

” World Creation for Games or Fiction”

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Origins Seminar

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Game World Design

- Overview & Definitions
- Selected References & Useful Supplies
- Bottom-Up World Creation
- Top-Down World Creation
- Organizing Your Creation
- Questions / Answers
- Frenzied Applause!

World Design

What we're trying to accomplish

We will begin with definitions which will be germane in the remainder of the document. Then, we will describe two procedures for creation of a fantasy Role-Playing world.

The name of the game in Role-Playing for the referee is creating a world where the players can *suspend disbelief*. The techniques described in this document will aid you in achieving this objective.

Gaming Principles

1. ***Stafford Principle: maintain a sense of wonder in the campaign.*** Make sure there is always some surprise or something special that makes a session, an adventure, a campaign and your whole world unique.
2. ***Perrin Principle: be consistent.*** If you do something once, it becomes a precedence. The players will remember it, and count on it being the same next time. If it's not the same later, have a darn good, obvious to the players reason that it's different.
3. ***Petersen Principle: make it fun.*** Don't be afraid to change a plot to go with player enthusiasm. Try something crazy or goofy, even (or especially) in serious settings. Roll with the mood and make it happen. Be high energy!
4. ***Staats Principle: reward the players as well as the characters.*** Handouts, riddles, music, etc. that can be experienced by the players' senses directly or challenge the players' creativity reward the players. The players are the ones that come to the sessions every week, and ultimately, it is the GM's goal to reward the players. Some folks are just fine vicariously being rewarded through their characters, but it's oh so much more fun to be rewarded as a player during the course of a session.
5. ***Sandy's Axiom: involve at least three senses in every scene.*** These can be described or experienced (e.g. props, incense, etc.). People have five senses, and adding details about weird sounds, the unusual smell or the texture of something adds to the gaming experience.

Definitions - I

1. **Role-Playing:** (We will use Schick's definition for the purposes of this document.)

Gygax in Role-Playing Mastery: "Acting out a make-believe position"

Costikyan in Toon: "Role-Playing is just 'Let's Pretend'"

Schick in Heroic Worlds: "Quantified Interactive Storytelling"

2. **Character:** The role a player assumes when playing a Role-Playing game.

3. **Adventure:** A Role-Playing session or series of sessions using the same characters throughout with definite beginning, middle and ending.

4. **Campaign:** A series of connected sessions where the characters accomplish something which could not have been done in one adventure.

Definitions - II

5. ***Fantasy Role-Playing*** (FRP): Role-Playing which takes place in a fantasy milieu.
6. ***Fantasy Role-Playing World***: The environment in which the characters interact. It has a consistent set of physical laws and a coherent mythical order.
7. ***Cross-Over***: Travel from one Role-Playing milieu to another.
8. ***Multi-verse***: Set of all Role-Playing worlds/milieu's possible for characters to enter from a particular campaign. (Note: these worlds do not have to all be run by the same referee.)
9. ***Party***: A group of characters involved in a campaign who travel through the Role-Playing world together with a common set of goals and objectives.
10. ***PC***: Player Character, a character controlled by a player
11. ***NPC***: Non-Player Character, a character controlled by the referee
12. ***Tie-In***: Connecting two plot threads or regions that were not previously related.
13. ***Maguffin***: a plot device or thread specifically designed to incite player interest.

Selected References

Role-Playing Mastery by Gary Gygax

Master of the Game by Gary Gygax

Heroic Worlds by Lawrence Schick

Campaign Law by ICE

Best of White Dwarf Articles (Vols. I & II) by GW

World Builder's Handbook by DGP

Fantasy Wargaming by Bruce Galloway

Different Worlds (Most volumes 1 to 20)

Beast Enterprises' publications: TS, etc.

The Art of War in the Middle Ages by C.W.C. Oman

War from the Stone Age to Alexander the Great by Arther Ferrill

Powers and Perils by AH

Landscape: Physical Geography by Marsh and Dozier

Contending Theories of International Relations by Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff

The Oxford History of Medieval Europe by George Holmes

Traveller by GDW and Imperium Games

Glorantha, Land of Ninja and Vikings by Chaosium/AH

Quest World by Chaosium

Many GURPS supplements by SJG

A good Atlas

A good Dictionary

Useful Supplies

Notebook - a nice, well bound notebook which you can carry around with you and jot down ideas as they occur to you.

