

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTEROS

Ancient History and Legends

The first inhabitants of Westeros were the Children of the Forest. Over 12,000 years ago, the First Men invaded from Essos (the neighbouring land to the East) and established hundreds of kingdoms across the nation. Eventually a peaceful Pact was signed between the First Men, who were to have the open lands, and the Children, who were to have the forests, after which the First Men adopted the Children's old gods of the forest, holding the white weirwood trees sacred.

For 4,000 years an age of prosperity endured throughout Westeros, known as the Age of Heroes. Many of the best stories hail from this time, and many of the Great Houses drawn their lineage back to then. But roughly 8,000 years ago, the Others came from the northern Lands of Always Winter. Also known as White Walkers, they swept through the kingdom, killing and then resurrecting the dead. Banding together, the First Men and the Children drove them back, and the famed Bran the Builder erected the Wall. The Sworn Brotherhood of the Night's Watch was created to defend the realms of men.

4,000 years ago, from the hills of Andalos in Essos, the Andals invaded Westeros, driven by their new Faith of the Seven. The war waged on for centuries. Eventually only the North stood against the Andals, the southern regions fallen, weirwoods burnt, and the Children of the Forest retreating into the woods or north of the Wall. The Andals created six strong kingdoms in the south, known as the Kingdom of Mountain and Vale, the Kingdom of the Isles and Rivers, the Kingdom of the Rock, the Kingdom of the Reach, the Kingdom of the Stormlands, and Dorne.

Meanwhile, on the Valyrian peninsula in Essos, dragons were discovered. Valyria began to take over surrounding nations such as Old Ghis and the Free Cities, driving the Rhoynar into Westeros to seek an alliance in Dorne. A minor Valyrian noble family built a grand dragon-shaped castle on a small island in Blackwater Bay – the island was Dragonstone and the family Targaryen.

Roughly 400 years ago was the Doom of Valyria. The exact circumstances are shrouded in mystery, but some sort of volcanic cataclysm took place, wiping out many Valyrians as well as their spells, knowledge and history. Very few families survived, and the only surviving dragonriders were the Targaryens.

Aegon's Conquest and Targaryen Rule

The common era began with Aegon's Conquest, when the Targaryen family invaded Westeros to seize control of the Seven Kingdoms. The war lasted two years and King Aegon, with just his two sisters, their dragons, and a small army managed to subdue six of the Kingdoms. Only Dorne succeeded in repelling the dragonriders. Some Kings submitted to Aegon's rule, like Torrhen Stark, the King Who Knelt; some were defeated with fire, like King Harren Hoare the Black, whose home Harrenhal is a ruin to this day. On Aegon's coronation the year 1 AC began, and the defeated Kings were demoted to Lords Paramount. Those who had stood against the Conquest were replaced by Targaryen supporters. The Targaryens built the city of King's Landing to rule from, and the swords of the defeated lords were melted by dragonflame to form the Iron Throne.

For over one hundred years, the Targaryens have held the Iron Throne and the feudal hierarchy of Westeros has hardly changed. The Targaryens had a practice of marrying brother to sister to keep their line pure, although they adopted many other customs of Westeros, including the Andal religion, the Faith of the Seven.

Aegon's Conquest did not manage to take Dorne successfully, and the years after his coronation saw further attempts to conquer it, all unsuccessful.

After Aegon's death in 37 AC (After Conquest), his son Aenys inherited. He couldn't have been more different to the Conqueror in strength of both body and personality. His reign was plagued by uprisings and rebellions. While the ones in his early reign were eventually quelled, his dedication to continuing the Targaryen customs of polygamy and incest led to the Faith Militant Uprising against the throne, where men of the Faith took up swords and spears to become the Warrior's Sons. He died one year into the rebellion, having reigned for five years, and upon his death his half-brother Maegor usurped the throne from Aenys' son.

The Faith Uprising continued throughout the entirety of Maegor's bloody reign. He began his reign by beheading the Grand Maester who protested his ascension. Two more Grand Maesters would be executed throughout his reign, but that is nothing to the number of septons and septa who died. His dragon Balerion burned the Sept of Remembrance in King's Landing to the ground, and all the holy men inside it. He also burned the noble houses of many in the Reach and Westerlands who opposed his treatment of the Faith. When his nephew Aegon rose up against him to claim his rightful throne, Maegor slew him and his dragon. He became known as a kinslayer, with the nickname Maegor the Cruel.

Finally, after six years of cruelty and destruction, in the midst of a rebellion by Aenys' son Jaehaerys, Maegor was found dead on the Iron Throne. None knew who did the deed, and some whispered that it was the Throne itself. Maegor's six wives had borne only malformed creatures who died, and so Jaehaerys was able to ascend the throne peacefully.

