

The Fantasy Writer's
Guide
to
WORLDBUILDING

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Dear Writer...

There are two basic rules when it comes to worldbuilding in fantasy.

One...Your world must be COMPLEX.

As great as it would be to draw an outline, slap on a cool-sounding name, and declare a world created...that's not going to cut it. Not in a real world already swamped with carefully crafted, articulately detailed fantasy worlds.

Two...Your world must make SENSE.

My worlds always made sense in my head. But once I started putting those ideas on paper, I realized there were some major inconsistencies. Things I would never have realized if I hadn't worked through these points.

And these two rules lead us right to the point of this workbook...

Building your own world TAKES TIME, EFFORT, and a TON OF RESEARCH.

Don't rush it. As fun as it is to delve into that first draft, you'll only be doing yourself and your audience a disservice. You've got an awesome story that deserves an awesome world in which to be set.

Don't settle for 'okay'. Your world has the potential to be 'fantastic', 'magical', even 'epic'. Take the time. Do the work. Trust me – you WON'T be sorry! (And neither will your audience.)

A few things to remember...

**THE WRITING PROCESS IS DIVERSE.
SO IS THE WORLD BUILDING PROCESS.**

There is no right or wrong order to the steps in this work book. They were written up to create a snowball effect, starting with the simple and progressing to the complex. It's an order that can be helpful if you're not sure where to start or are feeling overwhelmed. However, let me state again...

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG ORDER.

Chances are, you've already got some ideas (or a million) for your fantasy world. This work book will help you sort those ideas, organize them, and fill in the blanks. So skip around to the parts you already have in mind, skip to the parts you hadn't thought of before, or grab your notes and go through the system as it was designed.

THIS WORK BOOK WAS DESIGNED FOR OTHER-WORLD FANTASY.

But it's also completely flexible. Even if you're working with something like a contemporary fantasy set in New York City, where the "world" building is already done, you will still need to develop things like magic systems, fantasy subcultures, and those awesome magical creatures you're planning on bringing out of the depths of hell at the climax of the series.

These steps are designed to get your ideas organized and provide options for research. Think of them as the building blocks. It's still up to you to do the arranging. But now you have something to get you started. Just take whatever parts you need and leave the rest.

This workbook consists of categories, notes, lists and research recommendations (online articles, YouTube videos, and books). There are checklists included and some spaces between the questions for jotting down notes. But you will want to have a notebook, binder or computer on hand. All the information you are going to need to successfully build a world will quickly fill pages and pages and pages.

So get ready, get set, GO!

PART 1...WORLD

GEOGRAPHY & TOPOGRAPHY

If you are creating your own world from scratch, the first question you need to ask is: **What does your world look like?**

- Is your world round or flat? Or oblong? (Maybe even square?) Is it a globe or is it a patch of material in a floating sea of unending mist?
- Is it a single anomaly kind of world? Is it one of many? Or possibly one of many dimensions? Does it intersect with any, through either magic or science?

Once you've decided what kind of world you are dealing with, it's time to settle on the layout. If it's a globe, does it have continents? Clusters of islands? Is it all earth with smaller bodies of water here and there?

GEOGRAPHY

At this point, you will want to make a WORLD MAP. Google "map of the world" and note the layout. You don't need to be a cartographer. A simple layout of earth and water is perfect.

You also don't need to be an artist. My personal preferred method for map drawing is to hop on the Paint program on my computer and use the pencil option to sketch outlines of continents and islands. Then I just color in blue for water and I'm done.

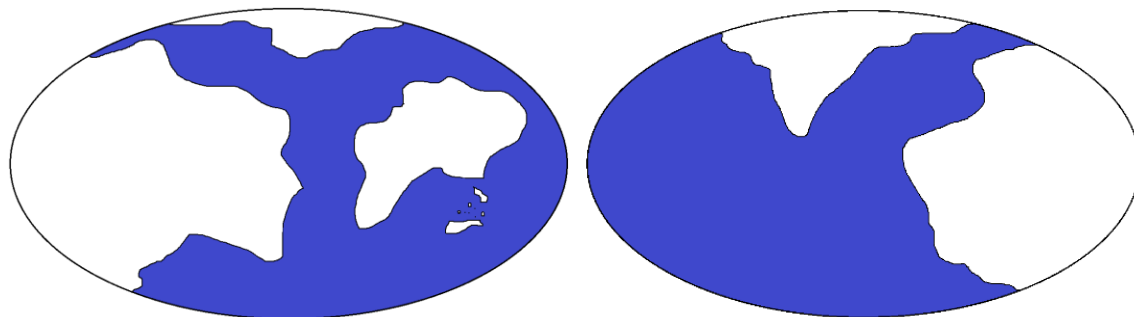
It isn't fancy. But it works. A real artist and cartographer can make a beautiful map for the inside of the book later. Right now, all you need is a layout.

Note: if you struggle to get what's in your mind on paper, try other methods. Cut out random shapes of paper and move them around against a sheet of blue cardstock until you find an arrangement you like. Or if you prefer modeling to drawing, you could always make a map out of clay or salt dough. This will also help with the next step.

STEP ONE: MAKE A MAP OUTLINE

- Shape of the Whole World
- Outline Sketch/Model of Continents, Oceans and Large Islands
- Save several copies for filling in different ways but save the original separately!

EXAMPLE:



TOPOGRAPHY

Our next step deals with terrain and bodies of water. What is the terrain across these continents and islands you've just created? What kinds of bodies of water are you using? How do they affect the terrain around them?

Now take your map and decide which kinds of terrains and bodies of water will go where. You can color these in (making sure to write out what each color stands for). Or you can draw symbols you have chosen to represent different types of terrains. (Arrows for mountains, swirls for forests, tic-tac-toe squares for farmland, etc. Again, make sure to keep notes of what means what.)

Below is a list of terrain categories and subcategories. Punch whatever looks interesting into Google and see what strikes your fancy.

TYPES OF TERRAIN

Mountain/Mountain Range

- Escarpment
- Monadnock
- Pass
- Volcano

Canyon

Stone Run

Cave

Desert

- Dune
- Salt Flat

Forest

- Jungle
- Seasonal Dry Forest
- Temperate Forest
- Temperate Rainforest

Glacier

Hill

- Butte
- Mesa
- Mima Rounds

Grasslands

- Outwash Plain
- Till Plain
- Lava Field
- Lacustrine Plain
- Scroll Plain
- Flood Plain
- Alluvial Plain
- Abyssal Plain

- **Prairie**
- **Steppe**
- **Savannah**
- **Game Jump**

Oasis

Tundra

- **Arctic Tundra**
- **Alpine Tundra**
- **Antarctic Tundra**

Valley

- **Box valleys**
- **Glacial valleys**
- **Hanging valleys**
- **Hollows**
- **Meltwater valleys**
- **Rift valleys**
- **Tunnel valleys**

