

ISSUE 3 | 2021

WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

**CRIME &
JUSTICE**
& other topics

Featuring:

C. D. TAVENOR and
the **WINNERS** of World Anvil's
**PECULIAR PLANTS
COMMUNITY CHALLENGE**

WORLD SHOWCASE

CobblePath Games' **LOCUS**

WHAT IS WORLDBUILDING?

a Theory of Worlds

OFF WITH HIS HEAD

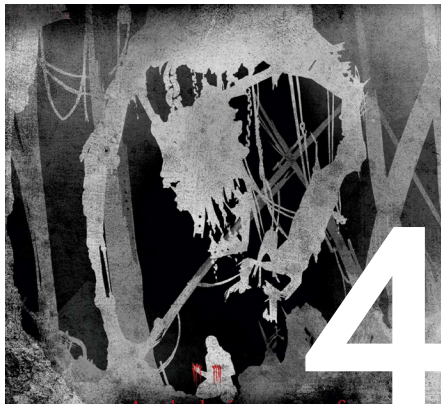
the Methodology of Punishment Throughout the Ages

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A hard-boiled detective races through neon-soaked city streets as her implants track targets through the haze. The judge, weary of the ongoing trial, looks upon the elf with an unpleasant blend of pity and duty, the just path unclear despite overwhelming evidence.

Whatever your personal views, judicial systems are an integral part of any society. They define laws, identify punishments for deviation, and organize enforcement. Similarly, they become the arbiters of crime itself: cataloging what is and isn't considered criminal in the first place. For many, these definitions are synonymous with morality, thus revealing the lawful and chaotic.

Within this issue of Worldbuilding Magazine, you'll find excellent advice from our volunteer contributors on creating your own in-world systems of crime and justice. I want to thank everybody involved: we have an incredible team of people working hard on every issue to bring the community a quality worldbuilding resource. Happy worldbuilding!



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WORLD SHOWCASE

COBBLEPATH GAMES' LOCUS

Interviewed by Aaryan Balu | Compiled by Ike Riva



INTERVIEW



TABLETOP GAMING

Jack Milton & Steph Williamson, also known as *CobblePath Games*, have been working on a personal horror, narrative RPG titled *Locus*. The game's focus on individual locations as the source of horror and conflict integrates its player-created settings into the narrative, breaking away from its traditional subservience to plot. This is what they had to say!

We're CobblePath Games. We're a two-person indie tabletop RPG studio from the UK. We make games built to facilitate specific themes and our flagship title is *Locus*. *Locus* is a personal horror TTRPG that aims to provide an experience where the fear is connected innately to the characters. It also centers around Mali Loci, or 'bad places,' as the source of the horror that manifests, and as the settings where the stories take place.



Dive into *Locus* there for a bit—obviously as a tabletop role-playing game, there's a balance between mechanical focus and worldbuilding. What are some of the cornerstones of the world *Locus* sets out to create?

Well, in line with the concept of personal horror, *Locus* was built to allow people to build their own Loci and set their games in locations of their own making. As a result, the game sets out a framework: a set of natural laws that will be at play within a Malus Locus and that can be used to shape a compelling setting for the story. This allows the Director (*Locus*'s version of the DM) to craft a world that will effectively work with the pacing and themes of the horror. Some cornerstones of this framework are:

- ◇ The power of belief: places are given identity and power by how they are perceived and what people believe them to be, e.g. tranquil parks, prestigious law firms, historic manors, a desolate town, etc.
- ◇ These locations are closer to forces of nature than sentient beings.
- ◇ These locations can change depending on what happens to them or who's in them.

- ◇ These locations, referred to as 'Genius Loci,' are generally neutral, but can become a 'Malus Locus' in response to traumatic events.
- ◇ All *Locus* stories take place in a Malus Locus.
- ◇ Mali Loci have layers: the deeper one travels, the more unreal it becomes. Yet the surrounding world also becomes more true to the Malus Locus's nature.
- ◇ Mali Loci can be restored to a benevolent/neutral Genius Loci in ways that are analogous to how a human might be able to process trauma.

Cool! So what's one example of a Malus Locus and the sorts of stories that take place within it?

An old sample story for our playtests was set in a mall or shopping center. After being hyped as a new building that would rejuvenate the surrounding town, it was left half-finished when funding ran out. The plot [of land] was then put up for sale. The player characters were there to survey and evaluate the property and got sucked into the Malus Locus. The central theme was unrealized potential, with the mall being the central anchor for that. In the most shallow layer, the mall was a colorless dusty construction site. As the characters descended into the Malus Locus, the space became like a twisted dream of what people expected and hoped it would become. Neon screens light up the fractured walls and scaffolding, the air hot with the heat and pressure of an unseeable crowd. The pinnacle of this takes the form of a powerful monster that stalks the lowest layer of the Malus Locus. In this case it was a giant statue (which in reality was in pieces in the lobby, waiting to be assembled), its eyes giant spotlights which it used to search for its prey.

What tools do player characters have to interact with the world and drive the story forward?

Interesting question. Player characters have a very intimate relationship with the Malus Locus, where it pulls from the darkest corners of their minds to create monsters and peculiar effects. The character's physical actions will directly impact their environment and ultimately the temperament of the Malus Locus.

In terms of the game, this revolves mostly around mysteries, which the characters will have to unravel to understand what actions to take. This most commonly resolves with them escaping, but they always have the opportunity to restore the Malus Locus [and turn it back into a Genius Loci].

The key here is that the steps that must be taken to escape or restore the *Locus* are closely linked with its theme, and the events that led to it becoming a Malus Locus. We have some guides in the *Director's Guide* of how to do this but, to put it broadly, it's about constructing metaphors. For example, with the mall mentioned above, it required the power for both the restoration and the escape endings.

Escaping it was more about finding the one part that was finished (the car park) and using the power to open the gates.

Reverting a Malus Locus back to a Genius Loci involved destroying the building plans after restoring the power in a metaphorical allusion to letting go of the dream that never happened.

I hope that answers the question!

I think so! I guess I'm trying to dig into figuring out who the characters are and their relationship to the conflict of the Malus Locus.

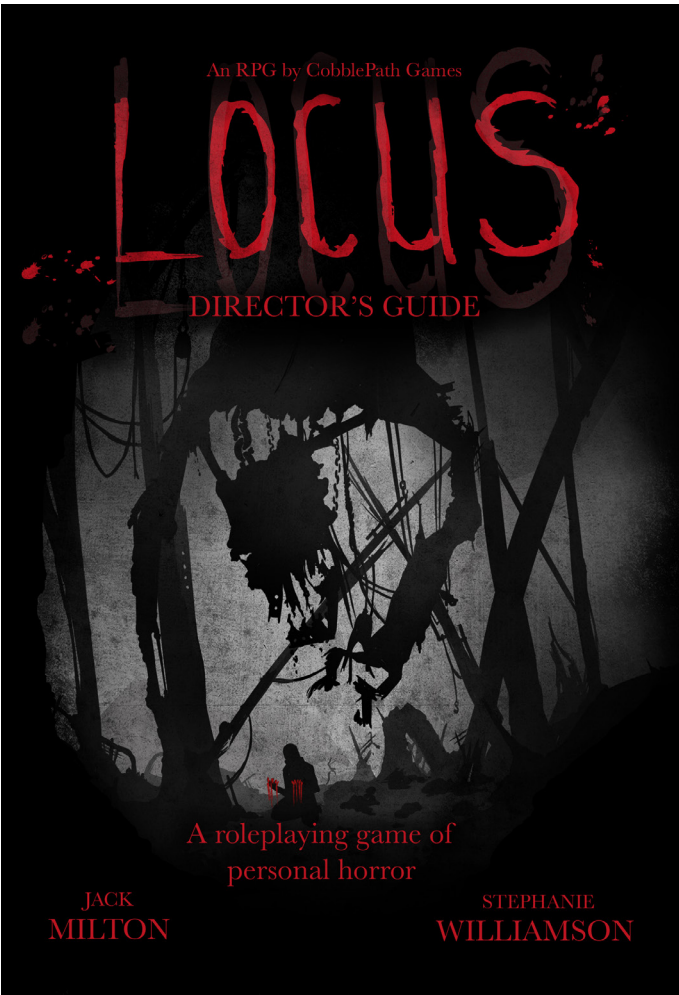
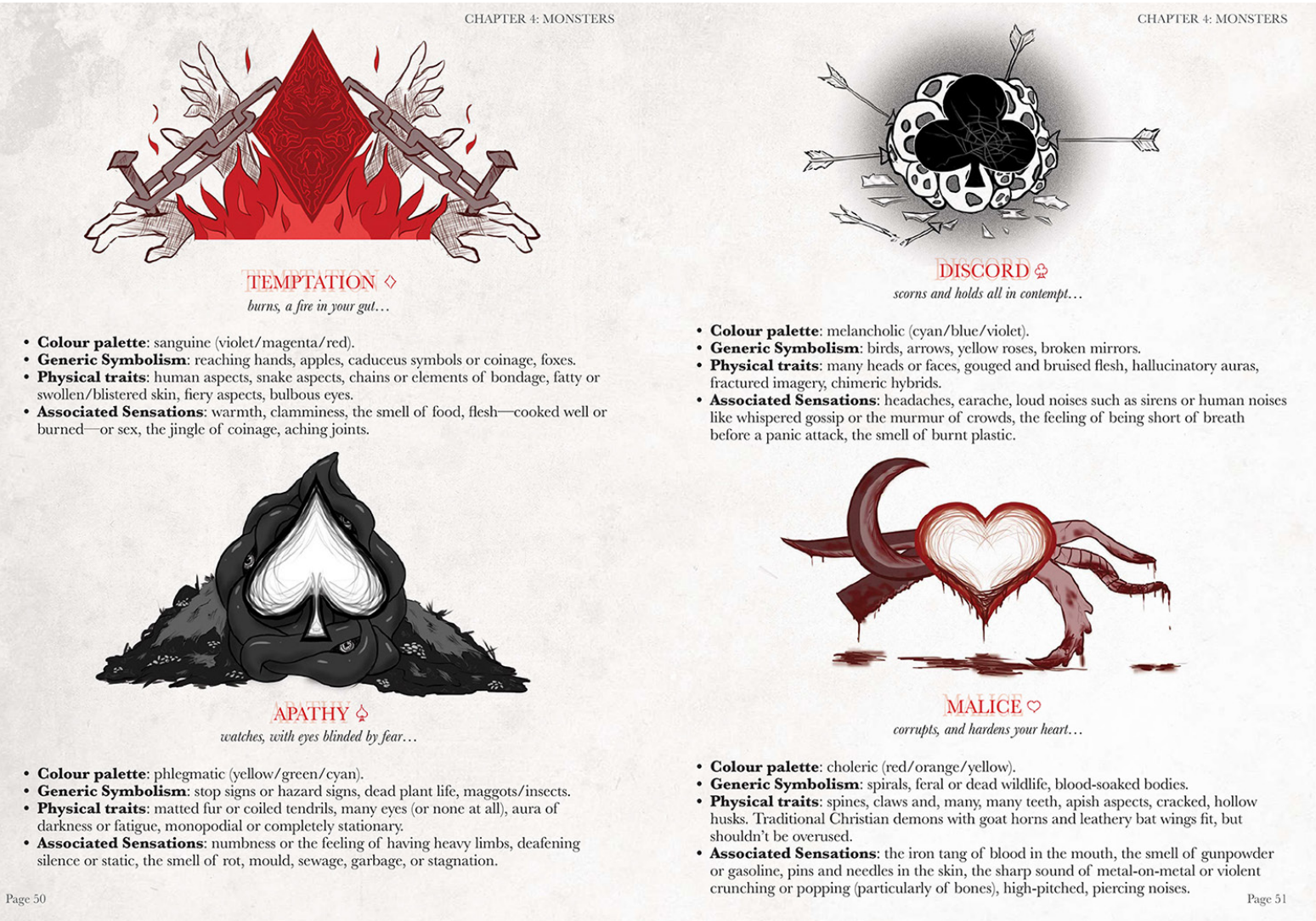
Ah yes. Well, like the worlds, the characters are built to be malleable and they're built by the players. Each of their 'Haunts,' as we call them, are events that prey on their minds and act as the center of the horror they experience. They are created by the player who plays the character. In our pre-written campaigns we try to make these align with the central theme of the *Locus*, but they do not have to. In terms of the lore of the settings, a Malus Locus will passively draw in and cling to those with Haunts. This is why the player characters have ended up in the Malus Locus and why they become trapped within it. The story is the opportunity for the characters to learn from the Malus Locus's story to address their own pasts.

On a sort of technical level, what are the mechanics and stats available to players and their characters?

The core attributes of the characters are quite strange for *Locus* and inspired by the wider horror genre. Instead of specifying a character's positive abilities, you put points into their more negative traits. These are: Frailty, Clumsiness, Carelessness, Ignorance, Cowardice, Repulsion, Impatience, and Temper. It is a roll-over system using D6s, so 1 Frailty means a character who is pretty sturdy and strong, whereas 5 is a character who struggles with most strength-based tasks. However, it's not all negatives—characters also have skills, which are learned abilities or aptitudes that provide benefits for specific tasks. There are also items, which come on their own cards, and can be used to make appropriate rolls easier. For example, a crowbar could make opening a container easier, but wouldn't help you find a document in a stack of papers.

Gotcha! I know the game is intentionally setting-agnostic—sort of a “it can happen anywhere” vibe—but is there anything else you can tell me about the nature of Mali Loci and Genius Loci?

Yes. So, as you say, we are setting-agnostic, and we will be releasing a sci-fi guide for the system that delves into how the sci-fi genre can alter certain aspects of the stories told and worldbuilding around them. However, a *Locus* story would be just as at home in a historical setting as in any worldwide location. We've released it on an Open License and are hoping that we might get to see some *Locus* stories created by folks around the world in settings that we wouldn't be familiar enough with to write in ourselves! Something else that is worth mentioning is the scale of a Malus Locus, which is very variable. Mostly this works to help moderate story lengths, with larger



As a Player, you will experience a Locus game through the Character you create and play. This Chapter will introduce you to the Character card and take you through the process of creating a Character. Blank cards can be found in [Appendix 4], Page XX).

ANATOMY OF A CHARACTER CARD

Name
Your Character's name

Haunt
This is an event that plagues them, weighs on them, and it is what the Locus uses against them. It is usually connected to something they've done.

Virtue
This is the most positive aspect of your Character, the thing that pushes them forward, and drives them to be better.

Stress
Stress is a changing element of the Character that can make situations more difficult. Stress levels will change dynamically throughout a story.



Willpower
Your willpower is a resource that can be spent to aid you in certain circumstances.

Death's Door
This is a tracker for the damage and trauma your Character has taken throughout the story. If the tracker fills, the Character dies.

Attitude Your Character's Attitude is an indication of how your Character has reacted to their past: do they feel guilt over their Haunt events? Is their general outlook optimistic or pessimistic?

Attributes Numerical representations of how capable, or incapable, your Character is at various things—are they particularly Fragile, for instance, or just Clumsy?

Skills
Characters have a set of unique Skills, abilities that are usually the result of training and that give them an edge in certain circumstances.

