



The Eid morning, the familiar smell drifting from the kitchen, and the bright faces of the little ones looking for salami—these are the elements that make our Eid special, and we tend to forget that until we no longer have them. For those fortunate enough this Eid at home, surrounded by family, make sure to spend time with them. One day, you might miss this the most.

IRFAN HOSSAIN

Eid, for most of us, means friends, family, and food. But for many, Eid looks different: phone calls across time zones, homesickness, nostalgic video chats, and attempts at cooking traditional Bangalee dishes.

For these individuals, Eid doesn't just look different; it feels lonelier. After all, how do you truly celebrate when you're thousands of miles away from the people and places that make Eid meaningful? The experience varies vastly depending on local culture and the size of the Muslim community there, but one thing remains constant: it is never quite like home.

For Ayman*, who is currently studying cybersecurity in Melbourne, Australia, it has been two years since he last celebrated Eid back home. "Eid doesn't feel like 'Eid' here," says Ayman. "The celebrations are mostly centred around the mosque. I get up early, go for prayers, and then rush off for my day shift, which starts at nine."

Ayman's only real support system there is the local Bangladeshi community: "When it is late afternoon, those of us who are free gather at the park. Many of the aunts and sisters of the community bring *shemai*, *sondesh*, and other desserts, and we have a little picnic. That is, perhaps, the only moment in the day when Eid truly feels like Eid."

Many try their best to hold on to these small traditions of making desserts, sending Eid cards, and giving salami as a way of staying tethered to their roots. Eshpa Jannatul, who has been living in the UK with her family for six years, understands the feeling well. "Back home, on Eid morning, our house was filled with guests and friends," she says. "We would greet each other, have *shemai*, go to the elders for salami, and play cards at night. I really miss those moments. The sound of my family gathered together in the early hours of Eid morning is something I would do anything to hear again."

Eshpa adds, "I try my best to make it work here in my own way. My manager is kind enough to give me the Eid day off. I make special Eid dishes with whatever I can manage. Everything is so expensive here. I wear a new dress, go for a picnic with my family, and video call everyone back home. I know

Eid will never be the same here, but I try my best to make it feel like home for my family."

Eshpa also points out that the UK has one of the largest Bangladeshi diaspora communities in the world, so the experience can differ significantly depending on how close you are to your community and how tightly knit it is. The situation is considerably lonelier in countries like China, where Bangladeshi communities are far more scattered.

For Ishtiak Ahmed, who is pursuing electrical and electronic engineering (EEE) at Guangdong University, China, Eid barely registers on the calendar. There are no decorations, no festive atmosphere, and more often than not, no day off. "For most of us, we do not even know it is Eid until our family calls us from back home, says Ishtiak. "Everyone here works like machines. The day just passes like any other."

Finding a mosque is already a daily challenge, let alone anything resembling a proper Eid jamaat. "Once, I missed my Eid jamaat because the nearest mosque was hundreds of kilometres away," Ishtiak adds. "During Eid morning, I try to cook something at home, but it never feels like the dishes my mother used to make."

The saving grace is a small but close-knit circle of fellow Muslim students. Ishtiak says, "We get together in someone's dorm room or apartment and bring whatever dishes we can manage. It is not much, but it is something. You hold on to whatever little piece of home you can find."

That instinct to carve out a little piece of home runs through almost every story. Zahidul Islam Zoha, pursuing a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) at Asia Pacific University (APU) in Japan, is celebrating his first Eid away from home, and the anxiety is real. "I do not know what it is going to feel like waking up on Eid morning and not being home," says Zoha. "I am trying not to think about it too much."

But Zoha may be luckier than most. APU is home to one of the largest Bangladeshi student communities in Japan, and Eid preparations are already well underway at the time of writing. "This is like a little piece of Bangladesh out here. People are already talking about what to cook and wear," Zoha adds.

Then there is Farhan Hasnat, studying at



New York University Abu Dhabi in the UAE, and his experience is almost like a different story altogether. Abu Dhabi is, after all, a Muslim country. The city does not let you forget that Eid is coming. Streets are decorated with lights weeks in advance, malls erupt in decoration, and the air carries a particular festive electricity.

"You can feel it everywhere," Farhan says. "The city transforms. It is loud, bright, and festive in a way that no part of Bangladesh has ever felt to me. The city takes on a whole new look altogether."

And yet, even amid all this celebration, it always feels like something is missing. "The food is different. The culture is different. Emirati Eid and Bangladeshi Eid are not the same thing. I can be surrounded by people celebrating, but I cannot be surrounded by my people celebrating," Farhan adds.

From the parks of Melbourne to the glittering

boulevards of Abu Dhabi, the feeling underneath is remarkably the same. Distance has a way of sharpening what matters most. It is rarely the grand traditions these students miss; it is the small, unremarkable ones.

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**Name has been changed upon request.*

Irfan spends his time writing, travelling, doomscrolling, and occasionally attending class for a degree he believes will be useful someday. Send him cat reels at: irfan.ink63@gmail.com.

