

ISSUE 4 | 2020

WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

REVOLUTIONS & other topics

WORLD SHOWCASE

Zaire Lanier's *The Bone Herder*

BETTER WORLDS, OR PERFECT ONES

Practical and Utopian Revolutions

HUSH

Secret Societies in Revolutions

With Featured Guests:
ALI HOFF and
DAEL KINGSMILL

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Somewhat befitting of this issue’s theme, our leadership saw some recent shifts. Adam Bassett took up the mantle of Editor-in-Chief, and from the depths of the Editorial Department, I slid into the role of Vice Editor-in-Chief. We have some other exciting developments that we hope to share with y’all soon, too.

Our Revolutions issue comes at a volatile time for many of us. Our articles cover historical revolutions, some more distant than others. As you worldbuild or experience other settings, you might encounter revolutions, if not similar concepts. We hope that the pieces you engage with here help you better understand these conflicts—whether successful or not.

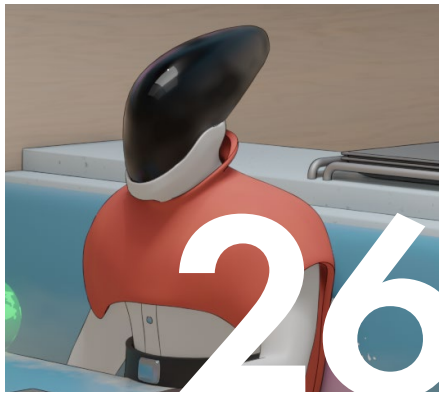
We dedicate this issue to worldbuilders of all kinds. Thank you for supporting Worldbuilding Magazine, and thank you to our staff and contributors!

Happy worldbuilding, and take care!
Ilanara “Imachinate” Natividad, Vice Editor-in-Chief



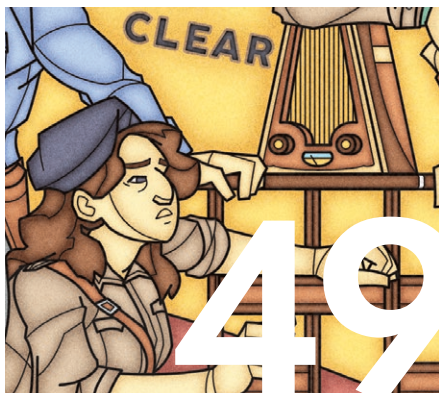
WORLD SHOWCASE

Zaire Lanier’s
The Bone Herder



ARTIST SHOWCASE

Ali Hoff’s Artistic Process



COUP DE TWEET

Technology in Revolutions

CONTENTS

- 4 **World Showcase:**
Zaire Lanier’s *The Bone Herder*
- 9 **Better Worlds, or Perfect Ones**
- 21 **Hush**
Secret Societies in Revolutions
- 26 **Artist Showcase:**
Ali Hoff
- 31 **Thinking Sideways**
About Internal Wars
- 42 **33 Tales of War**
Stories 21-24

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

- 58 Artist Corner
- 69 Community Art
- 80 Resource Column
- 96 Ask Us Anything
- 100 Meet the Staff



GHRANZE

- 49 **Coup de Tweet**
- 61 **Exclusive Interview:**
Dael Kingsmill
- 71 **Let My People Go**
- 81 **Revolution as a Violent Act**
- 87 **Call of Cartography**
World Anvil Contest Results

SHOWCASE INTERVIEW

ZAIRE LANIER'S BONE HERDER

Interviewed by Aaryan Balu

INTERVIEW TABLETOP GAMING

Zaire is creating the upcoming Afropunk fantasy horror comic, *The Bone Herder*, which recently passed \$50,000 in funding on Kickstarter. Here's how she describes the world of Koatrom.

Koatrom is a precolonial African civilization. It was inspired by ancient African cities like Carthage and Kush, which were major trading centers—with, of course, the typical fantasy villages spread throughout the nation.

Could you tell me a bit about afropunk, and those inspirations?

Afropunk started as a form of music and was a battle cry against the norm. It isn't easily defined. I consider *Bone Herder* afropunk because it takes a typical white/western genre, fantasy, and I am turning it on its head. I do enjoy Western fantasy, but it has its issues in its portrayals of BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color) characters. I wanted something centered on people that look like me.

I want to make fully fleshed out characters that aren't stereotypes of the "dark continent" trope. I want black characters that have hopes and dreams and that grow. They aren't just sidekicks. They exist in thriving worlds and realities with cultures that should be valued and explored.

The Bone Herder centers around the main character, Cass, and her struggles with tradition. What can you tell me about her village and daily life?

Cass's parents run the blacksmithing shop in one of the local villages. I want to create a strong picture of a Black family, so there will be flashbacks of their interactions.

Cass helps in the shop sometimes and really looks up to her parents' example. She is going to join the tradition of Bone Herders. They go



TUMO MERE

across the countryside punishing wrong-doers by flaying their bones and burying them. This is part of a pact with the Flesh Folk, an ancient and monstrous race of beings.

What can you tell me about the pact and the Flesh Folk, without delving into spoilers?

Without too much spoilers, the Flesh Folk were becoming too numerous, and their ravenous craving was becoming an actively malevolent force.

As a team, we've been discussing the Flesh Folk themselves. We've been kind of comparing them to *Alien*, which had soldiers, Queens, and other hierarchy. We modeled the Flesh Folk after that idea a bit. As they incorporate more bones and flesh, they go from draggers, to crawlers, to walkers, etc.

I haven't completely figured out the society's ideas on the Flesh Folk. Cass gets a glimpse of them, so she believes, but it feels like it would be like when someone spills salt. Some people will always throw it over their shoulder, others dismiss it as superstition.

The Bone Herders are begrudgingly respected, but in many ways reviled.

Yeah, how do the Bone Herders decide guilt and punishment?

They try and investigate, but it isn't a perfect practice, which will also come into play. I will definitely have arcs where people try and take advantage of their duties.



TUMO MERE

What elements have you specifically been drawing from existing African cultures to build this world?

The use of Kente cloth in the clothing as well as some mixes of modern and ancient African architecture. I'm not African, but as a Black American, I do feel some connection to Africa, though it's a bit nebulous.

I'm trying to be respectful because Africa is not a monolith. It has thousands of cultures and languages, which is part of why I chose a fictional country to set the story in rather than a real one.

I will bring in more cultural inspirations as the story progresses. Right now, it's more focused on Cass and Analleli just to establish their relationship and the beginning of the story.

What is that relationship like?

Tenuous. Cass is furious at Analleli. She literally tells her that she is going to kill her one day for the death of her father and for taking her away from her home.

Meanwhile, Analleli is a woman that is tired of doing her duty. She has regrets, but she feels a strong sense of duty. She wouldn't wish her life upon anyone.

What happened to cause Analleli to kill Cass' father?

When Analleli comes to collect Cass, her father and mother try to protect her. No one wants their child to be a Bone Herder. Cass's father tries to attack Analleli, and he loses his life in the process.

Let's shift gears for a moment. Could you tell me a bit about the process of creating a comic? We haven't had a comic writer before, so I'm curious to hear what got you started and what the experience has been like.

I actually started the comic during [Gail Simone's Comics School](#) that she did on Twitter when the quarantine started. I had always wanted to do comics, but it has no standard way of writing like, say, screenplays.

I wrote the comic, and it was originally 8 pages. Gail and the comic school community really enjoyed it, so I thought I would do the Kickstarter if I found an artist, which I did. I also have a sequential artist and a concept artist working with me, as well as a friend who wanted to contribute his art half way through. We got a ton of money, so we are going to do a full first issue of 24-30 pages with the additional stretch goals.



MORGAN MADELINE

Can you walk me through the process of working with the artists to achieve your vision?

Yeah. I have a general idea of what I want a character to look like and maybe some inspirations for how they look or their attitude. I create a character sheet that has a general description of their characteristics and notable features. I talk it over with the concept artist and then I let them bring my vision to life. I don't want to be super strict, because I want them to show off their styles. So, for Cass, I think we had four different character models and we picked which one we liked best and tweaked it until it was right.

The script itself has descriptions on what's happening in each panel. It's a fine line between po-

licing the artist too much, but letting your vision also come through some. You have to trust your artist.

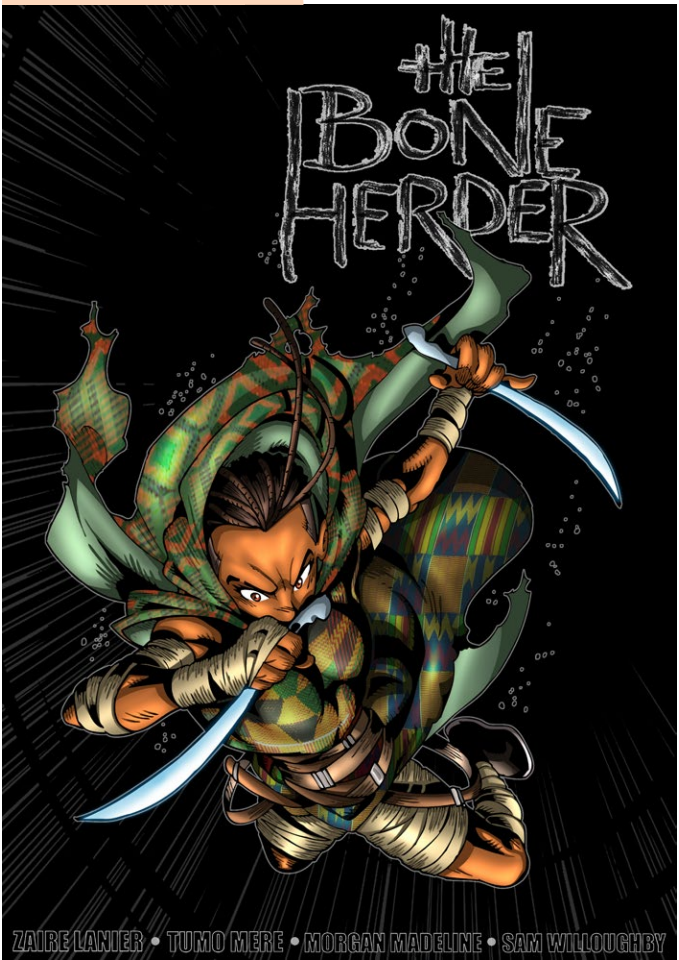
How have you found the comic-making experience overall?

It's hard, but I find it rewarding. I really enjoy my team and they do excellent work. It's humbling and exciting to see them bring the visions in my head to paper.

Is there anything else about this project that we haven't touched on and you'd like to share?

I don't think so. I am just really excited. My team is awesome. We are just really thankful for everyone's support and interest. This went so far beyond what we ever thought it could.

SAM WILLOUGHBY



This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Thanks to Zaire for joining us! If you like what you heard about Bone Herder, you can find Zaire on [Twitter](#), check out the Bone Herder [Kickstarter](#) page, or visit her [website](#).

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

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

BETTER WORLDS, OR PERFECT ONES

written by MasterThief

 REVOLUTION  HISTORY  THEORY & ANALYSIS

“The political and social effects of revolution are measured not in years, but in generations, or even centuries. There are, in fact, only two iron laws that seem to apply to all major revolutions. First, they generate immense turmoil and suffering. Second, they confound the expectations of their founders and their enemies alike. As Charles Issawi liked to point out, “Revolutions revolve 360 degrees.”

—Gary Sick¹

Worldbuilding is always done in the service of a story. And there are few stories that involve more excitement or peril than tales of revolutions: fundamental, often violent changes and reorganizations of government, nation, state, and even people. For all of recorded human history, governments have risen and fallen. Until fairly recently, their ends were usually the result of conquests or dissolutions that common people had no control or say over, and resulted in the mere replacement of one monarch or dynastic line with another.

It was not until 1568, when the Seventeen Provinces of what would become the modern Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg began an eighty-year war for independence from their distant Spanish Habsburg rulers, that a “popular” rebellion against an established monarchy succeeded, resulting in a free and independent Dutch Republic in 1648.² Perhaps not by coincidence, this was the same year that Europe’s bloody wars of religion came to an end with the Peace of Westphalia. Forty years later, England experienced its own “Glorious” Revolution, a nearly bloodless uprising against an unpopular king that established the first “constitutional”—power-limited—monarchy. The pace of revolu-

tions quickened in the following centuries. The years between 1774 and 1849 are unofficially known as the “Age of Revolutions,” marked by continent-spanning revolts against absolute royal rule across both Europe and the Americas.³ The American Revolution created a new, prosperous, and steadily expansionist country, while the contemporaneous French Revolution resulted in the violent end of a monarchy, years of state terror, and the rise of a new and even more absolutist Emperor, Napoleon, with designs on the rest of Europe. In turn, Napoleon’s wars resulted in more revolutions across the colonies of Spain, Portugal, and France. In the Americas: uprisings from Mexico, Peru, and Argentina, to Brazil, to the first (and so far only) successful national-level slave revolt in the French colony of Haiti. Though Napoleon was defeated and most European monarchies continued, European revolutionary fervor erupted again in 1830 and 1848, affecting nations from Portugal to Poland, Denmark to Italy, though in many of these countries the old regimes were quickly restored.

These revolutions had an impact on a struggling philosopher-journalist named Karl Marx, who became obsessed with the study of political economy and revolution. Marx theorized that the true motor of history was in material conditions, and that each era is determined by economic relations between classes. When societies outgrow one kind of economic relation, revolution is the necessary result, leading to a restructuring of social order. For Marx and his

disciples, “history begins from ‘primitive’ communism—an ‘immediate’ unity and harmony—to move outwards through a long self-sundering as man exploits man and classes ‘struggle’ for ascendancy. And history returns at last to the original unity, but in the ‘higher,’ self-knowing, and fully ‘realized’ form of ‘full communism.’”⁴

Marx’s ideals, widely dismissed at the time, would go on to inspire a new wave of revolutions in the twentieth century after the First World War. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia was the first, organizing a new Soviet Union expressly along the lines of a permanent revolutionary order, one which sought nothing less than to remake the world in the mold of “full Communism.” Other countries endured their own revolutions, some inspired by Communist thought, and others—like German National Socialism and Italian Fascism—reacting to it, leading to a new and even bloodier World War. Communist revolutions continued through the 20th century, with many old orders in countries from China to Eastern Europe swept away at gunpoint.

Utopian political theory was not confined to Communists, with everyone from Islamists in Iran and Egypt to Democratic Socialists in northern Europe laying out their own political programs to bring about revolution, some by peaceful democratic means, others through violent ones.

Speculative fiction, itself a product of the 20th Century, has provided frame stories for all kinds of revolutions: the heady mix of libertarianism and anarchism in Robert A. Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, a rebellion against corruption and decadence in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*, the revenge-driven revolts

The word utopia is from a Greek phrase meaning “no place.” It was first used as the title of a book by the English philosopher and lawyer Thomas More. More’s Utopia is, perhaps, one of the first known instances of worldbuilding: a description of an imaginary island and its hypothetically perfect government “whose home is in words, for I think it can be found nowhere on earth.”⁵

¹ Gary Sick, “Iran: The Adolescent Revolution,” *Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 1 (1995) p. 145, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24357446>. Issawi, an Egyptian economist, also published a short collection of aphorism and essays—*The Laws of Social Motion* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1991)—which is also worthwhile reading for any worldbuilder...or revolutionary.

² Encyclopedia Britannica, “Eighty Years’ War,” <https://www.britannica.com/event/Eighty-Years-War>.

³ See generally Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context 1760–1840* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

⁴ Anthony Kenny, ed., *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 211.

⁵ Dominic Baker-Smith, “Thomas More,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2014, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thomas-more/>.

of Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn*. This is to say nothing of the speculative retellings of historical revolutions, from C.C. Finlay's *Traitor to the Crown* series and its magical take on the American Revolution, to George Orwell's tragic allegory of the Bolshevik Revolution in *Animal Farm*.

There's been plenty written and said about the morality, military strategy, economics, sociology, and everything else about revolutions. What I aim to provide here is a guide to revolutionary politics for worldbuilders. While academics have come up with infinitely many categories of revolutions, for a science fiction, fantasy, or speculative fiction writer, they can be grouped into two broad kinds: the practical and the utopian.

First, the practical revolution is about changing the most intolerable and unjust aspects of the world, be it a distant or autocratic government, the lack of religious freedom, or systems of slavery or servitude. Compromise, alliances, and an eye towards not going where the populace doesn't want to go are the hallmarks of a practical revolution.

By contrast, the utopian revolution is about changing basically *everything*: the people, the nation, the world, economic systems, family life, in pursuit of the perfection of society itself. Utopian revolutions are marked by both high and sweeping ideals, and deep piles of rubble and corpses.

Which of these paths your own worlds' revolutions take will determine many details of your world: your heroes and antagonists; the stakes of your conflict; the strategies and tactics of your world's militaries; the organization of families,

neighborhoods, towns, and cities; the occupations and outlooks of your lower, middle, and upper classes; your world's art and architecture, and above all, the deepest question of politics and philosophy: Are people fundamentally good or evil? What is the ideal state? Who should rule, and why? And what, ultimately, is the point of revolution: to make things *better*, or to make things *perfect*?

FIX ABUSES? OR START OVER?

It is no coincidence that the first successful political revolutions came at a time when political philosophy was questioning the legitimacy and wisdom of monarchies, asking the first question that a revolutionary worldbuilder must ask: what, in the existing government, makes revolution necessary? Is the problem with the current rulers, such that limited changes in the structure of government and enacting long-delayed reforms enough? Or is the problem deeper, with the existing society itself?

The practical side—exemplified by the writings of John Locke, Edmund Burke, Charles-Louis Baron de Montesquieu, and Alexis de Tocqueville—is about how to build political order in a world of imperfect human beings, and how to keep it running while avoiding both tyranny and mob rule. As Locke noted, revolution becomes a possibility “if a long train of abuses, prevarications, and artifices, all tending the same way, make the design visible to the people, and they cannot but feel what they lie under, and see whither they are going; it is not to be wondered, that they should then rise themselves, and endeavor to put the rule into such hands which may secure to them the ends for government was at first erected....”⁶

⁶ John Locke, “On the Dissolution of Government, §225”, *The Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1689), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/222#Locke_0057_497.

What are some possessions that the people of your world might collect? What makes them significant?

100+ Prompts!

What social classes and class mobility exist in your world, and what are they based on?

Describe one of your world's holidays. Why were they founded, and what do people do during them?



#worldbuilding-wednesday

Join our Discord for more weekly prompts!



Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish parliamentarian and philosopher who witnessed both practical and utopian revolutions, preferred the practical ones, noting how the contemporaneous French Revolution had ended in the destruction of essential individual rights, the ownership of property, stable government, and the “little platoon”: small institutions of civil society such as parishes, small towns, and even social clubs.⁷ Meanwhile, the French jurist Montesquieu noted the practical importance of dividing power among different people in any just government, and particularly separating the powers of *making* law from the powers of *enforcing* it, lest the resulting government concentrate power in the hands of one person, and the whole system fall into tyranny.⁸ And Tocqueville, a French diplomat and philosopher, found much to admire in the end result of the practical revolution that had taken place in America fifty years before. Speaking of what he saw in the direct democracy of a New England town meeting, he wrote that:

[The average citizen] is devoted to his township because he helps to run it; he loves it, for he has nothing to complain about; his ambition and future rely on it; he is engaged in all the happenings of local life; he is comfortable in this confined space; he is engaged in the government of society... he acquires a taste for order; he understands the balance of powers and has clear, practical ideals on the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.⁹

The best known examples of such a revolution were the English Glorious Revolution, and the American Revolution, each of which rested on constrained and limited government, certain inviolable individual rights, methods to channel popular discontent into prudent reform, and

⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), 26, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/burke1790.pdf>.

⁸ Charles Louis de Secondat and Baron de Montesquieu, “Of the Constitution of England” in *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. T. Evans (1748), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/837#Montesquieu_0171-01_1212.

⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London: Penguin Classics, [1840] 2003).

consistent, long-standing, fairly applied laws.¹⁰ But even these basic demands can provoke violent responses if they are made of autocratic governments in no mood for change and the practical revolutionaries lack the means to defend themselves. This was the fate of revolutions in 1848 in Prussia, France, and many states of Italy, which saw the current regimes entrenched even deeper. Even in states where past practical revolutions have succeeded, a failure by the existing government to live up to the revolution's principles can lead to renewed popular anger and demands for reform, as recent events should remind us all. Indeed, the history-minded Tocqueville gave a prescient warning in 1840 of what would happen if a practical revolution backslides:

[T]his present industrial aristocracy, having impoverished and brutalized the men it exploits, leaves public charity to feed them in times of crisis.... Between the worker and employer, there are many points of contact but no real relationship... if ever aristocracy and the permanent inequality of social conditions were to infiltrate the world once again, it is predictable that this is the door by which they would enter.¹¹

The Utopian side started from an entirely different perspective, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's declaration that "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."¹² But unlike Locke, Rousseau held that in order to establish a "general will"—a collective preference on how the world is to be run—that could give people back their true freedom, there could be no reserved individual rights. He concluded that anyone who was unaware of what the general will is may be forced to act in accordance with it: in essence, forced to be free.¹³ Rousseau's thought had a profound impact on Maximilian Robespierre and Louis Saint-Just, leaders during the opening years of the French Revolution. Unfortunately, in their hands the enforcement of the "general will" against all possible challengers justified political repression, mass executions at the guillotine of suspected enemies of the revolution, and ill-fated attempts to replace popular religious sentiment with a "Cult of the Supreme Being." Robespierre and Saint-Just's deaths at the hands of the utopian revolution they led marked the end of what would be called "The Reign of Terror."

The catastrophic failures of the French Revolution echoed across Europe for decades, as intellectuals and thinkers debated how the revolution went so wrong. It was not until Karl Marx's writings that anything approaching utopian political

thought became popular again. By the late 19th Century, existing political orders in Europe, in Marx's view, had reached a crisis point. By exploitation of the lower and working proletarian classes, Marx wrote, a wealthy bourgeoisie was piling up wealth for itself, just as the old nobility had, and just as Tocqueville had feared. To Marx, the time was now ripe for the proletariat, in inevitably violent revolution, to absorb or eliminate the bourgeoisie; and through a hopefully short-lived "dictatorship of the proletariat," abolish all distinctions between human classes.¹⁴ While there were many variants of Marxist thought, by far the most influential was inspired by Vladimir Lenin, who led the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and became the first and undisputed leader of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In particular, Lenin developed the theory of the "vanguard," a group of professional revolutionaries drawn from the proletariat that would safeguard the revolution from both internal and external enemies.¹⁵ By necessity, the vanguard had to work in secrecy before the revolution began in earnest; and continue afterward with total political power until the last social remnants of the old regime were eliminated. Lenin and his successors made a point to expand their revolution worldwide, using the resources of the USSR to create vanguard-led revolutionary movements, co-opting or overthrowing non-Communist governments through propaganda, agitation, espionage, and in many cases by direct military intervention.¹⁶ Lenin himself, in noting the inevitability of class struggle in Marxist—and perhaps all utopian—revolutions, said:

People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. Champions of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realise that every old institution, how ever barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is *only one* way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can—and, owing to their social position, must—constitute the power capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organise those forces for the struggle.¹⁷

¹⁰ Kenny, 321-29.

¹¹ Tocqueville, p. 648

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. H.J. Tozer (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, [1762] 1998), 5.

¹³ Kenny, 332

¹⁴ Ibid., 351

¹⁵ Vladimir Lenin, "The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organization of the Revolutionaries" in *What Is To Be Done?*, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (1901), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iv.htm>.

¹⁶ Kenny, 356.

¹⁷ Vladimir Lenin, *Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, trans. George Hanna (1913), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/mar/x01.htm>.

Like these real revolutions, fictional ones have a choice of paths between the slow and plodding practical, or the faster but riskier utopian. In addition, worldbuilders must consider what trends and events specifically incite the revolution: the rise of a “middle class” between peasantry and nobility, increased access to education that gives more people free time to think about better forms of government, dissatisfaction with government policies ranging from taxes on tea or state religions, to institutions of serfdom, indentured servitude, or outright slavery, to catastrophic defeat in a major war.

MAKE ALLIES? OR TARGET ENEMIES?

Another consideration for worldbuilding revolutions is whether your revolutionaries will seek allies, or make it a point to go after enemies. In general, practical revolutions try to seek as many allies as possible, both foreign and domestic. Accordingly, they are willing to make compromises or concessions. The Glorious Revolution in England, directed against an unpopular Catholic king, was aided by the Netherlands. Not only did the Dutch share England’s Protestant faith and its style of constitutional monarchy, Dutch *stadtholder* William of Orange, who descended from English royalty, was expressly invited by the English Parliament to take the throne. In addition, William and the Parliament used their authority to make allies *within* the British Isles to ensure the success of their Revolution, mandating religious tolerance and equal rights for any Protestant, of whatever sect, who would swear loyalty to the Crown.

Likewise, the American Revolution 100 years afterward owed much to the assistance of the French, who gladly took the opportunity to hamstring their British rivals. American revolutionary leaders one-upped the British, promising religious freedom to everyone, not just Protestants; and they intentionally kept the aims of their revolution modest to ensure no defections among the rebelling colonies. Yet while these leaders made it a point to leave as much of the power of government in the hands of the individual colonies, this meant compromising with the southern colonies where slavery was legal. Although the post-revolutionary order ended the worst abuses, it also guaranteed a property right in slaves, considered a “birth defect” of America’s founding, and a difficult legacy that the people of America still struggle with to this day.

