# Cersei Lannister

Cersei Lannister is a fictional character in the A Song of Ice and Fire series of fantasy novels by American author George R. R. Martin, and its television adaptation Game of Thrones, where she is portrayed by English actress Lena Headey. In the novels, she is apoint of view character.

Introduced in 1996's A Game of Thrones, Cersei is a member of House Lannister, one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the kingdom of Westeros. She subsequently appeared in A Clash of Kings (1998) and A Storm of Swords (2000). She becomes a prominent point of view character in the novels beginning in *A Feast* for Crows (2005) and A Dance with Dragons (2011). The character will also appear in the forthcoming volumeThe Winds of Winter.

In the story, Cersei Lannister, Queen of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros, is the wife of King Robert Baratheon. Her father arranged the marriage after his attempt to betroth her to Prince Rhaegar Targaryen, as she wanted, failed. The Targaryen dynasty lost the war, and her father schemed his way into the role of a political counselor for the newly crowned King Robert. The Lannisters are the richest family in Westeros and helped him to win the Throne, which is why Robert agreed to a marriage between them. Cersei has a twin brother, Jaime, with whom she has been involved in an incestuous affair. All three of Cersei's children are Jaime's. Cersei's main character attribute is her desire for power and her ambition.

Headey has received critical acclaim for her portrayal of the character on the HBO series Game of Thrones. She has been nominated for four Emmy Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series and a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress for her performance. Headey and the rest of the cast were nominated for Screen Actors Guild Awards for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series in 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016. In season 5, a young version of the character is portrayed by Nell Williams in a flashback.

# **Contents**

### Character background

#### **Storylines**

A Game of Thrones

A Clash of Kings

A Storm of Swords

A Feast for Crows

A Dance with Dragons

Family tree of House Lannister

### TV adaptation

Storylines

Season 1

Season 2

Season 3

Season 4

## Cersei Lannister

A Song of Ice and Fire character Game of Thrones character



Lena Headey as Cersei Lannister

**First** appearance

Last

by

Novel: A Game of Thrones

(1996)

Television:

"Winter Is Coming" (2011)

Video game:

"Iron From Ice" (2014)

Video game: appearance "Reigns" (2018) Created by George R. R. Martin

**Portrayed** Lena Headey

> Nell Williams (young) (Game of Thrones)

Voiced by Lena Headey (video

game)

Motion Lena Headey (video

capture game)

Information

Gender Female

**Title** Protector of the Season 5 Season 6 Season 7

Recognition and awards

References

# **Character background**

Cersei was born the only daughter and first child of <u>Tywin Lannister</u> and his wife Joanna, with her twin brother <u>Jaime</u> born soon after. Cersei and Jaime looked so similar as children that Cersei occasionally wore Jaime's clothes and was mistaken for him.<sup>[1]</sup> They even went as far as to experiment sexually at an early age but were discovered by a servant who informed their mother. She decided to separate them using a guard and keep this a secret from their father, threatening them that she would inform him if they ever repeated it.<sup>[2]</sup> Soon after, her mother died giving birth to their <u>dwarf</u> brother <u>Tyrion</u>. Cersei blamed Tyrion for her death, and started to abuse him as a baby.<sup>[2]</sup> Martin said in *Rolling Stone*.

There's certainly a great level of narcissism in Cersei. She has an almost sociopathic view of the world and civilization.<sup>[3]</sup>

Tywin hoped his daughter would marry Rhaegar Targaryen from a very young age and rejected the Princess of Dorne's proposal to betroth Oberyn Martell and Elia Martell to her and Jaime respectively. She became infatuated with Rhaegar and even hid her infatuation from her brother as her father advised he<sup>[4]</sup> At the age of eleven, Jaime was sent away to serve as a squire for Lord Sumner Crakehall.<sup>[2]</sup> A year later, Aerys Targaryen rejected Cersei's marriage to his son, humiliating Tywin. [4] Tywin took Cersei to King's Landing and, in the following years, refused every other offer of marriage for her. In 281 AC, when Cersei and Jaime were fifteen, Jaime, newly knighted on the battlefield, came to King's Landing on his way to Casterly Rock to visit his sister, from whom he had been separated for years. She informed him that their father planned to marry him to Lysa Tully and persuaded him to join the Kingsguard in order to be near her, after sleeping together for the first time. [2] They started an affair which lasted until the morning of her marriage to Robert Baratheon. While she was happy marrying Robert at first, [5] he didn't return her affections and repeatedly cheated on her. She then resumed her incestuous affair with her brother, resulting in the births of Joffrey, Myrcella, and Tommen.

