

Creating a Setting For Your Series



A Workshop by David Keener

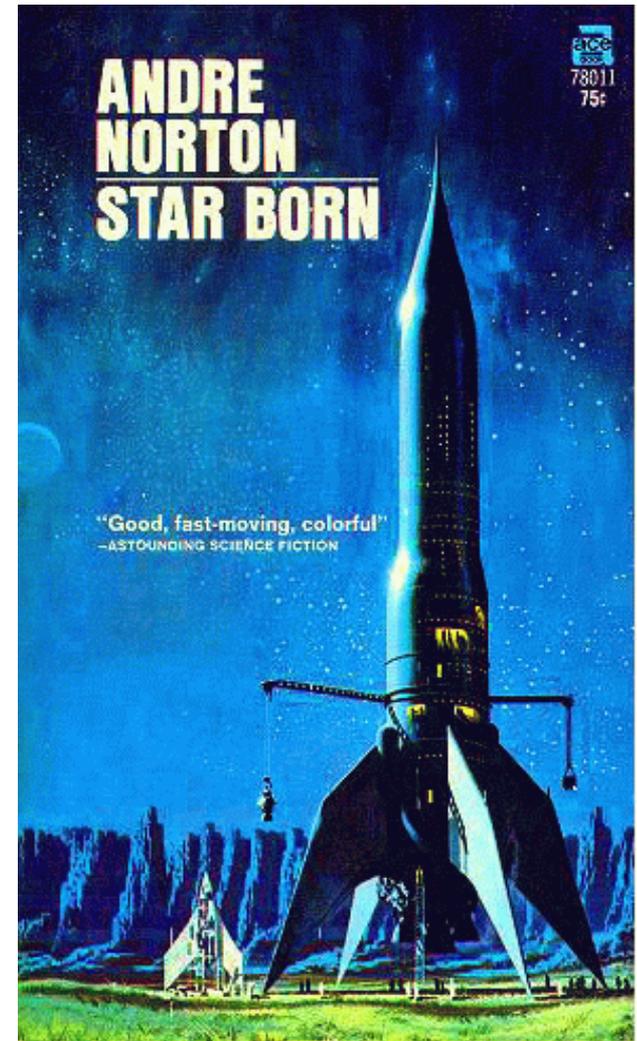
Capclave 2019 | Rockville, MD | Oct 18 – 20
Workshop: Saturday, 5:00 PM, Oct 19th

Agenda

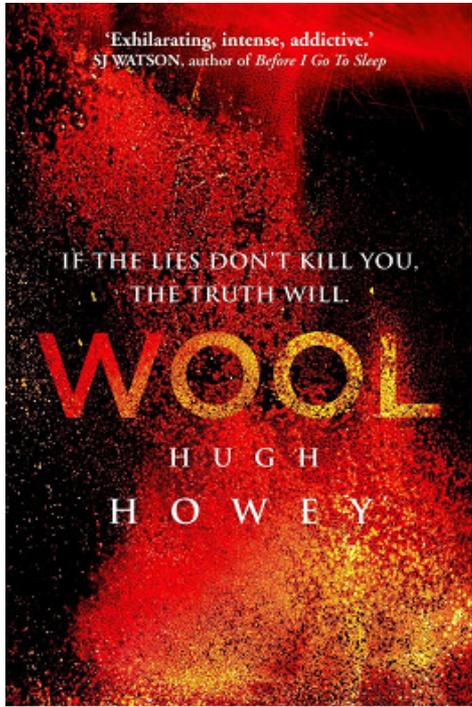
- Introduction
- Settings: High-Level
 - With Exercises
- Break (5:55 AM - 6:00 PM)
- Settings: Low-Level
 - With Exercises
- Wrap-Up (and totally shameless plug)

About Me

- Knew I wanted to be a writer when I was 10
- Then Life got in the way
- Plus there were too many Gatekeepers
- So I did games...lots and lots of world-building



Then I Met This Guy...



What Not To Do

- Design a Setting that serves only one purpose
 - “The Terminator” syndrome
- Add a major SF/Fantasy element without considering the impact on society
 - We have the Transporter...now what?
- Create a Setting that’s too neat and orderly
 - Reality is messy
- Ignore basic infrastructure details
 - How do that many monsters live in a cave?

What Makes a Good Setting?

- Sufficiently complex to seem plausible
- Well-defined prerequisites
- Logical, consistent flow from those prereqs
- Setting promotes the possibility of CONFLICT
- For a series, the Setting should provide multiple avenues for CONFLICT to occur
- It feels real

The Reactive Net

The Goals are:

- To create a coherent, consistent and connected background
- That can support multiple story lines over time
- Leveraging the same Setting, Characters and a diverse cast of Supporting Characters.

