

ISSUE 2 / MAY 2017

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

The second issue of Worldbuilding Monthly Magazine is finally out! In this issue you will be able to read a great selection of articles loosely related to the art of planetbuilding. The team and I hope you enjoy!

Over the course of the last month the team expanded and contracted, as internet projects often do, and we had to adjust accordingly. We are committed to creating quality content to help out all worldbuilders in their respective projects, and we will strive for no less.

The Magazine's team has passed its honeymoon phase, and no part of this process has been easy. We are still trying to figure out our final direction, but that won't stop us from producing the content that we love in the meantime.

If you want to submit a finished article on a worldbuilding subject to be showcased in this magazine, please contact me on reddit!

Cheers,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'u/UNoahGuy'.

u/UNoahGuy

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# CREATING IMAGINARY NAMES

Ethan Oswell

You’ve done it! You’ve sat staring at a screen or paper for hours thinking *No, that’s too stupid* or *It just doesn’t fit!* I get it. We’ve all been there. Thinking of a realistic sounding name isn’t easy. It gets harder when you’re naming fictional cities, plants, animals, or even rocks that previously only existed in your head. Coming up with a realistic name doesn’t have to be hard though.

The first thing you have to do is make your own language. Easy right? Well, to be honest, you don’t need to make an entire language just the embryo of one.

Every word has to start somewhere; some place early man stopped relying on body language and started to make consistent sounds. As it turns out humans didn’t make a lot of things back then— A tool here, a shirt there. The diversity of things in their world was more scarce than it is today. To create the facsimile of a proto-language, all we need to do is name those early things with super simple proto-words; words like tree, land, farm, man, hill, bear, river, and stone. Linguists argue over the exact number and ubiquity of these words but most can agree on around 200 words. Thankfully our job isn’t too hard, and we only need to come up with the words we want to use. Let’s come up with some now.

*Wom* is going to be the word for “river”, *Kallt* the word for “home”, *Rulla* means “son”, and *Crad* will be our word for “hunter”. Now we can name that town on the river; we’ll call it *Kalltwom*, or Home-River. Or, let’s name our main character; well, he was born to a hunter so we can call him *Cradrulla*. Of course, these names sound like nonsense to us now, but with more exposure, they’ll grow to have meaning.

You also should take into account that languages evolve over time. What we’ve created are the original words and as such we still have some work to do. First, we need to edit those two names to account for the passage of time. As people talk they tend to get lazy with their speech. Names like Bryce might have been Bryantson 200 years ago, derived from the original “Bryant’s-Son”. One of the easiest targets for evolving words are those that take too long to say, just like “Bryant’s-Son”. So we shorten it to Bryantson, eliminating the double “s”, and further to Bryson. But then someone never

learned to spell it properly so we ended up with Brycen. Even then everyone just called this person Bryce because it was one syllable and easier on their brains. You can see how this type of evolution can happen to any word.

So we have our two home-brewed words, *Kalltwom* and *Cradrulla*, let’s see how we can “evolve” them. First things first, make them shorter by destroying certain sounds the mouth may slur or stumble with. The products of this, *Alwom* and *Cradul*, can be made even easier to say by rearranging their syllable and vowel structure. Modern words like *out* were once pronounced similar to how we now say boot. Other words shuffled or removed syllables to loosen them up. Words like *cat* were pronounced *c’hazh*, like the Spanish word Casa, by early Celts. It’s important to note that some words gain syllables instead of losing them; A good example is the word *beauty* which added the “y” at the end after modern influence on the otherwise Old-French word *Beute*. If we let the same processes take effect on our fictional names we’re left with our new imaginary city *Aluwom* and our new protagonist *Kradol*.

There! You’ve just made some simple as can be homebrew names with *meaning* attached. If you cannot think of a name through sheer creative will-power just try this method, it works in a pinch and adds some lore and realism that your audience just might pick up on. 🍷

# THEIFOFOHOPE’S “CHROMAVERSE”

Gangsterduck

World Showcase

Welcome to the “Chromaverse”! This neutral dark fantasy world built by ThiefofHope exhibits multiple elements such as spirituality, linguistics, and an in-depth magic system.

The Chromaverse is sealed inside a terrarium called “the Orb”; a place of bleakness until the demigods, called *Ochenan*, created creatures called the *Ren*.

These creatures are humanoids aside from their multicolor blood and gray skin. The diversity is a product of the *Ochenan* wanting to offset the bleakness of the world, and there are 5 main hues, black, white, red, blue, and silver. The blood colors have no biological purpose except for being a shining beacon within the darkness, but can sometimes lead to intercolor conflict and segregation. *Ren* also have access to magic, called *Essencecasting*, which involves dancing to release magical energies.

The *Ren* use a currency called *Tadril*, which mainly comes in coins of ones, fives, tens, and hundreds, as well as thousand *Tadril* bills. The coinage alternates in between circles with triangular holes

and triangles with circular holes, each made of its own metal ranging from copper to silver. One thousand *Tadril* bills are special, they consist of a sealed tube and a special piece of paper inside. Only when the paper is sealed in the tube is it currency. The average income for *Ren* is about 250 *Tadril* per month, which is barely enough for 3 meals of bread and cheese a day for a month for one person.

*Ren* in the nation of *Candrisif* have a 3-tier caste system of the Upperbirths, the *Nezhdoya*, and the Lowbirths. The Upperbirths are the wealthy *ren*; the ruling dynasty, aristocratic elite, and educated elite. The Lowbirths are everyone else, the *Nezhdoya* being Lowbirths stolen as children by the Upperbirths for a variety of different reasons — from having extreme talent to being exceptionally beautiful. *Nezhdoya* are considered slaves with rights. *Ren* from all castes and nations get facial tattoos done in the color of their blood on their

**TIP:** Neutral Dark: A world where it is a hellish place but it is possible to change it



Credit: ThiefofHope



ninth birthday, and on their fifteenth their ears are pierced by helices to signify adulthood. Many Ren in this world also have a hard time getting food as jobs pay poorly.

The main nations are at war extremely often, the culprits mainly being the *Aalsia* and *Rendrara*. Having clashed so much, their people and culture are closely related to death. Aalsia is known for burning all that stands and salting the earth after, while the Rendraran Army is known for a smaller force of troops with a focus on healers. Candrisif, the nation enforcing the caste system, employs officers at all times and is protected by natural mountains, and the nation of Bris makes the seas' its own with the most powerful navy. While all of them have large armies, communication is hard and leads to disorganization. This disorganization among armies and states leads to bandits running wild.

Thus concludes our tour of the "Chromaverse". ThiefofHope, the creator of this world, used *The Elder Scrolls*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Brave Story* by Miyuki Miyabe, and several other authors as inspiration for their world. To read more of the world, ThiefofHope has put out a short story, and books in this world are on the way.



Credit: ThiefofHope

#### Links for more Chromaverse content:

- [The Chroma Books](#) - Official Website
- [Siona's Kiss](#) (part of a Short Story Collection)

Credit: ThiefofHope

# MAP GENERATORS: PROCEDURES FOR THE PROCEDURAL

*hodmandod*

Maps are the easiest way to communicate to your reader the placement of a world's important locations. However, for those whose strengths lie on the writing side of worldbuilding as opposed to the visual side, mapping one or several whole landmasses can be a daunting endeavor. Procedural map generators can make the task much more accessible, though it's important to be aware of their limitations in order to make the best map possible.

A vast array of map generators are available on the internet, each with its own visual style and generation algorithm. On a fundamental level, however, they all have several things in common. Many create their maps by iterating changes on some simple figure, creating a fractal noise pattern. Others create polygons or fields of points and generate maps based on the arrangement and relationships between these. Each generator requires different information from the user to generate its maps, though most are also able to generate the majority of this information independent of the creator. One common input type is the seed: a number used by the algorithm to determine the features that will be generated. Seeds can also be used to recreate a specific map, since a generator's algorithm will only create one map for any unique seed. Different generation techniques and algorithms will, of course, generate dramatically different maps.

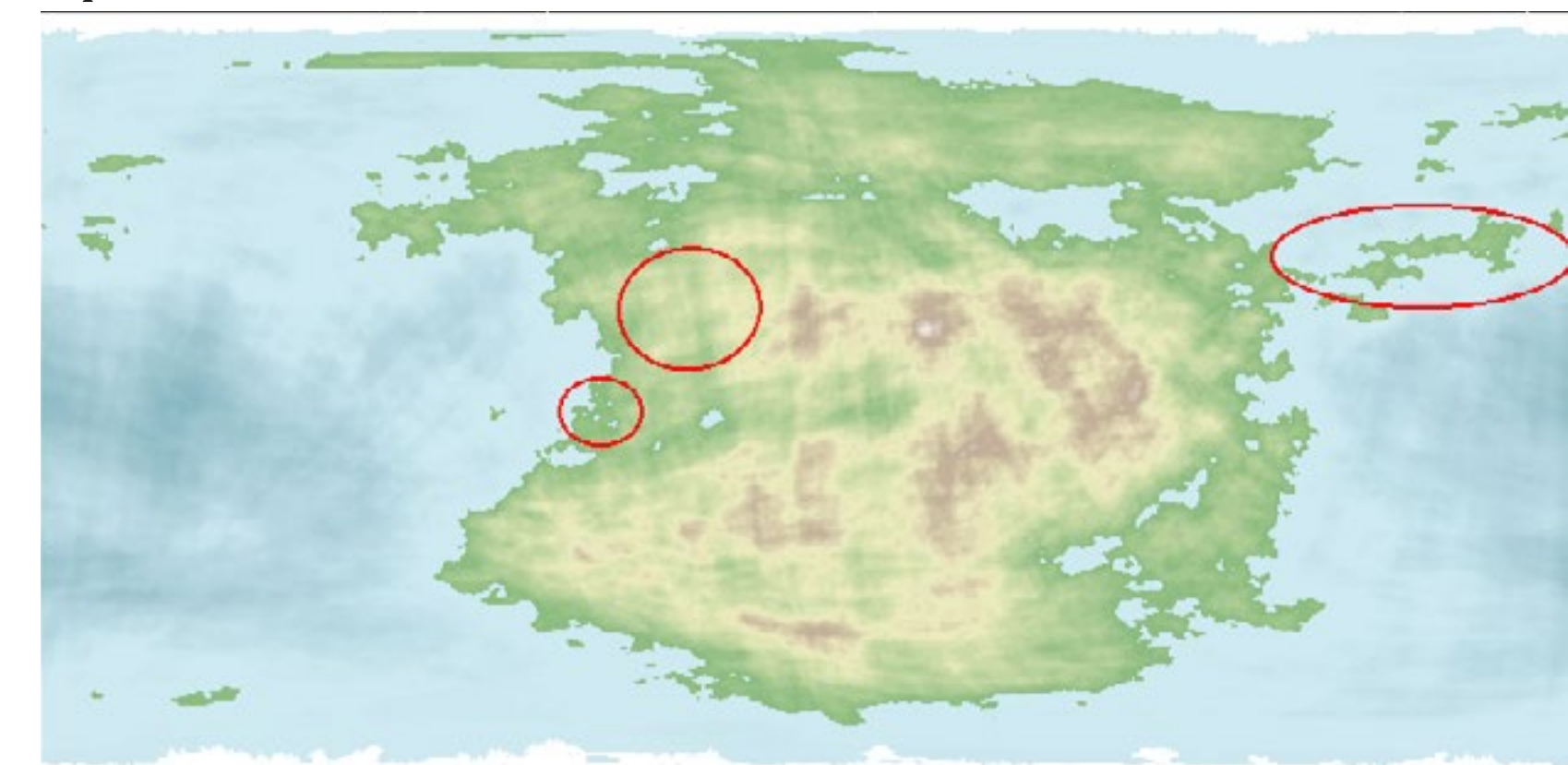
Along with the variation in inputs and results comes a similar variation in strengths and weaknesses. Though every generator has a unique set of advantages, there are common disadvantages. An often-seen drawback, shared with hand-drawn maps, is projection. Most map generators have a limited selection of projections they can create, if they are even able to create more than one. Therefore, if a mapmaker needs a specific projection, the choice of generators may be limited. Another limitation is the map's color scheme. Most map generators create a colorful and aes-

thetically pleasing map, which in most cases is perfectly usable, but the more complex the colors the more difficult editing or other forms of processing often become.

The third, and final, common major drawback of procedural generation is that the algorithms almost invariably produce some amount of unnatural-looking artifacts in the terrain. Each algorithm produces distinct artifacts. While it's all but impossible to find or create a map completely without these flaws, the good news is that removing them is much easier than creating a new map completely from scratch.

[Donjon's Fractal World Generator](#), [Terra Incognita](#), and [Exupero's Island Generator](#) are good examples of a few different styles. More are linked at the end of the article, but these three serve well as an introduction to what's possible.

