



VOLUME 4 | ISSUE 1

# WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

## THE ARTS

& other topics

### WORLD SHOWCASE

Mike Myler's *Mists of Akuma*

### ART AS PROPAGANDA

A Social Barometer

### THE ART OF DRESSING CULTURES

On Worldbuilding Cultural Costumes



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

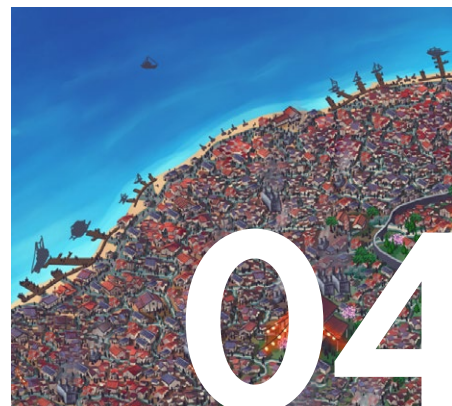
Since our first volume began in 2017, we have published almost 1,000 pages of worldbuilding content—and we're far from done. So what's next?

This year our podcast, *Worldcasting*, became available on most platforms. On it, we've discussed building histories and magic systems, interviewed author Phil Athans, and much more. Meanwhile *Worldbuilding Magazine* has been working to maintain the high bar of quality we set for ourselves last year while exploring new worldbuilding concepts. This issue focuses on the arts, and we're already planning for our next two which will take a close look at ancestry and architecture, respectively.

There's more to come, and we can't wait to share it. Until then, we hope you find something in this issue to help make your world feel just a bit more lived-in.

Happy worldbuilding!

Adam Bassett, Vice Editor-in-Chief



## WORLD SHOWCASE

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## ART AS PROPAGANDA

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## THE ART OF DRESSING CULTURES

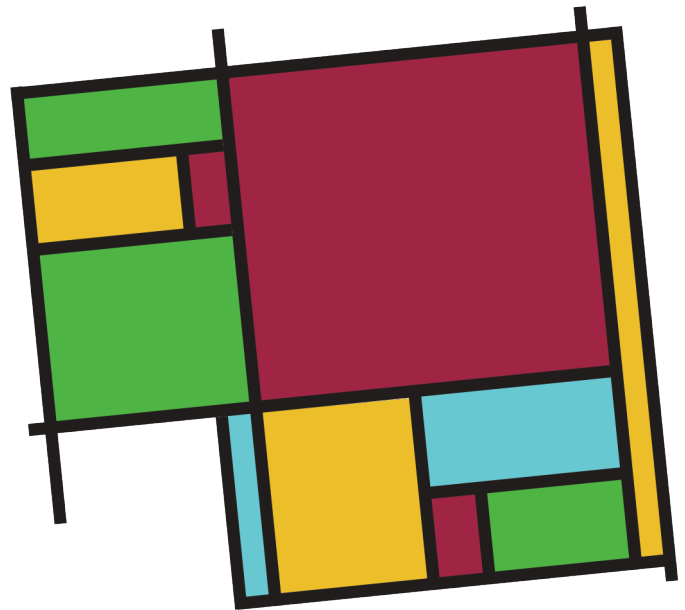
On Worldbuilding Costumes

# CONTENTS

- 04**    **World Showcase**  
Mike Myler's *Mists of Akuma*
- 12**    **Art as Propaganda**  
A Social Barometer
- 20**    **Thirty-Three Tales of War**  
Stories Eight - Eleven
- 33**    **Thinking Sideways**  
About Magic and Crime
- 44**    **Exclusive Interview**  
Michael D. Nadeau
- 50**    **The 2020  
Worldbuilder's Checklist**  
Nearly 200 prompts!

## ADDITIONAL CONTENT

- 27** Community Art
- 29** Artists Corner
- 96** Ask Us Anything
- 99** Staff Picks
- 100** Meet the Staff & Credits



 ADAM BASSETT

- 57**    **The Art of Dressing  
Cultures**  
On Worldbuilding Cultural  
Costumes
- 71**    **Beyond the  
Meaning of Words**
- 79**    **Avatars of the Divine**  
Gods Living  
Among the Ancients
- 84**    **Artist Showcase**  
Kurt Ian Ferrer
- 89**    **Gender Dynamics in Art**

# WORLD SHOWCASE

## MIKE MYLER'S MISTS OF AKUMA

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interviewed by Aaryan Balu

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INTERVIEW



TABLETOP GAMING

**M**ike Myler has been creating Mists of Akuma, a homebrew campaign setting for role-playing games (RPGs). This is how he describes his world.



*Mists of Akuma* is an eastern fantasy noir steam-punk. The fastest way to think about it is *Afro Samurai* + *Warhammer 40,000* + *Onimusha*.

Almost two centuries ago, the lightning-powered ships of Ceramia pierced the skies of Soburin, heralding an age of oppression that still marks the lands with the resources stripped from the countryside. Ripped away from a long age of peace and broken by soldiers wielding scientifically advanced weaponry, the warriors of the prefectures were drafted into a distant conflict across the edge of the world. Now, ancient traditions of violence have reawakened a thirst for blood in those few that survive in the decaying world. Emperor Hitoshi's rebellion a decade ago threw down foreign rule, but an ancient danger has reappeared to push society to the brink of collapse: the Mists of Akuma.

The corrupting fog transforms those within it into bloodthirsty *adeddo-oni*, monsters that seek only the rending of flesh and the taste of living meat. Nobles have retreated to the cities dotting the countryside, leaving the common folk to face the supernatural haze alone and add to the undead horde. Nature itself has been perilously wounded as well, and the technology that might save the prefectures is both shunned and feared by the Masuto Dynasty and its subjects.

It's a world of desperation, Pyrrhic victories, and tragic heroes.

On the game design side of things, *Mists of Akuma* is very modular, which has been received well by game masters (GMs). Plenty of folks have told us that they just dropped the island into their homebrew worlds and it's worked out well, which is something we were shooting for while making the setting. There's definitely stuff going on beyond the island of Soburin, but one of our top goals as designers was to make it accessible and easy to plug-and-play inside other settings.

*So what's the relationship between Soburin and Ceramia? Is Soburin a single island, and if so, how large is it?*

The relationship was bad. Ceramia busted through a thought-to-be impassable barrier and then used advanced technology to subjugate and occupy Soburin for some 150 years (the Kengen Occupation). Then something went very wrong, and meaningful contact with the mainland of Ceramia came to a full stop. There are still some Kengen diehards and ex-generals roving about, but for the most part, there's not really a Ceramia to have a relationship with at this point.

On the second question: Soburin is its own land-mass, but whether it's a tiny little island or a proper continent is up to the GM. In all of the books, you won't find any distance measurements; when we have to provide that kind of information, it is always couched in increments of time (it takes the party X days to reach the village, etc.). In my personal games, it's about the size of the East Coast of the United States.

*What are some of the races present in this world?*

- *Bakemono*: goblins begat from insect swarms in the Mists of Akuma.
- *Enjin*: ape folk
- *Hengeyokai*: many varieties, including fish, birds, and snakes
- *Kappa*: turtle-folk
- Mutants: from beyond Soburin
- *Necroji*: tech-animated skeletons from Ropaeo
- *Oni-touched*: tieflings
- *Psonorous*: also from beyond Soburin
- *Pyon*: frog-folk
- *Shikome*: hobgoblins formed from animals in the Mists of Akuma
- *Steametic*: automaton soldiers from Ceramia
- *Tanuki*: raccoon-folk
- *Tengu*: bird-folk
- *Umibo*: water people

*A hengeyokai is a hybrid animal-person able to assume the shape of their animal or disguise themselves as humans.*

Among those, many are hated outright (bake-mono, mutants, necroji, oni-touched, shikome, and steametics). They even get a trait for that social perception in-game.

The tanuki are in a bit of a gray area because, after the successful rebellion, the re-instated emperor called for an end to slavery—but their prefecture is just kind of ignoring the edict. The rest of the races have been influenced by their time being subjugated, and it depends on where you're looking at. Tengu have kind of gone with the flow; the umibo suffered mightily and live long lives, so the memories of the Kengen Occupation are fresh; the Enjin have clung to tradition in the face of oppression and embraced nature.

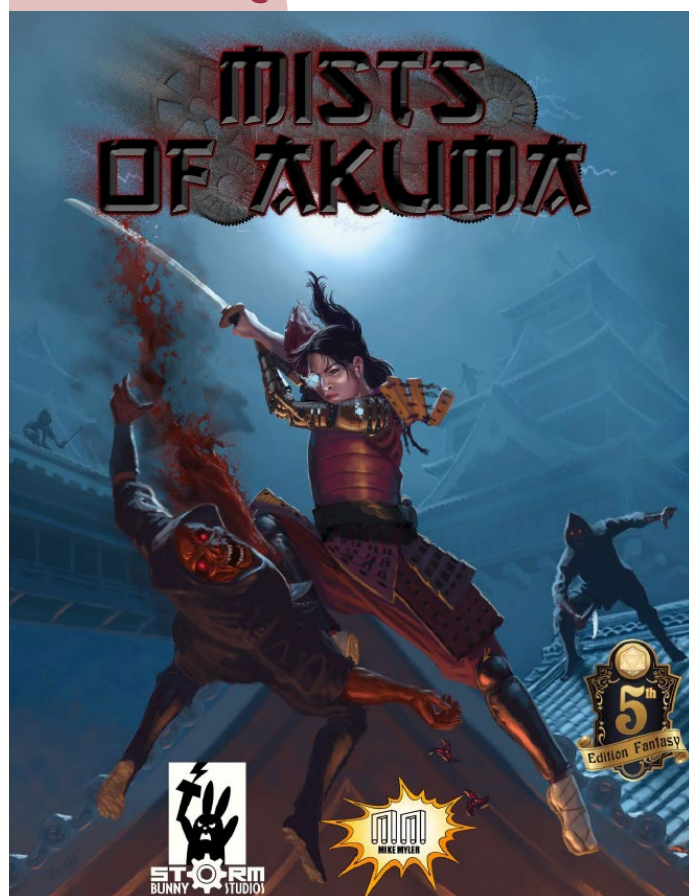
The dozen different hengeyokai run the gamut but generally align with their associated animal's traits—inū (dog) hengeyokai are known to be loyal; saru (monkey) hengeyokai are mischievous and often unlawful; nezumi (rat) hengeyokai are sneaky planners.

*Can you tell me a bit about the first few years of Ceramian occupation, or is the focus of the content more on the present-day?*

It was very brutal and gets covered in the "Prefectures" chapter, but basically they showed up, proved they were an overwhelming force, and then divided up all the inhuman races across the continent. All the tanuki over in Shinko; all the kappa forcibly moved to Korusu; on and on down the line. They mostly used Soburin as a source for soldiers in a distant conflict (the War of Kaiyo) against the Ropaeo, but they also strip-mined and deforested and basically abused the land.

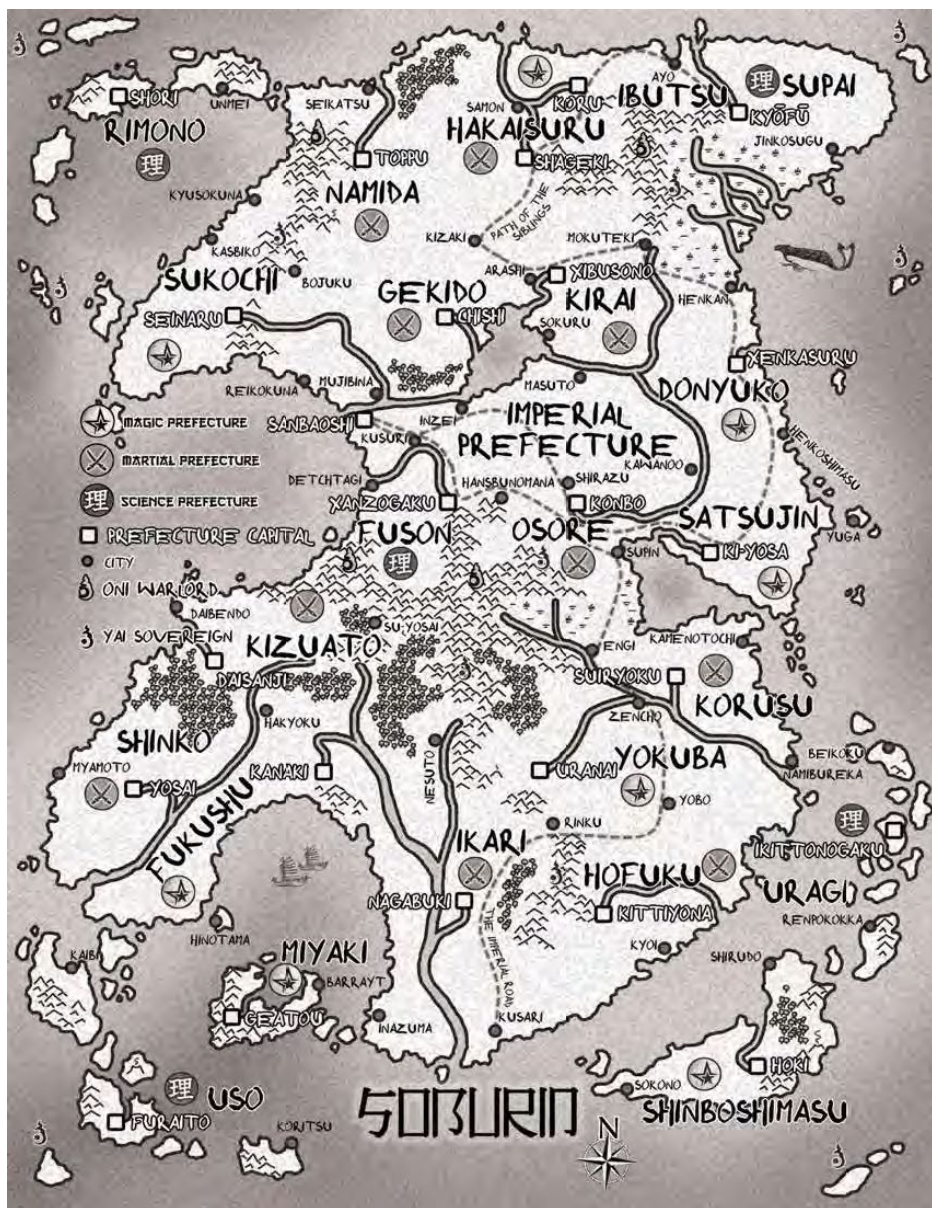
The focus is definitely on the modern day, but that whole modular design I mentioned? It has another facet. Lots of people are against steam-punk, and we are aware of that, so you can just

CLAUDIO POZAS



NATHANAEL BACHELOR





 MICHAEL MCCARTHY

Each prefecture is ruled over by a clan of nobles who can claim ancestry among the Imperial Siblings that founded Soburin some ~3,000 years ago. They mostly get along, although the Gekido, Nami-da, Hakaisuru, and Kirai have this long-time feud which is at the heart of Imperial Matchmaker, one of our adventures. The Rimono, Supai, Uso, and Uragi all embrace science and technology—which is heresy. Most people fear technology not just because of its use against them during the Kengen Occupation, but also because the Mists of Akuma can prematurely transform an object into a tsukumogami (a monster with attitudes and desires determined by how well it was treated before attaining sentience—so weapons of war tend to be angry, destructive, and murderous).

Oh, and nobody trusts Miyaki. That whole island recently reappeared via the mists with a supposed true Imperial Sibling ruling over it.

take the steampunk out. That's why it's always the last descriptor for the setting. All the prefectures (a territory within the empire of Soburin) that have embraced science are literally on the corners of the world map, so if you want to use the book and play a more traditional Eastern fantasy noir game, you just declare that those prefectures are absent and remove a few character options.

### *What can you tell us about the titular Mists?*

The Mists of Akuma and the ravenous undead roaming within the fell haze arrive and depart whenever the GM decides. They are a narrative tool to reinforce the desperation across Soburin and to tax the resources of both the party and the people of the countryside. The more time a creature spends inside of the Mists, the more *Haitoku* ("fall from virtue," a game statistic) it gains,

*The Imperial Siblings are mythological wuxia figures—impossibly powerful warriors and mages who tamed the lands long ago, beating back the oni and other monsters that stood as obstacles to civilization. You can meet two of them (Shūshō Ikari and Kanja Korosu) in Trade War—specifically in Feud Primordial, which is part of that adventure path. There's not much known about them, however, as officially they've been in absentia for millennia (although obviously, we know they are not actually gone; they are incognito and up to their own business).*



*Erītokirā are power armor-wearing hobgoblins made as an homage to space marines. These mercenaries are the reason monstrous races are tolerated at all. Anyone can hire them as long as they have gold enough, and they are held with deep, fearful respect.*



SARA SHIJO 

and when it reaches a certain threshold, it transforms (in almost all cases into an adeddo-oni). Adeddo-oni are fast, barely-intelligent zombies that dislike sunlight.

All the prefectures have their own unique way of dealing with the supernatural haze. For example, in Korosu the nobility have attendants that carry huge iron domes that they just drop onto the ground and hide under; in Supai they use fans to blow it away; in Uragi they widely distribute biological cultures to combat the effects of the Mists of Akuma. Which tactic they use (physical, magical, or scientific) is determined by the general culture of the prefecture (warriors, mages, or scientists).

*By “biological cultures,” do you mean something akin to vaccination?*

Yeah. Wouldn't have to be a vaccine necessarily, though. Contraction could be via a cookie or an aerosol spray, for example, but Uragi are all about biology. Some are also more brutal than others. In Gekido the nobles keep a circle of warriors around them, and when the folks on the outer ring change, they get cut down and a new warrior gets pushed out to take their place in line. Meanwhile, in Sukochi they crafted a spell to make air-tight cabbages for folks to hide in!

*To what extent are the various races correlated with Prefectures?*

Mildly so. There is not a hard and fast rule like “if you are playing a tanuki your character has to be from Shinko prefecture,” but what's going on there should color your character's worldview. You can find kappa villages beyond Korosu's borders, but you'll find more within that territory simply because so many were made to resettle there.

*That makes sense. What are some of the biggest conflicts going on in the world during the present day?*

Rogue Kengen generals for one. Oni warlords and their superiors, the Yai Sovereign—powerful monsters that went into hiding for the Kengen Occupation and now seek to enlarge their domains. Imperial dragons, too, and the various erītokirā chapters have their own schemes like trying to take over territory. In narrative terms, erītokirā are cleavers and dragons are scalpels.

There's also the conflicts between the aforementioned prefectures that embrace science and the (many more) who reject technology. The Imperial Prefecture (Emperor Hitoshi's big territory in the center, ruled over by him and the rest of the Masuto Clan) straddles the line because intellectually the rulers know that to survive they sort of have to embrace it, even if they can't openly do so without upsetting all the various clans. Really,



though, that's a bit above-the-board for games set in *Mists of Akuma*. The focus is on urban adventures and city-scaled narratives.

*What are some of your favorite adventure paths for players to explore, and what are some of the more fleshed out cities in this setting?*

Regarding cities: each adventure focuses on just one or two prefectures to gradually breathe more life into the setting. In *Trade War*, you save the small village of Shibai, Sukochi, then unravel a mystery in Nesuto, Ikari. That's followed by some union-vs-the-railroad action in Samon, Haikusuru prefecture; chasing after a vigilante-turned-villain in Kakasu and Shinjitsu (villages in Fuson); there's an oni city after that; and the penultimate bit happens in Kizaki, Gekido.

The second wave of modules focuses on Kittiyona in Hofuku, Ikittongaku in Uragi, and a tiny village named Noru (in a Seven Samurai inspired

adventure). In addition, you encounter two big cities in the Rimono prefecture (Unmei and Shori) as you chase-then-help Kōmoro Toko, the katana-wielding vigilante.

But I went kind of insane on Sanbaoshi in *Imperial Matchmaker*—which has 147 pages of material and that drop-dead gorgeous map by Indi Martin—because with a book's worth of content, how could you not have a gorgeous lavish two-page map? That'd be a crime!

There are at least three more cities/prefectures to get detailed in the rest of Wave 2's modules (Kobai in Uso, a secret tanuki village in Shinko, and a city in Namida) but those are still in development.

*What are some of the game mechanics you've introduced?*

*Haitoku* and *Dignity* are awesome. I'm a huge fan of thematic attributes because it's a way to

 INDI MARTIN



make important themes a constant but not overwhelming presence in games. In this case, a “fall from virtue,” and then what people think about how honorable you are. The nitty-gritty for both of these are in every *Mists of Akuma* book, including the [free Soburin primer](#).

Now, it's always at the GM's discretion, but in general, whenever your Dignity goes up your Haitoku is lowered by the same amount, and vice versa. When a player's character (PC) does something shitty and underhanded, they get Haitoku. When they're witnessed doing a good deed, they get Dignity. How intensely a GM tethers the game to that is also at their discretion but it's recommended that the group review what happened during a session at the end and get rewarded Dignity and Haitoku then. You can use Dignity sort of like a Wisdom/Charisma fallback. Not for everything, but if a social situation can be influenced by your social standing you can use it instead of another ability score. Haitoku can do the same for Intimidation, but otherwise, it can be used to try and get back up after you've been dealt a blow that would have otherwise knocked you out. Plus, there are bonuses based on your Haitoku score: higher speed during combat, more durability, and others.

*So, in theory, these can be added onto any game system?*

I'd make sure there's a 20-sided die available, but otherwise, yeah. Haitoku and Dignity are quite transferable between systems. You could definitely use this as a stand-in for some weird d20 Star Wars wuxia hack or classic D&D 3.5 or even 4th edition.

*So while the theme of this world is obvious, what drew you to the eastern-inspired and steam-punk/noir aspects?*

So, I'm sitting here in the dining room/office at about 3:00 AM finishing the layout work for another world ([Hypercorps 2099](#)) and had the thought “what would it have taken for Commodore

Perry to turn the gunships around in 1854?” That's when Japan (after being forced by foreign powers) ended the long Tokugawa Isolation and began the Meiji Restoration, during which a bunch of weirdness happened thanks to more than a century of solitary development meeting the not-exactly-friendly culture of Americana and the world at large.

Being the wildly imaginative and creative guy I am, of course I was like “oh, magic would do it, sure, but if we're giving them magic, we should up the ante for the western imperialists, too,” I landed on electropunk. Like if Nikola Tesla just went wild. At that point I started up a document listing out ideas. Because that's not enough, frankly, and I didn't just want to make a “here's fantasy Japan!” world for a wide variety of reasons (primary one being I'm 0% Japanese).

The idea for the Mists came from two things:

1) I wanted some fast zombies. I love [Onimusha](#) and definitely had that in my head when I was thinking, “what would be a cool place to GM and play in?”

2) Tsukumogami. In this anti-colonialist scenario I was building in my head (where the Ameri- er, where the Ceramians are defeated), there has to be a good reason not to embrace the appropriated technology, and like I've found for literally every other question I've asked about it, Japanese folklore had something ready to go.

Once I had the big global narrative (a colonized place reasserting itself and rejecting machines as these evil mists wither it), I had to figure out what I call the “North Star”, kind of a guiding principle. In this case, it was “cool.” After that was the rolling-up-sleeves and getting-down-to-business side of making a campaign setting.

*Have there been other collaborators in bringing this world to life?*



Oh absolutely! I have a team of designers that I drag around from project to project. Initially for *Mists of Akuma*, that was Savannah Broadway, Luis Loza, and Michael McCarthy (plus a fantastic project backer, Bryant Turnage). Chris Rippee wrote the adventure that comes inside the setting book, *Revenge of the Pale Master*. Claudio Pozas, Indi Martin, Sara Shijo, Nathanael Batchelor, Naiche Washburne, and Jacob Blackmon all have done custom artwork for these works. They've since been joined by Andrew Engelbrite, who wrote *Honorable Wills*, and Anthony Alippio, who wrote *Seven Grains of Rice*. And Duan Byrd, who helped figure out some things for making the *Trade War* adventure path work correctly. Specifically, the Mubo Brothers—these two brutish idiots with shoulder-mounted cannons that you fight in the first module, and their siblings who subsequently seek revenge wielding their own particular firearms—was his idea.

### *What's your favorite part of this world?*

Oh that's easy. Erītokirā. One hundred percent. They are, for sure, my favorite thing. That's why one of the iconics is an erītokirā and why all of the iconics have special features (because he's not erītokirā without the power armor).

The iconics should probably get mentioned! Iconics are pre-generated characters that are emblematic of the campaign setting. I'm working on a free quickstart adventure right now to go with the [PDF](#) that includes their 3rd- and 7th-level builds, so folks who are interested in the setting can download the one-shot, hand out character sheets, and experience *Mists of Akuma* without investing a ton of time reading the setting book or what have you. The *Imperial Matchmaker* mega adventure can be played with original characters, but it's best experienced with the players using the iconics.

Savannah made Natsuko the Kamispeaker (and her spirit snake buddy Hiba), McCarthy's iconic is Lan (a Sun Wukong knockoff), Luis's was

Rinna (a tengu warlock seer from the future), and Duan's was Tomoe Masamune (the lady on the original *Mists of Akuma* cover—a badass samurai with a tsukumogami steam arm).

The rest are basically what I want everyone to play: Ayakashi the mask bard that possesses people, Kanden the necroji ninja, the private eye Matsi Tsunami, and, of course, Piasu—a hobgoblin shock trooper in power armor and a debt to an opium dragon.

Each is also beautifully, beautifully illustrated by Claudio Pozas. I mean, come on.

I should also mention that we did some cultural sensitivity readings on the book, and I have a funny story about it, if you like.

### *Go for it.*

So my publisher [Storm Bunny Studios](#) has a friend in Japan who teaches high school and college courses, and we had him run the setting's manuscript across interested students. For the most part, they thought we did a great job and loved the setting. Great positive feedback, with one exception: the city of fans. In the Supai prefecture, there's a 10-page spread about this settlement that's just fan-crazy. Local guards are outfitted with fan prosthetics; there are two colleges, each championing different kinds of mechanical fans. Now, the city is called *Kyōfū*, but at the time, we were calling it *Chikan*.

While the term *Chikan* has meanings that have to do with wind, more commonly it is a word used to describe “creepy old dudes on the subway who grab at women and girls.”

### *I can see how that might be a problem.*

So we did have to make one rather important change to the book, but fortunately, it was just that one thing.

*Any last tips for worldbuilders?*

“North Stars,” ya’ll.

When it comes time to put words to the page, you’ll find that building a campaign setting is a more complex endeavor than you might be used to from preparing lore for your games. The trick is that everything needs to feel like it fits together, from the illustrations, to the maps, graphics, page backgrounds, and, of course, the written content. You’re not going to know if everything will come together just right until you’ve got a finished document—and that’s where your “North Star” comes in.

Your campaign setting’s “North Star” is probably not an actual star, but it’s a short phrase that serves the same purpose: navigation. In short, your “North Star” is a tool to keep artwork, copy, and graphics focused on a coherent theme. Ideally, it should be as few words as possible and able to encapsulate the overall theme of your campaign setting. Think of the world (or universe, or micro-universe, or whatever your setting is) as a gigantic stage upon which people will play out their stories, and consider that every stage is not suitable for every story. You might be able to tell a world-spanning global story about epic heroes and supreme villainy in Eberron, but it’s not predicated for it. Its goal is to help tell noir stories and city-focused narratives, and while you could squeeze out some wuxia if you really like, that’s not what all the tools you’ll find are meant to do.