Malus Loci generally needing more and/or longer sessions to resolve. A playable Locus could be as small as a single clearing in some woods, or as large as a city district, but could be both bigger or smaller than this. However, we'd caution that anything larger or smaller than these examples would make the story more difficult to run. The idea of Genius Loci and Mali Loci is that they could plausibly exist in the real world without us knowing. In fact, you could probably make a solid argument for the concept of places having personality being something that *does* exist in reality. Though less so for the twisted un-realities of a Malus Locus's layers.

What was some of the inspiration behind the concept of Genius/Malus Loci?

There's quite a lot, the idea of an evil place that is itself the monster is fairly common in horror, but not something we'd seen a TTRPG about when we started this around seven years ago. Some major influences that worked their way into *Locus* were *Forbidden Siren*, *Event Horizon* (1997), *Silent Hill* and *Silent Hill 2* especially, *Whispering Corridors* (1998), *Triangle* (2009). The idea of a Genius Loci is at least in part based on the ancient Roman concept. Literally meaning 'spirit of the place,' their conception was more of a specific figure that protected a place, so it's not a 1:1 reference.

Cool! Anything else about the world that we haven't covered that you want to showcase?

Probably the nature of monsters in *Locus*. As mentioned earlier, a Locus has a big nasty monster. However, it also generates other monsters, each of which is modeled on a character's Haunt. This is one of the primary ways a character's Haunt affects the game, by being used by a Director as the guide for their own personal monster. In terms of the lore of the world, these monsters are a passive result of those with a Haunt being caught in a Malus Locus. There is an entire chapter of the *Director's Guide* dedicated to making mon-

sters for the characters. It also intends to guide the Director to make resonant, meaningful, and impactful monsters that also have mechanics that are cohesive with their concept.

Thanks! Anything you want to finish out on—anything you're most proud of when it comes to Locus? And finally, where can people find your work and your game?

Steph: I think I'm most proud of the fact that we've made something that really encapsulates parts of a genre we love, that is really true to what we wanted to make.

Jack: I think I'm most proud of the monster system and how the framework we've made for it allows both a mechanical and thematic reflection of a character.

This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Thanks to Jack and Steph of CobblePath for coming by to speak with us for this interview! If you're interested in following their games you can find them on [their website](#), [Twitter](#), and you can check out [Locus on DrivethruRPG](#) and [itch.io](#).

If you would like to be a Showcase interviewee, [click here to apply!](#)

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POLICING THE PEOPLE

by JD Venner



CULTURE



CRIME

“ [...] he hated thinking of them as civilians. What was a policeman, if not a civilian with a uniform and a badge? But they tended to use the term these days as a way of describing people who were not policemen. It was a dangerous habit: once policemen stopped being civilians the only other thing they could be was soldiers.

— Commander Sam Vimes, *Snuff*¹

Police. Both a verb and a noun. All inhabited worlds will have some form of policing, but will they have a police force? It may be an informal collective that ensures no one oversteps their bounds, a draconian robot army that watches people’s every move, or a solitary gun-toting administrant of justice. Whatever their role, numbers, orders, or organization, the police of a world will often find themselves at the forefront of any social or political change, whether it’s something as minor as evolving technology, or major as a revolution. They can often make or break any such change, whether by clamping down hard, or allowing

things to play out, whether due to orders from on high, or their own personal feelings. This is why it is so important for us as worldbuilders to properly define the organizations or beings that police our worlds.

In most civilizations, policing will be conducted by a dedicated police force, usually set up and administered by either a government entity, or a powerful corporate entity on the governing body’s behalf. This close association with the ruling class often causes such police to differentiate meaning. The important factor here is in deciding how you

wish your police forces—or any organization for that matter—to be perceived. Utilizing colors associated with strength, dominance, or danger strongly implies the attitude and tactics people can expect from the police force, as well as how people are expected to treat them.

It’s important not just to consider the color and style of clothing, but also how they are worn. In the 2019 HBO television series, *Watchmen*, the police wear masks to conceal their identities after a coordinated attack on police officers in their homes. However, this facial concealment immediately serves to inject an element of fear and intimidation by tapping into a primal fear of obscurity, anonymity, and a removal of association with a recognizable face. We instinctively trust those who are more open with us, both physically and emotionally. Police who wear individually identifying markers, such as badge numbers or even nametags, are also often perceived as less of a threat, perhaps because we subconsciously believe that if individual officers can be identified, they can be held accountable for any miscarriage of justice or unnecessary show of force. However, this association only works when we believe the police can be held accountable. If the perception is that a miscarriage of justice by a police officer would never be adequately punished, then the idea of individual identification is of little comfort.

You should also consider the tools, weapons, and vehicles utilized by your police force. More than 90% of the police forces in our world carry firearms of some kind, and so the carrying of lethal equipment does not necessarily denote a militaristic approach to policing, nor that the area

COLOR REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN SELECTING A UNIFORM.

they are policing is particularly violent. However, the use of military-grade equipment, such as heavier weapons or vehicles, would certainly seem intimidating. Such displays are often a statement of force, or are used in areas of high violence in an attempt to show what could happen if things get out of hand. Conversely, less-than-lethal equipment, such as pepper spray and tasers can be a clear statement of non-lethal intent. We should remember however, that “non-lethal” does not mean that these weapons cannot severely injure or maim, and that despite non-lethality being the intent, officers on the ground can still use such weapons to devastating effect if they so wish.

So, for example, if you were looking to create a dystopian police force, you might start with the style of uniform, making it seem more militant in appearance. You could begin by looking at the uniforms of the military in your setting, if you have one, and adapt that, rather than creating the uniform from scratch. Next, look at color. If your police force is intended to be overt and visible for the deterrent of crime, they will need to be dressed in easily-identifiable uniforms that differentiate them from other organizations. The colors could be bold and intimidating, perhaps drawing on the collective psyche of the beings they are policing. Then, look to introduce anonymity. Your dystopian police may wear helmets or masks;

² Bindler, Anna, and Randi Hjalmarsson. 2020. “The Impact Of The First Professional Police Forces On Crime”. *VOXEU.Org*. <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-first-professional-police-forces-crime>.

³ Johnson, Richard R. “An Examination of Police Department Uniform Color and Police–Citizen Aggression.” *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 40, no. 2 (February 2013): 228–44.

⁴ Lakritz, Talia. 2017. “Here’s What Police Uniforms Look Like In 14 Countries Around The World”. *Insider*. <https://www.insider.com/police-uniforms-around-the-world-2017-9>.

¹ Pratchett, Terry. 2011. *Snuff*, pg 200. London: Doubleday.

they may be stripped of identifying insignia or markings. They may even speak through a device that strips their voice of any nuance of individuality to remove the threat of reprisal as in the *Watchmen* series mentioned earlier. Finally, equip them with some truly terrifying, cutting-edge technology that can quickly incapacitate or kill those they target. Now, stand back and observe your dystopian pseudo-soldier, ready to enforce the will of a dictatorial government on a subdued people.

What if, however, you're looking for a helpful, trusting police force? A representative of the people—simply a citizen given a badge, some limited powers, and likely having little to no equipment. They may forgo a uniform altogether, simply preferring civilian clothes that encapsulate respectability and openness. Individuality may be something they value, with each officer being allowed to replace small forces to tread the fine line where “authority” can quickly become

“authoritarian.” Sometimes their twin goals of enforcing laws and maintaining societal structures can conflict, and often it is up to their leadership, organization, and their own consciences to decide how that conflict is resolved.

But we often don't have the time to delve deep into the conscience of each officer, let alone their collective morals and personalities. Instead, we need to make two broad decisions: what will our police force be like, and how can we best show it. In this article, we'll look at two key factors that should help us answer the above questions: appearance and organization.

OPINIONS BY DESIGN

What we think of as the modern police uniform originated in the early 1800s with the famous “Bobbies” of London, England, who were the first professional police force in the world devoted solely to deterring crime and catching criminals. They were given military uniforms that were dyed blue, instead of the red uniforms worn by the military at the time. This was a deliberate decision by their founder Sir Robert Peel, who wished to disassociate his newly created police force from the army in the hopes of presenting them as a “community force.”²

Color represents an important factor when selecting a uniform. In the Western world, black uniforms are often subconsciously associated with aggression, strength, and power, while blue uniforms are often associated with security and safety.³ While it might therefore seem that blue uniforms would be the logical choice for a police force in a Western country, it has been shown that officers in black uniforms are attacked less often and produce higher levels of compliance in the community. So, in communities that experience high levels of violence and lawlessness, it may be that black uniforms are more practical for keeping people safe. In some Asian countries, such as Malaysia, red is used to denote the more

aggressive “crowd-control” police units, with their vehicles and insignia daubed a bright red.⁴ This flash of color is meant as a warning symbol, similar to the bright stripes of a wasp or snake.

Obviously, these subconscious associations are for humans growing up in our roundworld. Color perception is likely to be very different across species and cultures. In our world, blue can be associated with security, sadness, or calmness, depending on the hue and context. In the world you're creating, you may also have to consider how biological differences affect this—what is the range of colors a species can observe or are there particular colors that trigger evolutionary danger senses? Nocturnal species in the world you're creating may perceive brighter colors to be more threatening, while color-blind species may rely more on patterns or shapes items of their uniform with whatever they wish. A police officer wearing their favorite sky-blue tie with little ducks on it certainly seems far more approachable than a jack-booted soldier in a mask. The colors and cut of the uniform may be softer, with less emphasis on power and intimidation. But be aware that such niceties may encourage disrespect and lawlessness. In 1969, the Menlo Park, CA Police Department changed their usual police uniforms to green sports jackets and slacks. They found that, although rates of violence initially decreased, after 18 months, the instances of violence against police nearly doubled.⁵ It seems that there is a fine line to tread between intimidation and respect. Whether your police force dances along this fine line or decides to jump across it one way or another will likely depend on both its culture and its hierarchy.

Again, keep in mind the peculiarities of your world. Our real-life examples only cover humans policing humans, but if you're creating

a multi-species fantasy society, there may be a different kind of dynamic that rises from that. Or, if you're writing a science fiction story set in the depths of space, how does policing work on space stations where there may not even be the guarantee of gravity?

STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE

The organization of any public body is key but, with a police force, the organization and hierarchy can hugely impact the perception, personality, and ethos associated with their role in the community. Their structure will generally reflect their intended role in society and may change over time, whether that be to deter crime, root out and punish criminals, or just make the community feel safe. This intended role can also be reflected in their structures and presence within society. Police officers who walk the streets and mingle with the community may seem less threatening and anonymous than officers who remain in vehicles or buildings, only entering the community to enact justice or prevent crimes.

In terms of hierarchy, it is generally accepted that there are four main types of organizational structure for police forces in our world. The first and most simply defined is the Line—a linear hierarchy from top to bottom. The Chief tells the Captain what to do, who tells the Lieutenant, who tells the Sergeant, who tells the guy with boots on the ground. Usually, you'll have more people filling up the lower ranks, and so the “line” actually represents more of a pyramid. This is what we tend to think of when we consider the hierarchy of a police force: the Sheriff and his Deputies. However, this structure is only usually used in more rural settings or with smaller forces, as it can quickly grow unwieldy. In larger municipalities,



⁵ Johnson, Richard R. 2005. “The Psychological Influence Of The Police Uniform”. *Police1*. <https://www.police1.com/police-products/apparel/uniforms/articles/the-psychological-influence-of-the-police-uniform-bhN9cdehTsvjzbMh/>.

with tens of thousands of officers, you end up with hundreds of captains, thousands of lieutenants, etc., or a hundred different middle-management ranks between them.

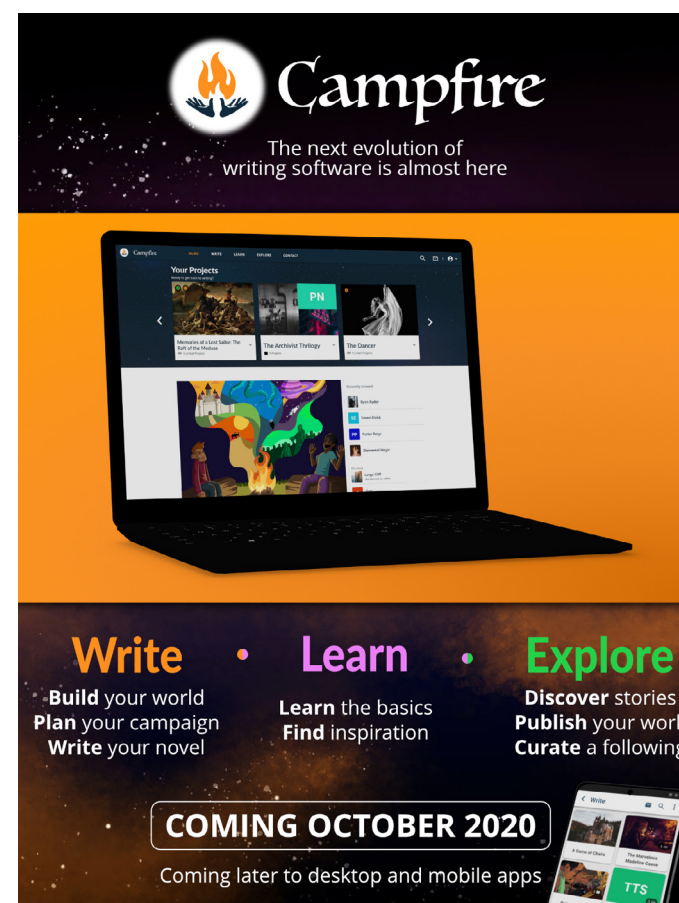
Therefore, many larger police forces prefer to use the Line and Staff structure. The “staff” in this case indicates the use of civilians to support the actual police officers. In such structures, a Lieutenant would have a team of administrative staff who would help them manage and organize the officers and squads below them. The Lieutenant can then have a much larger number of officers beneath them, and therefore cover larger areas with more citizens. This system is also particularly useful for regions where the police serve a more reactive than preventative role, i.e., they solve and convict crimes (with all the accompanying paperwork) more than preventing them from occurring in the first place. Unfortunately, this system can become quickly bogged down by administrative duties, causing more money to be spent in producing paperwork than in fighting crime. Even when this is not actually true, the perception of increasing administrative staff and reducing policing staff can often lead to this assumption. In several areas of Britain, for example, this Line and Staff system has led to the administrative staff outnumbering the police officers, a fact often looked upon negatively by the local community.⁶

The third system is Functional. As the name would suggest, this system splits the organization into groups of similar function. For example, homicide detectives would work in their own team, with their own offices and hierarchy. This system can lead to exceptional efficacy, with the pool of like-minded individuals working on similar projects resulting in issues being resolved quickly

and comprehensively as the individuals feed off each other to become more highly skilled and efficient. However, such a structure can result in a silo-culture with potentially catastrophic consequences, where holistic approaches are eschewed and the overall efficiency of the organization suffers. We’ve all heard stories of such events, where homicide detectives don’t coordinate with their colleagues in drug enforcement, so they miss a vital clue that allows the killer to escape.

Therefore, many of the largest police forces around the world utilize the fourth structure, the Matrix.⁷ This system combines the Line and Staff with the Functional approach to create function-based teams that report to superiors and admin staff who preside over several teams of various functions. This system hopes to offset the perceived lack of efficiency in a Line and Staff approach, while avoiding the silo-culture of a true Functional system. The admin staff serve to support the teams, removing bureaucratic burdens and ensuring smooth operational capability. This allows the function-based teams to do what they do best and feed off each other’s skills and knowledge. The implementation of line management outside the teams enables higher-ups to have a more holistic approach, observing patterns across various functions and creating cross-department task forces.