In contrast, utopian revolutions look for ideological uniformity first among both their own people and foreign allies, and any compromises are by necessity tactical and short-lived. Both the French and Bolshevik Revolutions expended huge efforts and costs to guard themselves from rival factions, whether the Girondists and Montagnards in France, or the Mensheviks of Russia, all of whom faced state repression and often execution. In their foreign relations as well, utopian revolutionary states and movements are carefully chosen and monitored. The various secret police and intelligence forces of the USSR, particularly after the Second World War, made a point to hand-pick native Communists from other countries, train them in the USSR, and send them home with both carefully selected ideologies and an absolute loyalty to directions from the “Centre,” inevitably in Moscow.¹⁸



GHRANZE

Whichever model your revolutionaries select will determine the theme and tone of your story. Will your characters be acting publicly and openly, giving speeches and making their case for change in public forums, facing down hostile and repressive governments directly? Or will they be operating in closed, conspiratorial secrecy, working through assassination and covert organizing, seeking to hit the government where its power is weakest, hoping to draw out a violent response? Likewise, if your revolutions have outside support, will it be with words, political influence, trade sanctions? Or will it involve weapons, the sending of revolutionary advisors, or even outside military action? How will the revolution deal with people who are “on the fence” and have not picked a side—will they be treated as potential allies to be won over, or potential threats or collaborators with the other side? The level of the populace’s education and literacy, the belief structures of major religions, the society’s level of technology, and its existing form of government—all of these will either be factors in, or determined by, the revolutionary path you choose for your story.

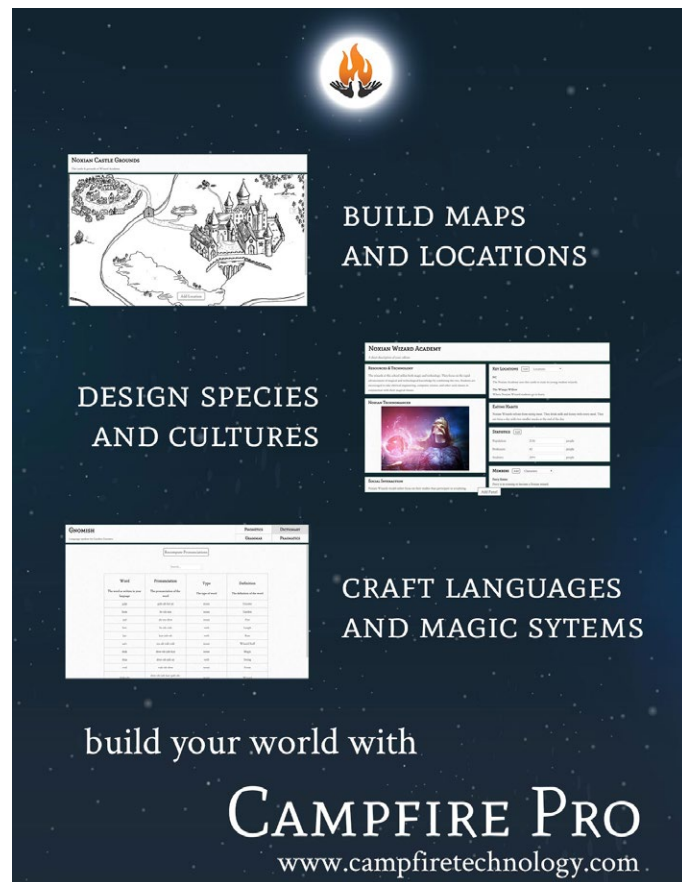
VIOLENCE: LAST RESORT, OR FIRST?

Practical revolutions, if human history is any guide, resort to violence only as a last resort. Though sometimes this is a weakness, particularly against authoritarian governments, against more open societies it can be a surprising strength, greatly reducing the economic, social, and human costs of badly needed reform. The American Revolution was preceded by a long series of attempts by the British colonies in North America to obtain peaceful solutions to their grievances, and it was not until actual war began that attempts at peaceful compromise were abandoned. In the 20th Century, revolutionary activists like Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi in British-controlled India, Martin Luther King Jr. in the racially segregated southern United States, Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel in Soviet-ruled Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Nelson Mandela under the white-controlled *apartheid* regime in South Africa, each developed methods and practices of non-violent civil disobedience and peaceful mass political actions, like strikes and boycotts. Often, this was done over the opposition of other leaders or of allied political movements. Nevertheless, the consistent practice of non-violence across all these revolutions turned the military and police strengths of the ruling governments into liabilities before both domestic and international public opinions.¹⁹

¹⁸ For an exhaustive history on this topic, see Christopher Andrew’s *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*.

Utopian revolutions have never had such qualms about violence. Yet these violent tendencies have been the violent end of more than one revolution; and even when violence has succeeded, the costs to a revolutionary movement can be extremely high. The refusal of the Soviet-directed German Communist Party in the early 1930's to compromise with other, non-Communist political parties was a major contributing factor to the rise of the Nazi regime.²⁰ Of course, the Nazi party turned not just on German Communists, but also their Soviet directors as well in the hell of WWII's Eastern Front. Likewise, when the Communist Party of China (CPC) made the decision to use military force to put down peaceful protests in Beijing in 1989, international condemnation was swift, and the government found itself on the defensive against its critics. The CPC's experience on the business end of attempted revolution is the driving force behind both its relentless attempts to expand its economy as a shield against popular discontent, and the creation of high-technology systems to monitor and suppress internal dissent.²¹ Indeed, the more utopian the revolution in human history, the more heavily those revolutions have brutalized people who do not conform with secret police, informants, enforced disappearances, labor camps, and mass graves.²²

Whether a fictional revolution will be peaceful or violent is, ultimately, the choice of its author. This is not to say that practical revolutions will always have happy endings, or that utopian revolutions will end in tragedy. It does howev-



er require the author to think about what kind of story they want to tell, what they want the theme of their story to be, and how the heroes and antagonists of their stories will seek and perpetuate power. It also requires a worldbuilder to think about how military forces will be organized and function, both for the revolutionaries and for the existing government. A nation with a highly professional military class, for example, will deal with a revolution very differently from one that relies on mass conscription. Likewise, the backgrounds of your revolution's

leaders will have a large role to play in whether and when violent revolution will be used. A revolution led by those formed in spiritual or pacifist traditions will choose very different tactics from a revolution led by hot-tempered political dissidents who have prior criminal records and spent years in the harshest prisons of the existing government.

ENDING THE REVOLUTION

Successful practical revolutions have an end. Once they've established a new political order, transitions from one generation of leaders to the next are usually peaceful, though not without bitter and contentious elections. While the ideals behind practical revolutions never really end—seeking “a more perfect union” appears to be an ongoing quest for Americans in particular—the pursuit of these ideals will, hopefully, rely less on dramatic contests of will or arms, and more on reason, persuasion, and the normal ways of politics. And even unsuccessful practical revolutions can still lay groundwork for future changes if their ideals stick around. Witness how the autocratic Prussians, badly shaken by the failed revolution of 1848, co-opted future revolutions by adopting social insurance and other reform legislation that endures today.²³ Utopian revolutions, by contrast, trend towards instability even when the revolutionaries win. Transitions between generations of leadership

in utopian revolutions often come with political infighting ending with power in the hands of a single strongman or ruling clique.²⁴ Future transitions of leadership in utopian revolutions run a real risk of falling apart, as the world has seen from Somalia to the former Yugoslavia to modern Syria. And if the revolutionaries lose, whether their loss was peaceful or violent, there is no shortage of apologists for failed utopias.²⁵

Whichever path the revolutions of your world take, always remember that unintended consequences not only make for good story-telling, they are also inevitable in any revolution. In fiction, unlike history, whether the consequences outweigh the rewards is up to you, the author.

Choose wisely.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

¹⁹ Several useful case studies of the challenges and successes of non-violent revolution can be found in Maria J. Stephan's and Erica Chenoweth's "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," available at https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IS3301_pp007-044_Stephan_Chenoweth.pdf.

For a comparative case study of the outcomes of violent versus nonviolent protest during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's American South, see Omar Wasow's "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting," available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542000009X>.

²⁰ Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 49; Steven Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg, and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 40-41.

²¹ Jeff Widener et al., "A Massacre, Erased," *Washington Post*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/opinions/global-opinions/tiananmen-square-a-massacre-erased/>.

²² For a summary of the human tragedies of utopian Communist revolutions across the 20th Century, see Stephane Courtois et al.'s *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*.

²³ Lorraine Boissoneault, "Bismarck Tried to End Socialism's Grip—By Offering Government Healthcare," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 14, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/bismarck-tried-end-socialisms-grip-offering-government-healthcare-180964064/>.

²⁴ Armando Iannucci's 2018 film, *The Death of Stalin*, is a loose, comedic, and surprisingly accurate retelling of the events surrounding the chaotic transition of power in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950's.

²⁵ Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, rev. ed., (New York: New York Review Books, 2016).

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR REVOLUTION

- Who rules before your revolution and how were they chosen? Is political power in the hands of a few, or many? Are the rulers physically close or distant to the places they rule?
- Who are considered the upper, middle, and lower classes of your society, and are there ways for people to move between each? Are there any groups of people who are enslaved or considered second-class?
- Do your world's religions say that people are equal, or are there distinctions among groups?
- How literate or well-educated are your people? Are books and printing presses widely available?
- Who fights for the existing government—professional soldiers or conscripts? Who inspires, leads, or assists them (philosophers, clerics, journalists, military commanders, populists)? Are there any political/ideological tests for leadership within the revolution?
- What is the precipitating event of your revolution? What is the desired end goal of your revolution?
- Do any foreign countries/powers support or oppose your revolution?
- Is your revolution based on force of arms, or can non-violent civil disobedience be used against the existing government?
- How does your revolution deal with enemies, traitors, or people on the fence? Are there any groups of people your revolution considers to be untrustworthy? Are there any tactics or strategies your revolution won't allow?
- If your revolution is over, who won and at what costs (life, economic, social)? If your revolution failed, why, and who is blamed for the failure? If your revolution was successful, has there been a transition of power between the people who first led the revolution and their successors? Was the transition peaceful or violent?
- Win or lose, did your revolution accomplish its goals?



HUSH: SECRET SOCIETIES IN REVOLUTIONS

by Seán Grey



POLITICS



HISTORY

REVOLUTION

Revolutions and secret societies have long shared a connection. Whether through military action or fostering divergent thought, these organizations have played key roles in several revolutions around the world. This article aims to help you create truly interesting and compelling revolutionary groups—a valuable skill for any prospective worldbuilder to add to their arsenal. Whether it be out of idealism and a desire for non-violent resistance, purely pragmatic, or somewhere in-between, revolutionaries have long engaged in cloak and daggers. It's time to peel back the curtain and find out why.

WHISPERED CONVERSATIONS

It is important to note that secret societies come in a variety of different flavors. For some of these groups, secrecy is only a means to foster martial revolution. Many a revolt has been stifled in its crib by informers and police raids, after all. For more peaceful groups, secrecy serves a different—if equally important—purpose: protecting ideas and conversations repressed by (usually) the government. Revolution does not



TITLE CARD BY TRISTEN FEKETE

have to be achieved through military means, and not all clandestine groups adopt violence as a tool. Secret societies can act as a forum for illegal or repressed thought. Many cultural transformations began in underground organizations, which encouraged non-conformative beliefs.

Violent revolutionaries are not the only group who form secret societies. Throughout history heterodox thought has been persecuted. These illicit beliefs often thrive within secret organizations because they have been forced underground. In many cases secret societies are founded with the explicit purpose of fostering divergent thought. The Bavarian Illuminati is an example of one such society. Its founder, Adam Weishaupt, wanted to spread the values of the Enlightenment throughout conservative Bavaria. Though formed on the first of May, 1776, it was not until April of 1778 that the group would call themselves the Order of Illuminati.¹ Initially limited to Weishaupt and his students, the organization would gradually begin to expand, partially by operating within the wide umbrella of German Freemasonry. These efforts would eventually stall, though the Order would continue to expand through individual recruiting. At the order's zenith it is suspected to have possessed up to 2,500 members, though only 650 of them have been reliably verified. The order attracted many intellectuals and liberal politicians and included such notable luminaries as Ferdinand of Brunswick and Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe.²

The Bavarian monarchy, influenced by the Catholic Church, had taken a repressive stance

in regards to free speech. As such, various secret societies, including the Illuminati, would be outlawed in a string of edicts from 1784 to 1790.³ This would prove to be the end of the Bavarian Illuminati. While active it was a venue for intellectual discussion, and a gathering place for like-minded individuals who didn't quite fit the monarchy's expectations. Though not affecting change through military means, the group aided in the expansion of Enlightenment values, such as religious tolerance and individual liberty. In many ways they laid the groundwork for a cultural revolution.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was an excellent example of this practical paranoia in action. Founded in 1858, its members wished to win an Irish republic through violent means.⁴ Paranoid about the reach of Dublin Castle (the seat of the British administration in Ireland), the Brotherhood organized themselves in the fashion of a secret society. The group was divided up into several "circles." The leader of each circle would choose nine lieutenants to operate beneath him. They would in turn choose their own nine sergeants who would then go on to choose nine subordinates of their own. The letters A, B, C and D were used to distinguish between each separate rank. Theoretically, this meant that each commander would only be aware of their hand-picked men. In practice this directive was often ignored by the various ranks who interacted freely.⁵ As a result an entire circle could be compromised if a member was arrested.

The Brotherhood would go on to play a key role in the Irish revolutionary period. The formation of the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF) in 1913 to en-

sure Home Rule in Ireland provided the IRB a ready source of recruits.

The outbreak of World War I caused a split in the IVF with the vast majority of the movement remaining outside IRB control.⁶ Despite this, the IRB would begin plotting a rebellion, even going so far as to contact Germany to request weapons.⁷ This would prove to be their undoing since the British deciphered German codes during the course of the war.⁸ Their interception of the German ship carrying arms proved ruinous for the IRB. With little hope of victory and confusion rife amongst the ranks, the leadership agreed to launch the rebellion on schedule. On Easter Monday 1916, IRB aligned forces seized several buildings around Dublin. The Easter Rising had begun. However, after a week of fighting, the IRB surrendered. Outgunned and vastly outnumbered by British forces, the rebels had been crushed.

Though a military defeat, the Rising was a *political* triumph for the IRB. It turned the Irish public against the British administration and led to wide support for the idea of an Irish republic. Though the IRB had been decimated, from its remains a new organization would arise—the infamous Irish Republican Army.

So far we have looked at examples on either end of the secret society spectrum, but not all will fit neatly into one category or the other. The White Lotus Society of medieval China practiced a fusion between the idealism of the

Illuminati and the pragmatism of the IRB. The Society had no love for the ruling Mongol Yuan dynasty. An unequal class system coupled with heavy taxation did much to create resentment among the peasantry of China.⁹ Kublai Khan's death in 1294 only made the situation worse by ushering in regular governmental instability thanks to dynastic infighting. By the 1340s, unrest was growing and the White Lotus were actively cultivating it as part of the wider Red Turban revolutionary movement.¹⁰

The Society was not created specifically to drive the Mongols from China, however. The White Lotus was a messianic Buddhist organization which had been outlawed for their beliefs. When their leader was captured and executed in 1351, the White Lotus Society openly revolted. Peasants across the empire rose with them. Soon the Yuan hold on China began to collapse and in 1368 a new emperor had risen: Emperor Hongwu of the Ming dynasty. Born Zhu Yuanzhang, a peasant, he had risen high in the Red Turbans before becoming ruler of all of China.¹¹ During his thirty-year rule as emperor, Hongwu would go on to reform much of the state's institutions. Hongwu was keenly aware of the role the White Lotus society had played in the Mongol downfall and his own subsequent success. To prevent a similar fate befalling himself, he would ban all secret societies despite the fact groups like theirs were a staple of Chinese society. Not even his erstwhile allies, the White Lotus, were spared, and they were swiftly stomped out.

⁶ White, Gerry, 'They Have Rights Who Dare Maintain Them': *The Irish Volunteers, 1913-15*, Atlas of the Irish Revolution, Cork University Press, 2017, pg. 168.

⁷ *ibid*, 172.

⁸ Aan de Wiel, Jérôme, *Ireland's War and the Easter Rising in A European Context*, Atlas of the Irish Revolution, Cork University Press, 201, pg. 231.

⁹ Messenger Charles, *The Ming Overthrow of Mongol Rule in China 1351-88*, Quercus, 2008, pg. 47.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 48.

¹¹ *ibid*, 52.

¹ Ed Josef Wäges and Reinhard Markner, tr Jeva Singh-Anand, *The Secret School of Wisdom*, Lewis Masonic 2015, pg. 15–16.

² René le Forestier, *Les Illuminés de Bavière et la franc-maçonnerie allemande*, Paris, 1914, Book 4 Chapter 2, pg. 389–429.

³ *ibid*, 453, 468–469, 507–508, 614–615.

⁴ McGee, Owen, *The Irish Republican Brotherhood*, Atlas of the Irish Revolution, Cork University Press, 2017, pg. 128.

⁵ O'Leary, John, *Recollections of Fenians and Fenianism*, Downey & Co, Ltd, London, 1896 (Vol. I & II), pg. 84.

CREATING SECRET SOCIETIES

Now that we've looked at a few historical examples of this unique relationship, it's time to apply it to your worlds and factions! Drawing on real world history is an excellent way to provide a solid foundation to your own worldbuilding efforts, but how can we make secret societies our own?

The most important step to consider is the core ideal(s) of the group. What are their goals? Is it spiritual in nature, entirely pragmatic, or something in-between? Can they realistically achieve those goals, or is it pie in the sky dreaming? This motive will inform the organization's name, methods, and ultimate fate, so it is important to figure it out early.

Let us say that our organization is a mix of ideological and practical. The land of Labar is dominated by an oppressive regime that silences dissenting viewpoints and enacts heavy taxation to fund its military. Formed from a mixture of disaffected intellectuals and desperate working class folk, our secret society is constantly balancing its inherent beliefs with a matter-of-fact approach. Unable to militarily achieve their aims, the society has turned to educating the largely poor & illiterate populace. If a military revolution cannot be achieved, a cultural one will have to suffice for now.

To this end, the group named themselves the Order of the Open Book. Members of the Order operate all over the country in illicit underground schools. They conduct classes in barns and kitchens while always keeping an eye out for the local constabulary. Forbidden books are rescued and spread through the Order's various branches to ensure no knowledge is lost. Flyers decrying the government are quietly printed and distributed. Those who speak out against the state are shuffled between safehouses and given a platform on which to speak. The Order has fully committed to a battle of hearts and

minds in their efforts to free the people of Labar from their oppressors.

This approach has gained them a great deal of popular support. Combined with a relatively decentralized leadership, this development has allowed the Order to survive despite governmental hostility. Though Labar has yet to be freed, the possibility of a popular revolt—or change from within by individuals elected to office who were educated by the Order—grows by the day...

Once the core belief is laid out, it becomes remarkably easy to construct the rest. Revolutionary organizations are inherently driven by a desire to change the world around them. Knowing why they strive for a better future—and what their “better future” looks like—will give you the seeds needed to turn your revolutions into compelling events.

It is important to note that secret societies rarely last long. Sometimes their enemies simply dismantle them. Even success inevitably leads to the society's dissolution. Victory eliminates the need for secrecy, and so they step out from the shadows. Considering what they fight for, who they fight against, and how they fight will provide a great jumping off point to determine whether a secret society is ultimately successful or if they are doomed to fall apart.

CONCLUSION

The Order of the Open Book is just one example of how to apply revolutionary secret societies to your own works. Revolutionaries and secret societies have long been friends—now it's your turn to investigate this deep relationship in your own works. Further research on this topic can be nothing but beneficial—this article offers only a meager selection compared to the wealth of information available to the prospective worldbuilder. Readers looking deeper into this topic are advised to remember that revolutions can have messy legacies that carry on to the present

day. Check out *Revolution as a Violent Act* by Cassidy M. Hammersmith on page 81 for one example of how bad things can get.

Clandestine organizations give worldbuilders a fascinating tool to offer insight into the upheavals in their worlds. Secret societies are not isolated from society, as they often strive to affect change from within it. Be it through military force, cultural teachings, or a fusion of the two, they will inevitably leave their mark. They can change the world—for the better or for the worse. Will your secret societies launch a bloody revolt, foster dissident thought, fight for equality, or seek some other change?

It's up to you to decide.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



ARTIST SHOWCASE

ALI HOFF

Interviewed by Tristen Fekete

INTERVIEW ART



My name is Ali Hoff, and I'm a freelance artist with a passion for worldbuilding. I currently work on a variety of things like concept art, book covers, and album artwork, as well as my own worlds and series.

I'm fairly new when it comes to all this, which started around three years ago. With my thirties on the horizon (this seems to be a great motivator for a lot of people, and I could see why at the time), I decided I had to be doing something creative for a career rather than the standard 9-5 job I was used to. Despite having had no artistic education, I always enjoyed being creative, so I decided to see if I could learn something in my spare time between a normal

job. I began by learning some pixel art for a couple of months, then tried my hand at some digital painting with a graphics tablet for another couple months before finally deciding to try and learn 3D. So I picked up Blender 3D—as it's free to try and it just clicked for me—after grabbing some courses online.

Do you stick mainly to Blender for your work, or do you use more than one program?

I tend to do everything in Blender. Occasionally I'll do some bits and pieces in Photoshop after, but I prefer just working in one bit of software if I can.

Honestly I would have never guessed your work is almost entirely 3D. A lot of it feels hand drawn and painted. Could you go a little into how your creation process starts and where some of the ideas for your pieces come from?

Yeah, especially with the release of 2.8, they really made things much easier to use and [Blender] feels much more like a modern bit of software.

The hand-drawn kind of style was a complete accident, to be honest. I can't remember how or

why, but I ended up stumbling across a YouTube tutorial for the "freestyle line set," which is a part of Blender that adds the ink-like outline. In the tutorial they also had a bit for a "toon shader" (which makes it look kind of like a cell-shaded game), but I couldn't get that part to work. I ended up leaving it out and using a more standard shader, but I really liked the outcome. Reminded me a little of older comics like Tintin, which I loved as a kid, so it stuck. I've been trying to refine it since then.



When I start something new, I mainly aim to make something with a recognizable element and something to explore. I really enjoy surreal elements and mixing the mundane with a sci-fi or weird element. I don't often go into a piece knowing exactly what it will end up like. I like to have a very basic idea for what I want to show and then create as I go. Finding new ideas leads to others, and you can end up at some really fun places.

I think visual exploration in art pieces is what draws a lot of creators and viewers to worldbuilding. Many of your pieces are connected through this character, Sojourn. Is the universe you've placed them in something you've planned out? Or do you let your process create the environment around the character and sort of roll with it?

I've planned out some broad themes and got an idea of some of the world's main locations, but I mostly like to let the creative process take the lead and use Sojourn as a vehicle to transport people around it. His name came from the direct meaning, "to temporarily stay somewhere,"

which I thought was quite fitting for both him as a character and me as a creator since I'm often all over the shop with ideas.

Have you encountered any issues with depicting other subject matters? Is there anything you'd like to delve into, subject- and/or method-related, moving forward?

Character design definitely feels like an area I struggle with, along with more organic subjects. These are definitely a couple of the many things on the list of things to learn and improve on. I've dabbled with animation a tiny bit and think that's something I'd like to look at a bit more this year as well. I would love to bring this world to life as an animated short or a game, so it seems like something I should start learning.

When you're working or thinking of new creations, what do you look to for inspiration?

Quite often when starting something new, I'll open up Pinterest and look through reference images I've put together, and one of my favorite subjects is architectural photography. I find

these photos great for inspiration as well as for helping with worldbuilding because they give you a great snapshot of a real world to build around. There's a few styles of architecture that really inspire me at the moment; particularly Brutalist, traditional Middle Eastern, and African. Sci-fi artwork from artists like Roger Dean, John Harris, Bruce Pennington, Moebius, and Chris Foss also provide a never ending source of inspiration for me.

What advice would you give your past self or other people looking to further explore their creative sides?

I'd definitely say just start being creative—even just a couple of minutes a day if that's all you've got. I had always thought about doing this kind of thing on and off for years before properly having a go at it, and now I just wish I had started sooner.

This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Thanks to Ali for joining us! If you enjoyed checking out Ali's work, you can find more on his [Instagram](#) or [ArtStation](#). You can also check out his [Patreon](#), where supporters get extra goodies!

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

 BACK TO INDEX



THINKING SIDeways

ABOUT INTERNAL WARS

by Robert Meegan, illustrations by Ahmed ElGharabawy

 HISTORY  WARFARE

The idea of a civil war is not new. Indeed, the term itself derives from the Latin *bellum civile*, meaning a *bellum* (war) fought between *cives* (the citizens of a nation).¹ The Romans knew of what they spoke; even using a fairly narrow definition of the term, Rome saw at least a dozen such *bella*. This total doesn't even begin to cover the spectrum of revolts, rebellions, uprisings, and mutinies that kept first

the republic and then the empire on edge, from founding through fall.

The Romans were not the first to experience internal conflict. The island of Corcyra was initially colonized by the Greek city-state of Corinth and later gained independence. As an independent nation, the Corcyraeans prospered and managed to avoid the unpleasantness of the

¹ David Armitage, "Civil War and Revolution," *Agora*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2009, pp. 18–22.

Persian Wars that devastated much of the region in the fifth century BCE. This peace and prosperity collapsed in a relatively brief but brutal civil war that began when Athens and Corinth began to lobby Corcyra for an alliance in what became the Peloponnesian War. The majority of the citizens favored Athens, while the wealthy and powerful preferred Corinth. A series of staged political events by both sides escalated into armed conflict. Attempts by Athens to mediate the situation failed; open warfare broke out with the populous enlisting slaves to their cause, while the wealthy hired mercenaries. The resulting carnage led the Athenian historian Thucydides to write philosophically about the particular vehemence of civil war, noting the extremities of actions and the desire for reprisals.²

Having documented the antiquity of the practice, it's probably good to step back for a moment to discuss what a civil war actually is. This is not a moot question; historians and social scientists have debated the issue for many years. The strict reductionists claim that nothing qualifies unless it is completely internal and actually a war. The first criteria rules out anything where external parties have instigated events or have materially aided the factions. The second criteria stipulates a war. That is to say, those who adhere to this rigid standard require the clash of armies on a grand scale. From this perspective, civil wars are very rare indeed.

Strict empiricists have defined a more numeric approach, defining a civil war as a conflict which meets the following criteria:³

- The combatants are the government and one or more internal groups using violence

to seize power over the whole nation or a major region or to get the government to make major changes in policy.

- At least 1,000 people were killed during the conflict with at least 100 killed each year of the war.
- Each side suffered at least 100 fatalities.

Under this approach, there were approximately 130 to 170 civil wars in the period between 1945 and 1999 alone (nuances in the first criteria account for the uncertainty). These wars killed between sixteen and twenty-two million people, making them roughly six times more deadly than wars fought between nations.