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

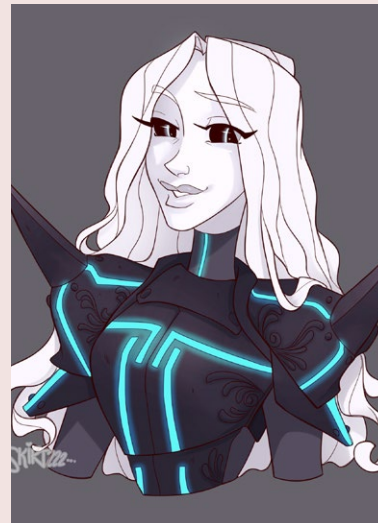
Thanks to Mike for joining us! You can find free PDFs for *Mists of Akuma* and more of Mike’s work [on his website](#). You can find his latest work, *Imperial Matchmaker*, on DriveThruRPG, or sign up for his [Campaign Settings Primer course at the RPG Writer Workshop](#).

If you would like to be featured in a future World Showcase, [click here to apply!](#)

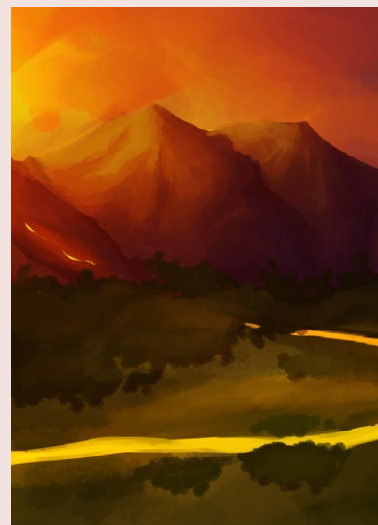


BACK TO INDEX

## RECENT WORLD SHOWCASES



Jay Howard's *Future Front*  
V316: [Trades & Occupations](#)



Lithish's *Kairos*  
V315: [Economics](#)

[Check out all previous issues!](#)



# ART AS PROPAGANDA

## A SOCIAL BAROMETER

by J.D. Venner

🖌️ ART 📖 CULTURE 🏛️ HISTORY 🤝 POLITICS

**F**rom the earliest hominids to modern-day, art has been a byproduct of humanity. Wherever art exists, it seeks to convey messages and influence others. The act of harnessing this effect to promote a specific sociopolitical cause is often referred to as *propaganda*, a word that has negative connotations in this day and age. Nevertheless, it is something that we should consider within our worldbuilding, as civilizations and communities throughout history have used the arts as propaganda—whether that be with the iron fist of a dictator or the fragile hope of an oppressed people, the cacophonous shouts of a free society

or the subtle cultivation of a modern state. The use of art as propaganda is as ubiquitous as it is powerful, and it should be a vital consideration for any worldbuilding foray.

**THE USE OF ART AS  
PROPAGANDA IS AS  
UBIQUITOUS AS IT IS  
POWERFUL.**

🖌️ TITLE CARD BY ANNA HANNON



The arts are traditionally split into three categories: visual, literary, and performing. Each of these artforms and their amalgamations have been used for propaganda purposes many times throughout history. We associate the term “propaganda” with wars and oppressive regimes but usually miss the plethora of it in our modern lives, whether intentional or not. From the US military’s subtle role in Hollywood productions, to the overt anti-establishment creations of prominent musicians, you don’t have to create a dystopian *1984*-esque setting to consider propaganda a major feature of a world.<sup>1</sup> The arts have existed, in some form or another, in every human civilization ever catalogued—and so have attempts at utilizing those artforms to convey messages and convince others.

## STATES AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Propaganda through the arts has an important role to play in every society, and is often created as well as propagated by individuals in an attempt to influence their peers. Plays and other public performances within your world will likely regularly reflect the current political situation or social feeling. Whether these are overt or unspoken messages, they can communicate volumes about the state of your world.

An interesting example occurred in 411 BCE, 20 years into the Peloponnesian War between the great city-states of Athens and Sparta. That year, an Athenian playwright named Aristophanes wrote *Lysistrata*, a popular comedic play that set Athens abuzz.<sup>2</sup> *Lysistrata* depicted the eponymous Athenian woman attempting to end the war by persuading the women of both sides to

withhold sexual activities from their men until they discussed peace terms. Through this play, Aristophanes conveyed a number of poignant and compelling anti-war arguments. *Lysistrata* was the third, and final, of the peace-plays that Aristophanes wrote during this period. He was a popular and influential playwright throughout this time, and so, whether or not his plays directly affected policy, it is likely that they resonated with the public. You can easily imagine the protagonist of a story entering Athens at the time, overhearing people talking openly about the anti-war/anti-government messages within Aristophanes’ plays. It would convey a strong message about Athenian free speech, open discussion, and discontent with the current rulers that would otherwise take considerable time for the protagonist to formulate. We can use this example in our worlds to speak volumes about the current state of a society through the art created and discussed by a populace.

Similarly, we can think of the prominent anti-Vietnam War culture that coalesced around the arts during the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States of America. Anti-war music, such as Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind,” became extremely popular during this time. Emerging anti-war visual artforms, such as photography and film, generated a significant social following. We only have to look at the photographs *Time* magazine regularly published to see how the visual arts impacted the movement.<sup>3</sup> This abundance of anti-war art, spread across nearly every conceivable medium, represented an overwhelming social movement that placed significant pressure on the governments of the time.<sup>4</sup> A character entering this environment would immediately pick

<sup>1</sup> Secker, Tom, and Matthew Alford. “EXCLUSIVE: Documents expose how Hollywood promotes war on behalf of the Pentagon, CIA and NSA.” Medium, 2017, <https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/exclusive-documents-expose-direct-us-military-intelligence-influence-on-1-800-movies-and-tv-shows-36433107c307>.

<sup>2</sup> Henderson, Jeffrey, and Aristophanes. *Aristophanes, Lysistrata*. Clarendon Press, 2002.

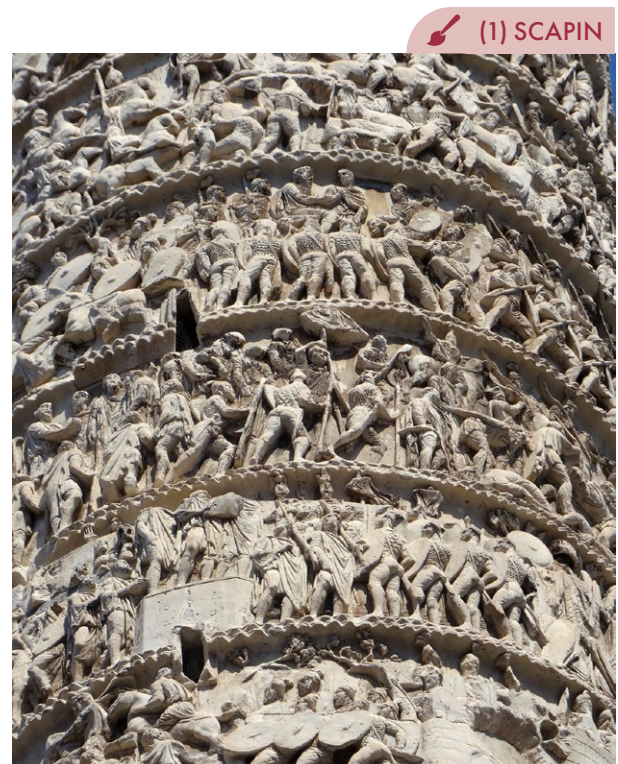
<sup>3</sup> Rothman, Lily, and Alice Gabriner. “The Vietnam War Pictures That Moved Them Most.” TIME, 2017, <https://time.com/vietnam-photos/>.

up on the rebellious, almost revolutionary, atmosphere. The sheer volume of anti-war art generates a central conflict before the protagonist has even opened their mouth.

We can use these examples in our worldbuilding to reinforce or elucidate societal atmospheres. An atmosphere of quiet discontent may be shown through the popularity of protest songs, overtly political street art, or simply people handing out flyers on street corners. It is likely that these expressions of discontent will differ in their message and strength, yet they will all agree that something is not right with the status quo. If this discontent has spilled over into full-blown outrage or rebellion, you can expect that the messages will become more overt and aggressive. Flyers on the corner will turn into impassioned speeches. Protest songs will become impassioned chants at marches. Street art will move from blank walls onto establishment monuments. In such an environment, expressions of discontent across multiple artforms will often coalesce into a single movement, generating an atmosphere that is immediately apparent to newcomers.

While powerful when amalgamated into a larger cause, individual expressions of artistic propaganda can often be easily ignored. Aristophanes was only able to influence Athenians on a large scale due to his pre-established fame, while the anti-Vietnam War movement took nearly a decade to fully develop. It usually takes time, significant galvanizing events, prominent advocates, or all three to widen a movement beyond a few individuals. For this reason, it has commonly been the state-sponsored arts that have prevailed over individual expression throughout history.

Often, particularly in antiquity, only the governing body had both the resources and the reach necessary to influence people on a grand scale. This power was frequently expressed through magnificent monuments and architectural endeavors. Emperors of the Roman Empire would regularly commission works of public art that established not only their own power, but that of Rome. Emperor Trajan, who reigned from 98 to 117 CE, conducted a series of successful campaigns in Dacia, an area that roughly corresponds to modern-day Romania and Moldova. He commemorated these campaigns with a 115-foot tall, 12-foot diameter marble column intricately carved with a 190-foot-long frieze that spirals its way up the column, depicting the story of his campaigns and major battles he won (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Even for the city of Rome, where monumental architectural feats were the norm, this 700-ton



(1) SCAPIN

<sup>4</sup> History.com. "Vietnam War Protests." *History.com*, 2010, <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests>.

<sup>5</sup> Penelope J. E. Davies. "The Politics of Perpetuation: Trajan's Column and the Art of Commemoration." *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 101, no. 1, 1997, pp. 41–65. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/506249](http://www.jstor.org/stable/506249).

Fig. 1 Scapin. "Trajan's Column" 2015. [Pixabay.com](https://www.pixabay.com). Web. Accessed 19 December 2019.

structure, with an internal staircase and external carving depicting over 2,660 individual characters, was [a statement of epic proportions](#). It would have solidified not only Trajan's name, but the supremacy of Rome as a state. The impact that such a wonder would have made on visiting dignitaries and travellers, many of whom would have still lived in settlements with wooden palisades and thatched roofs, cannot be overstated.

These projections of state power have traditionally been grand, swift to implement, and incredibly effective. A protagonist entering a city and observing a single imposing monument to the current ruler would gain an immediate impression. This can be invaluable in worldbuilding, as it allows us to convey a societal atmosphere in one quick stroke. Consider this quote from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* about a statue in the main hall of a government building under the control of the evil Lord Voldemort:

"A gigantic statue of black stone dominated the scene. It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones... Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words MAGIC IS MIGHT...Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards."<sup>6</sup>

This statue conjures an atmosphere of oppression and a government-sponsored desire for inequality and persecution. As a piece of art, it creates

a powerful image. But these government monuments don't need to only exist in societies under dystopian regimes. In New York Harbor, there stands the Statue of Liberty. In one hand she holds a tablet commemorating the Declaration of Independence. In the other, a torch. At her feet lie broken chains and shackles. This statue was once the first thing seen by immigrants to the United States as they arrived from the horrors they'd left behind. The colossal statue was deliberately built and placed to convey a specific message to these immigrants, a first impression of the society they would join. These grand, public works of art often convey messages about a government, society, or culture. Whether they are correct, outdated, or blatant lies, is up to the viewer and the society itself. This is the weakness of state-sponsored monuments over individual art. A monument tends to depict a desired atmosphere at a specific period of time and can become outdated or ignored by society.

State-created or sponsored art can be utilized to convey the desired atmosphere in our settings. Several imposing art pieces depicting a single figure may indicate a ruler that seeks to inspire loyalty and devotion. A series of monuments to previous rulers could indicate the desired importance of societal order and transitions of power. The age, respect, and attention paid to these monuments, combined with the atmosphere generated by individual art displays, can create complexity in the world that would otherwise take thousands of words to explain.

## FREEDOM AND OPPRESSION

Oppressive regimes often shackle or twist free speech through art to fit their agenda. The aim is usually to put forward an inaccurate reflection of society, both inwardly towards their own citizens

<sup>6</sup> Rowling, Joanne K. *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows*. Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 242.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes, Anthony, Victor Margolin, and Harris Lewine. *Propaganda: the Art of Persuasion: World War II*. New York: Chelsea House, 1976.



and outwardly towards other states. Often, this propaganda is aimed at the largest and least-educated subsection of the adult population.<sup>7</sup> During the early Soviet Union, Dmitry Moor became hugely influential due to his vivid and simplistic posters.<sup>8</sup> His pop-art style utilized large images, often solely in red and black, with single phrases underneath that extolled the virtues of communism and the communist party leadership. These phrases usually consisted of a few words that accused or targeted the individual reading the poster, such as: “*Did you volunteer?*”

These posters were explicitly aimed at near-iliterate or poorly-educated Soviet communities, such as soldiers, farmers, and laborers. This type of propaganda often involves simple images and short, hard-hitting phrases, usually comprised of only a few words. These basic phrases and ideas tend to spread and become embedded far more easily among these communities than informative articles or expert opinions. They are also much easier to disseminate. At one point during the Civil War, these posters were being sent to the Soviet frontlines at a greater rate than artillery shells.

Regimes don’t only produce their own propaganda. Often, it can be equally important to destroy competing or alternative information. To this end, “subversive” or contradictory art is often destroyed or repressed. This leaves space for only the regime-approved or sponsored art.

The act of book burning has been practiced by many oppressive societies, from the Qin dynasty of Ancient China to the infamous mass-scale book burnings of the Nazi regime.<sup>9, 10</sup> Literature

is often seen as the most dangerous artform for propagating “subversive” thoughts. In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, the CIA’s chief of covert operations wrote:

“Books differ from all other propaganda media primarily because one single book can significantly change the reader’s attitude and action to an extent unmatched by the impact of any other single medium.”<sup>11</sup>

This unparalleled threat to oppressive regimes became significantly more potent once books were able to be printed en masse. This is an important factor to consider in a world. Does the means to mass-print literature exist? If so, is this technology available, or reproducible, by non-governmental entities? If you answer yes to both these questions, then your government will likely struggle to maintain a firm grip on the thoughts and social feeling of its populace. Once this is the case, a government or party that wishes to stay in power will have the following options:

- Retain the genuine support of the populace through benevolence, perceived necessity, or godlike worship.
- Generate propaganda that overwhelms opposing views.
- Oppress the populace in a manner that leaves no recourse for revolution.

Regardless of whether it’s a single advocate for change or a fully-flowered social movement, a world with any level of free expression will

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<sup>8</sup> Bonnell, Victoria E. *Iconography Of Power*. University Of California Press, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Sun Chang, Kang-i et al. *The Cambridge History Of Chinese Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Battles, Matthew. “Knowledge on Fire.” *The American Scholar*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2003, pp. 35–51. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/41221149](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41221149).

<sup>11</sup> Meyer, Martin. “American Literature in Cold War Germany.” *Libraries & Culture*, vol. 36 no. 1, 2001, p. 162-171. Project MUSE, [doi:10.1353/lac.2001.0015](https://doi.org/10.1353/lac.2001.0015).

CHAHN QUACH



doubtless have some members that will express their opposing viewpoints in the form of art. Most of us see this every day in our own lives with a wide plethora of opposing opinions painted on the sides of buildings or plastered across subway walls. As inherently social animals, we humans tend to enjoy seeing our ideas ingested and replicated by others. The internet has shown that entire communities can be created from the smallest shared passions or ideas. This drive to reach out and either find, or convert, others often prevails even in the most hostile of environments. Easily hidden or quickly applied visual artforms, such as symbols or tokens, are often used under authoritarian regimes to show support for suppressed movements or ideals. We see examples of these in popular fiction as well as real life. In *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, our protagonist glimpses a rebellious mockingjay symbol painted on a wall as she travels on a train.<sup>12</sup> This sudden flash of a rebel icon is intended to portray the growing support for the rebel movement and the building discontent among the populace.

Total control over an individual's freedom of expression is very difficult to enforce. Instant, short-lived art forms, such as graffiti and "soapbox" speeches, can be limited and repressed but never totally eliminated. If methods of mass-printing exist in your world, then leaflets and flyers can be quickly made in their thousands and spread with little fear of traceability.

The importance of free speech and free expression is now recognized throughout most of our world. In these more liberal locations, the difficulty is not in disseminating your information, but in having your voice heard over others. A key feature of liberal societies is a plethora of accessible communication channels, from public-access television to self-published novels. If your world or society does not attempt to repress free

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, Francis. *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. Lionsgate Films, 2013.



speech, you can likely expect a similar cacophony of voices and opinions. Some of these communication channels may be more valued than others, the same way that news networks are often more trusted than random blogs. However, unless a hierarchy is clearly defined, these channels can vary in relevance. This can lead to “official” channels becoming mistrusted and more popular channels becoming temporarily sacrosanct. With this variation, it can be difficult for governmental entities to maintain a powerful and consistent message. Therefore, they will likely struggle to control, or even strongly influence, public opinion. In these societies, governments will often expend great resources attempting to remain relevant and trusted.

The difficulty of producing and maintaining an overwhelming propaganda machine often results in regimes either collapsing or degenerating into the oppressive techniques outlined by the third bullet-point above: oppression. We have seen this time and again in our world, from the Third Reich to the Soviet Union. The value that people place on free expression can make life extremely difficult for regimes that wish to remain in power, particularly in our world of mass communication and easily accessible information. The information aspect, particularly, has resulted in the near-elimination of states pursuing the first bullet-point: the cultivation of a godlike following. Countries such as Britain and Japan, where the head of state was previously seen as a figure appointed by God, now take far more pragmatic and earthly views towards their rulers. The difficulty of implementing the first two bullet-points, without resorting to the third, has resulted in far more governments attempting to tread the tight-rope of exerting influence without appearing to subvert democratic processes. Mass communication and dissemination of information has seen a downward trend in authoritarian regimes worldwide. Whether that will remain constant, or whether regimes will successfully redefine and adapt how they utilize propaganda, we do not know.

## A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS

The way that a society operates will greatly affect the art it produces. The quality, quantity, and coherence of art will often directly correlate with whether a civilization is going through a period of civil change, brutal oppression, or harmonious existence. Much can be ascertained about a world by examining its art, and art is often one of the first aspects of a world imprinted upon a visitor. Likewise, detailing the difference between state-sponsored and independently-created art can quickly create remarkable depth and complexity within a world. Therefore, it is vital that we consider the types and themes of art within our created worlds and civilizations. It is often true that a picture is worth a thousand words, and as worldbuilders, we can make use of that by having the artists of our worlds paint the picture around them.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



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# THIRTY-THREE TALES OF WAR

## STORIES EIGHT TO ELEVEN

by Emory Glass, illustrations by Emory Glass and Tristen Fekete



FANTASY (HIGH)



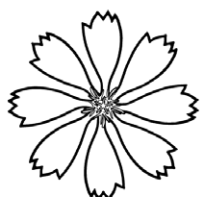
FANTASY (DARK)



CULTURE

**T**hirty-Three Tales of War is a collection of flash fiction pieces that follow thirty-three anonymous individuals living during the Candrish Civil War. Stories one through four appeared in Volume Three, Issue Two: *Technology* and stories five through seven in Volume Three, Issue Six: *Trades and Occupations of Worldbuilding Magazine*.

### VIII: HEALER



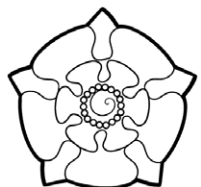
“**EXCUSE** me, *uyr*,” the healer asked an important-looking man out of many in the field camp. He nearly smacked her in the head with the wax tablet he carried when he pivoted to find her.

“*Ayryi*,” he said. “What are you doing out here? Get back to the city. There’s war on the horizon. It’s not safe.”

“I have come to fight. Where may I register?”

His expression darkened as he looked her up and down. “This isn’t the time for fooling around.”

“I am not.”





He sighed. “Meaning no disrespect, this is your grandchildren’s fight. Frankly, you don’t look strong enough to lift a weapon.”

“I need no weapon. I have my Essence.”

“The Rirah would never allow it. Go home.”

The man began to walk away. She snatched a fistful of his rough tunic and held on as tightly as her gnarled fingers would allow. “I am a dedicant of Blazroshi Monastery in Sarona—I know my ability and my age. Let me savor what youth I have left in me if Mercy means anything to you.”

The man gently tugged her hand from his tunic and clasped it in his, kneeling down to meet her gaze lowered by a crooked spine. “You’re a healer. If you must do something, go be with your like in the rear camp.”

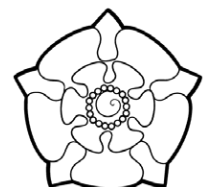
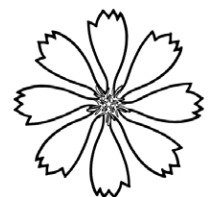
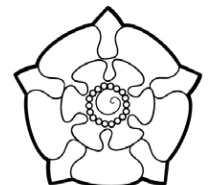
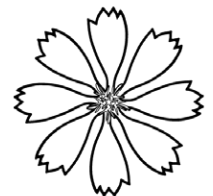
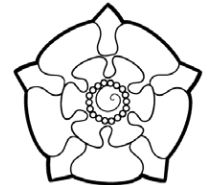
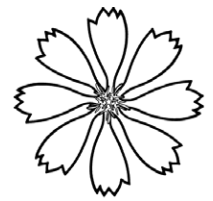
“No. I will fight. If you’re worried about your Rirah, let me speak with her myself.”

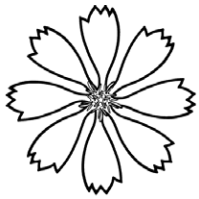
He squinted. “Why are you so persistent?”

The healer withdrew her hand from his grip. “Because of *them*.”

“Who?”

“We come from Pobresil on the border between Sosna Chonok and Zoldonmesk. When the Rosehearts razed the village, Vladri went out to fight. To protect me. I found him in the field pinned to the ground by arrows. The bones in his arm pierced the skin and his face was mottled with blood. I almost didn’t recognize him. My own son.” Her heart beat against pins and needles. “I removed his arm myself and sutured the rest of his wounds. I used scrap of soulcasting the Monastery had taught me. Nothing worked. He could not rise from where he fell, and I could not carry him to safety. Even if I had tried, there was nowhere for us to go. His soul had been cracked so badly I worried it might shatter if I so much as held his hand. We stayed in that field for days. I watched his skin pale and his eyes turn to glass, his feet blush with lividity and his chest struggling to draw breath. I knew I could not fix him. Then, on the third morning, he did not wake up. I knew I could not fix him, but I tried. I used my Essence, my breath, my own blood. I could not fix my baby boy. I did not leave him until his skin had turned to paper and his eyes were sunken in. They took my baby.





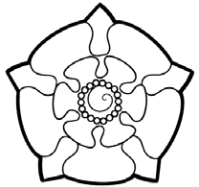
I could not fix him. So, I will avenge him. If I die in this war, so be it. My life is all I have left to give.”

The man just nodded and held his stylus over his wax tablet. “Alright. If you wish to fight, I will not deprive you of that.” He sniffled. “What is your name?”

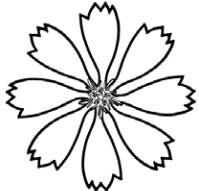


## IX: SEAMSTRESS

**THE** tattoos along her pointer finger were due for darkening. She could barely see the measuring lines anymore, and it showed in her stitching. Sighing, she set aside the mock-up of the skirt she was working on and took a sip of water from the cup on her chairside table.



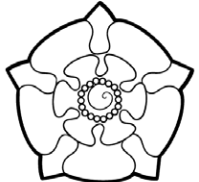
This was not a gown she had the luxury of mismeasuring. The Red Queen’s steward had given her precise measurements of the Queen’s shoulders, hips, waist, and bust; besides, it was to be the gown she wore for her first public speech in months.



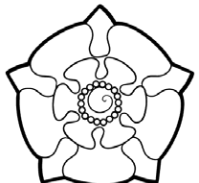
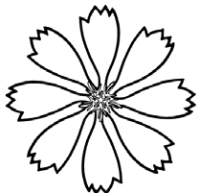
The seamstress’s hands trembled. She was still quite young—her apprenticeship had only ended this spring, and although it wasn’t really her first time working on her own, it felt like it. She had never sewn a maternity dress before.



That was something she was never allowed to mention to anyone until the Red Queen’s speech. Nobody knew she carried a child, and even fewer knew she had taken a Charivi husband. The Yellow Queen’s only son—Pashzak Yolkerev, or something like that. If he was lucky, he would have given her a daughter. The Red Queen’s subjects might be willing to overlook a marriage alliance with the Yellow Queen if he gave them an heir. Otherwise, it might seem like the Yellow Queen had her finger in too many pies and might want a bite of Zoldoni lands, being that her son had married their mistress.



The seamstress took up her stitching again. At least the gown wasn’t terribly complicated. It just required a lot of fabric—something that was not available in large quantities during wartime, no matter how much *tadril* the Red Queen threw at it. Every scrap had to find its way into the final product. The pattern left little room for error. No thread could be wasted. Even if silk itself was hard to come by now, her signature deep shade of red was no less stunning.





The seamstress worked long into the night. She caught herself nodding off more than a few times, always refreshing with another sip of water and a few more stitches. If she hurried, she might be able to sneak in a second fitting before marching ahead to the real thing. She prayed the Red Queen would like it. With the textile shortage, she'd need the tadril from further commissions—if not from the Queen herself, then from her recommendation to other members of her court. Otherwise...

She grimaced. Otherwise, she might have to fight.

## X: MINSTREL

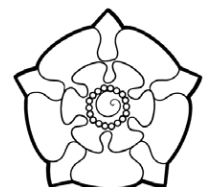
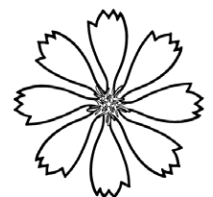
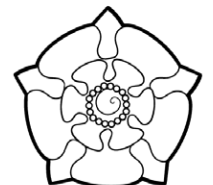
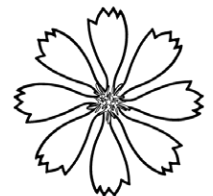
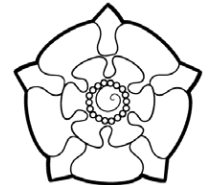
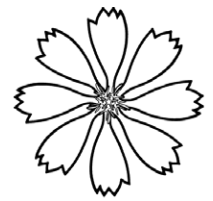
**SILENCE** cradled the final note of the minstrel's song. He remembered standing still as pond water, clutching his prized bone flute close to his chest as the Red Queen's court looked on in horror. A Roseheart guardian had snapped his bone flute in half and crushed it beneath his heel on the glossy granite floor. The Red Queen herself had descended from her throne, airy skirts aflutter, to slap him across the face.

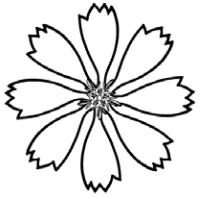
No one had asked him to sing the song that he did. Certainly nobody had told him to bring a knife. She was heavily pregnant. That was why he hesitated. If he hadn't, there would be one fewer Queen to worry about.

Now he sat atop a bloodstained table in a tiny, damp, and dim room in the bowels of the Rose Fortress, pondering his fate. No one had discovered his intent to push a blade through her heart, thank the gods, or else he'd already be nailed to a post. If North and West Kandrisev had anything in common, it was their love of crucifixion.

