



## **A Feast for Crows**

*George R.R. Martin*

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With *A Feast for Crows*, Martin delivers the long-awaited fourth volume of the landmark series that has redefined imaginative fiction and stands as a modern masterpiece in the making.

After centuries of bitter strife, the seven powers dividing the land have beaten one another into an uneasy truce. But it's not long before the survivors, outlaws, renegades, and carrion eaters of the Seven Kingdoms gather. Now, 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—emerge from an ominous twilight of past struggles and chaos to take up the challenges of the terrible times ahead. Nobles and commoners, soldiers and sorcerers, assassins and sages, are coming together to stake their fortunes...and their lives. For at a feast for crows, many are the guests—but only a few are the survivors.

## A Feast for Crows Details

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Author : George R.R. Martin

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## From Reader Review A Feast for Crows for online ebook

**mark monday says**

*Behold: the Ugly Stepchild of A Song of Ice and Fire!*

*Behold: the Readers of A Feast for Crows: Angry, Sullen, Vengeful!*

silly readers. i'm not sure i've ever read such a collection of resentful reviews for one book. one reviewer just decided to repeat the same phrase over and over and over again (sorry Joel, had to say it). another decided to note that "...kids are inherently boring. Kids aren't clever..." er, wtf?

sigh. i suppose i can understand the backlash. Martin took a long-assed time to put this out into the world and then - WHAT THE HELL - reader favorites Tyrion & Jon Snow & Daenerys have dropped off of this book's radar. but i am also perplexed - despite the loss of these wonderful creations, this is an excellent and challenging novel. come on readers, grow a pair!

personally, i savored this book from beginning to end. the intricate plot, the propulsive narrative, the intelligent world-building, and most importantly the depth of characterization that were all hallmarks of prior volumes are still in place and undiminished in this installment. one of the things that is often overlooked about Martin is that he is a brilliant writer of quality prose. his descriptions are not just lavish, they are often quite beautiful. he has an expert grasp of language; the man knows how to create imagery that is by turns stark, subtly threatening, strangely enchanting, morbid, nostalgic, and ambiguous. the only reason the novel does not earn a top rating from me (but really, who cares anyway) is because of an unfortunately heavy reliance on repetition - mainly of key phrases and dream imagery. still, this novel should stand tall as an excellent continuation of this amazing series.

first and foremost, A Feast for Crows is *A Story of the Women of Westeros*. because this is set in a medieval land that has very little wish fulfillment in terms of rectifying gender imbalance, it is fated by its own nature to be an unsettling and unfulfilling narrative.

CONSTANT SPOILERS FOLLOW

**The Queen Regent.** Cersei Lannister is this series' chief villain and so it was with much anticipation that i approached her POV chapters. they did not disappoint. quite unlike the POV chapters from her formerly villainous twin Jaime, there is not much redemption coming Cersei's way. *she's such a fuckin bitch*, as the saying goes. she remains cold, grasping, machiavellian, murderous, and extremely petty. she is also incredibly entertaining: a villain in the Grand Old Style, full of swallowed rage and sweetly-uttered put-downs and viciously cruel schemes. she takes to drink and she lets a fellow viper into her bed (which also allows Martin to indulge in an enjoyably laugh out-loud lesbionic interlude). she makes a classic mistake in allowing fanatics to arm themselves. in the end, she literally outsmarts herself, and is the victim of her own foul trap. best of all, she is going crazy! her dreams haunt her, dreams of her death and the deaths of her children. much of her villainous nature is explained by these dreams...what mother wouldn't stop at anything to protect her children? and so Cersei doesn't stop at anything.

but what i mainly took away from her chapters were two important lessons that i learned, oh, years ago, probably in my various college Gender Studies classes. first: a woman in power within a patriarchal structure is a woman in constant battle with her peers. she will not receive the automatic respect granted to men; she will have to "earn it", whatever that even means. she will be constantly reminded that her job is actually to marry and to bear children, and that her position of authority is somehow unnatural, against the natural order of things. i despised Cersei, but i also despised those around her who did not give her the automatic respect a

man would have in her position. i appreciate that Martin made this inequity crystal clear: he is against Cersei (of course he is - she's the villain) but he also gives the challenges she faces in her new position a rather timeless quality. gender inequity *is* timeless.

and the second lesson: a woman who gains power within a patriarchal system by mirroring the gender essentialism that supports that system has, sadly, sublimated that structure as natural and right - and will therefore enact that chauvinism. Women's Studies 101, folks. Cersei does not "challenge gender imbalance" - she supports it. her interior monologues are full of the same bullshit as any sexist dumbass. she despises "weakness" in men. she condemns "slutty" behavior while indulging in it herself. she uses classic chauvinistic tactics to bring down a rival and even-more-classic male brutality to destroy men and women alike. as i mentioned...she's a fuckin bitch! but her character is a fascinating one to contemplate.

**The Sand Snakes and The Dorne Princess.** i suppose the chapters set in Dorne could contribute to many readers' disengagement with this novel. oh, whatever. i love Dorne! Dorne is the ugly stepchild of Westeros: matrilineal and distantly threatening, with a great big chip on its shoulder. but what a place it is: aggressive and volatile, sure, but also a land where women are automatically given the same respect as men, where a princess is the natural heir to the throne, where bastards are not automatically disrespected. the brief glimpses of the Sand Snakes, despite their inability to start the war they craved, were compelling in how differentiated they were in their various proposals to begin battle. and i also appreciated how fallible Arianne Martell turned out to be: a girl unused to schemes but still scheming away, a seductress who fell in love, a woman loyal to her friends and disinterested in cruelty, an heiress and misguided leader-to-be, one whose time in the limelight approaches.

**Sansa/Alayne and Arya/Cat.** sometimes a girl has to literally convince herself that she is someone else, simply to survive. sometimes a girl has to forget the parts of her that make her *herself*, in order to achieve her goals. of course in one case, this is a girl who has lived her life as a pathos-ridden pawn. in the other case, we have a girl who is slowly losing her humanity as she becomes a kind of living weapon. eh, so what? they both have my full support. go Sansa & Arya, go! survive this series, you can do it!

