

Worldbuilding: Enriching Your Story With Culture and Setting

Worldbuilding is not merely where your story takes place; it's about the unique way that your characters interact within the world and with each other. Authors Jeannie Lin and Shawntelle Madison discuss the ways in which they bring their worlds to life by incorporating elements of surface and deep culture, making it relevant to whether your story takes place in modern times, in a historical setting, on Mars, or your own backyard.

Warm-up: What are three examples of stories you've read with excellent worldbuilding?

I. Setting as a Character

- a. The setting takes on its own "personality" and interacts with the characters
- b. Characters impose their thoughts and emotions upon an environment
- c. Just like characters, the setting has a backstory, it can evolve & carries its own meaning & symbols

II. Creating Culture as Worldbuilding

- a. What makes a world interesting is not its surface characteristics, but how the characters struggle and thrive within it
- b. Creating the spoken and unspoken norms for how your characters will interact
- c. The environment/setting intimately affects a culture

III. Surface Culture vs Deep Culture

a. Surface culture examples:

- Food
- Holidays
- Arts
- Folklore
- History

b. Deep culture examples:

- Courtship & Marriage
- Esthetics
- Ethics
- Family ties
- Gestures & Body language
- Concepts of Life & Death
- Concepts of Time

V. Research - A labor of love

VI. Setting Details – Tips for Execution

VII. The character in the world

- a. What makes a world come alive is how the character interacts with it
- b. Relevant description
- c. Your protagonist changes your world and vice-versa

VIII. Rules in worldbuilding

- a. Consistent in and of itself
- b. Dictated by the culture and time period of your story
- c. Storytelling rules: Not just about "magic"

Presented by: Jeannie Lin (www.jeannielin.com) and Shawntelle Madison (www.shawntellemadison.com)

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Jeannie Lin _____ Shawntelle Madison _____