The dragons are all dead. The last dragons—those that flew and exhaled fire—perished one hundred and fifty years ago. But the family Targaryen, who had come out of the ruin of Valyria to Westeros three centuries past on the backs of dragons, who had united seven squabbling kingdoms under the Iron Throne, whose emblem was a three-headed dragon, and whose words were Fire and Blood, those dragons died only recently.

Aegon the Conqueror set foot on Westeros three hundred years ago, along with his sisters Visenya and Rhaenys. Together, they were the three heads of the dragon. They arrived on the backs of Vhaghar, Meraxes, and Balerion—the true dragons—and they laid waste to all who opposed them. Some, like Torrhen Stark, the last king in the North, bent the knee. Others, like King Mern of the Reach and King Harren the Black, burned.

For three centuries, the Targaryens united the kingdoms of Westeros under one rule, despite many tumultuous upheavals. The Targaryens survived their own civil war between brother and sister, known as the Dance of the Dragons, where Viserys I's daughter Rhaenyra and his son Aegon nearly tore the realm apart with their dragons. The Targaryen dynasty would also survive the Blackfyre Rebellion of Aegon IV's bastards, the conquering and later marriage of Dorne into their kingdom, the invasion in the North of the King-beyond-the-Wall, and the War of the Ninepenny Kings. The Targaryen reign lasted until King Aerys II ascended to the throne. Known as the Mad King, he would usher in the fall of the dragons.

Aerys II was torturously cruel and violently insane. He saw enemies in every shadow and turned his subjects against him through inhumane acts of despotic power. In the end, Robert Baratheon of Storm's End led an uprising against the king after Crown Prince Rhaegar Targaryen abducted Robert's betrothed, Lyanna Stark. Known as the War of the Usurper, or Robert's Rebellion, Robert united many of the great houses behind his cause, including the houses Arryn, Stark, and Tully.

Robert Baratheon slew Crown Prince Rhaegar on the banks of the Trident. King Aerys, in desperation, opened the gates of King's Landing to the armies of his former Hand, Lord Tywin Lannister, who immediately betrayed his king and set his forces to sack King's Landing. Tywin's son, Ser Jaime, an honored knight of the Kingsguard, murdered the king he had sworn to protect and has been known ever since as the Kingslayer.

It is now the reign of Robert Baratheon, the First of his Name, King of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, and Protecter of the Realm. He is married to Lord Tywin Lannister's golden daughter, Cersei, and they have three golden-haired children: Crown Prince Joffrey, Princess Myrcella, and Prince Tommen.

The only surviving Targaryens, Prince Viserys and his younger sister Daenerys Stormborn, hide in lands far to the east.

To talk of Westeros is to discuss several distinct regions, known collectively as the Seven Kingdoms, for at one point each was its own great realm. This usage dates back to the time of Aegon I Targaryen, known as Aegon the Conqueror. When the Targaryens arrived on this continent, they encountered the King in the North, the King of Mountain and Vale, the King of the Rock, the King of the Reach, the Storm King, the King of the Iron Islands, and the Prince of Dorne, each dominant in his own lands.

And before there were seven kingdoms, hundreds of kingdoms and different peoples existed. The earliest period of Westeros—long before the Targaryens, or even the First Men, were known—is referred to as the Dawn Age. During this era, the children of the forest lived alone throughout Westeros and worshipped natural gods, such as the gods of the trees and rocks and streams. This period lasted until the arrival of the First Men, who invaded Westeros about 12,000 years ago. The First Men came from the east across a land bridge, through what would one day be known as Dorne. The First Men brought bronze weapons and horses with them, in addition to their own gods. They warred with the children of the forest and cut
down the children's woods and their carved weirwoods—pale trees carved with the faces of their gods, which the First Men feared. The children eventually shattered the land bridge, creating the region known today as the Broken Arm of Dorne and the Steppes, but it was too late to stop the First Men.

The war between the children of the forest and the First Men lasted for centuries until they buried their enmity by forging the Pact on the Isle of Faces. The Pact was a great peace that ended the Dawn Age and began the Age of Heroes: four thousand years of friendship between the First Men and the children. They worked together, traded between their villages, and the First Men even took on the old gods of the children, adopting the carved weirwoods as their own.

This era also encompassed the founding of the Seven Kingdoms, though that name would not come into the histories until far later. Many of the noble houses of Westeros today trace their lineage back to the Age of Heroes, when grand figures such as Brandon the Builder and Lann the Clever were said to have lived.

The Seven Kingdoms were not all born at once, but each of today's regions can be seen in the pattern of that time long ago. The Starks, family of Brandon the Builder, rose as the rulers in the North. The Casterlyrs ruled in the west—until Lann the Clever winkled Casterly Rock from them, making it then and forever the historic home to the Kings of the Rock. The kingdom of the Reach was established by Garth Greenhand, father of House Gardener (and many smaller houses as well, for his seed was fertile). The Storm Kings, founded by Durran, swept over the stormlands. Duran raised their castle at Storm's End with stone and magic to withstand the fury of the gods of sea and wind, for he stole and married their daughter. Then there was the legendary Grey King, who ruled not only the Iron Islands but also the sea itself; the Mudd family was one of a dozen houses to rule over the Riverlands.

During this era, the Sworn Brotherhood of the Night's Watch was founded. The Night's Watch was to be the shield that guarded the realms of men from the barbaric wildlings and nightmarish Others of the Far North. Brandon the Builder was said to have helped the Night's Watch build their mighty wall, a construct of stone and ice nigh 700 feet tall and hundreds of leagues long.