**Catelyn/Stoneheart.** and sometimes a woman fails. to accomplish her goals, to protect her loved ones, to save her children. i imagine that some women can get past this and can go on to define themselves anew. and other women cannot, or do not. they swallow their bitterness but do not forget: it becomes their fuel, their purpose for being. it can turn a heart to stone. and, um, it probably doesn't help having your throat slashed at your brother's wedding and then being revived as a monstrous quasi-zombie. and so Catelyn becomes a dread avenger, and not a pretty one. she is a killer without regard to reason or even justice, and she turns Dondarrion's Merry Men into a grim and bloodthirsty cabal. i never thought i'd see Thoros be so sad, so lost. i never thought Lemoncloak could be such an uncaring asshole. i never thought Catelyn would hang an innocent woman or a mere lad. well, i suppose that's what can happen. so i know that Brienne survives, that's obvious. but if Podric Payne dies, i'm coming after you, George Martin!

**The Maid of Tarth.** i saved one of my favorite characters of the series for last. i don't think Brienne is a lot of readers' favorite; i assume they find her constant integrity and her equally constant naivete, repetitiousness, and lack of imagination to be tedious. but that's not how i feel! i loved her from beginning to (probably not her) end. there is such genuine *realism* to her loyal, awkward, lovelorn character. she is a warrior woman, but this means nothing in male-dominated Westeros except constant and automatic disrespect. she is, i suppose, "physically unattractive" and is constantly reminded of that by nearly every person she meets. she is always Doing The Right Thing; that integrity causes her to be disrespected even more, and it often means nothing to the people around her. well it means a lot to me! her quest may have been aimless, but it was also useful in illustrating the true and awful tragedy of war: the lives lost, the tormented survivors, the bleak landscapes, the sense of a world turned dark and bloody and soulless - a world without meaning. seeing such a brave person travel through this blighted landscape and continuously,

stubbornly, mulishly trying to do good was hard to read - but it was also what i really needed in order to truly connect with this novel: a hero, tried and true. her two fight scenes, vanquishing members of the appalling Brave Companions, were awesome. what a brave lady and what a unique addition to the fantasy genre's Hero Archetype. i love her. as i loved this book.

now on to the next one!

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## Jayson says

**(B+) 77% | Good**

*Notes:* It's about people on journeys, spread too thin over too many inconsequential perspectives, with too little of a pay-off.

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## Netts says

Are you kidding me? This volume should have been called A Test of Patience. Where do I even start? First, there is a conspicuous dearth of crows (as in Nightwatch or anything at or beyond the Wall). There is also little feasting but by now I've grown beyond tired of Martin's medieval menu descriptions so that's a relief. Curious about Jon Snow and The Others? Bran and that three-eyed crow? Tyrion's escape? The dragons!? Well, forget it. They don't make a single appearance. Instead we get to trudge along up a hill and down a river and up a tower and down a forest with Brienne who is as boring as she is ugly (remember how ugly she is? It's ok, you'll be reminded again. And again. And again. Just in case you have severe amnesia.) There are a few other people who are also on their tedious way somewhere but can't get there slow enough. And Cersei being evil and suddenly dimwitted. A couple of interesting chapters in Dorne. And some pointless ones about the Iron Islands (which are bleak. You'll be reminded of that too, ad nauseam.) Did I mention the abysmal quality of the writing? It was easier to turn a blind eye to it in volumes where the action and characters were interesting but good luck with this one...

At the end of the book one finds a note from the author excusing himself for having served up A Cauldron of Crap. He insists he wrote more but his dog ate all the interesting chapters. Actually, he maintains he wrote "pages and pages and pages" (oh my!). So many he had to cut the volume in half and keep the good stuff for a second installment. That was in 2005 and we're now in 2011 and so he was obviously too busy wanking off to rape porn for the past six years to walk down to the post office and mail those pages to his publisher...

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## Kai says

*"Words are like arrows. Once loosed, you cannot call them back."*

This took me - compared to it's prequels - "only" a month to read. As always, there were chapters that I enjoyed more than others. Sometimes so intriguing I did not want to stop reading, other times I wondered why in seven hells someone would bother wasting their time writing such pointless words.

## Here's the list of POV's from most to least liked:

Cersei

Sansa  
Arya  
Jamie  
Samwell  
Arianne Martell  
Aeron Greyjoy  
Asha Greyjoy  
Areo Hotah  
Arys Oakheart  
Victarion Greyjoy  
Brienne of Tarth

**Arya:**

I've never been a big fan of Arya's chapters. They bored me in the same way Brienne's do now: lots of aimless wandering around Westeros, from one disaster to the other. I'm glad she arrived in Bravos and can't wait to find out more about her life under the eyes the Many-Faced God.

**Brienne:**

Why. Why bother. We all know she won't find Sansa in the Riverlands. We all know exactly where Sansa is. To me there was nothing more pointless in the whole series than her chapters. Luckily her plotline got more exciting towards the end of the book.

**The Greyjoys:**

It was interesting to read about the Iron Islands, especially about the Kingsmoat. But I could live happily ever after without those Ironborn, who only stir up more trouble. It's not like there's not enough misery already.

**The Martells:**

While I always wanted to know more about Dorne, the chapters did not really add much to the big plot. Again, it seemed a little pointless to me, but yes, I loved finding out about Dorne's secret plans and affairs.

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**Kim says**

George R. R. Martin is a blowhard.

I mean that with respect, I suppose. I guess any author that got me to read over 2400 pages of his writing garners some respect, right? A smattering, maybe? I don't know, maybe it's because I was raised Catholic, or maybe it's my sense of follow through or maybe just the fact that I've invested so much time in this damn series... whatever. I'm here, I've finished book #4. Yay.

