LITERATURE & ENTERTAINMENT

a song of ice and fire calendar

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Quick Takeaways for Fans and Scholars

- Year Zero: The calendar centers on Aegon the Conqueror's coronation at Oldtown (1 AC).
- Dating Notation: Events are recorded as BC (Before the Conquest) or AC (After the Conquest).
- Seasonal Mechanics: Years consist of 12 lunar months, yet seasons are erratic, lasting years or even decades due to magical influences.
- The Maesters' Role: The Citadel in Oldtown is the primary authority for timekeeping and seasonal announcements via white ravens.
- Name Days: Westerosi characters celebrate "Name Days" instead of birthdays, marking the completion of another solar year.

Introduction: The Complexity of Time in George R.R. Martin's World

In the vast, intricate tapestry of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*(ASOIAF), time is as much a character as the lords and ladies who vie for the Iron Throne. For the casual reader, the passage of time might seem straightforward, but for the dedicated lore-hunter, the ASOIAF calendar is a labyrinth of historical revisionism, lunar cycles, and the unpredictable whims of magic. To truly understand the political shifts of Westeros, the motivations of its players, and the impending doom of the Long Night, one must first master the mechanics of the Westerosi calendar.

Unlike our Gregorian calendar, which is tied strictly to the earth"s orbit around the sun and the resulting four seasons, the calendar of the Seven Kingdoms is a social and administrative construct designed to bring order to a world where a single winter can last a generation. This masterclass article will dissect the foundations of Westerosi timekeeping, the major eras of history, and the scientific (and supernatural) theories behind the world"s irregular seasons.

I. Foundational Concepts: BC and AC

The standard system of dating in the Seven Kingdoms is the **Aegon's Conquest**era. This system was established by the Maesters of the Citadel to provide a unified timeline for the newly unified realm. It is divided into two primary segments:

1. BC (Before the Conquest)

Anything that occurred before Aegon I Targaryen was crowned by the High Septon in Oldtown is labeled BC. Because the Targaryen conquest took several years, the "Year Zero" is specifically pegged to the coronation, not the initial landing at the mouth of the Blackwater Rush (though that is often a point of confusion for students of history). In historical texts, the years count backward; for example, the Doom of Valyria occurred roughly 100 BC.

2. AC (After the Conquest)

The era beginning with Aegon's coronation is labeled AC. This is the era in which the majority of the novels and the *Game of Thrones* television series take place. For reference, the events of *A Game of Thrones*begin in 298 AC, nearly three centuries after the dragons first forged the Iron Throne.

Pro-Tip: When researching historical dates in the ASOIAF wiki or books, pay close attention to the distinction between "Aegon"s Landing" and "Aegon"s Coronation." There is a two-year gap that often leads to minor discrepancies in different historical accounts.

II. How a Year is Measured: The Solar and Lunar Cycle

One of the most frequent questions asked by fans is: *"How do they know a year has passed if the seasons don"t change?"*

In Westeros, a year is determined by the stars and the moon, not the weather. The Maesters at the Citadel have spent thousands of years tracking the movements of celestial bodies. They have identified that the sun returns to the same position in the sky every 12 lunar cycles. Therefore, a Westerosi year is functionally identical to a real-world year—roughly 365 days.

The Twelve Moons

The Westerosi divide their year into 12 lunar turns. While the books rarely name specific months (unlike our January or February), the characters frequently refer to "the turn of the moon." This regular progression allows farmers to plan harvests and lords to collect taxes, even if they are currently in the middle of a five-year-long summer.

The Concept of the Name Day

Because there are no fixed seasonal holidays (like a universal Spring Equinox celebration) that apply every year, the most significant personal milestone in Westeros is the **Name Day**. This is the anniversary of a person"s birth. Tracking name days is the primary way the common folk and nobility alike keep track of their age and the passage of time.

III. The Maesters: The Keepers of the Clock

The Citadel of Oldtown serves as the scientific and historical heart of the Seven Kingdoms. Without the Order of Maesters, the ASOIAF calendar would likely have collapsed into localized, inconsistent systems. The Maesters are responsible for:

- Observations: Using bronze tubes and lenses to track the stars and the height of the sun.
- Record Keeping: Maintaining the vast libraries that house the genealogies and chronologies of every Great House.
- The White Ravens: When the Maesters determine that the solar position and temperature trends indicate a true change in season, they dispatch white ravens from the Citadel to every major castle in the realm.

The False Spring of 281 AC

The difficulty of seasonal prediction is best illustrated by the "Year of the False Spring." In 281 AC, the weather turned warm, and the people of Westeros believed a long winter had finally ended. The Maesters, however, were cautious. Their caution was vindicated when, after a few months of thaw, the cold returned with a vengeance. This year is pivotal in the lore as it was the year of the Tourney at Harrenhal, the event that effectively sparked Robert’s Rebellion.

IV. Comparative Chronology: Westeros vs. Earth

To help readers grasp the scale of time in Martin"s world, the following table compares key aspects of the ASOIAF calendar with our own Gregorian system.