Wetland

- **Bog**
- **Mangrove**
- **Marsh**
- **Saltmarsh**
- **Swamp**

Island

- **Archipelago**
- **Iceburg**
- **Shore**

BODIES OF WATER

Ocean

- **Blue Hole**
- **Reef**
- **Sandbar**

Sea

Lake

Inlet

River

Bay

Lagoon

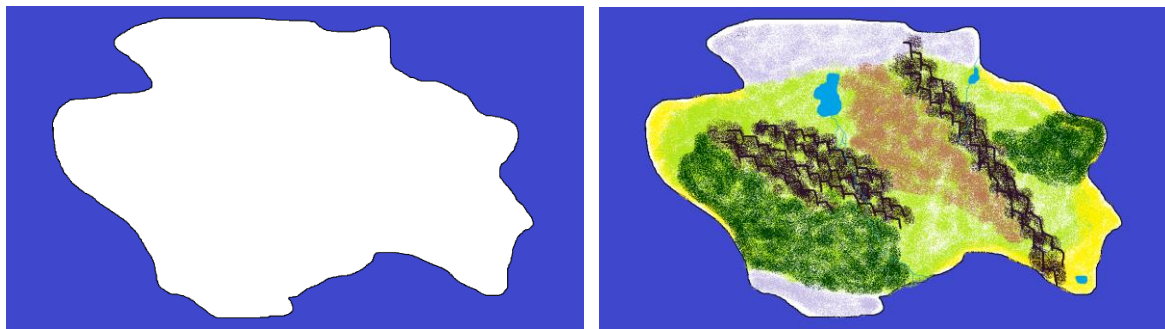
IMPORTANT NOTE: Don't forget to make your terrain locations LOGICAL. If you're not basing it on a part of our world you already know well, DO YOUR RESEARCH FIRST. Or ask someone who knows a lot about these things.

ALSO: Be sure to include notes on what seasons and weather conditions will look like in the areas where your story will be set. (Remember the basic laws of our world – four seasons, opposites on either side of the equator. But also feel free to play with them and flip things upside down once in a while.)

STEP TWO: MAKE TOPOGRAPHICAL MAPS

- Take a copy of the outline map and pull out one continent/island at a time in a separate document (to make it manageable).
- On each individual continent/island, fill in your outline with different colors for different types of terrains
 - Example: **Yellow** for Beaches, **Tan** for Deserts, **Light Green** for Plains and Grasslands, **Dark Green** for Forests, **Jade/Faded Green** for Swamps, **Purple** for Mountain Ranges, **Navy Blue** for Oceans and Seas, **Medium Blue** for Lakes and Rivers, **Light Blue** for Coral Reefs/Shallows, **White** for Arctic Regions
- Do this for each continent/island.
- Save several copies for filling in different ways but save the original separately!

EXAMPLE:



Now that you have the bigger picture taken care of, it's time to GET CLOSER. Zoom in on the world you have made, however big or small it is – whether it's a full globe, a magical island floating in the ether, or even just one magical coffee shop in small town Vermont.

Start with continent(s) or larger islands. (You'll only need to map out the ones that come into play in your story.)

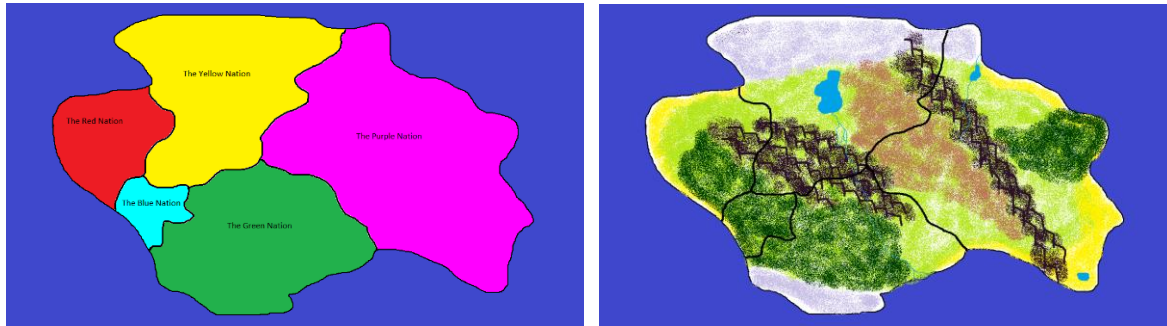
Follow up with the section of that continent/island where your story takes place, complete with the regions, nations, or whatever divisions you've decided on for the story.

STEP THREE: MAKE A NATIONAL/REGIONAL MAP OF EACH CONTINENT

- Take a copy of the *outline* map and pull out one continent/island at a time in a separate document (to make it manageable)
- On each individual continent/island draw lines through it to create the different national/territorial/regional boundaries. (Use your topographical map as a reference so you know where everything will end up terrain/condition-wise.)

- In the outline form, use colors to fill in each individual nation/region/empire/etc.
- Do this for each continent/island.
- Save several copies!
- Next, take a copy of the **topographical** map and pull out one continent/island at a time in a separate document (to make it manageable).
- Lay the dividing lines over it to see where the nations/regions/etc. line up across various types of terrains and conditions.
- Save several copies!

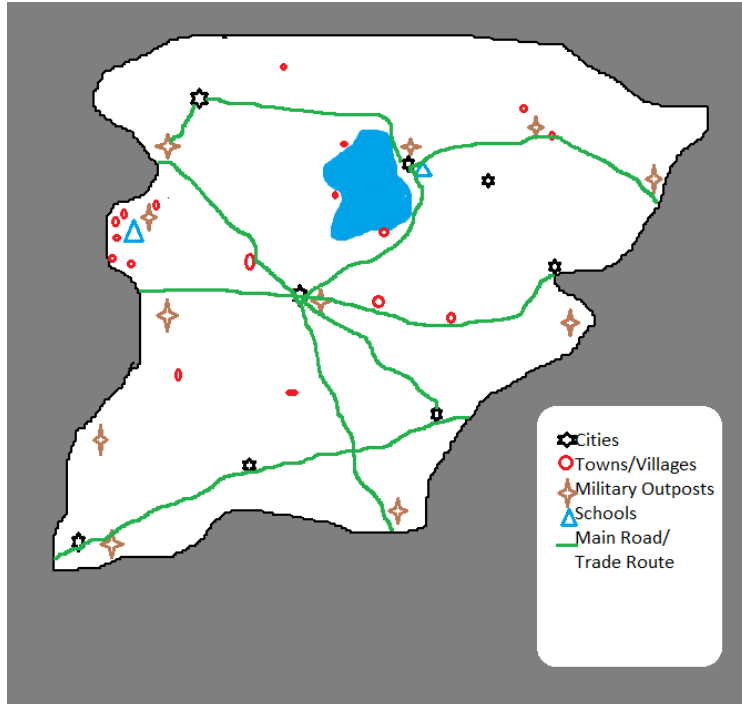
EXAMPLE:



STEP FOUR: MAKE INDIVIDUAL MAPS

- Take the National Maps of the various continents and islands, and create a new outline map of each individual nation by either...
 - Cropping the individual nation out of the larger map and saving a copy or...
 - Sketching a brand-new outline map of the nation based on the original.
- Choose the most important nation in your story (if an outline, fill in with topographical colors) and begin mapping it out.
- Create icons to represent the following essentials:
 - Cities, Towns and Villages
 - Natural Resource Centers (plants, refineries, mills, farms, etc.)
 - Military Bases/Outposts
 - Important Schools/Academies & Libraries
 - Important Estates & Palaces/Castle
 - City Ruins
 - Monuments & Historical Sites
 - Major Roads/Trade Routes
- Using the icons, put those essentials across your map (be sure to keep in mind terrain and natural resources such as water, farmable land, and mines as you select locations)

EXAMPLE:



Next, map out the important places in your story. Is it a city? A small town? A village?