There is also the taxonomic approach, proposed by political scientist Harry H. Eckstein. In this view, the genus *internal war* contains the species *civil war*, *rebellion*, *revolution*, etc.⁴ These latter terms are all subtle nuances on a broad concept. This perspective makes it possible to look at the American and French Revolutions as variations upon a theme, rather than as events of radically different natures.

Certainly, the most common solution to the problem of a definition might be called the "victor's version of history": if the insurgents win, the war was a glorious revolution, and those who fought against the state were heroic patriots. On the other hand, should the incumbents remain in control, the war was an uprising, a revolt, or a mutiny, and those who challenged the state were lawless bandits. This particular outlook has obvious weaknesses, but it remains perpetually popular.

TALKING ABOUT A REVOLUTION

If we use civil wars and their kin in our worldbuilding, we need to understand what causes these wars and what sets them apart from conflicts between opposing nations. That's going to require us to poke rather deeply into some uncomfortable topics. What we find will give us the tools to create realistic worlds for more powerful storytelling.

The Age of Enlightenment did much to establish the groundwork for modern democracy and is often looked upon as the foundation for the Age of Revolutions, the period from roughly 1770 through 1850 which saw wars of independence and revolutions throughout the Americas and across Europe. In particular, the works of John Locke heavily influenced the creators of the United States of America, while Jean-Jacques Rousseau served as inspiration for the leaders of the *Première République*, the First French Republic.

Collectively, the great minds of the Enlightenment did much to advance the political, social, and economic sciences, and their works served as a basis for understanding phenomena such as civil wars and revolutions. The enlightened view of internal wars revolved around the concept known as the "Social Contract." A social contract is the agreement that the people support the government by paying taxes, serving in the military, and otherwise obeying the laws enacted, while in exchange, the government provides physical and economic security. This agreement may be tacit, based upon tradition, or explicit, where it is codified by a constitution. In either case, the populous *consents* to be governed. Under this theory, if the government does not live up to its obligations the populace has not only the right, but also the duty to overturn the government. This theory was specifically cited in the Declaration of Independence used as a basis for the American Revolution.⁵

It's interesting to note that the people who believed in this theory of revolution were very particular about who was allowed to invoke it. For example, when Haitians had a revolution to gain their freedom from France, fellow revolutionaries Napoleon Bonaparte, who sent his brother-in-law to crush the rebellion, and Thomas Jefferson, who imposed an embargo on the new nation (in order to prevent slaves in the United States from getting rebellious ideas of their own), proved less than sympathetic.⁶ This reality exposes an inconvenient issue regarding the right of revolution when the social contract is broken, namely that the righteousness of the cause depends greatly upon which side you're on.

J.D. Venner's article, "Let My People Go" on page 71 of this issue has much more on the Haitian revolution and how it relates to worldbuilding.

² Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Translated by Richard Crawley, J.M. Dent & Sons, Limited, 1914.

³ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97 2003: pp. 75–90.

⁴ Harry Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," *History and Theory*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1965, pp. 133–163

⁵ Thad W. Tate, "The Social Contract in America, 1774-1787: Revolutionary Theory as a Conservative Instrument," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1965, pp. 376–391.

⁶ *Dominican Republic and Haiti: Country Studies*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2001.

I WANTED EVERYTHING

In the middle of the twentieth century, the nearly constant inter-state warring that had lasted roughly seventy-five years ground to a halt with the end of World War II. This wasn't to say that there was universal peace between nations, but the epic conflicts that had engulfed entire continents faded into the past. With the exceptions of the wars in Korea and Vietnam (the second phase, from 1965 through 1975) and the Iran-Iraq war, those wars that did erupt tended to be very short and highly localized.

On the other hand, internal wars became nearly endemic, as roughly three times as many after 1944 took place compared with the period ranging from the start of the century to that point. That's the kind of distinction upon which academic reputations can be made, and historians and sociologists immediately leapt upon it. Several facts became immediately apparent. One was that the majority of these later wars were fought in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, as opposed to the earlier wars found in Europe and the Americas. Another was that the average duration of an internal war increased in the second half of the century.

The initial inclination was to consider these wars to be somehow inferior to "proper revolutions,"—defining proper revolutions as high-minded patriotism choosing to debate matters of great import on the field of battle while the rest consisted of lawless mobs who raise insurrections without legitimate grievances. A school of thought developed that greed and rampant criminality drove these internal wars.

This impression was strengthened by reporting from war-torn countries that emphasized the harsh brutality of the combatants and the relatively paltry wealth that was fought over.⁷ Revolutionary leaders were referred to as "warlords," which was intended to brand them as brigands and bandits. A number of academics supported this idea of "loot-driven rebellion."⁸

A problem with this theory is that the earlier "proper" internal wars and inter-state wars both had similar rates of looting and theft. The American, French, Russian, and Chinese revolutionaries all used seizure of goods and property to finance their rebellions, and no small quantity of the confiscated material found its way into the backpacks of soldiers. Quaint, but meaningful, evidence for this practice exists in the memoirs and diaries from almost every conflict in the last several hundred years which report advancing troops gathering the most unlikely items either for immediate use or to send home.⁹

Further, while attacks with machetes and axes are undoubtedly horrific, they're more a result of weapon availability. Victims slashed by cavalry sabres or shot by rocket-propelled grenades are unlikely to be pleased by being killed or maimed with more sophisticated weapons. When an attacking aircraft can indiscriminately cause scores of casualties, the space for debating ethics becomes treacherously narrow.

From a sociological perspective, the idea that recent internal wars appear more brutal and driven by plunder should be treated with suspicion, given that those who promote the notion tend to be North Americans and Europeans talking about wars in Asia and Africa.¹⁰ Cultural

biases cannot be ruled out and, in some cases, are even overtly stated in the literature.

LET'S KEEP IT BETWEEN US

A new approach to looking at internal wars developed late in the twentieth century: ethnic nationalism. The reasoning was that different ethnic and religious groups were naturally incompatible. This incompatibility would inevitably lead to conflict. Moreover, while most other sources of conflict, such as political beliefs and social status were mutable, ethnicity was considered to be fixed at birth. As a result, individuals were locked into these conflicting groups.¹¹ However, this view overlooked the growing trend toward ethnic diffusion, where increasingly urban and mobile lifestyles softened the edges of ethnicity through intermarriage and the diaspora of young people spreading out to seek better opportunities.

Other authors preferred religion as the distinctive factor. In their view, the future was to be ongoing strife between Islam and "the West," which was either secular or Christian (and occasionally both) depending upon the writer. This became known as the "Clash of Civilizations" after the title of the article (and later book) by Samuel P. Huntington. While these ideas gained little traction among mainstream scholars, they flourished among more reactionary commentators on both sides of Huntington's clash. Those in the West envisioned their countries buried under waves of immigrants with strange customs, while the theocratic leaders greatly feared being undermined by the temptations of decadent secularism.

Both ethnicity and religion certainly play some role in the revolutions and civil wars of the latter

twentieth century, but they fail to answer the basic question of why an uprising would occur. That they are insufficient themselves can be seen in the many countries with diverse populations which have not experienced internal conflicts. On the other hand, numerous instances of such conflicts in the same period had no meaningful ethnic or religious differences between the warring sides. Clearly something more is required to serve as a spark.

REVOLUTION 9

The end of the Cold War meant the end of superpowers engaging in war by proxy, resulting in several long-running insurgencies grinding to a stop as external sponsors became more concerned with their own affairs. To the surprise of many, this did little to stem the outbreak of internal wars around the world. For example, the breakup of Yugoslavia represented the kind of civil war not seen in Europe in half a century, while at the same time, old grudges resurfaced in the Fifth Iraqi-Kurds War, the Fifth Burmese War, the Fifth Lebanese War, and the Eighth Colombian War.

The usual factions of social scientists devoted to debating the nature of such events soon found their own longstanding conflict disrupted by the Information Revolution. Numerous research groups at universities and in international agencies began to collect (relatively) empirical data for the purposes of exploring the causes and consequences of conflict. Currently, the most frequently referenced of these datasets are:

- The Correlates of War (COW) Project,
- the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program,

⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1994.

⁸ Paul Collier and Anke Elisabeth Hoefler, "Justice-Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War," World Bank, 1999.

⁹ Joan E. Cashin, "Trophies of War: Material Culture in the Civil War Era," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2011, pp. 339–367; Beevor, Antony. *The Fall of Berlin, 1945*. Viking, 2003.

¹⁰ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics*, no. 54, Nov. 2001, pp. 99–118.

¹¹ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, 2011.

- and the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset Family by the Center for Comparative and International Studies.

Together, these sources exhaustively document conflicts from 1946 through the present. This mass of data has allowed researchers to perform statistical studies on the characteristics of these wars. The sheer quantity of information contained is staggering. For example, the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset has information on more than 800 ethnic groups, including their location and the nature of their settlement (regional, urban, migrant, etc.), their political power, their connections to other ethnicities as well as their linguistic, religious, and racial makeup. The UCDP/PRIO Dataset is a year-by-year listing of conflicts, including one-sided and non-state actions. The CoW extends their coverage back to 1816 and also includes additional information, such as military capabilities (military expenditures; weapon, iron and steel, and energy production; and population), territorial relationships including boundary changes, colonial relationships, and diplomatic exchanges.

This ocean of data has allowed for extensive trawling in search of meaningful conclusions. Frequently, when social scientists are provided with large datasets, different researchers come to very different conclusions, generally supporting their preconceptions. As one might expect, given the name of the CoW dataset, a common approach has been the use of multivariate analysis. This method calculates the relative importance of each variable in determining an outcome—the statistical correlation. For example: if we had demographic data such as age, sex, height, and nationality about a thousand people as well as whether they drink coffee, tea, or milk for breakfast, we could use multivariate analysis to create a model for determining how likely it is that any random person in the set would drink milk.

SUBSCRIBE TO WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE



Worldbuilding Magazine began in 2017, and has continued thanks to its many incredible volunteers. In that time we've had the pleasure of interviewing authors, podcast hosts, game developers, and more! Plus, check out our team's amazing art, articles, stories, and tips.

Clearly, there's a lot happening. We're just excited that we get to talk about worldbuilding with you.

Go download each issue of *Worldbuilding Magazine* for free, and subscribe for more!

Subscribe to *Worldbuilding Magazine*

Join our Discord Community



The problem is that the model would be, at best, incomplete. For one thing, it wouldn't necessarily apply to someone outside of the dataset. It's possible that the model may have no application whatsoever in a particular country that wasn't sampled and where no one drinks milk. The data also doesn't contain any information about those who prefer water or fruit juice for breakfast. Or those who skip breakfast entirely. The model is only as complete as its inputs. Within the population sampled, it may still be inaccurate because sufficient data wasn't considered—even if eighty percent of the adults preferred to drink coffee or tea. If the remaining pool consisted entirely of members of a religion with a prohibition on drinking hot beverages, that one fact, which wasn't included in the dataset, would account for *all* of the probability that a random adult would prefer milk. Even data that is included might be meaningless; a person's height is almost entirely determined by their age, sex, and nationality. In statistical terms it's dependent upon those values and using it in an analysis will do little more than to dilute the significance of the other three.

Does this mean that all attempts to analyze data are doomed to failure? Of course not. But it does require the reader to pay careful attention to the variables used for the analysis and what outcome is being calculated. If someone studied the relative importance of national ethnic diversity in predicting the likelihood of an internal war and included languages, religions, races, and rural vs. urban ratio as variables, other factors, such as climate or topography, might be swamped since the first variables listed closely correlate to ethnicity, while climate and topology are generally more loosely tied.

Despite the challenges, some analyses have demonstrated fairly clear-cut conclusions. In particular, the nature of the internal war is a very good predictor of its duration.¹² Coups and “popular revolutions,” the latter being defined as one that begins with mass protests in the capital seeking the overthrow of the government, tend to be very brief. “Peripheral insurgencies”—those involving rural groups operating near the country's borders—often last for many years, particularly if the rebels have access to sources of funding from products such as opium, cocaine, or diamonds. This difference makes sense: an uprising in the urban center of the country must succeed quickly or overwhelming force will easily put it down, while even a relatively small group operating far from the government's power bases can carry out a low-intensity campaign with the intention of making the war expensive enough in lives and currency to make a negotiated settlement worthwhile.

A real-world example of the strengths of peripheral insurgencies took place in Nicaragua from 1967–1990.¹³ The Sandinistas began their civil war against the Somoza regime as a guerrilla force based in the northern mountains with support from Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela. After they successfully won power in 1979, a counter-revolutionary force, the “Contras,” arose. This group, supported by the United States, Costa Rica, and Honduras, was able to use the border regions and the “Mosquito Coast”, an inhospitable and nearly uninhabited area along the Caribbean, as their base. Both the revolution and counter-revolution each lasted roughly a decade, involving high civilian casualties and numerous human rights violations. Eventually, a peace treaty was negotiated when the end of the Cold War greatly reduced the interest of the external supporters.

¹² James D. Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 41, no. 3, May 2004, pp. 275–301.

¹³ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Civil Wars,” *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

THE WAR WILL COME TO YOU

By the start of the twenty-first century, a general consensus began to grow among sociologists and historians around the idea that many, if not most, internal wars resulted from an imbalance of power. At some point, a critical mass of people feel sufficiently disenfranchised enough to willingly risk rebellion. While there are still those who wish to debate regarding whether the fracture will happen upon ethnic, religious, or rural/urban lines, a dispassionate viewer could state that all of these factors have a role to play and that disentangling them can be almost impossible in some cases.¹⁴

An economic driver is often present and frequently serves as the spark that sets off the chain of events. A group might suffer decades of abuse, ranging from benign to nearly intolerable, without an uprising, but crop failures or economic collapse will galvanize action. This occurrence is particularly true in kleptocracies, where those in power are looting the public coffers for their own benefit. Eventually, either the level of theft crushes those on the bottom into abject poverty, where they have nothing left to lose, or it squeezes the middle class to the point where they rise up against the existing power structure. The “People Power Revolution” that swept Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos out of office (and the country) in the Philippines is an almost perfect example of this situation. Over the course of roughly three days in February of 1986, an abortive military coup and mass uprisings in the country’s capital of Manila brought the government down. This example also shows how quickly a revolution at the center of a state’s power can come to a climax.

The nature of the opposing sides makes a difference to both the duration of the war and the number of non-combatant casualties. Students of internal wars tend to group them into three categories.¹⁵

First, conventional civil wars involve set-piece battles involving roughly equal forces with access to similar levels of weaponry. The Roman, English, and American civil wars are examples of this category. In many cases, the existing military forces will split in a conventional civil war, or one side receives extensive support from an external source. These wars tend to be shorter than the other two types, but have higher battlefield casualties.

Irregular wars occur when a lightly-armed group of insurgents fight a conventional military (normally the government forces). The Taliban in Afghanistan has fought such wars against Afghan governments supported by the Soviets in the 1980s and the Americans/NATO in the 2010s. Irregular wars generally last the longest and have the most civilian casualties. In part, their duration stems from the insurgents’ ability to gain control over remote areas and to establish independent authority over those areas. This approach provides them with the resources needed to sustain long campaigns. At the same time, their need to establish dominance in the areas they control often requires the use of force against the inhabitants of the region. Simultaneously, their integration with the local population makes it difficult for the government forces to identify who is sympathetic to the rebels and who has been coerced. The nature of war being expediency, it’s not uncommon for regular forces to take the path of least effort and accept civilian casualties in the hope of breaking the insurgency.

The third type of internal conflict encompasses symmetrical non-conventional (SNC) wars. These occur when both sides in the conflict are lightly armed and poorly organized. Most of these occur in failed states or otherwise barely functional regions. The wars in Somalia provide representative examples. SNC conflicts are intermediate in duration and have the lowest casualty rates. The capabilities of the factions limit both the duration and casualties. Generally, neither side can create a functional government in any territory they control, and whatever resources they have results from pure banditry. SNC wars often end in stalemate as both sides exhaust their finances, weapons, and manpower. This situation makes recurring flare-ups more common, as the underlying causes remain unresolved.

Regardless of the type or what the large-scale motivations may be, virtually every internal war shares a characteristic described by Thucydides nearly twenty-four hundred years ago. Civil wars are cruel and vicious affairs, and much of what happens result from local and even personal grievances.¹⁶ Even apparently straightforward conflicts saw fighting determined as much by old animosities as by grand and noble philosophy. The English Civil War and the American Revolution are often held up as clear examples with starkly drawn lines; however, in the former, many nobles chose sides based upon personal grudges, and in the latter, local militias often fought those in neighboring towns as often or more so than the English army. The Troubles in Northern Ireland are generally portrayed as being based on strictly religious grounds, but the spate of killings in the villages of Coagh and Ardboe from 1988 to 1991 actually dated back to 1610 when Scottish settlers forced the native

Irish of the region off the land. Sporadic warfare between the two communities stretched back more than 370 years as first reported in letters dispatched to London in 1615.¹⁷ It’s frequently the case that a civil war serves as nothing more than an opportunity to get long-simmering revenge.

REVOLUTION ROW

So, where does that leave us as worldbuilders? Internal wars are common with roughly two percent of the world’s nations engaged in one at any time in the last two centuries. Historical evidence indicates that this trend has persisted as far back as we have records. The social and economic factors that drive internal wars can fit virtually any milieu. It’s difficult to imagine any meaningfully complex environment where there are no aggrieved parties unsatisfied with the status quo.

If we choose a genre such as space opera, we might decide to set our tales within the framework of an epic conventional civil war with both sides possessing large fleets of military spacecraft. The insurgency (we can call them the rebel forces) might choose to hide on bleak and sparsely populated worlds, far from the center. The primary cause for the war could be the disempowerment of a large fraction of the population when a political elite chooses to concentrate their grip on power by selecting one of their own to serve as dictator. Simultaneously, religious adherents on each side might decide to settle old scores, both personal and doctrinal. Regardless of how the war turns out, there is always room for a sequel, as the strongest predictor of an internal war is a prior one in the same territory.

¹⁵ Laia Balcells and Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 58, no. 8, 2014, pp. 1390–1418.

¹⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, no. 03, Sept. 2003, pp. 475–494.

¹⁷ Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA’s Soul*, Picador, 2000.



Or, thinking sideways about internal wars in hard science fiction, we might choose to have a group of deep-space miners secede from the planetary alliance. While hopelessly outnumbered and overmatched by the resources that the planets can pour into building spacecraft, the rebels can use hit and run tactics to disrupt the flow of resources back to the inner system. They have neither the hope nor the desire to gain control of the entire system, but they can try to make the cost of the rebellion high enough that the inner planets grant them independence in exchange for an armistice. Perhaps if they hold out long enough, help might even come in the form of resources from outside forces eager to see the strength of the inner planets limited.

In both scenarios, there is plenty of room for storytelling from the perspectives of either side, not to mention the innocent civilians who find themselves in the middle of a war spanning the skies and beyond.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



The Writing Cartel.

A group of writers trying to do the impossible—actually finish a project.

- Discussion Channels.
- Weekly Critiques.
- Critique Exchanges.
- Optional Word Count Tracker.
- Seasonal Events.
- ...and Lots of Writing Sprints!

Join us. 

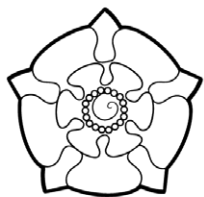
THIRTY-THREE TALES OF WAR

STORIES TWENTY THROUGH TWENTY-THREE

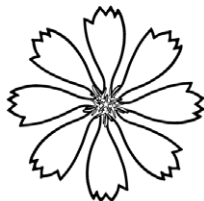
by Emory Glass, illustrations by Emory Glass and Tristen Fekete

 FANTASY (HIGH)  FANTASY (DARK)  CULTURE

Thirty-Three Tales of War is a collection of flash fiction pieces that follow thirty-three anonymous individuals living during the Candrish Civil War. You can find previous pieces on the [author's website](#).



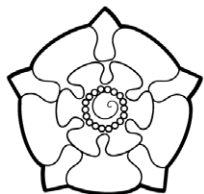
WITH a solemn face, the Town Crier trudged to her usual spot near the grand stone steps leading to the Hall of Prisms, clutching a crumpled scroll in her trembling hands.



The entire city was silent. Neither wind nor birds uttered a sound. The Town Crier forced down the lump in her throat and quietly unfurled the scroll.



“On the ninth of Gods’ Tears, Year Two-Hundred-Twenty-Seven of the Second Age,” she read to the empty streets, “Our *Rirah*, Sofezhka ĭnna Ranov, *Rirtsriya* of Kandrisev, *Ayrtsriya* amongst *Chobortsriya*, Chobortsriya of Sosna Chonok, *Radyatsriya* of the Blue Army, Keeper of Sarona and the Allied North, and Oracle of Yav Vsevnyi, has been captured at sea by Charivi rebels.” The Town Crier bit back tears. “She is in custody at an undisclosed location where she will await trial. The charges brought against her are as-as s-such.”



Inhaling deeply, she read, “Treason. Usurpation. Tyranny. Unlawful imposition of religious doctrine. Prosecutorial overreach. Economic disruption. Illegal warfaring.”

Her eyes cascaded down the list. Ten further charges lacerated the page with rich black ink. Black, like her blood. The thought of granting an ounce of validity to these seditious claims by uttering them aloud turned her stomach.

She let the scroll fall from her hands. It fluttered limply to the ground.

So that was it. This was the end. She raised a hand to the back of her neck and traced the raised scar where a tattoo once stained her moon-grey skin; now a shapeless blob infected with a deceitful hope. Spreading news to the good folk of Sarona had been a wonderful dream while it lasted. Hunters would flood the countryside again. Charivi loyalists would jump at the chance to point them toward former *nezhdoya*. After all these years, she was no longer free.

Alone in the streets of Sarona, the Town Crier sobbed.

All she had left was grief.

XXI: WARRIOR

THE Warrior sat alone by the fireside, winding a hempen cord around a simple silver ring. Occasionally, she strung up a painted clay bead so it hung inside the ring. As she worked, she tried to remember each face.

Her brother’s was freshest in her mind. He’d died only a few weeks ago on a raid in southern Sosna Chonok. Blue Army sympathisers caught him in his temple with a slingshot. The crack of his skull as he crumpled still rang in the Warrior’s ears.

She strung another bead.

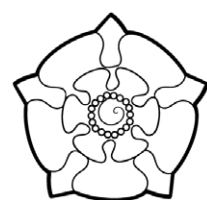
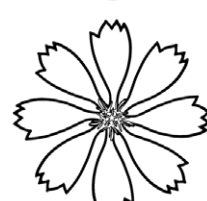
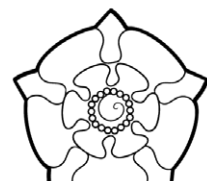
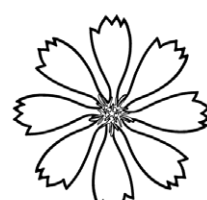
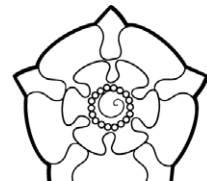
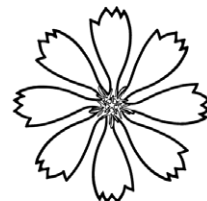
Last winter, the Ninefold Goddess brought Duska and Nivak swift slumber during an ambush at Hrukchik Pass. Six arrows, twelve wounds. Even now the Warrior felt their warm black blood pouring out. To try and revive them was folly. They died beneath her hands.

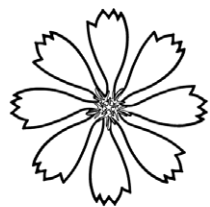
She strung two beads.

More faintly, she recalled Zerhei: swept away by the Voyarmak River as they marched for Hrukchik Pass. No one realised he was missing until the morning after he perished. A week later, the Warrior found his bloated corpse washed up on the riverbank.

She strung another bead.

She had grown up with Valya and Ksevanya—they weren’t so hard to remember. When they were killed, a shard of her own soul shattered. A hillwalker trampled Valya at the Battle of Losevka Field. Ksevanya, run through with a pike when their



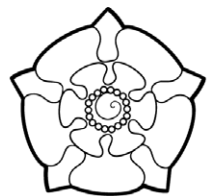


war party charged the blue bastards head-on. Their bodies were too mangled to burn on a pyre. Still, the Warrior smelled sweet grass and sweeter flesh burning; she had set the entire field aflame to make sure their souls found their way home.

She strung two beads.

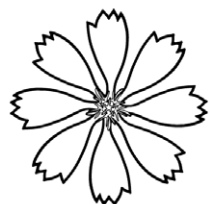


Vakrik's broken head haunted her dreams nightly. Just days after the war party first journeyed north, a band of Rosehearts attacked along the road to Igna. They split her husband's skull with a club. In return, the Warrior gave them no quarter.



She strung another bead.

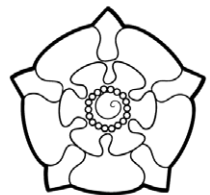
Winding the cord a final time around the silver ring, she closed her eyes to remember the faintest face of all.



The Warrior did not witness her daughter's death. Nezhdoya hunters abducted her years ago while she played by the river near their winter camp. The rest of the clan clung to hope that she had been delivered to safe pastures. Something deep within the Warrior's bones ached so bitterly she knew no one would ever see her again.

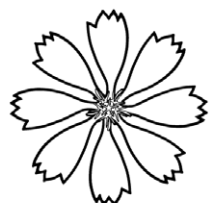


The Warrior knotted the cord and clutched the grieving wheel close to her heart, saying their names aloud. "Vorez. Duska. Nivak. Zerhei. Valya. Ksevanya. Vakrik. Movanya."



The fire crackled. She stared into it, hoping to glimpse their souls.

No queen deserved to win this war. Blood dark as Void and black as tar stained every belligerent hand.

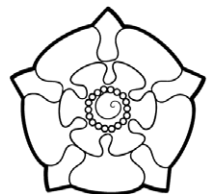


The Warrior closed her eyes. Softly, she whispered, "May our shattered souls entwine in the Vast Spiral and know each other again."

