



## **Why *A Song of Ice and Fire*? Why did you pick such a big concept?**

I felt like doing something big. I've been working in TV for 10 years. Television movies are very restrictive; for a one hour show, you only have 46 minutes. You are always cutting, cutting, cutting. Movies are somewhat bigger, two hours... 100 minutes. I wanted to do something more expansive, something epic without having to worry about how big it was going to be. Where I could have characters without economizing on plot and where I could have a cast of thousands. I wouldn't have to worry about budget. It was almost a reaction to my 10 years in TV.

## **Did you find it at all daunting? Did you realize the scope of what you were about to undertake?**

Initially I knew it was going to be big but I didn't know just how big. When I was still in the very early stages I was projecting three books of about 800 pages – manuscript – that would have been bigger than anything I had done, which would have seemed like a lot. Well, the first book was 1100 pages, the second 1200 pages and the third one 1500 pages in manuscript and I'm not done. And there are three more books. So, it will be six books, not three, and they are all a lot bigger than originally conceived. I've already exceeded my initial expectations.

## **Did you know where were going or did you just start and go from there?**

Well, actually, I started back in 1991 during a lull while I was still working in Hollywood and I was working on another book, a science fiction book I had always wanted to write. So I was working on that book when suddenly the first chapter of *A Games of Thrones*, not the prologue but the first chapter, came to me. The scene of the direwolves in the summer snow. I didn't know where it came from or where it needed to go, but from there the book seemed to write itself. From there I knew what the second step was and the third and so on. Eventually, I stopped to draw some maps and work out some background material.

## **And the family trees?**

Yes.

## **Well you certainly do have a cast of thousands.**

It's getting pretty close.

## **But you are managing to kill them off at a pretty substantial rate in this novel.**



Well, wars do have that effect and I've noticed that in real life too. But not in fantasy, except for the orcs.

**Do you find yourself ever worrying about writing too much? Tad Williams once referred to his epic fantasy as the “bloated epic that wouldn’t die.”**

Sometimes while I'm struggling to finish a book there are moments of fear and doubt. But that is true of thin books too. There are days where you hate everything you've done and days where it's the most brilliant thing you've done. I see it as part of the writing process. So far I'm still very enthused by the series and I will wrap it up in six books, so it won't last forever. It will be a massive story for certain. But with the cast I have and the direction I'm taking, it needs to be massive.

**Where do you draw your inspiration?**

Certainly there are other fantasies. Tolkien had one of the greatest influences when I was a kid. All kinds of imaginative literature. Throughout my career, people and reviewers have made a big deal of me “leaving” a field. “He's left science fiction and is writing horror.” “He's left horror and is writing short stories.” I've never made a big deal of it. When I was young, I read all sorts of stuff. One week it would be Lovecraft, the next Vance. It was all imaginative literature, or as my dad called it “Weird Stuff.” It was all “Weird Stuff.” I never drew any sharp distinctions between science fiction and fantasy or horror. It was all good stuff. Lieber, Vance, Peake, etc. but there is also history and historical fiction. I love historical fiction; but there is a problem. I know a fair bit of history so I know how the historical fiction is going to end! A story on the War of the Roses can only end one way! I like not knowing. The suspense, the tension. I wanted something with the scope of historical fiction without the restrictions of knowing the end.

**The Wall, the Others... where did that element of the story come from? Did that grow up as a plot device or is it more?**

Well some of it will be revealed later so I won't talk about that aspect of it, but certainly the Wall comes from Hadrian's Wall, which I saw while visiting Scotland. I stood on Hadrian's Wall and tried to imagine what it would be like to be a Roman soldier sent here from Italy or Antioch. To stand here, to gaze off into the distance, not knowing what might emerge from the forest. Of course fantasy is the stuff of bright colours and being larger than real life, so my Wall is bigger and considerably longer and more magical. And, of course, what lies beyond it has to be more than just Scots.

**One thing I have noticed is the deliberate constraints. Not so much the good vs. evil but more the contrast between perception and reality. The knights, the concepts of the Wall and “taking the black,” the concept of nobility vs. the ugliness.**



Sure, with a number of the aspects of what you mentioned, to some extent, I was writing in reaction to other fantasies. It's always the question of the good vs. evil. Tolkien started it and did it quite masterfully, but others who followed didn't do as well. I think the battle between good and evil is certainly a valid one, but I think that the battle is much more interesting in real life than in fantasy. I am particularly irritated by fantasy where you can always tell the bad guys because they are ugly and wear black. That's why I deliberately pulled a twist on that with my Night's Watch. Sure they are criminal scum but they are also heroes and they wear black and I wanted to play with the convention a little. As for the knights, sure, I think it's an interesting question too. It not only affects fantasy but our history, too. We've always had a class of "protectors". The church divided us into knights and those the knights were suppose to protect, with the church praying for both. The worker, the prayer and the fighter. Of course, the way it often worked out is the people the peasants often needed the most protection from who were their own protectors. I think there is a powerful story in that. The ideals of knighthood embody some of the finest ideals the human race has ever come up with. The reality was somewhat less than that, and often horribly so. Of course, that is true in the Seven Kingdoms as well.