The Reactive Net (2)

It provides a set of steps for crafting your Setting with...

- Enough potential Conflict to support a series
- Enough implied Complexity to feel realistic
- Enough Connectivity to “suggest” useful story interactions
- Enough Flexibility to adapt to inciting events and character actions

Exercise 1: Playing Field

- Define your “Playing Field”
 - The home territory where most action occurs
 - Gives us a thumbnail sketch of your Setting
 - 100 words or 5 bullet points

For Batman, it's Gotham City. Harry Potter has Hogwarts.

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 1: KOSMOPOLIS

- Small but growing city in Tennessee
- Noteworthy bio-tech corporate presence
- Home of MOEX Technologies (bio-tech)
- Home of Dartfell University (bio-tech, comp)
- Agricultural rural areas around the city
- Large and liberal artistic community
- Surrounded by rolling hills, forests & parks

Exercise 2: Special Rules

Tell us about any special rules that are in play...

- Does Magic work?
- FTL?
- Aliens?
- Elvis?
- Is there a Hell-Mouth nearby?
- Zombies?

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 2: SPECIAL RULES

- Werewolves and vampires – out of the closet
- Speculation about other supernatural critters
- Magic works, but is rare
- Magic seems to be increasing slowly...
- Major ley line nexus nearby
 - Artistic community centered around nexus
 - Influential Fey community nearby

Exercise 3: Factions

To provide the potential for multiple angles of conflict, you need factions, i.e. – groups or orgs with differing goals

- Define three groups within your Setting
 - Give us a 1 - 2 line description of their goals

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 3: FACTIONS

- **City Government** (notoriously corrupt)
- **Police** – Thin blue line protecting the public
- **FBI** – Investigating corruption, Fey threats, etc.
- **Dartfell University** – Gov. grants; bio-tech grants
- **MOEX Technologies** – Too much money/power
- **Werewolf Pack** – Buffer between Fey / Humans
- **Kalifey** – Fey community in “Brambles”
- **Church of Christ Triumphant** – Hates “subhumans”

Reality Isn't Predictable

- Everybody pulls in different directions
- Nobody ever gets everything they want
- Reality is what happens when all these things get worked out in the Stew Pot of History

You want your Setting to imply enough complexity to feel real

Break

Exercise 4: Detailed Faction

Define one faction in more detail. Provide a sentence or two for each category below:

- Attitudes
- Goals
- Strengths
- Weaknesses

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 4: CHURCH OF C.T.

- **Attitudes:** Everything supernatural is part of a nefarious plot by Satan. All supernatural creatures and those who dabble in the black arts (magic) should die violently. Supernatural creatures, including mages, are not really people.
- **Goals:** To expunge the supernatural from the world.
- **Strengths:** They're relentless, smart and wealthy. They're also good at public relations.
- **Weaknesses:** They are relentless. Sometimes they don't recognize when to cut their losses. They're fanatical. Compromise isn't a word in their vocabulary.

Exercise 5: Operations

How do the factions perform their day-to-day operations? Where do they get the money they need to run? How do they recruit new members? Who's doin' deals with who?

- Detail at least three operational interactions...
 - Can focus on one faction...or...more

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 5: OPERATIONS

- Werewolf Pack has a group house owned by the pack leader where they all meet. They live separately and tithe 10% of their income.
- CCT runs a syndicated “Anti-Monster” radio show and accepts donations to campaign against the supernatural realm.
- MOEX Technologies pioneered the blood substitute, AAA-Plus™, that vampires use so they’re not dependent on human blood.

Exercise 6: Key Roles

Define some key roles within the Setting, i.e. – roles that are likely to appear in your stories.

- At least four roles
- Can be in different factions
- Or even not associated directly with a faction
 - Ex. – the local fence for stolen goods

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY 6: KEY ROLES

- The “fixer” from the Werewolf Pack
- The ambitious reporter looking for a story
- The guy selling a new recreational drug that affects supernatural creatures
- The local fence for stolen goods
- The vet at the local zoo
- The FBI agent investigating Fey threats

“Just In Time” Design

- Your Setting design is done in broad strokes
- You design your factions and roles
- You don't have to figure out every detail now
- You fill in more details as you go
 - Keeping a series bible can be useful
- Don't get hung up on world-building...

Theory Time

- You've designed your Setting
- You've added connectivity
- You've added operational details

Now let's put this Reactive Net thing to the test...

