

Jon took a deep breath as he stared at the massive structure of the Titan of Braavos. The enormous structure of a warrior made of granite and bronze gleamed as the first rays of dawn shined in it. He supposed he was among the luckiest few fortunate to see the Titan up close and on level with its head, thanks to the airship.

He supposed some of his Targaryen ancestors might've seen the same thing he saw on their dragons when they visited the free city of Braavos.

Jon took a few steps back, startled when a roar came from the mouth of the Titan.

"What the...?" Jon spluttered.

"That's the roar of the Titan. Whenever a ship approaches the statue, it roars to warn the Arsenal." Harry explained.

"How's that possible? Is the statue alive?" Jon asked incredulously.

"Of course not. It's most likely a combination of several horns operated by men in a cleverly designed chamber that amplifies sound. After all, the Braavosi are not solely famed for their ship-building capabilities." said Harry.

"So, there is no magic involved?" Jon asked, a pinch disappointed.

"Not that I know of. Maybe there is some magic involved." Harry said thoughtfully before a gleam entered his eyes that made Jon uneasy.

"Tell you what. Let's find that out tonight. It'll be an adventure like never before." Harry suggested.

"Is that wise? I mean, wouldn't the Braavosi be cross with us if we violate their treasured possessions?" Jon asked hesitantly, but he also liked the idea of investigating the Titan.

Jon didn't know why, but he was getting a strange feeling from the Titan. It felt like something familiar was gnawing at the edges of his mind, but for the life of him, he could not discern what it was.

"They'll be cross with us if they find us. What they don't know won't hurt them. Besides, there is something interesting in the Titan's roar. I'm sure you've also felt it."

Jon nodded slowly while eyeing his brother out of the corner of his eyes. He got the feeling Harry suspected something, but gleaning anything from Harry was as difficult as earning the trust of a dragon.

"Yes, but I don't know what it is." Jon muttered, frowning intently at the Titan's mouth.

"Well, that makes the two of us brother." Harry patted Jon's shoulder.

"I've been thinking of telling the truth to Robb." Jon suddenly said as the airship started to lower itself as they approached the Titan.

"It's not time." Harry shook his head.

"But..." Jon started.

"You'll have to wait, Jon. Trust me." Harry said firmly, staring ahead. "Our priority must be to keep your heritage a secret from everyone. The less number of people who know this secret, the better."

"But Robb is my brother. I trust him." Jon argued.

“Good. Then make sure you tell the truth after Theon Greyjoy leaves Winterfell.”

“Theon?” Jon blinked in surprise. “What do you...?”

“Robb has many good qualities. But one bad habit he picked from our father is that he is blind to the shortcomings of his friends.” said Harry.

“You...” Jon cut himself off when he found Robb coming towards them to join them on the ship's bow.

“So, what’s the plan? Are we supposed to fly in like this in broad daylight?” Robb asked.

“That’s exactly the plan. The whole point of going into Braavos on the airship was to show them we rule the skies.” said Harry, making Jon frown.

“Aren’t the Braavosi our allies?” Jon asked, confused.

“Allies?” Harry raised an eyebrow. “Have we ever signed an alliance agreement with Braavos, to your knowledge?”

“But... we trade with Braavos.” Jon’s forehead creased.

“We also trade with Pentos, Myr, Tyrosh, Lys, Volantis and anyone willing to trade with us on the other side of the Narrow Sea. That doesn’t make them our allies.” Robb pointed out.

“Exactly!” Harry beamed. “Braavos is a valued trade partner. We have no military alliance with the Sealord, and that places them squarely with the rest of the Free Cities. The only difference is that our volume of trade with Braavos exceeds compared to any other polity on the other side of the Narrow Sea.”

“But we hope to make them an ally, right?” Robb asked.

“In time, yes. For now, we only need trade agreements from them. Our focus should be on that alone.” said Harry.

Jon wanted to remind Harrion how contradictory that was. Only a moment ago, his brother suggested they sneak into the Titan to see what was making that roar. It was not exactly the work of a trade delegation. But he had enough grace not to point that out to his brother.