Okay, so the reason I'm grumpy is that it took me 480 pages to get into this. Which left me 200 pages to actually enjoy. That's not fair. And this isn't the first time, this is a *pattern* with this guy. I spend all this time trying to remember who is who and why I care that I'm either confused or bored silly. Okay, for example: We have Elys who is married to Alys and we have Belwas and Boros and Balon . And Pate, Pod and Peck (don't ask me to explain who is who, please) and then we have Sansa who is now Alayne ---not Arianne,

she's someone else--- and we have Arya who was Weasel and then was Arry and *then* became 'no one' and then became Cat of the Canals, who shouldn't be confused with Cat who was Caitlyn who became 'The Hooded Woman' and then later 'Lady Stoneheart'. Do you see what I mean?

This is worse than *Days of Our Lives* because then you really only need to watch maybe a day or so to catch up. Oh, and if Jaime and Brienne don't hook up, there will be hell to pay, Mr. R.R. Martin. **HELL**. And, thank you for having Sam lose his virginity; that gave me hope. (oh, come on, are you going to get on me for *spoilers*?? If you're even reading this review, it's because you've invested as much time in this series as I have.)

Then... *THEN* I come across this little gem:

*"Hey, wait a minute!" some of you may be saying about now. "Wait a minute, wait a minute! Where's Dany and the dragons? Where's Tyrion? We hardly saw Jon Snow. That can't be all of it..."*

*Well, no. There's more to come. Another book as big as this one.*

Bastard.

Okay, so I'm whining. I know. Of course, I'll read 'A Dance with Dragons' (oh, and another thing, George? Can we get you to work on better titles? Because when I'm sitting there reading these tomes and someone comes up to me and says 'Whatcha readin?') I'm a bit hesitant to say 'A Feast for Crows' or 'A Game of Thrones' without rolling my eyes and explaining that I'm NOT into D&D, just a suggestion. Thanks) but I will do so reluctantly.

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## Justin says

I'm not quite sure what happened, here.

As others have mentioned, Martin slows the pace of the story down considerably in this fourth installment of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, ostensibly writing this as the first half of a two-book volume, with a 3-5 year production time on each. As such, the book is by necessity filled with unresolved storylines, AWOL main characters, and lengthy travelogues where nothing of importance happens. Of course, this draws the inevitable comparisons to another famous fantasy series that started strong and became a sluggish, irritating morass (something to do with wheels and time, as I recall).

The pace isn't really the problem, here, though, as the story still stands on its own two legs. The problem is the writing.

Though the first three books were extraordinarily well-written as a whole, one could never classify Martin's prose as elegant. In this book, he takes three steps backward for some reason, and sounds almost amateurish in some chapters. The book is filled with phrases and sentences that are awkward, clichéd, and sometimes downright hackneyed. Martin's prose may typically be spare and to the point, but I never audibly groaned while reading the first three books.

One of the biggest problems with this is Martin's sudden inclusion of colloquialisms that, so far as I can tell, never existed in the books before this one. Coz's, nuncles, and valonqars abound, even though we've never read any character use these turns of phrase before, and be prepared to hear "groats" referenced multiple times in a single chapter. This doesn't only present a continuity problem, for those of us wondering why these dialect oddities are so suddenly commonplace... Martin seems to have run out of patience for phrasing things differently, so the exact same idiom often gets used ad nauseum. I was weary of these invented clichés before I even truly understood what they meant.

By now, fans of the series thus far are used to the disturbing ubiquity of rape in Martin's world, but even that loses what little subtlety it had in this book, with at least two characters being described as "needing a hard raping" (another example of redundancy in Martin's writing... did that expression really need to be used twice in one book?). The consensual sexuality devolves in this book, as well; Martin uses strange fixations and blunt-force descriptions (the comparison of female private parts to a "swamp" was the high point for me, as it were) which make them seem almost bizarre, and therefore a lot more gratuitous than they were in the first three books.

I gave it two stars instead of one because the standout elements of this series are still evident in A Feast For Crows, despite Martin's apparent attempt to sabotage them with clumsy writing. The characters are multidimensional, unpredictable, and well-developed, and the overarching story is fascinating enough to keep me turning pages. However, I am genuinely concerned about the direction of this series, which has heretofore been my favorite fantasy series and often recommended to friends. I don't know what's going on with Martin's writing, but I truly hope the next book returns to the caliber of the first three. I would hate to have to do with this series what I do with Jordan's: recommend that people stop at Book 3 and pretend it's an open-ended trilogy. I'd much rather dismiss this one as "the mediocre volume" and go back to enjoying the series. Here's hoping.

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## Candace says

Although this epic fantasy has me captivated, I have to say that 'A Feast for Crows' didn't hold as much appeal for me as the earlier books. That being said, it is still an extremely well-written story. I have no doubt that the new characters, places and events will serve to further the plot.

While hearing Cersei's viewpoint was somewhat enlightening, it got tiresome. Cersei is as cold and cruel as Joffrey was. Being "stuck" in her mind was torture. She was constantly scheming and manipulating. Honestly, does this woman never stop? Just hearing it was exhausting.

Arya and Sansa continue to do what they have to in order to survive. It is interesting to see how they evolve as their circumstances change. I would've liked to hear more about the Stark girls, but maybe next time.

This book also introduced some new characters...and brought back some old ones. I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the back from the dead Catelyn Stark. She's definitely changed in more ways than one. Sometimes, things are better left alone. I'm struggling to accept this particular twist.

Mostly, I was disappointed to find many of my favorite characters noticeably absent in this book. Daenerys is my favorite. I longed to hear about what was going on with her and her dragons. How is their journey going? Unfortunately, I didn't get that information.

Similarly, Tyrion Lannister was nowhere to be found. As a character, he really grew on me. His disappearing



act left me feeling a bit bereft. Like Daenerys, information on Tyrion was noticeably absent. I'm dying here!

Like the last one, this one ends with a bit of an upheaval. Cersei finds herself in a bind and calls upon her knight in shining armor to save her. I'm hoping that she finally gets what she has coming, but I'll have to wait and see.

Overall, I'm still very much addicted to this series. The writing is spectacular, as is the narration. I'm on to the next book. Based upon the title, I'm expecting to hear more from Daenerys and the dragons. This may have been my least favorite of the books so far, but it still blows most other books away.

