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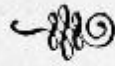
By George R. R. Martin

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About the Illustrator



Fire & Blood
Being a History of the
Targaryen Kings of Westeros



Volume One
from Aegon I (the Conqueror)
to
the Regency of Aegon III (the Dragonbane)

by Archmaester Gyldayn
of the Citadel of Oldtown
(here transcribed by George R. R. Martin)



Aegon's Conquest

*T*he maesters of the Citadel who keep the histories of Westeros have used Aegon's Conquest as their touchstone for the past three hundred years. Births, deaths, battles, and other events are dated either AC (After the Conquest) or BC (Before the Conquest).

True scholars know that such dating is far from precise. Aegon Targaryen's conquest of the Seven Kingdoms did not take place in a single day. More than two years passed between Aegon's landing and his Oldtown coronation...and even then the Conquest remained incomplete, since Dorne remained unsubdued. Sporadic attempts to bring the Dornishmen into the realm continued all through King Aegon's reign and well into the reigns of his sons, making it impossible to fix a precise end date for the Wars of Conquest.

Even the start date is a matter of some misconception. Many assume, wrongly, that the reign of King Aegon I Targaryen began on the day he landed at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, beneath the three hills

where the city of King's Landing would eventually stand. Not so. The day of Aegon's Landing was celebrated by the king and his descendants, but the Conqueror actually dated the start of his reign from the day he was crowned and anointed in the Starry Sept of Oldtown by the High Septon of the Faith. This coronation took place two years after Aegon's Landing, well after all three of the major battles of the Wars of Conquest had been fought and won. Thus it can be seen that most of Aegon's actual conquering took place from 2–1 BC, Before the Conquest.

The Targaryens were of pure Valyrian blood, dragonlords of ancient lineage. Twelve years before the Doom of Valyria (114 BC), Aenar Targaryen sold his holdings in the Freehold and the Lands of the Long Summer, and moved with all his wives, wealth, slaves, dragons, siblings, kin, and children to Dragonstone, a bleak island citadel beneath a smoking mountain in the narrow sea.

At its apex Valyria was the greatest city in the known world, the center of civilization. Within its shining walls, twoscore rival houses vied for power and glory in court and council, rising and falling in an endless, subtle, oft savage struggle for dominance. The Targaryens were far from the most powerful of the dragonlords, and their rivals saw their flight to Dragonstone as an act of surrender, as cowardice. But Lord Aenar's maiden daughter Daenys, known forever afterward as Daenys the Dreamer, had foreseen the destruction of Valyria by fire. And when the Doom came twelve years later, the Targaryens were the only dragonlords to survive.

Dragonstone had been the westernmost outpost of Valyrian power for two centuries. Its location athwart the Gullet gave its lords a stranglehold on Blackwater Bay and enabled both the Targaryens and their close allies, the Velaryons of Driftmark (a lesser house of Valyrian descent) to fill their coffers off the passing trade. Velaryon ships, along with those of another allied Valyrian house, the Celtigars of Claw Isle, dominated the middle reaches of the narrow sea, whilst the Targaryens ruled the skies with their dragons.

Yet even so, for the best part of a hundred years after the Doom of Valyria (the rightly named Century of Blood), House Targaryen looked east, not west, and took little interest in the affairs of Westeros. Gaemon Targaryen, brother and husband to Daenys the Dreamer, followed Aenar the Exile as Lord of Dragonstone, and became known as Gaemon the Glorious. Gaemon's son Aegon and his daughter Elaena ruled together

after his death. After them the lordship passed to their son Maegon, his brother Aerys, and Aerys's sons, Aelyx, Baelon, and Daemion. The last of the three brothers was Daemion, whose son Aerion then succeeded to Dragonstone.

The Aegon who would be known to history as Aegon the Conqueror and Aegon the Dragon was born on Dragonstone in 27 BC. He was the only son, and second child, of Aerion, Lord of Dragonstone, and Lady Valaena of House Velaryon, herself half Targaryen on her mother's side. Aegon had two trueborn siblings; an elder sister, Visenya, and a younger sister, Rhaenys. It had long been the custom amongst the dragonlords of Valyria to wed brother to sister, to keep the bloodlines pure, but Aegon took both his sisters to bride. By tradition, he would have been expected to wed only his older sister, Visenya; the inclusion of Rhaenys as a second wife was unusual, though not without precedent. It was said by some that Aegon wed Visenya out of duty and Rhaenys out of desire.

All three siblings had shown themselves to be dragonlords before they wed. Of the five dragons who had flown with Aenar the Exile from Valyria, only one survived to Aegon's day: the great beast called Balerion, the Black Dread. The dragons Vhagar and Meraxes were younger, hatched on Dragonstone itself.

A common myth, oft heard amongst the ignorant, claims that Aegon Targaryen had never set foot upon the soil of Westeros until the day he set sail to conquer it, but this cannot be truth. Years before that sailing, the Painted Table had been carved and decorated at Lord Aegon's command; a massive slab of wood, some fifty feet long, carved in the shape of Westeros, and painted to show all the woods and rivers and towns and castles of the Seven Kingdoms. Plainly, Aegon's interest in Westeros long predated the events that drove him to war. As well, there are reliable reports of Aegon and his sister Visenya visiting the Citadel of Oldtown in their youth, and hawking on the Arbor as guests of Lord Redwyne. He may have visited Lannisport as well; accounts differ.