XXII: EXECUTIONER



THE sky was a burial shroud: deep grey and shot through with streaks of white. Light rain wet a tall pinewood pole sticking out of the mud in the heart of an ancient redoubt. Under its outstretched arm, a puddle sat stagnant in the shape of two feet. The thin shadow of a rope cut across its still surface.



The Executioner inspected the gallows. It was hastily built, but safe. He tugged the noose. Safe as a gallows could be, anyway.

The condemned had been offered poison: hemlock and poppy wine. It was refused. Poison, the Executioner decided, would be his preferred death were his role ever reversed. To choose hanging seemed foolish. The precedent it set was a grim one. Lots of northern Upperbirths were about to die now that the North had been brought to heel. Lots of debts had to be repaid.

The jail door banged open. Two Roseheart warriors entered the courtyard ahead of a woman clad in magnificent red robes, accompanied by a man who bore a richly-embroidered sling of crimson linen, no less well-dressed than his wife. A child no older than two napped inside the folds of the sling. Behind the trio followed two more Rosehearts.

A second entourage arrived not long after: an aging woman costumed in gold and black walking ahead of four warriors with tarry laurel wreaths emblazoned on their yellow tunics.

The Executioner bowed his head as they passed. The Red and Yellow Queen halted at a small wooden platform built directly in front of the gallows and seated themselves on cushioned stools. The man and child sat between them.

Finally, the jailer appeared from the side door. He pulled an emaciated young woman toward the gallows by a rope tied around her skeletal wrists. Bloody footprints stained the rocky ground: dark, black, and glistening. Despite her withered state, she maintained good posture and stared ahead.

For the briefest moment, her presence humbled the Executioner. This was, of course, the fabled Blue Queen of Kandrisev—the caste whore, the blue bitch, the false prophet. It took seventeen years, but she had finally been deposed: the first and last nezhdoya queen.

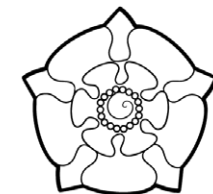
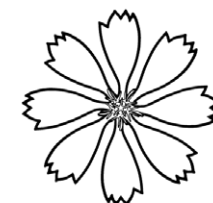
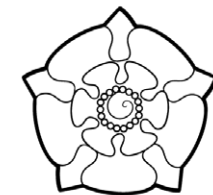
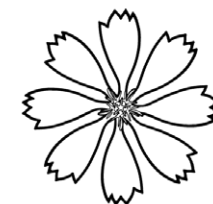
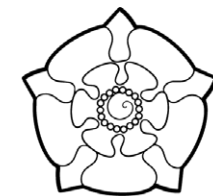
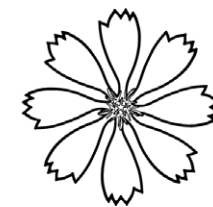
The Executioner helped her onto a step stool and fit the noose around her neck, waiting with bated breath for her inevitable cries for mercy. Everyone cried when faced with death. Everyone begged. Everyone bargained. Upperbirth or lowbirth, dignified or ignoble, pure or corrupt, every soul clamoured to remain alive.

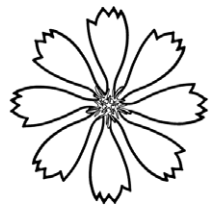
The Blue Queen stayed silent.

He frowned. Invoking fear in others didn't titillate him, but it did signal a job well done. Who wasn't afraid of death? Even he found it hard to glimpse corpses as they were wheeled away to be burned.

Ah, yes. Burning. The Blue Queen's soul wouldn't like that very much. Special instructions had come from the Yellow Queen herself: no trace of her existence was to remain. The last thing the North needed were holy relics. Still, such a fate was taboo in the northern faith.

The Executioner looked to the Yellow Queen. She stood. "I, Elgana Rusalya of the Yolkerev dynasty, Queen of Chariv, Protectress of Ochetsk and Rahvesk, Conqueress of the North and by that right Rirtsriya of Kandrisev, hereby sentence Sofezhka, a nezhdoya woman belonging to the Ranov family, to be hanged by the neck until dead for her crimes against the benevolent folk of Kandrisev. By my mercy she is granted an opportunity to speak her last words."





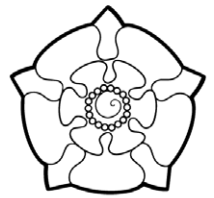
Still, the Blue Queen remained silent.

“Aryri?,” the Executioner whispered. “What say you in your final moments?”

Her voice was thin and quiet. “I pray it is known I have done all I could.”

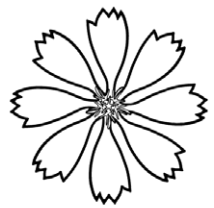


He raised an eyebrow. For a woman of her import, that was a rather lackluster statement. Even the lowest of Upperbirths had some long-winded speech spun up in an attempt to stall the inevitable. The Executioner tightened the noose. “Are you sure that’s all?”



The Blue Queen nodded.

Smirking, the Executioner readied himself. Even if the Blue Queen put on a good show of stoicism, everyone gasped when they had no air. Everyone flailed and choked, their faces contorting into grotesque and twisted masks of pain. Everyone fought to stay alive, clawing at the rope around their necks, raking their skin until black blood ran down their chests in rivulets just so they might draw breath.



And, when the Yellow Queen nodded and the Executioner kicked the stool away, the Blue Queen of Kandrisev died just like everyone else.

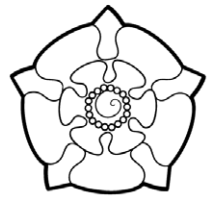


XXIII: SCHOLAR

Thirty-Three Tales of War: Exploring the Diarchal Collapse through the Lives of Kandrisev’s Citizens

2A213 – 2A230

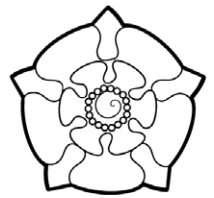
Presented by Emestesi Dvir, Senior Field Historian for the Ghinnish Academy of Higher Learning



THE Candrish Civil War, also known as the Diarchal Collapse, began in First Light of year 213 of the Second Age and lasted until Second Root of year 230, when Sofezhka İnna of the Ranov dynasty was captured and later executed by Elgana Rusalya of the Yolkerev dynasty and Magya Dvorina of the Odov dynasty.¹ Unsurprisingly, Yolkerev and Odov were the Civil War’s primary belligerents. After Ranov’s execution, Yolkerev and Odov went on to ignite an ongoing conflict dubbed the *Nine Queens’ War*.



In Sun’s Pale of year 207 of the Second Age, Sofezhka İnna Ranov assumed the



¹ Sofezhka Ranov is known colloquially as the “Blue Queen,” Elgana Yolkerev as the “Yellow Queen,” and Magya Odov as the “Red Queen.”

title of Rirtsriya² following the unexpected deaths of her older sisters: the dynasty’s natural heirs. Due to Ranov’s nezhdoya³ status and intensified by the lack of another living Ranov woman of direct descent to fill the role of Ayrtstriya⁴ — thus making a monarchy of Kandrisev’s traditional diarchy — her accession was met with extreme controversy. A compounding factor in the dispute over her legitimacy was Ranov’s role as the primary religious leader of Orthodox Quintinity, a widespread Northern faith. Historically, Candrish nobility have been disallowed from holding positions of religious significance while participating in government.

Outraged by the lack of opposition to Ranov’s rule, Magya Odov, then Chobortsriya⁵ of Zoldonmesk, declared secession. When doing so, she renamed Zoldonmesk “Zoldoni Chovrekozh,” a controversial decision in itself. The name hearkened back to a time when Zoldoni folk were widely intolerant of and aggressive toward outlanders, including allies. Hoping the loss of Kandrisev’s largest and most productive region would encourage dissension, Odov urged the other Chobortsriya to likewise assert their independence.

Despite encouragement from her allies to force Zoldonmesk and Southern Kandrisev’s reunion with the North, Sofezhka Ranov continually declined to declare war. At the time, Igna, Zoldonmesk’s capital, had a higher population than that of each major Northern city combined. Direct war with Odov meant certain defeat. Instead, Ranov embargoed Zoldonmesk, following with embargoes of Chariv and Ochetsk after their respective Chobortsriya came out in support of the Zoldonmesk’s secession.

By year 210 of the Second Age, Kandrisev had fractured into three main states: Zoldoni Chovrekozh, Southern Kandrisev, and Northern Kandrisev. Nezhlovyad, an eastern region, remained generally neutral and declined to join any of the three states or declare independence.

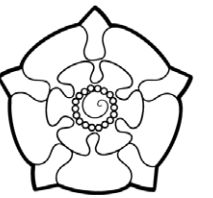
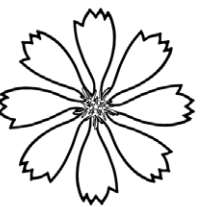
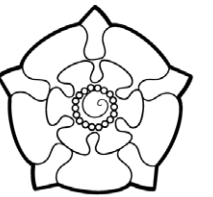
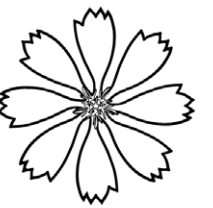
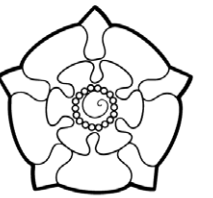
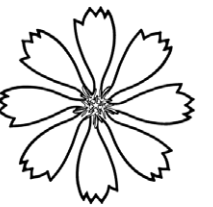
Being nezhdoya herself, Ranov was frequently and fervently petitioned to divorce her blue-blooded husband, Patriarch Edgandris Paltra of the Brisian Empire, renounce and disinherit their three children, and marry a Candrish man by whom she could create black-blooded heirs. Every region, with the exception of Morozhe-

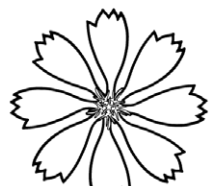
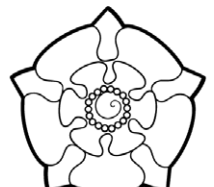
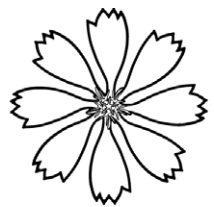
² Literally, “Mother” (Rirah) + “Protectress” (Tsriya). Honorific and legal title for the “Principal Woman” of Kandrisev, traditionally viewed as the head of the diarchy. Often shortened to “Rirah.”

³ Literally, “not” (nezh) + “mine” (doya). A lowbirth child forcibly adopted by an Upperbirth family for the express purpose of entering into a cross-blood-colour (“hemotone”) marriage alliance because the child possesses a unique trait or talent.

⁴ Literally, “Sister” (Ayr) + “Protectress” (Tsriya). Honorific and legal title for the “Second Woman” of Kandrisev, traditionally viewed as Kandrisev’s principal Chobortsriya.

⁵ Literally, “Sovereign” (Chobort) + “Guardianess” (Vasriya). Honorific and legal title for the leader of each Candrish administrative district (region). Answers directly to the Ayrtstriya.





lo and Sosna Chonok, pressured her to meet these terms. Her staunch refusal to acquiesce worsened relations with Southern Kandrisev and soured Nezhlovyad against the idea of allying with the North. In Harvest's End, year 212 of the Second Age, Ranov unilaterally banned the nezhdoya trade and ordered all current nezhdoya to be given the opportunity to leave their spouse or families and return to their place of origin if they so desired.

In retaliation, Elgana Yolkerev sent three cohorts to raze Yav Vsevnyi, the holiest site in the Orthodox faith. The nezhdoya trade was a long-standing economic crutch within Chariv deeply ingrained in regional culture as an honorable and righteous use of one's life. Families of children selected as nezhdoya were often given stipends or property deeds by the Upperbirth family that purchased their child. It is estimated that two-fifths of Candrish folk living in foreign lands were nezhdoya of Charivi stock in the same year the practice was banned.

Already embroiled in a centuries-long rivalry, the Yolkerev and Ranov dynasties' mutual embitterment ignited after the sacking of Yav Vsevnyi. Unable to continue her policy of peaceable resolution in its wake, Sofezhka Ranov was finally forced to declare war.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



COUP DE TWEET

by Juhani Taylor

 POLITICS  TECHNOLOGY  REVOLUTION

On a warm summer's day in 1936, Spaniards tuned into their radios to hear the latest news. Spain was a nation in turmoil—it had abolished its monarchy five years prior, and tensions were running high between loyalists of the new republic and an alliance of monarchists and fascists. A few weeks earlier, the Prime Minister (the tenth to hold the office in under three years) had exiled several nationalist military officers, while a socialist police officer had been murdered just a few days before.¹


 TITLE CARD BY DAEMON OF THEALIA


¹ "Spanish Civil War," *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Spanish_Civil_War.

TALE FOUNDRY WRITING GROUP

SUBMIT MICROFICTION FOR A CHANCE TO HAVE IT READ AND CRITIQUED LIVE ON STREAM!

- Every Friday at 7:00pm CST
- New prompts every week!
- Anyone can submit!

 [Twitch.TV/Talefoundry](https://www.twitch.tv/talefoundry)



Radio listeners heard a now-infamous phrase: “*Over all of Spain, the sky is clear.*”² It was the signal the right-wing rebels had been waiting for—the revolution begins now.

One-time coded messages like this are an example of the power of technology in rebellions. Starting a simultaneous, nationwide uprising through secret meetings and careful planning alone would be near-impossible—but one sentence uttered into a microphone was all it took.

This article explores the influence of communications technologies on insurrections and revolutions throughout history, how they shape the events and what lessons we can learn for building our worlds.

A GRAY ANATOMY

Revolutions are like snowflakes—every one is unique. Different pressures, environments, and times instigate different movements. Even two revolutions in the same region or time are each unique, because the historical factors are different. Despite this, historians can find some similarities. Brinton’s *The Anatomy of Revolution* is a staple read in the study of political history.³ In it, the author considers the “uniformities” of four major revolutions—the English (Civil War), American, French, and Russian—in four stages:

1. *Fall of the Old Order:* Summarized as “the ruling class becomes politically inept,” this is the moment that the old regime becomes unable to maintain power and collapses. British power in the Thirteen Colonies fits well here, in its own way. Though the British government did

not collapse during the American Revolution, their control over those colonies did.

2. *Moderate Regime:* A new government comes to power, and seeks to enact peaceful social reform, but rapidly falls apart itself as splinter factions, once united by the common cause of ousting the old regime, diverge and oppose each other. The short-lived Provisional Government of 1917 Russia embodies this well, before it fell to the communists in the October Revolution.

3. *Radical Regime, or “Reign of Terror”:* The hard-line and often more extreme factions take control and authoritatively institute sweeping reforms. Sometimes this presents itself as a coup d’état against the new moderate government from a splinter group. Spain exemplifies this with the installation of the brutal Franco regime at the civil war’s conclusion, leading to 36 years of fascist rule.

4. *Thermidorian Reaction:* From the ensuing civil war, a period of “convalescence” occurs where quieter times prevail. This peaceful period can take several forms: the establishment of a “new tyrant,” a restoration of pre-revolutionary ways, a repression of radicals and establishment of a new order by moderates, or “aggressive nationalism” as a means of uniting the populace in a common, foreign threat. England’s 1660 Restoration returned a restricted monarchy to power, while Mussolini fomented a vision of a reborn Roman Empire in his fascist Italy.

As insightful as it may be, Brinton’s anal-



“*Vi veri universum vivus vici. Vi veri veniversum vivus vici.*”

² Joseph Cummins, *The War Chronicles: From Flintlocks to Machine Guns* (Beverly, MA: USA: Fair Winds Press, 2009), p302.

³ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1938)

⁴ Torbjørn L. Knutsen and Jennifer L. Bailey, “Review: Over the Hill? The Anatomy of Revolution at Fifty,” *Journal of Peace Research*. 26, no. 4 (1989): 421-431.

ysis is not without limitations. Many historians consider his four phases to be overly simplistic, and only suitable for high-level overviews of revolutionary history.⁴ Furthermore, when considering the role of communications technologies in revolutions, one must bear in mind that *Anatomy* was published in 1938—before personal computers or widespread television usage, when a middle-class family *might* have a telephone, or a cabinet-sized wireless radio. Even with revisions in 1956 and 1964, we must consider the gulf of progress since his time.

This is a good time to assess the level of communications technology in your world. How do your inhabitants converse with each other over long distances? Do they use written letters, telegraphs, or online chat rooms? This will affect not just the speed at which the revolution occurs, but also how far it spreads, how the old and new regimes speak to their populace, and how easily resistance can organize.

Technological progress is often modelled as an exponential rate with features like Moore's Law, which means that early evolution is slow.⁵ There is negligible difference in communication methods between the English Civil War (1640s), the American Revolution (1770s), French (1790s), and even the Russian Revolution some 128 years later. Having only abolished the feudal system of serfdom in 1861, the Russian revolutionaries were largely agrarian peasants a century or two removed from their Western European cousins.⁶ Russia had only just started a major drive to electrify its technology, and by February 1917

electrification had only reached major industrial centres for wartime production needs.⁷

Thus, when we consider the effects of modern technologies such as smartphones and social media, the series of events which lead to revolution must be reconsidered. Consider a country with an oppressive government: what steps would there be to install a new regime?

Planning: This can be the longest phase of all. It is the slow-cooking phase of growing discontent of a populace in its leadership; a march of tiny grievances, each too small to warrant action alone but piling up like straws on the proverbial camel. Niemöller's famous "*First they came for the communists...*" speech epitomises this phase.⁸ Discussion groups form in this period. "Organizations" are loose at this stage, mere groups of equals with similar interests. They traditionally meet in public spaces—pubs, bars, cafés, libraries—and on online forums or social network groups in recent years. How might the popular social spaces facilitate this in your world? For that matter, how openly can people discuss dissent? If it requires hushed voices then they might meet in dimly-lit taverns with lots of corners and sheltered booths.

Push for Peaceful Reform: These groups start to empower their members, telling each other not only that something should change, but that *they* should be the ones to change it. Discussion becomes activism. Private meetings become public protests and rallies. As movements become more organised, leadership becomes necessary. How

do these leaders communicate with their activists? Secret meetings, private Facebook groups, encrypted group messages—the media may vary, but the trend is the same: public discussion becomes private, hidden away from eavesdroppers. Brutus met his co-conspirators at his private residence in Rome, and the First Continental Congress met behind closed doors in 1774.

Reaffirming Oppression: Threatened by the reformists, the old regime will persecute them. The spectrum of actions here is broad, and can range from censorship to prosecution, torture, and execution of activists. These actions usually fall under the umbrella of "counter-intelligence," and will be accompanied by covert surveillance and infiltration of these groups.⁹ Graffiti is washed off walls, meetings are broken up, and books are burned. Here, technology emboldens the oppressor. The Catholic Church condemned anyone holding "such a despicable opinion" as Galileo's teaching that the Earth orbits around the Sun. Inquisitors used ownership of Galileo's works as proof of heresy—ownership which was only possible due to the recent proliferation of the printing press.¹⁰ Today, the infamous "Great Firewall of China" tailors the internet access of Chinese citizens to what is approved by the ruling Communist Party.¹¹ This is an uphill struggle for the activists, as the regime has the tools of the establishment at their disposal: propaganda, control of the press, control of the judiciary, and of course the wealth of a nation to fund it

all. A character revisiting a country after many years might note the increased police presence, or a general sense of unease with being out in the open instead of inside.

Radicalization: The more extreme activists, those calling for direct action, now point to this renewed oppression as proof that peaceful reform is no longer an option. In doing so, they win over or silence the moderates among them. This shift is idealized in the "Overton window": the range of accepted political discourse at that moment.¹² This window shifts continuously, and as the regime cracks down on reformists, opposing politicians and activists start considering more extreme actions to be acceptable. The shifting window is accelerated by the public visibility of the government's bad actions. Pre-digital communications typically limited such visibility to the cities; it is therefore no surprise that most revolutions start there.

Tipping Point: Eventually, the growing tensions reach a climax. Whether spontaneously started by a riot or planned in a "*sky is clear*" move, the time will come when the activists become insurrectionists. Though the trigger may be sudden, the process must be methodical for it to survive. In many cases, these pushes are indistinguishable from military operations—Julius Caesar literally marched an army into Rome.¹³

⁵ Erik Gregersen, "Moore's Law," last modified December 26, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Moores-law>

⁶ Michael Lynch, 2003. "The Emancipation of the Russian Serfs, 1861," History Review, History Today, December 2003, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/emancipation-russian-serfs-1861>

⁷ Jonathan Coopersmith, "Chapter 4: The Rise of Electrification, 1914-1917," *The Electrification of Russia, 1880-1926*. " (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992): 99-120

⁸ Harold Marcuse, "Niemoeller Quotation Page," UC Santa Barbara, University of California at Santa Barbara, last updated July 9, 2019. <http://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/niem.htm>.

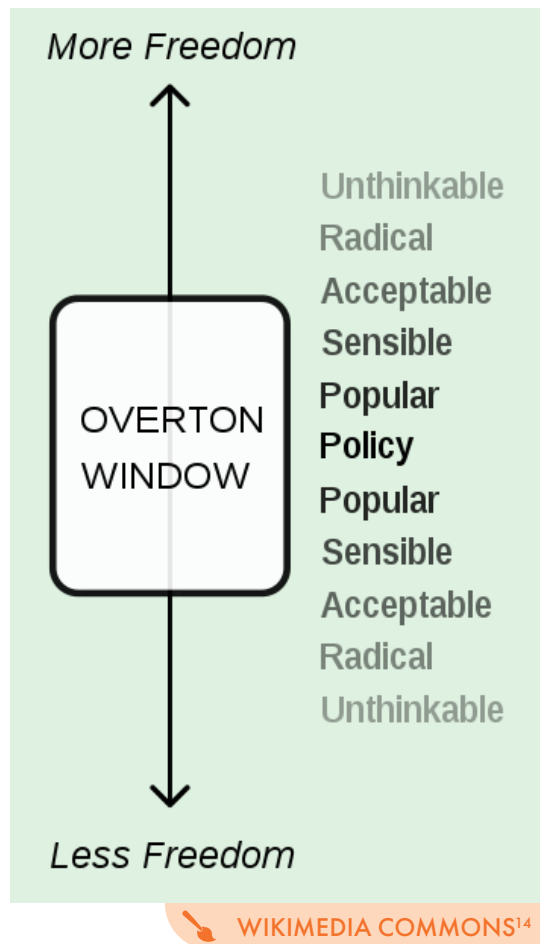
⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book III: Final Report, 94 Cong., 2d sess., 1976, S. Rep. 94-755, <https://archive.org/details/finalreportofsel03unit/page/n7/mode/2up>

¹⁰ Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Retrying Galileo, 1633-1992*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005)

¹¹ Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Great Firewall of China: Xi Jinping's Internet Shutdown," *The Guardian* (London, England), June 29, 2018.

¹² Anand Giridharadas, "How America's Elites Lost Their Grip," *Time*, November 21, 2019, <https://time.com/5735384/capitalism-reckoning-elitism-in-america-2019/>.

¹³ Stephen Dando-Collins, *Caesar's Legion: The Epic Saga of Julius Caesar's Elite Tenth Legion and the Armies of Rome*, ed. S. Power (New York: Wiley, 2002).



But while Caesar’s march was primarily a show of power, it demonstrated perhaps the most practical way of organizing the takeover with the technology of the day. Following the same logic, it is little surprise that guerilla warfare has grown in use considerably since the start of the Twentieth Century: Modern technology can now easily organize asymmetric warfare. Commanders need to react to a changing battlefield to issue orders to their often-outnumbered soldiers carrying out covert missions. The now-basic tool of ra-

dio communication is what enabled this. Along with motor vehicles, it defines the boundary of second- and third-generation warfare, where line and trench formations give way to small tactical units infiltrating and collapsing enemy lines from behind.¹⁵ Beyond communications, what is combat like in your world? If the use of magic or alternative technology invalidates the use of line infantry and trenches, then perhaps guerilla warfare developed much earlier.

By the end of this phase, the activists-turned-revolutionaries have declared themselves the new government. But the fight is far from over, for now they must face:

Loyalist Reaction: No matter how popular the uprising, there will always be opposition. Choosing sides in a revolution is a game of odds—you must not only weigh the probabilities of each side winning, but what the consequences will be for you personally. Those leading the counter-revolution are usually the people with closest ties to the old regime as they have the most to lose. This can often result in odd alliances, such as the monarchists and fascists in 1930’s Spain. They had very different goals (returning to a constitutional monarchy vs installing a dictator), but united their efforts to oust the republican government. The messages to the public can appear confused and contradictory at this time, as the press is also in a transitional state. Independent outlets must choose a side, while the old regime is losing its grip on the establishment.

In this phase, the media often casts the deciding vote in the outcome of the rebellion. Indeed, revolutionaries throughout history have recognized the importance of seizing control of the press, and many who failed to do so ultimately failed in their aims too. Governments of European countries (and their empires) realized how important delicate control of the press is in the wake of the 1848 “revolutions in government.”¹⁶ Here, as Clark writes, they “renegotiated the relationship between government and public” after the heavy-handed censorship of pre-1848 newspapers stoked the revolutionary fires. This is amusingly modelled in today’s media as the Streisand Effect, where attempts to censor information from the internet result in drawing far more attention to it.¹⁷

It follows, then, that a tight grip on the press is needed for any insurrection to succeed—but this must not translate into overt censorship or it will undermine the public message. In the modern world, this is increasingly difficult to achieve. While in Roman times one might have paid off the *praecones* (town criers) to announce the news of your glory, modern technology has massively decentralized our news sources. Hitler had to deal with 4,700 separate newspapers in 1930’s Germany, but now, thanks to smartphones and the internet, there are tens of millions of potential news sources in a single country and it is impossible to silence them all.¹⁸ However, a “reliability bias” can still lend an advantage to the revolutionaries, as larger news outlets are typically regarded as more trustworthy than strangers on Twitter. So if they are controlled, the public message can be appropriately massaged and the loyalists silenced. How would

this wrestling over media control appear to the average person in your world? How might they react to this confusing series of contradictory messages that all claim to be factual?

