
Imaginary World of the Story
Introduction to World Building



The Relationship between the World and the Story

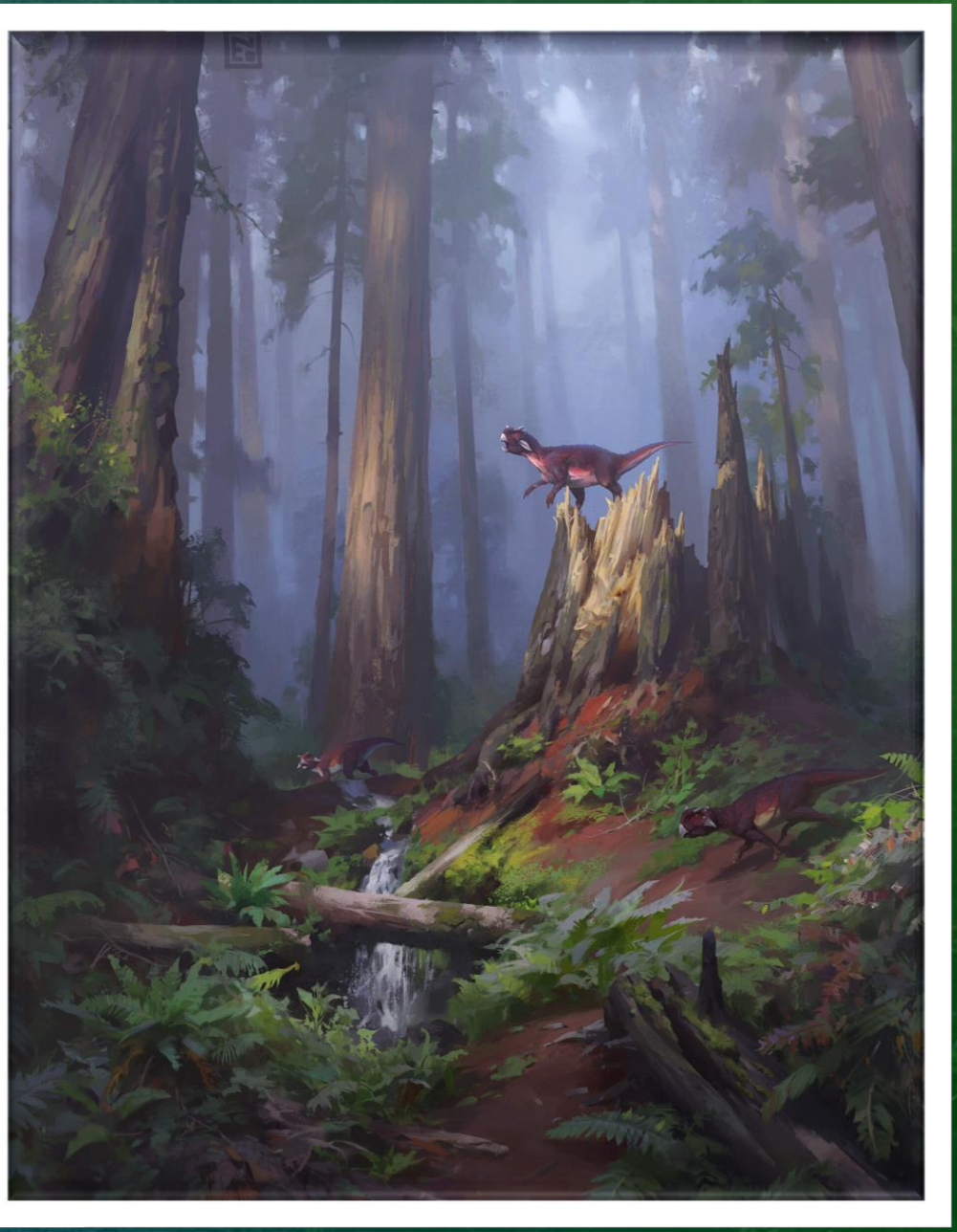
Part 01

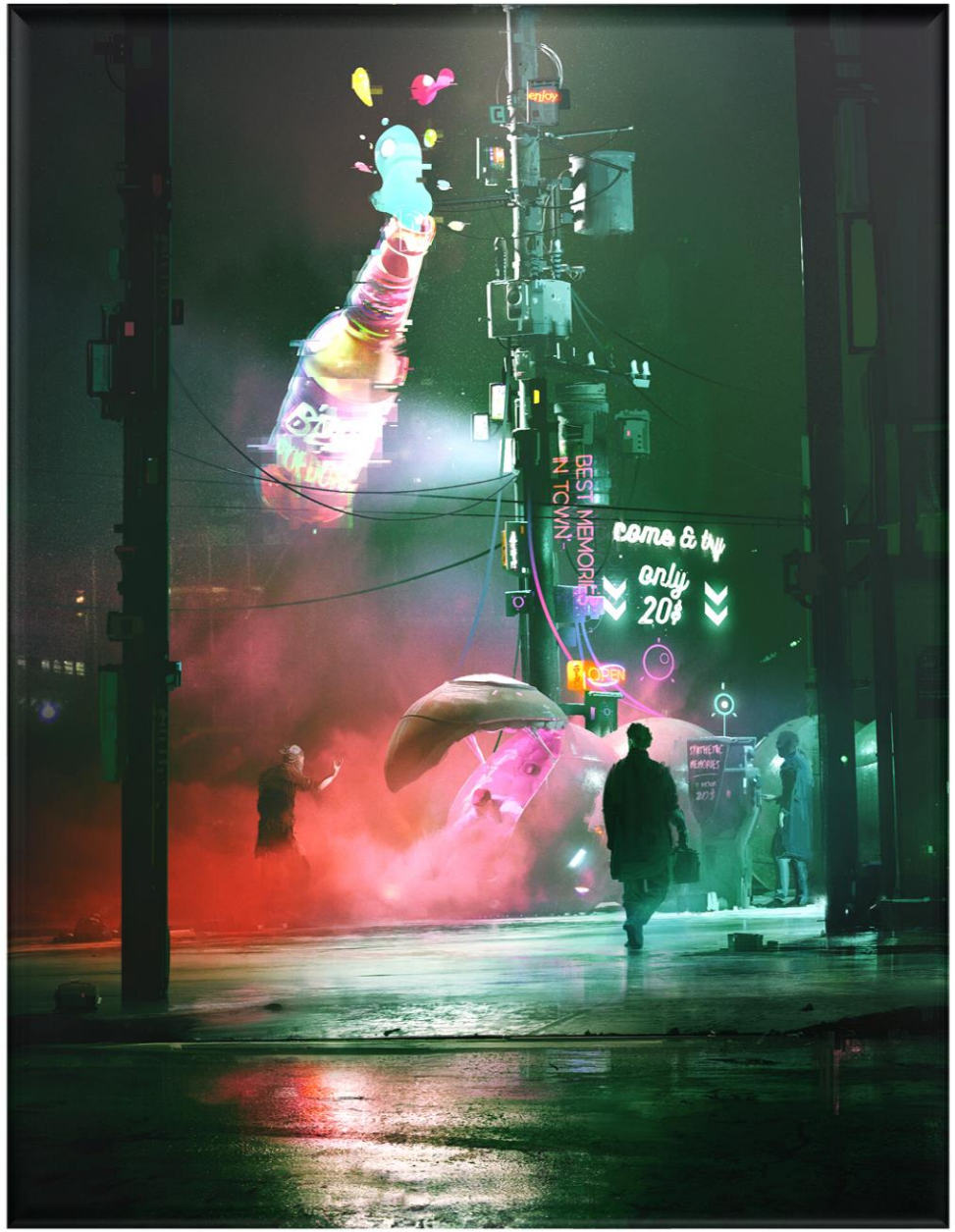
“Worldbuilding is the process of constructing an imaginary world, sometimes associated with a whole fictional universe. The resulting world may be called a constructed world (or conworld). Developing an imaginary setting with coherent qualities such as a history, geography, and ecology is a key task for many science fiction or fantasy writers. Worldbuilding often involves the creation of maps, a backstory, and people, including social customs and, in some cases, an invented language for the world.”

After the basics that was covered in the last semester, we move on to more elaborate sections in the practice of World Building. To list down some necessary points to remember, here is a comprehensive gist –

- **World Building** is based on one primary logic, and that is the Suspension of Disbelief. By definition, the Suspension of Disbelief “is an intentional avoidance of critical thinking or logic in examining something surreal, such as a work of speculative fiction, in order to believe it for the sake of enjoyment.”

- **World Building** can be done either of two ways. A writer can either create a world and base a story within this world, or a writer can have a story and can structure a world around this story. As a writer or a creator of a world, exploring both these options become very essential to effective world creation.



