How to Create
Your Own
World Wonders

How to Create Your Own World Wonders

GM Advice from Roleplaying Tips Readers

Presented By

Johnn Four

With Awesome Contributions From

Alexander Goodsell, Ben Scerri, Chad Robb, Craig Cartin, Erik Freeman, Jack Butler, Jehackmaster, Jeremy Brown, Jochen Stutz, Jon Sadler, Lee Barklam, Mark Moncrieff, Rick Darwin

Errors, Omissions, Feedback?

johnn@roleplayingtips.com

Table of Contents

Introduction

Boring doesn't cut it in your games. Mundane don't entertain. Only things that stand out will get—and keep—player attention. Plus, boring things are hard to craft stories around. You need special people, places and things as ingredients to build superior adventures.

Enter Reader Tip Request from RPT#557 that asked, "How do you create wonders for your world?" **What a great example of special content you can add to your setting to make it interesting and mysterious!**

Even if the wonders of your world stay as background pieces, they will add depth, and by definition, wonder to your setting with just a little bit of design effort.

Several readers wrote in with great advice about how to create world wonders. Let's dive in.

World Wonders: The Synopsis

From Jeremy Brown

1. Describe the wonder. Be sure to use literature, art, games and real world places as inspiration.
2. What makes it wonderful?
3. Who built it? How did it form?
4. Why was it built or formed?
5. What significance does it have in the present game world?
6. Why should PCs care?
7. Does more in-depth knowledge of the wonder give more power, information or coolness to the players?

I'll demonstrate using something from my own campaign world.

The Tower of the Demons

1. Describe the wonder

The Tower of the Demons is a platform of rock, triangular in shape, 150 feet on a side, that stands some 200 feet above a mountain plateau.

The entire structure is built of three granite pillars surmounted by the granite platform itself. It commands an enormous prospect, and from it you can easily see people moving in or through the Pass of the Demons that connects Kinan with Saram.

2. What makes it wonderful?

There is no granite in the immediate area, and all approaches to the area preclude the transportation of such huge pillars.

There is no logical way (from current campaign standards) for the structure to exist where it does.

Several theories exist:

- The structure is actually composed of smaller pieces that were somehow probably magically fused together.
- The structure was brought whole from another quarry or plane by immense flying creatures such as dragons.
- Earth elemental magic was used, or possibly, transmutation magic, to create the structure.

3. Who built it? How did it form?

The "demons" of Kinan are actually the elves who were driven out over 4000 years ago.

In the present campaign world, the nearest elven kingdom lies hundreds of leagues from the Tower, but it was built by elves to aid elves escaping the War of Exile that drove them from their original homeland.

4. Why was it built or formed?

The elves built the tower as an observation post to guard the pass and allow more of their people to escape once the Great Migration had begun.

5. What significance does it have in the present game world?

To the Kinani, the tower is a symbol of their triumph, and in a way, their continuing feeling of social inferiority.

The Kinani, a human people, were harbored by the elves when they were in extremis. The Kinani repaid them by driving them from their land.

The Tower was the last place from which the elves were dislodged, and therefore is the symbol of that triumph. But it also carries a feeling of shame, and the tower is considered unlucky, ill-omened or haunted.

6. Why should PCs care?

In the current campaign, the PCs shouldn't care except to marvel at how it was done and why it is there.

There is no longer a purpose or use for the structure, at least on the surface.

However, the tower is a powerful magical artifact that greatly magnifies the user's vision and gives him other powers of perception related to the surrounding area.

7. Does more in-depth knowledge of the wonder give more power, information or coolness to the players?

Yes. For players who have played in other portions of the campaign world and know the story of the Great Elven Migration, the tower is a tangible symbol of that part of the world's history.

Further, as mentioned above, in-depth knowledge of the tower's powers might give a PC an advantage in guarding the pass from invaders or other threats.

The Bay of Belcharath

Here's another example, for a "natural" wonder:

1. Describe the wonder.

The Bay of Belcharath, sometimes called the Bay of the Lost Land, is an enormous gulf in the northern coasts of Tyrdha.

It covers an immense area, and rumors say the land of Vanduria once lay where the bay now lies.

2. What makes it wonderful?

Nothing especially other than its immensity. It is one of the largest bays or gulfs on this continent. Only one, the Gulf of Sardon, surpasses it.

3. Who built it? How did it form?

The Bay of Belcharath was caused by the Black Mage, an elven patriot, joining the symbols of the Elder Gods together in an attempt to split the continent so elves would have a homeland safe from humankind.

The cataclysm caused the northernmost peak of the Eastern Mountains to split open, and it has since been called Clovenpeak.

The greater portion of the land of Vanduria sank to below sea level, allowing a huge tidal surge to engulf the land. Lava burst from the ground, the people of the kingdom were scattered and her far-flung colonies were cut off.

