BETWEEN THE STORY AND THE WORLD

Better Interactive Worldbuilding
Ben Schneider (he/him)
Narrascope 2024
world-building **noun**

*world-build·ing*  (ˈwərl(d)-ˌbil-dən*)

**variants** *or less commonly world building or worldbuilding*

: the creation of a fictional world (especially within the science fiction and fantasy genres) that is believable and consistent within the context of the story

*Merriam-Webster.com*

Worked for my 8th grade book report. Why not my Narrascope talk?
WORLDBUILDING

Any comprehensive, coherently thought-out setting

AKA IP (Intellectual Property)
… basically “Worldbuilding Under Capitalism”

Realistic or far-flung, big or small, genre or not*

* But to be fair: especially good with genre0
WORLDBUILDING

CREATOR

AUDIENCE

STORY

WORLD
Lesson 1

WHAT IS BEST IN WORLDBUILDING?
The best worlds capture the imagination and are great places to tell stories in.

Hallmarks:
• Promise of Transport
• Rife with Adventure
• Welcoming and Accessible

Hold on, I’ll explain
PROMISE OF TRANSPORT

• **Transport**: aka immersed
• **Promise**: that it will be sustained
• See also:
  • Suspension of Disbelief
  • The Magic Circle
  • “Living, breathing worlds”
  • Yeah yeah immersion
• **Promise as important as Transport!**
RIFE WITH ADVENTURE

- Living, breathing, boring
- Adventure:
  - Here meaning narrative interest, potential
  - Via instability, injustice, aspiration
- Rife:
  - Varied and spread out
  - Non-monolithic
  - Ideally, wheels within wheels
  - (Also just a word I like)

Full of story hooks
WELCOMING AND ACCESSIBLE

• Accessible
  • Worlds need a way in
  • AKA entry point(s)
  • Inclusivity starts here!

• Welcoming
  • Once you’re in
  • Familiar beginnings
  • Wondrous destinations

Looks safe out there

Go from the **credible** to the **incredible**
The best worlds capture the imagination and are great places to tell stories in.

Hallmarks of great worldbuilding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promise of Transport</th>
<th>Living, breathing worlds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rife With Adventure</td>
<td>Instability and varied story hooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming and Accessible</td>
<td>Familiarity and inclusive entry points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 2
DELIVERING THE WORLD
WHERE YOU CAN LOREDUMP: A HANDY GUIDE

Some. Not too much!

And some here

OK a little here

Not here

Not here either

Not here either

Crisis

Rising Action

Falling Action

Resolution

Conclusion

Ah, the fandom site. Go wild.
The ‘Iceberg Problem’

This

HAS TO GIVE YOU

THIS

During the battle, rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire
THE FIRST THING YOU SEE:

SO IT’S SCI FI

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away....

Maybe there will be princesses
And wizards!

OH, BUT
IT’S LIKE A FAIRY TALE

Okay, but I hope there’s some
Pewpew and robots, too.
Spaceships, check
Pewpew, check
Princesses?
Imperial Senate?
Rebel spies??
Plans???

WHOA.
COOL.
THE PARADOX OF IMMEDIACY

• Immediacy leads immersion…
• Immersion leads transport…
• Transport leads worlds.

Curiously related:
Architectural Phenomology (via Chris Totten)

#1 Worldbuilder’s tools: bullet lists
The micro and immediate must convey what’s most essential about the macro. In the first moments and throughout.

The paradox of immediacy, that
The Iceberg Problem, What’s below is clear from above
In-clueing, Exposition thy world artfully
Lesson 3

WORLD UP FRONT

GAME

STORY LATER

WORLDBUILDING
Concept art by my friend, the amazing Sean Andrew Murray
Bridge clearance: 10,000 years
SEPARATE WORLDBUILDING FROM STORY

• Separate worldbuilding from plot construction
• Worldbuilding early!
  (plus premise and other really big moments)
• Plot outline later

• The practical: team communication, schedule
• Protects larger project from writing process
SEPARATE WORLDBUILDING FROM STORY

Philip Pullman *The Path Through the Wood (How Stories Work)*

- World = forest
- Story = path
- Totality of possible paths = story phase space

- Linear storytelling: “stick to the path!”
- Interactive storytelling: “that wolf looks like good XP”
WORLD FIRST... AND FOREMOST
Every new region, a new lore doc:

- Maps
- History
- Relation to major LOTR themes and characters
- Invented characters, goings-on, issues

Worldbuilding :cheff_kiss:
Lore doc, rated:

✓ Worldbuilding first, story later
✓ Promise of Transport (we thought this all through)
✓ Rife with Adventure (story hooks great and small)
✓ Welcoming & Accessible (why our players care, how they get there)
✓ Iceberg problem: title, premise, theme

Check, check, check, check, check, and check
LORE VS STORY
CONSIDER THE AUDIO LOG
Worldbuilding

Player

Story
Narrative of a playthrough:
• Plot…
• and Choices
• and Gameplay
• and Emergent accident
• and Distractions
Conclusion

THE VIEW FROM HERE
**A Quick Review**

**Great Worldbuilding:**
Captures the imagination and affords great story

**Accessible and Welcoming:** inclusive and familiar entry points

**Promise of Transport:** Reliable magic circle

**Rife with Adventure:** Multifarious narrative veins

**The Iceberg Problem:** understand the world through a fragment

Worldbuild early, plot later

In interactive media, the player comes *between* the story and the world
2023 GDC Talk: “The Secret Lives of NPCs”

Story structure like braided hair
Loose strands + gather points

Scale: large
NON-Plot Narrative Toolbox

- Diary entries
- Maps, Diagrams, Trees
- Interactive conversations
- Interactivity, NPC behavior, and other gameplay
- Scheduling and other autonomous NPC behavior
- Environmental text and audio: radio, graffiti, screens…
- Collectibles
- Choices to define self & relationships
Build amazing worlds
So your stories flow out of them
And those who play them are empowered, immersed, and fulfilled

THANK YOU