

## Advanced Topics in World Building



From time to time here (and starting today), I'll be posting some advanced-level posts on world building. These are not intended for beginners in this field. Rather, these subjects are aimed at folks already grounded in the basics, who want deeper knowledge about various (possibly obscure) aspects of societies and cultures and how they function.

Of course, anyone is welcome to read them. If they feel like too much info, or the content does not seem useful for your purposes, you're certainly welcome to skip it entirely. This material is not essential to basic or even intermediate-level world building.

If you do decide to dig in, I apologize in advance if some of this is dense reading. These posts are definitely written at a college level of expression and comprehension, and the topics can be rather more involved than not. Although I will try to keep it simple, there is a danger here of misleading by oversimplifying a subject. You'll want to set aside some thinkish time for these Advanced posts, and probably sit down with a cup of coffee when you read them. Maybe also a note pad, to jot down ideas that resonate and any inspirations that may relate to your own setting.

These posts will happen when I find something worth commenting on and have the time to dig into it. I can't promise they'll come in any particularly logical order beyond whatever has inspired me in the moment. They will be tagged "macro" or "micro" depending on the level of analysis, and all will be tagged "advanced topic," so you can find them with a blog search. You will also find these listed under the [Free Info](#) index tab.

### Topic Areas & Approach

What sort of things will I be covering? Well, here are some thoughts on that.

Very broadly speaking, I'm looking at civilizations, societies and cultures through these lenses: sociology, anthropology, political science, social psychology, social history, and very occasionally, economics (which is less in my wheelhouse than these other subjects). Usually I will take one of two approaches (but probably more of the first):

- **macro**, which is high-level dynamics, systemic issues, patterns, and interactions—big-picture stuff that may apply to an entire society, or
- **micro**, which looks at small-scale interactions and patterns, from small group dynamics down to individual behaviors.

I want to outline what we know of how something works in our world (or what some of the prevailing theories suggest), and then, first principles explained, use that as a jumping-off point for how you might apply the info to your own setting. Or at least, offer some questions you should ask about your world in light of the material just presented.

So what kind of stuff am I talking about here? Oh, you know. Things like social status, pair bonding, how organizations think, the effect of public opinion on government, what revolutions have in common--and what this has to do with a constructed world. The cog-works of how the world goes round. The innards of our social structures and systems. Like that.

### **Complex Society Bias: Yes, But...**

I don't know for sure yet, but I suspect these posts will be biased towards discussion of the attributes of complex, rather than simple, societies.[1] Most of what we know in these fields (sociology, etc) has been developed in modern times and learned by analyzing our own society in fairly modern times. While many of the principles thus arrived at can be applied to other places and times in history (often very fruitfully), it may just be easier to demonstrate the principles if I stick to the original models used.

For instance, when I talk about social identity, it might be easier to use some of the research examples from the 1950 and '60s than to transpose things to Roman times. Though the Roman example might be much more entertaining! So I don't know, we'll see how that goes.

My larger point, though, is this: if it seems I offer a lot of analysis aimed at our modern world, I would say yes, on the surface that would appear to be true. *However*, most of the core principles do seem to withstand the test of time and apply also to simpler civilizations, and presumably can be extrapolated to ones even more complex (and futuristic) than our own. So while my subject matter may stem out of one era, and use our modern world for examples, the underlying principles can often be extended to other eras and styles of civilization where humans are the dominant race and culture. And that is why I think these Advanced posts will have particular relevance to world building.

### **Our Timeline as Reference Point**

**If your story world is contemporary**, or set in a near-Earth analog, then the things I discuss in the Advanced series will apply directly to your setting. In contemporary worldbuilding most of the backdrop remains the same, but you may end up tinkering with a lot of things directly related to your story. If that's your situation, these Advanced posts can help you understand some of the hidden workings of the world we're in. Once you understand those dynamics of it (or at least, some of our present theories about those dynamics), you can play with aspects of your setting and have a much better idea what you are experimenting with.

**If your world is not an Earth analog**, but at least has humans as the dominant culture, those humans may behave similarly to those in our own timeline. If that is the case, the gist of the Advanced topics should still apply, at least to the human parts of your society.

**If your world is dominated by a race other than human**, then you face a different challenge. You can pick and choose from the Advanced topics to find aspects that will work well with the psychology and culture you are developing for your non-humans. Proceed with caution, though: if you borrow these dynamics wholesale, then you are reproducing human behaviors in what you claim is an alien culture. That needs some careful thinking through.

**If your world is Earth in the future**, or a distant planet (with humans on it), the Advanced topics will still give you a basic starting point for structure and behaviors. You will have to rely on your own sense of invention, though, to figure out "what comes next" in your futuristic society. It is notoriously difficult to logically predict what future social changes will evolve from a given starting point, so the Advanced topics will probably be a stepping stone, not an end point, for you here.

OK, so that's it for my intro to this occasional series of posts. I hope you enjoy the Advanced worldbuilding topics if you decide to dip into them. In fact, if you have that cup of coffee to hand, you might want to [follow this link to the first post in the series](#).

Questions, comments, thoughts? Let me hear from you in the Comments below!

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1. Complex society: this term has somewhat different meanings in different social science disciplines. Here I am using it in the sociological sense, which I will define in a future post in more detail. For now, let's understand a "complex society" to be one that is early industrial, industrial, modern, post-modern, or futuristic. Societies at these levels develop higher levels of interdependencies, specializations, and complex systems than do pre-industrial civilizations.

**First post in this series: Specialization and Credentialing, Part 1**