During her teenage years, believing that her betrothal to Rhaegar would soon be announced, Cersei brought her companions Melara Hetherspoon and Jeyne Farman to a witch named Maggy the Frog. Jeyne was instantly frightened and left the tent. Cersei and Melara stayed and tried to get the witch to tell them a prophecy. In the face of Cersei's threats, Maggy agreed to answer three questions. Maggy told Cersei

Realm Lady Paramount of the Westerlands Lady of Casterly Rock Light of the West Queen Dowager Queen Regent Television: Queen of the Andals and the First Men **Family** House Lannister House Baratheon **Spouse** Robert Baratheon **Significant** Jaime Lannister other Children with Jaime: Joffrey Baratheon Myrcella Baratheon Tommen Baratheon Television: with Robert: Unnamed infant son Relatives Tywin Lannister (father) Joanna Lannister (mother) Jaime Lannister (twin brother) Tyrion Lannister (brother) Kevan Lannister (uncle) **Lancel Lannister** (cousin) Kingdom The Westerlands The Crownlands

she would marry the king and not the prince, and that she would be overthrown by a younger and more beautiful queen. She further predicted that Cersei's children will die during her lifetime and that the valonqar (High Valyrian for "little brother") would come to end her life. Melara then asked if she would marry Jaime, to which Maggy answered that she wouldn't marry anyone and that her death was near her and would happen that night. It is implied that Cersei killed the girl to prevent her speaking of the prophecies and for being greedy with ideas above her social status.<sup>[4]</sup> Cersei spends her entire adult life attempting to subvert the prophecy and eventually develops a strong paranoia over this.

# **Storylines**

### A Game of Thrones

Robert, Cersei and most of the court visit the North to appoint <u>Eddard Stark</u> as Hand of the King. During the royal visit to <u>Winterfell</u>, Eddard's son <u>Bran</u> finds Cersei committing incest with Jaime in a tower. To prevent their adultery from being revealed, Jaime pushes Bran from the tower; Bran survives, but has no memory of the fall and is left paraplegic.

Eddard eventually discovers the truth of Cersei's infidelity and confronts her, giving her the opportunity to flee into exile and thus spare her children certain execution. Cersei had already arranged Robert's death in a hunting accident. When Robert dies, Cersei seizes control as <u>regent</u> and has Eddard arrested for treason. Cersei intends for Eddard to publicly confess and join the Night's Watch as punishment, but Jofrey orders Ned executed instead.



Coat of arms of House Lannister

## A Clash of Kings

Frustrated with Cersei's many political blunders, as well as her failure to control Joffrey, Tywin appoints Tyrion as Hand of the King with explicit instructions to control Cersei and Joffrey. Once at the capital, Tyrion enters into a bitter power struggle with Cersei, subverting her authority and removing her supporters from positions of power. In Jaime's absence, Cersei begins taking other lovers, including Lancel. When Stannis Baratheon sails on King's Landing, Cersei and Joffrey hide in a tower, leaving Tyrion to mastermind the defense of the city Ultimately, Tywin arrives in time to force Stannis to retreat and save the city

### A Storm of Swords

After formally assuming his position as Hand of the King, Tywin makes it clear to Cersei that she is no longer welcome at Small Council meetings, *de facto* stripping her of political authority. Furthermore, Tywin intends to wed Cersei to Wilas Tyrell in order to form an alliance with House Tyrell. This state of affairs is shaken when Joffrey is poisoned at his wedding feast. Maddened with grief at the loss of her eldest son, Cersei lashes out against Frion, accusing him of poisoning the king **a**t of revenge.

