

= Winter Is Coming =

" Winter Is Coming " is the first episode of the HBO medieval fantasy television series Game of Thrones . It was written by the show creators David Benioff and D. B. Weiss , in a faithful adaptation of the first chapters of George R. R. Martin 's book A Game of Thrones . The episode was directed by Tim Van Patten , redoing the work done by director Thomas McCarthy in an unaired pilot .

As the first episode of the series , it introduces the setting and the main characters of the show . The episode centers on the Stark family , and how its lord , Eddard Stark , gets involved in the court politics after the king chooses Eddard to replace his recently deceased chief administrator ( " Hand of the King " ) . The episode received largely positive reviews , and was seen initially by 2 @. @ 2 million viewers . A week before the episode first aired , HBO made the first 15 minutes available as an Internet preview .

= = Plot = =

The episode begins the process of interweaving action happening in multiple separate locations within and around the fictional continent of Westeros . Most of the action takes place in and around Winterfell where Lord Eddard Stark ( Sean Bean ) is the feudal overlord of the northern reaches of the kingdom . Outside of Westeros is a land across the Narrow Sea where the two surviving members of House Targaryen , previous rulers of Westeros , live in exile .

= = = Beyond the Wall = = =

The episode opens with three rangers of the Night 's Watch - Ser Waymar Royce ( Rob Ostlere ) , Will ( Bronson Webb ) and Gared ( Dermot Keaney ) - scouting beyond the Wall , a massive barrier of ice at the north end of the kingdom . After finding the mutilated corpses of some wildlings ( tribal humans who live north of the Wall ) , the rangers are confronted by White Walkers ( demonic creatures ) and undead wildlings . Two of the rangers are killed by the White Walkers , while the third , Will , is for some reason left alive . Fearing for his life , Will deserts the Night 's Watch .

= = = In King 's Landing = = =

Queen Cersei ( Lena Headey ) , and her twin brother , Jaime Lannister ( Nikolaj Coster @-@ Waldau ) , are watching as the dead body of Jon Arryn , The Hand of The King ( John Standing ) is tended to by the Silent Sisters . They discuss whether he revealed any dangerous information regarding the two of them to anyone before his death . Jaime assures his sister that if Arryn had spoken to anyone , they would already have been executed .

= = = In the North = = =

After the opening sequence , the Starks of Winterfell are introduced , including Lord Eddard " Ned " Stark , his wife , Lady Catelyn " Cat " Stark ( Michelle Fairley ) and his five children : their heir Robb ( Richard Madden ) , their elder daughter Sansa ( Sophie Turner ) , younger daughter Arya ( Maisie Williams ) , ten @-@ year @-@ old son Bran ( Isaac Hempstead @-@ Wright ) and youngest son , Rickon ( Art Parkinson ) . Also introduced are Ned 's illegitimate son Jon Snow ( Kit Harington ) and hostage / ward Theon Greyjoy ( Alfie Allen ) , who , like Robb , are older teenagers .

Ned is informed that a deserter of the Night 's Watch , Will , has been captured . Members of the Night 's Watch are sworn never to desert their posts , upon penalty of death . Ned takes his sons to witness Will 's execution . Will faces death bravely , admitting that he deserted the Wall after being attacked , but stands by his statement that he saw White Walkers . Ned himself passes sentence and beheads him . When Bran asks his father about the ranger 's talk of White Walkers , Ned dismisses it as a madman 's ravings , insisting that the Walkers have been considered extinct for thousands of years .

Upon their return , the Starks find a dead stag , sigil ( seal ) of House Baratheon . A bit farther they find a dead dire wolf and her surviving pups . Noting that the dire wolf is the sigil of the Stark family and there are as many pups as the Stark children ( even an albino runt for Jon ) , they take the pups in as companions .

Back at Winterfell , Catelyn informs her husband of a letter announcing the death of Lord Arryn , Eddard 's old mentor and Catelyn 's brother @-@ in @-@ law . An additional message , brought by a raven , reports that the king himself is coming to Winterfell . Winterfell receives the royal court , including King Robert Baratheon ( Mark Addy ) ; his wife Queen Cersei ; their three children : the heir Prince Joffrey ( Jack Gleeson ) , Princess Myrcella ( Aimee Richardson ) and the youngest Prince Tommen ( Callum Wharry ) ; as well as Cersei 's twin brother , Jaime Lannister , a member of the Kingsguard ; and their younger brother , Tyrion Lannister ( Peter Dinklage ) , a dwarf known as " The Imp . " As Robert pays his respects to Lyanna Stark , his late fiancée and Ned 's sister , Robert confides to his old friend that he doesn 't trust anyone around him . He decides to name Ned as the new Hand of the King , and to solidify the alliance between the two families , he suggests that Ned 's daughter , Sansa , be betrothed to his son , Joffrey .

At night , Catelyn receives a troubling message from her sister , Lord Arryn 's widow . She suspects her husband Jon was murdered by the king 's in @-@ laws , the powerful Lannisters . Ned , who at first was reluctant to accept the position of Hand of the King , does so in order to protect his old friend . Bran , who enjoys climbing the walls of Winterfell , climbs an abandoned tower where he stumbles on Queen Cersei and Jaime having sex . To keep the incestuous relationship a secret , Jaime shoves Bran out of the high window .