**That theme is quite obvious with a couple of the key groups: the Mummers, the Brave Companions and the brothers Clegane. Actually Sandor is developing into a very interesting character.**

Well, Sandor is a sword for hire and makes no excuses for it. In many ways he's just as brutal as his brother, but he doesn't subscribe to the hypocrisy of claiming to be a knight.

**One thing I've found particularly interesting is how well you've been able to keep the disjointed plot moving with what seems to be equal interest. One time, I counted six or seven plots. Now that you've killed off a couple of kings, the number of plot lines is somewhat less, but you are still working with a number of story lines. Particularly with the story of Daenerys, a continent away from the central story.**

Well... It will all eventually come together.

**It's virtually impossible to know with any certainty which characters or plots will remain central to the story and which won't.**

I'm glad that it works. I certainly didn't not want to fall victim to the greatest danger of writing from multiple viewpoints. The reader might become more interested in one than the other, to the point of skipping those chapters that don't hold any interest. You want to avoid that and make everything interesting in its own way. I gained a great deal of experience doing this with the *Wild Cards* series. If you are familiar with it, you'll know that every third book was a mosaic book where we had six or seven authors writing from their own characters' point of view. We had a common timeline – "the weather will be sunny," "somebody gets murdered at noon in the park" – and then each author would have their own story lines that we would review to make sure they all matched



together. I was the editor. It wasn't so much being an editor as the chief wild man at the mad house. It was interesting because we had characters crossing paths and working at cross-purposes. So when I started writing this novel it was really a *Wild Cards* collaboration with me writing all the parts.

**Do you find it tough to keep all the plots equal? Do you find yourself favouring one over the other?**

Certainly some characters are easier to write than others. They are all my kids in a sense. Even the villains... Certainly I have my favourites. Tyrion Lannister is my favourite. He is the grayest of the gray. In every conventional sense, he is on the wrong side but you have to agree with some of the things he is doing while loathing others. He is very smart and witty, and that makes him fun to write.

**Tyrion is a very well-developed character. I've noticed, in particular, that for all his shortcomings, he does have some limits that even he won't cross. He's definitely been on the short end of the stick and yet still hasn't violated those personal values.**

At least by his viewpoint; Tyrion also doesn't identify with his family very much. This is a family struggle. Westeros isn't medieval England but, from my readings in history, one of the things that impresses you is that the medieval mindset was very different and I'm trying to convey that. I think that is lost in modern fantasy. While they may be riding horses and living in castles, it is a very modern setting. You see peasants sassing princesses, religion being disregarded and lots of things that happen. I can't say I've done a complete medieval mindset. I haven't. In fact, if I had I think it would be too alien. But I've tried to convey some of it. One of the aspects is that they didn't have our current sense of nationalism. They weren't English; they were citizens of a town or members of their family. They didn't have the sense of country that we do. The question of legitimacy of kingship was very important. The king was seen to be an avatar of god, sent by the god, "by the grace of god" where "his grace" comes from.

**I've certainly noticed that the question of succession is fascinating. It's rare to find an author who is willing to kill off that much of his cast, regardless of the reader's perception of the character, to further the story.**

**But I'm going to jump back to a comment you made about the difference between writing for TV and writing a novel. You've suggested that the scope and breadth available to the novel makes it easier to write, but what is better about the shorter formats?**

Scripts are an easier form because you don't have to worry about the prose. When you are doing a novel you are everything – writer, producer, special effects – but you have to do it all with prose. Choosing the right words is difficult. A screenplay, you have other people to help and they bring their own special talents. Different to be sure, but easier in some ways.



**I would assume that the time constraints add some stress to the screenplay environment?**

Believe me there are time constraints in writing a novel too. I have more time but I have more writing to do.

**Speaking of deadlines, how is the new book coming?**

It's just started, unfortunately. I've been in Germany for a month, I returned for two days. Now I'll be away for two weeks. Unfortunately I'm not one of the "lug a laptop" types. I write best at home with my own machine, in my own office. I'm not a "10 pages a day" kind of writer. Some are, but I'm not.

**Before you started this series, you were chiefly known for short stories and novellas. Is that something you are going to get back to?**

Sure, if I can find the time. Actually, I did write a novella recently. *The Hedge Knight* appeared in *Legends*. I'd like to write some sequels to that. I really like the two characters in that and I'd like to tell some more stories, probably in a series of two or three linked novellas. It's just a question of finding the time to do it. And time is in short supply.

**What other projects would you like to pick up again?**

Well one thing I am about to get back to is *Wild Cards*. We just got a new deal on *Wild Cards*. iBooks, an ebook version, is going to be reprinting the first 8 books in this new format with new illustrations and they are purchasing two new books. Probably one anthology and one novel.

**Here is one question that may be unfair but I'll ask it anyway. For those writers who don't know your work very well, which of your contemporaries do you think match your style closest.**

I don't know anybody who writes quite like me. There are other writers that readers would like if they like my work. Jack Vance... I used to strive to write like Jack but I don't think I succeeded. Tad William's fantasy series, that was very influential. It was good work. When I read his books, it was one of the things that got me to think of doing one of my own.



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**Well, I think you've answered all the questions I had. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today.**