# WORLDBUILDING
## MAGAZINE

# ARCHITECTURE
### & other topics

## WORLD SHOWCASE
### vbwyrde's Elthos

## EXLUSIVE INTERVIEW
### with Chris Lockey

## STORMING THE BASTILLE

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

You can quickly recognize Paris by the presence of the Eiffel Tower. Athens by the Parthenon. Sydney by its Opera House. Beyond single buildings, unique patterns in architecture denote different cultures across the globe and throughout time. In this issue, we delve into the most visible components of civilization. It is my great pride to present to you the culmination of more than two months of hard work by the *Worldbuilding Magazine* team and community: the Architecture issue.

On a personal note, this issue is bittersweet for me,  as it is my last issue as Editor-in-Chief of *Worldbuilding Magazine*. I'm not leaving, though. I am stepping down to a more focused role so that I can more effectively accomplish long-term goals. I'm very thankful to the team for everything we've accomplished thus far, and I look forward to the future as we continue to serve the worldbuilding community.

Happy worldbuilding!

LieutenantDebug, Editor-in-Chief

**23**

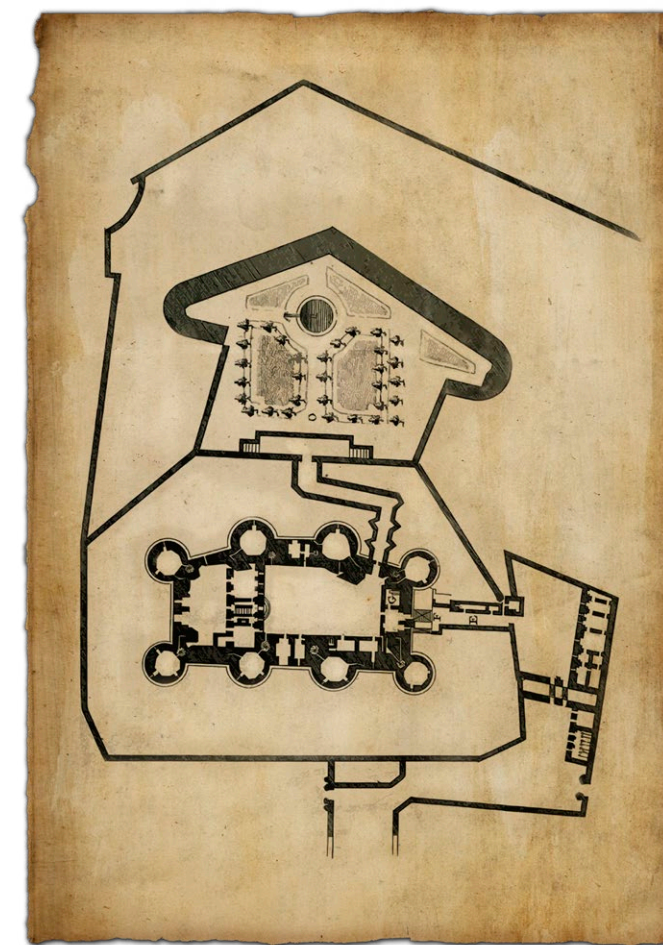**A BOY IN THE WOODS**

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# WORLD SHOWCASE

## VBWYRDE'S ELTHOS

interviewed by Aaryan Balu | illustrations by vbwyrde

**INTERVIEW**    **TABLETOP GAMING**

Vbwyrde has been creating Elthos, a homebrew *Dungeons & Dragons* game world, for over forty years. Here's how he describes his world.

Elthos has been in the works since 1978, when I first started hosting as a Game Master. It's my own setting. So after all these decades, there's a lot to the place. It's a planet, not entirely unlike Earth—a parallel universe. Here, there are True Gods, called the *Elkron*, plus magic, mysticism, monsters, tales of woe, and glory. It started with The Iron Legions of Telgar and then shifted focus in the 1990's to an area known as Korak. In the 2000's the game again shifted focus, this time to Glendale in the Realm of Palamar.

Elthos is magical, but the magic is more Tolkienesque than your usual overt role-playing game's. Magic, while it does have the usual panoply of spells and clerical powers reflective of *Original Dungeons & Dragons*, it is also low key. Most mysticism is "in your head, man."

*How so? What makes the magic mystical?*

It's really in the descriptive narrative that the magic of that happens. I do not rely on mechanical descriptions like "Ok, you cast Firebolt and deal 2d6+5! Orc takes 10 damage! Now what do you do?"

Instead it's more like this: "The wizard is mumbling again...the torchlight is flaring wildly and one torch hits a wall, and sparks are flying everywhere, and the shadows are dancing like crazy-marionettes, and one of the Orcs hair caught on fire, and he's shrieking horribly and dashes his head screaming...and what do you do?"

Dice rolls happen. But the descriptions are designed to keep the magic ambiguous. Was it a fire bolt that took out the Orc? Or something else? I never say. The wizard will tell you it was the Magic of Fire. But he's a wild-eye'd mumbler. Can you really believe what he says?

*Is this built into some fundamental aspect of the world, or more just a narrative choice for how you conceive of magic?*

I try to convey that is how Elthos works in the descriptions of my spells, or in the description of how magic works generally. But mostly it is all in the wrist...er...how I narrate the game.

*Makes sense. I definitely try to lean into more elaborate/ground-level descriptions of magic as well. Could you tell me a bit about Glendale and the troubles brewing in that area?*

Glendale is a mythical land in the World of Elthos, high up in the Realm of Palamir, Elkron of the Sun. It all started with a fairy tale. A long time ago now, I had read a story named *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole and conceived from it a fairy tale for Elthos, very loosely based on some aspects of that story. I used Walpole's story as a "Deep Backstory" for my campaign.

Glendale itself is not real. It's a prison. A very large, very pretty, and very illusory prison—but a prison nonetheless. It was created to hold the Prince and Princess of the Kingdom of Oswald by the Witch-Sister of the King, and her consort Klingzor, a malevolent sorcerer. The overarching backstory is all about rescuing the Moon Princess and her brother, the Sun Prince. But, to be honest, there has been almost no mention of any of that in all of the Adventures of Glendale thus far. Because it is Deep Backstory. In Whitewode, finally, they caught a hint of that when they actually met the Moon Princess, briefly. After 20 years of play. In fact, if my players ever read this, they will note that they had no clue about any of this.

Glendale has its own fantastical backstory as well as four major townships. Hobbinton, a mountain town filled with thieves on the edge of Glendale, is where most of the story has taken place in recent years. Here, one can find a number of mysteries... even the town's origin itself.

At this point, though, I should mention that Elthos (as I GM it) is about 50% about the world and 50% about the characters in it. The two go hand-in-hand, and the actions of the characters very largely drive the story. While there is a vast

back story going on around them at all times, the player's characters are the focus of the world. What they do makes all kinds of difference to what happens in the rest of the world. They are the heroes of the story, after all.

*So what's the hook for the campaign?*

Well, we've been playing for a very long time. My current group has members who started playing with me in 2009. So the initial hooks are very much in the distant past. But that said, this is what it was at first:

There was a group of heroes who joined the Adventurer's Guild in Hobbinton. One member, Hermel, of Yellow Clay Village, became the ostensible leader of the group. It featured a Paladin named The Star of Justice, the dwarf Arik Anvilbreaker, the lizard-ish orphan boy Praymar, Lido the hobbit and tanner's son, and his richer friend Ishcandar. Hermel had a dream of a dragon tear that dropped from the eye of a Green Dragon and landed like a meteor in the roots of a tree in the courtyard of the tenement house he was living in. When he woke up, Hermel went downstairs and, sure enough, found a tear-shaped emerald buried into the roots of the tree. He decided that he was going to use it somehow to rescue his hometown Yellow Clay from the bandits that had been harassing it for years, and had sent him to the big city to begin with. That's how the adventure began back in 2009. That campaign was named *The Adventure of Yellow Clay Village*...and it lasted till 2013. I later did a write-up of the entire campaign, word for word, which I posted to my blog here. If anything, it gives a real feel for both what Elthos is about, and also what can be done with my Elthos RPG rules and the Mythos Machine, a web application I created to support them.

None of which has much to do with Whitewode, a story which took place about three years (real-world time) after the end of that campaign.

Fat rich and happy, the heroes all retired, married, and had kids. They were living on the fat of the land and their reputations as village heroes. It was all going swimmingly, and they did not want to adventure anymore. Ever. But one day I found an article with a very cool little isometric map of the underground city under Derinkuyu. And that was the beginning of the end of their retirement, I tell ya.

I loved the map so much, and the amazing city under the earth, that of course I had to create my own. So I created the Caverns of Grimdel... isometric style. It looks tiny, but it has two levels actually, and is larger on the inside than on the outside. Tardis style. That's just level 1.

Anyway, I had to figure out a way to hook my players into this new campaign. It was a struggle, but in the end, through sheer horrible GM trickery, I pulled it off. So the retired team flung on their equipment and ran pell-mell into the night to rescue Hermel's daughter from her kidnappers. That campaign went on for about two years and earned the name *The Horrors of Whitewode*. Not just because the place itself was a horror—which it was—but because this was my most overly-ambitious campaign ever to date. A ridiculously ambitious project that bore all kinds of malignant fruit. But, it was also spectacular, and none of us will soon forget it. The glooms of Whitewode are not someplace you'd ever want to visit. I can tell you that.

If you look closely at level 1 of the Caverns of Grimdel, you'll notice that the doorway opposite of the red glowing statue in the rightmost chamber has a rolling stone next to it. That was the trap which kept the players in the dungeon for two years. And it is exactly like the rolling stones you will find in the Derinkuyu cave-city. And it worked like a charm.

*What resides in the Caverns of Grimdel?*

I should preface this a bit by saying where this horrible idea came from. I had spent about a year watching 495 episodes of *Dark Shadows* (the original series) from Episode 1. In the middle of that, Christopher Lee passed away, and so I went to look up some of his old films and found *"City of the Dead"* aka *"Horror Hotel."* The fusion of these two is the primary inspiration for Whitewode. In particular the witches of Whitewode. Never was there a more cunning, evil, lying, charming, deceitful, complex, and voracious group of villains ever in the history of my world. Their tactics were so simple and yet so profoundly effective I myself was shocked by how well their plans worked. Until the end of course. But all along up until then, they just lied and lied, and threw confusions, temptations, illusions, dreams, charms, memory wipes, voodoo, and... just about every trick I learned from *Dark Shadows*. My players suffered horribly at their hands for years.

*Do tell.*

It was all psychological stuff. There they were, trying to rescue the children of Yellow Clay. They came upon Whitewode and sought information. What they encountered instead were witches. Now these witches didn't announce themselves as witches of course, and it took quite a while for my players to even catch on that they were being incessantly lied to, and even then they didn't catch on to why for some time.

Eventually they found out that the witches were cursed and doomed to remain in the town until they could complete their Coven with a thirteenth member, which they hadn't been able to do for 300 years prior to the start of the campaign. Instead they were trapped in the dismal town as it sank slowly year by year into the ground because of the curse they put on it themselves. They had been counter-cursed! So, they only had one last year remaining before the cavern ceiling, now only a few yards wide, would seal them in forever and seal their fate. They were getting desperate. So, they tried everything they could to wheedle, tempt, or threaten any one member of the party to join them. And no one did. The end of the campaign was as glorious as the entire
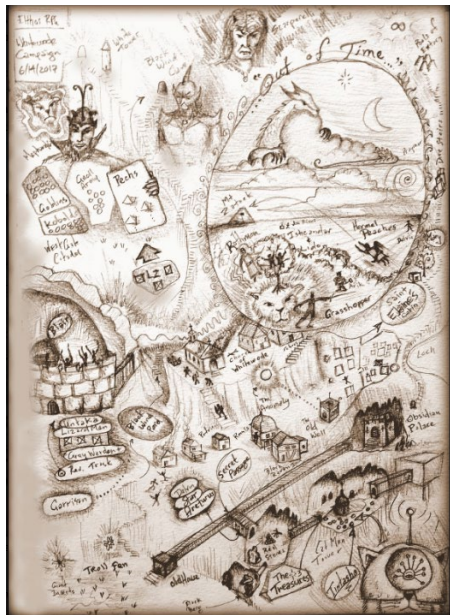
*The Meta Game, aka The God Game, is designed to be a competitive worldbuilding game for GMs who want to collaborate on creating a Shared World, with all of its Mythological History based on their actions as The Gods (aka Elkron) during the course of the game.*

*Here's the first in a series of blog posts about the Meta Game.*

thing had been gloomy. Fire and brimstone, I tell ya. And that's not the half of it. Not the quarter of it, really. It was a long and very wide campaign, with lizardmen, giants, three sibling demons, two arch-villains, an angelic doctor, a sci-fi Wizard, and not to mention the appearance—finally—of the Moon Princess and the cat-men. It was wonderful, even though my players hated Whitewode with a passion. They said that a lot, though they came to every single game without fail. So take the hate with a grain of salt, I guess.

*Let's zoom out a bit—can you share what the world looks like?*

Let me show you a map of the whole shebang that we created using another project of mine called The Meta Game...

Glendale is inside one of the hexes in the upper right corner. That's the Realm of Palamir. Or Realm of the Sun. Here's another slice.

*What kind of conflicts are going on between these various zones?*

In the far North is the Realm of the Moon. There you can see that there's a frozen tundra with Crystal Mountains. There dwell the first race—crystal giants. They are peace-loving and creative, and they are the masters of gems and all precious things as well as fantastic craftsmen of old. They are intelligent, but their only ambition is to create beautiful works, which they mostly do in their deep caverns below the world, and most people haven't an

inkling that they exist. However, they will also sometimes extend themselves to the surface world if things ever should turn so dire as to merit their intrusion in the affairs of the top-worlders.

To the south west you can see the Realm of Uranus. The deep sea merges with this domain, which is formed of coral reefs and island chains and is also marked by mountains on its eastern border. There dwell the fish folk. They are not necessarily very nice or very peaceful, and they can definitely have sharp pointy teeth and magic powers like no one's business. In the north of that land is a very ancient structure known only as The Dolmen. It is someplace the Elkron do not even dare to approach. It is even older than they are.To the far west is the land of Chaos, the Realm of Mars. there you can see the Floating Volcanic Islands, and the Great Whirlpool River. The Armies of the World seem to spawn from there, and it is most notable for its incredible Ruby Towers which line its northern border.

These are just gleanings of details from our Meta Game. We didn't get a chance to complete the game as two of our four players had a child and, well, priorities.

*What are some of your favorite aspects of this world?*

If I must choose, one of the things I love most about Elthos is how it always seems to interweave itself with the real world in strange and mystical ways. For example, you remember I told you about the dragon tear, right? Well, the night we played that, a player (Ishcandar) picked the pocket of an old blind man, and Hermel went back to him and gave him his own money to compensate him for his loss. As a reward, the old blind man gave Hermel a tarot reading during which he was to pick one card. I have my own Elthos Tarot deck, and so my player picked a card. It was the Dragon card. I carried it from there, and Hermel had the dream about the Green Dragon Tear falling to the ground like a meteor. One year later I was looking online at astronomy stuff and I found

out that the night we played was *the* night of the Draconid meteor shower: October 7-8th, 2011. Our game night.

Stuff like that happens quite a lot for whatever reason. It's one of Elthos' most endearing aspects for me.

*Any last thoughts you want to leave us with about worldbuilding?*

As Tolkien called it, *mythopoeia* is one of the great arts of the human race. We get to participate in creativity at a level that can bring wonders to light for us and our friends. RPGs are a means by which we can not only practice mythopoeia, but can also play out our worlds as games with our friends, bringing forth myriads of heroic adventures and incredible stories. Worldbuilding is an art, and Elthos is my art form. I also want to encourage people to build their own worlds because it is just so rewarding. To help, I created a project called The Mythos Machine, a tool to help create grand stories and worlds.

*This interview was edited for Worldbuilding Magazine.*

*Thanks to Vbwyrde for joining us! If you would like to be featured in a future World Showcase, click here to apply!*

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# ARCHITECTURE & CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN ART

by Adam Bassett

✎ ART   ⌂ HISTORY   ⚑ RELIGION

Alongside the expansion of a people, so too is there an expansion—and altering—of their art. In c.640 CE, Muslims ruled Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Two years later, the Byzantine army abandoned Alexandria, leaving Egypt to the Muslims. In 651, they took Iran from the Sassanids, thus ending more than 400 years of Sassanid rule. By 710, all of North Africa was under Muslim control with later advances into Spain and France. The Franks repelled their invaders, but in Spain, the Muslim rulers of Córdoba remained in power until 1031. Even then, Muslim influence and power didn't leave the Iberian Peninsula until much later.

It was not military might alone that was so impressive about the expansion of Islam. Muslims converted millions as the expansion spread, and Islam remains one of the world's largest religions today. In addition, they taught the foundations for algebra and arithmetic to much of the world. Many Muslims went on to make significant contributions which advanced the fields of medicine, astronomy, and science. Several Christian scholars studied Arabic translations of ancient Greek writers such as Aristotle, and Arabic lyrics later inspired French troubadours.[1] All of this is to say that the expansion of Islam, though militaristic at times, also spread new ideas that overall benefitted many people. Of course, with this expansion, the conquered peoples had a bit of influence on the Arabs as well.

We're going to take a look at some pieces of architecture from around the Islamic world and then consider how we might use them as inspiration for our worldbuilding projects. Each structure comes with an element of mystery or a grand story and remains standing today—a testament to the builders who created them.

## DOME OF THE ROCK

"Islam is not only a religion, but a way of life." This major tenant is how the Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art describes the faith. They go on to state that "the lands conquered by the Muslims had their own preexisting artistic traditions and… those artists who had worked under Byzantine or Sassanian patronage continued to work in their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons [after the conquest]." This blending of ideas and art forms didn't begin to unify into a definitely Islamic art style until during the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE). It was a gradual shift, but during this period, art and architecture slowly began to form around four components: calligraphy, vegetal patterns, geometric patterns, and figural representation.[2]

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem may be the first great piece of Islamic architecture. It was erected c.687-692 by Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik after they took the city from the Byzantine Empire. It is, without a doubt, one of those buildings constructed during the aforementioned phase of mixing ideas. The Dome of the Rock was constructed for Islamic functions but displays an amalgam of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Sassanian elements in its artistry and construction. It is an octagonal building with a large golden dome at the top, a layout likely inspired by Late-Antique Mediterranian structures such as the San Vitale or Hagia
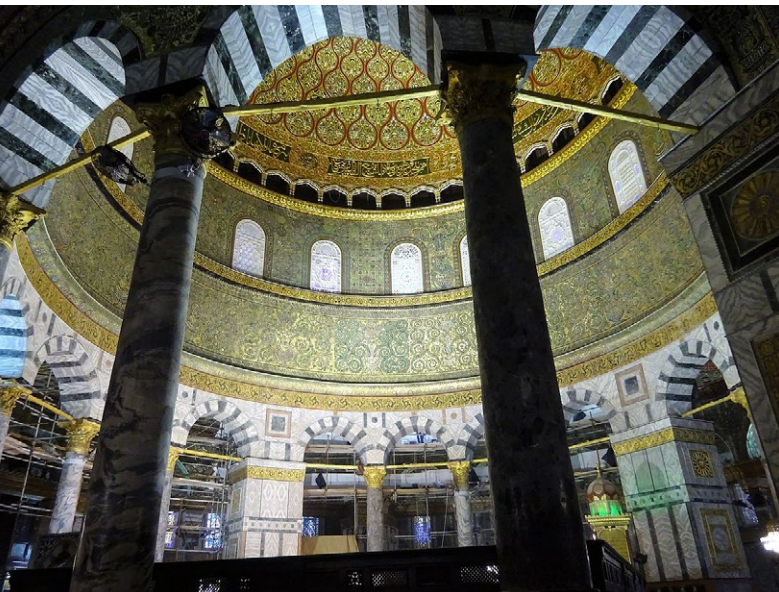


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Sophia. The interior was beautifully decorated in vegetal and geometric mosaic patterns, featuring images of crowns, jewels, chalices, and other royal motifs. This may have been a reference to the caliphate's triumph over the Byzantine and Sassanid empires. Calligraphic inscriptions, most from the Koran, suggest Islam is the new superior monotheistic faith. At the center of the building is an exposed rock. It's not mentioned in any of the writing on the walls, but has since become known as the place where the Prophet Muhammed may have begun "his miraculous journey to Heaven (the *Miraj*) and then in the same night, returned to his home in Mecca."[3]

The Dome of the Rock is also somewhat mysterious in its intent. Several clues were left for us; however, history is messy, and the

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[1] Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History.* 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 284.

[2] Department of Islamic Art. "The Nature of Islamic Art." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/orna/hd_orna.htm. Accessed December 18, 2019.

[3] Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History.* 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 285-287.

## THE GREAT MOSQUE OF CÓRDOBA

After approximately 115 years of Islamic rule, the Abbasids revolted and either killed or forced the Umayyad caliphate out of Syria in 750 CE. A few of the Umayyad fled west to Spain and founded a new dynasty. They ruled from their capital of Córdoba, located at the southern end of the Iberian Peninsula. This new Muslim state rivaled that of the Abbasids and exerted a significant influence over the Christian states of Western Europe.

The jewel of Córdoba was, of course, its Great Mosque. Mosques are places of Muslim worship, a wall always facing Mecca—the direction all must face when practicing Islamic prayer. The construction of the Great Mosque at Córdoba began in 784 by Abd al-Rahman I and later enlarged during the ninth and tenth centuries. When it was finished, the building boasted an impressive 514 columns, all topped by a unique double-tiered system of arches. This style was done because the original builders used short columns, and the aforementioned revisions demanded that the roof be raised higher.[4]

structure has been interpreted to be many things. Christians and Muslims during the Middle Ages thought it was the site of the Temple of Solomon. Later it gained significance as the burial place of Adam (the first man) and also as the place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. As such, the Dome of the Rock has cemented its place as a religious destination for several major world religions that each persist to this day.

One major takeaway here is that it took years for an Islamic art style to develop, and one of its most important buildings still hadn't found that style when it was made. Additionally, the intent of the building is unclear. It can be enticing, even comforting, to detail our worlds to the letter and guarantee with certainty what each aspect is for. However, it is important to remember that sometimes things can be confused, lost, or forgotten over time.

*The arches at the Great Mosque at Córdoba are horseshoe-shaped, likely as a result of earlier Mesopotamian or Visigothic influence. In time, the style became closely associated with Western Muslim architecture.*

The original structure contained beautiful geometric patterns. It wasn't until the tenth century revisions under Caliph Al-Hakam that the mosque gained more detailed designs. The new caliph sought to imitate the structures built by the Umayyads centuries before, and covered the walls with marbles and mosaics.[5]

Caliph Al-Hakam accomplished his goal. The finished Great Mosque at Córdoba stands proudly to this day, boasting intricate mosaics that remind one of structures such as the Dome of the Rock while also retaining a strong sense of uniqueness due to the double-tiered arches and airy halls. Again, we see a clear mixing of cultures. Caliph Al-Hakam may have sought to imitate the Umayyads with the expansion, but his work resulted in a new style of Western Muslim architecture that was similar, yet distinct, from the other forms.