If the artifacts had not refused to work at the end, it is possible that world-wide disaster would have ensued.

4. Why was it built or formed?

This was touched on earlier but needs to be amplified. The Black Mage is the oldest living elf and her memory stretches back over 7000 years. She was one of the fierce fighters that helped fight the War of Exile that drove the elves from Kinan.

She helped raise the Tower of the Demons, and she has been a major actor in elven history from time to time. Her name was struck from records and she is only referred to as the Black Mage for her endeavors to turn the remnants of the ancient elven empire of Syridel into a magocracy with herself as its empress.

She is the most powerful two-legged wizard in the world. And this act, though unspeakably evil, was made to try and "save" elves.

She fiercely feels humans continually encroach upon, outbreed and supplant elves at every turn, and only separate continents can save the older race.

5. What significance does it have in the present game world?

The bay is a huge body of water. As such, it warms a vast area of upper northern temperate zone. Without it, winters in this area would be much tougher.

However, besides this, it has significance to worshippers of the Elder Gods, as it is a sign, if they are aware of it, of exactly what the symbols of the gods united can accomplish.

Such power in the right hands could accomplish similar wonders. For those of good intent who also know the truth of how the Bay of the Lost Land formed, this threat has led to the secreting of the symbols in widely dispersed places, and steps have been taken to safeguard them.

I ran an entire campaign based on the PCs' race to acquire the artifacts before an evil organization could do so.

6. Why should PCs care?

The idea that any group or person could have enough power to crack the world and destroy a section of continent should concern denizens of a magical culture in much the same way that nuclear disarmament concerns us.

7. Does more in depth knowledge of the wonder give more power, information or coolness to the players?

I believe so. My PCs had been chasing the symbols for close to eight months when they finally discovered that the artifacts, when joined, could destroy whole sections of the world.

It brought a new urgency and a new sense that these were not just super powerful magic items that were dangerous but cool. It brought home that these were powers not meant to be tampered with.

Beyond that, in another campaign, I used an expedition into the sunken half of the capital of Vanduria as a stepping stone to a greater end. The experience of finding the partial ruins on the shore, then descending to find whole buildings still intact (more or less) beneath the surface was exciting and awe-inspiring.

The 5 Rules of World Wonders

From Johnn Four

1. Make Ones Far Away

A wonder should be legendary, which means word will spread about it through time and space. Go ahead and create wonders the PCs will never see. That's part of the point: your world has amazing things in it and amazing depth.

Besides, if all your world wonders are in one region the PCs can reach, then you've got a problem. Either you break sense of disbelief from having all your wondrous things in one place, or your wonders are not wondrous enough.

The two-headed pig of farmer Brown is interesting, but too local to be a *world* wonder. Not having far away wonders is a clue you need to think bigger.

The Gossamer Empire lies months beyond the Ruby Sea. Its strange peoples have unusual customs, and few understand its politics. Yet this rich and exotic land draw explorers and travellers like moths to a hydra's breath.

And those who manage to return tell tales of a massive keep in the empire's heart so large it could house ten of our cities. Its walls are taller than a dozen stone giants standing on each others' shoulders. The noise from its teeming streets would drive normal men mad within a day. And the smells....

2. Make Natural Wonders

Let nature do some work for you. Create wonders formed by your world's physics and evolution.

Give each natural wonder an *edge*. By that, I mean some kind of outlier aspect. Something that makes it stand out as the biggest, best, worst, tallest, most dangerous, most beneficial. Pick some attribute of your wonder that's the most extreme example of that attribute in your world. Instant wonder.

Scar Lake is named because of its shape and depth. It runs like a jagged wound through the Bleak Foothills, and it's so deep no one has ever seen its bottom. Its depths have even defied magical divination through the ages.

3. Make Constructed Wonders

Be sure to add artificial wonders to nature's collection. Cultures build massive projects to show off. Rare is a constructed wonder of pure utilitarian purpose.

First, decide who built the wonder:
- Nation or city
- Religion
- Arcane order
- Race
- Villain or hero

Next, pick its purpose. Give it some utility, as most builders would want the double win – form *and* function.

- **Attract wealth:** we're the best, smartest or wealthiest
- **Defense:** if we can do this, you don't want to mess with us
- **Appease the gods:** see what we did for you?
- **Legacy and ego:** this will put my name in the history books
- **Function:** choose a spell effect, make it a great observation place, give it a specific task

Finally, give it an aesthetic theme based on the builders' beliefs, values, customs or preferences.

If gnomes are mechanical in your world, make their wonder clockwork. If the villain hated humans, give his construct the form of a tortured human king. If the nation was notable as seafaring, give their wonder features related to boats or the sea.