Go even closer! Is there a school that is important? A large estate? A business building? A temple? A mansion or palace?

MAKE A MAP OF EACH OF THESE AREAS. They don't have to be complete yet. Just get the bare minimum down on paper. Now you know where your characters will be throughout the story, and if they journey what that journey will look like.

CHECKLIST:

- *World Map*
- *Continental Map*
- *Regional/National*
- *City/Village*
- *School/Estate/Mansion*

NOTE: Keep your topographical world map handy. We'll be using it in the Third Part of the workbook to make maps of the following:

- *Magical/Unique Creature Habitats*
- *Race/People Group Placements*

PART 2...MAGIC SYSTEMS

THE ROOT OF FANTASY

Question: Can you write a fantasy novel without magic?

Answer: Yes, technically.

Fantasy is speculative fiction, so it is possible for you to speculate about a world of your own making and choose not to include magic. However, it's an easy bet that MOST fantasy worlds involve some element of magic. Even with the popular YA fantasy worlds where magic has been gone for centuries, magic existed at some point. Which means that you, as the creature of the world, must sit down and figure out what that magic looked like from creation to its Golden Age to when your story starts.

A well-crafted magic system that is logical-yet-fun is crucial if you want to keep your audience engaged. As I mentioned earlier, our world has been swamped with fantasy novels. This genre has never been more popular. And audiences have seen every variation on magic systems there is. This leads to some pretty lofty reader expectations.

It's not impossible to goof up on your magic system and still have dedicated fans. Some of the world's best loved fantasy sagas have had some significantly flawed magic systems. (A good reason to make sure your story is solid enough that a few holes in your magic system won't derail your whole series.)

The goal is to develop a system that is interesting and logical enough to allow your audience to suspend their disbelief and get lost in the world you've crafted.

So where do you begin?

Research! Yay. But seriously, rather than reinventing the wheel, let's look at what some best-selling fantasy authors have laid out for us.

Begin with Sanderson's Laws of Magic. Brandon Sanderson is famous for his incredible magic systems within his novels. And his points on how to develop your own are invaluable. You'll want to read the full articles about these laws on his website.

(Go to <https://brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/> to read them.)

But for now, let's just look at the bare minimum of the rules themselves.

LAW #1: An author's ability to solve conflict with magic is DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL to how well the reader understands said magic.

LAW #2: The limitations of a magic system are more interesting than its capabilities. What the magic can't do is more interesting than what it can.

LAW #3: Expand what you already have before you add something new.

There's obviously a lot more to those laws than simple statements. But it gives us a good idea on how to proceed as we get started. Determine how involved your magic will be with the story and the characters. The two basic categories are soft magic systems and hard magic systems.

Soft magic systems are there more as a background for the story, an ambience if you will. They make the world fantastical, but they aren't crucial to the plot or to the characters growth. Because of this, they don't need detailed explanations or even really much explanation at all.

Hard magic systems, on the other hand, are the foundation of the plot and deeply impact the characters' journeys. They require a lot of explanation and take up significant space in both the plot and the narrative. In other words, they were be no real story without the magic.

Fortunately, you don't necessarily have to pick one or the other. You can find a nice spot in between the two extremes. (This is where many fantasy sagas sit on the scale.) The important thing is to decide how involved your magic will be in your story and much impact it will have on your characters.

The next thing to consider is what kind of magic will you be using? Very often, authors use contrasting elements in their magic systems. That's good! Contrast makes things pop. Two sets of contrasts are used in most fantasy. Use neither or both, whatever works for your story.

1) Natural vs. Learned

Natural magic is magic that comes straight from your character's DNA or the world around them.

Learned magic is detached from the user. It doesn't require a certain bloodline. It simply requires talent and perseverance to learn.

(Most magic systems work with a combination of these contrasting elements. Natural magic that is enhanced through training, or trained magic that is enhanced by certain bloodlines or natural abilities.)

2) Light vs. Dark

Light magic could be considered "good" magic. It is used for war when needed, but its power isn't destructive by nature. And it is rarely world-threateningly powerful.

Dark Magic could be considered "bad" magic, the kind characters are advised against using and bad guys almost always use. It usually has a tendency toward evil and often comes with a heavier price than light magic, or messes with the mind of the user in a way light magic doesn't. It is also almost always destructive or corruptive, and its power often has the potential to be unlimited.

Now let's get into the actual crafting of this magic system. There are four steps, each one based in simply asking questions. Go back to the old 'who, what, where, when, why & how' you were taught in school. Those questions will save your story's backside!

STEP ONE: SOURCE & ORIGINS

The source of your magic system is what your magic stems from. There are four common categories when it comes to sources:

- 1) Energy (a force, either ethereal/spirit or from nature itself)
- 2) Genetics (the DNA of a given race or bloodline, either inherited or injected/grown)
- 3) Assignment/Gift (almost always from a higher person or power, either merited or arbitrary)
- 4) Objects, Substances, and Words (magic contained in material of some kind, or in the spoken or written word, often pertaining to a special language or special combination of common words mixed with an object like a wand or an amulet)

Once you know the source of your magic, it's time to figure out how it came to be in the first place.

- Was it created? If so, by whom? (A deity? A scientist?) Was it on purpose or randomly/accidentally?
- Because of this, is it considered natural, unnatural, or a gift?
- If not, how/when did it develop naturally? And why?

Include information on how it came to be natural or learned, or good or evil, or possibly why it is a combination or neutral.

STEP TWO: USE & MANIFESTATION

How is accessed? (A combination of words and objects, concentrating via meditation, prayer to the deities it was given by, a magic wand, exercising a muscle in your brain, emotional response, etc.)

Who can access it? Why? (All elves, special druids, those of royal bloodline, those entrusted as guardians by a higher power, those cursed by that higher power, etc.)

Does its use vary from person to person? (Based on individual DNA or physical strength, different powers assigned to different people, etc.)

Does it require training? (Mentors, academies, etc.)

Is it acquired by using x amount of y? (Do you need four red crystals to control the big green crystal? Must you complete a series of riddles and tests to be given the sacred scepter of the higher power, etc.)

Do you have to travel somewhere to get it?

Can you magic be taught? How about traded? Bought? Stolen? Siphoned?

STEP THREE: LIMITATIONS & PRICE

We as humans best understand something's structure when we see the boundaries. And we appreciate something more when it has a cost. The higher the cost, the more we appreciate it – and the more courage/fearlessness/pure evil is required from the character using it, which makes everything more interesting.

- How can it NOT be used? Why?
- Who can NOT use it? Why?
- Does one element, object, or deity trump another?
- If you have one power, can you not use certain objects?
- If magic isn't DNA restricted, is it limited to the physical or mental strength of the user?
- Is it infinite or is there a visible cap off?
- If it comes from nature, will using it too much eventually drain the supply? Destroy the world?
- What does it cost the user? Does it simply wear them out? Age them? Leave scars? Drive them insane? Make them susceptible to the powers of others?
- Does it require a moral cost? A human sacrifice? The blood of a demon? The spirit of an innocent maiden? A thousand souls?
- Is there a literal price to purchase it? Do you need to refill it eventually?
- Can people with these magical abilities be hired? Kidnapped and forced to use it? Tapped into and drained of power? Can the power be transferred to another person?

Now you know what your magic LOOKS like and ACTS like. So it's time to decide how it affects the beautiful world you created in the last step.

