World-Building

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Part 1: Government

Getting Started

Welcome, World-Builders!

I am so excited to present you with Part 1 of my six-week world-building series! In this issue, we'll be looking at all aspects of **Government.** Government plays a huge roll in the lives of people. Heck, even the absence of government will influence your characters!

We're going to start by looking at the **Systems of Government** and figuring out which system best suits your world. You don't have to directly copy an already established system of government. Feel free to adapt any of them or make your own. The problem with creating your own is that you have to logic everything out yourself. You must make it believable! Which is my key thread in all of these lessons that may seem weird at first. But truly – **You must make elements of your world realistic.** This doesn't mean cutting out all fantastical elements, but the readers must be able to relate to your story and your characters. Elements must be tangible. That is key to a great story. If you can logic a system of government into existence and make it tangible to your reader, you're on your way to a great story. Tangibility tends to be easier if elements of your story are based on real things, but don't let this dissuade your imagination. Just take careful time planning the specifics of your world.

We'll also examine **Law and Justice, Military, and Money and Commerce.**

I'm so excited to adventure with you!
Michelle

Elements of Government

Systems of Government

There are hundreds of different forms of government: think the tribal governments of the indigenous or the republics of Plato. Since the dawn of man, people have tried to put in place what they believe is the best form of government. The government in your world doesn't have to be the best. But whatever your government is, has bearing on the rest of your story. The type of government you have dictates who is in charge, relationships to other governments/countries, and the laws your main character may have to break (or follow) to achieve their goal. Below are some of the more common systems of government.

Golden Rule #1: Know all of the information about the government of your world suggested in this document, but don't dictate it to your reader in excessive amounts of text. That's a surefire way to get someone to put a book down (I guess unless they're really into government??). Say enough so that your reader understands how your world works. And better yet, show it through the eyes of your character and the experiences he/she has.

Anarchy: The absence of a government. Think of the chaos this could cause! Or—is everyone so morally sound that this works in your society?

Dictatorship: The ruler has complete authority over every aspect of society and makes all decisions. Should your world have a supreme ruler? Don't just think in terms of evil dictators. Dictators *can* be good!

Democracy: Think classic United States. People vote on matters that concern them. This is considered a government of the people.

Monarchy: Kings, Queens, the traditional fantasy ruling. Just because it's traditional doesn't mean it's bad. It means it works.

Oligarchy: A small group serves as rulers over a population. These rulers could be determined by race, wealth, or something else. What unique feature could determine rule in your world?

Theocracy: In this society, God(s) rules. God(s) could directly rule this society or religious members could rule.

Tribalism: Various groups claim dominion over different areas. There is no governing authority over the tribes as a whole, but each functions separately. Don't confine this system to just indigenous peoples or less technologically developed societies. What about a tribalism in a futuristic society? How would that work?

Most of these even have several variations! Just because you choose one of these systems of government doesn't mean you can't vary them in your world. Try a female dictator or a democracy where only shapeshifters can vote as many times as they can shift in one minute. What about a society where everyone tries to be exactly equal?

One of my favorite resources for government is https://thebestschools.org/magazine/common-forms-of-government-study-starters/ because they give real-life examples so you can see the effects of that government on a real people.

