

G.R.R. Martin. Proper Grown Up Fantasy

George R.R. Martin is the undisputed king of fantasy writers, and with the adaptation of his epic *A Song of Ice and Fire* for TV by HBO his audience is set to grow still further. So just what is his secret?

His multi-volume epic is set in an invented, and wonderfully realised world called Westeros full of the most appallingly amoral characters ever seen outside an episode of *The Borgias*. The sheer scope of his invention is staggering, and keeping track of all of the characters can pose problems for the inattentive reader.

Martin is a superb storyteller, who manages to keep the reader involved over hundreds of pages, but he is also a writer of delicacy and skill when it comes to probing the inner lives of his characters. He also makes use of an unusual literary device, whereby successive chapters are told from the point of view of different characters. The effect of this is that the reader is not restricted to empathising with only one or two characters, which adds to the sensation of being caught up in something monumental.

The fantasy genre is often criticised for failing to engage with real, grown-up human themes, particularly sex. That could certainly not be said of Martin's epic – far from it. And although there is a magical, or fantastical element, this is introduced so carefully that it seems wholly acceptable. Alongside magic, and in some ways more important, is the theme of religion – how new religious beliefs are born, spread and eventually decay, although there seems little evidence that the gods of any of the characters pay much attention to their prayers.

Let me conclude with a word of warning. These are enormous books, six volumes have been published to date with two more to come and they represent a huge investment in time and energy. But if you're looking for a new writer to engage you over the next few years, take the plunge into the world of George R.R. Martin and I don't think you'll be disappointed.