



Intro

Hello and welcome to *The Art of World Building* podcast, episode number one. Today's topic is an overview of the podcast and what you can expect. This podcast is based on my three-volume series of books called *The Art of World Building*. While I won't be reading from the text, I'll be covering portions of the same material. And I'll also be introducing myself and my world building experience.

Intro theme. Do you want practical advice on how to build better worlds faster and have more fun doing it? *The Art of World Building* book series, website, blog, and podcast will make your worlds beat the competition. This is your host, Randy Ellefson, and I have 30 years of world building advice, tips, and tricks to share. Follow along now at artofworldbuilding.com.

Overview

What I'd like to begin with is an overview of the podcast and what we're going to be covering during the episodes. For the most part, we are going to be following along with the three-volume series I have written called *The Art of World Building*. The first volume is called *Creating Life*. The second volume is *Creating Places*. And the third volume is *Cultures and Beyond*; that's basically a catchall for everything that didn't fit into the first two volumes.

I'm not going to be reading passages from the book. If you want to hear that, there's going to be an audiobook of them forthcoming, but I will be more or less following along with the content of the three volumes, starting with *Creating Life*. So let's talk a little bit about what is in each volume, so you know where we're going with all this.

The Volumes

Volume 1 talks about why we should build a world or even if we need to. And then it goes on to talking about how to create gods, species and races, world figures like heroes and villains, monsters, plants, animals, and finally undead.

The second volume is called *Creating Places*, and it talks about how to create a planet, continents, land features like forests, mountains, swamps, and it's got a big chapter on understanding sovereign powers. This is something that's often not covered. In many cases, it seems like people just present everything as a generic kingdom and don't go into details of what's going on with this government and how it functions, and what the effect is on people. There's quite a bit of research I did and I basically shortened it and made it something that's easier to digest, and has a focus on what a world builder would need to know to create believable sovereign powers, and a better variety of powers.

After that, we talk about how to actually create a sovereign power, then how to create a settlement. And then another subject that doesn't seem to get covered much, which is travel by land, which in a medieval society or a fantasy setting, it's usually going to be horses or wagons or even mythical creatures like dragons. So how do we figure out how long it would actually take anyone to get from one place to another unless we have a reliable way of doing this?

There's a similar chapter on travel by sea. This is another subject that most of us, unless we're into sailing, we have no idea how long it takes to get from one place to another on a boat or ship. There's quite a bit of information about that, including on ship types in that chapter. There's another about travel in space using fictional technologies.

And then we go on to talking about creating time and history, and places of interest such as supernatural phenomenon located somewhere. And then there's a bonus chapter on how to draw maps.

For volume 3, *Cultures and Beyond*, we'll talk about cultures and things like greetings, how to create a language, religions, military groups, supernatural and a system of magic, and of course magic items, and technology if you're doing sci-fi. And then there's a big chapter on how to create names and there's another chapter about keeping everything in perspective so that you don't get overwhelmed with the act of building worlds.

The three volumes don't need to be read in order, nor do their contents, and this podcast can also be listened to out of order. However, I will say that there will probably be times when I don't finish a subject in one podcast and will resume it in the next, but I'll make sure that the description of the podcast makes it very easy for you to understand when this is happening.

How to Start

One of the subjects that tends to trip up world builders is how to start, or where to start, so throughout the book series and in this podcast, I provide tips on exactly what to do. These usually come at the end of a chapter and it will come at the end of the podcast as well. The reason being that I think it's important to understand the subject that you're going to create before you get an idea of where to start.

So for example with gods, you need to know all of the things that you need to consider about this and figure out which ones are most important to you. Based on what I have explained, at the end I will say, "Okay if you want to do this or that, here's what you should start with. Otherwise, start on this. And here are the things that can wait until later."

The Website

There is more help that you can find on the website, artofworldbuilding.com. Note that it is not **theartofworldbuilding.com** even though that's the name of the book. The website is just www.artofworldbuilding.com.