Feature	Westerosi Calendar (Citadel System)	Gregorian Calendar (Earth)
Standard Unit	Solar Year (12 Moon Turns)	Solar Year (12 Months)
Epoch/Year Zero	Coronation of Aegon I (1 AC)	Birth of Christ (1 AD)
Season Length	Variable (Months to Decades)	Fixed (3 Months)
Season Cause	Magical/Supernatural Axial Tilt	Fixed Planetary Axial Tilt
Primary Timekeepers	Maesters of the Citadel	Astronomers / Atomic Clocks
Dating Notation	BC (Before Conquest) / AC (After Conquest)	BCE (Before Common Era) / CE (Common Era)

V. Major Eras in the ASOIAF Timeline

To understand the calendar, one must understand the blocks of time that define the history of the world. The Maesters divide history into several distinct ages.

1. The Dawn Age (c. 12,000 BC)

The earliest known era, when the Children of the Forest inhabited the continent. There was no formal calendar during this time; history is preserved through song and the carvings on Weirwood trees. The First Men arrived across the Arm of Dorne around 12,000 years ago, leading to centuries of war.

2. The Age of Heroes (c. 10,000 BC to 6,000 BC)

This era began with the signing of the Pact between the First Men and the Children. It is the era of legendary figures like Brandon the Builder and Lann the Clever. The **Long Night** occurred during this period, roughly 8,000 years ago. It is important to note that many modern Maesters question these dates, suggesting the Age of Heroes may have been much more recent.

3. The Andal Invasion (c. 6,000 BC to 2,000 BC)

The Andals brought the Faith of the Seven and the first written records to Westeros. Their arrival marks the transition from pre-history to recorded history. Much of the chronological confusion in the ASOIAF calendar stems from the discrepancies between Andal records and First Men oral traditions.

4. The Valyrian Era (c. 5,000 BC to 100 BC)

While Westeros was fragmented into seven kingdoms, the Valyrian Freehold dominated Essos. Their calendar was likely based on the volcanic cycles of the Fourteen Flames. The era ended abruptly with the Doom of Valyria in 100 BC.

5. The Targaryen Dynasty (1 AC to 283 AC)

This is the most precisely documented era in the calendar. It covers the reign of the Dragonlords, from Aegon the Conqueror to the Mad King Aerys II. Key events include the Dance of the Dragons (129–131 AC) and the Blackfyre Rebellions.

VI. The Seasonal Paradox: Why is the Calendar So Weird?

The defining characteristic of the ASOIAF calendar is the disconnect between the year and the season. George R.R. Martin has stated in numerous interviews that the cause of the long, unpredictable seasons is "magical" in nature, not scientific. However, that hasn"t stopped fans from developing complex theories.

The Science vs. The Magic

Some fans suggest that Westeros exists in a binary star system or that the planet has a wobbly axial tilt. However, the internal logic of the books points toward the Others (White Walkers) and the presence of dragons as the primary drivers of the "Long Summer" and the "Long Night." When magic is strong in the world, the seasons become more extreme.

The Impact on Life

Because the calendar doesn"t predict the weather, the culture of Westeros is obsessed with preparation. The Stark words, "Winter is Coming," are more than a warning; they are a socio-economic reality. A "summer child" is someone who has never experienced a true winter, which can last five or ten years, leading to mass starvation and societal collapse.

VII. Common Pitfalls in ASOIAF Chronology

Even the most diligent readers can get lost in the dates. Here are common areas of confusion:

1. The Discrepancy of the Long Night: Some sources say the Long Night was 8,000 years ago, others say 5,000. This is an intentional narrative choice by Martin to show how history degrades over time.
2. Character Ages: In A Game of Thrones, the characters are significantly younger than their TV counterparts. Daenerys is 13, Jon Snow is 14, and Bran is 7. Keeping track of their name days is vital for understanding their development.
3. Travel Time: Martin is notoriously vague about the time it takes to travel from Winterfell to King’s Landing. While the calendar moves forward, the "pacing" of travel often stretches or compresses to fit the plot.

VIII. Advanced Strategies for Tracking the Timeline

If you are writing fan fiction, analyzing the text, or playing the *A Song of Ice and Fire*Roleplaying Game, follow these steps to maintain chronological accuracy:

Step 1: Anchor Your Event

Decide how many years after Aegon"s Conquest your story takes place. For the main book series, start at 298 AC. For *House of the Dragon*, the timeline centers around 101 AC (Great Council) to 131 AC.

Step 2: Account for the Season

Check the current seasonal state. At the start of the books, it is the end of a ten-year-long summer. By *A Dance with Dragons*, winter has officially been announced by the white ravens.

Step 3: Verify the Ruler

The calendar is often contextualized by the reign of kings. "In the fourth year of King Robert’s reign" is a common way characters identify time. Use a list of Targaryen kings to cross-reference dates.

Frequently Asked Questions

Conclusion: Why the Calendar Matters

The A Song of Ice and Fire calendar is more than just a list of dates; it is a framework for understanding the fragility of civilization in a world of monsters and magic. By separating the solar year from the seasonal cycle, Martin emphasizes the theme of uncertainty. Just as the characters cannot predict when the winter will end, the reader is kept in suspense about the future of the realm.

Whether you are a casual fan of the show or a hardcore reader of the *Fire & Blood*histories, understanding the AC/BC system and the role of the Citadel will deepen your appreciation for the world-building that makes this series a masterpiece of modern fantasy. Remember: in Westeros, time is a weapon, and those who track it best—the Maesters—are often the ones who hold the most power.

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