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## Madeline says

Hey everyone, George RR Martin here. I thought I'd take some time off from planning my intricate and complex storylines (spoiler alert: everyone has sex with everyone and then kills each other) to introduce *A Feast for Crows*, the long-awaited fourth installment in my epic fantasy series! You guys are in for a treat, this one is *awesome*.

So the last book was quite a ride, huh? There was that craziness that was the Weddings of Death, Tyrion killed his father, Jon Snow finally got cool and is now Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, Arya continued to be a tiny BAMF, Bran looked like he was finally moving towards a real plot, and Daenerys decided to temporarily shelve her whole unleash-the-dogs-of-war plan and be a queen for a while. Also I made Christmas come early for Madeline when I killed off Catelyn Stark, only to bring all her hopes and dreams crashing down when it turned out that Catelyn is a zombie now and will never die. Hee hee hee.

Anyway, with all that cool stuff, you probably thought that this book was going to be *made of awesome*, what with all the fallout from the stuff I described above. And it will be, but unfortunately my attention to detail and complex storylines finally came back to bite me in the ass, and it turns out I couldn't devote an entire book to all the plots I started in the last book. So I divided them into two volumes, and saved all the cool people for Book Five. Want to read about Jon Snow, Daenerys, and Tyrion? Too fucking bad.

Don't worry though, this means we get to meet lots of fun *new* characters, like Theon's crazy uncles and a lot of random people from Dorne. They each get just one chapter, of course, because they only exist so I can have a perspective to show all these events from (my changing single-character viewpoint structure has also begun to bite me in the ass, unfortunately) and you'll probably never see them again, but that's what makes it fun!

It's not all bad, at least - Arya's still here, even though she's not doing much murdering or really much of anything. This is where Arya learns how to be more awesome, so she can wreck everyone's shit later - or maybe not, because in the last chapter we see her in, she's just gone blind. Is it temporary, or permanent? You'll just have to buy the next book and find out (maybe)!

And hey, I gave you guys some Cersei chapters, finally. And yes, she's just as much of a psycho bitch as you always suspected. You're welcome. Also Jaime chapters - bet you didn't think *he* would turn out to be one of the only decent characters in the series, huh? (of course, if he's becoming one of the good guys, that means I'll probably murder him soon) And there are more Samwell Tarly chapters! Everyone loves reading about Sam, right? Guys? Guys? Where are you going?

Don't worry, the next book will be all about Tyrion and Daenerys and Bran (look, it's going to pay off soon, I swear. Really guys, he's going to be interesting eventually.) and all the other cool characters that I totally

ignored in this book and that you really wanted to read about. As for all the character-based cliffhangers I established in this book, will they be resolved in the next volume? Probably not! I am George RR Martin, and I demand your money and your tears!

PS: Quit bitching at me to write faster. You'll get your books when I say you get them, and not a day sooner. Don't push me, or the next volume published will be titled *A Siege of Tears* and it'll be nothing but Jon Snow, Bran Stark, and Samwell Tarly sitting around and thinking about how inadequate they are. Do not test me on this, nerds.

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## **Matt says**

The context here is everything.

*A Song of Ice and Fire* began with the publication of *A Game of Thrones* in 1996. *Thrones* introduced us to the land of Westeros, a continent the size of South America but suspiciously similar to medieval England. We followed a handful of characters representing various factions of the Seven Kingdoms, squabbling for the right to sit upon the Iron Throne. Its grittiness, tactility, fully-realized characters, and high stakes (a major character loses a head) gave it a cult following.

Two years after *Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings* was published. It told the story of “the War of the Five Kings.” Though it started slowly, it built to a fine ending, which included the shocking loss of Winterfell (home to many of our main characters) and the epic Battle of the Blackwater. A phenomenon had started.

Like clockwork, the third novel in the cycle, *A Storm of Swords* came two years after *Kings*. It was the biggest book so far, and easily the best. It featured all the hallmarks we'd come to expect from author George R.R. Martin – swordfights, detailed descriptions of food, casual misogyny, laughably crude sex scenes, shocking twists, major character deaths, and a humdinger of a cliffhanger – but those elements were heightened. There are set pieces in *Swords* that are simply classic (see, e.g., “the Red Wedding”).

At the end of *Swords*, the fate of several major characters – beloved characters – dangled in the wind. Readers thirsted for the next installment. They began their wait.

And then crickets.

Nothing for five years.

After five years, we were given the present installment: *A Feast for Crows*. By this time, it was nearly impossible for any book to live up to the expectations of *Swords*. On this level, at least, *Crows* did not disappoint. It certainly met the expectation that it could not meet expectations.

As the old saying goes, the only thing worse than a bad meal is a small bad meal.

Not only did *Crows* fail to meet the challenge of *Swords*, it was over too quickly. When readers got to the last page, they were left to wonder, *this is it?* Martin, you see, had allowed the manuscript for *Crows* to get so long, he decided to cut the thing in half. As he explained in a now-infamous postscript, Martin decided to split the book geographically, rather than chronologically. That meant that many of the best characters did not appear; none of the cliffhangers from *Swords* were resolved; and we were left to follow the dubious quests of various secondary personages. To make matters worse, Martin tentatively promised the next volume, *A Dance With Dragons*, would be published the next year.

That postscript was written in 2005.

Six years later, *A Dance With Dragons* was finally released.

Thus, it is a fortuitous time to review *Crows*. It is a much-maligned book, buffeted by two competing elements: the long wait before the book was published, and the longer wait after. In other words, the book has suffered critically because it took so long to come out and did not satisfy the pent-up demand. It also suffered because it did nothing to alleviate the long wait for *Dragons*.

Almost all agree that *Crows* is the weakest volume in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Beyond that, opinions are split. Some people hate it with the light of a thousand suns. Some people love it like a pug dressed in a tuxedo. Others acknowledge its weakness while admitting that a subpar steak is still a steak.

The length of time it takes Martin to churn out his opuses creates some high passion amongst his fans. That passion, combined with the internet and thousands of basements belonging to thousands of moms has created a great deal of hyperbolic ire directed towards Martin. While this criticism is a minority report, it is loud, and has colored the merits of *Crows*.