STEP FOUR: AFFECTS OF CULTURES & CHARACTERS

In a soft magic system, the magic often doesn't affect cultures or characters in any significant way. However, this honestly doesn't make much sense if you think about it. If people in France could cast sleeping spells, wouldn't that be a big to-do? If a secret spring in Egypt held the secret to eternal youth, wouldn't people be lining up at the front door – even having full-scale wars over it?

Questions you will want to ask include...

How do different societies view magic? Is it marveled at? Feared? Envied? Do some view it as evil, while others view it as a godsend? Is it overall considered better left alone? Is there civil unrest taking place in one society because nobody can agree on this?

How does magic affect the different societies? Are some of the nations built around magic or magical inventions? Are wizards highly sought after in the courts of the kings? Do you have magic users who are powerful making good money and magic users with minimal power just scraping by on the streets? Are there whole armies of flame-wielding elves? Are there entire societies of magic users? Or do they intermingle with commoners?

Because of these things, is magic using kept in secret or is it a public affair? Does that vary between nations? Are there laws to restrict magic users and protect non-users? Are there any nations or people groups that actively hunt down magic users? Are there any nations or people groups setting up safe houses or providing sanctuary for magic users? How does magic cause conflict between nations and people groups?

If it is gifted to races, are there any races that require purging of non-magically-gifted individuals? If it is all about the bloodlines, are there any bloodlines that are sought after for kingships? Military positions? Gladiator rings? Is there any particular race or bloodline being hunted down? Maybe by everyone? Maybe for seemingly logical reason? How about religious creed?

And, of course, lastly – how does magic in your world affect your characters? All of these cultural factors will play into your story somehow, whether it's a simple roadblock or an integral part of the MC's character arc. Either way, you'll want to map out how each important character is affected, both externally, interpersonally, and internally, by the magic in your world, or even the absence of it if that's the story.

NOTE: Magic systems can quickly become complex. And even if you understand it, they may be difficult to explain to your audience without info-dumping. This is especially true if you have developed a more unique or underused system. Be sure to do your research on avoiding info-dumping prior to drafting. You can also send your manuscript to your trusted critique partner(s) during the drafting phase and ask them if your system is making sense throughout the story.

Checklist:

- Hard or Soft Magic System
- Natural, Learned, or Combination
- Light, Dark or Neutral
- Source (energy, genetics, assignment/gift, objects/substance/words)
- Origins
- Who Can Use It/Not Use It & Why?
- What does its use look like? (Include variations based on individuals, bloodlines, races, objects, morality in use, etc.)
- What are its limitations? (To one person, to a bloodline, to everyone)
- What is the cost(s) of using it?
- How does its existence and use affect the different cultures?
- How does its existence, use, and cultural views affect each main character of your story?

EXAMPLE:

- *Hard Magic System*
- *Natural and Learned*
- *Neutral*
- *Source: genetics and objects/substance*
- *Origins: woven into world at its creation*
- *Only water races and creatures have magic built into their DNA. As such, they have the ability to harness certain elements and cast a variety of spells. The selkies even have innate healing abilities, and the cloaks that turn them into seals in the water are coveted because they can be drained of their magic and that magic used for potions. Land races are not magical, except for the werewolves who were turned by the selkies in an effort to keep the elves busy. However, all land races have the ability to take magic from water creatures or to drain it from certain plants and mountains where pockets of it exist (leftovers from creation). Gnomes are especially skilled in using it because their stout physique allows them to withstand the great physical strain, and their intelligence is acute enough to manipulate it skillfully with training and time. Giants, on the other hand, have the physical ability but not the brains to manipulate it.*
- *The water creature's DNA-based magic is limited to the individual's physical and mental strength; however, the greater and more complex spells used, the heavier the strain; thus very few are ever able to use their magic to nation-threatening potential, let alone world-destroying. Each power and spell are limited (for instance, selkies can heal but they cannot bring people back from the dead, and only the most powerful can heal fatal wounds). The land creature's potions are limited based on the skill of the creators and the power of the substance or creature it was taken from. The common ones are for sleep, health, beauty, strength, speed, agility, intelligence, etc. The more affective ones are derived straight from the source of the magic, and thus are incredibly expensive. The cheap ones are mostly useless additives that sound good (dragon scales, kraken slime) but don't really do much good because there isn't much actual magical substance to them.*
- *The physical cost of using magic for those born with it is simply exhaustion. The bigger the spell, the more tired you get. The more powerful spells, however, do begin to take a toll on*

mental health. Using them too much too frequently causes confusion, temporary memory loss, and eventually brain damage. There is also an emotional wear, making users depressed after extended use.

For land creatures, it takes intelligence and physical strength to manipulate the natural substances. It also takes a great deal of patience when making potions or draining powers from a magical creature. The process is slow, and even the tiniest miscalculation can result in either powerless potions or great explosions. For this reason, they also have a high material cost. Most magic manipulators create potions and objects from the substances and then sell them to the highest bidders. Usually only the very wealthy or influential can afford them, or someone with something the manipulator wants. Thus the saying, 'find the gnome's desire' – find out what it wants and you'll get what you want in return.

- *Almost all the societies viewed magic as necessary and good toward the beginning of the world. However, over time it became obvious that the gnomes were the only ones truly capable of manipulating it to create potions and objects. This was a cause of some dissension. The elves then discovered selkies and began hunting them because draining their magic was easier and quicker, if immoral in the eyes of many people. At the beginning of the story, magic exists in every nation but is only used frequently in the Yellow, Green, and Purple nations. The Red Nation doesn't view it as morally upright. And the Blue Nation prides itself on using hard labor and cleverness over 'quick tricks.'*
- *The magic-based issues between the Purple and Red nations affect our main characters, Prince Roderick and Princess Lillian, when their parents decide to arrange their marriage to ensure a peaceful alliance between the two nations.*

STEP 3...POPULATION

FANTASY CREATURES & RACES

DISCLAIMER: In this section, the first thing I want to make clear is that there is a HUGE distinction between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. And this is very important when it comes to populating your fantasy world.

In our world, ‘race’ is often used interchangeably with ‘ethnicity’. It is reliant entirely on physical appearance and the part of the world where your ancestors lived. In fantasy worlds, ‘race’ is usually meant to differentiate between intelligent, emotionally capable beings of varying biological makeup, NOT to tell which people groups have different color skin color. That is ‘ethnicity’. Within each race, you will then have ‘ethnicities’ – differences in appearance, languages, nationality, etc. (Realistically speaking, in our world we are all one race – humans.) We will delve more into this in a later segment. But let me again make it clear. . .

There is a HUGE distinction between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ in fantasy worlds. In this workbook, we will be using the terms independently of each other. The terms will be used by the above definitions.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE YOUR CATEGORIES

When it comes to fantasy races, there are five basic categories most races will fit. Your world can be filled with two or three of these kinds of beings. You could opt to only use one. You could go crazy and include all five. The options are limitless.

1) **Humanoid**

Think any being that is basically a human with varying physical features – pointy ears, extra arms, gills, wings, etc. – or other defining traits – special powers, immortality, etc.

EXAMPLES: Elves, gnomes, nymphs, banshee

2) **Half-Human**

These beings are your hybrid beings. They will feature an even combination of human and animal/creature appendages and features or be dominantly animal/creature. These features can either be permanent or they can come and go at random or at the discernment (or emotional outbreak) of the being.