The Sails of Krator can be seen by anyone sailing within 250 miles of them on a clear day. Carved from tall cliffs just a mile from Candleport, each of the five sails is painted a different colour and bears different runes on it.

One sail warns of the city's mighty naval fleet. Another welcomes traders. The third praises the sea god. The fourth curses all pirates who look upon it. The runes on the fifth have been lost to time, though some speculate it offered a map of the coastline with trouble spots highlighted.

4. Give It Famous Events

Wonders should not be famous just for their intrinsic greatness. Give them at least one place in history.

World wonders will draw communities, conflicts, celebrations, fearful tributes and pilgrimages.

Create an event that took place near the wonder. Create another that took place because of the wonder. This will help integrate the wonder into the fabric of your world.

Historians debate whether the Battle Of Grey Chargers is famous because Gilroy's victory was the tipping point for turning him from king into emperor, or because the bloody conflict was waged at the iron feet of the Grim Colossus. Regardless, no general now goes into an important battle without first kissing the mega statue's toes.

5. Hook It into Your Rules

Let's take a step back for a minute and say that all good design is about creative restrictions.

Gameplay must have parameters, else it would be boring. PCs can't start out at maximum power or level, with all the best treasure, able to defeat any foe. The game would be a yawn fest.

All good stories revolve around character growth. Ergo, characters at the start don't have everything they want. Alternatively, something happens to happy characters that upset the status quo, and by story end the characters realize something was missing from life and they just did not realize it.

It's what we can't do, or what a design chooses as its constraints, that makes for great design and fun gameplay.

I encourage you to consider making some character options restricted and unlockable only through gameplay. Make a list of a few cool feats, spells, equipment, classes, abilities and other options players can't give their PCs during character creation or during character advancement. Instead, these things must be *earned* during the game.

And guess how your world wonders can fit into this scheme? That's right. Give some of your world wonders the power to unlock these character options.

This makes your wonders valuable to the players, which is a whole new level of interest than mere wonderment, detail and immersion.

The Godstone rests in a dark cavern deep beneath Razor Peak. Only the foolhardy and desperate ever seek it out, and maybe one soul in a hundred years finds it and returns alive. But when they do return, they are changed. *These individuals through the ages have often gone on to become kings, generals, mighty heroes and history's worst villains. Seek not the Godstone and stay home where it's safe.*

8 Wonder-full Things to Consider

From Jack Butler

When creating really cool world wonders for your game setting, the operative phrase is "Go Big or Go Home." And by big, size is not the only factor.

If you're compiling a list of man-made (or dwarf-made, or what-have-you) wonders, then keep these ideas in mind:

1. Wonders Should Be Huge

The bigger the better. No one is going to "wonder" over a man-sized statue of a bearded guy holding a sword. Make this statue 300 feet tall and straddling a fairly large river, and they'll wonder aplenty.

2. Wonders Should Be Impressive In Other Ways Than Size

These are things that, when viewed, should make the person seeing them go "Wow!" There is something to be said for grandeur and beauty in addition to mere size.

3. Wonders Should Be Ancient

The mystery of their creation is part of the allure. There should definitely be a sense of "how'd they do that?" in a world wonder.

4. They Should Be Somehow Impractical

You want this factor because your "wonders" should be things no modern society would want to put together. That way, the wonder is unique because no one's going to build another one.

5. They Should Be Cool!

There should be something about them that makes them interesting.

Think about the Taj Mahal for a moment. When you boil it down to its base, all the Taj Mahal is, is a mausoleum. It's a tomb. There's a woman buried there. It's her grave. But what makes the Taj Mahal a wonder is the story behind it.

The Taj Mahal was created by a king as the resting place for the woman he loved beyond all other things. Her death was a great spiritual blow to him, and he wanted her to rest forever in a place of beauty.

When he found there were no locations already existing that matched what he thought she deserved as a final resting place, he had one built. All that, and because he loved her so much, he created one of the most beautiful spots on the planet. Now that is cool!

6. They Should Be Unique

Consider two real world "World Wonders," the Great Pyramid of Giza and the Empire State Building (the first a wonder of the ancient world, the second a wonder of the modern world).

There are a lot of pyramids and skyscrapers out there. What makes the Great Pyramid so special is it's immenseness, and it's made of blocks so large one has to wonder how exactly did a Bronze Age culture do it?

The Empire State Building, on the other hand, not only was the tallest building on the planet for nearly forty years, it was also the first building on Earth to pass 100 stories high. It doesn't matter that other buildings have since surpassed the Empire State Building's height. The fact it was the first building that tall gives it a cool-factor important when it comes to being a world wonder.

7. None of Your Wonders Has To Fulfill *All* of These Items

The Empire State Building is huge, grand, cool and unique in its own way, but it's hardly ancient and isn't all that practical. But it's a world wonder nonetheless.

