

G.O Thrones 91

Chapter 91: A New Blessing

Meanwhile, on Dragonstone Island...

Beneath the night sky, a figure stealthily slipped out of the castle, navigating the shadows with practiced ease.

With caution in every step, it made its way to the shoreline.

Compared to a few days ago, the scenery changed, several inverted spears stuck on the shallow beach where the tide was rising, forming an atmosphere.

Through the dim moonlight, it was possible to vaguely make out several heads stuck on spears.

Heads of dragonkeepers, servants and guards.....

The figure moved swiftly, making a beeline for a secluded cove where a small boat awaited.

As Rhaenyra approached, Robert emerged from the shadows, his concern evident. "Princess, the sea vessel is prepared, but are you sure about this?"

"I know what I must do, Lord Robert," Rhaenyra replied, her weariness evident beneath the moon's gentle glow.

Stepping onto the boat, her resolve unwavering, she spoke with determination, "Rhaegar has been missing for too long, and my father has yet to uncover any leads. I must return to King's Landing to search for my dragon."

"Princess, Prince Rhaegar has his dragon by his side. Perhaps the situation isn't as dire as it seems," Robert attempted to reason.

But Rhaenyra shook her head, a heavy sigh escaping her lips. "I have waited long enough."

With that, she gestured to the sailors to set the small boat adrift, guiding it towards the awaiting vessel anchored in the vast expanse of the sea.

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Meanwhile, within the castle's confines...

Viserys lay upon his bed, his slumber disrupted by a restless stirring.

A flicker of emotion crossed his serene features, his brow knitting with unease.

In his dreams, he had many visions.

A fire erupted from the heart of King's Landing, spreading it across the expanse of the Seven Kingdoms.

Amidst the fire, a figure emerged—a young man astride a black dragon, his hair shimmering like molten silver.

Brandishing a sword and spear with effortless grace, he cut through hordes of enemies.

None could stand against him, succumbing either to dragonfire or his weapon.

Amidst the chaos, a crown of darkness adorned his brow—a symbol of sovereignty forged in blood and flame, Viserys recognized that it was the crown Aegon the Conqueror had worn at his coronation.

As the flames danced higher, the features of the youth became clearer, drawing Viserys' gaze with an insatiable curiosity.

With bated breath, he strained to discern the face that emerged from the conflagration.

And then, in a moment of revelation, recognition dawned upon him.

"Rhaegar!..."

The name escaped his lips in a startled murmur, a testament to the profound impact of the vision that had seized his slumbering mind.

Plop...

Startled awake by the echoes of his cries, Viserys bolted upright in bed, his heart racing by his dream.

Gasping for air, beads of cold sweat dotted his brow.

"Rhaegar... It must be Rhaegar!" he muttered breathlessly.

For a fleeting moment, he hesitated, grappling with the surreal remnants of his dream before the truth solidified in his consciousness.

The visage of the young man, atop the back of a black dragon, was unmistakable—his firstborn, Rhaegar Targaryen.

In that instant of clarity, Viserys remembered.

The last remaining black dragon in all the lands—Cannibal—is under his son's command.

As his thoughts swirled, Viserys reached for the glass and bottle by his bedside, seeking solace in the familiar embrace of wine.

A soft knock interrupted, it was Harrold's voice, tinged with concern.

"Your Majesty, are you awake?"

Brushing the remnants of sweat from his brow, Viserys replied wearily, "Yes, just a dream."

With a creak, the door yielded to Harrold's gentle push, allowing the captain of the Kingsguard to enter.

"Your Majesty, your sleep has been very bad lately," Harrold said, his brow furrowing with worry.

Viserys offered a weary smile, his voice tinged with a newfound sense of purpose. "It's of no consequence. These dreams... they're different."

Savoring a sip of wine, a spark ignited within Viserys' tired eyes, his weariness momentarily eclipsed by excitement. "This dream, it's the one I've long sought. And now, it's finally found me."

Harrold's brow furrowed in confusion as he listened to Viserys' words.

"Prepare a grand feast; I have a feeling my son is returning," Viserys declared, his voice tinged with an unwavering conviction.

"Your Grace, Prince Rhaegar's whereabouts are still unknown. It may not be prudent to celebrate prematurely," Harrold interjected, his tone laced with bitter persuasion.

Viserys' expression shifted dramatically, his features taking on a solemn gravity. "No! My son has returned. He is the prince of prophecy, born amidst blood and fire."

"Your Grace..." Harrold faltered, at a loss for words.

To him, it seemed as though the king's longing had clouded his judgment, leaving him somewhat bewildered.

Viserys chose not to dwell on Harrold's skepticism, instead shifting his focus to more pressing matters. "How did the investigation fare?"

"The dragon guards and dragonkeepers on the island have been questioned, and several hidden passageways within the castle have been discovered. There are signs of recent activity within," Harrold reported, his expression hesitant.

"One of these passages leads to the Queen's chambers," he added, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

"Alicent?" Viserys' features registered a mixture of shock and contemplation. "You suspect the Queen's involvement in Rhaegar's disappearance?"

"This possibility cannot be discounted, Your Majesty. However, concrete evidence is needed before any conclusions can be drawn," Harrold analyzed objectively.

Viserys closed his eyes briefly, his countenance betraying no discernible emotion as he contemplated the gravity of the situation.

After a moment of silence, he reopened his eyes, resolve etched into his features. "Initiate covert surveillance on Alicent's activities. Report any findings to me immediately."

"Yes, Your Grace," Harrold affirmed, nodding in acknowledgment of the king's orders.

Just as Viserys was preparing to depart, a sharp knock echoed from the door, and Robert's voice pierced through the silence.

"Your Majesty, the princess has clandestinely departed the castle and returned to King's Landing by boat," Robert informed, his tone tinged with urgency.

"Seven Hells! Who dares to defy my orders!" Viserys erupted in fury, his voice reverberating through the room as he vented his frustration. "Summon the Maesters at once. Order them to dispatch a message to have Rhaenyra placed under house arrest the moment she sets foot in King's Landing!"

"As you command, Your Grace," Robert responded promptly, his demeanor reflecting a mixture of apprehension and deference.

With a sense of dismay lingering in the air, Robert hurriedly made his exit, feeling torn between his duties to the king and his loyalty to the princess.

In the end, he found himself caught in the crossfire.

...

As the first light of dawn filtered through the window, Rhaegar stirred in his bed, roused by the familiar beep of his system.

"Exploration complete. Retrieve the lost treasures," the notification flashed across his screen.

Blinking away the remnants of sleep, Rhaegar's gaze fell upon the red-painted mask nestled beside him.

"The exploration complete..." he murmured, his mind slowly clearing as he reached for the mask.

[Cursed Mask of the Shadow]

Exploration Progress: 100%

As he absorbed the information displayed before him, Rhaegar felt a surge of satisfaction. Last night's battle replayed in his mind, and he broke the curse.

Beside the red mask lay a faint purple glow, catching Rhaegar's attention. With a smile, he extended his hand, poking at the halo.

"Relic retrieval successful. Initiating detection..." the system announced.

"Detection complete. Epic relic identified: Blessing of the Lord of Light."

With a metallic clink, a black iron token adorned with a crimson heart fell into Rhaegar's palm.

Studying the token intently pondering. "A blessing? Like the White Hart's Blessing?" he mused, reading the system text about the token.

"The power of the gods lies dormant within. Do not underestimate it, for it shall unveil miracles in your time of need," he read aloud.

Rhaegar carefully stowed away the token, recognizing that its potential. Perhaps, in the future, an opportunity would arise to unlock its hidden powers.

"Let's get up..." Rhaegar's voice echoed through his chambers as he roused himself from slumber and donned his attire.

The shadow was killed and his adventure in the Peninsula had ended, now it's time to go back to Dragonstone Island and join his family again.

Chapter 92: Celtigar

Dyre Den Castle

Within its walls, the formidable figure of Cannibal rested, his massive form sprawled on the ground, his breath sending waves of heat.

Approaching the dragon, Rhaegar's gaze met its closed pupils and he reached out to stroke the creature's muzzle.

Doubtfully, he addressed the dragon, his words fraught with uncertainty, "Cannibal, are you feeling depressed today?"

In response, a low roar escaped the dragon's throat, its massive frame shifting slightly as it conveyed its feelings.

"It feels its own strength," Rhaegar interpreted, a wry smile gracing his lips. "It's disappointed it didn't get a chance to fully unleash it last night."

Chuckling softly, Rhaegar reassured the dragon, "Fear not, my friend. When we return to Dragonstone Island, we can find those two dragons and take our frustration out on them."

Their bond strengthened with each passing day, and Rhaegar had no doubt that with Cannibal at his side, they would emerge victorious against Vermithor and the wounded Silverwing.

As their conversation continued, a group of figures approached, their presence drawing Rhaegar's attention.