I am immune to this misplaced anger. I am a latecomer to Martin's work; accordingly, when I started reading *Thrones*, four books had already been published, with a confirmed release date for the fifth. I've never suffered the long withdrawals between books that the early adopters have had to overcome.

Due to this tardiness, I feel like I can judge *Crows* based on its literary qualities, rather than its late arrival onto the *Ice and Fire* firmament. Unfortunately, the literary qualities of *Crows* are in short supply.

Most of *Crows*' problems stem from Martin's decision to divide the story by geography, and focus mainly on the action in Westeros that takes place south of the Wall. That means that the dwarf, Tyrion Lannister, Martin's greatest creation, is missing. So are Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen. Not only are you losing fantastic, multidimensional characters with whom we've traveled for hundreds and thousands of pages, you lose the heart of the story. As far as I can tell (and I'm sure I'll be wrong), Martin's endgame seems to point towards two events: the struggle at the Wall against the onslaught of the walking dead (the song of Ice); and Daenerys' struggle to reclaim the Iron Throne with the help of her dragons (the song of Fire). Neither of those crucial points get any play in *Crows*. Instead, it's 700 pages of B-side.

The viewpoint characters in *Crows* (Martin's story is told in the third-person limited, with chapters that alternate points-of-view among various characters) are mostly new to the spotlight. Jaime Lannister, Samwell Tarly, Arya Stark and Sansa Stark are the only returning viewpoint characters. The other viewpoints go to Queen Cersei, Aeron, Asha, and Victarion Greyjoy, Areo Hotah, Brienne of Tarth, Aerys Oakheart, and Arianne Martell.

Some of these characters are brand new. Some have been barely mentioned. Most of them are confusingly named (it gets a bit tough keeping Arya, Areo, Aeron, Aerys and Arianne apart, at least for me; unfortunately, I'm not able to devote my entire life to these books). With some exceptions, their stories do not rise to the level of interest or intensity as the plotlines of Martin's earlier books.

The bulk of this book, nearly a quarter of the pages, belongs to Cersei. Given space to develop her character, Martin is his usual strong self. Earlier in the series, Cersei was a terrifying, enigmatic peripheral character. In *Thrones*, she showed her smarts, and her cruelty, by getting the drop on Eddard Stark (admittedly not the sharpest tool in the shed). After the death of her son, King Joffrey, in *Swords*, Cersei's transformation began. She became more guarded, paranoid, and megalomaniacal. Her descent into madness is marked by her growing certainty that all her decisions are correct. The most interesting aspect of *Crows* is Cersei's long fall contrasted with the rise of a fanatical religious movement called the Faith.

Cersei is also beneficiary of one of Martin's weird peripheral-characters, the the fallen maester Lord Qyburn. Like Dr. Frankenstein, Qyburn toils away in the dungeons, doing odd experiments on living subjects, the result of which, it is obvious to see, will be half-human, half-monster. (Unfortunately, Cersei's chapters are disadvantaged by a subplot concerning Westeros' outstanding loans to the Bank of Braavos. All the talk of high finance and trade federations harkened uncomfortably to another famous fantasy/sci-fi epic that lost its way).

Cersei's brother/lover, Jaime, has the second most page-time. His evolution from villain to hero takes a big leap forward, as we see him go from murderous sister-humper to a canny leader pushing back against the excesses of King's Landing. With Jaime's chapters, Martin is able to tie up a few loose ends still dangling after the War of the Five Kings (for example, the dragging siege at Riverrun is finally concluded).

The balance of *Crows* is told in scattershot style through the ten remaining viewpoint characters.

We barely hear from Sansa, which is fine with me. Still, it is nice to see that she is developing at least a semblance of wit. I have a major problem with her character, mainly because Martin portrays Sansa as a real child; that is, as someone who is uninteresting and dumb. The problem with kids as characters is that kids are inherently boring. Kids aren't clever, no matter what I see posted on Facebook. Only in a book or movie is a kid who can't tie his shoes crafty enough to turn his house into a living version of *Mousetrap* to foil a pair of robbers. So far, Sansa is realistic in the sense that she is dull, frightened, mistake-prone, and hollow. This also means she is a weak protagonist. In *Crows*, despite a limited appearance, she finally starts to learn some of the finer points of deception.

Arya Stark is a more traditional fictional child. Despite her tender years, she performs great heroic feats. Her ever-growing darkness, however, makes her a joy to follow (I wouldn't be surprised if, at the end of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, we counted her among the bad guys). In *Crows*, Arya is exiled to Braavos. She doesn't do much of anything, and her chapters seem meant only to explore the islands of Braavos. This would've been fine if Braavos was interesting. Instead, it's just Venice, right down to the swaggering, arrogant, hand-talking men-folk.

Three characters, Areo, Arienne and Aerys, serve to give us entrée into Dorne. The set up here – the machinations of Dorne against King's Landing – is obviously important. However, these chapters are rushed (and the Aerys chapters are so short and abrupt I have a hard time understanding their inclusion). The same goes for the chapters with the three Ironborn characters: Aeron, Asha, and Victarion. In perfunctory style, they are moved like chess pieces, put in place for further development down the road.

The chapters following Brienne are like walking on a treadmill. She's given a lot of space to do things, but she never gets anywhere. Martin has her crisscrossing the ruins of a war-torn Westeros, searching for Sansa Stark. Of course, we know exactly where Sansa is; therefore, we know that Brienne is never going to find her. Also, for all her abilities, she is portrayed as a slow-thinker, a female Forrest Gump who's handy with a sword. Even if we didn't know where Sansa was hiding, we'd have a pretty good idea that Brienne's plan to find her would fail (it literally consists of her wandering around, asking where Sansa has gone).

These are structural problems. And forgivable, as long as the book's quality had been consistent. It's not. This is a poorly written book by Martin's standards. His descriptions seem tired. His writer's tics are more pronounced. The dialogue, which had been whip-smart and eminently quotable, is execrable. It is flat, repetitive (Jaime's "I love you too, sweet sister" is repeated on a loop), and filled with odd, obtrusive, never-before-used idioms. For some reason, the characters start referring to their uncles as nuncles, even though uncle had served just fine before. In one chapter, the insult "stoatish" is used two or three times (as far as I can tell, it means weasel-like) and then dropped like a bag of flaming poo.