Cersei <u>manipulates Tyrion's trial</u> to ensure a guilty verdict, bribing and intimidating witnesses. When Tyrion demands a <u>trial by combat</u>, Cersei selects the imposing <u>Gregor Clegane</u>, "The Mountain," as the Crown's champion. The Mountain prevails, killing Tyrion's champion <u>Oberyn Martell</u> Tywin then pronounces Tyrion guilty and sentences him to death, but Tyrion escapes prison and kills Tywin. Cersei is once again in complete control of the capital.

## A Feast for Crows

With the death of her father and her son, Cersei *de facto* rules the kingdom. Her youngest child, Tommen Baratheon, is crowned king but is widely considered weak, signing every decree that passes in front of him. However, Cersei rules a kingdom on the brink of ruin. The huge losses suffered by House Lannister in the war, combined with the wartime disruptions to trade and harvest mean that the Lannisters are dependent on resources from House Tyrell. The Tyrells leverage this position and begin to build power in the capital, much to Cersei's consternation.

Furthermore, Cersei makes a series of political and economic blunders, alienating allies such as <u>Pycelle</u> and <u>Kevan Lannister</u>. In an attempt to undermine the Tyrells, as well as release her son from his marriage to Margaery, Cersei attempts to frame Margaery for adultery and treason. However, this plot backfires as the investigation into Margaery reveals evidence of Cersei's own adultery and her complicity in Robert's death, resulting in her arrest by the Faith. She sends a letter to Jaime, asking him for help, but he burns her note

# A Dance with Dragons

Cersei confesses her post-marital affairs (though not her relationship with Jaime), while the more serious charges of <u>regicide</u> and incest are to be settled in a trial by combat. Cersei is punished with a walk of shame, being stripped naked and forced to walk through the capital in full view of the public, nearly breaking down in tears near the end. Confined to the Red Keep awaiting trial, the kingdom is now run by Pycelle and Kevan. However, at the nadir of her fortunes, <u>Varys</u> returns to the capital and murders both Pycelle and Kevan. The book ends with Cersei's fate unknown.

## **Family tree of House Lannister**

# TV adaptation

Cersei Lannister is played by Lena Headey in the television adaption of the book series.

In October 2014, Headey and several other key cast members, all contracted for six seasons of the series, renegotiated their deals to include a potential seventh season and salary increases for seasons 5, 6, and 7. [6][7] *The Hollywood Reporter* called the raises "huge", noting that the deal would make the performers "among the highest-paid actors on cable TV". [6] *Deadline Hollywood* put the number for season 5 at "close to \$300,000 an episode" for each actor, and *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote in June 2016 that the performers would each be paid "upward of \$500,000 per episode" for season 7 and the potential season 8. [8] In 2017, Headey became one of the highest paid actors on television and will earn £2 million per episode for the show. [9][10]



Lena Headey plays the role of Cersei Lannister in the television series

## **Storylines**

Much of Cersei's storyline from the first and second seasons in the television series is unchanged from the books. However, a notable change in the show is Joffrey's authorising the purge of Robert's bastards, rather than Cersei.

### Season 1

Cersei learns that her husband Robert is in danger of finding out that the children he sees as his heirs to the throne are not his.<sup>[11]</sup> Robert meets his end as the result of a boar attack on a hunting trip, before Ned Stark tells him the truth about his children. Cersei works quickly to instate her oldest son, Joffrey, on the throne, with her as his chief political advisor and Queen Regent.<sup>[12]</sup> Joffrey quits listening to his mother

#### Season 2

Tywin decides that Cersei does not exercise enough control over her son and sends Tyrion as an additional political advisor. Cersei and Tyrion do not get along, and constantly try to undermine each other's authority over the crown. As of the end of season 2, Tyrion has accumulated more sway over the Iron Throne and has shipped Cersei's only daughter off against Cersei's will to be married to the prince of Dorne.