This Matrix system is a relatively new development, still only really used in the largest cities and municipal areas of the world. The main issue is that it is incredibly complex and requires a huge amount of admin staff devoted simply to coordination between departments. It can also be very slow to adjust, with new issues or events taking a long time to prompt organizational change. Therefore, when creating smaller municipalities



or towns, you may prefer to stick to Linear or Functional systems. However, if you’re creating an international police force with the budget of a medium-sized country, a Matrix system would be the way to go.

When it comes to organization affecting the ethos or personality of the police force, Linear systems are the most susceptible. Due to the strict hierarchical nature, the personality and drives of the people at the top quickly propagate throughout the force. A disciplinarian, devoted to stamping out crime, can instill this ethos in a linear structure very quickly, where the refusal of orders can be the only excuse needed to remove dissenting voices from within the organization. As such, Linear structures can be volatile and unpredictable, switching from a peacekeeping

force to fascist oppression in a matter of days if the person at the top changes. In contrast, the other three systems are less prone to this volatility, as dissenting voices or blockages to disagreeable policies can be hard to remove or silence. However, these others are arguably more susceptible to corruption. The myriad of departments and squads, both police- and admin-based, can lead to a lack of oversight and transparency, making it quite easy to get away with small-scale, or even department-wide corruption.

When creating your police force, first think about the size and scale of such a force. Are they to police small, peaceful towns spread far apart, where officers and local departments will have to be semi-autonomous and strictly Linear? Are they to police a vast, sprawling megalopolis with a budget and population-pool big enough to support a Matrix-like system?

Once the size has been decided, look at the function or role of your force. Are you creating a galaxy-spanning enforcement organization that requires hordes of civilian staff simply to keep track of all the planets and spaceports? Are your police enforcing a brutal regime that would require the quick, brutal results of a linear system? Are they peacekeepers who are expected to be model citizens and therefore have a vast background admin team ensuring every rule is followed to the letter? Then, consider particular focal points of the community. Is homicide or burglary a major concern? Abuse of magic?⁸ Unregulated technology? If the municipality is large enough, task forces or function-based teams would likely be created to combat these issues. If there are a large number of these teams, you may have a Functional system, where each of them operates in relative autonomy.

⁶ Adetunji, Jo. 2010. “Civilian Staff Outnumber Police Officers In Two British Police Forces”. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/may/16/civilian-staff-outnumber-police-officers>.

⁷ Maguire, Edward R. 2003. *Organizational Structure In American Police Agencies*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁸ Interested in the idea of how magic could be used to create some clever crimes? Robert Meegan wrote about just that in our February 2020 issue! You can read *Thinking Sideways About Magic and Crime* on page 33.

Once you have the overall structure and focal points, you can evaluate the system’s susceptibility to corruption and abuse. This doesn’t always have to be negative. In an oppressive regime, “corruption” might be an officer who goes against the grain and supports the subversive elements they are supposed to stamp out. By the end of this exercise, you’ll not only have the bones of a functioning police force, but the seeds of several stories and encounters that can start to fill your world with characters and events.

POLICING THE POPULACE

Ultimately, your police force will be either a reflection of the world in its current state or what your world will soon become. A brutal, militarized police force may not indicate that the civilization is currently a dystopia, but it’s surely an indicator that it is becoming one. Usually, people will not stand oppression for long, and it is up to the policing organizations to decide whether to double down on that oppression or take a step back. Similarly, a peaceful police force, faced with an internal threat for which it is not prepared, must decide whether or not to compromise their values to protect the populace.

The police forces of your world will change with the culture and politics of the time, but if you have created the foundations correctly, the choices they make should seem relatively obvious. By choosing how they are organized and how they appear, you can display the rationale behind that choice and so retain verisimilitude whenever change comes.

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A PODCAST BY WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE



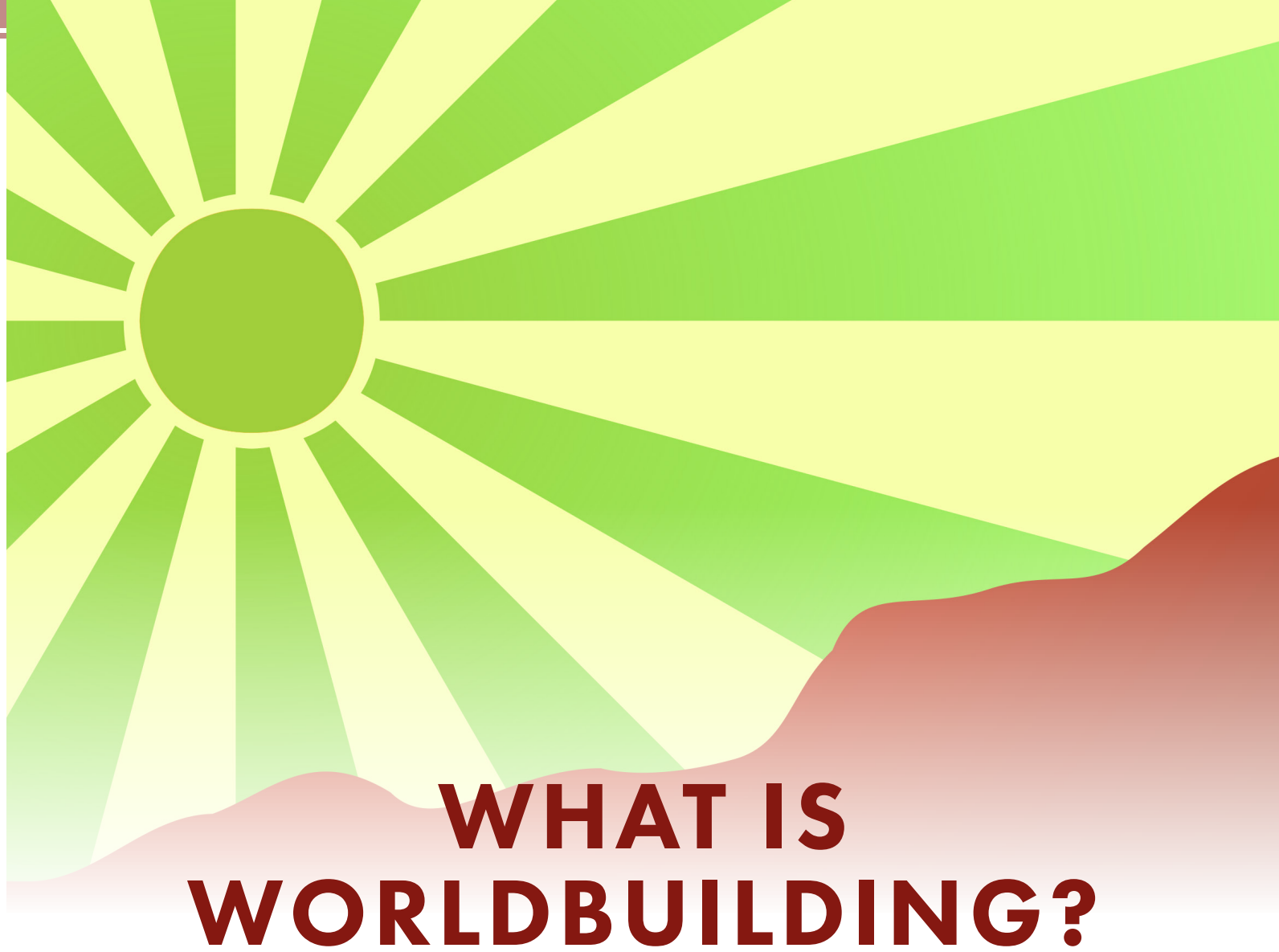
WORLDCASTING PODCAST

*Worldcasting is a podcast hosted by volunteers from **Worldbuilding Magazine**, featuring special guests such as Tim Hickson (*Hello Future Me* on YouTube), Angela Abreu (creative director of the Dominican Writer's Association), and Nicholas Eames (*Kings of the Wyld*)!*

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WHAT IS WORLDBUILDING?

by Ike Riva & M.E. White | cover art by S. King

 LINGUISTICS  THEORY & ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

There is a fundamental lack of clarity to the term “worldbuilding,” beginning with whether it should be spelled with or without a hyphen. But this ambiguity goes far beyond matters of spelling. Practitioners and theoreticians labor under various definitions and conceptions of “worldbuilding,” which are seldom stated explicitly—those knee-deep in the hobby either assume a common understanding or propose recursive definitions as a last resort. In this article we will humbly attempt to analyze and unpack

the meaning of “worldbuilding,” in the hopes of providing an accessible definition of the term for both long-term practitioners and newly-interested parties. To do so, we will take a page out of J.R.R. Tolkien’s book—specifically, from the introduction to “*Essay On Phonetic Symbolism*,” published for the first time in 2016:

“*Phonetic Symbolism: What is meant? I don’t know. What do I mean?*”¹

Sometimes there is no way to get at the definition of something directly; we must interrogate what we mean when we use the term. And so...

Worldbuilding: What is meant? We don't know. What do we mean?

NARROW DEFINITIONS

One fact becomes immediately clear upon first glance: the term worldbuilding expresses a connection between the concept of a “world” and the act of “building” it. This is so evident that official dictionary definitions of the term employ a hyphen to create a compound of both: “world-building.” When defined, as by Worldbuilding Magazine, the term becomes somewhat recursive: it means “the process of constructing an imaginary world,”² a definition which is predicated on the concept and term “world.” It is this recursive, vague element which plagues worldbuilding discussions. The term is completely divorced from its conceptual and etymological root: our own world.

To discuss how to worldbuild, and how to worldbuild *well*, one needs to clearly define what “worldbuilding” and “world” are. Our contemporaries employ a definition of worldbuilding that can be summarized as “the process, and product, of constructing secondary worlds.” We find this definition to be constricting. Similarly to Tolkien's thoughts on defining “fairy-story,” we find that this second definition would make our “topic hopelessly vast. But the first sense is too narrow. Not too narrow for an essay; it is wide enough for many books, but too narrow to cover actual usage.”³

If worldbuilding is to be accurately defined, and defined in such a way as to foment productive discussions and actual usage, its definition must also encompass the only tangible world we have access to: the primary world. After all, to be accurate to its etymology and functional meaning, worldbuilding should also describe the “building” of the primary world—or at least the relationship that the primary world has to the secondary worlds that we create. The contemporary, constrained definition only encompasses secondary worlds; it does not concern itself with the world we all experience, and how it is produced. Addressing the primary world is essential to understanding the generation of our secondary worlds.

However, when grounding secondary worldbuilding in the primary world, worldbuilders must not confuse the field of worldbuilding for that of philosophy. It should be clear that, while secondary worlds do not exist in any tangible way, the reality that we exist in ostensibly *does*; this is an assumption we make about reality to avoid losing ourselves in the weeds of philosophy—in debates about existence and knowledge, topics which prevent us from discussing worldbuilding.

Since the latter is our focus, we need to make our initial assumptions clear—mainly, that reality is real but that we do not perceive it directly. While we know that this idea naturally leads us to question reality itself, it isn't our focus and shouldn't distract the reader. If you would like to be “distracted” by this line of thought, we advise that you explore reading material that relates to the philosophy of perception, and/or phenomenology. The questions raised are interesting and important—just not relevant to worldbuilding. They are merely foundational arguments that we

import from other disciplines to establish an initial position and build it up towards worldbuilding: philosophy is a launching pad for the discussion, but nothing more.

REALITY, YOU, & PRIMARY WORLDS

You do not perceive reality directly. If you did, you would have objective knowledge of the universe. One perceives reality as mediated through bodily senses, and as processed by the faculties of our brain; at every step there is the potential for errors. That's how we get optical and auditory illusions, hallucinations, or sensory deprivation. More importantly, for worldbuilding at least, there is ignorance. Not in the pejorative sense, but in the sense that—because we do not perceive the world directly—there is information that we do not have access to, that we ignore. A concrete example of this ignorance, and how it affects our view of reality, is the story of Copernicus. Before the publication of his magnum opus, “On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres,” in 1543, most people on Earth believed that our planet was at the center of the solar system. That is to say, they spent their lives ignorant of reality and, as a consequence, living in “their own world.” Copernicus' *refining* of our understanding brought mankind's perceptions closer to measurable reality. And, when he published his work, it was not reality that changed but our conceptions of it: the primary world.

This principle is known as “Indirect Realism” and, together with its opposite “Naïve” or “Direct Realism,” is part of the debate making up the **philosophy of perception**. Indirect Realism relates to worldbuilding because it underpins the concept of the “primary world,” and explains how our perceptions can be (and often are) wrong. Since we do not perceive reality directly, what do we perceive? We perceive internal representations of reality through a collection of schema[§]. These internal representations have no inherent truth value, which is why they can be wrong, and the

collection of them is what we term the “world”; in this essay we call this collection the “primary world.”

Let's use another concrete example: someone who believes in the existence of a flat Earth and another person who does not both exist in the same reality, but act within separate primary worlds. Likewise, someone who believes in the existence of a Builder and someone who does not both exist in different primary worlds. Regardless of veracity, these beliefs have real-world consequences: they predicate how people interact with their environment, what they predict and expect of it, and how they engage with others. The reality that exists *outside of* our perceptions and the world that exists as a *product of* them are two different things.

However, if there were no reality to perceive there would be no primary world to be “built” from it. In this way, the primary world—and, more importantly, the building of the primary world—is dependent on reality. What is meant here by primary worldbuilding?

Primary worldbuilding, when understood in this way and considering its relationship to reality, signifies the act of gathering perceptive data and processing it into information, into “facts” which are then assembled into schemata that we use to understand, communicate, and predict our world. These “facts,” as stated above, impact how we interact with the primary world regardless of verity—they are true because we believe them to be or because we find them useful. Primary worldbuilding is not a process which ever stops, since new perceptions and connections between “facts” are constantly, reflexively being made.

SECONDARY WORLDS

In the same way that the primary world is reliant on reality, secondary worlds are reliant on primary worlds. If there were no perceptions to

¹ Tolkien, J.R.R. “Essay on Phonetic Symbolism.” *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages*. HarperCollinsPublishers, 2016, p. 64.

² Worldbuilding Magazine. “Home Page.” *Worldbuilding Magazine*. August 4, 2021. www.worldbuildingmagazine.com.

³ Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories: Expanded Edition with Commentary and Notes*. HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014, p. 28.

sort into schematics, and then condense into a primary world, there would be nothing to refract and recombine into secondary worlds. The fact underlying this matter is that we do not world-build by refracting and recombining reality directly, but that we do so using the “clay” of our primary world—our “facts”—a clay that can be molded into fantastic shapes only to be gleaned in the mind’s eye.

