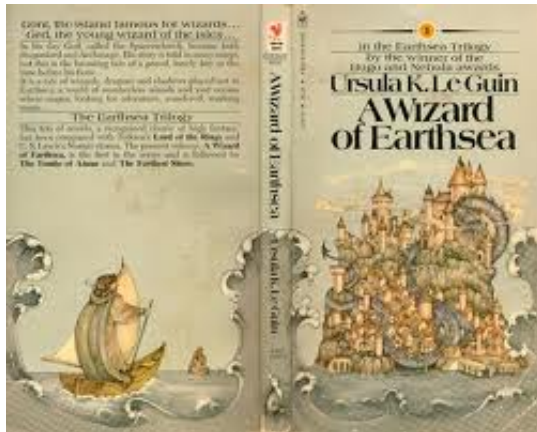


## On Writing Believable Worlds



When I first started thinking about doing the World Building Academy, one of my first steps was to do market research. I needed to get a feel for how many people shared my passion for world building, and more importantly, what kinds of problems and challenges folks deal with in this area.

One of the things I heard very frequently was a concern about creating a fictional setting that was truly believable. Did a fictional world stand on its own? Was it a place a reader could get sucked into and carried along into the story? Did the setting support the story in a positive way--not just structurally, but by helping to keep the reader or gamer immersed in a plausible world?

The essence of these various challenges all boiled down to one thing: how can I make sure my constructed world is believable?

### How NOT to Create a Believable World

There are many answers to this question, but as I thought about it, one thing became evident to me: before we can trust that our world is believable--proactively drawing the reader in--we have to make sure we are not derailing the Imagination Train right at the start by obvious mis-steps.

If we strike a false note, or have parts of our world be blatantly UNbelievable, then the whole construct grinds to a halt right there. Many, if not most, of our audience will not get past that point, or they will carry on grudgingly, already having their "belief" in this fictional setting run off the rails.

So although I generally prefer to come at world-building and writing advice from a positive direction (more "Do This" instead of "Don't Do That!"), in this case it seemed unavoidable: there are certain things you *cannot* do, and *must not do*, if you want to keep your audience in a state of whole-heartedly believing your fictional creation.

There are other things you can do to strengthen that spell (for perhaps it can be likened to a spell: how we enrapture a reader or captivate a gamer, and get them to Live There with us).

But all of that good work is carelessly thrown by the wayside if you do just one or two critical mistakes along the way.

## Ursula Le Guin and Plausibility in Fiction

One thing in particular emerged as an acute, short-term problem that most quickly destroys an audience's belief in a setting. The other thing that became evident to me is a chronic issue burbling beneath the surface, which may or may not blow up in your audience's face, depending on how comprehensive a fiction-spell you have woven throughout your work.

Item number 2 touches on the issue of proactively creating a plausible setting. How does one establish a constructed world that the audience can buy into? This is something I talk about in an exclusive interview with [Ursula K. Le Guin](#). This master of American letters recently agreed to speak with me about creating believable fiction, and we touch on plausibility challenges in our conversation, among other things[1]. This is also a subject I'll be blogging about here over the coming weeks, because there are many sides to this elephant.

However, the acute problem identified as item #1 is both singular, easily grasped, and easily identified. Of the array of problems in fictional worlds it is the one that seems to most quickly destroy an audience's belief in a setting.

And that is why **I have made that #1 killer of believability into a workshop**. It is a common problem, and here I offer acute and rapid fixes for this terrible distraction to a world's believability. [2]

~~This teleclass will happen this Wednesday, October 10.~~ [This teleclass is available online right now](#). The interview I conducted with Ursula is available for now only for teleclass attendees as a bonus download. (At a future time it will be online in a more public area of this website, but at this writing the timing of that is still a question mark.)

The believability of a world directly affects how much people buy into it, and therefore how much they are entertained, how much they end up liking your work, praising it with reviews and word-of-mouth, and supporting your work commercially. This is a concern especially if you are writing for publication or hope to become a professional. This workshop offers a fix for one of the more common problems in world design. For more on the workshop, [click here](#).

As to the more chronic "plausibility" problems, look for future blog posts here. Subscribe to the RSS feed for blog posts as they are published.

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1. This interview with Ursula is not very formal. We cover a lot of territory in what turned out to be a very personal and personable chat. So in the whole, this interview is a chunk of a great writer's perspective on a grab-bag of things, than it is just about plausibility in fiction. And for that reason, all the more worth listening to.

2. Yes, I recognize that I am speaking obliquely about what this acute problem is. I give a lot of information and how-to away for free here at WBA. This is not one of those things. While my insight itself is not a secret, I did go to time and expense to put this together into an instructional format, so for now, I'm sharing these details only in a classroom setting. At some future time I expect I will do a "Killer-Lite" version of this workshop, or intro to it, for free. I'm just not there yet. I need to teach the class first to see what parts of it I can share without giving the store away. I hope my readers and subscribers understand my constraints here. If someone takes issue with this (and some already have, hence this comment), we are probably not a good match for the teaching and learning of world building as I am conducting it here.