## Season 3

Cersei comes to fear that Margaery intends to usurp her as queen and unsuccessfully tries to alienate Joffrey from her. Cersei is delighted when Tywin learns of the Tyrells' plan to wed <u>Sansa Stark</u> to Margaery's brother Loras, and he intervenes by having Tyrion marry Sansa instead, but is furious when Tywin also orders Cersei to marry Loras. When Jaime returns to King's Landing, he immediately seeks out Cersei, who is shocked to discover that his sword hand has been cut for

#### Season 4

Cersei has Tyrion arrested after Joffrey is fatally poisoned. It is implied that she knows Tyrion's guilt is highly unlikely but just wants to see him dead, although Jaime refuses to carry out the order. Indeed, at Tyrion's trial, it is obvious Cersei has manipulated the entire procedure so that the witnesses give either incomplete or entirely false testimonies to implicate Tyrion and Sansa further in the murder. When Tyrion demands a trial by combat, Cersei quickly chooses Ser Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane as her champion, to diminish Tyrion's chances of acquittal, and has Bronn betrothed to a noblewoman so that Tyrion cannot choose him as his champion. Cersei's wish comes true when Tyrion's champion, Oberyn Martell, is killed by Clegane, but she still refuses to marry Loras, threatening her father with revealing the truth about her relationship with Jaime and the parentage of her children. Tywin is killed by an escaping Tyrion soon afterward.

#### Season 5

Cersei receives a threat from Dorne, where Myrcella is betrothed to Trystane Martell, and sends Jaime to Dorne to retrieve her. Tommen is married to Margaery, who tries to manipulate Tommen into sending Cersei to Casterly Rock. Fearful of losing her power, Cersei meets the religious leader, the High Sparrow, appoints him as the High Septon, and gives him authority to re-establish the Faith Militant. In order to destabilise House Tyrell, Cersei arranges for the High Sparrow to arrest Loras for his homosexuality, and have Margaery also arrested for perjury after lying to defend Loras. However, Cersei's plot backfires when Lancel, now a member of the Faith Militant, confesses to his affair with Cersei and his role in Robert's assassination, and accuses Cersei of incest, prompting the High Sparrow to arrest her. Cersei is eventually allowed to return to the Red Keep after confessing to having committed adultery with Lancel, but has her hair cut off and is forced to walk naked through the streets of King's Landing as atonement. Cersei returns, distraught from the abuse directed at her by the smallfolk of King's Landing, but is consoled by Qyburn's successful reanimation of Ser Gregor Clegane!<sup>[14]</sup>

#### Season 6

Cersei remains in the Red Keep, confined to her chambers and stripped of her authority. Alhough she accepts Tommen's apology for his lack of action in her arrest and walk of atonement, she remains looked down upon by other members of the court. Cersei learns from Tommen that the High Sparrow plans to have Margaery do a walk of atonement before Cersei's trial and conspires with the Small Council to have the Tyrell army march on the Sept of Baelor to secure Margaery's and Loras' release. Their plan backfires when it is revealed that Margaery has joined the Faith of the Seven and has convinced Tommen to merge the Faith and the Crown. Despite being stripped of her allies, Cersei opts to remain in King's Landing, having named Ser Gregor as her champion in her trial by combat. However, Tommen announces that trial by combat has been abolished and replaced by trial by the Seven. Cersei arranges for a cache of wildfire to be detonated beneath the Sept during Loras' trial, which kills the High Sparrow, Margaery, Loras, and the rest of the Small Council. As a direct result of Cersei's actions, Tommen commits suicide after witnessing the explosion. With House Baratheon officially extinct (although House Baratheon technically became extinct upon Stannis Baratheon's death) and no one to oppose her in King's Landing, Cersei is crowned the first ever Queen Regnant of the Seven Kingdom<sup>15</sup>.

### Season 7

Despite nominally being ruler of Westeros, Cersei's grip on the throne is tenuous, with the Riverlands in upheaval following Arya Stark's massacre of House Frey, the Vale and the North's declaration of Ned Stark's bastard son Jon Snow King in the North, and Tyrion, Dorne, and the Reach all supporting Daenerys Targaryen, whose fleet has seized Dragonstone. Cersei remains cold and distant after Tommen's suicide, viewing it as a betrayal of their family. With no children left to protect, Cersei's malice and vindictiveness have grown, and she relentlessly seeks to expand her power and destroy her enemies. Cersei reaches out to the King of the Iron Islands, Euron Greyjoy, to form an alliance, but rejects Euron's marriage proposal as she considers him untrustworthy. Euron later ambushes Daenerys' fleet and captures Yara Greyjoy, Ellaria, and Tyene Sand, and presents them as a "gift" to Cersei. She agrees to marry Euron after the war is won; however, she continues her affair with Jaime, no longer attempting to hide their relationship from their servants. Cersei imprisons Ellaria and Tyene in the dungeons, kills Tyene with the same poison used to kill Myrcella, and keeps Ellaria alive to watch her daughter die and rot.

