Westeros deserves a much better hero than Jon Snow

At this point, we're halfway through the final season of *Game of Thrones*, and two things have become excessively clear. One, Jon Snow is the protagonist of this show now. Two, Jon Snow sucks.

Where has Jon Snow ever actually succeeded on *Game of Thrones*?

Spoilers below for all of *Game of Thrones,* including season 8.

Both as a leader and as a protagonist, as one of the series's primary load-bearing characters, Jon is one of the most ineffectual people on the entire show. He fails almost perpetually, blundering his way from one situation to the next until someone — usually a more competent woman, including but not limited to Ygritte, Melisandre, Sansa, Arya, and Daenerys — bails him out of his latest problem. Then he's rewarded, and the cycle repeats again.

Being good in Westeros is suicidal — except for Jon Snow
The best, and really only, thing Jon Snow has going for him is that he's a nice and honorable guy. In Westeros, *this is not a good thing*, as the series has gone to great pains to remind us by killing off every other member of the Stark clan who was similarly nice and honorable. And yet Jon is not only lauded by people like Davos Seaworth for this otherwise suicidal trait, but the show portrays it as a positive thing, as if somehow, Jon's earnestness will succeed where Ned Stark's similar honor got his head chopped off.

To truly understand the history of failure that is Jon Snow, let's start at the beginning. Jon starts the show by deciding

to join the Night's Watch and go to the Wall, mostly because he's bummed that he can't join his family at dinner because he's a bastard. He wants the life of freedom and equality of being a sworn brother of the Watch. But at the Wall, he makes enemies almost immediately by showing off his superior fighting skills (he has a marked advantage in this arena, having grown up as the son of the Lord of Winterfell) to the Master at Arms, Ser Alliser Thorne. (This will come back later.) Despite his total lack of social graces toward his new companions, he's fast-tracked for leadership by Jeor Mormont, who was the current Lord Commander.

When news of Ned Stark's death reaches the North, Jon immediately tries to break his oaths and betray his sworn brothers, until Lord commander Mormont convinces him that it's more important to stick around and fight the White Walkers. That will become Jon's entire mission going forward, but he has to be talked into it, and he doesn't much succeed at it.

Jon then betrays the Night's Watch to join the wildlings (as a terrible spy, but most of the Watch doesn't know that). While this obvious ploy would have gotten most *Game of Thrones* characters killed, Jon gets the backing of a wildling named Ygritte, and he is allowed to stay, with the price of Ygritte constantly reminding him that he knows nothing. (Just because it's true doesn't make it kind to say.)

So he betrays his super important Night's Watch celibacy oaths to have sex with Ygritte. But don't worry: his next move is to betray Ygritte (who risked her life by standing for him and seemed to genuinely care about him) to go back to the Night's Watch and defend the Wall again. He essentially betrays everyone on both sides of this fight, which gets his friends, his girlfriend, and a whole bunch of other people killed — the exact opposite of Jon's entire goal with his betrayals, which

was to prevent the conflict. Even though it takes Stannis, acting on Melisandre's advice, to win the day, Jon somehow ends up on top of this situation: he winds up as Lord Commander of the Night's Watch.

Betrayal, betrayal, betrayal… promotion?
At this point, it seems like Jon would start to take his duties more seriously, instead of making rash decisions for personal reasons and expecting everyone else to accept his good intentions as an excuse. But no. Jon is unable to get his men to respect him or follow orders, and when Janos Slynt (admittedly a terrible person, who's at least partially responsible for Ned Stark's death) refuses to obey him, Jon dutifully follows Ned's lead by killing Janos as an example to the rest of the Night's Watch. Insubordination: okay when Jon does it, death sentence when he's giving the order.

From there, his situation spirals downward. Jon does the one thing he was not supposed to do as Lord Commander: keep the things that are north of the Wall north of the Wall. Instead, he makes allies with the wildlings. Is he correct that letting the wildlings south of the Wall is a merciful and wise decision, given the pending war with the undead? Yes. But he doesn't relay his reasoning to those under his command with any skill or diplomacy. He does it so poorly, in fact, that his men *kill him* for it because they believe he's so thoroughly betrayed his oaths.

