Worldbuilding Design Patterns in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien

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A "design pattern" is a formalized description of a common problem in a field of endeavor which is accompanied by a recommendation towards a solution. The term "design pattern" was introduced in the architecture classic <u>A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction</u>, published in 1977 by Christopher Alexander and others. Alexander and his colleagues were interested in discovering and codifying architectural elements that result in a building, neighborhood or town being "alive". They developed a system (a "design pattern language") of design patterns which described ways of designing buildings and urban areas to make them pleasant and "soulful" places to live in.

An example of a design pattern in architecture for building a community is the "sidewalk café". Alexander et al describe this design pattern: "The street cafe provides a unique setting, special to cities: a place where people can sit lazily, legitimately, be on view, and watch the world go by... Encourage local cafes to spring up in each neighborhood. Make them intimate places, with several rooms, open to a busy path, where people can sit with coffee or a drink and watch the world go by. Build the front of the cafe so that a set of tables stretch out of the cafe, right into the street." (Alexander 1977, 437,439).

Another example of a design pattern in architecture, this time for home design, is "Light on Two Sides of Every Room". This pattern notes that people will gravitate towards rooms which have light on two sides, and avoid rooms which are only lit from one side. If a builder wishes to have "successful" rooms in a house this pattern would need to be kept in mind, with rooms being designed with light from two sides. (Alexander 1977, 747)

Other fields of endeavor have developed design pattern languages. Software engineering has developed a pattern language over the past 35 years which describes recommended approaches to solving common problems while designing computing software.

There is growing interest in discovering and identifying design patterns in other fields of creative endeavor besides architecture and software design. In particular, the art of worldbuilding, of designing new secondary worlds, could benefit from the discovery and identification of best practices and the formulation of design patterns and a pattern language. Such a pattern language could be useful guidance to authors, game designers, enthusiasts (worldbuilding as another "secret vice"?) and others who are involved in the design and construction of secondary worlds that need to be believable and have the illusion of depth.

Design patterns are discovered or identified by a combination of the observation of successful solutions in the "real world", introspection and experimentation. Examining the work of successful creators of secondary worlds may uncover design patterns applicable to world-building. This paper will examine worldbuilding best practices, techniques and ideas in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, one of the most successful worldbuilders of all time, and see how they can be formulated into design patterns and contribute towards a pattern language for worldbuilding.

What is the purpose of Design Patterns?

A design pattern is more than just a "technique" or even a "best practice" though these capture some part of what a design pattern is. Patterns don't give precise instructions, but rather describe an approach that has been shown to often result in an effective solution. Metsker described design patterns as "a way to capture and convey the wisdom of a craft" (Metsker, 2). Alexander wrote that "each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment and then describes the core of the solution to that problem in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice". (Alexander, "Timeless" x)

A design pattern is a way of pursuing a purpose. Alexander believed that the architecture design patterns he discovered, if followed, would lead to towns and buildings that would be enjoyable and spiritually nourishing to live in, that would have "life" and "spirit" (Alexander, "Timeless" x). Worldbuilding design patterns working together as a design pattern language have a similar goal: the creation of worlds that will have depth, believability and verisimilitude, that will be enjoyable to visit and inhabit and that will evoke the sense of awe and wonder that is at the heart of all successful subcreation.

Why Design Patterns?

There are a number of benefits that arise from identifying and describing design patterns in an area of endeavour. The first is "codification" - there is a value to simply recording and describing ideas that might be design patterns in a standard and concise format. Some of the patterns will seem to be "common sense" or obvious. However, common sense is not universal. Experienced world designers will likely be aware of some of the design patterns described

below, but may also find something new. Also, the process of discerning design patterns aspires to completeness, though recognizing this is impossible. So a "complete" and formally described set of design patterns, a pattern language, may be of value to worldbuilders, even if not everything is new.

Secondly, design patterns provide a "common language" for use by worldbuilders. It is difficult to talk about things which do not have a name, or if different names are used for something. Having commonly known names for ideas and best practices makes it easier to refer to them and discuss them. Design patterns together as a design pattern language provide practitioners with a common set of terms to discuss design ideas.

Finally, there is value to identifying those specific design patterns used by Tolkien. Those who study his work may find it useful to understand how he went about worldbuilding, the particular ideas he found important and techniques and best practices that he used and discovered.