Jaehaerys and his sister-wife Alysanne had been what the realm needed. Known as the Conciliator and the Good Queen, they put the realm to rights, made peace with the Faith and began several construction projects, including the great roads that linked the major cities. After almost twelve years of disaster, the realm was at peace.

The Great Council and Succession

Jaehaerys' rule was long and steady. His main issue was his succession. Originally, his son Aemon was in line, but after Aemon died in 92 AC Jaehaerys passed over Aemon's daughter Rhaenys, in favour of naming Aemon's younger brother Baelon heir. Unfortunately, Baelon himself died in 101 AC, which led to Jaehaerys calling a Great Council. Harrenhal was the only castle large enough to house all of the Lords that wanted to attend, so it was held there.

Nine lesser claims were heard and dismissed, including Rhaenys and her daughter Laena. The two final candidates were Prince Viserys, Baelon's eldest son, and Laenor Velaryon, son to Rhaenys. Primogeniture favoured Laenor, while proximity favoured Viserys. Viserys was a man of 24, while Laenor was a child of 7. Viserys was the last rider of Aegon the Conqueror's dragon Balerion, before it had died seven years ago, although Laenor was also already a dragonrider. Laenor was the son of Corlys Velaryon, the richest man in the seven kingdoms, who could call a fleet to support his claim, while Viserys had the support of his younger brother Daemon, who was willing to form an army.

In the end, Viserys was chosen, by a rumoured margin of twenty to one. For many, this established an iron precedent that the Iron Throne could not pass to a woman, nor to the male descendent of a woman.

Prince Viserys went on to inherit, and with Aemma Arryn he had a daughter, Rhaenyra, a charming girl known as the Realm's Delight. When his wife died in childbirth twenty-three years ago, he named his daughter heir, and lords from across the Seven Kingdoms came to swear fealty to her.

But the king remarried, to Alicent Hightower, daughter of Otto, the Hand of the King. She gave the king three sons and a daughter. But Viserys never named his son Aegon his heir, nor unnamed his eldest daughter. In fact, he seems reluctant to speak of the matter at all.

Elsewhere, Prince Daemon Targaryen, banished from court by his brother, declared war on the Triarchy and invaded the Stepstone islands. With the support of his dragon and Corlys Velaryon, he wrested control of all but two of the Stepstones and declared himself King of the Narrow Sea.

Back at court, two parties began to form – the queen's party, and the party of the princess. During a tournament in 111 AC, the queen wore a green gown and the princess wore a dress in the Targaryen colours of black and red. Since that day, the two parties have been known as the Greens and the Blacks.

In the years since, Rhaenyra wed Laenor Velaryon and gave birth to three boys. After Laenor's death she remarried, to her uncle Daemon, with whom she has had two more sons. By this point Daemon had abandoned his seat in the Stepstones and been allowed to return to court. The islands had been reconquered by a Triarchy-Dornish alliance.

This Year

It is now the year 128 AC. The realm is in the middle of autumn, and it is believed that winter is coming soon.

Last year, King Viserys cut his hand to the bone on the swords on the Iron Throne. The wound became infected and the Grand Maester was forced to remove two of his fingers. While outwardly he has recovered, his health is poor and it is widely whispered that he will not live for more than another year.

More and more of the day to day business of the realm is now delegated to the King's Small Council, led by the Hand of the King, Otto Hightower. The rest of the Small Council consists of: Lyman Beesbury, Master of Coin; Jasper Wylde, Master of Laws; Tyland Lannister, Master of Ships; Larys Strong, Master of Whisperers; Ser Criston Cole, Lord Commander of the Kingsguard; and Grand Maester Orwyle.

It is widely feared and suspected that civil war is on the horizon. The greens and the blacks are making preparations for the inevitable death of the king, and both sides are rallying allies to their cause. Prince Aegon has recently celebrated the birth of his second son Maelor, and Princess Rhaenrya is pregnant again.

The Principality of Dorne remains independent and a thorn in the side of the Iron Throne, with frequent small raids crossing the passes to pillage the Stormlands. In the North, wildling incursions across the Wall have become increasingly common. Meanwhile in Essos, the Triarchy (an alliance of the powerful merchant cities of Myr, Lys and Tyrosh), are growing increasingly interested in Westeros, not least because Daemon Targaryen still claims the title of King of the Stepstones and the Narrow Sea. An ambassador has recently been sent to King's Landing to represent their concerns.

There can only be one King or Queen of Westeros. The Blacks maintain that Princess Rhaenrya is the designated and rightful heir; the Greens cite the precedent of the Great Council of 101, which clearly states that no woman can sit the Iron Throne. The enmity between the Princess and the Queen is personal, long lasting, and at this point seemingly irreconcilable.

After all, when you play the game of thrones, you win or you die.