

The Old, the True and the Brave
A History of the Fall of the Targaryean Dynasty, the Rise of the Velaryon Dynasty, and the
Reign of the Line of Azor Ahai
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Foreword

“The Seven Kingdoms of Westeros were forged in Fire and Blood”. Indeed, that was the popular phrase within the Seven Kingdoms for well over a century. However, a new phrase has come to dominate the minds of the small and great alike. “Those who would rule the Seven Kingdoms must grow Old in service, be True to the realm, and be Brave”. While perhaps a clumsy way of integrating the words of House Velaryon into a neat maxim for the histories, it was not the Velaryons who created that idea. Instead, the Velaryons lived out their words, and the Seven Kingdoms prospered from them.

We are perhaps jumping somewhat ahead in history. Let us now travel to the events and rulers who would bring about the fall of the Targaryeans and the rise of the Velaryon kings of Westeros.

Lord Corlys Velaryon of Driftmark is the primary focus of this, as the legendary mariner, known far and wide as “the Sea Snake”, had used his fortune accrued through his nine journeys to greatly improve both the infrastructure on Driftmark and the standing of House Velaryon within the realm. Lord Corlys, however, was not content to wait for the Stranger from within High Tide. “I shall drown at sea with the Sea Snake crumbling around me before I die contented.” he once boldly declared to his maester.

Thus, the Lord of the Tides began to prepare and research his tenth and undoubtedly greatest voyage in the waning days of 114 A.C.

Another focus for the beginning of our tale is King Viserys of House Targaryean. Known as the Young King in his youth, and as the Gentle King in his formative years, King Viserys was amiable, well liked, and beloved by all. Little needs to be said about his reign, save that it was plentiful, prosperous and peaceful, despite a few instances of small revolts, largely inspired by the dying remnants of the Poor Fellows, the long disbanded group of religious warriors. Following the untimely death of his daughter, Rhaenyra, who succumbed to a wound taken putting down a peasant rebellion in the Vale, Prince Aegon, the son of King Viserys and Alicent Hightower, was installed as Prince of Dragonstone and the heir apparent to the Iron Throne.

The last member of our study, for the time being, takes place far from Westeros, across the Narrow Sea, in the Great Plaza of Old Volantis. There, a young girl was given up by her parents to the Red Priests of R'hllor, the Red God of Fire, in exchange for coin and drink. The parents would be found dead two years later, killed by the very same vices that had compelled them to give up their only child. Their names are lost to history, but the girl's name is writ large

in the history of both R'hllor and of Westeros. At her birth, she was named Les, a mocking name her parents bestowed upon her for “always wanting more, and getting less”.

In time, however, she would be hailed as Lessella the Black, High Priestess of R'hllor, and most importantly, the right hand of Azor Ahai reborn.

In the year 115 AC, Lord Corlys announced the destination of his final voyage: the Smoking Sea and Valyria. Many scoffed, others paled, and all were convinced that the Lord of the Tides had at last lost his mind. Indeed, many of the lords and maesters who had studied the law were quick to point out that Jaehaerys I Targaryean, the Old King and the Conciliator, had banned travel to the blasted sea on pain of death.

But Lord Corlys laughed in the face of such blusters. “I am an old man, and I have seen much and more. I have been to Asshai by the Shadow, and experienced much and more. I intend to sail into the Doom, and return. Prevent me at your peril.”

King Viserys was loathe to condemn such a noteworthy lord as Lord Corlys. Without the Sea Snake’s assistance, he pointed out to his small council, the Triarchy would not have lost their stranglehold on the Stepstones, and Daemon Targaryean, the king’s own brother, would have surely lost his life in his wars for the same result.

Ser Otto Hightower, the imperious Hand of the King, sought to rid the realm of the Sea Snake for different reasons. Lord Corlys had been a staunch opponent to the majority of the Hand’s proposals and plans, citing that Lord Hightower “cared more about climbing ever higher up his own tower when the realm stretches out below him”. With the Sea Snake gone on his “mad” adventure, the Hand could solidify his and his family’s position as the second house in the realm, and undo the progress the Sea Snake had imposed on the Velaryon family.

There was only one voice, neither opposing nor approving of his journey that would shake the foundations of the realm generations later. The Lady Laena Velaryon, rider of the great dragon Vhagar, was loathe to see her father go on this great journey without her, but like the rest of the realm was all too familiar with the monstrous stories of the Smoking Sea and the Doom. According to legend, Laena confronted her father in the shipyards of Driftmark while the mighty *Sea Snake*, the ship that had made Lord Corlys a legend, was being prepared for the journey. Descending from the sky upon the great dragon, Vhagar, Laena Velaryon, a maid of ten and seven, declared that she was her father’s daughter, and that she would make her own journeys, to see the sights and wonders of the world.

In many households of lords, there are often daughters that are willful and wild. Some of the children eventually grow out of their wildness and settle down with a husband to father children, while their own fathers look on in relief. Other children see their parents grow wroth, and confine them in lonely towers and holdfasts, and while the results may seem like sweet fruit, hatred and resentment eventually rot the harvest to its core.

Lord Corlys and Lady Laena Velaryon were not the typical father and daughter. One was a great mariner, an explorer of renown, and the other was a dragon rider, a fierce fighter and proud warrior.

Accounts differ on the nature of their parting. The gentler suggest that, instead of dissuading or berating his daughter, Lord Corlys smiled proudly, if not sadly, embraced his daughter, and wished her good fortune. They go on to say that Laena was stunned, and clung to her father tightly, weeping silently.

The bolder say that Lord Corlys simply gazed at his daughter, with the great dragon Vhagar waiting behind her, and gave her a curt nod, before boarding his ship to continue his preparations.

The foolish say that both Laena and Corlys both wailed loudly at their parting, and begged a passing septon to bless both of their voyages, for both feared that the Stranger would hound their journeys.

Regardless of the nature of their parting, on that day, in 115 AC, Laena Velaryon departed Driftmark for Essos on Vhagar. A year later, Lord Corlys would depart for the Doom of Valyria aboard the *Sea Snake*.

They would never see each other again.

The *Sea Snake* pulled away from the port of Driftmark full of sailors, supplies and superstitions. Despite Lord Corlys' diligent if not obsessive research on the Doom and the Smoking Sea, tales of horror still filled the mind of his men. Would they encounter demons? Dragons? Perhaps undead men, still burning centuries after the Doom had claimed the Lands of the Long Summer?