“Well, at least we know for sure Arya would be disappointed to learn the Titan does not come to life to smash the enemies of Braavos and eat highborn ladies.” Jon said amusedly, making his brother laugh.

“Old Nan have such wild imaginations.” said Robb, smiling fondly at the memory of Old Nan telling them fantastical tales about the Titan.

“All right. Enough dallying. We have people to meet and deals to be made.” Harry clapped his hands and led them back to their rooms to get ready.

They were quick to make themselves presentable as the airship lowered from the clouds. They all saw the famed Arsenal of Braavos after they bypassed the towering visage of the Titan. The fortified shipyard of Braavos was famed for building one ship every day. It was a fanciful claim to make, but Jon saw the hundreds of galleys anchored at the infamous shipyard at the entrance of Braavos’ lagoon and changed his mind.

“Look at those battlements on the top of that rock. No fleet could bypass them.” Robb pointed a finger at the Arsenal.

Sure enough, Jon found several huge siege engines, scorpions and spitfires atop the knob of rock overlooking the Arsenal. The hundreds of galleys moored at the shipyard sported the banners of Braavos fluttering in the wind.

“Look at those galleys. It’s no wonder no other fleet could defeat them.” Robb said, looking at the rows upon rows of galleys anchored at the shipyard.

“Alyn Velaryon defeated them at the Stepstones.” Jon absently said, making Robb look at him in surprise.

“Is that true?” Robb asked, turning his sights on Harrion.

“It must be true. I’ll trust Jon’s expertise on the subject of battles of the past.” Harry said amusedly.

They fell silent and enjoyed the view of the city of Braavos sprawled out in all its splendour across a chain of islands.

Unlike other sailships, the airship was not supposed to be anchored in a harbour. Instead, arrangements were made ahead of their arrival in Braavos, and Jon was only learning about them now from Harrion. Looking down from the ship, he could see some of those arrangements. A large circle was painted on the ground of a huge mansion where the airship was supposed to land. Under Lady Anya’s captaincy, the airship lowered steadily towards the painted circle.

He also noticed the people gathered nearby under the shade of the mansion, waiting for their arrival. The Manderly colours were easily spotted among the company of men and women waiting on the ground.

“I had sent the Manderlys ahead of our arrival to Braavos to arrange our lodgings near the Purple Harbour. It’ll only take a few minutes of walk to reach the Sealord’s Palace, where the negotiations will be held.” Harry explained.

Jon bleakly noticed there was not a single tree inside the city sprawled out over the many islands. It was as if the Braavosi had levelled their islands with bricks and turned all their trees into ships. However, he did spot some greenery among the huge mansions he could see from the airship, but they were a rarity in the city. His attention was diverted back to what was happening on the bow of the airship as the household guards of House Stark arranged themselves neatly dressed in fine armour and armed with the finest swords and spears. Ser Hallis Mollen led the guards in the absence of Ser Jory and Ser Rodrik.

A slight tremor passed through the airship as it touched down on the ground but otherwise remained stable as always. The side panel on the starboard side of the airship folded inwards, and a long wooden pathway formed outwards until it touched the ground.

Jon quickly joined Harrion’s and Robb’s side, with guards led by Ser Hallen flanking them from all sides. Together, they disembarked the ship, and Jon took notice of Wylis and Wendel Manderly among the delegation receiving them on the ground.

A thin, short man with slicked black hair dressed in a fine red silk doublet and black breeches stepped forward with a smile.

“Lord Harrion, Lord Robb. My name is Titus Ethreon. On behalf of the Iron Bank, let me say it is an honour to welcome you into our city.”

“The honour is ours.” said Robb with a slight nod.

“We’ve only heard of Braavos’ beauty and the famed Titan in tales and the pages of books in the library. We’re heartened to see your city’s beauty exceeds the words of the maesters of the Citadel.” Harry greeted back with a smile.

Jon was thankful he was left alone to his own devices while a swarm of courtiers of the Sealord and several other representatives of the Iron Bank swept away Harrion and Robb. Instead of participating in any of the talks, he went straight to his room. Along the way, he found Lady Anya engaged in an expressive conversation with Elsera Snow near the controlling bridge of the airship.