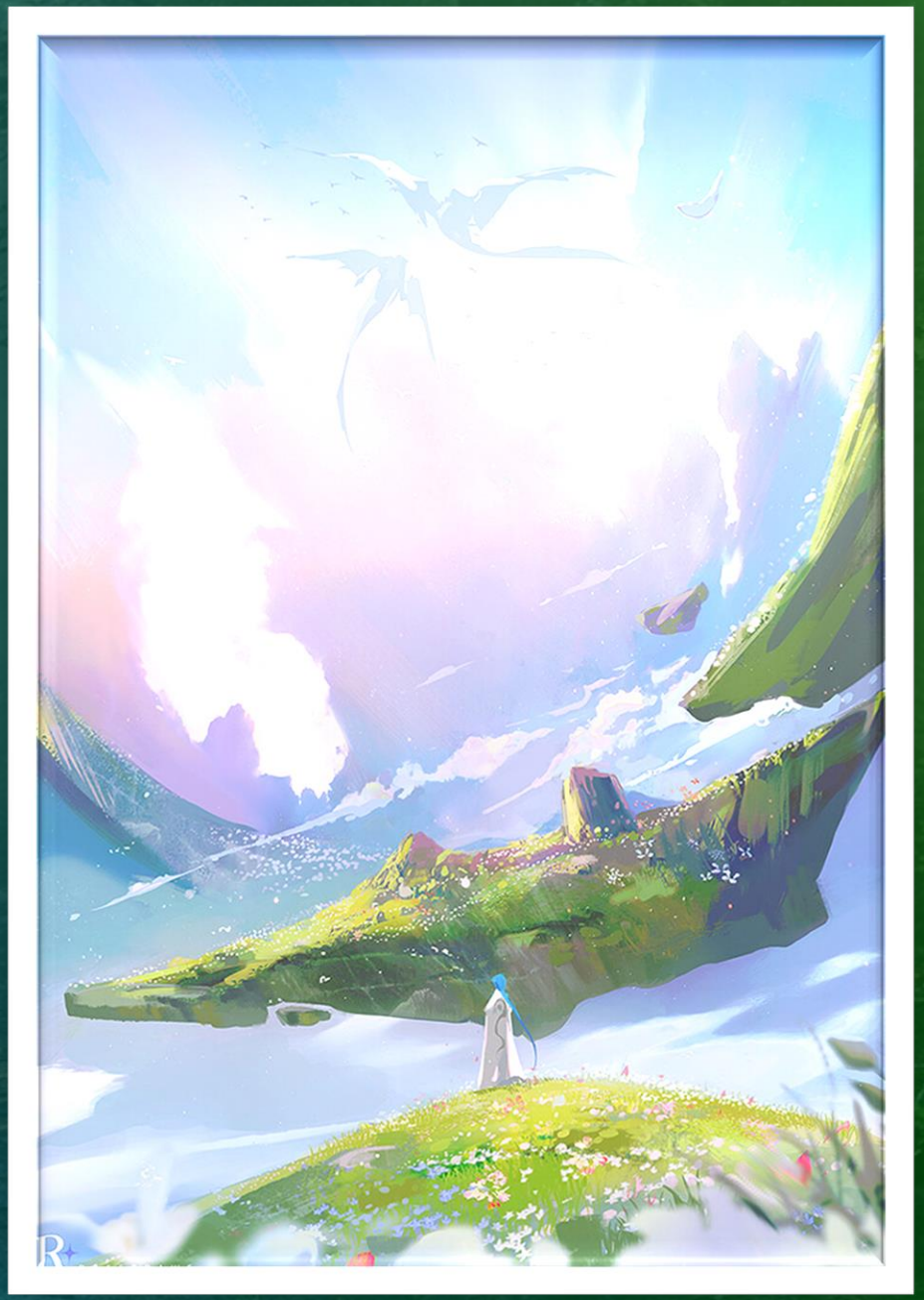


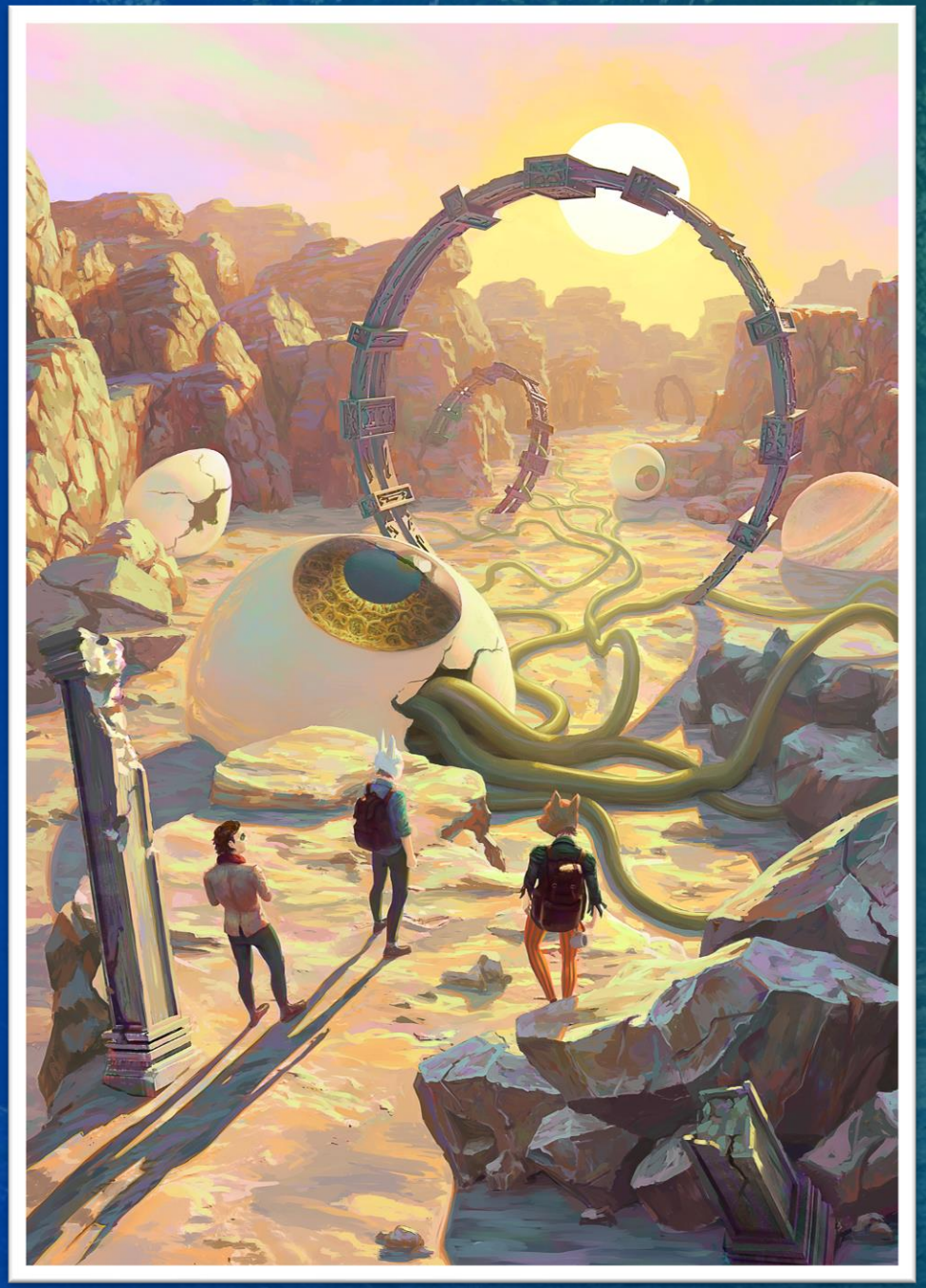
1. **Story before the World (In-to-Out Approach)** – When a writer ventures into fantasy or sci-fi based narratives, it is a given that he wants to explore elements that are not common to the real world. Whether you consider surreal or metaphysical beings or traits or technology so advanced it can only be conceived within the human mind, the writer will venture into unchartered imaginative territories in order to create a 'New Adventure'. But having such fantastical plots, characters, vehicles and creatures greatly works towards jeopardizing the suspension of disbelief. As a result, the world building becomes of great consequence, to justify the twisted rules of nature and people and to pull the readers into the thresholds of this unique narrative. In many ways, this approach of World Building helps to tie any and every lose ends that the story and its character might have left behind. The conflict, which becomes the inciting event for the story, is worked into the history of the world so that it seems like a seamless amalgamation.