The Westeros of Aegon's youth was divided into seven quarrelsome kingdoms, and there was hardly a time when two or three of these kingdoms were not at war with one another. The vast, cold, stony North was ruled by the Starks of Winterfell. In the deserts of Dorne, the Martell princes held sway. The gold-rich westerlands were ruled by the Lannisters of Casterly Rock, the fertile Reach by the Gardeners of Highgarden. The Vale, the Fingers, and the Mountains of the Moon

belonged to House Arryn...but the most belligerent kings of Aegon's time were the two whose realms lay closest to Dragonstone, Harren the Black and Argilac the Arrogant.

From their great citadel, Storm's End, the Storm Kings of House Durrandon had once ruled the eastern half of Westeros, from Cape Wrath to the Bay of Crabs, but their powers had been dwindling for centuries. The Kings of the Reach had nibbled at their domains from the west, the Dornishmen harassed them from the south, and Harren the Black and his ironmen had pushed them from the Trident and the lands north of the Blackwater Rush. King Argilac, last of the Durrandon, had arrested this decline for a time, turning back a Dornish invasion whilst still a boy, crossing the narrow sea to join the great alliance against the imperialist "tigers" of Volantis, and slaying Garse VII Gardener, King of the Reach, in the Battle of Summerfield twenty years later. But Argilac had grown older; his famous mane of black hair had gone grey, and his prowess at arms had faded.

North of the Blackwater, the riverlands were ruled by the bloody hand of Harren the Black of House Hoare, King of the Isles and the Rivers. Harren's ironborn grandsire, Harwyn Hardhand, had taken the Trident from Argilac's grandsire, Arrec, whose own forebears had thrown down the last of the river kings centuries earlier. Harren's father had extended his domains east to Duskenale and Rosby. Harren himself had devoted most of his long reign, close on forty years, to building a gigantic castle beside the Gods Eye, but with Harrenhal at last nearing completion, the ironborn would soon be free to seek fresh conquests.

No king in Westeros was more feared than Black Harren, whose cruelty had become legendary all through the Seven Kingdoms. And no king in Westeros felt more threatened than Argilac the Storm King, last of the Durrandon, an aging warrior whose only heir was his maiden daughter. Thus it was that King Argilac reached out to the Targaryens on Dragonstone, offering Lord Aegon his daughter in marriage, with all the lands east of the Gods Eye from the Trident to the Blackwater Rush as her dowry.

Aegon Targaryen spurned the Storm King's proposal. He had two wives, he pointed out; he did not need a third. And the dower lands being offered had belonged to Harrenhal for more than a generation. They were not Argilac's to give. Plainly, the aging Storm King meant to establish

the Targaryens along the Blackwater as a buffer between his own lands and those of Harren the Black.

The Lord of Dragonstone countered with an offer of his own. He would take the dower lands being offered if Argilac would also cede Massey's Hook and the woods and plains from the Blackwater south to the river Wendwater and the headwaters of the Mander. The pact would be sealed by the marriage of Argilac's daughter to Orys Baratheon, Lord Aegon's childhood friend and champion.

These terms Argilac the Arrogant rejected angrily. Orys Baratheon was a baseborn half-brother to Lord Aegon, it was whispered, and the Storm King would not dishonor his daughter by giving her hand to a bastard. The very suggestion enraged him. Argilac had the hands of Aegon's envoy cut off and returned to him in a box. "These are the only hands your bastard shall have of me," he wrote.

Aegon made no reply. Instead he summoned his friends, bannermen, and principal allies to attend him on Dragonstone. Their numbers were small. The Velaryons of Driftmark were sworn to House Targaryen, as were the Celtigars of Claw Isle. From Massey's Hook came Lord Bar Emmon of Sharp Point and Lord Massey of Stonedance, both sworn to Storm's End, but with closer ties to Dragonstone. Lord Aegon and his sisters took counsel with them, and visited the castle sept to pray to the Seven of Westeros as well, though he had never before been accounted a pious man.

On the seventh day, a cloud of ravens burst from the towers of Dragonstone to bring Lord Aegon's word to the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. To the seven kings they flew, to the Citadel of Oldtown, to lords both great and small. All carried the same message: from this day forth there would be but one king in Westeros. Those who bent the knee to Aegon of House Targaryen would keep their lands and titles. Those who took up arms against him would be thrown down, humbled, and destroyed.

Accounts differ on how many swords set sail from Dragonstone with Aegon and his sisters. Some say three thousand; others number them only in the hundreds. This modest Targaryen host put ashore at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, on the northern bank where three wooded hills rose above a small fishing village.

In the days of the Hundred Kingdoms, many petty kings had claimed dominion over the river mouth, amongst them the Darklyn kings of Duskendale, the Masseys of Stonedance, and the river kings of old, be they Mudds, Fishers, Brackens, Blackwoods, or Hooks. Towers and forts had crowned the three hills at various times, only to be thrown down in one war or another. Now only broken stones and overgrown ruins remained to welcome the Targaryens. Though claimed by both Storm's End and Harrenhal, the river mouth was undefended, and the closest castles were held by lesser lords of no great power or military prowess, and lords moreover who had little reason to love their nominal overlord, Harren the Black.