The *Sea Snake* was not so paranoid. Instead of sailing blindly into the Smoking Sea itself, he intended to sail around the Doom, and would launch expeditions into Valyria from the trade post of Elyria, a small colony founded by Volantis some years ago, close to Slaver's Bay. This, he hoped, would allow the expedition to take their time and uncover any artifacts they could without vanishing without a trace.

Meanwhile, the Seven Kingdoms continued as they always had under King Viserys, prospering, but with storm clouds gathering on the horizon. Prince Aegon was the undisputed heir to the Iron Throne, true, but many believed that he was ill suited to lead the Seven Kingdoms. Indeed, some began to fear Aegon would undo the delicate balance that the Gentle King had established. A notable instance occurred at a feast held in honor of King Viserys' twentieth year on the Iron Throne. Instead of greeting the Lords Paramount with honors or charm, the young prince berated his lords for "not arriving on time, nor with suitable gifts for my lord father". Ironically, the various lords had sent the king gifts in advance, and the Gentle King had already thanked them profusely for them all. It was this event that caused many lords to call the heir-to-be "Aegon the Mutilator", mocking the prince for ruining an otherwise delightful occasion. A foreshadowing of things to come.

Meanwhile, in far off Volantis, the young priestess called Les was being formally inducted into the Light of Red R'hllor. As was customary, each initiate must spend a night in solitude staring into a nightfire, the great flames billowing and beckoning the young priests with promises of visions and prophecies from their god.

Or so the tales go. Most inductees wind up night-blind for several days, others with missing eyebrows and singed faces, claiming to have seen various bits of nonsense within the roaring flames.

The young Les was different. Timid and shy, she bowed her head, her instructors wished her luck, and closed the door to the tower upon which she stood with her roaring flames.

Within moments, the girl began to scream. Scream loud, scream long, and always the same words, over and over again, in utter rapture. "Azor Ahai! Azor Ahai! Azor Ahai comes again, and again, and again, eternal and forevermore! The blood of kings, of dragons, of the sea and the earth! Azor Ahai!"

The instructors and elder priests were stunned, tempted to open the door and demand an explanation, but, bound as they were by tradition, they stood firm, and waited until morning. When at last dawn broke over Old Volantis, they opened the door to find a changed woman in front of the smoldering embers.

Where once there had been a shy, quiet and somewhat unsure child, there stood a confident woman, whose voice spoke with an authority and power they had never heard before. The first words she spoke, after a night of ranting without drink or respite, have been taken down in the lore of Westeros and Essos.

"Azor Ahai is coming. We must make ready the path for their ascension."

We must leave Les and Volantis for now, but it must be noted that in a few short months, the young priestess would rise rapidly through the ranks of her order, while ruthlessly persuading, dissuading and crushing all opposition. She would thus earn the nickname "the Black", for her unflinching and unfading conviction, as well as the brutal manner by which she would decimate her opposition.

Laena Velaryon had left Driftmark roughly one year before her father had sailed for the Doom, and her destination was, shall we say, unknown. Essos intrigued her, the lands of Asshai and Yi Ti tempted her, and even the far off lands of the Summer Isles and Ibben remained destinations in her mind. So, instead of picking one, the young dragonlady decided to visit them all. Ibb, Vaes Dothrak, Asshai by the Shadow, looping around to Yi Ti, Slaver's Bay, Qarth, Qohor, all throughout the world Vhagar flew. Far and wide, Laena Velaryon became known as Laena the Wanderer, the Explorer, the Pompous (by one Yunkai merchant whom she beat in a game of dice), the Imperious, and even the Unsullied. So many names she collected, that Lady Laena was wont to say that "I could call myself one name, go into a tavern, and come out with five more."

At last, Laena Velaryon arrived in Old Volantis, and began to tour the city, a crowd of onlookers clamoring to see the famous explorer and her dragon.

And one, a young priestess of R'hllor, to tell her of her destiny.

This journey would take several years, and would and indeed does fill several volumes. For more details of the specific voyages of Laena Velaryon, the tome *The Travel's of the Sea Snake's Daughter: From Driftmark to Old Volantis* by Archmaester Yurriel is the most authoritative within the libraries of the Citadel.

We must pause for a moment and journey to the Stepstones, the pirate infested islands between Dorne and Essos. Daemon Targaryen, the brother to King Viserys, had carved out a kingdom on those islands with blood and fire, as is a hallmark of many Targaryen dragon riders. He ruled, however, for only 3 years, before a combination of assaults from the Kingdom of the Three Daughters, the union of Myr, Tyrosh and Lys, and local pirate uprisings forced him into abdication. A series of pirate kings had proceeded him, some of them bastard Targaryens, others not, and so it would be for years to come. We shall return to the Stepstones shortly in our tale, and in greater detail, but not quite yet.

No word had reached King's Landing of Lord Corlys for nearly two years, and Otto Hightower was delighted by that prospect. Without the interference of the Sea Snake, the Hand of the King proceeded to put into motion several different projects and plans. Ostensibly, the various taxes and reforms were meant to solidify the king's control over the various bureaucracies that truly ruled the Seven Kingdoms. In reality, everything amounted to the Hightowers exerting more and more influence within the realm, accruing even more power to themselves.

It may have worked to, if Otto Hightower hadn't suddenly died, followed almost a fortnight later by King Viserys himself.

The maesters were baffled by the death of the Hand. A hale man of six-and-forty, Otto Hightower did not drink, did not consort with whores, and to all seemed to be the very picture of health. On the day of his death, he was presiding over a meeting of the small council, ruling as he always had. Complaining of a headache towards the end of the meeting, Ser Otto Hightower begged leave of his fellow councillors, before retiring to his chambers for an early evening.

A serving girl, who customarily brought him his breakfast and any important letters regarding happenings in the realm, found him collapsed on the floor the next morning, a chair knocked over on its side and papers strewn across the room. She at first thought he had merely slipped and fell, but later, Grand Maester Pollean noticed a small trickle of blood from the Hand's nose and mouth.

If Ser Otto had been alive, he would have read a very interesting letter, from far off Slaver's Bay, that would have most likely killed him all the same.