Despite taking five years to write, *Crows* feels like a first draft. There are brief glimmers displaying Martin's

mastery of both his world and his writing. For instance, even though Brienne's dead-end quest is inert as a narrative, Martin's evocation of a war-weary Westeros is captivating, with its fresh graves, burnt-out homes, and outlaw-infested roads.

Subpar writing can be saved by a propulsive plot or a great set piece. As I noted before, the plot grinds forward. Moreover, *nothing* exciting happens. Swordplay is kept to a minimum. There isn't a battle to be found (in a way, Martin's exhausted effort mirrors the tiredness of war-blasted Westeros). With the exception of *Moby Dick*, I try not to use the word "boring" in my reviews. Here, though, things get awfully close to the b-word.

To be sure, there are a few saving graces. The first is the sex scenes. They are just awful, and bound to put a smile on your face. The high/lowlight is a lesbian sex scene between Cersei and Lady Taena that involves an unfortunate comparison of a women's nether regions to a swamp. It had me laughing my ass off.

Martin is also able to add a few twists at the end, including a cliffhanger that leaves one character dangling by the neck. Here, unlike in *Kings*, a strong ending isn't enough to save the rest of the book. To the contrary, Martin should take lessons from M. Night Shyamalan: you can't rely so much on 11th hour shocks or uncertain character fates.

At some point, *A Song of Ice and Fire* will be finished. Either Martin will complete the saga, or it will linger forever as a partially-completed near-great thing. When that time comes, it is very likely that the esteem for *Crows* will rise. It's faults will be less glaring; its virtues will seem more virtuous.

Right now, though, I just want to move on to *A Dance With Dragons* and pretend *Crows* wasn't half as bad as I know it was.

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## Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

The book was better than the first time around. I didn't like the narrator on this one so it ruined it the first time around. I still didn't love it but I was glad to have Arya & Brienne ?

"Death is not the worst thing," the kindly man replied. "It is His gift to us, an end to want and pain. On the day that we are born the Many-Faced God sends each of us a dark angel to walk through life beside us. When our sins and our sufferings grow too great to be borne, the angel takes us by the hand to lead us to the nightlands, where the stars burn ever bright. Those who come to drink from the black cup are looking for their angels. If they are afraid, the candles soothe them. When you smell our candles burning, what does it make you think of, my child?"

*Winterfell, she might have said. I smell snow and smoke and pine needles. I smell stables. I smell Hodor laughing, and Jon and Robb battling in the yard, Sansa singing about some stupid lady fair. I smell the crypts, where the stone kings sit, I smell hot bread baking, I smell the godswood. I smell my wolf, my smell her fur, almost as if she were still beside me. "I don't smell anything," she said, to see what he would say.*

. . . and she leapt to meet his rush, both hands on her sword hilt. His headlong charge brought him right onto her point, and Oathkeeper punched through cloth and mail and leather and more cloth, deep into his bowels and out his back, rasping as it scraped along his spine. His axe fell from limp fingers, and the two of them slammed together, Brienne's face mashed up against the dog's head helm. She felt the cold wet metal against her cheek. Rain ran down the steel in rivers, and when the lightening flashed again she saw pain and fear and rank disbelief through the eye slits. "Sapphires," she whispered at him, as she gave her blade a hard twist that made him shudder. His weight sagged heavily against her, and all at once it was a corpse that she embraced, there in the black rain. She stepped back and let him fall . . .

\*Old Review\*

I don't have any idea when I started this so I just set it to today. I do that a lot when I don't add books to my currently reading. I get anal having too many books on my currently reading.

Anyway, I hate giving this a 3 star review but at some point I'm going to re-read it. I'm trying to listen to a lot of my chunkers on audio and mark my place in the book. Unfortunately, the narrator ruined it for me. I think he would be a great narrator for other books but not this one and that's just my opinion. When he was doing the voices they all sounded like whiny little boys or something. Do you think the evil Cersei sounds like that or the awesome Brienne or even Jaime? And he kept calling Brienne, Brain.

Anyway, it pretty much ruined it for me.

I did miss my fav characters but I'm fine reading about others. I love Brienne and Jaime. And Arya had some parts although she sounded like a whiny little boy. Ugh, it was bad

I will just have to physically read this one day because the audio is just no :-(

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## **Kelly says**

Dear George,

How do you do this lovely May morning? I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I really did think that I must in good conscience warn you of this problem I have. You see, I know many people who read these books and absolutely adore them. Legions of fans. I'm sure you know that. Really, the books are quite high quality and quite enjoyable and whatever you need to do to get them to stay at that quality, please do it.

... within reason. It has come to our (the masses') attention that perhaps waiting three to four years between books is a bit excessive. Don't you think so?

Now, more importantly than the principle of the thing... I've noticed some very unhealthy side effects from these gaps in between the books. Namely, some severe mental complexes that are resulting in a personal hostility towards you. I thought I had an obligation to warn you that I have heard of several imaginative plots that many of my fellow readers have dreamed up to get you to finish these books. All of them involve house arrest, most of them involve chaining you to your computer, a few involve terribly cruel things with assorted war instruments like those you brutally describe in your novels. I've heard a few terribly distressing things along the lines of, "shoving a broadsword up his ass." I'm sure you can imagine the rest.

Now while I don't think that people would employ such plans now, I do notice that these mental complexes seem to get worse over time. So... who knows in the future?

Just thought you should know!

So, toodle pip, hope that put you in the mood for writing. (These people apparently think that such things will.)

A sincere fan.

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## **StoryTellerShannon says**

Whew, this is a tough book to review simply because it doesn't follow on the expectations of the readers after A STORM OF SWORDS.

Now some people are already saying that the book is horrible and a great letdown and others go to the other extreme and hold faithfully that it's just as good as the previous books.

I don't feel either take is fair or accurate.