2. **World Before the Story (Out-to-In Approach)** – In this approach, the writer creates the world first and lays down the rules of nature, the history and significant events which will eventually create the framework for a story. The conflict arises from the way the world works and the natural order of things native to the world. The story, eventually, becomes a reactionary process for the characters, either for or against the aforementioned natural order of things. The suspension of disbelief is much better protected in this scenario because the rules of nature and/or mechanism are thought about first, and then the story.

- The story will give rise to a protagonist, an antagonist, secondary and tertiary characters. The one thing that remains common between all of them is the World, but not the way the world impacts them. The relationship between individual characters and the world is what impacts their mentality and shapes their psychology. It is common stance in most narratives for characters who are in harmony with the world to be perceived as ‘Positive’ characters and characters who are not in harmony to be perceived as ‘Negative’ characters.

- The story and the world are complimentary to each other and justify each other’s existence. A world is created to be the canvas, and story, the paint. It is an association of credibility. The occurrences of the World will impact the story and in turn, the narrative of the story will impact the world. In a way, the writer looks at creating a snowballing relationship between the world and the story i.e. something that starts off with minimal significance but gains in momentum and impetus to soon become something of massive importance.





- **A multiverse narrative** involves the creation of multiple worlds. That is not to be confused with large scale Science Fiction narratives existing in the same universe, such as Star Wars. The difference being that in a narrative based in a single universe, there are multiple planets, and more often than not, these planets are characterized by homogenous traits. For example, Tatooine from Star Wars is a desert planet with no other topographical or climatic distinction. In a multiverse narrative, however, the same planet can many other features and combination of features across the dimensions. Without a doubt, multiverse narratives is a far more complex form of World Building and narrative structuration.