The realm mourned the death of one who had served them so faithfully, but not so loudly as to give the wrong impression. Ser Otto had been admired as an administrator, but he was not loved, nor did he seek love. The only person who truly mourned him was his daughter, Queen

Alicent, who claimed that no one in the realm would be able to match her father as Hand. As such, very few looked into the manner of his death, and none looked far.

The question of who to succeed Ser Otto as Hand vexed King Viserys, who despised contention, debate and conflict in all forms. Falling into despair, the king stopped eating, spending all night poring over ledgers and lists of names. Finally, on a rainy day in 119 A.C, King Viserys burst into the small council chamber, declared that he had found the perfect candidate, then collapsed, of a burst heart.

Now, the realm openly wept. The bells in King's Landing tolled, lords of all ranks travelled by the hundreds to pay their respects to their king. The king's body was lead through the streets, flanked by knights of the Kingsguard, down towards the docks, where a funeral pyre was built. The body would be burned, as was the custom, and the ashes would be transported to Dragonstone to be interred, as was tradition.

As the body was being placed onto the pyre, however, a sentinel called out that a ship was sighted heading towards the city. And not just any ship. Battered, her paint faded and worn, she was almost unrecognizable. Her only recognizable feature was the brilliant white sea horse on a field of blue, fluttering proudly in the sea breeze, the sigil of House Velaryon. The *Sea Snake* had returned from the Doom of Valyria.

Lord Corlys was not aboard, however. When Prince, or rather King, Aegon II demanded to know where the Sea Snake was, the crowds cried out in fear and amazement when a great purple dragon descended from out of the clouds.

The Sea Snake had returned to Westeros at last.

The return of Lord Corlys Velaryon from a voyage to the Doom of Valyria would have stunned a kingdom into silence, followed by jubilation. The death of Ser Otto Hightower and King Viserys would have rendered any realm helpless with mourning.

The return of Lord Corlys, the death of the Hand and his King, and the Sea Snake's impossible arrival on a dragon on the day of the funeral rendered the Seven Kingdoms catatonic.

There were celebrations, there were wakes, there was rejoicing and mourning. All of the lords, great and small, were terrified of the uncertain future that faced them, yet all wanted to hear of the tenth journey of the Sea Snake.

Many of them were very curious to hear of the riches the Sea Snake might have obtained on the voyage, as well as the nature of him obtaining a dragon.

And what a dragon it was. Scales, thick and dark purple, coated the beast like a suit of armor. Instead of the typical maw of a dragon, Stormcloud, as Lord Corlys had named the beast, had a small mouth that was flanked by two large pincers. All in all, it was an ugly, sickly, unnerving dragon, yet it was a dragon all the same.

King Aegon II, the temperamental new king, was heard to say that "Lord Corlys should have returned on a seahorse, or not at all, for he is now a threat." While he was certainly not subtle with such a remark, he was not wrong. Up until now, the only dragon riders of any note

had all been Targaryeans. Some Velaryons had managed to hatch dragons from eggs, but not one of them had ever managed to successfully tame one. Lord Corlys' own son, Laenor, had died a painful death in his attempts to mount his childhood dragon, Seasmoke. The only exception had been Laena Velaryon and Vhagar, but they had long since left Westeros for Essos and the Far East.

For a man of Corlys Velaryon's skill and aptitude to have obtained a dragon was a shattering blow to the Targaryean supremacy, should the Sea Snake seek to rise above his station.

Taking to his name well, Aegon the Mutilator sought to mutilate the threat in its cradle. Calling Lord Corlys before the Iron Throne, the king clumsily welcomed him back, and then bluntly asked if House Velaryon was still loyal to "the Targaryean kings, to whom you owe much". Lord Corlys answered yes, that nothing had changed since he left Driftmark nearly 5 years before.

King Aegon then stood, and began to walk down the throne to stand before Lord Corlys. He slipped at one point, and sliced his hand somewhat on a jagged barb he used to stop himself from falling. Somewhat shorter than Lord Corlys, certainly less authoritative, with a paunch, barely visible blonde whiskers and a bleeding hand, King Aegon looked less like a king and more like an unlucky mummer.

Drawing the Valyrian blade, Blackfyre, King Aegon bade Lord Corlys kneel, and swear by "this blade of Old Valyria, which no one else in the world has". Many members of the court looked at one another in confusion. Several maesters have since studied the king's words, and determined he meant to say that no one else had a blade like Blackfyre, but again, the Mutilator mutilated.

Lord Corlys smiled, and replied, "Your Grace would do better to bid me swear by mine." and unbuckled the sword sheathed at his side, and, kneeling, presented it to the king.

It was a beautiful sword. The slim blade, a smoky gray, like all Valyrian steel, with a hilt of blue steel, inlaid with silver. A simple decoration, but the effect was pronounced. The court murmured their awe and approval, and even the king was rendered silent for a moment.

When he found his words, King Aegon pronounced the blade "nice", in a stuttering tone, before accepting Lord Corlys' oath of loyalty, and returning his sword. When Lord Corlys turned to leave, however, the king casually asked if the Sea Snake had named his blade. The old mariner turned to the young king and replied, "Not yet, Your Grace. I don't think I'll give it a name that will do it justice."

It would be ten long years before that blade, found by Corlys Velaryon in the Doom, would receive a name. Lord Corlys, indeed, would not name the sword, but it would be named in his honor by his heir, both to the lordship of Driftmark and the blade itself.

Sea Snake.

Little and less needs to be said of the reign of King Aegon the Mutilator. Every opportunity to bind the realm closer together, instead saw King Aegon II making more and more lords murmur angrily behind his back. He disgraced the ancient family of House Baratheon by, following a drunken rant by the Lord Boros Baratheon of “our dear departed king’s dolt of a son”, transferring the rule of the Stormlands to the Evenstar of Tarth. While the Stormlanders were outraged, many of the other lords were glad to see the proud Borros Baratheon laid low, though the revocation of the title gave them pause.

The most infamous instance of King Aegon’s mismanagement came in the form of Daemon Targaryean, the former King of the Stepstones and King Aegon’s uncle. The warrior had returned to King’s Landing after a fruitless mission to Pentos, hoping to gather support for another assault on the Kingdom of the Three Daughters, when he came before the king asking for an appointment on the small council.

“Your father is dead, and the lords are grumbling behind your back. You need a strong hand to rule alongside you.” Daemon was reported to have said. “Who better than me?”

King Aegon sneered at his uncle, “Who better than a king who lost his crown to a group of pirates and some over-proud merchants and pillow-biters? I can think of several.”

