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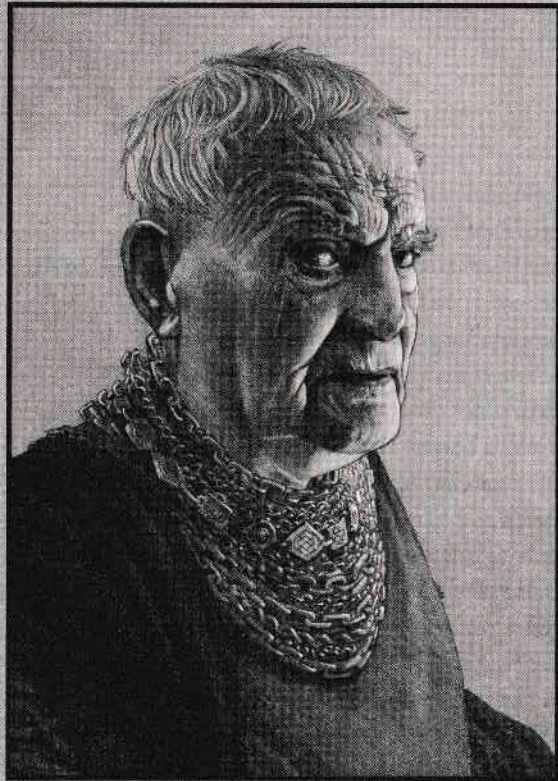

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Fire & Blood
Being a History of the
Targaryen Kings of Westeros



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

The 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 Duskindale 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 Celtigers 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 Rhaeny's 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