## THE MOSQUE OF SELIM II

In the late twelfth century, the Seljuk Turks fell from power, creating an opportunity for the smaller dynasties they once ruled to rise up in Anatolia.[6] Among those groups, Osman I founded the Ottoman Empire, which his successors brought to great heights. By the fifteenth century, the young empire became one of the world's greatest powers.

Sinan the Great has gone into many history books as the greatest Ottoman architect, credited with perfecting the Ottoman style. Employed by

Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled as sultan through much of the sixteenth century, Sinan was at the center of several major construction projects. One of his masterpieces was the Mosque of Selim II.

Before delving into Sinan and the mosque, it is important to first note the significance of the Hagia Sophia. The Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople in 1453, and with it gained the infamous cathedral. Of course, the Ottomans converted it into a mosque, and today the building functions as a museum. It is a marvel of architectural engineering and art that has stood since its construction c.535 CE. Recalling how Byzantine craftsmen helped construct the Dome of the Rock, we can imagine how the Ottomans must have seen familiar themes in the old cathedral when they visited it for the first time. However, mosques require a wall facing Mecca, and the Hagia Sophia did not quite fit that mold. Plus, this was a Christian building, made by Christians—and nothing could rival its magnificence.
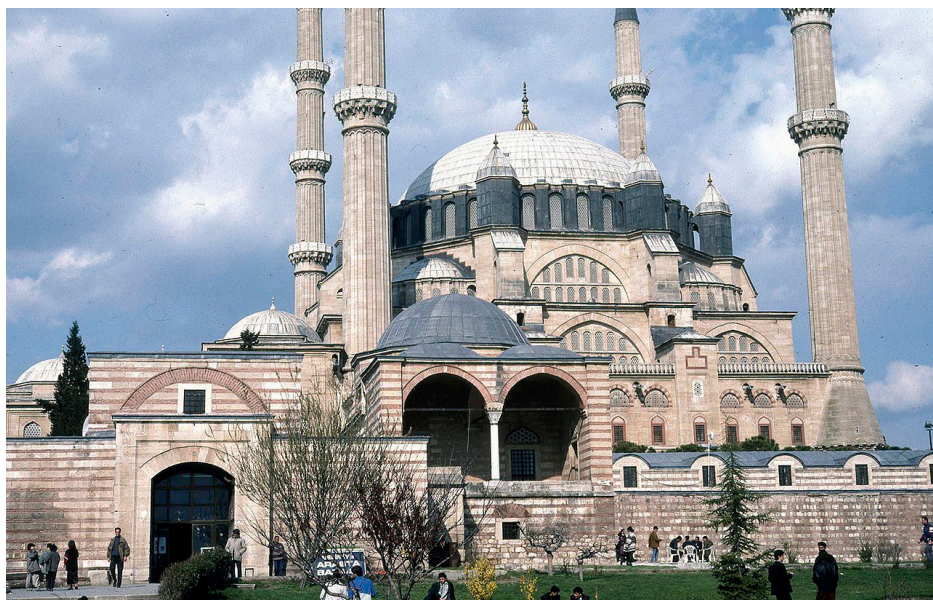
So, when Suleiman the Magnificent commissioned a mosque made in his son's name, he and his brilliant architect Sinan set their goals high to compete with the old Byzantine cathedral. They built the mosque in Edirne, approximately 147 miles west of the Hagia Sophia. It was an ideal place to show the world the might of the Ottoman Empire and Muslim craft—Edirne was the first major city that Europeans reached as they traveled into the empire.[7]

[4] Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History.* 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 290-291.

[5] Kleiner, Fred S. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History.* 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 290.

[6] "Seljuq." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., https://www.britannica.com/topic/Seljuq. Accessed December 18, 2019.

[7] Macauley-Lewis, Elizabeth. "Mimar Sinan, Mosque of Selim II, Edirne." *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy, https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/ap-art-islamic-world-medieval/a/mosque-edirne. Accessed December 18, 2019.

*The dome on the Mosque of Selim II doesn't quite reach the height that the Hagia Sophia does, but the land in Edirne is higher than that in Istanbul. Therefore, the total height above sea level is higher than the Hagia Sophia. Regardless, the Ottomans believed that the mosque's completion finally proved they had outdone the Byzantine cathedral, as well as Christendom itself.9*

The Mosque of Selim II, completed c.1568-1575, was built in the shape of an octagon with a dome over the center. Four slender minarets adorn its four corners, each reaching more than 200 ft. into the sky. The entire structure was engineered to keep strict mathematical ratios. The mosque's height, width, and masses relate to one another in a 1:2 ratio, tying the structure together in a precise visual harmony. It is no wonder, then, that Sinan the Great proclaimed this building his masterpiece.[8]

The spirit of competition here is of particular interest. The previous buildings we've looked at have been the assimilation of ideas, and while the Mosque of Selim II is not an exception to that case, it is certainly made in competition with the Hagia Sophia. An interesting exercise might be to consider rivalries in your world and see if they might compete by trying to outdo one another's artistic or architectural accomplishments. In the same way people attempt to top one another's records, they might strive for the tallest buildings, most realistic statues, or most numerous columns.

## INFLUENCERS

Throughout this brief history of Islamic architecture, one thing has remained ever-present: the influence of outside cultures. The Dome of the Rock was built with heavy Byzantine and Sassanid influences, perhaps even by architects and craftsmen from those empires. The Great Mosque at Córdoba was influenced by either Mediterranean or Visigothic cultures, then took on those horseshoe-shaped arches as a major theme in Western Islamic architecture. The Mosque of Selim II, of course, was directly influenced by the Hagia Sophia. A meeting of peoples will always create influences on one another. The United States has a network of roads (the interstate system) in part because of President Eisenhower's experience mapping the roads of France for the military during World War II as well as his knowledge of Germany's autobahn which was enormously helpful in transporting people as well as equipment.[10]

When worldbuilding, keep in mind how your cultures come into contact with one another. Those who conquer will take structures and resources from the people they defeated. Those who trade will exchange ideas. It is easy to be building a new world of your own and forget this simple fact, but having a bit of mingling between groups—be they allies or enemies—will add a great amount of depth to the world.

For example, let's assume a scenario akin to the expansion of Islam we discussed earlier. If a nation expands their empire, what will they encounter for the first time? Might there be exotic materials, strange carvings, or towering buildings unlike what they're used to? It's important to consider how they might react to these new experiences. Any answer is valid, so long as you can justify it. Many conquerors throughout history have destroyed that which lay in their path. Others, like the Ottoman Empire, instead assimilated much of what they encountered. What will come of your peoples meeting?



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[8] Kleiner, Fred S. Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History. 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 297-299.

[9] Kleiner, Fred S. Gardner's Art through the Ages: a Global History. 14th ed., book C, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2013, p 298.

[10] "Highway History." U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration. 24 July 2017, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/brainiacs/eisenhowerinterstate.cfm. Accessed December 18, 2019.
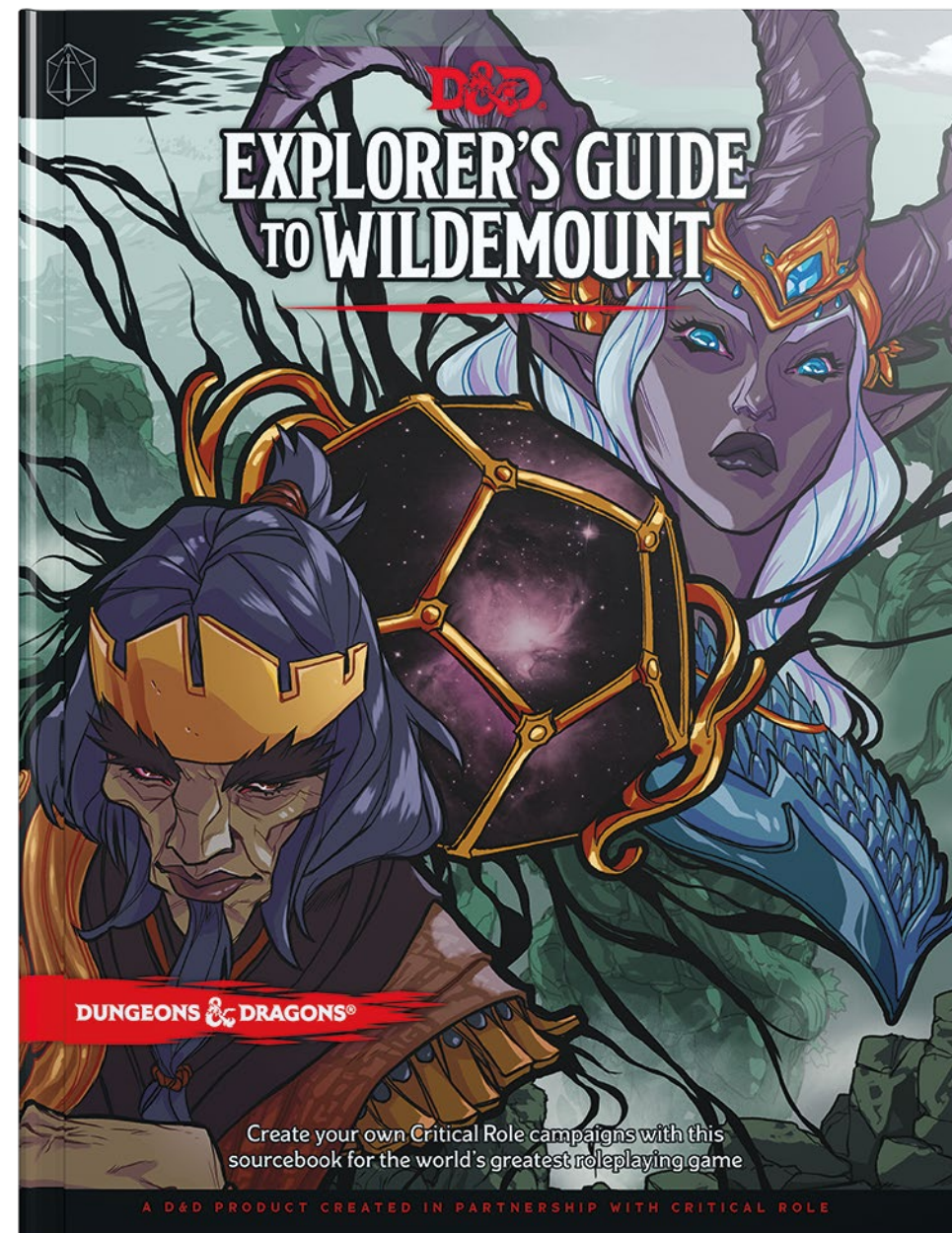
# EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## CHRIS LOCKEY

interviewed by Adam Bassett

🗨 INTERVIEW     🎲 TABLETOP GAMING

**C**hris Lockey works with Critical Role. *One of his most recent projects to see fruition is the* Explorer's Guide to Wildemount. *He discusses his role in writing it and shares a few more broad thoughts on role-playing games and their settings.*

My name is Chris Lockey (although my Aunt Rita always calls me Christopher, and my contemporaries usually refer to me by a solitary surname). I'm a writer, director, producer, photographer, and editor of broadcast media in Los Angeles, California—where I currently (and quite contentedly) work for Critical Role. As the multi-hyphenate title suggests, I am a jack-of-all-trades. I spent my early scholastic years as an overachiever of the "accidentally gifted" variety, and I never managed to shake the sense of onus that comes along with my particular brand of ambition.

I'm a storyteller in a southern gothic tradition, by way of classic horror fantasists like Edgar Allan Poe, Robert E. Howard, Shirley Jackson, and Stephen King. Among a myriad of artistic influences, I occasionally play favorites: I love the films of John Carpenter and Ridley Scott, the music of Black Sabbath and Tangerine Dream, the paintings of Frank Frazetta and Zdzisław Beksiński, Batman comics, cosmic horror, cartoons, ghost stories, electric guitars, movie theatres, Mexican Coke, and pizza. But enough about me, let's talk about *Dungeons & Dragons...*

*Sounds good to me! Let's begin with the big news: you helped write the new* Dungeons & Dragons *book* Explorer's Guide to Wildemount. *Could you tell us about how you happened to join that project, and what you contributed to it?*

Working with *Critical Role* for a few years as the in-house photographer has allowed me some very precious (and extremely valued) time around that table. The rapport required to capture the kind of candid, behind-the-scenes coverage that I sought eventually led to some classic "table talk" between fellow D&D enthusiasts. It's impossible to avoid talking a little shop on Thursday nights. And it just so happens that I'd also been working as a freelance RPG designer for the better part of a decade, thanks to Wolfgang Baur and Kobold Press. My projects at Kobold Press (such as the *Tome of Beasts*, *Creature Codex*, and *Deep Magic: Mythos Magic*) are what silently earned me Matt Mercer's interest as a potential contributor to the *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount*. Matt did a masterful job of hiding his intentions until the fateful moment, smack dab in the middle of Critical Role's second campaign, when he asked me to join the sourcebook's writing team.

Mercer had already done a staggering amount of work on this book before recruiting Joey Haeck, James Introcaso, and myself to help round it out. And that expert level of preparation is apparent in the collected and confident way he runs the Wildemount campaign on-air every Thursday night. From the very beginning, Wildemount was a fantasy setting that I fell in love with. Rather than the classic high fantasy of Tal'Dorei (the setting from Critical Role's first campaign), here was a place that was riddled with sullen atmosphere and thrilling mystery—a foreboding world of dark fantasy, where warring governments and zealous factions vie for the spoils of the very gods that abandoned them. I was eager, honored, and elated to design some of the most sinister locations, creatures, and accoutrements that Wildemount has to offer—including a batch of nefarious magic items, a handful of horrific monsters, and the post-apocalyptic arcane

wasteland known as Blightshore.

*The book claims there are "four regions... [which] provide endless potential for adventure in a land of brewing conflict and incredible magic." What are these four regions, and what makes each distinct?*

I already mentioned my beloved Blightshore, which occupies the Eastern Wynandir seaboard, but let's take a quick look at the grand scope of Wildemount before we get too weird. The four regions of Wildemount include Western Wynandir, Eastern Wynandir, the Menagerie Coast, and the Biting North.

Western Wynandir takes its cue from classic fantasy storytelling with a distinctly darker slant. In a somewhat draconian and nativistic fashion, the presiding Dwendalian Empire maintains a stalwart front against the encroaching forces of the Kryn Dynasty from the east. Dashes of inspiration from the likes of *Warhammer*'s Old World, *The Witcher*'s Continent, and *Bloodborne*'s Yarnham can be found in Western Wynandir's gothic landscapes and dreary settlements. This is where the Mighty Nein began their journey at the top of *Critical Role*'s second campaign, and it's where you'll find some of the familiar dark fantasy tropes you've come to recognize throughout the genre's history (along with a few new surprises).

The southwestern edge of Wildemount is known as the Menagerie Coast, a region of verdant beaches and lush tropical islands. Home to some of Wildemount's more lawless adventurers, the Menagerie Coast is perfectly suited for any players with a penchant for pirateering.

Eastern Wynandir is home to the Kryn Dynasty—an emergent nation of drow elves who worship a mysterious entity known as The Luxon—along with a wide array of what are traditionally considered "monstrous" societies. Eastern Wynandir is a region of strangeness and unfamiliarity, marked by weird and wild

fantasy locations like the goblinoid Wastes of Xhorhas and the magically-corrupted Miskath Strand (also known as Blightshore). To call Eastern Wynandir "dangerous" would be a bit of an understatement, but that really depends on which side of the swamp you're from.

And above Wynandir lurks the Biting North, a cold region of arctic landscapes and cruel icy wilderness. The Biting North is a realm defined by its isolation from the rest of the world. Here, explorers risk life and limb delving through the frigid depths of snow-capped enigmas—from the cursed tundras of the Greying Wildlands to the monstrosity-haunted ruins of Eiselcross.

*Thanks for the brief tour! Now, part of Wildemount's description mentions magic. How does it differ from the rest of* Dungeons & Dragons' *style of magic?*

Thankfully, the creators and custodians of 5th Edition D&D have made it abundantly clear that balance is a top priority when it comes to gameplay. With that in mind, the new spells, magic items, and magical effects developed for the *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* stem from Mercer's love of metaphysics while tapping into Introcaso's enthusiasm for super-science and my own ardor for necromancy and transmutation.

Before the *Explorer's Guide* was even a twinkle in my eye, Matt had shared some early drafts of what he referred to as a new school of magic— what *Critical Role* viewers would come to know as *dunamancy*. Inevitably, dunamancy didn't become a new school of magic; it rather exists as a sort of sub-school for arcane casters with an abstruse passion for physics, gravity, and time.

Dunamancy is the study of dunamis, the primal magical energy of potentiality and actuality. It is this esoteric magic that is explored in a handsome collection of spells and subclasses that Matt had already developed before bringing the rest of us into the fold. A cronourgist, for example, uses dunamancy to manipulate time; while a

graviturgist focuses on the manipulation of gravity, often localized to control the battlefield. James Introcaso added a few hot new spells of his own, and folks at Wizards of the Coast went through them all with a fine-tooth comb to ensure maximum compatibility with the pre-existing spells for 5th Edition D&D.

I personally didn't develop any new spells for the guide, focusing my efforts instead on a complement of magic items and some new, interesting magical effects native to present-day Miskath Strand. Of the 30+ standard magic items in the *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount*, I worked on a solid eight or so that have their unofficial/official roots in Blightshore. The magic items I developed were the kinds of treasures I've longed to see at my own table in an authoritative capacity, so I was thrilled at how well my humble (yet hopefully daring) offerings held up under the scrutiny of the team. And I can't wait to see them in action.

*Was it limiting to have to fit* Explorer's Guide to Wildemount *within the confines of an existing game system? What challenges, if any, did you face in fitting it into established systems?*

In many ways, the setting of Wildemount is a love letter to the D&D game system itself. I feel like that's reflected in its design from top to bottom. As mentioned before, Wildemount is the follow-up to Matt's Tal'Dorei setting from the first *Critical Role* campaign; to me, it feels like the ripened fruit of Matt's original vision. Like much of the speculative fiction that inspires us, stories in Wildemount are often told as fantastic yet grim reflections of our own world here on Earth. The sword and sorcery storytelling of D&D is the essential lens we use to look at Wildemount, which hopefully provides a fertile setting for centuries of stories to come.

5th Edition D&D is a streamlined, stripped-down version of what some players came to regard as an overcomplicated system, and its popularity owes a lot to its accessibility. There

are, however, some mechanical constructs and considerations in previous editions of the game that do make for more nuanced design elements. Much of the challenge of designing for 5th Edition D&D is adhering to the rigid style guide, but it's also dreadfully important to keep things simple. The precision of the 5th Edition ruleset results in less confusion at the table, and it's part of the genius that makes the latest edition work on such an immediate level for so many players. The trick ultimately becomes: how do you keep things simple while leaving room to innovate? I decided to listen to my gut, honor my inspirations, respect Matt's vision, and commit to ideas that I felt would stand the test of time.

*How do you write about a setting for other people to use and explore, giving them plenty of information to work with, without doing the adventuring for them? How do you decide what to tell them, and what to let the players/DMs figure out for themselves?*

The development of Blightshore was a direct exercise in providing tools for the Dungeon Master to do their own thing. Matt had already defined the majority of Wildemount and mapped it out with cartographer extraordinaire Deven Rue. Once the team was assembled, Matt offered up a choice of assignments to us on a proverbial platter—James "Joey" Haeck pioneered his Heroic Chronicle system, James Introcaso was immediately hot for Eiselcross, and I instantly gravitated towards the psychedelic sprawl of apocalyptic arcane terror known as Blightshore (Matt later admitted this was his master plan all along).

With assignment in hand, my self-appointed mission was to provide a location in Wildemount for all of the unexplained phenomenon a campaign might possibly want to explore. Blightshore needn't be overexplained. I wanted to preserve a sense of mystery while arming Dungeon Masters with tools to tell compelling stories in a place that feels distinct from every other setting in the game's history. Ravaged by innumerable arcane calamities, Blightshore emerged as a place that

was unwelcoming but impossible to ignore—the kind of place where bounty hunters and tomb raiders would thrive, where the perverse experimentations of the Betrayer Gods run amok, and where untold treasures lie waiting to be discovered in their accursed vaults.

I've heard our beloved design overlords at Wizards of the Coast refer to the *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* as the first D&D setting expressly designed for 5th Edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. We imagined that to be the case during early development, and Blightshore quickly became (for me) a wonderful surrogate location for every classic deathtrap dungeon I ever wanted to update to 5th Edition. Consider this: Maure Castle, White Plume Mountain, that cool new indie module you've been dying to try out? They're not *officially* located in Blightshore, but I'm encouraging any intrepid Dungeon Master to reason that they might be...

Another helpful component to this strategy was the inclusion of four 1st-level adventures, designed to help players kick off new campaigns in each of Wildemount's regions. These campaign starters are the perfect way to whet your appetite with what we've established without committing to several levels of a pre-baked narrative. My contribution—known as "Unwelcome Spirits"—occurs in the wastes of Xhorhas, where a spooky arcane disturbance threatens the rough-and-tumble goblinoid village of Urzin. It's a fierce little combo of hex-crawl exploration, procedural investigation, and event-based encounters; I hope people dig it.

*What part of the book was the most difficult for you to work on? Similarly, what part of the book are you most proud of?*

The collaboration with James, Joey, and Matt was so astonishingly copacetic that it often seemed more like play than work. Once we'd moved into early revisions with editor Hannah Rose, we all started to feel a palpable sense of accomplishment. And in all honesty, the hardest part of working on

this book was balancing my writing time with the early days of the new *Critical Role* studio and the Kickstarter for our animated series. While keeping pace at the studio—surrounded by *Critical Role* cast and crew members who could know absolutely nothing of what I was working on—I found myself dreaming of Blightshore and Xhorhas at length yet utterly unable to discuss them. Creativity was constant, but the discipline of word processing was hard won in those heady days.

I spoke briefly about Dungeon Master tools for Blightshore...I think one of the more interesting things I brought to the book was a set of terrain mechanics that would help DMs chart their own version of the ever-shifting Miskath Strand. Really, I'm a monster kid at heart, so I'd be lying if I said I wasn't extremely proud of the new creatures. And it must be known: my suite of Blightshore-native baddies is brought to insidious life by the absolutely stunning art of illustrator Stephen Oakley.

I'm very proud of the collective effort we all put in this book: Matt's extensive and inspiring foundation, Haeck's sense of player agency, Introcaso's design acumen and bold ideas for Eiselcross, the incredible artistic contributions from the art team, the expert development from the Wizards staff...but I'd be a real schmuck if I didn't tell you how radical Joey Haeck's Heroic Chronicle is. I'd hesitate to play a future D&D campaign without some version of it at my disposal. Don't sleep on it.