Aegon Targaryen quickly threw up a log-and-earth palisade around the highest of the three hills, and dispatched his sisters to secure the submission of the nearest castles. Rosby yielded to Rhaenys and golden-eyed Meraxes without a fight. At Stokeworth a few crossbowmen loosed bolts at Visenya, until Vhagar's flames set the roofs of the castle keep ablaze. Then they too submitted.

The Conquerors' first true test came from Lord Darklyn of Duskendale and Lord Mooton of Maidenpool, who joined their power and marched south with three thousand men to drive the invaders back into the sea. Aegon sent Orys Baratheon out to attack them on the march, whilst he descended on them from above with the Black Dread. Both lords were slain in the one-sided battle that followed; Darklyn's son and Mooton's brother thereafter yielded up their castles and swore their swords to House Targaryen. At that time Duskendale was the principal Westerosi port on the narrow sea, and had grown fat and wealthy from the trade that passed through its harbor. Visenya Targaryen did not allow the town to be sacked, but she did not hesitate to claim its riches, greatly swelling the coffers of the Conquerors.

This perhaps would be an apt place to discuss the differing characters of Aegon Targaryen and his sisters and queens.

Visenya, eldest of the three siblings, was as much a warrior as Aegon himself, as comfortable in ringmail as in silk. She carried the Valyrian longsword Dark Sister, and was skilled in its use, having trained beside her brother since childhood. Though possessed of the silver-gold hair and purple eyes of Valyria, hers was a harsh, austere beauty. Even those who loved her best found Visenya stern, serious, and unforgiving; some said that she played with poisons and dabbled in dark sorceries.

Rhaenys, youngest of the three Targaryens, was all her sister was not, playful, curious, impulsive, given to flights of fancy. No true warrior, Rhaenys loved music, dancing, and poetry, and supported many a singer, mummer, and puppeteer. Yet it was said that Rhaenys spent more time on dragonback than her brother and sister combined, for above all things she loved to fly. She once was heard to say that before she died she meant to fly Meraxes across the Sunset Sea to see what lay upon its western shores. Whilst no one ever questioned Visenya's fidelity to her brother-husband, Rhaenys surrounded herself with comely young men, and (it was whispered) even entertained some in her bedchambers on the nights when Aegon was with her elder sister. Yet despite these rumors, observers at court could not fail to note that the king spent ten nights with Rhaenys for every night with Visenya.

Aegon Targaryen himself, strangely, was as much an enigma to his contemporaries as to us. Armed with the Valyrian steel blade Blackfyre, he was counted amongst the greatest warriors of his age, yet he took no pleasure in feats of arms, and never rode in tourney or melee. His mount was Balerion the Black Dread, but he flew only to battle or to travel swiftly across land and sea. His commanding presence drew men to his banners, yet he had no close friends, save Orys Baratheon, the companion of his youth. Women were drawn to him, but Aegon remained ever faithful to his sisters. As king, he put great trust in his small council and his sisters, leaving much of the day-to-day governance of the realm to them...yet did not hesitate to take command when he found it necessary. Though he dealt harshly with rebels and traitors, he was open-handed with former foes who bent the knee.

This he showed for the first time at the Aegonfort, the crude wood-and-earth castle he had raised atop what would henceforth and forever be known as Aegon's High Hill. Having taken a dozen castles and secured the mouth of the Blackwater Rush on both sides of the river, he commanded the lords he had defeated to attend him. There they laid their swords at his feet, and Aegon raised them up and confirmed them in their lands and titles. To his oldest supporters he gave new honors. Daemon Velaryon, Lord of the Tides, was made master of ships, in command of the royal fleet. Triston Massey, Lord of Stonedance, was named master of laws, Crispian Celtigar master of coin. And Orys Baratheon he proclaimed to be "my shield, my stalwart, my strong right hand." Thus Baratheon is reckoned by the maesters the first King's Hand.

Heraldic banners had long been a tradition amongst the lords of Westeros, but such had never been used by the dragonlords of old Valyria. When Aegon's knights unfurled his great silken battle standard, with a red three-headed dragon breathing fire upon a black field, the lords took it for a sign that he was now truly one of them, a worthy high king for Westeros. When Queen Visenya placed a Valyrian steel circlet, studded with rubies, on her brother's head and Queen Rhaenys hailed him as, "Aegon, First of His Name, King of All Westeros, and Shield of His People," the dragons roared and the lords and knights sent up a cheer...but the smallfolk, the fishermen and fieldhands and goodwives, shouted loudest of all.

The seven kings that Aegon the Dragon meant to uncrown were not cheering, however. In Harrenhal and Storm's End, Harren the Black and Argilac the Arrogant had already called their banners. In the west, King Mern of the Reach rode the ocean road north to Casterly Rock to meet with King Loren of House Lannister. The Princess of Dorne dispatched a raven to Dragonstone, offering to join Aegon against Argilac the Storm King...but as an equal and ally, not a subject. Another offer of alliance came from the boy king of the Eyrie, Ronnel Arryn, whose mother asked for all the lands east of the Green Fork of the Trident for the Vale's support against Black Harren. Even in the North, King Torrhen Stark of Winterfell sat with his lords bannermen and counselors late into the night, discussing what was to be done about this would-be conqueror. The whole realm waited anxiously to see where Aegon would move next.