Daemon bristled at that barb, but was level headed enough to, humbly, request his old position as commander of the City Watch.

The king, instead, forced his uncle to take vows as a septon, and live out the rest of his days on Dragonstone. The Rogue Prince died a bitter, broken man, his own dragon Caraxes not long outliving him. In his final days, Daemon expressed many regrets, the chiefest amongst them “not being there to warn my brother of his bastard of a son.”

Instead of Prince Daemon, King Aegon, in an isolated episode of intelligence, named as Hand of the King Corlys Velaryon, who served the realm ably from 116 A.C until his death at the beginning of 126 A.C, at the age of two and seventy. Lord Corlys endured the japes, the barbs, the scandals and the numerous amount of diplomatic failings that King Aegon visited upon the realm with diligence and prudence, and was said by many to be the only reason that the lords of Westeros did not rise in red revolt against the impetuous king.

Sadly, the worst was yet to come. In 123 A.C., King Aegon was blessed, and the Seven Kingdoms cursed, with the birth of his firstborn son, whom he named Viserys after his father. In time, the babe would grow to become one of the worst Targaryean kings since Maegor the Cruel.

But that is a story for another time. For now, we must turn to the succession of Driftmark, and the journeys of Laena Velaryon, and Lessella the Black, in Old Volantis.

The question of who was to succeed Lord Corlys as Lord of the Tides and Master of Driftmark upon his eventual death was a thorny problem for many within the realm. Whomever inherited Driftmark not only received the might of House Velaryon, but also quite possibly a clutch of dragon eggs. A new house of dragonriders might emerge within the realm to challenge the Targaryeans, and the realm mayhaps would be devoured in firey conflict.

The many did not need to worry about Stormcloud, however. The beast declined the longer it stayed in Westeros, and never produced a clutch of eggs. Lord Corlys remained taciturn about much of his journey to Valryia and his obtaining a dragon, but the one thing he would repeat often was that “that dragon cost me dearly”. What that meant, no man can say.

What men did know, and what King Aegon knew especially, was that Laena Velaryon, somewhere in Essos, possessed Vhagar, the greatest dragon in the known world. The last living child of Lord Corly’s body, she had not married when she left Westeros, and it seemed that she would never return to, as King Aegon put it, “bother us again, with her womanly wills and temper and schemes”.

If only the poor king knew...

Lord Corlys was adamant that his daughter succeed him, but King Aegon preferred one of the Sea Snake’s nephews. Jacaerys Velaryon, born to Ser Luceon and Lady Elana Velaryon (cousins, as it was), was a brilliant tactician, albeit a poor fighter, a skilled diplomat, though inexperienced in foreign diplomacy, and above all else, loyal to the throne. Jacaerys had been known to, when in his cups, toast King Aegon endlessly, wishing that his father “had been as noble, as brilliant, and as mighty as our dear King Aegon, long may he reign!” While his father, Ser Luceon, had never been a famous knight, the Sea Snake had found memories of his brother, who had served him faithfully as castellan before his death in 122 A.C. This, King Aegon reckoned, was a perfect way to offset the imbalance the Sea Snake had created in Westeros. Who better to serve after Corlys Velaryon than a lickspittle, the king thought.

Unfortunately, Jacaerys Velaryon wanted to serve his king so fervently, he did something wholly stupid. One day, in 124 A.C., he scaled the cliffs of Dragonstone, found the lair of the Cannibal, the black dragon who haunted the cliffs of the Dragonmont. He sought to claim the dragon so that “His Grace can see I am more than just a relative to the Sea Snake. That I am my own man, his own man.”

Needless to say, the Cannibal did not take well to the intrusion, and Jacaerys Velaryon died screaming, burning, and pointlessly. With him went King Aegon’s best chance to subvert the possible inheritance of Laena Velaryon.

There were some at court that believed that Lord Corlys encouraged his nephew Jacaerys to attempt to claim the Cannibal, but the more astute note that, while the Hand was not shy about flying to and from Driftmark on Stormcloud, there were other dragons in the world that could have been claimed. For Jacaerys to choose the Cannibal as his potential mount speaks to the occasional insanity of children born of incest, albeit distant incest.

For the moment, we must leave King’s Landing and the issue of Driftmark, and travel back in time and across the Narrow Sea to Old Volantis in 120 A.C. Lady Laena Velaryon had arrived at the first Valryian colony intent on seeing the sights of the city, only to discover a great

crowd awaiting her. She was a great explorer, after all, and possessed the greatest dragon, Vhagar, who had grown to enormous size. The press crowded around the great adventurer, and Laena began to shout at them to back away, to stand aside, but her words fell on deaf ears, as she spoke little of the Volantene style of Valryian, and spoke less of Valryian in general. As Laena attempted to break through the crowd without causing a panic, as Vhagar was still ill-tempered and hungry from their flight, a shout rang out in the Volantene-style of Valryian. An armored man, bearing a sigil of a white sword and falling star on a field of purple, along with a small retinue, entered the square and began to disperse the crowd, escorting a priestess of R'hllor, tattooed and robed in black, red and gold.

Laena Velaryon thanked her rescuers, in hesitant Valryian, and asked their names. The man introduced himself as Samwell Dayne, a lesser son of the Dornish house of the same name. He did not claim to be a knight, for he wasn't, and Laena could see that, underneath the visor and thick plate mail, earnest eyes pleaded for reprieve from his iron prison.

The priestess, with flames tattooed across her cheeks, chin and forehead, was none other than Lessella the Black, now one of the senior priests within Old Volantis. She strode up to Laena Velaryon, who stood proud in her travelling leathers, her long silver hair streaming behind her in the breeze. To the dragonrider's surprise, the priestess knelt before her, and did her homage as "Lady Laena of House Velaryon, daughter of the Sea Snake, and mother of kings". When Laena protested, saying she was not wed nor had any children, the priestess simply smiled and said, "Not yet."

History loses track of what exactly befell Laena Velaryon within Old Volantis. Some say she quarrelled with the families of the Black Walls, who doubted her lineage in spite of her possession of Vhagar. Others, mainly romantic singers, say that she and Samwell Dayne shared many a dockside walk in which they shared many of their travels and experiences. Few, mainly zealous septons, claim that Lessella the Black cast terrible sorceries upon the Sea Snake's daughter, twisting her mind and damning her soul to the Seven Hells.

