inheritance.

"Enough! Regardless of her status as your stepmother, she fulfills the role of a mother in your life, and you will show her respect!" Viserys admonished his eldest son for his insolence.

Rhaegar considered retorting, noting that it was his squire who tended to his needs. But acknowledging Alicent's position as queen, he chose silence, understanding that the credit would inevitably fall to her.

Observing her brother's defiance, Rhaenyra redirected the conversation. "Rhaegar, what happened? Why did Her Grace accuse you of mistreating Aegon?"

Her choice of words, substituting "torture" for "mistreating," did not escape Alicent's notice. In her heart, Rhaegar was a dutiful and obedient son, incapable of harming others.

Alicent picked up on the implication and retorted, "He's a fiend, burning Aegon with a red-hot steel bracelet!"

Viserys, sensing the tension, noticed with astonishment the reddened steel bracelet in Rhaegar's hand. "Rhaegar, the bracelet in your possession..."

There was no mistaking it - the bracelet gave off an intense heat.

Rhaegar's bold act of grasping the heated steel with his bare hands shocked his aging father to the core.

It wasn't until Viserys pointed it out that the others realized the truth, including Alicent, who had confronted Rhaegar moments earlier and had just turned the corner.

In the face of their stunned expressions, Rhaegar nonchalantly remarked, "After the burns healed, my tolerance for flames improved greatly."

"See? I told you he was a demon! What kind of man isn't afraid of flames!" Alicent's accusation rang out, her arms wrapped protectively around Aegon in horror, though her sentiment found no echo among the others.

Once Viserys had recovered from his seasickness, he quickly took command. "Captain Harrold, seal off the corridor. Let no one approach."

Harrold nodded dutifully, his gaze lingering on Rhaegar as he left, leaving only the family in the cabin.

Viserys drew a deep breath, his gaze fixed on Rhaegar as he asked again, "Rhaegar, do you feel any pain?"

"No, just a little warm," Rhaegar replied truthfully. Ever since he had been burned by the dragon's flames, the potency of the Blood and Fire seemed to have increased, rendering him largely immune to ordinary flames. Even as he held the blazing steel bracelet, his palm remained unblistered, with only a slight sensation of heat.

Viserys' astonishment was palpable as he looked at Rhaegar with newfound awe. "It seems that the dragon flame has awakened your ancient bloodline and given you fearlessness in the face of fire."

Throughout the illustrious history of House Targaryen, there have been many tales of gifted individuals and their extraordinary abilities. Though none were immune to fire, Viserys believed it was a manifestation of their shared heritage.

As the saying in their family lore went, "Blood and fire come from the same source."

Rhaegar made no protest, accepting his father's speculation. He knew he couldn't hide his abilities forever, and a prudent display of them now might pave the way for greater acceptance in the future.

Watching the exchange between father and son, Alicent interjected eagerly, her voice charged with urgency. "Viserys! Rhaegar has harmed Aegon; you must bring him to justice!"

In her eyes, Rhaegar's actions against her child were unforgivable. Aegon was her emotional anchor, and she would never tolerate anyone mistreating her children.

Viserys, now composed, surveyed the distraught Aegon, noting the red, swollen slap mark on his face and the visible signs of distress. His gaze then shifted to Rhaegar, his expression clouded with distaste. "He's your brother. Why did you strike him?"

"He provoked Helaena and tried to steal the bracelet I gave her. I merely hit him," Rhaegar recounted truthfully, gesturing at Aegon's cheeks with a hint of amusement. "The worst injury he suffered was not inflicted by me."

Aegon recoiled from Rhaegar's pointed finger and clung to his mother's arms, his head bowed in shame.

After a moment of contemplation, Viserys realized that the marks on Aegon's face did not match the force Rhaegar could have used at his age.

Approaching Alicent, Viserys took Aegon's hand firmly, his tone stern. "Aegon, look at me."

Aegon, overwhelmed with tears, obeyed, and Alicent shook him firmly, urging, "Your father is here for you. Show some courage."

"If you truly have courage, confront Rhaegar like you do when you bully little girls," Rhaenyra interjected, her tone laced with cold sarcasm.

Aware of Helaena's preference for Rhaegar's company and her own disdain for Aegon's bullying, Rhaenyra's words were meant to defend her brother.

Chapter 52: Pick It Up!

"Rhaenyra, enough!"

Viserys' voice cut through the tension and turned his attention to Aegon.

"Have you been bullying Helaena?" he asked sternly.

Aegon's answer was tentative, his fear palpable in the air as he admitted, "Yes."

"And did Rhaegar punish you for it?"

"Yes," Aegon replied, his voice barely above a whisper.

Viserys' eyes narrowed, his concern evident as he asked further, "Did he hurt you with the heated bracelet?"

Aegon hesitated for a moment before answering, "No."

Viserys shifted his attention to Aegon's injured side, his touch gentle yet probing as he assessed the damage.

As Viserys spoke, his tone carried a sense of authority and understanding, directed at both Aegon and Alicent.

"Alicent, while Rhaegar's actions may have been overly forceful, they did no lasting damage to Aegon."

Alicent bristled at Viserys' assessment, her frustration evident in her response.

"But what if things had escalated further? What if no one had intervened?"

"There were no signs of injury on Aegon; Rhaegar could not have caused them." Viserys' expression hardened, his voice firm as he countered her concerns.

"We cannot always shield our children from every conflict, Alicent. Sibling disagreements are part of growing up, and they must learn to deal with them."

Alicent opened her mouth to protest, but Viserys cut her off with a pointed comment.

"I understand your concern, Alicent, but let us not forget that even I had my disagreements with Daemon in our youth."

Alicent's grip tightened around Aegon, her concern still evident as she sought reassurance from her husband.

"Have you ever seen Daemon in distress, crying out in fear and pain?"

Alicent hugged Aegon tightly, her gaze fixed on her husband.

Once, her father had warned her that when Rhaenyra took the throne, she would never leave her children unattended. At the time, she had dismissed it as mere speculation.

Now it seemed to be coming true.

Rhaenyra hadn't even begun her reign and yet Rhaegar had already acted impulsively.

Viserys furrowed his brow in irritation and lifted Alicent from the floor, trying to quell her temper as he gently intervened, "That's enough for tonight, dear."

"Rhaegar must apologize to Aegon and assure him there will be no further threats," Alicent insisted, seizing the opportunity to seek justice for her child.

After a brief moment of reflection, Viserys turned his gaze to Rhaegar and Rhaenyra.

With a sigh, he conceded, "Both children are to blame; they should apologize to each other."

"Aegon started the fight by bullying his sister, he should apologize first."

Alicent asserted, her attention shifting to Aegon in her arms.

Aegon's face bore the marks of his ordeal, and he timidly stole a glance at Rhaegar, finally summoning the courage to speak, "I'm sorry, big brother."

"All right, Rhaegar, it's your turn," Viserys urged, signaling for Rhaegar's cooperation.

Rhaegar's once hollow eyes suddenly brightened with a smile as he accepted the apology, "I accept your apology and I apologize for my aggressive behavior. I shouldn't have frightened you like that."

He didn't want to embarrass his father any further and saw no harm in complying with Alicent's wishes.

Viserys offered Alicent a forced smile and suggested, "It's getting late; let the children return to their rooms."

Alicent nodded, content that justice had been served, while Aegon, still reeling from the encounter, remained silent.

As they headed for the door, Rhaegar's sudden action took everyone by surprise.

"Aegon, don't you like the bracelet? Take it," Rhaegar said, his voice devoid of emotion as he dropped the heated steel bracelet to the ground in front of Aegon.

Aegon recoiled in fear, retreating into Alicent's embrace.

Viserys, furious, demanded, "Rhaegar, enough!"

But Rhaegar remained indifferent, insisting, "I know it's over, but Aegon wants the bracelet. I promised it to him."

With a firm stare, Rhaegar ordered, "Pick it up and take it."

"No... I can't," Aegon protested, shaking his head vigorously and backing away from Rhaegar.

"It's yours. You must take it," Rhaegar's tone turned icy, his patience wearing thin.

"I don't want it, ever," Aegon pleaded, his voice shaking.

Undeterred by Aegon's fear, Rhaegar's voice grew colder, "Pick it up, I'll let you."

"No, I don't want it," Aegon insisted, shrinking back into Alicent's arms, eyes wide with fear.

Rhaegar stood firm, his voice unyielding, "You must. I won't ask again."

As Aegon trembled with fear, Alicent's expression crumbled, her gaze turned to Viserys, silently pleading for intervention.

Her tear-filled eyes seemed to plead, "You see? Even your favorite son would persecute Aegon before you."

As the situation escalated, Rhaenyra stepped in, soaking a handkerchief in water and wrapping it around the bracelet before handing it to Aegon.

Then, with concern etched on her face, she approached Rhaegar: "Stop this, Rhaegar."

Seeing his sister's concern, Rhaegar relented, his icy demeanor thawing as he teased, "It's an easy task. How could Aegon struggle with it?"

With the tension eased by the siblings' exchange, the atmosphere in the room relaxed slightly.