Donjon's Fractal World Generator creates entire world maps. It tends to create one or two continents per world, often with one continent located on one of the planet's poles. It accepts input for the percentages of both ice and liquid water on the surface, and unlike the other two, can produce maps in several projections and color schemes as well as a wide range of sizes. Common artifacts of its algorithm include long, straight chains of land or water, curved or cross-hatched patterns of lines in its textures, and at a small enough scale, unrealistic numbers of small lakes and islands near coastlines. In most color schemes, its maps are difficult to edit because of the variation in color



Example of a Donjon-generated world map, with artifacts indicated



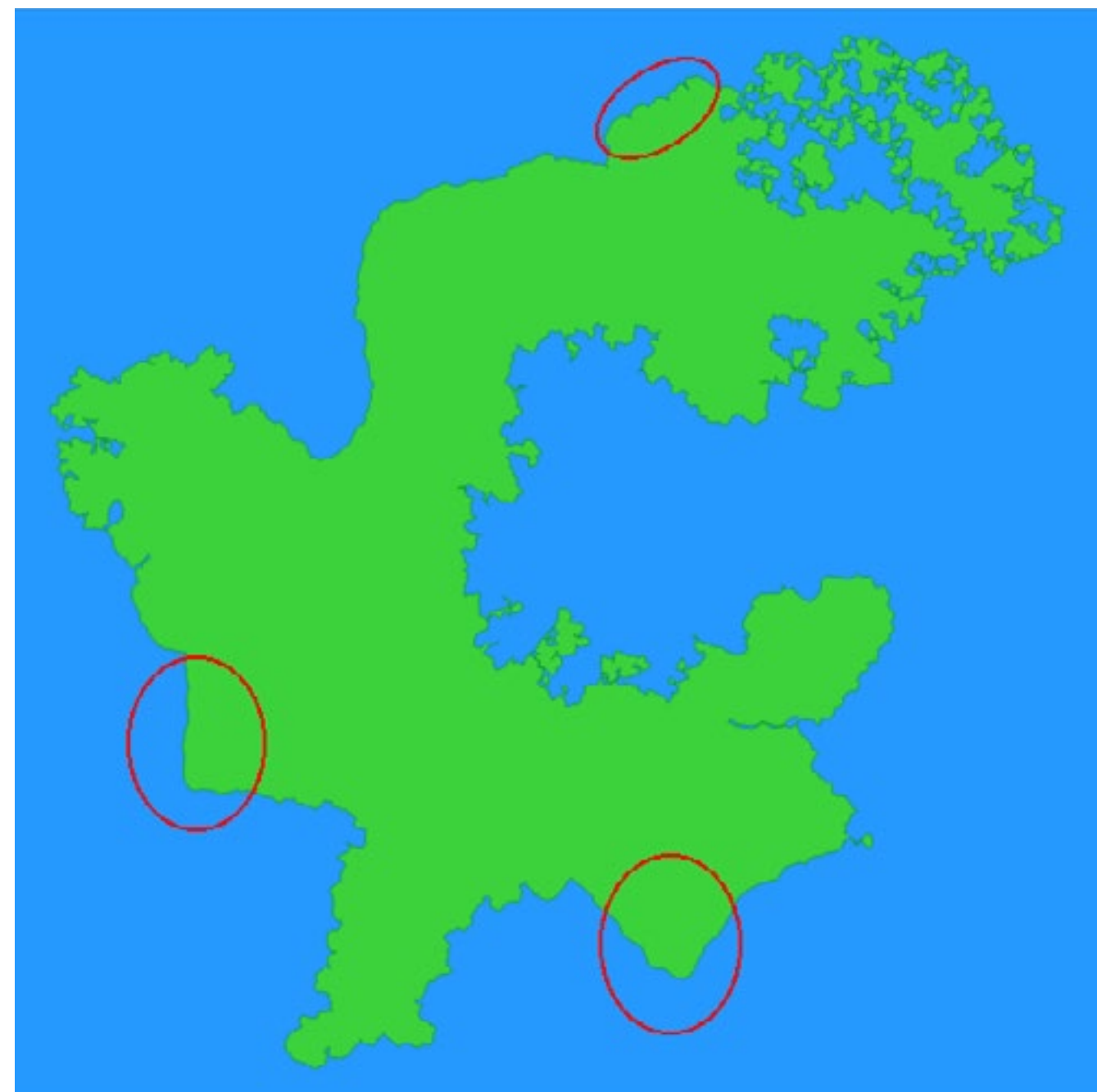


*Example of a Terra Incognita map, with artifacts indicated*

produced by the height algorithms. This generator is best for creating entire worlds if the mapmaker doesn't want to make many substantial changes to the terrain, or for maps in one of its specific color schemes.

Terra Incognita consists of an extremely large canvas of landmasses, displayed for the user to sift through and save or take screenshots of. The size and variety of the landmasses means that almost any shape can be found with enough looking. It can be used to generate anything from chains of small islands when zoomed out, to full maps of continents, to detailed maps of fairly small areas when zoomed in. Common artifacts include overly-jagged coastlines, extremely sudden changes in elevation and color, and unrealistic patterns of coastal islands and lakes. If zoomed out far enough, repetitive patterns of land and water become visible, and, like with Donjon's generator, the complexity of its color schemes means its maps can be difficult to edit. Terra Incognita is best for creating single landmasses for use in flat maps, because it has no alternate projections at all. It also has the best "natural" colors, resembling a high-altitude photo of the landscape.

Exupero's island generator creates single landmasses or small, clustered islands. Despite the reference to islands in the name its maps have no scale, which makes them suitable for use at almost any scale of map. Unlike the other two generators it can create both rough and smooth coastlines on



*Example of an Exupero map, with artifacts indicated*

the same landmass, which adds verisimilitude to its maps. It is extremely simple to use, consisting of only a single button and generating its own seeds (found in the URL for the map). By the same token, however, its outputs are the least customizable. It creates no topographical information, but the simplicity of its visual design means that its maps are much easier to edit. Common artifacts include predictable patterns in coastline features — regularly-spaced and similarly-shaped peninsulae or inlets — large square or triangular areas, and unrealistically linear features. Like Terra Incognita, Exupero excels at creating individual landmasses without regard for map projections. By and large it requires considerably less work than Terra Incognita and also has one major advantage over the other two: it is much easier to fuse multiple Exupero maps into larger landmasses than either of the other two generators.

So, what's the best way to deal with generation artifacts? Unfortunately, the only way to eliminate them entirely is good old-fashioned elbow-grease and an image editor. The maps above have not been edited, so an attentive eye may pick out visible artifacts. The best course is to find a map that fits your needs, identify unwanted artifacts or other features that need changing, and edit them out. Small artifacts, or those in areas or maps without large variations in color, can easily be painted over. Larger artifacts, crossing multiple colors, may require the use of a clone tool to avoid creating sudden lines or repetitive patterns.

In general, because the majority of map artifacts are relatively small, they can be removed in this way without affecting large stretches of coastline. In cases where large edits need to be made, for example an Exupero island with a particularly large triangular or right-angle artifact, cutting-and-pasting a usable stretch of coastline from an unneeded area of the map, or from another map created by the same generator, is usually the best solution. One quick and simple way to deal with unnecessary lakes or islands is to select the unwanted surface by color, deselect the areas that are to be kept, and then fill the selected surface with the appropriate color. This technique is one of the most useful for making lots of small edits, but it may

become difficult if there is wide variation in the colors that needs to be removed.

In short, no procedural generator will create a perfect map. Only in the rarest of cases will any generator produce a map that fits all the needs of the mapmaker, even disregarding artifacts. That's why having different generators in one's toolbox is helpful, like different brushes in a painter's kit, or drills for a woodworker. A variety of map generators help to create specific kinds of maps.

## Further Reading

[Explanation of the techniques behind the Donjon map generator](#)

[Similar explanation for the Exupero generator](#)

Other procedural map generators:

- [Martin O'Leary's Generator](#)
- [Torben M's Planet Map Generator](#)



*Further examples of procedural generation artifacts from each of the three featured map generators*



# PLANET BUILDING IN FANTASY, OR: HOW PLANETOS INTRIGUES US

*JoblessSteve*

In building a world with spaceships, lightspeed travel, and hyper-advanced technology, the value of planetbuilding may be obvious. If there are ships traveling long distances, they surely need somewhere to travel to. In this case, planets are perfect; they provide vast arrays of habitats and environments in which to worldbuild. Regardless of the details, planetbuilding in space just makes sense. What about fantasy or other non science-fiction worlds? If one builds a world in which the inhabitants are only aware of the landmass they live on, the value of planetbuilding may be missed. The builder might miss out, however, as planetbuilding can add two important things to a world: mystery and context. These two might seem contradictory on their face, but within this article they have a clearer meaning. Mystery refers to incentive given to an audience to ask questions about the world, and Context, in turn, is the information given to the audience which allows them to see the world as a more cohesive whole. So, let's walk through these

elements together, more slowly.

Look to the image below of two landmasses. Imagine them together on a map—to the west are The Bluelands, and to the east is the other, here called The Eastlands. On a flat projection, things are simple; one can see all that there is. Because no land is cut off by the edge, and because of exposure to world maps in the real world, it is easily and readily assumed that there is no land beyond the map. This assumption is only present, however, when the given information is considered in a vacuum. Consider now the idea that the map is only a flat projection; it is a simplification, showing only the basics of the lands of East and Blue. Immediately, questions spring to mind, chief amongst them being, “what lies beyond the map?” This is a wonderful example of mystery and its value. To use a real-world example, George R.R. Martin's Planetos is rife with examples of planetbuilding being used to the same effect. Theories abound of what lies “West of Westeros,” and even locations import-

ant to central characters are shrouded in mystery, such as Asshai by the Shadow. There is even one theory which claims that Westeros and Essos may connect on the other side of Planetos. These mysteries would be much less engrossing, maybe even nonexistent, if not for the knowledge that the World of Ice and Fire is a planet.

Inciting questions to be asked is beneficial on its own, but if a worldbuilder never bothers to answer any, then the mystery is likely to just frustrate an audience. It is having the answers to these questions is the benefit of context. Think back to the flat map. As before, things are simple, but it limits how the world is perceived. Its major drawback is that in the mind of a reader, the individual elements of the world are rendered separately, depicted as a series of lakes, rivers, forests, and plains scattered about a shape, only connected by land or water. In this case the world is only seen as the sum of its geographical objects, and the map is the space in which they exist. This doesn't happen on a globe, though. Rather than being a space onto which a worldbuilder places their mountains and forests, the planet is itself an object. An onlooker won't bother to differentiate between geographical elements; rather they are considered a whole. This stitching together of individual elements, paired

with the expanded perception gained by seeing the world as a single object, is the context which so enhances the experience of an audience.

It can be easy to dismiss certain worldbuilding tools when one works in certain genres; there are things which simply seem to fit better in a galaxy than in a kingdom. Planet building is just one of the tools we have as worldbuilders, and serves to explain one of the many ways that worlds like Planetos keep audiences engaged. By forgetting the tools we have at our disposal simply because they seem at first unfitting, we may miss out on opportunities to enhance our worlds in powerful ways. 🐉





# MARIANA TRENCHES OF WORLDBUILDING

Mick Galadeta

Ostensibly, Tolkien's Lord of the Rings is presented as a classic tale of Good versus Evil, of brave hobbits and ancient elves, and of the power of temptation. But dive deeper- beneath this surface, there's a whole world of lore waiting to be discovered. For example, it might be common knowledge that **Galadriel** was the elf queen who **resisted the temptation of the Ring** in Lothlórien. But how many know that **Galadriel** was **among the first elves**, who witnessed the **light of the Two Trees**, who was there **for Fëanor's forging of the Silmarils**, and who led her people across the **Helcaraxë**? This is just one example of how deep Tolkien's world goes. And the more into this lore one goes, the more one finds similar depths. Nothing is ever taken at face value- there is a story behind everything.

And it's the fact there is a deep story behind everything which makes Tolkien's tale so damn good. However, in this case, as in many cases, Tolkien's worldbuilding suffers in favor of his story. It's fairly easy to add depth to any particular area of a world; just throw in enough detail, enough history, or enough facts, and you've created complexity. What is infinitely harder, and what separates a well-built world from shoddier constructions, is maintaining that complexity across all parts of a world- keeping the world at a consistent depth. A common mistake made by novice worldbuilders is to color in one part of the world, only to leave the surrounding portrait nothing more than a line drawing. For example, one might sketch out a certain animal within a world; what it looks like, how it breeds, how it interacts with other members of the species, etc, but completely neglect its place in the greater ecosystem it lives in.

These are the Mariana Trenches of worldbuilding — areas where a worldbuilder might inexplicably dive into detail hitherto unseen in their world, for whatever reason. Often times they reflect a personal passion of the worldbuilder, or an area for them to soapbox. They are detailed for detail's sake and nothing more. These singular trenches don't add any true depth to a world. In contrast, these uneven depths lead to a sort of cognitive dissonance that makes a world less believable when contrasted with other, more shallow areas of worldbuilding. Take, for example, Tolkien's

dwarves. In contrast to his elves, who have mountains of linguistic, historic, or cultural notes, the dwarves are just a footnote. They appear occasionally in the histories of Middle Earth, but mostly are convenient plot hooks. Their language consists of three phrases and a handful of names. In terms of worldbuilding: they're very *shallow*.

A comprehensive world is a well-built world, and coloring in all areas of the world makes that world come alive. Not everything has to be extremely detailed- just equally detailed. Some of the often forgot areas of the world are some of the greatest causes of detail inequality. It's easy to write about the wealth of a certain character, but simply writing about his wealth in a void does little to flesh out the world or the character. What is the economy like that allowed for this character to grab wealth? What are the taxes like? How wealthy is 'wealthy'? What is there to do with this wealth? As you answer these questions, you'll find more of your world filled out through tangential worldbuilding. Higher taxes within a nation might go towards extensive welfare programs — which is a huge cultural point worth talking about in its own right. Other areas of worldbuilding that can help even out the depth of your world include population's, food supply, and ethnic diversities.

There is no world which will ever answer every question sufficiently — not even our own world has an answer to every question we ask it. And others are just as critical of Tolkien's work. George RR Martin called the legendary author out on his over-simplification of some key areas of Middle Earth lore:

*"Tolkien can say that Aragorn became king and reigned for a hundred years, and he was wise and good. But Tolkien doesn't ask the question: What was Aragorn's tax policy? Did he maintain a standing army? What did he do in times of flood and famine? And what about all these orcs? By the end of the war, Sauron is gone but all of the orcs aren't gone —they're in the mountains. Did Aragorn pursue a policy of systematic genocide and kill them? Even the little baby orcs, in their little orc cradles?"*

The story of the Lord of the Rings might not be directly affected by these details, but the world of Middle Earth certainly needs them, just as the world needs more information on Dwarves. This is where the line between storytelling and worldbuilding lies.

This level of worldbuilding is hard to pull off — it's essentially condemning a world to a cycle of endless questions. But as with all things, the more effort put into a project, the better the results. Some Redditors have done a fantastic job with this, and I'd like to highlight them here.

u/Gany-de-Beilovsky's Hall of Autumn has done an excellent job filling out a world that is consistently descriptive. His world has grown exponentially since we were introduced to it, but he has maintained the right levels of information and mystery. It's important to note — Gany doesn't answer *every* question related to his world. His world touches multiple aspects of the city, allowing read-

was available. If you wanted to know the most dangerous and forbidden rites for the summoning of demons, there was a sourcebook for that. If you wanted to learn Tsolyani, you could — Barker was a linguist by trade (another close parallel with Tolkien).

An interaction between Barker and one of the players at his tabletop game illustrates this concept; it was tax season in the empire, and one of the players decided that he was going to actually sit down and do his taxes. Barker accepted this, and for the entire session the two of them set out the tax code, gathered up their assets, and did their taxes, much to the chagrin of everyone else around the table.



Credit: IntOrFloat

“ This is where the line between storytelling and worldbuilding lies. ”

ers to immerse themselves in the subterranean gothic city. He has covered the scientific advances of the people, the food substitutes to match an underground utopia's needs, and the political tensions of a nation gripped in fear.