8. None of Your Wonders Has To Fulfill *Any* of These Items

Consider this: in November of 2006, USA Today and Good Morning America released a list of "The New Seven Wonders." This list included the Great Migration of the Serengeti and Masai Mara.

In case you don't recognize it, they're talking about an annual mass migration of wildebeest in which millions these antelope mass together to move from one part of Africa to another to coincide with the seasons.

It's an impressive sight, and several nature documentaries have recorded it. It's also not what one might consider a world wonder. But think about it. It's an awesome and unique event wondrous in its own right.

But it's not a tangible *thing* in the sense of the other, usual items and locations people think of when they think world wonders.

Ruins, Natural Features, Language and Culture

From Mark Moncrieff

How do you create world wonders? Here are 4 tips.

1. Ruins

If a civilization has existed in the past and is built from stone, the ruins of that civilization will continue to exist. Create objects that seem out of place. For example:

- A palace wall that still stands and is much taller than anything around it, the rest of the building gone.
- A memorial to a long ago war, ruler or god. It could be an arch, spire, obelisk or stone circle. It could be with or without an inscription, which would be in an old or dead language.
- Graveyards, or villages or cities of the dead would still exist, enough for the locals to know what it was.

Remember that while you will know what it had been, describe it to your players as they see it now, not as it once was.

2. Natural Features

Don't forget the landscape. There is a reason towns keep being built in the same area.

Good water, fertile land, with mountains, hills, swamps, forests, desert or even farmland to surround the towns and give them character and a reason to exist where they do.

3. How People Talk and Think

If you want to give the impression of an old culture, have them talk in a slightly stilted or formal fashion.

For example, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles when two armies fight they don't fight on a battlefield. They fight "at the place of slaughter." In my campaign people don't die, "they go to the other life." Someone who is dying would hear "the call of the other life."

Keep it appropriate, though. A street urchin or a miner are unlikely to use terms like this. But when your players hear it said by a priest or an authority figure, including the GM, it carries a special weight.

4. Cultures

Make human cultures different. For example, to many people in India cows are sacred. In the West we eat cows. To many African cultures, cows are symbols of wealth. Same animal, three very different ways of treating and thinking about them.

Use this principle for nearly any object or idea.

One final thought. As if you need an excuse to watch them, but the Lord of the Rings movies include many ruins, ruins which obviously don't belong to the current cultures. Some great inspiration there.

Video Games, Spells, Races and Earth

From Lee Barklam

I *love* world wonders and use them often in my games. They are constant reminders even powerful characters have a long way to go until they fully match the power, influence and ingenuity of heroes who have trodden the lands before them.

The easiest place to start is with an ancient civilisation that has disappeared, been destroyed or has otherwise deteriorated beyond recognition.

1. Mine Video Games

Consider the Elder Scrolls series of computer games. The dwarves were an advanced people that built complex steam-powered machines in giant underground cities near exposed pools of lava used to generate steam.

It's a great concept in an advanced magical (but pretty low-tech) world, because no matter how advanced the characters become, and however much they learn about the dwarves, the PCs can never hope to divine the secrets of some of these great machines.

In my world, there is an ancient civilisation that worshipped the dragons (and, in my campaign, dragons can grant spells to their priests, just as the gods can). Due to an epic cataclysm, all settlements of significant size were dragged through rifts in the earth deep underground.

Whilst the majority of the people were killed, the nature of the curse preserved many of the buildings. And those people who did survive were transformed into a hideous hybrid of dragon and man (dracomen, for those familiar with the Dragon Warriors system) and in the ensuing generations, their civilisation deteriorated into brutish tribal barbarism.

Now consider the land left behind:

- Giant rifts in the earth with entire towns sprawled out in its depths
- Towns clinging to the sides of the chasm
- Towns lining the chasm floor hundreds of feet below
- Some settlements ruined and some in impeccable condition as if servants of the dragon lords still dwell deep within

The buildings left intact have strange and graceful architecture inspired by the colours and grace of dragons, mysterious survivors of a cataclysm that claimed almost every other stone structure in the kingdom.

Then consider what type of buildings you could create if you had dragon labourers at your disposal that could haul giant stones to the tops of even tall structures with ease.

And what if you could command mighty dragon magic? What artefacts could you create and what magical legacy would you leave behind?

2. Mine Your Spells

Ancient civilisations aside, you can draw inspiration from your own spellbooks. In the Dragon Warriors game, player character magickers can pretty much do everything they are going to do by 12th rank. What could a 20th rank magicker do with a 15th rank spell?