But beneath the surface, it was clear that the family's balance had been upset.

Viserys gave Rhaegar a complex look before leaving the room alone.

Alicent snatched the damp cloth from Aegon's hand, tears welling in her eyes as she left, her voice choked with emotion, "Remember your promise. I'll keep Aegon away from you."

Rhaegar watched her leave, his eyes widening with realization.

Alicent had preconceived notions about him, and no amount of explanation would change her mind.

With nothing more to say, Rhaegar remained silent.

After the others had left, only Rhaegar and Rhaenyra remained in the cabin.

Rhaenyra closed the door behind them and leaned against it with her arms crossed over her chest, sighing, "What got into you to cause such a scene?"

"I just wanted to scare Aegon," Rhaegar replied helplessly.

"It's not that simple in Alicent's eyes," Rhaenyra observed.

"But what could I do? She bumped into me and immediately accused me of plotting against Aegon," Rhaegar lamented.

Seeing her brother's tired expression, Rhaenyra's heart softened and she moved closer to embrace him.

Stroking his silver hair, she comforted him, "In the future, mind your own business. Alicent is very protective of her children."

"So are we less because we lack a mother?" Rhaegar asked bitterly.

"You know I didn't mean that," Rhaenyra reassured him.

"It doesn't matter. A cub without the protection of a lioness must learn to grow sharp teeth and claws quickly," Rhaegar remarked, falling back onto the bed in frustration.

His original plan had been to take out his frustration on behalf of Helaena, but Alicent's accusations had painted him as a villain, all based on the notion of "motherly love".

Wasn't he just being picked on because he didn't have a mother?

If he hadn't resented Alicent's overprotective nature, he wouldn't have taken it out on Aegon again.

"Well, don't dwell on it. I'll sleep with you tonight," Rhaenyra offered, understanding her brother's feelings. She rubbed his right hand lovingly, noticing that it showed no signs of having touched hot steel.

"You really are different, Rhaegar," she remarked quietly.

With little desire for further conversation, Rhaegar undressed and climbed into bed, pulling the covers over himself.

Rhaenyra didn't press the matter any further, simply patting him on the shoulder and humming a soothing tune, much as she had when Rhaegar was a child, as she drifted off to sleep beside him.

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As the night passed, the sailboat continued its journey, navigating the waves until it reached the Throat Range.

On deck, Rhaenyra held Rhaegar's hand as they looked out over the sea and took in the sights.

"The waters under King's Landing's jurisdiction are known as Blackwater Bay. After sailing for a day and a night, we are now approaching the Gullet area," Rhaenyra explained.

"Do you know the significance of the Gullet?" Rhaenyra inquired.

Stepping out on deck to feel the wind, Rhaegar replied, "The Gullet serves as both the entrance and exit to Blackwater Bay, making it as vital to it as a throat in the body."

"Indeed," Rhaenyra confirmed, "the Gullet is protected by three strongholds: Dragonstone, Driftmark, and Sharp Point. Together they form a formidable line of sea defense, capable of withstanding even the strongest of foes."

Pointing to a massive island in the distance, Rhaenyra continued, "That island you see over there is Driftmark, the ancestral domain of Lord Sea Serpent Corlys."

Chapter 53: Dragonstone Island

"The House of Velaryon?"

Rhaegar's interest piqued at the mention.

Rhaenyra chuckled, "Indeed, they are renowned for their mastery of long-distance navigation and have been steadfast allies of our house for generations."

"I have heard tales of Lord Sea Serpent's formidable character, which often caused our father no small amount of frustration."

Rhaegar's curiosity deepened.

"It is true that there have been tensions in the past, stemming from disputes over inheritance. Our journey serves in part to heal those rifts and strengthen our bonds with House Velaryon."

Rhaenyra's revelation hinted at hidden complexities that further intrigued Rhaegar.

"Why would we seek reconciliation with a house of lesser stature than our own?" Rhaegar asked, his brow furrowed in thought.

"That is a matter for the king to weigh," Rhaenyra replied, a hint of frustration in her tone as she playfully tweaked her brother's nose. As heir to the throne with limited powers, she could only speculate on her father's motives.

Rhaegar pondered for a moment. "The Velaryons are also said to have the ability to ride dragons, which brings its own dangers..."

Rhaenyra's expression faltered at his words, her dismay evident. "This is mainly due to Aunt Rhaenys' influence."

...

The sun hung high in the sky as the sailboat anchored in the waters under the jurisdiction of Dragonstone Island. With a sense of relief, Viserys stepped onto the soft sand and savored the firmness beneath his feet.

"Your Grace, the castle has prepared sumptuous delicacies and fine wine," Robert, the acting Lord of Dragonstone Island, announced, leading his servants in a respectful greeting.

Viserys' smile widened at the mention of the banquet. "Excellent, this is exactly what I had in mind."

Approaching his wife and children, Viserys sought to mend the previous night's discord with words and smiles. Alicent followed him to the right, accompanied by her children, while Rhaegar and his sister walked to the left, both sides clearly separated.

Observing the scene, the acting City Lord of Dragonstone Island took the opportunity to intervene.

"The young prince and princess are setting foot on the island for the first time. Would you like me to give them an introduction?" he offered.

Without even looking at him, Rhaegar spoke up. "But my sister is the Princess of Dragonstone Island," he explained, earning a gentle squeeze from Rhaenyra, who quietly urged him to refrain from further remarks.

The acting city lord, slightly taken aback, turned to Rhaenyra for guidance. "Princess, would you like me to make a presentation to your siblings?"

Rhaenyra nodded graciously. "Yes, Lord Robert, please enlighten them."

"As you wish, Princess," Robert acknowledged, maintaining his smile as he launched into a description of Dragonstone Island. "Dragonstone Island is a vast landmass characterized by strange rock formations and sparse vegetation. Its most notable feature, however, is its active volcano, which makes it an ideal habitat for dragons."

Despite the lord's earnest attempt at conversation, his words seemed to fall on deaf ears, as most of the party were engrossed in their own thoughts. Viserys chuckled softly at the lord's enthusiasm, while Rhaenyra made occasional efforts to engage in conversation to ensure that his efforts didn't go entirely unnoticed.

As they approached the towering cliffs, a large gate decorated with carved dragons came into view. Robert stopped speaking and called to the towers flanking the gate.

The massive black gates slowly creaked open, revealing a winding staircase that seemed to go on forever, leading to a colossal castle perched atop the high mountain. Built entirely of black stone, the castle was meticulously designed to resemble a mighty dragon.

Rows of upright guards stood behind the city gate, greeting Viserys with a resounding chorus as the gate swung open.

The grandeur of the scene left Rhaegar awestruck as Viserys confidently led the way over the bridge-like stone steps. Robert resumed his enthusiastic commentary.

"The castle on the island of Dragonstone dates back to ancient Valyrian times and served as a strategic stronghold on the Westerosi mainland," he explained animatedly. "Built of the durable black stone characteristic of Valyrian architecture, the castle's construction remains a marvel of ancient engineering."

"From a distance, it resembles a magnificent dragon perched atop the mountain, surveying the lands of Westeros," Robert continued, his excitement palpable.

This time Rhaegar listened intently, captivated by the description of the dragon-shaped castle and the awe-inspiring staircase beneath his feet.

After a long walk, they finally entered the castle. The inner hall exuded an air of grandeur, decorated in a palette of black and red that reflected the aesthetic of the Targaryen House.

Rhaegar took a moment to wash his hands before formally taking his place at the table, ready to partake in the sumptuous feast that lay before him.

As the meal drew to a close, Viserys contentedly rubbed his stomach and took a sip of fine wine before inquiring, "Robert, how has Dragonstone Island fared lately?"

Robert replied, "Your Majesty, two days ago, the volcano on the island erupted, causing Vermithor and Silverwing to become agitated. Fortunately, they returned to their nest without harming anyone."

Viserys nodded in relief. "That is fortunate. Tomorrow we will prepare my two sons to begin their dragon-bonding."

Robert's next words, however, brought a shadow of concern. "Your Majesty, due to the recent disturbance, the young dragons that were previously under guard have gone into hiding. Efforts are still underway to locate them."

Viserys' expression instantly darkened, his wine glass lowered as he turned a stern gaze on Robert. "The young dragons are missing? What of the island's dragon keepers and dragon guards?"

Robert bowed his head in remorse. "My deepest apologies, Your Majesty. The young dragons were typically docile, and our vigilance waned."

Recognizing Robert's responsibility, Viserys' anger softened slightly. "Find the young dragons with the utmost urgency. The princes' bond with them cannot be delayed."

Robert bowed repeatedly, his determination evident as he hurried to organize the search.

With only the family left at the table, Rhaenyra expressed her surprise. "It is unexpected that Vermithor and Silverwing have emerged after years of dormancy."

Viserys reassured her, "It's not unusual. Volcanic eruptions are natural phenomena, and dragons have an instinct to avoid danger."

Thoughts of his own formidable dragon, Balerion, crossed Viserys' mind. Once he had ridden the massive dragon through the skies of King's Landing, but those days were long gone.