It pays to know the clay one works with well because, as Professor Janet Burroway notes, “what all imaginative writing has in common is that it calls up pictures in the mind,” images originally tethered to physical perceptions. “[T]he kinds of writing we group under the heading ‘imaginative’ [. . .] exist fundamentally as *re-presentations*. [. . .] the writing calls up sense impressions in the mind,”⁴ (emphasis our own). In “re-presenting” the primary world through imagination, the artist untethers “facts” from any reference to reality—forming the building blocks of a secondary world: fictitious facts, or “ficts.” As J.R.R. Tolkien puts it in his twin manifestos “On Fairy-Stories” and “A Secret Vice”:

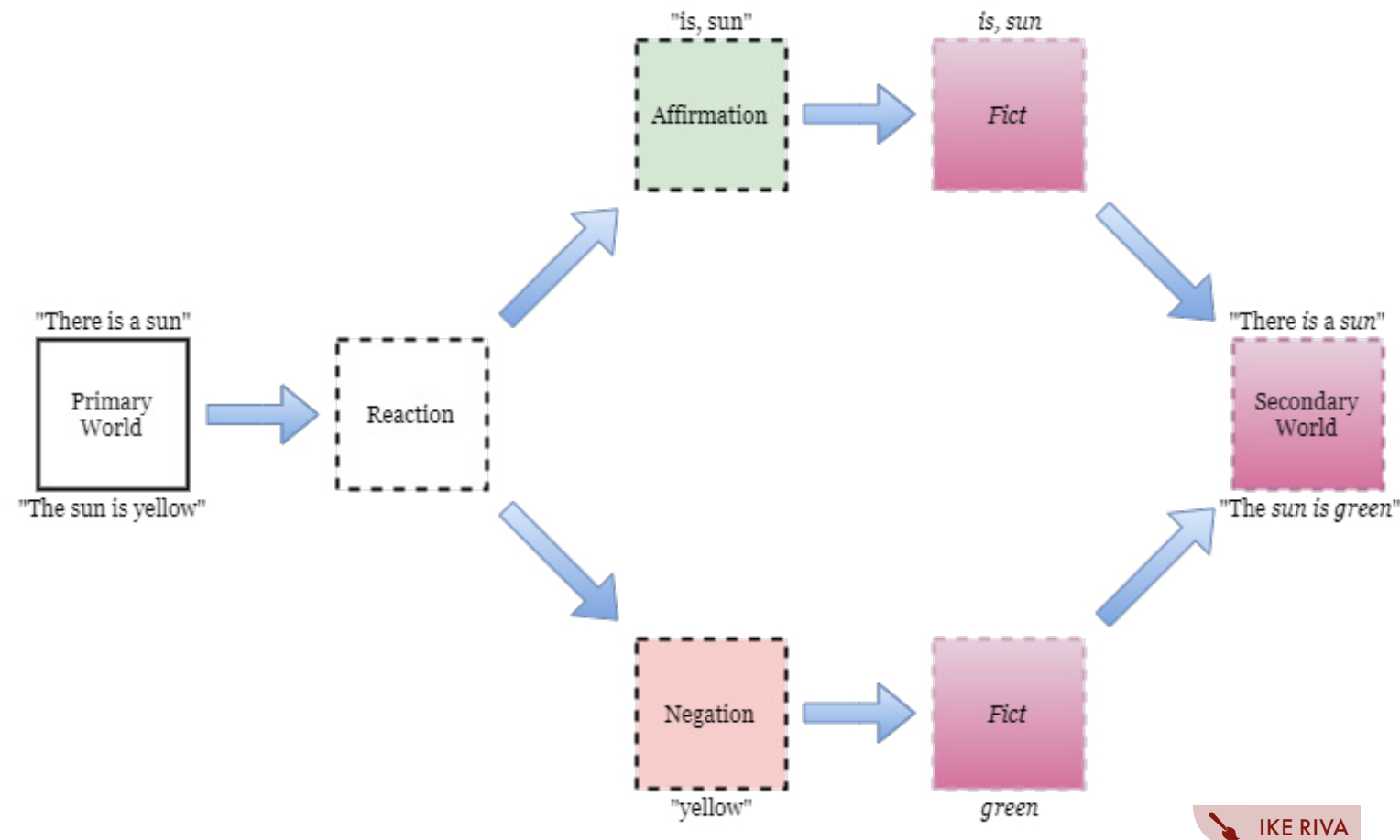
*The human mind, endowed with the powers of generalisation and abstraction, sees not only green-grass, discriminating it from other things [...], but sees that it is green as well as being grass. [...] The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter’s power — upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. [...] creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it.*⁵

*You may say green sun or dead life and set the imagination leaping. Language has both strengthened imagination and been freed by it. Who shall say whether the free adjective has created images bizarre and beautiful, or the adjective been freed by strange and beautiful pictures in the mind.*⁶

Because of this, the worldbuilder’s primary world—a composite of perceptions, images, concepts, beliefs, words, etc.—will (no matter how hard they try) impact their secondary worlds. If they did not know about the “green” of grass they would not be able to use it freely, but if they knew of a hundred different shades of green they could more expertly use them.

For example, a worldbuilder who knows about the rules that dictate the structure and evolution of languages will be able to draw on (affirm) them and create more verisimilar constructed languages; or, conversely, they will be able to reverse, disregard, or transform (negate) these linguistic rules with more intention and creativity, to create more surreal or unique constructed languages. Worldbuilders are all limited to these two reactions: we can only ever “affirm” our primary worlds—meaning copy what we perceive into a secondary one—or “negate” it—meaning to change or undermine our primary worlds. Conversely, what someone ignores will also show in their finished work: a worldbuilder that ignores said linguistic rules would not be able to affirm or negate anything concrete when doing so—such a worldbuilder would do best to create utilitarian constructed languages, or otherwise embrace the aesthetic produced by such lack of knowledge.

When one understands the relationship between reality, the primary world, and secondary worlds the importance of research becomes apparent. Research is the refinement of a researcher’s primary world, and means they can better construct both verisimilar or surreal worlds because of it—depending on whether one wants to affirm



or negate a particular perception. Moreover, when we understand the process in this way, we can justify and properly contextualize the place of research in the whole worldbuilding process. Consequently, worldbuilders can choose what to research with more intention, and decide what to remain ignorant of depending on the aim of their creative project. For example, if one is creating a world centered around speculative biology, one doesn’t necessarily need to put too much work into studying linguistics; whereas if one is creating a world centered around a constructed language, like Tolkien, one would do well to learn more about linguistics and less about evolutionary

theory. This may be self-evident to some, but by stating what role the primary world plays in the process we can more accurately say what role research truly plays in the whole scheme of our sub-creation.

WHAT IS WORLDBUILDING, IN GENERAL?

After having unpacked these three layers, what can we say about worldbuilding in general? To get a clearer picture, let us sum up the concept which feed into the artistic habit we know and love.

⁴ Burroway, Janet. “The Elements of Craft: Image.” *Imaginative Writing*. Fourth ed, Pearson, 2015, p. 16.

⁵ Tolkien, J.R.R. *Tolkien On Fairy-Stories: Expanded Edition with Commentary and Notes*. HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014, p. 41-65.

⁶ Tolkien, J.R.R. *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages*. HarperCollinsPublishers, 2016, p. 34.

Reality: The universe in its totality. The reality that exists outside of us, containing all matter, energy, time, and anything else that may exist that we are ignorant of. It exists *a priori*, without need of perception, and is consequently objective.

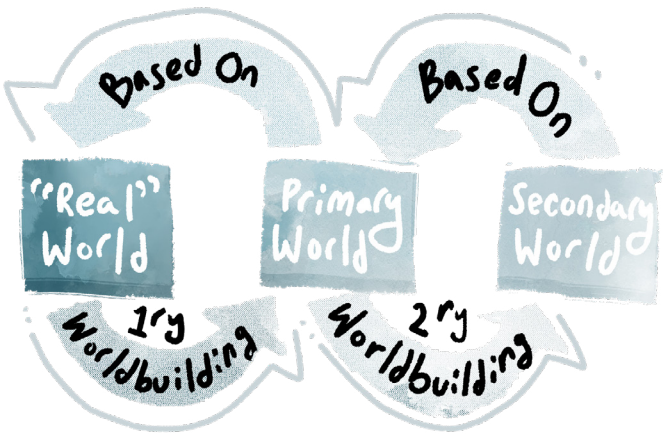
Primary Worlds: Our perceptions of the universe, processed by our senses and our mind into *schemata*. The totality of these schema, which are connected to each other but not necessarily accurate or reflecting reality, is what we *perceive* as “our reality.” Due to the primary world’s perceptive nature—requiring a subject to perceive it—it is subjective.

Secondary Worlds: Our refracted and recombined primary world. Because our perceptions have no direct relationship to reality, they are “free” and can be played with artistically to create new, imaginary concepts and landscapes: for example, *green sun*.

Of these “three worlds” only two are truly worlds: the first is a material reality that is in no way created by us, and therefore objective. From this we can infer that a **world** is something perceived by a subject and the product of this subjective perception. Therefore, we need only apply “worldbuilding” to the latter two concepts.

Primary worldbuilding is the act of collecting, processing, sorting, and connecting perceptions of reality into a cohesive framework of “facts.” Sometimes primary worldbuilding is an automatic response to external stimuli, while other times it’s a result of intentional reflection. The resulting primary world is one that helps us navigate and predict what will happen in reality, but is not necessarily accurate to it. Because of it, our deductions and connections can be wrong—this may even have deadly consequences: for example, if a child sees superman flying on television and then, having built a schematic based on this observation, attempts to fly themselves.

Secondary worldbuilding is the act of untethering “facts” from reality and any connection to it, affirming or negating them, and then recombining them into a constructed, secondary world. The resulting fictitious facts—“ficts,” for short—rely on the primary world to “push off” from. Refined, concrete primary worlds provide surer footing for worldbuilders to react to; incomplete, vague understandings do the opposite.



M.E. WHITE

Like nested dolls, secondary worlds and the process by which to make them are reliant on Primary Worlds; Primary Worlds, and the process by which to perceive them, are reliant on reality. Whether reality is reliant or not on anything to exist, such as a theoretical Builder, is undetermined—and perhaps undeterminable.

In conclusion, the only thread which connects primary and secondary worldbuilding is the mechanism and process that allows us to collect, sort, combine, and recombine information. It processes thoughts and perceptions into navigable, predictable systems of information—in other words, into **worlds**. Worldbuilding is the mechanism that allows for this to occur—allows for us to perceive “our reality” and then creatively

“build” perceptions of fake realities by refracting it. More than imagination, it is the *underlying principle* of imagination that allows us to break free from constraints and envision infinite landscapes, concepts, words, colors, and fantastical worlds. As we discover more about reality, and expand the boundaries of our primary worlds, who can say what new heights secondary worlds will reach?

ENDNOTE

§A “schema,” plural “schemata,” is a concept or framework that organizes and interprets information into a mental structure that represents some aspect of the world.

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

WITH C. D. TAVENOR

Interviewed by Adam Bassett | Art by S.E. MacCready



INTERVIEW



WRITING

I got a chance to chat with C.D. Tavenor, a science fiction and fantasy author who also acts as the Director of Editorial Services at Two Doctors Media Collaborative. His most recent project at the time of this interview—*The World's Revolution*—is an anthology featuring stories about people fighting climate change. We talk about all that and more right here.

I'm a science fiction/fantasy author and editor based in Columbus, Ohio. My first series, *The Chronicles of Theren*, focuses on philosophical questions surrounding artificial intelligence, with the main character being the first synthetic intelligence named "Theren." I also have a shorter fantasy novella series and a short story collection. My current project is an epic flintlock climate fantasy series, which I'm hoping to release in 2022.

And I'll emphasize the word "*climate*" noted for my current project. The alter ego of C. D. Tavenor is a public interest environmental attorney by day, specifically motivated by the threats of the climate crisis. While my first few fiction projects touch on environmental issues tangentially, as I've immersed myself in both my work as an attorney and as an author, I'm exploring new ways to intersect my work.

And that brings us to "*The World's Revolution*," the project we're discussing today. Last year, in collaboration with a few author friends, I started thinking about what it would look like to create a climate fiction setting, just a few years in the future, that lots of writers could build together. Because in my opinion, we need to be addressing climate change on all fronts. While I started writing because I had too many stories in my head, in the present, I'm writing fiction because I fundamentally believe in the power of stories to influence the way people view the world.

Just for some context, can you break down what it is that a public interest environmental attorney does? That's a string of words I don't think many people are used to seeing all together like that!

Yes, absolutely. As an attorney, I work for a nonprofit organization advocating for environmental protection in all levels of government, and we especially focus on climate policy. So a "public interest" attorney is advocating on behalf of what will benefit the public, as opposed to private interests or governmental interests.

In addition to your attorney work, you are the Director of Editorial Services at Two Doctors Media Collaborative. I'd like to take a moment to give some advice to authors editing their work, or editors looking to improve their game: what are some tips you can give people?

Great question. I've been providing editing services to authors for almost three years now, and the number one piece of advice I can give writers is to learn the rules of grammar and style so you know how to break them. Understand what words and phrases you overuse so you can learn to use them intentionally, rather than subconsciously. Language has rules, but I'm one of those people that loves to see the rules broken when it serves the story. In learning the rules, though, you'll save yourself a ton of time (and money).

Do you have any editing horror stories of clients who you struggled with, or pieces that pushed your skills to the limit? How did you resolve them?

I learned within my first year that it's really important to "like" what you're editing. More importantly, it's really important to know what you're about to edit before you edit it.

I was [once] given a short story by an author that ended up including some really graphic violence that shook me as I edited. Fortunately, when I talked to the author about it, they were really understanding and apologized for not warning me. Since then, I've learned to ensure authors let me know if there's any graphic content I should be prepared for.

That's great advice. It definitely helps to enjoy what you're doing.

I'd like to move on and chat about some of your personal work, such as the aforementioned *Chronicles of Theren*. First, what are some of the inspirations you draw upon for your own writing?

The *Chronicles of Theren* is a series close to my heart, not just because Book 1, *First of Their Kind*, was the first book I published.

I started writing the book all the way back in [my college] undergraduate [year], and it was heavily inspired by my studies in philosophy, specifically cognitive science and philosophy of mind. In those subjects, a lot of questions emerge regarding the nature of consciousness, artificial intelligence, and the human experience of the world. A question slowly formed in my mind: what would actually happen if humanity successfully created an artificial mind with emergent consciousness like we see in our species, as opposed to an algorithmic artificial intelligence simulating intelligence?

That book went through something like five or six drafts, but I'm really proud of the story I ended up crafting, focusing on Theren's life. I ended up exploring how humanity would react to a created mind (probably not well), and how that mind would define itself. For instance, Theren ends up using they/them pronouns, which felt like a logical choice for its identity. And that snowballed into all synthetics (more of their kind are created later) adopting different genders all depending on how they developed.



And the final question the *Chronicles of Theren* asks: what would it look like for a being like Theren to live and lead in near perpetuity? And so by the end of the second book, 300 years have passed, and the third book and other related stories occur in a *Star Trek/Mass Effect*-esque universe, which is a fun sandbox to explore philosophical questions in. Though, there aren't any other aliens for them to interact with . . . not yet, precisely. I won't spoil the third book and the future of the series, but I'm excited to explore different ways of conceptualizing consciousness.

While we're talking about that series, I'm curious about how you write from the point of view of a synthetic intelligence like Theren? Clearly they have very human feelings and desires, but I'm interested in what kinds of strings you have to pull to make that character both relatable and inhuman.

Love this question. Mostly because I've had readers say "they can't relate at all to Theren" then others say the exact opposite! Theren, at their core, is someone devoted to sustaining and protecting humanity. And they define humanity to include created synthetic persons. They're driven by very fundamental goals, and since they don't have biochemical needs, they don't always fall for impulses that might distract from those goals. Though synthetics still developed their own types of emotions, those feelings are fundamentally different from what humans experience.

Additionally, Synthetic Intelligences (SIs) can achieve "simultaneous perspective," essentially a flawless form of multitasking where their conscious perspective has multiple points-of-view at once. This created for a really fun writing experience, since Theren might be working on a project in one room while talking to another character right next door with no break in perception.