EXAMPLES: Centaurs, werewolves, mermaids, harpies

3) **Sentient Creatures & Elements**

Any creature, plant or natural element can be a sentient being. These can be either openly sentient and interact on a human level with their own species and/or others. Or they can be more reclusive and only show their intelligent side if they need or want. They can also be sentient without showing it. They can even be a guardian of animals or natural elements. You can also mix and match your animals to create new creatures and give them sentience.

EXAMPLES: Fire element, talking horses, talking flowers, enfields, Pegasus

4) **Spirit Beings**

These being are immaterial, usually made of shadows or of beams of light. They are in their own separate category even though they can sometimes be combined with the above and serve as guardians over animals and elements. For instance, the spirit of the ocean, the spirit of forest

animals, the spirit of the desert wind. However, this also includes ghosts, angles and demons. These are usually in service to a deity, a force of either good or evil, or to nature itself.

EXAMPLES: . . . all of the above!

5) Deities

Gods and demigods are a central force in ancient mythology. And while most fantasy novels don't have them as main characters, most well-thought-out fantasy worlds will at least have them in the backstory for sake of realism. (After all, the world had to come from somewhere!) Basic subcategories in deities include gods and demigods (obviously), supreme deities vs. lower deities, and deities designated to elements or world events.

EXAMPLES: the god of war, the god of rivers, the son of a god, the daughter of a goddess and a mortal, a mortal promoted to deity for exceptional heroic – or demonic – qualities or actions; gods of realms – heaven, earth, hell.

Make a list of the categories you will be using. Then fill that list with the following information.

STEP TWO: MORAL, IMMORAL, OR MIXED

Something that is common in fantasy novels, particularly those patterned after Tolkien's Middle Earth, is to have a race that exists solely to be evil. They are nasty, gnarly, and rejoice in the suffering of others. They kill without thought, even going so far as to feast on each other if food is scarce. And they somehow always end up as the army for the Big Bad of the story.

Equally common in fantasy novels is to have a race that is deemed as morally upright, wise, good and all-around perfect, if somewhat arrogant. They used to come in the form of Elves. Now they can also be a number of humanoid races.

Some readers view both these options, let alone a combination of the two, as cliched. Others view them as a lazy writer's cop-out. And when it comes to the 'naturally evil race', some even go so far as to say it is morally wrong to write them into a world.

Whatever your take on this situation, you need to decide right out of the gate if you are going to have any races that will have a genetically-predetermined moral viewpoint or moral tendencies. If you do, you need to sit down and ask yourself the following questions.

Why is this race biologically good or evil? How does it manifest? Are there ever any exceptions, whether by birth or by choice? Are they able to redeem themselves? Defile themselves? Were they created this way, either by the creator character or a superior race/being in the story? Or was it an accident? Did they devolve or ascend to this state because of something their history? Is it a genetic trend in this world for races to devolve/ascend with time? Are they the only race to whom this has happened? If there are more, how are they different/similar? Why?

Figure out those points and include specifications for how other societies view and treat them, how they view and treat other societies, and how they interact with other races. If you plan to leave morals of the races up to individuals, skip this step entirely.

STEP THREE: ORIGINAL, GENRE OR UNIQUE

When creating fantasy races, you need to be aware that there are reader stigmas attached to certain races (like elves and dwarves). Since this is the case, you will need to take a look at the three main options available to you as the world creator.

- 1) You can research and utilize the origins, myths and physical/magical features from the cultures where commonly known fantasy races originated.
- 2) You can utilize current or classic fantasy race trends.
- 3) You can take a fantasy race and add your own unique spins to the origin, biology and magical makeup.

If you are using ancient mythological races that are uncommon, or making up completely new races, you won't have any trends to follow/defy. But be aware – readers will still make comparisons. Take common and classic trends into consideration as you create.

STEP FOUR: (OPTIONAL) RESEARCH RACES

If you are planning on creating multiple fantasy novels and series with completely separate worlds, you might want to invest in some books on the subject of fantasy races and keep them on hand for world building sprees.

Here is a list of elements you will want to consider and make note of when developing any fantasy race:

- Physical appearance
- Level of intelligence
- Ability or means of communicating (verbal, telepathy, sign language)
- Magical properties or lack thereof
- Life expectancy
- Reproduction rates
- Preferred natural environment
- Origin (We'll deal with this in more detail under the History section; you can save your notes till then, or you can jot them down now and just add them in when we get to that part.)

NOTE: Search for fantasy race forms/profiles online to get even more ideas for details you will need to know about your races.

STEP FIVE: ETHNIC DIVERSITY

You've got your basic races lined up. You know their physical makeup, their origin story, they magical properties. Now it's time to divide up all those races into people groups. Unless you are planning on having all your races live in tiny spaces of land completely separate from each other and have them all ruled by one mind-controlling magician, you are going to have a variety of people groups living in a variety of places. The more races, the greater the diversity.

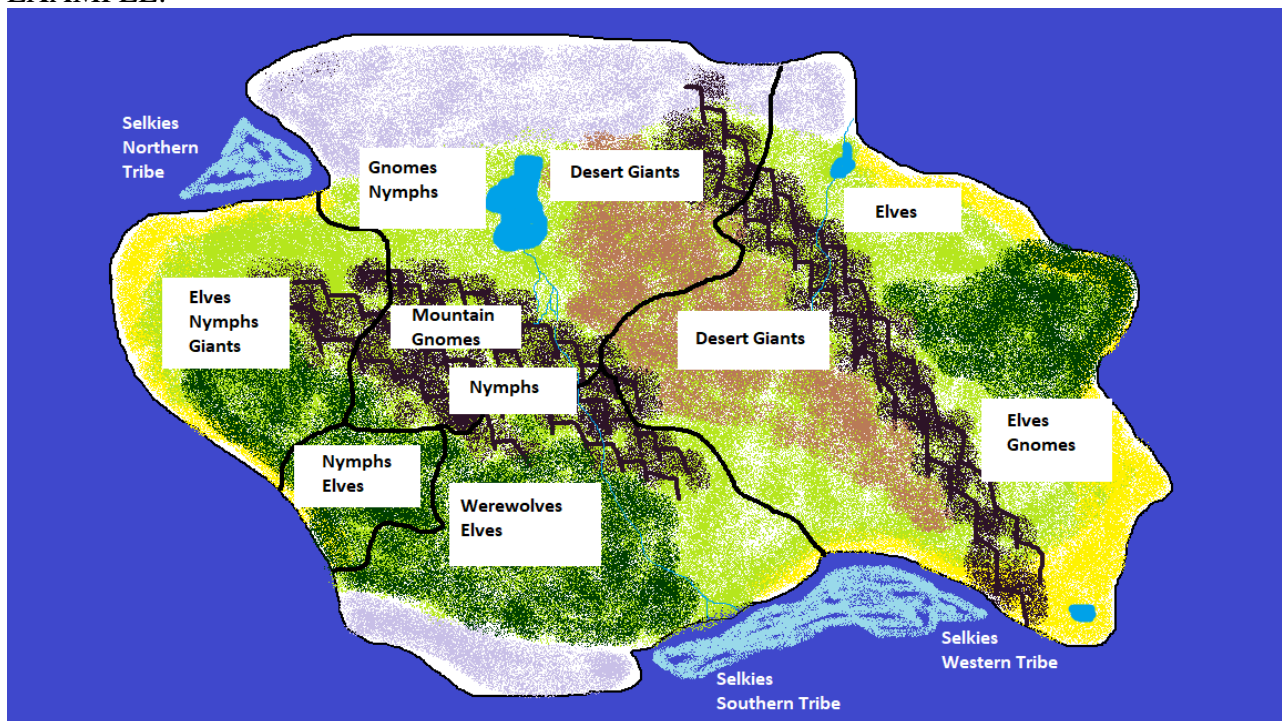
When people grow in number, they tend to expand their territories. Some even go far away and create their own territories, whether to get away from the crowds, to start over after tragedy, in exile, in exploration, or to escape hunting. You have people from the same race in living in different environments, in many cases all marrying the same kinds of people over and over again. Which leads to differences in a lot of areas.