With a chuckle, Viserys pushed back his chair. "I have indulged enough. Now it is time for your king and father to retire for a well-deserved rest."

As Viserys left, the table fell silent for a moment, each member of the family finishing their meal before going their separate ways.

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It was early in the day, and Rhaegar persistently urged Rhaenyra to give him a tour of Dragonstone Island.

Despite her initial reluctance, Rhaenyra finally agreed to his request.

They began their exploration by walking around the castle, marveling at the grand structures of the ancient Valyrian era.

Rhaegar was particularly impressed by the castle's dragon-shaped design and the towering spires that resembled the mythical creature, its head overlooking the island from all directions.

As the afternoon approached, Rhaenyra, unable to resist Rhaegar's insistence, took him for a walk along the beach.

As they gazed at the towering cliffs and the vast expanse of the sea, Rhaegar's spirits lifted as he revelled in the freedom of nature.

Compared to the confines of the Red Keep, the natural beauty of Dragonstone Island was a refreshing change for him.

Rhaenyra couldn't help but chuckle as she watched her brother's happiness. "You poor thing, you've hardly had a chance to venture outside since you were young."

It dawned on Rhaegar that Dragonstone Island was merely the threshold of the Targaryen family's domain, not truly venturing beyond the confines of the king's domain into the vastness of the Seven Kingdoms.

"Sister, come quickly! There's a deep, dark cave over here," Rhaegar called excitedly, beckoning Rhaenyra to join him.

Chapter 54: Dragonglass

Rhaenyra's heart raced as she stepped onto the soft sand, shaking the water from her soaked boots. In the distance, she heard Rhaegar's call, but when she looked up, he was gone.

Panicking, she cried, "Where are you? I'm coming for you!"

"I'm over here! I'll check first!" Rhaegar's voice echoed faintly.

Rhaenyra sprinted in the direction of his voice, the moss-covered cliffs stretching endlessly and dotted with numerous caves at their base.

Scanning the cliffs frantically, Rhaenyra muttered in disbelief, unable to discern which cave Rhaegar had entered.

"Stop hiding, Rhaegar! Come out and stop playing games with your sister!" Rhaenyra's voice echoed through the cliffs, her frustration growing.

But despite her calls, there was no response from Rhaegar.

Now gripped by fear, Rhaenyra searched every cave, finding nothing but bat droppings and remnants of the tide's retreat.

Rhaegar was nowhere to be found.

With her pulse pounding in her ears, Rhaenyra realized that Rhaegar's disappearance was no joke. He had actually ventured into one of the caves.

"Seven hells! Who knows how deep this cave goes or what dangers lurk within," Rhaenyra cursed under her breath, her mind racing with worry.

With determination in her steps, she turned and sprinted back, intent on summoning the guards to aid in the search.

...

In the castle, Viserys lay fast asleep in his chamber.

The years had taken their toll on him, his once vigorous frame now showing signs of aging, his energy waning with each passing day.

Once, in days long past, before Rhaegar's birth, he would have embraced his wife in the warmth of their bed, finding comfort in her presence before drifting off to sleep.

But now Alicent entered his chamber, her expression contorted in disgust as she caught a whiff of the lingering scent of alcohol that clung to him. With a disapproving frown, she quietly slipped away to seek refuge in another room.

Years of marriage and refinement had not dulled her sensitivity to such smells, and she craved the freshness of a room untouched by the scent of liquor.

Finding solace in the quiet solitude of the adjoining chamber, Alicent settled into a plush armchair, intending to steal a moment of respite from the chaos of the day.

However, her rest was short-lived.

A series of knocks jolted her from her half-conscious state, causing her to glance at the door, expecting to find a maid seeking her attention.

But there was no one there, and no voice calling to her.

Knock, knock...

Alicent's brow furrowed in confusion as she searched for the source of the sound, her senses on high alert.

To her astonishment, the knocking seemed to be coming from the very walls of the chamber.

More specifically, from within the walls themselves.

Alicent's heart quickened with a surge of panic, her mind racing as she struggled for a course of action.

Then, as if in a nightmare, the bedroom wall began to shift, slowly rotating to reveal a hidden passageway.

Alicent recoiled in shock, her hand shaking as she reached for a nearby knife, her instincts screaming at her to defend herself.

As the wall swung halfway open, revealing the darkness beyond, Alicent's mind raced with fear and uncertainty.

Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined that a simple room could hide such a secret passage.

With bated breath, she peered into the yawning void of the secret passage, her nerves on edge as she awaited whatever lay on the other side.

"Who... who goes there?" she called out, her voice shaking with fear.

Knock, knock...

Two more insistent knocks echoed from the hidden passageway, accompanied by a cool breeze that swept through the room.

And then, suddenly, a figure cloaked in black emerged from the darkness.

...

A rustle came from the dimly lit crypt.

Rattling--

The clash of flint and a torch burst into flame.

The firelight flooded the crypt, casting a crimson glow on Rhaegar's face.

"Rhaenyra's not following. Should I turn back?" Rhaegar murmured in a hushed tone as he returned the flint to his spatial bracelet.

Since acquiring this treasure, he had been secretly stockpiling supplies for emergencies.

Looking around, Rhaegar realized that he was standing in a tunnel, surrounded by remnants of mining activity, evidence of previous visitors.

"Since I'm already here. Let's keep going," Rhaegar reassured himself, his heartbeat slowly slowing as he stretched the torch into the darkness ahead.

The cave stretched before him, its air crisp and inviting, urging Rhaegar to press on in search of the young dragon.

His heart yearned to reunite with the fledgling dragon, unsure if it might be lurking within these depths, waiting to be discovered.

As he traveled deeper into the cave, the passage narrowed, its walls bearing the scars of numerous cuts and excavations.

A dark crystal protruded from the stone, its surface seeming to absorb the flickering firelight.

"Is that dragonglass?" Rhaegar wondered aloud, his fingers tracing the smooth surface of the black crystal, memories of the months he had spent under the tutelage of the two Maesters flooding back.

In that time, he had gained knowledge of this unique mineral - dragonglass - a unique substance found on Dragonstone, also known as obsidian. Though it adorned select armour and weapons within the Red Keep, its practical uses remained largely untapped.

Rhaegar carefully removed a fragment of dragonglass from a nearby chiseled pit and stowed it in his spatial bracelet - a rare addition to his collection.

Since he was already here, he didn't want to return empty-handed.

Pushing forward, Rhaegar continued his journey into the depths of the tunnel, the light of his torch guiding his way.

Despite the increasing depth, he remained undeterred, confident in his familiarity with the route.

As he advanced, the tunnel began to narrow, the walls becoming densely packed with dragonglass ore.

Soon, the entire passageway seemed to be carved from dragonglass.

Finally, he reached the end of the tunnel, where the firelight revealed intricate patterns carved into the walls of dragonglass - depictions of shepherds, dragons, giants, and even grotesque-faced monsters.

Approaching, Rhaegar studied the carvings, piecing together the meaning of each image.

"The Song of Ice and Fire!" he exclaimed, his mind instantly conjuring the legendary prophecy.

Etched into the dragonglass wall was a narrative that encompassed the Fourteen Flames of the ancient Valyrian era, Aenar's fabled voyage across the sea, and the chilling tale of a Long Night brought by sinister creatures.

"The prophecy of Aegon the Conqueror is true. The Others really exist?" Rhaegar murmured in astonishment, his gaze fixed on the mesmerizing scene before him.

This revelation eclipsed even the awe-inspiring presence of a dragon - the realization that the legendary monsters were no mere myth, but a tangible threat, foreseen and inscribed in the very heart of the Dragonglass Mines on Dragonstone Island.

As Rhaegar reached out to brush the dust from the carving, a sudden beep rang in his ears, startling him.

"A exploration mission is now active. Target: Dragonglass Wall," the system announced, projecting a data panel in front of him.

[Dragonglass Wall]

Exploration progress: 0.2%

"From the exploration mission... the carvings seem to be authentic," he mused, interpreting the system's feedback.

The quality of the Dragonglass Wall hinted at its significance - it was either extremely valuable or of considerable antiquity.

The prophetic carvings adorning its surface were of undeniable value, their timeline far beyond his knowledge.

It seemed he was on the verge of acquiring another priceless relic.

Sitting on a small bench retrieved from his spatial bracelet, Rhaegar leaned back against the dragonglass wall, patiently awaiting the completion of the exploration.

"I hope Rhaenyra will not grow anxious, fearing my absence," he murmured, his thoughts momentarily drifting to his sister's well-being.

...

In the bedroom that belonged to Alicent, she was jolted awake by a sudden surge of anxiety, her brow furrowed as she sat angrily in her chair, her gaze fixed forward.

Before her stood a figure cloaked in black, his arms folded resolutely behind his back.

Breathing heavily, Alicent expressed her irritation. "What brings you to Dragonstone Island and what is your purpose here?"

Undeterred by her hostility, the black-robed man spoke in a low, measured tone. "My purpose is unimportant. What matters is the purpose of your visit."

Perplexed, Alicent inquired, "And what might that be?"