Yet, Theren is still a person. They were "raised" by the scientists who created them. They like playing

games, especially chess, a game introduced to them by their principle creator. They've experienced loss—and by the end of the second book, quite a few times over. You make a lot of friends over the course of a few centuries, after all. So we have a character who both can essentially live forever and think differently than humans—yet they're going through a lot of the same experiences as humans. In writing the *Chronicles of Theren*, I'm always trying to toe that line of ensuring readers understand that SIs are people—just a different type of person, simultaneously alien yet familiar.

How do you approach worldbuilding when the "world" is actually a galaxy? For example, earlier you mentioned that the third book's scale gets much greater.

Worldbuilding for books two and three of the *Chronicles of Theren*, and its stand-alone novel, *Flight of the 500*, took a lot of upfront work.

One of the questions I immediately asked—what scale of stellar expansion do I want to reach? And I started doing math.

A lot of math.

And I realized how truly immense the galaxy is.

In the *Chronicles of Theren*, a second "emergent" technology appears on the scene closely after the creation of synthetic intelligence—an Alcubierre-based Faster-than-light (FTL) drive.¹ I always knew I wanted to take the story to space, and I really liked the idea of having an almost Earth-shattering tech appear right after SIs arrive. Thus, Theren and other SIs also have to deal with the significance of that tech to humanity.

Yet, even as I tried to ensure I didn't "hand-wave" FTL, I realized how incredibly fast an FTL drive

would need to be to cross significant "galactic" distances. So I decided, instead, to keep the story relatively "local" to Earth.

What did this look like? A lot of research into the distances to nearby stars. Determining that even if an FTL drive was ten times faster than the speed of light, relatively speaking, that means it can only traverse ten light years in a year. What impact does that have on space exploration? How far could humanity conceivably explore, even if using unmanned probes?

So by the time the story is firmly in that "space opera" setting, humanity's really only established a foothold on a sphere of space a few hundred light years in diameter. Tiny, on the galactic stage, but that amount of space still contains hundreds of thousands, potentially millions of stars.

Climate fiction is the genre you're working in lately, and it's a newer genre of fiction, or at least one that is growing in popularity in recent years. Since it is still developing, there's more leeway with how it is expected to be. Clearly you're a fan of the genre but I'd like to know if you have any criticisms of it.

Interesting question. Right now, climate fiction is very young, as you said. Climate change can be a theme in a lot of fiction, even if it's not central to the narrative. If I had any critique of climate fiction as it stands, it's that it ends up leaning too hard into the "post-apocalyptic" genre. I definitely think we need our "what if the world collapses due to climate change" stories, but we also need our hopeful, inspirational climate stories! Where people, in the present or near-future, successfully make progress to stop the climate crisis.

On that note, would you say the goal of *The World's Revolution* is to be optimistic, or pessimistic, or something else?

¹ The Alcubierre Drive is a speculative piece of technology that is based on Einstein's work which—in theory—could enable faster than light travel. More information is available [here](#).

THE WORLD'S REVOLUTION

The World's Revolution is fundamentally a setting designed to paint a realistic picture of where the climate is going—where geopolitics might go—and then consider a fantastical question: what would happen if the Earth, as a semi-spiritual organism (think: the Gaia Hypothesis), was able to *fight* back against the threat to its biological systems?²

So, it's a little pessimistic. It doesn't paint a rosy picture for the next few decades. But I also like to think it's optimistic. The stories that the authors have written for it are filled with hope—standing against an existential threat, both environmental and human—and they're also stories that make it clear that we can't do this alone. No one human is going to stop the climate crisis. It will take all of us. And in the case of *The World's Revolution*, it'll take humans reacting to the planet fighting back, and learning how to fit themselves into that larger story.

You mentioned the setting so I wanted to ask—is everyone writing in a shared setting for the anthology?

Yes! It was an experiment. We didn't know how it would go. And it worked out better than I could have imagined. Some authors have taken stories they had already written and crafted them to fit the setting—or submitted them with the understanding that I would make any minor recommendations to ensure it fit the setting.

I would say most authors wrote stories directly in response to the prompt, though. We tried to create a timeline that was fairly sparse with details to give authors just enough to work with so they could create a character-centric narrative. And through that process, we've had authors tell some really wonderful stories, and through it all, they're building details of the world collectively.

One of the greatest moments in reviewing and editing selected stories has been noticing the purely coincidental moments where two authors essentially reference similar events or concepts, creating emergent unity between the stories. Other times, it takes a simple recommendation for one author to shift an event slightly so it subtly references the events in someone else's story.

All together, the first anthology is going to establish an incredible framework for the setting of *The World's Revolution*.

That's great to hear! On that point, what difficulties have you had to overcome by using a shared setting for the anthology? Keeping everything consistent between each author, all of whom want to make their own mark—or who might be afraid to make waves—must be quite a challenge.

Honestly, I've been surprised by how few issues we've needed to overcome. No author tried to tell a story that fundamentally affected the en-

tire world. Almost every story is a very focused narrative on the experience of one character in a particular geographic location. While characters in stories might reference events going on outside the world—a lot of authors enjoyed referencing events from the timeline, sometimes directly through news broadcasts on a TV—the stories are often very personal in nature, even if the final outcome has repercussions for the setting.

When I've needed to make recommendations for authors to shift their narratives slightly, everyone's been really excited to make the changes. The most difficult part, in reality, is going to be tying it all together. I'll be penning a "conclusion" to the anthology that connects many of the characters and stories, and I'm more stressed about whether I can do the whole endeavor justice after we received such fantastic narratives.

That's great. As a follow-up, how has the setting changed over time as you take in and develop submissions?

While the general timeline hasn't changed, we've definitely had some fun worldbuilding occur as a result of the accepted stories. A bunch of

authors ran with the concept of "Gaia Awakens" and had a number of their characters directly refer to the Earth as Gaia, in almost a religious/spiritual fashion. What that's amounted to, in a way, is the development of a "spiritual" movement across countries and the planet. In the setting, as a response to the climate crisis AND some of the fantastical events occurring, lots of people have leaned into an "eco-religious" perspective of the Earth.

And I actually don't think this is that far-fetched of a philosophy to occur over the next few decades (without the fantastical events, of course). As humanity becomes more and more traditionally secular, yet we continue to fundamentally hurt our planet, I think it's pretty likely people will develop a shared language about how we should care for the planet, even through semi-religious language, even if there aren't deities involved.

Thanks for joining us! I've really enjoyed chatting with you about your work and upcoming releases. Is there anything you'd like to add that we didn't get a chance to talk about before?

I'd like to emphasize the open-endedness of *The World's Revolution*. I'm really excited about where this setting could go in the coming years. We're starting small with a single anthology after the successful Kickstarter, but the sky's the limit. If we continue to find readers and connect with more authors, I'm excited by the possibility of writers penning entire novels or series in the setting. I'm excited about the idea of multiple authors working on a larger, collaborative arc between multiple stories and books.

In a sense, I would love to see this setting become the playground of many different authors. When we talk about a threat like climate change, we need all hands on deck. One person won't change the world. So, it only makes sense, in my opinion, that a setting focused on the climate crisis and the planet's fight against it, requires multiple voices and perspectives to make it happen.



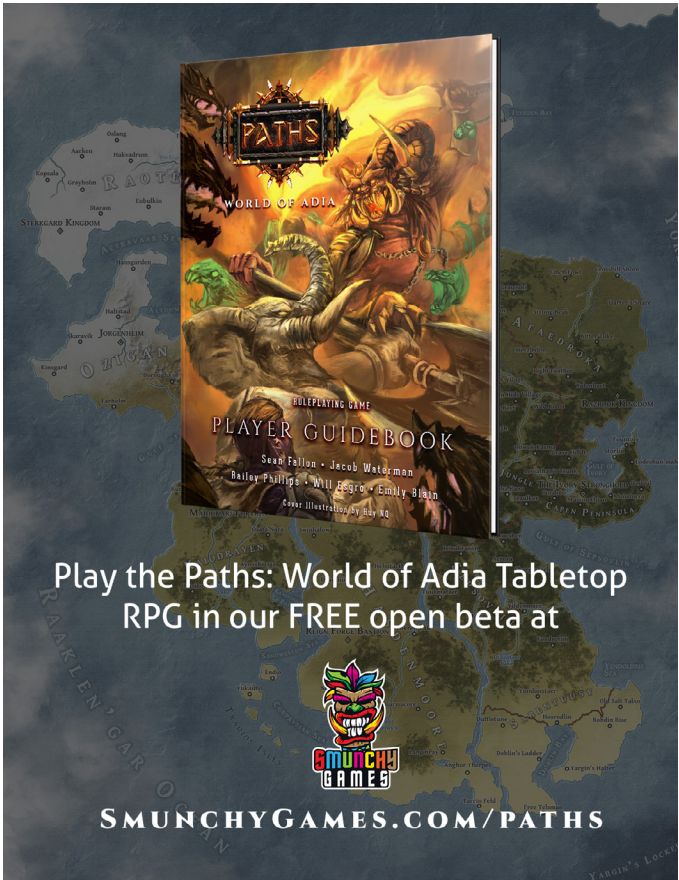
² The Gaia Hypothesis is a model of Earth in which the living and nonliving parts are viewed as a single organism or system. More information can be found [here](#).

While a lot of our authors are based in the United States, I was pleasantly surprised by how many international submissions we received. For future collections, anthologies, or stand-alone stories in this setting, I hope we receive perspectives from across the planet, reflecting the multitude of approaches to solving our planet’s greatest existential threat.

This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.

Thank you to C. D. Tavenor for joining us! You can follow him on Twitter, Facebook, Amazon, or BookBub if you want to stay up to date on any of his work.

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DIVERSE WORLDS

NICHE FINDS

by Zaivy Luke-Aleman

 [REVIEW](#)

In the previous installment of this series (which you can find in [volume 5, issue 1](#), “[Getting Started Again](#)”), we talked about diversity, worldbuilding, and how the two can influence each other, especially through a look at video essays on YouTube. Today we will be exploring: What are great ways to find short pieces with worldbuilding by typically marginalized voices? In particular, this time we’re looking at prose and comics.

ANTHOLOGIES

THE OTHERSIDE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF QUEER PARANORMAL ROMANCE


WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

With the boom of the internet, a lot of worldbuilding in storytelling happens visually. People who ordinarily face obstacles distributing their work now have more opportunities to share to larger audiences. Digital illustrations, graphic novels, zines, and anthologies have become more popular as the ability to create and distribute them has increased. Some of these works come about in the form of short-term projects like, *The Otherside: An Anthology of Queer Paranormal Romance* edited by Melanie Gillman and Kori Michele Handwerker, a graphic novel anthology. This physical edition explores ghosts, witches, demons and more on their journeys through love.

Tale Foundry Writing Group

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Other anthology projects have long-term goals, like the recently established publisher, Power & Magic Press. Both *The Otherside* and Power & Magic Press are dedicated to developing spaces for queer people to gather, produce, and distribute their art and narratives. They are filled with different styles of art that create intriguing and unique stories. I think it is within this medium, and at this length, that soft worldbuilding excels.

Power & Magic Press, in particular, publishes several fantastical anthologies. The stories are a mix of magical realism, near-future tales, and new worlds. My personal favorite from their press is *Heartwood: Non-Binary Tales of Sylvan Fantasy*; not simply because it's a beautiful hardcover

book with golden edged pages, but because of the unifying ethereal feel the stories have. As a worldbuilder, I appreciated seeing the balance between narrative and light worldbuilding. There was a comfortingly gentle drift between worlds that reminded me of manga like *Mushishi* by Yuki Urushibara, and *Natsume Yuuinchou* by Yuki Midorikawa, where the mundane world coexists with a magical one. Glimpses of it feel like unexpected overlaps with fate, the nature of which—be it good or bad—is simply a matter of coincidence.

LaVar Burton was once an advocate for reading in the homes of many children, and his passion for storytelling lives on in his podcast, *LaVar Burton Reads*. In this anthology-like podcast series, he reads short stories that he simply enjoys, and to my delight, occasionally discusses worldbuilding elements. One episode of the podcast features an interview with Dr. Nnedi Okorafor, who you may recognize from her novella *Binti*. During the interview, they explore how she came up with some of her worldbuilding ideas from her featured short story, *Mother of Invention*, which involved going to a writing conference with a team of scientists. I chose LaVar Burton because—well, his taste is impeccable, but also because he values worldbuilding. And, most importantly to this article series, he reads works that are by a diverse range of authors. His most recent reads (as of July 2021) include “Chivalry” by Neil Gaiman, “The Paper Menagerie” by Ken Liu, and “Kin” by Bruce Alister. This is not a completed work, and so the podcast itself will go unranked.

However, LaVar Burton also wrote the introduction for a different anthology of prose, *New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Color* edited by Nisi Shawl. As a warning, this volume does include mature content. This is a fantastic collection, which values worldbuilding elements in storytelling. One of my favorite stories is by Minsoo Kang, which looks at the unique history of the fictional setting “The Virtue of Unfaithful Translations.” Written as if it were a historical

POWER & MAGIC: IMMORTAL SOULS VOLUME 1

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

POWER & MAGIC: THE QUEER WITCH COMICS ANTHOLOGY VOLUME 1

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

POWER & MAGIC: THE QUEER WITCH COMICS ANTHOLOGY VOLUME 2

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○○●○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD

NEW SUNS: ORIGINAL SPECULATIVE FICTION BY PEOPLE OF COLOR

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○○○●○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ○○●○○ HARD

HEARTWOOD: NON-BINARY TALES OF SYLVAN FANTASY

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○○●○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

KEY

Interested in the worldbuilding scale provided for this article? This scale was developed to communicate the extent of worldbuilding within the volumes. Some stories within an anthology may have softer magic systems than others, and so the scale measures the accumulation of stories, rather than each story within one volume. An example of softer worldbuilding is MTV's *Teen Wolf*, and a harder example of worldbuilding is Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*.

SOFT ●○○○○ HARD

The worldbuilding is largely aesthetic. World elements usually look like (or are) Earth with few adjustments.

SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

Might rely more on already established tropes to inform the audience of their world/magic/science. There may be world details sprinkled in, however it is not evident that they belong to a carefully crafted system as opposed to one that is loosely defined.

SOFT ○○●○○ HARD

Stories like these may not take place on Earth, and often have a magic/science system the audience can generally follow. The worldbuilding may have small details that make it feel unique, which may be explored in shallow depth.

SOFT ○○○●○ HARD

The worldbuilding is large in either scope or scale, from which an audience could replicate similar spells/devices and remain consistent with the system it borrows from. At least one of the worldbuilding's complex systems is explored in depth.

SOFT ○○○○● HARD

Complex in both scope and scale. The systems and setting are detailed enough that the audience could replicate similar spells/devices and remain consistent with the system it borrows from. Explaining the setting can take a long time, and learning it can be difficult

text, the emphasis on in-world translation wonderfully explores the diplomatic affairs within the setting. It's a story that makes one consider the unnoticed history of heroes in the shadows. I imagine many of our readers would be interested in it because of its unique storytelling and worldbuilding elements. It asks questions like, how is your world influenced by who controls the narratives?

