

What is Wrong with "A Song of Ice and Fire" by G. Martin?

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“A Song of Ice and Fire” (usually abbreviated as ASOIAF) is a world-famous book series of the American writer George R. R. Martin. Currently, it includes five published books out of the seven that the author has planned to write. Belonging to the genre of epic fantasy, it has already gained the popularity commensurate with J. R. R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" and Robert Howard's books about Conan.

ASOIAF tells the story of a political and military crisis in an imaginary pseudo-medieval world. At the same time, another plot line describes much more global events that endanger all the inhabitants of the continent named Westeros, or perhaps even the whole planet. The reader sees the story development through the perception of numerous characters, usually referred to as “POVs” (abbreviated from “point of view”). Fans have praised ASOIAF through its many strengths that include realistic and dark surroundings, thought-out political and military intrigues, skillful character development, and rich lore of Martin's world. The characters of the cycle favorably stand out against the background of other fantasy heroes, as they are realistic, have fears, anxieties, sins, and moral dilemmas. One of Martin's most original achievements is the construction of the "gray world" where the division of factions into "good" and "evil" is absent, and the righteousness of people depends on the point of view through which their actions are perceived. However, like any other work of literature, ASOIAF has its weak points.

First of all, in the most global perspective, the world in which the events of the books unfold is poorly thought out at some points. It would not have played such an essential role in another situation but, given that Martin claims that his world is realistic and emphasizes this with the behavior of his characters and the overall internal logic of his books, inconsistent world-building becomes a significant problem. The most notable example of unrealistic logic is the

linguistic question. In one of his interviews, Martin admitted that Westeros is about the size of South America (Mulray, 2017). At the same time, at least three different ethnic groups inhabit it: the First Men, the Andals, and the Rhoynar. However, from the far North to the South of Dorne, all people speak the same Common Tongue. Dialects are absent throughout the continent, and the inhabitants of Westeros have no problems with understanding each other, even if they were born and grown in the entirely different cultures separated by thousands of miles.

Another example of an internal logic violation is the economic system of the Seven Kingdoms. In the world of Martin, the value of money is an inconsistent indicator which the author himself cannot ultimately determine. For example, in "A Storm of Swords," the third book of the series, Jaime Lannister thinks about three hundred golden coins (the "dragons") as a good ransom price for the lord's daughter (Martin, 2000). This figure proves the gold coin to have an extremely high value. At the same time, in the first book of the cycle, the winner of the royal tournament was to get forty thousand "dragons" (Martin, 1996). Such a sum was supposed to be equivalent to the wealth of the richest Westerosi noblemen, which completely violates the internal logic of the books. Subsequently, the author shows similar jumps between the value of the coins multiple times, making them either fabulously expensive or excessively cheap. Undoubtedly, this problem does not affect the readers' satisfaction with the books, but it is still a pattern of inconsistency that the author of such a level as Martin should not allow.

Another element of the books that reduces their overall quality is "fan service." After "Game of Thrones," the first book of the series, was published in 1996, readers received it with enthusiasm, because Martin's characters were mortal, and even the main heroes of the series were not "insured" from death. Similarly, readers appreciated Martin's directness in describing physiological details, including the cases of sexual intercourse between the characters. In the first

book, both of these elements were necessary for the development of the plot. Moreover, the author used them while knowing the measure to which to use them and adhering to it. However, it seems that after the success of "Game of Thrones" the author realized that people liked these elements and began to overuse them in subsequent works. The characters' deaths is something the books are popular for, but in the latest books, they have lost their suddenness and unexpectedness. Similarly, the scenes of intimate relationships have ceased to being utilized effectively, and instead began to appear in most chapters of the later books. In their totality, these factors create the impression that the author is trying to shock the audience and, thus, maintain the reputation of ASOIAF as a dark and provocative book series.

Finally, the last but not the least weakness of the series is its excessive complexity. ASOIAF has never been simple, and since the very first book, it was developing a "mosaic" system, in which the plot lines of many characters created one general picture. However, since "A Feast for Crows," the author has changed this system. Instead of a few stable characters whose sections alternated each other, he began to introduce additional POVs, such as Ser Arys Oakheart and Prince Quentyn Martell, for several chapters (Martin, 2005). The number of characters began to spill over rapidly, due to which Martin divided the fourth and fifth volumes of the series to describe the events that were happening to different characters at the same time. In such a way, the author has put himself into a plot trap—the so-called "Meereenese knot"—within which most of the key characters must finally meet in one place and merge their plot lines. This is one of the key reasons that the writing of the new books started taking much longer. For now, seven years have passed since Martin has written the fifth book—and the sixth volume, "The Winds of Winter" is still far from being complete. Thus, the excessive complexity of the composition and the branching of the plot lines have become the main factors inhibiting the

dynamics of Martin’s writing.

Summarizing the above, despite the numerous positive aspects of “A Song of Ice and Fire,” this book series is not devoid of significant weaknesses. First, although Martin claims to be realistic, he fails to reach consistency regarding the language and economy of the Seven Kingdoms. The whole vast continent speaks one Common Tongue, despite the cardinal difference between the three cultures that inhabit it. Besides, Martin fails to determine the value of the local currency, ultimately. Secondly, George Martin tends to use apparent fan service, turning the deaths of characters from plot devices into content aimed at shocking readers. Finally, starting with the fourth book, the cycle is becoming more and more complicated. The author introduces dozens of new characters—some of which only appear in a few chapters, and branches out the existing storylines. In turn, the writing of the new books requires more effort and time. “A Song of Ice and Fire” remains an exciting book series—a modern fantasy classic. However, readers should enjoy the novels without idealizing them and remember that, like all mortal people, George Martin is not safe from making mistakes.

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