Depth and Believability

Worldbuilders are in the business of deception, of creating an illusion so compelling that the audience gladly relinquishes disbelief and attention for the privilege of experiencing that illusion. How do worldbuilders go about creating that "compelling illusion"? Tolkien had a lot to say about sub-creation and fairy-tales in his essay "On Fairy Tales", and much of it applies to worldbuilding, since worldbuilding is a form of sub-creation. Tolkien spoke of having "the inner consistency of reality" as being important, but he also spoke of "strangeness and wonder" (OFS 59-60). These two phrases describe the two (sometimes mutually exclusive) goals of the worldbuilder. A created fantasy world must be similar enough to the Primary World to be believable and consistent, but must also evoke awe and wonder, or no longer be fantastical.

A continuum can be imagined between the completely Alien and the completely Mundane, between perfect strangeness and perfect familiarity. The audience cannot connect with the completely Alien world, it is too strange. Completely Alien worlds are very rare, since it takes considerable effort for the worldbuilder to completely step outside of everything that is familiar. The completely Mundane at the other extreme is a legitimate mode to work in (in fact most literature is at this end), but it is no longer a fantasy world at that point. Between these two extremes is a "zone of wonder" where fantasy worlds exist, with some combination of familiarity and strangeness, of comfort and wonder. (See Appendix B for a diagram of the "Zone of Wonder".)

"Depth" refers to the characteristic of a created world that it appears to have more to it than immediately appears to the audience, that there is more "offstage". There are a number of design patterns which can be used to bring this about, but they all are related to the human tendency to extrapolate from what is known to what is unknown. We tend to map our understanding and expectations of the Primary World onto created worlds. If one city is described and two more are mentioned, the audience will believe that there may be other cities

on the world. If a historical event is mentioned or described, or ruins are found, or old songs are sung, then the audience can believe that there is a more full history and background to a world, of which that event, ruin or song is only a part.

Depth is the result of including detail in what the audience sees, particularly details that are not necessary for the story, that are mentioned in passing. C.S.Lewis, another master worldbuilder, speaks of the "perception of Reality" in his An Experiment in Criticism: it is "...the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail" (Lewis 57). In a compelling created world, there is the sense that detail is "fractal". At every level the audience is zoomed into or out to, an equal density and distribution of detail will be seen.

"Believability" is the sense that a created world makes sense, that it is consistent, there are no "holes" or "cracks". It either follows the laws of (Primary World) nature, or has its own laws. Illogical things, if they exist, have explanations that make sense within the created world. Anachronisms and elements that "don't belong" are not found in it. The level of believability required often depends on the audience. The more experience of the world an audience has, the more is required from the worldbuilder. Worldbuilders like Tolkien and Lewis were widely knowledgeable and this is part of the reason their created worlds are so compelling. Tolkien's linguistic knowledge results in a completely believable language system for Middle-earth, more so the more the audience knows about languages.

Depth and believability are related. Depth makes immersion possible, the sense of being "completely surrounded" by, and fully engaged with, a created world. If an unbelievable element is introduced, then that sense of "completeness" and "fullness" is broken. Believability makes depth possible.

Conclusion

Appendix A includes 26 design patterns discerned from Tolkien's works, primarily The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion. This is can only be an incomplete list, there are quite probably others. Design pattern languages are collaborative efforts, so readers of this paper are encouraged to seek for more. Each pattern is described, along with an example from Tolkien's works that demonstrates the pattern. Examples from the Primary World may also be included. Suggestions for using the design pattern in worldbuilding are offered.

Humans have always imagined other worlds. Only recently have we given much thought to how they are created, or how they could be better designed. The number of secondary worlds has exploded in recent years, and they have become big business. Audiences are highly demanding, very discerning and very engaged with their favorite worlds. The study of worldbuilding as an art form is just getting started. Worldbuilding design patterns may be useful to worldbuilders who want to build better and more compelling places for the enjoyment of audiences, and for students of worldbuilding who want to understand the art better.

