Obligatory disclaimer: I don't own ASOIAF; that honour goes to GRRM.

Edited by: Bub3loka

I also want to thank everyone for their support and encouragement.

The exact origin of King Jon Stark is greatly disputed, but most scholars agree that he is King Viserys's son. Some claim he's a dragonseed left by Jaehaerys in his royal progressions in the North, but they offer little proof.

Nothing is known about King Jon's childhood or dwelling, and the first record of him is in Ashcove, in the final months of his father's reign. Even the King has never spoken of his family, aside from the name of his mother, Lyanna, once mentioned in the trial of Queen Alicent.

Contrary to expectations, King Jon Stark was well-versed in the matters of law, justice, and rulership despite his birth as a natural-born child. He assumed the role with practised ease, though some claim his ascension to power had gone smoothly only because the realm was too drained from the Dance to resist. Too afraid of dragons after Aemond the Kinslayer showed what a dragon could do against castles and villages when provoked. While there is some truth to those sayings, Jon Stark's generosity played a great role, as the king was skilled in making friends and subjects out of his former foes.

In the third year of his reign, Jon Stark pushed the infamous royal succession law, stating that the firstborn son would always inherit unless the sitting king deems him unfit and exiles him from court. Some consider it a clever move to legitimise his own rule, as he was half a year older than Aegon the Elder, and thus the true inheritor of the Iron Throne.

The rest of the inked law was more suggestive, advising his future descendants to keep an heir and a spare, and then avoid siring more children for a cleaner succession. While such a tactic was considered prudent, Jon Stark's third child and second son, Daemon, came with a twin brother, named Maekar, as if the gods were mocking the king's words.

Another law was that no Targaryen Princess or Lady would be allowed to claim a dragon unless she married into the royal family. Eggs were no longer placed in the cribs of the newborn but were nested by dragons in the Dragonpit.

"A dragon," the king had said, "is a weapon. A weapon of war and destruction with no equal in the world, not something to be granted to toddlers and called their birthright. A weapon that shall only be allowed to the royal family and no other. And as such, a dragon is a privilege granted to those deemed worthy of it, whether through loyalty or skill."

From that moment, even the royal princes were not allowed to claim a dragon until they could at least fight one of the kingsguard to a draw in a fair duel or forge thirty links in the Citadel, more than twice the requirement to be eligible to take the vows of a maester…

Excerpt from ***'The House of the Dragon'*** *by Archmaester Armen*

The Dance of Dragons officially ended in the middle of the Year 130 After Aegon's Conquest, with Jon Stark the First sitting victoriously on the Iron Throne and all his half-brothers slain.

But some lords and knights were reluctant to take the knee to a bastard, let alone one that was a Stark. Others were reluctant to trust a kinslayer, for Jon the Generous had killed his half-brother Daeron in the Third Fall of King's Landing.

The last of the fighting ended on the third day of the fourth moon of the Year 131 after Aegon's Conquest, when Lord Ammon Cuy dipped the Green Banner and returned to the King's Peace. Many knights, second and third sons, and even some minor lords went into self-exile to Essos, reluctant to pay homage to a Stark king.

Jon Stark had the blood of the dragon, of that there was no doubt, as he had mastered the Bronze Fury with ease. With his wife, Queen Rhaena, mounting Silverwing, the two were said to be Jaehaerys and Alysanne reborn.

Though those claimed similarities stretched no further than the dragons they rode. Dark of hair and grey of eyes, King Jon was all Stark in looks, with not a trace of fine Valyrian features on his face. Courtiers of the time even mention his accent, and his mannerisms were of the North, though they grew softer with time.

With the Crownlands expanded nearly tenfold in size, the start of Jon Stark's reign was shaky. He inherited a realm half-ruined by war in the midst of a fierce winter. Bandits plagued the roads and the forests, many knights had turned to brigandry, and even the Mountain Clans of the Vale had started raiding the lowlands in desperation.

The king sent out his men and called many trusted lords to action, clearing the roads and forests, sweeping bandits and rooting out brigands from their lairs, and order was quickly restored across the realm.

It was said that by the middle of the year 132, one could travel unmolested from Castle Black to Oldtown—if lucky enough to avoid the deep snows.

Then, his gaze turned to the Iron Islands, the furthest part of the new royal domain. Prince Aemond and the Redwyne Fleet had devastated the Ironborn, turning most of the shipyards, towns, and castles into ruins. Hunger had taken much of those who called the dreary place home, and cold was said to kill twice as many. When Lord Redwyne had finally retreated from his task, he had ferried away thralls in the tens of thousands into the Westerlands and the Arbour, leaving behind desolate, wind-swept islands.

By then, the Iron Islands were at the mercy of the king, unable to do anything but obey.

Jon Stark had exiled all the remaining Drowned Priests from the Iron Islands on suspicion of treason. He had commanded the six remaining reaver lords to foster their children within the Crownlands or the Westerlands by royal decree. With thralldom and reaving banned and the royal presence strengthening by the year as new ports and mining towns full of Crownlanders flourished, the notorious reputation of pirates was soon a thing of the past.

Of course, the challenges to Jon Stark's reign had just begun.

The first trial came from Essos—the Triarchy had fallen apart after the Dance. The uneasy alliance had never been solid, bound only by fleeting enemies and mutual interests. The Battle of the Gullet was a death knell, for it saw the Tyroshi and Myrish suffer devastating losses. The Lyseni had cleverly gone around the other side of Dragonstone, plundering Spicetown and High Tide and keeping much of their strength at sea.

With only three ships from Myr and Tyrosh returning compared to Lys, which saw over thirty survive, all laden with plunder, a terrible rift was formed between the allies.

After a string of assassinations and murders, the most untimely of which was the demise of Sharako Lohar at the hands of a love rival for the affection of Johanna Swann, the former alliance quickly fell apart.

By the beginning of 132, the Stepstones and the Disputed Lands were soon engulfed in the fires of war.

Trade across the lower Narrow Sea came to a grinding halt yet again, and Lord Corlys Velaryon petitioned the king to "solve this Stepstones problem once and for all."

"The disruption of trade is troublesome, yes, but there's still Pentos, Braavos, and Lorath to trade with," Jon Stark had declined, seemingly uninterested in participating in the war.

It was said that the king's attention was set on Dorne instead.

But trouble never came alone. Despite the royal decrees to turn away ships should the crew be gravely ill, disease struck. The Winter Fever struck across the Seven Kingdoms, and men across Gulltown, King's Landing, White Harbour, and Duskendale were dying in droves.

The skirmishes across the Dornish Marches grew fiercer by the moon, and in the end, Lord Lyonel Hightower led an expedition across the Red Mountains. The nearby Dornish lords raised their banners and gave him a fierce battle that lasted three days. Both sides retreated, claiming victory after suffering significant losses.

