



*The Magic of World
Building . . . for Romance
Authors
by Julianne Revezzo Draper*

As writers we create our stories from scratch, straight from our imaginations onto the page. The craft of creating those stories not only comes with characters and dialogue that others can (we hope) love, but also with the worlds in which these characters exist. For some authors it seems worlds are bursting from their heads, fully-formed, ala the great goddess Athena. For others . . . well, it takes a little more work. For the novice writer, it seems to be the perpetual question: How does one create a believable world in which their stories can take place?

Personally, I've always been one of those "Athena" worldbuilders, probably because I've been steeped in the fantasy and science fiction genres from a very early age; building a world for any genre of story has always been easy for me. And, I maintain, worldbuilding isn't just for the two subgenres mentioned above. Is your story set in the Regency era? Well, ask yourself, do you live in Georgian England? Have you ever visited Medieval Norway? No? Then get ready, because you too will need to construct that world from scratch. And you better get it right, because I'm here to warn you, as a reader, I can tell when an author just doesn't know how to pull it off; and yes, there are some very tough critics out there—especially in the futuristic-fantasy loving community—most particularly among readers of Hard SF!

But I digress . . .

So, how can you, the Romance writer, build a believable new world in which your story can thrive?

For me, sometimes it really does start with the world itself. Is the story going to take place on Earth, or another planet, light-years away, that requires generations of space travel? Many futuristic authors tend to favor completely new, never-before-seen worlds. Yes, it makes it harder on the writer, but then, you can control everything. How many continents are on the surface of your world? Are there any? Could it just be an "oceanic" world? Is it a rock solid planet at all, or a space station orbiting a gas giant? Where do your people come from? Is evolution responsible, or did the inhabitants originally come from Earth? What flora and fauna do you picture, when you think of your world?

Most all this you can ground with a little reading in basic scientific and astronomical theory. You can then use that research to formulate the all-important "problem", or to construct the secondary problem. Then comes your characters, their history, traits, and languages. Do the inhabitants of your world know about Earth, and how? Is their language based on an existent language, like Greek? Or is it something you've completely invented? (For instance, do you remember what Ariel referred to by the term "dinglehopper" from Walt Disney's *Little Mermaid*?)* How do your characters travel around their world? Is it by horse and buggy? Or are cars, or starships, or magic carpets the favored mode? Then you must decide what your characters treasure: is it jewels, the garden snowdrop? Or something vital to life itself, like drinking water?

From there, it's time to move on to the character's motives; and here you can think about how might their world influence those motives? Once you know all this (created in any order you choose), then you can set your characters comfortably in that world, and let them verbally and physically lash each—erm, play.

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The popularity of Paranormal Romance has pushed this need to create a world from scratch to the wayside somewhat. Note I said, somewhat. Sure you can say, “She gunned her engine, waiting for a break in the speeding traffic,” and the reader will instantly have a picture before them. However, if your story is set in a paranormal realm, you’re still going to have to create something. For instance, does a faery have wings at all times, or only under certain circumstances? Are elves always tall and gorgeous, with pointed ears? Or are they more diverse? Are they tricksters, or benevolent? Why do the faeries and werepandas hate them? How long have they been fighting? Do they fight with magic, or are they strictly guns, ammo, and claws-dependent? How do the local police view the nonsense between the factions? Do humans even know about it? Yes, all this is part of world building, too.

Boy, that’s a lot to think about, isn’t it? But you’re not done yet: what are the mores and customs guiding relationships within these built worlds? If, in your Paranormal, the werepanda falls for the 100% human cop, how will the werepanda’s friends feel about her

decision? Will the lovers follow their hearts or, due to some cultural taboo, will they cave in and marry their own kind? What about an alien invader, and a cabbie? What are their conflicts and similarities?

The same is true of any story, from a historical whose author must know what type of clothing was worn or what slang terms were used in Henry VIII’s court, to a contemporary romantic comedy starring an early 20th century Jamestown bookkeeper and her Pennsylvania gambler paramour, to its sequel about the bookkeeper and gambler’s time traveling zoologist great, great grandson. All these places and times lend themselves to the building of those worlds in the reader’s minds, and your own.

I’m not being evil, I’m really not, but hopefully the preceding makes my point. Worldbuilding is not as daunting as it sounds, but it takes effort to invent the perfect strange new world for your tale. With practice, you’ll get the hang of it. Who knows? Once you try it, you may not be able to stop yourself at just one. And that is truly magical.

*Oh, and please try to make those words pronounceable! A term like “the XMT’LJM” can just blow it for a reader!

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*Julianne Draper has been writing fantastic tales for as long as she can remember. She is a new member of TARA and most days she can be found grinding away at her latest masterpiece, or expending her talents on a handful of personally owned websites, as well as writing about the books she loves for Examiner.com.*