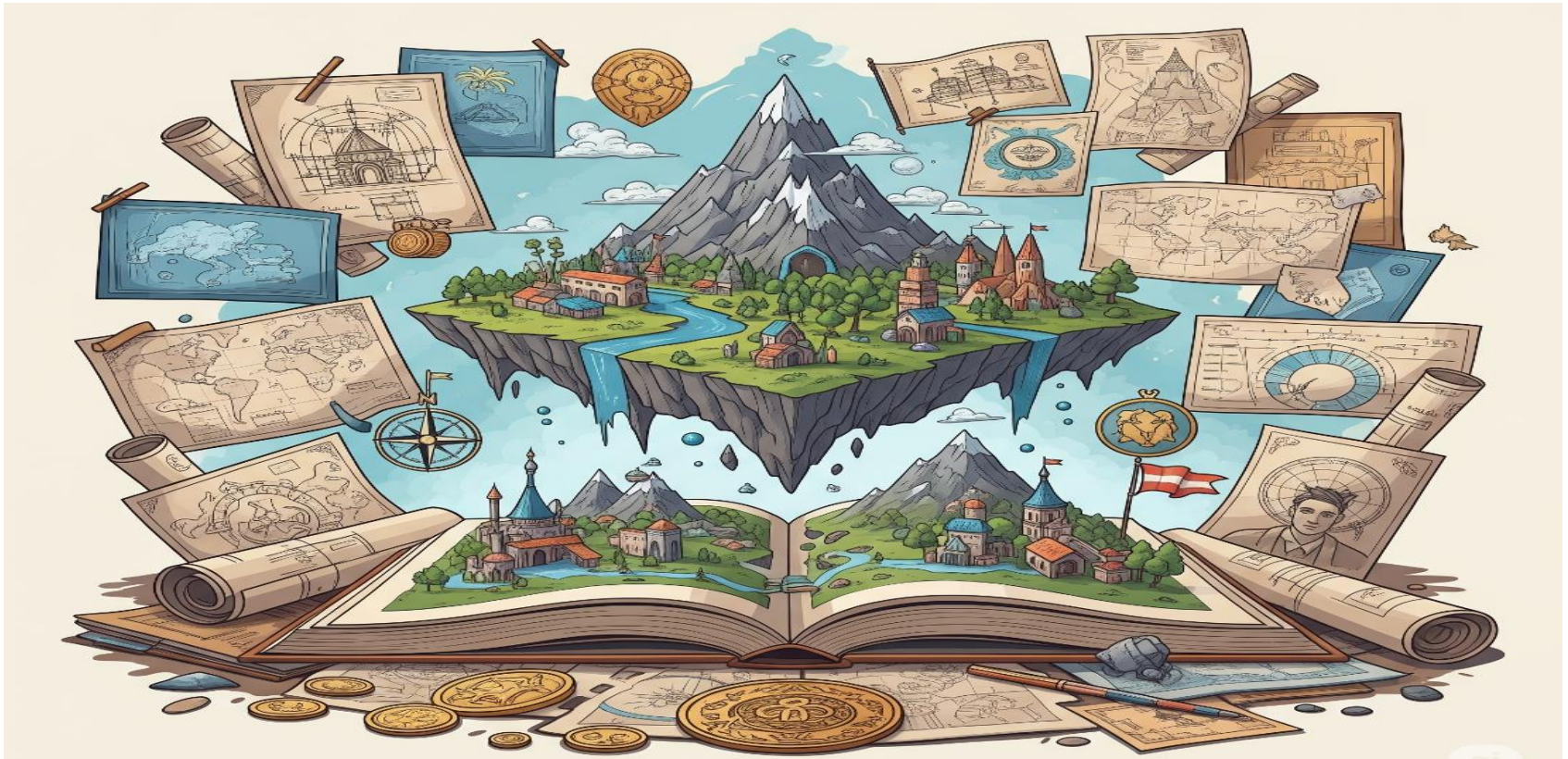


WORLD BUILDING FOR NOVELS

WITH EXAMPLES



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The Bible says God created the world in six days, but if you're writing a novel, it can take longer.