While Dorne's gaze was set on the banks of the Torrentine, Lord Borros Baratheon had led three thousand battle-hardened Stormlanders, rushing through the snowy passages of the Boneway when the Dornish least expected, and taking castle Wyl by surprise…

Excerpt from ***'The Life and Reign of King Jon Stark the Unifier'*** *by Maester Olyvar*

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133 AC, the Red Keep

Jon Stark

His gaze did not leave the bundle soundly sleeping in the crib. It was a baby with pale skin and a tuft of silver hair, barely a moon's old. Beneath the tightly shut eyelids hid a pair of indigo eyes, so dark that they could be mistaken for grey.

It was Prince Aemon Targaryen, his firstborn, a babe who had come to this world barely a month prior.

He had sworn to father no children, once. It felt like a lifetime had passed since—perhaps it had. He had sworn to take no wives, wear no crowns, and win no glory, but he had broken those vows, too.

Nobody would know, of course. Stannis had absolved him of those solemn promises, whether out of necessity or desperation. But could a king truly dissolve a word given before the gods? Jon's oaths had been given before a heart tree.

Perhaps that was why the gods had chosen to punish him so.

No, not a punishment, but a warning.

"His fever broke two days prior," Rhaena's hoarse voice came from behind his shoulder. "He'll be fine now."

His wife was as pale as their son. It was not the birth that had taken a toll on her, but the Winter Fever.

Jon knew the disease would come sooner or later, despite his efforts to avert it, but seeing it with his own eyes was sobering. On the first day, all those who caught it would see their face grow flushed. On the second day, the afflicted would start to shiver and feel chill despite burning hot to the touch, and by the third day, they would become delirious and begin to sweat. The next day, either the fever broke or the afflicted perished.

With no known cure, only one in every four survived.

Alas, even the Grand Maester Munkun was rendered helpless before the disease, only able to offer temporary relief but no proper remedy.

How could Jon accept such terrible odds for his wife and child?

It was not luck that had saved Aemon and Rhaena, but sheer desperation. When his wife had started shivering, Jon sent her to Silverwing. She had been nestled under the she-dragon's wing like a duckling with her mother. His wife survived.

Just as he had breathed a sigh of relief, his newborn son had fallen sick.

His son was too young, too fragile to be 'nestled' by a dragon, so Jon held Aemon himself and desperately had his firstborn warmed by Vermithor's fire day and night.

Perhaps his desperation had moved the gods, and his son had survived—barely. Even Munkun could not say if his efforts had done a thing, but Jon knew the dragonfire had helped. Especially as Vermithor was now exhausted, slumbering in the Godswood after devouring a dozen plump cows. It would be weeks before he awakened.

Now, Jon dared not let Aemon out of his sight. He did not fear the disease himself, for it seemed that common sickness would not take hold in his body. Perhaps his flesh had grown too strong for any disease to take hold after feasting on Cannibal's heart and bathing in his blood.

"You need rest too," Rhaena whispered, her slender hands cupping his face and taking a kiss. Then, her nose scrunched up. "And you definitely need a bath."

Jon opened his mouth to object, then took a whiff of his doublet and grimaced.

“Fine,” he said, finally relenting.

“Go,” Rhaena said, gently pushing him away. “Watching over Aemon is my duty, not yours.”

“Grand Maester Munkun said you need plenty of bed rest, too. I can take a hot bath and come back.”

His wife gave him a fond smile. “The realm cannot do without a king, Jon. Not now. You know this.”

“The realm will survive another day without me. That’s why Lord Gunthor is Hand here.”

“He also fell ill,” was the chilling reply. “Even if he pulls through, Gunthor is an old man in his seventh decade. Once his health worsens, it will not easily recover… if at all.”

Her eyes grew distant, doubtlessly remembering her grandfather, who had survived the Winter Fever by the skin of his teeth, only to die a fortnight later.

The proud Sea Snake had perished reluctantly, leaving a little Daenaera Velaryon as the ruling lady of Driftmark, a young girl of barely three years. She was orphaned, too—the Fever had taken her father, and the birthing bed had stolen her mother. Perhaps the gods had chosen to mock Corlys Velaryon one last time, for she was the granddaughter of Vaemond, his eldest nephew, who had wished to claim Driftmark but had been beheaded for calling Rhaenyra’s children bastards.

Then there was Alyn’s bastard, a girl born with teak skin, dark eyes, and six fingers on both hands. Too imperfect for an heir, Corlys had sent both her mother and the babe to the Faith.

Raena gently picked up Aemon and fixed Jon with a sterner look. “You really can’t stay here for too long—the Yronwood and Dayne envoys have been waiting for a meeting for four days now. Any further delay would see your plans crumble.”

Jon let out a long sigh. “You’re right.”

A quick hot bath later, Jon met the envoys in his private audience chamber. Calling them envoys was wrong; the two men before him were lords, here to speak for themselves and no other.

Both came in fine sand-silk and fox-fur cloaks to ward off the chill.

“Excuse me for the delay, my lords,” Jon said solemnly. “I was otherwise occupied.”

If the days of waiting had offended Lord Vorian Dayne or Lord Ulrick Yronwood, it did not show on their faces.

The Dayne lord was a muscled man in his early thirties, with a well-combed mane of golden hair and piercing violet eyes. His fellow Dornish lord almost looked like his blood brother, with shoulder-length locks the colour of pale honey and a braided beard. But the similarities ended here. Where Dayne was no taller than most men, Yronwood towered half a head above with his lanky, almost gaunt body. He looked a decade younger besides—there was a young man’s restlessness in those blue eyes.

“It’s understandable,” was Dayne’s reply. “It is not every day that the Lords of Starfall and Yronwood are invited to the infamous Red Keep. The first time, in fact.”

“It is not every day that powerful Dornish lords are willing to accept an invitation from the Iron Throne,” Jon said back. “Not when Sunspear is at war with my realm.”

“No declaration of war has ever been sent, Your Grace,” Vorian Dayne said, voice soft. “So, there’s no war with the Iron Throne, merely… skirmishes, for now.”

Jon’s mouth twitched in amusement. “The *Sacking of Wyl* was a skirmish, then?”

But even Yronwood, the lord of a House that was usually on good terms with the Wyls, merely shrugged his shoulders.

“There’s always a bunch of daring raiders.” Ulrick’s voice was dripping with disdain. “That’s all they can do—skirmish and raid around villages and defenceless towns. The Lords of Dorne truly don’t think much of the skirmishes, unlike the Daughter’s War, for which Princess Aliandra seemed to have sold her hand to a Lyseni banker for a handful of useless rocks in the sea.”

One would think that Ulrick had a feud with House Martell.

It was true, in a sense. Jon knew he had been Princess Aliandra’s most ardent pursuer. But would a Prince of Dorne ever agree to have his heir have the Lord of Yronwood for a consort?

Not only that, but Princess Aliandra had shown little interest, according to his spymaster.

Ulrick was here as a man scorned—and that was the first reason why Jon had invited him.

“That pesky war has indeed dragged on for too long,” Jon said, nodding his head. “Even Braavos, Pentos, and Lorath have stirred, sending ships and men to join the mess. A few of my lords are eager to fight, too, especially those who rely on trade through the Stepstones for their wealth. I’m afraid that whatever the outcome, the Three Daughters will be torn asunder, never again to wield the power they could boast while united.”