A New Order: The revolutionaries have done it. They have risen up, deposed the old government, quashed the resistance and seized control of their country. Now what? Presumably they have a series of policies they want to enact and changes they want to make to shape the country to their liking. But how does their message change now that they are using official government channels? Bold ideas of social justice can swiftly become a new wave of oppression if not carefully managed. Here, the revolutionaries must work hard to prevent their own radical factions from wresting control from the moderates as Brinton predicted. This, too, is made harder by modern technology. When the barriers to outreach are as low as 140 characters typed on a smartphone, like it is on Twitter, this new government must work ever harder to ensure its members toe the party line.

What happens when those loyal to the old regime inevitably reorganize and attempt a revolution of their own? The new government has now become the movement they fought against—will they react in the same way, or adopt a different approach? The Soviet Union is often presented as an example of Brinton’s “new tyrant” replacing the old oppressor. Despite allusions to freedoms of speech and press in the constitution, the new communist government actively silenced “hostile tsarist comments” in letters to newspapers for being “anti-Soviet.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Wikimedia Commons, s.v., “Overton Window Diagram,” January 12, 2015, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Overton_Window_diagram.svg.

¹⁵ Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” Marine Corps Gazette October 1989, pp. 22-26, <https://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/lind/the-changing-face-of-war-into-the-fourth-generation.html>.

¹⁶ Christopher Clark, “After 1848: The European Revolution in Government,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (2012): 171–97. doi:10.1017/S0080440112000114.

¹⁷ “Words We’re Watching: ‘Streisand Effect.’” Merriam-Webster, accessed June 16, 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/words-were-watching-streisand-effect-barbra>.

¹⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Press in the Third Reich.” Holocaust Encyclopedia accessed June 16, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-press-in-the-third-reich>.

¹⁹ Siegelbaum et al., *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 178.

²⁰ Mervi Pantti and Annika Lepp, “Memories of Watching Finnish Television in Estonia during Soviet Occupation,” *VIEW Journal of European Television History & Culture*, 3, no. 2 (2013):

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE LIKED AND SHARED

There are many more ways in which media and communications technologies have affected revolutions that do not neatly fit into the above sections, yet still merit discussion. In the 1980s, despite heavy media censorship in Eastern Bloc countries, many of those bordering Western countries received Western broadcasts through special devices attached to their televisions, or sometimes just through ineffectual signal blocking by the Soviets.²⁰ This gave them a window through the censorship with profound effects as the communist hegemony crumbled around them in 1989. As Adam Jones writes, in Czechoslovakia “large crowds gathered in front of department store TV displays to watch footage of Czech soldiers beating peaceful demonstrators.”²¹ Millions in the East watched the Berlin Wall fall live on Western TV while domestic outlets were deafeningly silent on the matter. Most of their newspapers said nothing about it at all, with East Germany’s *Neues Deutschland* simply reporting “a lot of traffic at border crossing points.”²² Consider our hypothetical traveler from outside this country. Knowing the dangers of spreading censored news, they have a choice of keeping safe and quiet, or informing the locals of the real situation.

Thus, Jones’ “Boomerang Effect” is defined: people in oppressed nations learning about local events from foreign sources. Western media had

become an indispensable tool in the democratic revolution of Eastern Europe. This effect is still in full force today and exploring new avenues. No longer does it need foreign news outlets; social media users disseminate videos and photographs that more traditional broadcasters dare not share. The internet is the new boomerang.

But how useful a tool is the internet, really? It is just as prone to censorship as any other medium, and some countries have repeatedly demonstrated the ease of blocking access altogether. The Cambridge Analytica scandal showed how easy it is to harvest users’ personal data to influence elections, while self-censoring “echo chambers” can be found around the web.²³ By the nature of this environment, members of these chambers become lax, and do not critically assess other members with the same rigor that they might outside of the group. Their safe spaces lull them into more readily believing the content they see at face value. In doing so, the cause can become weaker, and appear chaotic and untrustworthy to outside observers. But this is a very manual process—why not automate it?

Studies have shown the incredible efficacy of using “bots” in social media.²⁴ As Bessi & Ferrara write, these bots are “algorithmically controlled accounts that emulate the activity of human users but operate at much higher pace.” They appear, even to trained eyes, to be genuine people opining on current affairs, and infiltrate these echo chambers to sway them in whatever

direction their owners desire. Indeed, even outside of these groups they operate on a vast scale, presenting what looks like monolithic support or disdain for certain viewpoints. But these bots exist as mere bytes on a server, or as a file hidden on a malware-infected computer as part of a million-strong “botnet.”

So while it is pervasive, the internet is not bulletproof.

Despite this, there are always ways around the hurdles. When networks are closely monitored or controlled by the “enemy,” one may rely on direct peer-to-peer communication instead. This is known as a mesh network—one that connects multiple nearby nodes (e.g. smartphones) with short-range radio technologies such as Bluetooth® instead of each having a single connection to a nearby hub (cell tower). Thus information, messages, and media can be passed through a crowd like an ironic game of Telephone without the authorities ever knowing. This has been famously put to good use in Hong Kong with apps like FireChat.²⁵

Finally, it seems fitting to conclude with a case study that, though fictional, demonstrates many of the points discussed above. It also happens to be a favorite film of mine: *V for Vendetta*. In it, the protagonist carefully harnesses and directs public discontent in the government through elaborate plots and public displays of defiance. After one such incident, he seizes control of the government-run television network to issue a call to arms to the general public. The ensuing protests become violent insurrection when a girl spraying graffiti is killed by a secret police officer. The protagonist successfully topples

the regime, and the story ends. Though it does not cover the entire arc of phases described above, *V for Vendetta* encapsulates several key principles: control of the media, shifting of the Overton window, a reaffirmation of oppression, radicalization, and a methodical execution of the revolution. The film demonstrates that we do not need to show every painstaking detail of a revolution in media—rather that phases can be implied to the audience where it would not add to the story.

This carries into our worldbuilding; do we need to show the entire revolution, or can we drop into the story partway through? Do we even need to adhere to the phases above? They are logical, but people are not always logical. There can be great merit in bucking this trend for a good reason. But whether we follow or deliberately break this process, if we simply remember it when planning a story then we will be well on our way to a realistic political landscape.

 **BACK TO INDEX**

²¹ Adam Jones, “Wired World: Communications Technology, Governance and the Democratic Uprising,” in Comor, E. A., *The Global Political Economy of Communication*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

²² Rayna Breuer, “How the press in Eastern Europe reacted to the fall of the Berlin Wall.” *Deutsche Welle*, August 11, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-the-press-in-eastern-europe-reacted-to-the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall/a-51155626>.

²³ Rosaline Chan, “The Cambridge Analytica whistleblower explains how the firm used Facebook data to sway election,” *Business Insider*, October 5, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-facebook-data-2019-10?r=US&IR=T>

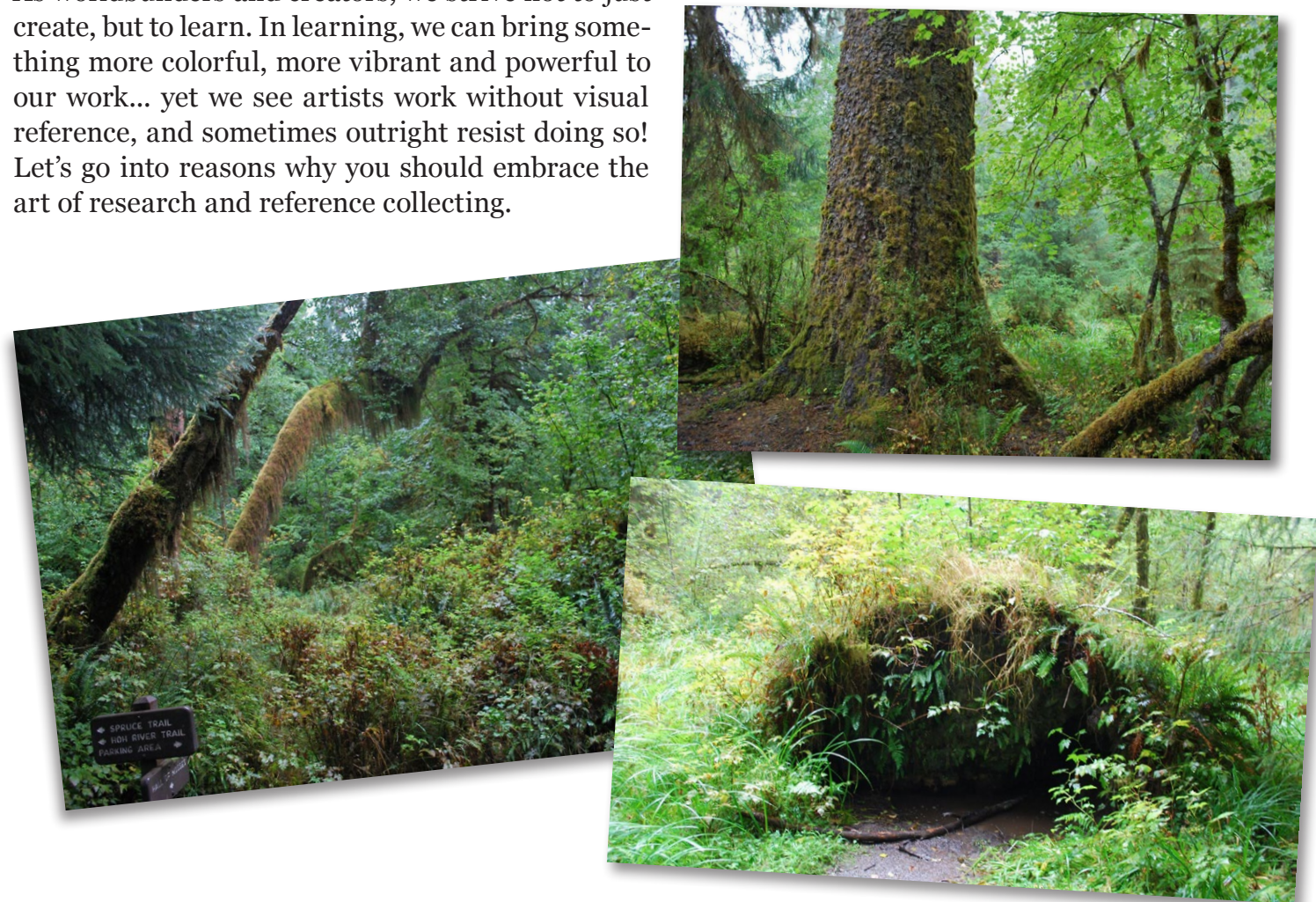
²⁴ Alessandro Bessi and Emilio Ferrara, “Social bots distort the 2016 U.S. Presidential election online discussion,” *First Monday* 21, no. 11-7 (June 8, 2017).

²⁵ Archie Bland, “FireChat – the messaging app that’s powering the Hong Kong protests.” *The Guardian* (London, England) September 29, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/firechat-messaging-app-powering-hong-kong-protests>.

ARTIST CORNER

by Anna Hannon, photographs and illustrations by Anna Hannon

For artists (and all creatives), nothing brings more power and clarity to your work than a collection of good reference from which to work from. Look out into this beautiful world of ours and you see a plethora of new and engaging things to understand. As worldbuilders and creators, we strive not to just create, but to learn. In learning, we can bring something more colorful, more vibrant and powerful to our work... yet we see artists work without visual reference, and sometimes outright resist doing so! Let's go into reasons why you should embrace the art of research and reference collecting.



One of the best ways to keep viewers entranced with your work is to keep things familiar and working from photographic reference helps ground your work in reality. Having this reference, though, also gives you the chance to try new shapes and colors that may be out of your comfort zone. Have you ever drawn or painted a bottle tree? Do you know what the flowers look like when they bloom? Gather the reference. Now what if you wanted to incorporate large and winding roots above ground? Gather some photos

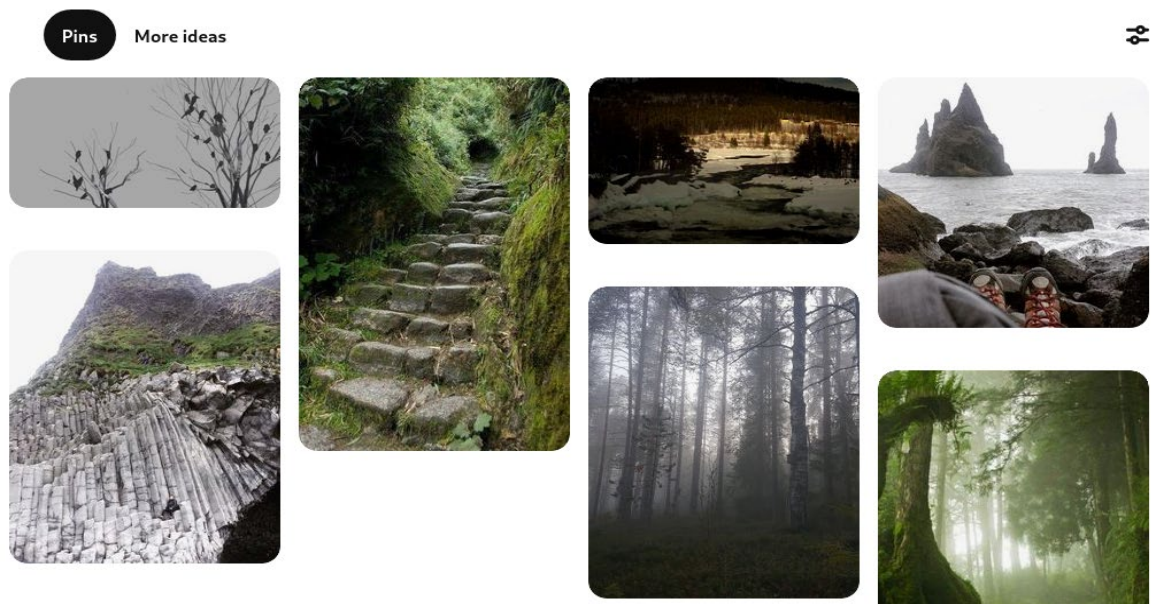
of tree roots in swampy areas or rainforests. Now you have your references ready for painting.

There truly is no such thing as a unique idea. We take our experiences, our visual library, and try to come up with something new. If that visual library of ours is limited, we will be creating the same thing over and over. We can liken our experiences to pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope, as Mark Twain says in his autobiography "There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages." - Mark Twain¹

I urge you to heed these words and go out and collect references for your work. The more little pieces of glass, the more beautiful your kaleidoscope will become.

Go to pinterest, create a board for one of your world's creatures. You can also print out images and pin them to a physical board or take photos and glue them to a page in your sketchbook. You can create a collage of images in Photoshop (or your painting software of choice) and turn it into your desktop wallpaper. Whatever your method, start pinning images of clothing, fabric,

An example from my Pinterest board



¹ Twain, Mark. Mark Twain Autobiography. Harper Et Brothers Publ., 1924.

landscapes. Focus on colors, focus on textures, focus on moods. Do these people live in the desert? Find images of desert dwelling peoples, examine closely what they wear, how they wear it. What colors are their clothes? What colors do they paint their homes? Find examples of those colors on murals or in paintings that other cultures have used.

Look at this example of a dwarf created for “Designing a Culture’s Aesthetics” (Volume 2, Issue 5). The idea was that of a dwarven culture that lived in the desert. I gathered references of color and texture to better paint an accurate article of clothing.



If you are able, go out and take your own photographs! I am lucky to live in a beautiful area where I take photos of the landscape. I have learned so much about rain-soaked environments from being in the Pacific Northwest and referencing the photos I’ve taken of leaves, tree trunks, ferns, and other native flora and fauna in my artwork. Start getting into the habit of getting your visual library full well before you begin creating. I sometimes craft a board for a project and then step away for a few days just to let the images ruminate in my mind. How can I use these in a new way? What visual connections can I make to other visuals I’ve prepared in the past? You never know what you can create with your kaleidoscope.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

DAEL KINGSMILL

Interviewed by Aaryan Balu

 [INTERVIEW](#)  [TABLETOP GAMING](#)

Dael Kingsmill is an actress, game designer, writer, YouTuber, Dungeon Master, and worldbuilder extraordinaire. In this exclusive interview, we talk about her love for evocative descriptions, ancient mythology, pervasive magic, and a good deal more.



So I've been making videos on the internet for more than five years now and, for most of that time, I was known for serving the niche of retelling stories from classical mythology with a little bit of an attitude. Not a cool attitude, like a Power Ranger, but just making fun of all the nonsense details people usually leave out because they want the past to sound important or mysterious, when really people back then were just as ridiculous as we are now. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, at some point along the way I realized that if I ever wanted to play *Dungeons & Dragons*, I would have to run the game myself. So I started DMing for my friends which involved a *lot* of homebrew and a *lot* of worldbuilding because, really, I think that's where the fun lies for me as a gamemaster. Fast forward a little later and I made a video about some of my D&D stuff on a whim, and people seemed to actually like it!

I can say, with certainty, that it's some great stuff. What are some of the hallmarks of your worldbuilding that people really respond to?

"I STARTED DM-ING FOR MY FRIENDS WHICH INVOLVED A LOT OF HOMEBREW AND A LOT OF WORLDBUILDING BECAUSE, REALLY, I THINK THAT'S WHERE THE FUN LIES FOR ME AS A GAMEMASTER."

I think people click with the instances that take something small we're given in the published material—something almost throwaway and insignificant—and build it up into something evocative. That's what I always say. It's almost becoming a cliché on my channel for things to be "*vague and evocative*," but I think the sort of people who enjoy my work are the people who gravitate towards that, who want to emphasize the mood of the setting and the narrative over top of the mathematical optimization.

"*Thieves' Cant*" is probably my most successful example of that. It takes this little rogue ribbon ability and attempts to make it something that might believably be useful to criminals of all walks in a functioning world—something fun that feels to players almost like a spy movie or something, like there really is a code and that they really are in on it.

I should be clear that there is nothing wrong with a style of game that emphasizes mathematical optimization. I'm just incapable of it and looking out for all the other literature/theatre nerds out there trying their hardest to balance encounters.

Can you elaborate on that phrase "vague and evocative" a little? "Vague" suggests a looser approach than building an entire "Thieves' Cant." That strikes me as a bit more "crunchy."

I totally agree! "Vague and evocative," I think, is a little bit funny. The first time I used a phrase similar to that in one of my videos, I tuned in about a week later to a Matt Colville stream where, at some point, he complained that something was "too vague! It's evocative, but it doesn't give you anything!" I remember saying: "Vague and evocative is my entire brand!" And ever since then, it was just a relevant phrase that would pop into my head while covering lots of different topics. In general, I guess it comes down to the idea of feeling; what do I think it would or should feel like to be stuck in a haunted house, or face down a giant, or be pirates on the high seas, or enter the realm of the fae—y'know, any of these very broad, "high concept" ideas.

What I'm getting at is the idea that you know what you think about those set-ups; you understand inherently the mood that you want to impress just based on years and years of generic conventions being absorbed into your brain by the media you engage with. That's the place that you should be starting if you want to give that feeling to your players. So it's vague and evocative because you're chasing the bright elusive

My approach to "Thieves' Cant," in brief, is that it isn't a language—or not a full language. You can't speak it like you would speak French or Portuguese. This is something that has developed specifically so that any rogue (a descriptor which can cover a huge range of criminal occupations) can get important information about illegal things to any other rogue. So that has to start with rogues being able to identify one another without shouting "I'm a bank robber" in the middle of a crowded pub. So to begin with, I introduce the idea that a rogue who wants to signal themselves to other rogues will wear something that, to those in the know, means "I'm a bank robber"—like in the real world we have shoes over telephone wires and the handkerchief code was a real thing. Then, you have a small number of things you can actually communicate in code ("lay low," "I need a place to hide," "I have a job to offer you") in the guise of a very ordinary conversation. From there, you organize a time and location where it will be safe to talk freely.

butterfly of [insert mood here] and trying to pin it down with game mechanics so that your players will have a structure and a scaffolding to work with as an interface.

So when it comes to something like "Thieves' Cant"—you're right, absolutely feels crunchier—it's one of the examples where the pinning phase worked out! It's one where I knew the mood I wanted to achieve (a cultural cypher, coded messages, fugitives and criminals working on the street under the eyes of the law, clever, spy-movie things), scribbled down a thousand different ideas as to ways that might be achieved within the context of a tabletop game, and then managed to condense it more into something that could work. The elusive butterfly of a spy movie feeling: pinned.

How has this style played out in your game? Is there anything special to watch out for besides players being excited and saying, "Wow, that felt just like a spy movie!"

I would say—counterintuitively—if the players say something to break the mood just a little bit, it usually means it's working. Also, if they make a reference to an external text in that same vein of genre.

Watch Dael's full video about the redcaps and narrative-centric combat in D&D [here](#).



When I ran redcaps—a type of small, mud-caked fey creatures—for my players, I wanted them to feel surrounded and creeped out. For me, that starts with actually writing out a descriptive opening to the encounter, prose as purple as I want, which I read out directly. Usually during this bit, I know they're feeling it because they're quiet *and* looking at me. Then, immediately after I stop talking, they all start reacting and talking to each other. It's almost like they forget I'm there for a second while they all debrief with one another about what they just heard. I let them talk like that for a minute or so before reminding them what they're supposed to do. Then, aside from all the moments of "this is so creepy," which really is a good indicator, there will be moments throughout where someone breaks that fourth wall because they feel like they have to—a player calling me out directly as Dael for constructing this scene or deciding they're going to do something a little funny. I like to think of it as breaching for air before diving back in.

Comparatively, a sequence that I don't think played as well for my group was an encounter

in a graveyard where someone raised all the corpses to retrieve a non-player character the party was supposed to escort. This one had a similar vibe, but a little less creepy and little more unnatural and uncanny. I started with my description like above, but when I finished, there was less chatter amongst the group and more questions directed at me. Questions not about what I had just described, but instead about a quasi-related bad guy they were still fixating on. Then, throughout the encounter, there weren't moments of noticeable fourth wall/genre breaking because they spent the whole thing sort of half in and half out. That time the mood just didn't land as well.

So it's all a sort of balancing act of trying to keep them in the mood as characters but letting them dip out occasionally as players. Even I'm still trying to work it out.

Interesting—I'd have thought that players breaking the fourth wall would indicate less immersion, but I like the idea that players might be stepping out of the game for a breather so they can dive back in.

Do you think there's any difference in that response between players with more of an acting experience and those without? Thinking back to my own games, I feel like I'm less likely to crack jokes during moments where my DM has really managed to hit us with a powerful moment. But maybe that's because I have a larger metaphorical lung capacity.

I actually think there might be. I'm working with a pretty small sample size, so I guess I couldn't really say for sure, but my regular party is mostly actors, one writer friend who also dabbled in some acting stuff, and one friend who's never acted. And, for sure, the non-actor friend is the most likely to do something wacky or unexpected or as a joke. I mean, she's also wonderful and highly empathetic, so it hasn't ever wrecked things for anyone else, but I do wonder if there's that element of acting which exercises your listening habits and your instinct for sharing the spotlight.

And yeah, there's a line beyond where immersion-breaking *does* mean the players are just having a day where they don't care about mood and just want to pretend-smash baddies, which is perfectly fair. I think just little breaks here and there usually come from the fact that their character is trapped in a stressful situation but they as a player aren't, so the player part of their brain takes control more as like a self-soothing tactic. That's my theory anyway!

Totally makes sense. Although now I'm going to be thinking about those habits during my own game time.

So using the example of "Thieves' Cant" and "Redcaps" is actually a good jumping-off point. A hallmark of a lot of your content is that it contains not just "vague and evocative" ideas and lore, but often rules/gameplay elements to implement those ideas into a game. Where does that come from, and where do worldbuilding and game design interact for you?

For me it's mostly a matter of remembering the medium that I'm using. I could write something that feels magical or spooky or thrilling, but this is a game, so I feel like if I were to just leave it at that, it would be a job unfinished. This isn't only a world I'm making up, it's a world that has to be played. So that encompasses things from not thinking too far ahead into events that might happen in the world because I want my party to be able to influence the world in that way, all the way down to making sure they can interact in some way with the vagues and the evocatives that I set up. If they're going to wander into the Fey Acre (my version of the Feywild), it's all well and good to say, "You realize that no matter how long you continue traveling, the sun is still firmly at high noon," but it's much more moody and involved if I only tell them once they start asking questions after their third short rest without an evening coming. That's a fun thing about faeries, all the weird stuff that's happening seems perfectly normal; you don't think about it being weird until something tips you off. Feywild is always tricky though because it's so at the far end of the vague and evocative spectrum.

For example, something like an island hopping sailing adventure, I'm disappointed if it's just "you go to the next island," even if that is technically what I signed up for. I want navigation and complications to be gamified so that my bouncing around like Odysseus feels like something that happened because of my character's interactions with the world. So yeah, I try to tie elements of narrative to solid real world game functions like long rests or dice rolls because I think that's the juncture where the player and the character meet. Why not make it where both the player and the character can meet the world they're experiencing!

Beyond just doing it yourself, you took the initiative to create a whole event around encouraging the tabletop community to write things. Could you tell us a bit about Gamowrimo?

Gamowrimo was a fairly spontaneous month-long game design event that I started towards the end of last year. I had (and still have) so many half-finished projects I'd worked on—from D&D supplements to system hacks or brand new TTRPG system concepts—that it was getting ridiculous. So when I saw a few friends getting ready to participate in NaNoWriMo (a month long event during which writers attempt to reach 50,000 words of whatever they're working on, or "finish a novel in a month"), I thought, "I should hijack that to force myself to finish any single one of my projects so that it's at least a playtest-able draft come December." And as with any and all thoughts I ever have, I put it up on Twitter.

Next thing I knew, loads of people were ready and excited to jump on board and finish their own game design projects! We had hundreds of submissions from people making new games, creating monsters or classes to be dropped into pre-existing games and adventure paths—all sorts of things. It was really thrilling to see so many people push beyond the idea of having to make something good and instead just focus on making something whole. I don't want to say "finished" because that implies polish and no intent to revisit, whereas this was more like getting something to Alpha stage. I'm looking forward to hopefully running Gamowrimo again with a little more forethought next time!

Very cool. Talking more specifically about the game world you've built—what's it actually like to experience it? What are some of the hallmarks that you've found important to include to define it?

