

Fire and ice

The final season of 'Game of Thrones' is finally here

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TV Media

The biggest show on television will soon come to an end, and fans everywhere are hunkering down for six weeks of "Game of Thrones" mania. It's been more than a year and a half since a new episode of this fantasy series aired, which means there's been ample time for fans to come up with all sorts of theories about how the show will end. Thankfully, the wait is over, and we can trade our tinfoil hat theories for the real deal when the eighth and final season of "Game of Thrones" kicks off Sunday, April 14, on HBO.

There has been rampant speculation about what this season will entail, but there are few things we know for sure. We do know that Season 8 is comprised of six installments, and that each one is filled to the brim with Westerosi action — it may be a short season, but some of the new episodes are almost an hour and a half long.

We also know that the final season features the greatest, most consequential battles and plot twists of the entire series. Now that Jon Snow (Kit Harington, "Gunpowder") and Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke, "Solo: A Star Wars Story," 2018) are united (in more ways than one), they will move against the terrifying army of the dead, and most fans speculate that there will be a great battle at Winterfell near the beginning of the season.

This battle was first hinted at back in Season 3, when Stannis Baratheon (Stephen Dillane, "John Adams") looked into the flames and saw "a great battle in the snow," and again in Season 6, when Melissandre (Carice van Houten, "Valkyrie," 2008), confused by Jon's apparent demise, said she "saw him in the flames fighting at Winterfell." The theory seems to have been

confirmed in HBO's Season 8 trailer, which shows Arya Stark (Maisie Williams, "Doctor Who") running for her life through the crypts of Winterfell.

Some of these names may be unfamiliar to you if you've never seen "Game of Thrones," but even non-watchers are likely still familiar with the show's premise: in Westeros, a fictional world that resembles our Middle Ages, various families and factions ruthlessly fight one another for power. Meanwhile, a sinister threat looms in the north as an army of the undead threatens to wipe out all of humanity. Based on the A Song of Ice and Fire novels by George R. R. Martin, the show is a marvel of cinematic achievement, and the character and world development are second to none.

At this point in the series, all but the major plot lines have been left by the wayside. We have Jon and Daenerys' combined forces dedicated to fighting the Night King and his army while Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey, "300," 2006) plots with other nefarious characters to defeat the power couple, seemingly content to ignore the threat from the north.

While the storylines may have slimmed down, there are a number of long-awaited events that should finally happen this season. Fans are looking forward to seeing many of their favorite characters reunite, especially Jon and Arya, who have not shared the screen since the first episode of Season 1. It says a lot about the quality of the series that their relationship remains one of the show's most endearing. Jon is also expected to finally learn of his true parentage, a secret that was revealed to viewers back in Season 6, and Jaime Lannister (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, "Gods of Egypt," 2016) has at long last deserted his psychotic twin sister and is on track to arrive at Winterfell very soon.



Maisie Williams as seen in "Game of Thrones"

The reunions will be satisfying, but the most anticipated elements of this final season are the battle scenes. The Night King, who leads the army of the dead, now has his very own dragon, which most fans assume means we'll get to see a dragon vs. dragon fight. Since we have yet to learn exactly what the White Walkers want, the inevitable clash between the living and the dead remains

shrouded in mystery — maybe they just want to kill all living things and take over the world, but maybe there's more to it. We know that the battle will be epic, though, and we'll all be holding our breath hoping our favorite characters make it through. This is "Game of Thrones," after all. It's entirely possible that everyone will die.

That's an outcome that would suit Cersei just fine, as the mad

queen has already adopted an attitude of "if I can't rule the realm, no one can." Judging from the official preview, the mercenaries of the Golden Company are on their way across the Narrow Sea to join Cersei and fight for her cause — for a hefty fee, of course. Will they continue to fight for her when they see what she's up against? Will she make the first move on her foes to the north? Will the White

Walkers make it as far as King's Landing? And for the love of Pete, is Cersei really pregnant?

These questions and more will be answered this season as we work our way towards the ultimate answer: when all is said and done, who will sit on the Iron Throne? Don't miss the premiere of the eighth and final season of "Game of Thrones" when it airs Sunday, April 14, on HBO.