Before Ice and Fire

The stories that forged George R R Martin

MIAZEE ABRAR

The world has been waiting 15 years for *The Winds of Winter*—the sixth book of George R R Martin's epic fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which inspired the acclaimed television series *Game of Thrones*. For 15 years, Jon Snow has been lying dead on the Wall, Daenerys Targaryen has been stranded in the Dothraki Sea, and Jaime Lannister has been marching toward concepnance from the vengeful Lady Stoneheart (if that last one doesn't ring a bell, pick up the books to see what you're missing!).

A Song of Ice and Fire may be Martin's magnum opus, but it's just one achievement in a prolific 50-year career filled with short stories, novellas, and novels across multiple genres—science fiction, horror, and fantasy. Here are some of his best works.

SHORT STORIES

Portraits of His Children (1985)

Where is the line between fiction's licence to borrow from life and violating people's autonomy over their own stories? What if a writer's characters become dearer than actual loved ones? Stories have long



Martin's stories often take us to the deepest pits of bleakness, not to affirm nihilism, but to unflinchingly examine the human condition and show what forges true light, all while breaking boundaries of genres and tropes.

interrogated the flaws and parasitic nature of storytellers, but seldom so brutally as *Portraits of His Children*.

When a novelist receives portraits of his characters from his estranged daughter that come alive, he must confront the darkest corners of himself and his profession. Martin tackles the danger of using real people and trauma as fodder for art.

With Morning Comes Mistfall (1973)
On Wraithworld, mesmerising mists rise at every sunset, cloaking the planet. Underneath lurk the Wraiths, mythic beasts blamed for tourist disappearances. A journalist is caught between a pragmatic scientist arriving to prove the wraiths do

not exist and a romantic hotelier who treasures the mystery.

The story is a commentary on sci fi and fantasy, where Martin questions what should drive scientific inquiry and whether the relentless pursuit of knowledge without reverence for beauty and colonising the stars is worth the loss of our humanity.

In the Lost Lands (1982)
"You can buy anything you might desire from Gray Alys. But it is better not to."

Grabbing hold with this cryptic first line, this "deal-with-a-witch" story is told subversively from the witch's perspective, exploring the danger of unchecked infatuation and the projections born from it.

The Lonely Songs of Laren Dorr (1976)
More a lyrical mood piece than a traditional narrative, it follows Sharra, a "girl who goes between the worlds", searching for her lost lover, and Laren Dorr, a melancholic sorcerer trapped in solitude, guarding the world gates. As Laren falls for Sharra, the story explores the bittersweetness of being a brief chapter in someone's life who has become your whole existence.

The Ice Dragon (1980)
A coming-of-age fairy tale of an avoidant child and her secret bond with a mythic dragon breathing icy death.

The Way of Cross and Dragon (1979)
Imagines Christianity in the far future spread across the stars, where a priest's faith is challenged as he investigates a heretical sect glorifying Judas.

Unsound Variations (1982)
Combines Martin's chess background with sci-fi in a narrative about obsession and

outgrowing past failures.

Novellas and novelettes
Before writing the *Tales of Dunk and Egg*—his richest novellas—Martin had penned a few others.

A Song for Lya (1974)
Telepathic lovers Robb and Lyanna investigate an alien religion centred on a parasitic organism that consumes its hosts. People willingly merge with it to die, receiving overwhelming emotional unity in return.

The pair, who believed their telepathic bond made their love deeper than ordinary intimacy, slowly unravel as Martin uses sci-fi to push human ideas of love, individuality and connection to their limits, meditating on existential loneliness and the dread of never truly knowing another person.

Sandkings (1979)
When a wealthy collector acquires a terrarium of intelligent ant-like aliens called Sandkings, they worship him as

God. But as he indulges in sadism for entertainment, their devotion devolves into something terrifying.

Martin crafts a chilling allegory about hubris, abuse of power, and the terrifying consequences of toying with living beings. This was his most famous, seminal work, until Martin started publishing his novels.

NOVELS

Fevre Dream (1982)
Set along the 1850s Mississippi River, this vampire novel follows steamboat captain Abner Marsh as he partners with the enigmatic Joshua York to build the grandest riverboat ever seen. Through the ideological conflict of two vampires, it draws harrowing parallels between vampirism and American slavery, testing the limits of human empathy. Amidst it is a profound friendship bearing dreams too beautiful to survive the world around them, yet worth chasing into the very heart of darkness.

Fevre Dream was Martin at his best, with evocative prose digging out every ounce of thematic depth from its subject and imagery.

Then he wrote *A Game of Thrones* and changed epic fantasy forever.

Martin's stories often take us to the deepest pits of bleakness, not to affirm nihilism, but to unflinchingly examine the human condition and show what forges true light, all while breaking boundaries of genres and tropes. He is a romantic with a wild imagination who mined his heartbreaks, disillusionments, and hopes to tell stories of dreamers trying to better the world. And regardless of their results, it's the pursuit and the heart in conflict with itself that makes their tales worth telling.

Ice and Fire is the zenith of it all, but these threads run through his bibliography. And as winter comes and goes without *The Winds of Winter*, and *A Dream of Spring* remains a dream, what may help you through the wait is a dive into the writer's work, who is much more than Westeros.

Miaze Abrar drowns in daydreams and writes stories for worms.