Chapter 2

The Great Body of Westeros

"Everything in this world has a hidden meaning."

— Nikos Kazantzakis,

Westeros-Essos Anatomy and Physiology 101

The real **entry point** to the hidden inner dimension of the *Game of Thrones* saga is to be found not at any one specific location, but within the very land itself — the geography and kingdoms of the two continents in which the drama of *A Song of Ice and Fire* unfolds: Westeros and Essos. So if you want to access the deeper secrets of this story, **the first essential thing to understand** is this:

> ***The very continents of Westeros and Essos compose a body — or, to be more precise, a single gigantic two-dimensional anthropoid body laid out across the map.***

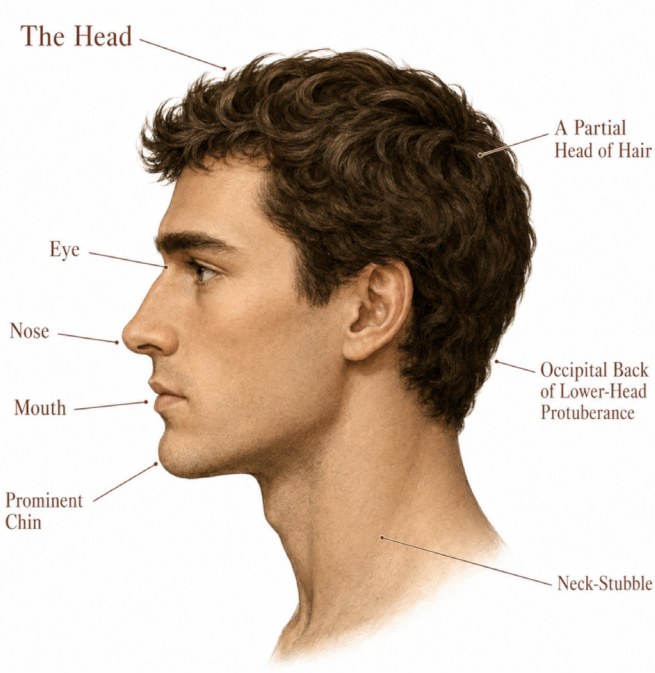
The Seven Kingdoms of Westeros — extending down from the great ice Wall to the deserts of Dorne — make up the ***head*** and ***torso*** of this ***geographical body***, and the less-travelled eastern continent of Essos — the land of the Dothraki and Slaver's Bay — makes up its lower body: its legs. It is upon and

within this two-continent body that all the action of *Game of Thrones*, both plain and hidden, takes place.

Talk About Keeping a Cool Head

The most obvious anatomical feature of this great geographical body is the ***Head*** of Westeros — more commonly known as *the North*. Traditionally ruled by the Stark family, the North is the largest single kingdom in all of Westeros.

The North is never explicitly called "the head" in the books or on the show. It doesn't need to be. The land says it instead — in a region named ***The Neck***, a bay named ***The Bite***, and a coastline that, once seen, is difficult to see as anything but **a *face*** in profile. ///



Although the North is not directly and explicitly named as the head in the books or television show there's a number of quotations hinting at it's deeper 'anatomical' role, such as, when Maester Luwin describes the Wall as the "**top of the world**", indirectly suggesting its role as the logical topmost point of the symbolic ***Westeros-Esos body***.

And A Neck to Support It ...

It's really the features of the land itself as well as key locations around it that *stark*ly confirm the identity of the North as the **great head** of the vast Westeros-Essos 'map-man'. Most blatant of these may be the North's lower region conveniently named and popularly known as ***The Neck*** - perfectly positioned to balance and support the North's Head just as a good neck should!

Another pretty obvious and conveniently named feature is ***The Bite*** the large bay enclosed by the east-coast of the North and the Neck region. Although its name suggests **a mouth** I would argue that the North's ***primary mouth*** is on its opposite, eastern, side.

Just About Looking You Right in the Face — It's One of Those Things That, Once You See It, You Can't Un-See It

But it's when you step back, squint, and blur your vision just a little that the truth becomes clear. Actually, you may not even really need to blur your vision at all: if you look at the northern region of Westeros as depicted on any good *Game of Thrones* map, you can easily begin to make out **the features of a profile** — a sideways-facing, distinctly **awkward human *face***, equipped with a ***mouth***, a ***nose***, an ***eye*** or two, and a **partial *head of hair*** — a patch on top, and

arguably a partial ***beard***, both in the form of dense forestry. Possibly ***nostrils***. And certainly a large ***Adam's apple***, down in the neck region.