*Was there anything that you or your team wanted to include in the book, but for whatever reason were unable to make happen?*

A few magic items didn't make the cut, and Matt still has some grander schemes for dunamancy magic. Ultimately, the completion of The *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* required a bit of restraint. As we pushed well past the 300-page mark, it became clear to all of us that certain elements had to reasonably be cut in order to keep this massive book as mean and lean as it

is. To ease some curious minds: Matt's Blood Hunter isn't offered as a new official character class, but a non-player character version does have a handsome stat block in the *Explorer's Guide's* bestiary.

*Final question on the book: could you name anything that specifically inspired the setting of Wildemount? How did these various sources impact the development of the world?*

The gothic fantasy settings of *The Witcher* and *Bloodborne* always struck me as inspirations for Western Wynandir. So when it came to building out Blightshore, I embraced the influence of other FromSoftware titles like *Dark Souls* and *Demon's Souls* (some of, if not, my all-time favorite video games).

The question I posed to myself, based on Matt's early descriptions of far-Eastern Wynandir, was precisely how much the proliferation of an undead subculture would impact a society. What kind of magic items would a population of undead characters benefit from, and what kind of locations would they be reanimated to protect? Hopefully, I found some cool answers along the way.

The *Fallout* series of video games from Bethesda also had a significant impact on certain locations of the Miskath Strand, like the frontier town of Rotthold and other anomalies. Also, the films *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant* from Ridley Scott & Co. were quite instrumental in my conception of how Blightshore came to be, informing how the Betrayer Gods cruelly ravaged the Miskath Strand with their loathsome arcane experiments. Blightshore's post-apocalyptia was also somewhat inspired by *Mad Max: Fury Road*, along with the cosmic horror of Clark Ashton Smith and the psychedelic fantasy of Michael Moorcock.

*Speaking more broadly about tabletop RPGs, how do you utilize player input when worldbuilding? Be it something like Wildemount, or another setting.*

Player agency is one of the most crucial elements in tabletop role-playing. Whether congregating for a casual roll of the dice or for the narrative tension of dramatic dialogue, everyone ultimately wants to sit down at the table and have fun playing a game—sharing an experience. A solid role-playing session can make friends out of perfect strangers.

What I aim to do as a worldbuilder is create a setting that is broad enough to cater to all types of storytellers, yet dynamic and interesting enough to provide a reason for creating it in the first place. Verisimilitude is also very important to me as a storyteller; logic drives a lot of my choices. So the worldbuilding itself, during the effort to make it both fun and compelling, is perpetually guided by the history of my interactions with other players at the game table. What did they find interesting, inspiring, or hard to believe? It's also not very easy to get immediate feedback on a project that's being shaped in relative secrecy. Often, in a case such as this, it's about trusting the reactions and relationships you've witnessed all along.

*Similarly, how do you worldbuild to anticipate the actions of your players?*

One of the great beauties of role-playing games is never knowing exactly what a group of players will do. Satisfying RPG worldbuilding should reflect that. Personally, I try less to anticipate the actions of my players, than I try to provide them with a variety of logical and interesting narrative options within a simulated ecosystem. That ecosystem can (and should) have limits that the stories themselves can bend and break. But, it's important for me to establish a shared language about the make-believe, and that starts with the world itself. Characters in role-playing games are often echoes of ourselves, and we're all products of our environment. The world informs the character, which in turn informs the rest.

*What aspects of worldbuilding do you find are easy to overlook when building a setting for a role-playing game?*

The finer details of worldbuilding never get enough attention in RPG settings. Things that deserve nuance like customs, cuisine, and currency; these elements are easy to overlook if your campaign is all about dungeon-delving and treasure-hoarding. Sure, name tables and backgrounds are cool, but I always want more. Joey Haeck did a fantastic job of seeding some of these elements into Wildemount's Heroic Chronicle by the way. And the rewards of this particular attention to minutiae might not be immediately apparent to the "murderhobos," but trust me—the devil's in the details.

*Finally, do you have a setting that you are personally working on or have made? We'd love to hear what you're busy with!*

As evidenced in my passion for Blightshore, I'm drawn to settings of a post-apocalyptic variety—worlds that have "moved on," as Stephen King muses in his *Dark Tower* series. One of my current obsessions is the development of one such setting that exists far outside of our normal conceptions of high fantasy. But I can't say too much more without provoking the ancient spirits of evil, so that'll have to do for now.

*This interview was edited for* Worldbuilding Magazine.

*Thanks to Chris Lockey for taking the time to talk with us for this issue! You can find him on* Twitter*, and if you're interested in reading the* Explorer's Guide to Wildemount*, you can order from* Critical Role's shop*.*
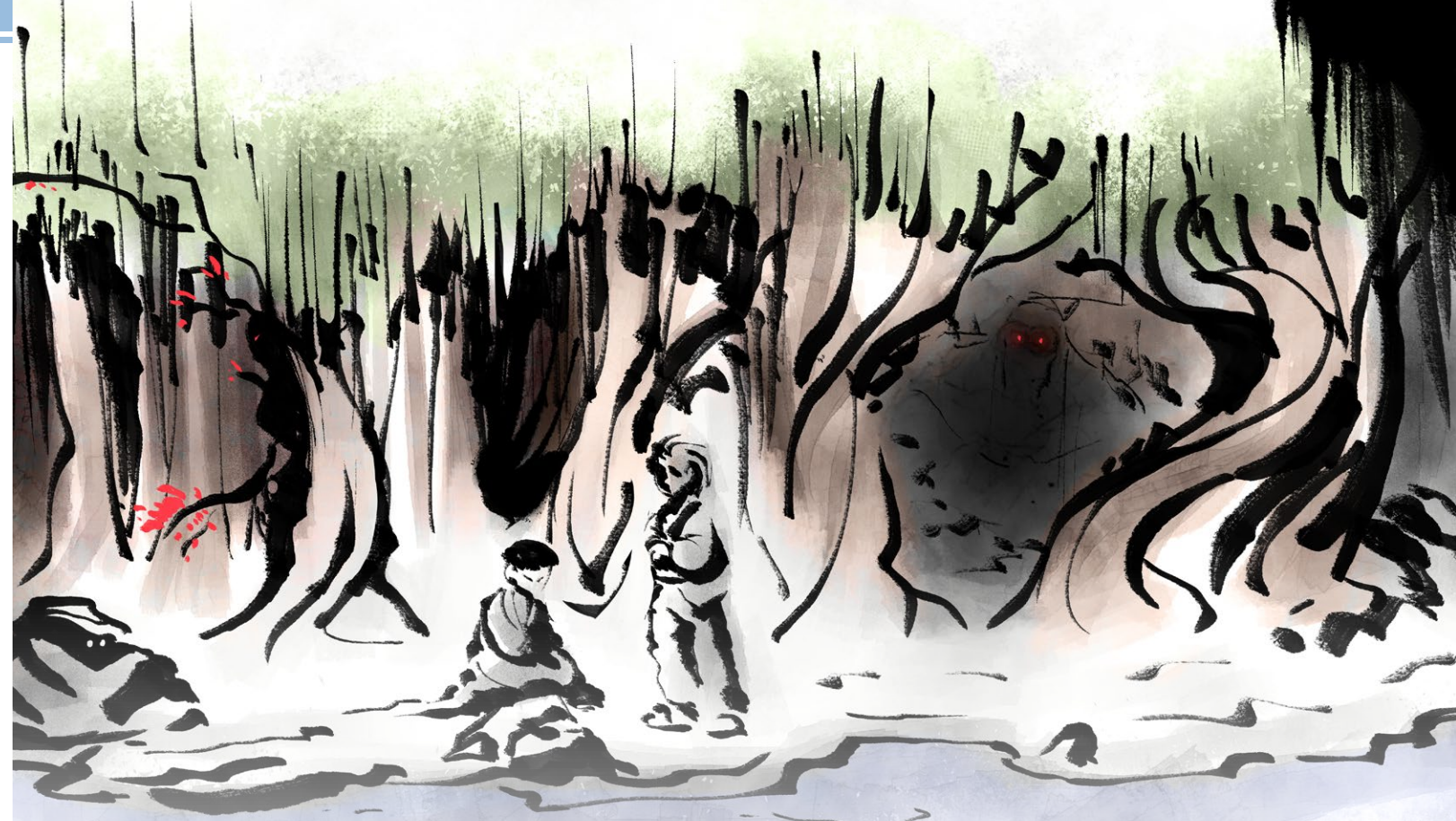
# A BOY IN THE WOODS

by Ianara Natividad | illustrations by

🐉 **FANTASY**   🐉 **FICTION**   👤 **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

The creek glistened with the midday light as Hari strolled onto the banks. He set his basket of dirty clothes against a nearby rock and knelt by the water. Placing his fingertips on the surface, he said, "Dear *marin* of this stream, I am Hari, and I would like to use the waters of your home. Please move aside as I wash my clothes and bathe today. Thank you." Hari waited for a few moments until the water's surface momentarily rippled against his fingertips. He bowed his head and pulled his hand away before he removed his robes, discolored from sweat and labor, and started washing his clothing.

A soft breeze cooled him while the sun beat down on his bare back. After receiving his first set of tailored clothes six cycles ago, the head priestess of the Temple of Light instructed him to care for them on his own. He had since become quite efficient at doing his laundry. At the least, the chore gave him ample reason to take a refreshing bath after.

Once Hari finished with the laundry, he clambered around the bank until he found a large stick to serve as his link to the land, warding off any mischievous marin that might fancy he belonged to the water. After wading in and jabbing the stick into a crevice, Hari washed himself. As he submerged his face in the cool waters, a muffled echo reached him beneath the surface. Hari breached the surface and looked towards the woods, and as the distant scream grew closer, he rushed to the rocky banks.

A teenage boy suddenly burst into the clearing, tumbling into the dirt. He looked about Hari's age—probably no older than thirteen or fourteen cycles—freckled with dark brown hair and utterly red in the face. The boy let out one more scream and wheezed. Hari stared at him, wide-eyed, but managed to pull his gaze towards the forest edge. As he squinted, he could just barely see the outline of a hulking creature in the woods behind the boy. Hari kept looking at it, sure that he recognized the spirit's appearance, though when he blinked, the form had faded from view. *Too large to be a* diwati, *and too angry. If I'm careful, I should be fine getting home, but...*

"Oh, spirits. Oh, karma. I'm—" the other boy sputtered as he laid on the ground. "I'm alive!"

Hari's expression turned to annoyance as the boy pulled himself up into a sitting position. After grabbing a still-damp robe, Hari wrapped it around his waist and kept his distance, gripping the stick tightly. Hari cleared his throat and called out, "Wh-what are you doing here?"

"Hey! Did you see that?" The boy jabbed a finger in the direction of the woods. "I had to run real fast from...something! I couldn't even see what it was, but it sounded big and loud and really scary. Maybe it was a spirit! Did you hear it?" He blurted out the words rapidly and paused only to take a breath. "I wonder why it let me go..."

*You weren't worth the effort of leaving the forest.* The forest's spirits weren't always kind to travelers, and based on first impressions, Hari wouldn't be surprised if this boy had done something to upset the woodland spirits. He winced and slowly asked, "That's good to



*Beautiful and mischievous, these water spirits take on the appearance of young women, while their lower halves look more akin to the tails of snakes or eels. Though inclined to teach disrespectful people a lesson, they nonetheless serve as guardians to bodies of water.*

know, but why are you here?"

"I already said I was running away from that spirit." The boy looked around, his gaze fixed on the forest canopy. "Do you know where the temple is? I need to go there, and I can't see it from here."

"The Temple of Light doesn't welcome strangers. Much less..." Hari looked him over. "Strange boys."

"Strangers? Oh, right." He held out a hand and grinned at him. "I'm Kaibo Angalang! I'm from the village. What's your name?"

"Village? You mean Baya-Marong?" Hari did not shake his hand. "I'm Hari-Moto."

"Oh. That's a northern name, right? Are you a traveler, Hari-Moto?" Kaibo began rummaging through his pack. "You want some bread? I think I have some left—oh, wait. No. It's all crumbly now. You still want some?"

"No thanks," Hari replied. His expression turned to disgust as the boy stuffed the crumbs into his mouth. "You can just say 'Hari.'"

"Where are you from? Ka-Ago?"

"No, just...nowhere."

"So you're a traveler! We get travelers in the village sometimes." Kaibo glanced towards the creek, his gaze honing in on the laid out garments. "Are these your clothes? You really should hang them up so they dry well, you know. And your robe's wet, too!"

"I know it is." Hari pulled the damp cloth tighter around him.

"Do you have any dry clothes? There's a breeze, so you might catch a sickness."

"I'll be fine," Hari said. "I don't get sick easily."

Kaibo rummaged through the sack again. "I brought an extra shirt. You can use it."

"Uhh, you don't have—"

Kaibo shoved a coarse-looking shirt speckled with crumbs at him. As it unfurled, a doll fell out of it.



*These spirits inhabit remote woods that see little permanent interactions with human society. Shy and territorial, diwati very rarely directly interact with trespassers, instead opting to curse those who dare bring harm or disrespect to their homes. However, people claim that the diwati sometimes take on humanoid forms to lead lost humans back out of the forests.*

"Huh." Hari picked up the doll and handed it back to Kaibo. "That… yours?"

"Nope. It's my sister's. Aya's. She likes to have it when she sleeps, but she forgot it before she left with the priestesses."

"And that's why you're going to the Temple." Hari grimaced. The head priestess intentionally made new recruits leave their belongings behind to help sever any ties that might distract them from their training. "They don't let men into the Temple."

"Huh?" Kaibo cocked his head. "Why's that?"

"Only women are allowed to become priestesses—any who they think are worthy."

"That's what they thought about my sister," Kaibo replied softly. He smiled at Hari. "I don't wanna be a priestess, though. I just gotta give Aya her doll."

"The priestesses will just turn you away. They probably won't open the gates, or even speak to you."

Kaibo stared at him for a few moments, mouth agape. "What makes you think that?"

Hari hesitated. "I—"

"Ah!" Kaibo's eyes widened. "They wouldn't let you in. Is that why you're out here, Hari?"

"Not exactly." Hari stepped towards his basket for some more distance between him and Kaibo. "This isn't about me—"

"Once I come back from the Temple, we can go to my house if you have no place to go." As Kaibo looked at him before his grin warped into a somber smile. "Aya's room is empty now, so I bet my ma wouldn't mind you staying with us."

"I don't need your pity," Hari snapped.

Kaibo clamped his mouth shut.

Hari's mind scrambled for a way to end this conversation, only then realizing he was usually the one waiting for someone else to send him off. "You need to go home, Kaibo. You won't get to the Temple, and you'll end up going through the forest in the dark if you keep trying."

"But I have to give—" Kaibo stopped as he noticed Hari's pointed expression. He looked toward the forest edge. "Wait, will the spirits come after me again?"

"Maybe." Hari watched the color drain from Kaibo's face. "I don't know."

Hari averted his gaze and started stuffing his wet clothes into his basket. *The head priestess would be livid if she found a recruit with a doll. She'd blame me, and it's not even my problem.* A soft breeze blew between them.

"Should I…should I just run through again? That worked last time, right?"

"*Nunos,*" Hari began as Kaibo stared blankly at him, "smaller spirits from the earth—won't really bother you if you ask them kindly to stay out of your way before you start walking. Same thing with the…fairy spirits."

"Oh, I kinda did that," Kaibo muttered. "The big one showed up after, though."

"You didn't do anything that would disrespect them, did you?"

"I don't think so." The other boy paused. "What would count as disrespect?"

Hari let out a long sigh. "I don't know. Like stomping over an anthill, snapping off branches, sitting under a tree without asking," he listed, looking expectantly at Kaibo.

"Oh, I didn't do any of that." Kaibo paused, jaw slack. "But I had a rotted banana, and I just kinda threw…it…away."

Hari squinted at him. "Yeah. That would do it. Some spirits like an offering, but you dumped your trash in their home." He hoisted the basket over his shoulder. "You're on your own with that."

"Huh? Wh-what can I do?"

Hari shrugged. "I dunno. Guess you'll have to run fast."

"I didn't mean to…" Kaibo nervously gripped at his tarp sack. "Can I say I'm sorry?"



Nuro

*Nuno are spirits that possess rocks, piles of dirt, and other earthly objects found on the forest floor. They tend to keep to themselves unless disturbed, which happens often because of their taken forms. Nunos have the power to inflict extreme fortune or misfortune on those who step on them, intentional or not. A common practice to avoid their ire is to kindly ask them to move out of the way.*

"Might work. But that's your problem now."

"Alright. I guess I'll try that," Kaibo said in a small voice. He perked up for a moment, managing a smile while waving at the other boy. "Bye, Hari! Stay safe and spirits guide you."

Hari gave the other boy a half-hearted wave and started walking away. After a few moments, he heard his name being called. Hari stopped mid-step and turned around. Kaibo had jogged up to him, holding out a spare shirt.

"I told you I don't need it."

"It'll get colder once it gets dark, and I won't need it if I'm running. Besides, I don't really have anything to thank you with, and ma always said we have to be grateful for the help we get."

Hari stared at the garment, brow furrowed. "I just told you what I knew. Didn't really do anything for you," he muttered. However, seeing Kaibo's expression, Hari had a feeling the other boy would only persist. As he took hold of the warm shirt, Hari remembered his grandmother's words: *'We at the Temple of Light guide those who do not understand the spirits.'* Hari sighed through his nose. He met the other boy's gaze and added, "This is a lot to take for just advice. You're...from Baya-Marong, right? Do you think you can make your way back?"

"I think so." Kaibo scratched his head. "I'm just gonna head up the Temple, and then I'll—"

"You won't make it there." Hari scowled at the other boy and added, "You probably won't even make it home on your own."

"I won't?" Kaibo paled. "Wh-what should I do?"

"We'll make it there if we head back now," Hari muttered, turning away. He changed into the dry shirt and a pair of discolored pants, swatted away the crumbs, and started walking back into the forest's edge. "Do what I tell you, when I tell you. Understood?"

Despite his furrowed brow, Kaibo straightened up. "I will!"

No more than a few steps into the woods, Kaibo came to a halt as Hari told him to stop. He looked to the other boy and mimicked him, each of them clapping their hands together in front of their chest and deeply bowing.

"Dear spirits, please move out of the way as we pass. We mean no harm and wish for safe travel through your home," Hari recited calmly.

Kaibo watched him before taking the hint from Hari's sidelong glance. "Dear spirits, please move outta the way. We mean no harm, and I just wanna safely get home through your...home." He grinned as Hari raised a brow and continued walking.

"D'you think we'll see some spirits, Hari?"

"Probably not. Most people can't see them."

"Eh? But the stories—You sure do know a lot about this stuff."

Hari snorted. "I just know the stories."

"Ma likes those stories, too, but my sister does better at remembering than I do. And my Ma didn't say much about prayers...Did your ma tell those stories?"

"No."

Kaibo blinked as the other boy turned his head away. "Oh? Then where'd you hear them?"

"I," Hari began, clearing his throat. "I read them."

"You can read?" Kaibo's eyes bulged. "You're amazing! Ma taught Aya and me, but I never got good at it."

"You just need to practice," Hari muttered beside him.

"That's what Ma—"

"Shush. Don't speak so loud," Hari whispered.

Kaibo tilted his head. He could still hear the chorus of forest critters and the breeze blowing through the branches and leaves. His gaze then followed Hari's finger pointing to a fallen tree trunk covered in moss and vines.

"See that? Remember what it looks like."

"The stump? Okay, but why?" Kaibo asked, matching Hari's volume.

"Just have a feeling. Now, come on."

*Tikbalang*

*Tikbalangs are powerful spirits that take on the form of a large man with a horse's head and hooves for feet. They're believed to arise from the spirits of travelers who meet unfortunate or untimely ends; as a result, they often act malevolently against humans, especially those who trespass into their territories. At best, they trick people with illusions, hindering their journeys while otherwise leaving them alone.*

"Whatever you say." Kaibo smiled at his companion, though Hari just kept walking forward. The pair continued their trek with Kaibo's occasional commentary on the surrounding woods. After what felt like nearly a half-hour to the boys, Kaibo halted when Hari glanced up at the forest canopy. "How long have we—" He cut himself off as he stared ahead. "Hey, Hari, didn't we already pass that?" He pointed at the fallen trunk no more than six paces away.

"Yeah. Good that you noticed." Hari pulled off his shirt. "It's messing with our senses. Turn your shirt inside out, and that should help."

"What's messing what?" Kaibo followed Hari's orders, glancing around again as silence surrounded them. He frowned at Hari, who had started squinting at something ahead.

"A *tikbalang*," Hari murmured quickly. A pair of red, glowing eyes stared at them, the creature's hulking frame blocking the wooded path ahead. Deep in its home, the tikbalang had enough power for it to manifest a more solidified spiritual form. "Head and hind legs of a horse. Body of a man...We're probably trespassing in its territory, Kaibo."

The other boy looked in the same direction of the creature. At that moment, the tikbalang stepped forward, the underbrush suddenly crackling under the weight of its hoof. "There, in the brush. What made that—" Kaibo yelled, as he instinctively took a step back.

Hari clasped a hand over the boy's mouth and hissed into his ear, "It's the spirit. Remember what we agreed. You have to speak when I say so."

Kaibo slowly nodded, eyes widened at the invisible creature.

"Spirit of this forest, we would like to safely pass," Hari said.

The tikbalang left another hoofprint as it drew closer to the two boys. Kaibo tried to pull back again, but Hari kept a firm grip over his mouth. He even tried to dig his heels into the ground, though Hari just pushed him forward.

The spirit took another step towards them.

"We know that this one has disrespected your home," Hari continued, "and he regrets his actions." Hari maintained his hold on Kaibo, trying to abate the other boy's panic as the spirit halted directly in front of them. The tikbalang bared its teeth, lowering its equine muzzle towards them. When a warm breath blew over their

faces and shoulders, Kaibo let out a muffled sob. "He means now to apologize." Hari removed his hand from Kaibo's face, pulling back from the tikbalang's snout.

Kaibo opened his mouth, though he managed only a gasp. He glanced back to Hari.

The tikbalang began to open its jaw, its tongue unfurling from within. Hari quickly met Kaibo's gaze, wide-eyed with beads of sweat dripping from his brow.

"I—" Kaibo swallowed. "Uh, dear tikbalang, I'm really sorry about tossing that food into your...house earlier today, I think. I didn't mean it, and I didn't know. I won't ever do it again, and uh..." He gritted his teeth, as a furious whinny from the spirit sent another rush of air at them.

Hari held Kaibo firm, both boys staring aghast. He watched the tikbalang raise its leg to stamp down on Kaibo, crimson gaze still bearing down on them. His mind raced for what the priestesses, what his grandma would say. "Some—" Hari stopped. He wasn't like his grandmother or aunt. He never thought he'd have to face a tikbalang of all things, nor could he, so he grabbed Kaibo's arm, the only action he could think of in that moment.