15th rank Earth Elementalists in my game can draw entire structures made from bedrock right out of the earth. This inspired one of my world wonders: a sealed tower constructed from a single piece of impregnable smoky crystal that juts high above the surface of a frozen lake. When the light is right, large shadows can be seen moving around inside, although details are impossible to make out through the crystal walls and there are no obvious entrances.

3. Mine Your Races

Races are great for developing unique structures. Consider a crashed alien spaceship in a culture that has no concept of spaceships or aliens. Maybe it is referred to as the metal palace, and the automated defences are just thought to be sophisticated traps that guard the areas of the palace no one dares explore.

Consider the skeletons or carapaces of enormous and perhaps extinct animals turned into unique structures of some sort.

Elves have their strange ways of building, too. Maybe one of their forests receded generations ago, but a tower woven from living vines that continues to protect the interior from looters and intruders has refused to die and now stands alone in a grassy wilderness.

4. Mine Our Wonders

Plagiarise the wonders of Earth. A lot of our wonders are inspired by religion or wealth and are displays of ostentation (either to the gods or to economic competitors).

Consider an ancient trading city whose glorious reputation as the trading heart of a massive economic empire is at risk. Now or at some point in history, such an economic centre would have been fabulously wealthy and might have invested that wealth in obscene structures in an ostentations display of vanity and economic superiority.

Cathedrals and tombs tend to attract the same kind of ostentation with the intention of inspiring awe amongst the flock of worshippers. St. Paul's Cathedral is, in my opinion, unmatched in the UK, and you only have to look at some of the structures in Vatican City for more inspiration.

If tombs are more your thing, look at Egypt for examples of what religions (with their deep pockets and endless supply of devout, loyal and possibly enslaved workers) can accomplish.

If you're looking for mysteries, just throw something akin to Stonehenge in your campaign world—a seemingly impossible feat of engineering for its time.

Treat Your Ancient Wonders like Natural Disasters

From Alexander Goodsell

1. Emphasize Time and Age

Make sure your descriptions include things that emphasize age, even if they might be anachronistic, like dust, petrification (of wood) and rust, especially on non-rusting things (like mithril or adamantine). Especially dust.

For example:

"As you enter the ancient tomb, the pitted and cracked stone yellowed with age, the dust at your feet puffs and swirls as if given life again after a long sleep. Each footstep a small explosion, each breath a phantom.

"Once bold carvings seem to have worn away. You brush one and it is in better shape than you first thought. As a small avalanche of fine particles descends like snow, and the dry stale air befouls every breath, you see [plot or history relevant item]."

And:

"The wood of the lance is clearly ancient and weathered. The rulers of this place were long departed even by the time of the ancient empire when elves ruled the world, millennium ago. However, rather than rot away, the lance instead seems to have become hard as stone."

And:

"The shirt made of shimmering links, seems to be mithril. But that's surely not tarnish on the left side? Even the bones of its wearer have become mostly dust, but the armor remains. Stained perhaps."

2. Emphasize Scale

While not all ancient buildings may be huge and awe inspiring, adventurers and archaeologists, have at least one thing in common. They fight over looting the big ones.

For example:

"The mountain before you looks odd. Nevertheless, this is the place the map points to. There is no building in sight unless...it couldn't be...trees grow on this hill, but it is so oddly shaped.

"Digging in through the dirt a bit you encounter stone, which though heavily scarred by the wind and rain of ages past, seems almost carved. As you use magic to blast away larger portions of dirt, it is clear you have reached a structure that was a perfect curve some time long ago.

"After you have cleared a few tons around the base, your work way around and break into a slight depression filled by a broken and rusty door. Or maybe just a metal plate. It stretches beyond view.

"After destroying some portion of that block of rust more than 10 feet tall and almost as deep, you see a dark space on the other side. This place was long thought to be a volcano, caldera and all, but now it is clear it was not made by the mighty wrath of nature but by some ancient civilization.

"You have broken seals forgotten by elves, dwarves, dragons, and perhaps even gods. You hope there was not a good reason they were in place."

Like the mountain, make civilization's impacts present, big and felt. Its relics may have become some of the local architecture, or have been presumed to have always been.

3. Immediacy: Both Then and Now

Make clear the reason this place was important then, and is important now. Perhaps you have found a structure housing an ancient super-weapon.

- What did it do?
- What has it done in recent times?
- What can it do?
- Does it work?
- Did the civilization that created it use it, and why or why not?

For example:

"You travel deeper into the tomb. After all the traps and guardians—ageless, malfunctioning and mad—you encounter a chamber. The door is still pristine. And unlike the rest of this place, the magic here is powerful and undiminished.

"Time has left this place alone. In this chamber a crystal of epic proportions rises taller than a house and floats just as high. Surrounding it are runes carved in stone that orbit at a majestic pace in an incomprehensible pattern.