He knew they wouldn't kill him. Not that he feared his death. The Rosehearts were infamous for their ... alternative methods of punishment. Some said they didn't actually kill their enemies, just maimed and deformed them such that they could never hope to walk again. "Black Stumps" wasn't a song about cutting down trees, after all.

The door banged open and two red-clad men entered carrying a large back-basket by the straps. It knocked aside the lone stool placed next to the door, which the shorter man pulled up to the table. He sat down, rummaging through the back-basket. "I'm not in the mood for hard work today, so we'll give the easy way a fair go



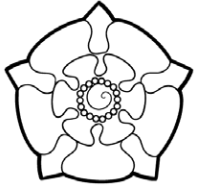


to start. Tell me where you learned the song and I'll leave you be."

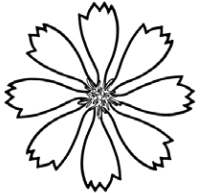
The minstrel glanced nervously from side to side. That was the thing. He hadn't learnt it anywhere. He wrote it himself. He could tell them it was Zerhei's idea—the little twat always took the good spots right in the middle of the market district. He wasn't even that good of a singer, but he sure was pretty.



No, the gods wouldn't look favorably on that. He kneaded his hands, searching for a better answer. Perhaps he could say he heard it from a wandering bard crossing the border into Chovrek. Useless enough to turn up nothing, but believable. He stammered out, "Agrovik of Ksenolishni. He's a wanderer."



The short man dug around in his sack. "And where can we find this bard?"

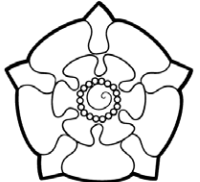


The minstrel grimaced. "He was leaving for Chovrek when I saw him last."

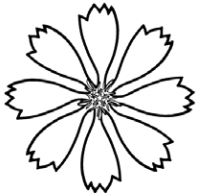


"And dare I ask why you thought it would ever be appropriate to sing such disgusting things in the Red Queen's court?"

"I—It's just that—I just—"



The short man placed three tools neatly on the table, the sight of which made the breath flee the minstrel's lungs. First, a thin pair of tongs. Second, a hammer. Third, a knife of similar length and shape to the one he had intended to kill the Red Queen with.

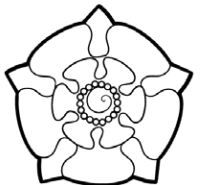


"I do hope for your sake that there was an Agrovik in Ksenolishni that made his way into Chovrek," the short man said as he sat on the stool. "Now. Has anyone read you your punishment?"

"No," the minstrel squeaked.



"Here we are then." He dug around in his pocket, clearing his throat as he unfurled a parchment. "I solemnly declare and consent to the guilt...yes, yes...ah, right here." He tapped his finger on the paper. "Consent that his eyes must be plucked out," he lifted the tongs. "His fingers crushed," he said, lifting the hammer, "and his tongue cut from his mouth." The torturer picked up the knife, shaking it a bit for effect. "But I demand his ears be left intact."





Woozy, the minstrel leaned over and tried not to be sick. “But I told you who—”

“But you still thought it would be amusing to insult our Queen, humiliate her in front of her court, and further have the gall to assume you would face no punishment.” The short man waved over his companion, who produced a small hand drum from the folds of his robes. “You’re known in Igna for your rendition of “Did You Ever See Poor Karchanya,” are you not?”

His limbs caved in to tremors. He couldn’t look anywhere but at the hooded man with his drum.

“I suppose you’ll never see poor Karchanya again, though I doubt you’ll ever forget my associate’s rendition,” the torturer waved back at the tall man. “So. Since you were honest with me, I’ll be generous. Shall we start with your eyes, your fingers, or your tongue?”

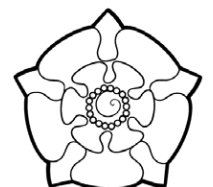
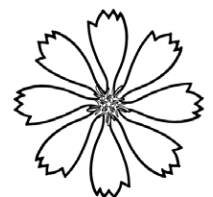
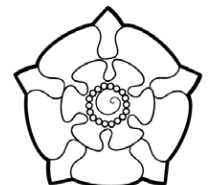
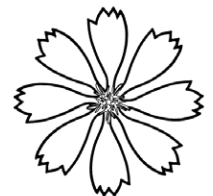
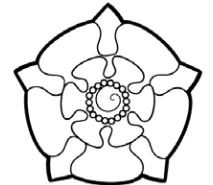
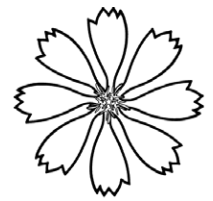
## XI: DYER

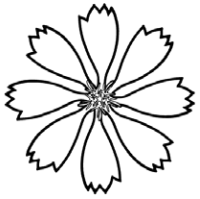
**HIS** hands were stained red. Not much in Zoldonmesk was any other color—not anymore.

It started when the Red Queen drove out the redbloods who came north seeking refuge from their home country’s war. Then came the Rosehearts, her very own elite army drawn from all over the region. Or nation. Could be either, depending on who you were talking to. All they wore was red, head to toe. Some even caked their hair in reddish paste for added effect.

The dyer pulled a large cut of fabric from the final vat and began to wring it out. Red water splashed into the catch-tray he stood in, inundating his shoes. With how much red the Queen required it’d be a miracle if madder root wasn’t driven out of Zoldonmesk, too. So many other shortages had cropped up: grain, ore, even wool was hard to come by. If they ran out of madder, what would she do? Bring the redbloods back?

The dyer wrung the cloth until his strength failed, then he untwisted the fabric and shook it out. He brought it to the clothesline stretched out under a wooden awning behind his storefront. Twenty more red banners just like it awaited his runner, Agrovik, who would deliver it to the banner makers for finishing up. He

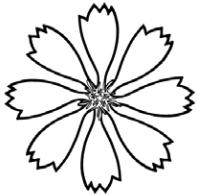
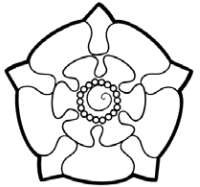




knew the pattern so well he could have stitched it all himself: *Gules, a rose in bloom Sable fimbriated Or.* Red, for the Queen. Black, for their blood. Gold, for the Yellow Queen that enabled their freedom.



He took a seat on a stool in the corner of his shop, crossed his arms and legs and leaned his head back against the wall. All this silence was strange. Sure, the streets bustled with shoppers and sellers and runners abundant, but there was an emptiness in the air that made it rather hard to relax. He had no wife, no children, no family anywhere near. The plague a few years back had taken care of all of that. He had nothing else to lose. Yet, he sat there, in his dye shop, doing nothing when he could be out there, in the mud and grit, doing something *real* to help his countrymen.



But he liked his life here in his little dye shop. It wasn't so bad making banners for the Red Queen and her Rosehearts, safe within the walls of Igna where there was no blood or mud or gore. He should really count his blessings, he thought. Most weren't so lucky.



[BACK TO INDEX](#)

# COMMUNITY ART

curated by Anna Hannon & Tristen Fekete

In an effort to include our fantastic community more in the magazine, we've decided to feature a small art submission section. To sign up and submit your own art for a chance to be featured in a future issue, apply [here](#).


## HOWLER'S DELL

by Aureus

Howler's Dell, is the largest and most prosperous settlement for many miles. Thanks to the protection of the druids, the villagers are not afraid of the nearby wilderness and the monsters it hides. The fertile land allows farmers to grow not only cereals, cabbage and beans, but also flax and hemp. The local fiber and clothes are gladly purchased by the other hamlets, which in exchange provide salted fish, tools, weapons, and lumber.

Check out [Roadwarden](#), a text-based RPG, on Steam.



 AUREUS



BLUETWODAYS



## OATHS & SHACKLES

by BlueTwoDays

This piece is the back cover of the Parselings tabletop role-playing game rulebook (soon to be completed). The figure is at the end of her journey, bound to the promises she made to her companions and contemplating bleak decisions ahead of her. Will she face the impossible for those that once traveled with her?

Even though Parselings focuses on the concepts of cooperation and unity, she is very much alone in these moments, because in the end she will have to live with any decisions she makes.

See more about Parselings from BlueTwoDays on the [Smunchy Games website](#), or follow it on [Twitter](#).



BACK TO INDEX

PLAYERS GUIDEBOOK

Seb Fallon • Jacob Waterman  
Bailey Phillips • Will Egger • Emily Bihan  
Cover Illustration by Ray NG

Play the Paths: World of Adia Tabletop  
RPG in our FREE open beta at

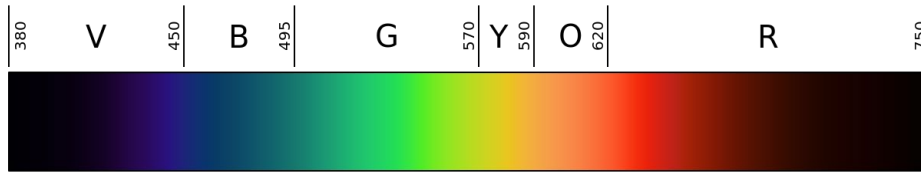
SMUNCHYGAMES.COM/PATHS

# ARTIST CORNER

by Tristen Fekete

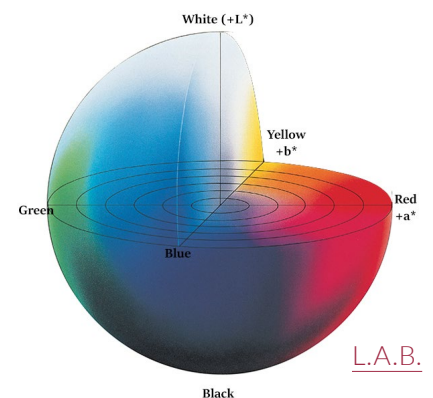
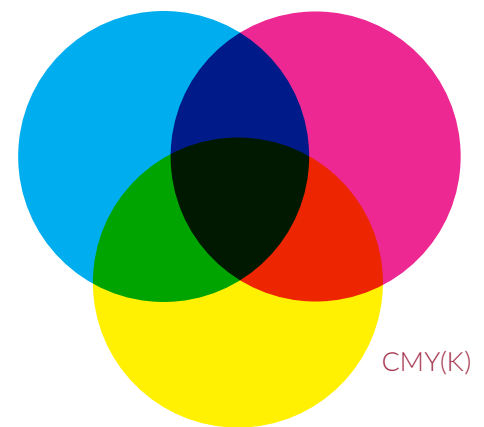
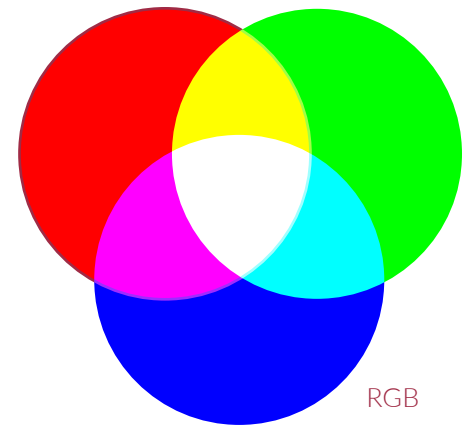
**H**ello! In an effort to bring more regular art content to our magazine, we are proud to introduce the Artist Corner where Anna Hannon, our Art Department Deputy Chair whose beautiful work you've seen on our cover multiple times and in articles, and myself, the Art Department Chair, will go over art-related topics to help our readers illustrate their worlds! For this corner, I'll be covering the basics of color theory.

Color theory is the study of how colors work together and mix. Colors emerge from white light reflecting off objects at specific wavelengths creating the spectrum of visible light (below).

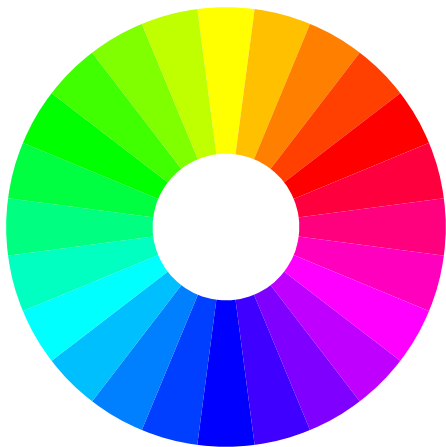


In traditional color theory, there are three primary colors: red, blue, and yellow. It was believed these colors could not be created from other colors by any natural means. The rest of the colors on the spectrum could be obtained by mixing these primaries. Secondary colors are made by mixing each primary with each other. Violet comes from a mixture of blue and red, orange from red and yellow, and green from yellow and blue. Tertiary colors emerge from mixing a primary with a secondary and get names based on primary-secondary notation.

Modern color theory has diverged from this original model and added three new systems: Additive, Subtractive, and  $L^*A^*B^*$ . Additive uses red, green, and blue as its primary colors. The Additive model is mainly used for electronic displays and functions by adding the wavelengths of these three primaries together to a black background to create the full spectrum of color. Subtractive uses cyan, magenta, and yellow as its primaries and is based on reflecting and absorbing light for its spectrum.  $L^*A^*B^*$  is a newer model, using a 3 dimensional grid of axes where the y-axis is lightness ( $L^*$ ), the x-axis is the amount of red or green ( $A^*$ ), and the z-axis is the amount of blue or yellow ( $B^*$ ).  $L^*A^*B^*$  is currently considered the most accurate to human perception of all the models.

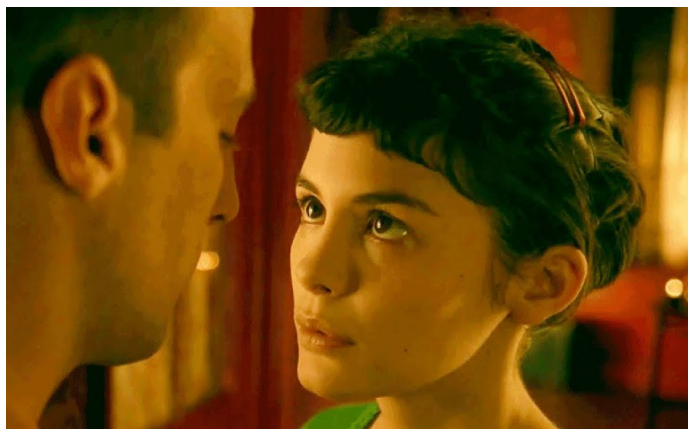






Laying it all out, we have color wheels. There are many versions of the color wheel but they all give the same information. Namely, usage for color harmony, which is a perception of what colors are aesthetically pleasing. Colors which lie directly across from each other in the wheel are complementary, and when mixed entirely tend to create brown, a neutral color. When not mixed, though, complementary colors are often used to bring out contrast in one another in bold schemes. Think yellow (or gold in this case) and purple being associated with royalty, red and green for Christmas, and blue and orange for sports teams and film palettes.

*Amelie (2001) uses reds and greens against each other to great effect.*



*Drive (2011) uses blues in the background to make skin tones pop.*



*La La Land (2016) makes this yellow dress the focal point of the scene.*



Palettes are a selection of colors used in visual media to bring a sense of unity and emotion to a work. Using the entire color spectrum in a single image is difficult to make cohesive with the amount of contrast, busyness, and muddiness (if the colors mix too much) it generates. Palettes are meant to limit the options an artist has in addition to providing more meaning. Well known palettes are complementary, monochromatic, primary, pastels, and greyscale. When used to good effect, these palettes can evoke particular emotions in viewers and consumers.

Using color to influence how people feel is a science—color psychology. It goes very deep into how our brains work and how hues can affect us, but we can simplify it and use it to our advantage pretty easily. As an example, consider the fast food restaurant logos on the next page. Notice a pattern? Red and yellow have been shown to increase our appetite and feelings of happiness. If you feel tricked, that's normal. How we can use color psychology is to do the same with





art—make our viewers, readers, or consumers feel or think what we want them to with our color choices.

Warm colors—reds, oranges, and yellows—are typically associated with positive feelings. Friendliness, joy, and optimism can stem from these colors, though red crosses over into less bright emotions. Cool colors—blues, greens, and violets—carry along calmness, nature, and mindfulness, but can also represent sadness and sickness. Using color wisely in your art can reveal a lot about who a character is or how to feel about an unsettling situation. Take a look at how other artists of any media use color to their advantage and try to apply it to the next piece you make.



[BACK TO INDEX](#)

## RESOURCES!

### ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

by Tristen Fekete



Adobe is one of the first names anyone hears when it comes to visual art making of almost any kind, and for good reason.

[Photoshop](#) is a powerhouse of a program which has more

features than any one person can truly understand. From digital painting and 3D rendering, to photomanipulation and compositing, Photoshop is considered an industry standard around the world. On top of that, if you're only looking to draw it's pretty easy to pick up.

Between having almost infinite freedom, the flexibility to approach your work from any angle, and compatibility with Adobe's other great programs, Photoshop is a fantastic tool for new and experienced artists alike.

### KRITA

by Anna Hannon


Several years ago I eschewed Windows OS for Linux, turning to Krita for a Photoshop alternative. I have never looked back! [Krita](#) is equipped with

the features one expects in any


painting program: brushes, photo editing filters, layers, etc. The brush engine is very strong, capable of innumerable presets with a simple UI to tweak brush settings as needed.

Krita also boasts several features that Photoshop lacks: reference photos that can be placed around your work area, a color mixing palette, seamless tiling settings, and a built-in color wheel!







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## ABOUT MAGIC AND CRIME

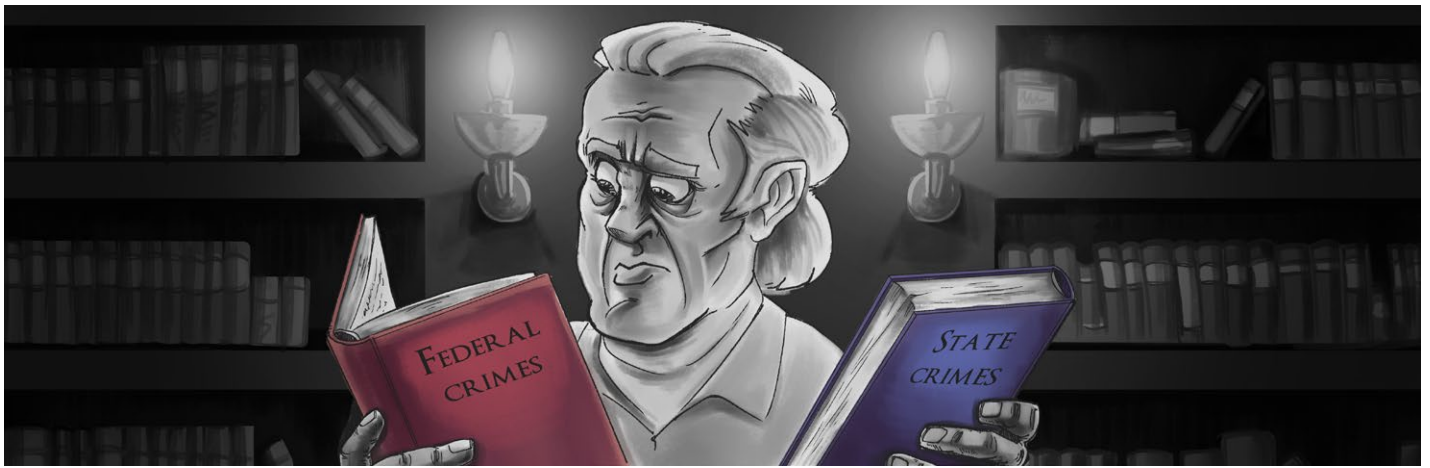
by Robert Meegan | illustrations by Ahmed ElGharabawy

CRIME    MAGIC

**I**t is axiomatic that the law is always trying to catch up with technology. Even things not intended for criminal or policing activities require regulation. When flying drones appeared, they were toys barely able to navigate inside of a room. A few years later, they are sophisticated platforms that can travel autonomously for kilometers while taking ultra-high resolution images. Self-driving vehicles have been around for much longer, but no one seriously considered them to be suitable for travel on public roads until suddenly they were doing so. Authorities found themselves in the familiar position of trying to catch up with barely understood developments.

To show how far behind the law can be, and how complex the issues are, consider that in the United States, as in some other countries, there is a separation between federal crimes, which violate laws passed by Congress, and state crimes, which violate laws passed by state legislatures. For a variety of historical reasons, federal law is limited to very specific types of crime—generally those involving interstate commerce. To further complicate matters, the nature of a crime and the severity of any punishment may vary between states, making the location where the crime takes place potentially very significant.





To give a real example of how all of this works, imagine a person standing in North Carolina and firing a gun that kills someone standing in Tennessee. The question arises whether the crime was committed where the gun was fired or where the victim was struck. In this particular case (in 1894), the killer's conviction was overturned in North Carolina since he had not killed anyone in that state.<sup>1</sup> Tennessee was not able to extradite him (have North Carolina turn him over for prosecution) because extradition law at that time only permitted the return of fugitives. Since the killer had never set foot in Tennessee, he could not be *returned*. Note that despite the bullet crossing between states, no federal law was broken. The laws of all states have since been changed to close this loophole.

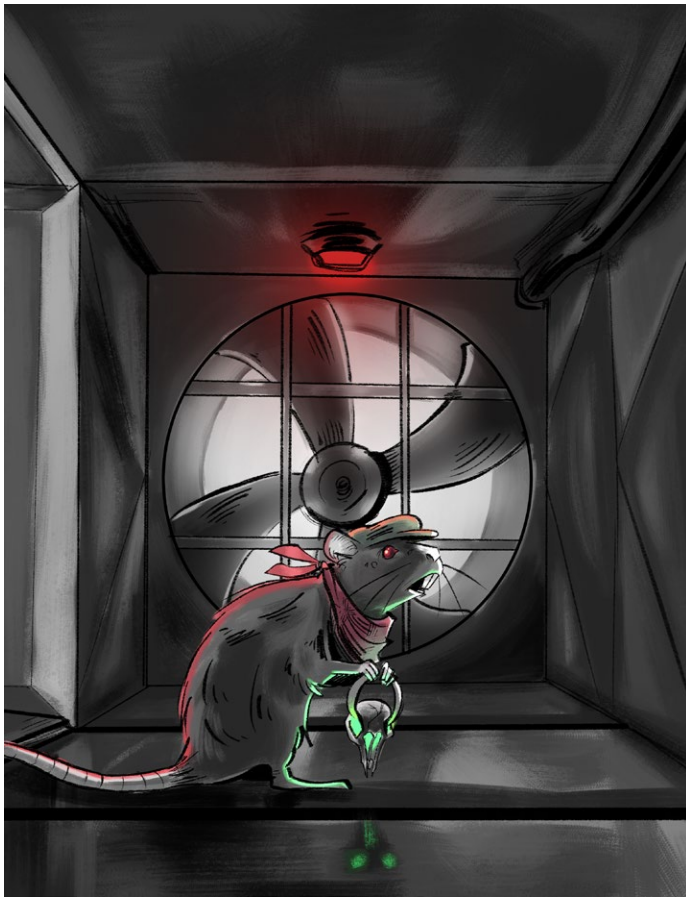
On the other hand, the US Constitution gives the federal government the right to regulate interstate commerce, which means that someone sending a bomb or committing fraud through the mail or via a common carrier (such as FedEx or UPS) is subject to federal law. This might not appear to be a technological problem at first glance, but what about a situation where a crime is committed using a telephone?

Consider the situation where two people in the United States are planning to commit a crime,

where one is in New York and the other in California. Neither person will leave their state, and the actual crime will be committed in California. Who has jurisdiction over such a case? Despite the first interstate telegraph services appearing in the 1840s, it wasn't until the Communications Act of 1934 (which has been amended many, many times) that telegraph and telephone systems were defined to be common carriers. This stated that a crime discussed or committed using a telephone across state borders could be a violation of both federal and state law, while if the two parties were in the same state, no federal crime has been committed. Which was perfectly clear, at least until telephone systems got more complex and calls between any two people—even neighbors—could be processed by systems in different states (or even different countries).

Eventually, the law caught up with the technology to clarify that calls are not considered interstate if the two parties were in the same state, even if the system might direct the call through part of the system located in another state. This means that if, for example, you were to call someone up the street to arrange for a murder, you could not be charged under federal law, even if your call was routed through a computer in another state. This seems to have cleared up all the loopholes, except that the law only applies to

<sup>1</sup> *State v. Hall*, 19 S.E. 602. (NC Supreme Court, 1894)



*state regulated* carriers, so if you use Skype or Facetime, or any of the messaging apps except those that use the mobile SMS system, you could face a federal prison term. Or not. There have been cases decided both ways, making it inevitable that the US Supreme Court will eventually need to make a definitive decision.<sup>2</sup>

## SMOOTH CRIMINAL

So, what does that mean for worldbuilders? The answer can be found in another law. Specifically, Clarke's third law: any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Actually, because this is an article about thinking sideways, we'll consider a corollary of that law—for all practical purposes, sufficiently powerful magic can be treated as a form of technology. And, as

been exhaustively demonstrated, the time that it takes any new technology to be diverted to criminal activities is essentially negligible.

In most fantasy worlds, there is a notable lack of magical criminality. Yes, there are often a few bent on world domination, or arcane destruction on a cosmic scale, but petty crime is often sorely absent. This makes no sense at all because many systems of magic found in both fiction and gaming have a number of spells useful for committing crimes. What's more, while powerful magic takes years—if not a lifetime—of study, the kind of spells that can be used for criminal activity seem to be among the first things that most spellcasters learn. Given the usual curves of expertise and talent found with any skill, it's very likely that the median ability will be quite low, and by definition, half of the practitioners will be below that level.

The most obvious is the ability to open a lock. This might be a door or chest, but in a more technologically advanced world it could be used to start a car or other vehicle. With a screwdriver to turn the ignition switch after it's unlocked, anything without a secondary electronic lock could be driven away in seconds. Given the potential value of the knowledge, you'd have to imagine an unhealthy amount of research devoted to dealing with the electronic aspects as well.

Invisibility is also a common low-level spell in some magic systems. While there are obvious uses in sneaking past guards, the ability to disappear *after* the crime would probably be more useful. Consider the effectiveness of pickpocketing, purse snatching, or even simple “smash and grab” robbery coupled with vanishing instantly into the crowd. Even if the victim realized that they had been robbed, how could the criminal

---

<sup>2</sup> *State Jurisdiction Over Interstate Telephonic Criminal Conspiracy*, 45 Wash. & Lee L. Rev. 1475 (1988), <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/wlulr/vol45/iss4/13>; *United States v. Garrido*, 713 F.3d 985, 998 (9th Cir. 2013); *United States v. Halloran*, 821 F.3d 321, 342 (7th Cir. 2016).

be identified? Alternately, the thief could choose to make the object invisible. In this way, items could be smuggled in or out of restricted areas. A clever person might use indirection with gaudy jewelry or an outrageous outfit to attract attention rather than divert it. Who's going to suspect that the woman wearing the leopard print dress and a small treasure chest's worth of costume jewelry actually had the priceless Jewel of the Empire in all of that mess?

Another magical effect that might be available is the ability to take on the appearance of another individual or creature. If the spellcaster can significantly change their size, entry into otherwise closed facilities as a rodent, bird, or insect becomes an option in many cases. Assuming the likeness of someone with authority to enter might allow easy passage past coworkers and security guards who might otherwise be suspicious, particularly if the appropriate badges and other passes were acquired through either magical

or mundane means. For those with a taste for more sophisticated activities along these lines, a viewing of the classic *Mission Impossible* television series will provide numerous examples of impersonation as a tool.

