



WORLD BUILDING

Recap: Verisimilitude

- Sensory proofs are necessary ingredients in almost all forms of literature, providing what E.M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, calls "intermittent realism." Ironically, these sensory proofs are perhaps most important to the writer of non-realistic fiction.
- Without attention to minute details – the sights, smells, sounds and textures of our fictional world – the reader will not believe that your world exists (or might exist, in some other realm).

Building a World

- All fiction requires a degree of WORLDBUILDING in order to conjure the time and place in which the story takes place.
- The amount of worldbuilding you need to do will grow depending upon the degree to which the fictional world diverges from the world that we know in real life.

Research

Historical: Can you model this new world on aspects of past civilisations? E.g. Aspects of George R R Martin's *Game of Thrones* were inspired by The War of the Roses, Hadrian's Wall, The Roman Empire.

Scientific: Can you draw on real science as the foundation for your story? Andy Weir, author of *The Martian* (2011) researched his novel in great detail so that the deviations from reality were more convincing – even to readers with a scientific background.

Creative: How do people live in this world? How is their society constructed? What are their value systems? How do they create meaning? How does their worldview differ from ours?

Write the rules

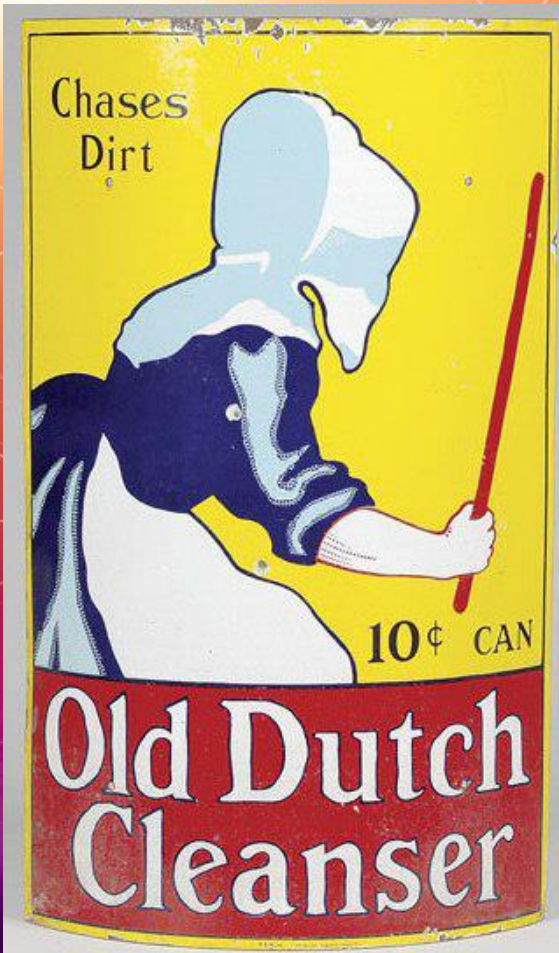
Establish the rules:

- Speculative fiction is just like all other fiction: it must be made **plausible and accurate** within its own set of rules.
- You will need to make decisions about the world you have created:
 - what are the **physics** of this world?
 - where are the **limitations** of its magic? e.g. Harry Potter can't bring the dead back to life.
- Once you have created the rules of your world, you must stick to them or risk breaking the contract you have made with your reader: **the suspension of disbelief**.
- World-building needs to be embedded in the characters' perceptions and language – not just in the descriptions of their world. E.g. if your world contains different fauna and flora to that of Earth, the characters' frame of reference cannot include gazelles or pine trees for example.

Visual Language

Develop a Strong Visual language:

- Visual language is a process of communicating a message or concept through images and text.
- In order to anchor your reader in the fictional world, you need to give them a series of strong visual markers with which they can picture the most important aspects of this world – as the writer, you must decide what these are. E.g. a wall, a building, a statue.
- Your visual language will also help to communicate some of the broader themes, e.g. utopia, oppression, surveillance.



Avoiding the Info Dump

“The author becomes anxious that the reader comprehends enough about the context to follow the story, but this anxiety is usually misplaced. It is actually far more difficult to comprehend a huge amount of abstracted information delivered in one blow than it is to gradually learn the context through carefully integrated details. The best way to integrate information is to mete out small amounts consistently over a long period.”