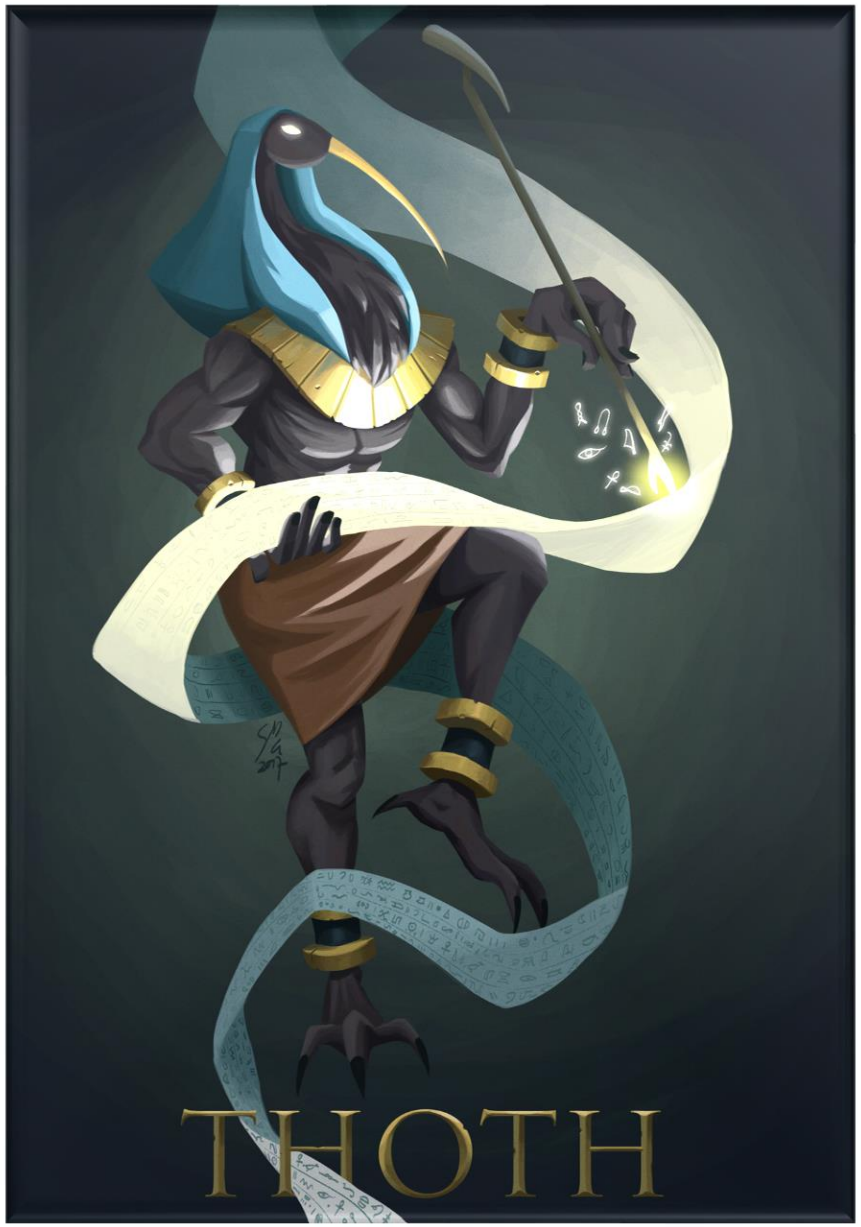


Society and Disbelief

Part 02

“The Suspension of Disbelief has been a rampant concept among human beings since the beginning of civilization. If we relax the term ‘speculative fiction’ from its definition, we will see how whole human societies have been based on the want and need to believe what can possibly be deemed as the illogical.

- All stories are arguably a work of fiction unless it is justified as cent percent true. And all stories depend on the listeners capacity to be able to believe it. And when a story is not believed, it loses all credibility. Despite storytelling sounding like a serious business, the concept of ‘faith’ came about and flourished under incredibly simple and abstract terms. The inability to explain natural phenomena, an outlet for their fear and as an answer to their insecurities and feelings of insignificance, mankind visualized the existence of a supernatural entity and generated devotion towards this entity. The concept of God rose in the mind of man, and thereafter, came factions, religions, castes, traditions, superstitions and the ever-engulfing concept of culture.





- One could argue that these might have been the result of misconceptions, mostly because Science did not have a foothold in human civilization. But such is the power of the Suspension of Disbelief, that even today, when science is the cornerstone of our society, faith and belief in a Supreme Power reigns as strongly and as passionately in the minds of the populous. The effects of culture and tradition is just as impactful as it was millenniums ago. Even when godmen from different parts of the world lay outlandish claims and subjugate other beliefs, there is a crowd waiting to applaud and accept their every word.

- But religion is not the only section of our day to day lives that is governed by the Suspension of Disbelief. People of power use the populations need to believe in something, as a tool for mass brainwashing. In fact, the suspension of disbelief plays a major role in political propaganda. This, added with the understanding of mob psychology and societal mentality, has proved to be weapon for political parties' time and time again. Some of the greatest political leaders of the west, such as Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin used the combination of barbaric dictatorship and mind-bending propaganda to bend the will of the people and change their core ideologies.

- These are just a few examples of how the suspension of disbelief is used extensively today. But cinema and other mediums of storytelling takes precedence over all other sections, when it comes to making the audience believe in something that is not real. And why shouldn't it, given the extensive history of people grasping at straws that do no exist. In fact, the impact of the abovementioned aspects of society as so overbearing that people look to storytellers to be transported into different worlds and in imaginative situations, as a medium of escape. Comic books and hyper-imaginative novels became extensively popular for this very reason. Artists, moviemakers and storytellers noticed the need to present fantastical stories and witnessed the audiences accept such narratives with open arms. During World War II, American superheroes went to war against the Nazis in the pages of comic books. Stars Wars took the audience on a massive science fiction journey, the likes of which they had never experienced before. Lord of Rings became an imaginative extravaganza and all these storytellers were deemed as heroes.