Tycho Nestoris of the Iron Bank arrives in King's Landing to request repayment of their debt. Cersei requests a fortnight in order to comply. She then has the Lannister and Tarly armies attack Highgarden, defeating the Tyrells. Olenna Tyrell commits suicide following the defeat and gloats to Jaime that she was responsible for poisoning Joffrey. The Tyrells' wealth is transported safely to King's Landing, but the food the Lannisters steal from the Reach is destroyed when Daenerys attacks the caravan with her Dothraki horde and dragon Drogon. Jaime barely survives the battle and encourages Cersei to consider a ceasefire.

Tyrion infiltrates the capital to meet with Jaime, and Jaime tells Cersei that Daenerys and Jon want to meet with Cersei to negotiate an <u>armistice</u> while mankind fights the threat of the <u>White Walkers</u>. Cersei is skeptical but agrees, and tells Jaime that she is pregnant. Daenerys and Jon meet with Cersei in the Dragonpit on the outskirts of King's Landing, and present to her a wight reanimated by the White Walkers as evidence of their threat. Although terrified, Cersei initially refuses to agree to an armistice, as Jon refuses to remain neutral in the war between the Lannisters and Targaryens. Tyrion speaks to Cersei in private, and apparently persuades her to ally with the rival monarchs. However, she later reveals to Jaime that she intends for her enemies to wipe each other out and then attack the victor, and has sent Euron to Essos to transport the Golden Company to Westeros. Disgusted by Cersei's selfishness and shortsightedness, Jaime finally abandons her side and goes north on his own, leaving Cersei alone.

## Recognition and awards

Cersei has been continuously praised as one of the most complex and multi-faceted characters in either version of the story. *Rolling Stone* ranked her at No.5 on a list of the "Top 40 *Game of Thrones* Characters", describing Cersei as a character who'd "rather die than give you control". On a similar list made by *Rolling Stone* ranking the "30 Best *Game of Thrones* Villains", Cersei was ranked No.1 and described as the "most dangerous human being in Westeros" as well as "one of the most complex and fascinating characters on television.....she's also a strangely sympathetic figure, warped by being treated like an expensive brood mare by powerful men her entire life and genuine in her affections". Alyssa Rosenburg of *The Washington Post* wrote, "As the men....destroy themselves and each other, leaving a generation of women without husbands, sons, and marriage partners, [Cersei] may be the only [person] left to repair the shattered world.

Lena Headey has received significant critical praise and acclaim for her portrayal of Cersei,<sup>[19]</sup> and has received multiple accolades including the <u>Portal Award</u> for Best Actress in 2012,<sup>[20]</sup> the <u>EWwy Award</u> for Best Supporting Actress in a Drama in 2012,<sup>[21]</sup> the <u>Women's Image Network Award</u> for Actress Drama Series in 2014,<sup>[22]</sup> and the <u>Gold Derby TV Award</u> for Best Drama Supporting Actress in 2015 and 2016;<sup>[23][24]</sup>

Headey has received several award nominations for her performance in the series, including four nominations for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2018. [25][26][27][28][29][30] She was also nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Series, Miniseries, or Television Film in 2016. [31][32] Other nominations include the Portal Award for Best Actress in 2011, [33] the Women's Image Network Awards for Actress Drama Series in 2011, [22] the Golden Nymph Award for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series in 2012, the Saturn Award for Best Actress on Television in 2012 and 2017, [34] the Gold Derby TV Award Best Drama Supporting Actress in 2012 and 2014, [35][36] the SFX Awards for Best Actress in 2013, [37][38] the Saturn Award for Best Supporting Actress on Television in 2016, the Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Drama Series in 2016, [39] and the Satellite Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Series, Miniseries or Television Film in 2017. [40][41]

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