Worldbuilding Framework

What is Worldbuilding?

Worldbuilding is the high-level conceptual process of designing the setting and history of the game world. The connections between narrative development, the embodiment of cultural ideas, and expressions of usable gamespace.

Worldbuilding is the foundation, it is the bones of your story and the space your story occurs in, so the qualities of your worldbuilding can and will influence the overall tone and experience of your game, in both explicit and implicit ways.

Worldbuilding Features Template

Name of place

- Is the name important for players?
- Is the name important for the civilization?

- Does the name need meaning or is it purely fictional?

Overview (LORE)

A quick summary of your world conveying the most crucial facts that others need to be able to find at a glance.

Tone

A quick explanation of the tone of your world used to guide decisions and answers below.

Physical geography

- What effect does geography have on civilization?

- On politics?

- On biology?

- On technology?

- What type of resources are abundant here?

- What type of resources are scarce here?

- How does this abundancy/ scarcity affect civilization? On politics? On religion? O biology?

- Are there important sound qualities to this place?

Unique creatures

- How have creatures adapted to the physical geography described above?

- How do civilizations respond to these creatures?

- How might these creatures sound?

Civilization

- Who are the main people of this place?

- What unites them? (A common cause, a common need, etc.)

- What causes dissent?

- What is the "thing" (value, concept, etc.) that people in this civilization value the most?

- Is this place generally harmonious? Generally rebellious?

- Who feels safe here?

- Who doesn't feel safe here?

- Where do people live?

- How is this civilization viewed by outsiders?

- What type of entertainment exists here?

- What type of sport exists here?

- What language(s) do they speak? Dialects? Accents?

Note: These questions are about the civilization more holistically versus individual people.

Technology

- What is the technology level of this place?

- Is technology commonplace or special?

- IKs technology fundamental to the world's organization or entertainment?

- Who has control of the technology?

- Who is the technology primarily helping?

- What gap exists in the technology?

- What are the trade-offs that exist in the technology?

- How has technology changed geography? Political systems? Religion? People's lives?

Magic

- Does magic exist?

- How does magic work?

- Is magic cosmological or geographical or some other explanation?

- Are there trade-offs to magic?

- Who can use magic? Who cant?

- How does society view magic?

Note: A lot of the same questions about technology can apply to magic, and vice versa!

The people

- How do people relate to each other?

- What causes personal friction? (Good and bad)

- What causes conformity?)Good and bad)

- What taboos exist in relationships?

- What is the typical family dynamic?

- What are the beauty norms?

Note: These questions are about the individual people, rather than the holistic concept of their civilization.

Infrastructure

- How do people travel in this world?

- What does this say about the world?

- What divisions exist in who can access various types of infrastructure?

Religion

- What religions exist?

- Who practices wich ones?

- Where do people practice their religions?

- How do different religions feel about each other?

- What type of music is associated with this religion(s)?

- What does this music say about religion(s)?

History

- What are the major moments in this place's history? Wars? Inventions? Labor policies? Public figures? Resistances? Entertainment milestones? Weddings? Deaths?

- How are these major moments viewed by the civilization as a whole?

- How are they viewed by different individuals?

- How is the place's history viewed by outsiders?

Secrets

- What secrets exist in this world?

- Between characters?

- Between ruling bodies?

- From history?

- In geography?

- In the creatures?

- What do these secrets mean for the future of this world and the people in it?

Worldbuilding Key Principles

- Prioritize believability

- Be expansive/ Open

- Focus on tangibility

- Find inherent pressures

Prioritize Believability

This principle comes from the premise that the game's world should strive to be believable rather than realistic.

Worlds become believable when we experience the characters within it reacts in ways we understand or can relate to, or when the spaces and rules of a world holistically feel consistent and supportive of each other.

Believability is about a world that is constructed in such a way as to feel realistic, even if it's not but it's also about relatable reactions to the various components of your world from the people and creatures who live in it.

Be expansive/Open

Expansive worldbuilding invites players in for "co-authoring" the world and the story. "Co-authoring" means that you, as the game developer, are co-creating the story with your player (i.e., the player's actions, decisions, and interpretations, whether in a branching narrative or not, are helping to determine the state of the story, character moments, and keys bits about how the world functions). Give spaces for the metagame.

Focus on Tangibility

"Show, don't tell". It's a common piece o writing advice centered around the idea that elements of your world and emotional states are more effective and resonant when your audiences simply aren't told about something, but rather are able to see the effect of it.

Find and inherent pressures

The concept of worldbuilding as a story engine revolves around this idea that elements of your world should be exerting some sort of pressure on your characters and therefore on your players. This pressure often presents as conflict, or the obstacles that characters face in your world.

So when determining the major aspects of you world, the prevailing systems, and the key geographical features, consider what type of pressures these components are creating.