We know this. In 121 A.C, Laena Velaryon wed Samwell Tarly in a simple Volantene wedding, officiated by Lessella the Black herself. A message was sent to Driftmark to invite her father, but bad weather and distance found the missive lost and unanswered. The bride and groom were happy, and madly in love. The singers compare their union to Jahaerys and Alysanne, but add the exoticism and flair that comes with a chance meeting in Old Volantis, first daughter of Valryia. The bride called the groom "my charming rock" whereas the groom called the bride "my wild dragon".

On that same day, at that same wedding, Samwell Dayne forsook his heritage as a Dayne, saying "No Dayne was meant to ride a dragon", and Lady Laena forsook the Seven Gods of the Faith, and took up the worship of Red R'hllor, the god of fiery sacrifices and dire prophecies. When asked about her change of belief, she simply said, with her husband laughing alongside her, "I saw it in the fires." Henceforth, the children of Laena Velaryon and Samwell Dayne would be Velaryons, and would also follow the Red God, R'hllor.

Shortly after the bedding that followed, Laena Velaryon began to make plans that would, in time, bring about the fall and rise of kings. Plans of conquest, plans of war. Plans of fire, blood, and power.

We must leave Laena Velaryon, Lessella the Black, Samwell Dayne and their schemes for the nonce, and return to Westeros, where long simmering tensions were about to boil over between the lords of the realm and their petulant king.

The revocation of the rulership of the Stormlands from House Baratheon had been met with much scorn by the various lords of Westeros. Nor had the Evenstar of Tarth, the new Lord Paramount, taken much liberty with his new title. Lord Selwyn of Tarth, an old man, had done little and less to exercise his authority, and when he died of old age in the waning days of 125 A.C, his successor, the young lord Willem, went to King's Landing to petition King Aegon and the court to "restore the ancestral rights of House Baratheon".

Lord Corlys had been away on Driftmark, attending to the business of overseeing the construction of improved shipyards, so he was unable to prevent the tragedy that happened next, much to the realm's sorrow.

Lord Willem knelt before King Aegon, seated on the Iron Throne, and explained that "House Tarth had long served the Storm Kings of old, and their successors, the Baratheons. We of Tarth do not command the respect nor prestige of the lords of Storm's End, and are better suited as bannermen, than lords paramount."

This statement surprised and enraged King Aegon. "I gave your family a great gift. And now you spit in my face and complain."

Lord Willem, ever humble, responded politely. "Your Grace indeed gave us a mighty gift, one we could never hope to match. And indeed, one I believe my family could never properly hold, nor wield half as well as the lords Baratheon."

The court murmured in approval and understanding. Tarth was not a rich island, nor did it command as many men as Storm's End. This was not a question of pride, nor prestige, but instead of simple logic: Tarth was not meant to rule the Stormlands.

King Aegon, however, was outraged. "You believe that your family does not need the rule of the Stormlands. Mayhaps your family simply does not need you. Perhaps another Tarth will rise to my needs, for the good of the realm." With that, Lord Willem was seized by the king's guards, and escorted to the dungeons.

All across Westeros, the lords recoiled in horror and anger, but none so severely in Riverrun, where the young Lady Falena Tully ruled. The sole surviving child of the late Robin Tully, Lady Falena had been a childhood companion to Lord Willem, and some had said that the two of them would wed. Angry ravens were sent from Riverrun, demanding the release of Lord Willem and "to establish a council, to determine the proper rule of Westeros".

Lord Corlys received the letter from Lady Falena, and agreed that the folly of Aegon II had to end. “Your Grace” Lord Corlys reportedly told the king, “if we do not agree to these demands, there will undoubtedly be war.”

King Aegon haughtily replied that “Aegon the Conqueror did not fear war.”, though it must also be noted that his face was pale and fearful as he spoke those words.

“But neither did he seek it out. With your leave, I shall move to make peace.” the Sea Snake curtly replied.

While Westeros appeared on the precipice of war, it must be noted that, in the ending of 125 and the beginning of 126 A.C, the Stepstones were embroiled in a bloody war between the Kingdom of the Three Daughters and the pirate kings of the small islands. An uncountable number of skirmishes and raids had occurred back and forth for years, and, just off of the shores of Bloodstone in 126 A.C, was about to occur the greatest and final battle of the “War for the Stepstones”.

The great navy of the Three Daughters, some 300 ships and thousands of soldiers was under the command of High Magister Lysenno, known as the “Painter”, both for being a skilled artist in his own right, and for “painting the decks of his ships red with foe’s blood”.

Meanwhile, the pirate fleet, being lead by Queen Helaena Waters, was only 250 ships strong, but commanded some of the greatest fighters at sea, ranging from fellow pirates, to sellswords, to some “loyal” knights of Westeros. Purportedly, Helaena Waters claimed to be a bastard of Viserys Targaryean, but this has been chalked up to a fantasy to draw followers to her. Though she did have the silver hair of Valyria, her eyes were famously an icy blue, giving her the name Queen Bright-Eyes, the Lady of the Ocean’s Eyes, and, in relation to her chronic need for coin, Helaena of the Empty Pockets.

The stage was set for a pitched battle, with simple chance and the skill of commanders and soldiers being the factor between victory and defeat.

It was indeed a shame that neither the pirates nor the Kingdom of the Three Daughters would win what would become known as the Maelstrom.

The armies of both combatants sailed towards one another, just northeast of Bloodstone. The sun had been shining when they had set sail, but dark clouds had unexpectedly rolled in, and a harsh wind had begun to whip about the decks of the ships. High Magister Lysenno and Queen Helaena both pressed onwards, the former saying that he would paint a masterpiece “today and tomorrow when I set the battle to paint”, and the latter declaring that “on this day, I prove I am my father’s daughter.”

The sea churned and rolled around them, the clouds growing ever darker. Rain began to fall, first lightly, then harder, then in a great deluge. Some of the ships attempted to turn away, only for their sails to founder and falter in the harsh wind. The battle was joined with the sea boiling all around them, great bolts of lighting tearing across the sky.

Scholars have wondered to this day who would have one the Maelstrom, the murderous painter or the pirate queen. Sadly, we shall never know.

Out of the sky poured rain, bolts of lightning flashed all around, arrows and quarrels sailed from one ship to another.