The Suspension of Disbelief can be a tricky concept when it comes to storytelling mediums, considering the audiences can be unusually critical about what is being portrayed and why. However, with a logical approach to world building and the creation of credible and gripping plot supporting the world, a storyteller can breach the mental blockades set up by the viewer and convey an effective story.

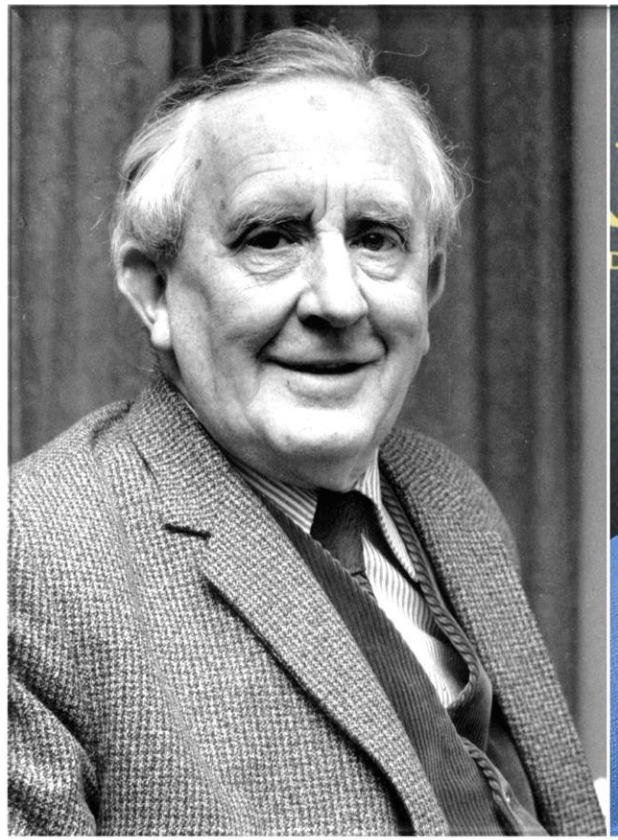


The Writer vs The Director

Part 03

World Building, as a concept, can lead to many results across various mediums. It can be used extensively in a role-playing game, or a film, or a comic, or a novel. But the practice of World Building always starts with the writer. The writer need not be a separate entity from the director or the game designer or the comic book artist. But in the chance that they are separate entities, and more often than not they are separate, how does the relationship form between the abovementioned individuals? In this section, we will only be talking about the role of the writer and how it corresponds to the role of the director.

- The writer is the one who lays the foundation for everything concerning World Building and the Story. It is an independent approach that does not involve working towards the satisfaction of anyone else. The way the writer architects the world is limited only to his imaginative prowess and his capability of narrative structuring and creative explanations. The practice of writing is one that is not bound by any sort of technicalities, other than the need for good vocabulary, correct grammar and perfect punctuations, and is considered to be a ‘Personal’ process as most writers work alone. But at the end of it all, the story demands a sense of coherence, a pattern of systemic narrative breakdowns and the chance to step into the shoes of the characters and experience the world first-hand. The popularity of a writer depends on these three aspects and these elements are evident in the works of JRR Tolkien, Lewis Carol, C.S. Lewis, JK Rowling and George RR Martin, to name a few.







- The director, on the other hand, has a larger and a more daunting task at hand. Filmmaking, in any medium, is a combination of creativity and technicalities and the task of maintaining the balance between the two, largely falls on the shoulders of the director. When a director chooses to adopt the story of a writer, he already has a definitive pathway set for him, when it comes to the story and the rules of the world. Be he finds solace in the fact they there is some room for movement when it comes to its visualization. However, this task becomes even more complex when the story that is to be adapted, is famous and has a significant fan-following. In such cases, the director also has to cater to the expectations of the fans, which has now become the prospective audience. Technicalities, namely visual effects, becomes another challenging part of adaptive filmmaking. As mentioned earlier, the writer has no hurdles when it comes to portraying imaginative scenarios, characters or creatures. But visualizing them in a film is a matter of technical prowess, effective scene and shot breakdowns and massive expenditure. Details about the story are either altered or even scraped to suit visual effects possibilities and sometimes, directors can take an extra step forward with their creativity and change the sequence of the story altogether (e.g. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban). Whether a director should approach adaptive filmmaking with such liberties is highly debatable, but it’s no doubt that a director’s job can be a lot more imposing.