The black-robed man's answer was cryptic. "The two princes were bought here to tame the young dragons, but unfortunately they were chased away. The relentless search of the guards will soon reveal their hiding place."

Alicent's curiosity was piqued. "Is that so? And what knowledge do you have?"

"I know the whereabouts of two young dragons," he revealed, his words laden with meaning.

"Prince Aegon may choose the first, but the other location must be shared."

Alicent looked at him with uncertainty, her mind racing to decipher his intentions.

Considering the immense value of a dragon to a Targaryen heir, she pressed, "Where can these young dragons be found?"

Chapter 55: The Second Legendary Relic

In an instant, the sky turned to twilight, casting an ethereal glow over the dragonglass mining cave where Rhaegar stood before the stone wall.

The young prince had fallen into slumber, oblivious to the passage of time beyond his rest.

Suddenly he stirred awake, a chill running through his body as he emerged from his sleep.

Perplexed, Rhaegar surveyed his surroundings, his attention caught by a timely system beep.

"The exploration is complete. Please claim the reward," the announcement echoed through the cave.

Instantly alert, Rhaegar's eyes darted around, scanning every nook and cranny.

[Dragonglass Wall]

Exploration progress: 100%

"Where could it be?"

Searching frantically, Rhaegar's eyes landed on a circular, crimson halo hovering above the Dragonglass Stone Wall.

"Red... it's a Legendary Level relic!" he exclaimed, his eyes widening in amazement as he cautiously reached out to touch the halo.

A burst of red light erupted like fireworks, cascading over his head in a mesmerizing display.

"Relic successfully retrieved. Initiating recognition..."

"Recognition successful. Confirmed as a Legendary Grade Relic: The Last Flame."

"It truly is a Legendary Grade - a mysterious relic akin to [Blood and Fire]," Rhaegar remarked, rubbing his hands together in anticipation as he watched the faint embers of fire on the system panel.

The core of the flame burned with a vivid orange hue, its edges flickering in a wavering crimson dance as if on the verge of extinction.

"The last flame... it seems its flame is dying," Rhaegar observed with a mixture of fascination and concern, his curiosity driving him to attempt activation.

"Activation failed. The Legendary Grade Relic has unique properties that require special conditions for activation," the system explained, prompting Rhaegar to recall his previous encounter with Balerion's Skull and the [Dragon Relic] it yielded, which required a dragon bloodline for activation.

"Indeed, treasures of this caliber are always accompanied by unique requirements," he mused, determined to uncover the secrets hidden within the enigmatic Last Flame.

With a furrowed brow, Rhaegar called up the note on the system panel, eager to gain any insight into the [Last Flame].

"Flame is the enlightenment of a civilization, ancient civilizations grow from tenderness to behemoths, from strength to destruction..."

"Each civilization has a unique legacy, immortal crystals preserved the last flame, waiting for the chosen one to revive its glory..."

The cryptic lines hinted at the origin of the last fire, but offered no explicit instructions on how to activate it.

Rhaegar's frown deepened, a pang of regret gnawing at him for possessing a treasure whose use remained unknown.

"If it's the Last Flame, it must be connected to fire and magic," he mused aloud, his thoughts racing.

In the realm of fire and magic, the only thing that came to Rhaegar's mind was dragons.

"The Dragon's Legacy required a dragon bloodline... could the Last Flame require a dragon's flame?" he speculated, his mind consumed by a whirlwind of conjecture.

As evening fell, the interior of the cave grew colder, Rhaegar's breath crystallizing into white mist, a stark contrast to the flickering flames of the torch.

"Oh no, it must be getting late," he muttered to himself, noticing the passage of time.

With the relics of his exploration secured, Rhaegar's current adventure had come to an end, though he braced himself for the repercussions of his unauthorized excursion.

Navigating the familiar path back, his mind raced with strategies to escape punishment.

Outside, the moon cast a silvery glow over the landscape, while the sound of waves crashing against the shore failed to deter the vigilant guards from their search.

Emerging from the narrow cave, Rhaegar spotted a torch bobbing in the distance, accompanied by a chorus of voices calling his name.

"I'm here!" he shouted, raising the torch to signal his presence to the approaching guards.

"Your Highness, quick, someone come!" one of the guards exclaimed urgently.

The beach soon buzzed with activity as Rhaegar was surrounded by a crowd of figures, including Viserys and Rhaenyra.

Before Viserys could speak, Rhaenyra, her face contorted with worry and anger, rushed forward and tackled Rhaegar to the ground.

"You fool! Where did you go?" she cried, her voice choked with emotion.

Rhaegar, subdued beneath her, explained, "I was just exploring the cave and stumbled upon something."

"What could be more important than your safety? You almost gave me a heart attack!" Rhaenyra's voice cracked with emotion as tears streamed down her cheeks. "You disappeared right in front of me. If something had happened to you, what would I have done?"

"You are all I have left, Rhaegar," she continued, her tone softer now, but still filled with an underlying concern. "I can't bear to lose you."

Moved by his sister's display of affection, Rhaegar allowed himself to be scolded, covering his face with his hands as Rhaenyra delivered a series of light slaps to his backside.

"All right, Rhaenyra," Viserys intervened, his initial anger tempered by the sight of his daughter's distress. He approached her and offered his comfort.

Rhaenyra, her tears subsiding, issued a stern warning. "Next time, I will not hesitate to break your legs and drag you back to the Red Keep, where I will lock you in the attic for the rest of your days."

Rhaegar nodded fervently, promising to heed her words and avoid such escapades in the future.

Pulling a piece of dragonglass from his pocket, Rhaegar spoke with a mixture of truth and deception. "I had no intention of leaving. It's like something is calling me from the underground."

"Bullshit. That's just an excuse," Rhaenyra replied bluntly.

Viserys, his brow furrowed in confusion, asked, "You entered the dragonglass mining cave?"

"Yes. Guided by an unknown force, I was drawn to the cave where I discovered an ancient prophecy," Rhaegar affirmed with conviction.

Intrigued, Viserys leaned forward. "What prophecy?"

Rhaegar traced several crude drawings in the sand, his expression grave. "Long ago, someone carved the legend of the Song of Ice and Fire in the dragonglass mines."

Viserys, realizing the significance of the prophecy, was eager to investigate further. "Is it really the Song of Ice and Fire? And which mine?"

Viserys was moved by his eldest son's solemn words, recognizing the weight they carried.

As a dreamer, Rhaegar's insights held considerable sway over him, prompting Viserys to lend a receptive ear to his son's tales of adventure.

Standing at the entrance to the cave, Viserys instructed, "You and Rhaenyra return to rest. She's exhausted from searching all day."

Accompanied by Kingsguard Captain Harrold and two guards, Viserys ventured into the cave, his curiosity piqued.

Meanwhile, Rhaenyra, still stunned by the revelation, muttered, "The Song of Ice and Fire... isn't that just a legend?"

Unable to answer at the moment, Rhaegar simply nodded. "Let's discuss that later. For now, let's get back."

"Then let's go back." Rhaenyra murmured, averting her gaze but holding onto his hand tightly.

As they made their way back, Rhaenyra clung to his hand, her exhaustion palpable.

The hour had crept past midnight, and she had been searching tirelessly since lunch, her exhaustion palpable as fatigue and hunger gnawed relentlessly at her.

...

After dinner, in Rhaegar's bedroom, the siblings had freshened up and were now lying on the bed in their pajamas.

Rhaegar meticulously recounted the history of the Song of Ice and Fire, detailing his discoveries in the cave.

Rhaenyra's eyes widened in wonder as she whispered, "So there are indeed otherworldly beings and armies of the undead in our world?"

"Who can say? The Age of Heroes goes back thousands of years," Rhaegar replied thoughtfully, leaning into her embrace and enjoying her comforting warmth. "Our ancestors were once dragonlords in the ancient Valyrian era, but if you go back further, they were just humble shepherds."

"I believe the Song of Ice and Fire represents a catastrophe unique to the continent of Westeros," he continued, his eyes narrowing in thought.

Rhaenyra raised an eyebrow. "Similar to the calamity that befell Valyria?"

Rhaegar shook his head. "Not quite. The Long Night is an icy calamity brought by foreign spirits, and historical records suggest that it was the army of humanity that defeated it and saved the continent."

"In contrast, despite the immense power of the ancient Valyrian civilization with its multitude of dragons, they ultimately succumbed to a cataclysmic natural disaster," he explained. "It emphasizes the terrible nature of the Doom, which offers no opportunity for resistance."

Their conversation delved into the depths of history and prophecy, each revelation shedding new light on the mysteries of their world.

Chapter 56: Making Decisions

"You seem quite knowledgeable!" Rhaenyra remarked with a teasing grin, pinching Rhaegar's cheeks affectionately.

"Indeed, I've been exposed to countless books. My head is bursting with knowledge," Rhaegar replied, a hint of exasperation in his tone as he recalled his extensive but tedious education.

Humming softly, Rhaenyra leaned closer. "Since you're so smart, help me solve a dilemma."

"Go ahead," Rhaegar replied confidently.