Within days of his coronation, Aegon's armies were on the march again. The greater part of his host crossed the Blackwater Rush, making south for Storm's End under the command of Orys Baratheon. Queen Rhaenys accompanied him, astride Meraxes of the golden eyes and silver scales. The Targaryen fleet, under Daemon Velaryon, left Blackwater Bay and turned north, for Gulltown and the Vale. With them went Queen

Visenya and Vhagar. The king himself marched northwest, to the Gods Eye and Harrenhal, the gargantuan fortress that was the pride and obsession of King Harren the Black.

All three of the Targaryen thrusts faced fierce opposition. Lords Errol, Fell, and Buckler, bannermen to Storm's End, surprised the advance elements of Orys Baratheon's host as they were crossing the Wendwater, cutting down more than a thousand men before fading back into the trees. A hastily assembled Arryn fleet, augmented by a dozen Braavosi warships, met and defeated the Targaryen fleet in the waters off Gulltown. Amongst the dead was Aegon's admiral, Daemon Velaryon. Aegon himself was attacked on the south shore of the Gods Eye, not once but twice. The Battle of the Reeds was a Targaryen victory, but they suffered heavy losses at the Wailing Willows when two of King Harren's sons crossed the lake in longboats with muffled oars and fell upon their rear.

In the end, though, Aegon's enemies had no answer for his dragons. The men of the Vale sank a third of the Targaryen ships and captured near as many, but when Queen Visenya descended upon them from the sky, their own ships burned. Lords Errol, Fell, and Buckler hid in their familiar forests until Queen Rhaenys unleashed Meraxes and a wall of fire swept through the woods, turning the trees to torches. And the victors at the Wailing Willows, returning across the lake to Harrenhal, were ill prepared when Balerion fell upon them out of the morning sky. Harren's longboats burned. So did Harren's sons.

Aegon's foes also found themselves plagued by other enemies. As Argilac the Arrogant gathered his swords at Storm's End, pirates from the Stepstones descended on the shores of Cape Wrath to take advantage of their absence, and Dornish raiding parties came boiling out of the Red Mountains to sweep across the marches. In the Vale, young King Ronnel had to contend with a rebellion on the Three Sisters, when the Sistermen renounced all allegiance to the Eyrie and proclaimed Lady Marla Sunderland their queen.

Yet these were but minor vexations compared to what befell Harren the Black. Though House Hoare had ruled the riverlands for three generations, the men of the Trident had no love for their ironborn overlords. Harren the Black had driven thousands to their deaths in the building of his great castle of Harrenhal, plundering the riverlands for materials, and beggaring lords and smallfolk alike with his appetite for

gold. So now the riverlands rose against him, led by Lord Edmyn Tully of Riverrun. Summoned to the defense of Harrenhal, Tully declared for House Targaryen instead, raised the dragon banner over his castle, and rode forth with his knights and archers to join his strength to Aegon's. His defiance gave heart to the other riverlords. One by one, the lords of the Trident renounced Harren and declared for Aegon the Dragon. Blackwoods, Mallisters, Vances, Brackens, Pipers, Freys, Strongs... summoning their levies, they descended on Harrenhal.

Suddenly outnumbered, King Harren the Black took refuge in his supposedly impregnable stronghold. The largest castle ever raised in Westeros, Harrenhal boasted five gargantuan towers, an inexhaustible source of fresh water, huge subterranean vaults well stocked with provisions, and massive walls of black stone higher than any ladder and too thick to be broken by any ram or shattered by a trebuchet. Harren barred his gates and settled down with his remaining sons and supporters to withstand a siege.

Aegon of Dragonstone was of a different mind. Once he had joined his power with that of Edmyn Tully and the other riverlords to ring the castle, he sent a maester to the gates under a peace banner, to parley. Harren emerged to meet him; an old man and grey, yet still fierce in his black armor. Each king had his banner bearer and his maester in attendance, so the words that they exchanged are still remembered.

"Yield now," Aegon began, "and you may remain as Lord of the Iron Islands. Yield now, and your sons will live to rule after you. I have eight thousand men outside your walls."

"What is outside my walls is of no concern to me," said Harren. "Those walls are strong and thick."

"But not so high as to keep out dragons. Dragons fly."

"I built in stone," said Harren. "Stone does not burn."

To which Aegon said, "When the sun sets, your line shall end."

It is said that Harren spat at that and returned to his castle. Once inside, he sent every man of his to the parapets, armed with spears and bows and crossbows, promising lands and riches to whichever of them could bring the dragon down. "Had I a daughter, the dragonslayer could claim her hand as well," Harren the Black proclaimed. "Instead I will give him one of Tully's daughters, or all three if he likes. Or he may pick one of Blackwood's whelps, or Strong's, or any girl born of these traitors

of the Trident, these lords of yellow mud.” Then Harren the Black retired to his tower, surrounded by his household guard, to sup with his remaining sons.