Turning to face them, he recognized Sam, Bart, and Skylar, their expressions a mixture of caution and reverence for the black dragon beside him.

As they approached, they knelt before him.

Rhaegar was taken aback by their display. "What are you doing?" he asked, his voice tinged with surprise.

Sam spoke first, his words filled with loyalty. "Prince, you led us to defeat the curse. We hope you will continue to lead us in the future."

Bart echoed his sentiments, his tone repentant. "My brother has made serious mistakes. While I dare not hope for the King's forgiveness, I ask only that you accept the loyal service of House Brune and allow us to atone for our sins by your side."

As Rhaegar's gaze settled on Skylar, he couldn't help but admire her bravery in the battle the night before.

After a moment of reflection, Rhaegar replied softly, "I promised Falcon that I would take care of his tribe. I will bring what remains of the Falcon tribe with me. But what do you want?"

Skylar raised her head, determination in her eyes as she spoke boldly, "Prince, you have worked tirelessly for the Peninsula. You should not abandon the fruits of your labor and leave."

"The fruits of my labor?" Rhaegar asked, confused by her words.

Skylar calmly explained, "You broke the curse and saved the people of the Peninsula. You were to gather them all and accept their allegiance."

"And then?" Rhaegar inquired further.

"You can unite the nobles and wildlings of the peninsula and become the first hero to unite the region in nearly a hundred years. You will return to your family with honor," Skylar continued.

Rhaegar hesitated, considering her words carefully. Before he could answer, Sam offered his advice. "Prince, the people of the peninsula are eagerly awaiting your presence. You should meet with them."

With a slight frown, Rhaegar nodded in agreement and let them lead him to the city walls.

Outside the wall, a diverse gathering had gathered: House Brune, House Crabb, the wildling army, and numerous small noble families they had encountered before.

As Rhaegar stepped onto the city wall, the entire assembly fell to their knees, heads bowed in reverence. Despite the silence, the intensity of their gazes was deafening.

Watching this display, Rhaegar was taken aback. He turned to Sam and the others. "Do they swear allegiance to me?" he asked.

"Yes, hero of the peninsula, prince of Targaryen," Sam and the others replied in unison, affirming their loyalty with bowed heads and kneeling forms.

Rhaegar sighed softly, a sense of resignation coloring his words. "Let them rise. I am about to leave."

"Prince, I implore you to accept the loyalty of the nobles," one of them urged.

"Prince, the crab claws you appointed to fight for you are still following your orders," another added.

The air was thick with anticipation as Rhaegar pondered their pleas. After a long silence, he relented. "Alright. Raise your heads, I accept your allegiance."

Reflecting on the previous night's victory, Rhaegar couldn't help but feel a sense of fulfillment. The admiration and respect in the eyes of these people was unfamiliar, yet gratifying.

Surveying the scene before him, Rhaegar realized that this hospitality was hard to resist.

Upon hearing the prince's acceptance, the gathering erupted in joyous celebration.

Under Bart's coordination, the nobles of the peninsula gathered in the waiting room of Dyre Den, where they knelt before Rhaegar and pledged their allegiance.

They won the wager.

Skylar, accompanied by Trangle, the representative of the Crab Claws, sought an audience with Rhaegar. Trangle, tall and bear-like, spoke in a mumbled tone, "Prince, some of the free folk wish to return to the wilderness, while a thousand wish to go with you.

Rhaegar nodded in acknowledgement and issued a command, "Calculate the total number of free men, including the remnants of the Hawk tribe and their families.

Despite his reservations about their naivety, he acknowledged their loyalty and sacrifice.

"About two thousand, mostly women and children," Skylar reported.

Rhaegar then considered the logistics of accommodating such a group. "Transporting two thousand will require a large ship."

Skylar interjected confidently, "The nobles of the peninsula may lack large ships, but I know where we can find one."

"Tell me more," Rhaegar demanded.

Skylar hesitated for a moment before speaking, her voice muffled, "The Celtigar House of Claw Isle. They've been loyal to the Targaryen dynasty for generations and have a formidable fleet."

"Are you related to the Celtigars?" Rhaegar inquired, intrigued by her reluctance.

Skylar bowed her head even lower, her teeth clenched in frustration. "Yes, Bartimos Celtigar. He's my father, but I'm just a bastard, born to a fisherman's daughter."

"Then why did you end up here at Crackclaw Point?" Rhaegar inquired quietly.

There was resentment in Skylar's answer. "Bartimos despises bastards, regardless of our circumstances. I was born to a different woman than Tormund, and fate led us to work together on a ship."

"After a shipwreck, Tormund and I were washed ashore at Crackclaw Point, where we were taken in by Uncle Falcon."

Skylar's hands clenched, her voice filled with resentment at their circumstances. "It's unfair."

Rhaegar sighed, understanding her plight. "I'll go to Claw Isle and borrow a boat. Meanwhile, you organize the free folk to leave with us."

Despite the lingering prejudice they faced, Rhaegar chose not to dwell on their past; he had no desire to reopen old wounds or add to their pain.

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Rhaegar led Cannibal to Claw Isle, which lay east of Crackclaw Point and near the Whispers. With Cannibal's impressive speed, they crossed the mid-sea in a matter of minutes and quickly reached the island.

Claw Isle, under the leadership of House Celtigar, is a large island in the sea.

Much like House Velaryon, House Celtigar traces its lineage back to the days of Old Valyria and accompanied the Targaryens on their journey to Westeros.

Members of House Celtigar boast Valyrian ancestry and are characterized by their distinctive silver hair and piercing purple eyes.

Known for their unwavering loyalty, the Celtigars have served the Targaryens faithfully for generations to the present day.

As they approached Claw Isle, Rhaegar surveyed the sprawling city below Cannibal Mountain. A towering castle graced the rolling hills.

"It's here," Rhaegar murmured, giving Cannibal a reassuring pat before signaling him to land outside the castle walls.

"Roar..." Cannibal circled the castle, releasing a burst of dragon flame as if to announce the arrival of the strongest wild dragon.

Cannibal landed, creating a gust of wind. The dragon's imposing figure loomed over the castle walls, dwarfing the soldiers and horses inside.

The sudden appearance of the dragon sent shockwaves through Claw Isle. Though the guards on the city walls trembled with fear, they held their ground and refused to flee.

Mounted on Cannibal, Rhaegar stood almost eye to eye with the guards. In a calm tone he addressed them, "Go and summon your lord. Tell him the Targaryen prince has arrived."

Chapter 93: An Unexpected Meeting With Lyonel

"Yes, just a moment..." The captain of the guards, armored, cast fearful glances at the imposing Cannibal before hastening down the wall.

The dragon's arrival had undoubtedly drawn attention, evident from the open gates of the castle. A procession emerged, arranged in two rows, with attendants bowing their heads in deference to the dragon's presence.

Among them walked several nobles, adorned in fine attire, led by an elderly man with a dignified countenance. His silver hair, a hallmark of Valyrian descent, thinned at the crown, while his keen blue eyes betrayed a shrewdness.

The group moved with purpose, yet maintained their composure until they reached the gate, pausing to regard the prince astride the dragon's back.

"Cannibal, lower me," Rhaegar requested softly.

"Roar..." The dragon emitted a low growl, lowering its body to allow its rider to dismount.

Maintaining a distance of one hundred meters, both parties observed each other. The assembled group dared not approach the dragon, instead standing before the city gate to pay their respects.

Rhaegar approached slowly, his gaze scanning the line of individuals until it settled on a familiar face.

"The Seven Gods have blessed me, allowing me to meet the prince here. How wonderful," exclaimed a rounded figure, quickly advancing from across the room with an agitated expression.

Before Rhaegar could utter a word, a smile spread across his face as he greeted, "Lord Lyonel, why are you here?"

The figure revealed itself to be none other than Lyonel Strong, the former Hand of the King. Despite his quick steps, Lyonel's stomach jiggled slightly, unable to contain his joy. "Prince, your well-being brings me great relief. I've been scouring the Narrow Sea in search of your whereabouts."

Ever since Rhaegar's dragon vanished, Lyonel had been dispatched to search tirelessly. Recently, he had visited Driftmark, home to the Velaryon family, before unexpectedly encountering Rhaegar during a visit to the Celtigar family on Claw Isle.

Upon their meeting, Lyonel bent down laboriously, his hands inspecting Rhaegar as if checking for injuries.

With a soft laugh, Rhaegar reassured him, "I'm fine. My dragon landed in Crackclaw Point to recover from its injuries, and I've only just returned a few days ago."

His words were not deceitful; Cannibal had indeed suffered severe injuries and had returned recently. However, the journey had been fraught with twists and turns, though he had been away from Dragonstone Island for less than ten days in total.

Relieved to find the prince unharmed, Lyonel expressed, "Prince, your absence without any news had the king and the princess greatly concerned for your safety."