The trick is to get organized—*by writing your own Bible.*

Every novelist's Bible will be different. Maybe mine will spark some ideas.



SCRIBOPHILE SAYS THIS:

Worldbuilding is the step in the writing process when a writer **establishes the parameters** of their fictional world.

This includes the sort of **people** who live in the world, what their **day-to-day lives** look like, their **beliefs**, and the way they've been shaped by their **ecosystem, geography, and history**.

See Scribophile's worldbuilding workbook for a detailed laundry list:

<https://www.scribophile.com/academy/what-is-worldbuilding>

MY TAKE: START WITH BASICS



- Focus on what matters for your plot and characters.
- Establish the fundamentals - Consider the physical world first: geography, climate, and how these shape where people live and how they survive.
- Then think about the social structures—government systems, economic foundations, cultural values, and belief systems. These elements should influence each other naturally.

ADD THE LOGIC OF THE WORLD



- Create consistent rules, whether you're writing fantasy with magic systems or science fiction with advanced technology.
- Establish limitations and consequences. If magic exists, what can it do and what does it cost? If there's faster-than-light travel, how does it work and how does it affect society?

ADD POV CONSIDERATIONS



- Show your world through how your characters interact with it. A farmer will notice different details than a merchant or a soldier. Let their backgrounds and concerns reveal the world's aspects naturally.
- Layer in history. Past events shape current conditions. Wars, disasters, discoveries, and cultural shifts leave marks on language, architecture, social tensions, and traditions.
- You may need detailed timelines.

ADD ROOM FOR DISCOVERY



- Keep notes, but don't overplan.
- Document important details for consistency but leave room for discovery as you write.
- Sometimes the best worldbuilding emerges organically from the story itself.
- The key is making your world feel lived-in rather than constructed—a place where people have real problems, relationships, and daily concerns that go beyond your main plot.



MY SPIN ON NOVEL BIBLE - I

- Add meta-documents and ideas
 - Premise
 - Themes
 - Atmospheric
 - Back-cover blurb (options)
 - Genre
 - Synopsis, logline, tagline
- Achieve end-to-end consistency
 - Spellings of characters, place names, organizations, artifacts/technologies, etc.
 - Character appearance, manner of speaking, skills, way of thinking
 - Settings descriptions and details – Including drawings, pictures
 - Backstory, origins, histories



MY SPIN ON A NOVEL BIBLE - II

- Establish character profiles
 - Pictures (I use actors as stand-ins for characters)
 - Psychological profile
 - Backstory and timelines
- Plot Outline
- Character and event timelines
- Maps
- Tech / magic system, artifact purpose, operation
- Genealogy
- Comp Titles
- Cover Art
- Chapter Summary