From the world outside Reddit, we can see other examples of this consistent worldbuilding. MAR Barker is often called the “Forgotten Tolkien”, and the name is apt. As a teen in the late 1940s, Barker began worldbuilding as a part of an early tabletop game and continued to work on it until his death in 2012.

It's difficult to give one a sense of just how thorough the world is in a simple introduction. Simply put, if there were any question concerning Tekumel, Barker had an answer. If you wanted a list of every legion in the dozen or so sovereign political bodies on the planet he could tell that to you. If you wanted to know what towns you might hit every day on a 1 month journey from the capital of Tsolyanu to its eastern border, that information

Those who are familiar with Barker's work understand that what he created is arguably more substantial and complete than any other project of its kind, including Tolkien's work. His fans continue to expand and build on the project through the Tekumel Foundation, usergroups, and spin-off products like Choice of the Petal Throne. For those looking to get lost in a world, Tekumel is easily accessed, either through the foundation website at tekumel.com, or by stopping by the Yahoo user group, where members who played with Barker are still active.

There are few if any trenches in Tekumel. Wherever you want to explore, there are depths waiting for you there. It took Barker a lifetime, 60 plus years, to achieve this. If you're willing to put that much work into digging, Tekumel is standing testament that you can create something that truly feels alive. 🐉



# DIG DEEP TO FIND THE HEART OF YOUR WORLD

Bokai

Companion to “*Mariana Trenches of Worldbuilding*” (pg12)

When people try to explain the difference between worldbuilding and writing fiction, most will say that with writing fiction the details need to be constrained to serve the narrative, while in worldbuilding there is no constraint on what would be considered relevant. It is the hope of many worldbuilders to create a project so immense and detailed that it rivals the amount of knowledge gathered about our own world. Unfortunately, such an ideal creation is not possible. Go to any nonfiction section of a local bookstore or library, and the reason will quickly become self-evident. The whole sum of human knowledge has taken hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people millennia to

carry meaning. An example would be in one of the common introductions people use when sharing their worlds with others. They start from the top and stay there, putting out a list of races, regions, nations, religions, and so on with a brief description of each. This method requires stuffing a lot of information into a small amount of space, and the result usually is overly broad descriptions that lack context or fail to introduce anything unexpected or new to the reader. I can't count the number of times I've read a description of a world like this and the only thing I took from it was, “OK, fantasy Catholic church, with elves, and the dwarves are tall.”

“Digging deep will more quickly unearth the details that make worlds stand out as different and interesting.”

compile. Even now, some scholar has dedicated their life to understanding the small differences between subspecies of certain fish in a remote coastal area, another is working hard to record and preserve a dying language in a small rural region no one could point to on a map, and another is scouring the archives to make connections between a handful of people who may have had an influence on the direction of an artistic movement for a few decades out of 5000 years of recorded human history. No single worldbuilder, or even a team of worldbuilders, could possibly match that level of information generation, even if one were to consider the fact that research isn't required. MAR Barker, in his 60 plus years of worldbuilding, only ever filled out one hemisphere of his world in detail, and Tolkien, who is said to have created Middle Earth to house context for his languages, died before completing all of them to the degree that they might be usable in everyday conversation.

So, what is a worldbuilder to do? Some people may try to cover every possible topic to an equal degree, but it's focusing on a few important elements that is the fastest way to finding the heart of your world and creating something unique and alive. Until an idea has been fleshed out to a certain level of detail it will remain a cliché that relies on someone's familiarity with similar ideas to

But digging deep will more quickly unearth the details that make worlds stand out as different and interesting. An excellent example of this was recently posted on the r/worldbuilding subreddit by /u/pandesmos, who shared a series of drawings and descriptions of the plant life in his world. Does the fact that readers know nothing about the fauna that coexists with these plants matter? Did not having a map make the illustrations and descriptions unrealistic? Considering the strong positive reception the post got, it appears not.

The language of Siwa is another example of successfully narrow worldbuilding. It's a conlang developed by /u/empetrum and is one of the most comprehensive conlangs developed, with a 700 page grammar covering everything from phonology, to transitivity, to temporal conjunctions. The worldbuilding context for this language is provided in the preliminaries and occupies around 10 pages, but if you read the glossary you get a good sense of the issues that mattered the most to the people who would speak this language.

This method has also been successfully used in professional settings. Thieves' World, a setting with dozens of books, a board game, and a tabletop system are based on, focuses almost exclusively on the history and day-to-day life of a single city. This city, called Sanctuary, does exist within a certain

amount of context. We know that it's in thrall to the Rankan Empire, and that a distant war and foreign political machinations have had some effect on its citizens, but it is hard to say how far away the Rankan capital is, what the structure of its royal family may be, what other vassal states might sit under its influence, or any other of the little details that are often used to flesh out a nation. Instead, the energy of Thieves' World's creators was focused entirely on Sanctuary. They built a cast of dozens of people over several generations, drew maps of the city and the subregions within it, focused on the relations between factions in its walls, and described the cultural conflicts between the expat Rankans and the Ilsig natives. We may know almost nothing about Ranke, but we do know everything about Sanctuary's mercenaries, traders, slave traders, cultists, docks, curses, and temples. If one were to measure Thieves' World by square feet it would be quite small, but it dwarfs many “whole universes” built by other projects in terms of words written about or within it. Even if it were approached as a worldbuilding project and not a setting that supported fiction and RPGs, it feels like it is just as broad as it needs to be.

Narrowing focus won't just make the world feel more alive. It will give the world its unique flavor. Even in a large, broad project, the fastest way to make your world stand out from the thousands of other projects out there is to focus on details that can't be properly developed without looking at one single subject as completely as you can. How many worlds out there have a detailed description of the development of print in its history? What are the specific tenets of a religion, how is it structured, and what is its relationship to other areas of influence like the government, military, and finance? If a world has something that could superficially feel like a fantasy Christian church, a simple fix can be to flesh it out until there are parts of it which are nothing like what might be expected from such a cliché.

Focusing on depth will simultaneously improve the breadth of a project; specific details that come out of deep investigation will necessitate broader context. If one is to think profoundly about the production of paper in a world, one must necessarily wonder what sort of fiber is available, how trade

routes have developed, whether or not governments are concerned enough to censor print, and if they're strong enough to enforce that censure. In his introduction to his grammar /u/empetrum says, “Siwa... widened my horizons and introduced me to exciting subjects: anthropology, botany, biology, genetics, human prehistory and most importantly linguistics.” The gravity of a single topic, when thoroughly investigated, will drag towards it all sorts of information, but without that focus sometimes it is hard to emphasize to the reader what information is of any relevance.

As worldbuilders, we all have particular biases towards or against certain subjects. Some of us hate maps or politics but love designing races. Some don't care to think about culture but could build fantastical creatures all day long. It's important not to think of this as a weakness, but as a strength that will provide a project its niche. Tolkien had this with his focus on mythical lore and language. George R.R. Martin, for all his criticisms of Tolkien, is no less biased towards the political intrigues and military history of one small region of his world. This doesn't make either of those worlds any weaker. On the contrary, the passion Tolkien and Martin had for their pet subjects comes through to the reader, and is part of the reasons that they are so beloved by fans.

So dig deep and go narrow. You may discover that there are universes within your project that can only be discovered if you do so. ■



# THE GRAND SCALE: RELIGION

BH Pierce

The Lord of Light, the Covenant, the convoluted pantheons of Dungeons and Dragons — these fictional religions add strong flavor and important motivators to characters in the worlds they exist in. Religion appears so often in fiction because it is a nearly universal aspect of the human experience, and a unique religion can give a setting depth. While creating a quarreling pantheon of gods or a unique creations story are the most fun and memorable parts of building a religion, that is not what we will discuss here today. In this article we will examine the extreme basics that will be present in all religions, from small tribal societies to galaxy spanning empires. On the macro level we will discuss the overall philosophy of a religion, and on the micro how it affects the lives of its adherents, along with a look at the middle, the hierarchy of the church.

Stephen Prothero's excellent book "God is Not One" is about the differences in the major religions of the world, and it is from this work that I take my cues in forming the philosophies of my religions. Prothero claims that there are four aspects all religions share; a Problem, a Solution, a Goal, and Exemplars. The *Problem* is what the religion is generally trying to address. In Christianity the problem is sin; in Buddhism the problem is suffering. Overcoming this problem requires a *Solution* prescribed by the religion. In Christianity one must follow the Bible; in Buddhism one must follow the Eightfold Path. Now, this is a gross oversimplification of two very large and complicated religions, but they get the point across; there will be an overall method prescribed by the faith. Following the technique to overcome the problem will lead to the *Goal*. In Christianity the goal is an eternal paradise found in heaven; in Buddhism the goal is to be freed from the cycle of reincarnation. The last part generally apparent in all religions is *Exemplars*, faithful people who are looked up to as role models for how to overcome the *Problem* by following the *Solution* to reach the *Goal*. Exemplars are not limited being the founders of a faith - Saints and Bodhisattvas serve this role as well.

The next step down is the organization and hierarchy of the religion. Perhaps the most difficult aspect to speak about broadly as very much of it will depend on its size, but for our purposes we will

look at a religion through the lens of Centralization versus Decentralization. Who in your religion has the ability to communicate with the higher power? In a centralized system that ability will rest with either a single leader or a chosen few, while in a decentralized system a broader mix of people will be privy to the will of the higher power. Given the type of setting you're writing in the nature of the higher power will change. In a fantasy setting the faithful may be communicating with literal gods. In a more mundane setting holy individuals may just be people with access to holy texts or secret knowledge. A centralized religion is more likely to have a strict hierarchy that requires a great deal of work to climb, and a well-established chain of authority. Whereas a decentralized religion will be looser, often with many high-level people occupying co-equal positions of power. Size is not a good indicator of how organized a religion might be; Catholicism and Islam both have adherents numbering in the billions and Catholicism is highly centralized while Islam is decentralized.

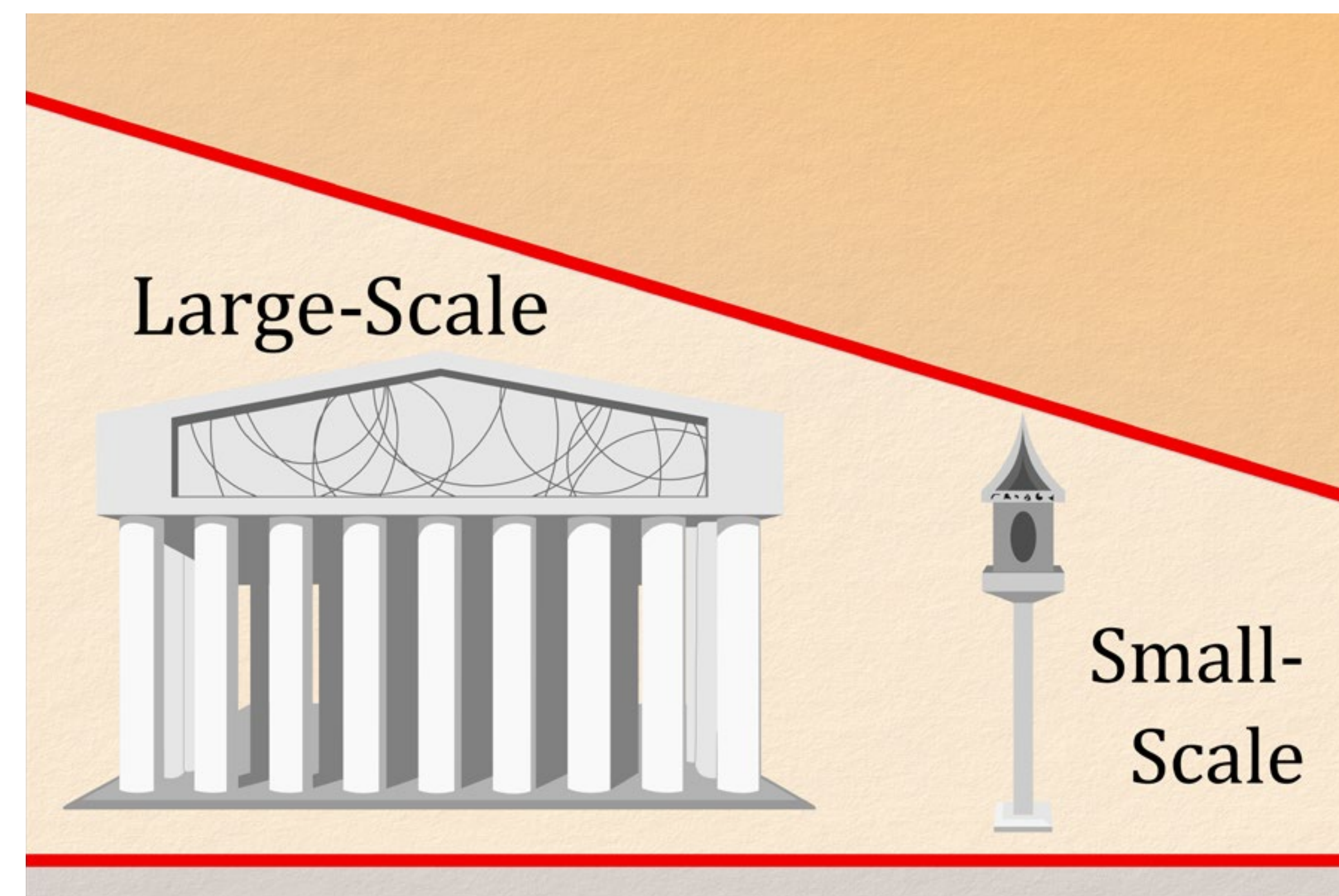
Finally, determine how your religion affects the day-to-day life of its believers. This will consist of applying doctrine to everyday life and creating rituals. When applying doctrine to everyday life consider what your doctrine covers. One limited to personal morality will not concern itself much when crops are planted, but if agricultural knowledge is considered holy then a priest may need to tell the farmers when the season will begin. Doctrine may cover a wide variety topics, such as who can marry whom, what jobs are considered good or bad, or even what medical practices can be performed on its adherents. After this you can turn to the slightly more fun task of inventing rituals. Rituals themselves can be split into two categories; personal and social. Personal rituals focus around milestones in an adherent's life, like birth, death, marriage, and ascension to adulthood. Your religion will likely have celebratory rituals for such personal events as they are universal, and given the nature of your setting, it may have more. Social rituals are ones shared in by the entire community, ranging from a common weekly service to annual festivals marking important dates or events in the religions mythology. The nature of these rituals, both personal and social, will widely vary

from religion to religion, but all seek to bring their community together with a shared experience. It is through these rituals that a religion will not only bind a community together, but bind the present to the past.