‘I suppose Robb is not the only one learning to fly the airship.’ Jon mused.

He didn’t dally around to see what they were talking about, and instead, he went straight to his room. Along the way, he passed by the household guards of House Stark of Winterfell and Avalon alike. At one point, he had hoped to be one of these men or even just a brother of the Night’s Watch, serving side by side with his uncle Benjen Stark.

But that was no longer possible because his ambitions had changed. His options were not so small or reduced, all thanks to Harrion.

It all started with the Stark name.

He desperately yearned for it, and Harrion delivered it to him on a dime without Jon ever asking for it. But now, he knew he was not a bastard of Ned Stark. He was the bastard son of Rhaegar Targaryen. He was a dragonseed of the Targaryen dynasty, which his uncle had righteously overthrown for the crimes committed against his grandfather, uncle and mother.

But the story of House Targaryen should not end with Aerys and Rhaegar. Harry helped him see beyond his hatred for the duo and what the Targaryens and even the Valyrians represented. While Jon saw the violence, greed for power, and endless expansionist wars, Harrion taught him to see their magic and how that empowered them. According to Harrion, the Valyrians failed to utilise the magic and use it to empower the people of Essos. They refused to share their magic with the rest of the world and jealously held on to its might to empower themselves.

Jon understood what his brother was saying. He realised the failing of Valyria was in using their magic to subjugate the rest of the world and its people instead of freeing them. Harrion had used his magic to conquer two islands of the Iron Islands. Once he did that, he gave them the benefits of trade and abolished the old ways of the Ironborn. All across the North, Harrion spread his magic and gave their people wealth and comfort. He gave them the opportunity to rebuild themselves, and Jon realised that was the true power of magic – freedom!

He knew his brother alone could not spread the benefits of magic everywhere. But if Jon could help more substantially, the work could spread far and wide. Even the threat posed by the White Walkers could be averted with more magic on their side.

With this noble goal in mind, Jon embraced the other half of the blood running in his body. He was determined to bring about great change in not just the North but the whole North using the dragon blood and the blood of the First Men.

But first, he needed to learn to bond better with his dragon and study more about magic from his brother. Closing the door behind him, Jon went straight towards a familiar-looking trunk in his room. Opening the lid, he stepped in, and with the aid of the flying carpet, he found Snuggles. He waved at the dragon, but the dragon just ignored him, making Jon sigh.

Jon had his work cut out for him with a rebellious dragon in hand, which he was supposed to tame before returning home.

“Are you sure this is the right place for this kind of discussion?” Harry asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Of course, it is. Do you see anyone eavesdropping on our conversation Lord Harrion?” Titus Ethreon said happily.

Harry looked around at the vacant bridge with carved faces staring at him from all corners. They sat on a bench on the bridge overlooking the ships moored at the Purple Harbour. The bridge had a huge span and was made of stone and wood. From the highest point on the bridge, Harry could almost see all of the city.

‘I suppose they aptly named the bridge – the Bridge of eyes.’ Harry thought, feeling a touch uncomfortable, feeling all the eyes of the carved faces on him.

It was like the feeling he got from the Godswood of Winterfell sans the magical power.

“Now, tell me more about this canal you’re proposing.” said Titus.

“House Stark has decided to carve out a canal connecting the Bite with Saltspear at Neck. We’ll do it in a way that it does not touch the Fever River,” said Harry before taking a map from his pocket and letting it sprawl out on the bench.

“That’s an ambitious venture,” Titus muttered, schooling his face so as not to show any emotions. “I suppose you are here to ask for our aid or a loan from the Iron Bank.”

“No. I’m here to negotiate a trade deal to set tariffs for Braavosi ships that’d cross the canal in the future.”

“You seem awfully certain you’d build the canal. How long is this canal?”

“Less than 80 leagues long.”

“How long would such a venture take to complete in Westeros?”

“It’ll only take at most a month.”

“A month?” Titus asked incredulously.

