

Ice, Fire, Four Options, and Jon Snow the Reconciler

> There are two, Onion Knight. Not seven, not one, not a hundred or a thousand. *Two!* ... On one side is R'hllor, the Lord of Light, the Heart of Fire, the God of Flame and Shadow. Against him stands the Great Other whose name may not be spoken, the Lord of Darkness, the Soul of Ice, the God of Night and Terror. ... (ASoS, Davos 25).

In her speech, Melisandre gives Davos two choices: Fire or Ice. A basic finite math class, however, will tell us that when presented with two choices we have **four** options: Fire, Ice, both, and neither. In the following I argue that apparently GRRM fully understands this “four, not two” possibilities. In fact, the underlying idea of A Song of Ice and Fire is somebody who chooses both, Ice *and* Fire. That champion of reconciliation is Jon Snow.

Before discussing the four options further, one can argue that there is always a fifth option of providing no definitive choice, refusing to commit, saying: “I refuse to choose” or “I don’t know”. Let’s call it the agnostic option. In fact, Davos immediately chooses that option:

> “My heart,” Davos said slowly, “is full of doubts.”

How many sides are in ASoIaF? There is clearly Fire. Ice. Every side (presumably) has its champion. Suppose the sides are:

- Fire
- Ice
- Both
- Neither
- (Agnostic?)

Who are their champions?

Proposition: Jon Snow is the champion of “Both”, the one who reconciles Ice with Fire. Here is how we can see it from the text followed by *why* he might choose this option:

He is arguably the “main” character of ASoIaF and thus represents both Ice AND Fire.

He is both Targaryen (Fire) and Stark (Ice).

Both deities have plans for Jon Snow. Both are trying to “impress” him. The famous scene from Hardhome is interpreted by many as the Night’s King’s invitation to Jon Snow to partake in the power of Ice. On the other hand, R’hllor resurrects him to presumably win him over.

Could somebody possibly ask GRRM the following, very innocuous, question: What color is garnet? How do you understand “garnet”? What does word “garnet” imply to you? A lot might depend on his answer. One might follow the origin of the word meaning “dark red”, specifically a pomegranate. See Wikipedia. Before discussing another possibility, let us see how it might be relevant for ASoIaF. Before giving Longclaw to Jon Snow, Jeor Mormont replaces “the hilt with one capped by a snarling wolf’s head of pale stone with chips of garnet for the eyes” (Westeros.org).

If “garnet” means primarily “red” for GRRM then Longclaw becomes more likely to become the “red sword of heroes” Melisandre promises in Sam 78. I suspect, and hope, that GRRM instead follows what Wikipedia is actually saying about colors of garnet: virtually all colors. All flavors of humanity, encompassing all – that is more like Jon Snow.

A good theory is recognized by its ability to make predictions. I had formulated these ideas and **after** that, I found these two moments in ASoS, Sam 78, that clinched it for me:

> Dragonglass... **Frozen fire**, in the tongue of old Valyria...

(GRRM’s cursive.) This is how Melisandre explains obsidian to Sam. The role Valyrian steel/obsidian plays in the book is apparently not so much being about fire and dragons, but being **frozen fire**.

“Small wonder it is anathema to these cold children of the Other.” This is another great example of Melisandre saying factually correct things, but failing to comprehend what they mean. How would frozen fire be automatically bad for creatures of frost? Also notice how on the show the White Walkers die when in contact with Valerian steel/obsidian: they shatter. Melisandre is basically saying: of course it is bad for them – it is fire. But if it were just fire, it would **melt** the ice. They, however, don’t melt – they shatter. They freeze even deeper? Or, possibly, obsidian makes them normal ice, just ice, and then they shatter like normal ice would.

And the second quote, in the **same** chapter:

> “On Dragonstone, where I had my seat, there is much of this obsidian to be seen in the old tunnels beneath the mountain,” the king told Sam. “Chunks of it, boulders, ledges. The great part of it was black, as I recall, but there was some green as well, some red, even purple. I have sent word to Ser Rolland my castellan to begin mining it. I will not hold Dragonstone for very much longer, I fear, but perhaps the Lord of Light shall grant us enough frozen fire to arm ourselves against these creatures, before the castle falls.”