To be fair, yes, the book doesn't move like the previous books, especially a STORM OF SWORDS. There are simply not the same level of WHAM BAM big moments nor shocking realizations (i.e. who killed Jon Arryn?). Additionally, some of the favorite characters of readers, like Jon, Dany and Tyrion, are not in this novel. Lastly, there are two new main POVs so we need to adjust to those. BTW, since other readers are spoiling the mystery POVs, did most of you notice that Brienne is apparently a descendant of Dunk from THE HEDGE KNIGHT. Pretty kewl. :)

Getting back to the debate, remember that:

(1) This is only half of a mega-sized book. GRRM is putting out only half of it and the other half is going to be in the next book. So, in essence, for those complaining he's taking too long, this is like four books as the average novel is 400 pages. Additionally, remember the guy has been writing for something like 30 + years and he's finally getting national acclaim. He has been asked to write scripts to some of his old novels, there's a game based on his series that he looked over, he's also gone over the HEDGE KNIGHT comic strip, he's written two novelettes on the hedge knight, he's been asked to attend dozens upon dozens of readings at various book/convention events (and, most recently, the prestigious one in D.C. where he was asked to give a long speech), he tends to answer the emails he gets from everyone which is in the thousands, he taught at the Odyssey program for about six weeks back east, etc. Most of these in the last two years.

So, bully for him as he's getting more acknowledgements but keep in mind the guy has said he can't write except back in New Mexico. Things are going to go slower; and

(2) While several of the POVs don't have resolutions, also keep in mind that they may show up in the next book with all those WHAM BAM moments everyone is seeking. Additionally, it probably isn't fair to view this as a stand alone simply because book four and five are like one book. The reason he broke it up, per his webpage at [...], is that his publishers demanded he get it out. For all we know, book four may be the midpoint of the story and book five is going to have a lot of climaxes.

AFFC is really a come down from several climaxes. As the dust settles, lots of information is shared. There's

a great deal of focus on characters. Lots and lots of characters, even if fleeting. As a result, not as much seems to happen. To some, this might be seen as meanderings, and, well, yes, some of it probably is. lol For those who want to know more about the world, here's your chance. Just don't expect it to be like ASOS.

I remember several complaints by earlier reviewers of previous books that there wasn't enough about context and almost nothing about the religion of the times. People complained that one would think the religion would have a greater impact and political power base than shown in the last three books. Well, you get it in this book. Big time.

Another thing to keep in mind: there are probably about 35-50% more character POVs simply because there are several small focuses on various characters all over the globe. We get a lot of focus on Dorne and the Iron Isles as well as King's Landing. There are sprinklings in other areas, too, like Oldtown and where Brienne travels (i.e. don't want to spoil it so I won't say where).

As result, these characters slows the story down from having big moments because there's more to tell.

While I get this is probably the least popular book of the four, assuming we were to take a tally, I still feel GRRM is the best living fantasy author out there if you want tales that don't overuse archetypes and have complex characters and plots.

I challenge anyone to email me to suggest a better author.

On that note, for people who haven't read the previous books, here's why GRRM is a superb writer from my previous review on ASOS:

First off, I'm a heavy duty fan of GRRM. I've read over a 100 different fantasy authors in my time. Took about 5 years off from the genre b/c I felt it was all getting too formulaic and cliched. Typical archetype character who turns out to be the missing heir or boy wonder who saves the world against the Dark Lord. So, when I came back to fantasy at the end of 1999, I read the usual: Goodkind, Jordan, etc. and then someone told me about GRRM and man, that was the kicker!

Here are the reasons to choose GRRM. I've also listed the reasons not to choose him to make it fair b/c I know there are certain personalities who won't like this series:

#### WHY TO READ GRRM

(1) YOU ARE TIRED OF FORMULAIC FANTASY: good lad beats the dark lord against impossible odds; boy is the epitome of good; he and all his friends never die even though they go through great dangers . . . the good and noble king; the beautiful princess who falls in love with the commoner boy even though their stations are drastically different . . . the dark lord is very evil and almost one sided at times . . . you get the idea. After reading this over and over, it gets old.

(2) YOU ARE TIRED OF ALL THE HEROES STAYING ALIVE EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE UNDER CONSTANT DANGER: this gets even worse where the author kills a main hero off but that person comes back later in the story. Or, a hero does die but magic brings him back.

This sometimes carries to minor characters where even they may not die, but most fantasy authors like to kill them off to show that some risked the adventure and perished.

(3) YOU ARE A MEDIEVAL HISTORY BUFF: this story was influenced by the WARS OF THE ROSES and THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR.

(4) YOU LOVE SERIOUS INTRIGUE WITHOUT STUPID OPPONENTS: lots of layering; lots of



intrigue; lots of clever players in the game of thrones. Unlike other fantasy novels, one side, usually the villain, is stupid or not too bright.

(5) YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BIASED OPINIONS AND DIFFERENT TRUTHS: GRRM has set this up where each chapter has the title of one character and the whole chapter is through their viewpoint. Interesting tidbit is that you get their perception of events or truths. But, if you pay attention, someone else will mention a different angle of truth in the story that we rarely see in other novels. Lastly and most importantly, GRRM doesn't try to tell us which person is right in their perception. He purposefully leaves it vague so that we are kept guessing.

(6) LEGENDS: some of the most interesting characters are those who are long gone or dead. We never get the entire story but only bits and pieces; something that other fantasy authors could learn from to heighten suspense. Additionally, b/c the points of views are not congruent, we sometimes get different opinions.

(7) WORDPLAY: if you're big on metaphors and description, GRRM is your guy. Almost flawless flow.

(8) LOTS OF CONFLICT: all types, too; not just fighting but between characters through threats and intrigue.

(9) MULTILAYERED PLOTTING; SUB PLOTS GALORE: each character has their own separate storyline; especially as the story continues and everyone gets scattered. This is one of the reasons why each novel is between 700-900 pages.

(10) SUPERLATIVE VARIED CHARACTERS: not the typical archetypes that we are used to in most fantasy; some are gritty; few are totally evil or good; GRRM does a great job of changing our opinions of characters as the series progress. This is especially true of Jaime in book three.

(11) REALISTIC MEDIEVAL DIALOGUE: not to the point that we can't understand it but well done.