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY, BOOK 1

Someone was savagely mauled by an animal

- The **Werewolf Pack**'s fixer is worried about a rogue lycanthrope
- The **Police** want to know what's going on
- Your **Hero** wants to prevent anybody else from getting hurt
- Your **Hero** talks to the **Vet** at the local zoo, who was originally brought in by the police to look at the body
- Your **Hero** encounters the fixer from the Werewolf Pack
- The **CCT** uses the incident as part of an anti-monster campaign
- Your local **Reporter** smells a story, too
- Finally, the **Kalifey** are annoyed because the body was left near the Brambles — was it a warning or a threat aimed at them?

SOUTHERN FRIED FEY, BOOK 2

A half-blood Fey dies of an overdose of a new street drug that affects supernatural creatures

- The **Kalifey** want to know where the drug came from
- The Kalifey ask your **Hero** to help them
- The **Police** want to find whoever's distributing bad drugs
- The **Werewolf Pack** is involved again because the drug affects werewolves, too.
- **Dartfell University** is involved because the drug was a byproduct of one of their experiments, and its been hijacked by an insider for illicit purposes
- The **CCT** thinks this is a great way to kill monsters

Events and Reactions

- The essence of the **Reactive Net** is that when an event occurs, people and organizations react, generating various types of conflict.
- Not only do they react, but they do so in logical, consistent ways.
- Reactions also occur when your Hero takes action as well.
- Leverage these reactions for your stories...

Questions

<http://www.davidkeener.org>

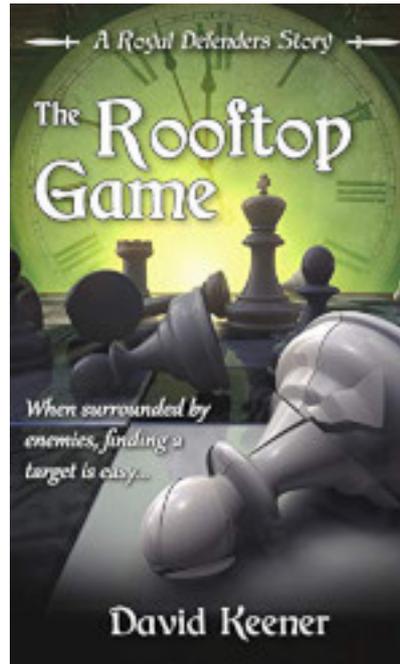


dkeener@davidkeener.org

Shameless Plug for My Books



Futuristic Heist
Behind Enemy
Lines



“Die Hard” on
the roof of a
Castle Tower



His first Mistake...
Buying a Magic
Road

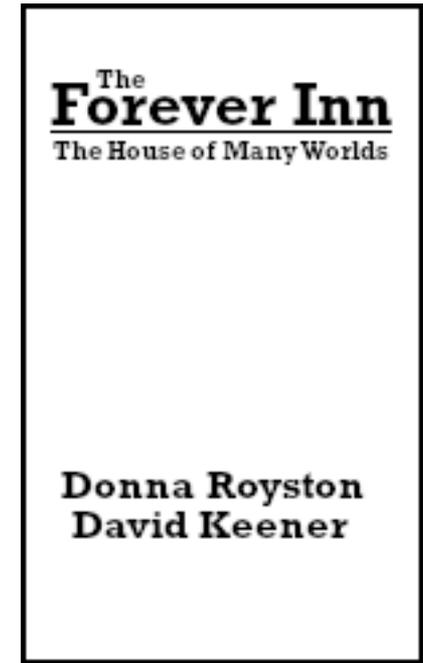
Shameless Plug for My Anthologies



Stories of Fantasy
Heroes



Stories of Fantasy
Crime Solvers



A Metaverse-
Travelling Tavern
And Shared
Setting
(Placeholder Cover)

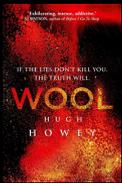
Credits



Cloud City, from the film, *The Empire Strikes Back*. It's a gas mining colony floating in the atmosphere of the gas giant, Bespin. Fan art by Daein Ballard, used under a Creative Commons license..



Cover art for Andre Norton's *Star Born*, one of the key books that made me realize at an early age that I wanted to be a writer. Art by Dean Ellis. Believed to be in the public domain.



One of the numerous covers for Hugh Howey's breakout indie-published bestseller, *Wool*.



Hugh Howey and I at dinner at an Irish pub during the 2012 Worldcon in Chicago. He'd just changed my life by educating me about indie publishing.



A brilliant picture of me taken by Edmond Joe in May 2015 at the District 29 Toastmasters Spring Conference. I was running A/V for the conference. This is near the end of the day, all is well, and I'm watching the show. Pretty much the same feeling I have when a successful workshop is over.