"Chains of light, spheres of fire and an ominous hum fill the chamber. It is then you realize you never did open the door. A voice sounds in your minds like the chiming of a bell. 'Welcome children of the [culture name], I am Fatum.'"

(Fatum is Latin for doom. This artefact was designed to annihilating things. It can even wound gods.)

"'What is the target?'"

After the PCs use it:

"You scry after Fatum's pronouncement of 'It is done' when you mentioned the Keep of Gerard's Pass. Where the keep walls once stood now the mountains run molten, the land for miles around is charred, and the air glows as if about to ignite.

"Most horrifying is not the mountains pouring onto the plains or that ash lies where mountains and farms once stood. For you see a hole deeper than you could imagine, filling with lava. The hole where the keep once stood."

Did the ancients use this weapon? Probably not. What is its purpose? To erase things. How does it do this? By tearing stars (or pieces thereof) from the sky as ammunition. Worst case scenario? Doomsday device: likely its purpose, in fact.

A High Tech Ancient Civilization Leaves Dangerous Traces

From Rick Darwin

The tried and true explanation involves an ancient high but now decadent or deceased culture, responsible for assorted sites and artefacts. The forerunners, if still present, might pose a danger to your soul (as in Andre Norton's Witch World series).

Or perhaps they are all gone and just their mysterious relics—probably of a much higher tech level than currently possible—remain to excite wonder and the dangerous desire to possess them.

Consider the original purpose of the site. A railway station? Bank vault? Amusement park? Then decide what parts still work. Maybe the public announcement system in the train station gives periodic cryptic messages about schedules or keeping back from the yellow lines. Remember, the languages will have changed, since the olde tymes (with lots of potential for misunderstanding).

Maybe the site is advanced from our real-world perspective too: a regional weather control station, a rocket launch complex, a robot assembly plant. Maybe that weather control system now can only cause floods in one region. Or maybe the site is just there, imposing and indifferent, like the Pyramids or Ankhor Wat.

When it comes to minor artefacts, there are lots of possibilities, like a PDA or tablet stuck in a translation program (for archaic dialects or dead languages), when its memory holds the equivalent of Sun's "The Art of War" or an engineering module that would revolutionize shipbuilding, road construction and all facets of life.

Build With a Purpose in Mind

From Erik Freeman

Start here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Wonders_of_the_Ancient_World

The great wonders were built for a reason. The Gardens of Babylon were built to impress a ruler's wife. The pyramids and Taj Mahal were tombs. The Statue of Zeus was to appease a god.

Why would a ruler spend an enormous amount of time, manpower and coin? To impress a god, their wife, intimidate foreign rulers or celebrate their lives with a sort of immortality!

A god will dictate the type of temple.

A wife would remind them of home.

Intimidation would invoke power, size and threats of war. Ancient powers were very keen to carve their victories into stone.

Tombs are tombs that would reflect the culture.

Draw From What Inspires You

From Jeremy Brown

I use the real world as a model. There are a lot of strange and interesting natural wonders.

The Ecology and Cultures, Silk Road, and Monster Geographica books by Expeditious Retreat Press all include instances of odd plant life, animal life, mineral formations, natural formations and ideas for scenery and odd encounters. These make a wonderful starting place for natural wonders. Another is just searching the web for natural wonder.

The original "Seven Wonders of the World" were manmade wonders, so these might give an idea as well. They included the Great Pyramids, the Lighthouse of Pharos, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Finally, there's the magical wonders of a world. Many stronghold building guidebooks such as WOTC's third edition Stronghold Builder's Guidebook include sections on magical architecture. Flying towers, castles that crawl through an area, floating islands and the like.

Magical locations such as the ones discussed in the DMG2 by WOTC make for interesting wonders as well.

Just think about what wows you. If it's architecture, imagine impressive buildings. If it's nature, think about what thrills you in nature. If it's the wonders of magic, think about something you'd find awe inspiring.

You won't hook all your players with your creation, but if you have enough variety, someone will get fascinated. Assuming you have players who haven't lost all wonder out of their imagination. :)

Think Over the Top

From Ben Scerri

In the real world, most of our natural wonders came from a religious or military background. Consider the Great Wall of China (built to keep invaders out), or the Great Pyramid (built to resemble to first land form and honour the deceased for a better afterlife).

These things are never built for the simple joy of building the best thing. Often, they are built big out of arrogance. The requisitioner needs something grand to fill their niche.

Surely the Great Wall could have been replaced by an army, and the Great Pyramid replaced by a smaller tomb? But that's not the point. The civilisation **can** go over the top, so it does.

Also remember that some of the original wonders were not actually real, such as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. No such gardens have been found, but they expound in rumour and myth.

So think about who is building the wonder, and what their religious and military history is like. Could they do with a ridiculously over-the-top solution in the form of a wonder?