Kaibo heard Hari's panic, as the brush shifted under the tikbalang's movement. Blinking, he looked ahead at the invisible creature and then breathlessly blurted, "I'm, I'm so sorry that I'll return with some...uh, tea! And bananas and food—to make up for it. I'm so sorry. Please let us pass!"

The tikbalang stopped moving. Hari tightened his grip on Kaibo's bicep, ready to pull him away in case they needed to flee. Then, the tikbalang's red gaze flickered before its horse-like form disappeared with a breeze that blew over them. At last, the sounds of the forest resumed.

"Wh-what happened?"

"You appeased it."

"I did?"

"You did." Hari whistled. "You thought of the offering."

"Yeah! I remembered Ma putting a tea bowl out—by our door. She'd say spirits get thirsty, too."

"That's good. But you better follow up on that offering."

"I'll have Ma pick out the best food!" Kaibo called out with a grin.

Hari scowled, but even he couldn't help relinquish a small smile. "Don't make promises you can't keep."

After an hour of traversing the downhill trail, the boys reached the edge of Baya-Marong. The village was little more than a gathering of straw-roofed shacks propped up on thick, bamboo stilts. Hari sighed with relief. Kaibo had unrelentingly chattered during their trek, asking about his home and family, to which he either feigned noticing a spirit or ignored him entirely.

"Can you get home from here?" Hari asked, stopping in his tracks.

Kaibo nodded. "My house is on the other side of the village," he said, pointing in its general direction. "Are you going?"

"Yeah."

"Oh." Kaibo frowned. "Don't you wanna come to my house? Ma will make dinner for us."

"I don't think I should."

"Why not?"

Hari grimaced. He remembered visiting this place only once, maybe four or five cycles ago. Even then, the trip had been brief, as he didn't ordinarily have permission to leave the temple. By his grandmother's whim—before his aunt succeeded her as the head priestess—he had gotten fitted with the clothing that now filled his basket. Just thinking about it made his stomach churn, though an obscene growl also emanated from his midsection, the day's labors catching up to him.

"You're hungry, huh?" Kaibo leaned with a cheerful smile. "Ma makes the best food. Come on!" He tugged at Hari.

Hari scowled at him, but his stomach made him dread the trek back to the temple. "Fine, but I'll eat and that's it."

Kaibo continued forward, thinking aloud, "I wonder what tikbalangs like to eat…"

As the boys passed through the village proper, there was a strong smell of earth mixed with the stench of feces. Hari couldn't tell if it belonged to man or animal, though; chickens clucked as they ran freely, while a handful of goats and cows stayed in pens. He scrunched his nose and glanced back towards the trail, pausing as orange rays of light poked through the green veneer of the forest-covered hillside. A tapestry of trees obscured the walls themselves, but over the verdant peaks, he spotted the Temple of Light's terraced roofs. The last time he visited Baya-Marong, he couldn't even see over the thicket. He then turned back around to continue following Kaibo. Children wearing sacks for clothing raced around the village, squealing as they played. Men and women alike trudged between homes: working, bartering, and gossiping. Hari even spotted a fancy covered wagon hitched to two chestnut horses, likely belonging to a traveling merchant.

Kaibo led him to a cottage set apart from the rest of the village. The boy opened the door and shouted, "Ma! We got a visitor."

Hari glanced around and noticed rolls of cloth, a few dyed in different colors, propped up against the wall. A half-finished robe laid on a table beside a spinning wheel. "Is your mother a seamstress?"

"Yeah. She does the sewing for the priestesses too," Kaibo replied, puffing his chest out slightly. "It's a great honor for us."

Hari paled slightly. "I think I should—"

"Who's this now, Kaibo?" A fair-haired woman stepped out from behind a divider, holding onto a length of crimson ribbon. Her gaze slid to Hari, who stiffened under her scrutiny.

Hari stared back, mouth flattened in a line. He remembered this fair-haired woman, who had measured him during his last visit to the village. He remembered his grandmother instructing her to make several sets of white silk robes for him, styled differently from the priestesses' garb—he didn't have the right to wear those. Hari also remembered the seamstress sizing his robes differently to account for his growth, making a few large enough that he wouldn't have to return to the village for some time.

"Ma, this is Hari. He's a traveler who helped me, and he's hungry."

"Hari…Hari-Moto."

The seamstress approached, nodded at him, and smiled. "Welcome

to our home, Hari. I'm Acora. Acora Angalang. My husband isn't home right now to greet you, unfortunately."

"A pleasure to meet you." Hari paused—his grandmother's lessons on courtesy echoing in his head—before he stepped forward and bowed. "*Tiya* Angalang."

"Oh, no need for that. Just 'Acora' is fine. I don't need to feel that old yet." She lightly laughed before giving him another once over. "Though, I'm surprised to see a traveler of your age. You mustn't be any older than Kaibo."

Hari swallowed and nodded. "Fourteen cycles this summer."

"Oh. Not even a cycle apart." Acora looked to Kaibo, who had continued to sheepishly grin at them both since they entered. "Well, I just have to do the laundry before I make dinner. Will you stay until then, Hari?"

He straightened his posture and bowed. "Thank you for your hospitality. You are very considerate. And Kaibo was very eager to…*help*."

Acora raised a brow at her son's direction. She reached over and pinched his cheek. "Well, I'm glad something stuck." She glanced over at the basket. "We have some space in the back for your things, Hari."

"Hari's great, Ma," Kaibo chimed in. "He knows all about the spirits—"

"I'm sure it's a great story, Kaibo," Acora interjected with a smile. "But for now, laundry. Get some water from the well."

"Okay, Ma," Kaibo said and eagerly jogged out a back door.

Hari turned to Acora, holding up his hands in a plea. "I'm truly sorry, Acora. I don't want to be ungrateful, but I can't stay for—" He stopped as he saw her calm smile.

"I recognized you, Hari. Hard to forget the boy that lives with the priestesses," she said, folding her arms. "Thank the spirits Kaibo brought you home, instead of some undesirable. Especially with folks resorting to banditry nowadays." Acora paused and sighed through her nose. "Kaibo didn't disturb the priestesses, did he?"

Hari shook his head. "He made it to the hill, but…" He hesitated.

"So it *is* a story. We'll hear it at dinner then," Acora said, nodding sagely. She muttered under her breath, "Probably some reckless thing. Always with that child. One day, he'll anger an evil spirit." Her expression softened. "Thank you for watching out for him, Hari."

"He was just—" Hari grimaced, looking down at his feet. "I didn't intend it like that. It's nothing."

"The spirits rejoice with good deeds, reciprocated or not. The priestesses teach this, no?" Acora's gaze lingered on him. "You know, by the time we finish dinner, it'll be too dark to travel. You should stay for the night."

Hari held up his hand and bowed his head slightly. "I can walk through the woods just fine."

"I'm sure you can. You seem like you really know how to handle yourself…That isn't my point, Hari."

"Acora. I—I can't burden you for that."

Acora waved off the remark. "No trouble at all. Besides, you're a guest Kaibo invited. We have…a lot of space." She glanced at the rolls of cloth cluttering the walls. Then, she laughed and smiled at him with a knowing look. "You deserve the best of our home. While you're here, consider yourself family. Please."

Hari stared at her. His mouth twitched, unsure how he should look at that moment. He could insist on leaving now and drag himself back to the temple on an empty stomach. If he made good time, he'd have to get ready for the dinner, probably help with setting the tables, and then…And then, all of the priestesses, even his grandmother, would gather while he ate alone in his room. That would be his night until he went to sleep. Or, he could—

"How 'bout it? Dinner and stay the night?" Acora asked softly. She added in a light tone, "I'll make a fruit salad for dessert. Special treat."

Or he could have dinner in a home that welcomed him.

Hari felt dampness at the corners of his eyes. He swallowed and bowed deeply. "Thank you, Acora. I'll stay for the night."

# RED SKY AT NIGHT, BUILDER'S DELIGHT

by Juhani Taylor

🍃 NATURE     📖 RESOURCE

**M**any aspects of how climate and geography affect architectural styles seem obvious in hindsight. As worldbuilders, the challenge comes in thinking ahead and planning these often-subtle cues into the design of our settlements. A thatched roof would seem unusual in the middle of a desert, for example, unless there was a water source nearby where reeds grow.

In this article, both the direct and indirect effects of climate on architectural choices are examined, followed by an exploration into how the "rules" can be broken and what that means for our worldbuilding. By the end, this article will have offered an idea of how architecture tells a story about its location and how we might build this into our worlds in a way that conveys depth and meaning to our audience.

## DIRECT DRIVERS

At its most fundamental level, architecture is about fulfilling one of the basic human needs: shelter. Throughout nature, the desire to protect one's self from predators and the elements is innate to almost all animals. This should come as no surprise; after all, if a group of apes do not protect themselves from the cold rain or the tiger nearby, they will produce fewer and less healthy offspring than their savvier cousins. In this way, architecture can be viewed as a result of natural selection itself.

Fending off predators is perhaps the easier of the two requirements; sturdy doors and walls will see to that. However, climate and weather are the real drivers in the design of buildings.

Two main themes emerge when considering protection from the elements: heat and water. Humans typically want to keep their homes somewhere between 64°F and 70°F (18°C and 21°C).[1] In colder climates, buildings attempt to retain heat inside, while in hotter countries, buildings might keep the heat outside. In both cases, the transfer of heat between indoors and outdoors is the critical aspect to be controlled.

When exploring how one might build a home in locations far hotter or colder than the 64–70°F range, common trends emerge. One such trend concerns what architects call the "Window-to-Wall Ratio," or WWR (sometimes termed the "void-solid ratio"). This value is calculated by dividing the total surface area of all external windows by the total surface area of the external walls and windows of a particular building. Thus, a WWR of 0% indicates a windowless hut, while modern, glass-fronted skyscrapers approach 90% WWR. Modern building design guides discuss WWR's as a factor in "daylighting": the amount of sunlight that enters the building and its impact on the occupants' visual comfort and mood.[2] Typically, as the amount of light increases, the well-being of these buildings' occupants improve, but older windows had more than aesthetics to contend with.

Before the industrialization of modern glass production and the advent of double- and triple-glazing, windows were expensive, fragile, and extremely poor thermal insulators. The infamous Window Tax was first introduced in England and Wales in 1696 as an explicit method of taxing the upper classes by charging them proportionally to the number of windows in their residences.[3] Only the wealthiest nobility could afford to heat large homes filled with expensive glass windows.

This tax had two main effects on the social perception of wealth. As the tax rates were public knowledge, the general public could glimpse the level of wealth on display in a stately home simply

🍃 WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

*(Above) A building in Southampton, UK, built in 1830, with bricked-up windows to reduce the tax bill.*[5]

[1] Public Health England, "Minimum Home Temperature Thresholds for Health in Winter: A Systematic Literature Review" (PHE publications gateway number: 2014423, London, UK, 2014), 62-63; Head, K., et al. WHO Housing and Health Guidelines. *Report of the Systematic Review on the Effect of Indoor Heat on Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2018.

[2] Nik Ibrahim, N.L. and Hayman, S., "Daylight Design Rules of Thumb." *Conferences on Sustainable Building South East Asia*, Malaysia, 11-13, April 2005.

[3] William III. "1695-6: An Act for granting to His Majesty severall Rates or Duties upon Houses for making good the Deficiency of the clipped Money." *Statutes of the Realm* 7, 1695-1701 (1820): 86-94. [21 March 2020]: https://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol7/pp86-94 .

[4] Harford, T. "The window tax - an open and shut case." *Financial Times*, December 4, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/5e9f029e-987d-11e5-95c7-d47aa298f769.

[5] Wikimedia Commons. Window Tax.jpg. July 19, 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Window_Tax.jpg. *24 March 2020. Shared under CC BY-SA 3.0 license.*

*(Above) The characteristic myriad of windows in Venice's Procuratie Vecchie.6*

*(Below) The houses of Oia, over-looking the Santorini caldera.7*

by the number of windows. Conversely, there are many examples throughout the British Isles of buildings dating back to this time with bricked up windows.4 This simple solution allowed home-owners to avoid a tax calculated on the number of windows in their abodes. However, what message did this send to neighbors? In a time when social standing and appearance among the landed gentry was of paramount importance to a nobleman, an admittance of being too poor to pay the fee might have been devastating. Or, perhaps, it was an act of defiance from a crafty lord, outsmarting the taxman at his own game?

In countries that see temperatures close to the range for the ideal home, there is more freedom in design choices. The city of Venice in Italy sees a year-round average temperature of 63°F (17°C) in a pleasant, coastal Mediterranean climate. Combined with a history of extraordinary trade wealth in the Late Medieval and Renaissance eras, these factors resulted in buildings like the Procuracies of St. Mark's Square, in which near-countless windows are separated only by narrow columns. The average WWR here is enormous compared to other pre-industrial buildings simply because little temperature control is needed.

Nine-hundred twenty miles (1,480 km) southeast of Venice lies the volcanic archipelago of Santorini. Here, where summer temperatures exceed 84°F (29°C), the famous whitewashed stone buildings sit low and embedded into the sides of the caldera. From these houses, *hypóskapha* (*hypó-* = "under," *skapha* = "vessels")

tunnel into the pumice hillsides. These building extensions provide additional shelter from the heat of the southern Mediterranean sun, and they crucially self-regulate building temperatures to stay in a comfortable range year-round. These buildings lie just 9° south of Venice, yet the windows are tiny by comparison, sunk into the thick stone walls to keep the interiors cool.

Conversely, 9° north of Venice is the Danish-German border, where the opposite problem is found: traditional architecture keeps the windows small to keep the heat *inside*. Just by looking at the windows of a building, we can learn something about the climate in which they are located.

There are other architectural features that are used in controlling internal temperature—overhanging roofs and balconies are common in hotter countries, as are windows that are recessed into deep alcoves. These features serve to limit the incidence of direct sunlight on the windows and thus reduce the heat transfer to the inside of the building. Water is mostly a complementary factor to temperature. It is an excellent thermal conductor, which means if a building is not watertight, it will transfer huge amounts of heat in or out. There are other issues that can arise from water ingress; mold, for example, can cause respiratory health problems if left unchecked.

There are also significant design choices made in response to precipitation. In locations with higher rainfall, snowfall, or even hail, flat roofs are shunned in favor of sloped roofs. If this choice seems blindingly obvious, perhaps it is. However, as with windows, there is nuance in roofs. With heavy snowfall, a sloping roof might accumulate an abundance of snow and hold it in place until disturbed, say, by a door slamming shut. The person who has just left the building then becomes the victim of a mini-avalanche as the snow dislodges from the roof. This incident can be avoided by making the roofs steeper, so less snow can accumulate before it slides off in

smaller amounts. Alternatively, small fences or rails can be installed at the lower edge of the roof to catch the snow, though special attention must be paid to how the snow is cleared before the weight becomes excessive. Where hail is commonplace, brittle roof tiles might be replaced with tougher metal, wooden panels, or thatch. Windows might also be sheltered with shutters or larger overhangs above them.

These ideas can be expanded further. While temperature control and waterproofness are decisions in basic building design, we can also consider whole structures designed with specific solutions in mind.

In some hot countries, tall towers can be found jutting above the adjacent low roofs with huge openings in the sides near the top. These are *bâdgir-hâ*, "windcatchers" or "windtowers" in Persian. They provide natural ventilation throughout buildings that are otherwise isolated from the outdoors for temperature control. Different combinations of these towers function

6 Pérez, N. Venecia, Italia - panoramio (16).jpg. February 24, 2012. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venecia,_Italia_-_panoramio_(16).jpg. 24 March 2020. Shared under CC BY-SA 3.0 license.

7 Leonard G. File:SantoriniPartialPano.jpg, April 22, 2007. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SantoriniPartialPano.jpg [Accessed 24 April 2020]

in various exacting ways, but their purpose is to create a flow of air. This cool breeze (without the accompanying sunlight) expels the hot air from inside. If we introduce water to the hot room, perhaps by deliberately capturing rainfall, this effect is amplified through evaporative cooling. Some of the room's heat goes into evaporating the water, and this vapor is then drawn out of the room by the airflow.

The ground, too, can offer solutions for temperature control. Geothermal power generation is a popular renewable energy source in the modern age, but it is not a new innovation. Ground-source heat pumps rely on the temperature difference between the surface and the soil some distance below it. In the winter, the surface will be colder; in the summer, hotter. This difference can be harnessed as a heat exchanger, allowing heat to be "moved" and used to heat a home or refrigerate food. In areas with more tectonic activity, such as near volcanoes, the temperature difference may be much greater too, allowing for

efficient heat exchange with magma that is near the surface. Iceland famously uses geothermal heat to keep its roads and sidewalks ice-free in winter by pumping 95°F (35°C) water just under the surface.[8]

The last major point we must consider of the direct drivers can be summed up in one word: resources. It is difficult to build a stone cathedral in grasslands without some mountains or quarries nearby, and a wattle-and-daub house would be out of place in polar tundra. There are too many combinations and factors to list here. It suffices to say that the resource availability for building is a logical continuation of climate-dependent building. Consider the core materials required—stone, wood, clay, etc.—and what quantities and varieties of each are available in a given region.

## INDIRECT DRIVERS

In the northern reaches of what are now Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia's Kola peninsula live the Sámi. They are an indigenous people distinct from Finns and Scandinavians in culture, language, and tradition. Most notably, the majority of their ancestral homeland, Sápmi, lies north of the Arctic Circle and thus sees midnight sun in the summer and polar night in the winter. In Kárášjohka, where the Norwegian Sámi parliament sits, winter temperatures regularly drop below -8°F (-22°C).

The majority of modern Sámi are urbanized, yet some still live in temporary tent shelters (*lavvu*) in the wild northern plains. Why? Aluminum and modern fabrics may have replaced wood and hide, but are these materials still inadequate for the cold climate?

*(Above) Traditional Sámi family in front of their lavvu, c.1900.[9]*

[8] Orkustofnun/National Energy Authority of Iceland. "Snow Melting." https://nea.is/geothermal/direct-utilization/snow-melting/

[9] Library of Congress. File:Saami Family 1900.jpg. Circa 1890-1905. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saami_Family_1900.jpg 24 April 2020

The 3,000 or so Sámi who live like this are *boazovázzi*, or "reindeer walkers." The Arctic landscape does not make for green pastures, so in winter, the herders must wander the countryside to feed their reindeer on lichen. This semi-nomadic lifestyle is not as necessary in the summer when leaves and grass abound, so they relocate to more permanent log cabins and cottages.

The Sámi are just one of many examples of how climate can affect architecture indirectly. The cold, unforgiving climate of northern Fennoscandia demands sturdy, thick shelter, yet its effect on local resources overrules that and necessitates the lavvu. This can be used in our worldbuilding to consider how direct drivers might affect other aspects of life, including the resource requirements of the occupants' profession. The Sámi are one example; another example would be fishermen who build their homes on stilts on the water's edge, allowing them to fish while keeping their home safely away from the water.

The salient point here is that incredible depth and richness can be achieved in our worldbuilding by simply asking the same questions one level deeper. These people live here because their food source is here, but what resources does that food need to survive? Food chains exist everywhere. The web of needs includes sunlight, water, warmth, and many other things.

## BREAKING THE RULES

The design of buildings can tell a story about the environment in which they were built. But, like many good stories, a particular interest should be paid to structures that buck the trend. So far I have focussed on pre-industrial architecture, and not without reason. Modern technology frees us from many constraints and allows for seemingly paradoxical design choices in architecture, many of which would have been nonsensical a mere century ago.

In Doha, Qatar, the traditionally styled Souq Waqif marketplace sits in the heart of the capital's old commercial district. It has the hallmarks of a pre-modern Middle Eastern marketplace: small shops in densely packed, rough-plastered mud-and-bamboo buildings with a maze of narrow alleyways connecting them. At one end, a wind tower helps to catch the breeze and waft the aromas of shisha and spices through the bustling crowds.

Less than two miles (3.2km) away across the West Bay Lagoon, the thirty-five skyscrapers of modern downtown Doha tower over the seafront. They defy logic with their glass façades in a country that sees 113°F (45°C) on an average summer day. And yet, they are not oddities. Why? The answer is obvious to us in the twenty-first century, but the notion of a fully air-conditioned building made of steel and glass is as alien to a pre-industrial

society as a sailless ship. While it comes with its own challenges, technology frees architects from the constraints of resources, temperature control, and shade versus insulation.

Much of East and Southeast Asia lies near the "Ring of Fire," a collection of volcanoes and earthquake-prone regions encircling the Pacific Ocean. In many of these countries, traditional carpentry and architectural techniques have allowed older buildings to withstand earthquakes for hundreds of years. The vertical growth of buildings in the last century presents a new problem: specialist wooden joints or masonry cannot protect a skyscraper from being shaken apart. Enter Taipei 101, so-named for its 101 floors and its location in the capital city of Taiwan. At over 1,640ft (500m) in height, it needs to protect itself not only from earthquakes, but the wind as well. Suspended between the eighty-seventh and ninety-second floors is a 728-ton steel sphere. Its job is to act as a tuned mass damper: a pendulum designed so that it naturally swings against vibrations and oscillations (such as those caused by high winds and earthquakes) and cancels them out. On stormy days, occupants can see the sphere move up to one meter to counteract the building's sway.[10] New challenges require new solutions.

But what happens when progress continues unchecked and is not controlled in a sustainable way? Perhaps we want to build a post-industrial city, a scene where the downsides of technology have finally caught up after failing to be controlled.

Jakarta is just such a city. It is the capital of Indonesia, and it is sinking—literally.[11] After securing independence in 1950, the new

Indonesian government had ambitions to turn their capital into a great international city. They poured funds into the construction of highways, national monuments, shopping centers, government buildings and other projects. Homes were built, and citizens were encouraged to move to the city. However, the underlying driver in these plans was more political than economic.[12] So, corners were cut. Building standards were guidelines, not rules. Anything to meet the deadlines set by an increasingly authoritarian president's vision of an emerging nation.

Sixty years later, these cut corners are bearing rotten fruit. Many of then-President Sukarno's projects involved setting thousands of tons of concrete atop Jakarta's swampy marshland; as a result, the city is sinking by up to ten inches (twenty-five centimeters) per year in some parts. Combine this problem with rising sea levels due to climate change, and here is a perfect storm of failing urbanization. Experts predict that by 2050, ninety-five percent of Jakarta will be submerged.

What is one to do in this situation? Indonesia's current president has announced plans to move its administration to an entirely new city that it will build, from scratch, over the coming decades. The new capital will be located approximately 760 miles (1,223 km) northeast of Jakarta on the eastern reaches of the island of Borneo, ready for the government's relocation by 2025.

This is not the first time a move like this has been attempted: Brazil, Burma, and Ivory Coast have all built new capital cities when they outgrew the old ones. We can use these settlements as templates in our worldbuilding. When a country

industrializes, its people inevitably flock to the cities. These urban centers must expand and adapt to the growing population, and they must do so sustainably or risk becoming overcrowded slums. This possibility is important to consider if we are building a world undergoing a technological revolution.

