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Game of Thrones for Dummies

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READ THIS SKIP THAT

HBO's new fantasy series *Game of Thrones* creates a massive world with its own jargon and a ton of characters—Jace Lacob's glossary and character gallery explain all!

For the uninitiated, *Game of Thrones* can be confusing. Based on the long, plot-heavy novels by George R.R. Martin, the HBO show (premiering Sunday at 9 p.m. EDT) is bursting with more characters and settings than you can swing a broadsword at.

Game of Thrones is a political potboiler crossed with the essence of medieval legend, as ambitious and power-hungry lords and ladies vie for the throne, unleashing a violent and dangerous game that threatens the tenuous peace of this feudal society. The world of Martin's novels—which contain maps, character lineages, and a slew of appendices to keep readers on the right path—is a complicated one, containing separate and sometimes interconnected storylines, told from varying perspectives, that reward paying strict attention. But the devil is in the details, and the HBO series is shoehorning in 800-plus pages of details, backstories, and legends into 10 episodes. We're here for you, newbie. Who the hell is the Kingslayer? What in God's name is a wildling? Why do they keep saying "winter is coming"—who cares about winter?

We delve into Martin's novels and beyond to define to offer you this glossary. No spoilers.

Aerys, The Mad King: The last ruler of the Targaryen Dynasty (see also: **Targaryens, The**), he ruled the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros prior to the current king, Robert Baratheon (Mark Addy). Gripped by madness, he was responsible for the murder of both the father and brother of Ned Stark (Sean Bean). He was killed, stabbed in the back by Ser Jaime Lannister (See also: **Kingslayer, The**), and is the father of the dead Dragonknight Rhaegar as well as the two known surviving members of the Targaryen clan: Viserys (Harry Lloyd) and Daenerys (Emilia Clarke).

Andals, The: An invading force thousands of years before the events depicted in *Game of Thrones*, these invaders are responsible for the culture, religion, and language (the Common Tongue) of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. They battled the First Men and brought their beliefs in a pantheon of gods called The Seven to the continent.

Arakh: The curved blade favored by the nomadic warriors of the Dothraki tribe, it is connected to the user by a lanyard that can be twisted to remove the blade while on horseback.

Black Brothers: A nickname for the Sworn Brotherhood of the Night's Watch, who guard the Wall (see: **Wall, The**). They are also known as crows, due to the black garb they wear.

Casterly Rock: The fortress seat of the Lannister family, located in Lannisport. The family's symbol is a golden lion. While its words are "Hear Me Roar!," most incorrectly ascribe a different and common saying to the wealthy clan, "A Lannister always pays his debts." Among the family's members: Tywin Lannister (see: **Hand of the King, The**), Ser Jaime (see: **Kingslayer, The**), Cersei (now the queen of the realm), and Tyrion (see: **Imp, The**).

[Click the Image for a Guide to *Game of Thrones*' Key Characters](#)



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Castle Black: The decrepit castle at the base of 700-foot wall (see: **Wall, The**) that divides the Seven Kingdoms from the wild forest. One of 19 original strongholds along the wall, Castle Black is one of just three remaining operating strongholds and the main training and living center for the Night's Watch.

Children of the Forest, The: The original, indigenous inhabitants of the continent known as Westeros, they had a deep connection to the natural magic of the world and some were gifted with prescience ("greensight"). They joined together with the First Men to fight the onslaught of The Others (see: **White Walkers**) and forged a truce with the First Men, keeping control of the vast forests and allowing the First Men to settle in the open plains. They have not been seen in thousands of years.

Dance With Dragons, A: The fifth volume in George R.R. Martin's multinovel series. It's due to be released on July 12, six years after the publication of Book 4, *A Feast for Crows*.

Direwolf: Distantly related to wolves, these fierce and terrifying creatures can grow to be as large as a pony. They have not been seen south of The Wall for 200 years before the events of *Game of Thrones*. The direwolf is also the symbol of the Stark family, the lords of Winterfell. (See: **Winterfell**.)