As you create subcategories within your races, consider the following reasons why these people are different from each other. We often jump right to skin color or the size of those pointy ears. But there are actually many reasons why people might distinguish an ethnicity.

It could be physical features. It could be their ancestors' place of origin. Sometimes it's completely cultural, like levels of advancement or education. For the Greeks, it was language. Their word "barbarian" actually comes from the Greeks mimicking other people groups' languages by saying the phrase "bar bar".

Pull out the topographical maps you made in Part 1. Make a copy and sketch out where your various races have ended up across the map, where they are separate, where they intermingle. Divide them up among the nations. When we get to Cultures, you'll be able to use these locations to better understand and describe the various living conditions of the various nations. Remember – different environments affect physical features, levels of advancement, and the balance between survival and leisure.

EXAMPLE:



Checklist:

- List of Fantasy Races
- Under each race, details of physical appearance, level of intelligence, communication, magic, life expectancy, reproductive rates, preferred natural environment, and origin
- Ethnic Division within each race
- Physical locations of each race across the map of your world

EXAMPLE:

RACE – Selkie (plural: selkies)

Origin – Scottish mythology

Physical appearance: Completely human on land; completely seal under the water.

Speak normally when above water; under water use special language only spoken among themselves.

Magical abilities: all selkies have healing powers, but only some can heal fatal wounds

They prefer to live in the colder shallow waters with easy access to deep waters. For this reason, they mostly are found around the northern shores of the Yellow Nation. (These are known as the Northern Tribe.) There are also large groups living in around the south of the Green and Purple Nations. (These are the Southern and Western Tribes.)

Now we're on to Creatures in your fantasy world. For this section, you'll do almost exactly the same thing as with the Races, with a few exceptions.

STEP ONE: SELECT CREATURES

This list includes all the non-sentient creatures in your world. Create a list that includes artwork and information on their mythological or fantasy history if possible.

STEP 2: DIVIDE INTO CATEGORIES & SPECIES DIVERSITY

(similar to ethnicities)

The purpose to dividing the creatures into categories is to determine their place in and out of society and how they currently affect your world civilizations. There are four categories.

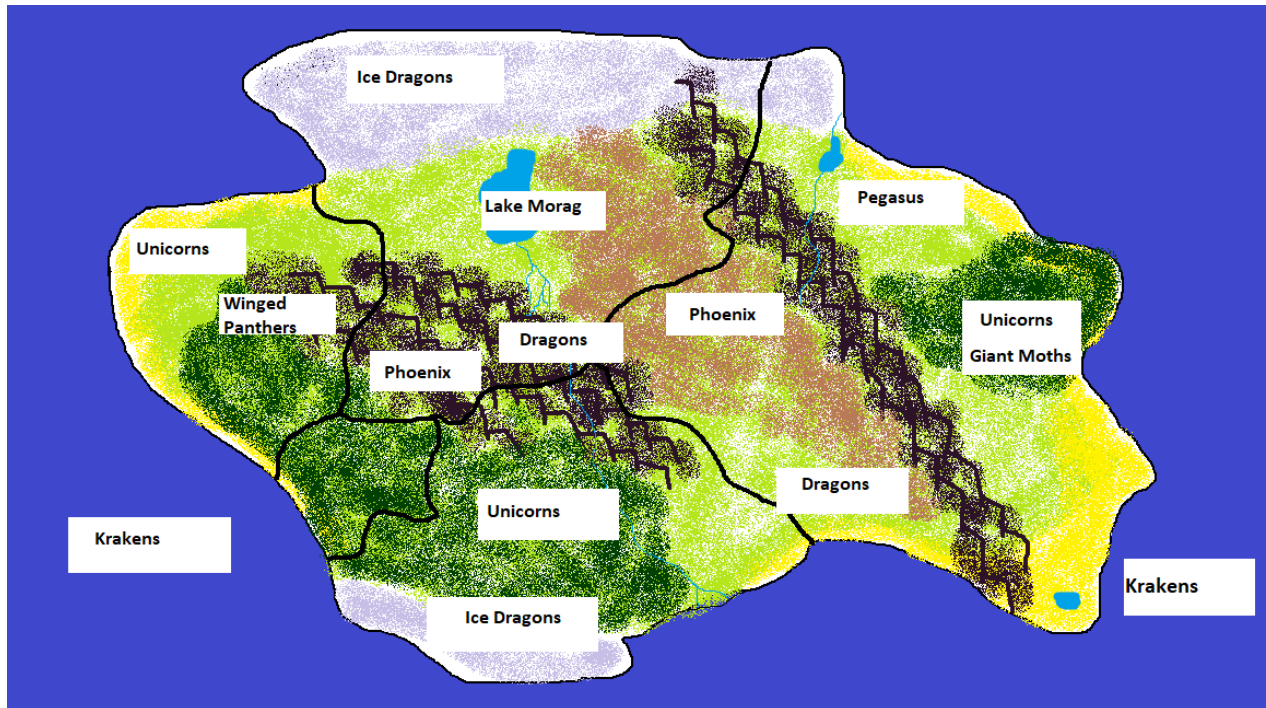
- 1) Domesticated – used in one or more nations/people groups as pets, beasts of burden, for a food/clothing source, to take warriors into battle, to relay messages over long distances, etc.
- 2) Wild & Domesticated – can be tamed and used among civilizations, but also have herds/flocks/etc, that roam wild.
- 3) Wild (non or mild threat) – either they are not able to harm people, or they do not pose a threat to people unless aggravated or threatened.
- 4) Wild (active threat) – avoid if possible!

STEP THREE: QUESTIONS

- Natural Habitat and migration/hibernation patterns
- Common or Rare (protected, hunted for extermination)
- Useful to people/useless (think rabbits vs. skunks)
- Beautiful, Hideous, in between
- Important in religions, symbolic to nations/royal bloodlines, used in family crests, etc.
- How does all of this differ from nation to nation, or does it at all
- Origin

STEP FOUR: PLACE ON TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP

EXAMPLE:



Checklist:

- List of Fantasy Creatures
 - Under each creature, domestication or threat level, commonness, Natural Habitat and migration/hibernation patterns; levels of usefulness symbolism in religions, nations/royal bloodlines, family crests, etc.
- Origin
- Species Diversity, if applicable
- Physical locations of each race across the map of your world

EXAMPLE:

Phoenix –

- *Wild, mild threat – will attack if it feels threatened but rarely to kill; will go to kill if its young are taken; hard to catch and even harder to drain of magic.*
- *Magical – can be drained for its fire power; used in potions for speed and strength; built into weapons so the users can create fire.*
- *Are very common in the mountains of the Yellow Nation where they are protected from hunters; becoming rarer in the deserts of the Purple Nation where they are starting to be hunted more and more by the elves in an attempt to stabilize their economy and build up their depleted armies.*