While all of these spells might seem paltry in comparison to the usual fantasy wizard activities, it's likely that someone with relatively modest skills could make a rather nice living off petty crimes, leveraging their magical skills without great effort or risk. On the other hand, if a more white-collar approach to crime is desired, very little additional time and effort studying the magical arts is needed. In fact, the spells above could easily be used to slip documents into and out of offices or other facilities. Impersonating a low-level minion in the background of an important meeting could gain you valuable information that could be sold to commercial or political competitors. Only slightly more advanced magic is usually available to allow the spellcaster to





see and/or hear into an adjacent room. This can prove even better than being present in person, if the point of view can be moved around, as it might permit reading documents that are otherwise screened from view. If a negotiation is taking place, a spell for communicating secret messages to an individual could provide your agent with the information that you uncover. More modern targets for these activities might mean watching people type in passwords or lock codes.

The ability to repair or reconstitute a damaged item provides the option of reassembling a shredded document. It could also be used as a method for getting items past security. There is an old (and almost certainly apocryphal) story about a worker at an auto factory smuggling a car out, one piece at a time. Imagine if a priceless object could be smashed into dust and then restored. A variation is to open an intercepted message and then reseal it, so that confidential information could be read without either the sender or receiver knowing. While all of this might seem trivial and bureaucratic, think about what a bandit gang or pirate captain might pay for cargo manifests and sailing schedules. They could reduce their risk by picking only high-value targets and not having to spend time lingering along the route.

Obviously, any augury or divination spells would be ruinous to gambling. Knowing the outcome of a sporting event makes betting upon it trivial, but even insight into which slot machine was about to pay off and how close it was could earn a year's income in a matter of minutes. If the laws of magic don't permit such knowledge, or if the spell is too difficult to learn, many games could be altered to favor a betting result by a strategic gust of wind blowing a ball into or out of a goal. A damp spot on a field could cause a player to slip and miss a play. If done with any subtlety at all, these could be almost impossible to detect.

Until now, all of the magic that I've described is indirect. That is, it relies upon surreptitious surveillance and misdirection. None of it is directed specifically *at* another individual. An entirely different can of worms lies in the use of spells that cause someone to act against their own best interest in the belief that they are making the correct choice. In the mundane world, this is called "fraudulent inducement." Telling someone that they should invest their life savings in a new cryptocurrency because the fact that it's nearly worthless now only ensures that it will be worth astronomically more in the future is both an example of fraudulent inducement and a press release from roughly a quarter of last year's new companies.

Reaching into the deep well of low-level magic, we can find spells that cause confusion, memory loss, and suggestion. For a halfway competent con artist, it only takes a few minutes to convince even otherwise intelligent and rational people to sign over vast wealth. Some gentle magical nudges make this type of fraud almost trivial. The requirement is only to push someone over the edge into doing something that they really want to do anyway. The American pyramid scheme artist Bernie Madoff convinced more than 4,800 people to give him a total of over \$60 billion, solely because he had come up with a way to make it appear to moderately sophisticated investors that he had a scheme for beating the market. Someone with the ability to magically befuddle a business partner should easily be capable of working out favorable deals. "This is your chance to get in on the beginning of tribble-mania. If you buy these now, you'll own the market when they catch on. Since we're friends, I'll let you have them at only ten percent above my cost." With some illusionary writing and/or memory alteration, you could have a signed contract stating that he agreed to purchase twenty shiploads of tribbles and he'll only be able to sputter indignantly.

For those not ready to delve into this kind of criminality, we can still use these spells for the old-fashioned variety. It's almost as if security guards were created for this very purpose. Think of Obi-Wan Kenobi playing a Jedi mind trick. "Hey, we left our badges on our desk, would you mind buzzing us in?" And on the way out, all that's needed is a quick, "Hey, thanks. By the way, you've never seen us before and you don't remember letting anyone through that door all day." Let's be honest—the first trick often works even without magical powers, given a modicum of charisma and an abundance of audacity.

What about spells that stun or freeze a person in place? In general, a smart thief avoids these, even if the target wasn't able to see or hear who committed the crime. There is a reason for this. In most legal systems, such an action is defined as an assault. This is, in technical language, a very bad thing. Adding assault to any crime usually has the side effect of adding additional charges when you're apprehended and dragged into court. What's more, the assault charge usually carries a harsher sentence than the base crime. Just to be clear, it's not necessary for the spell to injure the target to trigger the assault charge. It is only necessary for the victim to *believe* that they will be harmed. A prosecutor should not find it difficult to argue that someone who was incapacitated by criminals has a legitimate level of concern about their safety.

Spells that actually inflict harm, such as fireballs, lightning bolts, and various flung objects could be of use to the thuggish practitioners of crime. Their showy nature and lack of subtlety likely restrict them to gang warfare and desperate escapes, at least when targeting other people. Adding attempted (or successful) murder to whatever other charges are faced deters most people from going to this extreme. These actions also have the disadvantage of not serving as a useful threat—pointing a finger at someone and saying, "Don't move or I'll shoot!" lacks the visual impact that a gun provides.

On the other hand (so to speak), these spells do offer significant potential when used in non-violent crimes. One example is arson. Experienced arson investigators were able to smell what are politely known as "accelerants," such as gasoline or oil, long before the invention of sophisticated electronic sensors. A fireball directed at a strategically flammable pile of debris could be just as effective, perhaps without leaving implicating traces behind. Similarly, modern electronics are exceptionally vulnerable to electrical surges. A lightning bolt fired on a rainy night that just happens to take out a security system or a company's computers might be considered a freak event, with no one even bothering to look for criminal intent.

If you are absolutely bent upon magical murder and are willing to wait for the perfect opportunity, simple illusion spells will go a long way. In many magical systems low-level illusions only affect a single individual. This provides plenty of witnesses who can testify that Rothgar must have been pretty drunk when he accidentally



tried to lean on the railing and fell through the open gap instead. Or that the pedestrian barely glanced up from his cell phone before stepping into the street and getting creamed by that truck. You know that Rothgar saw the railing and that person saw stopped traffic and a walk signal, but no one else does.

Drivers can be tricked into running off cliffs or into concrete barriers through all sorts of devious tricks. Illusions and slippery patches are good options. A winding mountain road is a terrible place to suddenly lose the ability to steer or apply the brakes, so this might also be the perfect opportunity to break out those spells that cause temporary paralysis. If the vehicle in question is drawn by animals or your target is riding one, simply startling the beast might be enough to cause a fatal crash or tumble. After all, it's not as though a horse can testify that it saw a wolf bearing down on it.

### I MIGHT NEED SECURITY

Now that we know that even magic wielders with only basic training are capable of committing a host of crimes, what are good, wholesome, law-abiding citizens supposed to do about it? If we look at our concept of magic as technology and compare it to our own world, the answer isn't very promising. The examples of guns, social media, and data privacy indicate that attempts to restrict the use of magic will be met with outcry from those who will point out all of the benefits it brings. The slogans that "when magic is outlawed, only outlaws will have magic" and "they'll pry my wand from my cold dead fingers" will certainly be heard. Some authoritarian regimes will undoubtedly manage to crack down on the practice of magic, particularly if the fraction of the population who can use it is small. In all likelihood, even those efforts will do little more than to drive practitioners underground. Banning magic completely is likely so improbable as to be laughable—the uses for it by the powerful and wealthy are too great to pass up.

Since we've been talking about a world where magic is not particularly uncommon, given some effort and study, it seems reasonable to expect laws that govern the acceptable uses of magic. Based upon our experiences with technology, this means that a majority of magic users will generally follow the law, at least in principle, but there will also be a not insignificant number who are morally ambivalent. For this group, anything is legal, at least until you get caught.

## WHEN MAGIC IS OUTLAWED, ONLY OUTLAWS WILL HAVE MAGIC.

A technological example of this attitude is computer hacking. Most people have almost no idea of how their computers, tablets, cell phones, and other devices actually work. You turn them on and you can do (almost) magical things with them. There are some who spend years learning how to create and program this equipment, but they're a small fraction of the population. The problem is that a fraction of that fraction have the moral ambivalence issue. They devote time and effort to stealing the secrets of companies and individuals who use those devices. It's against the law, but they rely upon the reality that only a handful are ever caught and convicted.

Magical hacking almost certainly would be similar. Official responses will likely be ineffectual because of a lack of interest in spending the money and effort to actually crack down on the problem. Government buildings of sufficient importance will have counterspells in place to prevent eavesdropping and scrying. Guards will be equipped to detect invisibility or illusions. Magical locks may be added to doors to hinder access. None of this will be sufficient to guarantee security, but it can at least make the challenge of gaining access much more difficult. All of this tends to make theft of official material a job that requires someone on the inside.



Organizations and individuals will be forced to implement whatever countermeasures they can. Large guilds, corporations, and banks of any era are going to have security similar to government buildings. How plentiful and powerful these defenses are depends greatly upon the quality of leadership and the available budget. Those individuals who can afford it will have protection from magical influence as well. It's not hard to envision magical security consultants either on the payroll or brought in during important projects. It's equally easy to expect that at least some of them will be hired to spy on competitors instead. Sometimes the best defense is a good offense.

The average person or small business will have to rely upon their insignificance and what basic preventative measures they can take. Paranoia regarding displays of wealth in public, taking care to minimize what can be quickly grabbed, and as much physical security as is possible are probably the best that most people can do. Those with a little more knowledge might invest in a basic protective charm or two, the magical equivalent to anti-virus software. The objective isn't to make yourself invulnerable, but to encourage a thief to find someone who presents a better value proposition.

## I FOUGHT THE LAW

Having examined criminal magic, we also need to think sideways about the magic of law enforcement. Again, it's worth remembering that the most powerful magic certainly won't be the most commonly used, nor might it be the most effective. If the Eye of Sauron couldn't find one missing ring, it's unlikely that any mortal magic is going to put an end to crime. The majority of crimes are going to be solved with the traditional tools of feet on the ground with open eyes and ears.

Individuals who only learn some basic spells before deciding on a career in law enforcement will probably end up as uniformed officers. Patrolling the streets and markets is the type

of work where the ability to affect movement—of the patroller or the suspect—as well as seeing in dark and hidden places will be most useful. Those abilities lend themselves to all sorts of crime detection and prevention. Detecting and dispelling magic, particularly illusions and invisibility, are needed for the types of criminal activity discussed earlier. Conversely, the ability to cast invisibility and/or alter one's appearance provide tools for undercover work.

Depending upon how authoritarian the government is, spells that compel a person to speak or allow the reading of thoughts may or may not be permissible. Regardless of their legality, it's not hard to imagine their use by a certain type of person. Rogue officers who operate just past the ragged edge of the law are staples of fiction and reality. How far past the edge and how often probably depends a great deal on the political climate and the social status of the person being subjected to the abusive treatment. It's not unreasonable to expect that dragging a petty thief of no particular importance into an alley and forcing them to tell what they know is unlikely to



be punished. If the same were done to the scion of a powerful family, our “Dirty Harry Potter” could expect the fallout to be far greater.

Some officers will wish to get off patrol duties and onto the more interesting (if we are to believe all of the television shows) detective squad. If they hope to do so using their magical talents, they will need more advanced, or at least more sophisticated, spells. The ability to detect hidden openings and locating missing objects is a start. Remote sensing abilities could serve a role similar to wiretaps today, albeit with different capabilities and limitations. Most of these spells, at least at lower levels, are limited in duration and only allow the caster to see or hear. Consequently, timing the casting so as to catch the targets discussing their crimes will be challenging to say the least. Even then, the results are only likely to provide new avenues for investigation, rather than evidence that could be used in court. Magical glyphs that trigger on the passage of a suspect, indicating their arrival or departure, are an alternative that allows greater flexibility at the expense of detail. A common low-level ability allows a spellcaster to locate an item that they have marked with a glyph, permitting the caster to track the suspect from a distance. Particularly devious detectives with some knowledge of the suspect’s habits could cast a spell on a coin that could be returned as change when they bought coffee or lunch.

Even with this magical assistance, detective work is primarily a realm of hard work, intuition, and deduction. At least, it is until science gets involved. In the mundane world, fingerprinting, DNA matching, GPS tracking, and other near-magical technologies have become available. Suspects have been identified from traces of saliva left on coffee cups and ice cream spoons retrieved from trash cans. Genetic testing by people hoping to find connections to royalty or historical figures have provided links that connected relatives to crimes. All of these advances result from scientific laws that govern how the universe works. There is no reason to expect that

arcane laws couldn’t be exploited in the same way. Solving crimes still requires legwork, but suspects can be identified or eliminated much more quickly with the right set of advanced tools.

The people who develop and use technology in law enforcement tend to have advanced degrees. They’ve spent years learning not just the tools, but the principles behind them. These people could be using their knowledge for commercial purposes, but something about catching criminals inspired a different career choice. Why shouldn’t similar people be found in a magical universe? Unlike those we have been speaking about, these wouldn’t be low-level hedge wizards. This type of career offers opportunities to more capable individuals with access to far more powerful magics. What’s more, they’d likely develop artifacts that allow repeated and extended use. They’d build more extensive toolkits, with alchemy, divination, and possibly even necromancy available in their labs.

The laboratories of these arcane forensic experts are similar to those of their mundane colleagues. The techniques, the discipline, and even the language seems familiar. The magical laws have relationships to the mundane that make them more alike than might be first thought. As an example, the Law of Contagion states that objects or beings that have been in close contact with each other retain a connection. Further, the longer and more intimate the contact, the stronger the connection. This means that objects that have been in proximity to a criminal can be identified with that person, even if the contact didn’t leave visible traces.

The various magical Laws of Knowledge, including the Law of True Names and the Law of Similarity, can be used as keys in an arcane database. As detectives gather more information about suspects, it enhances the ability of those back in the laboratory to trace their movements, to locate evidence, and to find additional connections. Through their actions, each person creates ripples through magical space. Specialists can

identify those ripples and see the patterns that they form.

To put this into more familiar terms, a drop of the victim's blood greatly enhances the effectiveness of a spell cast to find the knife that spilled it. Having a photo, painting, or even a rough sketch of a suspect can help with a divination spell to determine their next move. Someone who has met a person, even for a moment, is going to be much more likely to sense the traces of that person's aura when trying to determine if they've been in a location.

### CAUGHT BY THE FUZZ

Sergeant Hoiber hated going down into the laboratories at headquarters. Crime happened in dirty places and involved dirty people. Solving crimes meant going to those places and dealing with those people. The labs were something else entirely. Too neat and orderly. Too quiet. The wizards who worked in them were fussy and arrogant. He'd never work with them if they weren't so damned useful, not that he'd admit that usefulness to anyone. He opened the door labeled "Alchemy," walked in, and set the bag down on the counter. "Here. We found this."

Makisa pulled on a pair of gloves and opened the bag. After a little shake, a knife slid out onto the table. She put the bag aside and poked at the knife with a pair of tongs. "Rusty. Where did you find it?"

"Under some bushes on the other side of the park."

Makisa flipped the knife over and peered closely at a dark spot on the blade. "This looks like some dried blood. Let's see if it matches our body." She carefully scraped it into a bowl and added some liquid. While it mixed, she opened the evidence cabinet and selected a vial. Putting a drop from it and one from the material on the knife into a glass dish, she began to chant. After a few seconds, a tiny spark of yellow light appeared. "Yes, they match. Either someone decided to dunk it into your victim's blood before they threw it away or that's the knife that killed him."

"I'll hope that it's the latter." He held the bag while she put the knife back in. "Now to see if we can get a trace." Hoiber took the bag down the hall. He hated the scrying lab. It made the other room seem like his grandmother's parlor. Inside, it was dimly lit and smelt of burnt feathers and fur. Most of the light came from the scrying mirrors mounted on the desks. He took a deep breath. It's okay, just as long as the person on duty wasn't Tokal.

"Hey! If it isn't my favorite overstuffed suit! I'm guessing that you're not here to find your lunch, because it's obvious that you aren't missing any."

Of course. It had to be Tokal. It was that kind of day. "Can it. This is important. We found the knife that carved up the guy in the park. I need you to see if you can find out who it belongs to." He held out the bag.

To his credit, Tokal got serious and brought the bag over to



 ADAM BASSETT



his desk. He pulled on gloves and put the knife on a silver plate in front of the mirror. From a drawer, he pulled out an eagle feather and laid it next to the knife. Then he closed his eyes and began to chant. This incantation was longer than Makisa's and clearly took more effort. Tokal was straining to spit out the words when the feather suddenly burst into flames. He opened his eyes and gently blew the smoke across the knife, so that it wafted up the mirror.

"Here we go." A face appeared in the mirror. It was a young blonde man who was very obviously dead and not all that recently.

Hoiber said, "That's the victim."

"Well, getting killed does tend to create a strong attachment to the object that did you in. Hang on, let's see if there is anyone else." Another puff of smoke and a different face appeared. This one was older, more grizzled. The image was fainter, as if farther away. Hoiber had seen this enough to know that it wasn't distance that made the image fade. It was time.

"Can you back out a bit, so I can see who it is?" Tokal concentrated again, hard enough that he began to tremble with the exertion. The image drew back slowly, showing a workshop. It continued to move back through the wall until the front of the building could be seen. "Great. That's the knifemaker. There's no chance that he was the killer. It doesn't even begin to make sense."

Tokal collapsed back in his chair and the image disappeared. "Maybe, but he's the only other person with an attachment to the blade. He made it. He had to have worked on it for at least a couple of days. That much time and effort makes a strong bond. Whoever owned it couldn't have had it for very long."

"Good point. Give me back the knife. I'll see if he can remember who bought it." As he reached the door, he slowed for a moment without turning. "Not bad, Tokal. Not bad."

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 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## MICHAEL D. NADEAU

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interviewed by Adam Bassett

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INTERVIEW



WRITING

**M**icheal D. Nadeau is both a traditionally-published and self-published author with his most recent title, *The Darkness Returns (A Lythinall Novel)*, the beginning of a fantasy series. Here's what he had to say about his worlds and experience in publishing!

I was born in the usual way, being normal for about 8 years, then I found fantasy. It started with *Dungeons & Dragons*, and I found that I loved being different people—as well as casting magic. In time, I also discovered a love for reading. I’ve read hundreds of fantasy books, living in each of their worlds, and after awhile, I started creating my own.

The worlds I’ve started building for my novels are quite unique in that I’m trying to do what Michael Moorcock did with his *Eternal Champion* series. In every world I make, and every story I write, they tie in together somehow. For example, I have a fantasy world that my land of Lythinall is set in, as well as a steampunk world created on World Anvil for a future trilogy.

*I'd like to begin by going over some of the worlds you mentioned, then discussing how they link together. So, to start, could you tell us about the land of Lythinall?*

When I sat down to write, I knew I needed my own world, so I started just drawing a map and expanded it as I went. Lythinall is a small area that has a history of enslavement and magic. It’s not huge, but as I wrote, I added to the map and threw in other nations next to it. Soon I had four nations, all nestled next to each other and trying to keep the peace. It’s old fantasy, similar to D&D with elves, dragons, and sorcerers. It’s hard to explain the history while being brief, but let’s just say that elves started it and enslaved the humans. When the humans rose up, the elves left and went into hiding. Today, the elves are thought to be a myth by most people.

*You said that there is a story of enslavement and revolt. Can you share with us how that happened?*

The humans began to come up from the southern plains. For a while they lived alongside the elves without much trouble, even helping to fight the dragons and stave off the incarnation of death (more on him later). However, nothing ever lasts. Magic is only cast by the elves, so when it breaks out, the elf-human war is bloody and short. They enslaved the humans, and for centuries kept

them as their own, teaching them about nature and their own culture. Then it happened; they slowly started taking slaves as consorts, and soon, one of the elves taught magic to a human. This splintered the elves and created a smaller faction that was banished. Of course, this new faction, G’harr, went to war with the elves. While this happened, the humans rose up and fought their elven slave masters, giving the elves a war on two fronts.

*What sort of differences existed between the elves and humans that put them at such odds?*

Initially the humans were just moving north in the usual “*what’s up here?*” mentality, and they did live with the elves peacefully for years. No one knows now what started the war, or who for that matter.

More broadly, they practice magic in different ways. In my world, magic is different from most others. The elves “ask” the elements for things like heating up the air, or asking the air to hold them up, etc. The humans didn’t train for as long as the elves, though, when they started commanding the elements. They forced nature to bend to their will, damaging the environment around them each time magic was cast. The second war with the elves was brutal and wiped out most of the great forests as a result. Seeing this destruction, a small force of humans that had fought the elves to escape their enslavement actually turned and helped the elves fight the new human sorcerers. These humans would be the first settlers of Lythinall, for once the war ended and the sorcerers were pushed back, the elves retreated and left their human allies with the ravaged land.

*Okay, so we have two wars, enslavement, and a tragic misunderstanding of how magic should work. Let’s look at that last piece a bit more closely. What exactly is the difference between commanding and requesting acts from the elements in Lythinallian magic?*

Asking the elements to do something is exactly like it sounds. It’s a request that is fulfilled via an ancient pact. The human sorcerers don’t ask...



they force the elements to do it and, in the process, strain the very nature around them since they want it done *now*! Elves take decades of training to learn what to ask for so that they don't upset the balance. Humans don't have that kind of time, nor do they often care, for that matter. For instance, an elf would ask the earth to hold someone still, and the very ground would encase their feet. A sorcerer would command the earth, and instead, it would crack the ground all around the person and almost swallow them. Where the elf's magic would dissipate afterwards and just collapse into some dirt, the sorcerer's would cause a lasting fissure—a wound in the earth, so to speak.

It's kind of a different take on the magic of the D&D module *Athas (Dark Sun)* with defilers draining the land. I wanted to make a magic system that was unique, one that didn't see the tired book wizards of old all over again.

*Lythinall is the world that your novel, The Darkness Returns, is set in. Can you tell us a bit about that story? In reference to the two wars we've discussed, when does it take place, and what story is being told?*

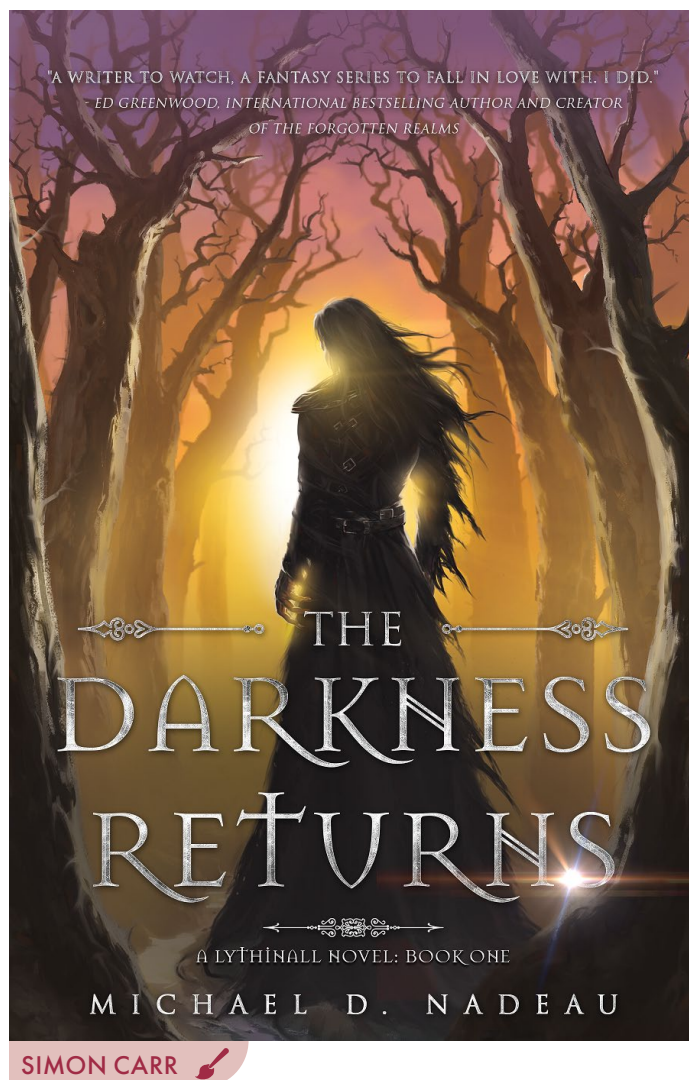
This novel is set hundreds of years after those events. An ancient evil sealed away by the elves breaks free and descends upon the land of Lythinall. A young warrior is swept up in a perilous journey of prophecy with the legendary bard, Karsis, and the Princess of Everknight. He has to learn how to control the awakening powers within him in time to stop this horrible evil.

*By "awakening powers," what do you mean?*

Even though he is human... our hero has started to show that he can ask the elements like an elven wizard. In the book, I don't just drop the history that we discussed above. That was for me, so that I didn't get things confused. In the first book, I start with the bare bones as no one really remembers the elves except the bards and the bloodline of the king (which is in itself a secret, too). So the reader gets a little bit of history here and there, kind of shrouded in mystery. In every book they learn a little more and should start to question

just what is going on. By the third book, they get the full history (and then some) and should go, "Ah, now I get it!"

As for the "ancient evil" I mentioned: when I sat down to create my world, I realized I had to come up with different terminology due to copyrights. That also meant I needed my own gods. I made five and then had them create "Incarnations" of their power. Mortals that could be imbued with a touch of their power to act as their pawns in the world—the gods already tried fighting among themselves and it nearly broke their plaything. These incarnations (a nod to the author Piers Anthony) are immortal and powerful. The ancient evil is the incarnation of the god of death and corruption and is pictured on the cover of the book. His name is Dar'Krist. The ground withers



at his passing and what he touches rots. He just wants to bring it all down—destroy everything.

*Let's change gears now and look at that steampunk world you mentioned earlier—Tamia. What can you tell us about that, and why switch from fantasy to steampunk?*

Kyanite put out a call for a steampunk anthology last year and so, like I always do, I needed a story for that as well. Since nothing in Lythinall is even near -punk, I wrote a short story based on a world like *Final Fantasy*. Airships, magic, and clockwork gears. Once I found out about [World Anvil](#) and the awesomeness of that platform, I wanted to bring one of my worlds to life. Unfortunately, Lythinall only had the first book out, so anything I created in that world may give stuff away. I looked at Tamia and decided to flesh that out. In the process, I developed three books and created a history that eerily resembled Lythinall, but with twists here and there.

*For more information on the varied -punk genres, check out our article [Punkography in the Technology Issue!](#)*

The world is separated into four nations with the dwarves in the southern mountains, the elves mainly in the western forests, and humans and half-elves in the other two. In this world, I have *gearrails* (trains), *gearwheels* (cars), and all manner of flying ships. Once again, there were wars and treaties, but no enslavement this time. Here, the dwarves created a race of clockwork people, and in response, the other races created the psions (psionic warriors).

*Interesting that you chose to rename trains and cars. What lead you to doing so?*

I wanted a fantasy feel to the world, and car and train are primarily a “today” kind of feel. I pictured dwarves coming up with practical names. The trains, for example, had gears and run on rails!

*I also notice the races are very similar to what existed in Lythinall. Is that intentional?*

Yes. I wanted to make them comparable. Even the magic is essentially the same here, and in most of my books. All of my elves are the same, too, even down to the hair color (white).

