Trent Hergenrader, *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. ISBN 9871350016668.

Reviewed by Calvin Fung

Amidst the recent and recurring negative reception of beloved worlds in video games produced by AAA studios such as *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017) and *Fallout 76* (2018), Trent Hergenrader's *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers* is a welcome title. This book will be of most interest to educators, writers (especially within gaming industries), gamers, and academics. This is an accessible and practical guide written for groups interested in building a world together, or for educators who would like to guide students through this process. Academics may also find this title useful as a point of reference for game studies terminology with the glossary included and the case studies in chapter 6. While addressed specifically to groups of people, as "collaborative" suggests, the clearly outlined recipes for fictional worlds will be useful to individuals creating their own worlds as well.

The book is divided into two sections: part one is an overview of terminology and theoretical concepts related to worldbuilding; part two puts theory into practice and guides the reader through the meticulous steps of building a world with peers. Part one acquaints the reader with the basic narratological concepts and concerns related to the creation of a fictional setting. Hergenrader covers topics such as the intended audience, genre, structures (for example, governance and cultural

influences), and metanarrative that are important factors to consider throughout the worldbuilding process. Case studies taken from popular media and franchises, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Star Wars* and *Fallout*, accompany this discussion so that those using this guide, especially those who are new to collaborative worldbuilding, can see theory in practice through concrete examples.

Part two follows the structure of a step-by-step manual that builds upon the narratological considerations raised in the previous section. In this section, throughout the chapters that methodically go through the execution of each of the components outlined in the previous section, Hergenrader incorporates into his discussion a fictive group of peers who are trying to create a world called "Tal-Vaz" as an example to demonstrate in detail and in an accessible way some of the issues that could arise during the process of collaborative worldbuilding and how to tackle them. Hergenrader offers many recommendations on software, media and tools. His evaluation of these ensures that those with different preferences or worldbuilding styles are taken into account. The use of Google Docs and Wikis, for instance, would be suitable for peers who enjoy the idea of both synchronous and asynchronous worldbuilding online and, for those who prefer an analogue approach or with limited internet access, how creating a world with pen and paper might work is explained. A companion website to this book, collaborativeworldbuilding.com, offers useful resources for writers and gamers who would like to consult previous worldbuilding projects or attempt a hands-on "card system" that can assist in developing parts of the framework of a world.

In spite of the specificity of his recommendations, Hergenrader makes apparent the flexibility of his guide and mentions alternative approaches—for instance, in the order in which the worldbuilding steps can be taken, noting the advantages and disadvantages and potential difficulty levels of different approaches. The careful attention to the *collaborative* part of the equation is one of the strengths of this book—that, as a group project, group social dynamics must be a prime consideration, and different members of a group create and work in a team in different ways. A must-read for beginners and experienced members alike is chapter 8, "Before You Begin Your Project." This chapter outlines crucial methods for

establishing boundaries and ways in which members of the group can give and respond to constructive feedback.

Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers distinguishes itself from earlier titles on worldbuilding. Unlike Mark Wolf's *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012), Hergenrader focusses on the multimodal creation of digital and popular worlds. Other titles engaging specifically with creative writing on digital platforms, such as the recently published co-edited volume, *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy* (2015), are directed more towards an academic audience. On the other hand, *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Writers and Gamers* will appeal also to writers, gamers and educators.

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