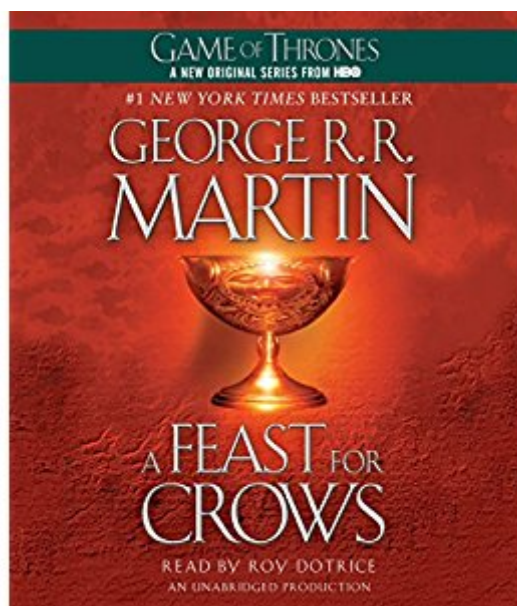


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A Feast For Crows: A Song Of Ice And Fire: Book 4



Synopsis

GAME OF THRONES: A NEW ORIGINAL SERIES, NOW ON HBO. Few books have captivated the imagination and won the devotion and praise of readers and critics everywhere as has George R. R. Martin's monumental epic cycle of high fantasy that began with *A Game of Thrones*. Now, in *A Feast for Crows*, Martin delivers the long-awaited fourth book of his landmark series, as a kingdom torn asunder finds itself at last on the brink of peace . . . only to be launched on an even more terrifying course of destruction. *A Feast for Crows* It seems too good to be true. After centuries of bitter strife and fatal treachery, the seven powers dividing the land have decimated one another into an uneasy truce. Or so it appears. . . . With the death of the monstrous King Joffrey, Cersei is ruling as regent in King's Landing. Robb Stark's demise has broken the back of the Northern rebels, and his siblings are scattered throughout the kingdom like seeds on barren soil. Few legitimate claims to the once desperately sought Iron Throne still exist-or they are held in hands too weak or too distant to wield them effectively. The war, which raged out of control for so long, has burned itself out. But as in the aftermath of any climactic struggle, it is not long before the survivors, outlaws, renegades, and carrion eaters start to gather, picking over the bones of the dead and fighting for the spoils of the soon-to-be dead. Now in the Seven Kingdoms, as the human crows assemble over a banquet of ashes, daring new plots and dangerous new alliances are formed, while surprising faces-some familiar, others only just appearing-are seen emerging from an ominous twilight of past struggles and chaos to take up the challenges ahead.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

OK, I did something a little different in this review. Soon there will be literally hundreds of reviews for this book, all giving similar reasons why people like or dislike *A Feast For Crows*. Instead of adding, and probably losing, my voice in amongst the clamour, I've done a bit of mathematics for you. I actually went through the book and noted which characters had chapters of their own and how many pages each of those chapters had, then I figured the numbers out as percentages (yes, I know, I need to get out more). So now, for your literary edification and illumination, I present to you a list of what actually happens in the book, according to my calculations (all rounded off).

CERSEI: 22.5%. That's right, folks, the Lannister Queen has more than one page in five, and nearly one page in four, devoted entirely to her point of view. If you've always wanted to know what goes on in her scheming little mind, then boy, do we have a show for you! Considering that there are thirteen people altogether who get chapter viewpoints of their own, Cersei's 22.5% share means that, on average, everyone else only gets 6.5% each. You could say that Cersei has the lion's share (terrible pun, I know).

BRIENNE: 17.5%. Next on our little list comes the Maid of Tarth. Most of the time we spend with her is on character development, rather than juicy action. Not that there's anything wrong with that at all, but you've been warned. If you were expecting her to become Lara Croft: Tomb Raider reborn, think again. Also, of some small statistical note, more than 60% of the pages in this book are devoted to the female character's points of view. Just so you know.

JAIME: 15.5%. The ever-more-interesting brother, and erstwhile lover, of Cersei continues in his evolution from out-and-out bad guy to, well, kind of a good guy. We're going to have to read the next book to see which way he jumps for sure, but so far he's certainly more inclined towards honesty and honour than he seemed to be in the first couple of books.

SAMWELL: 9%. The first character with less than ten percent of the ink investment is Sam. One of the more down-to-earth minor characters from the previous book, he gets fleshed out a little more here (excuse the pun).

SANSA: 8%. One of the few remaining Starks, and one of only two who get chapters of their own in this book, Sansa is also evolving as a character. In this book she is very slowly starting to show signs of an independence that she heretofore lacked. Of course, with only three chapters of her own, she doesn't show much. Not that she was ever on the front lines of either political intrigue or physical combat.

ARYA: 6%. The only other person from House Stark with chapters from her own viewpoint. Arya has always been an interesting character to me. Her moral ambiguity, like Jaime's, is stretched further in this book. I'm a little nervous as to how she'll shape up in the end. At this point, it's a little difficult for me to tell, though I have optimistic expectations.

