

GAME OVER!

Winter isn't coming, it's here.

A fairy tale foretells the end of the American Dream.

By K.M. Churchill

Ask anyone who watches *Game of Thrones* what kind of show it is and you'll encounter a problem. Your artistic and intellectual friends will expound on the literary quality of the narrative and shy away from answering, but ask your resident geek (I know you have one) and they'll call it "fantasy." In fact, *Game of Thrones* belongs to the genre more commonly known as fairy tales and this is where our troubles begin.

On April 6, 2014, Season 4 of *Game of Thrones* premiered to [6.6 million Americans](#). Online demand for the first episode was so great that HBO's streaming service crashed. By the end of the day, more than 8 million Americans had watched it.

By mid-April, *Game of Thrones* had been featured in: *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *Vogue* ("you need nails that say politics, death, sex, and

WATCHING THE THRONE

"One of the perks of being the most powerful man in the world: yes, you get to see the episodes early."

betrayal”); and co-creators, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, had confessed in a [Vanity Fair interview](#) that rumors regarding President Obama were true: “One perk of being the most powerful man in the world: yes, you get to see episodes early.”

The problem is that history shows a strange correlation between the popularity of fairy tales and the decline of western empires. It was not so long ago that immigrants thought America’s streets were “paved with gold.” But today, the Lannisters aren’t the only ones who are broke. According to the US government, the [average American family](#) now carries a debt nearly 3 times its annual income and has less than \$4,000 in the bank.

Enter *Game of Thrones* in 2011. The year a [New York Times editorial](#) began, “when people say that the recovery does not feel like a recovery, they are describing reality.”

TEMPLE OF DOOM

“The Iron Bank is a temple. We all live in its shadow, and almost none of us know it.”

People often think of fairy tales as mere children’s stories but these stories have a darker, more defiant history according to Professor Cristina Bacchilega, of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. “Folk and fairy tales (like *The Hunger Games* today) are about economics and problems such as hunger, poverty, and oppression,” she writes in an e-mail interview.

On the other hand, the [Gallup index](#), recently published findings showing that, “U.S. economic confidence rose in 2013.” A few weeks later, economist Bill Conerly agreed, predicting in a [Forbes article](#) that “the economy will generate better growth than we saw last year.”

FOLLOW THE
BREADCRUMBS

“There was a hint
of it here...a hint of
it there.”

So, if the outlook is so bright, and *Game of Thrones* is so awesome, then why all the doom and gloom? Because one of the best ways to gauge a nation’s strength is to measure its debt-to-income ratio and the only western countries with a [higher debt-to-income ratio](#) than America today are Greece and Italy. Or, as Tywin Lannister puts it, “the Iron Bank is, a temple. We all live in its shadow, and almost none of us know it.”

We can ignore the parallels between “the rise of the French fairy tale and the decline of France,” noted by Professor Jack Zipes in his book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. And we can disregard the well documented popularity of [fairy stories in Great Britain](#) not long before “the empire on which the sun never sets” went dark. But we do so at our peril.

Because, when the king is in his counting house watching *Game of Thrones*, I find myself pondering something George R. R. Martin—author of the *Song of Fire and Ice* series of novels on which the show is based—said in a recent [Vanity Fair interview](#), ““but there was foreshadowing. There was a hint of it here; there was a hint of it there. I should have seen it coming.””

SOURCES

Amadeo, Kimberly. "National Debt by Year: Compared to GDP, Recessions and Other Major Events." *About.com*. Accessed April 15, 2014.

<http://useconomy.about.com/od/usdebtanddeficit/a/National-Debt-by-Year.htm>.

Conerly, Bill. "Economic Forecast 2014-2015: Looking Better With Help From Oil And Gas." *Forbes*. January 22, 2014.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/billconerly/2014/01/22/economic-forecast-2014-2015-looking-better-with-help-from-oil-and-gas/>.

Cristina Bacchilega, e-mail message to author, April 20, 2014.

Hibberd, James. "'Game of Thrones' gets record ratings: Biggest audience since 'Sopranos' finale." *Entertainment Weekly*. April 7, 2014.

<http://insidetv.ew.com/2014/04/07/game-of-thrones-premiere-ratings-4/>.

"How bad are US debt levels?." *BBC.com*. Last modified October 16, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-24541140>

Maria Tatar, e-mail message to the author, April 26, 2014.

Martin, Philip. "Fairy-Tale Fiction in Fantasy Literature." *Fantasy Literature*. November 27, 2012 <http://www.fantasylit.com/fairy-tale-fiction-in-fantasy-literature/>.

Moore, Brendan. "U.S. Economic Indicators Improve in 2013: Gallup's economic confidence, job creation, and consumer spending measures rise." *Gallup*. January 9, 2014.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/166784/economic-indicators-improve-2013.aspx>.

"The Economy in 2011." *New York Times.com*. Last modified January 1, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/opinion/02sun1.html>.

White, Donald W. *The American Century, The Rise and Decline of the United States as a World Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/w/white-century.html>.

Windolf, Jim. "The Gathering Storm." *Vanity Fair*, Last modified April 2014.

<http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/04/game-of-thrones-season-4>.

Zipes, Jack. "The Rise of the French Fairytale and the Decline of France." *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and their Traditions*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=5IEsXuq3gPwC&pg=PT313&lpg=PT313&dq=Jack+Zipes,+%E2%80%9Cthe+rise+of+the+French+fairy+tale+and+the+decline+of+France%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=gXKe0Bb4w-&sig=qYx-zFrs2OieKtr4Z7Uvti3pDzM&hl=en&sa=X&ei=LNJWU6LSNrbNsQTR3oHYDg&ved=0CEEQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=Jack%20Zipes%2C%20%E2%80%9Cthe%20rise%20of%20the%20French%20fairy%20tale%20and%20the%20decline%20of%20France%E2%80%9D&f=false>