That is a very good question. I'm not sure how my players would answer. It's highly possible that it's mostly tedious with sporadic bursts of flavour, although I hope not. I think the core considerations for something to fit into my setting are an almost disjointed scale of magical to non-magical. I've been asked before whether

my setting is high magic or low magic, and my answer is always that it is *pervasive* magic. I think from a glance it would look like my setting is low magic because I have a sort of fixation on the inclusion of the ordinary, but really it boils down to a concept of magic which is a little bit like the Force from *Star Wars*, before the force became about telekinesis and lightning powers. It's everywhere, but it's deep. Very few people can engage with True magic. Fae can because that's just in their nature, but it's something supernatural in the sense of being the most natural thing there is. It's in the rocks and the rain and the color of an autumn dawn and the sound of thunder—you can feel it but you can rarely ever access it in a raw, natural form. The magic that player characters have access to is like tapping into a tiny spring. Their magical feats are magicians' tricks cooked up by wizards using clever formulas to get just a taste, but it's nothing compared to the power of actual magic.

And so it has become necessary to me that if something I'm putting into my world doesn't need to be magic, then it isn't at all magical. Like, a ghost to a certain degree has to be magical in its essence in order to feel like a ghost. But a giant can still feel like a giant even if it's just an ordinary beast; same with goblins, or even my redcaps. I end up emphasizing the ordinary at every turn to more effectively highlight the magical stuff when it is encountered and make it feel properly alien or supernatural. With some exceptions made begrudgingly for magic items because even if I want them to only exist as legendary artifacts, my players would be disappointed to not get a simple, straightforward super power from time to time.

But—a short answer after expounding too much—it's my hope that the settings I create would feel like man's adventures on the border of the "perilous realms," as Tolkien would say. Like you're always in a little bit of danger, but you're not totally sure what the danger is.

Hence the Fey Acre, I'm sure. Sometimes you just walk too deep into the woods and find yourself in the land of the Faerie.

Absolutely!

I do like that juxtaposition. It has something close to a fairy tale feel to it, or at least a blur around the edges in my mental picture. Speaking of which: a good portion of your YouTube channel is dedicated to exploring mythological stories from a variety of cultures. What do you find fascinating about myths, and how does that interest factor into how you build your game world?

My relationship with mythology is such a strange one. I don't really remember how I got into it. I know I read books about mythical creatures as a kid and hung around as an annoying little sister while my brother read every single encyclopedia entry in *Age of Mythology*, but I don't remember actually investing serious time into it as a special interest. I do know that by the 7th grade I already just knew a bunch more about Greek myths—the actual stories rather than facts about the gods or what have you—than was anticipated. Kind of reminiscent of Athena showing up on the scene fully grown in some ways. The result of it is that people often think it must be a proper hobby of mine when really it's more like I'm wandering about, living my life, when something suddenly reminds me of a really strange story I somehow know, so I'll go look up the details and different tellings in the reference library I suddenly own and then share all the strangeness with the internet.

"WORLDBUILDING IS THE PLACE WHERE I, AS A GAMEMASTER, GET TO PLAY THE GAME MY WAY"

However it all got into my brain, though, I'm grateful for it. For starters, because I get to sound like a total snob casually referencing *Metamorphoses* or the *Aeneid* in conversation. But also because I think it's provided me with quite a full understanding of how humans relate to storytelling, particularly with subjects like history or religion, and it has given me a drive to achieve the same thing for worlds and cultures I'm making up myself. I never want it to feel like I've made everything up at the same time. I want the stories to seem like they've lived and changed through eons, iteration after iteration, to land wherever the current understanding for that world is. I'm not convinced I've ever fully accomplished that, but I do try.

Sounds awesome. Do in-world myths play a role in providing that sense of history, or are there other tactics you try to employ?

And that's where we reach the clash of my interest in, for lack of a better term, cultural realism with my fixation on the ordinary. I don't stress too much creating full on mythologies because, frankly, I don't think I would ever be able to make it work. I try to keep that stuff to a level similar to an average Joe's understanding in the real world. So mostly I'd tie it to things like in-world holidays; Joe can probably tell you the basic concept behind Christmas or Easter, whether he grew up going to Sunday school or not. It's when the players start specifically seeking out a piece of mythology/lore that I really get to dig into that stuff. And since they'd need to find a library or a scholar to get the details, it usually buys me enough time to write something fitting.

Outside of mythology, then, where do you tend to get your inspiration?

Oh, so many books or movies or games from my childhood. And some from later in life, but there's something about the media that made an impression on you when you were little that

really makes great fodder. I've found that a lot of the things I draw from tend to be visual rather than wordy—the art of Sidney Long or Caspar David Friedrich, the art from the early editions of *Talisman*, *Faeries* by Brian Froud and Andy Lee, the art from pre-movie *Lord of the Rings* calendars. Those are all things that hit a certain mood for me. But then there's the stuff that inspires me through actual scenes; movies like *Willow*, *Flight of Dragons*, *Return to Oz*; picture books like *Dragon Quest* illustrated by Nick Harris; or of course video games like *Dragon Age* or *Fable*.

All stuff that just crawled into my skull and sat there cooking until it had something useful to add to what I was doing with my life.

Visual inspiration makes a lot of sense, especially when it comes to trying to capture a mood. What draws you to tabletop role-playing games over other forms of media?

I think it's the empathetic quality of it. It really touches a lot of the same bases that acting does for me. Sure, you're working together to tell a story, but for me, it's the listening, sharing, understanding, and trying to lift each other up into the spotlight. It's maybe not something inherently present for all TTRPG experiences, but it's the angle I like to take.

What's your takeaway when it comes to worldbuilding? Why do it, and what core tips do you have for someone who wants to cut their teeth on creating a world for a game or story?

For me, worldbuilding is the place where I, as a gamemaster, get to play the game my way. Because I firmly believe that all the players should be having fun, and the GM is one of the players. But when you're actually in a session, you're having to act as both player and referee, keeping an eye out to make sure your friends are having an enjoyable experience—it's kind of like hosting a party. You're having fun, yes, but you also have

to worry about organizing the pizza, cleaning up afterwards, making sure all your friends have a ride home, and sorting out the lost and found items the next day. But the party planning is the bit where you get to do exactly what you want and nobody can stop you. It probably says something about me that that's the thing I enjoy! I've said before that it's the GM's curse to only ever get to play in their ideal game by being the one running it, so I think embracing that is key.

For people getting started on making a world of their own, I would say not to be shy about what you like. It's really easy to feel pressured to cut corners and make the world you think your players/readers will like, but everyone has such different tastes that it's just going to leave you upset that the world you're building doesn't look how you want it to. So if you like something, put it in. If you don't like something, you get to decide that it doesn't exist. Because you need to be having fun, too.

This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Thanks to Dael Kingsmill for taking the time to talk with us for this issue! You can find her on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

COMMUNITY ART

curated by Anna Hannon and Tristen Fekete

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

A SPARK OF HOPE

By Inky

As it is Yashidal tradition, on Winter Solstice people release lanterns to wish for hope and prosperity for the upcoming lighter season;

sometimes they even write more specific wishes on the paper lanterns that they want to come true.





SHAN

By Adam Bassett

Ashanne is the main character of a story I've been working on for a few years now. She's a member of the Throneguard—your classic bodyguard for the monarchy—and an extremely talented sorceress.

This portrait shows her profile, wearing her uniform with the iconic yellow scarf given to all Throneguard.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

LET MY PEOPLE GO

by J D Venner, illustrations by Ghranze

 REVOLUTION  HISTORY

Riots, revolutions, rebellions, and revolts. These words are never far from the tip of a worldbuilder's tongue. Societal upheaval can be a great watershed moment in a world, whether real or imaginary. Entire civilizations often begin and end in such turmoil and so we regularly see them replicated in fictional worlds. However, we seldom see these themes reproduced as faithfully as other world-changing events, such as wars, natural disasters, or new discoveries. Often, revolutions and their like can seem flat and two dimensional. This is because we often boil complex causes down to a single point of contention over which two sides disagree and fight. While this can, and often does, make for compelling stories, as worldbuilders we must look a little deeper and identify secondary, tertiary and even quaternary issues that can contribute to verisimilitude in our worlds.

Take, for example, the simplest form of revolution, the slave revolt. On the surface the cause is plain: freedom. Yet, often the causes are multiple and

contradicting, with such revolts being triggered by external events or people with ulterior motives. While there are many examples of successful slave revolts throughout history, it is perhaps not surprising that there are many, many more examples of unsuccessful attempts. Most of these are consigned to the footnotes of history, the loss of lives in pursuit of the noblest of causes barely given a line of text in the history books.

So why is it that some revolts succeed where others fail? It cannot simply be the ideals behind the movement, as surely yearning to be free is an ideal all slaves share. Why is it that many minor revolts are quelled, while others create surges of support that overwhelm their oppressors? As worldbuilders, we must go beyond the simple character development and action scenes within a revolt and look at the reasons behind it. Often these people have lived under oppression for decades, or even centuries, and so sometimes the most important question to ask while world-building is: why's the revolution happening *now*?

The answers to these questions usually lie in what is happening outside the revolt. Mass scale revolutions can be triggered by external factors, whether it be natural disasters or a distracted government. These triggers go on to form the basis for the revolt, with revolutionary movements feeding off whatever advantages they can gain in their struggle against oppression. In this article, we'll look at three major slave uprisings throughout history in an attempt to analyze their differing triggers, successes, and downfalls.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

The society and practices of Ancient Sparta have been well popularized in recent years, with films such as *300* cementing the idea of a powerful militaristic society that thrived on a code of honour and strength. While there is an element of truth to them, these stories tend to ignore the fact that nearly every aspect of Spartan life was based upon dominance over an enormous contingent of slaves.

Known as *helots*, these slaves came from wars fought by the Spartans throughout the Peloponnese, wars often fought for the sole purpose of capturing more slaves. The Spartan way of life only existed due to this abundance of slave labour, with helots performing the vast majority of agricultural work necessary to support the state. This reliance enabled Spartan men to focus on military training and adhering to their strict code, while it allowed Spartan women to take a surprisingly dominant role in politics and economics for the period.

However, this two tier society came at a cost, with the helots outnumbering Spartan citizens by up to seven to one during some periods.¹ The significant disparity meant that fear of a slave revolt was a constant undercurrent within Spartan society. According to Plutarch, each year the Spartans would declare war on the helots in an attempt to reduce their numbers and instil fear, effectively allowing Spartans to indiscriminately kill them without punishment for a limited period.²

With such a large, cohesive group of subjugated people, there were likely many helot revolts throughout Spartan history. Both Aristotle and Plato used the Spartan helot system as an argument against mass slavery, due to the regular turmoil and unrest it caused. Aristotle went so far as to write that the helots were “like an enemy constantly sitting in wait for the disasters of the Spartiate.”³ When such a disaster occurred in 465 BCE, the helots struck in what would later become known as the Great Helot Revolt.⁴

That particular year, an earthquake struck Sparta, and the epicentre was likely in the city of Sparta itself. Plutarch states that it was the largest ever recorded, and several contemporary sources testify that only five houses were left standing in the city.⁵ The event was devastating to Sparta as a whole, but mostly to the internal security of the state. Due to the location of the earthquake, and the demographics of Sparta's population, it seems that Spartan citizens were hit much harder than the helots in the surrounding farms and villages. Later scholars estimate that the ratio of helots to Spartans may have risen after the earthquake to as high as fifteen to one.⁶

¹ Herodotus. *The Histories*. Open Road Media, 2020, pp. 9-10.

² Plutarch. *Plutarch's Lives*. A. Donaldson and J. Reid, 1763, pp. 28, 3-7.

³ Aristotle., and H Rackham. *Politics*. Harvard University Press, 1944, p. 1269a.

⁴ Nino Luraghi. *Helots And Their Masters In Laconia And Messenia*. Center For Hellenic Studies, 2003.

⁵ Plutarch. *Plutarch's Lives*. A. Donaldson and J. Reid, 1763, pp. 16-18.

The helots chose this moment to revolt. With the Spartan state in ruins around them, they attacked the city en masse. One of the two Spartan kings at the time recognized the danger in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Rather than letting his people pick through the rubble of their houses for loved ones and valuables, he blew the horn that denoted an enemy attack.⁷ According to Plutarch, it was only this that saved the remaining Spartans as they barely had time to arm themselves before the helots surged into the city. The helots, seeing the armed Spartans ahead, chose not to press their attack, and instead retreated to a mountain town in Messenia and fortified it.

It speaks to how decimated the Spartans were that they went to Athens, their emerging rivals in the Ancient Greek world, for help. The Athenians, supposedly experts at siege warfare, sent a large army. That should have been the end of the revolt. The two most powerful Greek city-states sending armies to confront the helots should have been enough. However, at the last minute Sparta changed their mind and sent the Athenians away. Whether due to the infamous Spartan pride, or simply nervousness at allowing a foreign army onto their land while they were crippled, it deeply insulted the Athenians.

They returned to Athens furious, enraging the populace enough to ostracize and banish the politicians that were friendly to Sparta in the first place. Distrust sown and honour offended, sources state that this was the point at which initial groundwork for the later devastating Peloponnesian War between the two states was laid.

As for the revolt itself, it continued for another decade. Sparta alone was unable to break the fortifications high in the Messenian mountains and the helots continued to send raids out to free remaining slaves and burn Spartan homes. Eventually, in the lead up to the long Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta, Athens helped the long-besieged helots escape. They settled them in the town of Naupactus, a key site that would later become a base of operations for the Athenians during the war, believing that the fiercest fighters against Sparta would be her former slaves.⁸

This revolt, while clearly triggered by the earthquake itself, must have been simmering for some time. The repeated slaughter of helots and their treatment at the hands of the violent Spartans would have led many helots to believe that they must grasp this opportunity to escape. It is interesting that, despite their far superior num-

⁶ A. French. *Greece & Rome* vol. 2, no. 3, JSTOR, 1955, pp. 108-118.

⁷ Paul Cartledge. *The Spartans*. Overlook, 2003, p. 70.

bers, the helots were quickly scared off from attacking the remaining Spartans. It seems that fear of their masters ran deep. Perhaps this is why they fled to a stronghold that they eventually held for 14 years. Had the Spartans not shot themselves in the foot by insulting the Athenians, the revolt may have ended quickly. As it was, not only did the Spartans fail to defeat the entrenched helots alone, but it was the Athenians that eventually granted them their freedom.

This idea of an enslaved populace escaping, rather than fighting, their masters is one that is seldom encountered in fiction. Perhaps it is due to our concepts of honor and pride that may make the prospect less appealing, but it is by no means uncommon in history. During those fourteen years, that fortress in Messenia must have seemed at turns prohibitive and liberating, a free city under constant threat of attack. We regularly see examples of this throughout fiction, from Zion in the *Matrix* films to the Last City in the popular *Destiny* video games, yet we rarely see the story of how people arrived in these bastions. The Great Helot Revolt is such a story, and therefore it makes for a fascinating source from which to draw inspiration.

THE GREAT LEADER

Many of us already know some of the legend of Spartacus, the gladiator that defied the Roman Republic. Whether it's from watching Kirk Douglas and his band of name-stealing warriors, or from seeing Russell Crowe reverse the storyline and go from general to gladiator. It is no exaggeration to say that the Spartacus Revolt, also known as the Third Servile War, very nearly brought Rome to its knees.

Despite its modern portrayal, the Spartacus movement was not intended to be a slave revolt. It began when Spartacus, and two hundred fellow slaves, escaped from a brutal gladiator school in Capua.⁹ Originally intending to flee before the Romans sent soldiers, Spartacus and his men were too slow and were quickly caught by a local militia force. Despite their inferior weapons and numbers, Spartacus' men were able to soundly defeat their enemies.¹⁰

They went on to use innovative tactics and remarkable intelligence to defeat several larger Roman forces sent against them. Each time they embarrassed the Romans, their support grew, eventually amassing over seventy thousand people under the banner of Spartacus.¹¹ Sources state that people from all over Rome flocked to join his cause, and not just escaped slaves, but shepherds and farmers too. Which begs the question, why would these people take up arms against the Roman Republic? There was no pestilence or earthquake, no famine or drought, and it certainly didn't seem to be in support of the abolition of slavery, with many of these people still owning slaves back home.

The answer may lie in what was known as the Social War. Some twenty years prior, the Roman Republic was only considered to be the area directly around Rome itself. The rest of Italy, made up of various tribes and semi-autonomous states, were considered allies and vassal states of Rome, but not true Romans. In the early 1st Century BCE, these states began to demand Roman citizenship and rights, something Rome itself expressly forbade. The war that resulted was bloody and violent, lasting over a decade and with hundreds of thousands dead. Eventu-

ally, in c. 87 BCE, the Romans won. However, in order to avoid further wars, they granted many of the states' demands, including citizenship.

Twenty years later, at the time of Spartacus' revolt, the region around Capua had not yet recovered from this war.¹² The people that flocked to Spartacus were likely the same people who'd recently been defeated by Rome, people like those in Capua, who held a deep anger and military experience.

Spartacus and his men continued to move around Italy for over two years, terrifying the Roman government and defeating every Roman force sent against them, but never really settling. Without a clear purpose beyond defeating the next army sent against it, rifts began to grow amongst his men. Over this time, many small groups within Spartacus' army left his command to pursue their own objectives, most being immediately destroyed by the armies that now continually tailed the rebels. However, despite his dwindling army, Spartacus still defeated legion after legion sent against him.

Eventually the confidence brought by such successes, and the growing rifts in his army came to a head. After a particularly great victory against a large Roman force, several of his commanders refused to retreat, wishing to attack another full Roman legion that was approaching. Spartacus was unable to reign them in, and they ended up charging the Roman force who seemed to quickly gain the upper hand against the smaller force. In order to save his men, Spartacus decided to commit his remaining troops. As he joined battle, a second Roman legion appeared on the field. The battle was long and bloody, and eventually Spartacus himself was killed attempting to reach the Roman praetor commanding the

first legion. The rest of his forces were killed or scattered and the two praetors that commanded the legions went on to become the next leaders of the Republic, Pompey and Crassus.¹³

Similar to the helot revolt in Sparta, the Spartacus Revolt's initial aim was only to escape their masters. The key difference between the two revolts being the first conflict. Where the helots quickly retreated before the Spartans, Spartacus' gladiators won a resounding victory. While this victory, and the others that followed, generated enormous support and began a movement, Spartacus did not seem to know what to do with it. They could have achieved their initial aim of escape many times throughout the period, and yet they never left Italy. Spartacus' movement lacked purpose. At no point in the historical sources do we see evidence of political demands or a cohesive aim. That's not to say that there weren't any, but if they existed, they were not loud or strong enough to overcome the militaristic face of the movement. With each battle won, the rebellion considered themselves unstoppable, and so they never thought to stop. It was a revolution defined and carried solely by military victories, and once they began to lose, their movement dwindled and died. This flash in the pan may have been impressive, and it definitely terrified the Roman government, but it ultimately achieved little politically with the only lasting effect seeming to be an increased wariness of slaves throughout the Roman dominion.¹⁴

Spartacus, while clearly a great warrior, tactician, and general, ultimately failed as a leader. He struggled to implement a vision, despite the power at his command. Such leaders may rise up in your worlds. Militaristic people with great charisma, who can inspire even the weakest, most downtrodden person into rebelling. Or

⁸ Robert Garland. *Wandering Greeks*. Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 187-190.

⁹ Mike Duncan. *The Storm before the Storm*. New York: PublicAffairs. 2017. pp. 135-136

¹⁰ Plutarch. *Parallel Lives: Vol 3*. Loeb Classical Library, 1916, pp. 8-12.

¹¹ Appian. *The Civil Wars*. Macmillan and Co., 1899. pp. 1-116

¹² Philip Matyszak, *Cataclysm 90 BC*, p. 107.

¹³ Lynda Telford, *Sulla*, p. 93.

perhaps just the opposite, a person with intelligence and vision, who knows how to implement their ideals, but lacks the charisma and drive to gain the power necessary to enact change. These revolutions often falter and fizzle because, after the shackles are thrown off, the newly-freed people need a new common goal to unite them, or else the movement splinters and fails.

Implementing such a revolt in your world is perhaps the simplest of the examples in this article. A charismatic leader often comes naturally to storytellers, and battles for freedom against great odds make for compelling stories. Yet, it is the downfall itself which is most interesting about the Spartacus revolt. Why did he fail to implement, or even publicly espouse, any political beliefs? A revolt generated by a single figure can often take on the flavour of their character. In this way, a great figure that seeks only vengeance may lead a vengeful, violent revolt. While a great figure that seeks coexistence may lead a peaceful revolution. When creating such a revolt, we must focus on developing the figure at the top, taking their beliefs, flaws and ideals and transposing them onto the movement as a whole. The way to achieve this without constructing a two dimensional monolith is to ensure the figurehead has a rich and deep character, generating the complexity from the inside before propagating it outwards. It is also important to consider exactly how this figure maintains their hold over the people. It may be that they have such genuine charisma that they inspire others, however they could be utilising magic or deception to generate a following. Either way, we should consider what would happen if that hold is broken. A naturally charismatic leader may lose confidence after a debilitating defeat, or a controlling mage may find that their magic has unforeseen consequences. When the entire revolt rests on the shoulders of a single person, any flaw in their character or actions becomes a flaw in the entire movement.

THE RIGHTS OF MAN

The island of Haiti used to be a French colony known as Saint-Domingue. Saint-Domingue and Jamaica, a nearby British colony, were the producers of the majority of the world's sugar, a crop that Europe was beginning to consume in vast quantities.¹⁵ It was by far the most profitable French colony throughout the

18th century CE, with more than one in every twenty people in France depending entirely on the island for their livelihoods.¹⁶ Nearly 20,000 slaves were forcibly brought to the island from Africa each year. Usually, half of them died within the first year from yellow fever, yet enough survived to outnumber the other residents by ten to one.

Though there were several minor revolts on Saint-Domingue throughout the years of French occupation, the events that led to the Haitian Revolution began across the Atlantic. In 1789 the new French First Republic published its Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This document established the rules and rights to freedom for people within the republic, including non-citizens; mentions of slavery were conspicuously absent.

Initially, the news was ignored by the Haitian slaves. However, the many free black people, known as “freemen,” on the island began demanding the rights accorded to them under the Declaration. White plantation owners protested, furious at the idea that the free black men on the island would become their equals. In 1791, Vincente Ogé, a wealthy black landowner in Saint-Domingue, demanded the right to vote. When denied by the governor of the colony, Vincente led three hundred freemen in a minor revolt with the aim of ending racial discrimination. He was captured and brutally executed by being broken on a wheel before he was decapitated.

Later, in August of the same year, the slaves and freemen revolted. Within a few months they controlled a third of the island and numbered over one hundred thousand. Realizing the cat-

astrophic impact of this revolt, the French government voted to grant all freemen full civil and political status wherever they lived in the republic.¹⁷ They simultaneously sent six thousand soldiers and a new governor to the island, hoping that would be enough.

For a time, it worked. Once their own rights were assured, many of the freemen on the island joined the French soldiers in attacking the other rebels, driving the slaves back and in several places defeating them entirely. Everything seemed to be returning to normal. Then in 1793, France declared war on Great Britain. Britain, seeing the potential to remove France's most profitable colony, began to further incite revolt in Saint-Domingue. This move was incredibly successful, and Britain began to land small groups of soldiers on the island to assist the rebels.

In early 1794, in a remarkable attempt to retain control of the valuable colony before it fell into the hands of the British, the French National Convention declared slavery to be abolished throughout the republic. Declaring that all men living in colonies were to immediately become citizens, regardless of color or race.¹⁸ The plan worked. Both former slaves and freemen alike turned on the British forces and forced them from the island. The British had sent a huge force to the island over the last year and had nothing to show for it. They lost over one hundred thousand men, half of them to yellow fever and the other half to the excellent tactics and skill of the Saint-Domingue forces, the vast majority of whom were former slaves or freemen.

Toussaint Louverture, the most skilled freeman general on the island, seized his opportunity and

¹⁴ Keith Bradley. *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1989. p. 156

¹⁵ James Perry. *Arrogant Armies: Great Military Disasters and the Generals Behind Them*. Edison: CastleBooks. 2005.

¹⁶ Laurent Dubois. *Avengers of the New World*. Harvard University Press. 2005.

¹⁷ Censer and Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, p. 124.

¹⁸ Jeremy D. Popkin. *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*. John Wiley & Sons. 2011. p. 66.

also expelled the colonial French government from the island. Instituting a new constitution, he declared himself ruler for life and made Saint-Domingue a sovereign black state. The French were furious. Napoleon Bonaparte, now Emperor of France, ordered over eight thousand soldiers to retake French control of the island. Before they departed, Napoleon gave secret orders to his brother-in-law, who was leading the forces, that once they had regained control they were to forcibly reinstate slavery on the island.

A year of vicious fighting ensued. General Rochambeau, an avowed white supremacist and leader of one quarter of the French forces, gained a reputation for killing any and all black people his men came across, whether combatants or civilians. Likewise, the former slave turned general Jean-Jacques Dessalines, became infamous for murdering every white inhabitant of any town or village he came across and stacking their bodies in the town square to rot in the sun.

Eventually the Saint-Domingue armies were forced to surrender. The French had invaded outside of yellow fever season, and despite the remarkable skill and discipline shown by the Saint-Domingue forces, they could not withstand the huge French onslaught. Toussant was arrested and shipped to France, where he would die in prison only a few months later. For a short period, the island was calm, then in 1802, Napoleon reinstated slavery.

Once again, the black people of Saint-Domingue revolted for their freedom. This time, the recriminations were harsh and immediate. Predicting this uprising, Napoleon had left the brutal Rochambeau on the island. Despite his forces having dwindled significantly as yellow

fever season began once again, Rochambeau instigated a near-genocidal attack on the new rebels. Dessalines, the leader of the new revolt, responded in kind. The war on Saint-Domingue had descended into a genocidal race war, with both sides hell bent on exterminating the other.

On November 18th 1803, after a year of the worst fighting Saint-Domingue had yet experienced, the French forces were decisively defeated by Dessalines at the Battle of Vertières. Rather than send reinforcements, Napoleon ordered the French forces to withdraw. The recent sale of Louisiana to the United States meant that Saint-Domingue was their last major colony in the Americas. The war with Britain was going poorly, and Napoleon had decided to cut his losses.