Systems of Government

Questions

1. What type of government does your world have?

2. Who is the current ruler? How did they get into power?

3. What aspects of the system of government you chose are evident in your novel?

4. How does this system of government impact your main character?

5. What does your main character think about this system of government? What do they think about the ruler?

6. Is your system patriarchal or matriarchal?

7. Are the people generally patriotic? Is your main character?

8. What is the relation of this government to surrounding governments?

9. Is there a capital? Where is it located?

10. What aspects of the traditional systems of government are you using in your world? What aspects are different?

11. Are men allowed to be part of the government? Are women? What about other species?

12. What influence did past rulers have on current society?

13. Has your government always been the same type? Has it changed over the years?

14. What are the responsibilities of governing authorities?

15. Have there been assassination attempts of any of your political figures?

Law and Justice

Why Law and Justice: Every society has some kind of rules or regulations. Even if one argues for a lack of rules or regulations, that is (circular thinking here) still a rule (The only rule is we have no rules!). This plays in closely with morals, but shouldn't be an exact copy. Morals dance between beliefs and law. They should tie together, but not be an exact copy. For example, murder could be wrong and punishable by life in prison, but assassins could play a large part of your society because the moral of cherishing life isn't at the forefront of your society, though they think it's valuable enough not to go around killing everyone for fun.

Understanding the law and justice system in your world is important because this system can act as a hindrance or an aid to your main character in reaching his/her goal. It can also be useful as a subplot. Having a law and justice system in place establishes a greater believability and gives you a framework of morality for working under.

Judgement is also important to consider because if a society has laws, but no punishment for breaking them, that creates an entirely different society. Think about how these parts interact as a whole.

How to create a law and justice system:

Start by examining what laws are necessary to give your reader a view of what day-to-day life is like. Establishing a framework of what your character needs to achieve is goal and what laws could stand in his/her way is a great start.

Think about how to make a justice system different. Could justice require that the offender swim to a nearby island and return with a special seed to prove his worthiness to live another day? Do people have to take justice into their own hands when laws are broken? Is there an overzealous government presence that enacts new laws every day that the populace struggles to follow? **Making your story different, but still relatable is how to set yours apart from the competition!**

Law and Justice

Questions

1. What laws exist that affect your character's daily life?

2. How does your character feel about the justice systems in place?

3. What happens if someone breaks the law?

4. What is the punishment for murder? Theft? Rape? Slander?

5. Who enforces the law?

6. Who creates the law?

7. Who judges the law?

8. Are laws written? Spoken? Word of mouth? Based on some sort of code?

9. How are these laws communicated to the public?

10. Is anyone above the law? Who is hurt by the laws in place?

11. Are there prisons? What is a typical sentence? Are prisoners ever released?

12. How do war crimes fit into the legal system?

13. Are criminals innocent until proven guilty or guilty until proven innocent?

14. Has your main character ever had trouble with the law?

15. How has the law kept your main character from getting what he or she wants? How has it helped?

16. Are there any moral or unstated laws?

17. Are these laws man-made or God(s) given?

18. What are the most important laws? Are these punished more severely? Or are all laws equal?

Military

Why Military?: Military and war are important in understanding the governance of your world. Sometimes, the military is the governing power and sometimes the absence of a military creates peace between nations.

War does not need to be a focal point of your story and it's quite probable you'll never touch on military. However, war is a classic conflict occurring between political rivals.

In the context of government, it is important to know the relationship between these two entities. Often they go hand in hand, but think about how to make this different: could the military be anti-government? Could the military be a peaceful one? Are they a coalition of heroes? Military doesn't have to be the traditional soldiers on horses going to war.

How to create a Military system: Start with the interactions of military with the populace. Then broaden to the military's interaction with the government. And finally, the military's interaction with outside governments and/or peoples. Do they routinely scout nearby lands? Is there a war raging currently? Was there a war that decimated the economy? If the military doesn't play a large roll in your story, perhaps they, or other high-ranking officials are in charge of enforcing laws. Be creative in how you use military, but understand that the presence of a military or the lack of one can seriously impact your society and therefore your characters!

Random Writer Tip: Ask around at local community colleges to see if they let you "audit" classes (it means you sit in on class periods but don't pay and don't earn college credit). Some community colleges will let you do this for cheap or free! I recommend classes in Philosophy, Ethics, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, and Ancient Cultures.

Weapons & Armor

We'll cover weapons in the Advancement section of World-Building in the weeks to come. Don't worry – I haven't forgotten! I'll also be looking at armor and what that conveys to the reader about the development, culture, and geography of a society. Right now, we want to consider how the formation of a military affects our government.