= = = In Pentos = = =

Exiled prince Viserys Targaryen ( Harry Lloyd ) plots to overthrow King Robert and reclaim his father 's throne . To this end , he brokers a marriage between his sister Daenerys ( Emilia Clarke ) and a powerful warlord Khal Drogo ( Jason Momoa ) , leader of a nomadic horde of Dothraki .

Daenerys voices her fear of the barbarian lord , but her brother tells her to marry him . During the wedding ceremony , Daenerys is given two wedding gifts . The first is a collection of books from the Seven Kingdoms , given by Ser Jorah Mormont ( Iain Glen ) , an exiled knight loyal to the Targaryens . The second gift is a chest containing three petrified dragon eggs , given by Magister Illyrio Mopatis ( Roger Allam ) , the man who helped arrange the marriage .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception and development = = =

A number of Hollywood studios had contacted George R.R. Martin about possible adaption of his book series A Song of Ice and Fire into a film , however Martin expressed the opinion the books could not be made into a film as too much would have to be cut from the books , but thought it could be made into a television series . In January 2006 , David Benioff spoke to Martin 's literary agent about the books he represented for possible adaption , and the agent sent the first four books of A Song of Ice and Fire to David Benioff . Benioff read a few hundred pages of the first book in the series , A Game of Thrones , called D. B. Weiss and said : " Maybe I 'm crazy , but I haven 't had this much fun reading anything in about 20 years . So take a look because I think it might make a great HBO series . " Weiss , who then read the first book in two days , was very enthusiastic about a possible television project based on the books . They arranged a meeting with George RR Martin , who asked them if they knew who Jon Snow 's real mother might be , and was satisfied with their answer .

In March 2006 , a few weeks after meeting Martin , Benioff and Weiss pitched the show to Showtime and Carolyn Strauss of HBO , who accepted their proposal . HBO acquired the rights to the novels to turn them into a television series , with Benioff and Weiss as writers and executive

producers of the series . The series went into development in January 2007 . The series would begin with the 1996 first book of A Song of Fire and Ice , " A Game of Thrones " , with the intention that each novel in the series would form the basis for a season 's worth of episodes . However , Benioff and Weiss had to resubmit a proposal after Carolyn Strauss stepped down as president of HBO in 2008 . The first and second drafts of the pilot script , written by Benioff and Weiss , were submitted in August 2007 and June 2008 respectively . While HBO found both drafts to their liking , a pilot was not ordered until November 2008 .

= = = Writing = = =

Scripted by the show creators David Benioff and D. B. Weiss , the first episode includes the plot of the book 's chapters 1 ? 7 , 9 and 12 ( Prologue , Bran I , Catelyn I , Daenerys I , Eddard I , Jon I , Catelyn II , Bran II , Daenerys II ) . Changes in the adaptation include the sequence of events in the prologue ( in the books it is Gared and not Will who survives and is beheaded by Eddard afterwards ) , new scenes showing the Lannister twins ' perspective , and Daenerys ' wedding night showing Drogo not waiting for her to consent to sex .

= = = Filming = = =

Tom McCarthy was chosen to direct the pilot episode , shot between 24 October and 19 November 2009 on location in Northern Ireland , Scotland and Morocco . However , the pilot was deemed unsatisfactory and had to be reshot .

The new pilot episode was filmed in 2010 by new director Tim Van Patten , and several actors appearing in the original pilot did not return for the series . Tamzin Merchant was replaced as Daenerys Targaryen by Emilia Clarke , and Jennifer Ehle was replaced as Catelyn Stark by Michelle Fairley . Additionally , Ian McNeice was replaced as Magister Illyrio by Roger Allam , Richard Ridings as Gared by Dermot Keaney , and Jamie Campbell Bower as Ser Waymar Royce by Rob Ostlere .

Another difference is that the original pilot featured scenes shot in Scotland and scenes in Pentos were shot in Morocco , but in the aired series , Winterfell was filmed in a combination of locations in Northern Ireland , while scenes from Pentos were from Malta . The Doune Castle in Scotland was originally used to recreate Winterfell , and its great hall was used for some interior shots . Some scenes survived , but as it was not practical to return to Scotland for the reshoot , an exact replica of Doune 's Great Hall was recreated in the soundstage in Belfast for the series . Castle Ward in Northern Ireland was used in the reshoot to film King Robert 's entourage entry into Winterfell castle . A car park stood in for the Winterfell castle 's courtyard and a wine cellar for the Stark family crypt . The Tollymore Forest Park was used for the opening scene of the encounter with the White Walkers .

All the scenes shot in Morocco were reshot in Malta . The original pilot reused the sets of Kingdom of Heaven in Morocco to stand in for Pentos and the site of Drogo and Daenerys ' wedding . In Malta , the Verdala Palace , the 16th century summer palace of the president of Malta , was used for the exterior scenes at Illyrio 's mansion . The Azure Window was used as the backdrop for the wedding . Filming at the Azure Window however caused some controversy when a protected ecosystem was damaged by a subcontractor .

