

Game of Thrones: Everything You Need to Know

Night gathers, and now our watch begins.

Are you late to the game (of thrones) or just in need of a recap? Do not fret, sweet summer child. Here is everything you need to know in anticipation of season 8:

How long is season 8 and when does it come out?

Season 8 comprises 6 feature-length episodes. Episode 1 will air on HBO Sunday, 14th April and on Sky Atlantic in the early hours of Monday, 15th April.



Which houses are still in the game?



House Targaryen

Daughter of the 'Mad King' Aerys and known as the 'Mother of Dragons', Daenerys Targaryen is the last known surviving member of House Targaryen. However, Bran reveals that Jon Snow (previously believed to be the bastard son of Ned Stark) is actually the child of Ned's sister Lyanna and Rhaegar Targaryen, oldest son of Aerys.



House Stark

While Jon is still believed to be Ned's bastard, only 3 legitimate Stark children remain. Sansa, the eldest daughter, currently watches over the North with the help of her sister, Arya. Bran Stark, the youngest child, has transformed into the 'Three-Eyed Raven'.



House Lannister

While all of Cersei's children might be gone, the 3 Lannister siblings still remain. Cersei is currently queen of King's Landing, while her brother Jaime has fled from the city (presumably to join the fight against the undead). Tyrion, who has cut all ties with the family, is special advisor to Daenerys Targaryen.



House Baratheon

All of house Baratheon is dead, apart from Gendry: King Robert's bastard son. Gendry is a blacksmith who befriended Arya Stark and Ser Davos Seaworth earlier on in the series and who more recently joined Jon Snow on his mission north of the Wall.



House Greyjoy

Euron Greyjoy murdered his brother, Balon Greyjoy, in order to become Lord of the Iron Islands. He is currently allied with Queen Cersei, who has promised her hand in marriage once the war is won. Euron is holding Balon's daughter Yara hostage, while her brother Theon managed to escape.



House Tarly

Randyll Tarly and his heir, Dickon, were executed by dragon fire after refusing to bend the knee to Daenerys Targaryen. He leaves behind his widow, Melessa Tarly, and his daughter Talla, who will become Lady of Horn Hill. His other son, Samwell, is allied with Jon Snow and the Night's Watch. Samwell's surrogate family consists of his partner Gilly (a wildling) and her son, Sam.

Who are the Main Game Players?

Team 1

The side that everyone wants to win – the ‘good guys’ if you will. These characters have joined forces to go up against the Night king and his army:

The Power Couple: Jon Snow has proved time and time again to be an excellent fighter and a born leader. Daenerys Targaryen has shown herself to be a fair ruler and a mother of dragons. It shouldn't be such a surprise, then, that romance blossomed between these two. With the Dothraki army, the Unsullied army and two dragons, the pair appear to be in a pretty powerful position.



The Stark Children: Sansa is currently ruling over the North while Jon is on his mission to convince other Westerosi leaders to unite against the Night King and his undead army. Arya Stark is arguably the most skilled fighter in the family with a number of enemies whose names she has yet to cross off her list. Bran ('the Three-Eyed Raven') will also prove useful in the battle against the Night King, as he can see into the past and warg into (possess) creatures. They have the support of smaller Northern houses like the Mormonts and will support their surrogate brother Jon in the war to come.

Others: Many of our favourite supporting characters make up the allied forces. Daenerys' closest followers include former slaves Grey Worm and Missandei, as well as the disgraced slave-dealer turned hero, Jorah Mormont. Jon Snow and the Starks have also wrangled the support of the unwaveringly loyal Brienne of Tarth, Podrick Payne, Ser Davos Seaworth and Sandor Clegane (The Hound). Jon's closest friend from The Night's Watch, Samwell Tarly, has also joined the Starks in Winterfell; his incredible knowledge of Westerosi history will prove valuable in defeating the white walkers. An important addition to the team is Gendry, a skilled blacksmith who may be essential for forging Valyrian steel in the battle against the Night King.



The Lannister Brothers: Tyrion Lannister long since abandoned his family after he killed their father, Tywin, for sentencing him to a crime that he did not commit. He became special advisor to Daenerys Targaryen and now serves both her and Jon Snow. Jaime remained loyal to his family right up until the final episode of season 7, where he is shown speeding away from Kingslanding to join the fight against the white walkers. It is also assumed that Ser Bronn of the Blackwater will join the two brothers in the fight against the undead.