- *Prefer dry environments where it's easier for them to manipulate and create fire; also prefer open spaces where they can fly freely; the bare mountains in the Yellow Nation provide protection will allowing lots of space for flying.*
- *They are considered wild wonders, not really useful in any way except for draining of their magic, and only the Purple nation does this. In the south of the Yellow nation, they area viewed as symbols of courage and freedom; the desert giants of the Purple Nation view them as omens of evil. The ruler of the Yellow Nation bears a phoenix on a medallion as a talisman against evil and protection for the royal line.*
- *Phoenixes were created at the beginning along with all the other races and creatures.*
- *They live in the deserts of the Yellow Nation and Purple Nation and in the mountains of the Yellow Nation.*

PART 4...HISTORY

THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUR STORY

When it comes to these next two segments, History and Cultures, you will find it hard to separate the two. History is what causes different cultures and peoples to develop the way that they do. Thus, as you are brainstorming for history, you will come up with many ideas for cultures, and when you are writing up culture ideas you will come up with many ideas for historic events. Feel free to jump back and forth between these two segments as much as necessary. Usually it's easier to come up with the ins and outs of cultures if you know where they are coming from and what they've been through. But sometimes it works backwards. Do what works for you and this story.

You should also keep in mind as you go through this segment that there will always be two versions of history: *real history* and *perceived history*.

- Real history is what actually happened, which you as the author will want to know.
- Perceived history is what different people groups THINK happened.

The variations on this are as numerous as the people groups involved in the historic event. Differences in perception are not always extreme. Sometimes they are. But more often, the differences are subtle. The victors of the war are insistent their troops fought bravely. The defeated claim the enemy used underhanded tactics and dishonorable methods. The country with supplies for the survivors of a horrendous disease remember coming to the aid of its neighbor with compassion and mercy. The neighboring country viewed their visit as a show of power and as propaganda to prove their good intentions to the surrounding countries.

Creating multiple versions of every single event in history could easily become overwhelming. But every event that has several versions is a chance for you to introduce conflict between people groups and thus external conflict for your characters. It also makes your world feel more realistic and thus easier to get lost in. And it helps with understanding why certain people groups and nations are the way they are.

For beginner world builders, try taking the most important historic event to your story's main plot and create the multiple variations. For advanced world builders, select as many historic events as were world-changing or nation-changing, or just as many as you want.

For this section, REFER TO ALL PREVIOUS WORKBOOK NOTES

STEP ONE: TIMELINE

While you don't need to sit down and make an actual timeline yet, it's important to determine a few facts about your timeline before filling it in. The way people know what time in history you are talking about, or what the current time and date are is essential in any novel that refers to history in even its most minor plot points.

What will the divisions in eras and ages be based on?

- Will there be Ages or Eras?
- Will it be divided by centuries or millennia? (The 1800's, the '50's)
- Will certain time periods have a name? (The Renaissance, the Middle Ages, the Victorian Era)
- Will the wars of significance have names that define the period? (The Civil War, the Great War, the French Revolution)
- Were there any events that broke up the timeline? (Birth of Christ – B.C., A.D.)

Decide on what you will be using for the various times and eras. Write up a list of titles and make note of any ideas. They may help you to decide the major events in the next few categories.

STEP TWO: WORLD HISTORY

For this step, sit down and write up the biggest events that happened in your world's history. We're talking things that affected the whole world. Then write them up in basic order of events. All of it will fall into three basic categories.

- Origin (how everything came to be)
- Races & Nations (how your current nations were divided up over time)
- Languages (the origins and development of current communication)

The language section also needs to include a history of the various languages' progression from oral only to pictorial to written, or specifications on which languages have not yet reached written or even pictorial.

This doesn't need to be an in-depth look yet. It's more of an overview that will later be filled in with the histories of individual continents, nations, peoples, cities, and even families. Use the following categories to brainstorm the succession of events:

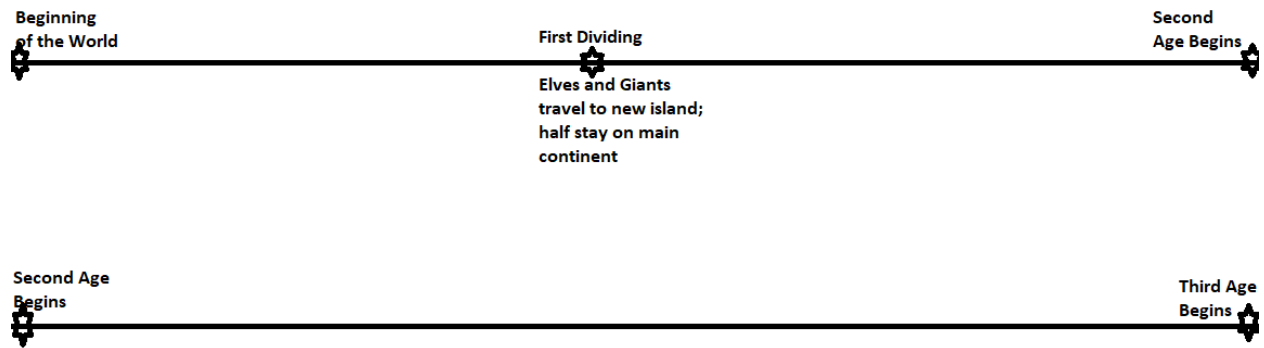
- Eras
- Advancements & Inventions
- Alliances, Annexations & Wars
- Plagues, Famines & Floods
- Magic
- Rise and Fall of Governments & Ideas
- Exploration, Colonization & Discoveries
- Establishments and Banning of Religions and Orders

Next, take that list of events and write it out in the form of a timeline. Use a piece of paper or the horizontal layout on your document. Draw three lines evenly spaced. Then mark the far-left corner of the top line as "Beginning of World". Make notes along that line, left to right, for important historical events. Then jump down to the far left of the next line to continue.

To make it easier to see eras, mark off evenly spaced chunks of timeline based on either one hundred years or one thousand years, depending on how many events you have and how closely spaced they are. Fill in all the major events you have, ending with where your story will start.

NOTE: It's normal for this first timeline to be relatively empty. Don't panic if you can't come up with too many world-changing events right away. As you fill in the details through later steps, more ideas will come to you and you can add them in then.