No one paid any mind to the sea beneath them, which had begun to eddy ominously. No one saw the great dark figure, occasionally illuminated by the lightning, growing larger and larger as it climbed higher into the sky.

At last, the Painter and Queen Blue-Eyes met on the conjoined decks of *The Long Summer* and *Daughter's Crown* and prepared for their fateful duel. But before they could even exchange courtesies, or more likely mocking words, two cries rang out over the sounds of storm and battle.

The first, a fearful cry of "Maelstrom!" caused visible panic and fear, as the ships of both fleets were suddenly pulled and tugged into a great, winding circle, with those unfortunate enough to be in the middle being sucked down into the maw of the sea.

The second cry only brought confusion, a slow sense of dread, and a horrific end to the battle.

"Dragon!"

Down out of the sky descended the great beast, goutts of fire engulfing ship after ship after ship. Many burning hulks slammed into unlit ships, only to spread the fires further and further, creating enormous burning rings of fire. Some of the ships attempted to flee, only for the ocean's wrath to drag them to their ends. Others, valiantly and stupidly, attempted to fight the newcomer, but with the strain of navigating the whirlpool, and the chaos of the battle itself, none of them could do anything meaningful before their brutal end.

The bodies of Helaena Waters and Lysenno the Painter were never found, most likely sunk to the bottom of the sea with *The Long Summer* and *Daughter's Crown*, but that has not stopped singers and poets from claiming one of a hundred different ways they died. Some say the two of them laid down their swords, and shared a bottle of rum, while their fleets burned around them. The singer, Tyam Beesbury, the Honeycomb Bard, composed *The Lovers of the Maelstrom*, a ballad by which the two commanders dueled brilliantly, before fire and sea consumed them both. Lastly, a whimsical folk tale has the two wash up on a lonely island in the Stepstones, utterly alone with one another. Putting aside their enmity and history, the two carve out a life with one another, fall in love, and die contented in each others arms.

What history says is this: in 126 A.C, a great and bloody slaughter occurred in the Stepstones, with the Free Cities panicking at the mention of dragons and fire.

In Westeros, the great Corlys Velaryon, Hand of the King, laid his head down after a lifetime of labor, went to sleep, and never woke again. He was two and seventy, and his last words, purportedly told to his serving girl just before bed, were "I hope it rains tomorrow."

In Riverrun, Lady Falena Tully called her banners, preparing to march on King's Landing to "confirm our rights to live and rule as we see fit".

In King's Landing, Prince Viserys, a boy of three years, purportedly set his septa's dress on fire with a poker from a nearby fireplace. As the woman screamed and burned, the child was said to have laughed and laughed, the fire dancing in his eyes.

The Maelstrom saw the end of the line of pirate kings, the death blow for the Triarchy, which would collapse both inwards and fall outwards within the next 2 years, and the establishment of the Kingdom of the Stepstones, led by the fierce dragon rider who had brought her enemies low.

Laena Velaryon had claimed her own seat.

The death of Lord Corlys was one of the only pillars keeping the reign of King Aegon II from falling into chaos and war. Another pillar lay in the dragons the Targaryens maintained on Dragonstone. As long as they held supremacy, any rebellions that would come about could be crushed.

And yet, that presented a thorny problem. Though Dragonstone was home to a numerous amount of dragons, there were very few dragon riders in Westeros in 126 A.C. King Aegon himself flew Sunfyre, a beautiful, but young, golden dragon. His queen, Rhaera "Targaryen", (for it must be said that, though Prince Daemon consistently extolled his daughter as trueborn of his "bronze bitch", many and more suspected Lady Rhaera was the child of Mysaria, the "White Worm" and paramour to the Rogue Prince) flew the dragon Syrax, the former mount of Princess Rhaenyra. Lord Corly's dragon, Stormcloud, did not long survive it's master, and died in its sleep on Driftmark a moon's turn following the Sea Snake's death.

That only left one other rider, and Laena Velaryon and Vhagar were such a threat that they could not be dismissed lightly. That is why, with Falena Tully marching towards King's Landing and the other lords of Westeros watching intently, King Aegon needed to ensure that the Sea Snake's heir was on his side.

Grand Maester Gyles, the Grand Maester for the majority of Aegon II's reign, would later write that, immediately following the death of Lord Corlys, Aegon II was utterly bereft. In spite of the king's paranoia and fears regarding the elderly mariner, Aegon held infinite respect for "the man who sailed to Valyria, tamed a dragon, and prevented me from all of my follies".

The king knew absolutely nothing about Laena Velaryon, and when word reached him of the bloody Maelstrom, he despaired. "I have that Tully bitch clamoring for the rights of the lords, rallying forces against me, and to the south, there lies possibly another Conqueror come to lay me low." Aegon purportedly told Maester Gyles.

Lord Stokeworth, the king's master of laws, put it even more bluntly. "We face a knight in front of us, all while a hungry dragon circles overhead."

The situation would grow even more grave with the news that Brus Baratheon, the Lord of Storm's End and the Lord Paramount of the Storm Lands in all but name, declared for Falena Tully and "my leal bannerman, the Evenstar of Tarth". Their combined forces could easily

overwhelm the meager defenses of King's Landing, and while the king commanded two dragons, he was loathe to commit them to battle so close to his own city.

Lord Paramount Jason Lannister, the king's master of coin, advocated for the king to marshall his forces and move out to meet the foes. "Make the Field of Fire anew your Grace. Let the lords remember what your ancestor did to mine." He faced stiff opposition from both the council and the king himself, but none was more opposed to Lord Jason than Rhaera Targaryen. The daughter of Daemon Targaryen, and King Aegon's queen, mocked the Lord of Casterly Rock, claiming that "the Lion of the Rock wishes to rewrite our history. He wants my husband to wash out the loss of his family's kingdom with violence and blood, only to moan and wail of Maegor the Cruel come again."

This enraged Jason Lannister. Not as cunning nor as patient as his forebears, he was caught attempting to write a letter to his daughter and heir, Patrice Lannister, instructing her to call the banners of the West, but hold them at the Rock "until a clear path forward emerges for our house."

King Aegon was outraged, and had his master of coin arrested at once. Lord Jason denied nothing, and went so far as to mockingly hail the king as "Aenys the Second, weak and as yielding as a whore in Flea Bottom."

Rhaera Targaryen intervened when he was sentenced to death. "As Lord Jason believes that fire and blood shall aid us in returning the realm to peace, let him taste his own prescription."