Team 2

This side is woefully ignorant of the real war going on in Westeros: the war between the living and the dead. Here they are:

Cersei Lannister: A witch once prophesised that Cersei would lose all 3 of her children. After the prophesy came true with the death of her youngest child, Tommen, she shed the last of her humanity to become Queen of the Seven Kingdoms. Cruel and manipulative, she will stop at nothing to gain power over her enemies. At the end of season 7, it seems the allied forces have done enough to convince Cersei to put aside her other ambitions in order to join them in the fight against the undead. However, she later reveals to Jaime that her plan is to wait for her enemies to be weakened in their fight against the undead, so that she can conquer them later on.



Euron Greyjoy: Uncle of Theon and Yara, Euron Greyjoy has taken control of the Salt Throne in the Iron Islands and is in command of the Iron Fleet. Yara remains his hostage and he bargains with Theon during the Parley at King's Landing in Season 7. After Jon Snow gives a demonstration on how to kill white walkers, Euron says they are 'the only thing that terrifies him' and claims to be heading back to the Iron Islands. It is later revealed by Cersei that he is headed to Essos to ferry the Golden Company back to King's Landing to fight for his queen.

Others: Cersei still has command of the Lannister army and will soon have the power of the Golden Company behind her. Other characters worth noting are The Mountain; a giant, ruthless bodyguard in terrifying zombie form and the mysterious, sinister Qyburn, who is a skilled healer and inventor.

Team 3

This is the side that will mean the death of humanity in all of Westeros:



The Night King: The Children of the Forest created the white walkers to protect themselves from the first men, when they were invaded centuries ago. However, the problem got out of hand and their creations soon turned on them. The Night King was the first man they turned by plunging dragon glass into his heart. The People of Westeros defeated the white walkers once before in the War for Dawn, driving the Night King and the remaining white walkers back into the far North to the Land of Always Winter. However, the Night King has resurfaced with more white walkers, a huge army of the undead and an ice dragon who has just destroyed the Wall, which has kept them out of the North for centuries.

Army of the Undead: These are the reanimated corpses that the Night King has recruited in his army also known as 'wights'. We know that there are thousands upon thousands of them and inevitably this number will only continue to rise as the battle begins.

Plot Points to Remember

'You know nothing, Jon Snow.' – Ygritte

The King of the North and Mother of Dragons – Daenerys and Jon Snow have finally consummated their relationship and it looks like they are all set to be Westeros' ultimate power couple. Unfortunately, it has subsequently been revealed that they are aunt and nephew. Oops.

Cersei's Baby – Cersei makes it clear to Tyrion that she is pregnant. This raises some questions about the prophecy that claimed she would have 3 children and that all of them would die. Will she be lying about the pregnancy, give birth to a still-born baby or die in childbirth? Or, perhaps the prophecy is wrong? Either way, it will probably be an important part of the plot for season 8.

The Golden Company – We don't know much about the Golden Company, except that it is one of the largest and most skilled armies of the Free Cities. It consists of at least 10, 000 infantry, cavalry and war elephants; this will undoubtedly create an amazing spectacle for viewers at home.

Valyrian Steel – We know of only 5 characters currently in possession of Valyrian steel. These people are bound to be important to the plot in season 8, as the steel is the only thing that can kill the white walkers. The 5 weapons are: Jon Snow's 'Longclaw', Brienne of Tarth's 'Oathkeeper', Jaime Lannister with 'Widow's Wail', Samwell Tarly with 'Heartsbane' and Arya Stark with Petyr Baelish's dagger.

The Spider and the Red Woman – The last time we see Melisandre, a Red Priestess to the Lord of Light, is in Dragonstone. Here, she tells Varys (previous Master of Whisperers) that she is destined to return to Westeros for a final time and that they shall both die there.

Wait – they're still in this?

There are some characters you remember with fondness, some you remember with loathing and some you barely remember at all. Here are all the characters whose names you can't quite place:



Tormund Giantsbane – A renowned warrior among the Free Folk who live beyond the wall, Tormund is loyal to Jon Snow, as he believes he is the prophesied warrior to lead them through the Long Night. He was last seen on the wall when the wight dragon was destroying it, so things aren't looking great for him.



Jaqen H'ghar – He is one of the Faceless Men of Braavos who trains Arya Stark to become a faceless assassin. Her training is complete after she kills the Waif and he officially declares her 'no one'.



Lyanna Mormont – She is the young Lady of Bear Island and head of House Mormont. She is tiny but fierce and a loyal ally to House Stark.



Daario Naharis – He was Daenerys Targaryen's advisor and enforcer during her mission to free thousands of slaves from captivity. He also became her lover but was forced to part ways with her when she sails for Westeros. The last time we saw him, he was left to keep the peace in the Bay of Dragons (formerly known as Slavers Bay).