"Father has proposed a marriage alliance for me with Laenor Velaryon, the Sea Snake's son," Rhaenyra revealed, her tone matter-of-fact, though she omitted the fact that Rhaegar himself was another potential suitor.

Rhaegar was taken aback, not expecting her question on the matter. Still a child, how could he understand the intricacies of politics?

After a moment's hesitation, Rhaegar ventured, "Do you have feelings for him?"

"No," Rhaenyra replied flatly.

Trying to process the situation, Rhaegar struggled with his young mind. "Is Father trying to make an alliance with the Sea Snake?"

Rhaenyra hugged him tighter, her tone light as she explained, "The Sea Snake is a renowned naval commander, and the Velaryon family's wealth and possession of three dragons make them a valuable asset worth pursuing."

"That sounds like a sound strategy, in line with Father's approach," Rhaegar observed, sensing his sister's reluctance and adopting a more serious tone.

"Tell me, should I accept the responsibility of being the heir?" Rhaenyra asked, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

"In your position, I would have agreed," Rhaegar admitted quietly, looking away.

Rhaenyra grunted lightly and pushed him away. "I knew you and Father were in this together."

"No... I am not," Rhaegar protested anxiously. "But as heir, you may have to face challenges until a better solution is found."

"Am I the problem?" Rhaenyra asked, her displeasure obvious.

"No, It's the Sea Snake!" Rhaegar exclaimed as the realization dawned on him.

Rhaenyra choked on his words and rubbed her forehead, remembering, "Ever since Aunt Rhaenys missed out on the throne, the Sea Snake has held a grudge. His reputation as a troublemaker is well known."

"We may not be able to eliminate the trouble, but we can neutralize the source," Rhaegar asserted firmly.

"Rhaegar, I must warn you against such dangerous ideas!" Rhaenyra interjected sternly, taken aback by his suggestion.

Shaking his head, Rhaegar clarified, "I am not suggesting that we eliminate the Sea Snake. With so many members of the Velaryon family, removing one sea snake, Corlys, wouldn't make much difference. There are many more sea lions and seals."

"He's driven by a lust for power, and we can use that to break down his defenses," Rhaegar explained with a serious look on his face.

Perplexed, Rhaenyra asked, "What would you do if you were in my position?"

"In the Velaryon family, nothing is as formidable as their sea fleet and the three dragons. The recent Battle of the Stepstones inflicted considerable damage on the Sea Snake's fleet, so they'll be vulnerable for some time," Rhaegar strategized.

"Our focus should be on their dragons," he continued, his brow furrowed in thought.

"Aunt Rhaenys, as a Targaryen princess, is unlikely to be a threat to us."

"Her two children, especially her eldest daughter Laena, who has successfully tamed Vhagar, are of concern. I've heard rumors that she is already betrothed and will soon marry into another house."

"And her brother Laenor, whose dragon Sea Smoke has proven its strength in battle, are formidable opponents."

Encouraged, Rhaenyra's eyes sparkled with anticipation. "What is your plan?"

"We need to establish clear rules to break up their trio of dragons," Rhaegar suggested. "One option is to create a Royal Dragon Rider Regiment to bring back and regulate dragon riders outside the Targaryen family name."

"But won't that be too obvious, considering that the Sea Snake's children are the only non-Targaryen dragon riders?" Rhaenyra asked skeptically.

"Convincing them to join voluntarily is unlikely. We may have to resort to coercion," Rhaegar admitted with a determined nod.

Rhaegar pondered for a moment, feeling a sense of helplessness in the absence of sufficient deterrents. "If only Father had a full-grown dragon, we wouldn't be in such a passive position."

"Don't be naive. Father's interest in dragons has waned considerably since Balerion's death," Rhaenyra reassured him, gently smoothing his furrowed brow. "You're already quite perceptive. You'll make a fine politician when you grow up."

Disappointed, Rhaegar said, "I wanted to help you."

"You will, when you're older," Rhaenyra assured him, her tired voice softening as she planted a kiss on his forehead. "It's not too late."

Suddenly, Rhaegar's expression became serious. "I do not wish to tame another young dragon. If I can't hatch one myself, I might as well try to tame an adult dragon."

Surprised by his sudden declaration, Rhaenyra asked, "What has caused this change of heart?"

"I may not be able to help you now, but harnessing the power of an adult dragon could be an invaluable aid," Rhaegar explained, rising from the bed to pull on his shoes. "I will find Lord Robert. He knows of Vermithor and Silverwing's nest."

"Do not be foolish. Haven't you learned enough from Dreamfyre's lessons?" Rhaenyra warned, grabbing his arm. "Adult dragons are dangerous. Vermithor in particular is known as the Bronze Fury. His temper is even fiercer than Dreamfyre's."

Rhaegar remained unperturbed, his confidence unshaken. "I almost tamed Dreamfyre once. I have the ability to tame a full-grown dragon."

Rhaenyra's gaze softened with a mixture of relief and helplessness as she squeezed his shoulder. "I will never allow you to risk your life for me, Rhaegar. Do you understand?"

Rhaegar's expression softened and he nodded in agreement. "I understand. I'll try to be a good brother."

Satisfied with his answer, Rhaenyra gently guided him back to bed, and Rhaegar fell silent, his mind consumed with thoughts of how to tame Vermithor or Silverwing.

As the lights dimmed, Rhaegar lay on his side, his resolve firm. "Father needs me, and so does Rhaenyra..."

With that, he drifted off to sleep, his determination to tame a full-grown dragon firmly planted in his mind.

...

The next day arrived and Rhaegar was awakened from his sleep by a knock at the door.

"Princess, the King has sent for you to discuss matters," Cole's voice echoed through the door.

"Understood, Ser Cole," Rhaenyra replied, quickly dressing before turning to Rhaegar. "No wandering off, understand?"

"I promise," Rhaegar assured her, patting his chest.

With a final admonition to Cole to keep an eye on her brother, Rhaenyra left the room.

Meanwhile, Rhaegar was fully dressed when the servant arrived with breakfast.

As he nibbled at a piece of bread, he glanced at Cole standing guard at the door and asked, "Would you like to join me for breakfast, Ser Cole?"

"Thank you, but there's no need to bother," Cole politely declined.

Accepting Cole's refusal, Rhaegar continued to eat alone, feeling a pang of regret that Erryk was not present and that the Kingsguard contingent consisted only of Captain Harrold and Cole. If Erryk had accompanied them, they could have shared a meal.

"Ser Cole, any news on the search for the young dragons?" Rhaegar inquired suddenly.

Chapter 57: Spying on Each Other

"Not yet. I hear Queen Alice has sent more men," Cole replied honestly.

"Is Lord Robert involved in the search as well?" Rhaegar asked casually.

"Yes, Lord Robert personally led a team and even searched the beach last night looking for you, Prince," Cole confirmed.

With a mischievous twinkle in his eye, Rhaegar stood up. "I've finished eating, so I'll take a stroll around the castle."

Regardless of Cole's thoughts on the matter, Rhaegar quickly made his way outside.

Cole hesitated for a moment, considering that his duty was only to keep an eye on the prince, and wandering around the castle grounds wasn't technically disobedience.

He followed Rhaegar, keeping a watchful eye.

"What do you think my sister and father will be discussing?" Rhaegar inquired as they walked.

"The king and princess are probably discussing important matters, as usual," Cole replied modestly.

"I wonder if my sister trusts you that much?" Rhaegar prodded.

Cole hesitated under further questioning and slowly replied, "Their recent conversations have revolved primarily around the princess's possible marriage. I am privy to little else."

"Are you familiar with Laenor?" Rhaegar pressed on.

"The eldest son of Lord Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake?" Cole confirmed.

"It seems you know him," Rhaegar remarked.

"When Lord Corlys served as Master of the Ships, the princess occasionally interacted with his children, and I had the opportunity to meet them," Cole explained.

Rhaegar turned to Cole with a serious expression on his face. "What is your honest opinion of Laenor?"

Cole kept his composure and gave an objective assessment. "Ser Laenor is handsome, amiable, and a skilled knight."

"Does he have any faults?" Rhaegar persisted.

Given Rhaenyra's penchant for handsome, gentle men, there seemed little doubt that if Laenor truly embodied Cole's glowing portrayal, it would be a match made in heaven.

Cole maintained a stoic silence, refraining from comment, and Rhaegar understood the unspoken sentiment.

Though Cole sensed something was wrong with Laenor, his sense of chivalry compelled him to refrain from disparaging others in their absence.

Rhaegar asked cautiously, "Perhaps he struggles with drinking and gambling?"

"Ser Laenor enjoys drinking but abstains from gambling," Cole affirmed with assurance.

Rhaegar then inquired, "Was he involved with prostitutes and had a tumultuous personal life?"

Cole hesitated before answering, "Ser Laenor never frequented brothels."

"And his private life?" Rhaegar pressed.

"At times I have heard whispers that Ser Laenor kept his distance from women, but there was no scandal to speak of in that regard," Cole replied cautiously.

Rhaegar frowned, "You don't refute his chaotic personal life, yet you claim he keeps his distance from women. That's contradictory."