With the withdrawal of the French troops, Saint-Domingue finally belonged to its previously enslaved inhabitants. A month later, in January 1804, Dessalines declared the island a free black nation and changed its name to Haiti, a name taken from an indigenous South American tribe. Haiti was finally its own country, run by and for the people who had spent decades enslaved.

Widely considered the most successful slave revolt in history, the Haitian Revolution began in 1791 and ended thirteen years later with complete independence for the former French colony. It may be the only slave revolution in history that resulted in the creation of a state both free of slavery and entirely run by the formerly enslaved.¹⁹ The incredible drive, intelligence and organisation demonstrated by the slaves during the revolt shocked those in slave-owning countries and is credited with many changes in attitude about white superiority across the western world.²⁰

The Haitian Revolution differs significantly from the other two revolts in this article. It was not triggered by a momentous event that crippled the oppressors, nor was it driven by a great leader who spurred the people onwards. It is a trope often quoted in works of fiction that “ideas cannot be destroyed.” From the robot-slave uprising in the video game *Detroit: Become Human*, to the titular character V in *V for Vendetta*. The Haitian Revolution, despite its fits and starts, was a singular movement. It was defeated several times, its people broken and many of its capable leaders executed, yet each time it rose again from the ashes. There was little the great empires of the time could do to stop it. The few times it faltered were when those ideals began to split, such as when the freemen were offered their own freedom at the expense of the slaves, or when different nations courted various groups.

Wherever there are oppressed people in your worlds, dreams of freedom may be fermenting. It may take years of struggle and suffering, but the dream cannot be completely de-

stroyed. While the oppressors may think only of tomorrow's profits, the oppressed are thinking of the freedom that the future might bring, whether for them or their children. Illustrating these underlying ideals is not easy. The tendency of a worldbuilder is to focus on the macro events, ignoring the micro signals that showed the fuse was lit. When it comes to a slave revolt, however, we can often utilize human nature. Most people understand the yearning for freedom, we recognize that enslaved people will doubtless try to get free. Therefore, as worldbuilders, we only need to illustrate escalating hints to our audience and allow them to extrapolate the undercurrent of impending revolt. For example, seeing a shady group of men give a secret knock at a door and

slip inside could have several connotations. But if those men are slaves, then many in your audience will begin to assume they're planning some form of revolt. Perhaps the men begin to meet every night, or the group is getting larger each time. We simply need to create a few hints and begin to escalate them. By doing this, we replace the standard trigger with a slow fuse, and so when the revolt occurs it does not seem to come from thin air, retaining verisimilitude without needing an external event.

THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMANITY

The motives and causes behind slave revolts may seem simple and yet, as with all human endeavours, they are often far more complex than they appear. Simple breaks for freedom can result in powerful movements that then fizzle away

from lack of direction. While slow stirrings of discontent can flare into a revolt that spans decades and forces the greatest of empires to concede.

The triggers and motives we use to spark the slave revolts in our world often have major consequences on their direction and eventual conclusion. When utilizing a charismatic figurehead, we must put work into developing their flaws and ideals before we allow them to flavour the revolt as a whole. When a cataclysmic event upsets the world order, we must decide if our slave revolts use the opportunity to attack, escape, or push certain demands. When far flung lands begin to embrace freedom, we must look at how that news affects those who are oppressed in their own lands.

To our lasting shame as a species, slavery has been a consistent thread in the tapestry of humanity. If the worlds and species you create also

“WHEREVER THERE ARE OPPRESSED PEOPLE IN YOUR WORLDS, DREAMS OF FREEDOM MAY BE FERMENTING.”

¹⁹ Franklin W. Knight. “The Haitian Revolution”. *The American Historical Review*. 2000 pp 103–115.

²⁰ Philip James Kaisary. *The Literary Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, PhD dissertation. University of Warwick. 2008. pp. 8–10.

RESOURCES!

PINTEREST

by Inky



[Pinterest](#) is a powerful tool when it comes to reference material and finding visual inspiration for your worldbuilding. It helps create moods and aesthetics you want to go for. With the proper key words, it is even possible to find faithful references since museums like the Met have their own collections on the website. However, its primary function should be as inspiration and reference, not as a means to source art you want to use in worldbuilding projects since it hosts many reposted and uncredited artworks as well.

MAGICPOSER.COM

by Truedevel

[Magicposer.com](#) is a web app for simple 3-D modelling. They have all the geometrical shapes you need to create because you can warp and resize them. You could build a 3D environment if you're patient enough, or use the app's figure models which can be moved at the joints to strike any pose. Just take a screenshot when you're done, and there you have it. The perfect reference!

MagicPoser

(TIP: If you accidentally refresh the page or close the window, the app will not store your progress and revert back to the defaults, so be careful with maneuvering while using the site.)

include this flaw, it is reasonable to conclude that there will also be slave revolts. As we know from our own extensive history on the topic, people will dedicate their lives to fighting their oppressors. Turning small scale rebellions into a large scale revolt takes triggers and by taking examples from our own world, we can make these realistic and meaningful.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



REVOLUTION AS A VIOLENT ACT

THE UNACCOUNTED COMPLEXITY OF INSURRECTION

by Cassidy M. Hammersmith

 [SCI FI \(SOFT\)](#)  [FANTASY](#)  [WARFARE](#)

Modern political fiction, particularly teen and young adult fiction, suffers from what I consider to be a deep and troubling gap in the treatment of the topic of revolution. The formula most often presented to the reader, shortly put, is this:

1. There exists an evil empire under which the people struggle.
2. The hero becomes aware of this evil and is motivated to combat it.
3. The hero joins or creates a movement of resistance to undermine the empire.
4. They succeed.
5. All live happily ever after, close curtain.

The tendency is understandable. Long fiction requires a problem, a conflict, and a resolution. A revolutionary campaign, in its breadth and scope, fits neatly into these needs. Watching the good guys beat the bad guys and win the day makes for an entertaining and uplifting story. It does, however, present a problem when this image of revolution is propagated too widely to a society. The simplicity of the narrative leaves little room for greater reflection and tends to glorify resistance movements, characterizing the protagonists as righteous and successful, while the antagonists are often vilified to such extremes that opposition to them is a natural consequence of their very existence.

Attempting to align this easy narrative with even a cursory survey of our human history immediately presents a problem in all but the most extreme cases. Revolutionaries are not universally good. The states they oppose are not universally bad. And the human, economic, and civil costs of these actions are never, in any case, easily wiped away.

As an American myself, it is easy to gloss over the idea of painful effects of revolt due to the circumstances of the nation's founding. The "revolutionary spirit" as it is sometimes called gave rise to many great social upheavals in the wake of the American Revolutionary War, including the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century which sowed the seeds of yet *another* insurrection before the country reached its first centennial. In many ways, that spirit continued throughout the twentieth century as embodied in the Labor Movement, Women's Suffrage, the Civil Rights movements of the 50s and 60s, modern feminism, and various other self-described progressive movements dotting our history. The language of American political discourse itself carries one such scar visibly when a person takes a position the other finds untenable:

"Do you really want to die on that hill?"

Americans love a good fight. Or even a bad one. Fighting—and dying—for what we believe in is part of what made us who we are.

But even our own war of independence, so often hailed as one of the great successes of revolutionary politics, carried with it burdens quite easily overlooked. Stories and letters abound of Continental soldiers and their families being deprived of pay during the course of the war. Families once well-off suddenly found themselves

unable to afford food, clothing, and firewood. This problem was due not only to shortfalls in the new government's ability to fund its war effort, but also a result of Britain's naval blockade—which threatened not just commercial fishermen, but also farmers who made substantial living by providing raw materials for export and the shipping industry that carried those goods overseas. Scarcity in import and export trade fueled incredible wartime inflation, which meant that even when a soldier's pay was available, it was often insufficient to provide for the basic necessities.

In an environment like this, it is easy to see the seeds planted for the American sense of rugged individualism which dominates the culture today. While it may seem like ancient history—given generational distance of roughly thirty to forty years—we are talking about a mass tragedy which left its mark only seven to nine generations ago. Coupled with additional opportunities for westward expansion and frontier living in the interim that reinforced those ideas, it is little wonder that the predominant narrative of American culture revolves around the individual's ability to survive on their own rather than as a communal effort.¹

A few months prior to the signing of the Constitution, one founding father wrote:

"There is nothing more common than to confound the terms of the American Revolution with those of the late American war. The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed." — Benjamin Rush 1787²

In the wake of this "late American war," the new-

ly independent colonies—which became the first thirteen states of the United States—saw themselves as independent nation states rather than a united singular entity. Prior to the signing of the Constitution of the United States of America, another document was signed that embodies this idea: the Articles of Confederation. Compare the opening lines of "To all to whom these Presents shall come, we the undersigned Delegates of the States affixed to our Names send greeting," and "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." It is clear that between 1777, when the Articles were created, and 1787, when the Constitutional Convention was held, a great deal of nation-building had taken place. In light of an untold number between 100,000 and 200,000 dead, 100,000 political refugees that had fled, and 25,000 disfigured, there was much to rebuild.³

Compare the complexity and nuance of the American War of Independence to that presented by the cinematic universe of *Star Wars*. Particularly in the original trilogy, Episodes IV through VI, the Rebel Alliance shows no signs of significant division within its ranks in terms of tactics or ideology. While the films mention losses and sacrifices, the movement is clearly well funded, such to the point that they can keep and maintain a branded fleet of starfighters and equipment to support them. No mention is made of what policies of the Galactic Empire they oppose, apart from the cartoonishly vile destruction of Alderaan to prove a political point.

We take for granted that the Empire is bad and the Rebels are good by nature of our cultural relationship to the concepts and the narrative focuses of the films, and that is all. It is perhaps understandable—given the format—that screen time was not devoted to that kind of nuance, but perhaps it is a disservice to the audience how little screen time wrestles with these concepts. The melodramatic presentation of the opposing sides does further disservice by distancing the audience from any sense of reality regarding the concept of interstellar war. It took another forty years from the release of *A New Hope* until the release of *Rogue One* in 2016, when finally we see aspects of the Empire and the Rebel Alliance humanized.

In *Rogue One*, our focus shifts away from the galaxy-shattering drama of the Skywalker family to a small ensemble of Rebel soldiers and commanders. The shift allows us to appreciate that, in a galactic war against a monolithic empire, an insurrection operates primarily as groups of loosely affiliated terrorists. These groups occasionally focus their efforts on undermining one another, rather than their common enemy, for internal political gain. They are not above shooting a former ally in the back if they think it will save them. And occasionally, they will pay another to find and assassinate a fellow commander who has splintered away. Indeed, this film is the first where internal schisms are even acknowledged in the *Star Wars* franchise!

Still, even that film does not solve the problem of finality in *Return of the Jedi*. The second Death Star is destroyed, the Emperor is dead, the galaxy rejoices, roll credits. The very first act of the galactic revolution is closed, and the curtain does not rise again until long after a new government

¹ Abrahamson, James L. "The American Homefront: A National Defense University Military History." Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1983.

² Rush, Benjamin. "Address to the People of the United States." New York, NY. January 1787. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/address-to-the-people-of-the-united-states/>

³ Ibid.

is already well established and under new threat in Episode VII. Of reconstruction and tallying costs, we have nothing. This beggars the narrative such that no greater moral message can be gleaned than “good guys win, bad guys lose.” Messages such as this, so prevalent in American literary culture (*Divergent*, *Hunger Games*, and *Equilibrium* spring to mind) feed into that simplistic idea of a just and unified revolt against obvious, monolithic evil with certain victory.

But reality, simply, does not bear this treatment out.

Old conflicts have a tendency to be abstract in the mind and to alienate us from understanding that their effects reverberate—while saying nothing of how. So instead, here is an insurrection, fresh and new and even ongoing to some degree: the Syrian Civil War.

The major players of this drama have been exhaustively reported by the western media: the Kurdish Rebels, the self-proclaimed Islamic State, and the Democratic rebels that sparked the conflict in a way not dissimilar from what has happened in recent months in the United States. The story runs deep and, for a time, captivated audiences as its chapters unfolded. It is, I think, one of the best examples of how well-documented insurrections depart dramatically from our popular notions about them.

The crisis in Syria has its roots in pro-democratic demonstrations in March 2011, when the cities of Aleppo and Damascus hosted large scale demonstrations following the arrest and torture of two teenagers who had written revolutionary graffiti on the side of a school a few

days prior in the city of Darra. Security forces responded to the demonstrations by opening fire on the crowd. More civilians joined the protest, and set fire to the Ba’ath party headquarters in Darra. In these first few days, fifteen protestors and seven police officers were killed. In the beginning of April, demands for President Bashat al-Assad and his regime’s complete overthrow became dominant, and the movement began to evolve. The Syrian Army became involved by April 25th, killing hundreds and instigating increasingly militarized responses from civilians and government defectors. These demonstrations culminated in the organization of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on July 29 of the same year, marking the beginning of the civil war proper.⁴

Throughout 2011, the violence continued to escalate and spread throughout the country with FSA forces battling Assad’s Syrian Army for control of major cities. By 2012, militarized fighting reached the cities of Aleppo and Damascus. Though the UN and Koffi Annan attempted to orchestrate a ceasefire in August of 2012, by June of the following year, 90,000 Syrians had already died.⁵

Let this sink in for a moment, in terms of scale. The entire American Revolutionary War, as mentioned above, estimated—at the low end—to have killed 100,000 Americans. Syria’s Civil War managed to rival that number after just a year of open fighting; we are still in the opening chapters of the conflict.

In 2013, revolutionary forces had already begun to fracture into several rival groups vying for control. By September of 2013, the Islamic State (best known in the West as ISIS) had usurped many of the holdings of the FSA and its allies,

took over much of eastern Syria, and continued to spread their influence and control throughout rural Syria.⁶ The Islamic State, claiming to establish a new caliphate in June 2014, had by now become the largest insurrectionist force in the country. This prompted a military coalition led by the United States to begin a campaign of airstrikes seeking to demoralize and eradicate the movement starting in September 2014.⁷

So here we are, three years into the conflict, and already the original pro-democratic FSA is rapidly losing relevance despite maintaining footholds in Aleppo, Damascus, and other urban areas to the west; a Kurdish ethnic militia is poised to fight their own battle for independence in the northeast; and the Islamic State has risen to dominate much of Syria’s rural areas and advanced as far east as northern Iraq. Three years in. Based on figures from the UN, reported by the BBC, we are well over 150,000 dead. And it gets worse.

The FSA was not the only secular opposition force operating in Syria over the course of the war. Several other groups, including the Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army, Syrian Revolutionary Front, the Hazzm Movement, and the Army of Conquest, also carried out operations against both the Assad government and the various sectarian groups of the conflict, such as the al-Nursra Front, the Khorasan Group, and Ahrar ash-Sham.

At the risk of making a poorly timed joke, the situation is starting to sound rather a lot more like a Monty Python sketch than any fictitious conflict which I am aware of. “Nah, we’re not the

Judean People’s Front, we’re the People’s Front of Judea!” A bit tongue-in-cheek, perhaps, but the contrast highlights an important difference between our popular notions of a unified insurrection with the reality of a fractured, stratified resistance at war—not merely with the established government of the region, but with one another as well.

Of course, foreign intervention in the conflict does little to simplify the analysis. US ground forces began operating in support of both Kurdish separatists and revolutionary forces as early as October 30, 2015. These operations were at least partly in response to Russian ground forces and Turkish ground forces supporting Assad and the Ba’athist government, resulting in significant territorial gain starting September 30 of the same year. Increased US support in the form of weapons and troops for rebellion forces and Russian support for the Assad government led some to speculate an escalation into a full-scale proxy war.⁸

As of 2016, amidst an estimated 250,000 dead and 4.5 million fled, UN inquiries into the situation concluded that all parties involved up to that point had committed war-crimes against the people of Syria; murder, torture, rape, starving civilian populations, and use of chemical agents have all been part of this conflict.⁹ What started as a demand for increased democracy in government, transparency of elections, and outrage over the capture and torture of two teenage boys has evolved into a humanitarian crisis and an eight-year-long civil war which is still far from over.

⁴ Monica Yacoubian, “Syria Timeline: Since the Uprising,” United States Institute of Peace, Middle East, June 4, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/06/syria-timeline-uprising-against-assad>.

⁵ Lucy Rogers et al., “Syria: The Story of the Conflict,” BBC News, Mar. 11, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Zeke J. Miller, “Obama Says U.S. Will Bomb ISIS in Syria, Train Rebels,” *Time*, Sep. 10, 2014, <https://time.com/3319658/obama-isis-speech-iraq-syria>.

⁸ Ian Bremmer, “These Five Proxy Battles Are Making Syria’s Civil War Increasingly Complicated,” *Time*, Feb. 16, 2018, <https://time.com/5162409/syria-civil-war-proxy-battles>.

⁹ Ibid.

By 2020, of the twenty-one million people living in Syria when the conflict began, nearly four million have fled the country as refugees, an additional 10.9 million have been displaced from their homes within the country, and 586,100 have died.¹⁰ A de facto autonomous zone, “Rojava,” controlled by Kurdish forces controls the north-eastern portion of the country. As of writing this article, a new constitution is still being drafted with delegates of opposition forces, the Assad government, and foreign guarantors. However, there still remains the question of how Syria will shoulder the burden of a reconstruction which the UN estimates will cost over \$400 billion.¹¹

Untangling the gordian knot of the Syrian Civil War is bound to take another decade at least. Though it is, perhaps, the most thoroughly documented war in human history, the sheer volume of information available makes understanding the ebb and flow of the conflict difficult at best.¹² What is clear, however, is that the normal superficial treatment given to armed conflict by not just fiction, but also popular history, is woefully inadequate to capture the character of the chaos experienced by the Syrian people over the last decade. So here is the question I am left with, looking at this great mess of tragedy: *why?*

What good does it do to us to view conflict so one dimensionally? That there are merely good guys and bad guys, and the good guys must win and the bad guys must lose? What are we gaining from this treatment of conflict? Is there a need for hope that such narratives harken to? Do we not trust our audience’s ability to handle the nuance of insurrection? Are authors fearful

that mentioning the numbers of dead and the level of destruction visited upon a country will make their protagonists less relatable? I am not sure, exactly.

Here is what I am sure of: in a time when the specter of revolt hangs heavy in the air, a responsible storyteller has some duty to portray revolution with due deference to both the destruction it causes and the nuance of its evolution. It does *Star Wars* no good to have one unified Rebel Alliance when it is far more likely there would have been two or five or thirty. It does *Equilibrium* no good to roll credits immediately after the bombs go off with the implication of unimpeded victory. There is deep, meaningful drama to be had in the conflicts and confusion that arise from within an insurrection or that are imposed by foreign agents. In the face of the truth, I cannot avoid the conclusion that “good guys vs. bad guys and the bad guys lose” is not great storytelling. It is instead convenient storytelling, and plays to our emotions and/or expectations. Without analyzing the truth that there are not always good guys, that everyone is capable of atrocity, and that battles are not easily won simply by nature of being morally right, we do ourselves, our worlds, and our narratives a grave disservice.

After all, if the point of worldbuilding is to make a fictional place feel alive, it behooves us to allow that place to properly account for the casualties of its conflicts.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)

¹⁰ “Syrian Revolution .. nine years on: 586,100 persons killed and millions of Syrians displaced and injured”. SOHR. 14 March 2020. <https://www.syriahr.com/en/157193/>

¹¹ “Sanctions On Damascus And Tehran Have Led To Serious Fuel Shortages In Syria,” RadioFarda, Apr. 14, 2019, <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/sanctions-on-damascus-and-tehran-have-led-to-serious-fuel-shortages-in-syria/29880330.html>.

¹² Ansel Pfeffer, “Five years in Syria: History’s most Documented War,” Haaretz, Mar. 21, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170312052613/http://www.haaretz.com/st/c/prod/eng/2016/news/03/syria>.

CALL OF CARTOGRAPHY CONTEST WINNERS

hosted by World Anvil

 **CONTEST**

The following sections were winning submission to World Anvil’s “Call of Cartography” contest. We hope that they inspire you to try something new with the locations in your own worlds.

GOOSEMOUTH PENINSULA

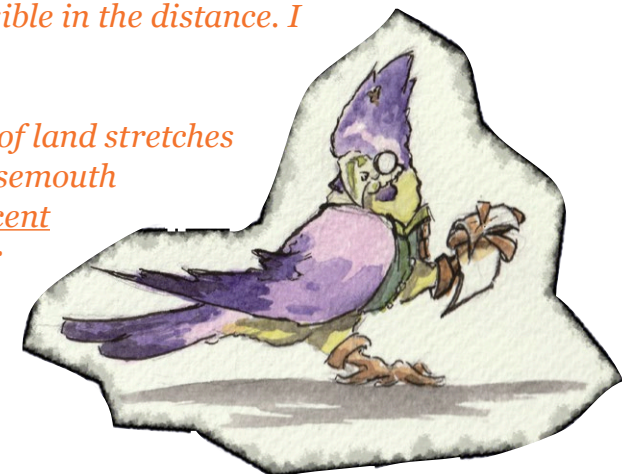
written and illustrated by Pouaseuille

The following article consists of excerpts from *Fyki Spirits’s* expedition book, *Southern journeys II*. It describes major kyliindrographical and political aspects of the Goosemouth Peninsula, where *Fyki* spent the years 5,548 to 5,551 AR.

As dawn lit up the sky, I reached the end of my trip across the Whimsy strait. I approached the ship’s bow to look at the coming land, visible in the distance. I was excited; I didn’t know what to expect.

South of the Crescent Sea, North of Balysia, a long patch of land stretches and separates the seas. This region, known as the Goosemouth Peninsula, was my destination. Home of the mythical Crescent Fly Federation, it is a place where Birds outnumber Humans by ten to one! I couldn’t wait to visit the towns, meet the peoples, and, yes, trade knowledge with them.

— *Fyki Spirits, Southern journeys, II*



CENTRAL MOUNTAIN RANGE

Even before reaching the port, one aspect of the Peninsula appeared very clear to me: just like what I could see in my first expedition in [Opert](#), the land is scarred by a large mountain range. How beautiful of a symmetry that is! The mountains, stretching from East to West, most likely organize many aspects of life on the Peninsula. For one, it most certainly prevents the locals from living far from the coast or even from inhabiting the center of the Peninsula.

One of the peaks in particular, the easternmost and thus closest to me and my ship, raises my interest. The mountain, called Oddem Peak, reaches so high in the sky that its top is covered by pure white glaciers. Strange clouds seem to perpetually cover the top of the mountains, almost like a white, foamy beard.

Almost one season has now passed since I landed in the port of Hygelmor. Over the past days, I have had the chance to travel across most of the Peninsula and observe the mountains from as many angles as possible. From these observations, I got particularly interested in a few peaks.

The more I watch the Oddem Peak, the less I understand how it came into being, or even how it remains stable. It is so high! Especially compared to its surroundings! It really feels like such a steep slope should not be stable at all. The mist surrounding the top of the mountain also bothers me. How I'd love to understand how the mountain formed! How I'd love to see the source of that mist!

Apparently, one monastery lies at the mid-height of the mountain. The monks who live in this Oddem Temple are said to be the most secretive of the Peninsula. They rarely venture into the nearby towns, and rarely send more than a dozen representatives to any major political events. They are said to know all there is to know about the mountains! Sadly, because they live so secluded, their temple is not open to visit.

Two other interesting mountains of the region are the Mons Fjuma and the Sparende Peak. Mons Fjuma, the mountain just west of Oddem Peak, is oddly similar to the large peak, as if it was a younger, smaller version of the larger mountain. It peaks at a slightly smaller height, its slopes slightly less steep. More importantly, it isn't surrounded by the same thick mist as Oddem. No, instead, the mountain fumes.

The fuming chimneys can be seen from afar. They regularly release clouds of a thick, white mist, similar to what is found at Oddem. Some nights, especially in the warm season, the fumes are so hot that they shine in the distance. People say that the fumerole chimneys go really deep down, down to strange and dangerous underground areas. What I say is that the same fumeroles probably exist at the top of Oddem, and they are the reason why it is always surrounded with mist. Then again, because I can't climb the mountain on my own, I can't know any of that for sure.

The Sparende Peak is much closer to the land. It is a particularly large—not very steep apart from its peaks—mountainous formation. Mostly uninhabited, it seems to be a source of water for large populations, for many rivers flow down the slopes of the Sparende Peak.

Because of its well-cut shape, the peak is currently used as a border point between the zones of influence of several city-states : Dunchep, Porthkale, Crescaster, and [Kusibandara](#) south of the Federation. Similarly to Oddem, a major monastery of the Federation is located in the mountain: the Sparen temple.

CLIMATES AND ECOLOGY

The peninsula is split into two very distinct climatic zones. Indeed, as most surface winds do in the Cylinder, the air tends to flow toward the north, carrying clouds and rain with it. The clouds, however, are mostly stopped by the central mountain range. As a result, the southern peninsula is famously warm and wet and doesn't change a lot over the year. The forest on that side is generally called the Mistun, the Wet Jungle. The Mistun, however, is not exactly that widespread. Untouched ecosystems sadly do not produce as much food as farmlands, and the wet climate of the South allows for an excellent crop production. As a result, the South of the Peninsula is generally more populated than the North.

The North of the Peninsula is characterized by a generally dryer, and more temperamental, climate. According to the locals, the winds can sometimes very suddenly change near the coasts, triggering very sudden and violent thunderstorms. As a result, the population is less diffused in the north: you can find regular hostel-towns along the coast, following the major road axes. Beyond these roads, the population in the countryside is much lower.

The vegetation in the north is notably different from what can be found in the south. Indeed, while the trees and forests of the south are adapted to a wet climate and proliferate to form a dense canopy, the vegetation of the North is much thicker, and closer to the ground, like a dense bush cover. This undergrowth is particularly solidly anchored on the ground and can resist the dense and contrary winds as much as it can absorb what little water can be found in the ground.

One species of trees in particular is worth mentioning : Half Titans. Growing North of the Peninsula, these majestic plants are revered as gods, and I can only understand why. They inspire awe and profound respect to anyone laying their eyes on them. Growing as tall and wide as a hill, they tower above their surroundings. They only produce leaves on their Southern side, as only that side receives light. Their trunk is as large as a castle, their branches like dungeon keeps.

