Honors 293 [I]: Worldbuilding in Fantasy and Science Fiction
CRN 16901
Dr. Jay Cole, Benjamin Ross, and Sam Gorski
Spring 2022
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30 – 3:45
Honors Hall, Room 120

Course summary

One of the most important elements of fantasy and science fiction novels, movies, and games is worldbuilding. The success of these works depends in part on the breadth, depth, and quality of the world(s) the readers, viewers, or players encounter as part of their experiences. This course will examine the process of worldbuilding as a creative and intellectual exercise and analyze a series of examples/case studies from literature, cinema, and gaming to understand how authors, directors, and designers have created worlds that are beloved by countless fans around the world. As a final project, students will become worldbuilders by applying what they have learned to create their own worlds. The primary purposes of this course are to give students an opportunity to think about worlds built by others and to be imaginative in building their own.

Course materials

We will draw from a wide range of source materials (books, movies, television series, and games) during the course. At the beginning of the semester, the instructor will discuss access to these source materials in an effort to minimize costs to the student. Related course materials, such as essays, reviews, and scholarly articles, will be provided by the instructor on e-campus.

Course format

The course will depend on in-class discussions during which the instructor will ask students for their opinions and analyses of some of the most famous worlds in science fiction and fantasy. There is much we can learn from each others' observations and perspectives about these worlds, so students are expected to participate actively and contribute regularly to in-class discussions.

Weekly schedule

Week 1: Introduction to worldbuilding

- 11 and 13 January
    - Early examples of worldbuilding
    - Fundamental questions of worldbuilding
    - Creative approaches to worldbuilding
    - Genres and sub-genres as guides for worldbuilding
    - Elements of worldbuilding
    - "For and against" worldbuilding

Weeks 2-6: Exploring worldbuilding in fantasy

- 18, 20, 25, and 27 January
    - Middle Earth (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*)
- 1 and 3 February
    - Narnia (*The Chronicles of Narnia*)
- 8 and 10 February
    - Wizarding and Muggle Worlds (*Harry Potter*)
- 15 and 17 February
    - Known World (*A Song of Fire and Ice*)

Weeks 7-12: Exploring worldbuilding in science fiction

- 22 and 24 February, 1 and 3 March
    - Star Wars Universe
- 8 and 10 March
    - Star Trek Universe
- 15 and 17 March
    - Spring Recess—no class sessions
- 22 and 24 March
    - Arrakis (*Dune*)
- 29 and 31 March
    - Chiba City/the matrix (*Neuromancer*)

Weeks 13-15: Exploring worldbuilding in tabletop and video games

- 5 and 7 April
    - various worlds of Dungeons & Dragons
- 12 and 14 April
    - Rapture (*Bioshock series*)
- 19 and 21 April
    - Fallout Universe (*Fallout series*) and Tamriel (*Elder Scrolls* series)

Weeks 16-17: In-class presentations of final projects

- 26 and 28 April (final exam date of 6 May will also be used if necessary)
    - In-class presentations
    - final projects due by 11:59 p.m. on 29 April

Assignments

Students will receive six grades in this course: one for journal entries on e-campus in which students work on the concepts of their worlds over time; class participation; three short essays in which students will analyze and critique iconic examples of worlds from fiction, cinema, and gaming; and a larger, more complex final project in which students will apply what they have discussed and learned during the semester to the creation of a world of their own.

Expectations for the journal entries and short essay assignments will be discussed during class. A grading rubric for the final project will be provided and reviewed during class.

- Journal entries: weekly thoughts that build toward the final project
- Assignment #1: analysis of *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884)
- Assignment #2: analysis of *Zork I: The Great Underground Empire* (1980)
- Assignment #3: analysis of *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)
- Final project: build your own world!

The total number of points for this course is 600, allocated in the following manner:

Participation in class discussions	100 points
E-campus journal	100 points
Short essays (3 @ 50 each)	150 points
Final project	250 points
Total	600 points

Thus, your final grade for this course will be based on the following scale:

540 – 600 = A
480 – 539 = B
420 – 479 = C
0 – 419 = F

Core values of the WVU Honors College

We lead.

The Honors College teaches students to be leaders in their classrooms and in their communities, pursuing a spirit of innovative thinking, responsible and accountable conduct, and extraordinary achievement. We model that leadership by fostering innovative learning environments that are test-beds for excellent teaching across the curriculum, and by epitomizing the integrity that we expect in our students.

We explore.

The Honors College helps students cultivate a curiosity about the world around them; develop persistence and resilience in solving the academic and social problems they encounter and research; and pursue an adventurous spirit that embraces intellectual risks for the sake of personal, academic, and community growth.

We build.

The Honors College builds an environment that empowers its students to construct their own solutions to individual and collective problems; to work harder and more deeply in the scholarly, research, and experiential activities they undertake; and to forge connections with peers, mentors, and community partners to better share our knowledge.

We work together.

The Honors College hosts an inclusive community of scholars by collaborating with faculty and

staff across the entire campus; by facilitating connections among students through social and academic activities in both their living and learning environments; and by encouraging them to expand the scope of their work to include local, regional, and global contexts.