Religion can be both a unifying force and a divisive force in a society, so you must take care when you decide how religion is to be implemented. In the West there is a very either/or view on religion; one practices this one or that one, is a part of this sect or that sect. In China and other eastern cultures many people celebrate holidays and rituals from many religions without ever defining themselves as strictly one or the other. There's a saying in Japan that the Japanese are born Shinto, get married Christian, and die Buddhist because they use rituals from each of those religions to mark those occasions. How do different religions interact in your world? Do they peacefully coexist? Is there rampant strife between them? Why? Remember that large-scale religious conflict usually does not come about for *purely* religious reasons; it was not

purely religious zeal that fueled Muslim Conquests or the Crusades. There was a great deal of glory and gold to be won on those battlefields, and it was not unheard of for Muslims and Christians to fight side by side. Religious tolerance can be a great or even greater political tool than religious persecution. When Cyrus the Great, the Romans, and Pachacuti conquered their empires they made it a point to keep their hands off local religious monuments and artifacts as a way to solidify their conquests.

The article is almost over and I'm sure you've noticed I haven't mentioned much about creation myths, pantheons, or schisms. These elements will likely appear in your religion and are what an audience will remember, but they are largely outgrowths of the topics we discussed today. This article serves more as a framework than a guide, given that you may already have given some thought to a religion for your world. In that case, find out how the aspects we discussed manifest themselves in your religion and build it from there.■



Credit: s6th



# THE FUTURE IS HOW?

Jason DiBlasi

This month flew by faster than the Heart of Gold after reaching infinite improbability! Last article we spoke of building a technological basis for a society. I left you on a little cliffhanger about how we build a society around the technology that it creates, and I briefly went over the techno-socio-political cycle. Today, we're going to go more in-depth on the political side of a futuristic society. We are going to break down different political environments and prescribe each to a "high" or "low" future society.

## The Techno-Political Cycle

First and foremost, we will break down the political side of the cycle in greater detail. This is easiest with a look at recent history. The rise of social media and instant messaging initially connected us faster and easier than ever before. This unprecedented jump in technology has had vast and profound effects on our lives. Most people use it to see pictures of their friends, plan events, or just feed their ego. Some people have found more malicious uses and brought about a new term: "cyberbullying." It took years for this term to really gain a hold, with it really only becoming relevant in the 2010's. The first text messages as we know them were sent in 1992, and it took until 2009 for a law to be made that allowed school administrators to discipline students who send text messages that are harassing or malicious in nature.

One of the first networks that allowed this all to happen was ARPANET, which was funded by the United States Department of Defense. The government called for a way to instantly transmit data over a distance, and that technology soon followed. Decades later, the technology called for a need to control some aspect of this instant communication, and the government responded by passing laws what is and is not allowed. There is an ebb and flow, first a new technology is released, and then it settles into society until an unforeseen use comes around that requires some form of legislation. This happens with any technology: technology used in war, technology used at home, and technology used at work.

Keeping in mind the cycle, there are various ways that technology can push societies and politics, below are a few.

## AI Singularity

Imagine a world that is totally controlled by a single intelligence. It makes decisions for all of the people under it, and they follow those decisions. It isn't a dictator nor a king, but an artificial intelligence designed to give society the perfect lifestyle. It calculates the cost of every decision that a person can make and it would decide for them if that is the correct decision. This society wouldn't be ruled by people, it would essentially not have a ruler, but a creator of guidelines that is obeyed for the good of all. Another variation is a hivemind created by linking all citizens to the same neural network, so they move as cogs in a machine. All decisions are information-driven and every step is a step in the right direction.

## Gerontocracy

With technology today pushing people well past 80 years of life, it's easy to think that one day people can live to be over 100 or 150 regularly. The ruling class might be composed of the oldest people in society. These people might retain their health, and they are simply replaced by the next oldest person as nature takes its course.

## Geniocracy

Another facet of technology is how smart it makes the average person. We as a species have been increasing our intellect for thousands of years. Only people of a certain intelligence would be able to vote and only those of a higher intelligence could serve in governments. It would make sense that the smartest of the smart lead a country, especially because the lowest intelligence people of the future might be smarter than some of the smartest people in the present.

## Un-Technocracy

Technology is unavoidable. It's just a product of intelligent existence. While a government could use technology to rule, they can also fight against technology and rule with their feelings. In this government, the people would decide on right and

wrong without any metric other than the decision "feeling right." It seems counterintuitive to do this, but if technology advances as fast as ours has in the past few decades, these people might feel that trying to reign it in would only lead to that technology controlling them. They allow the people to use it, but it is not used for legislation.

## Galactic Federation

This is one of the easier political environments to implement into your stories. Improvement in communication across long distances might enable larger and larger states, until entire galaxies can effectively be run by a single bureaucracy. Every planet in the federation will send a representative to a large assembly where they will all vote on laws and governances for the galaxy as a whole. Perhaps a group of the richest traders runs the show. Since they control the trade, they control the flow of goods and money. There's a lot of power in that.

There might be a president or a representative who holds the highest office. This social system is also incredibly flexible, as you can have the galactic council create laws but also allow different planets or sectors to have their own ability to create laws for themselves. You could even have a dictator rise up from nowhere or have a trusted member of the ruling class take control through other means. A galactic federation also allows a lot of communication and trade of goods and technology throughout the galaxy, so a relatively primitive race can become fairly advanced in a short time. Just be wary of the senator who speaks of Darth Plagueis the Wise...

I hope you learned a little about creating a political background for your worlds. Next month we will focus on society and how to build a culture in your world.🐼



# BLASTING OFF INTO SPACE OPERA

LordHenry7898

Genre Article

Last issue, StronglyOPlatypus walked you through high fantasy. Now, let’s see what happens when we let the usual high fantasy tropes play out in space. High fantasy, as was mentioned last week, often focuses on good versus evil narratives, and often has heroes and villains who are definitely good and evil respectively. Furthermore, the hero often embarks on some sort of quest to stop the villain. What happens if this narrative plays out in space? Now we have space opera!

Space opera is probably the most well known of the science fiction genres, and yet, many people don’t recognize it until they see it. They usually know it as Star Wars, Firefly, or a whole slew of other space opera.

Space opera is a relatively new genre of science fiction. It came about in the 1930s as a way to make fun of sci-fi stories, in magazines, that sounded as if the author had taken a western and replaced the cowboys, horses, six-shooters, and bandits with astronauts, spaceships, lasers, and aliens. It wasn’t until movies like Star Wars and TV shows like Star Trek that space opera began to resemble what we view it as today.

In space opera, you will usually see some of the following.

**A clearly defined battle between good and evil.**

You should be able to look at the movie, book, video game, whatever, and say “that’s the good guy. That’s the bad guy”. This will include a heroic central character and an easily noticeable evil character. Often, something will happen that allows you to see that the bad guy is, indeed, bad. Tarkin blew up Alderaan, for example.

**Monsters.**

One of the things that many viewers love about space opera is the monsters. Think about one of the most beloved space operas of all time: Star Wars. Every film had a memorable scene with some sort of monster. *A New Hope* had the Dianoga (trash compactor monster onboard the Death Star). *The Empire Strikes Back* had the Wampa Ice Beast (the critter on Hoth that nearly eats Luke). *Return of the Jedi* sees Luke squaring off against the

Rancor (the big brown beast that lived under Jabba’s palace). The reason monsters are so popular is that monsters let the worldbuilder go wild with their imagination.

**Futuristic weaponry.**

Star Wars had blasters and lightsabers. *Dune* (the movie, not the novel) had the Weirding Modules, which fired blobs of weaponized sound. You get the idea. One of the most recognizable aspects of space opera is the weapons. Lots and lots of directed energy weapons. For best effect, they should be big and flashy, and make some sort of pew pew sound when they’re fired. This helps to give the viewer a feeling of “we’re in space!” This stems from 1950s sci-fi films (The Forbidden Planet being a good example) in which the daring astronauts would fight against the evil bug-eyed monsters. Often, both sides had laser guns. This image of the dashing astronaut fighting the alien, getting the girl, and saving the day, has stuck in the public consciousness, and is most commonly found in films such as Guardians of the Galaxy.

**Spacefaring civilizations.**

Spacefaring civilizations are just as important to space operas as magic is too high fantasy. Without them, nothing would happen. It might as well be realistic fiction. Essentially, they are the vehicle allowing space opera to be space opera; their interactions are what make space opera tick. There may or may not be some sort of interplanetary government as well.

**Interplanetary governments.**

Interplanetary governments in space opera can serve as either the good guys or the bad guys. As the good guys, they often serve as some sort of interspecies peacekeeping force, solving disputes, welcoming new species, and acting as a way for civilizations to interact with each other. As the bad-dies, they are generally heavily militarized. They commit all sorts of atrocities and often value one or two species over all the others.

**Aliens.**

Space Opera aliens are usually somewhere between three extremes. First is the humanoid aliens. For all intents and purposes, these guys are humans, but with a few differences such as different colored skin, or a funny forehead (I’m looking at you, Star Trek). Next is the kind of alien that people usually imagine. They have a lot of differences, but retain the basic human shape. Chewbacca comes to mind, or the typical gray alien. Finally, you have the truly alien alien. These are the ones that are nothing like people. Stargate’s Goa’uld (parasitic mind-controlling aliens) would fall into this category. Most races fall in between these 3 extremes.

**Spaceships.**

If spacefaring civilizations are the bread and butter of space opera, then spaceships are the tray on which they’re served. Typically, they will either be gorgeous works of art, or dirty, run-down, and industrial. The latter will occasionally need a kick to get started.

Now, if you don’t want to include a particular trope, that’s fine. Not every space opera has every single trope. These are just what you can reasonably expect to see in space opera. In Stargate, for example, spaceships took a bit of a backseat until later seasons of *SG-1*.

**A list of Space Opera in Fiction:**

- Dune (books, movie, miniseries)
- *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (TV show)
- Star Wars (Movies, books, TV shows)
- Star Trek (Movies, books, TV shows)
- Stargate (Movies, books, TV shows)
- *Firefly* (TV show)
- *Farscape* (TV show)
- Hyperion Cantos (book series) 📖



Intro Piece (The Planetfall Miscalculation):

I. *The true adventurer goes forth  
aimless and uncalculating  
to meet and greet  
Unknown fate.*



“Reading O. Henry again, are you?”

Griswold ignored the Virtual Intelligence. Sinking back in his chair, he closed his eyes as the observatory was veiled in silence. Bright words appeared on the hemispherical window that opened to the vast space beyond, describing the dimensions of the passing star system. The numbers briefly illuminated the room in white, blue, and yellow before fading back into the comforting darkness. He swirled his whiskey, listening to the rhythmic ringing of ice on glass.

“You’ve been quiet, Gris.”

Despite the artificiality of a Virtual Intelligence, her voice was oddly soothing.

“Tell me a story, Vienna.” Gris opened his eyes, meditating on the distant star system.

“You know I can only share as many adventures as you have had on this ship,” Her voice echoed through the observatory, seemingly coming from all directions. “My memory goes as far back as my implementation into the ship’s systems shortly before launch: nothing more, nothing less. You are an Aeternum, Gris, capable of an eternal life. You have seen and experienced Earth. I’m interested in learning more of it.”

Gris set down his whiskey, closed the book, and rose from his seat. He shuffled towards the thick window and rested his forehead against it.

“You’ve always avoided my inquiries of Earth, Gris.”

“Vienna, you don’t have a sense of time. You don’t have human longing. You don’t have love or hate or desperation. Do not press me.”

“I may not exhibit such feelings typical of man, but I am able to understand them. You are frustrated, desperate, longing for something that can’t come soon enough. I can feel that.”

“You’ve tried too often to comfort me. Do you know when enough is enough?”

“I am here to ensure a successful transition to a new world, Gris. Over the last hundred years, you’ve restricted many of my personal functionalities, but do not prevent me from helping you with this.”

Gris chuckled, pressing the side of his face to the cold window.

“Would you like me to analyze you for causes of your headache?”

Gris strolled back to his chair, sinking into the warm leather. “Why do you worry about me?”

“You know the answer to this question, Gris. I need to ensure your mental and physical health before planetfall protocols. People depend on you.”

“Planetfall isn’t for another year and three months.”

“Analyzing your current condition, you’ll need every minute of that.”

“Vienna, I did not give you permission to scan me..”

“You’ll thank me later, Gris.”

He lifted the drink to his lips, observing the passing asteroid. Bright numbers reappeared on the window, showing its trajectory, heat, and velocity. This was the literature of the great ship. This was the literature of the hundreds of thousands of exiles born and raised in the desolation of space:

experimentation, analysis, calculation, prediction. But it wasn’t Gris’s. He picked up O. Henry’s novel, flipped to his bookmark, and let the stories of a world far behind him pull him into a deep sleep.



Blaring sirens woke Gris. The peaceful observatory now flashed with red lights in rhythm with the siren’s pulse. As Gris jumped to his feet, an ear shattering blast sent him sprawling across the room like a toy thrown in a fit of anger.

“Vienna, talk to me!” Gris rolled to his side, only to shriek with pain as he put pressure on his shattered arm. “Vienna! What is goi...”

A second blast flung his broken body into the opposite wall. Gris looked up in shock as he noticed a growing crack in the observatory window, but what he saw beyond it disturbed him even more. A red and blue world filled his view as the bright numbers reappeared:

*Planet: Postantera*  
*Distance: 1,003 km*

Gris shook with fear as he read the final two lines.

*Ship Velocity: 9,881 km/h*  
*Time Until Impact: 0 yrs, 0 months, 0 days, 0 hours, 9 minutes, 43 seconds*

BASICS:

The miscalculated planetfall procedure soon proved to be a catalyst for the rise of numerous civilizations as in-fighting and territoriality encouraged camaraderie and bonding under shared ideals.

While some stayed with the wreckage, clinging to the hope that the damaged technologies brought from Earth stored within could be recovered, others abandoned this hope and spread wide across the unfamiliar planet of Postantera.

Thus, a new history began in a phase similar to Earth’s Dark Ages. Clashes of ideals led to bloodshed among warmongers, and trade cooperatives fueled the wellbeing of intellectuals, not unlike human life on the old Earth. Nations rose and fell, great people were born and remembered, religious figures swayed the tides of battle, and humanity slowly crawled to all reaches of the new world.

This history is ever-growing, with many stories yet to be written, and so... welcome to **Postantera**.