As the last light of the sun faded, Black Harren’s men stared into the gathering darkness, clutching their spears and crossbows. When no dragon appeared, some may have thought that Aegon’s threats had been hollow. But Aegon Targaryen took Balerion up high, through the clouds, up and up until the dragon was no bigger than a fly upon the moon. Only then did he descend, well inside the castle walls. On wings as black as pitch Balerion plunged through the night, and when the great towers of Harrenhal appeared beneath him, the dragon roared his fury and bathed them in black fire, shot through with swirls of red.

Stone does not burn, Harren had boasted, but his castle was not made of stone alone. Wood and wool, hemp and straw, bread and salted beef and grain, all took fire. Nor were Harren’s ironmen made of stone. Smoking, screaming, shrouded in flames, they ran across the yards and tumbled from the wallwalks to die upon the ground below. And even stone will crack and melt if a fire is hot enough. The riverlords outside the castle walls said later that the towers of Harrenhal glowed red against the night, like five great candles...and like candles, they began to twist and melt as runnels of molten stone ran down their sides.

Harren and his last sons died in the fires that engulfed his monstrous fortress that night. House Hoare died with him, and so too did the Iron Islands’ hold on the riverlands. The next day, outside the smoking ruins of Harrenhal, King Aegon accepted an oath of fealty from Edmyn Tully, Lord of Riverrun, and named him Lord Paramount of the Trident. The other riverlords did homage as well, to Aegon as king and to Edmyn Tully as their liege lord. When the ashes had cooled enough to allow men to enter the castle safely, the swords of the fallen, many shattered or melted or twisted into ribbons of steel by dragonfire, were gathered up and sent back to the Aegonfort in wagons.

South and east, the Storm King’s bannermen proved considerably more loyal than King Harren’s. Argilac the Arrogant gathered a great host about him at Storm’s End. The seat of the Durrandons was a mighty fastness, its great curtain wall even thicker than the walls of Harrenhal. It too was thought to be impregnable to assault. Word of King Harren’s end soon reached the ears of his old enemy King Argilac, however. Lords Fell and Buckler, falling back before the approaching host (Lord Errol

had been killed), had sent him word of Queen Rhaenys and her dragon. The old warrior king roared that he did not intend to die as Harren had, cooked inside his own castle like a suckling pig with an apple in his mouth. No stranger to battle, he would decide his own fate, sword in hand. So Argilac the Arrogant rode forth from Storm's End one last time, to meet his foes in the open field.

The Storm King's approach was no surprise to Orys Baratheon and his men; Queen Rhaenys, flying Meraxes, had witnessed Argilac's departure from Storm's End and was able to give the Hand a full accounting of the enemy's numbers and dispositions. Orys took up a strong position on the hills south of Bronzegate, and dug in there on the high ground to await the coming of the stormlanders.

As the armies came together, the stormlands proved true to their name. A steady rain began to fall that morning, and by midday it had turned into a howling gale. King Argilac's lords bannermen urged him to delay his attack until the next day, in hopes the rain would pass, but the Storm King outnumbered the Conquerors almost two to one, and had almost four times as many knights and heavy horses. The sight of the Targaryen banners flapping sodden above his own hills enraged him, and the battle-seasoned old warrior did not fail to note that the rain was blowing from the south, into the faces of the Targaryen men on their hills. So Argilac the Arrogant gave the command to attack, and the battle known to history as the Last Storm began.

The fighting lasted well into the night, a bloody business and far less one-sided than Aegon's conquest of Harrenhal. Thrice Argilac the Arrogant led his knights against the Baratheon positions, but the slopes were steep and the rains had turned the ground soft and muddy, so the warhorses struggled and foundered, and the charges lost all cohesion and momentum. The stormlanders fared better when they sent their spearmen up the hills on foot. Blinded by the rain, the invaders did not see them climbing until it was too late, and the wet bowstrings of the archers made their bows useless. One hill fell, and then another, and the fourth and final charge of the Storm King and his knights broke through the Baratheon center...only to come upon Queen Rhaenys and Meraxes. Even on the ground, the dragon proved formidable. Dickon Murrigen and the Bastard of Blackhaven, commanding the vanguard, were engulfed in dragonflame, along with the knights of King Argilac's personal guard. The warhorses panicked and fled in terror, crashing into

riders behind them, and turning the charge into chaos. The Storm King himself was thrown from his saddle.

Yet still Argilac continued to battle. When Orys Baratheon came down the muddy hill with his own men, he found the old king holding off half a dozen men, with as many corpses at his feet. "Stand aside," Baratheon commanded. He dismounted, so as to meet the king on equal footing, and offered the Storm King one last chance to yield. Argilac cursed him instead. And so they fought, the old warrior king with his streaming white hair and Aegon's fierce, black-bearded Hand. Each man took a wound from the other, it was said, but in the end the last of the Durrandon got his wish, and died with a sword in his hand and a curse on his lips. The death of their king took all heart out of the stormlanders, and as the word spread that Argilac had fallen, his lords and knights threw down their swords and fled.