Dothraki: A nomadic people who travel the open plains known as the Dothraki Sea. They are fearsome horse-mounted warriors who mistrust the actual ocean, as it is made up of "poison water" that their horses cannot drink. They speak an oral language also called Dothraki, which was created specifically for *Game of Thrones* by David Peterson of the Language Creation Society and based on passages from George R.R. Martin's novels. The Dothraki are vicious fighters and, when defeated, they must cut their long braids. Victorious fighters take bells from the hair of the men they have slain and wear them.

Dragons: Fire-breathing mythical creatures. Aegon the Conqueror, who arrived in Westeros from ancient Valyria, used his three dragons to conquer the entire continent. Now extinct, dragons have not been seen in Westeros for hundreds of years. The dragon is the symbol of House Targaryen and the remains of ancient dragons' skulls can be found in the lower levels of the Red Keep, the royal castle, at King's Landing. (See: **King's Landing**.)

Essos: The continent east of Westeros where the grasslands known as the Dothraki Sea are located. Essos is also home to the archipelagos of Braavos and Lys, cities Pentos, Asshai, Yi Ti, and the Shadow Lands. It is separated from Westeros by the Narrow Sea.

Eyrie, The: The home of House Arryn, it sits atop a treacherous mountain called The Giant's Lance and can only be reached by passing through three gates as one ascends the mountain. It is home to Lysa Arryn (Kate Dickie)—sister to Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley)—and her son Robin (Lino Facioli). (Note: In the novels, he, too, is named Robert.) Ned Stark and Robert Baratheon grew up here, fostered by Lysa's husband Jon Arryn (see Hand of the King, The).

First Men, The: Human settlers who came to Westeros thousands of years ago and formed a pact with the Children of the Forest. They believed in the old gods (as opposed to the new gods; see: **Seven, The**) and their influence is still keenly felt in the North (see: **Winterfell**), where their religion and customs still hold sway, such as the belief that if a man is sentenced to die, the one doing the sentencing should carry out the execution.

Godswood: A small copse of trees inside many castle walls, it's a place for solitary contemplation and a place of devout worship by those who believe in the old gods of the First Men. (See also: **Heart Tree**.)

Hand of the King, The: The chief and most trusted adviser to the king, this key position serves on the small council and often rules when the king is away or indisposed. When *Game of Thrones* begins, Jon Arryn is the Hand of the King, serving King Robert Baratheon. His predecessor, Tywin Lannister (Charles Dance), served the Mad King Aerys. Tywin's son, Ser Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) slew the Mad King and Tywin's daughter Cersei (Lena Headey) is now married to King Robert and serves as queen of the Seven Kingdoms.

Haunted Forest, The: The wild expanse north of The Wall, it's home to wildlings and whispered to contain unimaginable creatures such as giants, mammoths, direwolves, and the white walkers. (See: **White Walkers, The**.) The 700-foot tall Wall separates the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros from the forest.

Heart Tree: Sacred weirwood trees (see: **Weirwood**) that have faces carved into them, allegedly by the Children of the Forest for some unknown purpose. Located at the center of a godwood, this red-leaved tree is where adherents to the old ways offer prayers and oaths (such as that for the Night's Watch). The tree's red sap grants the carved eyes of their faces a blood-hue.

Ice: The sword, made of Valyrian steel, wielded by Ned Stark, Lord of Winterfell.

Imp, The: The nickname given to Tywin Lannister's youngest son, a dwarf named Tyrion (Peter Dinklage).

Iron Throne, The: The throne on which the king of the Seven Kingdoms sits. It was forged by the heat of dragons' breath when 1,000 bent their swords in fealty to Aegon the Conqueror. As it's made of sharp swords, it can easily cut the person who sits on throne. Only the king or his "Hand" may sit atop the Iron Throne.

King's Justice, The: The king's executioner and headsman. The mute Ser Ilyn Payne (Wilko Johnson)—whose tongue was ripped out by the Mad King—fulfills this role for King Robert.

King's Landing: The capital city of Westeros' Seven Kingdoms and the seat of the Iron Throne. The Red Keep, the royal castle, is located here, as well as the Great Sept of Baelor, the seven-sided holy seat of the High Septon, a religious figure more or less analogous to the pope. (See: **Seven, The**.) While the ruling classes exhibit all of the pomp and circumstance (as well as showy excess) one would expect of the royal court, the city is deeply divided between the haves and the have-nots. While the castle is located within the sprawling city, so, too, are taverns, brothels, and shanties.