One of the resources you will find on that website is free templates that you can download and use while you are creating worlds. For example, each volume covers various subjects and as a result there are several templates that go with it. Volume 1, *Creating Life*, there are templates for creating a god, a species, a world figure, a monster, a plant, and animal, and an undead. These are all free to download.

There is one catch, however. You just need to join the newsletter for *The Art of World Building*. I have a separate newsletter for just that. If you are interested in my fiction, feel free to read something. You can actually read a book of mine called *The Ever Fiend (Talon Stormbringer)* for free by joining the fiction newsletter. Both of these are located on the same sign-up form so, as you are joining the newsletter for *The Art of World Building*, so that you will be emailed the free templates, you can also check another box for the fiction newsletter and you will get a link to download the e-book of *The Ever Fiend*. The link for this newsletter is at artofworldbuilding.com/newsletter.

And what are you going to get in the newsletter? Well, in addition to the templates that you can download, you're also going to get, I think at this point it's bimonthly, tips on how to do world building. These tips are drawn partly from the actual volumes. Sometimes I find other useful things out there on the Internet and I will summarize these or send you links. No one likes spam so I'm not going to send you a lot of stuff. I just don't have the time honestly to do it and you don't have time to read it if it's not useful.

Review

if you're enjoying the podcast, please rate and review the show at artofworldbuilding.com/review. Reviews really are critical to encouraging more people to listen to a show haven't heard of before, and it can also help the show rank better, allowing more people to discover it. Again that URL is artofworldbuilding.com/review.

About Me

So let's talk just a little bit about me. After all, you're listening to my podcast. Why should you follow my advice? Who am I? What have I done?

Well, I have been doing world building for almost 30 years now. Much of my work has been on a single planet called Llurien. It even has its own website now (Llurien.com) as I'm beginning to publish my stories and I wanted another place for people to go and find out more information. This is partly so that I'm not tempted to just go on and on about my world building and all my creations in the context of a story. We'll talk more later about this problem, which is called the problem with exposition. This website is one way of going around that.

The point I'm making is that I'm pretty much kind of nuts to have spent three decades building the same planet. I'm something of an expert. I've done just about everything that is in this podcast and series of books, so I have practical experience with everything.

Now in addition to building Llurien, I have sometimes built other worlds for just a single project like a short story or a one-off book that is not going to take place in that setting. So I've done everything from this incredibly intense and in-depth creating of one setting, and I've also done this kind of admittedly skimpy approach to just one setting that I need for one story, and I don't want to spend an incredible amount of time and detail doing that if I'm only going to use it once. And I've got some advice for you in this series about when to do what and how to decide how much to do for each of your projects.

[Piers Anthony Endorsement.](#)

If that's not enough to convince you that I know what I'm doing, you can take the word of best-selling author Piers Anthony. I was lucky enough to get him to take a read through of volume 1, *Creating Life*, and he had this to say:

"It is exhaustive, well-written, and knowledgeable. I, as a successful science fiction and fantasy writer, have generated many worlds, so this material is familiar, but it would have been easier and probably better had I had a reference like this. It is realistic, recognizing that the average writer may not have the patience to work out all of the details before getting into the action."

For those of you not familiar with Piers Anthony, I first came across his [Incarnations of Immortality](#) series. He's probably most known for his [Xanth Series](#), which has almost 30 books. It actually probably has more than that. I recommend checking out his work. It's pretty good!

One of the things I talk about in this podcast and in the series of books is that we need to find a balance explaining our world to the audience and maintaining our story or narrative flow. We don't want to stop our story to say "Hey here's the thing I created!" and go on and on for paragraph after paragraph about it. So I try to keep the world building practical and accessible for the audience and I think this is something that you as a world builder also need to focus on. I've got quite a bit of tips coming your way for how to do that.

As for my actual writing, I do have this three-volume series of nonfiction books. I have also written over a dozen short stories, and I've written about six novels, some of which I'm in the process of starting to publish now.

My focus is for the most part on fantasy, so much of my advice is admittedly a little bit weighted towards fantasy, but in my experience, most of it really does apply to science fiction as well. It is something like travel in space that is obviously much more of a sci-fi thing than fantasy.