Kim Wilkins, ‘Genre and Speculative Fiction’ in *Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. by David Morley, and Philip Neilsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 43.

Whose World?

“My contention is that the best way to describe fantastic ideas is through the viewpoint of characters who have realistic and familiar reactions to the world around them, even if that world is unfamiliar. In fact, it is arguably more important for the characters in fantastic secondary worlds to have realistic reactions, to keep the fantastic elements anchored to lived experience.”

Kim Wilkins, ‘Genre and Speculative Fiction’ in *Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. by David Morley, and Philip Neilsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 43.

Part 2: Close Reading

Read the excerpt and discuss the following questions with your partner/group:

- Which tools of writing craft does the writer use to build their fictional world?
- What do we learn about the way people live in this world?
- In what ways does the world of the novel resemble our own, and how does it differ?
- What do you learn about the geography of this world, and its physics?
- How does the author go about providing sensory 'proofs' to the reader?
- What does the setting tell you about the characters / narrator?
- Can you draw out some effective examples of sensory imagery?
- How much does the writer 'show' and how much do they 'tell'?

Chapter I

There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall.

Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.

Looked at from one side, the wall enclosed a barren sixty-acre field called the Port of Anarres. On the field there were a couple of large gantry cranes, a rocket pad, three warehouses, a truck garage, and a dormitory. The dormitory looked durable, grimy, and mournful; it had no gardens, no children; plainly nobody lived there or was even meant to stay there long. It was in fact a quarantine. The wall shut in not only the landing field but also the ships that came down out of space, and the men that came on the ships, and the worlds they came from, and the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper VOYAGER, 2011) p. 1

Looked at from the other side, the wall enclosed Anarres: the whole planet was inside it, a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine.

A number of people were coming along the road towards the landing field, or standing around where the road cut through the wall.

People often came out from the nearby city of Abbenay in hopes of seeing a spaceship, or simply to see the wall. After all, it was the only boundary wall on their world. Nowhere else could they see a sign that said No Trespassing. Adolescents, particularly, were drawn to it. They came up to the wall; they sat on it. There might be a gang to watch, offloading crates from track trucks at the warehouses. There might even be a freighter on the pad. Freighters came down only eight times a year, unannounced except to syndics actually working at the Port, so when the spectators were lucky enough to see one they were excited, at first. But there they sat, and there it sat, a squat black tower in a mess of movable cranes, away off across the field. And then a woman came over from one of the warehouse crews and said, "We're shutting down for today, brothers." She was wearing the Defense armband, a sight almost as rare as a spaceship. That was a bit of a thrill. But though her tone was mild, it was final. She was the foreman of this gang, and if provoked would be backed up by her syndics. And anyhow there wasn't anything to see. The aliens, the off-worlders, stayed hiding in their ship. No show.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper VOYAGER, 2011) p. 1

It was a dull show for the Defense crew, too. Sometimes the foreman wished that somebody would just try to cross the wall, an alien crewman jumping ship, or a kid from Abbenay trying to sneak in for a closer look at the freighter. But it never happened. Nothing ever happened. When something did happen she wasn't ready for it.

The captain of the freighter Mindful said to her, "Is that mob after my ship?"

The foreman looked and saw that in fact there was a real crowd around the gate, a hundred or more people. They were standing around, just standing, the way people had stood at produce-train stations during the Famine. It gave the foreman a scare.

"No. They, ah, protest," she said in her slow and limited lotic. "Protest the, ah, you know. Passenger?"

"You mean they're after this bastard we're supposed to take? Are they going to try to stop him, or us?"

The word "bastard," untranslatable in the foreman's language; meant nothing to her except some kind of foreign term for her people, but she had never liked the sound of it, or the captain's tone, or the captain. "Can you look after you?" she asked briefly.

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper VOYAGER, 2011) p. 2

Creative Task

- Build a world using the template provided as a jumping off point.
- Build a character who is from this world.
- Build a character who is not from this world.
- Write a scene where the two encounter one another.