*So are elves in the two worlds related to one another?*

They are actually different dimensions. “Worlds seen through a glass darkly,” to paraphrase a good book I read once by Lewis Carol. This way, when I do start world hopping or combining, I don’t have to worry about different magic systems messing it up. Even my elven pirate story has the same rules.

That one is one of my favorites. It’s actually a funny story. BK Bass, editor-in-chief at [Kyanite Publishing LLC](#), was messaging me and a word auto-corrected to “*Seltemver*.” Instantly, we were wondering about names, and I came up with a short story for their website with an elven pirate named Seltemver. He had an imp for a parrot and a crew of orcs. I even named the ship after BK’s city. I’ve now written five short stories on them and have two published in journals with a third submitted now. The ship is cursed so that every time it sets sail, a storm comes and transports it to another world. I can do almost anything I want with that concept, but Amonar the imp is one of my favorite characters I’ve come up with.

Amonar is an imp from the hells, summoned up by a dark elven wizard. A brash Seltemver slew the wizard, but before the wizard died, he transferred the imp to Seltemver as a curse. Amonar has to keep him alive or be dragged down the hells from which he came to be tortured for all of eternity. If Seltemver dies while cursed, he is also sent down to the hells. The kicker is that Amonar hates violence. He is sarcastic, obnoxious, and funny, but the minute Seltemver draws his enchanted blade, the imp is off and hiding. Yet, Amonar is not defenseless. He can cast infernal magic, summoning the deep elements as elves do, but only to destroy. He hates doing it, and it makes him sick to have to, but when his master is in trouble he has no choice.

*Alright so we've got a bit of both worlds here—plus that of this interdimensional pirate ship! Now you said that they are connected through some portals?*

I linked my worlds together through the social sci-fi journal that Kyanite put out. In it, Harrision McAlister—smartest man on the planet—had developed an interdimensional viewer. With this, a person could see the different versions of themselves (and only themselves) across the many dimensions. As he looks through in part of the story, he sees that some of the versions of himself don't even resemble him but are still the same soul, so to speak. He sees Karsis the bard (from Lythinall), and then he sees a person called Aleksandr (from Tamia, my steampunk world) as well as other versions that do look like him.

With this idea, and my writing style, I can set up virtually any story I write to be the same hero, and some day I plan to write the one story that will probably break me. Getting them all together in one book to save the universe or somesuch.

Each world is a reflection across the many dimensions, like the TV show *Sliders*. When Harrison McAlister created the dimensional viewer, he could look at his own self across these dimensions. In some of them, he was boring, sitting behind a desk shuffling papers, yet in some he was different altogether. He is Karsis, and he is also

Aleksandr from Tamia... I call it *The Timeless Hero*. The same soul across all the worlds, always ready to fight the good fight.

*Do these worlds interact in your stories? If not, do you plan to have them interact?*

It's both a fun thing and a future project. One day, once all these books are out and I'm rich [laughs], I want to write a story that brings all of these heroes together for a single purpose. Something so grand that only these beings can accomplish it. Of course, hilarity will ensue and there will be more sarcasm than anything else, but it will be epic.

I actually do have other stories that aren't connected, but they are for contests and other publishers. Anything to get my name out there.

*On that subject of getting the name out there, what most helped you as you got into publishing? Also, what differences have you noticed publishing novels vs. publishing stories as part of a magazine or anthology?*

For anyone looking to publish for the first time, I would first get a Twitter account and connect with the writing community there. There are a bunch of publishers that have things open for submissions, both novels and short stories, and it's a great place to find and connect with other writers. Beta readers, advanced review copy readers, and everything else can be found there in the great writing community.

Personally, I like both novels and short stories. The novel is the backbone of the world, while the short stories provide the color you couldn't get into that massive undertaking. Both are great ways to get out there, and I don't think one is much better than the other. Novels are more time consuming, though, I will say. Making sure everything lines up and that you haven't forgotten anything—it's a lot of notes, that is for sure. I'm a huge fan of continuity. Everything has to line up and fit within the world and the timeline. I've taken notes, written things down, and rearranged just to make sure I had this. It's a big pet



peeve of mine to read stories that change things halfway through, so I wanted to make sure I didn't do that. I have an anthology planned before book three comes out, and it's full of short stories about some of the side characters you meet in my novels and others who will appear in book three, kind of tying them all together.

*Have you found anything particularly helpful in your query letters or other submissions to make sure publishers give you a serious look?*

I didn't actually take the query route. I self-published after sending my first manuscript to two publishers and getting the "not what we're looking for" letter. I put out two books then found Kyanite Publishing on Twitter. The rest is sweet history, and they've been awesome to me with my stories.


Self-publishing was hard, though. I think all told, after a year and a half, I sold a total of thirty books...but I also had some extremely good luck. If you look at the top of my book, there is an endorsement. The author is Ed Greenwood, the creator of the *Forgotten Realms*! He had tweeted one day about how to get your books published by Hasbro. A satire post about buying the company and firing them all, etc. At the end, he simply stated that you should write your book for your own world, and he would put it on his shelf. Well, I just shamelessly said "here!" and sent him the link to my book. He bought it and the second one and liked them. When BK signed me up with Kyanite, we joked about having Ed say a few things for my book, so I tweeted to him what BK wanted and asked, "Is this a thing?" Ed responded with "It sure is" and then gave us a quote we could use for the book. It's at the top of *The Darkness Returns* cover!

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

*You can learn more about Michael on his [web-site](#), or contact him on his [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) pages. Keep an eye out for his next release, Darkness Within (A Lythinall Novel, Book 2), which releases in later this year! You can also read some short stories of his for free [here](#) on his website!*

*Special thanks to Micheal for taking the time to speak with us!*

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



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# THE 2020 WORLDBUILDER'S CHECKLIST

by Adam Bassett & Tyler "Dino" Sylva

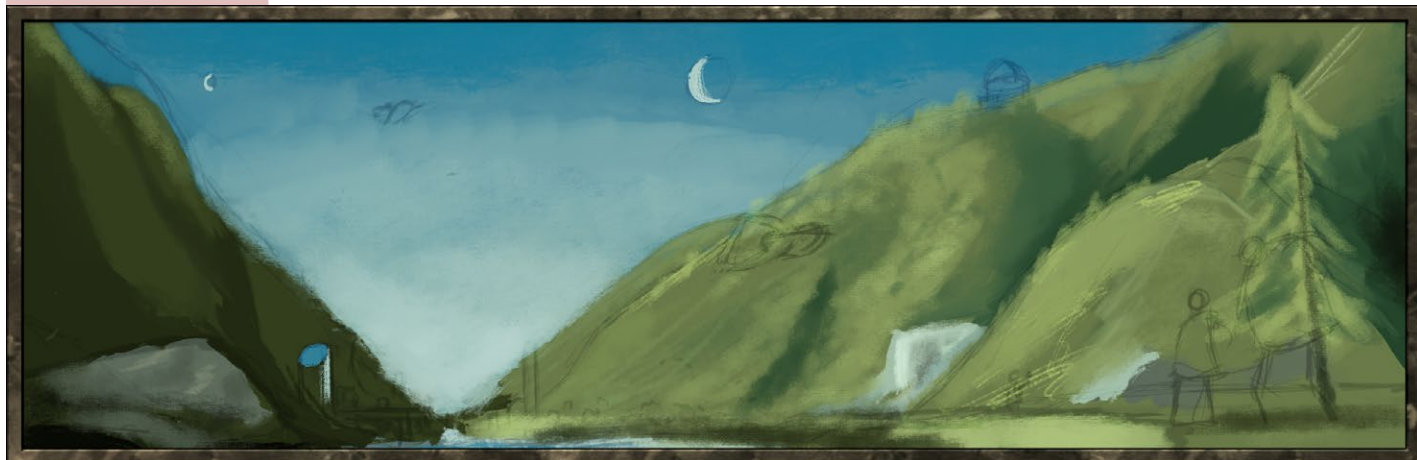
With a new year upon us, we thought it was about time to update the Worldbuilder's Checklist, originally published in our first issue of 2019, [Death & Taxes](#). Our 2020 iteration contains a total of 192 prompts that will help you build and map your world, design cultures and histories, and ask even the mundane (or very detailed) questions like "What are your streets made of?"

*Download the  
a print-friendly  
version of the  
checklist from  
our blog!*

When reading the list below, consider how others have responded to these same questions as well as how our own history answers them! For example, in Brian McClellan's Powder Mage novels we see characters make use of hackney cabs—carriages meant for public transport like taxis are used today. This addresses the issue of transport around the series' main city of Adopest while also helping us place the setting on a timeline. However, in our own world's history, we see examples of people exerting their influence on art and culture. The Medicis were major patrons of the arts and would often insert themselves into religious works, such as how the Medici family crest appears in Fra Filippo Lippi's painting of The Annunciation.

Of course, it is important to also consider how you'll use your dragons, what you'll name the places in your world, and these other more commonly asked questions—but we ask that you don't discount the details either.

TRISTEN FEKETE



## THE NATURAL WORLD

- ☐ Stars, suns, moons, and planets
- ☐ Oceans and/or major bodies of water
- ☐ Common and rare plants
- ☐ Common and rare animals/creatures
- ☐ Poisonous and/or medicinal flora & fauna
- ☐ Invasive or synthetic species

## RACES & SPECIES

- ☐ Common and uncommon races and/or species
- ☐ Dynamics between species and/or races
- ☐ Cultural similarities or disconnects between species and/or races
- ☐ Species commonly kept as pets

- ☐ Species used for industry
- ☐ Social opinions regarding various races/species

## WEATHER & CLIMATE

- ☐ Typical and atypical weather
- ☐ Seasonal variations in weather
- ☐ Atmospheric phenomena
- ☐ Natural disasters (and places prone to them)
- ☐ Social opinions regarding weather

## MAGIC

- ☐ Access to magic
- ☐ Access to education in magic
- ☐ Prevalence of magic users
- ☐ Restrictions on magic
- ☐ Common and rare magical skills
- ☐ Common and rare potions
- ☐ Restrictions on potions

- ☐ Requirements of using magic
- ☐ Magic's relationship to science
- ☐ Magical flora & fauna
- ☐ Magical reactions/illnesses
- ☐ Black market or forbidden magic
- ☐ Social opinions toward magic

## TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Availability of technology
- ☐ Access to education in technology
- ☐ Capabilities of technology
- ☐ Entertainment technology
- ☐ Energy production technology
- ☐ Transportation technology
- ☐ Inventions that change how society functions
- ☐ Advancements in medicine
- ☐ Black market technology
- ☐ Social opinions toward advancing and/or aging technology



JOSEF STEYN

## CARTOGRAPHY

- ☐ Topographical, political. Elevation, or other types of maps
- ☐ Known or skilled cartographers
- ☐ Restrictions to cartography/limits of the known world

## LOCATIONS

- ☐ Natural formations
- ☐ Landmarks

- ☐ Government buildings/castles
- ☐ Transportation hubs/major pathways
- ☐ Places for shopping
- ☐ Houses/apartments
- ☐ Towns and cities
- ☐ National boundaries
- ☐ Places with positive/negative opinions toward them



## TRAVEL

- ☐ Restrictions on travel (societal and/or geographical)
- ☐ Dangerous locations
- ☐ Luxury/vacation locations
- ☐ Immigration/emigration trends
- ☐ Common methods of travel
- ☐ Affordability and access to travel
- ☐ Social opinions toward travel and travel methods



ANNA HANNON 

## PROFESSIONS

- ☐ Common and rare professions
- ☐ Specialized professions
- ☐ Social or actual restrictions on professions
- ☐ Unemployment rates
- ☐ Social opinions toward various jobs

## FAMILY

- ☐ Marriage customs
- ☐ Typical age of marriage
- ☐ Typical number of children
- ☐ Availability and opinions toward birth control
- ☐ Typical family dynamic/structure
- ☐ Attitudes towards romantic love and sex
- ☐ Attitudes towards children and the elderly
- ☐ Care for children (traditional parenting, nannies, boarding school, etc.)
- ☐ Elderly care (in-home, nursing homes, etc.)
- ☐ Typical gender roles, or lack thereof
- ☐ Importance of birth order to family roles, inheritance, etc.
- ☐ Social opinions toward families

## EDUCATION

- ☐ Availability of schooling/education
- ☐ Cost and other restrictions on education
- ☐ Typical education level
- ☐ School subjects
- ☐ School environment (strict, lenient, etc.)
- ☐ Societal or other outside influences on education
- ☐ Social opinions toward education

## LANGUAGE

- ☐ Primary/major languages
- ☐ Regional/minor languages
- ☐ Prevalence of multilingual/bilingual people
- ☐ Colloquial phrases, slang, and curses
- ☐ Unconventional or unusual languages
- ☐ Naming conventions/rules
- ☐ Social opinions toward different languages

## SOCIETAL ORDER

- ☐ Social structure
- ☐ Members of the highest levels of society
- ☐ Social mobility, or lack thereof
- ☐ Social norms and values
- ☐ Sense of individuality and equality
- ☐ Slavery and servitude
- ☐ Treatment of the dead
- ☐ Social opinions toward current forms of societal norms



CHANH QUACH

## ART

- ☐ Access to galleries
- ☐ Access to supplies or lessons
- ☐ Affordability of supplies or commissions
- ☐ Who is commissioning work
- ☐ Trends in architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, film, or other media
- ☐ Influence on society
- ☐ Famous artists and works
- ☐ Social opinions toward art

## CLOTHING

- ☐ Cheap and expensive fabrics
- ☐ Differences in clothing styles between economical classes
- ☐ Uniforms and functional clothing styles
- ☐ Seasonal wear
- ☐ Differences in clothing between genders
- ☐ Differences in clothing between regions
- ☐ Differences in clothing between cultural groups or species
- ☐ Social opinions toward clothing styles

## ENTERTAINMENT

- ☐ Restrictions on entertainment
- ☐ Affordability or access to films/sports/games/instruments/books, etc.
- ☐ Professional and casual sports
- ☐ Board games and/or card games
- ☐ Music and instruments
- ☐ Common themes and subjects in fiction
- ☐ Printed entertainment/digital media
- ☐ Humor and comedy preferences
- ☐ Social opinions toward entertainment

## FOOD

- ☐ Staple foods
- ☐ Luxury foods
- ☐ Availability of food
- ☐ Local/regional dishes
- ☐ Foreign foods
- ☐ Unique diets of different peoples
- ☐ Social opinions toward different diets



ADAM BASSETT

## ARCHITECTURE & INFRASTRUCTURE

- ☐ Common and rare or expensive building materials
- ☐ Appearance and layout of typical/expensive houses
- ☐ Appearance and layout of typical shops/markets
- ☐ Streets and sidewalks (brick, cobblestone, dirt, etc.)
- ☐ Availability of plumbing/sewage/snow removal/garbage collection, etc.

## ECONOMY

- ☐ Distribution of wealth
- ☐ Lifestyle of the poor and rich
- ☐ Lifestyle of average income earners
- ☐ Money or bartering systems
- ☐ Currency conversions
- ☐ Resources in excess or at a deficit
- ☐ Opinion of wealth among various cultures
- ☐ Social opinions toward the economy

## RELIGION

- ☐ Major religions
- ☐ Origin of religion
- ☐ Prevalence of religion
- ☐ Places of worship, or lack thereof
- ☐ Structure, or lack thereof, within each religion

- ☐ Dynamics between religious groups
- ☐ Dynamics between religious/secular groups
- ☐ Creation myths and theogony
- ☐ Religious holidays and days of worship
- ☐ Morals and beliefs
- ☐ Social opinions toward religion

## HISTORY

- ☐ The age of civilization and/or recorded history
- ☐ Major world events (wars, diseases, storms, etc)
- ☐ Social revolutions (i.e. the industrial revolution)
- ☐ Previous leaders/rulers
- ☐ Recent cultural shifts/changes
- ☐ Monuments
- ☐ Forgotten, hidden, or incorrectly recorded history
- ☐ Social opinions toward history

## LAW

- ☐ Laws impacting daily life
- ☐ Common sentences for crimes (prison, labor, execution, etc.)
- ☐ Police behavior, uniform, practices, powers
- ☐ Criminal justice system
- ☐ Fundamental rights
- ☐ Major and minor crimes
- ☐ Prison conditions
- ☐ Recidivism rates
- ☐ Corruption in the judiciary system
- ☐ Social opinions toward law enforcement



## POLITICS

- ☐ Form of government
- ☐ Current leader (and how they came to power)
- ☐ Political parties or factions within government
- ☐ Prominent members of court and/or government
- ☐ Secret government agencies and/or organizations
- ☐ Influence of religion on government
- ☐ Access to news and freedom of the press
- ☐ Rebel or resistance groups against the current leader(s)

- ☐ Social opinions toward government and its leaders

## WARFARE

- ☐ Offensive and defensive technology or magic
- ☐ Famous battle strategies
- ☐ Famous generals, conquerors, and tacticians
- ☐ Allies and enemies of each nation
- ☐ Methods of acquiring soldiers
- ☐ Hiring mercenaries
- ☐ Social opinions toward war and soldiers

## YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

One of the easiest ways to begin a conversation on your worldbuilding with someone new is to give them an elevator pitch. For those who don't know, and those who need a refresher, an elevator pitch is a 3-6 sentence description that conveys the interesting relevant ideas on a topic that can be said in the time it takes to go up an elevator: 30-60 seconds. Why bother with this? Simply put, it's commonly said that within 7 seconds a person has formed first impressions. It may be more or less depending on the person, with some impressions made after just a 1/10th of a second glimpse.<sup>1</sup> Explaining an idea to someone requires grabbing their interest quickly and without confusing them, or risk losing it.

One way to solve that issue is to create a tagline, which is an elevator pitch condensed down to a dozen or fewer words. These two should directly relate to one another, and an elevator pitch can be used as a followup to elaborate on your tagline. Taglines are a gross oversimplification of

your setting, but they exist to convey your idea within that limited time you have to make a first impression. The best use of a tagline is to just catch their interest. It's okay if it does not properly display the nuance of your setting, that will come with later elaboration and explanation (if, of course, the person you're speaking with wants to know more). So, when thinking of your tagline, remember that it serves a simple purpose, and it's alright to leave out all of the broad strokes.

As an example here is Dino's tagline:

"500 years ago, God died in Moonfall, now ancient powers fight mortals for dominion."

This tells you essentially nothing about the setting, but it piques interest and it's a central event to the world's backstory. Two important foundations are laid out in fourteen words, and further elaboration can fill in the blanks. Following up your tagline with your elevator pitch will cement the main idea(s) you've set forward. In your pitch,

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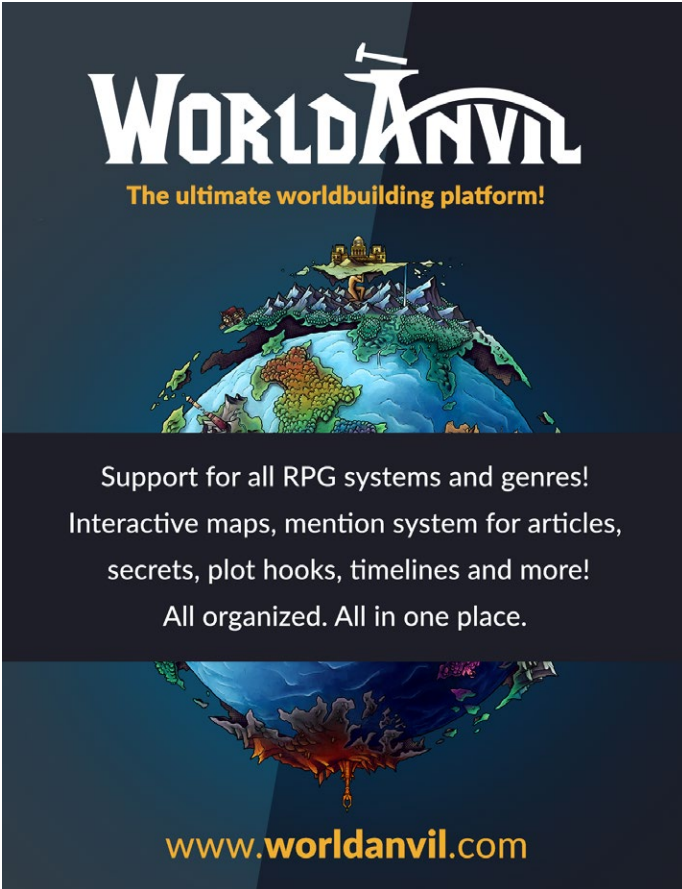
<sup>1</sup> Wargo, Eric. "How Many Seconds to a First Impression?" *Association for Psychological Science* - APS, Association for Psychological Science, 1 July 2006, <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/how-many-seconds-to-a-first-impression>. Accessed December 20, 2019.

try to be as clear and concise as possible, using the simplest terms you can. This will encourage others to want to learn more about your setting, so you should focus less on details and more on interesting themes and broad concepts.

For instance here is Dino's elevator pitch:

"The Moon King baited God into appearing, then destroyed his entire civilization (and the Moon) to kill God. This was Moonfall, and it changed everything. Now the worlds have gotten back on their feet, and new empires have begun to arise. The Age of Mortals is in full swing, old threats are stirring once more. For those born at the Dawn, they find themselves few in this new age, but mighty still. War is inevitable."

Don't worry if you think the tagline appears too short, or if your longer pitch can't fit everything about your world. So long as you communicate the major points, and pique interest in those listening, you've accomplished your goal. Having these statements ready will help you communicate with others about your world in a more concise manner—and it may just help you learn a thing or two about the setting as well.



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**BACK TO INDEX**



# THE ART OF DRESSING CULTURES

## ON WORLDBUILDING CULTURAL COSTUMES

by Inky & Zaivy Luke-Aleman | illustrations by Inky



RESOURCE



ART



CULTURE

Clothing is one of the most ubiquitous and diverse fields in the arts. If we look at fashion history, it always becomes a chronicle of culture. Clothing is worn culture, and one of very few aspects that let us tell that story visually—not only with individual characters but entire civilizations. It should be as layered (metaphorically or literally) as your social structures, easily hinting at shared values, beliefs, or political stances. Looking at how our world dressed in the past, what we wear now, and how visionaries think our clothes will look in the future can make incredibly rich resources for worldbuilding.





1950s FASHION PLATE

With such a plethora of possible inspirations and endless possibilities to explore, isn't it weird that the carefully crafted cultures of many worlds often get the generic fantasy look? Typically, non-humans fare a little better than the human societies when it comes to diverse and interesting clothing choices, yet this happens mostly to *other* them from the human race—and, sometimes, to accommodate for additional limbs or other anatomical differences. Whether subconsciously done or with intent is a topic for another day. Here, we will discuss how to better craft clothing that conveys relevant worldbuilding information for your cultures while still looking intriguing.

Let's dive deep into the world of dyes, silk brocades, and fashion plates to get your creative juices flowing!



1920s FASHION PLATE

## WHAT IS A "SIGNATURE LOOK"?

What we will call the "signature look" of a culture and time in this article is the outfit that immediately pops up in your mind when you think about that specific time and place. When we say "1950s USA," most people will think about the A-line dresses with petticoats, bullet bras, red lipstick, and teenagers trying to look like Elvis. When we say "Roaring Twenties"—which is just three decades prior—you'll have a completely different image in mind. A signature look is the embodiment of your culture's stereotype or essence.

1950s Fashion Plate: McCall's 4172, McCall's 1957

1920s Fashion Plate: McCall's 4856, McCall's Quarterly, Summer 1927

When creating a signature look, one of the first things to develop is a sense of consistency. What will generally be consistent in a style of clothing? This is true on a cultural and individual level. Is it a color, like in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*? Or is it a style of cut, like the angular cloth against the chest of a Korean hanbok? It could even be an accessory, like a crown for monarchs. Think about what consistently identifies a group and how to apply that technique.

With a signature look, it becomes easier to decide how people from a specific culture would dress as well as what they most likely would consider aesthetically pleasing, attractive, or generally beautiful to look at. It also helps to convey certain sentiments or worldviews of your people: their current issues, their values, ideals, how they see themselves and others, their political standing, or whether they are currently forward-thinking and excited about the future or rather nostalgically dwelling in the past.

However, a signature look never summarizes all there is to your culture's clothing. Throughout history, there has always been some sort of subculture or individualistic styles reflected in clothing as well. Considerations of status, wealth, and function can also create an entirely different look. Your signature look is a base you can build upon and alter as much as you like, and establishing this first creates a guideline which makes it easier to branch out.

It is also important to detach the signature look from individual characters and their personal quirks, preferences, and personality traits if they don't have a huge influence on the culture you're currently building. While an individual character may be very nostalgic, this doesn't mean it's the zeitgeist of their entire culture.

*When we talk in general about clothing, it can become hard to keep track of what actually belongs to a complete attire.*

*Here are the elements that a thorough worldbuilder should keep in mind and might use to alter according to factors we will later discuss:*

- indoor garments
- outdoor garments
- underwear and sleepwear
- footwear
- hats, gloves, or other accessories like jewelry, parasols, tissues, or shawls
- hairdos, beards, wigs, and body hair
- body hygiene and skin care
- cosmetics like make-up, perfumes, or deodorant
- body modifications like piercings or tattoos



 COUPLE IN HANBOK

## RESEARCHING DRESS

Even if you already have a great aesthetic in mind when you think about your culture, let's save these ideas for later and step back for a moment. We often forget that clothing was developed first and foremost out of the necessity to protect ourselves against the environment, like the climate, weather conditions, geography, flora and fauna, and the activities we participate in throughout the day. This is where every culture started, and it will make your life easier to base the research initially on these aspects to make your worldbuilding develop more authentically.

The easiest way to kick off the process is to get out a map and mark down areas within our world that has similar terrain, climate, weather conditions, wildlife, and resources. The environment will dictate which resources are available for dressmaking and which would need to be imported. Once you know the environment, research real-world cultures who live and have

lived in similar areas to see how they dressed throughout history. Additionally, you may want to research cultures who have or had a similar way of life as your culture. This gives you an idea of what type of clothing is the most sensible to wear, how certain events throughout history are mirrored through their attire, and how sentiments are conveyed.

Once you find cultures that can serve as initial inspiration, become familiar with native terms for clothing and time periods. Then, research those terms to get a look at actual native historic dress, explanations on how the pieces were worn, and how their use changed over time. Good starting points are online collections of museums like the [Met](#), blog articles, YouTube channels of fashion historians, and technical literature on the topic. Even [Pinterest](#) can be a valuable resource in your endeavours so long as you use the proper terminology!

**"CLOTHING WAS  
DEVELOPED FIRST AND  
FOREMOST OUT OF THE  
NECESSITY TO PROTECT  
OURSELVES AGAINST  
THE ENVIRONMENT."**





## PUTTING YOUR SIGNATURE LOOK INTO PERSPECTIVE

By the time you've turned to Pinterest boards, you're likely diving into more aesthetic-driven research. Look into features you would like to associate with your culture, such as patterns, dyes, color palettes, embroidery, and jewelry. While resources can be limited and only a few general shapes practicable, the ways to decorate your clothes are almost endless and shouldn't be limited to the cultures you researched prior to this point. Over time you will realize which shapes and patterns you're drawn to, and thus, the clearer your vision will be.

**"THE ENVIRONMENT  
WILL DICTATE WHICH  
RESOURCES ARE AVAILA-  
BLE FOR DRESSMAKING  
AND WHICH WOULD  
NEED TO BE IMPORTED."**

The neat thing about building a culture from scratch is that you are not limited by the specifics of the real world. Especially when it comes to heavily gendered clothing, it's more fun to ignore the previous implications and make them your own. You can absolutely rewire the clothing as long as you're being culturally sensitive.