“I might be presumptuous in asking, Your Grace, but are the Stepstones not a place of great strategic importance to the Iron Throne?” Vorian cocked his head. “Yet you seem to disdain it so.”

“It is important, Lord Dayne. But the Stepstones can never be conquered without a nearby foothold.” Jon motioned for them to follow him to a table where a map of the region had been prepared beforehand. “On the east, the Three Daughters loom, ready to strike at any power that would come and threaten them, giving them the advantage of easy supplies and proximity. Perhaps even put aside their usual squabbles to face any new enemy.”

He moved his finger from the Disputed Lands to pause on Sunspear. “To the west, Dorne moves much the same, ready to unite with the Three Daughters to dislodge any ambitious newcomers, forming the perfect pincer. Your ruling princess is doing it right now, with her alliance with the Rogares of Lys. To be fair, I’m far more interested in Dorne, rather than the Stepstones.”

“We have sworn vows to Princess Aliandra,” said Ulrick through gritted teeth. Vorian merely nodded, showing his stance on the matter. “We will not be turning cloak.”

“Vows of fealty go both ways, my lords,” said Jon. “The Prince of Dorne had promised your father, the previous Lord Yronwood, a Valyrian steel weapon for their assistance and reneged on their promise. House Yronwood fought hard against Prince Daemon, sacrificing thousands of men, and in the end, he

was dislodged from the Stepstones. There was even a Valyrian steel axe in the spoils, then, but when Qoren Martell received it, it was granted to a Vaith."

Ulrick scoffed. "And you're willing to give me a dragonsteel weapon, then?"

"If you swear your fealty to me, I will." Jon leaned onto the table. "That or make House Yronwood the Highlords of Dorne."

"I have no grievances with House Nymeros Martell," Lord Vorian said, seemingly amused. "Neither does House Dayne. We do not lack for spell-forged swords, either. How will you try to entice me, Your Grace?"

"Don't you?" Jon quirked an eyebrow. "Did not Princess Aliandra promise to arbitrate the inheritance dispute over Sandstone fairly, but your maternal cousin got passed over despite having the better blood claim?"

Vorian averted his eyes. "The Princes of Sunspear might be mercurial at times. But they avoid interfering with the affairs of the Forty Lords of Dorne. There are worse overlords." '*Like the dragons'* remained unsaid, but Jon heard it all the same.

'What do you call arbitrarily solving inheritance disputes with no rhyme or reason other than favourability, then?'

It seemed that he was dealing with a shameless man.

Jon took a sip from his cup of ale and sighed. "Truth be told, I do not seek war. Nor do I seek subjugation through force, not if I could help it."

"Yet you seek to rule Dorne all the same," the Dayne lord said flatly. "You claim to be benevolent in one breath, and full of ambition in the next."

"As long as the Iron Throne exists, the kings sitting on it will inevitably turn their heads to Dorne sooner or later, eager to prove themselves by achieving." Jon let out a long sigh. "And while fighting and conquest might be bloody, inevitable even, Dorne joining the fold will be just as beneficial to the Dornish in the long run."

"The Conqueror tried to bend Dorne, broke his teeth, and lost his wife instead," Yronwood said, puffing his chest in pride as if he had been the one to beat away Aegon and the Black Dread.

Jon wanted to laugh, then. Such a great pride for a House that had been suppressed by their liege to the point of rebelling three times in the next hundred years.

Or was it perhaps empty posturing?

"If I wanted to conquer Dorne, I wouldn't do it at once," he said instead. "I would gather a fleet and a host of ten, perhaps twelve thousand men, small enough to be easily supplied on a march across the Red Mountains, but big enough to threaten a fortress. Or siege it. They would move to descend at the mouth of the Torrentine or the Vulture river—each close enough to the Reach and the Stormlands to ferry supplies through the sea, allowing them to pin down a castle."

"And Dornish banners would rise to meet them," Vorian countered, looking more intrigued rather than offended. "Your men might land, but we'll easily push them back into the sea."

Jon snorted. “Of all the things to expect in such a war, a dragonrider fears a gathering of Dornish banners the least. Once Wyl or Starfall have fallen, I will merely hold, clearing up the surroundings and sending in smallfolk from the Reach and the Stormlands to mix in with the locals or even replace them, should they prove rebellious. Next will be Blackmont, giving me full control over the Torrentine.”

A heavy frown settled over Yronwood’s face. “We might not be able to do anything against a dragon, but a dragon cannot be everywhere. Even if you manage to burn down a host, the rest will scatter into countless warbands and raiding parties, ambushing your men. Each league of Dornish land you win shall come at the cost of your men.”

“And why would I push deeper into Dorne?”

The question saw both of them flabbergasted.

“All I need to do is hold the castles and absorb them into the Seven Kingdoms.” Jon’s smile widened. “It’s the Princess of Dorne who will have to come and fight me, for it’s her bannermen’s lands she’s failing to defend. Every month that I hold a Dornish keep is a month she loses prestige and respect. In a year, the Dornish lords will question the strength of House Martell if she doesn’t move to take it back. After all, a liege lord who will not defend their lands and bannermen inspires little loyalty.”

Ulrick opened his mouth to retort, but then his eyes widened, and he remained gaping wide open.

“Clever,” Vorian was the one to speak, his words laced with reluctance. “You mean to split Dorne asunder and eat it up piecemeal, unlike the Conqueror, who was eager to gobble it all up in one go and choked…”

“And there isn’t much you can do but struggle,” Jon said flatly. “In the end, you don’t have a fleet. Your shores are undefended. The men Dorne can call upon can maybe rival the Stormlands… if I’m being generous. Six kingdoms stand behind me, and for every small host I lose, I can raise two more. I have mastered a dragon, and the sky is my domain. Defeat is inevitable, and the only reason Dorne stands tall today is that the kings of yore were too spineless to make the final push. Why should you die and struggle for House Martell? What can House Martell give you that House Targaryen can’t?”

The two Dornish lords shared a wordless glance, and Jon could see hesitation in their eyes.

“We want to consult with each other, Your Grace,” Ulrick Yronwood said at last, looking somewhat torn.

Jon stood up with a nod. “I’ll wait for you outside.”

As soon as he passed through the door, he slipped his mind into Blackfather, who stood by the slightly ajar window.

With him gone from the room, both Dornish lords no longer looked unyielding and stubborn to the bone.

“He would respect our rights as lords, then?” Ulrick asked, voice tight. “And keep his promises?”

“Of that, there is no doubt.” Vorian took a pitcher of wine and poured himself a goblet. “They do call him the Generous for a good reason. I heard that the royal steward was a simple fisherman who saved the king’s life and rose high. Even his Lord Commander of the Kingsguard received a dragonsteel sword for his service, and his brother became a lord who could easily rival the Qorgyles. The First Highlord to back

him during the Dance got so many boons and honours that would turn even a pious septon sworn to austerity green with envy."

"Wouldn't we gain plenty if we're the first to bend the knee in Dorne, then?"