Military

Questions

1. Is there an organized military presence? Unorganized?

2. What role does the military (or lack thereof) play in your story?

3. Who are important military figureheads?

4. How does the military train?

5. What recent wars or battles have there been?

6. Is the military made up of your main character's own people? Or other peoples/beings?

7. How does your government recruit people for military service?

8. How big is the military? What is the gender makeup?

9. What does the military hierarchy look like? What are the various positions called?

10. Are there any restrictions to joining the military?

11. How does the populace view the military and military service? Are soldiers respected?

12. How are widows taken care of?

13. Is the military corrupt or law abiding?

Golden Rule #2: If you can't pronounce it, either spell it differently or re-name it. Nobody likes a main character like XLlsred. Names should be able to roll off your tongue. If you can't pronounce it, chances are your readers won't be able to either. I love unique names, but I always spell them phonetically. Gaelia (gay-lee-uh) or Saysundra (say-sun-druh) are prime examples. Again, this leans on the rule that your fantasy world should be tangible.

Money and Commerce

Why Money and Commerce?: Whether or not your character can easily access the goods and services they need can be instrumental to the conflict of your story. Can he easily get a Gipu bird? Or does he have to go on an adventure to find it in order to save his dying wife? The economy is important to consider because, again, this creates conflict for your character. If your character is a blacksmith with a hefty paycheck, but she can't get meat at her local market, that is going to impact her.

How to create Commerce and Money:

Think of what your character needs in their daily life. These items should be somewhat readily available if they don't play a main part in your narrative. For example, if your character is a woodworker, he or she should have easy access to wood. If not, that becomes a pivotal part of the story. Unless you want that to happen, you need to ensure your character has access to the things they need in order to progress your story.

Another point I see in many new writers' stories, is that the main character somehow has unlimited gold (or gems etc.) to get whatever they need. I'm not saying you need to keep a spreadsheet of your character's checking account (though it wouldn't be bad if you did!), but you should understand how they get and spend money. Think about what a typical person of their socio-economic class would have access to. How does the rule of the government affect this?

Golden Rule #3: Your world doesn't have to be 'real', but it does have to be tangible. Use your character's experiences, senses, thoughts, and feelings to make your constructs real. You don't have to use a real form of government or any of these ideas (that's the beauty of world-building. However, you must make the story tangible for your reader. If they can in no way relate and spend half their time reading trying to figure out what the world looks like or what the complicated laws are, they're going to drop your book like its hot. Think the book of Leviticus or Numbers in the Bible. Those laws shaped the Israelites for thousands of years. In Jewish communities, those laws still apply today! Look at how that set of laws influenced the people. Your government, laws, texts, and regulations should do the same in your novel. But please, don't spend countless pages talking about the size of a tabernacle. As with every sort of writing, show the aspects of your world through your characters eyes and experiences. If you can't do that, it's great that you know that about your world, but keep it out of your story!

Money and Commerce

Questions

1. What type of money does your world use? Do people pay with acts of service, tangible goods, paper bills, or gems and coins? Is it universal or area-specific?

2. How important is money to your main character?

3. How does your main character's community get the food and resources they need to live?

4. Are there trade guilds? How is trade managed?

5. Are there taxes? What do these taxes fund?

6. What are the punishments if taxes aren't paid? Are there regulations on how much can be charged?

7. Where would your character go for basic needs (food, supplies, medicine, etc.)? What about more complicated needs (weapons, potions, spell books, warhorses)?

8. How easy is it for your character to get what they need?

9. With which countries/tribes/governments will your government trade? Are there agreements?

10. What are the imports and exports of your area? Surrounding areas? Does your area have a specialty?

11. What are the natural resources of the area? How are they used in your society?

12. How often does your character shop for goods? Is there anything unique about his or her shopping habits?

13. How does your character get the money he/she needs?

14. Does your character have to travel far to get what he/she needs? Or do traders come to them?

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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