We are Mountaineers.
As a prominent component of West Virginia's flagship institution, the Honors College cultivates an attitude of service to the Mountain State, our broader region, and the world. By combining a service mindset with the leader's stance, the explorer's vision, the builder's work ethic, and the community's collaboration, we embody and model the Mountaineer spirit.

Academic Integrity Statement
The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, instructors will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of their courses. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Standards Policy. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see your instructor before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

COVID-19 Syllabus Statement
WVU is committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Should campus operations change because of health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic or other campus-wide emergency, it is possible that this course will move to a fully online delivery format. If that occurs, students will be advised of technical and/or equipment requirements, including remote proctoring software.

In a face-to-face environment, our commitment to safety requires students, staff, and instructors to observe the social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) guidelines set by the University at all times. While in class, students will sit in assigned seats when required and will wear PPE according to current University guidelines. Students who fail to comply may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for sanctions.

COVID related absences fall under the University attendance policy found here: attendance. As detailed in the policy, a student who becomes sick or is required to quarantine during the semester should notify the instructor. The student should then work with the instructor to develop a plan to complete the course learning outcomes while he or she is absent.

Inclusivity Statement
The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in your classes, please advise your instructors and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services. (https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/)

More information is available at the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (https://diversity.wvu.edu/) as well.

Examples of worlds from fantasy, science fiction, tabletop RPGs, and computer RPGs

During this course, we will study a small fraction of the many incredible worlds created in science fiction and fantasy literature, films, and games. The following list is intended to be illustrative, not comprehensive. Please let me know about other worlds you have encountered that you found compelling.

World	**Primary creator**	**Primary source**
Fantasy		
Atlantis	Plato	*Timaeus* and *Critias*
Avalon	Marion Zimmer Bradley	Avalon Series (*cf*. Darkover)
Barrayar	Lois McMaster Bujold	Vorkosigan saga
Discworld	Terry Pratchett	Discworld series
Dreamlands	H.P. Lovecraft	Dream Cycle (Cthulhu mythos)
Earthsea	Ursula K. Le Guin	Earthsea trilogy
Flatland	Edwin Abbott	Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions
Gor	John Norman	Gor series
Hyboria (Age)	Robert E. Howard	Conan series
Inferno	Dante Alighieri	Divine Comedy (*cf.* Purgatorio and Paradiso)
Arendia (*et al.*)	David and Leigh Eddings	The Belgariad and the Mallorean series
Known World	George R.R. Martin	A Song of Fire and Ice series
Krynn	Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis	Dragonlance series
Lilliput *et al*.	Jonathan Swift	Gulliver's Travels
Majipoor	Robert Silverberg	Majipoor series
Malazan	Steven Erikson	Malazan Book of the Fallen
Middle Earth	J.R.R. Tolkien	The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings
Narnia	C.S. Lewis	The Chronicles of Narnia
Nehwon	Fritz Leiber	Swords series
Neverland	J.M. Barrie	Peter Pan
Oz	L. Frank Baum	The Wizard of Oz series
Panem	Suzanne Collins	Hunger Games series
Pellucidar	Edgar Rice Burroughs	Pellucidar series
Pern	Anne McCaffrey	Pern series
Prydain	Lloyd Alexander	The Chronicles of Prydain
Redwall Abbey	Brian Jacques	Redwall series
Roshar	Brandon Sanderson	The Stormlight Archive
Tekumel	M.A.R. Barker	Empire of the Petal Throne
Temerant	Patrick Rothfuss	The Kingkiller Chronicle
The Four Lands	Terry Brooks	Shannara series
The Land	Stephen R. Donaldson	Chronicles of Thomas Covenant
The World	Robert Jordan	The Wheel of Time series
The World	Philip Pullman	His Dark Materials series
Utopia	Thomas More	Utopia (*cf*. other utopias and dystopias)
Witch World	Andre Norton	Witch World series
Wizarding World	J.K. Rowling	Harry Potter series
Wonderland	Lewis Carroll	Alice in Wonderland series
Science Fiction		
Arrakis	Frank Herbert	Dune series
Barsoom	Edgar Rice Burroughs	John Carter series
Chiba City	William Gibson	Sprawl trilogy (Neuromancer)
Galactic Empire	Isaac Asimov	Foundation series

Helliconia	Brian Aldiss	Helliconia series
LA in 2019	P.K. Dick	Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
Pandora	James Cameron	Avatar movies
Riverworld	Philip José Farmer	Riverworld series
Star Trek universe	Gene Roddenberry	Star Trek franchise
Star Wars galaxy	George Lucas	Star Wars franchise
The Stillness	N.K. Jemisin	The Broken Earth trilogy

<u>Tabletop games</u>

Forgotten Realms, Mystara, others	Dungeons and Dragons
Catan	Catan
Golarion	Pathfinder
Milky Way Galaxy	Warhammer 40,000
Ninth World	Numenera
Sixth World	Shadowrun
Third Imperium	Traveller
World of Darkness	Vampire: The Masquerade

<u>Video games</u>

Azeroth	Warcraft
Fallout Universe	Fallout
Great Underground Empire	Zork
Hyrule	The Legend of Zelda
Halo Universe	Halo
Milky Way	Mass Effect
Myst Worlds	Myst
Rapture	Bioshock
Tamriel	The Elder Scrolls