It is worth noting that first sketches and drafts are never too early. Even if you don't consider yourself a good artist, it will clarify how you think of your culture. However, with every added image to your moodboard, you will change your views and opinions on your culture's costume—and that is perfectly normal! With every iteration you will get a better idea of what is uniquely your culture's style compared to other cultures populating your world, and you may even stumble upon new sources of inspiration you hadn't considered prior.

*Fashion is complicated.*

Fashion, just like any part of culture, doesn't exist in a vacuum. Clothing regarded as a testament of time is never fully static and can even date events in history. As clothing is worn culture, cultural developments of any kind are typically mirrored in attire in one way or another.

Changes within the political spectrum usually work via association to a specific political stance and the desire to *not* be associated with other or preceding political factions. Shifts in power structures and authority (like the French Revolution) as well as the change or irrelevance of social dividers like gender, age, or class usually summon rather drastic changes in fashion. They often also induce contra-movements from conservative factions.

Aside from politics, many other factors can influence changes in fashion. Sometimes cultures change from a hunting and farming society to a society of scholars. War reduces resources, whereas flourishing intercultural trade makes more options available. New discoveries and inventions can serve as new inspiration just as much as the arts and literary movements that might romanticize the past. Maybe there are influential individuals like kings, actors, athletes, or internet celebrities who found a specific style that tickles their fancy. The zeitgeist will always find its way into clothing, and this is what makes the way we dress so interesting. Some changes are subtle or need several decades to actually be established.

Sometimes in the fun of making new fashion, it suddenly becomes apparent that there are certain practical limitations to the clothing being designed. Perhaps an outfit is designed in a way that makes it more difficult to go to the bathroom (like a romper sometimes does). For those a bit eccentric in taste, it may be better to avoid creating

1786 FASHION PLATE



1793 FASHION PLATE



*During the French Revolution, the elaborate court fashion with stiff bodices and wide, paniered skirts made way for more plain and high-waisted gowns modelled after ancient Greek and Roman statues to show the rejection of the monarchy and its splendor.*

solutions to inconveniences in the way we do today. For example, are there other ways to make clothes easier for bathroom use besides zippers, buttons, or elastic bands? Perhaps clothing is made with telepathic nanotechnology that separates to expose people in a similar fashion to Mystique's skin in *X-Men*. When thinking about what's fashionable, also try to imagine how clothed creatures accommodate for certain dangers. Are certain fabrics more flammable than others? These challenges characters may encounter could be interesting ways to slip in

worldbuilding while creating stakes and tension in a story.

Another issue is that of accessibility. In a culture reliant on buttons, how does an individual with limited finger dexterity put on their clothes? Are there fewer options for them when they go shopping? Is there accessibility already in mainstream fashion? The answers to these questions can reveal a lot about the world in which your characters exist.

1786 Fashion Plate: Le Magasin des Modes, 49e Cahier, 5e Figure, 1786

1793 Fashion Plate: 1793 by Ann Frankland Lewis

## HOW TRENDY IS YOUR CULTURE?

Eventually, you might want to examine how prone to trends or changes your culture may be. Not only can this show time passing, but it also can lead to funny or even dangerous situations for your characters. This aspect is nicely applied in *Avatar: The Last Airbender, Book 1*. The Northern Water Tribe wants to disguise as Fire Nation soldiers. However, Sokka notes that the armor that they would use is about one hundred years old, and the current uniform has gone through some changes that the real soldiers would recognize, effectively ruining their entire strategy.

Of course, being trendy is very relative. If we go by extremes, a culture of strong consistency may change the popular trims on a hemline every other decade and still use the same sewing patterns that their great-grandparents used without alterations. One strongly prone to trends might require you to never wear an outfit twice. Most cultures will lie somewhere in between these two. Are you wondering how fast-paced your culture's fashion most likely is? There are many aspects that can tilt the scale in one direction or the other.

### FAST-PACED AND TRENDY

Strong intercultural connections

Fast communication technology / devices

Variety of resources / materials

Strongly influenced by individuals as fashion icons and their personal taste

Uniqueness

Affordable

Easily destroyed

Single-purpose

Wealth

Easy to obtain / produce

Futurism

Many seasonal changes due to climate

### SLOW-PACED WITH STRONG CONSISTENCY

Secluded

Slow communication technology / devices

Limited resources / materials

Strongly influenced by one or few dogmatic / traditionalist institutions

Uniformity

Expensive

Durable

Multifunctional

Poverty

Hard to obtain / produce

Nostalgia

Few / no seasonal changes due to climate





1886 FASHION PLATE



1896 FASHION PLATE

One thing to consider when designing clothing for cultures is the way in which that clothing interacts with the world around it. Think about where the arts overlap: How do ceramic artists inspire designers? Do textiles and current fashion show up at the dinner table in cloth napkins or cushioned chairs? This will add complexity to your world and highlight what is valued or considered popular.

This overlapping complexity can also be used to demonstrate influence. Who are the creative voices in the culture? Who is leading the artistic movement? Why do they have power in this development? Why are these varying mediums of art overlapping in the way they are? Perhaps a monarch with artistic taste decides to keep all the artists in their castle, creating a space where these different creatives strongly influence each other.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN DRESS

Social hierarchies are typically based on social dividers that justify power and authority or submission to someone else. It can be as straightforward as Neo-Confucianism; sometimes it is only implied but still of importance nonetheless. Social hierarchies generally require a quickly readable social marker for everyone to immediately know where they stand with the other person, especially if the one in charge can preside over the life and death of the other person.

One option is to always walk around with a giant sign that contains all the important information, but since we're talking about clothing here, it should be obvious that this isn't a very practicable route. In addition, the less important a social divider becomes in social hierarchies or roles, the blurrier the social marker will become, too,

Women 1886-1887, Plate 005 – Costume Institute Fashion Plates – Digital Collections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries

1896, Plate 080 – Costume Institute Fashion Plates – Digital Collections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries

since it doesn't wield as much power anymore. Social dividers also change over time in their prominence. Nowadays you probably won't immediately know if you're standing in front of an aristocrat, which was completely unthinkable just 300 years ago. The relevance of gender has also changed: if you just look at the past 70 years, you will notice the massive changes in our societies—and the cool thing? You can detect those changes in fashion too!

But now, how do you actually mark class, status, or whatever else you want to identify? Let's take a look at a few ways in which these social divisions would impact the garments of their members.

Different activities may require different types of clothing. For example you wouldn't wear the same outfit to: 1) go swimming at the Bahamas, and 2) go on an Iceland pony trekking tour in winter. If you stay at home all day, you probably would opt for more comfortable clothes, compared to a hunting trip where agility and weather protection might be of higher priority. Over time, some dividers (most prominent examples are gender and professions) may become more heavily associated with specific activities and roles, thus domineering the choice of clothing.

Shape can also stress things like beauty ideals: the ideal lumberjack might look huge with wide shoulders and a big frame. The ideal scholar is, perhaps, supposed to look more delicate instead. If it is of utmost importance in your culture to know whether you're standing in front of a scholar or a lumberjack, lumberjack clothing might even overexaggerate their size and use bulkier shapes than a scholar's clothing that emphasizes a lithe frame and whimsical features. Another common signifier in terms of shape (specifically, length of clothing) was age—not only did skirts get longer with each age group from toddler to adulthood, but trousers too! These changes of clothing can tie to a specific ritual, if not a gradual shift. However, don't confuse accommodating clothes to a certain body shape to actually creating a social divider within clothing. The reason why,



for example, women generally dressed differently from men wasn't because they have breasts and wider hips, but because of gender roles that heavily influenced their lives. If gender doesn't matter in your society, treat wider hips and larger breasts just the way you would treat wider body dimensions of a big man—just add more fabric where it's needed.

If we talk about excess in clothing, typically signifying wealth, it almost always will show in more exaggerated shapes. Skirts and collars will get wider, sleeves puffier, and excessive layers multiply just to show how much fabric one can afford.

Colors are often symbolic in nature, which can be religious, political, or a general cultural notion, and mostly requires context. Red, for example, is the color of traditional Chinese wedding dresses but is generally associated with the Labor movement and various parties that bear socialist ideals in politics. In a broader cultural context, red across most cultures can be linked to blood, passion, or the element of fire.

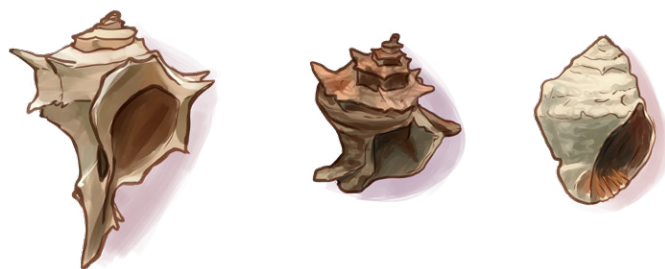
**“COLORS ARE OFTEN SYMBOLIC IN NATURE, WHICH CAN BE RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, OR A GENERAL CULTURAL NOTION, AND MOSTLY REQUIRES CONTEXT.”**

A lot of color symbolism, especially when indicating class or wealth, stems from the history of dyes that lay behind it. Depending on the technological levels of your culture, some dyes might not have been invented yet or are much harder to produce than others since certain components cannot be synthesized yet. *Tyrian purple* was so expensive to make, due to rare ingredients and a highly specialized process, that it was also dubbed *royal* or *imperial purple* since only royalty could afford to wear it.

Another aspect is the pigmentation of the dye: a lot of natural dyes need several dyeing procedures to reach a high pigmentation, which is one reason why dark clothes were a sign of wealth in various Norse cultures. Bleaching fibers was also a sign of wealth since natural fibers tend to have an off-white color. Big, stark white collars were very popular in 16th- and 17th-century

Europe because they showed you could afford to bleach your cambric and keep it particularly clean and stiff, a difficult task if handwashing is still involved.<sup>1</sup>

Materials also have a set value depending on the scarcity of required resources. However, production methods can also heavily impact their cost, making quality wools much more expensive than silks for example. To raise costs even higher, differently colored threads, sometimes even made of rare metals, could be either woven into intricate brocades or changeant, or stitched onto the fabric as embroidery. Sometimes pearls, beads, shells, or even beetle wings enhanced the cloth in addition to the fancy needlework. A cheaper variant would be printed or painted fabrics. Created patterns can signify a current fashion, hold coat of arms, or show off entire works of literature either as illustrations or texts, like in some Arabic patterns.



A major misconception is that poorer people did not enhance their clothing. Embroidery or knitting were staple skills, a common activity (and even a perfected art) on which people spent their time aboard fisher boats or during the winter months when not much field work was to be done. The materials may not have the same quality compared to the richer population, but designs could be just as intricate.

<sup>1</sup> Werlin, Katy. Ruffs. The Fashion Historian 1 Nov, 2011 <http://www.thefashionhistorian.com/2011/11/ruffs.html>

<sup>2</sup> Anu. History of Natural Hair: A Helpful Illustrative Guide. Aphro Graphics 10 Jan, 2019 <http://afrographics.com/history-of-natural-hair/>



Accessories, such as jewelry, bags, or headwear like turbans and hats, typically varied significantly depending on profession, rank, social and relationship status, or age. How they are worn can also be a hint at the occasion or can be a distinct fashion of one's region, as seen with how diversely Muslims wrap their headscarves.

When we look beyond the attire, hair and cosmetics have always played major roles in distinguishing different demographics. Different hairdos oftentimes signified relationship status or hierarchy;<sup>2</sup> length could be a sign of honour, bravery, or virtue, and lack of hair could mark a slave, prisoner, or soldier. Of course, hair wasn't only braided artistically but also decorated with beads, combs, ribbons, flowers, veils, or hair pins depending on the occasion.

For a long time, cosmetics marked the wealthy and performing artists and, depending on the current fashion, was seen as either enhancing beauty or framing the wearer as virtueless. Of course, makeup and other forms of face or body paint especially could have various symbolic and ritual meanings, including, for example, henna and other forms of tattoos.

## SUBCULTURES AND CULTURAL VALUES

Sub- and contra-cultures use a specific way of clothing not only to develop a sense of belonging and togetherness, but also to send a message to the average citizen. The most prominent example is likely the Punk movement from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, which was mostly anti-establishment with a generally pessimistic outlook on the world, politics, economy, and environment. This was not only a sentiment, but a very visible stance in their clothing as well. Torn or “scandalous” and unconventional clothing, hair standing unnaturally tall, piercings, dog collars and leather everywhere—to a lot of people, it wasn't a very tasteful way of clothing, but it was eye-



catching and unusual compared to the fashion of the 60s and 70s to perfectly show the rebellious mentality. Like a lot of lesser known phenomena, Punk at some point wasn't just outrageous anymore but cool, and it became mainstream, resulting in the more glamorous iteration in the late 80s and early 90s that eventually caused earlier punks to not identify as “Punk” anymore. By now, Punk elements are established in high fashion to make it look “more edgy,” something completely contradicting the initial Punk core mentality.

While opposing the values and mentality of the status quo visibly through clothing may be the most obvious choice, this hasn't always been the case. For example, *Sturm und Drang* had its iconic style inspired by the popular literary character Werther, and Goth culture from the 1980s to early 2000s was historically motivated by the early Victorian era and Dark Romanticism.

One thing to consider when deciding how fast these unique styles change is the ease of communication within the group. Trends may change differently if factions are isolated from each other. Consider a cultural movement like a diaspora, for example. Although a particular group may have begun with the same cultural values and styles, these things may change according to how factions interact with other groups as they travel. If there is no way for one part of the group to contact another, these influences may make for diverging styles.

On the other hand, if members of a particular subculture are in constant contact with each other, these styles may change as the ideals of the people within the group change. This can be true for communities that have hyperactive ease of access to each other (especially in a group that meets online everyday without a defined focus). And of course, the larger the group, the more likely people will have different opinions. For example, one of the new versions of the gay pride flag has black and brown stripes on it to represent the often times underappreciated racial differences within the gay community. Not everyone within the community agrees with this flag.

If the group has a strong sense of tradition or a key symbol used as an identifying marker (the Nike logo used by self-identified inspired athletes for example), these changes may occur slower as more importance is placed on the significant styles. Consider, for example, Hasidic Jewish people who place strong value in their iconic style. Among other things, the men are known for their black hats and long locks (payots), which are rooted in religious values. This is a style that is unlikely to visually change too much over time.

There's also a notable difference between the *current* signature look of your culture and possible "traditional" clothing. Not every culture has traditional clothes, especially not if they are the dominant culture in their sphere and don't have many foreign influences that are reflected in their clothing. However, if normal clothes originally *aren't* rooted in their "native" culture but are a foreign import (e.g. through colonization, conquests, or because individuals immigrated into a different culture), "traditional clothing" usually becomes part of their cultural identity. It typically borrows from past or present signature looks of their origin culture, now worn mostly for special occasions like holidays, weddings, funerals, or other celebrations.



HASIDIC JEW 

Fashion can be both complex and simple. It inspires some and is rejected by others. As one of the primary ways we can identify ourselves amongst strangers, how will your characters and societies demonstrate who they are? Design signature looks for the cultures you make and find that special line between practical and artistic. The alluring rabbit hole of research can always help you in this process. Even still, the world you build will have influences on fashion that may be different from our world. Look for those unique aspects of your universe to create a style that embodies it. Lastly, here are a set of questions to help guide you through the process of creating art through the fashion of your world. Happy worldbuilding!

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



## **FURTHER READING**

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Worldbuilding Magazine Blog Post



## CLOTHING PROMPTS FOR YOUR CULTURES

- How advanced is the technology surrounding cloth-making?
- Do people generally buy clothes off the rack, go to a seamstress, or make clothes themselves?
- Can everybody sew or only a specific group? If so, why?
- Which items and materials are rare to come by and, thus, expensive? Which are affordable for everyone? Which are native to your culture, and which are imported? How easy are they to make? How good is their quality, and how intricate are they?
- How secluded is your culture? Which other cultures do they have contact with? Who are their friends? Who are their foes? How does that translate to clothing?
- Is there a hidden language in specific weaving patterns, embroidery, or other embellishments? Is it a known way of communication throughout your entire culture as a sort of writing system, or is it a secret code? What do other cultures know about it?
- What do your climate and weather conditions look like? Are there seasons that require alterations to the wardrobe or a flexible attire, like in the onion layer style?
- What groups utilize uniforms? How do uniforms from clans, sects, public offices, or other organizations differ from everyday clothing, and what are signifiers of rank or other states of importance? Is the coding known amongst non-members of the group, or is it a secret known only to those who are part of the “inner circle”?
- Are there any individuals or small groups that have a large influence on what is or will be popular (famous actors or musicians, the royal family, artists, athletes, etc.)?
- If there is an excess of resources, is that excess hoarded to express wealth or distributed evenly within the community?



# BEHIND THE MEANING OF WORDS

by Dominik Dalek

 LINGUISTICS

 WRITING

There are many avenues for artistic expression: painting, sculpting, music, performance arts, literature, and more. Some are harder to pigeonhole into a single category, as they live at the intersection of two or more different art forms. The art of beautiful writing, known as *calligraphy*, is one of them.

Many examples of calligraphy exist throughout the world. Some of these forms emerged as unique expressions that reflect the aesthetic sensibilities of their creators. Others seem to be a natural extension of the script being used. Others still

were localized versions of what their neighbors did before. At the same time, many scripts produced beautiful calligraphy, while others didn't.

So it makes sense to ask: would the world I'm building have this form of art represented? What would it look like? How would calligraphy be used by the peoples inhabiting my world? And what is calligraphy anyway?

## WHAT IS CALLIGRAPHY?

Calligraphy is described as “artistic, stylized, or elegant handwriting or lettering,” or “the art of producing such writing.” At its core it is an art

 TITLE CARD BY ANNA HANNON

of skillful and aesthetically pleasing rendering of words and phrases. This is even sometimes reflected in calligraphy's local name. Serbian calligraphy, for example, is known as *krasnopis*, literally “beautiful writing.”<sup>1</sup>

But beauty comes in many shapes and sizes. Sometimes, it's achieved through symmetry or consistency. Sometimes, the aim is to reflect meaning in the form of writing produced. This synergy of form and function may be very obvious when pictograms are involved—if the word “horse” is represented by a picture of a horse, there's little left to do. But if you use the Latin alphabet, can you somehow make the word “horse” visually represent a horse in the same way a pictograph might?

Calligraphy means different things in different contexts, so it might be helpful to understand why that is so. Multiple factors contribute to local varieties of calligraphy. There's function, logistics of producing pieces of art, and inherent differences in scripts used. Before we attempt to explain how these interact with each other to produce beautiful writing, we have to look at how different writing systems may lend themselves to calligraphy. Then, we can discuss how you can incorporate calligraphy into your world.

## WRITING SYSTEMS

There are many different types of writing systems in use around the world today, and more that you could come up with for your world. The writing system readers are likely most familiar with, an *alphabet*, typically maps a single phoneme (audible sound) to a written character or glyph. However, results may be distorted by the history of language, changes to orthography, and

script evolution. These alterations led to the silent “k” in English's “knight” but not in German's “knecht,” for example.<sup>2</sup>

Whether medieval or modern, Latin and Cyrillic calligraphy is full of examples of large volumes of text, labored over to be consistent and regular. Manuscripts were often adorned with complex, detailed initials and marginalia full of floral motifs, genre scenes, or fantasy creatures. This doesn't exhaust alphabet calligraphy, but unique one-off pieces of calligraphy are more commonly present in other writing systems.

Sometimes, vowels aren't represented as separate symbols and instead, like in Indic and Ethiopic scripts, form clusters with consonants in what is known as an *abugida*. On occasion, vowels get the short straw and aren't represented at all, or are sporadically marked when they matter in specific contexts. In these cases, we're talking about *abjads*, writing systems typical to Arabic, Persian, and, more broadly, Semitic scripts.



<sup>1</sup> Calligraphy. *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calligraphy>. Accessed 15 December 2019.

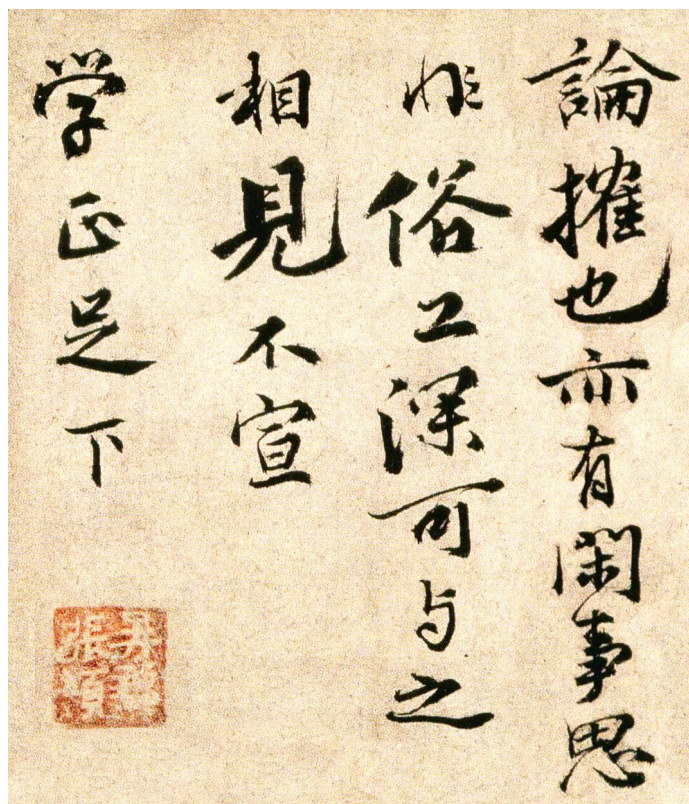
<sup>2</sup> Writing system. *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. 23 November 2019, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing_system). Accessed 15 December 2019.



Abjads in particular gave birth to many beautiful and unique pieces of art with words or short phrases weaved into a picture. One doesn't have to understand the script to see flora, fauna, and everyday objects in Islamic calligraphy, a feat rarely achieved by European manuscript authors.

Then there's *syllabary*, a writing system where each glyph maps to a complete syllable. Japanese katakana and hiragana are excellent examples from this category. Among the remaining types of writing systems—and there are still quite a few—the most widely used are *logograms*, where easily recognizable images (everyday objects, animals, etc.) are commonly a direct representation of what is being conveyed.<sup>3</sup>

East Asian calligraphy shares certain similarities with European tradition with its emphasis on regularity and uniformity, and both were often used for recording things that mattered to authors. However, there's also a strong parallel current that stresses artistic expression and puts emphasis on both process as well as the result.



<sup>3</sup> Peterson, David J. *The Art of Language Invention*. Penguin Books, 2015, pp. 214-225.

Some of the logograms evolve, and with time, they become less of a direct representation of ideas and encode phonetic information instead. In these cases the pronunciation of objects found in logograms represents sound cues of the word that's being written. You can think of it as if the word "catastrophe" were represented by a picture of a cat, a donkey, and a trophy. Chinese characters, Mayan glyphs, and Egyptian hieroglyphs are great examples of this. Later hieroglyphs are not only phonetic, but come with an additional twist: like abjads, in which only consonants get represented. We've been able to decipher these for less than 200 years and not much is known about these calligraphic traditions.

There are fifty thousand Chinese characters, and even though over eighty percent are used rarely, its calligraphy is going to look a lot different than that of any language using Latin or Cyrillic script. Not only types of scripts affect the aesthetics of the calligraphy though, as languages have varying consonant and vowel inventories even within the same or similar script families: from eight consonants in Hawaiian to over seventy in Ubykh. When representing Hawaiian language using the Latin alphabet, we are down to thirteen characters and length markers in total, which of course alters the overall looks of the art.

## SURFACE AND PURPOSE

All these different writing systems did not appear in a void. They were always influenced by the surfaces that people wrote on. This surface as well as the tools available dictated shapes that users could have produced.

Carving typically leads to simpler shapes full of straight lines, clear intersections, and sharp edges. Early Chinese writing, known as oracle bone script, was carved and later painted on bones and other hard surfaces of animal origin. It was composed of simple, straight lines, just like carved inscriptions in Germanic Futhark runes or Irish ogham. Writing stamped in clay tends to have very low stroke variation, not unlike cuneiform which was

written using wedge-shaped tools.

Most of the calligraphy we know is done on absorbent surfaces with the help of ink or paint. With these tools calligraphers can create smoother shapes, make varying widths of strokes, and modulate opacity of the ink, and they generally don't have to fight against the surface they use. We have very few examples of text written on hard, stone surfaces that would be implicitly categorized as calligraphy. It is clear, however, that calligraphy produced using carved characters would differ from its painted siblings.

The last pillar that seems important in the world-building context is the purpose behind the calligraphy. Exquisite writing exists for many reasons. Some bodies of text are done to document spiritual matters. Some are done to organize religious or social life. Others have more personal roots as calligraphy on jewelry often indicates. Finally, calligraphy may be done as a pure art form, to express the artists' desires or to accompany some other art piece.

## CULTURE-FIRST CALLIGRAPHY

Calligraphy may very well become part of your world. If so, you may wish to connect it to other facets of your creation instead of building something that feels disconnected and simply dropped in. Who are the people involved in pretty writing? What is their script, and how did it come to be? In what context of their lives is calligraphy important? Finding a core focus of calligraphy in your world, its reason to exist, should help you answer these questions.

You can focus on a culture that you've already envisioned and build from there. Would creatures close to nature use parchment or paper? If they don't have the technology or refuse to use it on some grounds, such as a spiritual reverence for trees or crops—the primary sources of paper pulp—then you have to come up with another surface they'd use. Perhaps stones aren't as sacred, and people can use them instead.





ANNA HANNON AND TRISTEN FEKETE 

But then how do you go from simple text, either carved or painted on a stone, to calligraphy? You could replicate western, monastic calligraphy tradition and aim for decorative, regular writing with optional marginalia, blending uniformly designed script with intricate imagery. Or perhaps the flow of text, the line that guides the reader, is what turns your writing into calligraphy.

On the other hand, these hypothetical people could limit calligraphy to other mediums such as body art. Mundane text might be put in ink on leaves and fade away in a matter of days—or hours depending on the weather. However, the important writings are tattooed on the body. Maybe there is even a special social caste, such as a group of zealots, dedicating their lives to becoming living, walking parchments? But if a law depicted on one's arm is struck by the new leader, does the arm have to go as well?

Calligraphy in your world can be made as significant, or as decadent, as you see fit. It could be found everywhere, or be reserved to highlight the intimate. Lovers could carve pretty words on jewelry or get people skilled in the appropriate craft to do it for them. Perhaps the ultimate love letter is not a poem—or not just a poem—but a piece of visually stunning art constructed with words.

Maybe feelings in general are important to your people, and the deepest emotion an individual wants to transfer onto a surface through calligraphy is rage. Your calligraphy ends up on a blade or on the tip of an arrow intended for your greatest enemy. We don't necessarily think about it in terms of word art, but couldn't magical runes on an axe be exactly that?

*If you're interested in developing an occupation focused on a very specific use of calligraphy in your world, you can start with Prompts on page 18 of the December 2019 issue [Trades & Occupations](#).*




 TRISTEN FEKETE

## CALLIGRAPHY FOCUSING ON PURPOSE

However, you don't have to start with your culture. It's possible that craftsmen in your world like to associate goods they produce with different animals. There's nothing special about animals; it's purely a method for these makers to differentiate their product. They can embed unique pieces of calligraphy in their goods, which makes this particular usage of calligraphy purely utilitarian. These don't have to be works imitating animals either, anything easily recognizable could suffice.