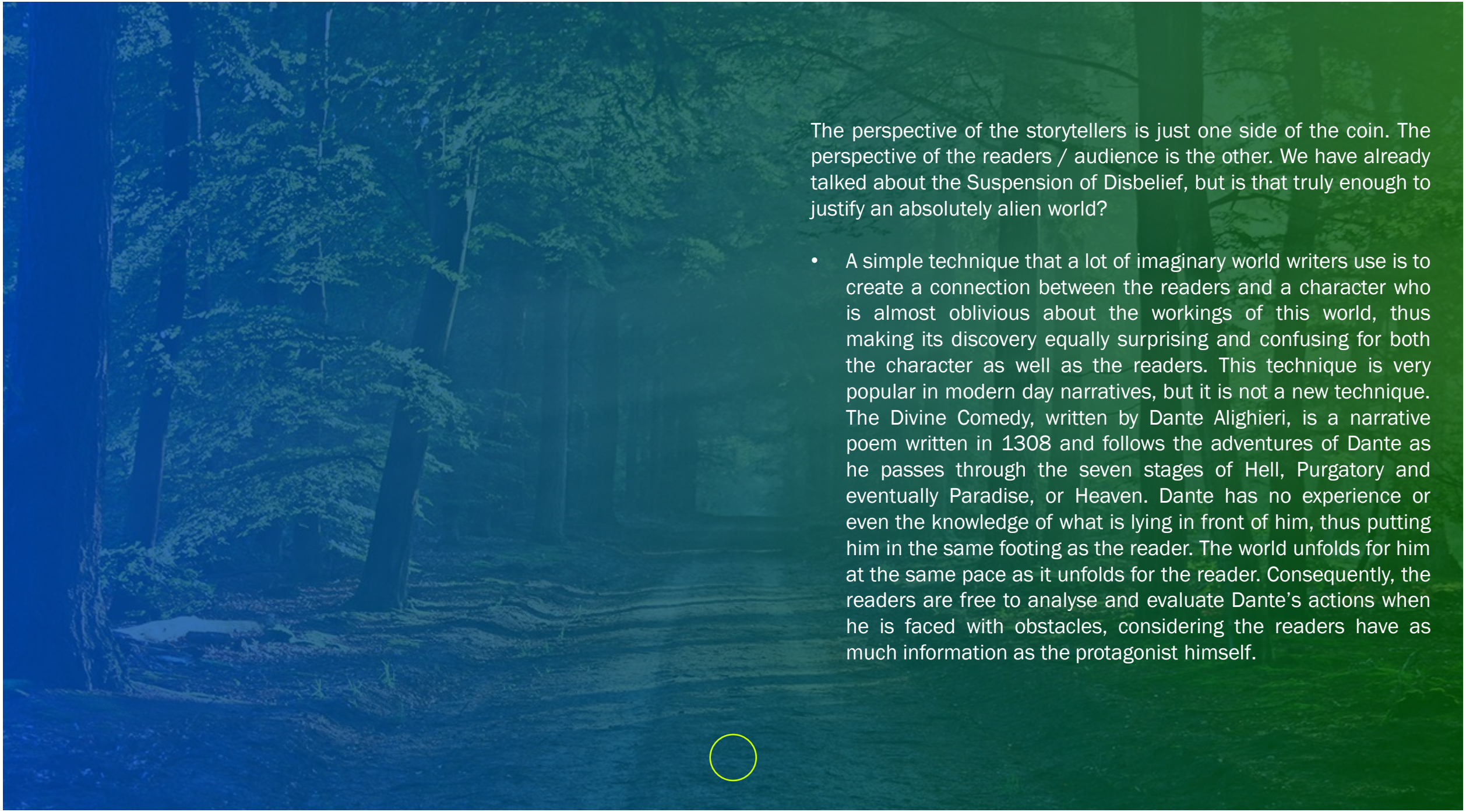
- When the writer and the director is the same entity, it becomes a combination, or rather a conflict, between what needs to be shown to effectively communicate the story and what can be shown based on technical limitations. It is important for this individual to find that sweet spot where both the story and visuals are adjusted to an optimum and enjoyable narrative experience.