Appendix A: An (Incomplete) Catalog of Worldbuilding Design Patterns Discerned in Tolkien's Works

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Cultural Design Patterns

Creation Story

Most cultures have one or more creation stories that are foundational to that culture. They describe the origin of the culture, the nature of the divine and sacred and establish values important to the culture. Primary World examples include Genesis 1-2 (Hebrew), the Enuma Elish (Babylonian), Rig Veda (Hindu) and many more. Tolkien provides a creation story for Middle-earth in the *Valaquenta* in the Silmarillion. Middle-earth is created by the One God, Eru or Ilúvatar, but much of the creation work is actually done by the Valar, divine beings who take an active role in Middle-earth. Creation itself takes place through music, but is marred by the dischord of Melkor, one of the Valar who rebels against Iluvatar. Elves are created and awake first, and then Men and Dwarves.

Worldbuilders can add depth to a culture by inventing creation stories which would serve a foundational role. They will describe the origin of the culture and the divine being(s) revered by the culture and their interaction. The way the creation took place might demonstrate values and other things important to the culture. An interesting experiment would be to begin with a creation story and imagine the culture that might arise from that story.

Earlier Peoples

When the Rohirrim ride to the aid of Gondor in Book V of the Lord of the Rings they encounter the Woses, the "Wild Men of the Wood", who are believed to be "[r]emnants of an older time...living few and secretly, wild and wary as the beasts" and "woodcrafty beyond compare" (RK 105-9). They are the original inhabitants of the land, first to cross the Anduin. But they have been pushed out of their land and persecuted, by Orcs but also by other men. One of the conditions of their help to the Rohirrim is that they "not hunt them like beasts any more". Unfinished Tales provides more information about them:

"They were a secretive people, suspicious of other kinds of Men by whom they had been harried and persecuted as long as they could remember, and they had wandered west seeking a land where they could be hidden and have peace." (Unfinished, 383)

The Woses, or "Drúedain" in Sindarin, are perhaps meant to be analogues of the Native Americans or Australian Aborigines, but may also be roughly analogous to the Tuatha De Danaan. According to Irish mythology this once-powerful people were persecuted by peoples that came after them. To survive they became secretive and hid in the hills. They became known later as the Daoine Sidhe, or the the Faerie Folk.

A worldbuilder could add depth to a secondary world by considering the original inhabitants of an area. Are they still there? What was their culture like? Are they in reduced circumstances? How has their culture changed? What do the dominant inhabitants think of them? Are they regarded as dangerous? quaint? mysterious?

Ethnic Groups Have Subgroups

Ethnic groups are often composed of, or include, subgroups which share many traits, but are distinct in some ways. Tolkien's hobbits come in three varieties, or "breeds" as Tolkien refers to them: Stoors, Harfoots and Fallohides. They are physically different, have cultural distinctions, and each variety has an affinity for one of the other major races of Free Peoples (FR, Prologue, 12). Over time the Elves differentiate into various groups depending upon whether they have been to Valinor or not, whether they returned or not, among other things.

Worldbuilders can add depth to a culture by considering the existence of subcultures within it. What traits do they share or not share with the main culture? Why are they different? What is the relationship between the subcultures and the larger culture, or between subcultures?

Imitation of Other Cultures

There are numerous examples of this in Tolkien's works, but perhaps the most important is the Elvish culture. Other cultures of Middle-earth tend to view the Elvish culture as superior and seek to imitate it. The Elves are generally generous with their knowledge (RK 315, Silmarillion 149). The languages of Men and Dwarves use Elvish letters, such as the Tengwar of Fëanor and Cirth (RK 395). The calendar used by Dunedain and the Shirefolk was of Eldarin origin (RK 385). The languages of Men and other peoples included many Elvish words and features, particularly the language of the Númenoreans, who were close to the Elves (RK 406-7). Indeed the Elves teach the Ents how to speak (TT 71).

Worldbuilders can add depth to a culture by considering which cultures it tends to imitate, and which ones imitate it. Does it imitate an "older, wiser" culture, one that has been around longer? Does it imitate a "younger, more vibrant" culture that has just come into the picture? Is the imitativeness found across the entire culture, or just in certain classes or

subcultures? Are certain kinds of traits (art and style, industry, religion, scholarship) copied over others?

