

The song of steel filled Harry's ears as he came across the famed Moon Pool. The Moon Pool housed not one but many fountains in the area. He supposed these fountains were necessary because this was the usual spot where the Braavosi came to practice their Water Dance. Men and women who could afford teachers in the personalised style of swordplay practised diligently from early morning.

"There is a certain elegance to it." Harry observed, watching the Braavosi perform their martial art in public.

Their movement was fast and fluid. The Water Dancing style depended on constant movement and less on strength, unlike the standard Westerosi style of swordplay.

"Is it true the Braavosi learned the Water Dancing from the Rhoynar?" Robb asked.

"It could be true. The Water Dance must've been based on an earlier Rhoynar style of swordplay." Harry said with a shrug.

"Sansa and Arya would love this place." Jon muttered.

"Indeed. Let's not rush to tell them. Otherwise, they'll run away from Winterfell and become Braavosi." said Harry with a snicker.

After a couple of laughs at the expense of their sisters, they observed the water dancers at their best for an hour before they moved to another site.

The next attraction they found was the Canal of Heroes. It was the largest canal in Braavos, located close to the Chequy Port. There were many bridges built across the canal filled with sculptures of fish, crabs, squids, eels, and seahorses. There was even a bridge dedicated to the Sealords of the past. Seeing that particular bridge gave Harry the idea of installing a similar bridge across the Sunset Canal connecting the Neck with the rest of the North. The bridge could be lined with the sculptures of the Winter Kings and former lords of Winterfell. The sculptures in the crypts could function as a basis for the new statues to be installed on the bridge.

An idea also came to him about adding several fountains and gardens by the sidewalk on the bridge that could attract tourists. Perhaps even some closed-off areas from the open air could host murals depicting the history of the North. The more he thought about it, the more Harry found appeal in the idea. Those statues and art could also be convenient camouflage to install stone golems and hide runes that could defend and protect the bridge from hostile powers.

'I'll have to rethink the plan of creating a bland bridge solely for transportation across the canal.' Harry mused.

Harry was confident he could even outfit some inns at the bridge if he could expand the current scope of the structure he had in mind. Of course, a structure that functions as not just a road but also a museum and art gallery might make it more complex and drag the construction far longer than he envisioned. Not to mention the cost involved. But that was a small price to pay because the returns he stood to gain far outstripped any initial investment.

For centuries, the Kingsroad that connected the Neck to the rest of the North was the lifeblood of all traders in the North and the Riverlands. There was bound to be a disturbance in that trade traffic once the North developed a dedicated merchant fleet, but land trade would not stop altogether. It'd be far cheaper for traders from the Vale and the Riverlands to trade their wares in the North through land routes.

Besides, the chief attraction of the Sunset Canal would be for Essosi merchant ships seeking to avoid the Stepstones.

After spending some quality time on the many bridges near the canal, they went straight for the Temple of Moonsingers. The Moonsingers were the priestesses of nomadic raiders who lived east of the Bone Mountains. Their religion came to Braavos when the rebel slaves took Valyrian ships to escape their captors. Supposedly, the priestesses of the tribes divined the safe location for the slaves to land, which later became Braavos. The Moonsingers worshipped the moon goddess named Thea. According to their tour guides, their temple was the largest and most beautiful in Braavos. The temple was built using white marble with a dome made entirely of glass, depicting the moon's different phases. They were also fortunate to attend a sermon session conducted by the priestesses. Instead of long and tedious philosophical talks, the sermons of Moonsingers were conducted by singing songs praising their goddess.

Harry found some of the songs he heard pleasing. The language of the Jogos Nhai sounded very similar to ancient Sanskrit but with a flair for romanticised phonetics and melodic notes in expressing certain emotions. It almost felt like Harry was listening to a fusion of French and Sanskrit influences in the language of the Jogos Nhai tribe. He found the whole religion and the Moonsingers interesting because he felt a benevolent vibe from the temple.

Ever since he killed the Drowned God and amassed its power in Godkiller, Harry had been learning to feel the gods active in the world. He could get a general feeling of their intent and energy whenever he was close to their places of worship. The gods of Westeros were cold and callous in their attention given to the mortal plane save for a few, like the Drowned God. So, coming across a spirit entity whose aura radiated benevolence and acceptance was a first.