When it comes to animals and lookalikes, it's important to note that zoomorphy and skeuomorphy aren't alien to calligraphy.<sup>4, 5</sup> A lot of Arabic and Persian or, more broadly, Islamic calligraphy is based on familiar shapes in which words are embedded. Abjads seem to be the perfect fit here as optional vowel markings can selectively build out the desired shape. Shapes harmonizing with the basic script that aren't easily confused with the actual text can further augment the picture, producing mesmerizing results for the uninitiated while conveying important information to those who are fluent in the script.

It's important to stress that calligraphy isn't limited to quasi-medieval settings. If you look around, you'll see a lot of modern calligraphy that draws inspiration from existing canon or adds

 ANNA HANNON


<sup>4</sup> The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zoomorphic>. Accessed 12 January 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/skeuomorph>. Accessed 12 January 2020.

significantly to it. Your own setting can benefit from it. Identities of companies could marry literal meaning of a word with a shape that it represents. It could even be a rule of law in your world that every barber has his name curved to look like a mustache.

There is a limit to what we currently consider calligraphy, but nothing prevents you from expanding its meaning in your world. Black metal band logos could count and become inspiration or you. Street art in the form of tags could very well qualify. Graffiti tends to be labeled as low art (even if it is not necessarily a quality judgement), but feel free to use it in your cyberpunk setting and call it calligraphy.

All of the real world examples of calligraphy assume that it is a two-dimensional art on a flat surface, but this is another limitation that can be struck in both fantasy as well as technically advanced worlds. It is hard to imagine modern humans

using writing that produces volumetric figures instead of flat shapes, but a magic-wielding creature or a humanoid who is more developed than us could do that. With magic and advanced technology in play, scripts can even become moving, morphing two- or three-dimensional structures that convey meaning not only through static shapes, but also through movement.

## UNBIASED CALLIGRAPHY

When introducing calligraphy into your world, remember that unconscious bias may lurk everywhere. If you're trying to replicate aesthetics of existing, historical calligraphy in your fictional world, don't let your preconceptions about the source culture color your results. Try things outside the box, too—the less cultural appropriation we get involved with the better.

There's an inherent tendency in all of us to perceive things on simplistic scales that don't always stand up to scrutiny. A lot of bad science around languages and writing systems happened over the years. At some point there was a tendency to belittle languages used by more primitive cultures.<sup>6</sup> After all, if they don't have gunpowder, how complex can their language be? It turns out that complexity of language isn't directly related to how technologically advanced speakers are. So, you should try to avoid this sort of characterization when coming up with your own beautiful writing. Treacherous or noble, your world's people can have as simple or complex a writing system as you want them to have.

<sup>6</sup> Peretsvaig, Asya. *Languages of the World. An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 201-204; *ibid.*, pp. 177-1178.





This lack of simple connections extends to many other types of environmental characteristics. Surfaces and tools available to people involved in the act of beautiful writing do affect shapes, but not inventory complexity. Keep in mind that sometimes artificial constraints you put on your creation can lead to the most amazing results, so your extremely sophisticated society could be using very limited sets of characters or even words. Perhaps this is what was deemed the most efficient. Who are we to judge?

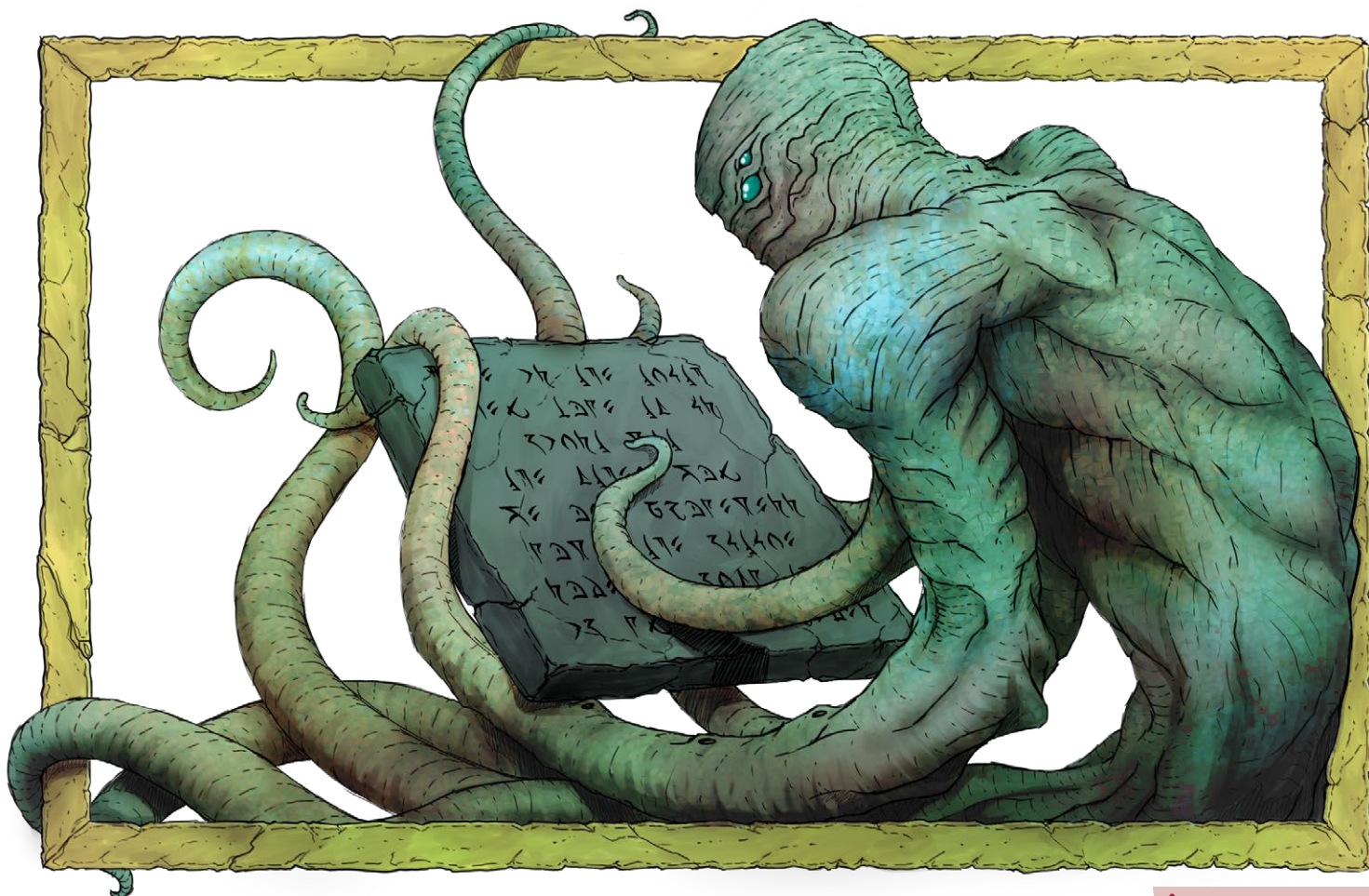
## EXTEND YOUR WORLD

Introducing calligraphy into a world may seem like a daunting task, especially if you want to start by constructing your own script instead of relying on an existing one. However, worldbuilding is a massive undertaking by any measure, so

why not go through this extra step? Remember that you're only limited by your own imagination...and perhaps what others are willing to believe, too.

Producing even a single piece of calligraphy can add to the flavor of your world and end up an exciting experiment. Just imagine how the script—and tools used to produce it—would look like if your people had flippers instead of hands. Or, what type of calligraphy would tentacled humanoids produce? And if they don't even need tools and produce ink directly from their appendages, how would this blot-driven piece of art look like? I'm sure we're all eager to see what you come up with.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



 JOSEF STEYN



# AVATARS OF THE DIVINE

## GODS LIVING AMONG THE ANCIENTS

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by B.K. Bass

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 ART  CULTURE  HISTORY  RELIGION

When we consider the history of world religions, certain images are bound to come to mind. Imposing Greek gods and heroes wrought in marble statues. Ancient Egyptian tomb walls covered with paintings of their deities. Along with these representations are the many totems, trinkets, and baubles that may grace either the neck of the devout, or a small shrine in their home. When we visit a gallery or museum in the Western world, or peruse almost any publication on the subject, we are often greeted with images from the Renaissance of figures from the Christian faith. Even today, many homes host icons of one god or another, and some people wear jewelry proclaiming an allegiance to their faith. Even for those of us who chose not to follow one of these traditions, it is undeniable that their presence not only fills our history books, but also permeates our modern world.

Looking at artwork intended to represent a people's theology isn't limited to places of worship. From civic projects to an idol in one's pocket, the presence of the divine was often kept close

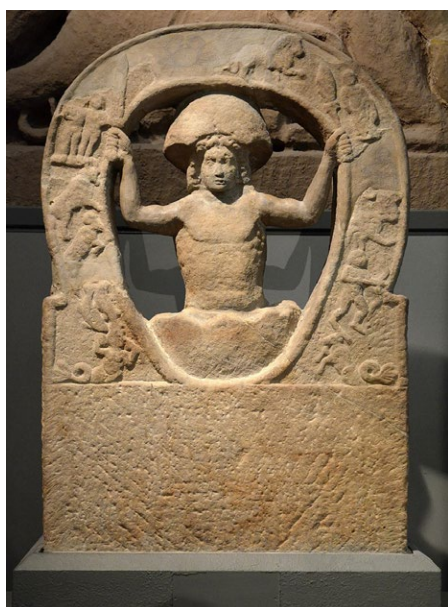
to the people. There could be many reasons for this phenomena, and exploring them all has already filled volumes. In its simplest form though, the act of creating artwork to represent one's beliefs is a way of taking an abstract concept and making it feel more real. One can describe Zeus upon his throne on Olympus, but actually standing before a statue of him carries more gravitas than a thousand words. For both those who believed and those who wished to convince others to believe, rendering something that is unseen and unseeable into physical form was—and still is—a powerful tool. Throughout history, the gods have resided among mortals in the form of artwork.

### FROM THE MOTHER

It's hard to say how humans first depicted religious figures. Some of the oldest recorded art comes from the [Indonesian cave paintings](#) created approximately 40,000 years ago, whose true meanings we can only infer. Among the oldest recognized religious artworks is the *Venus of Willendorf* (fig.1). Dated between 28,000 and



(1) MATTHIAS KABEL



(2) CAROL RADDATO

25,000 BCE, it is named after the region in which it was discovered: Willendorf, Austria. However, the statue was made of oolite limestone, a material not native to the region where it was found. This suggests that it travelled to Austria from some other land, and one might presume it was perhaps even traded among cultures. It is one of forty similar and intact figures from the era with another eighty that exist in fragments. We have no way of knowing for certain the meaning or purpose of the small, handheld figure, but many assume she represents a fertility goddess due to the figure's exaggerated breasts and belly showing typical traits of pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

It was a widespread phenomenon for cultures to venerate a fertility goddess—or an idea of the mother as divine—for millennium after the *Venus of Willendorf* was made. As late as 2,000 BCE, cultures from the Indus Valley to Scotland left evidence that their religions focused on a devotion to such figures. Many different symbols have dotted the landscape of these beliefs, including pregnant women, the moon, snakes, and eggs. These symbols have been found on pottery, idols, and in architecture. However, the unifying themes of birth, death, and rebirth are almost universal among them.<sup>2</sup>

## TO WARRIOR KINGS AND WISE WOMEN

Around 2,000 BCE, we see a decline of Earth Mother and nature religions accompanied by the rise of classic polytheism. Gone are the primordial egg and pocket-sized statues of pregnant women, replaced by pottery, frescoes, and towering edifices adorned with warrior gods and kings. No matter the culture of the period, a defining characteristic of the time was organized religion with an absence of documentation. There were no holy texts, nor could much of the populace read them if they had existed. Instead, tales spread through word of mouth while every aspect of life was decorated with images of the gods. Even at home, paintings adorned the walls and deities graced the surfaces of pottery and other everyday

<sup>1</sup> Kuiper, Kathleen. *Venus of Willendorf*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Venus-of-Willendorf>. July 11, 2018. Accessed December 12, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> The Eternal Female: Worship of the Mother Goddess. Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/the-eternal-female-worship-of-the-mother-goddess-1607599.html>. February 12, 2009. Accessed December 12, 2019.

Fig.1 Kabel, Matthias "Venus von Willendorf" c. 22 DEC, 2011. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venus_von_Willendorf.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 12 December 2019.

Fig. 2 Raddato, Carole. "Stone Relieve with Mithras Emerging from the Cosmic Egg" 4 JUL, 2017. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_Relief_with_Mithras_Emerging_from_the_Cosmic_Egg.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 12 December 2019.

implements. The gods lived among the people through these representations. As their likenesses were recreated, a mostly illiterate populace obtained a consistent worldview through these shared artistic trends.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to being found in temples and homes, some representations of the gods endowed early governments with the legitimacy of the divine. Considered by many to be the first example of a written code of laws, the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1,780 BCE) can be found engraved upon the seven-foot tall Stele of Hammurabi. The stele's top depicts an image of the sun god Shamash presenting Hammurabi with the code of laws, solidifying the divine right of the king to then decree these laws to the people.<sup>4</sup>

While much of the ancient and classical world was dominated by the likes of Shamash, Zeus, and Thoth, the importance of women in religion continued after the decline of the Earth Mother. Many important divine figures in ancient times were women, and they held prominent roles as embodiments of fertility, the harvest, the home, and wisdom, among others. Even victory over one's foes has been represented by female deities, best exemplified by the statue of *Athena Parthenos* in Athens, Greece. This monument was completed c. 438 BCE as part of the Parthenon temple complex in celebration of the unified Greek victory over the Persians. The 11.5-meter tall statue of the goddess was a testament to this victory as lead by the city-state of Athens.<sup>5</sup>

## AND BEYOND

Images of divine figures could be found everywhere in the ancient and classical world. The examples we've seen include a pocket-sized



(3) Erik Dorst



(4) MBZT

<sup>3</sup> Osborn, Robin & Vout, Caroline. *Art and Religion in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Oxford Research Encyclopedias. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-81>. May 2016. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> *Stele with Law Code of Hammurabi*. American Historical Association. <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/images-of-power-art-as-an-historiographic-tool/stele-with-law-code-of-hammurabi>. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Cartwright, Mark. *Athena Parthenos by Phidias*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/785/athena-parthenos-by-phidias/>. January 25, 2015. Accessed December 13, 2019.

Fig. 3 Dorst, Eric. "Ancient Greek Pottery" 20 MAR, 2010. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_Greek_Pottery.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 12 December 2019.

Fig. 4 Mbzt. "Louvre Code Hammurabi Bas Relief" 2011. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louvre_Code_Hammurabi_Bas_Relief.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 13 December 2019.



idol, household pottery, a code of laws, and even a colossal statue surrounded by an imposing edifice. Look around today, and I'm sure you'll see modern examples of the gods walking among us. From necklaces with Thor's hammer to a Christian's crucifix, many of us still bear our faith on our person.

For the purposes of our worldbuilding, remember that the gods do not exist solely in their ivory towers or within the walls of temples. People from all cultures throughout history surrounded themselves with depictions of their faith—and

continue to do so today. The span of intended impact and patronage across these depictions is as broad as any form of art could be. Considering these elements can help add realism to your own depiction. Why was the art created? For what audience? And what is the intended impression? Also, who declared that such an effigy should be created? Look at any courthouse around the world and you may see a statue of Iustitia, the Roman goddess of justice, declaring the intent of the building for all to see. In this regard, we have a religious figure used with an entirely secular purpose. Although this example uses a figure not



(5) MICHAEL RIVERA


Fig. 5 Rivera, Michael. "Athena Parthenos." 6 MAY, 2015. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Athena_Parthenos.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 13 December 2019.

considered divine by the culture applying it, it is still a wonderful example of the power these symbols hold. A government may use their culture's own theological figures in a similar way, perhaps adorning the columns of the town gibbet with representations of some god of revenge.

Don't stop with the temple and the town square, though. Next time you're describing a piece of pottery, the wall of a home, or some jewelry, you may want to describe the image of one of your world's deities. Faith is a personal experience, and many choose to keep their gods close to them at all times. While the god of revenge might grace the town gibbet, a goddess of the hearth, peace, fertility, or family bonds might grace the mantle of a fireplace. Perhaps a blessing on the home itself is rendered in a carving above the front door. Everything from a simple clay figure to an entire shrine may also act as the family's personal place of worship.

Many of us put a lot of work into the theological aspect of our worlds. Conveying these details to our audience often falls victim to the dreaded *info-dump*, an oft-maligned practice when a writer inundates the audience with exposition that does not have immediate correlation with the core story. Through artwork, however, we can show some of these myths, legends, and religions in subtler ways. More importantly, we can show how the beliefs of our people become part of their everyday lives.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



# WORLDCASTING

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# ARTIST SHOWCASE

## KURT IAN FERRER

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Interviewed by Anna Hannon | Illustrated by Kurt Ian Ferrer

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 ART

 INTERVIEW

**K**urt Ian Ferrer is a professional illustrator melding 3D and 2D elements to create breath-taking landscapes and character work. We talk about his start in the business, and his hopes for his personal project *Sword of the World*.



My name is Kurt Ian Ferrer, and I am a freelance concept artist/illustrator in the Philippines. My first contact with the world of art, in terms of it being a legitimate job, happened in 2016 when I first graduated college with an advanced diploma in 3D animation. I wasn't really very informed about the industry, and I lacked the portfolio to be considered, blaming the school for not teaching us enough. After some falls and mishaps, I returned home and thought to myself, "Okay Kurt, I'll give you one year to try this art thing and study yourself, and if we fail, we get a 'real job.'" I have been working professionally for 2 years now.

*Thanks for joining me today! Most of your work portrays these gorgeous fantastical landscapes-what draws you to creating landscapes in particular?*

At first, I used to draw portraits a lot, but I knew I had to practice landscapes to improve. When I started it, I was just so drawn to the freedom to express what I wanted to put in landscapes! There could be a town in the distance, a beautiful

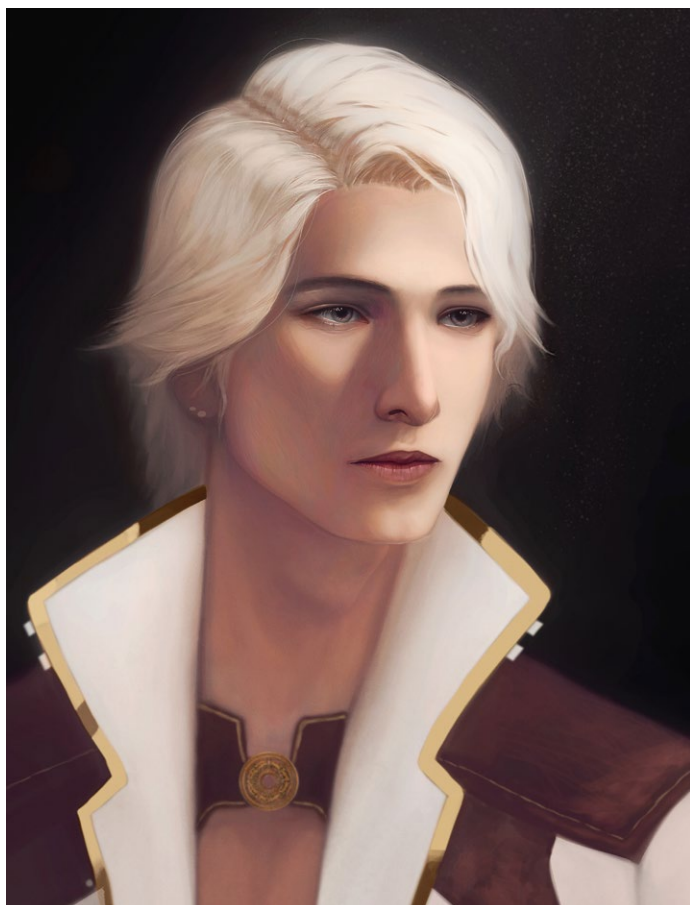
glowing river at night, some fireflies by the rose-fields? That was so fun for me.

*Ah, that's awesome! Do you have any projects you are actively working on right now? Maybe working on a personal project?*

Yes! Actually three right now that I juggle. One is named *Sword of the World*; the title was created when I started writing when I was 17 (I am 25 now), and I just kept it for sentimental reasons. The next is a project where I remake a PS1 game, and the third is a set of illustrations for some prints I plan to sell this February at a local con here in the Philippines and also online when I figure out how to do that.

*The dedication and love for the craft is obvious. This project, Sword of the World, that you mentioned from your youth, have you been working on it steadily since then, or more on-and-off? I'd also love to hear a little bit about the project, if you can share anything.*

It is more on-and-off actually. There were years



I didn't work on it. It started with just some day-dreaming of an anime of my own back in 2013, with a plot revolving around two people traveling the world. Then it grew and grew until I wanted to actually visualize it, and then I realized my art skills were so lame that it wasn't up to the standard I wanted it to be, so I began studying art.

Fiorella Rosso is the central character to the story, and Agne Arkani, her partner and a prince in a very powerful empire (page 82).

Whenever I'm down and feel like I'm not improving anymore, I go back to my old sketches and get inspired. That's what keeps me going now.

*That's an excellent idea for any creative. You had mentioned before that your process involves working with 3D—would you be able to share a bit about your process?*

Gladly. I actually have two different processes that I use, though. The first starts with linearts for perspective, then some basic coloring over it.

Then I use a process called photobashing, which involves putting textures over a painting. I use it to create faster concepts for visualization when the concepts are more important for me.

The second process I now use involves 3D software. At first, I needed to consider whether it would be faster to create it in 3D or paint it instead. I learned that, because I can create a 3D scene and just move the camera where I needed, starting from 3D was faster. Building in 3D takes me about an hour, then I set up lights to check the mood and go from there.

I use [Cinema 4D](#) for it, but any other 3D software that you could model, put lights, and position them is enough.

I built the assets up like LEGOs, so if you look at some parts, you can see repetitive assets. When I'm satisfied with it, I head over to my preferred painting program, Photoshop, to paint over and photobash other elements.

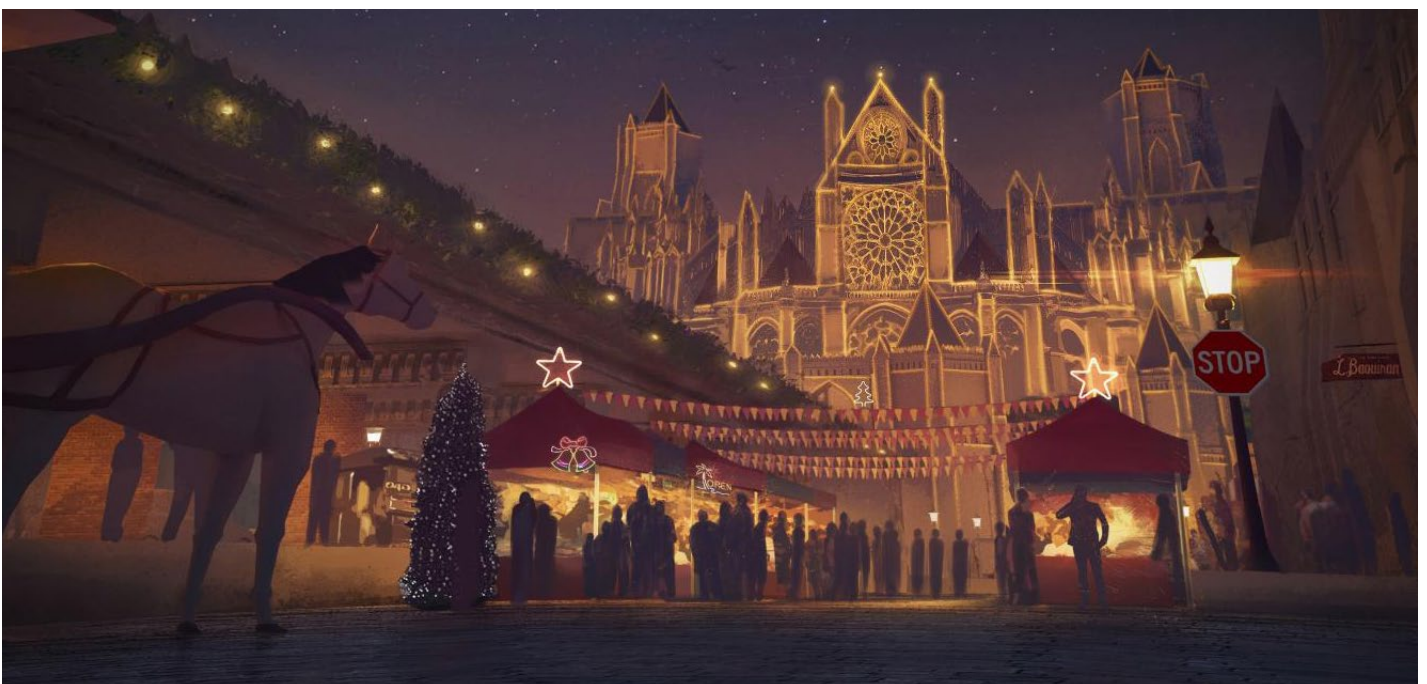
Lineart process







*3d modelling process*





*Do you think you have a favorite piece of yours? If you do, which would it be and why?*

Yes, I do! I think the Garanzo throneroom (below) would be my favorite piece. Not because of the art itself, but I was on overdrive mode at that time. I think I finished this in four hours? That's because I was streaming on Facebook; my heart was pounding so much.

*What is your ultimate goal for Sword of the World?*

I think a game would be my ultimate goal; exploring the carved mountains, getting lost in the catacombs of cities, and flying off in an airship would be a dream come true!

*What is one piece of advice you would give to other creatives getting started?*

Find support from people who believe in you, and disregard the opinions of those who want to see you fail. We only get one shot in life!

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

*Kurt Ian Ferrer can be found on [Instagram](#), or [Artstation](#).*

*Special thanks to Kurt for taking the time to speak with us and share a bit about their work. If you have an illustrated world of your own, [apply for one of our future art features](#).*

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



# GENDER DYNAMICS IN ART

by Adam Bassett



ART



CULTURE



GENDER



HISTORY

Art, in most cases, reflects the culture that created it. One of the more fascinating aspects of cultures is how they treat divides (or lack thereof) between genders. This detail may not seem as attractive as setting up your magic system or alien species, but it is just as important to creating a realistic world. Just as we need to make decisions on how magic functions, we should understand how people in a culture interact with one another. People view interactions between people of assigned (or self-assigned) genders in different ways, and it can be helpful to see how that's been addressed throughout history.

In an effort to consider this question of how art displays gender roles and ideas, I'll turn to our most valuable source: our own history. We'll look at parts of Europe, Central America, and Africa in our quest to glean some insight from real cultures that displayed gender dynamics through their art and how that work influences what we know about them.

## THE PALACE AT KNOSSOS

The Minoans lived on Crete, and a few other Aegean islands, and flourished during the Middle Bronze Age (from approximately 2000 BCE-1500 BCE). Fantasy or mythology fans may notice that the name is quite similar to the term *minotaur*, which has its roots in Crete and King Minos—but that's a story for another time.

