

KOWALSKI ANALYSIS



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If you are familiar with *Game of Thrones* fan theories, you might have heard one that suspects Jaime Lannister is Azor Ahai, a King Arthur-like figure who will rise up to save humanity. Jon Snow is the most popular choice for this title, but a story of redemption is often times far more appealing than that of someone who was a hero throughout the series.

When I first watched *Game of Thrones*, I was appalled at the lengths Jaime Lannister would go to for Cersei. The Lannisters might not have been good people, but that does not mean the characters aren't well-written. As the show progressed, Jaime's character developed to be more compassionate. One could argue that Jaime started to change when he met Brienne because in her, he saw the honourable warrior he could be.

In the last episode, he finally reached Winterfell, and our hearts rejoiced at this tale of redemption. His character development reminds me of what I consider the greatest redemption arc in the history of television—that of Prince Zuko in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

*Avatar* is not a trending topic in pop culture over a decade has passed since the show ended. But as we revel in the brilliance of *Game of Thrones*, I must point out

tribe friends Katara, Sokka, and lemur Momo on his pet bison Appa. Toph from the earth kingdom later joins them, creating what Sokka calls "Team Avatar".

Zuko follows them to the ends of the earth, often coming close to capturing Aang. He is ruthless and violent at the start of the show. But soon, it is revealed that the banished prince is much more layered than a typical cartoon "villain".

At the tender age of 13, Zuko's cruel, conniving father challenged him to an Agni Kai (firebending duel) simply because he had spoken out of turn. The young prince had to beg for mercy, but he was left scarred and banished.

Throughout the first two seasons, the character is in a constant inner struggle. In one of my favourite episodes in season one, he disguises himself as the 'blue spirit' and saves Aang's life, albeit with the intention of capturing him later. But even Aang sees good in him, asking an almost unconscious Zuko if they could be friends someday.

Zuko continues to go back and forth between good and evil. The first time I watched the show, I was tired of him constantly disappointing me. But Uncle Iroh never gave up on him, always urging him to look inside. In the final season, the

avatar finally learns firebending from him, completing Team Avatar with the final element. Jaime could also be that missing puzzle piece in Jon's fight against the Night King.

Both Jaime and Zuko's evil deeds were driven by their relationship with their families, but the particular motivating factors were very different. Jaime was blindly loyal to Cersei and his house, but Zuko was simply confused about where his loyalties should lie. From a young age, his mother and uncle were tender and loving towards him, while his father and sister Azula were cruel and insensitive.

Azula grows up to mirror Ozai, but the prince knew better. Zuko was never a villain, rather an anti-hero. On the other hand, Jaime's actions at the start of *Game of Thrones* were more similar to that of a plain villain. As we discovered more about his struggles with the Kingslayer label and Cersei's hatefulness, he turned into an anti-hero, and in this season, he might just prove the Azor Ahai theory right.

Redemption is not as easy in real life, but shows like *Game of Thrones* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* evolved over the years, and its audience also grew older and wiser with the characters. A well-written redemption arc is much more satisfying

# Tale of two princes

## Redemption arcs in *Game of Thrones* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*



that a children's series has shown almost the same level of brilliance in storytelling and character development.

At the beginning of the show, Prince Zuko was travelling with his uncle Iroh. They had both been banished from the Fire Nation, and the prince's quest was to capture the Avatar to restore his honour. But it wasn't merely a quest, it was a hunt.

Aang is the avatar, who is supposed to master all four elements (earth, water, fire, air) and restore balance in the universe, ending the hundred-year war started by the Fire Nation. He travels with his water

prince finally defies his father Fire Lord Ozai, and decides he will fight for the good guys.

Ten years later, on the second episode of *Game of Thrones'* final season, Jaime Lannister declares he is here to fight for the living. The episode begins with his tense encounter with Daenerys and the Starks, similar to the scene where Zuko arrives at the air temple to join Team Avatar, but he's not met with a warm welcome.

He proves his loyalty soon enough, helping Aang and his friends defeat the fire nation assassin that Zuko himself had

to viewers, probably because it gives us a feeling of hope, and makes us believe in second chances.

As someone who always roots for that one confusing character who's stuck between good and evil, Prince Zuko and Jaime Lannister have been my absolute favourites. I hope that Jaime's story will be written as masterfully as Zuko's, because this character deserves it.

*The writer regularly rewatches Uncle Iroh's scenes from the show. Reach her at [aanila.tarannum27@gmail.com](mailto:aanila.tarannum27@gmail.com).*