Khalasar: A vast group of Dothraki bloodriders, their slaves and women, and their leader (known as a khal). Khal Drogo (Jason Momoa) leads the Dothraki clan seen in the first episode of *Game of Thrones*. The khal's bride is known in the Dothraki tongue as khaleesi.

Kingsguard, The: Seven knights sworn to protect the life of the king, they are more or less analogous to the Secret Service in the United States. Under the terms of their oaths, they cannot marry nor hold lands and they serve for life.

They wear white cloaks, the symbol of their station. Ser Jaime Lannister is a member, sworn to serve King Robert. (See: **Kingslayer, The**.)

Kingslayer, The: The nickname given to Ser Jamie Lannister (also: **Oathbreaker**), a sworn member of the Kingsguard who nonetheless slew his master, Aerys II, The Mad King.

Lemon cake: A sweet confection, much beloved by several characters in *Game of Thrones* and fans of the novels. Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) enjoys this airy, citrus-flavored pastry.

Maester: A member of a revered order of scholars and healers who are trained at The Citadel in Oldtown, they serve the lords of Westeros as valued advisers and members of their household. Each master wears a heavy chain collar comprised of links of different metals, each representing a different area of study. The sage Maester Luwin (Donald Sumpter) serves the Starks of Winterfell, for example.

Narrow Sea, The: The body of water separating Westeros from Essos.

Night's Watch, The: An organization of sworn brothers who act as a shield for the realms of man, they oversee the 700-foot Wall dividing the Seven Kingdoms from the Haunted Forest beyond. Each brother takes a vow upon completing his training to uphold his sworn oaths for life, giving up any lands or titles and vowing never to take a wife or father any children. They dress all in black, earning them the nickname "crows." While many of the members are highborn nobles (usually younger sons), many are criminals: thieves, rapists, and murderers, who often choose the Wall over other sentences. Desertion from one's post is automatic grounds for execution. Benjen Stark (Joseph Mawle), brother to Ned, is the First Ranger of the Night's Watch.

Others, The: Not to be confused with the island-dwelling inhabitants of ABC's *Lost*, these entities are an ancient evil whose very name has become a curse for the Westerosi, though they haven't been seen in thousands of years. In *Game of Thrones* (unlike the novels and the original pilot), they are referred to as "White Walkers."

Pentos: A seaport and one of the so-called Free Cities on the continent of Essos, where its residents are not beholden to the Iron Throne, but whose merchants often maintain beneficial trade relations with Westeros. Magister Illyrio Mopatis (Roger Allam) is a wealthy Pentoshi merchant that we meet in the first episode of *Game of Thrones*.

Riverrun: The seat of House Tully, whose members include Catelyn Stark and Lysa Arryn, this stronghold is located in the riverlands. House Tully symbol is a silver trout; its words are "Family, Duty, Honor."

Seven Kingdoms, The: Once seven individual kingdoms—the North (home to Winterfell), the Vale (home to The Eyrie), the Stormlands, the Reach, the Westerlands, the Iron Islands, and Dorne—they now comprise a unified Westeros ruled by King Robert of House Baratheon. The terms "Westeros" and "The Seven Kingdoms" are more or less interchangeable, though there are also two regions—never independent—contained within its borders: the Riverlands (containing Riverrun) and the Crownlands, where King's Landing is located.

Seven, The: The seven deities worshipped by the majority of the residents of Westeros. This was the faith brought over to the continent by the Andals and is represented by a seven-pointed star representing each of gods (which are, thought by some, to be seven aspects of a single deity). The Seven are comprised of Father, Mother, Warrior, Maiden, Crone, Smith, and Stranger; adherents pray to each in turn in a seven-sided church known as a sept. Male priests are known as septons and females as septas. Septa Mordane (Susan Brown) is a teacher to Sansa and Arya Stark (Maisie Williams).

Song of Ice and Fire, A: The (proposed) seven-volume series written by George R.R. Martin on which HBO's *Game of Thrones* is based. The fifth installment is due out in July. (See **Dance with Dragons, A**.)