(12) HEAPS OF SYMBOLISM AND PROPHECY: if you're big on that.

(13) EXCELLENT MYSTERIES: very hard to figure out the culprits; GRRM must have read a lot of mystery novels.

(14) RICHLY TEXTURED FEMALE CHARACTERS: best male fantasy author on female characters I have read; realistic on how women think, too.

(15) LOW MAGIC WORLD: magic is low key; not over the top so heroes can't get out of jams with it.

#### REASON TO NOT READ GRRM

(1) YOU LIKE YOUR MAIN CHARACTERS: GRRM does a good job of creating more likeable characters after a few die. But, if that isn't your style, you shouldn't be reading it. He kills off several, not just one, so be warned.

(2) DO NOT CARE FOR GRITTY GRAY CHARACTERS: if you like more white and gray characters, this may unsettle you. I suggest Feist or Goodkind or Dragonlance if you want a more straight forward story with strong archetypes.

(3) MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEWS TURN YOU OFF: if you prefer that the POVS only go to a few characters, this might be confusing for you.

(4) SWEARING, SEX: there's a lot of it in this book just as there is in real life. If you have delicate ears, this book may upset you.

(5) YOU DEMAND CLOSURE AT THE END OF EVERY BOOK: this isn't the case for all stories in the series. Some are still going on; some have been resolved; others have been created and are moving on.

(6) IF YOU WANT A TARGET OR SOMEONE TO BLAME: this can be done to some extent but not as much. This is b/c he doesn't try to make anyone necessarily good or evil.

(7) ARCHETYPES: some readers like archetypal characters because it's comfortable; we like the good young hero (sort of like Pug in Feist's THE RIFTWAR SAGA); it's familiar and we sometimes like to pretend we're this upcoming, great hero. You won't get much of this in GRRM with the exception of one or two characters. There really aren't any super heroes compared to all the other characters as it's more grittier and no one is shooting fireballs every millisecond or carrying around some super powerful sword.

(8) LENGTH: you don't want to get into a long fantasy epic series. In that case, look for shorter works as this is biiiiig.

(9) PATRIARCHY: men are most of the main characters with lots of power (one female exception). While this is realistic of the medieval era, some readers may not prefer this if they want more girl power, so to speak.

By the way, if you don't want to commit to a big book until you know the author better, check out his short story, THE HEDGE KNIGHT, in LEGENDS.

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## **Bookdragon Sean says**

There's only one problem with this book, and that's the point of view characters. As a reader I've grown somewhat used to things like this:

So, when I'm just given things like this instead it's bound to disappoint:

There are massive pacing issues with the most recent (ha! that's a joke) two books of the series, and I mean massive. There's a whole lot of nothing in this one. Cersei's chapters are excruciating to read. That's not surprising considering she is probably the least likable of characters within this series. This doesn't make the book bad because of this. I think she needed some point of view chapters, but what she didn't need was a

never-ending amount of them; it was just too many. By doing this it meant that there were very few chapters that were enjoyable to read; there was no Tyrion, Dany, Jon Snow or Bran in the book.

I think George R. R. Martin made a massive mistake when he decided to have this and *A Dance with Dragons* occur at the same time. The story clearly got away from him and became a little convoluted. The pacing is terrible; there is no real payoff in either book (unlike its predecessors). The book comes to an end at a random point of the story, which just didn't feel quite right. Personally, I think he should have continued the trend he set with his the previous books in the series. It just needed one straightforward time arc. We don't need events happening at the same time across books; it didn't need to become that complex; it's already perfectly complex. He's clearly wrote himself into a corner with it. Hence the time it's taken him to get the next book out.

Well, that being said, there is still a lot to take from this book. The story does, of course, develop and become even more engaging. If anything this book made me count down the days to the release of *A Dance with Dragons*. But, that's not really a good thing. I think most people tend to forgive Martin for his slip into convolutedness because the previous books were so damn good. I just hope he has tamed the amount of new point of view characters in the much anticipated six book. I think it's far too late to add so many point of views into the series. One or two is understandable in a book of this type, but when it's like six or seven it becomes a little bit of a joke. It takes away from the central stories. I'm moaning again here. I began to lay down the positives which just developed into another rant!

### Redeeming features

This books not all bad, far from it. Arya's story takes a most interesting turn, and Jaime begins to search for his lost honour. These are amongst interesting characters of the entire series, so there points of view saved the book. And then Sam gets his moment in the light. Things do develop and go forward; we see the politics from a different angle. But, I still think it should have been all along one time arc; it would have been a lot easier. See what I mean? I just can't focus on the positives, so I'm going to leave it here.

I may complain about this book, but in reality it's only because I love this series so much. There are obvious problems with it, though it doesn't stop me from reading on or re-reading previous books. I may grit my teeth and cringe when I read certain chapters, but I'll read them again and complain about them again. This series is what got me into reading in the first place, so I do owe a lot to it even if this book fell below the benchmark Martin set himself.

### A Song of Ice and Fire

1. *A Game of Thrones*- A life chnaging five stars
2. *A Clash of Kings*- An Impish five stars
3. *A Storm of Swords* - A Lannister loving five stars
4. *A Feast for Crows* - **A flat 3.5 stars**

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### Raeleen Lemay says

This book definitely wasn't quite as eventful as the previous books in the traditional sense. There weren't any huge battle sequences or weddings filled with bloodshed, but rather a lot of *plotting*.

This book contained two of my favorite characters, Arya and Sansa, but there weren't enough chapters about

them to satisfy me. This one mainly followed Cersei and Jaime, along with quite a few side characters who we didn't see much of in the first three books.

I'm really interested to see what happens in the next book, but I'm already anxious for book six because I need to know what's happening with Arya and Cersei. THINGS ENDED OFF SKETCHY FOR THEM.

*edit*

So I hear that Arya is actually in ADWD, along with a bit of Cersei and Jaime. All is well. (well probably not but I'm happy with this lol)

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## **j says**

A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. (A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair?) A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair. A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair.

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A highborn maid of three-and-ten, with a fair face and auburn hair!

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