The palace at Knossos, Crete is striking for its mural paintings. These frescoes, though faded and cracked, are brilliantly colorful. The *Rhyton-Bearer* mural was found in the South Propylaeum, and dolphins swim on a mural in what may have been the queen's quarters. Still more murals line the old palace's walls. *Bull-leaping* (c.1400-1370 BCE) (*Fig.1*), reconstructed and now in the Archeological Museum at Heraklion, once decorated the East Wing of the palace. It depicts a pastime that has been enjoyed throughout centuries and across many cultures—bull sports. The mural shows three people interacting with the titular bull: one grasping its horns, another leaping over



(1) Hellenic Ministry of Culture

it, and the last appears to have just dismounted. Their stylized forms are iconic of Minoan art, which was unique in the way it depicted people with pinched waists and long, curly hair.<sup>1</sup>

A peculiar detail about this mural is that the figures are painted with both male and female characteristics. The Minoans followed ancient Egyptian conventions in art, wherein they painted women white and men a darker tan or brown. So, based on this, the left and right figures in Bull-leaping should be women—but they wear loincloths, a man's dress. To further complicate things, all three figures' hair is long and curly,

which the Minoans used to depict both men and women. Perhaps this indicates gender crossing was not uncommon in Minoan culture, or that gender was a more fluid concept.<sup>2</sup> However, this theory is, for now, just that. The situation is complicated by other works, such as the paintings on the *Hagia Triada sarcophagus* (c.1400 BCE), where the skin tones for men and women do not appear to divert from the established norm.<sup>3</sup> Why two of the three men were painted white on the *Bull-leaping* mural, so far, is still a mystery.

<sup>1</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book A, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 91.

<sup>2</sup> "Bull-Leaping Fresco from the Palace of Knossos." Khan Academy, Khan Academy, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/aegean-art1/minoan/a/bull-leaping-fresco-from-the-palace-of-knossos>. Accessed 6 December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "Hagia Triada Sarcophagus." Khan Academy, Khan Academy, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/aegean-art1/minoan/a/hagia-triada-sarcophagus>. Accessed 6 December 2019.

Fig. 1 Art Citation: "Bull-leaping," c. 1400-1370 BCE. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bull-leaping_fresco.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 16 August 2019.



## TEMPLE 23

Moving into the Common Era again, we find ourselves in present-day Mexico. Specifically, Yaxchilán, which was a major center of Classic Maya civilization. Located on the Usumacinta River in the Yucatán Peninsula, it flourished c.580-800 CE, likely thanks to trade that flowed along the river.<sup>4</sup> From the ruins nearby, specifically Temple 23, we've found a number of carved lintels which help us understand Mayan culture. *Lintels 24* (Fig. 2), 25, and 26 (c. 725 CE) depict a series of rituals being performed by the Mayan King Itzamna B'ahlam II (hereafter referred to

by his more common title "Shield Jaguar") and his Queen, Lady Xoc. From these carvings we can infer some of the duties the pair had as leaders of the Mayan people. For example, in *Lintel 24*, we see Lady Xoc "outfitted in elaborate woven garment, headdress, and jewels. With a barbed cord she pierces her tongue in a bloodletting ceremony that, according to accompanying inscriptions, celebrated the birth of a son to one of the ruler's other wives as well as an alignment between the planets Saturn and Jupiter...These ceremonies induced an altered state of consciousness in order to connect the bloodletter with the supernatural world." We see the result of this ritual illustrated in *Lintel 25*, where Lady Xoc has a vision of an ancestor.<sup>5</sup>

From just a few carvings, we've already discovered a great deal about Mayan culture, belief, and the roles of king and queen. From the images and accompanying inscriptions beside them, we learned the meaning of the bloodletting ritual, and that a Mayan Queen had responsibilities in such ceremonies. In addition, we can infer that the King took on multiple wives, painting a picture of what their social structure was like. The glyphs on *Lintel 24* note Lady Xoc's title, and they even state that the bloodletting occurred on October 28th, 709 CE.<sup>6</sup>

## NORTHERN EUROPE

Perhaps the greatest 17th-century Flemish painter was Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) who "built on the innovations of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque masters to formulate the first truly pan-European painting style."<sup>7</sup> Many of Rubens' works were religious in nature, painted at the



(2) WIKIMEDIA

<sup>4</sup> Cartwright, Mark. "Yaxchilan." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, Ancient History Encyclopedia, 7 Feb. 2015, <https://www.ancient.eu/Yaxchilan/>. Accessed 6 December 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 503.

<sup>6</sup> "Yaxchilán-Lintels 24 and 25 from Structure 23 and Structures 33 and 40." Khan Academy, Khan Academy, <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/indigenous-americas/a/yaxchilan-lintels>. Accessed 6 December 2019.

pleasure of his wealthy and pious commissioners. For example, he painted 21 large canvases which glorified Marie de' Medici's career (who wed King Henry IV of France and reigned as queen until he was assassinated in 1610). Late in his career, just a year or two before his own death in 1640, Rubens completed *Consequences of War*. Two years prior, he wrote a letter explaining his work to its commissioner, Fernando II de' Medici.<sup>8</sup>

Rubens strove for peace during his life, though war existed all around him. In creating *Consequences of War* (c.1638-1639 CE) (Fig.3), the artist sought to express his distaste toward the Thirty Years' War (which lasted

from 1618-1648). However, rather than discuss the elegant fluidity of motion represented here, or even his depiction of war being pulled in both directions, I would instead like to explore the issue of gender roles on display in Rubens' work. Although not perhaps an intended message, Rubens did give us a glimpse at how men and women were viewed when the painting was made. Note the genders of the figures involved—whether they were related to religion or not—and we can see a vision of his world.

 (3) WIKIMEDIA



<sup>7</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History* 14th ed., book D, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 697 Fig. 2 "Lintel 24." c. 725 CE. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lintel_24.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 16 August 2019..

<sup>8</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. Translated by Kristin Lohse Belkin, 14th ed., book D, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 700.

Fig. 3 Rubens, Peter Paul. "Los Horrores de la Guerra." c. 1638-1639 CE. [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Los_Horrores_de_la_Guerra.jpg). Wikimedia Commons. Web. Accessed 16 August 2019.



The important aspects to consider from Rubens' letter are these: Mars, Venus, Harmony, the mother with the child, and the architect. Firstly, let us consider Rubens' statements regarding the divine figures of this painting:

"The principal figure is Mars, who has left the open temple of Janus (which in time of peace, according to Roman custom, remained closed) and rushes forth with shield and blood-stained sword, threatening the people with great disaster. He pays little heed to Venus, his mistress, who, accompanied by Amors and Cupids, strives with caresses and embraces to hold him. From the other side, Mars is dragged forward by the Fury Alekto, with a torch in her hand. Near by are monsters personifying Pestilence and Famine, those inseparable partners of War."

Mars, also referred to as War, is a man with a bloodied blade who tramples on letters. He is being called to make war just as his mistress, Venus, tries to pull him in the other direction. While he is clad in armor and steps with confidence, she is nude, save for the cloth that conveniently drapes over her waist and leg. She does not pull Mars back with strength, but as Rubens said, she "strives with caresses and embraces to hold him." A case could be made that these are simply characteristics of Mars and Venus, though we could also point to this as a demonstration of how men and women were depicted differently in Northern European art.

Rather than stress that, though, it may be better to look at some other figures in this piece. While an argument could certainly be made, Mars's and Venus' natures as mythological figures give pause to assertions such as these.

"On the ground, turning her back, lies a woman with a broken lute, representing Harmony, which is incompatible with the

discord of War. There is also a mother with her child in her arms, indicating that fecundity, procreation, and charity are thwarted by War, which corrupts and destroys everything. In addition, one sees an architect thrown on his back, with his instruments in his hand, to show that which in time of peace is constructed for the use and ornamentation of the City, is hurled to the ground by the force of arms and falls to ruin."

Harmony—the representation of her as a topless woman with a broken lute—is an interesting image. Rubens described her as "incompatible with the discord of War," which we can certainly see by the way he is about to trample over her, Harmony being defenseless to stop this. Similarly, we see Mars bearing over the mother and child. Interestingly, in this part of the work, Rubens says "that [she indicates] fecundity, procreation, and charity are thwarted by War." Thus, we are confronted with an image of women representing harmony, procreation, and charity (if we consider Venus, we may be able to include love or seduction into the mix). In contrast, the sole man among those in Mars' path, the architect, is described as "thrown on his back, with his instruments in his hand, [and] ... is hurled to the ground by the force of arms and falls to ruin." It is unfortunate we have no other examples of mortal men in this image, but we could decipher this as men being associated with work, labor, art, and similarly, harmony (since his tools were intended for peacetime).

*Consequences of War* is most certainly an anti-war painting, though it is not terribly difficult to see how he assigned men and women to the scene. Women represent gentleness, love, and procreation. Men represent action, be they the architect (who is the only figure defined by his work), or the more celestial figures of Mars, Pestilence, or Famine (who are causing the action in the scene).



## AFRICAN MASQUERADES

Art in Africa has historically been quite gendered. Men were the primary architects, carvers, smiths, and alloy-casters. Women were the primary painters (wall and body), decorators, potters, and often clay sculptors. The two overlap in textiles, beads, and weaving. Although the gendered divisions are generally less prominent today in the early 21st century, the aforementioned specialties remain mostly true. This is not to say that the men and women do not cooperate; it is quite the opposite. If something, such as a mask, must be carved then painted, the men will carve it and collaborate with the women who will later paint the object. It has been this way for a long time, and though it is less severe today, elements of the old ways remain deeply rooted in the many African peoples.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Mende women are the only group who don masks of their own. Traditionally, men are the only ones who actually perform with them in masquerades. We see this gendered division in cultures such as the Kuba peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Samburu of eastern Africa, and many others.

At the court of Kuba are three masks—*Mwashambo*, *Bwom*, and *Ngady Amwaash*—which each represent royal ancestors. They are made with wood, fabrics, beads, shells, and feathers set into colorful geometric patterns. At festivals, masqueraders will reenact creation legends involving the three. While the *Ngady Amwaash* mask is meant to honor and represent women, like most African cultures, only men will don the masks.<sup>10</sup>

The Samburu are interesting due to the way they decorate their hair or bodies. Men, especially

warriors who are unwed, will spend hours putting their hair in elaborate styles, paint their bodies with red ochre, and wear all manner of beaded jewelry made for them by women. Women will decorate themselves as well, adorning stacks of beaded collars and shaving their heads to don headbands instead. Much of this is done to convey information through their code of accessories: by looking at the way a person is dressed, you could ascertain information about their age, marital or initiation status, parentage, and more. The Samburu will wear masks and perform in them as well, but this more casual form of art in clothing—and communication of status through it—is just as important.<sup>11</sup>



(4) MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART

<sup>9</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book F, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 1070.

<sup>10</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book F, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 1076.

<sup>11</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book F, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 1076-7.

Fig. 4 Art Citation: "Sende Mask." c. 1950 CE. [artsmia.org](https://www.artsmia.org). Minneapolis Institute of Art. Web. Accessed 16 August 2019.

Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea are all home to the aforementioned Mende, who are of particular note due to the way that women perform masquerades. Put in terms that are too simplified to do the Mende justice: there are two societies, the men's (*poro*) and women's (*sande*). Both aim to initiate boys and girls into manhood or womanhood, and both are "secret" in the sense that members of each gain knowledge they are only permitted to share with others among their society. Each society also partakes in donning ceremonial masks like this *Sande Mask* (c.1950 CE) (Fig. 4). They are chiefly made of wood, and carved by the men regardless of what society the mask is intended for. However, when a man is commissioned for a mask, they will often work collaboratively with the person who it is for—male or female.<sup>12</sup> The particular mask shown here embodies Mende ideals of female attractiveness, as indicated by the high forehead, downcast eyes, and hairstyle.<sup>13</sup> Men's masks likewise accent favorable masculine traits.

## ART IN WORLDBUILDING


An explorer—we know this is his job since he's got that classic explorer's mustache—happens upon some ruins. Perhaps it's decorated with old, decaying murals. As he rounds a corner, a face is staring at him and he leaps backward, only to discover a moment later that these are masks gazing blankly past him. He ventures forth, shaken but intrigued to see what lay deeper in these ruins.

But what if he didn't? What might our explorer learn by taking a moment to look at the mural or pick up the masks? Should he truly examine these works of art, what would he learn about the place he's wandering through? Would he find inconsistencies in how people are represented, or perhaps learn about a few significant rulers who

once lived there? At no part of this haphazard attempt to define cultural gender roles through art did we *only* discuss gender roles. The concept of masculinity, femininity, and any other gendered concepts are tied to the greater culture of a people—this is why art is so important. Art tells us about people's lives, as the Minoan murals do. Art tells stories, much like the Mayan carvings depict a story of Lady Xoc performing a ritual. Art conveys layers of meaning, just as Rubens did with his religious scenes. Art has purpose, as it helps continue tradition and guide the youth in African masquerade culture. So the next time you're worldbuilding, stop to look at the paintings. Take a few minutes to consider how the culture who made them might have done it. Consider what the intent was. In the end, you'll have richer cultures for doing so.

 **BACK TO INDEX**



CHANH QUACH 

<sup>12</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History*. 14th ed., book F, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 1075.

<sup>13</sup> "Sande Mask, Mende." Minneapolis Institute of Art, <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/1937/sande-mask-mende>. Accessed 6 December 2019.

# ASK US ANYTHING

by Robert Meegan

**T**his *Ask Us Anything* is presented by a senior member of the Amalgamated Order of Interdimensional Persons, Percival Aluminus Illumnius, Adjunct Professor of Gateways, 3423 WestNorth Street, Dunny-on-the-Spire.

*What are the most important things to think about when starting to create a new world?*

—Angela

The single most critical thing is to start with the end in mind. Of course, this presupposes that you, like me, have the ability to traverse space and time, so that you can clearly identify what the end will actually be. If you are limited to a more linear timestream, it's still the most important thing, but you'll need to be prepared to adjust as the end goal wanders around.

Even if you only have a rough approximation of where the end might be, you can use this to keep the project under control. If your intention is to create a platform for a sweeping epic with grand story arcs, don't waste time creating fiddly little details. Most of them aren't going to get used, and any that might be needed can be created when the time comes. What's important is making certain that the big pieces fit together with consistency. Breadth is needed, not depth. On the other hand, if you intend to create small, intimate stories, don't spend effort in developing parts of the world that will never be seen. If you need a dark stranger from a place far away, just toss them into the story and get on with it. A bit of dialogue to provide some backstory will suffice. What's important in these circumstances is to have the depth to make this part of the world feel utterly real. Everything else fades into the distant mist.

Your goals for the world also drive your choice of genre. This might seem self-evident, but there are a lot of worldbuilders who get this wrong and end up getting frustrated. If you want to write epic clashes of empires, urban horror is probably not a good choice. Similarly, if angst-ridden characters watching their humanity slipping away are going to feature strongly, space opera might prove overly expansive. Even a more subtle distinction, such as between high- and low-magic systems, can make a world of difference. Unless your primary characters are going to be magic users themselves, making magic rare and obscure can help keep you out of plot holes like the eternal question of why Gandalf just didn't load Frodo onto an eagle and deliver the Ring to Orodruin via airborne express.



 AHMED ELGHARABAWY



*When you're creating a culture, how do you make it as realistic as possible? —ThatOnePerson*

Considering the range of variety of human cultures—not to mention other species on Earth, those on other planets, or celestial, demonic, and otherwise extra-dimensional beings—I am forced to ask, “what is realistic?” A culture is a group defined by its (a) customs, (b) shared knowledge, and (c) outlook. This means that an online community focused upon a series of movies is every bit as much of a culture as a nomadic race with a thousand-year tradition.

If your intention is to create a believable culture, consider which of the three elements listed above is the most important for that group. If it's a monastic order in a post-apocalyptic wasteland (see *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller), the customs and traditions will carry most of the load. For a society mining asteroids, the shared knowledge of how to stay alive in an unforgiving environment will largely determine everything else. Outlook is probably the least commonly used as the defining characteristic of a group, but when it is, it can be very powerful. Religious extremists from the Crusades through the present are examples of cultures defined through their perspective of righteousness.

With respect to how much detail is required, that depends upon how large a role culture will play in the stories that you intend to tell. In some cases, culture is the story (*The Word for World is Forest* by Andre Norton). In other cases, (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams, for example) it's completely tangential. Perhaps the definitive answer was given by the late American president Abraham Lincoln when he was asked how long a man's legs should be: “Long enough to reach the ground.”

*Can you suggest some world concepts that haven't been overdone? —Ademal*

As a frequent traveler through interdimensional gateways, I've seen more worlds than I can count.

In my experience, there seem to be a shortage of worlds that are built around Bronze Age and early Iron Age cultures. These more primitive civilizations have to deal with very different problems and offer significantly different story options. The supernatural will be more closely interwoven into daily life when success in hunting means life or death for your family. Looking at examples of human civilizations from that era shows that alternatives from small tribes to vast empires are possible. Travel and trade were more common than most people realize, making epic journeys an option as well.

Probably the single most important factor when building a world is finding a twist that makes it your own, rather than a cookie-cutter cliché. The problem is that it's easy to make a “green-orc” twist, in which everything is more or less the same except the orcs are green, or the dwarves are beardless, or the aliens are humans with lumpy foreheads. This type of change is obvious to the audience, and rather than your world appearing new and imaginative, it looks like you took a quick and dirty solution. A successful twist has to be something that fundamentally alters the world in a way that inspires curiosity, rather than scorn.

Mixed genres also offer potential for worldbuilding through a twist. While steampunk and western horror may seem somewhat mainstream now, both were wildly innovative when they appeared. Adding magic to a noir detective world would be a good example of something that's still largely untapped. In fairness, I should note that there are combinations that simply don't work. That world I stumbled on where gothic horror was mixed with J-pop still gives me nightmares of bubbly vampires in pink dresses.

*I'm developing an alternate history world where the Chinese settle western North America at about the same time that the Europeans are arriving on the Atlantic side. It's now 2020 and instead of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, there are eastern*

*and western countries. How would things be different? —Anonymous*

This is the butterfly problem with alternative histories. It's easy to imagine some event in the past having a different outcome, but from that point on, things will begin to diverge rapidly. With a change as significant as what you're describing, the present world would look nothing like the reality that you currently occupy. For example, in order for the Chinese of the Ming Dynasty to have reached North America in any number, the "Sea Ban" of the Yongle Emperor, which put an end to nautical exploration, could not have occurred. Without this ban, it's all but certain that Chinese ships would have dominated trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesia, keeping the British, Spanish, and Dutch out of those rich regions.

Without access to that wealth, the Age of Discovery would have looked very different, likely leaving Britain and the Netherlands relatively poorer compared to their European counterparts. With Chinese pressure from the Pacific, it is likely that the Spanish would have fought harder for Florida. This could easily have brought Britain into the Thirty-Years War, which might have led to the complete partitioning of the Iberian peninsula and, more importantly, the valuable South American colonies. How the flow of events in Europe would have been affected by these changes in fortune makes for interesting speculation. In any event, it's reasonable to assume that they would have diverged considerably over the next 350 years.

Obviously, China's history would also have traveled a different path as well. It's not that difficult to imagine that with access to the gold and silver of the American west, along with the greatly expanded trade with southeast Asia, India, and Africa, the Ming Dynasty might have mitigated the economic disasters that sowed the seeds of its collapse in your Earth's timeline. This would have undeniably altered the dynamics of central Asia, potentially causing extended open war with the Manchu or else driving them into eastern

Russia. Faced with an externally active China, the Japanese could have possibly felt the need to establish their own presence in North America, founding colonies in the Pacific Northwest.

Having explored a few of these timelines in my travels, I can tell you that all of them were fascinating, but relating them to your own reality (which is, of course, just an alternative history of theirs) is folly.

*How do you know when it's a good point to stop worldbuilding and to actually create and tell the stories within the world you were building—especially when you might have worldbuilder's disease and always feel that it's not quite enough yet? —Inky*

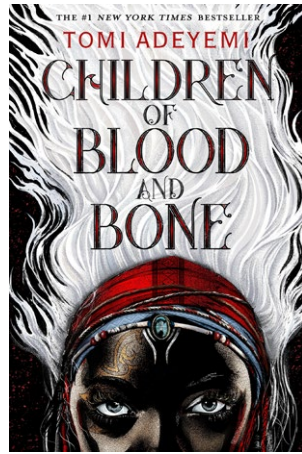
Sadly, all evidence indicates that worldbuilder's disease is virtually incurable. Fortunately, one treatment exists that can allow sufferers to retain their status as functional members of polite society, at least temporarily. The most successful approach to dealing with the problem is worldbuilding through storytelling. Instead of working on background material, start telling a story through whichever medium you prefer.

As you write, draw, or play, allow the world to develop organically, creating details as you need them rather than "just-in-case." This method can be very satisfying on many levels, as it exposes your work to an audience and provides narrative hooks for additional exploration. Just don't be surprised if you discover totally new parts of your world that are far more interesting than what you had been working on. As long as you continue to focus on those areas that contribute to a shared enjoyment with your audience, consider the condition under control.

 **BACK TO INDEX**

# STAFF PICKS

**Title Name:** *Children of Blood and Bone*  
**Author:** Tomi Adeyemi  
**Published:** Henry Holt (2018)  
**Picked by:** Zaivy Luke-Aleman



Tomi Adeyemi mixes art and religion to weave in important aspects of her storytelling. From mosaics to statues, her worldbuilding brings a sense of wonder and beauty to the land of Orisha. In a story of oppression, revolution, and family ties, she carefully illustrates the complexities of her characters and societies.

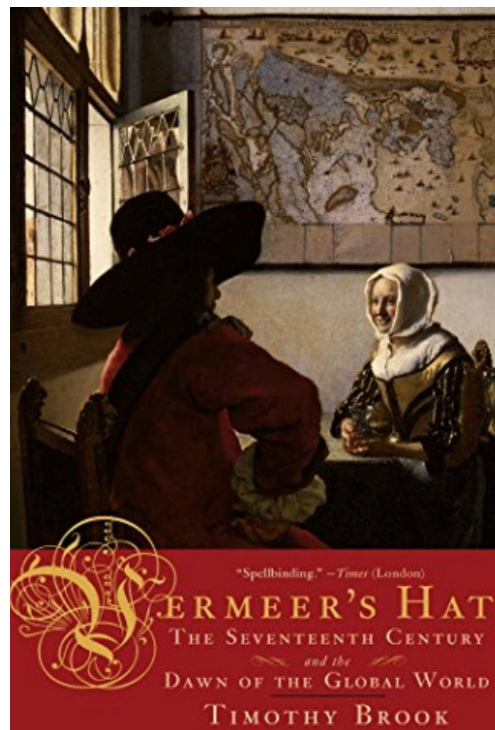
**Title Name:** *The Bear and The Nightingale*  
**Author:** Katherine Arden  
**Published:** Del Rey (2017)  
**Picked by:** Wynter



*The Bear and the Nightingale* is a wonderful counter-example of the character trope of a woman who doesn't feel like she fits in. Arden's book showcases how a young woman with magical powers c. 15th-century Russia might be viewed by not only her family but her village as well, and how being different could strain those ties.

**Title Name:** *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World*  
**Author:** Timothy Brook  
**Published:** Bloomsbury Publishing (2008)  
**Picked by:** ACGrad

*Vermeer's Hat* explores the history of world trade through objects and locations depicted by the 17th century painter. Piece by piece, Brook covers how different goods were traded and used during this time and how cultures became more intertwined by trade.





# MEET THE STAFF

## INKY

*Curated by ACGrad*

*Art by Inky*

*Please introduce yourself! What is your role for the magazine? What do you hope to do going forward?*

Hello, I'm Inky, and I'm a communication design student and freelance illustrator from Germany! I'm also part of the Art and Layout teams here at [Worldbuilding Magazine](#) and occasionally might pop up in the [Worldcasting](#) podcast, too.

I should be done with my Bachelor thesis by this time next year, and plan to pursue a Master's degree in Illustration afterwards. Editorial design and illustration, together with character design, are things I truly enjoy working on, so I hope to steer my career that way in the future. Also, I wouldn't mind moving back to Seoul for a few years and finally getting to work on my long-term comic project.



*Tell us about your world! Will your comic be the medium for your worldbuilding?*

Yes, it actually is! It's a very low-fantasy, secondary world, and I quite enjoy that it doesn't have any type of magic, fantasy races, or original creatures in it. Not even divine intervention! This might sound a bit boring to some, but it gives me many liberties as well.

In the very beginning of the story's creation, I thought I had to include some sort of magic, but soon I realised it didn't suit the story at all, so I scrapped that idea completely. I wanted to focus on politics and domestic life since a lot of the plot takes place at court with a government conspiracy and foreign diplomats. This means a lot of work for a visual medium to make cultures organically distinct and lived-in by their looks while still being original, especially if you're working on a trading nation with a lot of intercultural traffic. You need to worry about a lot of details that are shown on a comic page, whereas a writer can just gloss over it if it's not as important. It allows you to add worldbuilding without it distracting from what is actually happening, though. Illustration gives more value to a second or third read once you notice all the tiny details. I also just really enjoy the sense of interconnectivity of culture. Literature, art, music, history, and politics influence each other immensely, so it's not obscure to bring that to the table if your characters are quite knowledgeable in most of these disciplines.



*As part of our Layout team, you were involved in creating the magazine's new design for 2020. Can you tell us a little more about that process?*

I think we, at first, only expected to make a few touch-ups and kind of minor beauty changes like a better body font for digital devices, but otherwise didn't plan to implement drastic changes. Unfortunately, they have me on the layout team, and there were structural issues that an ordinary reader probably won't notice but gave the layout artists very limited options to work with, and I was quite vocal about that. It was a heated debate within this process actually, but eventually, we got to implement the new 6-column grid. It probably is the biggest layout revolution within this magazine, and I'm happy I could push this through.

Some of the current changes were mostly to adjust to the new grid and make everything look neat, but we also added some new features that are now possible with six columns instead of just two. Side-notes, for example, can be easily added, which hopefully makes reading more fluent and convenient. We also can give each article a more individualistic look without compromising the overall layout.

Although we knew that this issue we would be working with more artists on our team than ever before, we still wanted a layout that could work and look interesting without any images.

We added text layers that are now also more distinguishable from each other and, in some cases, even give a pop of colour to break off walls of text. If we just look at the old interview layouts compared to the one you're actually looking at now, I think that is a major improvement in terms of clarity and readability, too.

It is also fun to look at the no-brainers we had—when Adam suggested the new article headers, the entire team was instantly smitten. It is a really good way to deal with negative space and clearly signals the start of a new article while giving the reader a little time to breathe.

We made minor adjustments to it, but really, that wasn't much. We eventually added a second type of headline that we took from the new Table of Contents (ToC) for recurring features like the "Staff Picks" or "Ask us Anything" to not use too much space for those and give the actual articles more weight.

The rest was mostly born from the desire to tidy things up and give structure to the overall layout. The new ToC is part of that since the old version was very busy and confusing at times. I think we found quite a good balance now where we can highlight the title articles without taking away attention from others, and still implement art.

However, we didn't change everything. I'm glad we could keep the tradition of a new colour each issue, even though there were talks about moving to just one major colour for each volume and only having small accents change. I think that was mostly considered since we didn't really have a master that the layout artists could work with, which in turn makes the whole process unnecessarily difficult. Now we have a less time-consuming and generally more efficient way to deal with the layout, and I think it shows.

---

Check out Inky's work on her [Twitter!](#)



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# BUILD SOMETHING NEW WITH US.



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