

World- Building

Part 4: Advancement

Getting Started

Welcome, World-Builders!

We've got Advancement up next on the 6-week world-building series! If you've hung in with me this far—thank you! Let me know how this series helped you by reaching out on Instagram, Facebook, or on the blog! I'd love to hear about how your world is progressing.

I feel like my creativity can stretch a bit more in this segment—there is so much you can do in regards to advancement within your world! I love to add minor steampunk elements to my fantasy books or certain aspects that might otherwise not exist. I think it keeps my worlds unique and fun. I hope you enjoy this process too!

We're going to dive right in to the subject of Advancement by looking at Art and Education, Weaponry, Magic, and Technological Advances. I had a lot of fun with this section of world-building! It is extremely broad and covers a lot of topics. This part and Civilization (which is coming up next!) are closely related. On many topics I had to draw my own personal line of what constituted Advancement and what Civilization. So if you don't see a topic here you were hoping for, hold on for next week!

As always, thanks for joining me on this journey.

I'm so excited to adventure with you!
Michelle

Elements of Advancement

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Art and Education

One aspect of advancement not always acknowledged is the development of art and education. When basic needs in a society are met, peoples are then free to pursue what have been considered more leisurely activities or endeavors. Art and education then evolve. So I consider this advancement!

Art involves everything from pottery for storage and cooking and decoration, to architecture, to formal paintings and mosaics. In what way is art evident in your world? Has your world progressed past creating things for necessity to creating things for beauty? This is important when considering the advancement of your world. A people who have to struggle to get by, who are nomadic, or who are living in “the dark ages” won’t have decorative pottery or frescoed ceilings. They’ll only have necessities. Art also includes performing arts, music, and entertainment. Again, when the basic needs of society are met, peoples can then focus on “luxurious” activities or pastimes.

Education can relate to formal (what we think of as) education, tutelage, apprenticeship, or anything in between! Does a child simply learn the trade of his father? Or is he free to pursue what he wishes? The more formal the education (typically) the more advanced the society. Think about how your main character learned his or her general knowledge, job skills, and anything else s/he uses in daily life.

This is a fun section (at least for me) to think about. I hope you have fun with it too!

Art and Education

Questions

1. Is there formal education? Tutors? Is this available for all peoples?
2. Are there buildings for education?
3. Is there written language? Is this prevalent among all classes of society?
4. Are there any taboos against being educated? Uneducated?
5. Are there collections of knowledge (e.g. libraries, museums, scriptoriums, universities)?
6. Are there historical or natural monuments? How are these preserved?
7. Is there a tourism industry?
8. How does news travel? How is it collected and/or documented?
9. Is there art? Is it respected? Is it collected? What kind of art is there?
10. What is the community's feeling toward artists (of all kinds)?
11. Is there performance theatre? Dances?
12. What instruments are there? Is it common to know how to play them?
13. What kind of music does the general populace like? What does it sound like?
14. At what age does education start? At what age does it end?
15. Are there guilds? Apprenticeships?
16. How does one become a master in their trade?
17. Where does one buy art? Education? Music?

Weaponry

You don't have to use weapons in your story, but fantasy stories often involve some type of weapons, whether that weapon is magic (see page 6) or physical weapons. Especially if you are using the traditional quest troupe, giving your characters weapons may be useful!

You do not have to create weapons from scratch. Pick a time period in history that fits your world and research time-appropriate weapons.

When giving your characters weapons, I highly suggest that you “flip the script” (as I've said before). It seems like every main character has a sword. What about a main character that is amazing with an axe? Or a crossbow? Or simply hand-to-hand combat?

Weapons range from bows and arrows, to poisons, to lances, to attack animals! What could you use in your story that is different than other fantasy stories?

Weaponry will take some research on your part, not only for *what* weapons to use but *how* to use them. It's no good if you have an amazing weapon yet don't know how to write a combat scene for your characters using that weapon! Familiarize yourself with typical combat terms and study action scenes in your favorite fantasy novels.