In the sex scene , the then @-@ pregnant Lena Headey was substituted by a body double ; the production hid her pregnancy for the rest of the season . In the scene in which the Starks encounter a stag killed by a dire wolf as they return from the execution , an actual animal was used rather than a prop . As the stag had been dead for two days , it stank so much that the actors had to take much care not to let it show on their faces . Some scenes filmed were never aired , for the example a flashback to the death of Eddard Stark 's brother , and the death of Jon Arryn .

= = = The original pilot = = =

The original pilot from 2009 was poorly received in a private viewing with friends , one of whom , Craig Mazin , said to Benioff and Weiss , " You guys have a massive problem " , and said " change everything " when asked for ideas . Weiss said of the viewing : " Watching them watch the pilot was a deeply humiliating , painful experience , because these are very smart individuals , and it just clearly wasn't working for any of them on a very basic level . " For example , it was never established that the two major characters , Jaime and Cersei Lannister were in fact brother and sister , a major plot point .

HBO did not make a decision for four months after the pilot was delivered . In March 2010 , HBO 's decision to greenlight the series including the pilot was announced , with the production of the series scheduled to start June 2010 . HBO however demanded extensive reshoot of the pilot , and wanted all the scenes from Morocco scrapped . A cameo appearance by George RR Martin as a Pentoshi nobleman at Daenerys ' wedding filmed in Morocco was therefore also cut . In all 90 percent of the pilot was re-shot in 2010 , with some cast changes and a different director .

== Aired episode ==

The original pilot remained unaired , although some footage from the original pilot was used in the first aired episode . This includes Sansa 's scenes with Catelyn ( Michelle Fairley 's footage as Catelyn was inserted over Jennifer Ehle 's performance ) , Will 's ride through the woods ( retained though also portrayed by a different actor ) , most of the feast at Winterfell , and Ned and Robert 's scene in the crypt . That scene is one of a few to be filmed on 35 mm film , and consequently slight film grain can be seen in the HD version of the episode .

== Reception ==

== Preview ==

On April 3 , 2011 , two weeks before the series premiere aired , the first 15 minutes of " Winter Is Coming " were released as a preview on HBO 's website . Wired 's Dave Banks called the preview " much better than anticipated . ( How ? s that even possible ? ) " Scott Stinson of Toronto 's National Post noted that " you know you aren't watching a network drama when there have been two beheadings in the first 15 minutes . "

== Ratings ==

The first episode of Game of Thrones obtained 2 @. 2 million viewers in its premiere airing , with an additional 2 million viewers in the reruns aired during the same night . The day after the premiere HBO aired the episode six additional times , adding another 1 @. 2 million to the viewer 's figures . Reruns aired during the following week upped the total viewership to 6 @. 8 million .

== International ==

The show premiered on HBO Canada at the same time as its U.S. premiere . On April 18 , 2011 , the show premiered in United Kingdom and Ireland through Sky Atlantic , gathering 750 @, 000 viewers , a ratings record for the network . The series was broadcast throughout Latin America beginning on May 8 , 2011 . New Zealand 's Dominion Post noted in an article on copyright laws that the popular series was downloaded via file sharing service regularly before its release to that market . In Australia , the July 17 premiere of the series was largely overshadowed by the release of A Dance with Dragons , but according to The Sydney Morning Herald was successful " especially with women , who aren't seen as a target market for sword @- fighting sagas " .

== Critical response ==

The critical response to the first episode of the series was positive . Review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes surveyed 10 reviews of the episode and judged 100 % of them to be positive . The website 's critical consensus reads , " ' Winter is Coming ' is an introduction to a wonderfully bleak journey that honors its source material with stellar execution and an impressive cast . " James Poniewozik from Time considered it an " epic win , " and Jace Lacob from The Daily Beast deemed it " unforgettable . " HitFix 's Alan Sepinwall wrote that while it was too early to say if Game of Thrones belonged to the HBO pantheon with shows like The Sopranos or The Wire , it had many things in common with those shows . IGN 's Matt Fowler wrote that the pilot " effortlessly takes us along , faithfully , through the book , but it also manages to capture the majestically morbid spirit of Martin 's pages and turn them into thrilling television . "

Much praise was given to the production values and the acting : Scott Meslow from The Atlantic states that " the show 's immense cast is almost universally strong , and the fantasy land of Westeros feels lived @-@ in , and looks terrific . " Alan Sepinwall also qualifies the casting as " really exceptional , " and states that the show is " feast for the eyes , " with all the different locations having their own memorable looks . The opening sequence , with an aerial view of the world where the series takes place with the different settings emerging from it , was also acclaimed .

On April 19 , less than two days after the initial airing , HBO announced that the series had been renewed for a second season . In a press teleconference , HBO executives announced their satisfaction with initial ratings , which they compared favorably to True Blood .

= = = Accolades = = =

Tim Van Patten received a 2011 Primetime Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series , and the episode was also nominated for Outstanding Makeup for a Single @-@ Camera Series ( Non @-@ Prosthetic ) .

= = = Awards and nominations = = =