Cole remained impassive and avoided eye contact.

Rhaegar, unable to get a clear answer, continued to ponder the implications.

Then a realization struck him.

"He prefers men?" Rhaegar's surprise was obvious as he looked at Cole.

Cole looked away, neither confirming nor denying.

Rhaegar was able to decipher Cole's reaction.

"Father plans to marry Rhaenyra to a man whose sexual orientation deviates from the norm. Isn't he concerned about the potential discord after the wedding?" Rhaegar pondered silently.

The Targaryens were no strangers to intrigue.

Each member possessed a carnivorous nature that did not shy away from manipulation or deceit.

"Absurd. Father's decision-making is perplexing," Rhaegar muttered to himself, his resolve growing as he considered his next move.

"Take me to Lord Robert's chambers. He should have a map of Dragonstone Island," Rhaegar instructed Cole.

Cole asked, "Forgive me if I'm out of line, but why do you need a map of Dragonstone Island?"

"To find the dragon! Get the map before we continue," Rhaegar insisted firmly.

"The search for the young dragons already has its own team. You don't need to get involved," Cole pointed out.

"Her Majesty the Queen has sent someone to look for them, but if they find the dragons, they will obviously be tamed by Aegon first, I can't afford to wait idly," Rhaegar argued.

Cole conceded the point and suggested, "If you want a map of Dragonstone Island, you don't have to go to Lord Robert's chambers. There's a pair hidden in the princess's room."

"Why didn't you mention this before?" Rhaegar's frustration was obvious.

"You didn't ask until now," Cole replied honestly.

Rhaegar slapped his forehead in exasperation before turning to head back.

Once in the princess's chambers, he found a massive map of Dragonstone Island tucked under the bed.

Sitting on the map, Rhaegar meticulously scanned its surface, searching for the location of the volcano. Vermithor and Silverwing resided in a lair beneath the volcano, so the search had to begin in its vicinity.

"It lies east of Dragonstone Island, in the Dragonmont," Rhaegar declared, his resolve firm.

In addition to dragons, Dragonstone Island was known for its unique geological formations.

The Dragonmount stretched from east to west and contained the active volcano.

With the general direction in mind, Rhaegar felt confident and determined to search for the dragon. He had already prepared his excuses.

"I will find the young dragons!" he announced.

Cole seemed ready to object, but Rhaegar raised his eyes and expressed his dissatisfaction. "The taming of dragons is a sacred duty given to every Targaryen. I am bound to join the search and do my part," Rhaegar declared solemnly.

"I cannot justify your absence to the Princess if I allow this excursion," Cole countered, shaking his head.

"Then you will accompany me and ensure our return before dinner," Rhaegar insisted, striding toward the door without giving Cole a chance to protest.

With a resigned sigh, Cole followed, feeling helpless.

The prince's status was extremely delicate; both the king and the princess held him in high esteem. All Cole could do was try to ensure Rhaegar's safety to the best of his ability.

The castle stood in the northern reaches of the island of Dragonstone.

Leaving the Red Keep, Rhaegar bypassed the stone-stepped promenade, choosing instead to head for the farmyard at the rear of the castle.

Dragonstone Island was home to a sizable population of civilians, many of them Targaryen bastards.

Having lived on Dragonstone for generations, they enjoyed relatively comfortable living conditions.

...

The conversation ended and Rhaenyra left her father's chambers, a faint hint of sadness lingering on her brow.

Viserys had spent half the night searching the Dragonglass Wall for the prophecy, returning at dawn, driven by an urgency that allowed no rest, and eager to share his findings with Rhaenyra.

He recounted the prophecy of the Song of Ice and Fire, detailing the ominous tale of the dagger and filling her with anxiety about the possible future regarding the Long Night and the Others.

She asked herself, if that dreaded day were to come, would she have the courage and ability to lead the Seven Kingdoms through the Long Night?

The answer she received was uncertain, leaning toward a resounding "no."

"It's fortunate the Long Night hasn't plagued us for millennia, and the prophesied prince named certainly won't be the type to cower in fear," Rhaenyra reassured herself, her thoughts turning to Alicent's son, Aegon, which rekindled her resolve and confidence.

On her way back, Rhaenyra heard Alicent's voice calling to her.

"Rhaenyra, may we speak?" Alicent's tone carried a hint of sincerity.

Rhaenyra turned her head, brushing off the invitation. "What could we possibly have to talk about? It's not time for afternoon tea yet."

"Please, I'm truly sorry for my earlier suspicions, and I would like to have a sincere conversation," Alicent implored, her expression sincere and hopeful. "Just like old times, when we could talk about anything."

Despite the friendly appearance, Rhaenyra could not shake the underlying feeling of contempt. Both sides were on the brink of confrontation, yet they still maintained the facade of sisterly affection.

"Very well, let's talk," Rhaenyra agreed reluctantly, curious about Alicent's intentions.

Alicent took Rhaenyra's hand and led her to the castle gardens, a smile playing on her lips.

As they strolled, Alicent broached the subject. "Why haven't I seen Rhaegar?"

"He's resting. He snuck out yesterday and I forbid him to leave," Rhaenyra replied truthfully.

"I heard about that. He stumbled upon an old prophecy, didn't he?"

"Yes, the Song of Ice and Fire."

"Oh, I thought that was just another bedtime story to frighten children," Alicent remarked casually.

"Indeed, a myth," Rhaenyra replied tersely, choosing not to elaborate.

The Song of Ice and Fire was a prophecy reserved for the heirs, not meant for Alicent to understand.

Chapter 58: The White Robe

As dusk fell, Rhaegar's footsteps came to a halt in the middle of a farmland, his gaze fixed on the rocky mountain range in the distance, devoid of vegetation.

"Your Grace, we should return to the castle," Cole, acting as his guard, advised.

Rhaegar's eyes lingered on the distant mountains as he muttered, "The island's active volcano is that way."

"Your Grace, the Princess will be displeased if we delay any longer," Cole sighed helplessly.

"I understand. We'll be back before nightfall," Rhaegar replied, his determination unwavering.

After traversing the small town on the island, Rhaegar gathered a wealth of information, including the approximate location of Vermithor and Silverwing's lair.

"Let's go, Ser Cole," Rhaegar called, taking one last look at a group of silver-haired children playing near the town's entrance before turning back.

Curious, Cole inquired, "Your Grace, do you long for company?"

"No, I was merely intrigued by the color of their hair," Rhaegar replied. The sight of the children's silver hair made him wonder if any of them might be his half-brothers.

After all, his father had been quite vigorous and robust in his youth.

...

In the evening, after the family had finished dinner and retired to their rooms, Rhaenyra and Rhaegar retired to their bedroom, as was their custom, and engaged in quiet conversation.

Rhaenyra broached the subject first. "Cole mentioned you were in town?"

"I was looking for a young dragon to tame," Rhaegar replied calmly.

"It would be advantageous for you to have one. A young dragon is better for a young Targaryen. Syrax and I have been companions since childhood," Rhaenyra remarked, understanding her sibling's desire for a dragon.

After a moment of thought, she continued, "Alicent came to see me and we had a long talk."

"What did she want?" Rhaegar inquired.

"I asked her the same question," Rhaenyra replied thoughtfully. "She mentioned my engagement and made some remarks that I dismissed."

"And?" Rhaegar prompted.

"I was in a sour mood, but Alicent was unfazed. She even brought up the whereabouts of the two young dragons," Rhaenyra recounted.

"So you find it..." Rhaegar began.

"Suspicious!" they both exclaimed at the same time, sharing a knowing smile.

Rhaegar chuckled, "Alicent is sneaky. For her to seek you out, she must have an ulterior motive."

"I agree. Alicent has always excelled at everything since childhood, and she harbors a deep-seated grudge against me. She would not extend kindness without a reason," Rhaenyra admitted with a wry smile.

Rhaegar inquired further, "Where did she say the two young dragons were?"

"They were sighted fighting on the east coast," Rhaenyra revealed.

"Given their proximity to an active volcano, it's plausible," Rhaegar analyzed the location.

Dragons thrived in high-temperature environments, making the caves beneath the volcano an ideal habitat for them.

Rhaenyra's grip tightened around a strand of hair, her determination evident in her eyes. "We must find the two young dragons before they do."

"They are probably unharmed. There's no need to rush," Rhaegar remarked, indifferent to the urgency.

"What do you know? There are only three suitable dragons, and a gifted young dragon will grow quickly in the future," Rhaenyra retorted, her frustration evident as she slapped his arm.

"I wouldn't know the dragons if I saw them. How am I supposed to tell the difference?" Rhaegar regretted.

Rhaenyra sat up and gave him a sharp look. "Choose Sunfyre! The dragon with the golden scales and pale pink wing membranes."

"Sunfyre hatched from the same clutch as your Syrax?" Rhaegar asked.

"That is correct. Sunfyre hatched a few years after Syrax and is a magnificent specimen. You must claim it," Rhaenyra pointed out, her concern evident.

"Two Targaryen siblings, each riding a golden dragon, quite a spectacle," Rhaegar chuckled at the thought.