Three-Ring Binder - a place to organize your sketches, maps, and articles you copy and save

Paper Punch - to prepare items for inclusion in your three ring binder

Camera - to take pictures of items that catch your eye with respect to world building/design

Colored Pencils - to highlight items and help you map and sketch

Felt-tipped Markers - as per colored pencils

Good pencil and eraser - for making/erasing notes and design work

Good ruler - useful for drawing lines or measuring things

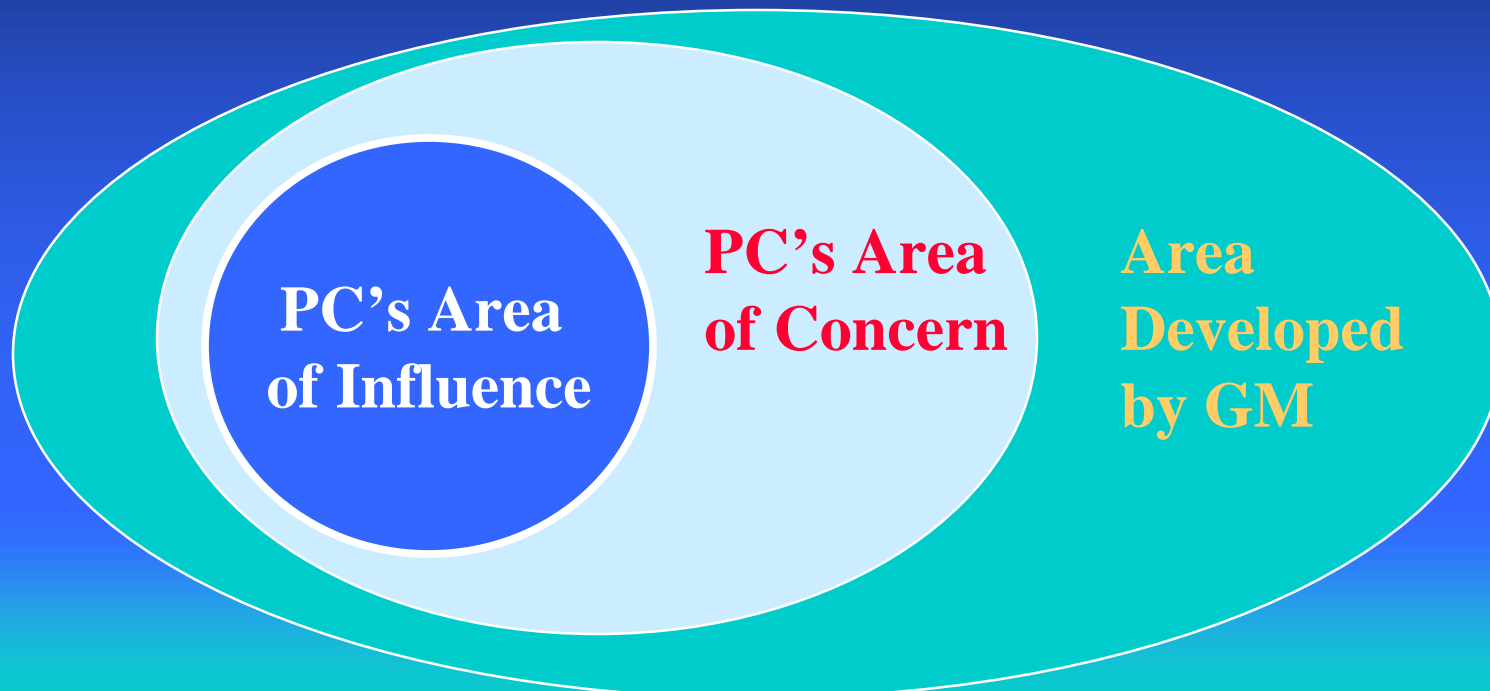
Hex and graph paper - organizational tools/big aids in sketch maps or line diagrams

Bottom-Up or Campaign World Creation

- The most common method in practice of creating an FRP world
- Natural outgrowth of campaigns
- "Easiest" method
- Potentially inconsistent
- The "Pre-Fab" campaign (e.g., Ravenloft, Dark Sun, EarthDawn, etc.) is a sub-set of this

Bottom-Up Description

- World is developed on a “Need to Know” basis
- Concentric Circle view of design



Bottom-Up Advantages

1. *The development of the campaign is natural.* The FRP World grows and matures as the campaign grows and matures. The referee is able to directly see which areas of the world need more development based on the actions of the characters.
2. *The players are an intimate part of the world creation process.* The actions of the PCs affect the part of the world "seen" by the characters; so, the players help define the world by determining what needs more detail and what does not. For example, if the players are very concerned about clothing styles in the world, the referee is likely to spend more time in that area, but the referee might be able to get by with a minimal description or examination of artistic styles.
3. *The referee does not devote "wasted" time in world development.* Because the world is shaped based on the characters' sphere of influence, the referee knows that most of the details he creates will be useful to the players.

Bottom-Up Disadvantages

1. *The referee has less control* in the world design than in Top-Down world creation.
2. *There is a large potential for inconsistency in the world creation.* This is especially true when the referee is mixing and matching "modules" into his campaign. Since many of the details in the world are being created more or less ad hoc, some of the details may be inconsistent with each other.
3. *The referee takes a big risk of being caught "off-guard"* if the players ask questions about details the referee did not anticipate or if the characters travel to some area of the world which has not been examined in advance by the referee.
4. *The relations between portions or the world can be artificial.* For example, if the referee decides to use both portions of Krynn and Arkham in his campaign, the connections between the two areas may be contrived at best.