Viserys Targaryen was present for the horror that followed, Grand Maester Gyles records. "The boy is growing strong, and shows quite the aptitude for tactics and politics, but there is something more." Gyles wrote "Something dark about that child, that makes my skin crawl even as I write now. There is a malice to him, more subtle and therefore even more dangerous than anything witnessed under the reign of Maegor the Cruel." When the dragon Syrax bathed Lord Jason in flame, and the court watched in horror as the man ran around wildly, attempting to douse the flames as his screams echoed endlessly within the Red Keep, Prince Viserys was noted to have watched with unnerving fascination.

The armies of the Stormlands and the Riverlands approached the city of King's Landing on the seventh day of the seventh moon of 126 A.C, with Lady Falena and Lord Brus agreeing that peace was likely not an option. With the king as truculent as ever, and the brutal execution of Lord Jason, and despite the presence of dragons, they agreed that they would most likely have to assault the city to ensure that the Seven Kingdoms did not burn.

The day of reckoning dawned sunny and warm, with only a few clouds, great, white and puffy, lazily traipsing across the sky. The armies of the Riverlords and the Stormlords were arrayed in perfect formation before the walls of King's Landing. Sunfyre and Syrax circled the city's walls, their riders unsure of whether to attack or simply patrol. The city itself was a chaotic mess of looting, a panicked defense by the gold cloaks, and a feeling of doom that had never

been seen before. King Aegon and Sunfyre landed before the assembled host, and the Stormlord and Riverlady rode forth to treat with them.

Their words have been set down by the maester that accompanied Lady Falena.

“Your Grace.” Lady Falena said, her red hair streaming in the wind.

“So, the Lady of Riverun and the Lord of Storm’s End have betrayed those who gave them their seats.” King Aegon sneered. “The Tullys and Baratheons owe everything to-”

“Your Grace, with all due respect, shut up.” Lord Brus thundered. A great bear of a man, Brus Baratheon stood tall and strong in thick plate mail, with his greatsword slung along his back. “We are here to treat, and perhaps end this without bloodshed.”

“What do you desire? Hm? The release of the Evenstar? The revocation of my right to decide who helps me rule the Seven Kingdoms?” Aegon spat at the Lord of Storm’s End.

“That, and your removal.” Lady Falena replied, stone-faced.

Aegon was stunned, his face a mask of fear and surprise. “My r-remov-”

“Aye. Your removal. You’ve proven to be ill-suited for the Iron Throne.” Lord Brus rumbled. “The lords of Westeros will rule until your son comes of age, to ensure that he becomes a king like your father.”

Aegon bristled at that. “My father was a fat man who couldn’t be bothered to leave his bed chambers, let alone the Red Keep. I am a greater king than he ever was!”

Lady Falena gazed at the king with eyes as hard as stone, and Lord Brus barked out a laugh.

“Well, setting that aside, we command thrice as many men that you do, your Grace” Lord Brus rumbled, gesturing to the army behind him. “Aye, you have dragons, but they won’t help that much when we storm the city, now will they?”

Before Aegon could reply, before anyone could say anything, a horn sounded through the air, from a watchtower in the Red Keep. It blew once, twice, three times in rapid succession, as sails and ships appeared, heading directly for Blackwater Bay and King’s Landing.

And above them all flew a great dragon, larger than Sunfyre and Syrax combined.

Laena Velaryon had returned to Westeros.

The king and the truculent lords might have put aside their differences as soon as the Velaryon ships had been sighted in the waters off of the Red Keep, but the descent of Vhagar prevented them from doing anything but stare. The oldest living dragon swooped down out of the sky, her roars echoing throughout the city. And from the Red Keep rose Syrax, wings flapping madly in a vain attempt to intercept the foe, for Rhaera Targaryean sought to defend her husband and city.

Vhagar did not swoop down onto King’s Landing, did not bathe the smallfolk in flame, did not even twitch in response to Syrax’ appearance. Instead, the great beast descended down to where the king and the lords had been discussing, landing with a great gust and a plume of hot dust. Sliding off of the dragon’s back, Laena Velaryon, clad in elaborate blue and silver armor,

with the Valyrian steel blade her father had retrieved from the Doom sheathed at her hip. Graceful and slender, with long flowing silver hair and purple eyes, the Lady of the Tides and Queen of the Stepstones looked like a warrior-goddess from Valyria of old.

Perhaps that is why the king and the lords were stunned when Laena Velaryon bent the knee to Aegon II, and handed him an ornate golden crown.

“Your Grace, the Lady Paramount of the Stepstones is at your command.” she declared.

The lords who had issue with King Aegon suddenly found themselves facing a force of hardened Velaryon levies, cutthroat pirates, and a dragon the likes of which they had never seen. King Aegon found himself reliant upon a queen who had given up her crown to him, and who possessed more men and a more fearsome dragon than he commanded. Peace was not so much negotiated as enforced by Lady Velaryon, who returned to Driftmark to organize her new seat. Her only request was that King Aegon give her any aid she might request to subdue the remaining Stepstones, which mainly consisted of utilizing the levies and shipyards on Dragonstone as well as Driftmark. This the king gladly gave, though he and his successors would rue such a decision in due time.

But, the city did not burn, the lords did not revolt, and peace endured, for the moment.

And all the while, Prince Viserys sulked. “I wanted to see them burn!” he complained to his father.

Westeros would burn. For within the next 4 years, Westeros would see the death of one king, the rise of three others, and the re-conquest of the Seven Kingdoms by dragonlords.

Though not by Targaryeans.

King Aegon, well aware of his own precarious position, declared three days of feasting to celebrate Laena Velaryon’s return and conquest of the Stepstones. According to court gossip, the king had intended to name Lady Velaryon as his Hand of the King, to replace her father, but the Lady of the Tides declined, and quite bluntly as well. “I am not my father, your Grace.” she is rumored to have told him. “My father was a man of coins, of charts and maps and ledgers. I was meant to sit a saddle, to swing a sword and command armies. Use me as that, or do not use me at all.”