Jon being Jon, he really screws that up, too
Normally, this would be the end – again, *Game of Thrones* has a gleeful habit of killing idealists – but Jon is too special for death to put him down for good. So Melisandre brings him back to life, he manages to kill the people who killed him, and he breaks his oaths *again*, leaving the Night's Watch. (Good luck with those ice zombies, Night's Watch!) Then he

tries to take back Winterfell for his family. Just to make that clear: Jon's driving force that's been used to justify nearly everything he does throughout the entire show, that he dies to defend, gets thrown out the window.

Of course, Jon being Jon, he really screws *that* up, too: in the Battle of the Bastards, Jon nearly gets himself and everyone else he knows killed by falling right into a Ramsay Bolton trap. He's completely walled in and about to die when Sansa bails him out with a last-minute calvary rush, courtesy of her alliance with Littlefinger. As a reward, Jon is proclaimed King in the North.

Image: HBO

The pattern continues: Jon's next move is to turn around, head south, and spit in the face of all those people who made him king by sacrificing that title and swearing alliance to his new crush / girlfriend / aunt. Then he heads north of the Wall in an ill-advised attempt to capture a wight, gets himself trapped, and needs to be saved by Daenerys at the cost of one of her three irreplaceable dragons. That, in turn, allows the Night King to raze the Wall with his freshly turned undead dragon, and invade Westeros for the first time in thousands of years. Jon promptly renders this sacrifice entirely meaningless by holding to his honor and insulting Cersei by refusing the terms of her alliance (because it would involve a lie), sundering the fragile detente between the North and south before it can even start.

Of course, when Jon gets back to the North, both Sansa and Lyanna Mormont rightfully put him on blast for this latest betrayal of his people. He responds with the narrative equivalent of a shrug. And is he punished for any of this? No. Despite his poor decisions and ineffective leadership, he gets rewarded with a dragon and information that makes him heir to the entire Seven Kingdoms.

Image: HBO

Even though he *knows* a massive battle that could decide the fate of the entire world is about to begin, he blurts that information out to the one person who least needs to hear it and is most likely to take dangerous action around it: Daenerys, who has successfully battled an entire continent on her way to the Iron Throne, only to be told she doesn't actually deserve it because of an accident of birth. And he says it as though she might just step out of the way now for him.

Jon Snow is not a hero by deed or action

When the battle comes and the Night King is finally here? Jon is practically useless. He flies around on his dragon, doing nothing of value — no strafing runs on wights, no attempts to attack the line of commanding White Walkers waiting in the rearguard, or even any fiery attacks from Rhaegal at all. Instead, he gets lost in a storm for a while, re-creates the plot of *How to Train Your Dragon 3* with Daenerys, and crashes his dragon. When faced with the Night King, Jon does the only thing he ever does: charges blindly toward him, hoping it might work out. It's no wonder Jon ends up shouting at a dead dragon in a futile attempt to do something useful, while Arya puts her years of assassin training to good use and actually saves the world.

Jon Snow is not a hero by deed or action. He's just a hero because the plot says that he is. His uselessness isn't entirely his fault: many of his failures come from his struggles to do the right and honorable thing, like protecting his family or the entirety of Westeros. He doesn't crave power and he doesn't enjoy cruelty. Compared to the morally gray and outright evil characters that tend to oppose him, he's a good guy.

But *Game of Thrones* has consistently underlined the point that

being “good” doesn’t get most people anywhere, and it often makes things worse than they were before. Jon fails constantly, and he’s consistently rewarded and honored for his failures. He never faces any consequences that aren’t temporary, and most of the time, everyone around him suffers for his choices while he walks away a little mopier and forlorn. Someone else cleans up his mess, he never learns any lessons or changes as a person, and he continues to charge forward, ignorant of what he’s done. And somehow, he’s still on track to end up as the King of the Seven Kingdoms. Westeros deserves better than Jon Snow, but it seems unlikely that it’ll get it.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/5/3/18528437/game-of-thrones-got-season-8-jon-snow-hero-westeros-daenerys-bad-leadership-dragons