While technology is the cause of such problems, it can also be its savior. Transport infrastructure allows for fast travel between cities. Telecommunications remove the need for many people to live near their employers. The mobilization and miniaturization of many technologies mean production lines no longer need to be based in industrial centers. And if all else fails, one can just start again with a new city.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

It is said that one of the most sobering realizations of growing up is that everyone around you is living through their own stories, just as rich and complex as yours. So it goes with architecture.

Architecture tells a story, and that applies to any and all buildings. Within these stories are glimpses of design choices. We can invent stories for buildings just by asking questions like:
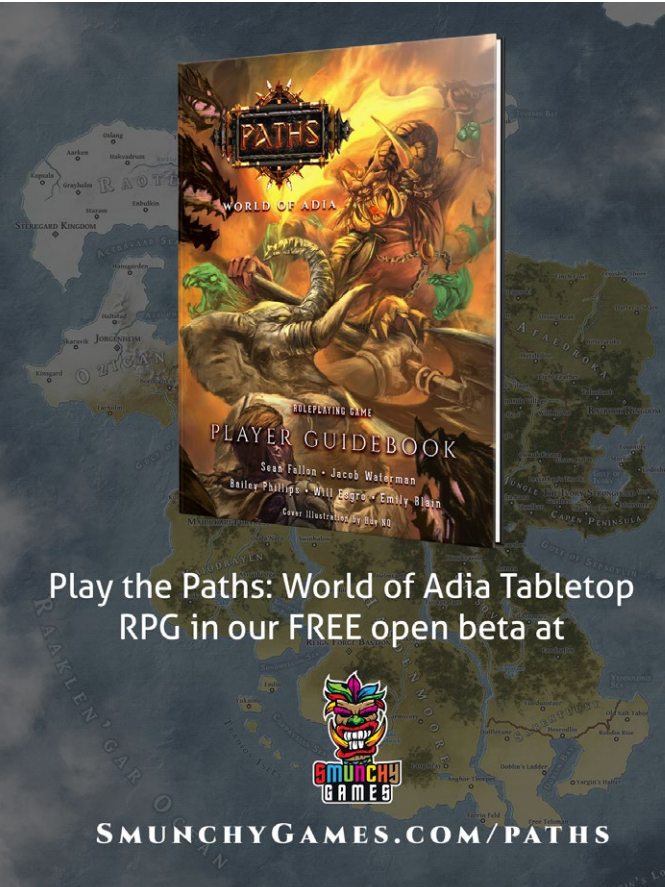
● Where are they built? Is the region hot? Cold? Humid? Arid? How might this climate affect the size of the windows, the shape of the roofs, or the thickness of the walls?

● What is the local landscape like? Cliffside homes have different requirements than those in flat grasslands.

● What natural resources are available for construction? Wood? Clay? Stone? Metal? If there are none nearby, how might residents source them?

● Similarly, what resources are there for the residents? Do they need to be mobile hunter-gatherers, or pastoral farmers? Or neither? How do they get their food, warmth, and money?

● What is the purpose of the buildings? Are they warehouses? Homes? Cathedrals? What are the requirements of these purposes, and how might they affect the designs?

If we ask these questions when we are worldbuilding, we can soon find that every structure has a history as rich and meaningful as any character.

[10] Limer, E. "How a Skyscraper Stays Upright in a Typhoon," The Code, *Popular Mechanics*, Aug 10, 2015. https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/design/a16819/tapei-101-mass-damper-record/.

[11] Mei Lin, M. and Hidayat, R.. "Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world." 13 August 2018. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44636934. 27 March 2020.

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# WORDS OF WORLDBUILDING CONTEST WINNERS

hosted by World Anvil

✤ CONTEST

**T**his year we're partnering with World Anvil to bring you the results of their worldbuilding contests. We hope that they inspire you to try something new with your own worlds. In the case of the "Words of Worldbuilding" contest, our two winners created some fun conlangs that we're excited to share with you.

## WE ARE KYKR, NOT FAY
*by Toblin*

The court of High Fay king Tháaltanassar lay at the foot of Ayla's Peak, the mountain at the heart of the Winterweald. The glade was covered by a thin sheet of snow, and the air was crisp. Small puffs formed with every breath from the assembled Fay. The king sat on his throne when Æþir, the Vindral representative, approached him from beyond the glade.

The king looked at him. "You know why you have been summoned, Æþir. Speak!" he said, gesturing to the snow-covered space in front of his throne.

"You have summoned me because you wish to stifle my people. Because you wish us not to expand. You have lent your ear to the Silfr and the trolls, but you have not heard us!"

The king's eyes flared. "Careful, Æþir!" he cautioned. "Your people have bent metal to your will and are using it to bring blood and death to your fellow kin. I had hopes

you might come to see the folly of your ways, but I see now that you are set on the path of destruction."

"My people are dying in the deep woods. Our men are devoured by the Silfr, the trolls steal our children, and you claim we have brought blood and death? Our mastery of metal is a desperate attempt to defend ourselves and our realm from the crimes of others! Something you, dear king, advocate. Evolve and adapt, you say." Æþir, usually calm in demeanor, found himself raising his voice.

A faint murmur of shocked and offended voices was heard from the gathered crowd as Tháaltanassar rose from his throne and walked to the end of the dais.

"Adapt and evolve through nature, not metal!" he snapped. "What your people have done is an abomination against nature as we know it, and we will not stand for it."

"Then what, oh mighty king, would you have us do?" Æþir's words slithered through his gritted teeth, laced with sarcasm.

"ENOUGH!" the king bellowed. "Your people are henceforth banished from the realm of Ayla! Any Vindral caught in the Weald within ten passings of the sun will be put to death." He gestured to the end of the glade. "Go! And may you find life elsewhere. Your time here is forfeit."

Æþir clenched his teeth, his hand fingering the grip of his bronze blade, before he came to his senses and bowed before the king. "As you wish, my lord."

And with these words, Æþir left the Court of the Inuelweri for the last time—to tell his people that they had been banished, and that they were no longer Fay, but something else. Something outside, something against the Fay. Æþir could barely stand to speak the language of the Inu, so he set a plan in motion in his mind to unify his people against all Fay. He knew that there were others in the world he could call on. Others who were not of the Fay; others that might help.

Æþir forsook the language of the Fay and began inventing new words to separate him and his people from the Fay. He declared that the Vindral were now "Kykr," which he described to them as meaning a deep union against the evil Fay: "One of us. Unity. Progress." As the Vindral fled across the Crimson Straits, they had already begun thinking of themselves as Kykr, rather than Vindral or Fay.

### ÆÞIR'S LEGACY

From that day forward, the Vindral considered themselves separate from the Fay. They would no longer live in glades or seek shelter in the woods. Their entire identity became one of active separation from the old ways. They refined their metalworking skills, and once they came into contact with the Illim of the Blood Coast, they learned of iron. The birth of the Kykr civilization was at hand, and the modified language Æþir created became the lingua franca of the Kykr. He named it Ósleiðr,

"Word of the Gods."

LISTEN TO *"We are Kykr, not Fay"* in *ATLÁGA VEKJA*

Felþira þøkkragi birkagi hirums Þaltanassar lægir þum rotúmer kellagi Aylis, kella ann skín rojarégi. Klífe slamtre tynn milkinégi oll nifra eysr meæ. Þykar hvindur skeín hylli øndemang fýr þøkkar farði. Birke birkutrún honnums án sittr, Æþir, estra hvindralégi, han askúnr fýr burtun klife.

**We Are Kykr, Not Fay** is also available in a constructed language—Atlága Vekja—created by the author. Read it in full on World Anvil, or listen to it on YouTube.

## PALINDROMES
*by Dylonishere123*

Oren looked up. The complex towered over him, easily the largest building he had ever laid eyes on. The glow of eerie green vapor radiated from the writing littering every surface. The shrine had existed for centuries as a lifeless reminder of horrors long past. Oren turned his attention to Loryt. An elven bard with black hair and brown skin, Loryt was young, almost too young to join their order.

She crouched low, studying the symbols on a slab lost in a pile of rubble at the entrance of the shrine.

"Can you read it? What does it say?" Oren asked.

She looked up and shook her head. "I can't translate it. The ancestors didn't have a written language as we understand it," Loryt whispered, as if the ancestors could hear. She sensed them around her, their silhouettes hovering somewhere between life and death in vaporous fluid.

"Then what do you call this?" Oren asked, pointing to the writing on the slab.

"Ancestral Alfen," Loryt began, tracing each letter engraved into the smooth, black stone with her fingers. "Every single word reads the same forward and backwards. Their language is nonsensical. There are no standards of sentence structure. Verbs, nouns, and objects shift and appear randomly in the sentence. We can't determine if it is meant to be read left to right, or right to left, and deconstructing a sentence can lead to words that don't even exist in the language. All of this is done to justify their love of symmetry and to fuel their obsessions," she stopped and pointed to the wall, "and there, you see that? This is a paragraph that does the same thing. One half of the text mirrors the other. Their writing was not bound by the same rules and grammar as ours. We think it was an art form to them. We drew pictures of animals we loved to hunt on our cave walls. The ancestral elves left behind their words."

"I prefer the pictures," Oren scoffed. "How do we keep them asleep?"

"I have no idea. I hear others calling me an expert, and I don't know why. No one knows how to read this, much less how to operate a tombshrine." Loryt stared at the symbols in silence as Oren prepared a response. She wondered why he seemed so confused, as if shocked by what he heard.

"I'm risking my life and the lives of twenty men and women to prevent another awakening. You're saying you can't do anything?"

"I didn't say that," Loryt said through a forced chuckle. "It's tricky. I won't make promises, but it's better than going in blind. It's certainly a better option than letting them wake up unimpeded." She paused and saw the looks of defeat staring back. "I can't read it, but this is a viral language. I can infer meaning from their text. This slab was a religious altar, for example," she finished, pointing to the altar, but her words didn't seem to ease their worry.

"I didn't know they had gods," Oren said.

"They didn't," Loryt replied, "The Symmetrical Logic is what they worshiped. They were obsessed. Look at the stones and how perfectly they fit into every space."

Oren looked at the floors, walls, and hexagonal columns. Each stone fit into its space with little to no gaps between. The dimensions of the room were deliberate, calculated to infinite fractions of an inch. The lines between the stones were hard to discern, and Oren strained to notice the contrast of black on black.

For a moment, Oren felt like he could almost visualize the geometric method used in the tombshrine's construction. Loryt spoke, but the words faded as he stared. The precision of every angle became clear, and Oren's head immediately began to throb. He turned away. The pain lingered for several minutes, and Loryt spoke when she noticed him rubbing his eyes, as if to push the painful sight out of his mind.

"Don't stare too long," Loryt said. "There are few things in nature with true symmetry. As an elf, I'm almost immune, but humans suffer the most if they stare at it for long periods."

They ventured deeper, twenty-two men and women who vowed to silence whatever ill will stirred in the shrine. Weeks ago, the green light had begun to shine. The last tombshrine to

activate sparked a massive conflict that led to many deaths. The tombshrine held thousands of ancestors within, each in a deathlike slumber during the final breath of their empire's fall in hopes that they would rise again.

The group passed rows of strange spheres; each contained the body of an ancestor suspended in jade-green fluid. Their slumbering forms twitched, a sign of the complex beginning to wake them up. The tension was heavy, each soldier jumping out of their skin at the slightest sound. Loryt was calm, collected, and driven.

With her guidance, the group navigated the corridors. Loryt paused routinely to gaze at the writings on the wall. Even Oren noticed their artistic quality. The sets of words lingered in full view, etched in prominent locations and centered on the wall. As with the rest of the complex, the opposite corridor wall possessed the same writing on display. Each stood as a perfect mirror image, and the layout of the complex's rooms did the same.

Many times, Oren asked if they were lost or going in circles. He found himself confused by the symmetrical floor plan; some rooms even had the same writings on the walls as ones they'd ventured into not long before. Loryt seemed to be the only one unfazed, diligently taking note of the writings, she followed directions only she could interpret.

The complex was empty. It was not only vacant of life, but the foundation of the tombshrine itself appeared void of personality and life. This absence only led to more confusion. If a room had anything within, it was the glowing words of the ancestors, or rows and columns of the strange spheres that stretched to the roof of the complex. Loryt stopped at the next threshold and turned to address the group.

"Here," Loryt began with a whisper. "The genesage lies in the next room. They were the highest members of their society, mutated beyond recognition. Touch nothing, say nothing, and we might succeed."

Nods of acceptance came as a reply. They ventured down a narrow hall with writing lining every inch of the walls, floor, and ceiling. The writing on each wall mirrored the other. The green vapor lifted and danced, drifting aside as they progressed. Oren felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. The hall seemed to stretch on for miles, each step taken with caution.

They came upon a room, its ceiling low and its walls lined with strange spheres far more ornate than the ones they had observed before. In the center of the room, the most beautiful sphere of them all rested higher than the others, perched atop a frame of translucent green stone. The group inched closer, Loryt and Oren taking the lead. They circled the central capsule, eyeing every corner of the room. Then, they heard something, a growl like a cat's, but distorted—unnatural. When they peered behind the central sphere, they saw something staring back. It stood over a stone tablet, raking its knifelike fingers over the words etched in the stone. The words glowed even brighter, and the central sphere began to rotate, floating in the air above its green stone perch. Loryt stepped forward.

"Hello," she began, doing her best to speak the elven tongue she'd grown up with in hopes there would be a connection. "Please step away."

The creature squinted at her, its eyes piercing through her gambeson. The creature wore nothing but a cloth sash around its waist, and its greenish-gray skin was like stone. It had no pores, no belly button, nothing that indicated a similarity to life today. It stood several feet taller than she did, hissing through sharpened teeth as she spoke. There was no hair on its body. Its ears were elongated to a point far longer than elves encountered in the world outside. Its teeth were jagged, lining a gaping maw. The lips, eyelids, and nose had been removed long ago, warping its visage into something Loryt could only refer to as monstrous.

The creature spoke. Its voice wheezed and rasped with every word while Loryt tilted her ear toward it on impulse in an attempt to understand it. She failed, losing track of each word in the layers of voices created by several sets of vocal cords. Her heart raced, and her skin dampened with the slightest amount of sweat. The moisture made the air feel cool. The creature was weak, but to attack outright would only lead to her death. Her eyes darted over to Oren. He still took refuge behind the central sphere.

Oren's expression said more than her words could. He drew his sword and called out to the creature. The surrounding soldiers sought to make as much noise as they could to draw the creature's attention away. Loryt acted on impulse. The moment the creature's head turned, she pulled a dagger from her sheath and plunged it into the back of its skull. The death was silent, but when the body collapsed to the ground, the sound echoed through the entire complex. Oren glanced at Loryt. Her breathing was fast, her hands shaking as she dropped the dagger.

"Are you alright?" Oren asked.

"I'll be fine," Loryt replied, running her hands through her hair and shaking her head. She took a deep breath, sighing as she scanned the tablet the ancestor was using.

The tablet contained six words, each isolated in rows and columns. She looked up to the sphere above. It rotated gently, but still remained inactive. Oren followed close behind, peering over her shoulder as she prepared herself.

"Any luck?" Oren asked.

"I don't even know where to start," she said, shaking her head again. The soldiers patrolled the room as she knelt down and retrieved a book from her pack. Oren gave a sigh of relief that quickly turned to narrowed eyes and a groan when he realized the pages were blank. She thumbed through the first few pages and revealed her notes, scribbled and compiled over time. Finding a half-filled page, she began to write each word down exactly as it appeared on the tablet before turning to Oren.

"I need some space. This isn't easy to do," Loryt said. Oren stepped away to assist the others in their patrol. Her mind raced as she stared at the words. She read

through her notes, reciting them in her head. Make note of empathic context, she thought. She proceeded to read each word carefully. The letters meant nothing. Each character, given a sound by those who study the language, was simply a piece of the whole. The resulting word's meaning depended not on its composition, but on the appearance and aesthetic of the word.

She gazed at each word as she wrote the emotions they invoked. Each emotion was powerful, sudden, and in some cases, overwhelming.

- *LaisilisiaL*: Pleasure, success, pride
- *KorproK*: Negativity, rage, fear
- *TersreT*: Pain, suffering
- *LowoL*: Positivity, impatience, anxiety
- *RithtiR*: Negativity, anxiety, loathing
- *SerasareS*: Completion, fulfillment

Loryt thumbed through her notes again, trying to push out the conflicting emotions the words brought out. She tried to keep her breathing under control, though her heart still raced. Eliminate lingual mirror, then note capitalized characters, she thought. She stopped, staring at the tablet and back to her notes, while she considered which word to choose. Oren stood off to the side, tapping his foot when he wasn't pacing.

"What's taking so long?" he asked.

"I can't decide," Loryt began. "I still haven't determined if the language expresses emotions in the writer or the reader. Each word can imply intent, but my own emotions can cloud that." She rubbed her temple with her hand and sighed, "If I read a word and I feel fear, I don't know if that fear comes from the writer, or myself."

"So it's just a guess?" Oren asked, trying to keep his voice down.

"The most educated guess you'll find, yes," Loryt replied, "and that's better than doing nothing. At least we have a chance." She pointed to the word that shimmered brighter than the others: *RithtiR*. "I know this is not what we need since the ancestor was using it, but the emotions don't line up as well as I'd like. Why would the writer loathe this option? It could be my emotions, but it could be a slave that etched these words into stone and I'd never know it did the opposite of what we want."

"So we should prepare to move," Oren began, his voice raised so all could hear. Loryt replied with a solemn nod. "Go on then."

She reached out and lightly touched the word she believed fit best, *SerasareS*. The ground shook as light burst forth from the tablet. Loryt turned to Oren, her eyes wide and her lip trembling slightly at her sudden realization. A low growl rose, the unnatural call of the sleeping terrors waking up.

# COMMUNITY ART
curated by Anna Hannon and Tristen Fekete

This is a small section we've dedicated to our community's amazing worldbuilding artists. To sign up and submit your art for a chance to be featured in a future issue, apply here.

## MAOZI
*by Jesse Daniel*

Perhaps the most iconic and recognizable symbol of the "Rat Monarchy" is the *maozi*, an ancient First Era helmet resembling that of a small northern temple with its low pointed "roof" and geometrically square like silhouette. The maozi's first mention in writing was in the classical First Era Opera The Rabbit Prince And 1000 Children, where on line 67, pg. 13,003, the narrator says: "And so the crimson 'demons,' of the rat denomination, stood forward with their maozi upon their head, with their lowly roof and pointed lid."

*See more of Jesse's work on Reddit.*

Monster Jagter se Gids tot die Slagfelt

Monster Jagter Eenheid

Ons is die son wat
deurskyn in die duisternis.

Ons is die swaard wat
die monster jag.

Ons is die ruiters wat
kom om jou te red.

Ons is die
Monster Jagter Eendeid.

### Spinnekoptrol

Most found in the area around the area of Die Swartwoud in the western parts of the Slagfelt, the Spidertroll is a formidable foe, capable of tearing a lesser man limb from limb in a instant and slowly liquidizing his insides into a soup which the beast then happily drinks. Its advise that hunters bring along experienced veteran for this beast.

### Drie Ooguil

The mountains around Knollvik are famous for this massive hunting bird that is believed to be distantly related to the Coral Roc of the western Coral Hightlands. It is worshiped by local people as the greatest hunter for its believed that the great bird makes no sound as it dives down onto its prey giving them no warning of the coming end. Around Knollvik watch the sky

### Verkleurslang

Among the many monster of the Slagfelt none can claim to be more elusive then this dragonoid cobra of the Bloedwoud. Once it was vastly more wide spread but a keen interest in their colorshifting pelts from the nobles lead to them now only remaining in the most remote of outlay areas, this is no small blessing as if they were to regain their former numbers it would be a great peril to small villages.

Knollvik
Jagter Hoofkwartier

1. Jagter Hoofkwartier
2. Jagters Mark
3. Eendeid se Herberg
4. Die Goue Slang Kroeg
5. Die Swart Wark Kroeg
6. Knollvik Ystersmid
7. Algemene Handelaar
8. Knollvik Klerewinkel

## MONSTER HUNTER'S GUIDE TO THE SLAGLEFT
### by Josef Steyn

The guidebook shows a backwater region of one of the larger kingdoms that has been left to its own devices since war broke out in the east. The local monster population has been on the rise since the militias have been mostly conscripted, causing the Monster Hunter Unit to try to recruit folks that are too old or too young to be pressed into military service. Sadly the newcomers don't know the full extent of the horrors that await them in these dust- and smog-covered lands. Only a handful survive to tell their strange tales to any who would listen.

See more of Josef's work on his Artstation portfolio.

# RESOURCES!

## BLENDER

### by Tristen Fekete

Blender is a free, open-source 3D modeling and animation program. It's a great tool to use for sculpting, rendering, setting up scenes, checking perspective, and more! Though it has a learning curve, it is well-supported with many tutorials and walkthroughs from all over the community.

Using 3D modeling is a great way to speed up your digital illustration process, and it is becoming a common practice for concept artists, illustrators, and graphic designers. Give it a try!

## MAP TO GLOBE

### by Dylan Richmond

Map to Globe is a free online tool that allows users to upload an image of their world map and apply it to a 3D globe. It is an incredibly helpful tool for those that struggle with visualising their map, highlighting the problem of distortion when solely designing a map in 2D.
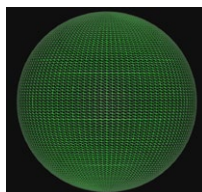
Map to Globe can also generate maps, make rotation animations, and serve as a tool to sketch on the map while in globe form.

## SIRDATCS AT WAR *(next page)*
### *by ObsoleteGoat*

"Within a crypt, lost deep in the remote area of the Shadow-Fell, a tomb was found; the last resting place of a demon, sealed there long ago. Alongside the coffin there lay an ancient tome, naming the sealed beast to be a Sirdatc. As these stories often go, the quest for knowledge led the explorers to prise open the demon's tomb and, from it, a fiend arose."

Sirdatcs are a unique type of immensely powerful—but deeply flawed—demon. They are created by the demon prince of war, Nagaa'ya. She is considered to be the Queen of Conflict, battles, and the scars that wars bring to the world. When a battle cry is let out, Nagaa'ya listens; when an army falls, this demon prince claims the lost souls and makes from them a Sirdatc.