Literate Cultures in Contrast to Oral Cultures

Literacy tends to have a profound effect upon cultures which make more than incidental use of it. Tolkien was familiar with both oral and literate cultures in his language and literature studies. He portrays the Rohirrim as an oral culture, as opposed to the literate culture of the Gondorians. Aragorn describes the Rohirrim:

> They are proud and wilful, but they are true-hearted, generous in thought and deed; bold but not cruel; wise but unlearned, writing no books but singing many songs, after the manner of the children of Men before the Dark Years. (TT 33)

Memory plays a greater role in oral cultures, and their literature tends to be structured so that it is easier to memorize and recite. Wisdom and knowledge is stored in orally conveyed proverbs, sayings and songs instead of books. There are no written contracts, so someone's word was their bond. Oral cultures are fundamentally different from literate ones, and those of us who are in literate cultures may find it challenging to understand oral cultures. Walter J. Ong wrote extensively on this subject and his works describing and discussing orality and literacy are recommended for worldbuilders interested in exploring this area.

Worldbuilders can add depth to the cultures of their Secondary World by considering whether cultures are oral, literate or somewhere in between. What effect does their literacy status have upon their culture? How does it affect how they are viewed by other cultures?

Migration of People

Migration is very common in human history. Tolkien's history for Middle-earth also includes numerous migrations by its peoples. Migrations take place when peoples move to an area that provides more opportunity. Some of the many migrations of the Rohirrim seem to be for this reason (RK, Appendix A, 344-5). After many migrations the Hobbits move into the area that would become the Shire (RK, Appendix A, 366-7). Some of these moves appear to be opportunistic, but in at least one case they may be fleeing Orcs and Nazgûl (c. 1300 Third Age). Migrations also take place when people are fleeing something dangerous.

Worldbuilders can add depth to a culture by considering what migrations have taken place by the people in that culture. Where have they come from? Why did they leave? Were they forced out by war or plague, etc., or were they moving to "greener pastures"? Was it a peaceful migration, or the result of war or conquest? What hardships or other events may have taken place during the migration? Did it take place slowly (over many years) or all at once? Did they remove or displace other peoples already living on the land? What is the significance of the migrations in the culture?

Unique Literary Forms

Cultures often develop unique poetic forms and literary styles. Primary World examples include *haikai* and *tanka* (Japan), the *sonnet* (Europe) and the *ghazal* (Arabia). Tolkien's elves have several unique forms, one of which is the *ann-thennath.* We have only 1 example of the *ann-thennath* form, and it is translated into English ("Song of Beren and Lúthien" FR 203-5), but it appears to be iambic trimeter with an abac babc rhyme scheme, with the "c" lines having feminine endings and the "a" and "b" lines having masculine endings. (Wynne, 113).

Poetry is characterized by pattern and repetition. There are number of ways that repetition can occur. The most common in the Western culture in the real world is "syllabic" in which the last syllables of each line rhyme. But there are other forms, such as alliteration, in which the initial sounds are similar. A good example of alliterative poetry in Tolkien's work is the "Lament for Theoden" (RK 76-7). There are also forms of poetry in which the repetition is of ideas. Hebrew poetry employs "parallelism", in which the same idea is expressed twice (or more) in separate lines, but in different words.

Worldbuilders can add depth to a culture by creating unique poetic forms for that culture. Poetic forms can vary by metre, rhyme scheme, form of repetition, word choice, style and other elements. How does the poetic form reflect the culture? What role does the poetic form play in the culture? Who uses that form? Is it primarily used by the elite, or by the common folk, or by some other group? Is it an oral form or a written form? Is it set to music, or recited? Is it considered sacred, or secular? Is it considered a difficult form to create, requiring skill and education, or a simple form usable by the common folk?

Detail Design Patterns

"Realism of Presentation"

C.S.Lewis defined "Realism of Presentation" as '...the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail" (Lewis 57). Tolkien was a master of this, and much of the depth perceived in his works comes from the details that he presents. Middle-earth is vividly and beautifully described throughout his works, and it is largely in the details that this vividness and beauty is provided.

A worldbuilder can add depth to a world through careful use of detail. There are a number of different kinds of details that can add verisimilitude if they are developed and expanded. Below are a number of patterns for using detail in worldbuilding.

Descriptions of Things or Events

An example of attention to detail in Lord of the Rings is the description of the Balrog the Fellowship faces in Moria. The audience is given a lot of information about this creature:

> What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, or greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it...Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs...the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings...Fire came from its nostrils....suddenly it drew itself up to a great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall. (FR 343-5)

In the description of the Balrog the audience is given vivid details about its appearance - a large winged creature, a mixture of shadow and flame. There is information about its capabilities - it is capable of great leaps and of wielding terrible weapons. The audience is also given some clues as to how we are meant to react to it, with "terror".