CHARACTER PROFILES

Berky Benson

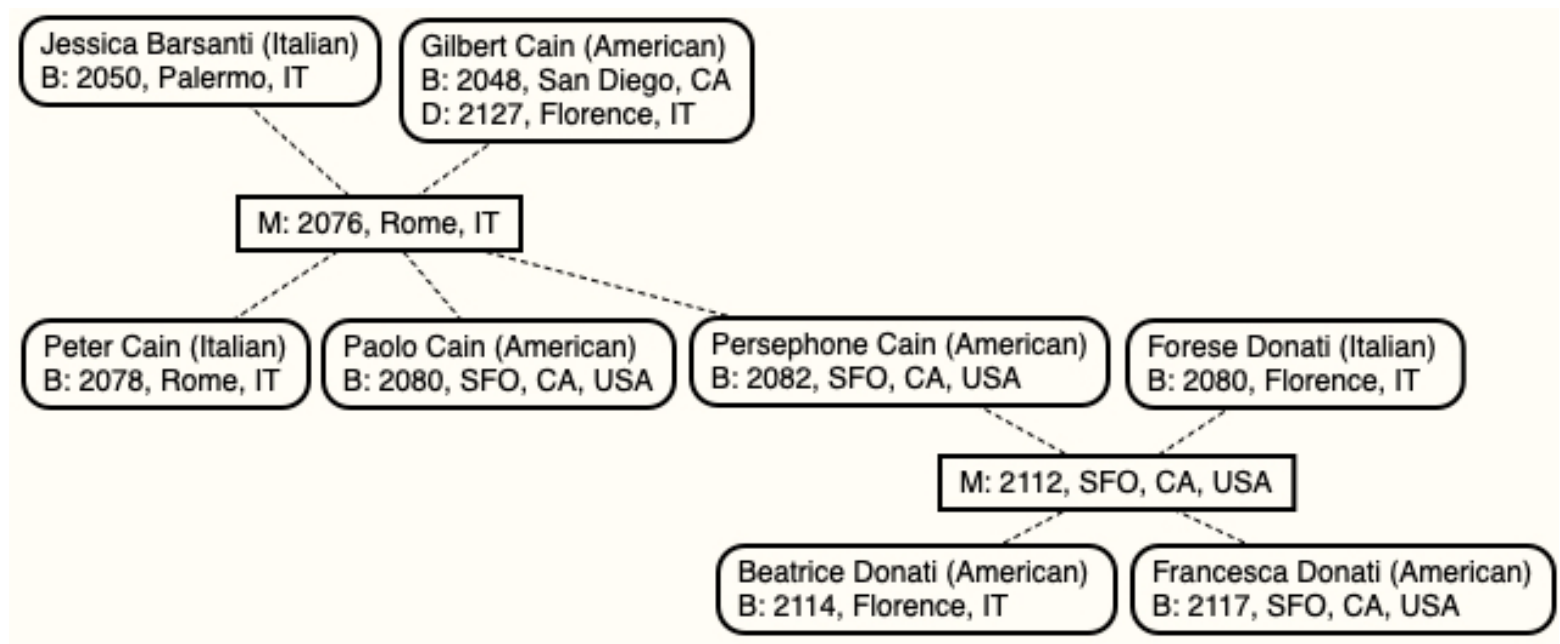
- *Bald, chunky*
- *Has the manners and motives of a moonshiner*
- *Whip-smart*
- Berky was the grown-up boy Nadia taught in high school, son of Lionel Benson, committed to an institution for the criminally insane at age 35 and stayed there until his death.
- Then there was Gloria Benson, Berky's mother, who nursed him through the bad times, made sure he went to school, and tried to interest him in her single, intellectual passion—the Dear Abby column. That was another narrative thread.
- Finally, whenever she greeted Berky, she saw his extraordinary brain—a brain that absorbed every bit of data she threw at him in science class and spun it in a peculiar way. Berky was brilliant, creative and, she had to admit, insane.
- As a fan of Dear Abby, he was obsessed with making a perfect world. Oddly, he was oblivious to human relationships. He would look for the structure of paradise in the electric motors he tinkered with, the animals he dissected, the homemade explosives he detonated, and the journals he kept.