*See more of ObsoleteGoat's work on Artstation, and see more about the sirdatcs in* Sirdatcs, Servants of the Demon Lord Nagaa'ya *on Dungeon Master's Guild.*

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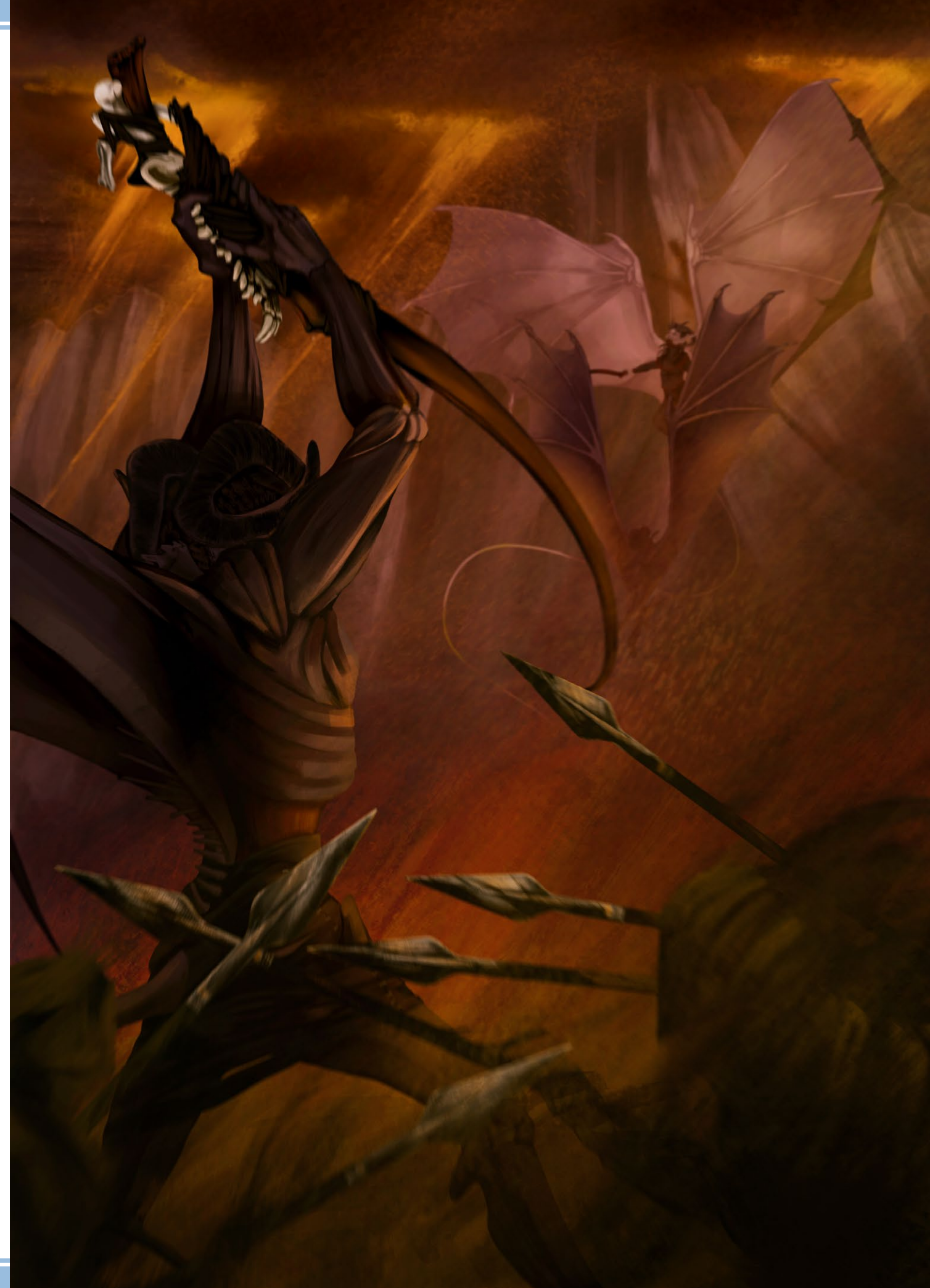
# ARTIST CORNER

by Tristen Fekete

This issue's Artist Corner will cover using perspective in your drawings, and a few tips to make it easier.

Linear perspective is "a type of perspective used by artists in which the relative size, shape, and position of objects are determined by drawn or imagined lines converging at a point on the horizon." Outside of the two-dimensional world, we see perspective every day. A building further from you looks smaller than a building of the same size closer to you. When attempting to translate that idea on to paper, it is very obvious when it is not done properly. When it is, linear perspective is an element many don't even notice.

"The School of Athens" by Raphael

*Raphael's "The School of Athens" is a great example of one-point perspective.*

There are three main treatments of linear perspective which all depend on how many vanishing points you use: one-point, two-point, and three-point perspective. Each is based on a horizon—an imaginary line which represents the viewer's eye level. Vanishing points are placed on this line and used to create the illusion of depth through collapsing your scene elements towards those points. Each type of perspective has its strong points, and which one you decide to use depends on your intent with the drawing:

One-point perspective is great for symmetry, aerial views, and drawing the eye towards a single, distant spot on the paper. It's one of the best, and easiest, ways to create noticeable depth.

Two-point perspective shines with close-up objects and street-level angles. It excels in a more lifelike depth than one-point.

Three-point perspective is mainly used for extreme angles. If you've ever stood in front of a tall building and looked upwards at it, its height creates a third vanishing point in the air which the edges of the building converge to. Three-point is fantastic in giving a sense of human scale to your drawings and can be used wisely to warp objects in interesting ways.
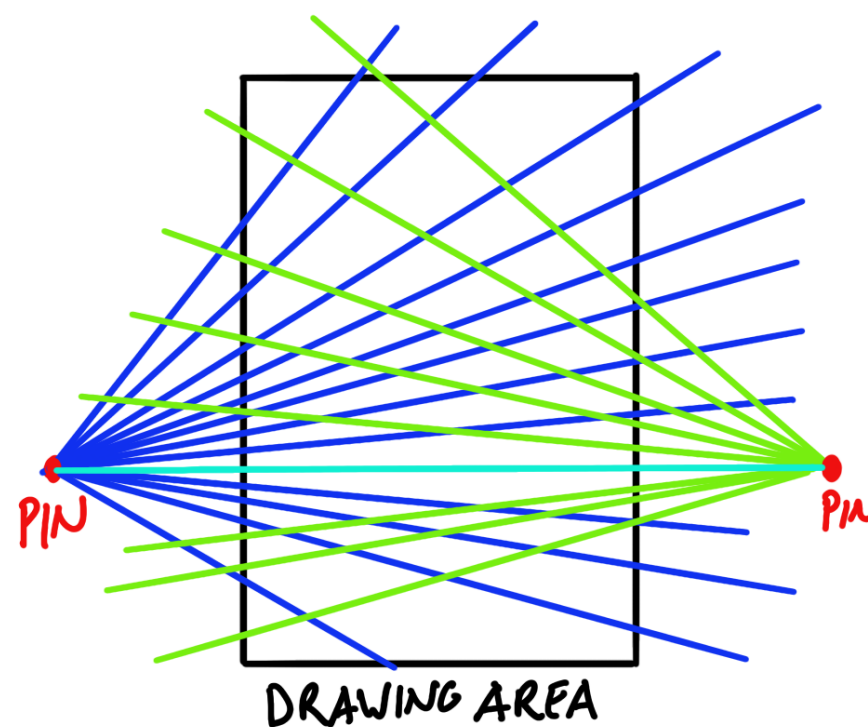
There are a few ways to go about creating your perspective grid. If you work traditionally, there's a clever trick you can use with string: get a spool of non-white string (so that you can see it more easily) and stretch it across the paper or canvas to create your horizon line. Tape, tack, or glue it down to the table or a piece of cardboard behind the paper or canvas. Choose the location of your vanishing point(s) and run a new piece of string from that point to the edge of your paper. Go around radially to cover the entire area you are drawing on.

Digital artists can use a similar method. If your program has

**PIN**  **DRAWING AREA**  **PIN**

**HORIZON LINE**

**VANISHING POINT**  **VANISHING POINT**
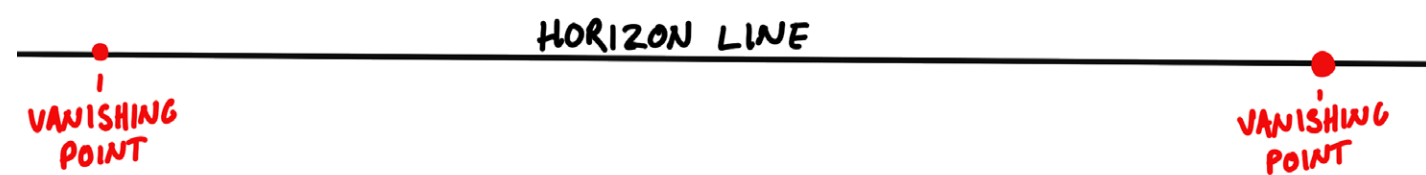
*What is new in your world's societies?*
*What is popular, or out of vogue?*

*What regional variations exist among your world's intelligent species/races?*

*What are your world's most controversial articles of clothing (or lack thereof), and why are they taboo?*

*Join us on Discord and sign up for weekly worldbuilding prompts!*

*#worldbuilding-wednesday*

WORLDBUILDING MAGAZINE

*Using Adobe Photoshop's pen tool is a quick and easy way to set up a perspective grid.*
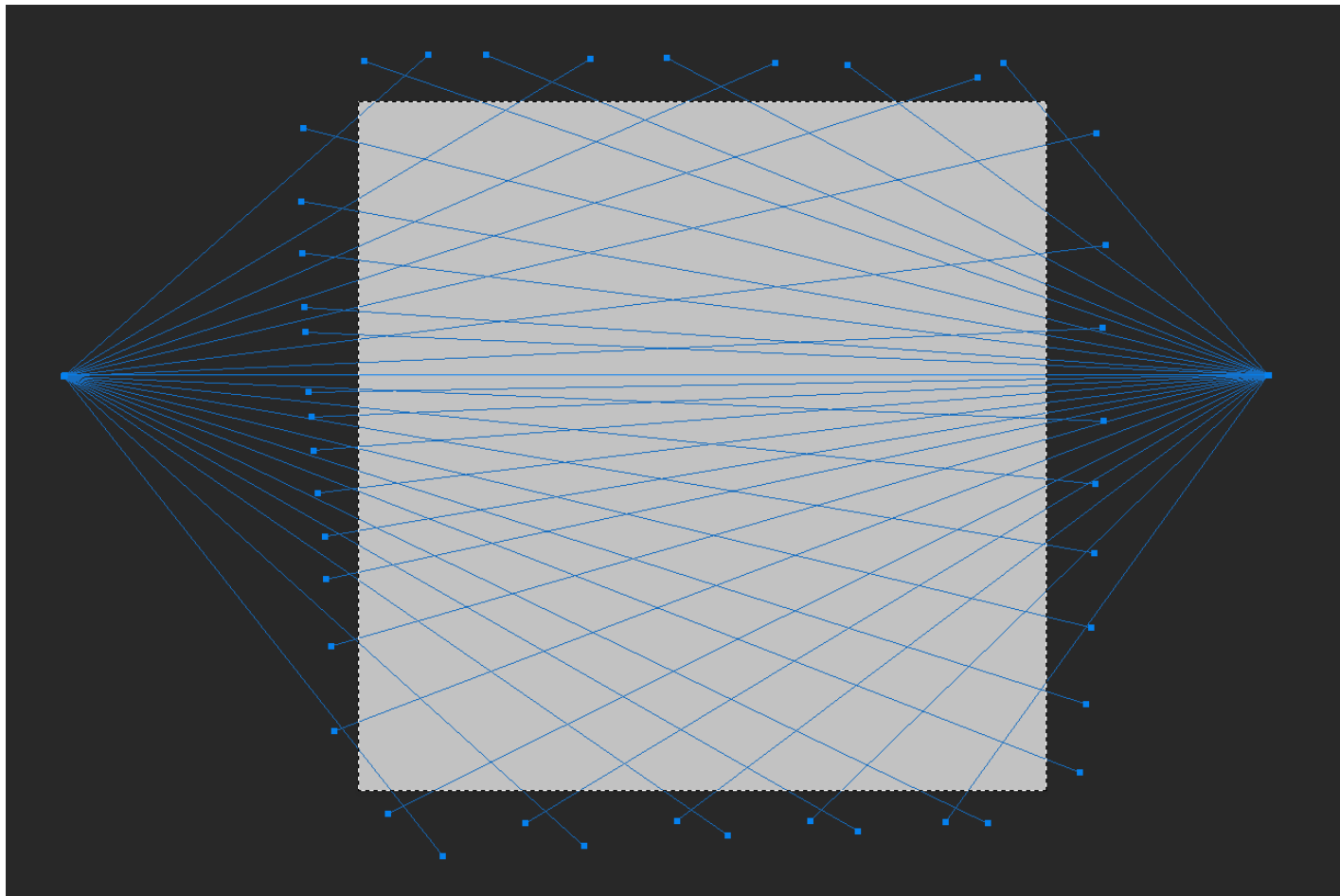
a bezier or pen tool, create a horizon line with that, choose your vanishing points, then create new lines from your vanishing points and stretch them around the canvas. If your program allows you to stroke these lines, it might help to create a new layer and stroke those lines so you can adjust opacity and lock it.

If this is all too much work, or you just want to make something quick, a sketched-in grid will help to keep your drawing roughly accurate. Always start with a horizon line, then imagine your vanishing point(s), and draw the grid expanding away from them. Some programs might have perspective tools to help with creating a grid as well. Another great resource are 3D modeling programs. They take a bit of time to learn, but once you do, you can use them to set a scene with basic shapes and a camera.

When placing your horizon line and vanishing points, keep in mind where you put them.

A horizon line low on the page is akin to a street view, so you'll have lots of sky space to fill. Placing it higher up on the page is similar to looking down at something. Moving your vanishing points far apart will reduce the warping that may occur in your drawings, but too far apart and it will eventually look flat. Keeping your vanishing points too close together will drastically increase the warping on your objects.

Linear perspective can be tedious to set up but is a vital component in supporting a piece of artwork. It's easy to notice when done poorly and invisible when done correctly. Practice and innovative tools can help you on your path to perfect perspective.

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# STORMING THE BASTILLE

by B.K. Bass

⛰ **HISTORY**    🤝 **POLITICS**    ⚔ **WAR**

"Certainement qui est en droit de vous rendre absurde est en droit de vous rendre injuste."

("Certainly anyone who has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit injustices.")

— Voltaire, *Questions sur les Miracles*, 1765

When one considers a government, it's only prudent to assume they have a number of buildings that serve practical purposes in their administration. Some have become landmarks—symbols of a nation's identity. Many of them stand for philosophical ideals, cultural heritage, or as bastions of authority. Among these are the White House in America, the Kremlin in Russia, and the Forbidden City in China. Out of these landmarks and others like them, one could argue that few have been as infamous a symbol as the Bastille in Paris, France.

## THE FORTRESS

Construction on the Bastille began in the mid-fourteenth century, under the direction of King Charles V, during the Hundred Years War. Intended as a defensive structure against English attacks, it was originally designed to serve as a gatehouse in the city wall of Paris.[1] The structure was initially named the Chaste Sainte-Antoine. It was not completed until 1382 CE, under the reign of King Charles VI. When complete, the name was changed to the Bastide—Old French for "The Fortress"—which evolved into the moniker that we recognize today: the Bastille.[2]

The finished building more than lived up to its new name. It consisted of eight towers, each thirty meters tall and connected by walls three meters thick at the base. It was also surrounded by a moat, and beyond this was a series of secondary defensive structures. The interior of the Bastille contained two courtyards, officer quarters, barracks, an armory, dungeon cells, meeting chambers, a kitchen, and a chapel. The height of the towers offered soldiers a clear view in every direction, and they were all linked to one another by way of the curtain walls upon which troops could be shifted to defensive positions as needed.[1] Over the next two hundred years, the Bastille continued to serve as a military fortification under both French and English rule.
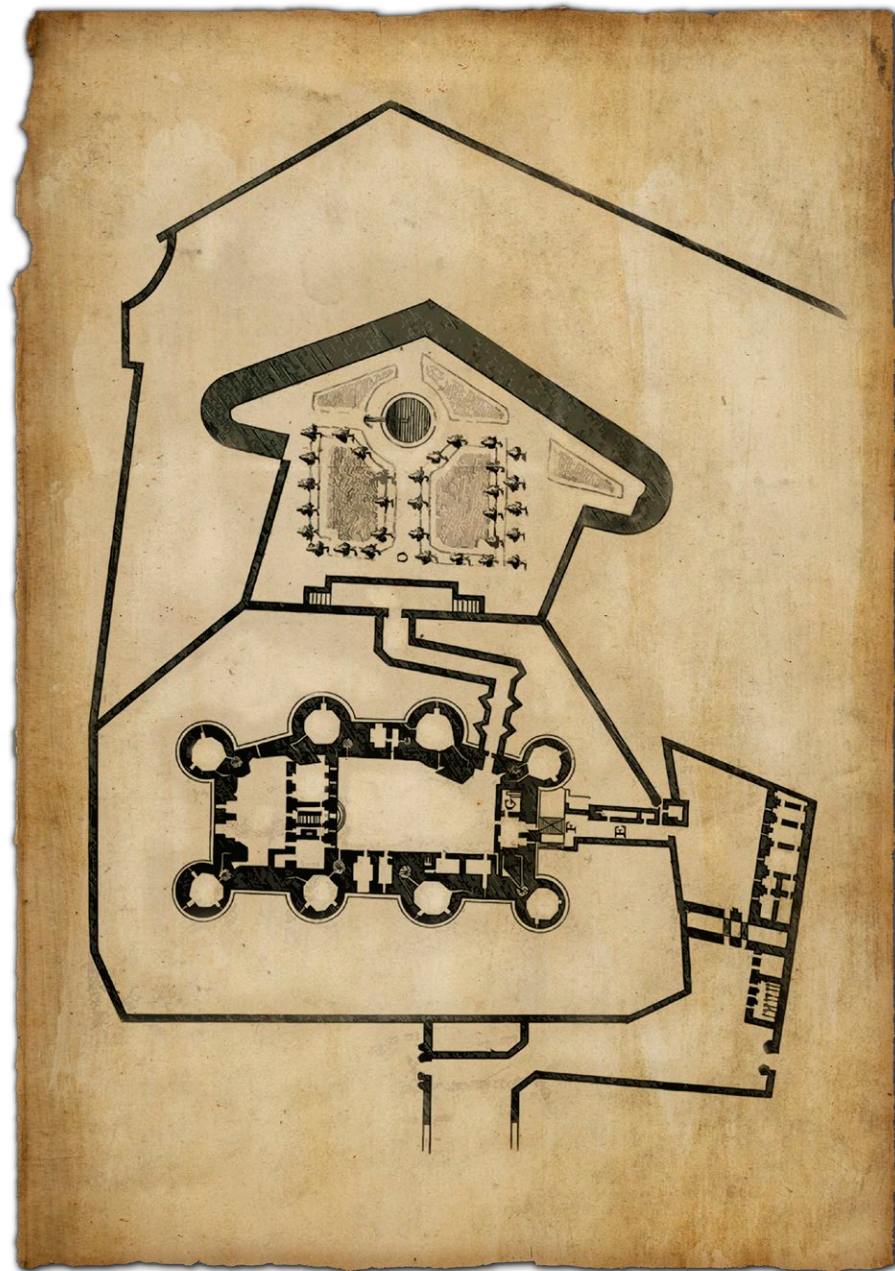
JOSEF STEYN

## THE PRISON

During the first half of the seventeenth century, during the reign of King Louis XIII, the Bastille was converted to a prison for upper-class enemies of the crown, many of whom were charged with the crime of high treason.

While the judicial system in seventeenth-century France was subject to royal decree and didn't consist of a codified national set of laws, there were still layers of jurisdiction that established a certain due process in political, legal, and criminal matters. A system of government officials, courts, and jurists worked to interpret various local traditions, royal decrees, and historical precedent to expedite legal matters in a systematic fashion.[3]

Those who found themselves in the Bastille often were not afforded this due process, or even an opportunity to speak in their own defense. Instead, the king needed only issue a *letter de cachet*—a letter of royal seal—to have a perceived enemy of the crown detained indefinitely. Many of these detainees were educated individuals who adopted ideals of the burgeoning Age of Enlightenment and spoke out against the power of the monarchy. Occupying the old officer's quarters from the structure's days as a military fortress, many of the prisoners stayed in spacious apartments and were allowed to bring furniture, books, and other amenities from their homes with them.[2]

As time passed and the common citizenry began to speak out against the crown, more and more of them were interred in the old fortress' original dungeons—small subterranean cells that were dark, damp, and infested with all sorts of vermin. By the 1780s, the fortress-come-prison was overflowing with detainees, as well asopald confiscated books and pamphlets that were considered to contain ideas which countered the status-quo. These squalid conditions, combined with the fact that the king could decree any person be imprisoned without any recourse or representation, led the Bastille to become a symbol of tyranny to the people of France.[2]

## THE STORM

During the reign of Louis XVI, France was in the grip of a crushing economic crisis. The primary legislative body at the time was the Estates-General, hosting representatives of the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. Because the representation of each of the three estates was divided equally, the commoners often saw themselves on the losing side of any vote due to the clergy and the nobility both voting in opposition. Seeing that this system would not bring about

ANNA HANNON

[2]. *History of The Bastille in Paris*. EUtouring. *eutouring.com*. Accessed February 16, 2020. https://www.eutouring.com/history_of_the_bastille_in_paris.html.

[3]. Breen, Micahel P. Patronage, *Politics, and the "Rule of Law" in Early Modern France*. Journal of the Western Society for French History, Volume 33, 2005. *Michigan Publishing*. University of Michigan Library. Accessed February 16, 2020. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0033.006.

[1] All About History Team. *All About The Bastille*. History Answers. *historyanswers.co.uk*. July 26, 2013. Accessed February 16, 2020. https://www.historyanswers.co.uk/medieval-renaissance/inside-a-medieval-monastery/.

TRUEDEVIL

# "NON SIRE, CE N'EST PAS UNE RÉVOLTE, C'EST UNE RÉVOLUTION."
# ("NO SIRE, IT'S NOT A REVOLT; IT'S A REVOLUTION.")
## —FRANÇOIS ALEXANDRE FRÉDÉRIC, DUC DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD-LIANCOURT, TO KING LOUIS XVI, JULY 15TH, 1789

reforms that the common people were clamoring for, many of those commoners who made up the Third Estate formed their own organization on June 17, 1789. This new body became the National Assembly, initially focused on creating a new constitution for France inspired by the recently liberated United States of America.[4]

By that July, civil unrest had grown to a boiling point. The National Assembly spoke out for the common people, but the opposition was firmly entrenched in their seats of power and proved to be unwilling to negotiate any compromise. Public demonstrations began on the 12th of July, resulting in violence between the protestors and the military.[4]

On July 14th, 1789, the revolution began. By this time the Bastille was nearly empty, and only housed seven prisoners. In the days prior, the military moved the city's garrison to the old fortress, along with 250 barrels of gunpowder, cannons and small arms. On the morning of the 14th, citizens gathered around the Bastille—

which had become such a symbol of royal tyranny—demanding that the weapons within be surrendered. Negotiations continued into the afternoon, and eventually violence erupted. Gunfire was exchanged for several hours until the garrison commander surrendered, seeing mutual slaughter as the only potential result of continued violence.[4]

The prisoners were freed and the weapons taken by the mob. The revolution was born in the shadow of tyrants cast by colossal stone towers.