"There's a limit to what can be gained, and turning your cloak first is a reputation that will cling to your name beyond the grave…"

Truth be told, Jon had put much thought into Dorne.

Even if he did not take it, it was inevitable that one of his descendants would turn his gaze beyond the Red Mountains. But Jon did not want a repeat of the Young Dragon, the Befuddled, and the mess that followed. He had been impressed by House Martell once, for resisting the House of the Dragon so eagerly, and for winning wars even after losing all the battles.

But now, he was the House of the Dragon, and House Martell were cunning foes he had to deal with.

Dorne had to be conquered. From the Red Mountains to the Broken Hand of Dorne, the lords would answer to the Iron Throne, and they would keep to the king's peace. Yet Jon had to plan carefully and move twice as cautiously. House Martell commanded too much loyalty from their lords and smallfolk and held the favour of the gods. No matter how badly they lost, they had this penchant for snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

Jon knew his history well—the Martells had won a princess and a queen after not winning a single battle and killing a king under a peace banner. It was shameful.

Even a century later, they were a vassal of the Iron Throne in name only. They were a thorn in Stannis's side to the very end. Even the future that would never be made him wary. He was wary of leaving such a dangerous viper to his descendants to deal with.

Yet all those mistakes the Iron Throne had made with Dorne and House Martell would serve him as a lesson.

Jon would use force where force had to be used and generosity for the rest. It had to be done cleverly—more so with the Dornish and the Martells. Too much bloodshed would give rise to spite in the Dornish, a stubborn resistance that might plague his rule for decades.

Yet Jon knew there were ways other than battle to defeat his enemy.

The Dornish were not the true obstacle to the Conquest of Dorne. It was House Martell's unyielding pride that was willing to see everything crash and burn before they bent a knee. That and the bad blood between the Dornish and the neighbouring kingdoms.

His face curled into a smile as he listened to the talk through the raven's mind. Yronwood and Dayne whispered and plotted for half an hour until they were ready to meet him again.

In the eighth month of 133, Jon Stark sent terms to Sunspear, demanding heavy restitution for the raids in the Dornish Marches.

It was not a simple request for redress, but an outright demand for submission and a threat of war.

It is said that Princess Aliandra Martell was so angered that she almost choked on her wine, and turned away the envoy with the words: Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken—Dorne fears no dragon.

Three days later, King Jon Stark declared war on Dorne, and Princess Aliandra told her bannermen to prepare for the coming attack on Dorne. A good part of the easternmost Dornish lords had already called their muster and were participating in the Daughter's War, attempting to claim more of the Stepstones with the help of the Lyseni fleet.

It was said that Aliandra Martell hoped that the Red Mountains would hold the Seven Kingdoms for half a year, and the heavy fighting in the Stepstones would halt the royal fleet.

Contrary to Aliandra's expectations, the Dornish Lords at the western reaches of her domain were apprehensive. The Dance of the Dragons had displayed what a ruthless dragonrider could do if he were truly angered in the Riverlands and the Iron Islands, and the Lords near the Red Mountains would be the first to suffer the brunt of the dragon's ire.

Yronwood and Dayne struck down their banners and travelled to Stonehelm and bent the knee to Jon Stark, decrying Aliandra Martell as an 'oathbreaker' and a 'cheat', unworthy of their loyalty and service.

The nearby lords were startled. With Yronwood and Dayne defecting, holding the passes of the Red Mountain was a tall task. Furthermore, Starfall and Yronwood were mighty fortresses, not easily taken by storm.

The situation turned grim for Sunspear, and Princess Aliandra Martell was said to have gotten ill with anger at the betrayal.

While the Dornish lords were gritting their teeth and preparing for a long, exhausting war, Jon Stark proved himself to be as daring as he was decisive. Under the cover of the night, he had already flown Vermithor to a rocky cove in the Broken Arm, alone and unafraid of ambushes. The next evening, the shadow of the Bronze Fury descended upon Sunspear, torching the very tower where Princess Aliandra Martell was bedridden.

Sunspear had been utterly unprepared for the coming of the dragon.

Next to burn were the quarters of her brothers, her cousins. By the end of the day, all twelve men and women bearing the name Martell in Dorne had met a fiery end. None escaped—including Prince Merion Martell, Aliandra's younger brother, who was said to be with his paramour in a nearby village.

He was killed when on his way to Sunspear, roasted on the road by dragonfire as he rode with haste to take up leadership of Dorne.

"Here is House Martell," Jon Stark had announced to the people of the Shadow Town as they gazed upon the half-melted Sunspear, including many of the lords who had arrived after the attack. "Unbowed, unbent, and broken for it. Bend the knee, and you will be spared, retaining your lands, titles, and privileges. Resist, and follow the line of Nymeros Martell to the grave."

The decisive and ruthless destruction of House Martell had left the lords of Dorne reeling and leaderless—somehow, everyone bearing the Martell name had been found and killed within the span of two days, no matter where they were. Many thought that Sunspear was thoroughly infiltrated by Targaryen spies, for the location of all Martells was seen through too easily.

Lady Alyssa Fowler of Skyreach, Lord Edrick Blackmont of Blackmont, Lord Doran Manwoody of Kingsgrave, and Lord Jeffory Wyl of Wyl were quick to bend the knee, sending their heirs as hostages to the Red Keep. The Ullers of Hellholt and a few lords remained belligerent, but were quickly brought to heel by their former allies; most notably, the rebels' Lord of Vaith was personally killed by Ulrick Yronwood, and his Valyrian steel axe was taken as spoils of victory.

By the end of the Year 134 after Aegon's Conquest, Dorne was finally folded into the Seven Kingdoms, without Jon Stark mustering a single sword. Lord Ulrick Yronwood was granted the title of Lord Paramount of Dorne, Lord Vorian Dayne received a generous city charter, and the former lesser vassals of Martell split the lands of Sunspear.

While the Dornish Lords were wary of King Jon Stark, the smallfolk from the Torrentine to the Broken Arm have been said to have welcomed the king, for he struck at the lords first, and kept peace with an iron hand…

Excerpt from ***'The Life and Reign of King Jon Stark the Unifier'*** *by Maester Olyvar*

By the year 145 of Aegon's Conquest, the Seven Kingdoms had seen an era of prosperity surpassing everything seen in the reign of Viserys I and the Conciliator. The Iron Islands had become a major hub for trade, fishing, and smithing, its population swelling beyond what they could boast before the Dance.

Much of the former lands around the Trident were fully restored. A great part of it was resettled by migrating Northmen, looking to escape the cold and hunger from the six-year winter after the Dance, both at the behest of Lord Cregan Stark of Winterfell and with the aid of King Jon Stark. As a result, followers of the Old Gods had a great resurgence in the northern parts of the Crownlands, and many houses like Frey and Vypren started raising their heirs in the tradition of both the Old Gods and the Seven.

After the submission of Dorne, the king seemed to set his gaze on his own city. With the funding from the Faith, the docks, the city's cisterns, and drains were greatly expanded, and the royal coffers themselves were opened, sweeping out much of Flea Bottom's ramshackled buildings and rebuilding the former slums.