"Rhaegar, I'm serious. Sunfyre is a perfect match for you. You wouldn't want Aegon to claim it, would you?" Rhaenyra's concern for her brother's choice of dragon was palpable. She had reserved Sunfyre for Rhaegar's taming if he failed to hatch his own eggs by his tenth nameday.

On this expedition, both Rhaegar and Aegon were tasked with taming their dragons, so Rhaenyra had arranged for Rhaegar to bond with Sunfyre first.

As fate would have it, the eruption of the volcano forced the two young dragons to leave their lair.

If Alicent had actually stumbled upon Sunfyre first and handed it over to Aegon for taming, Rhaenyra would feel sick.

Seeing his sister on the verge of losing her temper, Rhaegar stifled a smile and assured her earnestly, "I will make every effort to tame Sunfyre and prevent Aegon from claiming it."

"Hmph, that's more like it," Rhaenyra murmured softly, settling back down.

In her mind, it was only fitting that the two siblings should each tame a golden dragon; it was the decree of fate.

...

Early the next morning, Rhaegar rose from his bed and, with the help of the maid, donned a set of black dragon-themed robes.

Running his fingers over the dragonscale shoulder pads, Rhaegar sighed, "Must I really dress like this?"

Rhaenyra, lying lazily on the bed, replied breathlessly, "The material of the dragon costume is exceptionally durable and breathable, perfect for extended activities."

"I'll wear whatever you want as long as you agree to my participation in the dragon search," Rhaegar asserted. He had spent the previous night trying to persuade Rhaenyra to allow him to join the search party, and had finally received her approval.

Before he could leave, Rhaenyra called to him, "I do not feel well. Cole will accompany you, and another team of dragonkeepers will be dispatched to follow."

"Don't worry. No matter how petty Alicent may be, she wouldn't dare lay a hand on me," Rhaegar reassured her, patting his chest confidently as he set off with a sense of excitement.

...

After leaving the castle, Rhaegar made his way to the active volcano, his goal not being a young dragon, thus avoiding the need to go to the eastern coast.

"Your Grace, shouldn't we go to the east coast first?" Cole interjected, noting the change in their direction and furrowing his brow in concern.

Rhaegar responded with a rhetorical question, "The information about the East Coast came from Alicent. Do you think it's all true?"

Cole hesitated, at a loss for words. He had heard about the tense relationship between the Queen and the Prince during their journey and understood the animosity between the two parties.

"So, are you willing to accompany me?" Rhaegar pressed, his gaze shifting to the white robes draped over Cole's body.

Somewhat taken aback, Rhaegar remarked, "The white robes signify the honor of the Kingsguard, correct?"

"Yes, Your Grace," Cole affirmed, his hand caressing the fabric with a hint of pride in his eyes. "I came from humble beginnings, serving a certain lord as a teenager before earning battle honors in a conflict with the Dornish. It was through these trials that I earned the honor I hold today."

"You value your current position highly, don't you?" Rhaegar asked with a faint smile.

Cole nodded solemnly. "Indeed, Your Grace. These white robes bestow upon me unparalleled honor and dignity."

Rhaegar couldn't help but feel a strange sensation at Cole's white robes. The pristine hue evoked a sense of purity.

Remembering a dream he once had, Rhaegar wondered aloud, "If it were soiled, would it not lose its purity?"

Looking at the steadfast Cole, uncertainty flickered in Rhaegar's eyes.

"Cole, cherish it and keep it pure," Rhaegar instructed evenly.

"I will, Your Grace," Cole replied, though perplexed by the prince's emphasis on preserving the white robes. Still, he smiled and offered his assurance, his eyes bright with anticipation for the future.

Chapter 59: Gray Ghost

After a brief pause, the group moved on with hushed urgency.

Before the sun reached its zenith, they reached a canyon within the Dragonmont.

A Dragonkeeper accompanying the group stepped forward to offer some insight: "Active volcanoes pose the threat of magma eruptions. To avoid such catastrophes, adult dragons on the island often seek refuge deep underground in the surrounding area."

Pointing to the ravine ahead, he continued, "This ravine was once inhabited by Vermithor and Silverwing, though they eventually abandoned it for reasons unknown."

Rhaegar considered, "Shall we venture inside and take a look?"

"Let the Dragonkeepers do it. Your presence isn't necessary," Cole interjected, directing a few guards to investigate before jogging toward the canyon himself.

Rhaegar saw no reason to disagree. It was an abandoned cave and the chances of encountering a dragon were slim. It simply wasn't worth the risk.

After a period of waiting, the sent dragonkeepers did not return, but two guards approached from the rear.

Bowing respectfully to the group, one of the guards spoke hastily, "Lord Robert has located two young dragons. One is currently being held captive, and the other was discovered within Dragonmont."

"Dragonmont is on the western side of the active volcano - a vast expanse of dangerous peaks where Silverwing recently laid her eggs," the accompanying dragonkeeper explained.

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!" Rhaegar exclaimed, his excitement palpable at the news of Silverwing's presence in Dragonmont.

But Cole leaned in close and warned in a whisper, "Your Grace, Dragonmont is teeming with adult dragons. It's too risky."

"We will only scout Dragonmont. Lord Robert will send his men as well. It should be no problem," Rhaegar countered, determined to seize the opportunity to encounter adult dragons.

Designating one guard to stay behind and await the return of the missing Dragonkeepers, Rhaegar instructed another to lead the way.

The journey to Dragonmont was swift, the landscape barren and desolate, littered with blackened rocks. The air was oppressively hot, reminiscent of the sweltering heat of summer.

As they ventured deeper into the cave of Dragonmont, Cole voiced his concern, "When will Lord Robert arrive? Our current manpower may not be enough to subdue a young dragon if it resists fiercely."

"I'm not sure, Ser," the guard replied, somewhat taken aback by the question, before resuming his lead.

As they progressed, the cave grew hotter and a foul smell permeated the air.

Observing his surroundings, Rhaegar singled out the guard and asked, "Who instructed you to spread this information? Did you personally see Lord Robert?"

The guard paled, unease evident in his reply, "Lord Robert is on his way, Your Grace. Please, do not worry."

Sensing the guard's vulnerability, Rhaegar snapped, "Cole, restrain him!"

Without hesitation, Cole drew his longsword and pressed it against the guard's neck, while the other Dragonkeepers quickly pinned him down.

"Please, Your Grace, I speak the truth! The young dragon really does reside in Dragonmont, and Lord Robert will undoubtedly arrive soon," the guard pleaded desperately.

"Gag him," Rhaegar ordered curtly, his patience wearing thin with the guard's feeble attempts at persuasion. It was obvious that his words had little credibility.

Furrowing his brow, Rhaegar crouched down and played idly with two small stones. "This represents the East Coast, and this, the active volcano, Dragonmont..."

In the heart of Dragonmont, Rhaegar carefully considered the one piece of information he possessed, wary of its implications.

Alicent's revelation about the east coast and the claim of a dragon hatchling in Dragonmont left Rhaegar feeling disoriented.

"What could be the guard's intention in luring me to Dragonmont if the information about the East Coast is partially false?" Rhaegar murmured, his thoughts swirling.

"It is certainly not with good intentions that they intend to take me to a young dragon," he concluded, his mind racing.

Remembering the information about Silverwing nesting in Dragonmont, Rhaegar's thoughts raced forward.

"It is possible that their intention was for the recently nesting Silverwing to encounter me in Dragonmont and go into a rage," he speculated.

With that possibility in mind, Rhaegar took a deep breath, his desire to tame an adult dragon overriding any fear of deception.

"Silverwing is in Dragonmont. I must try to tame her," he decided, knowing the risks.

"Just a glimpse, and if it fails, we retreat," he decided, clinging to hope.

Approaching the guards, Rhaegar addressed them condescendingly, "Did the message say the young dragon was in Dragonmont?"

"Yes, Your Grace. That's what Lord Robert's message said. I swear." the guard defended in a panic.

"Who gave you this information?" Rhaegar inquired further.

"It was one of Lord Robert's Dragonkeepers," the guard replied.

"It seems someone has influenced this Dragonkeeper," Cole interjected, his intuition sharp.

Rhaegar nodded in agreement. "I understand. This is a trap."

"We should return, confront Lord Robert and expose the traitor," Cole suggested seriously.

"No, we've already ventured into Dragonmont. There's no reason to retreat now," Rhaegar countered, his resolve unwavering as he prepared to press on.

But before he could continue, Cole stepped in front of him, his expression solemn. "Your Grace, Dragonmont is extremely dangerous. I cannot allow you to put yourself at risk."

Before Rhaegar could answer, a painful roar echoed from deep within the cave.

"Protect the prince and fall back!" Cole quickly ordered, positioning himself in front of Rhaegar with his sword drawn.

As the roar continued, the Dragonkeepers formed a protective circle around Rhaegar, ready to defend against whatever threat lay ahead.

Rhaegar tugged at Cole's white robe, his surprise evident as he exclaimed, "Listen, that doesn't sound like a grown dragon."

Cole's eyes narrowed as he strained to listen.

