



Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding (Kobold Guides to Game Design)

Janna Silverstein (Editor) , Wolfgang Baur , Jeff Grubb , Chris Pramas , Keith Baker , Steven Winter , Jonathan Roberts , Ken Scholes (Introduction) , more... Michael A. Stackpole ...less

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The Essential Elements for Building a World

Roleplaying games and fantasy fiction are filled with rich and fascinating worlds: the Forgotten Realms, Glorantha, Narnia, R'lyeh, Middle-Earth, Barsoom, and so many more. It took startling leaps of imagination as well as careful thought and planning to create places like these: places that readers and players want to come back to again and again.

Now, eleven of adventure gaming's top designers come together to share their insights into building worlds that gamers will never forget. Learn the secrets of designing a pantheon, creating a setting that provokes conflict, determining which historical details are necessary, and so much more.

Take that creative leap, and create dazzling worlds of your own!

Essays by Wolfgang Baur, Keith Baker, Monte Cook, Jeff Grubb, Scott Hungerford, David "Zeb" Cook, Chris Pramas, Jonathan Roberts, Michael A. Stackpole, Steve Winter, with an introduction by Ken Scholes.

Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding (Kobold Guides to Game Design) Details

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From Reader Review Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding (Kobold Guides to Game Design) for online ebook

Hteph says

Interesting collection of essays on worldbuilding for table top rpgs (compared with for books and MMO).

However I must say that I raised an eyebrow (both actually) when non of the essays on religion even mention Glorantha. As Glorantha is prominently mentioned in the blurb on the back I can't see that as anything other than snobbery, stupidity, or ignorance. Perhaps a combination of all three...

The problem is, with such blatant omission I start questioning the rest of the material in areas I are less aware. What other good/influential sources are ignored and/or censored.

I start looking at the text critically and the reading becomes less fun and I think I wont finished it.

Dave McGraw says

Great book! So, so much good information in this collection of essays. I will be returning to this tome frequently.

James Bowman says

A great collection of short essays on designing fictional worlds. Most of the contributors are designers from the fantasy role-playing game industry, which biases the book towards advice for the design of fantasy game worlds. However, I could definitely see this book being useful for any creator who wants to design their own fictional world. (Two of the last essays also had pragmatic advice clearly aimed at aspiring industry professionals, which was a slight surprise.) A fairly fast read, and interesting too! (A-)

E.W. Pierce says

I picked up the Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding based on my interest in writing fantasy and running roleplaying games. While the content is definitely more geared toward the latter, the essays touch on some aspects of world creation that a writer must also consider, though with a fantasy slant. Fine for my needs, but a caveat nonetheless.

Not counting the light introduction by Ken Scholes, there are 18 essays in total, covering a wide swath of topics. Alas, the fare is hit-or-miss.

Over a third of the total offering is penned by Wolfgang Baur, who also compiled the whole thing. He is informative, if boring, and I often found myself hoping the next bit was authored by someone else. Maybe Wolfgang handed out the choice assignments, leaving himself to fill in the cracks. Topics such as - 'How to Design a City-State' or 'How to Design a Pantheon' read like history text as written by an academic.

Fortunately, there is better, more engaging stuff here too. Keith Baker's two essays are highlights - 'Bringing

History to Life' and 'How to Make a High-Magic World'. The absolute highlight for me though is 'Here Be Dragons', written by Jonathon Roberts, a cartographer of some renown. Not only does he talk about how to create your own maps, but in doing so he also illuminates how this exercise helps to inform the world creation process itself. Great stuff.

Overall - uneven, but ultimately worth the read, as there are some real gems to be had.

Erik says

Hi. My name is Erik and I love to read books about creating fictional worlds and constructed languages. I have read many such books and this is one of the best. It is not a manual, and by no means defines a 'process' for creating worlds. Instead, it is a set of thoughtful essays from smart, creative people who have thought deeply about the topic. This is among the most highlighted books on my Kindle. The content is deep, fresh and covers a broad diversity of topics.

Jonathon Dyer says

The Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding is a small book. Digest-sized and running barely 120 pages, the truly amazing thing about it is just how much good advice the writers have packed into it. It helps of course that the collective contributors would have, at a conservative guess, well over two hundred years experience in the field of professional game design and speculative fiction writing.