Golden Rule #6: READ

This should go without saying. But so many writers forget to read. And I mean this in the nicest way. You cannot be a great writer without reading. You must familiarize yourself with your genre and what is being published currently.

This is also important for when you write your query letters (if you're traditionally publishing). You'll need to detail how your books fit into the current fantasy book landscape. How do you do that?

You read. A lot.

Reading also helps develop your own ideas, brainstorm new ones, and see how authors do certain things you struggle with (like fight scenes).

I highly encourage you to read outside of your genre as well (WHAT? That doesn't make sense!) Yes—read outside of your genre. Want to learn how to write that great kiss scene? Read a few romances. Want to know how to write great battle scenes? Read military fiction (Jeff Shaara is a personal favorite of mine—especially for his battle tactics).

You'll grow so much as a writer if you start reading—as a writer!

Weaponry

Questions

1. What weapons are used in your world?
2. How are weapons made? Is this a common occupation?
3. How ornate are weapons? Is there an art or design element that goes into making them?
4. Which weapons are used in war? Which are used by common people?
5. Are weapons permitted? Who can have them?
6. What weapon does your main character favor?
7. How long have these weapons been used?
8. Is there any element of magic in your weapons?
9. Is there weapons training? At what age does that start? Is there a certain age you need to be to purchase weapons?
10. Are there poisons, powders, or elixirs? Antidotes? Who makes these?
11. How does one get away with murder in your world?
12. What fighting style does your world have?
13. Does everyone have equal access to acquiring weapons? Where do they buy weapons?
14. Is the craft of weaponry a desirable skill?
15. Does the government regulate weapons?

Magic

Magic is hard. And it's complicated. But don't let that dissuade you from using it in your world. Magic takes the most attention to detail. I consider this section of Advancement the "So Why Didn't Voldemort Just Throw Harry Out the Window" section. Because come on. He could have done that and that could've been the end of it.

Magic must make sense and it must be an enhancement of "normal" life. In Voldemort's case, it shouldn't take away someone's common sense. He did not have to "avada-kedavra" an infant. He relied almost unbelievably on magic. But this could just be a me thing!

Magic, like every aspect of world-building must be believable. **It needs to make sense within your world.**

Random Writing Tip: Pick up a few fantasy books that revolve around magic. Take notes while you read. What worked? What didn't? What made you have a "So Why Didn't Voldemort Just Throw Harry Out the Window" moment? Now consider how you can use the elements you like in your world. How can you make sure to avoid those not-so-great aspects?

I think the hardest thing about magic is reigning it in, so to speak. **Magic can't be all-powerful.** If it is, you wouldn't have a story. It can't know all things, do all things, fix all things. There has to be some sort of limit, some sort of shortfall. Think about this especially when you're designing magic for your world. How can magic enhance your world without making someone god-like? How does magic interact with current technologies? Again, think of magic in how it can work with your story—not stand out from it.

If you're struggling with this, it's okay! I struggle with defining my magic sometimes too! I find it easier to break it into generalized magical areas (telekinesis, transformation,

healing, creating, etc.—these don't have to be your categories, they just help me categorize my magic in my stories!) Categories can be helpful when defining magic for your world.

Above all, be consistent! No one likes when they think they understand the magic system of a world and then the author changes it.



A broad list of types of magic to spark your imagination:

Alchemy, Herbalism, Elemental (fire, earth, air, water, metal), Necromancy, Healing, Divining/Prophecy, Creating, Transformation, Telekinesis, Dark/Black Magic, Astrology, Spirit Magic, Possession, Destructive, Incantation, Animal Magic...

Worship and Rituals

Questions

1. Is magic featured in your story?
2. What aspects of life would your society find to be “magical” (e.g. the weather)?
3. Are there schools for magic? How is it taught?
4. Does magic require spoken word? A channel (like a wand)? Or just thought?
5. Does every person have magic?
6. Is there good/bad magic?
7. What does the government think of magic? Religious institutions? Everyday people?
8. How is magic or the use of magic regulated?
9. What kind of magic does your world have? Is it elemental? Spiritual? Something else completely?
10. Is there a test or trial to confirm ones ability to properly use magic?
11. Who is the best at magic? Why?
12. Is the use of magic different between different peoples?
13. At what age does the ability to use magic begin?
14. Are those who use magic celebrated? Or ostracized?