Tolkien does not give the audience all these details at once, but rather they are spread over the entire encounter, which takes over 500 words to describe. Too much detail can overwhelm the audience, Tolkien gives us a lot of information, but it is spread out skillfully to heighten the impact.

Historical References

Tom Shippey writes:

> One quality which that work [Lord of the Rings] has in abundance is the Beowulfian 'impression of depth', created just as in the old epic by songs and digressions like Aragorn's lay of Tinuviel, Sam Gamgee's allusions to the Silmaril and the Iron Crown, Elrond's account of Celebrimbor and dozens more. (Shippey 229)

References to historical events give the impression of depth over time. The audience senses that there is more to the Secondary World than is immediately visible, that it is has a history just as the Primary World does. It also increases engagement as the audience is often interested in learning more about historical events.

Minor Characters

Tolkien will sometimes give names and other details of characters which have little to do with the plot. For example, the day after Bilbo leaves the Shire, Frodo evicts a young hobbit named Sancho Proudfoot who has been excavating his pantry looking for gold. The audience is told that Sancho is "old Odo Proudfoot's grandson" (FR 48). This extra detail goes a long way to establishing the sense that there is a large and complexly interrelated society in which the hobbit characters exist. Similar detail is given about the other cultures of Middle-earth.

Natural Details

The audience of <u>Lord of the Rings</u> is frequently told the weather and the phase of the moon at locations along the travels of the Fellowship. The plant-life is also often described. Some of these plants exist in the Primary World, which gives the visitor a connection with the familiar. But also mentioned and described are plants that do not exist in our world, such as the *mallorn* trees and *simbelmynë* flower, which remind the visitor that Middle-earth is both familiar and alien to us. Wildlife is also described, though less often. Together these details help give the sense of Middle-earth as a world whose physical systems are as complex and rich as our Primary World, and indeed is our own world, though in a distant fictional past.

Historical Design Patterns

Divide History Into Periods

Tolkien divides the history of Middle-earth into "ages". Each of these Ages ends with a conclusive battle against evil, against either Morgoth, or his servant Sauron. The events of the Silmarillion take place largely in the First Age which ends with a battle that overthrows Morgoth. The Second Age ends with the overthrow of Sauron, though he is not completely destroyed. The events of the Lord of the Rings, the destruction of the One Ring and the final overthrow of Sauron mark the end of the Third Age. Dividing long periods of history into "ages" or periods is one way that historians begin to analyze and describe history.

A worldbuilder could add depth to the history of a culture in a Secondary World by breaking that history into "smaller pieces". There are many ways that periods of a history can be marked. Periods can be sections of time that share common characteristics. The "Mediaeval Age" is a Primary World example, it was a long and relatively static period in Western civilization. Periods can also delineate times of rapid change, such as the "Victorian Era". Periods are sometimes associated with a century ("Twentieth Century") or decade ("the Roaring Twenties"), but sometimes correspond to actual events. For example the "Cold War" period can be marked as 1945-1991 (though some argue for different start dates), that is, the end of World War 2 through the fall of the Berlin Wall. Sometimes specific events, such as the birth of a famous person

(Jesus Christ), founding of a city (Rome) or a war (American Civil War) will mark the beginning or end of a period. Particularly common, especially in ancient civilizations, is to divide up their history by their rulers. The 3500+ years of Egyptian history are divided into some 30+ dynasties, which helps Egyptologists to keep track of it all. What ages or periods exist in the history of a culture in the Secondary World? What characterizes each of the periods, and what events, etc. mark the end of each period? Is the system of periods assigned by the inhabitants of the culture themselves, or by someone else? How do other cultures in the Secondary World think about the history of that culture?

Rise and Fall of Empires

The region of Eriador is a part of Middle-earth that has become largely an empty wasteland, with the exception of a few places such as the Shire, Bree and Rivendell. However its population was once much greater. It was the kingdom of Arnor, one of the two great Numenorean realms in Middle-earth. The other Numenorian realm was Gondor, which thrived. But Arnor suffered a long series of misfortunes, beginning with a division into three parts which struggled with eachother, and followed by a long struggle with the evil realm of Angmar to the North and then great plagues. The three kingdoms of Arnor eventually disintegrated, leaving scattered peoples, many of whom dwindled away completely or were destroyed by invasions of Orcs and other evil creatures. There are parallels with the fall of the western Roman Empire, which left a number of smaller, weaker, disconnected states amidst great areas of wasteland.