CLIMATE:

Despite being farther from its parent star than Earth is to the Sun, Postantera is hotter and much drier than Earth, due to its star being slightly larger than the Sun. This causes Postantera's average surface temperature to be about 64F (18C), compared to Earth's 61F (16C). This difference may not seem like much, but there are significant temperature differences near the equator. Around inland regions near the equator, temperatures can often reach 122F (50C) or more.

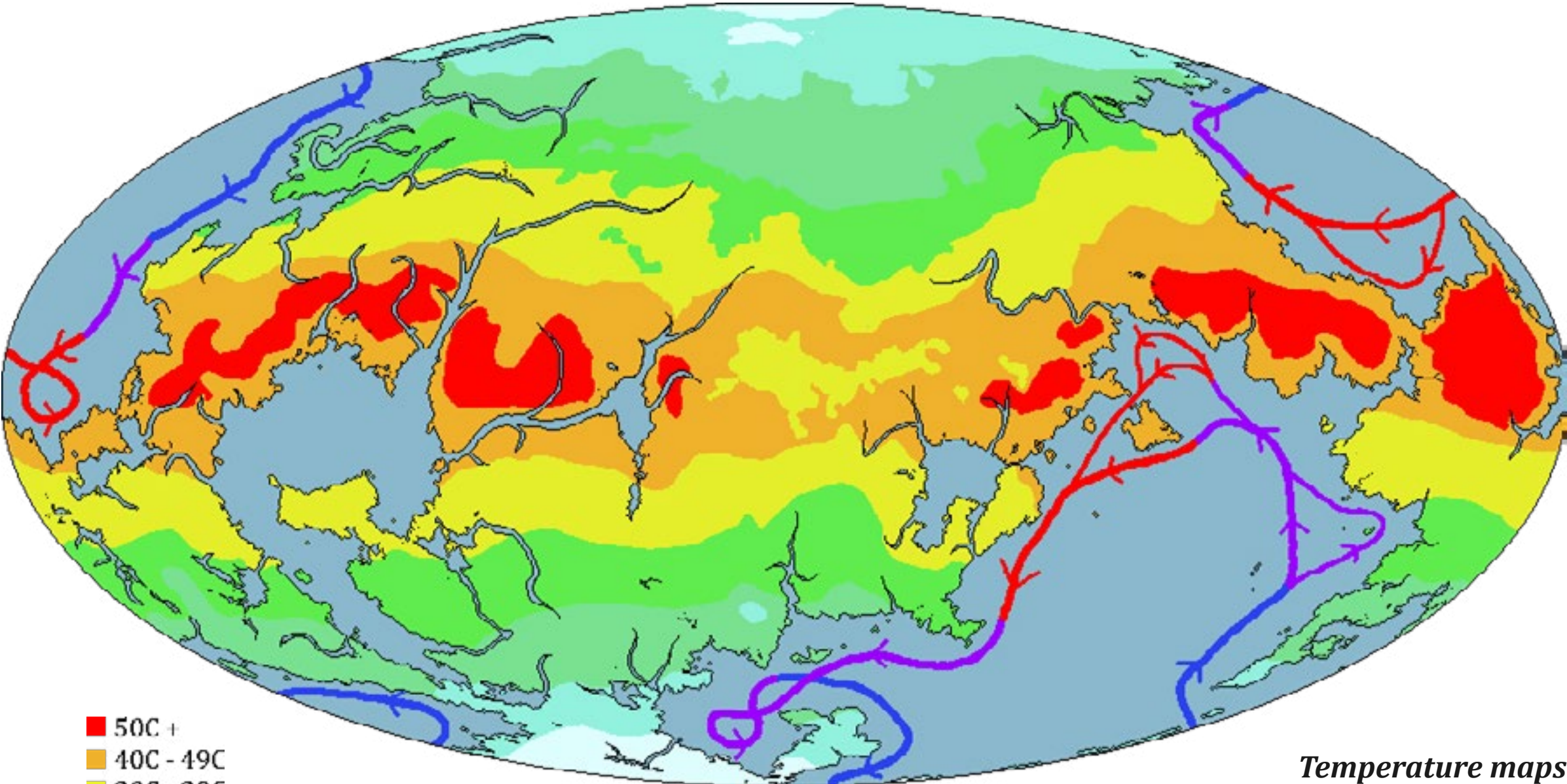
Looking at a map, it is easy to see why Postantera is so dry. Not only does Postantera have far less ocean than Earth (it is about 38% ocean compared to Earth's 71%), most of Postantera's landmass is in a single supercontinent, resulting in most areas being landlocked.

In light of these two facts, it should be no surprise that Postantera is dominated by desert and steppe. Over 45% of the surface is classified as arid or semiarid under the Köppen climate classification system. There are also large tropical areas, mostly near the oceans and seas.

There is a large area in the north that receives no rain, due to the mountain ranges surrounding it, combined with the area's distance from major bodies of water. Postantera's two largest

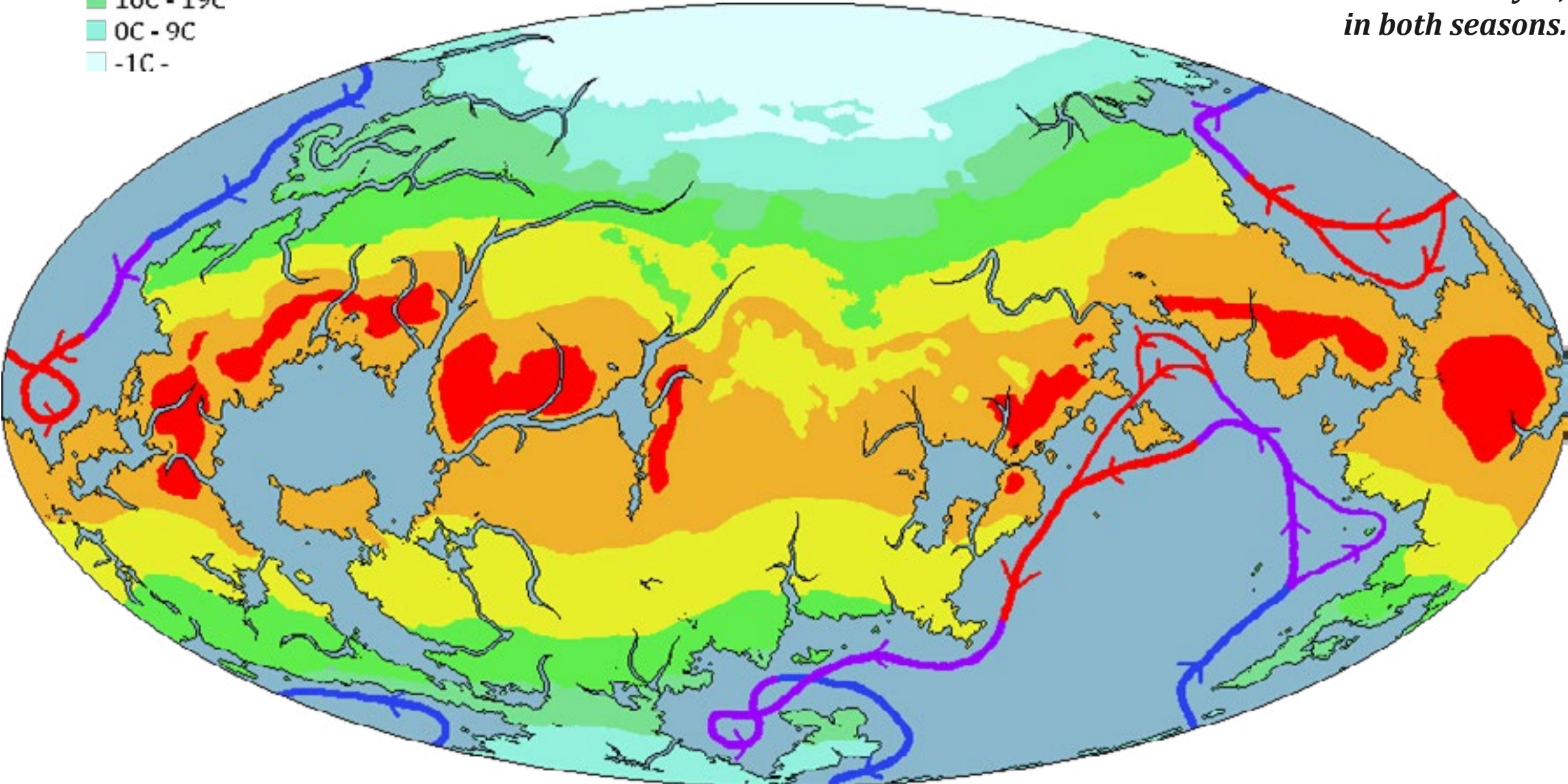
oceans are completely separate, meaning that it distributes heat differently from Earth. Postantera has two distinct ocean currents that distribute heat (called thermohaline conveyors), while Earth has one that covers all of the planet's oceans. There is less land in the southern hemisphere, leading to the climate there being more temperate than in the northern hemisphere.