Both the peace of the Pact and the Age of Heroes reached their end with the arrival of the Andals, new invaders from across the sea, who landed in what is known today as the Vale of Arryn. The Andals brought new gods and deadly weapons forged of steel with them. The Andals fought the First Men for centuries until, in time, all six southern kingdoms fell, and the Andals destroyed the weirwood groves and the children of the forest wherever they found them. The children were either all killed or fled far to the North, for they were never heard from again. The only realm of the First Men to stand against the Andals was the Kingdom of the North.

The Andals spread their faith in the Seven Gods throughout the lands. They established themselves as Kings of Mountain and Vale (from which House Arryn descends) and Kings of the Westerlands.

The last major migration to Westeros happened roughly 1,000 years ago, when the warrior-queen Nymeria led her fleet of 10,000 ships from the east to Dorne. Her people, the Rhoynar, named for the Rhoyn River they once called home, were initially met with hostility from the Dornish lords, but Nymeria made peace with Lord Mors Martell by taking him as her husband. With their combined strength, they forced all of Martell's rivals to bend the knee, and he became the first Prince of Dorne, after the custom of Nymeria's Rhoynar.

These centuries were marked by regular skirmishes and bloodletting across the kingdoms. The lords of Dorne fought intermittent wars with both the Kings of the Reach and the Kings of the Stormlands. Southron armies smashed and broke against Moat Cailin to the north, and from north to south. King Richard Stark slew the Marsh King. The Storm Kings conquered the riverlands of the Trident and held them for hundreds of years until the ironborn defeated Arrec the Storm King and claimed them for themselves.

Then, more than 400 years ago, the Doom came to the wondrous Freehold of Valyria, far to the east of Westeros, known as the ancient home of language, art, and magic. The survivors fled the smoking ruins, arriving on the eastern tip of Westeros, at the isle of Dragonstone, which had been Valyria's westernmost outpost. Dragonstone's masters, the Targaryens, already long established on Dragonstone, came to dominance over the remaining Valyrians. They abandoned their old gods who had betrayed them and converted to the Andal religion of the Seven.

The Targaryens remained on Dragonstone for more than a hundred years before they ventured forth and set foot on Westeros. Aegon, accompanied by his sisters Visenya and Rhaenys, sailed from Dragonstone to unify the squabbling kingdoms of the Andals. They landed on the eastern coast and built a simple wooden and earthen fort. Few could see that one day that very site would bloom into King's Landing, seat of the king of all Seven Kingdoms. Although the Targaryens had

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CERANEYEN  STARK  BARATHEON  GREYJOY  ARRYN
few forces and were vastly outnumbered, they had the greatest weapon of all: dragons.

When King Loren of the Rock and King Mern of the Reach joined their armies to drive the Targaryens from Westeros, they had nearly 60,000 sworn swords under 600 different banners. The Targaryen army numbered barely 12,000 and was made of conscripts and volunteers, most of them as young and green as spring grass. They met on the ripening wheat fields of the Reach, and the Targaryens fell like the summer harvest. Only then did Aegon and his sisters release the dragons—the only time in recorded history that all three flew as one. Four thousand burned on the Field of Fire, including King Mern. King Loren escaped and later bent the knee.

With the power of their dragons, the Targaryens conquered six kingdoms: the Kingdom of the Rock, the Kingdom of the Reach, the Kingdom of the Mountain and Vale, the Kingdom of the Storm King, the Kingdom of the Iron Islands and the riverlands, and the Kingdom of the North. Only Dorne remained unconquered for several generations, but it, too, would eventually fall under the Targaryen rule, first by sword, and then by marriage.

One hundred and fifty-seven years after Aegon the Conqueror, his descendant Daeron the First, the Young Dragon, broke the Dornish armies when he was but 14. However, although the Dornishmen were conquered in name, they resisted brutally and won back their freedom when they slew the Targaryen king. It was almost 30 years later when King Daeron II married the Dornish princess Myriah, and married his sister to the Dornish Prince, that Dorne was truly brought into the Seven Kingdoms.

Lands of Westeros

The continent of Westeros is long and relatively narrow. The lands north of the Wall are wild and uncharted, home to wildlings and stranger beasts that dwell among the frostfang Mountains and swim in the Shivering Sea. The farthest region, which stretches beyond the known map, is called “the Land of Always Winter,” even the longest summers do nothing to melt its snows or thaw its ice.

Beneath the Wall, the North stretches south to the boggy marsh of the Neck, the Bay of Ice borders the region on the west, and the Bay of Seals borders on the east. It is the seat of the Starks and contains the port city of White Harbor.

South and east of the North is the Vale of Arryn, surrounded by the stony peninsulas of the Fingers, the rocky and barren Bay of Crabs, and the foreboding Mountains of the Moon. It is the seat of House Arryn, the Defenders of the Vale.

The kingsroad, which runs all the way from the Wall to King’s Landing in the south, passes by the western border of the Vale, paralleling the mighty waters of the Green Fork of the Trident. The Trident marks the riverlands, a lush and bountiful region ruled by House Tully from Riverrun. It contains the lake called the Gods Eye, which holds the Isle of Faces. The riverlands are bordered by the Neck to the north, the Vale to the east, the westerlands to the west, and King’s Landing and the Reach to the south.

The westerlands are home to the Lannisters, who rule from Casterly Rock. The region is also home to some of the richest gold and silver mines in all the Seven Kingdoms. It is a small region, dominated by Lannisport and the Rock.