A worldbuilder could add depth to the cultures in a Secondary World by considering how empires rise but also how they fall. What happens to an area that was once a mighty realm or empire but has succumbed to misfortune? What kinds of misfortune have brought it to this point? What do the remaining inhabitants have to face now that the central power is gone? How do they survive? How much influence does the imperial culture still have over the survivors?

Ruins

Ruins, old buildings that are no longer in regular use and are falling apart, can be used to give a sense that an area has been populated for a long time, that it is no longer populated, or that it was once populated by a different people. There are multiple examples of ruins in Lord of the Rings, particularly in Books 1 and 2, where the Fellowship is passing through the region of Eriador. The Numenorean kingdom of Arnor once extended throughout Eriador, but now is no longer. Eriador has become largely a wasteland, with the exception of a few areas such as the Shire, Bree and Rivendell. It contains many ruins of Arnorian origin. Amon Sûl, or Weathertop is perhaps the most familiar example of a ruin in Lord of the Rings, where Aragorn and the hobbits encountered the Nazgûl. It was once a tower built by Elendil and held the only palantir in the north. When Arnor split into three kingdoms (861 TA), Amon Sûl was on the border between Cardolan and Rhudaur and was fought over often by them. In 1409 TA the tower was destroyed by an army of Rhudaur dominated by Angmar. When Aragorn and the hobbits visit it, it is described as "a wide ring of ancient stone-work, now crumbling or covered with age-long grass" (FK 198). It would have been more than 3000 years old at that time, and have been destroyed

nearly 1600 years beforehand.

A worldbuilder could add depth to a secondary world by considering whether the presence of ruins would add evidence of previous inhabitation. Are there areas that were once populated, but are no longer? Or were populated by a previous culture? Or have been populated for so long that some buildings are no longer in use? If there are ruins, are they unknown, or well known? Are they considered mysterious, or just a pile of rubble? What do they indicate about the history of the area? What kinds of things or creatures might be found in them?

Language Design Patterns

Languages Change Over Time: Sound Changes

Languages change over time, often according to rules that can be discerned by linguists and philologists. Perhaps the most famous of these rules is Grimm's Law which describes changes taking place in the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages. Tolkien describes the sound changes that Sindarin has undergone (RK 393).

Worldbuilders can add depth to language systems by considering how the sounds in a language change over time. Sound changes tend to follow rules.

Languages Change Over Time: Variant Forms

Languages change over time, and one of the results is they tend to develop variant forms, such as dialects. Variant forms may be mutually intelligible, though often with some difficulty, or would perhaps be considered separate languages at some point. Variants tend to develop through isolation. For example, populations that originally spoke the same language but are isolated geographically will tend to develop variants as each area's language changes separately. Isolation need not be geographical, some dialects form within class, ethnic or religious lines.

Tolkien notes that the process of creating variants was beginning to take place with Westron (Common) but that he lessened the differences while "translating" the Red Book into English. He writes:

> The Common Speech, as the language of the Hobbits and their narratives, has inevitably been turned into modern English. In the process the difference between the varieties observable in the use of the Westron has been lessened. Some attempt has been made to represent these varieties by variations in the kind of English used; but the divergence between the pronunciation and idiom of the Shire and the Westron tongue in the mouths of the Elves or of the high men of Gondor was greater than has been shown in this book. Hobbits indeed spoke for the most part a rustic dialect, whereas in Gondor and Rohan a more antique

language was used, more formal and more terse. (RK 411)

Worldbuilders can add depth to language systems by considering how formation of variants may be taking place within languages. What kinds of isolation are present, and how could these lead to variant forms of the language? How do speakers of one variety of the language consider speakers of other varieties? Are any varieties considered "inferior" or "superior" to others? Which variants have writing systems, and which are more colloquial? How does language vary across classes? ethnic groups and subgroups? religions? Do speakers know more than one variant at that same time, such as at home and also at school or in society?

Languages Develop or Borrow Scripts

Many of the peoples of Middle-earth adapted writing systems devised by the Elves, such as the Tengwar of Feanor and the Cirth, for their own language. As cultures become literate they will need a script to represent their language. Some cultures invent their own writing system, but it is also common to adapt one already in use. A Primary World example is the Latin alphabet, which is used by more than 60 languages, from Icelandic to Vietnamese.