Next to catch the royal attention was the Citadel.

"Each kingdom must have its own Citadel," the king had decreed at the end of the summer. "And since the knights of the mind enjoy royal patronage, a branch must be opened in King's Landing, no inferior to what is taught in Oldtown."

On Visenya's Hill, a grand new building of white marble with sprawling courtyards, gardens, and pale domes arose, just next to the newly built Sept of Austerity, surpassing the Citadel in both size and splendour. Under the king's call, tomes of knowledge were purchased from all corners of the world, and even the Maesters' Order reluctantly started copying down and moving their collection to King's Landing.

The king's patronage had sparked a translation movement that would continue for decades as scholars eagerly worked to translate tomes from Yi-Ti, Leng, Qarth, and even as far as Asshai.

Lord Eldrick Arryn, Lady Johanna Lannister, and Lord Cregan Stark were the next to build their own branches of the Citadel.

By the end of Year 150, the Citadel in Oldtown was a shadow of its former self, with a tenth of its maesters and novices. The mighty city itself had yet to recover from the Winter Fever that took a fourth of those calling it home with it. The rise of the fledgling city of Starfall to the east had seen yet another rival for trade and influence rise in the region.

However, of all the things King Jon Stark did during his reign, many consider his roads and bridges to be his crowning achievement. Despite House Frey's protests, seven new stone bridges were raised above the Green Fork, and by the time of Jon Stark's abdication, the new bridges across the Crownlands numbered over a hundred, each made of solid stone and built by skilled craftsmen.

Next, the roads were paved with cobblestones and smooth river stone. Each lord of the crownlands was to provide work-hands and match the royal coin in the endeavour. By the third decade of the king's reign, the art of road making and paving flourished. The Greater Crownlands were connected by road from the Mander to the Neck and could be easily traversed even in the rainiest weather.

King Aemon the First not only continued his father's endeavour by expanding the roads through the kingdom, but vowed to build one road that would connect the Wall to Starfall…

*Excerpt from '**The New Crownlands**' by Maester Alarick*

Some claim that Jon Stark is afraid of the sea, for he has always avoided taking a ship.

But I know better—His Grace is haunted by a giant kraken, and any ship he would board would be attacked in the deeper waters.

The kraken is a cunning beast, and I have seen him myself, dwelling in the depths of Blackwater Bay as he glared at the Red Keep from afar…

Curiously, the Bronze Fury never tried to help his rider with this many-tentacled menace. Some even claim the dragon was also afraid of the monster in the depths. Others, mostly the remnants of the Ironborn, claim it is the Drowned God's revenge for the king had not been too eager to stop the attacks on their islands…

*Excerpt from the **'Cursed Kraken'** by Janos the Mage*

The Daughter's War ended in 135 with no clear winner. Even though Racallio Randoon fled the Stepstones for the Basilisk Isles, Lys could only hold Torturer's Deep. By the year 140, the sellsails and captains that had taken hold of the Stepstones declared themselves kings and pirate princes.

Though fearing a union of the Three Daughters, the tolls set for ships passing the Stepstones were greatly lowered. In the end, Lys, Myr, and Tyrosh relented, preferring to pay coin for passage rather than throw lives and gold into the endless pit that was the Stepstones.

The other Free Cities and the Iron Throne were of a similar mind. As long as the tolls were acceptable, many were willing to pay them.

Yet as the years passed by, some of the pirate princes grew greedy. They didn't dare to offend the Three Daughters, whose fleets were greatly replenished, and instead, chose to raise the tolls for all others little by little. By 148 AC, many had grown bold enough to extort Pentoshi and Westerosi ships.

Jon Stark summoned the royal fleet, but did not call the banners.

Instead of trying to devour all the Stepstones like Prince Daemon and many others had done before him, he wrenched away the Veiled Island and Bloodstone from their pirate lords and crushed the rest in a series of battles at sea.

The remaining pirate lords and the Three Daughters watched on with trepidation, ready to unite against the Iron Throne, but the continued attack never came, and their vigilance lessened.

Two wooden forts were raised on the Veiled Island and Bloodstone within a moon.

Then, labourers were recruited among the locals, and builders and stonemasons were brought in from the Seven Kingdoms, beginning the construction of a heavily fortified castle on the Veiled Isle and a fortress city in Bloodstone. This was an endeavour even the Rogue Prince and the Sea Snake had not dared to undertake. Of course, the construction did not go unnoticed, and within half a year, everyone from Lys to Tyrosh knew that King Jon Stark was making a heavily fortified foothold.

The Iron Throne had come to the Stepstones, and it was here to stay.

By the year 151 AC, the Three Daughters once again united, but they failed to take the half-finished fortresses by storm. Then, their fleets were burned to cinders by King Jon Stark and his heir, Prince Aemon Targaryen, the rider of Tessarion, and Prince Viserys, the rider of Shrykos.

The royal banners were called in full, and the War of the Stepstones officially began. The pirate lords quickly crumbled under the full might of the Iron Throne, as even the Redwyne, Lannister, and Manderly fleets were mustered. Envoys from Myr, Tyrosh, and Lys tried to entice Braavos and Pentos to join them against the Iron Throne, but King Jon Stark had already moved first, promising the Sealord of Braavos and the Prince of Pentos that ships flying under their banners would pay the same preferential tolls afforded to his lords and merchants in perpetuity.

By 154 AC, the Disputed Lands were plundered clean by the Dornish and the Stormlords. Lord Cregan Stark of Winterfell and his Northmen had sacked Tyrosh, Lord Lyonel Tyrell had looted the Lyseni heartland, and the Iron Throne had conquered the Stepstones, never to relinquish them again.

The Veiled Isle and Bloodstone remained under direct royal control and were governed by a steward, while the rest of the islands were granted to those who had contributed the most. By the year 165 AC, many holdfasts, keeps, and castles had been raised out of stone and granite, turning the Stepstones into a veritable fortress, placing it under the Iron Throne's tight control…

Excerpt for the 'Scramble for the Stepstones' by Archmaester Jonnothor

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While some said King Jon Stark was a kinslayer, a man cursed by the gods for killing his half-brother Daeron in cold blood, others praised his mercy as he took his niece, Princess Jaehaera and raised her like his own daughter.

The king's reign showed that Jon Stark had a distaste for war and bloodshed, and each time he started fighting, he did not indulge in wanton slaughter and sought victory in the swiftest and cleanest way possible. Some even claimed him a sorcerer, for he had the uncanny ability to find the enemy leaders and kill them by his own hand.

The end of the Dance, the fall of King's Landing, the Conquest of Dorne and the Stepstones had shown the king as a patient yet decisive man who could strike hard and fast when the opportunity arose. While the Conquest of the Stepstones was bloody, nobody mourned the death of pirates and corsairs, and the fleets of the Three Daughters were turned to ash by dragonfire, unable to stir up any waves.