Borrow Ideas from Reality and Fiction

From Jon Sadler

I plagiarize and make it my own. I grab ideas from real world events and cultures, and movies and novels I've read.

However, you might want to decide what you mean by "world wonder."

Natural or from old civilizations? Natural is easy, just open any geological text book or read about the Grand Canyon. It could be made from rock, dust, water, crystal, etc. For example, several years ago the largest crystal formation in the world was discovered: [The Cave of the Giants](#).

This is underground and massive…massive doesn't even describe it. This is a perfect example of a natural wonder you could use. Now, take it a step further. What if the surrounding rock and dirt had broke down throughout the millennia exposing the crystal structure (and it survived)?

For a wonder of a civilized culture, I'll use something somewhat obscure. [Puma Punku](#). I like this one because of the controversy surrounding its construction.

The one feature that stands out in the controversy is the precise stone cuts some say cannot be reproduced today without the aid of lasers for both cutting and guiding. Add to that (I believe that it was said) there was no written language found on any of the megalithic stones. For an RPG, this can be left as is if all you want to do is to create a mystery. You could have a mountainside sized structure built with these specially cut blocks linked together with strange metal *dowels*, or some such.

A more modern take on a wonder could be something like the St. Louis Arch, [Coral Castle](#), or the [Georgia Guidestones](#).

Lastly, you could use something like the [Burj Khalifa](#), the tallest manmade structure in the world. Just take a look at that picture. See the design compared to the surrounding buildings.

Now, imagine that made of stone or crystal. Remove those buildings and have this structure surrounded by water. Or place it in the middle of a desert. Or, better yet, place it in the middle of a desert on a Sea of Glass (I5, "[Lost Tomb of Martek](#)" from the Desert of Desolation series I3-I5).

It doesn't even need to be located on the world you are creating (i.e., part of the sky *always* shows a spiral galaxy or some other structure). [Check these pictures](#) for an idea of what our sky might look like in millions of years as the Milky Way and Andromeda continue on their crash course.

Mix it up! There doesn't need to be a rhyme or reason behind what you create unless you want there to be. It doesn't have to match the technology or magical level of your campaign. That's why it's a "wonder."

Borrow From History, Game Books and Pictures

From Jochen Stutz

Seek Inspiration in History

Sure, an obvious idea. There are many more memorable sites that might be called world wonders than just the seven classical ones.

Seek Inspiration in Other Games

I recommend "GURPS: Places Of Mystery" as inspiring reading.

If you understand German, I recommend the worldbook to the sword & sorcery RPG, "Malmsturm." They made the setting feel ancient with lots of interesting sites.

Earthdawn, Talislanta and the Dying World RPG are inspiring in this regard, too.

Seek Inspiration in Pictures

I love pictures of ancient sites (Angkor Wat, Petra in Jordan, Pompeii, The Valley Of The Kings). And there are countless fantasy artworks showing temples, impossible statues and similar stuff.

A lot of album-covers, especially from metal and hard rock bands, use similar motifs. Just look at Iron Maiden's "Powerslave" to see what I mean.

Another great source of inspiration here might be some cards from Magic The Gathering.

Give the Wonder a Great Name

A good and memorable name sets the right atmosphere. Take your time to find a truly inspirational name that fits the mood and background—it's worth it.

Let NPCs Mention the World Wonder

If the party comes near a world wonder, it is reasonable to let NPCs mention them before it comes into view. Let the party overhear gossip and stories about it. Make it a part of the whole setting, don't let it just stand there. Build anticipation.

Let the Imagination of Your Players Work for You

Enigmatic wonders need not be explained in their function. Or, at least, there might be a couple of possible explanations.

Much like Stonehenge, the Moai or the Pyramids, it's not always obvious why civilisations ages ago created them. That makes them just more fascinating.

A World in Decline
From Jehackmaster

Nothing says world wonder better than some old monuments built with technology the world no longer possesses.

In Lord of the Rings, when The Fellowship passes The Argonath statues, it hints at long-lost history and powers. This makes players realize their characters live in a world that has "passed its prime," and creates the feeling many secrets are lost that could either save or destroy the world.

If your game has a tendency towards the horrifying (Call of Cthulhu comes to mind), these remnants could range from the disturbing to the outright ghastly.

Including monuments that clearly resemble modern structures, you could drive home the feeling of loss, of great things come to end.

Best hint to drive home the right sense of awe: use colorful language and pictures. Lacking all else, hit your players with either a saving throw or some xp (more if they react well). Make them realize something great has touched them, for good or bad....

It Should Reflect the Civilization That Built It
From Chad Robb

The construction of a world wonder is an achievement of advanced civilization.

It may serve no function other than to inspire awe in visitors and pride in natives.