Famous
Actor
Picture

Source: Novel Bible_The Perfection of Fish



EXAMPLE: CHARACTER GENEALOGY



Source: a work in progress



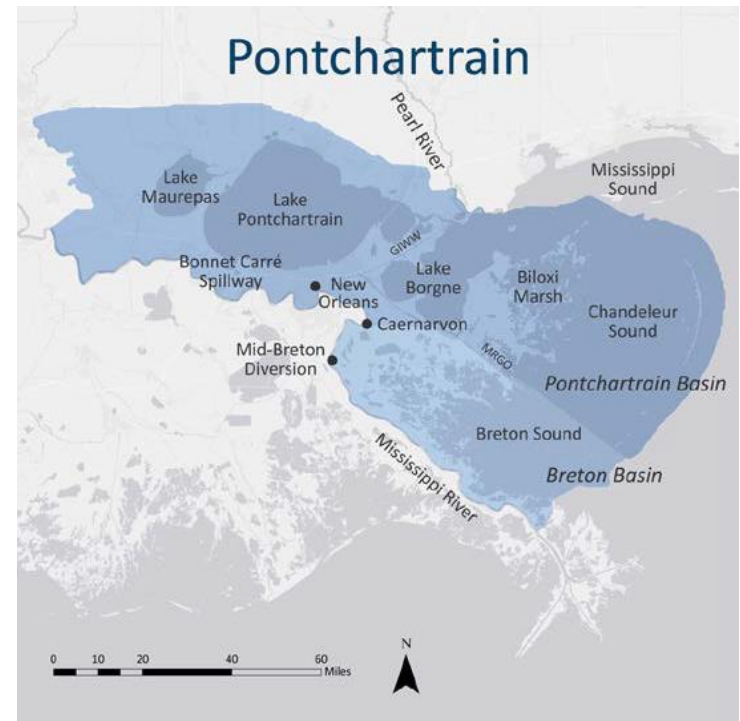
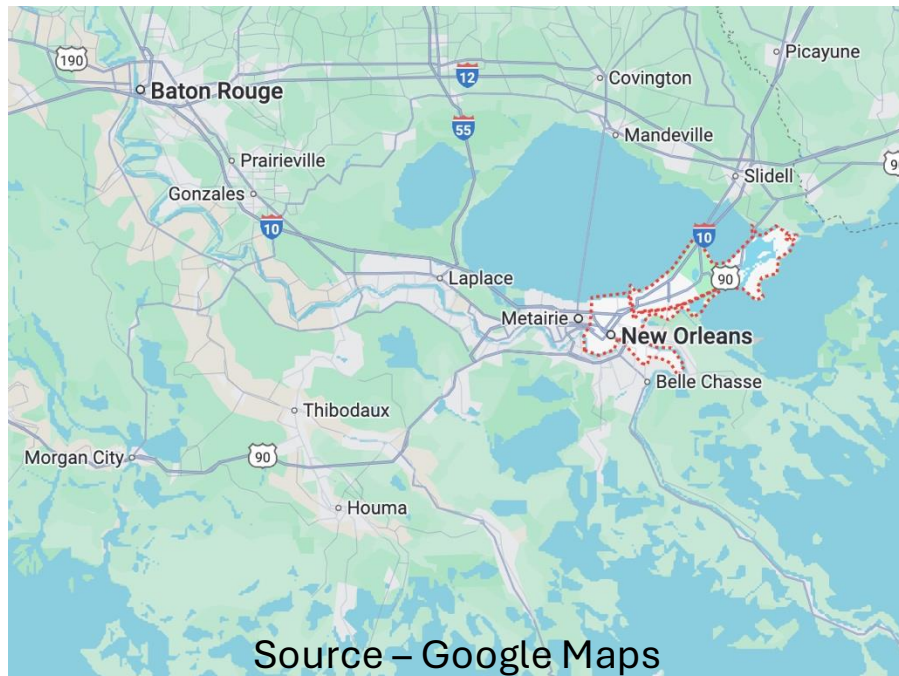
EXAMPLE: CHARACTER TIMELINE

YEAR	AGE	JEHU CAIN	AGE	BEATRICE DONATI	AGE	PHILIP CASE
2056	39	Holds office of President	3	Francesca, Beatrice's sister, is born in Florence.	11	
2057	40	Jehu secretly begins planning for the Guild	4	Beatrice starts school	12	Expelled from school
2058	41	Jehu begins construction of Castello Della Mente.	5	Beatrice transfers to an international school and begins learning English	13	
2059	42	Resigns from Presidency	6		14	
2060	43	Starts Penteres Ltd. And The Guild as its leader	7	Sister Francesca (4) starts school in Florence.	15	
2061	44		8	Father Forese (44) dies in a freak accident.	16	Juvenile detention
2062	48	Jehu helps support Persephone and Beatrice—strong blood ties. He arranges for a lattice implant for his favorite niece, Beatrice. Jehu offers implants to Persephone and Forese, but they decline.	9	Family pow wow. Jehu, Persephone (42), Beatrice (10), sister Francesca (7), and Grandmother Jessica (74) attend. Jehu (49) offers lattice implants. Only Beatrice takes him up on it.	17	