Storm's End: The ancestral seat of House Baratheon and before that the legendary Storm Kings. House Baratheon—its chief members being brothers King Robert, Lord Renly (Gethin Anthony), and Lord Stannis—has a black crowned stag as its symbol; its words are "Ours is the Fury." King Robert and Queen Cersei have three children: heir to the throne Prince Joffrey (Jack Gleeson), Princess Myrcella (Aimee Richardson), and Prince Tommen (Callum Wharry).

Targaryens, The: A dynasty that conquered Westeros using their famed dragons and ruled the Seven Kingdoms for nearly 300 years, its reign came to an end the day that Jaime Lannister slew Aerys II. Aerys' heir Rhaegar, his wife Elia, and their children were murdered, but two Targaryen offspring escaped execution at the hands of their enemies. The last of the "blood of the dragon," siblings Viserys and Daenerys were raised in the Free Cities, far from King's Landing. Among their ancestors, they believed in wedding brother to sister to preserve the bloodline. House Targaryen's symbol is the dragon, its words are "fire and blood."

Usurper, The: A whispered nickname for Robert Baratheon, whose rebellion led to him crowning himself as king of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, following the murder of Aerys Targaryen by Jaime Lannister.

Vaes Dothrak: The only fixed city among the nomadic Dothraki warriors, it is a sacred place where weapons are not permitted and where no blood can be shed. Its wall-less streets are lined with statues and relics from bygone conquests. The former wives of khals—known as dosh khaleen—are considered to be holy and dwell here; additionally, there are two markets.

Valyria: A fallen city that was once the capital of the Valyria Freehold that was destroyed in a cataclysmic event known as the Doom, which occurred several hundred years before the events depicted in *Game of Thrones*. The inhabitants of this place were renowned for their magical abilities and for their forges, which produced the whisper-sharp blades known as Valyrian steel (see: Ice). House Targaryen originally came from Valyria.

Wall, The: The 700-foot-tall wall that is a barrier between the Seven Kingdoms and the wild beyond, it stretches 300 miles along the North. Built from rock and ice, it is said to have spells woven into it, a literal shield against the nightmarish creatures and the "free folk" (see: **Wildlings**) who would cross over into the realm of man. The Wall is defended by the Sworn Brotherhood of the Night's Watch, which has fallen on hard times of late. Few believe there is anything worth stopping in the darkness beyond the Wall and, of the 19 castles that once garrisoned the troops of the Night's Watch, only three remain.

Ward: A person under the care of another. In this case, wards were often underage highborn hostages seized during battles by lords who sought to make their parents behave and put down their arms. Theon Greyjoy (Alfie Allen)—whose father, Lord Balon, launched the bloody Greyjoy Rebellion—is a ward at Winterfell, though he has been treated well by the Starks.

Weirwood: A species of tree that is indigenous to Westeros and was held as sacred to the Children of the Forest and the First Men. Its leaves and sap are blood-red and its bark is pale. Lysa Arryn's throne at The Eyrie is made of weirwood.

Westeros: The continent where much of the action of *Game of Thrones* is set. Comprised of seven kingdoms and two regions, it is the northernmost continent in this world.

White Walkers, The: A mythological race not been seen for more than 8000 years, these creatures have been reduced to being Boogeymen villains in children's fairy tales, and some doubt they ever existed. According to legend, these creatures—white-fleshed with terrible blue eyes—were driven behind the Wall by a joint effort by The Children of the Forest and the First Men.

Wildlings: The barbaric human residents beyond the Wall who refer to themselves as the "Free Folk." They hold no allegiance to the Iron Throne and often attempt to cross the Wall and raid northern villages. They are governed by Mance Rayder, the "King-Beyond-the-Wall," a former member of the Night's Watch.

Winterfell: The ancestral home of House Stark, descendants of the First Men. From here, the Warden of the North—currently Ned Stark—has kept a close watch over Westeros' northern kingdom, where it snows even during summer. House Stark's symbol is a gray direwolf; its words are "Winter is coming."

Winter is Coming: The official motto of House Stark, which can be taken to mean that there are dark days ahead and one must always be prepared. In a world where summer can last a decade, the cruel winter to come could last

generations, as it did during the "Long Night" event 8,000 years ago, when the Others were said to have invaded Westeros.

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