

Make Your Own Middle Earth
Worldbuilding with Mike Braff and Kevin Hearne
Pike's Peak Writers Conference 2017

Workshop Purpose: To identify the main areas of worldbuilding and to examine how good practices can provide storytelling options as well as a world that feels *real* to readers.

Worldbuilding is the “inner-logical” development of the universe in which your story takes place. It is the *what* and the *why* behind your *who*, *when*, and *how*.

- Why is Worldbuilding important in genre fiction?
 - To answer that we have to first consider what fiction is.
 - At its most basic level, fiction is the first way that people could collectively imagine.
 - A properly built world will most effectively open up a communication between author and reader.
 - Good worldbuilding allows the reader to invest themselves fully in the “story universe”, bringing a deep connection between the two.
 - Worldbuilding broadens the story you are telling, while also opening up numerous other story opportunities.
 - This provides both creative and commercial options for the writer.
 - While you're working on worldbuilding, you are essentially creating thousands of broad outlines for future stories.
 - You're also figuring out the inner workings of your own story world.
 - It also provides a number of ways for you to practice your craft in various sub-genres of fiction (mix: science fiction, fantasy, paranormal, mystery, noir, romance, war, horror, etc.).
- How does the “story universe” affect things like plot, pacing, characters, tone, etc.?
 - The world (that is, the physical, historical, cultural, and geo-political setting) have an immense amount of bearing on every aspect of your story.
 - Physical Setting: What is the look, feel, scent, taste, etc.?
 - History: Why and how did your characters get to the story at hand?
 - Culture: How do the beliefs and practices of people in this world impact your story?
 - Geo-political: The physical place dictates how individuals interact with it: how has the physical world of your story influenced things like politics and history?

Worldbuilding Disciplines

- The physical world:
 - Geography: the study of the physical features of your world and its atmosphere, and of human activity as it affects and is affected by these, including the distribution of populations and resources, land use, and industries.
 - How do plate tectonics impact the physical shape of a region?
 - Mountains; flow of water; setting
 - Meteorology/Climatology: the study of the process and phenomena of weather and its impact upon human life
 - How does the weather impact the climate of a region?
 - Biomes; microclimates; weather
 - Biology/Ecology: the study of life and living organisms including their structure, function, and distribution.
 - How do the plants/animals of a place impact physical place?
 - Vegetation; animals; resources
- The human elements:
 - Anthropology/Sociology: the study of human societies and their development, structure, and functions.
 - How do the physical traits of a region guide the development of cultures in that region?
 - Clothing; diet; shelter; tools/weapons; occupations; transportation
 - Economics: the exchange of goods and services necessary for the function and expansion of human society.
 - How do humans value, manipulate, and utilize the physical world?
 - Trade; valuation; economy; industry
 - Religion/Cosmology: humans' metaphysical understanding of the world around them.
 - How do the people of a region understand the physical world and its workings?
 - Worldview; philosophy; rules/punishments
 - History: the study of past events and human affairs
 - Assuming your world has existed for a long time, how does the past impact the story of the present?
 - Cultural history; familial history; personal history

Worldbuilding Methods

- Ground-up: starting from the creation of the physical world and a step-by-step progression of logic to determine worldbuilding.
 - Plate tectonics→ geography→ climatology→ ecology → anthropology et. al.
- Lateral: starting with analogous cultures/settings on Earth and extrapolating traits onto the fictional world.
 - Anthropology→ geography + climatology + ecology → economics + religion + history

Writing Exercise: We will now each take 30 minutes to write an original piece set in the group-imagined world. Afterward, we will have a chance to share our writing and provide feedback. The intent of the exercise is to experiment with how to impart the worldbuilding to readers without relying too heavily on exposition. Types of writing can include (but are not limited to!):

- Short fiction: any story set in the world
- History: a high-level overview of a place or people
- Artifact: Experience of daily life as told by people
 - Diary
 - Letter
- Arts: Humans' artistic expression of physical world
 - Poetry/Lyrics
 - Epics
 - Play
- Lore: The metaphysical understanding of the physical world
 - Religious text
 - Myth/Legend
 - Fable