As a final note, I'm also a musician. My degree is technically classical guitar but I was always more of a rocker. [I have released three albums](#) of my own instrumental rock, including the title song that you heard at the beginning of this podcast. I've also released an album of classical guitar, and one album of acoustic guitar instrumentals. So I've had a lot of experience putting together major projects and releasing them to the public and now I'm doing the same with [my fiction career](#), and this podcast is part of that.

And last but not least, I am still a working stiff like you probably are, so I work as a professional software developer in the Washington DC area and I have my own consulting company that I've been doing for quite a while now. It's a good way to pay the bills and more importantly, it pays for all of my releases.

By the way, you can also get a free MP3s from me if you're on [that newsletter sign-up page](#), as there's another section for music. You can click the checkbox, I think it says instrumental guitar, and get another email with about a dozen songs that you can download. So I give away a certain amount of content for free.

If you're someone who supports crowdfunding efforts, you can go to artofworldbuilding.com/patreon. I'm on that crowdfunding site. You can donate as little as a dollar a month to support this podcast and any of my other projects as well. It all kind of goes into the same bucket.

World Building Introduction

So let's talk world building. If you're following along with volume 1, [Creating Life](#), we will be discussing the subjects that are covered during the introduction. One of the things that we always need to decide on is our goal, so we're going to look into how to examine these and figure out what our options are.

We're also going to look at using analogues. An analogue is something that exists on Earth and we can leverage and use in our settings. For example, we might have a civilization like that of Japan and we might want to borrow elements of that when we are creating a sovereign power on another world. We'll talk about the pros and cons of how to do that and how to not be too obvious about what we're doing. Because what you don't want is to have the audience see this culture that you've created and have them go, "Oh it's just Japan. You didn't do anything original. You just stole that from Earth." So we don't want that kind of reaction.

That brings up the subject of what we really mean by world building. Now it's perfectly fine to do something like have a story happen on Earth and we do a reimagining of something like the Greek gods in modern times. You know, a story like that is fine but that is not what I mean by world building. World building is really the act of creating an imaginary world. Now I say world and we call it "world building," but more often than not, we're creating far less than a whole planet. I mean I've been creating [Lurien](#) for 30 years and I still have only two continents done at this point.

Now it might be good to have all the continents named and have some high-level ideas on all of the regions, but as far as doing details of each continent, that's just kind of crazy. So that's one of the things we're going to be looking at is to figure out just how much we need to do for each situation.

I also want to throw out a general disclaimer. This will come up more when we talk about species and races, but for the most part, I use the word species throughout this podcast and the series of books. We will talk a little bit more about why later, but I just wanted to point that out now. I'm not gonna keep saying "species or races."

And on the same note, if I'm talking about fictional characters that we might want to invent, I'm just going to go ahead with the male pronoun "he" and not say "he/she" all the time. This is not meant to be disrespectful. It's just easier.

Throughout this podcast, I'm going to be talking about fantasy and sci-fi. Just to make sure we're on the same page, by fantasy I generally mean a world without modern technology. It can be something like *The Lord of the Rings*, where there's knights, there's castles, there's magic, fictional creatures like dragons. And for sci-fi, usually we're talking about technology that doesn't even exist yet on Earth. It might be a future state of Earth, or it might be on entire other planets like in the *Star Wars* universe, where there's no connection to Earth. But generally they have technology that we do not have.

Much of the world building advice is really applicable to both of these, but if I do specifically talk about something being for fantasy or for being sci-fi or science-fiction, depending on what you want to call it, I'll bring that up at the time, but most of the advice will cover both.

Closing

All of this show's music is actually courtesy of yours truly, as I'm also a musician. The theme song is the title track from my [Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid](#) album. We're going to close out today's show with it. You can hear more songs at [RandyEllefson.com](#). Check out [artofworldbuilding.com](#) for free templates to help with your world building. And please rate and review the show in iTunes. Thanks for listening!