Worldbuilders can add depth to the language system of a Secondary World by considering the writing systems in use. Not every language will need its own script. A language that is in the process of becoming literate may adopt and adapt a script from another culture. Newer cultures in particular may decide to borrow a script from an older, more sophisticated, or dominant culture.

Languages Have a "Sound"

The human vocal system is capable of producing more than 100 sounds or phonemes, but individual languages will only use a subset of these. Within the set of phonemes used by a particular language certain ones will be used more often, giving that language a distinct and unique "sound". For example, a quick analysis of Quenya as found in *Ai! laurië lantar lassi súrinen* (FR 394) reveals a very frequent usage of "l" (32 times), "n" (29 times), "r" (36 times), and rare usage of "c", "b" and "h" (3, 2 and 3 times respectively). This selection of certain sounds over others is only one of the factors that go into the distinctive "sound" of a language, such as combinations of sounds, accenting, word length, syllable choice, etc.

Worldbuilders can add depth to the language system of Secondary World by considering that each language will have a particular "sound" to it. Which of the many sounds produced by the human vocal system is used by each language? Which sounds and combinations of sound, etc. are preferred over others?

Languages Have Different Basic Structures

As a linguist and philologist Tolkien would have known well that languages have different basic structures. His invented languages reflect a diversity in these basic structures. The Elvish language Quenya uses a structure of inflected verbs and affixes. This is similar to many Indo-European languages. Khuzdul, the Dwarvish language, uses a triconsonantal root system which has been described by Tolkien as similar to Hebrew (Vink 123-124). Tolkien described the Entish language as "agglomerative" (RK 409) which may be similar to agglutinative languages like Finnish, Turkish and Hungarian "in which complex words are formed by stringing together morphemes, each with a single grammatical or semantic meaning" (Wikipedia "Agglutination").

Worldbuilders can add depth to the system of languages in a secondary world by varying the basic structure of those languages. Some research into Primary World languages will give a sense of the many possibilities available for basic structuring principles, and some inspiration for creating new structures.

Vehicular Language (Lingua Franca)

A "lingua franca" or "vehicular language" is a language which becomes used to facilitate communication between people who do not have the same native language. It will be the second, etc. language for many of these people, but may also be a first language ("vernacular") for other people. "Westron" or "Common" is an example of a vehicular language in Tolkien's work. It began as the vernacular language of the Númenoreans, who journeyed from their home island of Númenor and interacted with peoples on the mainland of Middle-earth. The Númenorean language became mixed with that of those peoples and developed into Common, which served as a vehicular language for many peoples. It was widely spoken and eventually became the native language of many of the peoples of Middle-earth.

Worldbuilders can add depth to a secondary world by considering whether any of the languages on that world are in a position to serve as a vehicular language for an area, or whether a vehicular language might come to be used in a region. A vehicular language is often the language of dominant cultures, such as that of the Numenoreans with Westron. They can also be the language of conquerors and empires. A Primary World example is English, which due to being the native language of the British Empire, has become a vehicular language for many peoples who dwell in areas once part of the British Empire. But vehicular languages can develop for other reasons as well. Swahili developed more peacefully as a vehicular language in East Africa through trade relations, though it was later promoted as such by British and German colonial powers. Vehicular languages can come to be used anywhere where peoples with different vernacular languages need to interact. In these situations a number of things can occur, such as development of pidgins and creoles. But sometimes a vehicular language is used instead.

Naming Design Patterns

Avoid Primary World Names (anti-pattern)

Tolkien largely avoids a common naming practice by worldbuilders which has many pitfalls. That is to use Primary World names, or names that sound similar to Primary World names. These should generally be avoided, suggests Lin Carter (Carter 192-212). He quotes an essay by H.P. Lovecraft on Robert E. Howard's names in the Conan series:

> The only flaw in this stuff is R. E. H.'s incurable tendency to devise names too closely resembling actual names of ancient history - names which, for us, have a very different set of associations. In many cases he does this designedly- on the theory that familiar names descended from the fabulous realms he describes - but such a design is invalidated by the fact that we clearly know the etymology of many of the historic terms, hence cannot accept the pedigree he suggests. (Carter 195)

Primary World names break the "impression of depth" by bringing in Primary World associations that may not be appropriate. In particular, if a worldbuilder is attempting to create a world which is not connected to the Primary World, that is entirely unassociated, then the use of Primary World names breaks that sense of alienness or unassociation. Middle-earth is our own world in an "distant imagined past", but Tolkien comes up with names which are not from the Primary World. There are some apparent exceptions to this, particularly with hobbit names, but these are explained as translations from the hobbitish languages, or from Westron (Common) into names more familiar to the audience.