Admittedly, there's also **a peculiar *horn-like appendag*e** growing out of the apparent forehead — but hey, we've all got our quirks. Actually, that's probably just part of a cool **hairstyle**.

Prominent Head Features of the North

So let's dive into a few of the specific details of this face of the North:

- **1**. The ***head Hair*** is the ***Wolfswood*** — a dense stand of forest sitting at thetop front of the head where hair naturally sits on a skull, with the woods west of the marshy core of the Neck region serving as **1.5.** a ***partial Beard***.

- **2.** The ***Eye*** is the unnamed lake directly under the Wolfswood,

- **3.** The awkward semi-flattened ***Nose*** juts out from the middle of the western shoreline,
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- **4.** The ***Mouth*** is **Blazewater Bay**, opening on the western coast.

- **5.** The ***Chin*** is the large pennisular outcroping under Blazewater Bay, capped by Cape Kraken.

- **6.** Around the lower back of the gigantic head - the North's east-facing shore - the coastline **bulges** eastward between White Harbor and Ramsgate, matching the ***Occipital Lobe*** swell that every human skull carries and that no one ever notices until they see it in profile.
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  7. And the broken marshland where the North frays into the Neck can even be imagined as ***Stubble***.

Talk About Two-Faced

There's also what could be interpreted as a considerably more **abstract *secondary face*** looking down from the upper opposite side of the head, with its own **strange *eye*** in profile and an exaggerated '***Wicked Witch***' or mild ***Pinocchio nose***. While quite awkward in its proportions, this secondary face does have the advantage of lining up properly with the aforementioned body of water named **The Bite**.

To me (Bo) personally, Blazewater Bay on the other side of the landmass makes more sense as ***a mouth*** — but I'm not trying to feed it or anything. ***The important thing to note*** is that the North does indeed have multiple visual and outright named features strongly pointing to its identity as the symbolic head of the continent of Westeros.

Third-Eye Blind — For Now

For now, we'll ignore the ***third-eye***-shaped lake in the middle of the North's **forehead** region, as well as what appears to be a pronounced and vast **White Walker-shaped *profile*** along the western coast of the Lands of Always Winter beyond the great Wall — equipped with its own neck and even another Adam's-apple-like protuberance to boot. But let's return to those mysteries in the next volume.

Queens*crown*, another anatomically relevant feature of far northern geography, located just below the great ice Wall, indirectly references the '***crown***' or top of a head. Additionally as adornment, a **crown** is a specifically intended to be worn on the top of one's head - the anatomical region matching the location of Queenscrown in the North.

The Black Gate – The Ancient Magical Big-Mouthed Head at the Top of the North

And there is one more specific location in the North that is at once especially spot-on in identifying the region as Westeros' *Head* and quite a lot ***stranger*** than our earlier examples.

At the Nightfort — the **oldest** and most thoroughly ruined of the castles along the great ice Wall — there is ***a door that is a fac***e.

The Black Gate is huge **magical head-gate** carved from ancient weirwood gone bone-white with age. It is ***literally a very large head*** - probably twelve feet or more in height - with extremely wrinkled skin and a mouth that opens wide enough for even Hodor to pass through.

Bran Stark and his companions **pass through** that **mouth** to reach the lands beyond the Wall. Samwell Tarly and Gilly come back through it the other way.

* Although these scenes are in the ***A Song of Ice and Fire*** book series they were left out of the show – perhaps because it was judged that a giant living head gateway would be a little too strange for many viewers.

Set aside for a moment what the Black Gate actually is, and consider only **where it is and what it looks like**. At the very crown of the ***head region*** of this continental body, Martin has placed an enormous ***preserved and semi-alive head***, and made his characters walk through it.

Ideally, Don't Lose Your Head

There are also a few key events in the story itself that add a more human-centric link to the head identification of the North : Actually two of the opening scenes preemphasize the 'head-related' quality of these regions – grimly – through decapitations:

First in the dramatic killing of a member of the Night's Watch by a White Walker in the lands beyond the Wall

– and then when Ned Stark carries out his duty by executing – beheading - a Night's Watch deserter.

And of course (very-out-of-date) **spoiler warning** . . .

— ultimately, and too much later, Ned himself is executed in the same manner: ***beheading***.

... I guess if there's gotta be beheadings then the only real place to go from here is ... ***the Neck***...