SUMMER



- 50C +
- 40C - 49C
- 30C - 39C
- 20C - 29C
- 10C - 19C
- 0C - 9C
- 1C -

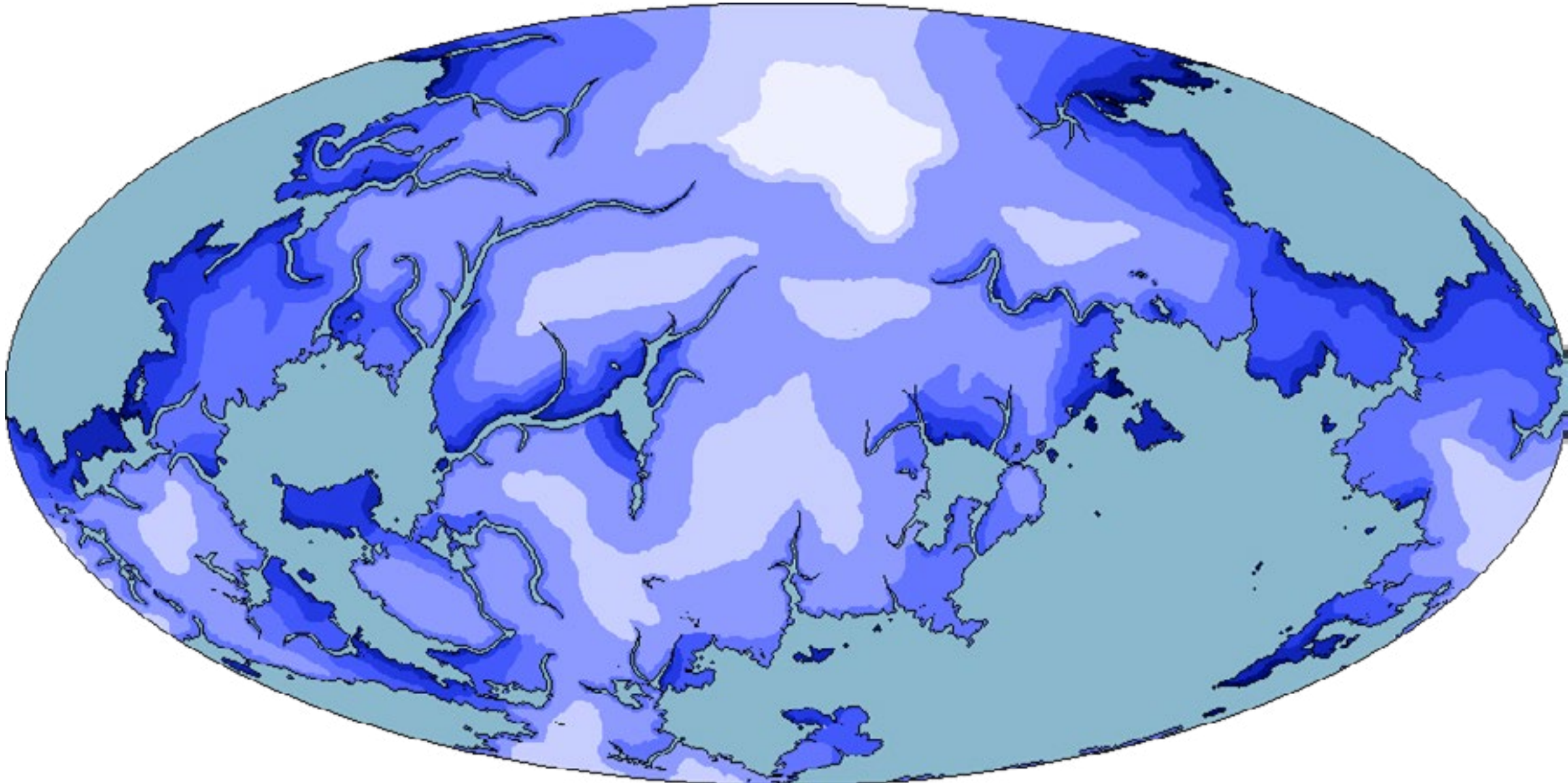
WINTER



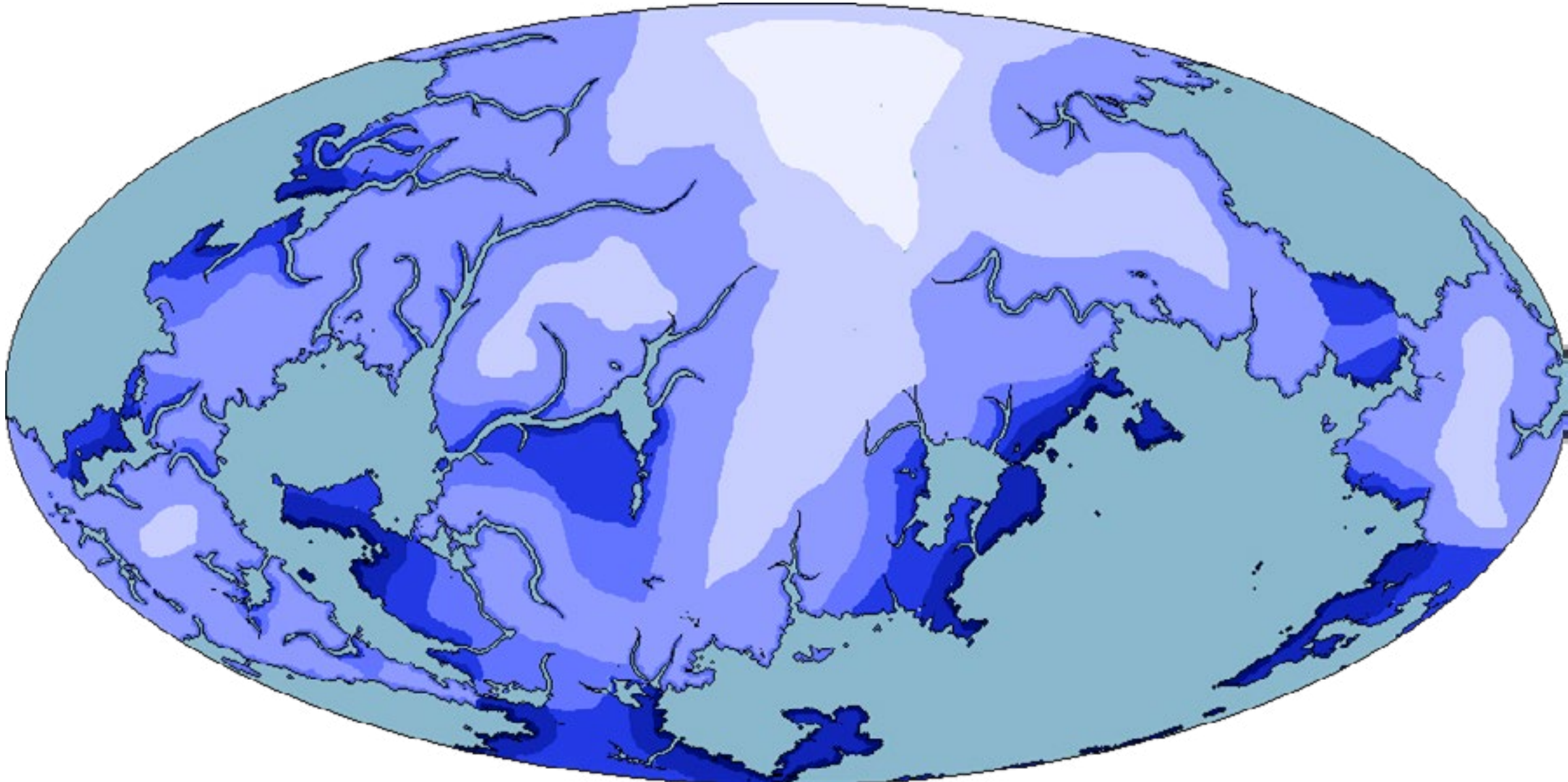
SUMMER

Temperature maps of Postantera, with thermohaline conveyor, in both seasons.

SUMMER



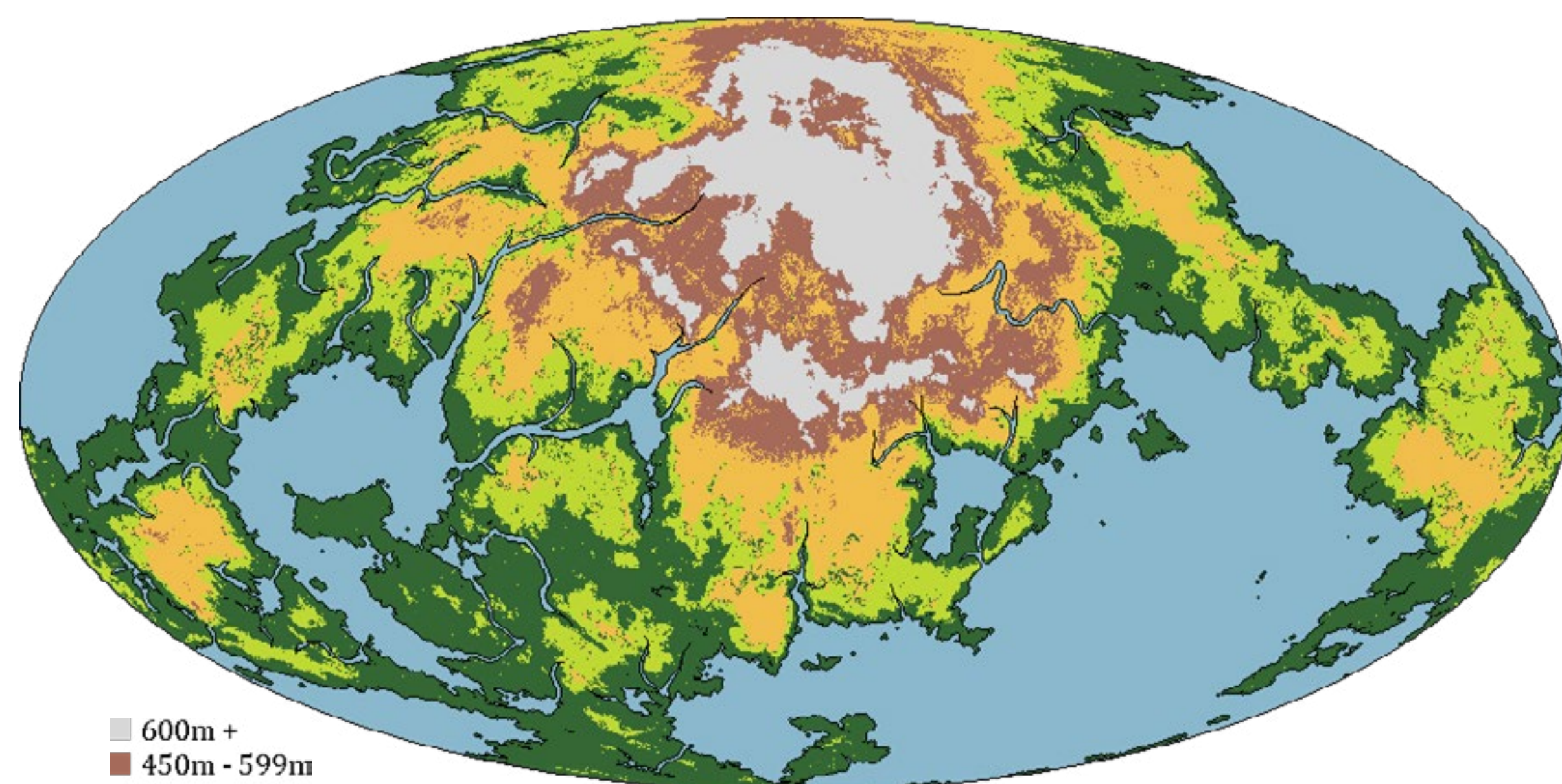
WINTER



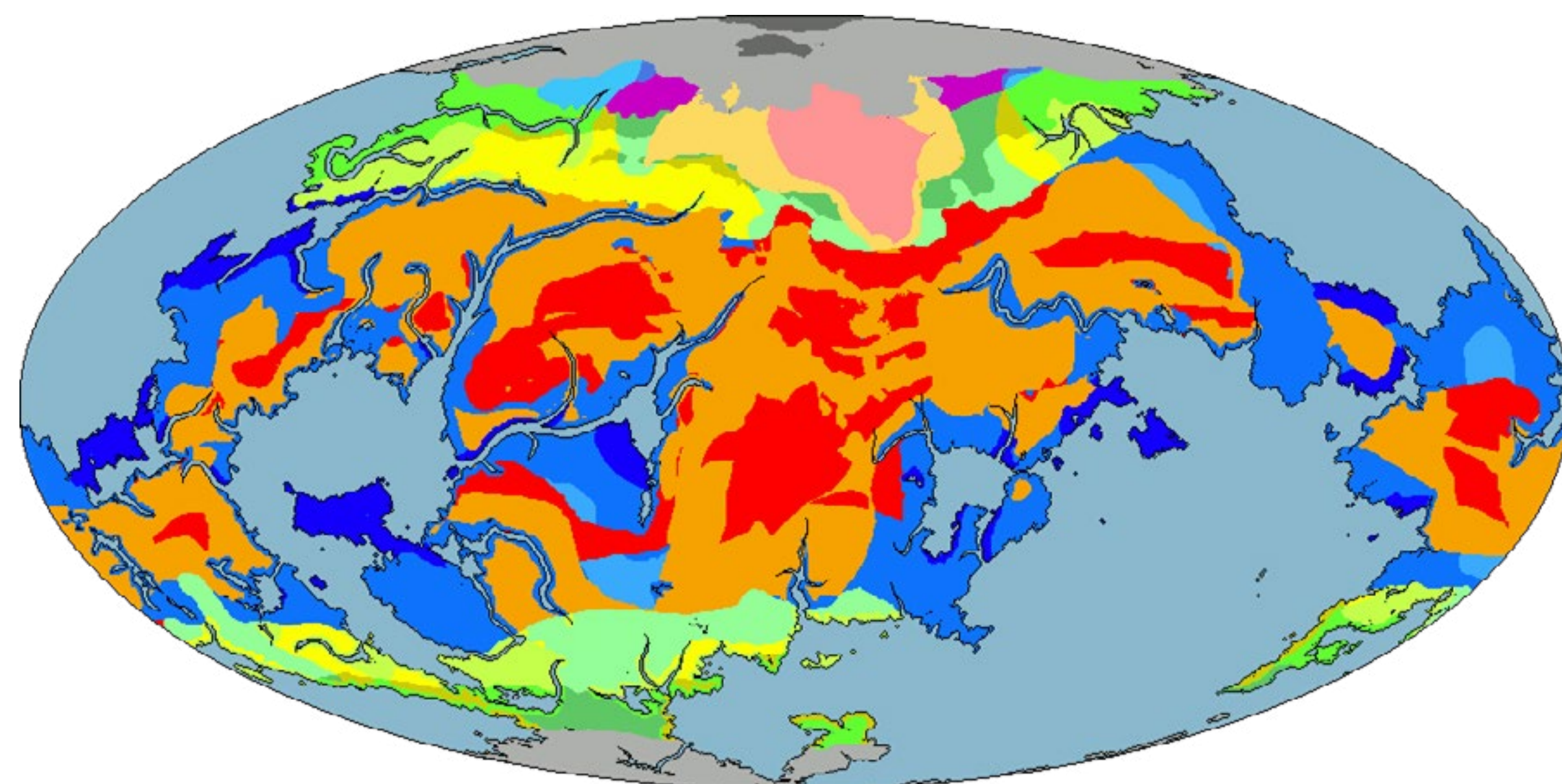
SUMMER

Precipitation maps of Postantera in both seasons.





Elevation map of Postantera.



Climate map of Postantera, using the Köppen climate classification.

Tropical (Semi) Arid		Temperate		Continental		Polar	
Af	BWh	Csa	Cwa	Dsb	Dwb	ET	EF
Am	BWk	Csb	Cwb				
Aw	BSH						
	BSk						

## SOLAR SYSTEM:

In the center of the system is the star Pospollo. Pospollo is quite similar to our Sun, at 1.02x its mass and 1.16x its luminosity.

The closest planet to Pospollo is Antgri. Antgri is a very small, rocky planet, only 4.7x the mass of our Moon. Antgri sits close to its star, and as such, is tidally locked. Both a day and a year on Antgri are 77.7 Earth days long. Antgri has an average temperature of 411F (211C.).

The next planet is Postantera, the focus of our efforts. It is quite Earthlike, as it is rocky and 90% the mass of Earth. A day on Postantera is 25 Earth hours long, and years are 400 days long. It has an Earthlike atmosphere and an average temperature of 64F (18C.).

Postantera also has two moons. The closest one, Brisna, is less than 3% the mass of our Moon. It orbits quite close to Postantera, and orbits the planet every 8.3 hours. It appears very large from the surface of Postantera, and has an angular diameter of 105 arc-minutes. Our own moon only has an angular diameter of 31 arc-minutes.

The more distant moon, Virina, is very dense, being made mostly of iron and nickel. It has 1.59x the radius of our Moon, but 11.3x the mass. It orbits Postantera every 3.8 days. From the surface of Postantera, it has an angular diameter of 85 arc-minutes. Virina is habitable, with an atmosphere comparable to Earth's and liquid water on the surface.

The next, and farthest, planet is Rentri. It is a rocky planet 83% the mass of Earth. Rentri is quite far from Pospollo; its year is 3.4 Earth years. Its days are also very long: 357 Earth days. The average temperature on Rentri is -155F (-104C.). It has a single moon by the name of Elna. Elna is large, at 2.8x the mass of our Moon. It orbits Rentri once every 3.6 days.

## BASIC ECOLOGY: (APEX PREDATORS)

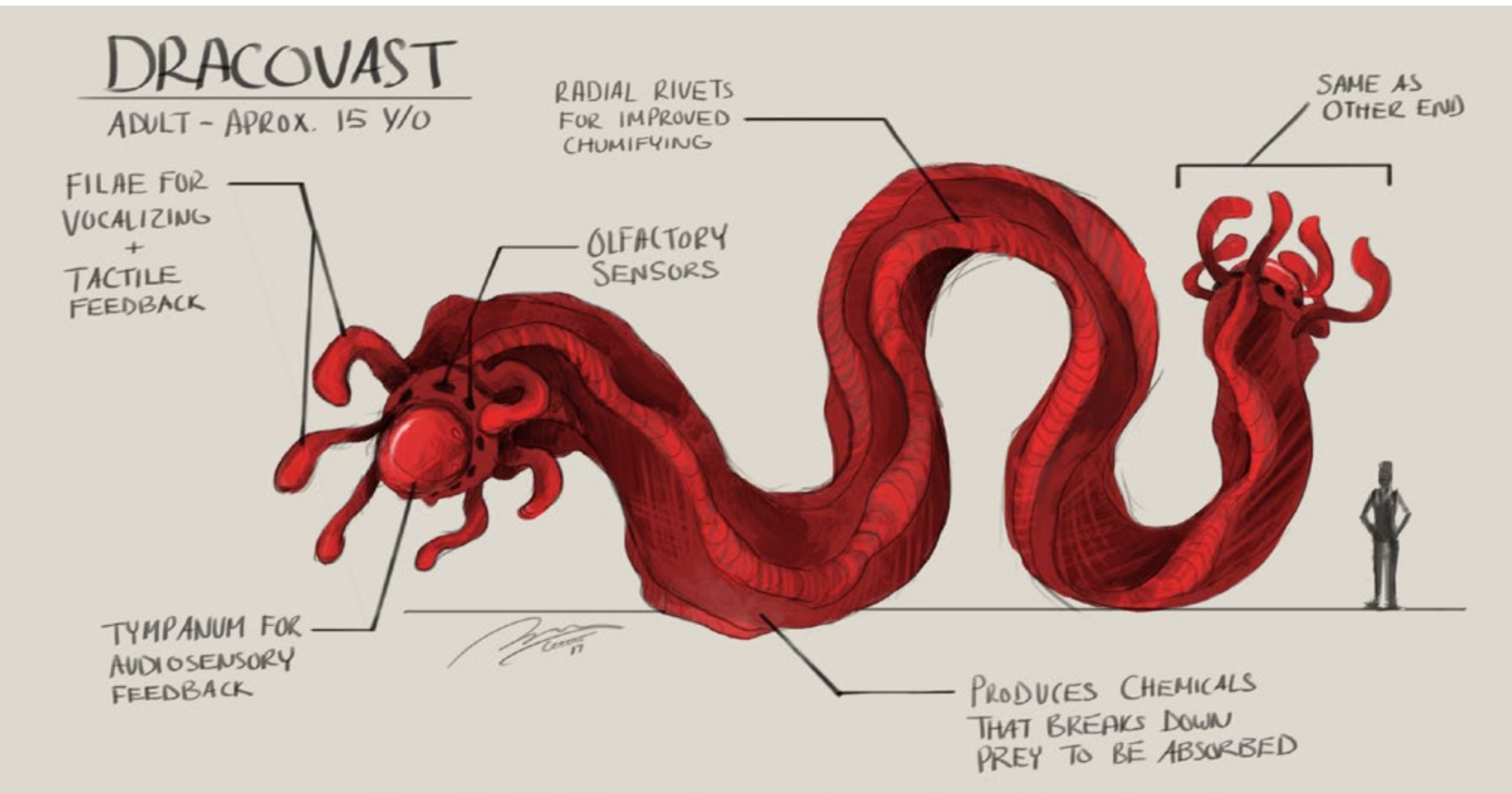
Postantera is a geologically young planet compared to our own. As such, life has not had the time to evolve into the levels of complexity that humanity experiences today. Creatures that evolved on Earth will be vastly different from aliens on Postantera because of the randomness of evolution and natural selection. The conditions on Postantera are similar to Earth, but in different key ways. Postantera is very much a red planet; almost 90% of the things living there are some shade of red. This is due to the high levels of iron found in the crust and how the early microbes evolved because of it. Since Postantera has slightly less gravity than Earth, alien lifeforms can grow taller and bigger without straining too hard.