However, some argue that the ruthless move towards the Essosi fleets was a warning—that he is not afraid to use overwhelming force when provoked. With Magister Bambarro Bazanne becoming an envoy for the Iron Throne, Lys withdrew from the war, and the second Triarchy fell apart in less than four months. Myr, joined by the exiled Tyroshi magisters and merchant princes, could not resist the Westerosi fleets alone and agreed to withdraw peacefully. The Iron Throne did not pursue the matter further, allowing them preferential tolls for half a century and retreated from Tyrosh.

The open-handedness and willingness to show mercy to those who had previously opposed the king led many to call him the Merciful.

Jon Stark did not lack for temper, however. But his temper was not the explosive fury of the dragon, but as cold as frost, glacial like the Wall.

House Hightower's previous rise had attracted royal scrutiny, but Lord Lyonel Hightower and his family never received royal sanction after bending the knee. But after the Citadel and the High Septon moved to King's Landing, much of their former influence was quick to wane, never to recover to its former glory again.

Furthermore, after Starfall and Ryamsport received royal charters and grew in size and prosperity, Oldtown's affluence itself entered an era of steady decline, and by the end of Jon Stark's reign, the Hightowers could no longer contest with the Tyrells or even the Peakes…

Excerpt from ***'The Life and Reign of King Jon Stark the Unifier'*** *by Maester Olyvar*

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160 AC, Ashcove

Vermithor roared from above, circling around Dreamfyre, Tessarion, Morghul, and the rest of the dragons that had just appeared. She knew *they* had arrived, then.

Rhaena watched the hubbub as her sons, nephews, and brother descended from the ships in a swift procession.

The formerly dilapidated village was transformed into a small walled town, with straight cobbled streets and houses of brick and lumber. It also had another name—the King's Retreat, for her husband had come to dwell here after abdicating the Iron Throne in favour of their eldest last year. She still called it Ashcove, having grown too fond of the name. A statue of an old man with a weary face loomed over the stony piers, as if guarding the docks with its presence—Aethan.

She missed the old man, who was always softspoken and thoughtful. He had survived the Winter Fever well enough, but it had taken a toll on his health, and the next winter had taken him down with a fierce cold.

“Your Grace,” she curtsied to meet Aemon.

“Mother,” he said, all too solemn. Her son always walked like he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. And he did—the dragonbone crown of his father sat well on his head. “We have come for Father’s nameday.”

Aemon was seven and twenty now, tall as his sire, yet absent his monstrous strength, but he had her father’s lean body. He was strong—stronger than any other man, but not half as strong as her husband. In truth, when Rhaena looked at her eldest, she saw her husband, but younger and as if someone had painted his hair silver and his eyes dark indigo. Blackfyre rested on his belt; the Sword of Kings had come to him along with the crown. Aemon was dangerous with it, too, winning the royal melee as a Mystery Knight at nine and ten even with a blunted practice sword.

Not that he would need to use it—six white cloaks shadowed him.

Cregan Stark was here, now a man with salt-and-pepper hair. His eyes were icy, and his expression unreadable as always. A great scar ran through his face—a token from the battle of Tyrosh. The sight of him made Rhaena feel a lurch in her belly.

Ah, her sister. He had killed her sister, poor Baela. Not directly, of course. Six children had not been enough for the Lord of Winterfell, and he wanted more. Baela had died in the birthing bed at seven and thirty, dying together with her newborn daughter. Rhaena never forgave Cregan Stark for it.

By his side were Alaric Stark and Brandon Stark—her eldest nephews and the heir and spare of Winterfell. They had taken their father’s colouring, and only a hint of their mother was their pale purple eyes. Cregan’s heir from his Norrey wife had perished in Tyrosh with no living heirs, leaving Winterfell and the North to her nephews.

Then, there were her younger sons, Daemon and Maekar, their eyes full of smiles as always, but no less dangerous for it. They had trained hard and had proven themselves as knights, enough to convince their father to grant them Dark Sister and Ashclaw. Enough to let them choose their own dragons.

Elaena, Rhaella, and Rhaenys were here too—her brother Viserys’s daughters, and her sons’ wives, now looking around Ashcove with scrunched-up noses.

Jaehaera was quick to embrace her, but Viserys had grown stern with age, distant and with a heavy frown always etched on his face. As Jon had foreseen, her brother had become a great Hand, and there had been no troubles with the succession because their children had all intermarried.

Viserys had only a single son—Aemon the Younger, married to Rhaena’s only daughter, Visenya.

“I’ll lead you to Jon, then,” Rhaena said lightly.

“Are we going to walk like peasants?” Elaena asked with a frown as she looked around. “It’s unbefitting.”

Rhaena’s lips pressed with displeasure. Her niece had grown disrespectful after less than a year of absence.

“It’s rather close,” she said coolly. “The road there isn’t suitable for the wheelhouse, I’m afraid. But you can take it to the royal hall, if you wish.”

“Very well. I’ll wait for you there.” Queen Elaena Targaryen then dragged her sisters towards the nearby wheelhouse.

“Excuse her, Mother,” Aemon said apologetically. “She…”

“She has let the crown get to her head,” Viserys was the one to finish darkly. “I should have been firmer with her. Spare the rod, spoil the child.”

Jaehaere looked exasperated. “You can’t blame her. She’s still feeling queasy from the swaying of the ship, and she’s already pregnant again.”

Rhaena’s irritation melted away like snow under the sun.

“Another child?” She smiled despite herself. “Congratulations, son. You ought to have let her remain in the Red Keep, then.”

“She was too eager to see Ashcove,” Aemon said wryly. “But now that she’s here, the eagerness is all gone. Anyway, let us go see Father.”

Rhaena led them along a narrow path by the shore as the procession squeezed through. Soon, the cobbles beneath their feet were replaced with packed dirt, and then with rocky stone as they passed the slender walls of King’s Retreat. Next was a climb over a small series of steep hillocks.

“We should have taken horses,” Jaehaera said breathlessly, rivulets of sweat running down her pale face.

“I feel better when I walk,” Rhaena said, closing her eyes. “I was tired at first, too, but then I felt my legs grow stronger again. My lungs, too.”

They were now at the more desolate parts of the shore.

“How can Father stay here alone?” Maekar frowned as he took in the rocky shore. It looked almost desolate.

“Easily,” Rhaena said with a chuckle. “He saved your late aunt and me from five Velaryon knights just beyond that hill, you know?”

“I’ve heard that story at least a hundred times.” Daemon clicked his tongue. “Of course, I know Father doesn’t fear any fight. I just didn’t think he’d dwell in a desolate place like this.”

“Grey Ghost died just by the nearby shore.” Rhaena’s tone grew fond as she motioned ahead. “I had almost tamed the little drake. Alas, it was not meant to be—that’s when Cannibal attacked, trying to turn your father and me to cinders.”

They crested the hill then and saw the U-shaped shore with the small stony pier. Today, Jon had not gone up the pier and was knee-deep in the swaying waves, with an iron-rimmed bucket by his side.

“Why is Father only wearing trousers?” Daemon asked.