The feasting was raucous and merry, with food and drink flowing freely. All of the lords and ladies wanted to hear the tales of the Lady of the Tides, and King Aegon found himself increasingly ignored in favor of Laena Velaryon. King Aegon’s bannermen, mainly the lords of Massey’s Hook, Sharp Point, Duskendale and Rosby, all were incensed that the Velaryons were rising above them. The tension at last reached a breaking point, when Lord Morden of Sharp Point, a proud and prickly man, deigned to confront Lady Velaryon about “the manner by which you disgrace yourself, your house and your king.”

Lord Morden railed against Lady Laena’s wild ways, her martial nature, that such actions as the ones she took in Essos and during the Maelstrom were “unbecoming of a lady of noble

birth” and that “perhaps the Seven would be better served with Velaryon children as opposed to Velaryon harlots.”

Lady Laena listened to the Lord of Sharp Point speak in a polite silence, and when he at last had no more words to say, she declared “I no longer serve the Seven, Lord Morden. Perhaps if you took your head out of your ass for a moment, you would have noticed that. I shall not have a minor lord of a no-nothing house deign to instruct me on my manners and my life. You call me a harlot? Then put up your steel, sir. This harlot challenges you to a duel.”

The court was shocked. It was one thing to demand a trial by combat to escape the king’s justice, but never had a duel for honor been invoked in full view of the king and court.

King Aegon was delighted at the prospect. “Either Lady Velaryon proves that she is indeed not her father’s daughter, or I rid myself of a dangerous vassal.” he was heard to have said to his wife in a drunken jape.

The two duelists went outside to the yard of the Red Keep. The stars glittered overhead, and torchlight danced across the armor of the combatants. Lord Morden was a older man, but hale and hearty, and chose a shield and mace as his weapon. He japed that Lady Velaryon would use her Sea Snake, the Valryian blade her father had acquired, “to make the fight more fair”.

Instead of the Valryian steel blade, Lady Laena chose a simple sword, given to her by her husband. Lord Morden bristled, saying “You face me with some hunk of iron from your lunk of a husband?”

Lady Laena smiled and replied, “Indeed I do.”

Then the blade caught fire.

The duel that took place was an entirely one sided affair. Despite Lord Morden’s size and rage, Lady Laena was a veteran of voyages and battles, had seen much and more, and was more than willing to take advantage of both her opponent’s fury at her and fear of her flames to ensure her victory.

Lord Morden took several burning cuts to his arms and legs, the fiery blade slicing into his ringmail and plate. The Lord of Sharp Point swung his mace to and fro, but was either deflected harmlessly away or found that his blows struck empty air.

Finally, it ended. Lord Morden swung violently upward, then moved to bring his mace down onto Lady Velaryon. But it was over. Lunging forward, the burning blade cut through plate, mail, flesh, bone and heart, before emerging, still aflame, out the angry lord’s back.

From then on, Lady Laena earned a new name.

The Light Bringer.

The realm was even more enthralled with Lady Laena following what became known as the Duel of Gods, so called as both combatants were fervent believers in the Seven and Red R’hallor respectively.

Some voices, however, loudly thundered against her. Lord Morden’s surviving children, namely his heir, Lord Tieran, were outraged that their father had been murdered at a feast, with

the young lordling declaring that “the guest right burned in the flames of the harlot’s wanton desires”.

The High Septon was more concerned with Laena Velaryon’s faith in the Lord of Light. “The Velaryons have long served the Faith as noble servants, coming to Westeros alongside the Conqueror himself.” he thundered from the Starry Sept. “Shall they now leave the Faith and Westeros after all of their history?”

King Aegon was unperturbed. So long as he remained in Lady Laena’s good graces, he reasoned, the longer he would be able to do as he please within the Seven Kingdoms.

Unfortunately for him, that period only lasted until the end of the year. King Aegon died abed, drunk and utterly inebriated by the time the grand maester rushed to his aid. Some would say it was the price he paid for his ineptitude and incompetence. Some would truly mourn his passing, for while he had been abysmal in keeping good will between himself and the lords of the realm, peace had still endured over a majority of the Seven Kingdoms for the totality of his reign.

There were those who, through years of cunning and political corruption, suggested a darker realization. With the passing of King Aegon, the throne went to his eldest son, the cruel and malevolent Viserys II. Though young, the new king was ambitious, ingenious, but completely lacked any morality. Many dismissed those concerns, remembering fondly the days of the Old King, Jaeharys, hoping beyond hopes that those days would return.

They were wrong. So very wrong.

The reign of the Tormentor had begun.

For the moment, Lady Laena returned to Driftmark, where it was discovered that she was with child. The maesters and the red priests that the Lady of the Tides brought back with her from Volantis advised she rest as the pregnancy progressed, and she fully intended to listen to their advice.

Events, however, prevented her from such luxuries. The remaining pirates of the Stepstones, desperate to retain their independence from the Sea Snake’s daughter, and united under the banner of the Would-Be King. They were called so because, despite the best efforts of maesters and historians, no one has been able to identify who exactly the pirate leader was, save for their desire for dominion over the Stepstones. A man, yes, but tall, short, fat, thin, Westerosi, a native of Essos or even further beyond, no one knows.

As Laena Velaryon left High Tide to deal with the rabble of rebels, she instructed her husband to begin the construction of new ships and the raising of levies across both Driftmark and Dragonstone. Lady Laena would ever be hailed as a warrior and tactician of great renown, but it must be noted that Samwell Velaryon, formerly of House Dayne, was the mind behind the funding and supplying of his warrior-wife’s efforts.

As the Light Bringer rushed south, preparing to brutalize the remaining pirate strongholds with dragon flame, Viserys II Targaryean was announcing his coronation plans, and the marriage between himself and Lady Falena of Riverrun.

Many of the lords of Westeros were shocked by this union, none moreso than the Evenstar of Tarth. While Lord Willem had been released from his confinement in the dungeons, he was still kept at court, to ensure the Stormlands did not rebel again. Unlike his father and grandfather, King Viserys should no hesitations when threatening his vassals, and proved quite adept at playing on fears and rivalries to get what he wanted. Some of the court gossips concocted an elaborate tale of love, betrayal and scandalous nonsense, which comes to us in the form of the novella *The Dragon and the Trout*. Many, however, simply suspected that the king simply gave Lady Falena an ultimatum: marry, or watch the Evenstar burn.

The wedding was joyous, with great crowds coming out to celebrate the union of their new young king and the beautiful Lady of Riverrun. Music wafted through the air, food and wine flowed freely, and smiles shared by all.

All except Lady Falena. She did not smile.
She would never smile again.