**TIP:** When setting up alien ecosystems, it is a good rule of thumb to have autotrophs and herbivores occupy the majority of the total fauna population, while primary and tertiary predators occupy a small portion, simply because herbivorous creatures can sustain themselves off fewer resources.

**TIP:** Look to the environment you created, and think outside of the box about what traits would be required to survive. Ask yourself what these creatures will do for the essentials, what body parts are needed for everyday activities, et cetera. If you really want to go in depth, create a pseudo-evolutionary chart that diverges each time a new trait appears.



**TIP:** A completely alien environment requires completely alien life. A good way to create believable aliens is to start from scratch.



Credit: Xayah

The flora and fauna of Postantera have evolved to be extremely diverse. The apex genus that populates the world is large enough to feast off of humans and is called the Dracovast (Dracovastus). Dracovasts are worm-like monsters that have no mouth but eat simply by absorbing the organic matter that has been caught in their slimy and heavily acidic coating. These worms start off as tiny creatures about the size of an earthworm and can grow to the size of a school bus over a period of twenty Postanti years. They have no mechanism for excreting waste, so it builds up inside them until they burst and die in a gloriously disgusting rain of acidic mush.

These creatures are heavily social and will entangle themselves in groups of over one hundred to better hunt for their prey, which can be anything from flora to fauna. In these groups, they can communicate through chemicals, share nutrients, and have a better chance of survival. These Dracovasts cannot reproduce sexually, but their filae will fall off and slither to other filae to form a new "baby" Dracovast with combined genetic material. Early settlers were scared to death of these things, as they are hive-minded and learn quickly. They can vocalize many different sounds to imitate their prey, and even mimic human screams and simple human phrases to catch the settlers off guard.

Dracovasts are the apex predator on Postantera, but there is much more living on the planet. Plants of Postantera are also weird in their own way; many species will grow vascular bat-shaped wings instead of having leaves.

Upon the arrival of human settlers, the ecosystem of Postantera changed forever. With the introduction plants, animals, and bacteria native to Earth, the native Postanti flora and fauna had to fight a war for nutrients and light -- a war that Postantera has been losing.

Since the living things of Earth and Postantera evolved in totally different ways, it was very difficult to get Earth plants entrenched. The Earthlings found Postanti plants and animals unpalatable and even downright poisonous, so everywhere they went they cut down the native ecosystems and set up little echoes of Earth. As history progressed over thousands of years, Postantera gradually looked less and less alien, and more like Earth. From the moon of Virina, one could visibly see humanity spread across the globe by merely tracking the gradual replacement of red with green. 🌱

# THE ARTISTIC METHOD: AN EXERCISE IN BRAINSTORMING

StronglyOPlatypus

A white page. An empty canvas. A world of nothingness. You have the power to create something beautiful, but you don't know what to do. You know that once the ideas come to you, the void will give way to intricate details, intriguing characters, and epic stories. You glance around, looking for something to draw inspiration from, but find nothing. Your hand hovers over the keyboard, but no keys are pressed. The blankness taunts you. You long for something, anything to help you bring the world you are trying to create to fruition.

It can be frustrating to be unable to brainstorm. The purpose of this article is to show you a method that I use often to come up with new ideas. This method will revolve heavily around art, but don't worry if you aren't the best at drawing or painting. Its purpose is not to create a masterpiece, a fact that will become abundantly clear as you witness my sketches. Rather, the purpose is to put something down on paper which will serve as the inspiration for your brainstorming. Feel free to adapt this method to your preferred medium of artistic expression, whether it be music, poetry, writing or another medium.

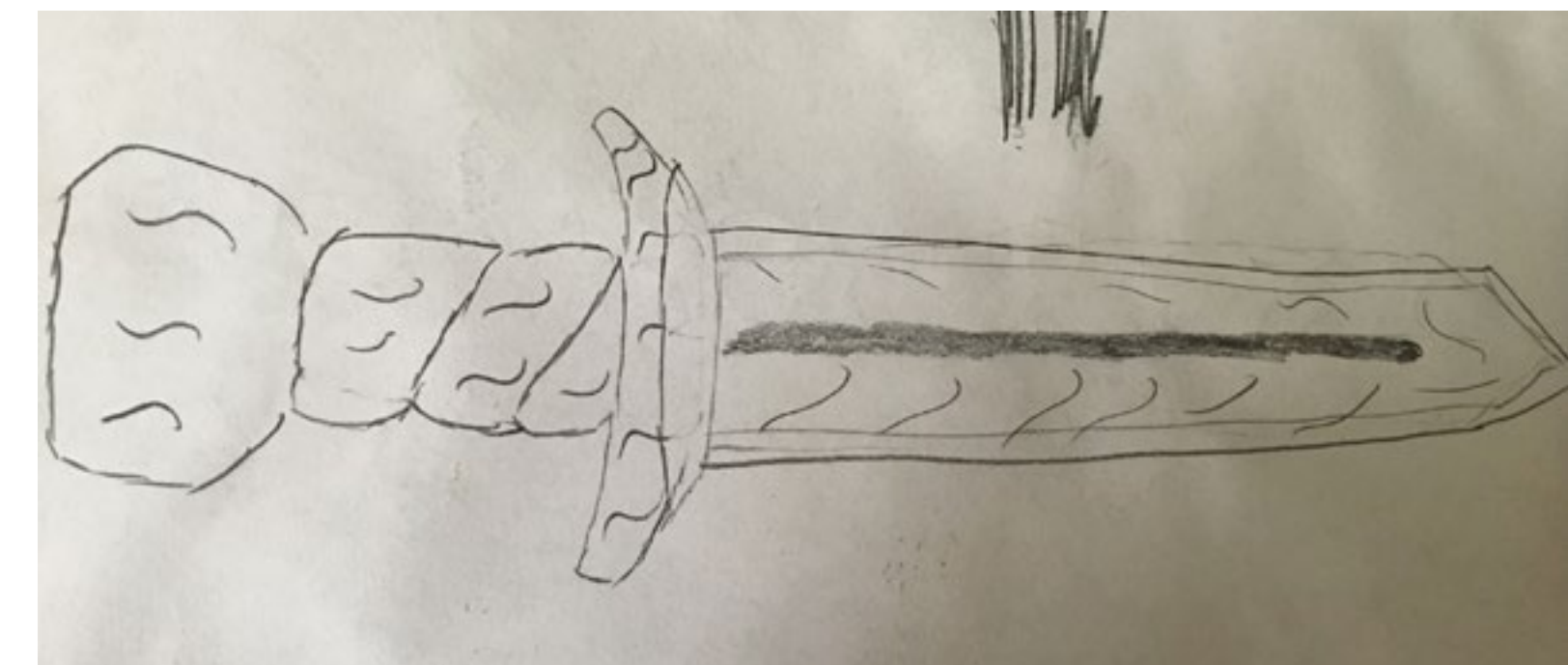
The first step of this method is to decide what you are going to make. Decide how far out of your comfort zone you would like to go, and start to think of what is in your world already that would make for good art. If you already have something in mind, go with that.

**If not, here's some ideas:**

- **A weapon:** swords, guns, lasers, spears, etc.
- **A building:** a grand mansion, a government office, or a simple house, etc.
- **A creature:** a weird alien, a cute dog, a great dragon, etc.
- **A character.**

I'm going to be using a sword as my example piece. So, grab your pencil, pen, mouse, or other tool, because it's time to get creative!

First, you'll want to do a basic outline. Just a sketch. It doesn't have to look good, or even much like what it's supposed to be. You just want to get an idea of what you're creating.



As you can see, I've created a very bad drawing of my sword. The final product will be much better. The important thing is that I have an inkling of what I want it to look like. Because I just drew what came to mind when I thought "sword", I know what kind of sword I'm drawing, the style of its hilt and guard, the fact that it has a groove, and that it's going to have a decent level of detail. I've placed squiggly lines where detailed etchings and designs would be, and I've made it look like a kindergartener drew it, but I have a plan for the final product now.

At this point, you should decide a few things about your artwork in-world. Don't go into too much detail just yet. I've decided to have this sword be from the nation of Fornim in my world, to have it be made by a renowned artist rather than a common blacksmith, and to have weapon making be viewed as an art in Fornim. I haven't yet created more than just a basic description, nothing about the background of the artist, the role of swords in Fornim's military, or the methods used to make the sword. Do the same for your picture. Take a moment to look at the features you have placed upon your basic sketch. Decide whether or not you like them, and what you might want to add, remove, or



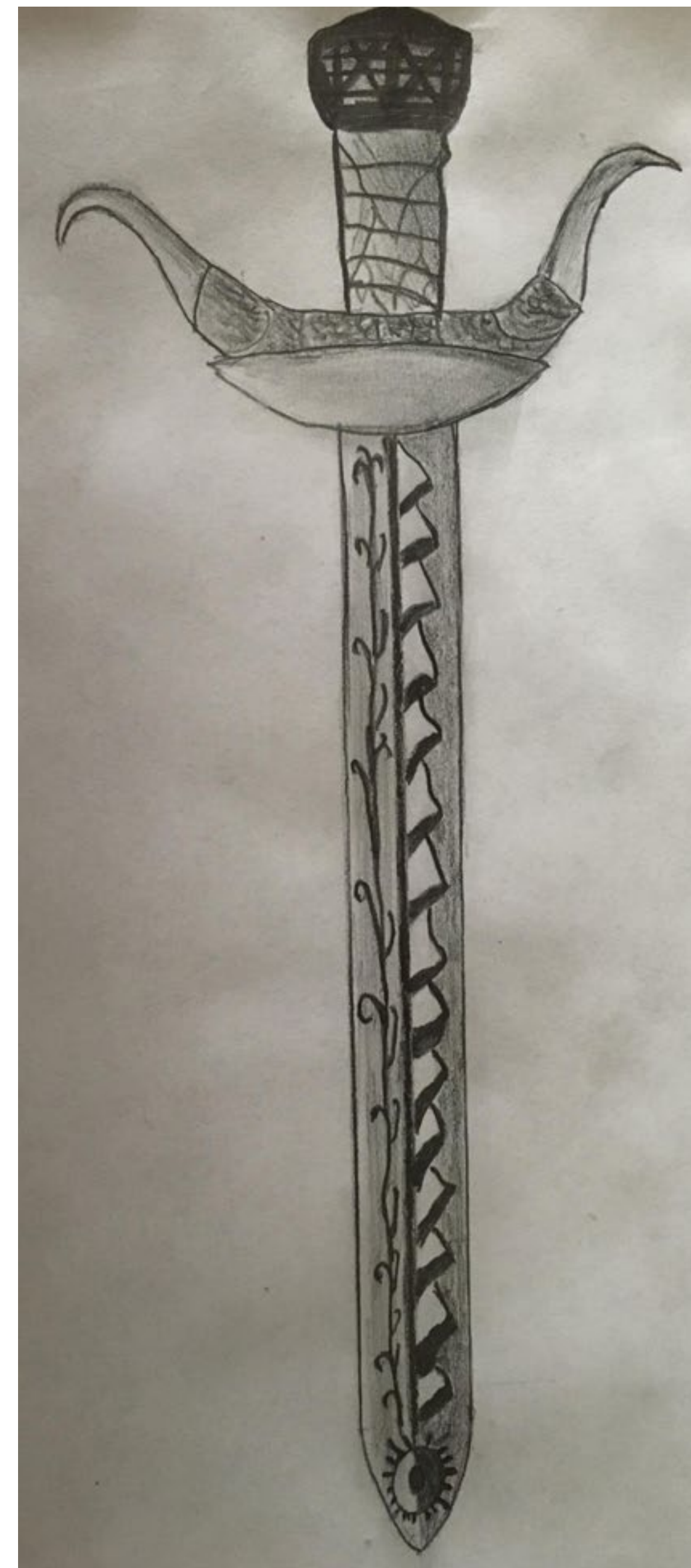
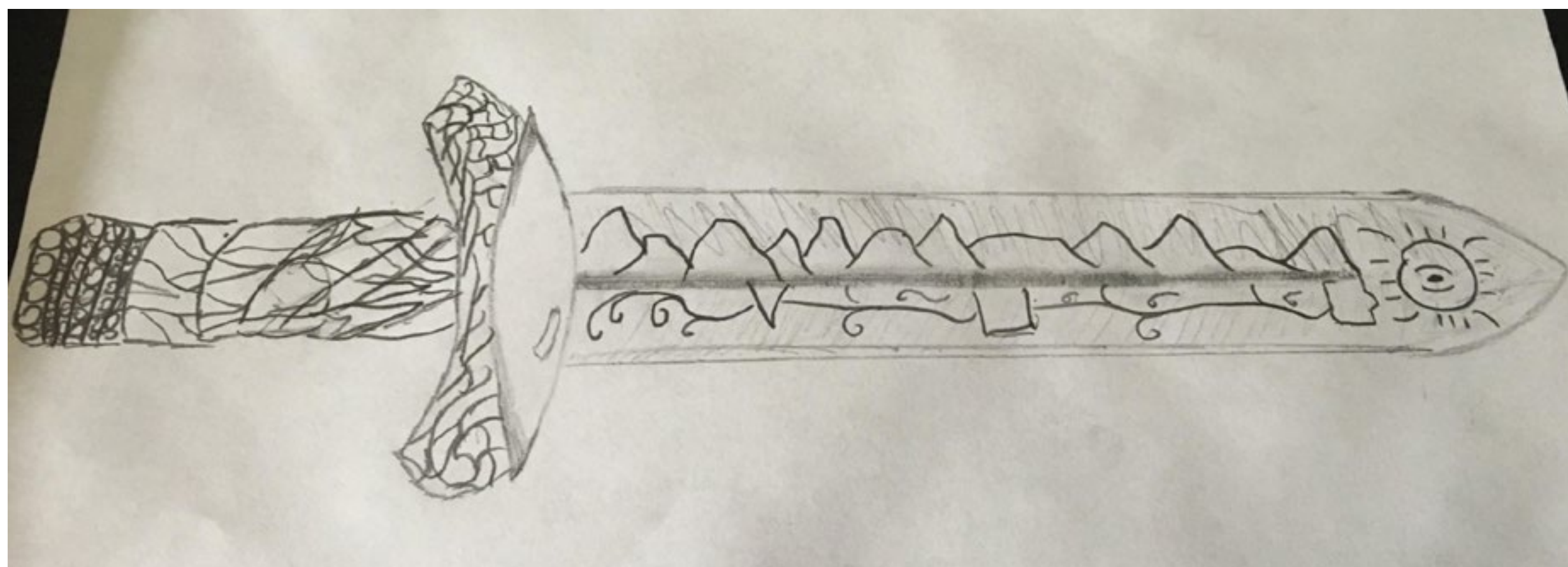
change as you move onto the next step.