Perhaps it is ceremonial, but its precise operation is lost to time. Maybe it resembles forgotten monarchs or heroes whose names are unknown. Maybe it looks impossible to build without magic or alien technology.

It is big enough to stretch to the horizon or to be seen from the horizon. It reminds people of an important person or event, a messiah or bringer of the end of time.

A wonder should reflect the civilization that constructed it.

Is it a show of power, a tool, a beacon of sanctuary, or a mysterious big weird thing that seems out of place because the rest of the world changed around it?

Three Examples

From Craig Cartin

I have been doing some world building myself recently and have included several wonders of varying types. Here is a sample of them.

The Frozen Zoo

Far to the north in a land covered in snow all year round are many deep ice chasms. In one the ice is clear enough for you to see a number of creatures caught in previous ice ages. Many look like they could just step right out of the ice and attack.

The Gargoyle

On a vast desert cliff face is a colossal statue, hundreds of feet high, of a demon sitting on its haunches. Its elbows rest on its knees, both hands held out flat as if asking for something. Between its cloven stone feet is a cave.

Nethercity

Deep in the hills, far from any civilized land, lies the ancient necropolis of Nethercity. Cyclopean tombs, warped buildings, unknown glyphs and writing are found throughout. Twisted statues of creatures too alien to have ever actually lived adorn each sepulchre and mausoleum.

GM Resources

FREE eBook: 7 Ways to Instantly Improve Your GMing

Find out how to:

- Tell better stories
- Develop a compelling voice
- Run diabolical villains (including specific tactics)

Join my private GM tips newsletter and get this ebook now:

 (If you have already joined Roleplaying Tips, enter your email address again to get 7 Ways to Instantly Improve Your GMing. You will not be subscribed twice.)

[Click here to get the free ebook »](#)

Faster Combat

End the grind. The world's first online course for game masters teaches you exactly how to cut combat time in half while **adding twice the story and excitement**.

52 lessons in 5 Modules show you step-by-step how to GM awesome combats:

Module 1: Game Knowledge

Module 2: Combat Design

Module 3: Roll Initiative!

Module 4: Spectacular Endings

Module 5: Combat Mastery (Advanced Topics)

*"I'm really enjoying the Faster Combat course. It's really helping, because it *does* have a ground up approach."* – Ria Hawk

[Click here to Cut Your Combat Time in Half »](#)

GM Mastery: NPC Essentials

The DEFINITIVE sourcebook on how to **design and roleplay** amazing NPCs.

Winner of the Gold ENnie, this book helps you build and run realistic and unforgettable characters.

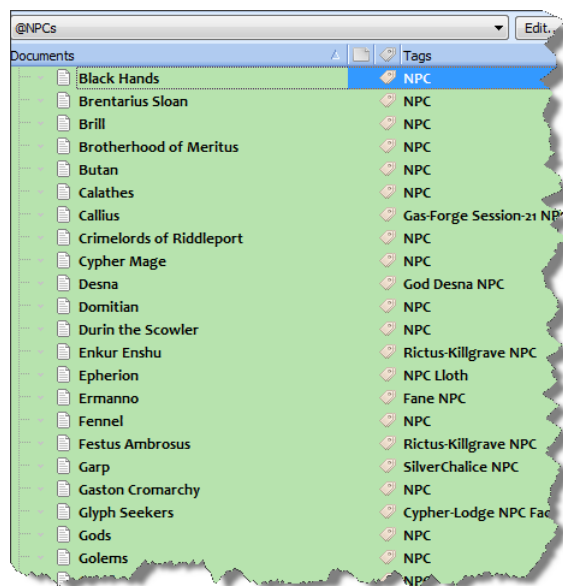Charts, tables and step-by-step instructions guide you to great GMing.

Rated 5/5 stars!

"This product is far and away one of the best purchases I have made on RPGNOW." - Christopher Sargent
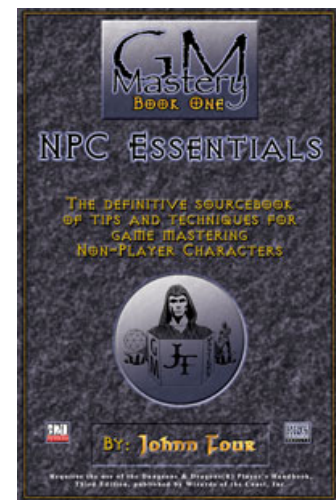
[Click here to build awesome NPCs »](#)

MyInfo Software (PC)

How to be on top of your game without breaking a sweat.

Track your entire world, your whole campaign and every adventure.

"I've tried other methods and other software, but MyInfo helps me run my games best." – Johnn Four

[Click here for a free trial »](#)

(P.S. I run MyInfo via Fusion VMWare on my Mac Air and it works just fine!)