“I know it sounds fanciful. But I’m not talking about carving out a long canal using labourers. That’d take years to finish the canal.”

“Then what’re you talking about?” Titus asked with a frown.

"I can carve out the canal using magic. All expenses for the canal will be borne by myself. But before I build the canal, we need to come to an understanding."

Harry watched as the Iron Bank representative went into a contemplative silence. Only the sound let out by seagulls patrolling the skies could be heard, as well as the steady lull of the sea.

"You're confident you can build this canal within a month?" Titus asked, breaking his silence.

"I'll be gone on a trip across Essos. Once my journey is completed, I'll return to the North, and the work on the canal will be completed within a month."

"If this canal is completed, Braavosi ships will gain access to the western ports of Westeros." Titus slowly said, never taking his eyes off the map.

"More than that. It'll ensure the expansion of our glass trade as well as the ice trade. Braavosi ships can access Avalon directly, and we can also do the same." said Harry.

"You'll need an audience with the Sealord and his advisors." Titus said.

"I've already requested an audience."

"That won't be necessary. Will you be comfortable meeting with the Sealord on the morrow?"

"Of course."

"Good. I'll arrange the meeting."

Eddard rubbed his eyes to alleviate the sleep that was consuming him and tried to make sense of the numbers on his desk. The taxes collected from Sea Dragon Point were well above some of the wealthiest regions in the North combined, like Barrowton, White Harbour and the Rills.

But it was not just Sea Dragon Point. All regions in the North had been generating more taxes than usual. His son's lands just happened to be the most productive, and it was shown by the people migrating to the previously uninhabited area for better job opportunities. Farming and hunting were still the most popular jobs of the smallfolk. But Avalon had been offering people other avenues with glass making, shipbuilding and now the ice trade.

If maester Luwin was correct, Bear Island was fast becoming wealthy because of the ice trade. The forest ice eater from the lakes of Mormont lands was most sought after in the south. They even called it the Bear Ice. House Mormont had not only settled all their debts brought upon by Jorah Mormont, but they had also made a killing in the ice trade that left them with a reasonable sum of gold and silver going by the taxes the Mormonts had sent him.

'If only Ser Jorah had been patient, he could've had it all.' Eddard thought with some disappointment.

While he hated the former lord of Mormont Keep for engaging in slavery, he acknowledged that the man was a good warrior. The ill repute the man's actions brought upon House Mormont would not be wiped away anytime soon.

However, what kept him at night was not just the increased tax collected from the North. Maester Luwin had delivered a raven from Jon Arryn. Thankfully, his foster father had only good news to share. Lady Lysa Arryn had delivered a healthy boy, and they had named him Robert Arryn in honour of his late friend and brother in all but blood. The contents of the parchment should not have made him stay the night, but it was writing the response that he found difficult.

Writing a congratulatory note was not a difficult task, but Eddard was also considering whether it was a good idea to inform Jon about the plans for building the canal. Usually, the Iron Throne had no authority in any construction that happened inside respective kingdoms, but it was a courtesy to inform the king about it. The canal was something that'd change the current shipping lanes of Westeros. Changing the geography of the North and the Westerosi continent was something he ought to inform the throne.

At the same time., he knew a canal in the North that gave Essosi merchants access to the Sunset Sea would upset many in the south. That was why he had held off on informing the Small Council about the plans for the canal; someone could act on the information and possibly disrupt Harrion's negotiations with the Braavosi. But it had been over a week since Harrion, Robb, and Jon departed for Braavos. He hoped his sons had enough time to gain the audience of the Sealord and discuss the matter of the canal.

Dipping his quill in the ink, Eddard began scribbling down a message on a fresh parchment.

The very next day, a raven flew from Winterfell carrying his best wishes for Jon Arryn and a message for the Small Council about their plans for carving out the Sunset Canal. Of course, Eddard was purposefully vague about the whole matter and merely mentioned he had sent out surveyors to map out the best possible site for the canal at the Neck.

He left out his son's involvement as well as the magic that will be involved in the canal's construction. Considering the Small Council's disposition to the Faith of the Seven, it was better to be as vague as possible.