Done? Good, let's move on. It's time to draw some more. Get another sheet of paper, open up another file, whatever. Add more detail. Fix up some of the mistakes you made. Do a second, better version of your sketch. This time, incorporate some of the elements from your world you want to use. This one doesn't have to be good either. It just has to be an improvement, both in terms of quality of work and in detail lore-wise. As you work, make some lore up about the details you add.

Down below, you'll see that I've changed up my proportions, added a small amount of shading, and done some designs. Some of the details were influenced by things already in my world, and some were made up on the spot and just added to my world. The pommel was made fancier, which reflects the fact that Fornim has a somewhat decadent culture, at least in the upper classes. The hilt has a design that's supposed to resemble fire, a common motif in my world's art. The weird round bit on top of the guard is actually a shrunk-down version of a feature common in Fornim weapons. Most of the nation's enemies utilize spears as their main weapon, so having small shields attached to weapons helps deflect blows from spears. I made some weird designs on the guard and blade, which

I have yet to decide the purpose of. I made most of that up as I worked and as I looked at the finished sketch. Repeat this step as many times as you like until you have something you think is worth being put into your world.

Take a second to look at your work. Are you happy with it? Does it make sense with your world's lore? If not, go back and change it, or remember what to change as you progress into the final step, which is making a finished product. Put some real time and effort into this one. This ultimate piece will serve as an inspiration for you, something to help you really get the ideas flowing. Make it fit whichever standards you, as an artist, have for yourself. Go a little outside your comfort zone. One important thing to note is that you shouldn't make it perfect. For reasons you will soon see, mistakes are vital to make in this method. You can see my final drawing below this paragraph. I've used a ruler this time, and made my lines cleaner. I changed up some of the designs, and tried and failed to make the proportions realistic. I even added some horns, just for the sake of it. Don't worry if you haven't yet decided much, the best ideas can come hours or even days after you are done.



Here you can see my final drawing. I've used a ruler this time, and made my lines cleaner. I changed up some of the designs, and tried and failed to make the proportions realistic. I even added some horns, just for the sake of it. Don't worry if you haven't yet decided much, the best ideas can come hours or even days after you are done.

I could write a whole article about the world-building that was inspired by this drawing, but for the sake of brevity, I shall limit myself to a one-paragraph summary. The sword was made by a famous blacksmith, named Thalun. The design on the blade represents a mountain range in my

world. The symbol on the top of the blade is a religious one, originating in a long-dead civilization, which survives in the imagery and artwork of nations like Fornim. The horns, I've decided, are meant to emulate the desert-oxen of my world, which are popular pack animals in Fornim. The pommel's design was changed. Each nook and cranny of this sword has a story, and when I look at it, I can imagine them all.

The drawing isn't perfect, but that's okay. One of the best parts of this method is how mistakes can turn into inspiration. For example, the hilt of the sword is still too big. We could just write it off and say I messed up, but for this method we want to pretend I did it perfectly. Instead, the handle is that big because of an in-world reason. I'll say that this sword is a piece of art first and foremost, and the large handle and design of the pommel help it to be mounted and displayed. Just like that, I just added a whole new art-form to my world, even though I drew a weapon. That's a hell of a lot more interesting than saying I made a mistake. Go back and look for flaws in your work, and think of reasons why they're there. Maybe that bump you accidentally made on an animal's head serves an evolutionary purpose. Maybe the slight difference in color between your character's eyes is actually a physical quirk that has affected their life in some way. Over time, this method will help you to visualize your world and to create interesting details about it.

## Conclusion

That was just a quick introduction, meant to show you how much this method can accomplish. The example provided here is just that, an example. In the end, you're the one building your world, and your world may be drastically different. This method has worked again and again for me, whether I'm drawing swords, pieces of clothing, or even an oil derrick. No matter what you're making, no matter what genre or what medium, it can be extremely helpful to create an image and let it inspire you. I hope you'll give it a try, and I hope it works as well for you, as I can confidently attest it does for me. Happy worldbuilding! 🐉



# ON THE PURPOSE OF RACE IN HIGH FANTASY

*Dheolos*

Imagine, if you will, a market. The details of the setting are irrelevant, all you need to know is that it's a generic middle age high fantasy world, in a city predominantly human, located at the cross-roads of the major races. At this market, wandering in the stalls, is a clear human majority, but there are also other races. Dwarves wander as well, eyeing the jewelry stall. Elves give dwarves the cold shoulder as they walk by, stopping to notice the spices. A lone orc stomps past, and a human spits at him. The orc grunts and snorts, but otherwise pays no attention. A goblin scratches his rear, haggling rudely with a tinker.

Now ask yourself, why are the dwarves *dwarves*? Why are elves *elves*? Why have you made the rude, scummy tinkerers goblins? The brutish warriors orcs? Why have you gone out of your way to make different races, and what do these races do that humans couldn't? Why not have humans that live in mountains, drink ale, and are fantastic metalsmiths? Why not have humans living in tranquil forest villages, playing calm music? Why have you made a specifically different race just for that purpose? A different species just to fit into the archetype?



*Credit: intOrFloat*

What is the purpose of including all these races, if they don't do anything that humans can't? What purpose, beyond novelty, is there for having dwarves, and elves in your world? Are they not just reskins of humans?

Let's read the first paragraph again, but instead of different races, these will just be different cultures of humans interacting (using names of places I'm just making up).

Imagine, if you will, a market. The details of the setting are irrelevant, all you need to know is that it's a generic middle age high fantasy world, in a city predominantly Allorian, located at the cross-roads of the major civilizations. At this market, wandering in the stalls, is a clear Allorian majority, but there are also other cultures. Numidians wander as well, eyeing the jewelry stall. Collaghs give Numidians the cold shoulder as they walk by, stopping to notice the spices. A lone Pethi stomps past, and an Allorian spits at him. The Pethi grunts and snorts, but otherwise pays no attention. A Gorithian scratches his rear, haggling rudely with a tinker.

Is there any less depth to this second setting than the original at the top?

Why do you do it? Why do you add societies whose inhabitants have subtly different physical characteristics from humans? Probably because Tolkien did. And if Tolkien did it, it must be a good template for worldbuilding. And why, from a purely meta point of view did Tolkien do it? Why did he make the forest people elves? Taller, slim people with long blond hair wearing robes with designs of trees and foliage, with fantastic dexterity can be a description of a human group; did giving them pointy ears (and some infrequently referenced perks such as immortality and incomparably good eyesight) really add anything new to the world?

Would you think Middle Earth any less interesting of a place if Rivendell had been populated by humans that had all the same characteristics of the elves, but without pointy ears? Okay, maybe a little. Perhaps it was because of this added novelty value that allowed his work to become the prestigious, world famous work it is today. But in terms of quality of worldbuilding, it's fairly shallow.



*Credit: Wynter*

Ask yourself this: If all my races were humans, but still had all the same culture that they have now, would my world be less interesting? If the answer is yes, you haven't put enough effort into your world. You've just taken the Tolkienist template and ran with it. It's poor worldbuilding. What you need to do is spend the time to really give your races a *raison d'être*. Flesh out their culture. Make them unique. Give them a role that humans could not fulfill.

Take this example: Colrums are a people that live by the shore, in crude huts constructed from driftwood and seaweed. They use stone spears to catch fish, and eat generally whatever creatures they can find on the beach. Are you envisioning these beings as humans? Well, they're actually humanoid fish people (colrum is murloc backwards). Does it really make any difference whether they're humans or scaly fish people? Add something to their description that would make it impossible for them to be humans. What about if they're amphibious? That's a good start, but that's not enough. Ask

yourself, then, what does them being amphibious add to their culture? Not just a new trait or two, an entire new level to their culture or addition to the intricacy of your world that would be impossible without them being amphibious.

Now, take this revised example: Colrums are a race of fish people that live by the shore, in crude huts constructed from driftwood and seaweed.

They use stone spears to catch fish, and eat generally whatever creatures they can find on the beach. They are amphibious, and they migrate frequently through the ocean, often turning up on small islands and raiding nearby fishing villages, causing a nuisance for townspeople. However, whenever they're attacked by the Royal Army, the Colrums flee into the depths of the ocean, only to go wreak havoc elsewhere.

They now have a genuine reason why they shouldn't just be humans, and they interact with other factions in your world in a way that encompasses the uniqueness

of their race. If you want your world to have genuine, original depth and intrigue, and not just be a redrawing of Middle Earth or Azeroth, you need to give your races (even if you don't invent new races from scratch but start with Tolkienist races) genuinely exclusive traits that make them different from humans, and they must interact with other races of your world through those exclusive traits. 🐟



# DEAR SARIK 01

Ethan Oswell

“ Dear Sarik,

My fantasy world is intended for writing a novel, and uses an elaborate magic system. I’ve spent a lot of time making sure that every kind of magic is backed with lore and explanation. What’s the best way to explain it to my future readers? Should I explain every aspect of it, or very little? Does magic always need an explanation?

Thanks,  
Magical in Montana.

Hello Montana, as an avid caster of spells and voracious reader of tomes, I understand the inherent value of understanding a magical system. Think of your job as an author; You are responsible for guiding the reader. You should find the goal, the purpose, of your writing.

I’ve found in my 210 years of life that we often over-explain concepts. When I teleport to the local tavern and tell stories of my travels many of the arcane details fall on deaf ears. Our local knight, Sir Gary the Breaker, knows nothing of the black sand and crows’ hearts needed for my elixirs. Thus, when I tell of my exploits, I leave out those details until they become relevant. If they never do that’s fine, that means they weren’t going to benefit the audience to begin with.

Of course, this won’t always work. Oftentimes you might want to foreshadow magical details for a later plot device: a sort of Chekhov’s wand. You might also want to explain, in elaborate detail, the specifics of a gorgon’s curse if it’s central to understanding the main plot. Still, there may be times you may want to deprive the reader of information to create suspense and mystery. The amount of explanation a topic received should be determined not by what you want the reader to know, but by what the reader needs to know.

A pen pal of mine, another sorcerer, who we’ll just call Mr. Erlin, once tried to explain how he created a fireball rune. Here’s an excerpt from his letter.



Credit: Kayla Catherine

“... The rune must be carved with a dragon-bone needle. No other carving device will do as they do not have the heat tolerance to carve a fire rune. Once the rune is carved the caster must plant his feet firmly, the blow-back will be very strong. The fire rune is hard to cast as well as powerful, so only high level wizards will manage to cast such a spell. They will chant the words in the old tongue of the volcano lords, for you see they were responsible for all fire magic’s origins...”

Montana, he proceeded to prattle on you see. This would be an example of an overly detailed description, as only someone trying to make a fire rune would have need of these details. I’ve used my magic to edit the message to make it more readable.

“... The rune must be carved with a dragon-bone needle, no others will do. Be sure to ready yourself for the impact as low level wizards may have trouble. Chant the ancient words...”

Not everything needs to be logically explained either, only that which will benefit the reader. Remember that a reader makes an investment, time in exchange for knowledge, and that if their time is wasted on what they may consider trivial they’ll stop reading. Thanks for your question Montana and happy casting!

“ Dear Sarik,

How do you balance accuracy and making the world interesting? I’ve been having trouble with that.

Sincerely,  
Anonymous.

”

Greetings Anonymous. This is a question all builders of worlds will eventually ask themselves, but perhaps it is the wrong question. As I’m sure you’re aware, there are many worlds which are both surprisingly accurate and terribly interesting. The success of these realms often depend on how relatable they are, not their realism.

There exists a fantastical boundary that people must cross before being invested in another world, their own disbelief. If a book is written well then this disbelief is easy to suspend. The key element here, as I’m sure you’ve guessed is the reader’s interest in the world. Interesting worlds such as Star Wars aren’t interesting because they’re accurate to real life laws of nature, but because we want to believe in the tantalizing lore and mystery of the jedi that makes lightsabers possible.

If you fear readers will be picky about your world’s exact workings then you’re no longer creating, but parroting information you think they want to hear. Don’t mistake my words, there are times, like in science fiction, where accuracy is paramount but those are special cases. Your audience, in that case, would be looking for a world that could be real. A different type of escape than fighting orcs in an ancient castle. They’re looking for “Earth 2.0” not “Middle Earth.” I recommend you find the right audience and write to them, but you’ll never please everyone so, in the end, remember to write for yourself.🐉

If you would like to ask a question of the great  
**SARIK THE SORCERER**  
just send an email to [sarikspell@gmail.com](mailto:sarikspell@gmail.com)



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