Worldbuilding Governments

How hard can it be?

Susan Jane Bigelow - Readercon 2018
About me

- Political columnist
- Recovering political blogger
- Author of 8 books and numerous short stories
- Librarian and general nerd
Let’s get started!

Activity #1: Name a government from speculative fiction that either seems very realistic or seems very improbable!

Possible answers:
- Republic/Imperial Senate (Star Wars)
- Panem (Hunger Games)
- Whatever is going on in LOTR
- Federation Council (Star Trek)
- IngSoc in Oceania (1984)
- Ministry of Magic (Harry Potter)
So you want to create a government. ... ....... why?
What do governments actually do?

The Basics:

- Security
- Infrastructure
- Justice/courts
- Foreign relations
- Regulation
What else do governments actually do?

The not-so-basics:

- Health care
- Education
- Social services
- Nationalization of industry/services
- Public transportation
- Science/research
- Commerce/trade
What forms can governments take?

- Monarchies
- Representative democracies
- Collective decision-making, like a New England town
- Cults of personality
- Autocracies
- Oligarchies, ruled by rich and powerful
- Theocracy, religious government
- Police states
- Traditional/tribal
- Anarchies
How do governments go bad?

- Surveillance state
- Arbitrary exercise of power
- Corruption
- Decisions driven by fear
- Political prisoners
- Powerful police
- Cults of personality
- Suffocating control of everything
- Rule of law vanishes
- No accountability
- Body counts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Type</th>
<th>Alignment</th>
<th>Representative democracy/Republics</th>
<th>True democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawful good</td>
<td>Neutral good</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chaotic good</td>
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<td>Neutral good</td>
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<td>Chaotic good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constitutional monarchy</td>
<td>Lawful neutral</td>
<td>Traditionalist Oligarchy</td>
<td>Chaotic neutral</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chaotic neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police/military state</td>
<td>Lawful evil</td>
<td>Repressive authoritarianism</td>
<td>Personality cults/Stalinism Unstable tyranny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autocracy</td>
<td>Neutral evil</td>
<td>Totalitarianism Fascism</td>
<td>Chaotic evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theocracy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Government structures

3 BRANCHES of U.S. GOVERNMENT

Constitution (provided a separation of powers)

Legislative (makes laws)
- Congress
  - Senate
  - House of Representatives

Executive (carries out laws)
- President
- Vice President
- Cabinet

Judicial (interprets laws)
- Supreme Court
- Other Federal Courts

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Government structures

Iran
Local Government

Citizens

Mayor & Town Council

Town Clerk

Town Manager

Town Attorney

Planning & Comm. Devt.

Finance

Parks & Recreation

Fire

Public Works

Police

Utility

Personnel

Tax Collection

Utility Billing

Fire Inspections

Buildings & Grounds

Streets

Water Filtration Plant

Wastewater Plant

Accounts Payable

Receptionist/Admin. Asst.

Sanitation & Recycling

Water/Sewer Construction

Meter Reading

Cross Connection Control/Backflow
Local Government
Historical Government Structures

Government of a Late Medieval Village

- Mayor
- Council: (III, IV, XII)
- Court: (Judge, Juror, Jury)
- Commune
- Lord
- Herdsmen, Apparitor, Waterer, etc.
- Ranger
- Surveyor

Relationships:
- Mayor to Chairmanship
- Mayor to Supervision
- Council to Election
- Council to Cooptation from the Commune
- Commune to Election
- Commune to Cooptation from the Commune
- Court to Appointment or Confirmation from the Lord
- Court to Appointment, Nomination, Confirmation from the Lord
Historical Gov’t Structures

- **The emperor**
  - The Grand Council advises the emperor
  - Board of Civil Appointments: In charge of appointing and dismissing all government officials
  - Board of Finance: In charge of collecting taxes and managing money
  - Board of Rites: Managed the examination system and also organised religious worship of ancestors and gods
  - Board of War: In charge of the army
  - Board of Punishments: In charge of legal matters, including prisons and law courts
  - Board of Works: Responsible for building projects and minting coins

- **Governor-general (or viceroy)**
  - Responsible directly to the emperor
  - Only eight of these in China. Each in charge of two or more provinces

- **A governor and a military official**
  - In charge of a single province

- Other government officials
  - Collect taxes, pass judgements and manage building projects.
  - Must have passed a special government exam

- The people
Worldbuilding Governments

So how do we create governments for our stories?

Here are some questions to consider....
Government and story

- Are there changes happening in the government that matter to the story?

- How is your government visible in the story?
- How does the government or lack thereof affect the characters and the plot?
- Are you going for verisimilitude, idealism, or dystopia? Why does it matter?
- What services are provided by government that might influence the story?
Government and setting

- Is this a historical, future, sideways, parallel dimension, fantasy, or completely off-the-wall setting?
- How does history influence the government and the story? How did things get to be the way they are?
- Are there certain conditions, like war, famine, dragons, etc., that might influence how the government works?
- What are politics like?
Government and character

- How do your characters feel about the government?
- Do your characters participate in government in any way? Are they disenfranchised? Do/can they vote? Run for office?
- What power does the government have and/or lack over the characters?
- What is interacting with the government like at any level, from police to politicians to the DMV? (or RMV, yes, I see you Massachusetts)
Example: Country of Gideon and the Novan Commonwealth

Country of Gideon

- Theocratic parliamentary democracy
- “Family voting”: Only the head of household may vote (in practice always male)
- The Church of Gideon is represented in the Parliament, women are not
- “Women’s Council,” an “advisory” body, addresses women’s affairs
- Government imposes travel and communications restrictions
- Government is strong in the cities, less so in the countryside
- There is a lot of unrest simmering beneath the surface between fundamentalists and progressives
- Deeply distrusts the Commonwealth
Example: Country of Gideon and the Novan Commonwealth

Novan Commonwealth

- Parliamentary democracy, *de jure* planetary government of Nea
- Consists of delegations from all of the countries of Nea (~300)
- Has limited power to interfere in the internal affairs of any country (see: first Novan Civil War)
- Arbitrates disputes between countries
- Imposes some regulations on trade and travel
- Is the only body empowered to deal with extraplanetary affairs
- Has its own interplanetary military and trade fleet
- Can create Commonwealth citizens attached to no specific country
- Agonizes over Gideon but has no power to change them
Activity

Let’s create! You may work with a partner or by yourself.

Directions:

1. Think up a setting--it could be one you’ve already made, a generic SFF world, or something entirely new.
2. Using the questions posed in the previous slides, create a basic government at the national, state/provincial, or local levels.
3. Be ready to share!
Questions? Comments?

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