"I apologize for causing them worry. I encountered a few obstacles, but I resolved them as quickly as I could," Rhaegar replied, moved by his father and sister's concerns.

"It's a relief that you're safe," Lyonel remarked, straightening up. He then led Rhaegar towards the city gates, introducing him to Lord Bartimos Celtigar, the patriarch of the Celtigar family and the ruler of Claw Isle.

Rhaegar nodded respectfully to Lord Bartimos, acknowledging his father's loyal bannerman. "Greetings, Lord Bartimos."

Lord Bartimos reciprocated with a courteous smile, gesturing towards the castle entrance. "It is an honor to host you on Claw Isle, Prince. Please, allow us to extend our hospitality."

Rhaegar accepted graciously, saying, "The honor is mine, Lord Bartimos."

With Lyonel by his side, Rhaegar proceeded into the castle.

As a renowned maritime family, the Celtigar lineage paralleled the Velaryons, initially amassing wealth through taxes levied on ships. With a formidable fleet at their disposal, they ventured into maritime trade, rapidly accumulating riches within a few generations.

Upon entering the castle, Rhaegar was immediately struck by the opulence that permeated the halls. Luxurious mil carpets lined the floors, windows boasted Valentine glass, and walls shimmered with gold and silver embellishments. Surveying the room, Rhaegar couldn't help but marvel at the wealth on display.

"Rich as hell," he mused inwardly.

Bartimos, ever eager to maintain appearances, observed Rhaegar's admiration with a self-satisfied smile. "Prince, forgive the modesty of our welcome. While we couldn't throw a grand reception, the kitchen has prepared a fitting banquet to honor Lord Lyonel."

Though Bartimos feigned regret, Rhaegar was unfazed. His visit was not merely social; he had come with purpose.

As the servants busied themselves with banquet preparations, Bartimos engaged Rhaegar and Lyonel in conversation. Lyonel recounted the events on Dragonstone Island during Rhaegar's absence—raids, executions, and Rhaenyra's fervent appeals to search for her brother. In turn, Rhaegar shared his own adventures in the Peninsula, leaving his hosts astonished by the tales of curses and magic.

Bartimos, skeptical, questioned, "Prince, do you truly believe that magic has invaded Crackclaw Point?"

Without hesitation, Rhaegar affirmed, "Certainly."

Lyonel, more diplomatic, interjected, "Prince, magic has long been deemed a legend by most. Its resurgence is quite unexpected."

Rhaegar posed a thought-provoking query, "If dragons were to vanish, would the world dismiss them as mere legend?"

The room fell silent as both Bartimos and Lyonel grappled with the implications of Rhaegar's words, uncertain of how to respond.

Bartimos chuckled, his hand resting on his palm. "Indeed, Prince Rhaegar speaks truth. In my youth, I traversed the Narrow Sea aboard ships, encountering many adventures."

Seated comfortably on a plush cushion, Rhaegar broached his request earnestly. "My lord, I've come to Claw Isle seeking to borrow a boat to transport the free people who have pledged allegiance to me. I implore your generous assistance."

Bartimos hesitated, his gaze shifting to Lyonel, who remained silent. It was clear that such a seemingly trivial request as borrowing a ship for transportation wasn't as straightforward when it involved a group of Peninsula savages.

Aware of the unspoken concerns, Rhaegar turned to Lyonel, suggesting, "If you doubt my words, accompany me to Crackclaw Point to witness the truth firsthand. The nobles there have already sworn their loyalty to me."

At Rhaegar's proposition, the room fell into a palpable silence. Lyonel's eyes gleamed with an enigmatic intensity as if peering into the depths of Rhaegar's intentions.

Meanwhile, Bartimos contemplated, recalling his interactions with the Peninsula nobles. They were known for their barbaric and confrontational nature, often engaging in skirmishes and petty feuds.

Given their formidable military prowess and the presence of Rhaegar's wildling followers, Bartimos realized the potential strategic advantage of securing their allegiance. After all, even cannon fodder could tip the scales in a conflict.

Chapter 94: Reunion at Sea

Without waiting for Lyonel to interject, Bartimos solemnly declared, "Prince, the Celtigar family has always been loyal to the royal family, and we shall honor your request."

Borrowing a ship may have seemed a trifling matter, but securing the favor of the king's eldest son held far greater significance.

Claw Isle lay just a few hours' sail from Dragonstone, a journey even quicker if undertaken by a mighty dragon. Given the circumstances, it made sense to acquiesce rather than decline, so it was necessary that the prince's return to island to make preparations.

While Rhaegar was puzzled over the subtle dynamics, he sensed that Bartimos harbored certain expectations of him. Nevertheless, he remained indifferent to it.

Tightening his smile, Rhaegar graciously replied, "Your assistance is greatly appreciated, my lord."

Bartimos's smile remained as he affirmed, "I shall ensure that the ships are prepared promptly for the journey to Crackclaw Point."

Only then did Lyonel emerge from his reverie. Casting a glance at Bartimos, he subtly lowered his head, opting to maintain a modest profile.

With his well-honed political acumen, Lyonel discerned that the prince's return to Dragonstone Island would likely provoke significant upheaval. Given the circumstances, it was necessary to exercise caution and refrain from drawing attention to himself.

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Two days later, three majestic sailing ships set sail from Crackclaw Point, their decks crowded with ragged but determined souls bound for Dragonstone.

A resounding dragon's roar pierced the air, and massive wings eclipsed the ships it soared into the skies.

Standing atop the ship's prow, Rhaegar looked at the endless expanse of sea.

Lyonel approached from behind, his voice a whisper amidst the wind, "Prince, word arrived last night by raven: the princess has returned to King's Landing in secret, escorted to the Red Keep by the Kingsguard for safety."

"Is she attempting to utilize the dragons to locate me?" Rhaegar pondered aloud, his thoughts drifting to Syrax's confinement within the dragon's pit.

"Yes, the princess has been fraught with worry since the dragon incident that fateful night," Lyonel murmured empathetically.

"Once I've met with my father, I shall swiftly journey to King's Landing to reunite with Rhaenyra."

Rhaegar's lips curved into a knowing smile, acknowledging the myriad advantages of dragon ownership, particularly in matters of expediency.

Suddenly, a thunderous dragon's roar rent the air, echoing from above. Rhaegar raised his gaze skyward to behold the Cannibal's imposing form, its gaze fixed intently on the horizon, as if issuing a warning.

In response, a second, less formidable roar reverberated through the air, prompting the occupants of the ships—both freemen and sailors—to emerge from their cabins, gazing upward in awe and trepidation at the spectacle unfolding above.

In the distance, a golden dragon emerged into view, capturing the attention of the onlookers below.

Perched upon the dragon's back was a young girl adorned in a sleek black dragon barding.

Rhaegar's heart leapt at the sight of the golden dragon, his excitement palpable.

Spotting the girl atop the dragon, Rhaenyra, he couldn't contain his shock and cried out, "Rhaenyra!"

Unaware of his presence, Rhaenyra's attention was drawn to the Cannibal, the imposing black dragon now under Rhaegar's command.

Her gaze momentarily flickered down to the trio of ships sailing below, hoping to catch sight of Rhaegar.

Sensing its rider's agitation, Cannibal set aside its hostility toward the other dragon and descended gracefully to sea level.

With claws slicing through the waves, the Cannibal surged toward the large ship carrying Rhaegar.

In a breathtaking maneuver, the dragon's head soared upward as its colossal body ascended into the sky.

With practiced precision, the long tail swept up Rhaegar, who awaited on his armor, before gently placing him upon its back.

Seated astride the dragon, Rhaenyra urged the her dragon, drawing closer to Rhaegar in mid-air.

A resounding roar echoed through the air as the Cannibal, dwarfing its counterpart in size, confronted Syrax, the golden-scaled dragon, causing it to tense and emit a warning roar.

Witnessing the spectacle from her vantage point, Rhaenyra's excitement grew as she recognized Rhaegar's figure, exclaiming, "Rhaegar!"

With a gentle touch, she reassured Syrax in High Valyrian, soothing its nerves.

Before long, Rhaegar was airborne, riding alongside Rhaenyra on her golden dragon.

The two dragons faced each other in the vast expanse of the sky, one black and the other golden brown, while Rhaenyra and Rhaegar exchanged glances.

Rhaenyra's appearance spoke volumes—her disheveled hair, reddened eyes, and worn countenance betraying the turmoil within as she gazed unwaveringly at Rhaegar.

"Rhaegar..." Her voice faltered, the weight of unspoken words hanging between them.

Rhaegar returned his sister's gaze, his eyes alight with the joy of their reunion, and exclaimed in astonishment, "Sister, I thought you were still confined within the Red Keep. What brings you here?"

Struggling to maintain her posture amid her evident distress, Rhaenyra's voice wavered as she replied, "I couldn't bear to be apart from you any longer. They couldn't stop me, not yet."

Rhaegar was deeply moved by her determination.