## BUILDING POLITICAL LANDMARKS

There's two major things we can learn from the history of the Bastille for use in our worldbuilding. First, one of the most obvious takeaways comes from the changes in the purpose of the structure over time. It was originally a fortress, then a prison, and finally a garrison again—if only for a short time. When developing key structures to place in our own worlds, we can draw inspiration from this and take a less planned approach to the purposes of our buildings. In an ideal world, every structure is tailor-made for its purpose. In reality, this isn't always the case. Sticking to Paris for our inspiration, we need only look to the Louvre for another example. This structure was also a fortress first, then a palace, and finally a museum. In one of my own series of books, I have an orphanage that was originally a roadside inn on a main avenue. As the city grew around it, it found itself in a secluded courtyard where it was overlooked by merchants and travelers alike, and so the owners found a new purpose for it.

The other key takeaway is how a building can become a symbol based on what happens there, and more so the actions precipitating what happens there that it represents. The Bastille becoming a prison, in itself, didn't make it a symbol of tyranny. The fact that people were imprisoned outside of the usual legal system by decree of the king is what made it so. There had to be an *act* of tyranny for it to become a *symbol* of tyranny. I would assume that few people hear the word "prison" and automatically associate this with an autocratic regime. Replace that with "gulag" however, and the idea of political prisons

[4] *22.3.3: The Storming of the Bastille*. History of Western Civilization II, Ch 22: The French Revolution. Open Education Resource Services. *lumenlearning.com*. Accessed February 16, 2020. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/the-storming-of-the-bastille/.

brings to mind the oppressive authoritarianism of the Soviet Union in the early and mid 20th century. It's not always the purpose of the building that makes it a symbol, but rather the methods in which that purpose is *executed*—pun very much intended.

When considering the architecture for our worlds, it's often quite appropriate to plop down something that's tailor-made for its purpose. From the king's castle to the roadside inn, many buildings maintain a consistent role for their entire use. Others evolve.

The Bastille is a great example of a structure that not only changed over time through physical modifications, but also in name and purpose. From the defensive fortress to the political prison, the building evolved along with the conditions of the world around it. If we look at other structures throughout history, both in the world at large and also in our local neighborhoods, we'll find many that were built with one purpose in mind and changed to suit other needs. This need not be as drastic as fortresses or political prisons, however. Perhaps a warehouse was converted into a school, or a business built into a former home. With the expense in both material and manpower required to build a new structure, often it's more pragmatic to repurpose an old one.

When considering the structures in your own world, you can add rich layers of history to the setting by showing evidence of change over time—and in the process give those lifeless wood and stone edifices some character of their own.

🐚  **BACK TO INDEX**

# THIRTY-THREE TALES OF WAR

## STORIES SEVENTEEN THROUGH TWENTY

by Emory Glass, illustrations by Emory Glass and Tristen Fekete

🐉 **FANTASY (HIGH/LOW)**    🌀 **FANTASY (DARK)**    📜 **CULTURE**

*Thirty-Three Tales of War* is a collection of flash fiction pieces that follow thirty-three anonymous individuals living during the Candrish Civil War. You can find previous stories in this series on the author's blog.

### XVII: COBBLER
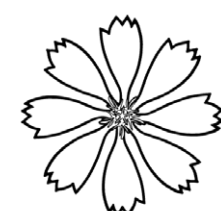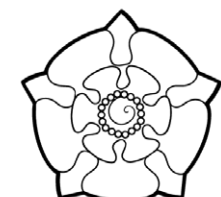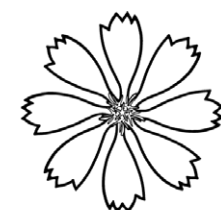
THE Cobbler blew fuzz and dust off a pair of field boots and set them on the shop counter. He patted the toes with a satisfied smile. The boots belonged to one of the Yellow Queen's elite warriors: a Laurel. For her sacrifices, he deducted ten percent from his normal price. Repairing them had been a simple endeavor, anyway. A lace length adjustment here, a few stitches there, and a good deep shine and buff all over had restored them to near-new condition. He didn't have to hope the Laurel would find her shoes expertly repaired. His customers always did—even if he made a few minor "adjustments" to their fit.

He retrieved a similar pair of boots from behind the counter, which belonged to a Chonokian girl he'd seen come into town every so often. The Cobbler didn't trust her at all with a pair of boots like these. They barely seemed different from the Laurel's boots, and indeed if he saw them on the street, he doubted he would be able to tell the difference. The Chonokian girl said she was a peddler. He didn't believe it for a minute. No peddler he knew of had any garment, much less leather boots, so indistinguishable from those of a Laurel. At best, she'd stolen them clean off the feet of some poor Yellow Army corpse. At worst...he snorted and shook his head. At worst she was a spy for the Blue Queen.

All sorts of folk passed through here: Zoldoni, Rahvi, Charivi, and sometimes Ochetski savages. Of course, the village *was* situated right smack on the border of Zoldonmesk, Rahvesk, and Chariv. He grunted. She could be a spy. It wouldn't surprise him. He knew he had not one lick of proof the Chonokian girl was anything other than a peddler. Because of that, he couldn't very well go to the Laurels billeted here raving about a spy. But, if she *was* a spy, she deserved every single punishment that could be inflicted.

Though no one else was watching him, he glanced around his shop before scoring the Chonokian girl's boot laces—not too deep, and only in the places where they'd eventually snap anyway. Earlier, he'd taken in the seam near the little toe *just* a tad. Sure, blisters were always a hazard, but he wanted a *guarantee*. Keeping the Blue bastards down at any opportunity was any good Charivi man's duty to the war effort, after all.

He put the Chonokian girl's boots on the counter and considered them alongside the Laurel's. A little bit of a markup—say, fifteen percent—would make up for the loss on the Laurel's pair quite nicely. A sliver of guilt wheedled into his mind. He wished he could simply hand the Laurel her shoes free of charge. It being wartime and all, folks didn't have much *tadril* to send shoes off for repair. He couldn't afford to turn down payment.

Moving behind the counter, the Cobbler stooped to find his box of parchment scraps. After setting it on the counter next to his pen and ink, he picked up two pairs of children's shoes overdue for retrieval from the back room, placing them near the Laurel's and Chonokian girl's boots. As he sat down to write receipts, the shop door opened.

"Hello?" asked a high, thin voice.

His cheeks flushed. It was Vivalya, the baker's daughter. She carried with her a loaf of bread. He looked down to hide his flushed cheeks and stuttered, "G-good afternoon."

Vivalya set down the loaf in front of him. "And a very good afternoon to you. I hope your day has gone well so far." She twirled the end of her currant red braid between her lithe fingers.

"Oh, very well now. What have you done today?" He snuck a glance at her. She was gorgeous, a vision, the very definition of true beauty. Her milky gray skin was nearly flawless, and she had the most stunningly vibrant yellow eyes he had ever witnessed.

He listened to her talk, hoping she didn't stop until the sun set and her mother called her home. Every word was like music, beautiful music he'd never guess came from a mortal mouth. Someone entered the shop, but he barely noticed them stop in front of the counter, take a pair of shoes, and leave a small pile of coins in their place with a huff.
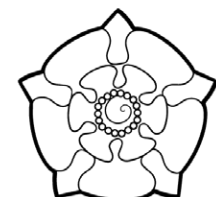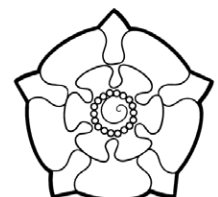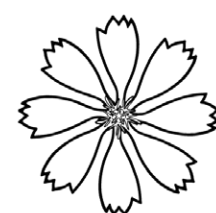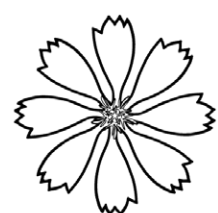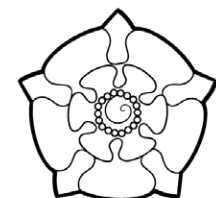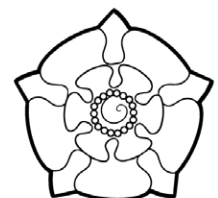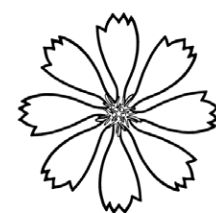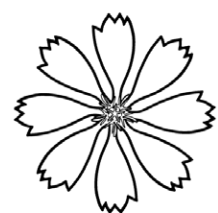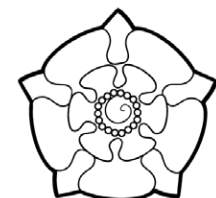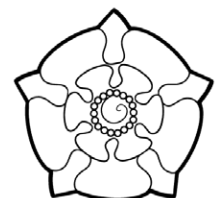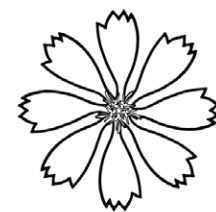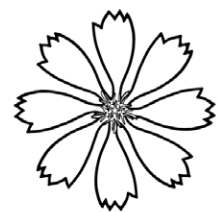
Another customer came in and waited patiently by the door while Vivalya spoke, clearing his throat loudly whenever she paused. Feeling the man's icy stare boring into his head, the Cobbler said, "Apologies, Vivalya, I need to take this customer. Hello, sir. How may I assist you?"

"I have an order here for two pairs of children's shoes." The man's rough cadence made no attempt to hide his displeasure. He tapped them. "I want my receipt."

"Of course. One moment." Muttering to himself, the Cobbler wrote out the receipt and handed it to him, noting the Chonokian girl's boots were gone. He took his coins and the girl's. When the door shut, he asked Vivalya, "You were saying?"

She continued her retelling of her morning while he counted out the coins. A tenpiece, a fivepiece, and a onepiece. He smirked. Stupid girl paying an arm and a leg for basic work. He pocketed the coins.

Again, someone came into the shop; a woman, head covered with a dingy, gray cowl. She waited patiently in front of the Laurel's shoes.

Vivalya glanced at her, then the Cobbler, and said, "It's clear you're quite busy. I'll come back tomorrow."

*Damn it*, he muttered under his breath as he went to help the Laurel with her shoes. When he instead saw the Chonokian girl's all-too-pleased face hiding under the cowl, he nearly choked.

"The work done on these is much better than expected, considering the price. I'll certainly be coming back here when I'm in the area." She dropped three fivepieces on the counter.

Speechless, he watched her leave. A cold sweat broke over his forehead. If the Chonokian girl picked up the Laurel's shoes, that meant the Laurel...

He sank onto his stool, holding his head in his hands. The Laurel had taken the wrong pair of shoes.

## XVIII: ARMORER

HER heartbeats clattered inside her chest as she crested Pvokri Hill; that giant mound of golden grasses that meant she was almost home.

Ten years had passed, yet it looked almost the same. Her feet ached as if she hadn't spent years on the march with the Blue Queen's army crafting and repairing armor for her warriors. Finally, she had been given leave to come home.

The Armorer halted just before the hilltop to adjust her one-handed grip on the large sack she dragged behind her. It would doubtless surprise her husband, but

coming home with one fewer arm was better than coming home dead. Besides, it wasn't insurmountable. For gods' sakes, she'd made it home on her own well enough. There were some trinkets and treasures she had to leave behind, of course, but she cherished nothing more than the look she'd soon find on her husband's face when she walked back through their cabin door.

When she came over the hilltop, she stopped. A tiny village sprawled out below. She carried on through her confusion. Last she lived here, Pvokri Village had been razed in a skirmish.

She descended. At least this meant things were looking up again. Despite the Red Queen's inability to protect her subjects in years past, Zoldoni folk always found a way to rise from the ashes and thrive. Even if she fought against Rosehearts, she respected their resilience.

The Armorer dragged her sack through the village toward the stand of trees where her cabin stood. Each footstep fell to the beat of splitting logs.

The woodcutter stopped her as she passed.

"What're you doin' round here, warrior?" the woodcutter asked. A woman—his wife, the Armorer assumed—came away from what she was doing near their log stack to stand by him.

The Armorer dropped the sack and gestured at the stand. "My husband and I have lived down yonder since we were children. I went away for..." she paused. Ten years, but the words wouldn't come out. "For longer than I wanted. But I'm back now, and I want to see him desperately."

The woodcutter's wife's voice was high and reserved. "What's he called?"

"Odzherhei."

She paled. The woodcutter studied the ground, one hand on his hip and the other weighing on the handle of his axe. "Best go with her, Vralya?"

Her stomach sank to her feet. "Why? Is he alive?"

Vralya nodded, gathering the Armorer's bag. "Just...best you both have someone you know when you see each other again. A decade's near long enough to raise a child."

At the mouth of the stand, she broke into a run. Her face was hot and her breaths ragged. Odzerhei. After all this time. When she saw their little cabin, she sobbed. A man sat on the porch, whittling.

"Odzerhei!" she yelled. "Odzerhei, it's me! It's—"
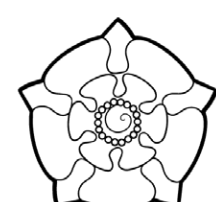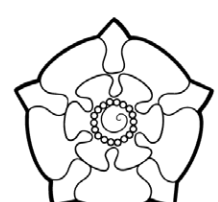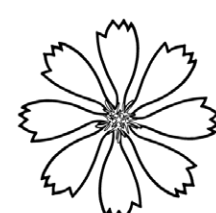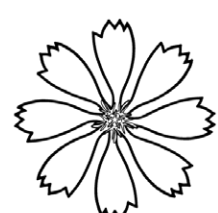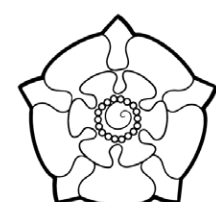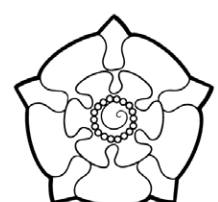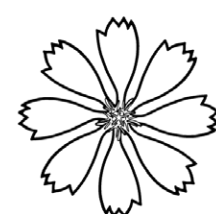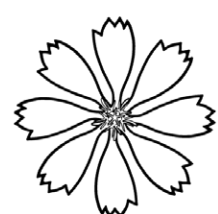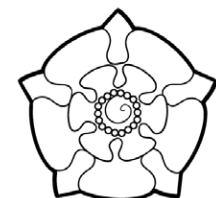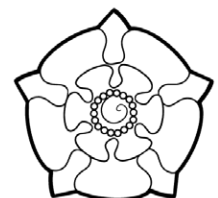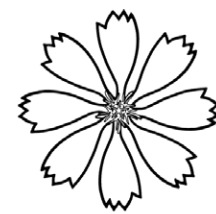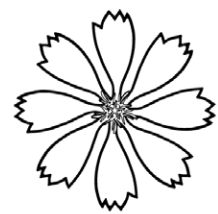
The cabin door opened and shut for a little boy no older than five. He climbed into Odzerhei's lap.

She stopped as if her feet had turned to stone. The breath evaporated from her lungs.

Vralya followed behind her, shouting, "Wait!"

The Armorer watched her husband stand through blurry eyes. His mouth moved, but no words came out. The little boy in his arms watched her with wide eyes, so innocent and curious.

"Who is that?" she croaked. "Who is he, Odzerhei?"

"Oddi? Are you alright? Who is that?" A woman, heavily pregnant, stepped outside. An older girl, near nine or ten, peeked out the window.

When the woman saw the Armorer, her expression soured. "This ain't an almshouse. Try Losevka." Exasperation laced every word.

"*Almshouse*?" The Armorer stepped forward. "I am his *wife*."

The woman looked at her belly, then back at the Armorer. "Mhm. And this isn't his child, it's the goat's."

"Evchala, go back in the house, please," Odzerhei croaked.

Evchala cackled. "This disheveled *lunatic* tomps up to *our cabin*, calls you *her husband*, and you try to send your *pregnant wife* inside?" She slammed the door hard enough to rattle the timbers. "Oh no. No no. I think *she* needs to leave, and *you* need to explain what in Leladya's name is going on."

The Armorer looked at Odzerhei. Only Odzerhei. The years had been kind to him. He looked well-fed, well-groomed, well...*happy.*

Vralya put a hand on her shoulder. "C'mon. Just c'mon, darlin'. I'll get my husband and see if we can't all sit down to—"

The Armorer wrenched her arm away and marched up to the patio to look at the man she once called her husband. "I *loved* you," she sobbed.

"You *left*," he cried. "You've up and left ten years ago! No notes. No pay. No *nothing*. I thought you were *dead*!"

"I *had to*!" she screamed.

"You *never had to*! You could have stayed here. We could have grown old together, but you left and you expected me to never move on?"

"I *told you.*" She tried to force her voice to quiet. Waves of rage and anguish broke through. "I told you when I returned—"

He scoffed, shaking his head. "I never thought you *would.*"

She looked him in the eye. Glassy, green as sea glass, scribbled with gold and grey. She'd loved those eyes. Every move they made, every skirmish won, every battle fought, every ring in every chain of every piece of mail she'd ever wrought, in all of them she had seen him and survived to look into those eyes one more time.

But she could feel it. They'd stopped seeing her long ago.

One more time was all she got.

She turned and ran past Vralya into the woods, muffling her sobs inside her elbow so his bitch wife wouldn't hear. Every step clipped a string in her heart until its music no longer played. A thousand paces blazed through her soul, burning them down shard by blackened shard for the shrikes and peregrines to warm their wings. Each footfall taunted her with memories of their life, their home, the things they'd built and the love they shared, all turned to ashes in a long-abandoned hearth.
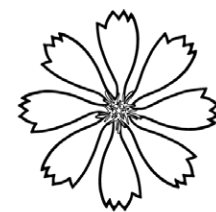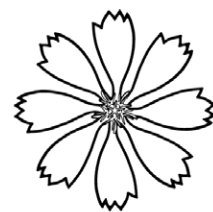
## XIX: TAX COLLECTOR

FEWER things were so welcome on a warm spring evening as a quiet stroll around town. The Tax Collector closed the inn door behind her. Followed by her bodyguards, Dmaril and Yalesk, she started off down Vialikzadni Road.

Wax tablet anchored to her hip, she walked along the forested path admiring the beauty of such a quaint little settlement. Loprikha? Yoprika? Something of that nature. The hamlet was barely a whisper on the wind back in Igna; being here, she could see why. The population was scarcely over fifty. What few buildings existed were built along the road. The inn, which appeared to be the only true business aside from the mill, had just three rooms. She made a note on her tablet. Of course, Vialikzadni Road connected Igna to Sarona—the Blue Queen's capital city.

Traveling here was nothing more than a vain attempt to squeeze blood from a rock. Despite the hamlet's destitution, there had to be *something* they could spare. It was built to support a grain mill, after all. The Red Queen needed every single scrap of tadril in Zoldonya Chovrekozh to win this war, and they were *so close.* Taxing landowners alone was no longer enough.

Igna was wealthy. The mining magnates alone funded most public works. Losevka and Vechnavaya took care of themselves, too, but Zoldoni lands were vast and bustling with life. Without everyone's contribution, how would the roads get built and repaired? How would victims of famine and plague receive compensation? Who would pay those brave warriors that risked their very lives to bring their countrymen independence? The Red Queen may be fabulously wealthy, but no single Zoldoni
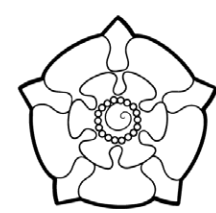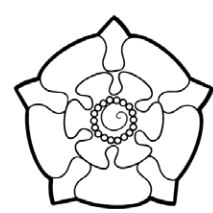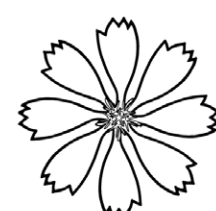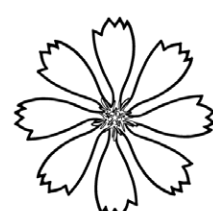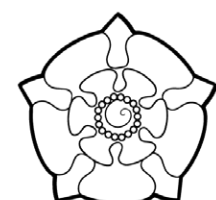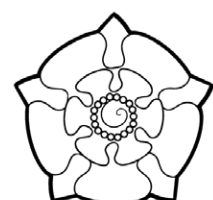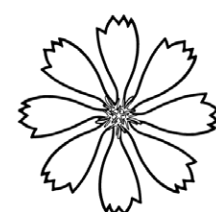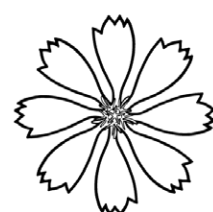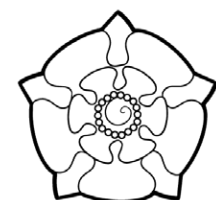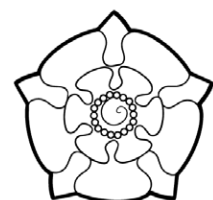
could be expected to finance an entire nation. The poor would have to make do. This was everyone's fight. It gave the Tax Collector no happiness; it was only her solemn duty. *Glory to the Red Queen*, she thought.

A little farther down the road, something just off the right-hand side clumsily disguised with vines and bushes caught her eye. She cast them off and smiled. A shrine to the Five. Of *course* they practiced Orthodox Quintinity here. The hamlet stood less than three hundred paces from the border. The Blue Queen's influence was nothing if not spiritually strong.

She made another note. Admittedly, this would raise their tax rate. A hazard fee, in simple terms. The Tax Collector frowned to herself. Adhering to the Cyclical Mysteries raised no rates at all. Lesser faiths whose names she couldn't bother recalling had much lower fees attached as well. Next to her note of the shrine's location, she added: "Increase total by twenty-five percent."

Her knee began to ache—an old war injury. It may have prevented her from continuing to fight, but it *did* open the door for her to acquire this position. The Red Queen needed self-sufficient, capable officers to travel the countryside. She turned back. Tonight, she had a meeting with the hamlet council over supper. Gods willing, she'd be off to the next settlement by sunrise.

Fifty paces along, she nearly walked straight into a dirty-faced boy of twelve or thirteen. She said nothing to him and carried on. From behind, she heard, "Greedy bleedin' pig."

She pivoted and stared him down. "Excuse me?"

He spit at her feet and made a gesture she'd never seen but could surmise as vulgar.

As she stepped nearer to him, she noticed a small gathering of settlers encroaching. Some lingered near the road while others yet pretended to do their washing and work. She glanced at Dmaril and Yalesk. They seemed to notice, too.

She huffed. "Wash your mouth, boy. I am your elder and you will respect me."

Someone came running from between the huts. "Vazhil?" He yelled. When he saw the Tax Collector, he lunged for the boy and yanked him behind himself. "I am so, so sorry," the man said. He was older, but not ancient, and definitely out of breath. "I don't know what was said, but he didn't mean it, I'm sure. He just lost his ma. Have mercy, please."

The Tax Collector pursed her lips. "And I presume *you* are the father?"

He winced. "Uncle. Pa's been dead years."

