

The Art of World Building

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To world build or not – that is the question.

When I started my writing project with serious intents to publish a book (eventually), I really didn't have any expectations about the depths and extents to which my research would take me. My eyes are open a little wider now!

In a very general sense, there are at least two possible approaches to writing of novel. The first is to let the creative spirit, the *Awen*, take hold of your soul and write within its ebbs and flows, disregarding any attempts to organize your thoughts, create plots or timelines, or develop details. As a younger person, I used to write this way, and many successful authors do, in fact, use this technique. To quote [Diana Gabaldon](#) (author of the highly successful *Outlander* Series) in response to the question “*Your books are so complex! Do you use an outline?*”:

*“No. Of course, I also don't write in a **straight** line; I write in lots of little pieces and then glue them together like a jigsaw puzzle. So I'll work forward and back, backwards and forward, until a scene is finished—then hop somewhere else and write something different. I don't even have chapters, until just before I print the completed manuscript to send to my editor; breaking the text into chapters and titling them is just about the last thing I do to a book.”*

However, what I have discovered, both in reading the works of others, and in my own writing, is that without some kind of framework, details get lost, plots drift, and sometimes strange anomalies occur in the story which require creative, and often unbelievable, explanations. As a scientist, who is maybe overly obsessed with the minutiae, I feel irritated when details don't align, especially in my own works.

So, a little older now, and maybe a wee bit wiser, I've taken world building seriously to heart. To quote good 'ol Wikipedia:

*“**Worldbuilding** is the process of constructing an imaginary world, sometimes associated with a whole fictional universe. The resulting world may be called a **constructed world**. Developing an imaginary setting with coherent qualities such as a history, geography, and ecology is a key task for many science fiction or fantasy writers. Worldbuilding often involves the creation of maps, a backstory, and people for the world. Constructed worlds can enrich the backstory and history of fictional works, and it is not uncommon for authors to revise their constructed worlds while completing its associated work. Constructed worlds can be created for personal amusement and mental exercise, or for specific creative endeavors such as novels, video games, or role-playing*

games.”

As I've discovered, world building can be as extensive as you want to make it. There are many questions you can ask yourself about your characters and their universe. Today, there are even some good sites out there to guide you in your approach (for example, "[Questions to Ask Yourself When You are World-Building](#)", "[An Introduction to World-Building](#)", "[Fantasy Worldbuilding Questions](#)", and "[The Ultimate World Building Questionnaire](#)"). I don't think all authors, or even many authors, develop their worlds to the full extent of some of these questions, only as far as they individually feel necessary. For me, they provide the basis of a structure, a network of details, upon which I can paint my stories, that will provide me (and hopefully my readers) with continuity and predictability throughout what I believe will be a series of novels set in the same universe.