Upon closer observation, he noted the toll that recent events had taken on Rhaenyra.

Compared to their last meeting, fatigue lingered beneath her eyes, mingling with the telltale signs of sleepless nights.

With a soft voice, Rhaegar called out, "Sister..."

Rhaenyra's eyes welled up with tears as she spoke solemnly, "Come back with me, Rhaegar."

"Of course, I've missed you all dearly," Rhaegar responded, his tone gentle and reassuring.

Obediently, he followed Rhaenyra's lead as she directed Syrax towards Dragonstone Island.

"Let's follow suit, Cannibal," Rhaegar said with a warm smile, guiding the dragon to trail behind Syrax, their forms weaving amidst the billowing clouds.

Although vastly disparate in age and size, the two dragons moved in tandem through the skies.

Rhaenyra maintained a cautious distance, mindful not to unsettle Rhaegar's mount.

Despite the circumstances, Rhaegar felt a swell of happiness; this was their inaugural flight together, a moment to cherish amid the turbulence of their current reality.

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Before long, the two siblings disembarked from their respective dragons, leaving the ship behind as they arrived at Dragonstone Island well ahead of schedule.

Syrax, who had maintained a wary vigilance in the presence of Cannibal during their journey, landed eagerly on the cliffs adjacent to the beach, while Rhaenyra kept a watchful eye on her brother.

Upon seeing her touch down, Rhaegar attempted to follow suit, but Cannibal shook its head adamantly, refusing to land and instead opting to circle the sky above.

Realization dawned on Rhaegar: there were still two adult dragons on Dragonstone Island harboring deep-seated animosity towards Cannibal.

Recalling their previous dragon skirmish, Rhaegar's heart quickened with anticipation, though he steeled himself for the confrontation ahead.

With a reassuring pat to Cannibal's spine, he murmured, "Let's do this, old friend. Show them what you're made of."

In response, Cannibal snorted defiantly, spreading its mighty wings wide and arching its neck as dragon flames brewed within its throat.

"Roar..."

In an instant, Cannibal unleashed a deafening roar that reverberated across Dragonstone Island, its fiery breath painting the sky with vibrant hues, heralding the return of the strongest wild dragon.

"Roar... Roar..."

Echoing its cry, two other dragon roars soon pierced the air, tinged with the unmistakable fury of provocation.

Perched atop Cannibal's back, Rhaegar surveyed the rugged terrain below, awaiting the arrival of adversaries long absent.

Before long, two colossal dragons of varying hues emerged from the mountains, soaring skyward with determined purpose.

One bore a resplendent bronze hue, its eyes ablaze with fury, its formidable presence akin to that of a seasoned predator - Vermithor.

The other, a light green dragon, bore the scars of past battles, a chunk missing from its neck and one wing hanging limp - Silverwing, struggling but resolute in its ascent.

Chapter 95: Another Dragon's Dance

When rivals come face to face, their eyes seem to burn with intensity.

As the two adult dragons soared into the sky, their roars reverberated, accompanied by the crackling of dragon flames.

The Cannibal, with its human-like pupils, looked over its opponents.

Unlike the Cannibal, who had ingested the Marsh Marigold to heal, Silverwing bore more grievous wounds.

Severely injured, Silverwing remained grounded in its nest, its ability to fly compromised and its fury its only sustenance. It posed little threat in its current state.

Thus, today's sole adversary was the Bronze Fury - Vermithor.

"Roar....."

In the confrontation, two more dragon roars echoed across the landscape.

One originated from the cliffs, where Rhaenyra rode Syrax.

The other emanated from the mountain range, where a massive brown dragon emerged from a cavern, casting a wary gaze upon the four dragons.

However, it made no move to approach, opting to perch on a distant reef, observing with a cautious eye.

Glancing at the newcomer, Rhaegar recognized the dragon - a wild dragon known as Sheepstealer.

This mature mud dragon, about the same age as Caraxes, had gained a reputation for stealing sheep from the island's herders.

It seems that Sheepstealer was startled by the loud roars of the dragons and came out to assess the situation from a safe distance.

Apparently, there is no reason to worry.

Simultaneously, Syrax flew to the side of Cannibal.

Rhaenyra, almost shoulder-to-shoulder with Rhaegar, looked annoyed. "Rhaegar, what are you doing, are you obsessed with fighting dragons?"

Rhaegar's tone was firm. "The Cannibal is the strongest of the wild dragons. It has its own pride. Where it falls, it must rise again."

"That doesn't make it any easier to control a dragon," Rhaenyra retorted, her gaze darting nervously between Vermithor and Silverwing.

She couldn't comprehend Rhaegar's risky behavior, but she couldn't simply stand by and watch either. She felt compelled to intervene and assist him.

Rhaegar analyzed the situation. "Silverwing is still recovering. I just need to defeat Vermithor."

"Syrax has never been in combat before, so my assistance will be limited," Rhaenyra lamented, her fingers tightening with tension.

Since becoming a dragon rider, she hadn't yet had the chance to experience a battle. Despite her initial intention to teach Rhaegar a lesson, she found herself secretly craving the adrenaline rush of a fierce clash.

Rhaegar's heart raced with anticipation as he flashed a confident smile. "You can watch. With the Cannibal by my side, I'm more than capable."

In the middle of their conversation, Vermithor and Silverwing closed in, unleashing jets of dragon flame.

"Protect yourself, Rhaenyra!" Rhaegar's urgent shout cut through the tension as the Cannibal surged forward, spewing emerald dragon flames.

Boom!

The collision of the three dragon flames unleashed a devastating force, engulfing the sky in heat.

Rhaegar lay on his back, gripping the Cannibal's scales with exhilaration in his eyes.

Despite the initial clash, the Cannibal kept up its speed and was ready for another attack.

The Cannibal's second dragon flame shot towards the larger Vermithor, aiming for its neck.

Vermithor, relying on its sturdy build, put up a good fight, using its wings to disperse the flames.

Seizing the chance, the Cannibal rushed towards the vulnerable Silverwing, who recoiled in pain.

A mournful howl echoed as the Cannibal's jaws closed around Silverwing's neck.

But Rhaegar's commanded. "Cannibal, watch out!"

The Cannibal reacted quickly to the command and changed direction, narrowly avoiding the golden dragon flames.

Vermithor was really angry to see its mate wounded again, so it unleashed a torrent of golden flames in pursuit of the Cannibal.

However, the Cannibal was faster and managed to dodge the onslaught, disappearing into the clouds.

Below, Silverwing crashed heavily to the ground, its neck gushing blood as it writhed in agony.

The Sheepstealer, watching from afar, cheered in anticipation, eager for a feast.

"Stop!" But its excitement was short-lived as Rhaenyra, commanding Syrax, intervened, positioning herself between them with a stern rebuke in High Valyrian.

She was enraged by the actions of Vermithor and Silverwing, which involved an attack on Cannibal and threatening Rhaegar's safety.

But Rhaenyra understood the delicate balance of power within House Targaryen.

Vermithor and Silverwing had been loyal mounts to her ancestors, King Jaehaerys and Queen Alysanne, serving the kingdom.

As much as she despised their actions, she couldn't ignore the value of these adult dragons to the Targaryen House.

In contrast, Sheepstealer, older and wilder, posed a significant threat.

Comparable in size to the formidable Caraxes, Sheepstealer dwarfed Syrax, who was still maturing.

With her nerves on edge, Rhaenyra led Syrax into a tense standoff with the Sheepstealer.

Sheepstealer roared menacingly, but refrained from launching an attack.

Syrax, sensing her rider's tension, echoed her aggression with a low growl, wings poised for defense.

Despite its smaller stature, Syrax possessed a spirit that matched larger dragons.

In response, Sheepstealer, intimidated by Syrax's display, retreated without a fight.

...

The aerial skirmish continues.

Cannibal disappeared into the thick clouds, out of Vermithor's sight.

Driven by fury, Vermithor pursues, his vision obscured by the billowing mist. In that moment of reduced visibility, a massive form hurtles from the flank, descending upon Vermithor with lethal precision.

Cannibal emerges, its jaws clamping down on Vermithor's neck, and blood spurting forth in a gory display.

"Roar..."

The attack took Vermithor by surprise, leaving him no time to prepare a defense. He struggled desperately to escape.

But Cannibal, driven by its instincts, presses its advantage, sinking its fangs deep into Vermithor's flesh, ripping skin and muscle with savage ferocity.

Vermithor roared in agony, his wings flailing and claws slashing at Cannibal's body.

"Cannibal, disengage!" Rhaegar's commanded

For a moment, Cannibal was overcome by the intoxicating scent of blood. But reason wins out, and it obeyed its master's orders.

Releasing its grip, it tears a chunk of flesh before retracting, gulping down the spoils.

Swiftly evading Vermithor's potential counterattack, it plants its hind limbs on its foe's abdomen, propelling itself into the air with a forceful leap.