GLITTER + ASHES: QUEER TALES OF A WORLD THAT WOULDN'T DIE

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD

An exciting new anthology (released just last year) comes from Neon Hemlock, a small queer-focused press. *Glitter + Ashes: Queer Tales of a World That Wouldn't Die*, is a post-apocalyptic work that focuses on concepts like found family and hopefulness. It is mostly made up of flash fiction, though it also includes short stories and poetry, while the last section of the book is reserved for a roleplaying game (titled “*Dream Askew*”). This surprised me, as I don't often see anthologies that include role playing guides. The unique tabletop game is diceless and only takes between three to four hours to play. The game is built to create ethical boundaries on a player-by-player basis. Emphasizing the themes of community, queerness, and life after the end of the world, the game connects well with the overall feel of the anthology itself. For those who like impromptu collaborative worldbuilding, I recommend trying it out.

If you happen to read anthologies with fun worldbuilding elements, say Hello in our Discord and let us know!¹

HOW TO FIND THEM

Unfortunately, many graphic novel anthologies from independent publishers or private groups are made with short print runs and are not always restocked. In some instances, this results in used paperback editions of books being sold online for hundreds of dollars (USD), as can be seen with *Elements: Fire – A Comic Anthology by Creators of Color!* (as of June 2021) and similarly titled anthology by the name of *Earth*.

Both of the aforementioned award winning books are edited by Taneka Stotts, who is an ambitious creative in comics and graphic novels. As Stotts mentions in the opening of *Earth*, projects like these anthologies are how Stotts openly challenges the lack of inclusivity in the medium. The works are beautifully arranged in spot color that compliments their themes: red for fire, green for earth. Although the physical copies are unavailable at the moment, digital copies are still for sale.

So how does one discover these rare finds before they sell out? If you're interested in works like these, I recommend keeping an eye on *Kickstarter*, or visiting conventions that focus on marginalized communities. *Kickstarter* in particular is an easy place to find recurring anthology editors like Elizabeth LaPensée, who is currently leading a project for *A Howl: A Comics Collection of Wolves, Werewolves, and Rougarou*; which is an anthology highlighting native and indigenous voices.

Conventions are another great place to grab some small-press or independently published stories. Due to COVID-19 most have been operating remotely, so keep an eye out for news from each convention since each will have different rules and procedures.

Flame Con in New York City is a queer-focused convention featuring books, comics, board games, and more. Other queer-focused conventions include Haven Con in Austin, Texas; and ClexaCon in Las Vegas, Nevada. The latter specifically aims to look critically at queer representation in fictional settings, as well as behind the scenes.

ELEMENTS: FIRE – A COMIC ANTHOLOGY BY CREATORS OF COLOR!

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

ELEMENTS: EARTH – A COMIC ANTHOLOGY BY CREATORS OF COLOR!

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○○●○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

LOVE BEYOND BODY, SPACE & TIME: AN INDIGENOUS LGBT SCI-FI ANTHOLOGY

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD

¹ You can find the link to our Discord on our [website](#). Come and talk to other worldbuilders, like-minded people and the authors and artists behind the magazine!
² Data on books by and about Black, Indigenous and People of Color published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Last updated April 16, 2021, <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/>.

Women-focused conventions like GeekGirlCon are another place to discover independent work, like zines. This past year, the convention had a panel dedicated to **worldbuilding in young adult books**. That specific panel focused on contemporary fantasy worldbuilding, but the young adult genre has used it in a wide variety of ways. Typically underserved, these authors and stories are now more likely to be published than before.²

One discussion I found interesting in the young adult panel from GeekGirlCon focused on the “white gaze.” When writing about a culture that does not borrow from traditionally established narratives, there may be language or cultural differences that many readers may not be familiar with. Writing in a way that accommodates for the assumed lack of knowledge on the behalf of White readers is known as catering to the “white gaze.” Alternatively, and as is often found in worldbuilding, authors can create context clues so that those already unfamiliar with cultural aspects can divine what they mean. For example, (spoiler ahead) in the anthology *Love Beyond Body, Space & Time: An Indigenous LGBT Sci-Fi Anthology* edited by Hope Nicholson, the story “Legends Are Made, Not Born,” by Cherie Dimaline has white buffalos in it. Catering to the white gaze would mean explaining that these are holy symbols, how they relate to prophecy, what they represent, etc.

However, catering to an indiginous gaze (the anthology is written by indiginous writers) would mean most readers should already be familiar with the nature of white buffalos. This is similar to how, when a character in a story written in the USA makes a cross with their hands, the audi-

ence is assumed to know this is a religious action without further explanation. The alternative way to address this would be to explain that signing the cross is a symbolic gesture in Catholicism. Many authors of marginalized identities are trying to challenge industry assumptions of the general audience in this way. Some argue that those who do not understand what any given cultural gesture might mean can simply use the internet to discern its meaning. Worldbuilders are in a unique position because some of us enjoy adding footnotes or glossaries for our created worlds. However, it is best to respect real cultures by allowing authors to represent themselves in the way they think is best for their work. Just as authors in general are diverse, the perspectives of marginalized authors are also diverse. Some may prefer footnotes, while others may prefer to leave context clues, and still others may expect the audience to either know terms or look them up.

Less-specialized conventions in the United States have increasingly focused on sharing space for diverse voices as well. Going to a panel featuring creators from underrepresented communities is another way to learn about these kinds of anthologies. For example, the superhero anthology *Ricanstruction: Reminiscing & Rebuilding Puerto Rico* edited by Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez was discussed on a NYC Comic Con panel featuring latine (sometimes written as latinx or latino) speakers. This particular anthology does not have strong worldbuilding elements to it, however it shares its setting with the DC Comics’ multiverse. If you are familiar with their worldbuilding, then consider the anthology on a similar scale. The comic series by Miranda-Rodriguez, *La Borinquena*, introduces more unique worldbuilding

elements than *Ricanstruction* with its exploration of Taíno mythology. This is a superhero comic, so if you like the soft worldbuilding associated with Earth-bound superheroes, I recommend it.

However, conventions can be costly. If you already have to save up to buy books, one alternative is to find creators you like on social media. Twitter and Tumblr, for example, are two platforms people often advertise through before release. Tumblr in particular is a great social media platform to find queer creators because it’s far more likely to have queer users than most other social media platforms.³ And if you are more interested in digital copies over physical ones, many anthology projects also offer PDF editions at reduced pricing. Sometimes social media pages will be made per project as an advertising method, as can be seen for the *Dames!* zine, a woman-centered project focusing on fighters. The launch project featured women knights, and their follow-up collection centers women warriors. If you want to expand your search to find more independent projects like these, social media platforms also take into account your preferences and recommend similar artists to follow.

LITERARY MAGAZINES

Aside from anthologies, another way to discover a multitude of unique voices from typically under-represented communities is by seeking out literary magazines dedicated to those voices. Whether you simply want to seek out unique voices, or you are from a marginalized community looking for places to conduct some worldbuilding, this section can help you find new resources. There are many different kinds of literary magazines featuring marginalized voices out there, but the ones this article focuses on are specific to our interests as worldbuilders, thus magazines featuring speculative fiction. These literary magazines contain short pieces of prose. Some also have podcasts, or other types of content to check out.

RICANSTRUCTION: REMINISCING & REBUILDING PUERTO RICO

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
SCIENCE: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD

LA BORINQUEÑA

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ●○○○○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

³ Paul Byron, Brady Robards, Benjamin Hanckel, Son Vivienne, and Brendan Churchill, “‘Hey, I’m Having These Experiences’: Tumblr Use and Young People’s Queer (Dis)connections,” International Journal of Communication no. 13, 2019: 2239-2259, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/9677/2655>.

⁴ “BSF Market-Side Data (2018),” FIYAH: Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction, accessed June 18, 2021, <https://www.fiyahlitmag.com/blackspecfic/bsfreport-2018/bsf-market-side-data-2018/>.

GlitterShip focuses on queer voices in science fiction and fantasy, publishing both short stories and poetry. As if to emphasize the power of the internet in spotlighting underrepresented voices, the queer-run magazine’s award winning anthology series is a crowdfunded project. Many anthologies that focus on uplifting queer voices are independently made, like the ones mentioned in the previous anthology section. In addition, the magazine also has a tie-in podcast featuring fantastical stories.

A fellow writer for Worldbuilding Magazine, Eleanor Konik, recommends *Fiyah*, a literary magazine focusing on Black stories from the African diaspora. In addition, the magazine features reviews of longer pieces of fiction, at times diving into the worldbuilding elements of the stories. For data nerds interested in the soft sciences, *Fiyah* also releases **survey reports** on black speculative fiction authors. Their 2018 survey on the literary market revealed that *Strange Horizons*, *Fireside Fiction*, and *Clarkeside* had the most submissions by their survey respondents.⁴ They also found anthologies had a sale rate of nearly 50% (of 29 total stories), making them a significant format to submit to for Black authors. In addition, the ambitious magazine hosts their own awards, events, and conventions. Constantly expanding, *Fiyah* is a literary magazine building a strong community for Black authors.

Lightspeed Magazine and its companions (*Nightmare Magazine* and *Fantasy Magazine*) feature a wide range of speculative fiction pieces, some of which are short stories. Although this literary magazine does not focus on diverse authorship, it started a project series of special issues that centers women, people of color, and queer people known as “**Destroy**.” An upcoming expansion of the series focuses on disabled individuals and is hosted by *Uncanny Magazine*.

WORLD SPOTLIGHT

Each article in this series, “Meet New Worlds,” focuses on one world to celebrate. For this article, let’s take a look at *Castle Swimmer* by Wendy Lian Martin. The webcomic takes place in an underwater kingdom with merpeople, but not just the fish-kind. The story explores themes of fate and responsibility, with a bit of romance sprinkled in.

For those unfamiliar, webcomics are typically serial releases. Despite short episodes, stories can take years to produce. Because of this format, worldbuilding is sometimes gifted to readers in snippets. In addition, like all visual formats of worldbuilding, the opportunities to share the physical or social environment can be subtle explorations of what is seen, rather than through dialogue or prose. This is sometimes referred to as “environmental storytelling.”

Graphic novels and comics in particular are a great way to worldbuild, because so many details can be hidden in a single panel. Unlike a movie or television show, in comics, the reader consumes content at their own pace and may digest the page differently than any other reader. Some might read the dialogue first and then go back to take a closer look at the pictures. Others may casually move from panel to panel. Some webcomic creators even include music or GIFs. However, in a webcomic released for scrolling, the reader’s journey through the story is more guided than with a physical issue. Because there are less natural pauses when reading a webcomic than when reading a comic, the flow of webcomic reading encourages people to continue downward rather than absorb one or two page spreads.

The worldbuilding in *Castle Swimmer* supports themes of fate and responsibility through the use of prophecies. The kingdom of sharks are plagued by a curse of recurring injury and death. The prince is prophesied to break the cycle by killing

the Beacon, a prophecy-bearing merperson. However, other kingdoms have their own prophecies that rely on the Beacon remaining alive.

WORLD DETAILS

Various kingdoms are made of different species of mercreatures. Merkrill vye for access to the Beacon against other merfolk. And meroctopi hunt for mini gods in otherwise abandoned sea floors. As a worldbuilder, it seemed a bit odd that regular fish coexist with mercreatures. However season two hints that merfolk have evolved from humans as opposed to the world being a mer-interpretation of our world. There are clues scattered throughout the story about the world, each making me more curious than the last.

The webcomic has fun real-world equivalents like bioluminescent slugs serving as flashlights, and shells functioning like medicine containers. A unique fantasy extrapolation is the use of squid ink as a shapeshifting form of magic. One character in particular, Mono, is mute and uses ink to illustrate symbols into the water as a form of communication.

At the moment, the worldbuilding appears to be on the softer side. While the world is huge, the scope is shallow, favoring story elements over complex worldbuilding. There’s intentional room for mystery and the unknown, which is used to reflect on various emotional and spiritual struggles of Kappa, the prophesied Beacon. The series, with its quirky humor and deeper themes, is currently on-going and available to read for free on **Webtoon**.

CASTLE SWIMMER

WORLDBUILDING: SOFT ○○○●○ HARD
MAGIC SYSTEMS: SOFT ○●○○○ HARD

THANKS FOR READING!

Whether you’re someone with a marginalized identity hoping to see yourself more, or someone curious about stories from underrepresented communities, thank you for engaging with this piece! Anthologies and collections of short fiction are a fun way to expose yourself to different creative perspectives. Did you end up taking an interest in any of the projects mentioned in this article? Do you know a collection not mentioned above that you want to share? Tell us in our **Discord**! Our magazine, after all, is about learning and sharing. It’s up to us to help each other grow.

 **BACK TO INDEX**



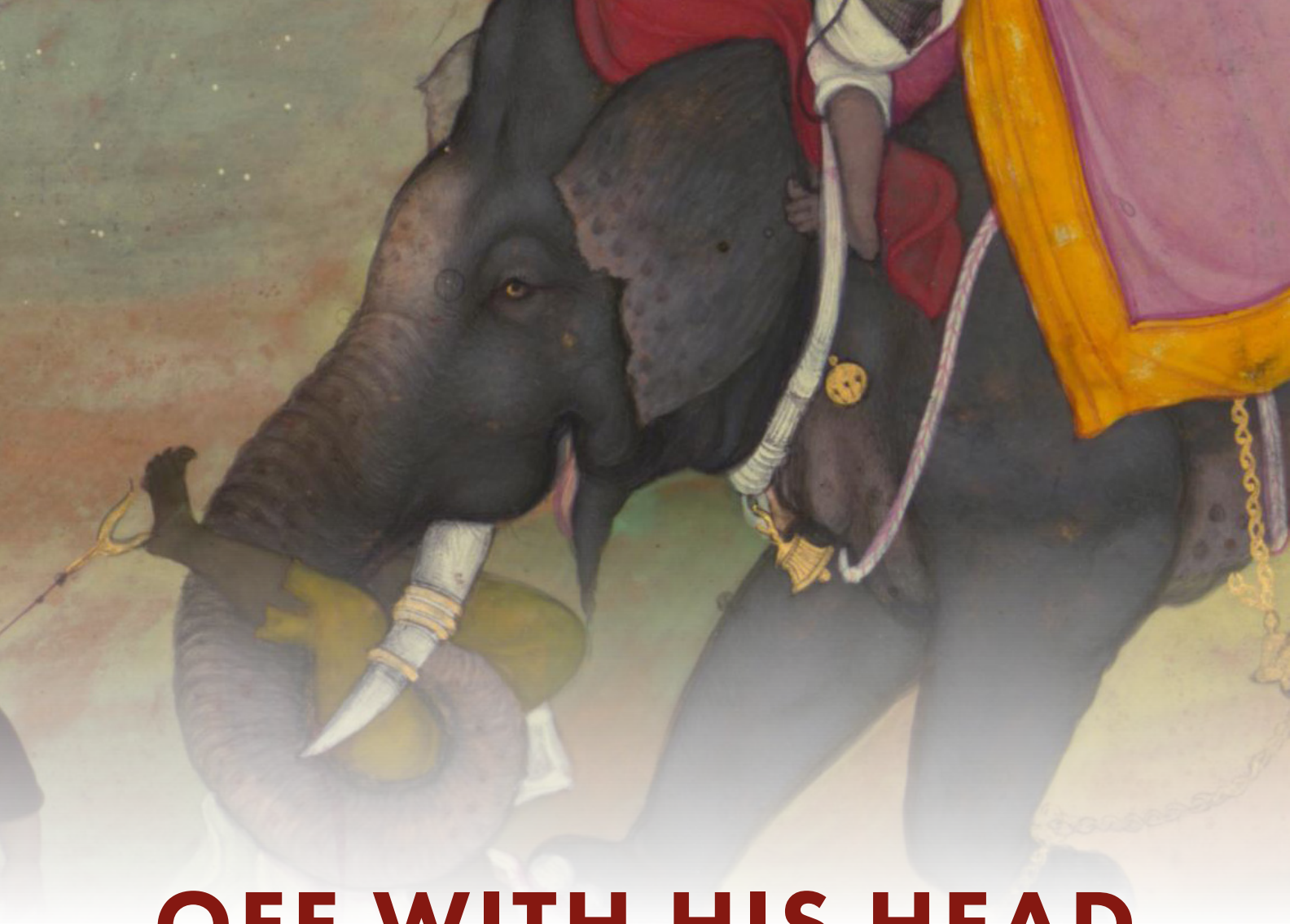
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OFF WITH HIS HEAD

by BK Bass | Cover Art by Jamal al-Din Husayn Inju Shirazi (Wikimedia)



CULTURE



HISTORY

Author's Note: The moral and ethical questions of execution are ones still being debated in our own society. This article does not take a stand on these issues. Rather, it is an exploration of the methodology of the subject.