Harry was so impressed he asked for the core religious texts of Jogos Nhai from the Moonsingers, which they were happy to oblige. That particular decision was also influenced by the realisation that a Keyholder of the Iron Bank was a priestess in the room in his routine surface scan.

There were so many places to visit in Braavos, but they returned to the manor by noon and rested till evening. The rest of their visits to the other temples in the Isle of the Gods were rescheduled for another day as they were invited to the Sealord's palace.

"It seems the Sealord is now prepared to talk with us about the canal." said Robb after the messenger from the Sealord's palace left their manor. "What do you think will he ask for?"

"Favourable tariffs for Braavosi ships and security from the Ironborn raids, of course. But he'll also be aware of my plans for a Northern bank. The Iron Bank will sound its concerns to us through the Sealord." said Harry.

"Concerns?" Robb asked with a frown.

"They don't want any competition in Essos."

"Are we planning on competing?" Robb asked.

"Of course not. The bank has not even started yet. It'll take decades for the bank to build a reputation to extend credits to foreigners. Our bank will be solely for Northerners."

"So, like the Hightower bank then?"

"Yes. Like the Hightower bank but far more expanded." Harry nodded.

The Hightower bank only functioned in Oldtown, and it was more or less holding all the loans given out by House Hightower inside Oldtown. The bank Harry envisioned for the North differed in its function and scope. Ideally, he wanted the bank to function like the Iron Bank, but he was realistic in his approach and realised that was not possible anytime soon. Therefore, he hoped the bank could be used to slowly expand from Winterfell and Avalon into other parts of the North to empower small businesses in the villages.

But that also came with several challenges. He needed dedicated staff for the bank to function. The lack of basic education among the North's nobility and smallfolk was a serious hurdle.

'All the more reason to start a school and recruit scholars for the school.' Harry thought.

Harry, Robb, and Ser Wylis Manderly sat across from the Sealord and his advisors. The Iron Bank also had several representatives, including Titus Ethreon.

"Any agreements we make today are not final and will be subject to further negotiations. Is that acceptable to you, heir Stark?" Ferrego Antaryon said.

Harry observed the Sealord of Braavos. The man was bald, and the little hair he had left was pure white. The Sealord did not look well. The man suffered from a fever, or the Sealord suffered his age.

"Of course, honoured Sealord. Lord Eddard Stark is the Warden of the North. Only Lord Stark can finalise the agreement from our side." Ser Wylis said.

"We are here solely to discuss terms of the agreement and to study any concerns raised by Braavos." Harry further added.

"Good. Then let's proceed."

They haggled for the toll to traverse the canal for the next half an hour. It was agreed upon that tolls would be collected using silver for the ease of currency exchange, as Essosi polities commonly use silver rather than gold. The Sealord proposed to use Lyseni silver as the standard, but Harry wanted silver moons of Westeros or Pentoshi silver. That particular issue was left to be discussed later. Harry also asked for 180 silver moons or its equivalent in Pentoshi silver as the transit fee, including access to ports on either side of the canal for a day. If the ships dallied longer in the ports, they'd have to pay extra port duties.

But Harry and Robb made it clear that the 180 silver moon fee was an offer they'd accept if paid in Volantine silver as well. After all, the silver from Volantis was much better quality than Lys, even if Volantine honours are smaller in size. The Braavosi understood they'd have to pay a higher toll if they insisted on Lyseni silver. Harry suspected the Iron Bank had somehow gotten hold of the Lyseni market if they insisted on Lyseni silver instead of Pentoshi silver or Westerosi silver moons or stags. The only Westerosi coin the Free Cities traded in was the gold dragon.

Most Essosi merchants avoided the silver coins of Westeros in favour of Essosi silver in trade across the Narrow Sea. This was a troubling prospect for the North till now, as their traders hardly had anything to sell in the Free Cities, which left them fully short of Essosi silver. This forced them to pay in gold for all spices from Essos, which had severe ramifications for the North's economy.