As Cannibal retreats, leaving behind a wounded and enraged Vermithor, the bronze dragon let out a roar of rage, blood cascading from its neck, barely able to maintain flight.

With a half-hearted roar, Cannibal vanished into the clouds, its trail obscured from view.

But just when it was out of reach, it emerged from below, launching another attack.

As Vermithor, badly hurt and unable to dodge, felt the burning pain of Cannibal's bite on his wing's shoulder blade, the sickening sound of bone breaking filled the air.

In a blind rage, Vermithor ignored the pain in his neck as he lashed out with a desperate attempt to bite Cannibal's flesh with his powerful jaws.

"Dracarys!"

Rhaegar's voice cut through the chaos, and he tightened his grip on the reins as he gave the command again.

Cannibal released its grip and unleashed a torrent of Dragon Flame directly into Vermithor's gaping maw, responding instinctively to its master's voice.

There was a loud boom!

The dragon flame hit Vermithor's head with a bang, filling the air with thick, swirling smoke.

For a brief moment, Vermithor was left dazed and disoriented, his neck sagging limply as his wounds seeped dragon blood.

But even though he took a devastating blow, Vermithor's strong defenses held up.

He tried to regain his senses and take control of his battered body.

Chapter 96: Dance of Triumph

"Roar..."

Vermithor let out a roar that could be heard all the way up in the sky. It was a mix of anger and desperation as he tried to get revenge. His massive tail swung with great force, striking Cannibal's abdomen and sending the dragon reeling.

Cannibal, pushed by the blow, quickly got out of the way. But Vermithor was really angry; he shot a bunch of golden flames.

"Cannibal, down!" Rhaegar's voice commanded Cannibal to dive low to evade the flames.

Cannibal plummeted earthward, avoiding the attack.

Seizing the opportunity, Vermithor, despite his injuries, attempted to give chase.

However, the pain from his broken shoulder blade and weakened wings made it difficult for him to keep up, and he started to lose altitude.

"Dracarys!"

Before Vermithor could regain his balance, Rhaegar's command echoed.

With agility, Cannibal circled around the wounded Vermithor, unleashing dragon flames.

Despite his resilience and formidable physique, Vermithor found himself overwhelmed by Cannibal's relentless assault.

As Rhaegar observed the futile struggles of the bronze dragon, a revelation dawned upon him, he often wondered why he lost the last fight.

Besides the fact that he fought Silverwing and Vermithor together.

He realized that the key to victory lay not only in skillful combat but also in exploiting the vulnerabilities of his opponents.

And today, it was Vermithor's swift and grievous injury that spelled his downfall, not Cannibal's.

In particular, after the fight with the shadow wurm, Rhaegar had a realisation about the essence of combat strategy.

Unless faced with an overwhelmingly difference, relying solely on sheer size would prove futile in avoiding harm or even death.

Dragons are naturally violent and fierce. Once they've used up their fire, they use their claws and fangs in close combat—weapons that are very lethal.

If it hadn't been for Cannibal's quick thinking and Silverwing getting in the way, Rhaegar's situation might have been much worse.

His opponent could have easily killed him by ripping his stomach open and then finishing him off.

With this in mind, Rhaegar decided to use Cannibal's speed and the it's fire as a advantage. He came up with a plan to attack first and surprise his opponent.

Cannibal's unbeatable speed made it the perfect choice for the front line. It just needed to deliver a crushing blow, leaving its opponent vulnerable to the next attack.

"Roar..."

The Cannibal's roars echoed through the sky as it unleashed fire on Vermithor, making the bronze dragon's wounds worse and making it lose composure.

...

Down below, amidst the dragon roars and explosive bursts, the Sheepstealer on the ground started to get restless.

Casting covetous glances at the Silverwing lying in a pool of blood, the scent of it whetted its appetite.

"Roar..."

Once more, the Sheepstealer spread its wings and soared into the air, its casting a shadow over Syrax. Its aim was to intimidate the latter into retreat.

Rhaenyra looked up at the brown dragon and her eyes flashed. She gave a firm command, "Dracarys!"

"Roar..."

Syrax waited until the right moment and then shot up, blasting a flames at dragon's face.

The Sheepstealer was caught off guard and awkwardly bobbed its head to avoid the fire, its demeanor transforming into one of aggression.

The Sheepstealer was one of the few untamed dragons that lived on Dragonstone. It had gained a bad reputation among the locals, even worse than the Cannibal.

Despite its menacing countenance, the Cannibal had always maintained a reclusive distance from human settlements, sporadically appearing only in the vicinity of Dragonmont and refraining from causing harm to humans.

The Sheepstealer was the opposite. It had an insatiable appetite for the herders' sheep and loved the thrill of the hunt. Any attempts to stop it from preying were met with dragon flame attacks, which often resulted in serious injuries or even fatalities.

The Sheepstealer was enraged by the sight of the dragon before it.

The Sheepstealer let out a loud roar, spewing an orange-colored dragon flame from its mouth.

The dragon flame was pretty distinctive, kind of like mud dots that spread out over a wide area.

"Move out of the way, Syrax!"

Rhaenyra reacted quickly to the threat and moved Syrax out of the way, then fired a burst of dragon flame back at the enemy.

"Roar..."

In its first battle, the young Syrax seemed to exude a sense of grandeur, roaring loudly as it unleashed a golden dragon flame, which merged with the Sheepstealer's attack and overpowered it.

Frustrated by its inability to overcome the dragon flame attack, the Sheepstealer's fury intensified as it beat its wings vigorously in an attempt to overwhelm Syrax with its size advantage.

However, Syrax, despite being smaller, compensated with remarkable agility, swiftly closing the distance and darting around its adversary with the grace of a seabird.

After a few failed attempts to catch its prey, the Sheepstealer redirected its aggression towards the badly injured Silverwing.

Its predatory instincts were focused on the vulnerable adult dragon, ready to deliver a fatal blow.

"Roar..."

Silverwing let out a terrified roar, its neck injury making it unable to move and defend itself properly. But the Sheepstealer wasn't going to let that stop it. It descended on its target, ready to bite.

"Dracarys!"

Rhaenyra saw Silverwing was in trouble. She wanted to stop the Sheepstealer, urging Syrax to intervene and halt the Sheepstealer's onslaught.

In that moment, Rhaenyra felt a strong sense of worry. With Rhaegar engaged in a fierce aerial duel against Vermithor above, she could only hope for the best for his safety, her heart heavy with concern.

Amidst her anxious thoughts, a deafening roar echoed from above.

A huge bronze dragon came down from the sky, accompanied by green flames.

Vermithor bore the scars of battle, with blood coming out of wounds on his neck, tail, and wings.

With a determined look on his face, Rhaegar steered Cannibal into a steep dive, unleashing a torrent of flames upon Vermithor, pushing him downwards and preventing any chance of retreat.

As they reached mid-air, Rhaegar told Cannibal to stop the attack. Cannibal slowed its descent with controlled wing beats. Vermithor, an expert at aerial combat, used his wings to slow his fall. He fell into the sea with a splash, sending waves out in all directions.

The dragon's crimson blood mixed with the blue ocean, turning the water a dark red. The sea churned and boiled under the heat.

A symphony of bubbles echoed through the waters.

"Roar..."

After a brief struggle, Vermithor's majestic head broke through the surface of the sea, gasping for air.

The waves were pretty wild, and Vermithor was having trouble flapping his wings. He was trying to get to the shore, but his body was hurt, so it was slow going.

Despite all the injuries he had, none of them were fatal. He managed to claw his way back to the beach, where he collapsed and panted, lost in thought.

Rhaegar looked on from above, feeling a mix of relief and contemplation.

Dragons were to be respected, not killed in battle.

He gave Cannibal a pat on the back, his voice full of triumph. "Cannibal, we did it!"

"Roar..."

Cannibal lifted his head proudly, his emerald eyes gleaming with arrogance as he paced back and forth, his sinuous form tracing patterns of victory in the sky with his verdant dragon flame.

At that moment, he was the undisputed ruler of Dragonstone Island. He had defeated Vermithor and Silverwing, and he was now in control of the island.

"Dragonstone Island, your prince has returned!"

Rhaegar's proclamation echoed across the winds, celebrating Cannibal's triumph and the success of their strategy.

But as the celebrations got underway, Rhaegar's gaze shifted towards Rhaenyra, his expression showing a hint of concern.

"Cannibal, let's help!" he said, his voice showing a hint of urgency.

Chapter 97: Lament of the Sheepstealer

"Dracarys!" Rhaenyra's commanded as she urged Syrax into battle against the Sheepstealer. Engaged in pursuit, the Sheepstealer's hunger drove it to persist despite repeated skirmishes.

Rhaenyra was totally focused, paying close attention to the rhythm of the battle as she guided Syrax. The clash of dragons was intense, with both of them trying to gain the upper hand. Their dragon flames intertwined in a deadly dance.