Rhaena could help but laugh.

“That’s how I met him the first time, too,” she murmured. “He was naked from the waist above, all scarred and fishing without a care in the world.”

He was scarred now, too, pale, silvery lines marring his torso, still as muscled as when she had met him. Rhaena could close her eyes, and it would feel like she had met Jon for the first time yesterday—everything was almost the same, even down to Skyfall that rested on Jon’s hip—the sword returned to her husband’s hands after Ser Alfred Broome died in his sleep three years ago.

But things had changed. The grey streaks in his hair betrayed his age—her husband was turning four and fifty today. And the fishing rod in his hands was no longer an old, weathered branch, but a dragonbone rib.

Jon sensed them swiftly, turning to greet them with a wave.

“Welcome,” he said, face looking content. “I’m almost done here—the bucket is full.”

“Then we can feast on your catches today, Father,” Aemon said with a chuckle.

Jon’s glance flickered to the gathered crowd. “I’m afraid I’ll have to catch a few more to fill your bellies.”

Cregan Stark decisively went to the nearby shed, went through the rack full of fishing rods of various shapes and sizes, picked up one, and joined Jon, shrugging off his cloak and boots as he went.

Before long, Jon was crowded by his nephews, sons, and even Viserys came over with a sigh, picking up a fishing rod of his own.

“Have you thought about my question?” Jon asked mildly. “Aemon?”

“If the Others return…” Her eldest son sighed, rubbing his brow. “It’s a ridiculous idea, Father.”

“Is it?” Her husband smiled with a smile that was not quite a smile. “This,” he ran a finger through a pale, straight scar that ran from his chest down his ribs, “came from a sword hewn out of ice.”

“Ice is too fragile to be made into swords.” Daemon reply was dryly, though his gaze lingered on the scar in question.

“I thought so too, once upon a time, until I had to fight against one.” Jon’s eyes grew distant. “I have ventured beyond the Wall, and I have fought things you can’t even believe. Things that many consider to be old wives’ tales, or old myths and legends.”

Maekar’s laugh boomed across the shore. “Next, you’ll tell me that the giants and the children are real, too.”

Alaric and Brandon Stark shared a glance, grimacing.

“They are,” Cregan was the one to answer. “There’s not much left of them, I believe. My father killed a giant in a skirmish beyond the Wall. Brought his head to Winterfell. I’ve seen wildlings claim they’ve seen the Children in the Haunted Forest, too.”

“The Others might have survived the Long Night,” Alaric said, swallowing heavily. “Otherwise, why would Brandon the Builder build the Wall?”

That finally got everyone's attention.

"Perhaps." Viserys cocked his head, face unreadable. "But why has nobody seen these Others if they survived?"

"Because they fell into a slumber," said Jon. "They can slumber for decades, for centuries, waiting for a chance to strike back. Let us put aside whether the Others are a threat or even real. Let us say they were real, and they were your enemy. What would you do?"

Aemon frowned. "I would call the banners, fly to the Wall and crush them in battle."

"That's easy to say." Her husband reeled in a fish and threw it into the bucket. "What will you do when the enemy hides under the snow, and you have no supplies to feed your host? What happens when they wait you out to freeze in the snow?"

"We should strike and kill the wildlings first, then," Viserys said, voice bored. "Sweep them clean and burn their bodies. The Others won't be much of a threat without an army of corpses to raise as wights. Perhaps the Haunted Forest can be conquered and used for lumber—"

"You can't truly conquer the cold. Snow melts for two months a year beyond the Wall, and that is in summer." Cregan's voice grew heavy. "Most of the land there is bound by ice and snow for the whole year. When the ground freezes deeply, it's harder than granite, and you can't even dig through with a pickaxe."

"How about a bridgehead…"

"We should find their lair, and strike first, I say—"

"What if there's no lair?"

Rhaena listened almost fondly. Her husband rarely spoke, only interjecting as her brother, sons, and nephews began to seriously consider the conundrum Jon had put before them.

Truthfully, she felt old, though she had yet to reach fifty. Even ten years earlier, she would have never agreed to let go of the throne and her crown, let alone retreat here. Yet her limbs were not as strong as they had once been, and her body was quick to tire and slow to rest. Even the chains and straps that held her to Silverwing's body made her ache, turning flight into a chore, not a joy.

So here she was, back to Ashcove with Jon.

Indeed, she did not like living as a fisherman's wife and missed the intrigue and luxury of a queen dowager's life (though not as much as her children), but her husband was content to return to his old ways, fishing from dawn till dusk. In the end, even as a queen, Rhaena had become a fisherman's wife.

Even Vermithor, who wanted to fly together with his companion, would rarely get his wish.

But she no longer minded. Rhaena had gotten her fill of balls and feasts, the splendour of tourneys and courtiers in King's Landing, and they no longer held her attention. Now, she was content to accompany her husband and stroll through the peaceful streets of Ashcove and the Queen's Gardens, which her husband had ordered built just for her. Removing the crown from her head had helped her shrug off a weight she had not even known was there, allowing her to sleep more soundly at night.

She had no regrets.

In the year 182, Queen Rhaena Targaryen passed away at the age of eight and sixty.

Her husband, former king Jon Stark, burned her body on a pyre himself and scattered the ashes over Dragonstone as was her final wish.

At six and seventy, the former king was still as strong as an ox, but he had grown slow and easily tired. It is said that he then flew to King's Landing with Vermithor, left Skyfall to his grandson Gaemon, and then headed to the Nightfort. Even Vermithor was left behind, chained in the Dragonpit.

Cregan Stark—then known as the Old Man of the North—had also travelled to the Wall to meet him after leaving Ice and Winterfell to his heir.

They were joined by Lord Osric Mormont, Lord Jon Umber, Lord Torrhen Dustin, and Lord Harrald Karstark—all battle-tested greybeards, who had lived long lives. The former king led a host of three thousand greybeards beyond the Wall in a great ranging, armed with swords of steel and spears and arrows with tips of obsidian.

They called it the "Grey Ranging", for it was said that not a single man accompanying the former king had black hair remaining. It was said that only the king and the heir of Winterfell knew of the purpose of this ranging, but if they did, they never spoke of it.

That was the last time King Jon Stark and Lord Cregan Stark were seen; not even a trace of the grand expedition was found later, as if the Haunted Forest had swallowed them whole. Even the few wildlings who traded with the Watch whisper only of a great battle beyond the great plains of ice, farther than most of their kind dared venture.

Some called it a great tragedy, but according to Maester Lom of the Nightfort, each man who had joined the Grey Ranging had done so, knowing they would never return.

Ever since, Lord Alaric Stark and King Aemon Targaryen spent many years slowly reforming the Night's Watch…

Excerpt from ***'The Life and Reign of King Jon Stark the Unifier'*** *by Maester Olyvar*

King Jon Stark's insight and rules had kept the royal succession free of turmoil for a time, as all the royal power was concentrated in King's Landing, and Dragonriders were not allowed to dwell outside the city.