Indeed, the roar lacked the depth of an adult dragon's, its tone slightly softer and thinner.

Rhaegar's smile widened. "That's what we're looking for. Let's go and investigate."

Cole hesitated for a moment before Rhaegar stepped forward.

Helpless, Cole gestured to the Dragonkeepers. "Take this traitor with you. If there's danger, feed him to the dragon first."

The gagged guard could only shake his head in panic as he was dragged away.

Navigating through the darkness of the cave, Rhaegar followed the sound of the young dragon's roar, his heart racing with anticipation.

As the cave widened, a massive chamber came into view, and before him stood a restless beast - the young dragon.

Approaching, Rhaegar observed the dragon's features: light gray scales covering its body, translucent white wing membranes, and gray-blue vertical pupils filled with fear.

"This is Grey Ghost, Your Grace," the dragon keeper accompanying him identified the gray dragon.

Rhaegar remained silent, taking in the scene before him.

Gray Ghost, though large, was lying on the ground, roaring in distress.

"He's hurt," Rhaegar remarked softly, noting the wounds that marred Gray Ghost's body, blood seeping from the light gray scales.

One of the worst wounds was on its wing, nearly torn from its ribs and dragging helplessly on the ground, making flight impossible.

"It's badly injured," Rhaegar repeated, remembering Alicent's earlier comment about a skirmish between two young dragons on the east coast.

It seemed her words were true - Gray Ghost's injuries were likely inflicted by Sunfyre.

Chapter 60: Cannibal

When a Dragonkeeper whispered, "Prince, shall we capture Gray Ghost?" Cole's anger flared, "Shut up! A badly injured young dragon will attack at any moment. Do you want to be reduced to ashes?" The Dragonkeeper, angry but silenced, retreated to watch over the messenger guards.

Cole urged Rhaegar to return immediately and seek Lord Robert's help in rescuing the dragon, wary of the danger posed by the dim cave and the excited young dragon.

But Rhaegar shook his head and muttered, "This is a trap. There shouldn't be just one badly injured Grey Ghost."

"Exactly. That's all the more reason to evacuate quickly," Cole insisted, his impatience evident as he tried to keep his voice down.

Rumbling -

Suddenly, a rumble echoed from above the cave, like the howl of the wind before a storm.

As the group looked up, they saw a behemoth whose wings seemed to cover the sky, hovering over Dragonmont.

"Seven hells!" Cole's eyes widened in shock, unable to tear his gaze from the awe-inspiring sight.

With a resounding bang, the behemoth circled before gliding to the ground, its colossal feet landing on the cliffs above the cave. Its sharp claws sliced through the rock, securing its position atop the mountain.

"Roar!!" The behemoth craned its neck, wings fully outstretched, and let out a deafening roar that echoed through the cave.

Through the layers of obstruction, Rhaegar caught a glimpse of the behemoth's entirety-black as charcoal scales, massive enough to rival a small mountain, and a pair of green pupils that seemed to pierce his very soul.

Every detail left Rhaegar stunned, his young mind overwhelmed by the sheer size of the creature before him.

This giant dragon surpassed anything he had ever encountered before, dwarfing even Caraxes, whom he had seen only a few times, and Dreamfyre, who was nearly a century old.

"Quickly! Quick, get the prince to retreat!" Cole sprang back into action, shoving a few Dragonkeepers aside and shielding Rhaegar behind him.

"Cannibal... Cannibal..." A Dragonkeeper leaned forward, his voice shaking as he murmured the name of the giant black dragon.

"Wake up and hurry!" Cole slapped him hard, urgency etched into every movement.

The Dragonkeeper, his whole body shaking with fear, managed to stammer out, "This is the Cannibal, the largest wild dragon on the island."

Cole didn't fully understand the meaning of the name "Cannibal", but he knew one thing for sure - if they didn't flee now, they would become dragon fodder later.

"Roar..." The Cannibal let out a low, ominous roar, his sinuous neck bending downward as he sniffed the air, searching for something.

"Prince, I'll get you out of here!" Cole declared, sword in hand as he reached for Rhaegar's.

But Rhaegar shook off his grasp, standing transfixed, his gaze fixed on the massive black dragon above.

Confusion flickered in Cole's eyes as he watched Rhaegar tremble, his pupils dilating, his breathing ragged.

"Prince, what's wrong?!" Cole waved his hand in front of Rhaegar's eyes, but received no response.

With a voice filled with excitement and wonder, Rhaegar murmured, "Cannibal... what a magnificent dragon... I have seen it before..."

At that moment, Rhaegar seemed to be transported to another world, his focus entirely on the awe-inspiring dragon before him.

Unbeknownst to Cole, the Cannibal had appeared in Rhaegar's dreams three times before, the last time on the night before their arrival on the island, revealing some of its physical features.

What Rhaegar had thought were only dreams were now materializing before him in reality, causing a wave of indescribable excitement within him.

Cole shook his body, trying to shake him out of his disoriented state.

Meanwhile, the Cannibal stopped sniffing, and the dragon's head stretched out, plunging into the depths of the cave below.

It had chosen its prey for the journey.

A delicious meal.

The cannibal's wings flapped furiously, and the dragon's maw, large enough to swallow several warhorses, parted, releasing a searing blast of air.

Boom!

In the next instant, ethereal green dragon flames, reflecting the color of the dragon's pupils, erupted and cascaded into the cavern like a deluge.

Crackling...

Waves of heat surged forth, scorching the air and causing explosions as the surrounding stone walls liquefied like wax under the dragon's fiery onslaught, molten streams dripping down like sticky tendrils.

"Run... Run!"

As scorching magma splattered to the ground and burst into fiery red blooms, a Dragonkeeper cried out in shock, fear causing her to turn and flee.

Swiss...

Cole's movements were swift, his longsword cleanly severing its head.

He shouted angrily, "Those who abandon battle will die!"

The remaining Dragonkeepers were shaken and frightened, urging, "Ser Cole, the Cannibal is the most dangerous of the wild dragons, to him we are mere food. Let us flee!"

"I understand the urgency to flee, but first ensure the Prince's safety."

Cole rebuked, then turned to Rhaegar and whispered, "Forgive me, Prince, but I must ensure your safety."

With that, he moved to lift Rhaegar onto his shoulders.

Rhaegar quickly dodged Cole's outstretched arm, his expression more determined than ever. "You must go. The Seven Gods have led me here to arrange a meeting with it!"

"This is no time to cling to faith. The Cannibal is clearly here to prey on young dragons. We cannot save it."

Cole believed that Rhaegar's intentions were noble, that he was trying to help the badly injured Gray Ghost.

"No! It is not Gray Ghost that I want!"

Rhaegar shook his head, a smile on his lips as he quickly maneuvered past Cole's blocking stance.

Under Cole's incredulous gaze, Rhaegar dashed into the open expanse of the cave, braving the lava that dripped like rain.

Lifting his head high, Rhaegar clasped his hands over his mouth and shouted with all his might in High Valyrian, "Cannibal, look at me!"

His voice, tender yet commanding, echoed through the cave and reached the ears of the black dragon.

The Cannibal paused its fiery charge, its head swiveling from side to side, assessing whether the cave could accommodate its massive form.

Satisfied that there were no obstacles, the Cannibal folded its wings, retracted its sharp claws from the jagged rocks, and began a slow descent into the cavern's depths.

Meanwhile, the Gray Ghost trembled on the ground, casting fearful glances at the approaching predator and emitting a menacing growl at the top of its lungs.

Unbeknownst to the Gray Ghost, Rhaegar approached with measured steps.

Pressing his hands against the Gray Ghost's tail, Rhaegar shouted in High Valyrian, "Get up and move!"

Only after repeating his command several times did the Gray Ghost shake off its fear and struggle to crawl away, its vertical pupils staring at him in disbelief.

"Hide deeper in the cave!" Rhaegar continued in High Valyrian.

"Roar!"

The Gray Ghost whined nervously, its head scanning the area for a suitable hiding place.

Rhaegar scanned as well and spotted a climbable slope.

Waving to the Gray Ghost, he quickly made his way up the slope, navigating past the lava that was strewn about.

Meanwhile, the Cannibal had already penetrated deep into the cave, his razor-sharp claws gripping the rock as he descended step by step.

As if taunting his prey.

Cole remained in the cave, stunned to witness Rhaegar's bold move and his communication with the young dragon.

He took a tentative step forward.

Splat!

A massive chunk of lava fell from above, crashing down in front of him.

As the crimson lava seared his vision, the heat singed Cole's forehead, sending a searing sensation through him.

Instinctively, his survival reflexes kicked in.

Cole's legs buckled, throwing him backward, narrowly missing the eruption of lava as it hit the ground.

Collapsing to the ground, he was quickly helped up by the Dragonkeepers behind him.

"Ser, we must leave at once!"

"Yes, the Prince is risking his life. Our priority is to retreat and seek reinforcements."

"..."

Several Dragonkeepers exchanged urgent words, determined to flee.

Cole swung his sword fiercely, his eyes glowing with determination as he roared, "If you fear death, you cannot leave. If anything happens to the Prince, none of us will survive!"