While the book is more or less focussed on the aspirant game-world designer - with a nod to those of use that do it as a sport and a pastime - much of the content would be equally applicable to fantasy writers looking to improve their world-building chops. Chapters cover the importance of maps to your world, developing a pantheon (and why monotheism generally doesn't cut it in fantasy writing/game design), designing believable, living communities from tribes to whole cities, and introducing magic and technologies without them feeling retrofitted.

Perhaps the most useful lesson to come out of the book, something repeated in differing contexts by a number of the contributors, understanding what to put in and what to leave out. A 'completest' streak seems to run through the gaming community and the fantasy fiction community alike, as my own collection of RPG supplements and favourite authors will attest. Wolfgang Baur, the publisher and chief contributor, and his fellow world-smiths present the best ways to approach the creation of worlds that players or readers will find compelling enough to return to again and again.

Note: I'd really like to give this four-and-a-half stars, but the technology won't allow such niceties. Take it as read that *The Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding* deserves the extra half-star.

Ross says

This book features a large and wide ranging selection of essays written by the giants in the industry of Role Playing Game design. I have already put several of the tools to use in my own Homebrew RPG setting, and look forward to returning to this book for reference in the future.

Many people recommend this book for aspiring fantasy authors as well. I can see many of the tools, techniques, and recommendations working in literature though the book is clearly written for game design first and foremost.

Daaron says

Many very interesting insides...

John says

There's a lot of good ideas and advice in this collection of essays on worldbuilding. The focus is on worldbuilding for fantasy RPGs, either as a gamemaster or a game designer, but much of the advice could also be adapted for other settings or for worldbuilding a setting for fiction.

Some of the included chapters cover map-making, creating and maintaining a world 'bible', creating religions, dealing with the impact of both magic and technology, and several other topics.

My personal favorites were the chapters "Why No Monotheism?" by Steve Winter, and "How to Make a High Magic World" by Keith Baker. The former discusses the reasons why monotheism is uncommon in fantasy settings, and then discusses some ways that it could be used. The latter discusses some of the problems and opportunities of a setting where magic is common enough to impact everyday life.

"Designing a Pantheon" by Wolfgang Bauer and "It's a Mystery: How to Design a Mystery Cult" by David "Zeb" Cook were also full of good ideas for creating fantasy religions. Although both made me wonder why the authors never mentioned the Glorantha setting when it contains many examples of the kinds of things being discussed. The former in particular laments the way that D&D has pantheons of gods worshiped as individuals rather than as pantheons, and then goes on to describe a system that is pretty much identical to the way that pantheons appear in Glorantha.

I have to mention that the chapter on working with licensed properties seemed a bit out of place, seeing as how it dealt solely with the professional aspects of doing so, and is thus useless to anyone looking to use an existing setting as a gamemaster rather than as a game designer.

Otherwise, I thought it was a good book, and deserving of the Ennie it recently won.

Tacoman says

Great set of essays about worldbuilding. Very deep understanding and great share of ideas from these well known authors.

Sam says

This collection of essays on the topic of worldbuilding was good, and even though it mostly focused on

worldbuilding for RPGs, a majority of the tips and tricks can be utilized when creating for novels as well. I can also say that this was a fairly quick read, which also means that it is not a massive how to on creating your own world. There were a few tips I found to be interesting and helpful, and I'm hoping my fantasy world becomes richer because of these guidebooks.

Angel Arturo says

A must read for anyone wanting to start into the hobby of World building. Whether as a means to create a setting for a novel, a game/videogame, RPG or just as a hobby, I think the tips conveyed here are great to starters that have no idea how to begin or develop a concept, or to seasoned worldbuilders to brush on the basics.

Probably there are other books with more depth for more experienced worldbuilders but for novices this is definitely a must.

Andrew Staples says

Excellent guide to designing game worlds from a selection of top designers. Individual chapters vary in quality and usefulness, but the overall book is worthwhile no matter how experienced (or inexperienced) you are.

Patrick says

I'm unsure how best to rate this book. I got it to help me spark ideas and provide some guidance on effective methods, exercises, and organization techniques for world-building for use in writing speculative fiction, especially high fantasy. The book is marketed as a tool for building worlds for tabletop RPGs with the aside that it should be useful for purposes like mine as well. While the editors might believe that to be true, the book was mostly pretty useless to me as a novelist. As far as reviewing the book holistically, I wouldn't want to dock my rating too heavily simply because it wasn't that useful for my goals that are admittedly tangential to its primary purposes, though it does factor into my judgment. Still, as a long-time player of tabletop role-playing games and having tried my hand at the game-running and design sides a few times here and there, this book still doesn't seem great and I'm stuck between a 2 and a 3 star rating even on its own merits. Most of my reasons for giving it a 3 is based on a few essays that felt like gems stacked against the other 70% of the book that didn't seem nearly as useful. Since this book is a collection of essays, I will attempt to explore the different groupings of essays individually to more accurately examine the content that several different authors contributed to varying degrees of utility instead of vaguely assessing the many different topics discussed all at once:

The first five or six essays I easily could've skipped. I think they serve some introductory purpose, but they seem so vague and basic that I doubt anyone who is familiar enough with the term "worldbuilding" to pick up this book would really gather that much from them. But I suppose if your background is next to none, they may be useful as a long-winded introduction that takes up the first third of the book. There are some explorations of distinctions made between different forms of fantasy that while I think can be interesting, don't really seem to play much role in helping you to be a better worldbuilder. Things like that really bog down these essays and what's left isn't all that useful.

The next essay provides a pretty good quick guide to mapmaking that has some useful tidbits that could be helpful in designing a simple, but realistic and interesting map. While I've already used a similar guide in designing my own maps, I still learned some things and think this essay would've been quite useful if I hadn't looked up anything prior. This was one of the better essays in the book.

The next four essays are more generally on designing cultures, citystates, and technology for your world. This really feels like the bulk of what a worldbuilding guide should focus on. Yet these chapters end up comprising about 15% of the book and I can barely even remember them as they didn't offer too much other than a tidbit here or there that might be useful in thinking about how you can design your cultures. If you aren't looking to copy/paste some of the ideas from the book, I can't see them being all that useful. More concrete exercises would've been much more helpful to new and seasoned worldbuilders but at most, it gives you a few vague things to think about.

The next four essays I quite enjoyed, focusing on pantheons and religious sects and practices in fantasy worlds (the fourth is technically on guilds, but I see guilds playing a similar function, at least in the sense they're using the term, so I group it together with these). I think all of these essays do a good job of outlining the role religions play in fantasy worlds, while recommending ways you could deviate or further explore those tropes in fun and interesting ways to fit your world. I also felt like these were some of the essays most translatable to worldbuilding for fiction writing and just generally the most useful worldbuilding essays in the book on actually making your world interesting and fun.

The next essay provides overview and explanation for what a world bible is and how you can go about building and maintaining one. I think this chapter is very useful both for RPG designers and fiction writers. It's succinct and to the point while offering concrete guidance and explanation that is easily applicable to your own work. I have directly referred to this chapter when working on my own worlds.

The last couple essays weren't great and could more or less be cut with very little being lost. The first discusses worldbuilding in another's universe, such as providing new content for an already established property like Pathfinder or the Marvel universe. I think the explanation of the business side provided would be useful for some people, but for the most part the message of the essay is that unless you're already huge in the industry (in which case I'm not sure why you're using this fairly introductory book), you're unlikely to be able to get any of this sort of work. I'm not sure why this essay really needed to be in the book other than to provide that warning which would only take a couple pages. The last essay is on the limitations of worldbuilding and realizing you can't (and shouldn't) do everything. Other than some common sense points, I didn't see how this essay was all that useful either.

Lastly, throughout many of the essay, especially Wolfgang Bauer's seven essays, there's a lot of what feels like self-promotion ranting about how awesome this or that property the author designed is in whatever arena is being discussed. I totally understand that some reference to the author's own works can be useful, if not necessary, for illustrating a point, but I left this book feeling a bit like I'd just read a series of advertisements that also gave me some advice here and there. The references just felt like they went too far beyond their purposes.

Ultimately, I don't know that I'd really recommend this book to a wide range of people. There are a few gems, but unless you could really use guidance on religion worldbuilding, mapmaking, or designing a world bible, I think this book won't be super useful to you and even then, probably not worth the price of a full book with other essays unlikely to help you. I will make the caveat that a brand new DM trying to design a tabletop RPG who could use a lot more of the very basic introductory information might still benefit a good deal from this. But I don't get the feeling that audience is especially large for the book.

Al Tarancón says

Una obra magnífica. Repleta de ideas y de conceptos que cualquiera que quiera crear mundos fantásticos en los que contar historias puede aprovechar. En principio está pensado para el mundo de los juegos de rol, pero mucha de los temas son bastante universales para la escritura fantástica de todo tipo. Un buen punto de partida para dar un paso atrás y pensar en cómo el mundo en que contamos nuestras historias puede afectar a las mismas.

Muy recomendado.