As long as humanity has entertained the concepts of crime and punishment, societies have considered some crimes to be so severe they meted out the ultimate punishment: Death. Any student of history will be aware that if there's one area where humanity's potential for creativity excels, it's in coming up with interesting ways to end lives. Normally, we explore this concept in the evolution of military technology. While that subject is a staggering display of ingenuity, it pales in comparison to the artistry cultures have employed in ending lives in a controlled environment.

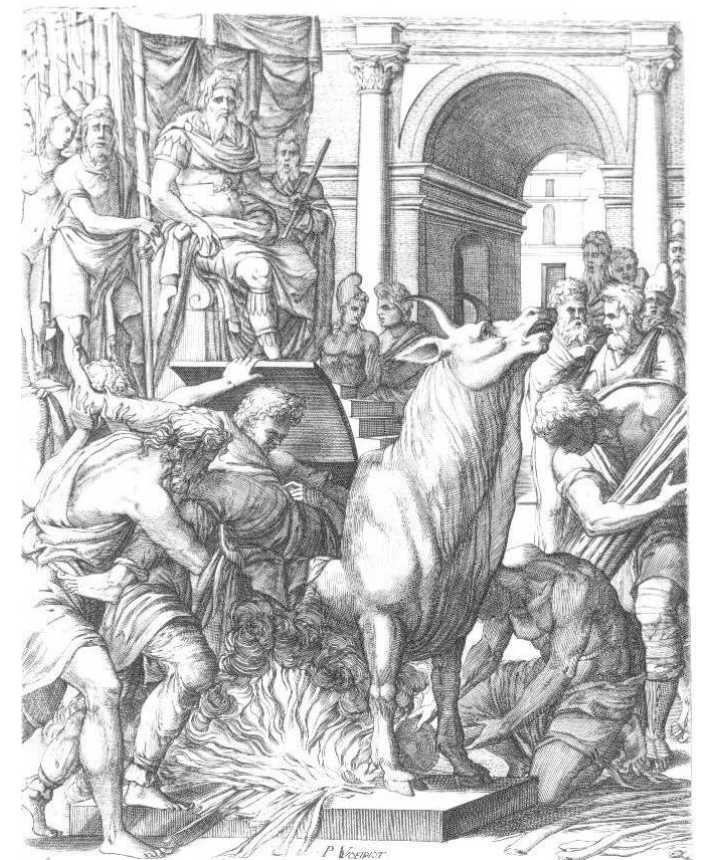
Many forms of execution are painfully familiar to us. These include antiquated methods such as stoning, beheading, and hanging. There are also modern methods such as the firing squad, the electric chair, and lethal injection. So many methods are possible, in fact, we could not possibly list them all.

As you build your worlds, any of these well-known methods might offer something appropriate to the time period of your setting. But we can be more creative than that. There have been a plethora of ways to execute a criminal throughout history, and even more in legend. Examining some of these unusual execution methods—even though many of them might be pure fabrications—might inspire us to create wholly unique methods of our own.

TRAMPLING BY ELEPHANT

Many cultures have employed animals to execute people in a myriad of ways for a variety of reasons. We're likely all familiar with the Romans feeding criminals to lions, but animals can kill in other ways. Trampling by animals has appeared as an execution method in many cultures, and for notable cultural reasons in some.

In cultures from Southeast Asia to the Arabian Peninsula, and even in Rome, Carthage, and Macedonia, death by elephant occurred frequently;



PIERRE WOERIOT (WIKIMEDIA)

but it carried a special significance in ancient India. There, the elephant was a symbol of royal power—of the ruler's dominion over the mightiest beasts of the land, and thereby the entirety of the land itself. Thus, executing criminals by trampling on them with trained elephants further cemented this projection of power. And while this might seem to be a method relying only on brute force, there was more nuance involved than one might think. The elephants were trained to approach the deed in different ways. Should a quick, painless end be decreed, the elephant would be directed to simply step on the head of the condemned. But if a more tortuous path to redemption was desired, the elephant would prolong the process and make the death slow and painful.

THE BRAZEN BULL

At first, it might appear that we're exploring another method of execution by animal. But



 SACRIFICIAL SCENE ON HAMMARS (WIKIMEDIA)

the name here can be deceiving. The brazen bull, according to legend, was a hollow bronze sculpture of a bull with a door set in one side. The tales say it was commissioned by Phalaris, an ancient Sicilian tyrant.

A fire would be made under the bull, heating the statue to incredible temperatures, and the condemned would be locked inside, essentially being cooked to death. The horns of the bull were said to be hollow so the screams of the victims would sound like the bellows of a raging bull, and smoke would waft from its nostrils. The veracity of the story is questioned by historians, as the bull itself has never been found; nevertheless, we include it here as the idea is so insidious that it is worth exploring for our purposes.

There is little cultural significance to tie the bull to ancient Sicily, but the impetus for its creation is one worth considering. We often try to tie up all the threads of our worldbuilding creations neatly, but forget that in reality, many things are arbitrary. So, why did Phalaris have the bull made? He was bored (and likely very, very sadistic).

THE BLOOD EAGLE

In the distant north of Scandinavia, we find another animal-execution that isn't performed by an animal. The blood eagle, like the brazen bull, is a form of execution that we don't have a lot of evidence for. It appears in the skaldic poetry of

the Norse, and with no contemporary accounts, it may simply be another legend.

According to the tales, the prisoner would be laid prone and their back cut open. The ribs would be broken from the spine and the ribcage opened up, then the lungs pulled from the open back and laid out to resemble wings. Some surmise that this execution method might have been devised to be as gruesome as the perpetrators could think of. Others propose the Skalds who wrote these tales may have misinterpreted the word-of-mouth stories that inspired them. It is quite possible that original references to the blood eagle may have simply referred to leaving a defeated foe face-down on the field of battle. In the aftermath, carrion animals may have torn open their backs, leading to a similarly gruesome result. In your own worldbuilding, don't forget that every account of a cultural phenomenon must be completely reliable. Quite often, cultures contain overexaggerated legends with a grain of truth at their center.

SCAPHISM

From Rome to Persia, we find an execution method that might have turned the stomach of even the most sadistic Roman or Sicilian tyrant. It was a second-hand story recounted by Plutarch in *Life of Artaxerxes*, describing the execution of a Persian soldier named Mithridates. The story is commonly regarded as being suspect at best,

and most likely a work of fiction, but it is no less fascinating a creation to consider.

In the account, Mithridates was made to lay sealed between two boats with his head and hands exposed. He was forced to eat until filled, and then milk and honey was poured over his face. Left to float like this for days, natural processes led to the inside of the boats being soiled by excrement. This, along with the souring milk and sweet honey, drew flies and a variety of other carrion creatures to him. Over the course of seventeen days, he was slowly devoured—and not just from the outside, as some creatures had settled into his bowels to feast.

Whether this was a singular event, a practice reserved for persons of significance, a common spectacle, or pure fiction is unknown. And was the impetus to put on a display to discourage others, or an act of sheer sadism? If you had a mad tyrant in your own worldbuilding, something so grisly just for the sake of it would be a great way to illustrate this.

BLOWING FROM A GUN

As we return from the realm of legend to well-documented history, we also return to India. Blowing from a gun was a practice of Portuguese colonists in 16th and 17th century India, Mughals in

the 17th and 18th centuries, and the British Empire in the 18th century. The last documented case of its use was in Afghanistan in 1930.

The method here is as simple as one can get. You tie the condemned to the mouth of a cannon, then fire it. Class dismissed.

Both joking and methodology aside, the cultural significance of this execution method far outweighs its simplicity. The results, naturally, are a body blown apart and scattered afield. This is a particular complication for members of the Hindu religion, who require the body of the deceased to complete funerary rites. Without these, the soul of the deceased is trapped in the body, or parts thereof, making the execution not only a physical punishment, but a spiritual one.

CONCLUSION

As we can see from these five examples, our history and legends hold an array of creative ways to put an end to the condemned. In some ways, we can see cultural elements holding sway, such as representations of power from the elephants of India. With blowing from a gun, we see a method specifically designed with religious implications, whereby a culture that believes in an eternal cycle of death and rebirth seeks to put an end to this cycle. And, as is the case with the

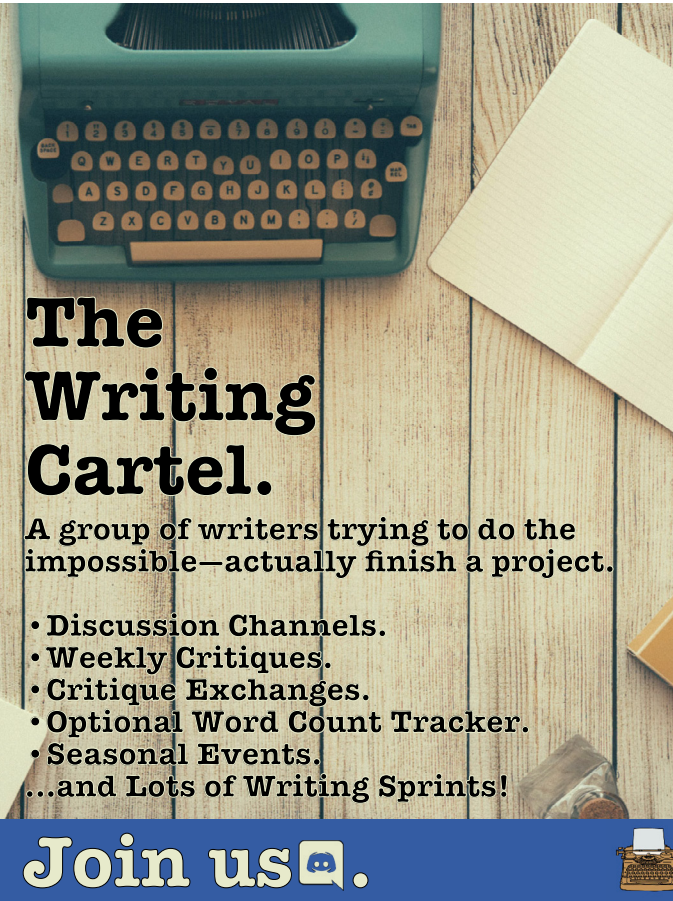
 VASILY VERESHCHAGIN (WIKIMEDIA)



blood eagle, sometimes a story may be misunderstood or exaggerated, leading to a legend of horrible forms of execution that are not entirely reliable. Finally, with the brazen bull, and likely with scaphism, we witness examples of cruelty for the sake of cruelty.

Depending on the cultures you are creating, you may consider any of these elements when determining the execution methods, if any, that are used in your world. Will you tie them to symbols of power or religious significance, or do you have a tyrant who has grown bored with the usual ways of killing people? There are other things to consider, such as geography and resources. A kingdom landlocked in a desert would not be using boats, and a land devoid of cattle likely would not craft an oven in the shape of a bull. Many cultures start out killing their most-despised criminals with what's at hand, such as with stoning. As time passes, they grow more creative, power and wealth are amassed, and even public executions become so routine that a new spectacle is needed. Throw in a sadistic despot and you have a recipe for some truly horrifying methods of execution.


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hosted by World Anvil | illustrations by Devon Ruscheinski

 **CONTEST**

We're happy to announce the winners of World Anvil's *Peculiar Plants Community Challenge*! Each winner created an article about a hero from their worlds. We had a blast reading through the winners' articles and are thrilled that we get to share them with you as well!

If you're interested in participating in future contests, swing on by *World Anvil* and keep an eye out for the next one.

ZARE MASNI

APPEARANCE AND CREATION

by Orpheus C

“Better not get too close to the woods, adventurers. They dislike intruders, and we wouldn't want you to get hurt.”

— A Dayiara's warning

Zare Masni, also referred to as “Plant Golems” by Danatelians, are powerful guardians used by Dayiara to protect their sacred lands. The secret of their craft is well kept among Circles, though many wizards have tried— and failed—to reproduce some across the years.

Zare Masni can take many shapes and forms, though they most often appear as large and fantastical humanoids, made out entirely of plants. They are able to walk, see, and talk, though their vocabulary is often limited. Once awakened, they will keep living until they are deactivated, or accidentally stumble into an anti-magic field.

Before they enter their life as guardians, Zare Masni must first be grown. Each Dayiara clan in the *Danatelian Lands* has its own method, each creating slightly different golems as a result. The longer a plant is grown before it becomes a golem, the stronger it will be once awakened.



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While techniques and traditions may vary, there are a few core rules and elements when it comes to growing a Zare Masni.

Faywada exposure is the first, and arguably an essential, step in a Zare Masni's creation. It is this exposure that will allow the plant to be awakened in the first place, as the chaotic magic changes the very essence of the sapling.

The only way to expose seeds to *Faywada* is to travel where it naturally resides — either the Echo Woods, or another liminal space touched by *Faywada*.

Nurturing the sapling is the second step of the process. For a Dayiara to have control over an awakened Zare, it must first oversee its care personally.

The time and energy poured into the sapling's growth allows the Dayiara to form a close bond with the Zare Masni, ensuring their commands will be obeyed. Poorly cared for saplings often awaken as uncontrollable monsters, wreaking havoc and chaos around them.

The creation of a Plant Golem is a slow and arduous process, which asks for a real commitment from the Nurturer. Successfully growing a Zare Masni also requires a lot of experience, and many years of training under an elder Nurturer. The last step of the process happens once the Zare has reached maturity.

The true (and final) form of the Plant Golem is revealed at the conclusion of a ceremony. This part of the ritual is where most tribes will diverge in tradition, and the specifics of each awakening are known only to the eldest Dayiara. The goal of the ceremony is to introduce a seal, which will act as an "on/off" switch for the golem's master. Once a Zare Masni has been awakened, it will stop growing and ageing until it dies or is deactivated.

Only the creator of the Zare Masni is meant to know the location and activation of the seal, though often this information is shared with a few trusted people in case the Dayiara was to pass away before deactivating the golem. Following the Awakening, the Zare Masni is named, before being introduced to the rest of the Dayiara clan. This step allows for the golem to distinguish friends from foes, and to know whom they must help in times of danger.

ROLE IN DAYIARA CULTURE

“Everybody, stay calm — Valor will be back to protect us soon. We just need to hide from them until he returns...”