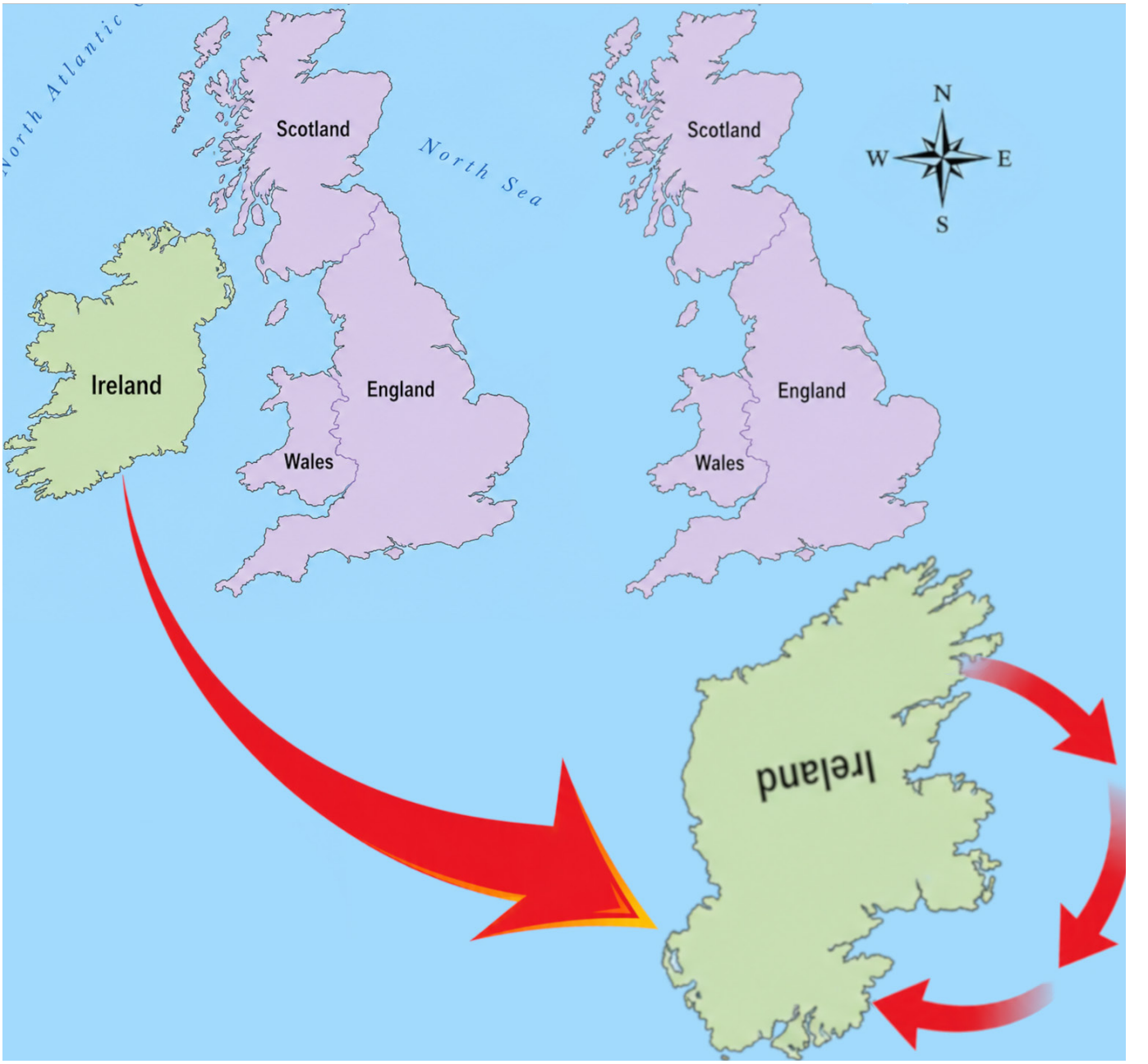
But Isn't the Map of Westeros Just Made up of a Map of the UK??

You may have heard this claim about the origins of Westeros' shape, and it is worth dealing with directly, because not only is it true, but it also makes GRRM's map design even more impressive and clever.

Although I don't believe George has ever directly admitted this to be the case, the reality of where he got the main structural source material for the map is undeniable – the pattern matches are just too spot-on.

Essentially, he based the main head region of the North upon England and Wales, and then Scotland if we continue up past the Wall.

Ireland, in turn, was taken, turned around a whole 180-degrees — such that North is South and South, North — then enlarged to about twice its proportional size, and finally moved to just below the landmass of England.



Look at Westeros with a map of the British Isles beside it, and the resemblance is hard to miss: the shape of the landmass, Ireland inverted and grafted below, and a great wall across the north with a wilder, colder people beyond it.

Even the great ice Wall is based upon Hadrian's Wall, which lines up nearly perfectly when the two maps are overlaid. This much Martin seems to have outright admitted, that Hadrian's Wall did indeed inspire the Wall, and that when he stood on it in 1981 it inspired him to reflect on what a Roman soldier would have thought about the vast unknown lands beyond.