But just as victory seemed within reach, the Sheepstealer deceptively retreated, luring Syrax towards the vulnerable Silverwing below.

Rhaenyra reacted quickly, trying to foil the ambush with a barrage of dragon flame, but the Sheepstealer had anticipated her move.

Suddenly, the tables turned as the Sheepstealer unleashed a torrent of dragon flame, engulfing both dragon and rider in fire.

"Syrax, evade!"

With horror etched across her features, Rhaenyra urged Syrax to turn, but it was too late.

The flames descended upon them, forcing Syrax to contort in a desperate attempt to shield Rhaenyra from the brunt of the assault.

"Roar..."

In the blink of an eye, Syrax's chest and abdomen bore the brunt of the dragon flame, eliciting a cry of pain.

Syrax was new to battle and struggled to maintain balance amidst the pain. Her body lurching downward as she flapped her wings.

Vulnerable, she was easy prey for the Sheepstealer, whose eyes gleamed with hunger as he lunged for the kill.

Rhaenyra, tethered by a chain around her waist, clung to the saddle, her body weightless as she braced for the attack with dread.

With the Sheepstealer closing in, she could only watch helplessly as the ferocious beast descended upon Syrax, rending flesh with merciless ferocity.

In the middle of the attack, a resounding dragon's roar was heard, heralding the arrival of a black dragon from above.

The wind whipped by its wings and struck Rhaenyra, temporarily blinding her as she watched her brother's mount descend with a roar, its claws poised to strike.

"Roar..."

The Sheepstealer's agonized shriek echoed through the sky as Rhaegar's dragon delivered a devastating blow.

"Cannibal... it's Rhaegar..."

Blood trickled down Rhaenyra's cheek as she beheld the figure in the black dragon's back.

"Drag it away!"

Rhaegar's command was followed by the chilling sound of flesh yielding to claws.

With a vice-like grip, Cannibal's dragon claws clamped onto the Sheepstealer's ribs, exerting crushing pressure as it mercilessly snapped the dragon's muzzle. With a quick flap of its wings, Cannibal lifted its struggling prey into the air.

The Sheepstealer was in agony, screaming in pain as it beat its wings in a desperate attempt to escape.

Meanwhile, Syrax, who had been caught in the Sheepstealer's grasp, quickly righted himself, avoiding a fall.

Cannibal, enjoying its hunt, played with its prey, easily keeping its grip despite the Sheepstealer's frantic struggles.

Rhaegar kept his gaze fixed on Rhaenyra, feeling a rush of relief as he watched Syrax regain control.

He wasn't aware of what had led to Rhaenyra's confrontation with the Sheepstealer, but he was just worried about her safety.

Rhaegar was grateful for his timely arrival and his expression hardened as he directed his fury at the Sheepstealer.

"Cannibal! Throw it into the sea!" he said firmly.

"Roar..."

With a roar, Cannibal did as he was told, lowering himself towards the ocean's surface with his captive in tow. With a final release of its claws, the Sheepstealer tried to escape, but was met with green flames that engulfed its head in searing agony.

With a muffled pop, the Sheepstealer's cries were suddenly silenced by the fire.

The second dragon of the day fell into the water. The Sheepstealer's fell, sending water into the air as it struggled to stay afloat in the rough waves.

Cannibal kept a close eye on the situation, staying alert and ready to act as Rhaegar steered it.

With each attempt by the Sheepstealer to get out of the sea, Cannibal met it with dragon fire, preventing any chance of escape.

Dragons, creatures of fire, just weren't built for the water. The Sheepstealer's struggles were slowly sapped of strength as it gasped for air amidst the depths.

As the drowning dragon's desperate pleas echoed, Rhaegar remained firm in his resolve. He gave Cannibal a gentle pat on the back and said, "Let's go, Cannibal."

"Roar..."

Cannibal grumbled a bit but did as he was told, turning away from the scene and flying off into the distance.

Although it had wanted to drown the stubborn intruder to enjoy a future meal, Cannibal listened to its master.

The Sheepstealer writhed like a trapped serpent, clawing its way onto the shore with effort, its movements clearly showing fear.

On the other side of the beach, Vermithor was absent. The tide had washed away any signs of him, leaving only the sand where he had been.

Rhaegar realized this and made a beeline back to find Rhaenyra.

"Rhaegar, I'm here!"

Rhaenyra's shout echoed from the cliff above.

Rhaegar looked down and saw Syrax on the ground, with Rhaenyra standing nearby, her hair tousled and waving at him.

Not far away, Silverwing, who was badly injured, had also disappeared without a trace.

"Cannibal, land," Rhaegar instructed.

As Cannibal descended, Rhaegar slid down from its wing and rushed to Rhaenyra's side.

Their reunion was a whirlwind of emotions.

He gave Rhaenyra a hug, his heart racing with concern. "Are you okay?"

Rhaenyra shook her head, her face flushed with excitement. "I'm fine, thanks. Syrax protected me."

Relief washed over Rhaegar's features as he buried his head against her back. "You scared me to death. You went charging in, risking your life."

Rhaenyra put an arm around him and gently stroked his head with her other hand. "I just wanted to help. But that brown dragon was after Silverwing."

"Where's Silverwing now?" Rhaegar asked, his tone casual but with a hint of concern.

"Just as Vermithor climbed up from the cliff's base, he flew off with Silverwing," Rhaenyra recounted, her voice tinged with fear.

"Next time you face a dragon, you need to stay far away," Rhaegar advised seriously.

Rhaenyra's expression faltered, feeling embarrassed. "It was my first battle, and you're scolding me, you are the younger here..."

"No, my dragon is much bigger than yours," Rhaegar replied, sounding a bit annoyed.

His confidence in engaging dragons came from two sources: his audacity and Cannibal's size and courage.

After defeating Vermithor and Silverwing, Rhaegar felt like he was unbeatable. But he couldn't help but feel apprehensive about one dragon, Vaghar.

Syrax was still a young dragon, less than twenty years old, while Cannibal was a formidable adversary. Rhaenyra had learned a valuable lesson from her brother: that actions speak louder than words, and defeat can be humbling.

She crouched down to meet Rhaegar's gaze, pressing her cheek against his and whispering, "You're right, Rhaegar."

Rhaegar gave her a warm hug, his cheek brushing hers as he murmured, "I missed you, sister."

"Where have you been since that night? Father and I were worried about you," Rhaenyra murmured, burying her head in the crook of Rhaegar's shoulder.

At the mention of his experiences in the Peninsula, Rhaegar's expression darkened. "I stumbled into a nest of savages. They were all insufferable—no intellect, nothing interesting to say."

Chapter 98: The Queen's Guilt

The siblings shared stories of their adventures.

Before long, a group of guards showed up.

"Rhaegar, Rhaenyra!"

Viserys, looking a bit worn out but happy to see them, brushed past the guards and hurried towards his children with surprising speed.

"Father!"

Rhaegar's face lit up at the sight of his father, though he couldn't hug him with Rhaenyra still leaning on him.

Rhaenyra was startled by her father's arrival and turned to face him, greeting him timidly, "Father."

She had slipped out of her chamber through the secret passage behind the Kingsguard, and she felt a twinge of nervousness at being caught.

"It's good to see you both safe," Viserys said, breathing a sigh of relief. He ignored his daughter's subdued greeting as he focused on his son.

He crouched down next to Rhaegar, his eyes scanning him with a look of paternal concern. He had dreamed of Rhaegar's safe return, and now seeing him in the flesh, he felt a profound sense of relief.

With an affectionate embrace, Viserys planted a kiss on Rhaegar's forehead. "When the dragon roared on the island, I knew it was you who had returned."

Rhaegar wiped away the drool with a sheepish grin and bragged about his victories. "Cannibal and I defeated Vermithor and Silverwing. No dragon on the island could match us."

"You're certainly bold, my boy," Viserys replied, his expression a mix of pride and concern.

Since Rhaegar's recovery, he had grown in many ways, but his audacity seemed to grow with each passing day.

From taming a dragon without permission to engaging in battles on their doorstep upon his return, Rhaegar's daring actions left Viserys wondering what the future might hold as his son matured.

Viserys was filled with thoughts but showed only relief on his face. "You've never been an ordinary child, Rhaegar."

In that moment, he recognized Rhaegar as the prince foretold in the Song of Ice and Fire prophecy.

Indeed, Rhaegar had proven himself capable of taming the largest wild dragon ever seen and defeating the renowned Bronze Fury and Silverwing of the continent.

"Come, I've prepared a grand feast to welcome you home."

Viserys gave his eldest son a playful pat on the head before lifting him up.

As they walked, Viserys turned to Rhaenyra with a hint of reproach in his voice. "You disobeyed me again, Rhaenyra."

"I'm sorry, Father," Rhaenyra apologized, bowing her head. "I was really worried about Rhaegar, so I couldn't just wait around."

