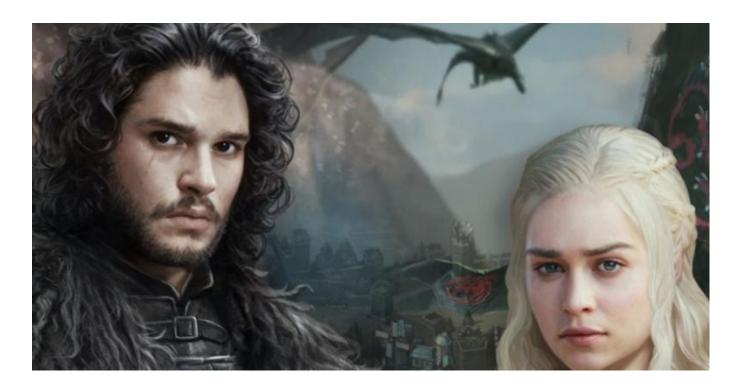What I'll miss most about Game of Thrones

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Game of Thrones came to an end two weeks ago, and while the ending might have been divisive, I think we can all agree we will miss the show to one degree or another. What exactly we'll miss will differ from person to person, but the aspect I think I'll miss the most was the community feeling.

Game of Thrones was a show best enjoyed in groups, be they literal or courtesy of the internet, and I believe it's that aspect of *Thrones* that will make it hard for a similar show to come along any time soon.

Game of Thrones succeeded for many reasons, from its stellar acting to its intricate plot to its spectacular special effects to Ramin Djawadi's stunning score. It was an excellent show, but there have been plenty of excellent shows over the years that didn't foster communities of fans like this one did.

Smarter people than me have tried to explain exactly why *Thrones* became so popular, so I won't try (at least not for long), but to me, there are two big things that helped the show become not just event viewing but a proper phenomenon with a community to match.

First is the intricate plot. *Game of Thrones* followed dozens of characters across multiple continents, blending magical prophecies with real world politics. Everyone had their favorite characters, whether they be secondary players like Jorah Mormont or Olenna Tyrell to major ones like Jon Snow or Daenerys Targaryen. Regardless, people were interested in more than just the main characters. That's different from a show like *Breaking Bad*, where our sympathies are always with Walt and Jesse, or *The Sopranos*, where it's all about Tony and his children. Yes, those series had other characters, but at the end of the day they were there to support the faces of the show. For a long time on *Thrones*, it was hard to determine just who the frontmen really were.

But as sprawling as the show could be, many of the characters still had the same goal: to come out on top, a desire represented most powerfully by the Iron Throne. That helped everything feel coherent even when we were following upwards of a dozen different plot threads. Who would come into power, and for how long? That was the central question that consumed us. We loved to spend time wondering how things would play out for Character A, and what that would mean for Character B. When a show like *Breaking Bad* (which I loved) was coming to a close, speculation was pretty simple: would Walt get away with it, die, or go to jail? There weren't any options involving his inbred heritage invoking madness, or whether an ancient prophecy would be fulfilled.

That kind of speculation was what drove the community and led to gatherings like the premiere feasts my family hosted each season, elaborate parties that featured games, food straight out of the series, and more money spent on authentic props than I'd care to reveal. Each season we had over 30 or 40 people, including some who flew across country, to watch. And when the episode was over, we'd all sit for hours and speculate on where our favorite characters were going. Enough red wine was drunk during these discussions to make even Tyrion blush, and it was honestly as much fun as the show itself, especially during season 8.

But whether you had replicas of Ice or Needle at your watch parties matters not; the best part was the sense of community. And if I can sound like an old man for a minute, at a time when many of us use devices to communicate across distances short and long, the show was always a great excuse to see people. From waking up at 3:00 a.m. the day of to begin smoking a hog leg, or running my AC unit into the ground trying to cool a house packed to gills during the Texas summer, it was always worth it to enjoy the company of friends and family around a show we all loved.

And the discussion didn't stop there. From debating the show online to writing about it here, there were always plenty of places to get my *Game of Thrones* as we waited for new episodes, and then for new seasons. There was a 24/7 community that kept our love of the show simmering for the length of its run.

Sadly, it might be a long while before we see a similar show rise up to take *Thrones* place as a great uniter. Any show hoping to replicate the community aspect of *Thrones* would first have to boast a similarly deep mythology and sprawling story. Plenty of people enjoyed *The Big Bang Theory,* but was there ever much debate what was going to happen episode to episode?

The way we watch television is also changing, as the rise of streaming services gives viewers a record number of ways to spend their time, and it's only going to get more competitive as Disney and who knows who else shoulders their way into the market.

On the one hand, it's great to have so many options, shows that might not have been made in the past are getting their shot, and there will almost always be something good to watch.

But that also presents a problem. There will be a show every individual person, but will there be one for *everybody*? You might find three or four of your friends that like the show you're watching, but will 30 or 40 people care enough to pack your house to watch the next episode? The variety makes that less likely, as does the "problem" of binging. Don't get me wrong, I love to blow through a whole season of TV in a matter of days, but it's harder to get people to do that with me.

We might have more shows coming on the air, but if the majority of them make their full seasons available on Day 1, it's harder to build a community and keep it guessing and talking week to week. It's that time between episodes that forces us to speculate and wonder and worry about our favorite characters.

None of these issues are insurmountable. HBO isn't going anywhere and even has a *Game of Thrones* prequel series in production, but with all of the factors listed above, it might be some time before we gather around our televisions in large groups for the same purpose. *Game of Thrones* was always a rare show, and it will take a similarly rare show to replicate the sense of community that was, for me and I think many others, the best part of the series.