But that was no longer the case as the glass trade brought some much-needed Pentoshi silver and Volantine honours into the North. Having more Pentoshi silver would only enhance the spice trade, especially with the canal in place. Harry was hoping to ink some deals with Pentoshi magisters for Northern merchants to buy their spices in bulk so that they could sell them in the Westerlands, the Riverlands, the Iron Islands and the Reach.

The next order of business was the Ironborn, and Harry thought that was a more contentious issue than the tariffs. One hundred eighty silver moons were nothing compared to the risks taken by merchant ships to avoid the pirates of the Stepstones. Even with the Arsenal, Braavos was hardly insulated from the troubles faced in the Stepstones. Most of their ships had to pay the heftier price for their cargo and life to sail safely from the Stepstones. After all, Braavos could not project their naval strength onto the Stepstones without eliciting a similar response from Lys, Myr, Tyrosh, Volantis and the Iron Throne.

Those concerns were also applicable in the case of the Iron Islands.

“In our eyes, we see no difference between the Ironborn and the pirates of the Stepstones. How can we be sure the Ironborn won’t prey on our ships as we exit the canal into the Sunset sea?” the Sealord asked.

“The islands of Blacktyde and Harlaw are now part of the North. House Tallhart now rules the island of Blacktyde, and Harlaw is under my supervision. Nothing moves in those two islands without my knowledge. The Iron Fleet has been reduced to a couple of small fishing boats and will remain that way. My ships are spread out in this area, and we can guarantee that our ships will protect all ships transiting the canal.”

“If that is not enough, there is another option.”

Harry fished out a leaf of parchment and offered it to the Sealord. He waited for the Sealord and his advisors to read the contract drawn up.

“That is a contract we hope to offer for any ship that transits the Sunset Canal. It’s a guarantee to reimburse the ship and its contents if the ship is lost to an Ironborn raid so long as the ship is insured and its contents are known to us beforehand.” Robb explained.

Harry shared a look with Robb. This was their plan to rope in some investments from Essos into their bank. Robb initially brought up the idea when he suggested offering a paid escort to Essosi ships. While Harry shot down that idea, Robb’s suggestion made him think about insurance companies for the muggles.

“This is an intriguing proposal.” the Sealord said after conversing with his advisors. “We’ll need more details about how you value the ship and other details.”

“That can be easily arranged.” said Robb, nodding at the Sealord.

“But we’re still concerned about the Ironborn. Westeros is not politically stable all the time. We’ve seen the Iron Throne shift its priorities and allies in the past. Even though King Stannis has worked tirelessly to cull the threat of the Ironborn, it might not persist. If a direct order comes from the Iron Throne to hand over the islands to the Ironborn, wouldn’t you be forced to do so?”

“House Baratheon is not House Targaryen, and there are no dragons to force the North to cede our lands at the whims of the crown. My fleet is more than enough to protect our interests in the region.” Harry stared firmly into the judging eyes of the Sealord and his advisors.

“How many ships do you have in your fleet, Lord Stark?” Ferrego asked.

“I have 38 war galleys, excluding my airships and merchant galleys. Within the year, that number will cross 50. Once the canal opens, I was hoping to buy more war galleys from Braavos and Pentos.” said Harry with a shrug of his shoulders.

But he knew his interest in buying ships from Braavos would sway the Sealord and his advisors. Ships were expensive, and Braavos had more than a lot of ships than they’d need. This had left their shipyards in a bind with only repair works in the last few decades. There had been no major conflicts for the Arsenal to engage in Essosi waters save for the occasional pirate in the sea. Therefore, Harry knew the Braavosi would jump at the chance of reviving their sleeping shipyards.

The increased chatter among the Sealord’s advisors was a prelude to that. Harry maintained a poker face, as did the ageing Sealord. But they both knew the negotiations had entered a far more relevant phase.

“Tell me something, Lord Stark, heir Stark? What’ll happen if the Ironborn rebels again, but the Iron Throne does not want to involve its fleet in the conflict?” Ferrego asked, steeping his fingers.