Here is why it is such a revealing moment, in my opinion. What is the purpose of suddenly discussing **color** of obsidian? An explanation I see: this is where GRRM

reminds us that garnet is all colors. Garnet -> Jon Snow -> reconciling things. And guess where Jon Snow is heading in Season 7?

Jon Snow as a reconciler

A lot has been written about Jon's obvious similarities with Jesus:

- The look
- Betrayal
- Death
- Resurrection (on the second night)
- Disputed parentage

(Having said it would be nice to have a reference or two for that – I don't know a good post documenting these similarities.)

Similar to garnet – is it “red” or is it “all colors” – we now have another interesting question: What is the main accomplishment of Jesus? On the one hand, he is often called a victor over death, a destroyer of hell. This option would mean Jon choosing fire and destroying the ice. He leads the humanity into the battle against ice and death and wins it. On the other hand, Jesus is often called a reconciler. “Earth and Heaven reconcile” as in hymns. From numerous quotes, let us present just two: “For God was pleased to have *all* his fullness dwell in him, and through him to *reconcile* to himself *all* things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making *peace* through his blood, shed on the cross.” And: “[Jesus] made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people”, Ephesians 2:15.

That understanding – religious or not – of Jesus' accomplishment would lead to Jon refusing to choose Fire over Ice and reconciling the two.

Jon as a reconciler:

- He is both Targaryen and Stark
- His main accomplishment so far: Wildings and the southerners
- Life and death in him
- Warging ability – debatable
- Garnet as “all colors”

The role of Jon as a reconciler is undisputable. But here we have an interesting question. Many of us would believe that he reconciles humanity to fight against a common foe – the Ice, the darkness, the army of undead. But what if his role as a reconciler is bigger than that? What if his true call is to reconcile Fire with Ice? The living with the dead?

This is obviously a topic for a much longer discussion. The only thing I can do is point out why Jon would hesitate to favor one side (Fire, Life) over another (Ice, Death). What's wrong with defending just the living and destroying the undead completely? Answer: there is a certain *justice* in death. And John did a lot of just things he didn't want to do. At this stage in the books we, the readers, would agree that certain undead deserve justice. If Ed Stark leads the army of undead to King's

Landing would we, the readers, really defend the city? And its queen? The dead demand their due.

Why, plot-wise, would Jon Snow choose both: Ice and Fire? If Ice means death, according to Melisandre, and Fire means life, why not make the obvious choice? Why not choose Life? This is where the writing becomes both challenging and obvious. We are already seeing “why” in the books – GRRM’s challenge is to make this, not obvious, choice more convincing.

Why not just Fire? Specifically: why Jon might refuse “Fire alone” option?

- Melisandre and things she does in the name of Fire.
- Dragons – something Jon hasn’t seen yet but will.
- Specifically, dragons as weapons of mass destruction. Beautiful and awe-inspiring, certainly, but weapons nonetheless.
- If not checked, Fire will consume everything. That obvious observation needs to be made personal, less abstract and the following item helps Jon remember that.
- Fire killed his grandfather and uncle.

That is the easy part. A challenging one is accepting Melisandre’s thesis: Fire = Life.

Why not Life?

- Remember Jon and Ygritte in the cave? Then, we die, but first we live. Refusing death completely would steal something valuable from life.
- Some developments clearly indicate GRRM going in this direction. Beric Dondarion, Lady Stoneheart, and possibly others later serve to prove: Life might be bad for you, especially if it is life eternal.
- Jon, on the show, is already refusing “just life”: If I die, don’t bring me back.
- The dead have justice on their side.

Plot-wise these rather abstract points are not enough to justify Jon defending both “life and death”, not “just life” or “just death”. I suspect his choice will be understood better if somebody he truly cares about champions Ice. Possibly, Eddard Stark or Bran. Who champions “Fire”? Who champions “Ice”? Who is the champion of “Neither”? That is a matter for another post.

TLDR: Fire. Ice. These two choices in fact give us **four** possibilities: fire, ice, both, or neither. In the post I argue that Jon champions ***both***.

Questions posed: Jon Snow is a reconciler. Does he reconcile the kingdoms and leaders to fight against the ice and darkness? Or is there a “total reconciliation”: Jon finds a compromise between Ice and Fire with unified humanity finding a safe place between the two? I present arguments in favor of the total reconciliation.