POLITICS OF THE PENINSULA : A BIRD FEDERATION

Even before I reached Hygelmores and the Peninsula, I knew of the famous Crescent Fly Federation, the largest political entity of the region. Then again, who doesn't? It is one of the few large nations of our time, and one of the most well-structured at that. Not to mention, it is almost entirely populated by birds!

Before being allowed to proceed in my expedition, I had to fill in some paperwork and get some authorizations to roam in the federal country. While it forced me to stay more than a dozen days in an undersized hostel in Hygelmores, it was worth it. I spent the rest of the season being welcomed in every city and several temples by official representatives, who gladly showed me the region.

THE SIX CITIES OF FIVE

The Crescent Fly Federation has many somewhat official names: Oddem Federation, Goosemouth Federation... One that particularly bugs me was the Six Cities of Five. Indeed, the federation is composed of five semi-independent city-states. The city-states all elect representatives and pass their own laws as much as they play with others. Yet, here is where it gets odd. There are five major city-states: Hygelmores, Wurmbeek, Dunchep, Porthkale and Crescaster. However, there is a sixth independent region: Sixtaby, literally the sixth city. Unlike the other city-states, Sixtaby's administration is limited within the city's walls, beyond which the region is administered by Hygelmores. Yet, Sixtaby has its own constitution and laws, and it elects its own representatives.

Another independent territory is [Bathum](#), the political capital of the Federation. Constructed around a particularly old and impressive Half Titan tree, Bathum is where elected members of all regions gather and where the federal government is located. Apparently, the city was founded in 5420 AR, as the cities were in a secession war

against the now destroyed [Trisean empire](#).

In the end, we have a nation called the Six Cities of Five, and it is actually composed of seven independent cities. If that does not scream Perrot's administrative logic, I don't know what does.

THE EIGHT TEMPLES

Things get even more complicated if you take into account the nation's clergy. The federation, being almost exclusively inhabited by birds, follows a highly derived

form of the [Shadow Church](#), one of the most widespread Perrot religions. It is a highly polytheistic religion that involves strong, almost tangible connections with the spiritual world and local divinities.

According to my findings, the local clergy is called Panskuganism. While the religion is relatively tolerant of the locals' practices and beliefs, it is well-centered around particularly powerful monasteries. Called the Eight temples (sic), these monasteries are in charge of a large part of the nation's education, academia, and spiritual defenses. The Eight Temples have the following names: Oddem temple, Bathum temple, Peekas temple, Duntan, Min temple, Forthlin temple, Sparende temple, and the Sultic temple.

In the end, the Eight temples and the Six Cities of Five form the major power structures of the Federation. I'll spare you the intricate organization of the institutions of these power structures, though they are very much worth knowing about and could teach us a lesson back in [Merinos](#).

THE COASTAL CITY-STATE OF RUSSIN

written and illustrated by Stormbril

This city has existed in this location for thousands of years —it was here even before the Gods died. It's full of history—you can go from having a drink in a brand new coffee shop to walking through ancient ruins by stepping through the back door. We are the original Russin!

— Conversation with a tourist

The city of Russin shares its name with both the country and continent it resides on. It's nestled within a wide and relatively flat stretch of land filling nearly 600 square kilometers, bordered on two sides by tall craggy mountains and shallow

oceans surrounding the rest. Its cityscape is broken up by winding rivers that twist their way through the flat lands, as various ruins from the city's long history are strewn about populated areas. Russin has a strong connection with [Sharenskus](#), boasting the strongest connection, as it's the death place of the massive God-husk.

Four distinct styles of architecture are found within the City's limits, thanks to its long and varied history. In the center of the city is Old Russin, known colloquially as Old Town. Old Town is the origin of the



city, containing ruins and buildings that have been there for over 4,000 years ago. Old Town was nearly destroyed during The Seven Day War, when the god Avartarian brutally murdered Sharenskus within the center of the city. Surviving denizens of Russin fled from the center, forming two smaller cities apart from each other. Eventually, southern invaders settling within the ruins of Old Town formed a third city. Over time these cities grew until all joined together as one.

THE ORIGINAL RUSSIN

Ancient Russin buildings were stout, square buildings made of a brownish stone quarried from nearby mountains. Over hundreds of years, the city grew with more of the brown stone buildings filling the space between the Sharen and Rivus rivers. These buildings housed both devout worshipers of Sharenskus and fierce warriors—frequent raids from the south ensured Russin was always ready to defend itself.

The city slowly subdivided its citizens based on geography, religion, and defensive strategy. Particularly devout worshipers of Sharenskus gradually migrated west to be closer to the water in which the god stood. The inlet gained the name “Holy Inlet,” and the people began to build temples to Sharenskus along its shores. The persistent attacks from the southeast prompted the construction of walls and barracks to the city’s southeastern edge. As time passed, early Russin expanded, crossing the two rivers that had previously contained it.

THE DIVIDE OF EARLY RUSSIN

Russin lost its protective deity when the Godly Civil War occurred. A fierce battle broke out between Sharenskus and Avartarian at the confluence of the Sharen River and Rivus River. Most of the city was destroyed with only the most sturdy of stone buildings remaining. The citizens fled from the core of the city, relocating to the east and west. When the dust settled after the war, Russin was no more—in its place, two smaller cities kept apart by rivers remained.

When Russin split, the merchants and worshipers fled west and settled the coast together. They favored a loose planning style—new buildings were constructed on an “as needed” basis with regards to both spacing and size. Western Russin slowly expanded along the coast and southward along the Sharen River. Temples were rebuilt on the shores, but the people found Sharenskus unable to communicate in his God-husk state. The temples were then used to observe the God-husk as he wandered the shallow oceans.

Forced to flee east from the carnage of two gods fighting, the core force of Russin’s warriors crossed the Rivus River, settling in a well-protected flat expanse of land. Few walls managed to remain standing between old Russin and the warriors new home with the land left behind being declared cursed ground. Many warriors vowed never to return to the destroyed city, instead focusing on building a new, safer area to settle.

This new eastern village, made up almost entirely of warriors, soon adopted a rigid, militaristic city planning style. Tight, utilitarian blocks of buildings were developed, with many walls along the river banks to turn the area into a defensive stronghold. Keeping the Rivus River to their south and west, the village expanded north and built row upon row of dense housing, barracks, and wide-open training grounds. Gradually East Russin grew all the way to the banks of the North River.

RETURN OF THE INVADERS

Many years after the Godly Civil War, exploratory raiding parties from the south once again made their way to Russin. Hoping to find a broken civilization to easily conquer, instead the raiders found nothing but ruins bordered by wide rivers with large walls on the opposite banks. These new people settled among the ruins, ignoring the obvious signs of life to both the east and west of them. They brought with them their style of large, open plots of land and circular communal buildings used for ceremonies and gatherings.

The natural borders of the Sharen and Rivus rivers became the basis of an uneasy armistice built between the invaders’ new village and both East and West Russin. Over time the armistice grew into a truce then slowly into a partnership, as all three villages grew and expanded into sizeable cities. Eventually the three were merged into one, once again becoming the heart of the country: Russin.



THE HEART OF RUSSIN

Once the three sub-cities combined together as one, an explosive period of growth occurred, fueled largely in part to the wealth and power wielded by the merchants of eastern Russin. They funded the construction of hundreds of new dwelling units, cultural centers, stadiums, and temples. Their control over the growth of Russin allowed them to shape and slowly take control of the massive city. In modern times, their influence can be seen in the many temples spread throughout the city’s limits.

Wealth and power funneled steadily eastward because of the control the merchants had. Lavish dwellings were constructed along the slopes of Mount Yoo, overlooking the sprawling city below. The multitudes of islands within God’s Bay saw parks and marinas built upon them as well as towers and shopping districts. Soon every square kilometer of western Russin was filled, prompting eager merchants to seek elsewhere to grow their businesses and their families. Economic hotspots formed and solidified on the northern shores of God’s Bay, within the ruins of Old Town, and to the far north within Harbour District.

My family has owned this plot of land for over 600 years! Who are you to come here and tell me I can't build my tower this tall?! I need a good view of the bay!

— Argument with city planners

AGRICULTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

As both east and west Russin grew in size, so too did they grow in population. Their need for food prompted the independent creation of large swaths of farmland, and the infrastructure to support it, which in the future would be used to feed the entire city of Russin.

Those southerners never really got into sustainable farming. That's why we don't have any farms down around New Town. Pretty sure their ancestors were hunter-gatherer types and ended up hunting most of the local fauna to extinction. Now we gotta feed 'em, go figure.

— Complaint heard in a Graceville café

Cathedris also underwent a technological revolution in the 2850's, thanks to the discovery of [Simulrendology](#). With it came Motives—large, single-rail bound vehicles that very quickly became commonplace across the world, finding use in transporting both goods and passengers. Russin soon built a massive railyard to the north to accommodate the new technology, adopting it faster than the rest of the country.

THE DARK UNDERSIDE OF RUSSIN

Russin has grown, expanded, and renovated itself within the same space for over 3,000 years. This development has resulted in an exceedingly complex system of ruins, rebuilt structures, and refuges within the city limits, allowing for a myriad of niches to grow.


A defining feature of Russin is its nearly endless labyrinth of catacombs and tunnels beneath the city. The underground complex has seen use for storage, for secrets, for rituals, and more. These days the catacombs are widely used as a means of travel—so much so that city planners have begun constructing Motive lines underground as a system of public transport. Contained within the Catacombs of Russin is the Black Market. Always moving, never in the same location, the Black Market of Russin is as famous as “myths” can get.




Those “in the know” can always find it, hidden in a new location within the Catacombs every few days. All manner of trade occurs here, from stolen items and outlawed contraband, all the way to dangerous materials, [Rendling](#) flesh, or even [Catalurgic goods](#).

Leaving the darkness of the Catacombs, and instead looking to the north, one can find the floating home residential district known as Hidden Shores. It started as a well-intentioned idea to create more affordable housing, but quickly became an unmanageable concentration of the less fortunate. The floating homes were intended to be easily built and moveable abodes for the homeless throughout Russin, but a lack of structure and relative lawlessness in the region meant the area soon became out of control.

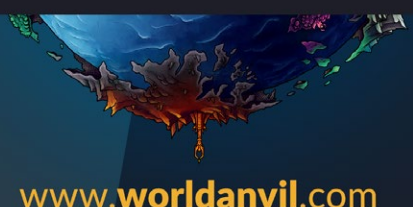
 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



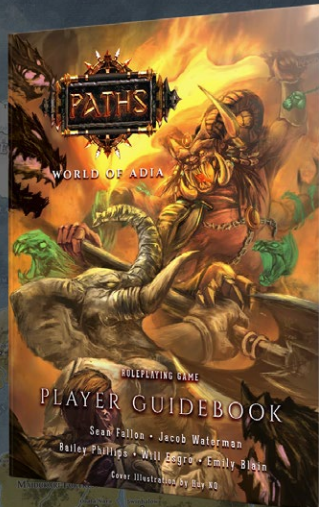
The ultimate worldbuilding platform!




Support for all RPG systems and genres!
Interactive maps, mention system for articles,
secrets, plot hooks, timelines and more!
All organized. All in one place.



www.worldanvil.com



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



SMUNCHYGAMES.COM/PATHS

ASK US ANYTHING

by B. H. Pierce

This 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.

I am working on a country that is on the edge of revolution [or civil war], but I fail to think of ways to show its decline. Any suggestions?

— *Il Magnifico Barbarossa*

To answer this question, we must first answer another: what is the difference between a revolution and a civil war? On the surface they seem very similar, both being a struggle between two (or more) groups within a single polity fighting for control of (or cessation from) a government. What makes a revolution different is that the two sides have radically different ideologies. In a civil war, the two sides fight to control the government, not change it. After the war everything will be much the same as it was before, except with someone new in charge. After a revolution, the government, and perhaps society itself, will be very different.

With this question answered, we can address your initial one. Two things usually required for a revolution are new ideas and an incompetent government. The most important thing to show is that new ideas have arisen and are circulating through society. They can be economic, political, religious, philosophical, or any other kind of society-changing idea that is different from those held by the current government. Just as important as new ideas is an incompetent government, as competent governments usually aren't brought down by a revolution. Show a ruling class jealously protecting its privileges

and power, repressing voices against them and shutting the opposition out of power.

Depending on the nature of society and government this incompetence can be expressed in different ways. In a milder situation, people with New Ideas are kept from positions of power and prestige in the government; the opposition might also stage protests and denounce the government. At the middle end of the scale, you can see mass arrests and the government confiscating property of those who oppose it. Resistance at this stage can take the form of boycotts, tax strikes, riots, and other mass actions meant to force the government to listen. On the far end of the scale, the government will aim to kill or otherwise silence its perceived enemies, and the opposition responds in kind with assassinations and armed revolt.

THE EDGE OF REVOLUTION IS OFTEN IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE WHEN STANDING AT IT.

I would also like to discuss the use of the word “edge.” Many countries and governments have come to the edge of revolution, only to step back from the precipice. History can later point out the event that sparked a revolution, but that will not be apparent in the moment. There will be no

way of knowing what the true point of no return was until well after the smoke has cleared and events can be looked upon with hindsight. To a person living through events, a revolution will be a time of great uncertainty. Their country could seem to be at peace one day and on fire the next. Centuries old laws and norms could go from eternal and unchangeable to scrapped and discarded within the course of a single year. The edge of revolution is often impossible to see when standing at it. Take that into account when designing revolutions and uprisings in your world.

How do you make different kinds of dragons in your world?

— *Dragonbard_Ceresca*

Ah, dragons. One of the heavyweights of world-building. Ancient, majestic, mighty, and terrible at running universities. I have tenure, I'll say whatever I want. Many worlds have dragons and benefit greatly from them. What can you do to give the dragons of your world their own flair to separate them from the rest of the miserly, funding hoarding pack?

Consider dragons as a biological class or order of organisms. They've existed for millions of years in your world and have spread to nearly every corner of the planet. How have groups of dragons in different locales evolved to survive in their environments? An easy way to differentiate them is to consider whether your dragons are land-, water-, or air-based. Terrestrial dragons might have stronger limbs to support their weight on land and smaller, almost vestigial wings which can no longer support flight. Aquatic species might not have much use for limbs as their bodies have lengthened, becoming streamlined to better navigate the seas. Air-based dragons may forgo forelimbs altogether for better aerodynamics, instead opting for much more developed hind legs.

Also consider their place in the food chain. Are dragons always the apex predators of any area they inhabit? Or are there creatures higher up? What do those creatures look like? How has a group of dragons evolved for both defense and offense against their predators and prey? A large dragon needs an appropriately large food supply, so there's little chance they'll be numerous and concentrated in a single area. Small dragons can survive on smaller prey and may form packs or have clever ways to catch prey. Also to consider, do both large and small dragons exist in a single area? Do the large ones form a rivalry with their smaller yet more numerous brethren?

Lastly, throw a bit of flavor into the mix. Color and wings can be used to intimidate, warn, impress, or camouflage. Scales are frequently used for armor, but perhaps they fall out with a lack of predators or have become like full-plate armor in the presence of far more ravenous hunters. Fire-breathing may have fallen out of style, or maybe the world has adapted around it to create fire-resistant flora. On that note, some of your dragons could have become omnivores or even herbivores due to the over consumption of other prey. This would open up a plethora of new features you can use to create interesting dragons.

With the biology of dragons sorted out, then turn to their minds. Some dragons are little more than powerful beasts, ravaging the countryside. Others are long-lived and wise as sages. You have these extreme ends of the scale as well as everything in between. For more bestial dragons, you don't have to look much farther than the natural world for ferocity and cunning. But when it comes to dragons capable of speech and long-term thinking, you have a chance to make something truly your own. How is a dragon's mind different from a human's? Do they lack understanding of certain concepts? Do they understand some concepts which humans can't? Do they put more focus on some impulses than would be considered normal in a person, or less on others? How does their way of living

drive their thought process and morals? Do they live alongside more bestial dragons, and what do they think of them? Asking questions such as these will help you build a species of dragon completely your own.

Lastly, take note that everything we've just covered is not exclusive to dragons. Consider the habitat, diets, predators, and traits of any creature you create, and you'll find they feel much more realistic—or this line of questioning may lead to exciting new results.

How do you keep the level of depth consistent across your world?

— Celestial_Blug

Don't worry about it.

What? Oh, very well.

Depth, by necessity, will vary widely across your world. Consider a grand temple, the very center of worship for the religion you created. You may know its blueprint, construction materials, history, the hierarchy of the priests who attend to it, and the symbolism of its decorations. Now consider the wooden hut three streets away. You know nothing about it, which is *fine*. More time and energy will be spent on aspects that have more of an impact on your world, but if you want a more even level of depth, take pains to decide what you consider an acceptable level of depth. Knowing the floor plan of every house in a city of 500,000 is not feasible. Knowing common building materials and architectural styles is.

The enemy of depth is scale. The larger the scale, the more difficult it will be to have a consistent level of depth. If the scale of your world is global, then it will be essentially impossible to have any meaningful, even depth across the board. You could know what the climate is like and where the major cultural groups are, but beyond that, it would require an extraordinary



✍️ AHMED ELGHARABAWY

amount of work to make level depth, the same level of depth in every facet of your creation. Things become more reasonable when you get to the continental level. Here you will not be able to reach a deep level of detail, but you can examine things much closer. At this level you can work out the distribution of animal and plant populations, cultures and subcultures, trade routes, prominent geographical features, as well as the broad strokes of history. The same becomes even truer when you get down to the regional and local levels.

When working out your acceptable level of depth, be aware of the many different *categories* of depth to engage with. There is the biological—knowing how the living things of your world are distributed and act. Are you comfortable with saying there is a forest between two cities, or do you need to know what kind of trees make it up and what kind of animal species live in it? On that note, how much do you need to know about

the geography of our hypothetical forest? Is it enough to know its overall area, or will you develop each region of hills, creeks, and bramble thickets? What of this forest's history? Do you simply make note that there are periodic forest fires and leave it at that? Or must you plot out when the major ones were in history, and where the stands of new growth and old growth are? Cultural depth is present even in the forest. Is it enough to know that the forest is within one kingdom, or will you work in the land use customs and laws that govern the people who make use of the forest?

Having a consistent level of depth in worldbuilding is good, but not vital. Suppose you have built a well-detailed kingdom in your world with cultural norms, political hierarchy, geography, and economics all worked out. Part of the economy is the importation of fine cloth from a land far away. In the spirit of level depth, you might want to plot out this far away land in as much detail as your kingdom. But as the only impact it has on your world is the cloth it exports, it is not strictly needed to do so.

[Send questions to Percival on our Discord server!](#)

🚀 BACK TO INDEX

A PODCAST BY WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE



Worldcasting is a podcast led by your host Tyler "Dino" Sylva, and his rotating panel of guests—other members of the *Worldbuilding Magazine* team plus special appearances by people such as Tim Hickson of *Hello Future Me*, plus Ed Greenwood, creator of the *Forgotten Realms*!

Together, the worldcasters draw upon their varied backgrounds and experiences to discuss worldbuilding in its many forms. Each episode tackles a different topic such as magic, religion, naming places, and more!

ANCHOR | APPLE PODCASTS | BREAKER | CASTBOX
GOOGLE PODCASTS | iHEART RADIO | POCKET CASTS
OVERCAST | RADIO PUBLIC | SPOTIFY | YOUTUBE

Listen to Worldcasting



MEET THE STAFF: JAREN J. PETTY

curated by ACGrad

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

My name is Jaren J. Petty, though the digital world is more accustomed to calling me Hikitsune-Red, and I'm the Editing Chair for the magazine. I joined the staff—if I recall—during the *Cartography* issue and since that time I've held many other roles ranging from wrangling Discord bots to helping create the *Worldcasting Podcast*.



Ever since I was a wee lad reading J.R.R. Tolkien and Edgar Allen Poe, or watching Saturday morning cartoons, I've been engrossed with the idea of telling stories. I've spent—if I had to make a legitimate estimate—nearly a third, if not half, of my life consuming the good, the bad, and the ugly of storytelling in all its various formats. In the—hopefully—near future, I intend to write some short stories and maybe even begin joining the amazing worldbuilders of YouTube in sharing tips and pointers in a medium I've always loved: video.

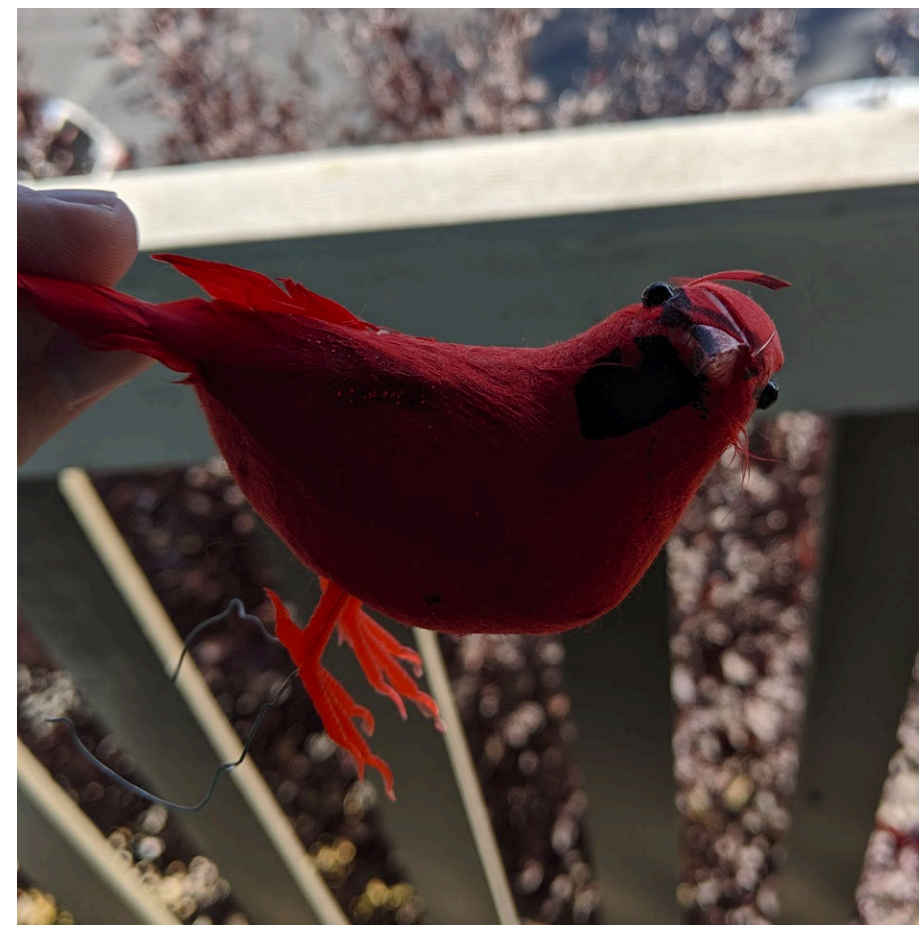
Tell us about your world! Do you have a final medium of choice?

I've been working with some fellow staff members for a number of months now on a diesel-, aether-, solarpunk mash-up world called *Hyroma* that I'd love to produce short, episodic fiction for, though the road to a fully realized world is long and arduous. It's been a fascinating project. The world has, thanks to one of my colleagues, been outfitted with one of the most robust yet wondrous magic systems I've seen in some time that utilizes colors of light and their blending into one another across the spectrum to define what powers people have.

What is your favorite part of worldbuilding?

Creating things that could never be, and then answering all the *what-ifs* that those kinds of things bring to light. Let's say you have—for instance—an empire that prioritizes the use of solar energy: what does that make their cities look and act like, building around that kind of infrastructure? Perhaps they choose not to tax their people, so how does the royal family afford political affairs and military operations? By owning and operating their own businesses? Maybe you casually remark in a story that Abraham Lincoln hunted werewolves in his spare time, so what if further down the American timeline one of the greatest jazz artists is found out to have wolf blood? Are there still hunters around, and if so, would they hunt a prominent public figure? How has history changed because of that one idea? You are, after a fashion, the god of your own world as a worldbuilder, and the choices you make for your world weirdly feel like they have a certain weight, a certain intrigue to them—I love that, the creativity of it all.

 [BACK TO INDEX](#)



CONTRIBUTORS

ADMINISTRATION

Editor-in-Chief
Adam Bassett

Editorial Chair
Jaren J. Petty

Writing Chair
B. K. Bass

Art Chair
Tristen Fekete

Meta Chair
Dinostompah / Tyler Silva

Vice Editor-in-Chief
Ianara Natividad

Editorial Deputy Chairs
Dylan Richmond
Zaivy Luke-Aleman

Writing Deputy Chair
Taylor Frymier

Art Deputy Chair
Anna Hannon

Meta Deputy Chair
LieutenantDebug



STAFF

Layout Artist
Ahmed Aljabry

Artist
Ahmed ElGharabawy

Artist
Daemon of Thealia

Layout Artist
Enya Gomez

Artist
Ghranze

Layout Artist
Inky

Artist
Truedevel

Writer
Aaryan Balu

Writer
B. H. Pierce

Writer
Cassidy Hammersmith

Writer
Emory Glass

Writer
J.D. Venner

Writer
Juhani Taylor

Writer
MasterThief

Writer
Robert Meegan

Writer
Seán Gray

Editor
Cat Optimist

Editor
Jon Krebs

Editor
Michael Karpati

Editor
Michael Kayser

Community Assistant, Layout Artist
ACGrad

Community Assistant
Celestial_Blu3

Community Assistant
Jacob Jackson

Community Assistant
NotDaedalus

Community Assistant
Rayfeller



Cover: Anna Hannon
Logo: Tristen Fekete
Fonts: Futura PT
Georgia
Lato

All in Fair Use

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

Ali Hoff
Featured Artist

Dael Kingsmill
Featured Guest

Zaire Lanier
Featured Worldbuilder

JOIN OUR TEAM

JOIN WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

The *Worldbuilding Magazine* team is made up of volunteer writers, artists, editors, and organizers who all have a passion for worldbuilding in one form or another.

If you would like to contribute to this project, simply contact us and tell us what you're interested in doing. We're always looking for people to help out!

[Learn About Our Team](#)