Origins of Magic:

Self | Magical Object | Deity | Organic (plants, animals, humans) | Rituals | Words | Written Word | Gestures | Mindfulness (Meditation)

Would you like to see a more in-depth post on magic? Connect with me and let me know!

Technological Advances

I'm using technology in a broad scope here. To me, technological advances will cover anything the previous sections here have not: tools, buildings, sources of light, time, transportation... etc. Each of these sections seemed too small to write about in and of themselves, so I've grouped them into this larger section.

But I know I could in no way cover everything, so use the next page as a starting point. Then brainstorm some of your own questions. Think about various scenes in your story. What does the pub look like, specifically? Even if you don't mention everything, it is important to know it as the author. Plus, knowing small tidbits of information such as what is used for light can change the entire vibe of the story. If your characters are huddled around dripping candles to read a map versus turning the knob of a small oil lamp, your story reads different. Be aware of this and of how every technological advance impacts your characters.

And (you must have caught on to this by now—I've said it enough) the advances must be realistic and make sense! They must fit into your world! As long as you can reason through it in a believable way that makes sense to your reader, go for it—have hot air balloons, have herbalism shops, have whatever you can think of. But make it realistic. Make it make sense!

What aspects of life do you think is considered technology?

Is the mail system? Transportation? Currency?

What about written text? Printed? Distribution of the written word?

There's so many aspects to our life that we consider outdated (I mean, who sends letters anymore? Though I do enjoy getting them in the mail!) that are actually very advanced.

Technology isn't just computers and spaceships and internet! Broaden your way of thinking when it comes to technology and brainstorm away, world-builders!

Technological Advances

Questions

1. How advanced is your society? Compare it to an era of earth.
2. What sources of light are there?
3. How is time figured?
4. Is there fuel? How is it collected?
5. How are goods and materials transported? How about people?
6. What does cooking technology look like?
7. What do buildings look like? How are they crafted? What materials do they use? Is art or design an important part? What unique features do they have?
8. Is there manufacturing?
9. What tools are common?
10. How are natural resources used? Are they overused?
11. Where do people buy traditional goods and services?
12. What animals are used for labor? How are they used?
13. How is food stored/packaged/distributed?
14. How is currency manufactured?
15. Are there pubs? Inns? Stores? Apothecaries? Describe the typical layout of a city.
16. What unique advancements does your world have? Is anything more advanced than today's world?
17. What sports or sporting events are there?

Connect with me!

About the Author: My journey began one day the summer before 5th grade. I had just finished reading J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and (in my young, naive mind) thought, if Tolkien can create such an amazing story, why can't I? I began what I continue to work on to this day, albeit with some major adjustments.

No. Strike that.

In truth, my journey began in elementary school in the days when schools had funding and therefore had print shops where you could submit your books to your teacher and she would "publish" them for you; spiral bound and laminated with your own design on the cover. I published over 25 books.

No. That's not right either.

My journey actually began one day during kindergarten when my teacher, Mrs. Johnson, brought in glossy scraps of paper that I thought looked perfect for writing books on (when in actuality, that paper was horrible and couldn't hold a pencil mark if its life depended on it). I wrote four books that year.

Well, whatever way it began, it endures. I'm a Michigander destined for adventure. Traveling is the only other pastime that stirs my soul (don't ask me my favorite destination - I don't know). When I'm not working my big girl job, I help run a comic book store with my family which means I'm always surrounded by fantastic art, good literature, mind-taxing board games, and love. A combination of cuddles from my cat (Aravis), a good cup of tea (or wine, or tequila - I'm flexible), and classical piano music is my recipe for a productive writing session. More often, I write to the sound of Office episodes and unending questions

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