Don't Use Apostrophes in Names Unless Really Necessary (anti-pattern)

Tolkien almost entirely avoids one naming mistake that many worldbuilders make, which is to use apostrophes in names where they are not necessary. Apostrophes used to make a name seem more exotic are unnecessary, overused, and bring up questions on pronunciation. Many audience members find them annoying (Allen, Fogarty, Williams).

Apostrophes do have legitimate uses in naming. Languages such as Hawai'ian and Arabic have a sound called a "glottal stop" which does not exist in Latin and Germanic languages and for which there is no letter. This is often represented by an apostrophe. For example, Hawai'i is the true name of the 50th state of the US, with the apostrophe representing "`okina", a glottal stop in Hawai'ian. Apostrophes may also be used to break up pairs of letters that should not be pronounced together. For example, the two parts of the name "Muad'dib" should be pronounced separately instead of run together. In Irish and Scottish the apostrophe is traditional. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostrophe#Use_in_transliteration)
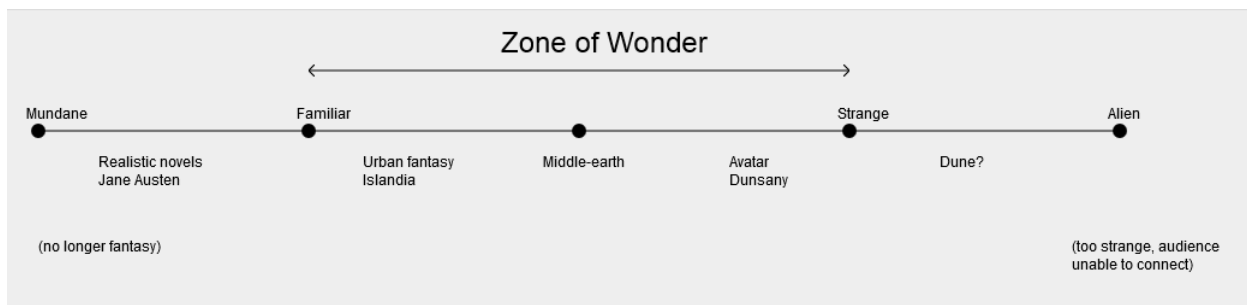
Names in Multiple Languages

Tolkien loved coming up with names and epithets, and he often gives more than one to characters and even objects. Aragorn for example declares himself to the Riders of Rohan: "Aragorn son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil's son of Gondor" (TT 36). (He was also known as Estel as a young man). Gandalf in particular has many names from the many places he visits. The Ring itself has many names and epithets: "Isildur's Bane", the "One Ring", the "Ruling Ring", the "Great Ring of Sauron", the "Great Ring of the Enemy" and others.

Worldbuilders can add depth to people, places and things in Secondary Worlds by considering whether they may have multiple names and epithets. They may have names in more than one language like Gandalf, or multiple names and epithets that reflect roles, or statuses, such as Aragorn's status as "heir of Isildur". Changes may result in new names or additional epithets. Aragorn gives Narsil, the Sword-that-was-broken, a new name, Andúril, when it is reforged. Smeagol undergoes a drastic change after stealing the Ring and becomes known as Gollum.

Use Primary World Sources for Naming Inspiration

While using Primary World names may not be a good idea, many good names resonate with Primary World languages. One example from Tolkien is "Sauron" whose name includes the Greek root "saur-" for lizard, reptile or snake. Similarly, the name "Mordor" gains some of its sinister sound from its similarity to "murder", "mortal", "mortality". We are not meant to understand that these names originated in Greek roots, etc. in Middle-earth, but rather that certain combinations of sounds have associations. Tolkien was a master at finding these associations and coming up with names which use them without sounding like Primary World names. Worldbuilders can use Primary World words, roots, languages, etc. to inspire new names.

Appendix B: The Zone of Wonder

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