EXAMPLE:

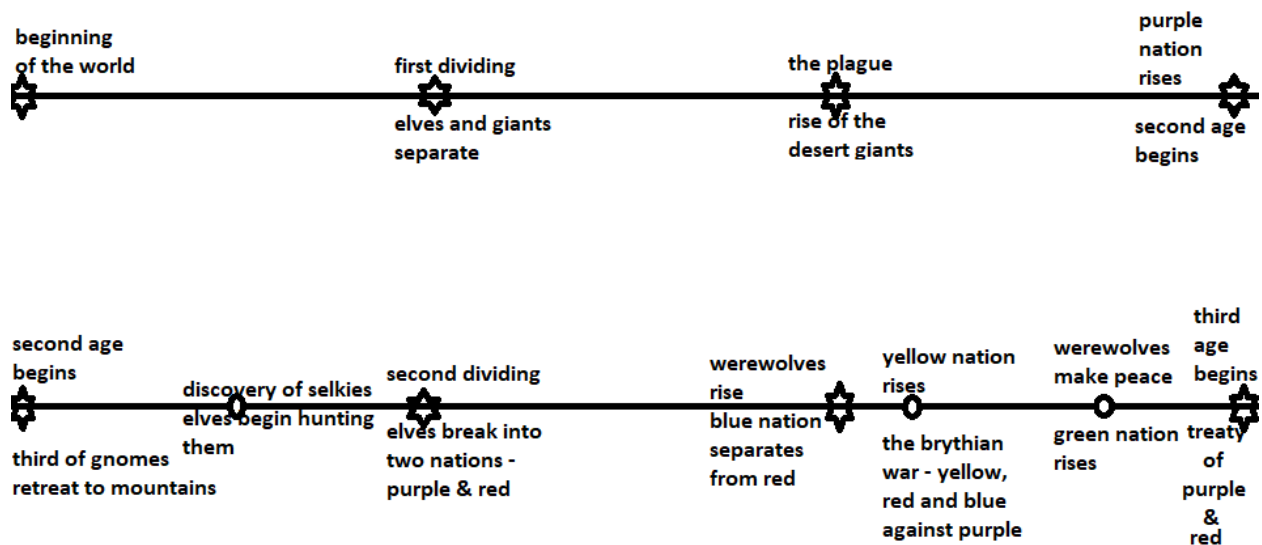


STEP THREE: CONTINENTAL/REGIONAL HISTORY

For this step, we're going to be zooming in and filling in the timeline gaps. Add to the timeline anything that happened between nations or people groups that were specific to certain continents or regions that didn't affect the others but were important to their part of the world. Use the list from Step 1 to come up with ideas.

Keep in mind that in ancient times, travel and communication were so difficult whole parts of our world were in the dark about each other for centuries upon centuries, yet entire civilizations and empires were developed in all those parts of the world without significantly affecting or being affected by them. Naturally, there were ripple effects, but the discovery of 'new worlds' happened because these parts of the world were so removed from each other that they didn't even know about each other. They didn't have maps or knowledge of any kind beyond myths. Use our world as inspiration to create these worlds apart from each other.

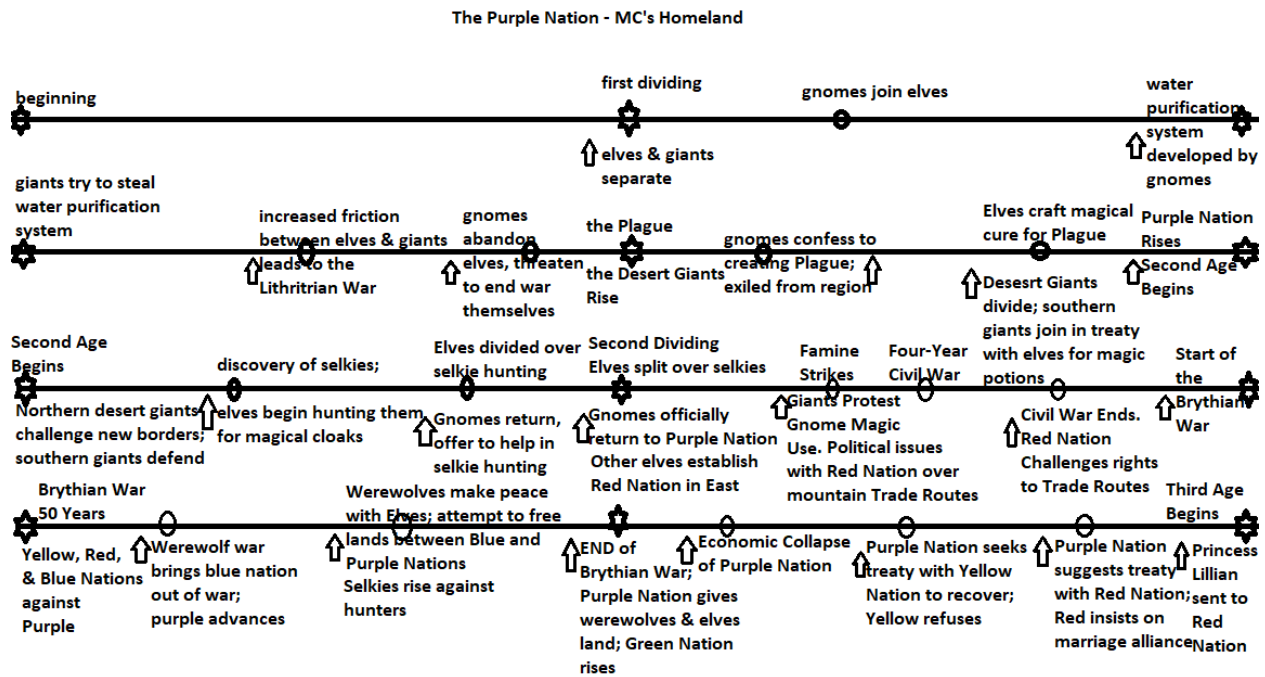
EXAMPLE:



STEP FOUR: INDIVIDUAL NATIONS/PEOPLE GROUPS

At this point, the timeline is probably too crowded for anything more. Open up a new document or grab a new piece of paper. Make a new timeline for each individual nation and people group. In that timeline, include only the world and continental historical events that affected this nation, as well as everything that only affected them. Mark the Beginning and carry all the way through to the start of the novel. Again, use the list from Step 1 to come up with ideas.

EXAMPLE:



STEP FIVE: INDIVIDUAL CITIES, VILLAGES, ESTATES, SCHOOLS, FAMILIES

Once you've established your national histories, look at the elements that make up that nation. Are there any that need histories written down?

The city where your Main Character was born and raised is important if it shaped their view of the rest of the nation or even of the world. This is especially true if there are any conflicts within a nation that will come into play between characters or in the overall plot.

Have a special family whose heritage predates current national boundaries? Who have strange powers no one else in their nation has? Write out their history in detail.

You can use the same list you did for the other categories for brainstorming. Write up a timeline or simply write up a narrative that goes through the timeline.

STEP SIX: THE GREAT STORIES

Mythology and lore are a key part to many fantasies, whether the world lore of a high fantasy or the ancient histories of secret elven communities in present day Europe. Mythology and lore also affect calendars and many aspects of culture. If these come into play in your story at all, you need to write up these stories. Keep in mind the slight differences between the kinds of great stories and make sure to include any details of specific people who wrote them down, turned them into plays, or who are in charge of preserving them.

Mythology – Stories everyone knows and most (in that area) believe to be true to a certain extent; usually revolving around deities and origins

Legends and Folklore – tall tales, exaggerated stories, usually based on factual events or real people

(NOTE: legends can take decades to develop, or a person can become a ‘legend in their own time’)

Great Works of Literature based on History/Mythology/Legend – self-explanatory

Notable Historical Figures –

Notable historical figures are the people that changed their world, for better or worse. They can be famous or infamous, celebrated with holidays or only used in curses. This part is optional. But chances are these types of figures will appear in your setting at some point. Whether it be in conversation or as enormous statues, be sure to include a paragraph or two describing how they affected their part of the world. The following list includes categories most notable historical figures are drawn from. However, there are more.

- Political
- Religious
- Scientist
- Medical
- Agricultural
- Military
- Philanthropic
- Romantic
- Extremist

If you need additional inspiration, look at histories of our world. There plenty of big names to choose from.