For a few days it was feared that Storm's End might suffer the same fate as Harrenhal, for Argilac's daughter Argella barred her gates at the approach of Orys Baratheon and the Targaryen host, and declared herself the Storm Queen. Rather than bend the knee, the defenders of Storm's End would die to the last man, she promised when Queen Rhaenys flew Meraxes into the castle to parley. "You may take my castle, but you will

win only bones and blood and ashes,” she announced...but the soldiers of the garrison proved less eager to die. That night they raised a peace banner, threw open the castle gate, and delivered Lady Argella gagged, chained, and naked to the camp of Orys Baratheon.

It is said that Baratheon unchained her with his own hands, wrapped his cloak around her, poured her wine, and spoke to her gently, telling her of her father’s courage and the manner of his death. And afterward, to honor the fallen king, he took the arms and words of the Durrandon for his own. The crowned stag became his sigil, Storm’s End became his seat, and Lady Argella his wife.

With both the riverlands and stormlands now under the control of Aegon the Dragon and his allies, the remaining kings of Westeros saw plainly that their own turns were coming. At Winterfell, King Torrhen called his banners; given the vast distances in the North, he knew that assembling an army would take time. Queen Sharra of the Vale, regent for her son Ronnel, took refuge in the Eyrie, looked to her defenses, and sent an army to the Bloody Gate, gateway to the Vale of Arryn. In her youth Queen Sharra had been lauded as “the Flower of the Mountain,” the fairest maid in all the Seven Kingdoms. Perhaps hoping to sway Aegon with her beauty, she sent him a portrait and offered herself to him in marriage, provided he named her son Ronnel as his heir. Though the portrait did finally reach him, it is not known whether Aegon Targaryen ever replied to her proposal; he had two queens already, and Sharra Arryn was by then a faded flower, ten years his elder.

Meanwhile, the two great western kings had made common cause and assembled their own armies, intent on putting an end to Aegon for good and all. From Highgarden marched Mern IX of House Gardener, King of the Reach, with a mighty host. Beneath the walls of Castle Goldengrove, seat of House Rowan, he met Loren I Lannister, King of the Rock, leading his own host down from the westerlands. Together the Two Kings commanded the mightiest host ever seen in Westeros: an army fifty-five thousand strong, including some six hundred lords great and small and more than five thousand mounted knights. “Our iron fist,” boasted King Mern. His four sons rode beside him, and both of his young grandsons attended him as squires.

The Two Kings did not linger long at Goldengrove; a host of such size must remain on the march, lest it eat the surrounding countryside bare.

The allies set out at once, marching north by northeast through tall grasses and golden fields of wheat.

Advised of their coming in his camp beside the Gods Eye, Aegon gathered his own strength and advanced to meet these new foes. He commanded only a fifth as many men as the Two Kings, and much of his strength was made up of men sworn to the riverlords, whose loyalty to House Targaryen was of recent vintage, and untested. With the smaller host, however, Aegon was able to move much more quickly than his foes. At the town of Stoney Sept, both his queens joined him with their dragons—Rhaenys from Storm’s End and Visenya from Crackclaw Point, where she had accepted many fervent pledges of fealty from the local lords. Together the three Targaryens watched from the sky as Aegon’s army crossed the headwaters of the Blackwater Rush and raced south.

The two armies came together amongst the wide, open plains south of the Blackwater, near to where the goldroad would run one day. The Two Kings rejoiced when their scouts returned to them and reported Targaryen numbers and dispositions. They had five men for every one of Aegon’s, it seemed, and the disparity in lords and knights was even greater. And the land was wide and open, all grass and wheat as far as the eye could see, ideal for heavy horse. Aegon Targaryen would not command the high ground, as Orys Baratheon had at the Last Storm; the ground was firm, not muddy. Nor would they be troubled by rain. The day was cloudless, though windy. There had been no rain for more than a fortnight.

King Mern had brought half again as many men to the battle as King Loren, and so demanded the honor of commanding the center. His son and heir, Edmund, was given the vanguard. King Loren and his knights would form the right, Lord Oakheart the left. With no natural barriers to anchor the Targaryen line, the Two Kings meant to sweep around Aegon on both flanks, then take him in the rear, whilst their “iron fist,” a great wedge of armored knights and high lords, smashed through Aegon’s center.

Aegon Targaryen drew his own men up in a rough crescent bristling with spears and pikes, with archers and crossbowmen just behind and light cavalry on either flank. He gave command of his host to Jon Mooton, Lord of Maidenpool, one of the first foes to come over to his cause. The king himself intended to do his fighting from the sky, beside

his queens. Aegon had noted the absence of rain as well; the grass and wheat that surrounded the armies was tall and ripe for harvest...and very dry.

The Targaryens waited until the Two Kings sounded their trumpets and started forward beneath a sea of banners. King Mern himself led the charge against the center on his golden stallion, his son Gawen beside him with his banner, a great green hand upon a field of white. Roaring and screaming, urged on by horns and drums, the Gardeners and Lannisters charged through a storm of arrows down unto their foes, sweeping aside the Targaryen spearmen, shattering their ranks. But by then Aegon and his sisters were in the air.