Source: John Morrison's work in progress



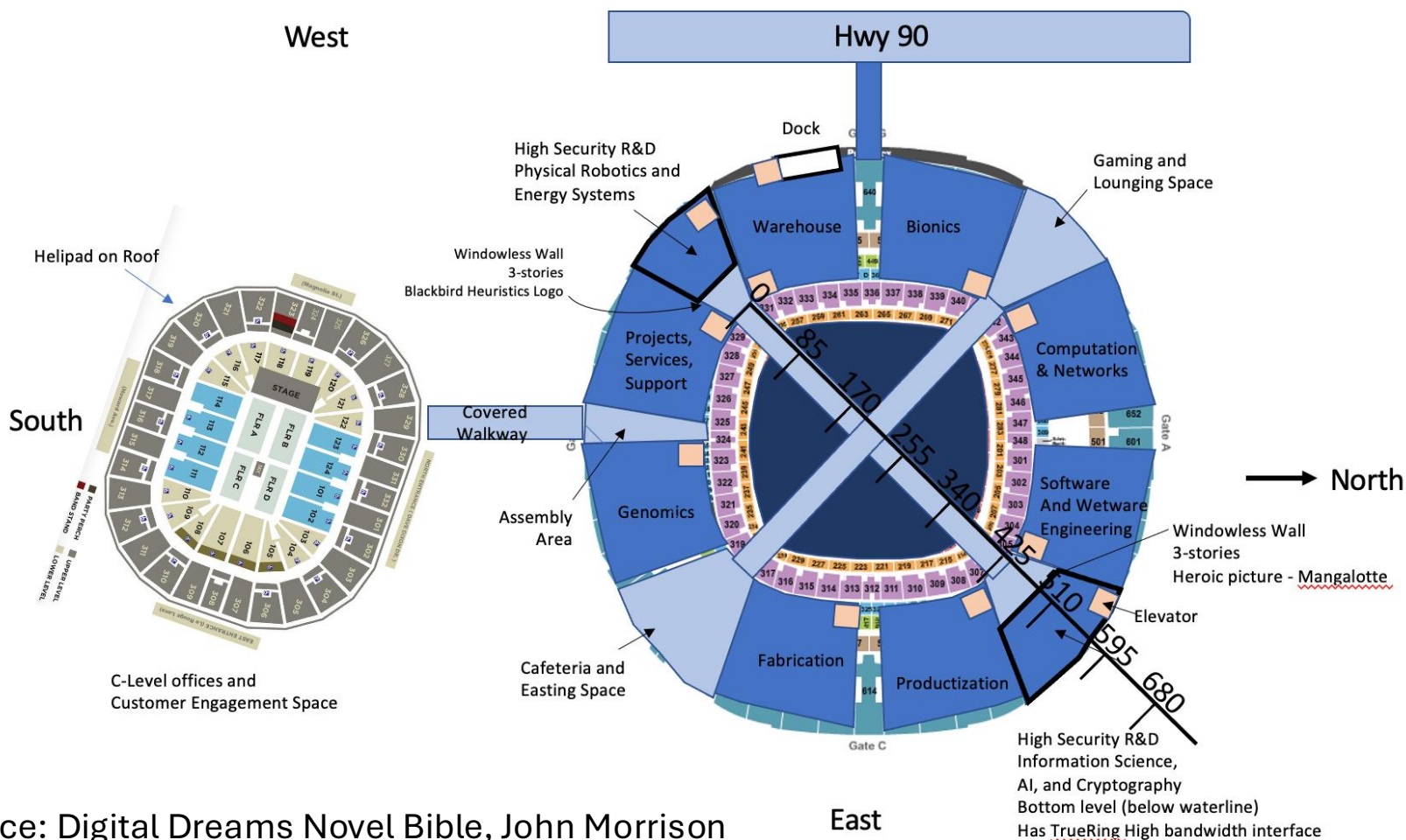
EXAMPLE: MAPS



Source – Right Image: *Envisioning the Future of the Louisiana Gulf Coast*,
by DONALD F. BOESCH
President-Emeritus, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
Fellow, Walton Family Foundation