WHO? WHAT? HUH?: 21.5%. Seven people, some of whom are hardly mentioned, or not mentioned at all, in previous books, have their own chapter or two each in this book. So more than one page in five is from the viewpoint of someone you probably can't

remember reading about before. And half the time the same viewpoint doesn't come up again in this book at all. TYRION, JON, DAENERYS, STANNIS, DAVOS, ETC.: 0%. These characters don't appear at all. We have to tune in to the next episode for updates on their adventures. I wondered about this when I bought the book and saw that the maps at the front only showed Westeros. So there you have it. If you're here reading reviews because you've gotten halfway through the book, don't like it, and want to see what everyone else thought, then I'd recommend that you keep reading. Slog through a few more pages; it does pick up at around the halfway mark. Although, in my mind, the endings for the various characters are fairly anticlimactic. Nothing is really resolved, unlike the previous books. And it's going to be the same for the next book, apparently, since Martin says that it will only focus on the characters who were expected to appear in this book but didn't. I've given *A Feast For Crows* three stars, where the previous books in the series would have each earned at least four stars from me.

It's doubtful that any sort of review will stop someone who has read the first three books from reading this long-awaited and justly anticipated instalment. Nevertheless, I'd like to voice an opinion which falls between the extremes which seem to be the most prevalent sort of responses to this book. Mr Martin is a great fantasy writer, and I don't think that has changed. However, *A Feast For Crows* is not up to the standard of this first three in the series. What I suspect HAS changed is the commercial pressure that has been placed on Mr Martin, combined with (I hate to say it) a growing over-indulgence which has been allowed him. When George Martin defends the delays, longer-than-expected lengths, and the seemingly extraneous side-stories, he is fond of referring to Tolkien by saying that "the story writes itself" (or something like that). I don't doubt that Martin experiences this "divine inspiration" like many other great artists, but this time around he seems to have been unable (or more likely, unwilling) to step away from that feeling to undergo the painful process of editing. When the pressure to make a release led to a cutting in half of the anticipated book, thus allowing two books of about 700 pages rather than one of about, say, 1000, it seems that Martin took it as a cue to go easy on the editing. The splitting of the book is itself substantially detrimental, but Martin's lack of self-criticism is the real reason why this book is somewhat disappointing. Not everything created by the divine inspiration of great artists is great art. People who are claiming that there is no plot development, either within the book or for the series, are of course exaggerating. There are certain interesting revelations and developments that will no doubt play a role in the eventual (and I say that optimistically) resolution of the series. Take for (spoiler-free) example the potential rise of the Church of the 7 gods as a major political player, the

implied motivations of the masters in Oldtown, the (loss of) direction that Berric Dondarions outlaws have taken, the grand plans of the new king of the Iron Islands etc. However, these sort of developments are only seen accidentally through the characters, who have become the real focus of this book. This is where Martin seems to have gone astray. The chapters of the three characters who by far dominate this book in terms of length (Cersei, Jaime, and Brienne) are all in turn overly-dominated by a personal theme. Cersei has become paranoid to the point of insanity, particularly with regards to a prophecy she was given as a girl (which, by the way, felt like a new idea of Martins specifically for this book, but doesn't seem to fit entirely comfortably with Cersei's character from the previous books). Jaime is torn between love/trust and hate/mistrust of his sister. Brienne struggles with doubt about her worth in playing the role of a knight as opposed to an ordinary, though ugly, high-born maiden. The problem is that not only are the bigger events of the "game of thrones" made subordinate to these longwinded inner struggles and dialogues, but that they tend not to go anywhere. Admittedly Cersei's paranoia has important ramifications in her final 2 chapters, but is it really necessary to spend her first 8 chapters or so just to give the sense of her paranoia? I feel it could have been done in 3 or 4 chapters, and thereby made more engaging rather than tiresome. The same applies at least as much for Jaime and Brienne. Speaking of Brienne, I think that Martin has blatantly sacrificed the flow of the story within and between books in favour of setting up a "cliffhanger" ending. In the previous books, anticipation for the following book has been achieved by a partial resolution of the characters (Jon Snow becomes Lord Commander and refuses Stannis' offer, Tyrion kills Tywin and leaves Westeros, etc) and leaves you able to intelligently speculate about their future. Brienne's predicament at the end of her final chapter is a matter that would be resolved in a matter of seconds in real-time, but unfortunately Martin has opted to finish it like a lame soap opera full of cheap tricks to make me watch the next episode, or a typical horror movie setting itself up for a money-making sequel. I dare say she will survive, but I am still left feeling a little more cautious of Martins artistic credibility. When I say that those three characters dominate the length of the novel, I am not exaggerating. The rest of the POVS are a mixed bag. I thought that the ones covering Dorne and the Iron Islands contained some interesting developments, although they are yet to take on their full significance, which makes them less engaging. I felt Arya had potential to become one of the more interesting characters at the end of the previous novel, but so far (in her 3 chapters) has failed to deliver. Her primary role here seems to be to describe life in the city of Braavos. Sansa's chapters are somewhat interesting but still contain a lot of filler (especially her last one, which I barely skim read up to the last page, something I never felt inclined to do in any of the previous books). The same goes for Samwell. Essentially,

AFFC contains writing that is as good as any of the previous books, but it is hidden and scattered between too many words, which costs us readers more of our time and money. Martin just seems to do a little too much taking and not enough giving in this instalment, and if things continue like this in the next instalment, he will lose my interest. I'm sure he is aware of the dangers of prolonging a story to the point of tedium. Let's hope that feedback to this book will make him raise his editing game, and get this song back into a refined composition rather than a noodling free-jam.

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