FAQS About Worldbuilding

written by Holly
December 20, 2009
By Holly Lisle

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- How do you make maps?
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- Do you do a lot of worldbuilding before you start a book?
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How important is worldbuilding?

How important is your story to you? People hear the word "worldbuilding" and automatically assume that the discussion is going to apply only to people who are writing science fiction and fantasy — after all, for everyone else, this is the world they're going to be writing in, and it has already been built.

That's not the case. You're worldbuilding when you sketch out a floorplan of the house that your character lives in so that you don't accidentally have her bedroom on the first floor in chapter one and on the second in chapter three. You're worldbuilding when you draw out a little map of the town in which your characters live and name the streets and decide that the corner drugstore is on the corner of Maple and Vine. You are worldbuilding when you decide that the town has two churches, one Prebsyterian and one Methodist, and that the Methodists think (as a whole) that the Presbyterians are a

bunch of godless heathens and the Presbyterians think the Methodists are a bunch of fanatics.

You're worldbuilding, in other words, when you create some guidelines about the place in which your story takes place or about the people who inhabit the place in order to maintain consistency within the story and add a feeling of verisimilitude to your work. So worldbuilding is essential to anyone who writes.

Where do you come up with names?

I have a stack of baby name books that I sometimes glimpse through. I usually alter spellings or use only portions of those names, but from time to time I'll find one that is just too cool to pass up. I also develop languages for the different peoples in my universes, and build the names using the rules of those languages. I notice names in magazines and on the spines of books, and use altered versions of the names of childhood friends. Sometimes I take a piece of paper and run through the alphabet until a letter strikes my fancy. Then I write it down and start scrambling letters after it in a list until I hit something that I think sounds nice.

I also frequently change the names of characters in the first drafts of books. They don't all gel for me (though I'm usually pretty solid on the main characters) until I send in the final draft.

How do you make maps?

This is something I've been doing since I was about six or seven, and I do it the way some people breathe — naturally and

without thinking about it. But I took the process apart eventually because I realized how essential it was to the way I worked, and how useful it could be to anyone who wanted to write. The process is time consuming, but if you're interested, do the Maps Workshop. It will be worth your while.

How do you develop languages?

Again, there is a long answer to this question, but not a short one. If you're interesting in developing your own languages for the books you're writing, I'm developing a lengthy workshop that you can go through. It isn't ready yet, but I hope will be soon.

Do you do a lot of worldbuilding before you start a book?

Oh, man, do I ever. I'm at the very extreme end of the curve on this, but I routinely do hundreds of pages of cultural background, linguistic development, mapping and so on.

Can you do worldbuilding that doesn't use knights, elves, dragons and castles?

Yes. And unless you can do something with knights, elves, dragons and castles that hasn't been done a million times, you really should.

If you caught the worldbuilding bug, and need to know how to do it professionally without OVERdoing it, take a look at my Create a World Clinic — which includes worksheets, video demos, a class forum, and more.