A Proposal for

Subcreation: Building Imaginary Worlds

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PROSPECTUS

Originally coined by J. R. R. Tolkien, the term "subcreation" is used to distinguish human creation from God's *ex nihilo* creation, indicating its reliance on the latter through the "sub" designation (literally "creating under"). "Subcreation" also refers both to the process and product of world-building, while avoiding philosophically slippery terminology like "real" and "imaginary", which tend to be seen as mutually exclusive domains. Tolkien's work built on the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and George MacDonald, and this book builds on all these author's work, as well as later authors like Lin Carter, Thomas Pavel, Lubomir Doležel, Marie-Laure Ryan, and others who have paved the way for the study of imaginary worlds.

Subcreation: Building Imaginary Worlds, then, is a book-length study of the theory and history of imaginary worlds, including those of literature, comics, film, radio, television, board games, video games, the World Wide Web, and other media, and considers these worlds as distinct objects in themselves. Whereas most approaches in Media Studies are medium-specific or narrative-specific, this book is world-centered in its approach, while still taking issues of narrative and media into consideration.

This book is divided into seven chapters, and arranged to set a foundation in the first three chapters before proceeding to explorations of particular aspects of imaginary worlds in the latter four. Chapter one attempts to define imaginary worlds and lays the groundwork for a theoretical description of how they operate, such as the way world-building extends beyond storytelling, the engagement of the audience, and the way in which worlds are experienced. Chapter two is a history of imaginary worlds, following their development over three millennia from the fictional islands of Homer's *The Odyssey* to the present, looking at the new directions and uses for imaginary worlds in the past century or so. It also follows some of the ways conventions and tropes changed over time and how worlds adapted to new technologies and new media windows through which they could be experienced. Chapter three then examines the various infrastructures used by authors and audiences to hold a world together, keeping track of all the relationships among all of a world's elements, and also how these structures relate to each other.

Imaginary worlds are often transnarrative, transmedial, and transauthorial in nature, and these concerns are taken up in the rest of the book. Chapter four looks at narrative as a structuring device, as well as how multiple narratives set in a world can interact, resulting in what one might call internarrative theory. Other ideas, like retroactive continuity, multiverses, and interactivity are also considered in regard to narrative. Chapter five focuses on a particular kind of situation in which subcreation is itself a theme, resulting in self-reflexivity and subcreated subcreators. Chapter six grazes the surface of an enormous topic, that of transmedial growth and adaptation, and the demands they make on a world, as well as some of the processes that occur when worlds make the jump between media. Chapter seven examines the transauthorial nature of imaginary worlds, the resulting concentric circles of authorship, and related topics of canonicity, participatory worlds, and subcreation's relationship with Creation. Finally, the book ends with a glossary of terms, and an Appendix which is a timeline offering a sampling of over 1,400 imaginary worlds produced across three millennia, along with the names of their authors and the works in which they made their first public appearance.

OUTSTANDING FEATURES

Apart from a different approach, this book proposes new terminology and analytical tools and concepts for the discussion of imaginary worlds, and collects the terms in a glossary. The book's second chapter presents a history of imaginary worlds, which is the first time that such a history has been attempted. The list of secondary world infrastructures in chapter three is likewise something which will aid the examination of imaginary worlds. Finally, the book's Appendix features a list of over 1400 imaginary worlds across three millennia, perhaps the most extensive list of worlds ever compiled and quite useful to the imaginary world researcher.

COMPETITION

Although there are books on imaginary worlds, including Lin Carter's *Imaginary Worlds* (1973), Jesper Juul's *Half-Real* (2005), Edward Castronova's *Synthetic Worlds* (2005), Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* (2006), T. L. Taylor's *Play Between Worlds* (2006), Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin's *Third Person* (2009), Celia Pearce, Tom Boellstorff, and Bonnie A. Nardi's *Communities of Play* (2009), and others, most of these works are more narrow in focus, for example, looking only at virtual worlds (which are a small subset of imaginary worlds), or looking only at specific media or specific narratives, or looking at sociological effects and other kinds of effects as they are found in worlds. Most of these studies are limited to new media or electronic media, and ignore the long history of imaginary worlds extending back into antiquity, as well as the non-interactive worlds of novels, film, television, and comics, and the non-electronic interactive worlds of board games and tabletop role-playing games.

Other books that discuss worlds do so in a more holistic fashion and are usually "how-to" books on world-building for writers, like *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1990) by Orson Scott Card or *World-Building: A Writer's Guide to Constructing Star Systems and Life-Supporting Planets* (1995) by Stephen L. Gillett. Such books may overlap in interest, but not in approach or purpose, and thus they cannot really be considered as directly competing with this book. *Subcreation: Building Imaginary Worlds* stands alone in the breadth of its historical view and transnarrative, transmedial, and transauthorial approach, confronting worlds as entities in and of themselves.

APPARATUS

The book includes an Introduction, seven chapters, a Glossary, and an Appendix. The Appendix lists over 1400 imaginary worlds, with each entry listing the world's name, the type of world, author, and work of first public appearance. While I currently have no plans to write any supplemental materials for the book, I would be willing to should the press deem it desirable.

AUDIENCE & MARKET CONSIDERATIONS

The book is designed to appeal not only to scholars, but to be accessible to a general audience interested in popular culture. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic suggests that there ought to be an academic audience for the book in a variety of fields, including Literature, Comparative Media Studies, Film Studies, Television Studies, Video Game Studies, and other branches of Media Studies, as well as Anthropology, Communication, Geography, History, and Philosophy, to name a few. Since so many worlds have spawned popular franchises, each with enormous fan bases, there may be popular interest in the book for those who wish to go further into the history and theory behind the building of imaginary worlds, and even hobbyists and practitioners of world-building may find the analyses within both useful and interesting. The writing style, while academic, is still accessible enough for a college-educated audience, and lively enough to engage readers outside of a classroom, and the Appendix can be used as a reference work as well.

Institutions whose members the book might interest:
    Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS)
    Popular Culture Association (PCA)
    Mythopoeic Society (MythSoc)
    Modern Language Association (MLA)

STATUS OF THE BOOK

The text of the book is complete, at 168,043 words, and I am now working on the illustrations and images that will accompany it; I am guessing that the press will want around 20-25 images or so (this is flexible, as only a few are really necessary).

REVIEWERS

The following academics have written about imaginary worlds in various contexts, and would be qualified to comment upon this book:

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Appendix: Timeline of Imaginary Worlds