“House Stark will annexe the entirety of the Iron Islands and destroy the Ironborn culture for good with extreme force.” Harry answered promptly.

“Is this the position of Lord Eddard Stark?” the Sealord asked sceptically.

“Theon Greyjoy is a ward of House Stark. It’s our hope that, in time, the Iron Island would have a new beginning with Theon as Lord of Pyke. If that’s not possible... Winter will come for the ironborn.” Harry said without missing a beat.

“I see.” Ferrego went into a thoughtful silence for a moment. “In that case, we have much to discuss, Lord Stark, heir Stark.”

The negotiations went late into the night as they hatched out some more details before coming up with several major points they agreed on. Now, all that remained was the wording of the overall text of the deal before being sent for review to Winterfell.

The upper levels of the Titan were crawling with soldiers of Braavos. But Harry and Jon quickly walked through the different levels uncontested under the disillusion charm and notice-me-not charm. There was a lift operating inside the Titan that allowed the soldiers to transport their provisions from different levels. But they didn’t use the lift and instead chose to trek the structure using the stairs. They saw every nook and cranny of the Titan until they finally reached their destination.

The head of the Titan was supposedly 400ft above sea level. The outer shell was made entirely from bronze, while the inside was layered with granite and wood. The floor was layered with painted ironwood, while huge glass panes were kept at the eyeholes of the head. Harry found it interesting to note that the glasses were arranged to focus light outwards. There were also huge mirror panes near the eyeholes.

The huge fires that burned inside the head provided the guiding light for ships to sail around the lagoon safely to the city's harbours. He supposed the lights could also be used to find enemy ships in the dark and even guide them to crash into the lagoons if they so wished.

It didn't take them long to find the chamber where the Titan's roar came from.

"It is a horn, after all." Jon whispered in awe when his eyes fell on it.

His imagination had been running wild ever since speculation began about how the Titan made the sound. Harry had jokingly told him that the sound must be created by the haunted souls of the enemies of Braavos. He knew that wasn't true, but that didn't stop him from having nightmares about ghosts living in the Titan's head.

"Not an ordinary one either. Look at these glyphs." Harry pointed at the nearly faded runes carved on the horn.

Another interesting thing Jon noticed was that the horn was gigantic and pitch black in colour. Also, most of the horn was encased in bronze, making it hard to discern the material used to build the horn.

Jon cautiously reached out and touched the surface of the horn that was not encased in bronze. It was rough but also hard and cool.

"Dragon bone! The horn is made of dragon bone." said Harry, surprising Jon.

"Where would the Braavosi get dragon bone?" Jon asked confusedly.

"The Valyrians must've made the horn before the Doom. The Braavosi might've come to possess it when they escaped with Valyrian ships from the Freehold. The horn might've been a family heirloom of a dragonlord of Valyria." said Harry, with a gleam in his eyes.

Jon looked at the horn with renewed interest. His eyes traced the delicate contours of the black bone of the dragon until he saw the gleam in Harry's eyes.

"We are not stealing the horn, right?" Jon asked for clarification.

"Oh, of course not. It'd be a dishonourable thing to do." Harry immediately said, but Jon saw his brother staring longingly at the horn.

"Come on. We should go." said Jon, pulling Harry away from the horn.

"No, wait! I'll just need to copy down the glyphs. It'll be good to have them cross-referenced later to understand what they mean." said Harry, breaking away from Jon's hold.

Jon could only shake his head.

'I suppose it's better than outright stealing the horn.'

The next day, the airship took to the sky after finalising the text of the final document with the Sealord. Their destination was Andalos, and, from there, Pentos.

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Jon: Why is the Titan silent?

Robb: Maybe the men are sleeping on the job.

Jon and Robb look suspiciously at Harry, who raises his hands in surrender.

Harry: I had nothing to do with it.

Elsera: Hey, look what I found in our ship. It's a cool-looking horn.

Jon and Robb stared intently at Harry again, who shrugged his shoulders with a guilty look.

Harry: It's stolen property of the Valyrians. I promised to return it to its true owner.

Robb deadpanned: The Valyrians are dead.

Harry smiled brightly.

Harry: Yay! I can keep it then.