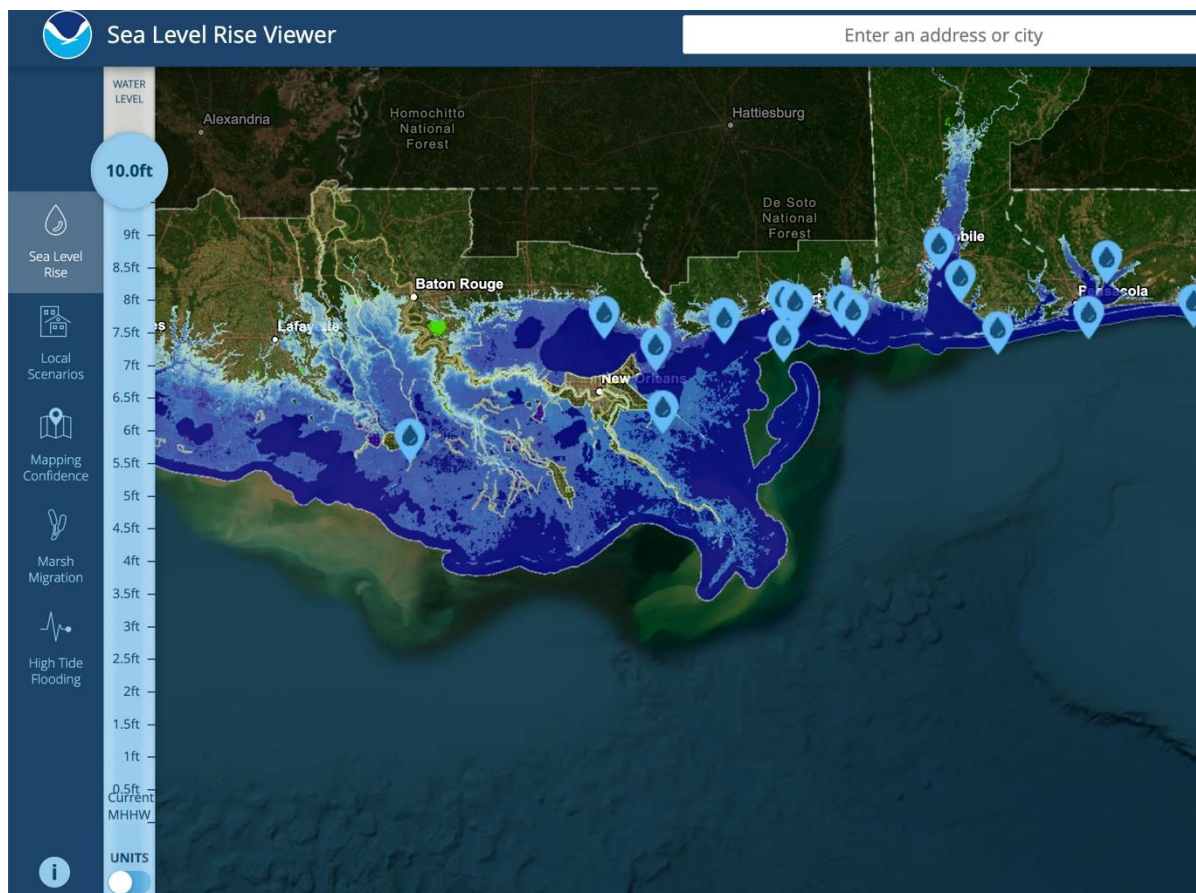
EXAMPLE: ARCHITECTURE



Source: Digital Dreams Novel Bible, John Morrison



DON'T FORGET RESEARCH!



Source: NOAA Sea Level Rise Viewer



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

TITLE		SUBTITLE			
The Water Knife					
AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	COPYRIGHT YR	PAGES	FORMAT	PRICE
Paolo Bacigalupi	Vintage	2015	378	H, P, E	\$31.99 (H) \$15.99 (P) \$9.99 (E)
BOOK CATEGORIES: Technothriller, Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction, Literary Fiction, Dystopian Fiction, American Literature					
COMPARISON WITH <i>THE PIECES OF MY SELF</i> :					
Similarities with <i>Pieces</i> :					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noir-ish tone.• The backdrop is a water crisis.• Adult technothriller.• Dystopian world.					
Differences with <i>Pieces</i> :					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focused on the scramble for water and water rights in the American southwest (vice the rising water levels of the U.S. Gulf Coast).• The protagonist is a cynical hitman with few human ties (vice a sarcastic woman mathematician obsessed with the safety of her two children).• It is about money (vice “blood”).					