The new tradition of keeping the crown prince and spare as a Hand or master of laws saw each new generation of kings ascend the Iron Throne as an experienced hand in the matters of rulership.

Houses Velaryon, Targaryen, and Stark kept intermarrying each generation. By tradition, the crown prince usually married his uncle's eldest daughter, and the eldest princess married her eldest cousin. Spare daughters from the royal cadet branches were always sent to Winterfell to wed, and by the end of the second century after Aegon's Conquest, the Starks of Winterfell of the main line were all purple of eye and silver-gold of hair.

Following in Jon Stark's footsteps, many kings abdicated and retired after three decades of rule, content to sit back and guide their heirs from time to time. Even King Jon Targaryen, the son of King Daemon Targaryen, let go of his crown at the thirty-first year of his reign, crowning his nephew as he married his sole daughter.

The Second Dance of Dragons was far shorter and less bloody than the first. Some claim it cannot be called a Dance, but a mere revolt.

In 249 AC, after King Aemon the Second, also known as Aemon the Drunken, died abruptly at the tourney of Rook's Rest, his nephew and brothers rebelled, attempting to usurp the crown.

But only one survived breaking into the Dragonpit and absconding with a dragon.

King Daemon Targaryen II mounted Tessarion, chasing his cousin and killing him in a battle over Blackwater Bay…

Excerpt from ***'The House of the Dragon'*** *by Archmaester Armen*

Out of twenty dragons at the start of the Dance, only eight survived—Vermithor, Silverwing, Dreamfyre, Sheepstealer, Morghul, Tyraxes, Tessarion, and Shrykos.

The royal couple had mounted Vermithor and Silverwing. Viserys, Queen Rhaena's brother, had tamed Shrykos the day after his knighting, and his wife had bonded Morghul as a hatchling. With Princes Aemon, Daemon, and Maekar mastering Tessarion, Dreamfyre, and Sheepstealer, only Tyraxes remained to be claimed by Queen Elaena Targaryen after marrying Prince Aemon.

After two decades, no more dragons hatched, and there was a worry that magic was waning and House Targaryen's lifeblood would be cut off. Before long, the number of Targaryens swelled far beyond the number of dragons, and many new princes saw themselves dragonless, even if they managed to forge enough links in the Citadel or defeat a white cloak in a fair duel. Two princes and their wives received dragon eggs, but neither managed to hatch them.

Maester Munkun had even theorised that the eggs had petrified after nearly three decades.

Then, Tessarion managed to hatch an egg of her own in the year 165 AC, and even three new wild dragons hatched on Dragonstone within the next decade.

The wild dragons were captured by the now abdicated King Jon the Just and brought into the Dragonpit under the firm control of House Targaryen. It was said that the retired king spent half a decade scouring through the Dragonmont, going through cracks, vents, and caverns, collecting each and every dragon egg he could find.

By royal decree of King Aemon Targaryen, all dragons belonged directly to the Iron Throne and were under no circumstances to be spread out. Some suggested that the king feared a new challenger to his power would rise from the dragonseeds in Dragonstone, following in the footsteps of his sire and claiming his power to the throne with a dragon.

Mushroom, in his later writings, claimed that chaining dragons into the Dragonpit would stunt their growth, but such rumours are considered to be fearmongering at best, as the impact was considered

insignificant. Caraxes and Meleys had been raised in the Dragonpit, and Vermithor had spent much of his life chained, yet eventually grew to the size of the Black Dread before his death.

Without putting eggs in the cribs of the newborn, the hatching of new dragons was slower, but by the year 230, House Targaryen could command twenty-three dragons…

Excerpt from ***'The House of the Dragon'*** *by Archmaester Armen*

The winter of the year 301 AC was exceptionally cold. Both Lord Brandon Stark and King Maekar II Targaryen were a common sight at the Wall in the last decade, but none knew what drew these two great figures to the Wall shortly after the Second Stepstones War.

Over the last century and a half, the Iron Throne and the North had taken great interest in the Night's Watch. Each hot spring across the Gift was meticulously recorded and later built over glass gardens that fed the castles along the Watch. Fortifications had been raised from the Shadow Tower to the Bay of Ice, and the half-ruined Westwatch-by-the-Bridge had become a fortress to rival the infamous Starpike.

Even House Mormont's Bear Island had been turned into half a fortress over the centuries, after Mormont Lords grew wealthy from governing the Stepstones for an uninterrupted stretch of three decades.

Furthermore, a vast network of underground tunnels had been dug out and reinforced with ironwood and stone, connecting the lands of the Gift from Eastwatch to the Bay of Ice. The passageways were wide enough for five men to ride abreast and could be used to resupply and travel in the depths of winter. It had taken over a century and millions of dragons to complete, the final stretch dug out by the second half of the third century after Aegon's Conquest.

After the Night's Watch's great reform, new members no longer swore for life, aside from the commanders. After two decades of service, volunteers were given land across the Gift and only had to pay a token tithe to the Watch in kind, and were allowed to take wives after leaving service. In return, they were requested to answer any call to arms from the Lord Commander of the Night's Watch. The land deed itself would only last for two generations before reverting to the Night's Watch unless the new owner served two decades in turn.

A new tradition arose in which a man would send his firstborn to the Watch as soon as he turned five and ten.

Criminals and outlaws could still take the Black, but their service would always be for life, settled into a new, separate branch of the order.

Eastwatch-by-the-Sea had grown into a bustling town. The Night's Watch had even opened a branch of the Citadel, focused on researching the growth of crops in the cold and underground. The Alchemist's Guild, eager for acknowledgement, had done the same, though they had claimed they wished to defeat the cold with alchemy for good.

By the beginning of the fourth century after Aegon's Conquest, the strength of the Night's Watch had swelled to over thirteen thousand, all the castles were manned, and even an outpost had been established at Skane and Storrold's Point, a wooden harbour fort built over the ruins of Hardhome. The

haunted forest had been pushed back for fifteen leagues from the Wall, the sheer amount of old, valuable lumber proving a great boon for the coffers of the order.

At the swing of winter, the year 302 AC saw an even heavier congestion at the Wall. King Maekar II Targaryen and Lord Brandon Stark had arrived at Castle Black with a solemn procession. They didn't linger for long, but three of Lord Stark's sons remained instead, and ten dragonriders of the royal family joined them to stand vigil on the Wall, as if expecting a great enemy to emerge from the snows beyond the Wall.

Yet no such enemy came, only the dire chill and the snow.

The winter lasted a full eight years, and it is said that over a third of Westeros died or froze in the snows. But spring came, as it always did, even though it was accompanied by the return of the Great Spring Sickness that took down many more lives.

Aside from its length, there was only one notable matter of the Great Winter. During 306 AC, a great comet could be seen, streaking through the sky for half a day before disappearing…

Excerpt from ***'The House of the Dragon'*** *by Archmaester Armen*

Author's Endnote: It is over!

I could probably drag it on for a few more epilogue chapters, but I think this much is enough. It was great fun writing No Joy, but I could have honestly ended it after Aemond's death at the God's Eye. Perhaps next time I will.