Of course, that certainly doesn't mean that Westeros' shape is only a version of real-world UK geography. This only makes Martin's accomplishment here all the more impressive: he took real lands and turned and resized them in just such a way that they suggested ***a head and body.*** As you can see from this overlay image, he saw the ***face profile*** that was already implied by England's coastline and then gave it a little ***rhinoplasty***, and added a big lake where an ***eye*** should be.

But the face is only the beginning. After he'd moved, flipped, and resized Ireland, he linked it to the 'head' landmass with a ***new neck*** – that became The Neck. And as we'll see soon, he also positioned the upside-down Ireland perfectly so that ***a hand*** would be where he needed it to be. Same with some spinal ***vertebrae***-like shapes, as well as some good map contours to suggest 'private parts.' We'll later see how some of the preexisting landforms of Ireland were enlarged and emphasized to further match the look of appropriate astrological signs too.

The contours of Ireland, England, Wales, and Scotland are here indeed – and so is half of a giant two-continent-spanning body! Real-world inspiration and encoded structure are two different kinds of claims, and both can be true at once. Martin took shapes from the world he lives in — as most writers do — and then wrote something else into it. ***This book is about the something else***.

No Hickey Yet —
But Some Other Interesting Features

Travelling down from the Stark-ruled North, we pass first through the aforementioned ***Neck*** region — and while the name rather says it all, there are a few other anatomical features worth noting. For instance, there's the peninsular protuberance on the western coast, exactly where the cartilage of an ***Adam's apple*** should be. And there is the Green Fork, the branch of the Trident that flows up from below and then divides into **two sub-branches** of its own — much as the ***carotid artery*** does in the human neck.

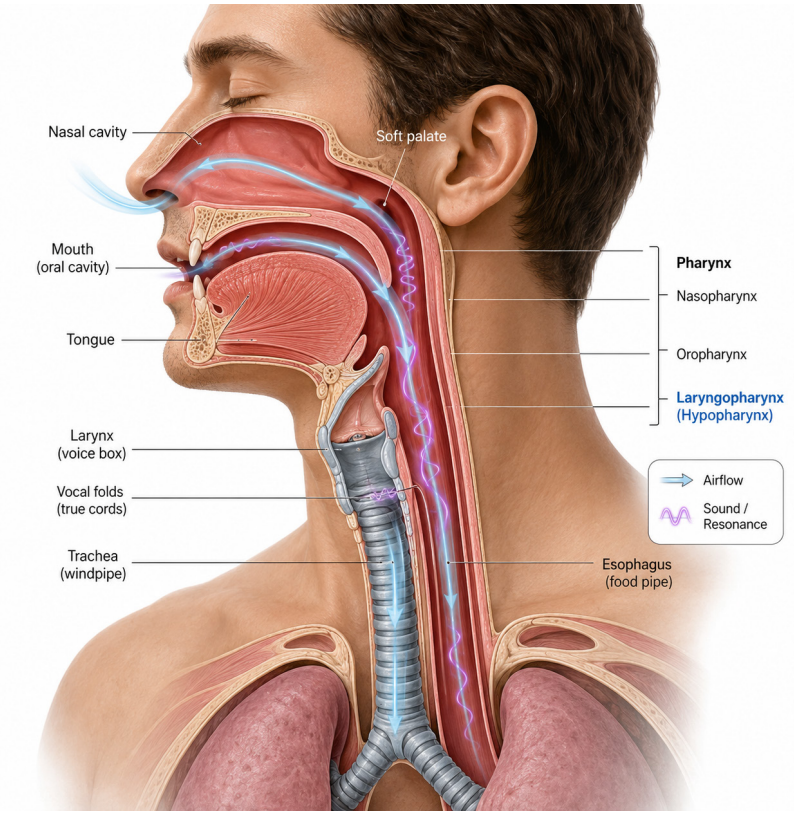
Floating Castles, Bones and Apples

Greywater Watch — the floating castle of House Reed — together with the knobby peninsula of the nearby Cape of Eagles, respectively suggest the ***hyoid bone*** and the ***Adam's appl***e protuberance of the laryngeal cartilage, both found in exactly this region of the human neck.

And the ***hyoid bone*** is worth pausing on. Of the two-hundred and six bones in the human body, it is the **only one that joins to no other bone** at all. It hangs **suspended** in soft tissue, anchored by muscle and ligament alone. It literally ***floats*** in a bio-logical sense. So Martin has not merely put a castle in the part of the map corresponding to a bony region of the neck; he has put ***a floating castle*** at the one place in the entire body **where the bone float**s.