Meera Reed – She is a firm believer in the Old Gods of the Forest and was crucial in helping Bran in his journey to become the Three-Eyed Raven. The last time we saw her, she told Bran she needed to return to Greywater Watch to be with her family when the white walkers come.



Beric Dondarrion – The man from the Brotherhood Without Banners who keeps being brought back to life by the mysterious ‘Lord of Light’. Red Priest Thoros of Myr, the man who resurrected him each time, was killed in Jon Snow’s expedition north of the Wall. Therefore, Beric is now on his ‘last life’. He may have been saved for a specific purpose that will become clear in this final season.



Edmure Tully – He is a maternal uncle to the Stark children and the last we saw of him, he was being thrown into a cell by Walder Frey. However, Arya Stark has since killed Walder Frey, meaning that Edmure’s fate is currently unknown.



Robin Arryn – After his mother Lysa was murdered by Petyr Baelish and after Baelish’s subsequent execution, Robin was left sole ruler of the Vale. His whereabouts is also unknown.



Roslin and Kitty Frey – Roslin Frey (now Roslin Tully) is the beautiful daughter of Walder Frey who married Edmure Tully. It is revealed that she has given birth to a son that Edmure has never met. Kitty Frey is the last wife of Walder Frey and Arya leaves her with a message of ‘The North Remembers’ when she murders all the male members of House Frey.



Eddison Tollett – A brother of the Night’s Watch, Eddison was made Lord Commander by Jon Snow when he departed Castle Black.



Archmaester Ebrose – As one of the governing members of the Order of Maesters, he takes Samwell Tarly on as an apprentice during his time at the Citadel.



Tycho Nestoris – A banker at the Iron Bank of Braavos, Tycho is only interested in making as much money for the Iron bank as possible. When Queen Cersei gives massive amounts of Lannister debt back to him in a single payment, he is impressed and suggests they may be able to invest in her venture to re-establish control over the Seven Kingdoms.



Hot Pie – Perhaps the most significant character of all, his baked goods can still be sampled at the Crossroads Inn.

Difficult Moments Ahead

‘If you think this has a happy ending, you haven’t been paying attention.’ – Ramsay Bolton

Heartbreak over Viserion: Daenerys already suffered the death of one of her dragons, Viserion, when the Night King struck it with a spear after she arrived to save Jon and the others from the white walkers. Just wait until she finds out that it is now a wight.

The North Remembers: The Northern houses are currently loyal to their King of the North, Jon Snow. They may not have such warm feelings towards him when they discover he has bent the knee to a Targaryen. It was the Mad King, Daenerys' father, who killed the Stark children's grandfather and uncle, creating a bitter rivalry between House Targaryen and the other Northern houses. To make matters worse, Jon is actually a Targaryen by blood, which definitely won't go down well.

R + L = J: Can you imagine how awkward it's going to be when Daenerys and Jon realise that they're actually aunt and nephew? This news is bound to shift the power dynamic between them, as it means that Jon has actually been rightful heir to the Iron Throne this entire time.

Toasted Tarlys: Samwell Tarly might be a fiercely loyal friend to Jon, but he won't be too happy once he discovers that Daenerys burned his father and brother alive for refusing to bend the knee to her.

Familiar Faces: It seems almost inevitable that *Game of Thrones* will try to hurt us as much as possible in these final episodes by taking some of our favourite characters and turning them into wights. The Night King's powers are bound to cause untold devastation in Season 8.

Moments to Look Forward to

The Mountain vs The Hound: The two brothers are bound to face off against each other in this final season. Sandor Clegane confirmed it when he addressed Gregor at the Parley in King's Landing: 'You know who's coming for you. You've always known.'

Arya vs Cersei: One important name on Arya's list is that of Cersei Lannister. Many are hoping to see these two powerful women go head to head, so that Arya can finally get revenge for her family.

Jaime's Redemption: Jaime's redemption arc has spread over most of the series and it will be complete once he selflessly joins the front line in the fight for the living.

Arya and the Hound are Reunited: The last time these two were together, Arya left Sandor to die. However, there might be a chance these two can forgive each other in light of the war to come.

Theon's redemption: Much like Jaime, Theon's character has changed a lot over the series and his final redeeming act will be when he faces Euron and frees Yara from their uncles' clutches.

Gendry and Arya: A relationship between these two has been hinted before, and now that Gendry has returned to Winterfell, sparks could fly (after the massive war, of course).

So, winter is finally here. All that's left to say is wrap up warm, stay inside: the night is dark and full of terrors.