Bottom-Up Process

- Define Key Areas
 - Identify Geographical Regions
 - Identify Key Groups
- Develop Relationships between Key Areas
 - One level past player interest
 - Use “open ended” NPC motivations
 - Be consistent!
 - Define Key Group motivations
- Shamelessly place Maguffins

Bottom-Up Helpful Hints

- Be willing to discard
- Supplement light material & weak motivations
- Write down decisions and ad libs; keep a good campaign journal
- Accept suggestions from the party
- Create interesting characters and plot lines

Top-Down or Deliberate World Creation

- It's time consuming!
- It is difficult!
- It is incredibly rewarding!
- It creates a very consistent world.
- This is generally not for a first-time referee!!!

Top-Down Description

- The GM starts with the cosmology and works down to the size and shape of the sand grains in the hobbit's sandals.
- This is the “Calculus textbook” approach to world creation. Every portion added is logically consistent and flows from earlier decisions.

Top-Down Advantages

- The referee has total control over the development of the world.
- The world is logically consistent. (At least the world is as logically consistent as the referee can imagine.)
- The referee runs little risk of being caught off-guard with respect to details or background in the campaign.
- It is one of the most direct creative processes possible. When you are finished, your world will be a direct reflection of your creative energies.

Top-Down Disadvantages

- The players have less input in the creation of the world.
- The process is very time consuming.
- If the campaign is not a long one, the referee runs the risk of spending large amounts of time on detail which the players will never directly experience.

Top-Down Process

Hold onto your seats!

- Select a gaming system
 - Comfortable, feel, workable mechanics
- Determine the scope of the world
 - Quests, details, exploration, travel, tech level
- Develop the cosmology
 - Myths vs Reality
 - Fundamental Questions (Creation, Why, Death)
 - Physical laws? Magic? Psionics

Hint: the weirder you make your setting, the more interesting it will be and the more difficult for the players to envision it.

Top-Down Process

Part Two

- Develop the physical world
 - Geography, climate, highlight peculiar features and special areas
- Populate the world
 - Major races, general areas
- Develop the Eco-Structure
 - Food chain (energy cycle), fertile/waste areas, base of the chain goes in first, exotic/unique areas, place predators from bottom to top

Top-Down Process

Part Three

- Develop Cultures
 - Place in world, type of race
 - Items of interest (resources, subsistence patterns, religions, tech level, social structure, symbolism, languages, trade/currency)
- Tie Cultures Together
 - Resource competition
 - Trade
 - Reproduction rates
 - Conflicts

Hint: conflicts make campaigns interesting, but make sure there is some type of stable structure for the party to work from.

Top-Down Process

Part Four

- Make the Nations
 - Social, Racial, Religions, Major NPCs, Laws, Customs, Holidays, Clothing, Education, Economics, Products, Military, Attitudes, Magic
- Highlight the Special Aspects of the World

(In other words, what things make your world truly unique?
Why would someone want to play in your world in particular?)

Top-Down Process

Part Five

- Do a Consistency Check
 - Ask a non-gaming friend or relative
- Re-Work any Major Logic Flaws
- Develop PCs and NPCs that highlight unique aspects of your world
- Introduce Maguffins in the campaign to explore neat aspects of the world
- Be willing to ad lib, but make sure you write it down!!!

Helpful Hints for Top-Down

1. **All those NPCs and "schtuff" --- they are all imaginary, really!**
2. Be willing to **modify part of the world later if it proves to be inconsistent**. But, carefully consider the effects of doing so before you dig out the eraser! Items in a fantasy world just as in the real world tend to be connected in ways we poor mortals cannot hope to see without very deep thought. Unfortunately, you, a mortal, will not see all of the interconnections right away. But, fear not! If there is an advantageous one for the PCs, they will spot them at the worst possible time!
3. **Make lots of notes in the creation process**. Writing down your thoughts tends to organize and crystallize them.
4. **The more different your world is from Earth, the more exotic and interesting it will be, but it will also be harder to visualize and referee.**
5. **Start small!** Do not go out and develop a Jupiter sized planet as your first project.
6. Humans are multi-sensed creatures. Be willing to **use visual and audio items to help suspend disbelief** and draw the players into your world as well as using good dialog.
7. Develop the cosmology and physical world to completion or near completion, but only develop outlines or skeletons for cultures which the gaming group will most likely never encounter. **Spend 80 percent of your time developing things that the party is likely to spend 80 percent of its time interacting with!**

Organizing Your World

1. *Get a bunch of binders.* The easiest way to organize is to break up the world into a bunch of smaller portions.
2. Here are *several sample organizational schemes*:
 1. By geography...
 2. By historical era...
 3. By culture...
 4. By race...
 5. Any combination of the above...
3. *Index your world* early on, or it will become an insurmountable task later on.
4. Always *include a brief description* of what a binder contains at the beginning. Ten years from now, you are unlikely to remember it contains "samples of Overmannish wedding garb from the Huvis-Kanine era".