Reeds, Howls, and Other Wind Instruments

Even the family name of the marshy Neck region's ruling House, ***Reed***, suggests the **shape** and **reed-like** quality of the **trachea-larynx** ***windpipe***. Tall grass-like **reeds** are relatively sturdy tube-like plants traditionally used as ***musical instruments***, writing pens or even housing construction materials, and this **tube shape** mirrors the form of the **windpipe and oesophagu**s that traverse the human neck. And in its musical application the vibration of its reed structure gives a typical wind instrument its ***voice*** — while the **trachea** is the body's own **windpipe** and allows us to create sounds-speech.



Additionally the head of House Reed, the mysterious **Howland Reed**, carries a ***howl*** inside his name. A '**howl**' — like the '***calling***' that echoes in the name of nearby **Moat *Cailin*** — is another **primal vocalisation** that can come from nowhere but the **throat**.

There’s second clever pun built in here. Howland Reed’s seat, Greywater Watch, is **a castle that moves**. Diana Wynne Jones’s novel **Howl’s Moving Castle*** centers on a castle that moves, and that belongs to a man named **Howl**. Two travelling castles, two near-identically-named masters. Martin’s work is a generous nesting-doll of homages to the writers musicians and other artists he loves, and this has every appearance of being one of them.

***** More popularly known through Hayao Miyazaki’s animated film version of the story

We'll come back to the significance of the Twins castle, the crannogman's marshy domain, and the stretch of the *Kingsroad* passing through here; for now we're only after the more obvious basic anthropomorphic anatomical correspondences in the landscape.

Onward, Into Westeros' Torso

Have a Heart… or Two

Continuing our descent into the heartlands of Westeros, we arrive at the combined regions of the Riverlands and the Vale. Having left the **Neck**, we have entered the **upper torso** of the greater body — which means we ought to be hearing a ***heartbeat*** somewhere about now.

And what is that? Is it the subtle pulse of ***High Heart***, the ancient haunted hill in the middle of the Riverlands? Or is it ***Heart's Home***, a little higher and further back, hidden within the Mountains of the Moon deep in the Vale .. or is it coming from somewhere else... somewhere even more veiled??

> *"It is only with the **heart** that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."*
>
> - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, ch. 21

It's both – and more. There are two places on this map **named outright** for the **anatomical heart**, and they sit **precisely where** the heart of the great two-continent body should be. There's also ***a third more subtle heart beat*** here but we'll only fine-tuned our ability to hear it after we've venturing much deeper into the mysteries.

1.22.2 / 1.22.3 [House Corbray siege; image of Heart's Home]*The **heart** has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing.*

— Blaise Pascal, Pensées, Public domain, — *Pensées, no. 423* (Lafuma)

- maybe to later section too - ?

The Two Great Vessels

Along with the heart itself, our chests contain **two great vessels** — the ***aorta***, carrying bright **red** oxygenated blood outward, and the ***superior vena cava*** , returning the **blue**, oxygen-depleted blood for renewal. At this same heart-resonant centre of the Riverlands, the great **Trident river system** — from which the region takes its name — spreads out through its three major subdivisions: the ***Red*** Fork, the ***Blue*** Fork, and the Green Fork. ***Like an arterial system***, these carry life-giving water to the head, the neck, and the wider chest of the continent.

I trust you've noticed the repeating pattern and connections here: Two great vessels of the heart, one carrying red blood and one carrying blue, and the rivers that flow out from the heart region of Westeros: the Red Fork and the Blue Fork. ***Red for arterial, blue for venous*** — the same colour convention printed in every anatomical atlas for the last four centuries. There is a third fork,

and a fuller account of all three waits for us later. For now it is enough to notice that the two great vessels are named, in the right place, in the right colours.

1.23 [map of the region with the two Hearts and the Trident sub-rivers labelled] · 1.23.5 [an actual anatomical heart]

The Nice and Friendly Bloody Gate

One of the more disturbingly named sites in this region — up in the mountains near the crossing from the Riverlands into the Vale — is ***the Bloody Gate***, a name suggesting past and potential incidents of mountain standoff and slaughter.

But read that name in the context of everything else in this region, and sitting as it does **just below *Heart's Home***, and it opens onto something less grim. The Bloody Gate is ***a gate that blood passes through***. That is ***not a metaphor*** for a **heart valve**. That is a ***definition*** of one — and an especially fitting description of the **aortic valve**, with the **tricuspid** as a candidate too.

Blood is a very special juice.

— Goethe, *Faust*, *Part I* (“Blut ist ein ganz besondrer Saft”), spoken by Mephistopheles