To Enter a New World

Part 04



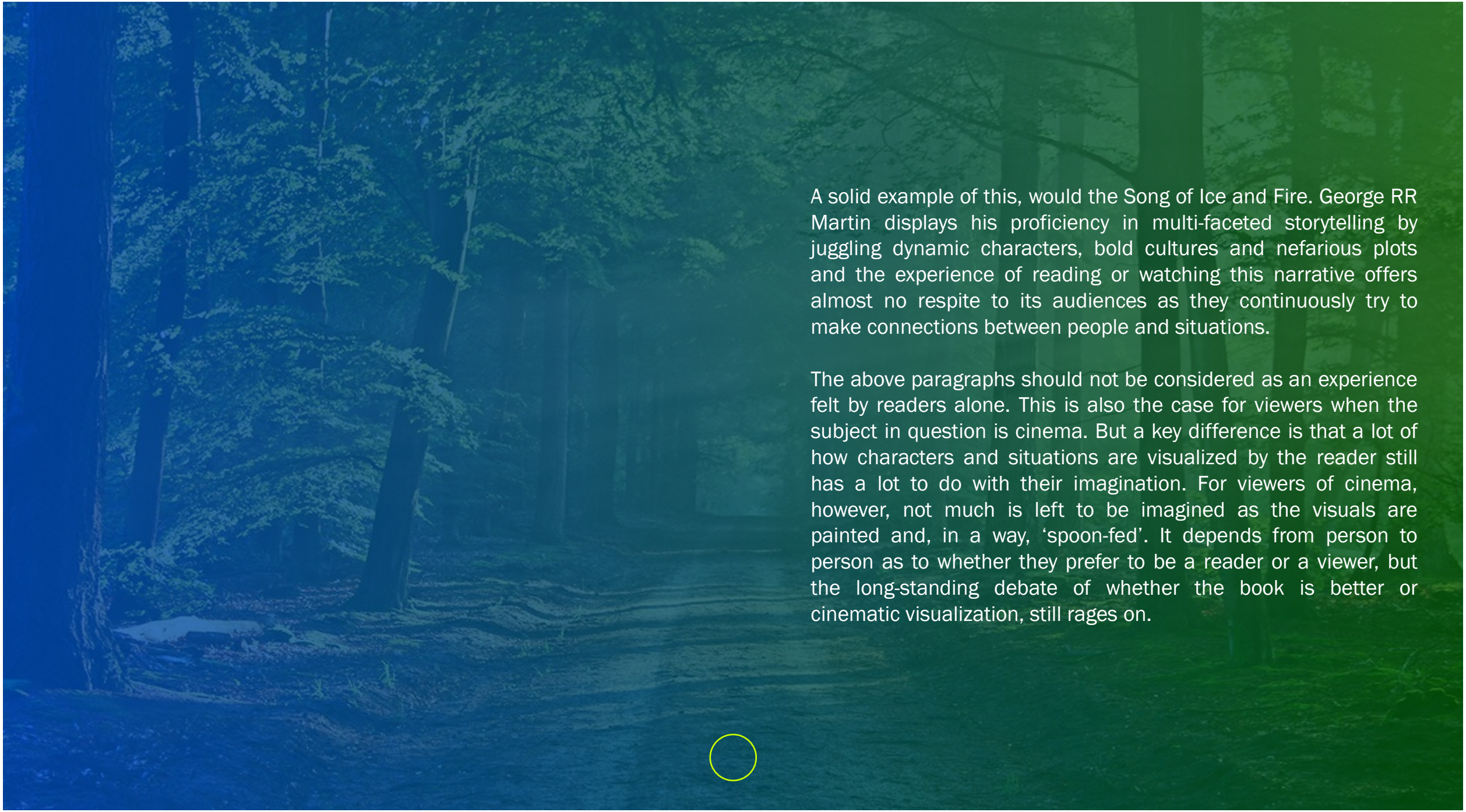
The perspective of the storytellers is just one side of the coin. The perspective of the readers / audience is the other. We have already talked about the Suspension of Disbelief, but is that truly enough to justify an absolutely alien world?

- A simple technique that a lot of imaginary world writers use is to create a connection between the readers and a character who is almost oblivious about the workings of this world, thus making its discovery equally surprising and confusing for both the character as well as the readers. This technique is very popular in modern day narratives, but it is not a new technique. The Divine Comedy, written by Dante Alighieri, is a narrative poem written in 1308 and follows the adventures of Dante as he passes through the seven stages of Hell, Purgatory and eventually Paradise, or Heaven. Dante has no experience or even the knowledge of what is lying in front of him, thus putting him in the same footing as the reader. The world unfolds for him at the same pace as it unfolds for the reader. Consequently, the readers are free to analyse and evaluate Dante's actions when he is faced with obstacles, considering the readers have as much information as the protagonist himself.

- The same formula is used in Lord of the Rings, where Frodo is stripped away from his comfort zone, that is The Shire and is now a part of a tumultuous quest, crossing places he has never been to before, meeting people and races he has never met before and facing hurdles he had never dreamt of facing. The same formula is used in Star Wars, where Luke Skywalker is taken away from the sheltered upbringing that he had in Tatooine and experiences a massive inter-galactic destiny unfurl in front of him. The same formula is used in the Harry Potter series, where Potter is hurled into a world he never knew existed. And to top it all off, he discovers that he is very important to this world and that everyone knows him. One by one, the mysteries of the world are unravelled to him and as he gets adjusted to his life, so does the reader. One must note that narratives using this formula usually go hand in hand with the Hero's Journey.

- However, this formula loses its scope in stories that have multiple protagonists or in stories where the concept of the protagonist and the antagonist is dissolved, altogether. In these narratives, the Hero's Journey is either broken down and bent to suit the needs of individual character or is completely abandoned. These narratives share a more complex relationship with its readers and entering and getting accustomed to the world is a process in itself. It pushes the reader to remember details and important incidents for without doing that, it would be almost impossible to understand the intricacies of the world and the characters.





A solid example of this, would the Song of Ice and Fire. George RR Martin displays his proficiency in multi-faceted storytelling by juggling dynamic characters, bold cultures and nefarious plots and the experience of reading or watching this narrative offers almost no respite to its audiences as they continuously try to make connections between people and situations.

The above paragraphs should not be considered as an experience felt by readers alone. This is also the case for viewers when the subject in question is cinema. But a key difference is that a lot of how characters and situations are visualized by the reader still has a lot to do with their imagination. For viewers of cinema, however, not much is left to be imagined as the visuals are painted and, in a way, ‘spoon-fed’. It depends from person to person as to whether they prefer to be a reader or a viewer, but the long-standing debate of whether the book is better or cinematic visualization, still rages on.

Bibliography

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