"It's not the first time you've disobeyed my orders," Viserys replied with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Let's set that aside for now. You both seem to be in good spirits."

"Yes, Father," Rhaenyra answered quietly, her gaze lingering on the father-son pair, a hint of longing evident in her eyes.

...

Once they'd freshened up from their journey, the two siblings found themselves seated at the long table in the hall.

Rhaegar told their father all about their adventures on the Peninsula in great detail, his eyes shining with excitement as he told about his exploits.

Viserys, holding a goblet in his hand, listened to his eldest son's stories patiently, his expression kind and attentive.

However, when Rhaegar got to the part about the Shadowbringer's head being resurrected and the mask being used to defeat the curse, Viserys's face darkened slightly, and a hint of gravity clouded his features.

Viserys saw magic and dragons as two dangerous forces. The idea of bringing the dead back to life and perpetuating curses made him feel ashamed and disgusted.

"The House Brune and the Crabb family," Viserys said aloud, his voice tinged with concern. "It looks like we need to send someone to look into this..."

His expression remained unchanged, but inwardly, Viserys was already calculating the depths of involvement of these two families.

As Rhaegar kept talking, he noticed that his father and sister were getting more and more subdued. He felt a sense of unease creep over him.

He thought his stories were pretty engaging. Why were they so passive?

After a moment of reflection, he decided to share the news of the Peninsula nobles' allegiance and the two thousand free men who had pledged their support and followed him across the sea.

Viserys's face changed as he processed this new information.

Meanwhile, Rhaenyra pursed her lips and took a sip from her glass, her expression unreadable.

Rhaegar stopped his story when he sensed something was wrong.

"Sorry I'm late, but I hope you're all ready." Alicent's voice broke the silence just in time.

The three turned to see Alicent coming down the stairs, cradling the baby in one arm and leading Helaena with the other, while Aegon trailed behind, accompanied by a maid.

Viserys paused for a moment, then turned to Rhaegar and said, "There are more than a few free folk following you. I'll have them transported to the area near the woods first, just to make sure they have what they need."

"Once you figure out how to use them, you can deploy them as needed."

"Understood, Father," Rhaegar acknowledged.

While the father and son conversed, Alicent made her way to the table and took her seat, her eyes filled with joy and emotion as she addressed Rhaegar, "The Seven Gods have blessed you with a safe return, Rhaegar."

"Brother!" Helaena's voice rang out with joy as she stood up to greet her long-absent sibling.

Rhaegar gave a small smile in response to Helaena's greeting, then turned to Alicent and said, "Thanks to Cannibal's protection, I made it back safely."

"The wild dragon?" Alicent's puzzled expression matched her crossed arms.

"Once I tamed him, he stopped being wild," Rhaegar clarified.

Alicent said, "You showed great courage in taming an adult dragon all by yourself."

"On the other hand," she added, glancing at Aegon, "Aegon is still struggling to command Sunfyre and has yet to succeed."

"Mom!" Aegon objected, his eyebrows furrowing.

As Rhaegar observed Alicent's hands, he noticed their roughness, which showed she'd been used to practical tasks like sewing and writing. Her fingers showed signs of recent injuries, with the wounds still fresh and unhealed.

Rhaegar, who was well-versed in scholarly matters, recognized these wounds as recent, likely inflicted in the past few days.

Rhaegar paused before speaking, "Your Majesty, what happened to your hand?"

"Huh?" Alicent seemed taken aback, looking at Rhaegar's gaze and quickly covering her hand with a slight panic.

Alicent offered a smile and said, "My apologies, perhaps it's just the humidity of Dragonstone Island making my hands itch."

"Make sure to keep warm," Rhaegar added casually, though his tone was peculiar.

While Dragonstone Island was indeed humid, King's Landing, being a seaside city, wasn't significantly drier.

Alicent's excuse didn't seem very convincing, and her nervousness only made Rhaegar more suspicious.

Alicent quickly changed the subject, asking a servant, "Is the banquet ready? Please bring it forward at once."

Viserys agreed.

Rhaegar leaned in close to Rhaenyra and asked quietly, "Why is Alicent nervously tapping her fingers?"

As Rhaenyra was Alicent's former confidante, she was aware of such details and whispered back, "It's a nervous habit of Alicent's. Whenever she's anxious, she tends to tap her fingers, often to the point of bleeding."

"Nervous?" Rhaegar echoed silently.

Why would someone be nervous?

Fear, excitement...

Or maybe it's a sign of guilty?

Chapter 99: Finding The Real Culprit

"Why was she afraid or guilty?" Rhaegar was thinking fast as he considered Alicent's nervous behavior.

Could it be that she was worried about him? Rhaegar doubted it. Knowing Alicent as he did, she would have preferred he never came back.

Aegon would have one less brother to compete with, making his path to the heirship clearer.

As plates of fine food were set on the table and the feast commenced, Rhaegar mechanically picked his favorite food, finding them tasteless.

Noticing his distraction, Rhaenyra nudged him with her elbow and asked, "What's on your mind?"

Furrowing his brow, Rhaegar abruptly rose from his seat, calling out, "Father!"

Viserys looked up, puzzled. "What is it, Rhaegar?"

Rhaegar's expression grew serious as he asked, "Father, why does a man's heart becomes anxious?"

Viserys looked up and put down his utensils. "A criminal may be anxious when he's trying to avoid getting caught and even more anxious when he's on trial."

"Understood," Rhaegar nodded, his tone shifting. "The night I left, I was attacked by two dragons because someone fed Cannibal a dragon egg laid by Silverwing."

"So, who did this, or rather, who ordered it?" he demanded.

The joy of family reunion couldn't overshadow Rhaegar's determination to get to the bottom of things.

He was aware of the dangers lurking in the shadows, and this time, upon his return, he was determined to expose the mastermind behind the scenes and hold them accountable.

As Rhaegar spoke, the room fell silent.

Rhaenyra watched her brother with a mix of amazement and concern. She'd been wondering why the two dragons had targeted Cannibal, but her concerns for Rhaegar's safety had made her focus on that instead of thinking more deeply about it.

Now, with Rhaegar bringing it to light, she realized someone was plotting against him.

Viserys's expression darkened as he spoke, his voice gruff. "Since your disappearance, I've been investigating. The guards involved in feeding the dragon eggs were found dead on the beach."

He paused, his gaze firm. "Rest assured, justice will be served."

Rhaegar's tone was somber as he continued, "Before I tamed Cannibal, I was lured into Dragonmont. Who was behind it?"

Viserys's expression twisted with guilt. "The guards were in the dark, and the Dragonkeeper was moved to a different post before I could get to the bottom of it."

Then Rhaegar dropped another bombshell. "As I was leaving Vermithor and Silverwing behind, I was attacked by a third dragon—with scarlet flames!"

Viserys shot up from his seat, his fists slamming onto the tabletop. "You're sure it was scarlet flames?" His voice was tight and urgent, each word carrying a sense of urgency.

"I'm certain," Rhaegar said with a firm nod.

Viserys's eyes were ablaze with fury, his teeth clenched in rage. "Daemon! You despicable creature..."

They both had a realisation. There were only two dragons with red flames: Caraxes and Meleys.

Meleys was owned by Rhaenys Targaryen, his cousin. She was known as the Queen Who Never Was and fought for the right to inherit the Iron Throne.

Despite their differences, Viserys had faith in her character. Honor was everything to Rhaenys, and she wouldn't risk the line of succession.

On the other hand, his brother, Daemon, recently expelled from King's Landing, simmered with anger and resentment. With knowledge of Dragonstone's secrets, including the Dragonkeeper's dealings and secret passages, suspicion fell squarely on him.

"It must be him," Viserys erupted, his fury palpable. "Because I refused to promise Rhaenyra to him, he's gone and put my child in harm's way!"

Viserys's anger shook him, and Alicent rushed to his side, urging him to calm down. But Viserys was relentless. "Summon the Maester to send a raven to King's Landing and issue a warrant for Daemon's arrest, dead or alive!"

Harrold, guarding the doorway, offered a suggestion. "Your Grace, Daemon has a powerful dragon. Instead of alarming him with a notice, we should alert the Vale first. He may be hiding in Runestone."

"Excellent! Send messages to the Vale and every maester. Anyone who captures Daemon will be rewarded in gold equal to their weight."

As Viserys fumed, Rhaegar interjected "Father, please calm down and take care of yourself."

Viserys looked at him and said in a resolute voice, "Father will definitely get justice for you!"

Rhaegar looked at Alicent, sensing his father's fragile state. His suspicions remained just that—suspicions.

"I trust you, Father," Rhaegar said, trying to reassure him, though the atmosphere remained tense. Viserys, enraged, abruptly left the table, with Alicent following to tend to him.

The once-festive family gathering dissolved into somber silence.

As his parents disappeared around the corner of the stairs, Aegon got up and left without saying anything.