Aegon flew above the ranks of his foes upon Balerion, through a storm of spears and stones and arrows, swooping down repeatedly to bathe his foes in flame. Rhaenys and Visenya set fires upwind of the enemy and behind them. The dry grasses and stands of wheat went up at once. The wind fanned the flames and blew the smoke into the faces of the advancing ranks of the Two Kings. The scent of fire sent their mounts into panic, and as the smoke thickened, horse and rider alike were blinded. Their ranks began to break as walls of fire rose on every side of them. Lord Mooton's men, safely upwind of the conflagration, waited with their bows and spears, and made short work of the burned and burning men who came staggering from the inferno.

The Field of Fire, the battle was named afterward.

More than four thousand men died in the flames. Another thousand perished by sword and spear and arrow. Tens of thousands suffered burns, some so bad that they would remain scarred for life. King Mern IX was amongst the dead, together with his sons, grandsons, brothers, cousins, and other kin. One nephew survived for three days. When he died of his burns, House Gardener died with him. King Loren of the Rock lived, riding through a wall of flame and smoke to safety when he saw the battle lost.

The Targaryens lost fewer than a hundred men. Queen Visenya took an arrow in one shoulder, but soon recovered. As the dragons gorged themselves on the dead, Aegon commanded that the swords of the slain be gathered up and sent downriver.

Loren Lannister was captured the next day. The King of the Rock laid his sword and crown at Aegon's feet, bent the knee, and did him homage.

And Aegon, true to his promises, lifted his beaten foe back to his feet and confirmed him in his lands and lordship, naming him Lord of Casterly Rock and Warden of the West. Lord Loren's bannermen followed his example, and so too did many lords of the Reach, those who had survived the dragonfire.

Yet the conquest of the west remained incomplete, so King Aegon parted from his sisters and marched at once for Highgarden, hoping to secure its surrender before some other claimant could seize it for his own. He found the castle in the hands of its steward, Harlan Tyrell, whose forebears had served the Gardeners for centuries. Tyrell yielded up the keys to the castle without a fight and pledged his support to the conquering king. In reward Aegon granted him Highgarden and all its domains, naming him Warden of the South and Lord Paramount of the Mander, and giving him dominion over all House Gardener's former vassals.

It was King Aegon's intent to continue his march south and enforce the submission of Oldtown, the Arbor, and Dorne, but whilst at Highgarden word of a new challenge came to his ears. Torrhen Stark, King in the North, had crossed the Neck and entered the riverlands, leading an army of savage northmen thirty thousand strong. Aegon at once started north to meet him, racing ahead of his army on the wings of Balerion, the Black Dread. He sent word to his two queens as well, and to all the lords and knights who had bent the knee to him after Harrenhal and the Field of Fire.

When Torrhen Stark reached the banks of the Trident, he found a host half again the size of his own awaiting him south of the river. Riverlords, westerners, stormlanders, men of the Reach...all had come. And above their camp Balerion, Meraxes, and Vhagar prowled the sky in ever-widening circles.

Torrhen's scouts had seen the ruins of Harrenhal, where slow red fires still burned beneath the rubble. The King in the North had heard many accounts of the Field of Fire as well. He knew that the same fate might await him if he tried to force a crossing of the river. Some of his lords bannermen urged him to attack all the same, insisting that northern valor would carry the day. Others urged him to fall back to Moat Cailin and make his stand there on northern soil. The king's bastard brother Brandon Snow offered to cross the Trident alone under cover of darkness, to slay the dragons whilst they slept.

King Torrhen did send Brandon Snow across the Trident. But he crossed with three maesters by his side, not to kill but to treat. All through the night messages went back and forth. The next morning, Torrhen Stark himself crossed the Trident. There upon the south bank of the Trident, he knelt, laid the ancient crown of the Kings of Winter at Aegon's feet, and swore to be his man. He rose as Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North, a king no more. From that day to this day, Torrhen Stark is remembered as the King Who Knelt...but no northman left his burned bones beside the Trident, and the swords Aegon collected from Lord Stark and his vassals were not twisted nor melted nor bent.

Now Aegon Targaryen and his queens parted company. Aegon turned south once again, marching toward Oldtown, whilst his two sisters mounted their dragons—Visenya for the Vale of Arryn and Rhaenys for Sunspear and the deserts of Dorne.

Sharra Arryn had strengthened the defenses of Gulltown, moved a strong host to the Bloody Gate, and tripled the size of the garrisons in Stone, Snow, and Sky, the waycastles that guarded the approach to the Eyrie. All these defenses proved useless against Visenya Targaryen, who rode Vhagar's leathery wings above them all and landed in the Eyrie's inner courtyard. When the regent of the Vale rushed out to confront her, with a dozen guards at her back, she found Visenya with Ronnel Arryn seated on her knee, staring at the dragon, wonder-struck. "Mother, can I go flying with the lady?" the boy king asked. No threats were spoken, no angry words exchanged. The two queens smiled at one another and exchanged courtesies instead. Then Lady Sharra sent for the three crowns (her own regent's coronet, her son's small crown, and the Falcon Crown of Mountain and Vale that the Arryn kings had worn for a thousand years), and surrendered them to Queen Visenya, along with the swords of her garrison. And it was said afterward that the little king flew thrice about the summit of the Giant's Lance, and landed to find himself a little lord. Thus did Visenya Targaryen bring the Vale of Arryn into her brother's realm.