YOU MAY NEED A TOC TO KEEP IT STRAIGHT

Table of Contents

<i>META TEXTS</i>	3
THEMES AND STORYLINES	3
TAGLINES	5
LOGLINES	5
EPIGRAMS.....	5
BLURBS	7
CONTENT WARNINGS.....	7
SYNOPSSES	7
<i>THE RESOLUTION</i>	8
CONSPIRACY THEORIES	9
<i>COVER CONSIDERATIONS</i>	10
<i>CHARACTERS</i>	11
PHILIP CASE	11
VIRGIL	12
BEATRICE DONATI	12
GUIDO.....	12

Source: John Morrison, work in progress



DON'T FORGET REVISION CONTROL

- Your story and world will evolve as you build it
- Never throw anything away (you may need it)
- I use a simple system that adds a revision date to the filename:

(e.g., Bible_Digital_Dreams_6 Aug 25)



PARAPHRASING SPIDERMAN

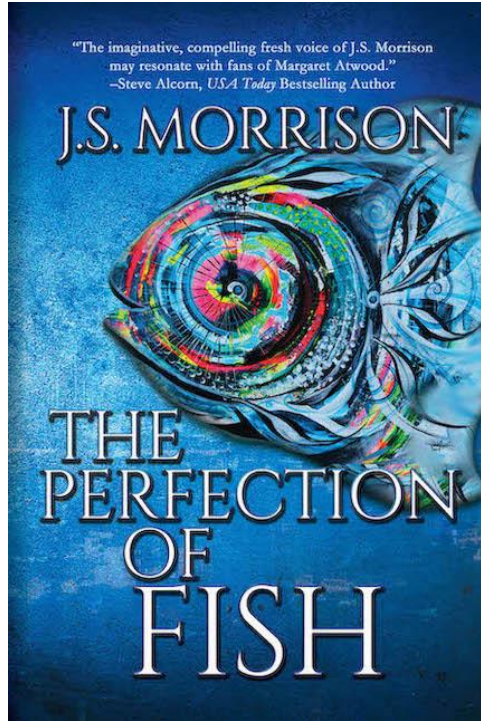
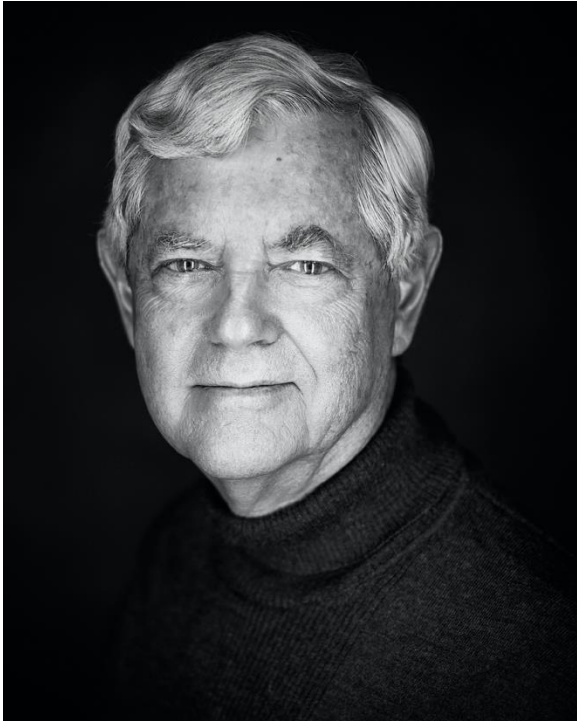
- You now have the power to create a world!



- With great power comes great responsibility—to make the novel text *consistent*, *believable*, and *enjoyable* to readers.

Image Source: Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel

JOHN MORRISON



John Morrison is a former intelligence officer and expert in cybersecurity who published his first novel, *The Perfection of Fish*, in 2020. His manuscript for *The Pieces of My Self* won the 2023 Claymore Award for Best Sci-fi/Fantasy. *The Digital Dreams of Henri Knightly* is a work in progress, long-listed for the Yeovil International Literary Prize. He belongs to an astrophysics society and lives near Annapolis, MD, USA.