— A scared Dayiara to their fellow clan members.

The crafting of Zare Masni long predates the birth of magic. Dayiara have perfected this art for centuries, and some tales of Elders and their Zare Masni are said to be as old as the First Circle itself. The Zare Masni are the sacred protectors of the Dayiara, a gift from Khave itself to its people.

When the Danateliens first invaded the continent from the seas in -811 I.A, the Dayiara closest to the coast suffered the most. They were peaceful by nature, and had never known the wrath of war and the blood of conquest. All who survived owe it to the Zare Masni who kept them alive long enough to disappear.

Among them, and probably most famous of all, was Zacharia Valor. After his master died without being able to deactivate him, he turned his rage towards the invaders who had slain her. Alone, he pushed them back beyond the Green Valley, and kept it safe for many more years to come.

The valley became a safe haven of Dayiara, which he defended on his own for more than a hundred years, never letting any Danatelian through. Almost a thousand years later, the

valley remains unexplored, and only memories and rumors have survived the passage of time.

ZORANA VILLAGES

“I passed by the Redorange village today to drop off Keeper. The others were doing good, and Gentle gave me this bud for you — they hope you'll be able to make a Zare Masni out of them.

— Dayiara to the Nurturer

What happens to “failed” Zare Masni? Dayiara are known for the high respect in which they hold living things, and the life of a Plant Golem is no exception. Instead of being destroyed, the Dayiara help them form communities where the Zorana may live their lives in peace and tranquillity.

Zorana villages are usually hidden in woods or nestled within quiet hills, their location kept secret by the Circles who watch over them. These communities are safe havens of calm and quiet, where the Zorana go about their daily lives.

A typical Zorana day includes walking around, tending to the communal gardens, playing some music, and dancing. The occasional adventuring party might accidentally stumble upon a Zorana village. While initially shy, Zorana are also curious by nature, and if the visitors show no ill intent they will come out of their homes to observe them.

Read the complete article on *World Anvil*.



SONOSAP WILLOW

by Devon Ruscheinski

“Your Mother, He'an rest her heart, used to love walking through the Murmuring Grove. Lots of small critters for her to observe, you know? She'd go out there for hours, talkin' out loud, organizing her thoughts. I'm certain somewhere in those woods, there's a Sonosap that heard her talking, and is quietly playing back her soft voice, evermore.

— A father's woes

Sonosap Willow trees are found growing within moderately dense, temperate forests, that populate the winding rivers of the mountainous southern continent of Enqua and some parts of northern Kazcallen. These trees stand out from the rest — gnarled, twisted, with draping leaves hanging down from their upper branches. Their bark is hardy, and comes in a variety of ashy purple or red colours.

As a Sonosap Willow grows, large hollow sections of the tree begin to form near the base of the trunk, which begin to fill with a slow-flowing, crystalline sap with some unique characteristics. The crystalline structure of the sap, and its placement within the natural echo chambers of the hollows, allow them to act as natural sound recorders; the hollow captures the sound and directs it into the sap, where it is slowed and almost frozen within the tree.

Over time as the sap naturally settles, it will release echoes of that initial recording, which then get reflected by the tree's hollow back into the sap, over and over again. It's estimated that a Sonosap Willow could hold onto a recorded sound for hundreds of years, if left quiet and undisturbed.

For the most part, any recorded sound within a Sonosap Willow is slowly erased by time — as wind blows and rain falls, these sounds echo their way into the Sonosap. It doesn't overwrite the previous sound entirely, but rather layers more recordings over top, diluting and warping the recordings that already exist within. Almost all natural Sonosap Willow trees contain these muddled sounds — listening carefully, you might hear the sounds of last year's thunderstorm, ancient animals scrapping nearby, or, if you're very lucky, the sounds of human voices murmuring.

“It's been, what...4 years since your mother passed? Surely, if there were any recordings of her in that forest, they'd be gone by now, right? I mean, we have had quite the spell of calm weather these last few years... but still, I'm almost certain there's no chance a recording exists.”

— A father's woes

Along with the advent of Simulrendology, engines, and basic electricity, a modern use for Sonosap was discovered. Very carefully taking raw, unrefined Sonosap and heating it up will evaporate the water from within, entirely crystallizing the substance and prohibiting any further recordings. However, when a small electrical current is passed through the resulting Sonocrystal, any audio previously recorded within is emitted at a very low volume. These sounds are then taken and amplified, allowing for their content to be heard again and again, whenever wanted.

The nature of recording any and all sounds heard by the tree has allowed the Sonosap Tree to become established in several cultures' mythologies and traditions. Some view the tree as a way of historical record keeping, while others view it as a mystic entity that may repeat wisdom from the ancients. Most who have any sort of cultural connection to Sonosap Trees view it with reverence, and find the idea of harvesting or harming the trees to be sacrilegious — which puts them at odds with those who attempt to create and profit off of taking the Sonosap and refining it into Sonocrystal.

In some cultures, when someone is close to death but still capable of walking, it is common to bring them to the site of a specifically chosen Sonosap Willow. Here, beneath the hanging vine-

like leaves, the person will come — sometimes alone, sometimes with loved ones. They will speak a final message to the base of a tree, in the hopes that once they are gone, the loved ones they left behind will find comfort in the sound of their voice reverberating from their chosen tree.

“We'd intended to go for a final walk, intentionally find a tree, and talk about simple things. Then I'd have a known tree with her voice in it, that I could visit any time. But in those last days, the sickness took hold so fast, we just never got around to it...”

— A father's woes

A similar cultural tradition exists, though less focused on a single individual's final words. In some cases, a family will choose a Sonosap Tree to communally talk to, layering voices upon each other to make a continuous song. While a family might be sad when the recorded voice in a Final Word tree is eventually lost due to natural sounds overwriting the voice, those who partake in the creation of Family Echo trees mind not the slow erasure. To them, the mixing in of wind, rain, and future voices combine to create a sound or song that represents what it is to be a family.

“Dad! Dad! I found it! I found Mom's tree!”

— A son's excitement

Read the complete article on *World Anvil*.

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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.

How should fantasy societies structure for maximum military/political/economical success?

— Maken

Ah, optimization. Tweaking, adjusting, and fine-tuning a thing well past the point of sanity until it is perfect in every way. A truly noble pursuit in all its forms. As we examine this question, let's put the spotlight on two different parts of that sentence. First off, 'maximum success' is a beautifully broad phrase as success is a wonderfully subjective thing. As the Sublime Archphilosopher Morticia Adams said, "Normal is an illusion, what is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly." Be sure to pin down what this hypothetical society considers success to be. A militant society might consider strength of arms as the greatest end goal, whereas a society more oriented towards religion could consider having the most impressive temple a sign of achievement.

After the first step of defining success, we can move on to the next troublesome part of this question, 'fantasy societies.'

The word 'fantasy' covers an astonishing amount of ground: Magical Realism, Isekai, Dungeon-core, Fairy tales, Superhero stories, Grimdark, Solarpunk—the list goes on. The word 'society' encompasses an equally absurd amount of territory: Nomadic pastoralists, Thassalocracies, Republics, Isocracies, Cybersynacies, Anarcho-Syndicalist Communes—the list goes on. Now, to spare our editors the task of editing a look at every possible combination of fantasy genres and societies, we will only examine twenty-one fifteen ten two examples in this issue. The first will be a low fantasy city-state and the second will be a high fantasy empire for maximum contrast.

In our first example, the size of the government is small. A council of elders with little control of

what goes on outside the city walls. Magic is an inherently mysterious thing with strange creatures living in the wilderness and some random people being born with supernatural abilities. Due to the nature of magic, optimization is difficult but not impossible. The people who live outside the city walls could have deals with the strange creatures that benefit both parties. Or they may know the habits and needs of the creatures well enough to stay out of their way. Those born with magical abilities would be cherished for their powers. The city councilors could be wary of being usurped and the best way to avoid that is to bring those born with magic into the fold as advisors and people of honor. With magic acting as a force of nature, maximum success for this society is knowing enough to protect themselves from disaster.

Secondly, we have our high fantasy empire. The government is large with a vast bureaucracy administering a large territory. Magic here is more rules-based, using specific chants coupled with magical materials to bring about the intended effect. As magic is more controllable, the state has a strong incentive to promote and regulate it. Beneficial spells and abilities would be subsidized by the government and there could even be schools of magic completely monopolized by them. What court system wouldn't want a spell or potion to sort through lies? Those that can do magic would be celebrated and rewarded for their contributions. In this scenario, with magic being manageable, maximum success becomes making sure supernatural abilities are running at peak efficiency.

Now that we have talked about a few ways to maximize efficiency, let's talk about why that almost never happens on a large scale. Societies are made up of a multitude of competing interests, all pulling in different directions to serve their needs. What is best for one group will be suboptimal for another. This will result in the needs of one being placed above another, or reaching a compromise that pleases both, but falls short

of being the best solution to a given problem. Societal convention can also reduce efficiency. Our two examples had positive views of magic, but what if they didn't? Resources would be spent suppressing magic, rather than supporting it. One type of magic could be venerated while another is despised. While there are some societies that function quite well, you will always find some flawed or illogical reasoning somewhere.

How do you deal with trying to prevent people from using their magical powers? Like prisons for magic users and stuff like that.

— Aurimus

Well, we just talked about negative views on magic and this is a natural extension of that. Bravo to your foresight. Magical powers come in a wide variety and so do the ways and means of shutting them down. Whether it's unlimited cosmic power, the ability to change your hair color, or anything in between, all methods fall into two general categories. Hard Suppression and Soft Suppression. Hard Suppression requires active measures to shut down magical potential, while Soft Suppression relies on passive measures. As with all things, there is considerable overlap and gray areas between and around these two categories, but fear not, they will be addressed.

Prisons for magic users would fall neatly into this category. If your world allows for individuals to develop all kinds of unique powers, then this prison will have a variety of cells designed to contain a specific type of power. Superhero comics can feature prisons designed to hold supervillains after they've been arrested. One famous example is the plastic prison constructed for Magneto, a supervillain that can control metal. In worlds where a large number of people share a similar power set, entire prisons can be built to halt one type of magic. Fire-users could be housed in a place made entirely of flame-proof materials. Those skilled in mental magic could be held captive in an


What knowledge was discovered in your world hundreds or thousands of years before it was properly or widely known?

Do people use the stars for navigation, or do they navigate through the stars?

Does your world have any original musical instruments or inventions?

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automated prison, rendering their abilities useless. Hard Suppression doesn't necessarily need to be prison. Things like anti-magic potions, amulets, or shackles count as well. A recent example of the latter would be from the Wixx Saga (a young adult contemporary fantasy show). In it, a character's arms are bound in magic metal that digs into the forearms. Magic is typically cast with the hands, and so we can believe magic is either too painful to cast, or that magic flows through the body into the hands, making the metal actively block the passive of magic. Perhaps both. Hard Suppression can be stationary or portable, what makes the difference is some force is actively countering magical abilities.

Soft Suppression, by contrast, does not target abilities but the caster instead. By creating an environment where casting magic would be a very bad idea, magic is naturally contained. A prominent example of this can be found in many forms of fiction, having the state or religious authorities actively seek out and destroy magic. If magic in your world is learned, then practitioners

will be forced underground, making learning magic much more difficult. Magic users who gain their powers by birth will hide their abilities for fear of persecution. There are other less intense forms of Soft Suppression. If certain materials like gemstones or special flowers are needed to cast spells, the authorities can destroy them. If spells can only be cast under the full moon, strict curfews could be put in effect to keep everyone inside. Magic does not need to be even specifically outlawed to be suppressed. Spellcasters can be barred from holding certain positions in government or benefitting from social programs. Soft Suppression is a gentler, if not more insidious way of repressing magical talent.

I did say we'd talk about gray areas, didn't I? Natural anti-magic fields fall in between both types. While they do actively suppress magic, they are the result of in-world natural forces. If magical materials are destroyed by accident or by an unrelated process, is that suppression? Does denial that magic even exists count as Hard Suppression or Soft Suppression? The answers to these will depend on the nature of magic and society in your world.

How can I use food in my worldbuilding?

— Anon

You are fortunate, for food is nearly ubiquitous across the multiverse. 82.397457% of catalogued worlds have some form of life that requires the consumption of nourishment to survive. Food is a wonderful tool for worldbuilding because it permeates all of existence. Most worldbuilders don't go to the trouble of making a food web for their setting, though they should as it can be an interesting place to start the process. For example, the pattern for the mundane world is a basic one. Plants grow using sunlight, herbivores eat the plants and then carnivores eat the herbivores. Simple, but it creates a lot of variety based on what environment it occurs in. If you want to

have some deep variety in your world, start here! Perhaps there is another source of energy beyond sunlight that a different type of life can utilize. Is there a magical food web that is separate or intertwined with the mundane one? At its most basic the food web is the circulation of energy through a system, what other types of energy could be introduced and to what effect? Altering the food web can give your world a unique flavor right from the start.

But if you don't want to go that deep that's fine. Most people won't think less of you. Even with leaving the food web alone, food will be foundational to the peoples of your world. After all, if there's no food, no one can live there for long (unless they live on one of the aforementioned 17.602543% of catalogued worlds not requiring nourishment). If you're creating pre-industrial civilizations, then a significant amount of the population is going to be occupied either growing, hunting or otherwise procuring food. Knowing what people eat can inform a lot about their culture. On a much smaller scale, knowing what the basic dishes are can help make your world feel more real to an audience. A setting can have all kinds of fantastical things from sky whales to brain uploading, but most of your audience will have very little experience with such situations. On the other hand, everyone has a favorite food and strong opinions on how it should be made and enjoyed. Hearing two people from wildly different backgrounds argue about the correct heat to serve tea at or the appropriate time of year to eat a kind of cake will make them and the world they live in feel much more tangible. Food is a versatile worldbuilding tool, make sure to use it to the fullest!

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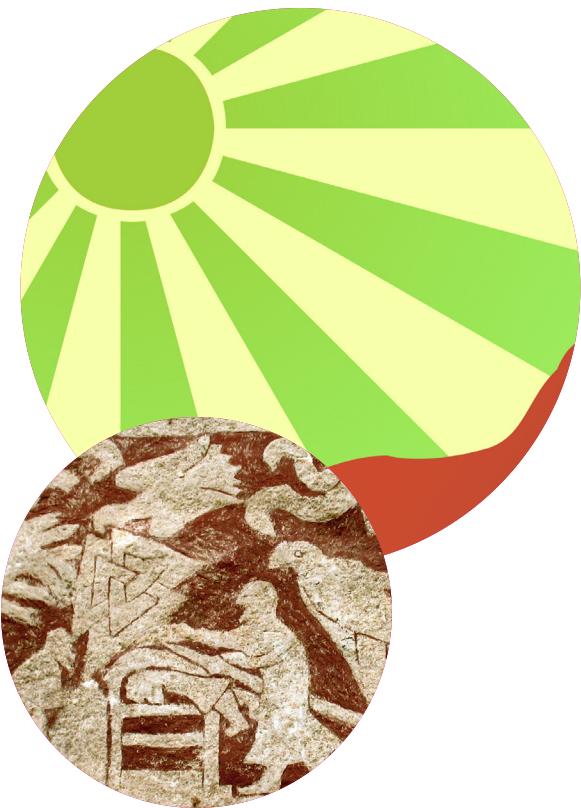
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