Rhaenys Targaryen had no such easy conquest. A host of Dornish spearmen guarded the Prince's Pass, the gateway through the Red Mountains, but Rhaenys did not engage them. She flew above the pass, above the red sands and the white, and descended upon Vaith to demand its submission, only to find the castle empty and abandoned. In the town beneath its walls, only women and children and old men remained.

When asked where their lords had gone, they would only say, "Away." Rhaenys followed the river downstream to Godsgrace, seat of House Allyrion, but it too was deserted. On she flew. Where the Greenblood met the sea, Rhaenys came upon the Planky Town, where hundreds of poleboats, fishing skiffs, barges, houseboats, and hulks sat baking in the sun, joined together with ropes and chains and planks to make a floating city, yet only a few old women and small children appeared to peer up at her as Meraxes circled overhead.

Finally the queen's flight took her to Sunspire, the ancient seat of House Martell, where she found the Princess of Dorne waiting in her abandoned castle. Meria Martell was eighty years of age, the maesters tell us, and had ruled the Dornishmen for sixty of those years. She was very fat, blind, and almost bald, her skin sallow and sagging. Argilac the Arrogant had named her "the Yellow Toad of Dorne," but neither age nor blindness had dulled her wits.

"I will not fight you," Princess Meria told Rhaenys, "nor will I kneel to you. Dorne has no king. Tell your brother that."

"I shall," Rhaenys replied, "but we will come again, Princess, and the next time we shall come with fire and blood."

"Your words," said Princess Meria. "Ours are *Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken*. You may burn us, my lady...but you will not bend us, break us, or make us bow. This is Dorne. You are not wanted here. Return at your peril."

Thus queen and princess parted, and Dorne remained unconquered.

To the west, Aegon Targaryen met a warmer welcome. The greatest city in all of Westeros, Oldtown was ringed about with massive walls, and ruled by the Hightowers of the Hightower, the oldest, richest, and most powerful of the noble houses of the Reach. Oldtown was also the center of the Faith. There dwelt the High Septon, Father of the Faithful, the voice of the new gods on earth, who commanded the obedience of millions of devout throughout the realms (save in the North, where the old gods still held sway), and the blades of the Faith Militant, the fighting order the smallfolk called the Stars and Swords.



Yet when Aegon Targaryen and his host approached Oldtown, they found the city gates open and Lord Hightower waiting to make his submission. As it happened, when word of Aegon's landing first reached Oldtown, the High Septon had locked himself within the Starry Sept for seven days and seven nights, seeking the guidance of the gods. He took no nourishment but bread and water, and spent all his waking hours in

prayer, moving from one altar to the next. And on the seventh day, the Crone had lifted up her golden lamp to show him the path ahead. If Oldtown took up arms against Aegon the Dragon, His High Holiness saw, the city would surely burn, and the Hightower and the Citadel and the Starry Sept would be cast down and destroyed.

Manfred Hightower, Lord of Oldtown, was a cautious lord and godly. One of his younger sons served with the Warrior's Sons, and another had only recently taken vows as a septon. When the High Septon told him of the vision vouchsafed him by the Crone, Lord Hightower determined that he would not oppose the Conqueror by force of arms. Thus it was that no men from Oldtown burned on the Field of Fire, though the Hightowers were bannermen to the Gardeners of Highgarden. And thus it was that Lord Manfred rode forth to greet Aegon the Dragon as he approached, and to offer up his sword, his city, and his oath. (Some say that Lord Hightower also offered up the hand of his youngest daughter, which Aegon declined politely, lest it offend his two queens.)

Three days later, in the Starry Sept, His High Holiness himself anointed Aegon with the seven oils, placed a crown upon his head, and proclaimed him Aegon of House Targaryen, the First of His Name, King of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, and Protector of the Realm. ("Seven Kingdoms" was the style used, though Dorne had not submitted. Nor would it, for more than a century to come.)

Only a handful of lords had been present for Aegon's first coronation at the mouth of the Blackwater, but hundreds were on hand to witness his second, and tens of thousands cheered him afterward in the streets of Oldtown as he rode through the city on Balerion's back. Amongst those at Aegon's second coronation were the maesters and archmaesters of the Citadel. Perhaps for that reason, it was this coronation, rather than the Aegonfort crowning on the day of Aegon's landing, that became fixed as the start of Aegon's reign.

Thus were the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros hammered into one great realm, by the will of Aegon the Conqueror and his sisters.

Many thought that King Aegon would make Oldtown his royal seat after the wars were done, whilst others thought he would rule from Dragonstone, the ancient island citadel of House Targaryen. The king surprised them all by proclaiming his intent to make his court in the new

town already rising upon the three hills at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush, where he and his sisters had first set foot on the soil of Westeros. King's Landing, the new town would be called. From there Aegon the Dragon would rule his realm, holding court from a great metal seat made from the melted, twisted, beaten, and broken blades of all his fallen foes, a perilous seat that would soon be known through all the world as the Iron Throne of Westeros.

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