"In that case, it would seem you *are* his father, and I would encourage you to keep a closer eye on your charges from now on. Being that I have a...*forgiving* nature, I leave his lesson in respect to you." She locked eyes with Vazhil. "Other officers of the Red Queen are not so kind."

"They wouldn't be dead if the red bitch wouldn't have *killed them*!" Vazhil shouted.

His uncle forced his hand over Vazhil's mouth. Unprompted, Dmaril came forward and struck the boy on the side of the head. At once, there was a crowd around them, spitting and snarling, screaming indecipherable taunts and insults. Five villagers circled Dmaril, prodding him and shouting at him to strike.

"Dmaril," the Tax Collector snapped over raucous taunts. "You listen to *me*. Citizens of Loprikha! I have no quarrel with you. I am here on official business. I will soon meet with your leader to—" A throbbing pain struck the side of her head. She clutched it, vision blurring with involuntary tears, and staggered forward. Her veins flared with brilliant orange Essence. Blind rage took control. She whipped around, letting her Essence flow. A ball of flames exploded from her hands.

Silence.

The Tax Collector stopped her dance. A rock laid at her feet. Black blood glistened on her hand as she withdrew it from her throbbing head. Whatever fool threw a rock at her must have had a death wish.

Ahead of her, seven scarred and blistering faces clutched at their skin, crying in agony, and their clothes singed. Her eyes fell upon Vazhil's charred hands covering his burned face.

For a full moment, the silence remained. The Tax Collector composed herself, raised her blistered hands, and shouted, "I do not wish to escalate—"

Everything happened at once. The mob ran at her, Dmaril and Yalesk, each other. Gritting her teeth, she drew more Essence from her veins until they glowed bright as the sun. She wheeled and spun, striking her attackers down in a violent dance of
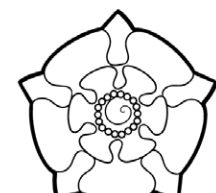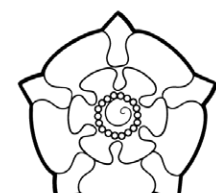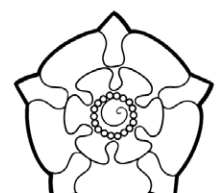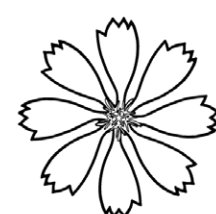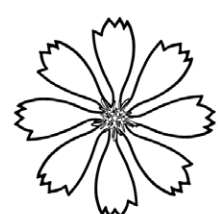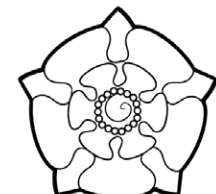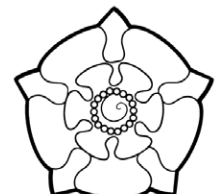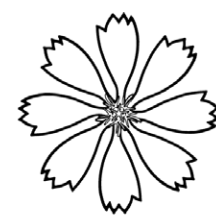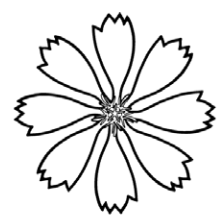
flames. Fistfights made ragged edges of the mob. She carved away a path for herself and bolted, bodyguards be damned. Their idiocy caused this mess.

Her knee ached, but she pushed ever northward down Vialikzadni Road until she could no longer hear the cacophony. She stopped to breathe behind a poplar. When the Tax Collector composed herself, she surveyed her hands. Cracked and blistered, as to be expected without the use of casting gloves. The wax tablet was long melted and abandoned, probably somewhere along the road. No use going back for that.

She sighed. Now there was the matter of being a Roseheart in Blue Army territory. If memory served, there was a river not far from here that ran across Rahvesk. If she followed it, Igna would eventually appear on the other end.

Face etched into a scowl, she started walking. This was just her luck.

## XX: MINER

THE Sakcha family had it coming. They didn't know it yet, and that was fine. The Miner relished in knowing their iron empire would soon fall.

His best friend, Mykiv, walked down the twelfth gallery alongside him. Down here, it was pitch-black. Thankfully, Mykiv was an essencecaster. His veins glowed just bright enough to cast faint light around them.

For a few precious moments, the mine would be empty except for water-men like Mykiv and himself. A nasty bout of witherlung had thinned out camp over winter. To keep the miasma low, the head overseer sent one shift down at a time, by gallery level. Since he and Mykiv worked at the lowest reaches of the mine—gallery twelve—they would be the first to arrive.

"I can't believe it," Mykiv whispered, thin black lips twisted up into the wryest of grins. He twirled his pickaxe round and round in his hand. "Their greed's their own undoing."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," the Miner snapped.

Too much had been sacrificed to bring this plan to fruition to risk it folding in on them now. Not long ago, the overseers forced everyone to dig down until they reached rock and clay that seemed to bleed water at an overwhelming speed. Eight miners drowned trying to quell the flow. No amount of adits, water-wheels, screw-pumps, or buckets could drain it, not even with the help of watercasters brought from Igna by special request. Eventually, the head overseer gave up and ordered the shaft sealed.

Water-men like themselves worked in shifts day and night to bail out the water, never resting, all of them slaves in everything but name to the Sakcha Family and, because of that, the Red Queen. It seemed the Red Queen's favorite method to get rid of

undesirables was to seal them in one of her mines, never again to see the light of day.

Eight years ago, he'd been a simple farmer none the wiser about any wars or any Red or Yellow queens. But, the Rosehearts had come and given him a choice: turn over his farm and join the war, or work in the mines. "Sod off" was, apparently, the incorrect answer.

The only thing that stopped him from jumping down the main shaft the day he arrived was meeting his wife. Now, it was the burning desire to protect the child they were soon to bring into the world. One of the overseers had a soft spot for pregnant women. It was already arranged that she'd help Oleva escape. The child would never know their father, but the thought of Oleva smiling with the sun in her face and their baby cooing in her arms, free of this dismal cave, was worth far more than spending another eight years down here with her, stealing kisses and finger-touches when the guards weren't looking during shift changes.

He and Mykiv did not go to the shaft in which their water-wheels turned. They carried on to find the sealed adit and, finally, its door.

Someone had packed clay into the jamb and the threshold, but it wasn't enough. Water leaked through the gaps.

The Miner turned to Mykiv. "Once we break through, run. Don't stop, don't gawp at it when you get on the ladder, don't turn around to make sure it's working. Understand?"

"Aye," Mykiv replied, raising his pickaxe.

They struck the door offset from one another, Mykiv counting evens and the Miner calling odds. *One*-two-*three*-four-*five*-six-*seven*-eight. Water gushed out. On Mykiv's next strike, the door collapsed. They abandoned their axes and bolted.

They reached the ladder. Mykiv went up first. Water surged into the stope. Soon, it reached the Miner's hips. He put a hand on one of the rungs. "Don't stop, don't gawp, don't look down," he bellowed at Mykiv. "I'm right behind you."

He wasn't. The water reached his chest, his shoulders, his neck. He watched Mykiv reach the top rung and disappear.

The water reached the Miner's chin. He climbed one rung, two rungs, three rungs, four. Maybe this didn't have to be the end. He had yet ample time to follow Mykiv before his absence was noticed. But what was left for him after this? His wife and child would be safe. The mine would be unusable if not forever, for long enough at least to hit the Sakcha Family and the Rosehearts where it hurt.
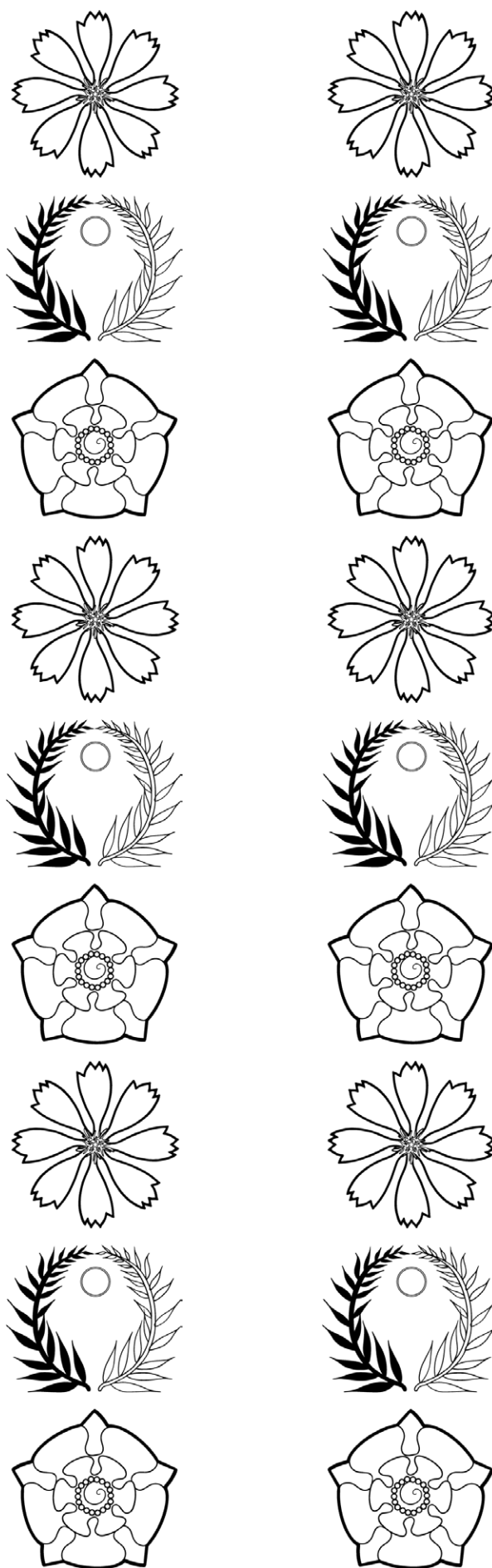
If the mine proved too much work to reopen, they'd just disperse the miners elsewhere anyway. The Sakcha Family practically owned the mountains for how many mines they lorded over.

Eight years he wasted in this mine aiding a cause he didn't much care for. The water tickled his chin.

No. He let go of the rung. He wouldn't waste eight years more.

# ASK US ANYTHING

by B. H. Pierce

**T**his *Ask Us Anything* is presented by a senior member of the Amalgamated Order of Interdimensional Persons, Percival Aluminius Illumnius, Adjunct Professor of Gateways, 3423 WestNorth Street, Dunny-on-the-Spire.

*What are some ways to show differences in classes in my world?*

*—Anonymous*

Let me answer your question with another question: what is class?

...I'll wait for the communists to quiet down. Are they done? Splendid. To answer your question about classes, you have to know what they are first. However, a detailed overview of historical classes and their expressions, while extremely entertaining, would go beyond the scope of this piece. A more reasonable distinction to look at is the difference in classes in three different eras in history. The Pre-Industrial Era, an Industrious Era, and the Industrial Era.

In the Pre-Industrial era, the largest class by far are those who work in food production, be they hunter-gatherers, nomadic pastoralists, or farmers. Artisans will make up a small portion of society and will mostly make functional goods. What luxuries they can produce will be provided for the even smaller ruling class. States and governments will be small-scale and local. Goods won't travel very far before they're used. People won't travel very far either. Most will stay in their home village and the class they were born in unless some war or other calamity comes screaming through and creates social mobility.



AHMED ELGHARABAWY

An Industrious Era is a middle point between Pre-Industrial and Industrial periods. These most often arise during a time of extended stability and peace over a large area of land. Usually, these periods occur in a large state or empire, such as Rome, the Ottoman Empire, or one of the better Chinese Dynasties. In an Industrious Era, the bulk of the population will still be concerned with making food, but a larger percentage of it will be artisans, bureaucrats and merchants. Due to the stability, trade and innovation will

flourish, making luxury goods available and affordable to more of the population. Social mobility is more common, though its extent will depend on specific cultural rules.

The Industrial Era is marked by the rise of machines used for manufacturing, farming, and transportation. The rural population typically decreases as people leave farms for the city, whose populations swell as the size of the agricultural classes shrink. The size of the urban worker class begins to increase, as do the populations of artisans, merchants, and bureaucrats. Luxury goods become more widespread, as technology decreases their prices and faster transport makes it easier to move them from market to market. Social mobility is easier in this era since rapid innovation and access to opportunities make it possible for the ambitious to move up in the world.

So now that we've covered different economic eras, let's circle back to your initial question about how to show class difference. One of the most important differences in class is access to power. The upper classes will inevitably exert a great deal of influence on how a society is run and organized, so showing them making laws and running things is one way. Another method is showing how their class or position protects them. In Edo Japan, one of the samurai class could legally execute anyone they felt insulted them, an example of a formal protection. However, informal ones exist as well, such as how the wealthy may have access to expensive lawyers who smooth out troubles for them.

The living situations of people in your world is also a fine example of how to show class. Large houses and estates are a classic way of showing wealth. What people do with their leisure time (if they have any) can be another great means of showing the differences between classes. There might be certain activities, such as types of music or certain sports only enjoyed by high-class people, whereas others may not have the money or inclination to engage in such activities. Manners, if you want to spend the time creating

detailed modes of behavior, are also effective. Learning a certain dialect, dance, or way of eating can take an enormous amount of time and might serve as an instant marker of who's who.

Before I let you go, I feel I must mention social mobility again. As mentioned before, changing your class can be easy or difficult. But the higher you climb, the harder it will be. The highest classes or the ruling classes do not like to share power or their station. Birth will usually count for a great deal, even more so than having access to the same opportunities, resources, and knowing when to use the second fork on the left.

*If a train leaves New York City, taking roughly 30 minutes to reach its maximum speed of 88 miles per hour and another train leaves Chicago, taking 45 minutes to reach its maximum speed of 95 mph and they are both traveling on a single rail system, while both carrying 55 passengers and this is in the midst of the 1850s, which is your favorite* Back to the Future *movie? (Don't forget to show your work.)*

*—Il Magnifico Barbarossa*

Are you mocking me? I think you're mocking me.

*When it comes to making merchants, what do I need to know about my world to make a savvy, intelligent businessman?*

*—Lynx*

In short, to know the businessman, you must first build the business. What is being sold or what service is being provided? Is the product/service vital to survival? Does it help make other things? Or is it a luxury only available to a few? A businessman who sells wheat by the wagonload will need a different set of skills than someone who sells pottery wheels or jewelry. To go even further, you have to know how that good or service relates to the society he sells it in. Is it locally produced and available everywhere, something everyone has access to? Then this businessman
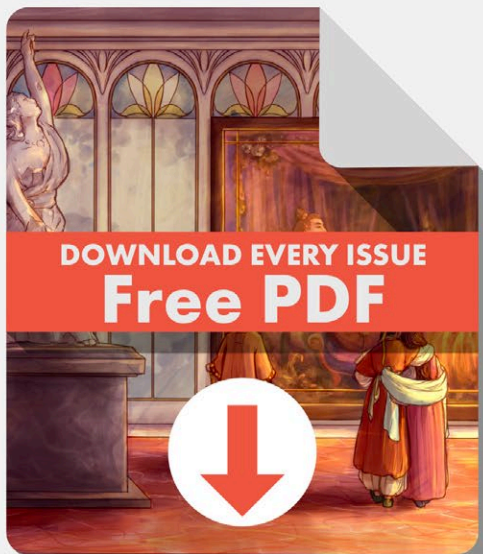
will need to be a slick marketer to convince his customers that his good is better than his competitors'. If what he is selling is rare and from a place far away, then he'll likely need to know a great deal about foreign trade routes, tariffs, and taxes as well as have intimate knowledge about the exclusive clientele it will be sold to.

Once you've built the business, you must have an idea of the economy it exists in. Knowing the era it takes place in (see above) will help you figure this out. Are there a great deal of laws your businessman has to know to legally make or sell their product? Is their profession heavily regulated, or can they do as they please? Do intrepid merchants risk it all one on shipment of precious goods or are their joint-stock companies that spread the risk around? Is success measured by having a longstanding, steadily profitable operation, or is it all about making a huge score fast? To learn these things, do your research. Find an era in history similar to your world and dive deep into its economics. Read up on how silk from Han dynasty China made it to Imperial Rome. Look into the history and practices of the Dutch East India Company. Find out how the capitalists of the Second Industrial Revolution made their vast fortunes. The rich and their riches have been written about for all of history. Make use of that information.

*What are some realistic reasons for a people/ country to invade or attack their neighbors?*

*—Anonymous*

Because they want something.

What? More? All wars are about resources. They're waged because the people declaring war think they have something to gain from it. With that said, there are many things to attain. It could be something physical. Their neighbors may have resources they want, such as minerals or fertile soils. The land itself may be valuable for access to trade routes or defensive terrain.

The reward could be political. A leader might go to war to boost their popularity or distract their followers from another issue. War may be waged to increase a nation's standing in the international order by showing that they are strong. Or, it could be about revenge. Insults and slights reduce the prestige of a nation, so waging war could be a way to restore what was lost.

The scale of the societies going to war will change how the conflict looks, but not the reasons why it is waged. Two pastoralist tribes raiding each other with bows and arrows over the best pasture is the equivalent of two industrialized nation-states going at it over oil fields. When Genghis Khan was a rising leader of the Mongols, he attacked the Chinese on his own. After the Chinese retaliated, he went to the other Mongols to unify them in response to the threat. When Bismarck insulted the French into attacking Prussia, he used the war to unify the German states under Prussian rule. Different place, different time, same strategy. When one tribe, state, nation, or empire attacks another, it is always because they believe they will profit from it. Just what they think they will get will depend on exactly who is waging war. When looking for a realistic reason to begin an invasion, start by looking at the culture and situation of the invader.

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# MEET THE STAFF: TYLER SILVA

curated by ACGrad

*Please introduce yourself! What is your role for the magazine? What do you hope to do going forward?*

My name is Tyler, though I'm oft-referred to as Dino. I host the podcast Worldcasting and serve as an admin for the Discord community. I spend most of my time not working on the magazine itself, but on related projects and community organization. Going forward I'd like to run more events for the community. Whether it be in giveaways, events, or contests, I'd just love to engage with all you wonderful readers more! Likewise there's the ever elusive convention scene that I hope to dive the magazine into one day.

*Tell us about your world! Do you have a final medium of choice? What is your favorite part of worldbuilding?*

Worldbuilding has been a lifelong passion and endeavor to craft a world. I've used my setting to write stories and to run tabletop games in. Getting to explore it in those mediums has been a lot of fun. My world has always been a blend of my favorite concepts from worldbuilding. Themes and aesthetics from across fantasy, horror, science fiction, and folklore from around the world. I always strive to make my world feel alive, as if it were a truly lived-in place. This doesn't mean that I try to obtain the ever elusive realism. Instead I strive to make it so that the pieces of the world blend together, that they meld to create a genuine feeling to everything that happens.

Over the years, my scope has expanded quite a bit from what was originally just a small part of a continent that relied heavily on Tolkien and D&D. Eventually it blossomed into a setting unafraid to draw upon any source while still committing to be its own version. A lot of this can be seen in my gods, who I've based on mythologies less used as inspiration such as Basque, Hindi, Ossetian, Romuvan, and Suomenusko—all the while still taking cues from Hellenism as a backdrop of ages of divinity and the decline of power and magic. Where the two blend is a world of living, breathing gods. These gods may be strong but are not all powerful, but they don't fit neatly into the slots laid down in D&D by the Olympians.

*What have been your favorite mythologies to research? What qualifications or themes do you think make a deity suitable for an RPG setting?*

I've spent years studying history and mythology. When it comes to history, there is a wealth in aesthetic, government, and diplomacy that can be created by figuring how your world relates to time periods in our own world. I like to do the same with mythology. There is, at least as I see it, a divide between the more popular and widely known mythologies (Hellenism, Norse, and Egyptian) versus the ones that tend to be on the periphery of people's conscious (Hinduism, Celtic, Tao/Dao, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism), and that tends to be all people know. I delved into those and took a lot from them. They had a lot of interesting lessons and creatures in them. I found morals and parables that work with a belief system to be of great interest. In many of the mythologies I listed, they are heavily delved into as well, with a piece of them making their way into my setting. I definitely took a lot of keynotes from Hinduism and Zoroastrianism for my own spiritual systems and mixed them with the Ovidian principles I grew to love as a child when reading the *Metamorphoses*.

Yet, that's not where I'd say the ticket stops for the most interesting mythologies. Those listed are just the ones I've read the most of. Though, that would be because they are the most explored. There are many great characters, and heroic concepts, inside Suomenusko and the different Slavic folktales, but the availability of those in English is sparse, which naturally makes them less well known or widespread. I find regional and smaller cultures or folktales have the most life to them. The three that stand out the most to me are Armenian, Basque, and Ossetian. The first two people are generally aware of, but the Ossetians were something I stumbled upon. Descendants of the last of the Sarmatian horse lords, the Ossetians are a minority group in the Caucasus Mountains. Their culture and folktales survived dozens of empires and migrations through their homeland. It is a treat to read about them. On the surface it seems to have a simple sky god who oversees a pantheon of gods. When you delve into it, the Ossetian Uatsdin is about the Universe, about how the scope of our world is so much larger than what we can see. That when you look up into the night sky, you see Xwyatsu and all that the Lord of Wisdom and Worlds has made and embodies. The most fascinating part to me is the Nart Saga, which shows that the link between divine and ordinary is short. Sometimes ordinary people do great things, and sometimes it takes a gift of power to stop a great evil. All of that serves as inspiration for good worldbuilding when it comes to the divine.

When it comes to RPGs and using deities in them, I find that it's all too easy to use a hat trope for them. To give them a portfolio or purpose and making their whole characterization around that. Personally, I find that to be not at all like the deities you find in any folklore. To most polytheistic faiths the gods were real beings who live in or were adjacent to this world. They had wants, desires, loves, and hates. They were gods but also people. In many of these faiths, the gods even wandered the world in guise to see how we, their faithful, truly acted. In RPGs I strive to have this feeling pervade throughout the setting.

When the heroes seem to be at a dead end, a bit of unassuming aid from a traveler or stranger can prove to be a bit more profound than previously anticipated. If the heroes strayed from their path and could fall, it seems within reason a patron god would test them. Then there's the ever present danger of a Trickster God giving help, unasked or unwanted, that could either help or hinder the party. I find that when emulating these entities, throwing pomp and circumstance to the window is the best option. I never make it seem like some grand affair, and I certainly try my hardest to have the moment of arrival feel natural. When communing with gods, I try to figure out the personality of the deity beforehand. A serious and formal one might require more austerity, whereas others may appear in guise and interact with the party while doing a casual activity like walking or carousing. I find that it gives them each a different (and memorable) face. That by being real and interactable, even active in the affairs of the world, it makes the players more engaged with that lore and more willing to seek it out. Plus it generally creates some good role-playing opportunities.

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The *Worldbuilding Magazine* team is made of of volunteer writers, artists, editors, and organizers who all have a passion for worldbuilding in one form or another.

If you would like to contribute to this project, simply contact us and tell us what you're interested in doing. We're always looking for people to help out!

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