He didn't want to share a meal with his half-siblings, especially his brother, who he found particularly difficult to get along with.

Meanwhile, Helaena sat bewildered, uncertain of what had sparked her father and brother Rhaegar's sudden anger. Despite her confusion, she was hungry, so she reluctantly nibbled on the cake in front of her.

She kept her eyes on Rhaegar and Rhaenyra, noting the tension in their expressions, and tried to blend in.

Meanwhile, Aemond was still asleep in his nanny's arms, unaware of the tension in the air.

Rhaenyra was the first to speak up, gripping Rhaegar's wrist and asking him solemnly, "You disappeared because of an attack by Daemon?"

"It's likely," Rhaegar confirmed quietly.

Releasing his hand, Rhaenyra's fists clenched, her expression hardening. "That wretch, does he have no honor when it comes to the throne?"

"Don't worry, he will face the consequences," Rhaegar assured her softly.

"He tried to kill his own nephew," Rhaenyra said angrily, repeating her brother's frustration.

Her feelings towards Daemon had changed a lot since the last abduction. The man she once saw as a caring uncle had now lost her respect.

Now, there was only one word to describe him: madman.

...

As night fell, the castle was filled with a heavy silence.

Viserys went to his room to try to forget his troubles with a few drinks until he passed out.

Meanwhile, the rest of the household went to bed, trying to get some rest after a busy day.

Alicent, unable to change her husband's mind or calm her wild children, went to her room to get some rest. However, she couldn't sleep, tossing and turning on the soft bed.

She was thinking about what happened that day, especially Rhaegar's conversation about guilt. Despite her insistence that Daemon was the culprit and she was innocent, she couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

How could she find peace of mind when she was plagued by such unsettling thoughts?

Chapter 100: Warning

Alicent's head was throbbing with pain, and she let out a silent sigh as she closed her eyes, seeking solace in sleep.

Time passed, and she found herself in a state of drowsy, half-consciousness.

Knock, knock, knock...

All of a sudden, the peace and quiet of her room was shattered by a loud noise.

Alicent's headache was so intense that she ignored the noise as just a minor distraction.

Before long, the noise stopped, and she started to drift back into a deep sleep.

But as she was about to fall asleep, she felt a sudden rush of warmth.

It felt like she was sitting too close to a roaring fireplace, causing beads of sweat to form on her forehead.

"It's really hot in here...I'm thirsty."

Alicent's parched mouth was yearning for relief, and in her stupor, she reached out for the glass of water on her bedside table.

However, her reaching hand encountered something unexpected—a layer of fabric.

As she gently touched the fabric, she felt soft flesh beneath it.

"Fabric... Soft flesh?"

Alicent's foggy consciousness suddenly came back to her, and she reluctantly opened her eyes to the dimly lit room.

There she saw a figure in a black robe sitting on the edge of her bed.

In the figure's hand was a coal brazier, its glow casting eerie shadows across the room.

"Who are you?"

Alicent's heart was racing with fear, and she instinctively recoiled, clutching the covers tightly around her body.

"It's me, Your Grace."

A familiar voice came from the figure, who then took off his hood and offered her a cup of water. "Here's your water."

Alicent's eyes widened in disbelief as she strained to make out the visitor's face.

Alicent looked at the boy standing by her bed in disbelief and said, "It's you, Rhaegar!"

"Are you scared, Your Grace?"

Rhaegar, wearing a black robe, looked at his stepmother calmly.

Alicent's complexion suddenly changed, and she scolded, "Why are you in my room? You should be asleep at this hour!"

For a moment, she thought that another family member had snuck into her room, and the thought made her nervous.

Rhaegar, holding the glass of water, tilted his head and said, "Are you not thirsty?" "Why don't you take a sip?"

"No, I'm not thirsty anymore. Leave this instant, do you hear me!"

Alicent's anger flared, and she rebuked him mercilessly.

"Very well, if you're not thirsty," Rhaegar replied calmly, setting the glass aside. "But before I go, I would like to have a word with you."

"There's nothing to discuss. How did you manage to enter my room? Where is the guard at the door!?"

Alicent was adamant about expelling her stepson from her quarters.

Rhaegar chuckled softly and pointed to a wall in the room. "Isn't there a secret passage in your chamber? A bit of exploration would reveal that."

After the family banquet, he had sought out Cole to inquire about recent events on Dragonstone Island.

Through their conversation, he had learned of the existence of several secret passages within the castle, one of which led directly to the Queen's chamber...

When he looked at them, it confirmed some of his suspicions.

So he had come tonight.

Alicent followed Rhaegar's lead and looked into the sealed secret passage. She subconsciously grabbed the sheet, her eyes flickering with panic as she asked uneasily, "What do you mean? What are you trying to tell me?"

Rhaegar watched her carefully, sensing her reluctance. He started to tell a story. "I couldn't help but wonder why there were always unexpected problems when I tried to tame my dragon."

"Daemon bribed the Dragonkeeper to send a false message, which led me astray towards Dragonmont," she continued. "Before that, someone had sent me similar information, but pointing towards the east coast."

Alicent's expression shifted slightly as she replied, "I was the one who shared that information with Rhaenyra. It turns out that the two young dragons were indeed on the east coast, and Sunfyre was found pretty early on. I didn't lie."

"As you said, the intel from the East Coast was spot on," Rhaegar acknowledged. "Then the Gray Ghost showed up on Dragonmont. The dragon that should have been there wasn't Cannibal, but Silverwing, in a sensitive period after laying her eggs."

"Given that, is it possible that someone knew I didn't trust them and intentionally gave me irrelevant information to guide me to Dragonmont?" Rhaegar's voice softened, and Alicent felt her nerves start to tingle in the dimly lit room.

Alicent's face grew cold at his words, and she replied in a chilly tone, "This is all in your imagination. It was Daemon who set you up."

"I was just trying to improve relations with Rhaenyra. We're like sisters."

"Fair enough, your explanation makes sense," Rhaegar nodded, not discounting her words.

He wasn't there to accuse her tonight. There wasn't any concrete evidence against the Queen. It was all just suspicion.

Rhaegar bowed his head and placed the portable coal stove on the bed, gently opening the lid. The red-hot coals were exposed to the air, dispersing the darkness with their bright flames. In the glow, Rhaegar's features, previously shrouded in shadow, were half-illuminated.

"What are you doing?" Alicent's nerves jangled at the sight, her mind racing with memories.

"Nothing much. Since you don't want water, let's get warm," Rhaegar replied, reaching out to cup a piece of ember in his hand.

He held it calmly and raised his hand between them. The coals glowed, casting light between them.

Rhaegar kept his eyes neutral as he spoke calmly, "Your Grace, I'm sure you're aware that my recent journey to the Peninsula wasn't exactly peaceful. Many people who disrespected me met their end by Dragonfire."

Alicent quietly moved to the other side of the bed, her face showing fear.

Without advancing, Rhaegar continued, "I don't know if you were involved, but I'd really appreciate it if you could set aside any prejudices you may hold against me, whether by ignoring them or adopting a more neutral stance."

"I just ask that you don't cause any trouble for me, my father, or my sister."

With that, Rhaegar looked his stepmother in the eye.

Click...

His fists clenched, and he crushed the charcoal, causing it to spill onto the white bedspread.

The broken coals ignited the fabric instantly.

Alicent let out a scream of panic and quickly used a pillow to smother the embers.

Rhaegar grabbed the cup of water nearby and started dousing the flames methodically, extinguishing them one by one.

As the smoke cleared, Rhaegar's face was still obscured, and his voice was barely above a whisper. "I hope you can retain some compassion, Your Grace."

"What in the world are you doing? I've done nothing wrong, how many times do I have to say it?" Alicent's irritation flared as she verged on breaking down, her voice filled with anger.

Rhaegar averted his gaze and interjected, "I believe you, for you are my stepmother, and I trust you to safeguard the children of your name, including myself and Rhaenyra."

"I am the Queen, your father's wife, and with that title comes a certain responsibility," Alicent replied, her expression hardening.

She continued in a harsh tone, "But you shouldn't treat your own mother with such disrespect. Trespassing into my room and threatening me with fire—I will tell your father about this and let him decide how to discipline a child who dishonors his name!"

"As you wish, Your Grace," Rhaegar responded nonchalantly, replacing the lid of the coal stove and lifting it once more, ready to depart.

However, just steps away, he paused as if remembering something, and turned back to say cryptically, "By the way, Aegon is my brother, and I value that kinship. It was through my own abilities that I managed to evade the murder."

"But he is still young..."

"Enough of this!" Alicent snapped, her neck straining, eyes reddened, and teeth gritted. "I will watch over my son, no matter what!"

"Very well, "Mother"," Rhaegar replied with a sweet smile, bowing like an innocent child.

He exited the bedroom slowly, carrying the coal stove, and disappeared through the entrance of the secret passageway under his stepmother's hatefull glare.